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About the Namibia Bird Club

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. The club's mission is to contribute to Namibian ornithology by, amongst other things, arranging regular birding outings, conducting bird ringing and atlasing excursions and educating the public about the value of birds. To achieve this, we organize monthly visits to interesting birding sites around Windhoek as well as regular visits to Avis Dam and the Gammams Sewage Works and occasional weekend trips further afield. Bird club members also participate in the African Waterbird Census twice a year.

Experienced birders are more than happy to help beginners and novices on these outings. If you have a transport problem or would like to share transport please contact a committee member. Depending on the availability of speakers and suitable material we present occasional lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive a digital newsletter, *Namibia Bird News*, which includes a programme of forthcoming events and the Bird Club journal, *Lanioturdus*.

The Namibia Bird Club is not affiliated to any global or regional organization and relies entirely on members' subscriptions and donations to fund its activities.

The opinions expressed in this journal are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Namibia Bird Club or its committee.

Instructions to Authors

Lanioturdus is a journal dedicated to birds and birding. Although the journal's primary focus is on Namibia, articles from other geographical parts of the globe will also be considered for publication. Authors should use common and scientific names of southern African birds as published in *Roberts' VII*. For other regions, English and scientific names following BirdLife International's species list (http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/species) should be used. Text should be submitted as a MS Word document. Photos, maps and figures should be sent as separate jpeg images, graphs as MS Excel charts or jpeg images and tables as MS Word or Excel documents. Please indicate in the article text where these should be placed.

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Editorial

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The plethora of public holidays in March and May certainly had an impact on several bird related activities in Namibia.

The Namibia Bird Club embarked on two major atlasing expeditions – one to the "far east" around Buitepos and one to the south around Maltahöhe. During these expeditions we managed to nudge the total number of pentads atlased in Namibia past the 10% mark – a truly remarkable achievement considering the number of active atlasers and the size of the country. Well done to all!

May was also the time of the traditional bird ringers' get-together. This time it was decided to combine this esteemed occasion with the bird club excursion and in my humble opinion it was a resounding success. Due to the current drought the number of birds caught was very low (but then most of us don't come to the get-together to ring birds) but the variety was quite amazing. In the end, between the ringers and the atlasers we racked up over 130 species, quite a number for an area that in places looked as if it had been swept with a broom. I think this may well be a recipe to be followed in the future.

As we are entering the "slowdown time" of winter this may be a chance to reflect on the past summer and perhaps write down some of the interesting observations we made (much like the contributions by Günther, Neil and Eckart in this issue) and send them to this, your journal.

Keep birding!

Namibia's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas 4: NA003 Okavango River, Andara to Mohembo

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Location	Namibia, Kavango East Region
Central coordinates	18˚ 18.00' South 20˚ 37.00' East
IBA criteria	A1, A3, A4i
Area	24 462 ha
Altitude	500 - 1,000m
Year of IBA assessment	2016

Ornithological information

The IBA's most important feature is the Okavango flood-plain in the Mahango and Buffalo core areas of Bwabwata National Park, which is critical habitat for breeding wetland bird species. About two-thirds of Namibia's bird species have been recorded in this area, and it boasts the highest bird species diversity in Namibia, the result of a diversity of both wetland and tropical terrestrial species. The flood-plain supports important populations of rare wetland birds including Slaty Egret *Egretta vinaceigula*, Wattled Crane *Grus carunculatus*, Rufous-bellied Heron *Ardeola rufiventris*, Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*, Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*, Lesser Jacana *Microparra capensis*, White-crowned Lapwing *Vanellus albiceps*, Long-toed Lapwing *V. crassirostris*, Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, Rosy-throated Longclaw *Macronyx ameliae* and Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*. The riverbanks and rocks hold Rock Pratincole *Glareola nuchalis* and African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*, while the fringing riparian vegetation supports Pel's Fishing-Owl *Scotopelia peli* and White-backed Night-Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus*. The surrounding grassveld also holds Palearctic migrants, including Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*.

Site description

This IBA includes the portion of the Okavango River in north-eastern Namibia between Andara Mission and the Botswana border at the western end of the former Caprivi Strip. The IBA includes parts of the Mahango and Buffalo Core Areas of the Bwabwata National Park, which essentially consists of the vast flood-plain along the Okavango River (the start of the panhandle of the Okavango Swamps) and its associated riverine forests and woodlands. Once the Okavango River leaves Namibia it flows into and creates the Okavango Delta in Botswana. High water occurs in April from rains in the highlands of Angola, and floods usually reach heights of 3–4 m above the low-level water in November. This flooding is essential for the functioning of all aquatic systems along the river. The climate can be divided into two distinct seasons—a dry season between April and November, and a shorter wet season from the end of November to early April. The monthly average maximum temperature is 30°C and about 80% of the region's rain (550–600 mm per year) falls between October and April.

