

# Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird News 7

Newsletter of the Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Working Group

March 2009

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For previous issues of this newsletter please see:  
[http://www.nacoma.org.na/Our\\_Coast/FaunaFlora.htm](http://www.nacoma.org.na/Our_Coast/FaunaFlora.htm) (bottom of page); also [www.nnf.org.na/coastalbirds.htm](http://www.nnf.org.na/coastalbirds.htm) & <http://www.frantic-naturalist.com> (thank you Nathalie, Alice & Vernon!)

## REPORT ON THE SUMMER WETLAND BIRD COUNTS, January/February 2009

**Holger Kolberg:** Namibian Wetland Count Coordinator, email [holgerk@mweb.com.na](mailto:holgerk@mweb.com.na)

The start of the new year once again meant that Namibia's bird watchers had to dust off their binoculars and venture out to do the annual summer wetland counts. The global economic crisis does not seem to have affected the birders because I'm pleased to report that twenty-seven sites were counted although the geographic coverage is still very much biased in favour of the coast. The two Ramsar sites, Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay, once again came up trumps in terms of bird numbers but the most species were encountered by Wilferd Versfeld at Oponono. Wilferd also reported the lowest count (Fischer's Pan). Cape Cross and the Walvis Sewage Works are emerging as important sites in terms of numbers. For the first time the figures for the Orange River Mouth are also included (usually reported by Mark Anderson as part of the SA), where unfortunately only the Namibian side was counted.

One interesting observation is the almost complete absence of White-fronted Plovers (only 1393 seen) and terns (11063 counted) at the coast and the overall low number of Lesser Flamingos (4267). Other notable absentees are cranes, Great Crested Grebe and Black-headed Heron. However, this is more than complemented by the list of rarities seen: American Golden Plover (3), Black-headed Gull (1), Elegant Tern (1), Eurasian Oystercatcher (1), Pectoral Sandpiper (1), Red-necked Phalarope (7) and Redshank (2).



Bird counters hard at work at the Swakop River Mouth on 16/12/08, while Mark Boorman (left) spots a rare American Golden Plover (photo Ann Scott)

Many thanks to all the counters without whom these counts would not be possible. Special thanks to Peter Bridgeford who has taken on the job of organizing the Walvis Bay count in his usual enthusiastic manner (see page 2).

Site	Birds	Species
Aeroplane Bay	67	6
Agate Beach	21	4
Cape Cross	3560	22
Ekuma River	4756	20
Elizabeth Bay	192	9
Fischer's Pan (dry!)	0	0
Griffith Bay	36	11
Grosse Bucht	136	6
Guano Bay	227	10
Hardap Dam	1202	24
Lüderitz Sewage Works	33	3
Mile 4 Saltworks	3797	36
Monte Christo	335	34
Naute Dam	1223	21
Oponono	5213	44
Orange River – Skilpad to Hohenfels	275	14
Orange River – Hohenfels to Bridge	705	19
Orange River Mouth (Namibian side only)	1735	34
Radford Bay	47	10
Sandwich Harbour	96146	37
Second Lagoon	296	21
Shearwater Bay	28	1
Swakop River Mouth	236	27
Walvis Bay	95380	42
Walvis Sewage Works	2241	26

(Counts for Shammvura and Swakop Sewage Works still to be added.)

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## SUMMER BIRD COUNT AT WALVIS BAY RAMSAR SITE

**Peter Bridgeford**, Coastal Environmental Trust of Namibia,  
email [pmbridge@iway.na](mailto:pmbridge@iway.na)

The annual summer bird count of the Walvis Bay wetlands, organised by the Coastal and Environmental Trust of Namibia (CETN) was successfully completed on 24 and 25 January 2009. Over 40 volunteers, from as far afield as Rundu and Windhoek, together with birders from Swakopmund and Walvis Bay combed the area and documented all birds seen. On Saturday, a boat from Namib Marine Services ferried three teams of counters across the bay to the mud flats opposite the yacht club. Others counted the many flamingos and waders along the edge of the lagoon to the salt works and all the way to the Walvis Bay Salt Refiners pump station. By one o'clock, the Saturday count was completed, and lunch, sponsored by Probst Bakery, was enjoyed at the lookout with cold beers and soft drinks donated by Namibia Breweries.

