



LANIOTURDUS

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Editorial

We rely heavily on books such as Roberts VII, (often referred to as the “birders’ bible”), for distribution maps, biometric measurements etc. - but is the information in these reference books always correct? And, possibly more importantly, do we read it correctly? Mark Paxton’s observations on the tail length of the green/violet wood-hoopoes he measured at Shamvura (Lanioturdus 43-2) got me interested. My own records of the measurements of the southern masked-weavers occurring in Namibia which can be seen in this issue further stimulated this interest. While there are some very obvious mistakes in even the best of publications (the distribution map for malachite sunbird in Roberts VII is a case in point as is the distribution map for red-billed quelea in Roberts Field Guide – Chittenden 2007), some of these can probably be put down to editorial oversight and printers’ gremlins, but the

Summary of the Summer 2010 Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia

Holger Kolberg
Directorate Scientific Services
Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Windhoek
holgerk@mweb.com.za

January 2010 announced its arrival with welcome and wide-spread rain throughout Namibia. The result of this was that we were expecting bumper counts at many of the inland wetlands, although the two coastal heavyweights would be expected to contribute the majority in terms of numbers, as usual.

During this count cycle 26 sites were counted, an increase on previous counts, in no small part due to the efforts of the Namibia Bird Club that is now counting many wetlands around Windhoek. A total of 228,484 birds of 92 species was counted at these sites, with Lake Oponono delivering the highest species total (44) and Walvis Bay the highest number of birds (116,108).

Only one Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) was counted (at Mile 4), underlining this species' status as an endangered bird in Namibia. Pink-backed Pelicans (*Pelecanus rufescens*) appear to have established themselves at Hardap Dam with a healthy total of 24 birds recorded this time. A White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) was spotted at the Lüderitz Sewage Works. Lesser Flamingos (*Phoeniconaias minor*) made up just under 10% of the total number of flamingos counted, but an estimated 12,000 birds were seen on a pan to the west of the Ekuma River on the border of Etosha National Park (this figure was not included in the count). Only Wattled (*Grus carunculatus*) and Grey Crowned Cranes (*Balearica regulorum*) were seen, both at Lake Oponono. Amongst the waders, Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) were ticked at Walvis Bay and Mile 4 whereas a Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) appeared on the Sandwich count. The Gammams Sewage Works delivered a Grey-headed Gull (*Larus*

cirrocephalus) and an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) was recorded at Hardap Dam.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond our control, the Orange River Mouth was not counted this time and it is still a cause for concern that no sites in the north-east of the country i.e. Tsumkwe Pans, Mahango and East Caprivi are counted.

My heartfelt thanks go to the many counters, most of them volunteering their time and money to do the counts. Those that have submitted counts for the first time, please keep it up; the stalwarts – your efforts are definitely not taken for granted.

Note: See the last page of this edition for a table of the counts by location.

Successful Release of Artificially Raised Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, *Merops hirundineus*, (Swaelstertbyvreter, Schwalbenschwanzstint)

Sonja Bartlewski
(sonja.michl@iway.na)

On 23 November 2009 a lady saw some construction workers digging out a nest of birds in a small embankment on a building site and kicking the nestlings away. She came across this scene at just the right time and was able to rescue all four birds alive. She then telephoned me to take over. And so this bunch of green creatures came to me. They turned out to be swallow-tailed bee-eaters aged about 5 days, 7 days, 9 days and 11 days. The oldest one had a broken wing and died a day later and the youngest one was too

stressed and died shortly after its oldest sibling. The other two were the strongest and survived very well. I fed them with a special mix of “rohhack”, Pronutro, dried crickets and mealworms. On 1 December 2009 they left the “cave” I had built them from a cardboard roll and started flying around in the cage together with their “friend”, a red-faced mousebird which I was also raising. One could sit in front of the cage watching them for hours; they were such beautiful creatures both in colour and in character. Prior to releasing them I had them ringed by licensed local bird ringers. On 15 December 2009 I opened the cage door and they left leaving me behind with one eye laughing and one eye crying. They are free...and they are still around with a flock of bee-eaters roosting in our neighbour’s tree every night. In March 2010 I managed to take a picture of one of them. One cannot see the ring in the picture but I am almost 100% sure I saw a ring on its leg when it took off.

I hope there are more people out there like this brave lady who did not turn away but took the initiative which led to the rescue and survival of these beautiful creatures.



The surviving bee-eaters – photo Sonja Bartlewski

(If you find orphaned or injured wild birds Sonja is contactable on 081 149 2313 –Ed)

Mahango Game Reserve in the Rainy Season

Richard Niddrie

Richard.niddrie@mtcmobile.com.na

At the end of January/beginning of February 2010 I had the opportunity of going to the Mahango Game Reserve. The Okavango River was in full flood and the flood plains were covered with water. This made the birding all the more exciting. In places the water was right next to if not on the road. This made for some good viewing of sometimes difficult to see birds as usually they are far away on the flood plain. Birds falling into this category of which I had a close up view included African pygmy-goose, slaty egret, goliath heron, wattled crane and yellow-billed duck. As expected no African skimmers or pratincoles were seen as all the sand banks were covered with water.

In the surrounding woodlands and savanna common ostrich, woodland kingfisher, African stonechat, red-backed shrike, magpie shrike, Burchell’s and Meves’s starlings and shaft-tailed whydahs were common. Present also were coppery-tailed and Senegal coucals, Meyer’s parrot, striped kingfisher, southern black flycatcher, swamp boubou, Hartlaub’s babbler, sand martin, greater blue-eared starling and red-headed and thick-billed weavers. Both red-billed and yellow-billed oxpeckers were seen pecking away on impala and giraffe. A number of broad-billed rollers was also seen in the drier broadleaf woodland.

Common throughout the park were southern carmine and little bee-eaters. Interesting was the number of juvenile carmine bee-eaters which are duller than the adults with an almost brown back.

Raptors were well represented with African fish-eagle, booted eagle, martial eagle, bateleur and shikra. At an impala kill of the previous night were lappet-faced and white-backed vultures, a lone white-headed vulture and the ever present marabou stork.