



Laniarius

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BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord


BirdLife
SOUTH AFRICA

Newsletter of BirdLife Northern Gauteng Nuusbrief van BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

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Notice to contributors

Laniarius is published four times annually, in Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer. Deadlines for contributions are 1 March, 1 June, 1 September and 1 December. Articles should preferably be e-mailed to the Editor, but may also be posted to the club post box. Contributions and advertisements are accepted at the discretion of the Editor. Digital photographic images are always welcome.

Kennisgewing aan bydraers

Laniarius word vier keer jaarliks uitgegee: in die Herfs, Winter, Lente en Somer. Spertye vir bydraes is 1 Maart, 1 Junie, 1 September en 1 Desember. Artikels moet verkieslik per e-pos aan die redakteur gestuur word, maar kan ook na die klub-adres gepos word. Aanvaarding van bydraes en advertensies word aan die diskresie van die redakteur oorgelaat. Digitale foto's is altyd welkom.



EDITORIAL/ REDAKSIONEEL

By now many of you will have heard the disturbing announcement that a mining group has been granted prospecting rights in the Wakkerstroom area by the Department of Minerals and Energy. Discussions with some of the landowners appear to indicate that they have not been consulted and there is grave concern that proper procedures have not been followed. BirdLife SA is taking up the cudgels on this issue and will need all the support they can get as there will be costly legal proceedings concerning this matter. See the article on this subject in this newsletter where you can obtain details on how to support this initiative.

Op 'n meer positiewe noot moet ons Mark Anderson en sy span in die Noord-Kaap gelukwens met die manjifieke projek by Kamfersdam naby Kimberley waar 'n ongekende hoeveelheid Kleinflamink vir die eerste keer in Suid-Afrika broei. Wat 'n wonderlike bewaring-suksesstorie wat hopelik ander kan inspireer om elders dieselfde vir ons voëls te doen.

The bush is looking as good as I can ever remember after the good rains we have received this summer, with localised flooding in some areas proving to be a bit of a challenge at times! There have been a number of interesting bird sightings and it would appear that this was a good year for local and long distance migrant species, many of whom will opportunistically move into an area to exploit improved conditions.

Ek doen 'n beroep op julle om aan SABAP2, die huidige voëlatlasprojek, deel te neem. Kyk na Stephan Terblanche se verslag oor hoe hierdie projek nuwe betekenis aan jou voëlkykery kan gee – iets wat ek ook kan getuig want ek vind dit uiters bevredigend om daaraan deel te neem, en ek het 'n persoonlike belangstelling in hoe die verspreidingspatrone van voëls met die tyd verander. Daar kan geen beter manier wees om direk tot ons kennis van voëls by te dra as om aan hierdie projek deel te neem nie.

André Marx

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Credits

Front cover: African Pygmy-Kingfisher/ Dwergvisvanger, photographed at Bakubung, Pilanesberg (Alta Fraser)

Back cover: Pectoral Sandpiper/ Geelpootstrandloper, photographed at Rooikoppies Dam, North West Province (Clive Kaplan)

Birding facts taken from *Everything you always wanted to know about birds* by Stephen Moss.



Algemene Jaarvergadering: Voorsittersverslag 2007/2008

Ernst Retief

“ Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present the Chairman’s report for the 2007/08 year.

Membership

In contrast to last year, membership increased by about 3% during the year. Most of the larger bird clubs in South Africa experienced a slight decline in membership so we can really be proud of this achievement.

Evening meetings

We have had 11 evening meetings during the last year. Again, Helen Biram managed to arrange speakers who covered a range of interesting topics. Thanks Helen for your contribution in this regard. My thanks also goes to Elise Venter who ensures that the hall is available and that everything is in place as well as Elma and André van der Walt who help arrange the refreshments that is enjoyed by all. As mentioned last year, the hall is provided free of charge to the club, however the club makes a yearly contribution of R500 to the University of Pretoria.

Naweekuitstappies en kampe

Die subkomitee onder die leierskap van Peter Wilgenbus het 40 oggenduitstappies en 10 kampe deur die jaar gereël. Die meeste was baie goed bygewoon. My dank aan Peter vir al sy harde werk. Hierdie portfolio is nou in die bekwame hande van Debbie van Zyl en haar subkomitee. Ek wens hulle sterkte toe met hierdie taak wat vir baie lede is waaroor die klub gaan.

My dank ook aan Adele van Vuuren wie vir enkele jare verantwoordelik was vir die reël van kursusse. Adele gaan nou ‘n welverdiende ruskans neem.

Baie dankie ook aan al die persone wat as leiers vir kampe en uitstappies opgetree het. Ek wil graag klublede daaraan herinner dat hierdie persone dit op ‘n vrywillige basis doen en die vergoeding wat hulle ontvang dek nie eers hulle koste nie. Die nuwe sub-

komitee gaan die moontlikheid van ‘n werkswinkel vir leiers ondersoek – so as jy nog altyd ‘n uitstapjie wou lei, sal hierdie jou kans wees om te leer hoe dit gedoen moet word.

Trading

Trading had a year of ups and downs – but overall it did quite well – again, mostly due to the efforts of Rynetta Coetzee. As indicated earlier in the year it is not possible for Rynetta to handle the portfolio together with her secretarial duties and at one point the committee decided to discontinue this function unless a club member come forward to take responsibility for it. Thanks to Hester McKenzie who has volunteered and this function will now continue, although on a smaller scale.

Laniarius

Laniarius bly maar een van die suksesverhale van die klub. ‘n Paar veranderinge is deur die jaar aangebring – veral die gehalte van die papier en drukwerk het baie verbeter. Die publikasie spog nou ook met ‘n volkleur voorblad – verbasend genoeg teen ‘n laer koste! Baie interessante artikels het verskyn en die terugvoer van lede bly positief. My dank gaan aan André Marx en sy subkomitee. Dankie ook aan al die lede wat artikels bygedra het en doen asseblief so voort.

Bird Ringing

Our club is fortunate to have an active ringing group that continues to ring on a regular basis. They are also tackling interesting new projects, such as a constant ringing project that will provide interesting statistical data regarding our birding populations. The club again contributed R5 000 to the cost of rings and other equipment used by the ringing group.

Finansies

Die klub se finansies is nou in die bekwame hande van Peter Wilgenbus. My besonderse dank gaan aan Elmen

Adendorff wat vir jare die portefeulje hanteer het en gesorg het dat die klub se finansies altyd in orde is.

Die groot onus wat op die komitee geplaas word om deur fondsinsamelings te sorg dat die begroting van die klub balanseer, is 'n bekommernis. Soos deur Peter in sy verslag aangedui, het ons hierdie jaar gelyk gebreek. Maar dit is grootliks te danke aan die bydrae van die komitee. Dit kan nie so voortgaan nie. 'n Stewige verhoging van die klub se ledegelde sal ongelukkig oorweeg moet word.

BLNG-Alert e-mail news and Website

BLNG-Alert remains a valuable communication tool. However due to the fact that people constantly change their e-mail addresses the list becomes outdated. It is important that members inform the secretary about changes in e-mail addresses.

Our website is managed by Déwald Swanepoel and is quickly becoming more and more important as a communication tool. I am extremely happy to announce that we have now registered our own domain, www.blng.co.za and www.blng.co.za.

Conservation and Bird monitoring

SABAP2 was launched during the course of this year. After a rather slow start as well as problems with software etc., the project is now picking up momentum by the day. At the end of January at least one list had been submitted for each of more than 800 pentads and more than 80 000 sightings have been recorded. However, despite various efforts to get people involved the number of people participating in this project is still low. In this regard our club is a shining light as we have a number of members that are actively involved in submitting lists. The result of their efforts can be seen on the progress map that is available on the SABAP2 website. More than 80% of the Northern Gauteng area has already been covered and with less than 20 pentads left it is believed that the whole area will be covered soon.

We are also fortunate in that a second atlas project called Natural World is driven by one of our members, Kevin Ravno. Many members submit their sightings to this project and with over 100 000 sightings recorded it is becoming a very valuable database indeed. A link to this project is also available on our website.

Our club is responsible for two Important Bird Areas (IBAs) – meaning that we have to complete IBA assessments and monitor the relevant sites. During the past year the assessment for the Magaliesberg IBA was completed. The Waterberg IBA will be assessed soon. We have also been asked by the Gauteng Regional Forum to investigate the possibility of declaring Elandsvlei and Rietvlei NR as IBAs. My thanks to Elba Swart who has assisted me with this project.

As reported earlier we have donated R7 500 to the EWT for posters for the Reb-billed Oxpecker project. These posters will not only help to promote the cause of this endangered species but will also promote our club as our contact details will be displayed on the posters.


Vraelyste

Ons het 70 vraelyste van lede terug ontvang. Die terugvoer het aan die komitee baie waardevolle inligting verskaf. Oor die algemeen blyk lede tevrede te wees met wat die klub bied en voel dat hulle goeie waarde vir geld kry. Soos verwag kan word van 'n klub van die grootte is daar soveel behoeftes as lede. Die komitee doen sy bes om in almal se behoeftes te voldoen. Baie dankie aan almal wat vraelyste voltooi het. Dit word oreg waardeer.

BirdLife South Africa and Regional Forum Committee

Together with André Marx, who is currently the Chairperson of the BLSA Gauteng Regional Forum, I attended most of the BLSA Council meetings held every second month as well as the Gauteng Regional Forum meetings (consisting of all chairpersons of the clubs in the region). These meetings all take place in Johannesburg. Our attendance at these meetings ensures the club stays updated with the activities of BirdLife South Africa. The forum meeting provides an excellent opportunity to learn about the activities of other clubs as well as to discuss issues that might be of general importance to the clubs of the region.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to thank all those people that have contributed to the administration of the club in the past year. The well-being of the club is dependent on the contribution of all its members. “ 



AGM: President's Address

Pauline Leinberger

“Good evening to you all and welcome.

I think Ernst has said all the thank yous so I will not repeat what he has said except our heartfelt gratitude for all Ernst has done as chairman. It is never an easy job and he has coped very well, ably assisted by our secretary Rynetta who bends over backwards to make our activities run smoothly, spending many hours on club matters. Ernst has made a great start personally to the SABAP2 project and he and his handful of atlasers have done a wonderful job in covering more than 75% of the pentads in our area at least once.


Times have changed so much over the years I have been a member of the club. It is difficult to keep track of our members who go swanning around all over the world, twitching as they go. Ecuador, India and Turkey, Israel, Australia and Africa. It makes you feel quite dizzy. And then of course Greg and Verona's trip to south New Zealand and the Sub-Antarctic Islands about which we will hear this evening so I will not keep you long.

I do, however, want to make mention of two achievements in our South African bird world of this past year that I find highly inspiring. The first is the matter of the Mount Moreland swallows which has been the subject of much discussion and study. Here it appears that airport authorities in Durban have learnt to respect the habits of the birds of the area. They have at Oliver Tambo International as well; a request was received recently for alarm calls of some of the problem birds to relieve the airport staff from having to drive down the runway screaming at the Hadedas, herons and guinea-fowls to frighten them off before take off of some of the flights. Sounds very African doesn't it?

The other achievement that I find most inspiring is that of the island which was built at Kamfers Dam near Kimberley through the cooperation of the Northern Cape Nature Conservation and a mining group. To have encouraged the flamingos to nest here and to produce

thousands of chicks goes a long way to counterbalance some of the depressing stories with which we are constantly beset, and particularly now the mine prospecting near Wakkerstroom. I hope you will all support BirdLife in their efforts to fight this project.

Back to club matters though. At a recent committee meeting discussion came round to club assets. We now possess several radios which are used at some camps and outings to improve communication between cars if we happen to be travelling in convoy. They can be very useful as long as one remains aware of the hazards of malfunction of the on-off switches when discussing private matters. Another of our possessions that recently came to light is the club loo. A very important asset it is too as it serves to remind us in this luxury living world of ours how we used to camp. This loo consists of a toilet seat which is fixed to a small folding chair. An open ended black plastic bag is fixed to the seat and the whole contraption is placed over a hole which is dug to arms length with a small spade, the loose sand at the bottom removed with a marmalade tin. I was never quite certain why it had to be a marmalade tin. All this was surrounded by a small tent and Percy Clark had even fixed a vacant/occupied sign to the seat with a long string. Of course a disused ant-bear hole came into use quite often. We had to make sure it was not occupied by a porcupine for instance as this would have had dire consequences. I remember well a camp we had at Elphick's banana farm on the Crocodile River. There is not much undergrowth among bananas so the loo was essential. A suitable ant bear hole was found complete with spider webs. The chair was put in place and good natured burly Ben Burfield was installed on the throne so that the tent could be put up around him with much merriment. It was all a little precarious as the mouth of the hole was a little large. The putting up was always fine but when it came time to take it down everyone found that they had urgent business back home.

Enjoy your evening and thank you again for being here.” 

Club News/Klubnuus

New club website address

The club now has a new website address as we have registered our own domain thanks to the kind sponsorship of Jacques and Debbie van Zyl. The new address is **www.bing.co.za**.

Over the past few years the club web page could be found on Etienne Marais' website; we offer our sincere thanks to Etienne for helping get our web page off the ground and for hosting it in its initial years.

Dates for club camps

Although bookings for camps are only open once they have been published in the programme, make sure you diarise the following dates for our camps for the rest of the year: 13-15 June: Mlawula in Swaziland – bookings now open with the secretary.

19-20 July: Bosveld Paradys near Marble Hall – bookings now open with the secretary.

15-16 Aug: Nokeng Eco-Lodge near Rust De Winter – bookings now open with the secretary.

19-20 Sept: Magoebaskloof Getaway in the Magoebaskloof area.

17-19 Oct: Lake Chrissie/Chrissiesmeer, near Carolina.

November: Nylsvley – camp dates to be confirmed.

12-15 Dec: Dullstroom for the long weekend.

Special outings

As part of our programme, we try to bring you exciting special events in far away places and we are pleased to highlight the following outings. Places are very limited so your payment in full confirms your booking:

18-21 July: Eshowe including Ongoye Forest and the aerial boardwalk at Dlinza Forest. Details in the May-Aug programme. Bookings now open with the secretary.

7-11 Aug: Teba Camp at Pafuri, Kruger

National Park. Details in the May-Aug programme. Bookings now open with the secretary.

