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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.

Birds. Vol. 1: Non-passerines. Harrison, J.A., Allan, D.G., Underhill, L.G., Herremans, M., Tree, A.J., Parker, V. & Brown, C.J. (eds), BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg).

The eagle was sighted approximately 60km southwest of Windhoek on the C26 (Gamsberg road) on 16 June 2002 at approximately 11h00. I was lucky enough to take two pictures, although I could not get as close as I would have liked to with my 300mm lens, but I think it is quite clear that I identified it correctly.

### **Mahango Bird Count January 2002**

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The rains this year seemed to have been more badly organised by the Chief Celestial Co-ordinator than previous years. Several visits to Mahango during December and early January revealed a severe lack of the usual seasonal pans all over the inland areas. These scattered pans usually attract a large variety of waterbirds like Snipe, Crakes, and the many smaller Plovers not seen on the main river system. They always add the last interesting finishing touches to the count and consequently boost the diversity numbers. I decided to postpone this year's count hoping for the rains to fill the pans. The rains did not arrive and we ran out of time.

Trygve Cooper was spending a week or so with us and I decided that the therapeutic factor of the count in Mahango would be good for him. Being a friend of longstanding Trygve no doubt also felt that I could only benefit from his more mature company and advice on this highly technical exercise. Not having seen each other for some years we both sub-consciously felt we needed a few days in the bush to re-bond the time frayed edges of our friendship as well. We therefore made sure we had a good supply of re-bonding liquid at the neighbouring Divundu Shopping Centre before heading into Mahango Game

Park. At midday we made our camp at the usual site some distance downriver from Kwetche "Game Capture" campsite. Once settled we decided to count the stretch of the river downstream to the Botswana border leaving the Nova de Marsh inlet until the following day.

The river was unusually low, as expected with the late rains, and there were still several sandbanks visible. The remaining deep-water areas had the usual scattered concentrations of hippos spending the daylight hours decadently laying about waiting for nightfall before venturing into the surrounding floodplains to feed. The water level had not yet penetrated the flood plains extensively enough to provide the hippos with secure pools amongst the reeds. This stretch of the river proved relatively uneventful though and provided the perfect opportunity to try out our recently acquired stocks of bonding liquid with what little ice we had with us. Needless to say we were an extremely merry pair of sailors when we returned to camp that night.

At this juncture something needs to be said about my crew – Trygve Cooper. Having known each other for the best part of twenty years we should by now be quite familiar with one another's little quirks, virtues and vices. Both Trygve and I have remained firmly focussed on our common passion, which is broadly speaking, Nature Conservation, and the various aspects thereof. However, over the past years we've both followed different paths that took us to different parts of this country. Trygve has remained, for the most part, firmly cloistered in Park/Game Reserve management while I've branched out and experienced the delights of living in Communal Areas, both in Hereroland and now in the Kavango Region. I have, therefore, been hardened to driving on roads shared by cattle, goats and other forms of livestock. Trygve, on the other hand has not! Trygve has also never trusted my naturally erratic driving where everything, except the road, is of interest to me. Trygve has only recently shared a vehicle with me driving through communal areas where the livestock seems intent on crossing the road only when a vehicle is approaching. To the hardened driver, like myself, the expected actions of livestock can be gauged and often no slowing down is required, while one dodges adroitly between the herds crossing the roads. However, to the unhardened individual, like Trygve, this kind of driving appears reckless, suicidal, and irresponsible and, while Trygve is the passenger, it is a

direct attack on his well-matured sense of self-preservation. Trygve is not a good passenger at the best of times, and driving with me through populated communal areas reduces him to a near gibbering, nervous, wreck who sees each cow on the road, or within 300 metres of it, as a potential disaster on hooves. Now, imagine Trygve on a boat, with me driving on the wide expanses of the Kavango River, in the Mahango Game Park, filled with herds of hippo concentrated in the only navigable stretches. His experience with hippos over the years has taught him great respect for their jaws, their bulk and their generally aggressive nature. He now has to be a passenger on my boat, which I drive at top speed on the river while identifying, sexing, and counting birds on the banks, sandbanks and overhead. My one hand is on the wheel, while the other is holding the tape recorder and manipulating the "pause" button while recording the birds seen. My one eye is on the banks and birds whizzing past, the other is on the water to see sandbanks and rocks before hitting them at speed. I'm also concentrating on the hippo herds ahead to judge the best route through them at high speed (on the plane) to minimize disturbance to the herds and also to minimize the risk of being attacked by an angry ton of hippo threatened by our presence in their water. Given Trygve's distrust of my vehicle driving abilities, you can imagine his thoughts on my boat driving abilities in these circumstances. Trygve stationed himself as "point lookout" on the extreme front of the boat where he could see each and every hippo head, in the river, and to be sure to point them out to me sometimes while kilometres away. Liberal amounts of bonding liquid did, no doubt, dull the senses to a tolerable degree, but not enough to stop Trygve from ever so subtly giving me a barrage of driving suggestions when approaching hippos. I've been counting birds along this river system and in the Mahango for several years now and naturally have become quite familiar with the hippo herds and how best to elude them. Trygve gradually came to accept this and resigned himself to his fate as "the passenger". We did have one nerve-wracking incident in one of the narrow channels when we were drifting past an island counting a large mixed group of Ruffs, Redwing Pratincoles, Wattled and Blacksmith Plovers and Whiskered Terns. Two large hippos surfaced suddenly some five metres in front of the boat at a crucial moment when I could not take my eyes off the birds and lose concentration. Having the tape recorder on while doing the counting I managed to capture the moment when Trygve saw

the hippos: - "Watch those hippos there! Watch the hippos right here! Right here! Right here! Not there, here! Two of them, right here! Right here! Right here! Right here, Mark! Right here! NOW!" We survived the incident with all our equipment intact albeit with some frayed nerves.

On the stretch of river near Kwetche we found a small herd of eight adult Elephant bulls completely immersed in a deep section of the river often with just their trunks visible above the water. They appeared to be just having an enjoyable swim and did not seem intent on crossing the river. Back at camp at sundown a leopard moved past some thirty m away boldly growling his opinion of our intrusion. We also found a trio of Fish Eagles feeding on a freshly caught Tigerfish, which must have weighed over five kilograms. The giant fish appeared quite healthy and the talon marks in the body proved it must have been a noteworthy fight to retain the fish and lift it out of the water onto the bank where we found the eagles feeding on it.

The Park itself was exceptionally dry for that time of year. None of the inland pans showed any signs of having had significant water retention and only appeared as green patches of grass areas in the otherwise dry surrounding grassland. The grasslands all appeared quite dead with expanses of brown dry grass. Very clearly this Park has not had its expected rainfall yet this year. The river system shows the water level has risen slightly this year but not to the expected level. The lack of variety of birdlife during this count clearly indicates a bad rainy season. The floodplains are green and the growth, although very low, is being grazed by the majority of game in the Park, which are concentrated here being the only available grazing.

The lack of rain and the subsequent low water levels has resulted in a lack of adequate nutrients that would attract waders at this time of the year. These factors all contributed to a relatively disappointing count with low diversity and low overall numbers.

My thanks once again to the M.E.T. staff both in Rundu and in the Park itself who remain helpful and interested in their Park and its wildlife.

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		<b>Total</b>	<b>1016</b>

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

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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