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The first six months of this year have been agonizing for the Committee of the Club — we had taken the Club out from under the wing of the Namibia Scientific Society and now the question arose as to whether it was the right decision. The fundamental changes that were decided upon were fairly simple. Firstly we had to take control of our own administration, secondly we had to get more information out to members on a regular basis (i.e. get *Lanioturdus* out regularly) and we had to put a cohesive programme of events and outings together.

When we sent out our early appeal for members to indicate whether they were interested in joining the "new" Club we were a little concerned that only 80 or so people responded — we had "lost" nearly 50 members overnight!! This gave us some food for thought, but it was decided we needed to go ahead with the changes as these were designed to make the Club more appealing. Happily, we think we made the right decision. Membership is up to where we were before the changes, we have a broader membership base (with a good representation on the coast and in the country districts) and more people are signing up every month.

Our programme of events seems to be hitting the right spot as well. We are averaging about 20 people per outing, with some reaching the unbelievable level of over 50!! The evening lectures are also being well attended and it is gratifying to see new people coming to these activities.

Lastly, it seems that *Lanioturdus* may be taking off as well. Articles and information seem to be coming in at a steady pace and we were able to put this copy together with the minimum of begging for material. Many thanks to Coleen Mannheimer for her artwork! I think it is the first copy for a long time with minimal inputs from professional ornithologists!!

Many thanks to all of you who have supported us through this period of change. Much still remains to be done (most importantly we need to appeal to younger members) and we depend on you, the Club members, for support and guidance in the future. Lets keep on hearing from you.

Wochen lang hielten wir dieses Nest im Auge. Wir nehmen an dass alle Junge flügge geworden sind.

Zwei Braune Sichler *Plegadis falcinellus* waren zu Anfang da, später nur noch einer, der sich mit den Kuhreihern *Bubulcus ibis* aufhielt. Einmal konnten wir ihm beim Baden beobachten. Anfangs Mai waren es wieder fünf. Zu unserer grossen Freude fanden wir wieder ein Paar Afrikanische Zwerggänse *Nettapus auritus*, die uns schon seit 1989 bekannt waren. Diese hielten sich noch bis April im Fley auf, wir konnten aber keine Jungen bestätigen. Klaffschnabel *Anastomus lamelligerus* besuchten uns auch kurz.

Zu Anfang sahen wir einige Wollhalsstörche *Ciconia episcopus*, die im April wieder auftauchten. Ein anderes Fley war ausgetrocknet, da gab es Fische zu füttern, nämlich Welse die aus Brunnen auf meiner und umliegenden Farmen stammen. Zwei Marabu *Leptoptilos crumeniferos* gesellten sich dazu. Zu dem Zeitpunkt jagte ich hinter einer halbwüchsigen Rotschnabelente her und wir versetzten sie ins Fley wo noch Wasser war. Also hatten die doch gebrütet. Meine Arbeiter meldeten mir auch junge Höckerenten, junge Taucher gab es Viele, sogar junge Stelzenläufer *Himantopus himantopus*.

Wo sich das Wasser jetzt langsam zurückzieht, gibt es andere Arten zu suchen. So meinte ich einen Kaptriel *Burhinus capensis* vor mir zu haben. Um zu bestätigen ging ich durch das Wasser näher ran. Ich kam nicht zurecht; meine Frau, mit ihrer besseren Kenntniss musste her. Wir waren uns noch immer unsicher, erst zu Hause konnten wir in anderen Büchern zwei Goldschnepfen *Rostratula benghalensis* bestätigen. Nach zwei Tagen fanden wir sie zu viert, danach sogar zu sechst. Eine andere neue Art war ein Pärchen Dreiband-Regenpfeifer *Charadrius tricollaris*. Ein Schwarm Rosa Pelikane *Pelecanus onocrotalus* hat sich ein paar Tage lang hier aufgehalten, wohl um die Fischereimöglichkeiten zu untersuchen. Die Rotschnabelenten haben sich jetzt hier zusammengezogen. Es gibt noch viel zu fressen vor dem Flug in den Norden. Woher die wohl kommen mögen? Ich habe in den 60iger Jahren eine beringte erlegt: National Museum, Livingstone, Zambia.....

