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EDITORIAL

This summer has seen the most remarkable influx of huge numbers of birds of a variety of species and a surfeit of rarities from the North to the coast and places in the South – or is it that we are getting more birders out into the field finding more birds and reporting their observations. I think it is probably a combination of both.

This year, some of the biggest numbers of Abdim's Storks I have ever seen, arrived and stayed even though there was a general lack of rain and *Koringkrieks*! Around Etosha, through the central parts of the country to south of Windhoek there were storks everywhere. Huge numbers of coastal terns, skuas, waders and pelagic seabirds were reported from the Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour areas. Large numbers of Western Redfooted Kestrels were reported from the central part of the country for most of the summer and huge numbers of European Swifts were reported at the same time. But for me the interesting thing has been the number of reports we have received of other species of interest (see *SHORT NOTES*) and the number of people reporting these. I can only hope that people's interest has again been stimulated to get out birding and that, although local, *Lanioturdus* is starting to provide the medium for pricking people's interest. This is what it is there for, and I cannot stress enough to you all that without your support and contributions the magazine (and the club) will fail.

Thanks for all your support and keep on birding.

up by carefully writing each name.)

To make interpretation easier, some of the species seen were: Jackal Buzzard, Rock Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Blackbreasted Snake Eagle, several fatalities.

This list will certainly be put into the file of family memorabilia to be looked at in years to come with much love and no small amount of amusement.

Jacal buzzard 8:12
Jackal buzzard 8:54
2x P. CG 8:55
K. Nese 8:56
9x Jacal buzzard 8:54
5x Red bird 9:00
bird trap 9:01
Jacal buzzard 9:01
Black breasted snake eagle
Jacal buzzard 9:07
Jacal buzzard 9:12
Kestrel 9:17
Lanner falcon 9:21

SHORT NOTES

Christopher Hines, Editor

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*

Large flocks of Abdim's Storks were reported from all over the country, from December to late March. The good early rains may have played a role in the massive influx of birds, but surprisingly they stayed on for prolonged periods of time even after the rain had ceased in many areas. Some of the biggest flocks were recorded in the Etosha-Otjiwarongo area with up to 6 000 birds being recorded at a single site near Outjo in mid-February (F Shutz).

Spurwinged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis*

Rob and Karen Batchelder report a pair of Spurwinged Goose at the sewerage works in Lüderitz on 16/2/98. This is considerably out of range

for this species, as they are absent from the lower Orange River and coastal Namibia.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

There have been several reports of Pallid Harrier this wet season. Jon Barnes reported a male on the eastern floodplains of the Zambezi in the Caprivi in February. W Swanepoel reported a male in the Witvlei area in late February and Peter Kaestner saw a male in the same area on 20/3/98. Two male birds were seen over the Ombuga grasslands south of Lake Oponono near Oshakati in early March (Christopher Hines).

Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi*

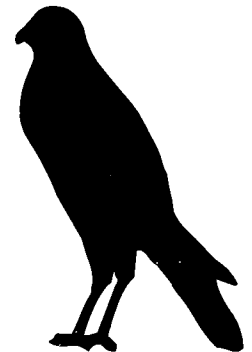
Gunther Friedrich reports a first sighting on his farm north of Grootfontein on the 12/09/97.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

Good numbers of Montagu's Harriers have been reported around the country this year. Wessel Swanepoel found 18 over the grasslands near Witvlei on 23/2/98. This species is known to roost communally and regular visits to Witvlei may well turn up significant numbers of this species. Witvlei has one of the best grasslands in the central part of the country and is always good for migrant raptors in the summer. Montagu's Harriers were also seen near Okaukuejo (8/3/98, Christopher. Hines), Lake Oponono (11/3/98) and Okashana (14/3/98). R Leslie also reported a number of sightings from the Caprivi.

Longlegged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Steve Braine and Mark Paxton report seeing a bird of this species in the Shankara area in the Okavango in late December. This Palaearctic migrant has only been reported a handful of times in southern Africa but is irregularly recorded in Zambia. It should be looked for in the north-east of the country during our summer months.



Jackal Buzzard *Buteo rufofuscus*

An adult bird with a marked red breast was found about 30 km south of the Windhoek International Airport on the road to Nina (on farm Onverwacht) by Chris Hines, Carole Roberts and Mike O'Connor-Smith. This is well out of its normal range. This is a species known to wander and should be looked out for throughout the south and central parts of Namibia.

African Hobby *Falco cuvieri*

Mark Paxton has reported African Hobby regularly from the Shankara area in the Okavango Region this summer. They have also been reported from the Zambezi Fish Farm just outside Katima Mulilo. This species is probably more abundant than presumed. Look out for it along woodland margins, along rivers and near waterholes in the Kalahari woodlands of the Okavango and Caprivi Regions.

Eastern Redfooted Kestrel *Falco amurensis*

There have been numerous reports of this species in Namibia this year, usually in large flocks of their sibling species, Western Redfooted Kestrel *Falco vespertinus*. Wessel Swanepoel reports a female from Platveld Station on the 28/2/98 and a male on 4/3/98 at Kaalkop Station near Kalkveld. A single female was found on the Ombuga grasslands north of Etosha on 9/3/98 and several male birds were found in mixed flocks of redfooted kestrels to the north of Lake Oponono by Chris Hines and Nicholas Clarke on 11/3/98.

Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

There have been several records of Honey Buzzard from around the country this summer. Dave Ward found a single bird in the large gum trees along the Khan River in Omaruru in late January. Mark Paxton reported a single bird in the vicinity of Shitemo, Okavango Region in January. John Mendelsohn found one at St Paul's College in central Windhoek in mid-December 1997 and there have been several sightings of birds in the gum trees at the school in central Otjiwarongo in January and February. Peter Kaestner reports a single bird in the vicinity of Witvlei in March.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Osprey seem to have become more established on rivers and farm dams throughout Namibia in recent years and reports of their occurrence are becoming quite common. The pair of birds at Friedenau Dam have been present all summer and there have been reports of birds seen at Avis Dam, Goreangab Dam and the Sewerage Works within Windhoek. At least two birds have been reported from the Fish River and Hardap Dam near Mariental. Several birds have been reported on the Okavango River (Mark Paxton), the Zambezi near Katima Mulilo (Katy Sharpe, Chris Hines) and the Kunene (W Dreyer). A single bird was found on a telephone pole about ten kilometres east of Kombat on the main Grootfontein Road on 18/1/98 (Chris Hines).

Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*

Peter Kaestner reported several Sabine's Gulls close inshore at Pelican Point in mid-January 1998. There were up to 16 birds (adults and immatures) between Pelican Point and Donkey Bay from 30/1/98–1/2/98 (Chris Hines, Carole Roberts and Jeanne Meintjies). There were also reports of a pelagic watching trip seeing up to 30 birds just off Walvis Bay at about the same time. This gull breeds in North America and is usually seen well off-shore. The reasons for finding so many inshore is unclear but several species of terns, skuas and storm petrels were also found close inshore in above average numbers perhaps indicating that sea conditions were unusual.

Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixican*

A single bird was found on the Walvis Bay sewerage waste water ponds in late January by Chris Hines and Carole Roberts. Tony Tree subsequently found up to three birds in the Walvis Bay area in late January–early February. At least one of these birds is probably resident as I have consistent records from March 1993 of a single bird present in Walvis Bay in winter and summer months.

Lesser Blackbacked Gull *Larus fuscus*

A single immature bird was found on Lake Oponono, Oshana Region on

12/3/98 (Chris Hines). This bird has expanded its range in Africa in recent years. It should be looked for on inland waters during our summer months. Any bird thought to be a Kelp Gull on inland waters is likely to be this species.

European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*

First reported by Peter Kaestner, large numbers of European Storm Petrels were present off Walvis Bay over several weeks from late January to late March. Several observers (Peter Kaestner, Tony Tree, Christian Boix, Chris Hines) found good numbers close inshore during this period. They could be seen flying 100 m or so offshore at Pelican Point (best views and numbers), Paaltjies and from the front of the Yacht Club. They were generally mixed in with equivalent numbers of Wilson's Storm Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* from which they were easily distinguished.

Longtailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

Several observers found significant numbers of Longtailed Skuas relatively close inshore during late January–early February, with most birds being seen on pelagic boat trips off Walvis Bay (Ian Sinclair, Tony Tree, Peter Kaestner). This is a species most often seen well offshore.

Skimmer *Rhynchops* spp.

An immature skimmer was found in the Walvis Bay lagoon by Tony Tree and Keith Wearne in February '98 and was subsequently seen by Peter Kaestner, Christian Boix and Chris Hines at close range but in poor light (we have to admit it was from the deck of the Raft Restaurant with beers in hand). As yet the jury is out on the identification, but it is possible that the bird is an American Black Skimmer *Rhynchops niger* which would constitute a first record for Africa. The findings of the enquiries regarding the identification will be reported in a late volume of *Lanioturdus*.

Mongolian Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

A number of Mongolian Plover were reported from Walvis Bay (Keith Wearne, Tony Tree, Chris Hines) and from a sandbank in the Zambezi River (Katy Sharpe). Keep an eye open for this species in April in Walvis

Bay when they should be in almost full breeding plumage.

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*

Etosha National Park and much of former Owamboland had big numbers of Caspian Plovers present from late December through to mid-March, with some birds still present in late March. Many of the birds seen were in full breeding plumage in early February.

Blackwinged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*

A group of about 24 birds were found at the artesian outlet at Okashana in Oshikoto Region in early February 1998 (Chris Hines and John Mendelsohn). Two birds were present in a small mixed flock of waders at Lake Oponono on 12/3/98 (Chris Hines and Nicholas Clarke).

Redbreasted Swallow *Hirundo semirufa*

A pair was found breeding on Farm Tsutsab north of Grootfontein by Gunther Friedrich on 15/08/97. This is an early date for breeding for this species. Please keep a lookout for breeding intra-African migrant species as most (particularly nightjars, swallows, sunbirds and pipits) are poorly known and report dates of first sightings and any breeding information.

