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RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

ANSWERS TO THE BIRD QUIZ

Editorial

In a past editorial (Lanioturdus 42-4) I mentioned the changing distributions of certain species. One species which seems to be a lot more common around Windhoek these days is the pin-tailed whydah. When I first moved to Windhoek some 28 years ago this was a species which one saw perhaps twice in five years. Now it is regularly seen at Avis Dam and we are getting more and more reports of these birds from suburban gardens all around Windhoek. Its host species, the common waxbill, is not a terribly common species around Windhoek and I certainly have not noticed any great increase in the numbers of these birds. However, both Roberts VII and Trevor Carnaby (Beat about the Bush *Birds* – Jacana Media 2008), indicate that it is suspected that the red-billed firefinch may be a secondary host although this is not proven. Come on you citizen scientists out there – this is a chance to make a name for yourself in the world of ornithology. We have a burgeoning population of red-billed firefinches in and around Windhoek and if they are indeed secondary hosts to pin-tailed whydahs this might just be the time and place to prove it.

My “Sighting” of the Year

Sonja Bartlewski
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One evening Michael and I were peacefully sitting on our sofa when we realised that a sound we were hearing was not coming from the TV. It sounded like a little puppy yapping outside. We rushed out when we realised that this sound was coming from above us and puppies really do not fly....! After discussing whether to switch the lights on or off, with “pssst” and “aua” we stumbled through our garden in darkness, sure of the fact that there was an owl or owlet on the other side of the house. When we arrived there the sound seemed again to be on the other side of the yard. Or was the owl maybe sitting on the roof? We played this game twice only to realise that this bird was making fools of us. Hoping that no neighbour was watching because he would definitely have called the people with the white jackets, we finally returned inside without having found the bird to check my iPAQ (those practical little computers upon which you can load SASOL or ROBERTS electronic bird book). We clicked through all the sounds of the owls and owlets but none fitted. So we ended up at the nightjars and finally it turned out to be a freckled nightjar. Description in SASOL: “Locally common resident on rocky outcrops and hilly terrain; also found roosting on buildings in towns and cities. Call: A yapping double-noted ‘kow-kow!’” This was definitely our sighting, sorry hearing, of the year.

As I clicked through the sounds on my mini computer, I realised that I had heard nightjars before at a completely different location, in connection with “*Passer aluminicus*” (aeroplane). After heartbreaking goodbyes to visitors from overseas at the international airport (as we have lots of family in Germany this happens fairly often) we do not drive directly back to Windhoek but turn left onto the tar road in the direction of Gobabis. After some two kilometres we stop next to the road where one can see a long part of the runway. It is always a great experience to watch these huge jumbo jets taking off into the African

night. The sounds out there are strange, but after listening to all the nightjar calls on my iPAQ, I realised that what we had been hearing was not frogs, geckos or crickets but rufous-cheeked nightjars.

The moral of this story: It is not always necessary to see a bird. It can also be very exciting to just hear a bird in the gloom or darkness.

Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 2: Grebes and Pelicans

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Larger scale replications of the graphs in this article are attached to the end of this edition

The following is a summary of waterbird count data for selected species in Namibia, covering the period 1977 to December 2008. For each species the Red Data Book (RDB) status, both global and Namibian, is given, the population trend as per Wetlands International, the number of times the species was counted, the number of times it has passed the 1% population criterion, the maximum count and the sites where it has passed the 1% population criterion. The local trend is calculated using the computer programme TRIM (see an earlier publication for the selection criteria and methods) (*Lanioturdus 43-2 – Ed*). Population trends are graphically presented as indices relative to a base year (in this case 1991) and thus all have a value of 1 for 1991. Thus an index value of 2 indicates a doubling of the population relative to 1991 and an index of 0.5 would mean half of the 1991 figure. A slope value of 1 would indicate a perfectly stable population, whereas any value above 1 means a positive trend and a value of less than 1 a negative trend.

2.1 Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)¹

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern
 Namibia RDB Status: ?
 WI Trend: Unknown



Photo: Eckart Demasius

The count data confirms this bird's preference for fresh water with the highest numbers being counted at rain-fed inland water bodies such as Lake Oponono and Fischer's Pan. Interestingly, numbers are very low at the large man-made impoundments perhaps an indication that these are less productive systems. Along the coast, Sandwich Harbour supports small but consistent numbers and the other coastal sites sporadically support a few birds.

No of times counted: 517
 No of times past 1% population (=10000): 0
 Maximum count: 389 at Lake Oponono on 26 July 2007

Past 1% population at: Nowhere

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 19
 Number of observed counts: 257
 Number of missing counts: 85
 Total number of counts: 342

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Avis Dam	799	13.3
Fischer's Pan	1146	19.0
Lake Oponono	1580	26.2

¹ Names follow Hockey, P.A.R., Dean, W.R.J. and Ryan, P.G. (eds) 2005. *Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa, VIIIth Edition*. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, South Africa.

Overall slope: Moderate increase ($p < 0.05$)
 1.0469 ± 0.0236

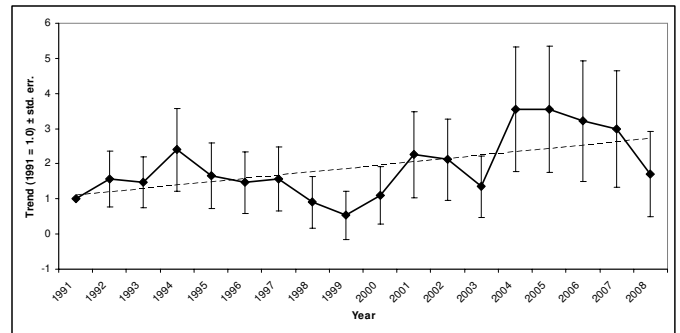


Figure 1: Trend of Little Grebe population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

2.2 Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern
 Namibia RDB Status: Endangered
 WI Trend: Increasing



Photo: Eckart Demasius

From the count data it seems that this bird is only regularly seen at the coast with only five observations from inland Namibia. This bird has disappeared from the Walvis Bay sewage ponds probably because the ponds were re-located in 2006. The birds are regularly recorded at Sandwich Harbour although the high number counted in 1977 has never been repeated.

No of times counted: 96
 No of times past 1% population (=100): 0
 Maximum count: 50 at Sandwich Harbour on 7 January 1977
 Past 1% population at: Nowhere

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 4
 Number of observed counts: 55
 Number of missing counts: 17
 Total number of counts: 72

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Mile 4 Saltworks	80	35.2
Sandwich Harbour	90	39.6
Walvis Bay	24	10.6
Walvis Sewage	33	14.5

Overall slope: Uncertain
 0.9792 ±0.0793

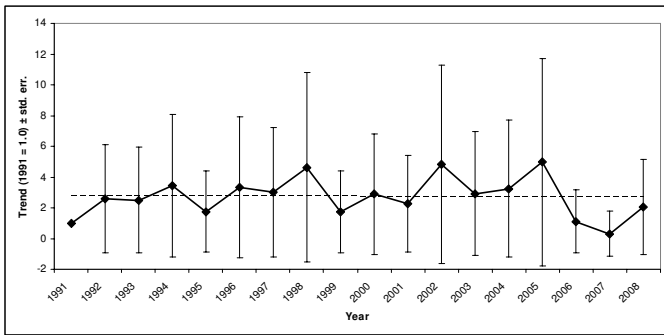


Figure 2: Trend of Great Crested Grebe population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

2.3 Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern
 Namibia RDB Status: Near threatened
 WI Trend: Increasing



Photo: Eckart Demasius

High numbers of these birds are regularly counted at the coast. In fact, the count of 23853 birds at Walvis Bay in 2008 is

considerably higher than the total population estimate for this species and perhaps a re-assessment of its status needs to be done. The fact that in about a third of the counts the numbers have passed the 1% population mark demonstrates that the sites counted are important for the survival and conservation of the species.

