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TRIBUTE TO KEITH WEARNE

Shirley Bethune, Ndina Nashipili, Kevin Roberts, Cynthia Ortmann, Barbara Curtis and all the members of the Wetland Working Group of Namibia and the national World Water, World Wetland day committee; email bethune@iway.na

All of us who belong to the Wetlands Working Group of Namibia and who have worked with Keith to organise the annual celebration of World Wetland Day over the years, would like to pay tribute to a very special man who has for many years been at the helm of wetland conservation at the coast and has instilled an appreciation of wetlands and the birds they support amongst hundreds of young Namibians.

Keith was born in 1926 in Portugal, where his father was a wine shipper. He attended school in Britain where his interest in natural history made him an avid collector of bird eggs, moths and butterflies. He saw active service in the Second World War, serving in the Royal Artillery. After the war he moved to southern Africa and settled on a farm bordering on the Kruger National Park where his keen interest in mammals, birds and reptiles was appreciated by the game rangers that he became friends with. From there he moved to Zimbabwe and later back to the Cape, his interest in conservation and love of the sea very much alive. He was a founder member of the False Bay Conservation Society, a group that created the first false reef in South African waters by sinking an old Navy ship in 35 metres of water in Smitswinkel Bay, and that succeeded in closing off False Bay to commercial fishing. Keith and his wife, Gail, moved to Walvis Bay in 1976. Ever keen to volunteer for community service, Keith joined the National Sea Rescue Institute as a coxswain and in 1980 became the

station commander. The next year he joined Rotary and was soon also one of the voluntary bird counters of the Round Table project that assisted Dr Tony Williams and Dr Chris Brown, then the state ornithologists, to monitor the wetland bird populations at the coast. When South Africa seceded Walvis Bay to Namibia in 1994, Dr Williams left for the Cape and Keith took over the bird counts, a task that he continued to manage and co-ordinate successfully until his death on 18 July 2008; in fact, he was still making arrangements for the latest count from his hospital bed.

Keith initiated a Walvis Bay Environmental Action Group, later renamed the Coastal Environmental Trust of Namibia (CETN), and together with this group of like-minded conservationists and bird enthusiasts, he succeeded in creating an awareness of the importance of the Walvis Bay wetlands and worked tirelessly to develop and implement a management plan for the Walvis Bay Lagoon and Environs. In addition to his efforts to engage the Walvis Bay Municipality in wetland conservation and his role on the Local Agenda 21 committee, as chairman of CETN he also served on the Kuiseb Basin Management Committee, on the Wetlands Working Group of Namibia and on the Advisory Environmental Committee of the Namibian Ports Authority both with regard to dredging and the development of a new Namibian Naval base. He was a respected member whose advice, although not always heeded, was sound. He did not shy away from drawing attention to threats to the wetlands and although seen as "crusty" by some, this was tempered by his sense of humour.

Three years ago, the Wetland Working Group of Namibia had the honour of nominating Keith Wearne for the Ramsar International Education Award 2005. The worldwide competition was stiff and he did not win, but to us his concern about wetland birds and wetland conservation, in particular of the Walvis Bay wetlands, richly deserved international recognition. Well-earned National recognition came his way in November 2000 when he shared the Namibia Nature Foundation's Environmental Award with his wife Gail. It saddened him that progress on proclaiming the proposed Walvis Bay Nature Reserve was so slow and he would have loved to see this very important Ramsar site receive the protective status these wetlands deserve. Perhaps a fitting tribute when this reserve is finally declared would be to name it after this man who has done more than anyone else to ensure Wise Use and responsible management of the richest coastal wetland in southern Africa.

The Walvis Bay Ramsar site supports over 240 000 wetland birds during the summer months and over 80 000 in the winter when the migrants have left. These birds include over 1% of the world population of 18 bird species. Amongst these are 65-70% of the world population of Chestnut-banded Plovers *Charadrius pallisus* and 40% of the world population of the African subspecies of the Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*. This site is also an important nursery for 1 to 3 year old African Black Oystercatchers *Haematopus moquini*. Other than the great number and diversity of birds the wetland also supports several mammals including black-backed jackals, a pair of brown hyaenas, oryx, springbok, Cape fur seals and Atlantic Bottlenosed Dolphins and Heaviside's Dolphins. Without Keith keeping his eye on his wetland over the last three decades, much of this may have been lost to irresponsible development, careless dredging and general disturbance. We salute Keith, may his spirit continue to guide all of us who strive to conserve our precious wetlands and the life they sustain.

