

Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird News 3

Newsletter of the Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Working Group

July 2008



Keith Wearne was well known for his work on flamingos, pictured here at Sandwich Harbour (photo Susann Klinghorn)

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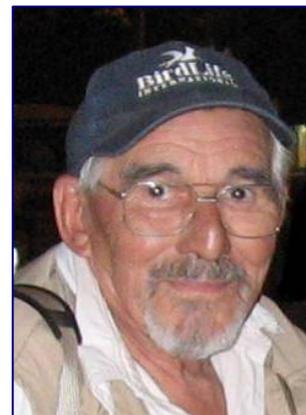
Farewell to Keith Wearne

This newsletter begins on a sad note as we bid farewell to Keith Wearne, whom we shall miss sorely both as a conservation icon and as a friend. Our sympathies go to Gail and their family. Keith very deservedly received the prestigious NACOMA "Coastodian" award on 31 July 2008. Below are two of the tributes we have received:

It is with sadness that I have received news of the death of Keith Wearne of CETN. Keith was a stalwart and dedicated citizen of Walvis Bay who will be remembered for a number of reasons, least of which was passion for the conservation of the Namibian coast and Walvis Bay in particular. I think that Keith represented our collective conscience, and his consistent efforts as advocate of all things natural will not easily be replaced. I think that his alert and dogged attention to our easily distracted approach to conservation issues has stood us in good stead and the only fitting testimony to his memory will be to uphold the principles that he stood for. He was brave and steadfast in the face of severe criticism from powerful forces, and I think that has set an example for all of us. I call upon the community of users of the marine environment in Namibia to consider establishing some form of memorial in his name, be it a bird hide, a fund or an annual lecture so that Keith's contribution and his watchful eye can remain alive in our minds as we enjoy the beauty that the Namibian coast offers us and of which he was such a committed servant.

Dr Neville Sweijd (ex-Director, BENEFIT programme)

Keith Wearne, best known for his work on flamingos, shorebirds and particularly the Walvis Bay wetland died of a heart attack on 18 July 2008. He became synonymous with fire-brand conservation of Namibia's spectacular desert wetlands and was affectionately known as the "Curmudgeon". Keith took no prisoners, was always up for a fight, and saw off many would-be



Keith, we salute you!

developers trying to impinge on the sanctuary that Walvis Bay is. He was the brains behind the Coastal Environmental Trust of Namibia whose influence spread beyond just the Walvis Bay wetland. It is thanks to him that Walvis Bay is recognised as the one of Africa's premiere sites for coastal shorebirds, particularly Lesser Flamingos. His work spanned three decades and in that time he made sure that Walvis Bay was recognised as an internationally acclaimed Ramsar wetland, and an Important Bird Area. He received the Namibia Nature Foundation's Conservator of the Year award for this work. He was approached by many birders and specialists alike for his expertise and wisdom - which he always gave freely and with a twinkle in his eye. Realizing his input the local saltworks built and named in his honour the only bird hide in the Walvis Bay complex (see photo below). His drive, enthusiasm, salty wit and sheer will to succeed will be sorely missed not just by his friends and family but by all conservationists who have benefitted from his time at the coal face.

Dr Rob Simmons (FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town)



Keith with his unruly bunch of bird counters at the summer count at Walvis Bay, January 2008 (photo Gail Wearne)

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The BirdLife International Albatross Task Force

Oli Yates & Meidad Goren, ATF

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Each year, over 300 000 seabirds are accidentally killed as bycatch in fishing operations. Of these, approximately 100 000 are albatrosses. This equates to around one albatross being killed every five minutes. Mortality of albatrosses and petrels in fisheries is the main threat to their populations and the impact is so great that 19 of 22 species of albatross are now in danger of extinction.

Since the realization of this needless slaughter, simple and cost-effective methods have been developed to massively reduce this unnecessary loss, which are highly effective when used correctly. An international collaborative effort is urgently required to promote adoption of these mitigation methods throughout target fishing fleets.

