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## Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

With this issue the *Lanioturdus* is now back to being a journal with 4 issues per year and I would like to congratulate the members for your support to make this happen. Within this issue is a wide diversity of articles from all parts of the country. Again we have articles on "common" garden birds which are not common according to the books.

I would like to apologize to Rob Simmons and Penn Lloyd for forgetting to include a figure in their article, which appeared in Volume 35(3). It is included in this issue.

We have only had 4 write-ups on bird club outings in Volume 35 from 2002 and I would like to appeal to organizers and members to please send me a short note on the outing. This will enable other members, who did not attend, to see what the club has been doing and what birds were seen.

Included within this issue is an extra membership form. Please give one to a keen birder you know, who is not a member. You may not know it, but the Namibia Bird Club only has about 90 members which is a rather shocking low number considering all the people we know who have an interest in birding in the country. If you just consider the number of tour guides operating that is more than 90 people. That does not count the number of hunting guides, farmers, scientists, and government employees who also either observe birds or do studies on birds. In 3 of our neighbouring countries Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe their bird clubs/societies have 300-600 members and have far less individuals who are active in the tourism or outdoor avocations.

AERIAL SURVEY OF LESSER FLAMINGOS <i>Phoeniconaias minor</i> AND GREATER FLAMINGOS <i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i> BREEDING AT SUA PAN, MAKGADIKGADI PANS, BOTSWANA IN JANUARY 2002	2
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## PALE-WINGED STARLINGS BREEDING IN THE NAMIB-NAUKLUFT PARK

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### Introduction

Although Pale-winged Starlings *Onychognathus naboroupp* are common and widespread over the western half of Namibia and in the northern and western Cape, as far as the Free State in South Africa, (Harrison *et al* 1997) “we still lack the most basic information ... for many southern African species” (Craig 1996). Roberts’ Birds of Southern Africa states “incubation and nestling: unrecorded” (Maclean 1993) and similarly in Tarboton (2001).

In the Namib-Naukluft Park we tried to obtain breeding records of these common birds for several years. Although nesting sites on the cliffs in the Naukluft Mountains were found, closer examination was hindered by the height of these cliffs. Some nests were accessible with a long extension ladder; however, the nests were well guarded by an abundant number of aggressive paper *Belonogaster* wasps. The Pale-winged Starlings also breed in the Sesriem Canyon to the west

of the Naukluft Mountains, but again the nests were inaccessible. This was also the case in the studies by Craig *et al* (1989).

### Nesting Site

In March 1997, a pair of Pale-winged Starlings built a nest in the very noisy and hot engine room producing power for the ranger's station at Naukluft in the Namib-Naukluft Park. The birds gained access through the door, which was generally left open. They built the nest on top of a side wall between the rafters, 2.5 metres above the floor. The nest was just below the corrugated iron roof and combined with the heat from the diesel engine became rather warm. Of the 12 nest record cards held by the Ornithological section of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, eight nests were in natural sites, none were on manmade structures and four were unknown (R. Simmons pers comm).

### Nest Construction and Eggs

Fine twigs from the wild olive tree *Euclea pseudobenus* formed the basis of the bowl-shaped nest. It was lined with animal hair, grass and the needlelike leaves of the wild green-hair tree *Parkinsonia africana*.

Six eggs were laid. Maclean (1993) gives the clutch size as 2 – 5 eggs. The smallest egg measured 30.5 x 21 mm and the largest 32 x 22 mm, with a mean of 31 x 21.5 mm, which corresponds to the egg sizes in Maclean (1993). The eggs were turquoise colour with red/brown blotches, concentrated at the thick end.

### Incubation

The nest was first checked on 7 Mar 1997 and five eggs had been laid (See Table 1). On 9 Mar 1997 there were six eggs. Assuming that the sixth egg was laid on 8 Mar 1997 and incubation began immediately and two chicks were hatched by 22 Mar 1997, then the incubation period is 14 days. However, as no observations were made before 22 Mar 1997 they could have hatched the previous day, then the incubation period is a day less.

