

LANIOTURDUS

Volume 49 No 2

June 2016

Namibia Bird Club



since 1962

Journal of the Namibia Bird Club
www.namibiabirdclub.org

About the Namibia Bird Club

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. The club's mission is to contribute to Namibian ornithology by, amongst other things, arranging regular birding outings, conducting bird ringing and atlasing excursions and educating the public about the value of birds. To achieve this, we organize monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Sewage Works and occasional weekend trips further afield. Bird club members also participate in the African Waterbird Census twice a year.

Experienced birders are more than happy to help beginners and novices on these outings. If you have a transport problem or would like to share transport please contact a committee member. Depending on the availability of speakers and suitable material we present occasional lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive a digital newsletter, *Namibia Bird News*, which includes a programme of forthcoming events and the Bird Club journal, *Lanioturdus*.

The Namibia Bird Club is not affiliated to any global or regional organization and relies entirely on members' subscriptions and donations to fund its activities.

The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Namibia Bird Club or its committee.

Instructions to Authors

Lanioturdus is a journal dedicated to birds and birding. Although the journal's primary focus is on Namibia, articles from other geographical parts of the globe will also be considered for publication. Authors should use common and scientific names of southern African birds as published in *Roberts' VII*. For other regions, English and scientific names following BirdLife International's species list (<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species>) should be used. Text should be submitted as a MS Word document. Photos, maps and figures should be sent as separate jpeg images, graphs as MS Excel charts or jpeg images and tables as MS Word or Excel documents. Please indicate in the article text where these should be placed.



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CONTENTS

KOLBERG H	Editorial 1
KOLBERG C, H KOLBERG M BOORMAN, H KOLB, A MADDEN and B MADDEN	Terra Incognito: Bird Atlasing Expedition to the Tsaukhaeb (Sperrgebiet) National Park 2
FRIEDERICH G	Bornholm Birds: Impossible Reality 8
THOMSON N	Namibia Bird Club Kunene Trip – 22 to 30 August 2015..... 11
KOLBERG H	Namibia's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas 4: NA003 Okavango River, Andara to Mohembo 16
DEMASIUS E	Rosy-faced Lovebirds are indeed real love birds..... 24
KOLBERG C and H KOLBERG	Sociable Weavers nesting on rock faces..... 25
THOMSON N	Rarities and Interesting Observations 26

Editorial

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The plethora of public holidays in March and May certainly had an impact on several bird related activities in Namibia.

The Namibia Bird Club embarked on two major atlasing expeditions – one to the “far east” around Buitepos and one to the south around Maltahöhe. During these expeditions we managed to nudge the total number of pentads atlased in Namibia past the 10% mark – a truly remarkable achievement considering the number of active atlasers and the size of the country. Well done to all!

May was also the time of the traditional bird ringers’ get-together. This time it was decided to combine this esteemed occasion with the bird club excursion and in my humble opinion it was a resounding success. Due to the current drought the

number of birds caught was very low (but then most of us don’t come to the get-together to ring birds) but the variety was quite amazing. In the end, between the ringers and the atlasers we racked up over 130 species, quite a number for an area that in places looked as if it had been swept with a broom. I think this may well be a recipe to be followed in the future.

As we are entering the “slowdown time” of winter this may be a chance to reflect on the past summer and perhaps write down some of the interesting observations we made (much like the contributions by Günther, Neil and Eckart in this issue) and send them to this, your journal.

Keep birding!

Bornholm Birds: Impossible Reality

Günther Friederich

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All photos © Günther Friederich

During the month of July 2015 I was taking care of the farms Bornholm No 188 and Olik No 192, in the south-eastern district of Grootfontein, Namibia (QDS 1918 CC & CD), whilst the owner was on a visit to Germany. Bornholm lies close to the Omuramba Omatako, less than 10 km northwest thereof. The Omatako, a perennial river, has its origins south of the town of Otjiwarongo, in the area of the Etjo Mountains, flowing south, turning east and crossing the B8 to Okahandja, then turning into a north-easterly direction until it reaches the Okavango River, east of the town of Rundu.

Naturally, I took binoculars and books, this area was new to me, I had to see what I could find. The vegetation: *Omaheke* – lots of Real Fan Palm *Hyphaene petersiana*, in low acacia shrub, mostly *Acacia meliffera*, few broadleaf *Combretum* spp., Shepherd's tree *Boscia albitrunca*, Kalahari Apple-leaf *Philenoptera nelsii*, and some Worm-cure *Albizia Albizia antelminthica*. Much of the shrub in the sandy areas had been cleared to make way for better grazing for cattle.

Lots of White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* were present, also nesting in the palms. This could be an opportunity for vulture ringing/tagging in the future, sometime. I have not noticed any tagged birds. Exciting species? The small, yellow bird I saw in a flash, turned out to be Yellow Canary *Crithagra flaviventris*, when I went back to that cattle post one late afternoon. More raptors? Southern Pale Chanting - *Melierax canorus* and Gabar Goshawk *Melierax gabar*,

Shikra *Accipiter badius*, no problems. The others – I had to leave them for the time being. I was here to do a job, not on a birding vacation.

At another cattle post I requested the labourers not to get off the vehicle for a while. Close by on a tree – Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*. Very nice to see! Some days later, at the same post, we had a visit by this elderly lady, coming in for a drink.



Towards the next post: Two long-legged birds running on the cleared field. "Are they present here?" "Yes". "Do they breed?" "Yes". When last have I seen Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius*? In March 2007, during a birding weekend on the farm Tiefland in the Kalkfeld area.

