

Namibia Bird News

No 2, June 2012



Two down - many more to come!

This is the second issue of Namibia Bird News and I must say I'm absolutely blown away by the positive comments and support I've received after the first edition. Thank you to everyone that has sent me material, there is already enough for a third issue but don't get slack now, keep it comin'!

This issue brings you a Smörgåsbord of news, stories and photographs that reflect the diversity of the Namibian birding community and hopefully there will be something of interest to everyone.

In hierdie uitgawe het ons ook 'n bydrag in Afrikaans en ek wil hiermee al ons Afrikaanse lesers aanmoedig om bydraes in te stuur, al is dit net een sin of 'n kort storie—eenigiets is welkom.

Auch unsere Deutschen Leser sollten nicht schüchtern sein mir Beiträge in ihrer Muttersprache zu senden. Es ist wirklich alles willkommen!

Remember to send contributions, comments and other useful stuff to nambirdnews@gmail.com.

Happy birding!
Holger



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Today's scary facts...

Of the world's threatened birds, over 80% have populations that are currently in decline, just 9% are stable, whilst only 5% are increasing (largely owing to conservation action). For 3%, the direction of the current trend is unknown or unset.

The Red List Index for birds shows that there has been a steady and continuing deterioration in the status of the world's birds between 1988 and 2008. The index is based on the movement of species between the categories of the IUCN Red List, with values relating to the proportion of species expected to survive in the near future, assuming no additional conservation action. Over these 20 years, 225 bird species have been uplisted to a higher category of threat because of genuine changes in status, compared to just 32 species downlisted.

A 'snapshot' survey of changes in status 2000–2004, irrespective of changes in IUCN Red List category, showed that just 11% of globally threatened birds were judged to have improved. This indicates that threatened birds are in serious trouble, and that the problem is getting worse.

This information was "gleaned" from the BirdLife International website.

Racing to save Africa's Vultures – the first Pan-African Vulture Summit, Masai Mara, Kenya

Holger Kolberg

I was privileged to be invited to attend the 1st Pan-African Vulture Summit (PAVS) taking place from 16 to 20 April 2012 at Ilkeliani Lodge, Masai Mara, in Kenya. The summit was organised by the Vulture Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and attempted to bring together all vulture specialists from Africa.



The adventure started with the taxi ride from the airport to the hotel in Nairobi. I probably died at least ten times on that trip! Apart from the fact that the taxi had no shocks and questionable brakes, never mind the 'loose' steering, everything was done at a speed that would have made Schumacher proud. Non-existent gaps between huge trucks were found, giant potholes that would make the *groot gat van Kimberley* blush were adroitly circumnavigated and, after several near misses and at least one hit, I was dropped off at the hotel. Counting my blessings and promising that I would never ever moan at a Namibian taxi again in my life, I checked in to the hotel and made my way to the bar to partake in one or two of the highly acclaimed local brews. Whaaat?! 300 Shillings for a beer! You must be sheeting me! That's 30 bucks! I figured one beer would be enough; and in any case I had to go to bed to prepare for the road trip to the Mara the next day.

The next morning a couple of minibuses pitched up at the hotel to take us to the lodge where the workshop was to be held. This trip would take at least five hours, we were told, because the roads were so bad. Soon we were barrelling along and there were some 'interesting' moments as we descended into



The conference hall, fig tree, sweet ribbons and all!

the rift valley. There's obviously a prize for the first bus to reach the lodge because the bus drivers kept using daring manoeuvres to overtake each other, exploiting even the slightest hesitation by another driver to sneak ahead. There must be a law in Kenya that prohibits vehicles from having working shocks and drivers are clearly instructed to hit every bump and pothole in the road. Anyway, after five or so hours - not wearing a watch I lost track of time - of back-bone jarring, nerve jangling travel we finally reached our destination.



Andre Botha opening the summit.

nuts with your overpriced brew! Yes, I was sure I could live here. And the summit hadn't even started yet.

