



# LANIOTURDUS

VOL. 43 (3) 2010

[www.namibiabirdclub.org](http://www.namibiabirdclub.org)

## CONTENTS

- THOMSON N Editorial
- PAXTON M Some Interesting Observations – Shamvura Camp and Kavango Region
- BARTLEWSKI S My “Sighting” of the Year
- KOLBERG H Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 2 : Grebes and Pelicans
- VERSVELD W Breeding Success for Flamingos on the Etosha Pan, Namibia, for 2006, 2008 and 2009
- FRIEDERICH G & T Collared Palm-Thrush
- DANTU S Hooked Kelp Gull
- SPAANS B & VAN KOOTEN L In Search of Individually Colour-ringed Bar-tailed Godwits in Namibia
- GRIEVE G Comparison of Techniques used on two Sociable Weaver Ringing Projects
- KOLBERG H Wetland Bird counts in Namibia 2 : Perennial Rivers and Dams

DEMASIUS E Kavango/Caprivi Trip 2009

RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

ANSWERS TO THE BIRD QUIZ

## Editorial

In a past editorial (Lanioturdus 42-4) I mentioned the changing distributions of certain species. One species which seems to be a lot more common around Windhoek these days is the pin-tailed whydah. When I first moved to Windhoek some 28 years ago this was a species which one saw perhaps twice in five years. Now it is regularly seen at Avis Dam and we are getting more and more reports of these birds from suburban gardens all around Windhoek. Its host species, the common waxbill, is not a terribly common species around Windhoek and I certainly have not noticed any great increase in the numbers of these birds. However, both Roberts VII and Trevor Carnaby (Beat about the Bush *Birds* – Jacana Media 2008), indicate that it is suspected that the red-billed firefinch may be a secondary host although this is not proven. Come on you citizen scientists out there – this is a chance to make a name for yourself in the world of ornithology. We have a burgeoning population of red-billed firefinches in and around Windhoek and if they are indeed secondary hosts to pin-tailed whydahs this might just be the time and place to prove it.

## Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Mark Boorman and Holger Kolberg who helped us organising this trip, gave us advice and allowed us to join their count trip to Sandwich Harbour. Thanks a lot for that. We enjoyed your and Sandra Dantu's nice company during this trip.

## Literature

Delany, S., Scott, D., Dodman, T. & Stroud, D. (eds). 2009. An Atlas of Wader populations in Africa and Western Eurasia. Wetlands International, Wageningen, The Netherlands.

Bernard Spaans  
Laurens van Kooten

Dept. of Marine Ecology  
Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ)  
Landsdiep 4, 1797 SZ 't Horntje Texel, The Netherlands  
tel. +31 (0) 222 369490  
e-mail: <[bernard.spaans@nioz.nl](mailto:bernard.spaans@nioz.nl)>  
<<http://www.nioz.nl/>>

Observations of colour-ringed Bar-tailed Godwits can be sent to: [shorebirds@nioz.nl](mailto:shorebirds@nioz.nl)  
Observations of colour-ringed Sanderlings can be sent to: [J.W.H.Reneerkens@rug.nl](mailto:J.W.H.Reneerkens@rug.nl)



## Comparison of the Techniques used on two Sociable Weaver Ringing Projects.

Graham Grieve  
([graham.grieve46@gmail.com](mailto:graham.grieve46@gmail.com))

During the May 2009 Namibian ringers' get-together at Farm Wiese near Rehoboth, ringers assisted Dirk Heinrich with what I believe was the third iteration of the ringing

project he had initiated with Dieter Oschadleus to study the movements between colonies of sociable weavers. While on the first occasion birds were fitted with metal rings only, on the second occasion colour rings were also added, using a single colour which applied to a particular colony - in order to track whether there is any movement between nests.

