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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.

## **Ringers Get Together, Augurabis Cañon Outpost, May 2011**

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My son Kai and I were very excited on Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup> April 2011 to hit the long and open road from Bathurst in the Eastern Cape and head to the Namibian Ringers Get Together (RGT). The RGT was being held at Augurabis Cañon Outpost, a lovely secluded camp of the Gondwana Cañon Park near the north end of the Fish River Canyon. We spent our first night at Upington. Our sleep there was disturbed by the number of noisy wedding receptions taking place as I think these youngsters felt it would be good luck to get married at the same time as HRH William and Kate.

The next morning after an early start we headed across the border and much to our and Holger and Claire Kolberg's surprise we were the first participants to arrive. Claire and Holger had taken it upon themselves to organize and cater for the entire week and what a fantastic job they did. The camp is situated in a minor "canyon" with a small clean river running through it. Well vegetated with large acacia, false ebony and wild fig trees and the river with reed beds and open sandy patches. There are ten double tents, two open ablution blocks and a renovated farm house with 4 bedrooms (for the older folk!) and kitchen area. A lovely open braai area in front of the house under a huge wild fig tree finished it off. Simon, the caretaker, helped keep the place clean and when he could find dry wood kept the 'donkeys' burning to keep us supplied with hot water.

A word about the weather. We go to Namibia for a number of reasons, one being the warmth and sunshine. This time it was different with at least three days of rain, overcast and cool weather and the reason why Simon struggled to find dry wood. There is nothing much more miserable looking than a bunch of damp Namibians and South Africans

waiting inside for rain to stop so that we could carry on with outdoor activities.



Graham Grieve in raingear : Photo Jessica Kemper

Ringers and interested parties gathered from Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, Lüderitz, Windhoek and Tsumeb and much to my surprise two other couples from SA, one from Midrand near Johannesburg and the other from the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast. Obviously dedicated ringers! For me there were a bunch of old faces, figuratively speaking Peter Bridgeford, and some new faces. The experience of ringing birds with a group of people was a new one for Kai and me and turned out to be a valuable learning experience and enthusiasm booster. The ringers at the RGT had a very wide range of experience and were always happy to share their knowledge. Kai, who is twelve years old, has been ringing with me practically all his life and is very enthusiastic and capable at ringing. Mark Boorman and Sandra Dantu let him help them with removing birds from their nets and flap traps, ring and measure birds. Dirk Heinrich did the same and tried his best to teach him some German as well! All were keen to share their knowledge and experience.

We put up our nets in various places around camp and across the river. Kai borrowed meal

worms from Mark to bait his flap traps and we started to trap and ring. The catch rate I think could be best described as steady and sedate when the weather allowed us to unfurl the nets. This certainly frustrated some of the ringers but it also does allow one plenty of time to catch up with news, pick up tips from other ringers and have the odd cup of tea, coffee or Tafel Lager, whichever is your poison. To my mind, two of the amazing sightings we had, considering we were in the pro-Namib, were firstly hearing and then seeing a Common Moorhen and then seeing a Squacco Heron. Too much tea?.....definitely not as they were both seen again on a number of occasions.

What about the birds? Obviously for us from the far south-east it was a good chance to catch birds occurring only in the arid west. Strangely enough we also caught a good number of species that occur in our home area that we have not caught there before. Into this category fell the Bokmakierie, Rock Martin, Three-banded Plover and Familiar Chat. Western birds caught were Pririt Batis, Karoo Scrub-Robin, Dusky Sunbird, Orange River White-eye, Ashy Tit, Acacia Pied Barbet and the beautiful Crimson-breasted Shrike. Species wise we caught a total of 21 different species of which 12 were 'ringing lifers'.



Crimson-breasted shrike being ringed by Sandra Dantu : Photo Jessica Kemper



Trainee ringer Hilke von Ditfurth processing a Cape Turtle-Dove: Photo Jessica Kemper

A highlight of the trip was a drive down into the canyon to the edge of the Fish River which was in flood. What a spectacular sight being a wide muddy water river flowing very strongly with some impressive "white water" rapids. This all where not long before you could have walked across without getting your feet wet! On this excursion we saw Ludwig's Bustard, Booted Eagle, Bradfield's Swift and Rosy-faced Lovebird.

