

# Projects of the Avian Demography Unit

**Doug M. Harebottle**

*Avian Demography Unit, UCT, Rondebosch, 7701*

*email: [doug@maths.uct.ac.za](mailto:doug@maths.uct.ac.za)*

The Avian Demography Unit (ADU) was established in 1991 by Prof. Les Underhill as a research unit within the Department of Statistical Sciences at the University of Cape Town. The mission of the unit is to make a contribution to the improved understanding of bird populations, particularly bird population dynamics, and so make a contribution to their conservation. This is achieved through mass-participation projects, long-term monitoring and statistical modelling. SAFRING is one of six projects currently administered and coordinated by the ADU and this article describes the remaining five projects.

## **CAR (COORDINATED AVIFAUNAL ROADCOUNTS)**

This project was started in 1993 and monitors the populations and distribution of 20 large terrestrial bird species, including cranes, bustards, korhaans, storks, etc. Most of the monitoring takes place in agricultural landscapes where participants drive 60–80 km routes, counting birds at 2 km intervals. The counts take place twice a year on specified dates during mid-summer (last Saturday in January) and mid-winter (last Saturday in July). Trends in population sizes relative to landscape use is one important aspect of the project and which will be included in a seven-year report due out in 2001. The project is coordinated by Donella Young and she can be contacted at (021) 650-4239, or email [donella@maths.uct.ac.za](mailto:donella@maths.uct.ac.za) for further information.

## **CWAC (COORDINATED WATERBIRD COUNTS)**

CWAC was launched in 1992 and aims to monitor the population and distribution of waterbirds at wetlands throughout South

Africa. This is done through a coordinated programme of counts twice a year (mid-summer and mid-winter) in which observers not only count the numbers of each waterbird species present but also describe and monitor the wetland itself. CWAC forms part of South Africa's fulfilment as signatory to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and has been incorporated into Wetlands International's African Waterbird Census Programme since 1992. A seven-year report (TOTAL CWAC Report) was published in 1999 and summarised the data collected from 1992–1997. The project is coordinated by me and I can be contacted at tel. (021) 650–2330 or fax (021) 650–3434 for further information.

## **BIRP (BIRDS IN RESERVES PROJECT)**

As a follow-on from the bird atlas, the ADU introduced the Birds In Reserves Project. Launched in 1995, this project catalogues all bird species occurring and breeding in protected areas (PAs) in South Africa. Very little is known about which species occur or breed within the approximately 700 publicly owned PAs in South Africa and BIRP hopes to help determine which PAs are important for prioritising bird conservation in South Africa. Private PAs are also included but are not as high a priority as publicly owned PAs. Participants simply complete daily checklists for the duration of the time they visit a specific PA and then submit them to the ADU where the data is analysed. The project is also coordinated by me.

## **NERCS (NEST RECORD CARD SCHEME)**

NERCS strives to get birders to collect enough data from active bird nests in order to

determine the reproductive success of South Africa's breeding species. It also allows gaps to be filled where breeding information (e.g. clutch size, incubation period, etc.) is lacking for certain species. Participants in the project are encouraged to visit nests on a regular basis recording their observations on specified nest record cards which are submitted to the ADU for analysis. This project has been completely revised from the old SAOS nest record card scheme and has been running since 1995. I also coordinate this project.

### **SAFAP (SOUTH AFRICAN FROG ATLAS PROJECT)**

Using a modified version of the bird atlas software, the distribution and relative abundance of South Africa's approximately 110 frog species is currently being mapped and updated. The project, started in 1998, requires participants to visit as many quarter-

degree cells as possible and record species occurring within each cell. Observations and recordings can be made visually or via taped recordings of calls. With only a handful of professional herpetologists in South Africa, SAFAP needs as much volunteer participation as possible to ensure thorough coverage of all grid cells. If you would like to become a frogger please contact the project coordinator, Marius Burger, at (021) 650-2330 or email [marius@maths.uct.ac.za](mailto:marius@maths.uct.ac.za), for more information.

These projects, like bird ringing, all make a valuable contribution to improving our knowledge about birds in South Africa and as bird ringers we often have excellent opportunities to get involved with some of these projects. I would therefore like to encourage you to become more involved and make even a greater contribution in conserving our wonderful avifauna ... and amphibians!

