

Additions to the bird check-list of Kaokoland and the Skeleton Coast

by

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Accepted: 2 February 1979

ABSTRACT

This paper presents new distributional and some new biological data for the birds of Kaokoland, northern South West Africa. The avifauna of the area was previously reported on by Winterbottom (1966). His expedition visited only one locality of the Skeleton Coast. We have included all coastal records available to us.

1 INTRODUCTION

The most recent list dealing with the birds of the Kaokoveld region of South West Africa is that of Winterbottom (1966). The only area of the coast visited by Winterbottom was Torra Bay and the Unjab delta. His expedition otherwise travelled largely through the eastern part of what is now the political zone called Kaokoland, an area where Dixon (1970) also did some collecting. Prior to the work of these authors Kaokoland was visited by Watt (1943) and by the Bernard Carp/Transvaal Museum Expedition (Macdonald and Hall 1957).

Our own visits to the Kaokoveld took place first between 11 and 20 December 1972 when we travelled to the Kunene and westwards as far as the Marienfluss and Orüpembe. Subsequently R. A. C. J. visited Ruacana in March 1973. We both travelled up the coast to the Kunene mouth (Foz do Cunene) in September 1975 and C. F. C. visited Möwe Bay in December 1976. Between 25 May and 9 June 1978 C. F. C. again travelled to the Kunene and Marienfluss and returned through southern Kaokoland to Rocky Point, thence southwards down the Skeleton Coast. The accompanying map (Fig 1) shows the routes followed and places visited during our various expeditions.

Since January 1978 T. G. Cooper and R. Loutit have been stationed in the Skeleton Coast Park and have contributed field cards from various localities along the coast. Where relevant their records are included in the list below.

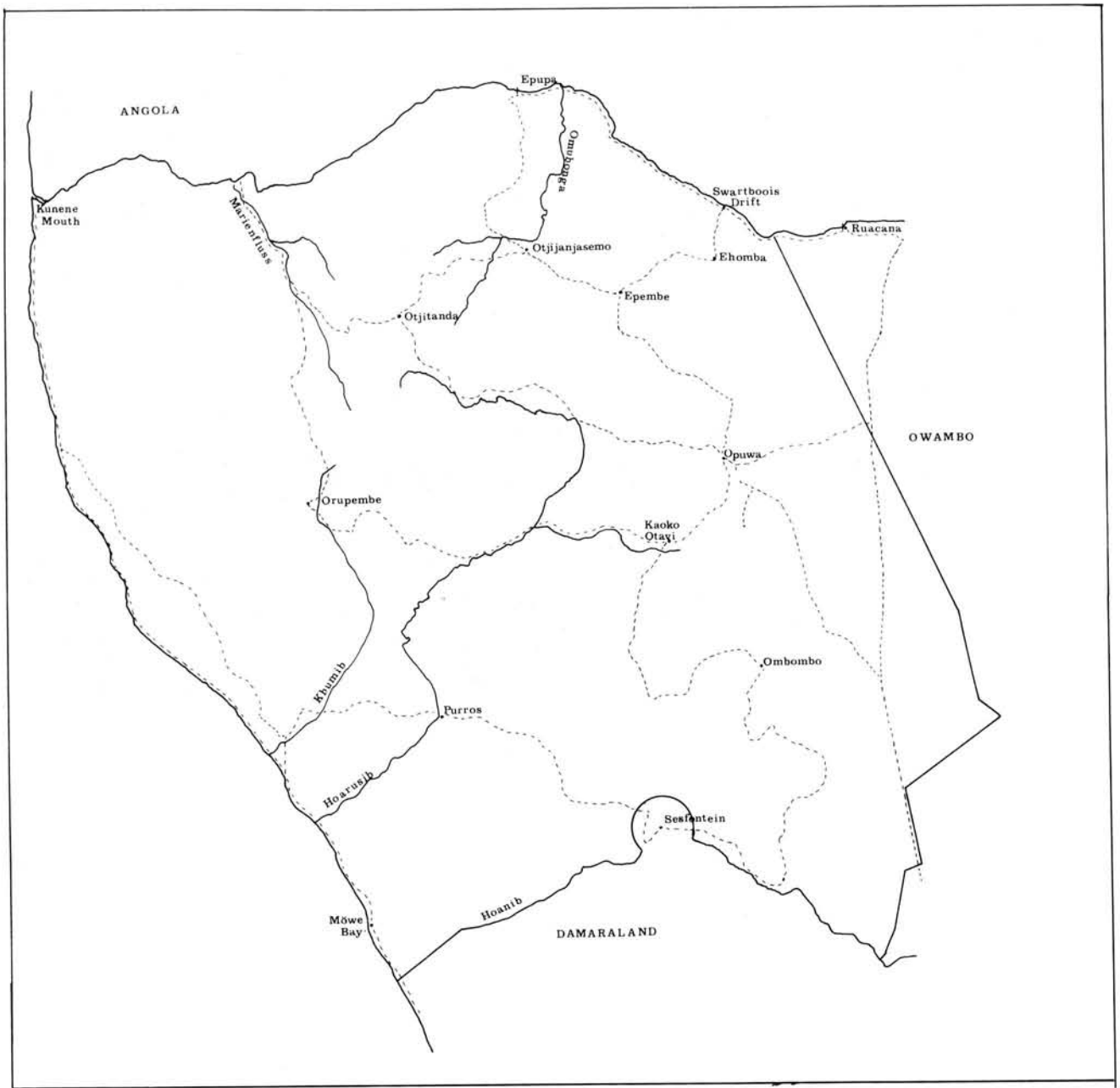
The geology, topography, vegetation and climate of Kaokoland have been discussed in some detail by Malan and Owen-Smith (1974). Although Ruacana is politically part of Owambo, it is ecologically part of the Kaokoveld and hence is included in our treatment of Kaokoland, as was previously done also by Winterbottom (*op. cit.*) and other biologists.

