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Editorial

With this issue the bird names and order follow the new *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa* VIIth edition published in September 2005. For those of you who have not purchased the N\$ 870 book yet, a real treat awaits you. The book has all the up-to-date information on all the species found in Africa south of the Kunene and Zambezi Rivers. For more on the book see the review in this issue.

Although *Roberts* is an epic tome, there is still much information needed on our Namibian endemic species. For example, there is scant information on the Bare-cheeked Babbler – little data on breeding, none of incubation, none on what newly hatched young look like, nothing on moult and only one nest has been found. Page through a copy and see what nearby species you have so you can contribute data.

The editor would like someone who has attended recent club outings to write up reports so those of us who missed the trip can see what was observed.

Contributions to the observations and notes section is the largest in many years and it is good to see that members are getting out and watching birds. Under the observation section the order of birds follows the new *Roberts* classification system. However, in the paper by Brown *et al.* I have not corrected the order of species in the tables. In the future all submissions must follow the new order.

Once again I appeal to all members to help the Namibia Bird Club. If you want to keep the club viable you must also do your part to try and get new members to join. We are currently down to less than 100 members.

Species

Some of the more interesting species observations include White-fronted cormorant, Darter and White-winged Tern. A mean number of 242.8 (SD=75.1) & 78.0 (SD=39.2) White-fronted cormorants, 205.5 (SD=51.8) & 92.8 (SD=59.8) Darters and 95.5 (SD=87.9) & 6.8 (SD=7.9) White-winged terns were observed at Swakoppoort and S. Von Bach Dams between March and June, respectively. There is also a significant difference between the numbers of White-fronted cormorants ($P=0.008$, $F=15.12$, $df=1$), Darters ($P=0.03$, $F=18.16$, $df=1$) and White-winged tern ($P=0.09$, $F=4.05$, $df=1$) at the two dams during this time.

White-fronted cormorant breed between March and June preferring trees surrounded by water (Maclean 1985, Tarboton 2001). There are more dead trees at Swakoppoort Dam than S. Von Bach Dam which may influence the significant difference in numbers of birds at the two dams. The higher number of darters at Swakoppoort Dam is probably because they prefer quiet lakes and dams with trees (Maclean 1985). White-winged tern is a non-breeding migrant species usually visiting southern Africa between August to April, (See Tables 3 & 4) often resting on floating vegetation and dead trees in the water (Maclean 1985). The habitat at Swakoppoort Dam is better thus more birds were observed.

According to Brown *et al.* (1998), wetlands and their avifauna consistently emerge as priority habitats for conservation work. The importance of protecting man made artificial wetlands such as dams is crucial because they provide foraging space (Williams 1991) and breeding habitat.

Acknowledgements

Our special thanks go to the following institutions and persons:

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism for supporting this project and the provision of transportation; staff of the S. Von Bach Game Reserve for their assistance; Namibia Wildlife Resorts for accommodation; Namwater, Okahandja for granting permission to visit the Swakoppoort Dam, and last but not the least to Shirley Bethune and Kevin Roberts for their overall assistance.

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Roadside colony densities of three weaver species near Windhoek, Namibia

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Introduction

Weavers have adapted to a variety of nesting sites, and are often found in high densities along roadsides (Macdonald 1990, Tarboton 2001, Oschadleus *et al.* 2003). On 25 May 2004 we surveyed two roads near Windhoek for roadside colony densities of three weaver species: Chestnut Weaver *Ploceus rubiginosus*, White-browed Sparrow-weaver *Plocepasser mahali* and Red-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis niger*.

Methods

Colonies were counted between the road and fence on both sides of the road, a total road reserve width of about 10 m. The first road stretch was along the B1 road, from the C25 turn-off, north to Windhoek, a distance of 76 km. The second stretch was along the B6 road, from the Klein Windhoek River in Windhoek eastwards to the airport, a distance of 35.7 km (Figure 1). Nests of the Red-

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billed Buffalo Weaver were counted in trees and on telephone poles, and each nest was considered to be one colony. Colonies of Chestnut Weavers were counted as the number of trees with nests – each tree colony had many nests but the nests were not counted individually. White-browed Sparrow-weaver nests were counted, but only after the first 20 km of the B1 stretch, and each nest was considered a colony. There were no Sociable Weaver *Philetairus socius* colonies within the area described – a few were noted some distance beyond the fences near the start of the survey. The colony counts are presented per 10 km road stretches, with both sides of the road combined. The study area falls in the following vegetation types: about 20 km of Southern Kalahari Savanna, and then Highland Scrubland up to Windhoek airport, both being in the Tree-and-shrub Savanna biome (Mendelsohn *et al.* 2002).

