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EDITORIAL

Summer has almost come and gone without my noticing it. It has been an odd summer in terms of weather but judging from my discussions with other people, the birding has been excellent this year. The thing I have noticed while putting this edition of *Lanioturdus* together is the really good numbers of rare birds that were seen during these last few months. These records raise the question of what brings these spurts of rarities about.

Is it the unusual rainfall and general climatic patterns experienced over much of the subcontinent? Is just that we are getting more reports of rarities because there are a lot more birders out there at the moment? Is it a consequence of the "Patagonia effect" described by Peter Kaestner in a previous edition of *Lanioturdus*. Whatever the situation is, we have had two new birds added to the Namibian list in the last six months. A presumed Pied Flycatcher at the Windhoek Sewerage Works (October 1998) and a Red-throated Pipit in Swakopmund (March 1999). These records may represent interesting biological indicators of broader environmental processes influencing the sub-continent. These records are interesting in themselves but seen against a background of a large number of other rare birds in the same period we have to admit the possibility of large scale climatic (or other) factors influencing their occurrence in Namibia.

So what happens to these records? Currently nothing much!! All records reported to me are put into the Short Notes section and I encourage people to write up their sightings. My feeling is that a tremendous amount of

SHORT NOTES

Christopher Hines, Editor

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*

An adult bird was present at Avis Dam for a protracted period from early December 1998 to late February 1999. The occurrence of this species in the central part of the country is unusual (only a single record for Windhoek for the Atlas period). A single bird was reported from Fisher's Pan in Etosha National Park on 06/03/99 (H. Koch).

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*

There have been several records of Black Heron from central Namibia in February and March 1999. Two birds were recorded on Monte Cristo II just north of Windhoek (C. Boix) and a single bird was seen for several weeks at Avis Dam. This species is very rare in central Namibia.

Abdim's Storks *Ciconia abdimii*

The Osbornes in Etosha report the first birds of this species on 06/01/99 at Rietfontien near Halali. This relatively late date of arrival is likely correlated with the late start to the wet season in the north of the country.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*

Two birds were present near the Municipal Bungalows in Walvis Bay on 19/03/99 (C. Hines). Small groups have been seen along the coast from January to March this year (A. Tree, B. Nebe). The occurrence of this species on the coast is unusual.

Black Stork *Ciconia niger*

Tim Osborne reports a single bird at Nebrownii waterhole on 12/02/99. Black Stork is a generally scarce species in Namibia and is most common in areas of high cliffs and mountains. Young birds, however, are known to disperse widely in the wet season and can turn up virtually anywhere.

Hobby Falcon *Falco subbuteo*

Tim Osborne recorded the seasons first Hobby Falcon at Okondeka in Etosha on 26/01/99.

Eastern Red-footed Falcon *Falco amurensis*

An adult female and two male birds were recorded in large flocks of Western Red-footed Falcon near Sukkes south of Otjiwarongo (1/3/99) and near Namutoni (5/3/99) (C. Hines). This species was formerly thought to be very rare in Namibia, but seems to occur in small numbers in the north of the country in most years. It is probably mostly overlooked as it generally occurs in mixed flocks of other small migrant falcons.

Western Redfooted Falcon *Falco verspertinus*

The earliest record for Etosha was of several birds at Homob (1/02/99) (T. Osborne).

Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*

Arnoud v.d. Berg photographed a single bird on a tourist road near Halali on 23/03/99. This is the fourth consecutive year that there has been a report of Sooty Falcon from the Halali area and there are several other records from Etosha in the last ten years. This bird is probably more regular than previously thought and should be looked for through the wet season, particularly in the tall mopane woodlands of central Etosha.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

A single bird was seen on 04/02/99 at the Okaukuejo airport in Etosha. Osborne. This is a species that ranges widely throughout the country.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

This year has been a bumper year for Honey Buzzard in Namibia. There was a record of a single bird at Avis Dam as early as August (A. Riley) with birds being regularly recorded in and around Windhoek through December 1998, January and February 1999. This includes birds seen at Avis (P.

