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Rarities and Interesting Observations

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I usually list the records submitted for this column in chronological order but due to an event of some magnitude I will start with the MEGA RARITY that showed up in Windhoek in early January 2015. A report was received from Irish birder, Oscar Campbell, that he had observed a Red-throated Pipit at Avis Dam in the late afternoon of 07 January 2015. Prior to this report there had been only one unsubstantiated record for this species in Namibia. A search of the area the next afternoon failed to find the bird but it was found the day thereafter which prompted a twitch with birders flocking in from South Africa to see this bird, only the sixth record of this species in southern Africa. Red-throated Pipit had never been photographed in Southern Africa before. As fate would have it there was a scheduled Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam on 11 January 2015 which meant that a number of members got to see the bird. The bird was still present at Avis Dam on 29 January.

Figure 1: Red-throated Pipit © Eckart Demasius

Figure 2: Red-throated Pipit © Trevor Hardaker

Next a few slightly older sightings reported by Otto Schmidt. On 01 October 2014 he and his party saw Madagascar Bee-eaters near Kunene River Lodge. It seems that this is a very early arrival date for this migratory species. On 04 October 2014 they observed a Verreaux's Eagle-Owl hunting in the heat of the day in Mahango Game Reserve. This owl had caught a Green Wood-Hoopoe which is a somewhat strange prey item as these birds give off a very unpleasant odour as if to say "I am not good to eat". On 05 October near Ngepi Camp they saw (in poor light) what they all believed was a Eurasian Bittern. Unfortunately this sighting could not be confirmed.

Eckart Demasius found a Pacific Golden Plover on the Walvis Bay lagoon just south of the municipal bungalows on 15 November 2014.

Figure 3: Pacific Golden Plover © Eckart Demasius

The presence of Woodland Kingfishers at Monte Christo, well south of their recognized range, for the sixth successive summer was confirmed in the course of the Namibia Bird Club's outing there on 23 November 2014. Also seen on this outing were a Grey Plover, a very uncommon species away from the coast, and a Greater Painted-Snipe.

Great White Pelican Methuselah is still around! This bird, which was ringed on 30 December 1972 by the late Dr Hu Berry on the guano platform between Walvis Bay and Langstrand, was seen again by Mark Boorman in the vicinity of The Raft in Walvis Bay on 30 November 2014. This bird is now around forty two years old!

Phil Palmer, who led a birding tour to Namibia in November/December 2014, reported a number of very interesting sightings. These included White-backed Duck at Gammams Water Treatment Works (see Lanioturdus 47(4)) on 23 November 2014, Great Snipe feeding on both sides of the road near Nauchas on 24 November 2014, American Golden Plover at Walvis Bay on 27 November 2014, European Honey-Buzzard at Rietfontein in the Etosha National Park on 01 December 2014, Collared Flycatcher at the toilet block between the pan viewpoint and Springbokfontein in the Etosha National Park on 02 December 2014, Wattled Crane at Andoni, Saddle-billed Stork 2 km north of Andoni and Lesser Spotted Eagle in the Stinkwater area all on 03 December 2014 and another European Honey-Buzzard at the Waterberg Plateau Park on 04 December 2014. The Collared Flycatcher and Great Snipe sightings are of particular interest as Collared Flycatcher has not been atlased anywhere in Namibia in SABAP2 while Great Snipe had not been recorded in SABAP2 anywhere in southern Africa.

Figure 4: Collared Flycatcher © Phil Palmer

Figure 5: Great Snipe © Phil Palmer

An atlasing trip to Okahandja on 07 December 2014 produced sightings for Gudrun Middendorff and me of Greater Painted-Snipe and White-winged Tern at the sewage ponds. Both of these are uncommon species in central Namibia. Also of interest

was the sighting of a small group of Red-billed Firefinches in riverine vegetation just to the south west of the town.

Eckart Demasius reported five Steppe Eagles at Erindi Private Game Reserve on 08 December 2014.

Figure 6: Steppe Eagle © Eckart Demasius

The Namibia Bird Club's last outing for the year to the Gammams Water Treatment Works on 14 December 2014 produced a number of interesting sightings. In addition to the White-backed Duck first reported there about two months previously (see Lanioturdus 47(4) and above) good sightings were had of Osprey, Purple Heron and at least five African Black Ducks. The highlight was, however, the sighting of a Giant Kingfisher. I have not been able to find any records for this species in central Namibia and the nearest SABAP2 records seem to be about 590 km away on the Okavango River near Rundu, 610 km away on the Orange River and 645 km away near Ruacana on the Kunene River. Where this bird has come from is a complete mystery.

