

# In your garden

Issue 11 - 19 September 2021



## Hoverflies - mimics of bees and wasps

Hoverflies are a group of flies that mimic bees and wasps. They tend to have yellow and black stripes. There are over 200 species of Hoverfly found in South Africa and some are hard to distinguish from actual bees. The name "Hover" Fly arises from their ability to hover very precisely. Fortunately, these are only mimics of bees and wasps, and they cannot sting you. Worldwide there are around 6,000 species of Hoverfly.

As far as I can tell the species in the photo is a **Band-eyed Drone Fly** (*Eristalinus taeniops*). I love the black bars in its eyes! I wonder what its vision is like. As you can see in the photo it is a pretty good mimic of a Honeybee, besides the eyes. It has a wingspan of around 20 mm. Interestingly it is attracted to white and yellow flowers. The adults feed off nectar. The larvae of the Band-eyed Drone Fly are referred to as rat-tailed maggots. They can be found in various unsavoury places such as animal carcasses, mud and water that contains pig manure.

It occurs in gardens and other habitats across South Africa with the exception of the drier western regions. Beyond our borders it has a widespread distribution stretching across much of Africa and Europe and parts of Asia.



## Fiscal Flycatcher

Many people are familiar with the Fiscal Shrike but not as many are familiar with the Fiscal Flycatcher and may even confuse the two. At a glance they look the same. Both are black on top, white underneath and have a white bar in their wing. The **Fiscal Shrike** is much bigger than the Fiscal Flycatcher and is normally seen perched on telephone wires, walls, and other exposed perches. The flycatcher prefers to stay near vegetation but may be seen perched on an outer branch of a tree or shrub.



## Village Weaver

The Bronze Mannikin is a well-known and much-loved garden bird in the eastern regions of South Africa. It has also established itself in Gauteng and in small populations in other places such as Cape Town. Many people know it as a "**Fret**", especially non-birders.

They are quite cute birds, especially when they snuggle up to each other on a branch. Generally, they will visit your garden in small flocks, perhaps numbering 30 birds, except during the

Fiscal Flycatcher's may be found in most places in South Africa, but the area should have plenty of vegetation. They are particularly fond of parks and gardens which offer them cover, breeding sites and these places tend to attract insects. They are normally found singly or in pairs, but groups may be seen together in a fruit tree outside of the breeding season.

Insects are their favourite food, but they can also be attracted to feeding tables by putting out bonemeal. When hunting insects, they perch in a spot where they can see some open ground below them and then fly down to catch their unsuspecting prey. Often, they will return to the same perch to eat the insect. Besides insects and bonemeal, they will sometimes eat a bit of fruit and aloe nectar.

Fiscal Flycatcher's may nest in your garden if they find a suitable site for the nest. They usually make their nest in the fork of a tree, often in a concealed location. The normal clutch size is 3 eggs which are incubated by the female. During this time the male brings food to her. After two weeks or so the eggs hatch and the chicks are then fed by both male and female.

breeding season when they tend to scatter and will be seen in ones or twos. They nest during summer and make an over-sized, untidy nest in a bush or a tree. They gain access to the nesting chamber via a side entrance. Up to 6 eggs may be laid and are incubated by both male and female. A clutch size between 3 and 5 is the norm. They both share the duty of feeding the chicks for around 3 weeks.

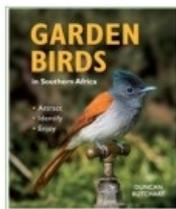
Once these birds find a garden that puts out seed then they will be there every day! They crowd bird feeders, even standing on top of each other at times. Besides seed they do eat insects and bits of plant material. Quite often you can see Bronze Mannikins feeding on the seed of grass on road verges. They hang on the long stalks which in turn bend over from the weight of these tiny birds.

Bronze Mannikins are one of the smallest birds to visit bird feeders and can't really be confused with any other species, except for the Red-backed Mannikin. Red-backed Mannikins may also visit gardens but less commonly than their bronze cousins. In my garden in Durban, I used to get both species, sometimes at the same time. The Red-backed Mannikin is reddish on its back and has a neater colouration overall. The Bronze Mannikin is brown on the back and looks a bit scruffy.

## Advertise in this newsletter

"In your garden" is looking for advertisers. This newsletter is aimed at South African gardeners, particularly those that are interested in indigenous plants as well as the birds, butterflies and more that their gardens attract. If you are interested, then please contact us at: [steven@natureinyourgarden.co.za](mailto:steven@natureinyourgarden.co.za).

I look forward to hearing from you.



### Subscriber Competition

As a subscriber to this newsletter, you are in line to win a copy of "Garden Birds in South Africa" by Duncan Butchart.

This excellent book describes around 100 birds that are likely to appear in gardens in South Africa. The book describes how you can set up a bird friendly garden to attract different species. 50 species of plants are described including trees, aloes, proteas and much more. The main part of the book covers 101 species of birds. This section not only helps to identify them but also how to attract them. Other chapters detail subjects such as feeding birds, providing nesting sites and migration.

This competition will close when the newsletter has 1,000 subscribers so why not encourage your friends and family to subscribe! Unfortunately, this competition is only available to subscribers in South Africa. Delivery will be done to the winner's nearest branch of Postnet.

## Send me your garden bird list

Do you keep a garden bird list, and you live in a housing complex or estate? I

would like to start building up a database of garden birds for as many complexes and estates as possible. As I start getting information then I will make it available to anyone who is interested. So, if you have a garden bird list then I would like to ask if you would be kind enough to send me a copy, and to send any updates as new birds are added to your list. In future issues I will be inviting readers to send in a short article about the birds in their gardens. It is your chance to brag about the birds that visit you and how you attract them.

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