

Namibia Bird Club



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# LANIOTURDUS

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## Editorial

The symposium and dinner to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Namibia Bird Club have come and gone. I am very pleased to be able to say that our members attended these events in numbers and that we had over seventy people there (including the invited speakers). The symposium went off without any real problems – none of the speakers overran his allotted time slot and on the technological front the laptops and the beamers communicated with each other.

There will be a special edition of *Lanioturdus* incorporating the papers presented so I will not go into detail here. Suffice to say that all the talks were at layman's level, all the feedback we have had has been positive and that we have had a number of people enquiring when we will be presenting another symposium – the answer to that one is simple – not before we have again accumulated sufficient funds.

Many people were able to obtain the software necessary to commence atlasing thanks to Arnold van der Westhuizen's efforts. SABAP2



Cape Siskin



Protea Seed eater



Greater Double-collared Sunbird

While we did not catch large numbers of birds we did manage to catch a number of species

we had not ringed before and Graham and I were able to recommend that Alan be granted a ringer's license which was duly issued. Those ringers who did not take up Alan's offer of free accommodation in return for ringer training have now missed out.

We would like to thank Alan for the hospitality and accommodation and his wife, Anja, for preparing our evening meals.

### **Owling or Finding Owls**

Eckart Demasius

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All photographs in this article are by Eckart Demasius

I find camp birding a very rewarding form of birding. Firstly, birds there are generally used to people and their noises and thus more approachable which is especially beneficial for photographing birds. Secondly, camps, this also includes lodges, are usually surrounded by healthy vegetation with large trees. Hence it does not come as a surprise that I find most of my owls in camps.

The literature is of the opinion that the Spotted Eagle-Owl is the most common owl, followed by the Barn Owl. My personal experience differs greatly from this, only twice have I seen Spotted Eagle-Owl in the wild, once in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and once in Etosha past Sueda.





In urban areas however, I have been more successful with Spotted Eagle-Owls. The first one I had was at my newly built house in Windhoek where it sat on the roof next to the chimney trying to be friends with it – maybe this was a case of mistaken identity. In Swakopmund I once saw them sitting on the roofs of houses in our neighbourhood. My last urban sighting was at Nonidas where a Spotted Eagle-Owl with two juveniles is currently residing.



My most common owl is the Pearl-spotted Owlet which is easily located if one follows its call; alternatively it can be “called up” by play back of its call. This is something that should be done with caution as it can stress birds unnecessarily and I have found that in camps this seems to have been overdone and the owls by now all seem to know the specific Guy Gibbon call and very often do not react at all. This also applies to other species.



Another advantage that comes with camps and lodges is that staff members are usually well informed about the whereabouts of owls and are happy to point them out to birders.

The Southern White-faced Scops-Owl is known to breed in the Nossob and Twee Rivieren Camps in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. When I am on my camp walks there I never need to ask for their whereabouts as the staff voluntarily point them out to me; even the tractor driver came to a halt just to point out a Southern White-faced Scops-Owl.



In Halali they also breed in the tall Mopane trees on the eastern side of the camp. Ask the security guards - for a tip they will gladly point them out to you .....



.... and if you ask really nicely they will also show you the well camouflaged African Scops-Owl which is usually around the restaurant building or the ablution blocks of the camping area.





Every time I see an African Scops-Owl I am amazed at their ability to camouflage themselves against the barks of different trees....



....and at my inability to see them without assistance from camp staff or security guards.



For the past two years the Barn Owl has made its appearance near the Halali office building in one of the large Mopane trees .....



....and a year later two juvenile birds were sitting closely together comforting each other.



Verreaux's Eagle-Owl is known to breed in the big Omumborongbonga tree at Okaukuejo. However, I have also seen this owl at Halali, at the waterhole, where it had a nest far off in a south-westerly direction.



At Okaukuejo the loud shrieking calls of the juvenile owl announces its presence in the



Omumborongbonga tree and if you look carefully you will find it sitting there.



And one can get really lucky, as I did once, when the Verreaux's Eagle-Owl was hunting at the waterhole at night and it perched close to the wall surrounding the waterhole; close enough to get a photograph even with a small flash on the camera.



Photographing owls has another big advantage; they usually sit still at the same place for hours. This came in very handy when I located an African Barred Owlet at Shamvura while I was in the swimming pool. I had time to fetch my camera and still get some rather nice photographs of the owlet.



Undoubtedly, my biggest owling surprise was experienced where one would least expect to see an owl, neither in a camp and nor at a lodge, but beside the Walvis Bay Lagoon!!

We were returning from a good day's birding at the inlet works when on our return journey we encountered a Marsh Owl sitting next to the little road through the salt pans. No one would have believed me had I not had my camera with me to deliver the proof thereof.



Reference:  
Tarboton W & Erasmus R: SASOL Owls and Owling in Southern Africa, 1998, Struik Publishers, Cape Town 8001