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EDITORIAL

This copy of *Lanioturdus* is made up almost entirely of trip reports and observations made during trips around the country. This is encouraging in that it is clear that people are getting out and watching birds – and much of the country is getting covered. The information given in these articles is non-scientific for the most part, but important none-the-less. In Peter Kaestner's article on the North of the country, he reports the first record of Blackfaced Lovebird from the Caprivi for close on ten years. Tony Tree's article gives a brief account of an American Black Skimmer seen in Walvis Bay in February – a first record for Africa. Mark Paxton's account of breeding pelicans in the Chobe area is the first in many years. These articles are largely reports of observations given in a generalised way, but their value in putting important information into print cannot be stressed enough. The point I want to make here is that *anyone* can do it. You don't need scientific training, a degree in journalism or any birding credentials. In this sense I would like to encourage people to join the Club's outings and activities, write them up and contribute to the process of developing the Club.

With regard to outings and activities, the Club Committee as a whole would like to thank Daphne McGivern for acting as our activities co-ordinator over the past couple of years. Daphne put in a tremendous amount of work, and the success of our programme was in a large part due to her inputs. We wish the McGivern family well in Cape Town. We are now looking for a new co-ordinator – anyone interested?

I would also like to thank Carole Roberts for her inputs into *Lanioturdus* over the past year and for volunteering to put the December edition together. I will be away in Australia and the Netherlands until January 1999 and Carole will be handling the magazine. Please submit all contributions directly to her via e-mail at carole@dea.met.gov.na or through the Club's postal address.

August and early September. This bird is probably the same one which has been seen at Friedenau Dam on several occasions during the same time period.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

A single Redshank has been present on the Walvis Bay lagoon (usually between the cottages and the Municipal bungalows) throughout the winter. This bird was interesting in that it moulted into almost full breeding plumage during this period. Redshank are generally rare in southern Africa and seldom overwinter.

Blackheaded Gull *Larus ridibundus*

A single second year winter plumage bird was seen by Chris Hines and Josep del Hoyo at the Ngoma Bridge over the Chobe River on 31 July. This bird was in a large group of Greyheaded Gulls feeding at the bridge. This species is expanding its range in Africa and should be looked out for on the Zambezi-Chobe system, as well as other major wetlands in the North.

Cape Eagle Owl *Bubo capensis*

Wessel Swanepoel reports seeing this species on the Brandberg in early August and then again on the Zebra River south of the Naukluft in early September.



European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

European Bee-eaters (and several species of swallow) have been reported very early this year, probably following the very mild winter here and the unusual rain in early September. Dieter Ludwig reports European Bee-eaters from Grootfontein on 23 August, Chris Hines found them at Namutoni on 29 August and there were several flocks reported from around Windhoek between 3–9 September.



ROADSIDE BIRDING IN THE FAR NORTH

Peter G Kaestner

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During a week-long business trip from Ruacana to Katima Mulilo in early August, 151 species of birds were sighted, mostly from the car. Highlights include a Horus (Loanda) Swift at Ruacana, Racket-tailed Roller at Eenhana, and Blackfaced Lovebird west of Katima Mulilo. Also notable were two concentrations of aerial insectivores, one in Ruacana and one near Lianshulu Lodge in East Caprivi.

Accompanied by an official from our Embassy in Pretoria, I traveled from Windhoek to the far north of Namibia for a week from August 1 to 6, 1998. While the purpose of the trip was official, I had several opportunities to observe birds in the early morning or evening. In addition, many birds were seen from the moving vehicle.

The drive up to the North on August 1 was uneventful, except for a male Shaft-tailed Whydah in breeding plumage just south of where the Red Line crosses C35. At the Ruacana Falls, a flock of Violet Woodhoopoes flew into Angolan territory, adding a species to my nascent Angolan list. While fueling up in Ruacana (and fixing a flat tyre) I noticed a large group of maybe 200 swifts and swallows. Looking carefully, I could see that the bulk of the swifts were Little and Alpine, the latter powerfully swooping low over the ground with whistling wings. I also noticed a couple of Bradfield's Swifts in the group, and a lone Palm Swift. As I was looking at a group of Little Swifts, I noticed a different bird, a larger swift with a forked tail, noticeably brown plumage and no white rump. The bird was noticeably smaller than the Bradfield's in the same flock. From the size, brown colouration (including rump) and range, I believe that the bird was a Horus (Loanda) Swift *Apus horus fuscobrunneus*, which has been recorded near Epupa Falls in August. (This form was described from the coast just north of the Cunene River in southern Angola.) The swallows flying over Ruacana that day were South African Cliff, Redbreasted Lesser Striped, Wiretailed, Pearlbreasted and Whitethroated.

