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The first six months of this year have been agonizing for the Committee of the Club — we had taken the Club out from under the wing of the Namibia Scientific Society and now the question arose as to whether it was the right decision. The fundamental changes that were decided upon were fairly simple. Firstly we had to take control of our own administration, secondly we had to get more information out to members on a regular basis (i.e. get *Lanioturdus* out regularly) and we had to put a cohesive programme of events and outings together.

When we sent out our early appeal for members to indicate whether they were interested in joining the "new" Club we were a little concerned that only 80 or so people responded — we had "lost" nearly 50 members overnight!! This gave us some food for thought, but it was decided we needed to go ahead with the changes as these were designed to make the Club more appealing. Happily, we think we made the right decision. Membership is up to where we were before the changes, we have a broader membership base (with a good representation on the coast and in the country districts) and more people are signing up every month.

Our programme of events seems to be hitting the right spot as well. We are averaging about 20 people per outing, with some reaching the unbelievable level of over 50!! The evening lectures are also being well attended and it is gratifying to see new people coming to these activities.

Lastly, it seems that *Lanioturdus* may be taking off as well. Articles and information seem to be coming in at a steady pace and we were able to put this copy together with the minimum of begging for material. Many thanks to Coleen Mannheimer for her artwork! I think it is the first copy for a long time with minimal inputs from professional ornithologists!!

Many thanks to all of you who have supported us through this period of change. Much still remains to be done (most importantly we need to appeal to younger members) and we depend on you, the Club members, for support and guidance in the future. Lets keep on hearing from you.

in some form or another — in the case of birds, the coding medium is a series of well-developed audible signals better known as bird calls or songs by which the signaller and receiver influence each other's behaviour in an interactive process. All bird species have individually distinctive vocalisations which serve to identify their respective heritages. Variations of these vocalisations are used to convey a range of messages. The same species may also develop regional "dialects", in other words, variations to the basic song patterns to identify the area of its origin; it is even possible that the overwintering region of an individual member of some migratory species may be determined from its calls.

Sound travels well in most habitats where birds occur. This is the prime reason for the evolution of the use of sound as a communication medium. In dense forests and woodlands, aural communication is more frequent and better developed than in more open areas where communication by visual signals can augment audible messages.

Bird songs and calls are often more intense and concentrated just prior to breeding time, since territories have to be established and potential breeding partners have to be attracted. During the courtship phase, the tendency to vocalise is influenced by a concentration of sex hormones in the blood, which reaches its peak during the mating/breeding phase. Bird song thus also has a reproductive function in addition to the more social function of warning of an approaching predator, mutual identification or definition of territorial boundaries.

Sound is generally produced more frequently by the males of a vocal species of birds. Most females, although capable of producing calls, do not do so as often as males. A number of species have developed a duetting type of vocalisation, during which each individual has a fixed sequence of calls resulting in a combination which may appear to be one single call. Duetting pairs often have a lifelong bond, broken only by the death of one member.

Each male bird develops its own song pattern slightly different from those of its immediate neighbours in order to judge the distance to the next singing individual on the basis of structural changes in the acoustic signals.

The ability of song is a meticulously organised procedure which immature fledglings have to start to learn before they can become fully independent. Call recognition and production is a species-specific, intensive learning programme, on which the individuals' chances of survival may depend, and calls may comprise inherited as well as acquired components. The ability to recognise its own song is an inherited ability, but the song of a bird raised in isolation is only an approximation of the species-specific vocalisation.

*In an article entitled "Big-brained Braggarts" in Africa Birds and Birding, 1997, Volume 2, Number 2, the phenomenon of birdsong is discussed from a different perspective. Studies done in Sweden suggest that a male bird's repertoire may be indicative of genetic superiority, and is used by females of the species to select the best available mate to ensure the highest possible chances of survival for her offspring'. This resulted in the side-effect of promoting the evolution of birdsong, to their advantage and our pleasure. — H. Dedekind*

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## A SIGHT RECORD OF WHITEBELLIED STORM PETREL — A NEW SPECIES FOR NAMIBIA

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Private Bag 12029, Aussspannplatz, Windhoek

From March 29 to 31, 1997, I was an official guest aboard a US Navy Frigate, the USS McInerney (FFG-8), which transitted from Walvis Bay, Namibia to Simon's Town, South Africa to participate in the South African Navy's 75th Anniversary Celebrations. During my spare time, I kept a constant watch for pelagic birds. Twenty species were observed in Namibian waters, one of which, the Whitebellied Storm Petrel, *Fregetta grallaria*, was a new sighting for the nation. Three more species were added while in South African waters, making a total of 23 for the trip list. This report will focus on Namibian sightings, only referring to South African observations tangentially.

