

NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

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All contributions for *LANIOTURDUS* should be sent to:

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NEW YEAR'S DAY AT RUACANA

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The New Year started most dramatically when I heard gunfire from a high-powered semi-automatic rifle. It was 3 minutes into the New Year and the shots were fired less than 100 metres from my tent at Hippo Pool Campsite, Ruacana next to the Kunene. I decided that my safest option was to remain as flat as possible in my sleeping bag. A few minutes later another volley of gunfire was released (into the air, I hoped), but thereafter I fell asleep until I was awakened again at 3am by a howling dog which we had kindly given scraps of food the night before. Epithets like "voertsek" made no impression on the howling and ultimately I had to climb out of my tent and only after I had hurled a missile at the dog did it quieten down and disappear. Apart from these two interruptions I had a good night's sleep.

You may ask why New Year's Day at Ruacana, what about the heat and malaria? The overriding goal was to see the Epupa Falls (before they might disappear) as well as the four Kunene specials. Because one of the 4, Olive Bee-Eater is a migrant we obviously had to look at the summer option. According to information we obtained, the risk of malaria is greater later in the summer season when rains might have fallen, but also in any event the two week period after Christmas was the least disruptive work-wise for each member of my party. I considered it safer to travel with two vehicles and I found a willing and enthusiastic partner in Werner, a medical specialist in Kimberley. We agreed to rendezvous at Waterberg Plateau Park on Saturday 28 December 1996.

On Friday 27 December Paul, Francois and I departed from Cape Town and before reaching Noordoewer we had seen eight predatory birds including the white-breasted form of Jackal Buzzard which is sometimes misidentified as Augur Buzzard. At Grunau petrol station we saw Great Sparrow. The road between Grunau and Keetmanshoop turned out to be most dramatic because we drove through the eye of a storm with raging torrents of water on both sides of the road. Our first night we camped at the

municipal campsite at Keetmanshoop which had a surprisingly large number of campers.

The next day we travelled to Waterberg and on the way there we saw Monteiro's Hornbill. We had hardly booked in when we saw Rüppell's Parrot. The next morning at about 15 minutes before sunrise we heard Hartlaub's Francolin, but failed to obtain views of it. We also heard the barking call of Freckled Nightjar. Later in the day I played the call of Carp's Black Tit just below the swimming pool and immediately out popped a pair. The campsite once again proved to be a good birding area and we saw *inter alia* African Hawk-eagle, Lanner, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Striped Cuckoo, Diederik Cuckoo, Pearlspotted Owl, Swallowtailed Bee-eater, Purple Roller, Scimitar-billed Woodhoopoe, Grey Hornbill, Bradfield's Hornbill and an immature Pied Barbet (without a red spot on its forehead), Cardinal Woodpecker, Ashy Tit, Icterine Warbler, Willow Warbler, Rattling Cisticola, Spotted Flycatcher, Chat Flycatcher, Redbacked Shrike, Crimsonbreasted Shrike, Puffback and Brubru.

On Monday 30 December we drove on the tarred road via Tsumeb to Ruacana. The road is somewhat depressing in that large sections of the surrounding countryside have been denuded of stunted Mopane and there are decidedly more liquor stores than there were birds to be seen. The only worthwhile view we encountered on the 9 hour drive was at a waterpan with receding water at which there were about 60 Yellowbilled Kite. A number of them were immatures with a black tip to the bill and they clearly had a more mottled appearance. Another disappointment was to see the bare, dry rockface of the formerly beautiful Ruacana Falls. Our spirits were, however, lifted by the sighting of the first of the Kunene specials, Olive Bee-Eater, which ultimately turned out to be so common that we saw one every day that we camped next to the Kunene.

The next morning we drove West on the road next to the Kunene in the direction of Epupa Falls. About 10 kms from Hippo Pools the road crosses a dry river bed. Because I had entered the dry river bed at what seemed to be an angle of almost 90 degrees I was travelling in low range first gear and of necessity very slowly. As we exited the riverbed, Francois who sat left

rear, asked me to reverse. As I reversed, I saw sitting on a bare branch and a mere 10 m from us, the second Kunene special, Grey Kestrel. We had excellent views of it to the extent that we could see the faint barring on the inside of its tail. After watching it for 15 minutes, we debated whether we should move on, but the debate was resolved when the bird flew off. We subsequently saw Grey Kestrel later that day from Hippo Pool Campsite. It sat in the shade on the branch of a dead tree. We watched it for more than 30 minutes. The following day and early morning we saw two Grey Kestrel sitting on the same tree. After about 5 minutes one left and the remaining one continued to sit in the shade of the main branch for about half an hour.

