

# Namibia Bird News



No 5, June 2013

## Time flies like an arrow...

... fruit flies like a paw-paw... and eggs will fly into Holger's face if he doesn't produce an issue of NBN soon!

Indeed, time has flown by and I have so not managed to produce an issue of NBN for March. I could blame all kinds of interesting things in my life for this slip-up but lets be honest and just confess that it was pure '*slapgatness*'. Some exciting things have happened in the past six months and in this issue of NBN you can read all about it.

Remember to send contributions, comments and other useful stuff to [nambirdnews@gmail.com](mailto:nambirdnews@gmail.com).

Happy birding!  
Holger



## Contents

Time flies like an arrow .....	1
State of the world's birds paints a dreary picture .....	1
World Migratory Bird Day celebrated in style! .....	2
Tracking flamingos—or not! .....	3
Ancient flamingo .....	4
Tracking Hobbys by satellite .....	5
Bird Atlas update .....	6
International Vulture Awareness Day 2013 .....	7
Some interesting retraps, controls, resightings etc.....	8
Stuff from the literature .....	9
Calendar of events.....	11

## State of the World's Birds 2013 paints a dreary picture

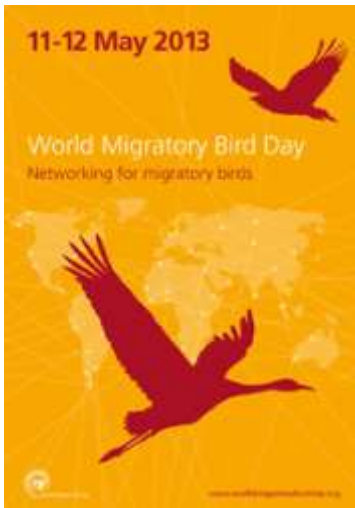
The latest *State of the World's Birds* report published by BirdLife International makes for some very depressing reading. For example, long-distance migrants between Europe and Africa declined by an average of 23% from 1980 to 2010 and waterbirds are declining on a global basis but especially in Asia, due to habitat destruction. Even more frightening is the fact that one in eight of all bird species globally is threatened with extinction. A range of threats is driving this trend as human actions are putting pressure on species, sites and habitats with human induced climate change perhaps the biggest challenge of them all.

Birds are good biodiversity indicators and the report highlights the importance of monitoring, especially in important bird areas, because this provides vital information on their condition, threats to the areas and conservation measures taken.

In Namibia we have a proud history of monitoring some of our important bird areas, especially Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour, but perhaps we should take this as a wake-up call and try to implement a more rigorous monitoring programme at all of our important bird areas.

You can download the complete *State of the World's Birds 2013* report at [www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb](http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb)





## World Migratory Bird Day celebrated in style!

World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated throughout the globe on 11 and 12 May 2013. This year the day bust all records with an astonishing number of 350 registered events in 88 countries! The theme for the day was **Networking for migratory birds** and the emphasis was not only on the importance of a global network of important wetlands but also on the importance of networking between governments, research institutions etc.

I was privileged to participate in a WMBD celebration in Kenya at Lake Elementeita as part of a 13 nation east and southern African delegation that had spent a week at the Kenya Wildlife Service Training Institute in Naivasha. We had learned all about the flyway approach to the wise use and conservation of wetlands and waterbirds and the celebratory day was the culmination of our training course. There were performances by school children and environmental groups and speeches by various dignitaries, one of whom was Kuki Gallmann, world renowned environmental ambassador and author. The first ever WMBD was held at her estate Laikipia in 2006.

Considering that Namibia has two of the world's most important wetlands for migratory birds in Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour we should think of celebrating this day here too.

Holger Kolberg



A group of school children performing a song as part of the World Migratory Bird Day celebrations at Lake Elementeita, Kenya.

