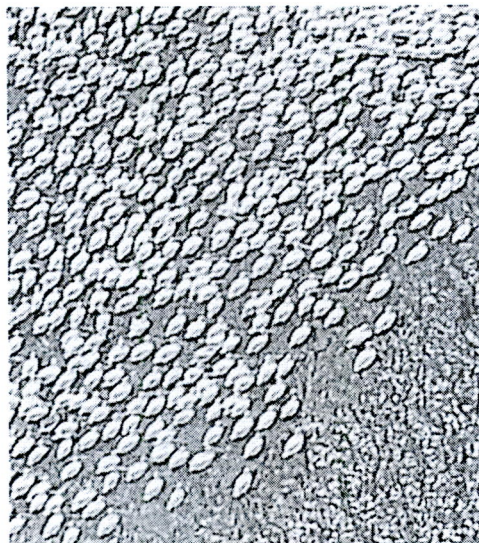


(1022)

# St Lucia - aerial bird count

7 March 2008



Part of a large flock of Great White Pelicans

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## Aerial bird count St Lucia - 7 March 2008

**Observers:**

Greg Nänni (pilot), Ricky Taylor, Meyrick Bowker and Amos Myeza.



**Figure 1:** Track of aircraft while counting birds over St Lucia – showing the intensity of coverage.

**Conditions:**

The count was done under very calm, but very hot conditions. Visibility was particularly good. However, lake levels are low and the beaches and shallow-water areas are extensive. The birds were widely distributed (rather than being in flocks) and hence counting was very intense. We did miss some birds as a result. Counting was done from about 0900 to 11:30.

**Technique:**

The count was done in the same way as we always do aerial counts – the same route was followed, starting with the Umfolozi/Umsunduze estuaries and then proceeding in an anti-clockwise route around the full lake system (see figure 1). We fly at about 300 ft and count all the larger birds. Where there are large flocks (as of waders) we estimate numbers. Flocks of the larger birds (especially flamingoes and pelicans) are photographed and counted from the photo after the flight. The count is considered to be accurate for the larger birds, but less so for the smaller and cryptically coloured ones. Identification is usually not a problem, but some birds – such as the great-white heron and the little egret are difficult to tell apart. It is usually not possible to identify the smaller terns. The count results are given in appendix 1.

**Count notes:**

- ❖ The South Lake seems much less productive than the North Lake. The largest bird concentrations were in the Selley's Lakes – Mkhuze Mouth area. This pattern is ascribed to the fact that the Mkhuze River has been flowing for several months – and the water in the northern areas is of a lower salinity and possibly richer in nutrients than in the south. The water in the north has a green colour which was not seen in the south.
- ❖ There are few flamingoes in the system. Both species of pelicans are abundant. A flock containing 3658 great white pelicans was seen in the northern part of the system.
- ❖ The water was very clear in the southern part of Catalina Bay. In the area along the northern shoreline of Mitchell Island we saw numerous schools of fish (possibly tilapia).
- ❖ Currently, when boating on the Narrows mullet are frequently seen jumping – indicating that they are reasonably abundant.
- ❖ Four marabou storks were seen at the Mkhuze Mouth. These birds are seldom seen in the St Lucia system
- ❖ A pair of saddlebill storks were seen at their nest in the forest north-east of Lane Island. Only one other saddlebill stork was seen
- ❖ A large proportion of the birds in the system are fish-feeders. Very few are plant-feeders (e.g. ducks)
- ❖ No submerged macrophytes were seen anywhere in the system.

Bird count 7 March 2008 Counters = Ricky Taylor, Meyrick Bowker, Amos Myeza & Greg Nanni

	Umfolozi Mouth	St L Mouth & Narrows (to Mpate)	Upper Narrows & Forks	Brodies & Makakatana Bay	Catalina Bay to Mamba Pt	Dead Tree Bay & Vincent Is	Fanies Is	Tewate Bay	Lane Is	Sengwana -south	Bird Is	Sengwana north	Selley's Lakes & NE Shallows	Mkhuze Mouth & lower Swamps	Nibela shoreline of main lake	False Bay North	False Bay South	Total
SECTOR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	17
White pelican				14		1					1		4939	25				4140
Pink-b pelican	4	2	10		1	5				1		14	67	20	30	38	15	203
Fish eagle		9	4		2	1		4			45		1			60	70	25
White-b cormorant			20										220					415
Reed cormorant									2									2
Lesser flamingo																		0
Greater flamingo								250		10	55	30	150		6	40		535
Stilt						87	38				5		67					203
Avocet						30		6					50	40		50		176
GH gull				126	216	68	326	260	116	4	24	22	4	80	254	59	64	1623
Caspian tern		2	19	10	5	5	1		104		1	2	5		2	9	29	194
Unidentified terns	40										30	10	240				15	335
Gt White heron		23	9	32		11	6	6	2	2	4	3	1	20				119
Little egret		1	15	8		5				1		1	11					42
Grey heron		6	20	44	7	28	7	2		6	1	1	25		3	2	3	155
Goliath heron	1	11	6	3	1	4	1	1	2	1	2	1		2				36
Woolly-neck stork		23	3	13	5	4		2										50
Saddlebill stork					1					2								3
Yellowbill stork	2	5	11	37		2		2		8		6	3	4		14		94
Spoonbill		15	43	25		94		90		50		125	60	60		40		602
Marabou														4				4
Sacred ibis		3																3
Whiteface duck		2			10								1					12
Yellowbill duck		8																9
Cape teal																		0
Red-bill teal																		0
Egyptian goose		6		5	7			79	3	11				10				121
Spurwing																		0
Waders		30	330	2	500		33	315		100	140		2570	40	15	40	60	4175
Greenshank			5										30					35

