

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON WALVIS BAY BIRD COUNTS (MARCH 1984)

At the instigation of the Walvis Bay Round Table Association two summer counts of the number of coastal waterbirds (excluding cormorants and pelagic species) using the Walvis Bay area have been carried out. These compare favourably with previous counts and indicate that between 50,000 and 75,000 coastal birds (see tables for the main species involved), use the Walvis Bay area during the austral summer and suggest that at times the total may exceed 100,000 individuals (Table 1).

Just how significant are these numbers in regional and international terms? And do they justify conservation and the supportive efforts of the Round Table?

In March 1974 counts were made of the numbers of wetland birds at Sandwich Harbour and at the Swakopmund salt works for comparison with the numbers reported from Walvis Bay (Table 2). From these counts it is clear that Walvis Bay is the most important of the three localities with about 60% of all the wetland birds concentrated there. Coastal wetland birds seek tidal or shallow water areas. Such conditions are rare along the Namib Coast (from the Kunene River to the Orange River) and it is reasonable to suppose that the Sandwich-Walvis-Swakopmund area supports about 75% or more of the total coastal wetland birds of the Namib Coast.

How important is the Namib Coast population on an international scale? Because coastal wetland birds tend to concentrate in relatively small areas they are countable and data exist for the winter populations of these birds in the whole of

western Europe, for the southwestern Cape Province of South Africa, and for the Banc d'Arguin a major tidal mudbank area in Mauritania (Tables AA-CC). In Table AA the maximum count of eight coastal wetland species from the Sandwich-Swakopmund area is compared with that from the SW Cape, the Banc d'Arguin and the whole of western Europe. For these species it is clear that the Namib populations are overall smaller than those elsewhere but are of major international importance for the Sanderling and of equal importance with the SW Cape for Grey Plovers and Knots and greatly exceed the SW Cape population of Bartailed Godwits. In terms of African waders the Sandwich-Swakopmund area has the world's largest concentration of Chestnutbanded Plovers and important concentrations of Whitefronted Plovers and Avocets (Table BB). It is well known that the Namib coast supports the great majority of the southern African flamingo populations when these are not breeding and the counts along the coast suggest that estimates of inland populations are greatly overestimated (Table CC).

It is fair to ask how reliable are the figures in these tables as indicators of importance. What, for instance of the numbers of birds on vast extent of African coastline between Mauritania and the Namib? In fact much of that area has a humid tropical climate that favours siltation along the coast followed by invasion of plants especially mangroves so that few areas are available to the kind of coastal wetland birds considered in this report and numbers are likely to be relatively small (although their actual scale is, for political and logistical reasons, not

likely to be known for far into the future).

From all this it is reasonable to conclude that the Walvis Bay area is for several coastal species a feeding area of international or more frequently major regional importance and that loss of the area would have a considerable adverse affect on their total regional and or world populations. In saying this it should be remarked that the world populations of many of the involved species are probably not more than a few million and in some cases (for instance Chestnutbanded Plovers) may be less than one hundred thousand individuals.

Conservation effort to ensure feeding areas for the large numbers of birds concerned are without doubt justified. Of greater concern to the Walvis Bay Round Table is the fate of the lagoon. In the March 1984 count about 25,000 of the c.75,000 birds counted were in the lagoon area so that in numbers alone, without analysis of the particular dependence of certain species on the lagoon area, this ranks as one of the most important areas for coastal birds along the entire Namib Coast.

Tony (A.J.) Williams & Chris Brown
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COASTAL WATERBIRD CENSUS MARCH 1984

