



# Laniarius

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Summer 2008



**BirdLife Northern Gauteng**  
**BirdLife Gauteng-Noord**

# Newsletter of BirdLife Northern Gauteng Nuusbrief van BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

PO Box/ Posbus 12563, Hatfield, 0028

E-mail: [blng.secretary@mweb.co.za](mailto:blng.secretary@mweb.co.za)

Website: [www.birding.co.za/blng](http://www.birding.co.za/blng)

**Bank account:** BirdLife Northern Gauteng/  
Gauteng-Noord, Nedbank, Corporate Corner.

Branch code: 163445

Account number: 1634010531

## Committee 2008 Komitee

### President

Pauline Leinberger; (012) 807-6898; [pauline.l@absamail.co.za](mailto:pauline.l@absamail.co.za)

### Chairperson – Voorsitter

Rynetta Coetzee; (012) 347-8343; [chairperson@blng.co.za](mailto:chairperson@blng.co.za)

### Secretary – Sekretaresse

Rita de Meillon; (012) 807-4002; [secretary@blng.co.za](mailto:secretary@blng.co.za)

### Honorary Treasurer – Tesourier

Peter Wilgenbus; 083 642-0016; [paw.birder@gmail.com](mailto:paw.birder@gmail.com)

### Programme Co-ordinator, Evening Meetings & Courses – Programkoördineerder,

### Aandbyeenkomste & Kursusse

Debbie van Zyl; 082 570-4125; [debbievanzyl@za.ibm.com](mailto:debbievanzyl@za.ibm.com)

Sub-committee: Pauline Leinberger, Tana Coetzer; Anne Shaw

### SABAP2 Atlas Co-ordinator – Atlaskoördineerder

Ernst Retief; (012) 332-3323; [ernst.retief@gmail.com](mailto:ernst.retief@gmail.com)

### Conservation – Bewaring

Elba Swart; 082 774-2253; [elbas@tshwane.gov.za](mailto:elbas@tshwane.gov.za)

### Bird Ringing – Voëlberinging

Gerrie Jansen van Rensburg; 082 840-4073; [gerriejvr@gmail.com](mailto:gerriejvr@gmail.com)

### Laniarius Editor – Redakteur

André Marx; 083 411-7674; [turaco@telkomsa.net](mailto:turaco@telkomsa.net)

Sub-committee: Faansie Peacock, Antony Cooper, Roger Fieldwick, Neels Roos,

Drinie van Rensburg (design & layout – [drinie@ecnmail.co.za](mailto:drinie@ecnmail.co.za))

### Website – Webtuiste

Jacques van Zyl; (011) 794-3143; [jvanzyl@za.ibm.com](mailto:jvanzyl@za.ibm.com)

### Trading, Bookshop – Verkope, Boekwinkel

Rynetta Coetzee; 012 347-8343; [chairperson@blng.co.za](mailto:chairperson@blng.co.za)

**Evening Meeting Venue Co-ordinators:** Elise Venter, Elma van der Walt

### 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

In recent years we have seen rampant development in many regions and concern has been voiced from many quarters about damage to the environment that we value so dearly. It is often said that conserving and sustainably using the environment goes hand in hand with economic development and that any conservation project must address the need to develop environmental leadership and environmental advocacy in the various communities across the country. The majority of us are amateur birders who are not qualified as scientists or conservation officials but as BirdLife South Africa members we act as environmental 'watchdogs' as we are much closer to local environmental matters than most. Becoming involved in a project that includes an aspect of environmental education for schools, or taking part in a conservation-based community development project is something we can do and is key to preserving many of the favoured natural habitats that we frequent in our birdwatching forays. It is likely that our club will engage in more of these activities in the years to come and I hope you will be able to read about this in the pages of this newsletter. You need to make yourself heard if you have special skills or an interest in projects of this nature.

Recently I attended the launch of the eagerly awaited book, *Birding Gauteng*, by BLNG members Faansie Peacock and Etienne Marais. A regional guide has been the subject of some discussion for a few years now and I wondered if one would ever materialise. This is a wonderful acquisition to my bird book collection and has opened my eyes to localities on my doorstep that I don't really know or don't have the contact or access details for. Faansie and Etienne deserve our heartiest congratulations.

I hope you enjoy the articles in the Summer edition of our newsletter which comes to you on time in December for once. Have a blessed Christmas and wonderful New Year!

*André Marx*

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## Credits

Front cover: Helmeted Guineafowl/Gewone Tarentaal,  
photographed in Pretoriuskop Camp, Kruger National Park  
(Drinie van Rensburg)

Back cover: Little Bee-eater/ Kleinbyvreter (Dup du Plessis)

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



## *From the Chairman/ Voorsittersverslag*

*Rynetta Coetzee*

### **Liewe lede**

Ek het die afgelope tyd ernstig begin wonder oor die sin van my voëlkykery. 'n Mens bereik 'n punt wanneer 'n ekstra voëltjie op jou lewenslys behoorlik in 'n missie ontaard. Ek gryp egter maar steeds na die verkyker wat by my kamervenster staan as ek 'n ongewone of alarmroep roep hoor net om seker te maak dat daar nie dalk 'n buitengewone besoeker opgedaag het nie want dit voel tog asof die gogga jou nie los as hy eers gebyt het nie.

Onlangs maak ek egter kennis met SABAP2. Ek besit nie 'n GPS nie en moet dus staatmaak op die sagteware wat van die webblad afgelaai word, maar is gans te besig met ander dinge om 'n werkwinkel by te woon. Ek mor en brom en skel oor die goed nie wil werk soos ek dink dit moet nie. Ernst probeer geduldig telefonies die dom "Christine viewer" se werking aan my verduidelik terwyl ek dreig om handdoek in te gooi, maar terselfdertyd ook hardkoppig weier dat 'n rekenaarprogram my baasraak. Uiteindelik skyn daar egter lig aan die einde van die tunnel toe ek uitvind dat ek nie al die programmatuur afgelaai het nie en daar werk dit. Groot verligting!

Nou vul ek atlasvorms in dat dit klap en kan nie wag vir die volgende geleentheid om kaarte te druk en lyste te maak om in te stuur nie en my voëlkykery betree sommer 'n nuwe dimensie en maak weer sin. Om die waarheid te sê, sommer lekker groot sin!

Elke rekord wat ingestuur word lewer 'n bydrae tot die groot prentjie van verspreiding van voël-

spesies in Suid-Afrika en dis lekker om te weet dat jou lysie daarin verwerk is. Ek wens so dat elke lid betrokke wil raak by dié noemenswaardige, landswyse projek, want as ek kan, kan julle ook!

Ek wil graag ook van dié geleentheid gebruik maak om almal 'n geseënde feestyd toe te wens, asook 'n nuwe jaar gevul met wonderlike voëlkykgeleenthede.

### **Dear members**

I recently decided to take the plunge and start atlasing. At some point in time you reach a stage in birding that every new tick on your list becomes a mission and you start looking for new challenges and so I found SABAP2. However, I do not own a GPS and had to rely on software downloaded from the SABAP2 website, including the pentad maps. It took a while to figure out that I forgot to download the pentad overlay, without which your printed maps don't make sense. Ernst's patience was tested to the utmost, as I was too busy to attend a workshop but in the end common sense prevailed and I filled in my first list!

Birding has a new purpose for me now, and a very meaningful one as well. My wish is that all club members will become involved in this important countrywide project as every list that is submitted is making a contribution to the larger picture of the current distribution of species in South Africa.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish you all a blessed festive season as well as a new year full of wonderful birding opportunities. ☐

# Club News/Klubnuus

## Photographic Competition

Don't forget to enter our fun photographic competition. With three categories to enter, there's a slot for everyone. Details and competition rules can be found on the club's website. Closing date is 23 January 2009.

## Club camps and bookings

Just a reminder that all club outings and camps that require a reservation, can only be arranged with the club secretary Rita de Meillon. All special outings will require an immediate payment in full (unless specified otherwise) to confirm the booking due to the number of last-minute cancellations. Rita's contact details are (012) 807-4002 or secretary@blng.co.za

## Pelagic trip from Cape Town

Why not join us for an outing with a difference and get

an opportunity to tick some very special sea birds? We have arranged a pelagic trip for the weekend of 24-25 October 2009. Costs for the sea voyage will be approximately R1 500 excluding accommodation and transport. As we may need to arrange a second trip around that time (max 12 people), we need your bookings as soon as possible please. R500 deposit secures your booking.

## Special outing to Ndumo Game Reserve

We have arranged an exciting long weekend outing on 1-5 May 2009 (4 nights) to Ndumo Game Reserve in northern KZN and booked out the entire camp for our club. Limited accommodation and camping will be available so you will need to book with Rita and pay for your accommodation as soon as possible. Costs for accommodation are R1 200/p in 2-bed huts and R500/p for camping (2-3 persons/site).

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## Lidmaatskapfooie – dit is hoe dit werk

Lidmaatskap word jaarliks henu in die maand wat u aangesluit het. BLSA stuur TWEE MAANDE voordat u jaar se lidmaatskap verval vir u 'n hernuwingskennisgewing vir die volgende jaar se fooie. As u nie betaal nie stuur hulle weer EEN MAAND voor die tyd 'n tweede kennisgewing.

Indien u nog nie betaal nie, verval u lidmaatskap en word u naam van BLSA se lidmaatskapslys verwyder. Dit beteken dan ook dat u nie meer die klub se inligtingsstukke, i.e. *Laniarius* en Program sal ontvang

nie omdat BLSA ook die adresetikette druk.

BLSA stuur daarna wel nog 'n derde hernuwingskennisgewing aan die Klubvoorsitter. Hierdie finale hernuwingskennisgewing en 'n versoekbrief van die Klubsekretaresse sal aan u gestuur word.

My versoek is dat u asseblief dadelik u lidmaatskap henu sodra u die eerste kennisgewing kry, so kan baie onnodige administrasie vermy word.

As u nie u lidmaatskap wil henu nie, sal u asseblief so vriendelik wees om die kennisgewing aan BLSA terug te pos met 'n nota dat u nie gaan henu nie.

## Information regarding membership subscriptions

Membership is on a "rolling basis" which means that 10 months after joining you will receive an invoice from BLSA for the following year. This first reminder is sent out TWO MONTHS in advance and if payment is not received, the second reminder is sent out ONE MONTH in advance.

If payment is not received then your membership will be terminated and your name will be removed from the mailing list for *Laniarius* and the Programme.

BLSA will send a third reminder to the Club Chairman or Secretary and they will, in turn, send you a letter with the final reminder.

My request is that you make sure your membership subscription is renewed immediately on receiving the first reminder in order to save a large amount of administration.

For those members who do not intend renewing their membership, please advise us by returning the invoice to BLSA indicating your cancellation.

**Rita de Meillon, BLNG Club Secretary**

# Austin Roberts: The Later Years (1930-1948)\*

Sandra Dippenaar and Pauline Leinberger

## Part 6: The Era of Consolidation (1930-1935)

*"An appeal to motorists: You must surely be interested in birds, which enliven the pleasures of your excursions. By a small subscription (1 Pound per annum) you can extend the protection and our knowledge of birds throughout the country. Our South African Ornithological Society is meeting for this desirable object, for everybody's benefit. A knowledge of the habits and names of the birds will enhance the pleasure of your own observations."*  
Austin Roberts (the Hon secretary)

### Part 6.1: It's All in the Name

Towards the latter part of the 1920s Roberts became increasingly concerned about the status of South African ornithology and earnestly thought that the birding fraternity could be better served. To understand why, we have to go back to the early days of the twentieth century when the South African Ornithologist's Union (SAOU) was established, at the instigation of AK Haagner and Dr JWB Gunning. The inaugural meeting of the SAOU was held at the Normal College in Johannesburg on 8<sup>th</sup> April 1904 with WL Sclater from the South African Museum (Cape Town) in the Chair and twelve prospective members in attendance. Among them were the Archdeacon Alfred Roberts and his son, the twenty-one-year old Austin. A published journal, aptly named *The Ostrich: a Journal of South African Ornithology* was envisioned at the first general meeting held at the Transvaal Museum (TM) a few months later. Due to complaints received from prominent members, however, the name was changed to *Journal of the South African Ornithologists' Union*.

The Society suffered a severe setback when its fiery President, Gunning, died in 1913 and Haagner's birding interests waned when he took over the directorship of the National Zoological Gardens. To make matters worse, both subsequent Presidents, Drs L Péringuey and A Theiler, were not particularly interested in birds either. Membership numbers dropped from a peak of 114 to an all time low with the onset of the First World War in 1914. At Haagner's suggestion the SAOU was dissolved in May 1916 and merged with the more broadly based Transvaal Biological Society (of which Roberts was, ironically, the Honorary Treasurer/Secretary) to form the South African Biological Society (SABS).

Roberts came increasingly to regret the 1916 merger and began to think of ways to turn things round. Knowing full well that it would be almost impossible to "reshape" the academically inclined SABS from within, he thought it best to establish a new society aimed at scientists and amateur birders alike. An opportunity came when a local businessman and keen birder, PJ Urquhart, offered secretarial and administrative help in getting things off the ground. With 55 promises of support to which another 13 were soon added, the two men decided to go ahead with the official establishment of the new society.

At a crucial moment a hitch occurred when Roberts was being caught up with the Vernay-Lang expedition and Urquhart moved to Durban. After consultation with "accessible members" they decided to forego an inaugural meeting and simply took the "society" for granted. The newly established Ornithological Society (SAOS) published the first number of its journal, *The Ostrich*, (without demur this time round) soon afterwards in 1930.

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\* **Erratum:** The previous article (Part 5) dealt with the period 1920-1930 and not 1910-1920 as indicated in the last issue. The editorial committee apologises for this error.

To emphasise the credibility of the SAOS, Dr EL Gill (Director of the SA Museum) was elected as President, with Dr R Bigalke, then of the National Zoological Gardens, and Lt Cmdr RW Wilson, who was a retired naval officer and avid birder, acting as Vice-Presidents. Urquhart was confirmed as Hon Secretary/Treasurer and Roberts as Editor.

Roberts soon brought the flourishing society under his tight control. He became Hon Secretary in 1932 and remained in that position until his death in 1948. Over the years he frequently offered to resign, only to be met with "Dr Roberts, the great stalwart of our Society, tenders his resignation for the (whatever the relevant number was) consecutive year, which again is unanimously not accepted".

### Part 6.2: Among Equals

The 1930 Vernay-Lang Kalahari expedition, in which Roberts was fortunate to participate, gripped the attention, not only of scientists, but of ordinary people yearning for good news at a time when the world grappled with the after effects of the 1929 Wall Street collapse. If ever there was a defining moment in Roberts' scientific career, this was most certainly it – his name became a household word both in South Africa and abroad.

This six month long, widely publicised, expedition had its inception when AS Vernay, a wealthy American philanthropist, arranged with Herbert Lang who was a renowned explorer and Associate Curator of Mammalogy at the American Museum of Natural History (and at that time a guest of the TM) to combine a "sporting" and scientific expedition across the unknown Central Kalahari to Ngamiland.

