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## Editorial

T. O. Osborne

After the cold winter everyone was predicting a very wet rainy season but as usual weather predictors were as wrong as ever. The farmers in the north are worried about drought but predictably most of the birds were holding off breeding until they saw signs of good rain. The guineafowl are not yet paired up and the kori bustards are just eating what few insects are about maintaining their bodies. It will take lots of rain followed by good growth of the grass before the insect abundance is enough to stimulate breeding.

After a drought of another sort articles and bird notes and observations are finally being sent for publication in the *Lanioturdus*. The club cannot function unless members know what is happening in the various parts of the country. It is the only publication we have which informs members of what has happened at the various outings. Once again I appeal to all members to send in to me your observations and articles. The editions of the journal are getting very thin and it is up to the members to contribute if they want to see the journal continue.

## Sandwich Harbour bird monitoring January 2002

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Sandwich Harbour was visited over 3 days from 21- 23 Jan with Rod Braby (RB) and Liz Komen to undertake the first monitoring of the new year. This was timed for the middle of January because Walvis Bay was counted the week before and an African -wide survey coordinated by RES was also timed for this time of year.

**Abundance and species richness** The total count for this Ramsar wetland was 84 248 birds comprised of 47 species (Table 1). This is slightly lower than the long term mean of 145 000 birds in summer for two possible reasons: The southern mudflats that hold the largest numbers of birds was relatively dry and concentrated the wading birds into relatively few wet areas. RB also reported numerous sulphur eruptions from the air prior to the count and some turquoise water symptomatic of this sulphur was present in the lagoon. This kills fish and may kill shoreline invertebrates as it reduces the oxygen concentration in the water. One dead pelican and a live ringed juvenile Penguin from Halifax Island in poor shape (missing a toe on the right foot) was found on the island. Large numbers of dead birds apparent during similar events last year were not apparent this year.

**TABLE 1 Summary of bird abundance and richness in the Sandwich Harbour wetlands January 2002**

Wetland	Species	Birds	Comments
North	30	1014	Remaining water approx. 30m across at min
Lagoon-side	23	9693	2 European Oystercatchers,
South Mudflats	18	58565	Very dry and high densities in remaining patches
West Sandspit	17	1217	Sulphur eruptions obvious here (turquoise water)
Islands (2)	9	13760	Cape and White-breasted breeding: Cape's 1782 nests (West Is.), 4310 nests (East Is.) Mean clutch=2.25 n= 53, mean brood=1.86 chicks/nest Kelp G rapacious, 30 - 40% colony predated. Ringed juv. penguin A11006 from Halifax Island
TOTALS	47	84 248	Dead Green Turtle s. mudflats, 26 jackals one with mange, Brown Hyena tracks. Thousands of seals

Very few Greater Flamingos (2916) and almost no Lesser Flamingos (59) suggested that inland thunderstorms have seduced them inland. The majority of the birds comprised Curlew Sandpipers (26 018 - 31% of the total), large numbers of Sanderlings (22 915 - 27% of total), and 16 200 Cape Cormorants (19%). The large numbers of Common terns that have swollen the numbers of birds at Sandwich in recent counts were poorly represented in this count (3035 - 4% of the total). **Rarer species:** included 2 European Oystercatchers and a Mongolian Plover. Damara Terns were found in good numbers (126) and had bred at Sandwich - adults were seen feeding flying young in the northern and lagoon-side wetlands. None were found on the lower southern mudflats where they have previously occurred.

