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RARITIES AND INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

Editorial

Included in this issue is the chairperson's report as delivered at the Annual General Meeting held on 5 March 2009. In it our chairperson, Gudrun Middendorff, outlines the activities of the Namibia Bird Club over the past year which include outings, talks, attendance of meetings and conferences by committee members and others, the partnership agreement with NEWS (Namibia Environment and Wildlife Society) and the donations and sponsorships given to various causes.

There are a number of birding projects on the go in Namibia and also a number of special interest groups eg. ringers, raptors, cranes and coastal birds. One can then ask what the primary function of the bird club is. We believe that the Namibia Bird Club provides social and educational birding to its members through outings, talks and of course, the publication of *Lanioturdus*. Morning walks are led by ex-

perienced birders who are able to help others develop their bird identification skills and general birding knowledge. It is our hope that members will go on to become involved in other projects where they can use these skills. A number of members have participated in the summer and winter bird counts at Walvis Bay which form part of the African Water Bird Census under the auspices of Wetlands International. The Bird Club has undertaken to contribute to these counts by doing summer and winter counts at Monte Christo. On 1 February 2009 four Bird Club members, Gudrun, Hanjo Böhme, Rolf Adrian and myself assisted by my daughter, Maren, as scribe, counted 335 birds of 34 species at Monte Christo. If there is interest from members and particularly if someone can provide a boat, the Bird Club could make an even bigger contribution to this project by doing counts on other inland waters such as perhaps Hoffnung Dam or Otjivero Dam which are not currently being counted.

Although I only fairly recently formally joined the Namibia Bird Club I have long been of the opinion that if one gets a lot out of birding one should put something back. Over the years I have been involved in data collection for the Atlas of Southern African Birds, various wetland counts, raptor road counts and I now have a ringer's license. I believe that by participating in these various activities I am putting something back into birding and I hope that others will also follow this path.

Tim Osborne resigned from the committee before the AGM (after resigning as editor of *Lanioturdus* some months ago) and Suzan Mallet-Veale has stood down from active involvement. We now welcome two new committee members in Holger Kolberg and Richard Niddrie.

Chairperson's Report 2009 Presented at the Annual General Meeting held on 5 March 2009

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First I want to thank my committee for their hard work, support and commitment and good spirit over the past year. Secondly a want to thank our members and friends for supporting our outings and lastly I want to thank the Scientific Society for the venue and their staff for excellent cooperation.

It has become a set pattern that we visit Avis dam and the sewage works alternately at the beginning of each month

soooo much baling twine for so few bales of Lucerne.

On Saturday I leisurely (= bal-chatri trapped) made my way down to the Orange River and after yet another stunning, balmy evening and a good night's sleep I reached Oranjemund on Sunday 27 July. Here bad news awaited me! My friend and long-term counting partner Mark Anderson had gotten entangled in Namibian bureaucracy and had not received his security clearance in time. All this meant was that I would have to do the bulk of the count on my own with Mark having to stay south of the border. For those of you not *au fait* with the geography of the Orange River Mouth, this equates to a 20 km plus walk. In the good old days we used to do the entire count by boat without getting stuck on a sandbank once – nowadays you end up carrying the boat more than you row it. Yes, the mighty Orange has been reduced to a mere trickle in the past ten or so years. Buoyed by the knowledge that I would at least be doing something for my personal fitness, I embarked on my "Groot Trek", first counting the Hohenfels to Skilpadkop section on Monday and then the section from Hohenfels down to the bridge on Tuesday. At least on Wednesday, when counting the actual river mouth, my slightly stiff legs got some respite because larger tracts of this section can be covered by car. An unforeseen opportunity arose to visit some more sites in the Diamond Area on Thursday 31 July when I was invited by Dr Antje Burke to have a look at some of her rehabilitation sites (No, this is not the same as being invited to look at a lady's paintings!!). Unfortunately we did not see any flamingos at Chameis Head, Baker's Bay or Bogenfels but we did see lots and lots of "very exciting" plants which all had to be photographed (by Antje and Silke, not me). We reached Lüderitzbucht well after sunset but the long day was soon forgotten after a hot shower and a cold beer. The Lüderitz count is always fun because you never know what you're going to get. This time it was stacks of Oiks, that's African Black Oystercatchers in bird-nerd speak. The flamingos had all been counted by Jessica Kemper a week or so earlier and she must have done a good job because she counted more than I did! But then Jessica is an official seabird biologist and I'm only an *ad hoc* ornithologist (I'm not making excuses, just justifying my ineptitude).