On Sunday, there were 40 volunteers again. Ten teams of counters checked the area south of the pump station, the pans of the salt works and from Pelican Point southwards. Some teams had to walk a long way but they were rewarded by cold beers and another lovely lunch prepared by Gail, Barbara and Bulani at the Wearne residence.

A total of 95 380 birds of 42 species were counted over the two days. The Lesser Flamingos were conspicuous by their absence and only 2 987 were recorded. Many are still breeding in Etosha Pan and at Sua Pan in Botswana. Greater Flamingos totalled 27 280. Some counts in the past recorded about 100 000 terns, however, this count did not reach 10 000. The huge flocks of Common Terns, the most numerous on our coast, were absent during the count. A total of only 5 300 Common Terns and about 500 other terns were seen. Unusual birds that caused great excitement were a Black-headed Gull, a European Oystercatcher and three Red-necked Phalaropes. Despite the shortage of flamingos and terns, everyone enjoyed the count and the weather was beautiful.

CETN would like to thank all the volunteers who made the count possible and Buccaneers Squash Club for the use of their premises. Radio Electronics supplied the communication equipment and we could not have done the count so efficiently without the radios. The Walvis Bay Salt Refiners are thanked for allowing us unlimited access to their property, financial support and use of the lookout.

*As a postscript, Peter adds: I have started trying to teach the young Namibians who come on the bird counts to ID birds. We started with five and now we are three, but they are keen to continue. It is not only bird ID but also teaching English. Many words are unknown to them. I have had 14 hours with them and it improves all the time.*



Flamingos on the tidal flats of Walvis Bay Lagoon  
(photo Susann Kinghorn)



Enthusiastic bird counters at the summer bird count at the Walvis Bay Ramsar site, January 2009  
(above & below; photos CETN)



### **Name me**

In one of his last emails on 29/6/08, the late Keith Wearne sent out this teaser. Please send your answers to Mark Boorman, email [felix@mweb.com.na](mailto:felix@mweb.com.na)



Excited Swakopmunders gather to watch the Swakop River reach the sea at 19h00 on 6/3/09 (photo James Tromp)



Floodwaters in the Swakop River reached the sea via a channel at the southern part of the mouth on 6/3/09; three weeks later (29/3/09) there was still very little bird life after this dramatic change in habitat (photo Ann Scott)

## SWAKOP RIVER BIRD COUNTS AND HABITAT CHANGES

On Friday 6 March 2009, the Swakop River floodwaters reached the sea after copious rains inland (Republikein 9 March 2009). This coincided with an east wind storm and heat wave, with 40° being recorded at Walvis Bay. That morning, due to a concern about rising river levels pushing back and damaging infrastructure on banks, a bulldozer was employed to dig a channel to the sea at the southern part of the lagoon at the Mouth. The floodwaters were accompanied westwards by masses of delighted Swakopmunders, and there was much cheering as the waters finally flowed into the sea at 19h00, for the first time in nine years.

Mark Boorman and his team of bird counters conducted their monthly bird count at the Mouth on 17/3/09. Mark remarks, "Our lowest count yet. No doubt due to the inundation of the area from the river having come down". Selected data (below) from this and the previous count (before the Mouth was open) show just how much the condition of the Mouth can affect the birdlife.

Count date	Total birds	Total species	Greater Flamingo	Cape Teal	Red-knobbed Coot	Kittlitz's Plover
28/2/09	210	17	71	33	29	5
17/3/09	51	14	1	5	8	17



High seas were again experienced at the Swakop Mouth area on 29/3/09, during the equinox (photo Ann Scott; see newsletter No 2, June 08 p3 for an earlier report of high seas on this stretch of coastline)

## RING RESIGHTINGS

Mark Boorman, email felix@mweb.com.na

**27/1/09:** Holger and myself controlled a full breeding-plumage Swift Tern at Mile 4 Salt works on 25/01/2009. This bird had been ringed by Tommy Hall at Luderitz Harbour as a chick on 26/04/1995. There was also at least one orange colour-ringed Swift from Possession Island today (27/1/09). These were ringed as chicks in April of last year and still clearly show immature plumage.

**19/1/09:** Today I was at the Walvis Bay lagoon (2258.617S 1428.903E) and saw a Sanderling showing:  
Left: White/green flag/yellow  
Right: Red/white

Bernard Spaans arrived not one minute later and was able to confirm the sighting!

