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Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

With this issue the *Lanioturdus* is now back to being a journal with 4 issues per year and I would like to congratulate the members for your support to make this happen. Within this issue is a wide diversity of articles from all parts of the country. Again we have articles on "common" garden birds which are not common according to the books.

I would like to apologize to Rob Simmons and Penn Lloyd for forgetting to include a figure in their article, which appeared in Volume 35(3). It is included in this issue.

We have only had 4 write-ups on bird club outings in Volume 35 from 2002 and I would like to appeal to organizers and members to please send me a short note on the outing. This will enable other members, who did not attend, to see what the club has been doing and what birds were seen.

Included within this issue is an extra membership form. Please give one to a keen birder you know, who is not a member. You may not know it, but the Namibia Bird Club only has about 90 members which is a rather shocking low number considering all the people we know who have an interest in birding in the country. If you just consider the number of tour guides operating that is more than 90 people. That does not count the number of hunting guides, farmers, scientists, and government employees who also either observe birds or do studies on birds. In 3 of our neighbouring countries Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe their bird clubs/societies have 300-600 members and have far less individuals who are active in the tourism or outdoor avocations.

Sandwich Harbour birds - April 2002

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A quarterly visit was made to Sandwich Harbour from 22 - 24 April 2002 to count the wetland birds of this Ramsar site. The team of counters comprised Rod Braby, Mark Boorman, Christian Boix and Lucy Witts. Calm winds, clear skies and temperatures in the mid-20°C made conditions perfect for counting birds. This time of the year is always more interesting (= difficult) when identifying birds because many are in breeding colours while others remain in their grey winter plumage. The highlights were large numbers of flamingos, a colour-ringed Black Oystercatcher, cormorants continuing to breed on the islands and helicopter disturbance by I-Max filmmakers.

A total of 79 000 birds were recorded of 40 species - a relatively high count for this time of year. Results for the individual sections of the Sandwich Harbour wetland are tabulated on next page.

Waders

Twenty African Black Oystercatchers, one with an engraved orange ring (X64) from Dassen Island, South Africa, were seen. The bulk of the wader total comprised 16 550 Curlew sandpipers, 8490 Sanderlings, 4525 Little Stint, 1145 Chestnut banded Plover and 1075 White-fronted Plover. Knots, which are not commonly seen at Sandwich, were well represented with 550 birds. Thus most waders were Palearctic migrants even in this month when most birds should already be on their way north to breeding grounds. Rarer species in the form of the distinctive Terek Sandpiper (2) were present but the European Oystercatcher had gone.

TABLE 1. Summary of bird abundance and richness found in the Sandwich Harbour wetlands April 2002.

Wetland	Species	Birds	Comments
North	25	1226	Remaining water approx. 20-30 m across at min.
Lagoon-side	25	2962	Colour-ringed African Black Oystercatcher Engraved Orange X64, O/Met (R) - Dassen Isl.
South Mudflats	18	47 259	Very dry and high wader densities in remaining patch.
Western Sandspit	13	2142	Subadult jackals here (4+)
Islands (2)	7	25 130	Cape Cormorant 230 nests, Whitebreasted Cormorant 30 nests, 6800 Greater Flamingos roosting
TOTALS	40	78 919	The majority was flamingos (23 000). Dead Green Turtle. Mudflats, many jackals seen none with mange, no Brown Hyena tracks. Thousands of Cape Fur Seals.

Flamingos

Much larger than usual numbers of flamingos were present (21 770 Greater, 1780 Lesser) and this precipitated another attempt to capture roosting flamingos with nooses set below the water. Only one bird was caught - a subadult (2nd or 3rd year bird) Greater Flamingo - which was subsequently given a large, engraved green ring with white letters - NAA. The bird was relatively light at 1.6 kg. Alternative sites for trapping will be used in future. Only a handful of birds were grey juveniles of the year (about 5 Lessers).

Cormorants and Pelicans

Large numbers of cormorants were still present on the islands where breeding was in full swing in January. A few nests remained on this survey and RB estimated 30 nests of White-breasted Cormorants and 230 nests of Cape Cormorants. Pelicans have bred successfully on the islands and 577 were recorded throughout the wetlands.

Terns and Gulls

Kelp Gulls dominated this group with 2452 birds present. The breeding cormorants (as food) and the access to the jackal-free islands (for breeding) probably attract them. Common Terns were low in number (470), with a smattering of Damara (54), Caspian with immatures (62), Swift (11) and Sandwich (34).

Other species

One Peregrine Falcon was evident chasing birds over the lagoon early one morning and using the high dunes nearby to scan for prey before heading off north. An adult and one juvenile Pale Chanting Goshawk were seen together indicating successful breeding.

Mammals: Dolphins, seals, and hyenas

A pod of at least 10 Bottle-nosed Dolphins were seen performing remarkable aerial acrobatics in the main lagoon. No Heaviside's Dolphins were seen. A freshly killed baby Bottle-nosed Dolphin was found washed up on the beach about 15 km north of Sandwich Harbour. It was about 1 m long and had huge bite marks in its belly; it was almost certainly taken by sharks. It was photographed and buried for further skeletal material. Seals were in abundance (not counted), and no fresh hyena tracks were seen. Jackals were plentiful.

Aircraft disturbance was once again present with about 70% of all planes flying out to sea as requested. However, aircraft ZS KWP flying 150 m over the water and V5 PIT flying at 100 m over the water committed violations of the 1000 m minimum height restrictions. (Other aircraft numbers could not be read in the low afternoon glare). The first is a South African registered plane, the latter a Namibian plane. The worst violation occurred from a helicopter no registration

number seen filming for the producers of a new I-max film on Namibia. He flew at about 100 m over our camp towards the flamingos on the southern flats, descended to about 50 m as the flocks of thousands of flamingos took wing and then flew south, apparently landing at Meob Bay. His permit was for flying over Sossuslvlei with no landing allowed. RB has since reported the incident to Aviation Authorities and confronted the pilot. This matter is being taken further.

Thanks once again to Rod for organising the boat and surveying the islands and to Mark Boorman, Christian Boix and Lucy Witts for expertly surveying the northern and lagoon-side wetlands.

Quelea breeding in north-east Namibia, April 1999

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INTRODUCTION and AIMS

The Redbilled Quelea (*Quelea quelea*) is a grain-eating bird that occurs in massive flocks throughout most non-forested areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Four subspecies are recognised, one in West Africa, one in northeast East Africa (Sudan and Ethiopia) an intermediate bird in East Africa and one in southern Africa (*Quelea quelea lathamii*) (Mundy & Jarvis 1989). It is possible that these subspecies occasionally overlap as exemplified by a bird ringed in South Africa's Orange Free State, recovered in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The bird is renowned for its gregarious nature, gathering in large "swarms" to breed, feed, drink and roost. Indeed it is the archetypal arid zone species moving in to regions with good rains, breeding extremely fast and moving out to the next best regions with good grass cover (Jones 1989). It is found mainly in thorny vegetation in the *Acacia* savannas of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. It is limited in the drier regions by access to water because it drinks twice daily (Mundy and