

# LANIOTURDUS

Volume 52 No 2

June 2019



Journal of the Namibia Bird Club  
<https://www.namibiabirdclub.org>

## **About the Namibia Bird Club**

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. The club's mission is to contribute to Namibian ornithology by, amongst other things, arranging regular birding outings, conducting bird ringing and atlasing excursions and educating the public about the value of birds. To achieve this, we organise monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Water Care Works and occasional weekend trips further afield. Bird club members also participate in the African Waterbird Census twice a year.

Experienced birders are more than happy to help beginners and novices on these outings. If you have a transport problem or would like to share transport please contact a committee member. Depending on the availability of speakers and suitable material we present occasional lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive the bird club's journal, *Lanioturdus* and outings and events are advertised on the club's website [www.namibiabirdclub.org](http://www.namibiabirdclub.org).

The Namibia Bird Club is not affiliated to any global or regional organisation and relies entirely on members' subscriptions and donations to fund its activities.

The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Namibia Bird Club or its committee.



# LANIOTURDUS

**Vol. 52 (2) 2019**

**June 2019**

**<https://www.namibiabirdclub.org>**

## CONTENTS

SCHWIPPERT B	African Harrier-Hawk vs Smith's Bush Squirrel ..... <b>1</b>
THOMSON N	An overview of ten years of bird ringing in Klein Windhoek ..... <b>9</b>
DEMASIUS E	How I became a birder ..... <b>14</b>
KOLBERG H	Summary of the 2018 winter wetland bird counts in Namibia ..... <b>17</b>
THOMSON N	Some "Do's" and "Don'ts" when feeding garden birds ..... <b>21</b>
ANON	Rotstirnbartvogel, R. No 432 ..... <b>23</b>
BOORMAN M	Vultures Namibia..... <b>25</b>
THOMSON N	Short Notes ..... <b>26</b>
THOMSON N	Rarities and Interesting Observations ..... <b>30</b>
KOLBERG H	Bird Atlas Update ..... <b>37</b>
KOLBERG H	Tracked Vultures ..... <b>38</b>

Cover photo Black-chested Prinia © Holger Kolberg

# An overview of ten years of bird ringing in Klein Windhoek

Neil Thomson  
batqs@afol.com.na

I started training as a bird ringer after attending the Ringers Get-Together held at Zebra River Lodge in May 2006. I was granted a ringer's licence in March 2008 and, after building a trap and purchasing some rings and other equipment, I ringed my first bird (a House Sparrow) at my Klein Windhoek home on 17 April 2008.



**Figure 1:** Applying a ring to a House Sparrow © Gudrun Middendorff

Just over ten years later, after submitting my midyear ring return in 2018, I thought it would be an interesting exercise to determine how many birds and which species had been ringed at this location. My daughter, Maren, qualified as a ringer in 2009 and ringed birds at my home when on university vacations and Gudrun Middendorff started ringing birds with me there from mid-2011. I have included the ringing data of Maren and Gudrun but I do not have data for several other ringers who have ringed a few birds at my home over the years. These include Graham Grieve, Dieter Oschadleus and Ulrich Hofmann.

By extracting the relevant ringing data I have determined that Gudrun,

Maren and I, between us, ringed 12 494 birds of 57 species in the immediate vicinity of my home in Rykvoet Street, Klein Windhoek between 17 April 2008 and 30 June 2018. As the smallest and cheapest rings cost about N\$ 78/100 this represents an investment of more than N\$ 12 000 in rings alone! I do not even want to think about how much I have spent on birdseed, fruit and food for mealworms in that time. In addition, we recaptured or recovered 7 589 ringed birds in this period. This includes multiple recaptures of some birds and hopefully the recaptures and also some species accounts will be the subject of future articles as these are likely to provide interesting information on longevity, movements, pair fidelity etc. A lot of work will, however, be required to extract this information and information pertaining to birds ringed elsewhere and recaptured by us. I will thus for now deal only with the new ringed (Code 1) birds.

The fact that we have ringed an average of about 1 200 birds per year at one location, and remembering that not every bird visiting our garden is captured and ringed, gives an indication of just how many birds must visit a suburban garden annually. We believe that those that claim that “their” birds are loyal to their garden need to have a rethink.

We have used four different methods to capture birds for ringing at this location. These are walk-in traps, mist nets, snap traps and by hand in the case of nestlings and once a Dusky Sunbird sleeping on a pot plant on our veranda (and more



recently a Grey Go-away-bird but that is another story). As the vast bulk of our birds have been caught in the walk-in traps which are normally baited with seed, the species most captured are heavily biased towards seedeaters. We seldom use mistnets or snap traps in the garden so the numbers of insectivores and frugivores captured are relatively low. We have on occasion caught insectivorous birds such as Crimson-breasted Shrikes and Familiar Chats in the walk-in traps although why they entered these traps remains a mystery. We also once caught a Laughing Dove in a snap trap but that was most likely a case of a clumsy bird that walked over the trap and bumped against the trigger mechanism as a dove would have no interest in either apple or mealworm bait. Acacia Pied Barbets and Rosy-faced Lovebirds have also occasionally been caught in the walk-in traps although we very much prefer to get these “biters” in a mist net. When a bird like this is caught in a mist net one can get hold of the head in such a way as to avoid being bitten while disentangling the bird. Grabbing an unrestrained one of these in a walk-in trap is a totally different proposition!



