

NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

VOLUME 30 (3), September 1997

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All contributions for *LANIOTURDUS* should be sent to:

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## THE PATAGONIA PHENOMENON

(A Windhoek Yard List)

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This is not a trip report about southern Argentina. Along the USA/Mexico border there is a roadside rest area that has a couple of large trees whose bird list reads like a *Who's Who of Neotropical Vagrants*. The location, which is near Patagonia, Arizona, has become a Mecca for both resident and visiting birders. Since so many people stop at this spot, it is covered as well as any place in the state. The large number of birders means that very few birds rest in those trees without being spotted. Because of the excellent coverage, more and more good birds are recorded, which attracts more birders, who find more good birds . . . I guess you see the pattern by now. In the United States we use the term Patagonia Phenomenon to describe an area whose impressive bird list is as much a factor of extensive coverage than any predilection to attract rarities. (Much the same happens in Central Park, New York City, the Scilly Isles in the UK, or at Cape Point, RSA.)

Since my arrival in Windhoek in August 1996, I have worked hard to record as many species as possible from my yard. The yard has very little to attract birds, since it is very small, planted mostly with exotics, and usually not watered. I guess that the paucity of habitat has made the quest all the more challenging, and therefore more fun. The poor habitat is compensated for by our location on a ridge top, which affords marvelous views of the sky. Finally, we are near enough (400 meters) from a rocky hillside that I can hear birds singing there, and using a 30x telescope I can identify species in the *Acacia* bush. Although I have set up a very successful feeder and planted native aloes to attract sunbirds, almost half (37) of the 84 species on my yard list had nothing to do with my yard. Those 37 were either flyovers (waterbirds, raptors, swifts, swallows), heard birds (francolins), or scoped on a nearby hill (Hawk-Eagle, rockrunner, tits). My strategy for finding birds is simple. I am constantly on the lookout. During the summer, I often would go out early in the morning and

listen for birds singing from the nearby hills or from the distant valley. Some afternoons, I would scan the hillsides with my 'scope. (I got the Ashy Tit this way.) In the evenings, especially in the Summer when it was light after dinner, I would spend hours looking into the sky to study swifts (and whatever else came my way).

While my main motivation for working so hard to build my yard list is personal satisfaction, there is also a more altruistic purpose. These observations will contribute to the understanding of the birds of Windhoek, and may spur others to look more carefully at what is around them. It is also a further confirmation of the Patagonia Phenomenon, which implies that there are many more birds out there than are being seen--all it takes is a lot of observation.

One quarter (21) of my yard birds was attracted to the feeder. Since I have discussed my feeder elsewhere (see Feeder Frenzy, in litt.) I will not go into the details here. Another 10 species on the list are swifts, which are also being discussed separately. This article will focus on the other species. There are about eight species that make up the core of the yard's birds. The non-feeder core birds are:

White-backed Mousebird	Familiar Chat
Grey Lourie	Rock Martin
Short-toed Rock Thrush	Red-eyed Bulbul
Cape Glossy Starling	Dusky Sunbird.

In the Summer, several migrants were part of that core group, though they were mainly species that only flew over the property. They included Diderick Cuckoo, Common (European) Swift, European Bee-Eater, and Greater Striped Swallow.

Most of the species on the annotated list at the end of this article are self-explanatory. Here are some vignettes on some whose stories are interesting, or whose presence on the list requires details.

### Egyptian Goose/Grey Heron/African Spoonbill

These birds are lumped together since they are related in their circumstance. My home is about two km's west of Avis Dam, on a line with Goreangob Reservoir and the Windhoek Sewerage Treatment plant. Therefore, we are on a direct flight line between the best wetlands in the area. On several other occasions unidentified ducks passed over, and at least one small group of egrets made it past without my getting an adequate view to put them on the list. The Grey Heron was interesting, in that a feeder bird put me on to it. While watching weavers on the feeder, I noticed one turn his head and look up into the sky. I followed his gaze, expecting to see a raptor, but there high above the yard was the heron, circling lazily towards Avis Dam.

### European Honey Buzzard

Two days before Christmas I was sitting in the yard after dinner, looking for swifts at six o'clock. My daughter Katie was around the corner of the house, which has a better view of the Klein Windhoek River valley. She soon came with the news that a big bird was coming. I walked a few feet around the corner of the house and immediately saw a Buteo-sized raptor heading straight for the house from the East. The barring on the underside of the narrower wings suggested that the bird was not a Steppe Buzzard, and I looked carefully for the diagnostic tail pattern. The obliging bird pulled up when he hit the updrafts cause by the ridge, and made a couple of slow circles directly above me as he gained altitude. On the tail, the basal double and distinct terminal bands were clearly visible, as was its smaller head. After showing off, (and having gained a couple hundred feet of altitude) the light phase Honey Buzzard took off again, gliding straight for the West.

