

CONTENTS

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EDITORIAL	1
KAESTNER, PG. Walvis Bay – birds for everyone	2
JARVIS, A & ROBERTSON, T. Namibian avifaunal database project	12
SHORT NOTES	21
OSBORNE, T & L. Etosha bird notes	23
BOIX-HINZEN, C. Spitskoppe weekend	25
GUDDE, E & E. Ruacana and the Kunene River	29

EDITORIAL

Several people have asked me why I continue to attend Bird Club weekends and outings – "Wouldn't you prefer to go birding on your own?" In answer to this I can quite honestly say, "No".

How you go birding is an entirely personal choice, but I believe that combining both social and independent (single) birding you can get the most out of it. There are almost certainly some birders who are either entirely social birders (never venturing far without being on an organised outing) or entirely single birders (entirely independent and not making use of the social, informational and club contacts available to them).

Why do I continue going out with the Bird Club? – the answer is I enjoy it. For several reasons – probably the most important of which is that I am continually reminded of my own fallability as a so-called "expert" birder. On outings I am often stumped by questions from "beginners" which make me re-evaluate my approach to birding, makes me develop new solutions to tricky groups and generally hones my skills as a birder. At the same time the "beginner" is learning something new and perhaps useful to develop their birding skills.

When you go birding with others you learn their skills too – some people are aces at listening to and identifying birds largely by call, others are visual experts, identifying birds by "jizz", teaching field characters which can only improve skills as a birder. But at the same time you learn from others not to become dependent on them for all your id's and birding experiences. Go out and try to apply some of the learnt skills, study your bird books and develop your own suite of birding tools. But remember, you can only achieve so much on your own – as with almost everything else in life you have to share experiences to grow. This is the value of the Club for me and hopefully for others as well. I appeal to you, the members, to make more use of the Club outings and functions, encourage others (especially kids) to join and to push some personal birding frontiers by learning from others.

Wetland bird counts

Regular counts of selected wetlands have been undertaken since 1991, with some earlier information also available for a few sites e.g. Walvis Bay and Sandwich. Although a lot is already known about the local and international importance of some of Namibia's wetlands, there are many aspects we still don't know enough about. Many of the wetlands in Caprivi are poorly known, for example, and information on the importance of Namibia's wetlands to migratory birds is limited. To date, the wetland counts have recorded over 3.75 million birds, of 154 species of wetland birds. With regular counts over many years it will be possible to identify trends in wetlands use by different groups of birds, and thus identify particularly important wetlands. Some wetlands may qualify as Ramsar sites on the basis of regularly supporting >1% of a species' population. Recognition of the importance of Namibia's wetlands to resident and migratory birds may enhance their perceived conservation value and protection status.

Museum specimen data

Many museums around the world hold bird specimens that were originally collected in Namibia, some dating back to expeditions made in the early 1800s. The database currently contains information on over 23 000 specimens of 571 species, most of which include collection date and locality information, although for some this is simply "Damaraland" or "Kaokoveld". For many species, particularly larks, weavers and finches there are several hundred specimens, with Sabota Lark at the top of the list with over 400 specimens. Comparing historical bird distributions with those of SABAP, for example, could produce an insight into changes over time and factors influencing birds.

SABAP data

Bird atlas data for Namibia are also held in the database, allowing reporting rates, species lists and maps to be obtained easily. For example, anyone requiring a list of species recorded in one of the National Parks, or in one or more quarter-degree squares, will soon be able to extract these data very quickly.

And finally...

If anyone still has completed data sheets for any of these monitoring schemes which have not been sent in, please do send them to the person named on the sheet so they can be incorporated into the database.

Also, if you are willing to participate in any of these monitoring schemes, particularly January and April bird counts at wetlands, please contact Rob Simmons at (061) 263131 or either of us at (061) 249015.



SHORT NOTES

Christopher Hines, Editor

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*

Twelve adult and three first-year birds were recorded at the von Bach water purification works (next to the B1) on 26/6/98 (Chris Hines). Other birds have been reported from Friedenau Dam (J. Bartlett) and a farm dam in the Gobabis district (P. Kleins). The dry season always heralds the large-scale movement of a number of waterbird species of which Sacred Ibis is one. Sacred Ibis are generally absent from the Windhoek-Okahandja area in the summer but are regular visitors in the winter.

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*

Peter Kaestner reports 12 Marabou Storks from the Brakwater area on 20/6/98. Marabou Storks move widely throughout their range in Namibia, but regular movements have not been confirmed. They are commonest in the wet season around the major wetlands systems in the North (e.g. Etosha, Grootfontein, Bushmanland and the river systems), but are often reported well out of this range during the dry season.

Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*

A single bird was seen over Windhoek by Peter Kaestner on 20/6/98. Given

the tiny population of these birds in Namibia (<50 birds?) this is an unusual record.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

The southern African population of Booted Eagle is subject to considerable seasonal movement. In the central highland areas of Namibia (around Windhoek) there is a definite winter influx of birds. A pale phase bird has been seen in the Olympia/Suiderhof area of Windhoek since early June. This bird has been seen catching domestic pigeons over the sports fields in this area. There is a dark phase bird which I (CH) have seen on several occasions in the Avis Dam/Airport road area in the last couple of weeks.

