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Editorial

The Namibia Bird Club is often accused of being the "Windhoek Bird Club" as most of our activities are centred around Windhoek. With this in mind the chairperson organized a camping long weekend at Farm Eileen to the west of Omaruru. This outing was attended by ten people including two of our Swakopmund members, Mark Boorman and Sandra Dantu. The weekend was used to atlas three pentads and to do a bit of ringing. The morning walks in Omaruru were widely publicized on various radio stations in the hope of attracting some local residents to join us and perhaps to become members of the bird club. This turned out to be wishful thinking as there was absolutely no response from Omaruru residents and nobody at all turned up at the publicized meeting points. No one can now say that we have not tried to involve others from outside of Windhoek.

After many above average rainy seasons it looks as if drought conditions have returned to central Namibia. I have been measuring

Cattle Egrets in Namibia

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I grew up in Cape Town where the Cattle Egret (or Tick Bird as it was then commonly called) was an extremely common species. These birds were regularly to be seen in numbers on the dairy farms out towards Malmesbury and anywhere else where large herbivores were to be found such as certain areas of the Cape Flats. The birds were also often to be seen on school playing fields and there was a roost in a pine tree just outside the brewery near Newlands station. I remember having to walk through this extremely unpleasant smelling area (the tree and the road beneath it were white with droppings) twice a day as a junior school pupil on my way between the railway station and the school – yes - in those days it was safe to travel to school by train.

When I moved to Namibia some thirty years ago one thing that struck me immediately was that there were no (or very few) Cattle Egrets. There were plenty of cattle to be seen on farmland all over the country but no white egrets accompanying them.

I do not know when exactly I became aware of more frequent sightings of Cattle Egrets at various locations around Namibia. I would guess that it was most probably about five or six years ago. From that time on I started noticing numbers of these birds all over the country – small numbers at Mariental, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay, regular sightings of reasonable numbers accompanying livestock in the northern regions, a few birds in Katima Mulilo, frequent sightings of forty plus birds at the Gammams Sewage Works and even birds accompanying cattle in the Khomas Hochland. Eckart Demasius also remarked to me that he had noticed numbers of these birds accompanying herds of undulates in the Etosha National Park. In the summer of 2012/13 there seemed to be a further explosion of numbers with personal sightings of many birds all across the

Oshana, Kavango and Caprivi regions and a count of 273 at the Gammams Sewage Works.

Interestingly, Holger Kolberg's "Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 4 – Herons and Egrets Part 2" (Lanioturdus 44 (3)) indicates that the Cattle Egret is in decline in Namibia although it is globally on the increase. I find this difficult to believe given my own personal observations and awareness of this species. I can only wonder whether the habits of this bird have something to do with the decline as far as the wetland counts are concerned. Cattle Egrets are not really wetland birds. According to Robert's VII they roost communally in trees and then fly out to forage in the early morning. They may congregate at water in the late afternoon before returning to their roost. It seems to me quite likely that unless the wetland counts are conducted in the late afternoon it might be quite possible to miss this species altogether in the counts thus giving a false impression that the species is in decline in this country.



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