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EDITORIAL

Several people have asked me why I continue to attend Bird Club weekends and outings – "Wouldn't you prefer to go birding on your own?" In answer to this I can quite honestly say, "No".

How you go birding is an entirely personal choice, but I believe that combining both social and independent (single) birding you can get the most out of it. There are almost certainly some birders who are either entirely social birders (never venturing far without being on an organised outing) or entirely single birders (entirely independent and not making use of the social, informational and club contacts available to them).

Why do I continue going out with the Bird Club? – the answer is I enjoy it. For several reasons – probably the most important of which is that I am continually reminded of my own fallability as a so-called "expert" birder. On outings I am often stumped by questions from "beginners" which make me re-evaluate my approach to birding, makes me develop new solutions to tricky groups and generally hones my skills as a birder. At the same time the "beginner" is learning something new and perhaps useful to develop their birding skills.

When you go birding with others you learn their skills too – some people are aces at listening to and identifying birds largely by call, others are visual experts, identifying birds by "jizz", teaching field characters which can only improve skills as a birder. But at the same time you learn from others not to become dependent on them for all your id's and birding experiences. Go out and try to apply some of the learnt skills, study your bird books and develop your own suite of birding tools. But remember, you can only achieve so much on your own – as with almost everything else in life you have to share experiences to grow. This is the value of the Club for me and hopefully for others as well. I appeal to you, the members, to make more use of the Club outings and functions, encourage others (especially kids) to join and to push some personal birding frontiers by learning from others.

in the past year, from business people to tourists. On a brief visit in February, I encountered several groups of people, including a dozen from England, who were eagerly enjoying Namibia's most recently recognized tourist attraction. While things look good in Walvis Bay, it has not always been that way. Decades of unenlightened exploitation of the lagoon has presented challenges. Those challenges, and the extraordinary potential of the future are being addressed by a model partnership of committed people in Walvis Bay, that includes the local, regional, and national governments, business, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Much of the recent recognition of the value of the Walvis Bay lagoon and the energy behind the move to ensure that its essential qualities are not forever changed is Keith Wearne. His NGO, *Save the Lagoon*, has been instrumental in the conservation of the lagoon. Keith can be contacted on (064) 205057 for further information on the lagoon and his conservation efforts. He is always looking for birders to assist with the biannual censuses of the birds in the lagoon.

As you can see, Walvis Bay does have something for everyone. Go and enjoy it!

"What happened to all my raptor road counts ...?"
THE NAMIBIAN AVIFAUNAL DATABASE PROJECT: PROGRESS AND PRODUCTS

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Ministry of Environment and Tourism, P/Bag 13306, Windhoek

The considerable public interest in birds in Namibia has been put to good use over the last 20 years or so, in the form of large-scale public-participation data collection programmes. The recent publication of *The*

Atlas of Southern African Birds illustrates how valuable data collected in this way can be, providing an unparalleled overview of bird distribution and abundance in the whole sub-region. Namibia also has a number of other bird monitoring programmes, some of which have been running since the 1970s, with large numbers of people contributing and huge amounts of information being collected. Many members of the Bird Club have been particularly active contributors to these programmes.

Up until last year, most of the Namibian information collected was stored in paper form in large files and filing cabinets, making it a laborious process to extract data of particular interest and, as a result, comparatively little use was made of it. Since last year, this has started to change!

The Avifaunal Database project began in January 1997 with the aim of making Namibia's bird data accessible and usable. The project, funded under Namibia's National Biodiversity Programme, is based within the Directorate of Environmental Affairs and works closely with the MET's Ornithology section. Several data sets have now been incorporated into the database and data entry is ongoing for other data. All the data are spatially referenced (i.e. given latitude and longitude co-ordinates, or a QDS), making it possible to look at what's happening in different parts of the country, as well as over time. Data on monthly rainfall are also contained in the database, allowing trends to be assessed in the light of rainfall variation. When completed, the database will become a 'public' resource, available for use by anyone concerned with conservation or land management issues and anyone else with an interest in any aspect of Namibia's birds. The huge amount of data allows many possible avenues to be explored and ultimately it will be possible for someone with little or no computer knowledge to extract the data they require simply by selecting options from a menu. We are currently busy with some aspects of data analysis, and present some preliminary results here for interest.

Raptor road count data

The raptor road count project was launched in 1977 and data collection has continued ever since, though in recent years interest has tailed off. The amount of data collected by this project is impressive: over 300 people have

been involved, recording raptors (and storks) during over 1.2 million km of driving throughout the whole country. A total of 116 551 birds, of 63 species, has been recorded during road counts.

