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Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

With this issue the *Lanioturdus* is now back to being a journal with 4 issues per year and I would like to congratulate the members for your support to make this happen. Within this issue is a wide diversity of articles from all parts of the country. Again we have articles on "common" garden birds which are not common according to the books.

I would like to apologize to Rob Simmons and Penn Lloyd for forgetting to include a figure in their article, which appeared in Volume 35(3). It is included in this issue.

We have only had 4 write-ups on bird club outings in Volume 35 from 2002 and I would like to appeal to organizers and members to please send me a short note on the outing. This will enable other members, who did not attend, to see what the club has been doing and what birds were seen.

Included within this issue is an extra membership form. Please give one to a keen birder you know, who is not a member. You may not know it, but the Namibia Bird Club only has about 90 members which is a rather shocking low number considering all the people we know who have an interest in birding in the country. If you just consider the number of tour guides operating that is more than 90 people. That does not count the number of hunting guides, farmers, scientists, and government employees who also either observe birds or do studies on birds. In 3 of our neighbouring countries Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe their bird clubs/societies have 300-600 members and have far less individuals who are active in the tourism or outdoor avocations.

Table 1. Mahango Wetland bird species count. January 2002 with numbers sighted

1	African Darter	100	24	Marsh Owl	2
2	Reed Cormorant	119	25	Osprey	2
3	Goliath Heron	8	26	Baillons Crake	1
4	Green-backed Heron	17	27	Black Crake	3
5	Purple Heron	1	28	African Jacana	26
6	Rufous-bellied Heron	1	29	Blacksmith Plover	134
7	Squacco Heron	13	30	Crowned Plover	3
8	Black-crowned Night-heron	53	31	Long-toed Plover	28
9	White-backed Night-heron	1	32	Threebanded Plover	1
10	Cattle Egret	70	33	Wattled Plover	10
11	Great White Egret	8	34	Whitefronted Plover	2
12	Little Egret	5	35	Common Sandpiper	10
13	Yellow-billed Egret	31	36	Curlew Sandpiper	2
14	Hammerkop	3	37	Marsh Sandpiper	2
15	Openbill Stork	35	38	Greenshank	4
16	Wattled Crane	3	39	Ruff	67
17	Sacred Ibis	1	40	Water Dikkop	46
18	Knob-bill Duck	15	41	Red-winged Pratincole	67
19	Whitefaced Whistling Duck	66	42	Whiskered Tern	3
20	African Pygmy Goose	17	43	Giant Kingfisher	1
21	Spurwing Goose	24	44	Malachite Kingfisher	1
22	African Fish Eagle	9	45	Pied Kingfisher	16
23	African Marsh Harrier	3		Total	1016

Lake Liambezi, Caprivi Region, Waterbird Census 14 & 15 July 2001

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Pilot & Emergency Doctor:	Dr Johan Dreyer
Co-ordinator, Chief Counter & Photographer:	Mark Paxton
Counter & Video Camera Operator:	Katie Sharpe
Counter & Transcriber:	Linda Sheehan
Mascot & Chief of Security:	Sukela

During June 2001, I happened to be in the Salambala area of the Caprivi accompanying my wife, Charlie, on one of her "Craft Excursions". We were camped at the Salambala Campsite and not being in the slightest way interested in the craft activities, I found I had some time on my hands. I, therefore, sallied forth into the surrounding woodland and forests in order to broaden my birding knowledge. On one of these forays I headed towards the Liambezi Lake following up on a "Katima Rumour" that there was water in the lake. Surprisingly this rumour unlike many others contained an element of truth. There was definitely water coming into the lake area.

I was also not the only party interested in this phenomenon which had last occurred some 15 – 18 years ago. There were waterfowl in flocks streaming into this filling lake making full use of the nutrient explosion. The locals in the area had over the years of no water in the lake established some extensive lands of maize. There was also some unusually feverish activity on their part to salvage some of their crops before the rising waters claimed everything. The rising waters in these maize fields had seriously disturbed the entrenched rodent population and caused some mass exodus to higher ground. The raptor population was capitalizing on this situation and there were many fat, contented birds to be seen. These were mainly Black-shouldered Kites, Lanner Falcons, Red-necked Falcons, Greater Kestrels and African Marsh Harriers. The waterbird concentrations were, however, the more interesting and even so given the infrequency

of this phenomenon. I, therefore, decided to attempt a census of the lake. On my return home I put this ridiculous idea to Rob Simmons. I got the usual derogatory and abusive response, but with my persistence he slowly warmed to the idea and before the end was positively bubbling over with enthusiasm. He agreed to produce the funds from thin air if I did the necessary arrangements. With that agreed I managed to find a plane owned by the resident private medical doctor in Rundu. Dr. Johan Dreyer is a young doctor recently moved to our great city of Rundu. Being a "baby pilot" he was quite eager to get as many flying hours as possible. He had no idea what he was in for!

