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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.

Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 6: Spoonbill, Hamerkop, Flamingos and Cranes

Holger Kolberg
Directorate Scientific Services
Ministry of Environment and Tourism
Windhoek

to get to the bottom of this phenomenon. My own hypothesis was that it was probably the result of garden pesticides such as the old DDTR and Dieldrin. My hypothesis was totally wrong (I was surprised to say the least) and so were others that claimed that the birds get their legs tangled in cotton strands (used as nesting materials) or get their feet burnt at waste sites in warm ash. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Tracy discovered with her work (she captured a large number of wagtails) that the birds are infested with *Knemidocptes* mite that works itself into the scant leg tissue, cuts off the blood supply and desiccates the leg due to the necrosis. I was really amazed at this finding. We believe that it is a mite that found its way from cage birds into the wagtail population. Due to the communal roosting habits of the birdies, the mite can easily move between hosts. This was confirmed by a much higher incidence of leg and foot necrosis in wagtails that were captured from large communal roosts.

I don't believe there is a way to mitigate this particular problem. It just illustrates again that human beings are the most important vectors for parasitic and other pathogenic organisms in the world."

According to the above, it would thus seem that the *Knemidocptes* mite known to be responsible for similar aberrations in Johannesburg, South Africa, has now probably become established in Namibia. How this mite became established in Cape Wagtails in Namibia is still unknown although a likely source of contamination could originate from the cage bird industry.



Photo: Peter Cunningham

The sixth article in the series on trends in Namibian waterbird populations summarises count data for African Spoonbill, Hamerkop, Greater and Lesser Flamingo and Wattled Crane for the period 1977 to December 2008. For each species the Red Data Book (RDB) status, both global and Namibian, is given, the population trend as per Wetlands International, the number of times the species was counted, the number of times it has passed the 1% population criterion, the maximum count and the sites where it has passed the 1% population criterion.

The local trend is calculated for the period 1991 to 2008 only because continuous data is available for that time. The computer programme TRIM was used for these analyses (see an earlier publication for the selection criteria and methods) (*Lanioturdus* 43 (2) – Ed). For each species the number of sites used in the analysis, the number of observed counts (this includes zero counts), and the sites containing more than 10% of the total number counted are given. A trend and slope are given. A slope value of 1 would indicate a perfectly stable population, whereas any value above 1 means a positive trend and a value of less than 1 a negative trend. Population trends are graphically presented as indices relative to a base year (in this case 1991) and thus all have a value of 1 for 1991. An index value of 2 indicates a doubling of the population relative to 1991 and an index of 0.5 would mean half of the 1991 figure.

Only Greater Flamingo exhibit a moderate increase, the trend for the remaining species is uncertain. The two flamingo species regularly pass the 1% population mark, underlining the importance of Namibia's wetlands as a habitat for these birds.

(Larger scale replications of the graphs in this article are attached to the end of this edition).

6.1 African Spoonbill (*Platalea alba*)¹

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern

Namibia RDB Status: ?

WI Trend: Stable



Photo: Eckart Demasius

Spoonbills are commonly encountered in small numbers at most inland sites but the odd bird has also been recorded at the coast. Count figures are relatively constant throughout the period under review except for 2005 when large numbers were recorded at Hardap Dam, Lake Oponono and the Mahango Game Reserve, resulting in a spike in the trend.

No of times counted: 147

No of times past 1% population (=1000): 0

Maximum count: 118 at Olushandja Dam on 4 January 1995 and 4 January 1996

Past 1% population at: Nowhere

Trend analysis

Number of sites:	12
Number of observed counts:	148
Number of missing counts:	68
Total number of counts:	216

¹ Names follow Hockey, P.A.R., Dean, W.R.J. and Ryan, P.G. (eds) 2005. *Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa, VIIth Edition*. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, South Africa.

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Hardap Dam	454	25.9
Lake Oponono	250	14.3
Olushandja Dam	271	15.5
Swakoppoort Dam	193	11.0

Overall slope: Uncertain

1.0098 ± 0.0235

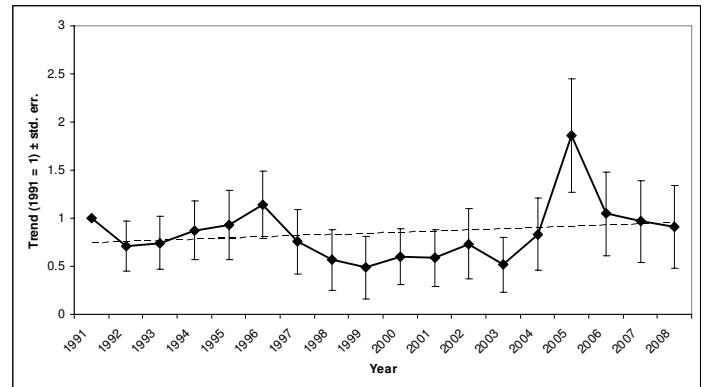


Figure 1: Trend of African Spoonbill population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

6.2 Hamerkop (*Scopus umbretta*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern

Namibia RDB Status: ?

