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HARTLAUB'S GULLS BREEDING AT SWAKOPMUND AND
WALVIS BAY IN 1983 AND 1984

S. BRAINE & R. LOUTIT

Directorate of Nature Conservation, Private Bag 13306, Windhoek.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Hartlaubsmöwe *Larus hartlaubii* ist an der Küste von Afrika zwischen 'Cape Agulhas' in Südafrika und 'Cape Cross' in SWA/Namibia beheimatet, während Meldungen von Vagabunden ausserhalb dieses Gebietes von (Liversidge 1959, MacLean 1985, Whitelaw et al. 1978, Cyrus & Robson 1980) vorliegen. Die gesamte Brutbevölkerung der Welt wird sehr niedrig eingeschätzt (ca. 20 000 Vögel, A.J. Williams in litt.), und die uns zur Verfügung stehenden Informationen sind unzureichend. Diese Möve wurde als Kandidat für das 'Red Data Book' der Vögel in SWA/Namibia vorgeschlagen. (Williams & Brown 1985).

Die Brutkolonie in der Walfischbucht-Swakopmund-Gegend ist die am nördlichsten gelegene der Welt, aber wenig ist über das Brutverhalten veröffentlicht worden. (Becker 1977). Hier werden Beobachtungen über das Brutverhalten der Hartlaubsmöwe berichtet in diesem Falle der Graukopfmöwe - während kurzen, regelmässigen monatlichen Besuchen im Jahre 1983 und 1984 in Swakopmund und Walfischbucht.

INTRODUCTION

The Hartlaub's Gull *Larus hartlaubii* is endemic to the coast of Africa between Cape Agulhas in South Africa and Cape Cross in SWA/Namibia, with only vagrant records beyond this range (Liversidge 1959, Maclean 1985, Whitelaw et al. 1978, Cyrus & Robson 1980). Because the overall world breeding population is believed to be small (c. 20,000 individuals, A.J. Williams pers. comm.) and because reported breeding success is poor, this gull has been identified as a candidate for treatment in the proposed Red Data Book for birds in SWA/Namibia (Williams & Brown 1985).

The breeding population in the Walvis Bay-Swakopmund area is the northernmost in the world but little has been written about the size of the population or any aspects of the breeding biology (Becker 1977). Here we relate observations made of breeding Hartlaub's Gulls,

and in one case Greyheaded Gulls *Larus cirrocephalus*, during brief regular monthly visits to Swakopmund and Walvis Bay in 1983 and 1984.

OBSERVATIONS

Walvis Bay saltworks 1983

In 1983 three pairs of Hartlaub's Gulls bred in the Walvis Bay saltworks on an islet in one of the evaporation pans within the salt-works. Eggs were found in June/July but there was no opportunity to visit this colony again and subsequent breeding success is unknown.

Swakopmund sewage works 1984

On March 27 a colony of c. 160 pairs of Hartlaub's Gulls was found preparing to nest within the Swakopmund sewage works. The colony was established on two parallel embankments of stones, grass, and vegetable and soil debris about 0,5 m high in the south-west section of the enclosed sewage works area. Nests were on the ground and spaced 1 - 4 m apart. The nests were slight depressions some unlined, others lined with grass.

On April 5 most birds were incubating. Of 64 clutches 29 % were of one egg, 56 % of two eggs, and 15 % of three eggs. The average measurements of 100 eggs were 55,7 (50,1 - 60,3) x 35,8 (27,1 - 49,7) mm.

On May 4th this colony was deserted and only fragments of egg shells remained. Workers at the sewage works reported that the colony had been deserted in mid April.

Hartlaub's Gulls tried to breed at the sewage works in 1982 and 1983 but were unsuccessful on both occasions (H. Kolberg & Dr J.S. Watt, pers. comm.).

Walvis Bay "Bird Paradise" 1984

In April a colony of 30 nests, and about 300 birds in all, was found at Walvis Bay Bird Paradise in the pool overlooked by the raised hide.

On May 3 - 4 there were three colonies one of 180 nests, one of 30 nests and one of five nests. Of the 215 nests about 10 % (20 nests) were occupied by Greyheaded Gulls. These colonies were built on flattened, dry reeds 6 - 50 cm to 5 m apart. The nests of Grey-headed Gulls tended to be placed singly near the edge of the Hartlaub's Gull colonies. To avoid the danger of chicks or eggs being displaced from the nests into the water, observations were restricted

to distant views from a 4 m high wooden observation tower. Incubation was in progress at about 70 % of the nests and the remainder had chicks, some of them close to fledging.

In June the water level of the entire area had risen considerably and flooded the nest sites, but there were some 20 fully fledged young in the area.

DISCUSSION

Breeding season

The latest edition of Roberts Birds of southern Africa (Maclean 1985) states that Hartlaub's Gulls breed between April and September. At Swakopmund a few birds may breed throughout the year (Williams pers. comm., Bird atlas cards held by the Directorate of Nature Conservation) on an artificial site in one of the permanent pools though numbers, restricted by the size of the site, are small (less than ten pairs). Elsewhere mass laying may occur from late January in the Saldanha Bay area (A.J. Williams pers. comm.). In our observations eggs were found between early April and June only but the presence at Walvis Bay of nearly fledged young on May 3 implies that eggs were laid from early March (Incubation c. 22 days, chick growth c. 5 weeks: A.J. Williams pers. comm.).

Habitat

Hartlaub's Gulls are said to breed on the ground or on roofs (Maclean 1985) but no mention is made elsewhere of breeding in reeds which seems to be peculiar to the Swakopmund-Walvis Bay population since such sites are also occasionally used at Swakopmund sewage works (A.J. Williams pers. comm.).

Eggs

Roberts' Birds of southern Africa (Maclean 1985) gives the clutch of Hartlaub's Gull as two eggs, rarely one or three but our clutch size distribution data are similar to those recorded elsewhere (e.g. c/1 28 %, c/2 52 %, c/3 20 % Robertson & Wooller 1981). Eggs at Swakopmund averaged longer but narrower than the 100 eggs measurements presented in "Roberts'" - 52,2 (47,4 - 56,9) x 37,1 (34,1 - 40,3) mm - (Maclean 1985).

Breeding success

The breeding success of Hartlaub's Gulls in the Walvis Bay -

Swakopmund area seems to be very poor with apparently total failure of mass breeding at the Swakopmund sewage works in 1982, 1983 and 1984 and seemingly near total breeding failure at the Walvis Bay Bird Paradise in 1984. The factors causing mass failure are not fully understood although erratic change in water level seemed to be the prime factor at Walvis Bay in 1984.

Attention should be paid to factors controlling the success or failure of breeding by this gull in the area considering its candidature for the SWA/Namibia Red Data Book.

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