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EDITORIAL

This is my first issue as editor of *Lanioturdus* and by reading the articles you may think I have taken the opportunity to monopolise the issue to publish everything I have done over the past several years. I do admit that my quest for material has spurred me to finalise several papers. But it seems that a stiffy disk with four articles, I sent to the previous editor, Chris Hines, over a year ago, got lost in the post. I have included these although the one on flamingos is dated information.

Good rains have fallen over most of the country and the birds are responding by breeding and the migrants are getting fat on the insects. Everyone should be seeing new birds and hopefully will report on the vagrants, local migrants and oddities.

When Chris met with me, over a beer at Joe's pub, to hand over the editor's job he said the hardest part of this job would be trying to get people to put to paper their observations, adventures and studies. Once again the editor appeals to all the members to please send in your articles so we can get our journal back on a four-times-a-year schedule. I would like to start a section of the *Lanioturdus* for visitors' comments, trip reports, etc. If any members have visitors or bird-watching clients please ask them to send us a short summary of their trip. I am sure that we would like to know what visitors are seeing and how their experience was in Namibia.

PESTICIDE AND WILDLIFE POISONING TRAINING WORKSHOP

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We attended a workshop presented by Prof Gerhard H. Verdoon and Tim Snow from the POISON WORKING GROUP, GIFSTOFWERKGROEP (PWG) on 23 & 24 January 2001, in Windhoek. Gerhard Verdoorn is the Director of the Poison Working Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, South Africa. He carries a Professorship/Doctorate in Synthetic Organic Chemistry and Tim Snow, a member of the PWG, works for Department of Nature Conservation Kwazulu-Natal at Spioenkop Nature Reserve.

The workshop was open to Namibian government authorities, NGOs and private individuals. Because the workshop was poorly attended by members from the Bird Club we have copied the programme for your information.

1. Welcome and Introduction by Ms N. Haindongo (Registrar of poisons and pesticides, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development)

2. Test your knowledge

A short questionnaire was given to attendants to test their knowledge on pesticides and wildlife poisoning – the results were poor.

- What does LD50 mean?
- Is it legal to kill a jackal with strychnine?
- What bird disappeared from Namibia due to poisoning?
- Which compound is more toxic: carbofuran or parathion?
- Which pesticide should be used to kill bats?
- What is the active ingredient of Nema-cur?
- How would you treat a cat that was poisoned by Curaterr?
- What is the most toxic compound known to mankind?
- What is the emergency help line number of the Poison Working Group?
- Who is allowed to buy pesticides in Namibia?

- Which product would one use to kill the neighbour's dog?
- Which three groups of birds in Namibia are most threatened by poisoning?
- How does a Brown Hyena kill a sheep?
- What is Compound 1080?
- How many people die of pesticide poisoning in Southern Africa every year?
- How long does DDT stay active in the environment?
- What product would you use for flies in a dairy?
- What is the best poison for sparrows in the garden?
- How much Temik will kill a woman of 60 kg?
- What is a pyrethroid?

Can anyone answer these questions – if you cannot, ask us or Liz Komen, although we did not know most of the answers ourselves?

3. Wildlife and human poisoning problems in Southern Africa

4. Technical background of pesticides

a. Toxicology

How poisonous is a poison? If a poison kills something, it is not “environmental friendly”. Poisons could however be “environmental compatible”.

b. Environmental threats and impacts

DDT – is low toxic. One has to swallow kilograms of it to die. However the problem with it is that its half-lifetime is 18 years. It takes 18 years to break down to the compound DDE, then to DDD which has the problem of not breaking down further. We all know of the decline of raptors all over the world because of the previous misuse of DDT. The only decent DDT obtainable is from the USA and Sri Lanka. The DDT the Namibian Government is currently using for control of mosquitoes, is obtained from India. It is of poor quality, containing more DDD than anything else.

c. Metabolism

How poisons are taken up into and stays in the metabolic system.

d. Products

Looking at various products available on the market.

5. Pesticide labels and interpretation

Read the label and apply as prescribed. Do not mix poisons or overdose to get a "better" effect. Follow the instructions to the letter.

6. Responsible use of pesticides: empty container disposal

Rinse the container at least 3 times with water, drain rinsing water into applicator tank.

Burn or dispose of empty containers: Do not use for other purposes!

7. Pesticide reference books and working session

We worked through the reference books supplied, looking at various scenarios to decide which poisons to use. One scenario Dr Verdoorn described: Just before he left for Windhoek a farmer phoned him with the following problem: A field of lucerne was in flower, which meant it had to be mowed within the next few days. It however was infested with caterpillars. Which poison should he use? The problem was the 300 White Storks at the edge of the field. Dr Verdoorn advised him on a certain poison but told him to try the following first: Try to drive the storks towards the caterpillars. If that does not work, get the storks out of the field early the next morning, apply the poison onto the lucerne and keep the birds out for the day. The following day the birds could be allowed back because by then the active ingredient of the poison would have broken down. The result? No poison applied, money saved, birds saved and well fed. The farmer managed to drive the storks towards the caterpillars and they had a big feast.