WI Trend: Unknown



Photo: Eckart Demasius

Hamerkop have been counted at most sites in small numbers. The high count of 40 individuals at Mahango Game Reserve in 1991 was never reached again, the next highest

figure being 15, also at the Mahango Game Reserve in 1999.

No of times counted: 77
 No of times past 1% population (=10000): 0
 Maximum count: 40 at Mahango Game Reserve on 27 August 1991
 Past 1% population at: Nowhere

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 6
 Number of observed counts: 76
 Number of missing counts: 32
 Total number of counts: 108

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Mahango Game Res.	134	63.5
Swakoppoort Dam	36	17.1

Overall slope: Uncertain
 0.9872 ±0.0408

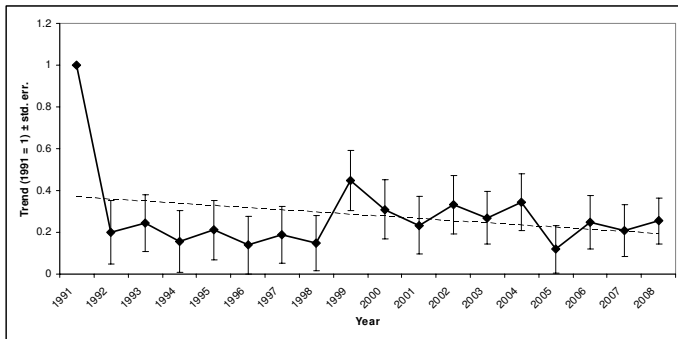


Figure 2: Trend of Hamerkop population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

6.3 Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern
 Namibia RDB Status: Vulnerable
 WI Trend: Stable



Photo: Eckart Demasius

The wetlands of Namibia are important for the conservation of Greater Flamingo as can be witnessed from the number of sites where this species has passed the 1% population mark. Two sites in particular, Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay, regularly host more than half the southern African population. It is encouraging to see this species showing a moderate increase.

No of times counted: 353
 No of times past 1% population (=760): 125
 Maximum count: 43679 at Walvis Bay on 18 July 2004
 Past 1% population at: Cape Cross (6)², Ekuma River (3), Fischer’s Pan (3), Lüderitz Peninsula (3), Mile 4 Saltworks (13), Sandwich Harbour (51), Tsumkwe Pans (2), Walvis Bay (42), Walvis Bay Sewage Works (1)

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 15
 Number of observed counts: 212
 Number of missing counts: 58
 Total number of counts: 270

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Sandwich Harbour	272489	35.1
Walvis Bay	449725	57.9

Overall slope: Moderate increase (p<0.01)
 1.0391 ±0.0086

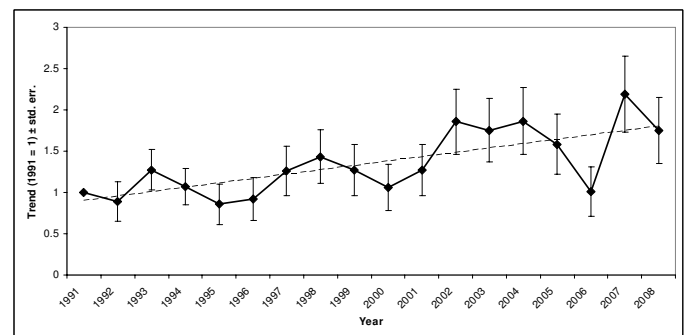


Figure 3: Trend of Greater Flamingo population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

² Numbers in brackets denote the number of times the 1% population mark has been passed.

6.4 Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*)

IUCN RDB Status: Near Threatened
 Namibia RDB Status: Vulnerable
 WI Trend: Stable



Photo: Eckart Demasius

Just like their larger relatives, Lesser Flamingo are well represented at many of Namibia’s wetlands, passing the 1% mark on numerous occasions. For this species too, Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay are important habitats. Successful breeding attempts at several sites in southern Africa over the past few years will hopefully bolster the numbers of these birds and result in an increasing trend.

