

Namibia Bird News

No 3, September 2012



Spring has sprung...

Spring has sprung and with that come warmer temperatures, flowering trees and plants and, hopefully, some migrating birds! Time to dust off the binoculars and go out there and do some birding. Why not go and visit a virgin pentad and do some atlasing?

Once again we have an issue that is jam-packed with interesting tidbits of information. Jessica gives us a glimpse behind the scenes of the Namibian ringer's get-together and we have the second contribution by Arnold about his stay in Namibia. These are the kind of contributions that I'm looking for, for this newsletter so keep 'em coming. Even if you are not a good writer you can submit an article and we'll tweak it so that it makes you look like Shakespeare.

I also would like to draw your attention to the talk which will be presented by Otto Schmidt and Johan Schlebusch. The bird club is always looking for persons to present talks, so if you have been anywhere interesting lately please consider giving a talk.

Remember to send contributions, comments and other useful stuff to nambirdnews@gmail.com.

Happy birding!
Holger



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Thank You, Old Mutual!

Old Mutual recently made a healthy donation to Vultures Namibia that will help us to cover the costs of this year's vulture chick ringing. Christo Snyman from Old Mutual arranged the funds through their social responsibility programme. Photo courtesy of Dirk Heinrich.

Bird Ringers' Get-Together: Farm Wiese, 3-6 May 2012

Jessica Kemper

There is a gentle tap on my tent and Gudrun's voice announces "time to get up". I groan, comfortably snug in my sleeping bag. It's 04h45. Why on earth did I volunteer to help catch and ring sociable weavers? I get up and stagger towards the smell of

freshly brewed coffee wafting from the tractor shed – cleaned out and lovingly decorated by the Bader family, to serve as this year's Bird Ringers' Get-Together "base camp" on Farm Wiese, about 50km east of Rehoboth as the weaver flies. After a quick cuppa, a short ride in pitch darkness and a good giggle when Mark meticulously closes the farm gate behind us but then finds himself on the wrong side of it, we arrive at the "red" nest, so-called because on several previous occasions the inhabitants of this sociable weaver colony have been caught and ringed with a combination of a numbered metal ring and a red plastic ring on one leg and in some cases with an additional colour ring combination on the other leg. The main aim of this project, initiated during the 2007 Bird Ringers' Get-Together, is to determine the rate of colony

fidelity or dispersal to other nests, and to recognize certain individuals and follow their breeding histories. Our mission this morning: ring more individuals and replace any colour plastic rings with colour metal rings; it seems the little brats have been cunningly nibbling off their plastic rings, defeating the point of this valuable ringing project.



At first light Dirk, Neil and a few others open the mist nets that had been placed strategically around the nest the previous afternoon. And now we quietly wait for our victims to wake up. As the sun rises and the dawn chorus of songbirds builds up around us, I remember why I had volunteered. But there is no time to reflect on the beauty of a Namibian sunrise; the weavers emerge from the large nest in droves, and a few seconds later more than 150 birds are entangled in the nets. We

move in, carefully pluck the birds out of the nets, place each one in solitary confinement in a soft cotton bag, neatly line these up for processing, and set up our ringing stations. After about three hours of ringing, taking blood samples for genetic analysis and carefully recording ringing and measurement details we take the mist nets down again. The job is finished and we return to Wiese for a hearty breakfast. Tomorrow morning we will tackle the "blue" and "white" nests.

It is the ninth edition of the annual Bird Ringers' Get-Together, and our fourth one on Farm Wiese. This year we are a motley bunch of 10 kids and 26 adults (boosted to 28 on Saturday when Holger and Claire join), having flocked to Wiese from Windhoek, Walvis Bay,





Swakopmund, Tsumeb, Lüderitz, and from some seriously far-flung South African corners. Of course the main brief is to enjoy some communal bird ringing, train novice bird ringers under the patient wings of experienced and licensed ringers, introduce the uninitiated to the joys of bird ringing, share details on some of the more creative aspects of ringing, such as bird trap design and bird tick removal techniques, and recount epic birding and ringing tales.

But our annual Get-Togethers are so much more than that. They are also a fantastic opportunity to catch up with friends, take time off from the rat race, finally find the time to read a book or two, experience the resident peacocks' blood-curdling wails permeating the early morning air, wallow in the luxury of having your tent put up in record time by Sheena, Craig, Kai and Jenny, take pleasure in the finest musical morsels provided by Elinor and Jessica (well, opinion seems to be divided on this), and, at regular intervals, to tuck into the

outstanding culinary delicacies rustled up this year by Ursula, Renate and Danika, with sporadic chopping, stirring and dish-washing assistance from various quarters.

