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Editorial

We rely heavily on books such as Roberts VII, (often referred to as the “birders’ bible”), for distribution maps, biometric measurements etc. - but is the information in these reference books always correct? And, possibly more importantly, do we read it correctly? Mark Paxton’s observations on the tail length of the green/violet wood-hoopoes he measured at Shamvura (Lanioturdus 43-2) got me interested. My own records of the measurements of the southern masked-weavers occurring in Namibia which can be seen in this issue further stimulated this interest. While there are some very obvious mistakes in even the best of publications (the distribution map for malachite sunbird in Roberts VII is a case in point as is the distribution map for red-billed quelea in Roberts Field Guide – Chittenden 2007), some of these can probably be put down to editorial oversight and printers’ gremlins, but the

stressed and died shortly after its oldest sibling. The other two were the strongest and survived very well. I fed them with a special mix of “rohhack”, Pronutro, dried crickets and mealworms. On 1 December 2009 they left the “cave” I had built them from a cardboard roll and started flying around in the cage together with their “friend”, a red-faced mousebird which I was also raising. One could sit in front of the cage watching them for hours; they were such beautiful creatures both in colour and in character. Prior to releasing them I had them ringed by licensed local bird ringers. On 15 December 2009 I opened the cage door and they left leaving me behind with one eye laughing and one eye crying. They are free...and they are still around with a flock of bee-eaters roosting in our neighbour’s tree every night. In March 2010 I managed to take a picture of one of them. One cannot see the ring in the picture but I am almost 100% sure I saw a ring on its leg when it took off.

I hope there are more people out there like this brave lady who did not turn away but took the initiative which led to the rescue and survival of these beautiful creatures.



The surviving bee-eaters – photo Sonja Bartlewski

(If you find orphaned or injured wild birds Sonja is contactable on 081 149 2313 –Ed)

Mahango Game Reserve in the Rainy Season

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At the end of January/beginning of February 2010 I had the opportunity of going to the Mahango Game Reserve. The Okavango River was in full flood and the flood plains were covered with water. This made the birding all the more exciting. In places the water was right next to if not on the road. This made for some good viewing of sometimes difficult to see birds as usually they are far away on the flood plain. Birds falling into this category of which I had a close up view included African pygmy-goose, slaty egret, goliath heron, wattled crane and yellow-billed duck. As expected no African skimmers or pratincoles were seen as all the sand banks were covered with water.

In the surrounding woodlands and savanna common ostrich, woodland kingfisher, African stonechat, red-backed shrike, magpie shrike, Burchell’s and Meves’s starlings and shaft-tailed whydahs were common. Present also were coppery-tailed and Senegal coucals, Meyer’s parrot, striped kingfisher, southern black flycatcher, swamp boubou, Hartlaub’s babbler, sand martin, greater blue-eared starling and red-headed and thick-billed weavers. Both red-billed and yellow-billed oxpeckers were seen pecking away on impala and giraffe. A number of broad-billed rollers was also seen in the drier broadleaf woodland.

Common throughout the park were southern carmine and little bee-eaters. Interesting was the number of juvenile carmine bee-eaters which are duller than the adults with an almost brown back.

Raptors were well represented with African fish-eagle, booted eagle, martial eagle, bateleur and shikra. At an impala kill of the previous night were lappet-faced and white-backed vultures, a lone white-headed vulture and the ever present marabou stork.

Surprisingly the game viewing was also good. Amongst the species seen were buffalo, elephant, hippopotamus, red lechwe, kudu, reedbuck, tsessebe, roan and sable antelope. With all the water about I did not expect to see so much game.

All in it was all a great birding trip.

Sparrow-Weavers and Buffalo Weavers at Kakuse, in Northern Namibia

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White-browed Sparrow-weaver nests are conspicuous and well known in Namibia. The birds build retort shaped nests of dry grass, initially with two openings at opposite sides. For breeding, one entrance is closed.

At the recent Namibian ringers' get-together (RGT) at Farm Kakuse north west of Tsumeb HDO found a colony of White-browed Sparrow-weavers with some strange nests. The nests had elongated entrance tubes resembling untidy Spectacled Weaver nests. When first found on the evening of 14 May 2010, an adult left the colony, indicating that it was not deserted. On 16 May NT and HDO returned to count the nests and take photographs.

The colony was 4-5 km from the farm house, in a small acacia tree, and had 13 nests (location 18°42.422'S 17°34.685'E).

Three nests had long tubes of about 20 cm length, and the other nests appeared normal. The nest tubes were untidily built. In one nest with a long tube, the opposite entrance hole

was open (non-breeding nest), while in another it appeared to be closed. White-browed Sparrow Weavers do not weave nests to the extent that true weavers do.

Rather they push new grass stems into the nest and bend the other end around the twigs supporting the nest (Collias & Collias 1964). The entrance tubes were probably built by light weaving.



The white-browed sparrow-weaver colony at Kakuse – Photo Dieter Oschadleus



One of the nests with a long entrance tunnel at Kakuse – Photo Dieter Oschadleus

There were several colonies around the farm house and camp site at Kakuse, but only normal nests were seen in these colonies in large *Acacia tortilis* trees even though these