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### Editorial

Normally I would have been tempted to devote a good part of the editorial space to another two species which have allegedly turned up in the northwest of Namibia. These birds were allegedly seen by one of the region's top birders but the validity of these claims appears to be in doubt and hopefully I will obtain more information and will be in a better position to comment in a future edition.

However, my editorial comment concerning previous sightings of Black Skimmers in Southern Africa (Lanioturdus 46 (1)) seems to have raised some lively debate and I think it is only right to conclude this issue now.

I published Tony Tree's response in Lanioturdus 46(2) and this has in turn solicited a response from Joris Komen which I am reproducing here. I am going along with Joris's closing remark that this matter should now be put to rest and I will not publish any further correspondence on this matter.

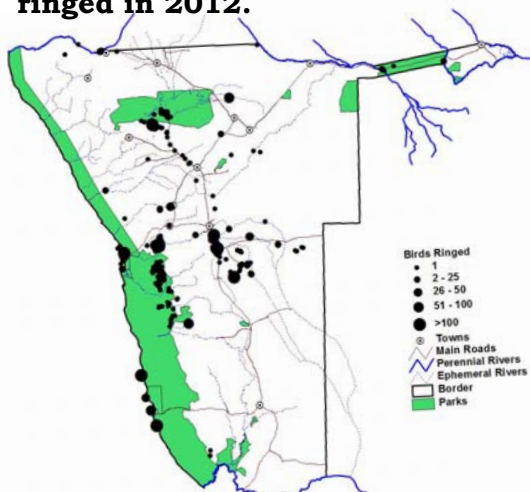
Joris's response reads:-

Species	Code 1	Code 2	Total
Bare-cheeked Babbler	9		9
Monteiro's Hornbill	5	1	6
Rosy-faced Lovebird	4		4
Rüppell's Korhaan	2		2
Rüppell's Parrot	2		2
Rockrunner	1		1
	85	10	95

**Table 7: Top twenty localities in 2012.**

Locality	Total
Rykvoet St Klein Windhoek	1858
Mercury	1611
Mile 4 Salt Works	977
Klein Windhoek	834
Kocherbaumposten	771
Vredelus House	569
Königsberg	556
Possession	445
Rykvoetstr. KlWdk	380
Marmor Kuduposten	374
Tandala Ridge, Windpoort Farm, Outjo Dist	353
Tandala Ridge, Windpoort Farm	321
Wiese Farmhaus	314
Otjihavera No 62	236
Halifax	229
Otjihavera portion No 3	226
Vredelus Springbokposten	209
Königsberg Sphinxposten	163
Vredelus Revierposten	152
Wiese Red Nest	149

**Figure 1: Localities where birds were ringed in 2012.**



## Cuckoo – African or Common?

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During my summer visits to the Etosha National Park I am usually lucky enough to see a cuckoo or two. Okaukuejo has been the best camp for African or Common Cuckoo.



They are normally shy, silent and are not easy to approach to photograph. Whenever I got lucky, something else attracted my attention soon afterwards and I never really bothered to check whether my cuckoo was an African or a Common Cuckoo.

In 2011 however, I was in Etosha at the beginning of December and while I was busy with my early morning walk in Halali I followed a restless noisy grey raptor-like bird and I was lucky enough to get a photograph of it. Then another call came from the opposite direction, somewhat different and I found what I thought were juvenile Shikras. I had seen them there before and a pair seems to breed there every year.

When I looked at my photographs later I was disappointed and excited at the same time. Disappointed for the specific photographs turned out to be not very good as the early morning light was still too poor for photography and excited as

the bird turned out to be a cuckoo. A noisy grey cuckoo – that has to be an African Cuckoo!!



Then I read up that the clever books tell us that African and Common Cuckoos are “*hard to distinguish in the field*”, but my bird’s bill had a larger yellow base and the “*tail heavy, blackish, spotted and completely barred white, barring incomplete in Common Cuckoo*”.

The call it made was more a shrieking kind of noise than the typical cuckoo call. But it called and the Common Cuckoo is said to be silent in southern Africa.

Three weeks later I found myself in Etosha again and the cuckoo in Okaukuejo did not disappoint me, it let me take some really nice photographs of it.

And yes, the yellow base and black tipped bill was clearly visible, the tail also heavily barred – however I find comparative characteristics difficult when the second species is not available for comparison.



It was then when I remembered a previous visit to Okaukuejo in December 2005 when Neil Thomson joined us and we were lucky enough to find a young cuckoo next on the nest of a Fork-tailed Drongo and still being fed by the drongo. The juvenile cuckoo had definitely not yet fledged.



As it happened, in this case we also did not take the time to read up about the cuckoo immediately afterwards but hurried on chasing something else. But herein lies the ultimate clue as Roberts states that the parasitic breeder’s “*only authenticated host is Fork-tailed Drongo*”.

So, it pays to read up the old field books over a cup of tea or a refreshing cold beer afterwards and one will find the pieces of the puzzle falling together and now I know, although this cuckoo is normally silent, the base to its bill is more yellow and the tail more barred - on the underside that is - the ultimate clue was in the nest we found some years ago. So the cuckoos I saw in Okaukuejo and Halali are indeed African Cuckoos.

*(Dieter Ludwig is adamant that he has heard Common Cuckoo calling in Namibia and that the call is noticeably different from that of the African Cuckoo – Ed).*