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EDITORIAL

The publication of this copy of *Lanioturdus* has been considerably delayed and this copy covers the June, September and December 1999 editions. It will immediately strike you that this is probably the least substantial copy of the magazine for a long time. We have a problem – for some reason 1999 seems to have represented the low point of everyones birding and ornithological careers – the articles and other materials have just not come in at all this year.

The success of the magazine and the Club as a whole depends on member participation. The committee recognises that most members are passive for the most part and choose to go their own way for most of their birding. However, we can't rely on just a few people to keep us going all the time. We need new members, new activities and new vision for the future. This is really a plea to you to get more involved in the future and to help the committee keep the Club going. If we are unable to keep bringing *Lanioturdus* out on a regular basis we are in real trouble.

On the positive side of things – the Club in conjunction with the Namibia Nature Foundation and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, is planning to start up a number of new projects as well as revive a number of older ones, including Raptor Road Counts and some form of atlassing in the future. We will probably put out a special edition of *Lanioturdus* in the New Year giving details of each of the projects.

A wonderful festive season to all of you – and good birding.



streaked breast changed in a definite line into a white underpart. The back was dark checkered. A white shoulder as on the Common Sandpiper. Photographs later confirmed that it was indeed a Pectoral Sandpiper.

American Black Skimmer

I have following notes on the bird reported in previous copies of *Lanioturdus*. I saw a skimmer like the African Skimmer except it had a black or very dark bill tip. The first third of the bill was very dark and formed a curve away from the bill tip. The lower mandible was marked longer than the upper mandible. The upper part of the bird was very dark. Underparts whitish with the pale colouration extending right to the bill, and around the bill was white. The legs seemed to be yellow or orange, but because the bird was flying, I did not get a good look. The underside of the wing was light with darker edges (outer) and tips (not black). The leading edge was white while the trailing edge was darker.

Australian Gannet *Morus serrator*

I found an Australian Gannet at Sandwich Harbour. Compared with the Cape Gannet, this one had a much shorter gular stripe (really short) and the outer tail feathers were white. Most striking of all was the dark blue eye colour which is quite different to the watery blue colour of the Cape Gannet.

Lesser Gallinule *Porphyryla alleni*

This bird was found in Swakopmund next to the Alfa Ko-op shop in the centre of town. There is a small piece of vegetation and the bird hid there for quite some time. The identification of the bird was confirmed when it was eventually run over and killed.

Black Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*

The bird, an adult female, was observed for two weeks in the garden in Fischreiher Street No 45 and then disappeared.

Southern Olive Thrush *Turdus olivaceus*

A single bird was seen on the 2/7/1999 at Sandwich Harbour, on the

northern lagoon (freshwater). Only one bird could be spotted together with a few Cape Wagtails.

Other interesting species such as Broadbill Sandpiper, Redshank, Grey Phalarope, Rednecked Phalarope, American Golden Plover have been sighted on various occasions this year.

WEST ETOSHA BIRD MONITORING PROJECT

Jeremy Duffield-Harding & Tim Osborne
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In 1998, Leon van Rooyen of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism requested the Namibian Bird Club to embark upon a bird monitoring project in Etosha National Park, with special reference to the western sector. Dr Rob Simmons, Dieter Ludwig, Hardi Dedekind and Suzan Mallet-Veal discussed how to implement the work.

The aims of the project were decided as follows:

- To conduct a bird census, using the Atlas squares
- Identify Bateleur Eagle nesting sites
- Verify the presence of Egyptian Vultures, especially to confirm nesting activities in the Omutambe Mauwe area
- Augment current research work in the park

The first field trip was scheduled for March 1999.

For the benefit of those who have not had previous experience of atlassing, I have inserted a brief explanation of the system employed:

Quarter-degree square maps are used as reference points for sightings, each square has its own unique code, for example 1914BA covers the area of Otjovasando. A GPS reading provides an accurate position of the squares

otherwise invisible boundaries. Species found within this square are naturally recorded on list 1914BA.

It would be thought that the extensive surveying culminating in the *Atlas of Southern African Birds* was sufficient to give a clear picture of species distribution and movement, however, there are many poorly surveyed areas. Etosha National Park demonstrates a good example of this, from three hundred and fifty surveys in the Okaukuejo area to one, well that's in the middle of the pan! Surprisingly, there are many squares with as few as two to thirty-five surveys.

With an ideal maximum of fifteen people and a strict limit of twenty, eighteen volunteers made their way to Okaukuejo for the long weekend of the 20th of March, well into the rainy season.

Almost all of the participants made it to Okaukuejo before the gates closed on Friday evening in spite of the holiday traffic on the road. The Friederichs from the Grootfontein district had the shortest drive. Dieter Ludwig just made Ombika gate as it was closing and was fortunate to see a Black Rhino on the road to Okaukuejo. The Duffield-Hardings slept at the last layby before Ombika, sharing their bed with two Hornbill nestboxes! On Saturday morning we all met at Okaukuejo's research campsite, home to Tim and Laurel Osborne who are currently working on Kori Bustard research in the Park.

