

LANIOTURDUS

Volume 52 No 2

June 2019



Journal of the Namibia Bird Club
<https://www.namibiabirdclub.org>

About the Namibia Bird Club

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. The club's mission is to contribute to Namibian ornithology by, amongst other things, arranging regular birding outings, conducting bird ringing and atlasing excursions and educating the public about the value of birds. To achieve this, we organise monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Water Care Works and occasional weekend trips further afield. Bird club members also participate in the African Waterbird Census twice a year.

Experienced birders are more than happy to help beginners and novices on these outings. If you have a transport problem or would like to share transport please contact a committee member. Depending on the availability of speakers and suitable material we present occasional lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive the bird club's journal, *Lanioturdus* and outings and events are advertised on the club's website www.namibiabirdclub.org.

The Namibia Bird Club is not affiliated to any global or regional organisation and relies entirely on members' subscriptions and donations to fund its activities.

The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Namibia Bird Club or its committee.



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Cover photo Black-chested Prinia © Holger Kolberg

Some “Do’s” and “Don’ts” when feeding garden birds

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A great many people like having birdlife around them and many make water available and put out food of some sort to attract birds to their gardens.



While some would argue that providing food and water for birds is unnatural and attracts far more birds to an area than would naturally survive there, by building towns and cities and planting trees and maintaining gardens man has created artificial habitats. For example, highrise buildings offer breeding sites far from any suitable cliffs for species which are naturally cliff nesters and exotic palm trees provide nest sites for African Palm Swifts far from their traditional range while sewage ponds create habitat for wetland birds where none existed.

Providing birdseed certainly seems to attract nomadic species such Red-billed Queleas to the urban environment in large numbers late in the dry season when natural grass seed in the veld becomes scarce probably increasing the survival rate

for the species. By growing winter grain crops, which are frequently plundered by these birds, man has already meddled with the survival rate of Red-billed Queleas which naturally reproduced in huge numbers in the summer when grass seed was plentiful and died in their thousands in the winter when food was scarce.



There is also an argument that feeding birds makes them dependent on such food handouts and that if one goes away one should arrange for someone to continue feeding. While this argument is probably relevant in Europe or North America in winter when birds would struggle to find food on snow covered ground I do not think that it is valid in our situation, particularly in Windhoek where so many people feed garden birds. Birds are opportunists and when they find there is no food available at one feeding station they will move on and find food elsewhere. We have certainly never returned home from a holiday to find our garden full of dead birds that have starved to death in our absence! In our experience the seed eaters and insect eaters find the food offered very quickly after the resumption of feeding but the

frugivores sometimes take longer, possibly indicating that they have found other adequate food sources which they are utilizing.



Whether feeding birds is the right thing to do or not people will feed garden birds irrespective of any arguments for or against it and certain species will continue to steal pet food as well. There are, however, certain foods which are suitable for birds and others which are not although I am quite sure that most of us have, at some stage, through ignorance provided unsuitable foods for our garden birds.

Suitable foods:-

- 1) Wild birdseed (but crushed maize is likely to attract mainly doves and pigeons)
- 2) Most fruit
- 3) Mealworms
- 4) Cheese – mild firm cheese (e.g. Cheddar) – not soft or strong cheese and not mouldy or rancid cheese
- 5) Suet
- 6) Sugar – 1:5 sugar/water solution in nectar feeders (no colourants)
- 7) Peanut butter – but not brands containing artificial sweeteners (Xylitol)

Unsuitable foods:-

- 1) Honey
- 2) Avocado – toxic to some birds
- 3) Bread and also rolls, bagels, crackers, chips, pretzels, biscuits, donuts etc.– junk food – filling but of little nutritional value
- 4) Beetroot – (colourant) does not occur naturally in nectar – effects unknown
- 5) Xylitol - (artificial sweetener) – highly toxic.
- 6) Porridge – junk food
- 7) Dog pellets
- 8) Processed meats such as polony – preservatives harmful

Please be aware of these foods unsuitable for birds and refrain from putting such out when providing food for feathered friends.

Feeding stations, birdbaths etc. should also ideally be raised and out of reach of potential predators such as mongooses and domestic cats and dogs.