

CONTENTS

VOLUME 34 (2), 2001

EDITORIAL	1
PAXTON, M. & L. SHEEHAN. Mahango wetland bird count – Jan 2001	2
LEONARD, P. A short intra-African migration	7
SIMMONS, R.E. & J.P. ROUX. A survey of African Black Oystercatchers	14
SIMMONS, R.E. Nambian wetland bird counts: Jan, Apr, Jul 2000	19
OSBORNE, T.O. Carp's Black Tit nesting observations	23
DANTU, S. A dilly penguin	26
DANTU, S. Observations at a White-throated Canary nest	28
BOORMAN, M. Unusual coastal sightings	29
BIRD OBSERVATIONS	31

EDITORIAL

I write this editorial having just arrived back from a month in the USA, mainly Alaska and I have to marvel at the bird life here compared to the winter in the cold north. One may think that April is spring in the Northern Hemisphere but if you get far enough north, spring comes much later. Geese and ducks were arriving as the snow was melting but they met temperatures of -30°C in the northwest of Alaska. Before we left the cranes were arriving and redpolls nesting but both the birds and humans were shocked to wake up May first to a blanket of 10–50 cm of snow which ranged from the coast to the interior.

Back in Namibia the late rains were well received by the birds and nesting continued. The first bird I caught in my mist net on 15 May was a recently fledged Yellow-breasted Bunting, the second a young Red-billed Quelea. The nest box I left with four tiny Carp's Black Tits was occupied by a dormouse. Another nest box had 3 small Grey Hornbills which is rather late for this species. In my absence, Pete Leonard visited the country from neighboring Zambia and he has written an account of his visit. He sends his apologies to Steve Braine and Keith Wearne for not having the time to visit. I would encourage everyone to ask their visitors to drop me a page-long account of their observations and memories.

This journal used to have more recent sightings published but I have not been receiving any from the members and I appeal to all to send in their observations directly to me via e-mail at korie@iafrica.com.na. For those of you in the dark, snail mail also works at PO Box 22, Okaukuejo.

A flamingo island was constructed in September 2000 at a newly constructed salt pan on the coast in the Walvis Bay Ramsar site. It measures about 120 m by 50 m and has been constructed out of an existing raised beach. About 50 clay nests have been added to it to entice birds to come and breed. This was a collaboration between the Walvis Bay Salt Refineries (Roy Stanton), the Coastal Environmental Trust of Namibia (Keith Wearne) and the Ministry of Environment (RES). While flamingos have never bred successfully at the coast, they have tried twice in living memory.

The **Orange River Mouth Ramsar** site is counted up to three times a year in a collaboration between South African and Namibian ornithologists. Just to prove its worth as both an IBA and a Ramsar site, the counters (Mark Anderson and Holger Kolberg) recorded over 50 species at the mouth in January. The second most species rich site was the Kavango River with 44 species (Mark Paxton and Linda Sheehan).

The site with the most birds was **Walvis Bay** where a massive 156 000 birds were recorded in January. The bulk of this total was comprised of (30 000) Curlew Sandpipers, Common Terns (6000) with many unidentified terns (probably a mixture of Common and Black Terns) and 5600 Black-necked Grebes. Ever-increasing numbers of Rednecked Phalaropes (4) Franklin's Gull (2) and Black-tailed Godwit (2) made up the rarities.

Namibia's rivers were well sampled with Orange River counts in March, Zambezi River counts in April and July (Val Sparg), Chobe River in June (M. Paxton and L. Sheehan) and the Kavango River in July and August (MP and LS). These are valuable counts because they have shown that Namibia's tropical rivers support at least 10 times the number of birds (and more species) for every kilometre of river, than the two desert rivers (Orange and Cunene). We (Simmons & Allan 2001) have also shown that there is also a curious increase in abundance and species richness of birds from east to west in the two desert rivers, contrary to what might be expected as these rivers enter the Namib Desert.

Of the cranes. 45 Wattled Cranes were present in the Nyae Nyae pans in February but only 6 Crowned Cranes were seen in the grasslands north of

Etosha in January. Blue Cranes continue to breed in Etosha National Park.

Finally in an effort to encourage continuation of wetland counting, the Wetlands Working group of Namibia's Biodiversity Task Force, has set aside travelling money for wetland counters. This is enough to cover petrol costs for those not using government transport. Strangely it has been poorly utilised to date.