12 Sept: Night tour of the Pretoria Zoological Gardens. Details in the May-Aug programme. Bookings now open with the secretary.

Questionnaire Feedback

Last year a questionnaire was distributed to members about all the club's activities. Thank you to the 70-odd people who completed the questionnaire. The results are summarised here with the number of respondents preferring an option indicated by percentage where appropriate:

Day outings – An equal number of people prefer Saturday and Sunday outings; 45% are prepared to travel 75 km for an outing, with 38% willing to go further (*although with the recent fuel price increase we will be watching this!* – Ed.); 43% would be prepared to pay R40 as an entrance fee, with another 28% prepared to pay more than that; 70% will be interested in a specialised outing e.g. atlasing or looking for a special species; 42% prefer casual birding, although 34% like more focused birding for special species; 77% of people felt outing leaders are very helpful.

Evening meetings – 40% of members attend talks 5 times or more per year; with the majority finding topics and speakers interesting.

Web page – 61% said they either never visited the club's web page or did so less than 10 times per year; with the information about birding venues being the most interesting.

Courses – 75% of people find specialised courses e.g. LBJs the most desirable; with most preferring a course that combined an element of lectures and practical field trips.

Camps/weekend trips – 75% would be interested in trips further afield in South Africa or in neighbouring countries; 51% prefer self-catering accommodation, 21% guesthouses,

and 24% camping; the majority of people are prepared to pay R100 (32%) or R200 (39%) for accommodation.

Projects – in this section about 55% of people indicated that they are not particularly interested in projects, although many people indicated they would be interested if they were provided with guidelines.

Laniarius – the majority of respondents are happy with the content of the newsletter; an equal number of people indicated they would be interested in bird identification articles, conservation, and club news events.

General – 80% of people felt the club is good value for money; 62% of respondents said they did not have access to e-mail and so did not read the club's e-mail communication; with regard to membership fees people are prepared to pay: R150 – 21%, R200 – 48%, R400 – 21%, R500+ – 6%; 7 people are prepared to lead outings if they are given training in that regard; most people felt the club meets their needs. In addition, several people made personal comments which the club committee has noted.

Courses

We have arranged two beginners' digital photography courses with Dr Philip Stapelberg (last one being **16-17th May 2008**) and by now everyone should be chasing down those birds and clicking away merrily. We have been fortunate enough to secure a date for Philip in August to present the next in his series of photographic courses. We would like to split up the intermediate course into two and the first one we will be running during **August** will be specifically aimed at those of you that do not have digital SLR cameras. If you have a point-and-shoot/mik-en-druk and are ready to move onto bigger and better things, why not come along and see how powerful your small camera can actually be. Philip's courses have been extremely popular so we are sure you will enjoy this one as well. Details of this intermediate course can be found in the programme and your payment confirms your booking. Places are limited and the price is very reasonable so please book with the secretary. 🐦

New Members/ Nuwe Lede

A warm welcome to the following new members! We trust your association with the club will be a long and happy one and hope to meet you at our evening meetings and outings.

'n Hartlike verwelkoming aan ons nuwe lede! Ons vertrou julle verbintenis met die klub gaan baie waarde- en genotvol wees; ons hoop om julle op ons aandlesings en uitstappies te ontmoet.

Hendrik & Liesl de Swardt – Faerie Glen; Jeff Edwards – Cullinan; Francois, Marianne, Marilé & Francois Haasbroek – Totiusdal; Jaco & Elaine Pretorius – Lyttleton; Paul & Marleen Pieters – Hatfield; Collin Albertyn – Onderstepoort; Jimmy & Hannie Lizemore – Lyttleton LH; Susan Velthuysen – Faerie Glen; Elmarie Janse van Vuuren – Villieria; Siegie Eiselen – Faerie Glen; Piet & Louise Geyser - Lynnwoodrif; Conrad Dinkelmann – Wapadransdorp; Ziyaad Docrat – Wonderboompoort; Christo & Annalie du Toit – Karenpark; Pieter & Ria Botha – Waterkloof; Usamah Dockrat – Laudium; Linda Barber – Garsfontein; Eberhard Braune – Murrayfield

Your Chance to Win R100 – Repeatedly!

In order to boost members' contributions to *Laniarius* it has been decided to reward the writer of the best article in every issue with R100. Members are welcome to communicate their choices to the editor but the winner will finally be decided upon by the editor and his sub-committee and be announced in the ensuing *Laniarius*.

The decision will be based mainly on the content of an article. This should be of general interest and have instructional and/or entertainment value and preferably be focused on a specific subject, species or other general cohesive topic constructed around a specific theme or thread. Like the proof of the pudding being in the eating so the success of an article is ultimately determined by the number of members actually reading and enjoying it. Generally speaking long lists of seen birds strung together and very heavy scientific articles do not go down well. Rather relate special or exciting birding related experiences, interesting places visited, unusual sightings, interesting behaviour, identification tips and the like.


Outstanding literary capability is not a prerequisite but poor general usage of language (spelling mistakes, ambiguity, wrong sentence construction, etc.) which requires extensive editing will be taken into account. For convenience of the editor articles should preferably be submitted in MS Word format.

U Kans Om R100 te Wen – Weer en Weer!

Ten einde bydraes tot *Laniarius* deur lede aan te moedig is besluit om die skrywer van die beste artikel in elke uitgawe met R100 te beloon. Lede is welkom om hulle keuse aan die redakteur deur te gee maar die finale beslissing sal by die redakteur en sy subkomitee berus, en die wenner sal in die daaropvolgende *Laniarius* aangekondig word.

Die besluit sal hoofsaaklik op die inhoud van 'n artikel berus. Verkieslik moet dit van algemene belang, leersaam en/of onderhoudend wees en verkieslik konsentreer op 'n spesifieke onderwerp, voëlspesie, of ander algemene saambindende onderwerp, tema of vertellingsraamwerk. Die sukses van enige artikel word uiteindelik bepaal deur die aantal lede wat dit lees en geniet. In die algemeen gesproke kry die sameflansing van lang lyste voëls wat gesien is of ingewikkelde wetenskaplike artikels nie veel aftrek nie. Vertel eerder van spesiale of opwindende voëlwaarnemings, interessante plekke wat besoek is, ongewone waarnemings, interessante gedrag, uitkenningswenke ens.

Buitengewone literêre vermoëns is nie 'n voorvereiste nie maar swak taalgebruik (spelfoute, dubbelsinnighede, verkeerde sinsbou, ens.) wat aansienlike redigering noodsaak sal in aanmerking geneem word. Vir die gerief van die redakteur moet artikels verkieslik in MS Word-formaat ingedien word.

[The first recipient of the R100 prize is Ingrid van Heerden for her article in *Laniarius* 107 entitled “BLNG Visit to Groot Marico”. Well done Ingrid! – Ed.] 

William Swainson: 1789-1855

Pauline Leinberger

William Swainson was another of the naturalist/collectors who lived in this exciting era when knowledge of nature was growing rapidly. He was born to a family who held high positions in the Customs House in Liverpool. His formal education was curtailed due to a speech impediment so he joined the Customs House when he was 14, remaining there until he was 19, whereupon he joined the Commissary General based in the Mediterranean. At this time he started making natural history collections in Sicily, Malta, Italy and Greece. He resigned due to ill health, returning to England on half pay in 1815 at the end of the Napoleonic wars. A year later he joined an expedition to Brazil where, though they could not explore inland because of a revolution, nevertheless made collections of about 760 bird skins and quantities of insects, fishes and plants.

On his return to Britain, Swainson tried to join the British Museum and, it seems, struck difficulties in his purpose in a society which

was based largely on patronage. William Leach of the Museum befriended him and, recognizing his talent for draughtmanship, encouraged him to take up the new technique of lithography, a method of printing plates which eliminated the use of engraving, thus reducing the cost of illustration considerably.

William's hopes of financial independence were dashed when his father died leaving only a modest estate, so he turned his talents to authorship. He completed many scientific works, making use of the new era of printing technology and cheaper paper, and using the lithography techniques he had learned through Leach to illustrate these volumes. Swainson made his mark on the world of natural history illustration with the work entitled *Fauna Boreali – Americana*, and it was thanks to this that Audubon named an American warbler after him and Nuttall a thrush.

The Quinary System of classification of natural history subjects was a system devised by WS MacLeay and supported by Swainson. This system sees all taxonomic relationships as based on groups put into circular form rather than the linear branching evolutionary form proposed by Darwin in 1859 in his *Origin of Species*. There were five touching circles in this Quinary System and all things were arranged in fives. In many cases conclusions drawn were peculiar to say the least. We may not agree, for instance, with the statement made by Swainson that nothing "can be more perfect than the analogy between the Bengal Tiger and the African Zebra," both being striped and both being impossible to tame.

Swainson, possibly disillusioned by the lack of approval and sometimes derision of his ideas, emigrated together with his family to New Zealand in 1840 after the death of his wife. His contribution to bird art was acknowledged by the inclusion of many of his 50-year-old illustrations in Alfred Newton's



Dup du Plessis


Swainson's Spurfowl (*Francolin*)/*Bosveldfisant*

Dictionary of Birds (1893-1897). This was a tribute made to Swainson after his death in 1855.

Seventeen species were named after him in all including:
Swainson's Spurfowl (Francolin): named by Sir Andrew Smith in 1859.
Northern Grey-headed Sparrow: named by Ruppell in 1838.

Audubon named the Swainson's Warbler.
Bonaparte named the Swainson's Hawk.
Nuttall named the Swainson's Thrush.

Source:

William Swainson: naturalist, author and illustrator, by David M Knight, a Ramsbottom lecture delivered in 1984. 

Austin Roberts: The Early Years (continued) (1910-1920)

Sandra Dippenaar

Part 4: A Tragedy unfolds: The Finch-Davies Story (1919-1920)

"God knows that after all the kindness you [Dr Breijer] have shown me, it must appear to you that I cannot have any excuse for what I have done, and now that I come to realize it, I cannot understand myself how I could have behaved as I have. I can only think that I must have suffered from the madness of the collector, which distorts the moral sense."

- C.G. Finch-Davies, Lt., 30th January 1920.

Towards the end of 1919 Austin Roberts found himself a most unwilling participant in a series of events at the Transvaal Museum (TM) that culminated in the tragic and premature death of the gifted ornithologist and bird illustrator Claude Finch-Davies.

Part 4.1: When life was pretty good

Claude Gibney Davies was born on 24th May 1875 in Delhi, India, the eldest son of Major-General Sir William and Lady Elizabeth Davies, who encouraged their son's early interest in natural history. A familiarity with natural history illustration was probably nurtured by his mother, who is reputed to have written a book on Indian snakes. Having finished his

schooling in England, the eighteen-year-old Davies joined the Cape Mounted Rifles (CMR) at their recruiting office in London, before setting off for the regiment's headquarters in King Williams Town via Cape Town.

After his basic training, Private Davies was posted to various outposts such as Lusikisiki



*Claude G. Finch-Davies Lt.
1st S.A. Co. R.*

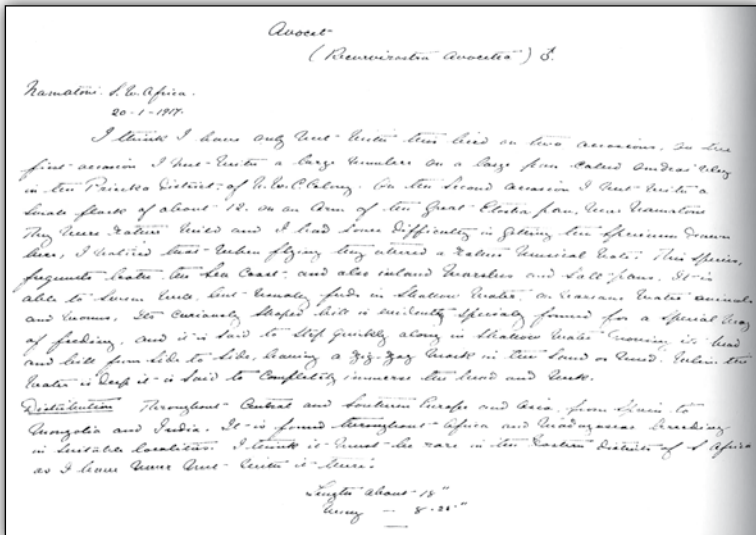
and Flagstaff in Pondoland. The outdoor life suited him and, over time, fostered a particular interest in birds. By 1898 Davies, now promoted to corporal, was actively collecting specimens and, more importantly, compiling notes on the birds he encountered.

The outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) put his birding interests on hold but, on the positive side, provided him with the golden opportunity to travel extensively throughout South Africa.

At the end of the war, Davies, now a sergeant, was posted back to Pondoland, particularly the Matatiele area. In 1903 he attempted his first known painting by illustrating an African (Ethiopian) Snipe. From this time onward, Davies consistently started producing the detailed and accurate bird-paintings for which he has since become renowned. All the paintings (water-colour over pencil-drawing) were done in small canvas-covered sketch books, of which he filled 30 during his career. Opposite each painting were his observation notes, and later also information gathered from scientific books and journals. Davies always sent his completed sketchbooks to his mother in

England, who used to ink over his pencilled field notes.

When the CMR became part of the Union Defence Force as the 1st Regiment, South African Mounted Rifles (SAMR) around 1910, it again provided Davies with an exceptional opportunity to make an intensive study of South Africa's birds, and particularly birds of prey, as he was able to travel widely between the various military camps and garrisons which he occupied. Over the next ten years Davies' preoccupation with birds became well known within local communities, and he was brought specimens on a regular basis. He also established sound contact with museum curators throughout the country, and corresponded regularly with ornithologists both in South Africa and England. At the TM he befriended Alwin K. Haagner who, as Honorary Secretary of the SA Ornithologist's Union, helped Davies with the publication of his ornithological observations in the Union's *Journal*. Over time, he also published several of Davies' coloured illustrations of new bird species in the *Annals of the Transvaal Museum*. Through the medical officer of his regiment, Captain L.C. Thompson, Davies



An example of Finch-Davies' hand-written notes opposite his colour plates

also made the acquaintance of Major Boyd Horsbrugh who was at the time writing his major work *The Game-Birds and Water-fowl of South Africa*, and who then invited him to produce 69 colour plates for this work that was published in 1912.

