



# LANIOTURDUS

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## Editorial

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Bird distributions are on the move with ranges both expanding and contracting. I have noticed in the short time that I have been editing this journal that there have been a number of sightings of various species in areas where they have not previously been recorded. Some examples of this are blue waxbill and African harrier-hawk sighted at the Spitzkoppe, great spotted cuckoo east of Lüderitz (although I suspect that this one might be a case of reverse migration), lesser jacana and rufous bellied heron at Farm Tsutsab etc. I was recently browsing through old issues of *Mitteilung der Ornithologischen Arbeitsgruppe*, the predecessor of *Lanioturdus*, and came across an article by S. M. Seftel wherein the writer was commenting on the disappearance of fiscal shrikes and southern white crowned shrikes from the Avis Dam area back in the 1974. I have also heard Dieter Ludwig comment that chat flycatchers and capped wheatears are no longer to be seen in the Windhoek area and that ant-eating chats have also disappeared from the Avis Dam area. I have myself noticed that white-tailed shrikes, which were regular visitors to my Klein Windhoek garden in the late 1980's, are now very seldom seen there while until about three years ago I had never seen a southern red bishop in my garden and now they come in droves. A new species moving into an area is probably far more noticeable than the gradual disappearance of an established species. While the Atlas of Southern African Birds and Roberts VII still contain the most accurate information available on species distributions in Namibia it must be remembered that data collection for the Atlas ceased some 16 years ago in 1993 and that there have been changes in the relatively short period since then although it must also be remembered that coverage for each individual species was not 100 %. Seven of the last ten rainy seasons have brought above average rainfall (at least to central Namibia) so changed climatic conditions may well be a factor in the extended ranges while disturbance and changes in habitat probably play a role in the contracting ranges and disappearance of species from some areas. Please continue sending in your observations of species new to an area or unusual in an area and also of species that may have disappeared. You never know – maybe someone who reads this journal in 35 years time will say “Oh wow – species X was already present in that area way back in 2009.”

## Why the bat moves by night and hides in caves

Once upon a time it so happened that there was a terrible drought. It was so severe that all the animals were thirsty and starving to death. The lion king called all the animals together for an emergency meeting.

They came up with the idea of digging a well. It was resolved that for the first week animals would dig then the second week it would be the turn of the birds. When the animals started the bat went to the side of birds claiming it was a bird since it could fly. Everyone agreed so it did not dig. When the turn of the birds came the bat also went to the other side claiming it was an animal because it breastfeeds its young and also does not have feathers but instead has animal fur. It further said all birds lay eggs but the bat gives birth to live young.

Everyone realised that it was fooling everybody therefore they chased it away.

To this day no animal or bird wants to see the bat. That is why it always moves at night and hides in caves.

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## A Remarkable Ring Recovery...

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Yennifer Hernandez, a temporary field assistant with Ingrid Wiesel's Brown Hyena Research Project in Lüderitz, has recently been busy with the fun-filled task of lovingly taking apart and sorting a whole collection of brown hyena poohs to extract prey items. On Saturday 20 June 2009, she came across ring FH41384 in a scat that had been collected by Ingrid on 28 October 2008 at a brown hyena den near the Swakopmund Salt Works.

The ring belonged to a white-fronted plover, ringed as a chick on 21 March 2007 at Mile 4 (2234S, 1431E) by Dirk Heinrich. I asked Ingrid whether the scat in question was still steaming-fresh when she collected it, to find out whether we could narrow down the plover's date and cause of death. Unfortunately the scat had been dry and white when it was collected, but Ingrid says that they do dry out quite fast. She has had reports that the den area was active around the beginning of 2008, so it could have originated from that time. In that case it is likely that the plover died from something else and the hyena subsequently scavenged it. Alternatively, it is possible that the hyena predated the plover when it was still a chick and before it could fly.

How is this for an exciting recovery record?

## ... an Interesting Recapture ...

Neil Thomson  
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On 12.09.2009 I recaptured a ringed red-billed quelea at my home in Klein Windhoek. (Ring No. FH27783). So? There are millions of them out there – what's so special about that?

That's just it. According to the SAFRING website (which has not been updated for some time) only 147 (0.25%) of the 58 296 red-billed queleas ringed in southern Africa have ever been recaptured while there have been 445 (0.76%) recoveries.

The bird I caught had an old looking 2.8 mm hard ring on the left leg. The recommended ring for red-billed quelea is a 2.3 mm aluminium ring. The only ringers I am aware of in Namibia who ring on the left leg are Dirk Heinrich and Mark Paxton while I know that Graham Grieve, who ringed birds in Namibia earlier in the year, and who also rings on the left, prefers to use soft rings.

Thinking that I might have a bird from elsewhere in southern Africa I sent an enquiry to SAFRING. The reply received was somewhat disappointing – the bird had indeed been ringed by Dirk Heinrich at his home some 700 m from mine but it had been ringed as an adult on 8.10.2006. I found out that Dirk uses hard rings on queleas as he believes that these hard beaked birds may be able to remove aluminium rings.

