

Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird News 9

Newsletter of the Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Working Group

October 2009

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Ed: We wish to thank Namrangers for their substantial contribution to the information in this newsletter, and for enabling us to share it with a wider audience.

SPOTLIGHT ON WILDLIFE/POWER LINE CONFLICTS ON THE COAST

Existing and potential conflicts between wildlife – especially birds – and power lines was the focus of a workshop organized by the NamPower/Namibia Nature Foundation Strategic Partnership at Walvis Bay on 22 October 2009. With the escalating increase in economic development on the coast and the accompanying demand for electricity, collisions and the electrocution of birds on power structures are also set to increase.

Why an industry-conservation partnership?

The management of threatened bird populations and habitats is based on addressing the threats outlined in the Red Data Book. One of the chief threats is electrocution on and collisions with electricity structures; many of these impacts could be reduced or prevented with appropriate communication, planning and management. At the same time, inconvenient outages (blackouts) caused by wildlife/power line interactions (e.g. electrocution and nesting on structures) result in high maintenance and repair costs, especially during the rainy season; these incidents are also largely preventable.

The NamPower/NNF Strategic Partnership was thus launched in October 2008, with funding by the European Investment Bank.

What is the Partnership's mission?

To provide a multi-disciplinary mechanism to assist NamPower to manage its impacts on the natural environment and *vice versa*, and to develop a biodiversity information resource that will assist Namibian environmental and industry role players to manage impacts on Namibia's biodiversity. The initial focus will be on birds, with a view to expanding it to other wildlife resources in due course.



A maze of power lines on the C14, east of the rapidly expanding port of Walvis Bay. South of this road, the Walvis Bay sewage ponds regularly hosts large numbers of coastal wetland birds, with a count of over 2 000 in July 2009 (including 1148 Lesser Flamingos). Numerous White Pelicans (centre & bottom) also regularly fly over the power lines; both species are now on Namibian Red Data List (photos: top & centre Ann Scott; bottom Susann Kinghorn)

The Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Action Plan is supported by Namibia Nature Foundation and the NACOMA Project
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For previous issues see http://www.nacoma.org.na/Our_Coast/FaunaFlora.htm (bottom of page) and www.nnf.org.na/coastalbirds.htm



Twenty coastal/marine bird species are of special concern in Namibia

*Namibian Red Data Status according to Simmons & Brown 2006;

G = global conservation status (in brackets) according to BirdLife International 2004

Species	Conservation status*	Species	Conservation status*
Albatross		Gannet Cape	Endangered (<i>G Vulnerable</i>)
Atlantic Yellow-nosed	Endangered	Grebe Black-necked	Near Threatened
Black-browed	Endangered	Gull Hartlaub's	Vulnerable
Shy	Near Threatened	Oystercatcher	Near Threatened (<i>G Near Threatened</i>)
Wandering	Vulnerable	African Black	
Cormorant		Pelican Great White	Vulnerable
Bank	Endangered (<i>G Vulnerable</i>)	Penguin African	Endangered (<i>G Vulnerable</i>)
Cape	Near Threatened (<i>G Near Threatened</i>)	Petrel	
Crowned	Near Threatened (<i>G Near Threatened</i>)	Northern Giant-White-chinned	Near Threatened
Flamingo		Plover Chestnut-banded	Near Threatened
Greater	Vulnerable	Tern	
Lesser	Vulnerable (<i>G Near Threatened</i>)	Caspian	Vulnerable
		Damara	Near Threatened; breeding endemic

What are the project objectives? To:

- Develop a dynamic web-based Environmental Information Service (EIS); a 'one-stop-shop' for public environmental information in Namibia (including mapping of all power lines in Namibia)
- Promote awareness of the risks that power lines pose to birds, and birds to power lines
- Provide training to stakeholders in the management of bird interactions with power line networks
- Monitor and investigate wildlife / power line incidents, and survey power lines where problems are experienced or expected
- Incorporate bird mitigation into the planning of future electricity networks

How you can become involved!

- Register with the project as a stakeholder. We need your help to build our database of relevant information which will become the basis of our dynamic, web-based Environmental Information Service (EIS) for Namibia (see website www.nnf.org.na/EIS).
- We specifically need information on wildlife / power line interactions (e.g. mortality, injuries, nesting, roosting etc.) on power lines in your area. Please use the Field Investigation Form to record this information (*downloadable from our website – see below*). Also let us know if you would like to undertake surveys beneath power lines in your area.



