

BIRD OF THE YEAR 2016

sociable weaver

The Sociable Weaver *Philetairus socius* is a highly social species that is endemic to the Kalahari region of southern African. As the common name suggests, these weavers work together to accomplish diverse tasks, from building their highly distinctive nests to helping to raise chicks and defending the nest and colony mates from predators.

Their impressive nest structure, which contains multiple individual chambers, provides shelter from the harsh Kalahari climate, keeping the weavers warm in sub-zero temperatures on winter nights and cool at midday in the scorching summers. It also provides a home to many other Kalahari creatures; Red-headed Finch, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Egyptian Goose and Kalahari tree skink are some of the species known to breed in a Sociable Weaver nest.

The most remarkable resident, though, is the Pygmy Falcon, which is totally dependent on Sociable Weavers' nests for breeding and has even been known to repay the hospitality by occasionally eating its hosts' young!

Large Sociable Weaver colonies also regularly attract snakes, and both Cape cobras and boomslangs often raid the nests to feast on the eggs and chicks that are abundant after the summer rains. As a result, entire colonies may fail to fledge young, even in years of good rainfall. Adding to this unpredictable predation, the Kalahari's erratic rains and extreme temperatures make survival and reproduction highly challenging. Sociable Weavers thrive, however, thanks to their unique cooperative behaviour and physiological adaptations to this



SOCIABLE WEAVERS MARIETJIE FRONEMAN

harsh environment. With the help of man-made structures like telephone and electricity poles, the weavers have even expanded their range into the northern parts of the Nama-Karoo, where in the past the lack of trees prevented them from nesting.

RITA COVAS

GUERRILLA TACTICS IN SANDTON



To birders, a crane is a bird. To the public at large, though, cranes are those enormous, steel lifting gantries that dominate the skyline above building sites. With this word play in mind, a golden opportunity for guerrilla marketing presented itself at the Sandton site of Sasol's new office being built by the Aveng Grinaker-LTA construction company. The marketing opportunity makes use of ambient media, whereby advertisements are placed on unusual items or in unusual and unexpected sites in order to deliver a relevant advertising message.

Marc Meire, MD of Aveng Grinaker-LTA, was happy to assist and agreed to sponsor banners on the company's cranes in support of the Bird of the Year 2015. Of course, the message has to be short, succinct, relevant and provocative – and 'Real cranes fly' fits the bill perfectly. It raises an eyebrow and piques curiosity, and also creates a talking point for pedestrians and

motorists on the busy streets around the site. It delivers a message for birds and bird conservation too.

Thanks go to Marc and to Andy Featherstone, Sasol and Alchemy for their support and assistance, as well as to Mel Tripp for the concept, design and production.

