

# LANIOTURDUS

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## CONTENTS

THOMSON N	Editorial	1
DEMASIUS E	Our First Pelagic Tours	2
THOMSON N	Who were the People after whom some of our Bird Species are Named? (Part 1 : Introduction and Overview)	6
KOMEN E	Falcons in the City	8
KOLBERG H	Wetland Bird Counts in Namibia 4 : Coastal Wetlands	9
DEMASIUS E	Breaking News : Greater Sandplover in Swakopmund	13
THOMSON N	A Trip to the South, May 2010	14
KOLBERG H	Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 3 : Cormorants and Darter	16
KOLBERG C	African Reed-Warblers can Swim!	19
BARTLEWSKI S	Lesser Spotted Eagle – an Extremely Endangered Migratory Raptor	19
RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS		21

## Editorial

Bird populations are dynamic – always on the move! I see this at my own home. I have lived in this house for over 23 years and up until about four years ago I had never seen a southern red bishop there – in 2009 alone I ringed 136 at this location! In September 2010 I experienced an irruption of common waxbills, a species I very seldom see in my garden. Over a period of 122 days until the end of the year we ringed 205 and then the numbers seen and caught dropped off sharply suggesting that most of them had moved on. In Lanioturdus 43(4) I mentioned the five pied crows I saw on 11/08/2010 across two Quarter Degree Squares between Rundu Airport and Ncaute where the species was not recorded in the Atlas. I had not seen this species there in about ten previous trips and I have not seen it there again since then on my subsequent trips through this area.

The above examples illustrate how dynamic certain populations actually are – some suddenly appearing and remaining, others merely moving through an area. With the climate changes currently being experienced we are seeing the earlier arrival of some migrants and also later departure dates. (In Lanioturdus 43-4 we published some of Günther Friederich's observations on the early arrival of grey-headed kingfisher and European bee-eater in our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section).

In our "Rarities and Interesting Observations" section in this issue we have a report of a Sabine's gull seen at Kalkheuwel waterhole in the Etosha National Park – as far as I have been able to determine this constitutes

populations. Have the birds dispersed to other locations where suitable elevated perching sites are still to be found? Or have the populations crashed? The south is not noted for its tall trees so elevated perches are in short supply down there once the telephone poles are gone.

All in all we managed to ring 66 birds of 22 species between us without having hordes of birds in the nets at any given time. We also recaptured a southern masked-weaver which Holger had ringed the previous year. Our “southern” birdlist was 72 species seen or heard but since the cinnamon-breasted warbler and the black-headed canary were not amongst them we have reason to “head south” again sometime in the future.

### **Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 3: Cormorants and Darter**

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The third article in the series on trends in Namibian waterbird populations summarises count data for cormorants and darter for 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 for the period 1991 to 2008 only because continuous data is available for that time. The computer programme TRIM was used for these analyses (see an earlier publication for the selection criteria and methods). (*Lanioturdus 43-2 – Ed.*) For each species the number of sites used in the analysis, the number of observed counts (this includes zero counts), and the sites

containing more than 10% of the total number counted are given. A trend and slope are given. 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. 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. 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.

Trends for two species of cormorant and African Darter could be determined. Reed Cormorant are deemed to be declining whilst African Darter are increasing. Although there is some count data for Cape, Bank and Crowned Cormorants this is considered not representative because their main aggregations are on the Namibian islands and data for these was not available and hence no analysis was done for these species.

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

#### **3.1 White-breasted Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax lucidus*)<sup>13</sup>**

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



Photo: Eckart Demasius

<sup>13</sup> 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.

These birds are regularly seen at most coastal and inland sites in moderate numbers. Numbers at Hardap and Naute Dam are considerably lower than at Swakoppoort Dam, perhaps an indication that disturbance plays an important role in the distribution of these birds. Both Hardap and Naute are used extensively for recreational activities whereas Swakoppoort is not.

No of times counted: 379  
 No of times past 1% population (=130): 92  
 Maximum count: 2500 at Cape Cross on 16 January 1996  
 Past 1% population at: Cape Cross (3)<sup>14</sup>, Hardap Dam (6), Kunene River Mouth (3), Mile 4 (7), Naute Dam (6), Sandwich Harbour (20), Swakoppoort Dam (21), Walvis Bay (26)

