



LANIOTURDUS

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Editorial

In a past editorial (Lanioturdus 42-4) I mentioned the changing distributions of certain species. One species which seems to be a lot more common around Windhoek these days is the pin-tailed whydah. When I first moved to Windhoek some 28 years ago this was a species which one saw perhaps twice in five years. Now it is regularly seen at Avis Dam and we are getting more and more reports of these birds from suburban gardens all around Windhoek. Its host species, the common waxbill, is not a terribly common species around Windhoek and I certainly have not noticed any great increase in the numbers of these birds. However, both Roberts VII and Trevor Carnaby (Beat about the Bush *Birds* – Jacana Media 2008), indicate that it is suspected that the red-billed firefinch may be a secondary host although this is not proven. Come on you citizen scientists out there – this is a chance to make a name for yourself in the world of ornithology. We have a burgeoning population of red-billed firefinches in and around Windhoek and if they are indeed secondary hosts to pin-tailed whydahs this might just be the time and place to prove it.

Rarities and Interesting Observations

On 30/03/2010 I saw at least six woodland kingfishers and heard black-collared barbets calling at Onandjokwe near Ondangwa. While these are both species one would expect to find in this area neither was atlassed in that particular Quarter Degree Square (QDS).

Gudrun Middendorff reported a juvenile bat hawk seen in broad daylight on Farm Kakuse north west of Tsumeb on 03/04/2010. In the following week Ulrich Hofmann reported seeing two of these birds hunting bats at dusk at the same location.

Gudrun also reported a little bittern at Farm Kakuse during the Easter weekend. There are very few records of this species in this part of Namibia.

On 07/04/2010 I saw two red-billed oxpeckers on a donkey in the Kavango region some 36 km north of Ncaute where I had seen a single bird on 25/11/2009 (see *Lanioturdus* 43-1). These two birds were also in a QDS in which they were not atlassed so I am really thinking that we may indeed be seeing a westward expansion of this species. On 09/06/2010 I again saw a single bird at Ncaute.

On 09/04/2010 I saw a single augur buzzard over Klein Windhoek. It is many years since I last saw one of these birds in Windhoek.

The Bird Club morning walk on 11/04/2010 at Windhoek's Gammams Sewage Works produced a sighting of a single African openbill. This after at least two birds were seen there on 14/02/2010 and a single bird over Avis Dam on 07/03/2010 (see *Lanioturdus* 43-2).

We received a report that Chris Brown had seen a pink-backed pelican at Avis Dam on 17/04/2010. Chris confirmed the sighting and advised that in the 1980's pink-backed pelicans were seen occasionally at Avis Dam. Holger Kolberg has seen a number of these birds at Hardap Dam in the course of his wetland birdcounts but this is the only recent

record for the Windhoek area of which I am aware.

On 22/04/2010 I saw a dark cuckoo with some white in the wings near Katima Mulilo (Mpacha) Airport. This bird could only have been the black morph of either Jacobin cuckoo or Levaillant's cuckoo. Unfortunately they are not distinguishable in the field but I have never seen the black morph of either species before.

Marc Dürr reported two tagged lappet-faced vultures (V029 & F047) at Hotzas in the Namib on 27/04/2010. These birds were both ringed on 07/10/2007, one by Hilke Riehmer and the other by Ann Scott at Gemsbokwater and Amichab respectively. Gemsbokwater is approximately 15 km from Hotzas while Amichab is about 34 km away. It should be noted that vultures tagged in Namibia are tagged only on the right wing whereas South African tagged birds are tagged on both wings.

The Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam on 09/05/2010 produced a sighting of an osprey. As this bird seemed to be moulting its primary flight feathers it was assumed that it would be overwintering in southern Africa rather than migrating to the northern hemisphere. There are records of juvenile and sub-adult birds overwintering in southern Africa.

At the Namibian ringers' get-together held from 13-16/05/2010 at Farm Kakuse some 70 km north west of Tsumeb Dirk Heinrich ringed 3 three-banded coursers including a chick which indicates that the birds have bred there. This is a nocturnal species which has rarely been recorded in Namibia outside of the Caprivi region. In the Atlas of Southern African Birds it was recorded in north central Namibia in only four QDS's and these records are all within approximately 180 km of Kakuse. In addition Günther Friederich reported identifying this species by its call at Farm Tsutsab near Tsintsabis some 58 km from Kakuse in March 2005 (see *Lanioturdus* 39 -1).

