



# LANIOTURDUS

VOL. 43 (2) 2010

[www.namibiabirdclub.org](http://www.namibiabirdclub.org)

## CONTENTS

- THOMSON N Editorial
- MIDDENDORFF G Chairperson's report
- DEMASIUS E A Visit to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park
- HILL G A Walk on the Wild Side – Windhoek Style
- KOLBERG H Have you ever been to Antarctica?
- DETERING H Caprivi Tour August/September 2009
- KOLBERG H Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia 1: Introduction and Overview
- KOLBERG H Summary of the 2009 Winter Count
- KOLBERG H Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 1: Introduction and Overview
- PAXTON M Contentious, Thought Provoking Observations : Shamvura Camp and Kavango Region
- RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS
- FUN NAMIBIAN BIRD QUIZ

## Editorial

I don't believe that anyone can deny that the Namibia Bird Club is moving forward. The chairperson's report published in this issue outlines some of the activities of the Namibia Bird Club including outings, wetland counts and our well attended Birding Big Day as well as the donations given to various bird rehabilitation centres and projects.

Your committee has managed to keep the subscriptions at their current levels for several years now. In this day and age where the price of everything is constantly increasing we would like to continue to maintain them at the current levels but this will depend on whether or not we can increase our membership base. If we can attract more members we will not need to increase the subscriptions. If you have enjoyed our outings and enjoyed reading Lanioturdus spread the word, bring your friends along and get them to join as well. It could just save you some money!

Mark Paxton's article in this issue certainly is a thought provoking one. Has he found species way off their recorded range? Or perhaps undescribed subspecies? Or even hybridized birds? Does the breastband of Shelley's/Marico sunbird change colour with age? It seems that there is plenty of scope for an ornithologist in his region.

In this issue we also have a trip report by Helga Detering written in German. Helga has however included the English common names of all species mentioned in the text in brackets

Well done, Neil Thomson and well done Conny von Dewitz for setting the journal.

And the best for last: the first ever Namibia Bird Club pelagic trip at the end of October from Walvis Bay was a huge success with 30 people participating – many travelling long distances to the coast. The next day an excursion to the Mile 4 Saltworks was led by Mark Boorman.

Our heartfelt thanks go to the Namibia Scientific Society for their excellent cooperation and to various radio stations and newspapers for advertising our programme.

Finally I want to wish everyone another fun filled year. Happy birding!

### **A Visit to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.**

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A visit to what used to be the Kalahari Gemsbok Park, (in May 2000 it was renamed the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park), is always worthwhile. Not necessarily worthwhile in the sense of comparison to the large numbers of game one sees in, for example, the Etosha National Park, but it is simply special because it is so different and mainly because of the most beautiful, black-maned lions that can be seen there. For us the Kalahari was always quality above quantity and this time it proved to be no different.

And then of course there are the birds; for us birders a special delight. 264 bird species have been recorded in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. However only a mere 78 species are resident, while 16 are seasonal and 18 are nomadic. The majority, i.e. the

remaining 152 species are vagrants and irregular visitors to the Park. The park is renowned for the many raptors that are usually seen and of the 74 species we recorded during our six day stay, 25% were raptors!!

We arrived at Mata Mata around lunch time on Friday 28 August 2009. Formalities at the border post were swift, friendly and efficient. Prospective visitors are reminded to bring their Namibian passports even though they might not leave the park on the South African side. The information on the internet in this regard is incorrect.

Camp birding is usually very rewarding, especially if one wants to photograph birds. So we opted to stay in the old established camps as they are fenced and one is free to roam, unlike at the up market and no doubt beautiful tented camps which are not fenced. The faithful Pearl-spotted Owlet, Crimson-breasted Shrike and Black-chested Prinia obliged accordingly.



Close to Mata Mata we saw our first Bateleurs and most of them were juvenile birds. The same applied to the Pale Chanting Goshawks and Gabar Goshawks. During this time of the year Black-shouldered Kites seem to be everywhere. Satisfyingly we also noticed a great number of White-backed Vultures, some with young on their nests, while other vulture species eluded us.

Early on Saturday morning we recorded our first and only Red-necked Falcon for the trip, followed shortly thereafter by the first Pygmy Falcon, Lanner Falcon and a very whitish Tawny Eagle. At one of the first waterholes we were very lucky to observe a pair of Burchell's Sandgrouse enjoying their early morning drink.

