

REVIEW

UNDERHILL, L.G., COOPER, J. & WALTNER, M. 1980. The Status of Waders (Charadrii) and other birds in the coastal region of the southern and eastern Cape, summer 1978/79. Cape Town: Western Cape Wader Study Group. pp.248. ISBN 0-620-04762-3. (Available from M. Waltner, 3 Montagu Way, Pinelands 7405, South Africa.)

This is the third in a series of reports brought out by the Western Cape Wader Study Group on coastal waders in southern Africa and has been extended to include all water and waterside birds observed on the coast or on bodies of water close to the coast. This report is an improvement on previous ones and reflects the increasing experience being gained by the study group.

The western limit of the census was Mossel Bay and the eastern limit the border with the Transkei thus the amount of fieldwork and homework done was tremendous. The report includes a discussion of the geology, geomorphology, climate and environment as well as a section on methods and rationale before dealing with the main body of results. The census time of late December, early January was chosen as the time of potentially least movement amongst Palaearctic waders but of course cannot take into account possible coastward movements of inland populations of waders and wildfowl in the event of drought or flooding. From some of the low counts it would appear that numbers of birds had not been forced to utilize the coastal environment. The fact that this is also an important summer tourist area was also considered but no idea of the effects of disturbance at this time of year could really be gauged. Mention is made of the effect of wind on shorebirds but no details are available since this requires more intensive study such as that being carried out by A.D. Boddam-Whetham on the Whitefronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus* at Port Alfred.

Counts were timed with the tide, evidently the best time to count is near high tide for large estuaries. I must, however, comment on one of the counts at Port Alfred, an area which has been intensively studied. The lack of simultaneous counts of Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* here has led to a lumping of individual counts giving an unrealistically high figure; this bird moves around a tremendous amount throughout all periods of tide thus repetition appears to have taken place.

A description of all 185 count sites as well as maps of each stretch of coast or specific localities of importance, such as Knysna Lagoon or the Swartkops River estuary, are given. Tables of counts for all sites and results based on habitat are also included. One comment on this section is that I feel that the maps should have been as close to the tables as possible for facility of comparison.

Before making some comment on individual species I must mention one aspect that has been badly underestimated and that is the

importance of some coastal areas as roosting sites of birds spread inland during the day. This applies particularly to Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* and Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola*. For instance, the count of 241 Ruff for the Swartkops valley area is totally unrealistic since numbers at night here normally run to 2 000 to 3 000 of this species.

It is stated that the Chestnutbanded Plover *C. pallidus* only appears to be common at Sandwich Harbour and Walvis Bay. These birds are almost certainly displaced from the Etosha Pan population while birds from Makgadikgadi Pan in Botswana appear to resort to the Mozambique coast where they appear to be quite common, though less concentrated than the west coast birds. No Kittlitz Plovers *C. pecuarius* were recorded east of the Boesmans River though they occur regularly at Steynrus (Old Mill) Dam outside Port Alfred, a locality that was, surprisingly, not visited yet is an important diurnal haunt for waders and waterfowl in that area. A small population also exists just east of the Great Fish River estuary. The Treblebanded Plover *C. tricolor* is essentially a winter visitor to the coast hence the low summer counts. The Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* counts were particularly low for the Port Elizabeth area, that population can run to 2 000 to 3 000 in the summer. Concentrations are best noted in the evening as they are with Ruff.

Although seabird numbers were noted, difficulty is experienced here as the large majority, particularly in the case of terns which number many thousands along the coast, feed out to sea during the day. However, there is little doubt that the Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*, an estuarine feeder, was undercounted since numbers at the Swartkops River estuary usually run into double figures. On the other hand it was very pleasing to see the inclusion of the Damara Tern *S. balaenarum* and it can only be hoped that this remote, eastern population may proliferate.

One species that was poorly represented along the coast was the Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* - only three birds were counted. These numbers are disturbingly low for this time of year and give cause for alarm that this attractive bird may disappear entirely from the Cape Province. This decrease in numbers has been fairly rapid in the 1970s.

Finally conservation aspects are dealt with. South Africa is a Contracting Party to the "Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat". Under this convention, South Africa has so far only conserved two wetlands totalling less than 10 000 ha. Various minor sections of the southern and eastern Cape coastline are protected at provincial level but much of this is unsuitable for waterbirds. Several important areas are listed in this report as wetlands of major importance and it is only to be hoped that provincial and national authorities react in a manner favourable to the establishment of many more coastal reserves.

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