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## EDITORIAL

This summer has seen the most remarkable influx of huge numbers of birds of a variety of species and a surfeit of rarities from the North to the coast and places in the South – or is it that we are getting more birders out into the field finding more birds and reporting their observations. I think it is probably a combination of both.

This year, some of the biggest numbers of Abdim's Storks I have ever seen, arrived and stayed even though there was a general lack of rain and *Koringkrieks!* Around Etosha, through the central parts of the country to south of Windhoek there were storks everywhere. Huge numbers of coastal terns, skuas, waders and pelagic seabirds were reported from the Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour areas. Large numbers of Western Redfooted Kestrels were reported from the central part of the country for most of the summer and huge numbers of European Swifts were reported at the same time. But for me the interesting thing has been the number of reports we have received of other species of interest (see *SHORT NOTES*) and the number of people reporting these. I can only hope that people's interest has again been stimulated to get out birding and that, although local, *Lanioturdus* is starting to provide the medium for pricking people's interest. This is what it is there for, and I cannot stress enough to you all that without your support and contributions the magazine (and the club) will fail.

Thanks for all your support and keep on birding.

## IDENTIFYING IMMATURE PLOVERS ON THE COAST: DO KENTISH PLOVERS OCCUR IN NAMIBIA?

Peter G Kaestner  
Private Bag 12029, Ausspannplatz, Windhoek

On November 20, 1997, I was eating lunch at the Esplanade of Walvis Bay with some colleagues from the American Embassy and crew of the visiting USS Whidbey Island. With the tide half out, there was a nice mud flat below us that was teeming with shorebirds. As I was checking them out, I noticed a small, immature plover that was greyer and more elongated than the nearby Whitefronted Plovers (*Charadrius marginatus*). Retrieving my scope from the car, I found the bird again and started studying it in earnest. I was immediately reminded of a Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), a bird that I had seen hundreds of times (in other countries). Unfortunately, I also realized that the bird was very rare in Namibia and very similar to the Whitefronted. It was clear that I would have to find a reliable way of distinguishing the two species if I were to be able to prove that I had seen this rare vagrant. The overall colour of the bird was clearer gray than the nearby Whitefronted Plovers, but not as silvery as the Chestnutbanded Sandplovers (*Charadrius pallidus*) that we had studied earlier that morning. The bird's grey back was separated from the concolourous crown by a neat white collar. The bird's forehead and lores were also white. The legs were dark greyish, not black. Looking closely at the scapulars and flight feathers, I noticed that the feathers were worn, indicating that it had not recently molted.

In reviewing my SASOL guide, I was disappointed to read that the two species are considered "virtually impossible to distinguish", though the book did mention the more slender, attenuated body that I had noticed in the first place. Unfazed, I got my copy of *Shorebirds* from the car (I assume everyone drives around with a spotting scope and reference books in their car!) and looked to see if the exquisitely accurate plates by Peter Hayman could help me. In reading up on the Kentish, I found the difference: the wing tips of the Kentish extend to the end of the tail or beyond, while the Whitefronted wing tips fall well short of the end of the tail. (This makes

sense since the Kentish is migratory and the Whitefronted is not.) Armed with a solid, objective identification criterion, I went back to the mudflat full of confidence. A friend, Rob Batchelder, and I started looking hard to locate the bird again to prove the identification. In the process, I started to examine critically the tail/wing relations of known Whitefronted Plovers. In each case, the wings of the Whitefronted Plovers fell distinctly short of the tail tip, and I became more and more confident that we were going to relocate the Kentish Plover.

Unfortunately, the tide was changing and the birds were moving. After about 30 minutes (we were, after all, on our lunch hour, and could not stay all afternoon) we gave up trying to relocate the Kentish Plover. I was disappointed that I could not definitively state that we had one, since I was never able to find the bird that we had seen earlier and see its long wings. I am about 75% sure that I had seen the Kentish based solely on the "jizz" and the elongated body shape that made it stand out in a crowd.

This episode underlines the importance of studying before you go out into the field. If I had known about the wing length before I had seen the potential Kentish, I could have positively identified it immediately. The next time I see such a bird, I will know, and so will you!

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## WORLD RECORD TERNS AT SANDWICH?

Rob Simmons  
Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Private Bag 13306, Windhoek

On Namibia's central coast lies two of the subcontinent's most outstanding wetlands: Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay. These wetlands are well known centres of concentration for migratory shorebirds such as waders and flamingos, and at times they hold over 200 000 birds between them. Walvis Bay is the best known of these with research on its birds stretching back into the mid-1970s. But what of Sandwich? Rumour has it that Sandwich is dying, a shadow of its former self. For seven years now, I have been monitoring the changes at this, Namibia's most dynamic and