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## Editorial

Tim Osborne

The dry season is truly upon us with the east winds howling in the interior and the berg winds affecting the coast. News reports state that the winds at Lüderitz were reaching 140 km/h. I wonder if there were any birders there to look for vagrants to the coastal desert? On our farm we have hardly seen any Queleas or Chestnut Weavers in months. I wonder where they have gone, in search of food and water I presume. The rodent high we have been experiencing for the past three years crashed and now the effects are evident in the form of missing birds. Gone are the Barn Owls, Black-shouldered Kites, Marsh Owls and even the Pearl-spotted Owls are scarce.

For those of you with Internet access you should check out the website for SAFRING. Go to [www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/safring\\_index.htm](http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/safring_index.htm). The site has life histories of all the birds that have been ringed. Each week more histories are added to the site. If you have ever wondered how many African Hawk-Eagles have been ringed and where you can check it out. It might surprise you how many have been ringed since 1948. There have been 244 birds ringed and with the start of computerized records in 1975 Namibia has the most birds ringed at 76. There have been 10 recoveries with the longest distance being 795 km and oldest time being 22 years, 9 months and 21 days.

It is nice to see more articles being submitted by members from the coast. Lots of interesting birds with some out of place like Black Kites, Flufftails and breeding Gray's Larks. I have requested the annual Chairman's and Financial reports for those of us who could not attend the AGM and I will put them in the next edition. I, like many of the outlying members, wonder if any of the outings publicized in the Bird Call were attended, as there have not been any reports submitted to the *Lanioturdus*. These are important to write up because those of us who cannot attend meetings in Windhoek and outings close to Windhoek would like to know what is being seen and more about club activities.

## National Ringing Training Courses

Dieter Oschadleus  
SAFRING, Avian Demographic Unit  
University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701  
dieter@adu.uct.ac.za

SAFRING is holding two courses to which ringers, trainees and interested bird-watchers are invited. The courses will run for one week each. There will be daily ringing to provide lots of experience, as well as detailed lectures. The courses will be similar to previous courses.

15-21 Nov 2003, Lamberts Bay

The focus will be on tern ringing at night, led by tern experts Tony Tree and Mark Boorman. There will also be opportunities to ring seabirds with Marine and Coastal Management, and fynbos birds on nearby farms.

Course cost: R500 per trainee for the week; R40 per day for qualified ringers

Social: additional cost to be announced.

Self-catering accommodation can be shared with other attendees (book with Sue Kuyper) or make own booking in hotel, guesthouse or camping at a central number (027 - 4321040).

3-9 Jan 2004, Wakkerstroom BLSA Wetland Centre

This course will focus on mistnetting in reedbeds, grasslands, and forest.

Course cost: R550 per trainee for the week; R40 per day for qualified ringers

Social: R65 pp on Saturday night, 3 Jan 2004.

Accommodation: BLSA self-catering dormitories cost R80 per night (two beds), first come basis. Camping and other accommodation is available in Wakkerstroom (details available on request).

More details on programs, what to bring, course material, etc will appear on our web at: <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/safring/notices.htm>

REGISTRATION (for both courses and accommodation): Sue Kuyper  
Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701.  
Tel: (021) 650 2423 - Fax: (021) 650 3434  
email: sunshine@adu.uct.ac.za

## Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta* at Epupa Falls, Namibia

Dirk Heinrich  
PO Box 6213, Windhoek  
dheinrich@az.com.na

While I was at Epupa Falls on the Kunene River I caught and ringed a Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta* on 6 June 2003. I set up a mist net along the river between some bushes where there were small water pools. I also caught a Malachite Kingfisher *Alcedo cristata* in the same net.

