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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.

Burchell's Courser *Cursorius rufus*: "Cryptic, elusive and confiding"...no friggin wonder...if it chooses to hang out on the quartz pebble hilltops of DVGR's most inaccessible koppies. In Feb 2000 and March 2001 whilst walking a hornbill census transect I came across a single individual (possibly the same one) scurrying along the very top of a koppie on the SE section of the reserve. Nice views from up there... but otherwise not a clue what he was doing there. However, the bird may be more common than we think if one keeps an ear out for it, Rob Simmons has reported hearing the bird several times in the early morning or late afternoon whilst checking nest boxes.

Ruppell's Parrot *Poicephalus rueppellii*: Thin on the ground as ever, at least at DVGR I have three more sightings to add to the list. The first one dates from 13th March 1999 when two individuals shot overhead whilst I was checking nest boxes in the Choub river at an area known as Rooiberg, not far from the reserve's northern fence. On 7th April 2000 an adult pair was sighted after good rains feeding on Buffalo Thorn *Ziziphus mucronata* berries around Peter Eisselein's dairy farm. These birds were subsequently re-sighted during the following week. Finally, last year, an adult single bird was seen after the late March rains and coinciding with the ripening of Buffalo Thorn berries. This bird also stayed a few days before disappearing...my guess is that it went downstream towards the denser riverine forests downstream from Ongos and towards the Montecristo farms.

Southern Grey Tit *Parus afer*: Observed by Mark Brown and Craig Symes and subsequently confirmed by myself in April 2000. A pair of Southern Grey Tits made residence along the *Acacia karoo* forests growing below Peter Eisselein's farm. Its quite likely that this species could be grossly overlooked, but I cannot say that I have seen any others ever since.

African Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*: Possibly a typing drop-out as it is a very common species in the reserve. Often found foraging along the river's edge or in *A.karoo* stands along the Aretaragas stream.

African Barred Warbler *Calamonastes fasciolata*: I am sure that this is also a typing error, as the reserve squeaks alive every year to the tunes of several hundred

Barred Warblers, resembling a vintage Argus cycle tour...if it's true that their call resembles a rusty old "fiets".

Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea*: Responding to the late March 2001 rains, a flock of 36 birds settled at Peter Eisselein's farm and roosted in a large *Acacia erioloba* within the reserve. They were not however spotted breeding.

Lesser Masked Weaver *Ploceus intermedius*: A local common resident in the reserve that somehow did not crack the nod on to the list either when first compiled. Obviously a mistake as this is a common and abundant resident in the *Acacia mellifera* stands of the reserve. Often seen breeding along the Aretaragas and in mixed flocks with Chestnut weavers.

Larklike Bunting *Emberiz impetuani*: In typical rain-tracking fashion this bird has not failed to show itself literally a few days after a reasonable downpour over the past four years.

Care to share some more of your own precious sightings with us? Would love and appreciate to hear all about them.....

Bushmanland Adventures

Tineka and Gunther Friederich
P. O. Box 207, Grootfontein, Namibia, tsutsab@mweb.com.na

My husband and I decided to visit Bushmanland again and we left on the 15th of February 2002. We did not have enough time so we only wanted to look around Tsumkwe and the surrounding areas. Sadly we could not go into the Kaudum Game Reserve this time.

We arrived at Tsumkwe Lodge around lunch time, it was still drizzling from the good rain shower they had and we had to wait before we could pitch up our tent at the campsite. That evening a lot of people arrived and we talked well into the night. The next day it still looked rainy and overcast so we took a walk near the

Lodge. The first bird we saw was a Cuckoo Hawk, a lifer for us! I saw it perched on a high tree branch on the edge of a smallish pan, a few meters from the water, behind the bungalows. It was grey all over with a crest on its head. It sat there for a while until I could make sure what it was. Then it flew away. It was Hawk-like in appearance; with bars on its belly, long tail and long wings. My first impression of it was that it was some raptor that I had never seen before. I looked through my guide books and the drawing confirmed that it was a male Cuckoo Hawk. Later after consulting the Atlas of Southern African Birds 1997 Harrison *et al.* we noted that the distribution of the hawk is limited to the Caprivi and Tsumkwe area in Namibia.

