

## CONTENTS

VOLUME 35 (2) 2002

OSBORNE, T. O. Editorial .....	1
LUDWIG, D. Chairman's report 2001 / 2002 .....	2 - 3
BOIX-HINZEN, C.& WITTS, L. Aromatherapy for tits .....	4 - 5
OSCHADLEUS, H. D. Ringing report for Namibia, July 2000-June 2001 .....	6 - 7
BOIX-HINZEN, C. Interesting bird sightings from Daan Viljoen Game Reserve over the past four years. .	8 - 11
FRIEDERICH, T. & FRIEDERICH, G. Bushmanland Adventures .....	11 - 15
BOIX-HINZEN, C., LUDWIG, T. & TURBE, A. Co-operative breeding in Carp's Tits <i>Parus carpi</i> .....	15 - 18
LE ROUX, J. Swift Tern Project .....	18 - 19
OSBORNE, T. O. Hartlaub's Francolins Egoli style .....	19 - 21
BIRD OBSERVATIONS/SHORT NOTES .....	21 - 24

## Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

The first edition of the *Lanioturdus* this year came out with only 20 pages and had a "thin" feel but I have received one email from a member who praised the contents as quality not quantity. His statement was "Congrats on the new *TURD!!!!!!!* That was really very much better! You know, if people just start thinking, observe, keep records, whatever. Then something like the paper by Eckart Demasius appears on adding value to bird lists. I think his results could be applicable everywhere. Those are the guys "who have nothing else to do but to observe their surroundings". These are the kind of email editors enjoy receiving and it is even better if is accompanied with a CONTRIBUTION!

The rain, what there was of them, have come and gone so winter is rapidly approaching, the palearctic migrants have gone back north and the intra-African migrants have left but that is no reason to quit observing as there are many birds breeding during the dry season

I do not know if anyone has seen drafts of the new "Robert's" yet but it will be a massive book to cover "everything" known about the birds. One of the good features of the book is it will highlight what we do not know about the birds and that is still considerable, especially here in Namibia with our endemics and local races of birds. As an example the species editor of the Short-toed Rock Thrush, Richard Dean appealed to me to find nests of this common bird as little is known about most aspects of the breeding biology such as courtship behaviour, displays, number of breeding attempts per year, geographical/seasonal variation in clutch size, sex roles in nest building and incubation, incubation shift lengths, plumage and morphological development of young, fledging and post fledging dependence periods, interactions among young and breeding success. Incubation period is unknown. All that is just for one species for starters.

By 25 May 2001 the pair was together but the young had moved off or had been predated. They engaged in duet calling to define their territory. On 6 June they were calling together just below our chalet. By 10 June only the Frank was seen and we presumed that the female was nesting. I tried to find the nest below our chalet but had no success. We next saw the ringed Lynnette on 30 July just below our chalet and she had 3 7-10 day old chicks. Frank was not present. We saw the Lynnette again on 4 Aug. with one chick and no Frank. Obviously something was taking the birds and we presumed that Frank was the first to be eaten followed by two of the chicks. There is no shortage of predators around the house and we have seen African Wild Cats, Genets, Spotted Eagle Owls, Pythons and Zebra Snakes. Based on our observations over the past 2 years both adults should have been in attendance when young were foraging.

The Lynnette was seen again on 6 Aug. with only one chick and no Frank. On 9 August the female called from our front stoop for 10 minutes at 06:30h. On 13 Aug. Laurel Osborne saw the female and male chick around the side of the chalet and the female was calling. After a bit a "second" male (Rex) showed up. Although he was not marked Rex looked smaller and different from Frank. We saw both adults again on 16 Aug. with the Lynnette trying to duet call but Rex was out of synchrony. So our poor Lynnette who lost her mate Frank called to get another but the young stud Rex who showed up could not harmonize. We next saw the pair on 20 Aug. and Rex was a bit closer in his duet but still out of synchrony.

On 22 September we saw the Rex, Lynnette and juvenile male resting in the shade of a Moringa tree. On 1 October we saw only Rex and Lynnette and found feathers of the juvenile so another bird was taken. We next noticed Rex on 18 December below our chalet calling the territorial call and a low contact call. The Lynnette was not seen. We kept watch every time we heard Rex call from 25-31 Dec. and never saw Lynnette. Alas, of the original family they were all gone. Rex had finally gotten the duet call correct only to have his mate taken.