No of times counted: 265
 No of times past 1% population (=150): 90
 Maximum count: 23853 at Walvis Bay on 19 July 2008

Past 1% population at: Cape Cross (16)², Ekuma River (1), Fischer’s Pan (1), Lüderitz Peninsula (1), Mile 4 Saltworks (18), Sandwich Harbour (4), Tsumkwe Pans (3), Walvis Bay (39)

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 11
 Number of observed counts: 155
 Number of missing counts: 43
 Total number of counts: 198

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Walvis Bay	107223	79.6

Overall slope: Moderate increase (p<0.01)
 1.0739 ±0.0145

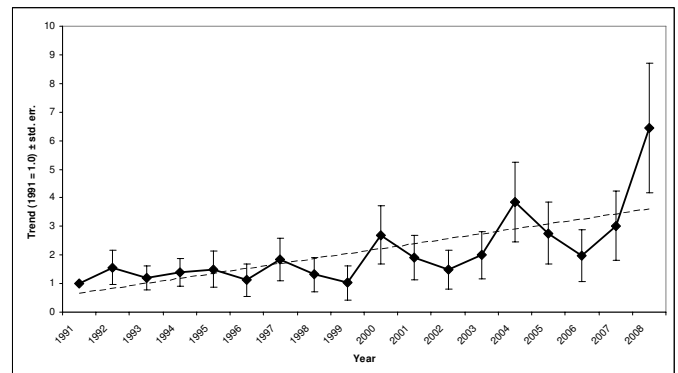


Figure 3: Trend of Black-necked Grebe population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

² Numbers in brackets denote the number of times the 1% population mark has been passed.

2.4 Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern

Namibia RDB Status: Vulnerable

WI Trend: Increasing



Photo: Eckart Demasius

The importance of Hardap Dam and Walvis Bay as breeding localities for this species is confirmed by the number of times the 1% population mark has been passed at these two places. Although this bird is regularly recorded at most sites, consistently high counts are only reported from three sites.

No of times counted: 421

No of times past 1% population (=300): 59

Maximum count: 2953 at Ekuma River on 12 June 1995

Past 1% population at: Ekuma River (1), Hardap Dam (13), Lake Oponono (2), Sandwich Harbour (12), Swakoppoort Dam (6), Walvis Bay (22)

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 18

Number of observed counts: 233

Number of missing counts: 91

Total number of counts: 324

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Hardap Dam	8201	25.5
Sandwich Harbour	6304	19.6
Swakoppoort Dam	3350	10.4
Walvis Bay	7376	22.9

Overall slope: Stable

1.0019 ±0.0194

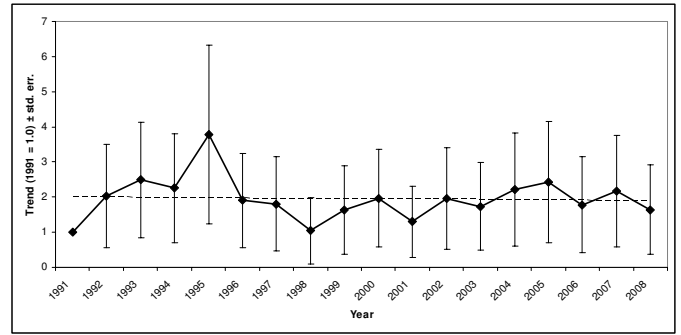


Figure 4: Trend of Great White Pelican population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

References:

IUCN 2009. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2009.1 www.iucnredlist.org

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

Simmons, R.E. and Brown, C.J. In press. *Birds to watch in Namibia: red, rare and endemic species*. Ministry of Environment and Tourism and Namibia Nature Foundation, Windhoek.

Breeding Success of Flamigos on the Etosha Pan, Namibia, for 2006, 2008 and 2009.

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Abstract

For the rainy seasons of 2005/06, 2007/08 and 2008/09 Namibia received normal to above average rainfall in the north resulting in much run-off water flowing into the Etosha pan. In the 2007/08 and 2008/09 seasons there was exceptionally high rainfall in the highlands of Southern Angola resulting in extensive flooding of the north-central region of Namibia. This water eventually ended up in the Etosha Pan filling it with floodwater to a level last seen in 1976 (H.H. Berry pers.

Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 2: Grebes and Pelicans

2.1 Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)⁸

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern. Namibia RDB Status: ?. WI Trend: Unknown

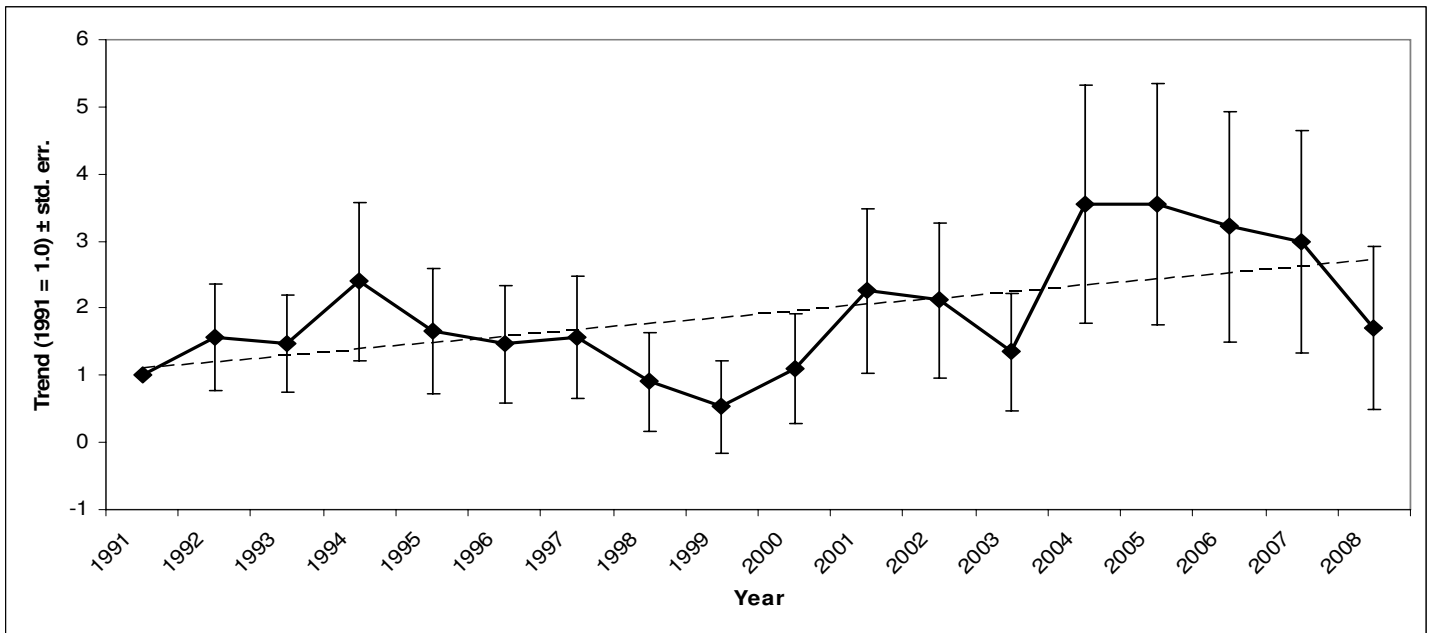


Figure 1: Trend of Little Grebe population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

2.2 Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern. Namibia RDB Status: Endangered. WI Trend: Increasing