## Tracking flamingos—or not!

Three flamingos, two Greater and one Lesser Flamingo, were fitted with satellite tracking devices at the Mile 4 salt works in January 2013 in an effort to try and determine the flyways of these birds to their breeding grounds in Etosha and Botswana. Of course, Mr Murphy was hard at work and none of the birds has left the coast so far! In a way, that is actually not at all surprising because we've had hardly any rain this season, so obviously (at least to flamingos), the chances of a successful breeding event are just about zilch. Nevertheless, the data obtained from the birds has given us some insight into the daily movements of flamingos along the coast. For example, one of the Greater Flamingos has moved between Mile 4 and Walvis Bay whereas the Lesser Flamingo has moved to Cape Cross and stayed there.

All the birds have been fitted with green engraved plastic rings so if you happen to see either **NFF**, **NFX** or **NFZ** please send a mail to Mark Boorman [felix@mweb.com.na](mailto:felix@mweb.com.na) or Ann Scott [ecoserve@iway.na](mailto:ecoserve@iway.na) or Holger Kolberg [holgerk@mweb.com.na](mailto:holgerk@mweb.com.na)



Katharina Reddig managed to snap this shot of one of “our” birds at Mile 4 on 30 May 2013.

## Ancient flamingo

The following news was circulated on the IUCN Flamingo Specialist Group list server:

*The Ringing Scheme of East Africa has just received news of a Lesser Flamingo that was found freshly dead at Lake Baringo on 13th February this year with a ring. The incredible thing about it is that the ring was a BTO ring (British Trust for Ornithology) that was one of those rings used on a batch of several thousand Lesser Flamingo chicks that bred at Lake Magadi in....1962!!*

*This bird was in fact ringed by none other than the very well-known Leslie Brown on 1st November 1962 making it **50 years, 3 months and 25 days old!***

*It must surely be the oldest recorded Lesser Flamingo and quite stunning that it lived for so long. A few years ago there was one recovered also at Magadi that was about 45 years old - there may be one or two more out there with rings from that time!*

*If anyone receives this who knows more about that ringing event of Lesser Flamingo chicks in 1962 - or was perhaps even there and took part, it would be really interesting to know the full story. I believe many of the chicks had got 'anklets' of encrusted soda formed around their legs which were acting as a 'ball and chain' and were killing the birds. Rescuers were breaking the balls of encrusted soda off and putting rings on thus saving the lives of many flamingos - some to live to over 50 years later!*

*The person who found the flamingo is Nick Armour of Swavesey, England, to whom we are indebted for reporting the ring. The distance from ringing site to recovery site is 242kms.*

*Colin Jackson*

What an incredible recovery! It just shows again that we actually know very little about the longevity of many of our bird species. So the next time you come across a dead bird, please kick it over to see if it has a ring or not. Who knows, you may just find southern Africa's oldest bird!





## Tracking Hobbys by satellite

A prototype of the smallest satellite transmitter produced so far, weighing just 5 g, was fitted to an adult Hobby *Falco subbuteo* in Germany in August 2008. Two autumn and two spring migrations were recorded successfully from the unit carried by this particular Hobby. All four migration routes were to the west of a direct line between breeding site and wintering area. The migration route in spring 2010 was up to 2,150 km farther west than that in autumn 2009, effectively forming a 'migration loop'. This was much less pronounced in 2008/09. The direct distance from the breeding site to the southernmost point reached in Zimbabwe in 2008/09 was 10,065 km. The fastest flight speeds on migration were recorded in spring 2010 in Mali and Morocco, when 1,243 km was covered in two days. Also in spring 2010, during migration from Morocco to southern France (1,032 km in two days), the falcon migrated at night, when a fix was made over the Mediterranean in the vicinity of Gibraltar. Migration across the Sahara took 4–4.5 days on each migration. The West African equatorial rainforest appears to be a significant ecological barrier, and the significance of this is discussed. Migration was noticeably rapid there with distances of up to 580 km flown per day – also partly at night. During both wintering periods the falcon spent the majority of its time in the Angolan Miombo woodlands, but in winter it also travelled large distances: from 16th October 2008 to 7th April 2009, the bird covered a total distance of at least 9,025 km between identified night roosts. In 2009, the bird spent half the year in the wintering area, a third on the breeding grounds and the remaining 18% of the time on migration; i.e. 65% of its time in Africa and 35% in Europe.

