

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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BANK CORMORANT CHICK ENTANGLED IN FISHING LINE DIES AFTER MORE THAN 88 HOURS

Kate J Robinson^{*1}, Corlia Meyer¹, Les G Underhill¹, Jordan-Laine Calder¹

¹Animal Demography Unit, Department of Zoology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7701 South Africa

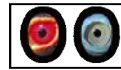
* Corresponding author: kate.robinson@uct.ac.za

The Bank Cormorant *Phalacrocorax neglectus* is endemic to southern Africa, breeding along the Namibian and the west coast of South Africa including the Robben Island harbour (Ludynia et al. 2010, Sherley et al. 2011). The species has had an IUCN Red List status of Endangered since 2004 (BirdLife International 2012) after first being classified as Vulnerable in 2000 (Barnes 2000). From 1990 to 2006, over a 16-year period, Kemper et al. (2007) reported a 4.3% annual population decrease. Neither Barnes (2000), Kemper et al. (2007), nor BirdLife International (2012) list entanglements with fishing line as a threat to the species.

Bank Cormorants construct their nests predominately out of seaweed and have occasionally been observed incorporating artificial material such as fishing line into their nests (Cooper 1986). This has been observed in Bank Cormorants breeding on the short arm of the harbour at Robben Island (33°47.907'S, 18°22.705'E) (Fig 1). Discarded fishing line is regularly found during beach clean-ups on Robben Island. Fishing line can be hazardous to marine animals and especially seabirds (Derraik 2002). While the major focus of entanglement research relates to bird by-catch during long-line fishing operations on the high seas (Lewison et al. 2012), entanglements can also occur along coastlines and at seabird

colonies. Ryan et al. (1999) pointed out that entanglements are one of the most visible ways in which plastic debris impact marine wildlife, yet quantifying entanglement trends remains problematic due to the rarity of the events. Such entanglement events have been noted to occur for another South African marine cormorant species the Crowned Cormorant *Phalacrocorax coronatus*, but without detailed description of the incidents. "Mortality, by starvation and suffocation, has arisen from the incorporation of fishing nets and line into nests" (Crawford 1997). Furthermore, nestling mortality through entanglement is not confined to seabirds; Oschadleus (2012) reviewed the analogous situation in Weavers (Ploceidae), where discarded cotton thread is incorporated into nests. Two of the observations documented occurred inland on Robben Island where Cape Weaver *Ploceus capensis* nestlings were discovered hanging dead from nests.

On 11 July 2012 at c 16:00 a Bank Cormorant chick was discovered hanging from its foot entangled in fishing line at a nest on the short arm of the jetty (Fig 2 and 2a). The chick struggled at intervals and judging by the angle from which it was hanging, its hip joint may have been dislocated (Nola Parsons, SANCCOB vet, pers. comm.). Due to the location of the entangled chick, nothing could be done to rescue it without the risk of disturbing the other surrounding Bank Cormorant nests. Such an attempt would have caused a disturbance that would have put the entire colony at risk. The chick was five to six weeks old and nearing the mean age at which they leave the nest at Robben Island (55 days, Sherley et al. 2011). This was the only chick in the nest. It was last seen alive and moving at 08:30 on 15 July 2012, over 88 hours after it had first been observed. It was found dead on 25 July 2012 (Fig 3). The exact time of death is unknown.



This event documents the danger discarded fishing line can pose to seabird nestlings. It also demonstrates that death in this manner can be a drawn out process. The integration of unnatural nesting material into nests can pose threat to chick survival.

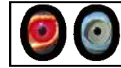
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Fig 1 – A Bank Cormorant nest on the short arm of Robben Island harbour in which fishing line has been included as nest material. Note the line on both sides of the bird. Photo by Kate J Robinson.

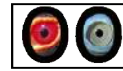


Fig 2 – Bank Cormorant chick entangled in fishing line hangs from another nest in the colony surrounded by five other active nests.
Photo by Jordan-Laine Calder.

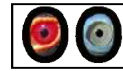


Fig 2a – Close-up of the entangled Bank cormorant chick. Photo by Jordan-Laine Calder.



Fig 3 – Dead bank cormorant chick hanging from fishing line.
Photo by Kate J Robinson.