

NONMARINE VAGRANT BIRDS AT THE PRINCE EDWARD ISLANDS,
JUNE 1981 - MAY 1983

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The known occurrences of nonmarine vagrant birds at the Prince Edward Islands from January 1948 to May 1981 have been discussed by Burger *et al.* (1980) and Berruti & Schramm (1981). This note records nonmarine vagrant birds sighted at Marion Island during the 24-month period 1 June 1981 to 31 May 1983, which includes observations made on seven days in May 1982 and five days in May 1983 on nearby Prince Edward Island. During this period the number of field biologists at Marion Island ranged from three to 12.

A total of 12 birds of eight to 12 species was recorded (Table 1), of which only one positively identified species, an African Cuckoo *Cuculus gularis*, had not previously been recorded. Of these 12 birds, three individuals of two species (Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* and European Swallow *Hirundo rustica*) were Holarctic migrants, with another (the unidentified wader) probably belonging to this group, and the two unidentified passerines also possibly belonging to this group.

The remainder were breeding African land birds. The identification of a putative juvenile Cape Turtle Dove *Streptopelia capicola* was suggested by R.K. Brooke, on the basis of the description by IPN. The chat was identified as either a Familiar Chat *Cercomela familiaris* or a Sicklewing Chat *C. sinuata* on the basis of its plumage and its typical chat-like behaviour of flicking its wings. Distribution patterns of these two species on the African mainland favour the Familiar Chat as being the vagrant (McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). Of the two unidentified passerines, one was a small brown bird, with white on the tail, which took refuge in a Whitechinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* burrow on one occasion. It was present around the base for several days. Suggestions of it being a wagtail (*Motacilla* sp.) were made. Of the other passerine, the viewing period was so short that the observer did not wish to make a guess at its identify.

Only the Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and juvenile African Cuckoo were captured. Both subsequently died presumably having been weakened beyond recovery during their flight to the island. The egret was caught on the first day it was seen. It was harassed by Subantarctic Skuas *Catharacta antarctica* but was not harmed. It died within a week of being captured. The African Cuckoo was first seen on 22 November 1982. It was seen attempting to feed in a mire the next day. It was captured on 24 November and died two days later. On its return to Cape Town as a frozen specimen it was examined by R.K. Brooke in the light of Payne (1977) on the differences between juvenile African and

TABLE 1

VAGRANT BIRDS AT THE PRINCE EDWARD ISLANDS, JUNE 1981 - MAY 1983.
ALL RECORDS ARE FOR MARION ISLAND UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

Species	Date first sighted	No. of birds
Holarctic migrants		
Turnstone		
<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	22 Dec. 1981	1
European Swallow	22 Dec. 1981	1
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	9 May 1982	1
Breeding African birds		
Cattle Egret		
<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	1 May 1982	1
Laughing Dove		
<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	3 Nov. 1981	1
? Laughing Dove ¹		
<i>S. senegalensis</i>	Jan. 1982	1
? Cape Turtle Dove (juv.)		
<i>S. capicola</i>	7 Feb. 1983	1
African Cuckoo (juv.) ²		
<i>Cuculus gularis</i>	23 Nov. 1982	1
Chat		
<i>Cercomela</i> sp.		
? <i>C. familiaris</i> or <i>C. sinuata</i>	6 Dec. 1982	1
Unidentified		
Passerine sp.	12 May 1982 (Prince Edward Island)	1
	10 - 14 May 1983	1
Wader (Charadrii)	6 Dec. 1982	1

1. G. Kerley

2. P. van Rensburg & M. Haupt

European Cuckoos *Cuculus canorus*. RKB writes "The specimen is an aberrant juvenile African Cuckoo in very fresh plumage except for the longest primaries (7 and 8) and the central tail feathers which were apparently damaged when it was kept in a cage on Marion Island. I place it as an African Cuckoo primarily on characters of the bill. The upper mandible was black on the outside with some dull yellow in front of the nares; inside it was yellow with a narrow black tomium. The lower mandible was dull yellow on the outside with a black tip; inside it was rich orange with the distal 8 mm dull black with some infusion of dull yellow. The exposed culmen measured 20,8 mm and its breadth at the base was 7,8 mm. The tarsus and toes were yellow with paler claws. The plumage of the upper parts was grey-brown barred with reddish brown. The pale tips of the crown feathers were obsolete (barely visible), a character of the juvenile European Cuckoo (Payne 1977), but there was no evidence that this was due to the bird rubbing its head against its cage. Payne (1977) draws attention to the size of the white spots in the central tail feathers but does not say whether he counts the white tip as the first spot or not. If the white tip is the first spot, the third spot measured 2,2 mm across; if the white tip is not the first spot, the third spot measured 2,5 mm across. The other measurements were : wing length 216, tail 161, tarsus 22,7 mm."

