

CONTENTS

VOLUME 32(1), March 1999

EDITORIAL	1
KAESTNER, P.G. A beginners guide to the larks of Namibia: Part Two	3
PAXTON, M. & SHEEHAN, L. January wetland bird count in the Mahango Game Reserve, Kavango	15
BRELL, B. & E. Birding on the Farm Rustig, Kamanjab District.	18
GLÄFKE, S. NBC bird of the quarter	20
NOTICE. News from the Namibia Scientific Society Library	22
BOIX-HINZEN, C. Interesting sightings from Daan Viljoen Game Reserve	24
BOIX-HINZEN, C. & JACOT, A. The counts of Monte Cristo	28
HINES, C. Short Notes	32
KIEKEBUSCH-STEINITZ, B. (Bird) Racing around Windhoek	38



EDITORIAL

Summer has almost come and gone without my noticing it. It has been an odd summer in terms of weather but judging from my discussions with other people, the birding has been excellent this year. The thing I have noticed while putting this edition of *Lanioturdus* together is the really good numbers of rare birds that were seen during these last few months. These records raise the question of what brings these spurts of rarities about.

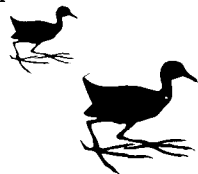
Is it the unusual rainfall and general climatic patterns experienced over much of the subcontinent? Is just that we are getting more reports of rarities because there are a lot more birders out there at the moment? Is it a consequence of the "Patagonia effect" described by Peter Kaestner in a previous edition of *Lanioturdus*. Whatever the situation is, we have had two new birds added to the Namibian list in the last six months. A presumed Pied Flycatcher at the Windhoek Sewerage Works (October 1998) and a Red-throated Pipit in Swakopmund (March 1999). These records may represent interesting biological indicators of broader environmental processes influencing the sub-continent. These records are interesting in themselves but seen against a background of a large number of other rare birds in the same period we have to admit the possibility of large scale climatic (or other) factors influencing their occurrence in Namibia.

So what happens to these records? Currently nothing much!! All records reported to me are put into the Short Notes section and I encourage people to write up their sightings. My feeling is that a tremendous amount of

information is lost because we do not have a formal reporting structure within the Club. Establishing the reporting structure would be relatively simple (there are thousands of examples to choose from around the world), but the real work comes in collating, adjudicating and reporting back on the information coming in. The point of this editorial is to encourage members to step forward to help re-establish a "rarities" committee to follow up on reports from around the country. I hasten to add that I do not think that we need to establish a full-blown 'rarities' committee, rather something along the lines of a Namibian Bird Records Committee. The Records Committee would have a much broader approach than strictly 'vagrant rarities'. I would like to see information on range extensions being collected, migration data (earliest and latest dates), data on truly rare Namibian breeding birds (e.g. Ground Hornbill, Blue Crane) being collated and an annual report back given in these pages. After a while I believe we will be able to get a good impression of how the regional weather patterns influence our birds, when migration peaks occur through the country (both inland and on the coast) and what are the major strongholds of our rarer birds.

So who is interested? I think this is a project in which any number of people could be involved and the burden of work shared (yes, there is work involved). If you are interested or have any ideas on this project please contact me (P.O. Box 22527, Windhoek) or by phone on 235603 (h) or 081-1275603.

We need further help in one other matter – getting the Namibian Bird Club onto the Internet. We would like to put *Lanioturdus* on to the net as well as post our programme, provide registration forms and give general information on a Club page. If you have any expertise or could help with this please contact any of the Committee members.



A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE LARKS OF NAMIBIA: PART TWO – SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Peter G. Kaestner

Private Bag 12029, Ausspannplatz, Windhoek.

This second instalment in a two-part series on lark identification discusses the species of larks found in Namibia with information on how to distinguish them and where to find them. The end of the article has several lists of larks expected at popular localities around Namibia.

The species accounts are not organized taxonomically, but are sorted by habitat and size, so that possibly confusing groups/pairs are presented together. As noted before, the distinction between the terrestrial and bush larks is somewhat artificial. Terrestrial larks may be found sitting in bushes and bush larks often forage on the ground. I am certain, however, that more often than not they will sort themselves out and you will find the distinction helpful in identifying this confusing group.

Large terrestrial larks

Long-billed Lark *Certhilauda curvirostris*

The Long-billed Lark (LBL) complex is a group of distinctive birds that are generally common in areas of open rocky desert or semi-desert. They are usually distinctive and easy to identify by their large size (as big as a thrush), long, curved bill and longish tail. Interior forms tend to be warm reddish brown above with some streaking on the chest. The coastal form is greyer, with a longer bill. They give a strong, descending whistle, often from a display flight.

