

CONTENTS

VOLUME 36 (3) 2003

OSBORNE, T. O. Editorial	1
BOIX-HINZEN, C & M. BOORMAN. Helping behaviour in Gray's Lark <i>Ammomanes grayi</i>	2
DANTU, S.& M. BOORMAN. A homing pelican—part II.	4
DANTU, S. Ugab birding week	5
BOORMAN, M. Bird ringing in Namibia	6
PAXTON, M. Some Unusual Sightings at Shamvura Restcamp – Okavango River	7
BOORMAN, M. Second coastal record of Buff-spotted Flufftail <i>Sarothrura elegans</i> for Namibia	8
OSCHADLEUS, D. National ringing training courses	10
HEINRICH, D. Pygmy Kingfisher <i>Ispidina picta</i> at Epupa Falls, Namibia	11
OSCHADLEUS, D, BM DYER, RJM CRAWFORD, & L UPFOLD Sociable Weaver roadside nest densities in southern Namibia	12
BIRD NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS	18

Editorial

Tim Osborne

The dry season is truly upon us with the east winds howling in the interior and the berg winds affecting the coast. News reports state that the winds at Lüderitz were reaching 140 km/h. I wonder if there were any birders there to look for vagrants to the coastal desert? On our farm we have hardly seen any Queleas or Chestnut Weavers in months. I wonder where they have gone, in search of food and water I presume. The rodent high we have been experiencing for the past three years crashed and now the effects are evident in the form of missing birds. Gone are the Barn Owls, Black-shouldered Kites, Marsh Owls and even the Pearl-spotted Owls are scarce.

For those of you with Internet access you should check out the website for SAFRING. Go to www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/safring_index.htm. The site has life histories of all the birds that have been ringed. Each week more histories are added to the site. If you have ever wondered how many African Hawk-Eagles have been ringed and where you can check it out. It might surprise you how many have been ringed since 1948. There have been 244 birds ringed and with the start of computerized records in 1975 Namibia has the most birds ringed at 76. There have been 10 recoveries with the longest distance being 795 km and oldest time being 22 years, 9 months and 21 days.

It is nice to see more articles being submitted by members from the coast. Lots of interesting birds with some out of place like Black Kites, Flufftails and breeding Gray's Larks. I have requested the annual Chairman's and Financial reports for those of us who could not attend the AGM and I will put them in the next edition. I, like many of the outlying members, wonder if any of the outings publicized in the Bird Call were attended, as there have not been any reports submitted to the *Lanioturdus*. These are important to write up because those of us who cannot attend meetings in Windhoek and outings close to Windhoek would like to know what is being seen and more about club activities.

Zimbabwe and Natal, South Africa during the summer months. It then migrates as far north as 2-3°N in Congo and Kenya. It is usually gone from southern Africa by March and winters records are very rare (Clancy, P. A. 1997. Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta*. in The Atlas of Southern African Birds. Vol 1. Non-passerines. Harrison, J.A., Allan, D.G., Underhill, L.G., Herremans, M, Tree, A.J., Parker, V., & Brown, C.J. (eds), pp 648-649. BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg).

The Pygmy Kingfisher is distinguished from the Malachite Kingfisher by the following features that can be seen in the photograph. The blue on the crown in the Malachite extends down to the eye, in the Pygmy the eyebrow line is orange between the eye and the crown. Also the Pygmy has violet ear coverts that are lacking in the Malachite.

Sociable Weaver roadside nest densities in southern Namibia

HD Oschadleus¹, BM Dyer², RJM Crawford², & L Upfold²

¹Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town
Rondebosch, 7701, South Africa;

dieter@adu.uct.ac.za

²Marine and Coastal Management, P/Bag X2, Roggebaai, 8012

In January 2003 we drove to Lüderitz and Walvis Bay for a seabird survey. Along some road sections we counted all Sociable Weaver *Philetairus socius* nests.

Methods

On the drive from Cape Town to Lüderitz we looked for the first Sociable Weaver nest. On subsequent drives (Lüderitz to Walvis Bay, and Lüderitz to Cape Town) we counted and recorded all nests seen during daylight hours, up to a distance of about 500 m from the road on each side. For each nest the following items were recorded: the odometer reading to the nearest kilometer, the side of the

road, the site (acacia, aloe or telephone pole), and the size of the nest in 3 size categories (small, medium, large). Two nest masses in a single tree were counted as one large nest.

