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Editorial

I don't believe that anyone can deny that the Namibia Bird Club is moving forward. The chairperson's report published in this issue outlines some of the activities of the Namibia Bird Club including outings, wetland counts and our well attended Birding Big Day as well as the donations given to various bird rehabilitation centres and projects.

Your committee has managed to keep the subscriptions at their current levels for several years now. In this day and age where the price of everything is constantly increasing we would like to continue to maintain them at the current levels but this will depend on whether or not we can increase our membership base. If we can attract more members we will not need to increase the subscriptions. If you have enjoyed our outings and enjoyed reading Lanioturdus spread the word, bring your friends along and get them to join as well. It could just save you some money!

Mark Paxton's article in this issue certainly is a thought provoking one. Has he found species way off their recorded range? Or perhaps undescribed subspecies? Or even hybridized birds? Does the breastband of Shelley's/Marico sunbird change colour with age? It seems that there is plenty of scope for an ornithologist in his region.

In this issue we also have a trip report by Helga Detering written in German. Helga has however included the English common names of all species mentioned in the text in brackets

		WI Trend			
		<i>Inc</i>	<i>Sta</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Unc</i>
Trend this study	<i>Inc</i>	6	9	0	5
	<i>Sta</i>	1	2	0	2
	<i>Dec</i>	1	1	0	1
	<i>Unc</i>	9	22	8	20

Table 4: Population trends from this study compared to Wetlands International trends.

Inc=increasing; Sta=stable; Dec=decreasing; Unc=uncertain

Contentious, Thought Provoking Observations-Shamvura Camp and Kavango Region

Mark Paxton
(shamvura@iway.na)

This region of Namibia is by its very nature and location not a well-visited part of the country, being somewhat “out on a limb” both figuratively and literally speaking. As a result most visitors, and birders, have in the past regarded this area more as a “through- route” to other more well-known, and better advertised destinations, rather than a destination in itself. As a consequence to this lack of recognition, particularly by the birding fraternity, it is relatively “under-birded”. The advantage of this, and the fact that we border on Angola and its uncharted wilderness, is that there could be several surprises in store for the birding world. We may have new species previously only recorded from Angola overlapping their distribution into Namibia, or hybridisation between similar species, or even (we live in perpetual hope) entirely new species waiting to be discovered.

Shelley’s Sunbird has been recorded in this region since October 2006, when I noticed a small group of four (2 adult males, 1 sub-adult male and 1 female) interacting in an *Albizia anthelmintica*, in the premises of a make-shift garage at Divundu, some 80 km from Shamvura Camp. This tree species is the

first to flower after the dry season and then, being the only source of nectar, is a veritable magnet for many insects and birds for a short period before the rest of the plant kingdom catches up. I was having a tyre repaired and, as is always the case here, nobody was in too much of a hurry, so I had a lot of time to observe these birds. In the morning sun the **bright red** band (one of the distinguishing characteristics) on the chests of all three males was unmistakable. I felt sure they could only be Shelley’s Sunbird. Afterwards I went through all the available literature to confirm that the most reliable distinguishing factor was the **bright red chest-band** and the major difference from Marico Sunbird. All the birds were vocalising and I took note of the calls. I did not have my bird call equipment with me at the time, so could not confirm until later. About two weeks later I told Christian Boix of the sighting as he was going the same way and had seen Shelley’s Sunbird before. He also played the birdcalls recording to me which I recognised as that of the birds I had seen. He later confirmed he had seen only one male at that location and that it was a Shelley’s Sunbird. During that season I saw another adult male here at Shamvura Camp and by now was quite sure we had more of these birds than we had originally thought and which had obviously been previously overlooked in this somewhat “under-birded” region.

All photographs in this article by Mark Paxton



Shelley’s Sunbird – male – intermediate plumage

I subsequently caught and ringed two male birds in intermediate plumage on 9 April and 13 May 2007. With the birds in the hand the chest-bands were unmistakably **bright red!** I posted the photographs on SA Birdnet and the responses were varied but overwhelmingly Shelley's Sunbird, with most of the doubtful responses saying the intermediate plumage was the reason for doubt. We also had many birding guests move through Shamvura Camp, some of whom were familiar with the bird from elsewhere and they all confirmed my thoughts.

With two ringed birds now flying around Shamvura Camp and with the acquisition of a digital camera, I began to take a more concerted photographic interest. These birds themselves became very vocal and displayed often on prominent perches while establishing their respective territories, allowing me to get several good photographs. My photographs began to reveal some reasons for concern, - the **bright red** chest-bands in a different light or at a different angle becoming **dark red**, bordering on maroon. The birds now suddenly became Marico Sunbirds! I managed, after great effort, to get the appropriate calls from reputable sources and played both calls to several males with no significant response at all. I still have many prominent birders who agree on Shelley's Sunbird and also some that say they are more likely to be Marico Sunbird.



