

## CONTENTS

VOLUME 37 (3 + 4) 2004

OSBORNE, T. O. Editorial .....	1
EDITOR. Authors Guidelines .....	2
JOUBERT, D. Blue Waxbill <i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i> nesting in exotic fig <i>Ficus microcarpa</i> .....	4
BISTRI, H. Monteiro Hornbills <i>Tockus monteiri</i> in unserem Garten .....	5
JOUBERT, D.J. Marico Flycatcher <i>Melaenornis mariquensis</i> nest in <i>Acacia mellifera</i> shrub. How important are hook thorned <i>Acacias</i> in affording protection to nests and chicks? .....	11
FRIEDERICH, G.& T. Birding weekend at Shamvura Lodge .....	13
PATTERSON, J. New Breeding Record for Grey-headed Gulls <i>Larus cirrocephalus</i> at Kunene River Mouth, Namibia .....	18
SIMMONS, R. Red Data Book Draft .....	19
FRIEDERICH, G. Uncommon raptor sightings on Farm Tsutsab 1818 CC, Tsumeb district .....	26
ADANK, W & P. CUNNINGHAM. Melanism in a Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i> .....	27
CUNNINGHAM, P. & N.STRAUSS. Lappet-faced Vulture <i>Torgos tracheliotus</i> breeding in southern Namibia .....	28
BIRD OBSERVATIONS AND NOTES .....	30
ANNOUNCEMENTS .....	31

## Editorial

Another hot dry season is upon us and birding is slow as we await the rains. Soon, however, the palearctic and intra-African migrants will arrive to increase the numbers of species. Our drab non-breeding local birds will get dressed up for the ladies and identification of most of the weavers, bishops and whydahs will be a lot easier. Unfortunately, the bird guides usually only illustrate these birds in breeding dress. In Namibia we only see them dressed up for 3-5 months of the year and identification is often frustrating.

Recently I caught non-breeding Shaft-tailed Whydahs in my mist net for ringing. After consulting all the reference books I found it is impossible to sex any of the birds. either in the hand or in the field. It would most helpful if members who know of any special aids or resources for identifying Shaft-tailed Whydahs would publish that information in the *Lanioturdus* for all of us. Another bird I have been trying to sex in the non-breeding season is the Chestnut Weaver. In the hand there is no problem since the male has a larger wing length and is heavier, but free-flying in a tree then identification becomes difficult.

The new Roberts VII will be about 1200 pages and will be out in April 2005 at a cost of R799. It will be nice to have all the up-to-the-date data on the birds but it is obvious from the draft texts on the website that information is missing on many of the species. See [www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/docs/roberts.html](http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/docs/roberts.html). Perhaps after the book comes out I will try and summarize where gaps in information on Namibia birds occur so we can try and fill the gaps.

nest without being scratched. This was due to the dense hook thorn cover, for which *A. mellifera* is notorious. The general habitat in the area could be described as a patch mosaic of bush thickets and open grassy areas. There were many taller *A. mellifera* (up to 4 metres high) trees close to the nest bush within 20 m. As there were other tall species such as *Boscia albitrunca*, it is reasonable to assume that the adults selected the small shrub, due to the protection provided by the dense thorns tall *A. mellifera* and other species, although having the advantage of height, have a looser, less dense branch architecture, with fewer or no hook thorns, and thus afford less protection.

If small birds select small thorny shrubs, this has implications for bush encroachment management. Currently, many farmers clear *A. mellifera* extensively, often selling the wood for charcoal to cover costs and make a little money. Many farmers express a desire to totally eradicate *A. mellifera*. Other more conservation conscious farmers try to clear small shrubs and keep more of the larger *A. mellifera* trees. But in general, the shrubs less than 2 m are considered useless for rangeland production and are cleared. Rangeland and forestry managers should pay more attention to the needs of smaller animal species when planning bush clearing.



Figure 1:

I checked nest records to determine whether there was any indication of selection for small *A. mellifera*. A total of 74 nest records were available at the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Directorate of Scientific Services. Although the natural history records regarding the nesting behaviour were extensive, observers paid scant regard to recording the tree species, height of tree or general habitat of the area. Thus, it was difficult to ascertain tree and habitat selection. I recommend that in the future, observers include more botanical and habitat information in nest records.

