



Laniarius

No. 111
Autumn 2009



Newsletter of BirdLife Northern Gauteng Nuusbrief van BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

PO Box/Posbus 12563, Hatfield, 0028
E-mail: secretary@blng.co.za
Website: www.blng.co.za

Bank account: BirdLife Northern Gauteng/ Gauteng-Noord,
Nedbank, Corporate Corner.
Branch code: 163445
Account number: 1634010531

Committee 2009 Komitee

President

Pauline Leinberger; 012 807-6898; pauline.l@absamail.co.za

Chairperson – Voorsitter

Phillip Calinikos; 012 430-2168; chairperson@blng.co.za

Secretary – Sekretaresse

Rita de Meillon; 012 807-4002; secretary@blng.co.za

Honorary Treasurer – Tesourier

Peter Wilgenbus; 083 642-0016; paw.birder@gmail.com

PR & Marketing – Skakelbeampte en Bemarking

Debbie van Zyl; 082 570-4125; debbie@blng.co.za

Sub-committee: Tana Coetzer

Programme and Activities – Program en Aktiwiteite

Amanda Haggett-Haagner; 084 444-5468; amandah@dpsa.gov.za

Sub-committee: Pauline Leinberger, Anne Shaw

Evening Meeting venue co-ordinators: Elise Venter, Elma van der Walt

Conservation – Bewaring

Vacant

Bird Ringing – Voëlberinging

Gerrie Jansen van Rensburg; 082 840-4073; gerrie.jvr@gmail.com

Laniarius Editor – Redakteur

André Marx; 083 411-7674; turaco@telkomsa.net

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

Drinie van Rensburg (design & layout – drinie@ecnmail.co.za)

Website – Webtuiste

Jacques van Zyl; 083 459-3715; webmaster@blng.co.za

Trading, Bookshop – Verkope, Boekwinkel

Ralda Heyns; 082 472-7027; ralda1@law.co.za

Other Portfolio Holders

SABAP2 Atlas Co-ordinator – Atlaskoördineerder

Ernst Retief; 012 332-3323; ernst.retief@gmail.com

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

From time to time I receive photos from members concerning an interesting sighting in their garden or a couple of photos of something really worthwhile from a holiday trip. I always encourage people to go one step further by documenting their experience and sharing it with members through the pages of this magazine. It is no problem at all to reproduce good photos and just a paragraph or two to explain the circumstances of the observation can make for an interesting short article. Please remember that.

The series on the life and times of Austin Roberts has been concluded with the last episode appearing in this edition. An editor always appreciates being able to feature such a well researched and informative series. My special thanks to Sandra Dippenaar and Pauline Leinberger for this huge contribution.

It is encouraging to note that the atlasing efforts of a number of people have led to several interest sightings, as reported elsewhere in the newsletter. This project is progressing well and we reached 100% coverage of Gauteng Province recently. When you consider that included atlasing in some high density residential and mining areas then that is no mean feat. In the process pockets of good birding habitat was discovered.

Hierdie *Laniarius* behoort jou vroeg in Mei te bereik net voor die aanvang van die BLSA Nasionale Voëlweek. Debbie van Zyl en haar span het 'n paar geleenthede vir ons tak gereël, so maak seker van die besonderhede in die program en deur ons BLNGAlert e-posdiens.

Lastly, as we progress from the good summer we have just had to autumn and then winter, be sure to write about your exploits. It is actually a very interesting time of year when several birds are more visible and easier to locate than during the wet season.

