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Editorial

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Bird distributions are on the move with ranges both expanding and contracting. I have noticed in the short time that I have been editing this journal that there have been a number of sightings of various species in areas where they have not previously been recorded. Some examples of this are blue waxbill and African harrier-hawk sighted at the Spitzkoppe, great spotted cuckoo east of Lüderitz (although I suspect that this one might be a case of reverse migration), lesser jacana and rufous bellied heron at Farm Tsutsab etc. I was recently browsing through old issues of *Mitteilung der Ornithologischen Arbeitsgruppe*, the predecessor of *Lanioturdus*, and came across an article by S. M. Seftel wherein the writer was commenting on the disappearance of fiscal shrikes and southern white crowned shrikes from the Avis Dam area back in the 1974. I have also heard Dieter Ludwig comment that chat flycatchers and capped wheatears are no longer to be seen in the Windhoek area and that ant-eating chats have also disappeared from the Avis Dam area. I have myself noticed that white-tailed shrikes, which were regular visitors to my Klein Windhoek garden in the late 1980's, are now very seldom seen there while until about three years ago I had never seen a southern red bishop in my garden and now they come in droves. A new species moving into an area is probably far more noticeable than the gradual disappearance of an established species. While the Atlas of Southern African Birds and Roberts VII still contain the most accurate information available on species distributions in Namibia it must be remembered that data collection for the Atlas ceased some 16 years ago in 1993 and that there have been changes in the relatively short period since then although it must also be remembered that coverage for each individual species was not 100 %. Seven of the last ten rainy seasons have brought above average rainfall (at least to central Namibia) so changed climatic conditions may well be a factor in the extended ranges while disturbance and changes in habitat probably play a role in the contracting ranges and disappearance of species from some areas. Please continue sending in your observations of species new to an area or unusual in an area and also of species that may have disappeared. You never know – maybe someone who reads this journal in 35 years time will say “Oh wow – species X was already present in that area way back in 2009.”

Rarities and Interesting Observations

Monte Christo Guest Farm some 25 km north west of Windhoek has become something of a hotspot for greater painted snipe. At the beginning of June 2009 Dirk Heinrich caught and ringed two of these birds there. Two were seen during the wetland bird count conducted there by Namibia Bird Club members at the beginning of July while no fewer than five were seen on the bird club outing to this venue on 26.7.2009.

In mid July 2009 Ulrich Hofmann reported the sighting of a white-breasted cuckoo-shrike at Farm Kakuse north west of Tsumeb. Atlas records suggest that this species is extremely scarce in Namibia outside of the Caprivi and eastern Kavango Regions. This sighting is approximately 120 km to the south west of the nearest record in the Atlas of Southern African Birds.

On the weekend of 25 and 26 July 2009 Holger Kolberg and Mark Boorman saw Karoo thrush, Bradfield's swift and an augur buzzard at Sandwich Harbour where they were conducting a wetland bird count. These are very unusual sightings for that area and these birds had probably been blown there by the strong east winds experienced at that time. The closest Atlas record for the thrush is some 170 km east of there. Further to this Neil MacLeod saw a Karoo thrush on his lawn at Rossmund Estate east of Swakopmund on 13.9.2009.

Our trip to the Kavango Region from 26-30.8.2009 brought sightings of Souza's shrike and rufous-bellied tit found for us by Mark Paxton off the B8 road some distance east of Shamvura Camp. On 28.8.2009 we saw three wattled cranes flying over the reeds at Kwetche picnic site in the Mahango Game Reserve and the following day we saw two more wattled cranes and two slaty egrets on the flood plains in the Buffalo Core Area on the eastern side of the river.

On 4.9.2009 Marc Dürr saw a lappet faced vulture with the patagial tag F045 at Hotzas in the Namib. This bird had been ringed and tagged as a chick some 38 km away near Kries-se-Rus on 7.10.2007.

On 6.9.2009 Gudrun and I saw a ringed immature great white pelican at Schumann Dam, Farm Frauenstein, north east of Windhoek. Unfortunately the bird was too far away to read the code on the plastic ring but we assume that it was one of those ringed as a chick at Hardap Dam possibly in May 2006 or May 2008. Hardap is approximately 240 km from Schumann Dam.

On 8.9.2009 Jessica Kemper reported the presence of a male violet-backed starling that had been observed in Lüderitz for about two weeks. This bird is at least 225 km south west of the nearest point where this species was atlassed and it is possible that it was blown there by the strong east winds experienced earlier in the year.

Mark Middendorff reported seeing a number of Caspian terns at Hardap Dam in mid September. While not unheard of on inland waters in Namibia this is nevertheless an unusual sighting.

On 12.9.2009 Rod & Sigi Braby spotted a swift tern with an orange colour ring amongst a mixed group of swift, com-

mon and sandwich terns at Caution Reef near Swakopmund. It transpired that this bird had been ringed at Possession Island south of Lüderitz.

Mark Boorman advised that two common redshanks were present at Mile 4 Salt-works north of Swakopmund on 17.9.2009 while there were reports of at least two red-necked phalaropes at Walvis Bay at about the same time.

Peter and Marc Dürr reported a lizard buzzard seen on 4.10.2009 in Peter's garden in Hochland Park, Windhoek. While there are a few scattered records of this species in central Namibia in the Atlas of Southern African Birds it was not recorded in the Windhoek area in that publication.