My return trip to Windhoek was uneventful except for the Black Harrier road kill (already reported on namringers) and my second raptor re-trap within a year (already reported to SAFRING). In October 2007 I caught a PCG (Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk) near Solitaire that had been ringed by Steve Braine a bit earlier and this one was another PCG that had been ringed by Dirk Heinrich in May 2006. Pretty cool!

Ringed Blue Crane Sighting

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The committee of the Namibia Bird Club is always ready to help birders in any way we can. Although none of us professes to be an expert at bird identification we are always willing to try to identify birds from pictures sent to us. A

recent example was when Lisa Berl sent us a photograph of a bird taken in the Richtersveld in South Africa which we were able to identify for her as a Karoo Thrush. The exchange of emails led to Lisa sending a picture of a colour ringed Blue Crane taken at Nieuwoudtville in Namaqualand, RSA in September 2008. I sent this photograph to SAFRING and the feedback received was that this bird had been ringed by Kevin McCann at Basberg, Hanover on 22/01/1998 more than 10 years before Lisa resighted it 475 km from the ringing site. Perusal of the SAFRING data base shows that Kevin McCann is a member of the Crane Working Group in South Africa and that he ringed 91 cranes - 43 Wattled Cranes, 23 Grey Crowned-Cranes and 25 Blue Cranes, one of which Lisa photographed.

As the Namibia Bird Club is a co-sponsor of the "Take a Closer Look" poster which was printed to raise awareness of ringed birds we are only too willing to forward any ringed bird sightings to SAFRING, and in the case of ringed birds seen in Namibia, to MET as well, and to pass any feedback information received on to the observers.



Ringed Blue Crane

Photo: Lisa Berl

Vagrants, range extensions and interesting bird records for Skeleton Coast Park Namibia and southern Angola

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Introduction

The Skeleton Coast Park (SCP) encompasses the arid coastal strip from the Ugab River in the south to the Kunene River in the north of north-western Namibia. The area is bisected by west flowing ephemeral rivers supporting permanent and semi permanent wetlands providing islands of suitable habitat for many wetland associated species. The Kunene River is the only permanent river in the region providing an important wetland at the mouth that is considered to be the second most species rich coastal wetland in Namibia (Simmons *et. al.* 1993) and is a listed Important Bird

Area (Simmons *et. al.* 1998). Several authors have published results of bird counts and bird lists of the Skeleton Coast Park (Ryan *et. al.* 1984; Braine 1988; Tarr and Tarr 1987; Braine 1990; Simmons *et. al.* 1993; Anderson *et. al.* 2001).

This paper presents the result of a wetland bird count done on 22/02/06 at the Kunene River mouth, a coastal ¼⁰ bird count covering 8 squares between Rocky Point (-18.993° S 12.477° E) and the Kunene River mouth (-17.250° S 11.753° E) on 20/02/06 and two squares between Rocky Point and Möwe Bay (-19.372° S 12.707° E) on 24/02/06. Incidental observations between 20 and 23/02/06 at the Kunene River mouth and the Hoanib Oasis (-19.447° S 12.823° E) on 25/02/06 are also presented.

New records to the area and interesting observations are individually discussed in more detail. A map showing the localities of the sightings is presented in Fig. 1. All GPS coordinates are given in decimal degrees.

