

# Review of bird ringing in Namibia: 1997–1998<sup>1</sup>

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Ringing of Namibian birds has always been done by a relatively small but highly motivated band of 'ring-and-lingers' within Namibia, aided by a few visitors from South Africa and overseas. This is a short summary of the ringers and the birds they ringed in 1997–1998.

A previous summary was provided by Brown (1991) who reviewed the period 1980–1990. He found that 11 620 birds of 308 species were ringed in this 11-year period, and at least three groups (Skeleton Coast staff, Dieter Ludwig and Chris Brown) had ringed over 1000 birds. Thus, on average, 1056 birds were ringed per annum. Simmons (1991) reviewed the pros and cons of ringing and flinging in a country as large as Namibia and highlighted the very low recovery rate of about 0.7% of all birds ringed. He recommended colour-marking birds to increase the reporting rate.

The summary here is based on SAFRING schedule I forms sent direct to the Ornithology Section (a part of the ringing permit requirements) and also a summary of 1997–1998 records, as a service provided by SAFRING (D. Oschadleus *in litt.*).

## ACTIVE RINGERS

While Namibia has few ringers they are all fairly active and they catch a wide range of species. Table 1 gives those ringers currently active in Namibia. Some enthusiasts are ringing purely for the interest of putting rings on birds and hoping for interesting returns, (much valuable data is also collected on morphology from such studies); other ringing such as Peter Bridgeford's and Tim (and

Laurel) Osborne's are part of long-term studies of Lappetfaced Vultures and Kori Bustards respectively. On the Lüderitz islands, Ichaboe, Mercury and Possession, the Ministry of Fisheries has three dedicated staff who ring impressive numbers of young penguins, gannets and Cape Cormorants each year. Pete Bartlett, Rian Jones and Yves Chesselet stay on the islands virtually year round and monitor growth and food of the birds there, and ring youngsters as they come of age. Some of the interesting species recovered from all this ringing is given below.

## RINGED AND RECOVERED BIRDS

The most frequently ringed birds in 1997–1998 were Cape Gannets (769 birds mainly nestlings) and 320 Penguins on the Lüderitz islands. A large total of 390 Whitebrowed Sparrow Weavers was ringed, mainly by Dr Sue McRae who was undertaking a study of them, while the fourth most frequently ringed bird was the Kelp Gull (268 birds, mainly youngsters). The total number of birds ringed in Namibia in the 1997 and 1998 year was 4408. The top ringer in that period was Mark Paxton (Table 2) with 1018 birds followed by Pete Bartlett (636) and Tim Osborne (549 birds). Mark Paxton, who has nets up almost continuously in his garden which backs onto the Okavango River at Shankara, was ably assisted by Linda Sheehan who put together all the ringing records for the last eight years.

Keep a look out for ringed birds wherever you are, and check any dead birds that you find for rings.

<sup>1</sup>Rob Simmons's report was based on 'individual ringers' schedules as well as summaries from SAFRING. The latter relate to Namibian ringers, even if they did some ringing in South Africa – Ed.

**Table 1.** Ringers currently active in Namibia in 1998 – records received to date.

Ringer	Locality	Nos. ringed	Species ringed	Interesting species
Bernd Brell	Walvis Bay/Kamanjab	119	28	Dickinson's Kestrel
Sandra Dantu	Swakopmund	50	5	passerines, waders
Mark Boorman	Swakopmund	–	–	passerines, waders
Tim Osborne	Etosha	817	52	Kori Bustards, Whitequilled Korhaan
Bruno Nebe	Swakopmund	–	–	waders
Rod Braby	Swakopmund	–	–	waders
Peter Bridgeford	Namib Desert	–	–	Lappetfaced Vultures
Dirk Heinrich	Windhoek, s. Namibia	–	–	raptors
Tony Tree	Central coast	457	22	terns and waders
Christian Boix	Daan Viljoen	–	–	hornbills
Yves Chesselet	Possession Island	–	–	penguins, gannets
Pete Bartlett	Ichaboe	–	–	gannets, penguins
Rian Jones	Mercury Island	–	–	penguins, cormorants
Mark Paxton & Linda Sheehan	Okavango	–	–	passerines, raptors
John Paterson	Mowe Bay	–	–	shorebirds, desert birds
Rob Simmons	Sandwich Harbour	–	–	warblers, shorebirds

### INTERESTING SAFRING RECOVERIES TO DECEMBER 1998

The following are the most interesting Namibian recoveries received from SAFRING by the end of 1998:

- **Wandering Albatross:** ringed on Marion Island in 1987 and recovered dead by John Paterson, 34 km south of Mowe Bay, almost 10 years later 3778 km from home.
- **African Black Oystercatcher:** travelled 2000 km (more than any previous record) from Knysna to the Swakopmund coastline in about 400 days. Caught by Mark Boorman and Tony Tree in February 1998 at the coast, ringed by the Black Oystercatcher Conservation Group in South Africa.
- **Cape Gannet:** ringed in 1994 in Algoa Bay Eastern Cape South Africa and found dead 2017 km from home near Terrace