Those people who contributed over 10 000 km of road counts are:

> 40 000 km	Mike Yates; Walter Bottger; Dave & Helen Boyer; Peter & M. Bridgeford; Hardy Dedekind
30 – 40 000 km	Chris Brown & family; Chris Hines (& C. Meyer); John Mendelsohn; Derek & Jennifer Clark; Steve Braine
20 – 30 000 km	Marion Schramm; John Powell; Peter Mostert; R. Jesnitz
10 – 20 000 km	Mark & Charlie Paxton; E. Joubert; N. Thomson; P. Jones; Jock Orford & family; Herta Kolberg; R. and/or R. Teifel; Rod Braby; S. & A. Gildenhuys; Dieter Ludwig; Dave Ward; Harry & Rina Biggs; Rudi & Blythe Loutit; J.L. LeRoux

Figures 1–3 provide examples of what these data can be used for. Figure 1 presents a summary of the spatial distribution of raptor and stork sightings during part of the raptor road count project, highlighting areas where large numbers of observations were made. These include areas around the Bushmanland pans, Karibib/Otjimbingwe, Tsondabvlei, Aus, Tses and Etosha (particularly in the west). Note that the map shows numbers of sightings, rather than actual numbers of birds which is often biased by sightings of large groups of gregarious species such as kites and storks. Figure 2 shows fluctuations in the density of Namibia's most commonly observed raptor, Pale Chanting Goshawk, in the central thornveld/highland savanna zone. The density of this species appears, unsurprisingly, to be strongly linked to annual rainfall, with the high bird numbers of the first two years of data collection following particularly high rainfall years. Figure 3 illustrates another potentially interesting use of these data – that of assessing behavioural characteristics of individual species. The activity recorded for these species throughout the day reflects their hunting methods. For the Tawny Eagle, a species which hunts by stooping either from a perch or in flight, a considerable proportion of the day is spent in flight. Pale Chanting Goshawks hunt almost exclusively by swooping from a perch and there is little variation in it's behaviour throughout the day. In contrast, Yellowbilled and Black Kites are highly agile scavengers often

picking up food items without landing.

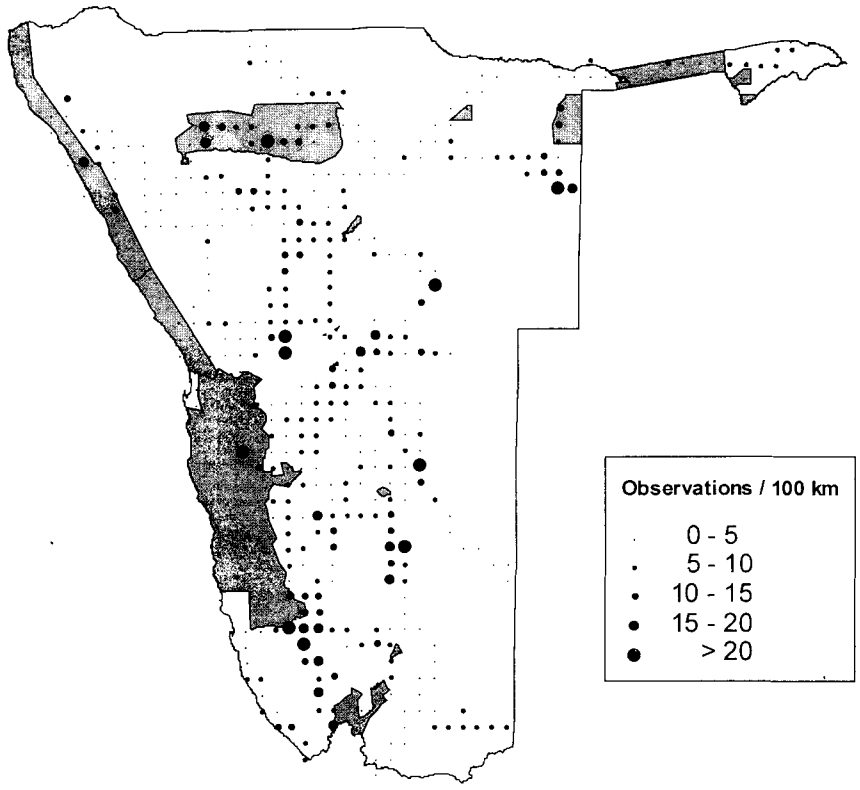


Figure 1. Number of sightings of raptors and storks along Namibia's roads, 1984 – 1997, per 100km of road travelled. Data are presented here only for those road counts where is was possible to determine exactly which route was taken.