Flamingos are particularly vulnerable to collisions with power line structures, due to their habit of flying at night; both Lesser Flamingos (above) and Greater Flamingos are classed as *Vulnerable* (photo Chris van Rooyen)

- Incorporate the above activities into those of existing working groups, or consider establishing a new action group if necessary.
- Subscribe to the Partnership's free, electronic newsletter (also downloadable from our website).

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COASTAL/WETLAND BIRD COUNTS

Summary of the 2009 winter wetland bird counts in Namibia

Holger Kolberg (MET), email holgerk@mweb.com.na

During the month of July 2009 volunteers once again participated in the winter wetland bird counts all over Namibia. A total of 27 wetlands were counted resulting in just over 99 000 birds of 87 species (see Table 1 & 2). The number of sites being counted is up thanks to the Namibia Bird Club, which is now conducting regular counts at Avis Dam, the Gammams (Windhoek) Sewage Works and Monte Christo. The Walvis Bay Ramsar site tops the list with over 50,000 birds, followed by Sandwich Harbour and the Mile 4 Saltworks. Walvis Bay also tops the list in terms of number of species, followed by Lake Oponono, Sandwich and Monte Christo – thirty species or more were recorded at each of these wetlands. Once again the count for the Orange River Mouth Ramsar site is only a partial count because no simultaneous count was conducted on the South African side.

Only two Great Crested Grebe were seen, one at Mile 4 and one at Sandwich, perhaps confirming that species' rare status in Namibia. The presence of 1 827 Black-necked Grebe at Cape Cross once again confirmed that wetland's status as a potential Ramsar site. Three Yellow-billed Storks were seen at Monte Christo, an unusual sighting for this time of the year. The majority of flamingos counted were Greater Flamingos, outnumbering Lesser Flamingos by a ratio of about 4.5:1. As can be expected for this time of the year, the numbers of waders and shorebirds are quite low, yet

good numbers of e.g. African Black Oystercatcher (256), Chestnut-banded Plover (1952) and White-fronted Plover (3641) were observed. Just four Damara Terns were recorded, three at Cape Cross and one at Sandwich, indicating that this species has moved up the coast to its wintering quarters. An Osprey was recorded at the Orange River Mouth and ten Red-necked Phalaropes were seen at Walvis Bay.

I'd like to thank all the counters for making the effort and taking the time to do the counts.

Table 1: Numbers of birds & species for each site counted.

Site	Birds	Species
Aeroplane Bay	124	6
Agate Beach	196	3
Avis Dam	92	10
Cape Cross	3 236	21
Ekuma River	105	7
Fischer's Pan	10	2
Gammams Sewage Works	188	17
Griffith Bay	43	9
Grosse Bucht	104	8
Guano Bay	55	8
Hardap Dam	620	12
Lüderitz Sewage Works	93	4
Mile 4 Saltworks	4 333	24
Monte Christo	316	30
Naute Dam	340	16
Okondeka	9	2
Oponono	2 313	32
Orange River - Skilpad to Hohenfels	660	3
Orange River - Hohenfels to Bridge	486	26
Orange River Mouth	780	29
Radford Bay	98	5
Sandwich Harbour	29 654	32
Second Lagoon Lüderitz	530	13
Shearwater Bay	8	2
Swakop River Mouth	103	13
Walvis Bay	52 626	36
Walvis Sewage Works	2 056	22
Total	99 178	87

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

Group	Birds	Species
Grebes	9 698	3
Pelicans	609	1
Cormorants and Darter	31 019	6
Hérons and Egrets	725	11
Storks	95	4
Ibises and Spoonbill	75	3
Hamerkop	4	1
Flamingos	32 115	2
Geese and Ducks	2 702	12
Rails, Gallinules and Coot	340	4
Jacanas	6	1
Waders and Shorebirds	11 667	26
Gulls, Terns and Skimmer	10 104	9
Birds of Prey	8	3
Additional Species	11	2



Bird counters busy at the Walvis Bay Ramsar site, July 2009 (photo CETN)

2009 winter bird counts at Walvis Bay

Peter Bridgeford (for Coastal and Environmental Trust of Namibia/CETN), email pmbridge@iway.na

The week before the count, the east wind was blowing with gusto in Walvis Bay. However, on Saturday and Sunday, 11 and 12 July 2009, the weather cooperated and both days were sunny with very little wind. Thanks to a large number of volunteers from Swakopmund, Walvis Bay and Windhoek. Without their assistance, the count could not have taken place.

