

PRILIMINARY REPORT FOR THE EXPEDITION TO THE SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL ERITREAN ISLAND FOR SOCOTRACORMORANT CENSUS

INTRODUCTION

The Socotra Cormorant is endemic to the continental shelf from the Arabian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden (Gallagher *et al.* 1984). The species is little studied and Vulnerable (wetland International 2006). Previously there were only two records from Eritrea and the Red Sea, one near Assab on 1889-1890 (Moltoni 1942) and one at the Eritrea-Djibuti border on 1987 (Welch *et al.* 1992). On the other hand the Eritrea's Coastal Marine and Island Biodiversity Project (ECMIB) and two Italian researchers have discovered that the species is present year round in the sea around Idi, Hawakil Bay and Anfile Bay. The highest counts were 3000-4000 in Hawakil Bay in January 2004, 1100 in November 2005 near Idi, more than 1500 birds in June 2006 near Idi (Kordumuit and NN195), about 150 in Anfile Bay on July 2007. Moreover information collected from Danakil fishermen, who could give extensive information about the habits of the species, led us to believe that breeding could be highly probable in the late summer (late August, early September), most likely in the Idi area.

This investigation was carried from 27, August – September 4, 2008 on the islands around Idi and Tio. The objective of the study is to ascertain the breeding if the species breeds on the area and to describe the habitat used, to estimate the population size on the Eritrean Red Sea, to evaluate the international importance of the site and to investigate the possible threats to the species and its habitat. Information was collected by visiting the islands and interviewing the local fishermen.

RESULT

IDI ISLANDS: - visited 28-30 August, 2008

On August 28 while cruising around the sea of Idi we spotted a flock of **8,000 – 10,000** Socotra Cormorant flying low over the sea moving northward in a slow and zigzag movement. On the next day we visited the islands Kurum Ali official Name NN195 (14.6102N 41.4004E) and we found **2,000** Socotra Cormorant resting on the rocky flat, on top of cliff and shallow water of the island but with no evidence of breeding. On the other islands however we found no Socotra Cormorant.

HAWAKIL BAY ISLANDS: - visited 1-3 September, 2008

We recorded 700 Socotra Cormorant on 4 islands and 1 coastal sites

Island/Site	Coordinates	Number of Socotra Cormorant
Seil	145027.3N 405040.1E	400
Crulli	145020.6N 404713.2E	250
Derebsasa	144504.2N 405256.7E	50
Hant	144524.6N 404813.6E	25
Tio village	14.72909N 40.77843E	10

INTERVIEW WITH LOCAL FISHERMEN

The Socotra Cormorant is called locally Subbahi. According to the information from an old fisherman and other fishermen (aged 70), they have seen the species around their village and on the islands in large number since they were kids. The largest number (in thousands) appear during the cold season mainly from October to January at times when the anchovies and sardine bloom. They feed on anchovies and sardine which the fishermen called them Mediff.

Regarding breeding some answered as they have seen chicks during the summer but majority answered never seen breeding Socotra Cormorant.

The attitude of the fishermen toward the species is good coz the species is a good indicator for the fishermen at times when they want to fish for anchovies and sardines. They usually concentrate to hunt for small fish.

As for the treat there is no threat at this area for the species. The local fishermen do not eat Socotra Cormorant meat, there are no damage from boats and fishing nets and sea cucumber collectors who were posing threats to seabirds before have no longer exist. Sea cucumber harvesting has stopped by the government.

DISCUSSION

The present survey reveals that the Socotra cormorant lives all year round in Central and Southern Eritrea Red Sea with the largest number during the cold season and a significant number in the hot season. According to the information gathered from old fishermen they have seen the species before 50 years or longer on the islands of Idi. This explains that the species have lived in the area for long time but it was hidden to ornithologists of the region due to the poor scientific investigation to the area.

The large number recorded on this survey (up to 10,000 which is above the 1% level) have never been recorded before and according to the fishermen information more than the recorded number are expected to arrive on the area coz the area between Tio and Idi (14.72 N 40.77 E to 13.54 E 41.58 N) is well known for large number of anchovies and sardines during the cold season. So the large number of the Socotra Cormorant on the area might be related with the bloom of sardines and anchovies during the cold season i.e. possibly short range feeding migration as the area are close to the Gulf where the species breed.

We still have further investigation to the area for December 2008, thus we will ascertain the status of the species in the area whether it is breeding or short range feeding migration. We still have to check Kurum Ali Island where the large number of flock recorded around it.

FINANCIAL REPORT

The table below shows the financial expense for the field trip done from August 28 – September 5, 2008 for the study of the Socotra Cormorant funded by the conservation fund of the African Bird Club.

Purpose	No. of days	Amount in NKF/USD (Exchange rate 1Pound St = 29.2 Nakfa)	Remark
Boat rent from Idi	3	5000 NKF = 171.2 Pound	Payment Voucher attached
Boat rent from Tio	3	6000 = 205.5 Pound	Payment Voucher attached
DSA for two people	9	9*200*2 = 3600 = 123.3 Pound	
Total Expenses		14,600 Nakfa = 500 Pound St	

ITINERARY

Day one (27/08/2008) – departed from Massawa 8am and overnight in Tio (396km)
Day two (28/08/2008) - arrived in Idi (439km), hire boat from fisherman and visited two islands and stayed the night on Sadla island.
Day three (29/08/2008) – visited five islands and stay the night on Cod Ali island.
Day four (30/08/2008) – back to Idi and stayed the night in there
Day five (31/08/2008) – back to Tio and night in Tio
Day six (1/09/2008) – hired boat from Tio, visited two islands and night on Derebsasa island.
Day seven (2/09/2008) – visited five islands and night on Siel island
Day eight (3/09/2008) – back to Tio and stay the night there
Day nine (4/09/2008) – back to Massawa

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