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Editorial

Normally I would have been tempted to devote a good part of the editorial space to another two species which have allegedly turned up in the northwest of Namibia. These birds were allegedly seen by one of the region's top birders but the validity of these claims appears to be in doubt and hopefully I will obtain more information and will be in a better position to comment in a future edition.

However, my editorial comment concerning previous sightings of Black Skimmers in Southern Africa (Lanioturdus 46 (1)) seems to have raised some lively debate and I think it is only right to conclude this issue now.

I published Tony Tree's response in Lanioturdus 46(2) and this has in turn solicited a response from Joris Komen which I am reproducing here. I am going along with Joris's closing remark that this matter should now be put to rest and I will not publish any further correspondence on this matter.

Joris's response reads:-

Trevor has put out the following request to subscribers and all those who would like their names added to the distribution list.

“This is a friendly request to all subscribers to SARBN out there to please make sure that you try and report your sightings and updates on rarities as soon as you possibly can. Most of you do that anyway which is hugely appreciated, so perhaps this is considered to be preaching to the converted.

The Southern African birding community is much larger than many of us actually know about and we need to try and encourage as many birders as possible to understand the urgency required in reporting rarities.

There are also so many people out there that are not actually aware of SA Rare Bird News, so perhaps I could request that all of you who are involved with the various bird clubs around the subregion perhaps try and get the word out to all of your various members to inform them of it.

It would be appreciated if you might consider putting a short note in your next bird club newsletters just letting your members know about SARBN and also stressing the importance of reporting interesting sightings as quickly as possible. The sooner news is broadcast of good birds, the better the chance is for all of us to chase them...

As a reminder again, you can report news directly to me either by email to hardaker@mweb.co.za or to my mobile phone at (0027) 82 780 0376. If you have any of your friends that would like to subscribe to SARBN, please ask them to send me an email asking to be added to the subscriber list and I will happily do it.”

Atlas Update

On 11/06/2013 full protocol card number 750 was submitted. This equaled the 750 cards submitted for Swaziland in the six years that the project has been running there although our 750 cards constituted only 32 443 records (average 44/card) as opposed to their 50 248 (average 67/card).

By 25/07/2013 850 full protocol cards containing 36 226 accepted records had been submitted for a total of 375 pentads. Thus 3.5% of the Namibian total of 10 586 pentads had been visited by this date.

What should our next target be? 500 Pentads or 1 000 full protocol cards? Having passed Lesotho and Swaziland in the number of cards submitted we have a long way to go to catch the least atlased of the South African provinces which is the Northern Cape with 4 674 cards submitted.

I have mentioned before the importance of ad hoc lists and incidental records in Namibia where full protocol coverage of many of the 10 586 pentads will be virtually impossible to obtain.

I would like to give an example of the value of ad hoc lists. I have a project in pentad 1835_1705 at Oshivelo. My visits to the site involve flying to the landing strip at Operet, usually having to wait there for transport, driving a short distance to the site and spending a limited amount of time on the site inspecting the progress of the building work and attending a site meeting. Obviously this does not allow for two hours of concentrated birding but after nine visits to this site for which I have submitted ad hoc lists, the lengths of which range from 7 to 25 species, I have managed to record 53 species on that pentad.

If all atlasers were prepared to make this sort of list for pentads where they are not able to spend long periods I think we will very soon start getting meaningful coverage (at least for the species maps) of large tracts of the country. Tour guides who leave their tourists to specialist guides for short periods (for example to visit a San village) are ideally placed to make this sort of list (in areas which would not otherwise be atlased) while their charges are otherwise occupied.

Atlasers should, however, also be aware of the “risks” associated with atlasing. On 21/06/2013 after completing my site work at Ongwediva I had some five hours to kill before check in time at Ondangwa Airport and went off atlasing with binoculars in hand.

It was not long before a police vehicle pulled up next to me and the occupants demanded to know what I was doing. While one was questioning me the other was busy on the radio and shortly thereafter reinforcements in the form of the Ondangwa station commander and two more police officers arrived.

It took quite a while to convince them that I was a quantity surveyor whose hobby was birds and that I was not a journalist and that I did not have a camera with me. The station commander went on to clear my activities with his superior officer before I was presumably deemed to be harmless and was allowed to continue birding after having been warned to beware of botsotsos in the area.

I don't know whether I should be happy that the police took quick action to investigate a “suspicious” character or whether I should be embarrassed that I had drawn five police officers away from their important crime fighting duties but I am quite convinced that all five of them thought I was stark raving mad!

Rarities and Interesting Observations

Firstly a slightly older record. Wessel Swanepoel photographed a Gull-billed Tern on the Andoni Plains just north of the Etosha National Park on 06/03/2013. This is a very rare species in southern Africa but there have been a number of recent records from both the Andoni area and from the coast.



Gull-billed Tern © Wessel Swanepoel

Dawid van der Merwe saw a single African Harrier-Hawk in Klein Windhoek on 01/04/2013. Roline and Johan Fourie reported an adult bird accompanied by two juvenile birds hunting around their palm tree in Suiderhof on 05/04/2013. The two juvenile birds were seen again at the same location on 24/04/2013 and on the same day Dawid saw two adult birds in Klein Windhoek. Sakkie von Plato reported a single adult African Harrier-Hawk seen in the vicinity of Maerua Mall on 19/04/2013 and Gudrun Middendorff saw a single bird flying over the city centre on 07/05/2013. I saw a single adult in the vicinity of the Alte Feste on 14/05/2013. Gillian Barnes also reported a single bird seen in the city centre on 14/05/2013 and Stefan Rust reported a juvenile bird in Pioneer Park on 18/05/2013. Wessel Swanepoel saw a single bird in Suiderhof on 20/05/2013. Bernette Louw saw a single bird investigating a palm tree in Eros in the last week of May and Helmut