Dr. Peter Ryan has published a taxonomic revision of this polytypic species in which he proposes five allopatric (i.e. geographically segregated) species (*The Auk*, January 1999). These five forms are illustrated in the latest SASOL field guide. They are (from top to bottom on the page): Cape LBL

C.(c.) falcistrostris, Agulhas LBL *C.(c.) brevirostris*, Karoo LBL *C.(c.) subcoronata*, Benguella LBL *C.(c.) benguelensis* (marked *kaokensis* on the plate), and Eastern LBL *C.(c.) semitorquata*). The three forms which should be in Namibia are discussed individually below:

1. Benguella Long-billed Lark *Certhilauda benguelensis*. The Benguella LBL, replaces the other forms of the complex from the Brandberg to Southern Angola. This form tends to be paler and shorter billed than the other long billed larks, but since no other *Certhilauda* species are found in the same range, identification is relatively easy. It is most easily seen around the plains east and north of Brandberg, though it may be more common farther north.
2. Karoo Long-billed Lark *Certhilauda subcoronata*. The Karoo LBL occurs from about the Spitzkoppe, south, to well into South Africa. Race *bradshawi* is common between Rosh Pinah and Aus, and also inland to the east of Keetmanshoop. The *damarensis* form is common around the Spitzkoppe and south along the eastern edge of the Namib. It avoids the dune areas, favouring rocky ground.
3. Cape Long-billed Lark *Certhilauda falcistrostris*. Ryan *et al.* (*Lanioturdus* Vol. 29) reports the possible occurrence of the longest-billed form of this complex in succulent Karoo vegetation near Oranjemund. With the acceptance of the new taxonomy, it would be worthwhile verifying whether this species does live north of the Orange River. It is distinguished from the *bradshawi* race of the Karoo LBL by its larger size, longer bill, greyer, not reddish, overall coloration, and coastal habitat.

Dusky Lark *Pinarocorys nigricans*

The Dusky Lark is somewhat of an enigma. It differs from other "bush" larks in being largely terrestrial and highly migratory. In Namibia it is a non-breeding summer visitor. It is very thrush-like, from its bold markings, and its undulating flight, to its terrestrial feeding habits – it looks superficially like a Groundscraper Thrush. When disturbed, however, it quickly takes to the nearest tree. It is found in well-wooded savannas from Windhoek north, mainly from November to May. It is common at Ruacana.

Medium Larks

Thick-billed Lark *Galerida magnirostris*

First a word about the name. The usual southern African name for this species is Thick-billed Lark, which is shared by a north African bird *Ramphocoris clotbey*. To avoid confusion *The Birds of Africa* calls the species Large-billed Lark (as do American lists) and the latest SASOL guide calls it the Southern Thick-billed Lark. Since the birds are not even remotely related, I believe that the Southern Thick-billed Lark name is misleading since it implies some connection between the two species. Therefore, I prefer to use Large-billed Lark. (And besides, *Ramphocoris* really has a THICK bill.) This locally common Succulent Karoo species only just crosses the Orange River into Namibia west of Rosh Pinah. It is a stocky bird (like a Rufous-naped Lark), with a cold, grey brown coloration. Its medium thick bill with a yellow base is unique amongst our larks. It has a distinctive, rollicking song, which consists of four to eight musical notes delivered quickly.

Barlow's Lark *Certhilauda barlowi*

This is the first of four similar species collectively called red-backed larks. They are smaller than their congeners, the long-billed larks, and have shorter bills. They are essentially terrestrial, and with the exception of the Karoo Lark, mainly restricted to areas with vegetated sand dunes. Barlow's Lark was only recently acknowledged as a separate species distinct from the Karoo Lark of South Africa. Barlow's is comprised of three forms, all found between the Koichab River near Lüderitz, east to Aus and south to Port Nolloth in South Africa. It is common in its restricted range, favouring *Euphorbia* hummocks or patches in sand dunes. The nominate form can be found about 12 km west of Aus in an area of *Euphorbia* hummocks just south of the main road. The *cavei* race can be seen just south-east of Aus on the road to Rosh Pinah, and again in *Euphorbia* hummocks or in sandy, Succulent Karoo south of the mine on the road to the Orange River. The bird looks much like a Dune Lark in coloration, but has fine and distinct black streaking on its chest. Barlow's Lark is slightly smaller, its bill is less stout, and overall coloration paler than the Red Lark, which is rarely

recorded from the border area in red sand dunes. Its song is distinguished by five to six introductory notes before a trill. (Karoo Lark only has a couple of introductory notes, the Dune Lark has a similar cadence to Barlow's, but the introductory notes are more mechanical, staccato.)

