

CONTENTS

VOLUME 31(1), March 1998

EDITORIAL	1
NACHRUF/OBITUARY: Hartmut "Eddy" Kehlbeck	2
FRIEDRICH, G. Vogelbeobachtungen auf Farm Tsutsab	3
MENDELSON, J. Nest boxes for birds in Namibia	9
BOIX HINZEN, C. Canned hornbills in Daan Viljoen Game Reserve	11
REID, A & J. A morning at Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve and a heronry, near Nuy Valley, South Africa	15
OSBORNE, TO. Suspended breeding: Effects of the current drought in Etosha	17
HINES, C & MENDELSON, J. Whitebellied korhaan in Namibia: A first record from the Andoni grasslands	19
KAESTNER, PG. Identifying immature plovers on the coast: Do Kentish Plovers occur in Namibia?	22
SIMMONDS, R. World record terns at Sandwich	23
BOIX HINZEN, C. Sexual encounters in Violet Woodhoopoes	26
BUTCHER, T & M. Immature amateur bird list	29
SHORT NOTES	30
VERVELD, F & SWANEPOEL, W. Sandveld wegbreek	36
PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES	
Greenspace and the Namibia Bird Club	41
Results of the WIS Bird Race	43



EDITORIAL

This summer has seen the most remarkable influx of huge numbers of birds of a variety of species and a surfeit of rarities from the North to the coast and places in the South – or is it that we are getting more birders out into the field finding more birds and reporting their observations. I think it is probably a combination of both.

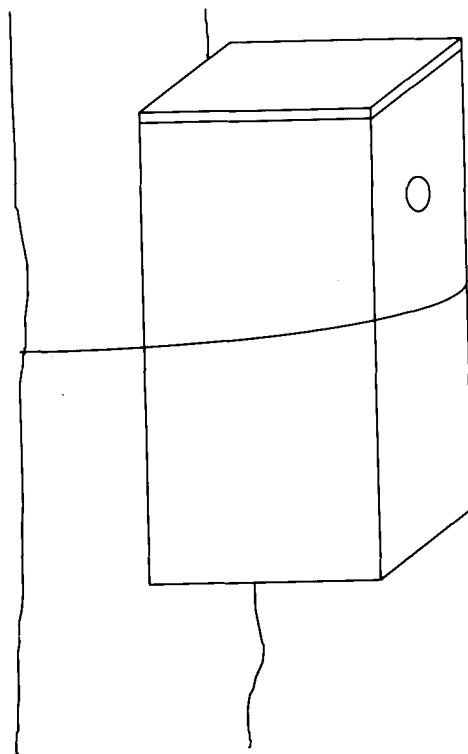
This year, some of the biggest numbers of Abdim's Storks I have ever seen, arrived and stayed even though there was a general lack of rain and *Koringkrieks*! Around Etosha, through the central parts of the country to south of Windhoek there were storks everywhere. Huge numbers of coastal terns, skuas, waders and pelagic seabirds were reported from the Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour areas. Large numbers of Western Redfooted Kestrels were reported from the central part of the country for most of the summer and huge numbers of European Swifts were reported at the same time. But for me the interesting thing has been the number of reports we have received of other species of interest (see *SHORT NOTES*) and the number of people reporting these. I can only hope that people's interest has again been stimulated to get out birding and that, although local, *Lanioturdus* is starting to provide the medium for pricking people's interest. This is what it is there for, and I cannot stress enough to you all that without your support and contributions the magazine (and the club) will fail.

Thanks for all your support and keep on birding.

chipboard because it swells and rots easily once water seeps into the wood. It is best to glue and screw the pieces of wood together to ensure that the joins are tight and strong. This helps keep the box together and seals gaps which might otherwise provide spaces for ants, mites and other animals.

A lid hinged to the top of the box provides the best access to inspect and clean the box when necessary. At Daan Viljoen the lids are held down securely with a screw to prevent baboons cleaning out the incubating adults, eggs and chicks. A number of ways of hanging boxes have been tried, but perhaps the simplest is to wrap a piece or two of strong wire around both the box and tree trunk or branch. Tighten the wire well, so that the box is held firmly against the tree – birds prefer to use a nest that does

not wobble. A nest chamber in a branch that sways around probably indicates to the birds that there is a good chance of the branch breaking off.