References

- Simmons, R. E. & D. G. Allan. 2001. The Orange River avifauna: abundance, richness and comparisons. *Ostrich* in press.
- WHOT 2000. Rainfall bulletin for Namibia, January and April. No. 22.3. Meteorological Office Windhoek

CARP'S BLACK TIT NESTING OBSERVATIONS

Tim O. Osborne
PO Box 22, Okaukuejo, Namibia
korie@iafrica.com.na

During the past 18 months I have been watching a resident pair of Carp's Black Tits *Parus carpi* at our farm, Windpoort, in the Outjo District. At our house, 19° 21.489' S 15° 29.028' E, I imported a 2.5 m mopane stump with several nice nest holes, and erected it just off our stoep. I thought it might attract one of the hole-nesting local birds who might breed. The habitat for Carp's tits appears to be wooded rocky hillsides and hill tops.

A few days after I installed the stump a tit flew into one of the holes near sundown with a green caterpillar and roosted for the night. Over the next two months whenever I was having a sundowner on my stoep, I recorded the behaviour and time the bird roosted (Table 1). The tit would arrive and start calling from low bushes near the roost from 1-5 minutes before it flew into the hole. Once the bird flew onto the stump it would call a couple of times

and immediately pop into the roost hole and make no further sounds. The bird would usually roost near sundown but from Table 1 the times varied from 14 minutes prior to sundown to 7 minutes past. Only one bird would roost in the hole. The bird returned several nights in succession but would occasionally use other roosts.

Starting on the 18 February, a pair of tits arrived but only one roosted, with the other flying off east. On 19 Feb, 3 tits arrived, one roosted and the other two flew off. On 20 Feb, a pair of tits arrived, one went into the hole, the other flew off, then the one in the hole flew out and joined the other bird. Two minutes later it flew back again and roosted in the hole for the night. On 21 Feb, the tit arrived, checked out two holes, then flew east to some other hole for the night.

Table 1. Time of arrival, time of roosting for Carp's Black Tit and sundown times at Tandala Ridge, Windpoort Farm.

Date	Time of arrival	Time in hole	Sundown
27 Dec'99	n/a	1920	1934
28 Dec'99	n/a	1918	1935
1 Jan 2000	n/a	1925	1936
2 Jan	n/a	1935	1936
10 Feb	1922	1926	1932
11 Feb	n/a	1935	1933
12Feb	1926	1928	1929
13 Feb	1925	1929	1927
14 Feb	1925	1928 ^a	1927
18 Feb	1935	1936	1929
19 Feb	1920	1925	1929
20 Feb	1925	1928	1928
21Feb	1926	^b	1927

^a tit roosted in live mopane tree 25 m away.

^b tit arrived and after checking out two holes flew to some other roost for night.

On 6 February 2001 while walking past a *Boscia albitrunca* a tit flew off from the mouth of a small hole in the trunk. The tree was situated on top of a dolomite hill on the farm at 19° 21.028' S 15° 25.129' E. The hole in the *Boscia* measured 25x35 mm. I returned on 8 Feb with a gyrogearloose torchlight soldered on to a wire attached to a torch battery. As I fed the light and wires into the hole the tit huffed and puffed like a snake and the sound

was very unsettling, as I was not sure that a bird was occupying the hole. I tried to see with the light and a dental mirror but had no success. I inserted a measuring tape into the hole and found the nest was 400 mm deep. In the process the female tit came out of the nest and flew off which was a bit of a relief to find it occupied by a bird.

I returned to the nest on 14 Feb with a better light setup and was able to see into the nest by standing on tiptoe and looking straight down into the nest. Four eggs were present. According to Wiggins (in C.H. Fry, S. Keith & E.K. Urban, 2000. *The Birds of Africa, Vol. VI*. Academic Press, London and New York) incubation is 13–15 days long. I returned to the nest on 18 Feb and after inserting the tape measure to flush the female, (I had a bag ready to capture the female but she squeezed out to freedom), I found two eggs and two day old chicks in the nest. The female stayed close to the tree and scolded at me. Two other adults, with food in their bills, arrived and joined in the scolding. From the three adults present I assume that the pair had a helper as in other members of the genus *Parus* (Robert's Birds of Southern Africa Maclean 1993).