Vegetation along the river is extremely diverse with 869 species from 88 families so far recognized, about 25% more species-rich than the delta itself. The vegetated dunes that dominate the topography away from the river include extensive dry woodlands. Dominant trees of the riparian woodland include *Garcinia livingstonei*, *Sclerocarya birrea*, *Diospyros mespiliformis*, *Acacia nigrescens* and *Grewia* sp. The vegetation of the dunes is dominated by mixed *Pterocarpus angolensis*, *Schinziophyton rautanenii*, *Ziziphus mucronata* and dense stands of *Baikiaea plurijuga* and *Baphia massaiensis* shrubs. The riparian vegetation is of particular importance. In Namibia, riparian woodland is increasingly rare as it is mostly destroyed during human settlement. The flood-plain comprises reed beds, swamps, open flooded grasslands and papyrus *Cyperus papyrus*. Two conspicuous species on the edge of the flood-plain are the palm *Phoenix reclinata* and baobab *Adansonia digitata*.

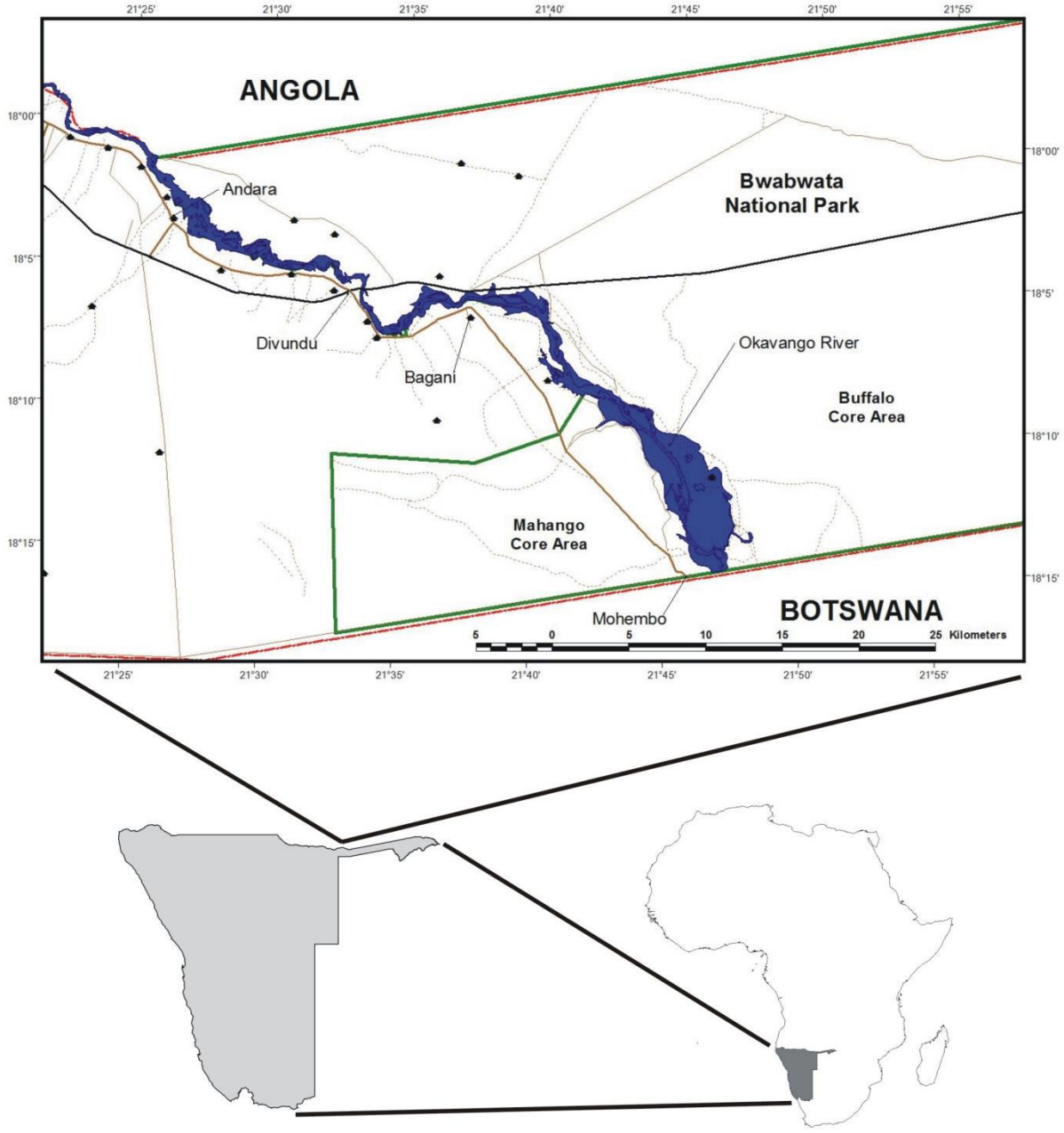

Figure 1: Location and features of the IBA.

