

## CONTENTS

VOLUME 31(1), March 1998

EDITORIAL .....	1
NACHRUF/OBITUARY: Hartmut "Eddy" Kehlbeck .....	2
FRIEDRICH, G. Vogelbeobachtungen auf Farm Tsutsab .....	3
MENDELSON, J. Nest boxes for birds in Namibia .....	9
BOIX HINZEN, C. Canned hornbills in Daan Viljoen Game Reserve .....	11
REID, A & J. A morning at Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve and a heronry, near Nuy Valley, South Africa .....	15
OSBORNE, TO. Suspended breeding: Effects of the current drought in Etosha .....	17
HINES, C & MENDELSON, J. Whitebellied korhaan in Namibia: A first record from the Andoni grasslands .....	19
KAESTNER, PG. Identifying immature plovers on the coast: Do Kentish Plovers occur in Namibia? .....	22
SIMMONDS, R. World record terns at Sandwich .....	23
BOIX HINZEN, C. Sexual encounters in Violet Woodhoopoes .....	26
BUTCHER, T & M. Immature amateur bird list .....	29
SHORT NOTES .....	30
VERSVELD, F & SWANEPOEL, W. Sandveld wegbreek .....	36
PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES	
Greenspace and the Namibia Bird Club .....	41
Results of the WIS Bird Race .....	43



## 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.

aus nach Rotschnabelenten. Die gab es leider nicht, dafür aber was viel mehr Aufregendes. Ich hielt mich wieder viel zu lange dort auf, aber am Nachmittag wollten wir doch wieder dahin.

Eine Menge Bruchwasserläufer liefen im Wasser rum auf der Suche nach Nahrung. Wir stiegen aus und umrundeten so langsam die 2 ha grosse Wasseroberfläche. Meine Frau wollte mir zuerst nicht glauben, aber musste dann doch einsehen, dass da etwa fünf Sturm's Zwergrohrdommeln waren. Zu guter Letzt konnten wir auch zehn Goldschneepfen feststellen. Langsam liefen wir weiter und fanden auch die etwa fünf Zwergteichhühner wieder, die ich am Morgen gesehen hatte. Die Maskenweber waren schon am bauen. Lappenstare, ein grosser Flug. Da – im Wasser hinterm Gebüsch ein

weisser Schatten – ein einzelner Silberreiher. Ein Geklopfe im trockenen Baum, natürlich ein Specht, aber der wollte von uns nichts wissen. Auf einem anderen Baum ein KBV (LBJ) – was? Helle Aufregung – ein Liest, aber bevor wir den in Visier hatten, war er schon wieder weg. Er liess sich aber dann doch nochmal blicken und wir konnten einen Streifenliest bestätigen. Das war das erste mal überhaupt dass wir sowas hier sehen konnten. Ein Brauner Sichler zog über uns. Der Silberreiher sass auf einem Baum, putzte sich sein Gefieder und liess uns ganz nah an sich passieren.

Die Sonne war schon am untergehen, als wir nach Hause fuhren. Nun sollten die Vögel wieder ihre Ruhe haben und dieses Wasser ausnutzen solange es noch da ist. Was uns wohl dieser Sommer noch bringen wird?



## NEST BOXES FOR BIRDS IN NAMIBIA

John Mendelsohn  
PO Box 80044, Windhoek

In the last issue of *Lanioturdus* (Vol.30(4)), I described studies in Daan Viljoen Game Reserve on hornbills. These are studies of birds nesting in nest boxes made of wood, and it seems possible that some readers may wish to build and hang nest boxes in their gardens and in other favoured areas.

At Daan Viljoen, four species of hornbills use the boxes: Monteiro's, Grey, Yellowbilled and Redbilled Hornbills. However, several other species also nest in these boxes: Lilacbreasted and Purple Rollers, Glossy Starlings and Greatspotted Cuckoos parasitizing the starlings, Pearlspotted and Scops Owls, African Hoopoes and Redbilled Woodhoopoes. Smaller boxes are used by Carp's and Ashy Tits, Greyheaded Sparrows, and Scimitar-billed Hoopoes. Tree rats, monitor lizards and bees often make the boxes their homes as well.

