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Editorial

With this issue the bird names and order follow the new *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa* VIIth edition published in September 2005. For those of you who have not purchased the N\$ 870 book yet, a real treat awaits you. The book has all the up-to-date information on all the species found in Africa south of the Kunene and Zambezi Rivers. For more on the book see the review in this issue.

Although *Roberts* is an epic tome, there is still much information needed on our Namibian endemic species. For example, there is scant information on the Bare-cheeked Babbler – little data on breeding, none of incubation, none on what newly hatched young look like, nothing on moult and only one nest has been found. Page through a copy and see what nearby species you have so you can contribute data.

The editor would like someone who has attended recent club outings to write up reports so those of us who missed the trip can see what was observed.

Contributions to the observations and notes section is the largest in many years and it is good to see that members are getting out and watching birds. Under the observation section the order of birds follows the new *Roberts* classification system. However, in the paper by Brown *et al.* I have not corrected the order of species in the tables. In the future all submissions must follow the new order.

Once again I appeal to all members to help the Namibia Bird Club. If you want to keep the club viable you must also do your part to try and get new members to join. We are currently down to less than 100 members.

A comparative study of wetland birds at two dams in central Namibia

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Introduction

The effect that humans have on wetland birds whilst utilising a water body for recreational purposes such as boating, angling, skiing, etc. is not always known. This note compares bird numbers and species between two contrasting artificial water bodies in central Namibia. It furthermore attempts to indicate the effect that humans have on wetland birds in general.

Bird counts were conducted at the more frequented S. Von Bach Dam and less frequently visited Swakoppoort Dams, respectively. Both dams are situated in the Swakop River. The S. Von Bach Dam is the older (constructed in 1970) of the two impoundments and situated close to Okahandja, within a small game reserve and is managed by the Ministry of Environment & Tourism. The two main ephemeral rivers feeding this dam are the Swakop and Satan Rivers. The dam has a catchment area of 2920 km², surface area at full supply of 4.89 km² and a full holding capacity of approximately 50 Mm³ (De Wet 1991) and an estimated water quality of 100 TDS mg/l (Van der Merwe 1983). Vegetation associated with the dam consists mainly of patches of *Cynodon dactylon* at waters edge, and thickets of sedges belonging to the family Cyperaceae. The dominant fish species occurring in the dam are *Oreochromis mossambicus*, *Clarias gariepinus*, *Cyprinus carpio* and *Micropterus salmoides* introduced for angling purposes.

The Swakoppoort Dam is the larger of the two dams (constructed in 1977) and is situated 55 km to the southeast of the S. Von Bach Dam. It is situated at the confluence of the ephemeral Swakop and Sney Rivers. The dam has a catchment area of 4800 km², surface area at full supply of 7.80 km² and a full holding capacity

of approximately 69 Mm³ (De Wet 1991) and an estimated water quality of 80 TDS mg/l (Van der Merwe 1983). It is privately owned and managed by Namwater. This impoundment has large shallow areas at the inflow and an undisturbed shoreline, unlike the S. Von Bach Dam. The fish fauna is similar to the S. von Bach Dam with the exception of *Micropterus salmoides*. Due to its fish fauna and large shallow areas, it boasts a rich bird diversity (Schachtschneider, 1997). The associated vegetation is similar to that of the S. Von Bach Dam.

Methods

Bird counts were conducted by covering the entire perimeter of the two dams by boat and identifying and counting the various wetland birds. Counts were conducted during March to June 1994. Binoculars, telescope and reference books on birds were used as aids. A comparison of counts conducted during 2004 was made to data collected at the two sites during April 1994 and April 1996.

Results

Table 1. Bird count results conducted during March, April, May and June 2004 at both S. von Bach and Swakoppoort Dams, respectively.

		March	April	May	June
Swakkoppoort	No Birds	1092	1553	1119	718
	No Species	27	22	21	20
S. Von Bach	No Birds	396	422	518	679
	No Species	20	18	19	21

The mean number of birds and mean number of species for S. Von Bach and Swakoppoort Dams respectively is 229 (SD=167) & 13.7 (SD=4.5) and 1528 (SD=280) & 22.3 (SD=0.6). There is a significant difference between the number of birds ($P=0.01$, $F=11.44$, $df=1$), but not between the number of species ($P=0.12$, $F=3.18$, $df=1$) at S. von Bach and Swakoppoort Dams during counts conducted between April and July 2004, respectively.

Table 2 compares the total number of birds as well as species counted at the two dams during April 1994, 1996 and 2004, respectively.

Table 2. A comparison of bird count results conducted during April 1994, 1996 & 2004 at both S. von Bach and Swakkoppoort Dams, respectively.

