



February 2008

FROM CRANES TO OTHER WETLAND BIRDS AND THEIR HABITATS

Greetings for 2008! We hope this year brings you good health, enthusiasm and success in your activities. This year the Namibia Crane Working Group will be four years old. As there is much support for and interest in our activities, we have decided that the time has come to broaden our scope to include the conservation of other wetland birds and of their habitats, for which cranes are charismatic ambassadors. This month the spotlight falls on the Kavango Region, and we bring you a special bumper issue to mark the celebration of World Wetlands Day. We would like to expand our mailing list, so please feel free to forward any relevant contacts to us. As always, your contributions and support are much appreciated.



Cranes are flagships for Namibia's wetlands in Caprivi, Bushmanland, Etosha, North Central and Kavango (Photos: Ann Scott)

WORLD WETLANDS DAY Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People

World Wetlands Day (2 February) is an international celebration commemorating the signing of the United Nations Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention) in 1971, whereby signatory countries (including Namibia) agree to implement programmes to conserve their wetlands. This year's theme is "Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People".

Namibia's joint national celebration for World Wetlands Day and World Water Day (22 March) will focus on a River Basin Management Conference on "Healthy River Basins" in Rundu, on the Okavango River, on 2 and 3 April 2008. The event is being planned by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in collaboration with other Government Departments, NamWater, NGOs such as NNF and the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia and the Wetland Working Group of Namibia. At the coast, the Coastal Environmental Trust of Namibia (CETN) held its annual World Wetlands Day Quiz for schools on 1 February. The winners have been invited to attend the above conference.

For information on two excellent educational resources (the Wetland Working Group's comprehensive booklet, "Wetlands of Namibia"; and *Bush Telegraph* Vol. 6 - No. 1, 2007: "Water is Life") please email the Wetland Working Group (bethune@iway.na).

Namibian delegation attends World Wetlands Day celebrations in Botswana

Based on a report by Shirley Bethune & Laura Namene, Wetland Working Group of Namibia
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"Whose Delta is it?"

Three riparian countries share the Okavango River. The bulk of the water originates upstream in Angola and passes along the north-eastern edge of Namibia, supporting development in the Kavango Region before entering the Delta through the Panhandle in northern Botswana. The above question led to a lively debate with inputs from the Botswana Minister of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism, the Honorable Onkokame Kitso Mokaila, Dr Pete Ashton of the CSIR, Dr Casper Bonyongo of the Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Center and Ms Myra Sekgororaoane, chief executive officer of the Botswana Tourism Board. All finally agreed that, geographically, the Delta belongs to the people of Botswana and, equally, that as a nation they have an international obligation to conserve its biodiversity for the world – a task taken very seriously by Minister Kitso Mokaila, who stated clearly that, "On conservation there is no compromise".

This intense debate formed part of a four day event in Maun and focussed on the Okavango Delta to mark World Wetlands Day. An International Wetland



Conference, to discuss and officially launch the recently completed Okavango Delta Management Plan (ODMP) preceded the celebrations and the launch of a secretariat for the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM). The celebrations were held

under a big tree on the banks of the Thamalakane River, with a keynote address by Dr Anada Tiega, the Secretary General of Ramsar, great singing and plays.

At the invitation of the Botswana Ministry of Environment Wildlife and Tourism a Namibian delegation attended these celebrations. It was led by the Hon. Hidino Nghishongwa, the Namibian High Commission to Botswana, and included Dr Kalumbi Shangula, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism; Dr Stefanus De Wet, the Director of Resource Management in the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and the Namibian chairman of the Okavango Basin Steering Committee (OBSC) of OKACOM; Ms Shirley Bethune, the co-chair of the Namibian Wetland Working Group and coordinator of the Okavango IRBM project; and Ms Laura Namene, Chief Water Quality Specialist in the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry and OBSC member.

