

Namibia Bird News

A close-up photograph of two swans, likely Great Egrets, shown in profile. The swan in the foreground is slightly lower and more to the right, while the second swan is behind it and to the left. Both birds have white feathers, long necks, and prominent pink bills. Their eyes are a striking yellowish-green. The background is a soft-focus greyish-blue, suggesting water or a similar natural setting.

No 6, September 2013

Tough times...

Namibia is currently experiencing the worst drought since recorded history. It certainly is the driest I've seen this country during my travels in the last three months. The entire country is aching for some rain, even the north eastern parts of the country are a sad reflection of their usual state.

As if that is not enough, another threat, that of commercial poaching, has raised its head. In the Zambezi Region elephants are killed for their ivory and a spin-off of this activity is the large-scale poisoning of scavengers, especially vultures, to prevent these birds from attracting the attention of law enforcement officials to the elephant carcass.

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

Happy birding!
Holger



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See a tagged vulture?

Thanks to 'Tate' Joris and his nagging pursuit of the origin of tagged vultures we now have a dedicated site where you can report tagged vultures. Just to be safe Joris has also added a twitter hash-tag and an email address, so there really is no more excuse for you not to report any tagged vulture you see!

Thanks Joris!

See a tagged vulture?
REPORT tag number, date & place
(a photo would be nice!)

report@vulturesnamibia.org  #seevultures
<https://vulturesresightings.crowdmap.com>

Vultures facing a bleak future

The recent mass poisoning of vultures in the Zambezi (former Caprivi) Region in north eastern Namibia once again highlighted the extreme pressure and threats facing this group of birds. The incident, where between 400 and 600 vultures were poisoned, received national and international media coverage and has done serious damage to Namibia's image as a conservation conscious country. To put this in perspective, this is equivalent to about 1% of the total Namibian vulture population being killed or 25 black rhinos being killed in Namibia in one go.



Apart from the immediate local impact, such an incident has far-reaching consequences. Proof of this is that two of the poisoned birds had patagial tags which allowed the birds' origin to be traced to the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. It is also the breeding season for vultures and a conservative guess is that at least a third of the poisoned birds would have been breeding birds i.e. they would have been sitting on eggs or have small chicks to feed. These eggs and chicks will not have survived even if one of the partners was still alive.

As a response to the incident, a group of persons active in vulture conservation met in Windhoek on 23 August and thrashed out a protocol on vulture poisoning. Not only does the protocol spell out immediate actions in the case of a poisoning incident but it also addresses head-office level actions and possible future actions to prevent such incidents from happening again. The protocol is currently under review by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and once it is accepted by the Ministry it will be made freely available on, amongst others, the Vultures Namibia and Namibia Bird Club websites.

Holger Kolberg

For some of the publications on the poisoning incident see the links below:

www.az.com.na/umwelt-natur/hunderte-geier-vergiftet.411729

<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/08/29/elephant-poachers-poison-hundreds-of-vultures-to-evade-authorities/>

<http://iucn.org/?13529%2FVultures--silent-victims-of-Africas-wildlife-poaching>

<http://news.mongabay.com/2013/0910-salisbury-vultures-killed-by-elephant-poachers.html>

www.4vultures.org/news

From Cape to Cairo...

Well, not quite, but Katima to Keetmans just doesn't sound the same and this is where my bird counting trips literally take me and this winter it was no different.

I started off with the Caprivi in early July, slipping in a little detour on the way up to Omambonde Tal to instruct the Düvel family on how to do bird atlasing. What struck me most about the Caprivi this time was how dry it was. It certainly is the driest I've seen this area ever and this had an effect on the birdlife with millions of Spur-winged Geese and White-faced Ducks, not to mention all the egrets, frequenting the floodplains of the Okavango in the Bwabwata National Park—I had my work cut out counting all of them. Next stop was Mavunje Camp on the Kwando and here things were much more relaxed with very few birds on the section of river that we count there.



On the way home my usually trusty car developed an oil leak (and it is **not** a Landrover, just to pre-empt rude remarks) which necessitated a change of chariot for my next leg, the south. So I finally got a chance to drive 'my' bus—the one that was purchased for my section to transport my non-existent staff to aerial surveys. Apart from it seeming way too big it was actually quite nice to drive—I'd forgotten how lekker it is to drive a car with aircon **and** music. Pity it doesn't have much ground clearance (I discovered this fact when I tried to pull off the road in Hardap) or I could get quite used to this car. Needless to

say, wherever I went it caused quite a stir because nobody could understand that I travelled alone in such a big bus. My first stop was van Rhyndam just outside Keetmanshoop for a quick count of 0 birds, 0 species (dam completely dry) and then it was Naute dam. Then it was Lüderitz (or is that Nam#//~]s?) where the weather cooperated for once and I completed my 'Quantum journey' at Hardap dam after which I made my way home for the next leg which would be the Sandwich count.