### African Hawk-Eagle

As I was planning this article, I wrote a list of birds that I would expect to see one day. Little did I know that that day would be the very next morning--less than 12 hours after I wrote the list! One morning in November, while driving to work, I had seen an immature African Hawk-Eagle near the corner of Nelson Mandela and Gever Streets, about one km from my house. At about eight o'clock in the morning on June 1st (just a

couple of hours ago as I write this) I heard a commotion from up on the hill. (Since all the windows in the house are closed due to the cold, and since the hill is some 500m away, you can imagine the scale of the commotion.) I went outside and realized that the noise was a frantic group of guineafowl calling. I went out to my front balcony, to get a clear view of the hill, and immediately saw a huge raptor flying close to the ground where the racket was coming from. Scanning with my binoculars, I only saw a covey of very agitated guineafowl claxon-horning their hearts out. As I watched, the raptor took off again and flew to a bare rock a few feet away. Clearly it was an adult African Hawk-Eagle. There was no evidence that he had been successful in his quest for a guineafowl breakfast.

### Orange River and Red-billed Francolins

I have never seen either of these, although a dark francolin that was seen flying down into the Klien Windhoek River valley one morning was probably a Red-billed. For a couple of weeks during the Summer, their raucous calls reverberated in the neighborhood. The Orange River called from the ridge tops, and the Red-billed from the Klein Windhoek River valley. Helmeted Guineafowl was in the same category, until I saw them and the African Hawk-Eagle on June 1, 1997.

### Spotted Dikkop

Soon after we arrived in Windhoek, we found a Dikkop standing next to our front gate on the corner of Ilse and Gever Streets. What it was doing there, I have no idea. When we approached it, it calmly walked away down Gevers Street.

### Namaqua Dove

The only interesting thing about this sighting was that I saw it on May 31. The reason I began writing this paper is that I thought that we were in a lull after the end of the Summer. For the previous two months I had not seen anything new, and I figured that it would be a good time to take stock and write down my observations while things were quiet. Wrong.

### Budgerigar/Zebra Finch

These two Australian species are clearly escaped cage birds. The former was a quick fly-over and the latter, an albino identified by its bill shape and color, visited the feeder once in Spring. There is some question about the provenance of some of the other finches that frequent my yard, such as Common and Blue Waxbills.

### House Martin

The vanguard of these migrants appeared on March 15, when three birds were seen overhead. In the following week, flocks of hundreds wheeled overhead, especially in the afternoons and evenings. By the end of the month, however, they were gone.

### Red Bishop

On January 10, 1997, I got out of bed at six a.m. but rather than beginning my usual routine I had a premonition that I should go out to the front balcony. No sooner than I reached the balcony (wearing nothing more than my pajamas) than an adult male, hormone-charged, Red Bishop came around the corner, passed the balcony and buzzed his way off toward the North-West. It was all over in about ten seconds. Feeling warm all over, I went back to the bedroom and started getting ready for another day's work.

Having seen 84 species in my first year, I am confident that I will break 100 before I depart in 1999. (Twitchers love goals). There are many species that I have seen in Windhoek (indeed some that I have seen in Ludwigsdorf) that are not yet on the list. A colleague from the Embassy has had button quail and African Paradise Flycatcher in his yard, and even hosted a White-tailed Shrike nest. I have seen Pied Barbets and several species of hornbill near my house but not in my yard. One of the biggest misses so far is the Black Kite, a bird that is regular in the Summer around Eros Airport and the golf course. Considering the number of hours that I spent looking in the sky at swifts, missing the kite is a real mystery. Other Windhoek species that are missing are: pelican, any vulture, Black-shouldered Kite, Pygmy Falcon, Abdim's and Marabou Stork, Rosy-faced Lovebird, African and Black Cuckoo, scops owls, Pearl-spotted Owl, any roller, any lark, any shrike, drongo, Kalahari Robin, Grey-backed Cisticola,

Cape Penduline Tit, eremomelas, Marico Flycatcher, Lark-like Bunting, and Grey-headed Sparrow.

Apart from looking for these species, I will especially keep watch for the unexpected - maybe a skein of skimmers!

