

# LANIOTURDUS

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### NAMIBIA BIRD CLUB

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and  
the Southern African Ornithological Society

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Swallows" no "natural" breeding sites are known at present and all sites are manmade structures (Earle 1987).

Not many observations were made at the colonies but the erratic breeding behaviour of South African Cliff Swallows appears to be directly linked to rainfall in the area. This is in accordance with finding of Earle (1986) that "it also seemed as if a certain minimal amount of rain was needed before there was an upsurge in the number of new clutches started.

The use of the very vulnerable Zaris culvert as a breeding area is perhaps a measure of the desperation of these birds to find a suitable nesting site in their breeding range.

**Table 2.** South African Cliff Swallow clutch sizes at the Maltahöhe and Zaris colonies.

Clutch Size	1	2	3
No. of nests with eggs	10	10	1
No. of nests with pulli	6	22	5

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#### ? THORN BIRD ?

SUZI VAN DE REEP

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Some time ago, on 7th February 1989 at 10h30 to be precise, on a typical summer day, I was trying to get some paper work done as I sat in our little office at Namutoni where we lived. I always enjoyed the distractions of the bird-life outside my window, but on this morning it was the behaviour of the Bushmen that distracted me. Three of them were staring up into an Acacia tortilis that is about 10 feet tall. Curiosity overcame me and I went out with my binoculars. Initially all I could see was a bird which had long red legs and somehow didn't belong in an acacia tree. Then I caught the iridescent blue-green plumage on the body and the odd glimpse of a reddish-brown eye glinting between the leaflets.

That was when I had to fetch the bird book to verify my suspicion. Could it really be ...? was it...? well, it definitely was a Gallinule, and according to the picture it had to be the Lesser Gallinule (*Porphyryla alleni*)! There was the cobalt blue frontal shield distinctly visible above the red beak. But what was it doing nine feet up an acacia tree? The closest water was a rain puddle at the camp gate, about 500 yards away of the swimming pool, about the same distance... I began to wonder if the bird was feeling alright (in it's head, you know)... but it seemed fine. It poked around in the branches and then stayed motionless for along while.

After observing it closely and enjoying the colours, admiring the long toes and double checking with the book, I took a couple of photographs - not an easy task with all the tiny acacia leaflets obscuring essential features. Finally I returned to my desk and the paper war. On checking the tree later, I found that the bird had departed. I didn't see it again, but there was a family of African crakes (*Crex egregia*) with five chicks at the puddle at the gate as I drove out of the camp that same afternoon. These were two very special water bird sightings, in one day and all within the camp too!



...And a Lesser Gallinule in a thorn tree!