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## EDITORIAL

The publication of this copy of *Lanioturdus* has been considerably delayed and this copy covers the June, September and December 1999 editions. It will immediately strike you that this is probably the least substantial copy of the magazine for a long time. We have a problem – for some reason 1999 seems to have represented the low point of everyones birding and ornithological careers – the articles and other materials have just not come in at all this year.

The success of the magazine and the Club as a whole depends on member participation. The committee recognises that most members are passive for the most part and choose to go their own way for most of their birding. However, we can't rely on just a few people to keep us going all the time. We need new members, new activities and new vision for the future. This is really a plea to you to get more involved in the future and to help the committee keep the Club going. If we are unable to keep bringing *Lanioturdus* out on a regular basis we are in real trouble.

On the positive side of things – the Club in conjunction with the Namibia Nature Foundation and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, is planning to start up a number of new projects as well as revive a number of older ones, including Raptor Road Counts and some form of atlassing in the future. We will probably put out a special edition of *Lanioturdus* in the New Year giving details of each of the projects.

A wonderful festive season to all of you – and good birding.



in palm trees in the centre of Windhoek.

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## BIRDS AND THE TREE OF THE YEAR: THE MAKALANI PALM *Hyphaene petersiana*

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Our tree of the year is the Makalani Palm, *Hyphaene petersiana*, home to many a Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*. The Palm Swift is one of our smallest swifts, weighing only about 15 g. Its long wings and tail (characteristic in the field), make it appear considerably larger.

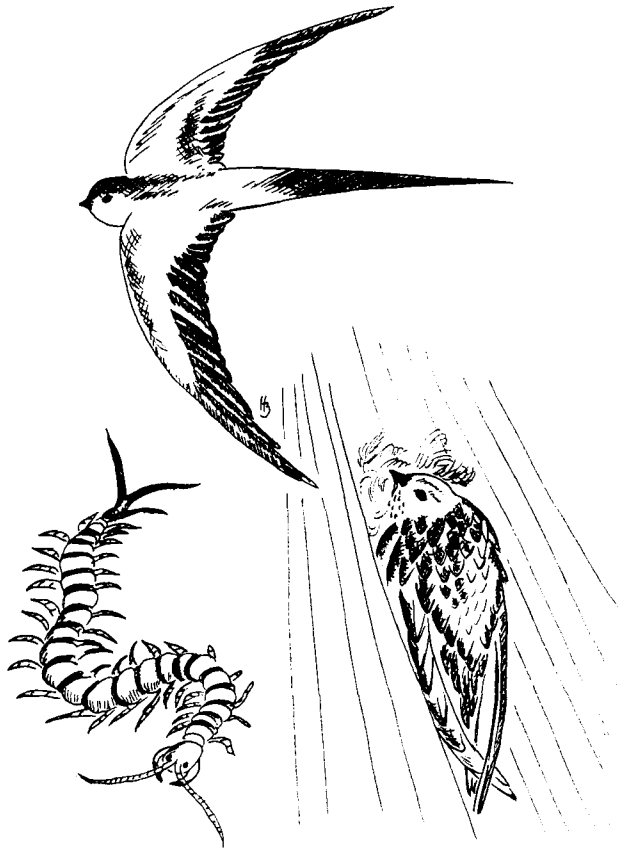
Until the 1930s, Palm Swifts were largely found only where indigenous fan-palms (*Hyphaene* and *Borassus* species) occurred. They probably ranged only as far south as Beira, the Zambezi, Sabi and Limpopo valleys, northern Botswana (where there is an endemic race), across the Grootfontein district and into northern Damaraland. From the 1930s onwards Palm Swifts rapidly expanded their range as they started taking advantage of the planting of exotic palms, especially the American *Washingtonia* palms, so common in many of our urban parks and gardens. Palm Swifts can now be found over most of Zimbabwe, Moçambique, Natal, the northern provinces of South Africa and over much of Namibia. It is common in most of towns and cities including areas in the far south of the country where they would not have historically occurred.

Palm Swifts use palms for breeding and roosting. All swifts produce large quantities of sticky saliva when breeding. In most species this is usually used to cement the nest together, but in the case of the Palm Swift, it is also used to glue the eggs to the nest. The Palm Swift nest itself is curious as it is no more than a crescent of feathers about 15 mm wide glued to the underside of a pendant palm leaf by the birds saliva. The eggs are also glued to this narrow ledge with saliva. The incubating bird clings to the nest with strong feet as do the nestlings after they have hatched. The nestlings cling so tightly that it is almost impossible to pull them off.

On the farm of my parents, a large Makalani Palm grows in the garden, and Palm Swifts are year round residents there. If a swift happens to fall or land

## ROCKY'S TALE

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on the ground they are unable to take off again because of their short, weak legs (it is only the feet that are strong) and long wings. In these cases we usually pick the bird up, toss it into the air and off they go. On one occasion my mother picked up a stranded bird and on attempting to get the bird to fly, discovered that she had a large centipede *Scolopendra morsitans* attached to her finger, which must have been attacking the bird. The centipede must have climbed the palm tree and got hold of the swift. After getting rid of this venomous, multilegged, unwelcome guest the bird was placed on the trunk of the palm tree but was found to have died a couple of hours later.

An immature Rock Kestrel with a broken wing was found near the Swakop River bridge in late November 1998. Its primaries were not all fully grown, nor were any of its tail feathers. The assumption was that it had come to grief on its maiden flight.

For the first few weeks it was nursed in a small travel cage. Once the wing had healed and the splint removed, it was transferred to a bigger area to exercise its wing and practise its flying skills.

Long before this stage was reached, "it" had been given a name, and Rocky had found a place in our hearts. I wonder who was imprinting on whom.

Rocky was eventually judged ready for release and this was duly done. That night Swakopmund experienced a big storm with thunder and lightning. There was much fretting about Rocky's well-being during those stormy hours. The dreaded news came the next day: an immature Rock Kestrel with an eye injury had been seen. It was Rocky with a swollen right eye and bleeding from the right nostril and mouth, but no injury to the skull or orbit. The eye was treated successfully in that the swelling subsided and the haematoma regressed, but the eye was left blind.

A bird with a double handicap such as Rocky had sustained is probably not able to survive independently in the wild, so we contacted Liz Komen at NARREC. She was able to house him with other Rock Kestrels. We bid Rocky another tearful farewell, and sent him away.

We visited Rocky at NARREC in May and were met with a wonderful sight. The adult plumage had developed by then and Rocky is no longer referred to as "he". Even better, she lives a semi-independent life, having been slowly allowed her freedom to come and go.