After breakfast we were divided into three groups, each group was assigned an atlas square to survey on the way to Otjovasando. Leaving Okaukuejo, Dieter's group lead the way but unfortunately took a wrong turn just outside the restcamp and headed north towards Okondeka. Tim's group watched the dust plumes in disbelief as they disappeared over the horizon towards the pan. Günther Friederich lead the third group thirty minutes later, and also ended up on a northerly path. Finally they all sorted out which way was west; fortunately, two of the vehicles had a GPS, otherwise they would have ended up in Ovamboland!

Passing through Sprokieswoud we arrived at Ozonjuitji M'Bari and

eventually passed the sign "permit holders only". We had left the eastern "tourist" side and were now in western Etosha. This section of the park is flat and rather monotonous; although, this could not dampen my excitement as we approached our first census square. I embarrassingly mistook a large black and white bird descending to land for a vulture; only when he joined a flock of over one-thousand comrades did I realise it was an Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*. Two other flocks added up to a little more than two thousand birds in total. We saw two male lions before stopping at the boundary of the first square for lunch.

We began atlassing, and drove along the firebreaks and tracks of squares 1814DD and DC west of Nomab and north of Dolomietpunt. Buks de Vry made us feel like extras, on a film set from "Out Of Africa" as Mozart's chords wafted across the savannah from his tape. An extremely drab bird singing from his arboreal perch had us guessing for awhile, as the bird continued to flaunt itself in front of us we took up the challenge and eventually settled upon a Fawn-coloured Lark *Mirifa africanoides*. We found nests of Cape Penduline Tit *Anthoscopus minutus*, Grey-backed Finchlark *Eremopterix verticalis* and Crowned Plover *Vanellus coronatus*. All three were fascinating in their own way. Tim showed us how the Cape Penduline Tit's ingeniously close the door of their well-built nest, while the Crowned Plovers were content to lay their speckled olive eggs on bare stony ground. But how Susan de Vry spotted the Finchlark's nest baffles me, even when standing next to this nest, it was invisible. At the end of the firebreak we arrived at a deserted army camp, Etoshafontein. Following old Casper tracks, we continued through deep dongas, that at times threatened to swallow a mere Combi. By far the most prominent bird throughout this area was the White-quilled Korhaan *Eupodotis afraoides*, as they were busy displaying. After driving for hours in low gears, it was good to finally arrive at Otjovasando, our base camp. A shower, cold beer and grilled steaks – what more could one ask for at the end of the day?

The following morning, to Tim's disgust, not all of us were up bright and early after two long days driving. The target today was Kaross, the area south of Otjovasando. This area has a very different nature to the one covered the previous day. The northern section of Kaross was very green

and lush, however, in contrast, the southern parts were parched. Rocky outcrops dominated the scenery, Dieter, Torsten and I ascended one to be rewarded by a glimpse of a Slender Mongoose; providing a welcome distraction from twitching. Flanked on either side by Trumpet Thorn and Confetti trees, the winding track ran between a series of koppies. Here we had a good sighting of a Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*. After several arguments with rocks and getting stuck twice in the sandy soil, we arrived at a sheet of water, fed by a rather alien rubber pipe. Despite man's intervention, the natural beauty of the place took precedence. A Brown Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinereus*, perched majestically in a distant Camelthorn, the first recorded in this square; the same applied for many other species. As the weekend progressed it became obvious that this area had not been covered during the rainy-season. Tim and his group arrived, they had seen a Black Rhino, Hentie Burger wished to have a look, so they all left to track the beast. Along the way they met Richard and Isabelle, they had abandoned their car because the track was too rough, and opted to walk. We were left with Ray Forgetter and Jill Stringer, a little anxious about retracing our way along that dreaded track. I had a map, but we were not sure of our location. We decided Karossfontein was likely, and followed a track north, bearing west, past Karospomp and the Rhinoceros pens, which according to the map should have brought us to the road, instead it ended at an electric fence. On re-examining the 1:50 000 map, bought only days before, we found it to be twenty years old. There had been a few changes since then! Eventually we made it back to camp. That evening, Jill gave an impressive demonstration on how to remove a skirt at lightning speed; the provocation, a hairy spider climbing up the inside!

On Monday some people left early for the long drive to Windhoek, Dieter, Ray and I stopped at Hobetere, while both the Osbornes and Friederichs returned to continue atlassing square 1914BB. Near Dolomietpoort, Tim spied a strange buzzard or eagle flying over a koppie ridge, a pale brown bird with a white chest-band speckled with a few brown feathers. Günther, four-hundred metres behind, was also unable to identify it. Continuing further along the road they then turned into a firebreak through the koppies and saw an Augur Buzzard *Buteo augur*, the mystery bird flew alongside the buzzard, providing a size comparison. Finally it made two passes

overhead. A closer view revealed, a thin pale chest-band speckled with pale brown feathers, the belly was pale brown and the tail was a very pale tan with two darker broad bands, while the under primaries were white with black tips. After the birds passed out of sight they consulted the books and the only bird which fitted the description was the Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*. It was not an eagle, its larger size than the Augur Buzzard eliminated the Steppe Buzzard. According to the new African raptor guide by the Kemps, the bird looked like the form illustrated as an immature female pale phase.

