

LANIOTURDUS

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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 organise monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Water Care 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 the bird club's journal, *Lanioturdus* and outings and events are advertised on the club's website www.namibiabirdclub.org.

The Namibia Bird Club is not affiliated to any global or regional organisation 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.



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Cover photo Southern Red Bishop © Beate Schwippert

Namibian hardwood charcoal industry

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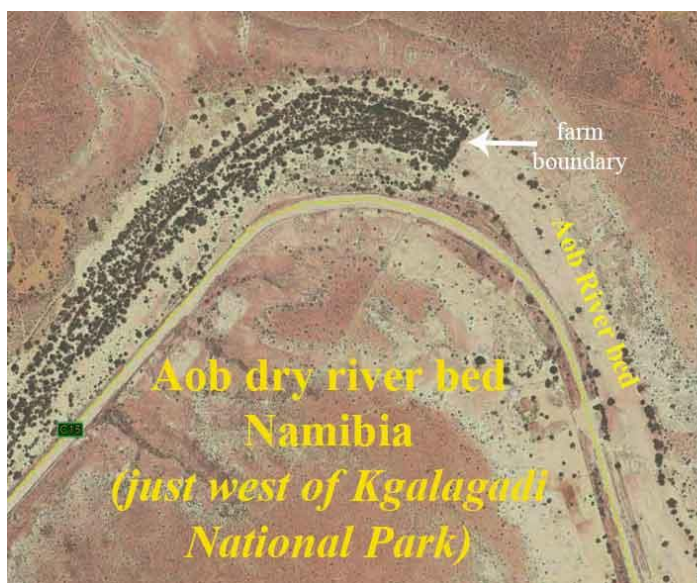
Giant Eagle-Owl and Southern White-faced Owl are just two species that are synonymous with the wooded river beds of the Kalahari region. Mature **river-bed** trees are an important habitat component for these two species, as well as other birds such as Sociable Weavers, in which to breed.



In eastern Namibia, just west of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, these wooded river-bed systems have slowly, over the past few decades, become smothered by the highly

invasive exotic *Prosopis*, or Mesquite trees (actually three different species present in that area). These aggressive invasives outcompete indigenous *Acacia* species, in, and along, the southern Namibian drainage lines. As an outsider to the region you may be forgiven for thinking that it's the exceedingly slow-growing indigenous Camelthorn, *Acacia* (now *Vachellia*) *erioloba* trees that are being removed for charcoal, but, not so. Also, I'm told that the Namibian charcoal industry is controlled to make sure that this doesn't happen, so converting the invasives to charcoal, they are slowly restoring some of these regions to their original state. Many people also get an income from harvesting the mesquites.

The two Google Earth images below are good examples of how dense some of the Mesquite tree stands had become in south eastern Namibia.





A pristine section of the Auob river bed just west of the Kgalagadi National Park.



A bag of Namibian charcoal made from 'hardwoods'. I somehow think they have missed a good marketing ploy by not **boldly** stating on the bag that the charcoal is derived from the invasive Mesquite tree!

My recent visit to the south-eastern regions of Namibia (just west of Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park) revealed the extent of mesquite tree inundation. The photo below shows mature camel-thorns left behind after the 'clean-up' operation in that particular area.



In 1912, the German botanist, Kurt Dinter, imported *Prosopis chilensis*, to what was then South West Africa to provide shade and fodder in the arid southern parts of the country. This proved to be a disaster as they create

impenetrable thorny thickets, depriving local vegetation of water and space, and also produce copious amounts of pollen to which many people are highly allergic.



Mesquite tree removal from the Auob River drainage line just west of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.



Charcoal in the making.

Although sections of drainage lines are now devoid of large camel-thorns, regrowth without competition from invasives, will ensure a better chance of these drainage lines returning to their original state.

Who would have thought that these magnificent semi-desert regions would be shackled by tree invasive problems like we have in moister eastern regions of southern Africa?

May the exceedingly slow-growing camel-thorn, and their avian dependents like Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Southern White-faced Owl and Sociable Weaver remain dominant features of arid southern Africa for us to all enjoy.

I thank John Mendelsohn (RAISON, Research and Information Services of Namibia) for supply of information.