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## Editorial

Bird populations are dynamic – always on the move! I see this at my own home. I have lived in this house for over 23 years and up until about four years ago I had never seen a southern red bishop there – in 2009 alone I ringed 136 at this location! In September 2010 I experienced an irruption of common waxbills, a species I very seldom see in my garden. Over a period of 122 days until the end of the year we ringed 205 and then the numbers seen and caught dropped off sharply suggesting that most of them had moved on. In Lanioturdus 43(4) I mentioned the five pied crows I saw on 11/08/2010 across two Quarter Degree Squares between Rundu Airport and Ncaute where the species was not recorded in the Atlas. I had not seen this species there in about ten previous trips and I have not seen it there again since then on my subsequent trips through this area.

The above examples illustrate how dynamic certain populations actually are – some suddenly appearing and remaining, others merely moving through an area. With the climate changes currently being experienced we are seeing the earlier arrival of some migrants and also later departure dates. (In Lanioturdus 43-4 we published some of Günther Friederich's observations on the early arrival of grey-headed kingfisher and European bee-eater in our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section).

In our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section in this issue we have a report of a Sabine's gull seen at Kalkheuwel waterhole in the Etosha National Park – as far as I have been able to determine this constitutes



All in all I was most satisfied with all three pelagic tours that I joined and if one's expectations are not unrealistically high I believe one can really enjoy these outings and you will probably have added another couple of lifers to your list.

I am certainly waiting for the next call when the fourth pelagic tour will take place and, yes, I will be part of it again!!

*(The sightings in this article are a combination of what was seen on all three trips and readers should not expect to see all these birds on a single trip {unless exceptionally lucky} - Ed)*

### **Who were the People after whom some of our Bird Species are Named? (Part 1: Introduction and Overview)**

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Both the common names and the scientific names of many species of birds occurring in Namibia incorporate the names of people. Examples of this are Burchell's courser (*Cursorius rufus*) and Cape shoveller (*Anas smithii*).

Perhaps a brief explanation of the scientific nomenclature is necessary to better understand this fascinating subject and how

bird species names come to include the names of people.

The system of scientific nomenclature in use today was devised by the Swede, Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) who was ennobled as Carl von Linné in 1757.

Under this system each species has a two part name, the first part denoting the genus (the generic name, which is always a noun which for the most part refers to aspects of the bird in question such as appearance, call, habits, food, behavior, legendary association and sometimes commemorative association) and the second part denoting the species (specific name, which is usually an adjective which may denote the bird's description, habits, place where found, commemorative association, classification or a combination of some of these). Thus in the case of Burchell's courser *Cursorius* is the generic name and *rufus* the specific name. Where there is a subspecies or race involved the scientific name will have a third part applicable to that subspecies. An example of this is *Chersomanes fasciata erikssoni*, the sub-species of the spike-heeled lark found in north central Namibia and named after Axel Wilhelm Eriksson (1846-1901), the Swedish "Trader King of Damaraland", who donated his bird collection to the Vänernsborg museum (see *Lanioturdus* 42-1) and his bat hawk specimen to the Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet in Stockholm (see *Lanioturdus* 43-1). However, as information on those for whom species are named is relatively difficult to come by, it would probably be a life's work to discover for whom all the subspecies are named so I will limit myself to those whose names (or derivations thereof) appear in the names of full species.

It should be noted that not all agreed with Linnaeus's classification of species. Le Vaillant for one gave the species he described his own descriptive French names. For example he named the southern pale chanting goshawk "le chanteur". Some of Le Vaillant's names remain with us today however. Bateleur is one and pririt (batis) is another, the latter

probably onomatopoeic remembering that the “t” would be silent in French.

Swainson was another who had other ideas on the classification of birds and who became a fanatical advocate of a strange system based on the magical number five whereby each category contained five divisions. Swainson also proposed major changes to scientific nomenclature rejecting all names derived from mythology, all names that were geographically unsuitable (an example of this would be the bokmakierie, *Telophorus zeylonus*, where the species was mistakenly thought to also occur in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka), or which honoured people who were not great zoologists.

Where a person’s name is reflected in the common name it is often also reflected in the scientific name (e.g. Temminck’s courser *Cursorius temmincki*) but this is not always the case (e.g. Burchell’s courser *Cursorius rufus*).

While most of those honoured in the scientific names are honoured only in the specific name there are exceptions. Swynnerton (1877-1938) is honoured in the common name, generic name and specific name of Swynnerton’s robin, *Swynnertonia swynnertoni*. Both Sheppard (1875-1958) and Gunning (1860-1912) are honoured in the scientific name of the east coast akalat, *Sheppardia gunningi* (formerly Gunning’s robin). Neither of these species occurs in Namibia and are merely used here as examples.