In 2006, BirdLife International and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) formed the Albatross Task Force (ATF), the world's first international team of mitigation instructors. The ATF works at-sea and on-shore to provide training and education in the use of mitigation measures to reduce the mortality of seabirds in longline and trawl fisheries.

The ATF's principal goal is: *"To reduce bycatch of albatross and petrels in targeted fisheries, and ultimately to improve the conservation status of threatened seabirds."*

This goal requires a long-term relationship between environmental NGOs, local government and the fisheries sector to ensure that fishers receive adequate training and education regarding mitigation measure use, with at-sea practical reinforcement of that knowledge. By working and collaborating with fishers the reduction of seabird incidental bycatch in fisheries will be a much more achievable goal.

The ATF has locally employed team members in Southern Hemisphere countries where fisheries bycatch of albatrosses and petrels urgently needs to be reduced. Currently ATF teams are active in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, South Africa and Uruguay. Namibia is the newest member of our team and, led by John Paterson, will work locally with key fisheries and internationally alongside the entire ATF to improve the conservation status of threatened seabirds.

Discussion:

- The task of the ATF is to work directly with the fisheries on-shore and at-sea; by helping to train local fishery observers and encouraging capacity building, so that more comparable seabird bycatch data can be collected.
- Many skippers have their reservations in the beginning but become keen to co-operate once the project is explained to them, and become involved in developing mitigation measures themselves.
- Training materials are required to ensure good

dissemination of the role of the ATF and to facilitate correct use of mitigation measures.

- Effective and proven bycatch mitigation can be a marketing tool, for a greener product.
- ATF Instructors also record other non-commercial fishery interactions, e.g. cetaceans, turtles, sharks.

What is junk food doing to our Cape Gannets?



Cape Gannet (photo ATF)

SEAWEB Marine Science Review – 264 (July 2008)

Email: enewletters@seaweb.org

Grémillet, D., Pichegru, L., Kuntz, G., Woakes, A.G., Wilkinson, S., Crawford, R.J.M., and Ryan, P.G.

A junk-food hypothesis for gannets feeding on fishery waste. *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London [B]* 275(1639): 1149-1156, 2008 (abstract)

Worldwide fisheries generate large volumes of fishery waste and it is often assumed that this additional food is beneficial to populations of marine top-predators. We challenge this concept via a detailed study of foraging Cape gannets *Morus capensis* and of their feeding environment in the Benguela upwelling zone. The natural prey of Cape gannets (pelagic fishes) is depleted and birds now feed extensively on fishery wastes. These are beneficial to non-breeding birds, which show reduced feeding effort and high survival. By contrast, breeding gannets double their diving effort in an attempt to provision their chicks predominantly with high-quality, live pelagic fishes. Owing to a scarcity of this resource, they fail and most chicks die. Our study supports the junk-food hypothesis for Cape gannets since it shows that non-breeding birds can survive when complementing their diet with fishery wastes, but that they struggle to reproduce if live prey is scarce. This is due to the negative impact of low-quality fishery wastes on the growth patterns of gannet chicks. Marine management policies should not assume that fishery waste is generally beneficial to scavenging seabirds and that an abundance of this artificial resource will automatically inflate their populations.

Related new publications:

- Crawford, R.J.M. Food, fishing and seabirds in the Benguela upwelling system. *Journal of Ornithology* 148(Spec. Publ. 2): 253-260, 2007.
- Pichegru, L., Ryan, P.G., Van der Lingen, C.D., Coetzee, J., Ropert-Coudert, Y., and Grémillet, D. Foraging behaviour and energetics of Cape gannets *Morus capensis* feeding on live prey and fishery discards in the Benguela upwelling system. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 350: 127-136, 2007.

Ring resightings & recoveries, and other newswashes

Albatross rings

John Paterson (email: john@paterson.alt.na)

A Fisheries Observer aboard a Namibian pelagic longline boat recovered a metal ring (J14019) and a plastic engraved ring (A43) from an Albatross caught accidentally during fishing operations on 11/11/07. According to SAFRING, co-coordinator of all bird ringing in Southern Africa, the ring came from a Tristan Albatross, *Diomedea dabbanena*, which was ringed on Gough Island as an adult male on 17/4/04.