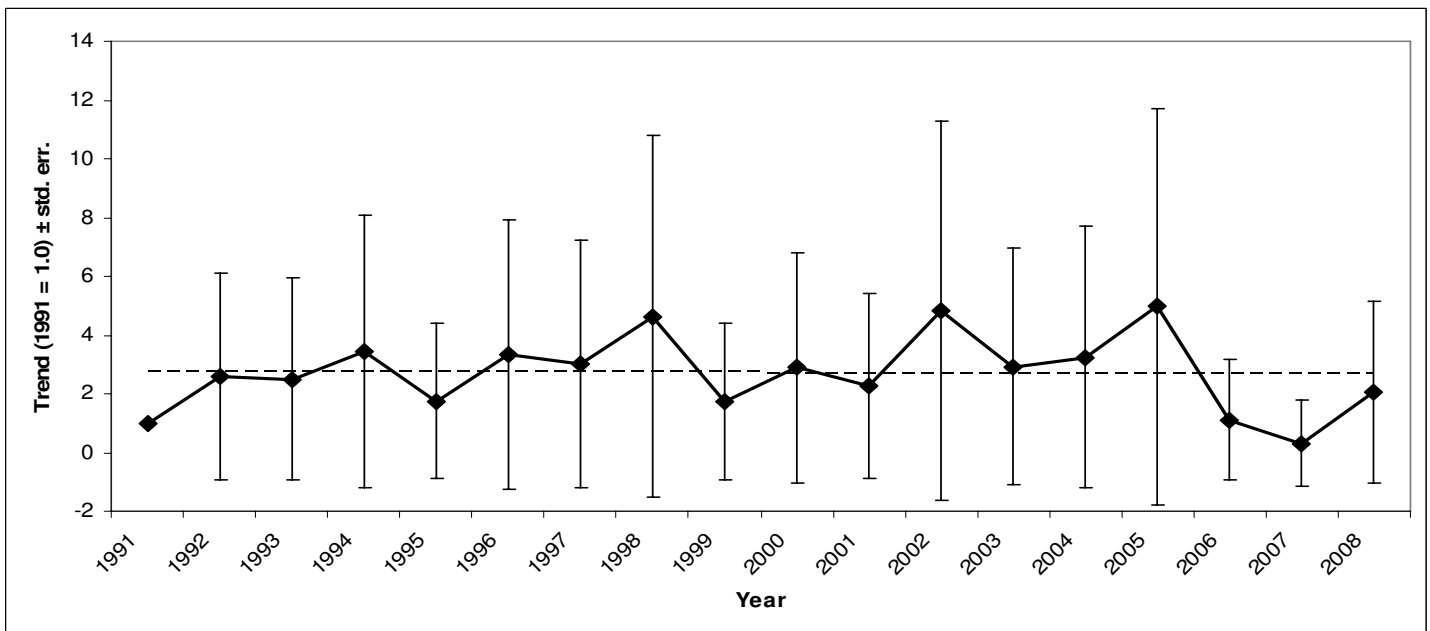


Figure 2: Trend of Great Crested Grebe population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

⁸ Names follow Hockey, P.A.R., Dean, W.R.J. and Ryan, P.G. (eds) 2005. *Roberts – Birds of Southern Africa, VIIIth Edition*. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, South Africa.

2.3 Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern. Namibia RDB Status: Near threatened. WI Trend: Increasing

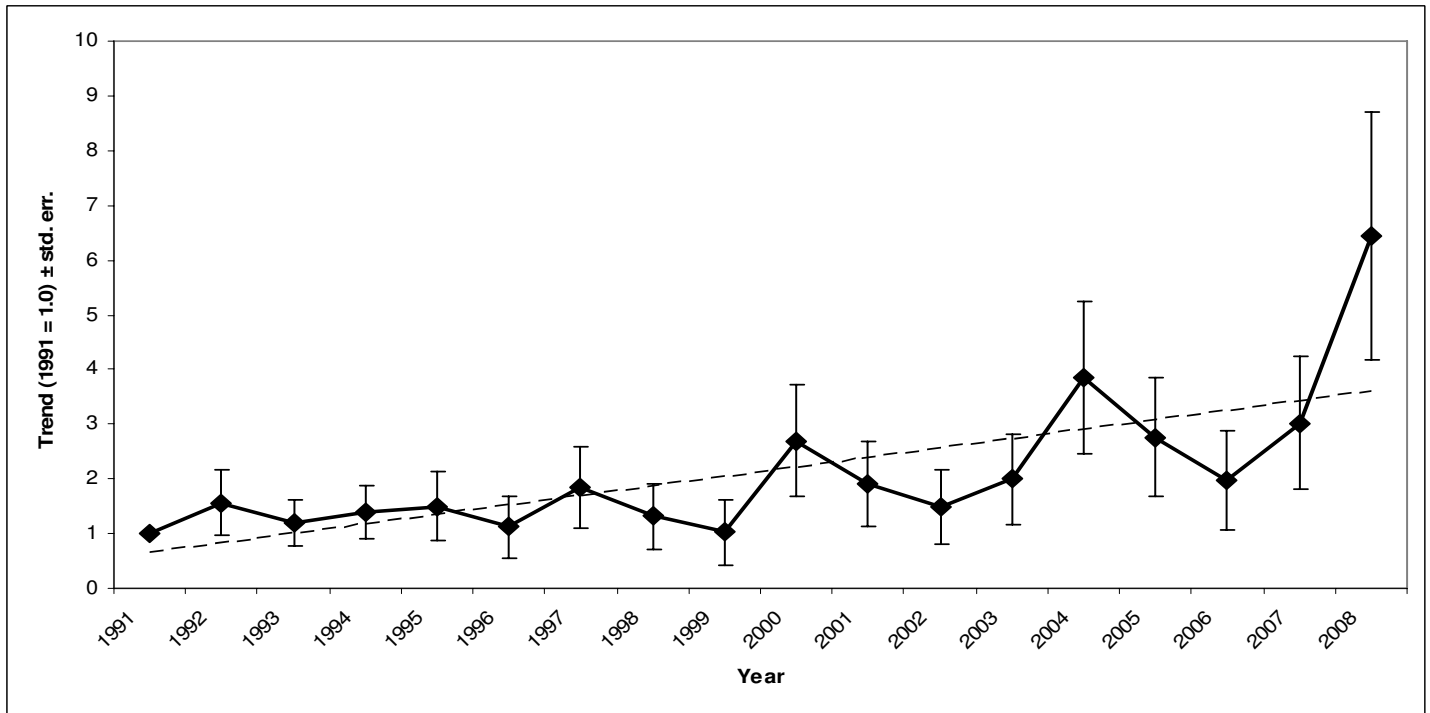


Figure 3: Trend of Black-necked Grebe population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

2.4 Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern. Namibia RDB Status: Vulnerable. WI Trend: Increasing

