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EDITORIAL

Several people have asked me why I continue to attend Bird Club weekends and outings – "Wouldn't you prefer to go birding on your own?" In answer to this I can quite honestly say, "No".

How you go birding is an entirely personal choice, but I believe that combining both social and independent (single) birding you can get the most out of it. There are almost certainly some birders who are either entirely social birders (never venturing far without being on an organised outing) or entirely single birders (entirely independent and not making use of the social, informational and club contacts available to them).

Why do I continue going out with the Bird Club? – the answer is I enjoy it. For several reasons – probably the most important of which is that I am continually reminded of my own fallability as a so-called "expert" birder. On outings I am often stumped by questions from "beginners" which make me re-evaluate my approach to birding, makes me develop new solutions to tricky groups and generally hones my skills as a birder. At the same time the "beginner" is learning something new and perhaps useful to develop their birding skills.

When you go birding with others you learn their skills too – some people are aces at listening to and identifying birds largely by call, others are visual experts, identifying birds by "jizz", teaching field characters which can only improve skills as a birder. But at the same time you learn from others not to become dependent on them for all your id's and birding experiences. Go out and try to apply some of the learnt skills, study your bird books and develop your own suite of birding tools. But remember, you can only achieve so much on your own – as with almost everything else in life you have to share experiences to grow. This is the value of the Club for me and hopefully for others as well. I appeal to you, the members, to make more use of the Club outings and functions, encourage others (especially kids) to join and to push some personal birding frontiers by learning from others.

and screening the scrub below, two Black Eagles on their way to a favourite hunting spot, cast some beautiful shadows against the orange rock. As it warmed up mixed groups of Alpine and Bradfield's Swifts gathered and screamed their way past camp.

We walked out to the Bushman paintings on a roundabout route to traverse as many different habitats as we could. We started from the car park heading east along the outcrop along a thickly bushed area growing along a drainage line. This proved to be good cover for Pririt Batis, Titbabbler, Burntnecked Eremomela and the expected dove assortment. Higher on the rock face a group of Rock Pigeons sunbathed after their morning toiletries at a nearby rock pool. Above them a Rock Kestrel scrutinised the surface for sluggish geckos cranking up their body engines with some solar power.

Eventually we reached a biggish pool with several Palewinged Starlings and Larklike Buntings splashing about – this really excited Ernie who by now had ticked Larklike Bunting for the 100th time. It became quite obvious that he had little intention to stop this ticking spree, and he continued twitching them as different species on the basis of bedraggledness, wetness, breast mottling variation.



It was getting quite hot and we decided to get to the paintings. On the way we stopped at one particular Kokerboom that has been branded through the years with graffiti, some of them dating back to 1928 and 1931. I have always found ironic how widely admired and accepted old graffiti is, compared to the freshly vandalised rock paintings up the hill!! With all due respects, Bushman's Paradise should be renamed Vandals Haven. Looking at it one struggles to understand whether this blatant destruction was triggered by disrespect, lack of education or simply bad manners.

On the birding side we soon reached a large rock pool where birds and lizards of all sorts had gathered. Sitting around the pool we added Pied Barbet, Whitebacked Mousebird, Bokmakierie, Monteiro's Hornbill, Whitethroated Canary and heard a Short-toed Rock Thrush. However the common locals were playing hard to get and we never saw Lanner Falcon or even heard a Rockrunner. We spotted a pair of Scimitarbilled Woodhoopoes that were mobbing a pair of Rock Kestrels which had just caught a snack. Black Eagles were seen cresting the ridge above us. A Longbilled Crombec and a stunning Dusky Sunbird, sporting its yellow epaulettes scolded a Slender Mongoose up the hill. Further on, a confiding pair of Plumcoloured Starlings were spotted.

The weekend wound down slowly with a late brunch at the camp and most people leaving in the late afternoon. We had got to see all the specials we had hoped for and with about 80 species for the weekend everyone was well satisfied. Another great birding weekend.

RUACANA AND THE KUNENE RIVER

Ernie & Ellen Gudde
PO Box 5218, Windhoek

During the weekend of the 21st to 25th of May 1998, many keen birders took on the long road to Ruacana and the Kunene in pursuit of the promised, (see Bird Call 2/1998) elusive Cinderella Waxbill and Grey

Kestrel.

Dieter had arranged the bookings with Kunene River Lodge and he and his son were the first to arrive. He pitched his camp in the reserved spot and noticed to his horror that the Ruacana-Epupa "highway" yielded more campers that weekend than could be handled by the lodge. The NBC was left with only three sites for nine parties!! It was therefore decided to move to Okapupa Restcamp about 10 km east of Kunene River Lodge. Dieter had no option but to move camp yet again!

Although the road was long and tough (and some birders claimed to have seen a cow in a tree!!), 23 birders eventually settled along the river sharing one toilet and one high-tech shower and a generator providing electricity for two bulbs. Only those with a deeper insight of the secrets of the paraffin contraption had a hot shower. However, the camping site along the river although rustic was most pleasant for all those who wished to get away from it all. Birding in the camp was easy, most of the vegetation at the site being undisturbed. The most notable camp bird was Black Crake, not at all alarmed by the sudden influx of visitors, walking along the banks of the river.

Birding was excellent through the weekend and by the final day some 168 species were identified. The success of the weekend was getting out and exploring several of the available habitats along the river. The long list included many highlights.

