



Editors of the seventh edition of Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa, Phil Hockey (seated) and Peter Ryan.

Roberts' comes to the Fitztitute!

Work towards the seventh edition of *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* is gearing up at the Fitztitute. Funded jointly by the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund and the Percy FitzPatrick Institute, the project will carry *Roberts'* into the next millennium. Our vision is for the new *Roberts'* to be a handbook summarizing what is known about the biology of southern African birds. The format will be enlarged and new artwork will be commissioned. It will be edited by Phil Hockey and Peter Ryan, but its success will depend on the project gaining the support of the entire birding community.

Some people have asked 'Why do we need a new *Roberts'*?' Perhaps the most pressing reason is to accommodate the enormous amount of knowledge that amateur and professional ornithologists continue to

gather about southern African birds. It will capture the main findings from the bird atlas and make them available to a much broader audience. It will also resurrect information on geographic variation and have new sections dealing with subjects such as movements, social behaviour, moult, parasites and disease, survival and relations with man. The text will be fully referenced, so that *Roberts'* value as a research tool will be substantially enhanced.

The project will result in more than just the publication of a new edition of *Roberts'*. Just as the bird atlas project stimulated amateurs to gather information on bird distributions, we hope that the *Roberts'* project will mobilize an army of bird-biology data-gatherers. To this end we shall identify gaps in our knowledge and challenge

birders to fill these gaps. The next issue of *Africa – Birds & Birding* will carry a list of birds for which elements of basic breeding biology are unknown. In the meantime, you are strongly encouraged to publish all interesting observations in your bird club newsletters so that they can be incorporated in the new *Roberts'*.

Another major spin-off will be the establishment of an electronic bibliography. All the literature on Afro-tropical birds is being identified, keyworded by species and subject matter, and stored in an easily searched database. This will be used by authors writing species accounts for the new *Roberts'*, but will also be an invaluable research tool for all ornithologists, both locally and worldwide. Copies of all papers contained in the database will be housed in the Percy

FitzPatrick Institute's Niven Library, where the database and the associated literature will be readily accessible. The establishment of the database is a daunting task which we estimate will take some 18 months to complete. If anyone in the Cape Town area is willing to assist with data capture – which mostly requires reading articles in the Niven Library – please call (021) 650-3290 and ask for either Peter Ryan or Phil Hockey. □

Visit the FitzPatrick website:
<http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/fitzpatrick>

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