



LANIOTURDUS

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Editorial

Pete Hancock, the editor of African Raptor News, commented in the first issue of that publication that it is sometimes easier as editor to write the newsletter yourself than to get contributions from others. Fortunately I have not been in this position during my first year or so of editing Lanioturdus but the one thing that I have found rather disconcerting is that of the 34 articles published in Lanioturdus 41 and Lanioturdus 42 (1-4) 26 have been written by only seven individuals. A very big thank you to those who have contributed but I am sure that many more of you have something to contribute. Remember – if it interests you it most likely interests other birders as well.

In anticipation of an influx of contributions I would like to offer the following guidelines to prospective authors:-

Editorial policy: Lanioturdus publishes articles and notes of broad birding interest for the membership of the Namibia Bird Club. Although preference is given to articles dealing with birds in Namibia, articles dealing with birds in southern Africa and beyond are also acceptable. The editor is allowed wide latitude in the choice of material; thus any views and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Namibia Bird Club. All material in Lanioturdus is copyright and permission to reproduce material should be negotiated with the editor and the author.

Format of submission: Manuscripts are accepted in English, German or Afrikaans. If papers are submitted in German or Afrikaans a short English summary should accompany the article. For papers in English, summaries in German or Afrikaans may also be submitted.

The preferred method of submission is via an attachment to an email. The preferred word processing programme is MS Word. The editor has MS Word 2007 and can thus open files in earlier versions. Other programmes are accepted but the files must be submitted as text only (.txt) or rich text format (.rtf) files. Typed or hand written submissions are also acceptable but the editor does not accept any responsibility for mistakes occurring from indecipherable handwriting. Photographs accompanying the articles are desirable and as Lanioturdus is now distributed electronically digital colour photographs are preferred. The photographs should be sent as a separate attachment and not be embedded in text files. If photographs are to be used in a specific position in the text this should be indicated. Likewise tables and graphs should also be sent as separate attachments and not be embedded in the text. Authors should however indicate where in the text such tables and graphs should be placed in the article.

Bird Names: The common names of birds should follow the new edition of Roberts Birds of Southern Africa Edition 7. Papers on the biology of species should include the scientific name of the bird the first time it is mentioned in the text. For long lists of species observed scientific names are not required.

References: References should be in the following format:



*Trying to hang on with feet not really suited to the purpose
Photo: Neil Thomson*

The sea was about as calm as the proverbial millpond but this did not prevent a few unfortunates succumbing to the dreaded “le mal de mer”. The first trip was accompanied almost the whole way by a freeloading kelp gull which kept alighting on the outboard motor covers, the webbing deck and the stainless steel railings, trying to hold on to the last with feet rather unsuited for the purpose.

On the first trip seabirds were scarce but there were sightings of white-chinned petrel, sooty shearwater and Sabine’s gull with a probable parasitic jaeger and shy albatross in the far distance. Neels was of the opinion that it was too calm and that it is likely that more birds would have been seen in rougher, windier conditions. Closer to shore a solitary African penguin was spotted and there were plenty of black-necked grebes on the water. Large numbers of terns were seen feeding close inshore. These were largely common terns although there were good numbers of black terns amongst them. The participants were also entertained by a group of Heaviside’s dolphins playing around the boat.

The second group did not fare much better as far as seabirds were concerned although they were able to add pomarine jaeger to the list. Highlight of the second trip was the sighting of all three dolphin species occurring off the Namibian coast – Heaviside’s, dusky and bottle nosed.

On the Sunday morning there was a well attended outing to the Mile 4 Saltworks under the leadership of Mark Boorman. While a good variety of shorebirds including chestnut-banded plover, white-fronted plover, curlew sandpiper, little stint, common ringed plover, ruff, sanderling, red knot, pied avocet, black-winged stilt and ruddy turnstone was seen there were no real specials although red knot has become rather uncommon on the Namibian coast in recent times. Of interest was a turnstone turning stones – the first time many had witnessed this behaviour. Unfortunately the common redshank took fright (and consequently flight) at the approach of the convoy and only Mark was able to get a glimpse of this southern African rarity (which has become something of a “trash bird” here at the saltworks).

All were in agreement that the birding weekend at the coast had been a resounding success with most being able to add species to their life lists and special thanks must go to Gudrun Middendorff and Naudé Dreyer for their organization and arranging the bargain basement price of N\$ 215 per person for the boat trip, Neels Dreyer for skippering and John Paterson and Mark Boorman for guiding.