Grey Kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus*

A single bird was reported by Peter Kaestner about 10 km west of Oshikango on 19/6/98. The palm savanna habitats of the central areas of former Owamboland are important for this species in Namibia. Grey Kestrels are also found along the Kunene River from Ruacana westwards to at least Epupa Falls. Several birds were seen during the Bird Club outing to the Ruacana-Swartboois Drift area on the weekend of 21-25/5/98.

African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*

Two birds have taken up residence at Avis Dam in the past few weeks (S. Mallet-Veale). An adult bird is also now present at Friendau Dam to the west of Windhoek. This species is known to move widely during the dry season and has been noted to feed on terrestrial birds (doves, sandgrouse, francolin) when no fish are present.

Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus*

An immature bird was seen on five consecutive evenings at Okapupa Camp on the banks of the Kunene River over the Bird Club outing 21-25/5/98. A single adult bird was seen at Eenhana on 11/5/98 (CH). This bird is undoubtedly under reported in Namibia.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Suzan Mallet-Veale reports that a single individual has been seen at Avis

Dam near Windhoek since early June 1998. This bird was last seen at the dam around 5/7/98. Although a migrant from the Palaearctic, younger birds are known to over winter in southern Africa.

Cape Eagle Owl *Bubo capensis*

Pete Siegfried and Andy Moore report hearing Cape Eagle Owl calling about halfway up the Brandberg on 4/7/98. This bird has long been suspected of occurring in the mountains of Damaraland and the Kaokoveld but is only known from the Orange River, Fish River, the Koichab River valley and the Swakop River in Namibia. This is a considerable range extension and confirms its occurrence north of the Swakop River. It should be looked for throughout the western mountains and river valleys in the West.

Dusky Lark *Pinarocorys nigricans*

Large numbers of Dusky Larks were reported during late May to early June in the northern parts of the country. Peter Kaestner reports seeing several birds near Ruacana on 30/5/98. I found small groups (1-8 individuals) commonly throughout the oshana area of central Owambo between 11/5/98 to 12/6/98. Continuous observation in these northern areas may confirm the suspicion that some birds (small numbers) remain in extreme northern Namibia all year round.



ETOSHA BIRD NOTES

Tim & Laurel Osborne
PO Okaukuejo, via Outjo, Namibia

Swallowtailed Bee-eaters *Merops hirundineus*

Numerous flocks of this bird were seen regularly during March, April and into May 1998. The flocks were loose aggregations of the bird with 30-50 individuals scattered over several hundred metres. Back in the 1970s in

Zambia we never saw this bird in groups larger than 6–10 birds and we do not remember seeing large flocks of the bee-eater in Namibia in 1997. Maclean (1993) mentions that in the non-breeding season it sometimes occurs in small groups. Herremans and Barnes (1997) used atlas records to show a movement from central Namibia and Botswana to moister woodlands in northern Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. The large numbers I saw may have been influenced by the drought conditions.

Greyheaded Sparrow *Passer diffusus*

A flock of 150 birds was seen at Gobaub waterhole on 11 May 1998. Maclean (1993) notes that in western southern Africa during the non-breeding season it is gregarious with flocks of 50–60 birds but rarely up to 500.

Short-toed Rock Thrush *Monticola brevipes*

In late May and June 1998 birds were seen in the Okaukuejo area and on the plains to the north-west. Birds were also seen in the same areas in 1997 at the onset of the cold season but it took a year before we were aware that birds were absent at other times. There is no rock thrush habitat closer than 30 km from the plains. We mistnetted and ringed an adult male on a farm in Outjo District and noticed that its head did not look like the illustrations in either Maclean (1993) or Newman (1996). The bird had a grey head but did not have the clear white or pale eyebrow and the crown was grey like the sides of the head. The bird did have a small white malar stripe which none of the books illustrate nor mention. There were two other adult males near the farm buildings. One had an engorged tick over the left eye which made it distinctive. From 20 m with 10x binoculars, it had the diagnostic features (white eyebrow, whitish cap) of the Short-toed Rock Thrush. The other bird which was not ringed was very similar to the bird we had handled and did not have the white eyebrow.

Driving from Okaukuejo to Outjo on 17 June we counted 20 rock thrushes perched on the telephone poles. On 26 June at Okaukuejo I (Tim) was discussing the strange rock thrush I had seen with Chris Hines and a similarly marked male flew up on a fence 20 m from us. It had an all grey

head like the Cape Rock Thrush, without the white eyebrow but with a faint white malar stripe.

I (Tim) suspect that in addition to resident rock thrushes undergoing local movements during the cold season from rocky mountains areas to the lower lands (Harrison 1997), that perhaps another subspecies migrates to the area.

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SPITSKOPPE WEEKEND

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The Independence Day weekend (21 March) saw several groups of keen birders descending on the Spitzkoppe near Uskakos. The area had had a little rain as had quite a wide belt of the country between Windhoek and Karibib. Raptors were particularly good on the way down and we saw several Tawny Eagles, Steppe Buzzards, Lanner Falcon and Rock Kestrels on telephone poles along the way.

Past Usakos Carole caught a glimpse of a pair of plain buffy coursers (Temminck's or Burchell's) next to the road. We stopped to get a better view and our prediction of Temminck's was confirmed by the the lack of white trailing edge in the secondaries in the flying birds. As soon as we got