

SHORT NOTE

Animal remains recovered from sandgrouse (Aves, Pteroclididae) crops in the Etosha National Park

by

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Sandgrouse are widely distributed throughout south-western Europe and Africa, eastwards to central and southern Asia (Clancey 1967) and are known to be mostly seed-eaters (Clancey 1967, Maclean 1969, Dixon and Louw 1978). Apart from the note by (Hume and Marshall 1880) there are no records of insects or other animal material being taken as accidental, or intentional food items by the Pteroclidids.

During a recent study of *Pterocles namaqua*, *P. burchelli* and *P. bicinctus* crops, from birds collected inside the Etosha National Park, South West Africa, were found to contain various animal remains. Of the 49 crops examined 2 (4 %) were empty, 4 (8 %) contained insect remains and 5 (10 %) contained the shells or fragments of terrestrial gastropods in addition to the normal seeds.

This material has been identified as:

INSECTA (4 specimens)

1	Coleoptera	Chrysomelidae	Halticinae
1	Diptera	Acalytratae	Chloropidae
2	Unidentified		

MOLLUSCA (11 specimens)

11	Gasteropoda	Achatinidae
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Crops of *Pterocles namaqua*:

Out of 15 crops examined 3 (20 %) contained insect remains and 1 (7 %) shell fragments. As none of this material has any quantitative significance (expressed as percent weight of total crop content and percent volume of total crop volume) it was most likely ingested by accident while the birds were feeding on seed.

Crops of *P. burchelli*:

Of the 16 crops examined only 1 (6 %) contained the remains of a Chloropid fly. As in the case of *P. namaqua* this material was probably accidentally ingested while the bird was feeding on seed.

Crops of *P. bicinctus*:

A total of 18 crops were examined of which 4 (22 %) contained whole or fragments of gastropod shells. These have been identified as *Xerocerastus ?nitens*. Relevant data concerning the samples are given in Table 1.

No large whole shells were recovered from male birds and it is probable that in their case fragments were picked up accidentally while feeding. In view of the large number of shells ingested by females, however, particularly during the critical stage of egg laying, it is possible that in *P. bicinctus* at least, a lack of calcium in their diet may result in birds taking up gastropod shells intentionally. Alternatively the shells may have been ingested to provide grit for the grinding process in the stomach. The matter is to be further investigated and reported on at a later stage.

TABLE 1: The percentage by weight and volume of gastropod shells from *Pterocles bicinctus* crops in the Etosha National Park.

Sample	Sex	Number of Shells	% Weight	% Volume	Condition of Gonads
PB 5	♀	8	4,75	3,57	Shelled egg in oviduct
PB 13	♀	3	2,66	1,78	Oviduct enlarged, two re-sorbs one yoked follicle
PB 14	♂	fragment	0,54		
PB 15	♂	fragment	0,34		

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