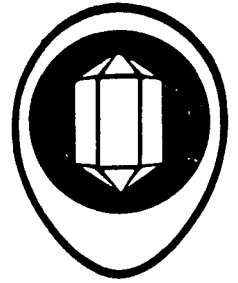


Lanioturdus torquatus
Drosselwürger

MITTEILUNGEN

ORNITHOLOGISCHE ARBEITSGRUPPE



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

Nr. 4

18. Jahrgang

Juli 1982

THE AMERICAN PURPLE GALLINULE

A NEW BIRD FOR NAMIBIA / S.W.AFRICA

An adult American Purple Gallinule Porphyryla martinica (Roberts 208 X) was found at Gobabis (22 18 Bd) on 25 May 1982. Its measurements (mm) were : tarsus 58,5; wing 177; and culmen 25,6 (to feathers on lores) or 41,2 (to base of frontal shield). These measurements are typical for a female but too small for a male of this species (see data in Cramp & Simmons 1979). The bird was in a very emaciated condition and weighed 120 g.

The bird was found by Mr. J. van der Merwe who first saw it when it landed in some bushes in his garden at 96 Humpata Street. A cat began to stalk the bird. In order to save it Mr. van der Merwe caught the gallinule and placed it in his poultry run. The bird was easily caught but clawed and bit its captor. It was found dead in the poultry run the following morning. Subsequently it was sent to the Department of Agriculture and Nature Conservation and then, since it was a species previously unknown from Namibia / S.W.Africa, it was passed to the State Museum. It is now a study skin (No. WAJ 1) in the museum collection.

The American Purple Gallinule is closely related to two African gallinules - the large Purple Gallinule Porphyrio porphyrio (R 208) and particularly the smaller Allen's or Lesser Gallinule Porphyryla alleni (R 209) - both of which occur in Namibia / S.W. Africa. Both the African gallinules have red legs and an all red bill. The American Purple Gallinule can easily be distinguished from them by its yellow legs and the yellow tip to its red bill. It should be noted that the frontal shield of the American Purple Gallinule is blue (Cramp & Simmons 1979) and not white as stated and depicted in Roberts Birds of South Africa -(McLachlan & Liversidge 1978).

All three of these gallinules are omnivorous. They feed primarily on plant food taking the shoots, leaves, flowers and seeds of aquatic plants, but also feed upon a variety of animal food including insects, leeches, molluscs etc. (Cramp & Simmons 1979). All three species breed among thick reeds or similar vegetation fringing bodies of lowland freshwater (Ripley 1977).

The American Purple Gallinule is characteristic of lowland freshwater habitat through much of tropical and subtropical America. In South America it breeds throughout the tropics south to Peru on the west, and to northern Argentine and Uruguay on the east, of the Andes. It breeds throughout the West Indies and Central America and its northern limits are the Gulf Coast of the U.S.A.. Most of the tropical populations are apparently sedentary but birds breeding near the northern and southern limits of the species' range are migratory and in winter move to lower latitudes. Gallinules are surprisingly strong fliers and birds from the southern U.S.A. may regularly migrate across the full width of the Gulf of Mexico. Migration is normally at night. This is probably because gallinules are not very agile in flight and would easily be caught by birds of prey if they flew far from cover by daylight. When migrating, Gallinules may be caught in storms. They may then prefer to fly with the wind than to struggle against it. This may cause them to be carried far off their normal migration routes. This is believed to explain the occurrence of stragglers which have occurred on the eastern side of the Atlantic Ocean in Europe, West Africa and in South Africa.

The American Purple Gallinule has been found several times at Tristan da Cunha, St Helena and Ascension Islands in the mid South Atlantic Ocean and there are at least 12 records from the Cape Province of South Africa (Cramp & Simmons 1979; Siegfried and Frost 1973). Most of these records concern immature birds. So far as we are aware no specimen of this species has previously been recorded in Namibia / S.W. Africa. Observers should keep a look out for possible further stragglers at such places as the sewage works at Lüderitz and Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, at other reed fringed freshwater habitats on the coast, and even, as this record from Gobabis shows, far inland. A small gallinule at Unjab Delta, in Skeleton Coast National Park, in June 1978 by R. Loutit might have been either P. martinica (R 208 X) or P. alleni (R 209).

