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### CONTENTS

EDITORIAL 2
ARTICLES & REPORTS:
BRANFIELD, A.: New bird records for the East Caprivi, Namibia
BROWN, C.J.: Birds of the West Caprivi Strip, Namibia22.
BRAINE, S.: Records of birds of the Cunene River estuary38.
KOMEN, J.: Sexing Chestnut Weavers <u>Ploceus</u> <u>rubiginosus</u> 45.
KEMP, A.: What is the status of the Damara Redbilled Hornbill?51.
HINES, C.J.H.: Leaves and flowers in the diet of Grey Louries and Yellowbilled Hornbills in Namibia53.
MENDELSOHN, J.: Yellowbilled Hornbill feeds Grey Hornbill nestlings54.
KOMEN, J.: Distribution of Greater Swamp Warblers in southern Africa55.
WILLIAMS, A.J.: Kelp Gull feeding capacity57.
ALLAN, D.G., W.K. STEELE & C.R. VELASQUEZ.: Lesser Blackbacked Gull at Etosha
THOMSON, G.: A "white-bellied" Mountain Chat59.
KOMEN, J.: Hartlaub's Francolin news
WILLIAMS, A.J.: Crowned Cranes and other wetland birds of the Ekuma River and Etosha National Park61.
BACHRAN, H.: Ein kleiner vogel als baumeister63.
ARNOLD, E.M.: Letter to the editor65.
PETZOLD, P.O.: Letter to the editor

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made, preclude the normally preferred food items of these two species, viz. insects and fruit. The utilization of Aloe zebrina plants is interesting because the plants occurring naturally in the veld at this time of the year are usually reduced to a small, dried out stem with a few dried leaves still attached. The Aloe is therefore unlikely to be a food item normally utilized by Grey Louries at this time of the year, although it may form part of the diet of this species later in the summer when the plants in the veld have regrown.

Diets of birds are generally poorly known, especially those of certain groups of near-passerines and passerines. The phenomenon of birds utilizing non-preferential food items during times of stress must be widespread especially in semi-arid and arid environments, but is seldom reported. Casual observation over a period of time can reveal much about what a bird is eating, when and possibly why. The feeding requirement of a bird species is often an important aspect of management strategy for the conservation of that species, but as is so often the case our knowledge of the species with regard to its food and feeding is lacking and we are often too late in finding out what these exactly are. The importance of casual observations cannot be stressed enough and I would encourage anyone who has the time to observe any species of bird closely to keep notes, which after a while can result in a surprising large body of publishable information.

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# YELLOWBILLED HORNBILL FEEDS GREY HORNBILL NESTLINGS

I am currently studying four species of hornbills (Monteiro's, Grey, Yellowbilled and Redbilled) breeding in nest boxes in Daan Viljoen Nature Reserve, near Windhoek. The study largely aims to investigate the energy requirements of the different species at various stages of the nesting cycle. To obtain the required information on energy requirements I visit the boxes every three to four days.

On 19 May 1990 I was driving along and noted an adult male Yellowbilled Hornbill flying past, carrying food in his beak. Being unaware of any Yellowbilled Hornbills breeding in that immediate area, I stooped and followed his movements. With great surprise, I saw him alight in a tree

and hop up to a nest box which contained three Grey Hornbill chicks, aged about 28-30 days. He presented the food at the nest hole entrance and this was apparently taken by the nestlings.

Such unusual and maladaptive behaviour is hard to explain. I am certain that the male did not mistake the nest hole as his own, since no Yellowbilled Hornbills nested in boxes nearby.

John Mendelsohn, The State Museum of Namibia, P.O. Box 1203, Windhoek.

### DISTRIBUTION OF GREATER SWAMP WARBLERS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

According to Maclean (1985) and Newman (1983) the Greater Swamp Warbler's <u>Acrocephalus rufescens</u> southern African distribution is restricted to the Okavango delta in Botswana. Elsewhere in Africa, they are commonly found in suitable habitat south of the Sahara, ranging from West Africa across to south-central Africa (Hall & Moreau 1970).

