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Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

With this issue the *Lanioturdus* is now back to being a journal with 4 issues per year and I would like to congratulate the members for your support to make this happen. Within this issue is a wide diversity of articles from all parts of the country. Again we have articles on "common" garden birds which are not common according to the books.

I would like to apologize to Rob Simmons and Penn Lloyd for forgetting to include a figure in their article, which appeared in Volume 35(3). It is included in this issue.

We have only had 4 write-ups on bird club outings in Volume 35 from 2002 and I would like to appeal to organizers and members to please send me a short note on the outing. This will enable other members, who did not attend, to see what the club has been doing and what birds were seen.

Included within this issue is an extra membership form. Please give one to a keen birder you know, who is not a member. You may not know it, but the Namibia Bird Club only has about 90 members which is a rather shocking low number considering all the people we know who have an interest in birding in the country. If you just consider the number of tour guides operating that is more than 90 people. That does not count the number of hunting guides, farmers, scientists, and government employees who also either observe birds or do studies on birds. In 3 of our neighbouring countries Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe their bird clubs/societies have 300-600 members and have far less individuals who are active in the tourism or outdoor avocations.

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Melanistic Hornbill?

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We have a bird-feeding site outside on the lawn on our farm Tsutsab in the Tsumeb District, where we supply crushed chicken feed. From the kitchen window we can observe the birds feeding, mostly hornbills and Cape Turtle Doves. On 20 July 2002, at 06h30, we saw a strange hornbill, which was feeding, among the others. It was not like the Red-billed or Yellow-billed Hornbills, it was mostly black:

The following is a description of the bird we saw:

Bill orange, no casque

Black overall, with no white on the belly, but lighter black than above.

Wings black.

White spots on outer primaries, \pm 1/3 from tip.

Tail feathers black, outer tail feathers white tipped.

White patches on wings.

Eyes yellowish.

Lighter black eyebrow.

Undertail coverts black with white patches.

I managed to get some photos but they are not good enough for publication. The next morning the bird showed up again, but has not been seen since.

We contacted Christian Boix Hinzen by e-mail, sent him the photos and he responded as follows:

“Very, very interesting. Thanks firstly for sharing the news. I really do appreciate it and am heartened to know Namibia has people that share this news and this information. I have never heard of a melanistic Redbilled Hornbill, or of any other hornbill species of the genus *Tockus* for that matter. I have checked the literature available and there is no mention of melanism (that means black!!) in *Tockus* hornbills. I have checked the latest Handbook of the Birds of the World, the 3rd volume of The Birds of Africa, and Kemp's Monograph on Hornbills. In addition, I did a search on melanism and albinism on the ROBERTS DATABASE here at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute, University of Cape Town and only one bird popped out, a reference from 1969 on an albino Redbilled Hornbill from Kruger NP, (funnily enough this year Alday gave me a picture of an albino Yellowbilled Hornbill from Kruger also) but there is nothing on melanism.”

“Melanism or leucism rather than albinism are not that uncommon. If its white it means the pigments did not develop, but only if the eye is pink, do we call it a true albino, if its just white its a leucanistic case; for melanism the opposite applies, it just means that the predominant pigment is black and that's that. Because the literature does not show cases of either does not mean they do not occur but that people do not report them thinking its not important.”

Previously we had never seen such a hornbill on our farm but I heard a report from Grootfontein where a black hornbill was seen in a town garden some time ago. Can anybody shed more light on this case?