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Editorial

Tim Osborne

I must apologize to the members for the delay in Vol. 37 (1). It was at the printers in late January but due to unforeseen circumstances it was delayed until April. It also had a distortion error and a double entry of the map accompanying Holger Kolberg's ringing report, which was my fault. Not having a printer, I only work on my laptop and sometimes I cannot see what the final page will look like.

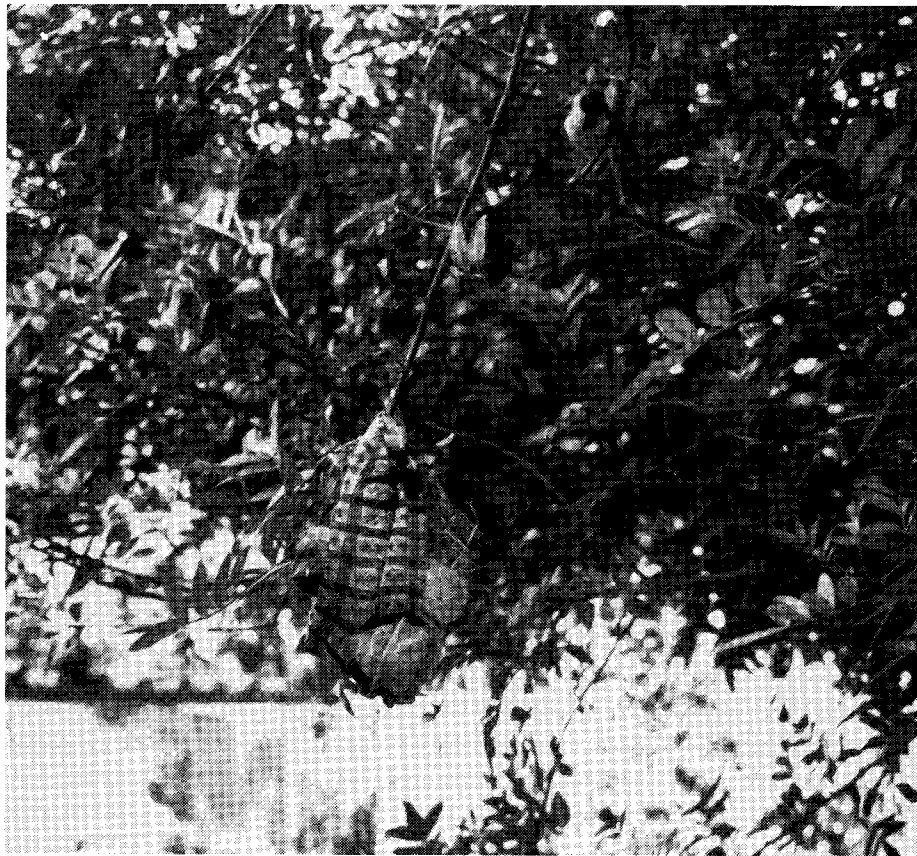
The rains are past and those birds dependent on insects have bred. The seed-eaters are enjoying the harvest and the large raptors are prospecting their nests as they also have lots of prey in the form of young birds. The Monotonous Larks are still singing their hearts out day and night on our farm. The African Scops Owls are also calling throughout the night. From our place we can hear 5 pairs, one of which is right outside our window. Funny how one gets used to natural sounds in the bush. When we come to Windhoek we cannot sleep with the car alarms, dogs barking and traffic, but here with a Scops calling all night we sleep right through.

From the Chairman's Report you will be able to see that the club membership is declining. If you want to keep the club viable you must also do your part and try and get new members to join.

There are a lot more sightings reported in this issue, which is a welcome change. Keep sending those in. So far this year we have added three new species to the Namibian list: Gull-billed Tern, Streaky-breasted Flufftail and European Blackcap (more on this species in the next volume).

with a caterpillar. The male would not let the female get near the nest. After watching this antagonistic behaviour for a while, with no let up on the part of the male weaver, my son shot the bird.

We then realized that this was not the first incident. Dead young birds had been found on the ground during the preceding days. On 3 January we found a whole nest on the ground with three chicks in different stages of development. The damaged nest was reinforced with a sock (see photo) and the female accepted the sock as part of the nest and continued to feed the chicks. The female was able to successfully raise her brood to the fledging stage.



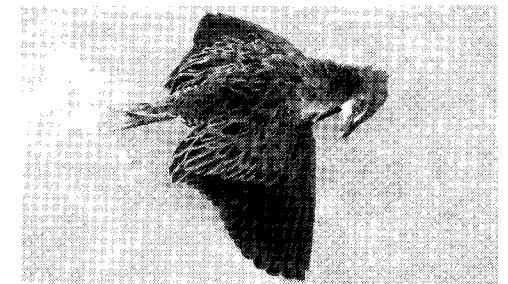
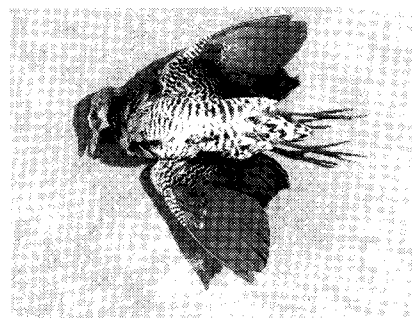
African Crake found at Swakopmund

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Miss Bonnie, birdwatcher of another kind, did it again. After finding the Gray's Lark chick east of Kramersdorf at Swakopmund last year (see *Lanioturdus* 36(4) 2003), she now found an African Crake *Crex egregia* that had just died in very much the same area.