### Feedback from Jeroen Reneerkens

Your observation is certainly the most exciting ring recovery of a Sanderling I have received so far. And that Bernard observed the bird shortly after you did is one of the most beautiful coincidences: he had observed this individual already at a small Wadden Sea island in The Netherlands this autumn! This bird was ringed by me as a 1 day old chick weighing 7.3 grams, together with three siblings. Eight days later we were able to catch this sanderling again and with a weight of 32 grams it was then large enough to also receive colour-rings. That it flew all the way to Namibia is most exciting, and great that Bernard was able to produce some photographic evidence! We expect to see this brave Sanderling back in Greenland in the summer of 2010. According to the books it should stay in Namibia for its first "summer" (June-July), and it would be great if that could be confirmed by more colour-ring observations of this individual. I also attach the resightings of two other sanderlings that Bernard and Laurens made. They are from Sanderlings ringed in Ghana, and there are now this at least three Ghanaian ringed Sanderlings (ringed during the migration period, end of August) in Namibia. It would be very interesting to colour-mark some Sanderlings in Namibia at some point. I look forward to any future observation of colour-ringed Sanderlings!

## POPULATION TRENDS IN SOME OF NAMIBIA'S COASTAL TERN SPECIES, 1990-2008 (Part II)

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

### Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*)

Red Data Book Status: Namibia - ?, International – least concern.

Wetlands International population trend: stable.

There are 153 counts at 24 sites on record for Sandwich Tern since 1990. The highest average of 3166 individuals was achieved in 1996 when ten sites were counted (Fig. 1). Ten sites were also counted in 1997 but only 1149 birds were seen. Four sites, Conception Bay (14%), the Mile 4 salt works (11%), Sandwich Harbour (34%) and Walvis Bay (22%), account for most of the birds seen.

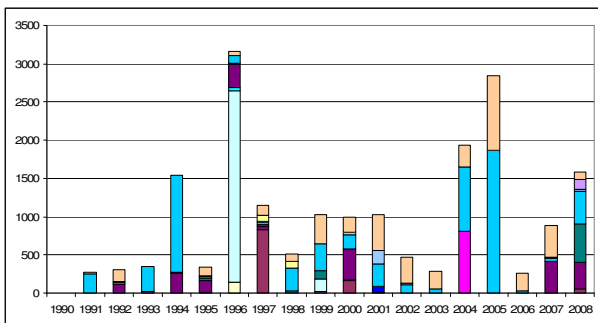


Fig. 1: Average number of Sandwich Tern counted per year from 1990 to 2008.

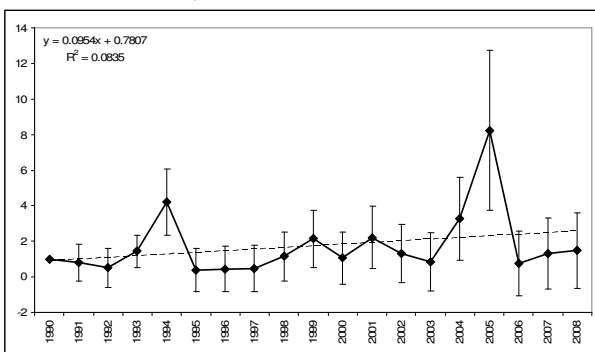


Fig. 2: Trends in Sandwich Tern populations using 1990 as the base time.

#### Trend Analysis:

Number of sites	2
Number of yearss	19
Number of observed counts	34
Number of missing counts	4

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

Chi-square 13069.43, df 31, p 0.0000  
Likelihood Ratio 10394.80, df 31, p 0.0000  
AIC (up to a constant) 10332.80

Wald-test for significance of slope parameter:  
Wald-Test 1.95, df 1, p 0.1627

**Overall slope: uncertain**

Ed: Population trends of the Damara Tern, Common Tern and Caspian Tern were presented and analysed in the last newsletter (No. 6, January 2009). This analysis is now extended to two more of Namibia's coastal tern species. Please see newsletter No. 5 (p3) for details of the methodology and interpretation.

### Swift Tern (*Sterna bergii*)

Red Data Book Status: Namibia - ?, International – least concern.

Wetlands International population trend: stable.

