

The African Telatelist

Newsletter 210 of the African Telately Association – December 2015.

SOME SUMMER VISITOR TO OUR SHORES - (C.Edwards)

Every year hundreds of thousands of birds make the long 10,000 to 14,000 kilometre journey from Europe to South Africa.



Most do not breed here, so for them it is a nice long summer jol. Here they enjoy the local cuisine while in the north nature shuts up shop.

Some of them are no more than 14cm long and weigh as little as 19grams - an incredible feat of flying!

Where do they stop on the way? Maybe our Associate member; Tommy Drinkwater can help with that question.

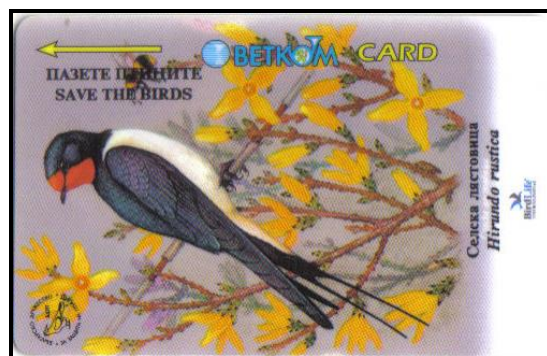
Unlike human male tourists, sex is not

uppermost on their minds, so many leave behind their glad rags and wear drab non-breeding attire instead. Most do not bother to sing while on holiday. Cuckoos do not cuck and warblers do not warble. Birdsong is essentially about territory and mating. So if you are just chilling out in the summer sun, who needs more than the odd danger call every now and then.

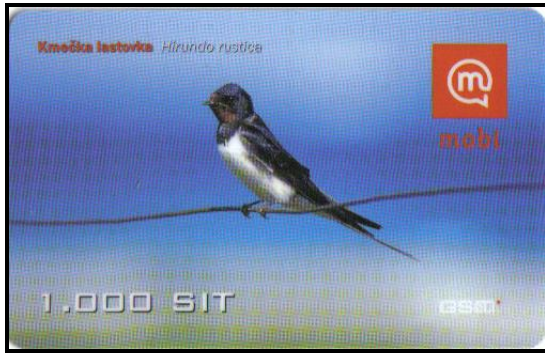
These avian tourists mainly arrive in September or October and depart again in April or May.

I suppose the birds that we associate most with migration are swallows.

The European Swallow, **HIRUNDO RUSTICA** (Ref: Roberts 518) is now called the Barn Swallow as we now use international names. It is most noticeable when it is just about to leave! Large flocks gather on telephone wires and in trees, twittering away, trying to talk up collective courage to start the long journey home. They are quite common throughout the country catching insects on the wing and roosting mainly in reed beds.

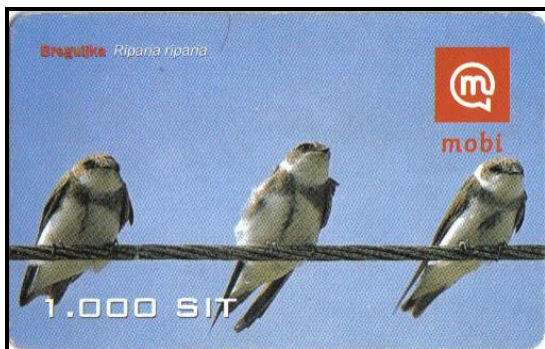


Above: Phonecard from Bulgaria



Above: Phonecard from Slovenia

A less common high flying migrant is the Sand Martin, **RIPARIA RIPARIA** (Ref: Roberts 532). It is found in the wetter parts on the country, mostly in the company of other swallows near marshlands, water bodies and sewerage works.



Above: Phonecard from Slovenia

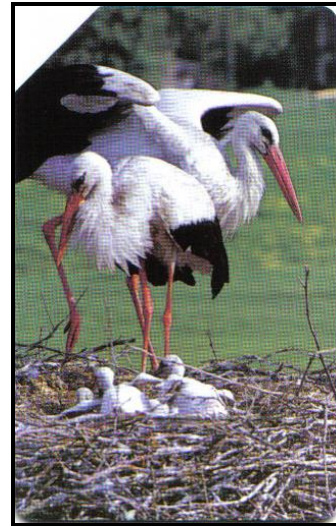
The European or Common Swift, **APUS APUS** (Ref: Roberts 411) does not even bother to land! It is permanently airborne in South Africa, catching flying arthropods (goggas) and resting while gliding at high altitudes. Its extra-long wing feathers give it the ability to float in the rarefied air.



