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RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

Editorial

Included in this issue is the chairperson's report as delivered at the Annual General Meeting held on 5 March 2009. In it our chairperson, Gudrun Middendorff, outlines the activities of the Namibia Bird Club over the past year which include outings, talks, attendance of meetings and conferences by committee members and others, the partnership agreement with NEWS (Namibia Environment and Wildlife Society) and the donations and sponsorships given to various causes.

There are a number of birding projects on the go in Namibia and also a number of special interest groups eg. ringers, raptors, cranes and coastal birds. One can then ask what the primary function of the bird club is. We believe that the Namibia Bird Club provides social and educational birding to its members through outings, talks and of course, the publication of Lanioturdus. Morning walks are led by ex-

perienced birders who are able to help others develop their bird identification skills and general birding knowledge. It is our hope that members will go on to become involved in other projects where they can use these skills. A number of members have participated in the summer and winter bird counts at Walvis Bay which form part of the African Water Bird Census under the auspices of Wetlands International. The Bird Club has undertaken to contribute to these counts by doing summer and winter counts at Monte Christo. On 1 February 2009 four Bird Club members, Gudrun, Hanjo Böhme, Rolf Adrian and myself assisted by my daughter, Maren, as scribe, counted 335 birds of 34 species at Monte Christo. If there is interest from members and particularly if someone can provide a boat, the Bird Club could make an even bigger contribution to this project by doing counts on other inland waters such as perhaps Hoffnung Dam or Otjivero Dam which are not currently being counted.

Although I only fairly recently formally joined the Namibia Bird Club I have long been of the opinion that if one gets a lot out of birding one should put something back. Over the years I have been involved in data collection for the Atlas of Southern African Birds, various wetland counts, raptor road counts and I now have a ringer's license. I believe that by participating in these various activities I am putting something back into birding and I hope that others will also follow this path.

Tim Osborne resigned from the committee before the AGM (after resigning as editor of Lanioturdus some months ago) and Suzan Mallet-Veale has stood down from active involvement. We now welcome two new committee members in Holger Kolberg and Richard Niddrie.

Chairperson's Report 2009 Presented at the Annual General Meeting held on 5 March 2009

Gudrun Middendorff
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First I want to thank my committee for their hard work, support and commitment and good spirit over the past year. Secondly a want to thank our members and friends for supporting our outings and lastly I want to thank the Scientific Society for the venue and their staff for excellent cooperation.

It has become a set pattern that we visit Avis dam and the sewage works alternately at the beginning of each month

and undertake an outing to a farm or place around Windhoek later in the month. A positive sign is that more and more people join these outings, we even get Oshiwambo speaking visitors, some nature conservation students and the odd self-employed tour guide coming along. During the year we had two talks, one about penguin rehabilitation and the other about falconry in Germany. Various interviews had been done on our broadcasting services.

NACOMA (Namibian Coastal Conservation & Management Project) organized a symposium under the title "Bird Action Plan" to protect the coastal zones, especially our bird life which I attended. Different presentations showed the different habitats, their advantages and their shortcomings. A draft was put together and discussed in detail. The same concept was presented here in Windhoek to get more input from different people. The bird action plan will be used to serve as a key in a plan to include the whole coast in a conservation area/national park.

The wetland count was done twice and was supported by members of our bird club. Sadly Keith Wearne well known conservationist of the lagoon, passed away in July.

I attended the AGM of Greenspace (Friends of Avis Dam) – the main concern being the plan of the municipal council to allow a hotel to be built on the hill.

The bird club signed a partnership agreement with NEWS (Namibian Environment & Wildlife Society). We were invited to a brainstorming session to maximize cooperation and minimize overlapping projects. A strategy plan was put together and a follow up meeting is planned for early 2009. The open day in the botanical garden saw us selling posters, self made birdfeeders and sisal logs for nests.

The big birding day at Monte Christo was an instant hit. Lots of participants came to count birds. Cash prizes were given and everyone was invited to a good lunch sponsored by the club.

During the year the club made several donations and sponsorships: Suzan Mallet-Veale for her bird hospital, Liz Komen for NARREC and Dr Sandra Dantu for penguin rehabilitation as well as Greenspace and a student working on rockrunners. The new poster "Take a closer look" was a joint venture of the Namibia Bird Club and NEWS and serves to draw the public's attention to ringed birds.