Results and Discussion

The White-browed Sparrow-weaver had the highest colony densities, followed by Red-billed Buffalo Weaver (combined telephone pole and tree sites) and then Chestnut Weaver (Table 1). The Chestnut Weaver colonies were the most concentrated in specific areas.

Chestnut Weaver

Colony size is usually 10-200 nests (Tarboton 2001), with 500 nests or more in a small area (Fry and Keith 2004); colonies are often along roadsides (Herremans 1997).

Two partial nest counts have been published. A count of the most densely occupied tree showed 94 Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* nests and 45 Chestnut Weaver nests, the two species apparently tolerant of breeding in close proximity (Berry *et al.* 1987). In mid-January a large colony of Chestnut Weavers was found alongside the main road about 20 miles north of Windhoek. The birds had occupied at least 100 trees with anything from about 40 to 100 nests in each. The counted trees were all within 35 m of the road and the colony may well have stretched further back (Braine and Braine 1971).

Komen (1986) suggested that this species has expanded its range to Windhoek because of improved roads. The records here are near the southernmost records for the species in Africa (Herremans 1997).

Red-billed Buffalo Weaver

1-5 males build 2-4, and up to 13 chambers in one nest mass; there can be up to 10 nest masses in one tree (Tarboton 2001), so one nest mass represents a small group of birds.

Nest density has been calculated as 9.1 nests/km, for 137 nests on 15 km of electricity transmission towers alongside the Kruger National Park (Tarboton 2001). A lower mean density was found in Namibia for a longer stretch of transmission towers, at 1.1 nests/km over 1447 km (Brown and Lawson 1989). The nest densities found in this study are lower, at 0.26 colonies/km (usually a colony had only one nest, sometimes two) for both trees and poles, i.e. 0.52 colonies/km for both types of nest site.

White-browed Sparrow-weaver

There are 10-12 nests per colony in one tree or few adjacent trees; but only one active breeding nest in a colony (Tarboton 2001). A group has a territory diameter of 50m (Fry and Keith 2004).

Macdonald (1990) counted nests in exotic and native trees along the N1 from 10 km north of Mariental to Keetmanshoop in Namibia. In several 10 km stretches the density varied from 0 to 1.8 nests/km for White-browed Sparrow-weaver. In this study we found densities within the range measured by Macdonald (1990), i.e. 1.21 and 0.87 colonies/km in the two road stretches.

Conclusion

Most of the survey was in Highland Scrubland. There was one Chestnut Weaver colony and some (uncounted) White-browed Sparrow-weaver colonies in the Southern Kalahari Savanna habitat. The Chestnut Weaver had high densities in the areas where the other two species had lower densities; White-browed Sparrow-weavers and Red-billed Buffalo Weavers often followed similar trends over different road sections (Table 1, Figure 2). The White-browed Sparrow-weaver colonies had the most uniform distribution, while the species with the largest colonies, the Chestnut Weaver, had colonies that were the most clumped over the survey area.

Acknowledgements

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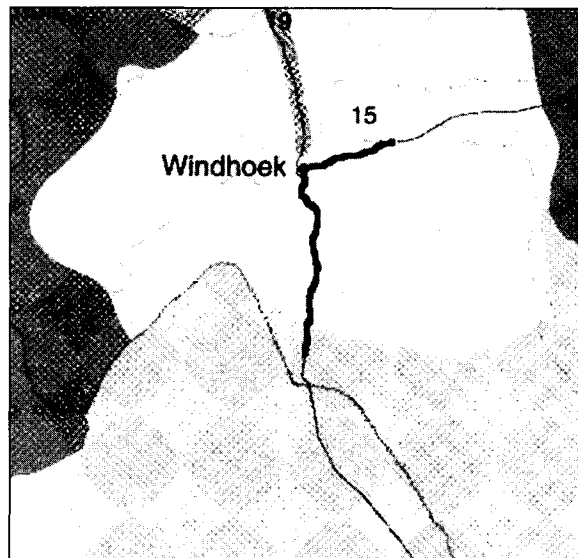


Figure 1. Diagram of the Windhoek area, Namibia, showing approximately the grid 22°-24°S, 16°-18°E (from Mendelsohn *et al.* 2002). The road survey is shown in bold black (south and east of Windhoek)

Table 1. Roadside colony densities of weavers in 10 km stretches near Windhoek, Namibia