On Saturday morning, three groups were taken by boat from the harbour to a point opposite the yacht club. They walked from here across the mudflats and edge of the lagoon to count the birds. Other groups went by vehicle and with telescopes and binoculars, scoured the lagoon and pans of the Walvis Bay Salt Company. Because most of the waders and terns had left for the northern hemisphere on their annual migration, not many birds were counted. However, many Greater Flamingo juveniles had arrived in the wetland and almost 15 000 were recorded. A year ago, only 4 655 were counted. Although Lesser Flamingo chicks are returning to the area and just over 4 300 were seen, this is very close to the figure recorded last winter. As usual, a large number of Kelp Gulls (5 812) and Cape Cormorants (16 800) were counted. Chestnut-banded Plovers (only 41) appear to have left the coast to breed inland. Last year there were 200. There are reports of these birds in Etosha, as there is still plenty of water in the pan. White-fronted Plovers breed here on the coast and July last year, 545 were seen. This year almost double that number was recorded. On Sunday, two teams also counted the birds at the Walvis Bay sewage ponds. Here 22 species and 2 100 birds were seen.

Unusual birds seen were 10 Red-necked Phalaropes and 3 Terek Sandpipers. Both these species caused some excitement as they are vagrants to the Namibian coast and many volunteers had not seen them before. In total, just over 52 000 birds (37 species) were recorded, last year the total was 54 000.

The summer and winter bird counts in the Walvis Bay Lagoon and RAMSAR Site have been carried out for over 20 years. These figures are invaluable for

assessing the health of the environment and are used by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, the University of Cape Town and Wetlands International. The latter co-ordinates wetland counts around the world. Several sponsors assist the Coastal and Environmental Trust of Namibia with these important surveys: Probst Bakery, Radio Electronics, Namibia Marine Services, Walvis Bay Salt Refiners, Namibia Breweries, Buccaneers Squash Club and Sandwich Harbour 4X4. Gail Wearne kept all the participants well fed and happy.

Swakop River Mouth bird counts

Led by **Mark Boorman**, email felix@mweb.com.na

The Swakop River Mouth was open to the sea on 6/3/09 (see newsletter No. 7). Subsequent monthly counts at the site have yielded the following results:

24/6/09 85 birds of 16 species

22/7/09 103 birds of 13 species

18/8/09 135 birds of 16 species

Including 29 Crowned Cormorant and 4 Greater Flamingo. A lull in the nasty weather gave us a pleasant count. Due to heavy seas the mouth had received a lot of water and the muddy bits at the bridge end have been inundated.

First Southern Pochard for a long time and the first time I've seen a feral duck here.

15/9/09 92 birds of 21 species

Including 10 Crowned Cormorant, 4 greater Flamingo and 1 (alien) Mallard

20/10/09 138 birds of 22 species

Good to see a variety of palaeartic waders around and for good measure a pair of Damara Tern flew over. A dark duck had me calling Cape Shoveler but my ID was shot down and it eventually turned out to be an oiled Cape Teal. Wonder where this happened?

TRACKING THE MOVEMENTS OF INDIVIDUAL BIRDS

First African Penguin spotted back in Namibia

SANCCOB (email carole@sanccob.co.za), via **Mark Boorman**

It was a **pink spot** day on Mercury Island when a Namibian conservationist spotted the first African Penguin back home after a recent 4-week stint of rehabilitation at SACCOB.

On 8 June 2009, just 18 days after their release from Derdesteen Beach in Cape Town the first of a group of 129 penguins, which have been successfully rehabilitated at SANCCOB, was seen back at its original breeding colony of Mercury Island.

After his release from Derdesteen Beach he was spotted on Robben Island on 25 May (4 days later). With this confirmed sighting on 25 May, this would mean that his actual swimming time was a fantastic 14 days!

At a total distance of 1 019km, he averaged 72.7km per day! So, if you play the lotto, you may want to remember the lucky numbers A10885 because that's the tenacious little tike that won the race to get back home.

As with all collectives of animals one immediately stood out as the feistiest and was immediately dubbed 'Black Angus' as it fought its way through rehab, pecking the handlers randomly and generally taking charge.

Weighing in at 2,8kg on admittance, which is a respectable weight for a penguin and put him ahead in the weight-class of his fellow refugees, he pretty much doubled his weight as he ate his way through prime Sardine a la SANCCOB, to finally weigh in at 4.1kg on his release.

