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EDITORIAL

Once again this edition of *Lanioturdus* has been considerably delayed in its production as few articles have come in over the past six months. The rush of articles in July and August have been gratifying and I hope that this will continue in the future.

This is the last edition of *Lanioturdus* I will be editing for a while as I am no longer in a position to give the magazine the attention it needs to be successful. When I started as editor about six years ago, I had had no previous active involvement with the bird club up to that time. I got involved because I (and many other members) felt that a small informative and interesting local magazine was absolutely integral to making the club a success and birding in Namibia the pleasurable pastime it should be. I think we succeeded to a large extent and I would like to thank all of those individuals who contributed so much to making *Lanioturdus* a success. Special thanks must go to Carole Roberts who has done the layout of every copy to go out in the last six years and has done so with unfailing good humour. Coleen Mannheimer contributed the vast majority of the artwork for the magazine over the years and deserves a special mention. A special word of thanks also to Hartwig Dedekind, Dieter Ludwig and others who did the german editing, often at short notice. Willi Peters and the staff at Typoprint were always helpful and quick to get the magazine out on time. I would also like to thank the Bird Club Committee and the staff at the Scientific Society who did the posting and packaging, set up exchange agreements and answered many queries.

Tim Osborne has volunteered to take over the editing of the magazine from October onwards. I would like to wish Tim (and I am sure Laurel) well with the editorship in the future and encourage all of the contributors of the past to continue to support the magazine.

English summary: Bradfield's Swift nest in palm tree

In November 1997 two pairs of Bradfield's Swift were observed breeding in palm trees in the center of Windhoek.

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PEREGRINES AND OTHER RAPTORS AT SANDWICH HARBOUR

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During December 1999 and January 2000, Sandwich Harbour supported large numbers of shorebirds. About 47,000 sandpipers and plovers comprised the bulk of the birds present and 13,000 Lesser Flamingos and almost 10,000 Greater Flamingos were also present in December. Flamingos had disappeared one month later in January, and headed for Etosha where they started breeding (report to come).

It always surprises me that there are not more falcons chasing this large flock of food, given that on open mudflats small birds are highly vulnerable to predation. In ten years' monitoring I have noted only about ten Lanners and Peregrines.

In January 2000, however, I was rewarded with not one but three Peregrines in different part of this coastal wetland and several other raptors. Two Peregrines were heard having a spat over the Eagle Wreck with an adult grey bird diving at and trying to strike a young brown bird. The latter turned on its back midair to avoid the stooping adult. Following five or six stoops the adult tired of the game and drifted north. Both birds were thought to be the Eurasian species *Falco peregrinus peregrinus* because of their size and heavy markings.

The third bird was seen hunting on the southern mudflats, by perching low on the sand or small lumps of driftwood. As I disturbed him on the open expanse of the Western Sandspit, he flew low for about 200 m before rising about 10 m into the air and swooping on a White-fronted Plover which hadn't seen him coming. The plover was easily caught and transported another 500m to a sheltered plucking spot behind some drift wood. This bird was also thought to be a Eurasian Peregrine, and may have been the adult seen later the same day.

Kelp Gulls reaction to Peregrines is minimal but Stints and Sandpipers rise in impressive tight flocks, wheeling and turning in such tight unison that they often confuse and deter hunting Peregrines. Some of these flocks rise in huge columns 100 m or more into the air and only disperse when the lower birds peel off and fly fast across the flats to settle. (Research has shown that wheeling birds do not just react to what their neighbours are doing, but must watch the outer fringes of the flock and all follow the turns that birds are making there – the result is a uniform turning, not a wave or ripple-like effect through the flock).

This is the second successful predation attempt I have seen by falcons here – the first was about four years ago when a Lanner Falcon hemmed a Black or Common Tern into the dunes and over about one kilometre dived on the tern on 18 occasions, before the tern's escape route was blocked by the 80 metre-high dunes. The Lanner then hit the tiring tern and dropped to the ground with it, obviously exhausted from the protracted chase. Other Peregrines have attempted to use these same dunes for hunting forays, climbing the sides using the winds, sometimes perching on them, before

swooping fast and low down the dunes to attack egrets, Cape Teal and shorebirds below them. All other attempts (about ten) seen have been unsuccessful.

Other raptors seen on this visit were three Pale Chanting Goshawks, one pair which may be nesting. One bird was seen carrying a gerbil which were in abundance in the dune hummocks and !nara plants. Barn Owls, a rare occurrence, were also observed at night, foraging over the dunes for gerbils. Later an Osprey was observed perching on Pelican Point. The reason for so many raptors here may have been that Sandwich was unusually warm with a sea temperature around 20° C. The surfeit of gerbils and shorebirds added to the good conditions, possibly attracting the Peregrines and other raptors to this normally cold and windy wetland.



JANUARY 1999 WETLAND COUNT DATA

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January 1999 saw generally dry conditions in Namibia, with the Meteorological Office reporting most northern areas having 75% to 100% of the normal rainfall for January, eastern areas having 25% the normal rainfall and areas in the south varying widely between 25% and 150% of normal rainfall. This once again illustrates the spatial variation in rainfall of sub-Saharan Africa's most arid country. For a wetland bird it means head south! An insight into how birds find spatially isolated wetlands in such a patchy environment is published in *Ostrich* 70: 145–148 by Simmons, Barnard and Jamieson. Namibian birders reached 24 regions, counted 30 different wetlands and recorded a total of 243,500 birds.