The next morning we made our way to the lodge next door (we were so many delegates that they had to spread us over two adjacent lodges) to kick off the summit. The conference hall was 'interesting' to say the least. A big tent pitched under a massive fig tree, chairs adorned with sweet ribbons and all the bangs and whistles. Turns out that same fig tree also was home to hordes of vervet monkeys, barbets and other fruit consuming creatures, with the net result that throughout the summit there was this barrage of falling figs (and no doubt some simian waste products) onto the roof of the tent. But this wouldn't deter a group of vulturephiles from doing what they came here to do, oh no! From the starting gun the pressure was relentless, one excellent presentation following another and before we had wiped our eyes the first day had passed and we had to retire to our freshly roasted cashews and Tusker. Yes, life is tough in Africa!

The second day was no different to the first one and we were all looking forward to the 'Personal Day' on Wednesday, to relax a bit from the stress. Most of us chose to spend the day in the Masai Mara to see if we could find some of that park's elusive wildlife. What can I say! The mind boggles! Just about every bird that we saw was new to me and even their springbok look different. Hmm? Oh, they're called Thompson's gazelle here. Our driver soon learned that we were not interested to stop at every Thommie or Toppie (that's not an old man but their version of our hartebeest) but that we wanted to look at birds. So we stopped for every Pink-throated Long-claw instead! I lost count at 368...

Then there was some excitement. A lion kill! Soon we were bundu bashing our way through the plains to get as close as possible to the beasts. I kid you not! It seems that 'Stay on the road' signs here are for decoration only. Faster than you could say it there were fifteen (15!!) cars surrounding the kill and the sound of camera shutters deafened out the tranquil soundtrack of the African plains. It didn't

I was pleasantly surprised. No thatch! I probably have to explain this one. In Namibia, if you own or manage a lodge, thatch roofs are compulsory. It seems Kenyans have not yet had that law forced upon them. After the usual formalities and pleasantries at reception I was shown to my tent. Eeeish! What a palace! A tent of ballroom proportions was all mine, super-duper king-sized bed, family size bathroom and all! The next surprise awaited me at the bar. Freshly roasted Kenyan cashew



This is what you can expect when you find a lion kill in the Masai Mara, the lions are on the right hand side.

take long, only a few muttered ‘hah soh, bigga rion, now we want lihno’ and we were left alone, awaiting the arrival of the vultures. And did they oblige! First came the Hoodeds, then the Lappets and White-headed, even a Tawny Eagle. Mean time the hyaenas did their best to make the carcass disappear in record time and, just as we were about to leave, a group of five Ground Hornbills marched past, not bothering to bat a long-lashed eyelid at us.



The remainder of the day was filled with yet more new birds and getting stuck in a rather insignificant looking muddy ditch which required us being pushed out by another vehicle. Lunch was had under a spreading acacia tree in the open – many a Namibian *natuurbewaarder* would have had an absolute fit about this bunch of tourists just having lunch under a tree in a park. Did I mention that we saw lions? I wasn’t scared, naaah, I was sure that I could outrun at least some of the others in the group. Far too soon the day came to an end and we returned to the lodge, mentally refreshed to tackle the next two days of the summit.

Thursday and Friday was once again a hectic maelstrom of presentations and group work and, against my own expectations (so much to do in so little time!), the final product was an exciting action plan, a resolution for all of us to promote and a press release.

Saturday morning saw us all boarding the by now familiar minibuses for the journey back to Nairobi. Everything went by in a flash, literally, and before you could say Fangio we were dropped off at the airport to start our respective journeys home.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Darcy Ogada, Munir Virani and Andre Botha who were the main drivers behind organising the summit. It is of course now up to all of us to help as much as we can in the race to save Africa’s vultures.



ANDERKANT DIE OU KALAHARI

Ek het die afgelope week lekker in Namibië gekuier saam met 'n klomp gawe en gasvrye mense. Die ekspedisie na ons buurland het reeds op Saterdag 28 April begin, aangesien ek die volgende dag 'n atlaswerkswinkel in Windhoek moes aanbied. Die Namibia Bird Club het op Maandag 30 April en Dinsdag 1 Mei hulle 50-jarige bestaan gevier met 'n simposium oor die voëllewe in en om Namibië. Tydens die simposium is die voëlatlas-projek wat al sedert 2007 in Suid-Afrika op dreef is, amptelik ook in Namibië van stapel gestuur. Ek is genooi om die Namibiërs te gaan touwys maak oor die hoe, waar en wat van die atlas.



