



LANIOTURDUS

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Editorial

English common names of bird species occurring in southern Africa : this topic seems to be the subject of a never ending debate. Recently *The Hornbill*, the journal of BirdLife Lowveld, published letters fuelling this debate over the ever changing English common names of our birds. My article in the last issue of *Lanioturdus* shows however that "new" bird names are nothing new at all and that the common names of species have been changing and evolving for many years.

The question does arise, however, as to which names a journal such as *Lanioturdus* should use. It is my policy as editor to use the common names used in Roberts VII and I shall continue to do so until another definitive publication is issued. I believe it is necessary to choose a standard and stick to it in order that most readers will be able to determine which species are being discussed. The common names used in Roberts VII are also for the most part used in all the newer publications such as Roberts Bird Guide, Sasol 3, Sinclair and Ryan, Oberprieler and Cillié and the new revised edition of Newman's. I am sure that most readers have access to at least one of these publications. Thus I shall stick to the names Comb Duck, Osprey, Barn Owl, Cattle Egret and Great Egret as per Roberts VII in spite of the fact that I understand that these are now Knob-billed Duck, Western Osprey, Western Barn Owl, Western Cattle Egret and Western Great Egret. I shall also continue to use the name Black-headed Canary and not the split Black-headed Canary/Damara Canary as it occurs in Sasol 3 – it seems that the authors of Sasol

attacks on the window glass. While he still favoured the bedroom window he was now also attacking windows in other parts of the house. By 03/03/2011 the female was, however, still not incarcerated in the nest and both birds were seen on the feeding table. Mad Monty was eating apple put out for frugivores (something I have not seen Monteiro's Hornbills do before), while the female was picking up the larger seeds from the table. The birds then began dueting with both birds bobbing up and down. Mad Monty puffed up the feathers on his thighs for this display so that it looked as if he was wearing bloomers while the female did not do so to the same extent. Thereafter the birds flew off and a short while later I heard Mad Monty having another go at the bedroom window.

The attacks on the window glass became more frequent and more violent. Trying to take a Sunday afternoon nap on 06/03/2011 was quite impossible with Mad Monty hurling himself at the glass every few minutes. It almost had me reaching for the cook books to see if I could find a recipe for "hornbill hash" or some similar culinary delight.

On 09/03/2011 I noticed that the half completed "plug" in the nest entrance was gone and judging from the debris (chips of sisal pulp) under the nest it looked as if the pair had been altering the nest cavity.

And then suddenly in the middle of March the birds disappeared. Peace at last. I have no idea whether something had happened to one or both of the birds, whether they had found another, perhaps more suitable or preferred nest site or whether perhaps it was the exceptional rainy season (by this stage we had measured more than 800 mm) that had made conditions unsuitable for a breeding attempt. (Calle Schlettwein advised however that the pair in his garden had made a breeding attempt). Or perhaps the quality of the accommodation offered had deteriorated to the point where it was no longer acceptable to the birds. Perhaps we should start looking out for another huge sisal stump.

Now we shall have to wait another year to see whether they return or perhaps whether

another pair claims this site. As neither of these two was ringed it may be impossible to tell whether future birds are indeed the same pair or not.



Mad Monty and his mate - Photo: Neil Thomson

Summary of the 2011 Summer Wetland Bird Counts

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Namibia was blessed with extraordinary rains in most parts of the country early in 2011 and this is evident in the results of the summer wetland bird counts. Access to many of the count sites was difficult due to the wet conditions. In fact, the count at Lake Oponono had to be abandoned because of the muddy conditions. Rain interrupted many counts and even at Sandwich Harbour the counters had to endure about two hours of pouring rain before continuing with the count. Oddly enough, Tsutsab Vlei, near Tsintsabis in northern Namibia, was bone dry when the counts were done.

At most of the large dams there were hardly any geese and ducks and a paucity of waders. The flamingos must have all gone to Etosha or Makgadigadi as very few (for this time of the year) were seen at the coast.

Two sites were added to the counts: Otjivero Dam which was last counted in April 2001 and Blaauw's Dam¹, a small dam on the northern outskirts of Keetmanshoop. In total

¹ Named thus by the author because at the dam wall there is a brick-built pedestal where, in the foundations, it is written "Gebou S.T. Blaauw 1959".

33 sites were counted, and that includes the three areas at the Orange River Mouth that are counted together with South African colleagues. The most birds were counted at Walvis Bay (119 860) and the same place also holds the joint record with the Orange River Mouth Ramsar site for the most species seen (48). Numbers at Sandwich Harbour were very low, presumably because the mudflats were completely flooded due to the rain (water extended 5 km past the point where it normally ends).

The usual gaggle of rarities popped up at Walvis Bay, Sandwich Harbour and the Mile 4 Saltworks whereas Pink-backed Pelicans were recorded for the first time (in the counts) at Otjivero Dam.

Many thanks to the counters who braved the “interesting” conditions to help with the counts and keep this project going. Your efforts are truly appreciated.

Note: See the last page of this edition for a table of the counts by location.

Weaver Colonies in Namibia

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PHOWN (Photos of Weaver Nests) already has over 800 records of 33 weaver species globally, and most of the records include colony size. In Namibia there are PHOWN records for six species: Red-billed Buffalo Weaver (4), White-browed Sparrow-Weaver (7), Sociable Weaver (1), Lesser Masked Weaver (2), Chestnut Weaver (42), and Southern Masked Weaver (5).

The Chestnut Weaver records are largely the Nest Record Cards which can, for the first time ever, be viewed on the internet (see http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown_sp.php?Sp=796).

The Handbook of the Birds of the World, Vol. 15 (HBW) is the most recently published summary of weaver information and for

Chestnut Weaver it gives the following: “highly colonial, e.g. more than 100 trees each held 40-100 nests at site in Namibia”. Data currently in PHOWN gives more detailed information on colony size for this species as up to 250 nests per colony, mean 86.0 (n=30).

The HBW does not have any data on colony sizes for the White-browed Sparrow-Weaver. Data currently in PHOWN gives colony size for this species as 1-35 nests, mean 12.8 (n=60). Neil Thomson and Gudrun Middendorff have submitted several interesting White-browed Sparrow-Weaver colonies on man-made structures.

No species has enough data yet - more records are needed to study variation in colony size geographically and in different years. Records from long ago can be submitted if you have a photo, GPS location, and date (nest count and other data is preferable but if you don't have this, still submit the record). To browse records and find out about submitting records, read

<http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown.php>.

A Different Kind of Birding Part II:

Birds on the Stamps of South West Africa

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South West Africa – the future Namibia - was declared a German Protectorate on 7 August 1884. Just under four years later, on 7 July 1888, the first stamps were used in Otjimbingue.

In 1891 the Eagle issue appeared and was used in the whole country. So the first stamps used in SWA had a bird as their image, be it “only” a graphical Reichsadler.

