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Birds on Farms: Selected results of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism's 2012 Farm Questionnaire Survey

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Introduction

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism conducted a wildlife questionnaire survey of commercial farms covering the period 1 January to 31 December 2012. A total of 383 completed questionnaires were received, comprising 571 farms (Figure 1). This is a return of less than 10% since there are just over 4 000 registered commercial farms in Namibia. The number of returns per magisterial district varies greatly (Table 1) but one has to bear in mind that e.g. Lüderitz district is made up almost entirely of parks with only a small area under commercial farms. In terms of area, the returned questionnaires cover 3 186 661 ha out of a possible 46 507 745 ha, or 6.85 % of the commercial farming area.

The questionnaire requested farmers to provide information on eleven different topics which ranged from e.g. information on the farming unit (farm name, number, size etc.) to boundary fencing to land use etc. A large part of the questionnaire was devoted to wildlife numbers and this included some information on birds. The section on game numbers included ostrich (wild birds only) and another section sought information on game birds. A third section requested information about vultures, raptors, storks, cranes, bustards and flamingos.

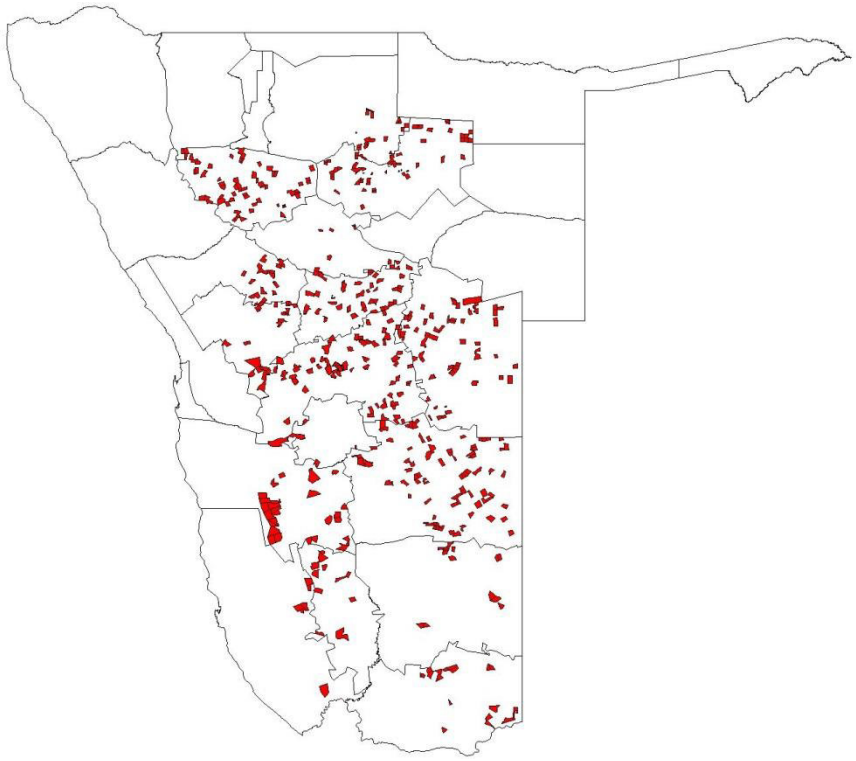

Figure 1: Distribution of farms from where returns were received.

Table 1: Number of returns per magisterial district.

District	No of returns
Bethanie	8
Gobabis	48
Grootfontein	46
Karasburg	16
Karibib	16
Keetmanshoop	6
Lüderitz	3
Maltahöhe	15
Mariental	61
Okahandja	30
Omaruru	15
Otjiwarongo	4
Outjo	45
Tsumeb	12
Windhoek	58
Grand Total	**383**

Results

Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*) numbers appear to be surprisingly low with a total of just under 3 000 birds calculated from the returns (Table 2). The total from Maltahöhe district is almost twice that of the next highest one, Mariental, with Windhoek district in third place.

Table 2: Number of ostriches per magisterial district.

District	Ostrich
Bethanie	25
Gobabis	313
Grootfontein	84
Karasburg	85
Karibib	168
Keetmanshoop	25
Lüderitz	61
Maltahöhe	881
Mariental	469
Okahandja	111
Omaruru	153
Otjiwarongo	50
Outjo	44
Tsumeb	
Windhoek	432
Grand Total	**2901**

