

LANIOTURDUS

SWA/NAMIBIA VOGELKLUB
eine Zweigstelle der
SWA Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft
und der
Southern African Ornithological
Society

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Mitteilungen des SWA/Namibia Vogelklubs
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Beiträge bitte an den Redakteur des LANIOTURDUS p.A. SWA Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, Postfach 67, Windhoek, 9000 senden.

Mitgliedsbeiträge für die S.A.O.S. und die Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft für 1986 sind wie folgt:

Mitgliedschaft SWA Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft und
SWA/Namibia Vogelklub R 25-00 pro Jahr
Mitgliedschaft SWA Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft und
der Southern African Ornithological Society R 26-00 pro Jahr

Als ein Ordentliches Mitglied von sowohl der S.A.O.S. als auch der SWA Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft, erhalten Sie die populärwissenschaftliche Zeitschrift BOKMAKIERIE, das wissenschaftlich ausgerichtete Journal OSTRICH und ebenfalls die lokalen Mitteilungen LANIOTURDUS, weiteres Informationsmaterial und die allgemeinen Publikationen der SWA Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft.

Als Ortsgruppen-Mitglied des SWA/Namibianischen Vogelklubs stehen Ihnen der LANIOTURDUS, sowie die Mitteilungen und zusätzliche Informationen der SWA Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft zu.

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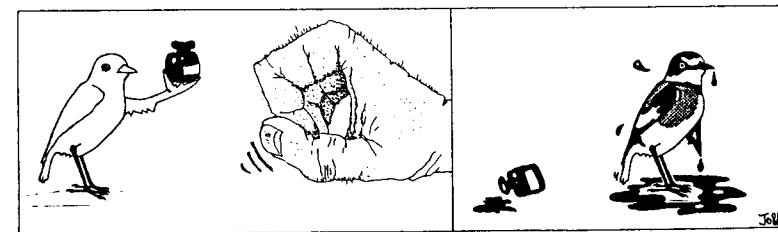
Klare Schwarz-weiss-Photographien (15 x 20 cm) können eingereicht werden, um die Arbeit zu illustrieren.

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1. "CREATIONISM"

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Editorial...Redaktion

On behalf of the SWA/Namibia Bird Club I would like to thank Walter Böttger and SWA CHEMICALS (PTY) LTD for their financial assistance - as you will have noted, LANIOTURDUS now has its own manila envelope, and this is greatly appreciated!

Chris Brown, Chris Hines and Roy Jones are congratulated for their sterling efforts on Big Birding Day (8 November) - representing the SWA/Namibia Bird Club, they 'twitched' in the Mahango Game Reserve and surrounds, and managed to 'tick' 189 species between 02h00 and 23h00 - an excellent achievement! There will be more news about Big Birding Day, and the results from other parts of southern Africa in the next issue of Lanioturdus.

This issue carries a variety of articles and notes from our local members to remind you that Lanioturdus is primarily a Newsletter, and will always remain so. However, I will attempt to maintain a 'mixed bag' standard, with occasional 'serious', or 'technical' articles. We do not have a specialized bird journal in Namibia, and until we do, Lanioturdus will continue to serve as a mouthpiece for all birding activities in Namibia, whether these are amateur or professional. Please remember that every birding activity in Namibia is exciting and interesting, and should be shared with our readers. So blow the dust off your 'bins', scopes and notebooks, and get out there and do some birding! (and let us know about it!)

Finally - here's hoping that you all have a prosperous year of birding in 1987 !!

Joris Komen



Articles and Reports Artikel & Berichte

IS THE WHITETAILED SHRIKE A TERRESTRIAL BATIS ?