The ship, under the command of Commander Deverill, departed Walvis Bay at about 08:30 on 29/3/97 under calm conditions. As we headed out of port we were struck by the incredible number of large, pink jellyfish, which formed a pink, floating mat for as far as the eye could see. One small pod of dolphins and a couple of fur seals kept us company as we glided through the pink goo. The ship sailed directly towards South Africa, averaging 40 to 60 kilometres off of the coast. The weather was "beautiful". Unfortunately, that meant the wind rarely exceeded 20 km/h, which inhibiting dynamic soaring (and so few birds such as albatrosses). One advantage of the calm light winds, however, was that the ship sailed smoothly. The frigate was a perfect seabird observing platform. (It does a lot of other things quite well too!). I spent most of my time on the weather deck, which was about 10m above the water and permitted easy access to either side of the ship. I could also get higher or lower, but that height was a good compromise between being away from the water and getting a more distant view of the horizon. Driven by gas turbine engines, the ship seemed to glide along effortlessly through the water, which when combined with the calm seas, provided a very stable viewing platform.

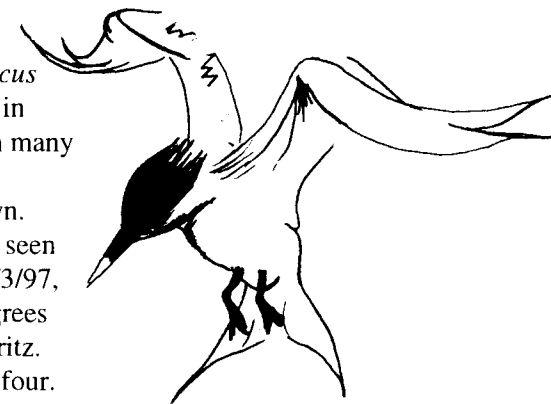
With the ship travelling at a speed of about 30 km/h, the first day's observations ended north of Luderitz. The next morning dawned as we were about an hour north of the Orange River mouth, which separates the Namibian from South African waters. After steaming the rest of the day down the coast of South Africa, night fell when we were just north of 31 degrees South. The next morning were awoke to a spectacular sunrise over Table Mountain as we slowly continued around the Cape and into False Bay and Simon's Town.

Though the ship's most constant companion was the Whitechinned Petrel, there were many other ornithological highlights of the trip. Some 20 mollymawks were observed, only about one quarter of which were identified positively. (Most were juveniles, resting on the water, or too distant allow for confident identification.) In Namibian waters, but oddly not in South African, two dozen storm petrels were observed, of four species. The star was a single Whitebellied Storm Petrel, which made a brief appearance at 14 degrees East latitude and 24 degrees South, just after we crossed the 200 fathom (400m) line over what looked like an undersea

canyon in the nautical chart. The last interesting phenomenon was that many of the terns were in breeding plumage, facilitating identification of this usually frustrating group. In general, birds were widely scattered (possibly due to the poor wind conditions). Apart from the concentration of storm petrels in Namibian waters, there were many more *Puffinus* shearwaters in Cape Waters, and Sabine's Gulls were only seen off the Orange River mouth, in both Namibian and South African waters.

### Species accounts

Jackass Penguin *Spheniscus demersus*. Only 12 seen in Namibian waters, though many more were seen as we approached Simon's Town. Namibian birds were not seen until the afternoon of 29/3/97, as we approached 26 degrees South latitude near Luderitz. Seen in groups of two to four.



### Blackbrowed Albatross

*Diomedea melanophris*. Only one adult, yellow-billed bird positively identified, near 25 degrees South at 15:30 on 29/3/97.