### Birding weekend at Shamvura Lodge

Gunther & Tineka Frederichs  
PO Box 207, Grootfontein, Namibia  
tsutsab@mweb.com.na

A Namibia Bird Club event on our farm Tsutsab had been scheduled for the Easter weekend, provided the ephemeral pan had been filled with water. Although we had good rains, the pan did not fill. So we cancelled this event and instead planned to see for ourselves how Mark Paxton's place had developed at the Okavango River, Shamvura Lodge.

We left the farm on Thursday, 8 April 2004, but had to negotiate a catastrophic detour of 20km along the soon to be re-surfaced road to Rundu. It had been raining a few days earlier, so the detour was muddy and potholed, just awful. Cars and big trucks got stuck and blocked traffic for some time. Fortunately by the time we passed, the surface was relatively dry and we negotiated slowly without problems. In Rundu we picked up some fishing gear and had lunch at the Omashare River Lodge. There we could already see the masses of water in the Okavango River.

To the east of Rundu the Omatako Omuramba had a surprise in store for us. Where it crosses underneath the tar road it was a pool of water. This water had been pushed up from the Okavango River, for the first time in 20 years, as we were told later. People were fishing; we saw Bream splashing in the shallows.

I went down into the bushes, looking for a plant I had atlased there previously, while Tineke recorded Red-faced Mousebird, African Golden Oriole, Greater Blue-eared Starling, and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, amongst others.

110 km east of Rundu we turned off the tarmac towards the Okavango River and Shamvura Rest Camp. Turning off into Shamvura's property gave us an impression of what awaited us. We approached a huge sand dune, overgrown with undisturbed pristine riverine forest, birds all around. At the Lodge we were welcomed heartily by Mark Paxton, his wife Charlie and assistant Linda. We were the only guests booked in, so we had the whole place to ourselves.

What impressed us a lot, was the neatly kept "orchard" on the premises: natural trees and shrubs neatly trimmed, giving the appearance of an orchard. Our "Ushivi" campsite was underneath a huge Baster Mopane *Guibourtia coleosperma*. It had a warm shower, open-plan kitchen, even a fridge. What more could we want? The fridge especially was most welcome, as our camping freezer was not operating properly, again.

We pitched our tent, got everything ready, and took the evening for ourselves. It did not take long, after darkness, when we heard the Wood Owls calling. Mark had informed us that there were two pairs present, but had advised us not to disturb them by tape calling as they had previously gone crazy for some time after being called in by tape. So we tried the other owls. What came to inspect? Two Wood Owls into the tree we were under. They kept us company for some time. Far off in the woods, we could also hear an African Barred Owlet calling, but it kept its distance. Later the night we also heard Verreaux's (Giant) Eagle Owl calling. Somewhere in the river, Hippos were snorting around.

When we met again the next morning, Mark was surprised that we had heard the Barred Owlet calling. He had not recorded this owl yet on Shamvura. This also counted for the Verreaux's Eagle Owl which was a good one for us. Two days later Mark informed us that he also had heard the Barred Owlet calling the evening before.

Mark had a bird on his shoulder, an immature Red-faced Mousebird he had saved from becoming a raptor meal. This bird was quite happy with his new

family and let himself be spoiled solidly. In the mornings, Mark prepared a dustbath for him by scratching in the sand in front of the bird, which he then utilised further. He was often a little nuisance. He had been dismissed out of the workshop when Mark was attending to his fishing reels. When I came in the bird took advantage and landed on my shoulder, probably thinking of new mischief.

So, what then was there for us to do at Shamvura? Nothing, we decided. That means we decided to just hang around, not rushing from place to place as we had done with previous trips at the Okavango.