The aircraft used was a Cherokee Piper 235, which has a low-wing and unfortunately cut down visibility of the ground quite substantially. This aircraft was however the only one locally available. The speed of the plane while counting was approximately 120 knots and the average height while counting was 100 - 200 feet above ground level. We conducted the counts on two consecutive days during the hours of 08h00 and 11h30. It was impossible to fly lower or slower without risk. However, on the many fly-pasts I was constantly urging the sweating pilot to "go lower and slower" until on occasions we were actually counting birds above us. At this speed and height we were able to flush the majority of the waterfowl improving bird identification and accuracy by counting flying birds. Most of the birds still sitting on the water surface were impossible to identify and count at these speeds.

The water area was quite difficult to cover and count effectively as only the Eastern bank had an easily recognisable and even line. The other edges of the lake comprised of numerous fingers of water as the incoming shallow water filtered into the undulating floodplain areas. We, however, decided to fly a circle around the approximate lake area and count the birds on the edges or banks where in fact they were most concentrated. We did a series of four separate counts involving two counters at a time (one from either side of the plane) (Kate swore she would never get into a boat again with Mark but I guess with someone else at the controls and not actually in the water she must have had a lapse. Ed). The results obtained from these counts were averaged out for each identifiable species and the results were then re-assessed and the more numerous species totals were evaluated. We then established a more acceptable estimate total for

each species based on the assumption that due to the flying circumstances we had severely undercounted. These estimated totals are however pure thumb-suck and based largely on personal opinion and gut feeling.

We also conducted a series of circuits of the lake area and took consecutive slides of the disturbed bird flocks coming off the water surface. In addition we also took some video footage at the same time.

The water feeding into the lake appeared to be coming from the Chobe system in the form of a series of distinct flowing channels which originated from some variable floodplains in the East. There seemed to be no visible water connection between the lake and the equally flooded Kwando system to the West. The water at this stage was still filtering strongly into the lake area and in my opinion would continue to do so for some weeks still. At first glance the water coming into the lake area looked to be about 7% of the total surface. However, after time spent flying around at low altitudes it becomes clear that the area, at first perceived to be the original lake, was in fact floodplain/grassland and probably never full of water. In the past 18 years since the lake was full the vegetation has now adapted and the disused lake area looks now the same as the surrounding grassland. We compared a map compiled in 1982 and according to this we would calculate the lake to be between 40% and 50% full. However, only a thorough ground survey would give any degree of accuracy. Interestingly, there was a small channel of visible water in the Bukalo Channel near to the lake but not connected. This could have been caused by water seepage from the ground or the water table rising to break the ground surface.

By flying along the Chobe system we confirmed that the majority of the bird concentrations were in fact in the lake area, and only some significant concentrations were noted in the surrounding dispersed floodplains.

In my opinion the lake supported an increasingly large amount of waterfowl and other waterbird species making use of this nutrient-rich water expanse. The width of the water expanse made it impossible to achieve an accurate count by ground level counts along the banks. Birds were concentrated more on the banks but a large percentage was further in towards the centre. The reeds and other vegetation,

in the lake and along the banks, made it impossible to view birds on the water surface more than 100 m from the banks. There were also no highpoints along the banks to improve visibility of the centre of the lake. Birds along the banks didn't always flush easily when approached but simply swam further into the lake and were then hidden by vegetation.

There was undoubtedly a significant population of birds on this lake and a count can be regarded as worthwhile considering this phenomenon occurred last some 18 years ago, and can therefore be seen as a notable ecological event. However, clearly a further fixed wing census was not worthwhile. I, therefore, suggested employing the services of 1 or 2 microlights with experienced counters and a periphery ground team of similarly qualified birders to confirm species easily missed by the flight teams. A strategy must then be formulated once the teams are assembled and ready on site when an "on-the-spot" assessment can be made of the current status of the lake and its birdlife concentrations.

Although, at that stage relatively insignificant, there were a number of gill nets and signs of other fishing activities by locals on the lake. There was also significant harvesting activities in the associated maize lands being inundated with water. All these activities seem to have had very little, if any, effect on the waterbird population on the lake. At the time of counting there were no signs of hunting or shooting activities. (This aspect might change depending on the bloodthirstiness of the counting team involved).

At the culmination of the count the actual stress of the concentrated flying of the pilot seemed evident. He complained of a headache and I referred him to a good doctor we knew in Rundu. This type of flying would definitely not have been recommended for the faint-hearted.

