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J Braby

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NEW MIGRATION RECORDS FOR THE DAMARA TERN STERNA BALAENARUM

Justine Braby¹, *

¹Animal Demography Unit, Department of Zoology, University of Cape Town, 7701
*Corresponding author: justine.braby@gmail.com

The Damara Tern Sterna balaenarum is Africa’s smallest breeding tern and is a near-endemic breeder to Namibia (Simmons 2005). It is globally Near-threatened (IUCN 2009) and breeds on the coastal mainland where the cold Benguela Current meets the Namib Desert. All but a small fraction leave south-western Africa for non-breeding grounds on the west African coast (Simmons 2005). Birds leave their respective breeding grounds at the end of the austral summer, latest April, and move northward along the Namibian coast where they coalesce with other post-breeding Damara Terns into larger flocks before migration (Braby et al. 1992). Groups then migrate northward to over-winter in countries such as coastal Gabon, Congo, and even as far as Nigeria (Bourdillon 1944, Elgood et al. 1973, Wallace 1973), Liberia (Borrow and Demey 2001) and Senegal (Brown 1979).

The first record of a ringed tern was in Benin in October 2000 (Oschadleus 2001, Table 1). Despite 98% of the breeding population being found in Namibia (Crawford and Simmons 1997), this individual had been ringed as a chick in South Africa in December 1999 (Oschadleus 2001). Since 1984, c. 1250 Damara Terns have been ringed in Namibia but because of a lack of observation at their non-breeding grounds, there have been few returns in the past. However, communication regarding ringing returns and migrant sightings have increased in recent years. On 16 October 2004, an individual ringed as a chick near Swakopmund, Namibia, was found in Grand Popo, Benin, on 21 November 2001, in the same region the first individual was found (Table 1).

Another chick ringed in the breeding season of 2000/01 near Swakopmund was found with a flock of other Damara Terns in Gabon in 2006. From April to September between 100–200 Damara Terns are often seen in Akanda NP, north east of Libreville, Gabon (van de Weghe pers. comm. 2008, Boix 2010, Table 1). They roost on wide sandy beaches and feed over shallow waters at Mondah Bay not far from land. They are also common at the outlet of the Ngove Loange NP, where they are possibly just passage migrants (van de Weghe pers. comm. 2008, Table 1). During the first half of September 2006, 100–150 birds were seen daily roosting on the beach together with between 2000–3000 Royal Sterna maxima and Common Terns Sterna hirundo (van de Weghe pers. comm. 2008, Table 1). On 14 August 2010 15 birds were seen at Iguela near the lagoon mouth called St. Catherine, none were ringed, several were in...

Figure 1 - Damara Terns and Common Terns roosting on Lighthouse Beach, Tarkwa Bay, Lagos, Nigeria on 15 August 2008
breeding plumage and a few were in non-breeding plumage (Boix pers. comm. 2010. Table 1). They were roosting on the sand, but were not mingling with other terns a few hundred metres away (Boix pers. comm. 2010).

In August 2008 I travelled to Nigeria to survey non-breeding Damara Terns near Lagos. I found they most commonly occurred on a long stretch of beach called Lighthouse Beach, Tarkwa Bay (Table 1, Figure 1). Damara Terns were observed flying past, foraging behind the breakers or coming in to roost or preen on the beach. After speaking to local residents and fishermen at Tarkwa Bay, I discovered that terns, including (occasionally) Damara Terns, were regularly trapped and eaten. The maximum number of Damara Terns ashore simultaneously during the day was 32 birds. I subsequently discovered that Damara Terns were roosting over-night at Lighthouse Beach when I flushed 200–300 individuals at 06h00 on 16 August 2008. The group flew offshore, presumably to feed. During the two-week survey, four Damara Terns were recorded wearing metal rings. One of these had a combination of two yellow rings unique to one individual trapped at its nest site at a breeding colony near Swakopmund, Namibia, on 20 November 2003, 4000 km south along the coast from Lagos (Figure 2). It was subsequently trapped on 11 November 2007 and on the 11 November 2008 within metres of the same nest site. This record is the first ringing return for the species in Nigeria and re-confirms this species as a migrant to these west African countries. It is assumed that the other three ringed individuals were birds ringed in Namibia, but the possibility exists that some or all of them were ringed in South Africa. These records contribute to a growing knowledge of the migration patterns of non-breeding Damara Terns.

