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## Editorial

A new year has rolled around and at least we have enough material for an issue of our journal the *Lanioturdus*.

After good rains in October and November we then had a very long dry spell until the first week of January. More good rain then with up to 100 mm at some places but another dry spell into February. The poor birds have had their share this season of starts and stops as far as breeding has been going. The masked weavers have built nests but then they sit and wait for the females who are not quite in the mood. Wait until the next rain!

During the festive season we went to Alaska to see our children and grandchildren. We mainly stayed in the city of Anchorage where the weather was a bit like here with the starts and stops to winter. Instead of just being winter the weather brought freezing temperatures with snow and then it would warm up above freezing and rain. Watching the Bohemian Waxwings (family: *Bombycillidae*) they would huddle in the hundreds during the cold but then when it warmed up descend on the crab apples and other shrubs with berries and eat the defrosted fruit.

Once again I appeal to all members to help the club. If you want to keep the club viable you must also do your part and try and get new members to join.

## African Palm Swift distribution

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On visiting the far most southern region of Namibia (Onseepkans area) for tortoise research recently, I noticed at least 5 individual African Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus parvus*) at dusk at a farmhouse approximately 20 km from the Orange River. According to the owners, these swifts were only recently (i.e. since late 2003/early 2004) observed in the area. These birds were even observed entering a *Washingtonia* palm tree possibly indicating local breeding although this could not be confirmed. Tarboton (2001) states, "Any tall palm tree with swifts flying around it is likely to contain nests". These swifts were recently in the Windhoek newspapers due to nest destruction and Orford (2003) discusses the plight of these birds in areas where the leaves of palm trees are trimmed for aesthetic purposes, in the process destroying the nests.

According to Maclean (2001) the far southern reaches of Namibia are not included in their distribution range although Mariental and Auob River are mentioned from this southern area. Furthermore, Maclean (2001) mentions that their numbers are increasing due to artificial planting of indigenous and exotic palm tree species. However, Tarboton's (2001) distribution map does include the Orange River within its distribution range. These discrepancies in range information from various authors indicate the lack of basic information on bird data – such as distribution – from Namibia and it is suggested that such distribution data be collated in some way.

### References

- Maclean, G.I. 2001. Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, RSA.  
Orford, M. 2003. Stripping palms is killing swifts. Roan News Issue 1: 9-10.  
Tarboton, W. 2001. A guide to the nests & eggs of southern African Birds. Struik Publishers, Cape Town, RSA.

## Cape Eagle Owl near Kunene River

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Cape Eagle Owl *Bubo capensis* has been recorded from scattered localities in western Namibia, mainly from the southern half of the country. Of these records, only four are substantiated, the most recent one being from the Ugab River (Swanepoel 2003, New records and notes on the distribution of the Cape Eagle Owl in Namibia. Bird Numbers 12(2):21–24). The purpose of this short note is to report the presence of Cape Eagle Owl in Namibia up to the Kunene River in the Kaokoveld. This record is 110 km to the north of the previous northernmost record by myself, from Okandjombo near Sanitatis, also in the Kaokoveld.

An area with suitable habitat in the Okakora Mountains (part of the Baynes Mountains), was identified and I decided to spend two nights in this area in order to listen for Cape Eagle Owl. Experience has shown that indicators of suitable habitat for these owls are the presence of rock rabbit *Pronolagus* sp. usually detected by its droppings, dassies *Procavia* sp., Black Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*, Rock Pigeon *Columba guinea* and of course high cliffs. All of these were present at the particular spot but no owls called during the first night. The second night was spent about 2 km from the first site, at the bottom of a wooded gorge with sheer cliffs. By 21:30 when nothing has happened, I decided to play a Guy Gibbon recording of Cape Eagle Owl. After playing back the recording three times, a Cape Eagle Owl responded immediately from the cliffs high up in the mountain. It continued calling for about 15 minutes without coming closer. After that it was silent again. A reasonable recording of the call was made with the aid of a parabolic microphone. To the human ear the call was quite similar to that on the Gibbon tape recording.

Of particular interest is the fact that the Kunene bird responded to a call from a bird in eastern South Africa (Mpumalanga, Carolina district), almost on the other extreme of its range in southern Africa. If not for the use of a tape recording, the presence of this enigmatic owl so far north in Namibia would remain unrecorded.

The Cape Eagle Owl has not been recorded from Angola (Dean 2000, The birds of Angola. British Ornithologist's Union, Tring). I suspect that the owl will probably be found in southern Angola as areas with suitable habitat can be found all along the western escarpment up to Lubango and beyond. From the Kunene River several locations with seemingly suitable habitat on the Angolan side were visible, e.g. the Serra Techicongo and Serra Techimalinde Mountains.

Details of the record:

Locality: 9 km southeast of Otjimbombonga on the Namibia/Angola border in the Okakora Mountains (i.e. a range between the Otjihipa Mountains in the west and the Baynes Mountains in the east) northern Kaokoveld, Kunene Region, Namibia.

Co-ordinate of record: 17°13.2S, 12°47.0E

Altitude: 1400 - 1500 m a.s.l.

Date: 13 January 2004

Time: 21:30 - 21:45

Observers: Wessel & Hannelie Swanepoel

## High density of Dusky Sunbirds in ephemeral river course in the Namib

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The Dusky Sunbird *Nectarinia fusca* is a southern African endemic confined to the arid and semi-arid western regions of the subcontinent. It is particularly common in the Karoo, Namib, the escarpment transition belt and the semi-arid thornveld, including parts of the southern Kalahari system (Harrison 1997). Like many species that inhabit arid areas, the Dusky Sunbird is highly nomadic in response to the availability of food (Maclean 1993). In this note I report on particularly high densities of Dusky Sunbirds in a river course in the Namib in response to the flowering of the parasitic mistletoe *Tapinanthus oleifolius*.

On 29-31 December 2004 large numbers of Dusky Sunbirds were found in the ephemeral, dry Diep River, which is a tributary of the Tsondab River, in quarter-degree square 2415Bb, just west of the Naukluft Mountains. The river crosses a section of the farm Dieprivier for a distance of some 12 km, and varies in width from about 150 to 250 m. On its northern bank is a wide gravel plain with sparse low shrubs and heavily grazed *Stipagrostis* grasses, while on its southern bank to the east (for a distance of about 3 km) is a mobile dune field, giving way to fossil dune cliffs (for a distance of some 5 km), then in the west to gravel plains (Figure 1). The Diep River supports a belt of camelthorn trees *Acacia erioloba* with smelly shepherd's bush *Boscia foetida* trees and shrubs interspersed.



Figure 1: Diep River crossing the gravel plains of the Namib as it heads west (left of picture) towards the Tsondab River and Tsondabvlei.

Over 80% of the camelthorn trees were parasitized by the mistletoe *Tapinanthus oleifolius*, some with over 20 mistletoe plants per host tree. The mistletoe was flowering profusely, and the sunbirds were moving busily from clump to clump feeding on the nectar.

Counts of Dusky Sunbirds were made, per sample blocks of 100 m of river course, in different sections of the river. Six blocks were counted, giving the following numbers of sunbirds: 9, 11, 16, 7, 10 and 6. On average, 9.8 sunbirds were recorded per 100 m of river. Taking the average width of the river as