There are 244 counts at 32 sites on record for Swift Tern since 1990. Ten of the sites are from the Lüderitz peninsula and these have been added together for the analyses. The highest average of 5761 individuals was achieved in 1994 when twelve sites were counted (Fig. 3.) Seventeen sites were counted in 1997 and 2309 birds were seen. Three sites, the Lüderitz peninsula (34%), Sandwich Harbour (17%) and Walvis Bay (24%), account for most of the birds seen.

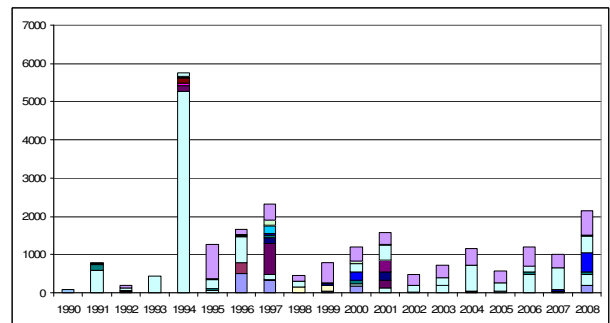


Fig. 3: Average number of Swift Tern counted per year from 1990 to 2008.

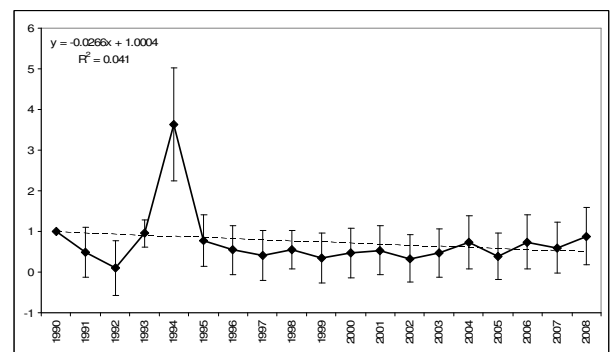


Fig. 4: Trends in Swift Tern populations using 1990 as the base time.

#### Trend Analysis:

Number of sites	4
Number of years	19
Number of observed counts	61
Number of missing counts	15

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

Chi-square 46219.07, df 56, p 0.0000  
Likelihood Ratio 27298.43, df 56, p 0.0000  
AIC (up to a constant) 27186.43

Wald-test for significance of slope parameter:  
Wald-Test 0.80, df 1, p 0.3711

**Overall slope: uncertain**

## PROJECT SHINE COASTAL BIRD COMPETITIONS

Last year the Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Working Group launched three competitions linked to coastal bird conservation and *Project Shine* (see newsletter No. 4, Sept 08 p5 & No 5, Nov 08 pp2-3). Bird book prizes were offered for the following categories:

1. The group that collects the greatest weight of (blue) plastic bottles for recycling.
2. The group that creates the best large seabird sculpture, made out of recycled litter found on the coast.
3. The group that finds and reports the greatest number of (dead) ringed seabirds.

At a ceremony at Swakopmund Municipality on 27 February 2009, these prizes were awarded to the following five organisations:

- Pro-Ed Akademie (for the 2 best bird sculptures)
- SIS Returning the Youth (for participating in the sculpture and plastic bottle competition)
- Tears of Hope (for participating in the plastic bottle competition)
- Henties Bay Local Youth Forum (for participating in the plastic bottle competition)
- The Voortrekkers (for rescuing an injured coastal bird and taking it to Dr Sandra Dantu for rehabilitation)

The overall winners of the Project Shine II competition were the Voortrekkers, SS Returning the Youth and Blue Boys Soccer Club. Many thanks to Berdine Potgieter of Swakopmund Municipality for making it possible for us to participate in this way, and to all the participants for their contributions to the conservation of our coastal birds and their habitats!



Creative bird sculptures produced by young artists of the Pro-Ed Akademie, Swakopmund (photo Ann Scott)



This mountain of plastic water bottles was collected for recycling by the Henties Bay Local Youth Forum (photo Berdine Potgieter)



A bird book prize for Tears of Hope (above) ... and for the Pro-Ed Akademie (below; photos Berdine Potgieter)



## **THE FIRST ALBATROSS TASK FORCE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP, CHILE**

**John Paterson**, Albatross Task Force Namibia, email [john@paterson.alt.na](mailto:john@paterson.alt.na)

From 18 to 23 January 2009 the Albatross Task Force (ATF) held an international workshop in Coquimbo, Chile, with all regional ATF teams attending as well as the manager of the Birdlife International Global Seabird Programme (GSP), Ben Sullivan, Marco Favero chairman of the Advisory Committee for the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), Esteban Frere and Ross Wanless from the GSP. Two leading researchers in seabird bycatch mitigation measures, Graham Robertson from the Australia Antarctic Division and Ed Melvin from Washington Sea Grants, also attended and guided a practical field research session. The ATF press officer Graeme Madge from RSPB was also present.

