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EDITORIAL

This is the final edition of *Lanioturdus* for 1997 — the fourth of the year and an achievement for all those people who contributed to the journal over the past year. Although we have seldom exceeded 40 pages in any one edition we feel that the value of the magazine has increased in that we are keeping our members informed and hopefully fostering more interest in birding in Namibia as a whole. Many thanks to all the authors and artists who submitted material for the year and I hope that the articles will keep on rolling in to make 1998 as successful as 1997.

The summer heat is upon us and with the first migrants having already arrived, you should all be looking forward to some excellent birding over the coming holiday period. This may be a particularly interesting year — the predictions of the weather boffins is that *El Nino* is likely to negatively influence the rainfall patterns in the country. This in turn will have a major effect on the distribution and breeding of birds over the next couple of months. I encourage all of you to get out there and look at what's going on — keep field notes on your observations and make some comparisons with what you know of previous years. This applies equally to common as well as rarer species. How much do we really know about doves in this country? I have noticed that in Bushmanland and at Aris, near Windhoek, that the numbers of Namaqua Doves is highly variable both within and between years. I suspect the same thing of Laughing Doves which seem to disappear at certain times of the year. Keeping basic notes and records can tell us so much about the birds we take for granted (many of which are surprisingly poorly studied). Your notes and records do not have to take the form of detailed scientific observations — casual and incidental observations are also valuable. Collect information, put it together in the form of an article and send it to *Lanioturdus*. Anyone can do it and I encourage of all of you to try!!!

On behalf of the Namibia Bird Club Committee, I would like to wish you all a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Good birding in 1998 and let's hear from you.

predict occupation rates to decline as the number of boxes increases. Neither prediction seems to hold water at Daan Viljoen, suggesting that other factors play important roles in determining the distribution and numbers of hornbills. Since one of the species, Monteiro's Hornbill, is a Namibian endemic, sorting out answers to these kinds of puzzles has obvious lessons for conservation practices in Namibia. The more we know about birds, including behaviour which may seem trivial or bizarre, the more we will understand of what matters to them and their continued healthy existence.

Further reading

Kemp, A.C. 1995. *The Hornbills*. Oxford University Press, New York.



NOTES ON MISDIRECTED FEEDING BEHAVIOUR

Christian Boix Hinzen
PO Box 8952, Bachbrecht, Windhoek

During early 1996, whilst collecting breeding behaviour notes on hornbills at Daan Viloen Game Reserve, I had the chance to witness a rather interesting and thought-evoking feeding event between a foraging Yellowbilled Hornbill (*Tockus flavirostris*) male and a sealed-in, incubating Grey Hornbill (*Tockus nasutus*) female.

I was busy recording male feeding frequencies at this particular nest box, when during one of the male's foraging trips I recognised an approaching Yellowbilled Hornbill male belonging to a breeding pair nesting 200 m downstream. He was foraging on the ground making slow progress towards the Camelthorn where the Grey Hornbill nest box was located. An emperor moth fled its path and sought safety in the groove that remains between a nest box and the tree.

The hornbill followed in close pursuit, scrambled up the tree and fished the moth out of the groove and then flew onto the nest box carrying the moth in its bill and proceeded to bash it. At this point the sealed-in Grey Hornbill female having carefully interpreted the activities taking place outside and certain that her mate had landed on the box, began to claim her share of food.

With the prey in his bill, and surrounded by the quivering calls from a begging female, the Yellowbilled Hornbill frantically inspected the nest box until he detected the protruding beak and source of the begging shrieks. Attracted by these stimulating shrills, the Yellowbilled Hornbill bent over and fed the moth to the Grey Hornbill female. However, after doing this he ignored all further begging shrills, seized another moth from the same groove and flew off towards his own territory where minutes later I saw him feeding his own partner.

When I commented on this to John Mendelsohn, he mentioned having recorded this behaviour in a similar instance when a male Yellowbilled Hornbill was observed provisioning Grey Hornbill chicks (*Lanioturdus* 1990). But the 1996 breeding season was not over yet, and by June 1996 I had the chance to witness several other similar events amongst hornbills.

During mid-February (1996) I observed a male Yellowbilled Hornbill feeding a cricket to a neighbouring incubating female of Monteiro's Hornbill and, in April during the chick rearing period, I recorded a female Redbilled Hornbill feeding a brood of Monteiro's Hornbill chicks at the nest box — and not just once — on three different occasions!

Finally, in mid-May 1996, a pair of Monteiro's Hornbills which had their clutch predated by a Nile monitor (*Varanus niloticus*), decided to join their neighbours down the road at the next nest box. This pair helped raise five chicks that were not their own progeny, and to which, presumably, were completely unrelated.

I commented these sightings to Prof MA du Plessis who recalled once seeing an adult female hornbill being fed by an adult male Redbilled

Woodhoopoe at the nest in the Eastern Cape (RSA). Coincidentally, the first time I witnessed this behaviour was also in the Eastern Cape where I saw a provisioning interaction between an adult Brownhooded Kingfisher (*Halcyon albiventris*) which had just caught a grasshopper and fed it to a fully fledged, begging Redbilled Woodhoopoe (*Phoeniculus purpureus*) youngster. This happened outside the breeding season of either species.

Having observed this misdirected feeding interaction between different species, amongst unrelated individuals of the same species, inside and outside the breeding season, suggests that these species don't need to be swimming in a "hormonal soup", like most do during the breeding season to behave in such a manner. Expressing a provisioning behaviour is a matter of becoming exposed to the right stimuli.

But is it not strange that such begging stimuli can be powerful enough to momentarily "cloud" mate and progeny recognition abilities. Surely being able to discriminate and distinguish who is begging for a feed must be advantageous to the feeding individual (parents). Because spending your day feeding females or chicks in which you have no genetic investment must be energetically expensive, especially if you have your own female or chicks to tender.

Nevertheless, cuckoos, honeyguides, widow-finches, etc., have long exploited the inability of many species to overcome these recognition shortcomings, and rely on the response evoked by a begging chick to have other parent feed their offspring. Even in those few species that have learnt to discriminate, discrimination takes place between their own eggs and parasite eggs, but there is hardly any evidence on nestling rejection. The evolution of an adaptation that allows a species to assess the identity of the individual who is evoking the provisioning response, appears to be non-existent.

Maybe, and given the apparent accidental nature of most of these encounters, the main force preventing misdirected feeding behaviours in nature is just the relatively low probability of these encounters taking place.

OSPREYS AT FRIEDENAU DAM

CJ Brown

PO Box 6612, Aussspanplatz, Windhoek

On Sunday morning 2nd November 1997, while lazily flicking a fly for reluctant bass, I saw an adult Osprey circle low over the hill across the narrow tongue of water I was fishing, near the north end of Friedenau Dam, Windhoek district. The bird circled a few times and then swooped down to plunge into the water about 30 m from me. It emerged a second later, flapping vigorously to lift itself and a bass of about 25 cm out of the water. The bird flapped to a dead tree some 200 m away, where it settled and started to eat its catch.

While watching the Osprey feed, a shadow passed over me. Circling above were two more Ospreys, one adult and one immature. They thermalled up until they were almost out of sight, then circled for about 10 minutes before starting a gentle glide towards the south end of the dam, where they disappeared. The perched bird meanwhile continued to feed. It was not disturbed by a troop of baboons passing under its tree, nor by a pair of Fish Eagles passing high overhead and calling. The Osprey was still slowly feeding some two hours later when I left the dam.

I have seen a single Osprey on almost all my visits to Friedenau Dam in the summer months. This, however, is the first occasion on which I have seen more than one bird.

