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RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

Editorial

Included in this issue is the chairperson's report as delivered at the Annual General Meeting held on 5 March 2009. In it our chairperson, Gudrun Middendorff, outlines the activities of the Namibia Bird Club over the past year which include outings, talks, attendance of meetings and conferences by committee members and others, the partnership agreement with NEWS (Namibia Environment and Wildlife Society) and the donations and sponsorships given to various causes.

There are a number of birding projects on the go in Namibia and also a number of special interest groups eg. ringers, raptors, cranes and coastal birds. One can then ask what the primary function of the bird club is. We believe that the Namibia Bird Club provides social and educational birding to its members through outings, talks and of course, the publication of *Lanioturdus*. Morning walks are led by ex-

perienced birders who are able to help others develop their bird identification skills and general birding knowledge. It is our hope that members will go on to become involved in other projects where they can use these skills. A number of members have participated in the summer and winter bird counts at Walvis Bay which form part of the African Water Bird Census under the auspices of Wetlands International. The Bird Club has undertaken to contribute to these counts by doing summer and winter counts at Monte Christo. On 1 February 2009 four Bird Club members, Gudrun, Hanjo Böhme, Rolf Adrian and myself assisted by my daughter, Maren, as scribe, counted 335 birds of 34 species at Monte Christo. If there is interest from members and particularly if someone can provide a boat, the Bird Club could make an even bigger contribution to this project by doing counts on other inland waters such as perhaps Hoffnung Dam or Otjivero Dam which are not currently being counted.

Although I only fairly recently formally joined the Namibia Bird Club I have long been of the opinion that if one gets a lot out of birding one should put something back. Over the years I have been involved in data collection for the Atlas of Southern African Birds, various wetland counts, raptor road counts and I now have a ringer's license. I believe that by participating in these various activities I am putting something back into birding and I hope that others will also follow this path.

Tim Osborne resigned from the committee before the AGM (after resigning as editor of *Lanioturdus* some months ago) and Suzan Mallet-Veale has stood down from active involvement. We now welcome two new committee members in Holger Kolberg and Richard Niddrie.

Chairperson's Report 2009 Presented at the Annual General Meeting held on 5 March 2009

Gudrun Middendorff
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First I want to thank my committee for their hard work, support and commitment and good spirit over the past year. Secondly a want to thank our members and friends for supporting our outings and lastly I want to thank the Scientific Society for the venue and their staff for excellent cooperation.

It has become a set pattern that we visit Avis dam and the sewage works alternately at the beginning of each month

Table 3: Vagrant species recorded giving their status in the context of the Skeleton Coast Park

Species	Count	Context
Common Redshank	1	First record for Park
Greater Sand Plover	2	First record for Park and possible first record for Angola.
Royal Tern	16	Rare regular visitor to Kunene mouth
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	First live record for Park
Crowned Cormorant	16	Range extension and first record for Angola
Loanda Swift	1	First record for Park
Little Bittern	1	First record for Park

Table 4: Additional species recorded at the Kunene mouth not included in the wetland count.

Cory's Shearwater	Banded Martin
White-chinned Petrel	Loanda Swift
Madagascar Bee-eater	Zitting Cisticola
Cape Wagtail	Southern Masked Weaver
African Pied Wagtail	Lesser Swamp-warbler
Barn Swallow	African Reed-warbler

Table 5: Species recorded at Hoanib Oasis. Number of species per group with their % of total species is given.

Species Group	Species	Species/group	% of group
Ducks	Cape Teal	6	25
	Red-billed Teal		
	Hottentot Teal		
	Maccoa Duck		
	Southern Pochard		
	Cape Shoveller		
Grebes	Little Grebe	2	8
	Black-necked Grebe		
Crakes, Coots, Moorhens & Gallinules	Red-knobbed Coot	4	17
	Moorhen		
	Black Crake		
	African Purple Swamphen		
Herons and Bitterns	Grey Heron	2	8
	Little Bittern		
Waders	Ruff	2	8
	Little Stint		
Sea birds	Kelp Gull	2	8
	White-breasted Cormorant		
Flamingos	Greater Flamingo	1	4
Crows	Pied Crow	2	8
	Cape Crow		
Passerines	Southern Masked Weaver	2	8
	African Reed-warbler		
Swallows	Barn Swallow	1	4

Early Birds on Tsutsab Vlei

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From the 5th to 12th November 2008 we had some exceptionally good rainfall on the farm, especially on the 12th, when we recorded 50mm during the night. A fairly large area of Tsutsab Vlei was covered with shallow water which prompted us to search for some early visitors.