During February 1911, from the mountainous terrain of Matatiele, Davies began his 20th sketchbook and devoted it entirely to birds of prey, which held an overwhelming fascination for him. Of the remaining 10 sketchbooks, 7 were devoted to these birds.

During the First World War Davies, promoted to Lieutenant, served in German South West Africa, where he was fortunate to meet up with an old friend, Captain (now Major) L.C. Thompson. From then on the two men frequently undertook excursions together and Davies was particularly delighted to have Thompson's fine library at his disposal. In July 1915 Davies fell ill, and was sent to Cape Town for treatment. It was probably during his convalescence that he met the 22 year-old Aileen, only child of Captain William and Mrs. Alice Finch. Aileen's father was very reluctant to approve of a marriage given the age and status difference. (Davies was now 41 years old, and had almost nothing to show for it.) In the end, however, Captain Finch relented, on condition that Davies included the name "Finch" with his own. From the outset, his apt new name was cause for much amusement.

The couple were married in Cape Town on 4th August 1916, and soon afterwards settled in Windhoek, South West Africa, where their first child, William Simon Charles, was born a year later.

This was a particularly productive time for Finch-Davies. He was able to write his most authoritative papers because he had time on his hands and the opportunity to travel and collect widely. He also had access to regular consignments of reference books and specimens from the TM. Furthermore he was able to complete his detailed paintings of all the raptor species then known in South Africa, each in its different plumage phase.

Towards the end of 1918, Finch-Davies

received news that his regiment was to return to South Africa. He immediately took leave and spent several weeks collecting along the coast in the vicinity of Walvis Bay. Specimens he collected during this time form the bulk of the paintings in his last sketchbook.

The Finch-Davies family then settled in Roberts Heights (Voortrekkerhoogte) Pretoria, where their second child, Bethea Alice, was born a few months later.

Part 4.2: The Roberts connection

"My dear Finch-Davies. It is a pity we cannot have a week or so together to talk over the thousand and one things we have to discuss."
(5th July 1917) – Austin Roberts

Although Finch-Davies had had access to the TM library as well as the bird skin collection for a number of years (through Haagner and Dr Gunning – the first director), his correspondence with Roberts only started in 1913, lasting till about the time that Finch-Davies moved to Pretoria in 1918.

Over the years an extraordinarily large number of letters passed between these two men who were so different in age. (Roberts was nine years younger.) For example in 1917 alone, twenty three letters passed between them. Roberts preferred his home address for this correspondence: "Would you mind addressing private letters to my private address, as I do my correspondence at home and they are rather inquisitive at the office. The subject of birds is more to me than mere employment, and I don't see that the Museum has any right to interfere as they are inclined to do – when the subject in hand is done out of office hours", he wrote on 5th July 1917. Once back in Pretoria, though, Finch-Davies would be a regular visitor to Roberts' office at the TM for long and vehement discussions and also to examine specimens and to make use of the library. Not all communication between these two passionate bird-lovers was, however, free of animosity, as they critically questioned each others descriptions

of new species. For example, in 1913, after examining the skins of the two specimens concerned, Finch-Davies was convinced that the “new” species of falcon, *Falco horsbrugh*, named by Gunning and Roberts in 1911, was rather an immature of the Red-necked Falcon already described as *Falco ruficollis*. Not only did Finch-Davies imply that Roberts’ new species was invalid, but he also made the mistake of asking his sister in London to take detailed paintings of the bird to William Robert Ogilvie-Grant at the British Museum (BM) for comment – who then “absolutely” confirmed Finch-Davies identification. Given his past experiences with the BM (see part 3:1) Roberts was understandably upset and wrote Finch-Davies a lengthy, scathing letter ending it with: “Every man is open to have his own opinion, but whether it is right to express that opinion openly with an apparent desire to injure others, without furthering the interests of the science concerned, is another question. That is the sort of thing I have to put up with from one quarter at least, and when I find you following the same trail, I think you will admit that it would be strange if I did not feel annoyed.....” As a gesture, however, to indicate that no hostility remained over this issue, Roberts named a new sub-species of the Red-necked Falcon, *Chiquera ruficollis daviesi* (1922) after his colleague.

Part 4.3 When Life Took a Turn

“I know that it is said that sin must be expiated, but it seems hard that at my age..... my whole life should be broken to bits.”
 – Finch-Davies (30th January 1920)

Military commitments prevented Finch-Davies from spending much time at the TM during 1919, while Roberts himself was away on active service until well into 1919 (see part 3.3). Then, towards the end of November 1919 an unfortunate series of incidents



A Blacksmith Lapwing from Finch-Davies’ final sketchbook

occurred that ushered in the last fateful year of Finch-Davies’ life.

On two different occasions Roberts happened to notice that 4 colour plates of *Phasianidae* had been torn from ornithological works in the TM library. A further search revealed many more plates (of other gamebirds besides *Phasianidae*, and some *Accipitridae*) to be missing from various major works, totaling 37 plates at that point. Reluctantly, suspicion centered on Finch-Davies who was the only ornithologist, besides Roberts, who had free and regular access to the reference books in the library. “Yet I could not believe that he would do so, from my knowledge of his care in handling books that were lent to him, and the great work he was doing in ornithology.” Roberts wrote in a statement.

However when the number of missing plates had grown to over 200, a trap for Finch-Davies was set by the police (CID) at the request of the director. On the 5th of January 1920 Finch-Davies was caught red-handed by a police officer watching from a hiding place halfway between the library and Roberts’ office. Roberts who was out on a

collecting trip on that fateful Monday, only heard of the arrest on the 6th. The 5 plates found in Finch-Davies possession were taken from *Falco*, a journal not yet bound. In an affidavit to the CID on 9th January, Roberts stated that the missing plates (now) amounted to 230, from 90 volumes of journals and books – with the possibility that more could be discovered in time to come.

In a letter to Roberts dated 7th January 1920 Finch-Davies stopped short of denying any serious wrongdoing. “(H)ad I met with you,” he wrote, “I might have explained several matters which may help to show you that I am not too much to blame as must appear to you.” However on the 30th of January 1920, in an official letter to Dr Breijer, he fully admitted his guilt; furthermore, asking for appreciation of his considerable service to the TM and pleading for clemency on behalf of his (pregnant) wife and two young children. With the threat of prosecution looming, Finch-Davies faced an uncertain future. Small wonder that he wrote to Dr Breijer: “Ever since the trouble came.....I have been nearly mad with remorse and anxiety, so that I wonder sometimes that I have not done some rash act.”

The matter ended for the TM when Finch-Davies handed over his 20 completed sketch books to act as security while he tried to repay the value of the damage through small monthly payments of 3-5 pounds from his meager army salary. The damage at the time was estimated at 380 pounds, while his paintings were valued at 200 pounds.

The military authorities eventually let Finch-Davies off with a severe reprimand, but transferred him from the prestigious 1st SAMR to the Returned Soldiers' Battalion based at the Castle in Cape Town – effectively ruining his chances of further promotion. This punishment might have been harsher however, had it not been for his good friend Alwin Haagner who interceded on his behalf.

Finch-Davies' wife, Aileen, remained in Pretoria until the birth of their third child, Hugh Claude, after which she joined him in Cape Town in July 1920, to stay in the married quar-



Pied Avocet

ters of her husband's unit in Claremont.

On 4 August 1920 Lieutenant Claude Gibney Finch-Davies was found dead in his bed. The discovery was made by an orderly delivering morning coffee to his room in The Castle, Headquarters of the Returned Soldiers' Battalion Cape Town. His wife, Aileen, later wrote that she had been “with him only an hour before he died and he was in the best of health.” One report stated he had been called to a meeting the following day, to answer accusations that might incriminate him, and had shot himself; another speculated on his having taken an overdose of cocaine. Although in straitened circumstances at the time, death was officially recorded as due to angina pectoris and he was accorded a military funeral at the Maitland Cemetery, Cape Town, on 6 August 1920, attended by officers of his battalion and a firing party drawn from his platoon. His remains rest in grave 95870C. – Dr Alan Kemp

Part 4.4 A Twist in the Tale

A different aspect to the tragedy surfaced.

On 18th May 1920, Dr L Peringuey, the

Director of the South African Museum, wrote a letter to Dr Breijer informing him that some 132 plates plus a number of descriptions, were missing from their museum's library collection as well. Obviously referring to Finch-Davies, he wrote: "well to make a story short, that same person has done the same here during his stay in Cape Town where he was recuperating. He had the full run of our library; in which room he drew his birds and abstracted at the same time plates of S. African birds and others, as well as of some mammals."

Initially "more interested in the recovery (of the plates) than in the punishment to be meted out," Dr Peringuey nonetheless decided to obtain legal advice, "to know whether condoning is possible after reparation, and how to set about recovering and possibly prosecuting..." (in a letter to Dr Breijer, 1 June 1920).

It furthermore appears that Dr Peringuey had made an appointment to meet with Finch-Davies on the 4th August 1920 – the very day that he was found dead in his room.

Part 4.5 Aftermath

Aileen Finch-Davies and the three small children were left destitute – her husband's estate being recorded as below the 300 pounds, on which death duty was due. She duly wrote to Dr Breijer asking that the 29 sketchbooks which were left her in his will, be returned to her. This, given the circumstances, he was not able to do.

The young Finch-Davies family then returned to her parent's home in Ireland, Aileen taking with her a few examples of her late husband's artwork, as well as the last in the series of 30 sketchbooks. Three years later, while residing in Lexham Gardens London she donated this final sketches (containing 21 coloured paintings, each accompanied by a page of hand-written notes, and covering the period 28 March 1918 to 4 April 1920) to the British Museum.

The unfortunate plight of the Finch-Davies family remained a source of concern

to Roberts. On 22 July 1925 he submitted a detailed report on the 900 or so paintings to the director, ending with a plea that the matter of the legal ownership of the paintings (which according to Roberts' calculations were worth at least 1,250 pounds) be resolved as soon as possible – not the least to benefit "the widow of the late Finch-Davies (who) was left in very poor circumstances, with young children to support..." Roberts then concluded his report with the following suggestion: "...if the Museum cannot make some payment, representing the difference between the losses (calculated by Roberts at not more than 400 pounds) and value of the security, perhaps some philanthropic gentleman of means might be persuaded to do so. The paintings are too good to be wasted by lying in obscurity."

Despite this earnest appeal, however, the museum committee did nothing constructive to resolve the matter. Thus the 29 sketchbooks remained in their orange tin trunk, locked in the Museum's strongroom until Norman Lighton made use of them during the late 30's to paint the plates for Roberts *Birds of South Africa*.

Around this time Roberts received a letter from Aileen Finch-Davies in Windsor, stating that she was in dire financial circumstances and could Roberts not perhaps help her to sell two of her late husband's paintings that she happened to have.

Roberts managed to sell both of them to an old friend, Major LC Thompson. "I am sorry to think that you have had to dispose of them, but you will have the consolation of knowing that they are in the hands of someone who knew your husband and can appreciate them", he wrote to Aileen on 4th February 1938. The amount paid was 7 pounds 7 shillings. This was the only income she was ever to receive from Finch-Davies' bird paintings.

The impasse regarding the ownership of the 29 sketchbooks remained unresolved until 1970 when the 50 year copyright restrictions expired and the TM was then free to publish

the paintings. Dr Alan Kemp (erstwhile head of the Department of Birds) took up the challenge, and finally brought the Claude Finch-Davies paintings to the public.

Postscript

Aileen Finch-Davies died in Windsor, England, during 1963, aged 76.

The 29 sketchbooks (dating from August 1903 to December 1918) remain in the care of the Transvaal Museum.

Part 5 1920 – 1930 Concludes the series on the early part of Roberts' career, and deals with aspects of fieldwork undertaken, his lecture tours and (of all things) his development of a motor vehicle turning signal – designed to resemble the fantail of a bird.

References and photographs / Painting and text reproduction credits

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- Various documents kindly made available to the Transvaal Museum by the Roberts family members. 🐦



Society Takes On Mining in the Wakkerstroom Region

Exploration for torbanite and coal in the Wakkerstroom region by the Delta Mining Corporation is the most serious environmental threat that this grassland and wetland area has ever faced. Rare and endangered species of plants and animals like the oribi, wattled crane, Rudd's lark, Botha's lark and blue crane are at risk of losing their foothold in one of South Africa's most famous Important Bird Areas if mining is ever allowed in the area. Conservation NGOs and civil society decided at a meeting on Monday at the BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Tourism Centre that mining would never be allowed to destroy the natural heritage of the region.

Representatives from BirdLife South Africa, Ekangala Grassland Trust, the Wildlife and Environment Society of SA, WWF-SA, Endangered Wildlife Trust, National Grasslands Programme of the Botanical Society of

SA, Wakkerstroom Natural Heritage Association, DEAT, DWAF, Mpumalanga Dept of Agriculture and Land Administration, Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Authority, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, farmers, Wakkerstroom residents, Koos Pretorius of Chrissiesmeer who has been fighting mining in that region shared facts about the proposed exploration for torbanite and coal on three sites east of the Wakkerstroom town en route to Luneburg.

With the information at hand it transpired that Delta obtained prospecting rights on two properties in the Wakkerstroom region (16 km East of Wakkerstroom town in the Luneburg area) and also on the Pongola Forest Reserve and the Paardeplaats Nature Reserve that are both Protected Natural Areas. It also became evident that the mining company is trying to obtain prospecting rights on at least five other properties for exploration. A copy of the EMP that



Wakkerstroom grasslands are at risk



Mining activities pose a threat to the natural heritage of the entire region

was authorised by Department of Minerals and Energy for prospecting revealed the following:

- There was NO consultation whatsoever with the environmental NGOs, the land-owners or the Wakkerstroom community. This is a fatal flaw in their process and yet Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) approved their application.
- The company states in their EMP that there are NO threatened species on the sites yet Wakkerstroom is a designated Important Bird Area with a large number of endemic and threatened bird species present in the grasslands. This indicates that no biological surveys were done by the company or their consultants.
- It appears that the DME also failed to do their due diligence: they should have advertised in the public media about Delta's application to prospect in the Wakkerstroom region. They should have called for public consultation processes to be started. None of this happened.
- The DME designated the environmental impacts as medium (given the scant information provided by the company) yet all parties present at the meeting agreed that the environmental impacts on the grasslands and water will be severe.