Acknowledgements
The survey in Nigeria was supported by Leventis Conservation Trust and the NRF SeaChange research grant to Les Underhill. Phil Hall is thanked for logistical support. Delmo Kesmen assisted with field work in Nigeria. Rod and Sigi Braby have conducted all the field work near Swakopmund, Namibia, and ringed most of the Namibian Damara Terns. JB is supported by the NRF SeaChange research grant to Les Underhill, the Gordon Sprigg Fellowship Trust, the Sam Cohen Scholarship Trust and Namdeb Diamond Corporation. Funding and support for the protection, management and monitoring of the breeding areas near Swakopmund, Namibia, have been given by the Namibian Coastal Management Project (NACOMA), BirdLife International through its Rio Tinto Birdlife Partnership Action Fund, Rössing Uranium Limited Swakopmund, Namib Film, Big Banana Film, Coca-Cola through its 2041 Antarctica Project, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism of Namibia, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources of Namibia, LA and RC in Erongo, CC Africa and various tour companies. Mark Boorman built the snap-trap enabling

Figure 2 - Ringed Damara Terns roosting on Lighthouse Beach, Tarkwa Bay, Lagos, Nigeria on 14 August 2008.
the capture and re-capture of breeding individuals near Swakop-
mund, Namibia. Christian Boix and JP van de Weghe relayed vital
information regarding Damara Tern migrant counts in Gabon.

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Ibis 115: 559–212.
### Table 1 – Records of migrant Damara Terns in west African countries during non-breeding season

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ring no</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ringing location</th>
<th>Coordinates</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Re-sighting location</th>
<th>Coordinates</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F44378</td>
<td>16 Dec 1999</td>
<td>Struis Bay, South Africa</td>
<td>S34° 34' E20°00'</td>
<td>Oct 2000</td>
<td>Grand Popo, Benin</td>
<td>N06°15' E01°44</td>
<td>Oschadleus 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual seen with white colour ring</td>
<td>2000/01 season</td>
<td>Swakopmund, Namibia</td>
<td>S22°44' E14°32'</td>
<td>Winter 2006</td>
<td>Gabon</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>R Braby, pers. comm. 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-200 (no rings seen)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Apr-Sep 2006</td>
<td>Akanda NP, Gabon</td>
<td>N00°37' E09°31&quot;</td>
<td>van de Weghe pers. comm. 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (no ring seen)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31 Jul 2010</td>
<td>Akanda NP, Gabon</td>
<td>N00°37' E09°31&quot;</td>
<td>Boix pers comm. 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC69752</td>
<td>20 Nov 2003</td>
<td>Swakopmund, Namibia</td>
<td>S22°44' E14°32'</td>
<td>06 Aug 2008</td>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>N06°46' E03°23'</td>
<td>This study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC69752</td>
<td>11 Nov 2007</td>
<td>Swakopmund, Namibia</td>
<td>S22°44' E14°32'</td>
<td>14 Aug 2008</td>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>N06°46' E03°23'</td>
<td>This study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC69752</td>
<td>11 Nov 2008</td>
<td>Swakopmund, Namibia</td>
<td>S22°44' E14°32'</td>
<td>15 Aug 2008</td>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>N06°46' E03°23'</td>
<td>This study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-32 day roost, at least four ringed, &lt;300 overnight-roost, individuals flying past</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4-17 Aug 2008</td>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>N06°46' E03°23'</td>
<td>This study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-150 (no rings seen)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>beginning Sep 2006</td>
<td>Ngove Loange NP, Gabon</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>van de Weghe pers. comm. 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 individuals (no rings seen)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14 August 2010</td>
<td>Near Iguela</td>
<td>S01°46' E16°17'</td>
<td>Boix pers comm. 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>