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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.

Epupa Falls

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The very name hints at excitement, something different and of course some great birding.

And so it proved to be when Christiane Maluche and I paid a visit to the falls at the beginning of May 2011. Part of the excitement was seeing the Kunene River in full spate resulting in the falls being at their spectacular best. Because of the amount of water there was not much opportunity to explore the river bank with only a small stretch being available for birding – from the so called beach at the bottom end of the falls to the first hill on the way to Swartbooisdrif, a distance of approximately three kilometres. This did not prevent some good birding.



Epupa Falls – Photo Richard Niddrie

Starting at Omarunga Camp where we stayed, familiar friends such as Red-billed Firefinch, African Mourning Dove, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Grey Go-away-bird, African Palm-Swift, African Red-eyed Bulbul and African Pied Wagtail were to be seen. What then about the specials or hotties as we call them? They were thankfully also there.

We were at Camp Site 5 which was perfect, being right next to the fence with Epupa Falls Camp and the river. The advantage of this camp site was that it was well sheltered by tall Makalani Palm trees whilst still giving clear views of the entire camping area. This allowed

us to sit in the cool shade keeping a look out for birds. Even in May the temperatures were still well in the thirties. The birds also seemed to appreciate the cooler area. A frequent visitor to this area was the Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush. It seemed to favour the fence and as the name suggests the Makalani Palm trees. Often it would first perch on the fence before hopping off to whatever palm tree took its fancy. It was also the first bird to wake us up in the morning with its distinctive melodious whistling.



Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush – Photo Richard Niddrie

This same area also produced Cinderella Waxbill, of which I had a fleeting, but clear sighting, and Jameson's Firefinch in addition to the familiar friends mentioned earlier. On the other side of the camp where the aftermath of the recent flood had left swampy conditions Black-crowned Night-Heron, Green-backed Heron and Woodland Kingfisher were seen.

Outside the camp was just as productive. At the lookout point the vegetation is quite different from that at the river and the falls. Here it is rocky scrub. Not surprisingly birds seen included Kalahari Scrub-Robin, Familiar Chat, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Black-chested Prinia, Pale-winged Starling and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. Nearer to the falls we saw Southern Red Bishop still in full breeding plumage and Marico Sunbird.

I certainly recommend Epupa Falls as a birding destination and will definitely go there again. I can just imagine the potential before

the rainy season when the falls and river are lower. The flip side is that the falls will not be at their thundering best as we had them. I suppose you can't have it both ways.

(I was interested to note that the Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush in the photograph is a ringed bird. According to the SAFRING website, at the time this article was written, only 31 of these birds had ever been ringed, not all of them at Epupa and in fact I know that some were ringed way to the north in Angola and others some distance to the east at Swartbooisdrif and near Ruacana. I wonder what the odds were against Richard photographing a ringed bird – Ed.)

Report on the Winter 2011 Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia

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The winter wetland bird counts were conducted during July and August 2011 at 32 sites throughout Namibia. The abnormal rainy season experienced in most parts of the country had resulted in plenty of water still being in the field and this was evident in the counts. Lower numbers than usual were recorded at most sites and the Walvis Bay count was the lowest since regular counts were started. The low numbers are due to an almost complete absence of flamingos, lower than usual numbers of geese and ducks and the absence of certain waders e.g. Chestnut-banded Plovers, Pied Avocets and Black-winged Stilts.

Sandwich Harbour had the most birds (thanks mainly to a large flock of Cape Cormorants and an even larger flock of Common Terns) whereas the Orange River Mouth confirmed its status as an important bird area with the highest number of species recorded (44).

In terms of rarities, a Slaty Egret was seen at Otjivero Dam and a White Stork at Monte Christo. The Orange River Mouth delivered a

Glossy Ibis and eight Wattled Cranes were counted at Lake Oponono; Maccoa Duck are making a return to the Walvis sewage ponds, with four being counted there. A Greater Painted-Snipe was seen at Fischer's Pan, two Eurasian Oystercatchers were observed at Sandwich Harbour and two Common Redshanks appeared on the count sheet at the Mile 4 Saltworks.

I would like to express my appreciation to all the counters and the effort they put in to conduct the counts.

Note: See the last pages of this edition for a table of the counts by location.

Rarities and Interesting Observations

Harmut Kolb reported seeing two Yellow-billed Oxpeckers on a donkey in the vicinity of Purros in the Kunene Region on 17/09/2011. These birds were about 200 km south of their recorded SABAP1 range.

Peter Morgan and some of his Kunene River Lodge guests saw a Slaty Egret on the Kunene River about 1 200 m upstream from the lodge on 21/09/2011. None of the distribution maps in Roberts VII, SABAP1 or any of the field guides show this species occurring anywhere near where this bird was sighted. Mark Boorman, however, referred me to a paper published in the Bulletin of the African Bird Club (Vol 17 No 1 March 2010) wherein mention is made of four Slaty Egret specimens in the museum at Lubango in Angola. These specimens had been incorrectly identified as Black Herons and were collected in June 1968 in Huila Province about 200 km to the north east of this sighting. Mark has also heard that Slaty Egrets have been seen fairly regularly at Olushandja Dam near Onesi. It appears that there may well be a small population of this species along the Kunene River and in other suitable habitat in that region. Although I have photographs of the