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About the Namibia Bird Club

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. The club's mission is to contribute to Namibian ornithology by, amongst other things, arranging regular birding outings, conducting bird ringing and atlasing excursions and educating the public about the value of birds. To achieve this, we organise monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Sewage Works and occasional weekend trips further afield. Bird club members also participate in the African Waterbird Census twice a year.

Experienced birders are more than happy to help beginners and novices on these outings. If you have a transport problem or would like to share transport please contact a committee member. Depending on the availability of speakers and suitable material we present occasional lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive the bird club's journal, *Lanioturdus* and outings and events are advertised on the club's website www.namibiabirdclub.org.

The Namibia Bird Club is not affiliated to any global or regional organisation and relies entirely on members' subscriptions and donations to fund its activities.

The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Namibia Bird Club or its committee.



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Cover photo © Holger Kolberg

Editorial

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Winter is usually a time of dormancy and hibernation but this issue of *Lanioturdus* certainly has somewhat of a breeding flavour to it.

How many of us have birds breeding in our gardens? The only time we take notice is when the birds destroy our plants in their quest to gather nesting material or when we find a little chick that has dropped out of a nest before fledging.

We probably also notice the nests but how many of us have taken note of when the bird started building the nest, when were the eggs laid, hatching date etc.

Although a good summary of breeding data for the birds of Namibia has been published, it still contains many gaps and even when paging through 'The Bible' i.e. Roberts, it is amazing how little information is available about the breeding habits of some species.

In fact, I remember when Roberts VII was published, there was a list of 'missing information' published on the book's website and a lot of it pertained to breeding. I still have that list somewhere; perhaps it is time to dig it out...

Keep birding!

Identifying the females and non-breeding males of the *Vidua* species occurring in Windhoek

Neil Thomson

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Four species of brood parasites of the genus *Vidua* occur in Windhoek. These are Long-tailed Paradise Whydah *Vidua paradisaea*, Shaft-tailed Whydah *Vidua regia*, Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* and Village Indigobird *Vidua chalybeata*. These birds all parasitize different host species - Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs use Green-winged Pytilias, Shaft-tailed Whydahs parasitize Violet-eared Waxbills, Pin-tailed Whydahs parasitize Common Waxbills while Red-billed Firefinches are the hosts of the Village Indigobirds.

The striking breeding plumage of the males of all four of these brood parasite species is virtually unmistakable. The male Long-tailed Paradise Whydah is largely black, yellow and red with a very distinctively shaped downward curving long tail which tapers to a point. Colourwise the male Shaft-tailed Whydah is similar to the Long-tailed Paradise Whydah but lacks red on the breast and has four distinctive long tail feathers with spatulate ends. The breeding male Pin-tailed Whydah is a rather distinctive black and white bird with a red bill and four long tail feathers. The breeding male Village Indigobird (subspecies *V. c. okavangoensis*) appears blue/black all over with a whitish bill and reddish legs.

Identifying the “little brown job” females and non-breeding males of all four species is a tad more difficult but actually the four species are very different and if one knows what one is looking for they are really quite

easy to tell apart. I hope that the photographs and brief descriptions which follow will help in differentiating between these seemingly similar little birds.



Figure 1: Long-tailed Paradise Whydah

Long-tailed Paradise Whydah: Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs are considerably larger than the other species under consideration here, weighing in at around 21 g. The striping on the head is bold (almost black) with a strong contrast between the light and dark stripes. The male has a black bill while the female has a grey bill being palest at the base of the lower mandible (see photograph above). The legs and feet are blackish, dark grey or pinkish brown.



Figure 2: Shaft-tailed-Whydah

Shaft-tailed Whydah:

This species are considerably smaller than the Long-tailed Paradise Whydah weighing in at around 16 g. The head markings are not nearly as distinct as those of the Long-tailed Paradise Whydah and the bill, legs and feet are an orange pink colour.



Figure 3: Pin-tailed Whydah

Pin-tailed Whydah:

This species is very similar in size to the Shaft-tailed Whydah. The head markings are considerably bolder being more similar to those of the Long-tailed Paradise Whydah but with the pale stripes being more buff than whitish. Non-breeding males have red bills. Females have black bills in the breeding season and reddish bills in the non-breeding season but are often seen in an intermediate phase as illustrated in the photograph above. The legs and feet are blackish grey.

Village Indigobird:

This is the smallest of the four species under consideration weighing around 12 g. It also has a fairly boldly marked head, again with the pale stripes being buff rather than white. The bill is an off white colour (in the case of *V c okavangoensis*) and the legs and feet are an orange red.



Figure 4: Village Indigobird

There have recently been sightings of the red-billed form of the Village Indigobird *V c amauropteryx* in Windhoek. I have not been able to catch one of these yet but I would assume that the females and non-breeding males closely resemble the bird in the photograph above but with a red bill.

Reference

Hockey, P.A.R., Dean, W.R.J. and Ryan, P.G. 2005. *Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa, VIIth ed.* The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.