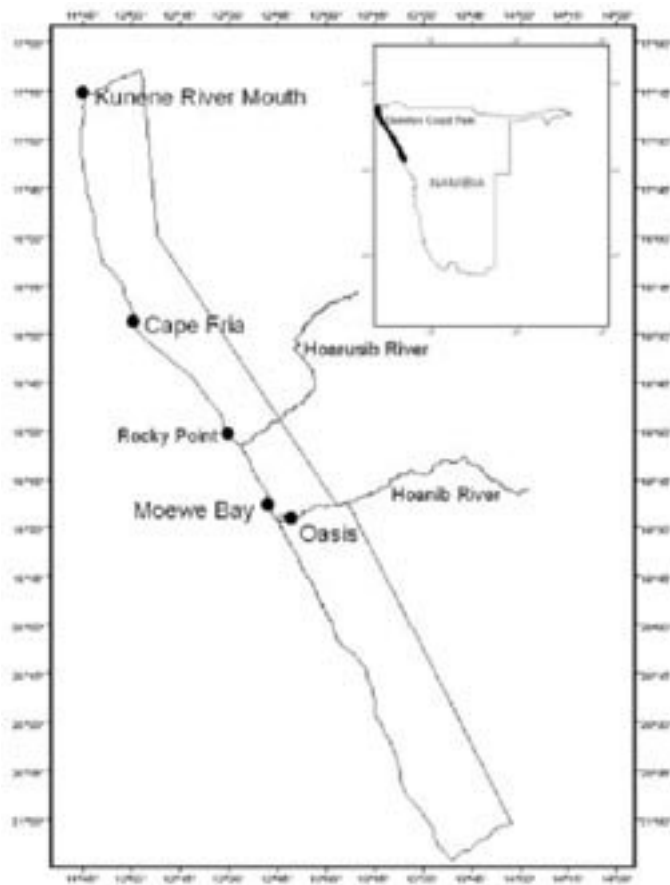


Fig 1: Skeleton Coast Park showing localities mentioned in the text.

Methods

Coastal counts were done from 2 hours before low tide to 3 hours after low tide on 20/02/06 and 2 hours before low tide for 1.5 hours on 24/02/06. The counts were done from a vehicle driving on the beach below the high water mark. There were 3 observers in the vehicle (driver/observer, observer/scribe and observer). Counts were done per ¼⁰. Accurate counts were done where possible with binoculars and large wader flocks (Sanderlings *Caladris alba*) were estimated. Damara Tern, *Sterna balaenarum*, congregations were counted as accurately as possible using bin-

oculars. Pelagic birds and other birds out to sea were estimated or otherwise noted for presence in a square. Kelp Gulls, *Larus dominicanus*, were separated by plumage into adult and immature classes.

The Kunene Mouth wetland count was done from the campsite (-17.257° S 11.765° E) west to the mouth. One team (2 observers, 1 scribe and 3 trainees) covered the river, islands and mudflats immediately adjacent to the river on foot using binoculars (10 x 40 and 8 x 40) and a spotting scope. A second team (1 observer and 1 observer/scribe) covered the lagoon south of the river, adjacent mudflats and the beach south of the river opening into the sea on foot and by vehicle. The duration of the count was 2 hours. Up river from the camp was not counted as was done by Anderson *et. al.* (2001) as most birds were west of the campsite and sections of the river are not accessible. Some incidental observations were done along the river east of the campsite, but are not included in the count. An attempt was made to estimate bird numbers on the Angolan bank and on the islands. Access to these areas is impossible without a boat so any population and species estimates are the absolute minimum. The area covered for this count was calculated using ArcView GIS software.

Unusual species were photographed by digiscoping. A small Sony digital camera was used to photograph birds through a Swarovski® spotting scope.

Observations using binoculars (10 x 40 and 8 x 40) and spotting scopes from high points along the north-western edge of the Hoanib Oasis was done giving a minimum species presence.

Results

The coastal count covered about 234 kilometres crossing 10 ¼⁰ squares. During this count 17 species totalling 7111 birds were counted giving an average observed density of 30.39 birds km⁻¹ of beach and 711.1 birds per ¼⁰ square (Table 1). A previous study by Tarr and Tarr (1987) gives a mean of 11.3 shorebirds km⁻¹ of beach for the northern Skeleton Coast. A density of 32.7 birds km⁻¹ of beach was recorded on the 28km stretch of coastline north of the Kunene to Baia dos Tigres between 20 December 1998 and 4 January 1999 (Simmons *et. al.* 2006). Four Species of pelagic seabird were counted, but they are excluded from the totals. The majority of birds seen were Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) 56%, Kelp Gulls (*Larus dominicanus*) 23.9% and Damara Tern (*Sterna balaenarum*) 14.4%.

The Kunene River mouth wetland is considered to have the second highest avifaunal diversity on the Namibian coast with 72 species, Sandwich Harbour has the richest with 79 species (Simmons *et. al.* 1992). More recent data, excluding this study, has increased the number of species recorded at the Kunene mouth to 96 (Skeleton Coast Park unpublished data). On this count we recorded 30 wetland species totalling 1335 birds (Table 2) in an area of approximately 295.5ha including four vagrant species that were new records for the area (Table 3). Incidental observations outside of the count period contributed a further 12 species, one of which was previously unrecorded (Table 4). The 42 species recorded are well below the 96 recorded for the area, but a high proportion (12%) were new records

for the area. The known avifaunal diversity of the Kunene mouth has been increased to 101 species.

