

REVIEW

An Ornithological Expedition to the Namib Coast

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To those who know the Namib coast, and more so those who do not, this bleak and barren area has an enchantment and mystery all of its own. For the casual visitor, who prefers Durban beach this region has little to offer, but to the naturalist, the fisherman and the "get-away-from-it-all" types the coast of South West Africa is a virtual paradise. Relatively little of the coastline is open to the general public but to that area, from Sandwich Harbour to Cape Cross, that is legally accessible the Western Cape Wader Group have made an excellent attempt at assessing the wader populations at a time when palaeartic migrants are settled into their non-breeding quarters and are relatively static. The group visited the area from late December 1976 until mid January 1977 and the study is complimentary to a similar one made in the South Western Cape.

This bulletin is the first of its kind to be published, following this particular format, on an expedition to a specific area, for a specific purpose, in southern Africa. It follows along similar lines to those issued in Britain for similar expeditions to, for example, North West Africa.

The most important aspect of the work carried out was a wader census of the aforementioned coastline and including the fabulous Walvis Bay Lagoon and Sandwich Harbour as well as salt-works and sewage works along the coast. The results were spectacular and some surprising results came to light. A certain amount of wader ringing was also carried out and amongst the birds captured was even a Sanderling that I had ringed at Port Elizabeth in September 1971!

The authors have gone into some detail in describing the study area, giving information on the prevailing cold Benguela current, the climate, geographical features as well as giving a precis of known information on the invertebrate fauna of the shoreline. Conservation aspects are discussed and both Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay qualify as wetlands of international importance as defined under the Ramsar Convention. To get down to some of the highlights of the census I really plumb first of all for the huge numbers of Chestnut-banded Plovers (1 900 + at Walvis Bay and nearly 2 400 at Sandwich Harbour). These are enormous concentrations for an indigenous plover and I have certainly never seen the likes in earlier visits there. It is mentioned, however, that a drought was prevailing in the interior and I would like to suggest that these birds were displaced from Etosha Pan where they breed in good numbers after good rains.

Most of the palaeartic waders were in expected numbers except for Turnstone and Sanderling. The total figures for each were

close on 7 700 for the former and 23 000 for the latter. Most Turnstones were found on rocky shorelines away from normal birding and count areas but, surprisingly, the largest concentrations of Sanderling were in the two large lagoon areas, but also good numbers on rocky and mixed rock/sand shores, and sandy beaches.

It is interesting to note that while the Sanderling does not seem to be confined to a particular area of the southern African coastline the population of Curlew Sandpiper in this area seems to be the same each year with very little interchange with the population summering in the South West and Western Cape.

I have one complaint - not enough copies of the report were published.

REWARDS FOR RECOVERIES

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I would like to comment on the question of rewards for recoveries, following Pat Morant's interesting article in Safring News 6 (1) 1977: 34-37. Firstly, humans being what they are, financial incentives offered as bait to encourage people to report ringed birds must inevitably result in abuse and corruption (the Cape Vulture Gyps coprotheres, for example, would be extinct within a fortnight if me and my mates got R10 for each recovery!). On the other hand, one can acknowledge people in non-monetary ways. A nice example of this is practiced by the Japanese Bird Banding Scheme. At the Fourth Pan African Ornithological Congress in Seychelles in 1976, some of us had the pleasure of meeting Mr Masashi Yoshii, Chief of the Bird Migration Research Centre, and he showed us how they "reward recoveries" in Japan.

They have designed a very neat and pretty little tie-pin, which features a miniature bird ring, complete with return address and serial number. The whole thing is silver-plated, and they send one to every person who reports the recovery of a Japanese-ringed bird. The tie-pins are mere trinkets, without any real commercial value, yet they mean something and are a tangible form of "reward" for the person who took the trouble to report the recovery. Nobody would bother to shoot birds in order to fill his top drawer with tie-pins, so the danger of the system being abused is minimal.

Many of the people reporting recoveries in our part of the world are relatively unsophisticated, and a little token like a shiny tie-pin, or a little medallion, or even a nicely printed certificate, would impart a sense of recognition, and make people willing to report further recoveries. More important, such tokens would very often become talking points in the community, and would effectively spread the message about bird-ringing at