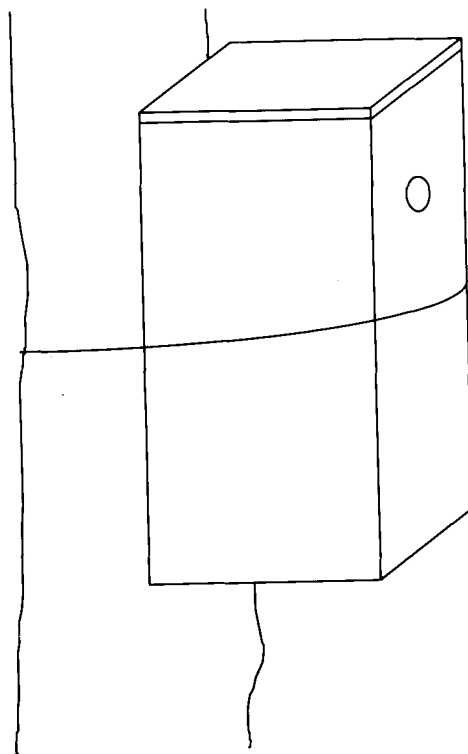
The use of nest boxes by different species depends to a great degree on the size of the box and diameter of the nest entrance. For larger birds such as Monteiro's Hornbills, boxes with internal dimensions of about 40–50 cm (height) x 15–20 cm (width) x 15–20 cm (depth) and a nest entrance of 4.5–6.0 cm in diameter work well, while boxes for the smaller hornbills, owls, starlings and rollers boxes should have internal dimensions of 30–40 x 12–20 x 12–20 cm and nest entrances with diameters of 3.0–4.0 cm. Smaller boxes are good for tits and sparrows and should have internal measurements of 20–25 x 10–15 x 10–15 cm and nest entrances with diameters of 2.0–2.5 cm.

I prefer to place the nest entrance about a third or quarter of the way from the top of the box, allowing the birds plenty of space at the bottom to line the nest. It is best to use good quality hard timber, at least 25 mm in thickness, if the boxes are to last a decent number of years. Some boxes made of pine have lasted 16 years in Daan Villjoen, but others have warped badly, fallen apart or had to be repaired from time to time. Never use

chipboard because it swells and rots easily once water seeps into the wood. It is best to glue and screw the pieces of wood together to ensure that the joints are tight and strong. This helps keep the box together and seals gaps which might otherwise provide spaces for ants, mites and other animals.

A lid hinged to the top of the box provides the best access to inspect and clean the box when necessary. At Daan Viljoen the lids are held down securely with a screw to prevent baboons cleaning out the incubating adults, eggs and chicks. A number of ways of hanging boxes have been tried, but perhaps the simplest is to wrap a piece or two of strong wire around both the box and tree trunk or branch. Tighten the wire well, so that the box is held firmly against the tree – birds prefer to use a nest that does

not wobble. A nest chamber in a branch that sways around probably indicates to the birds that there is a good chance of the branch breaking off.



Nest boxes have been hung at any number of heights, directions and angles, and I find it very hard to judge whether the position of the box makes much difference at all. Even boxes that receive direct sunlight from the west on hot summer afternoons seem to be acceptable to most birds. Perhaps all I can say is to choose sites where the nests will not heat up too much, and where they will escape the attention of other people and predators. Be sure, however, to choose sites where you can reach the boxes easily to check

the nest contents.

The species listed above are those that use boxes at Daan Viljoen. In my garden in Windhoek, I have had Glossy Starlings (now on to their third brood this summer) and Ashy Tits use nest boxes. Many other species are of course good candidates for nest boxes, depending on the area of Namibia. Habitats in which birds are most attracted to nest boxes are those where there are few natural nest holes. Much of Namibia is thus ideal for nest boxes because most of the Acacia trees that dominate our woody vegetation have few natural nest holes.

Finally, once you have birds using your boxes, be sure to keep an eye on them to record events as eggs are laid, and chicks hatch and then leave their nests. The breeding biology of most Namibian birds is poorly known and your observations can help shed new light on the biology of our birds. Your observations should be recorded on nest record cards and sent to Rob Simmons, Ornithology, Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Private Bag 13306, Windhoek.

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### **CANNED HORNBILL IN DAAN VILJOEN GAME RESERVE!!**

Christian Boix Hinzen  
PO Box 8952, Bachbrecht, Windhoek

Right, now that I have your attention – relax – there is no hunting scam going on at Daan Viljoen and there are no new dishes on the restaurant menu, but we might be witnessing the effects of hornbill overpopulation. Read on and find out more about DV's first hornbill squatter camp attempt.

A couple of weeks ago Martin Britz shared with me an anecdote that I am sure will amaze most birders. Last year, February 1997, whilst enjoying a walk with his daughters at Daan Viljoen Game Reserve, Martin came across a rusty, old milk can lying on an open gravel hill. Such a well