### Yard List - 1 Ilse St. Ludwigsdorf, Windhoek (August, 1996 to August, 1997).

Egyptian Goose	Fly over three times in Spring
Grey Heron	Fly over once January 9
African Spoonbill	Fly over once October
European Honey-buzzard	Fly over, one light phase adult
Gabar Goshawk	Fly over once January 6
Little Banded Goshawk	Hunting songbirds at feeder, three passes.
Common (Steppe) Buzzard	Fly over uncommon in Summer
Black Eagle	Fly over uncommon
African Hawk-Eagle	One, hunting guinea fowl June 1 on the hill
Rock Kestrel	Fly over, uncommon, usually around the hill.
Peregrine Falcon	Fly over, only once, December 28
Helmeted Guinea fowl	Seen June 1 on hill, heard December 23
Orange River Francolin	Heard from ridge top starting on December 23, 1996.
Red-billed Francolin	Heard in the valley starting on 28 December
Spotted Dikkop	One standing by the gate in September
Laughing Dove	Feeder bird very common
Cape Turtle Dove	Fly over, once October
Namaqua Dove	Fly over, one bird, May 31, 1997
Budgerigar (Exotic)	Fly over, one bird, obvious escape
White-backed Mousebird	Common, attempted to nest.
Red-faced Mousebird	Uncommon, eats figs in season.
Grey Lourie	Common, eats palm fruits.
Klaas' Cuckoo	Heard only once

Dideric Cuckoo	Fly over, very common in Summer
Spotted Eagle-Owl	Fly over, once in October
Freckled Nightjar	Calls on roof, Oct, Nov, May, June
African Palm-Swift	Fly over, all year, but sporadic
Alpine Swift	Fly over, common in Summer
Mottled Swift	Fly over, one seen in February
European Swift	Fly over, abundant in Summer
Pallid Swift	Fly over, one seen in December 28
African Black Swift	Fly over, rare, five seen in Summer
Bradfield's Swift	Fly over, sporadic, mainly Summer
Little Swift	Fly over, common all year round
Horus Swift	Fly over, one seen January 9, 1997
White-rumped Swift	Fly over, uncommon all year round
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater	Fly over, once November
European Bee-eater	Fly over, common in Summer
African Grey Hornbill	Fly over, only twice
Pirit Batis	One visited briefly in November.
Short-toed Rock-Thrush	Common, carrying food in March.
Pale-winged Starling	Fly over, uncommon
Glossy Starling	Common
Wattled Starling	Fly over, uncommon
Mountain Chat	Uncommon first seen January 15
Familiar Chat	Common
Rock Martin	Always a pair around, nesting
Barn (European) Swallow	Fly over, very common in Summer
Pearl-breasted Swallow	Fly over, twice in Summer
Greater Striped-Swallow	Common in Summer, also three in June
House Martin	Fly over, large flocks in late March
Red-eyed Bulbul	Common
Damara Rockrunner	Scoped on hill after hearing many times
Willow Warbler	One bird January 11, 1997
Black-chested Prinia	Heard from ridge in March, 1997.
Ashy Tit	Scoped on Hill, January 12, 1997
House Sparrow	Feeder bird common
Great Sparrow	Feeder bird uncommon, mostly in Summer

Zebra Finch (Exotic)	Feeder bird once
Melba Finch	Feeder bird uncommon in Summer
Blue Waxbill	Feeder bird uncommon in Summer
Violet-eared Waxbill	Feeder bird, once in December
Common Waxbill	Feeder bird, once in November
Black-cheeked Waxbill	Feeder bird common in Summer
Red-headed Finch	Feeder bird common
Shaft-tailed Whydah	Feeder bird common in Summer
Pin-tailed Whydah	Feeder bird very uncommon in Summer
Paradise Whydah	Feeder bird uncommon in Summer
Cape Wagtail	Uncommon
Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver	Fly over once three birds January 5
Scaly-feathered Finch	Feeder bird, once in Spring
White-browed Sparrow-Weaver	Feeder bird, for a week starting March 3
Lesser Masked Weaver	Feeder bird, once in December
Southern Masked-Weaver	Feeder bird, common
Chestnut Weaver	Feeder bird, absent in summer
Red-billed Quelea	Feeder bird, sporadic
Red Bishop	Fly over once, male on January 10
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	Common, frequents blooming Aloes
Dusky Sunbird	Common, frequents blooming Aloes
Marico Sunbird	Uncommon, frequents blooming Aloes
Black-throated Canary	Feeder bird very common
Yellow Canary	Feeder bird, once in October
Rock Bunting	One bird in November
Cape Bunting	Scoped on hill after hearing January 10

A total of 84 species, with 26 species only recorded once, 22 feeder birds and 4 heard only.