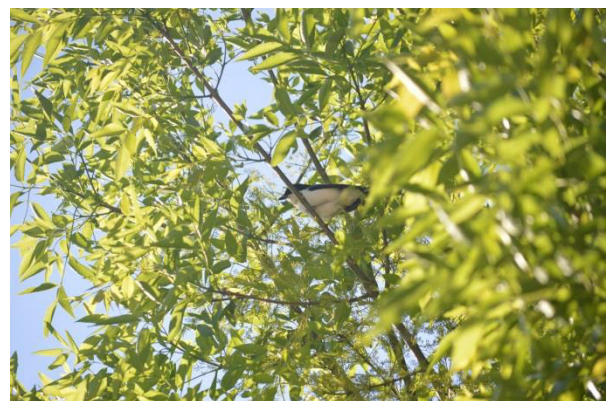
Southern White-faced Scops-Owl *Ptilopsis granti* and Pearl-spotted Owlet *Glaucidium perlatum* I have heard, also Fiery-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus pectoralis*, Barn Owl *Tyto alba* seen. There are lots of mice in the sheds, also running around in the fields, I have seen them. All those *Hyphaenes* – where were the African Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*? But I eventually saw two of them, late afternoon. At the first cattle post, Ant-eating Chat *Myrmecocichla*

formicivora were quite common. I had expected Double-banded- and Burchell's Sandgrouse, but none of these. However, Namaqua Sandgrouse *Pterocles namaqua* were plentiful. The Parrot-breeding on the farm might also have attracted Meyer's Parrot *Poicephalus meyeri* and Rosy-faced Lovebird *Agapornis roseicollis*. I have heard and seen Pirit Batis *Batis pririt*, also some Kalahari Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas paena*. At another cattle post I just managed to confirm African Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides typus* before it flew off. I missed Grey- and Red-billed Hornbill. Southern Yellow-billed-*Tockus leucomelas* and Bradfield's Hornbill *Tockus bradfieldi* were common, however. Another exciting species seen in quite open veld, in between low acacia shrub, just after its smaller brother Red-crested Korhaan *Lophotis ruficrista* had announced itself by call, was Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*. Later in the afternoon I saw this one again at the water of an overflowing dam.

This leads me to the Impossible: On the morning of July 24th, I was up early, preparing to go to town. At about 06h20, close to sunrise, I was in the kitchen, taking a ration of coffee, when I heard this call. Close. Pirit Batis? Brubru? No. A call I knew, but not from this area. I went outside and searched in the trees, no binoculars at hand. Again – that call! I was familiar with that call! Then the bird took off – I had a short glimpse – I could not believe it! The call I had heard, fitted the bird I had seen: medium size, white under parts, black above. We had seen and heard this bird just the previous weekend, at Namushasha Lodge on the Kwando River in the Zambezi Region, where I was hiding away from a planned birthday party. This just could not be, but it was: Swamp Boubou

Laniarius bicolor! The call was of a male – a hollow whistle, as described in *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa*. I was stunned, couldn't believe it. Where did this bird come from? It was totally out of range, about 250km south of the closest perennial river, the Okavango River. How did the bird get here?

Later, the following week, I started having doubts. The parrots do make and mimic lots of "foreign" calls. A few times, on hearing those calls, I searched – nothing. Was it really Swamp Boubou, or did I just want to have this bird? Also – if it was a boubou – was it Swamp -, or could it have been Tropical Boubou? Swamp Boubou does only occur along perennial rivers, whereas Tropical Boubou, with its' pinkish-coloured under parts, does occur away from rivers, as I have experienced in Zambia. However, Tropical Boubou has only been recorded in Namibia in the Zambezi Region along the Kwando, Linyanti, Chobe and Zambezi Rivers. So, Tropical Boubou occurring here was most unlikely.



So came Friday morning, July 31st. I was again leaving for town, binoculars packed away, I would not need them. I was sipping my ration of coffee in the kitchen. Just before 07h00 – I heard that call again! Binoculars? Guess. I dashed outside; found the bird in a tree before it took off into another one, less dense.

Swamp- or Tropical Boubou? I could not decide. For some reason, maybe because I got the binoculars out again, the bird did me the honour by giving me a clear view: Swamp Boubou. How did it get here, why? Questions ... the bird would not say.

I have only one suggestion for the bird being in this area: The bird must have followed the Omuramba Omatako upstream, from where it enters the Okavango River, east of Rundu. When the water level of the Okavango rises, the water pushes up, back-stream into the Omatako. This was the case during the rainy season of 2013/14. How far this water reached, I do not know. However, with high rainfall, water also enters the Omatako from its catchment area in the upstream regions. Some of this water enters the river from the farm Bornholm, which has lots of shallow depressions, collecting water from surrounding areas, through the farm

Ovisume, just south-east of Bornholm, into the Omatako. Bornholm had 680 mm rain during that season. Inflow into the Omatako occurs all along the course of the river. In places the water might start flowing, but at least there are lots of puddles and depressions filled with water, with enough dense vegetation, which the Swamp Boubou requires. When these waters disappeared, the bird could not find its way back to the Okavango. While hanging around in the area, it might have been attracted by the parrots' calls at the homestead of Bornholm.

On Saturday morning, August 8th, when the owners of the farm were back, we saw the bird again. They confirmed this bird has been around for about a year already. How long it will stay, and whether it will find its way back to the Okavango River, remains to be seen.