Shy Albatross *Diomedea cauta*. Clearly the most common albatross, with four positively identified and several more "likelies". Both the nominate and *salvini* races were seen well. They were spread out along the transit of the afternoon of the first day, that is between 24 and 26 degrees South latitude. Several more were seen in Cape waters.

Yellownosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos*. Only one seen positively, separated from *D. cauta* by its more slender 'jizz,' darker bill, and lack of black mark at base of the underwing.

Whitechinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*. This most common species was constantly with the ship. Never out of sight, there were always a few off the stern, but never large numbers.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*. Only seen in Namibian waters after 19:00 on 29/3/97 and in the early morning of 30/3/97. When it showed up, it was common, with flocks of 20 to 30 birds suddenly appearing at about 26 degrees South.

In South African waters, Sooty Shearwaters were common, though Cory's Shearwaters *Puffinus diomedea* were the predominate *Puffinus* in Cape waters on 31/3/97. One Greater Shearwater *Puffinus gavia* was seen at midday on 30/3/97 at about 30 degrees South and a couple were in the flocks of Cory's near Cape Town on 31/3/97.

Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*. The commonest Hydrobatids seen off Namibia with a three small groups seen, totalling 15 individuals.

Whitebellied Storm Petrel *Fregatta grallaria*. One seen just before noon on 29/3/97 at 14 degrees East, 24 degrees South, about 50 km offshore. The ship had just passed into a tongue of deep water (over 200 fathoms) that extends northeast into the continental shelf according to the nautical charts that the ship was using. My notes are reproduced here: "flying off starboard bow, wildly erratic flight right on the water, seemingly skimming along the surface. Seen for about 15 seconds in excellent light 50 to 100 feet distance. Back was somewhat greyish black, with a pure white belly and rump". At this time of day, the midday sun was over my right shoulder, and the short view was ideal. Having seen several other storm petrels (of three different genera) that day (most of which were in the deep water where *Fregatta* was seen) the distinctive, low flight of this bird was remarkable. The bird appeared to almost bounce off the waves as it flew off the starboard bow, and then turned back, past me, and off to the west. While the generic identity of the bird was clear from its odd flight, white rump, and broad white underwings, it was only through the perfect viewing conditions and the fact that the bird first presented a dorsal view (off the bow) and then a clear lateral view (as it turned back past me) give me confidence that the species was *grallaria*. The back of the bird was not jet black, but had a greyish cast, especially on the mantle. The belly was pure white, as far as I could see, with the head and tail contrastingly black. Upon reference to my field guides, the bird appeared to resemble more the illustration in the SASOL guide, than Harrison's *Seabirds*. The pale bar on

the upper wing (formed by grey greater wing coverts) depicted in Harrison's painting was not evident. I believe that this is the first sight record of the species from Namibia.

European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*. Oddly, this was not the commonest species of Hydrobatid on the trip. Only five single birds were positively identified, though most of the unidentified storm petrels seen were likely *Hydrobates*.

Leach's Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*. One seen well in deep water at 14 degrees East, 24 degrees South. Very distinctive with a high, buoyant flight and long, pointed wings.

Cape Gannet *Morus capensis*. In Namibian waters they were uncommon, with only 12 seen, in four groups at the end of 29/3/97 as we approached Ludertiz. Near Cape Town they were very common.

Rednecked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* and Red (Grey) Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria*. One large, mixed flock of phalaropes was spotted at 16:00 on 29/3/97 at about 25 degrees South latitude. Some 40 birds were *fulicaria*, and about five were *lobatus*. The birds were in non-breeding plumage, and only direct comparison permitted accurate identification of the two forms.

Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*. In Namibian waters, one adult in full breeding plumage was seen at a point perpendicular to the Orange River mouth at approximately 16 degrees East. Another, less spectacular individual was seen a couple of hours later in South African waters.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*. Interestingly, five single Black Terns were seen around noon on 29/3/97 in the deep water where the Storm Petrels were found. All were in full breeding dress.

