



SNR FACT SHEET

AFRICAN BLACK OYSTERCATCHER SWART TOBIE (*Haematopus moquini*)



This striking wader with glossy black plumage, orange-red eye-ring, large orange beak and pink legs can be seen foraging on the mud flats adjacent to the northern shores of the Steenbok Nature Reserve.

The African Black Oystercatcher is territorial, and the same pair breeds in the same place year after year. They mate for life and are known to live for over 18 years. They usually lay only 2 eggs in a nest which is a scrape in the sand within 30m of the high water mark.

The species is under threat because its peak breeding season coincides with the height of the summer holiday season. Increased human activities and domestic dogs disturb the birds, who fly away and expose the eggs and chicks to predation by Kelp gulls.

The 2010-2011 breeding season for the entire Knysna lagoon area produced only 6 survivors. The Ashmead Channel area recorded no surviving chicks, compared to 3 in the 2009/2010 season.

Oystercatchers hunt for food only at low tide, so if disturbed do not have enough time to collect food for themselves and their chicks before the tide comes in again. The preservation of the invertebrate reserve adjacent to SNR should help to make it easier for pairs breeding nearby to obtain sufficient food without being disturbed.

Because of concern over the future of the African Black Oystercatcher, the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town has set up an Oystercatcher Conservation Programme to monitor and develop a conservation strategy for the oystercatcher population. The Lakes Bird Club is an active participant in this important programme.



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