On the 24 January 2002 we heard Rex call below our chalet and heard answering calls 50 m to the east. At 12:00h a new bunch of birds arrived at the lapa. There was an adult male (Chris), adult female (Louwana) and 3 male juveniles. The lone Rex was still calling but the others were feeding within his territory. The

new bunch were not as friendly to us as the old mob and would fly every time they saw us. The old bunch including the Rex would allow us to approach within 5 m of them. It was one way to tell them apart.

During February and March 2002 we saw the new bunch frequently but Rex would still call and we would see him.

Hartlaub's francolins are dry season breeders so imagine our surprise when on 3 April 2002 we spotted Rex with an adult female (Karin) and a juvenile female just below our lapa. I guess he finally called in a female and whether or not she had a juvenile with her or he was the sire will remain a mystery. On 18 April the family of 3 (Rex and Karin) was duet calling below our chalet and the new bunch (Chris and Louwana) were calling 100 m to the east. Since Rex acquired Karin the new bunch has not come any farther to the west than 50 m from our chalet. Perhaps the duet call is important in maintaining a territory. Stay tuned for the next installment of Egoli.

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### Bird Observations/Sightings

#### **Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber***

Gunther Friederich (GF) On the morning of the 30th January 2002 I was loading a load of sand on the farm Tsintsabis 881, QDS 1718DD. I was at the so-called cutline, the veterinary control fence between the commercial and the communal farms. At about 08h30 I heard an unmistakable call of birds overhead: Greater Flamingo. They were high up, flying in formation in a roughly north-westerly direction, about 30 to 40 birds.

Where did they come from? Possibly from somewhere in Botswana. Where did they go to? Their destination could not have been the Etosha Pan, which while not far away, they should have gone into a more westerly direction. Maybe they were on their way to a pan or a shona somewhere in Owambo. There have been some good showers recently. The rest of the north of Namibia was still dry by this day, with no chance whatsoever of any ephemeral pan having water. Or could they be on their way to somewhere in Angola?

As they also have crossed QDS 1818CC, I can add them to our list of birds, although this is not the first time we had a flight of Flamingo. The previous fly-

over I am aware of was on (date) when I was on the farm Stilhoek 823, at that time. My father also mentioned that we already have had Flamingo on our vle. I myself have never seen any.

Whether one or some of these birds had been ringed by Tim Osborne or somebody else, I could not determine. Firstly, I did not have my binoculars with me and, secondly, they were too high up, I could not reach that high.

Reference: Simmons, R.E., Barnard, P. & Jamieson, I.G.: 1999. What precipitates influxes of wetland birds to ephemeral pans in arid landscapes? Observations from Namibia. *Ostrich* 70 (2): 145 - 148.

#### **Dwarf Bittern *Ioxbrychus sturmii***

Neil Mac Leod (NML) saw an adult bittern at the Karibib golf course on Sunday 10 March 2002. The bird was disturbed from a tree at one of the water obstacles and flew a short distance to perch on an acacia tree. Video material of the bird was also obtained.

#### **Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus***

T. Osborne (TOO) saw one immature bird on 31 Jan 2002 at Goas Waterhole at 16:29h in Etosha NP. The bird may have been a second or third year bird with a white back, belly but a brown head, wing coverts and breast. The primaries were white but with black tips and the face was brown. It was drinking with an immature Bateleur and took off with the Bateleur

#### **Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar***

(GF) On the morning of the 8th April 2002 I was on my way to a cattle post. At about 07h20 I noticed two birds in front of me, one of them being mobbed in flight. The one being mobbed was a melanistic Gabar Goshawk, mobbed by a "common" Gabar. I have not noticed such behaviour before. The melanistic form we do not see much here, but it is not rare. Was this mobbing just co-incident, or was it "normal" for the melanistic Gabar to be mobbed? The area in which the melanistic Gabar was being mobbed is his, as I regularly see him / them there.

