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Editorial

With this issue the bird names and order follow the new *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa* VIIth edition published in September 2005. For those of you who have not purchased the N\$ 870 book yet, a real treat awaits you. The book has all the up-to-date information on all the species found in Africa south of the Kunene and Zambezi Rivers. For more on the book see the review in this issue.

Although *Roberts* is an epic tome, there is still much information needed on our Namibian endemic species. For example, there is scant information on the Bare-cheeked Babbler – little data on breeding, none of incubation, none on what newly hatched young look like, nothing on moult and only one nest has been found. Page through a copy and see what nearby species you have so you can contribute data.

The editor would like someone who has attended recent club outings to write up reports so those of us who missed the trip can see what was observed.

Contributions to the observations and notes section is the largest in many years and it is good to see that members are getting out and watching birds. Under the observation section the order of birds follows the new *Roberts* classification system. However, in the paper by Brown *et al.* I have not corrected the order of species in the tables. In the future all submissions must follow the new order.

Once again I appeal to all members to help the Namibia Bird Club. If you want to keep the club viable you must also do your part to try and get new members to join. We are currently down to less than 100 members.

Roberts Birds of Southern Africa - a review

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In September 2005 the seventh edition of Roberts Birds of Southern Africa was published by the John Voekler Bird Book fund. This epic book of 1296 pages edited by PAR Hockey, WRJ Dean and PG Ryan is supposed to contain all the information known about those 915 species known to occur. Unfortunately, although the book weighs 5 kg, limits were placed on each species author and they had to cut and condense information down to two pages. I know from personal experience that the kori bustard species account ran to 7 pages and much valuable data was cut out. Unfortunately, the economics of selling a five volume book was not there.

When you first open the book you might think the printers have mixed up the pages. The species accounts start with Ostriches, followed by chickens then ducks, woodpeckers and hornbills. Near the end of the non-passerine section are found falcons and eagles then finally after storks, albatrosses and shearwaters, groups which used to lead the book. The editors have taken a bold step in arranging the order of families in the most current classification system based mainly on new findings using DNA. This system uses evolutionary relationships based on a "molecular clock" using rates of DNA divergence.

Another "new" feature is that common names have changed for some of the birds. New species of birds are also included where research has shown that what were once considered subspecies are now full species. Some of the name changes were made to align southern African names with birds found over wider ranges which had different names. Other names revert back to the old names you once knew, like the Kalahari Robin is once again the Kalahari Scrub-Robin. Other names try and define subgroups of species like Hartlaub's Francolin is now Hartlaub's Spurfowl since not all the francolins have spurs on their legs. The Crested Francolin, which does not have spurs, is still the Crested Francolin. Some species have conflicting names in other parts of the world. The Rock

Bunting lives in Europe so our Rock Bunting is now the Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. Of course the names do not always make sense. The Blackbreasted Snake Eagle is now the Black-chested Snake-Eagle because birds do not have breasts although the Rock Bunting mentioned above seems to have one that is cinnamon coloured. Another sensible change is the use of hyphens. Previously adjectives were not hyphenated so it looked ridiculous to use triple 'eee's when writing about bee-eaters. Now it is the Southern Carmine Bee-eater.