Populations of IBA trigger species

Species	Season	Period	Population estimate	Quality of estimate	IBA Criteria	IUCN Category
Southern Ground-Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeteri*	resident				A1	Vulnerable
Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculatus*	resident	1991 - 2016	10 – 15 individuals	good	A1, A4i	Vulnerable
Slaty Egret *Egretta vinaceigula*	resident	1991 - 2016	20 - 30 individuals	good	A1	Vulnerable
White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*	resident				A1	Critically Endangered
Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*	resident				A1	Critically Endangered
Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*	resident				A1	Vulnerable
Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius*	resident				A1	Vulnerable
Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*	resident				A1	Endangered
White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*	resident				A1	Critically Endangered
Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*	Summer				A1	Near Threatened
African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*	Summer	1991 - 2016	100 – 500 individuals	good	A1, A4i	Near Threatened
Dickinson's Kestrel *Falco dickinsoni*	resident				A3	Least Concern
Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*	Summer				A1	Near Threatened
Bradfield's Hornbill *Tockus bradfieldi*	resident				A3	Least Concern
Black-faced Babbler *Turdoides melanops*	resident				A3	Least Concern
Hartlaub's Babbler *Turdoides hartlaubii*	resident				A3	Least Concern
Spur-winged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis*	resident	1991 - 2016	700 – 2 300 individuals	good	A4i	Least Concern

Protected areas

Most of the IBA falls within the Bwabwata National Park, with only a small portion i.e. the western bank of the Okavango River from Andara to Divundu being communal state land.

Protected area	Designation	Area (ha)	Relationship with IBA	Overlap with IBA (ha)
Bwabwata NP	Game Park	637 364	protected area contains site	24 462

Habitats
The Okavango River is the critical habitat of the IBA as it determines the nature of the area and provides the only source of water for wildlife during the dry season.

IUCN habitat	Habitat detail	Extent (% of site)
3 Shrubland	3.5 Subtropical/Tropical Dry	30%
4 Grassland	4.4 Temperate	30%
5 Wetlands (inland)	5.1 Permanent Rivers	40%

Land use
Although most of the IBA falls within the Bwabwata National Park there is extensive human settlement in the multiple use area to the north of the tar road B8 within the park. Extremely high human densities occur along the western bank of the Okavango River except for the part falling within the Mahango core area, the bulk of these being tourism establishments and subsistence agriculture.

Land-use	Extent (% of site)
nature conservation and research	95%
tourism/recreation	50%
subsistence agriculture/fishing	25%

Other biodiversity
This is the second most species-rich area for mammals in Namibia, with 99 species. Threatened mammals occurring in the protected area include African wild dog *Lycaon pictus* and African elephant *Loxodonta africana*. The frog *Phrynomantis affinis*, with only five specimens known, occurs here. About 71 species of fish occur in the Okavango River, including two threatened species.

Management considerations
The area is part of the Babwata National Park, a consolidation of the former Mahango and West Caprivi game parks.

The management of the riparian strip and flood-plain is of utmost importance. Any dramatic alteration of the Namibian portion of this river will affect the Okavango Delta (BW003) in neighbouring Botswana. The entire portion of the river in Namibian territory needs careful management planning since the majority of the people who occur along the Okavango live within 5 km of the river and the pressure for resources is intense. Measures to mitigate human impacts on the flood-plain and adjacent riparian strip and alternative options to slash-and-burn agriculture need to be sought. Education campaigns on sustainable utilization of the river's resources and its surrounding habitats are a

priority. Human disturbance to African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris* is caused by the wake generated by motorized boats destroying sandbank nesting sites. Disturbance by humans also causes adult birds to abandon their nests, exposing eggs and chicks to intense heat and additional predation pressure.

Uncontrolled fires in the Kavango and Zambezi Regions can also cause extensive damage to wildlife and reduce plant species diversity. Pesticides used annually to control malarial mosquitoes and tsetse fly *Glossina* (DDT and dieldrin) are found in the river and occur mainly from the astonishing practice of rinsing equipment and occasionally from the dumping of surplus supplies directly into the river. If future water abstraction occurs at Rundu to feed the growing population of Windhoek, off-take during flooding periods may reduce flooding levels below the critical threshold required for spawning fish.

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Figure 2: View across the extensive floodplain from the Buffalo core area (February 2015).

Figure 3: Riverine vegetation near Buffalo ranger station showing considerable elephant damage (February 2015).

Figure 4: Backwater of the Okavango River on the Buffalo core area side (February 2015).

Figure 5: During the dry season elephants are commonly encountered along the river (July 2015).

Figure 6: Flooded Omuramba near Mahango ranger station (February 2016).

Figure7: Buffalo are very common on the floodplain (February 2016).

Rosy-faced Lovebirds are indeed real love birds

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Rosy-faced Lovebirds, *Agapornis roseicollis*, got their name, according to sources on the internet, because they are loving birds which bond for life. Bonded pairs spend extended periods throughout the day and night snuggled up together, preening and feeding each other.

And indeed they do! I witnessed this at Cañon Roadhouse where I stayed for a day or two. I noticed a Rosy-faced Lovebird sitting in the tree calling.

It turned out that it must have called its mate. As soon as they were together they started being nice to each other, cuddling and preening,

They obviously had more on their minds and what usually follows the cuddling and preening is that little bit

to ensure the future preservation of the species. After that happy encounter each one went off on its own way!