While it was considered “bad form” to name species after oneself this did not stop Adolphe Delegorgue (Harlequin quail, *Coturnix delegorguei* and eastern bronze-naped pigeon *Columba delegorguei*, formerly Delegorgue’s pigeon) from naming the birds after himself (as did one or two others), while Bradfield (Bradfield’s swift, Bradfield’s hornbill) fell out with Austin Roberts of the Transvaal Museum when Roberts refused to name every species and sub-species sent in by Bradfield after him whereupon Bradfield ceased contributing specimens.

While one might expect that birds would be named for those who collected the original

specimens or those who described the species this is often not the case. Many are named after museum directors, financiers of expeditions etc. but very few women are honoured in the names of species. Some of those for whom southern African species were named never even set foot in Africa while others who worked in east, north or west Africa are honoured in the names of species occurring in southern Africa. Some never even saw the birds named in their honour. Some knew each other - Rüppell and von Kittlitz were on an expedition in north east Africa together while Wahlberg and Delegorgue arrived in Durban on the same ship in 1839 and collected together in Natal. Thomas Ayres accompanied James Jameson on an expedition to Mashonaland in 1880. Many lived to a ripe old age (particularly some of those who never visited Africa). Some died very young. Wahlberg died violently under the feet of a wounded elephant while others such as Böhm and Dickinson succumbed to tropical diseases.

In many cases the lives of the people after whom the birds were named touched the lives of other famous historical figures – Andrew Smith met Charles Darwin when H.M.S. Beagle called in Table Bay in May 1836, rendered medical assistance to the missionary, Dr Moffat, at Kuruman and later crossed swords with Florence Nightingale in the Crimea, Dickinson worked with the missionary, David Livingstone, in what is today Malawi while Jameson died while on an expedition with Henry Morton Stanley in the Congo.

It will be noted that many were members or office bearers of the Royal Society, the Zoological Society and other such bodies. These were bodies of high esteem and their members and office bearers included some of the most brilliant scientists of the time.

So who were these people? Different sources differ on dates, spellings and even the nationalities of some of these people. In the case of Bennett’s woodpecker there is some doubt as to which Bennett is honoured in the name. A similar situation applies to other

species such as Baillon's crake and Gray's lark. McKay often differs from other authors regarding who a bird was named after and Craig openly disagrees with him on a number of species. Where there is more than one possibility I have tried to include all the options but I have been limited by the literature I have managed to unearth, some of which is fairly old. There may well be newer theories and explanations of which I am not aware. In some cases a wealth of information is available regarding the person concerned, in other cases virtually nothing. For the purpose of these articles I will deal only with those species occurring in Namibia, those possibly occurring in Namibia (e.g. Ross's turaco and Fülleborn's longclaw) and those occurring off the Namibian coast.

I pondered hard over how best to sequence the names of those for whom species are named and have come to the conclusion that the alphabetical order of the common names of the species is as good a sequence as any. As far as I can determine seventy six to seventy eight people (depending on which Smith the wire-tailed swallow was named after and whether the coqui francolin was indeed named after a Mr Coqui) are honoured in the names of bird species occurring in Namibia (sub-species excluded).

The scientific names used in these articles are those used in Roberts Birds of Southern Africa (VIIth Edition) 2005. The name and date in brackets after the species name is the name of the person who described the species and the date thereof.

The next article in this series will begin with Abdim's stork and end with Franklin's gull.

### **Falcons in the City**

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Namibians are fortunate to have an interesting variety of small bird of prey species that adapt to living in our cities and towns. This diversity includes diurnal falcons, goshawks and

kestrels, nocturnal owls and even a crepuscular owl. The fortunate part is that these predatory birds control populations of creatures that are considered pests around homes, gardens and inner city areas. The pests include rodents, bats, some garden insects as well as, for some gardeners, small fruit eating birds.

Cities and towns create a range of habitats; there are the high and low concrete or brick buildings, the river-beds with riverine shrubby or woodland edges and the planted gardens with diversity of indigenous and exotic flowering and fruiting trees and shrubs as well as often nutritious grass planted as lawn. Each species of predatory bird is adapted to a specific habitat with preferred nest sites and preferred food items.

Of the most common urbanized diurnal (day) raptors is the Rock Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*. Throughout Namibia this 200 gram falcon has adapted to nesting on buildings in cities and towns. Pairs of kestrels are sedentary and providing that their prey items, rodents, lizards and insects do not become scarce they can be seen around their city blocks throughout the year. As the summer approaches and usually with the onset of the first rains the city kestrels will take up their nest sites on a building ledge. Pairs prefer to use the same site each year and if the rain season begins early and is extensive a single pair of kestrels may have two clutches of eggs in one summer season.

After a 4 week incubation period and an approximate 5 week nestling period great activity can be seen as 2-4 young birds leave the nest site and spend much of their days over the next month or two playing in the wind and practicing their flying and predatory techniques between the buildings. The city kestrel nest sites are often on window ledges of buildings. Many people only begin to notice the Rock Kestrels when the chicks are part grown and become vocal in their demands for food and attention.

Young kestrels are endangered in a number of ways. People can disturb the site when too