Species	Sandwich	Walvis	Swakop.	Total
Greatcrested Grebe	37	-	2	39
Blacknecked Grebe	235	754	250	1239
Little Grebe	3		-	3
White Pelican	359	262	2	623
Grey heron	45	28	1	74
Little Egret	124	7	4	135
Greater Flamingo	8291	19216	691	28,198
Lesser Flamingo	c7500	20484	693	28,677
Cape Teal	91	67	35	193
Coot	176		-	176
Black Oystercatcher		38		38
Turnstone	c300	1634	82	2,016
Ringed Plover	c500	292	2	794
Whitefronted Plover	c300	457	40	797
Chestnutbanded Plover	c200	294	10	504
Kittlitz' plover	-	1	-	1
Threebanded Plover	5	-	-	5
Great Sandplover	1+		-	1
Grey plover	c200	631	16	847
Curlew Sandpiper	c4000	4965	3235	12,200
Little Stint	c200	911	660	1,771
Knot	c200	232	133	565
Sanderling	c4000	6239	2	10,241
Ruff	2	35	14	51
Common Sandpiper	2	4	-	6
Greenshank	14	40	2	56
Bartailed Godwit	274	261	17	552
Whimbrel	3	8	-	11
Avocet	269	877	16	1,162
Stilt	-	28	-	28
Kelp Gull	303	2049	NC	2,352+
Hartlaub's Gull	109	164	392 Br	665
Caspian Tern	7	21	-	28
Sandwich tern	721	170	26	917
Swift Tern	73	30	-	103
Comic Trns	1169	3200	78	4,447
Black terns	2	209	-	211
Whitewinged Tern	6	53	-	59

Nb. OR=70 OI 20/30/42/53/62

WATERBIRD CENSI AT WALVIS BAY

SPECIES	1977	1983 May	1983 Nov.	1984 Mar.
Blackneck G.	451	1611	315	1217
White Pelican	574	932	118	327
WhiteB Cormorant	-	302	34+	249
Crowned Ct.	-	-	1	4
Grey Heron	24	68	21	31
Little Egret	8	25	55	7
Greater Flamingo	7912	11,000	4482	23,160
Lesser Flamingo	9600	23,986	1363	23,620
Unspecified			21,568	
Cape Teal	-	290	34	225
Black OysterC.	87	24	78	38
Turnstone	595	293	896	1648
Ringed Plover	179	1	114	567
Whitefront Pl.	1093	78	211	685
ChestnutB.	1909	855	3558	590
Grey Plover	2438	3362	523	841
Curlew Sandp.	9307	13852	7041	8038
Little Stint	0	406	3811	1725
Knot	1074	1832	1221	225
Sanderling	8280	19	5025	7572
Greenshank	30	41	17	72
BarT Godwit	598	381	371	482
Avocet	716	1896	53	1465
Stilt	0	83	53	44
Kelp Gull	88	2500+	c.500	2178
Hartlaubs	-	208	829	171
GreyH	210	2	NC	7
Caspian Tern	30	104	52	25
Common T	188	1762	15,000+	3322
Sandwich T	138	53	148	174
Swift T.	107	20	50	41
Damara T	25	85	23	37
Whitewing			38	41
Black			0	209
Totals	45,661	66,071	52,503	79,037
Absolute maximum		110,081		

TABLE AA

NUMBERS OF PALAEARCTIC WADERS IN EUROPE & WESTERN AFRICA

	Namib	SW Cape	Arguin	Europe
Turnstone	7,000	9,138	ND	ND
Ringed Plover	800	1,454	23,000	28-34,000
Grey Plover	4500	4,571	23,000	50,000
Curlew Sandpiper	20,000	54,698	130,000	1000
Little Stint	2,500	6,007	2-43,000	600
Knot	4,000	3,831	336,000	430,000
Sanderling	24,000	14,772	34,000	10,000
Bartailed Godwit	2,200	52	215,000	89,000
	64,000	94,500	780,000	616,000

ND = No data

Sources: Cramp & Simmons 1983, Summers et al. 1977, This report

Table BB

NUMBERS OF AFRICAN WADERS ON WESTERN COAST OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

	Namib	SW Cape
Whitefronted Plover	3,000	5,110
Chestnutbanded Plover	4,500	135
Avocet	1,700	2,228
Stilt	50	765

Summers et al. 1977, This report

$$\begin{array}{r} 9250 \\ \hline 8238 \end{array}$$

Table CC

NUMBERS OF GREATER & LESSER FLAMINGOES

	World	Sn.Africa	Namib
Greater Flamingo	790,000	75,000	28,000
Lesser Flamingo	3 million	1 million	29,000

Berry 1975, Kahl 1975, This report

Nb Since the vast majority of the southern African population occurs along the Namib coast this suggests that the southern Africa figures are grossly exaggerated.