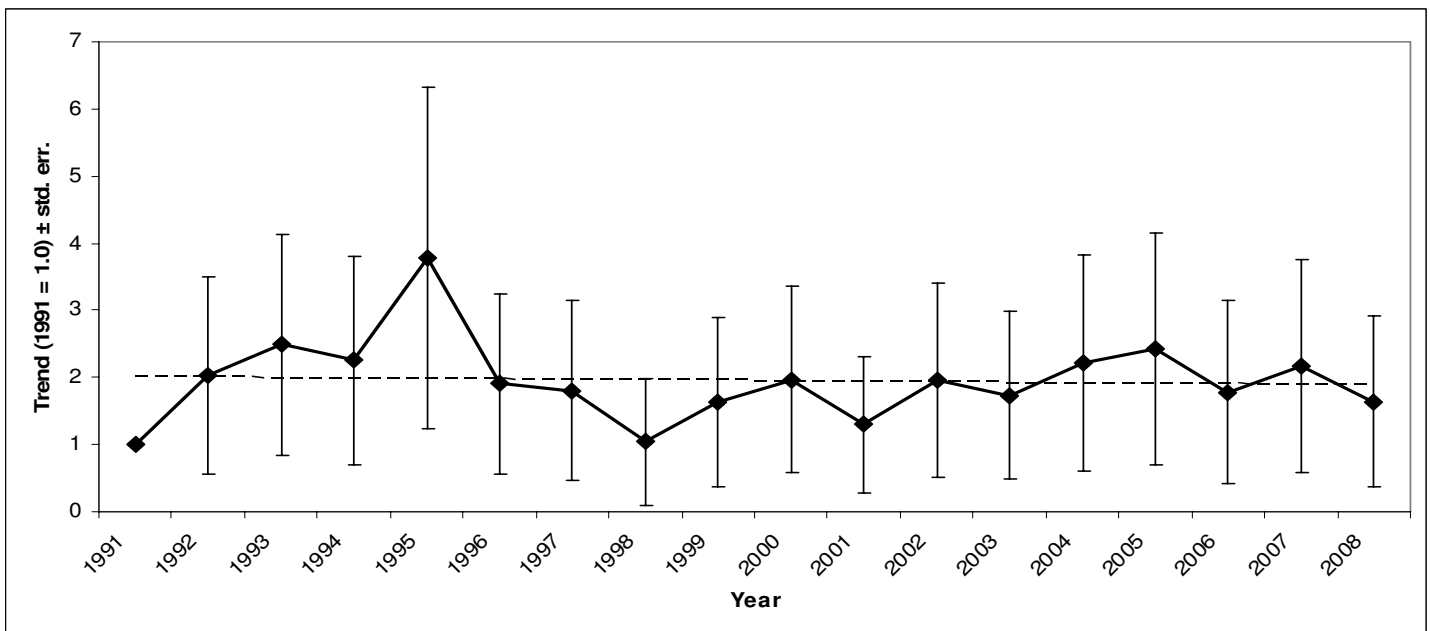


Figure 4: Trend of Great White Pelican population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia 2: Perennial Rivers and Dams

2.1 Mahango Game Reserve

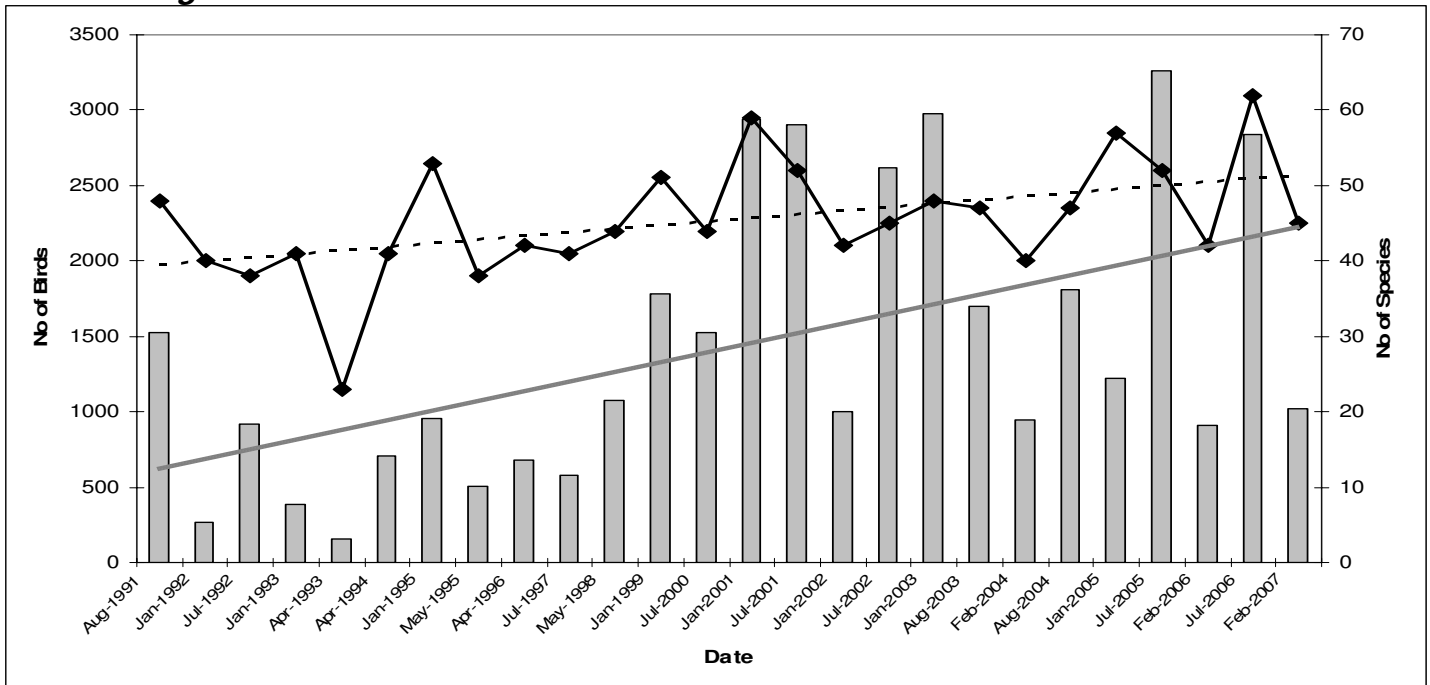


Figure 1: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Mahango Game Reserve and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.2 Shamvura, Okavango River

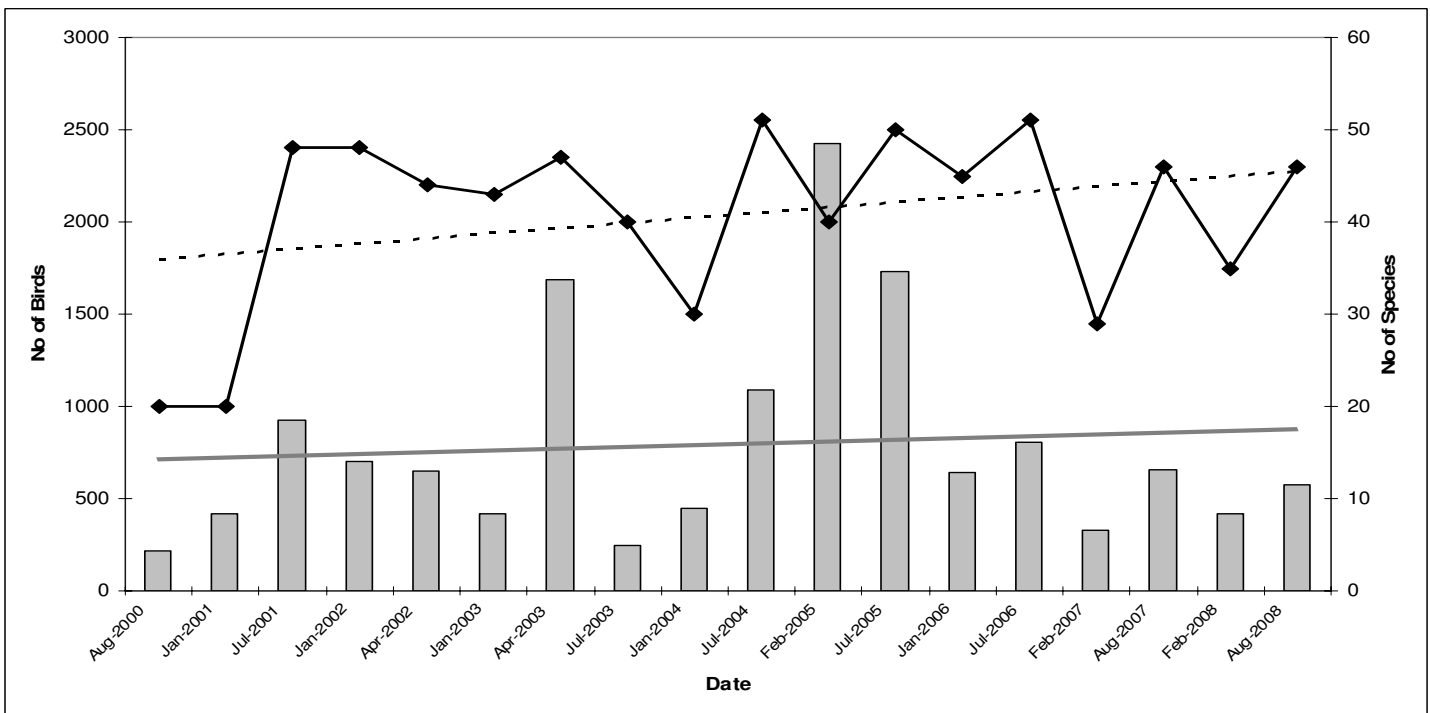


Figure 2: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Shamvura and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.3 Avis Dam