Dune Lark *Certhilauda erythrochlamys*

Dune Lark is usually considered Namibia's only true endemic bird. It is completely confined to the Namib dune fields from the Kuiseb River in the north to the Koichab River in the south. It is the palest and least streaked of the four red-backed larks. It is most common in areas of small, vegetated dunes such as those near the weir five kilometres downstream from Rooibank or adjacent (to the east) of the forestry department nursery south of Walvis Bay off the Sandwich Harbour road. It is usually seen scurrying between the dunes like a small, pale mammal, keeping just one dune ahead of the observer. When singing, however, they perch on a small bush and are quite conspicuous. I have had them singing all morning at the nursery, disproving the notion that they only sing at dawn.

Red Lark *Certhilauda burra*

There are two specimens of Red Lark from along the South African border with Namibia. It is the largest of the red-backed larks, and the reddest. Its bill is stouter than the other three, and its tail longer. It is easily seen in red sand dunes in northern South Africa, especially west of Pofadder, near Brandvlei, and near Upington. I know of no extant populations of Red Lark in Namibia. Its song is described under Barlow's Lark.

Karoo Lark *Certhilauda albescens*

With the separation of Barlow's Lark, I am not aware of any records of Karoo Lark from Namibia. It can be distinguished from the other red-backed larks by the ventral streaking, which reaches the flanks of the Karoo Lark. It is a coarser bird, with heavier streaking on the back and breast than its congeners. Its bill is shorter than Barlow's or Dune Larks' and longer and less stout than a Red Lark's. Its song consists of two or three introductory notes and then a bubbling trill. It should be looked for in succulent Karoo

along the Orange River.

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*

The presence of this species on the Namibia list is controversial, in that some scholars believe that the specimen collected in 1930 in Swakopmund was an escaped bird, as evidenced by the wear of its feathers. Since Bimaculated Larks are abundant 'winter' visitors to the Sudan, and have been known to wander from their usual wintering grounds, I prefer to keep the bird in the pool of species to be considered for Namibia. Maybe some day one (or another) will show up. Bimaculated Larks are easy to distinguish with their black pectoral patches and white tipped tail.

Spike-heeled Lark *Chersomanes albofasciata*

The only lark in Namibia with a white tipped tail, the Spike-heeled Lark is common, conspicuous and distinctive. Other field marks are its long, thin, curved bill, short tail, and rufous underparts with contrasting white throat. It is found throughout the country except the north-east, preferring open, bare ground. It is much less common in the Namib than in the Etosha National Park and rocky plains east of Keetmanshoop. It has an unusual habit of retreating into burrows in the ground, presumably to avoid the hot sun or to escape from predators.

Red-capped Lark *Calandrella cinerea*

Another very distinctive bird, the Red-capped Lark is true to its name in having a contrasting red cap. Other species of lark with red on the top of their heads have the same color on their mantle. It also has red smudges on the sides of its chest, which are diagnostic. Like the preceding species, it is common and prefers open bare country. It is distinctly local, with a concentration in the Etosha Pan.

Small Larks

Gray's Lark *Ammomanes grayi*

A near endemic to Namibia, Gray's Lark is restricted to the flat gravel

plains of the Namib Desert, north of Aus. It is a very plain, almost white bird, which has a distinctive tail pattern. (The race *hoeschi*, found from Cape Cross north to southern Angola, is darker and browner than the nominate race). Its outer tail feathers are black at the end and white at the base, which is especially obvious when the bird is flying. (The central tail feathers and rump are the colour of the back.) The most likely bird to be confused with a Gray's Lark is the Tractrac Chat. The chat differs in having a darker and thinner bill, more upright stance, pale rump, black central tail feathers, and more solitary habits. Gray's Larks are common in the right habitat, so the key is finding a bare gravel plain that is a pale grey colour to match the bird. Easily accessible habitat occurs near the Walvis Bay airport, near the Weltswitchia Plain east of Swakopmund, and on bare, flat ridge-tops south-west of Spitzkoppe, along the road to Henties Bay. On occasion I have seen them in mixed flocks with Stark's Lark in the eastern Namib in somewhat grassier habitat than expected, but they were keeping to the edge of the road (which was more like their preferred substrate).