Some of the new species listed are really old. When Austin Roberts brought out the first book in 1940 he listed many new species like the Long-billed Lark species group. Subsequent authors of Roberts lumped all his species. Now recent research has shown that Roberts was correct. The splits that affect Namibia which are listed on page 21 are: The Red-billed Hornbill which is now the Damara Hornbill with the separation of species running along a line from Ondangwa to Waterberg. The Burchell's Coucal which lives in the north is now the White-browed Coucal. The Cape Parrot which lives in the Caprivi is now the Grey-headed Parrot. The Knysa Lourie in the Caprivi is now Schalow's Turaco. Not many Namibian birders use boats to watch offshore but four of the albatrosses that could have been encountered are now 9 species. When looking offshore for the White-chinned Petrel also now look for its split-off cousin the Spectacled Petrel. Our Cape White-eye is now the Orange River White-eye, the former is only found in Cape Province and NE from there. Again in the Caprivi the Black-backed Cisticola is now the Luapula Cisticola (note the name is miss-spelt Luapala on page 21). The Spotted Prinia is no more, and has been turned into the Karoo Prinia in southern Namibia and the Drakensberg Prinia of the same mountain. The Bleating Warbler is now the Grey-backed Camaroptera in Namibia and the Green-backed Camaroptera in SA and Mozambique. The Clapper Lark has been split into our Eastern Clapper Lark and the Cape Clapper Lark restricted to the Cape. The Long-billed Lark has been split into 5 species. From that split we have gained two new species the Benguela Long-billed Lark north of the Swakop River and the Karoo Long-billed Lark south of the river. The Olive Thrush is still the Olive Thrush unless you are in SA then it is the Karoo Thrush. The Grey-headed Sparrow is now the Southern Grey-headed Sparrow over most of Namibia and the Northern Grey-headed Sparrow is found at Ruacana and at a few places along the Botswana border in the Caprivi.

If you are lucky you could have up to six "new" species to add to your tick list without leaving home.

The species accounts contain much new information which is a great improvement, and the species authors are to be commended. However, the accounts that cover species mostly endemic to Namibia are still missing some data. This is where members of the Namibia Bird Club can still contribute. Pick a species, try and fill in the missing data and then write an article for the *Lanioturdus*.

The only complaint I have with the book is with the colour plates illustrating the species. Seven artists are used and each has a different style, from detailed drawings to watercolour washes which makes paging through a little jarring to the eye. The biggest problem I have, however, is the subject matter of the plates. Roberts is too large to carry as a field guide so it will be used as a stay home reference book. The publisher missed a golden opportunity to illustrate those birds which are not illustrated in the plethora of field guides, and handbooks already in most people's home libraries. Everyone must know what a male breeding plumaged Eastern Paradise Whydah looks like but nowhere is the juvenile illustrated, not even in Birds of Africa (BOA), Volume 7 by Fry and Urban. Another bird which is not illustrated is the female Little Sparrowhawk. It cannot be found in any of the guides or BOA. Plates of un-illustrated birds would have been the ultimate fall back for everyone who has seen a bird and been unable to ID it using the standard guides.

Bird observations and notes

Observations follow the classification order in the new *Roberts*.

Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor*

Two ringed lesser birds were seen at the corner dam on Windpoort Farm. Although I have only ringed 8 honeyguides at our house 3 km away it was surprising to see the 2 together as a pair on 8 July 2005. T.O. Osborne

Verreaux's Eagle-Owl *Bubo lactus*

At Huab Lodge a nestling was ringed on 17 Oct 2005. It was being fed African hedgehogs which have only been seen once on the property. T.O. Osborne, J. & S. van de Reep

Rufous-cheeked Nightjar *Caprimulgus rufigena*

A male starting to call on 15 Sept 2005 at Windpoort Farm. This is about a month early. T.O. Osborne

Common Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

One seen on 1 July 2005 at Walvis Bay Salt Works, another bird on 2 Oct. TO Osborne. Seen 30 Oct on in non-breeding plumage Salt works pump house, on 1 Nov in full breeding plumage at pump house and one in partial breeding plumage at Mile 4 Salt works, Swakopmund. T. Tree and M. Boorman

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinerea*

One bird seen at the last salt pond next to Paaltjies on 30 Oct 2005. T. Tree, TO Osborne & M. Boorman

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

4 & 5 Nov 2005 one at Mile 4 Salt Works, Swakopmund. On 14 Nov 2005 4 at Paaltjies. T. Tree & M. Boorman

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

On 27 Oct 2005 ca 500 at Dolphin Park beach. T. Tree & M. Boorman

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

One on 1 July 2005 at Walvis Bay Salt Works, T.O. Osborne. One on 1 Nov 2005 same place. T. Tree & M. Boorman

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

One seen at Walvis Bay sewerage works on 2 Oct 2005. The bird was seen with a 45 power scope and the following features were noted. Wings longer than tail and a broad buffy eye stripe. T.O. Osborne & P. Triggs