



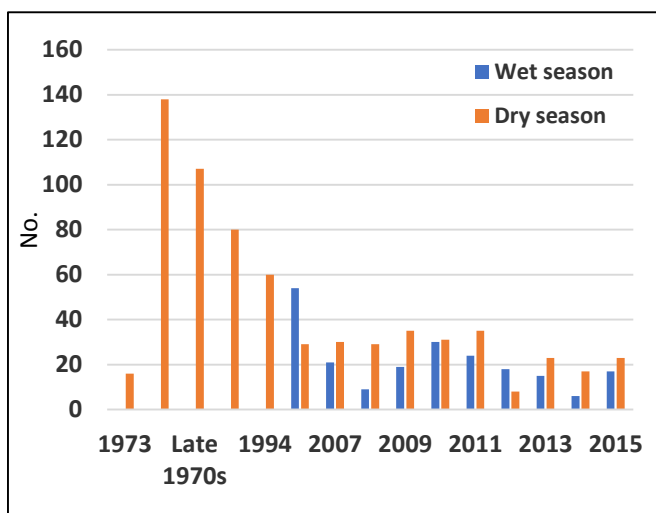
Two Blue Cranes engage in their delightful dance at Newbrowni, Etosha in May 2015; will this Critically Endangered species be able to survive in Namibia in the future? (photo Christo Snyman)

IN THIS ISSUE

- Namibia's Blue Cranes hang in there ...1**
- Crane awareness is a priority ...2**
- Blue Crane activities at Namutoni Environmental Education Centre ...3**
- Funding update ...4**
- Crane sightings**
 - Grey Crowned Crane ...5
 - Wattled Crane ...5
 - Blue Crane ...5
- Update on the Flight Paths for Wetland Flagships project ...7**
- Flamingo tracking devices used for locating preferred feeding sites at Mile 4 Saltworks, Swakopmund ...7**
- The night of the flamingo snatchers ...9**

NAMIBIA'S BLUE CRANES HANG IN THERE

Our latest dry-season counts of Blue Cranes are encouraging, although still short of the 35 last recorded in 2011: 23 were counted at Lake Oponono in mid-July 2015 during the wetland count conducted by Wilferd Versfeld and Mark Boorman, and 21 at Andoni on 21/10/15 by Wilferd (see below for further details of these sightings). Once again our dry-season count is higher than that of the previous wet season, a maximum of 17 adults plus one chick in March 2015 (which unfortunately disappeared by the end of April 2015). Where do the other cranes disappear to at these times? Wet-season and dry-season counts of Blue Cranes in Namibia from 1973-2015 are shown on page 2.



Wet-season and dry-season counts of Blue Cranes in Namibia from 1973-2015.

Ringed cranes

Nine known-age cranes have been recorded this year (see table on right; also previous issue, No. 53). During the past season, five birds ringed in 2006-2009 were breeding (i.e. 6-9 years old).

Code	Year ringed	Mar 2015	Oct 2015	Breeding site
NHD	2006	X	X	Halali Seepage
NHF	2006	X	X	Charitsaub
NHH	2007	X	X	Charitsaub
NBN	2008	X	X	Halali Seepage
NBW	2008	-	X	
NBZ	2008	X	X	
NHM	2009	X	-	Salvadora
NCJ	2014	X	X	
NCK	2014	X	X	

Table 1. Known-age Blue Cranes recorded in 2015 (breeding birds indicated in red)

Of interest is that NBW, a non-breeding bird, was not recorded in March 2015 but was present at Andoni in October 2015. One of the breeding birds, NHM (Salvadora), was not recorded at Andoni in October; hopefully this bird will still turn up this coming season. An additional ringed bird (metal only) was recorded in March 2015. Thank you Wilferd, for the latest October and November 2015 records of ringed birds at Andoni.