Stark's Lark *Eremalauda (Spizocorys) starki*

Of the three small, brown larks (Sclater's, Stark's and Pink-billed) this is by far the commonest. It is also paler than the other two (especially on the belly), and has a crest which is often concealed. While it prefers open stony desert plains, I have found that it tends to be in grassier areas than Gray's Lark. Grass about 25 cm high seems about ideal. Like many desert species it is somewhat nomadic, appearing commonly and then vanishing. In late May 1998, they were abundant at Etosha, near Halali, but they can be seen more routinely on the plains north of Okaukuejo. I see them more consistently along the eastern edge of the Namib along the C28 road to Swakopmund.

Sclater's Lark *Spizocorys sclateri*

Sclater's Lark is one of the more difficult birds to see in Namibia. It matches the colour of the stony, reddish plains it inhabits. The best place to look is where the stones are a couple of centimetres in diameter in the Nama Karoo biome. (Nama Karoo is a summer rainfall area that is drier and less thickly vegetated than the Succulent Karoo which gets most of its rain

in the winter.) They have a distinctive, two-noted flight call, that has the querulous quality of a *Passer* sparrow. Once seen, the unique bill of this small lark will clinch identification. The lower mandible curves upward to make it appear wedge-shaped. In addition, Sclater's Lark has a black teardrop shaped mark between the eye and the base of the bill. I have only seen the bird twice in Namibia, once south-east of Karasberg and once along the road about halfway between Keetmanshoop and Aroab.

Pink-billed Lark *Spizocorys conirostris*

Another small, local lark that can be difficult to find. Before I saw my first, I tried to turn many Stark's Larks into Pink-billed, but when I finally saw a Pink-billed, there was no mistaking its conical, pink bill. Its uniform rufous underparts also distinguish it from Stark's Lark. In the small area of overlap with Sclater's Lark, the bill and face patterns should make separation easy. Pink-billed Larks inhabit open pans, especially saline pans with short grass and/or small shrubs. One good place to look for them is west of the airstrip north of the Okaukuejo Camp in Etosha Park once it has rained and the ground has a green blush. Pink-billed Lark has a distinctive flight call, of two sharp notes, repeated about once a second.

Grey-backed Finch-Lark *Eremopterix verticalis*

Finch-Larks are probably the first larks that beginning birders master. The bold patterns allow for easy specific identification, and they tend to be common and conspicuous when they are around. With the exception of the far north-east, the Grey-backed is the commonest finch-lark, and often the commonest lark. Its dirty grey back affords it some camouflage while on the ground, but the black underparts render it very distinctive in flight. Often they are attracted to areas of dark soil or rocks. While you should not have to look for this species, the highest numbers I have encountered have been north of Okaukuejo at Etosha, and along the Gamsberg Pass Road about 70 km south-west of Windhoek.

Chestnut-backed Finch Lark *Eremopterix leucotis*

This handsome bird is restricted to the northern half of Namibia, and even

there, it seems more sporadic than the Grey-backed. In the grassy plains just north of Okaukuejo the two species are sometimes seen foraging together. It is a beautiful bird when seen well with the male showing a stunning chestnut mantle.

Black-eared Finch-Lark *Eremopterix australis*

Like Sclater's Lark, this species is endemic to the Nama Karoo, and so is restricted in Namibia to the southern half of the country. It is very dark (appearing all black in anything but good light) and lacks the white cheek (ear) patches of the other two species of finch-larks. Not surprisingly, I have only seen this species twice in Namibia, once south-east of Karasberg and once along the road about half way between Keetmanshoop and Aroab not far from when I spotted Sclater's Lark. This bird is abundant across the border in South Africa, especially near Brandvlei and Pofadder.

Bush Larks

Bush larks seem to be a bigger problem than the terrestrial larks since they are more apt to be on the ground pretending to be terrestrial than the other way around. Especially in the non-breeding season, bush larks can be found on the ground and not in bushes singing. As my wife pointed out while testing the key to identification, she looked to see if the lark looked "happy" on the ground or in a bush. Another strategy is to watch the bird for a while, usually they will sort themselves out. Of course, if you just wait until the breeding season!

Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafra africana*

In much of Africa, the Rufous-naped Lark is the commonest lark. In Namibia it avoids the most arid (western and southern) half of the country. It is conspicuous where it occurs, so it is not a hard bird to find. It prefers open bushy savanna, with some bare patches and plenty of perches. One of Namibia's largest larks, the Rufous-naped is a richly-coloured, husky bird with a substantial, slightly down-curved bill. It has a short crest, but its rufous nape is usually not a good field mark. If you are close enough to see the nape, you will have probably already figured out the identification. It

has a distinctive, clear three-noted whistling song, which is given from a perch. Sometimes it accompanies the song with a rapid beating of its wings while perched. It is relatively common around Etohsa Park, east of Windhoek, and the areas north and east of those locales to and through the Caprivi.

Fawn-coloured Lark *Mirafra africanoides*

The Fawn-coloured Lark is a specialist of the red Kalahari sands throughout eastern and northern Namibia. It is usually common, but it can be confusing since it is very variable. (Mackworth-Praed and Grant's African Handbook of Birds shows eight races in Southern Africa, including distinctive forms described from Windhoek, Gobabis, and Otjiwarongo). It often feeds on the ground on bare earth between bushes in *Acacia* savanna. Its song is distinctive, a cheery if hurried jumble of notes ended with a buzzy whistle. While variable, its plumage is usually characterized by whitish lower parts with a modest amount of streaking on the chest. There are two white marks on the face, above and below the eye, but these may not be very obvious. They can usually be found east of the Windhoek International Airport and in Mahango Park.

Clapper Lark *Mirafra apiata*.

The Clapper Lark is a southern African near-endemic which is closely related to the Flappet Lark, which is found throughout Africa. The two overlap in the far north of Namibia and the Caprivi. The two are easily distinguished only if displaying. The Clapper Lark has a flight display that consists of a long sequence of wing flaps, ended by a descending whistle. The Flappet Lark has a display consisting of a series of short bursts of wing flapping, and there is no whistle at the end of the flight. Otherwise, range and habitat should be one's first clues. The far north and Caprivi, the Clapper Lark likes grassier areas with bushes and trees, while the Flappet Lark is more wedded to trees. Morphologically, the Clapper Lark tends to have whiter outer edge to the tail and is overall a bit paler than the Flappet Lark. Mackworth-Praed & Grant separate the clapper larks into two species, the Cape Clapper Lark *Mirafra apiata* and the Damara Clapper Lark *Mirafra (apiata) damarensis*. The form most likely to be seen in Namibia

would be the Damara Clapper Lark, while a record of Clapper Lark near Rosh Pinah would most likely be the Cape Clapper Lark. (*These forms are not recognised by current southern African experts – Editor*). In reality, there may be more species than anyone knows. There is a complex mosaic of large and small-billed forms throughout Southern Africa. This is an area where birders can make a contribution to the science of lark taxonomy. Make careful records of your 'Clapper' Lark sightings, and try to get tape recordings of the songs. Get in touch with the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute or Joris Komen at the Namibian National Museum, and share your data.

Flappet Lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea*

This species has been covered in the Clapper Lark description. Since it is only found in the far north and Caprivi, there is not too much area of overlap.

Monotonous Lark *Mirafra passerina*

The Monotonous Lark is one of the real mysteries of the Namibian veld. I spent a lot of time looking for them without any luck. One day in January 1997, I stopped my car 100 km west of Outjo on the Kamanjab Road (under the electricity pylons) when I saw an odd bird in the road. When I got out of the car, I noticed that the bush was ringing with Monotonous Lark song! There were scores of Monotonous Larks, singing from the telephone wires, singing in the air, singing from every bush, even singing in the middle of the road! Since then I have seen them several times (in Summer 1997/98 they bred around Windhoek), but I have always noticed them first by their distinctive, monotonous call, "bangladesh", which is repeated unendingly. Part of the mystery is what happens to them after the wet season. There are a few odd records for them in the winter, but they are never seen in the numbers that can occur when they are breeding. Their posture while singing from their usual bush perch is completely horizontal, with their white throat puffed out, which can help identify a Monotonous Lark from the briefest glance. If you see one well, notice its uniform brown face (as opposed to the Fawn-colored Lark), and its whitish belly (to distinguish from Clapper/Flappet and Rufous-naped Larks).

Sabota Lark *Mirafra sabota*

The Sabota Lark has been split by American listers into two species, the thick-billed Bradfield's Lark *Mirafra (s.) naevia* and the thin billed nominate form. Sabota (Bradfield's) Lark is very common and widespread throughout Namibia, wherever there are bushes for them to sit on. They are, without doubt, the commonest lark around Windhoek in the Khomas Hochland and much of the rest of Namibia. The nominate form is probably only recorded from the eastern Caprivi. Morphologically, both forms are distinguished by a clear white supercilium, which imparts a "capped" appearance to an otherwise pretty dull bird. One important difference is that it is the only true bush lark in Namibia that does not have rufous edgings on its wings. They are very easily seen in Daan Viljoen Park, outside of Windhoek.