Large areas of the East Caprivi, bordering the Zambezi, Kwando and Chobe Rivers, as well as the Mahango Nature Reserve bordering the Kavango River in eastern Kavango, have large perennial and seasonal wetland areas. In these areas, inundated <a href="Hyparrhenia">Hyparrhenia</a> grassland, extensive, mixed <a href="Cyperus papyrus">Cyperus papyrus</a>, <a href="Typha latifolia">Typha latifolia</a> and <a href="Phragmites australis">Phragmites australis</a> reedbeds are permanent or temporary homes for large numbers of European Sedge <a href="A.schoenobaenus">A.schoenobaenus</a>, <a href="African Marsh A.baeticatus">A.schoenobaenus</a>, <a href="African Marsh A.schoenobaenus">Arrican Marsh A.schoenobaenus</a>, <a href="Caparity Samp">Caparity Samp Warblers</a> appear to be restricted to Papyrus swamps where they may be quite

During a few birding visits to the Kavango River and East Caprivi wetlands during 1986 to 1988, Greater Swamp Warblers were trapped, collected, recorded and seen at a number of Papyrus swamp localities (Figure 1). Since these warblers are territorial and show vigorous response to playback of male advertising calls, the status of the species is readily recorded. On the Kavango River outside the Mahango Reserve, Greater Swamp Warblers were only documented at two localities; the Cuito-Kavango junction near Katere and Popa Falls. The presence of the warblers (at least two males) at Popa Falls was surprising since the papyrus vegetation there covers a tiny area in contrast to areas of papyrus swamp observed elsewhere. No warblers were found at any of the accessible small patches of papyrus vegetation between Popa Falls and the Bagani bridge.

It is noteworthy that the Greater Swamp Warbler has not been reported further east along the Zambezi than the present record of a few birds at an isolated 'malapo'

reedbed in the Maningimanzi area along the Zambezi River. The species has been reported on the Luanginga and Lungwebungu tributaries of the Zambezi River in Zambia (Benson et al. 1971).

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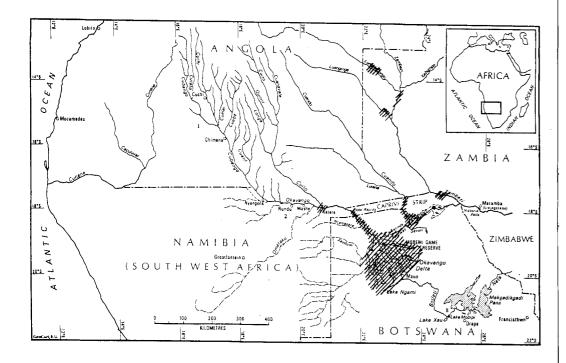


Figure 1: Hatched areas represent known distribution of Greater Swamp Warblers in southern Africa.

### KELP GULL FEEDING CAPACITY

On December 6 1988 I inadvertently disturbed a colony of Crowned Cormorants <u>Phalacrocorax</u> coronatus on Seal Island, near Lüderitz. The adults took an usually long time before returning to their nests. While they were away an adult Kelp Gull <u>Larus dominicanus</u> flew down and walked along the cormorant breeding ledge feeding on nest contents. In the course of a few minutes the gull took and ate seven small chicks and two eggs. The chicks were all naked and so between newly hatched and six days old. The gull seized each chick by the head and then swallowed it whole.

This incident provides some insight into the capacity of adult Kelp Gulls for ingesting food. Crowned Cormorant eggs have an average weight of 24g, newly hatched chicks weigh 17g, and at five days average chick weight is 75g (Williams & Cooper 1983). Assuming that two of the chicks were about five days old and the remainder newly hatched then the total weight of eggs and chicks eaten by the adult gull was about 266q. Adult male Kelp Gulls of the southern African race L. d. vetula have an average weight of 1096g (Brooke & Cooper 1979). This gull therefore consumed about a quarter of its expected body weight in a matter of two or three minutes. At some stages of the breeding cycle the gull might have been feeding to provide for its chicks or to provide food for its mate during courtship feeding. This was unlikely in this case. A survey of the contents of 200 Kelp Gull nests on Seal Island revealed that most had full clutches and that incubation was almost complete with some chicks already hatched. Courtship feeding was almost certainly over at this stage and it was probably too early for the bird to have chicks to feed. We must assume then that this gull ate these eggs and chicks purely for its own sustenance.

The conservation message is to always do your best to avoid disturbing colonially breeding birds when known nest predators are in the vicinity. This is especially the case when the birds are at the most vulnerable stage of breeding. Eggs and small chicks provide easy-to-take prey for a wide variety of nest predators. The Crowned Cormorant with a global breeding population of fewer than 2,500 pairs (Crawford et al. 1982) is one of rarest of the world's 30 species of cormorants, although not considered endangered. The effect of this incident on the cormorants at Seal Island is not too serious in conservation terms as the adult birds survived to breed again. This incident will have put back their breeding by about two or three months. They will take some time before their hormones reactivate for courtship. The affected individuals will then join a displaying group