

# LANIOTURDUS

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Namibia Bird Club



since 1962

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**[www.namibiabirdclub.org](http://www.namibiabirdclub.org)**

## **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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## **Editorial**

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The plethora of public holidays in March and May certainly had an impact on several bird related activities in Namibia.

The Namibia Bird Club embarked on two major atlasing expeditions – one to the “far east” around Buitepos and one to the south around Maltahöhe. During these expeditions we managed to nudge the total number of pentads atlased in Namibia past the 10% mark – a truly remarkable achievement considering the number of active atlasers and the size of the country. Well done to all!

May was also the time of the traditional bird ringers’ get-together. This time it was decided to combine this esteemed occasion with the bird club excursion and in my humble opinion it was a resounding success. Due to the current drought the

number of birds caught was very low (but then most of us don’t come to the get-together to ring birds) but the variety was quite amazing. In the end, between the ringers and the atlasers we racked up over 130 species, quite a number for an area that in places looked as if it had been swept with a broom. I think this may well be a recipe to be followed in the future.

As we are entering the “slowdown time” of winter this may be a chance to reflect on the past summer and perhaps write down some of the interesting observations we made (much like the contributions by Günther, Neil and Eckart in this issue) and send them to this, your journal.

Keep birding!

## **Namibia Bird Club Kunene Trip – 22 to 30 August 2015**

Neil Thomson

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Unless otherwise stated all photographs in this report are © Delene van Dyk.

As Klein Windhoek moved into Saturday 22 August 2015 the lights went out and the power remained off until around 08h00. That day was the start of the Namibia Bird Club's trip to the Kunene Region and the power outage meant a delayed start to the trip for us. Gudrun still needed to print payment confirmations and I could not even get the vehicle out of the garage as the emergency manual lock on the electrically operated door was jammed.

A much delayed start saw us being the second last couple to arrive at Porcupine Camp west of Kamanjab where the group of fifteen in seven vehicles assembled. One noteworthy observation along the way was that of an African Hawk-Eagle feeding on roadkill. When the bird was disturbed by our vehicle and took off its crop was so full that it hung like a goitre below the extended neck. By the time we arrived Franz, Michael and Elke had already compiled a two hour atlas list for the camp pentad and had gone off to the west to atlas a virgin pentad there. One of the highlights on that pentad was the sighting of a Verreaux's Eagle.

Porcupine Camp that afternoon and early the next morning proved to be a great location for Namibia's near endemics with eight of these species – Hartlaub's Spurfowl, Monteiro's Hornbill, Damara Hornbill, Bare-cheeked Babbler, Rockrunner, Carp's Tit, White-tailed Shrike and Rüppell's Parrot being observed there – actually nine if you are one of those who considers Rosy-faced Lovebird to be a Namibian near endemic.



**Figure 1:** Hartlaub's Spurfowl



**Figure 2:** White-tailed Shrike

Then it was time to leave for Omarunga Lodge and Campsite at Epupa Falls. The road from Kamanjab to Opuwo is tarred but beyond Opuwo it is a gravel road which was not in great condition being corrugated and stony and where culverts were being built there were dust bowl detours. After about 185 km of this it was a pleasure to come around a hill in the barren landscape and find ourselves in the palm belt at the river. All arrived safely although Danie and Gertrud blew a tyre just a couple of kilometres short of our destination.



The first of the Kunene specials and a lifer for many, Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush, was present right in the camp. Good sightings were also had of a number of the species which are found in Namibia primarily along the northern river systems such as African Mourning Dove, Red-eyed Dove, African Pied Wagtail, Wire-tailed Swallow, Golden Weaver, Little Bee-eater, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Meves's Starling. We also saw good numbers of Yellow-billed Oxpeckers, a species we continued seeing frequently at various locations on the trip and Gudrun and I were both under the impression that these birds were far more numerous than they had been the last time we had been in the extreme north west of Namibia some years previously.



**Figure 4:** Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush

Part of the object of the trip was to atlas as many pentads as possible around Epupa and this was achieved on foot and by vehicle over the three days spent there with five full protocol cards and one ad hoc card being completed. On the Monday morning Michael and I drove south and managed to record about twenty five species in a very dry pentad while

on the Tuesday Gudrun and I did the pentad to the east of Monday's where we discovered surface water and found far more species including African Jacana, Blacksmith Lapwing and Three-banded Plover.



**Figure 5:** Yellow-billed Oxpecker

One afternoon at Epupa I observed an African Darter which was carrying a sizable fish come ashore on rocks in the river. I watched the bird as it maneuvered the speared fish off its bill into a position where it could toss it up to catch it and then swallow it head first. The darter then waddled to the edge of the water and immersed its head in the river and shook it. The bird did this three times and I can only conclude that it was washing its head as the bill had been blood stained after swallowing the fish.

Lodge manager, Harald Piek, informed us of recent Bat Hawk sightings at the lodge but three evenings of stake outs for this species, which I am starting to believe is only a figment of someone's imagination, proved fruitless.

