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Editorial

We rely heavily on books such as Roberts VII, (often referred to as the “birders’ bible”), for distribution maps, biometric measurements etc. - but is the information in these reference books always correct? And, possibly more importantly, do we read it correctly? Mark Paxton’s observations on the tail length of the green/violet wood-hoopoes he measured at Shamvura (Lanioturdus 43-2) got me interested. My own records of the measurements of the southern masked-weavers occurring in Namibia which can be seen in this issue further stimulated this interest. While there are some very obvious mistakes in even the best of publications (the distribution map for malachite sunbird in Roberts VII is a case in point as is the distribution map for red-billed quelea in Roberts Field Guide – Chittenden 2007), some of these can probably be put down to editorial oversight and printers’ gremlins, but the

Namibia Bird Club Long Weekend at Okatjikona

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For the first time in a number of years the Namibia Bird Club organized a weekend outing. Perusal of old programmes indicates that at one time this sort of outing was held quite frequently but more recently it has largely been replaced by morning walks and day outings.

Heroes Day (26 August 2010) fell on a Thursday so by taking the Friday off participants were able to get a four day weekend. With Holger Kolberg's assistance the club was able to book the Okatjikona Environmental Education Centre at the Waterberg for the weekend. After a limited response from club members the invitation was thrown open to "birding friends" as well and a total of thirty two people descended on Okatjikona although some arrived late and others left early. The objectives of this outing were severalfold – to socialize with members and potential members, to do a bit of birding, to demonstrate and explain ringing and to provide new posters for the vulture hide on the plateau. The accommodation was basic although clean ablution facilities and a communal kitchen with a fridge, freezers, stoves etc were available and each group catered for themselves.

Due to the number of people participating there was no rigid programme and people were free to participate in morning and afternoon bird walks etc as they chose. We were fortunate to have Barbara Curtis along so those with an interest in trees and shrubs were able to benefit from her incredible knowledge of Namibia's flora. I chose to concentrate on ringing and managed to ring 69 birds of 14 species including several species I had not ringed this year and one ringing lifer (burnt-necked eremomela). Gudrun ringed 33 birds of 12 species a few of which, such as crimson-breasted shrike and golden-breasted bunting, were lifers for her too.



Extreme concentration is needed to get a rosy-faced lovebird out of a mistnet without shedding blood. Photo – Judy Fuller

Sue Harvey managed to cause a bit of consternation on returning from a walk by announcing that she had seen a Dickinson's kestrel. After some debate it was generally thought that this must have been a misidentification. An Ovambo sparrowhawk had been seen in the area the previous day.

The ringing highlight for most people was the capture of a pearl-spotted owllet which was called into a mistnet using a recording of the call on the Friday night. Many had not seen these tiny owls close up and a large audience gathered to watch the ringing. After ringing the bird I placed it on its back for a few moments and in typical owl fashion it just lay there perfectly still for the appreciative audience although glaring at them with malevolent yellow eyes. On the Sunday morning I recaptured this bird – this time in a snaptrap baited with a giant mealworm.



Pearl-spotted owllet. Photo – Christiane Maluche

On the Saturday morning a trip to the top of the plateau was undertaken under the guidance of Robert and Thomas from the education centre. Many of the party had never been on the plateau before and for a number of others it was the first time after a long interval. Our guides took us first to the bomas where the captured game is kept prior to relocation and explained the workings of the rhino boma with its heating devices to prevent the animals from succumbing to the cold in the event of a drastic drop in temperature as has happened elsewhere in the past. From there it was on to the dinosaur footprints and then to one (of seven) of the hides used for the full moon game counts. Unfortunately no animals were present and we moved on to the vulture hide where we put up a new poster on the plight of the Cape vulture. Unfortunately there were no vultures at the restaurant and, although some of the younger members of the party volunteered to lie down and play dead in front of the hide, the four African white-backed vultures seen soaring high above shortly afterwards were not in the least interested. As the “Take a Closer Look” ringing poster (partly sponsored by the Namibia Bird Club) had been posted in the hide I gave a short talk on the different rings and patagial tags used in Namibia to those present. We were also able to assist our guides in determining the differences between double-banded and Namaqua sandgrouse when a pair of the former was seen only a couple of metres from our vehicle.



Most of the group with “volunteer vulture bait” in the foreground – photo Elmarie Visser

Game was fairly scarce on the plateau (or perhaps just not visible in the thick bush) but we did see giraffe on two occasions, a solitary roan and a group of sable (although some of us saw only one of these magnificent antelope while others missed them completely) and Anja van Greunen saw the rear end of a rhino disappearing into the thick bush.

While we did not see any of the Waterberg “specials” such as coqui francolin and Bradfield’s hornbill some were convinced that they had seen both Meyer’s and Rüppell’s parrots but I can only say with certainty that I saw Rüppell’s. A reasonable variety of bush birds including Carp’s tit was seen and the highlight was probably watching a Verreaux’s eagle sailing effortlessly above the cliffs fairly close by.

Gudrun and I were able to ring a few of the less frequently ringed birds such as crimson-breasted shrike, white-browed scrub-robin, fork-tailed drongo and rosy faced lovebird together with a number of the more ubiquitous violet-eared, blue and black-faced waxbills, green-winged pytilias and golden-breasted buntings etc.

All in all I believe that the participants had an enjoyable, relaxing weekend and some must have learned quite a bit about birds, ringing and trees. However, perusal of some old issues of *Lanioturdus* indicates that the Namibia Bird Club has had at least two previous outings to Okatjikona and that the now very dilapidated hide at the waterhole near the centre was in fact built by the bird club. Perhaps the club can rebuild this hide at some time in the future.



Photo: Eckart Demasius