On the same drive where we saw the Grey Kestrel for the first time, we saw the third Kunene special, Rufoustailed Palm Thrush. We ultimately saw the Rufoustailed Palm Thrush every day we spent next to the Kunene. Later that day and at approximately 5.30 pm we noticed a Rufoustailed Palm Thrush fly from thick riverine bush into the most eastern of a group of Makalani Palms. It stealthily moved from Palm to Palm and when it got to the fifth Palm from the east - incredibly it went to sit on its nest. The nest was in a live branch on the western side of the Palm approximately 30 cm from the centre spine and about 30 cm from the top of the leaf. The nest consists largely of clay which is plastered on plant fibres. The next morning Werner took a photograph of this rare sight.

As stated before, the New Year started most dramatically at Ruacana, but the drama of the night was soon forgotten when, whilst breaking camp at Hippo Pool we saw another Namibian special Whitebrowed Coucal. Hippo Pool campsite turned out to be an excellent birding spot because we also added Goliath Heron, African Fish Eagle, Gabar Goshawk, Greenspotted Dove, Woodland Kingfisher, Little Bee-eater, Violet Wood Hoopoe, Great Reed Warbler, Yellowbilled Oxpecker, Chestnut Weaver, Golden Weaver and Goldenbreasted Bunting. On the road south of Hippo Pool we saw plenty of Whitetailed Shrike, with its unduly long legs. In the canyon below the dry rockface of Ruacana Falls we saw Augur Buzzard. We ultimately saw Augur Buzzard on three further occasions at other sites. Our two night stopover at Ruacana turned out trumps as far as birding was

concerned and we had only missed out on one of the four Kunene Specials, Cinderella Waxbill. Ruacana will, therefore, see me again.

There are two roads from Ruacana to Epupa. The most direct route is along the Kunene but this is an all day 4X4 trip. Because we wanted to spend the least possible time on the road to maximise birding time, we opted for the easy option by going south then west to Opuwo and ultimately north to Epupa. This round trip took 6 hours. The road surface is good enough for any vehicle with a reasonable clearance. *En route* to Epupa we saw Blackfaced Babbler and Barecheeked Babbler. My party regard Epupa Falls to be the second most beautiful in southern Africa (Victoria Falls still comes first). The beauty of Epupa, however, is enhanced by the total unspoiltness of the area (unlike Victoria Falls). According to local opinion, a dam will decidedly be built at Epupa which will ultimately make Epupa Falls history. My suggestion is that you make every effort to see the falls while they are still there - you only have to have regard to the reality of what has happened to the Ruacana Falls which are no more. Apart from the spectacle of Epupa Falls, the birding is excellent. The campsite, which has showers and toilets is amongst Makalani Palms and Rufoustailed Palmthrush can be seen at almost any time of the day. The 2 kilometre walk South of the Falls is beautiful and we saw *inter alia* Augur Buzzard, Black Eagle, African Mourning Dove, Rüppells Parrot, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Bradfield's Swift, Palm Swift, Olive Bee-Eater, Sabota Lark, Wiretailed Swallow, Swamp Boubou, Plumcoloured Starling, Chestnut Weaver, Golden Weaver, Redbilled Quelea, Jameson's Firefinch, Violeteared and Blackcheeked Waxbill. We also travelled East of Epupa and added Painted Snipe, Klaas's Cuckoo, Kalahari Robin and Rock Bunting.

Although it was hot, it was a dry heat and provided you stayed in the shade and did not move around too much it was quite bearable. I swam a few times in a counter eddy above the Falls but after I heard that there was a crocodile upstream I lost my enthusiasm for another swim.

On Saturday 4 January, after 3 idyllic days at Epupa Falls, we travelled for 7 hours to a lovely campsite on Karos Farm, 36 kilometres north of

Kamanjab. On the road and just north of Opuwo we saw an Augur Buzzard in a tree a mere 5 metres from the road and twice Carp's Black Tit flew across the road. At Karos Farm we added Pied Babbler and incredibly, one of the Kunene Specials, Olive Bee-Eater.