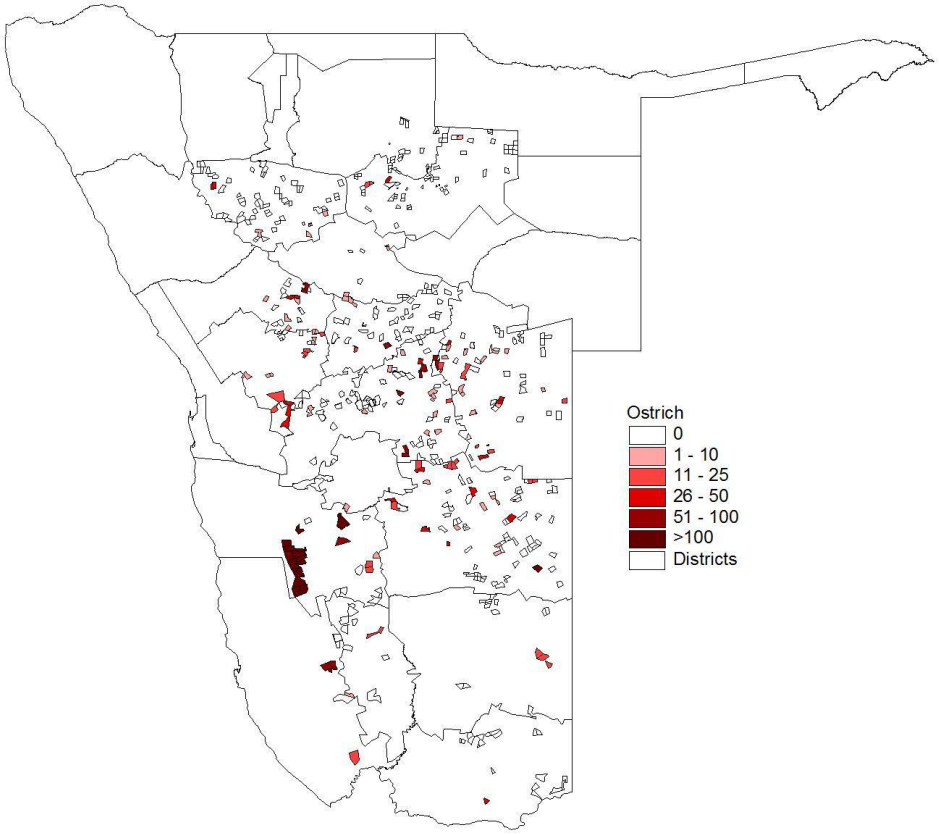

Figure 2: Density and distribution of ostriches.

In the section on game birds, farmers were requested to provide information on nineteen species in terms of abundance. The categories were: individuals (less than 10), small flocks (10 – 100) and large flocks (more than 100). Results are presented in Table 3 with more detailed results for selected species in Tables 4 to 8.

Table 3: Abundance of game birds on farms.

Species	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*	20	173	75
Namaqua Sandgrouse *Pterocles namaqua*	48	132	44
Double-banded Sandgrouse *Pterocles bicinctus*	32	66	21
Burchell's Sandgrouse *Pterocles burchelli*	29	31	7
Kurrichane Buttonquail *Turnix sylvaticus*	23	18	4
Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*	57	48	11
Harlequin Quail *Coturnix delegorguei*	19	8	2
Crested Francolin *Dendroperdix sephaena*	29	24	6
Red-billed Spurfowl *Pternistis adspersus*	54	71	15
Swainson's Spurfowl *Pternistis swainsonii*	19	23	3
Orange River Francolin *Scleroptila levaillantoides*	16	12	2
White-faced Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*	22	13	2
Egyptian Goose *Alopochen egyptiaca*	78	37	7
Cape Teal *Anas capensis*	26	15	1
Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*	10	6	1
Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha*	26	20	4
Cape Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia capicola*	60	143	70
Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis*	51	82	33
Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*	64	89	27

Out of the 383 responses, 268 report Helmeted Guineafowl on their farms. The abundance reflects the species' distribution in Namibia with higher numbers in the north-east and central parts of the country and low occurrence in the west and south (Table 4). Fourteen out of fifteen respondents, or 93.3%, in the Omaruru district report having this species on their farm, mostly in flocks of ten to 100 individuals. The majority of responses report the species occurring in small flocks but almost a quarter reports them occurring in large flocks.

Namaqua Sandgrouse are reported by 224 of the 383 respondents (Table 5). The species is common across all parts of Namibia except the north-eastern areas and this is reflected in Table 5. The highest reporting rate comes from Windhoek district where 43 out of 58 respondents, or 74.1%, report the presence of this species, again predominantly in small flocks. The overall abundance is similar to that of the Helmeted Guineafowl i.e. mostly small flocks but also a fair number reporting large flocks.

The abundance of Red-billed Spurfowl (Table 6) also reflects the accepted distribution of this species in Namibia. Less than half of the respondents (140 out of 383) report this species from their farms and Omaruru district once again has the highest abundance (12 out of 15, or 80%)

The proliferation of farm dams, sewage works and other water bodies has led to the spread of Egyptian Geese into areas where they previously didn't occur. This is reflected in Table 7 where they are reported to occur in all but two of the districts, albeit in low numbers. Only 122 of the 383 respondents report this species on their farms. Three out of the four respondents (75%) from Otjiwarongo district list this species, the absence of it in Tsumeb district is perhaps surprising.