No of times counted: 308
 No of times past 1% population (=600): 109
 Maximum count: 43420 at Walvis Bay on 30 July 2003

Past 1% population at: Cape Cross (4), Ekuma River (1), Fischer’s Pan (5), Lake Oponono (2), Lüderitz Peninsula (4), Mile 4 Salt Works (13), Sandwich Harbour (31), Tsumkwe Pans (3), Walvis Bay (42), Walvis Bay Sewage Works (4)

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 13
 Number of observed counts: 186
 Number of missing counts: 48
 Total number of counts: 234

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Sandwich Harbour	116239	22.9
Walvis Bay	342348	67.5

Overall slope: Uncertain
 0.9728 ±0.0176

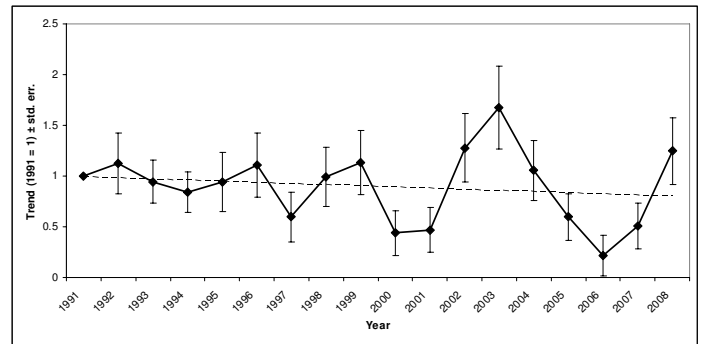


Figure 4: Trend of Lesser Flamingo population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

6.5 Wattled Crane (*Bugeranus carunculatus*)

IUCN RDB Status: Vulnerable
 Namibia RDB Status: Endangered
 WI Trend: Decreasing



Photo: Eckart Demasius

This crane is considered rare in Namibia and numbers are fairly constant in all the counts with the Tsumkwe Pans delivering the highest totals throughout.

No of times counted: 61
 No of times past 1% population (=75): 2
 Maximum count: 95 at Tsumkwe Pans on 7 April 1990
 Past 1% population at: Tsumkwe Pans (2)

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 3
 Number of observed counts: 47
 Number of missing counts: 7
 Total number of counts: 54

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Lake Oponono	171	25.6
Mahango Game Res.	94	14.1
Tsumkwe Pans	403	60.3

Overall slope: Uncertain
0.9885 ± 0.0527

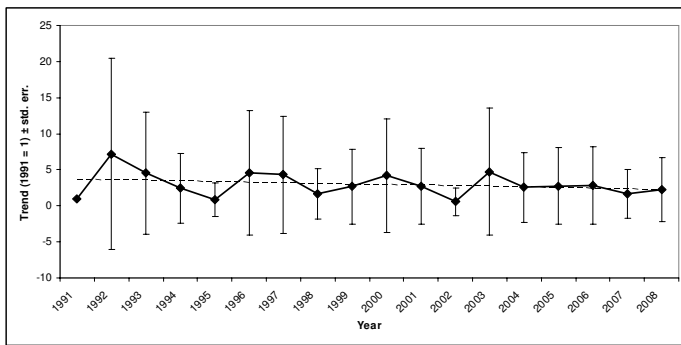


Figure 5: Trend of Wattle Crane population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

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**Success Story from Unfallstation-Wild Bird Hospital :
Pale-winged Starling “Jim Knopf”
Sonja Bartlewski
(sonja.michl@iway.na)**

All photographs in this article are by Sonja Bartlewski

On a farm near Windhoek Jim Knopf and his two siblings hatched in a nest high up under

the roof of a barn. One morning the farmers found the oldest sibling lying dead on the ground. They observed the nest for a while and realized that the parent birds had not been returning to the nest for more than a day. The next morning they found sibling number two lying on the ground but still alive. Now they knew something was wrong and they rescued the remaining chick out of the nest. This is how two Pale-winged Starling chicks came to Wild Bird Hospital on 28 February 2011.



2 March 2011

The first bird had a severe head injury and did not look as if it would ever be able to fly or even walk without difficulty. The farmers and I decided that it would only be a torture to keep the bird alive. We would rather concentrate on the survival of the healthy looking remaining chick, which I named “Jim Knopf”.

He was very hungry but also very active and very lonely. But he developed well. He made friends with my tame mousebird and of course with me. He would make a real effort to keep me away from the door when I tried to leave the hospital.

As he grew up his favorite pastime was to sit on my shoulder, mess up my clean T-shirt and bite into my ear! Slowly but surely I realized that he had to start becoming a wild bird. I had to go to Cape Town for four days and took him to NARREC for Liz and Co. to look after him. It took only seconds for both students to fall in love with him. I had a good feeling about leaving him there.