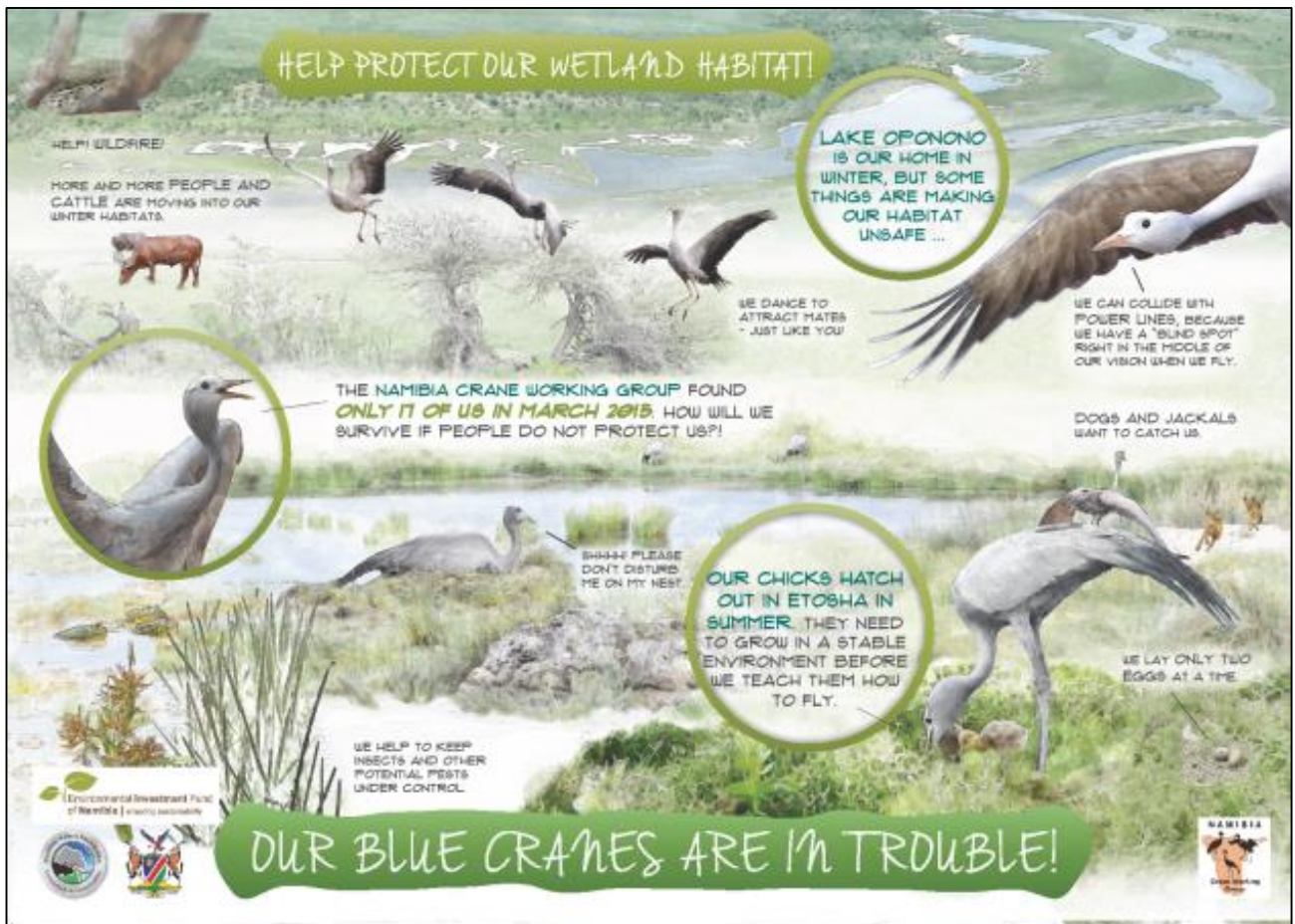
CRANE AWARENESS IS A PRIORITY

As mentioned in our previous issue (No. 53), promoting awareness amongst local communities about the plight of the Blue Crane has been targetted as a priority in our action plan, in view of the continued decline in numbers. The Namutoni Environmental Education Centre (NEEC) has come to the fore with strong support for reaching these communities to the north of the Etosha Park who can influence the cranes when they visit these areas in winter (see article on page 3).

