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Editorial

The attendance at our morning walks and outings has been disappointing of late and is a cause for concern. The committee goes to great lengths to organize outings to places where we are likely to see interesting birds.

The morning walk at the Gammams Sewage Works on 09/10/2011 is a case in point. There were only seven participants and four of those were committee members. Yes – I know that South Africa was playing Australia in the Rugby World Cup that morning – I decided to give the rugby a miss and go on the bird club outing instead and I think that was a good choice given the result of the rugby and the good birds found at the sewage works. In about three hours we found sixty eight species with a number of specials amongst them. A Pink-backed Pelican was seen – this is the second sighting of which I am aware at the sewage works – two birds were seen on 12/06/2011 and it constitutes only the fourth recent sighting of which I am aware in central Namibia; the others being a single bird at Avis Dam on 17/04/2010 and two birds seen at Otjivero Dam on 30/01/2011.

the rainy season when the falls and river are lower. The flip side is that the falls will not be at their thundering best as we had them. I suppose you can't have it both ways.

(I was interested to note that the Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush in the photograph is a ringed bird. According to the SAFRING website, at the time this article was written, only 31 of these birds had ever been ringed, not all of them at Epupa and in fact I know that some were ringed way to the north in Angola and others some distance to the east at Swartbooisdrif and near Ruacana. I wonder what the odds were against Richard photographing a ringed bird – Ed.)

Report on the Winter 2011 Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia

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The winter wetland bird counts were conducted during July and August 2011 at 32 sites throughout Namibia. The abnormal rainy season experienced in most parts of the country had resulted in plenty of water still being in the field and this was evident in the counts. Lower numbers than usual were recorded at most sites and the Walvis Bay count was the lowest since regular counts were started. The low numbers are due to an almost complete absence of flamingos, lower than usual numbers of geese and ducks and the absence of certain waders e.g. Chestnut-banded Plovers, Pied Avocets and Black-winged Stilts.

Sandwich Harbour had the most birds (thanks mainly to a large flock of Cape Cormorants and an even larger flock of Common Terns) whereas the Orange River Mouth confirmed its status as an important bird area with the highest number of species recorded (44).

In terms of rarities, a Slaty Egret was seen at Otjivero Dam and a White Stork at Monte Christo. The Orange River Mouth delivered a Glossy Ibis and eight Wattled Cranes were counted at Lake Oponono; Maccoa Duck are making a return to the Walvis sewage ponds, with four being counted there. A Greater Painted-Snipe was seen at Fischer's Pan, two Eurasian Oystercatchers were observed at Sandwich Harbour and two Common Redshanks appeared on the count sheet at the Mile 4 Saltworks.

I would like to express my appreciation to all the counters and the effort they put in to conduct the counts.

Note: See the last pages of this edition for a table of the counts by location.

Rarities and Interesting Observations

Harmut Kolb reported seeing two Yellow-billed Oxpeckers on a donkey in the vicinity of Purros in the Kunene Region on 17/09/2011. These birds were about 200 km south of their recorded SABAP1 range.

Peter Morgan and some of his Kunene River Lodge guests saw a Slaty Egret on the Kunene River about 1 200 m upstream from the lodge on 21/09/2011. None of the distribution maps in Roberts VII, SABAP1 or any of the field guides show this species occurring anywhere near where this bird was sighted. Mark Boorman, however, referred me to a paper published in the Bulletin of the African Bird Club (Vol 17 No 1 March 2010) wherein mention is made of four Slaty Egret specimens in the museum at Lubango in Angola. These specimens had been incorrectly identified as Black Herons and were collected in June 1968 in Huila Province about 200 km to the north east of this sighting. Mark has also heard that Slaty Egrets have been seen fairly regularly at Olushandja Dam near Onesi. It appears that there may well be a small population of this species along the Kunene River and in other suitable habitat in that region. Although I have photographs of the

Kunene bird I have not been able to obtain permission to publish them.

Gudrun Middendorff reported a Pied Kingfisher seen at Windhoek's Gammams Sewage Works on 05/10/2011. This is a very uncommon species in central Namibia but this is the second recent sighting of which I am aware - at least one bird was seen at Monte Christo in July 2011 (see Lanioturdus 44 (4)).

On 06/10/2011 Gudrun Middendorff saw a Dwarf Bittern at Monte Christo. While not regarded as a rarity this is an uncommon bird in central Namibia.

The Namibia Bird Club morning walk at the Gammams Sewage Works on 09/10/2011 produced another sighting of a Pink-backed Pelican, a very uncommon species in central Namibia although this is the second recent sighting there (see Lanioturdus 44(3)). An Osprey was also seen on this outing while the Pied Kingfisher (see above) was still showing well.

