



LANIOTURDUS

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CONTENTS

THOMSON N	Editorial	1
THOMSON N	Obituary: Marc Dürr	2
DEMASIUS E	Some Birding Notes on a Trip to Etosha	3
THOMSON N	Namibia Bird Club Long Weekend at Okatjikona	5
BRIDGEFORD P	Trivial Pursuit or Environmental Catastrophe?	7
KOLBERG H	Wetland Bird counts in Namibia 3 : Inland Wetlands	7
KOLBERG H	Summary of the Summer 2010 Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia	13
BARTLEWSKI S	Successful Release of Artificially Raised Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters	13
NIDDRIE R	Mahango Game Reserve in the Rainy Season	14
OSCHADLEUS D & THOMSON N	Sparrow-Weavers and Buffalo Weavers at Kakuse in Northern Namibia	15
THOMSON N	Some Interesting Personal Observations	16

DE VRIES J	Crowned Eagle – a First for the Western Caprivi and Namibia	20
KOLBERG H	Summary of the 2009 Ringing Season	20
OSCHADLEUS D	Dial into PHOWN	23
	RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS	24

Editorial

We rely heavily on books such as Roberts VII, (often referred to as the “birders’ bible”), for distribution maps, biometric measurements etc. - but is the information in these reference books always correct? And, possibly more importantly, do we read it correctly? Mark Paxton’s observations on the tail length of the green/violet wood-hoopoes he measured at Shamvura (Lanioturdus 43-2) got me interested. My own records of the measurements of the southern masked-weavers occurring in Namibia which can be seen in this issue further stimulated this interest. While there are some very obvious mistakes in even the best of publications (the distribution map for malachite sunbird in Roberts VII is a case in point as is the distribution map for red-billed quelea in Roberts Field Guide – Chittenden 2007), some of these can probably be put down to editorial oversight and printers’ gremlins, but the

consists of endless drawers full of neatly catalogued specimens (date, place, species, collector), with lots of replicates of a single species - these are the specimens used for research into distribution, taxonomy, etc. The ADU's museums are "virtual" as they contain digital images of specimens. For example, a picture of every Sociable Weaver nest on a telephone pole in the Northern Cape, together with the date and place and photographer, could be submitted to neatly catalogue in our database.

Rarities and Interesting Observations

Kobus Bekker reported an African harrier-hawk some 20 km south of Sesriem at the end of June. Perusal of the Atlas indicates that this bird was seen in the same quarter degree square (QDS) as the southernmost Atlas record in Namibia. Enquiries have revealed however that Peter Bridgford saw one some time ago at Two Pumps on Farm Aandster (part of the NamibRand setup) which is south of this sighting.

Eckart Demasius reported three spotted thick-knees just east of Kramersdorf, Swakopmund, on 01/07/2010. While there are records of this species in this area it is by no means a common species there. Eckart last saw spotted thick-knees at the coast in Walvis Bay about 20 years ago.



Spotted thick-knee – Photo Eckart Demasius

On 11/07/2010 Leona Compion, Wessel Swanepoel and others saw five Layard's tit-babblers on Farm Lichtenstein south of

Windhoek. This sighting seems to be about 60 km to the north east of the closest Atlas record and is also further east than any Atlas record for central Namibia.

The wetland count at the Gammams Sewage Works on 18/07/2010 turned up yet another sighting of an overwintering osprey (see Lanioturdus 43-3) and an osprey was seen there again on 14/08/2010.

On 24/07/2010 Toni Hart saw a juvenile martial eagle in Windhoek's Academia suburb. It is highly unusual to find these birds in town and one has to wonder whether domestic pets are safe if a raptor of this size (and particularly a young, inexperienced bird) is around. While I can't find any records of martial eagles taking domestic pets, African crowned eagles are known to do so in towns.

The winter wetland count at Walvis Bay on 31/07/2010 and 01/08/2010 turned up no fewer than eight terek sandpipers – one group of four birds and four individual birds. This is an uncommon species on the Namibian coast, difficult to find in summer (when they are more likely to be present), and most unusual in winter although last year's winter count did produce three birds (see Lanioturdus 42-3). Also of interest was the high number of African black oystercatchers seen in the course of the count. 308 Birds were recorded at Walvis Bay and Gudrun and I saw a further 38 at Mile 4 Saltworks on the same day.



Terek sandpiper – Photo Neil Thomson

The count at the Walvis Bay sewage ponds on 01/08/2010 turned up a solitary fulvous duck. This bird is way off its recorded range although there is a record of one which hung about the Swakopmund Sewage Works for a few months about three and a half years ago. Perhaps this is the same bird.



