NAMIBIA BIRD CLUB

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All contributions for *LANIOTURDUS* should be sent to:

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WORKING WEEKEND AT THE WATERBERG

Daphne McGivern
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Two dozen energetic birders set out for Okatjikona at the Waterberg in June with the intention of building a bird hide for the use of the public. Mark Griffiths had chosen a suitable site near a waterhole within a few minutes walk from the main centre.

The hide was constructed of materials that Mark had managed to obtain for us. Strong gum poles were set in concrete to form the basic four corners of the hide to these wooden planks were attached onto which the roof of galvanised iron could be nailed. Unfortunately the split poles which Mark had ordered from Windhoek to finish the outer four walls had not arrived so the structure could not be completed. We have arranged for a return date in November in which to do the final touches. That Saturday evening Mark rewarded our work with a night drive onto the plateaux where we were fortunate in seeing eland and rhino. On Sunday he again treated us to a drive on top of the plateaux, this time to see the Bushmen etchings and cave. It was a relaxed way of rounding off the working weekend, thank you Mark!

NAMIBIAN WETLAND BIRD COUNTS FOR 1997

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The rains for 1996-1997 smiled on Namibia and filled many of our more arid regions with water. World-famous Sossusvlei, a dry pan at the end point of a usually dry river in the huge linear dunes of the Namib Desert, was last filled in 1988. Now ten years later not only are the pans full but the car park and surrounding areas are flooded. Like the water, visitors are pouring in from all over the world.

Good rains may flood typically dry pans and recharge springs, but widespread rains reduce bird numbers on permanently flooded areas as these birds disperse to newly flooded parts. Hence some wetlands experience reduced bird populations at just the time when they would be expected to show increases. This explains why Namibia's main month for maximum densities of birds in its wetlands is emerging as November - the month just before our main rains. This is partly confirmed by new data from Namibia's sewage works which remain stable and unfluctuating while all natural pans and wetlands are oscillating from wet to dry. Sewage works therefore can be seen as a crude control against which monthly bird populations in dams and pans and river mouths can be judged. Monthly counts by Dr Sandra Dantu and Mark Boorman in Swakopmund have now confirmed the trend for November to be the peak month. Numbers of birds in Swakopmund's sewage works peaked at almost 1 000 birds of 20 species, declining to below 800 one month later. This 20% decline is again probably due to birds dispersing from this oasis-in-the-desert to flooded regions to the East.

Bushmanland pans in Namibia's central northeast, received excellent rains and flooded pans and surrounding woodland alike. The latter proved an ideal study area for visiting researchers Drs Ian Jamieson and Sue McRae who took a close look at Coots, Lesser Moorhens, Whiskered Terns and Black necked Grebes, which bred en masse in Nyae Nyae Pan. Egg dumping - laying one or two eggs in someone else's nest - is common in

species that nest in colonies and their study confirmed this for all 4 species. They also uncovered Namibia's first breeding record of Baillon's Crake whilst doing their rounds. Several publications will arise from their study. We also learned how wetland birds probably find these ephemeral pans in vast arid regions like Namibia. Phoebe Barnard and Rob Simmons were present just before massive thunderstorms filled several of the northern pans, and watched as larger birds spiralled down from out of the storms onto the rapidly filling pans below them. Within two days one pan had attracted 37 birds of 5 species, on the third day it had 73 birds of 11 species and on the fourth day 120 birds of 11 species were present. A larger pan 4 km east meanwhile had attracted 326 birds of 13 species within 5 days of being filled. It seems then that like migrant raptors, wetland birds are directly following the rain fronts and instantly colonising the waterbodies that form below them (Simmons *et al.* MS).

Etosha Pan also experienced inflow from its main eastern feeder the Omuramba Owambo, bringing with it thousands of flamingos that began breeding sometime in March. About 15 - 20 000 birds were estimated by Dr Nad Brain, all with nests. By June the young - the first major injection of young for almost 2 decades had winged their way to the coast, 500 km south west.

Previous counters for 1996 can pat themselves on the back for producing one of the highest total number of birds (and the highest for any southern African country) at 274 000, almost half the entire southern African total. Note also the very useful table produced by Tim Dodman and Valerie Taylor on page 133 of the 1996 report. It lists those wetlands were more than 1% of the world population of any species are found. There are 19 sites included, with some obvious ones such as Walvis Bay, Sandwich Harbour, the near-shore islands off Luderitz and the Mahango Game Reserve. But look also at the unexpected ones: Luderitz Sewage works, Swakopmund Sewage Works, and the Swakoppoort Dam. The message here is that the artificial sites can be as important for wetland species as are the natural and better-known wetlands. It is essential then that these sites are monitored continuosly.