At the wetland conference Dr de Wet gave a presentation on OKACOM and its role in collaborative trans-boundary management of the Okavango River Basin. At the launch of the OKACOM Secretariat he explained how OKACOM operates through the Commissioners, the more technical Okavango Basin Management Committee, specialist task forces on hydrology, biodiversity and institutional strengthening; and the role of the secretariat to co-ordinate all of this. The important achievements of the communities living alongside the river through the 'Every River has its People' Project and the Basin Wide Forum for the Okavango River were recognised. This Sida-funded project is being implemented through the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) in Namibia, through the Kalahari Conservation Society in Botswana and through Acadir in Angola.

The establishment of a permanent secretariat for the OKACOM marks an important milestone. The OKACOM was established in 1994 and is one of the oldest river basin commissions in southern Africa. It serves to advise the governments of Angola, Namibia and Botswana on water related issues pertinent to the joint management of the Okavango River Basin. Credit for the successful establishment of the OKACOM Secretariat must go to OKACOM and the donors, USAID and Sida, who through the Okavango Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) project have facilitated the process over the last three years. The newly appointed OKACOM Executive Secretary, Dr Ebenizario Chonguica was introduced, and the offices of the secretariat in Maun were officially opened by Minister Kitso Mokaila.

Attendance of these events allowed the Namibian delegation to share views and gain valuable insight from the experiences of experts on issues related to inte-

grated water resources management pertinent to the Okavango River Basin. The messages they brought home were:

- OKACOM must continue to work together to ensure sound management of the whole river basin.
- Namibia can learn much about collaborative and participatory planning involving all different Government departments, NGOs and communities living alongside the Okavango River from the Okavango Delta Management Plan process. We need to initiate a similar planning process for Kavango.
- Geographically the river and its wetland resources belong to the communities who live along it, but it has to be managed at international (OKACOM), national (pertinent Government departments), regional (Kavango Regional Council) and community (Basin Wide Forum, Conservancies, Every River has its People Project) levels.
- Data need to be accessible, updated, improved and shared. Ongoing research and monitoring of these precious wetland resources must remain a national priority to form the basis for sound decision making.
- "Integrated Flow Management" is an effective tool for managing the basin as a whole and although this will require a basin-wide approach, Namibia must be ready to collaborate by forming its own integrated flow management team of river experts to work together with similar teams within the basin.
- We must recognise that within Namibia the riverine forest alongside the Okavango River supports the highest biodiversity of trees in the country and the river itself supports a rich biodiversity of fishes, as well as birds. The riverine forests should be declared "strategic forests" and their biodiversity protected for posterity. Namibia must strengthen collaboration with neighbouring states through the OBSC hydrology, biodiversity and institutional task forces.
- Namibia should pass the National Wetland Policy well before the next international Ramsar meeting. The draft was prepared by the National Wetland Working Group for the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (DEA), widely circulated to all Ministries, revised and finalised in 2004. Equitable sharing of benefits is important; this should be a bottom up approach and decentralised.
- Namibia should seriously consider applying to Ramsar to extend the Okavango Ramsar site in Botswana across the border to include the river section between Mukwe and Mohembo.

Kavango Region Schools Logo Competition for Grades 8-12

The national World Wetlands/Water Day committee would like to invite all Senior Secondary School learners in the Kavango Region, to submit designs for a logo for the future Okavango River Basin Management Committee.

2 February is World Wetlands Day and 22 March is World Water Day. Each year the Namibian Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry in collaboration with other departments,

the Wetland Working Group of Namibia and NGOs such as the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF), who are concerned with wetland and water issues, organises a special event to commemorate these two international conservation days. This year the **joint event will be held on 2 and 3 April in Rundu** on the banks of the Okavango River, one of our very important wetlands that we share with Angola and Botswana.