During our 1972 visit the country was extremely dry although the mopane and most acacias were well leaved. Showers fell in patches during our stay, particularly at Ruacana, but were insufficient to start significant vegetation growth or insect blooms. In May 1978 the country was again dry. Although most trees still had leaves, there was no grass cover except on the fore-Namib plains.

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MAP 1: Map of Kaokoland showing some localities mentioned in the text. The dotted lines indicate routes travelled during our visits in 1972 and 1978.

The following list gives new records from the area as well as changes in status and range indicated for various other species. "Winterbottom" without date should be taken to refer to Winterbottom's (1966) list of birds from the Kaokoveld region.

2 NEW RECORDS

Circaetus cinereus Brown snake eagle
Not specifically recorded for the Kaokoveld by Winterbottom (1966, 1971). We saw examples at Ruacana and on the escarpment east of Orupembe in 1972 and at two places along the Kunene west of Swartboois-drift in 1978.

Cursorius rufus Burchell's courser
A pair with two flying young west of Kaoko Otavi in 1972 is our only record of this species in Kaokoland.

Rostratula benghalensis Painted snipe
We recorded single males at the hot springs vlei at Otjijanasemo in 1972 and at Kunene mouth in 1975.

Bubo lacteus Giant eagle owl
Unrecorded by Winterbottom (1966) although Dixon (1970) collected it on the Omuhonga River. We found it fairly widespread along the Kunene and inland on other major river courses.



PLATE 1: Cinderella waxbill female about to enter nest of spectacled weaver at Ruacana.

Apus apus European swift
We saw several with other swifts (including *A. bradfieldi*, which enabled us to be sure of our identification) at a termite hatch near Ruacana in December 1972.

Delichon urbica House martin
A large flock came to drink below the falls at Ruacana in 1972.

