

Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird News 4

Newsletter of the Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Working Group

September 2008

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Namibian holiday-makers in Nigeria

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In the beginning of August 2008, a Damara Tern *Sterna balaenarum* survey - sponsored by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation - was conducted on the beaches of Lagos, Nigeria. Damara Terns are known to migrate to the coastlines of Gabon, Cameroon, Nigeria and Benin during the non-breeding season (April to October). No seabird surveys had been done around Lagos since the 1970s, where thousands of Black Terns *Chlidonias niger* and hundreds of Damara Terns among many other seabird species were found feeding and roosting around the many suitable habitats in Lagos. A conservation biology Masters graduate from the University of Jos, Nigeria, and I would do a survey of these areas to assess any changes since this period.

Only one place, Lighthouse Beach, still harboured terns, and many other habitats, like the estuarine marshes in Victoria Island, are now too polluted with oil and litter to attract any seabirds. No more than a hundred Black Terns, Common Terns *S. hirundo* and Royal Terns *S. maxima* were found preening themselves and feeding just off Lighthouse Beach. Damara Terns were still found at this beach too, mainly flying past or coming in to preen themselves. No more than 30 Damara Terns at a time would land on the beach to preen, and fly off again. They did, however, come in to roost at night, and on one morning, more than 200 Damara Terns were seen leaving their roosting area to go offshore to feed for the day. This implies that numbers of this tern have not decreased here, despite the increase in human disturbance.

Four Damara Terns were seen wearing rings on their legs, one of which had two colour rings on the right leg and a silver ring on the left. This combination of rings was found to be unique to one bird which had been trapped on its nest in the Horses' Graveyards Colony near Swakopmund in 2003, and ringed by Rod and Sigi Braby with the combination pink over yellow on the right leg and a silver ring on the left. It was caught again in 2007, only a few metres from its previous nest site. It had lost the pink colour ring and Sigi Braby added another yellow over its original yellow ring. This is the first record of a ringed individual in Nigeria, and proof that the Swakopmund breeders migrate around 4 000 km to over-winter along the West African coastline.



Two ringed Damara Terns found at Lighthouse Beach, Lagos (bottom right). Terns are camouflaged by all the litter on the beach, Lighthouse Beach, Lagos (top left).



The estuarine marshes in Lagos, where thousands of Black Terns were found in the 1970s, are now heavily polluted.
(Photos: Justine Braby)

The Namibia Coastal/Marine Bird Action Plan is supported by Namibia Nature Foundation and the NACOMA Project
This newsletter is funded by the GEF Small Grants Programme / UNDP Working Group & newsletter contacts: Ann & Mike Scott
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Walvis Bay Winter Bird Count

Pete & Marilyn Bridgeford, email pmbridge@iway.na

The annual winter count of the birds in the Walvis Bay Ramsar Site took place over the weekend of 19 and 20 July 2008. This important count, together with the summer count in January, has been done for the past 20 years. As the Walvis Bay area is one of the most important feeding areas for birds along the west coast, the annual counts monitor the number of birds using the wetlands. The number of birds regularly feeding here are an indication of the "health" of the system. The annual counts of birds help to monitor this state of health.

For many years the counts have been organised and conducted under the able leadership of Keith Wearne of the Coastal and Environmental Trust of Namibia (CETN). Keith was hospitalised just before the count and he died peacefully at home a few days later. The count went ahead under the capable organization of Sue Roux and her team, as Keith would have wanted it and in memory of this remarkable conservationist.

The total number of birds counted was close to 50 000. This is well below the summer counts of about a quarter of a million birds, but the majority of migrant water-birds have moved to the northern hemisphere to breed. The first migrants are expected to start arriving back here in September. During the count, an astounding number of 23 853 Black-necked Grebes were seen. This is the highest number ever recorded here for this species. The flamingos are usually the most abundant, but as most are in Etosha National Park and Botswana for the breeding season, only 4 382 Lesser Flamingos and 4 655 Greater Flamingos were found. Apparently a few thousand flamingo chicks have been seen in Etosha. The gulls do not migrate and 5 812 Kelp Gulls and 2 775 Hartlaub's Gulls were seen. A few waders were counted: Curlew Sandpipers 822, Little Stints 37, Turnstones 124 and Chestnut-banded Sandplovers 200.

On behalf of CETN, Allan Louw, Babara Hecht and everyone involved in the count is thanked for their enthusiastic support and the following for their generous sponsorship: Namibia Breweries, Probst Bakery and Walvis Bay Salt Refiners.



Almost 10 000 flamingos were counted at the Walvis Bay Ramsar site on 19-20 July 2008 (photo: Helga Detering)

Population census of flamingos in Namibia, July 2008

This report is dedicated to the memory of Keith Wearne – he will be missed!