Rarities and Interesting Observations

On 3.10.2009 Richard Niddrie and Eckart Demasius saw a flock of about 15 sharp-tailed starlings in woodland near Shamvura Camp before finding three Souza’s shrikes and an African hobby while birding with Mark Paxton. On 7.9.2009 they saw a pallid harrier and a western banded snake eagle near Kalizo Lodge east of Katima Mulilo and on 9.10.2009 they found a pair of white-backed night-herons roosting in a tree overhanging the water while on a boat trip out of Mahangu Safari Lodge on the Okavango River near Bagani. These are all uncommon species much coveted by twitchers for their life lists.

On 20.10.2009 Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford saw a single white stork circling over Walvis Bay. It seems that there are very few records of this species at the coast.

The Bird Club outing to Farm Ongos just north of Windhoek on 25.10.2009 produced a sighting of a pair of African black duck. Not exactly a rarity but by no means a common species in central Namibia.

Pelican Methuselah (see *Lanioturdus* 42-3) was sighted again on 31.10.2009 at the small craft jetty at Walvis Bay. This bird is now nearly 37 years old!

I saw a group of about seven African openbills in the almost dry “pannetjiesveld” some 40 km south of Ondangwa on 2.11.2009 and then on 30.11.2009 I saw three marabou storks in the same area. Neither of these species was at-lassed in the Quarter Degree Square in which they were seen but I suspect that, because of the remoteness of this area, atlas coverage was not as complete as it might have been.

In early November Tom Breckwoldt reported seeing a pair of African fish-eagles accompanied by a juvenile bird at Avis Dam. It would thus appear that the long resident pair has finally fledged a chick. Having observed these birds earlier in the year I suspected that they had moved to a new nest site some distance northward up the valley away from the disturbance of dog walkers, mountain bikers and bird watchers although I did not find the nest. The juvenile together with one of the adults was seen by us on 20.12.2009.

The Namibia Bird Club’s Birding Big Day at Monte Cristo Guest Farm north of Windhoek on 22.11.2009 again produced sightings of greater painted snipe and African black duck but the highlight was undoubtedly the sighting, by a number of participants, of a woodland kingfisher. This bird is some 200 km south of the closest Atlas record and about 470 km south of its normal range. An African jacana with an orange colour ring was also seen. This jacana was ringed as a juvenile in June 2009 by Dirk Heinrich.

Peter and Marilyn Bridgeford reported a grey wagtail they saw on Farm Friedental some 80 km south west of Windhoek on 21 & 22.11.2009. (See also below).

On 25.11.2009 I saw a red-billed oxpecker at Ncaute about 52 km south of Rundu. This species was not atlased in the Quarter Degree Square in which Ncaute falls, nor was it recorded in any of the adjacent QDS's. The nearest Atlas record to the east is some 70 km away although there are a couple of isolated records west of here but further to the north. In early October Eckart Demasius and Richard Niddrie saw a yellow-billed oxpecker at Nkwazi Lodge about 6 km east of Rundu. This species was not atlased anywhere near there. In fact the nearest Atlas record for the eastern population is some 150 km to the east. Could it be that we are witnessing a westward range expansion of both oxpecker species? I would be extremely interested to hear of any other records of oxpeckers (either species) within, say, 75 km of Rundu in recent years.

Sakkie von Plato reported a single hadeda ibis at Avis Dam towards the end of November confirming the continued presence of this species around Windhoek. There have also been reports of a bird frequenting van Rhyn Dam in Pioneerspark Extension 1. Sakkie also sent some pictures taken at Avis Dam of a strange looking duck which he was unable to identify. It had us stumped too so I forwarded the pictures to Trevor Hardaker who expressed the opinion that it was a male mallard in eclipse plumage. On 28.11.2009 Sakkie saw four greater painted snipe at the Gammams Sewage Works.



Male mallard in eclipse plumage

Photo: Olaf von Plato

Richard Niddrie reported seeing a grey-headed kingfisher at Avis Dam on 6.12.2009. While there are records of this species in central Namibia it is seldom seen here.

In early December Friedrich Nauhaus reported a probable female greater honeyguide from his farm in the Gobabis area. There are very few records of this species in Namibia outside of the Caprivi Region.

Eckart Demasius reported sighting a Karoo thrush in the bushes on Rossmund Golf Course on 10.12.2009. Eckart

is of the opinion that this species is resident in the Swakop valley although the nearest Atlas records are some distance from there.

On 12.12.2009 Gudrun and I saw a flock of what we believed to be juvenile common house-martins which we estimated at between 200 and 300 birds near Tsintsabis. Trevor Hardaker confirmed from the photographs that they were indeed house-martins but indicated that they could have been adult birds in very worn plumage just prior to moult. This is not a common species in Namibia – I think I have only seen it twice before and never in these numbers. It is probable that we were in the right place at the right time to witness this large flock on their southward migration as birds heading for the Western Cape presumably pass through Namibia.