The Okavango River Basin is one of the potential Ramsar sites or "wetlands of international importance" in Namibia. The people living alongside the Okavango River are in the process of considering the establishment of a regional committee to manage the Namibian section of this international river. It is for this reason that this year's celebration will be in Rundu. A two day conference on "**Healthy River Basins**" is planned to mark both World Wetland Day and World Water Day this year. It is hoped that by sharing experiences with existing and emerging River Basin Management Committees from elsewhere in the country (Kuiseb, Ilishana, Omaruru and Fish rivers), a similar committee for the Okavango River will be established. Hence we are seeking a **logo design** for the future Okavango River Basin Committee – a design that reflects our theme of the Okavango River Basin as a "Healthy River Basin". The winner will be announced before the event and the prizes will be presented during the conference.

Entries should please be submitted to Ms Dorothy Wamunyima, of the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF), Every River has its People (ERP) project **BEFORE 15 MARCH 2008**: Either: by hand at her NNF / ERP office in NDC Building, Block A, Office Number 4, Rundu or posted to Ms D. Wamunyima, PO Box 2113, Rundu (tel. 066 256145 & fax 066 267202).

The winner will be announced before the event and the prizes will be presented during the conference. If you have any queries about the competition, please contact Ms Shishani Nakanwe (tel. 061 208 7135, email nakanwes@mawf.gov.na or Ms Otilie Angula (tel. 061 208 7195, email angulao@mawf.gov.na).

KAVANGO BIRD CLUB
Chairperson's report (November 2007)
Steven Maseka: Cell 081 203 9870
c/o Philip Steyn, MET Parks & Wildlife, Rundu; email psteyn@met.gov.na

I feel honour and privilege as a Chairperson of Kavango Bird Club ending the year 2007 with a lot of successful activities being done. As a nature concerned person and a Chairperson Kavango Bird Club, I thought you might be interested from our meetings in year 2007. We discussed some of the issues and came up with ideas, suggestions and solutions.

The issues that threaten birds in Namibia

1. Population growth and settlement

Expanding population > pressure to expand agriculture and industry > pressure on limited resources, e.g. trees, soil, wildlife, water, and to increasing pollution. This in

turn leads to environmental degradation, e.g. soil erosion; deforestation; Biodiversity loss; Birds loss; and thus to poverty increase, and a threat to human health.

2. The use of poison on birds is high on the agenda

*Poison could however be environmentally compatible.

*The loss of only one species of bird can cause other species to face extinction.

3. Land issue

*The lack of land tenure, in particular inadequate systems of group tenure might threaten birds, because it does not provide incentives for people to care for the land. A lack of appropriate tenure over land resources (water; grazing; trees; wildlife and soil) encourages the over-exploitation of these resources and causes land degradation.

(More problems have been discussed.)

Efforts to mitigate the issues threatening birds

*Environmental education > prevention is better than cure > programmes in all Namibian schools should teach learners about environment so that they can grow up knowing how to live in tune with it.

*Namibia's Biodiversity programme.

*Community Based Natural Resources.

Those are some of the issues and solutions discussed, but a lot was done!

Thank you

I would like to thank Kavango Bird Club members for their commitment, dedication and effort to educate our Namibian brothers and sisters, the importance of looking after our beautiful Namibian birds. I would like to thank you again for going to the remote areas about 10 km, without being paid, as we do it as volunteer work, thanks very much!

The Club Committee consists of: Mr Maseka Steven (Chairperson), Mr Mangundu John (Vice-Chairperson), Miss Kativa Theresia (Treasurer), Miss Hellena Kangayi (Secretary).

I would like to thank again the following communities for working with us: Kasote Community; Kaisosi Community; Nakazaza Community.

My thanks go again to Maggie from Namibia Red Cross Society from Rundu for letting us to guide and teach orphan children about birds.

My thanks go to Mr Tom from Switzerland for letting us to guide his family on birding, and the club generate some money, thanks a lot!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Manager of NBC, Rukavango National Service to represent our programme.

A special 'thank you' goes to the Director of NARREC Liz Komen for giving us advice, how the Club can be, posters and books.