Most of us already arrived on Wednesday afternoon, after having celebrated the Namibia Bird Club's 50th anniversary in Windhoek the previous few days. The rest trickle in on Thursday and that evening we have our traditional meet-and-greet session during which we introduce ourselves. We each receive a colourful insulated mug, engraved with the Bird Ringers' Get-Together 2012 logo, generously sponsored by Dirk Heinrich Photo Library. What a brilliant and useful memento.



The mist nets and snap-traps set up strategically all around "base camp" produce some fine specimens, including Rüppel's Parrot, Gabar Goshawk and Pygmy Falcon. Dirk's mist nets have several close encounters with a herd of cattle, but only the mist net poles suffer some minor damage. Arnold patiently provides extra lessons on bird atlassing to those in need and atlases a pentad or two in the process. After a good day's ringing, reading or relaxing with friends in the shade provided by the Teifel family's sizeable tent, we are entertained by various presentations in the early evening while

supper is fragrantly bubbling away in the groot potjie pot. During the course of the Get-Together we listen attentively to Dirk summarising the impressive ringing efforts on Wiese to date, Dieter informing us about the PHOWN (photos of weaver nests) virtual museum project, Jessica talking about how GPS data loggers can tell us where African Penguins find their food, Mark explaining the contribution of his Black Tern ringing project to understanding their migration routes and patterns, and Rod discussing the latest findings of his family's Damara Tern long-term monitoring efforts.



Saturday evening sees the Master of Ceremonies for the evening, Holger, first thank Arnold on behalf of the Namibia Bird Club for his sterling efforts to teach us the intricacies of pentads, field sheets, incidental observations and online data submission. This is followed by a prize-giving ceremony. A merit award for ringers working on sea- and shorebirds is jointly bestowed on Sandra and Jessica for their penguin rehabilitation efforts. Ursula receives a special award for her admirable commitment, beyond the call of duty, to organizing various Get-Togethers over the years. The Marc Dürr trophy is awarded to Liz (in absentia) for her dedicated vulture conservation work and the "Oubaas" Kolberg trophy is conferred on Dirk for his enormous contribution to Namibian ornithology through ringing.



The days pass in a flash, and before I have a chance to memorize the names of the handful of tame lambs constantly loitering between our tents, it is Sunday; time to pack up and trek home. The 2012 Bird Ringers' Get-Together has been, without a doubt, another legendary success and I am sure I am not the only one already counting down the days to the 2013 edition. The jury is still out on next year's venue, but watch this space.



Many, many thanks to everybody who made this Get-Together such a memorable occasion; particularly to the Bader clan, who once again excelled in housing, feeding and entertaining the boisterous masses. Werner, Renate, Danika and Marcel: brace yourselves...this was certainly not the last time that we invaded your home.



DWERG MAAR MAN!

Hierdie dwergie is maar 'n skrale 20 cm lank en weeg so iewers tussen 50 en 70 g, maar hy kan sy man behoorlik staan. Die **Dwergvalkie** *Polihierax semitorquatus* (Pygmy Falcon) is die kleinste dag-lewende roofvoël in suidelike Afrika.



Dwergvalkie (manneling) © Dieter Oschadleus

Ek het met my onlangse besoek aan Namibië die geleentheid gehad om een van die outjies te kon ring tydens die Namibiese beringers se jaarlikse naweek-byeenkoms op die plaas Wiese in die omgewing van Rehoboth.

Saterdagoggend het ons die valkies vir die eerste keer opgemerk by 'n kleinerige Versamelvoëlne in 'n Kameeldoringboom nie ver van die opstal nie. Laatmiddag het ons die patroon van die vorige twee dae gevolg en die misnette in 'n wye driehoek aan die nes se kant van die boom opgeslaan. Die nette word dan weer sorgvuldig toegevou, sodat die voëls nie enige onraad moet vermoed nie.

Voor sonsopkoms die volgende oggend het ons in die skemerdonker die nette weer oopgemaak en toe geduldig gewag totdat ons die eerste roepe van die Versamelvoëls uit die nes gehoor het. Met 'n bietjie lawaai is hulle toe aangemoedig om die nes in 'n swerm te verlaat en sodoende reg in die nette vas te vlieg. Vinnig het is die voëls uit die nette verwyder en ons het begin met die ringproses. Maar ons het geen teken van die Dwergvalkies bespeur nie – selfs nie eers die kenmerkende wit mistrepe om een van die neskamers in die Versamelvoëlne nie.