Our crane activity book continues to be popular among learners of all ages, one of the main target groups for spreading the message. Our talented graphic artist and designer, Saar Maritz of "saardesign" has produced a striking Blue Crane poster, to supplement the above awareness tool. This poster is also available in Oshiwambo, kindly translated by Matheus Shimpileni. A big thank you to Vilho Absalom, Environmental Educator at the NEEC, and to Hanjo Böhme of the Namibia Bird Club, for your help in distributing these awareness materials! The sponsorship of the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia for the printing of the posters is acknowledged with gratitude.

Right and above: Vilho Absalom from the NEEC (right) and Thomas Kornelus, a ranger at Namutoni, took a short outreach to the neighbouring conservancies in the north to meet up with chairmen; they gave out posters to the headman of Onanke village as well as the chairman of King Nehale Conservancy (photo top: Thomas Kornelus and bottom: Vilho Absalom)





This striking Blue Crane poster (available in English and Oshiwambo) was produced by Saar Maritz of "saardesign" as part of our crane awareness materials.

BLUE CRANE ACTIVITIES AT NAMUTONI ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRE

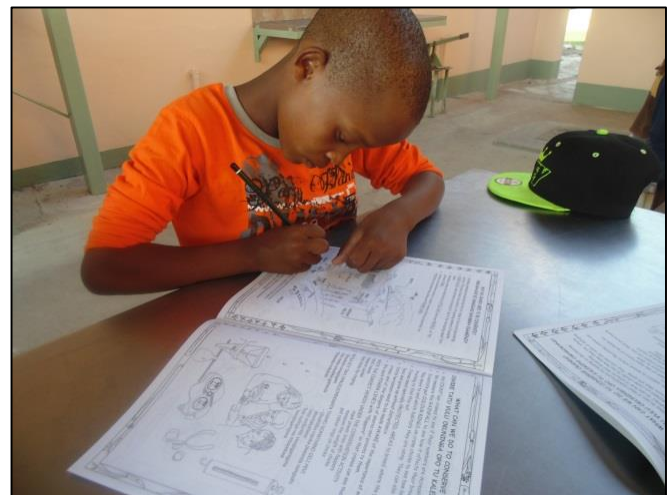
Vilho Absalom (absalomevilho@yahoo.com)

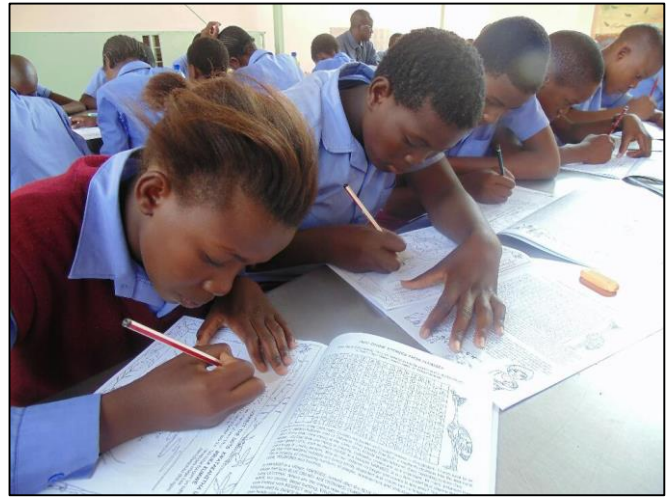
28/4/15: Namutoni Environmental Education Centre has included in their Primary School programme the Blue Crane activities. After receiving 2,000 copies of the crane activity booklets, we had a chance to test out the activities in the booklet with J.R. Cam Primary School, a school from southern Namibia. It turned out to be a very interesting activity for the learners. The pictures show learners doing activities in the booklets.

9/6/15: We had yet another interesting weekend with little ones from Deutsche Privatschule, Grootfontein with our activity booklets in June 2015. Although it was a totally new thing to them, I should say they enjoyed playing the games in the booklet.

16/9/15: Just an update on our posters distribution. I have so far given out posters to two schools that visited the centre and, together with Thomas Kornelus, a ranger at Namutoni, and I took a short outreach to the neighbouring conservancies in the north to meet up with chairmen. I gave out some more to the headman of Onanke village as well as the chairman of King Nehale Conservancy.