Source: Meyburg, B.U., P.W. Howey, C. Meyburg and K.D. Fiuczynski 2011 Two complete migration cycles of an adult Hobby tracked by satellite. *British Birds* **104**: 2-15

*Ed.*: In case you are wondering what this has to do with us—the bird actually spent considerable time in north-eastern Namibia, thanks John Mendelsohn for sharing this article.



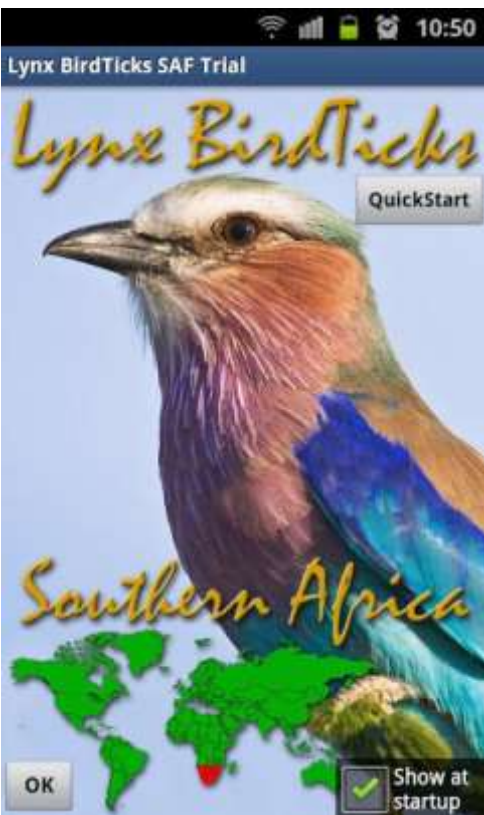
Verreaux's Eagles photographed by Susann Kinghorn at Düsternbrook in January.

## Bird Atlas Update

Six months have gone by since the last update and the Namibians are doing exceedingly well. To date we have covered 372 pentads or 3.5141% of all the Namibian pentads. There are 69 active observers who have submitted 826 cards at an average of 12 cards per observer. Congratulations and well done!

The next landmark will be the 5% mark. With the current enthusiasm and commitment, I'm sure we will be able to reach that figure by the end of the year, less than two years after the official start of SABAP 2 in Namibia.

Our challenge is to spread the message and to get as many people as possible involved. Sure, people are intimidated when they first come across the atlasing protocol and all its paraphernalia, so it is up to us experienced atlasers to show them that atlasing can be fun and is not too much hard work. We need coverage in areas that are not normally accessible to Joe Public e.g. farms and tourism concessions and the only way we will achieve this is by involving more people.



I've recently discovered a very simple way to do atlasing. If you have a smartphone or tablet that runs on the Android platform, get yourself the Lynx Bird Ticks app and you're halfway to becoming an atlasing whizz-kid. The app does all the hard work for you such as keeping track of the time spent atlasing, whether you're in or out of the pentad or not etc. and then sends the card in as well. Just the thing for a lazy birder like me and at US\$11 it's a steal!

Thanks once again to all the persons that have sent in atlas records and forwarded all the ORFs that came with them without batting an eyelid.

Keep atlasing!

Holger Kolberg

Regional Atlas Coordinator for Namibia





## International Vulture Awareness Day 2013

International Vulture Awareness Day, or IVAD, will once again be celebrated on the first Saturday in September 2013. All over the world government departments, NGOs and other organisations will celebrate vul-

tures on 7 September and hope to raise awareness about the plight of these birds. After albatrosses, vultures are probably the most threatened group of birds on this planet and need serious intervention to stop their numbers from further decline.