It was agreed that four, fully paid, members of the TM's professional staff would accompany the expedition. These were Roberts who was the ornithologist/mammalogist, George van Son who was the entomologist/botanist, Vivian Fitzsimons whose field of interest was lower vertebrates and invertebrates (except insects) and Fred Noomé who was a taxidermist. (See photograph in part 5) The TM also obtained the services of five specially



*A map of the expedition route*

trained African people for the preparation of skins of birds and mammals; among them was the well respected Saul Sithole who was Roberts' trusted field companion of many years.

Besides Messrs Vernay and Lang, who played an active part throughout, the expedition was joined by Dr AW Rogers, the director of Geological Survey, in his private capacity as a geologist. Also joining the group were Captain Beeching of the Bechuanaland police and three constables, as well as four experienced drivers *cum* mechanics. Including the various assistants and preparators, the regular staff totalled 31 people who had to be catered for and transported in an area where regular supplies were unobtainable. While some supplies were forwarded by rail and ox-wagon to targeted areas, others were transported from campsite to campsite in vans comprised of three closed one-and-a-half ton Dodge motor *cum* sleeping vans and two trucks for the purpose of carrying bulkier material which included petrol,



*Part of the convoy of Dodge vehicles*

water tanks and large game specimens. The latter had been specially modified by a Mr Douthwaite. A "Victory Six" Dodge touring car was also secured for more mobility in getting to collecting spots from base camps.

The Dodge vans were tested beforehand in conditions likely to be encountered, by Lang Fitzsimons and Douthwaite on a trip to Makarikari and Molepolole in December 1929. In order to run in the touring car and to provide training for the five TM taxidermists assistants, Roberts, Lang and Noomé made several excursions in the vicinity of Pretoria in January/February 1930.

It was understood by all parties that the collected material was to be classified in the entirety at the TM, and that the museum

was also to receive the required share of the material, including all type specimens of new species. Vernay, however, made it clear that he desired the major portion of the collections to go to the Field Museum in Chicago. He subsequently arranged that the American Museum of Natural History (New York), as well as the British Museum of Natural History (London), were also to receive a share of the material. Difficult as it was to secure enough specimens to supply all four museums in this harsh environment, the capable crew, nevertheless, managed to do so in all but a few cases. Roberts, personally, collected over 320 species of birds, apart from subspecies which were still to be classified.

Roberts' engaging account of the expedition was published in 1935 as "Scientific results of the Vernay-Lang Kalahari Expedition, March to September 1930: Birds" in the *Annals of the Transvaal Museum, XVI: 1-185*. We content ourselves with two excerpts from this report:

"It was sunset when we arrived (at Kanke Pan), and in the short time still available I endeavoured to secure a few birds in the open ground of the pan. A small party of the Spike-heeled Lark (*Chersomanes albofasciata*) seen here were so wild that I could not get anywhere within shot-gun range. When eventually I ventured a shot at long range, they flew away over the bushes

*Mammal skins and skeletons are prepared under the watchful eye of Saul Sithole (extreme right)*





and were soon out of sight. This was a matter for regret, as only a single pair was seen again and one secured – its mate escaping when wounded into a Ground Squirrel burrow – at a pan near Van Zyl's Cutting on 20<sup>th</sup> April."

"On 17<sup>th</sup> June we proceeded forward to Tsotsoroga... (T)o secure representative collections, one had to walk for many miles every day.... The results of this continuous walking was first the chafing of my feet, then these becoming sore and ultimately turning septic. It was weeks before... I was able to walk in comfort. (At) Zweizwe a new form of Yellow-eye Canary (*Serinus mozambicus vansori Rbts*) was obtained.... Around Tsotsoroga Pan a few rare birds were procured, mostly in single specimens, such as "Palm Nut Vulture" (*Gypohierax angolensis*), Grey Kestrel (*Dissodectes dickensoni*), Sharp-billed Honeyguide (*Prodotiscus regulus*), Mechow's Goshawk (*Melierax mechowi*), Black Helmet Shrike (*Eresornis retzii retzii*) and Red-headed Weaver (*Anaplectes*)..."

Roberts also wrote a number of semi-scientific articles, as well as popular pieces, on the subject of the Expedition. For example in an article in the *Farmers' Weekly* (October 15, 1930), he dealt extensively with the way of life of the indigenous peoples, the state of the roads and the variable veld conditions.

### Part 6.3: Never Enough

The following year, Roberts, accompanied by Saul Sithole, set off again on a rather unusual excursion which combined his traditional fieldwork with the study of collections in the Albany (Grahamstown) and Kaffrarian (King Williamstown) Museums. At the Albany he worked closely with John Hewitt, who had been a staff member at the TM in the years before Roberts joined the ranks in 1910.

In his account of this two-month long excursion, Roberts wrote: "Since the year 1917, I have always desired to gain insight into the nature of the veld of the Eastern Cape Province, whence numerous birds and mammals were first procured by early explorers, such as LeVaillant, Sir Andrew Smith and other notable



Roberts, Fitzsimons and Saul Sithole outside the TM after the first SWA expedition

pioneers." However, "novelties were not expected in a field so thoroughly worked before and, beyond a few minor varieties, nothing of great importance was found; but several records of considerable value and new to Mr Hewitt, who has been particularly active in all branches of zoology in his district."

All things considered, including spells of awfully bad weather and long, arduous hours spent amid the various skin collections, Roberts seemed pretty satisfied with his "fine collection" of birds (and mammals), and was particularly appreciative of the enthusiastic and accommodating farm owners of the Albany district.

Two years later, Roberts was at it again – this time back to north-eastern Zululand to complete the three-month long, third leg, of his survey (see part 5.4), while in the meantime he was putting the finishing touches to numerous publications. Among these were the preliminary descriptions of 57 new forms of SA mammals and 66 new forms of birds.

Other field excursions of note between 1933 and 1941 were: The Barlow Expedition to SWA/Northern Cape in 1937 (4 months), Southern and Southwestern Cape in 1940, (3 months and Northwestern Cape and SWA in 1941 (4 months). (See Part 3.1 for a full list of fieldwork undertaken)

It seems as if Roberts' almost frenetic field activities came to an abrupt halt after the publication of "*Birds of South Africa*". Perhaps it was a case of "mission accomplished"?

## Part 6.4: To Have and to Protect

In his later years, Roberts became increasingly preoccupied with the protection and conservation of birds. On behalf of the Ornithological Society he drew up a circular, as well as a questionnaire, which were distributed to every urban council and adjoining territories in the Union. In these he explained that the society was keen to gain support for the betterment of bird protection, and asked what urban regulations were in force that could be brought into play. In particular, he enquired as to the suitability of certain urban areas as sanctuaries, the existence of breeding colonies, and whether any council officials were employed who could bring protection regulations into effect. Similar questions were put to members of the Mine Managers' and Coalowners' Associations.

Roberts received replies from 124 Municipalities and Town Councils, as well as a "Unanimous sympathetic response" from the mine associations concerned.

In his "Preliminary Report upon an enquiry regarding bird protection in urban and industrial areas," Roberts noted that the clearest account of birds on a mining property was from a manager near Geduld who stated that: "... the dams team with water birds (3000 ducks for example) but, unfortunately, iron sulphate, with perhaps zinc sulphate, from reduction works on the mines, has killed off all the mammal life and duckweed in the water. A lower dam now teems with life, but may suffer the same fate. Wild duck breed in the grass near a main road and steps are being taken to fence it off adequately".

Another excerpt from a lengthy reply to the Town Clerk of Queenstown serves as an example of the trouble Roberts went to in promoting his conservation cause: "The sociable swallows and Indian Swifts that are a nuisance can be checked by installation of small-mesh wire-netting under the eaves, which is already in vogue in some towns in the Karoo. The Lesser Kestrels that visit your town in great numbers certainly deserve protection. They are almost exclusively insectivorous... Blue gums planted on the commonage would meet the case, as they would take to them

in due course, if regularly scared from the trees in the town itself".

Following the outcome of these questionnaires, Roberts singlehandedly embarked on a 15-year long mission to have provincial authorities reassess bird protective legislation and, in particular, regulations pertaining to permits for the capture of wild birds.

A barrage of articles, newspaper commentaries, letters, lectures and talks were to follow, all of them in true Roberts' style; advising, motivating, encouraging, cautioning... Titles such as "Wildlife and the farmer", "Birds and other wildlife in relation to soil conservation", "Nature trails", "The Jackie Hanger's habits" and "Effects of the change of course of the Zambesi river", can perhaps attest to this.

Towards the end of his life, Roberts dedicated his untiring efforts to the establishment of the Wonderboom Nature Reserve to the North of Pretoria, whilst retaining a particularly soft spot for the Rietvlei dam environs, just south of the city.

## Part 6.5: The Man of the Moment

In the beginning of 1934 Roberts took a chance and applied for a three-month long Carnegie Corporation Visitors' Grant to enable him to "...make a comparison of African material of birds and mammals in American museums; study the organisation of the US Biological Society; and to make a study of conservation of fauna methods."

When the grant was approved in May 1934, Roberts foresaw the possibility of his combining his US tour with the 8<sup>th</sup> International Ornithological Congress to be held at Rhodes House, Oxford, in July of that year.

With his wish granted by the Director of the TM, Roberts departed for England where he joined the company of distinguished biologists, including Julian Huxley and Konrad Lorenz. Roberts delivered a paper on "Physical conditions in South Africa and their bearing on birdlife." He also took the opportunity to study collections of SA birds, particularly those obtained by the early African explorers as well as his old mentor Thomas Ayres, in the smaller museums of

Norwich, Cambridge and Liverpool. His intention was to visit the British Museum “(but not to pay) attention to the study collections there, partly because of the quantity and mainly because these have been more carefully examined by recent workers.” (Remember his war of words with Oldfield Thomas? See Part 3.1)

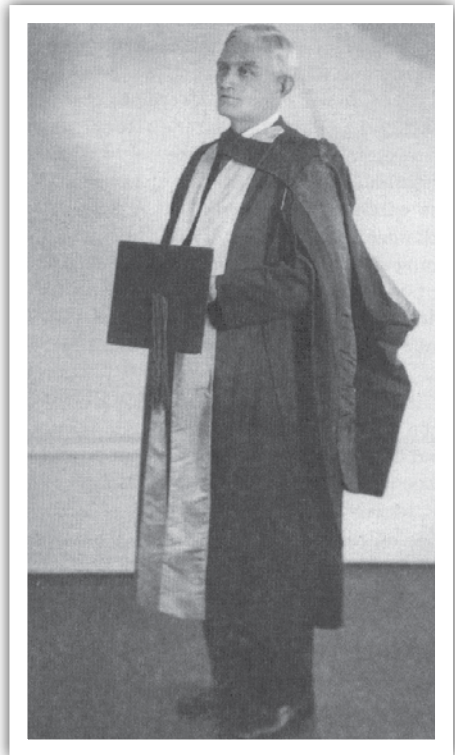
Going on to the US, he made a close study of the museum collections at the American Museum of Natural History, NY; the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Cambridge, Mass.; The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia; and the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago. He also made a detailed study of the organisation of the US Biological Survey at the US National Museum, Washington DC.

His report to the Carnegie Corporation was published in 1935 as: “Museums, higher vertebrate zoology and their relationship to human affairs;” In line with the US survey, he subsequently wrote a well considered “Memorandum on suggested foundation of a South African biological survey”, in which he urged the Union Government to pay particular attention to the “scattered and piecemeal” legislation dealing with vertebrates; the “lack of cohesion on concerted research and control” among and within, the relevant State Departments; and the “general lack of comprehension of the technical side of higher vertebrate zoology”. Whether one agrees with Roberts’ views or not, his memorandum certainly makes for a thought-provoking read.

Prior to Roberts’ US tour, his scientific contributions had not gone entirely unnoticed. He attained honorary/charter memberships of various professional international societies, among them the American Society of Mammalogists (1919), American Ornithologist’s Union (1920), Bavarian Ornithologist’s Society (1922) and the Zoological Society of London (1934).

The ultimate reward for Roberts’ tenacious efforts, however, came in 1935 when Dr Rudolph Bigalke nominated him for an Honorary Doctorate at the University of Pretoria.

When Roberts received a letter (in Afrikaans) from the university in August 1935, offering him the honorary degree (D.Sc.), he immediately accepted the offer with: “Dat my nederige



*The 52-year-old Roberts on the occasion of his graduation, 1935*

pogings in die belang van ons land met onverwagte erkenning bekroon word verskaf dankbaarheid, en dit sal lei tot verdere inspanning. Bowendien hoop ek dat dit ook bemoedigend sal wees aan andere om vol te hou met hul ywerige taak op die gebied van wetenskaplike ondersoek in Suid-Afrika, alwaar daar nog baie te doen staan, en aldus die vooruitgang van ons volk bevorder” (“My gratitude is expressed at this unexpected acknowledgement of my humble efforts in the interests of my country and hope that it will lead to further endeavours. I furthermore hope that it would encourage others to continue this task in the field of scientific research in South Africa where so much still requires to be done towards the advancement of our nation.”)



The Roberts family and the family dog, Micky (1930's). The children are Valentine, Eric (back), Mervyn (who died during the war) and Doreen.

The graduation ceremony took place in the Plaza Theatre (Pretoria) on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1935. This was followed by a lunch at Polley's Hotel.

Recognition from various societies was to follow. In November 1938 he was awarded the Senior Captain Scott Memorial Medal by the SA Biological Society; in August 1940 he received the South African Medal and Grant from the SA Association for the Advancement of Science; and in 1941 he was given Honorary Life Memberships of both the Wildlife Protection Society of SA and the SA Ornithological Society.

**Part 7: The Era of Consolidation (1936-1948)** deals with the production of Roberts' "The Birds

of South Africa" (1940), and the remaining years of his life.

### References and photographs/map credits

Brain CK (1998), *Austin Roberts: A Lifelong Devotion to South African Birds and Beasts*: The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.

*The Illustrated London News*: August 16, 1930 (p288).

NB. Various documents kindly made available to the Transvaal Museum by the Roberts family members. □

## Eggstraordinary

The smallest egg is probably that laid by the world's smallest bird, the Bee Hummingbird, which measures about 12.5 mm long by 8.5 mm in diameter and weighs just half a gram – about half a paper clip! It would take 125 Bee Hummingbird eggs to equal the weight of a hen's egg.

# Carl Linnaeus: 1707–1778

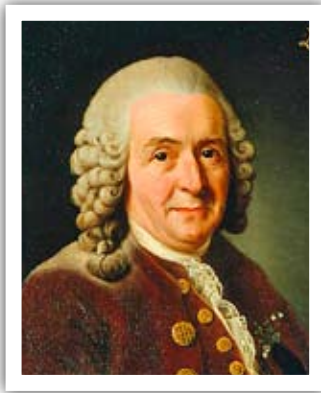
Pauline Leinberger

While I have been discussing various characters who lent their names to birds, there has always been a man lurking in the background whose passion for orderliness resulted in an internationally acceptable system of naming in nature. This was Carl Linnaeus, who in his 10<sup>th</sup> edition of *Systema Naturae* proposed a binomial system of scientific names for animals, the same as the one he had been using for plants since 1753.