André Marx

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chairperson's Report/Voorsittersverslag	2
AGM: President's Address	4
Club News/Klubnuus.....	5
Austin Roberts: The Later Years (Continued)	7
The Woodward Brothers.....	13
The Adventures of a Birder: Looking back on a decade of fun, mischief and brilliant birds	14
Bird Distribution and Latitude 26 Degrees South	17
Greater Gauteng's Commonest Birds	18
Uitstappie na Montle Metse.....	20
Rarities and Unusual Sightings Report	21
Notes on Cuckoo Finch Behaviour	25
Diderick Cuckoo vs. Lesser Masked-Weaver	25
War and Peace in the Garden.....	26
A Cape Robin-Chat Caught in a Hailstorm.....	28
Breeding Habits of the Southern Masked-Weaver.....	29
A Book or Two.....	32

Credits

Front cover: Reed Cormorant/Rietduiker (Winning photograph by Kevin Ravno)

Back cover: Bokmakierie (Clive Kaplan)



Chairperson's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

Rynetta Coetzee

"Madame President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to present the Chairman's report for the 2008/09 year.

Membership

Our membership decreased by 5% from 669 in 2007 to 635 currently. What I found very worrying is that we had 85 new members enrolling during 2008, which effectively means that we lost 119 or 18% of people that were members at the beginning of 2008. BLSA experienced serious problems with the membership system, which resulted in a number of members just disappearing off the system and others were not invoiced when their membership became due. I'm urging you to please make sure that your name is still on our membership list and inform our secretary if you do not receive your renewal during the coming year. Also, if you do not receive *Laniarius* it could mean that you are no longer a member, so please notify us if that should happen. BLSA has now installed new software, which will hopefully take care of all the failures and shortcomings of the old system. I want to stress the fact that our members are very important to us and without your financial and other support we cannot function as a club. I want to thank our secretary, Rita de Meillon for all her hard work in this respect.

Evening meetings

We hosted 12 evening meetings during 2008 featuring talks on some very interesting topics. I again wish to thank Elise Venter, who ensures that the hall is available and ready, as well as Elma and André van der Walt who have for a number of years been responsible for the tea and refreshments that we all enjoy, including this evening's spread. The hall is kindly provided free of charge but the club makes a

voluntary yearly contribution of R500 to the University of Pretoria Personnel fund.

Weekend outings and camps

I would like to thank Debbie van Zyl and the programme sub-committee who arranged 40 Saturday and Sunday outings as well as 10 camps during the past year, most of which were well attended. The quality and variety of venues during the past year have delighted us all. I also want to thank all our camp and outing leaders. They do this on a voluntary basis and the small compensation they receive hardly ever covers their costs.

Club trading

Trading experienced another year of ups and downs, mostly due to the fact that I found it very difficult at times to handle this portfolio, as well as attend to my duties as chairperson. You may recall that I had to warn members that club trading would have to be discontinued completely if a volunteer did not come forward to relieve me of my duties. I'm now delighted to say that Ralda Heyns has volunteered to take over so we can hopefully continue this service to our members.

Laniarius

The team of André Marx, Drinie van Rensburg and the *Laniarius* sub-committee has continued to enthral our members with many interesting articles that are published in every issue of *Laniarius*. Due to unforeseen problems during the middle of the year, only three issues were published in 2008 but the bumper summer issue surely made up for the previously missed one. André and the sub-committee also decided to award a R100 prize for the best article published in every issue, much to the delight of the recipients. I would also like to thank Jacques van Zyl for his

input while Drinie was away on holiday. *Laniarius* is greatly dependent on the contribution of articles by our members. André constantly needs trip reports, reports of unusual sightings, club news and birding related articles in order to publish an issue, so please keep sending in your contributions.

Ringling

The ringling group still continues with their activities on a regular basis. Our yearly contribution of R5000 to the group has not been paid out for 2008 yet, but will be made available as soon as the group requests it.

Finances

The club's finances are healthy at this stage and our very able treasurer, Peter Wilgenbus, will present a full report. I want to mention that we thankfully showed a profit this year despite the decline in membership and in contrast to the previous year when we barely managed to break even.

BLNG-Alert and website

BLNG-Alert remains a valuable communication tool. However, due to the fact that people constantly change their e-mail addresses, the list becomes outdated. It is important that members inform our secretary of changes in this respect so that the list can be kept up to date. Jacques van Zyl, our new web manager, designed and activated our exciting new website. We effortlessly migrated to the new website and with it also received our own BLNG e-mail addresses. We are saving \pm R1800 pa by not being subscribed to MWeb any longer. He and Debbie are also sponsoring the cost of the website, which we are very grateful for.

