



SNR FACT SHEET

CATERPILLARS AND CUCKOOS

During June and July large numbers of hungry and gregarious caterpillars hatch in shrubs of the *Taaibos* (*Searsia*) species in the Park, and can be seen along sections of the brick pathway. Groups of the caterpillars mass together as they eat every leaf on the shrubs, soon completely denuding them so that from a distance they look dead. However, after a few weeks the first signs of new green leaves appear and eventually the shrubs recover completely.



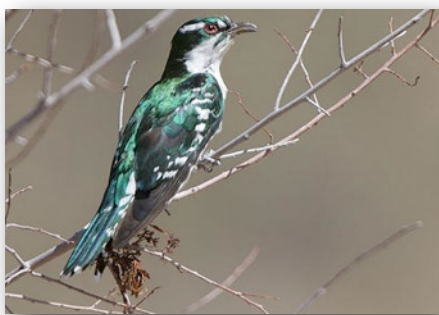
Klaas's Cuckoo
(*Chrysococcyx klaas*)



The caterpillars are the larvae of the Barred Eggarlet Moth (*Bombycomorpha bifascia*) – a light-coloured moth with brown markings on its wings, which lays its eggs on the host plant in April or May. When they are fully grown, the caterpillars move to places where they can create tough cocoons in which to pupate, from which the moth eventually emerges - so beginning the cycle once more.

Winter is a difficult time for insect-eating birds, and not many like hairy caterpillars! Cuckoos, however, are known to eat hairy caterpillars, and the Diderick Cuckoo has been photographed eating these identical caterpillars in other parts of the country.

Unfortunately the Diderick Cuckoo arrives in Knysna too late to benefit from this juicy food source. Klaas's Cuckoo, which is here all year round, has been seen in Nature's Valley eating these caterpillars. It very probably feeds on them in Steenbok Park as well, as does the Black-headed Oriole – another Park resident.



Diderick Cuckoo
(*Chrysococcyx caprius*)

Photographs by
Trevor Hardaker

Acknowledgements
to Geoff McIlleron,
Nature's Valley



Black-headed Oriole
(*Oriolus larvatus*)