Carl Linnaeus was born in May 1707, the son of a Swedish Lutheran minister who was an enthusiastic botanist and gardener. The name Linnaeus was a concocted name derived from the word “lind” meaning a linden tree. This was a requirement for university entrance instead of the traditional name, “son of Ingmar”.

Little Carl was fascinated by flowers and the plants that bore them and it was this fascination that grew into a reverence for all forms of nature and a passionate need to bring order to the vast and diverse collection of information in existence at that time. He was preceded in this need by others, including Aristotle who had classified animals as “blooded or bloodless”. Up to this time various attempts had been made to name living things and the method of stringing together adjectives and references became ever more unwieldy as knowledge grew.

In his first edition of *Systema Naturae* in 1735, Linnaeus outlined a system for classifying the “three kingdoms of nature” – plants, animals and minerals. The animal world he divided into 6 classes which were Quadrupedia, Aves, Amphibia, Pisces, Insecta and Vermes. These classes were divided into genera which in turn, were divided into species and from this system was to grow



the binomial method of naming living organisms.

Plants were his earliest and main focus of interest, however, and his classification of the Plant Kingdom was comprehensive and based on the sexual organs of plants, that is, the stamens which were the male organs and the pistils being the female. He divided the Plant Kingdom into 24 classes, 23 of which encompassed all flowering plants and the 24<sup>th</sup> including those plants which don't flower.

Each of the twenty-three classes he named according to the number, size and arrangement of the stamens and to these he gave names such as Monandra (one husband), Diandra (two husbands) or Triandra (three husbands). He seemed to enjoy the scandalous insinuations of such arrangements as he then divided each class into orders which were related to the arrangement of female organs. These then were given appropriate names such as Monogynia. A plant of the order Monogynia within the class Tetrandria would accordingly imply the shocking relationship of the wife with four husbands, a concept which gave rise to snide comments from many of his contemporaries. Linnaeus, therefore, though his own views were creationist, paved the way with his ordered system for Charles Darwin's theories of relationships which were based on evolutionary descent.

After some years in Holland where he took a medical degree Linnaeus returned to Sweden where he became a professor at Uppsala University where he continued to write. He revised and expanded his *Systema Naturae* into the 10<sup>th</sup> edition in two volumes, which extended his binomial system for the naming of plants into the animal world as well.

Linnaeus was a popular teacher whose field trips into the countryside on summer Saturdays sounded rather fun as the party not only took picnic lunches, but were also accompanied by kettle drums and bugles which sounded whenever any rare species of plant was found.

He didn't again leave Sweden, rather collecting information from naturalists from all over the world and, in particular, from his students. The young men collected the information and he gathered it together and systematised it. The Swedish government awarded him nobility in 1761 at age 54 and his Linden-tree name became von Linne.

After his death in 1778 Linnaeus' library,

manuscripts and collections were sold to James Edward Smith, an Englishman who founded the Linnean Society of London to house the treasures which are still accessible to students today. His country home, Hammarby, has been preserved as a museum and his bedroom walls are still covered with flowers nearly three hundred years later that are gradually fading. There are also pictures cut from books and many hand painted engravings by Georg Ehret, Linnaeus' old friend and illustrator of many of his books.

**Source:** Quammen, D. 2007. *National Geographic*, June 2007; Vol **211** No 6 (72-86). □

## *New Bird Species Discovered In Gabon, Africa*

*Science Daily (Aug. 16, 2008) – Scientists at the Smithsonian Institution have discovered a new species of bird in Gabon, Africa, that was, until now, unknown to the scientific community.*

The newly found olive-backed forest robin (*Stiphornis pyrrholaemus*) was named by the scientists for its distinctive olive back and rump. Adult birds measure 4.5 inches in length and average 18 g in weight. Males exhibit a fiery orange throat and breast, yellow belly, olive back and black feathers on the head. Females are similar, but less vibrant. Both sexes have a distinctive white dot on their face in front of each eye.

The bird was first observed by Smithsonian scientists in 2001 during a field expedition of the National Zoo's Monitoring and Assessment of Biodiversity Program in southwest Gabon. It was initially thought, however, to be an immature individual of an already-recognised species. Brian Schmidt, a research ornithologist at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and a member of the MAB program's team, returned to Washington DC, from Gabon in 2003 with several specimens to enter into the museum's bird collection. When he compared them with other forest robins of the genus *Stiphornis* in the collection, Schmidt immediately noticed differences in color and plumage, and realised the newly

collected birds might be unique.

"I suspected something when I found the first bird in Gabon since it didn't exactly match any of the species descriptions in the field guides," Schmidt said. "Once I was able to compare them side by side to other specimens in our collections it was clear that these birds were special. You, of course, have to be cautious, but I was still very excited at the prospect of possibly having found a new species of bird."

To ensure that the specimens Schmidt collected were a new species, geneticists at the Smithsonian's National Zoo compared the DNA of the new specimens to that of the four known forest robin species. The results clearly showed that these birds were in fact a separate and distinct species.

Discovering an unknown mammal or bird species is far from a common event. Before the 20th century, the rate of discoveries was great – several hundred new species were being described each decade. Since then, however, the pace has slowed and new species of vertebrates are generally only found in isolated areas.

Now officially recognised, the olive-backed

forest robin brings Gabon's number of known bird species to 753. Other than its existence, however, little is known to science about this newcomer.

There is some knowledge about the species' habitat choice since all of the birds seen and heard in the wild were found in dense forest undergrowth. Other facts such as specific diet, mating and nesting habits, and the species' complete habitat range are all things that still need research.

"This discovery is very exciting for us," said Alfonso Alonso, who directs the Biodiversity Program in Gabon. The opportunity to study areas the tropics of Gabon allows scientists to learn about the organisms that live there and in turn develop plans to protect them in the future. "Finding the olive-backed forest robin strongly underscores the importance of our research. This helps us show the conservation importance of the area."

The MAB program is part of the Centre for Conservation Education and Sustainability at the National Zoo. This particular study in the program is being conducted in the Gamba Complex of Protected Areas, a coastal region in southwestern Gabon containing the Loango and Moukalaba-Doudou National Parks with a restricted-access industrial corridor between them.

Scientists in the program are assessing the species diversity of the region, conducting applied research on the impact of management and development and providing biodiversity education programs locally to guide the regional conservation strategy. The program has partnered with the Gabonese government and Shell Gabon to integrate biodiversity conservation into energy development. The partnership has produced the first in-depth study of rainforest biodiversity in



*A male specimen of the newly-discovered Olive-backed Forest Robin is carefully examined in the hand of Brian Schmidt, the Smithsonian ornithologist who discovered the species*

this area of Central Africa, provided relevant scientific advancements on the effects of development on biodiversity and identified conservation strategies for the long-term management of the area.

"Although finding an unknown species like the olive-backed forest robin was not the goal of the MAB project," Schmidt said, "it is definitely a reminder that the world still holds surprises for us."

These findings were published in the international science journal *Zootaxa* Aug. 15. □

## ***Birding in the Land of the Midnight Sun***

***John Bannon***

As a relatively new member of BirdLife Northern Gauteng, I hugely enjoy the weekend outings; seeing new birds, meeting new people, finding new places and

generally having a great time, but at no great expense.

Being a birding 'pommie scouser' from Liverpool in North West England seems to be of



*Midnight at Kitka Lake*

no great disadvantage, apart from annoyingly forgetting most of the common bird calls and songs, but luckily André or Pauline or someone else is on hand to put me on the right track. Perhaps 20 years from now I too will know them all, just as I do with most of the birds of Europe, but then I will be nearly 80.

The BLNG Crimson-breasted Shrike car sticker scores massive bonus points in the uniquely odd English competition of Bird Sticker One-Up-Manship. Nobody else has one even remotely like it. Believe me, I take enormous pride in pointing it out to fellow birders, dog walkers and cyclists on the car park of my 'local patch' here in the UK. They are particularly impressed when I insist on reading out the Afrikaans to them, with as much pompous arrogance as I can muster.

However, when it comes to our birds and especially those of the far north of Europe, right up in the Arctic Circle, I will leave you guys for dead.

Recognising the calls of a Broad-billed

Sandpiper or a displaying Little Stint, the song of a Red-flanked Bluetail from the top of a pine, or the wonderful 'cork-popping' song of the Capercaillie – is no problem. The millions of miles of forests, bogs and lakes are just wonderful and I have been very fortunate to have birded in Sweden, Norway or Finland, almost every year since 1999; seeing and hearing some brilliant birds along the way.

Almost every Palaearctic wader is on show from mid-May to the end of June and they are all in their full summer breeding finery; displaying and calling all around you. 'Lekking' Ruffs, Green and Wood Sandpipers everywhere; noisy Redshanks and Greenshanks, trilling Whimbrel; immaculate coal-black Spotted Redshanks; Little and Temminck's Stints; tiny Jack Snipe with their amazing 'klippity-klop' horse-like display song. And then there's the shorebirds like Red Knot, Dunlin, Turnstone, Ringed Plover and Sanderling. The high fjells have Golden Plovers and if very lucky, also Dotterel and Purple Sandpipers, but definitely rapacious Long-tailed and Arctic Skuas (Jaegers).

My favourites are the fine-billed Red-necked Phalaropes, madly 'spinning' on roadside pools. The females are the brightly coloured ones, who quickly attract a mate, do the business, lay the eggs, and then spend the rest of the short Arctic summer, lounging about on pools in huge hen-parties, gorging themselves on the 200 billion trillion mosquitoes. The poor hen-pecked males are left to incubate the eggs and bring up the young, entirely on their own.

If it's owls you want, then how about the enormous (to us poms) Great Grey Owl or their slightly smaller relative, the fiercely aggressive Ural Owl. Its name in Swedish is the Slaguggla (strike or hit owl) and you have to be extremely careful when near their nests when they are feeding young. They think nothing of ripping the top of your scalp off and presenting it to their young as a vole-like food item. Then we come to the amazing long-tailed Hawk Owl, the Harry Potter Snowy Owl (very rare); the pearly-spotted Tengmalm's Owl, which nests in boxes, as does the tiny Pygmy Owl, which is closely related to both the Pearl-spotted, and African Barred Owlets.



Lakes echo to the evocative 'loony' calls of both the Red-throated and Black-throated Divers and the surrounding woodlands and fjells have displaying Capercaillie, Black Grouse, Willow Grouse, Ptarmigan and abundant 'whistling' Hazelhens. Woodcocks display at night, but in midsummer in the Arctic Circle, the sun never dips below the horizon, so 'one' can bird for 24 hours if 'one' is mad enough. Needless to say I have done just that many times.

I had almost forgotten about the woodpeckers – they're amazing. Especially the huge ivory-billed Black Woodpecker, with its weird, almost frightening contact calls. The almost common Eurasian Wryneck calls just like its Rufous-throated cousin in your Gauteng garden and then there's the beautiful but elusive Three-toed (Boreal) Woodpecker. Add in Siberian Jay, Siberian Tit, Waxwings, three Crossbill species, Pine Grosbeak, Snow, Lapland, Rustic and Little Buntings and the handsome Shorelark plus Arctic, River and Blyth's Reed Warblers and the absolutely stunning (aka USA 'awesome') Red-flanked Bluetail, then there's definitely a 'little brown job' for everybody to enjoy and appreciate.

Somehow, up to now, I had forgotten to mention the ducks – and what a superb collection they are. Steller's, King and Common Eiders, immaculate Long-tailed Ducks, which the yanks, god bless 'em, call the 'Oldsquaw'; Velvet and Common Scoters, unbelievably beautiful drake Smews, Goldeneyes nesting on every lake. The north is also waterfowl-heaven and you can see Pintail, Scaup, Pochard, Wigeon, Goosander and Red-breasted Merganser, plus trumpeting Whooper Swans and Common Cranes, almost anywhere.

Dear reader, I hope your mouth is well and truly watered by the prospect of visiting the Arctic mainland of Europe. The experience is truly life-changing and believe it or not, has now become reasonably affordable. Low-cost airlines, such as Easyjet or Ryanair can get you to Stockholm or Tampere in S. Finland from the UK/Europe, at rates as low as £50 return from the UK – if you book well ahead.

I know, I have done it several times with



*Pygmy Owls frequently breed in specially provided nesting boxes*

my local birding pals, some of whom are so reluctant to part with their money, that I usually have to prise their wallets open on a vice. It is affordable, with seven days of almost 24 hours birding for up to ten people travelling together, costing about R8 500, including flights from the UK, minibus hire, accommodation, biltong, local guides, etc.

Of course you still have to get yourself to the UK, but believe me you won't regret it. End May to end-June, after the snow and ice have melted is the best time and although there's trillions of mozzies, there's no malaria. Anyway, most Finnish shops sell this anti-mozzie gel called OFF! which works really well!

If you need any further encouragement or details, contacts, etc., just send me an email at [jkb@gdpassociates.net](mailto:jkb@gdpassociates.net) and I will do what I can to help you. I'm also seriously considering setting up an 'Arctic Birding' package-tour specifically for you poor southern hemisphereans, so let me know if you would be interested. □

# *BirdLife SA Presents the Avi-Career Programme*

*Priya Vallabh*

Realising that young men and women, especially from rural communities, could offer a significant contribution to conservation in many of South Africa's prime birding areas, BLSA started training local bird guides in 2001. The programme focused on a bottom-up approach to conservation, through the local environment, and has already led to the spreading of a grass-roots conservation consciousness in areas of significance.

Now, 7 years later, exciting changes are happening within the programme. The programme's expanded approach to conservation-based development looks at supporting community engagement with natural habitats in ways that benefit communities socially and economically, while maintaining environmental integrity and growing the relationship between livelihoods and conservation areas.

Realising the huge potential within the young (and sometimes older) people working

with BirdLife in rural and peri-urban communities, we've begun to develop a wider range of career development choices related to birds and their conservation – thus the new name. The re-invented programme focuses on servicing communities linked to important birding sites and projects, and aims to provide youth with a variety of career paths in bird conservation.

## **The courses include:**

- A ground-level entrepreneurial course that helps youth from projects develop basic business management skills for running a one-person-business;
- An environmental education for beginners course that provides additional skill to guide and project participants for working with schools; and
- An environmental project management course that helps talented project managers with no formal training to develop project planning and management tools and skills.

This year has seen the training of 37 bird guides, 10 environmental educators, 3 project managers and 17 entrepreneurs.

In the New Year, we also hope to offer courses in ground-level research skills, responsible tourism and mentorship.

## **Overall benefits**

Many guides initially meet resistance towards their chosen career from their parents and friends, and often express excitement at going home to impart their knowledge and prove the success of their career choice.

