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Editorial

I don't believe that anyone can deny that the Namibia Bird Club is moving forward. The chairperson's report published in this issue outlines some of the activities of the Namibia Bird Club including outings, wetland counts and our well attended Birding Big Day as well as the donations given to various bird rehabilitation centres and projects.

Your committee has managed to keep the subscriptions at their current levels for several years now. In this day and age where the price of everything is constantly increasing we would like to continue to maintain them at the current levels but this will depend on whether or not we can increase our membership base. If we can attract more members we will not need to increase the subscriptions. If you have enjoyed our outings and enjoyed reading Lanioturdus spread the word, bring your friends along and get them to join as well. It could just save you some money!

Mark Paxton's article in this issue certainly is a thought provoking one. Has he found species way off their recorded range? Or perhaps undescribed subspecies? Or even hybridized birds? Does the breastband of Shelley's/Marico sunbird change colour with age? It seems that there is plenty of scope for an ornithologist in his region.

In this issue we also have a trip report by Helga Detering written in German. Helga has however included the English common names of all species mentioned in the text in brackets

Table 2: Numbers of birds and species counted for each group of wetland birds.

Group	Birds	Species
<i>Grebes</i>	9698	3
<i>Pelicans</i>	609	1
<i>Cormorants and Darter</i>	31019	6
<i>Herons and Egrets</i>	725	11
<i>Storks</i>	95	4
<i>Ibises and Spoonbill</i>	75	3
<i>Hamerkop</i>	4	1
<i>Flamingos</i>	32115	2
<i>Cranes</i>	0	0
<i>Geese and Ducks</i>	2702	12
<i>Rails, Gallinules and Coot</i>	340	4
<i>Jacanas</i>	6	1
<i>Waders and Shorebirds</i>	11667	26
<i>Gulls, Terns and Skimmer</i>	10104	9
<i>Birds of Prey</i>	8	3
<i>Additional Species</i>	11	2

Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 1: Introduction and Overview

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Data on wetland bird numbers has been collected in Namibia on an *ad hoc* basis since the early 1960's. Since 1991 regular counts have been conducted at several sites and thus a considerable amount of data has accumulated. This article and the ones to follow is a summary of the available data and an attempt to derive population trends for selected wetland bird populations.

To date (July 2009), data from 1703 counts at 172 places has been entered into a database. A total of 177 different species of waterbird have been counted at these sites. Blacksmith Lapwing is the species most commonly recorded, having been seen in 915 counts (Table 1). In terms of numbers counted, Common Tern are just ahead of Cape Cormorant (Table 2) however this is not a true

reflection because the latter were not always counted.

Data from 1991 to 2008 was used in the trend analysis and the highest number seen per site in each respective year was taken (to account for migratory species). Only sites with nine or more annual counts and where a species was recorded three times or more were used. Using this approach, population trends for 88 species could be derived. Population trends were generated using the computer programme TRIM (Trends and Indices for Monitoring data). TRIM is a programme for the analysis of time series of counts with missing observations, as is the case with many of the counts considered here. The programme can be used to estimate indices and trends and to assess the effects of covariates on these indices and trends (see Pannekoek and van Strien 2005 for an explanation of the theory and methods). In this study no covariates were introduced i.e. the trends are based purely on presence/absence data.

For the majority of the species (n=60) the programme gives the trend as "Uncertain" and five populations are considered "Stable" (Table 3). Twenty populations are increasing, of which three, Common Moorhen, African Jacana and White-fronted Plover, are "strongly increasing". Reed Cormorant and Cattle Egret are "moderately declining" whilst Little Stint are "steeply declining", the reasons for this will be investigated in the various species accounts to follow. When one compares the trends from this study with trends given by Wetlands International (2006) there are only six species for which the trend is given as increasing by both (Table 4). A further nine species are listed as increasing by Wetlands International where the trend was given as uncertain by this study. One species, Cattle Egret, is increasing according to Wetlands International but shows a declining trend in this study. It must be borne in mind though that Wetlands International deals with populations at the sub-regional level, in this case southern Africa, and hence local trends may not be reflected. Wetlands International

lists eight species as declining for which this study came up with an uncertain trend.

The value of long-term monitoring of waterbirds at selected sites has been demonstrated by this study. Species of conservation concern can be identified using the trends generated and the reasons for e.g. declining trends must be identified and corrective measures taken where possible. Similarly, species that show an increase should be studied to determine the reasons why this is so and then perhaps actions can be undertaken to bolster currently declining species. The biggest challenge, however, is posted by the species whose trend is uncertain. Admittedly, many of them are solitary or secretive species that are not easy to count but quite a few occur in large enough numbers that would make derivation of trends technically possible. The challenge thus is to find out why these species do not show a trend and what can be done to rectify this.