**Breeding:** The islands which have formed in recent years inside the lagoon comprise two main sand and shingle areas - an East and West Island. They are entirely isolated from all sandspits and are not accessible to jackals. The East Island held an estimated 4310 Cape Cormorant nests and was also inhabited by Kelp Gulls. The Western Island which was more thoroughly sampled held 1782 Cape Cormorant nests and had 14 juvenile pelicans amongst the 157 adults. These birds must have hatched here but the nests were not found (cormorants steal nest lining as soon as it is vacated). Other species included roosting Knots, Ruffs and breeding Kelp Gulls. In an attempt to ascertain clutch and brood size of the Cape Cormorants, a small isolated sub colony of 60 nests was briefly visited and counted by 3 observers as quickly as possible. Mean clutch size of 53 nests was 2.25 eggs (12 c/1, 16 c/2, 25 c/3, no c/4 were found). Mean brood size was 1.86 chicks/nest from 7 nests. (3 b/1, 2 b/2, 2 b/3) some of which had eggs still to hatch). As we left this colony and before all of the parent cormorants had returned, Kelp Gulls flew in and raided eggs and nestlings and an estimated 40% of the colony was destroyed (chiefly the outer nests). No other colonies were visited thereafter.

Grey Herons were breeding in the *Phragmites* reeds at the *Eagle* wreck - which is now half buried by an encroaching dune.

**The Berry "Green Pulse" theory** suggests that when the Kuiseb River flows strongly there is a strong influence on the fresh water that pulses through to

Sandwich Harbour, and this affects the green ribbon of vegetation along the sides of the wetland about 12 months later. We looked for this greening effect 9 months and 12 months after the April high of 2000 and found no influence. However in this count, 20 months after the strong Kuiseb flow, most of the !Nara plants held melons and the *Phragmites* and *Typha* reeds were all bright green. A freshly dug, 30 cm deep, hole near one of the shell middens filled with fresh water which indicated that water was infiltrating the area. This accords with Berry's Green Pulse theory and should be tested more rigorously given the apparent disagreement over this issue between geologists and biologists.

**Other species:** One Green turtle was found dead on southern flats (64 cm carapace presumed male from indented lower shell), 26 Jackals one with very bad mange (skin showing) at the Eagle wreck, European swallows were foraging over the mudflats and roosting on them. Brown Hyena were found tracks and 10 000 plus seals were hauled out on the western beach of the south. mudflats. Adult and juvenile Pale Chanting Goshawks were present. Pellets from a large falcon at a post at block No. 2 was full of feathers.

My thanks goes to Rod Braby and Liz Komen for their expert assistance and Gunther Koch for the loan of his rubber duck.

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### Weekend on Farm Uitsig

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During the long weekend in August 2001 a group of members went for a visit on Farm Uitsig of Mr. and Mrs. Diekmann. On arrival we were greeted by a White bellied Sunbird in the garden in citrus trees. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne were there already and showed us to the campsite. Between the bushes we found a site to erect our camp. Mr. Diekman had a water trailer on site and a make shift shower. Later during the day Mr. and Mrs. Gudde and Mr. and Mrs. Friederich arrived to join us during the weekend.

During the afternoon a short trip on the farm was undertaken. At a dam we made halt to train us in swift identification as many birds of 4 species were around. The surrounding area was very dry and birding was very slim. We witnessed two Pale Chanting Goshawks who had just killed a Red-billed Francolin and were starting to feed on it

During the evening Mr. and Mrs. Diekmann invited us for an extensive braai which was very much appreciated. A number of matters were discussed especially the reintroduction of Cape Vultures into the area, as Mrs. Diekmann has a special interest in vultures and the evening carried on till late.

The next day an extensive farm drive was done to do some birding which proved to be very difficult due to the dryness of the area. On our way back we came across a Kudu bull carcass on which more or less 60 vultures were feeding on. They were mainly White-backed Vultures with a few Lappet-faced Vultures also present. This was a spectacular experience to observe this happen so close. Later in the afternoon we climbed on a mountain from where a number of kudus and large flocks of guinea fowls could be observed.

Monday was time to leave again and everybody was busy to pack up. Altogether we observed 53 species of birds.

A big thank you goes to Mr. and Mrs. Diekmann for a lovely weekend. We will be back.

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### Avis Dam Windhoek

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Informal walks at Avis Dam were introduced in September 2001, with a walk organized each month. We meet at the main (guarded) car park at the end of Avis Street at 0715 on a Sunday. They are organized at short notice, members in-