Conservation has already benefited from the intervention of these guides in the direct



*Environmental educators in the making..... meet some of the guides from Zululand and Southern KZN.*



*Getting to grips with field work – learners exploring river health in a river system as part of a basic ecology lesson.*

protection of bird species and habitats. Community guides have already become champions to the conservation cause, while empowering their communities to have input into decisions around natural resource management. These new courses have helped to build on the foundations laid down in the last seven years.

There is no doubt that these courses have direct and related benefits, both to people and conservation. Avitourism involves communities in the economic benefits of eco-tourism, while building livelihoods that benefit from the conservation of our precious environment. Communities and conservation come out winners in this relationship.

### **How to get Involved**

The programme relies on birders for support and growth, and there are a number of ways in which individuals and organisations can get involved in this exciting project:

- 1 Become a guest lecturer** – guest lecturers are volunteers who have expertise to share in specific areas, from basic bird identification, to ecology, to guide and business skills. Guest lecturers typically work with learners for anywhere from 2 to 10 days.
- 2 Become a mentor** – with guides and course participants all around the country, there is

always a need for mentors to help support their ongoing development. As with the lecturers, mentors are people who have a specific skill or skills to share with the programme participants, ranging for birding and guiding skills to communication and business skills to research skills.

- 3 Invite guides on bird club events** – clubs can get involved by including guides on their birding events and helping to up their skills through participation.
- 4 Use a community guide when you go guiding** – using community guides commercially helps to keep this valuable.
- 5 Funds and resources** – as with many conservation programmes, we are always looking at funders or resources to help support the programme.

**For more information or to get involved, contact us on:** [guides@birdlife.org.za](mailto:guides@birdlife.org.za); phone (011)789-1122; fax (011)789-5188 or PO Box 515, Randburg, 2125. □

*“I look at bird guiding as my long term career and future. Since I started to work as the bird guide my life has changed. I am the member of Bhekimvelo Conservation Club. Our conservation club has the great achievement of preventing the hunting of birds within our tribal area. My family now also shows respect to the presence of birds. My brother is learning to identify birds using the Zulu names and I hope that he will become another bird guide from my family.”*

*Noxolo Mtembu (Muzi Pan)*

# ***BLNG Conservation Outing to the Rhino and Lion Park: 4 October 2008***

***Pauline Leinberger***

This outing was attended by 13 adults and led by Elba Swart. The area presents great wildlife photo opportunities and is an ideal place to introduce overseas visitors to close-up views of plains game. Lions, cheetahs and wild dogs roam in spacious camps and rhinos contentedly munch their fodder. Antelopes were represented by most species you would expect to see and even some you wouldn't. The reserve is quite extensive as can be expected to accommodate all these animals and the burnt veld was greening quite quickly in spite of the late rains.

We had a total of 61 birds and stopped several times to identify pipits. We ticked Long-billed, African and Plain-backed Pipits. Cape and White-backed Vultures were present, soaring over



the vulture restaurant in expectation of the feeding which would take place later. These were being harried by several Pied Crows.

For a while a displaying Rufous-naped Lark showed off his fancy plumage to any who might be watching. I was also interested to see a Cape Weaver building its nest in a tree next to one of the dams without a reed bed anywhere in sight. A Mountain Wheatear frequents the large picnic area which also houses an animal crèche and an enclosure where you can get up close to photograph a Marabou and a Saddle-billed Stork as well as other large birds.

This was a pleasant way to spend the day and thank you to Elba for arranging a special rate for us. □

## ***Chrissiesmeer: 17-19 October***

***John Bannon***

Friday October 18<sup>th</sup> saw over 30 BLNG members making their way down to the shores of Lake Chrissie for an excellent weekend of birding and braais. The first heavy rains of the summer accompanied by terrific electrical storms made the beautiful location of the camp, overlooking the western shores of Lake Chrissie itself, even more dramatic.

Birding was only really possible on Saturday morning, as by mid-afternoon the torrential rainstorms had set in and a strategic retreat to the shelter of the camp was called for. Rynetta

bravely attempted a roll-call of the birds seen after the evening braai, but even her dulcet tones were completely drowned out by the claps of thunder and the billions of raindrops hammering on the tin roof of the dining area.

Splitting up into various 'pentanding' teams, we covered most of the back roads in the Lake Chrissie area, turning up some interesting sightings as we travelled about. Waterbirds were much in evidence as you would expect, but we didn't expect the mighty white hunter on a quad bike, shooting at the birds on one very productive lake.



Lake Chrissie: sunset view

He was politely asked to remove himself forthwith and after the message was repeated, he quadded off! This incident was in total contrast to the local nature-positive attitude, with a 'Lake Chrissie Birding and Flora Festival' being advertised for January. For example, we stopped at one very beautiful elevated farmhouse location for tea and several of Pauline's delicious cheese scones and were warmly welcomed as fellow birders by the proprietors, when they returned.

Birds of note included Denham's Bustard; Blue Korhaan; Coqui and Red-winged Francolins; Secretarybird; Southern Bald Ibis, Whiskered and Black-winged Terns; Maccoa Duck and Black-necked Grebes and migrant waders such as Little Stint, Ringed Plover and Curlew Sandpipers. Over 130 species were seen over the weekend.

Just as interesting as the birding to me, is the current 'League of Nations' membership of BLNG. At one point, ID criteria was being earnestly debated by Eran (Israeli), myself (Scouser) and Sandeep Murthy (from Kerala in India) as well as Debbie and Jacques van Zyl from Joburg – a veritable 'rainbow nation of birders'. Excellent!

As usual, I managed to obtain some scars – almost removing my shin bone when walking into the kitchen range in total darkness, (I must get a light on my head like Torchie the Battery Boy). But I do love these BLNG weekends so much. You are all such nice, generous, warm-hearted people and even if I don't understand Afrikaans and you could be talking about the stupid pommie b\*\*\*\*\*d, I don't care, we foreigners love you all! ☐

## ***Towards More Efficient Atlasing***

***Roger Fieldwick***

### **Introduction**

Data collection for SABAP2 is expensive, both in terms of time and transport costs. It then makes sense to plan atlasing trips efficiently so that you get a bigger bang for your buck. Two questions

are addressed:

- Is it better to concentrate on the birding hot-spots (Rietvlei Dam, Rooiwal sewage works, Zaagkuil drift Road and Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain, for instance) or to spend more time in the 'cold-spots'?

- How do you judge when a quarter-degree cell (QDC) has been adequately atlased?

### The SABAP2 website

If you visit the project website on <http://sabap2.adu.org.za>, click on Summaries on the left-hand side of the home page, then click on Gap analysis, a map of South Africa will appear. If you then click on an area of interest and wait a short while, a list of each of the 16 QDCs within the chosen 1 deg x 1 deg cell will be shown. For each QDC, the number of species recorded and the number of cards submitted during SABAP1 together with current species total and cards submitted during SABAP2 are given. The latter totals are updated daily as new lists are submitted.

Below these summary data of each QDC, all nine pentads are listed. The number of cards submitted each month for each pentad is tabulated, together with the total cards and the total species recorded in that pentad. These figures are likewise updated daily.

These are the data on which the subsequent analysis is based.

### The pentad mean and the QDC total

The *pentad mean* is the average of the number of the species recorded in the nine pentads in a QDC at a given time; the *QDC total* is the total species recorded in the QDC at that time.

To examine the relationship between the pentad mean and QDC total, the QDC and pentad data for the one-degree cells 2527 and 2528 were abstracted from the SABAP2 website at intervals over a few months and entered into a spreadsheet. These one-degree cells embrace northern Gauteng and parts of the adjoining provinces. The pentad means were calculated and plotted against the corresponding QDC total in the form of a scatterplot, illustrated in Figure 1. There is a strong non-linear relationship between the two variables – as the pentad mean increases, the QDC total increases rapidly, gradually flattening as the pentad mean further increases. This approximates to a logarithmic curve and such a curve has been fitted to the data.

Fig 1: QDC total against pentad mean for one degree cells 2527 and 2528

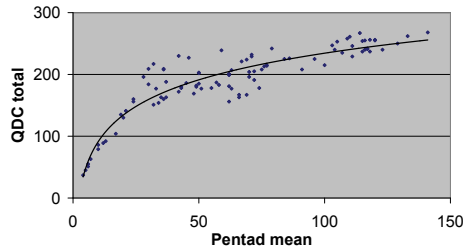
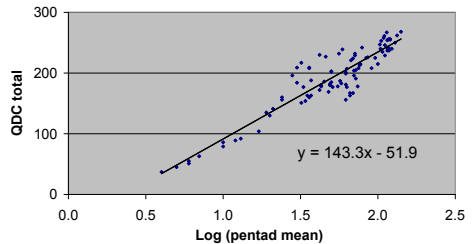


Figure 2: QDC total against log (pentad mean) for cells 2527 and 2528



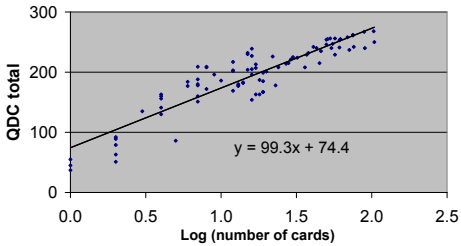
A linear graph is more convenient to interpret and Figure 2 shows the QDC total plotted against the logarithm of the pentad mean. To make this understandable to those who have forgotten their high school maths, zero on the horizontal axis represents a pentad mean of one, one represents a pentad mean of 10 and two represents a pentad mean of 100. The trend is linear but with a certain amount of scatter around the fitted line. The formula describing the relationship between the QDC total ( $y$ ) and the log (pentad mean) ( $x$ ) is shown.

When the pentad mean is 100 species, log (pentad mean) is 2; substituting in the expression gives an estimated QDC total of 236 species.

### Birding effort

The SABAP2 website does not show the hours spent by participants collecting the data but it does give the number of cards submitted for each pentad. If we plot QDC total against the number of cards submitted for cells 2527 and 2528, we get a graph (not illustrated) similar in

**Figure 3: QDC total against log (number of cards) for cells 2527 and 2528**



form to Figure 1 – as more cards are submitted, the QDC total increases ever more slowly. To make the curve linear, we can plot QDC total against the logarithm of the number of cards submitted. This is illustrated in Figure 3. A straight line has been fitted to the data and its formula given. Thus, when  $x = 0$  (one card), the QDC total = 74; when  $x = 1$  (10 cards), the best estimate of the QDC total = 174.

If we extrapolate and set  $x = 2$  (100 cards), the resulting QDC total = 273. To record 300 species in a QDC would require an estimated 187 cards to be submitted. Thus, a 10 % increase in the number of species requires 87 % extra effort. Pat Tattersall and I have averaged 3,75 hours per card over the past year and to achieve a QDC total of 300 species would require us to spend 700 hours, about 2,8 years of our birding time.

## Applying the results

The key to atlasing a QDC thoroughly is to maximise the pentad mean, which requires that all pentads should be visited several times. This means atlasing those boring areas as well as the hotspots. We all like to finish a day with a large total of species seen and heard, so use visits to bird-rich pentads as special treats.

Deciding on when a QDC has been adequately birded is really determined by the resources that can be marshalled – the number of people available, the time they can donate and the costs that they can afford. At the time of writing (September 2008), of the 32 QDCs that comprise the one-degree cells 2527 and 2528, 250 species have been recorded in four QDCs and between 200 and 250 species in a further 12. On the other hand, fewer than 100 species have been recorded in five QDCs.

An efficient way of using scarce resources is to atlas a QDC until, say, 250 species have been recorded. After that, birding effort could be directed to another QDC until, in turn, a further 250 species have been recorded, whereupon effort would be directed to a third QDC. If 250 birds have been recorded in all the target QDCs and the data collection phase of the project is still continuing, the QDCs could be revisited and the bar raised to, say, 260 species. □

## *New Members/Nuwe Lede*

A warm welcome to our new members! We trust your association with the club will be a long and happy one. Please join us in the fun of evening lectures and weekend outings, ensuring you get the full benefit of your membership. Baie welkom aan al ons nuwe lede! Ons vertrou julle verbintenis met die klub sal baie genotvol en waardevol wees. Woon asb die aandpraatjies en uitstappies by want so leer ons mekaar beter ken en kan julle ten volle voordeel trek uit julle lidmaatskap.

Willem, Johanna en Cobus Janse v Rensburg, Lynnwoodrif; Sandeep Murthy, Sunnyside; Elmeri en Bernard de Bruin, Faerie Glen; Paddy and Leoni Bell, Lynn East; Mr and Mrs Huddle, Centurion; Prof Mashudu Tshifularo, Rietondale; Stefan de Meillon en Tilana vd Westhuizen, Meyerspark; Chris Pheiffer, Wingate Park; Tineke Oranje, Garsfontein Oos; Clifford Petzer en Anastasia Patrys, Moregloed; Nicolaas Buys en Janeke Kirchner, Onderstepoort; Robin, Sean, Shannon en Merrick Naude, Irene; Cornelis en Marion Uys, Centurion; Lompies Lombard, Silver Lakes.

# Die Voëlatlas en Lewenslesse

Stephan Terblanche

Dit is skuius na 14:00 op 10 September 2008. Die lesing op die gesofistikeerde termometer, waarvan die sensor sorgvuldig in die skadu hang sodat dit net die lug se temperatuur meet, lees 39,7°C. Een Geelborswillie sit onder in 'n bos, met 'n bek wat wyd oophang. Hy kry net nou en dan 'n lae "kwer" uit. Meer aktiwiteit bou te veel liggaamshitte op. Roofvoëls wat op die warm lugstrome ry is nêrens te sien nie. Hulle hou natuurlik die Boeings so 10 000 m bokant Punda Maria besig.

Vyftien uur later atlas ek in die atlasblok 2240\_3110. Dit is so eenkant dat mens nie eers 'n naam kan kry om aan die blok toe te dig nie. Die temperatuur is 19°C; 'n suidooste wind vou graslande plat en buig boompies skuius; die lug is 'n depressieskeppende grou. Na die eerste uur begin ek droomkastele bou van 'n nuwe rekord, want my lys staan op 'n jammerlike 5 spesies! Dit is eenvoudig onmoontlik dat iemand anders ook al vir 'n uur lank voëls in Suid-Afrika gekyk het vir net 5 spesies. Hierdie onmoontlikheid geld soveel te meer vir die noorde van die beroemde Kruger Wildtuin. Omdat die enigste pad waarmee mens tot die betrokke blok toegang kan kry in 'n noord-suid-lyn soos 'n groot luislang in en uit die blok kronkel het ek in 'n uur al tweekeer langs dieselfde roete gery. Ek blaas die aftog. Atlas is nie veronderstel om 'n marteling te wees nie. Ek sal die volgende dag weer teruggaan en probeer om die rekord vir 'n volle twee ure vol te hou. Gelukkig is daar op dag 2 meer lewe en kon ek na 2 ure se intensiewe voëlskyk 18 spesies aanteken.