Riparia paludicola African sandmartin
Not in Winterbottom (1966) although he records it (1971) from Kaoko Otavi. We found it at Hoanib Oasis and Kunene mouth in 1975, and along the Kunene west of Swartbooisdrift in 1978.

Campephaga phoenicea Black cuckoo shrike
Winterbottom (1966, 1971) has no specific records. We saw a female in fringing forest 10 km downstream of Ruacana in 1972.

Acrocephalus schoenobaenus European sedge warbler
With no specific records Winterbottom (1971) says "probably widespread along northern rivers in summer". We found it common all along the Kunene and saw several at Otjijanjasemo in 1972.

Prinia subflava Tawny-flanked prinia
Winterbottom (1966, 1971) has no Kaokoland records of this species and regards *P. flavicans* as a dominant bird along the Kunene. We found both prinias equally common along the river.

Buphagus africanus Yellow-billed oxpecker
The western-most locality given by Winterbottom (1971) for this species is Ovaquenyama, Owambo. We observed a single bird on a donkey between Ruacana and Swartbooisdrift in 1972.

Ploceus xanthops Golden weaver
Winterbottom did not record this species although he mentions that Rosa Pinto found it on the right bank of the Kunene. We recorded it all along the river in 1972 and at the mouth in 1975.

3 WIDER DISTRIBUTIONS

Tachybaptus ruficollis Dabchick
Only recorded from the Unjab delta by Winterbottom (1966). We have recorded it on the Skeleton Coast wherever there is open fresh water but not at Kunene Mouth. In May 1978 C. F. C. recorded four birds at a small dam near Otjitanda.



PLATE 2: Spectacled weaver female inspecting nest under construction, Ruacana.

Podiceps nigricollis Black-necked grebe
Not recorded north of Swakopmund by Winterbottom (1971). T. G. Cooper has recorded this species at the Hoanib Oasis near Möwe Bay.

Phalacrocorax africanus Reed cormorant
Phalacrocorax coronatus Crowned cormorant
Winterbottom (1966, 1971) regarded these as conspecific; they are now realised to be separate species (see e.g. McLachlan & Liversidge 1978). T. G. Cooper has recorded *P. coronatus* at Möwe Bay and we found *P. africanus* breeding in reeds at Kunene Mouth in 1975.

Neophron percnopterus Egyptian vulture
Andersson (1872) says of this species "not uncommon in Damaraland . . ., more especially in the neighbourhood of the coast". It is now all but extinct in southern Africa, so that McLachlan and Liversidge (1978) say "recent sight records required". C. F. C. photographed a single sub-adult Egyptian Vulture between Swakopmund and Henties Bay in June 1978.

Falco biarmicus Lanner
Falco subbuteo European hobby
Falco vespertinus Western red-footed kestrel
Milvus migrans Black kite

All were recorded at a termite flight near Ruacana, on the Kunene, and odd sightings elsewhere. It is clear that they are widespread species, the three migrants being influenced in their distribution by local rainfall and resulting insect blooms.

Falco tinnunculus Rock kestrel
Aquila verreauxii Black eagle
Widespread residents throughout mountainous areas.

Francolinus levaillantoides Orange River francolin
Recorded by Winterbottom only along the Kunene, although he gives records of other workers who collected the species further south. C. F. C. found them, with very young chicks, between Etengwa and Otjitanda in north-western Kaokoland, in May 1978.

Coturnix coturnix African quail
Previously recorded by the Carp expedition from Orupembe and Opuwa, but not by Winterbottom. C. F. C. found them in the Giribes Flats east of Purros in May 1978.

Gallinula chloropus Moorhen
Winterbottom encountered this species at the Unjab delta. It occurs wherever there is fresh water at river mouths along the Skeleton Coast up to the Kunene Mouth.