In November various interested groups gathered at Swakopmund to decide on an umbrella body to combine the birding specialist groups together. A constitution was put together under Chris Brown's expertise. The new body will be called Birds Namibia and hopefully be accepted by Bird Life International soon.

It was a successful year and after early rains we now look forward to a super rainy season.

Of Gale-Force Winds and Balmy Days... Narrative of Twenty-Five Days of Bird Counting in the Wild Hinterland of Namibia

Holger Kolberg

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After being office-bound for more than a month, fighting demons that were threatening to drag me into the maelstrom of negativity and attending sanity-sapping meetings *ad nauseum*, the winter wetland bird counts couldn't come soon enough! This time there was even a cherry on top of the bird count cake because as part of the southern Africa-wide flamingo census we had planned to visit as many sites as possible along the coast.

On 8 July Chantel Louw and I raptor road counted our way to Möwe Bay, reaching that hallowed destination without incident late in the afternoon. The next morning we set off to the Kunene River Mouth under the able guidance of Alwyn Engelbrecht. I had hardly informed Chantel of how "I always get stuck on this dune" when said thing happened. But, no harm done, after a few less kPa in the tyres and a second run at it we managed fine. Just when I thought that Alwyn was really determined to test my non-existent dune driving skills, we stopped at a small wetland known as the "Little Oasis" (10 birds, 6 species). By now the north coast weather was at its best, gale-force winds were whipping sheets of sand along so that it was very difficult at times to see where we were going. Alwyn suddenly remembered that it was actually low tide (and not high tide as he had somehow thought all the time) and so we made our way onto the beach, stopping occasionally for dead whales and other interesting stuff before reaching the mouth. The morning of 10 July dawned beautifully which could only mean one thing – more wind! This could however not perturb hard-core "natuurbewaarders" like us and we counted the Kunene Mouth (327 birds, 18 species) as best as the conditions permitted, gritting our teeth (literally)! After the count we had an opportunity to inspect the desecration of artefacts and blatant flaunting of regulations by the friendly local diamond prospectors.

The next day we took on the return journey, this time Alwyn had read the tide table correctly and we had to take on the high beach because the tide was up. At Cape Frio the observed negative trend on our fuel gauges forced us inland and Alwyn took us on a scenic route past Quick-sand Springs, yet another lot of friendly local miners at Sarusas, the "non-existent due to wash-out" Sarusastfontein to a campsite in the Hoarusib. The journey continued the following morning with a small detour to the Poort, a nerve-jangling drive down the wet Hoarusib, a lung-busting climb up a tiny dune before reaching the sanctuary of Möwe Bay. On Sunday 13 July we visited wetlands around Möwe Bay, first the Hoanib Mouth (45 birds, 10 species) where we encountered our first flamingos. Alwyn then led us up the Hoanib and tested my (by now) much improved dune driving skills once more by taking us to the Oasis. This is one of the most amazing places I have ever seen and we were rewarded with some good birds, including an African Jacana (138 birds, 17 species). Our next stop

was Kranstwater, a seasonal pool formed by the Hoanib, populated by several Avocet and Little Grebe (for some or other reason I did not record the birds here, I'm sure the presence of lion tracks had absolutely nothing to do with it). After another nerve-jangling drive through thick bush, nervously trying to spot non-present elephant before they spot you, we arrived at Auses where again I didn't record the birds (Alzheimer's?). On our return to Möwe Bay we granted ourselves a well-deserved sundowner.

Monday morning we proceeded on our journey southwards, hoping to get to Terrace Bay before our fuel got to "empty". With Terrace Bay in sight I remarked that "it would be really funny if we ran out of fuel now" but the words had hardly left my lips when the car came to a stuttering halt, more or less precisely next to the sign depicting the northern border of the fishing area around Terrace Bay. At this point in time I quietly resolved not to make any more comments about getting stuck, running out of fuel or, for that matter, anything ever again! Fortunately there was still a bit of fuel in the quad bike which I managed to siphon into the trusty automobile and this allowed us to crawl into Terrace Bay where we could refuel. Here we bade farewell to Alwyn and continued heading towards Swakopmund. We checked the Uniab Delta (45 birds, 6 species) and the Huab Mouth (47 birds, 3 species) and left the Skeleton Coast Park heading for Omdel Dam. At our destination, with the sun setting, I discovered that the trailer now had what in motoring circles would probably be described as a "floating axle". One of the shackles holding the springs had completely sheared off on the badly corrugated and washed out road and the axle was only held by one rather flimsy looking shackle on the other side. No problem, "n boer maak 'n plan" and an ingeniously engineered rig out of several metres of nylon rope soon ensured that the axle was not as free-floating anymore as it had been. Much to our disappointment we discovered the next morning that Omdel Dam was dry, in fact, it looked like the dam had not had any inflow at all this rainy season. We proceeded to Swakopmund, anxiously monitoring the rear-view mirror for any irregular trailer movements but much to my relief the "boere plan" held and we reached Swakop without any nasty surprises.