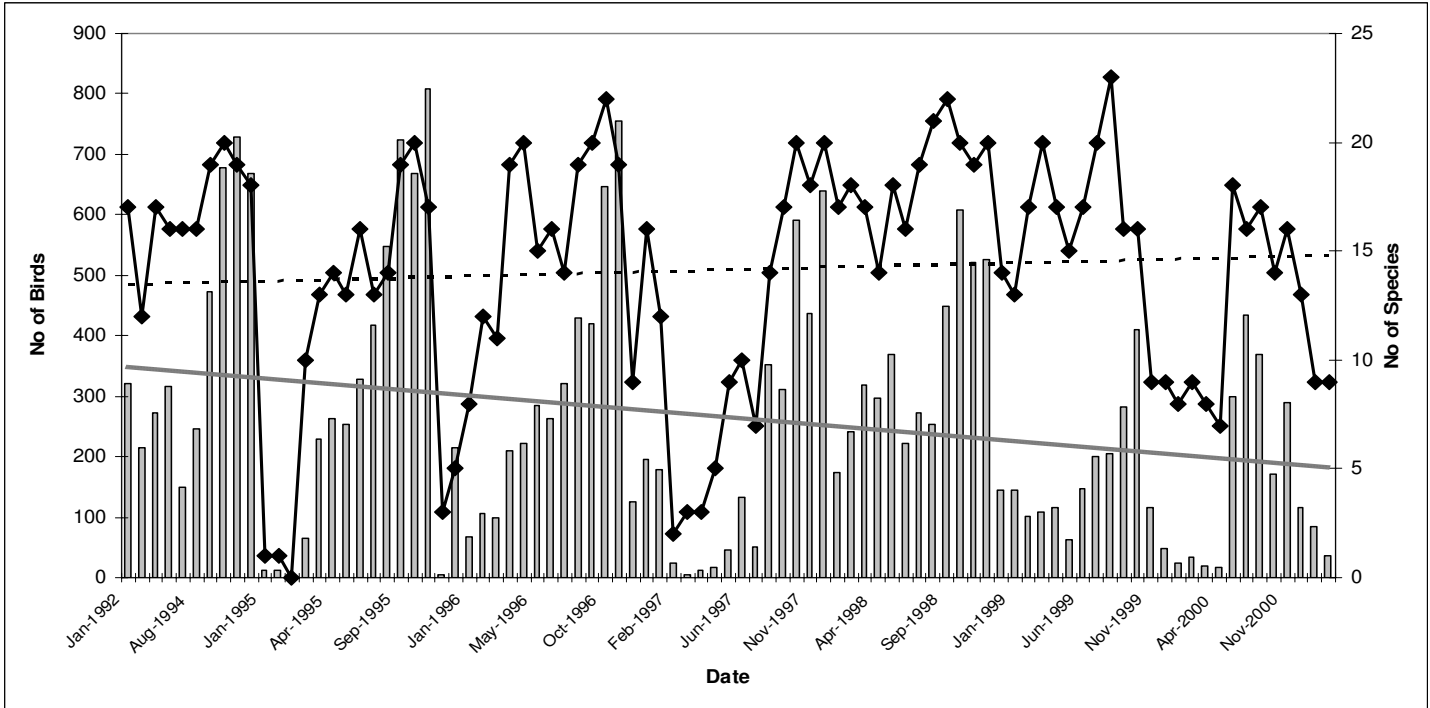


Figure 3: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Avis Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.4 Friedenau Dam

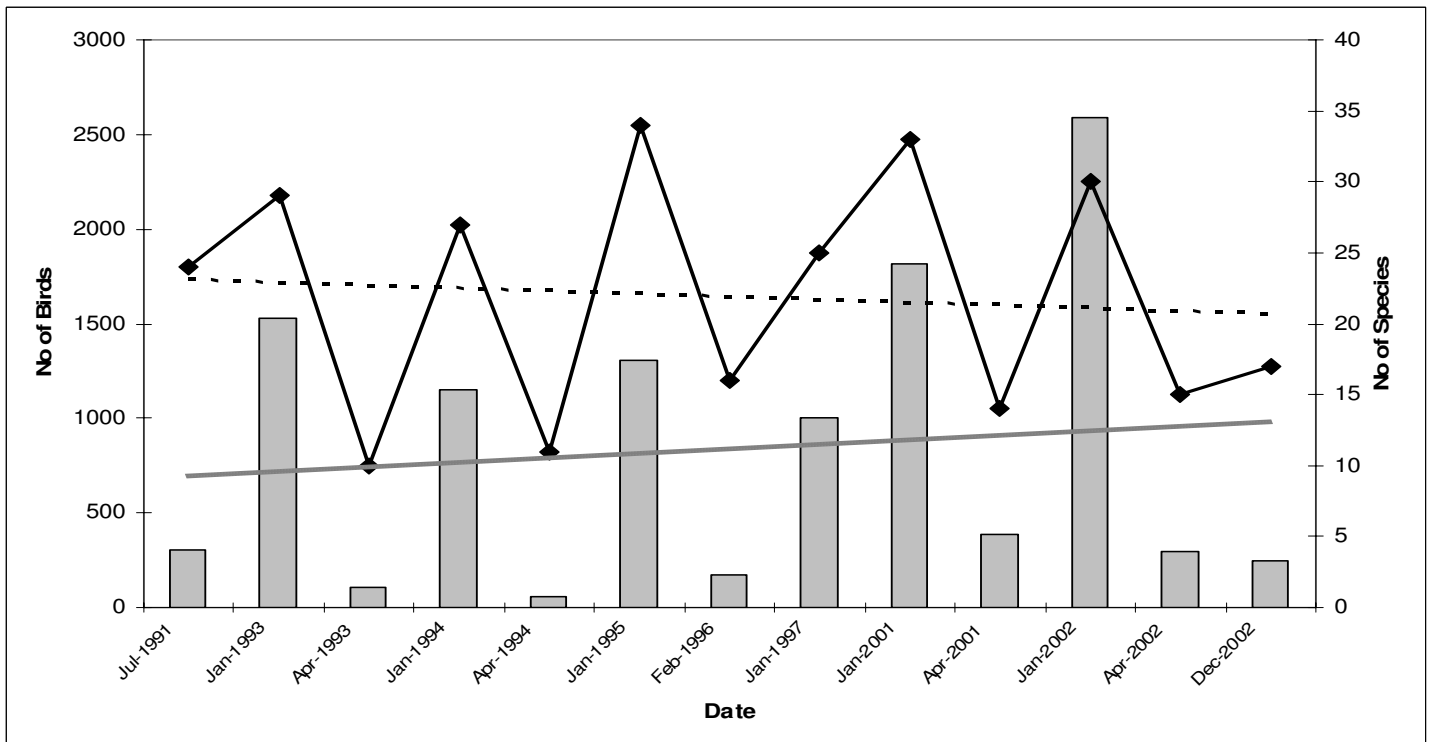


Figure 4: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Friedenau Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.5 Hardap Dam