Results

Cape Town - Noordoewer – Keetmanshoop – Goageb - Lüderitz

On 19 January 2003 we drove on the N7 from Cape Town to Vioolsdrift at the South African/Namibian border. No Sociable Weaver nests were seen in South Africa along the N7. From the border we continued on the B1 to Keetmanshoop, and then the B4 to Lüderitz. The first nest seen was in an acacia 138 km north of the Namibian border post Noordoewer (36 km before Grünau; just beyond the C10 turnoff to Karasburg). Other nests were not counted but seven small Sociable Weaver nests on telephone poles were noted between Keetmanshoop and Goageb. At some of these, Sociable Weavers were seen flitting or perching on the telephone wire.

Lüderitz - Aus - Helmeringshausen – Maltehöhe - Walvis Bay

On 21 January 2003 we drove from Lüderitz to Walvis Bay, via Aus, Helmeringshausen and Maltehöhe. We left Lüderitz at about 15h00 and continued the survey until it was dark (24 kms beyond Maltehöhe). We covered 391 km and counted 83 nests (Table 1). From Lüderitz the habitat was initially sandy and rocky desert. At about 80 km inland, short grass starts appearing. At about 107 km from Lüderitz the first crow nest on a telephone pole was seen. The first Sociable Weaver nest was seen 7 km before Aus, where acacias started appearing in a slightly hilly area.

One nest was seen in an *Aloe dichotoma* tree, 5 km after Aus. For the next 45 km on the Aus-Helmeringshausen road (C13) no nests were seen. Then the arid plains turned into a long narrow valley. Between the hills on either side were a large number of acacias supporting a relatively high density of Sociable Weaver nests (0.85 nests/km, Table 1). One acacia contained a large Sociable Weaver nest as well as many Whitebrowed Sparrow-weaver nests. There was one section that had seven nests on separate telephone poles, even though there were suitable trees nearby. These nests were all clumped within about 2 kms of each other.

Between Helmeringshausen and Maltehöhe there was mainly short grass and shrubs, habitat not suitable for Sociable Weaver nests. There were two nests in acacias that were large enough to support nests. There were six nests on telephone poles within a 5 km stretch of road.

After Maltehöhe there were 14 nests on telephone poles within a 12 km stretch of road. There were low acacias that could potentially be used by Sociable Weavers but were probably not ideal as initially the tree density was very high. The telephone line followed a turnoff 14 km after Maltehöhe, so nests were only observed in trees thereafter. This stretch of road had the highest nest density (1.08 nests/km, Table 1). Unfortunately it was too dark to continue the survey north of 24 kms beyond Maltehöhe.

Lüderitz - Goageb - Keetmanshoop - Noordoewer

We sailed by ship from Walvis Bay to Lüderitz. On 30 January we left Lüderitz at 3h30 in the morning. At 45 km before Keetmanshoop (6h00) it was light enough to continue the nest survey. Three nests on telephone poles were recorded.

For some 70 km south of Keetmanshoop there were shrubs but no trees or telephone line, hence no nests except one in an *Aloe dichotoma* (some 17 km south of Keetmanshoop). Thereafter there were many nests until Grünau, at a density of 0.74 nests/km (Table 1). For 36 kms south of Grünau there were trees with nests, at a relatively low density. From there until the border were few trees but no nests, as noted on the way north.

Conclusion

There was a slight difference between numbers of nests seen on left and right sides of the road (Table 1) but, since there were 4 observers looking in all directions, no observer bias is suspected. The proportion of active/inactive colonies in this study is not known, although Maclean (1973) found a total density of 2.5 nests/km versus an occupied nest density of 1.86 nests/km (i.e. 74% occupied).

Nest sites

Sociable Weavers commonly use acacias as nesting sites, although the crosspiece of telephone poles and other sites are also used (Maclean 1993). In this survey

most nests were located in acacias. In some stretches telephone poles were chosen as nest sites even though acacias were available nearby. Telephone poles could allow breeding in areas where no suitable habitat occurs. Sections where telephone poles were used were usually in areas where acacias were also used (except the piece between Goageb and Keetmanshoop): presumably areas with trees provide other requirements for breeding, like nesting material, food, etc. Three nests were observed in aloes; usually few acacias were in the vicinity.

