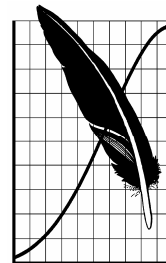




Animal Demography Unit
 Department of Zoology
 University of Cape Town
 Rondebosch 7701 South Africa
 Tel. (021) 650-4698
 Fax. (021) 650-3434
 E-mail: marius.wheeler@uct.ac.za
 Web: <http://www.adu.org.za>



COORDINATED WATERBIRD COUNTS (CWAC)

NEWSLETTER 28

January 2008

Dear CWACers

Wishing you all a great 2008! My you enjoy many great hours of birding in the coming year. I trust this has already started but if not, do not worry; the summer waterbird counts are around the corner and no better time to kick off! **Enjoy!!**

From ADU to ADU

From 1 January 2008, the **Avian Demography Unit** (or the ADU for short) will become the **Animal Demography Unit** (still the ADU). What prompted this? Ever since the ADU initiated the frog atlas project a decade ago in 1998, there have been issues with the name Avian Demography Unit – “Why is the **Avian** Demography Unit doing the frog atlas?” This inconsistency has recently been heightened by our involvement with projects on reptiles (Southern African Reptile Conservation Assessment, effectively the reptile atlas), and with butterflies (Southern African Butterfly Conservation Assessment, the butterfly atlas), and with five postgraduate students doing PhD and MSc projects on seals, one on rare mammals in Namibia and even one on dwarf chameleons.

Although the academic world thrives on these kinds of delightful contradictions, there is no need to perpetuate them for ever. We will thus change our name to be more representative of what we do. We also change our host department at the

University of Cape Town, resolving another anachronism, moving from the Department of Statistical Sciences to the Department of Zoology.

The new website address will be <http://www.adu.org.za> We remain in the same offices, and all our contact details are unchanged.

Les Underhill, Director, ADU

If you are keen to participate in any of the other ADU projects, please visit our website for more information. You could try bird, reptile or butterfly atlasing!

CWAC 2007

Last year has indeed been a busy year for the project. Apart from the normal project operations, there have indeed been a few developments. One of the most significant contributions to the project has been the establishment of a CWAC Advisory Committee (AG). This has been a crucial step for the project in terms of setting up an internal structure that can give advice and support to the project; making sure we head in the right direction.

One of the key aspects of setting up the AG was to ensure that we draw on expertise from all over the country. At the moment the AG is comprised of thirteen members spread across the country. It includes scientists with various environmental backgrounds and degrees of experience. The group is represented by various

provincial conservation bodies, BirdLife South Africa, the South African Biodiversity Institute as well as the ADU. The expertise level of the group is high and I am confident that it will take CWAC from strength to strength. Thank you to all the members that have made themselves available in this regard.

During August 2007 the CWAC project underwent an external review. The review was successful and identified some strengths and weaknesses of the project. One of the main strengths included the strong volunteer base that the project is built on. I can only thank each and every one of you for making this possible.

One of the main challenges for the project is to provide basic waterbird and wetland information to the public and specifically conservation bodies to enable them to make use of the data. Access to much needed information will hopefully lead to enhanced conservation action on ground level.



CWAC 2008

The project has taken up the challenge of providing information to the public at large. The preferred method for this interaction is certainly the web. It is a readily form of communication that can be easily up-dated and very importantly it is cost effective. We have made good progress with putting the new CWAC website together. It is a dynamic website that will certainly change over time. Important aspects of the new website include:

- **The availability of maps!** The website uses the Google Maps platform to display wetlands in context. This is a great development and will certainly draw attention to the project. Please note that accurate wetland positions are dependent on accurate co-ordinates. I have done some site consolidation throughout the country but have yet to finish the provinces of Kwazulu-Natal

and Mpumalanga. I urge people to have a look at their wetlands and let me know if you suspect something is wrong with the position. Either send me a map indicating where exactly the wetland is, or provide me with accurate GPS co-ordinates. The latter should be either in decimal degrees or degrees, minutes, seconds and please specify which were used. In some instances a detailed description would also suffice.

- **Provincial breakdown of sites** including a breakdown of counts per site. This is particularly useful to determine where CWAC sites are situated and how many counts are available per season per site. This facility can serve as a gap analysis tool, providing information on spatial and data gaps associated with wetlands.

This section also gives an indication of which sites have their counts available and which not. Unfortunately not all counts are publicly available in terms of the agreements with the data providers. However, following the correct procedures and obtaining permission, these counts can be made available. Furthermore, data for any of the sites can either be "locked" or "opened" depending on whether the observer/data provider wants to do so. Please report any problems/changes in this regard to me so I can make the necessary changes.

The ADU encourages the data to be opened to serve as a greater source of information for wetland conservation management.

- **Basic site information** includes site code and name, as well as count, conservation and management status. Wetland classification and size, Ramsar and IBA protection status as well as a brief description of the wetland are also included. We also plan to add threats facing the particular wetland to this category.