Toe die sonnetjie egter bietjie later warmer word, het ons die kenmerkende geroep van die klein roofvoëls uit die nes begin hoor. En 'n rukkie later het die mannetjie uitgedop en in die sonnetjie op 'n droë tak kom bak. Kenmerkend van hulle gedrag is die op-en-af-pomp met die stert – en so het hy sit en pomp en die wyfie geroep. Sy antwoord elke keer uit die nes.

Later moes hy sekerlik maar ongeduldig geraak het vir die lank wag op vroulied en het weggevlieg – reg in die net in. Gou is hy uitgehaal en veilig in 'n voëlsakkie gesit – om gering, gemeet en geweeg te word.



Dwergvalkies (wyfie met kastaiingbruin rug - links) © Dieter Oschadleus

Toe hy stil word, het Mevroutjie skielik uit die nes uitgedop ... en ook op die tak sit en roep. Woerts weggevlieg – in die net vas! En so kon ons die paartjie toe vang en albei ring.

In hierdie spesie is die mannetjie die pragtige onaansienlike enetjie, want die wyfie het die mooi kastaiingbruin mantel- en rugvere. Dit dan ook die manier waarop die geslagte uiterlik van mekaar onderskei kan word. By Dwergvalkies is die mannetjie ook kleiner as die wyfie en weeg bietjie minder. Dit is 'n algemene verskynsel by roofvoëls dat wyfies groter en swaarder as mannetjies is – tot sowat 10%.

Die valkies woon in die neste van Versamelvoëls, waar hulle 'n neskamer van die gashere vir hulleself toe-eien. Gewoonlik maak die misstrepe 'n baie duidelike wit kring rondom die ingang van die betrokke neskamer. Hulle kom voor in plat graswêreld in die semi-ariëde en savanna gebiede in suidelike Afrika – en verkies areas waar die Kameeldoring-bome yl verspreid is. Daar is ook populasies van hierdie spesies in noord-oos Afrika (Soedan, Ethiopië, Kenia en Tanzanië). Hulle verspreiding val baie naby saam met dié van die Versamelvoëls, by wie hulle as loseerders in die nes intrek.

Die voëls is grys van kleur oor die rug en agterkop, met wit om die oog, af onder die keel en onder die pens. Die primêre vlugvere op die vlerke en die stert is swart met wit spikkels. Die wyfie word onderskeid deur die kastainingbruin vere op haar rug. Die snawel (wat geniëpsig kan byt) is grys met 'n swart punt en neusvrat is oranje-geel. Hulle oë is donkerbruin, met 'n oranje-rooi oogring rondom en die kort beentjies is oranje-pienk van kleur.

Hulle vreet veral kleiner reptiele, maar sal ook jag maak vanaf 'n opvallende sitplek op kewers en ander insekte. Soms sal hulle ook klein voëls in vlug vang en soms van die kuikens van Versamelvoëls uit die neskamers roof.

Hulle verkies normaalweg van die groter Versamelvoëlneste – met meer as 50 kamers. Daar slaap hulle reeds in die uitgesoekte neskamer voordat hulle sal begin broei. Die wyfie lê 1-4 eiers en dié broei uit na 27-31 dae en die wyfie doen die meeste van die broeiwerk op haar eie en dan dra die mannetjie vir haar kos aan.

In die winter kan hulle meer as 60% uit 'n dag van 24-uur in die nes spandeer ... styf van die koue!

Groetnis van nes tot nes

Arnold vd Westhuizen

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DON'T MISS THIS TALK!

Birding in Ethiopia

In April/May 2011, 14 members of the Cape Bird Club led by chairman Vernon Head travelled to Ethiopia on the first of the club's proposed annual "international" birding trips. We spent 17 days covering a wide variety of habitats from the highlands of the Ankober Escarpment, the 4000+ meters high Bale Mountains, the low-lying semi-desert Afar territory with its many camels and AK47 wielding tribesmen, the Rift Valley lakes and the drought-stricken south. Birds came thick and fast, from high-altitude specials such as Spot-breasted Lapwing and Rouget's Rail, Africa's most endangered species, the Sidamo Lark, the lovely Prince Ruspoli's Turaco and the range-restricted Stresemann's Bush-Crow. With the birds came sightings of special mammals such as Ethiopian Wolf and Gelada Baboon as well as the opportunity to enjoy the stunning scenery and local people in the different regions. The birding produced a total of 435 species including most of the country's endemic and near-endemic birds (the 2nd highest number on the continent after South Africa), and was followed by a cultural add-on at the historic town of Lalibela with its famous rock-hewn churches.

