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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 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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Nesting boxes, Honeybees and Lesser Honeyguides

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Fifty bird nesting boxes were put up at Farm Regenstein, some 10 km SSW of Windhoek, during the course of 2013 (Figure 1). Thirty-eight boxes were affixed to trees on the Regenstein raised plateau at an altitude of about 2,000 m asl. The remaining twelve boxes were attached to trees below the raised plateau at about 1,850 m asl. The Regenstein site is part of a larger experiment to determine whether food supply or cavity nest sites are limiting to the population sizes of different cavity-nesting bird species and to study succession and dominance in these species over time. The nest boxes are set up in clusters: four boxes each about 50 m apart, then, about 500 m away, three boxes about 50 m apart, then 500 m away two nest boxes and, a further 500 m, one box. This pattern is repeated five times.

Figure 1: Nest box attached to a *Ziziphus mucronata* tree at Regenstein. This box was occupied by an African Grey Hornbill (see insert).

The boxes were all checked on 13 April 2014. Of the 38 boxes on the plateau, 24 (63%) were occupied by swarms of the Honeybee *Apis mellifera*. None of the 12 boxes below the plateau had bees (Table 1). Almost 80% of the boxes occupied by bees involved two or three boxes within a cluster, i.e. two or three different swarms of bees occupying boxes in close proximity to each other. These findings suggest that (a) on the Regenstein plateau, the availability of natural sites for bees to establish hives limits the size of the bee population and that the food supply available to bees would support a significantly larger population, and (b) below the Regenstein plateau, natural sites for bees to establish hives are not a limiting factor.

Table 1: Nest boxes occupied by Honeybees at Regenstein

Cluster	**No. of boxes per cluster occupied by bees**		
	Options	**On raised plateau**	**Below raised plateau**
4	4 of 4	0	0
	3 of 4	1	0
	2 of 4	3	0
	1 of 4	1	0
	0 of 4	0	1
3	3 of 3	2	0
	2 of 3	1	0
	1 of 3	0	0
	0 of 3	1	1
2	2 of 2	1	0
	1 of 2	1	0
	0 of 2	1	2
1	1 of 1	3	0
	0 of 1	1	1
Total occupied boxes		24	0

Twelve Lesser Honeyguides *Indicator minor* (Figure 2) were seen during the course of checking the nest boxes. This is by far the largest number of Lesser Honeyguides that we have ever seen at one location in a day. All were seen in the immediate vicinity of nest boxes occupied by bees. The food of the Lesser Honeyguide includes beeswax, adult, pupal and larval Honeybees, other insects, their larvae and pupae. They hawk insects, investigate crevices in bark and holes in trees and glean insects from leaves and branches (Hockey *et al.* 2005). Although they are reported as solitary (Hockey *et al.* 2005), four sightings were of two birds each and four where of single birds.

Figure 2: Lesser Honeyguide showing its grey head, short stubby bill with pink base, olive wings and back, and white outer tail feathers. The local subspecies, *I. m. damarensis* has no or only very faint malar stripes (see Chittenden *et al.* 2012).

There was on average a Lesser Honeyguide per every two nest boxes occupied by bees (or 0.5 honeyguides per box occupied by a swarm of bees). The honeyguides were not, however, evenly distributed between the bee-occupied boxes (Table 2). At clusters with three boxes occupied by swarms of bees, there were on average more honeyguides per swarm (0.67) than at clusters of two swarms (0.5 honeyguides per swarm) and single swarms (0.2 honeyguides per swarm).

Table 2: Relationship between numbers and clusters of Honeybee swarms and Lesser Honeyguides					
Number of bee swarms per cluster		**Number of Lesser Honeyguides**			
		Pairs	**Singles**	**Total**	**No./swarm**
3 swarms	3	3	0	6	0.67
2 swarms	5	1	3	5	0.50
1 swarm	5	0	1	1	0.20
Totals swarms	24	8 birds	4 birds	12 birds	Mean = 0.5

From these observations it is clear that Lesser Honeyguides are strongly attracted to hives of Honeybee swarms and particularly to sites of multiple swarms. When the nest boxes were put up, and on subsequent visits before large numbers of bees had established themselves in the nesting boxes, no Lesser Honeyguides were seen, despite bird atlasing intensively concurrent with the nest box work.

It would be interesting to establish whether there are fewer Honeybees below the Regenstein plateau than on the plateau. If there are fewer bees below the plateau then one could assume that their population size is limited by food availability. If bees are as abundant below as on the plateau, then one could assume that the reason they have not occupied any of the nesting boxes below the plateau is because there is an abundance of natural sites for bees to establish hives, e.g. in cavities in trees and in cracks and crevices in rocky cliffs around the plateau.

It would also be interesting to monitor Lesser Honeyguide numbers at Regenstein in relation to the number of swarms of bees over time. Colour-ringed birds would help establish whether they were resident at a swarm or cluster of swarms, or whether they moved between swarm clusters.

References

Chittenden H, Allan D & Weiersbye I. 2012. *Roberts – Geographic Variation of Southern African Birds*. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.

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