In Namibia the pygmy kingfisher has not been recorded west of the Kongola River although there is a record from the Kavango River in Botswana. The bird is an intra-African migrant that breeds in eastern southern Africa, from Zambia,



Pygmy Kingfisher, 6 June 2003, Epupa Falls, Namibia

Zimbabwe and Natal, South Africa during the summer months. It then migrates as far north as 2-3°N in Congo and Kenya. It is usually gone from southern Africa by March and winters records are very rare (Clancy, P. A. 1997. Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta*. in The Atlas of Southern African Birds. Vol 1. Non-passerines. Harrison, J.A., Allan, D.G., Underhill, L.G., Herremans, M, Tree, A.J., Parker, V., & Brown, C.J. (eds), pp 648-649. BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg).

The Pygmy Kingfisher is distinguished from the Malachite Kingfisher by the following features that can be seen in the photograph. The blue on the crown in the Malachite extends down to the eye, in the Pygmy the eyebrow line is orange between the eye and the crown. Also the Pygmy has violet ear coverts that are lacking in the Malachite.

### **Sociable Weaver roadside nest densities in southern Namibia**

HD Oschadleus <sup>1</sup>, BM Dyer <sup>2</sup>, RJM Crawford <sup>2</sup>, & L Upfold <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town  
Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa;

[dieter@adu.uct.ac.za](mailto:dieter@adu.uct.ac.za)

<sup>2</sup> Marine and Coastal Management, P/Bag X2, Roggebaai, 8012

In January 2003 we drove to Lüderitz and Walvis Bay for a seabird survey. Along some road sections we counted all Sociable Weaver *Philetairus socius* nests.

### **Methods**

On the drive from Cape Town to Lüderitz we looked for the first Sociable Weaver nest. On subsequent drives (Lüderitz to Walvis Bay, and Lüderitz to Cape Town) we counted and recorded all nests seen during daylight hours, up to a distance of about 500 m from the road on each side. For each nest the following items were recorded: the odometer reading to the nearest kilometer, the side of the

road, the site (acacia, aloe or telephone pole), and the size of the nest in 3 size categories (small, medium, large). Two nest masses in a single tree were counted as one large nest.

### **Results**

#### **Cape Town - Noordoewer – Keetmanshoop – Goageb - Lüderitz**

On 19 January 2003 we drove on the N7 from Cape Town to Vioolsdrift at the South African/Namibian border. No Sociable Weaver nests were seen in South Africa along the N7. From the border we continued on the B1 to Keetmanshoop, and then the B4 to Lüderitz. The first nest seen was in an acacia 138 km north of the Namibian border post Noordoewer (36 km before Grünau; just beyond the C10 turnoff to Karasburg). Other nests were not counted but seven small Sociable Weaver nests on telephone poles were noted between Keetmanshoop and Goageb. At some of these, Sociable Weavers were seen flitting or perching on the telephone wire.

#### **Lüderitz - Aus - Helmeringshausen – Maltehöhe - Walvis Bay**

On 21 January 2003 we drove from Lüderitz to Walvis Bay, via Aus, Helmeringshausen and Maltehöhe. We left Lüderitz at about 15h00 and continued the survey until it was dark (24 kms beyond Maltehöhe). We covered 391 km and counted 83 nests (Table 1). From Lüderitz the habitat was initially sandy and rocky desert. At about 80 km inland, short grass starts appearing. At about 107 km from Lüderitz the first crow nest on a telephone pole was seen. The first Sociable Weaver nest was seen 7 km before Aus, where acacias started appearing in a slightly hilly area.

One nest was seen in an *Aloe dichotoma* tree, 5 km after Aus. For the next 45 km on the Aus-Helmeringshausen road (C13) no nests were seen. Then the arid plains turned into a long narrow valley. Between the hills on either side were a large number of acacias supporting a relatively high density of Sociable Weaver nests (0.85 nests/km, Table 1). One acacia contained a large Sociable Weaver nest as well as many Whitebrowed Sparrow-weaver nests. There was one section that had seven nests on separate telephone poles, even though there were suitable trees nearby. These nests were all clumped within about 2 kms of each other.