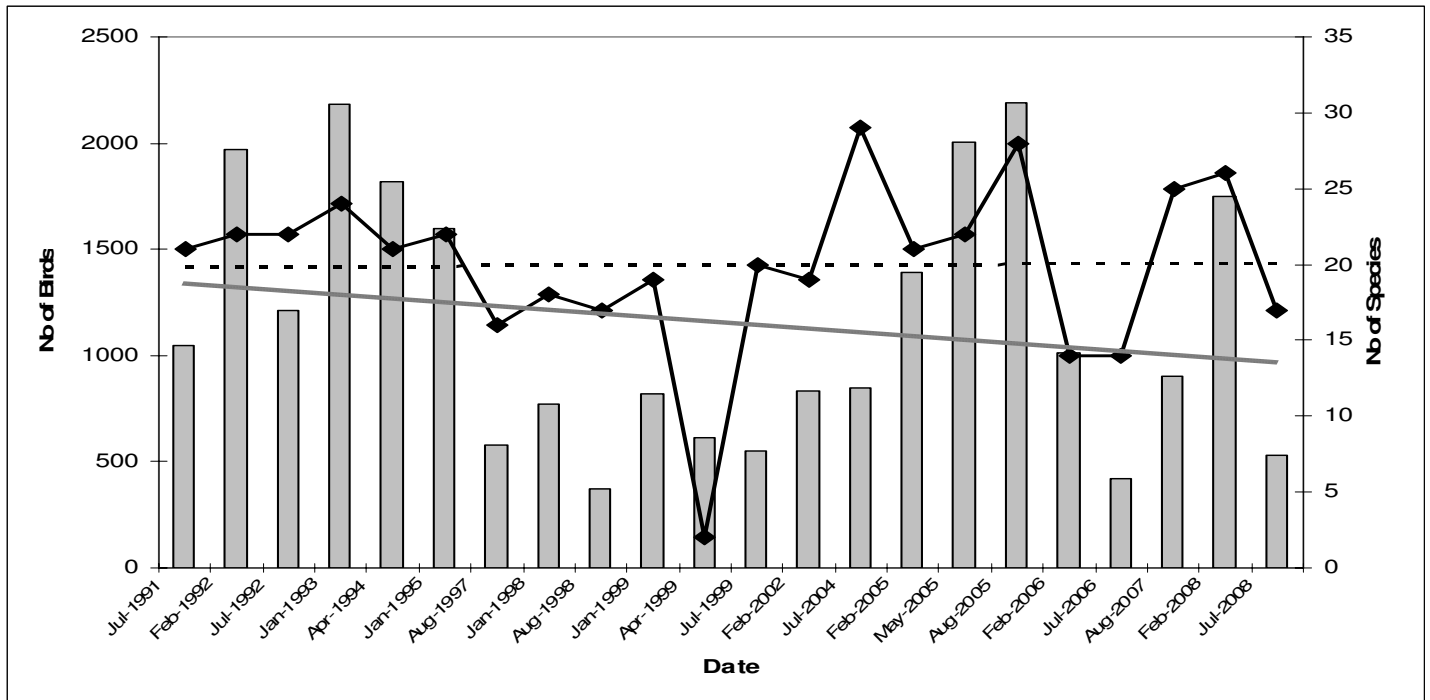


Figure 5: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Hardap Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.6 Naute Dam

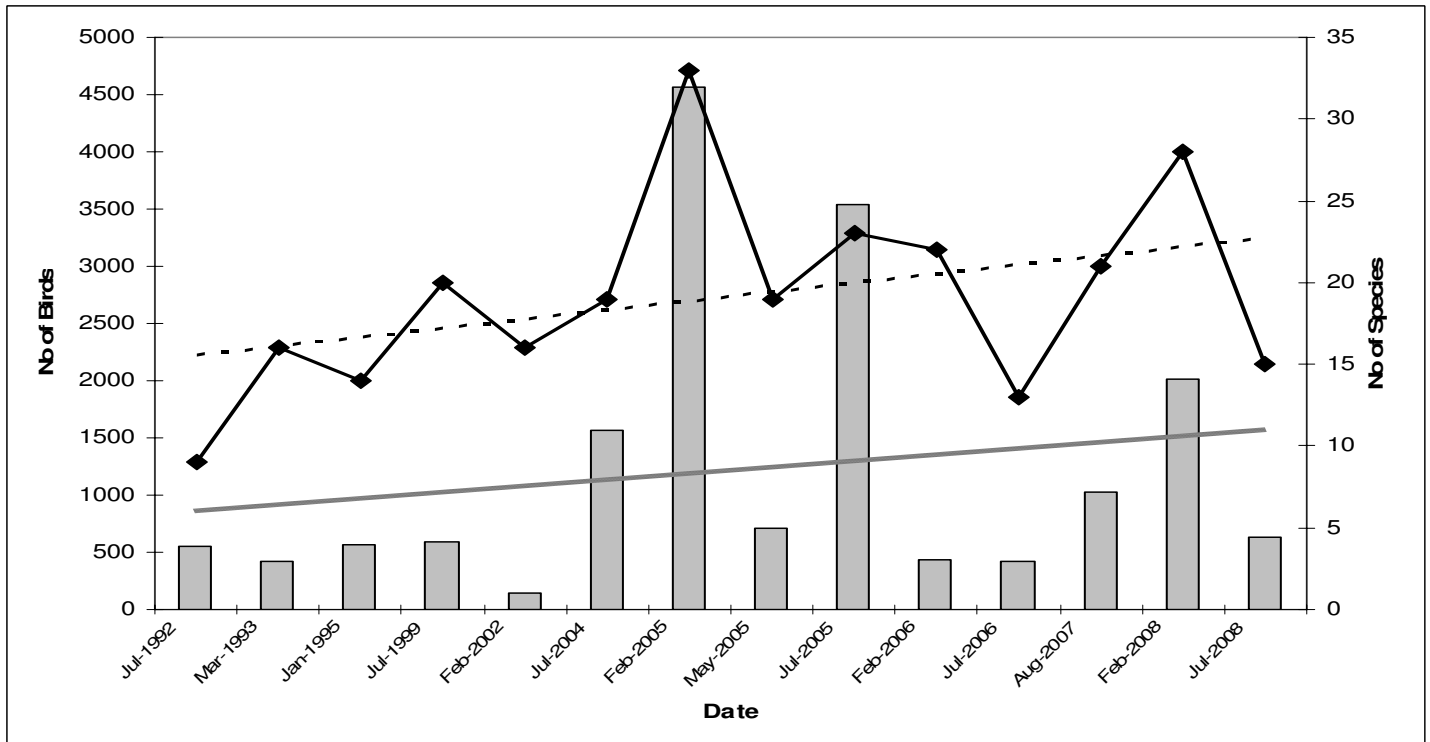


Figure 6: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Naute Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.7 Olushandja Dam

