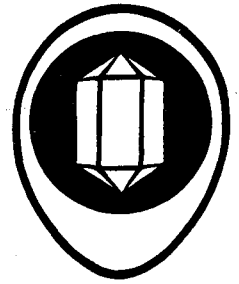


Lanioturdus torquatus
Drosselwürger

MITTEILUNGEN

ORNITHOLOGISCHE ARBEITSGRUPPE



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A EUROPEAN CUCKOO AT AVIS DAM, WINDHOEK

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On 10 November 1974 we saw a large brownish cuckoo in the bushveld fringing the south-east side of Avis Dam. Closer inspection revealed it to be a European Cuckoo (Cuculus canorus), apparently a female (sub-adult?) of the hepatic (red-brown) phase since it had the underside entirely barred brown, but fading on the throat, and with a rufous wash on the chest. A few faint bars were visible on the brownish upperparts also. The bird differed strikingly from an African Cuckoo (Cuculus gularis), well-known to us, and considered by some to be a race of the European bird. In this regard, field-guides such as "Roberts" are somewhat misleading in not stressing the ease with which the two cuckoos may be separated in the field, despite some (avoidable) pitfalls. There is considerable variability leading to an overlap of possibly every one of the distinguishing features mentioned below (M.K. Rowan, pers. comm., and junior author's pers. obs.), but no one bird of either species is likely to show more than one or two features characteristic of the other species. Thus, European Cuckoos are larger, distinctly longer-tailed, with spotted rather than barred tail, much less (and more greenish) yellow at the base of the bill, and finer dark bars on the underside, when compared with African Cuckoos. These characters have been consistently useful in the field to the junior author, both in South West Africa and in Rhodesia (where many European Cuckoos were seen on migration in 1971). The European bird is not known to call in southern Africa, but the calls are in any case completely distinctive. Breeding African Cuckoos have a very bright yellow eye-rim which has not been noticed in the wintering European birds - possibly another useful feature.

The Avis Dam cuckoo elicited much curiosity from all the local small birds, which gathered around - respectfully - to view it. On this same occasion the first Black Cuckoo (Cuculus clamosus) of the season was heard calling not far away. We wondered if the two cuckoos had perhaps arrived on the same "overnight flight"?