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## Editorial

Bird populations are dynamic – always on the move! I see this at my own home. I have lived in this house for over 23 years and up until about four years ago I had never seen a southern red bishop there – in 2009 alone I ringed 136 at this location! In September 2010 I experienced an irruption of common waxbills, a species I very seldom see in my garden. Over a period of 122 days until the end of the year we ringed 205 and then the numbers seen and caught dropped off sharply suggesting that most of them had moved on. In *Lanioturdus* 43(4) I mentioned the five pied crows I saw on 11/08/2010 across two Quarter Degree Squares between Rundu Airport and Ncaute where the species was not recorded in the Atlas. I had not seen this species there in about ten previous trips and I have not seen it there again since then on my subsequent trips through this area.

The above examples illustrate how dynamic certain populations actually are – some suddenly appearing and remaining, others merely moving through an area. With the climate changes currently being experienced we are seeing the earlier arrival of some migrants and also later departure dates. (In *Lanioturdus* 43-4 we published some of Günther Friederich's observations on the early arrival of grey-headed kingfisher and European bee-eater in our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section).

In our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section in this issue we have a report of a Sabine's gull seen at Kalkheuwel waterhole in the Etosha National Park – as far as I have been able to determine this constitutes

## African Reed-Warblers Can Swim!

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On Sunday, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2010, Dirk Heinrich, Ursula Bader, Holger Kolberg, Mark Boorman and I went out to Monte Christo, about 30 km outside Windhoek, to do some birding and bird-ringing. In the evening, close to 17h00, as the cold set in and the birds started moving to their roosting places, Dirk caught a couple of African Reed-Warblers *Acrocephalus baeticatus* in a net close to some reeds. The first bird was ringed and released and it flew in the direction of the reeds where it had been caught.

The second bird had a very unusual moult. The three outside primary feathers on each wing were only partly grown and Dirk gave the moult as being 555555222 for both wings. The wing length was 57 mm. The bird was ringed with metal ring No AP69761. When the bird was released it was immediately obvious that it had some difficulty flying. Instead of flying down towards the reeds it flew in an ever lower semi-circle landing in the cold water of the main pond at Monte Christo about 10 m from the water's edge. The ever intrepid Dirk started hauling out his hand net and had ideas of jumping into the cold water after the bird – that's if a barbel (catfish) didn't get to it first! Much to our amazement the bird started 'swimming' towards the reeds on the opposite side of the pond, a stretch of about 40 m. After a few long minutes it disappeared into the reeds. With the cold evening temperature setting in, we didn't think that the survival chances of this sopping wet bird were very good.

Two weeks later, on Sunday, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2010, Dirk Heinrich and I were out at Monte Christo. An African Reed-Warbler with a ring was recaptured by Dirk in a mistnet close to the reeds in precisely the same place as those the fortnight previously. In jest, but hoping, I suggested that it was the 'swimmer'! Much to our surprise the bird had ring No AP69761 -

the very same bird that had made an extraordinarily long cold swim across the large pond. The little bird was in good condition and Dirk gave the moult as being 555555444. In a span of two weeks the three outside primary feathers had almost fully grown.

The little bird had indeed survived its watery ordeal and we were left to consider how well this particular African Reed-Warbler could swim!

*(I think that a brief explanation of moult scores is necessary here – 1 denotes a missing feather or a pin, 2 a feather emerging to one third grown, 3 a feather between one third and two thirds grown, 4 a feather two thirds to fully grown, 5 a fully grown new feather and 0 an old feather – Ed)*

## The Lesser Spotted Eagle – An Extremely Endangered Migratory Raptor

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The lesser spotted eagle, *Aquila pomarina*, (Schreiadler, gevlekte arend) is a rather insignificant brown eagle about the size of a large buzzard.



Photo 1  
W.Grummt, H.Strehlow, Zootierhaltung Vögel,  
Verlag Harri Deutschland

Lesser spotted eagles are migratory birds wintering in Africa south of the Sahara mainly in Zambia, Zimbabwe, northern Namibia, Botswana and Angola. They cover distances of over 10 000 km per trip. They leave their central European breeding sites in September and leave us again in April to return. Male lesser spotted eagles especially are very faithful to their territories and return almost every year to the same breeding area.

Although the same pairs find each other each year, the mating ceremony starts all over again with spectacular nose dives and loops in the air. The nest is built in natural woods on coniferous and deciduous trees. Sometimes they also take over old steppe buzzard nests. The female lays two eggs, the male feeds her and later the chicks. The main food sources are rodents and amphibians. In Africa they also feed on reptiles and large insects and sometimes they also plunder sociable weaver nests.

Unfortunately mortalities through humans play an important role in the decline of lesser spotted eagle populations. Major problems are collisions with power lines and wind power generators, but a more frightening danger is the hunters around the Mediterranean Sea.