The results for Laughing Dove (Table 8) are a little surprising with less than half (166) of the 383 respondents reporting this species. All respondents from Lüderitz district say this species occurs on their farms.

Table 4: Abundance of Helmeted Guineafowl per magisterial district.

District	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Bethanie		1	
Gobabis	3	22	10
Grootfontein	2	16	18
Karasburg	1		1
Karibib	2	8	2
Keetmanshoop	1		
Lüderitz	1		
Maltahöhe		9	
Mariental	6	24	2
Okahandja		13	13
Omaruru	1	12	1
Otjiwarongo		2	
Outjo		23	17
Tsumeb	1	5	3
Windhoek	2	38	8
Grand Total	**20**	**173**	**75**

Table 5: Abundance of Namaqua Sandgrouse per magisterial district.

District	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Bethanie		2	2
Gobabis	9	10	2
Grootfontein	10	14	
Karasburg		4	5
Karibib	1	6	4
Keetmanshoop	2	2	
Lüderitz	1		
Maltahöhe		6	2
Mariental	4	15	12
Okahandja	4	13	4
Omaruru	2	9	
Otjiwarongo		2	
Outjo	6	21	3
Tsumeb	2	1	1
Windhoek	7	27	9
Grand Total	**48**	**132**	**44**

Table 6: Abundance of Red-billed Spurfowl per magisterial district.

District	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Bethanie		1	
Gobabis	9	6	2
Grootfontein	7	11	1
Karasburg	1		
Karibib	3	1	1
Keetmanshoop	1		
Lüderitz	1		
Maltahöhe	1	2	
Mariental	3		
Okahandja	5	7	5
Omaruru	3	8	1
Otjiwarongo		2	
Outjo	10	11	2
Tsumeb	1	1	2
Windhoek	9	21	1
Grand Total	**54**	**71**	**15**

Table 7: Abundance of Egyptian Goose per magisterial district.

District	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Bethanie		3	
Gobabis	12	2	1
Grootfontein	4		1
Karasburg	3	1	
Karibib	9	2	
Keetmanshoop			
Lüderitz	1		
Maltahöhe	5	2	
Mariental	6	5	
Okahandja	8	2	2
Omaruru	4	2	
Otjiwarongo		2	1
Outjo	10	2	
Tsumeb			
Windhoek	16	14	2
Grand Total	**78**	**37**	**7**

Table 8: Abundance of Laughing Dove per magisterial district.

District	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Bethanie		2	2
Gobabis	7	10	4
Grootfontein	10	4	5
Karasburg	2	3	1
Karibib	1	5	3
Keetmanshoop	1		
Lüderitz	2	1	
Maltahöhe	2	4	
Mariental	8	9	1
Okahandja	5	5	5
Omaruru	1	6	1
Otjiwarongo		2	
Outjo	5	15	2
Tsumeb		2	1
Windhoek	7	14	8
Grand Total	**51**	**82**	**33**

A second part of the questionnaire section on birds requested information on vultures, raptors, storks, cranes, bustards and flamingos. The results are presented in Table 9 with detailed results on vultures and bustards in Tables 10 and 11 respectively.

Just about two thirds of the respondents report the presence of vultures on their farms whereas less than half confirm the presence of raptors. Bustards are reported from just over a third of the farms.

Table 9: Abundance of other birds.

Group	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Vultures	81	149	10
Raptors	97	42	1
Storks	51	19	3
Cranes	26	8	0
Bustards	109	43	1
Flamingos	10	0	0

Table 10: Abundance of vultures per magisterial district.

District	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Bethanie		4	
Gobabis	9	23	1
Grootfontein	4	18	
Karasburg	5	1	
Karibib	7	3	1
Keetmanshoop	2	3	
Lüderitz	1		
Maltahöhe	5	1	
Mariental	13	28	3
Okahandja	5	12	1
Omaruru	2	9	
Otjiwarongo		2	
Outjo	14	12	1
Tsumeb	1	3	1
Windhoek	13	30	2
Grand Total	**81**	**149**	**10**

Table 11: Abundance of bustards per magisterial district.

District	Individuals	Small Flocks	Large Flocks
Bethanie	2	1	
Gobabis	11	6	
Grootfontein	11	2	
Karasburg	3	3	
Karibib	7	3	
Keetmanshoop	1	2	
Lüderitz	1		
Maltahöhe	3	1	
Mariental	15	4	1
Okahandja	11	6	
Omaruru	7	3	
Otjiwarongo	2		
Outjo	14	4	
Tsumeb			
Windhoek	21	8	
Grand Total	**109**	**43**	**1**