Figure 7: Giant Kingfisher © Jennie Lates

Also on 14 December 2014 Eckart Demasius photographed an Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove in his Swakopmund garden. The possibility of this being an escapee from an aviary cannot be ruled out but the bird was approximately 330 km away from the nearest SABAP2 record just to the south east of Otjiwarongo.

Figure 8: Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove © Eckart Demasius

On 21 December 2014 Gudrun Middendorff and I saw no fewer than eight Hamerkops at an almost dry dam on Farm Teufelsbach between Windhoek and Okahandja. Also of interest at this "puddle" was a single sub-adult Yellow-billed Stork, an uncommon species in central Namibia.

Franz Klein reported a Peregrine Falcon near the guano works at Mile 4 on 22 December 2014. There have occasional records of this species at the coast in recent years.

A morning outing to Otjivero Dam on 23 December 2014 produced sightings of at least five Pink-backed Pelicans, a Glossy Ibis and a Greater Flamingo for Eckart and Birgit Demasius and me but the highlight was another inland sighting of a Grey Plover (see above).

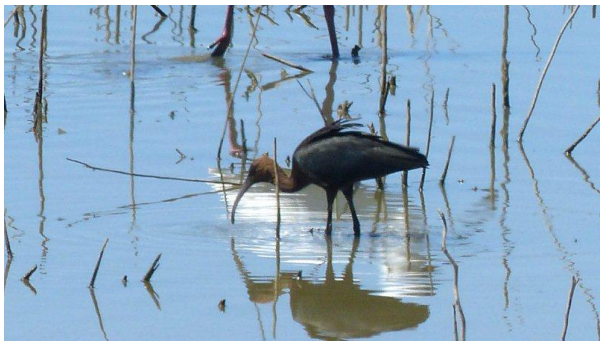

Figure 9: Glossy Ibis © Eckart Demasius

Figure 10: Pink-backed Pelicans © Eckart Demasius

Daan Viljoen Game Reserve produced a sub-adult Yellow-billed Stork for Eckart Demasius and me on 24 December 2014. I can't help wondering whether this was perhaps the same individual seen a few days earlier at Farm Teufelsbach (see above).

Damian Newmarch photographed a European Honey-Buzzard at Okonjima on 24 December 2014.

Figure 11: European Honey-Buzzard © Damian Newmarch

Gudrun Middendorff and I found two magic species when atlasing at Farm Neu Heusis some 50 km west of Windhoek on 27 December 2014. We saw at least six Caspian Plovers and a single Black-winged Pratincole, both extremely rare species in central Namibia, in the vicinity of a farm dam.

Figure 12: Caspian Plover © Neil Thomson

Figure 13: Black-winged Pratincole © Neil Thomson

A number of European Honey-Buzzard sightings were reported by Oscar Campbell in late December 2014 and early January 2015. A "probable" was seen at Avis Dam on 20 December, one bird was seen at the Waterberg on 27 December, one at Shamvura on 30 December, two at Popa Falls on 02 January and another "probable" between Divundu and Rundu the same day. He also reported forty two Red-necked Phalaropes at Walvis Bay on 23 December 2014.

Eckart Demasius reported seeing eighteen White Storks in the Goas area of the Etosha National Park on 27 December 2014 while on 28 December 2014 he had a very profitable day in the eastern side of the park where he found a Wattled Crane, a Montagu's Harrier and African Quailfinches at Andoni waterhole, another White Stork near Fischer's Pan, a Steppe Eagle at Springbokwater and a Greater Painted Snipe at Kalkheuwel. On 30 December Eckart found African Quailfinches again at Okondeka. Quailfinches are probably not that uncommon but my experience is that this is a very difficult species to find.

Figure 14: White Storks © Eckart Demasius

Figure 15: Wattled Crane © Eckart Demasius

Figure 16: Montagu's Harrier © Eckart Demasius

Figure 17: African Quailfinch © Eckart Demasius

A rather bizarre record comes from Kobus Bekker who reported a Parasitic Jaeger found dead on a farm near Solitaire on 29 December 2014.

Figure 18: Parasitic Jaeger © Kobus Bekker

Sonja Bartlewski had four male Village Indigobirds in her Hochland Park garden on 31 December 2014.