During the spring and autumn of 2009 16 000 hunters crowded onto Malta to target the migrating birds. Endangered and threatened species like marsh harriers, European honey-buzzards, stilts, purple herons and lesser spotted eagles were shot illegally. Due to the fact that hundreds of thousands of shots are heard all over the island many killing doves and quails legally it is impossible for the police to find out which other birds are killed too. It turned out to be a sport to kill as many birds as possible, no matter what species. Many hunters like to have stuffed eagles in their living rooms but the main aim is birds to eat.

On Malta the barn owl and the peregrine falcon are extinct. According to BirdLife International this is the only European country where not a single pair of birds of prey has bred in recent years. Due to the illegality of certain hunting there are no

accurate statistics but a Maltese journalist estimated that during the 1990's 3 million finches, 500 000 thrushes, 500 000 swallows, 80 000 orioles and 50 000 birds of prey were killed.

The laws of the European Union are slowly but surely taking hold but still millions of migrating birds are shot each season. Not only Malta but Cyprus and France are also full of bird hunters. As actions by the police and other organisations increased the hunters devised other strategies. Besides their complete disregard for the laws they put up so called "voice traps" and so catch waders and plovers in nets. Other passerines are caught by "glue traps"; branches of bushes are greased with a sticky substance from which no bird can escape. In other parts of the world people try to save endangered species only to know that they can not stop birds from migrating over these areas.



Photo 2

A trader pays a hunter up to €4,00 for a small passerine like these warblers and a plate of 4 birds with a piece of lemon costs up to €35,00 in a restaurant. Komitee gegen den Vogelmord e.V. [www.komitee.de](http://www.komitee.de)

But back to the lesser spotted eagles. Some scientists found that another area, namely the Middle East, poses a growing threat especially for lesser spotted eagles. Besides the route over Italy and Malta they use a route over the Bosphorus and Israel. In Lebanon and Turkey as on Malta the hunters are busy with their cruel work. Scientists and conservationists have not given up yet and are still hoping on the conscience of the people in these areas and try to raise awareness for tourism.

Another method was started in Germany to increase the number of lesser spotted eagles. As in most eagles the older chick kills the younger one. If due to unforeseen circumstances, the older chick dies, the parents have the younger one as "backup". In Brandenburg conservationists started taking the younger chicks out of the nests before they were killed by their siblings. "Abel" is then raised by hand, without making too much contact with humans and put back into the nest after some weeks. By now "Cain" has stopped his hatred and accepts the sibling so that the parents can raise both chicks successfully. In this way the breeding success of these eagles is doubled. The project started in 2004 and is running very successfully. In 2007 a similar project was started in Latvia. The scientists are now using this knowledge they gained from the lesser spotted eagle to increase numbers of other threatened eagles, for example golden eagles in Ireland. By means of rings and satellite tracking it has also been proven that the hand reared chicks successfully returned from Africa..... if they survived the slaughter around Mediterranean Sea!!



Photo 3

This Lesser Spotted Eagle "Sigmar" was hand reared at Hiddensee in Germany. It was ringed 15.07.2007 and found seriously injured by shot on Malta on 23.09.2007. All efforts to save its life were unsuccessful and it died like many other birds on their way to and from Africa.

[www.imalta.de/Zugvogeljagd-auf-malta](http://www.imalta.de/Zugvogeljagd-auf-malta)

## References

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Vögel Magazin für Vogelbeobachtung Heft 02/10, dwj Verlags-GmbH.

\*Daniel Lingenhöhl, Wilderei auf Malta erreicht traurigen Höhepunkt, Vögel Magazin für Vogelbeobachtung Heft 02/10, dwj Verlags-GmbH.

*(While I find the idea of hunting small passerines despicable and the idea of crunching a mouthful of small bones extremely unappetizing, I wonder if Africa has not missed a trick. If a trader is prepared to pay a hunter €4,00 for a small passerine then surely there must be an export market for those millions of red-billed queleas that plunder Africa's grain crops..... Ed)*

## Rarities and Interesting Observations

In early September Kai-Uwe Denker encountered a male pennant-winged nightjar on a road on the outskirts of Usakos. He saw the bird clearly in the headlights of the car when he flushed it. There are a few records for this species in central Namibia (I know of at least one near the international airport) but this appears to be the westernmost record for central Namibia.

Peter Bridgeford reported that the vulture ringing weekend (16 & 17/10/2010) in the Namib had been a resounding success with a record equaling 86 lappet-faced vulture chicks ringed for the season. This total was also achieved in 2007.

Günther Friederich reported the reappearance of a collared palm-thrush at Farm Choantsas near Tsintsabis when the Makalani palms *Hyphaehe petersiana* started flowering. The bird was first seen on 11/10/2010. It was seen regularly in the evenings drinking at the bird bath and was roosting in a Bougainvillea shrub in the garden. It is highly possible that this is the same bird reported from this location at the same time last year. (See