

Namibia Bird Club



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## Editorial

In this issue I am delighted to be able to publish articles on two species new to Namibia, one of which is in fact new to the southern African sub-region and is believed to be resident in the far north west of Namibia.

In May 2012 Wessel Swanepoel discovered a population of Angola Cave Chats on the southern slopes of the Zebra Mountains west of Swartbooisdrif in the far northwest of Namibia. This species was thought to be an Angolan endemic but has now been found south of the border. Please take note of Wessel's request that he be informed of any further sightings of this species in order to facilitate his research into this species in Namibia.

The second species new to Namibia which we feature in this issue is the Lesser Yellowlegs seen by Simon Woolley at the Rundu Sewage

## An Interesting Observation on Feeding Behaviour

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When I was at Otjibamba Lodge near Otjiwarongo at the beginning of February 2012 I made an interesting observation on feeding behaviour.

After rain the entire night, the birds were very actively searching for food early in the morning.

A Crimson-breasted Shrike was very successful with its hunt for insects and worms and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows, Southern Masked-Weavers and White-browed Sparrow-Weavers were not far behind in their searches for food either. Then I saw a Crimson-breasted Shrike at what appeared to be a monster sized worm and I moved closer as fast as I could as I did not want to miss observing this feast.



On closer inspection I found that this was no worm or insect at all but a left-over chicken bone from the previous night's dinner. The shrike was quite happily feeding on the last bits of meat on the bone.



When it moved off two White-browed Sparrow-Weavers did not want to let this opportunity go either and started to feed on some of the morsels still available.

The Crimson-breasted Shrike returned and joined one Sparrow-Weaver and they competed for what meat was left on the bone.



Roberts VII describes the feeding habits of Crimson-breasted Shrike as:

*“On ground, flicks bits of vegetation aside, much like a thrush, when foraging for small arthropods (especially ants on the ground) and fallen fruit.”*

The White-browed Sparrow-Weaver’s feeding habits are described as follows: *“Eats insects, seeds, seed pods, fruit and fleshy leaves.” Insects can be as much as 80%, in the Kalahari, of their diet”.*

Both species thus have a mixed diet and the bone was probably mistaken for big insect or was it simply a golden opportunity of “meat is meat and a man must eat”?

*(Birds generally are opportunistic feeders and particularly birds that are habituated to human presence will readily feed on any “junk food” available. A few years ago I observed a similar incident with Red-winged Starlings feeding on the scraps of meat left on a discarded chicken bone at the BirdLife Centre in Wakkerstroom – Ed).*

### **Are you sure that “your” Garden Birds really are “your” Garden Birds?**

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(Unless otherwise stated this article deals only with the period from April 2008 to the end of 2010)

How often don’t I hear people talking about “their” birds in their gardens. Many believe that they have a resident population which visits their feeding stations every day, month in and month out. Many are also convinced that it is the same pair that returns to breed in their garden year after year.

OK – how many birds do you think visit your garden in a year? Two hundred? Three hundred? Five hundred? I think that you may be in for a surprise. It was only after I had been ringing birds for a while that I started to

realize how many birds actually visit a garden where food and water are available to them. I started ringing in April 2008 and up to the end of 2010, with a little assistance from my daughter, Maren, and from Gudrun Middendorff, between us we ringed 3 042 birds of 41 species in the immediate vicinity of my Klein Windhoek home. This is an average of over 1 100 new ringed birds per year and not every bird that visits the gets caught and ringed. In addition we recaptured 776 different ringed birds over this period. If these are added to the total it can be seen that an average of nearly 1 400 individual birds has been caught each year. I catch most of my birds in walk-in traps although I sometimes use snap-traps and mistnets.

Generally I catch more birds in the early morning than during the rest of the day. So assuming that I trap for about 60 hours per month (this varies considerably from month to month) and that there is an average of 360 hours of daylight per month this could mean that theoretically up to about 8 400 birds could be caught in my garden per year. I really do not know whether this number of birds actually visits the garden and I can only speculate but it would seem to me that a figure of at least 3 000 or even higher would not be unreasonable.

All in all in the above time period we handled 1 357 retrapped or recovered birds. Included in this total were the 776 different individual birds mentioned above and of these 108 were birds ringed by other ringers (mostly birds ringed by Dirk Heinrich who lives fairly close to me). The remaining 581 retraps were multiple retraps with some birds having been caught up to nine times. I should point out here that for the first two years of my ringing I only recorded recaptures a minimum of three months after ringing but after discovering that SAFRING had changed the rules from then on I started to record all recaptures. Thus the actual number of birds recaptured should be considerably higher as many of the earlier recaptures went unrecorded. The percentage of recaptured birds is high at just over 25% but this also means that nearly 75% of the birds ringed at this location have not been