

Namibia Bird Club



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## Editorial

The symposium and dinner to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Namibia Bird Club have come and gone. I am very pleased to be able to say that our members attended these events in numbers and that we had over seventy people there (including the invited speakers). The symposium went off without any real problems – none of the speakers overran his allotted time slot and on the technological front the laptops and the beamers communicated with each other.

There will be a special edition of *Lanioturdus* incorporating the papers presented so I will not go into detail here. Suffice to say that all the talks were at layman's level, all the feedback we have had has been positive and that we have had a number of people enquiring when we will be presenting another symposium – the answer to that one is simple – not before we have again accumulated sufficient funds.

Many people were able to obtain the software necessary to commence atlasing thanks to Arnold van der Westhuizen's efforts. SABAP2

Maximum count: 784 at Swakoppoort Dam on 14 July 1992<sup>2</sup>  
 Past 1% population at: Swakoppoort Dam (1),  
 Walvis Bay Sewage Works (9)

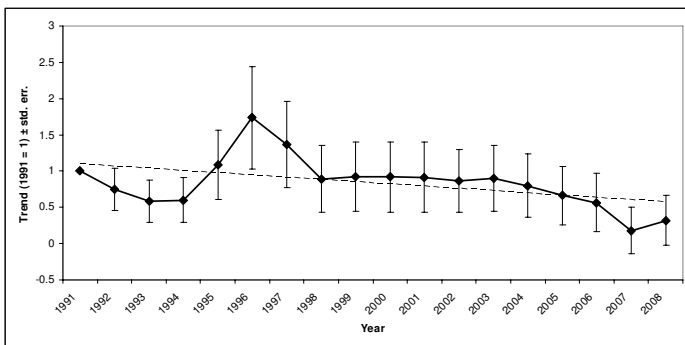
*Trend analysis*

Number of sites: 7  
 Number of observed counts: 92  
 Number of missing counts: 34  
 Total number of counts: 126

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Sandwich Harbour	447	38.9
Swakop Sewage	140	12.2
Walvis Bay Sewage	391	34.0

Overall slope: Uncertain  
 0.9502 ±0.0530



**Figure 12: Trend of Maccoa Duck population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.**

References:

IUCN 2009. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2009.1 [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org)  
 Wetlands International. 2006. *Waterbird Population Estimates – Fourth Edition*. S. Delany and D. Scott (Eds.), Wetlands International, Wageningen, The Netherlands  
 Simmons, R.E. and Brown, C.J. In press. *Birds to watch in Namibia: red, rare and endemic species*. Ministry of Environment and Tourism and Namibia Nature Foundation, Windhoek.

<sup>2</sup> This is most likely a case of mis-identification as this is the only time Maccoa Duck were recorded at Swakoppoort Dam. The next-highest count is 129 birds at the Walvis Bay Sewage Works on 19 July 1996.

**More Short Notes and Interesting Observations**

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**Great Crested Grebe**

In mid May 2011 Ulrich Hofmann “confiscated” a bird from the children of his farm workers at Farm Kakuse some 70 km north west of Tsumeb. Where and how they had caught this bird was not certain but they had pulled out the primary flight feathers leaving the bird flightless. The bird was obviously a grebe and Ulrich identified it by the striped head and neck as a young Great Crested Grebe. The question then arose as to what to do with this bird. Being a specialist diving bird feeding largely on fish, tadpoles and aquatic insects it was obviously not possible to keep the bird in captivity until the flight feathers had regrown. Following the exceptional 2010/2011 rainy season many of the seasonal pans on the farm were still flooded and Ulrich reckoned that they would retain water until at least September. He thus decided to release the bird onto one of the larger pans on the farm where it would be able to feed itself even if it was unable to fly. The bird was seen there about a month later in the company of Little Grebes and was noticeably larger than the Little Grebes. When the pan had dried up by October there was no sign of the bird. One can only hope that the flight feathers regrew before the water dried up. Great Crested Grebe is an extremely uncommon species in Namibia, and, since the Walvis Bay sewage ponds were relocated, this species has virtually disappeared from the Namibian coastal wetlands. In north central Namibia there are Atlas records (SABAP 1) for this species from only four Quarter Degree Squares.

