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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).

## American Golden Plover near Etosha NP, Namibia

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### Summary

On 10 November 2003, an American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* was sighted and photographed at an artesian bore situated approximately 8 km east of the King Nehale Gate, Etosha National Park, and 3 km west of the small town of Okashana in Namibia. A description of the bird is given from observations in the field and from studying digital images. Separation from Eurasian and Pacific Golden Plovers is also discussed. To our knowledge this is the first inland record for Namibia and possibly for Southern Africa of this species.

### Introduction

At 11h50 on 10 November 2003, RW was scanning a small wetland created by the constant flow from an artesian bore, looking for Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*. On the far bank of the main body of water he identified a *Pluvialis* plover. Knowing the region, he realised the rarity of this and he asked CH to view the bird. CH immediately thought the bird was much bulkier and less 'golden speckled' than Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, a bird which CH is very familiar to seeing due to living in north-western Australia. The bird was initially viewed through telescopes and digitally photographed from a distance of 35 metres. We realized closer views were necessary in particular to see the primary projection and how much the wings projected beyond the tail. We agreed tentatively that it was an American Golden Plover, but knowing the similarities between the 3 species of golden plover wanted to check reference books and view the digital images obtained. Fortunately the bird was fairly approachable and we had views as close as 15 m and additional photos were secured.

### Optics and conditions

Weather conditions were ideal for viewing with a clear blue, cloudless sky. The sun was overhead as it was around midday. The bird was viewed with Leica trinovid 10X42BA and Swarovski SLC 10X42 binoculars and both of us had

Kowa TSN 823 telescopes with 32X wide-angle eyepieces. Images were taken with a Nikon Coolpix 4500 attached to one Kowa telescope and with a Canon EOS D60 camera with 170–500 mm Sigma lens mounted on a tripod.

### Description

This description is an amalgamation of observations in the field, brief notes taken during the sighting and from studying the digital images.

### First impressions

Our first impressions of the bird were of a bulky golden plover with a bold, broad and long, white supercilium. CH was struck by the bulk and broad chest of the bird and its lack of golden-yellow flecking on the upperparts. (Photos 1 and 2), in comparison to the slender and well marked Pacific Golden Plovers he is used to seeing.

### Head and face

The most obvious feature of the bird was its broad, bold and very long, white eyebrow. (Photos 1 and 2.) This started in front of the eye and continued well down the side of the neck. This gave the bird a somewhat 'capped' appearance.



Photo 1

In PGP the supercilium is much shorter and is less white and more buff. The bill was in proportion with the bird's head. In PGP the bill looks very fine, even taking into account that PGP is a smaller species. On Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, the bill is small on a large, deep-bodied, bulky bird.

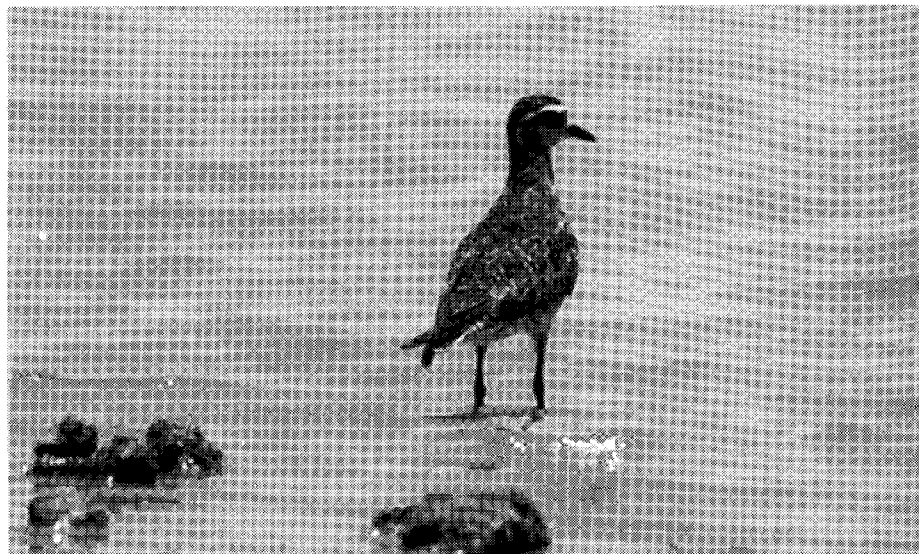


Photo 2

#### Upperparts

The mantle, scapulars and all wing coverts of the plover were greyish with pale edging and only the hint of golden-yellow flecking (Photo 2). In PGP the golden-yellow is obvious and on brownish feathers, even when PGP is in non-breeding plumage. The wings were long; much attention was paid to this feature. The primaries projected well beyond the longest tertial and also well beyond the tail tip (Photo 2). An attempt was made by CH to count the primaries on show beyond the longest tertial in the field. He identified that at least 4 primaries were on show, but was not totally certain if it was in fact more given the views obtained. Images were no more helpful with this particular feature, but this feature still does not support the bird being PGP. It was very easy to see in the field and in the images that the wing tip is well beyond the tail of the bird. In PGP they fall level or very slightly beyond the tip of the tail. In brief flight views, the primaries appeared all dark; no wing bar was easily discernable. The bird had a dark rump

ruling out any confusion with Grey Plover. In flight, the bird appeared 'bulky and long winged' according to CH.

