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About the Namibia Bird Club

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. The club's mission is to contribute to Namibian ornithology by, amongst other things, arranging regular birding outings, conducting bird ringing and atlasing excursions and educating the public about the value of birds. To achieve this, we organise monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Water Care Works and occasional weekend trips further afield. Bird club members also participate in the African Waterbird Census twice a year.

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 present occasional lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive the bird club's journal, *Lanioturdus* and outings and events are advertised on the club's website www.namibiabirdclub.org.

The Namibia Bird Club is not affiliated to any global or regional organisation and relies entirely on members' subscriptions and donations to fund its activities.

The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Namibia Bird Club or its committee.



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Cover photo Black-chested Prinia © Holger Kolberg

Short Notes

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All dressed up and no place to go?

For many years we have had Red-billed Queleas plundering the seed on our feeding table from late winter to early summer. The birds usually appear in late winter and stay until the rains start in earnest and then disappear until towards the end of the next dry season.

We have observed male birds moulting into breeding plumage, usually from about October onwards, with many in full breeding plumage by the time they depart.

In the winter of 2017 the Red-billed Queleas came to our garden early and in larger numbers than usual. As usual the males started moulting into breeding plumage but probably due to the poor rains the birds did not leave town as they usually do.

We caught and ringed many full breeding plumaged males and a number of yellow-billed females until towards the end of February 2018. We then noticed that some males were moulting out of breeding plumage in late February and early March.

We assume that the prevailing conditions had been such that the birds had elected not to make a breeding attempt due to a shortage of food on which to feed their young.

A case of “All dressed up and no place to go!”

Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs

Further to Franz Klein’s article on gatherings of Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs (see *Lanioturdus* 51[1]), a picture taken in Otjiwarongo on 08 March 2018 showing a similar

gathering of nearly one hundred birds was posted on the Birds of Namibia Facebook page. This gathering appeared to comprise both male and female birds. At about the same time there was a report of a flock of about one hundred or more of these birds in Ludwigsdorf, Windhoek.

The omnivores triumph

Having bred up a large surplus of meal worms we took to putting out surplus pupae for insectivores in our garden thinking that this would be of special benefit to the resident Chestnut-vented Tit-Babblers. We soon found that the tit-babblers had no chance against the horde of African Red-eyed Bulbuls, House Sparrows and Southern Masked Weavers that outmuscled them to get the food.

Likewise, we found that African Red-eyed Bulbuls, Southern Masked Weavers and White-backed Mousebirds were the chief beneficiaries of the sugar water provided in the sunbird feeder which, until now, has hardly attracted any sunbirds.

Another interesting observation that we have made is that the birds taking the pupae will consume all the available pupae before they will take shredded suet. When we put both pupae and suet out together the first choice of all the birds is the pupae and they will only take suet after they have consumed all the pupae.

Siblicide in Little Grebes

While staying at Farm Teufelsbach between Windhoek and Okahandja in late May and early June 2018 we noticed that several pairs of Little Grebes on at least three different

dams had small chicks with them. It seemed late in the season for the birds to have bred but since the rains had been late we assumed that conditions had been unsuitable for breeding until the dam levels had risen in March and April.

At least two pairs of Little Grebes had four chicks, all of which seemed to be of similar size and which seemed to be existing together harmoniously. One pair, however, had only two chicks, one of which was considerably larger than the other and which showed considerable aggression towards its smaller sibling. The larger chick outswam the smaller to reach any food item brought by the parent birds and aggressively attacked the smaller chick, pecking it about the head and pushing its head under water while the parent birds were foraging close by. The adult birds did nothing to stop this behaviour.

It seemed to us that the smaller chick would have had very little chance of survival and when we returned to that dam a few days later we saw only one chick with the pair of adult birds. It appeared to us that a deed of Cainism had indeed been done.

Overwintering Chestnut Weavers

We have, on occasion in the past, found numbers of Chestnut Weavers overwintering in central Namibia. In the winter of 2012 we trapped and ringed a large number of juvenile Chestnut Weavers between Windhoek and Okahandja. The following winter we caught a large number of adult birds, mostly males, at our Klein Windhoek home while in the winter of 2015 we again caught a few birds at the ringing site between Windhoek and Okahandja (see *Lanioturdus* 52 [2]).