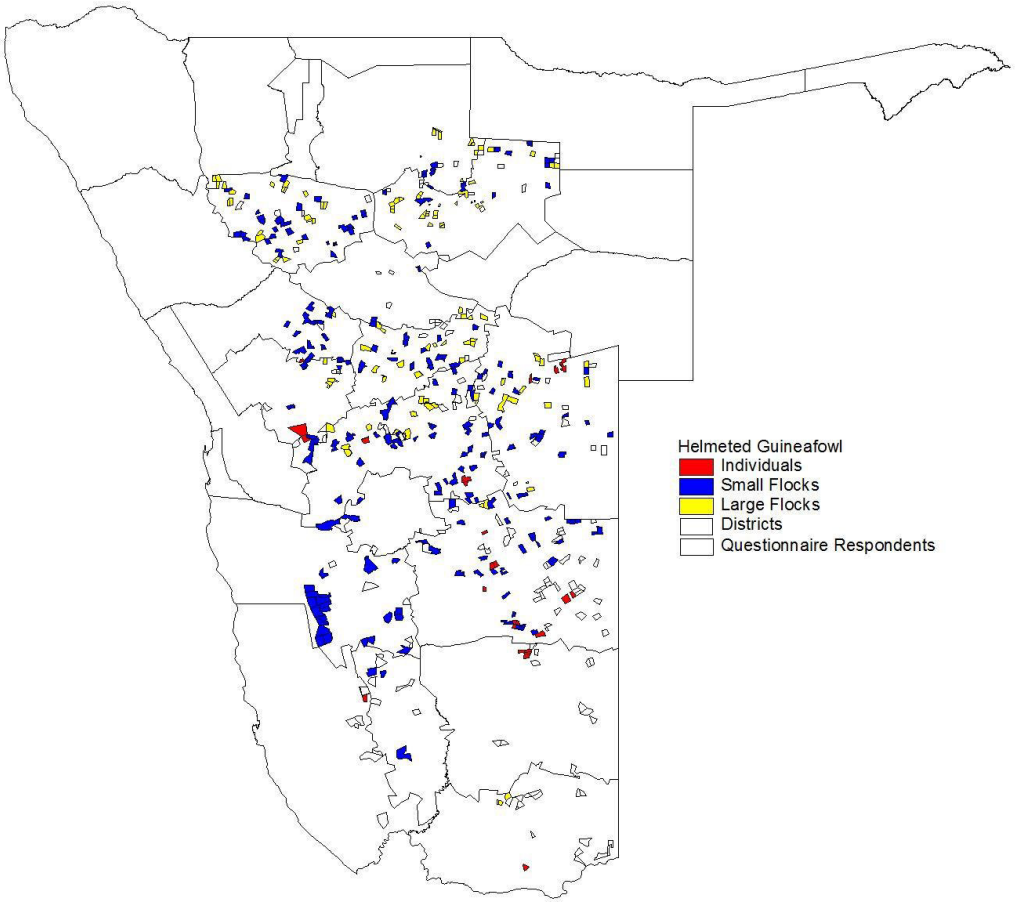

Figure 3: Abundance of Helmeted Guineafowl.