Nest sizes

Colony size varies from 2 to 500 birds per nest mass (Maclean 1973). A large nest mass can contain 5–50 nest chambers (Maclean 1993). Telephone poles and *Aloe dichotoma* do not allow large nests to be built, hence the preference for acacias (80%). Most nests in acacias were subjectively judged to be medium to large sized (90%). Sociable Weavers keep adding to the nest mass over many years (Maclean 1973).

Nest clumping

Where telephone poles were used, there was a tendency to clump nests, not on every successive pole necessarily, but certainly close together. These probably comprise single colonies (Maclean 1973). By analyzing the nearest neighbouring nest for each colony, using the odometer reading, it was determined that 87% of nests were within 0 to 1 km of each other, showing a high degree of clumping (data for 21 January, all sites).

Nesting density

In a study of birds nesting on electricity pylons in Namibia, Sociable Weaver nest density was very low: 132 nests on 3106 towers over 1447 km (Brown & Lawson 1989). Maclean (1973) recorded an overall nest density of 0.62 nests/km in his study area in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park. This is higher than our overall density of 0.25 nests/km (Table 1). The maximum density in Maclean's study was 5.6 nests/km along the Nossob River (Maclean 1973), which is much higher than our maximum density of 1.08 nests/km.

Maclean (1973) found an inverse relationship between number of trees and percentage of trees with nests, suggesting that Sociable Weavers do not like nesting in areas with a high tree density. Our highest densities were in dwarf

shrub savanna (north of Aus) and Karas dwarf shrubland (south of Keetmanshoop) (habitats from Mendelsohn *et al.* 2002).

Acknowledgements

Benedict Dundee of Namibia's Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources organized the seabird survey in Namibia. Marine and Coastal Management of South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism provided the road transport and costs thereof.

References

- Brown, CJ; Lawson, JL. 1989. Birds and electricity transmission lines in South West Africa/Namibia. *Madoqua* 16: 59-67.
- Maclean, GL. 1973. The Sociable Weaver, Part 1: Description, distribution, dispersion and populations. *Ostrich* 44:176-190.
- Maclean, GL. 1993. Roberts' birds of southern Africa. Cape Town: John Voel. Bird Book Fund.
- Mendelsohn J, Jarvis A, Roberts C & Robertson T. 2002. Atlas of Namibia. David Philip: Cape Town.

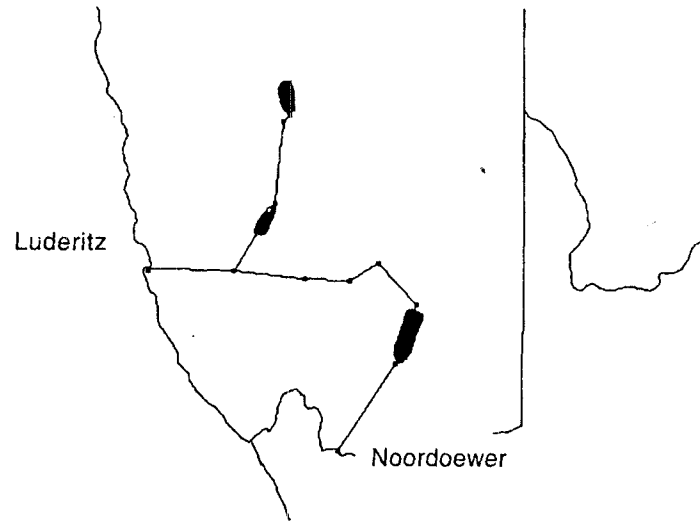


Figure. 1. Areas of higher Sociable Weaver nest density, roadside survey, southern Namibia.

Table 1. Sociable Weaver roadside nest densities in southern Namibia

	km	Site and density			Size in acacias			Side of road for all nests	
		Acacia	Aloe	Tel pole n/km	Small	Med	Big	Left	Right
21 January 2003									
Lüderitz - Aus	125	1		0.01		1		1	0
Aus - Helmeringhouse: arid	50		1	0.02				1	
Aus - Helmeringhouse: hilly	55	39		0.85	4	22	13	34	13
Helmeringhausen - Maltahohe	137	2		0.06	1	1		8	0
Maltahohe + 24 kms	24	14		1.08	2	9	3	21	5
30 January 2003									
45 kms - Keetmanshoop	45		3	0.07				3	0
Keetmanshoop + 70 km	70		1	0.01					1
Karasberge - Grunau	86	63	1	0.74	5	25	34	17	47
Grunau - 36kms	36	8		0.22	1	6	1	3	5
Totals	628	127	3	0.25	13	64	51	88	71