

Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird News 5

Newsletter of the Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Working Group

November 2008

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Are you a Coastodian?

NACOMA's Coastodian campaign aims to increase the awareness and knowledge on the importance of our coastal areas to unite all Namibians together for protecting our coast. Its attractive new logo is displayed at the bottom right of this page. What Namibia wishes for, is that people state: "I am a Coastodian, are you?"

The word "Coastodian" comes from custodian and coast. The holding hands show our collective obligation towards safeguarding the coast and natural assets. The yellow and orange of the dunes symbolize energy and the longevity of the Namib Desert. The blue sea represents the Atlantic Ocean's life-giving Benguela current. The circle encompasses the harmony between mankind and nature, while the green represents biodiversity, renewability and growth.

For further information please contact NACOMA:
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Website: www.nacoma.org.na

Caring for the coast - Caring for the future

New poster on Namibia's threatened coastal and marine birds



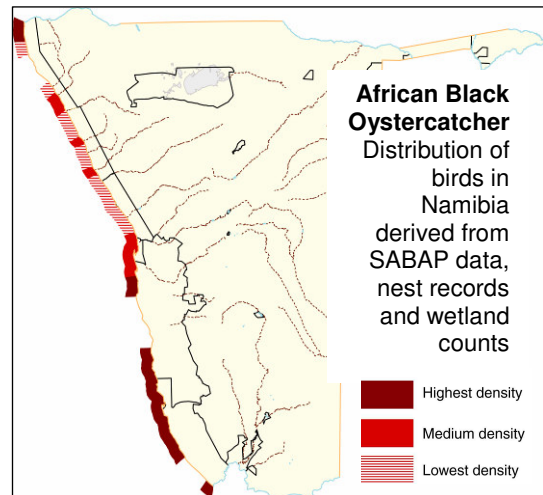
An attractive new poster on Namibia's threatened coastal and marine birds has been produced as part of a series of three (two more posters, on threatened inland wetland birds and raptors are in production). The poster is funded by NACOMA and the GEF Small Grants Programme, and features the artwork of well-known local artist Christine Marais. Please contact NACOMA (see above) if you would like to collect a copy of this poster.

The African Black Oystercatcher

Haematopus moquini

Near Threatened

"...safeguarding the recruitment of the core South African population (in Namibia) will add more to population stability than any other action ..."



Information summarized from: **Simmons R.E. & Brown C.J.** 2006. Birds to watch in Namibia: Red, Rare and Endemic Species. National Biodiversity Programme, Windhoek.

Distribution and abundance

Breeding range: Lüderitz to Port Edward (SA). Core areas and highest densities in Namibia on rocky shores around the Lüderitz peninsula and south to Elizabeth Bay in the Sperrgebiet, and the guano islands, particularly Possession Island and those in the Lüderitz Bay. Unsuccessful extralimital breeding attempts at the Hoanib River mouth. Vagrants occur north to Lobito, Angola and eastwards to Inhaca Island, Mozambique.



Adult African Black Oystercatcher at Halifax Island
(photo Jessica Kemper)

The Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Action Plan is supported by Namibia Nature Foundation and the NACOMA Project
This newsletter is funded by the GEF Small Grants Programme / UNDP Working Group & newsletter contacts: Ann & Mike Scott
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Global breeding population estimated at < 2000 pairs in the early 1980s, making it the third rarest, as well as one of the most range restricted oystercatcher species in the world. Recent research has increased the Namibian population estimates to 1840 birds or 38% of the world population. A large proportion (c. 500 birds) is found on the 18 Namibian off-shore islands, especially Possession Island and Flamingo Island.

Breeding adults are territorial, sedentary and non-migratory. Sixty per cent of fledglings undertake localised dispersal movements, whereas 40% undertake highly targeted 'migrations' to one of five (or more) nursery sites in Namibia and southern Angola, which support ca. 400 juveniles. Conditions at nurseries are favourable and juveniles remain there for 2-3 years before returning to natal sites.