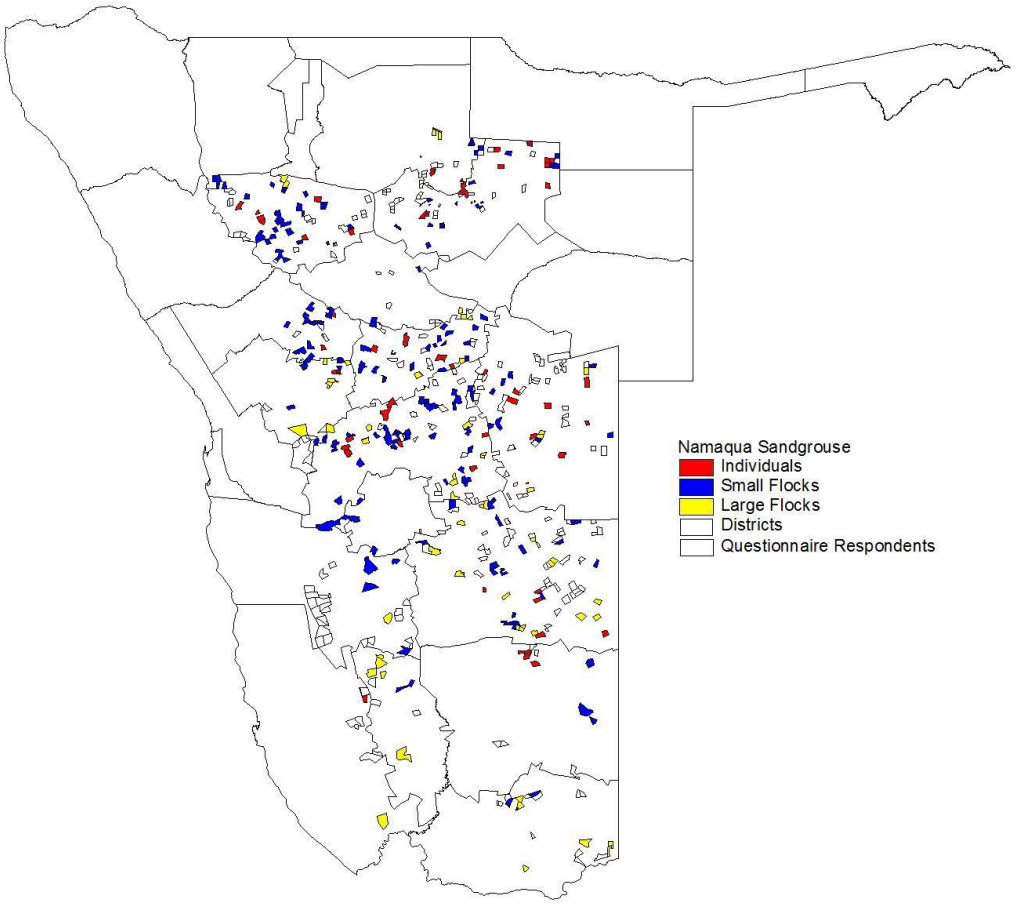

Figure 4: Abundance of Namaqua Sandgrouse.

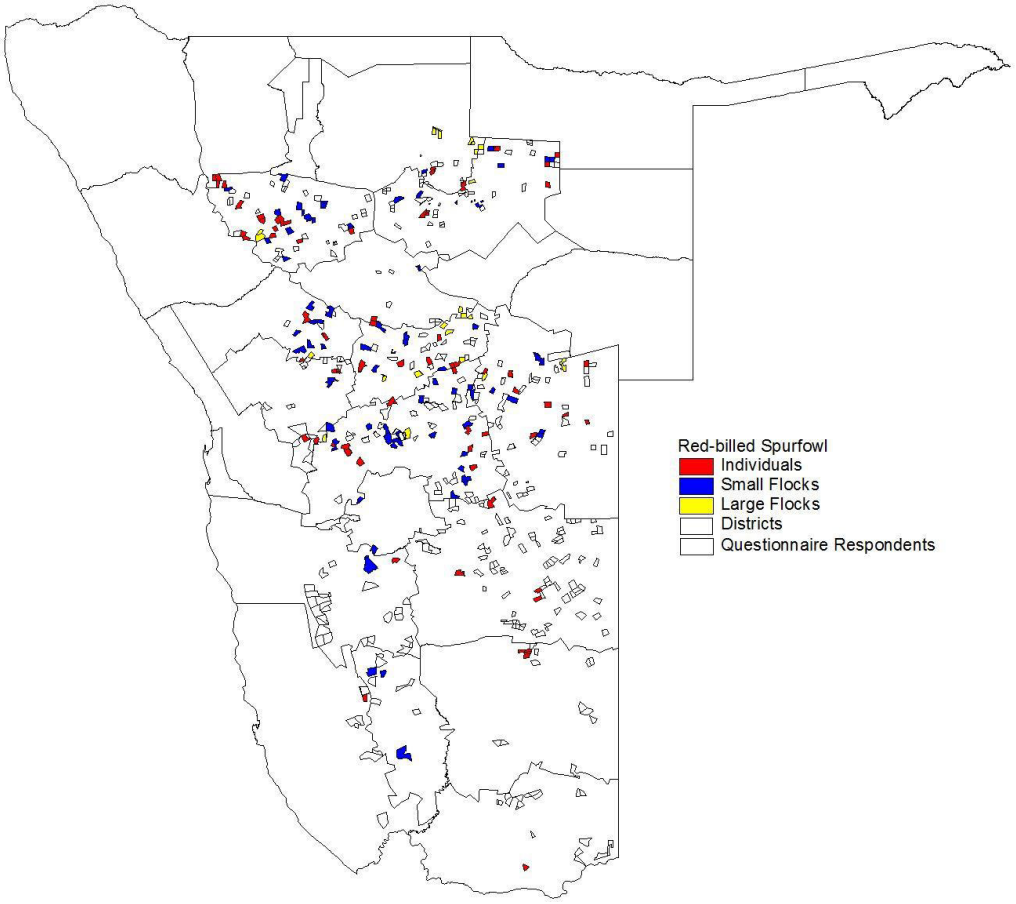

Figure 5: Abundance of Red-billed Spurfowl.