TONY HARRIS

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[Received 19 September 1986]

INTRODUCTION

The Whitetailed Shrike *Lanioturdus torquatus* was discovered by Captain (later Sir) James Alexander, who gave his name to Alexander Bay near the mouth of the Orange River, and made one of the first successful expeditions into 'Damaraland' from the Cape. He discovered the Whitetailed Shrike at what was then known as Bull's Mouth Pass, today known as Bullsport, in the Naukluft Mountains. The type specimen was collected between 31 March and 2 April 1837, and later described by G. Waterhouse who was employed by the Zoological Society (Macdonald 1951).

The systematic position (relationship to other groups) of this species has been uncertain from the day it was discovered. The generic name *Lanioturdus* reflects the uncertainty of the original describer; *Lanius* = butcher, i.e., shrike, and *turdus* = thrush. The specific name *torquatus* refers to the bird's black necklace or collar.

Alexander (1838) suggested that *Lanioturdus* had affinities with the shrikes, and particularly with the bush shrikes. Roberts (1946) noted that the eggs and nest of *Lanioturdus* resembled those of the helmetshrikes. However, Vincent (1952) placed it with the flycatchers of the subfamily Muscicapinae. Hall & Moreau (1970) placed *Lanioturdus* with the shrikes, but pointed out a similarity with male *Batis* flycatchers. More recently, *Lanioturdus* has been retained in the shrike family Laniidae (Clancey 1980, Howard & Moore 1984, Maclean 1985). As far as I know, no detailed comparative study of *Lanioturdus*, *Batis* and shrikes has ever been carried out. This paper does not attempt such a detailed comparison, but instead highlights some characters which perforce suggest a possible affinity between *Lanioturdus* and *Batis* flycatchers. In so doing, some of the gaps in our knowledge of the Whitetailed Shrike are identified to stimulate greater interest in this unique bird.

On the basis of plumage, structural and behavioural characters, *Lanioturdus* was compared with the following *Batis* species; *Batis molitor*, *B. pririt*, *B. soror*, *B. minor*, *B. capensis* and *B. fratrum*. These character comparisons are detailed in Tables 1 and 2. Only the plumage of male *Batis* was used in comparison with *Lanioturdus* plumage, since female *Batis*, although sharing numerous plumage characters with the males, have russet-brown plumage-areas unlike *Lanioturdus*.

DISCUSSION

Lanioturdus shows considerable plumage similarity with male batises (Table 1). It differs in a few ways, particularly in the fact that the shrike has sexually monomorphic plumage (sexes cannot be distinguished by plumage) and batises have sexually dimorphic plumage (sexes can be distinguished by plumage). *Lanioturdus* has conspicuous white frontal (forehead) feathers not seen in batises. However, some batises do have white feathers at the base of the bill, but these are much less conspicuous. The crown and nape are black in the shrike, a condition not seen in batises. The breast is grey and white in the shrike compared to a similar white area in male batises. Interestingly, the grey area shows a similar distribution to the russet-brown area on the breast of some female batises, e.g., *E. capensis*. Finally, *Lanioturdus* has all twelve tail feathers white, with the exception of the two central feathers, which have a variable amount of black. Batises show varying amounts of white in the tail, which is confined to the tips and outer web of the outer feathers. This difference is therefore one of degree only. Andersson (1872) commented that *Lanioturdus* had stiff tail feathers, but this was not confirmed in the comparison with batises.

Soft part areas and other structural characters of *Lanioturdus* and batises were also similar (Table 1), lending support to the suggestion that these species are closely related. The relatively longer tarsus, shorter tail and greater mass of *Lanioturdus* are probably adaptations to a terrestrial life (batises are mostly arboreal (tree-dwelling)).

Despite a lack of data, it is the behavioural characteristics of *Lanioturdus* and the batises which provide the strongest evidence for a close relationship (Table 2). The single major difference appears to be the shrike's terrestrial foraging behaviour - batises are almost exclusively arboreal foragers. However, feeding strategy is not considered an important systematic character since similar feeding strategies have evolved independently in unrelated groups.