Ecology

Breeds from November - March in SA, and December - May in Namibia, primarily along the open rocky coast and on the guano islands. Breeding success in protected areas in SA in unprotected ones.

Gastropods such as mussels, limpets and whelks, as well as bivalves (*Donax* spp.) dominate the diet. However, a major change has occurred since the early 1980s, with the rapid spread of the invasive alien Mediterranean Mussel *Mytilus galloprovincialis*, which has been linked to an increase in the overall African Black Oystercatcher numbers and may help explain the apparent increase in their numbers in Namibia (1200 to 1800 birds in 23 years).

Threats

In SA the species' single largest cause of breeding failure is human disturbance, as the breeding season corresponds directly with the holiday and tourist season. The high frequency of jackals on Namibia's coast probably keeps the number of breeding birds on all but the islands at very low levels. Predation by gull populations can be detrimental to the few pairs that do breed.

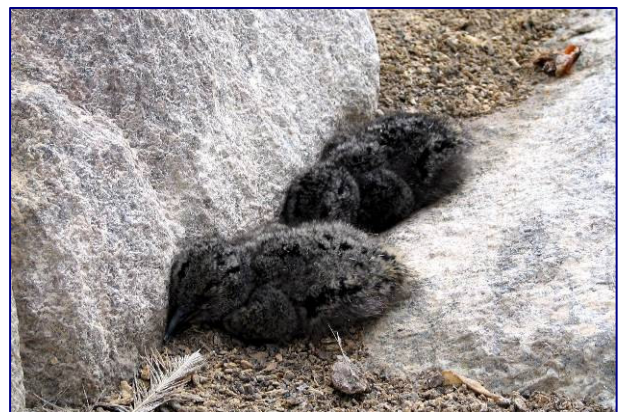
Conservation status

A Specially Protected Bird in Namibia under the draft Parks & Wildlife Management Bill 2002, because of its small population, endemic status and Namibia's position as a nursery for approximately 40% of South Africa's production. Categorized as *Near Threatened* in Namibia since it is within 800 birds of the 'small population' category. Nurseries will be offered greater protection in the new Sperrgebiet National Park, and the small breeding populations on the islands are also protected.

Actions

With the discovery of significant oystercatcher nurseries north of the adults' breeding range, the conservation requirements of the African Black Oystercatcher have become more complex than previously appreciated. A large proportion (about 40%) of the global annual production is concentrated in a few specific localities in Namibia, and ensuring the survival of juveniles at these sites is as important as any other conservation measures implemented in Namibia or South Africa

aimed at enhancing the population's productivity. In Namibia with its few breeding pairs, safeguarding the recruitment of the core SA population will add more to population stability than any other action. The four largest nurseries (three north of Lüderitz at Hottentot's Point/Neglectus Island, Caravan Beach and Douglas Point) and the fourth at Walvis Bay/ Swakopmund), support 300-350 juvenile oystercatchers. Besides the Ramsar status of the Walvis Bay Lagoon, these sites are not formally protected in 2002. Research should continue to monitor these populations, estimate age classes from feather moult and report colour rings to the Oystercatcher Conservation Programme. Understanding what fraction of birds breed on the Namibian islands and mainland and what they add to the global population is also of importance.



Top: Nest belonging to a pair of ABOs that have been using the same nest site on Halifax Island at least since 2004 (photo Jessica Kemper)

Centre: Newly hatched ABO chicks on Pomona Island, February 2008 (photo Jessica Kemper)

Bottom: Namibia is a nursery area for SA chicks, including some ringed at De Hoop Nature Reserve (photo Ann Scott)

Population trends in African Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus moquini*) in Namibia, 1990-2008

