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Namibia Bird Club



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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 organize 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 a digital newsletter, *Namibia Bird News*, which includes a programme of forthcoming events and the Bird Club journal, *Lanioturdus*.

The Namibia Bird Club is not affiliated to any global or regional organization 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.

Instructions to Authors

Lanioturdus is a journal dedicated to birds and birding. Although the journal's primary focus is on Namibia, articles from other geographical parts of the globe will also be considered for publication. Authors should use common and scientific names of southern African birds as published in *Roberts' VII*. For other regions, English and scientific names following BirdLife International's species list (<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species>) should be used. Text should be submitted as a MS Word document. Photos, maps and figures should be sent as separate jpeg images, graphs as MS Excel charts or jpeg images and tables as MS Word or Excel documents. Please indicate in the article text where these should be placed.



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Kunene River Lodge in search of the Cinderella Waxbill and the Angola Cave Chat

Paul Gascoigne and Helen Pooley
pauldunelark@aol.com

Getting to Kunene River Lodge situated in the far north on the Kunene River and Angolan border in a normal rainy season would be out of the question in a 4x4 let alone our 2x4 hire car. Rivers might be flowing, roads can be washed out and the surfaces slippery, just to mention a few of the difficulties.

However 2015 was a very dry year and our passage to the lodge was almost trouble free and we were able to get there relatively easily. The purpose of our visit, having been frustrated in the previous two years, was to hopefully see two specific birds. The Cinderella Waxbill and a bird only discovered in Namibia some two to three years ago, the Angola Cave Chat.

Peter and Hillary Morgan, the owners of the Kunene River Lodge, welcomed us warmly to their lodge and although we arrived later than intended they fed and watered us with the perfect meal of steak and chips before we retired to bed after a full days driving.

Peter Morgan, a keen ornithologist in his own right and a man who is clearly fully aware of the birds in his patch, informed us that the Cinderella Waxbills, his "lodge logo", had not been seen at the lodge in over a year until the day before our arrival. He told us they were creatures of habit and we should check behind reception in the morning and hopefully, with a slice of luck, they would return.

At the conclusion of breakfast we immediately made our way to the rear

of reception in search of the elusive waxbills. At the appropriate hour and right on schedule our quarry appeared and gave us excellent extended views. It was indeed a big score for us but also a huge relief to Peter as he was sure that as a result of the drought this was now a bird under pressure in the area.

So we all went away to celebrate our latest tick and revel in the glory of at long last seeing this beautiful but elusive bird.

The following morning at 4:45am we embarked on our next quest, the Angola Cave Chat. A two hour drive would allow us to arrive at the appointed location just before dawn giving us the best opportunity to locate and see this newly discovered gem of a bird.

We departed the lodge in Peter's Land Rover in total darkness and made our way along the gravel road to Swartbooisdrif. At this point we picked up the road south in the direction of Opuwo.

In the total darkness and goodness knows where [even Peter missed the turn initially] we eventually made a turn into the bush. There did not seem to be any sign or track of any description and here lay the value of Peter and his local knowledge.

We proceeded in the darkness through the bush, crossing dry river beds, and climbing out of river beds, up rocky and uneven banks that only a 4x4 was capable of negotiating and if there was a track it was not obvious to us. We made our winding way towards the Zebra Mountains.

The route was somewhat precarious and certainly a 2x4 car was out of the question to this desperately remote destination. We passed Himba villages and a few campfires glowed in the distance at these encampments. At several points along the way we had to cross patches of "Black Cotton" soil notoriously renowned for its gluey surface especially in wet weather.

As dawn approached we neared our destination and came to a halt at a spot that "remote" does not really describe in any way at all. Certainly without GPS equipment, and one or two fixed positions, getting out of this region and back to some form of civilisation may have been quite a challenge for us supposedly civilised world dwellers.



Immediately in front of us was a wall of boulders, a barrier, as yet, no vehicle man has invented could negotiate. This terrain was forbidding to everything other than klipspringers and dassies and of course man on foot in his clumsy way. [Some of us more clumsy than others].

We started up this forbidding terrain to a location that hopefully would give us good views of the bird or birds should they choose to show themselves. We settled into a comfortable niche amongst the boulders and waited. As we waited a

pair of Verreaux's Eagles soared above us and an Augur Buzzard nonchalantly glided overhead. A White-bellied Sunbird visited a nearby bush and probed a flower or two that were in bloom.

A hornbill called from a distance and a Grey Go-away-bird decided it would announce our presence to any local interested inhabitants. Still we waited; it seemed the Angola Cave Chat was in his cave and not coming out to play today.

This required a new strategy and Peter headed off across and up the scree slope to a new location in an effort to flush a bird from one clump of bushes to another and hopefully it would be visible as it flew across the open ground.

A short time later I was beckoned over to where Peter had located a bird and even took a quick photograph but alas on my arrival it had gone to ground again. We waited some more and heard the bird calling several times but it did not seem to want to be seen by Helen and me today.

Eventually thirsty and bedraggled and a little disappointed we made our way down to the bottom of the slope and started to organize breakfast. No sooner had we opened up our feast than the bird started calling again and the little miscreant eventually showed himself. We had several brief views of the bird or birds bouncing over the boulders and showing off their luminescent white plumage. Sadly pictures were not possible but sometimes you have to take what comes and at least we had good views through our binoculars.

Needless to say we were all delighted, none more so than Peter who worked tirelessly to ensure we saw the bird. As we proceeded with breakfast the

bird showed again and we put down our cereal and yoghurt bowls once again to further our birding cause.

I feel sure it has crossed your mind as it did mine, "How come this bird was never found in Namibia until 2012"? A few days later at the Namibia Bird Club annual general meeting Holger Kolberg presented a very interesting talk about early pioneers who visited Namibia in search of Namibia's many and varied wildlife jewels, both fauna and flora. As we know from Holger's talk they travelled mainly by ox cart and wrote in their journals of the many new sights they discovered. I can only say that had any of these early explorers got as far as the Zebra Mountains they would very soon have realised this was end of the road so little wonder these early travellers didn't discover this bird.

The Zebra Mountains as I understand it are some forty kilometres in length and a further forty in depth and were you to reach the top of the first rise you would see they undulated their way into the distance quite impassable even by a 4x4 ox cart!

As we departed the area on our journey back to the lodge we saw the Zebra Mountains from a distance and where water once flowed down the mountains, lines of foliage had grown



creating stripes along the mountains resembling the stripes of a Zebra - hence the name Zebra Mountains.

Helen and I wish to thank Peter Morgan for providing us with what was a wonderful adventure into this remote wilderness area and a highly successful trip in finding the Angola Cave Chat, not to mention the Cinderella Waxbill.

Peter's local knowledge, bird skills and his trusty Land Rover were invaluable in our quest and I say with absolute certainty that we would never have located this bird without him, and certainly not in our little car, and I doubt if anyone else would find it without great difficulty and a huge slice of luck.

A big thank you also to Wessel Swanepoel, a keen bird watching botanist, who was responsible for discovering the bird in May 2012.