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FERAL POPULATION OF COMMON PEACOCK *PAVO CRISTATUS* BREEDING IN BLOEMFONTEIN, FREE STATE

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BREEDING BIOLOGY**FERAL POPULATION OF COMMON PEACOCK *PAVO CRISTATUS* BREEDING IN BLOEMFONTEIN, FREE STATE**

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The Common Peacock *Pavo cristatus* is an introduced species to southern Africa, originating from Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka (Anderson 2005). It was introduced in South Africa during 1968 and feral populations are only known from Robben Island, the Settlers Park area in Port Elizabeth and East London areas (Anderson 2005). At Robben Island no detailed surveys have been made although the population has increased since the 1990s (Sherley *et al.* 2011). Although this species is widely distributed in southern Africa around farmsteads, suburban areas and nursery areas, no more data are available on this species distribution and breeding (Anderson 2005). This may be due to the fact that they were free ranging semi-wild birds at farms and that they don't wander away from these localities. This species was not atlased during SABAP1, so no historical distribution data are available and during the current SABAP2 project it was decided to add this species. It shows a wide distribution range over South Africa, but mainly in urban and suburban areas and around farmsteads.



Fig. 1. Leucistic Common Peacock incubating on eggs where nest are on top of the hay grass heaps at DOW Nursery, Bloemfontein.

Common Peacocks have only been recorded breeding in the wild at Robben Island (Leshoro *et al.* 2010). The first nest with eggs was recorded during February 2008, while only young birds were observed on previous occasions, mostly during the summer months (Leshoro *et al.* 2010). Although commonly encountered as free ranging birds in farming areas and suburban areas (and possibly breeding), no breeding activities have been reported for this species. This note reports on the (possibly) the first breeding record in Bloemfontein, Free State for this species.



Fig. 2. Common Peacock nest with 4 eggs in hollow of hay grass heap at DOW Nursery, Bloemfontein.

The small population of peacocks is known to have been present at the DOW (Department of Works) nursery in the central parts of the city (29° 08' 5.22" S, 26° 12' 52.873" E) for the past 20 years (Denise Krige, *pers comm.*) and is one of few localities where they occur in the Bloemfontein area. On 24 November 2015 I visited our National Museum stores (our exhibit specimens are stored there) and while walking between the compost and hay grass heaps, I located two female peacocks sitting on nests on top of the hay grass heaps. Female 1 was an leucistic bird (Fig. 1), sitting on 5 eggs. Female 2 was sitting on 4 eggs (Fig. 2). These birds were breeding at this

locality for several years, and this represents the first documented breeding of this free ranging feral population.

Although the exotic populations of Common Peacock do not seem to be expanding the range of the species (as in case with Common Starlings *Sturnis vulgaris* and Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis*) to other areas, this breeding observation represents the second breeding record of free ranging peacocks in South Africa and is therefore worth documenting.

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