Pink-backed Pelican : Photo – Neil Thomson

Then the Gammams Sewage Works really started to buzz with sightings of uncommon birds. In addition to those mentioned above Dieter Ludwig reported two Little Bitterns seen in mid October while Uschi Kirchner and Paul Gascoigne saw two Greater Painted Snipe and two Purple Herons there on 26/10/2011.

Greater Painted Snipe : Photo – Paul Gascoigne

Mark Boorman reported that he and John Paterson had seen two Sanderlings with unique colour ring/flag combinations at Walvis Bay Lagoon on 27/10/2011. One of these birds had been seen previously (on 28/12/2009) at the same place by Mark, Sandra Dantu and Hartmut and Helen Kolb. This bird had been ringed in Ghana on 09/10/2009 and had been seen again in Snettisham, Norfolk, UK on 25/07/2011. The second bird had also been ringed in Ghana but no further details were available.

Richard Niddrie reported sighting Slaty Egrets on the drying flood plains of the Zambezi near Schuckmannsburg in the Caprivi Region in the third week in November.

Mark Boorman advised that the Gull-billed Tern (see below) was relocated at Walvis Bay Lagoon on 26/11/2011. The bird was still present there on 04/12/2011 when it was seen by John Paterson.

The Namibia Bird Club's Birding Big Day at Monte Christo produced a sighting of a very much off range Yellow-billed Oxpecker. This bird was seen by most participants and there is no doubt whatsoever that it was correctly identified. There was a suspected sighting there about a year previously but the presence of this species in central Namibia is now confirmed. Also seen on this outing were at least three off range Woodland Kingfishers. This is at least the third consecutive season that these birds have returned to this venue well south of their recognized range. As far as I am aware this is the first time that more than two birds have been seen there. The Pied Kingfisher (see above) was also seen again by some.

Woodland Kingfishers – Photo Neil Thomson

Jessica Kemper informed me of the sighting of three Terek Sandpipers at Radford Bay, Lüderitz on 29/11/2011. This is an uncommon species on the Namibian Coast and while Jessica says she has frequently seen a single bird either there or at Second Lagoon the presence of three birds is very unusual.

On 30/11/2011 Gudrun Middendorff saw a Eurasian Honey-Buzzard in Olympia. This is the second consecutive summer that she has seen one of these birds there (see Lanioturdus 44(1)). On 02/12/2011 Gudrun again saw a Eurasian Honey-Buzzard this time between Olympia and Suiderhof – possibly the same bird.

Christian Boix completed a trip to Namibia in November 2011 and in addition to the Gull-billed Terns and Green Sandpipers mentioned below he reported the following rarities and interesting sightings :- Black-winged Pratincole at the artesian spring outside King Nehale Gate (Etosha), Terek Sandpiper and Red-necked Phalaropes at Walvis Bay, Ospreys at Avis Dam, Walvis Bay and Mahango Game Reserve, Madagascar Bee-eater near Outjo and Angola Swallow and Great Snipe near Shamvura. In addition he recorded Souza's Shrike, Red-faced Crombec, Shelley's Sunbird, Ayres's Hawk-Eagle, Racket-tailed Roller and Collared Palm-Thrush between Shamvura and the Mohembo Border Post. This is quite a list of specials and gives an indication of what Namibia has to offer for the serious birder.

On 09/12/2011 Jo Tagg reported that a Village Indigobird was back in his Klein Windhoek garden. This species was seen there last summer too (see Lanioturdus 44(2)).

The Namibia Bird Club morning walk at the Gammams Sewage Works on 10/12/2011 turned up a Violet-backed Starling. Not a rarity but certainly a very uncommon bird within the Windhoek city limits.

Dieter Ludwig reported yet another African Harrier-Hawk in Windhoek in the second week of December. This time the bird was seen in Stein Street, Klein Windhoek (see Lanioturdus 44(3) and 44(4)).

On 16/12/2011 Mark Boorman reported the presence of a Wilson's Phalarope at Walvis Bay. According to Trevor Hardaker this is only the eighteenth record of this species in southern Africa. Mark also advised that two Gull-billed Terns had been present at Walvis Bay on the same day.

In mid December Luise Hoffmann heard a coucal calling at Sonnleiten Farm Residence between Windhoek and the Hosea Kutako International Airport. A Senegal Coucal well south of its normal range was seen there on 28/03/2011 (see Lanioturdus 44(3)) so perhaps the same bird has returned.