Conservation and bird monitoring

SABAP2 is now well into its second year and as reported during last year, our club's contribution to this project is really something special. The contribution that our atlasing members have made cannot be underestimated. At this moment there are approximately 25 active atlasers in the club who have contributed nearly 2000 full protocol lists with the average number of pentads covered by each

one at 59. I'm also delighted to report that Gauteng has already been covered at 100% with at least one list per pentad, the first province in South Africa to achieve that. We also have the first pentad to turn pink, meaning that 100 full protocol lists have been submitted for the pentad. Ernst Retief has also been appointed as Regional Co-ordinator for the SABAP2 Gauteng Region and André Marx, Etienne Marais, Rihann Geyser and Stephan Terblanche are serving on the vetting committee. I would like to urge our members to get more involved with this project. I know it all sounds very complicated but I can assure you it is not.

BirdLife South Africa and Regional Forum Committee

Together with André Marx, who was the Chairperson of the Gauteng Regional Forum Committee until recently, I and Ernst Retief, who is the Regional Co-ordinator for SABAP2, attended most of the BLSA Council meetings as well as the Gauteng Regional Forum meetings that are held bi-monthly in Johannesburg. As you all know by now, Mark Anderson has been appointed the new Director of BirdLife South Africa. We wish him well in his efforts to transform BLSA into the organisation it is meant to be.

Conclusion

I wish to thank all the committee members for their hard work and support during 2008. Without their constant willingness to donate their time and money, this club would not be able to function at all. As many of you already know, I have decided not to make myself available for re-election on the committee due to personal reasons. It was a privilege to get to personally know so many of you during the two-and-a-half years I served on the committee and I sincerely hope I made some friends. I also learnt much during this time and acquired skills I never thought possible. I want to urge you to support the new committee in their efforts and my honest wish for BirdLife Northern Gauteng is that it will progress from strength to strength because it really deserves to be regarded as the greatest club in South Africa.

I thank you all." □



AGM: President's Address

Pauline Leinberger

Good evening and welcome to members. I was hoping to welcome Mark Anderson as well but unfortunately he couldn't join us. I am sure that under his leadership BirdLife SA will achieve greater visibility through better communication and thus assure the increased respect of its members.

Our club has, I think, given its members an exciting year with many and varied birding opportunities, spreading our activities far and wide through what used to be the Transvaal. We are truly fortunate to have a great diversity of habitats in our area. Greg Lock once noted over 500 species just from attending all our outings at the time that he was running the programme. Maybe this could be a possibility for a new competition; perhaps we could award a prize for the longest list of birds seen when birding with the club over the course of a year.

Adding a new perspective to our birding of course has been the atlas and this has also given us new purpose, contrary to the Cassandras who did not believe that dividing the atlas squares by 9 was feasible. I must confess to a few sneaky doubts myself but thanks to dedicated atlasers like Ernst and Roger and the competitiveness of our birders we seem to be outstripping even Les Underhill's expectations. So many interesting facts are coming to light and the great pleasure is the instant availability of these facts. Working on SABAP1 was a matter of blind man's buff. New trends were not available until the big books were published and even then some of them were already outdated. We thank you Ernst for giving us inspiration and I know that even if we won't be seeing you at committee meetings we can still expect new atlas challenges from you.

Another familiar face we will not be seeing at committee meetings in the coming year will be our chairperson, Rynetta, who has put her heart and soul into a sometimes difficult job and for this we thank you Rynetta. We will miss your hard work and enthusiasm. When you whisk off to the States, I am sure you will get the American birders sorted out as you did last time. Believe it or not she got her local club to start their outings at 6 a.m. instead of the comfortable 8 a.m. to which they had been accustomed. I hope her new community knows what they are in for. She is always on the edge of cyclones, fighting off elephants or even post office hijackers.

