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Editorial

In this issue I am delighted to be able to publish articles on two species new to Namibia, one of which is in fact new to the southern African sub-region and is believed to be resident in the far north west of Namibia.

In May 2012 Wessel Swanepoel discovered a population of Angola Cave Chats on the southern slopes of the Zebra Mountains west of Swartbooisdrif in the far northwest of Namibia. This species was thought to be an Angolan endemic but has now been found south of the border. Please take note of Wessel's request that he be informed of any further sightings of this species in order to facilitate his research into this species in Namibia.

The second species new to Namibia which we feature in this issue is the Lesser Yellowlegs seen by Simon Woolley at the Rundu Sewage

I would also like to thank Neil and Gudrun for allowing us to stay with them before the Get-Together and for the arrangements they made to enable us to do some more ringing north of Windhoek.

May there be many more such Get-Togethers.

Eben with a Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill

Summary of the 2012 Summer Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia

Holger Kolberg
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Ministry of Environment and Tourism

Wetland bird counts were once again conducted throughout Namibia during the months of January and February 2012. A total of 33 sites were covered resulting in 262 833 birds of 112 species. For the first time since 2007 counts were also conducted in the Caprivi, on the Okavango and the Kwando Rivers. The effects of the good rainy seasons over the past few years are still very evident with low numbers of especially flamingos and ducks recorded at the coast. Rains which had fallen in the central northern and north-eastern parts of the country since early January probably account for the low numbers recorded at those sites.

Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour made up the bulk of the total of birds counted, once again confirming the importance of these two sites not only in Namibia but also as internationally important wetlands. The highest number of species was recorded in the Mahango, with Walvis Bay running a close second. Several rarities were observed: 4 Common Redshanks at Mile 4, 3 Eurasian Oystercatchers at Sandwich Harbour, 1 Common Redshank, 3 Terek Sandpipers and 13 Red-necked Phalaropes at Walvis Bay, 2 Slaty Egrets on the Kwando and one in the Mahango, 1 Black Heron at Otjivero Dam and 1 Pink-backed Pelican at Hardap Dam. Maccoa Ducks are making a come-back at the Walvis Bay sewage ponds with a total of 27 counted.

I would like to thank all the counters for the time and effort that they spend to do the counts. My sincere gratitude goes to Christian Thimende and Dan Stephens who expertly skippered us around the Okavango and Kwando Rivers respectively.

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

Red-billed Queleas

Neil Thomson
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I think that most people know Red-billed Queleas as rather drab little birds almost fitting the LBJ (little brown job), or the Afrikaans equivalent VVV (vreeslike vaal voëltjie), moniker. The bright red bill however makes them readily distinguishable from most other LBJ's.

A Red-billed LBJ

Red-billed Queleas occur in vast numbers in Namibia and we have all seen great flocks of them rolling like smoke over the landscape. These birds can be very destructive to grain crops and it is not without reason that they are often referred to as “Africa’s feathered locusts” and the term “swarm” may indeed be more appropriate than flock.

A “swarm” going to roost

Males, however, become quite stunning little birds when they attain their breeding plumage. The head takes on a variety of patterns and colours including yellows, pinks and black. Here are some examples of the various colours and head patterns.

Male in breeding plumage

Male in breeding plumage

Male in breeding plumage

Male in breeding plumage

Male in breeding plumage

Male in breeding plumage

Male in breeding plumage

Male in breeding plumage

Obviously birds which are moulting into or out of breeding plumage have a motley appearance being neither one thing nor the other.

Male moulting into breeding plumage

Male moulting into breeding plumage

Male moulting into breeding plumage

Male moulting into breeding plumage

Male moulting into breeding plumage

Interestingly the bill of a breeding female Red-billed Quelea is yellow.

A breeding female

So if you are wondering what on earth that strange little bird on your feeding table might have been perhaps you should be thinking in terms of one of these variations of the ubiquitous Red-billed Quelea.

Atlas Update

Les Underhill posted the following on the SABAP2 website on 07/07/2012:-

"SABAP2 in Namibia has reached 1% coverage. Each 1% increase in coverage in Namibia needs another 106 pentads to be atlased so it is a huge challenge. We will get a 'gap analysis' on the website for Namibia soon,

but as Holger Kolberg, who is leading SABAP2 in Namibia says, '1% coverage means that 99% has yet to be covered so at the moment we have more gaps than non-gap'. All atlasers visiting Namibia are encouraged to atlas and it is clear that '**incidental records**' and '**ad hoc lists**' are going to be even more important in Namibia than they are in the remaining SABAP2 region."

A month later Les followed this up with the following:-

"Especially in the Northern Cape, in Namibia and other countries to the north **incidental records** are going to be of critical importance in documenting the basic distribution of species."

Here we have it from the horse's mouth so to speak – if you cannot do the full minimum two hour protocol please submit the list you have made for the time you have spent in the pentad. It seems that many people are apprehensive about the minimum two hour protocol and are reluctant to collect and submit data when they are unable to spend this "minimum" period birding in a pentad. Namibia comprises 10 584 pentads and to get meaningful coverage of the country all records and lists are valuable contributions. If you are unable to do the full two hours it means that your data cannot be used in determining how common or otherwise a species is but it will be used in redrawing the distribution maps. When Gudrun and I go out ringing we do not spend the required two hours of intensive birding but we keep a list of what we see (and catch). At one location fairly close to Windhoek where we have three times been ringing and once visited for about 45 minutes there are now 58 species recorded on the database for that pentad for which no other data has been submitted.

Likewise, my job takes me to a number of remote places in Namibia such as Nepara, Katwitwi, Oshivelo, Mosokatwane, Kanono etc. While I do not have the time to go birding on these trips I do make and submit lists of what I see around the building site, landing strip etc. and along the roads while travelling. Usually these lists include only the most conspicuous and easily identifiable species but at this stage they constitute the only data submitted for these pentads.

As at 24/09/2012 at total of 252 full protocol atlas cards for 156 pentads had been submitted by about thirty six active atlasers. This constitutes some full protocol coverage for 1.5 % of the pentads in Namibia.

It can be seen that we have a huge task ahead of us. Those of you who have not yet registered for atlasing please do so and those who have registered but have not yet started now is the time to become active. If you are having problems submitting data Holger can be contacted for assistance to get you going.

Rarities and Interesting Observations

Jessica Kemper reported an African Jacana seen in the vicinity of the Lüderitz Sewage Works on 21/05/2012. This bird seems to be a long way off its recorded range.

Three Caspian Terns were seen flying over the Gammams Sewage Works in the course of the Namibia Bird Club morning walk on 10/06/2012. This is a very unusual sighting. There is a small population of Caspian Terns at Hardap Dam but, to the best of my knowledge, this species has not been recorded on inland waters elsewhere in Namibia. The three birds seen were flying in a rough line abreast and quite high in a southerly/south easterly direction. It seems most probable that they were in passage to some destination, possibly Hardap Dam.

Also seen on this outing was a single Purple Heron, an uncommon species in central Namibia but one seen not infrequently at the sewage works.

Further to the recent spate of African Harrier-Hawk sightings in the Windhoek area Dawid van der Merwe reported a single adult bird seen flying over the Windhoek High School sports field on 17/06/2012.