Tristan Albatrosses only breed on Gough Island where it is estimated that just 2 000 pairs survive. Their status in Namibian waters is uncertain as they are virtually indistinguishable from the similar Wandering Albatross, *Diomedea exulans*, in the field. This recovery of an adult Tristan Albatross highlights the impacts of accidental bycatch on Albatross populations. This bird was probably a breeding male that might have been raising a chick with his partner. Once this bird died, the chick would be doomed as the female would desert the nest to search for food. The pair bond is broken so the female would not be productive until she formed a new bond. In a population as small as the Tristan Albatross, which is now regarded as critically endangered, this is a serious loss.

Please keep all rings found on any bird killed and recovered during fishing operations, and note the date and locality (GPS co-ordinates) of the recovery. If a bird is caught alive with a ring, note the number and all writing on the ring with date and locality and release the bird. Please hand the information to the Albatross Task Force. Data gathered through ring recoveries are invaluable for plotting bird movements and longevity. (Reproduced from *Albatross Task Force Newsletter: July 2008, p5*)

8/7/08: I recently managed to photograph a ringed Black-browed Albatross +/- 140km SW of Walvis. Other interesting birds on the trip included 3 Spectacled Petrels, 2 Wandering Albatrosses and what was probably an Antarctic Prion. The following mail is the reply from Andy (British Antarctic Survey/BAS) who ringed the bird.



Black-browed Albatross – note red darvic ring on left leg
(photo John Paterson)

In our opinion this is one of our birds with red darvic ring 762. This bird was ringed this season at Bird Island, South Georgia (54'S 38'W), probably by myself when I was there between September and November 2007. It is an unknown age bird, breeding in a colony in the eastern part of the island, and its breeding attempt this season failed in early January 2008.

We have satellite tracking information for Black-browed Albatross from Bird Island which indicate that the waters off South Africa and Namibia are a regular haunt for failed and successful breeding birds later in the season. Your sighting adds to the growing body of evidence that this area is very important for the South Georgia albatrosses at this time of the year.

Follow-up on ringed Swift Terns

Mark Boorman, Marc Dürr, Harmut Kolb, Keith Wearne (email: felix@mweb.com.na)

On 25/6/08 Marc Dürr and I spent some time scoping a group of Swift and Sandwich Tern at Mile 4 Salt Works. There were at least 7 juv birds with orange left, metal right. Also seen was an adult carrying metal left, white right. This is one of 250 chicks ringed on Robben Island in 1996. Of the approx. 400 Swifties in the group, 20-25% were juveniles. Some 200 Sandwich Tern were also present. Tony Tree reports one of the orange left, metal right birds from Mauritz Bay (north of Saldahna) seen on 14 June. A bonus was seeing 2 Common Redshank (1st year birds) which look like they'll be spending the winter here.

A visit to Walvis Bay on 27/6/08 produced a bunch more colour-ringed swifties:

Pelican Point: approx. 370 Swift of which about 30% juvenile; 7 juvs. with orange left, metal right. 1 adult metal left, white right (Robben Is. 1996); 10 Sandwich Tern.

Oysterbeds and adjacent area: approx. 200 Swift of which about 20% juv; 6 juvenile with orange left, metal right. 1 adult green left, metal right (Marcus Is. Saldahna Bay 1983!); 10 Common Tern; 5 Sandwich Tern.

Although possible, it is unlikely that some of these birds had been seen a bit earlier in the day at Pelican Point so I think that we can assume that these were two different groups.

The same applies to the birds seen in Swakop on the 25th. Just to add to a good day's birding, 9 Red-necked Phalarope, a Peregrine Falcon and an over-wintering Osprey were also seen.

19/7/08: During a count at Sandwich Harbour on 19/7/08 we were able to spot two juv. Swift Tern carrying orange - the color-rings of this year's chicks from Possession Island. Bonus bird for the count was an over-wintering Black-tailed Godwit.

Unusual visitor at Lüderitz

Jessica Kemper (email: jkemper@mfmr.gov.na)

Talking of "weird coastal visitors", I spotted an African Spoonbill at the Lüderitz Lagoon on 3/8/08, hanging out with a bunch of Little Egrets. It isn't really supposed to be here and is certainly the first one I've seen here.

