



Biodiversity Observations

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FEET BATHING AS A COOLING DOWN MECHANISM IN TWO SPECIES OF BIRDS OF PREY

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BEHAVIOUR

FEET BATHING AS A COOLING DOWN MECHANISM
IN TWO SPECIES OF BIRDS OF PREY*Julio de Castro**34 Hedsor Drive, Harare, Zimbabwe**Corresponding author: juliojdecastro@gmail.com*

October is Harare's hottest month with a maximum and minimum temperature averages of 29°C and 15°C respectively (World Weather



Figure 1 - A Lizard Buzzard standing in the water.

Online 2016). Surface water is scarce so offering water in the garden invariably attracts interesting species, many of them not seen the rest of the year. Our garden in northern Harare had the visit of two small birds of prey: a Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus* on 9 October 2016 and a Gabar goshawk *Miconisus gabar* on 10 October 2016.

While at the water my attention was drawn to their similar behaviour. Although both birds drank and the Gabar Goshawk also bathed, both species spent a long time (over 30 minutes two or three times a day on the days observed) standing on the water baths during the hot hours of the day, around midday. Although they got scared and flew off a few times, they both returned to the water after a while. Was it a coincidence or did they find relief by the freshness of the water?

Birds lower their temperatures through a variety of different mechanisms (Mayntz 2016). The bare skin on their legs and feet helps them to dissipate heat. Water birds stand in the water, presumably to enhance the cooling (Shriner 2012). Some birds such as vultures and storks also use urohidrosis, the habit of defecating on their bare legs. The latter uses fluid evaporative cooling to achieve its effect.

It seems likely that both the Gabar Goshawk and the Lizard Buzzard were using the water of the bird baths to cool down their legs and feet and in this way, as the water birds, increasing the cooling effect of their bare skin.

References

Mayntz, M 2016. How Do Wild Birds Keep Cool in Summer?

Accessed on 10 October 2016.

<http://birding.about.com/od/birdingbasics/a/howbirdskeepcool.htm>



Figure 2 - A Gabar Goshawk standing in the bird bath, having bathed in the water.

Shriner, J 2012. 15 Unusual Ways Some Birds Beat the Heat. Accessed on 10 October 2016. <http://www.birdinginformation.com/15-unusual-ways-some-birds-beat-the-heat/>

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