Right and above: Learners from the J.R. Cam Primary School in southern Namibia learn about cranes (photos Vilho Absalom)





Above: Learners from Deutsche Privatschule, Grootfontein (photos Vilho Absalom)

Above: Learners from Ondjora Combined School (photos Vilho Absalom)



Above: Learners from Xungileni Combined School (photos Vilho Absalom)

FUNDING UPDATE

The generous funding for our action plan provided by the Environmental Investment Fund (EIF) of Namibia came to an end in July 2015. We wish to express our sincere appreciation for this invaluable support, which has funded our crane surveys (including aerial census work) for the past three years, as well as satellite tracking and crane awareness materials.

Our grateful thanks to the Hessische Gesellschaft für Ornithologie und Naturschutz e.V. (HGON) in Germany for another donation of 500 euro (which translates into N\$7,450!) on 15 October 2015. The HGON, together with Mathias Stein and Barbara Hudec, have now contributed N\$36,505 to the Namibia Blue Crane Project since 2012, without which we would not be able to continue with our conservation activities.



CRANE SIGHTINGS

- Wattled Crane

25/3/15 Hugo Haussmann, (Hubis Tours & Safaris, email hubis@iway.na, www.hubistours.de)

I have been asked to send you my photos from some Wattled Cranes I observed in the Nyae Nyae pans on 25/3/2015. Enjoy!



CRANE SIGHTINGS

- Grey Crowned Crane

Nancy Robson, Oshikango (email ner@iway.na, Cell +264 817591304)

10/5/15: Some time ago I was looking at archival reports (not birding) and came across a few reports by Cockie Hahn on areas in Owambo where he had sighted the larger variety of birds in Western Owambo. If interested it may be of interest for someone to follow this up.

In about 1966/67 I saw 3 Crowned Cranes about 30+ km west of Oshikango. This was the only time I ever saw them.

CRANE SIGHTINGS

- Blue Crane

26/2/15 Paul & Helen Gascoigne (pauldunelark@aol.com)

At 11h15 we saw FIVE Blue Cranes near the waterhole at Andoni. In tall grass so unable to see any rings. All adult birds. No chicks.

18/4/15 Immanuel Kapofi (kimmanuel@yahoo.com)

Sightings are getting exciting in the Park too. The following are sightings of cranes at Etosha over the last month.

18/4/15 at Charitsaub at 10h30: three birds were counted (1 male, 1 female and 1 chick. Band NHH or HHN)

18/4/15 at Halali flats about 8km before turn off to Halali from Okaukuejo, five birds were sighted

21/4/15 at 10h45 at Fischer's Pan area, south side two adults birds were sighted

Total Birds sighted was 10

29/4/15 Wilferd Versfeld (wversfeld@met.na)

Bad news, I could not find the Charitsaub chick this morning. The Salvadora pair and Charitsaub pair were together at Salvadora at midday but no chick. Three rings NHE, NHF, NHH.

Halali seepage had 4 cranes, NHD and NBN and 2 unringed birds. The two unringed birds are still at Newbrownii.

So I saw 10 of the 15 birds today.

10/5/15 John Pallett (john.pallett@saiea.com)

Two cranes at Nebrownii 10-11/5/15.

13/5/15 Christo Snyman (email snyman1@iway.na)

I am from the Namibia Bird Club. I thought you may want this information on the two cranes that seem to reside at the Newbrownii waterhole in Etosha. I saw them on 13 and 14/5/15 (also see the photo on page 1).



14/5/15 Neil MacLeod (SafariWise; neil@safariwise.com.na)
Two blue cranes at Newbrownii and one at Salvadora with a light green tag, NHF.

17/5/15 Hanjo Böhme (gmbhanjo@iway.na)

Have just returned from Etosha. I went to all the memorable spots for Blue Cranes, but unfortunately the yield was rather pathetic with only one ringed crane at Salvadora (I couldn't see the ring, but most probably NHF, which Neil MacLeod also saw.) No trace of the chick or any other bird. A friend of mine is at the moment up in Etosha; she also saw the Salvadora Bird and another two at Klein Namutoni. From Okaukuejo we went west checking Charl Marais Dam/Ozonjati Mbari and all the waterholes right to Otjovasandu. Nothing at all!

