



LANIOTURDUS

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RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

Editorial

The winter bird count at Walvis Bay has come and gone and it was extremely gratifying to see the number of Namibia Bird Club members participating in the count many of whom had traveled long distances at their own expense to be there. It is my belief that the bird club can make a real contribution to projects such as this.

Presumably everyone knows by now of the oiled penguins which were rescued at Lüderitz some months ago. What is possibly less well known is that the Namibia Bird Club committee made the decision immediately after the news broke to donate N\$ 5 000 from club funds towards the

rehabilitation of the oiled birds and following this Gudrun Middendorff was interviewed on the German radio service and was able to raise a further N\$ 10 000 as a result of this interview.

Holger Kolberg has put together an index of all the articles that appeared in *Ornithologische Beilage* (a supplement to the Scientific Society's newsletter) and *Mitteilung der Ornithologischen Arbeitsgruppe*, the forerunner of Lanioturdus, for the period 1963-1984. This index lists the articles published in chronological order and also by author and is a very useful tool for anyone writing articles and seeking references. The index can be obtained from the Namibia Bird Club at N\$ 40.00 per copy and all issues of *Ornithologische Beilage* and *Mitteilung der Ornithologischen Arbeitsgruppe* are to be found in the library of the Scientific Society.

In this issue we feature two articles on red-billed firefinches in and around Windhoek, one written by Peter and Janke Cunningham who had seen a firefinch in Windhoek for the first time and the other by myself who had been aware of their presence for some time. Both come to the conclusion that these birds most probably did not arrive in Windhoek unassisted.

In an earlier issue of Lanioturdus I asked for readers' comments on the new electronic format of this journal. To date the comment received has been overwhelmingly favourable with only one member saying that he preferred the printed booklet format.

Diary of a Successful (?) Breeding Attempt of Gray's Larks

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Saturday, 28 February 2009

- On the afternoon of 28 February 2009 my wife found the nest of a Gray's Lark, *Ammomanopsis grayi* containing two eggs, east of Kramersdorf, whilst walking the dogs.
- The cup-shaped nest was located on the southern side of an *Arthraerua leubnitziae* bush.
- The nest was not constructed in typical fashion but with lots of pieces of cotton string.
- No adult bird was in the vicinity.

The Saga of the Vanishing Pelican Rings

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On 15.1.2008 Dirk Heinrich caught and ringed two adult white pelicans on the beach at Mile 14. Exactly how this was done is another story but it involved barbel heads and fishing tackle (there were no hooks involved but Dirk's advice to ringers is not to attempt to catch an adult white pelican unless you have able bodied assistance at hand). The two birds were ringed with 35 mm uniquely numbered stainless steel rings secured with aluminium pop-rivets on the left leg and with large plastic rings with an engraved two letter code on the right leg. The plastic rings were encoded SB and SL and the birds will be referred to by these codes hereinafter. (SB features on the "Take a Closer Look" poster partly sponsored by the Namibia Bird Club and both the metal ring and the plastic ring are clearly visible on the poster).

On 2.12.2008 SB was seen by Mark Boorman and John Paterson at the Mile 4 Saltworks north of Swakopmund. The SB ring was clearly seen but the metal ring was missing. A flurry of email correspondence followed on the ringers' email forum with a lot of good natured banter that Dirk should be relegated to the status of "appy" until such time as he learned to put rings on properly and with Dirk becoming more and more indignant and adamant that he had fixed the ring correctly. Suggestions were even made that the pelicans had somehow got hold of pliers or a cordless drill. It was not long before serious consideration was given as to where the problem might lie and the immediate suspicion was that it lay with the pop rivet. Electrolytic corrosion can occur when two different metals come into contact with one another but as stainless steel and aluminium are close together on the electrochemical series table it seemed unlikely that this was the real problem. A long explanation on the corrosion of metals was received from Joe Noci and it seems likely that the problem does indeed lie with the pop-rivet, more specifically the remnant of the set pin of the rivet. The reaction between the steel of the

pin, the aluminium rivet and the salt water probably results in the very rapid corrosion of the rivet and the subsequent loss of the ring. SL was seen at the coast on 1.1.2009 also sans metal ring.

The pelican ringers are now faced with the problem of finding another way of securing these rings but how many have been lost up until now will never be known. Fortunately many, but not all, of the pelicans ringed were also fitted with the plastic rings.

Please be on the lookout for these ringed birds. If you see one please record the date and place, the code on the plastic ring and whether the ring is on the left or right leg and let us have this information.

Rarities and interesting observations

On the Easter weekend Eckart Demasius and Richard Nid-drie saw a blue waxbill at the Spitzkoppe. This species was not atlased anywhere near the Spitzkoppe and this appears to be a significant range extension. They also saw a brown snake-eagle there. While not a rarity in Namibia, Atlas data suggests that this bird was at the extreme south western edge of its range. Eckart and Richard also had good sightings of the elusive Herero chat at this location. On the same weekend they saw Burchell's courser at Omdel Dam – again a species which was not atlased in that quarter degree square (QDS).

The Namibia Bird Club morning walk at the Gammams Sewerage Works on 19.4.2009 turned up a purple heron and a little bittern, neither of which is a common species around Windhoek.