It is important to note that in order to serve a useful function; the information provided in this section should be as comprehensive as possible. Presently many information gaps exist and within the coming year we will certainly work towards filling these. Much of the information provided in this section are of a static nature and hence would not require regular up-dating. The information is however important and I am keen to work towards filling the gaps. If anybody can contribute information in the meantime, please do not hesitate to send it to me.

- Another major development has been the **addition of count data**. This is available in summary format or individual count format. The summary format provides information on the total number of waterbird species recorded at the wetland, including their red data status. Furthermore it provides minimum, maximum and average values for each species per season; including a combination of all counts. In addition, it also lists breeding information for species and crucially it indicates whether or not a species has met either sub-regional IBA, global IBA or Ramsar levels. **All this information is extremely important in terms of defining the conservation importance of both species and wetlands.** Similar information can also be accessed on an individual count basis by opening the counts individually.

In addition to the new features, the website also contains all the other essentials such as access to information sheets, newsletters, etc. I urge everybody to have a look at the new site and let me have your thoughts or suggestions. To access the site, point your browser to: <http://cwac.adu.org.za/>

I am really excited by all the developments thus far and look forward to fine tuning the website to serve as a valuable source of information for both wetlands and waterbirds. I am grateful to Michael Brooks from the ADU IT department that has made

all this possible and will continue to do so in future.

I would welcome short articles or snippets on waterbird or wetland issues. If you would like to contribute such an article, please contact me.



Department of Agriculture,
Conservation and Environment

The Twelfth Pan-African Ornithological Congress

The Twelfth Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC) will take place at the Goudini Spa Conference Centre, near Cape Town, from Sunday the 7th to Friday the 12th of September 2008. It will be hosted by the [Animal Demography Unit](#) & [Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology](#) at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, as well as the [AP Leventis Ornithological Research Institute](#) at the University of Jos, Nigeria. These are the three university-linked ornithological research groups in Africa. Abstracts for orals, posters and/or round-table discussions should be submitted before 31 March 2008. For further information on how to register, please visit the PAOC website at: <http://paoc12.adu.org.za/>

Thank You!

The ADU is particularly grateful for the logistical help received from the following conservation organizations: **Cape Nature, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Environment, Northern Cape Provincial Government and the Free State Department of Tourism and Environment.**

The following people deserve special recognition for their efforts during the 2007 summer season. Each person has

surveyed at least fifteen CWAC sites; a real commitment indeed.

1. **Mark Anderson** – Northern Cape Province (28 sites).
2. **Brian Colahan** – Free State Province (25 sites).
3. **Caroline Fox** – Kwazulu Natal Province (21 sites)
4. **Craig Whittington-Jones** – Gauteng Province (19 sites).
5. **Enrico Oosthuysen** – Northern Cape Province (19 sites).
6. **Ken Hatting** – Mpumalanga Province (16 sites).
7. **Richard Dobson** – Kwazulu Natal Province (16 sites).

The ADU would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every CWAC participant for the valuable contributions they have made during 2007. We value your support.

Electronic Excel census form

This year also sees the implementation of a brand new way of submitting CWAC data electronically. As most compilers are already familiar with the electronic “Word” form, it should be a fairly easy switch over. The “Excel” form looks slightly different but essentially has the same functionality. The form is designed in such a way that it can not be altered or changed in any way. Only the necessary data fields are accessible. Where necessary some data fields will only allow specific information to be entered. In other instances a data field may prompt you for specific information, or give you an error code if the wrong entry is made. The reasons for all these measures are to minimize errors and mistakes. Also, this form will be electronically read by computer and for this reason the format of the form needs to stay constant.

The form comprises two sections (worksheets); a header section similar to the front page of the conventional CWAC form, as well as a counts section, similar to the back page.

The major advantages of the new census form are that it will cut down on the amount of paper forms that need to be checked and handled manually. The data capture and vetting process that currently takes place is arduous and often takes months to complete. With the new system, the turn around time for vetting and getting data into the main CWAC database will be greatly reduced. Furthermore, additional vetting systems can easily be implemented which means that in the end the data entering the database will be accurate and clean; more so than is currently the case.

I have attached the new Excel census form with the newsletter (for those that have email facility). It is also available on the new CWAC website for download. Please familiarise yourself with it. I urge everybody that currently uses the “Word” format census form to switch over to the new form as of this year. Make sure that you **save a blank copy** of the form on your machine for future use. I also strongly advise you to **save a copy of every single count that you submit for backup purposes**. When sending the form to me, please make sure you attach it to the email message as an **attachment**. If something is unclear regarding the new census form, please do not hesitate to contact me.

For those people that do not have email facility, you are welcome to submit your data on normal hardcopies. If however you do in future obtain email facilities, please let me know so I can sign you up for this service.

CWAC dates

The 2008 summer count can take place on any day between mid-January and mid-February with the preferred dates being the last weekend of January. The winter count can take place on any day during the month of July with the preferred dates being the 14, 15 and 16th of July. If further information is required on any of these count dates, please feel free to contact your regional organiser or myself. I wish everybody all the best with their counts!

**Marius Wheeler,
CWAC Coordinator**