28/7/15 Wilferd Versfeld & Mark Boorman

Mark and I completed the wetland count of Oponono and found our missing cranes, a new total now of **23** in 3 groups close together amongst the homesteads and fences at the far west water. This far west water is full and has a different inflow to the rest of Oponono so the west must have had the late rain; Etosha also had rain in the west. So all is not lost. They were in that area close to the water tanks between the two water bodies; 18.17179S/15.70740E. Interesting that we could see only 4 rings and we could not get close.

Ed: See two Google Earth maps on the right (top), which indicate the locality of the above sighting of 23 Blue Cranes at Oponono in July 2015.

25/9/15 Wilferd Versfeld

Had an interesting trip yesterday to Andoni. There are 14 blue cranes on Andoni. Four rings, NHH, NHF, NBZ and NBW, of which the two are the Charitsaub pair (NHH, NHF). NBW has not been seen since 27/9/13, so these birds are hiding somewhere, and NBZ is the Chudop bird. These are not the Oponono birds as these are tame: I could read the rings.

21/10/15: There are now 21 cranes at Andoni. They are NCJ, NCK, NBN, DHN (NHD), NHH, FHN (NHF), NBW and ZBN (NBZ). 8 are ringed, very tame. NHM (Polly 1, the Salvadora bird) is still missing.



7/11/15 Nina Lampel (a very observant tour guide) & **Hanjo Böhme**

I received a little notification from one of the tour guides via a friend, who went up to Andoni yesterday and observed 20 Blue Cranes at the water hole. Seven of those were ringed: NCJ/NHF/NBW/NCR(?) /NCK/NHH/NHD.

UPDATE ON THE FLIGHT PATHS FOR WETLAND FLAGSHIPS PROJECT

The GPS satellite transmitter on our Greater Flamingo (fitted to our Greater Flamingo marked with a green ring NFL at Mile 4 Saltworks on 16 November 2015; see previous newsletters) continued to transmit accurate GPS signals until 2/7/15. As expected, the battery power was reaching its end. The weaker "Doppler" signals continued until 28/10/15. Sadly, this bird was brought in on 4/11/15 after being harassed by dogs and died on 9/11/15.

Although there was no movement inland (due to insufficient rainfall, or rainfall of unsuitable timing for breeding there), our bird made a brief visit to Walvis bay and back between 20/5/15 and 4/6/15 (see map below). At Mile 4 Saltworks the bird showed strong and consistent habitat preferences for the "oyster pond" to the east, and the adjacent pond to the west. These preferred feeding sites have been investigated in detail by Wendy Swart (see report below).

The tracking of flagship Red Data wetland bird species such as flamingos is a ground-breaking initiative of the "Flight Paths for Wetland Flagships" project, funded and supported by the Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia (EIF), the Nedbank Go Green Fund and the NamPower/NNF Strategic Partnership. It is hoped that the flight paths that emerge will indicate focal areas for addressing potential interactions between flamingos and overhead lines – one of the main concerns of the Partnership (<http://www.nnf.org.na/project/nampowernnf-partnership/13/5/5.html>).

We would like to thank all those who are supporting this project in different ways, including the Klein family for access to the Mile 4 Saltworks and to Mark Boorman, Dr Sandra Dantu, Dr John Mendelsohn and the Swart Family for their interest and support for these tracking efforts.



FLAMINGO TRACKING DEVICES USED FOR LOCATING PREFERRED FEEDING SITES AT MILE 4 SALTWORKS, SWAKOPMUND

Wendy Swart (email wswart@wis.edu.na)

Wendy is a grade 8 learner at Windhoek International School and used the flamingos for her science project at school. She won first in her grade and third in the school for her effort.

Ed: Apologies for incorrectly stating that Wendy was a learner at St Paul's College in the previous issue.

