



# LANIOTURDUS

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### Editorial

The attendance at our morning walks and outings has been disappointing of late and is a cause for concern. The committee goes to great lengths to organize outings to places where we are likely to see interesting birds.

The morning walk at the Gammams Sewage Works on 09/10/2011 is a case in point. There were only seven participants and four of those were committee members. Yes – I know that South Africa was playing Australia in the Rugby World Cup that morning – I decided to give the rugby a miss and go on the bird club outing instead and I think that was a good choice given the result of the rugby and the good birds found at the sewage works. In about three hours we found sixty eight species with a number of specials amongst them. A Pink-backed Pelican was seen – this is the second sighting of which I am aware at the sewage works – two birds were seen on 12/06/2011 and it constitutes only the fourth recent sighting of which I am aware in central Namibia; the others being a single bird at Avis Dam on 17/04/2010 and two birds seen at Otjivero Dam on 30/01/2011.

We are confident that we will secure more speakers of this quality and the symposium will be a once in a lifetime opportunity to hear all these experts in their various ornithological fields speak at one symposium and to interact with them. I am quite sure that this will certainly never happen again in Windhoek in my lifetime (and probably also not in the lifetimes of many who are a lot younger than I am).

The event is being financed largely from accumulated Namibia Bird Club funds although the committee is still looking for sponsorships to help carry the costs.

The free admission for Namibia Bird Club members is seen by the committee as a thank you to our loyal members and an incentive for new members to join the club. As it would be totally unfair on the members to expect them to subsidize non-members all non-members will have to pay the abovementioned fees to cover the costs of their participation in the symposium and/or dinner.

The subscriptions for 2012 are due by 31 March 2012 and be warned that should you not have renewed your subscription by that date you will be regarded as a non-member and will be charged accordingly for your participation. The committee hopes that there will be a very good turnout of members at the symposium as a lot of effort has gone into the organization thereof.

Should any member wish to help sponsor the event in any way (cash or kind) please contact Holger Kolberg ([holgerk@mweb.com.na](mailto:holgerk@mweb.com.na) or 081 129 5163) or Gudrun Middendorff ([gudrunm@iway.na](mailto:gudrunm@iway.na) or 081 240 3635).

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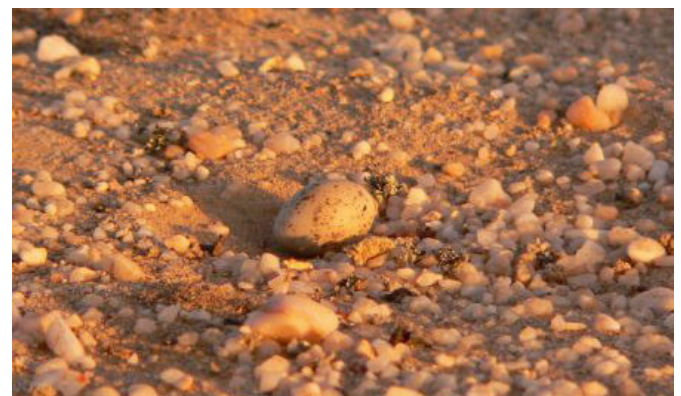
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## Damara Terns : Development and Care of the Young

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After having witnessed the mating of the terns, described in a previous article (*Lanioturdus* 44(4) - Ed.), this article will concentrate on the raising and care of the young.

The cycle starts with the laying of a single egg in a shallow scrape in gravel or depression in hard salt pan. Sometimes sparsely lined with shell chips or small stones, usually placed there during incubation. (Roberts VII) Peak laying times are between October and December.



Often in raised location (usually with good visibility) and frequently adjacent to visually disruptive object such as large stone, deep tyre or ostrich track, small river wash or driftwood or root. (Roberts VII)

On the gravel plains the markers consist mainly of tracks, *Arthrerea leubnitziae* bushes and some boulders.

Nests are sometimes situated directly in a track and an unsuccessful breeding attempt is then pre-programmed.



When disturbed the bird flies off, leaving behind the well camouflaged egg for up to sixty minutes. During this time the tern circles around the area often diving down onto an intruder.



Once the tern is at ease with the situation it will land a short distance away from the egg and then slowly move closer to the nest to carry on with the task of incubation. Unfortunately these eggs are much sought after by some predators such as chameleons, gulls, suricates and jackals.



Incubation of the egg is the responsibility of both parents. During December 2007 I was fortunate to witness the changing over of the incubation duties between the two parents. While the one bird incubates the egg the other flies in to take over its duties. It lands close to the incubating bird, approaches it from behind and the first bird leaves the nest for the second bird to take over the incubation.



