

## CONTENTS

VOLUME 36 (4) 2003

OSBORNE, T. O. Editorial .....	1
THERON, T. CUNNINGHAM, P. & E. SIMATAA. Notes on the breeding of White Pelicans <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i> at Hardap Dam, Namibia. ....	2
CUNNINGHAM, P., ADANK, W., MULISA, C. & B. SIMATAA. The diet of Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i> from the Otjivasando area, Etosha National Park .....	7
DEMASIUS, E. Damara Terns and the upcoming holiday season ..	12
DEMASIUS, E. Fourth Gray's Lark Ringed in Namibia .....	15
DEMASIUS, E. Another nest in the road .....	19
BIRD OBSERVATIONS AND NOTES .....	22
ERRATUM .....	24

## Editorial

Another year is about over and we have produced four issues of the *Lanioturdus*. The Namibia Bird Club would like to thank all those who contributed. Your articles are what keep the club informed and active. As you read the articles you will see that some people were prompted to write because of an article they had read in the journal. It either confirmed an observation they had made or pointed out the rarity of such observations. That is the reason the journal is published to inform readers about club activities and to stimulate members to report on their observations. I am still waiting for the Chairman's annual report as given at the Annual General Meeting in March 2003. Regretably no reports of club outings in 2003 have been submitted. Perhaps if the club would undertake outings to the remote and exotic areas of Namibia participants would be impressed enough to share the results.

Once again it is the time of the year when everyone is wishfully looking into the sky for clouds that can build up into something bigger to convert the parched landscape into green vistas. The Red-crested Korhaans are calling but whether they breed or not will depend on the amount of rain. Last season they called but no breeding took place in northern Namibia. As of late November there have been reports of rain but not in all regions.

Once again I appeal to all members to try and sign up a friend as a member of the Namibia Bird Club. It would be nice to see the club membership double this year.



Photo No. 4

We reversed the bakkie and decided to wait for the tern to return to its egg. After a couple of minutes this happened and the tern quite unperturbed continued to sit on the egg. Photo No. 4.

Damara Terns are said to use tracks in the desert as markers for their nests. Obviously they do seem to lay their eggs in the tracks at times as well!

We could not establish whether the bird managed to hatch and leave the scrape safely before the holiday season started in mid December.

We all know how important it is to remain on existing tracks, yet it may appear inevitable that some egg and/or chick casualties may still occur in the holiday season at the end of the year, which coincides with the breeding season of the Damara Tern.

## Fourth Gray's Lark Ringed in Namibia

Eckart Demasius  
P O Box 1413, Swakopmund, Namibia  
e-b.de@iway.na

On Monday, 29 September, my wife Birgit took our new Irish Terrier puppy, Miss Bonnie, for a walk on the gravel plains east of Kramersdorf in Swakopmund. She and her friend with her dog, Jule, soon noticed that Miss Bonnie was curiously inspecting something next to an old track at some dead branches of an ink bush *Salsola* sp.

Fearing it could be an adder; they immediately called back the dog and went to inspect what caused the curiosity of Miss Bonnie. Instead of a snake it was a newly born chick in a cup-shaped nest, neatly lined with fine grass inflorescences (fig.1). They decided to immediately leave the nest alone for fear of more dogs coming to inspect. The area east of Kramersdorf is very popular with dog owners who take their dogs for a walk.

Over lunch I was informed about the find and we decided to have a look later in the afternoon, in the hope of being able to identify the little chick. The chick was absolutely minute, its beak still bigger than its head. It was very clear to me from the outset that Miss Bonnie found a newly hatched Gray's Lark chick. In addition, the nest contained an unhatched egg.

We wanted to protect the nestling and ensure its survival, so we only requested Sakkie Roothman to take some photos, as our equipment is not well suited for these photos. We wanted Sakkie to take a photo of the adults feeding the chick at a time when not many people were about with their dogs. Sakkie put up his camera and long lens with remote control and he himself sat in his car as far as possible to ensure the remote to function, but he reported that the adults would not come closer than one hundred metres from the nest. In order not to stress the little one he repeated the exercise two days later with the same effect.

It was then that I received the latest edition of *Lanioturdus*, 36 (3) 2003, and after reading the article on the ringing of the third Gray's Lark in Namibia, I decided to inform Mark Boorman about our discovery. Naturally he was keen to see the nest, but when I tried to fend him off with the excuse, that it would only



Figure 1.  
The newly hatched  
chick in the nest  
waiting to be fed.

be convenient for me to show him the nest a week later he informed me that by then it would be too late. According to Keith *et al.* (1992) the chick leaves the nest about 9 to 10 days after hatching.