Holger Kolberg, Directorate Scientific Services, MET
Email holgerk@mweb.com.na

The African Black Oystercatcher (ABO) is listed as near threatened in the Namibian red data book. Regular wetland bird counts have been undertaken in Namibia since 1990 and currently there are 284 counts at 32 sites on record for ABO. Twelve of these sites are on the Lüderitz peninsula and for the purpose of this analysis the counts for these sites were added together and evaluated as one site. The average number of birds seen per year was used in all analyses to account for sites where there is more than one count per year. The highest average of 848 individuals was achieved in 1997 when 13 sites were counted (the two other sites with very high counts that year were Elizabeth Bay and Possession Island). However, ten sites were counted in 1995 but only 190 birds were seen. Two sites, the Walvis Bay Ramsar site and the Lüderitz peninsula, account for most of the birds seen.

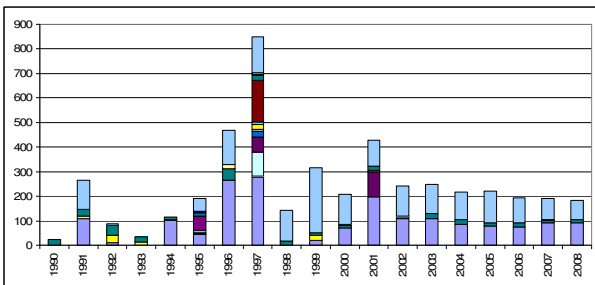


Figure 1: Average number of African Black Oystercatchers counted from 1990-2008.

Analysis of trends was done using the computer programme TRIM 3.53 (TREnd analysis and Indices for Monitoring data) developed by Statistics Netherlands (Pannekoek and van Strien 2005). TRIM uses log-linear Poisson regression to model population trends based on site-based time series count data. Missing values which arise in years when a site is not counted are “imputed” using data from other sites in the same year. Only data from sites with more than ten counts, i.e. more than half of the years covered, were used for this analysis.

Number of sites	3
Number of years	19
Number of observed counts	51
Number of missing counts	6

Results for the linear trend model (Figure 1) using 1990 as the base time give the following goodness of fit values:

Chi-square	1250.82	df 47	p 0.0000
Likelihood Ratio	1241.64	df 47	p 0.0000
AIC (up to a constant)	1147.64		

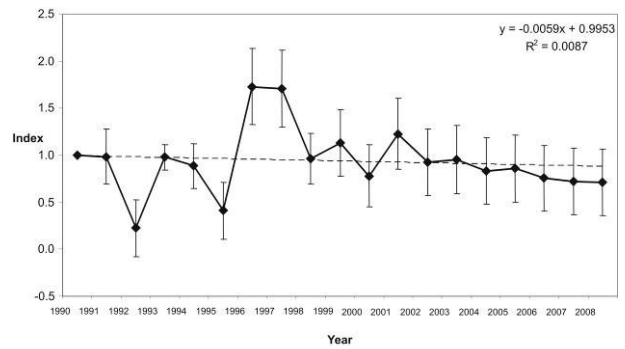


Figure 1: Trend in African Black Oystercatcher numbers (expressed as an index) from 1990 to 2008.

Akaike's Information Criterion, is very high (the lower this value the better the fit). Therefore, other variables (e.g. habitat, weather?) are influencing ABO numbers at these sites.

The model gives the trend as “uncertain” (numbers are decreasing by about half a percent per year). This contrasts with the Wetlands International 2006 population assessment of “increasing”. Looking at the three sites individually (Figure 3), the trend is increasing for Lüderitz and Walvis Bay but decreasing for Sandwich Harbour.

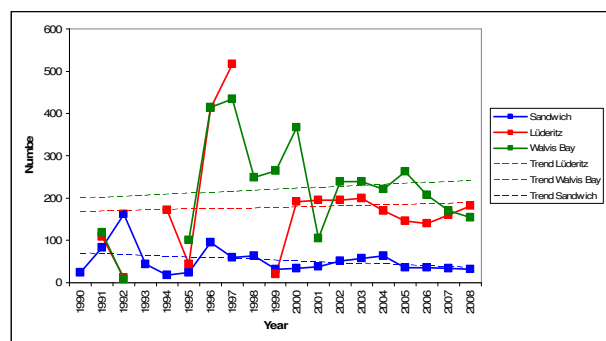


Figure 3: African Black Oystercatcher numbers and trends at Sandwich Harbour, the Lüderitz peninsula and Walvis Bay.

