

The Cape Eagle Owl has not been recorded from Angola (Dean 2000, The birds of Angola, British Ornithologist's Union, Tring). I suspect that the owl will probably be found in southern Angola as areas with suitable habitat can be found all along the western escarpment up to Lubango and beyond. From the Kunene River several locations with seemingly suitable habitat on the Angolan side were visible, e.g. the Serra Techicongo and Serra Techimainde Mountains.

Details of the record:

Locality: 9 km southeast of Ojimbombonga on the Namibia/Angola border in the Okakora Mountains (i.e. a range between the Ojijhipa Mountains in the west and the Baynes Mountains in the east) northern Kaokoveld, Kunene Region, Namibia.

Co-ordinate of record: 17°13.2S, 12°47.0E

Altitude: 1400 - 1500 m a.s.l.

Date: 13 January 2004

Time: 21:30 - 21:45

Observers: Wessel & Hannelie Swanepoel

High density of Dusky Sunbirds in ephemeral river course in the Namib

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The Dusky Sunbird *Nectarinia fusca* is a southern African endemic confined to the arid and semi-arid western regions of the subcontinent. It is particularly common in the Karoo, Namib, the escarpment transition belt and the semi-arid thornveld, including parts of the southern Kalahari system (Harrison 1997). Like many species that inhabit arid areas, the Dusky Sunbird is highly nomadic in response to the availability of food (Maclean 1993). In this note I report on particularly high densities of Dusky Sunbirds in a river course in the Namib in response to the flowering of the parasitic mistletoe *Tapinanthus oleifolius*.

On 29-31 December 2004 large numbers of Dusky Sunbirds were found in the ephemeral, dry Diep River, which is a tributary of the Tsondab River, in quarter-degree square 2415Bb, just west of the Naukluft Mountains. The river crosses a section of the farm Dieprivier for a distance of some 12 km, and varies in width from about 150 to 250 m. On its northern bank is a wide gravel plain with sparse low shrubs and heavily grazed *Stipagrostis* grasses, while on its southern bank to the east (for a distance of about 3 km) is a mobile dune field, giving way to fossil dune cliffs (for a distance of some 5 km), then in the west to gravel plains (Figure 1). The Diep River supports a belt of camelthorn trees *Acacia erioloba* with smelly shepherd's bush *Boscia foetida* trees and shrubs interspersed.

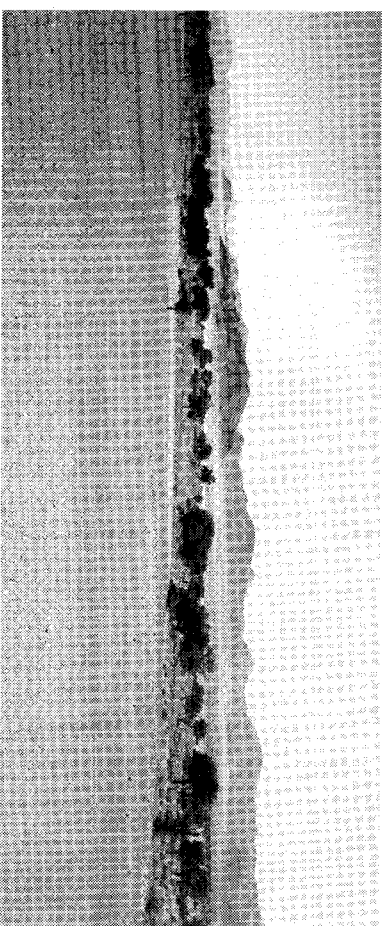


Figure 1: Diep River crossing the gravel plains of the Namib as it heads west (left of picture) towards the Tsondab River and Tsondabvlei.

Over 80% of the camelthorn trees were parasitized by the mistletoe *Tapinanthus oleifolius*, some with over 20 mistletoe plants per host tree. The mistletoe was flowering profusely, and the sunbirds were moving busily from clump to clump feeding on the nectar.

Counts of Dusky Sunbirds were made, per sample blocks of 100 m of river course, in different sections of the river. Six blocks were counted, giving the following numbers of sunbirds: 9, 11, 16, 7, 10 and 6. On average, 9.8 sunbirds were recorded per 100 m of river. Taking the average width of the river as

200 m, the number of birds per km² of river was 490, and the number calculated for the entire 12 km stretch of river on the farm was about 1,180 Dusky Sunbirds. This very high density of Dusky Sunbirds attests to their highly nomadic lifestyle in an unpredictable and variable climate. It also illustrated the very high density of birds that may congregate at a good source of food, in this case a dense infestation of flowering mistletoe.

References

- Harrison JA 1997. Dusky Sunbird *Nectarinia fusca*. In: The atlas of southern African birds. Vol. 2: Passerines. Harrison JA, Allan DG, Underhill LG, Heremans M, Tree AJ, Parker V & Brown CJ (eds), pp 510-511. Birdlife South Africa, Johannesburg.
- Macleod GL 1993. Roberts' birds of southern Africa. 6th ed. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.