

LANIOTURDUS

Newsletter of the Namibia Bird Club
Volume 27, 1993.

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NAMIBIA BIRD CLUB

A branch of
the Namibia Scientific Society
and
the Southern African Ornithological Society

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im November jedoch verschwand sie von heute auf morgen, ohne auch nur einmal zurückzukehren.

3. Vor einigen Wochen, es mag Ende November gewesen sein, riefen mich meine Farmhelfer, da sei eine Schlange, ich sollte sie schießen. Nicht länger ein Soforttöter von Schlangen, besah ich sie mir zunächst. Dabei bemerkten wir ein paar kleine, unscheinbare, graue Vögelchen mit schwarzer Kopfdecke und weißem Strich vom Ansatz des etwas länglichen Schnabels über das rotgeränderte Auge bis nahe dem Ende der schwarzen Kopfdecke. Sie stürzten sich mit wahrem Heldenmut unter erregten tzzick-tzzick Rufen auf die Schlange und pickten ihr auf den Kopf. Das Reptil war eine grüne Baumschlange. Sie wußte sich schließlich nicht anders zu helfen, ringelte sich zu einer Spirale auf und verbarg den Kopf an deren Unterseite. Die nunmehr reglose Schlange schien den Vögeln nun nicht mehr gefährlich. Sie flogen davon. Ich stand unter dem Eindruck, sie hätten ihr Nest verteidigt. Wir konnten aber keines entdecken. Auch meine Helfer waren sicher, es sei keine Brutstätte zu sehen.

Zufällig konnten wir das gleiche Schauspiel 14 Tage später nochmals beobachten. Wieder war eine grüne Baumschlange davon betroffen. Zwei Vögelchen wie oben beschrieben, wahrscheinlich ein Pärchen, attackierte die Schlange, daß uns nahezu das Herz stockte; denn die Schlange wehrte sich mit aufgerissenem Fang und schlug böse nach den Angreifern. Die beiden Gefiederten aber wichen ihren Paraden geschickt aus. Schließlich wurde es der Schlange zu bunt. Sie glitt am Baumstamm herab, wurde dabei von den kleinen Helden besonders gezwickt und verschwand in einer Höhlung im Baum. Die Vögel beruhigten sich jedoch nicht. Sie kamen auch vom Baum herab, setzten sich in nahes Gesträuch und suchten, eifrig hin- und herfliegend, die gesamte Umgebung des Baumfußes nach der verschwundenen Schlange ab. Dabei wendeten sie ihre Köpfchen in alle Richtungen, um den bösen Feind wieder aufzuspüren. Es war zu possierlich zu sehen, daß sie ganz sicher gehen wollten, daß die Schlange nicht da war.

Schließlich flog einer von ihnen in die Krone des Baumes und stieß wie eine Siegesfanfare einen recht melodischen Ruf aus, den ich aber nicht wiederzugeben imstande bin, da er nur einmal rief. Meine Helfer, die auch wieder zugesehen hatten, meinten, diese Vögel seien hier durchaus heimisch. Sie sind mir, wahrscheinlich wegen ihrer Unauffälligkeit, bisher nicht bekannt, und ich habe vergeblich versucht, sie anhand Sinclair's Buch zu identifizieren. Wer kann helfen?

BIO-ACOUSTIC RESEARCH AT THE STATE MUSEUM OF NAMIBIA

JORIS KOMEN & ERIC MALULEKE

State Museum of Namibia, P.O. Box 1203, Windhoek

The Bird Department at the State Museum of Namibia maintains one of the most diverse collections of southern African bird material, including skins, anatomical and skeletal material, eggs, nests, bird bibliographies, photographic and audio-visual material of the calls and behavioral displays of birds. Collecting, preserving and studying this material are primary functions of museum-based ornithology, focused on taxonomic and evolutionary research of birds.

Nearly two-thirds (about 100 species) of the southern African endemic avifauna has its focus of distribution in the southwestern African arid region, and many of these species are very poorly known. One avenue of research into evolutionary relationships is the fine-scale analysis of animal communication, within behavioural and ecological contexts, to identify the specific and (often) subtle cues used by species to identify conspecifics and sexual partners.

Audio-visual material, represented primarily by recorded vocalizations of more than 1000 bird species on magnetic and video tape in the Bird Department are available for research, education and publicity purposes. From as early as 1983, the Bird Department has collaborated with, and provided sound recordings of many of Namibia's endemic birds to, institutions such as the Fitzpatrick Bird Communication Library (South Africa), to be rendered into sonograms for inclusion in a host of scientific and popular publications, as well as books such as *Roberts' Birds of southern Africa*. Sonograms are visual representations of bird calls and provide one of the few ways for measuring, analyzing and visually displaying sounds (see Figure 1).