Coastal and marine bird training workshop

In a joint venture, the Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Working Group and *Project Shine* invited all the participant groups of the project to an informal training session on 24 October 2008, to promote the identification and conservation of some of the birds found in our coastal and marine habitats.

“Project Shine II” was launched on 1 July 2008 when 12 non-profit organisations were appointed to participate in the cleaning of the Namibian coastline between Henties Bay and Sandwich Harbour (see Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird News No. 4, September 2008, p5). The project is kindly co-sponsored by Rio Tinto / Rössing Uranium, Namibia Breweries Limited, Swakopmund Municipality, NAMPORT, Murray Roberts, HAN, Walvis Bay Municipality, NEC Stahl and Smith Sales and Services.



Workshop participants outside the MRMF Auditorium, Swakopmund (photo Ann Scott)



Mark Boorman leads an interactive session on bird identification (photo Ann Scott)

Forty representatives of the participating groups (Swakop Private School, Tears of Hope, Die Voortrekkers, Eben Ezer Youth Group, Pro Ed Akademie, Swakopmund Cricket Academy, Blue Boys Soccer Club, Joint Compassion Keepers, SIS Returning Youth Ministry, Henties Bay Local Youth Forum, U/15 Youth Development Team and Kamwandi Junior Secondary School) took part in our workshop, as well as five presenters/facilitators.

The programme started with an interactive bird identification session, using the Roberts' Multimedia programme, guidebooks and a worksheet. While the emphasis was on the more common species, some of Namibia's threatened bird species were also mentioned. Well-known local bird-ringer Mark Boorman, who specializes in the ringing of tern species, also explained the reasons for, methods and value of bird-ringing. Dr Sandra Dantu gave a thought-provoking presentation on the conservation plight of the African Penguin and other seabirds, which led to the suggestion that the participants should form their own bird club(s) as a basis for conservation action and bird watching.

Finally, the NC/MBWG launched three competitions linked to bird conservation and *Project Shine*. Bird book prizes will be awarded for the following categories, to be judged at the beginning of March 2009:

1. The group that collects the greatest weight of (blue) plastic bottles for recycling (weigh-in at end of February 2009).
2. The group that finds and reports the greatest number of (dead) ringed seabirds.
3. The group that creates the best large seabird sculpture, made out of recycled litter found on the coast (similar to the gemsbok "sculpture" below).



Many thanks to Berdine Potgieter of Swakopmund Municipality for ongoing support, and to Mark Boorman, Dr Sandra Dantu and all our enthusiastic participants! The workshop was funded by the GEF Small Grants Programme.

Newsflashes

ABO sightings at Walvis Bay Ramsar Site

Mike & Ann Scott (email below)

20/7/08: Our team counted 114 ABOs at the pumphouse during the Walvis Bay wetland counts in July 2008.

Marilyn & Pete Bridgeford, email pmbridge@iway.na

11/9/08: Herman Neethling saw 75 ABOs at the pumphouse at the oyster beds next to the hide at Walvis Bay.

Terns and shorebirds are late!

Rod & Sigi Braby, email rbraby@nacoma.org.na

27/10/08: The terns and shorebirds generally are later than they have been for 17 years. Sigi has 9 Damara Tern nests, all initiated within the last week. 12 jackal are also watching and waiting with interest, surviving on human picnic remains.