Ek leer met die atlassyery veel meer van voëlgewoontes as in die afgelope 20 jaar se nuwelinge jag. Die bogenoemde wildtuinervaring het my 2 belangrike dinge geleer. Die eerste is dat voëls wat



in die binneland leef nie van wind hou nie: Dit is omtrent net duive wat kans sien om teen sulke winde in te vlieg, al val hulle maksimum spoed maklik tot 40 km/h; Bruinsylangstertjies sukkel om hulle sterte uit hulle snawels te hou; troupante kan net met hulle snawel wind se kant toe op een plek bly sit, wat natuurlik vinnig hulle traankliere droogwaai; Langstertlaksmanne wat oudergewoonte 'n territoriale fluit gee veroorsaak oordadige ontsteltenis by die bure,

wat dink die fluit is besig om te betree; geen vertoonvlug werk soos dit moet nie; ensovoorts.

Die tweede les is dat rivierlope in die bosveld 'n geweldige verskil aan voëlverskeidenheid maak. Atlasblok 2240\_3110 is nie uniek nie. Ander areas van die Wildtuin wat uit groot vlaktes met eenvormige plantegroei bestaan het ook nie veel verskeidenheid nie. Die oomblik wat mens egter 'n rivierloop teëkom, of dit nou droog is of nie, maak dit 'n dramatiese verskil. Toe die atlas in kwartgraadblokke gedoen is was hierdie verskil skaars waarneembaar, maar ek vermoed dat die nuwe, kleiner skaal die verskille sal uitwys. As mens nou net in daardie dele van die Park kon inkom wat nie vir die algemene publiek toeganklik is nie...

Dit is 19:00 op 13 September 2008. Die temperatuur is aangenaam, wat dit ookal is. Oorkant die dam anderkant die kamp se draad plas en raas die seekoeie. Van links en regs klink die unieke, virtuoese klank van Afrikaanse Naguile op in 'n koor van verskillende stemme. Op twee, drie ander plekke probeer 'n Laeveldnaguil sy motortjie aan die gang kry. Skopsuile se een toon klink eentonig uit die bosveld op. Die braaivleisvuurtjie gooi 'n weerkaatsing in die witwyn se glas. Dis die lewe!! ☐



# Ringers' Corner

Graham Grieve

As a result of rain, year-end functions and injuries, little ringing was done in the last month or so. However, soon after retiring at the end of August 2008, I managed to fit in ringing at a number of sites around the country during an extended trip which included participation in the Pan African Ornithological Congress at Goudini Spa in the Western Cape.

The first stop was at Witsand NR in the Kalahari and this produced the first lifer of the trip, namely Sociable Weaver. A couple of days later nets were erected on a farm near Nieuwoudtville and this site produced a magnificent male Malachite Sunbird and several White-throated Canaries. Although a number of stalwarts put nets up at the Goudini Spa during the Congress, the conditions were not favourable (strong winds and rain) and few birds were caught.

The next ringing opportunity arose when I participated in a session arranged by Andrew Pickles at Umzumba on the lower south coast of KZN, which produced three new birds for me; Brown Scrub-Robin, Grey Sunbird and Magpie Mannikin. This included ringing all three species of mannikin during a single ringing session.

My retirement trip ended with a ringing



*Magpie Mannikin/Grootfret: a KZN special*

session on the farm Ntsinini near Waterval-Onder in Mpumalanga. This farm has been the location of a number of ringing sites for several years and more than 1 300 birds from 114 species have been ringed here. On this occasion two female Green Twinspots were caught. These were only the second and third records of this species for the farm. The other notable catch was a retrap of an African Goshawk which had originally been ringed as a juvenile bird in the same place 30 months previously. It was interesting to see the marked change in the plumage of this individual over the 30 month period. □

## Kaapse Draaie

Neels Roos

Hoe lekker is dit tog nie om te kan ontsnap uit die stad ten einde die pragtige uitgestrekte natuur in ons mooi land te kan ervaar en geniet – en natuurlik altyd ook met die heerlike vooruitsig om nuwe voëls daar te kan waarneem!

Ons eerste oornag blyplek was die Gariëp Forever Resorts by Gariëpdam naby Colesberg. Èrens in die suidelike Vrystaat op pad daarheen was ons eerste groot verrassing 'n groepie **Blou Korhane** wat rustig gewei het in die kort groen

opskiet-grassies reg teenaan die besige N1. Dië skugter spesies hou meestal in ietwat langer grasveld en moet mens heelwat moeite doen om hulle te sien te kry. **Swartpieke** daarenteen was ontelbaar volop oral op die grenspale en -drade.

Gariëpdam was amper vol en watter skilderagtige en asemrowende prentjie was dit nie om die wye oranje-pienkerige weerkaatsing van die dageraad en latere sonsopkoms op die uitgestrekte watervlak te kon aanskou nie!



*Black Harrier Adult/ Volwasse Witkruisveivalk*

Van die besondere voëls wat bygedra het tot die oggendkoor was **Gariepglasogies**, 'n **Feev-lieëvanger**, **Piritbosbontrokkies** met hulle kenmerkende gevlekte sye, **en Bergwagters**. Laasgenoemde se wyfie is eenvormig donkergrys en net haar kruis en buitenste stertvere is wit om so 'n onderstebo V te vorm. Sy het oral teen die baksteenmure van die chalets vasgeklou en baie insekte gevang wat oornag deur die buiteligte aangelok was: 'n Formidabele groot (seker 10 cm), veelkleurige en aggressiewe Hottentotsgod (*Polyspilota aeruginosa*) het in die oorvloed gedeel. Duisende **Kleinwindswaels** het in en uit hulle nessies onder die dakoorhange van die chalets geswiep. 'n **Kleingrysmuishond** met dik opgepofde stert het teen oggend- en aandskermering versigtig sy gebied verken.

Vanaf Graaff-Reinet na Willowmore met die N9 langs was al 3 spesies inheemse kraaie volop. **Swartkraaie** hou blykbaar daarvan om op dwarslatte van telefoonpale nes te maak. By meeste neste, en daar was baie, het een daarop gesit en broei òf was pare in die omgewing teenwoordig. 'n Donkerige roofvoël op 'n telefoonpaal het ons vinnig maak omdraai vir nadere ondersoek. Met sy rug na ons gekeer was dit maar 'n gesukkel met die uitkenning. As hy nie later voor ons afgeduik het na die lang gras oorkant die pad,

en na 'n rukkie weer met 'n slang in sy kloue weggevlieg het nie, sou ons nie die kenmerkende rooierige stert oopgespreid gesien en die **Rooiborsjakkalsvoël** herken het nie! Vir 'n lang afstand suid vanaf Graaff-Reinet strek daar aan die regterkant 'n reeks indrukwekkende berge geleidelik weswaarts weg van die N9 af, en na Aberdeen bly net die Aberdeenvlakte met lae rantjies oor. Na die Beervleidam kronkel die pad deur die eerste plooibergreeks, die Grootrivierberge, en maak sulke lang nimmer-eindigende draaie – nou weet ek waar die naam van Kaapse draai vandaan kom! By Willowmore

het ons op 'n plaas oornag. Tydens 'n wandeling laatmiddag het ek my verbeel ek hoor Bloukorhane teen die kliprant roep maar moes toe in die boeke ontdek dat hierdie spesie wel marginaal na die semi-woestynagtige noordoostelike Karoo se grasveld uitbrei maar dat, in die Willowmore omgewing baie verder suid, dit eerder die roep van die **Valkorhaan** was. Hulle roepe klink baie dieselfde!

Vanaf Willowmore na Uniondale is al die klipperige Karoorante kilometers ver oorwegend oortrek met verspreide korterige **Gewone Ghwarrie** (*Euclea undulata*) boompies met netjies geronde, digte krone wat gelykweg onderlangs deur kleinvee en wild weggevreet skyn te wees. Dit lyk kompleet soos ewegroot mosbolletjies en is dit so kenmerkend van die deel dat Gwarripoort daarna vernoem is!

Daar was aan die R339 tussen Willowmore en Avontuur gewerk en moes ons met die N9 verder oor die Potjiesbergpas met sy pragtige geplooië rotsformasies ry tot waar die R62 vanaf Humansdorp, deur die Langkloof en oor Avontuur, daarby aansluit. Ons môens net eenvoudig weer die grondpad vanaf Avontuur deur die Prince Alfredpas aandurf. Selfs 'n "Road Closed" teken langs die begin van die pad kon ons nie keer nie. Op navraag is ons meegedeel "die pad is sleg maar julle kan maar ry want almal ry daar – die kennisgewing waarsku eintlik net dat jy dit

op eie risiko doen"! Karavane word verbied en as die pad nat is is dit nogal groot sports. Ongeluk-  
kig was die uitsigte vanaf die hoogste eerste deel  
van die pas hierdie keer heeltemal onmoontlik  
vanweë uiters digte mis maar ons is heelhuids  
daardeur.

Die pas was in die 18de eeu net 'n voet-  
pad vanaf die kus deur die Langkloofberge na  
Avontuur en is eers tussen 1863 en 1867 deur  
die welbekende Thomas Bain met 250 bandiete  
voltooi. Voorwaar iets buitengewoons en die  
moeite werd. As mens terugkyk by De Vlucht  
kan jy sien hoe ongelooflik nou die skeur in die  
berg is waardeur jy pas gekom het! Behalwe vir 'n  
**Geelbekbosduif** het ons geen voëls daar gesien  
nie maar die tog op sigself het oorgenoeg plesier  
verskaf. Opvallend is die vervuiling van Black  
Wattle bome (*Acacia mearnsii*) in hierdie dele  
en elders langs die suidelike kusgebiede van die  
Kaap. Hulle het oral pragtig gebloom en 'n heerlike  
geur oral deur die klam-vars berglug versprei.

Vanaf Kruisvallei laer af is ons met die R340  
verder na Plettenbergbaai vir 'n klasreünie  
waartydens daar nie veel geleentheid vir voëlskyk  
was nie. Ek moet egter melding maak van die  
Plett Forever Resorts op die wal van die Keur-  
boomsrivier wat puik huisvesting in chalets en  
ruim, skaduryke kampeer-/karavaangeriewe  
omring deur die digte inheemse bos bied. Hier  
was dit my geluk om die **Lawaaimakerjanfred-  
erik**, 'n baie sku inwoner van digte woude, lank in  
die ope direk by ons chalet te kon waarneem.

Vandaar is ons met die N2 Franschhoek  
en Kaapstad toe vir 'n familie-aangeleentheid.  
Tussen Swellendam en Caledon is twee groepe  
van respektiewelik 2 en 25 **Bloukraanvoëls**  
in die uitgestrekte geel afgeoeste koringlande  
waargeneem en by die Theewaterskloofdam  
naby Villiersdorp nog twee. By die Waterfront  
in Kaapstad was daar oorgenoeg tyd vir my om  
**Hartlaubse Meeue** deeglik te leer ken terwyl van  
ons kleinseuns aan 'n "dragon-boat" kompetisie  
deelgeneem het.

Hierna het ons eintlike voëlkykvakansie begin  
en is ons met die R27 kuslangs na die Weskus  
Nasionale Park by Langebaan. Met 'n effense  
ompad oor die Darling Hills grondpad na Darling

kon ons weer by Groote Post wynplaas aandoen  
om voorraad in te laai. 'n **Gebande Oewerswael**,  
'n ou maar skaars kennis, langs dië pad het my  
dag gemaak. By die Weskus NP het ons tuisge-  
gaan in 'n chalet by Duinepos, 'n bemagtigings-  
projek van plaaslike Kleurlinge, wat net oorkant  
die pad van Geelbek af geleë is. Ontvangs was  
gul en professioneel en die chalets ruim, netjies,  
modern toegerus en heerlik stil snags – soveel so  
dat 'n **Gevlekte Ooruil** veraf gehoor kon word.

Die aantrekkingskrag by die park is natuurlik  
die twee waarneming-skuilings by Geelbek langs  
die strandmeer waar kort-kort skaars voëlbesoek-  
ers op die internet rapporteer word. Daar sou  
ons weldra met behulp van 'n teleskoop heelwat  
ou waadvoël bekendes soos o.a. **Grysstrand-  
kiewiete, Kleinwulpe, Ringnekstrandkiewiete,  
Krombekstrandlopers** en selfs 'n klompie  
**Kleinflaminke** identifiseer. Omdat die weer nie  
altyd saamgespeel het nie en ons binnelanders  
ook maar onnosel is met die gety-afskattings  
kon ons die skuilings nie optimaal benut nie. Die  
reënerige misweer was egter 'n goeie verskoning  
om na die **Witkruisvleivalk** te gaan soek wat  
ons tydens 'n vorige besoek èrens tussen Geelbek  
en Langebaandorp gesien het. Geluk was aan  
ons kant en by die 32 km merk op die pad het  
een skuinsweg van links na regs laag en stadig  
oor die sandveld-plantegroei aangevlieg gekom,  
voor ons oor die pad verbygevlieg, en 'n hele ent  
verder aan die anderkant verdwyn in die mistige  
reëntjie. Ons was net betyds op die regte plek!

'n Verdere hoogtepunt van die besoek  
hier was dat ek heelwat van die voëltjies met  
voornaam Karoo, soos die **Karoolangstertjie,  
Karoospekvreter**, en **Slangverklikker**, asook  
die westelike vorm (*galtoni*) van die **Gewone  
Spekvreter** kon identifiseer en vergelyk. Hulle  
was volop in en om die kamp en moet dit 'n  
absolute fees wees om hier jou vangnette te kan  
span en die voëls van naderby in die hand te kan  
bekyk. Die Karoolangstertjie het 'n kenmerkende  
opvallend-gespikkelde bors en sye. Vir uitkenning  
van die ander is dit egter nodig om die kleur-  
patrone van hulle kruise en sterte goed waar te  
neem. Dië patrone word baie mooi in die boeke  
illustreer.



*Common Whimbrel/ Kleinwulp*

Hier sou ek ook vir die eerste keer 'n jong gespikkelde **Gewone Janfrederik** mooi sien toe hy 'n yslike spinnekop dig teenaan ons chalet gevang en net daar verorber het. Ek dag eers dus 'n spesie wat ek nie ken nie! **Kaapse Glasogies** in diè deel van die Kaap het 'n grys bors en pensie en verskil dus van hulle maatjies in die natter oostelike dele. **Kaapse Fisante** was volop en maklik om uit te ken want daar kom geen ander fisante daar voor nie! Pas egter maar op om nie muisvoëls met wit op die bek sommer as Gevlekte Muisvoëls te eien nie want hulle pootjies is rooi en is hulle dus **Witkruisuisvoëls!** **Geometriese skilpadjies** het orals rondgehoop.

Vroeg, met sonopkoms, het ons afskeid van die park geneem en was verstom oor die glinster-nat wonderwêreld wat, as gevolg van die vroeë-oggend mistigheid, op al die sandveld-plantegroei langs die pad opgetower is deur die sonstrale.

