



Avian Demography Unit

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COORDINATED WATERBIRD COUNTS (CWAC)

INFORMATION SHEET No. 9

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Guidelines for the completion of the Census Form

PLEASE READ THROUGH THESE GUIDELINES CAREFULLY BEFORE COMPLETING THE CENSUS FORM

A. The following notes refer to items on the front page of the Census Form:

Name of site

The full correct name of the site, as it will appear in reports and publications.

Site code

The 8-digit number, based on the centre-point coordinates of the site, under which the site is registered at the ADU. Use only the registered code; if a code has not yet been registered, give a set of coordinates in minutes and seconds South, and minutes and seconds East, together with the comment: "*suggested site code*". Please be consistent in your use of the official site code, even if the code does not accurately reflect the actual centre-point coordinates, because it is the identifier for the data in the CWAC database.

Date of count

The date the count was done; use the *dd/mm/yyyy* format.

Starting time

The time the count started

Finishing time

The time the count ended.

Name of compiler

Your full name and provide any new information of changes to your tel/fax/cell/e-mail details.

ADU Observer code

Your five-digit ADU observer code (e.g. 01025, 00653, 00020). If you do not have an ADU observer code, leave blank and one will be allocated to you.

Compiler's postal address

Your postal address, and indicate if this has changed since the last count.

Names of observers

The full names of all observers who participated in the count.

Has this site been counted for CWAC before?

Indicate whether this site has previously been counted for CWAC, or if it is a new site.

Type of count

Indicate the survey method used for this count. If more than one method was used, option 5 should be selected and the type of methods used underlined.

Conditions for count

Indicate the conditions under which the count was done. For bad, poor or moderate conditions provide details of these conditions in the Comments section below.

Condition of wetland

Indicate the volume of water present at the wetland during the count. Please remember that, even if the site is dry and no waterbirds are present, this still constitutes a count and a census form should be completed and returned, otherwise it will be assumed that the site was not visited during the census period.

Percentage of wetland area covered by count

Write in the percentage shoreline and open water covered during the count. Most times this will have to be estimated, therefore round off to the nearest 5%. Note that, as far as possible, the site should be consistently counted in the same manner on each occasion.

Fixed-point photography

Indicate if any fixed-point photographs were taken during this particular count. If yes, write the number of the fixed point, the name of the site, and count (e.g. Winter 1997, Summer 1999) clearly on the back of each photograph. If photographs were taken for the first time, please attach a map showing the numbered fixed points and their respective fields of view in relation to the wetland. Remember that CWAC fixed-point photography involves photographs being taken from the same points at regular intervals, i.e. every two years, in order to detect changes and trends in wetland condition and vegetation structure. CWAC is compiling a computerized database of these images for future analysis.

Comments

Use this section to write any comments concerning the count, especially any factors that may have affected the results. Also use this space for comments related to the birds, e.g. unusual sightings, new heronries, roost sites, new threats, etc.

B. The following notes refer to the back page of the Census Form:

Count data

The count data is entered in the five blocks to the right of the double line, opposite the appropriate species name. Enter one digit per block. Keep the count numbers right justified, i.e., any blank blocks should be on the left hand side. For example, if the count for a species is 102, the number is entered with two leading blank blocks, followed by 1 in the third block, 0 in the fourth, and 2 in the fifth block. The blocks are unavoidably small, so please take care to write as legibly as possible.

Breeding data

As of the January 2000 count, the recording of breeding information has been introduced. An additional column headed (Br) has been inserted just before the column for the number of birds counted. In this column you indicate the breeding status of those species' found breeding. An appropriate **breeding status code** (see below) should be entered into the block to the left of the double line; if no breeding behaviour was observed, leave the block blank.

The breeding status codes used are the same used for BIRP (Birds In Reserves Project). These codes provide a simple and effective way of recording breeding information. The codes are:

Code 2: possibly breeding: evidence of possible breeding includes:

- adult bird or a pair of adults, in breeding plumage, in suitable habitat, singing full song (i.e. not just contact or alarm calls), during the breeding season, or
- as above and engaged in courtship or territorial display, during the breeding season.

Note that the observation must be made during the breeding season, as given in the Atlas of Southern African Birds, Roberts' or other suitable texts. Singing and displays are sometimes observed outside of the breeding season but are then not acceptable evidence of breeding.

Code 3: probably breeding: evidence of probable breeding includes:

- adult bird feeding a mate
- adult bird carrying nesting material

- adult bird building or excavating a nest
- an identifiable nest currently under construction
- a recently completed but empty identifiable nest
- adult sitting in the cup of a nest and thought to be incubating eggs or brooding chicks
- agitated behaviour or distraction display by an adult bird, suggesting presence of nest or young out of the nest
- adult carrying food but nest not seen
- adult carrying faecal sac but nest not seen
- adult carrying food into a completed nest
- adult taking a faecal sac out of a nest
- recently used, as revealed by fresh eggshells or droppings, but empty nest
- fresh droppings, moulted feathers, or food remains found around or under a nest that cannot be seen into, but is thought to be active
- recently fledged juvenile with gape flange and/or some downy feathers seen away from the nest
- recently fledged juvenile accompanied by an adult

Code 4: confirmed breeding: Evidence which can be taken as proof of breeding includes:

- eggs seen in the nest
- nestlings seen, or heard calling, in the nest
- sighting of downy chicks or non-flying juveniles of species which leave the nest on hatching, e.g. ducks, cranes, waders

NB: *If you have evidence for more than one status code, use the highest number on your CWAC census form, i.e. 4 instead of 3 and 3 instead of 2.*

Additional breeding information

An additional breeding information box has also been added to the end of the form. This is for species for which it is **possible to estimate the total number of active nests that are present**. This would apply especially to species which breed in groups, as in a heronry or a colony. Of course it is very useful to know how many pairs are breeding at a site because this may have considerable conservation significance. In such cases you should count the number of active nests and enter this number into this box, together with the species name and the 4-digit species code number (just read it off the species list on the form).

Note that:

- (a) for the species which you enter into the Additional Breeding Information box, you will also have given a breeding status code of 4 (confirmed breeding) in the normal census part of the form;
- (b) there may be several species for which you are able to give a breeding status code but for which you are not able to estimate the total number of active nests. There is no problem with this – just provide the status code in the census part of the form, and nothing further.

Note: *In all instances of observed breeding, if the contents of a nest are known, i.e. eggs and/or chicks, you also have sufficient information for the completion of a Nest Record Card or for active heronries/colonies a Colony/Heronry Record Card. You are encouraged to fill in these cards in such cases and submit it with your CWAC form.*

Additional census information

This section has been allocated to include any additional information that relates to the census itself. Include information about the birds observed particularly breeding birds. If not enough space is provided please use a separate sheet.

Thank you for reading this information sheet carefully. We look forward to your valuable contributions to CWAC.

Doug Harebottle and James Harrison