On the afternoon of Saturday the 15th we approached the edge of the vlei carefully so as not to disturb the birds. We saw a lot of *Red-billed Teal* (*Anas erythrorhyncha*) in the distance, heard waders calling and saw some of them feeding in the shallows. In spite of the shallow water two *Little Grebe* (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) did their diving acts.

After the first observations we scanned the teal with the spotting scope –hoping there might be some other birds amongst them. Just as we noticed the odd one the whole group flew off but landed even closer to us. And there they were, two of them. Ducks with broad black bills, not like any other bill colorations we had seen here before; brownish blotched overall. The legs were more to the yellow side than orange-yellow. We were unable to observe them in flight, but the upper parts appeared a very deep steel-blue. This description fitted only the *Cape Shoveller* (*Anas smithii*), a species we have never seen before on the vlei and a lifer for us. One of the birds was a sub-adult. In “Roberts Multimedia Birds of Southern Africa” it is mentioned that this bird is seldom seen together with other species; here it was together with about 80 *Red-billed Teal*.

Two *Glossy Ibis* (*Plegadis falcinellus*) appeared; we had not seen them during the previous season. The two birds flying over the water, hovering, dipping downwards turned out to be *Whiskered Tern* (*Chlidonias hybrida*) in breeding plumage. Having checked on all the waders, we just waited for more species to make their appearance. Earlier scanning beneath the trees in the shade had brought nothing. Suddenly there they were close by: a male and female *Greater Painted-snipe* (*Rostratula benghalensis*). They can usually only be seen very late in the afternoon when they come out into the open to feed. At other times they keep under cover. A few days later when we made another visit to the vlei there were two pairs.

The rains persisted giving us a total of 209 mm for November. After another big shower on 3rd December in the catchment area of the vlei some water started flowing in. More *Little Grebe* arrived and we saw a *White Stork* (*Ciconia ciconia*) two days later. On Sunday, December 7th after yet another shower we went to look again. Another *White Stork* had arrived, more *Woolly-necked Stork* (*Ciconia episcopus*) as well as *Saddle-billed Stork* (*Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*). A huge area of the vlei was covered with shallow water, ideal for all the waders. Two *African Spoonbill* (*Platalea alba*) and a *Pied Avocet* (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) had also arrived. Late on Tuesday afternoon we went to search again. All present but there was some other ducks. We had not brought along the scope and, as the light was fading it had to be back the following morning.

Luckily that was an off-day, so I, (G), went early. I crept into the open, getting my equipment ready. The *Spoonbills* and *Egyptian Geese* (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) flew off but I was able to count nine of the geese; they must have arrived during the night because the previous afternoon we saw only two. I settled down and started scanning. Immediately I nearly fell over: six *Whitefaced Duck* (*Dendrocygna viduata*) together. Yesterday - none. Jackpot! Another addition to the QDS (Quarter Degree Square) list. They had probably arrived late the previous evening or during the night. We had seen them just a week earlier at the Okavango River near the premises of Mahangu Lodge. Another duck-like bird turned out to be a single *Southern Pochard* (*Netta erythrophthalma*) which we had recorded here before.

Then I got stuck with another duck. Why hadn't I brought along another field guide? There were four of them, feeding just beyond the water's edge within the vegetation and keeping their heads down, giving me just an occasional glimpse. It appeared they could be *Yellow-billed Duck* (*Anas undulata*) or perhaps a female *Mallard* (*Anas platyrhynchos*). Neither really seemed to fit completely. They were blotched pale overall. They kept moving, feeding. I had the glare of the sun against me which complicated the observation. I did not want to move closer. Eventually they settled down on some rocks to rest and I was able to observe them better. Immature *Red-billed Teal* came to my mind - they had bred the previous season, but NO. Then I saw some white on the secondaries. One of the ducks eventually did me the favour of stretching its legs and wings to show the distinct white bars on the secondaries. This made me look at the in flight illustrations of the ducks. Both aforementioned ducks could fit on that. However, this one did not have the yellow bill, more towards a light yellow-reddish something, difficult to determine in the glare of the sun. It was definitely not *Yellow-billed Duck*. The conclusion I came onto was *Cape Teal* (*Anas capensis*), another addition to the QDS list. After having been baked in the sun for quite some time I stealthily moved off, leaving the birds in peace.

