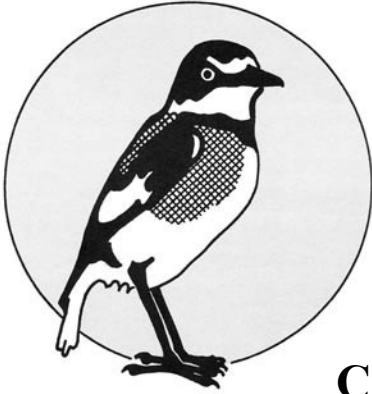


# LANIOTURDUS



**VOL. 42 (1)**  
**2009**

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# Sooty Tern, *Sterna fuscata*, a New Record for Namibia

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Sooty Tern, *Sterna fuscata*, is a pelagic tern occurring in all tropical and sub-tropical seas rarely coming ashore except to breed on oceanic islands (Harrison 1983). This is the most abundant tern with a world population exceeding 14 million birds (Hockey et. al. 2005).

Sooty terns are considered by Hockey et. al. (2005) to be regular visitors to the Southern African sub-region occurring off the north eastern coast KwaZulu Natal and Mozambique. There are also several inland records from the Lowveld, Eastern Zimbabwe, Swaziland and KwaZulu Natal following cyclones in the Indian Ocean (Ryan 1997 and Hockey et. al. 2005). The western most records for Sooty Tern in Southern Africa are from Dyer Island and Strandfontein in the Western Cape (Ryan 1997 and Hockey et. al. 2005).

Seven sub-species of Sooty Tern are recognized globally, though it is not possible to differentiate them all in the field (Harrison 1983 and Hockey et. al. 2005). *S. f. nubilosa* is confined to the Indian Ocean (Harrison 1983) and is, thus far, the only recorded sub species in Southern Africa (Ryan 1997 and Hockey et. al. 2005). In the Atlantic Ocean Sooty Tern is represented by *S. f. fuscata* that occurs in the tropical Atlantic from America to the West African coast, the Gulf of Guinea and on St. Helena Island (Harrison 1983 and Urban et. al. 1986). There are no records for Sooty Tern along the west coast of South Africa or Namibia.

On 3 November 2006 a dead adult Sooty Tern was found on the high beach at 19° 16.32' S 012° 39.96' E approximately 10 km north of Mōwe Bay. The carcass was intact, between 4 and 7 days old. The plumage was in good condition and showed little wear. There was no active moult apparent on any of the feather tracts. Primary moult score was 5<sup>10</sup>. The upper parts were a uniform black (Fig. 1.), white underside with the primaries and secondaries showing grey (Fig. 2.). The outer retrices were white. Culmen and legs were black. The vibrant plumage would suggest a bird in breeding plumage rather than the dull, worn non-breeding plumage (Harrison 1983). Measurements compared with those taken from

previous Southern African records indicate this bird to be generally smaller than average suggesting a possible female (Table 1).

The distinct geographical separation of the various sub-species (Harrison 1983) suggests that the bird found on the Skeleton Coast is likely to be from the Atlantic population of Sooty Tern, *S. f. fuscata*. This is a first record of Sooty Tern for Namibia and probably the first record of the sub-species *S. f. fuscata* for Southern Africa.

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**Table 1:**

Measurements in mm of Sooty Tern found on Skeleton Coast compared to South African records

	Skeleton Coast Specimen	South African Specimens (Hockey et. al. 2005)
Wing	286	283 – 305 (294.4)
Culmen	43.2	39 – 44 (42.6)
Total Head length	88.0	
Culmen Depth at Gonys	17.8	
Tail Outer	154	152 – 178 (166.6)
Tail Inner	76	
Tarsus	Not taken	21.5 – 24 (22.8)

**Figure 1:**  
Dorsal view showing  
uniform black plumage.  
Note the white outer  
retrices.



**Figure 2:** Ventral view showing white plumage. Note the grey primaries and secondaries and characteristic white frons and black loreal stripe.