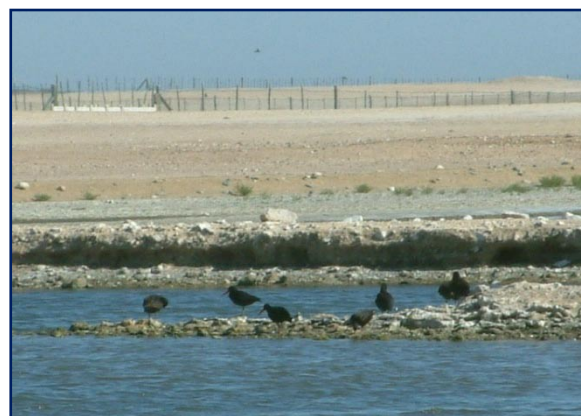
Of course it was he who strode out ahead of the group at the beach release, and first to take to the waters. And follows that he had to be the one to win the long swim home, to strike familiar soil shore and to announce triumphantly to his fellow Mercurians "Black Angus is back!".

SANCCOB thanks all readers, listeners and volunteers who have followed the story of the 129 African penguins oiled off the coast of Luderitz as well as helped us with "Getting our birds back on their feet."

Ringed African Black Oystercatchers

Ann & Mike Scott

On 5/7/09 at 15h00 we spotted group of seven African Black Oystercatchers at Mile 4 Saltworks, Swakopmund, roosting and bathing on the edge of a saltpan. Apparently none were very young (first-year) birds; one had a yellow plastic ring on the right leg. We saw one more bird on the coast nearby. Where could this bird have been ringed?



Jessica Kemper, email jkemper@mfmr.gov.na

Only five oystercatchers have been ringed by MFMR staff with yellow rings. All five were ringed yellow left, metal right, as chicks on Possession Island in March and April 2007.



Apart from that, we had a resighting of an oystercatcher which was ringed metal left, yellow right on Ichaboe Island on 1 April 2005. I also had a resighting of an oystercatcher ringed metal left and either faded-yellow or aged-white right on Halifax Island on 3 June 2008 (complete with an out-of-focus photo as inconclusive evidence; reminiscent of the colour rings of the vulture featuring in the seminal February 2007 edition of Raptor News).

Marius Wheeler, email marius.wheeler@uct.ac.za
When I did my Oystercatcher project in Walvis Bay in 2001 (can't believe it is that long ago!!) in conjunction with the SA Oystercatcher Conservation Programme, I was looking at ringed birds and their SA origins. It is well known that the youngsters from particularly the west coast of SA will fly up to Namibia (particularly Walvis Bay area) then spend 1-3 years up there before they return back down south.

During that time I had a number of ringed birds up there with a number of different colour rings. The following is a short extract from my project:

The long, individually engraved, ring is usually placed on the left tarsus. Colour is used to indicate region of origin and the inscription on the ring to identify the particular individual. Below is a list of regions indicated by the colour of the long ring (Hockey, 2001):

Blue = Lamberts Bay to Cape Point mainland.
Yellow = Saldanha Bay Islands.
Orange = Dassen Island.
Red = Cape Point to Breede River mouth.
Light Green = Breede River mouth to Cape St Francis.
White = Cape St Francis to Cape Padrone.
Turquoise = East of Cape Padrone (1998/99 – 1999/2000).
Black = East of Cape Padrone (2000/2001).

ABOs ringed on Possession Island in 1998/99 have a short dark green/metal right and a short dark green left. Birds ringed in 1999/2000 have a short dark green/metal right with two short dark green rings left.

During the course of the project a total of 27 individually identifiable ringed ABOs were seen. Not all were observed at the same time. Most birds originated from Dassen Island with 9 birds (33% of the total). The

second largest group of birds came from the region between Cape Point and the Breede River mouth with 6 birds (22%). Again it could be argued that the reason for these two areas being so highly represented is the fact that many young birds were ringed in these areas. The third largest group (19%) is represented by the group of birds whose origin is not known.

Birds coming from the Saldanha Bay Islands make up 15%, whereas birds from the Lamberts Bay to Cape Point area and Possession Island make up 7% and 4% respectively. It is also very likely that more ABOs originate from Possession Island and other islands in the south of Namibia. According to Simmons & Roux (2000), hotspots of density do occur on the rocky shores around Lüderitz where breeding does occur. The problem is, however, that very few of the young birds are ringed with the exception of a few on Possession Island.