Our next visit was on Saturday afternoon, 20th December. The water had receded quite a bit as we had had no rain for some days. We saw three *Woolly-necked Stork*, one *Grey Heron* (*Ardea cinerea*), one *Little Egret* (*Egretta garzetta*), 15 *Red-billed Teal* and the four *Cape Teal* were still present as were a lot of waders. But there was this bird perched on a rock at the far-side of the water. Immediately a *Pratincole* came to our minds, but which one? By the time we had the spotting scope up, the bird was gone. We scanned and found it again. It was no *Rock-Pratincole* (*Glareola nuchalis*), so we had to make a choice between the other two. We had recorded *Black-winged Pratincole* (*Glareola nordmannii*) here earlier, a flock of 27 birds close to the homestead on the 8th January 2008. We could see the thin black line at the throat. We also noticed a white eye-ring, which is not mentioned in either "*Saso!*" or "*Newman's Birds of Southern Africa*." However the new "*Roberts Bird Guide*" which we had obtained earlier, does mention a "*white lower eye-ring*". We did not observe the tail length of the bird as it was moving constantly - gone again. We searched for the bird but could not find it again.

While scanning for the *Pratincole*, we saw a *Dwarf Bittern* (*Ixobrychus sturmii*) coming out of its hiding place underneath a tree and moving into the open. Following this bird we also saw the *Greater Painted-snipe* once more, a total of 13 birds moving out of their hide underneath some scrub. In the far distance was a single *Black-crowned Night-Heron* (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) perched on a tree.

At home we consulted the books. According to distribution maps and atlas records of "*The Atlas of Southern African Birds*" the pratincole was most likely to be the *Black-winged Pratincole* but the *Roberts Bird Guide* stated otherwise. "*The Complete Book Of Southern African Birds*" (Ginn, P. G; Mc Illeron, W.G; Milstein, P. le S). states in "field recognition" that in non-breeding plumage *Collared (Red-winged) Pratincole* (*Glareola pratincola*) has a pale-cream throat patch with black-streaked borders. We saw these borders. The *Black-winged Pratincole* in non-breeding plumage lacks the "clean-cut yellowish throat". "*Roberts Multimedia Birds Of Southern Africa*" also mentions that "the thin black line is absent with the *Black-winged Pratincole*". The bird we had seen was thus a *Collared Pratincole*, another addition to our QDS list.

However, on Sunday afternoon I (G) could no longer find the *Pratincole*. I scanned the area in vain for a long time. The water was receding quickly, only a few more days to go. Only one *Red-billed Teal* was left - it was foraging together with the four *Cape Teal*. I saw eight *Greater Painted-snipe* feeding in the open. One bird was still under cover of some fallen branches underneath a tree. Then it hit me: this single one was not a *Painted Snipe*. Why had it not joined the others? I observed it for a while. It moved around but never came out into the open, always keeping in the low vegetation. This was an *African Snipe* (*Gallinago nigripennis*), first recorded here in 2000.

I just kept on observing the other birds. One *Three-banded Plover* (*Charadrius tricollaris*) chased something that looked to me like a small frog. The eleven *African Openbill* (*Anastomus lamelligerus*) kept together probing for snails in the mud without much success. It was interesting to see how the flesh was manipulated out of the shell when a snail was eventually found. The *Grey Heron* was standing quite still, focusing on a point in the water ready to strike. Suddenly it turned around, strike-ready again. This indicated to me that they must have an excellent ability to detect sound.