Welcome to those members who have agreed to stand for nomination for the new committee. I can assure you life with birders may be a lot of things but it is never boring as our hard-working secretary, Rita, will agree to. Thanks to her and to Peter as well who has kept our heads above water financially even though these behave like a yo-yo from time to time. We thank André for his *Laniarius*, which has become a publication to be proud of and Debbie who has produced an interesting and varied programme. We thank Elba also for her work on the conservation portfolio and wish her well with her studies.

Thank you too to those on the subcommittees and the leaders who are always ready to share their knowledge with beginners.

I must mention to you that we have a new "call girl" in our midst. Lisl inherited the title when she got 90% at the sound quiz we had recently... I say inherited, as this was a title I tried to live down for some years as I tried to make recordings with my now obsolete Sony cassette recorder and directional microphone. The tiny recorders in use today which plug straight into the computer to transfer their data make the old equipment

look ridiculous. The June Stannards and the Forsythe van Nierops who produced first class quality recording in the sixties with their metre-wide dishes and reel-to-reel recorders the size of a suitcase are greatly to be admired.

Finally my "down memory lane" snippet came to mind when we spent a week-end at Nylsvley a few weeks ago. In the early 80s we camped in the bush at the far end of the causeway through Vogelfontein. You may know that the Vogelfontein farm was owned by Oom Hendrik Geyser who built the dykes to create ponds where wildfowl collected in thousands. These provided him and his friends with good hunting. We of course enjoyed the spectacle of thousands of waterbirds coming in to roost accompanied by the booming of the Bittern. (It did exist and boom in those days). At one such camp

Lilian arrived at the start of the causeway, which in those days was quite a bit lower, to find it slightly awash. Nothing daunted (Lilian didn't scare easily) she drove along only to slip off the edge into deeper water. She was immediately dubbed "Lilian of the Nile" when she emerged from the bush at the campsite with her tent slung over her shoulder. Here it was too that the dignified Professor van Drimmelin danced with the fire fairies and Ingrid's elegant father on a visit from Sweden turned out for the evening braais in a suit and tie.

Such are the memories of this magical wetland which one hopes will stay that way for years to come, providing excitement and pleasure for many more generations of birders like you and me

Thank you and enjoy your evening." □

Club News/Klubnuus

New committee members

At the AGM on 10 February three new committee members were elected. They are:

- Philip Calinikos, a long standing member who returns to the committee several years after serving as Treasurer and who was elected Chairman at the first meeting of the new committee.
- Amanda Haggett-Haagner, who has been a member for a couple of years now after joining us from BirdLife Zululand where she served as chairman; Amanda takes on the portfolio of Programme and Activities coordinator.
- Ralda Heyns, a new member who has enthusiastically tackled the Trading portfolio, where she will source books and other birding material at preferential rates for members.

BLNG Shrike Awards

There were three recipients of Shrike Awards this year. They are:

- Mike and Irene Birch, longstanding members who have displayed a great deal of dedication to the club. Mike and Irene have been instrumental in all arrangements for club courses held at Waterkloof Primary over a number of years.
- Neels Roos, one of the founding club members of the club as we know it today, an early club chairman and past editor of *Laniarius*. Neels currently serves on the *Laniarius* sub-committee and is still active in club activities, always showing an interest in the wellbeing of the club.
- Pauline Leinberger, our club President, was awarded a special award – a Meritorious Service Award. After nearly 40 years of membership Pauline has supported the club in a multitude of different ways, not the least of which is her long involvement in helping arrange the club programme, where her wealth of knowledge of the different localities the club has visited has been invaluable.

Laniarius prize

Congratulations to John Bannon, who is the winner of the R100 prize for the best article in the last edition entitled '*Birding in the land of the Midnight Sun*', an entertaining account of birding in the far north of Europe near the Arctic Circle.

Get ready to get smart!

