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Editorial

With funding for research projects becoming ever more difficult to secure more and more reliance is placed on the citizen scientist to help collect the data required for research. You and I who participate in atlassing, ringing, wetland counts, raptor road counts etc. are the citizen scientists, the amateurs, who provide much of the data from which the professionals are able to conduct their research.

In a way the wheel has turned a full circle. Some years ago (as far as I am aware around the mid 1970's) the school of thought was that research was purely the domain of the professionals and amateurs or citizen scientists were actively discouraged from data collection. A case in point is bird ringing where a policy was introduced whereby amateur ringing was only permitted if a project was registered. The immediate result of this was that many amateur ringers lost interest and threw in the towel. One cannot help wondering how much valuable data was lost through this short sighted approach. How many birds, that might have been ringed by

I again waited in the vehicle and shortly afterwards I heard the welcome call of Gray's Lark. One bird came close but displayed the same rather strange behavior of circling around the nest and sitting down on the ground from time to time.



On more occasions, and this time for longer periods, the bird pretended to incubate, sitting in a deep depression for a very long time making me start to think that it had made a new nest!!



As my time was running out again I decided to make a scientific approach to the whole matter and I walked up to the bird, which obviously gave way and I saw to my utter amazement that the bird had only been sitting in an empty depression.



A couple of days later I came back again, but by then the nest was deserted and was already falling apart. The remaining egg was still in place.

I happened to be out there on Sunday 14 August 2011 and I was most surprised to find in what relatively good condition the nest still was after all that time and considering the exposure to some very strong east winds!!



The nest on 14 August 2011.

Trends in Namibian Waterbird Populations 7: Ducks and Geese (1)

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This article continues the series on trends in Namibian waterbird populations and summarizes count data for ducks and geese 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 twelve species could be derived but only two show an increase the remainder are uncertain. Four species have passed their 1% population at least once in the period under review.

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

7.1 Fulvous Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*)¹

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern

Namibia RDB Status: ?

WI Trend: Unknown

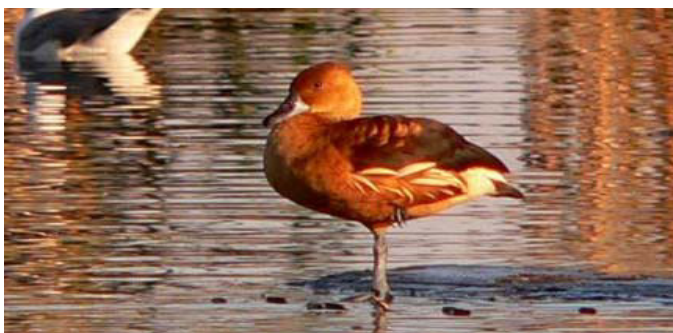


Photo: Eckart Demasius

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

Although this duck is only regularly recorded in north-eastern Namibia it has been seen at Sandwich Harbour on a consistent basis. Peaks in the counts are due to large flocks being recorded in the Mahango Game Reserve and at the Tsumkwe Pans respectively.

No of times counted: 52

No of times past 1% population (=2500): 0

Maximum count: 130 at Tsumkwe Pans on 3 May 2000

Past 1% population at: Nowhere

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 5

Number of observed counts: 66

Number of missing counts: 24

Total number of counts: 90

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

| Site | Number | % |
|-------------------|--------|------|
| Mahango Game Res. | 136 | 26.0 |
| Sandwich Harbour | 89 | 17.0 |
| Shamvura | 65 | 12.4 |
| Tsumkwe Pans | 230 | 43.9 |

Overall slope: Uncertain

0.8945 ±0.1442

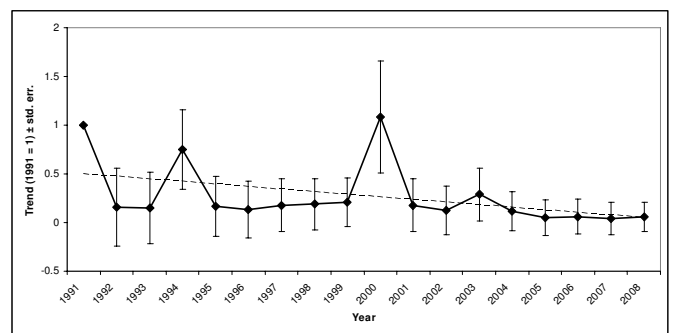


Figure 1: Trend of Fulvous Duck population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

7.2 White-faced Duck (*Dendrocygna viduata*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern

Namibia RDB Status: ?

WI Trend: Increasing



Photo: Eckart Demasius

This is one of the most common ducks in north-eastern Namibia with large numbers recorded, especially in the Mahango Game Reserve.