The delegates agreed that the permit for exploration appears to be invalid due to the lack of consultation, the lack of any data on rare and threatened species and the authorisation for exploration in two protected natural areas (Pongola Forest Reserve and Paardeplaats Nature Reserve). Legal advice will be sought immediately and appropriate actions will be launched in order to have permits refuted and declared null and void.

This leaves serious doubts as to the ability of the DME to implement appropriate protection of the natural environment whilst issuing invalid licenses for exploration and mining in one of the country's most sensitive catchments and biodiversity hot spots.

Postscript

The BirdLife South Africa Council decided that we will fight this with everything we have and we need your support as a branch, affiliate or member of BirdLife South Africa. BirdLife South Africa joined forces with other NGOs and landowners to tackle the problem and the first anticipated step is to have the permits refuted. We need tens of thousands of Rands to start the litigation process and to continue until we have stopped all exploration, mining

and any further endeavours of mining houses to even think about mining in the Wakkerstroom and the Eastern grasslands region. Please pledge your support as a branch or affiliate of BirdLife South Africa by depositing your financial contribution to this critical cause into the BirdLife South Africa account.

REMEMBER: MINING MUST NEVER HAPPEN AT WAKKERSTROOM!! IT IS OURS TO PROTECT AND DEFEND. FOR NOW AND FOREVER!!

We (I) (name of branch, affiliate or member) pledge (amount) to the Wakkerstroom crisis. We (I) deposited our (my) contribution on (date) into the following account:

Account name: BirdLife South Africa
 Account type: Current
 Account number: 62067506281
 Bank: FNB Randburg
 Branch: Randburg

(BirdLife Northern Gauteng has donated R6 000 to the fund – Ed.) 

Ringers' Corner

Graham Grieve

Catches by BLNG ringers in 2007 were generally well below levels experienced in the past. While the cause of the poor catches could probably be ascribed to drought conditions at the end of the 2006/7 rainy season, it was agreed after some discussion that it was not possible to demonstrate the drop in numbers conclusively in view of the fact that the ringing effort (RE) had varied at most sites visited. BLNG ringers therefore agreed to initiate a program of Constant Ringing Effort (CRE) (Konstante Ringpoging) at a limited number of sites during 2008 with the intention of ringing at each of these sites once every three months and continuing this into the future.

The CRE ringing will have the following features:

- A fixed location for 8x12 m nets at each site
- The birds from these nets would be recorded separately, although this information would be included in the consolidated totals for the day's report
- The nets would remain in use for CRE recording from first light to about 10:30
- Climate, weather and temperature conditions would be monitored

The program was initiated in January 2008 with the first attempt in the reed bed area at Witkoppiesvlei in Rietvlei NR. In contrast to the poor catches up to the start of the rainy season at the end of 2007, this outing produced extremely good catches and ringers were hard pressed to cope with all the birds caught. This followed a similarly busy outing at the top of Marais dam at Rietvlei NR in December 2007. The statistics for these two outings and the information on the subset of CRE ringing in January are shown in the table below:

Date	16 Dec 2007	5 Jan 2008 totals	5 Jan 2008 CRE
Total birds ringed	355	582	160
Total species ringed	25	25	7
Total retrapped	12	45	2
Number of species retrapped	6	9	2
% retrapped	3.3	7.2	

Subsequently, the first CRE ringing attempts have also been carried out at the following sites:

- Buffelsdrift (Gauteng) 32
- Olifantskop (Limpopo) 26



Spotted Thick-knee/ Dikkop

Die plaas Olifantskop en die omliggende gebied het blykbaar 'n goeie reënseisoen ervaar en nie alleen was die hoofplaasdam heelwat voller as gewoonlik nie (wat pogings vir sandpatryse gekortwiek het), maar die mate van grasbedekking in die veld was uitstekend. As gevolg daarvan is groot getalle sypies gevang – 'n welkome kontras met die skrale vangste van dië spesies laat verlede jaar (62 in Maart 2008 in vergelyking met 8 in November 2007). Colin de Kock se nuwe handnet het goed gevaar en drie Dikkoppe is die Saterdag gevang – die eerste van dië spesie wat hier gering is.

SAFRING: 60th anniversary

SAFRING (the South African Bird Ringing Unit) administers bird ringing in southern Africa, supplying rings, ringing equipment and services to volunteer and professional ringers in South Africa and neighbouring countries. All ringing records are curated by SAFRING, which is an essential arm of the Animal Demography Unit (ADU – previously the Avian Demography Unit). Contact is maintained by the SAFRING Project Coordinator with all ringers.

The Bird Ringing Scheme in South Africa was initiated in 1948, so 2008 sees the 60th anniversary of the scheme. In the first half century of ringing in South Africa over

1.7 million birds of 852 species were ringed. There have been a total of 16 800 ring recoveries since the inception of the scheme. This gives an overall recovery rate for rings in southern Africa of marginally less than 1%, averaged across all species. This probability varies enormously across species.

The very first ringing in Southern Africa took place over the August holiday weekend in 1948, just three months after the scheme had been given the go ahead by the AGM. The rings were ready a matter of hours beforehand and were collected in Pretoria en route to Kranzberg. It was organised jointly by the Witwatersrand Bird Club and the Transvaal Mountain Club, who were essential partners as they had decided to give the Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* the honour of being the first recipients of the new rings. It is not clear why this choice was made unless it was that an expedition of this sort was sufficiently “way out” to celebrate so important an occasion. Anyway, 31 birds were ringed and a good time was had by all, except a newspaper reporter who had come along in leather-soled town shoes and insisted on climbing to the nesting sites (Ashton 1979). One of these birds was recovered in Zimbabwe 15 months later, at a distance of 447 km to the NNE. To celebrate the 60th anniversary in 2008 SAFRING is organising a number of events. One of these, a Bird Ringing Orchestra Weekend (BROW), was organised over the weekend of 16th and 17th February 2008. This involved a request to as many ringers as possible countrywide to hold ringing sessions over the weekend and to invite birders and the general public to observe the proceedings. BLNG ringers arranged to ring at Nylsvlei over that weekend and contributed 144 birds from 45 species with a 2,7% retrap rate. The overall national total for the weekend (including contributions from Namibia and Zambia) was 2,000 birds from 161 species. Ringers in Poland also participated in the BROW weekend through links between Polish researchers currently working on projects in South Africa, and their colleagues in Poland. —

Atlas Laat Loopbaan Herleef

Stephan Terblanche

My voëlkykery het die afgelope jare nou nie eintlik vooruitgeboer nie. My lewenslys het in 2003 die 800 geslaan. Daarmee was die blus en die lus om dit na 'n volgende magiese syfer te verhoog eenvoudig uitgewis. Natuurlik het ek steeds voëls gekyk waar ek gekom het, maar daar was maande wat ek net eenvoudig geen motivering vir die aksie kon vind nie. En toe breek SABAP2 aan.

Die atlassy neem mens na plekke toe waar niemand sou dink om te gaan voëlkyk nie. Maar dit is soms ook nodig om bekende gewestes te gaan herontdek. Die verstommende is dat baie van hierdie plekke vir atlasdoeleindes nog beswaarlik gedek is. Borakalalo bied 'n goeie voorbeeld hiervan, met die gevolg dat die Bosveld Bokmakieries 'n naweek in Februarie in die Pfuduphudu kamp bespreek het. Hierdie

kamp is merkwaardig genoeg een van die voëlloosste plekke in die bosveld, maar ons is elke aand met kore van Skopsuile en Witkoluile (African Scops & Pearlspotted Owl) vergas. Dag en nag het Bontkwartels (Harlequin Quail) se "whit-whit-whit" uit die ruie gras geklink. Hulle was letterlik oral.

Die breëblaarboomveld was Saterdagoggend maar stil en die voëls het moeisam gestyg. Ons het Bosveldpapegaai (Meyer's Parrot) se gille oor 'n afstand hoor opklink, maar daarbenewens was 'n Groottroupan (Purple Roller) basies die hoogtepunt. Na ontbyt skuif ons toe na die doringveld rondom die pieknieplek en die lys styg dramaties. Al gehoor van voëls wat uit die bome val, so baie is

daar? Amper so iets. Dit is swaeltjies en sysies en wewers en vlieëvangers net waar jy kyk. Waaierstertvlieëvangers (Grey Tit-Flycatcher) sing omtrent die hele naweek van iewers af. Die pieknieplek lewer Gewone Spekvreter (Familiar Chat), Kardinaalspeg (Cardinal Woodpecker), Gewone Swartmees (Southern Black Tit) en Gevlekte Lyster (Groundscraper Thrush) op, en 'n Bruinslagarend (Brown Snake-Eagle) met 'n vreemde wit band oor die bors vlieg teen die

rante na die weste toe. Na vier ure staan ons al op feitlik 90 spesies. Die rit deur die wildkykarea dra spesies soos Rooibekeend (Red-billed Teal) aangesien dit het baie gereën het, Witkatlagter (Southern Pied Babbler), Gestreepte en Bontnuwejaarsvoël (Levaillant's and Jacobin Cuckoo) en Pylstertroiebekkie (Shaft-tailed Whydah) op, maar hier moet ons



African Scops-Owl/Skopsuil

nogal kophou om te weet in watter atlasblok (*pentad*) ons onself bevind. Weens al die reën is die Audi-omrit, wat al langs die dam loop, gesluit. Die pad is besonder ongeskik vir Duitse spogmotors, maar besonder geskik vir Visarende (*Audi* in Tswana). Nietemin kry ons elders heelwat voëls langs die water: Bosruiter (Wood Sandpiper), Kempmaan (Ruff), Nimmersat (Yellow-billed Stork), Grootlangtoon (African Jacana) en tonne Kolganse (Egyptian Geese). Ons kan meeste van hierdie voëls ongelukkig nie vir die hooflys opskryf nie – effens frustrerend, maar die atlas is nie net plesier nie!

Laatmiddag spandeer ons langs die Moretelerivier onderkant die damwal. Die voetslaanpad lei steeds onder die gevolge

van Januarie se oorstromings en daar is oral kleiner waterpoele – ideaal vir Hamerkoppe en Groenrugreiers (Green-backed Heron). By die uitgraving op pad na die Moretelekamp, waar die klip vir die damwal vermoedelik vandaan kom, is daar 'n groepie Gestreepte Koesters (Striped Pipit) wat baie goeie reken-skap van hulleself en hulle gewoontes gee.

Ons gaan slaap met 'n lys wat reeds oor 100 spesies strek en wonder hoeveel werk die volgende oggend gedoen sal moet word om nog iets te kan bylas. Ek meen, wat bly immers oor?


Ons het verniet gewonder. Sondagoggend se ervaring langs die Moretelerivier bied genoeg materiaal vir baie kampvuurstories ... stories wat aangehoor word deur jaloerse toehoorders. Ons begin met Swartoogtiptolle (Dark-capped Bulbul), die eerste en enigstes vir die naweek!, toe Bosveldtinkinkies (Rattling Cisticola), toe 'n wielewaal waaroor daar tans nog onduidelikheid heers, maar heel moontlik 'n Afrikaanse Wielewaal (African Golden Oriole) was. Die Watertrapper (Finfoot) wat op die toneel verskyn het was maar een van die redes hoekom die wielewaal toe nie so goed bekyk is nie. Net agter die Watertrapper sit daar toe 'n Gryskopvisvanger (Grey-headed Kingfisher) en 'n rukkie later duik 'n klein visvangertjie herhaaldelik die water in net voor die Watertrapper. Dit is toe 'n baddende Dwergvisvanger (Pygmy Kingfisher) en nie 'n etende Kuifkopvisvanger nie. Later, terwyl ons 'n volgende Watertrapper bekyk, vlieg 'n Blouvisvanger (Half-collared Kingfisher) stroomaf verby, kort daarna gevolg deur 'n paar Swarteende (African Black Duck). Die Blouvisvanger was ons sewende visvanger die oggend. Ons het net Kuifkop-, Mangliet- en Gestreepte Visvanger gemis. Ons sluit die atlassy in die blok af met 'n totaal van 135

spesies – 'n nuwe rekord vir die Noordwes provinsie. Totdat dit verbreek word.

So bied die atlas veral vir ervare voëlkykers die geleentheid om op verskillende vlakke weer lewe in hulle voëlkykery te blaas. Dit gee kans vir sosiale voëlkyk – meer oë en ore bring meer voëls. Dit bied opwinding – wie verwag nou 'n Europese Spreeu (Common Starling) in die middel van Middelburg, Mpumalanga? Dit voorsien motivering – ek kon nie meer die nut vir geld- en tydbesteding insien net om my eie lewens- of ander lyste se onthalwe nie. Dit verbeter mens se indentifikasievaardighede en kennis – wie wil nou 'n potensiële Afrikaanse Wielewaal (Oriole) laat wegkom net omdat jy nie die fyn onderskeide met die wyfie Europese Wielewaal ken nie, of 'n sanger net omdat jy nie die fyn onderskeide in roepe ken nie? En, lesbes, dit gee kans vir bietjie kompetisie – wie het al die meeste spesies in die eerste uur gesien, of in enige blok in die land, of in 'n provinsie?

Dit is lekker om op die internet te gaan kyk na die kaart van Suid-Afrika en te sien hoe die dekking eksponensieel groei. Ek vertrek binnekort vir 'n twee weke vakansie. Hoe meer my persoonlike dekking op 'n Suid-Afrikaanse kaart dit laat lyk of die land masels het, hoe gelukkiger is ek.

Ek kan maar net sê, kom doen mee. As mens eers die paar tegniese probleme uitgesorteer het is die res net een plesier. En as die petrol onbetaalbaar duur word, dan atlas ek eenvoudig op my drumpel.

(Visit the SABAP2 website at <http://sabap2.adu.org.za> to view the results of atlasing to date and to obtain details of joining this tremendous project – Ed.) 

