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EDITORIAL

The publication of this copy of *Lanioturdus* has been considerably delayed and this copy covers the June, September and December 1999 editions. It will immediately strike you that this is probably the least substantial copy of the magazine for a long time. We have a problem – for some reason 1999 seems to have represented the low point of everyones birding and ornithological careers – the articles and other materials have just not come in at all this year.

The success of the magazine and the Club as a whole depends on member participation. The committee recognises that most members are passive for the most part and choose to go their own way for most of their birding. However, we can't rely on just a few people to keep us going all the time. We need new members, new activities and new vision for the future. This is really a plea to you to get more involved in the future and to help the committee keep the Club going. If we are unable to keep bringing *Lanioturdus* out on a regular basis we are in real trouble.

On the positive side of things – the Club in conjunction with the Namibia Nature Foundation and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, is planning to start up a number of new projects as well as revive a number of older ones, including Raptor Road Counts and some form of atlassing in the future. We will probably put out a special edition of *Lanioturdus* in the New Year giving details of each of the projects.

A wonderful festive season to all of you – and good birding.



will have a metal ring below a dark green ring on the right leg, and a dark green ring only on the left.

BIRDING NONSENSE

While on a birding trip recently one of my clients came out with this entertaining limerick on seeing his first Kori Bustard. The origin of the verse is not known.

*The Bustard's a fortunate fowl
With minimal reason to growl
Escaping, you see
Illegitimacy
By the grace of one fortunate vowel*

CHRISTMAS PENGUINS AND PELICANS

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The 1998/99 holiday season had its fair share of African Penguins and White Pelicans brought to the SPCA in Swakopmund.

Five penguins were rehabilitated. One was an adult that had been oiled during the Apollo Sea oil spill off the Cape Coast years ago, and had been successfully rehabilitated and released after that disaster. He was found on the beach unwilling to go back to the water and refusing to eat. After a few days he started a moult, which explains his reluctance to get wet and to eat. (Penguins remain on land and fast, living off their fat reserves, during a moult.) A second bird moulted from juvenile into adult plumage during his stay. The remainder were juveniles which were exhausted and underweight. They were fattened up and all were released near Luderitz.

Three pelicans were brought in, but unfortunately one had to be euthanased when a maggot-infested wound was found extending into the peritoneal cavity. The second one was only a few weeks old and had to be kept till he fledged and was able to fly. The third was a newly fledged bird which was found wet, hypothermic and weak, apparently after having been blown from the bird platform north of Walvis Bay. Both were successfully released, have been seen since, and are apparently doing well.



OBSERVATIONS OF VULTURES AT DOMESTIC STOCK LAMB CARCASSES

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Many farmers in Namibia are of the opinion that vultures are responsible for small stock lamb mortalities, especially during drought conditions. The vultures in question are the Whitebacked *Gyps africanus* and Lappetfaced *Torgos tracheliotos* Vultures.

Information was obtained from a farmer that vultures were observed killing sheep lambs and devouring them on a farm east of Rehoboth. As a result of this information, observations were conducted over a period of four days (2/12/1998 to 5/12/1998) to confirm this tendency.

According to the farmer the mortalities from vultures were so high that he had to kraal the lambs during the daytime while the ewes were released into the camp to graze. During the observation period, ten ewes with lambs were

put out to graze in a camp approximately 800 m x 1000 m in size close to the homestead at 08h00 on the 3/12/1997. The sheep and lambs were then left in the camp overnight. The following morning (4/12/1997) various vultures were observed and one Lappetfaced landed at 10h45 in the camp (see table below). The observer arrived five minutes later and found the Lappetfaced Vulture approximately 20 m from the sheep ewe. The ewe was standing at the carcass of the half eaten lamb. According to the condition of the carcass, it was estimated that the lamb must have died during the night. There were also clear signs of a scuffle, with jackal spoor imprints clearly visible. The next morning (5/12/1997) vultures started landing at 08h30 in large numbers. The observer arrived at the scene two minutes later and found 35 Whitebacked and four Lappetfaced Vultures at a carcass of a Steenbok. The area was searched for clues, and spoor which could possibly have been cheetah or dog were found in the vicinity.

The Whitebacked and Lappetfaced Vultures are virtually exclusive carrion eaters (Mundy, Butchart, Ledger & Piper, 1992; Maclean, 1993; Pickford, Pickford & Tarborton, 1994). The literature does however indicate that Lappetfaced Vultures were observed occasionally killing the young of Springbok, Thomson's Gazelle and "hare", while Whitebacked Vultures were observed preying on baby Springbok. Mundy *et al.* (1992), however, emphasises that there are no known records of Lappetfaced Vultures preying on domestic stock.

Although the camp in which the ewes and lambs were kept was supposedly "jackal-proof", the farm labourers acknowledged that holes did exist under the fence. The fact that jackal spoor as well as possible feline spoor were observed around the various carcasses suggests that predators were responsible for the deaths. The many inconsistencies of the farmer regarding the predatory behaviour of the vultures as well as the inability of the farmer to differentiate between vultures and eagles and the belief that bat-eared foxes also prey on lambs, suggests that vultures were possibly not responsible for the deaths of the sheep lambs. During the observation period it can, with relative accuracy, be stated that the Lappetfaced and Whitebacked Vultures were not responsible for the domestic stock deaths. It must however be stated that this issue needs further research to verify the

predatory behaviour of vultures.

The following table indicates the various times that vultures were seen over the camp area during the observation period.

Observations of vultures over the vicinity of the camp

Date	Time	Altitude	Number	Species	
2/12/1997	16h30	Ground	6	Whitebacked	
3/12/1997	09h05	High	4	Whitebacked	
	10h47	High	2	Whitebacked	
				1	Lappetfaced
			Low	1	Lappetfaced
4/12/1997	11h50 - 13h30	Various	9 - 20	Whitebacked	
	09h00	Medium	4	Whitebacked	
	09h24	Various	9 - 22	Whitebacked	
	09h49	Low	2	Lappetfaced	
	10h45	Low - Lands	1	Lappetfaced	
	12h00	Low	1	Lappetfaced	
	15h00	High	2	Whitebacked	
5/12/1997	08h30	Low - Lands	35	Whitebacked	
			4	Lappetfaced	

References:

Mundy, P. & Butchart, D. & Ledger, J & Piper, S. 1992. *The Vultures of Africa*. Acorn Books and Russel Friedman Books, Randburg, South Africa.

Maclean, G.L. 1993. *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa*. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, South Africa.

Pickford, P & Pickford, B & Tarborton, W. 1994. *Southern African Birds of Prey*. Struik Publishers (Pty) Ltd, Cape Town, South Africa.

SHORT NOTES

Lesser Kestrel Falco naumanni

Mark Boorman reports a Lesser Kestrel found by a fisherman on his boat out at sea was brought to Keith Wearne in November 1998. It was ringed and released from his garden. This is the first ringing record for this species