SURVIVAL AND MOVEMENT OF A LESSER DOUBLECOLLARED SUNBIRD RELEASED AFTER A YEAR-LONG LABORATORY EXPERIMENT

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Thirteen lesser Doublecollared Sunbirds were mistnetted in the western Cape, South Africa, in March and early April 1995, and brought into captivity under permit from the Cape Department of Nature Conservation. These birds were then used in a series of non-invasive physiological and sugar preference experiments, lasting nine months. The effect of nectar concentration on energy and water balance was examined (Lotz & Nicolson in press), as well as the bird's behavioural preferences for different sugar types (Jackson, Nicolson & Lotz 1998). The experimental protocols were approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of the University of Cape Town.

At the end of the experiments, all 13 Lesser Doublecollared Sunbirds were ringed and then released at the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens (33°59'S, 18°26'E) on 2 February 1996. There was a measure of uncertainty as to where each of the sunbirds had originally been trapped, and it was therefore not possible to release each bird at the site of capture.

One of the released birds, Safring ring X75385, was recaptured on 3 May 1996, three months later, at the Durbanville Nature Reserve (33°50'S, 18°38'E). The recapture site is 25 km from the release site. No mistnetting took place at Kirstenbosch in the months following release, so nothing is known about the fate of the remaining birds.

The observation is noteworthy because it is rare for a released experimental bird to be recaptured after a sufficiently long interval to be certain that it has made the transition back into the wild. The alternative to release of an experimental bird is euthanasia, an option that has to be considered seriously after a bird has been in captivity for a year, as is the situation considered here. In this case, the decision to release the birds has been demonstrated to have been the appropriate one.

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REFERENCES

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