Donations/Donasies

The following members have made donations to the club and are thanked/ Die volgende lede word hartlik bedank vir donasies ontvang: AM Gosling, LA Lotter, T Kruger, A Moore, A Pinkerton

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Wakkerstroom Crisis Appeal: E Swart

Special radio donation: P Calinikos

Kgomo-Kgomo in Flood: February 2008

André Marx



An aerial view of the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain showing the remarkable extent of the flooding, looking west from the main bridge (Johann Grobbelaar)

The aerial photograph by Johann Grobbelaar above shows the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain transformed after the heavy January rains when more than 300 mm fell in some catchment areas. When this event takes place a number of species will move into the area to take advantage of the conditions. During late January into March when the floodplain starting drying up numbers of ducks, herons, storks and other waterbirds were seen as well as African Marsh-Harrier, Lesser Moorhen, Dwarf Bittern, Allen's Gallinule, Greater Painted-snipe, Corncrake,

African Crane, Baillon's Crane, with even the elusive Striped Crane being spotted. Harlequin Quail moved into the surrounding grassland areas in numbers and their distinctive call could be heard constantly. It was also a good year for warblers in the acacia thornveld in the district, with River Warbler being found in a number of locations, as well as Olive-tree, Icterine, Sedge, Marsh and Garden Warblers and Common Whitethroat. Thrush Nightingale was present in a few places with one celebrated individual remaining at one spot for a number of weeks. 🐦



**LESSER
FLAMINGOS**
*Make History at
Kimberley's
Kamfers Dam*
*Mark Anderson**

This is a follow up article to the one in Lanarius 102 (Spring 2006) when the flamingo project at Kamfers Dam was first featured – Ed.

During January 2008 it was announced that Lesser Flamingos had started breeding at Kamfers Dam, the large, permanent wetland located just north of Kimberley, in the Northern Cape Province, South Africa.

The first chicks started hatching at the end of December 2007 and it was estimated that there were in excess of 500 young Lesser Flamingos on the island in mid January 2008, with thousands of eggs still to hatch. It was difficult to determine the exact number of breeding flamingos, as the island is located several hundred metres from the shoreline.

Kamfers Dam is only the fourth breeding locality for the near-threatened Lesser Flamingo in Africa, and the sixth in the world. Lesser Flamingos breed at Etosha Pan (Namibia), Sua Pan (Botswana) and Lake Natron (Tanzania), as well as at Zinzuwadia and Purabcheria salt pans in north-western India. As all of these breeding sites are threatened by various human-induced factors, it is

critically important that Lesser Flamingos now have another breeding site. This is the first time that Lesser Flamingos have successfully bred in South Africa and the first time that they have bred on an artificial island.

Although the most numerous of the world's flamingos, the Lesser Flamingo is classified as "Near Threatened" in the 2006 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, indicating that it is considered likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future.

The Kamfers Dam flamingo breeding island project is a collaborative project of the Department of Tourism, Environment & Conservation, Ekapa Mining, Envirossec, and Kamfers Dam's landowners, Herbert and Brenda Booth. The construction of the flamingo island was proposed by Mark Anderson, the Department of Tourism, Environment & Conservation's ornithologist, and he has been responsible for managing this project.

Ekapa Mining, a majority black-owned junior mining company, funded and constructed the Kamfers Dam flamingo island, the third of its type in the world. Soon after construction was completed in September 2006, the flamingos started using the island

**Specialist Nature Conservation Scientist (Ornithology), Department of Tourism, Environment & Conservation, Northern Cape Province, South Africa*

and even constructed nests and laid a few eggs a few months later. The island which is 250 m x 25 m in size and S-shaped was built with 26 000 tons of calcrete, rocks and clay. A submersed pump, powered by three solar panels, provides water for four ponds on the island, and thus the wet clay that the flamingos use to construct their nest turrets.

This important conservation initiative has already received acclaim, as Ekapa Mining has been the recipient of a prestigious Nedbank Capital Green Mining Award as well as a Wildlife & Environment Society scroll. Dr Brooks Childress, Chairman of the IUCN-SSC/Wetlands International Flamingo Specialist Group, described the construction and success of this new flamingo breeding island as the most significant flamingo conservation event internationally in many years.

Kamfers Dam supports the most important permanent population of Lesser Flamingos in southern Africa, usually numbering in excess of 25 000 individuals, but during recent months in excess of 50 000 birds. The dam is a Natural Heritage Site and an Important Bird Area.

Both Lesser and Greater Flamingos have previously attempted to breed at Kamfers Dam, constructing nests and even laying a few eggs. Disturbance from people and dogs was probably responsible for these breeding events not being successful. Lesser Flamin-

gos are very sensitive while breeding and therefore people will not be allowed access to the area close to the island.

The Lesser Flamingo does not breed annually at the five other sites in Africa and India, mainly because they are only irregularly inundated during periods of good rainfall. They only breed infrequently at some sites, such as at Etosha Pan in Namibia. Conservationists are concerned that the most important breeding site, Lake Natron in northern Tanzania, will be severely impacted by the proposed mining developments on the shores of this ecologically important lake. The Kamfers Dam breeding event is therefore very significant as it is now another site at which the Lesser Flamingo breeds. It will thus contribute to the conservation of this threatened species, especially if they breed annually at this permanent wetland.

Update

On 18 March 2008 during a fly over of the flamingo island a number of high resolution images were taken. These images were used to count the number of chicks and incubating adults. The final tally was 6 310 chicks and 1 932 incubating adults and there is therefore a potential total of 8 242 chicks. This is probably an underestimate as some chicks were probably not visible behind other chicks and adults. This is the first time in recorded history that Lesser Flamingos have bred in South Africa! 🐦



Mark Anderson

A group of adult Lesser Flamingos with some small chicks visible in the foreground



Mark Anderson

Lesser Flamingo chick

BLNG Conservation /Bewaring

Elba Swart

Over the past year there have been a number of articles in *Laniarius* about the monitoring of Important Bird Areas (IBAs), bird atlasing (SABAP2) and bird ringing. These three disciplines fulfil their own individual purpose, but they also cumulatively contribute towards one very important aspect – **Conservation**, especially in terms of data acquisition on birds and their habitats in general.

BLNG gaan nou weer met hernude ywer aan die belangrike saak aandag gee en doen 'n beroep op elke lid om op die een of ander manier hierby betrokke te raak. Die hoof-fokusareas is:

- Weerstand teen Wakkerstroom en Chrissiesmeer mynbouprojings.
- IBA monitoring
 - Bestaande IBA: Magaliesberg Area
 - Voorgestelde IBA's: Rietvlei NR en Elandsvlei Bewaria
- Die invloed van ontwikkeling op die voëllewe binne ons stadsgebied.

The Wakkerstroom and Chrissiesmeer crises will be attended to by BLSA from a legal standpoint. Our contribution towards these projects will mainly be of a supporting nature – especially financially. In this regard I wish to mention that our club has already donated over R6 000 to BLSA in response to the Wakkerstroom Crisis Appeal (see *article on p. 15 – Ed.*). Thanks to each individual who has already donated or made a pledge. Bird-Life SA is embarking on what might turn out to be a lengthy and costly litigation process, so please consider supporting this appeal.

Baie van ons wonder dan ook waarom al ons gunsteling voëlkykplekke nie outomaties as IBA's gereken word nie. Wat maak 'n gebied geskik vir die gesogte IBA status? 'n IBA is 'n gebied waar daar een of meer van ons rooidata voëlspesies broei. M.a.w.

een van die voëlspesies wat as bedreig of kwesbaar gereken word vind binne hierdie gebied daardie spesiale habitat en omstandighede wat dit vir hulle aanvaarbaar maak om in te broei. Ter wille van daardie spesie se oorlewing moet hierdie habitate dan met hand en tand beskerm word... dis dan ook die rede vir die 'ingryping van BLSA se kant teen die mynbedywighede in Wakkerstroom en Chrissiesmeer omgewing.

Vir 'n feitelike argument vir die bewaring van hierdie gebiede, moet gereelde monitoring gedoen word t.o.v. die omgewingstoestande (bv. plantegroei, water, grond, lug, die invloed van menslike bedrywighede, soos stedelike ontwikkeling en kommersiële landbou-ontwikkeling, verkeer – lug en pad asook besoedeling – lug, water en grond). Ons bydrae in die projek is dan ook gemik op die versameling van hierdie data en een van die IBA's waarvoor BLNG verantwoordelik is, is die Magaliesberggebied met spesifieke fokus op die drie kolonies Kransasvoëls (Cape Vulture) wat in die Magaliesbergreeks broei. Die eerste IBA verslag wat gedurende 2007 by BLSA ingedien is, het veral op die aasvoëlkolonie by Skeerpoort gekonsentreer omdat daardie omgewing so geweldig deur ontwikkeling bedreig word. Ons dank dan ook aan Prof. Gerhard Verdoorn wat 'n waardevolle bydrae in die verband gelewer het.

Continuous monitoring will be undertaken at this IBA and the reports are to be submitted to BLSA with particular emphasis on the state of the environment where the other two vulture colonies breed. To kick off this conservation awareness we had Kerri Wolter as speaker at our first evening meeting of the year. Kerri is the manager of the Magaliesberg Vulture Programme and she also has a Vulture Rehabilitation Centre (VRC) on her farm. She gave us a very informative presentation on the Cape Vulture

and the threats the species endures and the role that secondary poisoning plays in the death of sometimes hundreds of birds at a time. In collaboration with Gauteng Nature Conservation they regularly undertake bird counts and ringing expeditions. She has accumulated data on all three vulture colonies over many years which she is willing to share with us. A visit to the VRC took place on 12 April 2008 when some club members were able to learn first hand about some of the threats vultures face. It was also possible to visit the Eskom enclosure where a few survivors of environmental and poisoning disasters live. Future visits to the centre will include a vulture count, ringing and a visit to one of the vulture restaurants.

The poging om die IBA status van Rietvlei en Elandsvlei op te gradeer gaan effens anders werk. Die twee Rooidata-spesies wat daartoe kan bydra dat hierdie gebiede uiteindelik die IBA status kry wat hulle verdien, is die Grasuil (Grass Owl) en Witpenskorhaan (White-bellied Korhaan). Aangesien daar nie voltydse werkgroepe bestaan wat die twee areas en hul Rooi-data-spesies moniteer nie, wil ek graag 'n beroep doen op enige persoon wat oor historiese en/of huidige data beskik, om dit asseblief aan ons beskikbaar te stel. Dan soek ons ook vrywilligers om deel te word van 'n werkgroep wat hierdie twee areas oor die volgende maande gaan moniteer. Ons het reeds die piek van die Grasuil se broeityd binnegegaan en dataversameling is nou kritiek.

Determining the influence of development on the bird life in our city is our long-term goal. We want to determine which species have declined or have disappeared and which species have increased their range during the years of development that the greater Pretoria area has undergone. Ringing data, atlasing data and bird checklists of the Groenkloof NR, Wonderboom NR and the Botanical Gardens will need to be compiled. If you have any data available or want to assist in this project please refer to the

undermentioned contact details!

Ons gaan as deel van hierdie projek ook die Irene Farm Village oor die volgende paar jaar moniteer. Danksy die vinnige optrede van Gerrie Jansen van Rensburg, die koördineerder van die ringersgroep, het ons die voëllys bekom wat vir die omgewingsimpakstudie saamgestel is nog voordat met enige ontwikkeling begin is. Ons het ook toestemming om daar te mag data versamel, mits dit gekoördineerd en in klubverband geskied. Ons is dus in 'n baie gunstige posisie om oorgenoeg data te kan versamel tydens al die fases van hierdie ontwikkeling. Alhoewel die vestiging- en stabiliseringsfases van die woongebied nog 'n paar jaar in die toekoms lê, is hierdie 'n geleentheid wat ons nie mag misloop nie.

So, everyone is encouraged to join in one or more of these very interesting conservation projects!!!! Please confirm your interest by sending an e-mail to elbas@tshawane.gov.za or SMS your name, telephone number and the conservation project(s) you have an interest in to 0827742253.



Cape Vulture/Kransaasvoël

Dup du Plessis

Gauteng Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC): Summer and Winter 2007

*Craig Whittington-Jones
Gauteng Directorate of Nature Conservation*

The Coordinated Waterbird Count, popularly known as CWAC, was initiated by the Animal (formerly Avian) Demography Unit (ADU) in 1991. The primary objectives of the project are to monitor waterbird populations at a national scale and to document threats to these populations and the wetlands on which they are dependent. There are over 40 registered CWAC sites in Gauteng (some comprise a single large waterbody, or parts thereof, while others include clusters of many small ones) and the number rises each year despite the hotly contested re-alignment of the western boundary of Gauteng which resulted in the "migration" of four important CWAC sites to the North West province i.e. Abe Bailey Nature Reserve (three sites) and De Pan.

CWAC at these sites will continue to be coordinated through Gauteng Nature Conservation until a suitable replacement is found/trained within the North West Province. Two new CWAC sites i.e. Teal Dam in the Devon area and Premier Dam near Bronkhorst-spruit were added to the Gauteng network in 2007. The scenically beautiful Premier Dam site, which includes navigable stretches of the Wilge and Bronkhorstspruit Rivers, is a particularly exciting addition as the potential exists for spotting the elusive African Finfoot and the winter 2007 count produced close encounters with two families of otters.

In total 28 112 birds of 81 species were recorded at Gauteng CWAC sites in summer 2007 and 38 248 of 71 species were recorded in winter 2007. This represents an increase of approximately 16% over winter 2006. Several important wetlands such as the Elandsvlei Pans, Glen Austin Pan and De Pan were completely dry during the winter count and water-

birds appear to have concentrated at more permanent wetlands, many of which showed impressive increases in waterbird numbers during winter 2007, a trend that reversed following the good summer rains in 2008. This emphasizes the value of artificial wetlands to waterbirds as well as the importance of conserving the entire network of wetlands within a region rather than just a few prominent sites.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the number of birds of each species counted for each CWAC site within the northern Gauteng region in summer and winter 2007.

While the importance of a wetland should not be gauged merely in terms of size, permanence, overall bird numbers or species diversity, it is nevertheless encouraging to note that several Gauteng sites supported regionally significant numbers (i.e. greater than 1% of the estimated regional population) of certain species despite the ever increasing human population pressures. White-breasted Cormorant numbers at Rietvlei and Marais Dams (175) and Roodeplaat Dam (495) exceeded the 1% regional threshold (i.e. 120) and Maccoa Duck numbers (118) exceeded the 1% regional threshold (i.e. 100) at Leeukuil Dam Nature Reserve (Vereeniging). Grey-headed Gull numbers exceeded 0.5% of the regional population (i.e. 1 500) at Bon Accord Dam and three sites on the East Rand i.e. Bonaero Park Pan, Lakefield Pan and Stewards Pan, with the last site also supporting greater than 0.5% of the regional population (i.e. 1 650) of African Sacred Ibis. Numbers of Whiskered Terns exceeded 0.5% of the regional population (i.e. 50) within the Blesbokspruit Ramsar Site and Black-necked Grebe numbers at Leeukuil Dam Nature Reserve exceeded 0.5% of the regional

TABLE 1: Summary of CWAC data for Northern Gauteng – summer and winter 2007.

