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THE MYNAS ARE COMING! A SUMMARY OF COMMON MYNA RECORDS IN NAMIBIA

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AVIAN RANGES

THE MYNAS ARE COMING! A SUMMARY OF COMMON MYNA RECORDS IN NAMIBIA

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On 19 November 2016, the authors were driving through Katima Mulilo, Namibia, on our way to the Katima Mulilo Sewage Works. Just as we arrived at the turnoff to the plant on the B8 highway, we noticed a Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* flying over the adjacent lawn. When we pulled over for a closer look, it turned out there was a pair of mynas feeding in the dry grass along the road. Knowing that this was beyond the typical range of the species in southern Africa and how their range has been expanding in the region, we took a series of photographs before moving on. The coordinates of the sighting were -17.5145, 24.2699.

Brown et al (2017), in the comprehensive “Checklist and analysis of the birds of Namibia as at 31 January 2016”, placed Common Myna in Category C, “species introduced, human-assisted transportees or escapes from captivity and whose breeding populations (if any) are thought not to be self sustaining”. The authors commented that “Reports from Oranjemund and Rosh Pinah [are] not confirmed.” The report from Rosh Pinah was thought to be mis-identified (Cunningham 2016).

Yet since the checklist was published, there are multiple reports of Common Myna in Namibia. The first was of a single bird on 12 Oct 2016 at the Transkalahari Border post at Buitepos (A. Collett in Thompson 2016). There is an additional record from the

second South Africa Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2) for the quadrat that includes Katima Mulilo. Shortly thereafter, we saw two in Katima Mulilo, followed by another bird at Ngoma on 22 December 2016 (G. and M. Blair in Thompson 2017a) and a possible sighting in Rosh Pinah in March 2017 (K. Jackman in Thompson 2017a). The geographical spread of these records is remarkable. Additional birds can be expected in the southeast of Namibia as well in the coming years, given recent records in and around Kgalgadi Transfrontier Park (Thompson 2017b) and previous anecdotal reports from Oranjemund (Thompson 2014).



Figure 1. Pair of Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* in Katima Mulilo, Namibia, 19 November 2016. Photo by Josh Engel.

Considering that mynas occur in many populated areas in the region, and given its rapid spread across the region from South Africa, it is no surprise that it showed up in Namibia. Indeed, Brown

et al (2015) predicted it as a species that would eventually be found breeding in Namibia. The first breeding evidence in the country was found in Katima Mulilo not long after our sighting, on 17 January 2017, when three Common Mynas were seen gathering nesting material (M. Boorman in Thompson 2017).

Common Mynas have spread tremendously in the last decade in southern Africa. Data from the southern African Bird Atlas Project show an extraordinary and rapid expansion from Johannesburg, in all directions, between the first (1987-1991) and second (started 2007) atlas projects (Underhill & Brooks 2014). Data show that they are using towns and villages to facilitate their spread (Peacock 2007, Underhill & Brooks 2014).

There were no records for Botswana or Zimbabwe from the first South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP1), yet since that time they have spread across both of those countries. On our trip, we saw them in Botswana at Nata Lodge, in Kang, and near Jwaneng. They appeared around Nata by 2012 (eBird 2017). There is also a record from Kasane, just across the Zambezi River from Namibia and just 100 km from Katima Mulilo, in December 2014 (Tyler 2015).

Common Myna expanded its range across Zimbabwe in the 2000s, where it is now widespread in urban areas (Lowe 2015). Zambia had its first records in 2014 and 2015 (Douthwaite 2015). There are records in eBird annually (except for 2014) from 2012-2017 at Victoria Falls, with records on both the Zimbabwe and Zambia sides of the falls (eBird 2017).



Figure 2. Pair of Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* in Kang, Botswana, 30 November 2016. Photo by Josh Engel.

There is reason for concern that the spread of Common Mynas could be detrimental to populations of native birds. It was one of three birds listed as among the 100 most harmful invasive species by the IUCN (Lowe et al 2000). For example, in Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe, a Common Myna was seen removing Red-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis niger* chicks from a nest and another in Zimbabwe was reported “taking over the nest” of Crested Barbet *Trachyphonus vaillantii* (Lowe 2015). In Botswana, “they successfully harassed to death the chicks” of three cavity nesting species: Green Wood-hoopoe *Phoeniculus purpureus*, Red-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* and Violet-backed Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*. Perhaps encouragingly, for southern Africa at least,

Craig (2005) reports that they have little impact on native birds except at “a very local scale”.

It will be fascinating to monitor their spread, which will no doubt continue, across Africa. Human populations have expanded and urbanized across the continent, creating an abundance of myna habitat, and, perhaps more importantly, creating a network of habitat corridors through the building of roads and towns along those roads.



Figure 3. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* in Katima Mulilo, Namibia, 19 November 2016. Photo by Josh Engel.

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