On Saturday 5 January we stocked up with provisions including steak at a butcher at Kamanjab and we set off for Torra Bay in the Skeleton Coast Park and which is open only in December and January. On route we called at Palmwag, a beautiful oasis where Desert Elephants had been 2 days before. At the entrance gate to the park, at Springbokwater the driver of the BMW in front of us stated that the temperature gauge of his vehicle reflected an outside temperature of 45° C. When the official who recorded our entry heard that we were there for the birdwatching and not fishing his face lit up and he stated that he would like to come and visit us at our campsite. He made everyone else wait whilst he himself opened the gate for us. As we approached the coast, the temperature dropped markedly. We added a Namibian special, Rüppel's Korhaan, a group of 3 adults and 1 chick who sat in the shade of a tree next to the road. My first impression of Torra Bay campsite was a squatter camp. The next morning we had a dawn chorus of generators. Because of the stone beach very little was seen in the line of birds. The waterfall at the Uniab River is beautiful and reminded me of Bourke's Luck Potholes. We saw no unusual waders or seabirds. We did, however, see a party of seven Redcapped Lark which looked amazingly pale. We went South to the mouth of the Koigab River where we first heard and then saw several Damara Tern.

After two nights at Torra Bay we departed for Walvis Bay but *en route* and directly East of Swakopmund on the Khomas Hochland road, we found another Namibian special, Gray's Lark. The birds are amazingly well camouflaged and a tape recording makes no impression upon them. At Walvis Bay we camped out for three nights at the excellent municipal campsite which is within walking distance of a multitude of waders. In the afternoon we drove for several kilometres to Paaltjies where we added Pomarine Skua and Subantarctic Skua. On the drive back from Paaltjies we added Bartailed Godwit.

The next morning (8 January) we had the benefit of Keith Wearne as a guide who also had access to the expansive saltworks. Thanks to Keith, we had excellent views of four Rednecked Phalarope. We also saw a number of Black Tern. In the afternoon and thanks to the guidance of Keith, we went on the Rooibank road which is a turnoff from the Sandwich Bay Harbour road. We played a tape for Dune Lark and in flew a pair. The birds are not shy and allowed us excellent views. On the way back to the campsite, we saw Terek Sandpiper. The next morning we added Knot (one was indeed red) and we also saw four Mongolian Plover, two of them in partial breeding plumage. The overwhelming spectacle at Walvis Bay is the incredible number of terns, mostly Commic (mixed flocks of Common and Arctic). The terns reminded me of clouds of Redbilled Quelea's. It is a beautiful sight to see terns in such vast numbers and it is worthwhile going to Walvis Bay in the summer just for this spectacle alone.

On Friday 10 January we left Walvis Bay at 5.45 am and we ultimately arrived at the Spitskoppe just after 8. Spitskoppe in early morning light is stunningly beautiful. Fortunately I recalled where I had seen Herero Chat, 11 years ago because I played the call once and the response was so fast that the call was not as yet completed when one came within 5 m and sat still for 15 minutes. Hereafter, Werner departed for Windhoek because his Landrover had once again developed drive-shaft problems. Whatever considerations I had to buy a Landrover have now disappeared. Paul, Francois and I then headed for Omaruru. On the Entemba road south of Omaruru and near Paula's Cave we played a tape for Rockrunner and it called back from the top of a tree and afforded us good views for more than half an hour. The campsite at Omaruru was good for birds and we added Littlebanded Goshawk and Bearded Woodpecker. Early next morning we were in a dry riverbed in the Erongo Mountains on the Entemba road where we heard several Hartlaub's Francolin call 20 minutes before sunrise. Unfortunately, not one of the secretive birds could be seen. As we left Omaruru we added Ludwig's Bustard.

At 6.30 pm we crossed the Orange at Noordoewer having seen 216 species in Namibia. On our 16th and last night we camped out at Kokerboom Caravan Park, a delightful camping site outside Springbok. Before lunch

on Sunday 12 January we were back in town having driven 6,847 kilometres and we had seen almost all the birds we had hoped to see. In the process we had seen truly fascinating natural scenery. Namibia is a great place to visit, even in the middle of summer.