While the great majority of *Sterna* terns were not specifically identifiable, many were in breeding plumage, and good looks yielded three species, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*, and Antarctic Tern *Sterna vittata* in that descending order of abundance.

Subantarctic Skua (Brown or Antarctic Skua) *Catharacta antarctica lonnbergi*. In Namibian waters, two were observed, one inside of Walvis Bay, and one at sea just north of the South African border on 30/3/97. Several more were seen near Cape town on the morning of 31/3/97. (The form of Subantarctic Skua seen here is recognised by certain authorities as a separate species, the Brown Skua *Catharacta lonnbergi* — Editor.)

Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger) *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Only one seen, in breeding dress not far out of Walvis Bay.

Pomarine Skua (Jaeger) *Stercorarius pomarinus*. One was sighted at about 30 degrees South in South African waters.

**Acknowledgements:** The assistance of the US Navy in making this voyage possible is greatly appreciated. I would especially like to thank the officers and men of the USS McInerney for their warm welcome. Their consummate professionalism and was only surpassed by their superb hospitality. The Commanding Officer Dirk Deverill and the Executive Officer deserve special mention as they helped make the trip a complete success. I would also like to thank Clyde Carter who picked me up in Simon's Town and delivered me to Cape Town airport, after feeding me with one of the quickest and tastiest spaghetti bolognais lunches in the history of the Cape.



## NOTICE

### BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF NAMIBIA

The Botanical Society of Namibia has recently been formed and is looking for new members. Many members of the Bird Club have indicated their interest in trees and plants during outings and this is an excellent forum in which to develop your knowledge and plant identification skills. They are planning regular outings and lecture programmes. Annual membership is N\$20-00 per person and this includes a newsletter. Anyone interested in joining should contact Magda Robinson (phone:061-222261) or Henk Dauth (phone: 061-2022001) or write to them at PO Box 1080, Windhoek.

## EIN WOCHENENDE BEI DEN POPAFÄLLEN

Gunther Friedrich  
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Da waren wir noch nie gewesen, es war für uns nicht so weit. Mit dem Klub waren wir noch nie irgendwohin gewesen, also nichts wie los. Endlich mal was Neues, bei uns ist es fast schon langweilig.

Mit vollbepacktem Wagen zogen wir los. Wir wollten wohl für drei Wochen auswandern, wofür denn all das Zeug ? Es war nicht mal mehr Platz für einen Mossie. Wir schauten uns kurz bei Rundu Beach um, packten alles Kaltzuhaltende auf Eis und mit vollen Tanks ging es weiter.

Bei Bagani mussten wir erstmal unser Camp suchen. Das Auspacken war wieder so ein Ding: Alles musste raus. Endlich stand das Zelt, und der Vorraum unter den Bäumen sah einigermaßen bewohnt aus. Jetzt aber erstmal Verschnaufpause. Ein kaltes Bier raus und hingesezt, haste gedacht: Buch und Fernglas her, in den Büschen auf dem Fluss flattern Vögel. Nach einigem Blättern und Fernglasen einigte ich mich auf den Zwergbienenfresser *Merops pusillus*. Meine Frau kam aus dem Zelt gekrochen und wir erkundeten zusammen die nähere Gegend. Wir können nur sagen man sollte mal da hin. Man hat volle Übersicht über die Fälle, einfach wunderbar. Es herrscht ein ständiges Rauschen, morgens ist man davon früh wach, dann liegt noch der Nebel über dem Wasser.

Bei unserem Rundgang trafen wir die ersten Vogelkundigen: Sean und Daphne mit Kindern. Sie waren schon vor uns aus dem Kaudom angekommen. Beobachtend und erzählend verging der Nachmittag. An den Fällen machten wir zwei Hammerköpfe *Scopus umbretta* aus. Die anderen Leute trudelten nach einer langen Fahrt aus Windhoek so langsam ein.

Nach dem Morgenkaffee machten wir unter der Leitung von Chris einen Erkundungsgang in die nähere Umgebung vom Camp. Es ist erstaunlich was man alles sehen kann, wenn man sich die Zeit nimmt: Jakobinerkuckuk *Clamator jacobinus*, Braundrossling *Turdoides jardineii*, Angola