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## EDITORIAL

This copy of *Lanioturdus* is made up almost entirely of trip reports and observations made during trips around the country. This is encouraging in that it is clear that people are getting out and watching birds – and much of the country is getting covered. The information given in these articles is non-scientific for the most part, but important none-the-less. In Peter Kaestner's article on the North of the country, he reports the first record of Blackfaced Lovebird from the Caprivi for close on ten years. Tony Tree's article gives a brief account of an American Black Skimmer seen in Walvis Bay in February – a first record for Africa. Mark Paxton's account of breeding pelicans in the Chobe area is the first in many years. These articles are largely reports of observations given in a generalised way, but their value in putting important information into print cannot be stressed enough. The point I want to make here is that *anyone* can do it. You don't need scientific training, a degree in journalism or any birding credentials. In this sense I would like to encourage people to join the Club's outings and activities, write them up and contribute to the process of developing the Club.

With regard to outings and activities, the Club Committee as a whole would like to thank Daphne McGivern for acting as our activities co-ordinator over the past couple of years. Daphne put in a tremendous amount of work, and the success of our programme was in a large part due to her inputs. We wish the McGivern family well in Cape Town. We are now looking for a new co-ordinator – anyone interested?

I would also like to thank Carole Roberts for her inputs into *Lanioturdus* over the past year and for volunteering to put the December edition together. I will be away in Australia and the Netherlands until January 1999 and Carole will be handling the magazine. Please submit all contributions directly to her via e-mail at [carole@dea.met.gov.na](mailto:carole@dea.met.gov.na) or through the Club's postal address.

## DUNE LARK DRINKING WATER?

CJW Pollard

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On the early morning of 19 March 1995 I visited the Namib sand dunes by the Kuiseb River at Rooibank to see the Dune Lark *Mirafra erythrochlamys*. It was overcast with a thick mist at ground level, causing heavy condensation on my vehicle windscreen and on the scrub vegetation in the lower dunes.

I found one Dune Lark walking around some low vegetation, and gently reaching up to the base of the leaves and twigs where it appeared to take something into its bill. This was repeated many times at a distance of some ten metres from me. I was unable to see what it was taking, and at the time assumed that it was food.

Three years later in the early morning of 23 March 1998 I was at the same place. The weather was clear with no overcast or ground mist, and the vegetation was dry.

I found four Dune Larks in a small party. They seemed unafraid and flew to a small sand hill near me. I watched from a distance of 3–6 metres as all four of them darted around the vegetation collecting insects from the bushes and the ground. The movement of these insect-hunting birds was brisk and erratic.

Having noted the comments of Cox (1983) in Volume 2 of *The Atlas of Southern African Birds*, viz... "It has never been seen drinking...", I feel that the slow and careful behaviour of the bird seen on the first occasion was in such contrast to the feeding behaviour of the group on my second visit, that it suggested the first bird was in fact sipping water droplets from the vegetation.

It is of interest to note that on the first visit, the Kuiseb River at that point had recently flowed, and there were still pools of water in the river bed. It

is likely that the Dune Lark (because of its general habitat) has never learnt to drink water from ground level, but is still able to let water droplets fall into an upturned beak.



## LESSER BLUE-EARED STARLING IN MAHANGO GAME RESERVE

CJW Pollard

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On 17 March 1998 in a tree in the Mahango Game Reserve, I found a mixed flock of starlings including Wattled *Creatophora cinerea*, Longtailed *Lamprotomis mevesii*, Glossy *L. nitens* and Blue-eared *Lamprotomis* spp.

Among them were three sooty-coloured immatures, two recognisable as Greater Blue-eared Starlings *L. chalybaeus* and one as a Lesser Blue-eared Starling *L. chforopterus*. It was immediately identifiable by the patches of brownish-rufous on the chest and underparts (showing that it was probably in moult to adult plumage) and the slightly iridescent sooty upperparts. I was unable to make out the eye colour.

I attempted to make some sense out of the multiplicity of calls emanating from this flock, but was unable to identify Lesser Blue-eared Starlings from their call. I encouraged the flock to fly away from the tree hoping to hear the departing "wirri-wirri" call without success.

I am familiar with all these species from the north-western sector of Zimbabwe, and particularly with the immatures of the Blue-eared Starlings.