Personally I think it is unlikely that any of these "older" birds are still in the Walvis/Swakop area. Also, almost all these older birds had their colour ring on the left leg. It must be said though that these were long individually engraved rings and not the smaller type individual colour rings. Your bird had the yellow on the right leg. I am not sure where that bird could have come from.

Scatty White-fronted Plover

Jessica Kemper

Yennifer Hernandez, a temporary field assistant with Ingrid Wiesel's Brown Hyena Research Project in Lüderitz, has recently been busy with the fun-filled task of lovingly taking apart and sorting a whole collection of brown hyena scats to extract prey items. On 20/6/09, she came across ring FH41384 in a scat that had been collected by Ingrid on 28/10/08 at a brown hyena den near the Swakopmund Salt Works.

The ring belonged to a White-fronted Plover, ringed as a chick on 21/3/07 at Mile 4 (2234S, 1431E) by none other than Dirk Heinrich. I have asked Ingrid whether the scat in question was still steaming-fresh when she collected it, to find out whether we could narrow down the plover's date and cause of death. Unfortunately the scat had been dry and white when it was collected, but Ingrid says that they do dry out quite fast. She has had reports that the den area was active around the beginning of 2008, so it could have originated from that time. In that case it is likely that the plover died from something else and the hyena subsequently scavenged it. Alternatively, it is possible that the hyena predated the plover when it was still a chick and before it could fly.

How is this for an exciting recovery record?

Intrepid Sanderling Traveller

Mark Boorman

On 17/07/08 an unfledged Sanderling was uniquely colour- ringed in Greenland by Dutch researcher Jeroen Reneerkens. Just over one month later on 26/08/08 another Dutch researcher read the ring combination on this bird on its first southerly migration, in Griend in The Netherlands. The bird was last seen there on 03/09/08.

On 19/01/09 I was waiting to meet two Dutch researchers at Walvis Bay who were coming to look for colour-ringed Bar-tailed Godwits. Whilst scanning the waders I picked up a colour-ringed Sanderling. At that very moment somebody walked up to me and said "Are you....." Hold on a minute", I said, "I'm looking at a colour-ringed Sanderling". As quick as a flash he had his scope out and said, that bird was ringed in Greenland!

After this excitement it turned out that this was one of the researchers I was to meet. Astonishingly, it later transpired that this researcher, Bernard Spaans, was the very person who had seen this bird in Griend. It was again seen on a few subsequent days and was last seen by myself on 17/02/09.

Imagine my surprise when I received an e-mail including a photo of this same bird taken on 17/07/09. This bird had been seen again on southerly migration. However, this time it was at the Sillon de Talbert reserve in France.

Knowing that most waders are very site specific I decided to mount a search for the bird back at Walvis Bay. Bingo! On 23/09/09 Johan Lotter and I spotted a Sanderling which was colour-ringed. Although it was carrying a green flag, (a ring with a small tab making it more visible) which placed it as having been ringed in Greenland, we were not able due to distance to get a full reading of the colour combinations. However, I am sure this was it.

On 09/10/09 John Paterson joined Faansie and Ronel Peacock and myself for a bit of birding. We stopped off at the Sanderling's hang-out and within a couple of minutes John picked up the bird and read out the magic colour-combination. This was verified by the rest of the party. What a great sighting.

So... if you're at the last parking area before Lover's Hill on the lagoon please keep a special look-out and let me know if you've seen (and preferably photographed) our intrepid traveler again.

Ringed Swift Tern

Rod and Sig Braby, email rbraby@nacoma.org.na
We saw on 12/09/09 a group of 80 mixed Terns @ Caution Reef – Swift, Sandwich and Common Terns. One Swift Tern had an orange ring on left and metal ring on right. Anyone out there who ringed this bird?

Tony Tree, email tony@zeane.com

This is a Possession bird. Nice to get a record from Nam, the majority went east this year.

Pelican Methuselah

Mark Boorman

Saw Pelican H1024 at his / her? normal spot (at tourist jetty in Walvis Bay) on 1/11/09. Oscar, please update this record in your database. This bird is now close to 37 years old.



