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Editorial

Once again in this issue we are able to report on species new to Namibia. Er, well, perhaps one of them is not really new to Namibia, but none of the previous records was accepted.

The species concerned is the Black Skimmer, a species native to the Americas and for which, as far as I can determine, there were no confirmed records on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

A single bird suddenly appeared at Rietvlei near Cape Town in October 2012, stayed a few days and then disappeared. A couple of days later a single bird (believed to be the same individual) appeared in Walvis Bay, stayed for a short period and again disappeared.

There have been two previous unconfirmed records of this species in Namibia of which I am aware. The first is Joris Komen's record from the Rundu Sewage Works in the mid 1980's which was not accepted by the then rarities committee on the grounds that it was just too unlikely that this species had found its way there - I don't think that Joris has forgiven that committee to this day.

The second record is Tony Tree's sighting of a single bird at Walvis Bay in February 1998, which, as far as I am aware, was also shot down by the rarities committee.

For more on the Walvis Bay Black Skimmer see Otto Schmidt's article and John Paterson's stunning action picture in the "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section of this issue.

A Spectacular Day at Namibia's Coastal Birding Mecca

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All photographs in this article are © Otto Schmidt.

At 8 am on the morning of Sunday, 7 October 2012, our group of four Cape Bird Club members (Johan Schlebusch, Joy Fish, Sandy and Otto Schmidt) met Mark Boorman outside our Walvis Bay hotel for a day's birding.

As we headed for the lagoon nearby, Mark asked if we had been on the birdnet since we left Cape Town. We said "No, why?" He then told us that a Black Skimmer *Rynchops niger*, the first confirmed record for Africa, had been present at Rietvlei just outside Cape Town on the Thursday and Friday just before. Our immediate thoughts were, "What are we doing here, when this mega rarity is just down the road from home!"

However, the local birds awaited us and a few minutes later we stopped along the Walvis Bay Promenade to look at the Greater Flamingos and a selection of waders around a sandbar a short distance away. A few minutes later Sandy exclaimed "What's that bird that has just landed on the sandbar?"

We thought Mark was going to have a fit as he realised it was a Black Skimmer. As the bird at Rietvlei had not been seen on the Saturday, despite a large number of local and upcountry birders scouring the area, this could mean that "our" bird had flown due north about 1 600 kilometres since Friday evening to land right in front of us at about 08h25 on the Sunday morning.

Modern technology immediately kicked in and both local and more distant birders were informed of this mega event, with several local birders deserting their families and Sunday morning breakfast tables to arrive at the lagoon within minutes.



Black Skimmer

After taking in this unexpected bonus for some time, we decided to head on and within a few minutes were enjoying the second rarity of the day, an American Golden Plover in full breeding plumage.

So the day continued, as we spotted a number of Red-necked Phalaropes near the saltworks. Eventually, Mark also found us a Red Phalarope, identified by its thicker bill, the third lifer of the morning for most of our group. In a tern roost we noted an Arctic Tern with its very short legs amongst the many Common Terns, and close views of Chestnut-banded Plovers amongst the many migrant waders were a delight and provided great photographic opportunities.



American Golden Plover

Near the lagoon's pump station there were again large numbers of terns, and Mark pointed out a couple of the slightly darker and smaller Black Terns amongst the throng, the first arrivals of the summer. Here we also had our only Damara Tern which flew over us carrying a fish. Greater and Lesser Flamingos were everywhere, and a couple of resident black-backed jackals seemed to be doing quite well preying on these. Numbers of African Black Oystercatchers, Great White Pelicans and a group of Eurasian Curlews swelled our bird-list as we enjoyed the spectacle.



Chestnut-banded Plover



Red Phalarope

Eventually we headed back towards town for another look at the American Golden Plover and the still-present Black Skimmer, which had now attracted some more local birders, before we headed towards Swakopmund. En route we stopped off at a coastal development to add Red Knot to our wader list for the day.

The next stop was the Mile 4 Saltworks just north of Swakopmund, where a similar spectacle of birds awaited us, but with fewer species and numbers than at Walvis Bay.

A brief view of a Peregrine Falcon (probably one of the Palearctic *calidus* migrant subspecies according to Mark) with its dinner was a surprise.

We also managed to photograph a ringed and flagged Sandwich Tern which has since been confirmed to have been ringed in Holland (**NV7** ringed as a nearly fledged juvenile on 19 June 2012 at de Scheelhoekelanden, near Stellendam, Zuid-Holland) (*Direct distance from the ringing site approximately 8 330 km – Ed*).

Then we were fortunate to find the leucistic Common Redshank which had been in the area for a while and had great views of this attractively marked individual; our 5th rarity of a remarkable day.



Ringed Sandwich Tern

Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 9 :

Waders and Shorebirds - Part 1

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Leucistic Common Redshank

However, there was more to come as we headed inland a short distance and came across a foraging group of the endemic Gray's Lark, another lifer for most of us, and were shown the very pale, almost white, form of the Tractrac Chat found in this very harsh environment. Now birded out, we said farewell and a big "Thank you" to Mark and headed for a celebratory dinner in Swakopmund at the end of an extraordinary day's birding.

The next (Monday) morning on our way inland we stopped briefly to confirm that the Black Skimmer was still present. The bird did a fly-past including a bit of skimming for a great finale.

It had been confirmed when seen in flight the previous day to be of the same (North American) sub-species as the one seen near Cape Town, almost certainly confirming that this was the same individual.

We later heard that it stayed until the Wednesday, allowing a group of twitchers who had flown to Cape Town the previous Saturday and missed it to make a second trip and connect with it this time.

The following is a summary of waterbird count data for selected species in Namibia, covering the period 1977 to December 2008.

For each species the Red Data Book (RDB) status, both global and Namibian, is given, the population trend as per Wetlands International, the number of times the species was counted, the number of times it has passed the 1% population criterion, the maximum count and the sites where it has passed the 1% population criterion.

The local trend is calculated using the computer programme TRIM (see an earlier publication for the selection criteria and methods) (*Lanioturdus* 43 (2) – Ed.). Population trends are graphically presented as indices relative to a base year (in this case 1991) and thus all have a value of 1 for 1991.

Thus an index value of 2 indicates a doubling of the population relative to 1991 and an index of 0.5 would mean half of the 1991 figure. A slope value of 1 would indicate a perfectly stable population, whereas any value above 1 means a positive trend and a value of less than 1 a negative trend.

(Larger scale replications of the graphs in this article are attached to the end of this edition).