I have ringed about 120 of these birds in my garden and have never so much as seen a ringed one there again suggesting that they are constantly on the move. Given that red-billed quelea is a highly mobile species one can only wonder where this bird might have been in the almost three years between ringing and recapture. Had it left town to join a breeding colony and returned? Or was this perhaps just a city slicker that had stuck around for the assured food source in suburban gardens. Unfortunately we shall never know.

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## ...and an Amazing Series of Sightings of a Globe Trotting Sanderling

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On 17.7.2008 an unfledged Sanderling *Calidris alba* was uniquely colour-ringed in Greenland by Dutch researcher Jeroen Reneerkens.

Just over one month later on 26.8.2008 another Dutch researcher read the ring combination on this bird on its first southerly migration. This was in Griend in The Netherlands. It was last seen there on 3.09.2008.

On 19.1.2009 I was waiting to meet two Dutch researchers at Walvis Bay who were coming to look for colour-ringed

Bar-tailed Godwits. Whilst scanning the waders I picked up a colour-ringed Sanderling. At that very moment somebody walked up to me and said "Are you....." "Hold on a minute", I said, "I'm looking at a colour-ringed Sanderling". As quick as a flash he had his scope out and said, "That bird was ringed in Greenland!"

After this excitement it turned out that this was one of the researchers I was to meet. Astonishingly, it later transpired that this researcher, Bernard Spaans, was the very person who had seen this bird in Griend. It was again seen at Walvis Bay on a few subsequent days and was last seen by myself on 17.2.2009.

Imagine my surprise when I received an e-mail including a photo of this same bird taken on 17.7.2009. This bird had been seen again on southerly migration. However, this time it was at the Sillon de Talbert reserve in France.

Knowing that most waders are very site specific I decided to mount a search for the bird back at Walvis Bay. Bingo! On 23.9.2009 Johan Lotter and I spotted a Sanderling which was colour-ringed. Although it was carrying a green flag, (a ring with a small tab making it more visible) which placed it as having been ringed in Greenland, we were not able, due to distance, to get a full reading of the colour combinations. However, I was sure this was it.

On 9.10.2009 John Paterson joined Faansie and Ronel Peacock and myself for a bit of birding. We stopped off at the Sanderling's hang-out and within a couple of minutes John picked up the bird and read out the magic colour-combination. This was verified by the rest of the party. What a great sighting.

So ... if you're at the last parking area before Lover's Hill on the lagoon please keep a special look-out and let me know if you've seen (and preferably photographed) our intrepid traveller again.



*"The" Sanderling in Brittany  
Photo: Gert-Jan Cromwijk*

## **Chronicles of a bird-ringing and botanical tourism trip to Namibia in May/June 2009.**

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(Imagine this being compiled accompanied by the distant sound of the waves from the warm Indian Ocean, the gentle breeze in the wild banana trees and the call of a Purple-crested Turaco).

When I retired from my working career at the end of August 2008, I had the firm intention of pursuing my hobby of bird ringing more actively. My wife, Kate, co-ordinated her retirement with mine and had the intention of devoting more time to her interests in botany and botanical art. Towards these ends we decided to participate in the ringing workshop held by SAFRING at Wakkerstroom in Mpumalanga in South Africa in December 2008.

At that workshop, we met Neil Thomson and Gudrun Middendorff from Windhoek and we were able to enjoy with them their pleasure in being exposed to species new to them. Meeting them awakened an interest which had long been in my mind, in visiting Namibia to see more of the country than had previously been possible during fleeting work-related visits to Windhoek that both of us had made in the past. And what better way to justify the trip than to add a ringing element to the visit.

Neil and Gudrun provided fantastic support for this idea with a range of suggestions. However the proposal that won the day was that of first participating in the Namibian ringers' get-together scheduled for May at Farm Wiese near Rehoboth before travelling further to see more of the country. This idea had the advantage of giving us the opportunity of meeting ringers from other parts of Namibia, which would optimise opportunities for ringing along the route. We decided that we would focus our attention during this trip on the southern half of Namibia only.

During the planning process we managed to sell our house in Pretoria and this precipitated our intended move to our "retirement home" in Munster on the far KwaZulu-Natal south coast. Unfortunately this had the unintended consequence of increasing the travel distance for the Namibian trip as we now had to travel westward below Lesotho before heading northwards to the Namibian border. However, we decided to use this as the opportunity to see more of South Africa as well, with overnight stops at Dordrecht and Upington in SA and Grünau in Namibia before the final leg to Wiese.

The overnight stop at "The White House" near Grünau provided us with the first detailed exposure to Namibian flora and fauna as we arrived early enough to walk around and explore. It was good to get a feel for the local flora; we could recognise some of the families present but did not know the species – that would have to wait until we managed to find suitable reference books in Windhoek.

At that stage it was already becoming clear that the distances between population centres are much greater than in SA; this and the lower population density result in – for us – surprisingly (and gratifyingly) little traffic on the roads.