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CONTENTS

THOMSON, N. Editorial

DEMASIUS, E. Diary of a Successful (?) Breeding Attempt of Gray's Larks

KOLBERG, H. Narrative of a Journey into the Hinterland of Etosha in Search of the Elusive Blue Crane

CUNNINGHAM P. & J. Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticla senegala* Observed in a Windhoek Garden

THOMSON, N. Red-billed Firefinches in and around Windhoek

FRIEDERICH G. & T. Sunday Lunchtime Raptors

KOMEN, E. Steel Jaw

KOLBERG, H. Report on the Summer Wetland Bird Counts January/February 2009

THOMSON, N. The Saga of the Vanishing Pelican Rings

RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

Editorial

The winter bird count at Walvis Bay has come and gone and it was extremely gratifying to see the number of Namibia Bird Club members participating in the count many of whom had traveled long distances at their own expense to be there. It is my belief that the bird club can make a real contribution to projects such as this.

Presumably everyone knows by now of the oiled penguins which were rescued at Lüderitz some months ago. What is possibly less well known is that the Namibia Bird Club committee made the decision immediately after the news broke to donate N\$ 5 000 from club funds towards the

rehabilitation of the oiled birds and following this Gudrun Middendorff was interviewed on the German radio service and was able to raise a further N\$ 10 000 as a result of this interview.

Holger Kolberg has put together an index of all the articles that appeared in *Ornithologische Beilage* (a supplement to the Scientific Society's newsletter) and *Mitteilung der Ornithologischen Arbeitsgruppe*, the forerunner of *Lanioturdus*, for the period 1963-1984. This index lists the articles published in chronological order and also by author and is a very useful tool for anyone writing articles and seeking references. The index can be obtained from the Namibia Bird Club at N\$ 40.00 per copy and all issues of *Ornithologische Beilage* and *Mitteilung der Ornithologischen Arbeitsgruppe* are to be found in the library of the Scientific Society.

In this issue we feature two articles on red-billed firefinches in and around Windhoek, one written by Peter and Janke Cunningham who had seen a firefinch in Windhoek for the first time and the other by myself who had been aware of their presence for some time. Both come to the conclusion that these birds most probably did not arrive in Windhoek unassisted.

In an earlier issue of *Lanioturdus* I asked for readers' comments on the new electronic format of this journal. To date the comment received has been overwhelmingly favourable with only one member saying that he preferred the printed booklet format.

Diary of a Successful (?) Breeding Attempt of Gray's Larks

Eckart Demasius

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Saturday, 28 February 2009

- On the afternoon of 28 February 2009 my wife found the nest of a Gray's Lark, *Ammomanopsis grayi* containing two eggs, east of Kramersdorf, whilst walking the dogs.
- The cup-shaped nest was located on the southern side of an *Arthraerua leubnitziae* bush.
- The nest was not constructed in typical fashion but with lots of pieces of cotton string.
- No adult bird was in the vicinity.

Namibia, as with many other jurisdictions around the world, has enacted statutes, which forbid cruelty to animals. In Namibia the anti-cruelty laws relate to all animals. However when certain predator control techniques are applied on farmlands cruelty is simply seen as a necessary practice. In Namibia leg-hold traps with appropriate names like “Terminator” and “Magnum” are available for both small and large animals. These traps are sold without warnings or description that could assist an ignorant farmer in minimizing the negative potentials of catching non-target animals and of cruelty aspects. Modified traps are manufactured to reduce potential animal injuries, but these are not readily available in Namibia. The modified traps have thick smooth offset jaws that are padded. But, like any other trap they need to be intelligently placed for the target species and to be checked very regularly.

Throughout the world domestic livestock and game farm animals may be at risk of predation. The question remains as to whether any non-selective or cruel and contentious methods of predator control have a place in modern farming.

**Report on the Summer Wetland Bird Counts,
January/February 2009**

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The start of the new year once again meant that Namibia’s bird watchers had to dust off their binoculars and venture out to do the annual summer wetland counts. The global economic crisis does not seem to have affected the birders because I’m pleased to report that twenty-seven sites were counted although the geographic coverage is still very much biased in favour of the coast. The two Ramsar sites, Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay, once again came up trumps in terms of bird numbers but the most species were encountered by Wilferd at Oponono. Wilferd also reported the lowest count (Fischer’s Pan). Cape Cross and the Walvis Sewage Works are emerging as important sites in terms of numbers. For the first time the figures for the Orange River Mouth are also included (these were usually reported by Mark Anderson as part of the South African counts) where unfortunately only the Namibian side was counted because no replacement for Mark Anderson has yet been appointed.

One interesting observation is the almost complete absence of White-fronted Plovers (only 1 393 seen) and terns (11 063 counted) at the coast and the overall low number of Lesser Flamingos (4 267). There are also some other notable absentees viz. no cranes, Great Crested Grebe and Black-headed Heron were counted.

However, this is more than complemented by the list of rarities seen: American Golden Plover (3), Common Black-headed Gull (1), Elegant Tern (1), Eurasian Oystercatcher (1), Pectoral Sandpiper (1), Red-necked Phalarope (7) and Common Redshank (2).

Many thanks to all the counters without whom these counts would not be possible. Special thanks to Peter Bridgeford who has taken on the job of organizing the Walvis Bay count in his usual enthusiastic manner.

Site	Birds	Species
Aeroplane Bay	67	6
Agate Beach	21	4
Cape Cross	3 560	22
Ekuma River	4 756	20
Elizabeth Bay	192	9
Fischer’s Pan (dry!)	0	0
Griffith Bay	36	11
Grosse Bucht	136	6
Guano Bay	227	10
Hardap Dam	1 202	24
Lüderitz Sewage Works	33	3
Mile 4 Saltworks	3 797	36
Monte Christo	335	34
Naute Dam	1 223	21
Oponono	5 213	44
Orange River – Skilpad to Hohenfels	275	14
Orange River – Hohenfels to Bridge	705	19
Orange River Mouth (Namibian side only)	1 735	34
Radford Bay	47	10
Sandwich Harbour	96 146	37
Second Lagoon	296	21
Shearwater Bay	28	1
Swakop River Mouth	236	27
Walvis Bay	95 380	42
Walvis Sewage Works	2 241	26

No counts had been received for Shamvura and Swakop Sewage Works at the time of writing.