

LANIOTURDUS

VOL. 44 (1) 2011

www.namibiabirdclub.org

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Editorial

Bird populations are dynamic – always on the move! I see this at my own home. I have lived in this house for over 23 years and up until about four years ago I had never seen a southern red bishop there – in 2009 alone I ringed 136 at this location! In September 2010 I experienced an irruption of common waxbills, a species I very seldom see in my garden. Over a period of 122 days until the end of the year we ringed 205 and then the numbers seen and caught dropped off sharply suggesting that most of them had moved on. In Lanioturdus 43(4) I mentioned the five pied crows I saw on 11/08/2010 across two Quarter Degree Squares between Rundu Airport and Ncaute where the species was not recorded in the Atlas. I had not seen this species there in about ten previous trips and I have not seen it there again since then on my subsequent trips through this area.

The above examples illustrate how dynamic certain populations actually are – some suddenly appearing and remaining, others merely moving through an area. With the climate changes currently being experienced we are seeing the earlier arrival of some migrants and also later departure dates. (In Lanioturdus 43-4 we published some of Günther Friederich's observations on the early arrival of grey-headed kingfisher and European bee-eater in our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section).

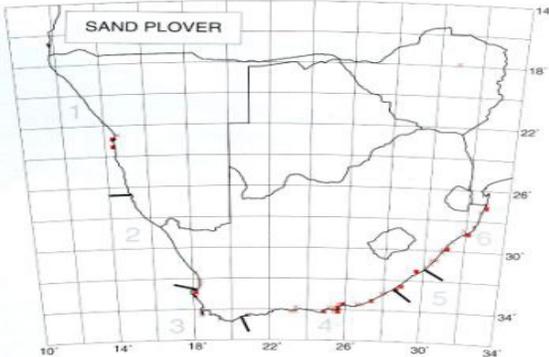
In our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section in this issue we have a report of a Sabine's gull seen at Kalkheuwel waterhole in the Etosha National Park – as far as I have been able to determine this constitutes

Well done to Mark Boorman who first sighted this rarity and for sharing this information. What a wonderful way to start a new birding year!! This record might just be the first official sighting for Swakopmund.



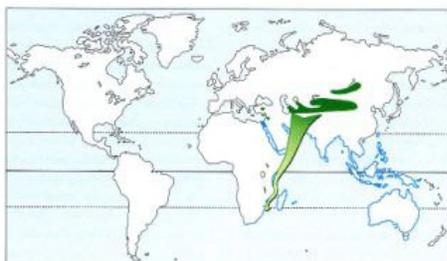
Photo: Eckart Demasius

At home I studied the literature on the Greater Sand Plover. The distribution map of the Atlas of Southern African Birds indicates that there are very few records along the Namibian coast.



The Greater Sand plover migrates along the East African Coast southwards and seems to prefer certain river estuaries as indicated on the distribution map with *only a handful of recorded sightings from Walvis Bay along the Namibian coast.* (Phil Hockey). The Atlas for Southern African Birds also makes reference to some records from Walvis Bay only.

SAND PLOVER
Charadrius leschenaultii



References:

Hockey P and Douie C: The Waders of Southern Africa, The Struik Publishing Group (Pty) Ltd Cornelis Struik House, 80 McKenzie Street Cape Town 8001, 1995

Harrison, J.A, Allan, D.G., Underhill, L.G., Herremans, M., Tree, A.J., Parker, V. & Brown, C.J. (eds). 1997. The Atlas of Southern African birds. Vol. 1: Non-passerines. BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg, 1997

A Trip to the South, May 2010

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Recent issues of *Lanioturdus* have featured a number of trip reports on excursions to the Kavango and Caprivi Regions of Namibia. The south, however, seems to be a rather neglected birding destination. So, when Holger and Claire Kolberg suggested that we might like to join their group at Holoog, where they were participating in the “Hunsberg Hellride”, we jumped at the opportunity. Quite why any seemingly sane and normal person would want to put his/her body and bicycle through that sort of punishment is quite beyond us especially when there are birding and ringing options available, but - to each his own, and anyway, ours is not to reason why.

I have done relatively little birding in southern Namibia and saw this trip as an opportunity to extend my lifelist possibly by finding cinnamon-breasted warbler or black-headed canary. Big mistake – it seems that one seldom finds the species one is specifically seeking and this trip was no exception.

We decided to start our southern birdlist at Mariental and it got off to a good start with the sighting of a bunch of marabou storks mooching about outside the abattoir there. We ticked off a number of raptors and a few other species which are identifiable from a moving vehicle before stopping at Naute Dam for a quick look at the waterbirds. Here we found both inland cormorant species, African darter, great white pelican, sacred ibis, little egret, little grebe, Egyptian goose and grey heron before proceeding to Holoog.