Road	kms	RbBW tree	RbBW pole	ChW	WbSW	
B1	0-9	0	0	1	*	
	10-19	0	0	0	*	
	20-29	8	1	0	15	
	30-39	2	4	0	7	
	40-49	2	0	37	9	
	50-59	7	15	0	11	
	60-69	1	0	0	13	
	70-76	0	0	0	13	
	<i>total</i>		20	20	38	68
	<i>col/km</i>		0.26	0.26	0.50	1.21
B6	0-9	0	0	0	3	
	10-19	0	0	0	4	
	20-29	3	17	2	21	
	30-36	0	1	16	3	
	<i>total</i>		3	18	18	31
	<i>col/km</i>		0.08	0.50	0.50	0.87

* not surveyed

ChW = Chestnut Weaver
WbSW = White-browed Sparrow-weaver
RbBW = Red-billed Buffalo Weaver

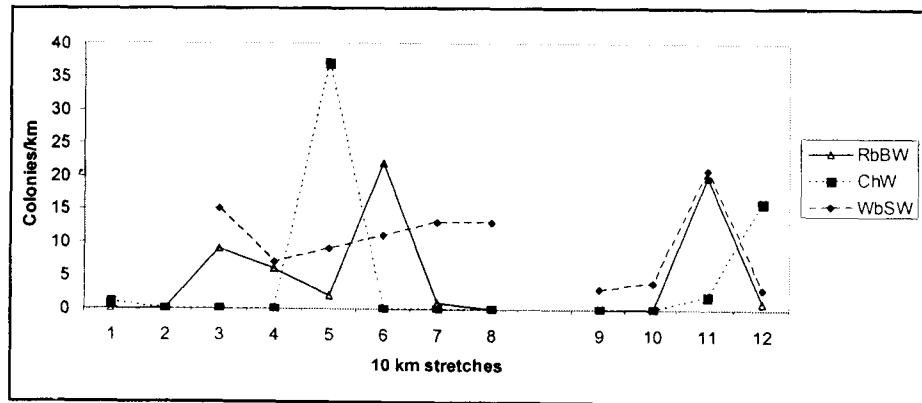


Figure 2. Roadside colony densities of weavers near Windhoek, Namibia. The number of nests per km for successive 10 km stretches of road, starting from 76 km south of Windhoek and ending at the Windhoek International Airport. No counts were made in Windhoek (open section between points 8 and 9 on the x axis) ChW = Chestnut Weaver
WbSW = White-browed Sparrow Weaver
RbBW = Red-billed Buffalo Weaver

Levaillant's Cisticola *Cisticola tinniens*, a new bird for Namibia

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Levaillant's Cisticola occurs from the Western Cape Province of South Africa northeastwards to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola and Kenya. It inhabits vleis, marshy areas, moist grassland and edges of reedbeds where it is highly vocal and conspicuous at all times (Maclean 1993). Prior to the Southern African Bird Atlas Project, it was regarded as being absent from the arid north-western parts of South Africa and from Namibia (Clancey 1980), probably due to lack of suitable natural habitat in these areas. As such, the various field guides and Roberts Birds' of Southern Africa indicated it as being absent from both Namibia and the middle and lower Orange River. During the Bird Atlas Project, Levaillant's

Cisticola was sparsely recorded all along the middle and lower Orange River in South Africa, as far west as quarter degree square 2820AC which is adjacent to Namibia (Berruti 1997). However, it was not recorded by Simmons on the Lower Orange River during a study of the avifauna along 50 km of river downstream from Haibmond, conducted in 1996 and 1997 (Simmons & Allan 2002).

On the 16th November 2004, I recorded several Levaillant's Cisticolas on the Namibian side of the Lower Orange River, on the Farm Stolzenfels 74, in quarter degree squares 2819BC and 2819DA. The birds were seen foraging and singing in cultivated lucerne fields on the river-bank. The diagnostic song and conspicuous dark back confirmed the identity of the birds. Levaillant's Cisticola occurred on the farm in lucerne fields only and at a density of approximately 2 birds/ha. It was recorded sympatric with the Fantailed Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*, a species normally associated with cultivated fields wherever it occurs in arid areas.

Lucerne is extensively cultivated along the middle and Lower Orange River (pers. obs). These fields superficially resemble the preferred habitat of Levaillant's Cisticola, thus providing suitable habitat and facilitating the western movement of this species into an arid area with otherwise completely unsuitable habitat. With time, Levaillant's Cisticola will most probably colonize the complete Lower Orange River wherever lucerne is cultivated.

The Stolzenfels records present a small western extension of the known range of Levaillant's Cisticola along the Orange River and is the first record (to the best of the author's knowledge) for Namibia. In addition, it is another example of the ongoing influence that human activities have on bird distribution in southern Africa.

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