**Figure 2:** Walk-in trap © Neil Thomson

In our ten years of ringing we have managed to catch four of Namibia's

near endemic species in our garden albeit in low numbers. These are Monteiro's Hornbill (5), Damara Red-billed Hornbill (2), Rockrunner (2) and White-tailed Shrike (1). We have never managed to catch a raptor but without a licence to use a bal-chatri trap we would need luck on our side to get a small raptor in a mistnet or a walk-in trap. I once saw one standing on top of one of the walk-in traps inspecting the birds in it but it did not enter the trap.

The five most ringed species (Red-billed Quelea 2 164, Black-throated Canary 1 928, Southern Red Bishop 1 623, Laughing Dove 1 447 and Southern Masked Weaver 999) comprise over 65% of all the birds ringed. Adding the next five most ringed species (Blue Waxbill 982, Red-headed Finch 693, Common Waxbill 667, Red-billed Firefinch 377 and House Sparrow 340) means that just ten species constitute nearly 90% of all birds ringed.

The least ringed species, where only one individual has been ringed, are Rock Martin, Barred Wren Warbler, Black-chested Prinia, African Paradise Flycatcher, Cape Wagtail, Marico Sunbird, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, White-tailed Shrike, Wattled Starling, Pearl-spotted Owlet and Red-billed Spurfowl.

The Red-billed Spurfowl was an extremely interesting case involving a real ringer's dilemma. We frequently hear Red-billed Spurfowl in the area and sometimes see them but I cannot recall ever having had one actually in the garden before. On 06 August 2016 I watched a male Red-billed Spurfowl come over the retaining wall and start scratching around in the vicinity of a walk-in trap. A few minutes later the bird entered the trap and as it did so the rest of the covey came up into the garden. What

to do? Close the trap and catch the male? Or wait to see if the others would also enter the trap but risk having the male walk out? I took the stance that a bird in the trap is worth several in the garden and went out and closed the trap and ringed the male. Needless to say, the others beat a hasty retreat as soon as they saw me and to this day I have never seen another Red-billed Spurfowl in our garden!



**Figure 3:** Measuring wing length © Gudrun Middendorff

One spinoff of bird ringing is that the data have to be meticulously recorded and one then has an exact date for when a bird was ringed or recaptured. So often when you ask someone when they last saw a particular species the answer is likely to be “Oh - about five years ago”. Experience tells me that this could mean anything between about two and fifteen years ago. From our ringing data we can accurately determine when we first or last caught a species. (This does not necessarily mean first or last saw a particular species at the ringing site though). When working with our data I noticed that we had ringed 58 Scaly-feathered Finches between 24 December 2008 and 27 July 2015. None of these birds was recaptured after 27 July 2015. It then dawned on me that we have not even seen this species in the garden since 2015.

Scaly-feathered Finches seem to have disappeared from our area entirely.

The number of birds ringed from year to year has fluctuated considerably depending on the ringing effort. Obviously when we have been away from home no ringing has been done there and there have been times when we have had to keep the traps closed such as when we have had a marauding Yellow Mongoose with which to contend. There have been several of these over the years and they have had a number of different *modus operandi*. The worst was one that behaved like a cheetah in a sheep kraal when it got into a walk-in trap, killing and maiming everything in the trap in a frenzy. Then there was one that would sneak into the trap, grab one bird (usually the biggest such as a Laughing Dove) and beat a hasty retreat with its prey. More recently there has been one which killed birds in the trap and ate only the heads although this one also seemed to get into a killing frenzy.

The ratios of hosts to parasites ringed also make interesting reading. We have ringed five different brood parasites and their host species. These are Lesser Honeyguide/Acacia Pied Barbet, Village Indigobird/Red-billed Firefinch, Shaft-tailed Whydah/Violet-eared Waxbill, Pin-tailed Whydah/Common Waxbill and Long-tailed Paradise Whydah/Green-winged Pytilia. One would expect to find the host species is more common than the parasite. If this was not the case, over parasitism could wipe out the host species leading to the demise of the parasite. Our ringing data show that we have ringed 25 Acacia Pied Barbets and 4 Lesser Honeyguides. The barbets have bred in the garden and the nests have at times been parasitized by honeyguides. Red-billed Firefinches are relatively new arrivals in