Armed with several litres of gearbox oil and double that amount of Namibia's finest (just



in case we got marooned and had to wait to be rescued) I made my way with my friend Mark to Sandwich. Holy Toledo, what a surprise waited for us there! Thousands of flamingos and terns kept us well occupied throughout the count. But the biggest surprise was waiting for me on the sandspit that separates the lagoon from the ocean. I was cruising along on my quadbike (yes, I use a quadbike for the count because it's the only way you're going to cover the area) when I noticed a vegetated hummock on the beach where I'd never seen one before. Curious



about the sudden appearance of a hummock I directed the bike towards it when said hummock suddenly jumped up and sprinted hell for leather towards the mudflats. It was a young female ostrich! I recorded this 'honorary wader' on my atlas card and continued the count without any further noteworthy incident.

We concluded the bird count round with a trip to Cape Cross with an unsuccessful search for a satellite tagged flamingo and all too quickly the end of the winter wetland counts had arrived.

Holger Kolberg



Eckart Demasius could not believe his eyes when this White-faced Duck pitched up literally on his office doorstep in Swakopmund.

Bird Atlas Update

The long weekend in August saw the first dedicated bird atlasing bash happening in Namibia. Members and friends of the Namibia Bird Club descended on the Namib-Naukluft Park (NNP). The northern part of the NNP consists of 161 pentads, most of them untouched, and we were hoping to make a small dent into this.

The atlasing party met at Ganab on Saturday morning and in the afternoon we 'hit' a nearby pentad, just to get us warmed up. The next day everybody scattered in order to achieve the greatest coverage and this is where many of us discovered that atlasing in the desert can be a bit tedious! After all, it takes you half an hour to see your first bird and then it is one of them LBJs! On Monday we packed up camp and went off, everybody trying to get in at least one more full protocol card before returning home. This was really a worthwhile exercise and hopefully this will be the first of many similar bashes.

Keep atlasing!

Holger Kolberg

Regional Atlas Coordinator for Namibia



The Atlas to date:

420 pentads

75 active observers

988 cards submitted

3.9626% coverage



The participants of the first ever atlasing bash, 24 to 26 August 2013, Namib-Naukluft Park.

Retraps, recoveries etc...

A Lesser Flamingo bearing a Canadian ring with the letters NAA engraved on it was photographed by Minister Calle Schlettwein in Walvis Bay in early July 2013. This bird was ringed as a two to three year old bird at Sandwich Harbour by Rob Simmons on 23 April 2002.

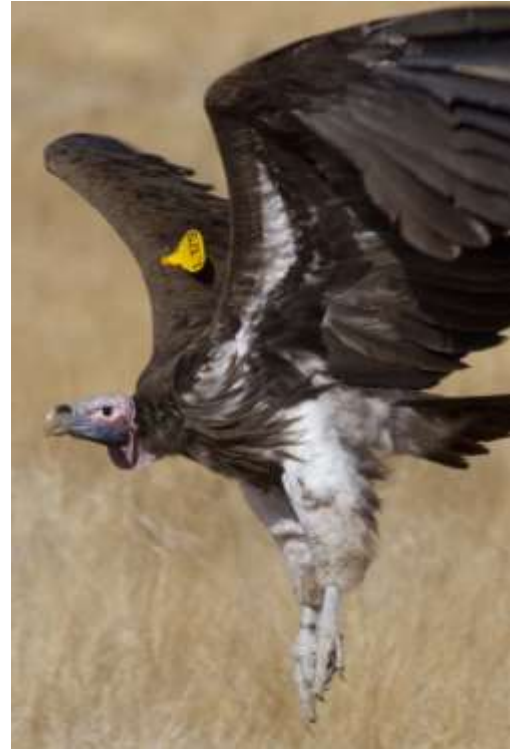
During the wetland bird count at Sandwich Harbour on 24 July 2013, Mark Boorman spotted a Swift Tern with an engraved ring. This bird was ringed on Robben Island, South Africa, on 30 April 2013.

Peter Adrian photographed a tagged Lappet-faced Vulture next to the C19 road between Solitaire and Sesriem. The bird (L129) was ringed south of Saagberg on 11 October 2010 by Christo Aldrich.

Steven Stockhall photographed a tagged Lappet-faced Vulture feeding on a baboon carcass in Chobe National Park on 7 July 2013. The bird was ringed as a chick by Wilferd Versfeld near Newbrownii in Etosha National Park on 4 October 2011.

Guy Bradley observed a tagged Kori Bustard at the waterhole in front of the fort lodge at Onguma on 1 August 2013. This bird was captured by Tim Osborne on 17 January 2001 near the Halali sewerage ponds as a sub-adult male.

Liz Komen's camera trap at her vulture restaurant at NARREC is proving to be a veritable gold mine of resightings with at least ten different vultures being recorded in the past three months, some birds appear as regular visitors.



Calendar of Events

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

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).

13 to 16 March 2014: Flock in the Berg, BirdLife South Africa AGM contact Nikki McCartney events@birdlife.org.za

18 to 24 August 2014: 26th International Ornithological Congress, Tokyo, Japan, website ioc26.jp



Hugo Haussmann photographed this bird and its pet in the Hoarusib River recently.



Hugo also took this photo of an African Fish-Eagle at Rietfontein in Etosha National Park.