Die terugtog huiswaarts het begin oor Darling na Malmesbury en vandaar op die R46 langs die pragtige bergwêreld roete met sy baie passe (Nuwekloof-, Michell's-, Theronberg- en Hottentotskloofpas) oor Riebeek-Kasteel, Gouda, Tulbach en Ceres om weer kort anderkant die Hexriverberge en duskant Touwsrivier by die N1 aan te sluit. Veral Michellspas waardeur mens Ceres

nader is baie indrukwekkend. Alreeds vanaf die Hottentotskloofpas was dit duidelik dat die Groot Karoo goed reën gekry het en was die landskap tot amper by Beaufort-Wes, ons volgende oorblyplek, 'n kaleidoskoop van kleure. Die enigste opwinding wat voëls betref op die rit was 'n **Kelkiewyn** wat ek teen 120 km/h langs die N1 raakgesien het. Dit is 'n eenaardige gewoonte wat sandpatryse het om so langs paaie te sit. Ons het teruggedraai en vasgestel dat dit 'n mannetjie was wat doodluiters in die klipgruis direk langs die pad gesit het

en ons oorgenoeg tyd gegee het om hom goed te bekyk.

By ons gunsteling Karoo Nasionale Park, net suid van Beaufort-Wes, het ons 2 nagte in 'n chalet oorgebly. Die voëlryk-skuiling aldaar bied nie juis iets om oor opgewonde te raak nie want die kleinerige dammetjie voor dit is te dig begroei met riete. Drie groterige skilpaaie was hier op hulle lomp manier aan die stoei (seker 2 mannetjies agter 'n wyfie aan). Een van hulle het die volgende oggend by die chalets opgedaag en die ander 2 was tandem-agtig padlangs op pad in die rigting van die Klipspringerpas wat ons ook daardie oggend ingeslaan het. Vanaf die uitkykpunt van hierdie pas het mens 'n pragtige vergesig oor die Karoovlaktes oos daarvan omraam met bergreekse veraf in die agtergrond. By die Rooivalle uitkykpunt was die **Witkruisarend** se nes nog teenwoordig, maar natuurlik onbeset die tyd van die jaar, en kon ons 'n **Kransvalk** mannetjie op 'n rotslys mooi bekyk. Die pas is onlangs verleng met die Potlekkertjiesingel terug na die kamp. Waar die verlenging aan die bopunt van die Klipspringerpas begin, was die terrein meer plato-agtig en kon ons daar 'n klompie **Vlaktespekvreters**, met hulle roeserigepienk kruise en sterte met 'n swart driehoek aan die punt, en twee **Karoolangbeklewerricke** vir die eerste keer identifiseer. Met sy groterige formaat en baie lang bek is laasgenoemde

onmiddelik herkenbaar! Die bergagtige deel van die singel is mooi en het ook 'n paar klipspringers, 'n rooihartbees en 'n paar sebras opgelewer maar die vlakke gedeelte terug na die kamp was vanweë die droogte taamlik oninteressant alhoewel ons daar 'n klompie gemsbokke en springbokke gesien het. Naby die einde van die singel het ons op 'n groot "opmars" van opeenvolgende "peletonne" voetganger-sprinkane oor die grondpad afgekome.

By die chalet self is ons veral tydens ete of koffie-en-beskuit tye op die stoepie geselskap gehou deur 'n hondmak

**Bergwagter** mannetjie en 'n paar **Roov-lerkstreepkoppies**. Nie minder nie as 4 tipiese modderbolletjie-neste van Grootstreepswaels, wat onderaan die grasdak vas was, was deur **Witkruiswindswaels** oorgeneem. Van daar af kon ons ook teen laatmiddag ons verkyk aan die warm kleurskakerings wat die laaste sonstrale teen die kranse van die Nuweveldbergtoppe opgetower het.

Digby die chalets is daar 'n kort maar baie leersame opelug uitstalling van fossiele (sg. "Fossil Trail") met bykomende inligting oor die geologiese ontwikkeling in die Karoo Kom en waarom hier so baie oer-fossiele van reptiele, wat reeds 20 miljoen jaar voor die dinosourusse op die toneel verskyn het uitgesteef, gevind word. Die Karoo rotse bevat 'n feitlik ononderbroke rekord van prehistoriese lewende wat strek oor amper 100 miljoen jaar.

Die baie ekstensiewe Karoo Kom<sup>1</sup> was 'n groot laagland area in die suidelike superkontinent Gondwana wat geleidelik vanaf die suidpool noordwaarts na die meer subtropiese dele verskuif en later opgebreek het. As mens die huidige droë, dorre, warm vlaktes en klipperige rante van die Karoo met sy lae valerige plantegroei aanskou kan jy nie glo dat daar 300 miljoen jaar gelede hier gletsers en binnelandse see was wat mettertyd, soos die Kom opgevolg het met spoelsand meegevoer deur reuse riviere, verander het in moerasagtige deltas en vloedvlaktes nie; en dat 'n groot verskeidenheid van oer-fauna en



Gareth Hazel

*Karoo Long-billed Lark/ Roovlerkstreepkoppie*

reusagtige tropiese plantegroei hier teenwoordig was nie. Die spoelsand was afkomstig vanaf 'n meer suidelike bergreeks wat blykbaar veel hoër was as die huidige Berg Everest!

'n Ekologiese katastrofe teen die einde van die Permiese Tydperk 251,4 miljoen jaar gelede, gekenmerk deur globale verwarming wat intense langdurige droogtes veroorsaak het, het al die fauna en flora uitgewis en is hulle mettertyd versteen om fossiele te vorm wat huidiglik weer ontbloot word deur omgekeerde erosie suidwaarts na die see. Geen wonder die Karoo word beskou as "a palaeontological wonderland"<sup>1</sup> nie! Die vraag ontstaan onwillekeurig of globale verwarming dan nie maar net 'n sikliese, of dan periodieke, "normale" verskynsel is nie?

Die aarde is blykbaar reeds 4560 miljoen jaar oud en was bogenoemde ongelooflike verwickelinge dus maar 'n baie onlangse fase van sy lang geologiese geskiedenis! Dit laat mens opnuut dink aan die vraag deur God aan Job gevra: "Waar was jy toe Ek die aarde gegrond het?" en die Psalmis wat vra: "Wat is die mens (te midde van al hierdie natuurwonders) dat U aan hom dink en die mensekind dat u hom besoek?"

<sup>1</sup> *An Introduction to South Africa's Geological and Mining Heritage* - Viljoen & Reimold, Mintek 2002. pp. 83-90 □

# Mapungubwe Voëlkyknaweek, 5-7 September 2008

*Salomi Louw*

Mapungubwe Nasionale Park, waar drie lande – nl. Suid-Afrika, Botswana en Zimbabwe – aanmekaar grens, is onder alle omstandighede 'n wonderbaarlike plek met 'n verskeidenheid geologiese, kulturele, historiese en ekologiese omgewings, maar om 'n naweek daar deur te bring onder begeleiding van ornitoloog Joe Grosel, soos gereël deur die Ereveldwagters van Limpopo-/Pietersburgstreek, is werklik 'iets om oor huis toe te skryf'.

Omdat die Park so ver van Gauteng is en ons Vrydag teen 13:00 al by ons verblyf moes aanmeld, het ek en Sanette reeds Donderdag vertrek en oornag in Louis Trichardt se Munisipale Karavaanpark, waar ons dit so geniet het dat ons selfs genoem het dat ons sommer die hele naweek net daar kon oorbly. Die kampeertrein met sy vliegebied en inheemse bome het wonderlike voëls opgelewer, die ablusieblokke was besonder skoon en netjies, die dorp met sy winkels, apteke en eetplekke is op jou voordeur sonder om inbreuk te maak op die rustigheid van die kampeertrein, en ons het selfs 'n rietrot gesien in die digte plantegroei van die spruit. Daarbenewens was die koste per nag (vir twee) slegs R101.50!

Vrydag het ons rustig ontbyt genuttig in die nabygeleë sentrum waarna ons deur Musina na Mapungubwe – in die rigting van Pontdrif – gery en algaande talle voëls waargeneem het. Die ander sewe gaste was reeds by die luukse verblyfoord waar ons moes tuisgaan en na kennis-making en 'n herontmoeting met vorige voëlrit-kennisse het ons 'n ligte middagete geniet. 'n Interne SANPark probleem het veroorsaak dat die bestuurder van die veldvoertuig nie opgedaag het nie, maar Joe Grosel het self agter die stuur ingeklim en ons op 'n kykersroete geneem wat tot laat in die aand geduur het. Ten spyte van sy volgehoue pogings kon ons die Driebanddraw-

wertjie nie werklik in die oog kry nie – net flitse telkens wanneer hulle opvlieg. Ander voëls eie aan hierdie gebied was egter volop. Met ons tuiskoms het die twee Ereveldwagter-gashere, Charles Hardy en Bruce Goetsch, ons van 'n heerlike ete voorsien.

Saterdag is ons vroegoggend – na koffie en beskuit – en met knibbelkos en sappies vir die lang pad, weer uit en het die Park gefynkam onder Joe se bewakame leiding. Na 'n genoeglike en groot middebyt ('brunch') by ons verblyfplek is ons weer uit op verdere verkenning van die Park en 'n soeke na voëls. Storms (of was dit 'n brand?) het die skuiling aan die einde van die 'board walk' erg beskadig, maar die voëls het gelukkig nie hiervan kennis geneem nie. Die uitsig vanaf die platform op die samevloeiing van die Shashe- en Limpoporiviere is nog net so mooi en besonders soos altyd.

Omdat hierdie uittog in 'n Nasionale Park gereël is deur Ereveldwagters, gelei is deur 'n erkende voëlkundige wat lank reeds in hierdie gebied betrokke is, en 'n Mapungubwe veldwagter/voertuigbestuurder ons Saterdag en Sondag begelei het, kon ons plekke besoek en staptogte onderneem wat nie toeganklik is vir gewone toeriste nie en het ons selfs in die Limpoporivier se loop gestap. Ons uitstappies was ook nie volgens die reëlmaat vir 2 of 3 uur nie, maar het geduur solank ons gjds(e) dit nodig geag het: om Saterdag van 15:00 tot ±20:00 voëls te jag met verkyker en kamera is nie iets wat elkeen hier beskore is nie. En, ja, ons het uiteindelik Saterdagagaand die Driebanddrawwertjie te siene gekry omdat Joe in die donker vasberade om-en-om in die spesifieke gebied gery het waar hulle tuishou. Vir al die besoekers was dit 'n eerste ('lifer')! Omdat hierdie voël tipies sy lyf wegdraai vir kykers, is die foto's wat ek in die donker geneem het van die soort waarvan 'n

mens sê: bo in die linkerhoek sien jy 'n dowwe kol met 'n ligter merk of twee; wel, dis die Drieband-drawwertjie daardie! Dit is dus nie ingesluit in hierdie verslag nie.

Den Staat is nie meer so toeganklik soos vroeër nie en Sondagoggend het ons dus na Samaria gegaan om water- en waadvoëls af te merk (en muskiete te trotseer). Na 'n genoeglike oggend is ons weer eens onthaal op 'n onverge-lyklike middebyt, waarna almal opgepak het om huis toe te gaan.

Ek en Sanette het egter Sondag nag oorgeby in die kampeertreën van Mapunbugwe NP waar ons die in- en aanvallende ape trotseer het en, natuurlik, nog voëls by ons naweeklys kon voeg voor ons Maandag teruggekeer het na Pretoria. Saam met Joe Grosel het ons van Vrydagmiddag tot Sondagoggend 179 voëls kon afmerk, en met die bykomende twee dae wat ons langer vertoef

het kon ons nog 22 byvoeg.

Die naweek was duur aangesien geleentheid gebied is aan slegs 9 voëlkykers, en dit boonop met 'n bekende ornitoloog as leier in 'n eksklusiewe oord in 'n besonderse Nasionale Park waarby ingesluit was uitmuntende etes en snoeperye, en ritte wat geen dag- of nagbeperking gehad het nie. Voeg hierby die eerstes ('lifers') vir mense wat van so ver as Durbanville gekom het dan was dit beslis die moeite en geld werd. Daarby moes ons nog inreken vervoer (en tolgeld) heen en terug, verblyf in Louis Trichardt en die Mapungubwe-kampeertreën, en steeds beskou ek dit as absoluut elke sent – en selfs meer – werd.

Alle BLNG-klubdele word aangeraai om die volgende geleentheid/geleenthede aan te gryp om met so 'n gedugte span na voëls in Mapun-gubwe NP te gaan kyk. □

## *A Visit to Northern Australia*

*Clive Kaplan*

An unexpected opportunity arose for a short birding trip to the Northern Territories in Australia on 23 June and at 10:30 am I and my two sons-in-law flew from a cold and grey Melbourne northwards for some 4½ hours. We touched down in a very warm Darwin, collected our rental vehicle and were pleasantly surprised to find we had hired a brand new Nissan Patrol. A short detour to collect the essential the supplies that every South African needs saw the acquisition of a cooler, beers and ice and soon we were on our way to our first destination, Mary River, about 140 km away.

We drove a short distance and at a fork in the road proceeded down the Arnhem highway, passing through the quaint little village of Humpydoo as the sun was setting across the Adelaide River. Birding was very quiet and we concentrated on driving the 140 km to our destination which we reached at 08:30. We enquired at supper whether there was any bird guide who could take us out and were told to wait for the resident cook who was also doubled as the bird guide, general

tourist guide and fishing guide and who would only be available at 10:30. This gentleman did not impress us but was full of information regarding interesting birds and directed us to a spot about 8 km towards Darwin which had yielded Gouldian Finch, a fast disappearing species which has become very difficult to find. We decided to try our luck the next day and found the spot quite



*Crimson Finch: a jewel in the Australian bush*

easily and what a good choice this spot turned out to be. Some of the bushes were flowering and a constant procession of Honeyeaters presented themselves: Rufous-throated, White-throated, Blue-eared and Bar-breasted were seen in quick succession.

The area had a small stream as well as a billabong (*Small pool of water or stagnant pool which only fills in the rainy season, occasionally with water all year around – Ed.*) and areas of flooded grassland and soon other species were seen: Friar Birds, Whistling Kites and small finches with red bills were plentiful which we later found to be immature Crimson Finches. It was while watching these birds that a movement caught the corner of my eye and I nearly dropped my camera with excitement... a male Gouldian Finch sat quietly on a branch not 5 metres away! I snapped away to first obtain a record picture and then tried my best to get a decent shot or two and was lucky enough to do so. A little further on I found a Billabong with overhanging trees and many birds came to drink there: Double-barred finches and Crimson Finches were common as well as Rufous-throated Honeyeaters. Overhead Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, ducks and other waterfowl flew and Whistling Kites were plentiful. A Varied Sitella paid a visit as well and after 4 or so hours we reluctantly decided to move on as time was a precious commodity with only 4 days available to us.