Dusky Lark *Pinarocorys nigricans*

There was a large influx of Dusky Larks into the central and northern part of the country from early January to early March. Chris Hines and Kevin Bartlett found up to 6 birds together in the area between Windhoek International Airport and Nina in early January. Christian Boix reported groups of birds in Daan Viljoen Game Reserve throughout the early part of the summer. Hines and Roberts found several groups of birds (up to five per group) displaying at Aris, just south of Windhoek in early February. There have been a number of reports of this species being commonly seen in parts of Etosha National Park throughout the summer months. This species is extremely poorly known and is only known to breed in Angola (only one nest known?).



Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*

Boix, Tree and Sinclair all report seeing Collared Flycatchers from Kalahari woodlands in the Bagani-Popa Falls-Mahango Game Reserve area at different times recently (December to February). This summer migrant is probably overlooked as it is regular in southern Zambia and is now regarded as rare but regular in Zimbabwe.

European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

A single bird was caught in mist nets at Shankara on the Okavango River by Mark Paxton in late December. This species is regarded as rare in southern Africa but is difficult to identify in the field and has been regularly reported from mist nets in north-eastern Namibia.

Shelley's Sunbird *Nectarinia shellei*

Tony Tree reports finding a pair feeding in mistletoe at Ndhovu Lodge outside the Mahango Game Reserve in late January. This species has been recently reported from Katima Mulilo (Katy Sharpe), Kalizo (R Randall) and Popa Falls. It should be looked for in riverine fringe woodlands especially during the summer months as it is thought to undergo some movements.

SANDVELD WEGBREEK

Freddie Versveld & Wessel Swanepoel
Posbus 1203, Windhoek en Posbus 21168, Windhoek

Terwyl ek op Wessel wag waar hy 'n paar laaste, maar allernoodsaaklike reëlins hier in Windhoek tref, verwonder ek my weer oor die aanpassingsvermoë van 'n Huismossie. Vlak voor my hop hy op die grond rond en sluk sulke geel hompe dadels in. Eintlik gaan hy deur as 'n tipiese saadvreter, maar sy kleintjies maak hy weer hoofsaaklik op insekte groot.

Die plan is om in Boesmanland by (Tsumkwe) te gaan draai en deur Hereroland-Oos (Otjinene) terug te keer. Skuins voor sonder is ons op 'n

tweespoor-veldpaadjie in breëblaar *Combretum*-veld, sterk op pad na die Boesmanskooltjie by Dengwe wat in aanbou is. 'n Kleinsingvalk met iets in sy pote trek ons aandag. Hy gaan skuil met sy prooi in 'n ruie sterkbos. Toe hy weer opvlieg kon ons ten spyte van die laatmiddagson met ons verkykers tog duidelik sy eenvormige dofswart kleur waarneem – ongetwyfeld die skaarser melanistiese vorm.

'n Hoogtepunt op ons vier-dae reis was beslis die ongereptheid van die uitgestrekte Nyae Nyae pan. Die ylingse vlug van die klein swermpies Gevlekte Sandpatryse in dié rigting belowe van vroeg-oggend af al dat daar 'n drinkwatertjie vorentoe lê. Was ons verbasing groot toe ons eindelijk in die snikhete ure van die dag op hierdie "oneindige" waterpan afkom. Watervoëls swem en waad in hulle honderdtalle in die betreklike vlak pan wat die illusie van 'n lugspieëling skep. Strandlopertjies, Bontkiewiete, Rooibekeende en Flaminke oes naartstigtelik wat die modderwater bied, of staan droomverlore en ineengedoke op 'n vol pens en dut.

Die Kemphane in die randwaters werskaf soos energieke, krom oumense in hierdie ongenaakbare oorlewingsstryd. In 'n droër deel van die pan lê die verstrooide bene van 'n ou kameelperd. 'n Groot luiperd se spore is sigbaar in die motorpaadjie. Op die wal van die pan langs sien 'n mens orals Gewone Koesters, Woestynkloppies en Rooineklewerikke.

Op 'n kaal padkruising onderkant die Ahaberge (blok 1920 DD) maak ons laatmiddag kamp. Die pioniers wat hierdie koppies benoem het was gewis Sandvelders. Hier het hulle so byna die spreekwoordelike berg van 'n molshoop gemaak! Toe die skadus lank word, bevind ons ons op een van die rantjies in die omgewing. 'n Mens moet jou roete versigtig kies of jy loop jou kort-kort vas in die digte bosse. Die reuk van stinkmiere hang plek-plek swaar in die lug. Vlak by die Botswana grens spoor 'n Gewone Swartmees-paartjie ons op en verkondig luidkeels ons ongewenste teenwoordigheid aan. Die grys strepe op die ondersterdekvere wat hom van die Ovamboswartmees onderskei is duidelik sigbaar. Die valer wyfie is ook duidelik onderskeibaar. Vier groot koedoebulle met kurktrekkerhorings beur die takke oop in 'n stadige gallop, doer onder in die rivierlopie. 'n Koei blaf verskrik hier by ons en hardloop dan onseker met haar kalf weg.