

BIRD CENSUS AT WALVIS BAY (NOVEMBER 1983).

There are only two significant coastal wetlands along the Namib Coast (from the Kunene to orange River mouths): Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay. There is concern over the future of the wetlands at Walvis Bay because human activities, in particular the saltworks and associated roads, are restricting the cleansing, selfdredging tidal flow in the lagoon with the result that it is silting up. The Round Table Association of Walvis Bay is concerned about the conservation aspects of such silting. In order to establish how important the lagoon and adajacent areas are for coastal birds they supported a preliminary survey of the numbers of these birds by Dr Hockey of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town. This indicated that some 60 000 coastal birds were using the area.

Dr Hockey's report covered only a single four day period in March? In order to establish the importance to coastal birds of the lagoon at different seasons the Bird Group of the SWA Scientific Society was approached to make counts in other seasons. The bird group undertook to make three counts in 1983/84, one in late November, one in February and a "winter" count in June or July. This article describes the Bird Groups' first Walvis Bird Count - November 26-27 1983.

The count team comprised: from Windhoek Collin Bailey, Chris Brown, Dieter Ludwig, Pieter Mostert, Ben Riekert and Tony Williams; and from the coast Herr Keibel, Herr Kolberg, John Patterson, and Herr Walter. The Round Table Association of Walvis Bay provided logistic support, including the necessary four-wheel drive vehicles and boats, and lavish (almost overwhelming)

hospitality for the non-coastal counters. The area to be counted was divided into six subunits each to be counted by a team of two except for the number one evaporation pan which was eventually counted by five people.

The numbers of birds counted are given in the accompanying table. In all some 75,000 coastal birds were found in the Walvis Bay area and this was certainly less than the full total of such birds in the area since some areas (the lagoon mudflats, part of the evaporation pans, outer beach at Pelican Point, and harbour area) could not be fully counted.

THE WADERS

Twenty-two species of waders were located in numbers ranging from one Terek Sandpiper to over 7 000 Curlew Sandpipers. In all the numbers of waders counted was over 25 000, certainly an undercount. Walvis Bay is obviously of particular importance to Curlew Sandpipers (7,000), Sanderlings (5,000), Little Stints (3800) Chestnutbanded Sandpipers (3600), Avocets (2300), Knot (1200) and Grey Plovers (900).

Conditions for learning to identify waders were ideal. At high tide flocks roosted close to the road from Walvis Bay to the saltworks and within the evaporation pans individuals could be approached by car and carefully on foot to within a few metres.

One southern African rarity was observed, a Common Redshank Tringa totanus, in the pan nearest to the pumphouse. Its vermilion coloured legs and red base to the longish beak were compared with Ruff and Greenshank in the same pan and its identification was certified when it briefly flew revealing the

white trailing edge to its wings.

A cautionary tale. Two plovers a little smaller than Grey Plovers and of distinct appearance were observed at one of the pans. Although the observers were sure these were not Grey Plovers they failed to take down detailed fieldnotes on the colouration, size and etc of these birds and also failed to flush the birds to see the flight pattern which is so important in the identification of waders. These two birds could have been Caspian Plovers which are relatively common inland but rare at the coast or even Lesser Golden Plovers, a North American species only recorded three times in Namibia. In either case the observations would have been significant. REMEMBER to have records of rare birds officially accepted by ornithologists TAKE DETAILED NOTES and with waders CHECK THE FLIGHT PATTERN and call if possible. With the new Newman's Birds of Southern Africa we have wader illustrations available which are second to none.

LARGER WADING BIRDS

Flamingoes dominant the Walvis Bay waters. Combining figures from both species a grand total of 27 000 flamingoes were seen in the Bay and saltworks. These form a superb sight and act as an important tourist attraction. By contrast we saw only 55 Little Egrets and 21 Grey Herons, mostly in evaporation pan number 1 near the pumphouse.

SEABIRDS

Twentytwo species of seabirds were observed in the area. Species which breed in the area were: White Pelican, Whitebreasted and Cape Cormorants, Kelp and Hartlaub Gulls and Caspian and Damara Terns. Three coastal species which breed only

farther south on the Namib coast were Jackass Penguin, Bank and Crowned Cormorants. The immense roosts of terns (14 000) along Pelican Point support roving Arctic Skuas of which several were seen closely enough to distinguish the elongated central tail feathers. None of the large, stocky Pomarine Skuas were seen but a single graceful, ternlike pale phased skua which flew past the pumphouse could only have been a Longtailed Skua rarely seen along the coast although the offshore area between Swakopmund and Luderitz is one of their principal wintering quarters.

Two southern pelagic seabirds were seen in the outer bay during the strong winds of Saturday afternoon. These were the Whitechinned Petrel, several of which flew very close to the observers at the pumphouse and over the mudflats, and some Sooty Shearwaters whose flashing silvery underwings, smaller size and paler colours contrasted nicely with nearby Whitechins.

In all this is a superb birding area providing the chance to easily observe and learn how to identify the initially puzzling waders, the superb spectacle of massed flamingoes, and the possibility of observing SW African rarities.

Chris Brown & Tony Williams
Ornithologists
Nature Conservation.

NUMBERS OF BIRDS COUNTED AT WALVIS BAY NOVEMBER 26-27 1983

WADERS

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| Black Oystercatcher | 78 | Sanderling | 5 025 |
| Turnstone | 896 | Ruff | 12 |
| Threebanded Plover | 2 | Terek Sandpiper | 1 |
| Ringed Plover | 114 | Common Sandpiper | 7 |
| Whitefronted Plover | 211 | Redshank | 1 |
| Chestnutbanded Plover | 3 558 | Marsh Sandpiper | 7 |
| Kittlitz's Plover | 58 | Greenshank | 17 |
| Grey Plover | 523 | Bartailed Godwit | 371 |
| Curlew Sandpiper | 7 041 | Whimbrel | 3 |
| Little Stint | 3 811 | Avocet | 53 |
| Knot | 1 221 | Stilt | 53 |

LARGE WADING BIRDS

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|--------------|----|
| Greater Flamingo | 4 482 | Grey Heron | 21 |
| Lesser Flamingo | 1 363 | Little Egret | 55 |
| Flamingos unspecified | 21 568 | | |

SEABIRDS

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--------|---------------------|--------|
| Jackass Penguin | 3 | Longtailed Skua | 1 |
| Blacknecked Grebe | 315 | Kelp Gull | c500 |
| Whitechinned Petrel | 3+ | Hartlaub's Gull | 829 |
| Sooty Shearwater | c10 | Caspian Tern | 52 |
| White Pelican | 118 | Common/Arctic terns | 15 232 |
| Cape Gannet | 5+ | Swift Tern | 50 |
| Whitebreasted Cormorant | 34+ | Sandwich Tern | 148+ |
| Cape Cormorant | c5 000 | Damara Tern | 23 |
| Bank Cormorant | 1 | Whitewinged Tern | 38 |
| Crowned Cormorant | 1 | Black Tern | 2 |
| Arctic Skua | c10 | | |