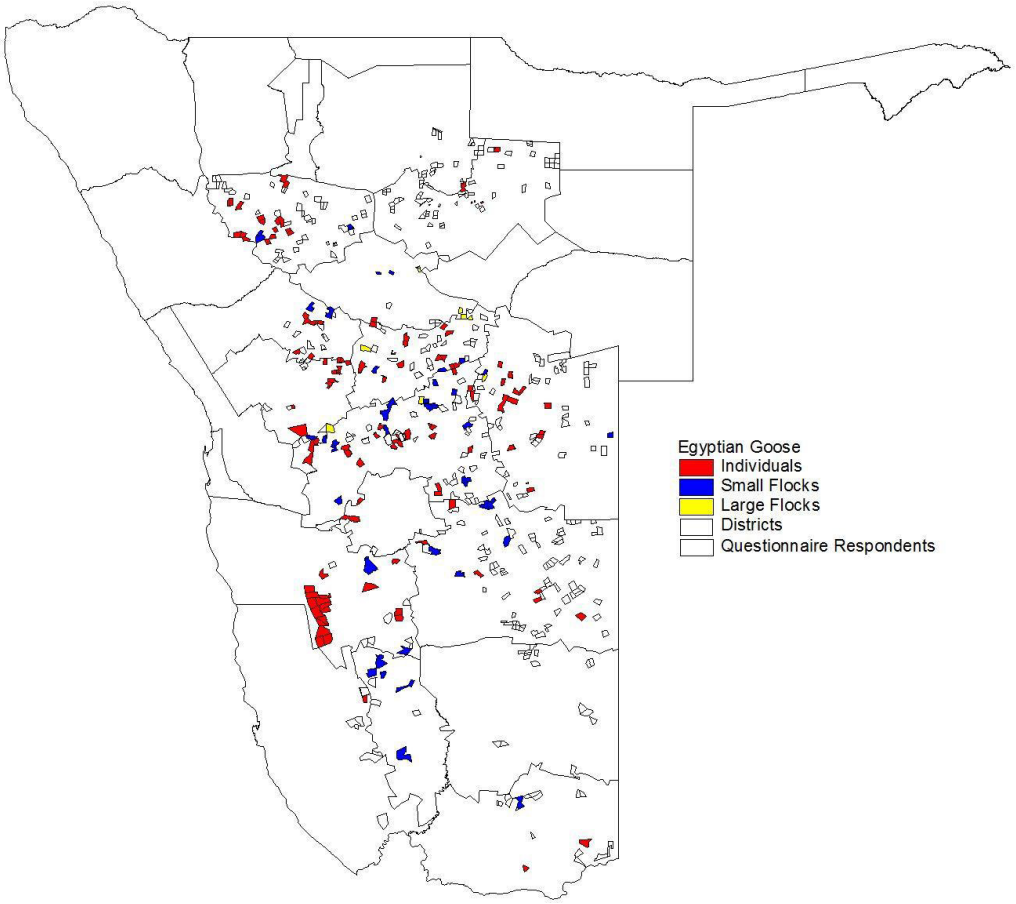

Figure 6: Abundance of Egyptian Goose.