American Purple Gallinules which occur in Southern Africa are almost certainly from Uruguay or Argentine. The shortest distance between South America and Namibia / S.W. Africa is 5,500 km but the straight distance between the coast of Uruguay and Gobabis is 7 250 km. It is probable that this bird had to fly a good deal further since it would probably start its flight some way inland and it is unlikely to have followed a direct course. It is also probable that this gallinule made this flight non-stop. Since it cannot obtain food from the sea or from a ship and the chances of it sighting an island are small there would be no reason for the bird to stop whilst it could still fly. Even allowing for strong tail winds such a long distance flight is an epic and probably the bird had to fly non-stop for four or five days to cross the Atlantic Ocean. To keep its wings flapping for this great distance the bird must have used up a tremendous amount of energy. It is therefore not surprising that it was emaciated and weak when found. Normally females of this species weigh between 200 and 300 g (Cramp & Simmons 1979) probably being the heaviest immediately prior to migration. The Gobabis bird

which weighed only 120 g when found, had thus probably lost at least 80-100 g or half of its body weight at the start of its trip from South America.

References:

- Cramp, S. & Simmons, K.E.L. (Eds.) 1979. The birds of the western Palearctic, Vol. 2., London: Oxford University Press.
- McLachlan, G.R. & Liversidge, R. 1978. Roberts, Birds of South Africa. Cape Town: Voelcker Book Fund / Struik
- Ripley, S.D. 1977. Rails of the world : monograph of the family Rallidae.
- Siegfried, W.R. & Frost, P.G.H. 1973. Regular occurrence of Porphyryla martinica in South Africa. Bull. Br. Orn. Club 93:36-38.

We are grateful to the Secretary of National Education for permission to publish this article.

Dr. A.J. Williams, State Museum, P.O. Box 1203, Windhoek

Mr. B.R. Riekert, Department of Agriculture and Nature Conservation, Private Bag 13306, Windhoek.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Amerikanisches Sultanshuhn (*Porphyryla martinica* R 208 X)

Ein weibliches Amerikanisches Sultanshuhn (R 208 X) wurde am 25. Mai 1982 in Gobabis gefunden. Obwohl von 12 - 20 verschiedenen Arten in der südwestlichen Kapprovinz von Südafrika berichtet wurde, glaubt man, dass diese Art das erste Mal in Namibia/Südwestafrika beobachtet wurde. Um bis nach Gobabis zu kommen, musste der Vogel 5 000 - 8 000 km über den südatlantischen Ozean fliegen. Dieses bedeutet einen ununterbrochenen Flug von 3 - 5 Tagen, wobei das Amerikanische Sultanshuhn die Hälfte seines Körpergewichts verlor.

Die Beine dieser Art sind gelb und der rote Schnabel hat eine gelbe Spitze. Dadurch kann man es sehr leicht von den verwandten afrikanischen Arten unterscheiden (R208) und R 209), die beide rote Beine und einen ganz roten Schnabel haben.

LAUFBRÜCHE

Laufbrüche machen auch keine allzugrossen Schwierigkeiten, wenn sie nicht offen und nicht gesplittert sind. Man schient sie von der Zehe bis zur Fusswurzel mit Strohalm, Federspule, Hölzchen u.a. Darüber streicht man Kolodium, UHU, Gips usw. oder wickelt einen Wollfaden darum. Auch leistet ein Zellophan-Klebestreifen (Tesafilm) als Schienung gute Dienste. Die Klebemittel kann man später in Aceton, Nagellackentferner, Äther u.ä. auflösen. Beim Tesafilm schlägt man das Ende kurz ein, um es leichter lösen und abwickeln zu können. Die Heilung tritt gewöhnlich in 8- 14 Tagen ein.

Aus „Krankheit der Stubenvögel“, von Dr. Alwin Komma