#### **Black and Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus migrans* and *M. parasitus***

TOO drove from Windhoek to Outjo on 3 March 2002 and saw approximately

1000 kites about 115 km south of Otjiwarongo, 300 kites 105 km south of Otjiwarongo and 250 kites 70 km south of Otjiwarongo. These were the largest flocks of the birds he had ever seen in Namibia. It reminded him of the large migratory flocks he used to observe in the Zambezi Valley in the 1970's.

#### **Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor***

TOO saw 3 of these falcons perched in mopane trees on the edge of Halali Plain on 19 October. Two were in immature plumage and one was an adult. He was impressed by the poor descriptions and drawings in the field guides and their emphasis on comparison with the Grey Kestrel the only field guide which showed the bird he saw was Sinclair's guide which had a photograph. The bird looked nothing like a kestrel and flew nothing like a kestrel so the only reason to compare it with the Grey kestrel is that they are both grey! The first bird to come to my mind when I saw the bird was a Red-necked falcon. Perhaps the lack of sightings in Etosha, aside from Ian Sinclair's (see *Lanioturdus* 34-2 and other past issues) is the need for better field description in the guides. Another individual was seen over the Okaukuejo waterhole on 16 Feb 2002.

#### **European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster***

TOO saw the first birds of the season on 18 October 2001 at Okaukuejo and then the last birds along the telephone lines between Okaukuejo and Outjo on 11 April 2002. Since the birds are supposed to breed in Europe starting in late March they appeared to leave rather late perhaps due to the late rains and poor insect crop.

#### **Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis***

TOO saw one male on the road near Aus, Etosha NP on 16 Feb 2002 and then 2 males and 1 female at Halali Plain West on 17 Feb 2002.

#### **Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor***

TOO saw a large fall of these European migrants along the northern edge of the vegetation on the south side of Etosha Pan on 27 November. There were hundreds of birds along a 12 km line. As with the European Bee-eater they also did not leave from the Outjo district until 17 April 2002 well after they should have been in Europe breeding.

#### **Plum-coloured Starling *Lamprotornis corruscus***

TOO found the first birds of the season in the Outjo Dist. on 8 December 2001.

**Blue Waxbill *Uraeginthus angolensis*.**

On 25 Jan. Peter Cunningham saw 2 Blue Waxbill's in my garden and he was not sure if Windhoek is included in their distribution. According to Robert's it does not, but he was wondering if there are other reports of Blue Waxbill's from Windhoek. He wondered if the birds I saw could also have been escapees or have migrated West after the last few years of good rain.

**Steelblue Widowfinch *Vidua chalybeata***

On the 9th April 2002 we had our first record of Steelblue Widowfinch on our farm Tsutsab, QDS 1818CC. We were having lunch in the kitchen, overlooking a water-operated cooler outside where all kinds of birds regularly have a drink. We noticed this little black bird, Sparrow-sized, but hastily like a Sunbird. Binoculars are never far out of reach; we got a first impression of a pitch-black, small bird, beak thick, like a seed-eater's, pale reddish. The bird had his water, hopped around a little and was gone, giving us not much time to observe. It was a bird like we have never seen here before, but the Steelblue Widowfinch came into my mind.

Consulting SASOL BIRDS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, we came to the only possible conclusion. We saw a Steelblue Widowfinch, a male in breeding plumage. According to "THE ATLAS OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN BIRDS, Vol.2", Steelblue Widowfinch has been recorded only on two occasions in Namibia, west of the Caprivi, namely on QDS 1714 and 1815. However, it is also stated that "atlas data may not be complete." "Females and non-breeding males can be confused with ..... and other small seed-eaters, or be overlooked altogether. The unexplained patchiness of the distribution especially in Namibia and Botswana, reflects under-recording."

We have so far seen this bird only during a Namibia Bird Club outing to the Popa Falls in the Caprivi area during May 1995.

NML also reports seeing Rednecked Francolin, Striped, Woodland, Pied and numerous Greyhooded Kingfishers along the banks of the Kunene River near Kunene River Lodge in December 2001.

**Cutthroat Finch *Amadina fasciata***

NML corrects his sighting from *Lanioturdus* 35(1). The birds were seen at Namutoni not at the Karibib Golf Course! They were four in total, two males and two females. They were seen during December 2001.