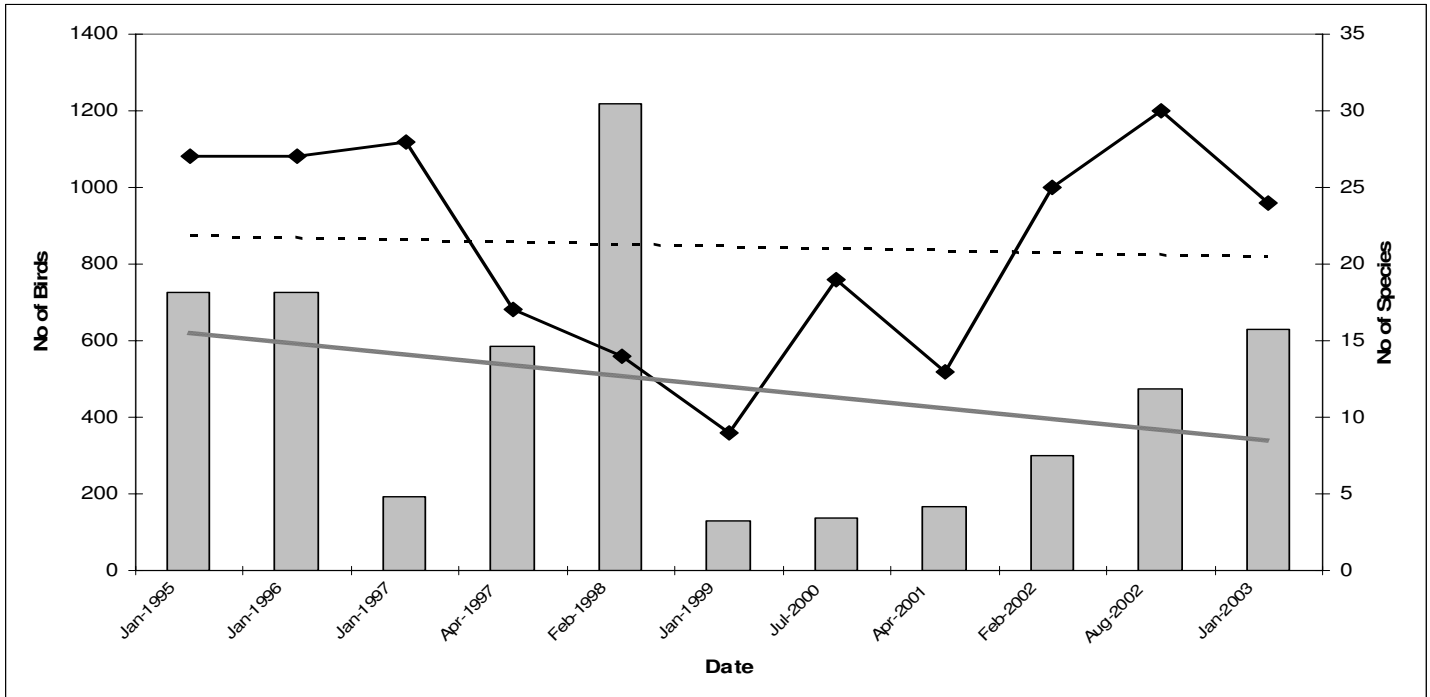


Figure 7: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Olushandja Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.8 Omatako Dam

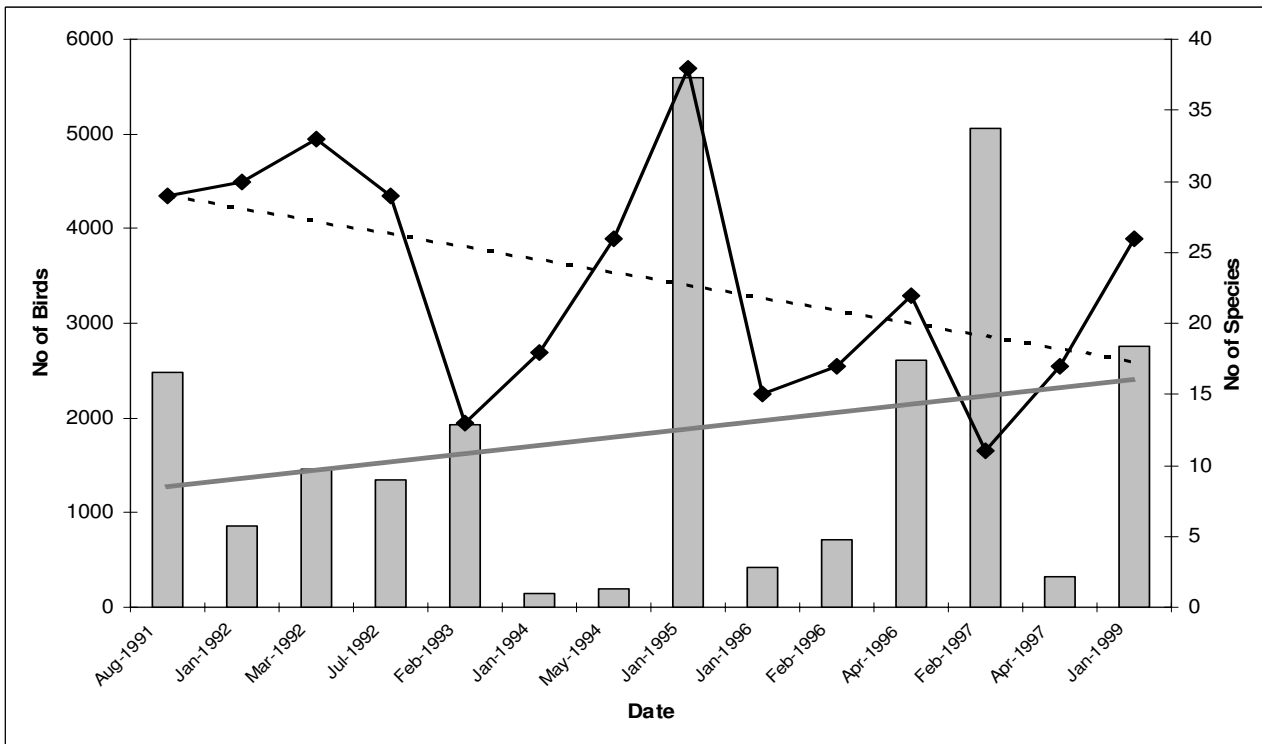


Figure 8: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Omatako Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.9 Otjivero Dam

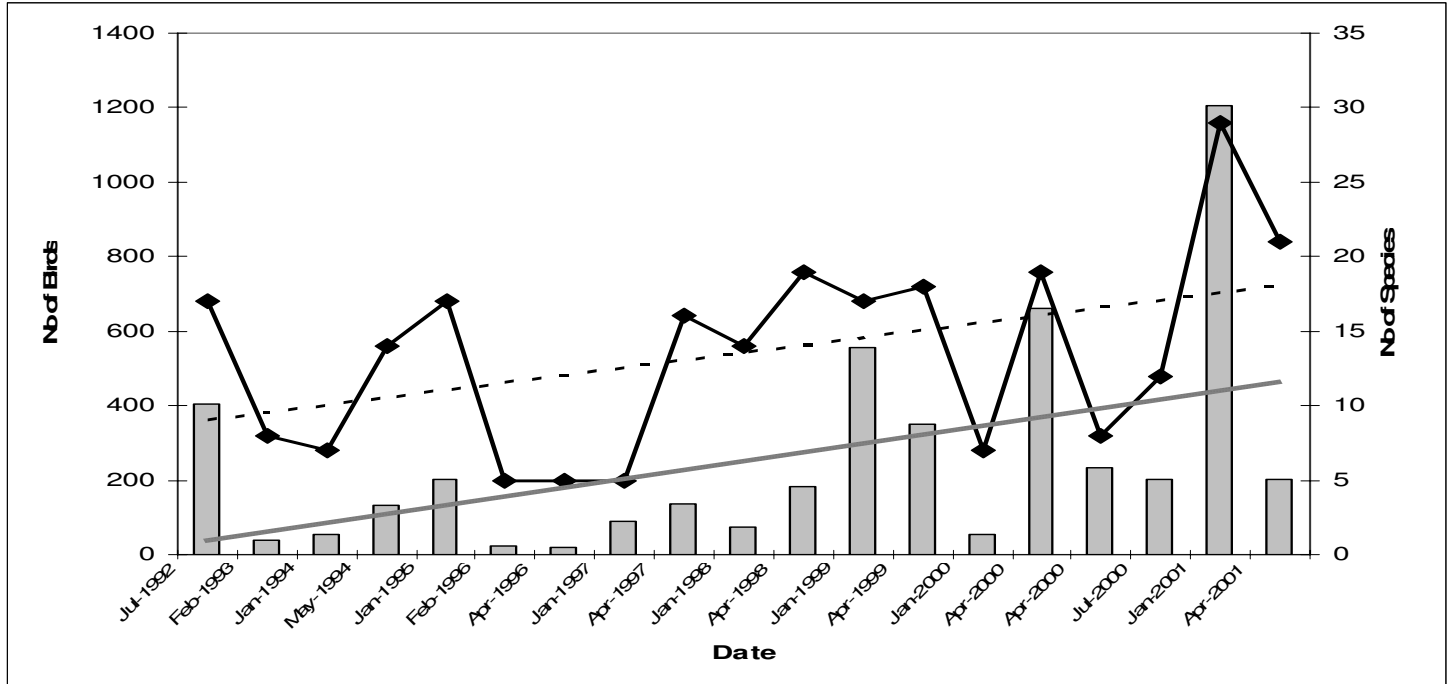


Figure 9: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Otjivero Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.10 Swakoppoort Dam