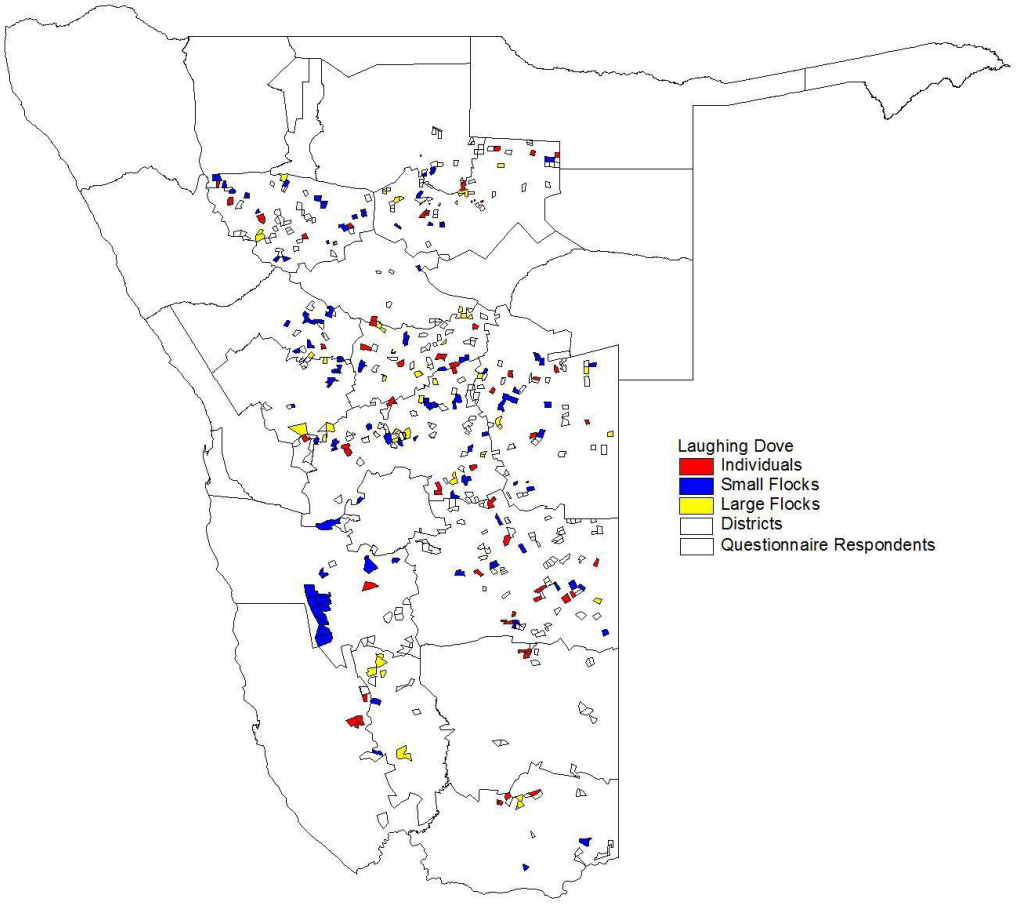

Figure 7: Abundance of Laughing Dove.

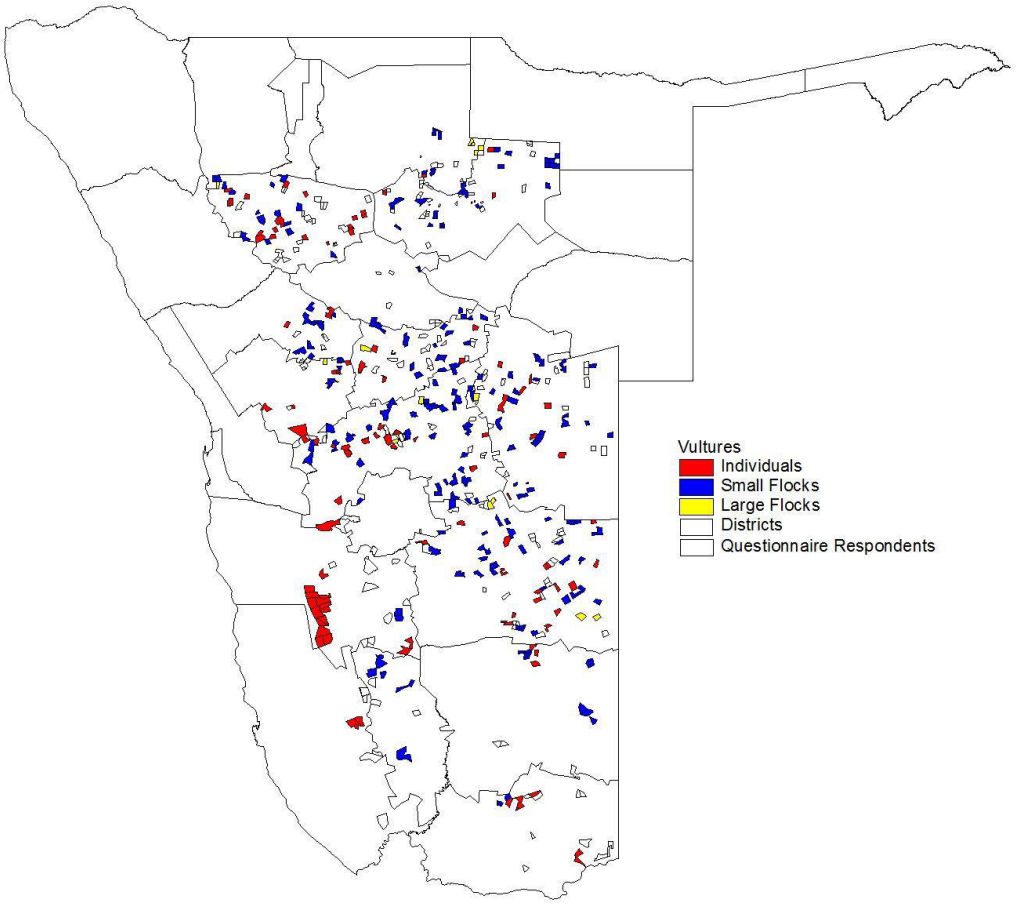

Figure 8: Abundance of Vultures.

