

CONTENTS

VOLUME 31(3), September 1998

EDITORIAL	1
POLLARD, CJW. Dune Lark drinking water	2
POLLARD, CJW. Lesser Blue-eared Starling in Mahango	3
PAXTON, M, <i>et al.</i> A weekend excursion to the Chobe River	4
LUDWIG, T. Easter weekend on Tsutsab	12
SHORT NOTES	13
KAESTNER, PG. Roadside birding in the far north	15
FRIEDRICH, GR & MG. Raptors on our rounds	18
TREE, AJ. Highlights of a seven-week visit to Namibia	21
PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES	
In search of field trip leaders	27
Vulture Watch Namibia	28
Update on the Namibian Tree Atlas Project	30

EDITORIAL

This copy of *Lanioturdus* is made up almost entirely of trip reports and observations made during trips around the country. This is encouraging in that it is clear that people are getting out and watching birds – and much of the country is getting covered. The information given in these articles is non-scientific for the most part, but important none-the-less. In Peter Kaestner's article on the North of the country, he reports the first record of Blackfaced Lovebird from the Caprivi for close on ten years. Tony Tree's article gives a brief account of an American Black Skimmer seen in Walvis Bay in February – a first record for Africa. Mark Paxton's account of breeding pelicans in the Chobe area is the first in many years. These articles are largely reports of observations given in a generalised way, but their value in putting important information into print cannot be stressed enough. The point I want to make here is that *anyone* can do it. You don't need scientific training, a degree in journalism or any birding credentials. In this sense I would like to encourage people to join the Club's outings and activities, write them up and contribute to the process of developing the Club.

With regard to outings and activities, the Club Committee as a whole would like to thank Daphne McGivern for acting as our activities co-ordinator over the past couple of years. Daphne put in a tremendous amount of work, and the success of our programme was in a large part due to her inputs. We wish the McGivern family well in Cape Town. We are now looking for a new co-ordinator – anyone interested?

I would also like to thank Carole Roberts for her inputs into *Lanioturdus* over the past year and for volunteering to put the December edition together. I will be away in Australia and the Netherlands until January 1999 and Carole will be handling the magazine. Please submit all contributions directly to her via e-mail at carole@dea.met.gov.na or through the Club's postal address.

remarkably distinctive bird. I believe that this is the first record of this rare species in Namibia in modern times, even though Dodman saw them only a few kilometres north of the Zambezi on the Zambian side of the river.

On the way back to Rundu, I did not add many birds to the list, but I did see a super herd of elephants in a water hole just west of Kongola. As it got dark, we had our third flat tyre of the trip and changed the wheel to the wails of the Fierynecked Nightjar. Our second night at the Sarusungu Lodge in Rundu was pleasant, with both Fierynecked Nightjars and Barred Owlets serenading us to sleep. In the morning my usual dawn walk yielded a nice Kurrichane Thrush in the hotel's gardens and several riverside birds along the Okavango. Friday morning, we took off early, so as to get back to Windhoek by midday. All in all, it was a superb trip to an exciting part of Namibia.

RAPTORS ON OUR ROUNDS

GR & MG Friederich
PO Box 207, Grootfontein

Over the past few months we have been fortunate to have had some good views of raptors while doing our rounds on our farms in the Grootfontein area. We would like to share them with other members of the Bird Club.

Pale Chanting Goshawks are commonly sighted on Driehoek, Stilhoek 823, Goab, Gorooab-East 294 and Ebenezer 836. Although we have not found the nest, we believe that there is at least one breeding pair based here. During August/September '97 we saw an immature bird on Stilhoek 823, and since June this year we have seen another immature on a regular basis. Sometimes the bird has been together with its parents, but since mid-August, we have seen it more on its own and have even witnessed an attempt by the youngster at catching his dinner.

On our way to Tsumeb, at the clearing of a gravel pit next to the road, an adult PCG was sitting on a fence pole. Another was perched further away

on a tree. The immature was hopping around the rocks and bushes next to the road, less than ten metres away, totally ignoring us. We reversed back. He was hopping around, flying off and coming back again in search of something. Then we saw what he was after: a Slender Mongoose making evasive actions between the rocks. In Clive Walker's *Signs of the Wild* it states that the Slender Mongoose is prone to attack from raptors – we left the PCGs alone while to allow the youngster to try his luck with this one.

