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EDITORIAL

Summer has almost come and gone without my noticing it. It has been an odd summer in terms of weather but judging from my discussions with other people, the birding has been excellent this year. The thing I have noticed while putting this edition of *Lanioturdus* together is the really good numbers of rare birds that were seen during these last few months. These records raise the question of what brings these spurts of rarities about.

Is it the unusual rainfall and general climatic patterns experienced over much of the subcontinent? Is just that we are getting more reports of rarities because there are a lot more birders out there at the moment? Is it a consequence of the "Patagonia effect" described by Peter Kaestner in a previous edition of *Lanioturdus*. Whatever the situation is, we have had two new birds added to the Namibian list in the last six months. A presumed Pied Flycatcher at the Windhoek Sewerage Works (October 1998) and a Red-throated Pipit in Swakopmund (March 1999). These records may represent interesting biological indicators of broader environmental processes influencing the sub-continent. These records are interesting in themselves but seen against a background of a large number of other rare birds in the same period we have to admit the possibility of large scale climatic (or other) factors influencing their occurrence in Namibia.

So what happens to these records? Currently nothing much!! All records reported to me are put into the Short Notes section and I encourage people to write up their sightings. My feeling is that a tremendous amount of

Osborne reports a single bird on 06/12/98 on the hill at Halali. This bird was probably on passage further south.



(BIRD)RACING AROUND WINDHOEK

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On March 13th, 1999, the Windhoek International School (WIS) conducted its second annual Bird Race. The idea here is not so much serious competition, but rather to introduce school children and their parents and friends to the joy of bird watching in a country with such a large variety of species. So, at 6:30 am seven groups, 38 people in all, set out for a 4 ½ hour nature experience in and around Windhoek. Guidance was provided by experienced and illustrious experts from the local Bird Club, for which we are most grateful.

Just as in the big (internationally renowned) bird races, each leader determines his group's route, visiting a variety of habitats. Primespot in everyone's itinerary: the municipal sewerage works. There, the big holding tanks and muddy sewerage treatment basins have rims filled by lots of water-loving birds. Also, for the last purification cycle, all the partially cleaned water flows into artificial lakes, lined by all sorts of vegetation. That becomes an absolute paradise for a myriad of birds and insects. Other favorite birding spots include fresh water dams, wildlife refuges (often with dry river beds where the remaining underground water still provides for rich vegetation), city parks, the cemetery (where exotic species of trees are watered daily) and the Windhoek Showgrounds. But then there are other conditions which are unique to this dry environment, related to the erratic patterns of rainfall, where one part of the city can get ten millimetres at night, while another part gets nothing at all.

Soon the day became quite hot. To wit, sun hats and water bottles are considered required equipment, just as important as binoculars. All the groups had different experiences, but Christian Boix's group was in for a special treat. They were allowed to see the inside of hornbill nesting boxes and inspect the young, still naked chicks as this trip was integrated into his daily routine of research-related inspections. Hornbills have the pattern of mating for life, and while the female is hatching the eggs, she walls herself into a cavity nest, leaving only a tiny slit for the male to feed her. The path this group followed was alongside the sewerage plant's overflow, where some large crocodiles had recently been spotted.

Compared to last year (which was particularly dry), the number of species counted this year was considerably higher. The recent rains must have contributed to the neck-in-neck race at the top with 105 species for the winning group (led by Christian Boix), followed by 104 (led by Chris Brown) and 102 (led by Peter Kaestner). Last year, the winning number was 83. Given the introductory quality of the birdrace, the rules were slightly modified. This year, at least the leader must have identified the bird positively to be counted (though preferably, all participating should see or hear it).

Here are some highlights. An unusual Yellow-billed Stork between several White Pelicans. Beautiful Marico, Dusky, and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds; Diederik's Cuckoo in beautiful colours, a Crimson-breasted Shrike (in German the *Kokarden-Vogel* because it brightly displays the black, white and red of the German imperial colours). Red Bishops, making everybody smile because of a recent ornithological research publication entitled "Polygamous Behavior of African Bishops".

The event concluded with a gathering of exhausted-but-elated participants in the big hall of the International School. Everybody received a certificate of appreciation, results were announced, and stories of interest were shared by each group. Moreover, the winning team will have its name engraved on the Bird Race's silver-plated trophy, for which they will be guardians until next year.