A brief survey of species present was conducted at the Hoanib Oasis on 25/02/06. During the 2 hour survey a total of 24 species was noted. Ducks contributed six species (25% of species total) and Coots, Moorhens, Crakes and Gallinules provided a further four species (17% of species total). Cape Shoveller, *Anas smithii*, and Red-knobbed Coot, *Fulica cristata*, were the most abundant species. White-breasted Cormorants, *Phalacrocorax lucidus*, were breeding (>100 nests) on the reed islands in the wetland. A Little Bittern, *Ixobrychus minutus*, previously unrecorded in the Skeleton Coast Park was also seen. A full species list is shown in Table 5.

Discussion

The high numbers of Kelp Gull, *Larus dominicanus*, 1,700, Sanderling, *Calidris alba*, 3983, and Damara Tern, *Sterna balaenarum*, 1,027, contributed significantly to the relatively high density of 30.39 birds km⁻¹ of beach. The density of *C. alba* is concurrent with previous data, but the *L. dominicanus* density was higher than previously reported for the northern Skeleton Coast (Tarr and Tarr 1987). The large flocks of *S. balaenarum* were probably pre migratory congregations that are known to occur on this coastline (Braby *et. al.* 1992).

The Kunene wetland count was done as part of the African Waterbird Census. During this count 3 vagrants were recorded that are new records for this wetland. Both the Lesser Black-backed Gull, *Larus fuscus*, and Greater Sand Plover, *Charadrius leschenaultia*, are generally considered as east coast or inland species, their presence at the Kunene mouth is surprising. Rains in Namibia generally result from weather fronts moving across the continent from the east. Extensive heavy inland rains in the month prior to this count are probably responsible for pushing these vagrants across from inland or east coast habitats.

Other vagrants recorded are possibly more regular visitors to the area or even resident at suitable wetlands, but are most likely overlooked due to their skulking behaviour or nondescript appearance (Little Bittern, *Ixobrychus minutus*, and Loanda Swift, *Apus horus fuscobrunneus*). Favourable weather conditions and probably food requirements are the suspected stimuli for the movement of the Crowned Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax coronatus*, so far north.

Detailed discussion of some interesting species and observations is given below.

Damara Tern *Sterna balaenarum*

Namibia harbours the majority of the world population, ±13,500 birds, of *S. balaenarum* that is considered a rare near endemic with the highest abundance and breeding density occurring on the central Namib coast around Swakopmund (Simmons *et. al.* 1998). Large pre migratory flocks of these birds are known to occur on the northern Namib coast in February (Braby *et. al.* 1992). The counts during February 2006 of 1027 birds, representing ±7.6% of the world population, are not altogether unusual.

Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*

This species is a breeding resident along the eastern border of the Skeleton Coast Park and is rarely seen on the coast. In 2005 four birds were seen feeding on a Brown Hyaena, *Parahyaena brunnea*, carcass near Möwe Bay (JP *pers. obs.*). This was however about 3 km from the coast. On 20/02/06 five *T. tracheliotus* were seen feeding on a young Cape Fur Seal, *Arctocephalus pusillus*, carcass -18.447° S 12.015° E, at the Cape Fria seal colony about 150 meters from the sea. This is a first record of this behaviour being observed in the S.C.P (JP *pers. obs.*). In November 2006 three *T. tracheliotus* were seen feeding on a seal carcass at Cape Fria (A. Engelbrecht *pers. comm.*). Further observations of this behaviour are necessary to ascertain if the vultures are using the Cape Fria seal colony as a regular food source. Seals have been put into vulture restaurants in the Namib Naukluft Park and were ignored by feeding *T. tracheliotus* (Bridgeford 2006).

Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

A coastal 1/4⁰ count covering 8 squares was conducted between Rocky Point, -18.993° S 12.477° E, and the Kunene River Mouth, 17.250° S 11.753° E, on 20/02/06. *C. diomedea* was the dominant pelagic seabird occurring in all squares sampled with a total count estimate of >500 birds. Though not all shearwaters were closely examined those that were displayed a relatively broad dark underwing tip suggesting that they were *C. d. borealis* that has completely dark flight feathers (Hockey *et. al.* 2005). Recent work suggests that *C. d. borealis* outnumbers the nominate race *C. d. diomedea* on the west coast (Hockey *et. al.* 2005).