No of times counted: 49
 No of times past 1% population (=10000): 0
 Maximum count: 496 at Mahango Game Reserve on 27 August 2003
 Past 1% population at: Nowhere

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 3
 Number of observed counts: 39
 Number of missing counts: 15
 Total number of counts: 54

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

| Site | Number | % |
|-------------------|--------|------|
| Mahango Game Res. | 3532 | 86.9 |
| Shamvura | 519 | 12.8 |

Overall slope: Uncertain
 1.2012 ±0.1657

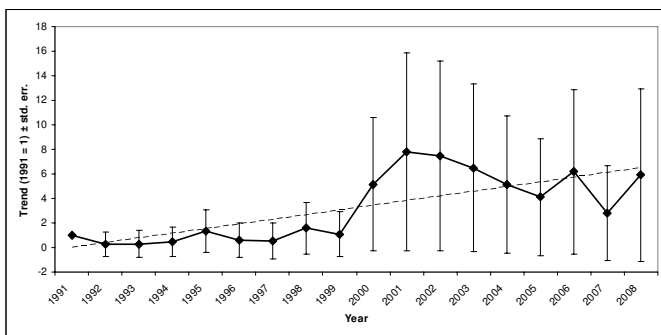


Figure 2: Trend of White-faced Duck population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

7.3 Spur-winged Goose (*Plectropterus gambensis*)

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



Photo: Eckart Demasius

This is another species that is common in the Caprivi but rarer elsewhere. A healthy population is also found at the Orange River Mouth.

No of times counted: 83
 No of times past 1% population (=750): 1
 Maximum count: 764 at Mahango Game Reserve on 19 July 2002
 Past 1% population at: Mahango Game Reserve (1)

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 6
 Number of observed counts: 80
 Number of missing counts: 28
 Total number of counts: 108

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

| Site | Number | % |
|-------------------|--------|------|
| Mahango Game Res. | 2867 | 83.1 |

Overall slope: Uncertain
 1.1652 ±0.0935

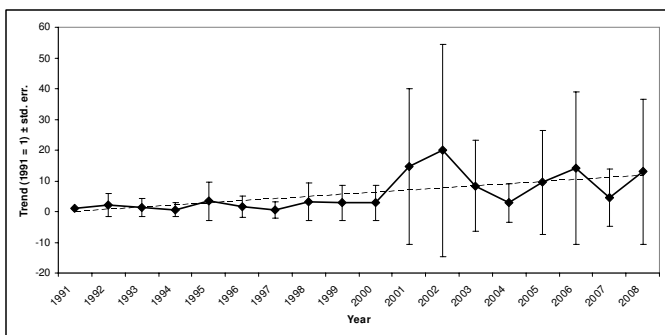


Figure 3: Trend of Spur-winged Goose population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

7.4 Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)

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



Photo: Neil Thomson

Large flocks of this species are often recorded at Lake Oponono and consistent numbers in the Mahango Game Reserve and Tsumkwe Pans.

No of times counted: 88
 No of times past 1% population (=3000): 0
 Maximum count: 279 at Otjivero Dam on 21 April 2000
 Past 1% population at: Nowhere

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 7
 Number of observed counts: 97
 Number of missing counts: 29
 Total number of counts: 126

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

| Site | Number | % |
|-------------------|--------|------|
| Lake Oponono | 621 | 40.0 |
| Mahango Game Res. | 221 | 14.2 |
| Otjivero Dam | 291 | 18.8 |
| Tsumkwe Pans | 228 | 14.7 |

Overall slope: Uncertain
 1.0045 ± 0.0885

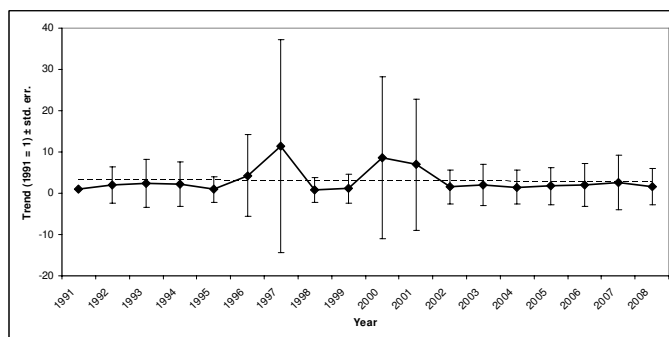


Figure 4: Trend of Comb Duck population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

7.5 South African Shelduck (*Tadorna cana*)

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



Photo: Neil Thomson

This southern African endemic has been recorded at many sites in Namibia. Large flocks congregated at Naute Dam in 2005, feeding on lucerne fields, resulting in a spike in the trend.