Because data collection spans 20 years, it is now possible to start using these data to answer questions such as:

- Are raptor numbers generally increasing or decreasing in Namibia?
- Which species or groups of species (e.g. scavengers, eruptive species) are showing most change?

- How is raptor density changing throughout different parts of the country?
- How has breeding success (i.e. ratio of adults to juveniles) changed over time?

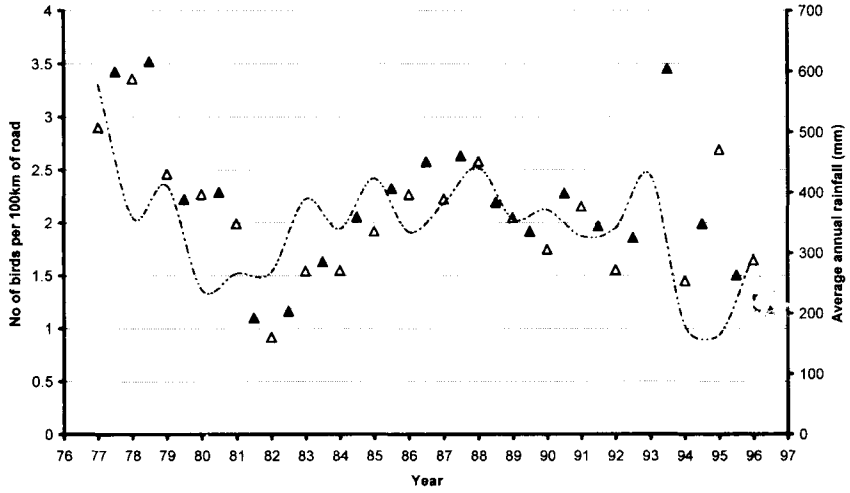


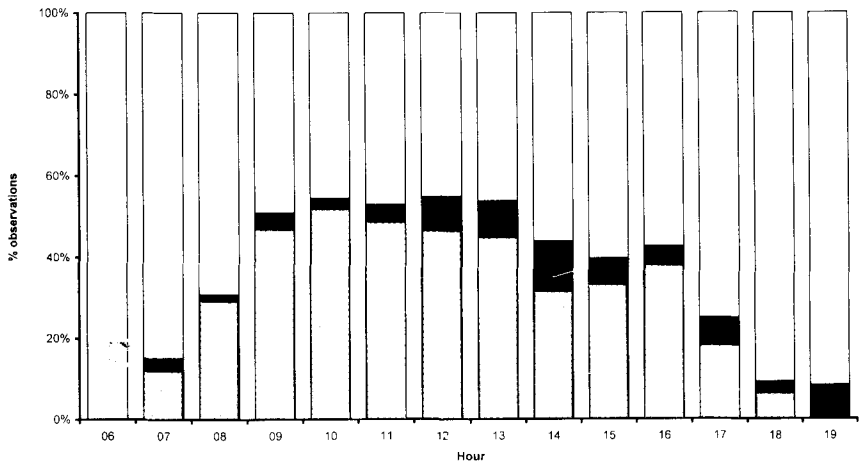
Figure 2. Changes in Pale Chanting Goshawk density in the Windhoek area (Road Count Zone 5: Central thornveld and highland savanna). Filled triangles represent counts between November and April (wet season) whilst empty triangles represent counts between May and October (dry season). The dashed line represents annual average rainfall based on data from 141 weather stations within Zone 5. Rainfall for one year e.g. 1977 includes rain which fell from May 1977 – April 1978.

For many species the reasons for population changes are known and well documented: these include deliberate persecution, poisoning (both deliberate and incidental), habitat degradation and changes in land use. However the answers to the types of questions above may help to elucidate other factors which are influencing raptors in Namibia, and which may be of concern for many other groups of species. Being at the top of the food chain, raptors can be sensitive indicators of environmental health – highlighting potential problems at an early stage.

The raptor road count project is ongoing. The methodology remains the same, however new data forms have been designed to make the data entry

and processing stage easier, and these can be obtained from the project.