Contrary to past experience White-chinned Petrels, *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, were conspicuous by their absence with only 3 birds being seen in 1 square. *P. aequinoctialis* are common off the coast and are easily seen usually representing the dominant pelagic seabird seen from the shore while *C. diomedea* are rarely seen in the Skeleton Coast Park (JP *pers. obs.*). This apparent decline in *P. aequinoctialis* could be as a result of birds being killed in the long line fishery and pelagic trawling.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

This bird is considered rare in Namibia with annual numbers in Southern Africa estimated at <20 (Hockey *et. al.* 2005). There is 1 record of this species in the SCP of a ring recovered at Torra Bay, -20.283° S 13.217° E, in December 2001 from a bird ringed in Sweden in July 1998 (Oschad-leus 2002). Generally records of *L. fuscus* are along the east coast and inland water bodies (Ryan 1997 (a) and Hockey *et. al.* 2005). Ring recoveries from East Africa and the Torra Bay recovery suggest that Southern African birds are of the nominate race *Larus fuscus fuscus* that originate from Sweden and the Baltic Sea area (Hockey *et. al.* 2005).

On 22/02/06 2 Lesser Black-backed Gulls were seen at the Kunene River Mouth on the Namibian bank at -17.250° S 11.753° E. Both birds were in adult plumage with varying amounts of brown streaking around the mantle. Neither bird was displaying the characteristic yellow legs or the yellow bill of adult *L. fuscus*. The uniform black back of the

birds without any colour variation between the back and primaries suggest that these birds were of the nominate race *L. f. fuscus* rather than *L. f. intermedius* or *L. f. graelsii* that originate from western Europe and migrate down to West Africa and possibly as far as northern Angola (Svensson *et. al.* 1999 and Hockey *et. al.* 2005).

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*

Royal Terns are considered as vagrants to Southern Africa and Northern Namibia (Ryan 1997 (b) and Hockey *et. al.* 2005). The Kunene River mouth is the only locality where they are regularly recorded in the sub region with group size ranging from 1 to 26 (JP unpublished data). It has been suggested that the occurrence of *S. maxima* at the Kunene is associated with the seasonal movement of the Angola Benguela Front (Komen and Paterson 1999). Warm water in central and northern Namibia with temperatures $>20^{\circ}$ during January and February at Möwe Bay seem to indicate that the Angola Benguela Front moved south creating favourable warm water conditions well into Namibia. Most records for *S. maxima* at the Kunene are for December to March (JP unpublished data and Hockey *et. al.* 2005) though there is a record for 8 birds in October 2002 (JP *pers. obs.*).

On 21/02/06 at about 09h00 between 14 and 16 birds were seen flying out of the Kunene Mouth -17.250° S 11.753° E to sea. During follow up observations in the evening and the following 2 days no more birds were seen. All tern species were scarce during the period of observation at the Kunene between the evening of 20 to 23/02/06 with only 1 Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*, and a flock of \pm 50 Damara Terns, *S. balaenarum*. There were no Sandwich, *S. sandvicensis*, or Swift Terns, *S. bergii*, present. The only Tern present in any number was Caspian Tern, *S. caspia*, which had a roost on the Angolan bank that appeared to hold about 80 birds. This is probably the highest recorded estimated number for this species at the Kunene with the previous highest count being 74 in January 2001 (Anderson *et. al.* 2001 and JP unpublished data).

Crowned Cormorant *Phalacrocorax coronatus*

Crowned Cormorants are endemic to the south and west coast of Southern Africa from Möwe Bay, Namibia (1 bird), to a recently discovered breeding colony in the Tsitsikama National Park, Eastern Cape (Hockey *et. al.* 2005). *P. coronatus* is considered rare in Namibia (Hockey *et. al.* 2005) generally associated with the islands from Walvis Bay to the Orange River. The record from Möwe Bay is an isolated record of a single bird (Hockey *et. al.* 2005).