What kind of fish has our Osprey caught?



Walvis Bay's Osprey is still being seen regularly
(Photo Jenny Lauth)

Please send your answers to the email address below – the winner will receive a kayak tour, kindly donated by Jeanne Meintjes

Eco Marine Kayak Tours cc, Walvis Bay
(email: emkayak@iway.na; www.emkayak.iway.na)

Assistant needed for Damara Tern field work Justine Braby (email: Jusbraby@yahoo.com)

Field assistant needed for Master's study on the desert-breeding Damara Tern in the restricted diamond area on the southern Namibian coast. From 1st October-20 December 2008. Must have driver's licence and *preferably* have (or be doing) a degree in Zoology (undergraduates or postgraduates welcome). Self-funded but accommodation is paid for - in Lüderitz. Work includes looking for tern nests on salt pans/gravel plains and recording foraging success. Amazing landscapes await you.

Save the flamingo campaign (www.savetheflamingo.co.za)

Dear bird-watchers, ornithologists, conservationists and other friends of flamingos

Your assistance is urgently required.

Kamfers Dam, which is located just north of Kimberley, South Africa, is under threat from deteriorating water quality due to a badly managed sewerage works.

This wetland is home to:

- The largest permanent population of Lesser Flamingos in southern Africa.
 - The only Lesser Flamingo breeding site in South Africa.
 - One of only four Lesser Flamingo breeding sites in Africa, and six in the world.
 - A host of other endemic and threatened waterbirds.
- Kamfers Dam is also a South African Natural Heritage Site and an important Bird Area.

Despite years of negotiating with the Kimberley's Municipality (the Sol Plaatje Municipality) to improve the quality of water flowing into Kamfers Dam, the water quality is deteriorating and there are consequently

severe health implications for Kamfers Dam's flamingos and the people living in neighbouring suburbs. We have now decided to step up our campaign and we therefore urgently need your assistance in terms of (signing our petition and/or (b) donating funds towards this important campaign.

PLEASE visit our website (see above) and contribute towards the conservation of Kamfers Dam and this important population of globally "near-threatened" Lesser Flamingos.

PLEASE forward this message to your friends, colleagues and family, and also post the message on your local email discussion groups.

We are very grateful for your kind assistance.

Registration for WWMD 2008 is now open! (www.WorldWaterMonitoringDay.org; email wwmd@wef.org)

The World Water Monitoring Day database is now open for business! Please visit our website (see above) to register yourself and your monitoring site(s) in preparation for this year's water monitoring effort.

Water test kits for WWMD are also available online. The kit includes everything you'll need to test your waterbody for pH, dissolved oxygen, temperature and turbidity and is designed to be an accurate, yet accessible technology for all levels of experience.

World Water Monitoring Day encourages participation from Low- and Middle-Income countries through the donation of monitoring kits – for more information, please contact the email address above. Also visit the "Resources" section on the website.

Workshop proceedings

Hard copies and a CD with the full proceedings of the Coastal/Marine Bird Workshop (1 April 2008), including powerpoint presentations, have been delivered to the following organizations:

Windhoek: NNF, Namibia Bird Club, Scientific Society, MET
Swakopmund: NACOMA, MFMR, MET
Walvis Bay: CETN
Lüderitz: MFMR

Thank you to Dr Chris Brown of NNF for assistance with the printing, and to NACOMA for financial support!

Rössing Bird Day Yvonne Mupupa, RUL

Email ymupupa@rossing.com.na, tel. 064 520 2233

The aim of the Rössing Uranium mine's annual BIRDWATCHING DAY is to encourage an interest in bird watching, monitoring and conserving birds in Namibia. This year, the event will take place on 19 September 2008 at the Swakopmund River Mouth. We would very much welcome your participation in this year's event to lead a group of school children in identifying birds. A programme for the day is available on request. Please let us know if you would like to participate. This event is being combined with the normal monthly bird count for September at the Swakop River Mouth.