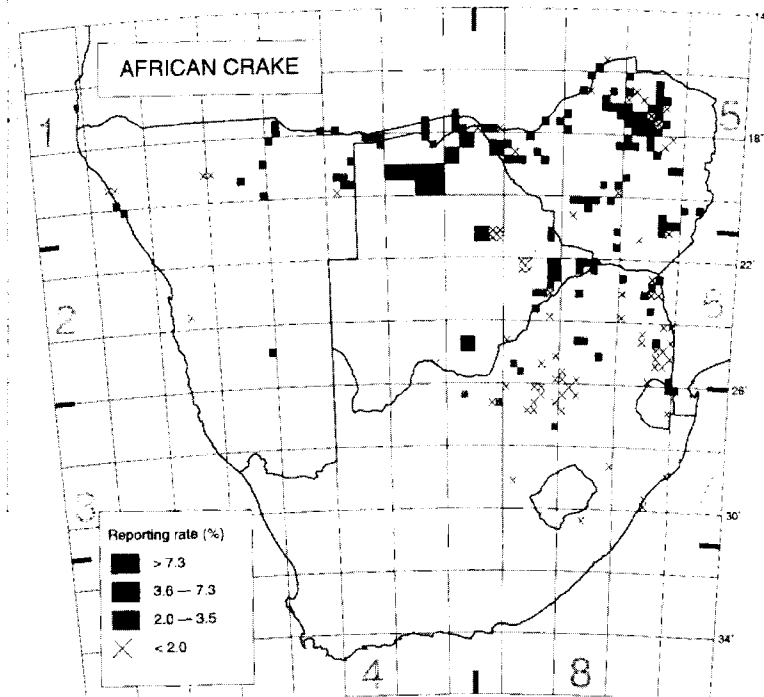


Photo 1: Miss Bonnie east of Kramersdorf where she found the African Crake.



Photos 2 + 3: African Crake

On Thursday 29 April, we took the dogs for a walk east of Kramersdorf, when suddenly Miss Bonnie would not be persuaded to move on. Instead she remained at a little *Arthrerea leubnitziae* bush. My wife went to investigate and called me to come and have a look at a most beautiful bird, which sadly was already dead.



The distribution map from the *Atlas of Southern African Birds* indicates that the bird is not seen often in the west of Namibia and that its occurrence is mainly as a result of east winds over the Namib, "...the occurrence of stragglers to the Namib Desert and the west coast is attributed to the effect of prolonged easterly winds." (Taylor, P.B. 1997 African Crake *Crex egregia*. In *The Atlas of Southern African Birds*, Volume 1: Non-passerines. Harrison J A, Allan D G, Underhill L G, Herremans M, Tree A J, Parker V and Brown C J. (eds) pp 320-321: Birdlife South Africa, Johannesburg, 1997.

During the week we had indeed some very strong east winds and it must be assumed that the Crake was blown into the desert by the strong east winds.

We gave the bird to Mark Boorman, who is of the opinion that the bird must have just moulted, as its feathers were in a very good condition.

Sociable-lising in Namibia

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This article is a short account, at the request of the editor, of a short research trip in pursuit of Sociable Weavers *Philetarius socius* in Namibia in August 2003. As part of my PhD research, I have been studying these bizarre birds at Benfontein Game Farm, near Kimberley in South Africa. Their enormous and permanent communal nests, low levels of dispersal from their natal colonies, and high levels of snake predation on nestlings seem to have combined to lend them a curious life history. My study so far had suggested that Sociable Weavers appear to differ quite strongly among colonies in morphology (for example bill shape), parasite load, and associated traits.

For example, colonies within sight of each other can have quite different degrees of ability to raise an immune reaction, suggesting that they have experienced different pressures from parasitism or might do better to allocate their resources in different ways, often depending on colony size. I am presently attempting to disentangle the likely mechanisms through experimental studies of the Kimberley population. However, it seemed a little arrogant to pretend to understand variation among Sociable Weaver colonies based on my postage-stamp sized study area (3 x 5 km), right at the edge of their extensive range!

Of particular interest in a broader context is the conspicuous gradient in aridity that exists from the semi-arid savannahs of the north and east, to the Namib desert fringe. Theoretically, we expect coevolution between parasites and their weaver hosts to be more intense in more productive environments, but there is yet little field data to test this prediction. For example, might Namib Desert birds suffer less from parasitism, and hence exhibit different kinds of variation among colonies? Beak shape, for instance, has been shown in other species to be related to preening ability and hence ectoparasite infestation.