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WEAVERS AND NECTAR FEEDING

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The recent article on nectar feeding by birds (Engelbrecht *et al.* 2014) highlights how important nectar is for a wide range of bird species, and the authors provide many new records of nectar feeding in southern African birds. Their article is likely to result in several new observations being published.

This short note lists some minor corrections to the species of weavers recorded as feeding on nectar. The authors list 17 weavers as nectar feeders, and 13 of these as feeding on *Aloe marlothii* nectar. The authors provide some unusual new records of weavers feeding on nectar: Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver *Bubalornis niger*, White-browed Sparrow-weaver *Plocepasser mahali* (with a photo), and Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea*.

The record of Chestnut Weavers *Ploceus rubiginosus* feeding on nectar is an error (A. Craig, pers. comm.). The record accidentally appeared in Birds of Africa (Craig 2004) and was repeated in Handbook of the Birds of the World (Craig 2010). These references list the Chestnut Weaver as feeding on four *Aloe* species, i.e. *A. arborescens*, *A. candelabrum* [= *A. ferox*], *A. ferox*, *A. marlothii*, but these plants do not occur in the range of the Chestnut Weaver. There are no original published records of this weaver feeding on nectar, to my knowledge.

Engelbrecht *et al.* (2014) lists the White-winged Widowbird *Euplectes*



Fig 1 – Village Weaver feeding on nectar of *Erythrina*, Southport, KwaZulu-Natal, 19 July 2009

albonotatus as feeding on the nectar of *A. marlothii*, citing Symes (2010). Symes (2010), however, made an error in citing Oatley & Skead (1972) who listed the widow as feeding on *A. davyana* [= *A. greatheadii*], not *A. marlothii*. However, White and Cyrus (1977) recorded a White-winged Widowbird feeding on aloes, with *Aloe marlothii* being suspected.

Engelbrecht *et al.* (2014) list 1957 as the earliest reference that mentions nectar feeding by southern African birds (other than the sunbirds or sugarbirds). There are, however, several early references to nectar feeding in weavers in southern Africa. The earliest record I have found so far is by Gurney (1868), who wrote the following of the Cape Weaver in KwaZulu-Natal: "These weavers



are exceedingly fond of sucking the nectar from the flowers of the Cape-Broom, a thorny tree which bears a bright scarlet blossom before the leaves appear, and is common all along the coast, where it blooms in the very early spring". This probably refers to an *Erythrina* tree, a species often used by weavers (Fig 1), although today the Cape Broom refers to a tree with yellow blossoms, *Genista monspessulana*. Stark (1900) and several other authors also listed a variety of weaver species feeding on the nectar of different plants.

Currently 18 (of 29) southern African weaver species have records of weavers feeding on nectar (Table 1), including the new records of Engelbrecht *et al.* (2014). Weavers not listed by Engelbrecht *et al.* (2014), are Yellow Bishop *Euplectes capensis* (Fraser & McMahon 1991 list *Protea* nectar), and Cardinal Quelea *Quelea cardinalis* although this nectar record is from Kenya (Short & Horne 1978). Eleven southern African weavers do not have original records of nectar feeding (Table 1), but it is likely that many more of these weavers will be found to also feed on nectar, at least occasionally.

Symes (2010) and Engelbrecht *et al.* (2014) suggested that *A. marlothii* attracts more bird species than any other plant, and this may be true in the case of the weavers too, with at least 13 southern African species being recorded (Table 1).

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Table 1 - List of southern African weavers showing those recorded as feeding on nectar, with the number of original records in my database (some of these records may be from outside southern Africa). See text for details for records marked with *.

Species	Nectar	<i>Aloe marlothii</i>
Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver <i>Bubalornis niger</i>	1	1
Scaly-feathered Finch <i>Sporopipes squamifrons</i>	0	0
White-browed Sparrow-weaver <i>Plocepasser mahali</i>	1	1
Sociable Weaver <i>Philetairus socius</i>	0	0
Lesser Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus intermedius</i>	2	1
Spectacled Weaver <i>Ploceus ocularis</i>	17	2
Cape Weaver <i>Ploceus capensis</i>	65	4
Yellow Weaver <i>Ploceus subaureus</i>	7	1
Holub's Golden Weaver <i>Ploceus xanthops</i>	11	0
Southern Brown-throated Weaver <i>Ploceus xanthopterus</i>	0	0
Southern Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus velatus</i>	45	7
Village Weaver <i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>	45	2
Chestnut Weaver <i>Ploceus rubiginosus</i>	0*	0*
Dark-backed Weaver <i>Ploceus bicolor</i>	7	1

Species	Nectar	<i>Aloe marlothii</i>
Olive-headed Weaver <i>Ploceus olivaceiceps</i>	0	0
Red-headed Weaver <i>Anaplectes rubriceps</i>	3	1
Cardinal Quelea <i>Quelea cardinalis</i>	1	0
Red-headed Quelea <i>Quelea erythrops</i>	0	0
Red-billed Quelea <i>Quelea quelea</i>	1	1
Yellow-crowned Bishop <i>Euplectes afer</i>	0	0
Black-winged Bishop <i>Euplectes hordeaceus</i>	0	0
Southern Red Bishop <i>Euplectes orix</i>	1	0
Yellow Bishop <i>Euplectes capensis</i>	2	0
Fan-tailed Widowbird <i>Euplectes axillaris</i>	0	0
Yellow-mantled Widowbird <i>Euplectes macroura</i>	0	0
White-winged Widowbird <i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>	2	? *
Red-collared Widowbird <i>Euplectes ardens</i>	7	2
Long-tailed Widowbird <i>Euplectes progne</i>	0	0
Thick-billed Weaver <i>Amblyospiza albifrons</i>	1	0
Total weaver species	18	13