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An electronic journal published by the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town

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Paper Editor: H. Dieter Oschadleus and Amour McCarthy

AERIAL ATTACK - INTERACTION BETWEEN TWO TRACTRAC CHATS

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Recommended citation format:

Franke-Bryson U 2017. Aerial attack - interaction between two Tractrac Chats. Biodiversity Observations, Vol 8.37: 1-2

URL: <http://bo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=332>

Published online: 7 August 2017

AVIAN BIOLOGY

AERIAL ATTACK - INTERACTION BETWEEN TWO TRACTRAC CHATS

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Figure 1 - Tractrac Chat habitat in central Namibia, 120 km from the coast

On a late June morning while driving on a farm road in the treeless gravel plains in Namibia (coordinates 22°25'S 15°24'E) I saw what looked like a Tractrac Chat *cercomela (Emarginata) tractrac* flying and repeatedly attacking something on the ground. At first I thought it might have struck down a snake or maybe a shrike on the ground, but it turned out to be another Tractrac Chat which was ducking every time another assault came down on it.



Figure 2 - Tractrac Chat adult.

The attacker was uninterruptedly “chattering” in excitement, giving fast loud clicking and cracking sounds I had never heard these sounds from this species before. It shot down at an angle of 45 degrees from about 3 m height, describing a large “8” in the air, turning and rising to attack again and again. This went on for two or

three minutes and it stopped only when I drove closer to have a better look.



Figure 3 – Close up of adult Tractrac Chat.

Unfortunately, from my point of observation I could not define the sex or age of the birds to be able to refer this behaviour to possible territory defense, e.g. one male attacking another (younger?) male, or to a possible pre-mating display by a male trying to impress the female?

Further reading

Clement P, Rose C 2015. Robins and Chats. Helm Identification Guides. Bloomsbury Publishing, London: 150-151; 622-623.

Peacock F 2012. Chamberlain's LBJs. The definite guide to South Africa's Little Brown Jobs. Mirafr Publishing, Pretoria: 135; 137.