To occupy ourselves on the long drives, both there and back (light allowing), we did a very basic and probably Totally Unscientific Road Raptor Count (TURRC). Every time we saw raptors along the way we noted the species and numbers. As most raptorphiles have noticed without perches provided by Telkom and Eskom and their Namibian equivalents you see very few raptors. Most of the way we were fortunate to have some form of perch near to the road and here below we present our counts.

All in all we had a wonderful trip. We learned a lot, renewed a lot of friendships and made a whole heap of new friends and acquaintances. Most of all we have a renewed sense of enthusiasm towards ringing which comes from associating with a group of caring, dedicated and enthusiastic Namibian ringers. We look forward to joining them again.

<b>Raptor Road Count (TURRC)</b>		
SPECIES	Bathurst - Augrabis	Augrabis - Bathurst
Greater Kestrel	10	14
Rock Kestrel	15	6
Verreauxs' Eagle	2	2
Black-shouldered Kite	4	7
Jackal Buzzard	11	14
Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk	45	37
Booted Eagle	0	1
Lanner Falcon	3	4
Peregrine Falcon	3	1
Pygmy Falcon	5	27
Martial Eagle	0	1
African Harrier-Hawk	0	1
Total Raptors seen	98	115
Total km travelled	1307	1291
Kilometres per Raptor	13.3	11.2

## **A Visit to the Fairest Cape**

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All photographs in this article are by Neil Thomson

The 2011 Namibian Ringers Get-Together took place in the first week of May at Augurabis near Holog in the south of Namibia. As this venue was already more than a third of the way to Cape Town, Gudrun and I decided to extend our trip and take two weeks holiday in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. I had started the trip with a Southern African lifelist on 598 species while Gudrun's total stood at 428 species. I had, however, birded the Western Cape before and did not expect to find too many lifers.

We crossed the border at Noordoewer/Violsdrif and the first bird we saw on the South African side was a Goliath Heron standing at the edge of the water. I took this to be a good omen as, on a previous

birding trip to South Africa with my daughter, I had also seen this species there and that had proved to be a very rewarding trip.

After clearing the border formalities we proceeded down the tarred road to Springbok. What was immediately noticeable on the South African side of the border was the number of Pied Crows and Jackal Buzzards (no doubt waiting to gorge themselves on roadkill). The Jackal Buzzards in this area show a high degree of white mottling on the breast and closely resemble Augur Buzzards. From Springbok we took the back road through the mountains of Namaqualand to Kamieskroon. This area boasts some really stunning scenery but also the worst road we traveled on in our entire trip. However – the object of the exercise was to find birds and it was not long before I found my first lifer, a Grey Tit. What was immediately noticeable on these back roads was that there were far fewer crows about. Presumably there is less roadkill available on these less traveled roads.

After overnighting in Kamieskroon we set off southwards and it was not long before we saw a Verreauxs' Eagle perched on a roadside crash barrier eyeing some roadkill. This eagle was being mobbed by a flock of at least twelve Pied Crows which no doubt thought that the roadkill should be theirs.

We proceeded southwards past Clanwilliam and turned westwards onto the Paleisheuwel road where we picked up Cape Siskin, Southern Boubou and Cape Sugarbird all of which were lifers for Gudrun. Thereafter we retraced our steps to Clanwilliam and went to Lambert's Bay to see the famous Cape Gannet colony. However, we were there at the wrong time of the year and instead of several thousand gannets there were only a few hundred present including a number of chicks ranging from downy to almost fledged. We were informed that a rainstorm in November 2010 had flooded the colony with the resultant loss of many eggs and that some of the birds had relaid later. This had resulted in a number of "laat lammetjies" which were presenting a problem as gannet chicks apparently only fledge successfully in