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EDITORIAL

This summer has seen the most remarkable influx of huge numbers of birds of a variety of species and a surfeit of rarities from the North to the coast and places in the South – or is it that we are getting more birders out into the field finding more birds and reporting their observations. I think it is probably a combination of both.

This year, some of the biggest numbers of Abdim's Storks I have ever seen, arrived and stayed even though there was a general lack of rain and *Koringkrieks!* Around Etosha, through the central parts of the country to south of Windhoek there were storks everywhere. Huge numbers of coastal terns, skuas, waders and pelagic seabirds were reported from the Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour areas. Large numbers of Western Redfooted Kestrels were reported from the central part of the country for most of the summer and huge numbers of European Swifts were reported at the same time. But for me the interesting thing has been the number of reports we have received of other species of interest (see *SHORT NOTES*) and the number of people reporting these. I can only hope that people's interest has again been stimulated to get out birding and that, although local, *Lanioturdus* is starting to provide the medium for pricking people's interest. This is what it is there for, and I cannot stress enough to you all that without your support and contributions the magazine (and the club) will fail.

Thanks for all your support and keep on birding.

analyze what had happened. One of nine radio-tagged females laid an egg and produced one chick. Three of our females still had yearlings in tow. In 1997, between April and June, we found 70 broods with an average of 1.52 chicks. Fifty percent of the broods consisted of two or more chicks. During February and March 1998 we only found nine broods with an average of 1.22 chicks per brood. Only 22% of the broods were comprised of twins and no triplets were found.

The interruption in the breeding season was not limited to Kori Bustards. At Okaukuejo Helmeted Guineafowl, *Numida meleagris*, wander the tourist camp and several flocks have birds with distinctive features, unusual casque shapes, missing toes, and healed fractures. These birds often visit our camp site to drink at the bird bath and we are able to recognize individual birds. 1997 was a bumper breeding season in the park with some adults accompanied by 20 chicks. In December males were chasing each other around and started to pair up with females. In January, the pairs would still come to the bird bath but by the end of February, they had not nested and rejoined the remaining flocks. On several farms adjoining the southern park boundary, farmers have mentioned to me that they have also noticed that guinea fowl flocks have not broken up into pairs. One farmer so far has only found one guinea fowl brood.

As we drive the plains looking for Kori Bustards we have also observed Whitequilled Korhaans, *Eupodotis afraoides*, and Blue cranes, *Anthropoides paradiseus*. In 1997, the park was full of Whitequilled Korhaan broods with three being the commonest brood size, but we found up to four in a brood. We did not count all the broods we encountered but we estimated an average brood size of 2.5. Maclean (1993) gives the clutch size as one (85%) or two eggs (15%), and none of the literature recorded any more than two eggs. To date, we are still seeing female korhaans feeding on the plains and males have ceased their aerial displays. We have not seen any chicks

In 1997 after the rains, most of the Blue Cranes we saw had two chicks in attendance. In December we saw single cranes feeding on the plains and assumed that the other of the pair was off nesting somewhere. By late

January pairs of cranes were on the plains and no chicks have been seen. We assume that the crane breeding season has also been affected by the drought.

The literature is full of references about the effects of drought on birds in arid climates but most of the observations have been anecdotal like our observations on the cranes and korhaans. Our radio-tagged Kori Bustards are giving us valuable data into the mechanisms which initiate breeding. Negative data is always good science but often boring. We hope that the predictions of good rains in March and April are correct. Then we can see if the breeding season is *interruptus* or *finis*.

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WHITEBELLIED KORHAAN IN NAMIBIA: A FIRST RECORD FROM THE ANDONI GRASSLANDS