Any behavioural characters ('signals', including vocalization) associated with the reciprocal recognition of males and females for reproduction must define the genetic limits, and hence a species' limits (Faterson 1984). The similarity of these 'specific-mate recognition characters' should provide good evidence for establishing a relationship between different species. Specific-mate recognition characters of *Lanioturdus* probably include various auditory and visual displays, such as specific calls and duetting combined with a 'jinksing' flight, fluffed-rump and bowing display of the male (as seen in some of the batises; Table 2).

TABLE 1
Structural comparison between *L. torquatus* and six *Batis* species.

1 = *L. torquatus*; 2 - 7 = *Batis* species*
+ = similar; - = different; ? = unknown for *L. torquatus*
Elank = unknown for batises; b = black; w = white; c = coverts;
M = male; F = female; Sec'ries = Secondaries; Prim. = Primaries; Sec. = Secondaries; yell. = yellow;

Plumage/soft parts Area	similar							Plumage/soft part Area	different						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Hindneck b/w	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	M & F same	+	-	-	-	-	-	
Lores black	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Frontal grey	-	+	+	+	+	+	
Ear coverts b	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Crown grey	-	+	+	+	+	+	
Supercilium w	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	Nape grey	-	+	+	+	+	+	
Chin/throat w	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Breast w	-	+	+	+	+	-	
Chest bar b	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	Flanks w	-	+	-	+	+	-	
Belly w	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	Tail b/w	-	+	+	+	+	+	
Thigh b/w	+	+	+	+	+	+	+								
Und-tail-c w	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	UNKNOWN							
Up-tail-c b	+	+	+	+	+	+	+								
Rump spotted	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Plumage/softpart colours							
Back grey	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	Area	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mantle grey	+	+	+	+	-	-	-								
Primaries b/w	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Spotted Imm	?	+	+				
Sec'ries b/w	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Chicks dark	?	+	+				
Prim.-c b	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Neosoptiles	?	-	-				
Sec.-c b/w	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	No mouthspots	?	+	+	+	+	+	+
Nape spot w	+	+	+	+	+	+	+								
Ad eye yell.	+	+	+	+	+	+	+								
Imm eye dark	+	+													
Bill black	+	+	+	+	+	+	+								
Legs/feet b	+	+	+	+	+	+	+								
Palate black	+	+	+	+											
Other struct. similarities								Other struct. differences							
Structure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Structure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bill shape	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Tarsus short	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
Tarsal scales	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Wing:tail <2	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
Wing loading	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Weight <15g	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
Egg colour	+	+													

* *Batis* species: 2 = *E. molitor*, 3 = *E. pririt*, 4 = *E. soror*, 5 = *E. minor*, 6 = *E. capensis*, 7 = *E. fraterum*

The similarities in behaviour, structure and to a lesser extent (and importance) in plumage, between *Lanioturdus* and the batises, appear to indicate a close relationship rather than convergent or parallel development. However, many questions about Whitetailed Shrikes remain unanswered (see ? in Tables 1 & 2), particularly those related to specific-mate recognition.

CONCLUSIONS

For example, does the male courtship-feed the female? How does the male courtship display take place? Does the male fan his tail during courtship? What other displays does this species have? Does the male announce his arrival at the nest with a nest relief call? What are the contact, alarm and food-soliciting calls? What do newly-hatched chicks look like - do they have mouth spots? Do nestlings hatch with down feathers? Are the shrikes parasitized by other birds? These are only a few of the questions which need to be answered before a meaningful comparative analysis of *Lanioturdus* and *Batis* (and other shrikes too!) can be attempted. The Whitetailed Shrike is an understudied species, and very little published behavioural information exists (e.g., Joerges 1972).

Most of the questions outlined above can be answered by simply spending time observing these birds. Ideally, colour marked birds would provide the best returns. However, there is no substitute to spending lots of time in the field, following individual birds from dawn to dusk.

TABLE 2
Behavioural comparison between *L. torquatus* and six *Batis* species.

