

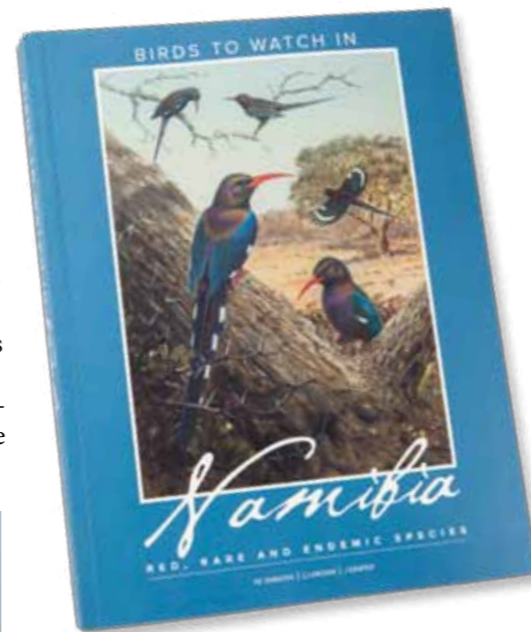
# NAMIBIA'S FIRST red data book on birds

Namibia's first Red Data book on birds has taken more than a decade to reach fruition. Why? The short answer to a long story is that a book of this nature, with no single, dedicated author, is more than simply an annotated list of Red Data species.

Co-authors Drs Rob Simmons, Chris Brown and Jessica Kemper decided long ago that the book should include not only Namibia's threatened species, but amber species too. Amber species are those endemic and near-endemic birds for which Namibia has sole (or at best, joint) responsibility for their wellbeing and

conservation. This category comprises 16 species, plus a surprising new addition (detailed below). Added to that is a large section on the 108 rare species that just graze Namibia's southern (desert) or northern (tropical) borders or visit Namibia irregularly, and which are referred to as Rare and Peripheral species. Put together, this 320-page tome, entitled *Birds to Watch in Namibia: Red, Rare and Endemic species*, was published in May 2015.

Here the authors reflect on the publication and what it reveals about the state of Namibia's birdlife.



So what have we found and what's new? One advantage to the book's long gestation period was that we were able to be reasonably thorough in scouring such a large and daunting country as Namibia. We were aided by a very long period of bird atlasing (beginning in the 1970s) and combined that with long-running schemes, including nest records (recently published by Chris and colleagues), raptor road counts, wetland counts and focused studies by international researchers, particularly on the near-endemic species. Added to that is the first 'at-sea' atlas data published for any marine birds in Africa, taken from the work by Dr Dave Boyer on the various albatross and petrel species found in Namibian waters.

The new and interesting findings during this period include the discovery of two species new to Namibia: one newly breeding (Souza's Shrike, found by Mark Paxton in West Caprivi) and one never before recorded here (the Angola Cave

Chat, discovered by botanist Wessel Swanepoel). The latter species is known from a few localities along Angola's wooded escarpments and was found for the first time in Namibia in May 2012 in the remote and inaccessible Zebra Mountains near the Namibia–Angola border. We estimate that there are 405 pairs of Angola Cave Chat in Namibia, based on continuing survey work by Wessel, and the species is classified as Near-Threatened in the country.

Of Namibia's 687 species, 71 are ranked as Threatened or Near-Threatened under the 'new' IUCN classification. Of these, one, the elusive Egyptian Vulture, is considered Nationally Extinct (as a breeding species); nine species are Critically Endangered, including the usual suspects such as Cape Vulture, Blue Crane (there are approximately 35 individuals left around Etosha) and Pel's Fishing Owl; 25 species are Endangered, dominated by wetland species (such as herons, storks and cranes), marine species (for example albatrosses and petrels) and raptors (Martial Eagle, and Black and Pallid harriers). There are 13 Vulnerable species, among them flamingos, vultures and terns.

In the Near-Threatened category are 23 species, again dominated by marine, wetland and raptorial birds, such as Damarra Tern, Maccoa Duck and the Peregrine Falcon.

This short review reveals that Namibia's Red Data birds are over-represented in three groups: marine or coastal birds (20 species: 28 per cent), scavengers and raptors (19 species: 27 per cent), and wetland species (18 species: 25 per cent). The other groups include three endemics which are classified as Threatened (Violet Wood-hoopoe, Rüppell's Parrot and Damarra Tern), large terrestrial species like the bustards, which fly as frequently into powerlines as they do in South Africa, and a smattering of small species (for example, Cinderella Waxbill, Sclater's Lark and European Roller).

## WIN!

You could win one of five copies of *Birds to Watch in Namibia* if you can answer this question correctly: **What is the latest addition to Namibia's avifauna and Red Data list?** Send your answer by e-mail to [editor@birdlife.org.za](mailto:editor@birdlife.org.za) by Friday, 21 August

2015, using 'Namibia Red Data Quiz' in the subject line. Please include your full contact details, including a street address and telephone number. Prizewinners' names will be published in the November/December 2015 issue.



The plight of scavengers is well known in southern Africa, with numbers plummeting mainly as a result of poisons and bush encroachment. In Namibia five species of vultures are threatened by the continued use of poisons and the new threat posed by poachers poisoning thousands of vultures to prevent their circling behaviour revealing the poachers' position.

Perhaps the greatest factor affecting in particular marine and wetland birds is the degradation of aquatic and terrestrial habitats. This is exacerbated in Namibian waters by the longlining and trawling fishing industries, which add to the fatalities through inadvertently drowning seabirds hooked on their lines.

Lest this sounds like a compendium of doom with no solutions in sight, each species account is accompanied by a plan of action to reverse the negative trends. There are several dedicated groups in Namibia undertaking conservation initiatives, including an albatross task force, raptor and penguin research rehabilitation centres, and crane and raptor working groups.

What impressed us as we worked through reams of data, grey literature and published reports is the motivation

and decades of input of many individuals. For example, Tony Williams and the late Keith Wearne counted Walvis Bay waders and motivated other counters to do so since the early 1980s, Hu and Conny Berry undertook some of the best research yet published on the breeding of flamingos, and the likes of Peter Bridgeford, Mark Paxton, Steve Braine, the Braby family, Wilferd Versfeld and countless others continue to add data and conservation drive to Namibia's efforts to retain its diverse avifauna.

We hope that this book will give further impetus to that effort and simultaneously educate the next generation of Namibians to know and save what they may lose, before it's too late.

R.E. SIMMONS, C.J. BROWN & J. KEMPER

*Birds to Watch in Namibia* is published by Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the Namibia Nature Foundation.

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