The same day we decided to drive around. We packed the necessary stuff and off we went to the Nyae-Nyae pan. A certain company from Australia is prospecting for diamonds in the area, so they damaged the road quite bad with their 6 x 6 wheel trucks. The road was in a terrible state, because they had lots of rain and the mud sucks you in if you're not fast enough. We nearly got stuck twice, even with 4 wheel drive it's difficult to get out. But the pan only had a little bit of water at one end. There I saw Three-banded Plover, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Red-billed Teal, a Pallid Harrier soaring in front of us and lots of Wattled Cranes. At the Windmill near by, we saw an estimated 120 - 150 Greater Flamingo's.

The Sunday we drove in the direction of the "Holboom" (Hollow Tree). On the way we nearly got stuck in a mudvlei. Then we reached a very beautiful sight - a big open vlei with the road passing right through it. We stopped and searched for waterbirds. We were fortunate. We saw a kind of Tern, we took our time to make sure it was a Whiskered Tern. Although we didn't see them, we heard Dabchicks. They were hiding on an island of grasses in the middle of the vlei.

In the next mudhole we really got stuck. After reversing and forwarding like mad, we got out with the mud flying over the cabin of the Toyota. We took our lunchbreak at the "Holboom". Raleigh International has started building a very rustic campsite there with showers and toilet covered with thatch. I wanted to wash my hands after lunch at the showers. As I approached the structure, very cautiously because you never know what's inside, a long black snake slithered away from me. I forgot to wash my hands right there!! After a while we left the

place with the snake still in the shower. Later at the Lodge I heard there wasn't water anyway.

Monday we went up to the Klein and Groot Dobe's. The road was again bad and with the help of our GPS we arrived at what we thought was Klein Dobe camp. The campsite is in a terrible state with no one there. The bungalows are terrible: broken and dilapidated. Later we heard the camp is not used anymore. With lots of arguing between us because the map says the real pan is to the east but we are driving northwest, we finally took a road leading east. After a while, on a road that's not really a road because at places you could not see it, we came to the most beautiful sight. A big pan filled with water and lots of birds. We stopped for lunch and we looked for birds. I saw Blacksmith Plover's, Knob-billed Ducks, Glossy Ibis, Redbilled Teal and three more Whiskered Tern. From here we went to Groot Dobe, which is more to the east, but that pan was dry with only a herd of Gnu's in the background. What a disappointing sight - we had expected more.

Monday night we had a rainstorm so the Tuesday dawned with a wet tent, standing in a puddle of water. Everything was wet, even our clothes. Not a very nice feeling when everything is wet and damp and of course no sunshine the whole day. We moved into a bungalow for that night because it looked as if the rain won't give up soon. We planned to go to the Aha hills that day, but everyone told us we would be looking for trouble if we do. So we hanged around the lodge and visited the Nature Conservation guy in town.

Wednesday dawned with sunshine and we decided to go anyway. The road wasn't too bad, just a few waterholes and mud. By the time we arrived at the Kremetart Kop it was already early afternoon. We stopped and had a rest. Günther climbed the koppie and I sat and sweated in the heat. Boy, was it hot and humid! We turned back towards Tsumkwe but we stopped again twice on the way. I saw Lesser and Greater Honeyguides in the trees next to the road. The Greater behaves just like a Greyheaded Sparrow, so I first thought it was them! On the way back next to the road in a vlei we saw 3 Spurwinged Goose taking flight when they saw us.

Sadly, on Thursday we had to pack to go home. But first I went to a craftshop where they sell handicraft made by the local Bushmen. Beautiful things there.

Bracelets, necklaces, handbags and other small things can be bought there at a minimal price. We left at noon and on a pylon sat 2 Pied Crows. Outside Tsumkwe I saw a raptor on a tree to our right. We looked through the Spotting Scope but the shimmer made it difficult to identify. What I could determine was that it was a Male European Marsh Harrier. The whitish crown, brown breast feathers and upright stance were diagnostic to me.

At home I looked it up my books: The Atlas of Southern African Birds; The Complete Book of Southern African Birds; Raptors of Southern Africa. The male has the white crown and brown body. According to the books it has been previously recorded for Bushmanland.

