

## News & Letters — Nouvelles & Lettres

### Request for information and photos of weaver nests

Weavers are a large and diverse bird family, ranging from granivores to insectivores, colonial breeders to solitary nesters, monogamous or polygynous mating systems, and with brightly coloured to dull brown plumage. Their conservation status ranges from the most abundant land-bird in the world, the Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea*, to 13 threatened species.

Many weavers are common and breed in close proximity to humans. This enables their breeding effort to be easily monitored, and the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town now provides a platform for observers to submit records directly to a web server. The project is a “Virtual Museum” project called PHOWN (PHotos Of Weaver Nests) and the following information is requested: a digital photo of a weaver colony or solitary nest, coordinates, identity of the species, nest count and date. The data submitted to PHOWN will provide information on the distribution, size and geographic variation of nesting colonies of weavers globally. Single records are used to examine nest site choice and the extent of mixed species colonies, while repeated photographs of a colony can track changes within a breeding season and over many years. More applications could be developed; for instance, users could monitor all the weaver colonies in a small area to provide nesting densities.

More details of the project may be found at <<http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown.php>>, including a species list, instructions on participating, a link to the Virtual Museum submissions page and summaries of records that have already been submitted. All weavers in the family Ploceidae are included. Ornithologists and bird watchers in West Africa are warmly invited to participate.

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