		April 1994	April 1996	April 2004
Swakkoppoort	No Birds	1795	1236	1573
	No Species	23	22	22
S. Von Bach	No Birds	131	135	430
	No Species	9	14	18

There is a significant difference ($P=0.002$, $F=47.53$, $df=1$) between the number of birds and the number of species ($P=0.03$, $F=10.90$, $df=1$) at S. Von Bach and Swakoppoort Dams during April counts conducted, respectively.

Tables 3 and 4 indicate the various species and number of birds counted at S. Von Bach and Swakoppoort Dams, respectively.

Table 3. Species composition and total birds counted between March and June 2004 at the S. Von Bach Dam.

Species	March	April	May	June
White Pelican	249	108	116	146
White-fronted Cormorant	40	52	95	125
Grey Heron	10	17	19	21
Squacco Heron	2	-	-	-
Black-crowned Night Heron	1	-	-	-
Egyptian Goose	4	39	73	130
Darter	7	111	108	145
Little Egret	1	5	7	12
Black Egret	1	1	-	1
South African Shelduck	3	-	4	-
African Spoonbill	2	48	10	11
Common Sandpiper	1	8	5	13
Hammerkop	2	4	9	7
Red-knobbed Coot	2	6	10	11

Yellow-billed Stork	15	10	13	13
Marabou Stork	1	1	-	-
Black Stork	-	1	6	8
African Fish Eagle	-	2	3	3
Osprey	1	1	-	-
Avocet	10	1	-	-
Black-winged Stilt	6	6	8	12
Blacksmith Plover	16	24	19	10
White-winged Tern	-	17	9	1
Yellow-billed Egret	-	4	4	7
Lesser Flamingo	-	1	-	2
Sacred Ibis	-	1	-	1
Total Birds Counted	396	422	518	679

Table 4. Species composition and total birds counted between March and June 2004 at the Swakoppoort Dam.

Species	March	April	May	June
White Pelican	257	524	357	111
White-fronted Cormorant	269	337	176	189
Grey Heron	24	47	39	38
Squacco Heron	2	-	-	1
Black-crowned Night Heron	-	1	1	-
Egyptian Goose	72	73	95	110
Darter	172	266	230	154
Little Egret	21	19	23	18
Black Egret	1	1	-	-
South African Shelduck	3	-	-	-
African Spoonbill	10	24	19	16
Common Sandpiper	13	23	15	-
Hammerkop	2	9	7	4
Red-knobbed Coot	1	3	8	7
Yellow-billed Stork	22	22	27	7

Marabou Stork	1	-	-	-
Black Stork	1	-	-	-
African Fish Eagle	2	2	2	2
Pink-backed Pelican	3	4	6	6
Avocet	1	-	-	-
Great White Egret	10	28	18	13
Blacksmith Plover	11	15	28	25
Kittlitz's Plover	2	-	6	6
Three-banded Plover	1	3	2	3
Reed Cormorant	4	2	8	-
Yellow-billed Egret	2	10	5	-
White-winged Tern	184	155	42	1
Whiskered Tern	1	5	2	-
Lesser Flamingo	-	-	-	1
Sacred Ibis	-	-	-	6
Total Birds Counted	1092	1553	1119	718

The following figure indicates the numbers of visitors, boats and birds for S. Von Bach Dam between March and June 2004.

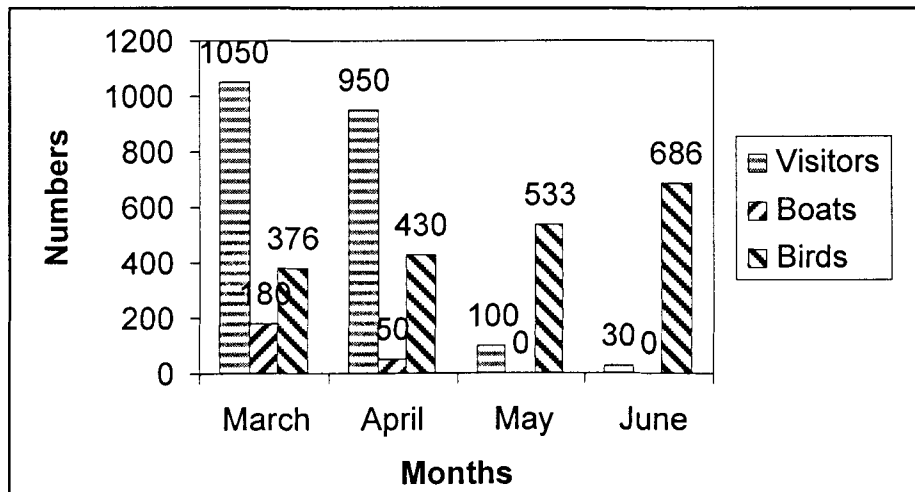


Figure 1. A comparison between the numbers of visitors, boats and birds at the S. Von Bach Dam between March and June 2004.