The presentation will be jointly done by Johan Schlebusch and Otto Schmidt. Both are on the club's International Trip Sub-committee with Johan being the chairman. This event will take place on 11 October 2012 in the hall of the Namibia Scientific Society.

Bird Atlas Update

We have been atlasing for four months now and have passed the 1% of pentads covered mark. To date we have covered 146 pentads, 230 cards have been submitted and there are 36 active atlasers. I have been inundated with ORFs and hopefully all of them have been processed.

Some people have experienced problems with the data management software (DMS) but so far I have managed to solve all issues without too much hassle. If you do experience any issues please contact me.

The SABAP 2 website www.sabap2.adu.org.za is well worth a visit. Not only can you track our progress but you can also download some really useful stuff. The latest addition to the downloads is a document called *Atlasing for dummies – 20 easy steps to submitting your first atlas cards*, if you have been too shy to submit your first card, this document is all you need.

After a marathon session of field work I finally have some time to think about other things and atlasing expeditions to exotic localities are high on my list of priorities. I'm considering visits to Waterberg, western Etosha and the Sperrgebiet amongst others, starting probably late this year or early next year. There will be space for four to six people each time. Details about these trips will be published in this newsletter and on the Namibia Bird Club website www.namibiabirdclub.org in due time.

Holger Kolberg

Regional Atlasing Coordinator



Cape Vulture at NARREC

The picture below of a Cape Vulture was recently taken at NARREC's vulture restaurant just north of Windhoek. Records such as these can be submitted to SABAP 2 as incidentals and are just as valuable as a full protocol atlas card. We are especially interested in sightings of vultures (all species), all large eagles (Martial, Verreaux's etc.), all cranes and storks.



Then and Now...



The photo above was taken by Peter Becker on 29 March 1983. It shows the wooden house in the freshwater wetland used by visiting researchers and conservators. In the picture Steve Braine, Herrmann Kolberg, Ernst Karlowa and two unknown persons. The photo below was taken by Sean Braine on 20 July 2012 at the same place. In the picture Holger Kolberg, Sandra Dantu, Mark Boorman and Steve Braine. Astonishing how the place has changed, no wonder Steve is scratching his head!



In Europe they do things on a different scale...

The following two emails were circulated on the Flamingo Specialist Group list server.

Dear all,

The breeding season of Greater Flamingo has practically finished in the Ebro Delta. This year the main colony was installed in a dike of the salines of the Punta de la Banya, although a small group of about 100 pairs was settled on the island of Tora dels Conills (traditional breeding place). This last core has not worked very well (Larus michahellis predation, etc.). Globally, 2,436 pairs were counted by aerial pictures.

The creche was formed by 1.200 chicks and the 22th July a total of 400 chicks (+ 9 adults) were ringed. A few days before, the creche was passed to the saltpan where the corral was located (always a delicated operation). During the banding operation, any significant trouble was occurred.

Pictures of ringing operation will be available in this link: www.picampall.org (see left side 'Àlbum de Fotos', where you can see another ringing operations e.g. Larus audouinii, Sterna sandvicensis, Larus genei). Also a short video can be visualize at (http://www.antenacaro.cat/share/share_videos.php?id_audio=1766)

Best regards,

Antoni Curcó i Masip

Àrea de Protecció i Recerca

Parc Natural del Delta de l'Ebre

Dear all,

This year again we have been lucky to ring 805 flamingos fledglings at the Fangassier lagoon in the Camargue, south of France. The creche was 3-4000 chicks in total and was driven smoothly to the corral where we caught ~830 chicks (almost perfect count !).

A few slides of the operation can be seen following this link : <http://flamingoatlas.org/galeriephoto2012.php>

As far as I know, this is the third successful ringing operation this year in the Mediterranean for a total of 1500 flamingo chicks ringed.

Any other ringing operation planned this year in the flamingo word?

Best wishes,

Arnaud

--

Arnaud Béchet

Chargé de recherche

La Tour du Valat

Dear friends of BirdLife South Africa,

As most of you are aware, *Africa Birds & Birding* magazine has been discontinued. The last issue of the magazine, the August/September 2012 issue, is currently being printed, and will be posted by Africa Geographic Publishers in due course. BirdLife South Africa will now be publishing its own magazine, *African Birdlife*.

