

## SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

### SADDLEBILL STORK KILLS AND SWALLOWS A RED-BILLED TEAL

On 2 March 1997 Alex Masterson and I were on Constantia farm (1932 B2) near Chivhu and at about mid-day were wading about in the lightly vegetated, waist deep Tagenhamo Pan which covers probably 25 hectares. I spotted a Saddlebill Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* and then another, and as I slowly wandered around the pan they moved in front of me at a distance of about 100 metres. Alex at this point was out of sight and wading in a deeper part of the pan.

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythroryncha* were the commonest duck around that day, with about 50 on the pan in small groups. Three came flying in and landed very close to the Saddlebills when suddenly there was a commotion and a large bird was flapping between the bill of a stork. I could not clearly identify what it was, but could see the grey webbed feet quite clearly and I had just seen the teal land there.

The Saddlebill battled with the bird for about two minutes and then decided to drown it and that tactic worked well. The stork then swallowed the bird head first and this took about a minute and obviously a lot of effort. Finally with the duck down the hatch, the stork took a few drinks and then both birds flew off, possibly to a nearby nest.

Other waterbirds on the pan that day included Dabchicks *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, White-faced Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*, White-backed Duck *Thalassornis leuconotus*, Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*, Southern Pochard *Netta erythroptalma*, Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* and Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata* but I am certain that the bird taken was a Red-billed Teal.

I could not distinguish the eye colour of the stork concerned so could not sex it, but Brown *et al.* 1982 (*Birds of Africa*, Vol. 1, pp. 185-186) state that males are about 10-15% smaller than females and mention under food, that they reputedly take small mammals and young birds. However, a Red-billed Teal is far larger than anything indicated and it seems probable that these birds may be capable of taking all but the largest species that were present on the pan that day. The average weight of 1366 Red-billed Teal males is 591 grams and 1177 females 544 grams, so it was a big meal on any scale. As there can be few fish in the pans which had only just recently filled, these storks must live mostly on amphibians and other prey and perhaps opportunistically overpower any other waterbird they can.

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### MARABOU BREEDING ATTEMPT NEAR HARARE

In recent years there have been an increasing number of records of Marabou *Leptoptilos crumeniferus* in the vicinity of Harare, but in this part of the world and unlike East Africa they are not common around towns and villages although to be seen at rubbish dumps in places like Kariba and at the Victoria Falls. They have been recorded breeding however on the highveld in such places