Jennings), Aris (C. Hines), Olympia (J. Mendelsohn), Pioneers-park (K. Bartlett) and Daan Viljoen (C. Boix). Honey Buzzard was also seen on 07/02/99 at Rietfontein, Etosha (T. Osborne), near Tsumeb (03/03/99; C. Hines) and Omaruru (c. 05/03/99)

Jackal Buzzard *Buteo rufofuscus*

A single bird was seen on 05/01/99 in the Ondondozoneananadana Mountains on the southern boundary of Etosha National Park by T. Osborne. This species is essentially a bird of the south in Namibia and occasionally strays northwards up the coast to about Mowe Bay. This record however represents a huge range extension for this species.

Augur Buzzard *Buteo augur*

Tim Osborne recorded a bird on 16/01/99 at Windpoort Farm, near Toshari, south of Etosha National Park. This species is rarely recorded in this part of the country although there are isolated records in the atlas.

American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

A single bird was seen at Walvis Bay during the bird counts on 30/01/99 (C. Boix & C. Hines). There have been numerous sightings of single birds in the same area subsequently (A. Tree, *et al.*). This is a North American vagrant which is recorded almost annually along the Namibian coast.

Mongolian Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

There have been isolated records in Walvis Bay through February and March 1999 (A. Tree *et al.*).

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Rob Simmons reports an immature bird from the Esplanade area in Walvis Bay in January 1999. There are no confirmed records of this species in southern Africa as yet.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

A single bird at the Swakop River mouth on 22/12/98 (B. Dyer). This species is an extremely rare vagrant which breeds in the Palaearctic.

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

This has been an exceptional summer for phalaropes on the coast. Tony Tree and his ringing group have recorded Grey Phalarope inshore around Walvis Bay through most of February and March. They have been seen at the Walvis Bay Yacht Club, Pelican Point, the Salt Works Pump Station and near the Bird Platform. On 21/03/99 there were up to 20 birds present just behind the surfline at Pelican Point (C. Hines).

Rednecked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Forty-two birds, including a female in full breeding plumage, were counted at the Walvis Bay Salt Works on 30/01/99 (C. Hines & C. Boix). The pond on which they were found has subsequently been drained and only singletons and small groups of up to three birds have been seen since (A. Tree *et al.*).

Broadbilled Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Up to three birds have been seen on the mudflats near the Municipal Bungalows at Walvis Bay from late November 1998 to late March 1999 (K. Wearne, A. Tree and others). This is a rare migrant which breeds in the far northern Scandinavia and normally winters on the Red Sea and parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Up to three birds have been present in the Walvis Bay since November 1998 (K. Wearne and others). A single bird was still present near Lover's Hill on the 21/03/99 (C. Hines). This rare migrant is recorded annually in Walvis Bay.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Steve Braine and Mark Paxton recorded a single bird near Shankara on the Okavango River on 20/12/98. Tim Osborne recorded this species on 27/01/99 at Fischer's Pan, near Namutoni. Three birds were present at the same locality on the 7/03/99 (H. Koch).

Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*

There have been numerous records of Sabine's Gull along the coast from Walvis Bay to Swakopmund. Steve Braine recorded a single bird at the Bird Platform near Walvis Bay in early December 1998. Up to 20 birds have been seen in the Walvis Bay/Pelican Point area during February and March 1999 (A. Tree *et al.*, C.Hines). Tony Tree's ringing group found a fresh carcass at Langstrand in early March 1999.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixican*

There seem to be at least two birds resident in the Walvis Bay area at present. There have been almost daily records at the settling ponds or the tidal ponds near Lover's Hill in recent months (K. Wearne, A. Tree and others). The birds present in Walvis Bay are probably now "resident vagrants" (this species breeds on freshwater lakes in central North America) and have been recorded almost monthly in the last year.

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*

There is an unconfirmed report of up to 13 Royal Terns at the mouth of the Cunene River in late February 1999. A single bird suspected to be of this species was briefly seen at a tern roost near Walvis Bay in mid-March (A. Tree *et al.*). This is a very rarely recorded species in southern Africa, although it is noted as being common about 200 km north of the Namibian border in Angola.

Burchells' Courser *Cursorius rufus*

Tim Osborne found 13 birds on the Halali plains (06/12/98). This highly nomadic species is uncommon this far north.

Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus*

The first birds in Etosha for the summer were recorded on 07/12/98 at Namutoni by Tim Osborne.

Black Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*

Rob Simmons recorded up to ten birds in a morning (no dates given) along the Chobe River in the Salambala Conservancy, eastern Caprivi.

