

CONTENTS

VOLUME 36 (3) 2003

OSBORNE, T. O. Editorial	1
BOIX-HINZEN, C & M. BOORMAN. Helping behaviour in Gray's Lark <i>Ammomanes grayi</i>	2
DANTU, S.& M. BOORMAN. A homing pelican—part II.	4
DANTU, S. Ugab birding week	5
BOORMAN, M. Bird ringing in Namibia	6
PAXTON, M. Some Unusual Sightings at Shamvura Restcamp – Okavango River	7
BOORMAN, M. Second coastal record of Buff-spotted Flufftail <i>Sarothrura elegans</i> for Namibia	8
OSCHADLEUS, D. National ringing training courses	10
HEINRICH, D. Pygmy Kingfisher <i>Ispidina picta</i> at Epupa Falls, Namibia	11
OSCHADLEUS, D, BM DYER, RJM CRAWFORD, & L UPFOLD Sociable Weaver roadside nest densities in southern Namibia	12
BIRD NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS	18

Editorial

Tim Osborne

The dry season is truly upon us with the east winds howling in the interior and the berg winds affecting the coast. News reports state that the winds at Lüderitz were reaching 140 km/h. I wonder if there were any birders there to look for vagrants to the coastal desert? On our farm we have hardly seen any Queleas or Chestnut Weavers in months. I wonder where they have gone, in search of food and water I presume. The rodent high we have been experiencing for the past three years crashed and now the effects are evident in the form of missing birds. Gone are the Barn Owls, Black-shouldered Kites, Marsh Owls and even the Pearl-spotted Owls are scarce.

For those of you with Internet access you should check out the website for SAFRING. Go to www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/safring_index.htm. The site has life histories of all the birds that have been ringed. Each week more histories are added to the site. If you have ever wondered how many African Hawk-Eagles have been ringed and where you can check it out. It might surprise you how many have been ringed since 1948. There have been 244 birds ringed and with the start of computerized records in 1975 Namibia has the most birds ringed at 76. There have been 10 recoveries with the longest distance being 795 km and oldest time being 22 years, 9 months and 21 days.

It is nice to see more articles being submitted by members from the coast. Lots of interesting birds with some out of place like Black Kites, Flufftails and breeding Gray's Larks. I have requested the annual Chairman's and Financial reports for those of us who could not attend the AGM and I will put them in the next edition. I, like many of the outlying members, wonder if any of the outings publicized in the Bird Call were attended, as there have not been any reports submitted to the *Lanioturdus*. These are important to write up because those of us who cannot attend meetings in Windhoek and outings close to Windhoek would like to know what is being seen and more about club activities.

A HOMING PELICAN part II

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In the previous issue, we said good-bye to Adolf at the bird platform near Walvis Bay, little knowing that we would meet again, and that he would be introduced to Keith and Gail Wearne of Walvis Bay also.

Adolf was not content in the company of other pelicans, and set off in search of human company. This search had him visiting homes, cafes and restaurants in Walvis Bay and Langstrand. The first few days post-release were uneventful but soon Keith was inundated with callers reporting an unwanted pelican. Murphy would have it that Adolf moved on before Keith could fetch him.

To cut a long story short, these events culminated in a call from the local constabulary. Could Keith come and bail Adolf out. A municipality employee who had found him on the road opposite Dolphin Beach had brought him to the police station. By this time Keith was livid at having his Saturday disturbed by pelican updates, and to add insult to injury, the rescuer demanded a N\$500.00 reward for having saved Keith's young ostrich!!! Keith's response was to tell the chap that not only was it not an @#!*# ostrich, but that he was welcome to keep it.

Gail's cooler head prevailed and Adolf spent the night, with fellow lost souls, at the Missions to Seafarers.

We had quite a debate followed as to what would be Adolf's ultimate fate. Should we attempt another release nearby and risk conflict with people again, or release him further afield? Sandwich Harbour, Cape Cross and the Ugab River Mouth were all considered.

Eventually Rod Braby released him at Sandwich and spent about 2 hours monitoring his interaction with and integration into a flock of pelicans there. This was in March and we haven't heard from Adolf since. (Editor. Will there be a part III to this saga? Stay tuned).