There are many tracks leading off the highway and we decided to drive down a track called

Hardy's Track, which meandered past many billabongs and crossed various creeks. At each billabong we were treated to a variety of herons and dotterils and the ever present Whistling Kites and once a flock of Red-tailed Black Cockatoos treated us to a noisy fly by. A Forest Kingfisher was found and after 45 km of driving on very rough roads we turned back, trying a few other tracks with much less success and finishing the day back at Mary River on a river cruise with the resident cook as our guide. The river cruise produced Jabiru, Large-billed Heron (very difficult to see), many saltwater and freshwater crocodiles, Red-winged Parrots and Sea Eagles. Later that evening we found flocks of Little Corellas flying in to roost and were well satisfied with our first day's birding.

Our second day found us exploring Bird Billabong; a walk of 4 km round a large body of water which was full of ducks, herons and geese. Although we found Rajah Duck and Plumed Whistling Duck the hide here was totally ineffective and besides facing the rising sun was very exposed and when walking there you flushed the birds, making it difficult to see or photograph anything, so we again spent the rest of the day driving down various tracks. Red-tailed Black Cockatoos were again seen in a large flock but the latter part of the day was very quiet.

The next morning we decided to drive some 40km back towards Darwin to Fogg Dam and found a wonderful spot for birding. Rainbow Bee-eaters flitted around a flood plain filled with Green Pygmy Geese and Pied Herons; Comb Jacana was regularly seen walking on the reeds. A necessity at this spot is some form of protective spray for mosquitoes which were a real pest. We reluctantly left the spot to drive to Kakadu our next base for the following 2 nights.

On arrival at Kakadu we were advised to take a cruise on the Yellow Waters and next morning we made our way to Jabiru and then Coindra. All along the way we explored various billabongs, some of which were very productive producing Black-tailed Tree Creeper, Pallid Cuckoo, Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo and tremendous Black-tailed Finches, some more Red-winged Parrots and flocks of Little Corellas. Late afternoon saw us on the Yellow Water cruise and again we



*Jabiru: a stork*



were treated to a wonderful array of birds. Azure Kingfishers, Nankeen Night Herons and ducks were plentiful as were the herons and bee-eaters. We were treated to the special sight of a pair of Brolgas on an adjacent farm along the vast waterway. The boat trip was much too short (1½ h) and a long drive back of over 100 km found us arriving in the dark once more.

The last day of our trip was spent driving the 250km back to Darwin but along the road we were fortunate enough to see Brown Falcon and Australian Bustard and another interesting spot called Leaning Tree Lagoon produced another great sighting of Jabiru as well as more Green Pygmy Geese.

We arrived in Darwin in the afternoon and immediately contacted a guide named Denise Goodfellow who met me at 4 pm. Proceeding to some nearby mangroves we found 6 different flycatchers in the short time we had available; the nearby sewerage ponds produced wood swallows, herons and cormorants. Denise is a wonderful guide and is well worth contacting if you are in the Darwin area.

The next morning we returned to Melbourne and I have every intention of returning as soon as possible as there are many wonderful areas still left to explore and many great birds still to see. Anyone needing more information or details of contacts is free to get in touch with me. □

## *Wildtuintoer in die Winter: Junie 2008*

*Elke Geggus*

Ons is vier vrouens, Marthie, Elise, Loy en ek, (Elke) wat gereeld saam op voëluitstappies gaan, en aan die begin van Junie was dit weer Kruger Wildtuin se beurt! Omdat ons, en veral ons motorbestuurder Marthie, en eienaar van die Fortuner waarmee ons gery het, die suide baie goed ken, het ons hierdie keer besluit om die noorde van die wildtuin te besoek.

Baie opgewonde het ons dou-voor-dag Maandag, 9 Junie in die pad geval. Digte mis tot by Dullstroom het dinge 'n bietjie bemoeilik, maar 'n goeie ontbyt by die Rose Cottage (die plek was sowaar oop, voor agtuur op 'n Maandagoggend) het ons gou weer laat glimlag. Die papegaai in die Rose Cottage wat ons met 'n duidelike "ek kry koud" gegroet het, het natuurlik ook baie aandag gekry! Met lekker gesels het die kilometers verdwyn en 11:30 was ons by die Phalaborwa hek. Ons sou die aand in Punda Maria slaap, en vir veiligheidsredes het ons besluit om deur die wildtuin te ry, in plaas van die vinniger roete buite om te gebruik. Om betyds by die kamp te kom was daar dus nie tyd vir voëls kyk nie! Maar 'n oulike Dubbelbandsandpatrys en 'n Witkopaasvoël, reg voor ons op die pad, het wel die nodige aandag geniet, en ons voëllys die aand het 'n goeie 50 spesies getoon.

Die volgende dag is ons bestemming die Pafuri piekniekplek, en ons vertrek vroeg. Ons ry die grondpad en die Klopperfontein Omrit. Die landskap is wonderlik met die reuse kremetartbome wat hier en daar te sien is. Ons ry met 'n draai na die piekniekplek en hier word Elise se droom waar. Sommer langs die pad wei 'n troppie van omtrent 60 Kuifkoptarentale, vir ons almal was dit 'n wonderlike gesig. Net na elfuur is ons by Pafuri. Dis so 'n pragtige plek, en dit vat ons 'n rukkie om genoeg te bedaar sodat ons ontbyt kan maak. Maar die opsigter/gids, Frank het ander planne. Hy ken al die voëls van Pafuri, en rus nie tot ons, en al die ander voëlkykers wat daar was, hulle almal gesien het nie! Hy was veral opgewonde (ons ook) oor die Gevlekte Stekelsterre wat elke nou en dan hulle verskyning gemaak het. Ons het nie 'n aparte voëllys vir Pafuri gemaak nie, maar die dag het ons 65 spesies gesien, en die meeste was by die piekniekplek. Daar was Bruinen Gestreepte Wipsterre, Heuglinse en Natalse Janfrederikke, Blousysies en Gewone Melbas, Jamesonse Vuurvinkies, Rooibek- en Swartbekkakelaars, Bontrok- en Withelmlaksmanne, 'n Paradysvink in volle broeikleed en nog baie meer. Ons het drie ure by hierdie mooi plek vertoef! Mooi vir die dag was ook die baie Langstert-



*Kuifkoptarentale/ Crested Guineafowl*

glansspreeus, Geelbekrenostervoëls, baie fisante, Bosveld- en Natalse en die Bospatryse wat baie keer oor die pad gehardloop het met 'n hele spul kleintjies agterna. Ons het ook jong roofvoëls gesien, waarvan die Kaalwangvalke en die jong Berghane nie 'n groot probleem was om uit te ken nie. Maar met 'n jong Witkruissperwer het ons gesukkel!

Woensdag op pad Shingwedzi toe, het ons eers die Mahonie Omrit gery. In die wonderlike groot bome op hierdie pad was 'n Gekroonde Neushoringvoël vir ons iets besonder. Oor die Bruinkop-/Woud-/Savannepapegaaie wonder ons nou nog. Na 'n lekker ontbyt by die Babalala piekniekplek, het ons die Mphongolo Omrit gery, waar 'n mens hier en daar 'n mooi uitsig oor die rivier gekry het. Op een van hierdie plekke het ons mooi Wolnekoioevare gesien. Daar was ook 'n Maraboe en 'n Grootwartooievaar!

Toe ons in Shingwedzi koffie gedrink het, het 'n groot verskeidenheid voëls kom bedel! Die Geelbek-, Rooibek- en Grysneushoringvoëls was daar, Kleinglansspreeu, Grootblouoorglansspreeu en tot my vreugde 'n enkele Rooioogtortelduif. Maar hy het ongelukkig nie geroep nie. Later het ons weer gery in die rigting van die voëlskuiling by die Kanniedood Dam. Hierdie keer was daar baie olifante op en langs die pad, en omdat Loy baie bang is vir olifante moes ons eers wag tot een van die ander karre die olifante so 'n bietjie verdryf het. Die Kanniedood Dam en voëlskuiling was mooi, maar daar was nie baie watervoëls nie.

Ons het 75 spesies vir die dag aangeteken. Die baie trouppante, Gewone en Groot-, was altyd

mooi om te sien, en oor die Moskeeswaels was ons almal opgewonde!

Donderdag het ons geweet gaan moeilik wees, want daar is nie 'n enkele piekniekplek tussen Shingwedzi en Mopani nie! Die reguit pad is net 63 km maar wie sê voëlkykers ry die reguit pad? Die Rooioogtortelduif het saggies geroep toe ons Shingwedzi verlaat het, en die weer was wonderlik! Ons het baie van die rivierdraaie gery en daar was altyd iets om te sien, maar toe ons afgedraai het na die Ou Hoofpad, het dit stiller begin raak. Toe ons 'n rukkie by 'n enkele Laeveldpatrys stilgestaan het, was ander mense bly dat ons ten minste iets gesien het! Elke keer as ons 'n bietjie vinniger wou ry verskyn daar weer 'n klompie voëls. Ons het 6 Gompoue gesien, altyd in pare, en 'n mooi Sekretarisvoël, almal naby die kar. Ons ry toe nog die Steenbokskeerkring Omrit en dit is toe al twaalfuur toe ons by die Tihongonyeni watergat stilhou. Mense in die kar langs ons, het net gelag toe ons se dat ons nog 'n plek soek waar ons kan ontbyt maak. Gelukkig was daar altyd iets om te eet in die motor, maar ons almal was lus vir 'n lekker koppie koffie en spek en eiers. Naby die watergat het die veld 'n rukkie gelede gebrand en tot ons vreugde het baie Trekdrawwertjies hier heen en weer gehardloop! Gysruglewerikke was ook volop, en van hulle het kleintjies gevoer! Maar almal se geduld was nou op, en ons het nie meer stilgehou tot ons by Mooiplaas se piekniekplek was nie. Ons het net altesame 108 km gery maar ons was 6 ½ uur op pad sonder om een keer uit die kar te klim. By Mopani het ons 'n mooi groot huis, met 'n wonderlike uitsig oor die Pionierdam,

tot ons beskikking gehad. Ons het hierdie mooi kamp die hele middag verken, want nie een van ons was weer lus om te ry nie! Ons het 76 spesies vir die dag gesien!

Vrydagoggend het digte mis oor die dam gelê, maar dit was tyd om huis toe te ry! Net na tienuur het ons die wonderlike voorreg gehad om te sien hoe 'n groot aantal Witrug- en Swart-aasvoëls opgestyg het en heerlijk in die blou lug rondgesweef het. Saam met hulle het 'n Visarend

gevlieg en herhaaldelik geroep!

Net na sesuur die aand was die heerlike vaksie verby! Dit was 'n wonderlike toer waar ons elke aand in netjiese kampe en silwerskoon hutte gaan slaap het! Ons het altesame 144 spesies voëls gesien. Omdat ons al ons kos self voorsien het en ons die tol- en petrolgelde deur vier kon deel, het die 5 dae in die wildtuin ons elkeen R1280 gekos. Wat 'n wonderlike voorreg om dit in die middel van die winter kon gedoen het! □

## *Teba Kamp – Augustus 2008*

*Willemien Joubert*

Susan en ek het met groot opgewondenheid vroeg die oggend van 6 Augustus na Teba vertrek.

Daar is geen aanwysings na Teba kamp nie. Dit was dus nie so maklik om dit te vind nie.

Maar laat ek by die begin begin. Al wat ons geweet het is dat dit naby Pafurihek is en het dus besluit om eers een aand by Tsipise te oornag. Kort na die afdraaipad by Louis Trichard besluit ons om vinnig af te trek en eers ons kaart te bestudeer – ons voertuig op 'n geelstreep! Vyf minute later trek 'n verkeerskonstabel voor ons in – 'n verkeerskaartjie is ons voorland! Susan sit 'n verwese gesiggie op en sê "We are lost"

Die verkeersbeampte vat ons kaart en bestudeer dit aandagtig. Hy begin toe beduie: "You drive until you come to a bridge, you jump that bridge. You drive on and you then find a tunnel, you jump that tunnel. After the tunnel you find people selling fruit, you jump them as well. You then come to another bridge and you jump that bridge. After the bridge you find a road turning left, you jump that road. You will then get to a big hotel and there you can ask some white people to explain the rest of the way". Ons is al giggelend daar weg – sonder 'n verkeerskaartjie.

Nadat ons "gejump" en "gejump" het vind ons toe ons bestemming.

By Pafurihek vra ons vir die beampte aan diens vir aanwysings na Teba. Sy aanwysings

"You drive about 20 kilometres and you will find a bridge. Two roads back you must turn left!

'n Vriendelike dame by die luukse Pafuri Lodge het ons darem na die Mosambiekse grenspos gestuur. Hier het 'n doeanebeampte ons gaan wys waar die afdraaipad is – geen naambord!

Ons ry teen die koppie uit en siedaar, hier lê die pragtige klein kampie. Impalalelies in volle blom begroet ons met hulle helder kleurspel. Pragtige koelgebome, silwerskoon swembad en groot goed versorgde tuine is 'n lafenis vir die oog.

Die verblyf is een groot woning wat agt persone kan huisves. 'n Toegemaakte stoep word ook gebruik. Die tweede huis kan vier persone huisves. Dit is goed toegerus en baie netjies.

Die huise is beide ouer as 100 jaar. Dit was aanvanklik die werwingskantore vir Mosambiekers wat in die goudmyne kom werk het. Heelwat interessante geskiedkundige artikels en voorwerpe word daar uitgestal. Teba is nie deel van die Nasionale Krugerwildtuin nie en word privaat bedryf.

Vroeg die volgende oggend word ons wakker met die gekras van die Kuifkoptarentale. Binne 'n kort tydjie het almal sommer so met bekers koffie in die een hand al 'n lekker lysie voels.

Met Crooks Corner net 'n paar kilometer van die kamp word dit daagliks besoek. Die "specials" wat ons hier sien is o.a. die Witkopkiewiet, die



*Witkopkiewiet/ White-crowned Lapwing*

Heuglingse Janfrederik, Witkeeljanfrederik, en Groenvlekduifie. Die wonderlikste ervaring was egter die Visarend wat 'n paar keer oor ons gesirkel het.

Pafuri piekniekplek word amper ons tweede tuiste. Soos Koos tereg gesê het: "Jy sit op jou stoel en bier drink en die voels kom na jou toe!" Hier ontmoet ons ook vir Paul wat 'n bekwame voëlgids is (Aparte artikel oor hom later).

Hy doen besonder baie moeite vir ons klublede en ons sien onder meer die Beloogbosbontrokkie, die Geelglasogie, die Kleinjantjie, die Swarthemlaksman en die Bloukuifloerie om maar net 'n paar te noem.

Koos het gedink dat hy die Lotto gewen het met die Witpenssteker wat hy gesien het. Ons dink egter dit was sy beloning vir die baie moeite wat hy vir my en Susan gedoen het. Hy het aangehou soek totdat ons die Geelglasogies in hulle volle glorie kon sien.