By die werkswinkel in Windhoek © Les Underhill

Nie minder nie as 40 entoesiastiese voëlkykers het die werkswinkel bygewoon en ons het na drie besondere plekke rondom die stad gegaan om ook prakties te gaan inoefen hoe die atlas se ratte draai.

Besoeke is gebring aan Avisdam aan die oostekant van die stad en ek kon hier sommer gou nuwe spesies by my lysie voeg. Dinsdagoggend voor die simposium se werksaamhede, het die span entoesiastiese atlasers die klankies en die reukies van die Gammams Rioolwerke aan die westekant van die stad trotseer en is daar sommer gou 'n lys van meer as 60 spesies saamgestel.

'n Besoek aan Monte Christo sowat 20 km noordwes van die stad was nog 'n hoogtepunt en die lys daar het sommer vinnig verby 80 spesies geskuif – met 'n verskeidenheid van watervoëls, bosveld-spesies en hordes klein saadvretertjies wat die lys sommer vinnig laat groei het. 'n Klein swerm van 5 Swart Ooievaars *Ciconia nigra* was een van die dag se hoogtepunte.



Sakkies met voëls wat bering moet word

© Jessica Kemper

Teen middagete op Woensdag 2 Mei het ek aangesluit by die saamtrek van die Namibiese voëlberingers op die plaas Wiese in die Rehoboth omgewing. Misnette is opgeslaan en wippe is uitgesit en sommer gou het die manne en vroue stories uitgeruil en tussendeur het die kinders baie pret gemaak.

Die groot projek van die naweek (dit was ook langnaweek in Namibië – hulle het Kasingadag gevier) was die beringing van die Versamelvoëls uit drie neste op die plaas.

Nette is teen laatmiddag rondom die boom waarin die Versamelvoël nes is, opgeslaan en dan mooi toegevou. Nog voor dagbreek die volgende oggend het die span ringers en helpers by die nes bymekaar gekom en op die gegewe oomblik, is die voëls met behulp van 'n bietjie lawaai tot in die nette gejaag. Daar was soveel hande om te help om die voëls uit die nette te haal, dat dit nie regtig baie lank geneem het om die 156 voëls in die sakkies te versamel nie. Daarna het die span ringers aan die werk gespring ... ringetjies is om die bene gepas, elke voël is ook gering met 'n unieke kombinasie van kleurringe om elke individu te kan uitken. Mates is geneem, verwerings-tabelle is ingevul, die voëls is geweeg en heel laaste is van elkeen 'n bloedmonster geneem om DNA-ontledings te kan doen.

Saterdag is voëls uit nog twee kleiner neste op dieselfde manier gering en die tweede deel van die dag het die ringers rondom die opstal allerlei spesies gering. Stories is uitgeruil, wenke oor tegnieke en metodes is oor en weer aangegee en daar is ook heerlik gesmul aan die lekker etes wat met groot

toewyding en entoesiasme voorberei is. Deurentyd is al die verskillende spesies ook aangeteken en nog twee atlaslyste is voltooi. Ek het ook heelwat vrae beantwoord oor die atlasprojek en die belangstellendes touwys gemaak oor die gebruik van die sagteware waarmee die inligting versamel en in die databasis opgeneem word. Die Namibiërs het ons paar Suid-Afrikaners wat saam met hulle op die plaas was, met soveel gasvryheid ontvang en getrakteer dat ons sommer soos familie gevoel het. En saam het ons ontdek watter groot verskil ons elkeen kan maak deur ons klein bydrae om die voortbestaan van voëllewe en die habitate waarin voëls lewe te verseker.



Die span bringers met die "vampiere" wat die bloedmonsters versamel naaste aan die kamera © Jessica Kemper

In volgende week se rubriek meer oor die baie spesiale spesie wat ek kon ring – die Dwergvalkie. 'n Kuier anderkant die rooидуine van die Kalahari is elke keer 'n baie unieke ervaring en die nuwe vriendskappe sommer baie spesiaal.