Red-winged Starlings *Onychognathus morio* hatch between 12.5 – 23 days, with an average of 16 days (Maclean 1993). Thus the incubation period of these Pale-winged Starlings of 13 – 14 days corresponds well with the congeneric Red-winged Starling.

Table 1: Incubation and nestling period of Pale-winged Starlings in the Namib-Naukluft Park, 1997

Date	Number of eggs	Number of chicks	Days	Comments
07 Mar 97	5			Started incubating?
08 Mar 97	?			Incubating
09 Mar 97	6	2		
21 Mar 97	4	2		Hatched
22 Mar 97	4	2	14	
25 Mar 97	4	2		
27 Mar 97	3	2		
05 Mar 97	0	2		
14 Mar 97	0	2		
15 Mar 97	0	0	24	Fledged

### Nestling Period

From the observations in Table 1 the nestling period was 24 days, again similar to the Red-winged Starling, which is 22 – 26 – 28 days (Maclean 1993). Only the female incubates (Tarboton 2001) and while she was on the nest, the male was regularly seen in a tree close to the engine room.

The two chicks were ringed on 30 Mar 1997 and each was also fitted with a single colour ring. One colour-ringed chick was seen around the station for a month after leaving the nest. Subsequently the adult birds laid another four eggs in the same nest, but when J.S. went away for a few days, the engine room door was closed, preventing the adults from getting to the nest. The eggs were abandoned.

### Summary

A pair of Pale-winged Starlings in the Namib-Naukluft Park in Namibia, incubated two eggs in 14 days and the nestling period was 24 days. These are the first records of incubation and nestling period for this species.

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## Melanistic Hornbill?

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We have a bird-feeding site outside on the lawn on our farm Tsutsab in the Tsumeb District, where we supply crushed chicken feed. From the kitchen window we can observe the birds feeding, mostly hornbills and Cape Turtle Doves. On 20 July 2002, at 06h30, we saw a strange hornbill, which was feeding, among the others. It was not like the Red-billed or Yellow-billed Hornbills, it was mostly black:

The following is a description of the bird we saw:

Bill orange, no casque

Black overall, with no white on the belly, but lighter black than above.

Wings black.

White spots on outer primaries,  $\pm$  1/3 from tip.

Tail feathers black, outer tail feathers white tipped.

White patches on wings.

Eyes yellowish.

Lighter black eyebrow.

Undertail coverts black with white patches.

I managed to get some photos but they are not good enough for publication. The next morning the bird showed up again, but has not been seen since.

We contacted Christian Boix Hinzen by e-mail, sent him the photos and he responded as follows:

“Very, very interesting. Thanks firstly for sharing the news. I really do appreciate it and am heartened to know Namibia has people that share this news and this information. I have never heard of a melanistic Redbilled Hornbill, or of any other hornbill species of the genus *Tockus* for that matter. I have checked the literature available and there is no mention of melanism (that means black!!) in *Tockus* hornbills. I have checked the latest Handbook of the Birds of the World, the 3rd volume of The Birds of Africa, and Kemp's Monograph on Hornbills. In addition, I did a search on melanism and albinism on the ROBERTS DATABASE here at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute, University of Cape Town and only one bird popped out, a reference from 1969 on an albino Redbilled Hornbill from Kruger NP, (funnily enough this year Alday gave me a picture of an albino Yellowbilled Hornbill from Kruger also) but there is nothing on melanism.”

“Melanism or leucism rather than albinism are not that uncommon. If its white it means the pigments did not develop, but only if the eye is pink, do we call it a true albino, if its just white its a leucanistic case; for melanism the opposite applies, it just means that the predominant pigment is black and that's that. Because the literature does not show cases of either does not mean they do not occur but that people do not report them thinking its not important.”

Previously we had never seen such a hornbill on our farm but I heard a report from Grootfontein where a black hornbill was seen in a town garden some time ago. Can anybody shed more light on this case?