1 = *L. torquatus*, 2 - 7 = *Batis* species*
+ = similar, - = different, ? = unknown for *L. torquatus*
Blank = unknown for *Batis*

M = male; F = female; displ = display; struct. = structure;
flt = flight; court. = courtship; Nes-rel. = Nest-relief;
prod. = production

Similar Behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Different Behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Monogamous	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Ground feed	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Flocking	+	+		+		+		UNKNOWN							
M rump displ	+	+				+		Behaviour	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bowing displ	+	+	+	+		+		Court. feed	?	+	+	+		+	
Duet	+	+	+	+		+		F beg call	?	+	+	+		+	
Tonal whistl	+	+	+	+	+	+		Juv beg call	?	+	+			+	
Both build	+	+	+			+		Nes-rel. call	?	+					
F incubates	+	+	+			+		Contact call	?	+	+	+		+	
M incubates	-	-	-			-		Alarm call	?	+	+	+		+	
F broods most	+	+	+			+		Bill snapping	?	+	+	+		+	
Incub. <20dys	+	+	+			+		Jinks displ	?	+	+			+	
Fledg. <20dys	+	+	+			+		M fans tail	?	+				+	
Nest struct.	+	+	+	+		+		Helpers	?	-	-			-	
Wing "frip"	+	+	+			+		Parasitised	?	+				+	
Scratch over	+	+	+			+		Both feed juv	?	+				+	
Hopping gait	+	+	+			+		Faeces taken	?					+	
Undulat. flt	+	+	+			+		Shell removed	?					+	
Glean feed	+	+	+			+		Pellet prod.	?	+	+			+	
Feed on wing	+	+	+			+									

* *Batis* species: 2 = *B. molitor*, 3 = *B. pririt*, 4 = *B. scror*,
5 = *B. minor*, 6 = *B. capensis*, 7 = *B. fratrum*

The Whitetailed Shrike shares many behavioural, structural and plumage characters with *Batis*. Many of these characters, particularly the behavioural ones, suggest a close relationship to the *Batis*. Of these, the specific-mate recognition characters are considered the most important. However, more information is required (particularly on mate recognition) to substantiate the relationship between *Lanioturdus* and the *Batis*. The gaps in our knowledge of the Whitetailed Shrike have been highlighted in the hopes that this may stimulate observations of this special bird. Is *Lanioturdus* a terrestrial *Batis*?

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Any observations (especially those ?? in Table 2), no matter how small, on Whitetailed Shrikes and *Batis*, will be appreciated and acknowledged.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following people are thanked for sharing their knowledge about the Whitetailed Shrike: R K Brooke, J Carlyon, C F Clinning, B Joerges, J Komen and L Praetorius.

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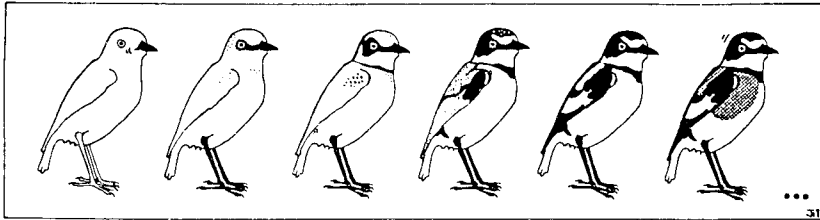
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[If anyone wants to undertake a behavioural study of a pair of colour-marked Whitetailed Shrikes in central Windhoek, please contact the Editor. Leon Praetorius monitored the breeding of this pair for some two years, and has prepared a paper which will be published in 1987. Unfortunately, Leon has left for the USA, and it would be a great shame to let this excellent research opportunity go to waste. Ed.]

