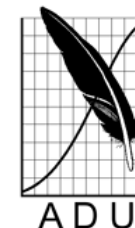


Ornithological Observations



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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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SNAKE IN THE GRASS ... BIRDS MOB PUFF ADDER

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SNAKE IN THE GRASS ... BIRDS MOB PUFF ADDER

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Mixed flocks of birds mobbing snakes is a phenomenon that is often talked about but not frequently observed, and even more rarely photographed. These paragraphs and photographs document an incident which took place at Tswalu Kalahari Reserve in the Northern Cape at 10:40 on 26 May 2012.

Our attention was attracted to an active flock of birds at the base of 2 m tall shrub. GPS coordinates were 27°10.188 S, 22° 26.097 E.

The flock consisted of c. 15 birds of three species: Scaly-feathered Finch *Sporopipes squamifrons*, Violet-eared Waxbill *Granatina granatina* and Black-chested Prinia *Prinia flavicans*. The birds appeared to be directing their attention to an object on the ground. They were giving warning calls and flapping their wings; their mobbing behaviour is captured in Fig. 1. After a minute, we approached this spot, and found a Puff Adder *Bitis arietans* (Fig. 2).

Within another minute, the snake crawled under the bush and vanished, presumably into a hole. Only one Black-chested Prinia remained quietly in the bush, directly above the spot where the snake seemed to have disappeared. The remaining birds dispersed.

Photos: Elsa Bussièrè

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Figure 1 - The behaviour of the flock of birds near the base of a bush mobbing a Puff Adder.

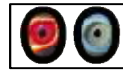


Figure 2 - The Puff Adder which was mobbed, partially hidden in grass