



LANIOTURDUS

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Editorial

Although I am the editor of Lanioturdus, Lanioturdus is not my journal. Lanioturdus is your journal (i.e. the members’ journal). However, for it to be truly the members’ journal it needs contributions from the members.

I have been fortunate in having been able to obtain sufficient articles to have allowed me to produce four editions for three consecutive years (actually this year there will be a special fifth edition) but it is somewhat disconcerting how few people actually contribute articles. Without the contributions of the likes of Eckart Demasius and Holger Kolberg I would have been very hard pressed to find sufficient material and I would then probably have found myself in another of those editor’s nightmare situations of having to write the bulk of the articles myself. A big thank you to all who have contributed especially those who contribute regularly - to the rest of you out there - why not try your hand at writing - if something interests you it will most probably interest other birders as well.

And it is not only articles for which I am looking. Your observations of rare birds, off range species, birds new to an area etc. are all worthy of a mention in Lanioturdus. We are not yet atlasing in Namibia and records of these sightings form valuable contributions to Namibian ornithology. I have mentioned it before - Lanioturdus is sent to the Niven Library of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology and the librarian, Margaret Koopman, has assured me that bird club journals are indeed used by researchers

The Damara Tern Mating Game

Eckart Demasius
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Towards the end of each year I visit the Damara Terns breeding north of Wlotzkasbaken. My first visit in 2010 was on the last weekend in October and to my amazement no terns had yet arrived. Rather late, I thought.

I was there again a week later and by this time seven Damara terns had arrived. Five of them were rather restless, flying to and fro, landing and moving about and making a lot of noise at the same time. Ah, I thought, this must be the mating game, something I had never witnessed before.

Very soon the flock of seven terns was reduced to five and then to three birds, always exhibiting the same procedure, flying to and fro, sitting down and making a lot of noise. The birds would walk up to each other and pass each other at a close distance. One bird remained sitting, presumably the female.

All of a sudden the presumed female bird flew off with only one bird following her. They flew further inland and landed not far from the road leading to Henties Bay. Here the ritual of walking up to each other was repeated a number of times.



Then they would sit still for quite a while and the procedure would start all over again. Now the male bird started flicking his tail and some of his back feathers would also start ruffling,

presumably all to impress the lady. I could not help but see a lot of parallels with humans!!



This ritual had by now been going on for more than two hours. Once the pair had separated from the other birds, the others stayed behind and made no further advances.

The female bird flew off at a very low height and landed in an area covered in little “dunes”, i.e. some sand that had collected in an area where there was some vegetation. The male followed the female bird immediately.

Again the feather ruffling and the chatter took place with very quiet periods in between. Then the female bird started sitting much lower on the ground, as if incubating an egg.



The male bird now moved very close to the female bird; he virtually sat next to her. I expected that the birds would start to mate at any time, so my camera was ready at high speed burst mode to document what birds do to ensure the existence of another generation.

After another long period the birds started to wiggle their tails again and they moved even closer to each other.

I started to let the camera run - just as well because the male bird started to mount the female and I was very happy to be able to document this act. In a flash it was all over though, to be exact it only took three frames at high speed burst mode of my camera!! And that is what they come for down here all the way from West Africa!!!



After the mating the female bird seemed to be quite content with her new situation while the male bird spent more than half an hour preening and making sure he was still attractive to the female. A rather vain little chap!!

Once the preening ritual was completed the birds flew off at a high altitude towards the sea and I soon lost them in the distance.



As we know Damara terns overwinter in West Africa and their purpose in coming to the Namibian coast is to breed.

The mating game is quite an elaborate one, my documentation of it took just on four hours. The mating itself is short and sweet and purposeful.

Now the laying and incubating of the egg begins and once the chick has hatched the worrisome period to ensure its survival starts.

Eventually the new generation will be ready and fully grown by the end of February and soon thereafter they will leave for West Africa and the cycle will start all over again.