The mean number of humans visiting the S. Von Bach Dam between March and June 2004 is 532.5 (SD=542.1) and the mean number of boats is 57.5 (SD=85). There is strong correlation between the number of visitors ($r=0.90$), boats ($r=0.78$) and bird numbers during this same period. Boats seem to have a highly significant influence on the bird numbers ($P=0.001$, $F=33.7$, $df=1$) at the S. Von Bach Dam compared to human visitors ($P=0.92$, $F=0.01$, $df=1$).

Discussion

Birds

The Swakoppoort Dam has a significantly higher number of birds than the S. Von Bach Dam indicating the preference that birds have for the first mentioned site. This is probably due to the more suitable habitat – i.e. size and the heterogeneity of this ecosystem with more breeding sites (dead trees located in the water) and shallower areas better suited for aquatic foraging. The Swakoppoort Dam offers more diversity in the form of multiple microhabitats such as large shallow areas at its inflows and an undisturbed shoreline (Schachtschneider 1997). Eight nesting sites were also recorded at the Swakoppoort Dam (mostly White-fronted cormorants and Darters) compared to the S. Von Bach Dam with only three observed nests. The effect that human disturbance has on nesting birds, especially birds breeding in colonies, is well known (Williams 1991). The isolation of the Swakoppoort Dam – i.e. lack of visitors with boats and associated activities – also probably contributes to the dam being favoured by birds.

Months

The significant differences between number of birds and species at the two dams between April 1994, 1996 and 2004 is probably due to the fact that breeding for most of the wetland species takes place during this period.

Fewer birds were observed at the S. Von Bach Dam during the warmer months between March & April compared to the colder months of May & June (See Table 1). which is probably due to a decline in human activities on the dam during the colder months indicating the effect that human disturbance has on bird numbers.

Fewer birds were observed during the warmer months at the S. Von Bach Dam than during the colder months (See Figure 1). This indicates that humans and boats significantly influence bird numbers at this site.

Species

Some of the more interesting species observations include White-fronted cormorant, Darter and White-winged Tern. A mean number of 242.8 (SD=75.1) & 78.0 (SD=39.2) White-fronted cormorants, 205.5 (SD=51.8) & 92.8 (SD=59.8) Darters and 95.5 (SD=87.9) & 6.8 (SD=7.9) White-winged terns were observed at Swakoppoort and S. Von Bach Dams between March and June, respectively. There is also a significant difference between the numbers of White-fronted cormorants ($P=0.008$, $F=15.12$, $df=1$), Darters ($P=0.03$, $F=18.16$, $df=1$) and White-winged tern ($P=0.09$, $F=4.05$, $df=1$) at the two dams during this time.

White-fronted cormorant breed between March and June preferring trees surrounded by water (Maclean 1985, Tarboton 2001). There are more dead trees at Swakoppoort Dam than S. Von Bach Dam which may influence the significant difference in numbers of birds at the two dams. The higher number of darters at Swakoppoort Dam is probably because they prefer quiet lakes and dams with trees (Maclean 1985). White-winged tern is a non-breeding migrant species usually visiting southern Africa between August to April, (See Tables 3 & 4) often resting on floating vegetation and dead trees in the water (Maclean 1985). The habitat at Swakoppoort Dam is better thus more birds were observed.

According to Brown *et al.* (1998), wetlands and their avifauna consistently emerge as priority habitats for conservation work. The importance of protecting man made artificial wetlands such as dams is crucial because they provide foraging space (Williams 1991) and breeding habitat.

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Roadside colony densities of three weaver species near Windhoek, Namibia

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Introduction

Weavers have adapted to a variety of nesting sites, and are often found in high densities along roadsides (Macdonald 1990, Tarboton 2001, Oschadleus *et al.* 2003). On 25 May 2004 we surveyed two roads near Windhoek for roadside colony densities of three weaver species: Chestnut Weaver *Ploceus rubiginosus*, White-browed Sparrow-weaver *Plocepasser mahali* and Red-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis niger*.

Methods

Colonies were counted between the road and fence on both sides of the road, a total road reserve width of about 10 m. The first road stretch was along the B1 road, from the C25 turn-off, north to Windhoek, a distance of 76 km. The second stretch was along the B6 road, from the Klein Windhoek River in Windhoek eastwards to the airport, a distance of 35.7 km (Figure 1). Nests of the Red-