Shelley's sunbird (ringed) showing dark red/maroon breast-band

Red-faced Crombec is not even considered a Namibian species, with a recognised distribution of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The sub-species of Long-billed Crombec occurring in this region is *Sylvietta rufescens flecki*. From all the available species descriptions in the latest literature, I compiled the following;-"**Chin and throat buffy white, diffused mottled grey. Supercilium whitish to pale tawny. Lores dark grey. Ear coverts and cheeks pale tawny.**"

In January 2007 I captured and photographed my first Crombec here at Shamvura Camp and thought very little of submitting the record as Long-billed Crombec. Only later, with more observations on captured and wild birds, I realised they had no white, or pale facial features at all. The supercilium was not paler but most definitely rufous or tawny buff, as were the rest of the under-parts, cheeks, lores and ear coverts, thereby fitting the description of Red-faced Crombec. The description of the bill as "upper mandible dark brown, lower mandible horn" and the eye as "yellow to hazel" also seemed to fit the Red-faced Crombec. Once again, many guests, familiar with the bird, confirmed my thoughts. The recorded calls for each species did not seem to elicit a decisive response either way from any of the birds.



Red-faced crombec

Black Scimitarbill is a species found in Angola with its southernmost limit being the Okavango River and therefore not found in Namibia according to the literature. The habitat on the southern side is, in many areas, identical to that on the northern side in Angola, where the bird apparently is common. Birds are not restricted by rivers and it stands to reason that if the habitat is similar, Black Scimitarbill could quite possibly be found in Namibia and become a new species for this country. Our Common Scimitarbill in the Shamvura area show some interesting characteristics shared with the Black Scimitarbill: the tail length is noticeably shorter, and with fewer white spots on the underside, and in flight, only one white bar is evident on the primaries. What makes this bird even more interesting is the fact that only 100 km to the east the birds there show the typical characteristics of the Common Scimitarbill and there is no confusion. Apparently the bill of the Black Scimitarbill is significantly straighter with almost no curve, but not having seen one personally, I would not be able to comment how significant this characteristic is, other than to say that our birds still show a noticeable curve. After many years of observation, countless conversations with prominent birders, and in the absence of any specific species literature, I have concluded that we may not have Black Scimitarbill in the Shamvura area, but we definitely have a different bird here which may, in fact, be a hybridised version of the two species.



Scimitarbill showing single white wing bar and short tail

Violet Wood-hoopoe occur in a small section in the north-west of the country and particularly in the Halali Rest Camp in Etosha National Park, where I spent over five years. While stationed there as a “Nature Conservation Officer” I captured several of these birds of different ages and genders, which were photographed and meticulously measured, head to foot and top to bottom. The female tail length averaged 22.5 cm, and the average male tail length was 26.1 cm. The tail measurement for Green Wood-hoopoe, given in the literature is about 16.5 cm for females and about 17.5 cm for male birds, which is a significant 10 cm shorter and should be quite noticeable in the field as a distinguishing characteristic.

Here in the Kavango region I also captured, photographed and measured several birds which are meant to be Green Wood-hoopoe according to distributional information in the literature but the tail lengths were an average of 23.7 cm being well within the parameters of Violet Wood-hoopoe which is said not to occur here. These birds also show an overall “coppery tinge” to the crown, face, nape and chin regions, which is also a characteristic attributed to Violet Wood-hoopoe and not the iridescent blue-green of Green Wood-hoopoe. All this suggests is that, if they are in fact considered separate species, then we have Violet Wood-Hoopoe here, which is a significant range extension.





Violet Wood-hoopoe showing coppery tinged neck and long tail

Rarities and Interesting Observations

Otto Brase reported a great reed-warbler seen on Farm Neuras north west of Maltahöhe on 09/01/2010. While there are a few scattered Atlas records for this species in central Namibia the closest one seems to be about 100 km to the east of where this bird was seen.

The only rarity seen by the summer wetland counters at Walvis Bay on the weekend of 16 & 17/01/2010 was a single common redshank.

Ulrich Hofmann reported a saddle-billed stork seen on Farm Kakuse north west of Tsumeb in mid January.

On 21/01/2010 I saw a number of southern carmine bee-eaters including juvenile birds at Katwitwi on the Angolan border. This sighting is just about at the western extremity of their atlassed range in Namibia. These birds disperse widely after breeding and it would be interesting to know where they bred. The only colony I am aware of in the Kavango region is near Shamvura Camp some 270 km to the east but there could well be other sites in the region or in Angola.



Juvenile southern carmine bee-eater – Photo:Neil Thomson

During the course of the wetland bird count at the Gammams Sewage Works on 23/01/2010 Bird Club members saw sand martins and a grey-headed gull. Atlas data suggests that these are both very uncommon species in central Namibia and Holger Kolberg confirmed that there are only two Atlas records for each of these species for the Windhoek Quarter Degree Square out of a total of 559 Atlas cards for the QDS. Richard Niddrie advised however that he had seen sand martins there before.

Hanjo Böhme reported a grey-headed kingfisher seen at Monte Christo Guest Farm on 24/01/2010 during the course of the wetland bird count conducted by Namibia Bird Club members. While not considered a rarity this species is seldom seen in central Namibia.

Holger Kolberg's summer wetland bird count travels this time also failed to find much by