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CONTENTS

Editorial

In a past editorial (Lanioturdus 42-4) I mentioned the changing distributions of certain species. One species which seems to be a lot more common around Windhoek these days is the pin-tailed whydah. When I first moved to Windhoek some 28 years ago this was a species which one saw perhaps twice in five years. Now it is regularly seen at Avis Dam and we are getting more and more reports of these birds from suburban gardens all around Windhoek. Its host species, the common waxbill, is not a terribly common species around Windhoek and I certainly have not noticed any great increase in the numbers of these birds. However, both Roberts VII and Trevor Carnaby (Beat about the Bush *Birds* – Jacana Media 2008), indicate that it is suspected that the red-billed firefinch may be a secondary host although this is not proven. Come on you citizen scientists out there – this is a chance to make a name for yourself in the world of ornithology. We have a burgeoning population of red-billed firefinches in and around Windhoek and if they are indeed secondary hosts to pin-tailed whydahs this might just be the time and place to prove it.

the pan. To all the pilots who have assisted; Ole Friede, Mark Jago, Frans Henning, Poverie Saushini, Mr and Mrs van Niekerk and Bernd Brell and especially Steve Braine from Hobatere who made his aircraft available at short notice.

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Photo: Eckart Demasius

Collared Palm-Thrush

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During October 2009 we received a report from our cousin on the farm Choantsas 292, Tsumeb District (Quarter Degree Square 1818CC), that an adult Collared Palm-Thrush *Cichladusa arquata* was hanging around near his homestead. He was attracted by its call which he had not heard before on the farm. Near the homestead were a number of tall Makalani palms, *Hyphaene petersiana*, to which this bird was keeping. Consulting the books he came to the conclusion that it could only be this species. Taking into consideration the narrow black collar he noticed, this bird had to be the Collared Palm-Thrush, as there are no other confusing species.

The *Hyphaene p* were starting to flower in October so it could be that this bird was attracted to them. We have an abundance of *Hyphaene p* in the area, a plant species which this bird requires. I (G) never got the opportunity to see this bird to take a photograph for confirmation.

Referrals:

1. It (Collared Palm-Thrush) is "*…found only where palms of the genus Borassus and Hyphaene grow…" "…but also nests in them…" "…there are only a few birds which are tied in this way to a plant species."* (C.J. Vernon) from: The Complete Book of Southern African Birds by Ginn P.J., McIlleron W.G. & Milstein P.leS. Struik Publishers, 4th Impression 1994.

2. …"*it is highly localized, being generally dependent upon thickets in palm savanna of Hyphaene and Borassus palms in some of the main river valleys, but even so it is sometimes inexplicably absent where these occur, such as the Caprivi Strip, the Okavango Delta…"*

Recorded in 29 grid cells with 187 records during the SABAP.

The Atlas of Southern African Birds Vol 2; Passerines, by: Harrison J.A.; Allan D.G.; Underhill L.G.; Herremans M.; Tree A.J.; Parker V. & Brown C.J. Published by *BirdLife South Africa*, 1997.

3. *"Also in Kruger National Park, South Africa, where regularly recorded at Shingwedzi and adjacent Hlanganani since 1995."*

   Roberts Birds of Southern Africa by Hockey P.A.R.; Dean W.R.J. & Ryan P.G. ; VIIth Edition 2005. Published by John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, South Africa.

   Referring to the *"Tree Atlas of Namibia"* (Curtis B. & Mannheimer C. published by *The National Botanical Research Institute, Namibia* 2005), there is a reasonably continuous distribution of *Hyphaene p* from 1818CC towards the north and northeast (Kavango Region) of Namibia which would make it possible for this bird to come down so far from its previously recorded location. The closest it had been atlassed during the SABAP was in 1725CC at the tip of the Caprivi Strip just outside Namibia with no records for this country. However, I am of the opinion that it could have been overlooked due to its scarcity in the areas where suitable habitat of *Hyphaene p* and Wild Date Palm, *Phoenix reclinata*, occurs at the Okavango River. It could also be that it has moved into the area recently. Whatever the case, we must consider this sighting, if it can be accepted as such, as a vagrant.

   The bird stayed for two to three weeks then was not seen or heard again.

   (See also Mark Paxton's article in this issue – Ed)

Hooked Kelp Gull

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We released this Kelp Gull at the Swakopmund sewage works. It was brought to us by Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources employees who found it in Walvis Bay, with a fish hook in its throat. The hook was attached to a stone by a length of nylon line. On closer inspection it could be seen that the hook had already penetrated the throat and was protruding through the skin beneath the chin. It was a simple matter of cutting off the barb with side-cutters and pulling the rest of the hook back out.

As the gull swallows its food whole it swallows the hook as well. As it tries to fly away, because of the weight, the line is pulled tight resulting in the hook lodging itself in the bird's throat and most of the time ripping through the flesh. The obvious inference is that someone used a baited hook to trap it. Similar traps have been found near the Mile 4 Saltworks, with Cape Cormorants having been trapped.