On 16 and 17 July I took Chantel to several birding spots around Swakopmund under the pretence of giving her some bird identification training. Nobody really needed to know that I also needed to brush up on my shorebirds, especially with the count at Sandwich looming! A group of us travelled to the Cape Cross lagoons on Friday 18 July to do the count there. As luck would have it, they were busy with road maintenance on a section of the road and the resulting mud fest soon made a mockery of my car's designer paintjob. On top of this the fog was really thick and we did our best at re-enacting "Grebes in the Mist" during the count (22038 birds, 18 species). This was my first visit to this wetland and I was pleasantly surprised at the number and variety of birds at this site. With hindsight though, I shouldn't have been because, after all, this is one of Namibia's prospective Ramsar sites!

We, i.e. Chantel, Mark Boorman and yours truly left for Sandwich Harbour early on Saturday with a breath of east

wind promising good conditions. Somebody had taken a grader and flattened the beach for us and at times it really resembled the Nürburgring rather than the treacherous track it can be. Even the "tricky bit" near Sandwich was like cruising the Champs Elysses (yes, I had been watching the *Tour*!). On our arrival Mark immediately picked out a Blacktailed Godwit (how does he do it!?) and I got my gall up over a low-flying aeroplane (don't worry, we got your number and its been reported to DCA, ha). We went to count the fast-disappearing northern wetland and northern sandspit/beach before returning to camp for a well earned lunch and a siesta to steel us for the "real" count the next day. Chantel and Mark tackled the lagoon and associated bits whilst I took the trusty old quad bike towards the mudflats. I hadn't gone far when I was treated to a spectacular scene that could have come straight from the Discovery Channel. Not twenty metres in front of me the water's edge suddenly exploded with fish flying in all directions and two dolphins nearly beaching themselves in an attempt to grab some breakfast. Breathtaking, absolutely breathtaking! I continued, hoping that this was a good omen, but when I got to the mudflats there were no birds! Zip, nada, nil! A couple of cormorants and a few lost gulls. The first two count blocks were dry and bird-less but then just before Whalebone Island I encountered a flock of about a thousand Hartlaub's Gulls. Further on still nothing until I got to the mussel beds where there were a few waders and Kelp Gulls. On the sandspit I at last encountered large flocks of terns and some more waders but as soon as I returned to the mudflats the birds again disappeared. I had fun driving back over the dunes (hey, I'm slowly getting the hang of this!) and got into camp just in time for afternoon tea-time. All this time the weather was absolutely stunning, sunny, hardly any wind and warm – just the kind of weather to make you want to spend a few more days at Sandwich. We returned Mark to Swakop on Monday and then made our way to Windhoek. For the record: We counted 58067 birds of 35 species at Sandwich.

I continued on to Hardap Dam on 23 July, the start of the southern leg of my adventure. In January we had driven through large parts of the dam, now you would need a submarine to reach most of those places. Incredible, the amount of water that must have flowed into the dam since our last visit. The down side of this was that the flat, muddy areas that were teeming with waders in January were now all under water and the steep, rocky shores of the dam were just about devoid of waders. On Bird Island it looked like at least sixty pelicans were still sitting on eggs; I did not want to disturb the birds so did not go onto the island but it made me wonder whether the pelicans here breed all year round or not. I finished counting in the late afternoon (532 birds, 17 species) and returned to base not exactly looking forward to the drive to Naute Dam the next day. Have you ever noticed how the stretch from Mariental to Keetmanshoop seems to be the longest road in Namibia? Anyway I survived the trip and booked into my customary campsite at the kiosk by the dam wall. The Naute count (635 birds, 15 species) went without any notable incident bar the kilometres (I kid ye not!) of illegal long-lines that I pulled out of the water. The NDC must be wondering how they use

soooo much baling twine for so few bales of Lucerne.