Liz Komen reported a Pennant-winged Nightjar hawking insects at dusk at the NARREC premises at Brakwater at the beginning of January 2015.

Jessica Kemper reported a Hadeda Ibis present at Lüderitz on 03 and 04 January 2015. This is undoubtedly a first for this species in Lüderitz although it occurs in southern Namibia along the Orange River. (*The bird was still present on 19 and 20 January 2015 – Ed.*)

Figure 19:Hadeda Ibis © Jessica Kemper

Eckart Demasius observed a Ludwig's Bustard flying over the Namwater reservoir just outside Swakopmund on 06 January 2015. It is somewhat unusual to see this species so close to the town and the coast.

The Namibia Bird Club's morning walk at Avis Dam on 11 January 2015 produced, in addition to the Red-throated Pipit mentioned above, a Peregrine Falcon and somewhat disconcertingly a Mallard, an invasive alien species known to hybridize with indigenous ducks. Also of interest was an unusually large flock of eighteen Common Greenshanks (which had grown to twenty three birds by 20 January and twenty seven by 24 January).

Figure 20: Mallard © Eckart Demasius

Hanjo Böhme reported a yellow morph Crimson-breasted Shrike seen at Farm Binsenheim between Windhoek and Dordabis on 11 January 2014.

A single Yellow-billed Stork was observed by Eckart Demasius, Gudrun Middendorff and me flying over Avis Dam on 14 January 2015.

A report was received from Wilfried Nauhaus of Hadeda Ibises seen on a farm some 35 km south of Gobabis in mid/late January 2015.

The weekend of 24/25 January 2015 proved to be an interesting one around Windhoek. On the Saturday Elsbeth Erblein saw a Hadeda Ibis in Pioneers Park Extension 1. It is some years since this species was last seen around Windhoek. On the same day Michael Houlden and I saw eight Mallards at Hoffnung Dam and Gudrun Middendorff saw a sub adult Yellow-billed Stork at Avis Dam, very possibly the same bird mentioned above. On the Sunday Gudrun recorded a European Honey-Buzzard at Gammams Water Treatment Works together with an African Black Duck and a Whiskered Tern while I found a Slaty Egret at Monte Christo. Slaty Egret was recorded at this venue in November 2011 (see Lanioturdus 46(1)) but nevertheless it is an

extremely rare species in central Namibia.

A Eurasian Golden Oriole was seen in Lüderitz by Noel Marais on 28 and 29 January 2015. This bird seems to be a long way off its normal range.

Figure 21: Eurasian Golden Oriole © Noel Marais

A Woodland Kingfisher was accidentally caught in a crop protection structure at the Kristall Kellerei at Omaruru on 29 January 2015. Woodland Kingfishers had been heard calling there since November 2014. This is well off their recorded range (see also above).

In addition Trevor Hardaker's SA Rare Bird News Reports mention the following rarities etc. seen in Namibia since late November 2014.

The House Crow which has been seen around Walvis Bay recently (see Lanioturdus 47(3)) was reported there again on 26 November 2014.

On 13 December 2014 a European Honey-Buzzard was reported from Mahango Game Reserve.

A Pacific Golden Plover was reported at Walvis Bay again on 14 December 2014.

Two Eurasian Oystercatchers were reported at Walvis Bay on 26 December 2014.

At least twenty five Red-necked Phalaropes were seen at Walvis Bay on 01 January 2014.

The report dated 05 January 2015 confirmed the continued presence of the two Eurasian Oystercatchers together with numbers of Red-necked Phalaropes while the Pacific Golden Plover had been seen again two days previously.

Three different European Honey-Buzzards were seen in the vicinity of Avis Dam on the weekend of 10 and 11 January 2015.

Figure 22: European Honey-Buzzard © Trevor Hardaker

A single Amur Falcon was located amongst Red-footed Falcons about 140 km north east of Windhoek on 11 January 2015.

An Egyptian Vulture was reported outside Swakopmund on18 January 2015 while the Pacific Golden Plover was still present at Walvis Bay.

On 19 January 2015 three Eurasian Oystercatchers were reported near Pelican Point.

A count of Caspian Plovers at the Omathiya Lakes north of the Etosha National Park revealed 1 300 individuals! This is possibly the largest congregation of this species ever recorded in southern Africa.

An Amur Falcon was reported at Avis Dam on 24 January 2015.

The report dated 26 January 2015 confirmed the continued presence of both Pacific Golden Plover and Eurasian Oystercatcher at Walvis Bay.