Holger Kolberg, Directorate Scientific Services, Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Windhoek; email holgerk@mweb.com.na

The southern African Lesser Flamingo population was estimated to number 55 000 – 65 000 individuals in the mid-1990s, but these were either under-estimates or the numbers have increased since, because at times Kamfers Dam, the Goldfields wetlands (in South Africa), Etosha Pan (Namibia) and Sua Pan (Botswana) each support more than that number. In order to try and get to grips with the size of the southern African population of Lesser Flamingos, a coordinated survey was planned for 20-21 July 2008. During this survey, all of the sites which at times have supported more than 750 Lesser Flamingos were to be counted.

In Namibia, Lesser Flamingos have been counted at 47 sites and the 750 birds criterion has been exceeded at least once at 12 of these sites, i.e. Okerfontein/Etosha Pan (100% of counts), Walvis Bay Ramsar Site (100%), Sandwich Harbour (64%), Mile 4 Saltworks (48%), Fischer's Pan (40%), Nyae Nyae (25%), Lüderitz Sewage Works (20%), Cape Cross Saltworks (17%), Ekuma River (17%), Lake Oponono (13%), Orange River Wetlands (12%), Walvis Bay Sewage Works (7%). (*Further details of other sites counted are available on request.*)

This meant most of the coastal sites and Etosha Pan would need to be counted, and a concerted effort was made to attain full coverage. Unfortunately the shortage of counters meant that not all sites could be counted at the given dates and a decision was taken to count the three most important sites, Walvis Bay, Sandwich Harbour and Etosha Pan on the 19th and 20th July and to slot the remaining areas in when time allowed. Counts started as early as 9 July and finished on 25 July, covering 18 sites. Both Lesser and Greater Flamingos were counted and counters were also asked to try and get separate totals for adults and juveniles. At nine sites Lesser Flamingos were counted, totalling 66 121 birds comprising 55 598 adults and 10 523 juveniles (see Table 1 on next page). The bulk of these were counted at Etosha Pan using aerial photography; the birds were still breeding there and perhaps more chicks will hatch (Wilferd Versfeld, pers comm.).

My most sincere thanks go to the many people who gave up their weekend, quality family time and other plans to help with the counts. It is heartening to see that despite the current economic crisis, people are still prepared to foot (sometimes considerable) expenses in order to count birds. These counters included Chantel Louw, Alwyn Engelbrecht, Sandra Dantu, Mark Boorman, Marc Dürr, Petri Hoppola, Arnold Uwu-Khaeb, Connie Berry, Ingrid Heller, Gisela Friede, Gisela Noci, Sue Roux and a huge team of volunteers, Ann Scott, Mike Scott, John Paterson, Wilderness Safaris staff, Hartmut Kolb, Sue O'Shann, Verna Hasse, Hans Goetze, Jessica Kemper, Mark Anderson, Werner Kilian and Wilferd Versfeld.

Date (July)	Site	Lesser Flamingo			Greater Flamingo		
		ad	juv	total	ad	juv	total
10	Kunene River Mouth						
09	Little Oasis near Hoarusib						
13	Hoanib River Mouth	1	5	6		8	8
13	Hoanib Oasis						
14	Uniab Delta						
14	Huab River Mouth						
18	Cape Cross Lagoon	1	10	11	1	4	5
20	Mile 4 Saltworks	37	43	80	2		2
21	Swakop River Mouth						
19	Walvis Bay Ramsar Site	4 382	372	4 754	4 655	296	4 951
21	Walvis Bay Sewage Works	854	9	863	955		955
19	Sandwich Harbour	1	1	2			
19	Lüderitz Peninsula	252	30	282	2		2
30	Orange River Mouth*	63	53	116			
26	Fischer's Pan	7		7			
19	Etosha Pan	50 000	10 000	60 000			
24	Hardap Dam						
25	Naute Dam						
	TOTAL	55 598	10 523	66 121	5 615	308	5 923

Albatross and other seabird sightings

John Paterson, Albatross Task Force Namibia, email: john@albatross.org.na / john@paterson.alt.na, www.savethealbatross.net

11/9/08: I had a good 11 days at sea, saw two ringed birds - a skua and a White-chinned Petrel. I could not read either ring, so no juicy or exciting return details on that front. Birds on my trip were at least 5 Wandering Albatrosses sighted continuously (20+ sightings) over several days, Soft Plumaged Petrel and a Manx Shearwater.

A Wandering Albatross ring was handed in which was ringed on Bird Island South Georgia by BAS and fledged late 2006. It was probably killed within the last month.

Its ring co-ordinates are a West Longitude in the same general area as the Tristan Albatross recovery (see below). I find it amazing how far away our boats are fishing.