**Red-billed Firefinch**

I received an article for publication in *Lanioturdus* from Thomas Göttert of the Humboldt University in Berlin on the birds observed in an area adjacent to the southern boundary of the Etosha National Park centred at approximately 19°30' South 14°45' East

(see *Lanioturdus* 44 (5)). I was very surprised to find that Red-billed Firefinch was one of the species listed. This is the only record of which I am aware for this species between their traditional areas in the far north of Namibia and the burgeoning population in and around Windhoek (see *Lanioturdus* 42-3 and 43-4). The area in question is at least some 115 km from the nearest Atlas (SABAP1) record. Is this a recent range extension or was the species overlooked in the collection of Atlas data? Could this be an indicator that this species might have extended its range naturally rather than being introduced in the Windhoek Area?

### **Great White Pelican/African Darter Incident**

Ronel van der Merwe of Oranjemund sent in the following:-

“I thought I would let you know of an incident I witnessed on the first weekend of September 2011 when I went paddling.

There are a number of newly formed sandbanks in the river after the floods and at the particular spot where I was launching there were a couple of hundred birds aggregated, far more than one usually sees in one spot. All kinds of birds were lounging in the sun on the sandbank : darters, ducks, pelicans, egrets, plovers and so forth. I noticed a pelican battling mightily with something in its bill and pouch. At first it looked like an otter as I could see only black body parts. Then a long neck and a frantic face emerged and I realized that the pelican was trying to swallow a live darter! Every now and then the pelican would dip its loot into the water as if trying to drown it but every time it tilted its head back to swallow and there was half a gap the darter would put up a great struggle and refused to go down the tube. This continued for about thirty minutes until eventually the pelican dropped the darter when the disturbance of my kayak entering the water spooked it. The newly freed darter dived out of harm's way and then swam a rapid escape. I thought this was a pretty amazing occurrence and wondered whether pelicans are in general opportunistic feeders or whether it was taking

a chance because of an ecosystem under pressure.”

Great White Pelicans have been known on occasion to feed on nestlings and there is a record from the Western Cape of a Great White Pelican swallowing an adult Cape Cormorant (Roberts VII) but this seems to be a very unusual incident.

### **White-backed Mousebird Behaviour**

I put out fruit, usually an apple, on my feeding table to attract frugivores. To date I have seen White-backed Mousebirds, Acacia Pied Barbets and African Red-eyed Bulbuls feeding on this fruit with the occasional Southern Masked-Weaver and even a Monteiro's Hornbill also sampling it. The mousebirds are the dominant frugivores at my feeding table and when a mob of up to fifteen birds moves in nothing else gets near the fruit. This mob manages to consume a whole apple within about ten minutes. However, there are certain times of the year when the mousebirds do not take the fruit offered – in fact I do not even see them in the garden. These periods usually last for about a week at a time and I am of the opinion that they must coincide with a more sought after or more palatable food source being available for a short period. I have no idea though whether this other source is in the form of a budding/flowering /fruiting indigenous tree or an exotic.

I have also noticed that the mousebirds are extremely canny – I do not often use mistnets to catch birds in my garden but on those occasions when I do set a mistnet in the vicinity of my feeding table the mousebirds stay away altogether and the apple will remain untouched for an entire day unless the barbets or bulbuls have a go at it.

### **Ringed Bird Eaten by a Fish**

This story was posted on the SAFRING website.

In July 2011 Kumbi Kilanga visited the village of Equimina, South Benguela, Angola where some fishermen gave him a bird ring.

According to the fishermen the ring was found in the stomach of a croaker *Argyrosomus hololepidotus* with a length of about 1.1 m and a mass of around 22 kg which had been caught about 300 m offshore from Equimina probably in the second week of June. The ring (9A50737) was traced to a Cape Gannet ringed by Rian Jones as a chick about to fledge on Mercury Island, Namibia, on 12/04/2011.

### **Lesser Spotted Eagle**

And this one comes from the *Zambian Ornithological Society Newsletter* Vol. 41, No. 10, October 2011. Entitled "BAD NEWS" the text reads:-

"Sadly ZOS has to report that Lisa, a Lesser Spotted Eagle tracked by the Milvus Group of Romania was killed by villagers of Mutoba Village near Kawambwa in Northern Province. The bird was seen by a villager on the 18<sup>th</sup> October, and killed as he believed it to have magical powers. The tracking equipment was subsequently burned and the ashes were taken to use as medicine.

ZOS will need to consider sensitizing the rural communities about satellite tracking equipment in its future advocacy campaigns."

One can only throw one's hands up in horror when one hears this sort of thing. Probably thousands of Euros and hundreds of hours of research time had been invested in this bird only to have it to fall victim to primitive superstitious beliefs.