UGAB BIRDING WEEK

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Berndt Brell of Save the Rhino Trust organised a week of birding tuition for the SRT guides and trackers during the first week of June. The purpose of the course was to teach bird ID skills and the principles and basics of bird ringing. It was also viewed as an opportunity to involve local communities in birding and to share our interest and knowledge with people who have fewer opportunities in life in general and to try to dispel the myth that conservation in general and birding in particular are elitist past-times.

This event was announced at the Bird Club's AGM, but was not included in the next Bird Call nor was it announced via the internet, as other notices have been. We also contacted as many active, licensed ringers as we could. Unfortunately, the response was dismal. I can only guess at the reasons for this as no-one gave any feedback as to why they could not come. Could it be that birding in Namibia is elitist after all, or that the Bird Club membership prefers the environs of Windhoek?

A total of 7 guides/trackers attended the course. The instructors/demonstrators were Keith Wearne, Mark Boorman, Sandra Dantu, Tim Osborne and Berndt Brell. Also present were Gail Wearne, Laurel Osborne and Denham Graig.

The course comprised bird ID in the field, concentrating on habitat, jizz, behaviour and vocalisations, and an interactive pop quiz using the Roberts' CD ROM with excursions up and down the Ugab River. We also ventured into the adjacent plains to find different species in different habitats. We demonstrated the use of mist-nets and Bal-Chatr trapping for ringing sessions, during which 153 new birds of 20 species were caught and ringed.

Each participant was presented with a certificate at the end of the course.

Some of the highlights included realising just how small a Pearlspotted Owl *Glaucidium perlatum* is in the hand; watching Tim herd a Ruppell's Korhaan *Eupodotis rueppelli* into his giant mist-net; finding a family of Burchell's Courser *Cursorius rufus* complete with chicks, and my ringing lifer in the form of a Barecheeked Babbler *Turdoides gymnogenys*. The non-birding highlight was the movement of elephants through our camp. A herd of 12 adults with 4 calves passed through one evening and again the next afternoon while Mark and I were in the outdoor shower. My feelings swung from petrified to privileged.

The most heartening of all was to meet these guides and trackers who despite their daily hardships have embraced the ideas behind conservation and conservancies, and from whom we could all learn so much.

BIRD RINGING IN NAMIBIA

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Bird ringing is often a natural progression in the life of a birder. It opens up a whole new way of observing birds and their behaviour: what do they do, where do they go, how long do they live?

At a scientific level, ringing projects attempt to answer these questions. At an individual level, ringing means different things to different folks.

There is the indescribable experience of holding a tiny Dusky Sunbird in your hand, the grappling with an African Penguin to get its flipper band in place, the rush when a raptor goes down onto your Bal-Chatr.

There are the early morning starts to get your nets set before the birds get going, when it seems as if all of nature is still asleep, but you have to leave your warm

bed or sleeping bag. Your reward is a net of birds needing rings or retrapped birds wearing rings already — who ringed this? —where? —and when?

Then there are the people. Young and old. Loners and flockers. Scientists and hobbyists. From all walks of life. From all parts of the world. All sharing a common passion.

Bird ringing is done under the auspices of Afring, the co-ordinating centre for ringing in Africa, based at the University of Cape Town. Training is required to obtain a ringing licence from Afring, after which a ringer may obtain rings and other equipment. No licence, no rings issued. In addition, a permit from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism's Directorate of Scientific Services is needed to trap and ring birds in Namibia.

Ringing in Namibia will have its 40th anniversary this ringing season. What better opportunity to generate new interest and fresh enthusiasm.

One of the initiatives planned is the setting up of a ringers' forum on the internet, similar to sabirdnet and ringersnet.

If anyone is interested in learning more about this fascinating subject, please feel free to contact Mark or Sandra.

Some Unusual Sightings at Shamvura Restcamp – Okavango River

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Red-headed Quelea

On the morning of 26 March 2003 I observed a small group of about 12-15 birds flying into the reedbed on the edge of the Okavango River close to Shamvura Restcamp. This group had at least two brightly coloured males amongst them. We were not able to verify any further details of the group. The brightly coloured males, however, made identification easier even though the group was observed