



LANIOTURDUS

VOL. 43 (4) 2010

www.namibiabirdclub.org

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Editorial

We rely heavily on books such as Roberts VII, (often referred to as the “birders’ bible”), for distribution maps, biometric measurements etc. - but is the information in these reference books always correct? And, possibly more importantly, do we read it correctly? Mark Paxton’s observations on the tail length of the green/violet wood-hoopoes he measured at Shamvura (Lanioturdus 43-2) got me interested. My own records of the measurements of the southern masked-weavers occurring in Namibia which can be seen in this issue further stimulated this interest. While there are some very obvious mistakes in even the best of publications (the distribution map for malachite sunbird in Roberts VII is a case in point as is the distribution map for red-billed quelea in Roberts Field Guide – Chittenden 2007), some of these can probably be put down to editorial oversight and printers’ gremlins, but the

Surprisingly the game viewing was also good. Amongst the species seen were buffalo, elephant, hippopotamus, red lechwe, kudu, reedbuck, tsessebe, roan and sable antelope. With all the water about I did not expect to see so much game.

All in it was all a great birding trip.

Sparrow-Weavers and Buffalo Weavers at Kakuse, in Northern Namibia

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White-browed Sparrow-weaver nests are conspicuous and well known in Namibia. The birds build retort shaped nests of dry grass, initially with two openings at opposite sides. For breeding, one entrance is closed.

At the recent Namibian ringers' get-together (RGT) at Farm Kakuse north west of Tsumeb HDO found a colony of White-browed Sparrow-weavers with some strange nests. The nests had elongated entrance tubes resembling untidy Spectacled Weaver nests. When first found on the evening of 14 May 2010, an adult left the colony, indicating that it was not deserted. On 16 May NT and HDO returned to count the nests and take photographs.

The colony was 4-5 km from the farm house, in a small acacia tree, and had 13 nests (location 18°42.422'S 17°34.685'E).

Three nests had long tubes of about 20 cm length, and the other nests appeared normal. The nest tubes were untidily built. In one nest with a long tube, the opposite entrance hole

was open (non-breeding nest), while in another it appeared to be closed. White-browed Sparrow Weavers do not weave nests to the extent that true weavers do.

Rather they push new grass stems into the nest and bend the other end around the twigs supporting the nest (Collias & Collias 1964). The entrance tubes were probably built by light weaving.



The white-browed sparrow-weaver colony at Kakuse – Photo Dieter Oschadleus



One of the nests with a long entrance tunnel at Kakuse – Photo Dieter Oschadleus

There were several colonies around the farm house and camp site at Kakuse, but only normal nests were seen in these colonies in large *Acacia tortilis* trees even though these

colonies were larger (20, 30, 30 nests in three colonies).

NT found similar nests previously at Gocheganas Nature Reserve and Wellness Village, about 25 - 30 km south east of Windhoek, in October 2007. There were about 6 nests in the tree and two of them had tunnels.



One of the nests with a long entrance tunnel at Gocheganas– Photo Neil Thomson

In checking the literature, two references were found to long tubes in this species. Collias & Collias (1964) reported a nest with a spout of 15 cm from the western Transvaal. Tarboton (2001) mentions that the breeding nest has a single entrance that leads up a short tunnel of 150-200 mm. This does not seem to be normal, however, as most colonies do not have nests with entrance tubes.

Buffalo Weavers

Three large *Acacia tortilis* trees near the Kakuse farm house contained Red-billed Buffalo Weaver nests. No birds were seen, although some ringers did see one buffalo weaver a few kilometres from the farm house. On 16 May HDO checked these nests at dawn and one bird flew out from a nest 5.58 am.

This indicates that buffalo weavers forage away from their colonies but some individuals may return to roost in a nest.

Thanks to everyone that helped with the ringing event! Thanks to Anke and Uli for their hospitality and meals, Gudrun Middendorff for organising the event, and all the ringers and others for being there.

References

Collias NE & Collias EC, 1964. Evolution of nest building in weaverbirds (Ploceidae). University of California Publications in Zoology 73:1-239

Tarboton W, 2001. A guide to the nests and eggs of southern African birds. Publishers (Pty) Ltd, Cape Town

(Another sparrow-weaver nest with an entrance tunnel was found on Farm Bismarck about 30 km east of Windhoek on 26/09/2010 – Ed)

Some Interesting Personal Observations

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Red-billed queleas

In December 2009 Gudrun and I between us ringed 12 red-billed queleas in Windhoek and a further 9 on the farms Kakuse and Tsutsab north of Tsumeb. What is of interest is the difference in mass of the birds captured in the different areas. If one discards the heaviest and lightest bird from each set the remaining 10 city birds averaged 21.2 g (range 19.8 – 23.0 g) while the remaining 7 country birds