On 11 June 2018 we caught and ringed an adult male (rather surprisingly in partial breeding plumage) in Klein Windhoek and on 19 June and 10 August we caught two more birds there. It would appear that at least a few birds again overwintered in central Namibia.

Precarious nest site

In the course of the winter wetland bird count on the Kwando River in the vicinity of Namushasha River Lodge in mid-July 2018 we observed Lesser Striped Swallow nests (some incomplete) on the river bank in recesses and under overhangs. As these banks are frequently undercut by the river and collapse into the water, these seemed to be particularly precarious nest sites. In addition to using manmade structures, Lesser Striped Swallows are known to build their nests on the undersides of tree branches, rock overhangs etc. We assume that these birds did not find suitable trees in the vicinity and opted for this high risk site. It seemed to us that the birds faced a race against time to complete their nests, lay and incubate their eggs and raise their young before this ever changing river again undercut and collapsed their bank.





Hausmann was astonished to find a foraging Honey Badger accompanied not only by a Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk but with two Kori Bustards and with at least a dozen Fork-tailed Drongos in attendance. The Honey Badger totally ignored the presence of the Kori Bustards although at times they were very close to the animal. This sighting occurred in the Etosha National Park on the main road through the park between the western Halali turnoff and the Etosha Lookout/Nuamses crossing.



Figure 1: © Neil Thomson

Black-crowned Night Heron numbers

During the wetland bird count on the Zambezi River near Zambezi Mubala Lodge on 17 July 2018 we counted fewer than a dozen Black-crowned Night Herons over a period of about five hours and a distance of some fourteen kilometres. That evening we counted the birds flying over and past our camp site and recorded an astonishing 168 Black-crowned Night Herons! It seems that either these birds roost on another part of the river or they were very well hidden at their roost sites during the day and were severely undercounted.

Honey Badger foraging with Kori Bustards

A Honey Badger foraging in the company of Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks is a fairly well documented occurrence. On 09 July 2018 Hugo



Figure 2: © Hugo Hausmann

Wintering grounds of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters

In a note published in *Lanioturdus* 51(1) I remarked on the absence of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters in central Namibia in the winter of 2016. In the winter of 2018, while not completely absent from the area, we noticed a large reduction in the numbers of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters we saw in central Namibia.

On 12 July 2018 we travelled the new tarred road between Otjinene and Grootfontein and were amazed at the number of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters seen along a stretch of about 100 km north of Otjinene. Could it be that in some years the birds from central Namibia move to this area some 230 to 330 km north east of Windhoek for the winter months?

Flamingo movements

A short note was published in *Lanioturdus* 50(2) on the epic nonstop flight of a satellite tagged Lesser Flamingo across the Mozambique Channel from eastern southern Africa to the west coast of Madagascar on 10 June 2016.

After spending two years in Madagascar (and surviving Cyclone Dineo) this bird returned to the African mainland on 29 May 2018 making a nonstop flight of 927 km and landing in Mozambique south of Beira.

Repeat performance

In a note published in *Lanioturdus* 50(2) I wrote about our resident Chestnut-vented Tit-Babblers starting to imitate summer migrants as soon as the weather started to warm up in late August 2016, long before the arrival of these migrant species.

We were treated to a repeat performance of this in 2018. For the duration of the winter we heard only the alarm calls of the tit-babblers. As soon as the weather became warmer in late August/early September the birds not only started to sing their own song but once again started to imitate both Diederik Cuckoos and

African Paradise Flycatchers, neither of which had returned to the area at that time.

We also noticed that one of the birds started singing (normal tit-babbler song) early in the mornings from the old nest that the pair used the previous summer and wondered whether the birds would reuse this nest or build another. As it transpired the birds did indeed make a breeding attempt in the old nest which was then destroyed in a wind storm. The pair subsequently built a new nest at the same site and made a further breeding attempt.

An interesting recapture

On 29 December 2018 I recaptured a female Red-billed Quelea wearing ring No. AP99980 at our Klein Windhoek home. I immediately realized that this was a fairly old ring but was nonetheless surprised to discover that this bird had been ringed as an adult female at the same location by Gudrun Middendorff on 05 January 2012, just a week less than seven years before recapture. The bird had not been recaptured anywhere in the intervening period so one can only speculate how far it might have wandered in its long life.