We also have a resident and breeding pair of African Hawk Eagles. On 8 August this year, we found them feeding a chick in a nest which we can observe from the house. The spotting scope is a great help.

This year, we first saw evidence of an attempt at breeding during the Bird Club outing to the farm in April. We saw them on a nest which they used to raise their chick late last year – during August. We thought that they might be on time this year but then the confusion started. We began seeing the birds on the new nest too, actually sometimes on both nests.

When we first noticed one of the birds feeding the chick it was midday. We thought that the chick must have just hatched because last year we found that the birds returned to the nest only at sunset. However, using the spotting scope we realised that the chick was not that small anymore – it still had fluffy, white down but black feathers were starting to develop on the wing coverts. It was quite mobile, moving around on the nest. It was, however, still too small to be left unattended – that is why the mother is with the chick most of the time.

Later on in the month (22 August) Torsten Ludwig was visiting and we had another close look at the nest during late afternoon. The parents were away at the time – we had seen them flying around, obviously looking for prey. We could not get a decent sight of the chick, but just as we were leaving we saw both parents approaching, flying low, one of them carrying a Francolin-sized item in its talons. This time the chick was left alone to feed on the prey brought to him. The sun was just setting and it was too dark to get a good view.



A few days later we got a good look at the two parents. Although we could not decide whether there was a difference in size between them, one bird appears to be of the dark form, as it did not have the white markings at the neck, while the other is a paler form.

Another exciting sighting for us recently has been the Giant Eagle Owl. One afternoon in mid-August, I was loading sand on the lorry on farm Gorooab-East. I had taken only the binoculars – I know my birds here (sic.). There is an unused pit nearby where birds always come to take water. In the vicinity are some tall *Hyphaene* palms, as well as huge Marula trees. In one Marula is an old raptor nest, smallish, I have never seen it occupied. But out of curiosity I had a look at it: empty. I started sweeping the other trees... A huge owl was looking at me from its perch in the palm tree. I cautiously moved around to get a better view: huge, overall grey and finely barred.

I hurried home with my heavy load, and raced back with Tineke and the spotting scope, hoping to find the owl still in its place. We were lucky. There she was in full presentation: the Giant Eagle Owl. With the scope we could make out the pink eyelids.

The last time we had Giant Eagle Owl was on 1 September last year. It was at a different location, but also during late afternoon just after sunset. Two birds were perched on a dead Tambotie tree. We saw them on two consecutive days. This year perhaps we will be lucky enough to find their breeding site, too.

HIGHLIGHTS OF A SEVEN-WEEK VISIT TO NAMIBIA IN EARLY 1998

AJ Tree
PO Box 211, Bathurst 6166, South Africa

It was some 27 years since I left Namibia to return to university and the changes evident over that time were great and most towns visited were almost unrecognisable. But that is the price of progress I suppose.

My main intention was to spend most time at the coastal wetlands of Sandwich Harbour, Walvis Bay and Swakopmund with greatest emphasis on studying terns and waders while also fitting in some ringing where this was possible. I also intended to fit in visits to the Fish River Canyon as guests of Canon Lodge and to the Okavango River at the invitation of the owners of Ndhovu Safari Lodge.

The journey through to Ariamsvlei was pretty uninspiring but I was surprised at how readily many of the culverts under this newish road had been colonised by Little Swift, while the Sociable Weaver was having a ball colonising as many telephone poles as possible. As is often said, food is not always a controlling factor in bird populations but rather the availability of suitable nest sites. My wife and I stayed at the Canon Lodge from 17 to 20 January on the way north, but the country was dry and barren and the birdlife not what one would expect if there had been recent rains. Although we scoured the area thoroughly we could find only a paltry 27 species of birds. The most interesting from my point of view were the rather uncommon Cinnamonbreasted Warbler and the Blackheaded Canary, both of which were additions to the locality list, as well as getting to grips with Dusky Sunbird once again.

From there we moved slowly north (we were towing a beach buggy!) and spent the night of the 20/21st at Gross Barmen. I was particularly interested to see if the European Swallow was still using the reedbeds as a nocturnal roost and was not disappointed to find some 5 000–6 000 birds, plus many thousands of Redbilled Quelea, flying in in the evening. The reedbeds