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Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

I made the appeal in the last editorial for everyone to give out a membership form to people you know who are not members. How many of you have done this? I gave out 2 forms and one has signed up as a club member! So I am batting 50% in getting new members. Hopefully at the next annual general meeting we will see if we are perishing as a club or growing. Certainly birding is growing world-wide and I would hate to think that we are not part of that trend.

The rains have been late as usual and spotty throughout the country but the rain birds have arrived and are doing nicely. On a trip to Windhoek I counted 7200 Yellow-and-Blackbilled Kites along the B1. Fortunately the road was empty so I was not a road hazard as I was alone and watching the sky more than the road.

This issue has a paper written by a school girl who shows what sort of good scientific information can be gathered in your backyard. It also has more of Paxton exploits from the north.

the back of his bakkie. The sky was incredible, with the setting sun illuminating long formations of whispy hanging clouds. Though we didn't see anything too special (they'd come across a cheetah and cubs not many days earlier), it was very pleasant, and I enjoyed the sight of a tree full of roosting Guinea Fowl silhouetted against the darkening sky. This was followed by a communal braai and some stargazing.

The following day started with an earlyish group walk around the area, and then some of us went to check on the Eagle and noticed a column of vultures along the way. Mr Schleicher took us to check out the situation, but nothing was found. We did note, however, a Yellowtailed (Golden ed.) Woodpecker consistently sitting on a fence post near the farmhouse and upon investigation discovered a nest hole in the post. Everyone headed back to Windhoek in the early afternoon, taking along the Tawny Eagle, which was left with Liz Komen at NARREC.

While I only saw 60 species that I know of, altogether 113 species of bird were sighted at the farm. Besides what has already been mentioned, highlights included: Brown Snake Eagle, Orange River Francolin, Kurrichane Buttonquail, (another) Ludwig's Bustard, Doublebanded Courser, Burchell's Sandgrouse, Capped Wheatear, Fiscal Shrike, Quail Finch, and Yellow Canary.

A final note: Mr Schleicher's enlightened use of his farmland is hopefully the wave of the future for much of Namibia's minimally "productive" land. He runs only half the number of cattle he could to allow for the wildlife that wanders in and out through game fences. He co-operates with neighbouring farmers who appropriately and strictly regulate the quantity and timing of hunting. I appreciate his allowing us to make free use of his facilities, and I hope that his attitude will be an example to his heirs and to his neighbours.

Why do Lappet-faced Vultures favour smaller carcasses?

P. L. Cunningham
Department of Nature Conservation
Polytechnic of Namibia, P/Bag 13388, Windhoek
pcunningham@polytechnic.edu.na

On a number of occasions now I have witnessed Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* feeding on carcasses of Black-backed Jackal *Canis mesomelas* and Cape Hare *Lepus capensis* road casualties. I have often wondered why such a big vulture would find it beneficial to descend to feed on small carcasses. Lapped-faced vultures (LFVs) weigh between 6-8 kg, have a wingspan of between 715-755 cm (Maclean 1985) and a wingspan of 2.80 (Mundi *et al.* 1992), being second in weight to the Cape Vulture *Gyps Cooprotheres* in Namibia.

Some possible reasons why they favour smaller prey:
LFVs are scavengers, but according to Maclean (1985) they also kill small mammals down to the size of hare. Steyn (1982) states that they mainly feed on smaller carcasses and supports this statement by indicating that they often show a lack of interest in large carcasses as well as the remains of food (usually smaller items e.g. hare, mongoose, civet, polecat, pangolin, etc.) found around their nests. Furthermore he states that the "gripping" toes are strong and the claws well curved" indicating that this feature supports small carcass selection.

They are also typically birds of the more arid areas (Pickford *et al.* 1994) where the availability of prey is often scarce and/or they cannot choose to be fussy about what they eat. Due to their size, LFVs are late movers due to the fact that they require stronger thermals to rise (Maclean 1985) and are usually the last to arrive at a carcass (Pickford *et al.* 1994). Although they are dominant at carcasses (due to their size) their late arrival often results in them having to make do with the scraps.

LFVs usually forage solitarily or in pairs (Maclean 1985, Steyn 1982) and their numbers usually make up only a few individuals at a mixed gathering

of vultures at a carcass. Steyn (1982) does however mention that as many as 26 LFVs have been noticed at a carcass of an Ostrich *struthio camelus* in the Namib Desert. Mundy *et al.* (1992) states that their visits to large carcasses are possibly more for the social function and they not necessarily partake in the feast.

LFVs have a small crop – proportionately – for a large bird, which suggests that they obtain their daily food requirements on a daily basis suggesting predation rather than scavenging (Mundy *et al.* 1992). The previous authors also mention that the crop of a LFV would rarely be able to hold more than 1 kg of meat.

LFVs do not readily eat meat, organs and intestines and usually remain clean and unsoiled during feeding (something that cannot be said for White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus* (Mundy *et al.* 1992). This preference also probably contributes to it selecting "cleaner" carcasses to feed on.
Habitat factors, such as their distribution (dry desert areas: "take-what-you-get"), general habits (solitary, late risers, kill small game, keeps clean) and build (small crop, strong claws), possibly contribute to the fact that they utilise small carcasses more frequently.
What I have also noticed is that when they feed on small roadkills they have the carcass to themselves – i.e. no competition – and usually leave very little, but feet, ears, etc., thus virtually consuming the entire carcass. This would mean that it is advantageous for LFVs to descend and consume an entire carcass (albeit small) and without competition at leisure.

I would like to acknowledge Mark Anderson (Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, Environment & Conservation - RSA) for his comments regarding a draft of this note.

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OBSERVATIONS ON THE NUTRITIONAL PREFERENCES OF GARDEN BIRDS IN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

Elsita Kiekebusch-Steinitz

Abstract
The primary research questions investigated in this study are, "What foods can be provided to discover what garden birds prefer to eat in Windhoek, Namibia, in autumn and in spring?" secondly "Into which outdoor garden settings should bird feeders be placed to attract certain species?" and lastly "What interactions can be observed between bird species during feeding-times? The research is valuable to birdwatchers and ecologist alike, because it addresses the issue of how to attract the greatest variety of garden birds to ones own garden with a combination of food that is preferred by the birds and is also low cost and easy to provide. The results are specific to the arid environment of urban Windhoek, and therefore of special interest to the popular practice of bird feeding in that city. The study utilized specially constructed feeding platforms where six different types of food were provided, in both a tree-covered and an open area of the garden. During two five-week periods the birds were observed while feeding at the two platforms and recorded by species, number, and type of food they consumed. In addition species dominance and co-operation was observed and recorded. Chi-square tests for both feeding platforms in both autumn and spring proved that each bird species preferred certain types of food, and that most bird species also made distinctions between the two feeding environments. Recommendations for further research are offered.

Research Question
This research tried to answer the following questions: 1) What foods do garden birds prefer to eat in Windhoek, Namibia, in autumn and in spring?
2) Which of two different outdoor garden settings is preferred by each species?
3) What interactions can be observed between bird species during feeding-times?" Based on these questions, two hypotheses were tested: