



LANIOTURDUS

VOL. 44 (4) 2011

www.namibiabirdclub.org

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Editorial

Although I am the editor of Lanioturdus, Lanioturdus is not my journal. Lanioturdus is your journal (i.e. the members’ journal). However, for it to be truly the members’ journal it needs contributions from the members.

I have been fortunate in having been able to obtain sufficient articles to have allowed me to produce four editions for three consecutive years (actually this year there will be a special fifth edition) but it is somewhat disconcerting how few people actually contribute articles. Without the contributions of the likes of Eckart Demasius and Holger Kolberg I would have been very hard pressed to find sufficient material and I would then probably have found myself in another of those editor’s nightmare situations of having to write the bulk of the articles myself. A big thank you to all who have contributed especially those who contribute regularly - to the rest of you out there - why not try your hand at writing - if something interests you it will most probably interest other birders as well.

And it is not only articles for which I am looking. Your observations of rare birds, off range species, birds new to an area etc. are all worthy of a mention in Lanioturdus. We are not yet atlasing in Namibia and records of these sightings form valuable contributions to Namibian ornithology. I have mentioned it before - Lanioturdus is sent to the Niven Library of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology and the librarian, Margaret Koopman, has assured me that bird club journals are indeed used by researchers

Lesser Flamingos at the Namibian Coast

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At times vast numbers of Lesser Flamingos are to be seen at Walvis Bay. Since 1994 the highest number recorded there in the wetland counts has been a staggering 32,377 individuals counted in the summer of 1996.

But have Lesser Flamingos always been present at Walvis Bay in these numbers?

Under "Historical Distribution and Conservation" the Atlas of Southern African Birds Volume 1 Non-Passerines (Harrison et al - 1997) states "*There is no evidence of changes in historical distribution or abundance in southern Africa. It may have benefited from the creation of saltworks and sewage works: these provide nonbreeding refuges which have probably increased survival rates during droughts.*"

However - I came across an article by Heinrich von Maltzahn which was published in Bokmakierie Vol 4 No 3 in 1952 (Bokmakierie was then the popular magazine for birdwatchers of the South African Ornithological Society and the Witwatersrand Bird Club. Heinrich von Maltzahn was a founder member of the Ornitologische Arbeitsgruppe of the Scientific Society which was the predecessor of the Namibia Bird Club). My interpretation of this article is that the sighting of single Lesser Flamingos at Swakopmund and Walvis Bay in 1947 was something new for von Maltzahn and the inference is that the bird did not occur there before this or if it did only in inconspicuously low numbers.

Titled "Flamingos in S.W.A." the text reads:-

"In The Bokmakierie, Volume 4, page 20, there is a request for information regarding the Lesser Flamingo. The following observations may be of interest:

At Swakopmund in 1947 I saw this bird for the first time, stalking behind a flock of young,

white Greater Flamingos. It was distinguished by its smaller size and black beak. It was plain that the bird had difficulty keeping up with its larger relatives.

A few days later in Walvis I saw a flamingo which was only breast-height with the rest of the flock, dark rose in colour, with a smooth, wholly black bill.

Again this year I have often seen a white flamingo (plainly a young bird) and a deep rose-coloured one (plainly an adult), both of similar size, and both with black bills. I therefore doubt whether the colour of the beak alters with age. The dark rose-coloured plumage of the Lesser Flamingo is so typical that any confusion with the greater species is impossible.

Amongst approximately 1,000 Greater Flamingos at Walvis, there was only one Lesser. Its beak appeared larger in proportion to the body, perhaps on account of it's generally darker plumage."

So - is my interpretation correct? Are Lesser Flamingos, at least in the numbers seen today, a relatively recent phenomenon at the coast? The von Maltzahn article was written before my time but I would be very interested to know whether anyone has any knowledge of a major shift in the numbers of Lesser Flamingos present on the Namibian coast.



Photo: Eckart Demasius