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EDITORIAL

This is the final edition of *Lanioturdus* for 1997 — the fourth of the year and an achievement for all those people who contributed to the journal over the past year. Although we have seldom exceeded 40 pages in any one edition we feel that the value of the magazine has increased in that we are keeping our members informed and hopefully fostering more interest in birding in Namibia as a whole. Many thanks to all the authors and artists who submitted material for the year and I hope that the articles will keep on rolling in to make 1998 as successful as 1997.

The summer heat is upon us and with the first migrants having already arrived, you should all be looking forward to some excellent birding over the coming holiday period. This may be a particularly interesting year — the predictions of the weather boffins is that *El Nino* is likely to negatively influence the rainfall patterns in the country. This in turn will have a major effect on the distribution and breeding of birds over the next couple of months. I encourage all of you to get out there and look at what's going on — keep field notes on your observations and make some comparisons with what you know of previous years. This applies equally to common as well as rarer species. How much do we really know about doves in this country? I have noticed that in Bushmanland and at Aris, near Windhoek, that the numbers of Namaqua Doves is highly variable both within and between years. I suspect the same thing of Laughing Doves which seem to disappear at certain times of the year. Keeping basic notes and records can tell us so much about the birds we take for granted (many of which are surprisingly poorly studied). Your notes and records do not have to take the form of detailed scientific observations — casual and incidental observations are also valuable. Collect information, put it together in the form of an article and send it to *Lanioturdus*. Anyone can do it and I encourage of all of you to try!!!

On behalf of the Namibia Bird Club Committee, I would like to wish you all a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Good birding in 1998 and let's hear from you.

Mwandi. Interspersed among these large flocks were relatively high numbers of Caspian Plovers (*Charadrius asiaticus*), a bird normally associated with short-grass plains and drier areas in Namibia.

The day ended well at Kalizo where we sat and watched a group of three males and one female Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) feeding in a small backwater near the lodge. Even more exciting was the group of four Spotted-necked Otters which came past the following morning — but the birding wasn't over yet. As we (AC & CH) were walking out of the camp we were both drawn by a distinctive call, that of Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*). We spotted a single bird flying rapidly upstream, calling. Although relatively regularly recorded inland in southern Africa it is generally rare on inland waters.

CH, AC and EC would like to thank all the staff at Impalila Island Lodge for the time and trouble they put into making the time we spent there so pleasant and successful. We can strongly recommend to anyone looking for exciting birding to visit this fantastic site, there are we have no doubt, many more exciting discoveries to be made here. My prediction is that the next rare bird to turn up in the area will be Gull-billed Tern (*Geochelidon nilotica*), a Palearctic migrant recorded on several occasions most notably at Victoria Falls (Pollard, 1992)



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BEWARE!!! GIN TRAPS AT THE SEWAGE WORKS

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One Saturday in November this year, Margot Van Heerden and myself visited the Gammams Water treatment ponds for the morning. We were slowly working our way along one of the moats that bisect the eastern-most ponds, trying to tune our ears to the calls of Baillon's Crakes but unfortunately after three hours of search we were unable to hear a single one. We were amused by two melanistic Gabar Goshawks being mobbed by a flock of Wattled Starlings and later by two Grey Hornbills. Finally we saw the goshawks taking their frustrations out on a Steppe Buzzard. Margot's highlight of the day was a sub-adult Greenbacked Heron that perched, confidently, in good light. I had a great morning scouting the reed edges, but in doing so I came across a rather unnerving sight, a dead Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) with a gin trap clamping its tarsi.

The bird had clearly struggled in vain to free itself — its thigh was raw but the bone was not broken. Presumably the gin trap must have been attached at some stage to an anchoring peg, but judging by the looks of things some sort of predator got there before whoever had set it, did. The head and neck of the moorhen were covered in dried saliva whilst the rest of the body appeared untouched; as if a snake had tried to ingest it but given up. The body had started to decay, but I brought it home to take some pictures and illustrate the trap so that you can all have an identikit of this item.