Wandering Albatross (photo: John Paterson)

Yellow A43: an albatross life cut short

Posted onto the ACAP website (http://www.acap.aq/en/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1) by **John Cooper**, ACAP Information Officer, with information from **John Paterson**, Birdlife International Albatross Task Force Namibia, Sept. 2008

Gonydale on Gough Island in the South Atlantic is the site of a long-term demographic study being conducted on the Critically Endangered Tristan Albatross *Diomedea dabbenena* by the University of Cape Town (South Africa) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK). One of the chicks in this colony in 1999 was banded as J-14019. In April 2004 the bird was recorded back in Gonydale as a "loafer", meaning it was not then attending a nest with an egg or chick, and was most likely not then sexually mature.

(continued on next page >)



Incubating Tristan Albatross Yellow A43 (photo: Marianne de Villiers)

In February 2007 it was recorded incubating in Gonydale (quite possibly as a first-time breeder), when colour band Yellow A43 was added and it was photographed and identified by measurements and plumage as a male. In September of that year its chick was still present at the marked nest, showing it had bred successfully up to then.

However, a report lately to hand shows that the bird was killed by the *Pescalamar*, a Namibian-registered longliner fishing for swordfish and shark some 1 400 km north-west of Gough Island in the south-west Atlantic at 32° 45'S, 21° 31'W on 20 November 2007. With Tristan Albatross chicks fledging mainly in the month of December there is a good chance its chick managed to survive, being fed by the female parent until it departed to sea.

Great albatrosses of the genus *Diomedea* can live for half a century or more, so *Yellow A43* died young at less than 10 years of age, emphasizing the parlous conservation state of the Tristan Albatross, with its chicks being killed by mice, and its juveniles and adults continuing to be caught on longlines.

The Albatross and the Ancient Mariner - a modern counterpart?

Have you perhaps been wondering about the details of the story of the albatross in Samuel Coleridge's poem, the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*? John Fanshawe, BirdLife International provides a detailed analysis and explanation of this epic work in issue 2 (July 2006) of **Sea Change**: the newsletter of the Global Seabird Programme, BirdLife International (pp 7-8).

"In *Birds Britannica*, Mark Cocker notes that, with the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, albatrosses have 'become indelibly fixed in the language as a metaphor for any insupportable burden or source of Penance'. This is a pity since, as Cocker goes on to say, Coleridge intended to employ 'the bird as a fundamental life force against which the mariner transgresses when he raises his crossbow to kill the ship's guardian spirit'. For contemporary conservationists, it is their life force, their beauty, power, and otherworldliness, which drives such a passionate commitment to albatrosses." A detailed analysis and explanation of this lengthy poem follows.

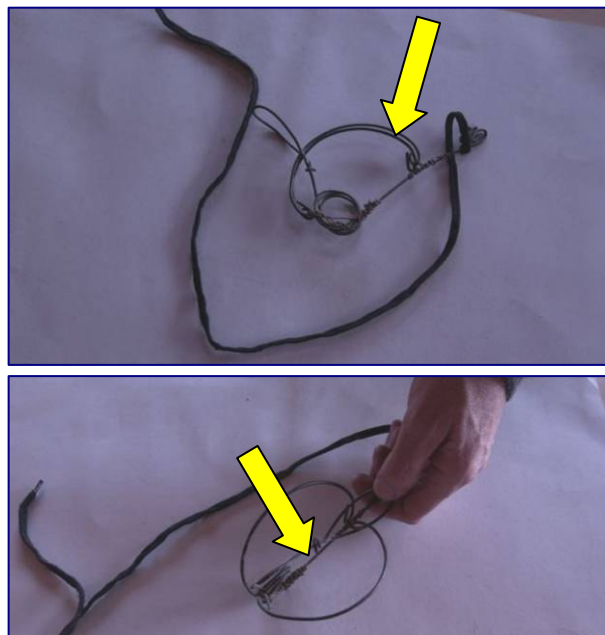
Fanshaw ends with these words: "Can we see a similar echo in bycatch, a contemporary mariners' mayhem that has inadvertently mechanized the slaughter of tens of thousands of albatrosses every year? The conservation outcome is clear, but is there another, deeper message in the wanton drowning of these iconic birds? Do we destroy them at our own peril? I think we do."

Contact **Ben Sullivan**, Co-ordinator of the BirdLife International Global Seabird Programme to subscribe to this interesting electronic newsletter, *Sea Change*: email ben.sullivan@rspb.org.uk.

Newsflashes

Who's been trapping our seabirds?

Gisela Noci, email gisela.noci@ate-international.com



Spring trap used on a Kelp Gull, closed (top) and open (bottom); arrows indicate where the bird's leg was held (photos: Gisela Noci)

While walking on the beach just below the old Mile 4 Oyster farm on 19/8/08, I noticed a Kelp Gull dragging a shoelace. On closer inspection, I noticed that the shoelace was attached to a trap in which the gull's foot was caught. I managed to put my foot on the end of the shoelace and approach the bird, expecting it to get quite agitated. But on the contrary, the gull let me manipulate its leg and the trap until I managed to get the leg free. Luckily the leg seemed undamaged and the gull flew off.