Nest boxes have been hung at any number of heights, directions and angles, and I find it very hard to judge whether the position of the box makes much difference at all. Even boxes that receive direct sunlight from the west on hot summer afternoons seem to be acceptable to most birds. Perhaps all I can say is to choose sites where the nests will not heat up too much, and where they will escape the attention of other people and predators. Be sure, however, to choose sites where you can reach the boxes easily to check

the nest contents.

The species listed above are those that use boxes at Daan Viljoen. In my garden in Windhoek, I have had Glossy Starlings (now on to their third brood this summer) and Ashy Tits use nest boxes. Many other species are of course good candidates for nest boxes, depending on the area of Namibia. Habitats in which birds are most attracted to nest boxes are those where there are few natural nest holes. Much of Namibia is thus ideal for nest boxes because most of the Acacia trees that dominate our woody vegetation have few natural nest holes.

Finally, once you have birds using your boxes, be sure to keep an eye on them to record events as eggs are laid, and chicks hatch and then leave their nests. The breeding biology of most Namibian birds is poorly known and your observations can help shed new light on the biology of our birds. Your observations should be recorded on nest record cards and sent to Rob Simmons, Ornithology, Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Private Bag 13306, Windhoek.

CANNED HORNBILLS IN DAAN VILJOEN GAME RESERVE!!

Christian Boix Hinzen
PO Box 8952, Bachbrecht, Windhoek

Right, now that I have your attention – relax – there is no hunting scam going on at Daan Viljoen and there are no new dishes on the restaurant menu, but we might be witnessing the effects of hornbill overpopulation. Read on and find out more about DV's first hornbill squatter camp attempt.

A couple of weeks ago Martin Britz shared with me an anecdote that I am sure will amaze most birders. Last year, February 1997, whilst enjoying a walk with his daughters at Daan Viljoen Game Reserve, Martin came across a rusty, old milk can lying on an open gravel hill. Such a well

preserved and fine piece of memorabilia from past farming activities is always worth collecting. But when he picked it up he soon noticed that the aperture of the milkcan was sealed by a familiar plug, not bees..., not wasps..., but a hornbill plug!!!.

The plug made out of faeces and millipede segments was attached to the edge of the cavity by a narrow layer of mud. Inside the canister the remnants of an ensconced female Monteiro's Hornbill were still intact. The carcass was still bearing feathers, but no eggs or chick carcasses were present. When he commented on this finding to me, I could hardly believe what I was hearing and asked to borrow the canister to examine it and piece together what happened. What follows is my interpretation of this kamikaze breeding attempt.

Nesting close to the ground is not unusual in Monteiro's Hornbills – even 20 cm below ground level at the edge of a steep bank is relatively common. But I have never recorded or heard of a ground breeding record. Though a rusty brown canister might seem a step up in accommodation options, when you are lying under no trees and fully exposed to a blazing sun, the upgrade still lies far from the right choice to breed in.

But how could she choose such a site?

Following a rain shower in Daan Viljoen Game Reserve one often comes across male Monteiro's mudding up cavity entrances and cracks in trees. If the time for breeding is right, male plugging activities are often an enticing activity to the female and a prelude to the onset of the breeding season. However if breeding conditions are not quite right, males will continue to narrow the entrances of selected cavities, to create what I call an "exclusion plug" a cunning strategy to keep away other cavity prospectors and competitors such as starlings, hoopoes, or rollers.

If the female falls for the males plugging charms, soon after the shower she will sneak in and build upon the males foundations. But more often females wait to see what effects the rain has had on invertebrate "stocks", and the male's ability to deliver the goods to her. Once a satisfactory environmental

and partner assesment has been made, she may then decide to start breeding. In this case she will first have to break through the "alien control" plug to squeeze in, and replace it with her own, more hardy cementing mixture made out of millipedes and faeces. The plug remnant I was able to inspect was riddled with millipede carcasses but its foundation around the canisters' rim was made out of mud, suggesting the female entered the canister soon after a shower when it was fresh and cool ... but this did not last for long.

To test my idea I placed the canister back in the field and sealed its entrance in hornbill fashion using cardboard and leaving a slit to insert a maximum–minimum thermometer. I measured the temperature following an afternoon rain shower on January 1998 and during the next five days. Temperatures inside the canister after the shower gently oscillated between 26° C (15h00) and 15° C during the night. However by 11h00 of the following day, the temperature in the canister had reached 50° C and remained at that temperature until well past 15h00. During the following days, maximum temperatures inside the canister consistently reached 50° C by 12h00, reaching a scorcher of 56° C on 11/01/98. As a matter of interest, I recorded surface contact temperatures on the rusty brown walls of the canister. At midday these were never less than 74° C! To give you an idea of what it must feel like, I suggest you take a metal chair to sit on it next time you have a sauna...