**Table 2.** Ringing totals from ringers active in Namibia in the 1997–1998 year.

Ringer	Locality	Total birds	Comments
Mark Paxton	Shankara and Okavango	1 018	only 8 years late! Riverine passerines
Pete Bartlett	Ichaboe Island	636	mainly young gannets and penguins
Tim Osborne	Etosha inside and out	549	Kori Bustards and raptors
Mark Boorman	Swakop sewage and coast	506	warblers and waders
Rian Jones	Mercury Island	415	young penguins and cormorants
Sandra Dantu	Swakopmund	352	waders, warblers and weavers
Dirk Heinrich	Windhoek, Aus & roving	277	raptors and garden birds
Sue McRae	Waterberg and Windhoek	264	Whitebrowed Sparrowweaver Project, Cambridge
Yves Chesselet	Possession Island	225	penguins, gannets
Bernd Brell	Walvis and Kamanjab	122	raptors and finches
Peter Bridgeford	Namib: Tsondabvlei	32	Lappetfaced Vulture Study
Rod Braby	Swakop and Mile 4	12	waders, warblers

**Table 3.** Foreign ringers active in Namibia in 1998.

Ringer	Locality	Nos. ringed	Spp. ringed	Interesting species
Robert Ellis, Natal	Orange River	109	21	Lesser DC Sunbird
Gerrie Grobler, OFS	Katima, Popa and Kwando	125	35	Purplebanded Sunbird, Redheaded Quelea
Mark Anderson, N.Cape	Orange River	15	2	Cape White-eye, Lesser DC Sunbird
Christian Boix, UCT	Daan Viljoen	88	4	hornbills

Bay a year later by Dr H.K. Weimann.

❑ **Wahlberg's Eagle:** 10 years 8 months old (but found as dried skeleton) only 8 km from ringing place in Okakarara district. Ringer: A. Harington, Finder: W. Diekmann.

❑ **Pale Chanting Goshawk:** two interesting recoveries came to light in the same year and both birds were ringed by Dr Harry Biggs during a study of this species on the farm Claratal, just west of Windhoek. The first was reported to Liz Komen by school children from Friedenau Dam, 20 years 9 months after it was ringed (as an adult). The second bird, ringed in 1982 as an adult (male), was recovered dead in a reservoir in July 1998, by Eke Freyer, on the same farm where it was ringed. This bird was, therefore, over 16 years old because it too was ringed as an adult. The latter recovery shows the danger of uncovered farm reservoirs to birds of prey, and farmers are encouraged to place a large branch in each reservoir to allow birds to climb out. This is not only raptor-friendly, but avoids pollution of the water source itself.

❑ **African Marsh Warbler:** this bird has had a colourful career. First ringed by Peter Bridgeford at Sandwich Harbour in December 1992, it was recaptured by a Dutch research group studying warblers in Walvis Bay sewage works where it was jizzed up with some colour rings in 1996, and then recaptured alive and well at Sandwich Harbour in January 1999, by Rob Simmons and Damian Newmarch as a six year-old bird.

❑ **White Pelican:** this is probably one of the longest-lived pelicans on record and still going strong. It was ringed by Hu Berry (who is also in this category), in December 1972 on the Walvis Bay 'Bird Rock' guano platform as a nestling. Its number was read in the field on 3 Jan 1999 by Bruno Nebe in Walvis Bay, 26 years and 14 days later – Nice record!

## MYSTERY RINGS

Two reports of birds with rings of unknown origin have been made known to us: Bruno Nebe reports a colour-ringed Greater Flamingo with black rings on its upper leg from the Walvis Bay/Sandwich area. No one has yet owned up that they have ringed flamingos with black rings. If you know who this may be, please let us know. They are not from the 1994 release – all young Greater Flamingos had yellow rings, and they are not any of the 1989 Etosha birds; the latter were not colour-ringed.

Colour-ringed Cape Wagtails were also reported to us, via SAFRING, from Henties Bay. I am the only person who has colour-ringed Cape Wagtails in recent years and they are not my birds. Again information on those who may have colour-ringed these birds will be useful.

## SUMMARY

About 16 active ringers currently operate in Namibia, and in the 1997–1998 season a total of 4408 birds were ringed. Visiting ringers also added to this total. Despite this relatively low tally, the year's total is much higher than

the average of 10 years ago ( $\pm 1000$  birds p.a.) and several interesting recoveries were reported including two 20+ year-old birds: a Pale Chanting Goshawk and a White Pelican. Active ringing takes place mainly on the Okavango River, at the coast, and in two protected areas: Etosha and Daan Viljoen. We encourage all ringers to maintain their ringing activities and submit their schedules to SAFRING by June each year, with a copy to the Ornithology Section of the Ministry of Environment & Tourism. To get your permit, simply send your old one to us, with your ringing schedules, and we will update it. If you wish to start ringing, the best way is to join one of the active ringers, learn the ropes and then apply to us, with a letter from the experienced ringer for a 'C permit'.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all those of you who have added to knowledge of Namibian birds

through your ringing activities. Thanks also to Dieter Oschadleus and Cynthia Best of SAFRING for their efficient service and Elly Hamunyela for decoding and totalling.

Please note: when submitting schedules always write the species name next to the **SAFRING code** (not Roberts' No.) on your Schedule 1 SAFRING form. This avoids embarrassing mistakes such as ringers reporting Broadbills, Longtailed Widows and Forest Canaries ringed in Namibia!

### REFERENCES

- Brown, C.J.** 1991. Bird ringing in Namibia. *Safring News* 20: 53–57.
- Simmons, R.** 1991. Squeezing the ringers, Namibian style. *Safring News* 20: 37–41.

