

# 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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## CLOWNING CROWS: PIED CROWS AT PLAY?

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## CLOWNING CROWS: PIED CROWS AT PLAY?

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On Sunday 2 September 2012, a colleague and I were travelling on the N1 in vicinity of Three Sisters near Beaufort West towards Cape Town. We came across what appeared to be a Pied Crow *Corvus albus* hanging upside down from a telephone wire about 20 m from the roadside. We turned our vehicle around to go back and take a photograph and try to ascertain how the bird had died. However, as we pulled up to the crow, it dropped off the line and flew away. It had something small in its bill as it flew off.

Later the same day, Andre van Sittert reported via the Cape Bird Net list server ([capebirdnet@yahoo.com](mailto:capebirdnet@yahoo.com)) that he had seen two Pied Crows hanging upside down on Eucalyptus trees. He reported: "My sighting occurred on a farm near Blackheath on the way to Stellenbosch. We saw several crows doing this. It was as if they were showing off to each other hanging upside down as if they were daredevils." Figs 1 and 2 included here were taken by Andre when he observed the birds.

Jill Mortimer has since reported that she had seen a Spotted Eagle Owl hanging upside down from a tree branch in Somerset West some time ago.

Roberts Birds of Southern Africa (7<sup>th</sup> edition) does not report on this kind of behaviour. A search on the internet produced a few reports,



**Fig 1** – Pied Crow hanging onto branch of Eucalyptus tree

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mainly from the United States of America, of crows hanging upside down and a photograph of a crow hanging upside down by one leg



**Fig 2** – Pied Crow "dive bombing" from tree  
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was posted on flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>) – a Yahoo website where photos can be shared.

The behaviour reported here, poses the following questions: Can this behaviour be described as "play" by the Pied Crows, as play in other species had been reported (Engelbrecht 2010; Howard 2011)? Is this behaviour a form of display where more birds were involved or is it "communal play"?

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#### **Acknowledgements**

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#### **References**

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(Accessed on 06.09.2012)