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Editorial

Another hot dry season is upon us and birding is slow as we await the rains. Soon, however, the palearctic and intra-African migrants will arrive to increase the numbers of species. Our drab non-breeding local birds will get dressed up for the ladies and identification of most of the weavers, bishops and whydahs will be a lot easier. Unfortunately, the bird guides usually only illustrate these birds in breeding dress. In Namibia we only see them dressed up for 3-5 months of the year and identification is often frustrating.

Recently I caught non-breeding Shaft-tailed Whydahs in my mist net for ringing. After consulting all the reference books I found it is impossible to sex any of the birds. either in the hand or in the field. It would most helpful if members who know of any special aids or resources for identifying Shaft-tailed Whydahs would publish that information in the *Lanioturdus* for all of us. Another bird I have been trying to sex in the non-breeding season is the Chestnut Weaver. In the hand there is no problem since the male has a larger wing length and is heavier, but free-flying in a tree then identification becomes difficult.

The new Roberts VII will be about 1200 pages and will be out in April 2005 at a cost of R799. It will be nice to have all the up-to-the-date data on the birds but it is obvious from the draft texts on the website that information is missing on many of the species. See www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/docs/roberts.html. Perhaps after the book comes out I will try and summarize where gaps in information on Namibia birds occur so we can try and fill the gaps.

Uncommon raptor sightings on Farm Tsutsab 1818 CC, Tsumeb district

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On the morning of the 21st August 2004 I went for my usual rounds checking up on the cattle posts. On the second one in the row a Brown Snake Eagle was perched on a dead tree. As I drove on, two White-backed Vultures took off out of a Makalani Palm, *Hyphaene petersiana*. As this one also had a nest of Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, I suspected a vulture nest and went to inspect. No nest, but this Makalani was regularly used as a perch by some big birds, as the old leaves on the ground were whitewashed with droppings.

Approaching the next cattle post, another raptor took off a green Tambotie, *Spyrostachys africana*, and perched nearby in a dead tree. The markings of this bird were so obvious, it could only be an Osprey. We have seen this bird only on two previous occasions, once on farm Finkenstein near Windhoek in October 1998 and in the Kaudom Game Park at Tsoana waterhole in May 2001.

I approached the bird cautiously under cover and had a good look at it. The diagnostics were obvious: I had an Osprey in front of me, a first record for this square, 1818 CC.

This bird is a non-breeding Palearctic migrant to southern Africa. It arrives at the southern coast late October, so I suggest this bird was taking a break on its migration route, although a bit early in the season. However, it could also have been a first-year bird, over-wintering in the Southern Hemisphere. Records from the Southern African Bird Atlas are very patchy, the closest one to this square being 1917 DA & DD, in the Kombat/Rietfontein area east of Otavi.

Then something interesting happened. As I was busy doing my things, I noticed the Osprey taking off. Immediately I heard more raptor calls. I spun my head around a few times in search and while unwinding again I saw one raptor flying

away from me, showing only his silhouette. It could have been a Bateleur, according to the wing form. The other two I identified as African Hawk Eagles. They both made their flying path towards the circling Osprey, which was trying to gain height. They circled around the Osprey a few times. Then one of the hawk eagles made a mob-attack onto the Osprey. This happened a few times but the birds did not make contact. It looked more like a playful act, as if the African Hawk Eagles were investigating this strange newcomer's presence.

All three birds disappeared in the distance, leaving me full of thoughts. At the last cattle post I found two more African Hawk Eagles, probably our resident breeding pair. This concluded an eventful Saturday morning.

Melanism in a Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

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Laughing Doves *Streptopelia senegalensis* are common throughout their natural range, which includes not only the entire width and breadth of Africa, but also Arabia and central Asia. In Namibia they are ubiquitous, being one of the most common garden birds, especially at feeding stations.

Between 20 July and 28 August 2004 an adult melanistic (in this case excess black, but could also be excess brown) Laughing Dove was observed at a feeding station in a Windhoek garden. The chest and head as well as the primary feathers were black in colour whilst the rest of the bird had the distinctive greyish-blue coloration.

Melanism as opposed to albinism (caused by an absence of pigment), erythrism (excess red) and flavism (excess yellow) seem to be genetically influenced. This is however generally not a common phenomenon with most birds although up to