



The Water Birds of Ledibeng (Part 2)



These **Whitefaced Ducks / Nonnetjie-eende** or ***Dendrocygna viduata*** were photographed on the Estate. Whitefaced ducks are very active flying around just before first light. Most other duck or goose species start to fly after first light. Whitefaced ducks feed on buds, seeds, rhizomes, tubers, some insect larvae, molluscs and crustaceans. They usually breed from December to May in our area, and the nest usually resembles a grass-lined hollow in tall grass or aquatic vegetation. The nests are very seldom lined with down.

Blacksmith Plover / Bontkiewiet or ***Vanellus armatus*** is a fairly common bird. They are usually seen at the edge of a dam, lake or stream. The sound made by these birds resembles the sound a hammer makes on an anvil, hence the name Blacksmith Plover. They usually feed on insects, worms and molluscs. The nests of these plovers are just a hollow in the ground, often lined with little

stones. It is very difficult to find the eggs or the nest. The best time to look for the eggs is during the hottest part of the day, around noon. The birds will, at this time, sit on the nest to regulate the temperature of the eggs.





The **Wood Sandpiper / Bosruiter** or **Tringa glareola** will in all probability leave South Africa at the end of March 2011 and fly to Northern Europe and Asia to breed. Some of them will return to South Africa in August of next year. It has been noted that some birds from this species will stay in South Africa during the winter months. They usually feed on molluscs, crustaceans, insects and worms. They are usually found along streams, flooded grasslands and estuaries.



The **Painted Snipe / Goudsnip** or **Rostratula benghalensis** is a very shy bird and difficult to photograph. They usually hide amongst reeds and water-plants. The bird in the picture is a female. The white marking or mask around the eye of the male doesn't extend quite as far back compared to that of the female. They usually feed on insects, crustaceans, worms and molluscs. Unlike other species, only the male sits on the eggs until they hatch.



Nature and Its Ways

A female bushbuck was killed by a caracal on the south eastern side of the Estate. The remains were discovered by the game rangers during an anti-poaching operation in the area.



The question now is: How can one tell if it was killed by a leopard, a brown hyena, a caracal or a jackal? All of these predator species mentioned have a different modus operadi when it comes to killing, and thereafter the way in which they feed on the carcass. Looking for tracks, in the vicinity of the kill is always a quick way to identify which species made the kill. However sometimes tracks are not all that visible.

When a leopard kills an animal the bite-marks below the jaw on the neck area can clearly be seen. In addition, scratch marks made by the nails of the front paws on the upper shoulder area where it



held onto the animal whilst suffocating it, are also visible. Thereafter the prey will be moved up into a tree or if the animal is too big it will be dragged under a bush. Often a leopard will remove hair by using the front teeth. The leopard will then continue to feed on the hind-quarters and the back straps of the animal.

After the leopard has finished eating it will cover the prey with grass and leaves if it was unable to pull it up into a tree. Quite often the area where the meat was bitten off can be investigated in an attempt to determine the distance between the canine teeth. With leopards this can be anywhere from 60-80 mm.



An animal killed by a jackal will also reveal bite marks on the throat area but with no nail marks on the body of the prey. The nails of a jackal, a dog and a brown hyena are non-retractable and therefore cannot be used in the way a cat can use its nails by holding onto the prey. After the animal is suffocated the jackal will usually start feeding in the area where the guts are located, thus eating the intestines, the stomach, the liver, heart and lungs.

When a caracal kills prey it will follow the behaviour of a leopard and thereafter it will start to feed on the hind quarters. A caracal is a fussy eater and will disregard the internal organs of larger prey. A Caracal usually doesn't position the prey in a tree but is known for covering it up. The distance between the canine teeth is in the region of 24-30 mm.



A brown hyena smothers its prey by grabbing it by the throat. Once the animal is dead it will start feeding on the gut area. Hyenas have an affinity for eating and digesting bones. When investigating a carcass where bones and all remains have been eaten, the chance is very good that a hyena has been involved.

One has to be careful not to confuse the evidence of the initial kill with that left behind by scavengers. The picture of the dead bushbuck clearly shows evidence of scavengers (jackal) that came long after the prey was killed by a caracal. Note how the guts have been removed.



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From your Wildlife Management Team