Above: Phonecard from Russia

Some of the biggest birds to migrate are Storks. The White Stork, **CICONIA CICONIA** (Ref: Roberts 83) weighs 3.5kgs. It prefers grassland, cultivated fields, wetland margins and open woodland. It does farmers a

favour by eating locusts and crickets, mice and flying termites. A few juveniles and injured birds do stay for winter. There is a small breeding colony near Bredasdorp.



Above: Phonecard from Poland



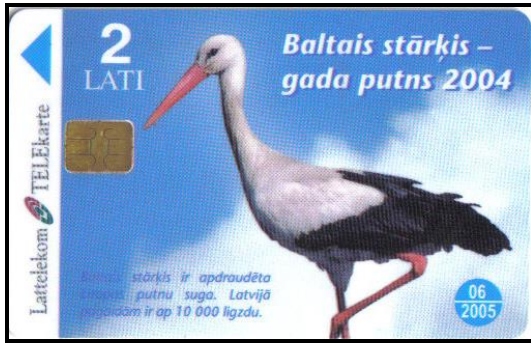
Above: Phonecard from Slovenia



Above: Phonecard from Bulgaria



Above: Phonecard from Germany



Above: Phonecard from Latvia

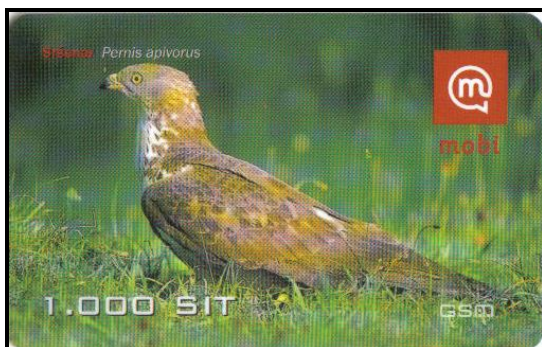
Some large birds of prey also fly in for their summer hols.

The Lesser Spotted Eagle, **AQUILA POMERINA** (Ref: Roberts 134) Flies from Eastern Europe and Russia in October. It is usually found in the north of S.A., in open woodland and in the company of its more eastern cousins the Steppe Eagles, **AQUILA NIPALENSIS** (Ref: Roberts 133). They share a taste for flying termites, rodents and nestling.



Above: Phonecard from Poland

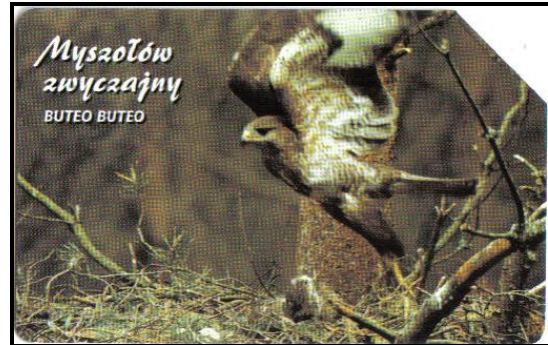
Another, but more rare brown raptor, is the European Honey Buzzard, **PERNIS APIVORUS** (Ref: Nr. 130 in the latest Roberts). It prefers well-developed woodlands and, as its name suggests, is partial in S.A., to wasps, bees and their brood.



Above: Phonecard from Slovenia

The Steppe Buzzard, **BUTEO VULPINUS**, previously **BUTEO BUTEO**, (Ref: Roberts

149) is quite common from October to March, especially in agricultural areas. It lives on insects, rodents, reptiles and small birds. It often hunts from the top of telephone poles, fencing posts and exposed branches of trees.



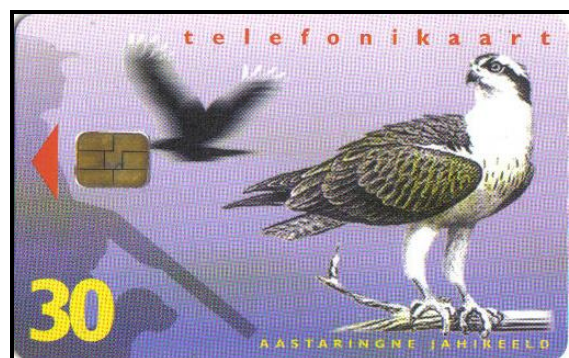
Above: Phonecard from Poland

These three are quite similar in colour and can be difficult to tell apart in the field.

