

CONTENTS

VOLUME 34 (1), 2001

EDITORIAL	1
LUDWIG, D.E. Chairman's report	2
OSBORNE, T. & L. Roadside oddity	4
FRIEDERICH, G. & T. Pesticide and wildlife poisoning training workshop	6
OSBORNE, T. & L. Brandberg weekend	12
SIMMONS, R. Successful conservation measures for Damara Terns	14
OSBORNE, T. Hartlaub's Francolin breeding in Namibia	16
OSBORNE, T. & VERSFELD, W. Raptor research conducted within Etosha	19
VULTURE STUDY GROUP. Indian vultures in trouble	21
OSBORNE, T. & L. Kanga gangs	25
EDITOR Short notes / Bird sightings	26
PRELIMINARY PROGRAMME, 2001	28

EDITORIAL

This is my first issue as editor of *Lanioturdus* and by reading the articles you may think I have taken the opportunity to monopolise the issue to publish everything I have done over the past several years. I do admit that my quest for material has spurred me to finalise several papers. But it seems that a stiffy disk with four articles, I sent to the previous editor, Chris Hines, over a year ago, got lost in the post. I have included these although the one on flamingos is dated information.

Good rains have fallen over most of the country and the birds are responding by breeding and the migrants are getting fat on the insects. Everyone should be seeing new birds and hopefully will report on the vagrants, local migrants and oddities.

When Chris met with me, over a beer at Joe's pub, to hand over the editor's job he said the hardest part of this job would be trying to get people to put to paper their observations, adventures and studies. Once again the editor appeals to all the members to please send in your articles so we can get our journal back on a four-times-a-year schedule. I would like to start a section of the *Lanioturdus* for visitors' comments, trip reports, etc. If any members have visitors or bird-watching clients please ask them to send us a short summary of their trip. I am sure that we would like to know what visitors are seeing and how their experience was in Namibia.

SUCCESSFUL CONSERVATION MEASURES FOR DAMARA TERNS IN NAMIBIA

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In South Africa the Damara Tern is listed as 'Endangered' because of its very small population (less than 125 pairs) and its continuing conflict with humans. Here in Namibia populations are much larger and healthier and Damara Terns number about 6000 pairs. Yet here too humans and terns come into conflict because they overlap in space and time during peak holiday months at the coast.

The largest and densest colony known of this species occurs near Swakopmund which supports 120 pairs of terns in just 2 km². This coincides precisely with a hot spot of activity on Namibia's central coast during the December-January holiday season. This relatively small patch of sand, gravel plain and beach front is the destination for hundreds of holiday-makers, quad-bike maniacs and crayfishermen from Namibia, South Africa and further afield. Hundreds of vehicles (870 per month to be precise) crossed the Caution Reef Damara Tern colony in 1995 during Rod Braby's study and similar numbers did so in 1997/1998 when volunteer Lucy Reiss monitored tern breeding success there for 2 months. Simply banning people from this favoured destination was not possible so other conservation measures had to be found.

Knowing that hatching success of Damara Tern was very low on this colony (~50%) compared with colonies in Möwe Bay where human disturbance was minimal (~72%), the Ministry of Environment & Tourism decided to reduce tern-human conflict through information signs and physically preventing visitors from driving over eggs and chicks. In November 2000, a 5-km-long barrier fence was erected along the main Swakopmund-Walvis Bay road stopping off-road vehicles and especially quad bikes from crossing the breeding

site to reach the beach. At the new entrances to the beach attractive new signboards were erected explaining that the area was full of breeding Damara Terns and that off-track driving was illegal. This did not prevent vacationers from accessing the beach but it did stop them making short cuts back to the national road and made them feel more guilty about performing 'wheelies' on tern eggs. It also heightened awareness in general such that all of the 52 groups of persons interviewed by the Chief Warden Rod Braby were well aware of the terns and keeping out of the area. This was in contrast to 3 years earlier when only about one quarter of those interviewed were aware of any breeding birds, and some camped right on active tern nests. It was also important that other areas were specifically earmarked for quad bikers to enjoy themselves so that their frustrations at being banned from one area didn't backfire.

What effects did this have on the terns and their breeding success? Following the new conservation measures, Israeli volunteer, Anat Shapira, with help from several local people found and followed the fate of all terns breeding in this area over one month during the peak Christmas frenzy. She and the Braby family found 30 nests in this 2 km² area and followed the fate of 15 eggs to hatch.