Table 1. Summarised Namibian wetland counts for January 1999. Wetlands that don't appear in the list were not counted.

Code	Site (Counters)	Species	Birds
6.	Cape Cross Saltworks (A.S. Uwu-khaeb)	11	3,903
9.	Swakop sewage works (S. Dantu and M. Boorman)	18	1884
12.	Sandwich N. wetlands (R. Simmons)	27	868
	S. mudflats (R. Simmons)	16	36,302
	W. sandspit (R. Simmons)	18	81,317
	Lagoonside (D. Newmarch)	23	2,960
14.	Bushmanland		
	Nyae-Nyae (N. Berriman)	1	9
	Gen Quo (N. Berriman)	4	46
	Tsumkwe	8	84
15.	Etosha		
	Fischer's Pan (T. Osborne)	28	2,711
	Okondeka (W. Versveld)	3	9
	Main Pan (Eyre, van Royen & Stohls)	1	3,000
16.	Ekuma River (W. Versveld & J. Kadner)	11	2,262
	Lake Oponono (W. Versveld & J. Kadner)	25	4,532
	Oshituntu (W. Versveld & J. Kadner)	26	1,926
19.	Omatako (D. Ludwig)	25	2,760
20.	Otjivero Dam (F. Schweninicke)	17	556
	Hardap Dam (C. Sikopo)	19	823
26.	Swakopoort Dam	28	2,016
27.	Windhoek Sewage Works (D. Ludwig)	23	200
30.	Mahango Reserve (M. Paxton, L. Sheehan)	51	1,785
44.	Avis Dam (S. Mallet-Veale)	13	144
48.	Walvis Bay Lagoon (K. & G. Wearne, <i>et al</i> **)	54	74,444
49.	Conception Bay (R. Simmons)	18	9,445
	Olushandja Dam (N. Robson)	9	128
69.	Walvis Bay sewage works (K. & G. Wearne)	34	1,499
71.	Orange River mouth (Kolberg, Anderson & Parkins)	57	7,058
72.	Orange River Hohenfels (Kolberg, Anderson & Parkins)	26	393
74.	Augeigas/Montecristo (C. Boix-Hinzen)	30	289
75.	Zambezi River – Kalizo (V. & D. Sparg)	32	3,104

243,500 birds were counted in 30 of 84 wetlands;
the highest number of species was counted at the Orange River mouth (57)

Some of the highlights were:

1. Some movements of flamingos became apparent from monitoring by staff based in Etosha. No breeding took place there despite some flooding of the eastern half of the pan. The birds appeared to be moving to Sua Pan, Botswana, where Graham McCulloch recorded breeding by mainly Lesser Flamingos. The movements occurred in January and involved a few thousand birds at a time. The same phenomenon was apparent in April for which a separate report is being produced
2. The highlight for the region and my parting gift as the regional coordinator for southern Africa (Doug Harebottle of the ADU in Cape Town takes over) is to have obtained the first ever count from Angola. Dr Alison Sakko counted the southwestern corner of that beautiful country, centred on the beaches and bays of the Baia dos Tigres. This 'Bay of Tigers' is so named because the Namib Desert dunes that meet the sea are striped with residual minerals. She counted 150 km of this coast, recording 5848 birds of 25 species for an average of 39 shorebirds per kilometre. Some of the more interesting finds were Royal Terns (239) rarely reported from southern Africa, Ospreys (3) and Black Oystercatchers (38) not usually found this far north. Damara Terns were expected and numbered 160. Kelp Gulls were seen breeding on the uninhabited sand island which is now cut off from the mainland.
3. Highest species totals in Namibia occurred at Walvis Bay (where 43 Rednecked Phalaropes was surely a record number of this rare visitor), Mahango Reserve on the Okavango River (52 species), and the Orange River mouth counted in collaboration with our South African colleagues with 57 species.
4. The largest single number of birds occurred at Sandwich Harbour on the central coast which boasted half the total number of birds counted in Namibia (121, 500 birds). Large flocks of Common Terns boosted this figure beyond the hundred thousand mark as it did in January 1998.
5. Black Egrets were found in some unusual places including a farm river just outside Windhoek and on the Swakoppoort Dam as well as the more expected areas of the Zambezi River.
6. Wattled Cranes occurred at Oshituntu (21) in the flooded grasslands north of Etosha National Park, together with five Crowned Cranes, and at

Nyae-Nyae Pan in Bushmanland (9 birds).

7. Black Tailed Godwit and good numbers of Lesser Moorhen were recorded at Fischer's Pan in eastern Etosha, while 2700 Redwinged Pratincoles were resident on the Zambezi River.

Thanks are due to all the wetland counters, particularly those that have been on the rack for ten years now, particularly the Namibian Bird Club and Nature Conservation officials who have given long term service. Special thanks to Keith Wearne for organising the Walvis Bay counts and providing monthly counts for Walvis Bay Sewage Works (the third Namibian wetland to be counted monthly), to Val and Dan Sparg for a second count of the Zambezi River, and especially Alison Sakko for the first ever count from Angola.

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JULY WETLAND BIRD COUNT – MAHANGO GAME PARK

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The month of July in the Kavango Region started with a general lull in the unrest situation throughout the area, with only localized pockets of action and disturbance. Army and Special Field Force activities in the area were stepped up and their presence was everywhere with varying degrees of effectiveness. I'd had six months of living on the river and only being able to look at it, without being able to put a boat on it. I made up my mind to consider the Mahango Game Park bird count the goal of the month and risk life and limb to bandits now and not only to crocodiles.