

CONTENTS

VOLUME 38 (2) 2005

OSBORNE, T. O. Editorial	1
SWANEPOEL, W. White-throated Canary <i>Serinus albogularis</i> unusual behaviour	2
STEYN, P. & MARTIN, R. Booted Eagle Enigmas	3 - 4
SWANEPOEL, W. African Mourning Dove <i>Streptopelia</i> <i>decipiens</i> range extension and habitat requirements	5 - 6
KOMEN, J. Is the Black Skimmer at Walvis Bay another “rarities” record destined to obscurity?	6 - 8
BOIX-HINZEN, C., FULTON, I., ANDERSON, J. & ASPINAL, T. Thick-billed Cuckoo at Shakawe Fishing Lodge, Botswana	8 - 10
BOORMAN, M. First record of Lesser Crested Tern for Namibia	10 - 12
SIVHUTE, V., CUNNINGHAM, P.L., ADANK, W. & ALBERTS, A. Wattled Crane <i>Grus carunculata</i> numbers, habitat use and diet in Bushmanland	13 - 19
SWANEPOEL, W. Birds on the move : range extensions and vagrants in western, central and southern Namibia 1994–2005	19 - 24

Editorial

This issue of the *Lanioturdus* would have been rather skinny had it not been for Wessel Swanepoel's numerous contributions. The editor is still waiting for the Chairman's annual report delivered to the March 2005 AGM and any trip reports from members on outings.

Peter Steyn and Rob Martin report on the puzzle of Namibia's Booted Eagles. Here is a species that used to be difficult to identify thus adding to the confusion but recent advances in field guides should help even novice birders identify this species. Surely the bird is a more common breeder than we think, people just have to scan likely breeding rocks, kloofs and canyons. Perhaps we can solve the mystery.

New birds have been reported for the country so it is good to see that birders have been active even though it is the dry season. There are two articles on rarities within the country and one from our neighbour, Botswana.

Once again I appeal to all members to help the Namibia Bird Club. If you want to keep the club viable you must also do your part and try and get new members to join.

I guess the bottom line here, Tony, is whether your Black Skimmer sight record will also be destined to obscurity given the absence of a specimen to prove the point. I believe it will without a specimen to "INDISPUTABLY" prove a first record for southern Africa (or is it all Africa?)!

I still get enormous pleasure from twitching without the peer-pressure, and though my eyesight is failing me more now than ever before (too many hours in front of computers), and I'm increasingly prone to senior moments, I suspect that my karma is shaping up nicely having not blown away any more birds for quite some years now (maybe I will come back as avian road kill for only another 3438 incarnations!). By comparison, I suggest that your karma won't be dented much by blowing away one wayward Black Skimmer - I suggest you go for it (I can even arrange to lend you a shotgun and a couple of cartridges)!

Thick-billed Cuckoo at Shakawe Fishing Lodge, Botswana

Christian Boix-Hinzen, Ian Fulton, John Anderson and Trish Aspinall
31 Riverside Drive, Kommetjie, 7975 Cape Town RSA.
Christian@tropicalbirding.com

On 28 October 2004, whilst birding the dryer Leadwood-Acacia woodland behind Shakawe Fishing Lodge we came across an adult Thick-billed Cuckoo *Pachycoccyx audeberti* feeding on caterpillars alongside a Jacobin Cuckoo. It was 07h00-07h30 am, the morning was still cool, skies lazily building up some cloud cover. No wind, no haze and frantic bird activity possibly due to recent showers. The early rains had encouraged local species such as Narina Trogon, Kurrichane Thrush and Orange-breasted Bushshrike to break into incessant call mode. A very evident influx of Palearctic migrants was apparent with Icterine Warblers, Willow Warblers and Spotted Flycatchers sallying and flitting across the road everywhere. Intra African migrants such as Woodland Kingfishers, Broad-billed Rollers, Black Cuckoo and even a Red-chested Cuckoo were sighted throughout the morning and except the latter; the former three species were displaying and calling actively.

As we birded along the edge of the woodland Christian picked up a medium-sized black and white bird, with a very obvious broadly barred under tail bursting out of the canopy and quickly slinking around the back of the tree's crown. He managed to find the bird again, its tail visible through a gap. Quickly, we were all directed to its whereabouts and we all had good looks at the under tail barring. At this stage Christian was pre-empting a small *Accipiter* (Shikra, Gabar ???) to burst out. We were approximately 100m from the tree, the tree was 10-15m high, and everyone had their bins trained on the bird. Christian inched cautiously towards a better side-viewing spot, but the bird made the job easier for all of us and flew out of its hideout perching out in full view of everyone. Once in the open its identity was blatantly obvious, far from an *Accipiter*, this was a cuckoo.

The bird was very relaxed and proceeded to clean off branches thoroughly studying their underside in search of caterpillars. This behaviour lasted a good 5-6 minutes allowing us ample time to enjoy and get a thorough description of the bird.