7 = Bon Accord Dam; 9 = Bronkhorstspuit Dam; 17 = Glen Austin Pan; 23 = Leeuwfontein Collaborative Nature Reserve; 26 = Premier Dam; 29 = Rietvlei Dam Nature Reserve; 32 = Roodeplaat Dam Nature Reserve; 33 = Rooiwal Sewage Works (S = summer; W = winter).

CWAC SITE	7		9		17		23		26		29		32		33	
SPECIES	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W
Great Crested Grebe		4		1								4				
Black-necked Grebe																
Little Grebe (Dabchick)		27	2	5							32	18	414		58	100
White-breasted Cormorant	14		5	10							33	175	9	495	14	5
Reed Cormorant	15	23	21	31	1				5	19	52	72	13	412	21	2
African Darter	50	24	8	7					8	29	85	89	16	138	3	10
Grey Heron	1		2	3					1	3		1	4	29	1	4
Black-headed Heron	2	1		1	2					3					1	2
Goliath Heron			2												2	
Purple Heron			4						3	6		5	13	15		
Great (White) Egret		2		3										4		
Little Egret	1		1						5		6		5	5	9	
Yellow-billed Egret																
Black Heron (Egret)			1						2		2		7			
Cattle Egret			7						1	1	1	41	18	2	19	140
Squacco Heron									13	2	1	1	6		18	
Green-backed Heron												1		1		2
Black-crowned Night-Heron									3			1				
Little Bittern									2		1	7				
Hamerkop			1				4				1	2				1
Black Stork															3	
Yellow-billed Stork																
African Sacred Ibis	55	363			25							13	52	82	10	57
Glossy Ibis					3								45			14
Hadedda Ibis									7	2	5	1	12	11	1	35
African Spoonbill					3									3		
Greater Flamingo																
Lesser Flamingo																
White-faced Duck		200			7		5						4	32	125	105
Fulvous Duck															72	6
White-backed Duck												1				4
Egyptian Goose	33	35	17	255	9		4	2	1	15	68	246	11	117	6	36
South African Shelduck											1					
Yellow-billed Duck	1	20	121	11	4		1		7	56	66	83	17	431	16	45
African Black Duck				1						2		1	1	2		
Cape Teal				4										9		
Hottentot Teal										9						2
Red-billed Teal			4	13	23							8		10	43	3
Cape Shoveler		21		2	1						3			14		
Southern Pochard			3							1	5	1		6	97	115
Comb (Knob-billed) Duck																99
Spur-winged Goose	2		2	1						4			1			1
Maccoa Duck									2				2			
African Fish-Eagle																
African Marsh-Harrier																
Osprey																
African Rail																
Black Crake	1			3					21	33	3	13	6			
Spotted Crake																
Baillon's Crake																
Red-chested Flufftail																
African Purple Swamphen (Gallinule)		1		1					6	8	1	10				
Common Moorhen		21	1	3					6	96	15	99	5		4	2
Lesser Moorhen											1					
Red-knobbed Coot	24	367	210	258	3				3	141	466	587	18	962	101	128
African Jacana		23								14			17	6	4	10
Greater Painted-snipe																
Common Ringed Plover				1												
Kittlitz's Plover				1	39										7	
Three-banded Plover				5	8						2		14	4	48	3
Blacksmith Lapwing (Plover)	15	9	35	28	14		6	2	13	9	37	9	33	42	66	105
Wattled Lapwing (Plover)					3					2			5	1		18
Common Sandpiper				3								1			7	
Wood Sandpiper				2	4									1	176	
Marsh Sandpiper															2	
Common Greenshank															1	
Curlew Sandpiper																
Little Stint				4												450
Ruff				38		1										740

CWAC SITE	7		9		17		23		26		29		32		33		
SPECIES	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	S	W	
African (Ethiopian) Snipe			2	10									1				
Pied Avocet				2	4										2		
Black-winged Stilt					9										15	73	59
Black-winged Pratincole																	
Grey-headed Gull	12	1041	80	21	18					5			60	1	115	398	122
Caspian Tern																	
Whiskered Tern			9						2					1			
White-winged Tern	23		1									1		6		11	
African Grass-Owl																	
Marsh Owl																	
Pied Kingfisher	2	2	1	1					9	10	1	3	2	9			
Giant Kingfisher	1									2		2	1	3	1		
Half-collared Kingfisher										2							
Malachite Kingfisher									12	1							
African Pied Wagtail											2					1	
Cape Wagtail		1	4	24						14			8	6	54	8	9
Yellow Wagtail																16	
Mallard																4	
Domestic Goose														3			
Hybrid Duck																	
Domestic Duck															2		1
Mallard hybrids																	
Unidentified terns																	
Unidentified ducks				24													
Unidentified waders													1				
Other exotic ducks															3		
TOTAL COUNT	252	2185	596	771	135	0	20	4	162	492	904	2000	369	3080	2668	1326	


population (i.e. 75). Great-crested Grebe numbers exceeded 0.5% of the regional population (i.e. 50) at Leeupan (East Rand) where Greater Flamingoes also exceeded the 0.5% of the regional population (i.e. 380).

An accurate estimate of waterbird numbers for Gauteng will require good coverage of all categories and sizes of waterbodies and as such there is still considerable potential to expand CWAC in Gauteng. Additional volunteers will always be welcome and may choose either to assist with counts at an existing CWAC site or identify new sites that they wish to register. Particular emphasis should be placed on dams smaller than 100 ha, pans smaller than 1 ha, sewerage works and rivers. Existing volunteers who wish to experience CWAC at other registered sites are welcome to contact the relevant site coordinator.

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Sincerest apologies are extended to any volunteers whose names may have been erroneously omitted from the acknowledgement list. Your contribution is no less valuable than that of those mentioned above. 

Voëlkyk Elders – Mpumalanga

Bets Oosthuizen

Jaarliks gaan ek en Theo die laaste naweek van November na ons kinders in Nelspruit, natuurlik om deel te neem aan die Groot Voëlkyk! Vanjaar is twee vaste lede van ons span, die Lysterkykers, elders besig en ons het twee nuwe lede. Die roete is, soos gewoonlik, om Nelspruit en omgewing, en verder oos tot in die suide van die Krugerwildtuin. Vrydagaand sluit die twee nuwes, dogter Elbie, 'n beginner-voëlkyker, en 'n kollega Frikkie, 'n nie-so-nuwe voëlkyker, by ons aan. Frikkie het nog nooit aan "BBD" deelgeneem nie, en ken dele van die roete nie so goed nie.

Die reën, wat al van Donderdagmiddag af val, val al harder en neem eers 03:30 Saterdagoggend af. Van 04:00 af is ons wakker en lyk dit asof ons darem kan probeer iets doen. Die huis op 'n koppie buite Nelspruit is 'n lekker beginpunt en ons ry eers 06:30 daar weg met 'n lys van 38.

Die spankaptein, dogter Susan, het met baie moeite daarin geslaag om 'n gids te kry sodat ons die reservaat by Kaapse Hoop kan binnegaan. Sommer by die hek sit die **Huil-tinkintkie** (Wailing Cisticola) op 'n grashalm. In die kloof word ons verwelkom deur die liedjie van die **Rooibektiptol** (Bush Blackcap) en vind hom ook. Ongelukkig sien net Elbie die **Knysnaloeie** (Knysna Turaco) en dit bly die spreekwoordelike groot vis wat wegkom. **Geelbekbosduif** (African Olive-Pigeon), **Kaapse Kliplyster** (Cape Rock-Thrush), **Ruigtesanger** (Barratt's Warbler) en **Kaapse Bosbontrokkie** (Cape Batis) word onder andere hier bygevoeg. Weer uit die kloof uit, voeg ons **Bosveldkarteltjie** (Kurrichane Buttonquail), **Rooivlerkpatrys** (Red-winged Francolin), en **Blouswael** (Blue Swallow) by.

Nou vinnig terug na die Laeveld Botaniese Tuin waar ons net binne die hek ons ontbytpekieken geniet terwyl ons ore hard werk vir 5 plusse in die kort tydjie. In Nelspruit besoek ons vinnig twee plekke waar die

Bonrugwewers (Village Weaver) en **Kaapse Wewers** (Cape Weaver) broei.

Nou Wildtuin toe waar Theo en skoonseun met die drie tienerkinders seker reeds in Pretoriuskop by ons slaapplek vir die nag wag. Op 'n paadjie deur 'n reservaat langs die N4 ry ons lekker stadig en voeg 12 by ons lys.

Net duskant die Malanehek is daar 'n parkeerplek waar ons meermale ekstra voëls gesien het. Vandag is die groot verrassing die **Rooioogtortelduif** (African Mourning Dove) wat ek nog nie so ver suid gesien het nie. Ek hoor hom en stuur die jonges om seker te gaan maak. Hulle bevestig dit. **Kleinseuningwyser** (Lesser Honeyguide) sit digby ons in 'n boom voor ons weer ry.

Malanebrug stel nooit teleur nie met reiers, visvangers, swaels, ens. Die wolke word nou dreigend en ons weet dat ons nie veel langer genoeg lig gaan hê nie. Die trouppante, fisante, neushoringvoëls, ens.



Duip du Piessis

Lesser Grey Shrike/Gryslaksman

kruip egter nog nie weg nie. By Renosterpan geniet ons die renoster saam met 'n pragtige **Gryslaksmán** (Lesser Grey Shrike) en **Rooborsswaels** (Red-breasted Swallow) wat reeds opgewonde rondvlieg asof daar 'n storm op hande is.

Motreën val reeds en ons is maar te bly vir klein verrassings soos die **Dubbelband-sandpatryse** (Double-banded Sandgrouse) en **Kleinswartvlerkkiewiete** (Senegal Lapwing). By Afsaal drink ons 'n vinnige koppie tee terwyl ons die **Skopsuil** (African Scops-Owl) laag af in 'n boom bewonder. Hier broei die **Swartkeel-** en **Kleingeelvinke** (Southern en Lesser Masked-Weaver) aan die westekant en noordekant van die geboue. Toe ons reeds weer motor toe stap, ontdek Frikkie 'n koe-koek diep in 'n lowerryke klein boompie. Na 'n lang redenase is almal oortuig dat dit 'n jong **Gevlekte Koekoek** (Great Spotted Cuckoo) is. Dalk is die **Roovlerkspreus** in die gewel van die gebou sy peetouers. Dit is reeds so donker dat mens skaars kan sien, alhoewel dit nog nie 16:00 is nie. Nou is ons tyd te min om nog Vervoerdam toe te ry en ons moet kortpad kies met Voortrekkerpad. Die voëls skuil meesal reeds vir die nag en ons moet net mooi kyk, maar sien darem onder andere **Gestreepte Nuwejaarsvoël** (Levaillant's Cuckoo), **Boskorhaan** (Red-crested Korhaan), **Geelvlakmossie** (Yellow-throated Petronia) en veral 'n hele paar **Afrikaanse Vleivalke** (African Marsh-Harrier). Nie snaaks nie, want op hierdie gewoonlik redelik droë pad is daar dikwels vleiagtige gebiede te sien. Die water om ons word al hoe meer.

Ons ry 18:10 by die kamp in en toe ons die hutte vind, reën dit reeds so hard dat ons Voëlkykdag beslis verby is. Oor reën mag ons nie kla nie en is tevrede met 161 voëls op ons lys. Meermale was ons totaal al meer, maar meermale ook minder. Soos altyd was dit egter 'n heerlike dag in die geselskap van vriende met dieselfde belangstelling en sal ons nog baie jare van die hoogtepunte onthou en lekker lag oor 'n paar snaaksighede.

Natuurlik is daar Sondagoggend wonderlike goed te sien en een en almal geniet dit ook, soos bv. die **Afrikaanse Koekoek** (African Cuckoo) wat naby die pad sit en roep sodat mens sy keel sien beweeg met elke "koe-koek" en die **Kleinbyvreters** (Little Bee-eater) wat broei in die wal van 'n paduitgraving.

'n Goeie span bring altyd agterna lekker herinneringe van 'n dag goed bestee, van lekker saamstry en saambesluit en met genoegdoening weet dat jy nou wéét wat jy gesien het. Volgens die twee nuwe lede, was die hoogtepunte die **Gevlekte Koekoek** by Afsaal, die **Kleinswartvlerkkiewiete** daar naby, die **Roobektiptol** by Kaapse Hoop en die **Afrikaanse Koekoek** (African Cuckoo) en 'n **Langbeenkorhaan** (Black-bellied Bustard) Sondagoggend.

Vir my was dit belangrik om die teenstelling te sien van **Oranjekeel-** en **Geelkeelkal-koentjie**, **Roovlerk-** en **Bospatrys**, **Huil-** en **Bosveldtinkinkie**, **Drakensberg-** en **Bruinsylangstertjie**, **Kaapse-** en **Kortstert-flap**, ens. – die eerstes by Kaapse Hoop, die ander in die Laeveld. 

Laws concerning rare birds

- #1 Rare birds reported on Wednesday are usually gone by Saturday.
- #2 The further you travel to see a particular bird, the less likely you are to find it.
- #3 If you don't see a bird within a certain amount of tries, it becomes insulted and deliberately avoids you from then on.
- #4 A bird will be seen by others only after you, as the sacrificial lamb, leave. Sometimes you can trick the bird into coming out by loudly announcing that you are leaving and starting to move in that direction.
- #5 A bird will be seen by others only after you have snuck into the bush to take care of biological responsibilities.
- #6 Good birds appear when you have a bagel with cream cheese in your hand.

Rarities and Unusual Sightings Report

Compiled by André Marx

With the onset of excellent rains in January conditions in the bushveld areas in the north of our region resulted in a number of interesting records that included a number of “rain migrants”. In addition, this was a good year for warblers with numbers of migrant warblers and rarities being encountered. Several interesting reports of garden birds were received as well.

National Rarities / Nasionale Rareiteite

Slaty Egret. Rooikeelreier: one bird was at Barberspan, in North West Province, 27 Feb 08 (JA).

