Namibia Bird Club 50 1962 – 2012

LANIOTURDUS

VOL. 45 (3) 2012

June 2012

www.namibiabirdclub.org

CONTENTS

THOMSON N Editorial **1**

THOMSON N, STEHN H AND BRIDGEFORD P The Dordabis Vultures Eat Poisonous Plants! **2**

BROWN C Huge Assemblage of African Openbills in Caprivi, Namibia **5**

KEMPER J Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus* drowns Sandwich Tern *Stella sandvicensis* **7**

THOMSON N Ringing at Blue Hill Escape **9**

DEMASIUS E Owling or Finding Owls **11**

KOLBERG H Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 7 : Ducks and Geese (Part 2) **15**

THOMSON N More Short Notes and Interesting Observations **19**

DEMASIUS E A Different Kind of Birding – Birds on the Stamps of Namibia : Namibia's 5th Definitive Series **22**

BARTLEWSKI S A Visit to the Austin Roberts and Barberspan Bird Sanctuaries **26**

THOMSON N Vulture Ringing at Farm Frauenstein **29**

RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS **32**

Editorial

The symposium and dinner to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Namibia Bird Club have come and gone. I am very pleased to be able to say that our members attended these events in numbers and that we had over seventy people there (including the invited speakers). The symposium went off without any real problems – none of the speakers overran his allotted time slot and on the technological front the laptops and the beamers communicated with each other.

There will be a special edition of Lanioturdus incorporating the papers presented so I will not go into detail here. Suffice to say that all the talks were at layman's level, all the feedback we have had has been positive and that we have had a number of people enquiring when we will be presenting another symposium – the answer to that one is simple – not before we have again accumulated sufficient funds.

Many people were able to obtain the software necessary to commence atlassing thanks to Arnold van der Westhuizen's efforts. SABAP2

Ringing at Blue Hill Escape

Neil Thomson
(batqs@mweb.com.na)

All photographs in this article are by Neil Thomson

Alan Lee, then a trainee ringer and resident at Blue Hill Escape near Uniondale at the extreme eastern end of the Western Cape Province of South Africa put out the offer of free accommodation to qualified ringers who could help him gain the necessary experience to qualify for his ringer's license. Who were we to turn down an offer like this? We were planning a trip to the Western Cape following the 2011 Namibian Ringers Get-together anyway and this would be an opportunity to see part of South Africa we did not know, to ring some of the fynbos specials and to help Alan towards his license. We knew that experienced ringers Mike Ford and Graham Grieve had already been there to ring with Alan. Alan, by the way, has a PhD from the University of Manchester on his work on parrots and macaws in Peru.

Blue Hill Escape

We arrived on the property shortly before lunch and I immediately got a birding lifer in Cape Rock-Thrush (which had been one of my bogey birds) while Gudrun got two – the rock-thrush and Streaky-headed Seedeater. After lunch Alan demonstrated his driving skills when he took us up into the mountains on a track where a mule would have hesitated to venture to a stand of mature proteas. There we set up a line of mistnets and it was not long before we had caught our first Cape Sugarbirds and Malachite and Orange-breasted Sunbirds. When it started getting cold in the mid afternoon we closed up the mistnets and returned to base planning an early start the next morning.

We were up before the sun and on our way up the mountain again before first light. On the way up we flushed a large owl – probably a Spotted or Cape Eagle-Owl. We reopened the mistnets and set some snaptraps but very soon we were enveloped in thick mist.

The term mistnet took on a new meaning with the mesh being covered in moisture droplets which must have made it very visible to the birds. While we could hear birds calling in the mist there seemed to be very little activity until the mist cleared although we did catch a Familiar Chat in one of the snaptraps. We were able to catch a few more Cape Sugarbirds and some more sunbirds including a Southern Double-collared Sunbird and we heard Ground Woodpeckers calling nearby without seeing them.

As there was not very much bird activity we decided to take the mistnets down and to re-erect them at a stream in the valley and also to put up some nets close to the house. That afternoon we were not very successful but we did catch a couple of Cape Weavers as well as a Common Fiscal which had been ringed by Mike Ford.

Cape Sugarbird

Malachite Sunbird

Southern Double-collared Sunbird

We had planned to try some night ringing that night and in the late afternoon Alan took us out on the public roads some distance from Blue Hill Escape. We had very good sightings of Ludwig's Bustard and Karoo Korhaan in the late afternoon and as the light was fading Alan took us down the spectacular Nuwekloof Pass.

There we had a magnificent sighting of a pair of Verreauxs' Eagles interacting with a White-necked Raven against a pink sky above the cliffs. Thereafter we tried finding birds to ring in the dark with the spotlights. After sighting a Spotted Eagle-Owl on a telephone pole (no chance of catching that one) we were stopped by one of the neighbouring farmers who obviously thought that we were poaching with spotlights. After convincing him that we were looking for owls he left us with a parting "Ja well – enjoy your owl poaching". Our night catching proved fruitless with only a sighting of some Spotted Thick-knees which flew off before we could even get close. With a nearly full moon rising we headed home for dinner.

By this stage we had not caught many birds and as the object of the exercise was to let Alan handle and ring as many birds as possible to gain ringing experience we moved some of the nets close to the house to more promising positions while opening those at the stream again. The water course produced a slow but steady stream of birds starting with the recapture of a Victorin's Warbler which had also been ringed by Mike.

Among the birds caught at the stream in the course of the day were Protea Seedeater, Cape Siskin, Karoo Prinia, Cape Robin-Chat and another unringed Victorin's Warbler. One of the mistnets close to the house proved to be quite productive with quite a number of Cape Weavers and a solitary Greater Double-collared Sunbird being caught. The Amethyst Sunbird which was seen in the vicinity declined the invitation to get itself caught. In the afternoon we set up some more nets fairly close to the house and were rewarded with a couple more Cape Weavers, a Speckled Mousebird (which is a monster compared to the White-backed Mousebirds we catch at home) and a Neddicky which had also been ringed by one of the previously visiting ringers.

Victorin's Warbler

Cape Siskin

Protea Seedeater

Greater Double-collared Sunbird

While we did not catch large numbers of birds we did manage to catch a number of species we had not ringed before and Graham and I were able to recommend that Alan be granted a ringer's license which was duly issued. Those ringers who did not take up Alan's offer of free accommodation in return for ringer training have now missed out.

We would like to thank Alan for the hospitality and accommodation and his wife, Anja, for preparing our evening meals.

Owling or Finding Owls

Eckart Demasius
e-b.de@iway.na

All photographs in this article are by Eckart Demasius

I find camp birding a very rewarding form of birding. Firstly, birds there are generally used to people and their noises and thus more approachable which is especially beneficial for photographing birds. Secondly, camps, this also includes lodges, are usually surrounded by healthy vegetation with large trees. Hence it does not come as a surprise that I find most of my owls in camps.

The literature is of the opinion that the Spotted Eagle-Owl is the most common owl, followed by the Barn Owl. My personal experience differs greatly from this, only twice have I seen Spotted Eagle-Owl in the wild, once in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and once in Etosha past Sueda.