ETOSHA FLAMINGO SURVEY (21 & 22 July 2008)

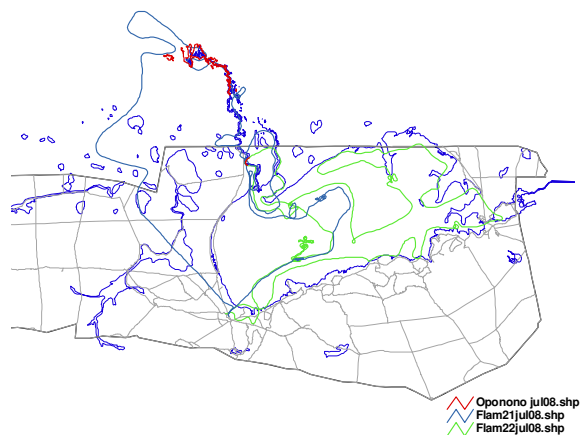
The good news is that the flamingos are here in masses and breeding on Etosha pan!

Wilferd Versfeld, MET EEI, Okaukuejo
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Since 5th March 2008, we had been flying over Etosha pan whenever a plane was available to monitor when the flamingos will start returning from Sua Pan in Botswana. This year they were again breeding at Sua Pan. During 2006 we had a similar rainy season with much flooding in the north, and the flamingos came back to Etosha during May/June and started breeding in June. This year we managed flights over the pan twice in March (with Steve Braine from Hobatere Lodge, and Frans Henning), twice in April (with Dr Mark Jago, and with Frans Henning during the Blue Crane survey) and again on 16th June (with Frans Henning). At all times, the pan was very flooded and the traditional nesting site near Okerfontein was under water and could not be located if not for the GPS position. We found the flamingos breeding near the Gonob Peninsula this year.

As part of the international flamingo survey coordinated by Mark Anderson, we flew over Etosha Pan and the surrounding areas on 21st and 22nd July 2008 (see map for flight paths of 21st and 22nd and ground count from 23rd to 25th July). We counted approximately 50 000 adult Lesser Flamingos and, after counting (estimating) 5 700 chicks, I decided to up the number to 10 000 chicks after looking at the photographs. There were still eggs on the nests so the number of chicks could increase.

On 23rd July 2008 I went up to Oponono to complete the ground count survey. Although there was still much water, this count was very disappointing with very few birds and wetland species.



Flight paths for the aerial surveys (green and blue); and ground survey (red) for the Oponono area, July 2008 (map Wilferd Versfeld)



One of six Lesser Flamingo nesting sites with eggs on nests in the foreground (photo Wilferd Versfeld).



Lesser Flamingo nesting site showing adult birds (pink) and juveniles (brown) (photo Wilferd Versfeld)

UPDATES ON ETOSHA'S BLUE CRANES *Exciting feedback on chick survival – and possible breeding at an unknown site*

2-4/7/08: Ann & Mike Scott

On 2-4 July 2008 we counted only 16 cranes. Most of them were at Andoni, including a family group with two unringed juveniles. Five of the 6 chicks we had found

within the Park in April 2008 had been ringed (see below) and we had searched all the likely areas for signs of breeding activity. So this observation raises an interesting question: had this pair bred outside the Park, taking advantage of the exceptional rain season?

A beautiful adult crane Twee Palms took up a most ingenious roosting place when night fell, on a rocky island surrounded by deep water in the waterhole. With Wilferd and his son Pieter we attempted to capture this bird, first with walk-in nets and then with a spotlight at night, but our efforts were in vain. The sight of a large male lion in the vicinity was somewhat disconcerting ...

17/8/08: Wilferd Versfeld

The mystery of "James" (the Blue Crane fitted with a PTT on 8/4/08) has been resolved. The PTT on this bird transmitted from 9-26/4/08, then stopped abruptly (see newsletter No. 36, May 2008). I saw the bird at Andoni on 14 & 15/8/08 amongst a group of 23 birds. The bird was close to the road and while trying to read the ring letters of the other marked birds I saw the antennae on its back. These must be Oponono (wild) birds as they are very skittish and move away from the road when you stop. The transmitter/solar panel is totally preened over by feathers, with only the antenna sticking up. This is why the unit is not charging. So, for the next PTT, we'll have to fit a big base pad and trim feathers away.

9/9/08: Wilferd Versfeld

I flew over the pan this morning with Dr Mark Jago to look at the flamingos. The Maulle is equipped with radio tracking equipment so we tracked just over the pan and, being high, we could have picked up the signal of our radio-bird, but there was nothing.

