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## Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

This edition has been edited 16,000 km from Namibia while I was in Alaska visiting our daughters and granddaughters. When we arrived in early March it was  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$  and the only birds I saw were hardy winter birds like ravens, redpolls and ptarmigan. Now it is Easter and the sun is shining, the snow is melting fast in the  $10^{\circ}\text{C}$  weather and Trumpeter swans, Canada geese and mallards are arriving into the snow-melt ponds. I have been out of touch with the Bird Club but I note that still our membership has not increased with the new year. Again I have to appeal for everyone to give out membership forms to people you know who are not members. How many of you have done this? The Club is slowly withering on the vine and it is frustrating for those of us who live somewhere other than Windhoek. We do not know what is going on with the Club. Are we perishing as a Club or not, that is the question? Certainly birding is growing worldwide and I would hate to think that we are not part of that trend.

At least I am still receiving articles for *Lanioturdus*, which means that there are still interested Bird Club members who want to communicate with their fellow members. As the article on Herero Chats shows us there is still plenty to be learned about our local birds. We have another chapter in the Paxton boat saga. He is still looking for volunteers (victims) to assist him as he tries to count birds on the various waterways of the north. One place he has not counted yet is the Orange River. Perhaps it is too tame without his usual challenges of crocs, hippos, bilharzia and UNITA soldiers.

## MIMICRY BY THE HERERO CHAT *Namibornis herero*

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I could not find any reference in the literature regarding mimicry by the Herero Chat *Namibornis herero*. However, I observed Herero Chats on three occasions, mimicking several other species of bird. In all three instances my attention to the presence of Herero Chats were drawn by their usual distinctive call. When they were not uttering their normal song, I heard them almost perfectly mimicking other species that occurred in the same area.

I had clear views through my binoculars on all three occasions while the birds were uttering both normal calls and mimicking calls. When they were not calling they hunted insects from their perches (Table 1). At both Onguati and Stinkbank two birds were observed about 30 m apart from each other. One bird called both normal and mimicked songs, while the second bird answered with normal calls. Only one bird was observed and heard at Davib-West.

The possibility exists that the mimicry heard at Stinkbank and Davib-West of Palewinged Starling *Onychognathus naborourop* is not mimicry at all, but part of its normal repertoire. Jensen & Jensen (1971) describe the contact call of Herero Chat as resembling the warbled calls of the Palewinged Starling and Rockrunner *Achaetops pycnopygius*.

The fact that mimicry by the Herero Chat had not been previously recorded, can probably be attributed to the fact that this enigmatic species is rather understudied. Most sightings of the bird are usually from people who do not have the opportunity to spend more time with the species, or are just satisfied when being able to tick it for their list. I spent ten minutes listening to two birds and 35 minutes with the third.

More intensive study will probably reveal that mimicry by this species is as common as it is with other chats.

Table 1: Observations of mimicry by the Herero Chat *Namibornis herero*

OBSERVATION	1		2		3	
	SPECIES	CALL	SPECIES	CALL	SPECIES	CALL
Species and calls mimicked	1. Rock Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> 2. Orange River Francolin <i>Francoelinus levaillantoides</i> 3. Glossy Starling <i>Lamprotornis nitens</i>	Trilled 'krreee'  'kibitele, kibitele'  'hurr-trreeu'	1. Sabota Lark <i>Mirafra sabota</i> 2. Bokmakierie <i>Telephorus zeylonus</i> 3. Palewinged Starling <i>Onychognathus naborourop</i>	Canary like notes  'bokmakiri-bokmakiri'  Churring and churring notes	1. Rock Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> 2. Redcrested Korhaan <i>Eupodotis ruficrista</i> 3. Greater Scimitarbill <i>Rhinopomastus cyanomelas</i> 4. Palewinged Starling <i>Onychognathus naborourop</i>	Trilled 'krreee'  'peep,peep,peep'  'wheep-wheep-wheep-wheep'  Churring and churring notes
Locality	Farm Onguati, near Karibib, Erongo Region, Namibia. Square 2115 DD		Farm Stinkbank, near Usakos, Erongo Region, Namibia. Square 2215 AB		Farm Davib-West, near Usakos, Erongo Region, Namibia. Square 2115 CD	
Habitat	Plain, with <i>Acacia</i> woodland, 1 km from a rocky hill.		Base of rocky outcrop, mixed <i>Commiphora</i> and <i>Euphorbia</i> shrubs and small bees.		Granite ridge, mixed <i>Acacia</i> and <i>Commiphora</i> woodland.	
Viewing distance	10 m		15 m		12 m	
Date	31 October 2001		7 November 2001		23 October 2002	
Time	12h15 - 12h25		11h40 - 12h15		14h30 - 14h40	

## References

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## CONCERN ABOUT PALM SWIFT HABITAT LOSS

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Why are palm trees being stripped of their old leaves? This new fashion like most fashions, is unnecessary (and ugly) but more importantly it also has the added disadvantage of being an environmental tragedy for the palm-loving swifts.

Windhoek is graced with a small number of large old palm trees of various types including *Washingtonia* palms (fan palms). Although palms are not indigenous to Windhoek, they have become an ornithological asset to the town since they attract swifts and the trees are considered to be aesthetically pleasing. As palms grow, older leaves die and form an attractive, dense protective covering around the palm tree's stem, similar to bark. This covering of dead leaves prevents dehydration of the palm stem and attack by diseases. Furthermore, this attractive 'petticoat' of dead leaves is home to one of Windhoek's wonders, the Palm Swift (windswael) *Cypsiurus parvus*. These beautiful birds along with Bradfield's Swifts *Apus bradfieldi* use these dead palm leaves as nesting and roosting sites.

Palm Swifts do not land to gather nesting materials, rather they gather nesting material on the wing that is floating in the air. With this material they fly in under the dead palm leaves. Clinging on to a dead palm leaf, swifts use their saliva to glue the nesting material onto the dead leaf forming a tiny nest. They

mate while clinging onto the leaves. Using saliva, the female glues each egg (she usually lays two) on the palm leaf and the nest. When the eggs hatch the baby palm swift then clings to the palm leaf until they are ready to fly. They fly off by dropping out from under the leaves and into the Windhoek sky. Palm swifts cannot take off horizontally, so without the dead leaves to cling and drop from even adult birds cannot use stripped palms.

If you have a moment spend some time watching a palm tree (with dead leaves still attached) and you will notice the swifts coming and going under the dead leaves. At sunset there is a surge of activity as the swifts come in to roost in the warmth of the dead leaves. Despite this incredible process, some humans feel the need to strip the dead palm leaves, leaving crushed eggs and young swifts on the ground. The adults are left without either a roosting or nesting site.

For the survival of the swifts, and the other creatures who live in these leaves I am appealing to everyone who has palms on their property, to landscapers and to developers to please stop the destruction to these birds. Please leave the palms with their dead leaves for the swifts.

## SUN ECLIPSE NAMIBIAN STYLE

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On 30 November 2002, together with the Osborne's we went for a trip to the Caprivi to experience the Solar Eclipse. We decided a long time ago to join them for this trip, and do some birdwatching in that area. Günther also wanted to do Tree Atlasing that Barbara Curtis of the National Botanical Research Institute had requested him to do. There were some squares that hadn't been done yet and he was going to get financial assistance. Who would say no to such an opportunity?