This cuckoo had black upperparts (head, crown, mantle, wings and tail) and white underparts. On the head, the black and white met just below the eye and ear coverts. An evident white/ or very pale creamy yellow eye ring was evident around its dark eye. By now Christian had called out the fact that we were watching a Thick-billed Cuckoo and summoned us to pay special attention to its bill, at this distance and given its searching behaviour we were unable to see much detail at the base of the bill. However, a nearby Jacobin allowed us to compare bills and the Thick-billed's was decidedly heavier. Christian somehow recalled the bill of this species to be heavier. This however, may possibly have been an optical effect, as he explained, most of the individuals he had seen to date were immatures, and somehow the black bill on their black and white scalloped faces contrasts out with a thicker appearance.

We were permanently exposed to flashes of its broadly banded tail, and black and white banded under tail coverts as it lurched about for prey and struggled to regain its balance. In a few of its lurches its "lumo" yellow feet were revealed and by now we were all pretty happy with every feature there was to explore, nonetheless we were dying to lay hands on a bird guide, something we all cunningly left behind that morning, yet this forced us to look even harder at this particular bird.

We mentioned our sighting to Elaine Pryce who was delighted to hear the news as she recalled that one of her previous lodge managers Duncan Pritchard had also sighted the species when he worked at the lodge 5 years ago. His observation though was rejected by the Botswana rarities committee for mysterious reasons, Elaine said.

SABAP regards the species as rare or alternatively elusive throughout its range. The Southern African Bird Atlas has no reports from the atlas period 1987-91 and no mention of D. Pritchard's record but mentions one "pre" SABAP sighting of the species in Botswana by Benson and Irwin in 1972. [Editors note: the Thick-billed Cuckoo parasitizes the Red-billed Helmet-Shrike *Prionops retzii* which are common in the area. The Bird Atlas also states that they thought the cuckoo was overlooked rather than absent.]

Unfortunately, we were all too excited and glued to our bins to even think of taking a picture, nonetheless I would like to submit this record to the Botswana Rarities Committee, if they would be so kind as to post me some rarity forms.

First record of Lesser Crested Tern for Namibia

Mark Boorman
PO Box 1445, Swakopmund, Namibia
felix@mweb.com.na

On 5 May 2005 whilst scanning a day-roost of terns at Mile 4 Salt Works (2235S 1432E) a single Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna benghalensis* was found. At the same roost were ca.350 Sandwich Terns *S. sandvicensis*, of which less than 10% showed breeding plumage, and some 60 Swift Tern *S. bergii*. A number of Swift Tern were showing full breeding plumage with about 50% of the total being immature birds less than 6 months old. Only one non-breeding Common Tern *S. hirundo* was present. The species and plumage variations present made for a thorough comparison to be made with the Lesser Crested Tern.

The Lesser Crested Tern was showing a full breeding cap extending to the bill and a distinct crest. The bill was not as heavy as that of the Swift Tern and was a much richer yellow with a hint of orange. It was also slightly down-curved over its length. Overall size of the bird was smaller than the Swift Tern – about the same size as the Sandwich Tern. The upperparts were darker than Sandwich Tern. Under parts were white and bill, legs and feet black.

The same bird was re-located by Rod Braby and myself the following day and allowed for a fairly brief sighting before flying out to sea. Despite visiting the same roost site several times shortly thereafter, no further sightings were made. No documented records for Namibia could be found, with the closest record being from Lambert's Bay, South Africa.

I asked Tony Tree to comment on this record and the ensuing is his response. "Following on the record of a hybrid Lesser Crested Tern at the Kromme estuary in the Eastern Cape Province in March 2005 (Tree *in press*), this record is very interesting as it raises several questions and comments. The bird seen at the Kromme was, to all intents and purposes, a Lesser Crested Tern but for the pink flush on its underparts which indicated an ancestry that included the Sandwich Tern. The Kromme River bird had been individually colour-ringed as a hybrid adult of unknown origin at Banc d'Arguin off the western French coast. However, the French suspected that it was hybrid Elegant *S. elegans* x Sandwich Tern and until a satisfactory DNA analysis is undertaken they will leave it at that. However, one of the photos taken at the Kromme was in flight and it showed the underwing pattern clearly as that of the Lesser Crested. This bird bred successfully with its Sandwich Tern mate in both 2003 and 2004 and produced healthy offspring. At this stage it would appear that the bird seen at the Kromme is an F1 hybrid and that its offspring would be a F2 hybrids. It is not totally clear, but is suspected, that these later hybrids are asymptotes and that they, and their later progeny, are in the process of reverting back, with each generation, to resemble one or other of the original parents.

So what has all this to do with the Mile 4 bird noted above? The race of Lesser Crested Tern that breeds in the Mediterranean, off Libya, winters off the extreme west coast of Africa south to about Guinea-Bissau and, apart from limited