#### Underparts

The throat and breast of the bird were heavily marked with black and brown flecks giving way to a predominately white belly and undertail coverts (Photo 1). A few black-tipped feathers, presumably of the bird's breeding plumage, remained on the belly. The throat and breast of PGP have a warm buff appearance with the black flecking. The underwing was not seen.

#### Identification

We believe our sighting to be an American Golden Plover due to the key identification features listed below. Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* is not discussed in detail as the bird had no white rump in flight and this is the only feature needed to rule out that species. Differences between American (AGP), Eurasian (EGP) and Pacific (PGP) Golden Plovers are discussed

This plover had a bold, broad and long, white eye-brow. In EGP this feature is indistinct (Hayman, Marchant and Prater 1986). In PGP it is yellow/buff and not as obvious. Our plover was bulky with a bill that looked in proportion with the bird. In EGP the bill is noticeably short and slim on a large bird (Hayman, Marchant and Prater 1986) and in PGP the bill is very fine and delicate (CH pers. obs.).

The plover had long wings that projected well beyond the tail tip which is a typical feature in AGP (Hayman, Marchant and Prater 1986) and at least four primaries were visible beyond the longest tertial, a feature seen in the field and shows to some extent in the photographs. EGP has the wing tip level or marginally beyond the tail tip. Hayman et al. (1986) stated that the PGP has a wing-tip clearly longer than the tail tip. CH has not found this to be the case in PGP in NW Australia. His field observations and images from that region show the wing tip to be only slightly longer than the tail tip. Images we have seen on various websites also seem to support this opinion. In PGP, primary projection beyond the longest tertial is usually two primaries (CH field observation, CH images and website images). Our plover showed at least four.

## Conclusion

We believe this is the first record of American Golden Plover for inland Namibia, given the discussion above. American Golden Plover has, very rarely, been recorded on the Namibian coast with records at Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. According to Hockey (1997) all the accepted Southern African records are from the coast. This would thus be the first inland record of this species in Namibia and possibly Southern Africa.

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## Hadedda Ibis, *Bostrychia hagedash*, sighting in the lower Orange River

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Hadedda Ibis, *Bostrychia hagedash*, are common throughout southwestern, eastern and northern South Africa, although generally absent from the dry, western regions. Records from the dry, western region include Clanwilliam, Nieuwoudtville and Augrabies Falls (Maclean 1985 & 1993). *Bostrychia hagedash* is a species known to be increasing its range with its Southern African range known to have doubled during the last century (Tarboton 2001).

On 6 February 2004 at approximately 19h00, two Hadedda Ibis were observed in flight whilst uttering their distinctive and unmistakable “ha..ha...hadedda” call at farm Beenbreek bordering the Orange River to the west of Onseepkans on the Namibian side of the river. This site is approximately 200 km west (or down river) from Augrabies Falls and approximately 15 km east of the Onseepkans border checkpoint. According to Strauss (pers. comm.), the owner of the farm, they have been sighted in this area only recently – i.e. “last few years”. Simmons & Allen (2002) conducted a survey of the lower Orange River during the late 1990s and did not record Hadedda Ibis from Haibmond (east of Noordoewer) westwards. The last-mentioned authors note that the overall bird diversity in the Orange River, albeit relatively low, increases from east to west and ascribe this to the slower flow and warmer water downriver.

It would thus seem that the Hadedda Ibis is moving westwards, by following the Orange River and thus subsequently increasing their range. Irrigation of lucerne and vines along the Orange River undoubtedly results in preferred habitat frequented by this ibis. It will be interesting to note when they reach the Orange River mouth and habitats around Oranjemund.

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## Nest boxes for Namibia

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Over the last couple of weeks a number of people have obviously sensed a slight increase in humidity and may even have felt a drop of water or two... I assume this explains the sudden barrage of calls to find out how to build a nest box. Well...it may be a bit late by the time this article is published but nonetheless its about time I make public the magic nest box formula... hence here is the Hornbill Nest Box patent...happy building and many happy hours watching!!