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## EDITORIAL

Summer's definitely here with the arrival of migrants and the promise of rain, and that means that we're nearing the end of yet another year. This is the fourth and final edition of *Lanioturdus* for the year. As many of you are aware, Chris Hines is roaming the globe at the moment and has trustingly left me (Carole Roberts) in charge of getting this edition out. (Hmm, I'm afraid the "Short Notes" are a little short this edition.) After having spent a month "down under" birding in Oz, Chris is now "up North" studying for a couple of months in the Netherlands. However, he hasn't forgotten us or *Lanioturdus* and submitted an article on his trip to Australia which mentions all sorts of winged wonders – frogmouths and friarbirds, parrots and pittas (to mention just a few). I have a feeling, though, that we might expect a much shorter article on his trip to the Netherlands!

There's no excuse for ignoring many of those LBJs in 1999! Peter Kaestner has put together a guide to the larks of Namibia for us. It will be published in two parts, the first of which is in this edition. He has tried to make it easy for us by highlighting the characteristics and range of each species found here, and has provided a field key as well. Peter stresses that the key should be regarded as incomplete because it needs to be put to the test (yes, that's our job), and that he would appreciate any comments to help improve it. So, birders, get out there and hit those larks!

I don't know about the rest of you, but I certainly didn't get out and about as much as I would have liked to this year. In this issue we have published a preliminary list of activities and outings for 1999 so we can all plan our trips early. If anyone has any ideas, requests or queries in this line, they should contact Dieter or Jeremy. See you out there!

That really just leaves me to extend heartfelt thanks to all those who've contributed to the journal over the past year – it can't happen without you – you've been great! Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas and a prosperous, bird-filled New Year!

## ETOSHA BIRD NOTES II

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### Shorttoed Rock Thrush *Monticola brevipes*

We still have a pair of thrushes resident at Okaukuejo as of 13 November 1998. Perhaps if we get rain they will leave the area to breed in some rocky place.

### Blue Crane *Anthropoides paradiseus*

Due to the drought in Etosha, Blue Cranes were exceedingly scarce within the park. We have been conducting monthly censuses of bustards from Okaukuejo to Namutoni along the main road and we have also been recording the number of cranes. During the rains cranes were regularly seen on Charitsaub Plain, Halali Plain east and Halali Plain west, Springbokfontien, and at other small plains adjacent to the pan. In September 1998 we only saw three pairs of cranes and none in October and November on our census route. There have been three cranes resident at Andoni Plains waterhole during the same period.

### Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius*

The drought has also caused a scarcity of Secretarybirds in the park and on adjacent farm land to the south. We were absent from the park in July and August 1998 and after our return in September and October we realized that we had only seen one pair of birds within the park and that was at Jakkalswater in the west. We asked others who worked and visited the park and farmers on the adjacent lands when had they last seen a Secretarybird and all we talked with also realized that they had not seen a bird in recent months. The lack of grass and vegetation which presumably affected the insect biomass probably caused a local movement of birds out of the area. During the first week of November we started seeing the birds again. It is possible that the birds were in the more heavily wooded areas of the park.

### Redbilled Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis niger*

These weavers have been absent from the park central and western parts of the and adjacent farm lands since May. The only place where we have seen the birds has been around Namutoni. At Sonderwater farm the birds nest in the windmills and thorn trees. No birds have been seen. We suspect the drought has also caused movements of the birds.

It is plain from the above observations that the drought in Etosha has had an effect on the bird life of the area. We also noted that Lilacbreasted Rollers were mostly absent and we found one juvenile Tawny Eagle which was emaciated and starving just at the time (11 October) when juveniles should have become independent. At a nest on the northern boundary on 14 October we found a large juvenile dead at a nest.

