

Multiple nest use by the Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

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Rowan (1983) made reference to multiple use of nests by the Laughing Dove: "... records of 2-8 successive clutches being laid in the same nests, usually after some refurbishing, with the intervals between fledging and re-laying varying from a few days to a few weeks."

During the period September 1992 to August 1996, I observed and monitored nest re-use in a *Cotoneaster* shrub outside the windows at Nampak Group R&D, Epping Industria, Cape Town. A total of five different nests were built in the shrub during this period, all of which were re-used. The following is a record of these nesting activities.

Nest 1

First occupation: Two eggs were observed in this nest on the afternoon of 23 Sep. 1992. On 30 September, there were two chicks, and at about 1 pm on 13 Oct., the first chick flew. Both had left the nest by the next day.

Second occupation: One egg was observed on the nest on 28 Oct. By 9 Nov., there was still one egg and incubation had been abandoned. The one egg remained on the nest for several days afterwards.

Third occupation: The bird was seen to be sitting on 30 Nov., and was feeding one small chick on 1 Dec. The chick fledged on the weekend of 12/13 Dec.

Fourth occupation: Two eggs were present on 15 Feb. 1993 and two chicks were seen on 8 Mar. They had fledged by 15 Mar.

Fifth occupation: Fresh nesting material was being added to the nest on 22 and 23 Mar. A bird was on the nest for part of the morning of 22 Mar. and most of the morning on 23 Mar,

but no eggs as yet. The nest was occupied for most of 24 Mar. and by 4.30 pm, when the bird left the nest, one egg was present. At 4.50 pm on 25 Mar., two eggs were present. At least one hatched chick was visible on the afternoon of 7 April. A very cold wet period followed, and on 14/15 April the chicks looked inactive and on 16 April the two dead bodies, covered in ants, were removed from the nest.

Sixth occupation: Bird seen at the nest site tidying up on 13 May. Further activity intermittently until 26 May when one bird sat all day during a period of wet weather. Assumed that first egg had been laid. On 10 June in the afternoon, an adult was seen feeding at least one chick. On 11 June, during a parent change over at 9.15 am, two chicks were visible. By 24 June, the chicks had left the nest and were sitting on branches about a metre from the nest. On 2 July they were seen being fed by the parents on the grounds near the nest.

In early July 1993, a new nest – **Nest 2** – was being constructed about 1.5 m from the first, slightly higher up, in the same shrub.

Seventh occupation: Adult present on nest 23 July, and one egg seen 27 July. On 28 July two eggs seen. By 2 Aug. this nest was abandoned with one egg remaining on the nest. This egg removed from the nest on 30 Aug.

Eighth occupation: After returning from a spell of leave on 20 Oct., the nest was again found to be occupied. On 25 Oct., the adult was seen to be feeding two small chicks. By 5 Nov., the chicks were moving onto branches near the nest, flexing their wings and preening. They had left the area by 8 Nov.

Ninth occupation: Activity at the nest on the mornings of 13, 14 and 15 Dec., but presence of 2 eggs only confirmed on 21 Dec. Both eggs still present on 31 Dec., but on 3 Jan. 1994 the nest was empty and slightly damaged – predation assumed to have occurred.

Tenth occupation: Bird sitting on rebuilt nest at 8.45am on 3 Feb. 1994 and at 9.45, when the bird left the nest, 2 eggs were present. On 4 Feb. the nest was seen to have been vandalised (eggs broken) and it was finally abandoned.

Nest 2

First occupation: On 9 July 1993, two eggs were present. On 17 July, both eggs had somehow fallen from the nest. One was broken, the other, when opened, contained a dead chick.

Second occupation: One egg on 26 July, two eggs on 27 July. One small chick, one egg on 10 Aug. Two chicks fledged successfully on 25 Aug.

Third occupation. 31 Aug., nest being refurbished. Assumed first egg laid on 2 Sep. Two eggs confirmed on 7 Sep. Two chicks were visible on 16 Sep. Both fledged on 29 Sep. and were still together near the nest on 30 Sep.

Fourth occupation: 2 eggs visible on 20 Oct. One active newly hatched chick unattended for most of 25 Oct.; eventually falls from nest in early afternoon. Parent returns to brood second egg which hatches at about 1.45 pm on 26 Oct. Parent removes egg-shell and returns to brood chick. Chick and parent present on morning of 28 Oct.; later that afternoon nest empty, no sign of adult or chick.

Fifth occupation: One egg present on 16 Nov., two on 17 Nov. Bird sitting until 22 Nov., but nest unoccupied on 23 Nov., although both eggs still present. These eventually disappeared.