Windhoek (first recorded in the early 1990s) and, since Village Indigobirds were only first seen in 2009, the firefinches had a long head start. We have ringed 377 Red-billed Firefinches and 15 Village indigobirds but expect the numbers of indigobirds to increase as they become more established. Before July 2010 we had ringed only one Common Waxbill in our garden. After that they became regular seasonal visitors and we ringed 667 of them. Their brood parasite, the Pin-tailed Whydah was, in my opinion, for many years a rather uncommon bird around Windhoek. In recent years we have seen more and more of them and have, since January 2013, caught 10 although almost all of these have been since the beginning of 2016 which seems to indicate that they may be becoming more common in our area in line with the increase in their host population. We have also recently, for the first time, caught Common Waxbill fledglings suggesting that they may now be breeding close by. The other two host/parasite ratios seem surprising. We have ringed only 2 Violet-eared Waxbills but 94 Shaft-tailed Whydahs and likewise only 27 Green-winged Pytilias but 64 Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs. I can only assume that the waxbills and pytilias do not breed in any numbers in our area and that the whydahs are foraging in the area rather than seeking nests to parasitize. Interestingly, 72 (77%) of the Shaft-tailed Whydahs and 27 (42%) of the Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs were ringed in a single calendar year, namely 2013.

The vast majority of the Lesser Masked Weavers, Cape Glossy Starlings and Pale-winged Starlings together with the only Wattled Starling we have ringed were caught at a time when there were building

operations going on across the circle and a kapana seller was plying her trade under the acacia trees in the circle. The food scraps dropped there seemed to attract these birds and a net or a snap trap set there over a weekend produced good catches of these species which otherwise rarely become catchable in our garden.



**Figure 4:** Checking primary moult © Gudrun Middendorff

Unfortunately, the data we have collected over the years have not been entirely consistent. The “rules” have changed a few times in the intervening years. When I started ringing I was led to believe that only birds recaptured more than three months after ringing should be recorded. It was only a couple of years later that I discovered that this was not so and that all recaptures (except those on the day of ringing) should be recorded. Quite a lot of early recapture data was thus lost which skews the statistics somewhat. In addition, at some stage we were asked to record “full breeding plumage”, “partial breeding plumage” and whether birds had brood patches. This is obviously to provide information of moult dates and breeding seasons. While active moult is easy to record I have to admit that I often neglect to check birds for brood patches. Once again though we

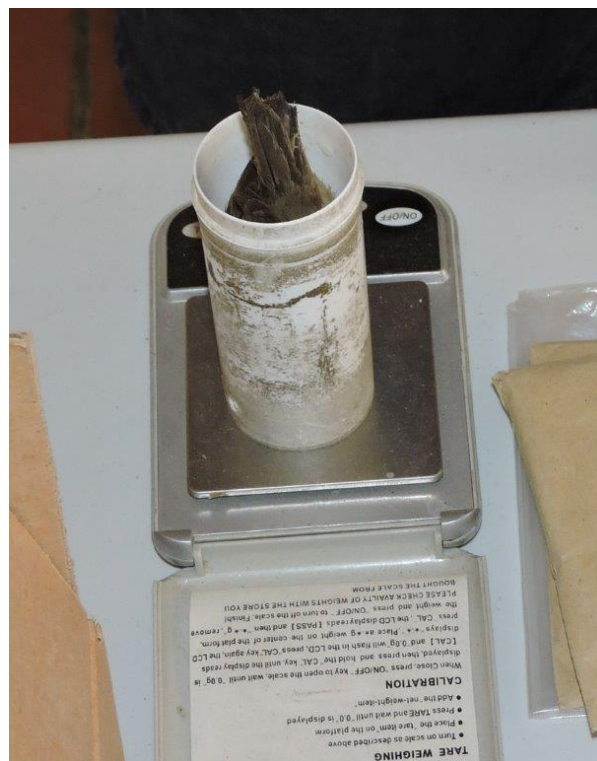


do not have any such data for the earlier years.

Although a variety of measurements can be taken in the course of processing a bird, in order to keep a bird captive for the least possible time and to subject it to the least possible handling, we elected from the start to take only the minimum required measurements which are wing length, mass and moult score unless there was a good reason for taking more measurements. We usually measure the tails of Chestnut Weavers because these birds can be sexed using a combination of wing and tail length and we have on occasion done full biometrics if requested when such measurements have been required for research projects.

Bird ringing has, however, taught us to become better observers and not to make assumptions. Male Blue Waxbills have blue flanks and females do not. When we started ringing we recorded birds without blue flanks as females. When we recaptured some of these sometime later we found that the flanks were blue. Obviously, they had been young males yet to develop adult male plumage. Likewise, we assumed that any Southern Masked Weaver with a red eye was a male. That is until we caught a red eyed Southern Masked Weaver with a brood patch – obviously a female. We also assumed that drab coloured Southern Red Bishops in the breeding season had

to be females. Measurements of some of these birds indicate that they are in all probability first year males.



**Figure 5:** Weighing a small bird © Neil Thomson

There is unfortunately only one other active ringer in our area. Dirk Heinrich lives less than a kilometre from us and consequently he catches birds ringed by us and we catch some of his. We think that if there were more ringers based in the eastern suburbs of Windhoek we could, through recaptures, possibly be able to build a far better picture of how birds move about in the area. At present we can only speculate.