In response to requests for more courses we have managed to arrange some special courses for the remainder of the year. We are covering Waterbirds with Geoff Lockwood, Nocturnal Birds with Dr Alan Kemp, LBJs and their calls with Faansie Peacock and Ecology with Rainer Grotsch. All bookings must be made with the secretary as soon as possible and your payment confirms your place. Check the programmes for details.

Club image library

Digital cameras are much in evidence at club outings these days and judging by the interest in the photographic courses

the club runs there are many budding photographers out there. The club's slide collection was digitised a while back and is being supplemented by digital photos that are received. If you do have photos you would like to contribute, especially of species that are from different parts of the country such as the dry west or the forests of the north and east of the country, then please send them to photos@blng.co.za, a specially created on-line resource for this purpose.

BLNGAlert e-mail service

Updates and reminders about club events are frequently sent to members via our e-mail service, which is a dedicated service to BLNG members only. E-mail addresses are not divulged to any other service provider and we promise not to spam your inbox with too much mail! If you are not receiving any mail or have changed your e-mail address please send an e-mail to the secretary, Rita de Meillon, at secretary@blng.co.za



Roberts Online *Birds of Southern Africa*

www.robertsonline.co.za

An invitation to contribute

Roberts Online presents a unique opportunity to access online the full texts of *Roberts Birds of Southern Africa 7th Edition*. The texts will be lavishly illustrated with thousands of photographs, and photographers are invited to take this opportunity to share their digital bird images and so contribute to ornithology in Southern Africa. We also invite bird sound recordists to submit their recordings of geographical variation and repertoire of bird sounds.

Please visit www.robertsonline.co.za for further details and to see our example pages.

Access to Roberts Online will be by subscription, while purchasers of Roberts 7 Multimedia PC or PDA edition will automatically receive one year free subscription.

Austin Roberts: The Later Years (Continued)

(1930-1948)

Sandra Dippenaar and Pauline Leinberger

Part 7: The Era of Consolidation (1936 – 1948)

John Voelcker: Can you recommend a book on South African birds?

Dr Bigalke: No I can't, but I can take you to the person who could write one."

At the National Zoological Gardens (1933)

Part 7.1: Success never comes on its own

Having at long last attained the highly prestigious recognition from the UP in 1935, an invigorated Dr Austin Roberts turned his full and immediate attention to the production of the bird book he had envisioned as a young scientist, by employing Norman Lighton at the Transvaal Museum (TM) to do the bird illustrations as early as April 1936.

Long before Lighton started work at the TM, however, wheels were set in motion by **Dr Rudolph CH Bigalke** who had held office as President of the SAOS from 1933-1938 (see photograph in part 5.2). Bigalke's contact with Roberts began in 1920 while he was employed as a lecturer in Zoology and Entomology at The Glen Agricultural College outside Bloemfontein. An exchange of 37 letters (October 1920 – March 1933) dealt extensively with the identification of moles, as well as a variety of other small mammals and birds, that Bigalke and his students had collected in the vicinity of the College. During March 1933, Bigalke went to Berlin to further his studies in Zoology. After obtaining a DPhil degree (1926), he returned to South Africa where he later joined the staff of the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria as Director (beating candidates such as Roberts and the well-known poet-naturalist Eugene Marais in the contest).

The other person who had proved to be just as indispensable to Roberts' success as a scientist, was **John Voelcker** (a chartered accountant) who joined the SAOS in 1932. He had a particular interest in bird migration and became an active member of the SAOS – serving as vice-president (1936) and later as President (1946-1954).

After Voelcker's visit to the Zoological Gardens in 1933 (see the quotation above), Bigalke took him directly to Roberts at the TM who explained at length his difficulties about obtaining finances, as well as an illustrator, for his planned bird book. Voelcker then approached Lighton with the request to paint a number of trial plates. This duly impressed him and led him to form a "Board of Trustees for the South African Bird Book Fund" (BBF), comprised of five members, among whom were Punch Barlow who sponsored various expeditions undertaken by Roberts, and AV Lindberg of the Central News Agency (CNA) that was eventually to take care of the book's distribution.