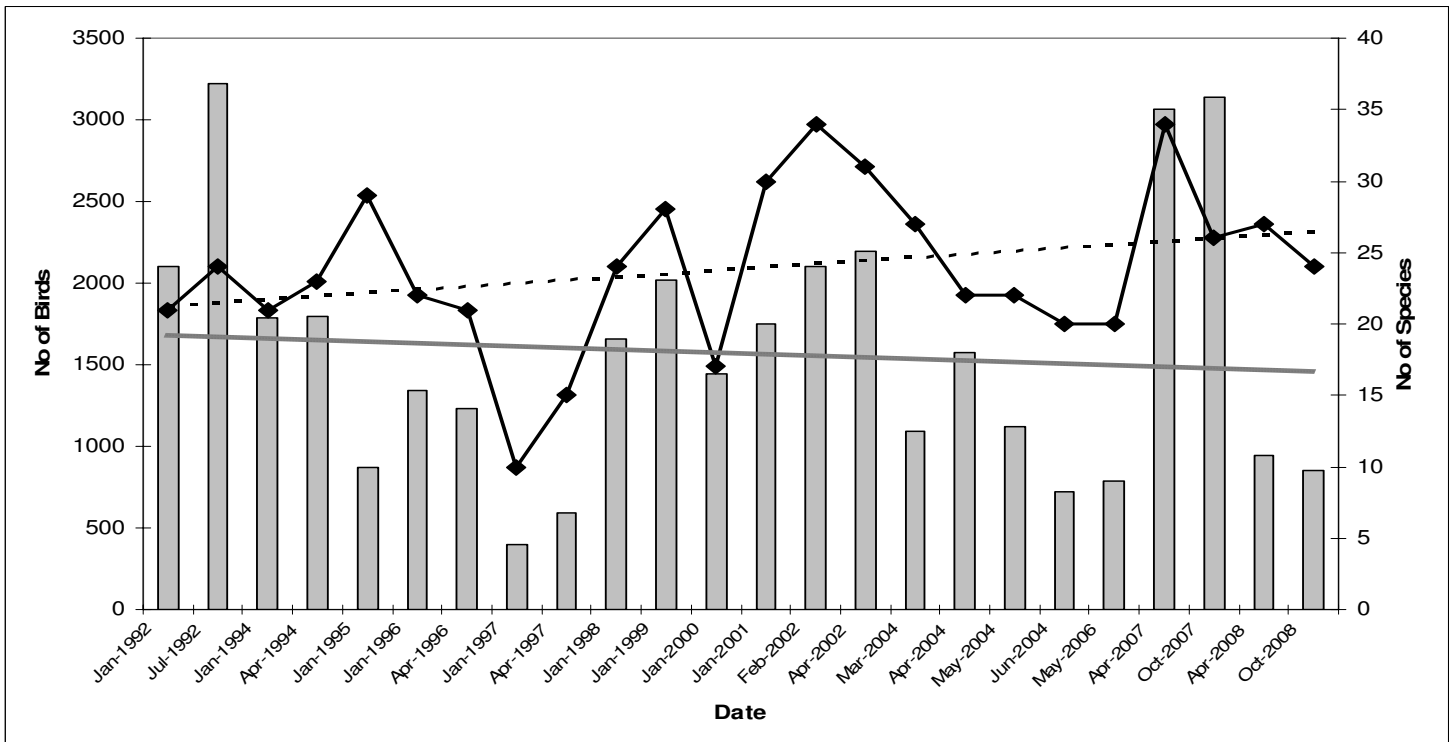


Figure 10: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Swakoppoort Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).

2.11 Von Bach Dam

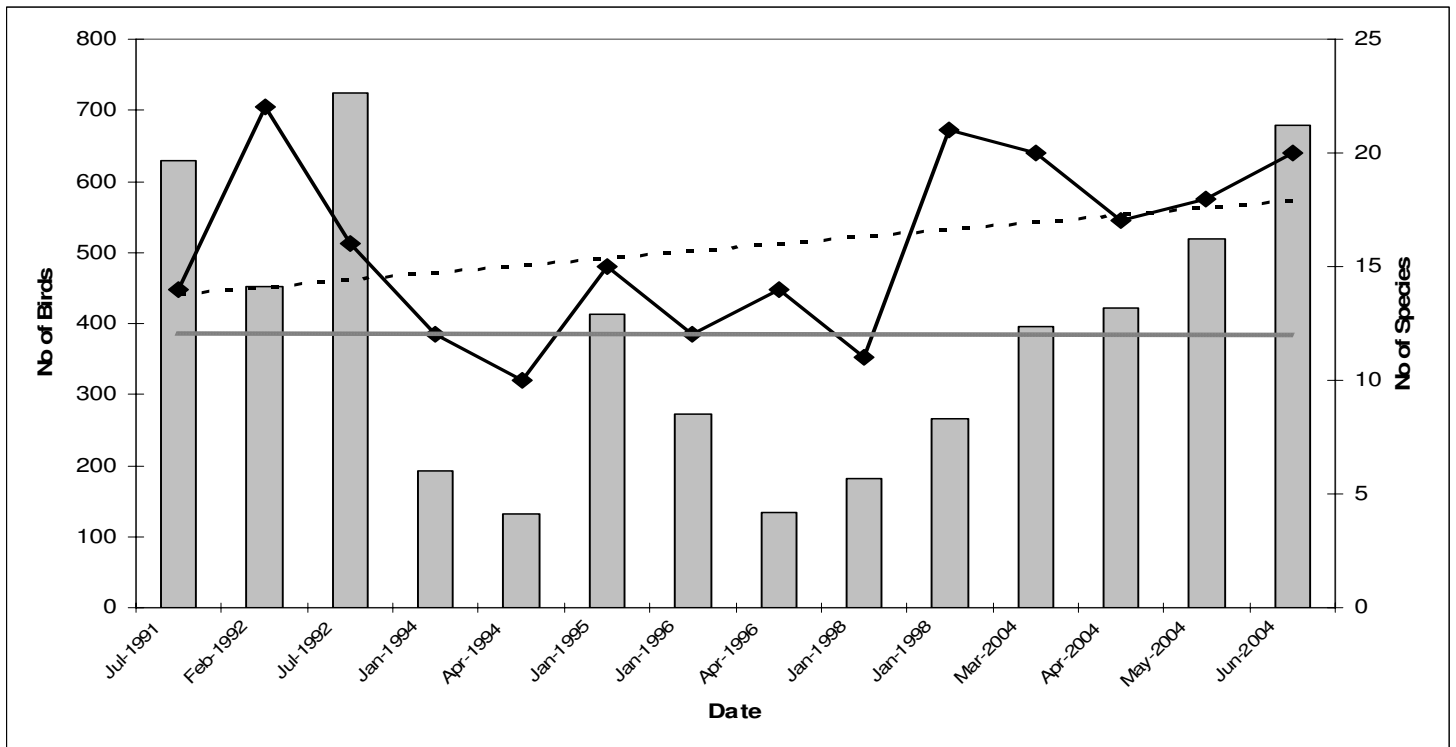


Figure 11: Number of birds (bars, left-hand y-axis) and species (diamonds, right-hand y-axis) counted at Von Bach Dam and the trend over the counting period (dashed line = species trend, solid line = bird numbers trend).