From Ruacana, I travelled down the C46 road to Ondangwa. At Ondangwa, I headed back to the border at Oshikango. Unfortunately, I was unable to find lodging at Oshikango. This was a great disappointment since I was really looking forward to birding at dawn in the scrubby bush that surrounds this Namibian boom-town. (Oshikango would be a great place to base out of for a long weekend of birding. Many good birds have been recorded in the area, including a Grey Kestrel and Crowned Crane.) The next morning we got an early start towards Eenhana, travelling north from Ondangwa on the recently paved road D3622. Just south of Eenhana, I saw a Racket-tailed Roller in some tall forest, west of its usual range. After refueling at Eenhana, we headed east on C45 toward Rundu. We made several side trips to border posts, east of Elundu, and west of Rundu. The entire way from Eenhana (indeed from as far west as the B1 road south of Oshikango) to Nepara is beautiful woodland. It would be another excellent place to spend some time, rather than whistling through at 100 km/h!

While visiting the south bank of the Okavango River along road D3405 we put up a small flock of Quail Finch among the common Grassveld Pipits that inhabited the short grass along the river. After overnighting at Rundu and fixing yet another flat, we continued east, visiting the Andara Mission, and two of the game lodges along the Okavango River, south of Bagani. In the afternoon, we continued to Lianshulu Lodge. Best birds in Caprivi Game Park were a couple of flocks of Sharptailed Starlings and one Rufousbellied Tit. By this time, the Chanting Goshawks had turned from Pale to Dark, Korhaans from Redcrested to Blackbellied, Batises from Pirit to Chinspot, and Bulbuls from Red to Blackeyed.

As we approached Lianshulu on road D3511, we came upon the leading edge of a bush fire that was racing along the side of the road. In front of the flames, were a dozen birds, including several Lilacbreasted (no Racket-tailed) Rollers, a bunch of Drongos, and a couple of Dickinson's Kestrels. Unfortunately from a bird perspective, we were put into a new facility at Lianshulu, a few miles downstream from the original lodge. Because of the construction, which was ongoing, birds around the building were scarce. That night (Wednesday) I was drawn out of my bungalow by an odd nightjar call, which sounded a bit like a Fierynecked, but with a twist. As

I was tracking down the source of the sound in the bush (there is no fence around the compound and lions are a real problem so I was a little jumpy) I was suddenly startled by a 'swoosh!' of a bird that came so close to my head that I could feel the wind of its wings as it zoomed by. Unfortunately, even in the full moon, I never got a glimpse of the creature that dive-bombed me that night. I can say, however, that I cannot remember when I was more frightened in my life. A dawn boat trip yielded little of note, except for an interesting flock of swallows, which yielded Sand, Plain, and Banded Martins, Greyrumped, Lesser Striped, Wiretailed, and Mosque Swallows. A shy Black Coucal sitting in reeds on the Botswana side of the Kwando River, completed the birds of note. (Noteworthy in their absence both here and along the Okavango were African Skimmers.)