On 14.12.2009 there was an unconfirmed report of an osprey at the Gammams Sewage Works. This species has been seen there in the past on Namibia Bird Club outings but is not common and always a nice species to find. There are however confirmed recent sightings of an osprey at Avis Dam.

On 20.12.2009 Gudrun and I saw a pair of village indigobirds at Avis Dam. The male had almost completed moulting into breeding plumage. These birds are of the subspecies *okavangoensis* which is found west of Victoria Falls with the male having a white bill and red legs. Village indigobird is the brood parasite of the red-billed firefinch. I speculated in my article on red-billed firefinches (Lanioturdus 42-3) that one of the reasons to believe that the firefinches did not extend their range naturally to the Windhoek area was the absence of the brood parasite. Now suddenly we have the indigobird in Windhoek! The nearest Atlas records for this species seem to be in the Okavango Delta in Botswana. I have seen village indigobird in Namibia at Swartbooisdrif, Shamvura Camp and near Bagani.



Village indigobird

Photo: Neil Thomson

On 26.12.2009 two woodland kingfishers were seen at Monte Christo Guest Farm (see above) as well as at least four greater painted snipe and the orange colour ringed African Jacana was also seen again.



*Woodland Kingfisher at Monte Christo
Photo: Eckart Demasius*

Towards the end of December Eckart Demasius reported a juvenile saddle-billed stork at Rietfontein in the Etosha National Park. While there are scattered records for this species in the area it is by no means common. Eckart also reported seeing 14 blue cranes at various locations in the park from near Chudop in the east to Salvadora in the west. This indicates that the cranes have dispersed, probably to their breeding territories, as 34 birds were seen together at Andoni at the end of October.

Günther & Tineke Friederich reported three white storks on the farm Brakkies in the Grootfontein District on 30.12.2009.

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

On 13 & 14.10.2009 Jessica Kemper and Jean-Paul Roux saw and photographed a Madeiran storm-petrel at Halifax Island off Lüderitz. This constitutes the first photographic record for this species in southern Africa. Ian Sinclair apparently saw four of these birds in a group of Wilson's storm-petrels on a trip between Cape Town and Walvis Bay in January but this sighting was not confirmed. (See also below).



*Madeiran storm-petrel
Photo: Jessica Kemper*

Also included in the report dated 19.10.2009 is the sighting of a Ross's turaco on Ntwala Island near Impalila Island in the Caprivi Region. If photographic proof can be obtained of this bird it will be the first substantiated record of this species in southern Africa.

Another report later the same week confirmed the continued presence of the black-headed gull and a number of red-necked phalaropes at Walvis Bay.

The report dated 26.10.2009 again mentions the black-headed gull and red-necked phalaropes at Walvis Bay and also a common redshank that had been seen there. First prize however went to the sighting of a grey wagtail at Popa Falls. This appears to be only the sixth record of this species in Namibia with two historical records from the Swakopmund Sewage works and one each from Eight Mile Beach, Halali and Avis Dam.

A green sandpiper was seen on the Kwando River in the Caprivi Region on 27.10.2009.

The report dated 12.11.2009 confirms the continued presence of two common redshanks at the Mile 4 Saltworks while 31 red-necked phalaropes were seen at Walvis Bay. A very unusual record was the sighting of a grey kestrel east of Katima Mulilo. This sighting appears to be some 600 km east of the previous easternmost record for this species.

In the report dated 19.11.2009 the continued presence of a number of red-necked phalaropes at Walvis Bay is mentioned while on 20.11.2009 the common black-headed gull was again sighted.

The report dated 30.11.2009 reconfirms the presence of common redshanks at Mile 4 Saltworks and common black-headed gull, red-necked phalarope and common redshank at Walvis Bay.

The report of 2.12.2009 mentions an unconfirmed report of a broad-billed sandpiper at Walvis Bay.

The report dated 7.12.2009 deals with a number of really exciting sightings off the Namibian coast. On a trip from Walvis Bay to St Helena a number of Madeiran storm-petrels were sighted 160 to 200 nautical miles north west of Walvis Bay (see above). Also seen were two red-billed tropicbirds – this sighting seems to constitute only the seventh record for southern Africa and is a first for Namibia but top bird prize went to the sighting of a masked booby which is a first for the southern African sub-region. Since both Madeiran storm-petrel and masked booby breed on St Helena it is perhaps not surprising that these birds are turning up in Namibian waters.

By mid December the European oystercatcher and the common black-headed gull were still being reported from Walvis Bay together with a number of red-necked phalaropes and a common redshank while two common redshanks were still to be seen at the Mile 4 Saltworks.

In the fourth week of December a number of red-necked phalaropes were still being reported from Walvis Bay.

Neil Thomson