On 21/02/06 a small group of 6 *P. coronatus* were seen on the beach on the Angolan side of the Kunene River Mouth. These birds were roosting on the ground with a group of Cape Cormorants, *P. capensis*. On 22/02/06 15 *P. coronatus* were roosting on the Namibian side of the river mouth. These birds were flying out to sea to forage and 2 *P. coronatus* were seen at sea with a group of *P. capensis*. Although the occurrence of *P. coronatus* in Angola has been suspected (Dean 2000), there are no confirmed records. Considering that the most northerly accepted record for this species is at Möwe Bay, -19.372° S 12.708° E, this new

record from the Kunene represents a range increase of about 300 km, and a new species record for Angola.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

Greater Sand Plover is listed as uncommon on the east coast of Southern Africa with most records from Kwa-zulu Natal and Mozambique and is considered rare in Namibia with some records from Walvis Bay (Tree 1997 (b) and Hockey *et. al.* 2005). While Dean (2000) does not list any confirmed records for Angola he considers it likely that it might occur on the south-western coast.

On 22/02/06 2 *C. leschenaultii* were observed foraging on the beach about 1 km south of the Kunene River Mouth. The birds were in a mixed flock of Common Ringed Plovers, *Charadrius huiaticula*, Little Stints, *Calidris minuta*, Curlew Sandpipers, *Calidris ferruginea*, and Sanderlings, *Calidris alba*. On 23/02/06 a single *Calidris leschenaultii* was seen at the river mouth in a group of *C. huiaticula*. Later on the same day another single *C. huiaticula* was seen on the beach south of the river mouth in company with *C. alba*. It is likely that all sightings were of the same 2 birds.

Common Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

Common Redshanks are regarded as uncommon visitors to Southern Africa and are seen regularly at Walvis Bay, Namibia (Hockey *et. al.* 2005). The majority of records are between August and January of mainly juveniles and second year birds that depart by February (Hockey *et. al.* 2005).

A single *T. tetanus* was found on a vegetated island on the mudflats to the south of the Kunene River Mouth on 22/02/06. The same individual was seen again at the same locality the following day. We suspect this was a passage bird on its northern migration as Hockey *et. al.* (2005) suggests that these birds have departed their Southern African sites by February.

Loanda Swift *Apus horus fuscobrunneus*

The Horus swift has a patchy distribution in the more humid eastern side of Southern Africa where it ranges from common to uncommon (Brooke 1997 and Hockey *et. al.* 2005). *A. horus* is regarded as a vagrant to Namibia (Hockey *et. al.* 2005). From a distance it resembles a Little Swift, *Apus affinis*, with both species displaying a white rump, but without the square tail (Brooke 1997, Sinclair and Ryan 2003 and Hockey *et. al.* 2005). There are two dark rumped varieties of Horus swift, with *A. h. fuscobrunneus* from S.W. Angola considered a subspecies and *A. h. Toulsoni* from N.W. Angola considered a morph (Fry *et. al.* 1988). The sub-species *fuscobrunneus* and morph *Toulsoni* have together been considered by some authors as a separate species, Loanda Swift (Chantler and Driessens 1995, Brooke 1997). Some authors, however, consider the two dark rumped types as a para species Loanda Swift under the Horus Swift super species (Hockey *et. al.* 2005).

Although both *A. h. fuscobrunneus* and *A. h. Toulsoni* have brown rumps, *A. h. Toulsoni* is as dark bodied as *A. horus*, with *A. h. fuscobrunneus* having a generally paler body lacking the strong gloss to the plumage (Chantler and Driessens 1995).

On 23/02/06 a small dark rumped swift with a shallow forked tail was seen flying along the Namibian bank of the Kunene about 3 km from the mouth. This bird was identified as being the dark rumped subspecies of Horus Swift or Loanda Swift, *A. h. fuscobrunneus*. This subspecies has previously been recorded on the Kunene River near Epupa and Ruacana and is the normal form in the coastal areas of S. W. Angola (Brooke 1997). This sighting is the first record for *A. h. fuscobrunneus* at the Kunene River Mouth.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

Little Bittern are uncommon in Southern Africa (Tree 1997 and Hockey *et. al.* 2005) displaying a highly fragmented distribution indicating that the species is an opportunistic wanderer (Tree 1997).

On 25/02/06 a single *I. Minutus* was seen at the Hoanib Oasis wetland (-19.447° S 12.823° E). The bird flew across a stretch of open water between two reed beds clearly displaying the pale buff upper wing coverts. This is the first known record for this species in the Skeleton Coast Park. Given its skulking behaviour and wandering nature it is possible that *I. Minutus* has been overlooked in the past both at the Hoanib Oasis and other suitable wetlands in the park.