References:

Pannekoek, J. and A. van Strien 2005. *TRIM 3 Manual*. Statistics Netherlands, Voorburg, The Netherlands. 58p.

Wetlands International 2006. *Waterbird Population Estimates – Fourth Edition*. S. Delany and D. Scott (Eds.), Wetlands International, Wageningen, The Netherlands

Species	Counts
Blacksmith Lapwing	915
Grey Heron	848
Kelp Gull	760
Three-banded Plover	715
Cape Teal	708
Hartlaub’s Gull	703
Little Grebe	698
Red-knobbed Coot	683
Egyptian Goose	670
Little Egret	649

Table1: Top ten birds seen during counts.

Species	Total
Common Tern	1697256
Cape Cormorant	1682756
Curlew Sandpiper	1507095
Greater Flamingo	1468297
Lesser Flamingo	932274
Sanderling	501209
unidentified terns	334426
Little Stint	325593
Chestnut-banded Plover	284905
unidentified waders	255662

Table 2: Top ten species in terms of numbers counted.

Group	Strong Increase	Moderate Increase	Stable	Moderate Decline	Steep Decline	Uncertain
Grebes		2				1
Pelicans			1			
Cormorants and Darter		1		1		1
Herons and Egrets		2	2	1		8
Storks						4
Ibises and Spoonbill		1				2
Hamerkop						1
Flamingos		1				1
Cranes						1
Geese and Ducks		2				10
Rails, Gallinules and Coot	1	1				3
Jacanas	1					
Waders/Shorebirds	1	5	1		1	18
Gulls and Terns		2	1			8
Birds of Prey						2
Total	3	17	5	2	1	60

Table 3: Trends of populations within the various groups² of waterbirds.

² Groupings follow the Wetlands International African Waterbird Census data sheet.

		WI Trend			
		<i>Inc</i>	<i>Sta</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Unc</i>
Trend this study	<i>Inc</i>	6	9	0	5
	<i>Sta</i>	1	2	0	2
	<i>Dec</i>	1	1	0	1
	<i>Unc</i>	9	22	8	20

Table 4: Population trends from this study compared to Wetlands International trends.

Inc=increasing; Sta=stable; Dec=decreasing; Unc=uncertain

Contentious, Thought Provoking Observations-Shamvura Camp and Kavango Region

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This region of Namibia is by its very nature and location not a well-visited part of the country, being somewhat “out on a limb” both figuratively and literally speaking. As a result most visitors, and birders, have in the past regarded this area more as a “through- route” to other more well-known, and better advertised destinations, rather than a destination in itself. As a consequence to this lack of recognition, particularly by the birding fraternity, it is relatively “under-birded”. The advantage of this, and the fact that we border on Angola and its uncharted wilderness, is that there could be several surprises in store for the birding world. We may have new species previously only recorded from Angola overlapping their distribution into Namibia, or hybridisation between similar species, or even (we live in perpetual hope) entirely new species waiting to be discovered.

Shelley’s Sunbird has been recorded in this region since October 2006, when I noticed a small group of four (2 adult males, 1 sub-adult male and 1 female) interacting in an *Albizia anthelmintica*, in the premises of a make-shift garage at Divundu, some 80 km from Shamvura Camp. This tree species is the

first to flower after the dry season and then, being the only source of nectar, is a veritable magnet for many insects and birds for a short period before the rest of the plant kingdom catches up. I was having a tyre repaired and, as is always the case here, nobody was in too much of a hurry, so I had a lot of time to observe these birds. In the morning sun the **bright red** band (one of the distinguishing characteristics) on the chests of all three males was unmistakable. I felt sure they could only be Shelley’s Sunbird. Afterwards I went through all the available literature to confirm that the most reliable distinguishing factor was the **bright red chest-band** and the major difference from Marico Sunbird. All the birds were vocalising and I took note of the calls. I did not have my bird call equipment with me at the time, so could not confirm until later. About two weeks later I told Christian Boix of the sighting as he was going the same way and had seen Shelley’s Sunbird before. He also played the birdcalls recording to me which I recognised as that of the birds I had seen. He later confirmed he had seen only one male at that location and that it was a Shelley’s Sunbird. During that season I saw another adult male here at Shamvura Camp and by now was quite sure we had more of these birds than we had originally thought and which had obviously been previously overlooked in this somewhat “under-birded” region.

All photographs in this article by Mark Paxton



Shelley’s Sunbird – male – intermediate plumage