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Editorial

Timothy O. Osborne

I made the appeal in the last editorial for everyone to give out a membership form to people you know who are not members. How many of you have done this? I gave out 2 forms and one has signed up as a club member! So I am batting 50% in getting new members. Hopefully at the next annual general meeting we will see if we are perishing as a club or growing. Certainly birding is growing world-wide and I would hate to think that we are not part of that trend.

The rains have been late as usual and spotty throughout the country but the rain birds have arrived and are doing nicely. On a trip to Windhoek I counted 7200 Yellow-and-Blackbilled Kites along the B1. Fortunately the road was empty so I was not a road hazard as I was alone and watching the sky more than the road.

This issue has a paper written by a school girl who shows what sort of good scientific information can be gathered in your backyard. It also has more of Paxton exploits from the north.

Spring 2002	Observed Data (independent of location)					chi square level of significance by species	Expected Frequency (no food preferences)					
	Small Seeds	Sunflower Seeds	Boiled Rice	Bread Crumbs	Sliced Apple		Small Seeds	Sunflower Seeds	Boiled Rice	Bread Crumbs	Sliced Apple	Total
	FEEDING	FEEDING	FEEDING	FEEDING	FEEDING		FEEDING	FEEDING	FEEDING	FEEDING	FEEDING	FEEDING
burghig dove	742	379	202	119	5	<0.001	289.4	289.4	289.4	289.4	1447	
rosy-faced lovebird	1	3	0	0	1	not significant	1	1	1	1	5	
whitebacked mousebird	2	7	10	182	457	<0.001	131.6	131.6	131.6	131.6	658	
monteiro's hornbill	0	2	0	0	0	not significant	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	2	
arcelia pipit barbel	3	4	1	1	6	not significant	3	3	3	3	15	
african red-eyed bulbul	0	2	9	74	47	<0.001	26.4	26.4	26.4	26.4	132	
mountain chat	0	0	11	13	1	<0.001	5	5	5	5	25	
plawinged starling	0	2	1	7	0	<0.01	2	2	2	2	10	
hoopoe sparrow	238	167	112	45	2	<0.001	112.8	112.8	112.8	112.8	564	
whitebreasted sparrow-weaver	7	7	2	4	0	<0.05	4	4	4	4	20	
southern masked weaver	53	19	145	64	0	<0.001	57.8	57.8	57.8	57.8	289	
chestnut weaver	7	6	12	5	1	<0.05	6.2	6.2	6.2	6.2	31	
red-billed quail	49	7	4	0	0	<0.001	12	12	12	12	60	
red-headed finch	87	10	8	2	0	<0.001	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	107	
black-throated canary	24	0	36	33	5	<0.001	21.4	21.4	21.4	21.4	107	
cape bunting	12	0	0	0	1	<0.001	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.6	13	
Sub-totals	1227	924	553	549	552		607	607	607	607	3485	

Kavango Bird Observations

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During the first week of November 2002 I was out on the Kavango River, near Shamvura (18 02S, 20 51E), with some British guests (Ian & Patience Smith). I regularly count this stretch of river, so I have a reasonably good idea of what's new in the zoo. However, being the start of the summer rainy season we usually pick up some interesting changes. We've recently had some exceptionally late and strong winds lasting several days, and some extensive early rains. Generally this would result in some unusual bird sightings. We spent some hours on the river with these guests who proved to be quite ardent birders and had some interesting sightings; our first was a group of eight Yellow-billed Ducks *Anas undulata*. I had, in fact, first spotted a group of 14 in front of Shamvura on 30 September and a group of 6 birds after this visit. I've no doubt that these were not different groups but possibly the fragmented larger flock of 14 birds. These sightings were, however, over a distance of 8 kms of river, which means that they seem to be really moving around. At all sightings the birds were either flying or sitting on a sandbank quite restless before taking flight. This would probably indicate that they had popped in on their way to a possibly more suitable stretch of river. They seem, however, to be staying some time before deciding to move on.

Also seen were a small group of eight Sanderlings *Calidris alba* of which at least 2 appeared to be more darkly mottled in immature plumage. This group was seen on Sunday 3 November, on a sandbank actively foraging and could be approached to within 10 metres.

Also on the same day we saw a Lesser Gannule *Prophyryla alleni* in a lily-covered inlet, together with some Jacanas *Actophilornis africanus*. This bird was aggressively attacking the lily buds and was also actively feeding.

We also observed a pair of Purple Gallinule *Prophyrio prophyrio* with a fully-fledged chick, which must have bred out and left the nest in mid-October. This by all accounts appears to be an early breeding record for Namibia.

A small group of 12 Yellow-billed Storks *Mycteria ibis* of varying ages were noted in a large group of Open-billed Storks *Anastomus lamelligerus* on the same stretch of river on 30 September. They are not regular visitors here and when they are seen on the river they are generally single bird.

Mahango Count (July 2002)

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A preliminary visit to the Game Park about 2 weeks before confirmed the extremely low water on the river and the bad rains were not going to produce a marvelous count this time. I, however, made plans to get a count underway and this tied in with a visit from my good friend Wayne Hanssen who would be only too willing to help.

On 19 July myself, Linda Sheehan and Wayne Hanssen made the necessary preparations and moved off to Mahango Game Park where we made plans with the, as always, helpful Park Officials to set up our campsite. Being quite late in the afternoon, once we'd finished setting up our basic facilities, we decided a quick recce on the river was in order. As usual this would give us an idea of what was going on along on river thereby giving us some direction for the forthcoming count. We did not make allowances for the "Botswana National Fisheries Inspectors!"

These people are the local Tswanas living in Botswana just over the fence line from the Park. As is the case with most Parks these rural people on the

extremities carry out poaching activities in the Park and in this case the river system is their main area of activity. They come into the Park along the river using their watos/makoros (dugout canoes) and illegally use gill nets and other trapping methods for fish. They also set hooks for crocodiles and undoubtedly kill any other game they encounter. The Park Officials are regularly involved in anti-poaching activities to counteract these incursions from Botswana, but they cannot be everywhere all of the time and always ask me for assistance where possible while I am in the Park.

In the boat we came up one of the river courses only to meet four canoes with "Fisheries Inspectors" on their merry way into the Park to set up their nets for the nightly harvest. Seeing our boat suddenly bearing down on them made them collectively change their minds quite radically. There was therefore some chaotic paddling to the shore. These craft are, at best, not the most stable of water-going vessels and are even more unstable in the wake of a motor-boat engine. Two made it to the bank and disappeared into the reeds abandoning their canoes. The remaining two decided to abandon ship and took their chances with the crocodiles. They too disappeared and abandoned their nets, canoes and possessions. We tethered the "watos" to our boat (one of which sunk to the bottom of the river) and in shifts dragged them to camp, subsequently loading them on the vehicle and delivering them to the Park Officials at the gate. They were very grateful and took up the follow-up procedures from there, leaving us to hopefully get on with the count. However, the "Botswana National Fisheries Section" was not yet finished with us. The following morning we set out to seriously start the count only to come across a moored "wato" a short distance from our camp. Naturally we tethered the craft and dragged it to camp and then to the gate again. We were beginning to think we were constantly going to be ferrying confiscated watos back and forth and never getting down to the serious business of counting. Wayne at this point was convinced that we were to become a fully operational private law enforcement agency with a subsidiary operation specializing in "wato retrievals and sales". Being an astute businessman and one who seldom misses an opportunity when it comes knocking at his door, I assumed his mind was undoubtedly working in turning this situation into a viable business. I was quite surprised to learn however, that he was not really enthralled with