First thing: an inspection of the area. I took my Tree-atlas sheets and binoculars, and went for a long walk. After what we had previously experienced all along the river, it was a heartening feeling to experience this undisturbed forest on a big, permanent sand dune, rising directly from the riverbank. Everything was lush, dense greenery. Suddenly, I found a steep decline down to the floodplains, that were covered in water. I scrambled down for a distance but the vegetation at the riverbank looked so dense, it made me turn around. To my surprise I stumbled onto a fairly big Baobab *Adansonia digitata*. There were about 14 of them on the premises. Another new species for me was the Wild-citron *Citrops daweanana*.

A big decision that day was risking our lives on a mokoro dugout. The "captain" was confident in what he was doing, his two passengers not at all of themselves!! We got off to a shaky start into a waterlily field – beautiful! We jittered through a reed passage into the open stream, a bit down-river, then up against the current. At a point the "captain" requested us to stand up, which we certainly declined to do. We cut short the trip and beached again, filling the mokoro with water. Not much birding done.

It was a far better and safer idea to do a trip by motorboat the following day. Now birding was much more relaxing. We recorded Reed Cormorant, African Darter, Grey Heron, Little Egret, (Common) Squacco-, Black-headed-, Grey-and Rufous-bellied Heron, Little Bittern, and a new species for us: Allen's (Lesser) Gallinule, to name only some birds. We also heard Streaky-breasted Flufftail calling. This bird had been confirmed on Shamvura some time earlier. On a few

occasions I later went down to the boatyard to try to call it in, but in vain. A Coppery-tailed Coucal made its appearance, and some Black Crakes scrambled through the reeds. Then I noticed a Black Crane coming closer, scrambling along the branches of the vegetation on the riverbank. It took no note of me, but took to the branches and settled down just above the water on a nest! And it was so close to the boat. Mark had not noticed it before. It was incubating a clutch of 4 eggs.

One lazy afternoon we spent on the treetop deck. Here one has a beautiful sight over the vast floodplains. Scattered all over were plenty of Open-billed Stork, some Cormorants, Herons, Egrets and the odd raptor flying around. In the far distance we saw Spur-winged Goose flying, Hippo nostrils disappearing into the water, and on a dead tree the resident African Fish Eagle.

During the evenings we had more visits by the Wood Owls. We heard Barn Owl, also Southern White-faced Scops and African Scops Owl calling. Fiery-necked Nightjars were active.

One morning trip took us to other localities along the river. Interesting – yes, but no place quiet; people all around. Either you were being followed or being stared at. I tried to get something edible out of the water without luck. On this trip we recorded Blacksmith- and Wattled Lapwing (Plover), Red-billed Teal and a Pipit on the plains which we could not decide on the identification. We also tried to find a Blue-bark Corkwood *Commiphora caerulea* again, a tree not on the Namibian tree list, which I had recorded in the area during our December 2002 trip. We found the location but there has to be made a thorough search for this tree.

Mark and I took to the bank vegetation. After having inspected the Black Crane's nest, we "strolled" along the riverbank. The "stroll" was really hard work. You have to battle with dense undergrowth, shrubs, creepers, roots, and fallen trees. Overhead there were huge trees; it was a paradise in which a botanist could have the time of his life. We looked for Streaky-breasted Flufftail but had not brought the tape recorder. The water in the river was rising again. The Quito River from Angola sheds its water into the Okavango just west of Shamvura. All these masses of water have to go somewhere – into the floodplains. It's just magnificent. One has to see for oneself to appreciate the sight.

On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> we packed our gear to leave for home. But we would be back someday, probably later the year to assist with the Wetland count at Mahango Game Park.

List of birds recorded:

Reed Cormorant	Fiery-necked Nightjar
African Darter	Pied Kingfisher
Grey Heron	Woodland Kingfisher
Black-headed Heron	European Bee-eater
Purple Heron	Little Bee-eater
Little Egret	Lilac-breasted Roller
Cattle Egret	African Grey Hornbill
Squacco Heron	Black-collared Barbet
Rufous-bellied Heron	Bearded Woodpecker
Black-crowned NightHeron	Rufous-naped Lark
Little Bittern	Brown-throated Martin
African Open-bill	Banded Martin
Red-billed Teal	Fork-tailed Drongo
Spur-winged Goose	African Golden Oriole
African Fish Eagle	Hartlaub's Babbler
African Goshawk	Dark-eyed Bulbul
Eurasian Marsh Harrier	African Stonechat
Helmeted Guineafowl	White-browed Scrub-robin
Black Crane	Great Reed-Warbler
African Purple Swamphen	Grey-backed Camaroptera
Allen's Gallinule	Luapula Cisticola
Blacksmith Lapwing	Black-chested Prinia
African Wattled Lapwing	Magpie Shrike
Red-eyed Dove	Swamp Boubou
Cape Turtle Dove	Brubru
Laughing Dove	Burchell's Starling
Namaqua Dove	Greater Blue-eared Starling
Meyer's Parrot	Red-billed Oxpecker

