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## Editorial

Another year is about over and we have produced four issues of the *Lanioturdus*. The Namibia Bird Club would like to thank all those who contributed. Your articles are what keep the club informed and active. As you read the articles you will see that some people were prompted to write because of an article they had read in the journal. It either confirmed an observation they had made or pointed out the rarity of such observations. That is the reason the journal is published to inform readers about club activities and to stimulate members to report on their observations. I am still waiting for the Chairman's annual report as given at the Annual General Meeting in March 2003. Regretably no reports of club outings in 2003 have been submitted. Perhaps if the club would undertake outings to the remote and exotic areas of Namibia participants would be impressed enough to share the results.

Once again it is the time of the year when everyone is wishfully looking into the sky for clouds that can build up into something bigger to convert the parched landscape into green vistas. The Red-crested Korhaans are calling but whether they breed or not will depend on the amount of rain. Last season they called but no breeding took place in northern Namibia. As of late November there have been reports of rain but not in all regions.

Once again I appeal to all members to try and sign up a friend as a member of the Namibia Bird Club. It would be nice to see the club membership double this year.

## BIRD OBSERVATIONS AND NOTES

On 11 September 2003 I spotted a Black Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* soaring above the National Botanical Research Institute's (NBRI) botanical garden in central Windhoek. Although I have observed Black Eagles around Windhoek, I have never observed any soaring over the city. Recently I was informed that Dassies *Procavia capensis* have been causing problems at the NBRI by destroying plants that staff are trying to establish there. This sighting of a Black Eagle over the area should come as a welcome relief to staff of the NBRI – including resident birders – as Dassies make up the largest part of the diet of this raptor.

[Peter Cunningham]

On 16 October 2002 we witnessed a Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* attacking a Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* in the Mahango Game Reserve along the Okavango River. The eagle attacked the heron on 3 occasions forcing the heron into the water. This was accompanied with raucous screeches from the heron. The attacks did not do any obvious serious damage to the heron and the latter was able to emerge safely from this incident. It was unclear what caused the eagle to attack the heron. (Editor: Most people assume that Fish Eagles always eat fish but during the breeding season Fish Eagles feed their small young mainly on water-birds like herons, ducks etc. After the young are larger they feed more on fish.)

[Peter Cunningham & Willie Adank]

At a local tea garden (Jenny's Place) in Windhoek I witnessed House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* feeding on sugar from sachets after breaking them open. A male House Sparrow was observed pecking and worrying sugar sachets until broken and then joined by a number of females to enjoy the sugar. This just goes to show that even the common sparrows can become problem individuals once a food source has been identified. [Peter Cunningham]

During the last week of October and first week of December 2002 I saw 2 Blue Waxbill *Uraeginthus angolensis* in my garden before 07h00 and usually (3 out of 5 sightings) after Windhoek had received light rain. This is the second time (Lanioturdus 35(2): 24) that I have seen this species in Windhoek. Previously I had suggested that they might have migrated westwards from their normal distribution further eastwards, after the above average rainfall the west has experienced over the last few years. Or else they were escapees from aviaries. Blue Waxbill

(3 individuals roosting together with Melba Finch & Blackcheeked Waxbill) were again observed at Avis Dam during the last week of April 2003. A note recently published by Merryl Butcher (Lanioturdus 35(4): 2-3) would confirm that they occur throughout the year in and around Windhoek which would suggest that the distribution for the species as indicated in Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa, is outdated. [Peter Cunningham & Dave Joubert]

On 3 December 2002 a melee of birds were observed in a feeding frenzy on the Polytechnic of Namibia's grounds after termites made their appearance during the late afternoon. Birds observed feeding on the termites were Little Swift, White-rumped Swift, House Sparrow, Whitebacked Mousebird and Feral Pigeon. The most interesting observation was that of the Whitebacked Mousebird as Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa indicates the diet for the species as: "fruit, flowers, leaves, nectar and seedlings". The Speckled Mousebird (Distribution: eastern parts of Southern Africa) has however previously been documented as feeding occasionally on insects (mainly termites), although this dietary observation may be new for the Whitebacked Mousebird.