A short visit on the 25th, Christmas day, revealed very little water. However, a lot of water flies could still supply a food source for the few *Three-banded Plover* and *Little Stint* (*Calidris minuta*). Three *Greater Painted-snipe* were present between the rocks as well as a *Little Egret*. The *Grey Heron* was some distance further. Three *Red-billed Teal* and the *Cape Teal*, made up the bird population. A quick glance the previous afternoon had revealed a *Saddle-billed Stork*, two *Egyptian Geese* and a *Hamerkop* (*Scopus umbretta*). Some waterbirds have another option a few kilometres to the east at a well within a sink line, filled with water. We have never checked this location. By the next day the water would be gone. This concludes another event of "Waterbirds on Tsutsab Vlei".

As a conclusion we find it worthwhile to mention the Flamingos. On the morning of Thursday, December 18th, at 05h45 I (G) heard a flight of *Greater Flamingo* (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) overhead. I dashed outside and could see about 25-30 birds flying in the direction of Etosha. They must have been on their way from Botswana - Sua Pan? I called Wilferd Versveld of MET in Okakuejo. He informed me that there was still water in the Etosha Pan and that the Flamingo chicks there would survive. Only about 1000 Flamingos had been counted at the Walvis Bay wetlands and they were breeding again at the Sua Pan as well as on Kamfersdam near Kimberley, RSA.

Species recorded:

Red-billed Teal	± 160	Egyptian Goose	9
Glossy Ibis	2	Woolly-necked Stork	25
Little Grebe	± 20	Grey Heron	1
Black-winged Stilt	8	White Stork	2
Cape Shoveler	2	Saddle-billed Stork	3
Whiskered Tern	2	Osprey	1
Common Green-shank	many	African Spoonbill	2
Wood Sandpiper	many	Pied Avocet	1
Blacksmith Lap-wing	many	Whitefaced Duck	6
Little Stint	many	Southern Pochard	1
Painted Snipe	13	Cape Teal	4
Great Egret	1	Marsh Sandpiper	16
Little Egret	1	Collared Pratincole	1
Three-banded Plover	10	Dwarf Bittern	1
Marabou Stork	2	Black-crowned Night-Heron	1
Cattle Egret	4	African Snipe	1
Open-billed Stork	22	Hamerkop	1

Tsutsab Vlei is an ephemeral pan, situated on the farm Tsutsab in the northern Tsumeb district of Namibia, QDS 1818 CC.

Post script. Then it started all over again! On 6 February 2009, six weeks after the vlei had dried up it started filling with water again. Good rains in the catchment area filled the vlei in four days. Birding kicked off with five *Maccoa Duck* (*Oxyura maccoa*) and ten *Whiskered Terns* (*Chlidonias hybrida*) amongst others. The depth of the water ruled out waders as areas that had had no water before now had dense vegetation standing in the water. We will continue to monitor the situation and see what new surprises this flooding brings.



Collared Pratincole

Photo: Eckart Demasius

Population Census of Flamingos in Namibia, July 2008.

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This report is dedicated to the memory of Keith Wearne – he will be missed!

The southern African Lesser Flamingo population was estimated to number 55,000 – 65,000 individuals in the mid-1990s, but these were either under estimates or the numbers have increased since, because at times Kamfers Dam, the Goldfields wetlands (in South Africa), Etosha Pan (Namibia) and Sua Pan (Botswana) each support more than that number. In order to try and get to grips with the size of the southern African population of Lesser Flamingos, a co-ordinated survey was planned for 20-21 July 2008. During this survey, all of the sites which at times have supported more than 750 Lesser Flamingos were to be counted. In Namibia, Lesser Flamingos have been counted at 47 sites and the 750 birds criterion has been exceeded at least once at 12 of these (see Table 1, data up to date, May 2008). This meant most of the coastal sites and Etosha Pan would need to be counted and a concerted effort was made to attain full coverage. Unfortunately the shortage of counters meant that not all sites could be counted at the given dates and a decision was taken to count the three most important sites, Walvis Bay, Sandwich Harbour and Etosha Pan on the 19th and 20th July and to slot the remaining areas in when time allowed. Counts started as early as 9 July and finished on 25 July covering 18 sites. Both, Lesser and Greater Flamingos were counted and counters were also asked to try and get separate totals for adults and juveniles. At nine sites Lesser Flamingos were counted, totalling 66121 birds comprising 55598 adults and 10523 juveniles. The bulk of these were counted at Etosha Pan using aerial photography; the birds were still breeding there and perhaps more chicks will hatch (Wilferd Versveld, pers comm.).