On Saturday I leisurely (= bal-chatri trapped) made my way down to the Orange River and after yet another stunning, balmy evening and a good night's sleep I reached Oranjemund on Sunday 27 July. Here bad news awaited me! My friend and long-term counting partner Mark Anderson had gotten entangled in Namibian bureaucracy and had not received his security clearance in time. All this meant was that I would have to do the bulk of the count on my own with Mark having to stay south of the border. For those of you not *au fait* with the geography of the Orange River Mouth, this equates to a 20 km plus walk. In the good old days we used to do the entire count by boat without getting stuck on a sandbank once – nowadays you end up carrying the boat more than you row it. Yes, the mighty Orange has been reduced to a mere trickle in the past ten or so years. Buoyed by the knowledge that I would at least be doing something for my personal fitness, I embarked on my "Groot Trek", first counting the Hohenfels to Skilpadkop section on Monday and then the section from Hohenfels down to the bridge on Tuesday. At least on Wednesday, when counting the actual river mouth, my slightly stiff legs got some respite because larger tracts of this section can be covered by car. An unforeseen opportunity arose to visit some more sites in the Diamond Area on Thursday 31 July when I was invited by Dr Antje Burke to have a look at some of her rehabilitation sites (No, this is not the same as being invited to look at a lady's paintings!!). Unfortunately we did not see any flamingos at Chameis Head, Baker's Bay or Bogenfels but we did see lots and lots of "very exciting" plants which all had to be photographed (by Antje and Silke, not me). We reached Lüderitzbucht well after sunset but the long day was soon forgotten after a hot shower and a cold beer. The Lüderitz count is always fun because you never know what you're going to get. This time it was stacks of Oiks, that's African Black Oystercatchers in bird-nerd speak. The flamingos had all been counted by Jessica Kemper a week or so earlier and she must have done a good job because she counted more than I did! But then Jessica is an official seabird biologist and I'm only an *ad hoc* ornithologist (I'm not making excuses, just justifying my ineptitude).

My return trip to Windhoek was uneventful except for the Black Harrier road kill (already reported on namringers) and my second raptor re-trap within a year (already reported to SAFRING). In October 2007 I caught a PCG (Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk) near Solitaire that had been ringed by Steve Braine a bit earlier and this one was another PCG that had been ringed by Dirk Heinrich in May 2006. Pretty cool!

Ringed Blue Crane Sighting

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The committee of the Namibia Bird Club is always ready to help birders in any way we can. Although none of us professes to be an expert at bird identification we are always willing to try to identify birds from pictures sent to us. A

recent example was when Lisa Berl sent us a photograph of a bird taken in the Richtersveld in South Africa which we were able to identify for her as a Karoo Thrush. The exchange of emails led to Lisa sending a picture of a colour ringed Blue Crane taken at Nieuwoudtville in Namaqualand, RSA in September 2008. I sent this photograph to SAFRING and the feedback received was that this bird had been ringed by Kevin McCann at Basberg, Hanover on 22/01/1998 more than 10 years before Lisa resighted it 475 km from the ringing site. Perusal of the SAFRING data base shows that Kevin McCann is a member of the Crane Working Group in South Africa and that he ringed 91 cranes - 43 Wattled Cranes, 23 Grey Crowned-Cranes and 25 Blue Cranes, one of which Lisa photographed.

As the Namibia Bird Club is a co-sponsor of the "Take a Closer Look" poster which was printed to raise awareness of ringed birds we are only too willing to forward any ringed bird sightings to SAFRING, and in the case of ringed birds seen in Namibia, to MET as well, and to pass any feedback information received on to the observers.



Ringed Blue Crane

Photo: Lisa Berl

Vagrants, range extensions and interesting bird records for Skeleton Coast Park Namibia and southern Angola

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Introduction

The Skeleton Coast Park (SCP) encompasses the arid coastal strip from the Ugab River in the south to the Kunene River in the north of north-western Namibia. The area is bisected by west flowing ephemeral rivers supporting permanent and semi permanent wetlands providing islands of suitable habitat for many wetland associated species. The Kunene River is the only permanent river in the region providing an important wetland at the mouth that is considered to be the second most species rich coastal wetland in Namibia (Simmons et. al. 1993) and is a listed Important Bird