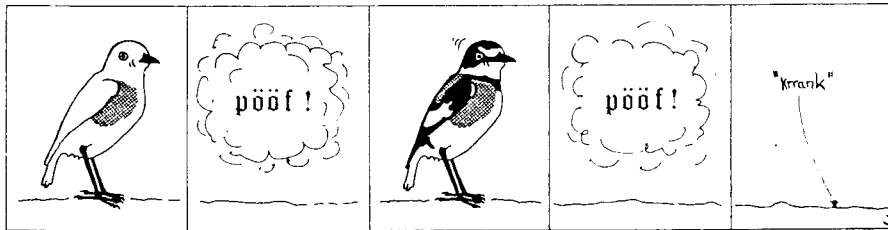
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PARK Notes / Berichte

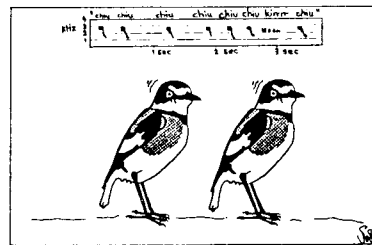
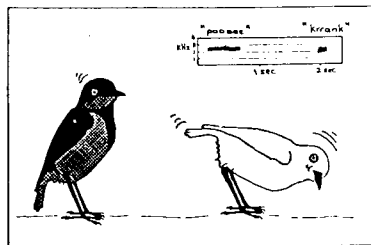
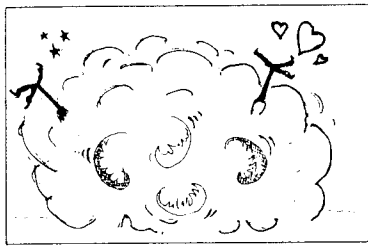
2. "GRADUALISM"



3. "PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM"



4. SMRS*



* "SPECIFIC MATE RECOGNITION SYSTEM"

AFRICAN SKIMMERS BREEDING IN THE OKAVANGO RIVER

A.J. WILLIAMS

Directorate of Nature Conservation
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[received 13 November 1986]

African Skimmers *Rynchops flavirostris* are endemic to sub-Saharan Africa where they are widely distributed on suitable rivers and lakes, from the "Sahel" zone in the north to the Okavango and Zambezi river systems in the south. The world population is not known, but it is probably less than 5 000 pairs. The largest recorded gathering is of 1 500 birds (Britton 1980) but the largest known breeding colony only comprised 50 pairs (Modha & Coe 1969). Skimmers are heavily dependent on the availability of sandbanks, surrounded by deep water, which deter would-be predators. Sandbanks are used for roosting and especially for breeding, which takes place between July and October (Maclean 1985).

In September 1983 a colony of African Skimmers was found breeding on a sandbank in the Okavango River a few kilometres north of the Botswana border, within the Mahango Game Reserve, Kavango, SWA/Namibia. A total of 13 nests with eggs were found and at least a further four to fifteen pairs were suspected of breeding. The principal colony was visited in the late afternoon, so that there would be no danger of the eggs or small chicks overheating while their parents were disturbed and off the sandbank. This colony contained twelve nests with eggs, and 81 additional nest scrapes. Skimmers probably make a number of nest scrapes before finally selecting the one where eggs will be laid. Judging from the number of birds in the area a further ten to fifteen pairs might have been about to lay eggs on this sandbank.

The twelve clutches examined contained a total of 28 eggs. There were four three-egg clutches and eight two-egg clutches. The mean weight of 28 eggs was $17,7 \pm (\text{S.D.}) 0,8 \text{ g}$ (range 16,0 g to 19,0 g). The mean egg size ($n = 28$) was $39,5 \pm 1,2 \text{ mm}$ (range 37,3 - 42,1 mm) \times $28,8 \pm 0,5 \text{ mm}$ (range 27,6 - 29,7 mm). These measurements fall well within the limits of 104 egg-measurements reported elsewhere (Maclean 1985). The twelve nest scrapes were, on average, $188,0 \pm 30,6 \text{ mm}$ wide and $46,5 \pm 6,6 \text{ mm}$ deep.