Adults remove the eggshells once the chick has hatched. The newly hatched young bird is golden-buff, with dark blotches on the back and white below. *Highly cryptic on sandy gravel plains. Tarsi thick and flesh coloured, later become withered and dull yellow. (Roberts VII)*





*After 2 days chick leaves nest scrape and is fed and brooded as it moves towards sea. Some older chicks move up to 1.7 km in 2.5 d, while others stay in nest area; chick movements probably dependent upon disturbance. (Roberts VII)*



I have witnessed this westward migration a number of times, however my impression was never that the chick, (two days and older), moves on its own. I have seen a number of terns flying low over the chick “pushing” it towards the sea. An adult bird usually has a titbit to eat in its bill and this is used in addition to lure the little bird closer to the beach.



The last time I witnessed this was on 19 December 2010 when I found a newly hatched chick a mere hundred metres west of the main road leading to Henties Bay. With the peak Christmas traffic at my back I photographed the parents and at least two other terns trying to “persuade” the new chick to move westward. It took the better part of an hour for the chick to move about one hundred metres, possibly because it was still extremely small. What an enormous feat!!!

It is known that Damara Terns breed up to eleven kilometres inland from the sea; this makes for a pretty long walk to the beach for a newly hatched chick!!! And I cannot stop wondering how they manage to cross the main road to Henties Bay during the peak Christmas traffic. Possibly they do a lot of this westward movement at night and are then not as much exposed to traffic when crossing the main road. In all my years of travelling along this road I have never seen a dead Damara Tern chick on the road, although dead scorpions and chameleons are seen from time to time. Even White-fronted Plovers are at times driven over.



The young birds grow incredibly fast, in fact they seem to get blown up. Within a week the chick has grown to easily double its size. With growth the camouflage patterns change so as to adapt to the new environment near to the beach.



They seem to take on the colour of their environment; if they are between the stones at Vierkantklip, they appear to be greyish to blend in.....



.... if they are on coloured beach sand, they appear to have that colour!!!



Once able to fly (at ca 20 d), chicks aggregate on beach in flocks.



Adults feed small fish to recently hatched young (which are regurgitated if chick disturbed). Larger fish fed to older juvs. (Roberts VII)



The juvenile birds soon reach the size of the adult birds and then they start to fly while still being fed by their parents.

During late January and early February adult and juvenile birds are visually hardly distinguishable, apart from the juveniles still being fed. It really looks a bit odd, a Damara tern in adult dress still being fed!!!



By late February to early March the terns are fully grown and they feed themselves.



Then the time has come to commence the long journey back to West Africa from where they will start the circle of life again.



Note : All photographs in this contribution are by Eckart Demasius

#### References:

Hockey PAR, Dean WJR, Ryan PG (eds) 2005  
Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa, VIIth ed.  
The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book  
Fund, Cape Town.

## Ringers Get-Together 2011 at Augurabis

Graham Grieve

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When Claire Kolberg announced the previous year that the Ringers' Get-together was to be held at Augurabis I was immediately tempted to make the trip, both because it was considerably closer for those of us travelling from South Africa, but also because I had never seen the Fish River Canyon – and this would be only a short distance from the ringing site.

So, at the end of April we set off on the long trip from the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast to Namibia stopping off at a freezing Middelburg and at Upington on the way. Once we entered Namibia through the Ariamsvlei Border Post, we liaised with Colin de Kock, my erstwhile ringing colleague from Gauteng and met to fill up at Grünau before the final leg to the ringing site. Driving along the track to Augurabis through the stark and sparsely vegetated surroundings it was difficult to envisage the lush river valley that we entered once we reached the ringing camp at Augurabis Cañon Outpost where we were met by Holger and Claire.

Colin and I wasted no time after unpacking our vehicles and soon had several nets up in the riverine bush. We managed to catch a few birds before it got too dark and we had to close the nets. By that stage most of the other participants had also arrived and we could get to meet them again – and some for the first time. Holger had started cooking dinner (fortified by his first Tafel) while those of us from SA tried to reset our biological clocks while we kept an eye on him.

The plan was to open the nets just before first light the next morning, but we heard strange sounds overnight – sounds that were distinctly like thunder and rain, but this was Namibia, the land of sunshine – right? Unfortunately rain it proved to be and this delayed ringing proceedings while coffee and rusks were consumed. It was mid-morning before we could open the nets but the birds still seemed