

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE MONITORING OF COLONIAL

NESTING WATERBIRD IN BIJOLS ISLAND

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Monitoring of Colonial Nesting Waterbirds in Bijol Islands

Introduction

Bijols Islands are part of Tanji Karinti Birds Reserve, covering an area of 612 km and managed by the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management, consist of a large and small island which converges at low tide and divides at high tide or rise in sea level. This island is offshore and provides an ideal habitat for sea birds. Its vegetation is very tolerant to salinity and this includes Morning glory, Baobab and Casuarinas trees spreading all over the larger island providing the only ideal breeding site for sea birds in the Gambia. The areas are low lying with maximum elevation of Ca.2m water level although this intervall and within shiffing. Bijols Island is a very significant area for birds and marine mammals. The up welling current enriches the Island with sufficient food for its living species. Birds found during nesting periods include Royal Tern, Caspian Tern, and Grey Headed Gull. Western Reef Heron, Long Tail Cormorant, Great White Pelican, Pink Backed Pelican etc. Green turtles also used these Islands as their breeding ground.

Monitoring Objective

Monitoring is conducted to gather baseline information on colonial nesting water birds for 8 consecutive months (January to August) of each year. Information gathered includes the total nesting and breeding populations, numbers of pairs and eggs found in each nest and Eggs laid by each species.

MONTHLY EGGS RECORDED FOR EACH SPECIES

SPECIES	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	Total
Grey headed Gull	235	1623	1321	1061	323	108	43	–	4714
Caspian Term	777	2420	2459	878	685	107	–	–	7326
Royal Term	–	–	–	10000	16356	406	–	-	26762
Western reef heron	–	–	–	4	27	34	28	–	93
Long tail Cormorant	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Slender Billed gull	–	–	–	10	1113	–	–	–	1123

Methodology

Transect Recording method is applied during this monitoring. (i.e. 24th day of each month). This is performed by staff of Tanji Bird Reserve who divided themselves into 2 teams and each team takes its turn for the monitoring on alternate months. The survey team divides the colony of species into transects lines of 2m to 5m apart. The counters walk alongside the transects and count the number of

eggs from each nest within the colonies while one team member will be recording. However damaged eggs are not counted. Fishing nets seen during the monitoring are collected to avoid birds entangling in them which is also one of the causes of their death.

Bird Ringing Initiative

Mr. John High, a British national who is a bird ornithologist sometimes accompanies our monitoring team to ring birds at the Island during breeding periods.

Observations

It was realized that the distance between grey headed gull nests ranges from 2cm to 8cm. In January 235 eggs were recorded for Grey Headed Gulls and 4714 eggs for the whole season and this shows an increase for this year over last year.

7326 eggs were recorded this year for Caspian Tern and this is more than the total eggs counted in 2009. New hatchlings of Caspian Tern and Grey Headed Gull were also noticed during the April and May monitoring of this year and dead bodies of two green turtles. Royal Terns were observed laying their eggs in April. The sporadic flooding that occurred on the small island in 2005 destroyed thousands of eggs laid by this species and as a result most of them shifted from their main colony and used the big islands as their new colony in recent years. The eggs laid for the species are on the increase annually and 26762 eggs were counted this year.

Western Reef Heron lay their eggs on branches of Casuarinas trees of the big Island. The nesting populations of this species which are of medium size increases yearly and 93 eggs were counted for this year.

Long Tailed Cormorants were seen over the areas in April at the main Island. Slender Billed Gulls are migrant and they appear during seasonal or winter period.

In 2010 the high number of slender Billed gulls recorded breeding on the Bigol Islands was so exciting. New species are discovered in each year's monitoring which indicates the islands' importance nationally and internationally.

Constraints

- Other part of the islands can only be accessible at low tide.
- The islands are frequently eroded and this will cause a negative impact on it in the near future.
- Lack of monitoring equipments such as GPS, Digital Camera, Rain boots, Raincoats etc
- Lack of computer to create a soft copy of the data collected
- Inadequate maintenance for monitoring boat

Recommendations

- Secure small grant funding from external donors for the effective implementation of this monitoring
- Desktop computer for keying data collected during monitoring
- Fix allowance for monitoring team
- Training on monitoring techniques

Conclusion

Bijols Island is an area of significant importance both nationally and internationally and as such there is need to pay proper attention to preserve its biodiversity. The team involved has been voluntary doing this monitoring for many years and this makes it to be very sustainable. Annually new bird species are discovered and if properly managed it will attract a lot of tourist thereby boosting the income for the park.