African Birdlife is being produced by a very competent team: Eve Gracie (Editor, who was for 18 years the Editor of *Africa Birds & Birding*), Bryony van Wyk (designer) and Tanya Caldwell (Advertising Consultant, with kind assistance from Helen Biram). We also have the expert assistance of three scientific advisors, Professors Phil Hockey, Peter Ryan and Andrew McKechnie. The magazine production is being managed by the *African Birdlife* Management Committee, and the committee is chaired by David Chamberlain.

The November/December 2012 issue of *African Birdlife* will be posted to our members in late-October, and should be available at retail outlets a week or so later. I have seen the cover and some of the articles and they are superb, and I am sure that you will be impressed.

After being notified about two months ago by Africa Geographic Publishers that *Africa Birds & Birding* will be discontinued, BirdLife South Africa has spent an enormous amount of time setting up this new magazine. *African Birdlife* is important for several reasons, especially as it fulfils BirdLife South Africa's obligation to its members (and to the birding community) to provide a specialist birds and birdwatching magazine.

African Birdlife will include well written articles and stunning photographs of our continent's birds, and importantly it will be a mouthpiece for BirdLife South Africa to create awareness about important bird research and conservation work in Africa.

Thank you for your support.

Regards,

Mark

Mark D. Anderson

Chief Executive Officer

African Birdlife in Namibia

The Namibia Bird Club is investigating the possibility of a bulk subscription to *African Birdlife* similar to the arrangement we had with Africa—Birds and Birding. As soon as we know details about costs these will be made available. In the mean time we wish BirdLife South Africa all success with this new magazine.



Some interesting reading matter

New Oil Spill Dispersant Made from Ingredients in Peanut Butter, Chocolate, Ice Cream—There have always been questions about the health and environmental effects of oil spill dispersants and these issues once again came to the fore after the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Scientists in the USA have now described a new dispersant that is made from edible ingredients and is said to disperse oil spills and stop oil from sticking to birds' feathers. I wonder how they're going to stop rescue workers from eating the dispersant rather than spraying it. Read more about it here: American Chemical Society (ACS). "New oil spill dispersant made from ingredients in peanut butter, chocolate, ice cream." *ScienceDaily*, 20 Aug. 2012. Web. 1 Sep. 2012.

Hormones Dictate When Youngsters Fly the Nest, Says New Research—Scientists from the University of Leeds have studied a colony of Manx Shearwaters on the island of Skomer to find out what provides the trigger for fledging birds to leave the nest. They swapped chicks of different ages between nests and found that about 60 days after hatching the parents would ignore the chicks pleas for food, irrespective of the chick's stage of development. At that stage there is an upsurge of the hormone corticosterone in the chicks which eventually leads to them leaving the nest after about 70 days. I'm sure most parents would have been able to tell the scientists this fact. Read more about it here: Keith Hamer et al. **Parent-offspring conflict during the transition to independence in a pelagic seabird.** *Behavioural Ecology*, 2012 DOI: [10.1093/beheco/ars079](https://doi.org/10.1093/beheco/ars079)

'Facebook for Animals' Tested On Wild Great Tits—Oxford University researchers have done studies on wild Great Tits in order to analyse the social networks that link individual animals together. They attached transponders to thousands of birds and placed sensors at 67 feeding stations that logged when the birds were feeding there. Their data enabled them to determine which birds were friends that foraged together and which birds were pairing up for example. Early results show that birds do indeed interact with a known group of individuals rather than at random. I wonder when I'll get my first friend request from a Great Tit on facebook. Read more about it here: I. Psorakis, S. J. Roberts, I. Rezek, B. C. Sheldon. **Inferring social network structure in ecological systems from spatio-temporal data streams.** *Journal of The Royal Society Interface*, 2012; DOI: [10.1098/rsif.2012.0223](https://doi.org/10.1098/rsif.2012.0223)

Calendar of Events

1 September 2012: International Vulture Awareness Day

9 September 2012: Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam (meet 07:00 at parking area)

23 September 2012: Namibia Bird Club day outing to farm Otjompaue

14 October 2012: Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Gammams sewage works (meet 07:00 at gate)

14 – 21 October 2012: Pan-African Ornithological Congress in Arusha, Tanzania

28 October 2012: Namibia Bird Club day outing to farm Wilhelmshof

11 November 2012: Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam (meet 07:00 at parking area)

25 November 2012: Big birding day at farm Monte Christo

9 December 2012: Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Gammams sewage works (meet 07:00 at gate)

1 – 5 March 2013: BirdLife South Africa AGM "Flock at Sea" with a visit to Walvis Bay