Once again I won't forget Namibia Crane Working Group for the effort to publish our activities in their newsletter. Thank you Ann & Mike Scott.

I take this last opportunity to give thanks to Vultures Namibia (Vulture Study Group), Peter Bridgeford, keep in touch with us, Kavango Bird Club.

Last, but not least I want to appeal to people who want to become a patron or member of KBC – please call us!

Know your birds. Know your environment!



Corm-like structures among the roots of heavily grazed grass *Sporobolus spicatus*, upon which Blue Cranes are feeding under dry conditions (Photo: Ann Scott)



This pair of cranes was cooling off in a puddle of rain water near Chudop during the heat of the day on 3/1/08 (Photo: Ann Scott)

BLUE CRANE UPDATES FROM ETOSHA

Ann & Mike Scott; and Wilferd Versfeld, MET EEI
 Email: versfeld@mweb.com.na

Oponono and Andoni provide further insights into Blue Crane diet and survival under dry conditions

On 5-6/12/07, Wilferd and Pieter Versfeld and his friend Alex Botha accompanied us to the Oponono area again to collect samples of the overgrazed roots of the grass *Sporobolus spicatus*, upon which the cranes were observed feeding in August 2007 (see newsletter No. 31, August 07).

We found no cranes at Oponono, which was practically dry; 12 at Andoni; and 2 at Sueda waterhole, on the Pan's edge. The group at Andoni were feeding practically non-stop on the roots of the above-mentioned grass, in areas where it was also heavily grazed around the waterhole.

Here we made another interesting discovery: the cranes were digging up and feeding on bud-like structures, resembling corms or bulbs, that occurred among the roots. We had first noticed these juicy-looking structures at Oponono. Ben Strohbach of the National Botanical Research Institute, Windhoek, mentions that sedges often form corms, e.g. the common "uintjie" (*Cyperus fulgens*). This source of food could help explain how the cranes manage to survive under these extreme dry conditions, when no other food appears to be available (not even dung beetles); and possibly why they favour these heavily grazed areas near waterholes. We are investigating further!

Some of the cranes are moving back into Etosha

From 30/12-6/1/08 we could find only 3 pairs of cranes within the Park, at Sueda, Chudop and Twee Palms, and none at Andoni. The pair at Chudop were feeding on small, round, dark items they found by pecking amongst the roots of the plants (caterpillars? - there had been some rain recently). Later, during the midday heat, we found these two very hot cranes standing in a small puddle of rainwater at the side of the road.

Wilferd reports: I went to Namutoni on 17/1/08 and found 14 cranes, but none at Andoni due to lack of water I presume. I think we need to highlight the water crisis there as I took photos of Andoni and then Okashana (to the north of Etosha) where the water is just pumping away. I found 4 cranes at Sueda on 9/1/08, but away south of the road near the newbrowni shrubs on that hard ground. I heard them calling from Sueda and then started looking for them. They were not there on 17/1/08, so I wonder if this is not the pair at Salvadora and the pair at the Halali Seepage. At the causeway there were 5, 2 and 3 cranes; one was the chick I ringed in April 2006 on the plain east of Rietfontein (NHD), so they have lost one chick (NHC). No sign of the bird with the radio collar, I will try to fly with the Berkeley University group and radio track next month. I heard about the two cranes at Chudop over New Year from the van den Reeps. The Namutoni MET staff (Willem and Markus) reported a group of 19 cranes at Mushara on 29 December and 10 January. There was 40 mm of rain on 19-20/1/08, but the clouds are all gone now.

More crane sightings

Gabriel Shatumbu, Science Warden-EEI-Etosha
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Hello, it was on 18.01.08 morning I and Johannes Kapner on our way to Namutoni to offload two Flamingos, it was raining almost the entire day. During such trip one pair Blue Cranes were observed at Halali area while two pairs were observed at Namutoni at Fischer's Pan, total 6 birds. Good luck!!