Groetnis van nes tot nes

Arnold vd Westhuizen

Bird Atlas Update

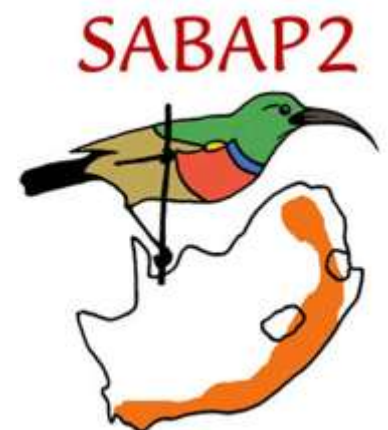
Holger Kolberg, Regional Atlas Coordinator

The bird atlas has now officially been on the go in Namibia for just under two months and Namibians are slowly warming to the task. Namibia Bird Club outings are now used as atlassing excursions and several people are atlassing whilst traveling for business or while on holiday. Atlassing excursions to remote and wonderful pentads will be arranged, just give us a chance...

As of 31 May 2012 we have atlassed 89 pentads (0.8% coverage), there are 27 active atlassers, so we are inching closer to the 1% coverage mark. My challenge to the Namibians is: let's get to 10% coverage (1055 pentads) by the end of the year!

After the initial workshop held by Arnold van der Westhuizen in Windhoek, Holger presented a workshop in Swakopmund on 18 May 2012 which was attended by seventeen people, a considerable turn-out considering that it was actually a working day. A practical session the next day turned out to be an exercise in bird call identification because the mist was so thick that one could hardly see further than a few metres. Nevertheless 29 species were recorded for the pentad.

Doug Harebottle (SABAP 2 head-honcho at the ADU) reminded me about Christine. No, that is not the blonde bombshell, that works at their reception but a GIS viewer that allows you to check out coverage maps and take them to the field with you. If you got the software from Arnold then you also have Christine! Updated coverage maps are posted every two weeks on the SABAP website. But that's not all!



Holger can give you files that show you the pentads, rivers, main roads, farms... Perhaps we should have a Christine workshop?!

If you are on facebook, 'like' the SABAP 2 and Namibia Bird Club pages and you will be kept up to date with outings, interesting sightings etc.

If you have not yet registered as an atlasser and would like to do so, please send your name, surname, preferred email address and telephone number to Holger (holgerk@mweb.com.na) and you will be registered as soon as possible. Holger will also gladly present more atlassing training sessions if there should be a demand for it – options would be in Swakop/Walvis Bay before or after the wetland count (21/22 July 2012) and in Windhoek around the weekend of 1 September 2012.

Namibia Bird Club Long Weekend at Farm Smalhoek

Neil Thomson
(batqs@mweb.com.na)

Africa Day (25 May) fell on a Friday and the Namibia Bird Club organized a long weekend outing to Farm Smalhoek about 130 km south east of Windhoek. The object was to relax, bash a pentad or two, ring a few birds (actually as many as possible), find active White-backed Vulture nests and generally socialize and enjoy ourselves.

A small group of five members arrived at the farm on the Friday morning with a sixth arriving late in the day. As the group was small we were able to use the guest rooms and did not have to set up camp. Mistnets



and snaptraps were soon set up but there were not very many birds to be seen around the farm house. After yet another above average rainy season there must have been plenty of food available for seedeaters in the veld and the bird feeder at the house was not attracting any birds.

Friday afternoon was spent around the farm house where a number of species were seen and a few birds were caught and ringed. After dark a Pearl-spotted Owlet was called in and caught in a mistnet and ringed.

The next morning we did a two hour walk in the vicinity of the farmhouse recording birds seen and heard for the atlas. A Chestnut-vented Titbabbler nearly had us fooled by mimicking the call of a Diderick Cuckoo though. Later that morning farmer Helmuth Stehn took us out with him on his rounds of his cattle posts. This meant traversing a further three pentads and, although we were not able to spend the

required two hours in any of them, we were able to make ad hoc lists although these lists are anything but complete as the identification of LBJ's from the back of a moving vehicle is well nigh impossible.