On 25/12/2011 Beate von Finckenstein saw a Barn Owl on the balcony balustrade of her flat in central Swakopmund. Perusal of the Atlas (SABAP 1) suggests that this is a very unusual sighting in this area.

Between 25 and 28/12/2011 Gudrun Middendorff and I caught and ringed eight Three-banded Coursers at Farm Kakuse about 70 km north west of Tsumeb. This is the second time these birds have been ringed there (see Lanioturdus 43(3)) but this is a very rare species in north central Namibia.

Three-banded Courser – Photo : Neil Thomson

On a day trip to the Etosha National Park on 29/12/2011 Gudrun and I saw eight Blue Cranes at various locations in the Namutoni area and ten White Storks between Namutoni and Twee Palms.

In addition Trevor Hardaker's SA Rare Bird News Reports mention the following rarities etc. seen in Namibia since the beginning of October 2011:

At least four Common Redshanks were reported from Mile 4 Saltworks in the report dated 17/10/2011. One of these birds appeared to be partially leucistic. This bird was still showing at the beginning of November.

Partially leucistic Common Redshank – Photo : Mark Boorman

The report dated 07/11/2011 makes mention of at least twenty four Red-necked Phalaropes and a Common Black-headed Gull at Walvis Bay while four Common Redshanks were seen at Mile 4 Saltworks north of Swakopmund.

On 09/11/2011 two Gull-billed Terns were reported from Namutoni Waterhole in the Etosha National Park while on the same day two Red-necked Phalaropes and at least three Green Sandpipers were reported from the general Namutoni area. There are only about thirty records of Gull-billed Terns in southern Africa.

Both Franklin's Gull and Common Black-headed Gull were reported from Walvis Bay Lagoon on 14/11/2011 while no fewer than forty Red-necked Phalaropes were seen at the Walvis Bay Saltworks.

Another Sabine's Gull appeared at Kalkheuwel waterhole in the Etosha National Park per the report of 21/11/2011. This is probably only the third inland record for this species in southern Africa and the second at Kalkheuwel! (See Lanioturdus 44-1).

A Gull-billed Tern was seen by Mark Boorman at Mile 4 Saltworks on 23/11/2011. This apparently constitutes the 32nd record for this species in southern Africa following closely after the recent sighting near Namutoni (see above). A Common Black-headed Gull in full breeding plumage was also seen at the saltworks.

Gull-billed Tern – Photo : Mark Boorman

In the fourth week of November the coast continued to turn up a number of rarities with four Common Redshanks (including the

partially leucistic bird) and a single Red-necked Phalarope reported from Mile 4 Saltworks while at Walvis Bay, in addition to the Gull-billed tern mentioned above, twenty Red-necked Phalaropes were seen.

The Gull-billed tern was still showing well at Walvis Bay lagoon on 01/12/2011.

An update was sent out on 19/12/2011 advising that the Wilson's Phalarope had been sighted again that morning along the Paaltjies road after having disappeared the previous day. The two Gull-billed Terns were also still present at Walvis Bay while between sixty and seventy Red-necked Phalaropes were also to be seen. At least three Common Redshanks were still at Mile 4 Saltworks.

According to the report dated 22/12/2011 the Namibian coast was still "humming" with the Wilson's Phalarope, the two Gull-billed Terns, fifty Red-necked Phalaropes, a Eurasian Oystercatcher and a Lesser Sand Plover reported from Walvis Bay while at least five Common Redshanks were present at Mile 4 Saltworks north of Swakopmund.

The report dated 27/12/2011 mentions a Pallid Harrier seen in the vicinity of Hardap Dam near Mariental.

Another Gull-billed Tern was seen in the Namutoni area on 24/12/2011 according to the report dated 31/12/2011.

Neil Thomson

About the Namibia Bird Club

The Namibia Bird Club was founded in 1962 and has been active since then. 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.

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 have lecture or video evenings at the Namibia Scientific Society premises. Members receive a programme of forthcoming events (the Bird Call Newsletter) and the Bird Club journal, Lanioturdus.

Membership Fees 2012

Members can receive a discounted subscription to the *Africa Birds and Birding* magazine. The fees below are with and without this subscription.

Category	**Without**	**With**
Single member	N$ 140	N$ 350
Family membership (Husband, wife, children)	N$ 160	N$ 370
Junior member (All scholars and students)	N$ 90	N$ 300
Pensioner	N$ 100	N$ 310
Foreign member (Not resident in Namibia)	N$ 165	N/A
Corporate membership	N$ 400	

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