Fulvous duck – Photo Neil Thomson

On 05/08/2010 I saw five Burchell’s coursers between Engombe and Oshakati. While there are Atlas records for this species in the general area there are none for the particular QDS in which they were seen. This is an uncommon species and is believed to be in decline in most of southern Africa.

Participants in the Bird Club morning walk at the Gammams Sewage Works on 08/08/2010 found a dead brown snake-eagle under a powerline close to one of the poles. This bird had a snake in its bill and we could only speculate that it had perched on the pole to feed and that the snake had touched one of the conductors electrocuting the bird.



Electrocuted brown snake eagle with snake – Photo Neil Thomson

Also seen on this outing were two pearl-breasted swallows – it seems very early in the season for this species to be present in central Namibia.

On 11/08/2010 I saw five pied crows along the way between Rundu Airport and Ncaute. I suddenly realized that I had never seen this species there before in the previous ten times I had travelled this road and perusal of the Atlas revealed that the species was unrecorded in the two QDS’s where I saw them.

Hanjo Böhme reported a sub-adult saddle-billed stork at Monte Christo on 29/08/2010. This bird is a long way off its normal range but there are isolated records from central Namibia. The bird was seen in the company of nine marabou storks.

Gudrun Middendorff reported an estimated 200 – 300 great white pelicans at the Gammams Sewage Works on 30/08/2010. In recent months these birds have been gathering at this location in ever increasing numbers (see also Lanioturdus 43-3).

Peter Cunningham reported the presence of eight white-fronted bee-eaters on Farm Komsberg along the Orange River south of Ariamsvlei in the extreme south east of the country from 03 - 05 September. These birds are a long way off their recorded range with the nearest Atlas records being some 250 km to the south east but they have been present there for at least two years according to the farm manager and there is also evidence of them nesting here.



White-fronted bee-eater on the Orange River – Photo Peter Cunningham

On 08/09/2010 and again on 06/10/2010 I saw a red-billed oxpecker on the road between Rundu airport and Ncaute indicating that there is a small resident population in this area where the species was not recorded during the Atlas period. (See *Lanioturdus* 43-1 and 43-3). I have also been on the lookout for these birds along the B8 south west of Rundu but to date have not found any which seems to indicate that, if they are spreading westwards, they have not yet reached that far to the west.

Helmut zur Strassen reported the sighting of an African quail-finch in his Klein Windhoek garden on 09/09/2010. This is an uncommon species in Namibia at the best of times and I have never heard of the bird occurring in suburban gardens before.

Günther & Tineke Friederich reported the presence of a ruff on their lawn at Farm Tsutsab near Tsintsabis on 05/09/2010. This is a species they have recorded only once before on the farm and that was at the vlei in the month of January. They also reported the presence of a grey-headed kingfisher from 11-20/09/2010 – in previous years they have recorded this species only from January to April. Also of interest was a flight of about six European bee-eaters flying over the farmstead in a southerly direction on 21/09/2010. This seems to be a very early sighting as this species is normally present in the area only from October to April.

In September I experienced an irruption of common waxbills in my Klein Windhoek garden. This is a species I very seldom see there but in the course of the month I caught and ringed 52 of them. In the previous two and a half years of ringing at this location I had caught only three! (And of course this after I had written in *Lanioturdus* 43 (3) that I had not noticed any significant increase in this species around Windhoek!) Eckart Demasius also reported seeing them for the first time ever at his mother-in-law's home in Eros.

Ulrich Hofmann reported a large flock of flamingos flying eastwards over Farm Kakuse on the night of 20/09/2010. One can only assume that these birds were moving from the Etosha Pan to the pans in Botswana although the timing seems strange. One would expect the birds to head for the coast when the pans dry up.

Otto Brase reported a sandwich tern with two colour rings (white over red) on the left leg seen at the mole, Swakopmund, on 24/09/2010.

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

Seven red-necked phalaropes were reported from Walvis Bay lagoon on 15/07/2010.

The report dated 12/08/2010 makes mention of an exhausted juvenile Eurasian golden oriole found on the beach near Conception Bay close to the wreck of the Eduard Bohlen. This bird is both out of range and unseasonal and while the east wind conditions prevalent at the time probably explain the location this species normally only leaves its European breeding grounds in August.

At least six red necked phalaropes were reported from Walvis Bay on 21/08/2010.

A grey-headed bush-shrike of the race *M b citrinipectus* was reported from the gardens of Kunene River Lodge in the report dated 02/08/2010. This is an extremely rare species in this part of the country.

In the first week of October three red-necked phalaropes were reported from Walvis Bay while two common redshanks were seen at Mile 4 Saltworks.

Neil Thomson