Redthroated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

A Redthroated Pipit was present at the mouth of Swakop River for about four weeks from mid-February to mid-March 1999. The bird was found by Bruno Nebe and subsequently seen by numerous observers. This is a first record for Namibia and only the third for southern Africa. This species breeds in the tundra of northern Europe and Asia and regularly migrates as far south as Tanzania.

Thrush Nightingale *Lucinia lucinia*

This is probably one of the most under-recorded species occurring regularly in Namibia. David Ward recorded one regularly in scrub undergrowth at Susuwe on the Kwando River over a period of six weeks from January to early March.

Red-faced Crombec *Sylvietta whytii*

Rob Simmons, in a brief note on sightings of Black Coucals, states that this species has been recorded in the Salambala Conservancy in the eastern Caprivi. Red-faced Crombec is generally a miombo woodland specialist in Zambia and Zimbabwe and this record would be a first for Namibia.

Olive Tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*

Another under-reported species in Namibia. Most of the world population is thought to winter in the southern African thornveld of the north-western Transvaal and central Botswana. The central eastern parts of the country should be particularly good for this species during our wet season. Tim

Osborne reports a single bird on 06/12/98 on the hill at Halali. This bird was probably on passage further south.



(BIRD)RACING AROUND WINDHOEK

Bernd Kiekebusch-Steinitz
P.O. Box 86266, Windhoek

On March 13th, 1999, the Windhoek International School (WIS) conducted its second annual Bird Race. The idea here is not so much serious competition, but rather to introduce school children and their parents and friends to the joy of bird watching in a country with such a large variety of species. So, at 6:30 am seven groups, 38 people in all, set out for a 4 ½ hour nature experience in and around Windhoek. Guidance was provided by experienced and illustrious experts from the local Bird Club, for which we are most grateful.

Just as in the big (internationally renowned) bird races, each leader determines his group's route, visiting a variety of habitats. Primespot in everyone's itinerary: the municipal sewerage works. There, the big holding tanks and muddy sewerage treatment basins have rims filled by lots of water-loving birds. Also, for the last purification cycle, all the partially cleaned water flows into artificial lakes, lined by all sorts of vegetation. That becomes an absolute paradise for a myriad of birds and insects. Other favorite birding spots include fresh water dams, wildlife refuges (often with dry river beds where the remaining underground water still provides for rich vegetation), city parks, the cemetery (where exotic species of trees are watered daily) and the Windhoek Showgrounds. But then there are other conditions which are unique to this dry environment, related to the erratic patterns of rainfall, where one part of the city can get ten millimetres at night, while another part gets nothing at all.

Soon the day became quite hot. To wit, sun hats and water bottles are considered required equipment, just as important as binoculars. All the groups had different experiences, but Christian Boix's group was in for a special treat. They were allowed to see the inside of hornbill nesting boxes and inspect the young, still naked chicks as this trip was integrated into his daily routine of research-related inspections. Hornbills have the pattern of mating for life, and while the female is hatching the eggs, she walls herself into a cavity nest, leaving only a tiny slit for the male to feed her. The path this group followed was alongside the sewerage plant's overflow, where some large crocodiles had recently been spotted.

Compared to last year (which was particularly dry), the number of species counted this year was considerably higher. The recent rains must have contributed to the neck-in-neck race at the top with 105 species for the winning group (led by Christian Boix), followed by 104 (led by Chris Brown) and 102 (led by Peter Kaestner). Last year, the winning number was 83. Given the introductory quality of the birdrace, the rules were slightly modified. This year, at least the leader must have identified the bird positively to be counted (though preferably, all participating should see or hear it).

Here are some highlights. An unusual Yellow-billed Stork between several White Pelicans. Beautiful Marico, Dusky, and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds; Diederik's Cuckoo in beautiful colours, a Crimson-breasted Shrike (in German the *Kokarden-Vogel* because it brightly displays the black, white and red of the German imperial colours). Red Bishops, making everybody smile because of a recent ornithological research publication entitled "Polygamous Behavior of African Bishops".

The event concluded with a gathering of exhausted-but-elated participants in the big hall of the International School. Everybody received a certificate of appreciation, results were announced, and stories of interest were shared by each group. Moreover, the winning team will have its name engraved on the Bird Race's silver-plated trophy, for which they will be guardians until next year.