Conclusion

The Skeleton Coast Park with its isolated wetlands provides important habitat for many bird species. The northern coastal areas of the park are important for migrating Damara Terns providing safe undisturbed staging areas for migration. Braby *et. al.* (1992) record large flocks of these terns on the northern coast and Paterson and Boorman (*pers. obs.*) have seen large flocks (>300 birds) in similar areas on a previous coastal count. The relatively high count in 2006 reinforces the importance of this area to these birds. The observations described in this paper support Simmons *et. al.* (1993) and Morant (1996) that the Kunene mouth provides an important and unique wetland in an otherwise barren landscape as a stop over and feeding station for migrating birds and a refuge for resident wetland birds. Other wetlands such as the Oasis provide suitable habitat for many species to breed, shelter and feed in the arid Skeleton Coast Park. The wetlands in the Skeleton Coast Park are, therefore, high priority conservation areas that must be maintained so that they continue to contribute to the survival of both resident and migrating birds in the harsh northern Namib Desert.

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Table 1: Coastal ¼° counts showing species totals per square traversed, total birds per species, % of species of total count and density per km.

Date of Count	24/02/06					20/02/06					Total	% of Total	Birds per KM
¼ Deg. Square	1912BC	1912BA	1812CD	1812CB	1812CA	1811BD	1811BB	1711DD	1711DA/DB	1711BC			
Kelp Gull ad	16	381	317	94	196	191	37	23	31	44	1330	23.91	4.16
Kelp Gull Juv	15	55	112	25	40	37	15	28	28	15	370		1.16
White-breasted Cormorant	4	54	70	4		2		1		5	140	1.97	0.44
Cape Cormorant		2	83		2	7	1			41	136	1.91	0.43
Grey Plover	3	25	11		12	7			2	4	64	0.90	0.20
White-fronted Plover		15	1	2	5	4		6	3	4	40	0.56	0.13
Three-banded Plover		2									2	0.03	0.01
Ruddy Turnstone			1								1	0.01	0.00
Sanderling		1190		11	1719	179	135		233	516	3983	56.01	12.45
Damara Tern				11	505		253	103	155		1027	14.44	3.21
Caspian Tern										7	7	0.10	0.02
Cape Gannet			1								1		
Cory's Shearwater			P	P	P	P	P	100	P	33	133		
White-chinned Petrel								3			3		
Sub Antarctic Skua								1			1		
Greenshank										1	1	0.01	0.00
Grey Heron	1	1									2	0.03	0.01
Great White Pelican										1	1	0.01	0.00
Osprey										1	1	0.01	0.00
Peregrine Falcon			1								1	0.01	0.00
Lappet-faced Vulture						5					5	0.07	0.02
Totals	39	1725	597	147	2479	432	441	265	452	672	7111	100.0	22.22
KM per ¼ degree block	9	30	40	4	31	15	22	29	27	27			

Table 2: Kunene River mouth wetland count with totals per species and species % of Total.

Species	Count	% of Total
Great White Pelican	86	6.44
Kelp Gull	178	13.33
Lesser Black Backed Gull	2	0.15
Caspian Tern	50	3.75
Common Tern	1	0.07
Damara Tern	58	4.34
Royal Tern	14	1.05
White-breasted Cormorant	200	14.98
Cape Cormorant	70	5.24
Reed Cormorant	4	0.30
Crowned Cormorant	16	1.20
Grey Heron	1	0.07
Goliath Heron	1	0.07
Little Egret	1	0.07
Black Stork	1	0.07
African Spoonbill	1	0.07
Egyptian Goose	18	1.35
Black Crake	2	0.15
Three-banded Plover	1	0.07
White-fronted Plover	23	1.72
Common Ringed Plover	18	1.35
Kittlitz's Plover	2	0.15
Greater Sand Plover	2	0.15
Common Sandpiper	1	0.07
Sanderling	59	4.42
Little Stint	500	37.45
Curlew Sandpiper	22	1.65
Bar-tailed Godwit	1	0.07
Common Redshank	1	0.07
Osprey	1	0.07
Total	1335	100.00

Table 3: Vagrant species recorded giving their status in the context of the Skeleton Coast Park

Species	Count	Context
Common Redshank	1	First record for Park
Greater Sand Plover	2	First record for Park and possible first record for Angola.
Royal Tern	16	Rare regular visitor to Kunene mouth
Lesser Black-backed Gull	2	First live record for Park
Crowned Cormorant	16	Range extension and first record for Angola
Loanda Swift	1	First record for Park
Little Bittern	1	First record for Park

Table 4: Additional species recorded at the Kunene mouth not included in the wetland count.

