

## NAMIBIA BIRD CLUB

a branch of the Scientific Society of Namibia  
and the  
Southern African Ornithological Society

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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 Acrocephalus rufescens 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 Hyparrhenia grassland, extensive, mixed Cyperus papyrus, Typha latifolia and Phragmites australis reedbeds are permanent or temporary homes for large numbers of European Sedge A. schoenobaenus, African Marsh A. baeticatus, Cape Reed A. gracilirostris and Great Reed A. arundinaceus Warblers. Greater Swamp Warblers appear to be restricted to Papyrus swamps where they may be quite common.

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'