Thursday, August 5 we left Lianshulu via Linyanti to Katima Mulilo. In appropriate habitat, I was looking hard for more Racket-tailed Rollers, but they are hard to see from a moving car because of their habit of perching inside the forest canopy. I stopped for a rest break near a thicket, and tried for Stierling's Barred Warbler. While I struck out on the warbler, I did get a Yellowfronted Tinker Barbet, which was new for my Namibia list. We lunched at the Zambezi Hotel in Katima and added a couple of goodies for the trip list in their great gardens. Immediately after lunch, we began our trip back to Windhoek. Near the Zambezi, north of town, I came across some irrigated fields in which were ripening vegetables, including millet. I was looking hard in the fields for lovebirds, since the area east of Katima Mulilo was suffering from a double whammy of recent floods and drought. I surmised that the lovebirds might be moving around more due to the El Nino drought that had gripped the eastern Caprivi this year. In 1994 Tim Dodman found (Bulletin of the Africa Bird Club Vol. 2 No.2, August 1995) Blackcheeked Lovebirds only 100 kilometres east of Katima Mulilo. After leaving town, we continued west on the B8 road towards Mpacha Airport. About halfway to the airport, I saw a single bird flush from the near side of the road along a large Mahango field. I instantly recognized the small size, greenish colour, and distinctive wingbeats as an *Agapornis*. As the bird turned towards the car I was struck by its dark head and bold, yellowish eye ring. Just that fast, it was gone, flying east towards the Zambezi River. Though the sighting was fleeting, it was a clear view of a

remarkably distinctive bird. I believe that this is the first record of this rare species in Namibia in modern times, even though Dodman saw them only a few kilometres north of the Zambezi on the Zambian side of the river.

On the way back to Rundu, I did not add many birds to the list, but I did see a super herd of elephants in a water hole just west of Kongola. As it got dark, we had our third flat tyre of the trip and changed the wheel to the wails of the Fierynecked Nightjar. Our second night at the Sarusungu Lodge in Rundu was pleasant, with both Fierynecked Nightjars and Barred Owlets serenading us to sleep. In the morning my usual dawn walk yielded a nice Kurrichane Thrush in the hotel's gardens and several riverside birds along the Okavango. Friday morning, we took off early, so as to get back to Windhoek by midday. All in all, it was a superb trip to an exciting part of Namibia.

RAPTORS ON OUR ROUNDS

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Over the past few months we have been fortunate to have had some good views of raptors while doing our rounds on our farms in the Grootfontein area. We would like to share them with other members of the Bird Club.

Pale Chanting Goshawks are commonly sighted on Driehoek, Stilhoek 823, Goab, Gorooab-East 294 and Ebenezer 836. Although we have not found the nest, we believe that there is at least one breeding pair based here. During August/September '97 we saw an immature bird on Stilhoek 823, and since June this year we have seen another immature on a regular basis. Sometimes the bird has been together with its parents, but since mid-August, we have seen it more on its own and have even witnessed an attempt by the youngster at catching his dinner.

On our way to Tsumeb, at the clearing of a gravel pit next to the road, an adult PCG was sitting on a fence pole. Another was perched further away

on a tree. The immature was hopping around the rocks and bushes next to the road, less than ten metres away, totally ignoring us. We reversed back. He was hopping around, flying off and coming back again in search of something. Then we saw what he was after: a Slender Mongoose making evasive actions between the rocks. In Clive Walker's *Signs of the Wild* it states that the Slender Mongoose is prone to attack from raptors – we left the PCGs alone while to allow the youngster to try his luck with this one.

We also have a resident and breeding pair of African Hawk Eagles. On 8 August this year, we found them feeding a chick in a nest which we can observe from the house. The spotting scope is a great help.

This year, we first saw evidence of an attempt at breeding during the Bird Club outing to the farm in April. We saw them on a nest which they used to raise their chick late last year – during August. We thought that they might be on time this year but then the confusion started. We began seeing the birds on the new nest too, actually sometimes on both nests.

When we first noticed one of the birds feeding the chick it was midday. We thought that the chick must have just hatched because last year we found that the birds returned to the nest only at sunset. However, using the spotting scope we realised that the chick was not that small anymore – it still had fluffy, white down but black feathers were starting to develop on the wing coverts. It was quite mobile, moving around on the nest. It was, however, still too small to be left unattended – that is why the mother is with the chick most of the time.

Later on in the month (22 August) Torsten Ludwig was visiting and we had another close look at the nest during late afternoon. The parents were away at the time – we had seen them flying around, obviously looking for prey. We could not get a decent sight of the chick, but just as we were leaving we saw both parents approaching, flying low, one of them carrying a Francolin-sized item in its talons. This time the chick was left alone to feed on the prey brought to him. The sun was just setting and it was too dark to get a good view.