On 2.5.2009 Gudrun and I saw a juvenile African Harrier-Hawk (*Gymnogene*) at the Spitzkoppe. This species was also not atlased in that area but as there had been exceptionally good rain in the area such predators may have moved in to take advantage of nesting birds. Chestnut weavers had obviously bred there. We also found Herero chat there. A really exciting (non bird) sighting was that of a black mongoose.

In the first week of May Horst Böckmann reported the sighting of a saddle-billed stork on his farm near Mount Etjo.

On 15.5.2009 Peter Bridgeford caught a ringed great white pelican near the small craft jetty in Walvis Bay. This bird had been ringed by Hu Berry as a chick on the bird platform on 30.12.1972! It had been seen before by Mark Boorman on 21.3.2003 near the Raft Restaurant in Walvis Bay where he was able to read the ring number with the aid of a telescope. At over 36 years this is one of the oldest pelicans known.

Wilferd Versveld reported that on 5.6.2009 an estimated 10 000 adult lesser flamingos were breeding at Etosha with about 2 500 chicks already hatched. The breeding site is on the southern side of the pan north east of the Gonob Peninsula. About 5 000 adult greater flamingos were also seen but further to the east.



Image: Holger Kolberg

On 6.6.2009 we saw two African black ducks at Monte Christo. While not regarded as a rarity this is another species which is by no means common in central Namibia. These birds were still present on 5.7.2009.

On 8.6.2009 the first of the rehabilitated African penguins which were treated at SANCOB in Cape Town returned to Mercury Island just 18 days after being released. As this bird was seen on Robben Island on 25 May this means that it swam 1 019 km in just fourteen days at an incredible average speed of 72,7 km/day!

Peter Bridgeford reported an African sacred ibis at the Walvis Bay sewerage works on 4.6.2009. This is a species which was not recorded anywhere close to Walvis Bay during the Atlas period. When considered together with the hadeda ibises around Windhoek and the glossy ibises reported from von Bach Dam and Swakopmund in previous issues of *Lanioturdus* one starts to wonder whether the various ibis species might be in the process of extending their ranges.

The Namibia Bird Club outing to Gocheganas (east of Aris) on 28.6.2008 produced a sighting of two yellow-billed storks. This species was not recorded in that QDS in the Atlas period but what is possibly more significant is that (if my reading of the Atlas is correct) there are no Atlas records whatsoever for this species in central Namibia in the months of June and July. The following weekend on 5.7.2009 three juvenile yellow-billed storks were seen by Bird Club members conducting a wetland bird count at Monte Christo. Holger Kolberg has advised that yellow-billed storks have been recorded during the winter wetland counts at both the von Bach and Swakoppoort Dams. However – these remain very unusual sightings.

In the course of the winter birdcount of the Walvis Bay wetlands a group of ten red-necked phalaropes was seen from the Paaltjies road on 11.7.2009 and again at the same location the following day. Also on 11.7.2009 a group of three terek sandpipers was seen. While the terek sandpiper is not regarded as a southern African rarity (possibly because it is to be found fairly frequently on the east coast) it is by no means common on the central Namibian coast and three birds together in midwinter is a very unusual sighting.

On 12.7.2009 Gudrun and I saw a common redshank at the Mile 4 Saltworks north of Swakopmund.

Trevor Hardaker's SA Rare Bird News Reports mention the following rarities seen in Namibia since early April 2009:-

A Franklin's gull was seen at Okerfontein, Etosha National Park, on 03 April 2009. This seems to constitute only the third inland record for this species in southern Africa - the other two inland records both coming from Gauteng Province, South Africa.

At least one common redshank was present at the Mile 4 Saltworks north of Swakopmund on 27.4.2009 and at least one bird was still present on 31.5.2009. Presumably this bird will overwinter there (see above).

On 10.5.2009 Shelley's sunbird was photographed at Mudumo National Park in the Caprivi Region. This sighting is about 100 km to the west of where these birds are known to occur near Katima Mulilo.

Six red-necked phalaropes were reported from the Walvis Bay salt pans on 12.6.2009 with one bird in full breeding plumage.

Also on 12.6.2009 two Angola swallows were seen over the Chobe River at King's Den Rest Camp on the Namibian side opposite Sududu Island. It is thought that the unseasonal weather system experienced that week may have been responsible for the presence of these birds in the area.

Neil Thomson

About the Namibia Bird Club

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. We organize monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Sewerage Works and occasional weekend trips further afield.

Experienced birders are more than happy to help beginners and novices on these outings. If you have a transport problem or would like to share transport please contact a committee member. Depending on the availability of speakers and suitable material we have lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive a programme of forthcoming events (the Bird Call Newsletter) and the Bird Club journal, *Lanioturdus*.

Membership Fees 2009

Members can receive a discounted subscription to the *Africa Birds and Birding* magazine. The fees below are with and without this subscription.

Category	Without	With
Single member	N\$ 120	N\$ 300
Family membership (Husband, wife, children)	N\$ 140	N\$ 320
Junior member (All scholars and students)	N\$ 80	N\$ 260
Pensioner	N\$ 80	N\$ 260
Foreign member (Not resident in Namibia)	N\$ 165	N/A
Corporate membership	N\$ 400	

Namibia Bird Club Committee 2009

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