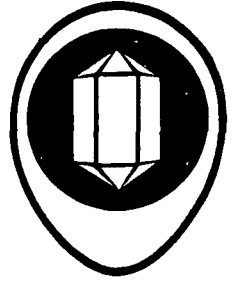




Lanioturdus torquatus  
Drosselwürger

## MITTEILUNGEN

# ORNITHOLOGISCHE ARBEITSGRUPPE



SCHRIFTLÉITUNG: POSTFACH 67, WINDHOEK, S.W.A.

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### POST-SYMPIOSIUM EXCURSION TO NAMIB AND THE COAST 26-28 SEPTEMBER 1973

R. A. C. Jensen

Early the morning following the second day of papers at the Har-dap ornithological symposium, twenty delegates climbed into a bus for the post-symposium three-day excursion. We were followed by two other delegates and families in two other cars. However, we lost these "hangers-on" when our bus developed two punctures - fortunately within "civilization" in the bustling quasimetropolis of Maltahoehe. Having rapidly exhausted the bird-watching possibilities, the shopping -possibilities and most other possibilities in Maltahoehe, our group descended to the hotel and would have doubtless rapidly exhausted their stocks too, had the bus not arrived shortly thereafter.

Birds were rather scarce along the route until we stopped for lunch in Bullspoort, the pass through the Naukluft Mountains. Conditions were very dry here of course, but despite the heat several members of the group plunged forthwith into the scrub and were rewarded variously with "South West Specials" like Monteiro's Hornbill, Rosy-faced Lovebird und white-tailed Shrike. Everybody admired two proud black Eagles sitting like sentinels on the Mountain top just west of our picnic spot.

On the plains west of the escarpment, where the rapid decrease in precipitation (about 150 mm per year) changes the vegetation drastically, our first Rueppell's Korhaans came in view. We stopped shortly at the Kuiseb Canyon, but in view of our earlier delay, pushed on almost immediately towards Ganab in the vast ( 5 000 square miles) Namib Desert Park.

Here the plains receive about 70 mm of rain yearly on average, but the falls are very patchy and the resulting grass also. Herds of ostrich, springbok and gemsbok were seen, increasing in numbers towards Ganab, a wide wadi or omuramba with large camelthorn trees, where a borehole with windpump provides water for the game. A quick walk in the wadi provided views of gemsbok as well as Lanner Falcon and several common desert birds. Into the sunset we pressed on towards Walvis Bay, passing groups of antelope and flocks of ostriches and larks in a grassy area where good showers had fallen the previous year. As darkness fell we reached the truly arid Namib, where rainfall averages below 50 mm a year.

The next day, Hugh Berry, our Division's coastal ornithologist, took charge of the main group, visiting spots along the coast to observe sea-birds and waders. I took a few ornithologists inland for a further look at desert birds and other fauna und flora. On Friday, having moved to a Swakopmund Hotel the previous evening, we drove out to the Swakopmund Salt works where Mr. Klein, the owner, had given us special permission to enter. Our visitors were tremendously impressed by the enormous numbers of cormorants on the guano islands and platform which are strictly protected by Mr. Klein.

Returning via the Swakopmund sewage works, our carload was privileged to stumble on the ornithological highlight of the whole excursion, a Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus in breeding plumage at a small puddle. Pandemonium ensued as driver and passengers battled for positions and dozens of photographic salvos were fired by batteries of glass-eyed telephoto "cannons". During the whole "engagement" which compared in intensity if not scope with those later desert battles to the north, the sandpiper calmly went about its business 10-15 metres away. The message was passed on to those already back at the hotel and a second group of "reinforcements" rushed out to give the bird a further optical and photograpic "pounding". Soon thereafter, well satisfied if somewhat weary, the group embarked for Windhoek where they arrived safely in time for a late dinner.

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#### SOME ORNITHOLOGICAL SIGHTINGS IN THE WINDHOEK AREA

S. M. Seftel

These notes concern some of the more interesting and attractive birds seen during the past six months, in or near Windhoek - four interesting zones well worth regular visits: Avis Dam (East); Daan Viljoen (West); Municipal Sewage Works, including nearby scrub flats and dry riverine (North-west); Eros- from wireless Hill to the Rising School, including hillsides and dry riverine (North East). The notes are informal and do not follow any particular system.

##### Avis Dam:

Apart from the dam and surrounding mudflats (well-populated with large and small waterfowl and waders) there are two other rewarding zones for bird-watching: the major and minor river beds (now, in September, quite dry) that flow into the dam from opposite directions; and the tree-fringed edges of the hills on two sides of the dam. The minor river that flows from the North and enters the dam near the outflow tower is also the late evening route taken by kudu and baboon which may often be seen dramatically silhouetted against last light, framed by *Acacia hereroensis* and *giraffae*.

In the late afternoon, to the East of the dam and in front of a fine young *Acacia* karoo I have recently seen small mixed bird parties of Malba Finch (R830) and Violet-eared Waxbill (R840) feeding on or near the ground. This requires a long patient watch but the small scene has a carnival quality given added depth by the lower-keyed colouration of females, and the possible addition

to the party of a Black-cheeked Waxbill (R841), etc. In the same area, one often now sees a solitary Kalahari Scrub Robin (R586) strutting around, flirting his tail like a fan, and slowly raising and lowering it after short runs- a very dapper bird indeed. On the hillsides, Short-toed Rock Thrush (R561) are now prominent on projecting branches, but rather shy. I find them particularly elegant.