The trap mechanism is identical to that of a gin trap, except somewhat more "ethno". The beauty lies in that the whole spring mechanism is made out of one single strand of steel wire, easily acquired from any fence in the vicinity. Two separate, yet identically shaped, wire arches had been carefully hinged to the spring lever which snaps them close once the trigger is set. In Spain, they bait them with live mealy-worms (*Tenebrio molitor*) and flying ants. Once a starving migrant (anything from a Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) or a Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) to a Robin

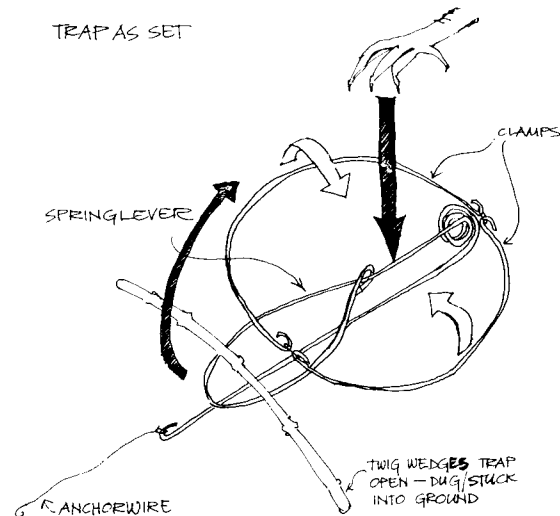


Illustration by Nana Maritz

(*Erithacus rubecula*) is enticed by the wriggling prey, it stands no chance of survival. However, yesterday's trap does not appear to have a food presenting device, and it's probably triggered by a step-on mechanism. Whilst this design might keep insectivorous species out of the equation, it still leaves a large suite of rambling rallids and small herons at its mercy.

You might think, what's a Moorhen loss for Gammams? Having actively campaigned against these traps in Spain, I know these devices are incredibly non-selective, tremendously luring and very efficient. They are in fact responsible for the death of 40 million migrant passerines every year, in Spain alone; add to this Italy, Greece and south France's similar tallies, where "Pajaritos Fritos" (deep fried passerines) and "Pâté de Sanssonait" (songbird pate) are sought delicacies — you can judge for yourself.

Mark my words, where there is one, there are many more. So next time you are at Gammams, keep an eye out, and instead of collecting the trap inform the authorities. It's better to catch the culprit than his traps. Besides, whoever designed this device is an engineering asset to Namibia.

"STANLEY'S BUSTARD" IN ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK, THE FIRST RECORD OF JACKSON'S BUSTARD IN ETOSHA

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The bustard *Neotis denhami* is widespread in Africa. It occurs in a belt of moist and dry woodland north of the equator, from Senegal to Ethiopia. South of the equator it is found in open grassland within the belt of moist woodland south to 20° S. There is an isolated population in South Africa, south of 24° S, extending down the east and south coast to Cape Town (Snow 1978).

The South African birds belong to the subspecies *N.d. stanleyi* and are called Stanley's Bustards (Clancey 1980; Maclean 1993).

Neotis denhami also occurs, albeit rather sparsely, in northwestern Zimbabwe, northern Botswana and in northern Namibia. These birds belong to the subspecies *N.d. jacksoni* and are called Jackson's Bustards. They apparently occur seasonally, in small numbers as non-breeding visitors, probably from the high interior of Angola, northern and northeastern Zambia and northern Malawi (Clancey 1980; Harrison, *et al.* 1997).

In Namibia, all recent records of *N. denhami* are from the East Caprivi, mainly from the grasslands of the Mamili National Park (e.g. Maclean 1992, in January 1991), but also from the Salambala area just north of the Chobe River near Ngoma, as well as the Mahango Game Reserve in April/May (CJH Hines pers. comm.). There are historic records of the birds in the Ovambo region (Brown 1993), and Finch-Davies (1918) collected specimens on grassy flats near Namakunde and Ondangwa in February 1917. There are no subsequent records for this region.

On 10 November 1997, I saw two Jackson's Bustards at Andoni waterhole on the grassy Andoni Plains, some 40 km north of Namutoni camp in