European Honey-Buzzard. Wespedief: a single bird was west of Pretoria Gardens, 15 Jan 08 (RGy); a dark phase bird was at Ezemvelo NR, north-east of Bronkhorstspuit, 02 Feb 08 (EM); one bird was photographed in Wierda Park, Centurion, 05 Feb 08 (EM); two different birds showing varying plumage were at Smuts House, Centurion, 07 Feb 08 (EM); one bird was in Wierda Park, Centurion, 09 Feb 08 (PW); another sighting was of one bird at Rooiwal, 10 Feb 08 (PW). *There have been a number of records of this species this summer once again, reaffirming the view that this species is becoming increasingly common.*

Western Marsh-Harrier. Europese Vleivalk: this species was observed during the Marievale CWAC count, 13 Jan 08 (EE, DN).

Striped Crake. Gestreepte Riethaan: a female with two chicks was seen crossing the road near Kgomo-Kgomo, 02 Mar 08 (EM).

Green Sandpiper. Witgatruiter: one bird was observed at “crake road” near Kgomo-Kgomo, 13 Jan 08 (LH); with a pair of birds at the same locality a day

later, 14 Jan 08 (AT). *There were numerous reports of this species this summer in the Zaagkuil drift area, possibly of the same birds that remained in the area for a few weeks.*

Pectoral Sandpiper. Geelpootstrandloper: one bird was located at Rooikoppies Dam where it remained for a few weeks; several people managed to see the bird, 16 Feb 08 (BLNG).

Thrush Nightingale. Lysternagtegaal: one bird was located at the 12 km mark on the Zaagkuil drift road where it remained for a number of weeks, during which time it was seen by several birders, 01 Feb 08 (BLNG).

River Warbler. Sprinkaansanger: a bird was singing near Vaalkop Dam NR, 12 Feb 08 (F&RP); at least five birds were seen and heard on the Zaagkuil drift road, 15 Mar 08 (BLNG, EM).

Regional Rarities / Streeksrareiteite

Southern Bald Ibis. Kalkoenibis: two birds were observed about 9 km before Ezemvelo NR, 01 Feb 08 (EM); this species was found again at Luiperdskloof, north-east of Pretoria, 09 Feb 08 (EM).

Tawny Eagle. Roofarend: one bird was found east of Borakalalo NR, 26 Jan 08 (BLNG).

Grey Crowned Crane. Mahem: one bird was in the Devon area, 22 Mar 08 (EM).

Cape Eagle-Owl. Kaapse Ooruil: the call of this species was heard on two evenings at Suikerbosrand and a bird believed to be this species was seen overhead, 09 Feb 08 (DN and others). *There are no recent records of this species in Gauteng, however it does occur in the vicinity of Suikerbosrand and it is likely to be present there.*

Square-tailed Nightjar. Laeveldnaguil: during a night drive at Rietvlei NR one bird was photographed and confirmed as being this species, 18 Jan 08 (RGy).

Pennant-winged Nightjar. Wimpelvierknaguil: one



Danie de Villiers

Square-tailed Nightjar/Laeveldnaguil at Rietvlei NR

bird was flushed a few times at Ezemvelo NR when the distinctive features of this species were noted, 02 Feb 08 (EM).

Other Interesting Observations / Ander Interessante Waarnemings

Black-necked Grebe. Swartnekdoobertjie: 15 birds with chicks were counted during the CWAC count at Groenfontein Pan, near Bronkhorstspuit Dam, 23 Feb 08 (AM,RCo,PLe).

Dwarf Bittern. Dwergrietreier: good views of one bird were had during the club outing to Buffelsdrift, near Rust De Winter Dam, 20 Jan 08 (BLNG); another bird was spotted during a club outing to the Kgomo-Kgomo area a week later, 26 Jan 08 (BLNG); several birds, including a juvenile, were at a wetland near Mkhombo Dam, about 100 km north-east of Pretoria, 22 Feb 08 (AM,PLe).

Maccoa Duck. Bloubekeend: one bird was at Northern Farm, south-west of Pretoria, 11 Jan 08 (H&RB).

Booted Eagle. Dwergarend: a pale phase bird was seen during the club outing to Longside Farm, west of Pretoria, 03 Feb 08 (BLNG).

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle. Kleinjagarend: one bird was seen soaring over Wierda Park, Sandton, 22 Feb 08 (DSw).

Long-crested Eagle. Langkuifarend: one bird was a surprise find alongside the N4 just outside Rustenburg, 27 Mar 08 (JJ); a single bird was observed just outside Brits, 03 Apr 08 (JJ).

Black Sparrowhawk. Swartsperwer: one bird was seen flying over Moreleta Park, 13 Jan 08 (F&RP).

Montagu's Harrier. Blouvlivalk: a single bird was at Suikerbosrand NR, 08 Jan 08 (EM); a first year male was seen quartering the grasslands at Kgomo-Kgomo, 09 Mar 08 (AM,DRJJ,JB).

Pallid Harrier. Witborsvlivalk: one bird was observed alongside the Zaagkuildrift road, 04 Apr 08 (P&GW,BE&AE).

Osprey. Visvalk: at least two different birds were at Vaalkop Dam NR, 14 Feb 08 (F&RP).

Red-footed Falcon. Westelike Rooipootvalk: a female bird was observed amongst a group of Amur Falcons in the Rietvlei area, 12 Jan 08 (RGY); with another sighting of a female bird at this locality, 28 Jan 08 (BG); one bird was observed at Middelburg, 28 Jan 08 (ST).



European Honey-Buzzard/Wespedief in Wierda Park, Centurion

Harlequin Quail. Bontkwartel: during a club outing this species was seen feeding on the Zaagkuildrift road when the birds could be watched through a spotting scope, 09 Mar 08 (BLNG).

Blue Crane. Bloukraanvoël: 22 birds were recorded in the Devon area, 22 Mar 08 (EM).

Corn Crane. Kwartelkoning: one bird was observed at the start of the Zaagkuildrift road, 12 Jan 08 (KR); this species was observed on the Zaagkuildrift road after a particularly wet spell, 19 Jan 08 (CK,DSw).

Blue Korhaan. Bloukorhaan: 6 birds were in the Devon area, 22 Mar 08 (EM).

Terek Sandpiper. Terekrutter: one bird was at Barberspan, an unusual record for an inland locality, 27 Feb 08 (JA).

Bronze-winged Courser. Bronsvlerkdrawwertjie: a single bird was in the Rietvlei area south of Pretoria, 12 Jan 08 (RGY); one bird was in Faerie Glen NR in Pretoria, 13 Jan 08 (ST); four birds were observed during a night drive at Rietvlei NR, 18 Jan 08 (RGY); one bird was reported as far west as Schoemansdrift, near Potchefstroom, 26 Jan 08 (AH); one bird was found on a plot of land in the middle of suburbia in the Fourways area, 06 Feb 08 (SO); one bird was heard at night in Moreleta Park, 08 Feb 08 (FP); a single bird was present in the Rayton area for a month, 28 Mar 08 (JvW). *It would appear that there was an influx of birds into our region this summer.*

Black-winged Pratincole. Swartvlerksprinkaan-

voël: Hundreds of birds were present on fields at Marievale, 15 Dec 07 (DD); a flock of about 500 birds was at Kgomo-Kgomo, 26 Jan 08 (BLNG); a huge flock of birds (possibly as many as 750-1 000 birds) was at Kgomo-Kgomo, 08 Mar 08 (BLNG).

Meyer's Parrot. Bosveldpapegaaï: two birds were in a Faerie Glen garden, 02 Mar 08 (EH).

Woodland Kingfisher. Bosveldvisvanger: one bird was a surprise visitor to a garden in North Riding, Randburg, 02 Mar 08 (GE).

Grey-headed Kingfisher. Gryskopvisvanger: one bird was near the start of the Zaagkuildrift road, near Pienaarsrivier, 13 Jan 08 (LH); one bird was seen near Wolphuiskraal, north of Pretoria, 08 Mar 08 (AM,JB); one bird was at Mkholwane Lodge, Mdala NR, north-east of Pretoria, 26 Mar 08 (DSO,PLe,RCO).

Common Scimitarbill. Swartbekkakelaar: a sighting of this species in Faerie Glen NR in Pretoria is considered unusual, 13 Jan 08 (ST).

Dusky Lark. Donkerlewerik: one bird was found in the Zwartkoppies area, east of Pretoria, 16 Dec 07 (RGy); one bird was about 5 km east of Hammanskraal, 15 Jan 08 (ER); one bird was at Tswaing, north of Pretoria, 26 Jan 08 (ST); one bird was near the entrance to Ditholo NR, 09 Feb 08 (F&RP); with another at Kwalata, north of Pretoria, 10 Feb 08 (F&RP); one bird was recorded near Beestekraal, 01 Mar 08 (DP,JJ). *This species was particularly numerous this summer.*

Common Starling. Europese Spreeu: an unexpected record was of one bird at Middelburg, 28 Jan 08 (ST). *This is not a species known in the cagebird trade and this could have been a genuine "visitor" to the region.*

Fan-tailed Widowbird. Kortstertflap: several birds were present at Elandsvlei, near Bapsfontein, an unusual occurrence at this locality, 07 Feb 08 (EM).

Bronze Mannikin. Gewone Fret: a record of this species at Marievale is considered unusual, 19 Jan 08 (DD).

Yellow Canary. Geelkanarie: one individual was at Vaalkop NR, somewhat out of range, 14 Feb 08 (F&RP).

Observers / Waarnemers:

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André Marx (AM)
BirdLife Northern Gauteng members (BLNG)
Bo Espensen & Annemarie Ennemark (BE&AE)

Bryan Groom (BG) Clive Kaplan (CK)
Dave Deighton (DD) Dave Sole (DSO)
Donald Peake (DP) Doug Newman (DN)
Déwald Swanepoel (DSw) Eric Ehlers (EE)
Eric Hough (EH) Ernst Retief (ER)
Etienne Marais (EM) Faansie & Ronel Pea-
Grant Esterhuyse (GE) cock (F&RP)
Helen & Ray Biram (H&RB) Jan van Wyk (JvW)
Jannie Jansen (JJ) Joel Avni (JA)
John Bannon (JB) Kevin Ravno (KR)
Louis Heyns (LH) Pauline Leinberger (PLe)
Peter & Gina Wilgenbus (P&GW)
Peter Wilgenbus (PW) Rihann Geyster (RGy)
Rynetta Coetzee (RCO) Stephan Terblanche (ST)
Sue Oertli (SO)

This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made within a 100 km radius of Pretoria, however observations made further afield are also welcome. While the majority of reports are included it is sometimes necessary to exclude some depending on space availability and whether the subject matter has already been well reported. Occasionally records are sourced from the Internet. All are encouraged to complete rarities documentation for regional and national rarities. Members are invited to submit details of sightings to Pauline Leinberger at 012 807-6898, e-mail pauline.l@absamail.co.za or to André Marx at 083 411 7674, e-mail turaco@telkomsa.net 🐦



Corn Crane/Kwartelkoning on the Zaagkuildrift road

Clive Kaplan

The Melodious Lark north and east of Pretoria

Roger Fieldwick

Introduction

The Melodious Lark *Mirafra cheniana* is a resident southern African endemic with a restricted and disjointed distribution. It is classified as Near Threatened. It is largely sedentary but may move into or out of areas in response to environmental factors.

The northern limit of its range in South African extends into our area (defined as within 100 km radius of Pretoria). It is not a conspicuous bird and, except when singing, is easily overlooked.

Pat Tattersall and I have often recorded the Melodious Lark during the past three years. In this article I describe its occurrence north and east of Pretoria and offer some pointers towards identifying and locating it.

South African distribution

Most observations of this lark in the first Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP1), recorded between 1987 and 1992, were made in the high-lying grasslands (between 550 and 1 750 m) between latitudes 26° (Midrand) and 31° (Colesberg) and longitudes 25° (Kimberley) and 30° (Ermelo). There were a few scattered records north of latitude 26° east and west of Pretoria and, apart from an isolated population in central Zimbabwe, latitude 24° is the furthest north it was recorded. It was observed throughout the year but was recorded mostly during the summer months when it was singing (Harrison *et al*, 1997).

Identification

This lark is small (12 cm), slightly smaller than a Southern Red Bishop (13 cm). Its upper-parts are brown, fairly heavily streaked darker brown; it has a white chin and buff underparts, with darker brown streaking

on its chest. Its conspicuous broad whitish supercilium gives the bird the appearance of a small Sabota Lark (14 cm). It is also superficially similar to its much larger cousin, the Rufous-naped Lark (17 cm), but lacks that species prominent crest. The Melodious Lark exhibits rufous edges to the primaries which show as a rufous wing panel in the folded wing. Its white outer rectrices and the dark tail are visible in flight (Hockey *et al*, 2005).

Its call is a loud, fairly high-pitched, ringing, unmusical *chuk chuk chuk* which lasts about a second. When disturbed or rising from the ground to make a display flight, it rises nearly vertically to a height of about five metres, calls, falls back slightly and then climbs steeply for a further five metres, calls, and falls back and then climbs steeply, and so on until it has reached a height of about 20 m or more.

Most of our observations of the Melodious Lark were made by first hearing this sequence of *chuk chuk chuk*, pause, *chuk chuk chuk*, pause, *chuk chuk chuk* and so on. This call is described in Roberts VII as an alarm call but we have heard it on occasions when there has been no apparent threat.

When the bird has reached the top of its climb it may simply drop vertically back to the ground or it may descend to the ground in a series of downward swoops, making its call at the top of each swoop. In summer, the male displays at high altitude by cruising around with rapid shallow wing beats singing a continuous stream of chatters, trills, whistles and scratchy notes. A common song sequence is a rapid phrase *choo-choo-choo chee-chee-chee* repeated many times, which reminds us of the cadence of a steam locomotive. It is a great mimic of other birds and Faansie Peacock has identified it mimicking the calls and songs of 73 species (Peacock, 2008). In January this year we observed a Melodious



Chive Kaplan

Lark cruising around for 20 minutes, singing continuously, imitating, amongst others, Diderick Cuckoo, Desert Cisticola, Wing-snapping Cisticola, Cape Robin-Chat and Long-tailed Widowbird. When the displaying bird drops to the ground, we have several times seen his mate (presumably) rise a few metres from the ground to greet him.