They also recorded the number of vehicles crossing the colony. The difference between before and after was dramatic. The number of vehicles crossing the area in January 2001 dropped from 870 per month (6 years earlier) to zero. The density of nesting birds rose slightly from 12 nests/km² to 15 nests/km² and most interestingly the hatch success rose from an average 56% to 80% of all eggs followed. No eggs were lost to human interference compared with 5% to 13% of all eggs previously. Curiously, fewer eggs were also lost to jackals and gulls compared with previous years. This was strange because these predators still had access to the colony unhindered and we assume they were not heeding our signs. We believe that the lack of tracks and human presence in the colony and the concentration of fishermen and picnickers along the beach itself, probably resulted in these scavengers concentrating their foraging along the beaches - where there were no tern nests. This unexpected spin-off undoubtedly increased the proportion of hatching eggs and thus increased reproductive success.

We are unable to follow the cryptically coloured chicks to fledging because they move very large distances, but the size of the area now protected suggests these birds will be more likely to fledge.

The success of this project is due mainly to the persistence of conservation officials in Swakopmund, particularly Rod Braby (the area is known already as Rod's farm), and it bodes well for other clumped species that interact negatively with humans near beaches (e.g. oystercatchers). Our hope is that pairs from the sub-colony closer to Swakopmund which are heavily impacted by quad bikes now move to this protected site where they too will enjoy enhanced protection. Further monitoring will tell us whether this is so and whether breeding birds continue to show improved success.

This year has been a good one for Damara Terns – new breeding sites have been uncovered at Easter Cliffs, and a new breeding record of 11.5 km from the coast, in the southern Namib – were all brought to light in the last 12 months. We hope this trend continues for this diminutive species which is still regarded as a globally near-threatened Red Data species.

HARTLAUB'S FRANCOLIN BREEDING IN NAMIBIA

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Hartlaub's Francolin *Francolinus hartlaubi* is a near-endemic to Namibia which is restricted to rocky hills in the country from Windhoek north to the extreme south-west Angola. There is one breeding record of a female laying three eggs in May (Komen 1987) from the Omaruru area.

Shortly after we purchased the farm, Windpoort, in the Outjo district, we discovered that the site we had chosen for construction of our house was in

the middle of the territory of a pair of Hartlaub's Francolin. We erected a tent at the building site located at Tandala Ridge, 19°21.48'S 15°29.03'E and in the mornings made observations on the birds. On 2 September 1999 we saw the pair accompanied by 3-month-old chicks. We continued to see the birds and the three chicks daily until 17 October when they did not frequent the area around our tent anymore. We continued to hear the male calling in the mornings and evenings in the vicinity, however.

On 5 November we again saw the adults but they were accompanied by three small chicks probably less than a week old. On 6 November we again saw the birds but this time they were accompanied not only with the three small chicks but also with three large juveniles. It appeared to us that the pair had nested a second time in the same breeding season. We continued to see the adults and both broods each evening as they came into our outdoor shower which dripped constantly. According to Maclean (1993) the bird "does not drink water". Our birds would drink the water that leaked from the shower and would also stand under the water to bathe.

In February 2000 while clearing some dead brush from next to the front stoep of our chalet I found the remnants of a francolin nest with egg shells. There were shells from three eggs, one of which could be accurately measured 25.4x37.5 mm, a second approximated 24x39 mm and the other was not complete enough. The shells were a plain cream colour with a dirt stain. The nest scrape was in a bowl of dried Sorghum grass *Sorghum verticilliformum* on a rocky ledge under the dead branches of a Purple-pod terminalia *Terminalia pruniodes*. The nest was surrounded by exposed rocks below a rock wall 1-m high. The eggshell fragments were sent to the Namibia National Museum where they were identified as Hartlaub's Francolin (J. Komen pers. comm.).

We set up a mist net to catch bats and in the morning of 10 April 2000 I found the female francolin in the net. We ringed her with a metal and red colour ring. By this time all the juvenile birds had dispersed and we only saw the adult birds around our house. During early June we saw the pair daily but then in late June through July we only heard the birds but did not see them. On 2 Aug. we saw the pair accompanied by a week-old chick. We were gone from the farm most of Aug. and Sept. and next saw the birds on 30 Sept. when