The Namibia Bird Club morning walk at the

Gammams Sewage Works on 13/06/2010 produced another sighting of an osprey. As this bird appeared to have a full set of flight feathers it is almost definitely not the same bird seen at Avis Dam some five weeks earlier (see above), so it is likely that we have at least two ospreys overwintering in central Namibia this year. Also of interest was the presence of at least 100 great white pelicans including a number of juvenile and sub-adult birds. I have never seen this many there before but we were unable to detect any ringed birds amongst them. Another highlight was seeing a sub-adult lanner falcon flying to the top of a power pylon with a crimson-breasted shrike in its talons. It then proceeded to pluck and eat the unfortunate victim on this lofty perch. Yet another interesting sighting on this outing was that of a dwarf bittern. At least two white throated swallows were also seen at the sewage works. These birds are intra-African migrants and sightings in midwinter are not common although in most migratory swallow species a few birds are likely to overwinter in southern Africa.

On 16/06/2010 I saw a single capped wheatear at Katwitwi on the Angolan border. This area is part of the northern Kalahari woodland biome which does not seem to be the preferred habitat of this species. Perusal of the Atlas indicates that the nearest Atlas record for capped wheatear is approximately 75 to 100 km from Katwitwi. Also present were at least two pearl-breasted swallows – presumably also overwintering birds.



Capped wheatear at Katwitwi – Photo Neil Thomson

On 21/06/2010 a very weak large raptor was picked up in Walvis Bay by Sonja Botma after a period of severe east wind conditions and taken to Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford. Unfortunately the bird did not survive but it was subsequently identified as a juvenile palm-nut vulture. Vagrants, usually juveniles, have been widely recorded in southern Africa and I believe that there is at least one previous record of this species at the Namibian coast – nevertheless a very unusual record.



Palm-nut vulture – Photograph Marilyn Bridgeford

Eckart Demasius reported a harlequin quail found in a garage at Wlotskasbaken on 27/06/2010. This is not a species one would expect to find there and its presence is no doubt again the work of the east wind. Atlas data indicate that there are records close to the coast much further to the north.



Harlequin Quail - Photo: Eckart Demasius

The quail was released by Mark Boorman at the Rosmund Golf Club on 29/06/2010 and he received a report of an African rail that had been seen in the vicinity of the club house. Again a species one would not expect to find anywhere near there and perhaps another victim of the east wind.

In addition Trevor Hardaker's SA Rare Bird News Reports mention the following rarities etc. seen in and off Namibia since the end of March 2010.

A European honey buzzard was reported from Katima Mulilo on 14/03/2010 while the golden plover seen at Rundu Sewage Works (see *Lanioturdus* 43-2) was confirmed to be an American golden plover.

In the week after Easter two common redshanks and a single red phalarope were reported from the Mile 4 Saltworks north of Swakopmund.

The report dated 04/05/2010 advised that two common redshanks were still present at the Mile 4 Saltworks while three birds were reported from this location on the weekend of 08-09/05/2010.

Also on the weekend of 08-09/05/2010 thirteen red-necked phalaropes were seen at Walvis Bay.

At least two spectacled petrels were reported some 80 km west south west of Walvis Bay in mid May.

Common redshanks were still being reported from the Mile 4 Saltworks in the first week of June and it would thus appear that these birds will again overwinter there.

Neil Thomson

ANSWERS TO FUN NAMIBIAN BIRD QUIZ

1. A strong wind during the hours of darkness – (THRUSH) NIGHTINGALE.
2. Crash hat costing twenty one shillings – HELMETED GUINEA-FOWL.
3. Paperwork received for late payment of game bird purchase – RED-BILLED SPURFOWL.
4. Water bird gives you a neat hairdo – COMB DUCK.
5. Very religious head banger – CARDINAL WOODPECKER.
6. The bird in the timepiece on the wall calls out every hour - COMMON CUCKOO.
7. Water bird from the pyramids – EGYPTIAN GOOSE.
8. Messing about on a mountain of sand – DUNE LARK.
9. A religious place for a gulp – MOSQUE SWALLOW.
10. Repeated conversation - TRAC-TRAC CHAT or FAMILIAR CHAT (depending on how laterally one thinks).