Four flamingos (see previous articles) were fitted with GPS tracking devices to compare their flight routes to where power lines are located. So far they have stayed at the coast (mainly the salt works at Swakopmund, Cape Cross and Walvis Bay). I used the data from Swakopmund for a different reason though. I used it to see if the depth and salinity of the pan affect where the flamingos feed. I also took water samples and measured the depth of four pans (Figs 1 & 2).

I downloaded the images of the salt pans from Google Earth (Fig. 3) and used GIS software from which I digitised the shapes of the different pans (Fig. 4).



Figure 1. Measuring the depth of the water with a measuring stick and sampling the water (photos Swart Family)



Figure 2. The water samples from different pans (photos Swart Family)

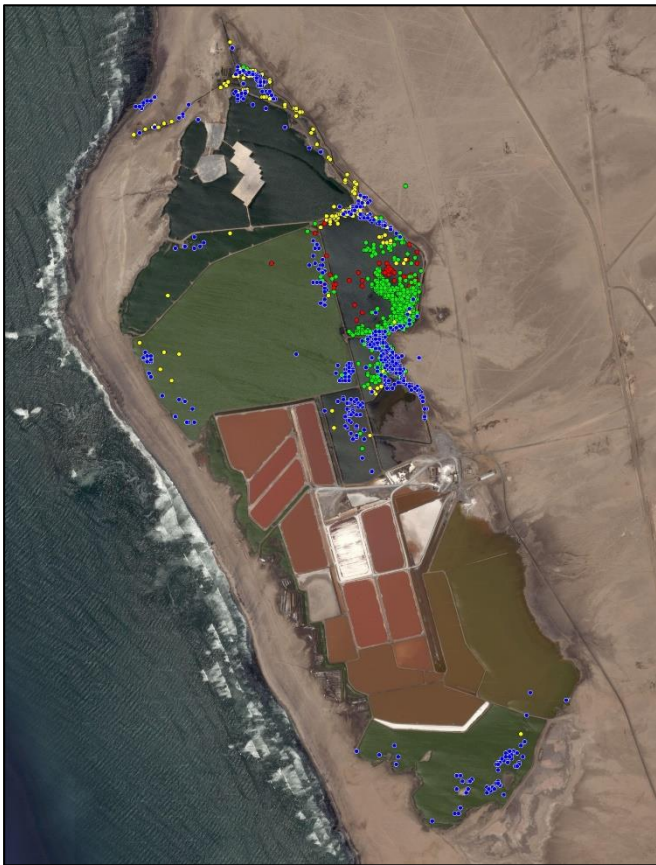


Figure 3. A satellite image from Google Earth of the saltworks at Mile 4; the coloured dots show the positions of the different birds.

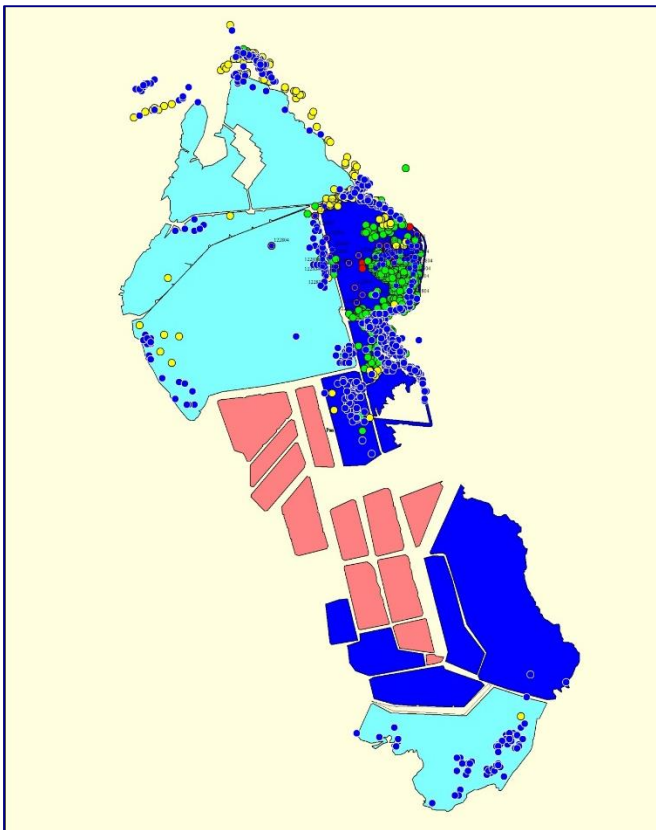


Figure 4. Map of the pans showing the different types and where the flamingos occur. Pink colours are the crystallisation pans, light blue the pre-evaporation and the dark blue pans are the evaporation pans.

