

*ceus velatus* (353), Larklike Bunting *Emberiza impetuani* (313), Melba Finch or Greenwinged Pytilia *Pytilia melba* (266) and Scalyfeathered Finch *Sporopipes squamifrons* (258). Of the top 20 birds 17 were seed-eaters, one an insectivore (Rattling Cisticola *Cisticola chiniana*), one a frugivore (Pied Barbet *Tricholaema leucomelas*) and one a nectar/insect feeder (Marico Sunbird *Nectarinia mariquensis*). Larklike Buntings were only caught in the winter and early summer of 1998.

There were marked influxes at irregular periods for many other species of seed-eater, although some showed a more regular pattern in their arrival and departure times, being

generally either summer (wet season) or winter (dry season) visitors. The few resident species were characterised by a high retrap rate. No Palaearctic or intra-African migrants were caught in large numbers, although Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio* were frequently caught in November and December (26 birds).

Ringling regularly at a series of sites within Botswana and in adjacent areas of South Africa would help differentiate between very local (<15–20 km) and longer-distance movements and show any widespread and consistent patterns of movements and the possible factors inducing these movements.

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## The Kalahari environment: its birds and mammals

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Every year brings a pestilence in these arid regions – this can be anything from caterpillars to termites or locusts. These are not predictable with our current knowledge. But it does illustrate that there is no truth in the cliché ‘balance of nature’, but rather that we have a ‘wobble of nature’. That is difficult to forecast.

Over a period of time the populations of the mammals in the Kalahari can vary quite dramatically. There can be an enormous influx of blue wildebeest when conditions to the north are dry. The availability of food such as the tsama-melon will also affect the movements of animals such as the hartebeest. The springbok with a double lambing period in one year can recover losses in a short time and so their numbers vary enormously – more so than may occur with the gemsbok, for example.

Similarly the bird populations are highly variable and one day can see the arrival or departure of hundreds of thousands of larks in any one area. Larklike Buntings can come in thousands. Raptors are dependent upon rains to the north, even when there are good termite eruptions that attract all types of birds. There are also unusual birds such as crakes, coots, jacanas and other non-desert birds that turn up in such wet seasons as we have had now. There seems to be a huge reservoir of birds that range over a vast area of the arid southern region. It is very difficult to determine the breeding success of such birds.

After such good rains as the area has had now, it is fairly safe to predict that there will be good years immediately ahead for the birds and mammals.