Ich vermisse seit Jahren hier schon die Schreiseeadler *Haliaeetus vocifer*. Es waren immer Einige hier gewesen. Fische gibt es ja genug. Verschiedene Reiher sind zwar da, aber früher wurde auch gebrütet. Die *Combretum imberbe* waren voll Nester von Graureiher *Ardea cinerea*, Silberreiher *Egretta alba*, Seidenreiher *E. garzetta* und Kuhreiher. Ich bin sicher dass einige andere Arten Vögel noch hier am Fley zu finden sein werden aber im Allgemeinen bin ich der Meinung dass viele Arten weniger geworden sind. Eine Ausnahme sind die Höckerenten, die seit 1989 wieder öfter vorkommen, in dem Jahr auch gebrütet haben. Einer dieser Jungen, hier von uns grossgezogen, kommt jedes Jahr wieder. Er hält sich ein bis zwei Tage im Hühnerstall auf, schlägt sich den Bauch voll und verschwindet wieder.

Für uns ist es nicht nötig weit zu fahren um Wasservögel zu finden. Die gibt es auch bei uns wenn das Fley Zulauf erhält. Vielleicht wäre der Eine oder Andere an so einer Wochenendtour interessiert, beim Nächstenmal?



COMMUNICATION IN OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS

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How often have we marvelled at the sight of a soaring bird in the sky. Nearly as often, we may have listened to a beautiful bird song either in the early hours or just before sunset of a sunny day, or even during the noonday hours. We tend to notice and appreciate their calls because birds vocalise over a range of frequencies perceptible to our sense of hearing. To us, the song of a bird may appear spontaneous as well as melodious — for birds, these vocalisations are well-orchestrated or even essential performances.

Communication entails the transmission and receipt of messages encoded

in some form or another — in the case of birds, the coding medium is a series of well-developed audible signals better known as bird calls or songs by which the signaller and receiver influence each other's behaviour in an interactive process. All bird species have individually distinctive vocalisations which serve to identify their respective heritages. Variations of these vocalisations are used to convey a range of messages. The same species may also develop regional "dialects", in other words, variations to the basic song patterns to identify the area of its origin; it is even possible that the overwintering region of an individual member of some migratory species may be determined from its calls.

Sound travels well in most habitats where birds occur. This is the prime reason for the evolution of the use of sound as a communication medium. In dense forests and woodlands, aural communication is more frequent and better developed than in more open areas where communication by visual signals can augment audible messages.

Bird songs and calls are often more intense and concentrated just prior to breeding time, since territories have to be established and potential breeding partners have to be attracted. During the courtship phase, the tendency to vocalise is influenced by a concentration of sex hormones in the blood, which reaches its peak during the mating/breeding phase. Bird song thus also has a reproductive function in addition to the more social function of warning of an approaching predator, mutual identification or definition of territorial boundaries.

Sound is generally produced more frequently by the males of a vocal species of birds. Most females, although capable of producing calls, do not do so as often as males. A number of species have developed a duetting type of vocalisation, during which each individual has a fixed sequence of calls resulting in a combination which may appear to be one single call. Duetting pairs often have a lifelong bond, broken only by the death of one member.

Each male bird develops its own song pattern slightly different from those of its immediate neighbours in order to judge the distance to the next singing individual on the basis of structural changes in the acoustic signals.

The ability of song is a meticulously organised procedure which immature fledglings have to start to learn before they can become fully independent. Call recognition and production is a species-specific, intensive learning programme, on which the individuals' chances of survival may depend, and calls may comprise inherited as well as acquired components. The ability to recognise its own song is an inherited ability, but the song of a bird raised in isolation is only an approximation of the species-specific vocalisation.

In an article entitled "Big-brained Braggarts" in Africa Birds and Birding, 1997, Volume 2, Number 2, the phenomenon of birdsong is discussed from a different perspective. Studies done in Sweden suggest that a male bird's repertoire may be indicative of genetic superiority, and is used by females of the species to select the best available mate to ensure the highest possible chances of survival for her offspring'. This resulted in the side-effect of promoting the evolution of birdsong, to their advantage and our pleasure. — H. Dedekind

A SIGHT RECORD OF WHITEBELLIED STORM PETREL — A NEW SPECIES FOR NAMIBIA

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From March 29 to 31, 1997, I was an official guest aboard a US Navy Frigate, the USS McInerney (FFG-8), which transitted from Walvis Bay, Namibia to Simon's Town, South Africa to participate in the South African Navy's 75th Anniversary Celebrations. During my spare time, I kept a constant watch for pelagic birds. Twenty species were observed in Namibian waters, one of which, the Whitebellied Storm Petrel, *Fregetta grallaria*, was a new sighting for the nation. Three more species were added while in South African waters, making a total of 23 for the trip list. This report will focus on Namibian sightings, only referring to South African observations tangentially.