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## Editorial

I am writing this while sitting on my stoep and watching 6 of the 10 endemic Namibian birds flying past or hunting for food amongst the mushara bushes, some of which still have green leaves left. The dry season in Namibia is so pronounced that it is surprising that more of the local birds do not leave for the greener places in Africa. I recently headed east to watch the solar eclipse and kept going east until I hit the Malawi-Mozambique border. If you want to know where all the Paradise Flycatchers migrate to, just visit the rift valley on the shores of Lake Malawi and they will be one of the commoner birds. There is a cold dry season in Malawi but it can rain any month of the year so the bush retains much of its greenery. Surrounded by highlands on most sides, the lake has numerous rivers into it which also provide for evergreen vegetation.

Malawi is a rather small country so it has no endemic species but does have several endemic races which occur on isolated mountains. I was interested in seeing the Brown-breasted Barbet but the dry season was not the time to look for this bird in Liwonde National Park. One fortunate thing Namibia has in its favour is its small human population and thus slow rate of deforestation. I tried to look for the White-winged Apalis in Thyolo forest reserve but failed to find the bird. I doubt that the bird will be there when I next return as the forest was just a remnant and was in the process of being totally cleared during my visit. However, other areas like Mount Mulanje were excellent and birding there was very good. I had forgotten how difficult birding is in montane forest compared to our open dry scrub vegetation. If you cannot recognize bird calls then you will see very few species. The forest is full of skulkers who call from a few meters away, flit around in the dense undergrowth and defy all attempts to bring them out for a view. Just as your patience is wearing thin, they fly across the trail and disappear forever.

The solar eclipse was worth the 2000 km drive and since there will be another one in Namibia on 4 December 2002 I strongly encourage everyone to try and see it. Kate Sharpe and I are willing to lead a bird club outing to Katima Mulilo next year for a combined bird watching and solar eclipse event. That part of the Caprivi is safe to visit and offers many species not seen in the rest of the country. Stay tuned to the Bird Call for specifics on the trip.

## Sandwich Harbour Report - April 2001

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A visit was made to Sandwich Harbour 29 April-2 May, 2001 to count wetland birds. We were joined by Pete Leonard and Kate Knox from Zambia, here on a whirl-wind birding tour, and Mark Boorman. The weather was relatively kind with no sandstorms or howling southwesters. The Leonards quickly adapted to sand driving and even appreciated the large pond off to the west rich with seabirds and fur seals.

The results of bird and species richness for each wetland are as follows:

Western Sandspit (and the 3 islands):	19 species,	6 450 birds
Southern Mudflats:	15 species,	24 932 birds
Northern Wetlands:	28 species,	886 birds
Lagoon-side wetlands:	27 species,	4 723 birds
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>45 species,</b>	<b>36 991 birds</b>

This very typical total for an early winter count, was comprised of 8224 Greater Flamingo (of which only 199 were young of the year, presumably from Sua Pan in Botswana, since there was no breeding in Etosha this year), a very small number of Lesser Flamingos (65), and good numbers of "over-wintering" Curlew Sandpipers (10 490). As usual a few Little Stints (628) were around. There were relatively low numbers of Chestnut banded Plovers (1225) and White-fronted Plovers (1331). These are expected to increase in the next count. Red Knots were common (849). The Cape Cormorant populations which are now breeding on the islands, were very low at 2360 birds. There were no rarities recorded except the fairly regular Eurasian Oystercatcher (the white sheep in a flock of Blacks!).

No Herons were seen breeding but they were standing on their nests at the northern lagoon.

No Brown Hyaenas were seen, Black-backed Jackals were plentiful, Cape Fur Seals were still present on the coast and the water bodies near the *Eagle* wreck are still dry. According to H. H. Berry there is supposed to be a "green pulse" of vegetation if the water flow in the Kuiseb River was high during the previous rains. The rainy season of 2000-2001 produced high water in the Kuiseb but no "green pulse" has been seen yet. No dolphins were seen.

It is encouraging to see light aircraft beginning to fly out to sea now after a long "war" to stop the pilots from flying over these wetlands and disturbing the flamingos.

Thanks to Pete, Kate and Mark for their valuable assistance in counting this ever-changing wetland.

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## Sandwich Harbour Report - July 2001

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A visit was made to Sandwich Harbour July 23-27, 2001 to count birds and attempt to catch flamingos with foot nooses as I tried at Sua Pan in Botswana. East wind weather hampered some counts but concentrated the birds elsewhere. Mammals were also recorded and ringed oystercatchers were intensively sampled by Antje Leseberg and Marius Wheeler from University of Cape Town, South Africa. Rod Braby supplied a rubber duck to gain access to the three islands and I surveyed the area with a Garmin II global position system (GPS). Results as follows:

Western Sandspit (and the 3 islands):	13 species,	41 087 birds
Southern Mudflats:	18 species,	24 582 birds
Northern Wetlands:	21 species,	326 birds
Lagoon-side wetlands:	24 species,	1 713 birds
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>41 species,</b>	<b>67 685 birds</b>

The majority of this relatively large total, for a winter count, were Cape Cormorants (40 000) followed by large numbers of Curlew Sandpipers (10 518). White-fronted Plover (3210) and Chestnut Banded Plover (3210), 4260 Greater Flamingos but no Lesser Flamingos which were probably present in Botswana. A Terek Sandpiper, 3 colour-banded African Black Oystercatchers (of a total 21) and one European Oystercatcher were the more interesting birds.

It is interesting to note that the counts from the southern mudflats held almost exactly the same number of birds in April (24,932) as in the July 2001 count (24,582). The main difference was in the total number of birds (36 991- this count, 67 865-July 2001) was the appearance of thousands of Cape Cormorants on the islands.

We caught one Greater flamingo in nooses set at the roost on the end of the small sand spit opposite from where we camp. Birds were settled there for only one of the 4 days trapping, partly because we scared them off when processing the captured bird (the bird itself did not scare the others when it was trying to escape). It was a young Greater Flamingo possibly 3-4 years old and it was marked with a green colour ring with the white letters "NAM" engraved into the ring and a metal ring number 9A15631. Body mass, tarsus, wing and culmen length measurements all were in the range of male body sizes given by Mendelsohn & Brown (1988).

Other interesting sightings were: 3 Heaviside's Dolphins, about 20 Black-backed jackals, Brown hyaena tracks, more than 10 000 Cape fur seals, and some dead fish on the lower flats that were being fed upon by a large number of Kelp Gulls who were occasionally robbed by White Pelicans. Light aircraft seem to be getting

the message to stay flying out to sea. But at least three planes had landed in block No. 1 of the lower mudflats where they taxied and then took off again.

There was still no "green pulse" in vegetation as expected by the Berry hypothesis of a link between good flow in the Kuiseb (rain year 2000-2001) and a flow through to the Sandwich Harbour vegetation - all was wilted and brown due in part to the strong east winds. An attempt to check depth of the well at the Sandwich Hut was not successful due to the dense growth of Phragmites there.

I GPSed the entire outer perimeter of Sandwich Harbour (bar the northern lagoon), the mudflats and the islands. When this survey is downloaded I will compare it with the previous 1994 and 1997 maps to see what changes have taken place in the size and shape of the harbour to see if there have been any effects on the numbers and locations of the birds.

Thanks to Rod Braby and Gunther Koch for supplying a boat to get to the islands and to Rod, Antje Leseberg and Marius Wheeler for assistance in counting.