The Osprey, **PANDION HALIAETUS** (Ref: Roberts 170), is much lighter in colour and not a common visitor. It has become rare in parts of Europe where special breeding programmes have been set up for its conservation. It likes water, especially estuaries and lagoons, but can also be found near inland lakes. It lives almost entirely on fish. Juveniles may overwinter. There have been a couple of records of it nesting in our region.



Above: Phonecard from Poland



Above: Phonecard from Estonia

The European Golden Oriole, **ORIOLE ORIOLE** (Ref: Roberts 543) is a common summer visitor to most of South Africa. Its African cousin, the African Golden Oriole **ORIOLE AURUTUS** (Ref: Roberts 544) too make a journey south. But is found only in the far north. The wings of the European one are solid black, while those of the African one are barred.

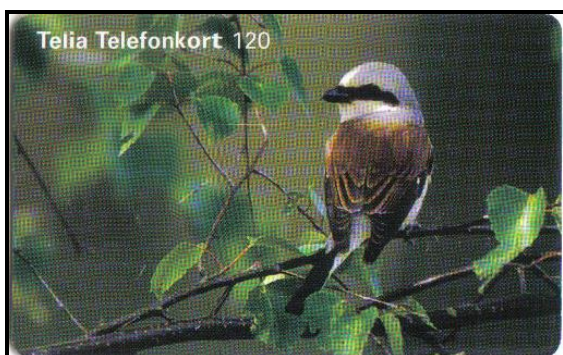
The Golden Oriole does not call in South Africa. If you are in Gauteng and hear what sounds like an Oriole, it is more likely to be a Southern Bou Bou Shrike, **LANIARIUS FERRUGINEUS** (Ref: Roberts 736) whose call is very similar.



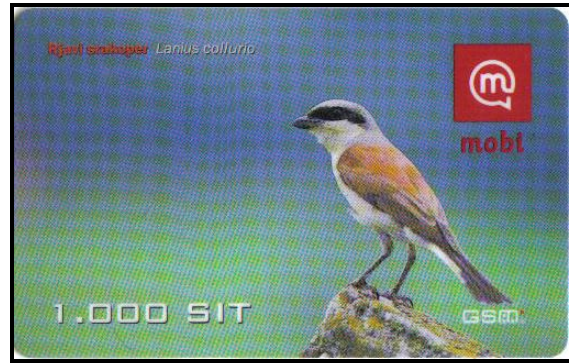
Above: Phonecard from Bulgaria.

The only resident Oriole in South Africa is the Black Headed Oriole, **ORIOLE LARVATUS** (Ref: Roberts 545) which is a frequent visitor to aloe gardens in winter.

One intrepid shrike that comes down for the season is the Red Headed Shrike, **LANIUS COLLURIO** (Ref: Roberts 733). It arrives late in November. Here it prefers the semi-arid open woodlands. Especially acacia trees (Now either Senegalia or Vachellia since the Ozzies usurped the name acacia for their own wattles!). From these branches the shrike hunts insects.

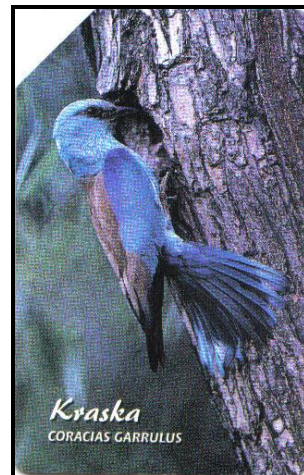


Above: Phonecard from Sweden



Above: Phonecard from Slovenia

Another "Sit and wait" hunter is the European Roller, **CARACIAS GARRULUS** (Ref: Roberts 446). It's completely blue head and chest distinguish it from its South African relatives. It can be found over most of the country from October. It likes open woodland and will perch on dead branches, telephone poles and power lines waiting for its lunch of insects to come by.