I was lucky enough to participate in the 2009 get-together and naturally helped with the ringing of the sociable weavers. I understand that it was only on a subsequent retrapping at one of the nests later in 2009 that any evidence was found of a bird caught at one colony having "defected" to another colony.

Subsequently, at the end of August 2009, I travelled up to Benfontein Farm to help researcher Dr. Rita Covas with her project on the social behaviour of sociable weavers. Benfontein, a De Beers-owned hunting farm just outside Kimberley lies on the provincial border between the Free State and the Northern Cape, although for nature conservation purposes the farm falls within the Northern Cape. The farm seems to be close to the eastern extremity of the range for sociable weavers.

Most of the farm is covered in Karroid scrub and sparse grass, but on one section of higher-lying ground there is deep sand and this is where the *Acacia eriolobas* grow and where the sociable weavers' nests are found.

Rita Covas was awarded her PhD some time ago for her earlier work on the sociable weavers here at Benfontein; this research has been continuing for several years now along with other projects (pursued by other researchers) such as one on ant-eating chats and another on aardwolf.

I thought it would be interesting to compare the work done on these two projects to see if any lessons could be shared between the projects.

In both projects, attempts are made to catch all individuals in the colony. This seems to be

best done by erecting furred nets on the afternoon of the day before the colony is to be ringed. Depending on the geometry of tree and nest colony, this might require two concentric cordons of nets set at both high and low levels. In both cases, experience has shown that the catch proportion is optimised by startling the colony at first light, having first – silently – opened the nets. So far things at Wiese and at Benfontein have been similar. In each case it is important to have sufficient competent ringers present to clear the nets quickly and to get going on the ringing process.

It is at this stage that the differences between projects start becoming evident. In Dirk Heinrich's project normal ringing biometrics and age are recorded and a metal ring and a single colour ring are attached to right and left legs, and the bird is released.

In Rita Covas' project, similar data is recorded although Rita has developed what she has found to be more repeatable ways of measuring wing and tarsus and it is important to follow these techniques for consistency with the database. In addition, on some nests earmarked for additional study, blood samples are taken from each bird and a combination of 3 colour rings and a metal ring is applied so that that individual can be recognised again from a (short) distance without the need to retrap.

The blood samples are analysed to determine sex and genetic relationship to other individuals in the colony. This is important for the further work still to be done, namely that of studying the behaviour of (colour-ringed) individuals at the nests later in the breeding season. Sociable weavers, apart from nesting socially, are co-operative breeders with mature and/or immature individuals helping a breeding pair to raise their clutch/es. Clearly this requires a significant amount of additional field work sitting near a colony with binoculars and watching and recording the interactions between individuals for days on end. I suspect that none of Namibia's hobby ringers would be able to dedicate this kind of

additional time to studying what happened at the colonies ringed at Wiese.



Sociable weaver ringing at Benfontein (Sept 2009). Rita Covas is the very pregnant lady on the right.

Rita's work here has allowed her to publish widely and extensively in ornithological journals and conferences as can be seen by visiting her website at [http://www.cefe.cnrs.fr/esp/R\\_Covas.htm#Publications](http://www.cefe.cnrs.fr/esp/R_Covas.htm#Publications). Any reader interested in more details of the social and cooperative breeding habits of sociable weavers could download some of her papers from this website.

So the differences between the two projects lie in the extent of resources and technology applied, but each is tailored towards answering the original questions asked. In Wiese's case this was simply - "do individuals move between colonies?", and the techniques applied should provide evidence to confirm or reject this. In the Benfontein case the project is a much more extensive study of the co-operative breeding habits of the sociable weavers and enjoys a higher level of funding and other resources to achieve its objectives. There is relatively little difference between projects with regard to the catching techniques used.

Perhaps the only suggestion I would leave with Dirk Heinrich and colleagues is to try erecting the poles and/or furred nets earlier on the preceding afternoon to allow the birds to acclimatise to their presence and allow the colony to be at full compliment when the noise starts the next morning.