SEABIRDS BREEDING AT PATERNOSTER ROCKS, VOËLEILAND (NOORDWESBAAI) 
AND HOSPITAL ROCK BETWEEN 1975 AND 1980

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Received 23 May 1980, accepted 20 October 1980

Paternoster Rocks (32 44S, 17 53E), Voëleiland (32 53S, 17 52E) 
Noordwesbaai and Hospital Rock (32 57S, 17 52E) (Fig. 1) were 
visited in 1979 to count breeding seabirds.

Paternoster Rocks were approached from the sea on 16 January 1979, 
and Bank Cormorants Phalacrocorax neglectus were observed breeding 
at seven separate rocks (Fig. 2). Landings were effected at most 
sites and totals of 85 nests and 165 adults were counted. On one 
of the rocks six Cape Cormorant P. capensis nests were also seen 
(Fig. 2), the overall head count of this species numbering 704 
individuals. Seven Whitebreasted Cormorants P. carbo were 
present, but there were no signs of breeding. On 1 November 
1975, nine Whitebreasted Cormorant nests were counted at rock p 
(Fig. 2) (J. Cooper, Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African 
Ornithology, in litt.). For Bank Cormorants additional census 
information is available for some of the rocks (J. Cooper in litt.) 
and is summarized in Table 1. It is apparent that this species 
nested at at least nine rocks during the period 1975-1980. At 
one of these (rock d of Fig. 2) breeding was observed in 1975 and 
1976, but not in 1979 or 1980, although during the latter two 
years, old guano was present. The reason for desertion is not 
known. The colony at rock p expanded by more than 50% after 
1975. Increased space for nesting is likely to have been avail­
able following cessation of breeding by Whitebreasted Cormorants. 
From aerial photographs Rand (1963) recorded Bank Cormorants 
breeding on two rocks in June 1957, but identification of the 
rocks is uncertain and no counts were given. He remarked that 
Cape Cormorants might also breed if human interference could be 
controlled.

Voëleiland was visited on 18 April 1979, and 27 Bank Cormorant 
nests were counted. Of these 17 were empty, three contained 
1 egg, five 2 eggs, one 3 eggs and the other, one small chick. An 
aerial photograph of this colony was taken at 10h20 on 27 November 
1978, using a 75 mm lens and 70 mm black and white film rated at 
200 ASA. A total of 32 nests may be distinguished (Fig. 3). 
Other counts of Bank Cormorants at Voëleiland include : 25 
occupied nests on 1 November 1975, 20 occupied nests on 31 August 
1976, and 27 nest sites on 25 April 1980 (J. Cooper in litt.). 
The 1975 and 1976 counts were from the mainland, but in 1980 a 
landing was made. Over the period 1975-1980, the population has 
been relatively stable. Breeding was observed on each visit, but 
was at an early stage in April of both 1979 and 1980. On 31 
August 1976, four occupied Crowned Cormorant P. coronatus nests 
were present (J. Cooper in litt.), but this species was not 
recorded in subsequent years.
Figure 1

The southwestern Cape Province of South Africa indicating Paternoster Rocks, Voëleiland and Hospital Rock
Figure 2
Sketch of the Paternoster Rocks indicating breeding localities of Bank and Cape Cormorants *Phalacrocorax neglectus* and *P. capensis* on 16 January 1980.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rock (see Fig. 2)</th>
<th>Date of census</th>
<th>Count of nests at Paternoster Rocks, 1975 - 1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Nov. 1975&lt;sup&gt;x&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>31 Aug. 1976&lt;sup&gt;x&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>c. 8&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>No count</td>
<td>No count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>No count</td>
<td>No count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>29&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>25&lt;sup&gt;+&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>q</td>
<td>No count</td>
<td>No count</td>
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<tr>
<td>s</td>
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<tr>
<td>t</td>
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<td>No count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>No count</td>
<td>No count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>x</sup> From J. Cooper (*in litt.*)

<sup>+</sup> Count from shore through telescope

<sup>xx</sup> Count from rock b

<sup>++</sup> Landing effected
Figure 3

Aerial photograph of Voëleiland taken on 27 November 1978. Bank Cormorant *Phalacrocorax neglectus* nests are visible as dark dots on lighter rock surface.
Hospital Rock, which at low tide is accessible from the mainland, was surveyed on 18 April 1979. Fifteen Bank Cormorant nests were present on two rocks. Of these, 12 were examined, 10 being empty and two having one egg each. Twenty-six nest sites were recorded on 9 May 1980 (Cooper in press).

Paternoster Rocks were formerly scraped for guano on a regular basis (Rand 1963). The maximum recorded yield since 1898 was 113 tonnes in 1923, whereas the most recent collection, that of 1973, yielded 50 tonnes. An application to again scrape guano at this locality was received by the Sea Fisheries Institute, under whose jurisdiction the rocks fall, in 1979. However, permission was not granted on account of the undesirability of disturbing one of South Africa's larger Bank Cormorant breeding colonies (Cooper in press). Utilisation by Bank Cormorants of seven rocks for breeding in 1979, compared with only two in 1957, and the presence also of breeding Cape Cormorants in 1979 suggest that the seabird populations are benefitting from reduced disturbance and that the current policy is justifiable. The smaller populations at Voëleiland and Hospital Rock may be expected to evidence similar responses to the level of human activity. On account of the easy access to Hospital Rock, there is a possibility that its Bank Cormorant colony will be subject to increased interference by casual visitors in future years, especially with rapid developments at Saldanha Bay and other localities in the southwestern Cape already underway. Adequate measures should be taken to prevent unnecessary disturbance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank J. Cooper for making his census information available and for commenting on the manuscript.

REFERENCES


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