



LANIOTURDUS

VOL. 44 (1) 2011

www.namibiabirdclub.org

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Editorial

Bird populations are dynamic – always on the move! I see this at my own home. I have lived in this house for over 23 years and up until about four years ago I had never seen a southern red bishop there – in 2009 alone I ringed 136 at this location! In September 2010 I experienced an irruption of common waxbills, a species I very seldom see in my garden. Over a period of 122 days until the end of the year we ringed 205 and then the numbers seen and caught dropped off sharply suggesting that most of them had moved on. In Lanioturdus 43(4) I mentioned the five pied crows I saw on 11/08/2010 across two Quarter Degree Squares between Rundu Airport and Ncaute where the species was not recorded in the Atlas. I had not seen this species there in about ten previous trips and I have not seen it there again since then on my subsequent trips through this area.

The above examples illustrate how dynamic certain populations actually are – some suddenly appearing and remaining, others merely moving through an area. With the climate changes currently being experienced we are seeing the earlier arrival of some migrants and also later departure dates. (In Lanioturdus 43-4 we published some of Günther Friederich's observations on the early arrival of grey-headed kingfisher and European bee-eater in our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section).

In our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section in this issue we have a report of a Sabine's gull seen at Kalkheuwel waterhole in the Etosha National Park – as far as I have been able to determine this constitutes

species such as Baillon's crake and Gray's lark. McKay often differs from other authors regarding who a bird was named after and Craig openly disagrees with him on a number of species. Where there is more than one possibility I have tried to include all the options but I have been limited by the literature I have managed to unearth, some of which is fairly old. There may well be newer theories and explanations of which I am not aware. In some cases a wealth of information is available regarding the person concerned, in other cases virtually nothing. For the purpose of these articles I will deal only with those species occurring in Namibia, those possibly occurring in Namibia (e.g. Ross's turaco and Fülleborn's longclaw) and those occurring off the Namibian coast.

I pondered hard over how best to sequence the names of those for whom species are named and have come to the conclusion that the alphabetical order of the common names of the species is as good a sequence as any. As far as I can determine seventy six to seventy eight people (depending on which Smith the wire-tailed swallow was named after and whether the coqui francolin was indeed named after a Mr Coqui) are honoured in the names of bird species occurring in Namibia (sub-species excluded).

The scientific names used in these articles are those used in Roberts Birds of Southern Africa (VIIth Edition) 2005. The name and date in brackets after the species name is the name of the person who described the species and the date thereof.

The next article in this series will begin with Abdim's stork and end with Franklin's gull.

Falcons in the City

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Namibians are fortunate to have an interesting variety of small bird of prey species that adapt to living in our cities and towns. This diversity includes diurnal falcons, goshawks and

kestrels, nocturnal owls and even a crepuscular owl. The fortunate part is that these predatory birds control populations of creatures that are considered pests around homes, gardens and inner city areas. The pests include rodents, bats, some garden insects as well as, for some gardeners, small fruit eating birds.

Cities and towns create a range of habitats; there are the high and low concrete or brick buildings, the river-beds with riverine shrubby or woodland edges and the planted gardens with diversity of indigenous and exotic flowering and fruiting trees and shrubs as well as often nutritious grass planted as lawn. Each species of predatory bird is adapted to a specific habitat with preferred nest sites and preferred food items.

Of the most common urbanized diurnal (day) raptors is the Rock Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*. Throughout Namibia this 200 gram falcon has adapted to nesting on buildings in cities and towns. Pairs of kestrels are sedentary and providing that their prey items, rodents, lizards and insects do not become scarce they can be seen around their city blocks throughout the year. As the summer approaches and usually with the onset of the first rains the city kestrels will take up their nest sites on a building ledge. Pairs prefer to use the same site each year and if the rain season begins early and is extensive a single pair of kestrels may have two clutches of eggs in one summer season.

After a 4 week incubation period and an approximate 5 week nestling period great activity can be seen as 2-4 young birds leave the nest site and spend much of their days over the next month or two playing in the wind and practicing their flying and predatory techniques between the buildings. The city kestrel nest sites are often on window ledges of buildings. Many people only begin to notice the Rock Kestrels when the chicks are part grown and become vocal in their demands for food and attention.

Young kestrels are endangered in a number of ways. People can disturb the site when too

much close attention is given to the nest. Cats, especially those that are in feral colonies, whether these colonies are fed or not, are always in direct competition for natural food items with small birds of prey. Cats are also known to disturb nest sites and predate on chicks. Quite often because of disturbance young birds leave the nest before they are really able to fly. These young birds are at the mercy of people as they are unable to easily or quickly get back to a safe high perch on a building. Every year NARREC receives calls from people who have found young birds on a city street.



Rock kestrel – photograph provided by Liz Komen

Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia 4: Coastal Wetlands

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This is the last article in a series describing the results of regular wetland bird counts in Namibia. This paper looks at eight coastal sites, including two of Namibia's four Ramsar sites i.e. Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay. Unfortunately data for Namibia's other coastal Ramsar site, the Orange River Mouth, is

incomplete and hence it has not been included in this analysis.

(Larger scale replications of the graphs in this article are attached to the end of this edition).

4.1 Cape Cross



Aerial view of Cape Cross - Photo Eckart Demasius

This wetland is about 120km north of Swakopmund and consists of a series of natural sea-fed ponds that are partially used for commercial salt production. A large guano platform has also been constructed and this no doubt is an added attraction to birds. The high count in October 1997 is due to the presence of over 24,000 Common Terns.

Area counted: Approximately 5km²

Number of counts: 21

Last counted on: 18 July 2008¹

Average number of birds: 5444²

Average number of species: 16

Maximum number of birds: 29545³

Maximum number of species: 22

Species past 1% population level: Black-necked Grebe (15)⁴, Cape Cormorant (7)⁵, Chestnut-banded Plover (1), Common Tern (1), Curlew Sandpiper (1), Greater Flamingo (6), Lesser Flamingo (4), Swift Tern (2), White-breasted Cormorant (3).

¹ After a lengthy break counts were re-started in July 2008 and are ongoing.

² This number excludes Cape Cormorants because that species was not always counted.

³ Excludes Cape Cormorants.

⁴ Numbers in brackets denote the number of times the 1% population was passed.

⁵ This number should be higher because Cape Cormorants were not always counted.