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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.

the covey was comprised of the adults, a juvenile male and three chicks about 10 days old. The adults drank water at our birdbath. On 10 Oct. the whole covey drank at the birdbath. On the 16 Oct. when we saw the covey one chick was missing. At the time the female was chasing the juvenile male way from holes she was digging for the smaller chicks to feed in.

Part of the feeding behaviour of these francolins is that one member of the covey is always on guard duty. The guard perches on a rock above the rest of the flock and does not feed until relieved by another bird. We once saw a 3-week-old chick relieve its mother and proudly perch on the rock watching the surroundings.

As of 11 March 2001 the covey was still together and composed of an adult male, adult female (ringed), and three immature males, one from the first brood and two from the second brood.

Double brooding is rare in francolins in Africa and has only been suspected in Grey-winged Francolin *Francolinus africanus* but not proven (Little, Crowe and Barlow, 2000). It is thought that only those birds that lost their eggs would re-nest since juveniles stay with their parents through the breeding season (ibid.). The accidental catch and ringing of the female Hartlaub's Francolin was fortuitous as it afforded us the proof that the female had nested twice in the 2000 breeding season. Although the female we saw with two broods in 1999 was unmarked we strongly suspect it was the same bird with we ringed in 2000.

References

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RAPTOR RESEARCH CONDUCTED WITHIN ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

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We have been colour ringing nestling vulture chicks in Etosha National Park since 1998. The object of the research has been to determine how far the fledged birds wander from the park and if they have a direction to their dispersion. Each bird was given a unique colour coded series of rings on the legs. The birds also have a metal numbered ring bearing the inscription "inform SAFRING, University Cape Town". African White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus* had blue over metal rings on the right legs and either 2 or 3 colours on the left leg in 1998 and 1999. During 2000 the birds were ringed with metal over blue over yellow on the left leg and three colours on the right leg. The colours used are yellow, white, blue, red and green. During the rains the colours may appear less distinct due to dirt. The Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotus* had metal over red over blue on the left leg and 3 colour combinations on the right leg in 1998 and 1999. In 2000 they had metal over green over blue on the right leg and 3 colour combinations on the left leg.

Table 1. Number of vultures ringed by year in Etosha National Park.

Year	Lappet-faced	White-backed	White-headed
1998	9	16	0
1999	11	30	1
2000	17	19	1

If vultures are seen at a carcass either within the park or elsewhere in Namibia, we would like to know if any colour ringed birds are present and the total number of vultures at the carcass along with the date and location. If birds are found dead we would like to have the metal ring returned to us but not the dead bird. We would like to know the date the bird was found and the location. If the ring is returned to us we will send the details to SAFRING. We will

continue to ring vultures within the park over the next several years. The scope of our research will probably be expanded in light of the problems with the Indian White-backed vulture *Gyps bengalensis* (see "Indian vultures in trouble" in this issue).

We are conducting a second research project involving Tawny Eagles *Aquila rapax*. We are investigating adult eagle survival and young eagle dispersion. To do this we need to find Tawny Eagle nests, ring and collect a few of drops of blood from the chicks. Tawny Eagles are territorial and nest in the same area, often in the same tree year after year. We extract DNA from the blood, in collaboration with Prof Dr Michael Wink at the University of Heidelberg in Germany. By comparing the band sharing coefficients within the DNA obtained from eaglets in year 1 to DNA obtained from eaglets in year 2, we can tell if both parents are the same, or if one has changed or if both are new parents. The advantage of using microsatellite pairing DNA and band sharing coefficients is that adult birds do not have to be caught and tagged to determine if one or both are replaced in subsequent years. DNA only needs to be obtained from nestlings. From this data we can then calculate the survival rates of the adults. We are also ringing the chicks with a SAFRING metal ring so if young eagles are found dead, we will be able to determine how far and in what direction they disperse.

We are currently conducting the eagle research within Etosha National Park but would like to expand the project over a wider area to see if there are differences in survival rates. We will be working with colleagues in Zambia who will collect data for us and we would like to find eagle nests in the commercial farming areas south of the park. If any club members or farmers know of nesting pairs of Tawny Eagles please contact us and we will come to ring the birds and collect a blood sample. Tawny Eagle pairs in Namibia begin displaying in the nesting area during April and are easily seen perched near the nest tree. In May the female lays eggs and birds are harder to find at this time. In June the chicks have hatched and then should be large enough for us to ring.

We can be contacted at the following at the address in the header or phone Wilferd at 067-229854 during the day or 067-229812 at night, or Tim Osborne at 067-333408 anytime.

INDIAN VULTURES IN TROUBLE

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A calamity of epic proportions has affected the vultures of the Indian subcontinent. According to studies of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) there has been a decline of 96% in the Indian White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) and 97% in Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) at Bharatpur between 1985 and 1999. This information was given at the International Seminar on the Vulture Situation in India, 18-20 Sept 2000.

A summary of the meeting highlights [*lowlights are more like it. Ed.*] are given below.

The details are that two of India's commonest *Gyps* vultures have been almost wiped out, almost certainly by a disease. They are now listed as Critical in the Red Data Book. Signs of the suspected disease have been recently seen in Pakistan and Nepal and if the suspected disease can spread to other *Gyps* vultures it may spread through populations in central Asia, Middle East, Africa and Europe. The Bombay Natural History Society is working with laboratories in India and a pathologist from the Zoological Society of London to identify the cause and possible actions in India.

Baselines and monitoring are urgently required in other *Gyps* range states to identify the spread of the disease.

Extent of the decline:

- a. The problem was highlighted when studies by BNHS (Prakash) showed 96% decline in Indian White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) and 97% in Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) at Bharatpur between 1985 and 1999.
- b. In April-June 2000, BNHS repeated surveys (funded by the Ministry of