(i)



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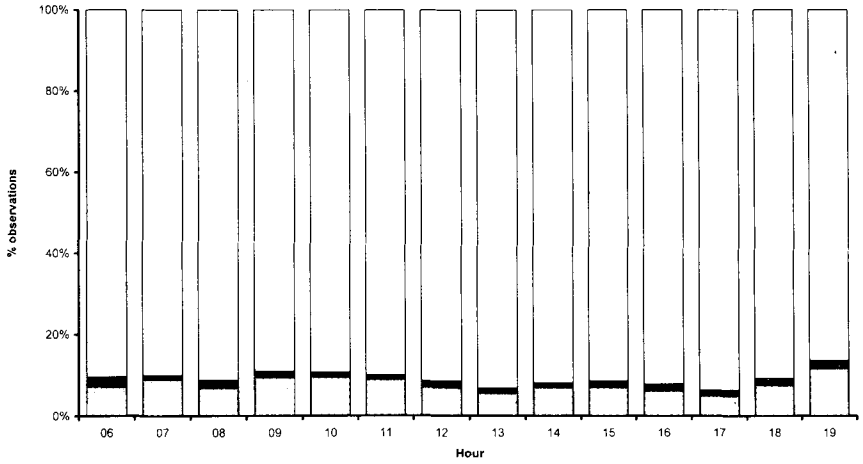

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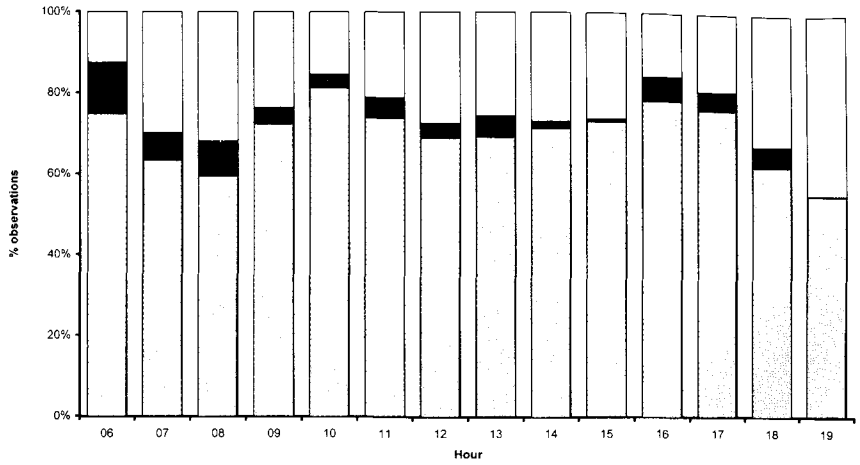
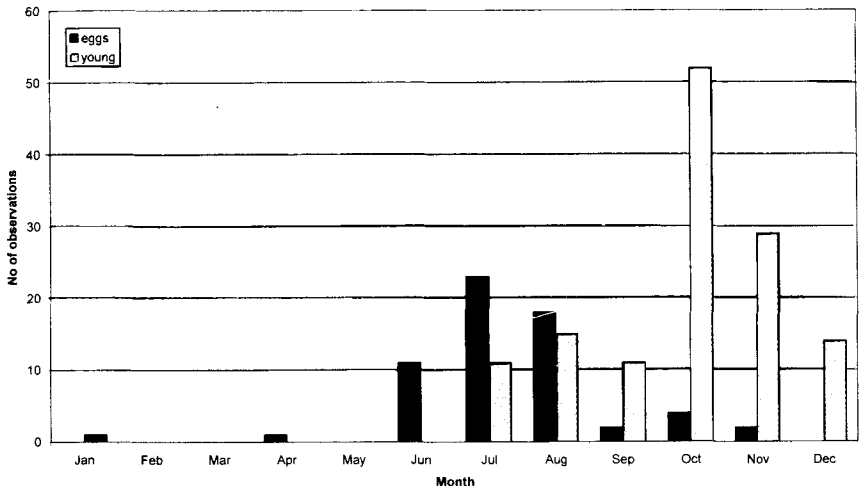


Figure 3. Bird activity over time. (i) Tawny Eagle (ii) Pale Chanting Goshawk (iii) Milvus Kite. White – perched; black – on the ground; grey – flying.

Nest record data

Nest record data cards have been collected for many years, with some additional data going back to the 1800s. There are now approximately 8000 cards, the majority of which have been computerised. Several species have over 100 nest records, particularly those which have been the focus of research projects, with Damara Tern and Lappetfaced Vulture topping the list at over 1000 and 300 cards, respectively. Others with over 100 cards include Ostrich, Whitefronted Plover and African Marsh Warbler. When data entry is completed, it will be possible to look at aspects such as breeding success and breeding seasonality in relation to factors such as location and rainfall throughout the country, for those species with sufficient data. Figure 4 illustrates the potential for these data to determine seasonality of breeding. This type of information can be used to set hunting seasons for huntable gamebirds, for example.