Breeding Black-winged Stilts on Swakop River

Lynette Le Roux, Stargazing Adventure Namibia cc

Email: adventurenamibia@iway.na

27/9/08: I discovered a breeding pair of Blackwinged Stilt in the Swakop River "oases" near the Golf course (see cellphone photograph below). There is also an Avocet breeding pair. I will let you know if I spot any young birds.





Buff-spotted Flufftail on Swakop River

Elke Erb, email erbelke@mweb.com.na

Herewith (above) the picture of the buffspotted Flufftail that I found dead in my garden on the Camel Farm on 12/04/2008. I have it still frozen in the deepfreezer. According to Mark Boorman, this is one of only four recorded in Namibia?

Flamingo movements

Elke Erb, email erbelke@mweb.com.na

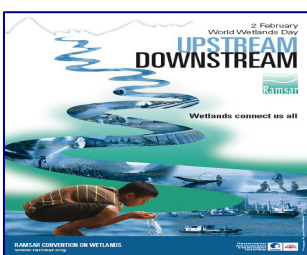
On 17/10/08 we heard that Pretoria, SA had had its first good rains. On 18/10/08 at sunset I heard flamingos flying high overhead over the Camel Farm. They appeared to be following the tar road (which runs west-east), rather than the Swakop River (which also runs in the same direction). It was darkish and there was a huge flock. On 19/10/08 my daughter in Windhoek heard flamingos flying overhead at lunch time. Other people in Swakopmund have reported hearing them in the evenings. Could they be coming from the Mile 4 Saltpans?

The flamingos fly higher than powerlines; but these lines could pose a risk when they land and take off from roost sites.

Youth Climate Conference & Wetlands Day 2009

Jonathan Wilsnach, email jonathan.wilsnach@milset.org and dduinehigh@iway.na

My organization (Milset) in conjunction with the De Duine Enviro Society, is busy with a worldwide youth climate conference program. I will be responsible for Namibia as well as Africa. Have a look at our website www.milset.org as well as at the YCC website www.ycc2009.org. I would like to arrange the African Youth Climate Conference to take place during the week of the international wetlands day competition, in February 2009. Currently I have interested parties from several African countries that would like to participate at this event. Please feel free to contact me for further information.



Prize collected for the competition, "What kind of fish has our Osprey caught?"

(see newsletter No. 3 [July 2008], page 4)

Jeanne Meintjes, Eco Marine Kayak Tours cc, cell + 264 81 129 3144, email emkayak@iway.na, www.emkayak.iway.na

The correct reply - a mullet, according to Jurg Walters – was provided by Mike Scott who with Ann enjoyed the prize of an exciting kayaking trip on 2 October 2008 - *thank you very much, Jeanne, also for the photograph!*

Interesting seabird rings

John Paterson, Instructor Albatross Task Force Namibia
email: john@albatross.org.na or john@paterson.alt.na
www.savethealbatross.net

30/9/08: Here are some more interesting seabird rings that have been handed in over the last couple of months:

A ring photographed on a Black-browed Albatross ± 120 km off Walvis Bay in June 2008; the bird was ringed on Bird Island, South Georgia in August 2007. The bird was breeding, but the breeding attempt failed.

More recently a ringed White-chinned Petrel was killed on a trawler and the ring was handed in to Jessica Kemper in Lüderitz. This bird had been ringed as a chick on 15 March 2007 on Possession Island, Île Crozet in the southern Indian Ocean. Thanks for this record, Jessica.

The latest is a Wandering Albatross ring recovered on a swordfish long line vessel fishing in the south western Atlantic on 17 August 2008. This bird was also ringed on Bird Island, South Georgia as a chick that fledged in late 2006.

Long-term trends for shorebirds

Dr Rob Simmons, email Rob.Simmons@uct.ac.za

Holger (Kolberg) and Rod (Braby) and I are working on long-term trends for shorebirds in Sandwich and Walvis - and we have some very interesting trends.

1. All residents are increasing!
2. Almost all migrant - waders - are decreasing, except
3. ... the three smallest (Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Sanderling) which all show increases.