The highlight of the morning's drive was a juvenile Jackal Buzzard, a new sighting for me in the Kalahari as were the many Wattled Starlings in the camp which joined us for lunch. Apart from birding in the park we found a spotted hyena den close to the road and were able to observe two young hyena being tended to by their mother and aunts.

On Sunday we moved camp to Twee Rivieren, the main camp in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Camp birds were pretty scarce but the camp is known to be a good stake out for Karoo Scrub-robin and after half an hour's search in the midday heat I found a pair feeding next to the camping area.

During our afternoon drive we witnessed the symbiotic relationship between Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks and a honey badger. This phenomenon was described in an earlier edition of Africa Birds and Birding and we felt very privileged to be able to see and photograph the incident. Up to six goshawks and even jackal are known to accompany a honey badger when it is searching for food. As it digs for snakes or mice any escapee will be attended to by the goshawk or the jackal.



The Kgalagadi brochure also describes this phenomenon and advises honey badger seekers to be on the lookout for low perching Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks as they are often a good lead to finding honey badgers.

Sunday morning took us to Nossob Camp. We had to take a detour along one of the dune roads as construction work was underway on

the first section of the Nossob road. The usually quiet and empty dune road delivered Black-headed Heron, Chat Flycatcher, Ant-eating Chat, our first Northern Black Korhaan for the trip and a hunting pair of Secretary Birds.



Unusually the Nossob and the northern areas were devoid of any game and if it were not for the birds we would have had a very boring drive to Nossob Camp. The road along the Nossob River however was unusually good and good progress was made without the fear of having one's vehicle shaken to pieces by the bad corrugations in the road.

In the camp we spotted the resident Southern White-faced Scops-Owl, still residing in the alien Prosopis tree after all these years with Yellow-billed Hornbill, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler and more Crimson-breasted Shrikes also in attendance. The camp gate is kept permanently closed to keep jackal roaming in the camp under some kind of control. Something has to be done to keep the hundreds of Cape Glossy Starlings under

control as well. The moment you stop at any camping site they flock to the tree, the shade of which you have elected to enjoy, but this joy is short lived with all the birds in the tree, as soon one is covered in bird droppings!!

We chose to drive further north in the afternoon hoping to find game and lion, which until then had eluded us, but that was not to be. Instead we added Brown Snake Eagle, Martial Eagle, more White-backed Vultures, Bateleurs and their offspring and Black-chested Snake-eagle to our list.



On Tuesday morning we took the long road back to Twee Rivieren, our next destination before we moved back to Mata Mata to end our trip.

With spring in the air the Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters seemed to be very busy close to the road where it appeared that they wanted to start digging burrows in the steep embankments at the side of the road for breeding.

So we came to the end of yet another wonderful visit to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, a visit where birding without a doubt was king!!! Oh, and we did after all see the other king as well.....maybe he was as impressive as our birding in the park!!!



## **Walk on the Wild-side, Windhoek Style.**

Gilly Hill

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As duty would have it, I was posted to Windhoek for 5 weeks in June 2009, and with restrictions to my wanderings out of town, I happily spied an inviting sign at the Namibian Craft Centre as I sauntered there for brunch one Saturday morning. It invited one to Walk on the Wild-Side with Tom, and look for birds of Namibia within the confines of the capital.

With a degree of eager alacrity, and being a very amateur twitcher, I called and spoke with Tom, who arranged for me to be collected the following Saturday for a jaunt with the Namibia Bird Club group.

07h30 that Saturday found me loitering on the curb when he pulled up, and off we went to join the group at the Council Sewage Works. The group was very friendly and quickly took me under their wing. The walk meandered us past all the various ponds and woodlands in this rather surprisingly lovely sewage processing plant, lovely that is because the trees and wetlands were unspoilt, and there was barely any odour.

The plethora, density and diversity of bird groups we saw that beautiful crisp winter morning was amazing; Dieter carried his mono-scope and we all got to see the birds with amazing clarity. The naming of, and habit descriptions rippled off just about everyone's tongue, leaving me green with envy but thrilled to be with a very experienced group of twitchers.

My delight of the day was a "1st", a Crimson Breasted Shrike. The delight was not just at its being a 1st, but the manner in which it was sighted: an eye catching, ruby red spot, sitting low in dusty green, semi arid slope of scrub bush, its radiating brilliance making it seem larger than life.

The utter joy and abandonment of its tuneful declarations, encased in its pushed out, shatteringly bright breast, was simply glorious.