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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.

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*)

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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

rumored presence of co-operative breeding in Carp's Tits, to try and establish which factors triggered it.

Co-operative breeding is a breeding strategy where a breeding pair receives assistance from one or more, related or unrelated helpers, in rearing their brood. So for example, the large groups of Red-billed Woodhoopoes *Phoeniculus purpureus* you are used to watching are generally composed of a breeding male and female, and an entourage of sons and daughters that are delaying their emancipation from the group, staying in the territory and assisting their parents in rearing subsequent broods. Other species that are co-operative breeders and you may be familiar with, are Cape Penduline Tits *Anthoscopus minutus*, Spike heeled Larks *Chersomanes albofasciata*, Barecheeked Babblers *Turdoides gymnogens*, White Helmetshrikes *Prionops plumatus* and Whitefronted Bee-eaters *Merops bullockoides* to mention some. However, there are categories in this trait, and if breeding in the species appears not to be possible without the presence of helpers, we define the alliance as "obligate". But, if breeding can take place without the obligate presence of helpers, we call it "facultative".

Whilst obligate co-operative breeders seem stuck to a formula, facultative helping is far more challenging to understand. Specifically, what the factors may be that determine from one season to the next, the build up or breakdown of a co-operative breeding unit. That is in fact what Dr Wiggins came to find out. However, after a 4 year stint in Namibia, he left without witnessing co-operative breeding among tits. Although Osborne (*Lanioturdus* 34-1, 2001) saw four adults at a nest he visited with food in their beaks and speculated that co-operative breeding was occurring, without marked individuals he did not have positive proof.

As Murphy's Law would have it, two years ago, whilst working on Monteiro's Hornbills *Tockus monteiri* at Daan Viljoen Game Reserve, I could not help noticing that the Tit nest boxes placed in the reserve were rapidly and numerously filling up with Carp's Tits. Such an opportunity to gather data on this near-endemic species could not go to waste. I decided to follow up their breeding efforts. Whilst at it, ring a few more Carp's Tits given that they are so easy to catch. Tits in general feed their broods from the nests rim inside a cavity or a nest box. This means that one can block the cavity entrance or nest box hole, open the lid and collect the feeding individual.

By mere chance we came across an active co-operative breeding unit feeding a brood of nearly two weeks old. The female had been seen prior to her ringing carrying food. She was thus no longer brooding. Having caught the male and the female, Torsten observed patiently whilst the parents returned to feed, whilst waiting for me to come and ring his morning tally. It was then that Torsten noticed the arrival of another individual to the nest box, and it was bearing food !!and was unringed!! and proceeded to feed the brood entering the nest box?? Confused by the scenario, Torsten proceeded to trap the individual and sat baffled in his hide, trying to figure out what funny monkey business was going on.

Once he had told me, the excitement had subsided and having explained the ins and outs, rarity and peculiarity of what we were witnessing. We decided to establish what level of helping the young helper was providing. Over the next couple of days we found out that both the adult male and the young helper shared a similar food provisioning load : Ad (female) 43 %, Ad (male) 29% and Young (helper) 26%. There was no difference in the composition of the food provisioned nor did it appear that either the male or the helper were bringing significantly different sized food items. For all intents and purposes the helper appeared to be taking its job as seriously as the adult male was.

We managed to obtain a droplet of blood from both adult individuals, the helper and each chick to be able to sex them and run some preliminary sexing and paternity tests.

The sexing of the helper should be quite revealing as it would allow us to establish whether its helping interests stem from the cryptic reasons that leads it to believe that one or more offspring in the brood could in fact be its own progeny. Were it a male this can easily be achieved through sneaking an extra pair copulation with the female whilst the male is not guarding her. Similarly, were it a female, through the dumping of an egg in the clutch whilst the alpha female was gone.

Either of the above scenarios would be substantiated if we found a mismatch in paternity or maternity within the brood. And whilst we are testing paternity it should be interesting to establish as well, what level of relatedness exists between the helper and the parents (if any?) for it is often very closely related individuals that engage in helping activities, as purely altruistic helping is an even more bizarre trait.

Whatever the association or motives for helping, an undeniable fact remains...the young Tit was indeed helping and whether this was because of an ancestral or phylogenetic trait (predisposed by a behaviour that is common among many other congeners in the family, as reported in Southern Black Tits *Parus afer* in South Africa, by W. Tarboton), a mistake or a behavioral trait on its making ... it is evident that helping or co-operative breeding in Carp's Tit has now been observed and reported and it can also be safely said that given the low incidence at which the trait has been observed, Carp's Tits are undeniably, facultative co-operative breeders.

So bear it in mind when you are next observing a "Carpie" carrying food, your curiosity could well lead us to better understand the breeding strategies of Carp's Tits, a Namibian near-endemic...and watch this space for an exciting batch of pending lab results.

Swift Tern Project

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Dear Namibia Bird Club;

I have registered to do my MSc with the Avian Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town. The title of my project is: **Post-breeding dispersal and post-fledging parental care of Swift terns, *Sterna bergii*, in southern Africa.**

The objective of this project is to investigate post-breeding dispersal with the aid of an intensive re-sighting program.

Volunteers from around the South African and Namibian coastline will be needed to make this re-sighting project work. Being a Volunteer would mean making weekly/monthly (whichever you have time for) observations of Swift Terns at their Roost sites. It would be best if you had a telescope for these observations, as I would need the following information:

Number of Swift Terns present
Number of Adults and Juveniles
All legs checked for colour bands
Any colour bands seen need to be recorded.

I would like to have observations from May until the end of the 2002 or beyond if possible.

The Swift Terns are currently breeding on Robben Island. I will be ringing the chicks with Red Bands that have white codes engraved on them. These codes will be simple and easy to see. Such as CK, 1A, AB etc.

This is an exciting project and will add to the understanding of the movement of these birds during and after breeding season. In particular, it will help identify if the juvenile birds are remaining in nursery areas. I would appreciate any help from people who are keen to do some bird counts for this project this year.

Please contact me for more information via e-mail:janine@maths.uct.ac.za or at: 27-21-6504697, cell: 082 2670961, home: 021 5597161. Alternatively, you could contact one of my supervisors: Prof. Les Underhill, John Cooper or Dr. Rob Crawford from MCM.

Sincerely,
Janine

Hartlaub's Francolin Egoli style

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This paper is a continuation of the last episode into the lives of the Hartlaub's Francolins *Francolinus hartlaubi* of Windpoort Farm, Outjo District. As we last left our birds in March of 2001 the resident family was composed of an adult male (Frank), a colour ringed adult female (Lynnette) and 3 immature males from the 2000 breeding season (Osborne 2001, *Lanioturdus* 34-1).