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Editorial

Tim Osborne

Here we are starting the New Year with the first issue of the bird club journal out early. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to make the *Lanioturdus* a success. I would like to specially thank Ellen Gudde for all the work she has done proofing the printer's drafts. Willie Peter and staff from Typoprint have been very understanding in trying to print the journal remotely from Outjo District.

There is a variety of articles in this issue, so there should be something for everyone. The editor would like to see a few more articles in German. None have appeared since Micki Ludwig published in Volume 35-1.

The country has finally had some rain over most parts so birding should be good for the remainder of the season. I have a nest of Carp's Black Tit in one of my nest boxes and the Chestnut Weavers are in breeding plumage. It looks as if the birds also like the rain.

groups or established research and survey programmes and the remaining range countries are now being encouraged to link into this supportive network.

With regard to Namibia, large numbers of Wattled Cranes have been recorded on the ephemeral wetlands in the north of the country during the wet season. The current population of this species in Namibia is estimated at 250 birds. Of these, only a few birds are breeding residents but these may be important post-dispersal areas for breeding birds in Angola, Botswana and Zambia. Until recently the Namibian representative on the AWAC steering committee has been Rob Simmons of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. Due to his relocation to South Africa, however, a new representative is being sought as well as ways of strengthening Namibia's involvement in the AWAC programme. With the proximity of Caprivi to a large proportion of the Wattled Crane range countries, Namibia could potentially play a leading role in the establishment of transfrontier conservation partnerships that focus on both cranes and people, and their wetland habitats.

AWAC hopes to evaluate how conservation efforts targeting the Wattled Crane as a flagship species can promote wetland conservation in southern Africa, especially for endangered but lesser-known species. We will approach this by identifying major threats to Wattled Cranes and their habitats through aerial surveys, field research, and interviews with local people and determining the links between management practices and wetland biodiversity. Based on the results of this research, we will be undertaking conservation planning for Wattled Cranes and wetlands, including strategic plans for each range country and a global action plan for the species.

We will facilitate support and training for key individuals who will become the future conservation leaders of Africa. Regular regional meetings and training forums will provide a platform, where participants from all 11 range countries can present the goals, strategies, and achievements for their projects and share their field work experiences with others.

The human component of this conservation programme is fundamental to its long-term success, as we recognise the intimate link between Wattled Cranes

and people through their dependence of the same wetland systems. By focusing attention on the conservation of the large wetlands of Africa, Wattled Cranes as well as communities relying on these systems for their livelihood will benefit in the long run.

This is an ambitious and exciting programme that will have to circumvent borders, political agendas, cultures and languages to ensure that a species and the precious wetlands it represents are secured for future generations.

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NOTE

Ways of strengthening Namibia's involvement in AWAC are currently being investigated, in co-operation with local role players. These include a mini-workshop during the first half of 2004 to review the current situation and do some forward planning for crane conservation in Namibia as well as looking at the feasibility of establishing a Namibian crane working group. If you would like to participate and/or be informed of further developments, please contact us.

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOUR OF THE NAMAQUA SANDGROUSE

J. Lensen

NamibRand Nature Reserve

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The most northern farm of the NamibRand Nature Reserve (25S, 16E,) is Vreemdelingspoort (12,700 ha) and it has no water in the western and central parts. Only one borehole supplies water in the northeastern corner of the farm and it cannot serve the rest of the farm. To promote a better distribution of wildlife on

the farm an artificial waterpoint, supplied on a weekly basis by truck and trailer, was created in the western section of the farm. The potential evaporative rate in the Namib Desert is 3 m per year. To conserve water a narrow cement drinking trough with a small surface area was constructed. Water for the trough is stored in two plastic tanks hidden on a side of a rock outcrop and regulated by a float valve. The small raised water trough was adapted for small wildlife by building, at one end, a sloping ramp on the inside and outside. The most frequent animals using the waterhole are springbok and oryx but many birds, including Namaqua Sandgrouse *Pterocles namaqua*, drink at the artificial oasis.

On 4 November 2002 I witnessed the flocks of Namaqua Sandgrouse flying in for their normal early morning drink. The birds usually land some distance from the water's edge, walk swiftly to the water, drink fast and then some males wade into the water to do belly wetting by bobbing up and down. This behaviour is documented in the species (Maclean 1993. Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa). The belly wetting is done to carry water to their chicks using the specially adapted and highly absorbent feathers of the belly.

What I observed that morning was very different. In small groups the sandgrouse would walk to the ramp at the end of the trough. Being narrow only 4-5 cm they could drink at once. The others would jump onto the edge of the 30 cm high trough. From the edge they could drink the water, which was about 4 cm below the edge. But they could not get their belly feathers wet from the edge. I observed that about one third of the birds would jump into the water and splash around for a few seconds and jump out again. The water is only about 12 cm deep in the centre of the trough so it is possible that their feet might have been able to touch the bottom when they were in the water. Unfortunately I was too far away to see whether it was only the males that were jumping into the water. From the edge of the trough the birds would jump back to the ground, pause and then fly away.

Sandgrouse are vulnerable to attacks by falcons and goshawks, when at the water's edge and they are understandably nervous. I have never observed sandgrouse bathing and have not come across this observation in the literature. The birds at the trough were faced with a dilemma of waiting their turn on the narrow ramp, flying to another water-point many kilometres away or adapting

an alternative method of getting a drink and wetting their belly feathers. They adapted their normal behaviour by jumping onto the trough edge and went one step further by even jumping into the shallow water. Thus a greater number of birds could finish what they came for along the length of the trough.

RED-BILLED FIREFINCH AND WAXBILLS OF WINDHOEK

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Living, as I do, amongst the birds (Flaminkweg, off Kingfisher, Hochland Park), I thought it time for someone on the western side of the city to continue the saga of waxbills in their gardens (Butcher *Lanioturdus* 35 (4) and Cummingham in the notes of 35 (2), both 2002).

I have seen four species of waxbill (Family Estrildidae) so far in my small garden with a fifth certain to be found on the other side of the wall. They seem to be attracted to a small water feature with reeds and running water in one corner. To date the most unusual sighting has been a pair of Red-billed Firefinches *Lagonosticta senegala* on one occasion, with single individuals on others. According to Nuttall (1997. Redbilled Firefinch. In: The Atlas of Southern African Birds. Vol. 2: Passerines. Harrison, J.A., Allan, D.G., Underhill, L.G., Herremans, M., Tree, A.J., Parker, V. & Brown, C.J. (eds), BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg) the firefinch has only been recorded from the northern and southern borders of Namibia along the rivers. This is the first record of the bird from central Namibia.

Second on the list comes an infrequent visitor, the Blue Waxbill *Uraeginthus angolensis* which, while common in Klein Windhoek, has not been reported on