(i)



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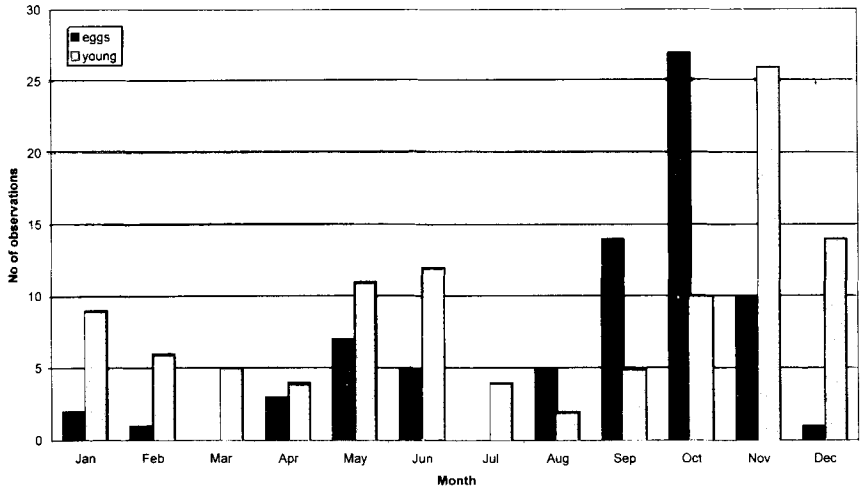

Figure 4. Number of nest record cards with records of eggs and/or young for (i) Lappetfaced Vulture and (ii) Ostrich.

Wetland bird counts

Regular counts of selected wetlands have been undertaken since 1991, with some earlier information also available for a few sites e.g. Walvis Bay and Sandwich. Although a lot is already known about the local and international importance of some of Namibia's wetlands, there are many aspects we still don't know enough about. Many of the wetlands in Caprivi are poorly known, for example, and information on the importance of Namibia's wetlands to migratory birds is limited. To date, the wetland counts have recorded over 3.75 million birds, of 154 species of wetland birds. With regular counts over many years it will be possible to identify trends in wetlands use by different groups of birds, and thus identify particularly important wetlands. Some wetlands may qualify as Ramsar sites on the basis of regularly supporting >1% of a species' population. Recognition of the importance of Namibia's wetlands to resident and migratory birds may enhance their perceived conservation value and protection status.

Museum specimen data

Many museums around the world hold bird specimens that were originally collected in Namibia, some dating back to expeditions made in the early 1800s. The database currently contains information on over 23 000 specimens of 571 species, most of which include collection date and locality information, although for some this is simply "Damaraland" or "Kaokoveld". For many species, particularly larks, weavers and finches there are several hundred specimens, with Sabota Lark at the top of the list with over 400 specimens. Comparing historical bird distributions with those of SABAP, for example, could produce an insight into changes over time and factors influencing birds.

SABAP data

Bird atlas data for Namibia are also held in the database, allowing reporting rates, species lists and maps to be obtained easily. For example, anyone requiring a list of species recorded in one of the National Parks, or in one or more quarter-degree squares, will soon be able to extract these data very quickly.

And finally...

If anyone still has completed data sheets for any of these monitoring schemes which have not been sent in, please do send them to the person named on the sheet so they can be incorporated into the database.

Also, if you are willing to participate in any of these monitoring schemes, particularly January and April bird counts at wetlands, please contact Rob Simmons at (061) 263131 or either of us at (061) 249015.

SHORT NOTES

Christopher Hines, Editor

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

Twelve adult and three first-year birds were recorded at the von Bach water purification works (next to the B1)on 26/6/98 (Chris Hines). Other birds have been reported from Friedenau Dam (J. Bartlett) and a farm dam in the Gobabis district (P. Kleins). The dry season always heralds the large-scale movement of a number of waterbird species of which Sacred Ibis is one. Sacred Ibis are generally absent from the Windhoek–Okahandja area in the summer but are regular visitors in the winter.

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*

Peter Kaestner reports 12 Marabou Storks from the Brakwater area on 20/6/98. Marabou Storks move widely throughout their range in Namibia, but regular movements have not been confirmed. They are commonest in the wet season around the major wetlands systems in the North (e.g. Etosha, Grootfontein, Bushmanland and the river systems), but are often reported well out of this range during the dry season.

Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*

A single bird was seen over Windhoek by Peter Kaestner on 20/6/98. Given