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Editorial

This issue of the *Lanioturdus* would have been rather skinny had it not been for Wessel Swanepoel's numerous contributions. The editor is still waiting for the Chairman's annual report delivered to the March 2005 AGM and any trip reports from members on outings.

Peter Steyn and Rob Martin report on the puzzle of Namibia's Booted Eagles. Here is a species that used to be difficult to identify thus adding to the confusion but recent advances in field guides should help even novice birders identify this species. Surely the bird is a more common breeder than we think, people just have to scan likely breeding rocks, kloofs and canyons. Perhaps we can solve the mystery.

New birds have been reported for the country so it is good to see that birders have been active even though it is the dry season. There are two articles on rarities within the country and one from our neighbour, Botswana.

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 and try and get new members to join.

White-throated Canary *Serinus albogularis* unusual behaviour

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On the 7th July 2002 at about 10:00, a colleague and I travelled on the farm Heiragabis, approximately 30 km to the east of Ariamsvlei. We noticed a few White throated Canaries *Serinus albogularis* feeding on small bushes next to the track and decided to stop briefly in order to watch the birds. We travelled in a bright yellow LDV with a white canopy.

As soon as we stopped, the White-throated Canaries took off, flew straight to us and perched on the vehicle. They were soon joined by many more White-throated Canaries flying in from all directions, all ending up perched on our vehicle. Within about 5 minutes approximately 80 birds were perched all over us – on the bonnet, the roof, the radio antennas, the mirrors, the bull bar and even on the half opened door windows, very close to where we were sitting inside. Those perched on the yellow coloured parts of the vehicle immediately started pecking as though they were foraging. After a few minutes the birds left in the same manner that they have arrived. At no stage of the spectacle was any sound uttered and the birds were extremely tame and confident, even those on the half opened windows within our easy reach.

A possible explanation is that the yellow colour of the vehicle resembled the colour of a favourite food item, probably some of the yellow coloured perennial flowers found in the area after good rains. The birds were probably attracted to this unexpected abundance of “food”. At the time the area was devoid of any of these yellow coloured flowers. Also of interest is the fact that approximately 80 birds were present whilst the maximum mentioned in literature is 30, when gathered at water to drink (Maclean G. L., 1993. Robert’s Birds of Southern Africa. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town).

Booted Eagle Enigmas

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Gordon Scholtz’s mention (*Promerops* 263:22) of a Booted Eagle *Aquila pennatus* on a nest in early December at Brukkaros north of Keetmanshoop in southern Namibia is of considerable interest and requires further comment.

The first breeding Booted Eagles in South Africa were discovered in the Western Cape in 1973 (Steyn 1982). We do not subscribe to suggestions, for example in The Atlas of Southern African Birds, that it is possible that the establishment of a local breeding population is a recent phenomenon (Boshoff and Allan 1997). Given the remote areas in which they breed, and the difficulty in finding nests, we believe that they were simply overlooked, despite being the commonest breeding eagle in the Western Cape with an estimated population of 700 pairs.

The status of the Booted Eagle in Southern Africa was summarised by Steyn and Grobler in 1985 as follows:

1. A South African population which arrives in early August, lays in the second half of September, and then migrates northwards in March, mainly to Namibia.
2. A small population in the Waterberg in northern Namibia with two nests discovered in July 1983 (June was the estimated laying month) and another inactive site located in 1984. However, no subsequent evidence of breeding there has been confirmed (Simmons & Brown 2005).
3. Palaearctic migrants from North Africa and Eurasia which arrive in Southern Africa in November and depart in March. Although recent research has revealed that southern African Booted Eagles are a genetically distinct (smaller) subspecies, this is not obvious in the field, so it is not possible to know how far south they travel and records from the south-western Cape cannot be confirmed as migrants.

The enigmas involve the Waterberg records of Booted Eagles which laid in mid-winter (June) at a completely different time to those in South Africa which, at that stage, would have moved northwards to Namibia where they would presumably overlap with those breeding in the Waterberg.

The enigmas are now further compounded by Gordon Scholtz's record of a Booted Eagle at a nest in southern Namibia in December. Although the contents of the nest were not known, the Brukkaros record suggests nesting that coincides with the South African laying season in the second half of September where breeding evidence extends to the Orange River at Augrabies Falls and into the Richtersveld. Significantly, there is even one record (Anderson *et al.* 1995) north of the Orange River near Griekwastat with eggs at the end of September, and this record is not a great deal further south than that at Brukkaros.

Dr Rob Simmons, formerly State Ornithologist for Namibia, who kindly commented on our first draft of this note, informs us that nesting at Brukkaros had been suspected but not confirmed. He also suggests that breeding further north at Spitzkoppe and in the Erongo Mountains in suitable habitat seems very likely as pairs have been seen there in November/December at a time when South African birds would not yet have moved northwards. Thus it appears on the evidence available that the isolated records of breeding in mid-winter in the Waterberg are at variance with the probable nesting season elsewhere in Namibia. Visitors to Namibia would do well to publish their observations on Booted Eagles, especially suspected breeding, and thus help to make them less enigmatic.

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African Mourning Dove *Streptopelia decipiens* range extension and habitat requirements

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In Namibia, the Afrotropical African Morning Dove occurs in the far north, where it is found in the area bordering Angola, Zambia and Botswana. It inhabits riparian woodland, cultivated land and villages (Maclean 1993) and is localized due to these particular habitat requirements. The atlas of southern African birds (Colahan 1997) indicates its distribution to extend as far south as the Hoanib River in the Sesfontein area (1913BD) in the arid north-west.

However, I found African Mourning Dove on four out of eight visits to the lower Ugab River, another major ephemeral river further to the south. All these records were from the period autumn to early winter, in June 2000, May 2003, April 2005 and May 2005. The birds were detected by their highly distinctive vocalisations after which good views were also obtained. At least two birds were present on the first three occasions while three birds were found in May 2005. The precise locality is at the foot of the Brandberg massif at Alpha (21° 01.05' S; 14° 38.78' E), approximately 210 km SSE of the southernmost record of the bird atlas project, on the Hoanib River.

The habitat at the Alpha locality consists of riparian woodland (mainly tall Ana Trees *Faidherbia albida* and thickets of Wild Tamarix *Tamarix usneoides*) at a marshy section of river, with permanent surface water. Similar habitat is also to be found at certain localities along the Hoanib and Hoarusib Rivers further to the north, where the African Mourning Dove is regularly recorded. From these observations it seems that in the arid north-west, the African Mourning Dove requires in addition to riparian woodland with tall trees (especially *Faidherbia albida*), also the presence of open water. Its preference to particularly *Faidherbia albida* is also mentioned for other parts of its range in southern Africa (Colahan 1997).