Four Common Redshank

Mark Boorman, email felix@mweb.com.na

9/9/08: Today there were 4 Common Redshank at Mile 4. One of them in full breeding dress, one not quite as showy, and 2 immature. First time I've seen so many together here.

What kind of fish has our Osprey caught?

(see newsletter No. 3 [July 2008], page 4)

Jeanne Meintjes, Eco Marine Kayak Tours cc, cell + 264 81 129 3144, email emkayak@iway.na, www.emkayak.iway.na

The correct reply - a mullet, according to Jurg Walters - has been provided by Mike Scott who now qualifies to come kayaking. Jeanne also reports that they saw the Osprey sitting on his pole on 11/9/08.

Ed: Thank you, Jeanne!

Delegates discuss flyway conservation

BirdLife International (www.birdlife.org/news) 15/9/08

The Fourth Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (**AEWA**) took place in Madagascar this month, in

order to discuss urgent conservation responses necessary to reverse the declines of many migratory waterbird species along the African-Eurasian Flyway. **AEWA** is an international treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds such as ducks, waders, storks, flamingos and many others which migrate along the African-Eurasian Flyways. Countries that are Parties to the Agreement commit to putting measures in place to conserve the region's waterbird populations and the habitats on which they depend.

Progress report on Project Shine (July 2008)

Berdine Potgieter (Project coordinator), Swakopmund Municipality, email bpotgieter@swkmun.com.na
Note: this report has been shortened due to a lack of space; please contact Berdine for a full copy of the report.

Project Shine was launched on 1 July 2008 when 12 non-profit organisations were appointed to participate in the cleaning of the coastline between Henties Bay and Sandwich Harbour. In return for their services each organization is to receive a monthly cash donation of N\$1000-00, plus additional performance bonuses for the three cleanest wards, to the total of N\$2250-00. The project is kindly co-sponsored by Rio Tinto / Rössing Uranium, Namibia Breweries Limited, Swakopmund Municipality, NAMPORT, Murray Roberts, HAN, Walvis Bay Municipality, NEC Stahl & Smith Sales and Services.

The project will run until 30 November 2008 to ensure that the shoreline is clean from pollutants for the festive season. It will continue for the month of February 2009 which will enable the organisations to do a clean-up after the holiday season. The glass and other recyclable items from this project will be used to feed local recycling operations. Two additional clean-up operations of the road reserve between Arandis and Swakopmund as well as at the Swakop River will take place.

During the evaluation done for July 2008 it was found that the beach line is still polluted, and a motivation letter was sent to all the organizations. It was also stressed that an accurate record of the amount of litter collected is crucial as it will be used to create a database. The reports indicated that glass and plastic are the main pollutants found on the beaches. The organizations involved expressed their gratitude towards the sponsors and indicated that the money earned would be used for worthy projects.

The following non-profit organizations are participating: Swakop Private School, Tears of Hope, Die Voortrekkers, Eben Ezer Youth Group, Pro Ed Akademie, Swakopmund Cricket Academy, Blue Boys Soccer Club, Joint Compassion Keepers, SIS Returning Youth Ministry, Henties Bay Local Youth Forum, U/15 Youth Development Team, Kamwandi Junior Secondary School.

Ed: Berdine reports that during the latest evaluation of the 12 wards on 12/9/08, the areas were visibly cleaner – well done and thank you all for making the coast a safer place for our birds!



Left: Members of the Voortrekkers after a long day's clean-up. Right: The Henties Bay Local Youth Forum collecting litter in their ward. (Photos: Berdine Potgieter)

Take A Closer Look - that bird may be wearing a ring!

Liz Komen, NARREC, email liz@narrec.net

The poster "Take A Closer Look" is jointly sponsored by The Namibia Bird Club and The Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS). Distribution and other logistics have been the responsibility of Liz Komen at NARREC. The information on the posters is extremely simple and set against a bright blue African-coloured sky. There will hopefully be an improved number of reports on sightings of ringed and tagged birds. *Please check the legs of any dead birds found along the coast!*

Through these posters a number of possible useful outcomes can be expected:

1. Increasing species-specific data for conservation strategies through increased reports on sightings; improved understanding of the interrelatedness of the region; and improved understanding of conservation issues by the public and relevant government officials.
2. Promoting and motivating ringing/tagging projects and the funding of these projects by making public the addresses of SAFRING and of country offices; linking various southern African country offices on the poster; and inviting a larger public audience to participate in the project. Numerous other positives can be expected.



For copies of the poster please contact the NEWS Office or NARREC (see above) in Windhoek