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## SOME PALAEARCTIC MIGRANTS IN NAMIBIA: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

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The process of editing the atlas texts for *The Atlas of Southern African Birds* involved sifting through many literature records. We find it difficult, however, to sanction some Namibian records published by Sauer & Sauer (1960). The authors spent from August 1957 to early May 1958 in northern Namibia and claim to have observed the following three Palaeartic migrants as new species for the country.

Groups of Black Terns "Trauerseeschwalbe" (*Chlidonias niger*) ranging in size between two and 43 birds were seen hunting over a dam and river on the farm Neudorf in the Grootfontein district on various dates between 12 and 30 December 1957. Six birds, all aged as immatures, were mistnetted and ringed; wing lengths were given but this does not assist with identification of the species because the mean wing-lengths of juvenile Black Terns (204.9 mm; range 193–213 mm) and Whitewinged Terns (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) (203.7 mm; range 193–213 mm) are very similar (Malling Olsen & Larsson 1995). The authors realized the possibilities of confusion between Whitewinged and Whiskered Tern (*C. hybridus*), particularly in winter and juvenile plumage, and state that identification was confirmed because of the diagnostic dark marks at the sides of the shoulders ("dunkeln Abzeichen an den Schulterseiten"). We interpret this feature to refer to the dark markings at the leading edge of the wing-bend which is, however, not diagnostic for Black Tern but also occurs in the Whitewinged Tern (Alström 1989, Malling Olsen & Larsson 1995), which species coincidentally was not observed at all by Sauer & Sauer (*op. cit.*). What is diagnostic in the Black Tern in non-breeding plumage are dark smudges on the sides of the chest, e.g. illustrated in the first Namibian specimens, reported by Jensen & Berry (1972). The Whitewinged Tern is the common freshwater tern through most of the interior of southern Africa (Williams in press a), while the Black Tern — though now known to be a regular but

frequently overlooked species along the west coast (Jensen & Berry 1972; Williams in press b) — avoids the interior. Also, although Tree (1975) reported five Black Terns from Lake Ngami in northern Botswana, most of the few confirmed inland records of this species in southern Africa refer to singletons or very small groups (e.g. Robson 1972; Schmitt *et al.* 1973). On the balance of probabilities the birds recorded and caught by Sauer & Sauer (*op. cit.*) are far more likely to have been Whitewinged Terns. Becker (1974) provided details of one of the birds ringed by Sauer & Sauer (*op. cit.*) on 28 December 1957, which was recovered in July 1959 near Denisowka (52°26' N, 61°41' E) in Kazakhstan. Unfortunately, the recovery site does not provide a further clue to the species identification, because it is within the breeding range of both Black and Whitewinged Tern. Becker (1974), however, also argues that it may well have been a Whitewinged Tern.

The Wood Warbler "Waldlaubsänger" (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*) is claimed by Sauer & Sauer (*op. cit.*) to have been recorded as 'innumerable numerous' in three regions on seven days in February and early March. Eight birds were caught, but the measurements presented (total length 12.8–13.2 cm and wing-length 6.6–7.2 cm) indicate that at least some cannot possibly have been Wood Warblers which have a wing length of at least 70 mm (Svensson 1992). Allowing for some uncertainty about the method of wing measurement used by Sauer & Sauer (*op. cit.*), all their measurements fit in the range of the Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*) (wing-length 59–72 mm), while their larger birds might have been Icterine Warblers (*Hippolais icterina*) (wing-length 73–82 mm). The non-breeding range of the Wood Warbler is restricted in Africa to the equatorial belt (Pearson & Lack 1992) and its occurrence in any numbers in an arid country far south of the equator like Namibia is outside the realms of possibility. Both species which could have been involved in the confusion, Willow Warbler and Icterine Warbler, were observed and caught by Sauer & Sauer (*op. cit.*) and we have no possible explanation for their decision that some must have been Wood Warblers.

On three different dates in December a total of three females and a male Eurasian Redstart "Gartenrotschwanz" (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) are also claimed to have been recorded. No diagnostic description is provided, other

than a general statement that no confusion with the Familiar Chat (*Cercomelas familiaris*) occurred and that the records are certain; the male is said to have sung its well-known phrases. The normal non-breeding range of this species is in the northern and equatorial Afrotropics (Pearson & Lack 1992). The single authenticated record of this species in southern Africa to date is a male near Klerksdorp in the northwest Province (South Africa) in May 1988 (Cohen in press), while a recent record at Lake McIlwaine in Zimbabwe (Couto & Couto 1995) awaits confirmation by the rarities commission. We cannot offer an alternative identification, except perhaps Herero Chat (*Namibornis herero*). In the light of the other inaccuracies discussed above, we find it highly unlikely that an unprecedented four trans-equatorial vagrants of this species would have been found in Namibia by Sauer & Sauer (*op. cit.*) in that wet season.

Clancey (1980) already advised that the records of the Wood Warbler and Redstart required confirmation before the species could be included in the southern African list. Cramp *et al.* (1992) followed this recommendation for the former species and the occurrence of the latter in southern Africa was confirmed in the meantime. We recommend that none of the above records by Sauer & Sauer (*op. cit.*) be considered sufficiently authenticated to warrant their perpetuation in the literature as valid.

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