At least four seemingly active White-backed Vulture nests were also located. These birds should have laid eggs by now and so perhaps the vulture ringing teams will be able to visit Farm Smalhoek again this year and successfully ring and tag some of the chicks.

Our ringing activities can be described as extremely successful although only in terms of quality rather than quantity. Only twenty three birds were caught and ringed but these included two Green Wood-Hoopoes, two Southern White-crowned Shrikes, four Burchell's Starlings, a Bennett's Woodpecker and a Pearl-spotted Owlet and both Gudrun and I got ringing lifers. Also of interest was the recapture of a Familiar Chat which I ringed there in December 2010 and which had in the intervening time period lost the whole foot of the unringed leg.



We achieved some atlas coverage of four pentads, ringed special birds, located active vulture nests, enjoyed good company and good food and relaxed in the mild early winter weather. What more could one wish for on a long weekend?

Special thanks go to Helmuth and Iris Stehn for hosting the bird club for this most enjoyable weekend.

Some riveting reading material

Biologists in North America have managed to track the migration of Golden-crowned Sparrows. By fitting tiny trackers to several birds the scientists were able to track the birds' migration route from California to their breeding areas in Alaska. The sparrows travelled between 2500 and 3800km one way and the north-bound journey took them only 29 days on average whereas the journey south averaged around 53 days.

Read more at: Nathaniel E. Seavy, Diana L. Humple, Renée L. Cormier, Thomas Gardali. **Establishing the Breeding Provenance of a Temperate-Wintering North American Passerine, the Golden-Crowned Sparrow, Using Light-Level Geolocation.** *PLoS ONE*, 2012; 7 (4): e34886 DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0034886

Scientists in Sweden studying bird lice have found some unexpected results. Since bird lice cannot fly and basically rely on contact between two birds in order to spread one would expect great genetic variety in lice. However the results from the study show that the body lice on almost all the sandpipers worldwide, with the exception of Dunlins and Ruff, are genetically almost identical. Another interesting finding of the study is that wing lice of small bird host species are found on more host species than those that parasitise large host species.

Read more at: Daniel R. Gustafsson, Urban Olsson. **Flyway homogenisation or differentiation? Insights from the phylogeny of the sandpiper (Charadriiformes: Scolopacidae: Calidrinae) wing louse genus Luniceps (Phthiraptera: Ischnocera).** *International Journal for Parasitology*, 2012; 42 (1): 93 DOI: 10.1016/j.ijpara.2011.11.003

From the Bird Ringers...

White-backed Vulture No L56 visited the NARREC vulture restaurant on 30 April 2012 (snapped by camera trap). The bird was tagged by Holger Kolberg as a nestling on farm Hantam (near the Omatako Dam) on 16 September 2009 (time between ringing and re-sighting = 957 days, distance travelled ± 142 km).

Lappet-faced Vulture No L264 was seen in the Namib-Naukluft Park east of Hotsas on 9 April 2012 by Ann and Mike Scott. The bird was tagged as a nestling on 16 October 2011 in the Gemsbokwater area of the NNP by Holger Kolberg.

White-backed Vulture No E038 was seen at Ombika waterhole, Etosha National Park, on 19 April 2012 by Nacho Aransay. The vulture was tagged as a nestling by Gabriel Shatumbu on 7 October 2011 to the west of Adamax in Etosha NP.

A White-backed Vulture that was ringed as an adult by Gabriel on 30 January 2009 in Etosha, then was re-sighted by Peter Bridgeford on 13 February 2010 near Sprokieswoud, was found poisoned on Mon Desir farm in the Outjo district on 12 January 2011.

A Great White Pelican that was ringed as a chick by Dirk Heinrich at Hardap Dam on 4 June 2011 was found dead by Marc Haubert near Tsumkwe on 7 November 2011 (distance travelled approx. 613km).

A Red-headed Finch that was ringed by Dirk Heinrich on 3 June 2011 at his house in Klein Windhoek, was snaffled by Gert Botha's dog on 27 May 2012 in Academia (time between ringing and 'unfortunate death' = 359 days, distance travelled ± 8.75 km).