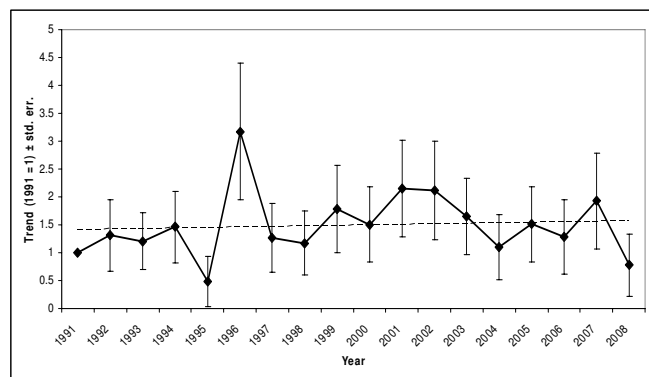
*Trend analysis*

Number of sites: 15  
 Number of observed counts: 187  
 Number of missing counts: 83  
 Total number of counts: 270

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Cape Cross	3200	11.7
Sandwich Harbour	4242	15.5
Swakoppoort Dam	9420	34.4
Walvis Bay	4625	16.9

Overall slope: Uncertain  
 1.0102 ±0.0213



**Figure 1: Trend of White-breasted Cormorant population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.**

<sup>14</sup> Numbers in brackets denote the number of times the 1% population mark has been passed.

**3.2 Reed Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax africanus*)**

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



Photo: Eckart Demasius

This bird's preference for fresh water is manifest in the counts, with an almost complete absence from coastal sites apart from river mouths and coastal sewage works. The model gives this species a moderately declining status and indeed, low numbers were counted from 1995 to 2004. This period coincides with seasons of below average rainfall in Namibia and thus reflects a lack of suitable habitat for the birds at the various dams. This argument is supported by the fact that numbers on the Okavango River over the same period have stayed relatively stable.

No of times counted: 172  
 No of times past 1% population (=10000): 0  
 Maximum count: 647 at Swakoppoort Dam on 24 January 1992  
 Past 1% population at: Nowhere

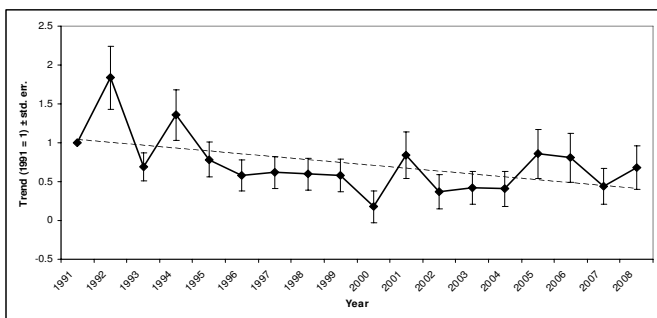
*Trend analysis*

Number of sites: 13  
 Number of observed counts: 161  
 Number of missing counts: 73  
 Total number of counts: 234

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Mahango	2685	41.0
Shamvura	1594	24.3
Swakoppoort Dam	1571	24.0

Overall slope: Moderate decline (p<0.05)  
 0.9577 ±0.0205



**Figure 2: Trend of Reed Cormorant population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.**

### 3.3 African Darter (*Anhinga rufa*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern

Namibia RDB Status: ?

WI Trend: Stable



Photo: Eckart Demasius

This species has only been counted at freshwater wetlands and has disappeared from the Walvis Bay sewage works probably because of a lack of suitable roosting areas after the re-location of the ponds in 2006. Why this species would show an increasing trend whilst Reed Cormorant are declining over the same period, is not clear. Numbers have increased dramatically at Hardap and Swakoppoort Dam from 2006 to 2008 with no noticeable decrease at any of the other sites. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that there must have been in-migration from wetlands that are not counted.

No of times counted: 265

No of times past 1% population (=1000): 0

Maximum count: 713 at Swakoppoort Dam on 25 April 2007

Past 1% population at: Nowhere.

#### Trend analysis

Number of sites: 8

Number of observed counts: 92

Number of missing counts: 52

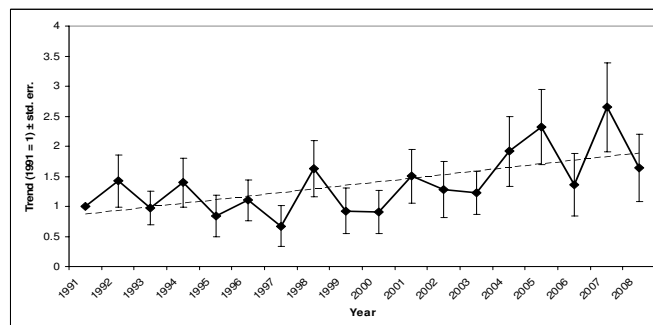
Total number of counts: 144

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

Site	Number	%
Hardap Dam	1961	22.3
Mahango	2298	26.2
Swakoppoort Dam	3543	40.4

Overall slope: Moderate increase ( $p < 0.01$ )

$1.0408 \pm 0.0125$



**Figure 3: Trend of African Darter population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.**

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