Above: Phonecard from Poland



Above: Phonecard from Hungary

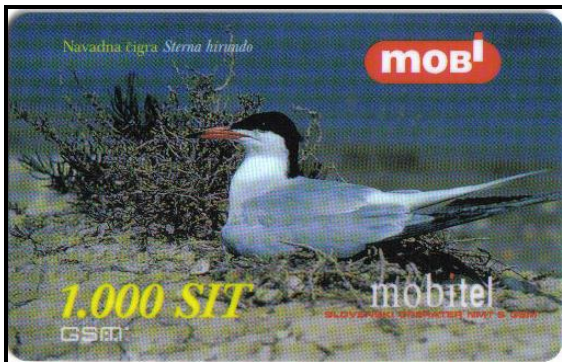
Sea birds too enjoy a change of scenery. The Common Tern, **STERNA HIRUNDO** (Ref: Roberts 327) arrives very early, in August. Males are incognito while here, losing colour in the feathers on their heads and changing the colour of their legs from red to dull orange. The Terns stick to the

coastline, mainly on the Atlantic side. Here it lives on small fish and crustaceans.

They are all very difficult to tell apart from their native cousins.



Above: Phonecard from Poland



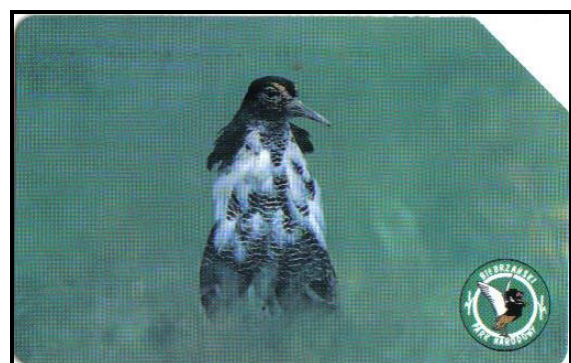
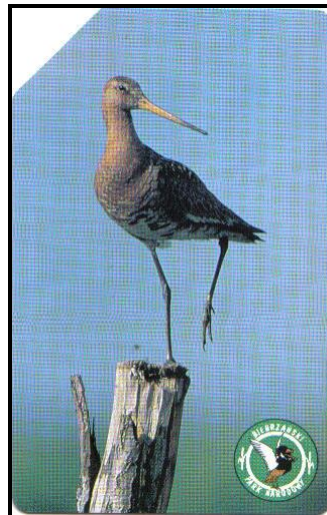
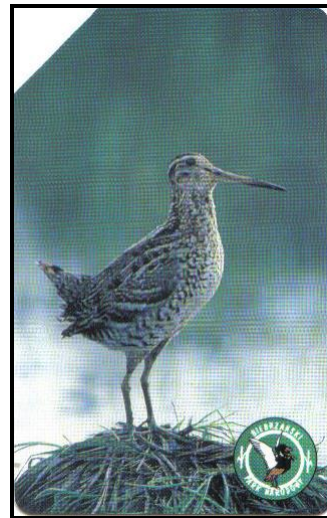
Above: Phonecard from Slovenia.

Another Tern to turn up here in summer is the White-winged Tern, *CHLIDONIAS LEUCOPTERUS* (Roberts 339). It arrives in September and prefer inland water bodies and wetlands

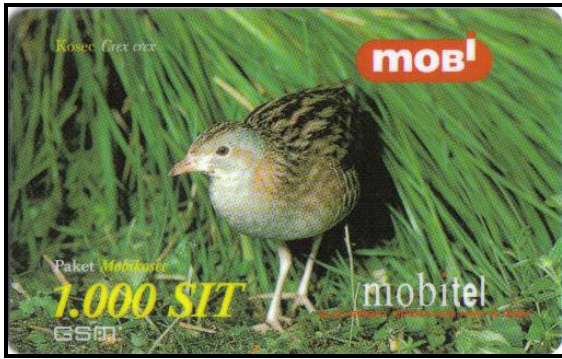


Above: Phonecard from Poland

Other water birds that often arrive for summer breaks are the Great Snipe, *GALLINAGO MEDIA* (Ref: Roberts 285), the Black Tailed Godwit, *LIMOSA LIMOSA* (Ref: Roberts 287), the European Curlew, *NUMENIUS ARQUATA* (Ref: Roberts 289) corncrake *crex crex* (Ref. Roberts 211) and the Ruff, *PHILOMACHUS PUGNAX* (Ref: Roberts 284). They all prefer wetlands and marshes where they dig for worms, molluscs, crustaceans and fish fry.