[Peter Cunningham, Willie Adank & Dave Joubert]

Whitebacked Mousebird were also observed feeding on the alien invasive *Alternanthera pungens* (Khakiweed or Paperthorn) that often grows between paving in built-up areas throughout Southern Africa. The paperthorn originates from South America and is thought to have been introduced in horse fodder brought in for the British troops (Khakis) during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). On a number of occasions during the latter part of 2002, I observed Whitebacked Mousebirds feeding on the leaves and seeds. The question now arises: To what extent are birds that feed on these alien species responsible for their distribution throughout Namibia? [Peter Cunningham]

On 5 April 2003 we observed a Chestnutvented Titbabbler *Parisoma subcaeruleum* adult feeding a "large noisy" chick in a suburban garden in Windhoek. On closer inspection the chick - which was almost fully grown - turned out to be that of a Diederik Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* with its unmistakable metallic green sheen. The Titbabbler parents were struggling feverishly to keep "their" fledgling supplied with food. According to Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa, Titbabbler are known to be parasitized by Diederik Cuckoo (24 host species authenticated) although the most heavily exploited hosts tend to be Cape Spar-

row, Masked Weaver, Cape & Spottedbacked Weaver, Red Bishop and Wagtail. Have Chestnutvented Titbabbler been recorded as host to Diederik Cuckoo from Namibia? [Peter Cunningham & Willie Adank]

On 2 April 2003 I noticed that the topmost leaves of a Syringa Tree *Melia azedarach* had been heavily eaten by what I initially presumed to be caterpillars of some sort until noticing a horde of Whitebacked Mousebird and Blackthroated Canary in the tree. After observing them closely I determined that it was these 2 species that were responsible for the tatty-looking tree. Whitebacked Mousebird are known to eat leaves while Blackthroated Canary feed mainly on seed, insects and flowers. Even stranger is the fact that the Syringa Tree is poisonous, with the berries containing the toxin Triterpenoid (limonoid of which melinon & melianol the two major compounds). It is one of the most common human poisonings in South Africa with chickens even occasionally being poisoned. Although the bark and leaves contain less of the toxin it is interesting to note the above mentioned species utilizing the leaves without any visible effects. Fortunately it would seem that for some or other inexplicable reason not all Syringa Trees are poisonous. The question now is: Did the Mousebirds and Canaries know this? [Peter Cunningham]

On 15 October 2003 we observed an Osprey flying over the Okavango River at Popa Falls. It landed in a tree on the edge of the fall about 75 m away giving us good views. [Tim and Laurel Osborne]

On 22 November 2003 a male Plum-coloured Starling arrived at Windpoort Farm, Outjo. This is the first arrival of the season for these species in the district. [Tim and Laurel Osborne]

#### Erratum

In Lanioturdus 36(1):5-6, four errors crept in as printing gremlins. The editor apologizes for this would like to make the following corrections: in the paper: Why do Lappet-faced Vultures favour smaller carcasses? By P. L. Cunningham Page 5, Paragraph 1 - ...a wingspan of between... (should have read a wing). ...Mundi *et al.* 1992... - (should have read Mundy *et al.*). ...*Gyps cooprotheres* in... - (should have read *Gyps cooprotheres*). Page 6 Paragraph 1 - ...Ostrich *struthio camelus* ...- (should have read *Struthio camelus*)

## NAMIBIA BIRD CLUB

### NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

*LANIOTURDUS* publishes articles and notes of broad birding interest to the membership of the Namibia Bird Club. Contributors should look at recent issues of the magazine for guidance and suitability and presentation of material. Manuscripts in English, German or Afrikaans are requested and should be typed in double spacing on A4 paper. If papers are submitted in German or Afrikaans a short English summary should accompany the article. For papers in English summaries in German or Afrikaans may also be submitted. Sketches, maps and figures should be submitted on good quality white paper in black ink. High contrast black and white or colour photographs (prints or transparencies) may be submitted to illustrate articles. Artwork illustrating any aspect of birds and/or birding are also requested. All submissions should have the author's address, contact telephone number and e-mail address (if applicable).

The preferred medium of submission for articles is either computer disk (high density 3.5") or attachments to e-mails. The preferred word processing programme is MS Word Version 7.0 on Windows 95. Any other programmes are acceptable but authors should also include an alternate version in either text only (.txt) or rich text format (.rtf) files. Handwritten articles are acceptable but must be printed and legible. Short notes and observations should be submitted on a quarterly basis.

All disks and photographs will be returned to authors but manuscripts will not be returned. A single copy of the issue in which your article appeared will be sent to the senior author.

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