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
African Reed-Warblers Can Swim!

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On Sunday, 23rd May 2010, Dirk Heinrich, Ursula Bader, Holger Kolberg, Mark Boorman and I went out to Monte Christo, about 30 km outside Windhoek, to do some birding and bird-ringing. In the evening, close to 17h00, as the cold set in and the birds started moving to their roosting places, Dirk caught a couple of African Reed-Warblers Acrocephalus baeticatus in a net close to some reeds. The first bird was ringed and released and it flew in the direction of the reeds where it had been caught.

The second bird had a very unusual moult. The three outside primary feathers on each wing were only partly grown and Dirk gave the moult as being 5555555222 for both wings. The wing length was 57 mm. The bird was ringed with metal ring No AP69761. When the bird was released it was immediately obvious that it had some difficulty flying. Instead of flying down towards the reeds it flew in an ever lower semi-circle landing in the cold water of the main pond at Monte Christo about 10 m from the water’s edge. The ever intrepid Dirk started hauling out his hand net and had ideas of jumping into the cold water after the bird – that’s if a barbel (catfish) didn’t get to it first! Much to our amazement the bird started ‘swimming’ towards the reeds on the opposite side of the pond, a stretch of about 40 m. After a few long minutes it disappeared into the reeds. With the cold evening temperature setting in, we didn’t think that the survival chances of this sopping wet bird were very good.

Two weeks later, on Sunday, 6th June 2010, Dirk Heinrich and I were out at Monte Christo. An African Reed-Warbler with a ring was recaptured by Dirk in a mistnet close to the reeds in precisely the same place as those the fortnight previously. In jest, but hoping, I suggested that it was the ‘swimmer!’ Much to our surprise the bird had ring No AP69761 - the very same bird that had made an extraordinarily long cold swim across the large pond. The little bird was in good condition and Dirk gave the moult as being 5555555444. In a span of two weeks the three outside primary feathers had almost fully grown.

The little bird had indeed survived its watery ordeal and we were left to consider how well this particular African Reed-Warbler could swim!

(I think that a brief explanation of moult scores is necessary here – 1 denotes a missing feather or a pin, 2 a feather emerging to one third grown, 3 a feather between one third and two thirds grown, 4 a feather two thirds to fully grown, 5 a fully grown new feather and 0 an old feather – Ed)

The Lesser Spotted Eagle – An Extremely Endangered Migratory Raptor

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The lesser spotted eagle, Aquila pomarina, (Schreiadler, gevlekte arend) is a rather insignificant brown eagle about the size of a large buzzard.

Photo 1
W.Grummt, H.Strehlow, Zootierhaltung Vögel, Verlag Harri Deutschland