I had installed three nest boxes in 1999, which were made by Thorsten Ludwig, and placed them in mopane trees near our house. In 2000, I was disappointed to find nothing nesting in them. On 8 March 2001 I walked past one of the boxes and flushed a female perched at the entrance. I opened the lid and found a clutch of four eggs. Richard Dean had asked me to take notes on the nest to supplement forthcoming edition of Robert's Birds of Southern Africa. I suspected that the female was perched at the entrance to the nest because she had just completed the clutch and I did not want to disturb the nest until the female was solidly incubating to avoid any abandonment. On 13 Mar. I opened the box, captured the female and measured the four eggs. The female weighed 19.4 g, had a wing 68.5 mm long and wing moult with primaries 1–4 new, 5 2/3 grown and 6–10 old and worn. The tail was also in moult with the new feathers in the middle. The eggs measured: 17.8x13.0, 16.8x13.7, 18.0x13.5, and 16.9x13.6 mm. The nest was lined with tree bark phloem.

Since the incubation is supposed to be 12–14 days I checked the nest again on

19 Mar (day 12) at 17h00 and found no female but c/4. On 21 Mar at 13h00 I checked the nest again and found no female but still c/4. On 22 Mar at 14h00 I checked the box and found c/1 and three new hatchlings but the female was not present. At 17h00 I opened the box and made notes on the three chicks. Their skin colour was pink (flesh) and they had almost no down. The down was light grey and the covering very sparse with less than 5% of the body covered. There was one down feather on each side of the middle of the back, over each eye and on the dorsal side of the humerus. The inside of the mouth colour was cream near the bill to pink deeper in the throat. The gape was cream colour. The three chicks weighed 2.4, 2.6 and 2.4 g. The female arrived with food five minutes after we had started to handle the chicks. The incubation period for this nest was at least 15 days. On 23 Mar at 18h45 I checked the nest and found four nestlings.

On 3 April I ringed the nestlings and their ring, weights and wing measurements were: AF42329, 19.0 g 40 mm; AF42330, 18.9 g 41.5 mm; AF42331, 19.1 g 38 mm and AF42332, 20.5 g 37 mm. Unfortunately I had to stop observations after 3 April. The fledging period is supposed to be 18 days but I highly doubt that the nestlings would have been able to fledge in the next 5 days.

On 24 May I caught one of the nestling AF42332 in a mist net and it weighed 21.8 g with a wing of 83 mm.



A DILLY PENGUIN

Dr Sandra Dantu
PO Box 1445, Swakopmund
felix@swk.namib.com



In May 2000, a weak underweight juvenile African Penguin *Spheniscus demersus* was found at Langstrand. It had been ringed by Pete Bartlett on Ichaboe Island as a fledgling in March 2000.

He was kept in captivity for supplemental feeding after being checked for injuries and initially did very well, eventually taking fish freely rather than being force-fed.

The day he was judged ready for release, he began displaying bizarre behaviour, thus earning the name Dilly. He would walk round in circles with his neck bent forward as if the muscles were in spasm. In between these bouts he would be normal.

Blood tests and smears were not very informative. There was no evidence of avian malaria but we could not exclude an intracranial infection such as meningitis or encephalitis. An attempt at ultrasound of the brain was unsuccessful because of the thick feathering. He would have lost waterproofing and insulation had we shaved his head.

Despite treatment with antibiotics and antifungals and vitamin supplementation, Dilly became worse. Any sort of stimulation would set off the spasms, and he began swimming in circles too. He was really not a happy penguin.

Despite being inundated by oiled Treasure penguins, SANCCOB accepted Dilly into their facility for further investigation and, we hoped, treatment. However, everyone there was at a loss for an explanation. Blood tests and tissue biopsies were all negative and it was decided to euthanase him. The autopsy was also negative.

Interestingly, in a 1964 issue of Ornithological News of the SWA Scientific Society was a report by a Mr. Kazmaier who had been involved with penguin rehabilitation in Lüderitz. He had a tame penguin that was confused and would swim in circles whenever attempts were made to release it. It would be fine one day, then confused the next. It died 5 months later from a lung infection.

The help received from Dr. D. Rodenwoldt, Dr. H. Winterbach, Dr. P. Murphy, the staff at SANCCOB, and Antje Leseberg is gratefully acknowledged.