NEWSFLASHES & PHOTO GALLERY

Two African Penguins seen at the Lüderitz Carnival

Hot penguin news from the "Southern Namibian Press"

Jean-Paul Roux (Lüderitz; own correspondent, 14 Sep 09) During the LÜKA 11 carnival celebrations at Lüderitz this weekend, several witnesses have reported seeing two African Penguins. Despite a clever disguise with yellow false beaks, they were allegedly recognized on the dance floor of the Turnhalle on Saturday evening. According to the witnesses, the numbered flipper bands (R0401 and A10853) were dead giveaways. No one at the Ministry of Fisheries was available for comment, however expert sources consulted confirmed that the flipper bands sighted were definitely from African Penguins rehabilitated after oiling earlier this year. The first one is well known to the Lüderitz residents as "Charlie", and was rehabilitated at the Lüderitz facility between 15 April and 6 June and released at Guano Bay. It was spotted back on Mercury Island a mere six days later. The other, still bearing a prominent pink spot on the chest, was sent to Cape Town for rehabilitation at SANCCOB. According to sources close to the Ministry, and the bird ringing records, this penguin was released near Cape Town on 21 May, was back on Halifax Island by 17 July and the parent of two chicks by 5 September. A few reports of late night sightings of penguins (and other pink wildlife) were made in the past in the town of Lüderitz but each time the reliability of the witnesses was questioned. This time, however, the two individuals were again sighted in town on Sunday morning and photographic evidence was obtained (see above).

Ruddy Turnstone

Susann Kinghorn, email susannkinghorn@gmail.com

A Ruddy Turnstone in front of the Beach Lodge in Swakopmund, taken in April 200 (see photo on right).

Black-chested Snake Eagle

Lynette le Roux, email adventurenamibia@iway.na

This morning at 10h15 we saw a Black-chested Snake Eagle on the plot of Mr Gavin Hansen (Namspace). It is the last plot along the Swakop River.

Karoo Thrush

Neil Macleod, email neil@safariwise.net

I noted a Karoo Thrush on my lawn out at Rossmund on 13/9/09. I am not sure if this species has ever been recorded here? Several other people at Rossmund have seen the same bird.

Eckart Demasius, email edemasius@swkmun.com.na

I have seen Karoo Thrush out there, in fact Dietmar Fleiss from Fleiss Garage, who lives and works out there alerted me to the bird.

Mark Boorman

There are a few records for Sandwich Harbour and the last time I was down there I saw one.

How many flamingos on the coast?

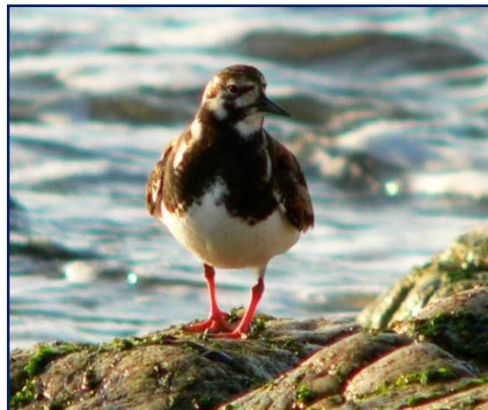
Wilferd Versfeld, email wversfeld@met.na

27/10/09 Can someone please let me know how many flamingos are at the coast? Last week on Etosha Pan on the northern boundary to the west of the Ekuma River there were thousands of Greaters with young and sub-adults (grey birds). Namutoni had received some rain so there were a few (100-200) birds at the causeway. Also if any flamingo have left the coast, as on 4-5/10/09 at Namutoni two small groups flew over during the night to the east.

Madeiran Storm Petrel in Namibia

Jessica Kemper

20/10/09 I had the strangest encounter of the avian kind last week Tuesday AND Wednesday on Halifax Island when I was repeatedly dive-bombed and buzzed by a storm petrel while counting penguin nests. I managed to take a series of photos of the storm petrel and, after consulting a number of books, forwarded the sighting to Trevor Hardaker, who then forwarded it to a number of hardcore storm petrel fundis for ID. As I had suspected initially, it turned out to be a Madeiran Storm Petrel! This constitutes the first confirmed record of the species in southern Africa (Ian Sinclair saw four of them in a group of Wilson's Storm Petrels during a cruise between Cape Town and Walvis Bay in January but this record apparently was not confirmed). So birders, go book yourself on the Bird Club's 31 October pelagic trip (advertised by Gudrun) and keep your eyes peeled for storm petrels of the Madeiran kind. I will visit Halifax Island on the weekend (weather-permitting) and will check if the storm petrel is still around...



Top to bottom: First Madeiran Storm Petrel in Namibia
(photo Jessica Kemper)
Ringed Chestnut-banded Plover (photo Mark Boorman)
Ruddy Turnstone (photo Susann Kinghorn)
Grey-headed Gull in breeding dress (photo Ann Scott)