Since its inception the ATF has comprised several teams in different countries, working in isolation. One of the main aims of this workshop was for all the teams to meet and share experiences of the various fisheries in each country. South America was strongly represented by a team of 4 from Brazil, 2 from Uruguay, 3 from Argentina, 2 from Chile including the ATF co-ordinator; 2 from South Africa and 2 from Namibia. A new recruit to the ATF, Ecuador had 1 representative as an observer.

A further aim of the workshop was to spend a day at sea under the guidance of Ed, Graham and Ben, looking at different Bird Scaring Line (BSL) designs from each country and to test some of the latest designs. We also looked at line sink rates in relation to propeller wash. A further objective was to look at the ACAP research priorities and develop research projects for 2009 addressing these priorities to present findings to the next ACAP Advisory Committee meeting in March 2010. Another important component was to have fun and socialize with the various teams, and boy can the latinos party!!

After the first day packed with a variety of presentations from all the teams, GSP and ACAP, we divided into three teams and spent a day at sea. I was fortunate enough to be on Graham Robertson's team with Rodrigo (ATF Chile) looking at line sink rates. We left port way before sunrise and returned around 11 that night, a long day at sea. But what a day! We started off by seeing several Salvins Albatross, followed by Bullers Albatross, followed by Grey-headed Albatross and capped off in the late afternoon with a Chatham Albatross. Absolutely stunning. This star cast was ably supported by a Westland Petrel, Juan Fernandez Petrels, Pink-footed Shearwaters, Brown Boobies, Brown Pelicans, Steinjaegers Petrels, Humboldt Penguins and a few others.

The sink rate experiments were a success and the results will be published soon. During the experiments we simulated a real fishing scenario as closely as possible, deploying around 25 Time Depth Recorders (TDR) randomly on either side of the propeller in and out of the wake for four shoots. Even though each shoot was short we caught around 100 blue sharks which



Top L: Chatham Albatross, R: Inca Tern  
Bottom: Fabiano Peppes, ATF Brazil (*photos John Paterson*)

were returned to the sea, hopefully in a fit state to survive. We also hooked, but failed to land, an Opah. Much to the crews delight two Poorbeagle Sharks, a delicacy, were caught and kept and finally a giant squid was also caught. Luckily no birds were caught during the operation though we did have a White-chinned Petrel come down and pinch a bait. Anxious moments.

The next three days were spent debriefing after the sea work and looking at ACAP mitigation research priorities and developing projects for each team. Namibia has a project looking at the relationship between offal and the effectiveness of BSL's in limiting bycatch. A second project we will be looking at is the effectiveness of flying 2 BSL's on demersal long line boats and also looking at the potential economic benefit of BSL's by showing less bait loss to birds means a potential increase in catch of target species. The workshop ended with all the ATF teams signing the "Coquimbo Declaration", showing a commitment to seabird conservation through research into effective mitigation.

Wednesday night we had an informal braai, the Argentinean contingent took charge here as they take their meat seriously. After turning down the offered portable braais by the resort management they found a corner and proceeded to make a proper fire with real coals. The upshot was a really good meal. The party carried on into wee hours with talking and dancing and some quiet beers. I was rudely awoken at 6am to go and have a look at an Inca Tern down at the harbor about eight km away. Meidad (ATF SA) and I dragged our heavy heads down to the harbor via garbled Spanish interactions with a taxi driver. It was worth it, we were greeted with spectacular views of the terns feeding and perching on mooring ropes. We made it back for breakfast and another day of workshop.

In summation this was one of the most inspiring workshops that I have ever attended. The delegates formed a cohesive group and were all committed to a common goal. All I can say is that Oli Yates organized a perfect workshop in a wonderful setting. Thanks.  
[http://www.acap.aq/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=204&Itemid=28](http://www.acap.aq/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=204&Itemid=28)  
[http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/02/ATF\\_chile.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/02/ATF_chile.html)  
<http://www.rspb.org.uk/news/details.asp?id=tcm:9-209321>