Being exactly one week after Miss Bonnie discovered the nest, I decided immediately to go and see whether the fledgling was still in the nest. To our great relief this was the case, and after realising how much the chick had grown in the mean time, this being only the third time I was at the nest, I immediately phoned Mark again and made arrangements to go and inspect the nest the next day. Interestingly, the second egg had as yet not hatched.

The next morning, Tuesday 7 October and the ninth day after our discovery, at around eleven o'clock we went to see the chick. We were just in time as the chick had left the nest and was crouching about ten centimetres away on the ground. Mark went about ringing the chick and when he put it back on the ground it sped away. We decided to catch it, but before putting it back in its nest we took the measurements of the nest and the egg. But the little chick did not want to remain in the nest and sped away once again.

We left it alone and alerted Sakkie that it was time to get the last photos of it on record. Later we heard from him that it took him a long time to find the chick, (fig

2) but again the parents according to Sakkie were only heard but not seen. The great distance kept by the parents is in stark contrast to what Christian and Mark experienced while ringing the third Gray's Lark (Boix-Hinzen and Boorman 2003). Could it be because of so much more human and dog related traffic that the adult birds were so cautious?

On Wednesday, 8 October, my wife and her friend noticed the nestling with three adult birds in attendance. One adult bird was recognised feeding the chick. Two days later the chick was seen for the last time, once again with three adult Gray's Larks tending the young bird. Our observation of a third adult at the nest confirms Boix-Hinzen and Boorman (2003) that helping behaviour is not a rare occurrence. On this occasion the young bird was seen already taking its first leaping attempts at flying!

For a few days there was no sign of the birds, so that we were under the impression that they had all left the area. But on 15 October, eight days after the chick left the nest, the dog-walking party once again saw the group of Gray's Lark and the juvenile bird being fed. The young bird was reported to be about three-fourths the size of an adult bird. The bird was still busy with his attempts at flying. That was the last time it was seen, let us hope this is a story with a happy ending resulting in a successful breeding attempt.



Figure 2. The ringed  
Gray's Lark nestling,  
Namibia 2003.

The measurements of the nest are as follows, inner diameter = 56 mm and depth = 75 mm, which compares well with the information given (Keith *et al.* 1992). The egg had the following dimensions: 21,0 mm x 15,6 mm, which falls within the average egg size reported of 21,2 mm x 15,3 mm (n=21) in the same publication.

The literature refers to the period between March and July as the main breeding period, with opportunistic occurrences in any month in response to rain, as well as exceptional records in September and January respectively. As we had no occurrence of rain at the coast during this period, this record would fall in the latter category.



Figure 3.  
The unhatched  
egg in the nest.

#### References:

- Boix-Hinzen, C. & M. Boorman. 2003. Helping behaviour in Gray's Lark *Ammomanes grayi*. *Lanioturdus* 36(3):2-3.
- Keith S, Urban E. K and Fry C. H (ed's). 1992. *The Birds of Africa*. Vol 4, Academic Press Limited, Inc, London.
- Tarboton, W. 2001. *A Guide to the Nests and Eggs of Southern African Birds*. Struik Publishers (Pty) Ltd, Cape Town

## Another Nest in the Road

Eckart Demasius  
P O Box 1413, Swakopmund, Namibia  
e-b.de@iway.na

The article in the latest *Lanioturdus*, 36 (3), 2003, on the helping behaviour in Gray's Lark made me aware of how seldom nests of these birds are seen in the veld and it persuaded me to share an experience me and my wife had some two years ago.

We were on a leisurely bird watching and "sunsoaking" trip on our way towards Ganab. We enjoyed the heat, as only we coastal folk can appreciate it after weeks of cold and misty weather at the coast. I was cruising at a slow speed, the windows open, the arm out of the window to enable me to have a view simultaneously out of my side window and the front screen.

Shortly after entering the turn-off from the C14 east of Walvis Bay towards Ganab, the bakkie comfortably tugged in under my right arm, a Gray's Lark flew off in front of us from the middle of the road. Nothing unusual, but as we crossed the spot the lark flew off, I noticed in a glimpse something unusual, similar to when unexpectedly seeing a coin in the street. We reversed back and went to investigate and to our utmost surprise and astonishment found a nest of the lark in the middle of the road in the intervening space *middelmannetjie* of the vehicle tracks on the gravel road.

We decided not to stay too long so as not to draw unnecessary attention or cause too much disturbance and stress to the Gray's Lark.

After driving off for a short distance, we decided to look back to see whether anyone would or could notice the nest. However, only when one was aware of the existence of the nest one would possibly notice it, as the photo below indicates. Once we were in Swakopmund I phoned Rod Braby requesting him to arrange not to grade the road for some time because of the nest, which I trust was done.