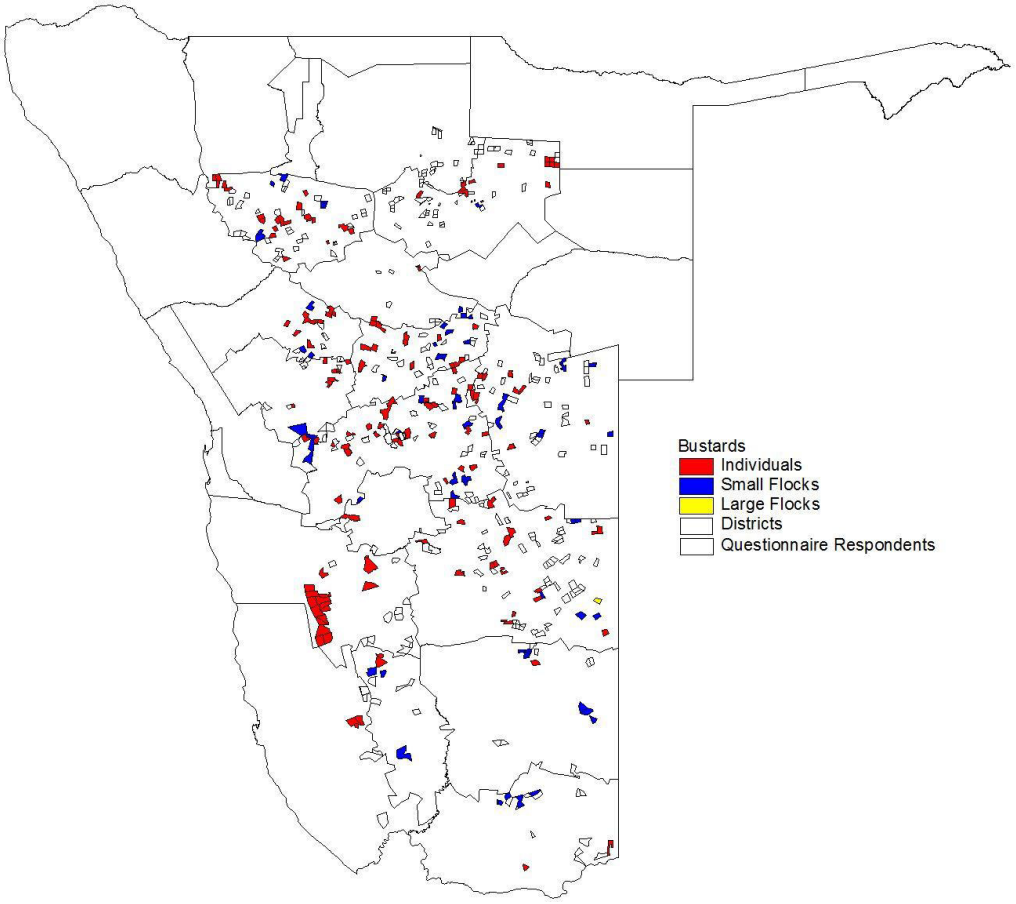

Figure 9: Abundance of Bustards.

There was also a section in the questionnaire on destruction and removal of animals which caused problems. Three farmers reported suffering losses due to vultures. One respondent from Outjo district reported having killed 12 vultures for this reason but gave no number or type of loss suffered. The second report is from Windhoek district where three vultures were killed for causing the loss of two head of game. The third incident is also from Windhoek district and the farmer claims to have lost 50 head of small stock to vultures but appears not to have destroyed any birds.

A total of 230 stock losses were attributed to birds of prey; this comprised 200 small stock losses, twenty game losses and ten other stock losses (chickens). The losses occurred in Bethanie, Gobabis, Karasburg, Mariental and Windhoek districts and eleven birds of prey were killed because of this (eight in Mariental and three in Windhoek district).

Discussion

Regrettably, participation in the survey was very low and therefore any conclusions drawn from the results should be treated with the necessary caution. For example, if one takes the number of ostrich reported and does a simple extrapolation this would give a result of just over 42 000 ostriches on commercial farmland or one ostrich per 1 000 ha of farmland. This number intuitively does not seem right, but on reflection, there is perhaps a reason for concern because ostrich numbers, from personal observations, do appear to be lower than they were, say ten years ago.

The results from the game bird section are interesting already from the fact that many farmers probably do not know the birds by their "proper" English names and therefore may have guessed which species are meant. Also, the categorisation needed a bit more thought since most of the species in the list, bar perhaps the sandgrouse, rarely occur in flocks of more than 100 birds. For example, 70 farmers claim that Cape Turtle-Doves occur in flocks of more than 100 birds on their farms. This is highly unlikely.

Similarly, amongst the other bird groups there is one report of raptors occurring in large flocks. Unless this farm is visited by groups of migrating kites or kestrels this is highly unlikely. Cranes are reported from all districts bar Bethanie, Lüderitz, Omaruru, Otjiwarongo and Tsumeb; surely this cannot be true and is also a case of misidentification. In contrast, the presence of flamingos is quite possible because flamingos are easy to identify and have been picked up in the wetland bird counts all over Namibia, especially after the past years' good rainfall.

It is disturbing to see that there are still farmers who believe that vultures kill livestock. Of course, this could also be a case of misidentification where, especially in the case of small stock losses, the culprits are large eagles that are mistaken for vultures. Many times though it is a case of drawing the wrong conclusions: farmers come across vultures feeding on a dead lamb and immediately assume it was the vultures that killed the lamb when it may have been still-born or killed by another predator.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings the questionnaire survey provided a unique insight into what is happening on commercial farmland in Namibia. Data collected by farmers, e.g. many conservancies do annual game counts, is seldom available to the Ministry (and *vice versa*) and the results give a snapshot view of some aspects of commercial farming. However, the results also give rise to many questions which need to be addressed at management and scientific level.