Susan en ek was ook bevoorreg om die Reuse-ooruil by Babalala te sien. Op pad terug het ons egter 'n minder lekker ervaring gehad toe ons deur 'n reuse veldbrand wat van Mosambiek af gekom het moes jaag. Die Troupante wat deur vuur aangetrek word om die goggas te vang was die pad vol en ons het onvermydelik van hulle doodgery. 'n Mens besef egter eers hoe groot hulle werklik is wanneer hulle teen jou voorruit vaslieg – 'n baie emosionele ervaring.

In die vier dae het ons groep van twaalf 175 spesies geïdentifiseer. Voorwaar baie besonders as in ag geneem word dat die somerbesoekers nog moes terugkeer!

Ek persoonlik het die kamp baie geniet en baie geleer – voorwaar die moeite werd! □

## ***In Search of the Streaky-breasted Flufftail and Other Harare "Specials"***

*Owen and Sue Oertli*

Owen and I were offered an opportunity to find the Streaky-breasted Flufftail in the vleis around Harare over the weekend of the 7-10<sup>th</sup> March 2008. Our hosts and guides were Gary Douglas and Jono Francis of DF Safaris. They are based in Mutare and Harare and offer an outstanding birding experience to locations in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and many other African destinations. Due to the exceptional good summer rains, they had managed to show 4 groups of birders this extremely rare, elusive and secretive flufftail at Monavale Vlei, which is situated near to

Crake Cottage, our lovely location for the 3 nights.

After the short, uneventful flight to Harare and a light lunch at Crake Cottage, we headed out to Christon Bank and some local miombo woodland to find some of the miombo "specials". The first lifers around the gardens at Crake Cottage were **Whyte's Barbet** and **Variable Sunbird**. By Friday evening we had seen, amongst others, **Miombo Blue-eared Starling**, **Eurasian Hobby**, **Southern Hylia**, **Black-eared Seed-eater** and had sustained scope views of **Spotted Creeper**. Dinners were catered for by Jono's

mother who spoils us with magnificent fare!

Early Saturday morning saw us decked out in full wading gear to go out into the vlei in search of the flufftail and other crakes, such as Striped Crake. Although we heard the flufftail at various spots and had a brief glimpse of one (not seen by all in the group), we were unable to locate it again. However the vlei compensated by showing us Black Coucal, Yellow-mantled Widowbird, and Orange-breasted Waxbill amongst others. Somewhat despondent, we consoled ourselves with another trip to the miombo NE of Harare later on and picked up Cabanis's Bunting and Miombo Tit here. Whilst birding the miombo, hysterical shouts from Gary and Jono saw us diving through thorns, bushes, dongas and thickets to be greeted by scope views of a magnificent male Collared Flycatcher in full breeding plumage. At another stop later in the day, we saw another "mega" tick, an Orange-winged Pytilia basking in the late afternoon sun! Sipping a congratulatory drink whilst viewing the pytilia in the scope for more than 10 minutes is hard to beat!

We went back to the vlei on Sunday and this time saw a male **Streaky-breasted Flufftail** as it dashed across the flattened area of habitat. It is about the size of a Cape Sparrow and moves extremely quickly once flushed. We then headed out to the town of Marondera to try and locate **Locust Finch** which Gary and Jono had found in suitable habitat there. Again in waders, we walked the location but did not find the finch. However we had good views of **Rosy-throated Longclaw** and **Broad-tailed Warbler** here. We also visited Goshu Park and once again the birding was exceptional. Our guides were able to show the group **Wood** and **Tree Pipit** together (wonderful for comparison purposes), as well as **Collared Flycatcher**, **Miombo Rock-Thrush**, **Stierling's Wren-Warbler** and **Red-faced Crombec**.

We arrived back home on Monday afternoon with 30 lifers between us! Gary Douglas and Jono Francis have an astounding wealth of knowledge of all flora and fauna (including butterflies) and our bird trip to the Harare area with them was truly amazing! ☐

## *A White-bellied Sunbird Nest at Pretoria Botanical Gardens*

*Ernst Retief*

Over the last few years I had the honour of regularly leading outings for SANBI at the Pretoria Botanical Gardens. While waiting on Saturday 25 October for the people to arrive at an outing my curiosity was aroused when a White-bellied Sunbird female flew into a cycad a few metres from me, reappearing a few seconds later. A few minutes later the same thing happened and upon further investigation I found the nest of this beautiful sunbird bound against one of the



*White-bellied Sunbird/Witpenssuikerbekkie:  
interesting nest location*

“thorny” fronds of the cycad. My outing had to start so I left them in peace.

However the next morning I returned to see if I could get a photograph of the nest without disturbing the sunbirds too much. In order to get a good view of the nest I had to press the camera through the outside fronds but had a great view of the nest. To my utter amazement the female flew in again and entered the nest right in front of me! Luckily I remembered to keep taking photos and managed to get some great shots. After leaving the nest she returned again within a few minutes. I did not hear any chicks calling but she was carrying worms, so they must have been

inside the nest.

The nest was about 1.5m above the ground. The cycad was one of a few on the grass patch before the entrance. According to Tarboton's *A guide to the nests and eggs of Southern Africa Birds*, the nest of the White-bellied Sunbird “is characteristically (but not invariably) placed in a thorny plant” (P233). Cycads are not listed as one of these plants but I suppose they have a thorny appearance.

Hundreds of people must have walked past the nest and I can only wonder how many might have noticed the cycad but not the nest inside it! □

# Rarities and Unusual Sightings Report

Compiled by André Marx

## National Rarities/Nasionale Rariteite

**Lesser Black-backed Gull. Kleinswartrug-meeu:** one bird was found at Leeupan, near Leandra in Mpumalanga, remaining in the area for a week during which time it was observed by several local birders, 23 Aug 08 (MR).



Dimp du Plessis

Yellow-bellied Greenbul/Geelborswillie

## Regional Rarities/Streeksrariteite

**Great White Pelican. Witpelikaan:** one bird was observed at Hartbeespoort Dam in mid-November and was still present a week later, 22 Nov 08 (JJ).

**African Goshawk. Afrikaanse Sperwer:** this species was encountered twice in the Groenkloof, Pretoria, area recently, with the first record on 11 Jul 08 (VP); a large adult female was observed in a garden at Navors, Pretoria 17 Oct 08 (AK). *Over the last year there have been occasional reports of this species in Pretoria and it would appear that this species is now definitely present in the city, a range extension of over 100 km from its known range.*

**Broad-billed Roller. Geelbektroupan:** one bird was photographed near Muldersdrift, north-west of Johannesburg, somewhat out of range, 29 Nov 08 (IG).

**Yellow-bellied Greenbul. Geelborswillie:** one bird responded to its call in the Rust de Winter dam area, 03 Aug 08 (EM); another bird was a surprise find at the start of the Zaagkuildrift road, north of Pretoria, 29 Nov 08 (CK, KR, PP).

**Common Starling. Europese Spreeu:** one bird was seen at Delta Park, Johannesburg, in the

company of a group of Cape Glossy Starlings, 09 Nov 08 (GLD).

### Other Interesting Observations/ Ander Interessante Waarnemings

#### **Black-necked Grebe. Swartnekdoobertjie:**

several birds were at Groenfontein Pan, near Bronkhorstspruit Dam, 26 Oct 08 (BLNG).

**African Openbill. Oopbekooievaar:** an out-of-range bird was found in the Potchefstroom area, 16 Nov 08 (AH).

**South African Shelduck. Kopereend:** two birds, a male and female, were observed at Borakalalo NR, 21 Sep 08 (RB).

**Booted Eagle. Dwergarend:** a dark phase bird was seen in the Seringveld area, north-east of Pretoria, 01 Nov 08 (DSO,LvD,RCo).

**Lizard Buzzard. Akkedisvalk:** one bird was found in the Rooihuiskraal, Centurion, area, 08 Aug 08 (EM); and observed again at the same locality, 22 Aug 08 (EM).

**Ovambo Sparrowhawk. Ovambosperwer:** a juvenile bird was in the Rooihuiskraal area, 22 Aug 08 (EM).

**Little Sparrowhawk. Kleinsperwer:** a pair of birds were observed in a Wierda Park, Centurion, garden when they started nest building, 21 Aug 08 (EM);

**African Harrier-Hawk. Kaalwangvalk:** the nest of a pair of birds was found in a stand of bluegum trees in Jukskei Park, Johannesburg, 06 Sep 08 (S&OO). *This species is becoming more regular in parts of Gauteng with increasing reports of breeding in urban areas.*

**Osprey. Visvalk:** an overwintering bird (?) was seen next to the R25 where it crosses over the Wilgespruit in the Bronkhorstspruit area, 08 Aug 08 (PLe,RCo); one bird was at Rust de Winter Dam, 01 Nov 08 (DSO,LvD,RCo).

**Pied Avocet. Bontelsie:** about 20 birds were at Glen Austin pan, Midrand, an uncommon species in Gauteng, 29 Nov 08 (EM).

**Water Thick-knee. Waterdikkop:** one bird was at Bronkhorstspruit Dam during the CWAC count there, 08 Aug 08 (PLe,RCo).

**Caspian Tern. Reusesterretjie:** two birds were observed at Bronkhorstspruit Dam during the



Martin Goetz

*African Harrier-Hawk/Kaalwangvalk*

CWAC count there, 08 Aug 08 (PLe,RCo); with four birds observed again at that locality, 26 Oct 08 (BLNG).

**Yellow-throated Sandgrouse. Geelkeelsandpatrys:** 3 birds were seen flying next to the N4 in the vicinity of the turn off to Sun City, not far outside the boundary of Gauteng, 25 Oct 08 (ST).

**Verreaux's Eagle-Owl. Reuse-ooruil:** one bird was sighted during the club visit to a farm in the Murrayhill area, 06 Sep 08 (BLNG).

**Half-collared Kingfisher. Blouvisvanger:** one bird was at Faerie Glen NR, Pretoria, 28 Sep 08 (ST).

**Woodland Kingfisher. Bosveldvisvanger:** one bird was at Northern Farm, south-west of Pretoria, 22 Nov 08 (AM).

**Eurasian Golden Oriole. Europese Wielewaal:** 4 birds were observed in the Rust de Winter area, 22 Nov 08 (DD).

**Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike. Oranjaborsboslaksman:** this species has been sighted on a couple of occasions at the Pretoria Botanical Gardens in recent times and was present again, 25 Sep 08 (ER).

**White-browed Sparrow-Weaver. Koringvoël:** one bird was observed in the Irene area, where this species seldom occurs, 11 Sep 08 (LK).



*Lizard Buzzard/Akkedisvalk*

**Yellow-throated Petronia. Geelvlekmossie:**

two birds were observed at Helderkruijn-View in the Roodepoort area, somewhat further south than expected, 22 Nov 08 (AB).

**Thick-billed Weaver. Dikbekwewer:** a pair of birds was a first record for a Lyttelton Manor garden in 29 years, 30 Aug 08 (MKo); one bird was also a first record in a Colbyn, Pretoria, garden, 15 Sep 08 (MN).

**Lesser Masked-Weaver. Kleingeelvink:** reported to be nestbuilding in early August in fever trees at the City Parks depot in Mayville, Pretoria, 10 Sep 08 (MvL); a male of this species built a nest at the post office in Totiusdal, Pretoria, an unusual record for the city, 12 Sep 08 (LvD).

**Cuckoo Finch. Koekoekvink:** a male was found calling from a telephone wire on the R114, a few km east of Northern Farm, 23 Nov 08 (EM).

**Observers/Waarnemers:**

Adrian Haagner (AH)  
 Alan Kemp (AK)  
 André Botha (AB)  
 André Marx (AM)  
 BirdLife Northern Gauteng members (BLNG)  
 Clive Kaplan (CK)  
 Dave Deighton (DD)  
 Dave Sole (DSO)  
 Ernst Retief (ER)  
 Etienne Marais (EM)  
 Geoff Lockwood (GLD)  
 Ian Grant (IG)  
 Jannie Jansen (JJ)  
 Kevin Ravno (KR)  
 Leon Kay (LK)  
 Lisl van Deventer (LvD)  
 Madeleen van Loggerenberg (MvL)  
 Malcolm Nebel (MN)  
 Martin Rudman (MR)  
 Mike Kokot (MKo)  
 Pauline Leinberger (PLe)  
 Phil Penlington (PP)  
 Renier Balt (RB)  
 Rynetta Coetzee (RCo)  
 Stephan Terblanche (ST)  
 Sue & Owen Oertli (S&OO)  
 Vincent Parker (VP)

*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 ☐*

**Leaving Home**

The longest fledgling period is that of the King Penguin, at up to 13 months.  
 Of flying birds, the Wandering Albatross takes up to 280 days (just over nine months).  
 The shortest fledgling period is nine days, found in several passerines.



# African Goshawk at Navors

Alan and Meg Kemp

On returning home at about 07:00 on 17 October 2008 from shopping for produce at the local Boere-mark, I was delighted to hear an African Goshawk calling from the top of a tall fever tree in our garden. I was able to quickly spot the bird and it then flew into the crown of a large oak tree where, after rushing inside for a pair of bins, I watched it amongst the foliage for about five minutes. It was a large adult female, obviously on the hunt, and when it flew off northwest its approach was heralded by alarm calls, especially the 'flying raptor' alarm of Grey Go-away-bird. I have been hearing the go-away-birds alarming in that direction a number of times in the last few weeks, without ever seeing the cause of their alarm, suggesting that maybe the goshawk has been around a while and I will now be on the lookout for a nest! The nearest I have seen African Goshawks to Pretoria previously is at Klein Kariba just outside Bela-Bela. Is this another new arrival to join us in the "urban forests" of



Richard Montinaro

African Goshawk/Afrikaanse Sperwer

Gauteng, like the Grey Go-away-birds, African Grey Hornbills and African Cuckoo Hawks of the past decade or two?

**Footnote:** *The occurrence of African Goshawk in Gauteng has been the subject of much debate in recent years. This species was not recorded in the greater Gauteng area during the data collection period for the Transvaal Bird Atlas (1987) when local sightings referring to this species were considered to be equivocal, or during the first atlas project, SABAP1 (1997). Other records have come*

*to light in recent times and it would seem that this species may have established a foothold in Pretoria at least. The nearest known locality where the species is occasionally recorded is in the Gouwsberg region, about 100 km east of Pretoria, with occasional records in parts of the Waterberg further north, also a considerable distance from Pretoria. – Ed. □*

## Lady of The List

The longest 'world list' is roughly 8,500 species, achieved by the late Phoebe Snetsinger, from the USA. This represents over 85% of the world's total. Having taken up 'world listing' when she was diagnosed with incurable cancer at the age of 49, Snetsinger lived for another 20 years, before she was tragically killed while birding in Madagascar in 1999. Her incredible life story is told in her posthumously published autobiography, *Birding on Borrowed Time*.



## Laniarius prize

The editorial committee decided to award two R100 prizes for the articles in the last edition since it was a bumper edition covering two periods. Congratulations to Dr. Daantjie Viljoen for his informative and well researched mnemonic guide to recognising bird calls. The second prize goes to Susan Velthuysen and Pauline Leinberger for their account of The Great North Trek which the club undertook earlier this year.



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