John Voelcker, founder of the South African Bird Book Fund



Norman CK Lighton

The ensuing fund raising campaign by the Board managed to raise 1256 pounds from 101 private individuals and 13 companies, and they also secured the secondment of Norman Lighton from the Public Works Department (PWD)

Part 7.2: The Artist, the Scientist and the Bestseller

Norman Charles Kingsley Lighton started work on 6 April 1936 under Roberts' direct supervision at the TM, who made all the Finch-Davies paintings (see part 5) available for reference.

Lighton grew up on a small-holding in Pretoria North as one of three boys whose father was an engineer on the SA Railways. Here as a six-year-old, he started to draw animals, while receiving some art tuition from a Miss N Murray. When his path crossed that of Voelcker he had been working as an architectural draughtsman at the PWD in Pretoria. He usually spent his lunch hour in the TM drawing the various animals on display, meeting with the taxidermist FO Noome and Roberts in the process. He also sketched at the Zoological Gardens, eventually being commissioned by AK Haagner to paint birds on the relevant copper identification plates. He furthermore executed 40 colour plates, as well as monochrome sketches, for Cecil

D Priest's four-volume work on *The Birds of Southern Rhodesia* (1933-1936).

The task that faced Lighton was an enormous one. Not only had he to produce water colour illustrations of at least 875 individual, attractively arranged, birds on 55 plates, and all to scale, but he was also to work against time as the limited funds in the BBF had to cover the cost of a replacement in the PWD for the duration of his stay at the TM.

As it turned out the production of the plates took much longer than Roberts anticipated. By January 1937 only 21 out of the 55 had been completed, and by January 1938, 35 – with a further 20 plates still to go. The Trustees had to arrange for a second secondment for Lighton from the PWD and calculated that the full series should have been completed by 31 December 1938.

The actual manuscript by Roberts was completed a year before, subject to the addition of a few new species discovered by Roberts on the 4-month-long "Barlow expedition" to SWA and the Northern Cape in 1939. In the meantime subscribers were urged to be patient "as an attempt to accelerate the production would be at the cost of the high standard of illustration." Lighton only managed to complete the last plate in October 1939, having just put in 1 327 hours of unpaid overtime. This drawn out process, as well as the very real concerns regarding the impending war, took a heavy toll on both men: Roberts became seriously ill with duodenal ulcers and chronic hyperacidity, while Lighton temporarily lost his eyesight and had to be kept in the dark for a while.

To add to their distress, Dr Leonard Gill published a potentially rival bird book, *A First Guide to South African Birds* in November 1936, illustrated with 20 colour plates by his sister Marion Gill. Five thousand copies were rapidly sold and it went into a second edition in March 1940. It was, however, Roberts' book, published three months later, that was to become the definitive work on South African birds. Gill gallantly conceded: "...its publication will be a landmark in the history of

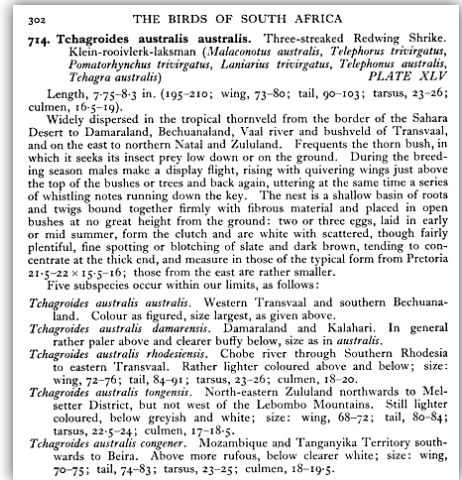
South African ornithology”.

After Lighton's eyesight had recovered, he joined the SA Medical Corps during the Second World War, and was subsequently seconded to the South African Institute of Medical Research where he made drawings of blood parasites and their hosts for a handbook on tropical diseases, to be used by SA troops serving in East Africa. He spent his last years in Cape Town where he died in 1981.