After that highlight they continued surveying the square. Passing Duikerdrink they spotted a lioness running and noticed a zebra kill nearby. Tim got out to take an anthrax blood sample and Günther and Laurel examined the spoor of the lion's attack on the zebra. After a while they finally noticed another lioness in the shade seventy metres away and decided it was best to leave before the Bird Club earned a reputation of feeding the wildlife!

In retrospect, this was quite an exhausting trip; a Combi being our limiting factor in negotiating the rough tracks off road, combined with covering perhaps too much ground; far too much time behind the wheel, and too little time spent birding!

However, having missed out on previous atlassing projects, I found this aspect interesting, whetting my appetite for more. From the earliest talks, it was envisaged that the areas covered should be surveyed in all three seasons to give meaningful results, so I hope to return. I suggest that for subsequent visits, we make our base camp within the area to be surveyed, for example Ou Jaghuis, in the Kaross area. Having made a start and now a little familiar with some areas, following visits should include an effort to locate Bateleur nest sites, and investigate the presence of Egyptian Vultures.

On behalf of the Bird Club, I wish to thank Leon van Rooyen, Dr Rob Simmons and the Ministry of Environment and Toursim firstly for inviting us, and also entrusting the Club in a restricted area. Also, I wish to thank

Dieter, Hardi and Suzan for giving up their time to liaise with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

NAMIBRAND GAME RANCH TRIP REPORT

Tim & Laurel Osborne
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The Namibian Bird Club visited farms Keerweder, Draaihoek, Toskaan, Jagkop and Wolwedans during the period 30 April to 3 May 1999. Nine members and family had a very enjoyable weekend recording 64 species of birds and accompanied by the farm manager, Achim Lensen, toured the sand dunes. Mr. Lensen's invaluable help was greatly appreciated.

The trip was led by Tim and Laurel Osborne who arrived on the Friday 30 April to reconnoiter the place since they had never been in the area before. We camped at the base of the mountains on farm Draaihoek near the old homestead. The rest of the group: Lynette and Charl Redelinghuis, Helmut and Agnes Bistri, Sean and nephew Sean and Gerda arrived on Saturday 1 May.

We walked around our camp site to a dry waterfall which had water in a small pool at the bottom. Numerous birds were coming in to drink and everyone got excellent views of the Lark-like Bunting which is bird distinguished by its 'lack of diagnostic features' (Newman's Bird Guide, SASOL bird guide) or described as 'nondescript' (Roberts). The pool was also full of two species of tadpoles as pointed out by nephew Sean.

On Sunday we all piled into two vehicles to tour the red sand dunes. Game animals were plentiful as the rains had been good and the grass very luxuriant for the desert. We saw both Greater and Rock Kestrels and found the Dune Lark in the dunes. Achim was very helpful as he explained the geology of the area and conservation measures taken by the Ranch. We wanted to know what the bare patches were in the grassland on the dunes and he stopped to explain that they were 'fairy rings' which might have been

created by chemicals from termites but no-one really knew what made them. He did offer us the opportunity of a lifetime to buy a fairy ring for the cheap price of N\$300. The owner would get a ceramic disk with a number placed in the ring, a certificate indicating the GPS location and the satisfaction that the money would go into research on Namib Rand Ranch. I am afraid that our group did not want to find out the answer to fairy rings that badly. The dunes did not yield many species but all agreed that the scenery was spectacular.

We found Grey-backed Finch-Larks feeding young, a pair of Doublebanded Coursers with a five-day old chick and a Bokmakierie building a nest in a *Euphorbia virosa*. The finch larks were the most numerous bird with thousands taking advantage of the flush of grass to breed.

On the last day (2 May) everyone left but the Osbornes who spent the day trying vainly on foot to catch a Ruppell's Korhaan. During the first Namibrand weekend in 1998, 39 species of birds were seen. We had a preliminary list of species likely to occur drawn up from the Atlas of Southern African Birds and Roberts. We saw 60 species from that list and added four species. What are lacking are migratory species and we recommend that the next Namibrand weekend be in early March.

NAMUSHASHA AND THE KWANDO RIVER: THE BIRD CLUB LONG WEEKEND FIELD TRIP

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The Bird Club enjoyed a convivial and relaxing long weekend on the Kwando River. Willem de Wet had invited the Club to Namushasha Lodge for the long weekend of the 22nd till the 25th of May, for the purpose of producing a bird list for the Lodge. A list downloaded from Roberts' multimedia CD-Rom, had given the area 380 species, so the Club had quite