Crex egregia African crane
Winterbottom (1971) records only three localities for this species in SWA. Clinning and Jensen (1977) recorded it in Etosha National Park. We found a mummified carcass of this crane at the Unjab delta in 1975 and subsequently C. F. C. found another at Sandvis in 1977. It is probable that the species occurs regularly in the north, and as a vagrant southwards e.g. at vegetated river mouths along the coast.



PLATE 3: Bare-cheeked babbler pair allopreening.

Recurvirostra avosetta Avocet
Not recorded on the coast by Winterbottom (1966). We have numerous records from the Skeleton Coast but not from Kunene Mouth.

Himantopus himantopus Black-winged stilt
Occurs with the previous species at deltas on the Skeleton Coast (not recorded from the Kunene Mouth).

Vanellus armatus Blacksmith plover
Winterbottom did not record it at the Unjab delta. We found it at all river mouths on the coast including the Kunene Mouth.

Charadrius marginatus White-fronted sandplover
Previous inland records of this species are of *C. m. tenellus* from the Zambesi in the Caprivi Strip (Winterbottom 1971) and of what is provisionally regarded as *C. m. mechowi* in Etosha (Clinning and Jensen 1977). We recorded a single white-fronted plover at Ruacana in December 1972 which may have represented one of these "inland races", if the two are separable.

Larus cirrocephalus Grey-headed gull
Winterbottom (1971) gives coastal records of this species from Swakopmund to Oranjemund. We recorded it at Kunene Mouth.

Hydroprogne caspia Caspian tern
Not recorded north of Swakopmund by Winterbottom (1971). We found it at Kunene Mouth in 1975.

Philomachus pugnax Ruff
Winterbottom (1971) says: "no records from the Kaokoveld". We recorded it at Otjijanjasemo and it probably occurs at other suitable localities.

Chlidonias leucopterus White-winged black tern
Traylor (1963) records it from the Kunene in Angola; we saw it at several places along the river from Ruacana westwards.

Columba guinea Rock pigeon
Widespread throughout the rocky Kaokoveld, particularly the west including the lower Kunene (Epupa, Otjinungwa), but oddly not Ruacana.

Streptopelia decipiens Mourning dove
Winterbottom (1971) records this species from the Kunene and south to Sesfontein. C. F. C. found it very common in the upper Hoarusib River near Purros.

Pterocles bicinctus Double-banded sandgrouse
Winterbottom recorded this species only from Swartbooisdrift. C. F. C. found them widespread in the west (Orupembe, Marienfluss, Purros) in May 1978.

Clamator glandarius Great spotted cuckoo
Not recorded by Winterbottom although he mentions that the Carp expedition recorded it at Warmquelle. C. F. C. saw a single juvenile near Otjitanda in May 1978.

Chrysococcyx caprius Didric cuckoo
Winterbottom had no records north of Kamanjab. We found it all along the Kunene as far west as Otjinungua.

Otus scops Scops owl
Recorded by Winterbottom only at Ruacana. We did not record it in 1972 but found it all along the Kunene, at Ehomba, and in fringing forest on the Hoarusib at Purros in May 1978.

Otus leucotis White-faced owl
Previously recorded only from Otjovasandu (Winterbottom 1966). We saw a pair at Epembe in 1972. It is probably widespread in acacia in southern Kaokoland.

Colius indicus Red-faced coly
Only found at Swartbooisdrift by Winterbottom. We found it to be the common coly, as far west as Otjinungua, Orupembe and Purros, both in 1972 and 1978.

Apus bradfieldi Bradfield's swift
Common throughout Kaokoland.

Alcedo cristata Malachite kingfisher
Recorded from the Angolan bank of the Kunene by Rosa Pinto (Winterbottom 1966). We saw it at Ruacana in 1972.

Halcyon senegalensis Woodland kingfisher
Winterbottom (1971) gives one record of *H. s. fusco-pileus* from Swartbooisdrift, and others of *H. s. cyanoleucas* from Owambo eastwards to Caprivi. We have sight records of this species (no race) from Ruacana westwards to Swartbooisdrift in 1972 and 1975. Dixon (1970) obtained *cyanoleucas* on the Omuhonga River.