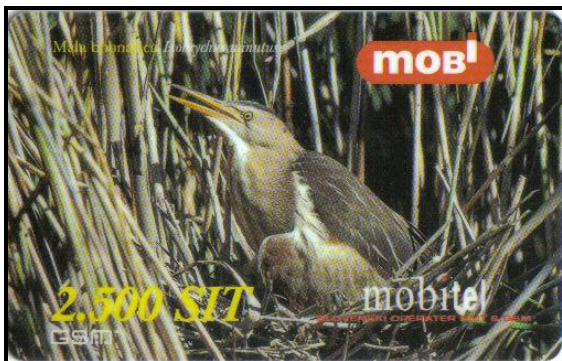


Above 4 Phonecards from Poland



Above: Phonecard from Slovenia

The little Bittern, *IXOBRYCHUS MINUTUS*, (Roberts 78) has breeding cousins resident in South Africa. It pays them a flying visit from December, but does not itself breed here. You shall not hear this bittern cry, it is mostly silent in South Africa.



Above: Phonecard from Slovenia



Above: Phonecard from Poland

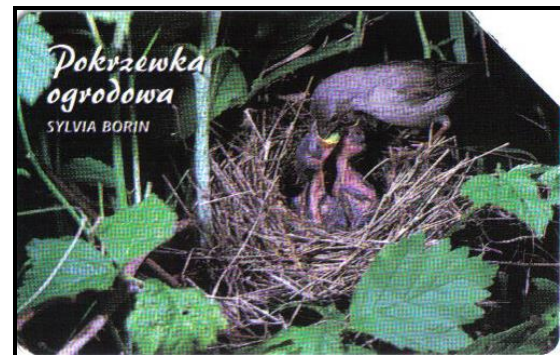
The Yellow Wagtail, *MOTACILLA FLAVA* (Ref: Roberts 714) is probably the smallest of all of the migrants weighing in at 17 grams! It is found on the eastern side of South Africa where it prefers salt pans and aquatic margins. Sometimes after rain it will

move to open countryside. This little insectivore sometimes sticks around for winter, probably too tired to fly home.



Above: Phonecard from Switzerland.

Another little 'un is the Garden Warbler, *SYLVIA BORIN* Ref: (Roberts 619). This tiny traveller can be found in thick vegetation and well-wooded gardens in the eastern parts of the country. Its food is mainly insects, but is also fond of berries and fruit.



Above: Phonecard from Poland

..... AND SOME THAT HAVE COME TO STAY

Of all those that have come to stay, the most well-known must be the ubiquitous Feral Pigeon *COLUMBA LIVIA*, or in our modern PC world the Rock Dove. (Ref: Roberts 348)

Why the name was changed I do not know as it only inhabits urban areas. It has become a curse in cities throughout the world defecating and defacing buildings and creating a mess. You would think that the world's poor would eat them and keep numbers down. We used to keep pigeons for the pot when I was a kid. A winter's speciality- pigeon pie!



Above: Phonecard from Russia

Another messy bird is the European Starling, **STURNIS VULGARIS** (Ref: Roberts 757). A major problem and common resident in “man-modified” areas of the Western Cape and as far as Port Elizabeth. Introduced by the British settlers to remind them of home, it eats mainly fruit to the annoyance of many urban gardeners and fruit farmers.



Above: Phonecard from Poland

Less of a problem but widely distributed wherever man has settled is the House Sparrow, **PASSER DOMESTICUS** (Ref: Roberts 801). Again brought here by the Brits, it mixes quite happily with local sparrows. Their dawn chirping can be quite pleasant. Like all sparrows they mainly eat seeds but will settle for any scraps on offer.



Above: Phonecard from Russia

A far less noticeable immigrant is the

Chaffinch, **FRINGILLA COECEBS** (Ref: Roberts 868). Now called the Common Chaffinch, although it is restricted to the Newlands/Constantia areas of Cape Town. It did enjoy the pine plantations of Tokai which were unfortunately destroyed in the March fires. It was introduced by Cecil John Rhodes as he was fond of the little bird. It lives on seeds and insects.



Above: Phonecard from Russia

Lastly, the Mullard, **ANAS PLATYRHYNCHUS**. Not even allocated a number in Roberts! It's interbreeding with native duck species in South Africa is becoming a major concern. More or less confined to Gauteng and the Western Cape, it was introduced to pretty up parks throughout the country. It has taken a liking to local birds who must be smitten by its gaudy gear!



Above: Phonecard from Russia

Message from Editor: A special word of thanks to Cedric Edwards for supplying all the phonecard images and compiling this very interesting Newsletter.

It is very clear that Cedric has a passion for Birds☺ - The feathered ones.