Cory's Shearwater	Banded Martin
White-chinned Petrel	Loanda Swift
Madagascar Bee-eater	Zitting Cisticola
Cape Wagtail	Southern Masked Weaver
African Pied Wagtail	Lesser Swamp-warbler
Barn Swallow	African Reed-warbler

Table 5: Species recorded at Hoanib Oasis. Number of species per group with their % of total species is given.

Species Group	Species	Species/group	% of group
Ducks	Cape Teal	6	25
	Red-billed Teal		
	Hottentot Teal		
	Maccoa Duck		
	Southern Pochard		
	Cape Shoveller		
Grebes	Little Grebe	2	8
	Black-necked Grebe		
Crakes, Coots, Moorhens & Gallinules	Red-knobbed Coot	4	17
	Moorhen		
	Black Crake		
	African Purple Swamphen		
Herons and Bitterns	Grey Heron	2	8
	Little Bittern		
Waders	Ruff	2	8
	Little Stint		
Sea birds	Kelp Gull	2	8
	White-breasted Cormorant		
Flamingos	Greater Flamingo	1	4
Crows	Pied Crow	2	8
	Cape Crow		
Passerines	Southern Masked Weaver	2	8
	African Reed-warbler		
Swallows	Barn Swallow	1	4

Early Birds on Tsutsab Vlei

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From the 5th to 12th November 2008 we had some exceptionally good rainfall on the farm, especially on the 12th, when we recorded 50mm during the night. A fairly large area of Tsutsab Vlei was covered with shallow water which prompted us to search for some early visitors.

On the afternoon of Saturday the 15th we approached the edge of the vlei carefully so as not to disturb the birds. We saw a lot of *Red-billed Teal* (*Anas erythrorhyncha*) in the distance, heard waders calling and saw some of them feeding in the shallows. In spite of the shallow water two *Little Grebe* (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) did their diving acts.

After the first observations we scanned the teal with the spotting scope –hoping there might be some other birds amongst them. Just as we noticed the odd one the whole group flew off but landed even closer to us. And there they were, two of them. Ducks with broad black bills, not like any other bill colorations we had seen here before; brownish blotched overall. The legs were more to the yellow side than orange-yellow. We were unable to observe them in flight, but the upper parts appeared a very deep steel-blue. This description fitted only the *Cape Shoveller* (*Anas smithii*), a species we have never seen before on the vlei and a lifer for us. One of the birds was a sub-adult. In "Roberts Multimedia Birds of Southern Africa" it is mentioned that this bird is seldom seen together with other species; here it was together with about 80 *Red-billed Teal*.

Two *Glossy Ibis* (*Plegadis falcinellus*) appeared; we had not seen them during the previous season. The two birds flying over the water, hovering, dipping downwards turned out to be *Whiskered Tern* (*Chlidonias hybrida*) in breeding plumage. Having checked on all the waders, we just waited for more species to make their appearance. Earlier scanning beneath the trees in the shade had brought nothing. Suddenly there they were close by: a male and female *Greater Painted-snipe* (*Rostratula benghalensis*). They can usually only be seen very late in the afternoon when they come out into the open to feed. At other times they keep under cover. A few days later when we made another visit to the vlei there were two pairs.

The rains persisted giving us a total of 209 mm for November. After another big shower on 3rd December in the catchment area of the vlei some water started flowing in. More *Little Grebe* arrived and we saw a *White Stork* (*Ciconia ciconia*) two days later. On Sunday, December 7th after yet another shower we went to look again. Another *White Stork* had arrived, more *Woolly-necked Stork* (*Ciconia episcopus*) as well as *Saddle-billed Stork* (*Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*). A huge area of the vlei was covered with shallow water, ideal for all the waders. Two *African Spoonbill* (*Platalea alba*) and a *Pied Avocet* (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) had also arrived. Late on Tuesday afternoon we went to search again. All present but there was some other ducks. We had not brought along the scope and, as the light was fading it had to be back the following morning.