The trip was all the effort and struggle through the mudholes worth because the birdlife there is just incredible. The summers are very hot and humid with lots of rain, but I noticed that it is the right time to visit Bushmanland. I have never counted so many bird species in such a short time ever. At the end my count stood at 110 birds. The raptors were plenty but no vultures were seen. All in all, a very successful trip. If any one wants information about Bushmanland, birds seen or GPS coordinates for the area, they can contact us.

Table 1. Birds seen 15 February to 21 February 2002 Bushmanland, Namibia

Ostrich	Common Sandpiper	Forktailed Drongo
Dabchick	Wood Sandpiper	African Golden Oriole
Cattle Egret	Greenshank	Pied Crow
Abdim's Stork	Blackwinged Stilt	Pied Babbler
Openbilled Stork	Spotted Dikkop	Red eyed Bulbul
Marabou Stork	Whiskered Tern	Capped Wheatear
Glossy Ibis	Yellowthroated Sandgrouse	Anteater Chat
Greater Flamingo	Doublebanded Sandgrouse	Whitebrowed Robin
Redbilled Teal	Cape Turtle Dove	Kalahari Robin
Knobbilled Duck	Laughing Dove	Titbabbler
Spurwinged Goose	Namaqua Dove	Greybacked Bleating Warbler
Yellowbilled Kite	Rosy faced Lovebird	Fantailed Cisticola
Blackshouldered Kite	Grey Loerie	Marico Flycatcher
Cuckoo Hawk	African Cuckoo	Chin spot Batis
Tawny Eagle	Black Cuckoo	Buffy Pipit
Lesser Spotted Eagle	Striped Cuckoo	Lesser Grey Shrike
Wahlberg's Eagle	Diederik's Cuckoo	Redbacked Shrike

Brown Snake Eagle	Barn Owl	Longtailed Shrike
Blackbreasted Snake Eagle	Pearlspotted Owl	Crimsonbreasted Shrike
Bateleur	Palm Swift	Brubru
Steppe Buzzard	Carmine Bee eater	Threestreaked Tchagra
Gabar Goshawk	Swallowtailed Bee eater	White Helmetshrike
Pale Chanting Goshawk	Lilacbreasted Roller	Wattled Starling
European Marsh Harrier	Purple Roller	Burchell's Starling
Pallid Harrier	Scimitar Woodhoopoe	Glossy Starling
Gymnogene	Grey Hornbill	Marico Sunbird
Redbilled Francolin	Yellowbilled Hornbill	Redbilled Buffalo-Weaver
Swainson's Francolin	Pied Barbet	Whitebrowed Sparrowweaver
Helmeted Guineafowl	Greater Honeyguide	Greyheaded Sparrow
Kurriehane Buttonquail	Lesser Honeyguide	Scalyfeathered Finch
Wattled Crane	Cardinal Woodpecker	Masked Weaver
Redcrested Korhaan	Monotonous Lark	Redbilled Quelea
Black Korhaan	Rufousnaped Lark	Blackcheeked Waybill
Threebanded Plover	Clapper Lark	Redheaded Finch
Crowned Plover	Dusky Lark	Shafttailed Whydah
Blacksmith Plover	Chestnutbacked Finchlark	Paradise Whydah
		Goldenbreasted Bunting
		Rock Bunting

CO-OPERATIVE BREEDING IN CARP'S TITS (*Parus carpi*)

Christian Boix-Hinzen¹, Torsten Ludwig² and Anne Turbe.
¹Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology
 University of Cape Town, RSA, Cboix@botzoo.uct.ac.za
²PO Box 21870 Windhoek, lud@iway.na

During 1993-1997 Dr. David Wiggins visited Namibia on a number of occasions to study Carp's *Parus carpi* and Ashy Tits *Parus cinerascens*, but was stumped out by the fact that breeding densities were not large enough to attain the desired sample to resolve the queries he wanted answered. Dr Wiggins' study was aimed at determining differences in life history strategies between Palearctic and Tropical or southern hemisphere species of the genus *Parus*, namely Carp's and Ashy Tits. Some of his findings have recently been published in *Ibis*:143:677-680, 2001. None the less, one trait he was particularly keen to witness, was the