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Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

This edition has been edited 16,000 km from Namibia while I was in Alaska visiting our daughters and granddaughters. When we arrived in early March it was -30°C and the only birds I saw were hardy winter birds like ravens, redpolls and ptarmigan. Now it is Easter and the sun is shining, the snow is melting fast in the 10°C weather and Trumpeter swans, Canada geese and mallards are arriving into the snow-melt ponds. I have been out of touch with the Bird Club but I note that still our membership has not increased with the new year. Again I have to appeal for everyone to give out membership forms to people you know who are not members. How many of you have done this? The Club is slowly withering on the vine and it is frustrating for those of us who live somewhere other than Windhoek. We do not know what is going on with the Club. Are we perishing as a Club or not, that is the question? Certainly birding is growing worldwide and I would hate to think that we are not part of that trend.

At least I am still receiving articles for *Lanioturdus*, which means that there are still interested Bird Club members who want to communicate with their fellow members. As the article on Herero Chats shows us there is still plenty to be learned about our local birds. We have another chapter in the Paxton boat saga. He is still looking for volunteers (victims) to assist him as he tries to count birds on the various waterways of the north. One place he has not counted yet is the Orange River. Perhaps it is too tame without his usual challenges of crocs, hippos, bilharzia and UNITA soldiers.

A HOMING PELICAN?

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White Pelicans *Pelecanus onocrotalus* breed on the wooden platform located just offshore north of Walvis Bay. There have been several young, reported to us, which have been either recently fledged and not been able to get back on the platform or unfledged birds that have fallen off the platform. This is a note about one such pelican.

On Monday 3 March 2003, we came across a young pelican being shooed off the road near the platform by three concerned members of the public. Realising what may have happened, we retrieved it and took it back to the shore opposite the platform, from where it swam off.

Later that evening, a friend telephoned to say that he had just come across a young pelican in the road and asking what he should do. Guessing that this was probably the same individual, we asked that he bring it to us. Ten minutes later it was ensconced in the rehabilitation cage with water and freshly thawed pilchards.

By next morning, the fish were untouched but after force-feeding it one fish, it quickly cottoned on and feeding it was never again a problem. What was a problem was keeping up with the demand. By the end of that first day, it had been baptised 'Adolf' in honour of its rescuer, and had come to believe that Mark was its father, even following him into the kitchen. When Adolf realised that the fish was coming to him from the kitchen door, he made himself comfortable on the kitchen step. Unfortunately he didn't move away to the sand when Nature called. Now we know how much guano one pelican can produce. To add insult to injury, he also stripped my painstakingly nurtured green pepper plants of fruit.

As the days went by, he exercised his wings by perching on a bench and flapping furiously and by taking practice runs down the driveway.

The long-awaited maiden flight finally happened on Tuesday 11 March. We were at a shop three blocks away from home when Mark spotted Adolf on the roof of the shop. After a few minutes of looking around (getting his bearings?) he flew off strongly in the direction of the sea. We tried to follow in the car, but lost sight of him. We also did not find him at any of the local pelican hang-outs.

Over the course of the next two days, a young pelican matching Adolf's description was seen at Vierkant Klip and at the slipway at the Mole. On the evening of Thursday 13 March, a young pelican in the road near the railway station was reported to Rod Braby, the Senior Warden of the West Coast Recreational Area. Rod went off in search of it but was unsuccessful. He then came to give us feedback on his search, only to see Adolf landing in the road not 100 m from our house.

Adolf, the prodigal pelican had returned. Off he sauntered down the driveway and straight into the kitchen. Feed me! Feed me! he seemed to be saying. And like the obliging humans we are, we did. Adolf was one hungry pelican. The next morning he was taken back to the platform to be in the company of pelicans again and to hopefully re-integrate into pelican society.

This episode serves to highlight some of the pitfalls of pelican rehab in particular and probably bird rehab in general. In summary:

- It has been our experience that young pelicans will imprint on humans very quickly.
- It has also been our experience that I become overly fond of our rehab birds and have to be constantly on my guard against this happening.
- They need adequate space for exercising their wings and for taking practice runs.
- They need to be released as close as possible to where they were found and preferably near others of their kind to have pelican behaviour re-enforced.

In retrospect, Adolf was unable to feed himself when he flew off and was subsequently seen at places where people fish or bring fish to land from ski boats. We think he made his way back to us because he had been unable to fend for himself. Had he been able to link up with one of the local flocks the day he first flew, he probably would have been alright, but this is speculation on our part.