

UPPING THE ANTE

We live in England and have just received our June/July copy of *Africa – Birds & Birding*. As regular visitors to South Africa and repeat visitors to the Kruger National Park we were interested in the editorial written by Peter Borchert. We agree that the park is one of the best DIY options for birdwatching in a wild environment and we support most of his observations about the infrastructure.

We particularly agree with the view that SANParks has not understood the potential for attracting birdwatching visitors. Surely it would not be difficult to erect a few hides and supply skilled birdwatching guides? Guides who know so much more about the area in which they operate could greatly enhance the pleasure of watching your wonderful wildlife for a visitor who has only a short time to enjoy and explore this magnificent place. Such guides already operate outside the park.

The accommodation is acceptable as far as it goes, but it does not compare with the standards and prices of B&B establishments outside Kruger.

Finally, we would like to congratulate you on a wonderful magazine that is a great advert for South Africa.

MIKE & ANNE EVANS
NORFOLK, UK

PREY TELL

This Jacobin Cuckoo flew into a tree next to our car between Nkuhlu picnic spot and Lower Sabie during our visit to the Kruger National Park in mid-February this year. We immediately noticed the object in its beak and at first thought it was an insect. We then realised that it was a small, recently hatched bird, which it promptly swallowed.

According to all our references, the Jacobin Cuckoo's prime food source is insects. Is it normal for this species to prey on smaller birds?

HERMIEN WAPENAAR
CENTURION, GAUTENG



Professor Peter Ryan comments: It is unusual for cuckoos to remove the host's chicks when laying their own eggs, because in general they wouldn't be laying that late in the breeding cycle. Also, as stated in *Roberts 7*, Jacobin Cuckoos don't usually take eggs from a nest when laying their own in it, which is another reason to suspect that this cuckoo was probably preying on the chicks. Although Jacobins are supposed to be caterpillar specialists, some other cuckoo species (such as Black Cuckoo) do take small vertebrates, including baby birds.

ROAD RAGE

If you speed, you're a killer. Drivers along the N2 will have seen this fairly dramatic road sign, obviously designed to scare drivers into obeying the speed limit by making them aware of the likelihood of knocking down pedestrians. But there is in fact more truth to that statement than the average driver would care to admit.

Collisions with motor vehicles are the most obvious impact of roads on birds, and they are listed as killed more frequently than most other animals in road-mortality studies. One estimate of bird mortalities from all causes lists death from vehicles as the fourth highest, at 80 million or more per year in the United States. The top three

reasons for bird mortalities were collisions with buildings and high-tension lines, and cats. Bird fatalities resulting from wind turbines were almost negligible at about 28 000 (less than 0.01 per cent), although the species involved may be of greater conservation concern.

More insidiously, roads also cause habitat fragmentation and isolation, as well as noise and light disturbance. Reduced breeding success has been correlated to road proximity or road density, for species ranging from warblers to vultures.

I imagine that few readers who are also drivers have not hit something during a journey across the country. So my question during a recent 3 000-kilometre bicycle ride across the Western Cape was how many birds are killed a day, and under what conditions. My journey took me along 2 000 kilometres of gravel roads of various kinds, and I travelled on just under 1 000 kilometres ▸