Sound analysis equipment became computerised in the early eighties, initially with specially dedicated equipment that cost in excess of R 120 000. As with so much computer-related equipment, prices dropped and quality rose all the time. By the beginning of 1992, when we approached Douglas Reissner, Director of the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF), to help us raise funds for computer-based sonographic equipment, the price of such sonographic equipment had dropped to under R 20 000. Negotiations for material assistance were soon under way, and thanks to the enthusiastic support of local businessman Theo Schoeman of Schoemans Office Systems, the end result was a three-way assistance package with contributions from Hewlett Packard International (an HP Laserjet Printer), Schoemans Office Systems and NNF (Ariel DSP 16-plus adaptor board and Hypersignal-Workstation software) valued at R 16 000. This sonographic equipment is housed in the Bird Department with the understanding that it will be made available to all Namibian and visiting scientists who may have use for this sound-analyzing facility. The equipment will also serve as an excellent educational tool for extramural under- and post-graduate zoological studies at the University of Namibia.

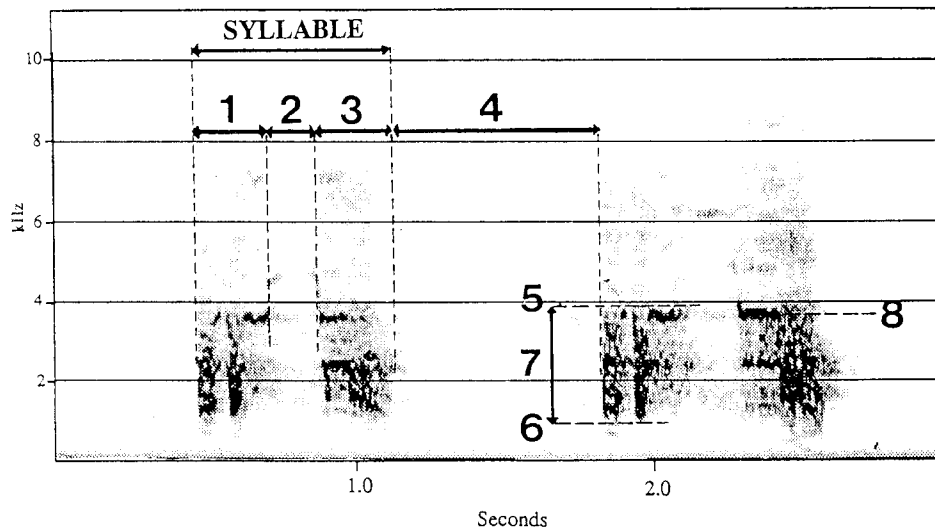


Figure 1. A sonogram illustrating nine bird-call variables which may be measured and compared statistically. "Syllable" and variables 1 - 4 are measures of sound-duration (seconds) and variables 5 - 8 measures of sound-frequency (kiloHertz).

COCKY BUSTARD

JAN AND SUZI VAN DE REEP

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Redcrested Korhaan (*Eupodotis ruficrista*): observation of the mating display, 27th October 1987 at 17:30, approximately 5km east of "Etosha Point" turnoff in Etosha National Park.

We had, in fact, stopped to watch and photograph a zebra at the edge of the road, standing against the light, his mane and whiskers ablaze in a glory of silver.

"There it is!" exclaimed one of our party and the combi rocked as everyone jerked around to follow the accusing finger pointing at ... it HAD to be at least a leopard.

"There, there, in the grass!"
"Where, where, what, what??"

"That bird with the bonnet, in the grass!"

The excitement rose as everyone realised what we were looking for. The Redcrested korhaan is not aptly named as the crest is only displayed during actual courtship. The perfect camouflage created by the exquisite batik-like chevron markings makes it a difficult bird to find at the best of times. The most easily observed display of this korhaan is the rocket-like shot into the air - about 20 yards straight up - and the subsequent tumble and fall. It is quite spectacular and for the uninitiated can cause some eye-rubbing as to whether one had seen it at all. The marked piping whistle is also easy to detect (when you know the call!) but the male bird we were watching was doing neither of these displays.

The female was crouched nearby, almost impossible to see, except for the light catching her eye when she cautiously turned her head. The male was "limping" towards her, loudly clacking his beak on every downward motion of the "limp" and he began circling her rapidly, as best as the surrounding bush would allow. His crest sometimes partially, sometimes totally erected. Three times he went around her and she remained motionless in her crouched position.

His personality had changed from the secretive, slowly moving bird that relies so much upon its camouflage, to a flamboyant show-off with only this "Chick" on his mind. Our proximity did not interest him in the least - indeed, I doubt if he knew we were there.

His "shoulders" rose (giving the impression that had he claws on them, he would have clutched her to him!), his head went low on stretched neck, his cheeks puffed out, his eye was beady and under his beak the fluffed feathers showed a broad black line, while the raised crest gave him a decidedly cocky appearance as he clacked and limped about in circles. He was quite unrecognisable by now and if we hadn't seen the transition we would have been hard-pushed to identify him by the depiction in the book.