Halcyon leucocephala Grey-hooded kingfisher
Winterbottom (1966) did not record this species but cites records of other collectors from the southern Kaokoveld. We recorded it all along the Kunene west to Epupa both in December 1972 and May 1978. The latter records indicate that it may be a resident along the northern rivers of SWA (*contra* Winterbottom, 1971), possibly even with a winter influx of birds from further south.

Coracias caudata Lilac-breasted roller
We found it fairly common and widespread throughout Kaokoland, including the Kunene.

Pinarocorys nigricans Dusky lark
Winterbottom (1966) lists two records from southern Kaokoland. We saw it at Epembe and Ruacana, in summer.

Oriolus auratus African golden oriole
Commonly encountered along the Kunene and at other localities with large trees to the south.

Aethocichla gymnogenys Bare-cheeked babbler
This babbler is widespread and common in mopane on the Kaokoveld plateau. Previously the species has only been recorded breeding in Etosha National Park (Clinning & Jensen 1977). In May 1978 C. F. C.

found a party of six bare-cheeked babblers at Orumana; two of these were young birds, still being fed by other members of the group.

Namibornis herero Herero chat
Not recorded from Kaokoland by Winterbottom (1966, 1971). We found it at several localities on the escarpment east of Orupembe and it has since been recorded from Iona National Park in southern Angola, in what is essentially an extension of the Kaokoveld mountain ranges.

Ploceus rubiginosus Chestnut weaver
Collected by Winterbottom at Kaoko Otavi and he cites other records from Opuwa and the Kunene. In May 1978 C. F. C. found it in non-breeding flocks in a number of localities and the presence of abandoned, recently used nests, particularly on the western edge of the plateau, indicates that it is common in Kaokoland in suitable seasons.

Estrilda thomensis Cinderella waxbill
Like Winterbottom (1966) we only recorded this species at Ruacana, where a pair was using an old nest of *Ploceus ocularis* for roosting at night.

Hypochera chalybeata? Widow-finch
The only widow-finch recorded by Winterbottom (1971) is *H. amauropteryx* (= *chalybeata*), from Ondongua, although he mentions that another species may occur to the south. Two possible widow-finch hosts occur along the Kunene, *Lagonosticta senegala pallidicrissa* and *L. rhodopareia ansorgei* (*vide* Winterbottom 1971). According to Payne (1973) the brood parasites of these two fire-finches are *H. chalybeata* and *H. purpurascens* respectively. In May 1978 C. F. C. saw a single male widow-finch in breeding plumage on the Kunene, west of Swartbooisdrift. This bird had a white bill, pink feet and little gloss to the plumage. This combination of characteristics suggests that the bird was a steel-blue widow-finch, probably *H. chalybeata okovangoensis* or a related population (see Payne, 1973). Jensen (*in prep.*) recorded this taxon in Kavango, and similar birds are reported from southern Angola. Definitive assignment must await the collection of song, breeding biology and specimen data.

4 ADDENDUM

Winterbottom (1966, p. 19) records a male little banded goshawk *Accipiter badius* collected at Ohopoho 13.10.65. R. A. C. J. examined this specimen in 1977 at the SA Museum in Cape Town, and there is no doubt that it is in fact a male little sparrowhawk *A. minullus* in transition (sub-adult) plumage. The only other record of *A. minullus* from the region is the one mentioned by Winterbottom (*op. cit.*): a specimen collected by Rosa Pinto on the Angolan bank of the Kunene.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks are due to officials of the South African Police Force at Ruacana, the then Bantu Administration Department at Opuwa, and geologists of the De Beers Company at Orupembe who provided us with fuel and gave us much-needed directions in 1972.

C. F. C.'s 1978 visit was made possible by the kindness of Dr P. Coulson of Walvis Bay.

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