

NAMIBIA BIRD CLUB

a branch of the Scientific Society of Namibia
and the
Southern African Ornithological Society

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and begin a new breeding cycle. Courtship and mating probably requires two or three weeks and laying of the clutch and incubation a further month to bring them back to the chick hatching stage.

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- A.J. WILLIAMS, CPA Chief Directorate of Nature & Environmental Conservation, P.O. Box 94, Walvis Bay 9190, South Africa.

LESSER BLACKBACKED GULL AT ETOSHA

There are only two records of Lesser Blackbacked Gull Larus fuscus from Namibia according to the Popular Checklist of the Birds of South West Africa/Namibia by Dr A.J. Williams. Although there may have been additional records more recently, the bird is clearly a rare visitor to Namibia and the rest of southern Africa.

On 11 August 1989 we saw one at the western extremity of Fischer's Pan, near Namutoni in the Etosha National Park. The bird first was seen perched in shallow water in the pan and was examined through telescopes and binoculars. It then flew up and circled the pan, diving down occasionally to scavenge items in the water.

The gull appeared to be in second winter plumage, i.e. a transitional stage between juvenile and adult plumage. It differed from an immature Kelp Gull Larus dominicanus in its smaller, slimmer head and body, shorter, less deep bill, flesh-coloured legs, and longer wings extending well beyond the tail

when perched. In flight it had shallower wingbeats, relatively longer, narrower wings, and was more buoyant than a Kelp Gull. Indeed its flight was remarkably similar to that of the Caspian Tern Hydroprogne caspia. The full details of this record have been submitted to the relevant rarities committees.

D.G. Allan, W.K. Steele and C.R. Velasquez, FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.

A "WHITE-BELLIED" MOUNTAIN CHAT

In May 1989, at the top of the Grootberg Pass (between Kamanjab and Palmwag Lodge, quarter-degree square 1914CC) I noticed a Mountain Chat Oenanthe monticola with unusual plumage. From the midbreast to the lower part of the belly was white, the remaining underparts (including the vent) black. This bird was accompanied by a female of normal plumage.

I find it very puzzling that this variation appears to be undescribed in the usual bird references (e.g., Maclean 1985; Roberts' birds of southern Africa) as I have found in my travels that this particular plumage is anything but unusual! I am a guide with Namib Wilderness Safaris and often travel on a route roughly from Etosha to the coast, via Naukluft to Windhoek. On the trip when I first saw this particular plumage morph, I subsequently saw two more birds of similar plumage at Naukluft Park (2416AB). On a more recent trip I found that four of seven males observed had the white belly.. They were seen in squares 2115 CC (Spitzkop), 2215 BA (south of Usakos), 2215 CB (Wustenquell) and 2013 BC (east of Torra Bay). Most of these birds were accompanied by females, and I have seen individuals with and without the distinctive silver 'cap' plumage on the head.

It would be useful if atlassers noted whether Mountain Chat males had the white belly or not, in order to establish the status and distribution of this ostensibly unusual plumage morph.

Gavin Thomson, P.O. Box 22541, Windhoek, Namibia.