In Namibia there will be two events: On 7 September the by now legendary fund raising dinner for Vultures Namibia will be held in Swakopmund at the Alte Brücke Resort, complete with live music, fire dancers and all. Just so that the Windhoekers do not feel left out, we have decided to also hold a dinner a week later i.e. on 14 September at River Crossing Lodge in Windhoek, although on a much smaller and more demure scale. The money raised at these dinners contributes vital funds to the budget of Vultures Namibia which in turn enables us to continue with the vulture monitoring work that has been going on for several decades.



This group of Wattle-necked Cranes was photographed by Wilferd Versfeld at Andoni in Etosha National Park in February.



## Some interesting retraps, controls, resightings etc.

Gabriel Shatumbu ringed and tagged a Lappet-faced Vulture chick on 7 November 2011 west of Adamax in Etosha NP. The bird was seen again at Gemsbokvlakte waterhole by Henk Dop of Amsterdam on 28 February 2013.

Wilferd Versfeld ringed and tagged a Lappet-faced Vulture chick on 8 October 2010 on the Halali plains in Etosha NP. The bird was seen and photographed by Hugo Haussmann at Homob waterhole on 10 October 2012, two years and two days after and 28km from where the bird was ringed.

On 6 October 2011 Wilferd Versfeld ringed an African White-backed Vulture chick south of Adamax pan in Etosha NP. Liz Komen picked this vulture up on one of the images of her camera traps at NARREC vulture restaurant on 13 June 2013, 616 days after the chick was ringed and 406km from where it was ringed.

Another African White-backed Vulture chick ringed by Wilferd west of Leeubron in Etosha on 23 October 2012 was captured on Liz's camera traps on 27 May 2013, 216 days after ringing and 394km from where it was initially ringed.

Holger Kolberg ringed an African White-backed Vulture chick on farm Aris on 1 October 2011. This bird was captured on Liz Komen's camera traps on 23 April 2013, some 43km from the original place of ringing and 570 days later. Another 36 days later, on 29 May 2013, the same bird was re-sighted near Naba-beeb in the Northern Cape, 752km further south.



Elizabeth and Tony Butler photographed this ringed Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk in Etosha.

The above records highlight the important role camera traps can play in adding to the database of vulture re-sightings and I would like to use this opportunity to call on all readers of this newsletter that use camera traps to please send me pictures that they get of tagged vultures.

Holger Kolberg

National Ringing Coordinator

[holgerk@mweb.com.na](mailto:holgerk@mweb.com.na)

P.S. Rumour has it that someone managed to catch and ring an Angolan Cave Chat— hopefully we will be able to provide you with all the details (and photos!) of this historic event in the next issue.

## Stuff from the literature

*The next time you get annoyed at a Pied Crow*—Professor Anne Clark of Binghamton University believes that crows can teach us a thing or two about adapting to the environment and managing stress. She has spent the past ten years studying a population of American Crows in the Southern Tier of New York. The reason for this study? To determine how these birds cope with stress on a molecular level or, in layman's terms, is it their genes that help crows adapt to their ever changing environment. Perhaps we can get her interested in the Pied Crows at Ganab... Source: Binghamton University, State University of New York (2013, April 23). Counting on black crows to help us adapt to stressful situations. *ScienceDaily*.

*Make sure your nest is well feathered*—Scientists from the University of Granada, collaborating with the University of the Witwatersrand and the FitzPatrick Institute have discovered that female House Sparrows will lay more eggs when the male brings more feathers to the nest. The study was conducted on 50 pairs of sparrows on Dassen Island in South Africa. The researchers took away and added feathers to nests and the recorded the behaviour of the females. For example, when females noted that feathers were missing from the nest they animatedly called the males and these would respond by bringing more feathers. Maybe I should have invested in those Unit Trusts... Source: Lola García-López de Hierro, Marcos Moleón, Peter G. Ryan. **Is Carrying Feathers a Sexually Selected Trait in House Sparrows?** *Ethology*, 2013; 119 (3): 199 DOI: [10.1111/eth.12053](https://doi.org/10.1111/eth.12053)

