



LANIOTURDUS

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CONTENTS

THOMSON, N. Editorial

DEMASIUS, E. Diary of a Successful (?) Breeding Attempt of Gray's Larks

KOLBERG, H. Narrative of a Journey into the Hinterland of Etosha in Search of the Elusive Blue Crane

CUNNINGHAM P. & J. Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticla senegala* Observed in a Windhoek Garden

THOMSON, N. Red-billed Firefinches in and around Windhoek

FRIEDERICH G. & T. Sunday Lunchtime Raptors

KOMEN, E. Steel Jaw

KOLBERG, H. Report on the Summer Wetland Bird Counts January/February 2009

THOMSON, N. The Saga of the Vanishing Pelican Rings

RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

Editorial

The winter bird count at Walvis Bay has come and gone and it was extremely gratifying to see the number of Namibia Bird Club members participating in the count many of whom had traveled long distances at their own expense to be there. It is my belief that the bird club can make a real contribution to projects such as this.

Presumably everyone knows by now of the oiled penguins which were rescued at Lüderitz some months ago. What is possibly less well known is that the Namibia Bird Club committee made the decision immediately after the news broke to donate N\$ 5 000 from club funds towards the

rehabilitation of the oiled birds and following this Gudrun Middendorff was interviewed on the German radio service and was able to raise a further N\$ 10 000 as a result of this interview.

Holger Kolberg has put together an index of all the articles that appeared in *Ornithologische Beilage* (a supplement to the Scientific Society's newsletter) and *Mitteilung der Ornithologischen Arbeitsgruppe*, the forerunner of *Lanioturdus*, for the period 1963-1984. This index lists the articles published in chronological order and also by author and is a very useful tool for anyone writing articles and seeking references. The index can be obtained from the Namibia Bird Club at N\$ 40.00 per copy and all issues of *Ornithologische Beilage* and *Mitteilung der Ornithologischen Arbeitsgruppe* are to be found in the library of the Scientific Society.

In this issue we feature two articles on red-billed firefinches in and around Windhoek, one written by Peter and Janke Cunningham who had seen a firefinch in Windhoek for the first time and the other by myself who had been aware of their presence for some time. Both come to the conclusion that these birds most probably did not arrive in Windhoek unassisted.

In an earlier issue of *Lanioturdus* I asked for readers' comments on the new electronic format of this journal. To date the comment received has been overwhelmingly favourable with only one member saying that he preferred the printed booklet format.

Diary of a Successful (?) Breeding Attempt of Gray's Larks

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Saturday, 28 February 2009

- On the afternoon of 28 February 2009 my wife found the nest of a Gray's Lark, *Ammomanopsis grayi* containing two eggs, east of Kramersdorf, whilst walking the dogs.
- The cup-shaped nest was located on the southern side of an *Arthraerua leubnitziae* bush.
- The nest was not constructed in typical fashion but with lots of pieces of cotton string.
- No adult bird was in the vicinity.

The Saga of the Vanishing Pelican Rings

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On 15.1.2008 Dirk Heinrich caught and ringed two adult white pelicans on the beach at Mile 14. Exactly how this was done is another story but it involved barbel heads and fishing tackle (there were no hooks involved but Dirk's advice to ringers is not to attempt to catch an adult white pelican unless you have able bodied assistance at hand). The two birds were ringed with 35 mm uniquely numbered stainless steel rings secured with aluminium pop-rivets on the left leg and with large plastic rings with an engraved two letter code on the right leg. The plastic rings were encoded SB and SL and the birds will be referred to by these codes hereinafter. (SB features on the "Take a Closer Look" poster partly sponsored by the Namibia Bird Club and both the metal ring and the plastic ring are clearly visible on the poster).

On 2.12.2008 SB was seen by Mark Boorman and John Paterson at the Mile 4 Saltworks north of Swakopmund. The SB ring was clearly seen but the metal ring was missing. A flurry of email correspondence followed on the ringers' email forum with a lot of good natured banter that Dirk should be relegated to the status of "appy" until such time as he learned to put rings on properly and with Dirk becoming more and more indignant and adamant that he had fixed the ring correctly. Suggestions were even made that the pelicans had somehow got hold of pliers or a cordless drill. It was not long before serious consideration was given as to where the problem might lie and the immediate suspicion was that it lay with the pop rivet. Electrolytic corrosion can occur when two different metals come into contact with one another but as stainless steel and aluminium are close together on the electrochemical series table it seemed unlikely that this was the real problem. A long explanation on the corrosion of metals was received from Joe Noci and it seems likely that the problem does indeed lie with the pop-rivet, more specifically the remnant of the set pin of the rivet. The reaction between the steel of the

pin, the aluminium rivet and the salt water probably results in the very rapid corrosion of the rivet and the subsequent loss of the ring. SL was seen at the coast on 1.1.2009 also sans metal ring.

The pelican ringers are now faced with the problem of finding another way of securing these rings but how many have been lost up until now will never be known. Fortunately many, but not all, of the pelicans ringed were also fitted with the plastic rings.

Please be on the lookout for these ringed birds. If you see one please record the date and place, the code on the plastic ring and whether the ring is on the left or right leg and let us have this information.

Rarities and interesting observations

On the Easter weekend Eckart Demasius and Richard Nid-drie saw a blue waxbill at the Spitzkoppe. This species was not atlased anywhere near the Spitzkoppe and this appears to be a significant range extension. They also saw a brown snake-eagle there. While not a rarity in Namibia, Atlas data suggests that this bird was at the extreme south western edge of its range. Eckart and Richard also had good sightings of the elusive Herero chat at this location. On the same weekend they saw Burchell's courser at Omdel Dam – again a species which was not atlased in that quarter degree square (QDS).

The Namibia Bird Club morning walk at the Gammams Sewerage Works on 19.4.2009 turned up a purple heron and a little bittern, neither of which is a common species around Windhoek.

On 2.5.2009 Gudrun and I saw a juvenile African Harrier-Hawk (*Gymnogene*) at the Spitzkoppe. This species was also not atlased in that area but as there had been exceptionally good rain in the area such predators may have moved in to take advantage of nesting birds. Chestnut weavers had obviously bred there. We also found Herero chat there. A really exciting (non bird) sighting was that of a black mongoose.

In the first week of May Horst Böckmann reported the sighting of a saddle-billed stork on his farm near Mount Etjo.

On 15.5.2009 Peter Bridgeford caught a ringed great white pelican near the small craft jetty in Walvis Bay. This bird had been ringed by Hu Berry as a chick on the bird platform on 30.12.1972! It had been seen before by Mark Boorman on 21.3.2003 near the Raft Restaurant in Walvis Bay where he was able to read the ring number with the aid of a telescope. At over 36 years this is one of the oldest pelicans known.

Wilferd Versveld reported that on 5.6.2009 an estimated 10 000 adult lesser flamingos were breeding at Etosha with about 2 500 chicks already hatched. The breeding site is on the southern side of the pan north east of the Gonob Peninsula. About 5 000 adult greater flamingos were also seen but further to the east.



Image: Holger Kolberg