20/9/08: Holger Kolberg

Tourguide Raini Becker reported a flock of 22 Blue Cranes just north of Andoni at about 14h00.

22/9/08: Wilferd Versfeld

I went to Andoni last week again, there are now 29 cranes at the gravel pit in groups of 21, 4 and 4. There is still water in the gravel pit. The ungulates come earlier and then move off and the cranes come at midday. I spotted 6 juveniles with rings (including NHE & NHF – siblings from Chudop Triangle, April 2006) and the adult ("James"), fitted with a PTT in April 2008.

Ed: This gives us a total survival estimate of 43% - amazing considering the (potential) predation and extreme climatic conditions!

Year	No. chicks	(No. ringed)	No. & % resighted Sept 08	Ring details
2006	7	(4)	3 (43%)	NHE NHF NHD
2007	1	(1)	1 (100%)	NHH
2008	6*	(5)	2 (33%)	NBY NBN
Total	14*	(10)	6 (43%)	

*Excludes 2 unringed chicks at Andoni 3/6/08



Top to bottom: Two unringed juveniles (left) with two adults at Andoni, July 2008; adult Blue Crane at Twee Palms; roosting site at Twee Palms (arrow); Wilferd (R) and Pieter Versfeld (L) with walk-in nets (photos 1-4 Ann Scott); crane fitted with PTT (middle of central group), Andoni (photo Wilferd Versfeld)



Potential crane habitat in Angola was recently pinpointed on Google Earth and then ground-truthed by Dr John Mendelsohn.

CRANES IN ANGOLA?

Dr John Mendelsohn, RAISON

Email john@raison.com.na



Google image for the above photograph (John Mendelsohn)

4/8/08: The photo at the top gives you a closer, ground of view of what potential crane habitat looks like up here. It was taken looking south from the spot shown in the Google image (above). There were no cranes about here or in other places I looked, but I assume that a few cranes could live on these scattered oshanas. Overall, the whole area is very wooded and there no large expanses of open grassland. Unlike Namibia, there are lots and lots of bush-meat hunters so I would think that cranes would not be left in peace.

Getting to these places is not easy, and very few could be reached on the ground without considerable slog and other hazards. So far the bakkie is going well and has not had any explosive punctures!

Ed: The Namibia Crane Working Group has been investigating a second aerial survey for cranes over southern Angola.

Dr W. Richard J. Dean, DST/NRF Centre of Excellence at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, SA
Email: lycium@telkomsa.net

8/8/08: No, no crane sightings in Angola. However, and most exciting, we found a study skin of a downy chick of Wattled Crane in the bird collection at Lubango, supporting the only record of the species breeding in Angola (although they must breed like flies throughout the southeastern wetlands).

FEEDBACK ON THE BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL WORLD CONSERVATION CONFERENCE

Dr Chris Brown, Executive Director, Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF), email cb@nnf.org.na

Last week I attended the BirdLife International World Conservation Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As you know, the birding fraternity in Namibia has unanimously decided that it would be in our interest to become an Affiliate and then a Partner Member of BLI.

For general info on BirdLife International please see their website at www.birdlife.org. You can also access the World Bird Data Base (WBDB) via this website. The following is a bullet-point account of the Conference:

- Some 500 delegates from 140+ countries, 40+ from Africa
- Programme focused on bird species and habitat conservation
- Despite years of conservation and effort, birds and their habitats globally are under more pressure than ever
- Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are one of the main tools used for conservation by BLI (Namibia has 21 IBAs)
- IBA tool box for Africa was launched (essentially a good practice guide)
- IBAs are now being expanded to Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) – which include other taxa (with IUCN)
- BLI is exploring the notion of establishing IBA custodians – local organisations or individuals that look out for IBAs
- As part of a "Prevent Extinction" programme BLI is exploring the concept of "Species Guardians" – a person, group or local organisation that takes the lead in conservation for a particular spp or small group of spp. Linked to this is a "Species Champion" – a lead funder to cover conservation costs and to adopt that species (or small group of spp.) as their financial responsibility. This concept does not need to be applied to spp. on the verge of extinction. In Namibia we have examples that would fall within this approach, e.g. the Braby family for Damara Terns as Species Guardians, and Rössing Foundation as the Species Champion
- Recognition that IBAs, as site specific, don't address migrants adequately – thus a Flyway Campaign was launched
- Strong focus on marine spp. – particularly global plight of albatrosses and petrels

- BLI and partners are strong on biodiversity issues, less strong on economics, markets, social / community aspects, etc.
- The Partnership aspect of BLI is one of their great strengths – excellent atmosphere, commitment & enthusiasm
- BLI emphasises good governance for all its members: there is an NGO "health check" and good governance doc online at www.birdlife.net

A bad living place for birds is a bad living place for people; conversely, a good living place for birds is a good living place for people!