Danie and Gertrud left the trip at Epupa and the rest proceeded to Kunene River Lodge near Swartbooisdrift for the next leg of the tour. Although I had taken a ten litre can of fuel with me I decided to get a bit more fuel in Okongwati where a local entrepreneur sells fuel – at a

price! – N\$ 18.00/litre! Needless to say I purchased only enough to ensure that I would have sufficient to reach Ruacana and still be able to do some atlasing en route.

On arrival at Kunene River Lodge we were greeted by Red-necked Spurfwowl on the lawns at the campsite – another lifer for many. The subspecies found there is the very attractive *Pternistis afer afer*. Another species frequenting the camp was Ashy Flycatcher which was also a lifer for some. Most spent the first afternoon there atlasing around the camp while Gudrun and I drove to atlas a new pentad a short distance to the west. At night the reeds along the Kunene River were roost to thousands of Chestnut Weavers, something we had also experienced back in August 2008.



**Figure 6:** Red-necked Spurfwowl - © Michael Houlden

The plan of action for Thursday was to travel to see the Angola Cave Chat in the Zebra Mountains some distance from the lodge and nine of us set off at about 05h00 in two vehicles with camp owner Pete Morgan and his assistant, Florian. Pete had told us that it was necessary to be at the site at daybreak when the birds were usually most active but potential disaster struck. First Florian, who was driving the lead vehicle, missed the turnoff and had to double back by which time the

second vehicle had taken the lead. After engaging four wheel drive to negotiate a donga the gear selector in the vehicle, dubbed “The Best 4 x 4 x Far” by its manufacturers, decided that enough was enough and refused to reengage a gear. This resulted in a lengthy delay as Pete had to return and institute running repairs. However did we manage before cable ties came onto the market? Having now personally travelled the route to the Angola Cave Chat site I am even more dubious of claims that it can be negotiated in small city cars.



**Figure 7:** Ashy Flycatcher



**Figure 8:** The road was too tough for the vehicle - © Neil Thomson

We eventually arrived at our destination considerably later than



intended but the weather was cool, overcast and moist and it was not long before the Angola Cave Chats were heard and seen. There were at least three birds present, possibly five. Fairly distant views were had from the bottom of the mountain before some of the group climbed partway up the scree slope to try to get closer to the birds. I elected to stay at the bottom with the spotting scope and I think that those of us who did this actually got the best sightings of the birds. This species was a lifer for all of us and Pete informed us that we were persons no's 210 to 218 that he knew had seen the birds.



**Figure 9:** Angola Cave Chat Habitat

After breakfast at the site we visited a waterhole in a riverbed which Pete informed us was the only water source for miles around. There we hoped to see Cinderella Waxbills but it was strangely quiet and devoid of birdlife, possibly due to the cool weather, although Bare-cheeked Babblers and Carp's Tits were seen. Pete then took us to Ehomba where Cinderella Waxbills were found in the vicinity of the spring – yet another lifer for most.

Our last day at Kunene River Lodge was spent atlasing and ringing. Uschi and I drove some distance to the east to atlas a new pentad while Gudrun attempted to catch birds near the

camp. Ringing proved to be very unsatisfactory with Vervet Monkeys making absolute nuisances of themselves, with the result that Gudrun was able to ring only four Meves's Starlings and a Laughing Dove. Uschi and I had more success atlasing and recorded forty seven species on our pentad including Red-headed Weaver which must be close to the western extremity of its range there.

After leaving Kunene River Lodge we went to the Ruacana Hydro Electric Power Station where ten of us went on a very interesting conducted tour. Franz, Michael and Anita first said they wanted to atlas the Hippo Pools area but it seems that the lure of another lifer proved too much for them and they went eastwards to coordinates given to us by Pete Morgan where Grey Kestrels had been seen. Their search proved unsuccessful and in the afternoon they went back to Hippo Pools while Gudrun and I atlased the area around Ruacana Town. We recorded fifty nine species without finding anything spectacular or particularly unexpected.

Suddenly it was the last evening of a very enjoyable trip. Yet another excellent evening meal was followed by a couple of bottles of bubbly and all the chefs were complimented for the excellent evening meals served throughout the trip. (Namibia Bird Club trips seem to be becoming culinary as well as birding adventures!) A good variety of birds was seen in the course of the trip including lifers for all. Thirteen pentads were atlased in full protocol format, seven of which were previously unatlasd and a number of other pentads were atlased in ad hoc format. Game proved scarce in the very dry areas we visited – I am aware only of sightings of a couple of



Damara Dik-Dik, a small herd of (presumably Black-faced) Impala, a solitary Springbok and three Kudu bulls. A number of crocodiles were, however, seen in the river – some of them sizable.



**Figure 10:** Kunene Crocodile

Early on the Sunday morning most were on their way home or off to other destinations with Gudrun and me, who had planned to spend an extra day there, remaining with Delene who was to link up in Ruacana with her husband who had been working in Angola. Our quest to find the Grey Kestrel and atlas the Olushandja Dam area that day is, however, another story.