We did a lot of birding around the camp, both up and down the river. Those not so keen on strenuous walking spent three hours at one Ana tree *Faidherbia albida* eventually spotting close to 30 species. The Ana tree was flowering and green worms made it a haven for bird parties – including Redbilled Woodhoopoe, Scimitar-billed Woodhoopoe and Hoopoe; several woodpecker species, including the unique looking Kunene subspecies of Bennet's Woodpecker, Pied and Barecheeked Babblers, Redeyed and Blackeyed Bulbul; Crimsonbreasted Shrike, Puffback, Brubru, Threestreaked Tchagra, White Helmetshrike, Redbilled Helmetshrike, Whitecrowned Shrike, Black Cuckooshrike, several species of starlings and

weavers, Blue and Violet-eared Waxbills, and more. Those who had ranged further afield had picked up Goliath Heron, Littlebanded Goshawk, Rüppel's Parrot and African Golden Oriole.

During a return from the river one late afternoon, Chris suddenly came to a grinding halt and summoned all of us out of the back of his pickup for a rare sighting. A Bat Hawk made his brief appearance, flew over and disappeared across the mountain in a southerly direction. The next evening the birding forces were massed in an open part of the campground, waiting for the bird to reappear (it had been seen on the first evening as well, but only by Chris). Seated in comfortable chairs, variously drinking sundowners and other refreshments, we must have been a strange sight. The bird made its appearance going up river at exactly the same time (17h30). We were able to get a good if brief view of it and interestingly it was seen on five consecutive days over the weekend.

Another highlight sighting was that of another Kunene special, the limited range Rufoustailed Palmthrush, which Chris lured to the foreground for all to see with a few tape recorded calls used very cautiously so as not to upset the birds. This was during an early morning expedition down river towards Swartboois Drift. While searching the large Ana trees in the area we found Rosy-faced Lovebird, Pririt Batis, Goldenbreasted Bunting, finalised our woodpecker list with a magnificent male Bearded (making four species for the weekend) and some people were lucky enough to get views of a Greyhooded Kingfisher. Just past Swartboois Drift, Tim spotted a Grey Kestrel perching for quite some time in a *Hyphaene* palm for everybody to enjoy. The bird was incredibly confiding and views from ten metres allowed everyone to really soak up this Kunene special.

On the way back to camp, Ellen, Ernie and Stanley missed a turn off and "got lost" along the banks of the Kunene only to be rewarded with the sighting of Rednecked Francolin with chick – a beautiful sight indeed. The Kunene subspecies of this bird is really magnificent and none of the bird books do real justice to it at all. Günther spotted a Water Dikkop during the break at Ondurusi Falls and forgot to eat his lunch in sheer excitement. A sip of OBS saved the day.

Owls are so predictable!! With just a few calls from the tape recorder and with the aid of Hardy's spotlight we saw Scops Owl, Pearlspotted Owl and Barred Owl. The Barred Owl promptly landed in the mist net to be ringed by Tim and "trainee" Tinneke and all had the privilege of a real close look.

On the Sunday of the weekend, whilst one group took the opportunity of rowing down the river in an inflatable, kindly provided by Mr John Redelinghuys, Tim, Laurel and Wendy made their way along a very rocky path and with a Himba guide to explore the escarpment in a search for Cinderella Waxbill. After a fourteen kilometre, four-hour grind they eventually came out at a site serviced by a large, easily drivable track!! However, their persistence paid off and at a small spring they spotted seven birds!! A number of people went up the next day and were also rewarded with good views of several birds. The river rowers enjoyed the sight of Giant, Pied and Malachite Kingfishers, Goliath Heron and many more and returned to camp with aching muscles.

On Sunday we all celebrated Chris' (30th??) birthday with cake and freshly whipped cream, champagne and coal-roasted chicken! A feature of the weekend was the range and skills of culinary expertise around the fire, with Wendy, Laurel and Tim leading the American-style (marshmallows on chocolate biscuits) and Hardy giving us a lesson in Bachelor-style speed cooking (sausage and potato on fire, warm and eat).

Dieter considered the outing as a "very successful birding weekend" upon which Chris remarked that the people were "also quite nice". As always this birding trip was most enjoyable, relaxing and successful – because birders are such fun to be with!!

For those who did not see "Cinderella", never mind – you need to visit the Kunene once more! With or without, it is a very special place to spend some time.



If you have any enquiries relating to the Namibia Bird Club please contact any of the Committee Members listed below or send your enquiries to:

NAMIBIA BIRD CLUB
PO BOX 67
WINDHOEK
NAMIBIA

Dieter Ludwig (Chairman)	tel: 223 986 (h) 290 2479 (w)
Suzan Mallet-Veale	tel: 252 700 (h)
Hartwig Dedekind	tel: 233 095 (w)
Siggi Gläfke	tel: 233 095 (w)
Jeremy Duffield-Harding	tel: 228 331 (h)
Christopher Hines	tel: 081-1275603 (h & w)

CLUB OUTINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Please contact any member of the committee regarding outings and activities. Dieter Ludwig is acting as the activities organiser so please confirm your attendance for any day or weekend outings with him. We have a number of members (both old and young) who do not have their own transport — if you have any place in your vehicle and are willing to give someone a lift, please let Dieter know.