The cherry on the cake goes to a Sanderling that was ringed as an adult on 8 July 2003 in Zackenberg, north-eastern Greenland. In 2009 she was re-trapped and fitted with colour rings and Mark Boorman saw her in Walvis Bay on 11 and 13 December 2009. She was photographed on 15 May 2012 in North Bay, South Uist in Scotland. This means that she has flown at least 230 000km in her life! Thanks to Mark and Jeroen Reneerkens for this information.



Liz Komen submitted this photo of an immature male Marico Sunbird. This is one of those birds that confuses you at first, especially as there are no illustrations in any of the field guides. The black throat is the giveaway, according to Roberts.



Flamingo Curry Continued

After publishing Charles John Andersson's recipe for flamingo curry in the first edition of NBN, I received an email from John Paterson with recipes from C. Louis Leipoldt's "*Cape Cookery*". They read as follows:

Flamingo, too, is "royal game", and cannot be shot. Formerly it was obtainable, though not easily, and I have eaten it on several occasions, and personally approved the two following recipes:

Flamingo supreme (*flaminkbors*). *Remove the breast meat; cut it into neat strips; beat each with a wooden mallet; roll in pepper and salt; place in red wine and let them lie for a couple of hours. Take out, wipe dry and place in a pot with diced pork fat, a blade of mace¹, a lemon leaf, a sprig of thyme, and a few peppercorns and cardamoms; add a few spoonfuls of wine, and let it stew gently with the lid on. Take out and place on your serving dish; thicken the gravy with flour, stir in a glass of brandy or sweet wine and a table-spoonful of lemon juice; pour over and serve.*

Stuffed breast of flamingo. *Carefully remove the flesh from both sides of the breastbone, and place it in red wine for a couple of hours; wipe dry and rub in pepper and salt and a little pounded chilli. Take a fairly coherent farce²; mould it to fit the inside of the two breast pieces; wrap them round the farce and skewer with wooden pegs or bind with string. Put in a saucepan with a few cups of red wine, a bit of lemon peel or scented verbena³, a few cloves and a handful of small onions. Let it simmer gently till tender; thicken the gravy with a white sauce and serve.*

