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Editorial

Once again in this issue we are able to report on species new to Namibia. Er, well, perhaps one of them is not really new to Namibia, but none of the previous records was accepted.

The species concerned is the Black Skimmer, a species native to the Americas and for which, as far as I can determine, there were no confirmed records on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

A single bird suddenly appeared at Rietvlei near Cape Town in October 2012, stayed a few days and then disappeared. A couple of days later a single bird (believed to be the same individual) appeared in Walvis Bay, stayed for a short period and again disappeared.

There have been two previous unconfirmed records of this species in Namibia of which I am aware. The first is Joris Komen's record from the Rundu Sewage Works in the mid 1980's which was not accepted by the then rarities committee on the grounds that it was just too unlikely that this species had found its way there - I don't think that Joris has forgiven that committee to this day.

The second record is Tony Tree's sighting of a single bird at Walvis Bay in February 1998, which, as far as I am aware, was also shot down by the rarities committee.

For more on the Walvis Bay Black Skimmer see Otto Schmidt's article and John Paterson's stunning action picture in the "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section of this issue.

Smalhoek is the farm where owner Helmuth Stehn, at that time a non-birder, observed White-backed Vultures eating the plant Slangkop (*Pseudogaltonia clavata*) which is believed to be poisonous. An article on this phenomenon was published in *Lanioturdus* 45 (3). Peter believes it is only the third time that anything about vultures eating plant material has been published and it was all thanks to Helmuth's observations and his willingness to share information.



Peter Bridgeford and Holger Kolberg spent the two weeks following that Sunday ringing vultures in the Dordabis and Gobabis areas. It is part of an ongoing project to promote vulture conservation and make farmers and farm workers aware of the importance of vultures and the risks they face. They processed 50 White-backed and three Lappet-faced Vultures on nine farms. That's a lot of ladders to climb.

Workshop Birding

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It was a Monday morning in office; the telephone rang - why was I not in Otjiwarongo for the workshop? Invitation - what invitation? - and so on. I love workshops, I love them even more when they are organised like this one seemed to be. My frustration reached maximum permissible tolerance levels.

Anyway, soon I was on my way to Otjiwarongo and after I had secured accommodation at Otjibamba Lodge just outside Otjiwarongo I felt a wee bit better.

I arrived late in the afternoon, in time for a little walk in the beautiful gardens. A Southern Masked-Weaver showed me the way.



A Helmeted Guinea fowl was enjoying the lush green veld...



... while a Groundscraper Thrush watched the proceedings from an acacia.



Oh no!! What do I see here? Flamingos in captivity. I do not understand what pleasure people derive from keeping birds (for that matter any animal) in captivity. I believe in “do to others as you want to be done by” and I cannot imagine a half sane person enjoying being in jail.



But then, where do you see Red-billed Spurfowl feeding together with Greater Flamingo?



A loud babbling noise emerged from the thick bush around the waterhole; at first I could not quite place it, indicating that I had not been to the bush for quite a while, but then, there it was, the Southern Pied Babbler, a bird long last seen.



I walked back to the waterhole where the Red-billed Spurfowl was looking for something to eat.

And there it was, the flicking of the wings, the speckled chest and striped head – yes it fitted, Spotted Flycatcher!



The next morning I was greeted by its local cousin, the Marico Flycatcher ...



Morning time is feeding time and the Southern Pied Babbler was already busy foraging for food....



... while the Crimson-breasted Shrike was first doing a bungalow inspection....



before taking time to find a nice and juicy breakfast for itself.



Both the Southern Masked-Weaver and the Lesser Masked-Weaver were already at work building new homes.



In between they were fighting each other although there was so much space for both of them.



In the afternoon when I returned from my workshop I witnessed how a Southern Masked-Weaver tied the first knot for his new nest.



Within ten minutes the “foundation” for the new home was constructed thanks to some craftsmanship that left me gasping in admiration.



The next morning both the Southern and Lesser Masked-Weavers showed off the finer skills of their craftsmanship in nest building.



That afternoon it was the turn of the Great Sparrow to show me the way.



First I was able to study a very simple but innovative bird feeder which certainly kept the overpowering doves at bay.



Then a Brubru telephoned his friend to tell him that that.....



.....the two masked-weaver species had decided to call it a day after all the hard work and fighting and to rather take a bath and cool off a bit before a restful sleep.



The next morning's walk started noisily with a woodpecker making quite a noise. It probably scared the wits out of a poor worm before it eventually got the better of it.

I moved to a quieter place and stood under a tree waiting for something to happen when I felt I was being watched.



I turned around and to my amazement I saw a Pearl-spotted Owlet watching me with a very stern expression.

Then the Grey Go-away-bird told me to "go away".



Well it was indeed time to go and I thought to myself that the workshop had turned out to be pretty good after all!!

A Zambian Birding Experience 2-6 July 2012 Trip (Part 1)

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Open Africa is in the process of developing a birding route in south-western Zambia. This area is best known for the highly localised and endangered Black-cheeked Lovebird. Besides the lovebirds the area is well known for the Caprivi/Delta specials including Schalow's Turaco, Coppery-tailed, Senegal and White-browed Coucals, Chirping and Luapula Cisticolas, White-backed Night-Heron, Rufous-bellied Heron, African Pygmy-Goose, Slaty Egret, Lesser Jacana, Western Banded Snake-Eagle, Shelley's Sunbird, Three-banded Courser, Tropical and Swamp Boubous, Brown Firefinch, African Skimmer, Pel's Fishing-Owl and Long-toed Lapwing, to name a few.

As part of the development and promotion of the route and local guides, Open Africa had approached Caprivi Birding Safaris/Tutwa Tourism and Travel to help organise and lead the first organised trip. They were sponsoring and covering a lot of the expenses for this trip. Caprivi Birding Safaris/Tutwa Tourism and Travel referred this to the Namibia Bird Club to try to find birders who might be interested in going.

This seemed to be a difficult search. Only Jutta Surén from Windhoek and I had initially shown interest. I just could not let this opportunity go by however, and I managed to get Werner von Maltzahn from Otavi into the