

# Ornithological Observations



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Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

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## REMARKABLE SIGHTINGS IN THE K GALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK FOR THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2011

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## REMARKABLE SIGHTINGS IN THE KGALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK FOR THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2011

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This paper serves to document interesting bird sightings in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park that my colleagues and I have had the pleasure of witnessing in the first quarter of 2011.

Having recently transferred to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KTP) as Biotechnician at SANParks, I have had the pleasure of seeing some very unusual and exciting birds. The beginning of this year had been a particularly wet one. The abundant rains has lead to some very interesting sightings.

Dr Gus Mills had a sighting of a Greater Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* on the 14 January 2011 at Kij Kij waterhole up the Nossob River.

On a trip through the KTP in late January I was fortunate enough to encounter a Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus* in the Mata Mata rest camp. The bird was heard on the evening of 28 January 2011. On the morning of 29 January 2011 it was still in the vicinity and it responded to me whistling its call. I was able to get a few photographs and a recording of its call. Interestingly the bird alternated between the female and male calls, the one immediately following the other.

Later that same day on arrival at Nossob Rest camp we encountered a leucistic kite *Milvus spp.* From a distance the bird looked much like an egret perched due to its white complexion.



Figure 1 – Black Cuckoo at Mata Mata rest camp.

It seemed to be part of a flock of kites, in excess of 60 birds, that contained both Black Kite *Milvus migrans* and Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus parasitus*. The individual seemed quite at ease and stayed in the area for approximately a week (Figures 2 and 3).

On 1 February 2011 Dr Gus Mills witnessed a flock of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* fly over Twee Rivieren rest camp.

A single specimen of African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus* was observed at Samevloeing waterhole in the south of the park on 4 February 2011. This bird seemed to be in transit and was only around for a few days.

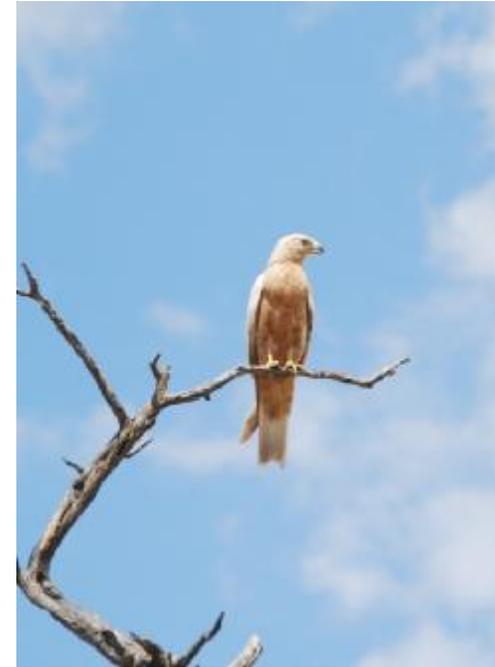
A few days after the African Jacana disappeared a rare form of Jackal Buzzard *Buteo rufofuscus* with an all-white breast was seen just north of Samevloeing.



**Figure 2** – Side on view of the leucistic Kite

In Figure 4 one can see the Jackal Buzzard with the almost entirely white breast bar a few chestnut blotches. This individual was seen on numerous occasions by different staff members in the southern parts of the park over a period of 2 months.

In early April after some more good rains, Samevloeiing water hole proved again to be a hot spot for sightings. On 6 April 2011 I photographed a pair of Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* with three chicks feeding in the shallow water (Figure 5.). They were around for approximately 2 weeks and I was at the waterhole when they took flight, not disturbed in anyway way, and they have not returned since.



**Figure 3** – Front view of the leucistic Kite.

The very next day – 7 April 2011 I was working at Samevloeiing waterhole when a juvenile Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* landed and proceeded to forage for aquatic invertebrates. It hunted and caught a few water beetles of the family *Dytiscidae* before it preened briefly and took flight. This short visit lasted all of about 20 minutes. Figure 6 shows the individual and after some consultation with various people we agreed that it was a juvenile Little Egret. The lack of yellow feet, a largely grey, not black bill and olive green not black legs caused some confusion initially.

Following on from this sighting, a few days later an Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* landed at a rainwater puddle at the workshop in Twee Rivieren.



**Figure 4** – Jackal Buzzard displaying an all-white breast

Probably the sighting of the season in the south of the park was a male Chestnut Weaver *Ploceus rubiginosus*. It appeared at Samevloeing waterhole in full breeding plumage on 12 April 2011. I was fortunate enough to get a couple of pictures of this bird (Figure 7). The bird was in a large group of birds congregating in small bushes in the flooded surrounds of the actual waterhole.

Extensive efforts were made in the proceeding days to re-locate it, but we were unable to find the bird again. Two previous sightings of the Chestnut Weaver were reported in January 2011. Whittington (2011) reported a sighting from Nossob Rest Camp and a week later another sighting was reported from Tswalu Private Nature Reserve. It is likely that these three sightings may be of the same bird.



**Figure 5** – Black-winged Stilt with chick at Samevloeing waterhole

Scratching around at the sewage settling ponds at Twee Rivieren looking for unconfirmed reports of a Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* we came across a dead small heron shown in Figures 8 and 9. Figure 8 shows its total length which was just on 60 cm. Figure 9 shows the rufous streaking which continued up its neck. The bird seems to best fit the description of a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*.



*Figure 6 – Juvenile Little Egret at Samevloeiing waterhole*



*Figure 7 – Male Chestnut Weaver alongside a Sociable Weaver*



**Figure 8** –Showing total length



**Figure 9** – Rufous streaking on the scapulars

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**References**

**Whittington, M 2011.** Chestnut Weaver *Ploceus rubiginosus*, a brand new visitor to South Africa. *Ornithological Observations* Vol 2:32-33