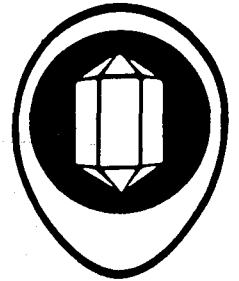


Lanioturdus torquatus
Drosselwürger

MITTEILUNGEN

ORNITHOLOGISCHE ARBEITSGRUPPE



SCHRIFTLÉITUNG: POSTFACH 67, WINDHOEK, S.W.A.

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A STUDY OF THE BIOLOGY OF THE PALE CHANTING GOSHAWK

(*Melierax canorus*) (R 165) IN SWA/NAMIBIA (2)

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Travellers in SWA must at some time or another have noticed this common large blue-grey hawk perched on a telephone pole. This is a bird about which surprisingly little is known. For instance, less than 15 nest record cards have been filled in for the whole of SWA, and apart from a few incidental notes very little has been published in Southern Africa on this bird. Why is this? Ornithologists speculate that the bird may be difficult to study for various reasons, and that potential workers may have been put off.

My wife and I, assisted by Mr. E. Freyer, the owner of the farm Claratal, on which the study is being conducted, have for 3 years been making a small number of basic regular observations on "Chanting Goshawks". Our plan of action is as follows:

- attempting to mark all Chanting Goshawks on the farm with colour rings of different combinations, to enable individual identification. To date 15 of an estimated total of 20 birds on the farm (numbers now reduced in drought) have been marked;
- to resight and map marked birds on a regular basis. With the aid of ornithological telescopes the rings are read in the field with reasonable success. Sightings are mapped on a grid system which has been drawn up for the farm. This enables us to determine territorial limits and favoured hunting areas;
- to follow on foot Chanting Goshawks (preferably marked ones) as soon as they are sighted and for as long as the bird can be "tracked". In this way a bank of daily activity data is drawn up, indicating for instance the periods in the day, when the birds are most active hunting, and any seasonal differences in activity patterns. Following the birds is challenging, because it involves a certain amount of skill in predicting where to find them and what they may do next. It also involves periods of walking, periods of sitting and making observations, and boring periods when for hours nothing at all happens but one has to keep watching. On the whole this form of observation is very satisfying as a hobby, and there never seems a shortage of people prepared to "follow a Chanter" to see what it does;
- to keep careful records of hunting activities, most of this data being generated during the above "watches". The most important aspects receiving attention are:
 - vantage points and their success for the hunting bird.
 - percentage successful/un-successful strikes.
 - actual hunting technique. We often find two birds hunting together, one evidently chasing a lizard out from under a bush, another one pouncing on the prey.
 - prey items and their relative importance in the diet of "Chanters" in this area.
- -
- to study breeding habits (see below why this has not been possible).

A FEW PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Since the onset of the study 3 years ago (just when the drought was becoming serious), no breeding has taken place on the study farm, this fact being the most important finding in the study so far - it would seem to imply that only limited breeding of this species takes place in the dry cycles and that the average ages of birds in any given year would depend largely on the timing of previous wet cycles.

While many other species of the birds of prey were observed to drop sharply in numbers during the drought (a talk on this was