The different types of pans could be identified by comparing their colour with a map of the pans which was published by the Geological Survey. I then used the GPS data to see where the flamingos occurred and which pans they preferred. This helped work out which pans were preferred by the flamingos and where they stayed in those pans.

I also looked at the water samples under a microscope and saw microscopic organisms in some samples, while salt crystals had already started forming in others.

I did an evaporation test to see which sample contained the most salt. After evaporation, the water from the oyster pond contained the least salt, and the pink one had the most.

The pond with the highest number of flamingos recorded had the least amount of salt and it was 18 cm in depth in the area where the flamingos largely stayed. This was pan 3 or the "oyster pan", as I called it. I therefore concluded that the flamingos preferred the fresh water pans and the shallow water areas where water was being pumped in from the sea.

I'd like to thank Mike and Ann Scott for arranging that I could visit the pans, for helping me collect the data and letting me use the satellite data. John Mendelsohn suggested that I work on this and gave me the data.

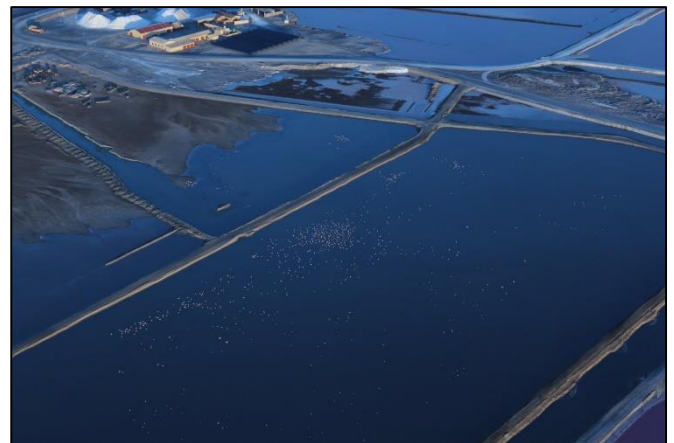
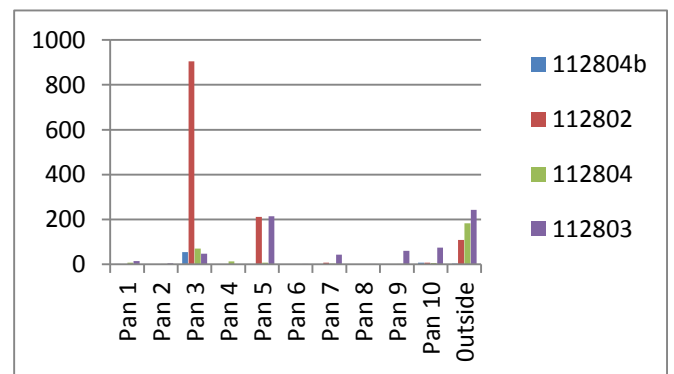


Figure 5. Aerial photograph of the pans, showing the flamingos as pink dots.



Graph showing how the different birds were counted in each pan. Pan 3 was what I called the "oyster pan" and this was the place that birds liked most.

THE NIGHT OF THE FLAMINGO SNATCHERS

Dr Ursula Franke (praxis@ursula-franke.de)

A curious incident was observed at the end of 2014 in the Saltworks in Swakopmund when a Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor* was trapped and held to the ground by a mussel.

Intrigued? Please see the full story on the site of the *Ornithological Observations*, the electronic journal published by the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town:

<http://oo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=188>



One lesser Flamingo snatched by a clam ... (photo Ursula Franke)