These records bring the number of positively identified nonmarine vagrant species at the Prince Edward Islands to 20, with a potential maximum of 35 species having been recorded over the past 35,5 years. A total of 87 individuals has been recorded (Crawford 1952, Burger *et al.* 1980, Berruti & Schramm 1981). This total does not include three ship-assisted House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* (Burger *et al.* 1980) but includes eight Cattle Egrets recorded by Crawford (1952), which were reported as only one record by Burger *et al.* (1980). Since all but 12 records were made after January 1974, it may be assumed that the paucity of records previous to this date is due to the small numbers of scientific personnel, and in particular ornithologists, visiting the island before 1974.

Seasonal distribution of all monthly sightings shows that most records fall in summer months (Fig. 1). The paucity of sightings in winter months can be attributed to a number of factors : there are fewer long distance migrants present in southern Africa in winter; the more severe weather conditions in winter are more likely to kill off arrivals before they are sighted; the bad weather and shorter days on the islands in winter mean that people tend to stay in the base when not compelled to go outside; and there are usually fewer scientific personnel on the island in winter.

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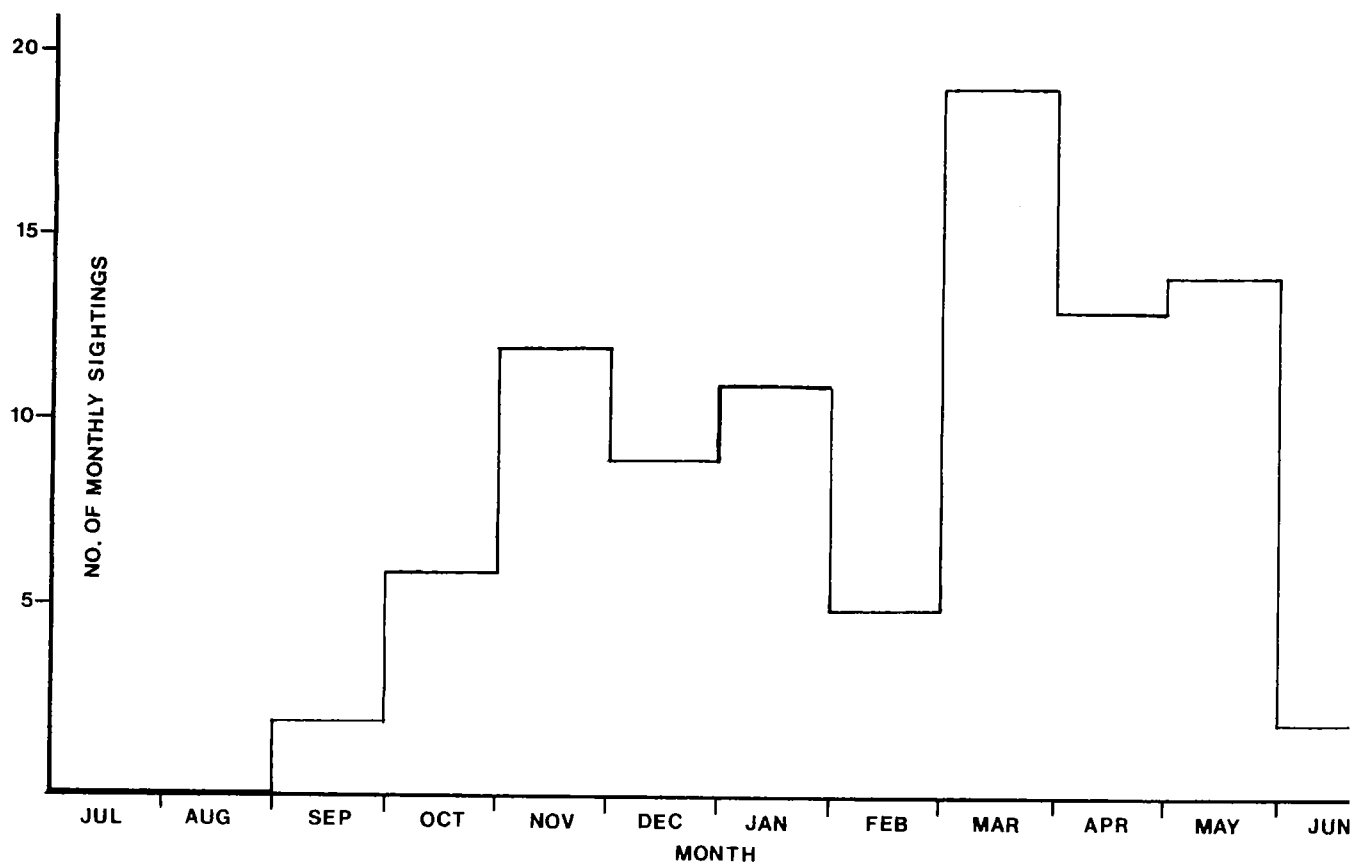


Figure 1

Monthly sightings of nonmarine vagrant birds at the Prince Edward Islands, January 1948 - May 1983