In mid-winter one often saw Fiscal Shrike (R707) similarly perched in the dry river beds- I have not seen one for some time, The white forehead on a black cap seems characteristic here, but not in the Cape. Nor have I seen the White-crowned Shrike (R730) for a similar period. The heavy dark eye-stripe that curves down past the ear coverts reminds one somewhat of the "theatrical eye make-up" of the Lanner Falcon (R114). Crimson-breasted Shrike (R711) are now common on the hillside, often in pairs calling with that explosive "quot" to maintain contact, and flitting from one swart-haak bush to the next. Gone, however, are the striking crimson "flowers" of Red Bishops (R808) that topped the marsh bushes some five months ago- I am looking forward to seeing their fine breeding plumage again.

#### Waders:

During the last week of August, there was a solitary White Stork (R80) at the dam. Perhaps it missed the big Palaearctic migrations this year and was on a smaller Ethiopian tour. For the sceptical reader, I should add that this was a very positive identification, and not a Wood Stork (R76), of which there were a small group in mid-April, often feeding in unison- ballet style- circling, or gliding low over the water like improbable Concordes. Anyway, let's set out the main diagnostic differences: the White Stork has a white tail and a dark red bill - the Wood Stork has a black tail, yellow-orange bill, and a red facial patch. Together with the Wood Stork were a few spoonbill (R85), pure white against the slightly pink Wood Stork. After they left, several Black Stork (R79) arrived, also in April. These large black-brown birds with white underparts and red "accessories" - so to speak- were at first excessively shy and flew off to the distant Northern hills at the least intrusion, but later they acquired some composure and merely crossed to the other side of the dam as the other sensible birds do.

Avocet (R269) have returned in force after an absence of about three months; Stilt (R270) and Blacksmith Plover (R245) in small but noisy groups have been with us all along; and we now also have a charming pair of Kittlitz Sandplover (R237) which have more equanimity and - I think- better looks than the several pairs of Three-banded Sandplover (R238). This pair has richer colouring than those at Swakopmund, near the Salt works, with attractive chestnut fronts and fawn "berets" edged with black and white that are worn on the back of the head.

#### Ducks:

In addition to the usual ducks to be seen at the various dams, there are now considerable numbers of Red-eyed Pochard (R102) at the Sewage Works. They are very nervous but eventually settle down and one can appreciate the unusual rather pointed head shapes and the attractive C-shaped white facial markings of the females.

These features are clearly shown in the Cape Department of Nature Conservation's booklet "Waterfowl of the Cape Province". Recently there was a pair of Cape Shoveler (R94) at the lower dam in the Daan Viljoen Reserve, and the blue shoulder patches are quite striking when the birds are landing and taking off, best seen when one has the advantage of a higher vantage point.

#### Terns:

A solitary White-winged Black Tern (R304) can now be seen at the Sewage Works in partial out-of-breeding plumage. I have not seen it dive, but gracefully hawk insects with a fascinating "wing-over" into wind, and a slow swoop that barely skims the water. It has a black bill, orange legs and a dark spot behind the eye that is perhaps the beginning of its breeding plumage black cap. During May, at Avis Dam, there was another solitary Tern that remains something of a problem. This bird flew wide, easy circuits with intermittent gliding, and dived for prey. It had silver grey wings, a white swallow tail with long edge feathers, red beak, red legs and a black cap with a thin white edge. The description fits the Antarctic Tern (R292) but if so then this was an very old visitor.

#### African Jacana (R228)

This solitary visitor is at the Sewage Works now. I have seen it several times, and at close range, and it is unmistakable. It has a favourite patch of marshy grass on a central strip between dams and is extremely shy. It flies strongly over to the opposite side at the least warning. One can see those incredibly long toes dangle on to take-off and then point out behind the bird. I have not as yet heard it call nor seen it dive. It is not only unusual but also a beautiful bird with a white throat blending into a golden chest and then a dark beautiful body. A glossy black crown and nape provides a fine contrasting accent.

#### Whydahs:

Paradise Whydahs (R852) and Shaft-tailed Whydahs (R847) are inconspicuous now but were seen fully feathered at the end of April in the Eros area, the latter as bad-tempered birds swooping down to scatter mixed bird parties on the ground, and the former were often seen flying over at considerable height and descending in steps to perch on a large tree with a corresponding showy sway of its "bustle".

#### Sunbirds and Bee-eaters:

In the Eros-area, at the end of April, I saw a Sunbird that poses a problem. There has been a recent Windhoek sighting of a Leaser Double-Collared Sunbird (R760) and this fits my notes except for the disturbing fact, that the bird I saw had a dark belly. I am sure that it was not a Marico Sunbird (R 755) - of which I have seen many in Acacia karoo (feeding at tubular parasitic flowers) alongside a dry river bed behind Katutura - as the breast band was bright scarlet topped with another of iridescent blue-green that varied with angle. The Marico's breast bands are maroon and violet. The green head showed yellow at the sides. This was probably iridescence. Skead notes that flashes of bright iridescence in Sunbirds can be very confusing to novices- I am quite prepared to accept that.

Scarlet-chested sunbirds (R774) were recently very active in the brilliantly blooming Kaffirboom opposite the Christuskirche.

I have not seen any Bee-eaters for some month but in May, Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters (R 411) were active at Avis Dam, singly or in

small groups, hawking from favourite perches - very striking birds with basic green colouration, yellow throats and forked blue tails.

At the end of summer, the Palaearctic migrant European Bee-eaters (404) were common over Eros and Klein Windhoek, hawking like Swifts, and keeping contact with clear liquid calls - "quilp,quilp". On Wireless Hill, I saw a group of about 20 dive out of a cloudy sky like a squadron of fighter planes, swoop to ground level, flutter upwards, and then dive again out of steep turns - a fine display of flying combined with, I think, the most polychromatic colouration of any bird to visit Windhoek: powder-blue undersides, black-edged yellow throats, chestnut upper parts, and greenish tails. It rained, and the birds perched in trees until it cleared whereupon they flew off in a Northward direction, perhaps to Europe.

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