

STORK KILLING BIRDS IN MIST NETS

Mist nets were being used to catch Red Bishops Euplectes orix for ringing, on the farm "Thorngrove", on the Modder River north of Bloemfontein (28.52S; 26.11E.). The nets were set up on the unplanted ridges dividing a lucerne field into blocks for irrigation. These ridges were covered with seeding grasses, on which mixed flocks of Quelea quelea, Red Bishop Euplectes orix and Golden Bishop Euplectes afer were feeding.

On December 18th, 1972 at about 9.00 a.m. a White Stork Ciconia ciconia was seen at the net. It was apparently trying to swallow a bird caught in the bottom shelf of the four shelf net. The stork was chased off, but eight dead quelea and three dead bishops were found in the bottom shelf. The head and body of one quelea was completely crushed, and the feathers soaking wet. Another bird was lacking a head, but the remainder were intact. Again on 21st December a stork was seen to approach the net. Watching through binoculars, it was clearly seen crushing a bird between its mandibles, then moving on to attack another. Three quelea and two Le Vaillants' Cisticola Cisticola tinniens were killed.

By the 18th, nets had already been used twice at this location and storks were always present, though they had never approached the nets. It is possible that the same bird was involved on both occasions. However, feeding storks may prove an unexpected danger to daylight netting.

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