DIE SCHWALBE UND DER FALKE

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Es war einmal ein Falke. Und dann war dort auch ein Schwälbchen. Wenn der Falke versuchte, Essen zu finden, dann bekam er es immer schnell. Aber das Schwälbchen, das mußte sich mühsam quälen, um nur ein paar Brocken zu kriegen. Eines Tages dachte darum das Schwälbchen: "Wie macht der Falke es bloß, daß er immer Essen hat? Das muß ich auskundschaften!" Und es flog nun hinter dem Falken hinterher. So wie der Falke flog, flog nun auch das Schwälbchen.

Da entdeckte der Falke: "Oh, hier ist ja noch ein Vögelchen!" Und er stieß hinab, um das Schwälbchen zu fangen. Da sauste das Schwälbchen geschwind an den Krallen des Falken vorbei, und jedesmal, wenn der Falke dachte: Nun habe ich es endlich! war das Schwälbchen doch entwischt. "Aha," sagte sich das Schwälbchen, "er hat Krallen, mit denen er zupacken kann. Ich muß hier schnell wegfliegen, sonst greift er mich!" Es flog fort und setzte sich in einen Baum. Dort saß es nun. Da bemerkte es: "Oh, hier kommt ja wieder der Falke!" Es kroch tiefer in das Geäst und lugte daraus hervor. "Was macht denn der Falke jetzt? Er fliegt so hoch. Wie macht er das nur, daß er trotzdem dort unten das Essen kriegen kann?" Da beobachtete es, wie der Falke plötzlich hinabstieß und ein Häschen packte und mit dem Häschen wegflog. "Wie macht dieser Vogel das nur?" dachte das Schwälbchen. "Ich kann einfach nicht hinunterfliegen und das große Ding dort aufgreifen. Ich wachse auch nicht mehr, da werde ich es auch später nicht können. Wie soll ich es nur anstellen?"

Es versuchte nun, ganz genau wie der Falke zu fliegen. Es stieß hinab und stieg in die Höhe, stieß hinab und stieg wieder in die Höhe. Und dabei sah es: "Da liegt ja ein Häschen! Es sieht wie ein Häschen aus!" Aber das war gar kein Häschen, das war ein Klippdachs. "Oh," dachte es, als es den sah, "das Ding, das muß ich auch kriegen!" Das Schwälbchen stieß hinab und versuchte, den Klippdachs mit seinen kleinen Füßen zu packen. Da sprang der Klippdachs auf, drehte sich zur Seite und blieb dann dort ruhig sitzen. "Warum habe ich das Ding denn nicht aufheben können?" dachte das Schwälbchen. "Wie macht der Falke das bloß? Und was habe ich verkehrt gemacht?"

Es flog wieder auf und setzte sich auf einen Baum. Es schaute umher. Da kam gerade der Falke wieder angeflogen, und er stieß hinab auf den Klippdachs. "Ich gehe mit ihm mit!" beschloß das Schwälbchen, und es kroch unter den Klippdachs und hielt sich mit dem Schnabel unten an ihm fest. Und so flog es mit dem Falken mit. Dann setzte es sich unter den Baum und beobachtete ganz genau, was der Falke mit dem Klippdachs machte. Da sah es dann: "Oh, der Falke reißt ja einen Brocken nach dem andern ab!" Als der Falke sich satt gefressen hatte und fortgeflogen war, versuchte das Schwälbchen, es genauso zu machen. Es pickte und pickte, aber es konnte keine großen Fleischbrocken abreißen.

Von daher kommt es, daß die Schwälbchen immer so flink wie die Falken umherfliegen. Sie fliegen genauso mit ausgebreiteten Flügeln. Damals haben die Schwälbchen damit begonnen. Und sie können keine großen Brocken essen. Aber wenn sie essen, dann reißen sie das Fleisch so wie der Falke auseinander. Das ist die Geschichte von dem Falken und dem Schwälbchen. So hat sie mir mein Vater erzählt. Von der Zeit habe ich immer genau aufgepaßt, wie die Schwälbchen fliegen. Und tatsächlich, sie fliegen wirklich so flink, als ob sie dich packen wollen. Und genauso machen es gewöhnlich die Falken, wenn sie nach den Hühnern herabstoßen.

Aus: Sigrid Schmidt: Tiergeschichten in Afrika. Erzählungen der Damara und Nama. Afrika erzählt 4. Köln: Köppe. 1995, 97-99.