In my mind there is little doubt that the female dehydrated and passed out before she could even peck her way out, which in normal conditions may take up as long as 4–6 hours – enough time to cook her to death. Surely, you must be thinking that 45–50° C should not be enough to kill a rock-dwelling, pro-Namib endemic. You are right, it shouldn't, as long as the bird can put into effect it's lifesaving cooling mechanisms. For example, by erecting their body feathers and drooping their wings into the breeze the sparsely feathered underwing skin becomes exposed to the desert air, and the bird's thermal windows start to offload heat. Black Crows do it in the Namib and survive feather surface temperatures of up to 80° C! Ostriches orientate their bodies to the sun to reduce the amount of body surface exposed. Sandgrouse huddle up to maintain a constant temperature and in



this manner they avoid extra inward heat flow for periods of time. But sealed in a breezeless milk can, reduces your heat offloading options considerably. In fact, the female in question was probably left with only one option, gular fluttering or panting, and that was obviously not enough.

There are two other options that might have caused her death. She could have been attacked at the nest or the male could have died once she had moulted. I personally don't buy the first option because I have experienced hornbills' aggressiveness to-

wards intruders and curious creatures that peek down the narrow slit of their plugs. Invariably snoopers receive a violent and accurate peck before they venture any further, and it is generally very effective as a deterrent as well as a useful to secure the odd snack. My own experience from stroking a hornbill plug either at day or night has always evoked a reaction similar to sticking one's fingers into a 220V wall plug.

The second option does not make sense to me in this case, because I fail to imagine how the female could have survived in the canister prior to moulting. Even if it had started moulting, I have recorded females abandoning nests without any tail feathers – once observing a female in complete moult feeding amongst rocks and bushes in the Choub River. I do not know if it survived the moult, but at least I have hope in that they do not sit and wait death by starvation if a male is to disappear.

Last year's breeding season was a remarkably good one. It started in mid-December and lasted through till the end of May. Ninety percent of the nest boxes in Daan Viljoen were occupied by several species of hornbills inhabiting the reserve. Unfortunately this female escaped my 1996 breeding season ringing effort, otherwise I am quite certain I could have shown that this suicidal breeding attempt was the result of inexperience in a young female trying out her chances.

MORNINGS AT VROLIJKHEID NATURE RESERVE AND A HERONRY NEAR NUY VALLEY, SOUTH AFRICA

Alex & Jean Reid
PO Box 2897, Walvis Bay

In October 1997, we spent about ten days in the fertile and beautiful Breede River Valley staying at self-catering accommodation on farms in the area. It was the breeding period for Red Bishops and Masked Weavers, so the reeds around the Breede and its tributaries and farm dams were alive with darting fireballs!

One of our hostesses, Mrs Almien du Toit of the farm Wederom in the Goree Valley, besides having a pair of Barn Owls that have nested in a silo for years, kindly contacted Mrs Dawn Tyler, the president of the Robertson Bird Club, who gave us a most memorable tour of the Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve. Dawn is a remarkable person in that she knows the area intimately, and will pick out a bird by its call and then, knowing the type of vegetation it prefers, will show you a "little brown bird" flitting around some low scrubby bush and identify it for you.

The actual Heron Trail encompasses diverse vegetation from succulents to marshland caused by seepage from a dam, on through a stand of Ankerkaroo (*Pentzia incana*), then through melkbos (*Euphorbia mauritanica*) and then on along a wooden boardwalk through a dense stand of thorn trees (*Acacia karroo*) to a second dam. We saw springbok and large tortoises besides birds too numerous to list individually – each in its own particular territory. In all, we counted 71 different species that morning which included various cormorants, Black Korhaan, various plovers (including Threebanded), doves, chats, robins, warblers, flycatchers, cisticolas, sunbirds and weavers. Among our favourites was a young Fairy Flycatcher who sat immobile at its mother's command while the mother bird tried to draw us away from the fledgling.

We also were pleased to have our prior identification of Le Vaillant's Cisticola confirmed by Dawn. However, seeing a *Gymnogene* was the