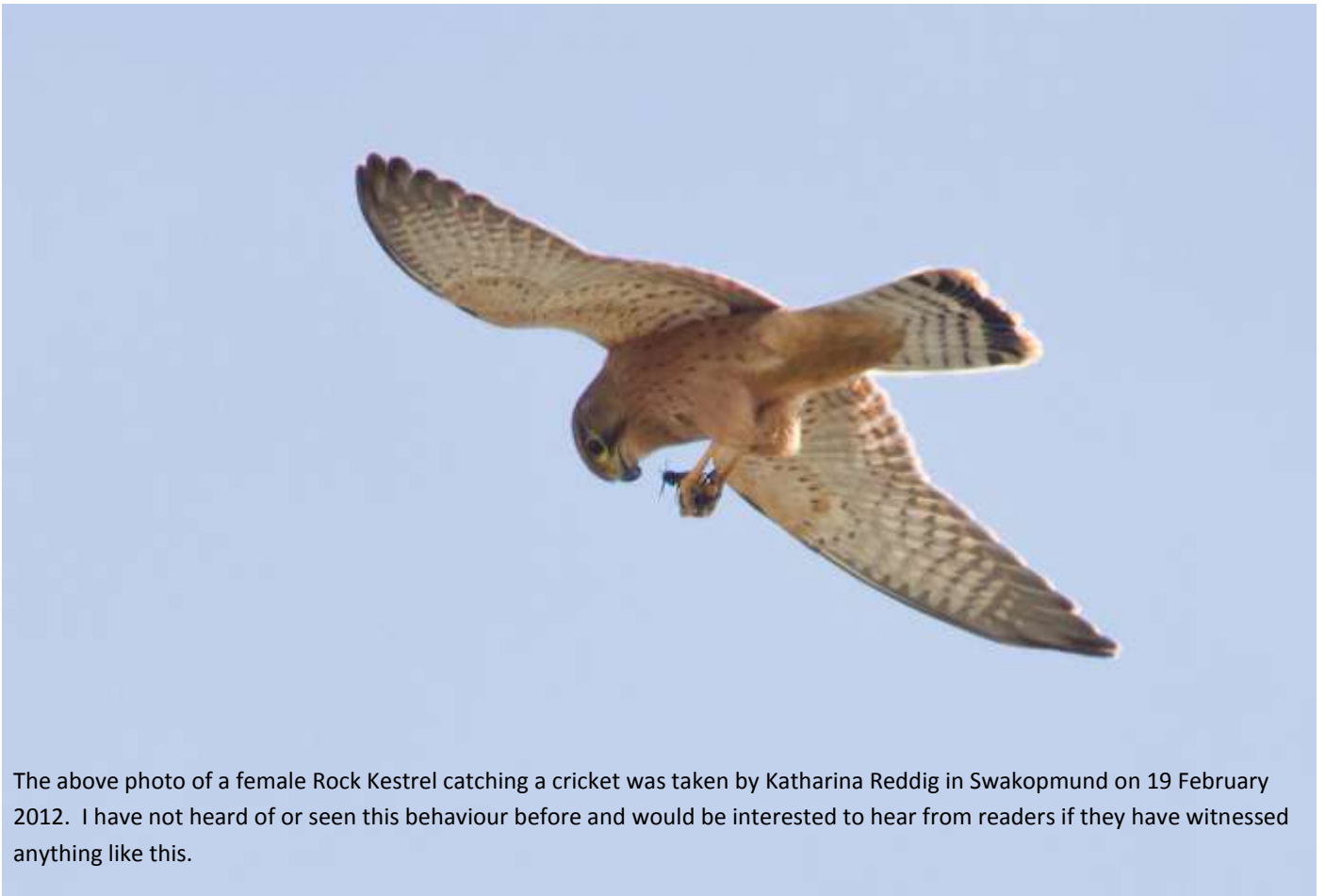
Flamingo flesh is equally good when simply shallow-fried in a little fat with pepper and salt. It is, of all bird flesh, perhaps the most tender, tasty and delicately flavoured, possibly because the bird feeds on an aquatic, plankton diet that imparts to its meat an extraordinarily savoury quality. An early Cape traveller maintained that soup made from it was claret coloured, but this is a mistake; the flesh is dark, like that of a duck, but contains no pigment of any kind; when grilled, it is practically indistinguishable from beef as far as colour is concerned, but its tenderness is far superior and it seldom needs larding.

OK, I think it's time for a flamingo cook-off!

¹ Mace is the outer shell of the nutmeg fruit. It has a lighter, sweeter flavour.

² Farce is the French word for "stuffing." *Farci* means "stuffed".

³ Lemon *verbena* is a herb that is native to Chile and Peru



The above photo of a female Rock Kestrel catching a cricket was taken by Katharina Reddig in Swakopmund on 19 February 2012. I have not heard of or seen this behaviour before and would be interested to hear from readers if they have witnessed anything like this.



Katharina also took this photo of a White-backed Vulture at farm Vergenoeg. There were at least five White-backed Vultures and two Lappet-faced Vultures feeding on a bustard that had hit the powerlines. Nice photo Katharina, keep them coming!



This photo of a strange flamingo taken in Walvis Bay was sent in by Ernst Ritter. Any comments?

Calendar of Events

10 June 2012: Namibia Bird Club outing to Gammams Sewage Works, for details please contact **Gudrun** gudrunm@iway.na.

24 June 2012: Namibia Bird Club outing to Gocheganas, for details please contact **Gudrun** gudrunm@iway.na.

8 July 2012: Namibia Bird Club outing to Avis Dam, for details please contact **Gudrun** gudrunm@iway.na.

21 & 22 July 2012: Walvis Bay Wetland Bird Count, for details please contact **Peter** pmbridge@iway.na.

28 & 29 July 2012: Wetland bird counts in Windhoek area, for details please contact **Gudrun** gudrunm@iway.na.

18 August 2012: Vulture Fundraising Dinner in Swakopmund, for details please contact **Sandra** felix@mweb.com.na.

1 September 2012: International Vulture Awareness Day

14 – 21 October 2012: Pan-African Ornithological Congress in Arusha, Tanzania