### **Southern Carmine Bee-eaters**

Hartmut Kolb reported that on 22/09/2011 he was told by the owner of Mazambala Lodge about Southern Carmine Bee-eaters nesting in the vicinity of the lodge (near Kongola on the Kwando River). Hartmut asked to be taken there and was very surprised to find well over 1 500 birds nesting not in the river bank but on flat ground. (Roberts VII states under "Breeding" - "*Breeds mostly in large, dense colonies (100 - 1 000 nests) in sandy river bank, erosion gully, or occasionally on flat open sandy areas.*") With this number of birds

around the trees around the colony resembled Christmas trees covered in red decorations.



The colony – Photo : Hartmut Kolb



Christmas trees – Photo : Hartmut Kolb

I have once before encountered Southern Carmine Bee-eaters nesting in flat ground but that was in the vicinity of Kalizo Lodge on the Zambezi. We were told that it was estimated that there were about 5 000 birds in this colony and there was presumably not sufficient nest space in the river bank itself and the overflow birds were nesting in the level ground above the bank. The Mazambala Lodge colony is thus an unusual although not unique colony.

Subsequent to receiving this report I read (KZN Birds No 34 – November 2011) that the river bank at Kalizo had collapsed and as the remaining material was too hard for the birds to excavate nest burrows they had resorted to nesting in the level ground above the bank. Three yellow-billed kites had discovered this and as the bee-eaters are easy pickings for the kites which ambush them at the entrances to their nests it was estimated that these raptors



are taking off 400 to 500 birds per season which is possibly the equivalent of the entire season's breeding. How much longer the birds will return there remains to be seen.

It is also again rumoured that there is a demand for the feathers of these birds and that Chinese are paying locals to raid the breeding colonies and capture and kill the birds for their feathers. This story has been around for a while but it is very often the case that there is no smoke without fire.

### **Milvus Kites**

The summer of 2011/2012 produced many sightings of Black or Yellow-billed Kites in Windhoek and its suburbs. On an almost daily basis for a period of several weeks I saw up to three or four birds over the urban areas. I cannot recall ever seeing these birds in town so frequently in the past.

### **African Red-eyed Bulbul Behaviour**

Elmarie Visser provided the following :-

“Recently I witnessed some interesting African Red-eyed Bulbul behavior. A colleague of mine picked up an African Red-eyed Bulbul chick near his flat – partially feathered but clearly not yet ready to leave the nest. Due to the number of cats in the vicinity he brought the bird to his secretary to hand rear. She brought the little bird to work in order to be able to feed it regularly. On a particular day we celebrated a colleague's birthday in the garden at our workplace. The young bulbul was also there and it began to call when it heard wild bulbuls in the garden. Inquisitively they moved closer. After a while I put the chick on the ground some five metres away from us. The wild bulbuls then started bringing food for the youngster – berries and insects. They took it in turns and were nervous of any movement from our side but they continued to feed the chick for quite a while. The nest from which this chick must have come must have been at least 3 km away so it is highly unlikely that these were its parents feeding it.”

Elmarie asked whether bulbuls are prone to this sort of behavior.

I have heard of this behavior before but I am not sure in which species. I am, however, unable to find any references to it in the literature available to me. I should imagine that this behavior on the part of the adult birds is triggered by the begging call of the chick albeit that it is not their own chick.

### **Common Tern Ring Recovery**

While Mark Boorman captures a number of foreign ringed terns each season it is not very often that we get to be informed of foreign ringed birds by non-birders. Butz Hoffmann saw us ringing at Farm Teufelsbach when Gudrun held her birthday bash there and having this awareness of the whys and wherefores of ringing noticed a ring on the leg of a dead tern he found on the beach about 5 km north of Torra Bay (approximate coordinates 22.28°S 13.20°E ) on 03/01/2012. He informed us of this recovery and enquiries revealed that this was a Common Tern that had been ringed as a young bird out of the nest at Virolahti, Finland (co-ordinates 60.24°N 27.42°E), on 27/06/2011. In its short life this bird travelled a minimum distance of about 9 260 km from the ringing site on a single migration. This is the direct distance – the actual distance covered following coastlines would have been considerably greater.

### **A Different Kind of Birding Birds on the Stamps of Namibia : Namibia's 5<sup>th</sup> Definitive Series**

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My previous contributions on Birds on the Stamps of Namibia ended with the anticipation of birds on the next definitive series of Namibian stamps which would be dedicated to our endemic and near-endemic birds only.