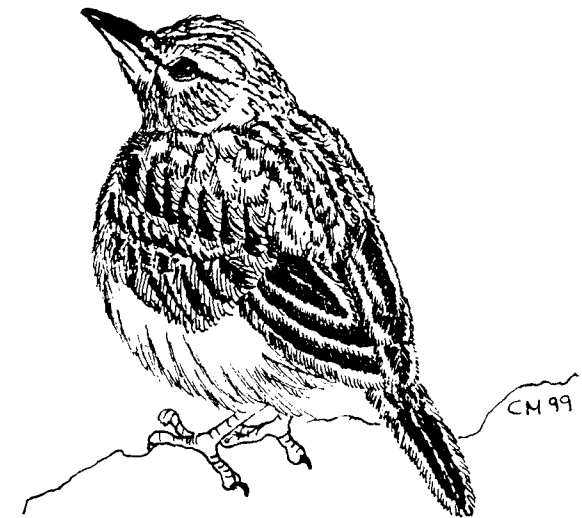


TABLE 1: List of species and sites at which they occur in Namibia

SPECIES	SITE						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Monotonous Lark	R*		R*			U*	U*
Rufous-naped Lark	C					C	A
Clapper Lark	U			R	R	U	U
Flappet Lark						R	
Barlow's Lark				C			
Dune Lark		C					
Fawn-coloured Lark	R				R	C	C
Sabota Lark	A		A		U	U	C
Dusky Lark	R*					U*	R
Spike-heeled Lark	C		C	U	C		
Red-capped Lark	A	U		U	C	R	
Pink-billed Lark	U*				U*		
Sclater's Lark					R		
Stark's Lark	C	U	C	U	U		
Gray's Lark		C	C				
Thick-billed Lark				R			R
Karoo Long-billed Lark		U	C	C	C		C
Benguella Long-billed Lark							
Black-eared Finch-Lark				U	R		U
Chestnut-backed Finch-Lark	C*					R*	R*
Grey-backed Finch-Lark	A	C	A	C	A		C

SITES:

1. Etosha
2. East of Walvis Bay (Namib Desert):
3. Namib Escarpment (C28):
4. Rosh Pinah (Succulent Karoo):
5. East of Keetmanshoop (Nama Karoo):
6. Mahango Park, Okavango
7. Windhoek International Airport

STATUS CODES

- A: Abundant, almost always see, many
 C: Common, usually see, few
 U: Uncommon, sometimes see
 R: Rare, very irregular, almost never see
 *: Especially irregular in occurrence

JANUARY WETLAND BIRD COUNT IN THE MAHANGO GAME RESERVE, KAVANGO

Mark Paxton & Linda Sheehan
 P.O. Box 368, Rundu

At the start of 1999 I got the usual misguided urges to start the new year by doing something productive that didn't necessarily involve getting bitten by a snake. So after the necessary spade-work with the local M.E.T. authorities I made preparations to count the riverine areas of the Mahango Game Park. My boat, aptly named "Mahango" or alternatively "The Red Bitch" depending on performance levels, was methodically given the once over. I then arranged to carry out the count with the help of Anton Esterhuizen (M.E.T.) and Linda Sheehan. However, as expected Murphy had his piece to say and Anton was unavailable at the last moment. Linda and I decided to enlist the help of other interested parties who could help with bird identification. Surprisingly, we got very little response from the limited Rundu pool of eligible candidates, and we embarked on our mission unaided. It was, however, agreed that we would involve one of the staff members at the Park itself.

When we arrived we found the available staff members otherwise occupied and we sought help elsewhere. Ndhovu Safari Lodge was the obvious choice and we managed to twist some worthwhile arms there. Peter and Lance made their expertise and enthusiasm available on three consecutive days, and there was no additional charge for the scintillating company and dirty jokes.

The level of the river was low, although it had risen quite significantly after the festive season's early rains. Sandbanks had almost all been covered and only the high areas of some remained. The level was high enough to slowly start filtering into the adjoining marshy areas, adding additional suitable waterbird habitat. These areas were however not yet entirely deep enough for the hippo population to leave the main river-course, and they still laid claim to all the deeper areas of the river. As these areas were still the only