Hartmut Kolb saw a grey heron at Hotzas waterhole in the Namib on 9.10.2009. There are no Atlas records for this species in that area.

Marc Dürr advised that a number of African white-backed vultures had recently been seen on the eastern side of the Namib Naukluft Park. These birds are not common in that area and one was seen at Hotzas on 10.10.2009 by members of the vulture ringing expedition. This bird was in the company of a number of lappet-faced vultures, four of which were tagged. Unfortunately no-one was able to get close enough to these birds to read the numbers on the tags.

Trevor Hardaker's SA Rare Bird News Reports mention the following rarities etc. seen in (and off) Namibia since mid July 2009:

In the report of 16.7.2009 mention is made of a great spotted cuckoo seen 47 km east of Lüderitz. While there are records of these birds overwintering in southern Africa this one is also way off its recorded range – in fact it seems to be some 235 km south west of the closest Atlas record. I wonder whether this was not perhaps a case of reverse migration – or was it just the work of the east wind again?

The report received on 20.7.2009 makes mention of three wandering albatrosses and four spectacled petrels seen from a trawler operating off the Namibian coast at approximately 19°S latitude. An Angolan epauletted fruit bat alighted on this trawler about 80 km out to sea – a really lost creature.

Three common redshanks were again present at the Mile 4 Salt-works north of Swakopmund according to the report dated 27.7.2009 and two birds were mentioned in the reports dated 27.8.2009 and 8.9.2009.

On 3.8.2008 a ringed Tristan albatross was seen from a fishing vessel about 180 nautical miles offshore off southern Namibia. It was determined that this bird is from the study group on Gough Island. Further to this sighting another Tristan albatross was sighted just outside the 200 nautical mile limit about a week later along with a sooty albatross and a blue petrel. It is thought that the blue petrel sighting might be the northernmost record for this species anywhere in the world. (Birds sighted offshore outside the 200 nautical mile limit do not qualify as southern African records).

The report of 24.9.2009 states that Walvis Bay is beginning to "work" and that eleven red-necked phalaropes, a juvenile European oystercatcher and a common black-headed gull in breeding plumage had been seen there while

two common redshanks were still showing themselves at the Mile 4 Salt-works north of Swakopmund. On 27.9.2009 at least 23 red-necked phalaropes were present at Walvis Bay.

The report dated 12.10.2009 confirms the continued presence of the common black-headed gull at Walvis Bay while three common redshanks had been seen at Mile 4 Salt-works.

Readers' comments and queries

Further to the report of the cut-throat finch at Farm Kakuse and the sighting of a group of five woolly-necked storks at Fischer's Pan (Lanioturdus 42-2) Günther Friederich advised that they had seen cut-throat finch at Farm Tsutsab back in December 1999 and that he had once observed a group of 25 woolly-necked storks at Tsutsab Vlei.

Elisabeth Schober-Redecker sent in a photograph of a kori bustard carrying a red Coke bottle cap in its bill and asked whether this could be part of a mating ritual. I was able to determine that April (when the photograph was taken) is not the mating time for kori bustards so it has nothing to do with mating but that they do swallow stones and grit as rangle stones to help their digestion. There is a record of the stomach contents of one bird including a piece of bone, a 12 bore shotgun shell, two bullet shells and a 45 x 45 mm piece of flat metal while another was found to have ingested 60 g of broken glass and part of the plastic tail light of a vehicle. It would thus appear that they sometimes swallow brightly coloured objects.

Elisabeth also queried whether it was normal for great spotted cuckoos to still be present in Namibia in May. While the adult birds usually leave for their winter ranges between mid February and mid March it is not unusual for the chicks to be here considerably later than this and they can only leave once they are no longer dependent on their foster parents. Occasionally great spotted cuckoos overwinter in southern Africa.

And finally

something posted by Dieter Oschadleus
on the SAFRING website

Wash, boil and serve!

The inscription on the metal bands used by the U.S. Department of the Interior to tag migratory birds has been changed. The bands used to bear the address of the Washington Biological Survey, abbreviated as "Wash. Biol. Surv." – until the agency received the following letter from an unhappy camper: "Dear Sirs: While camping last week, I shot one of your birds. I think it was a crow. I followed the cooking instructions on the leg tag and want to tell you it tasted horrible." The bands are now marked "Fish & Wildlife Service."

Neil Thomson

About the Namibia Bird Club

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. We organize monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Sewerage Works and occasional weekend trips further afield.

Experienced birders are more than happy to help beginners and novices on these outings. If you have a transport problem or would like to share transport please contact a committee member. Depending on the availability of speakers and suitable material we have lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive a programme of forthcoming events (the Bird Call Newsletter) and the Bird Club journal, Lanioturdus.

Membership Fees 2010

Members can receive a discounted subscription to the *Africa Birds and Birding* magazine. The fees below are with and without this subscription.

Category	Without	With
Single member	N\$ 120	N\$ 300
Family membership (Husband, wife, children)	N\$ 140	N\$ 320
Junior member (All scholars and students)	N\$ 80	N\$ 260
Pensioner	N\$ 80	N\$ 260
Foreign member (Not resident in Namibia)	N\$ 165	N/A
Corporate membership	N\$ 400	

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