With these books one can decide on a poison for virtually every problem, taking into consideration the toxicity of each one. These books are available on request and with costs – at least every farmer should have and make use of them.

8. Wildlife poisoning investigations & reference sheets

How to react, what to do and how to look for signs if one comes upon dead animals which might have died by poisoning. On appearance of where and how a dead animal is found one can come to conclusions as to from what this animal might have died. There also are reference sheets on to what to do

when sick animals are found: Raptor Poisoning Reference Sheet; Predator Poisoning Reference Sheet; Game Bird & Waterfowl Poisoning Reference Sheet; Garden Bird & Owl Poisoning Reference Sheet; Crane Poisoning Reference Sheet. These sheets are only a guideline and a qualified veterinarian should always be consulted.

9. Law enforcement

Offenders should be charged, but the Poison Working Group advises to first convince people not to abuse the use of pesticides and to pass the correct information to the user.

Every pesticide for sale on the shelves should be registered e.g. Reg. No. L4284 Act 36/1947. If that is not the case, the poison is illegal. Poisons may also not be decanted into smaller containers for sale. Offenders in this case are nurseries, we have been informed by participants of the workshop. They buy plant pesticides in bulk and sell them in small containers to the public without any accompanying instructions for use, precautions, etc.

10. Problem animal management

How do you identify the stock thief? A booklet is available with descriptions of predators and the way they kill their prey.

The sensible and responsible management of problem animals was dealt with. We heard about the existing scenario and what methods are available. We were shown a detailed method for getting rid of problem animals, as recommended by the Poison Working Group. To summarise this point: success is measured in real terms; not in the number of problem animals killed, but in the amount of reduces in loss of stock. Doses of strychnine for use for various problem animals were recommended.

11. Conclusions

It has been decided that a subsidiary of the South African Poison Working Group or an independent organisation will be established in Namibia. Liz Komen of NARREC and Judy Storm from the NNF are working to establish the group. Dr Verdoorn will be available for advice.

To conclude the report on the workshop, some data to think about:

Table 1. Known Vulture Poisonings in Namibia 1995–2001

Area	Date	Numbers and species
Usakos	May 1995	86 Lappet-faced, 8 White-backed Vulture
Solitaire area	Aug 1995	12 Lappet-faced Vulture
Mangetti	Sept 1996	2 White-backed, 6 White-headed Vulture
Waterberg Plateau Park area	March 1997	3 Lappet-faced, 1 White-backed Vulture
Helmeringhausen	Jan 1998	1 Lappet-faced Vulture
Etosha	Sept 1998	5 Lappet-faced, 20 White-backed Vulture
Dordabis	Feb 1999	3 White-backed Vulture
Keetmanshoop	June 1999	13 Lappet-faced Vulture
Etosha boundary	Aug 1999	1 White-backed Vulture
Grünau	Sept 1999	1 Lappet-faced Vulture
Okakarara area	Dec 1999	6 White-backed Vulture
Maltahöhe	April 2000	1 Lappet-faced Vulture
Maltahöhe	June 2000	2 Lappet-faced Vulture
Mariental	Feb 2001	100+ White-backed Vulture, 1 Martial Eagle

Remarks on Table 1 by Gerhard Verdoorn, past Chairman Vulture Study Group: Namibia is a disaster zone for vultures in Southern Africa. These episodes represent the tips of the iceberg since learning about such episodes require that someone finds the poisoned birds and the matter is reported.

We have attended this workshop in our own interest, as nature-concerned people – especially towards birds. The attendance was disappointing. *[Editor note: The Namibia Bird Club was informed about the workshop but the notice did not get into the preliminary annual calendar and Tineka and Gunther were the only members to attend.]* Attendants were mostly from Ministry of Environment and Tourism, AFRICAT Foundation, Cheetah Conservation Fund, Namibia Nature Foundation, NARREC, Conservancies, Otjiwarongo Veterinary Clinic, a representative of the Crop Producers from Grootfontein and a few farmers in their own capacity.

The 2-day workshop in Windhoek was followed by a morning lecture to farmers and other interested persons in Otjiwarongo on 26 Jan.

In the mean time we have made our own investigations and found the Agricultural Veterinary Product Association of Namibia (AVPAN) which is the Namibian subsidiary of AVCASA, a global organisation that takes care of



the use poisons and pesticides world-wide. We made contact with to Mr Herman Louw at AGRA, who is the present chairman of AVPAN. AVPAN's board includes Animal Health, Environmental Health, Animal Feed & Crop Protection as Ordinary Members, and amongst others the Namibian Agricultural Union and NARREC as Associate Members. We foresee that the creation of POISON WORKING GROUP – NAMIBIA (PWG-N) could well fit into this category. We will be invited to the annual general meeting of AVPAN during April 2001. However, it is felt that the PWG-N should be an independent organisation to mostly care for our threatened birds in Namibia.

For any more information on this matter, or requests, please feel free to contact the following us at (067) 232000 (tel) or Liz Komen (Co-ordinator, Namibia Animal Rehabilitation and Research Education Centre (NARREC)) at 061–264409 (tel).