Grey Go-away Bird  
Jacobin Cuckoo  
Coppery-tailed Coucal  
African Wood Owl  
White-faced Scops Owl  
Pearl-spotted Owlet  
African Barred Owlet  
Giant Eagle Owl

White-bellied Sunbird  
Village Weaver  
Fan-tailed Widowbird  
Brown Firefinch  
Pin-tailed Whydah  
Long-tailed Paradise Whydah

### **New Breeding Record for Greyheaded Gulls *Larus cirrocephalus* at Kunene River Mouth, Namibia**

John Paterson

Ministry of Environment and Tourism

Skeleton Coast Park, Private Bag 5001 Swakopmund, Namibia

john@paterson.alt.na

Grey-headed Gulls, *Larus cirrocephalus*, are seen regularly at the Kunene River Mouth, 17 ° 15' S 11 ° 45' E, on the northern Namibian coast. Clinning and Jensen (1979) regarded them as being common, but more recent observations seem to suggest that they are a regular visitor rather than common (*pers. obs.*). Breeding has not been recorded there.

On 26 July 2002 a Grey-headed Gull chick was noticed walking down to the water's edge of a large vegetated island in the Kunene estuary. More detailed scanning of the area revealed 3 more chicks further away from the water beyond vegetation fringe. There were several adult Grey-headed gulls in the vicinity. No other gulls except Kelp Gulls, *Larus dominicanus*, were in the area.

During a subsequent visit on 29 August 2002 a landing was made on the island and the area around where the chicks were observed was investigated. Although there were no gulls present, 6 abandoned nests were found. The nests were placed on the short spiky grass, *Odysea paucinervis*, that covered that section of the

island. The platform was made of reeds with the cup lined with grass. The nests were situated 20 meters back from the water's edge with a minimum distance of 2 meters and a maximum distance of 4 meters separating them.

On the mud flats approximately 1 kilometer upstream of the island, 2 flying juvenile Grey-headed gulls were observed begging food from an adult. Both chicks were begging from the same adult. Presumably these chicks were from the breeding site on the island at the mouth.

Grey-headed Gulls are a winter breeding species between April and November with the peak laying period from May to June (Tarboton 2001). The recent successful breeding event of this species at the Kunene River mouth falls well within this period. Grey-headed Gulls breed regularly at the Swakopmund Sewerage Works (R. Braby *pers. comm.*). This record extends the known breeding range of this species on the Namibian coast by at least 700 km.

#### **References**

- Brook, R. K. 1997. Greyheaded Gull *Larus cirrocephalus*. In: *The Atlas of Southern African Birds. Vol. 1: Non-passerines*. Harrison, J. A., Allan, D. G., Underhill, L. G., Herremens, M., Tree, A. J., Parker, V. & Brown, C. J. (eds.), p.464. BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg.
- Clinning, C. F. and Jensen, R. A. C. 1979. Additions to the bird check-list of Kaokoland and the Skeleton Coast. *Modoqua* 11: 247-253.
- Maclean, G. L. 1993. *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town
- Tarboton, W. 2001. *Nests and Eggs of Southern African Birds*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town.

#### **Red Data Book Draft**

Rob Simmons

Associate Researcher FitzPatrick Institute

University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa

harrier@botzoo.uct.ac.za

The following is a draft of the Red Data Book entry for the Tawny Eagle. I would like all readers of the *Lanioturdus* to please read the draft and send me any comments, corrections, observations that will improve the document.