Sixth occupation: Two eggs visible on 21 Dec. On 31 Dec. bird seen feeding two chicks. Nest empty and slightly damaged on 3 Jan. 1994 – probable predation.

Seventh occupation: One egg visible on 10 Jan. and two on 12 Jan. On 14 Jan. nest robbed of eggs by stray cat. Nest not used again.

Nest 3

In Jan. 1994, a new nest – **Nest 3** – was being built about a metre above nest No.2. The original nest platform had been built by Cape Sparrows, but they had not completed their nest.

First occupation: Bird sitting tightly from 21 Jan. 1994; presence of two eggs could be confirmed on 31 Jan. Two small chicks visible on 7 Feb. Both fledged 22 Feb.

Second occupation: Bird sitting tightly on 4 Mar., assume 2 eggs. Two half-grown chicks on 28 Mar., still present on 31 Mar. After 7 Apr., nest empty, assume chicks fledged.

Third occupation: Activity at the nest during May and June, bird seen sitting again only on 25 July. Two chicks present on 5 Aug. Two chicks still on nest on 20 Aug., one still in the vicinity on 29 Aug.

Fourth occupation: One egg by late morning on 30 Aug. and two by 31 Aug. This proved to become a most unusual breeding attempt, as the bird present on the nest late on the afternoon of 31 Aug. was seen to be a chick (presumably the “late bloomer” from the previous breeding attempt). On the approach of the adult, it started begging for food. The adult flew off, followed by the chick, fortunately without any damage to the eggs. On 1 Sep., the adult was seen incubating in the morning; in the early afternoon the chick was sitting on the nest and by later in the afternoon both adult and chick were sitting on the nest. They were again sitting side-by-side on the morning of 2 Sep. In the early afternoon, the chick was on the nest when the adult arrived.

Nest No.	Occupation No.	Periods of Occupation	No of eggs laid	No of chicks hatched	Fledging Success (%)
1	1	23/09/92 – 13/10/92	2	2	2
	2	28/10/92 – 9/11/92	1	0	0
	3	30/11/92 – ±13/12/92	1	1	1
	4	15/02/93 – ±15/03/93	2	2	2
	5	24/03/93 – 15/04/93	2	2	0
	6	±26/05/93 – 24/06/93	2	2	2
	7	27/07/93 – 02/08/93	2	0	0
	8	±20/10/93 – 06/11/93	2	2	2
	9	±20/12/93 – 30/12/93	2	0	0
	10	02/02/94 – 04/02/94	2	0	0
					9/18 = 50%
2	1	09/07/93 – 17/07/93	2	0	0
	2	26/07/93 – 25/08/93	2	2	2
	3	02/09/93 – 29/09/93	2	2	2
	4	20/10/93 – 28/10/93	2	2	0
	5	16/11/93 – 23/11/93	2	0	0
	6	21/12/93 – 03/01/94	2	2	0
	7	10/01/94 – 14/01/94	2	0	0
					4/14 = 28%
3	1	±21/01/94 – 22/02/94	2	2	2
	2	04/03/94 – ±4-5/04/94	2	2	2
	3	25/07/94 – ±27/08/94	2	2	2
	4	30/08/94 – 05/09/94	2	0	0
	5	12/09/94 – 03/10/94	2	2	0
	6	10/10/94 – 13/10/94	0	0	0
	7	19/10/94	0	0	0
	8	31/10/94	0	0	0
	9	28/11/94 – 24-25/12/94	2	2	2
					8/16 = 50%
4	1	14/08/95	1	0	0
	2	26/09/95 – ±22/10/95	1	1	1
	3	±20/11/95 – 29/11/95	2	0	0
	4	18/01/96 – 29/01/96	2	0	0
	5	06/02/96 – 02/03/96	2	2	2
	6	±12/05/96 – 09/06/96	2	2	2
	7	21/08/96 – 27/08/96	2	2	0
					5/12 = 41.7%
5	1	23/08/95 – ±26/09/95	2	2	2
	2	26/10/95 – 13/11/95	2	1	0
					2/4 = 50%

It started begging and the adult flew off, leaving the chick on the nest which now contained only one egg (the second had presumably been dislodged during squabbling between adult and chick). Later that afternoon the adult was sitting, but by the following day (5 Sep.) the nest had been abandoned with the one egg remaining on it.

