

The Drakensberg Rockjumper

The Cape and Drakensberg Rockjumpers were split into separate species in the 1980s, so the two shouldn't be confused. The Drakensberg Rockjumper is distributed in the Lesotho Highlands and areas surrounding. The two Rockjumpers differ slightly in size and plumage.



Predated on by Boomslang



Sources:
BirdLife South Africa,
Biosphere-expeditions.org,
Wikipedia.



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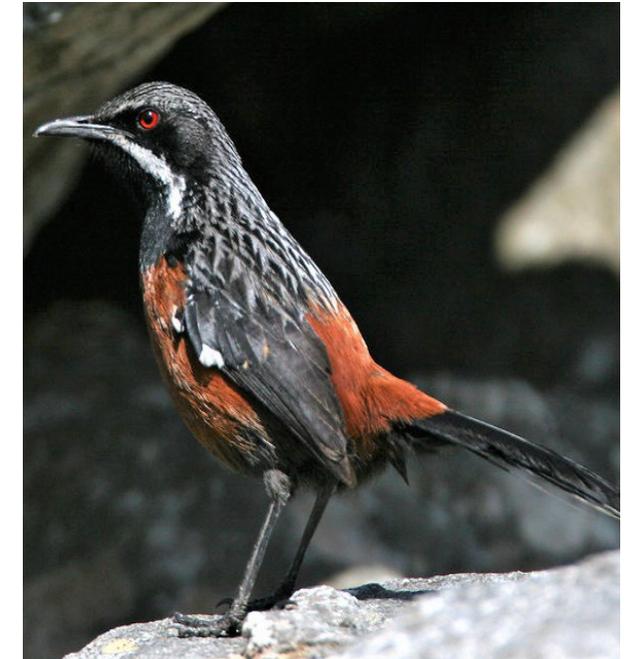
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Cape Rockjumper

(*Chaetops frenatus*)

2021 Bird of the Year



BirdLife South Africa chose this species as 'Bird of the Year' as it is an ambassador for the Fynbos biome: the unique plant kingdom found only in South Africa. There are seven other bird species found here and nowhere else on earth: Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Protea Canary, Cape Siskin, Victorin's Warbler, Agulhas Long-billed Lark and Hottentot Buttonquail.



Cape Rockjumper

Description

With red eyes and striking colouration, the Cape Rockjumper is one of South Africa's most recognisable bird species and birdwatchers from all over the world travel here to see it. The Latin epithet "Frenatus" refers to the "bridled" or black-and-white head pattern. They are small birds with mostly black, white, and red/rufous plumage.

Habitat

Cape Rockjumpers exist only in Alpine Fynbos, a specialized habitat of 90 000 ha from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth in South Africa. These birds are alpine habitat specialists and used to a very specific range of temperatures. Increased fire frequency creates habitat that is favourable to Cape Rockjumpers by opening up the habitat for this species, as it likes to forage by hopping around on the ground. This is a reason that it is mostly associated with high alpine areas and mountainous terrain within the Fynbos, where vegetation is naturally sparse and low.



Nest built under an overhang

Nests

Nests are built on the ground under rocky overhangs, and lined with either fur from red rock hare or old and fluffy protea seed pods. In general, nests are built under rocks on the downward facing slope to provide protection in inclement weather.

Diet

Insects are the major part of the diet, although small vertebrates are reported to be taken by Cape Rockjumpers. A range of insects are taken, including caterpillars, moths, grasshoppers, beetles and flies. In addition to insects other prey include lizards and geckos, amphibians, scorpions, annelid worms and spiders. Their wings are proportionately small and they do not fly very often, although they will often take long gliding "flights" across valleys or downslope. They spend most of their lives running and jumping among rocks and grasses while hunting arthropods, small lizards and amphibians.



The distinctive red eyes and striped head

Conservation status

The Cape Rockjumper is the first South African species to gain a threatened conservation status. This vulnerability appears to be due to a combination of factors. Firstly, they have a physiology that relies on water-loss to keep cool, an odd strategy given the bird lives in a region that experiences dry summers. Juveniles and chicks seem particularly vulnerable to heat stress, while adults simply stop foraging when it gets too warm. Secondly, as ground nesters, Rockjumpers face large amounts of predation from the Boomslang. They also experience predation from Cape Grey Mongoose, Honey Badger, Common Egg-eater and African Vlei rat.