*Big city, new bird*—Scientists have discovered a new species of bird with distinct plumage and a loud call in downtown Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The Cambodian Tailorbird (*Orthotomus chaktomuk*) prefers dense, humid lowland scrub, of which only small fragments remain in Phnom Penh but was even found on a construction site! I'm sure there's at least one new species hiding in Windhoek... Source: Mahood, Simon P., Ashish J. I. John, Jonathan C. Eames, Carl H. Oliveros, Robert G. Moyle, Hong Chamnan, Colin Poole, Howie Nielsen & Frederick H. Sheldon. **A new species of lowland tailorbird (Passeriformes: Cisticolidae: Orthotomus) from the Mekong floodplain of Cambodia.** *Forktail*, 2013

*Anti Virus*—Researchers at the University of British Columbia have developed a vaccine that may halt the spread of West Nile Virus. The virus is borne by mosquitoes and in 2012 alone killed 286 people in the USA. West Nile Virus has been identified as a threat contributing to the extinction of some rare bird species and a vaccine would help to prevent further extinctions. Source: Joanne A. Young, Wilfred Jefferies. **Towards the Conservation of Endangered Avian Species: A Recombinant West Nile Virus Vaccine Results in Increased Humoral and Cellular Immune Responses in Japanese Quail (*Coturnix japonica*).** *PLoS ONE*, 2013; 8 (6): e67137 DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0067137](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0067137)

*Not in my backyard*—History was made in the first GBBC or Great Backyard Bird Count when birdwatchers from 103 countries counted more than 25 million birds of 3144 species from 15 to 18 February 2013. OK, next year it will be 104 countries... Source: Cornell University (2013, February 21). Great Backyard Bird Count goes global, shatters records. *ScienceDaily*.





This Black-headed Heron was photographed by Hugo Hausmann at Sesriem campsite.



Hugo also snapped this Spotted Eagle-Owl at the Sossusvlei parking area.



# Calendar of Events

**14 July 2013:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam (07:30 at parking area).

**20 and 21 July 2013:** Wetland bird count around Windhoek, contact Gudrun [gudrunm@iway.na](mailto:gudrunm@iway.na)

**27 and 28 July 2013:** Walvis Bay wetland bird count and 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the counts contact Peter Bridgeford [pmbridge@iway.na](mailto:pmbridge@iway.na).

**11 August 2013:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Gammams Sewage Works (07:30 at entrance gate).

**24 to 26 August 2013:** Namibia Bird Club bird atlasing bash to the Namib-Naukluft Park.

**7 September 2013:** Vultures Namibia fund raising dinner at Alte Brücke Resort in Swakopmund contact Sandra Dantu [felix@mweb.com.na](mailto:felix@mweb.com.na).

**8 September 2013:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam (07:00 at parking area).

**14 September 2013:** Vultures Namibia fund raising dinner at River Crossing Lodge in Windhoek contact Holger Kolberg [holgerk@mweb.com.na](mailto:holgerk@mweb.com.na).

**21 September 2013:** Namibia Bird Club afternoon birding at Avis Dam (15:00 at parking area).

**22 September 2013:** Namibia Bird Club day outing to Farm Haris.

**13 October 2013:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Gammams Sewage Works (07:00 at entrance gate).

**27 October 2013:** Namibia Bird Club day outing to Farm Otjiseva.

**10 November 2013:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam (07:00 at parking area).

**24 November 2013:** Namibia Bird Club big birding day at Farm Monte Christo.

**28 November to 3 December 2013:** SAFRING conference at Barberspan, North West Province, South Africa contact Dieter Oschadleus [doschadleus@gmail.com](mailto:doschadleus@gmail.com)

**30 November 2013:** Namibia Bird Club at the Biomarkt.

**8 December 2013:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Gammams Sewage Works (07:00 at entrance gate).