Fifth occupation: Morning of 12 Sep., a bird was seen sitting on 3 eggs (one presumably remaining from the previous failed attempt). The birds incubated continuously and on 21 Sep., during an incubation changeover, 2 eggs were seen to be present. On 26 Sep., two small chicks were visible and these progressed well until 2 Oct. On the morning of 3 Oct., the nest was empty, probably predated by a Pied Crow seen in the area late the previous afternoon.

Sixth occupation: A bird was seen adding new nesting material on the afternoon of 7 Oct., and two eggs were present on the morning of 11 Oct. On 12 Oct., the birds were seen to be incubating fairly erratically, and by 13 Oct. there was no sign of further incubation, although the two eggs were still present.

Seventh occupation: On the morning of 19 Oct. the two eggs were still present, and by early afternoon the nest contained three eggs. There was no further evidence of nesting activity. Egg dumping?

Eighth occupation: On 31 Oct. a bird was sitting on 4 eggs. There was no further evidence of incubation. Second instance of egg dumping? The 4 eggs were removed by a member of staff on 14 Nov.

Ninth occupation: On 28 Nov., a bird incubated all day; two eggs seen on 29 Nov. On 12 Dec. two small chicks seen. Parents very attentive and on 23 Dec. the chicks were almost ready to fledge. By 26 Dec. the nest was empty, the chicks presumably having fledged.

Over the period 27 Dec. to 9 Jan. 1995, considerable activity was witnessed at the nest site, but no further laying occurred.

Hereafter followed a lull in activity until Aug. 1995, when two new nests were constructed. **Nest 4** (built about 11 Aug.) was approximately 2.5 m above ground level and very visible from a parapet on the building frequently used by cats on the property. **Nest 5** (built about 22 Aug.) was at the same height, but on the opposite side of the tree in a less visible spot.

Nest 4

First occupation: On 14 Aug., bird sitting all morning, and one egg seen in early afternoon. This disappeared shortly afterwards, presumably taken by a cat seen on the parapet opposite.

Second occupation: On 26 Sep. one egg was seen. Still only one egg on 5 Oct., and on 10 Oct. one small chick was present. The chick developed well and a fledged chick was seen near the nest with the adults on 23 Oct.

Third occupation: On 17 Nov., new nesting material was being added to the nest. From 20 Nov. the nest was being incubated and only on 27 Nov. could two eggs be confirmed. On 29 Nov. the nest was undamaged but empty, presumably predated.

Fourth occupation: Between 13 Dec. and 18 Jan. 1996, the birds frequently sat on the nest for long periods, but no eggs laid. From 18 Jan., incubation again continuous and on 23 Jan., two eggs confirmed. On 29 Jan. the nest was again found empty.

Fifth occupation: From 6 Feb. the birds were again incubating and on 19 Feb., two small chicks confirmed. These grew well and fledged successfully on 2 March.

Sixth occupation: Birds on nest effecting repairs from 10 May, and two eggs confirmed on 20 May. Chicks probably hatched about 27 May and almost ready to fledge on 8 June. By 10 June the nest was empty, the chicks presumably having fledged successfully.

Seventh occupation: The birds were adding nesting material on 8 Aug. and sitting tightly

from 12 Aug. Two eggs were visible 19 Aug. and two small chicks on 26 Aug. These had disappeared by 27 Aug.

Nest 5

First occupation: Nest built about 22 Aug. 1995. One egg on 23 Aug. and two on 24 Aug. Both chicks fledged about 26 September.

Second occupation: Birds adding new nesting material from 23 Oct., and presumably laid about 26/27 Oct. On 10 Nov. an adult was seen feeding at least one small chick, but by 13 Nov. the nest was abandoned with one egg (addled?) remaining. The single egg eventually disappeared and the nest was not used again.

Unfortunately, the “project” ended in Sep. 1996. Whilst I was away on leave, the shrub was severely pruned by an over-zealous gardening service, so much so that it subsequently died.

The table on page 26 summarises the timing of the nesting attempts and their rates of **success**/failure.

Unfortunately, none of the birds were ringed, and one had to assume that nest re-use was by the same birds. With the presence of so many nests in the same shrub, ringing to establish possible relationships between the various nest builders and occupants could have been interesting.

The Laughing Dove is a highly successful species, and these observations indicate that this is more the result of frequent breeding attempts than a high rate of breeding success. The likelihood of predation, particularly by Pied Crows, was certainly higher later in the observation period as these predators became well established in the area. Although close to regular human activity, interference from people was minimal and is not likely to have had a noticeable effect on nesting success or failure, except for the one incident mentioned.

Rowan M.K. 1983. *The Doves, Parrots, Louries & Cuckoos of Southern Africa.* David Philip.