On arrival one of the first species we saw was Karoo long-billed lark which was a lifer for Gudrun. Then it was over to the serious business of catching and ringing the southern birds. Holger had promised us hordes of larklike buntings and white-throated canaries and you can imagine our bitter disappointment when we were unable to find, much less catch, either of these species.

On the second day we eventually caught a couple of white-throated canaries but it was not until the third day that we saw our first larklike bunting and it was only a few hours later that we actually caught one. Bokmakieries were calling all around us but showed no interest in our snap traps and kept well away from the mistnets while at night we heard a pair of spotted eagle-owls calling nearby.

We managed to ring a number of species including red-faced mousebird, mountain wheatear, pale-winged starling, Cape wagtail and common scimitarbill. Later perusal of the Atlas indicated that 24 of the species we saw around Holoog were not recorded in this particular quarter degree square (QDS) during the Atlas period. Lack of coverage in this remote area seems to me to be a more likely explanation than range extensions as in most cases the species had been recorded in adjacent QDS's although it seems that the nearest Atlas records for both green-winged pytilia and cardinal woodpecker were some 50 to 80 km away.

On the Sunday we travelled some 17 km to the west to Augurabis where we met up with the cyclists for lunch. We set up some snap traps at this stunning place and were rewarded with Karoo scrub-robin, Cape robin-chat and the white-bellied form of the mountain wheatear. We later caught a grey morph mountain wheatear at Holoog. While not a rarity this morph seems to be considerably less common in Namibia than the various black forms. Also back at Holoog we caught a speckled pigeon in a mistnet – a somewhat unusual catch as these large birds tend to bounce out of nets.



White-bellied form of the mountain wheatear – Photo Neil Thomson



Grey morph of the mountain wheatear – Photo Neil Thomson

On the Monday a late afternoon trip to a waterhole where we were promised “lots of birds” produced little but we did see common ostrich and Karoo korhaan en route, the latter another lifer for Gudrun.

And then suddenly it was Tuesday morning and time to leave. We took a detour to the Cañon Roadhouse which had been rebuilt in the three years since I was last there and managed to add a few more species to our list including pygmy falcon, jackal buzzard and chat flycatcher, the last yet another lifer for Gudrun.

Road counting our way home again it was very obvious to us that the south has a very healthy raptor population but the raptors were seen mostly in those areas where there are still overhead telephone lines or electricity transmission lines up to 66 kV which are carried on wooden pylons. This left us wondering what impact the removal of the overhead telephone lines has had on raptor

populations. Have the birds dispersed to other locations where suitable elevated perching sites are still to be found? Or have the populations crashed? The south is not noted for its tall trees so elevated perches are in short supply down there once the telephone poles are gone.

All in all we managed to ring 66 birds of 22 species between us without having hordes of birds in the nets at any given time. We also recaptured a southern masked-weaver which Holger had ringed the previous year. Our “southern” birdlist was 72 species seen or heard but since the cinnamon-breasted warbler and the black-headed canary were not amongst them we have reason to “head south” again sometime in the future.

Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 3: Cormorants and Darter

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The third article in the series on trends in Namibian waterbird populations summarises count data for cormorants and darter for the period 1977 to December 2008. For each species the Red Data Book (RDB) status, both global and Namibian, is given, the population trend as per Wetlands International, the number of times the species was counted, the number of times it has passed the 1% population criterion, the maximum count and the sites where it has passed the 1% population criterion.

The local trend is calculated for the period 1991 to 2008 only because continuous data is available for that time. The computer programme TRIM was used for these analyses (see an earlier publication for the selection criteria and methods). (*Lanioturdus 43-2 – Ed.*) For each species the number of sites used in the analysis, the number of observed counts (this includes zero counts), and the sites

containing more than 10% of the total number counted are given. A trend and slope are given. A slope value of 1 would indicate a perfectly stable population, whereas any value above 1 means a positive trend and a value of less than 1 a negative trend. Population trends are graphically presented as indices relative to a base year (in this case 1991) and thus all have a value of 1 for 1991. An index value of 2 indicates a doubling of the population relative to 1991 and an index of 0.5 would mean half of the 1991 figure.

Trends for two species of cormorant and African Darter could be determined. Reed Cormorant are deemed to be declining whilst African Darter are increasing. Although there is some count data for Cape, Bank and Crowned Cormorants this is considered not representative because their main aggregations are on the Namibian islands and data for these was not available and hence no analysis was done for these species.

(Larger scale replications of the graphs in this article are attached to the end of this edition).

3.1 White-breasted Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax lucidus*)¹³

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern
Namibia RDB Status: ?
WI Trend: Stable



Photo: Eckart Demasius

¹³ Names follow Hockey, P.A.R., Dean, W.R.J. and Ryan, P.G. (eds) 2005. *Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa, VIIIth Edition*. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, South Africa.