Highlights:

1. Thousands of Abdim's Storks (estimated at 4-5000 birds) seen at Omatako Dam by Dieter Ludwig and many thousands were seen in in the west of the country near Usakos, together with White storks and *Milvus* kites in December 1996, but too early for this count.
2. A single Pink-backed Pelican at Oanob Dam, central Namibia, was reported by Kevin Roberts in January.
3. First breeding records of Baillon's Crake for Namibia were recorded in Tsumkwe District (Bushmanland) by Dr Sue McRae.
4. During intensive monitoring of coots and moorhens breeding at Windhoek Sewage works, Dr Ian Jamieson recorded a Northern Shoveller *Anas clypeata*. While the species is a regular to northern Africa, it is very rare in southern Africa and has never been recorded in the waterfowl counts since 1991. There are no waterfowl collections locally that could explain its presence so it may be a first for southern AWC counts.
5. Mile 4 Saltworks is a salt extraction centre 4 miles north of the coastal town of Swakopmund, which also provides wooden platforms for nesting Cape Cormorants. Guano is scraped from the platforms for sale as fertiliser. This relatively small area however, boasted a major event in 1997. Not only did it support 59 000 birds (mainly Cape Cormorants but 37 other species including 1 050 Blacknecked and 13 Great Crested Grebes) but it also boasted the first documented breeding attempt of Greater and Lesser Flamingos on the coast. Several hundred birds were present and they built nest mounds on a raised portion of a flooded pan. It is uncertain if eggs were laid, but birds were sitting during observations by visiting wetlands expert Dr Warwick Tarboton and local conservation officer Rod Braby. The attempt was unsuccessful due to ubiquitiuos Jackals disturbing sitting birds. A previous attempt was made at Cape Cross many years ago but birds then only built nest structures and got no further. Thousands of young birds are expected in this area during the July counts because Greater Flamingos were successful on Etosha (15-20 000 pairs bred in March) as were Lesser Flamingos further afield in Botswana (T.Liversedge. pers. comm.).
6. The highest counts once again came from Walvis Bay where Keith Wearne and his team counted 118 000 birds. This Ramsar site, the most important for bird numbers anywhere in southern Africa is coming under increasing threats from harbour pollution and natural siltation, and was the

subject of a successful July workshop organised by Keith's Walvis Bay Environmental Action Committee. We hope that Wetlands International will be able to provide future funding to this very dynamic group to safeguard southern Africa's premiere coastal wetland.

7. Following the successful shoreline counts in 1996 we have initiated counts of highly productive and human-used beaches in the central coast. One new site, "30 km beach, Swakop-Walvis" is monitored monthly by Rod Braby and in January had 7800 birds at an average of 260 birds/km! If anyone knows of places with higher totals for beaches anywhere in Africa we would like to hear from you.

Species richness tallies (Sp.) and count totals (Number) for each site are summarised in Table 1. In January 296 068 birds were counted with the highest species total of 54 being recorded at the Orange River mouth. In April 125 596 birds were counted with the highest species total (40) being recorded at Walvis Bay. Thank you to all the counters for their continued support of this important international effort to monitor our wetlands.

TABLE 1. Summarised Namibian wetland counts for January and April 1996. Wetlands that do not appear in the list were not counted.

Area	January		April	
	Sp.	Number	Sp.	Number
Cape Cross saltworks	16	9383	18	6780
Mile 4 saltworks	31	60722	38	59531
Swakop sewage works	16	438	11	360
Sandwich N. wetlands	24	763	15	892
Sandwich S. mudflats	28	44983	21	25287
Luderitz: Agate Beach	18	609		
Luderitz: 2nd Lagoon	24	1821		
Luderitz: G. Bucht	13	107		
Shark Isl + Harbour	9	269		
Peninsula (Aero+Guano+Grif)	23	716		
Sewage Works + overflow	13	450		
Bushmanland Pans: Nyae Nyae	46	1286		
Klein Dobe	10	76		
Big Dobe	5	36		
Makuri V.	11	40		
Khabi	16	750		
Etosha: Fisher's Pan	29	955	28	1867
Etosha:Okerfontein	1	20000		
Ekuma River (5km)	15	1275	17	1393
Lake Opono	7	19	24	1074
Oshituntu	10	77	13	247
W. Etosha springs	6	76	3	19
Friedenau Dam	25	1004		
Omatako Dam	11	5054	17	319
Otjivero Dam	5	91	16	137
Karamba/Toronto	1	4		
Oanob Dam	9	110		
Swakopoort Dam	9	398	15	589
Windhoek Sewage wks	19	320	11	109
Kwando River (5km)	23	105		
Tsondab Vlei	Dry			
Sossusvlei	4	36		
Haris dams, K.Hochl	18	327	nc	nc
Avis Dam, Windhoek	17	253	5	16
Orange River mouth	54	4809	35	1288
Walvis Bay lagoon	44	118061	40	48755
Conception Bay	8	2825		
Diamond Coast: Elizabeth Bay	18	1074		
Halifax Island	2	267	3	881
Ichaboe Island	9	17404	10	3011
Mercury Island	2	3452	1	1348
Possession Island	4	5013	1	17067.
Olushandja Dam	28	193	17	587
Walvis Bay Sewage	23	2065	nc	nc
Ujanis Sewage Works	nc	nc	7	61
Orange River (50/10 km)	16	130	10	34
Orange River (Hohenfels)	22	450	17	233
30 km beach Swakop/Walvis	18	7808		

Reference:

Simmons R.E, Barnard, P.E & Jamieson, I.G. *MS*. How do wetland birds find ephemeral pans in arid landscapes? Observations from Bushmanland, Namibia. submitted *Ostrich*