Table 1. Waterbird counts at Lake Liambezi, Caprivi Region, Namibia 2001

White-faced Duck	2 750	(Estimated 6000)
Red-billed Teal	2068	(Estimated 5000)
Knobbilled Duck	1438	(Estimated 3000)
Fulvous Duck	720	(Estimated 3000)
Black-winged Stil	235	(Estimated 700)
Southern Pochard	60	(Estimated 300)
Blacksmith Plovers	35	-
Hottentot Teal	23	(Estimated 1500)
Cattle Egret	20	-
Pelican (unidentified)	20	(Estimated 40)
Reed Cormorant	20	-
Great White Egret	19	-
Dabchick	8	-
Grey Heron	4	-
Spurwing Goose	4	-
Squacco Heron	4	-
Fish Eagle	2	-
Purple Heron	2	-
Black Crake	1	-
Greenshank	1	-
Totals (20 species)	7,434	19,660

Visit to Gammams Water Works, Windhoek 15 September 2002

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Obviously not many people were put off by the thought of visiting a sewage farm as we had a good turn out (13 people showed up), in fact we timed it just right, there was not even a hint of the distinctive aroma in the air. The new textile factory next door does not seem to have affected the bird life as yet, although the noise level was quite high. The total species count was exactly fifty, the highlights being 2 Greenbacked herons, 8 Blackcrowned night herons and 4 Hottentot teals.

BIRD NOTES/OBSERVATIONS

All by T. O. Osborne

Bateleur

There appears to be more Bateleur eagles in the sky lately, which is good news for the endangered species. It quietly disappeared from the skies in southern Africa in the 1980's. Scientists and bird watchers noted that it was very scarce on roadside raptor counts and it was put on the red data list. The species even became rare in Zambia where it was once possible in the early 1970's to see one of these eagles in sight the whole drive from Livingstone to Lusaka 500 km. In late February 2002 I drove from Etosha NP to Rundu, Mahango and down the western side of the Okavango River to Maun. I saw about 70 Bateleur Eagles on the drive. The vast majority was immature birds, which was a good indication that the population is growing. Although it was February, which is the height of the breeding season, so some adults would be on the nest. I also noticed in

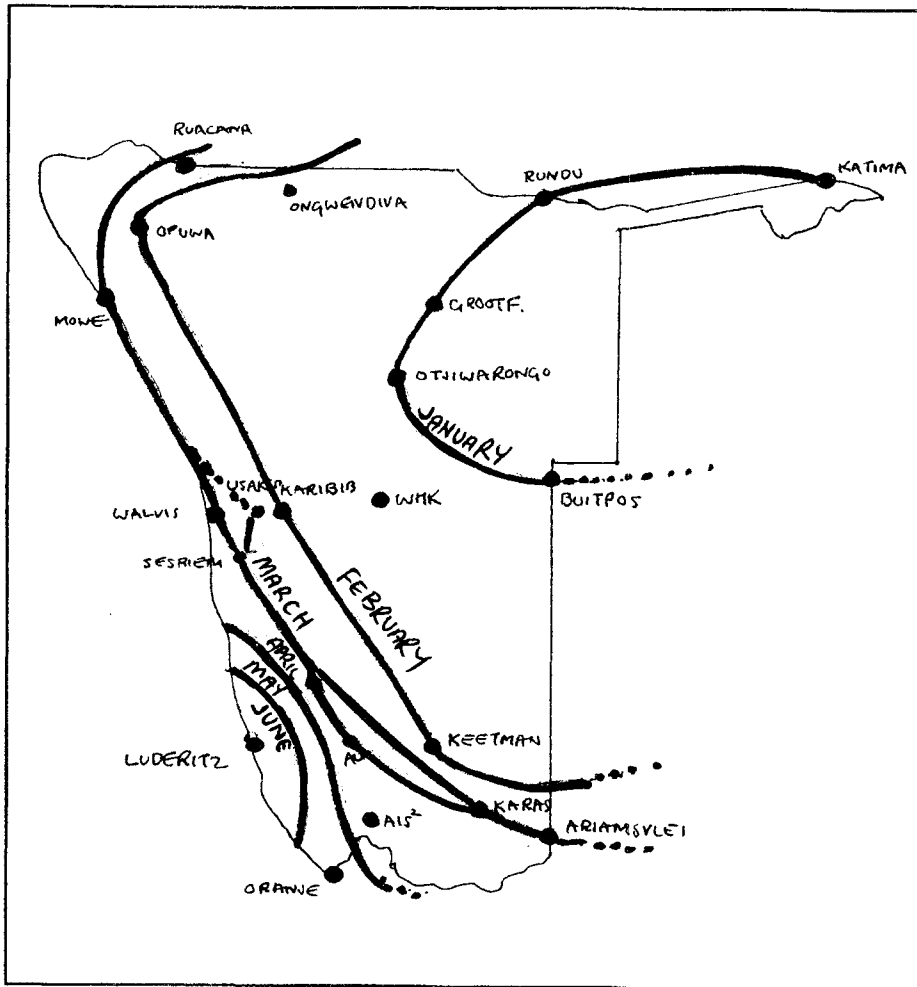


Fig. 5 Peak rainfall months by region throughout Namibia. Sources: Bernardi (1997; Kilian (1995)

Erratum

Figure 5 from SIMMONS, R & P. LLOYD. 2002

Sandgrouse: The biology behind conserving through sustainable use.

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