Occasionally, the lark will deliver its song from a fence or the top of a shrub or tree.

The exuberance of the song and the great energy expended during the display flight make this one of our favourite birds.

Habitat

The Melodious Lark is found on flat or gently sloping open grassland and nests on the upper and middle levels, avoiding bottom lands. It prefers fairly short grass (usually Rooigras *Themeda*) with some bare ground between the plants, usually on sandy or stony soil (Tarboton, 2001; Tarboton *et al*, 1987). It is tolerant of mild disturbance and often occurs on the edge of suburbia, sand works and agricultural areas, where it is particularly attracted to *Eragrostis* pastures. It is locally abundant at breeding sites and 1,3 to 5,1 (mean 2,0) pairs/ha have been estimated (Peacock, 2005).

Notwithstanding the above, we saw several males displaying above a mealie field in January this year, where they were apparently breeding. The mealies were about 1,2 m high, the land between the rows had

been cultivated and was clear of grass and weeds but there may have been grass growing between the plants within the row that would have provided nesting cover.

Our observations

Greater Gauteng

Since January 2005, we have been atlas-ing within the greater Gauteng area (within a radius of 100 km from the centres of Pretoria and Johannesburg), randomly visiting different areas, and have recorded 110 Melodious Larks in 738 hours; this translates to 6,7 hours per bird. After the Rufous-naped and Red-capped Larks, the Melodious Lark is the third-most common lark that we have recorded in the region.

I am currently examining the comparative frequency of bird observations and bird-ing effort within the greater Gauteng area (which will form the subject of a future article in *Laniarius*). In classifying the comparative frequency, I am proposing that those species recorded between one and 10 hours/bird are designated *Common*: those species recorded between 10 and 100 hours/bird are designated *Uncommon*. When we apply these criteria, the Melodious Lark falls into the *Common* category.

We have recorded the Melodious Lark in every month except May but the greater proportion of the observations (74 per cent) occurred during the breeding months of December, January and February when the male is displaying.

North and east of Pretoria

I have defined the area by a contiguous block of nine quarter degree cells (QDCs), as follows: in the north: 2528AD (Hammanskraal); 2528BC (Moloto); 2528BD (Kwaggafontein); in the centre: 2528CB (Silverton); 2528DA (Cullinan); 2528DB (Sokhulumli); in the south: 2528CD (Rietveldam); 2528DC (Bronkhorstspuit); 2528DD (Balmoral).

The Melodious Lark was recorded in all these QDCs but the number per hour varied quite markedly from cell to cell. It was commonest in cell DC west of Bronkhorstspuit (26 birds; two hours per bird), in BD in the grasslands between Kwamhlanga and Verena (15 birds; likewise two hours per bird), and in cell DB north-east of Bronkhorstspuit (30 birds; three hours per bird). It was also common in cells CB (three birds; 10 hours per bird) and DA (14 birds; 10 birds per hour). It was uncommon in the remaining cells. The sample size in some of these cells is rather small and the comparative results might well change as more data is gathered.

Summary


The Melodious Lark is found throughout the area north and east of Pretoria. It is common between KwaMhlanga and Verena; north-east and west of Bronkhorstspuit and east of Cullinan; elsewhere it is uncommon.

Once its distinctive call and flight charac-

teristics are learned, it is quite easy to identify, especially during mid-summer.

It is an interesting bird to observe and is one of the specials in our area.

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The Secret Lives of Bushveld Pipits

John Heywood & Faansie Peacock

Although widespread and locally common throughout the savannas of northern South Africa, the Bushveld Pipit *Anthus caffer* is inconspicuous, rather difficult to identify and easily overlooked. Therefore it comes as no surprise that descriptions of some of the basic components of its biology are still lacking. While doing atlassing fieldwork for the South African Bird Atlas Project 2, in pentad 2420_2805 south-east of Vaalwater on 9 January 2008, John Heywood observed interesting behaviour from this species: his attention was initially attracted to a smallish bird flying in a circle of a 5 m diameter just above the canopy of Wild *Seringa* tree (*Burkea africana*). Closer examination, and

particularly the distinctive nasal, buzzing calls of the bird, confirmed its identity as a Bushveld Pipit. While repeatedly flying in this circle on stiff, fluttering wings in a somewhat dipping manner (typical of the genus), the pipit would utter single calls at 2-3 second intervals. Most typical pipits lack vocal prowess (at least to human ears) and in the Bushveld Pipit there is little difference between the flight calls (e.g. when flushed) and the song. However, the territorial songs of males (which was most likely what the bird in question was performing) consists of a slow, measured repetition of notes (Peacock 2006), fitting this bird's behaviour. The fluttering bird (presumably a male) was directing his



Neels Jackson

attention to a second Bushveld Pipit (presumably a female) perched quietly just below the canopy of the tree. When the male landed in the top of the tree, the female would utter a single, thin, piping call. After a short time, the male bird would again commence its circular display flights, and when the female relocated to another location, the male would follow and continue with this same action!

The timing and context of John's observations also suggest that this previously unrecorded behaviour was a courtship display by a male bird towards a female. Throughout the year, but particularly in early summer, male Bushveld Pipits also sing from low perches (e.g. tree stumps, open branches, rocks) or in a wide, circular display flight 40-80 m above the woodland canopy (Peacock 2006). Duetting and countersinging have also been recorded (Dean 2005), strongly suggesting that the species is a monogamous breeder. However, the intricacies of its displays and their respective contexts is still very much unclear and even casual observations (such as that reported here) are of tremendous academic value.

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Cat Got Your Tongue? Mimicry in Fork-tailed Drongos

Faansie Peacock


While walking around in the gardens of the Smuts House Museum, Irene, on 22 January 2008, we were constantly serenaded by the characteristic twanging and scratchy rasping song of a Fork-tailed Drongo, *Dicrurus adsimilis*. During our walk a domestic cat appeared and started lazily trotting towards us – probably in the hope of some tidbit or simply a good ear-scratching. Having just finished chasing a Black-headed Oriole from the treetops, the cat-eyed drongo then swooped down and alighted on a wire about 4 m above the cat's head. Being a cat owner

myself I recognised the familiar, high-pitched "twittering" sound that cats make when they are watching potential prey (including birds). However, on closer inspection I saw that it was not the cat, but the drongo uttering this sound! The drongo then proceeded to mimic typical cat "mewing" sounds interspersed with the "twittering" perfectly, all the while bowing its head down and keeping a close eye on the indifferent cat. The mimicry of the cat sounds was so perfect that if I hadn't seen the drongo's hooked bill opening and closing I wouldn't have been able to tell the difference!

The motivation for such behaviour from the drongo seems unclear. Possibly it is simply attempting to scold the cat or let it know that it has been discovered. There are many published accounts of drongos mimicking the calls of raptors and owls – see for example Peacock (2007) for a description of drongos imitating Gabar Goshawks and the “tu-weep” call of Pearl-spotted Owls. I have previously also observed that drongos (and species such as Sabota Larks) can identify predators and accurately match the relevant mimicry to that specific predator. In the Kalahari, Fork-tailed Drongos use the alarm call of Suricates to cause them to scatter, leaving morsels they

had dug out for the taking (Dean 2005). In this case the reason for the mimicry was not kleptoparasitic (as with the suricates), and seemingly neither territorial nor sexual.

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Artistic Weavers

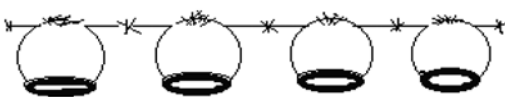
Neels Roos

In several spots around Wakkerstroom, which we visited with the club in December, we encountered 4 to 5 weaver nests strung from the top strands of fences crossing shallowly eroded, water-containing, gullies next to the roads. We simply assumed them to be Cape Weaver nests because where we stay Southern Masked-Weavers, the only other weaver species we saw in the Wakkerstroom area, always nest in trees and we were unfamiliar with the structure of Cape Weaver nests. On our way back to Pretoria on the Amersfoort road we eventually came across 2 sites where a male Southern Masked-Weaver was present on one of the nests and that finally revealed the identity of their occupants.

The end-on view from the road shows the round, evenly spaced nests, woven with yellowish dry plant material. The openings

of all the very short entrance tunnels faced obliquely towards us (slightly more than illustrated and also a bit smaller) and were neatly fringed with a widish dark olive-grey rim which contrasted with the rest of the nests. The rounded brooding chamber could be seen only on the side-views.

This observation shows that Southern Masked-Weavers in the Wakkerstroom area are not only, of necessity, innovative but also more artistically inclined than their big-city cousins here in Gauteng. Innovative because trees in that grassland area are in very short supply and suspending their nests high above the ground from the fences will provide reasonable protection against most predators. Artistic because the openings of all the entrance tunnels are adorned with this plant material of a different colour. Could this improve visibility




End-on view



Side view

of the openings to a flying bird approaching it in dense fog? I have no idea why the openings are positioned so obliquely but it varies from the customary horizontally aligned opening to a vertical entrance tunnel commonly used in nests suspended from the ends of tree branches here in Gauteng. One can postulate

that it is an adaptation to facilitate landing on a nest's opening at the end of a forced low-flying final approach.

As can be seen in the illustration of weaver nests in the nests of Southern Masked- and Cape Weavers generally speaking look very much alike. 



Watse Duif is Dit?

Willie en Nora Grabow

Hierdie duif het onlangs vir 'n paar maande lank gereeld in ons tuin kom kuier in Die Wilgers. Die duif het dood luiters saam met ander duive kos wat ons uitsit geniet. Die kleur was baie lig, bykans spierwit. Wat kan dit wees? Is dit dalk 'n albino Gewone Tortelduif (R354 Cape Turtle Dove / *Streptopelia capicola*) of 'n uitheemse duif wat iewers uit 'n hok ontsnap het? Hoe dikwels sien mens albino tortelduiwe?

Antwoorde en kommentaar sal in die volgende uitgawe van *Laniarius* gepubliseer word.

Bosveldvisvanger in Pretoria-Noord

Neels en Ingrid Roos

In vorige jare het ons meermale 'n Bosveldvisvanger in die omgewing van ons huis hier in Pretoria-Noord vir 'n dag of twee in Oktober/November gesien en gehoor waarna dit weer verdwyn het. In Maart of April het die proses homself dan weer herhaal.

Op 10 November verlede jaar was dit weer so maar hierdie keer het hy gebly en vir amper 'n maand lank elke dag dikwels en hard sy kenmerkende roep laat hoor. Op 18 November het ons waargeneem hoe hy etlike kere in ons swembad geplons-bad het. Ons het aanvaar dat hy deur sy voort-

durende roep 'n maat soek en tot ons groot vreugde was daar op 9 Desember skielik 2 Bosveldvisvangers teenwoordig. Drie dae later was beide so 'n meter van mekaar in die droë takke van 'n boom in ons bure se werf teenwoordig en het een doodstil met 'n yslieke akkedis dwars in die bek gesit. Watter teken dit vir die ander een gegee het sal mens nie weet nie maar skielik het die ander een nader gevlieg en met haar gepaar terwyl sy ewe doodluiters met die akkedis in haar bek bly sit het. Op geen stadium was ons bewus van enige vooraf hofmaak-vertonings nie.



'n Week later het die 2 saam in 'n ander boom se dooie takke rondgesit toe 'n derde sy verskyning gemaak het en onmiddelik verwilder is deur een van die paar.

Dit was duidelik uit die rigtings van die 2 se vlugpatrone ('n enkele keer ook met 'n akkedis in die bek) dat hulle iewers in die bure se tuin 'n nes het. Ons vermoed dat dit moontlik 'n ou nes van 'n Bonthoutkapper in die groot dooie stam van 'n palmboom was waarvan die dooie takke afgesaag was. Mens durf ongelukkig nie heeldag oor 'n hoë betonmuur loer wat in jou bure se werf aangaan nie! Die verdere verloop en sukses al dan nie van die broei-proses kon ons dus nie waarneem nie. Tydens hierdie hele periode was

hulle merkbaar stiller en so teen die einde van Februarie het ons hulle nog vir outlaas in die buurt gehoor.

Terloops net 'n waarskuwing oor die variasies in kleur wat dieselfde sub-spesies in verskillende boeke kan aanneem. Tydens 'n besoek aan die Nylsvley Natuurreservaat op 4 Maart het ons 'n volwasse Bosveldvisvanger in die middel van die dag waargeneem wat 'n baie duidelike **liggrys** kroon, agterkop en nek vertoon het. As dit nie was vir die swart onderkaak en swart merk agter die oog nie sou mens in die versoeking gewees het om dit as 'n Manglietvisvanger uit te ken. Omdat dit so verskil het van die amper donkerblou kleur van dië dele in *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa* se 3de uitgawe wat ek altyd saamdra het ek bietjie naslaanwerk gedoen in verskeie boeke. Meeste van hulle het die kop en nek gryserig geïllustreer! Volgens die nuutste **Roberts** is die kleur van die voorkop, kroon en agterkop van die suidelike sub-spesies (*Halcyon senegalensis cyanoleuca*) wat tussen ons en ekwatoriaal Afrika migreer ligbruinerig-grys en die veertjies se punte breedweg **ligblou** van kleur terwyl die res van die kop (ek neem aan die nek is hierby ingesluit) **grys** is. Die *Complete Book of Southern African Birds* verduidelik dat dië blou nie deur pigmentasie veroorsaak word nie maar wel deur ligrefraksie in die punte van dië veertjies. Wanneer hierdie punte verslete is (voordat hulle weer in Maart/April noordwaarts begin migreer) is die dele baie ligter (en dus meer grys). Dit verklaar waarskynlik hoekom illustrasies en beskrywings van die kleur van die kop van hierdie sub-spesies so kan verskil. Dis nie net die drukkersink nie maar ook wanneer die "skins" tot die beskikking van die kunstenaar versamel is wat die resultaat kan bepaal! 🐦

What is 'jizz'?

Jizz is a term used by birdwatchers that refers to a bird's general impression and behaviour, rather than any specific feature, and can be used to identify a bird quickly at a brief glimpse or at a great distance. Jizz is difficult to pin down; it amounts to a combination of the observer's experience with some indefinable but definite quality on the part of the bird – essentially its 'character'. The origin of the term has been disputed, but it appears to have been coined by the Manchester ornithologist T.A. Coward, who wrote about jizz in 1922.

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