No of times counted: 270
 No of times past 1% population (=500): 2

Maximum count: 1102 at Naute Dam on 29 July 2005

Past 1% population at: Naute Dam (2)

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 14
 Number of observed counts: 192
 Number of missing counts: 60
 Total number of counts: 252

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

| Site | Number | % |
|-----------------|--------|------|
| Avis Dam | 485 | 12.8 |
| Naute Dam | 1294 | 34.1 |
| Swakoppoort Dam | 628 | 16.5 |

Overall slope: Uncertain
 1.0637 ±0.0335

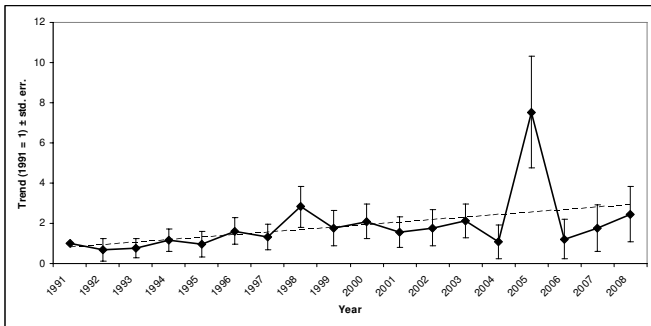


Figure 5: Trend of South African Shelduck population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

7.6 Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*)

IUCN RDB Status: Least concern

Namibia RDB Status: ?

WI Trend: Stable



Photo: Eckart Demasius

This is the most common waterfowl in southern Africa and it has been recorded at most counting sites in Namibia. Huge flocks were recorded in 2005 at Naute Dam feeding on lucerne fields, resulting in a spike in the trend. The species is probably increasing in Namibia because of an increased availability of suitable habitat in the form of farm dams and sewage works.

No of times counted: 453

No of times past 1% population (=3500): 0

Maximum count: 3000 at Naute Dam on 4 February 2005

Past 1% population at: Nowhere

Trend analysis

Number of sites: 18
 Number of observed counts: 244
 Number of missing counts: 80
 Total number of counts: 324

Sites containing more than 10% of the total count:

| Site | Number | % |
|-----------------|--------|------|
| Hardap Dam | 2615 | 13.6 |
| Lake Oponono | 3566 | 18.6 |
| Naute Dam | 6028 | 31.4 |
| Swakoppoort Dam | 2027 | 10.6 |

Overall slope: Moderate increase (p<0.05)
 1.0425 ±0.0209

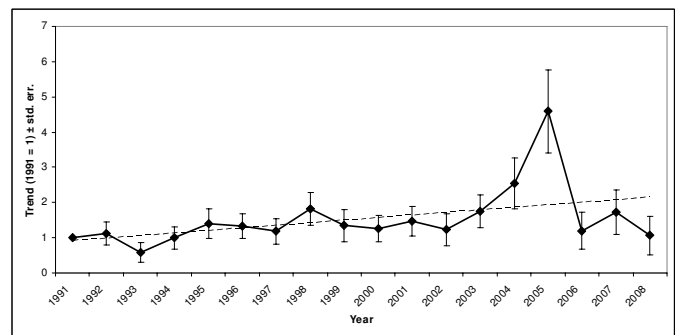


Figure 6: Trend of Egyptian Goose population in Namibia from 1991 to 2008.

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

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Short Notes and Interesting Observations

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African Red-eyed Bulbuls

Monika Gerlach reported having observed African Red-eyed Bulbuls catching and eating newly hatched rock agamas. African Red-eyed Bulbuls are generally regarded as being frugivores and according to Roberts VII they eat a wide variety of wild and cultivated fruits as well as flower petals and they are known to probe aloe flowers for nectar. Roberts VII further states under "Foraging & Food" – "*also eats arthropods, flying up to hawk insects above trees or shrubs; darts after insects flushed from foliage.*" I cannot find any reference to them feeding on young reptiles so perhaps this is behaviour previously unrecorded for this species.

White-browed Sparrow-Weaver Nests

On 13/02/2011 we found a colony of eleven White-browed Sparrow-Weaver nests on a steel electricity pylon just outside Windhoek's Gammams Sewage Works. This is somewhat unusual because White-browed Sparrow-Weavers rarely build nests on manmade structures. What was equally unusual was that one of the nests had a distinct entrance tunnel, a phenomenon recorded before at Gocheganas, Farm Kakuse and Farm Bismarck (See *Lanioturdus* 43-4).



WBSW nests on pylon – Photo : Neil Thomson



WBSW nest with entrance tunnel – Photo : Neil Thomson

On the same day a further two White-browed Sparrow-Weaver nests were discovered on the insulators and conductors very high up on an electricity mast a few hundred metres south of the last location. Again one of these nests had an entrance tunnel.



WBSW nest on electricity mast – Photo : Neil Thomson