NEWSFLASHES

A comparison of wetland birds in temporary and permanent dams in the vicinity of Windhoek

Timoteus Kadhila, email tkcibi85@yahoo.com
This internship is being funded by the GEF Small Grants Programme, through the Namibia Crane Working Group, and the project is being initiated and supervised by Shirley Bethune.

The research of the above mentioned topic is conducted at selected dams around Windhoek in order to compare the relative importance of these dams to wetland birds in the dry season. The selected dams are: temporary dams (farm dams) - Neudamm and Rüsich farm dam; permanent dams which are in two types: Municipal dams - Avis and Goreangab and State dams - Friedenau and Swakoppoort. The objectives of this research project are to compile a checklist of wetland bird species at selected dams, to map the wetland bird habitats of each dam and record habitat use by birds, to record human disturbance at each site as well as to compare the composition and numbers of wetland birds using temporary and permanent dams in the dry season.

10th Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

The 10th meeting of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar COP10) will take place in Changwon, Republic of Korea from 28 October to 4 November 2008. The 158 countries that have ratified the Ramsar Convention will gather to assess the progress of the convention and the sustainable use of wetlands to date, share knowledge and experience on technical issues, and plan their own and the secretariat's work for the next three years. The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. To date 1 759 wetland sites are included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance, covering over 161 million hectares. Four of these wetlands are in Namibia, namely the Etosha Pan, Walvis Bay, Sandwich Harbour and the Orange River Mouth.

Take a closer look - that bird may be wearing a ring!
Liz Komen, NARREC
 Email liz@narrec.net

The poster "Take A Closer Look" is jointly sponsored by the Namibia Bird Club and the Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS), with distribution and other logistics by Liz Komen at NARREC.



Please report leg-ring and wing-tag information in order to support the conservation of threatened birds in southern Africa, noting:

- **Date, time and place where bird was seen**
- **Colour, number and letters on the ring or tag**
- **Ring or tag on the left or right side of the bird**

Kindly send the information with your contact details to SAFRING, UCT, RSA, email safring@adu.org.za, and to Namibia Nature Foundation, tel. (061) 248-345, email sw@nnf.org.na. For copies of the poster please contact the NEWS Office or NARREC (see above) in Windhoek.

Namibian Blue Crane article in Die Burger
Engela Duvenage, email engelouis@mweb.co.za

18/8/08: After a longish wait, my article on your Blue Cranes was finally published in today's *Buite* supplement of *Die Burger* (<http://www.dieburger.com/Stories/Features/Buite/18.0.783833886.aspx>)

19/8/08: A response from Boet & Ina Fourie (Box 733, Stilbaai 6674 RSA; email jjfourie@vodamail.co.za)

Dit is interessant om in vanoggend se *Buite* tydskrif van *Die Burger* (19/08/08) te lees van die Bloukraanvoël projek wat in Etosha aan die gang is. Ek en my vrou Ina is entoesiastiese maar amateur voëlkykers en was dit interessant om Bloukraanvoëls in Etosha te sien. Ons kom van Stilbaai in die Suid-Kaap en is die voëls dus meer te wagte hier by ons. My Roberts het egter aangedui dat hulle wel voorkom in Etosha. Ons het laat oggend - ongeveer 11:30 - op 9 Augustus 2008, naby die noordelike hek naby Andoni gery toe ons op 'n baie groot trop zebbras, blouwildebees en ander wild afgekom het. Tussen hulle was daar 'n trop van ongeveer 20 Bloukraanvoëls. Dit was moeilik om hulle presies te tel. Ons was verbaas oor die groot trop want dit is gewoonlik die "bachelors" wat so saamdrom. Hulle het baie gelukkig en baie spelerig voorgekom. Ek weet nie of die waarneming van enige nut is nie, maar het dit interessant gevind om verlede week die voëls te sien en vandag is daar 'n artikel daaroor in die koerant. Ons het dit baie geniet. In elk geval, baie sterkte met u werk daar en ons glo die navorsing wat u doen sal vrugte afwerp.