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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.



time of ringing, have long colour-rings on the left and metal only on the right. These new colour-rings are bi-layered with an alpha-numeric code etched onto them that can be read through a good spotting scope.

Please send details of sightings to:

Prof. Phil Hockey, Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Fax: +27 21 650 3295; e-mail ocp@botzoo.uct.ac.za.

Please provide details of date and precise locality, as well as of the ring combination. Additionally, if you know the location of any high tide oystercatcher roosts in Namibia (other than those in the salt pans at Walvis Bay and Swakopmund), this would also be extremely valuable information.

OF HAEMATOPUS MOQUINI & MAL DE MER

Sandra Dantu
P.O. Box 1445, Swakopmund

Mark Boorman and I went to Possession Island in early April 1999 to catch, ring and sample the blood of African Black Oystercatchers as part of Phil Hockey's African Black Oystercatcher conservation programme.

The project has been active in the Republic of South Africa for a few years, but this was the first opportunity to kickstart it in Namibia. One of the aims is to determine where juvenile birds disperse once they leave their natal areas. It was initially thought that the dispersal areas were not more than 100–150 km from the natal site. This theory was turned upside down when Mark and Tony Tree mist-netted a bird in Swakopmund that had been ringed as a chick in Mossel Bay. We have since seen a number of colour-ringed birds from the East and West coasts of South Africa at Swakopmund Guano Works and nearby shoreline, at Walvis Bay Oyster Farm and at the bird platform north of Walvis Bay.

While waiting in Lüderitz for the weather to allow sailing to the island we had a chance to do ringing work in a breeding colony of Swift Tern on

Shark Island. The colony was mixed with a breeding colony of Hartlaub's Gull, and a small breeding colony of Crowned Cormorant.

We found that the terns were not breeding synchronously. Some birds were still incubating eggs, and the chicks ranged from freshly hatched to almost fledged. There was also a range of leg colours from completely yellow to mottled yellow–black to completely black. This did not seem to be an age- or size-related characteristic. Also noteworthy were breeding adults that did not show a full black breeding cap.

After a four-day wait we eventually set sail for Possession into the teeth of a howling south-wester and waves the size of skyscrapers. I was later told that they were "only two-metre swells". However big they were, I was in no state to appreciate my first sightings of Whitechinned Petrel and Blackbrowed Albatross.

Apart from being a breeding site for oystercatchers, Possession is also home to a number of small breeding colonies of African Penguin, Cape Gannet, Swift Tern, Hartlaub's and Kelp Gulls, Crowned Cormorant and Whitefronted Plover. There are also resident groups of Yellow Canary, Cape Wagtail and Cape Sparrow. Here we also saw Swift Terns breeding before the appearance of the full breeding dress.

The oystercatcher chicks proved quite difficult to find and catch on the rocky shores. We spent many hours watching areas we knew had chicks in them, to no avail in many cases. When instructed by the parent's alarm call to go down, they do exactly that and don't budge again. They are cryptically coloured, go to ground under stones, rocks or overhangs or onto narrow ledges, and become all but invisible.

The technique for processing these chicks has been demonstrated to Sea Fisheries personnel on Possession, and hopefully the project will continue each breeding season.

We are now eagerly awaiting the arrival of juvenile African Black Oystercatchers from Possession Island here at the central coast. These birds

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

Sandra Dantu
P.O. Box 1445, Swakopmund

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

P.L. Cunningham & A.I. Cunningham
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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