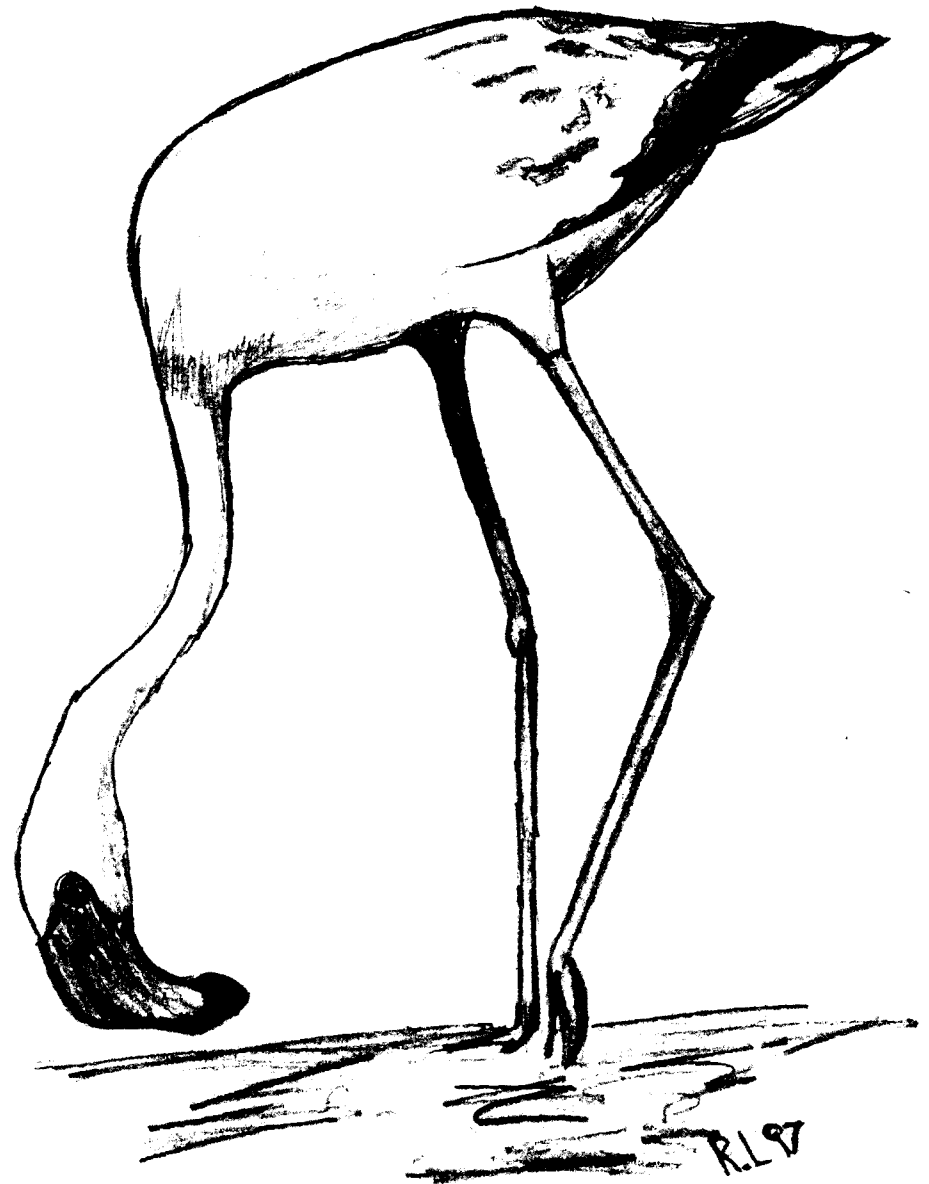
Christopher Hines & John Mendelsohn

While working in the Andoni grassland area on the northern boundary of Etosha National Park, we found a single female Whitebellied Korhaan in tall grass on the boundary fence. We had a clear view of the bird as it was drinking from a small rainwater puddle in the road and then as it walked off a couple of metres into some tall grass. The striking thing both of us noticed was the rich brownish-red tones of the back, the mottled appearance (neither barred or chevroned which separates it from Northern Black, Redcrested and Blackbellied), the grey, black and white v-shaped crown patch and the pale belly (which separates it from Northern Black and Redcrested, and from the male Blackbellied). The bird was not tall and leggy and had a pale reddish base to the bill which separates it from the female Blackbellied Korhaan. We subsequently got the bird to fly. The pale

underwing coverts and the clear buffy patch in the primary feathers were the most noticeable features of the bird. It also flew like a typical small bustard and not with the heavy wingbeats of a Blackbellied Korhaan. It came to ground following a typical "parachute" descent, with the wings raised and shallow flapping. The bird was subsequently identified as a "Whitebellied Korhaan", which constitutes a first record for Namibia. The problem, however, is which species?

Several subspecies of Whitebellied Korhaan are recognised in Africa, but the southern African form of the Whitebellied Korhaan is considered by many authorities to be a separate species from the form that occurs further North in Africa. The southern African species (form), *Eupodotis caffra*, is essentially endemic to South Africa with some old, isolated records from the extreme south-eastern part of Botswana. The other species (form), *Eupodotis senegalensis*, occurs through western Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Angola and further north into Ethiopia and west Africa. The nearest record for a "Whitebellied Korhaan" found in the literature is one of a bird from southern Huila province in Angola, just north of the Namibian border. The taxonomy of this bird is unknown, but would presumably be in the "northern" species (form) considering its geographic proximity to other "northern" populations. This raises the question as to whether we are looking at two species in southern Africa – the Southern Whitebellied Korhaan (as it is called in the latest edition of Sinclair et al.'s *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa*) which only occurs in South Africa and the Northern Whitebellied Korhaan (Bustard) which is widely distributed elsewhere in Africa. We may, therefore, have inadvertently added another species to the southern African list.

The Andoni and Ombuga grasslands north of Etosha National Park are ornithologically poorly known and warrant considerable further research, and may well harbour a previously unknown population of Whitebellied Korhaan. Any visitors to the eastern end of the ENP should keep a sharp lookout for smaller korhaans in the vicinity of Andoni waterhole, north of Namutoni. The bird we saw was probably less than one kilometre from the waterhole just outside the park boundary. Please report any sightings to us or to *Lanioturdus*.



A Greater Flamingo drawn by one of our younger birders, Roland Ludwig