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## EDITORIAL

The publication of this copy of *Lanioturdus* has been considerably delayed and this copy covers the June, September and December 1999 editions. It will immediately strike you that this is probably the least substantial copy of the magazine for a long time. We have a problem – for some reason 1999 seems to have represented the low point of everyones birding and ornithological careers – the articles and other materials have just not come in at all this year.

The success of the magazine and the Club as a whole depends on member participation. The committee recognises that most members are passive for the most part and choose to go their own way for most of their birding. However, we can't rely on just a few people to keep us going all the time. We need new members, new activities and new vision for the future. This is really a plea to you to get more involved in the future and to help the committee keep the Club going. If we are unable to keep bringing *Lanioturdus* out on a regular basis we are in real trouble.

On the positive side of things – the Club in conjunction with the Namibia Nature Foundation and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, is planning to start up a number of new projects as well as revive a number of older ones, including Raptor Road Counts and some form of atlassing in the future. We will probably put out a special edition of *Lanioturdus* in the New Year giving details of each of the projects.

A wonderful festive season to all of you – and good birding.



## UNUSUAL BIRDS ON THE COAST

Bruno Nebe

Turnstone Tours, P.O. Box 307, Swakopmund

These observations were made on the Namib Coast mostly around Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and Sandwich.

### Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

I saw a new bird the other day (28/4/99). I suspect it to be a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*). It was sitting together with Kelp Gulls. It was slightly smaller than the average gulls around – which had YELLOW legs (the yellow of the typical plastic raincoat), with a more slender and slightly shorter bill (with the red dot). The black on the wing was not as black as on the Kelp Gull, but rather a dull black or even very dark grey. The head seemed to be more elegant (not as hefty as a Kelp Gull) and the eye seemed to be slightly lighter in colour than that of the Kelp Gull. A problem with my Sasol guide is that it depicts both gulls with light coloured eyes. Having seen this, I and a South African guide (Jeff Crane from Cape Town with his birding clients) inspected all other gulls and found that not a single one had a light colour eye. I checked with Newmans which shows that the Kelp has a dark eye and the Lesser a paler eye. The other interesting feature was that whenever this unidentified gull found something to feed on, it was immediately taken away by a Kelp Gull. The only way it could keep its mussels (they were feeding on black mussel) was to fly away and hide. The bird was seen several times and one should be careful not to go by the yellow feet only. I have seen a number of Kelp Gulls with yellow feet, but they were defiantly not LBBGs.

### Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)

On 28/4/99 I saw two Dunlin on the Walvis Bay lagoon. They were feeding together with a group of Curlew Sandpipers. They were pecking on the water's edge, jabbing or stabbing at insects (flies) similar to a Broadbill Sandpiper – not in the water. They were slightly (10–15%) smaller than the Curlews with shorter bills. The bill was not as curved as the Curlew's bill.

They had no marked eye-stripe. The breast was slightly (lightly) streaked with white underparts. When they flew, their tails had a black centre (wedge) and whiter edges. Jeff Crane, who had seen one Dunlin recently at Langebaan was sure that they were indeed Dunlins.

### Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

On the 15/1/99 at the Swakop River mouth I spotted a Red-throated Pipit. The bird sat together with two Cape Wagtail on the high water mark feeding on what I assumed to be sand-flies. The bird looked like a pipit, was heavily streaked (very dark) on a light coloured chest. It had what appeared to be a rufous coloured collar, but not very defined. The underparts were white with a streaked rump. The bill was bicoloured with the base being fleshy in colour and the tip dark. It had a slight eye-stripe and the legs were orange/grey. This bird was seen on various occasions by myself and others. The last time I saw it was on the 7/4/99.

### Black-legged Kittiwake *Larus tridactyla*

On the 5/2/99 I saw a gull that was the same size as the Hartlaub Gull *Larus hartlaubii*. It had a yellow bill (bright yellow) and very dark legs. The legs seem to be shorter than those of either the Grey-headed *Larus cirrocephalus* or the Hartlaub Gulls. The flight was more buoyant than that of the other gulls (a bit like that of a Sabine's Gull). The underwing was white except for the wingtips which were black. It was only the tips of the wing that were black, the rest were white underneath and grey on top. The tail was white and square. It appeared that the grey back led into a grey upper neck and it had a grey smudge behind its eye. It was silent, and was together with about 50 mixed gulls (one Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* was also present). It was later identified as a Black-legged Kittiwake.

### Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

On the 13/3/99 at the Sandwich freshwater lagoon I found a Pectoral Sandpiper. It was together with two Curlew Sandpipers. It seemed to be slightly smaller and more slender than the Curlews. The beak was shorter and not as curved. It was lighter in colour at the base. It had a white eye-stripe with a darker cap (dark rufous). The legs were orange/yellow. The

streaked breast changed in a definite line into a white underpart. The back was dark checkered. A white shoulder as on the Common Sandpiper. Photographs later confirmed that it was indeed a Pectoral Sandpiper.

#### American Black Skimmer

I have following notes on the bird reported in previous copies of *Lanioturdus*. I saw a skimmer like the African Skimmer except it had a black or very dark bill tip. The first third of the bill was very dark and formed a curve away from the bill tip. The lower mandible was marked longer than the upper mandible. The upper part of the bird was very dark. Underparts whitish with the pale colouration extending right to the bill, and around the bill was white. The legs seemed to be yellow or orange, but because the bird was flying, I did not get a good look. The underside of the wing was light with darker edges (outer) and tips (not black). The leading edge was white while the trailing edge was darker.

#### Australian Gannet *Morus serrator*

I found an Australian Gannet at Sandwich Harbour. Compared with the Cape Gannet, this one had a much shorter gular stripe (really short) and the outer tail feathers were white. Most striking of all was the dark blue eye colour which is quite different to the watery blue colour of the Cape Gannet.

#### Lesser Gallinule *Porphyryla alleni*

This bird was found in Swakopmund next to the Alfa Ko-op shop in the centre of town. There is a small piece of vegetation and the bird hid there for quite some time. The identification of the bird was confirmed when it was eventually run over and killed.

#### Black Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*

The bird, an adult female, was observed for two weeks in the garden in Fischreier Street No 45 and then disappeared.

#### Southern Olive Thrush *Turdus olivaceus*

A single bird was seen on the 2/7/1999 at Sandwich Harbour, on the

northern lagoon (freshwater). Only one bird could be spotted together with a few Cape Wagtails.

Other interesting species such as Broadbill Sandpiper, Redshank, Grey Phalarope, Rednecked Phalarope, American Golden Plover have been sighted on various occasions this year.

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## WEST ETOSHA BIRD MONITORING PROJECT

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In 1998, Leon van Rooyen of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism requested the Namibian Bird Club to embark upon a bird monitoring project in Etosha National Park, with special reference to the western sector. Dr Rob Simmons, Dieter Ludwig, Hardi Dedekind and Suzan Mallet-Veal discussed how to implement the work.

The aims of the project were decided as follows:

- To conduct a bird census, using the Atlas squares
- Identify Bateleur Eagle nesting sites
- Verify the presence of Egyptian Vultures, especially to confirm nesting activities in the Omutambe Mauwe area
- Augment current research work in the park

The first field trip was scheduled for March 1999.

For the benefit of those who have not had previous experience of atlassing, I have inserted a brief explanation of the system employed:

Quarter-degree square maps are used as reference points for sightings, each square has its own unique code, for example 1914BA covers the area of Otjovasando. A GPS reading provides an accurate position of the squares