In May 1938 the title of the bird book was planned to be *A Handbook of South African Birds*, but this was subsequently changed to *The Birds of South Africa*. The foreword to the book was signed by General JC Smuts. At the time of publication, the financial resources of the BBF had dwindled almost to nothing. Fortunately a financial arrangement was reached with the CNA, which was to be beneficial to both parties.

By July 1940, 2 000 copies of the ordinary edition arrived in South Africa from the London printers, to be sold at branches of the CNA at the price of 30 shillings. Leather-bound editions were made available for the trustees, Roberts, Lighton and General Smuts while specially bound copies were also reserved for subscribers. Roberts and Lighton received no royalties, but it was decided by the trustees that they receive 12 and 6 free (ordinary edition) copies respectively.

The Birds of South Africa ran to over 400 pages, with a 15-page introduction on various topics (e.g. nomenclature and classification). This was followed by a diagram showing basic bird anatomy, and descriptive ornithological terms. Each of the South African species dealt with, was allotted the famous “Roberts number”. After every scientific name, the common names in Afrikaans and English were listed, as well as taxonomic synonyms and “indigenous names” in some cases. A description of each species followed, with notes on dimensions, habits and the appearance and size of eggs. Each description then referred to the relevant Lighton plate. A very comprehensive index of Latin, English, Afrikaans and



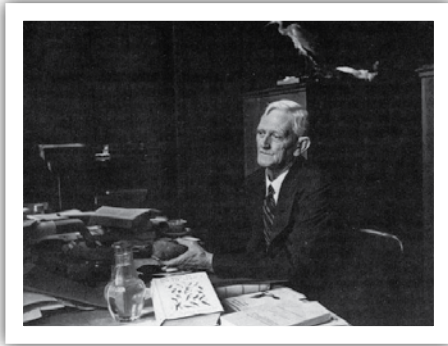
An example of the 1940 text



An example of Lighton's work

African names appeared at the back.

Six weeks later the Sunday Times reported: **Book is bestseller. First edition goes in six weeks**, which, of course, took its publishers by complete surprise, given the



Roberts in his office shortly after the publication of his bird book

rather hefty price tag.

Through the untiring efforts of the trustees of the BBF, the first edition of the book ran to nine impressions, selling a phenomenal total of 24 313 copies in the period 1940-1957. The first six editions saw a total of 329 705 copies sold by the end of 1997.

Part 7.3: Another idea takes flight

Soon after the appearance of Roberts' book, public interest in birds received another boost when the United Tobacco Company (UTC) obtained permission from the BBF to reproduce 150 of Lighton's colour illustrations on 5 cm by 8 cm cards (referred to as "stiffeners"). One card was included in each packet of cigarettes sold by the company. A 106-page bilingual album, "*Our South African Birds/Ons Suid-Afrikaanse Voëls*", was made available, with a numbered space for each collected bird card.

The accompanying text by Roberts covered a whole range of interesting aspects of Southern African birdlife such as: The development of ornithology, trade in plumes of birds, game birds, egg collecting, bird photography, nests, parasitism, birdwatching, diet of birds, flight and migration. John Voelcker was asked to write the foreword. This venture proved to be an enormous success, with 300 000 of these albums eventually printed.

The BBF and Roberts each received 100 guineas in payment from the UTC, with Roberts using this unexpected windfall to buy the second-hand Ford Safari van that he drove on his 1941 expedition to SWA.

Public interest in bird matters was furthermore kept alive for many years by the annual appearance of bilingual calendars featuring Lighton illustrations, as well as introductory notes on each bird by Roberts.

Part 7.4: Not Yet Done

With *Birds of South Africa* behind him, Roberts turned his attention to another life's ambition – the production of a volume on mammals. It should be remembered that Roberts not only collected birds during his numerous field-trips, but also small mammals. The separate entries/lists in almost all of his field notebooks bear testimony to this.

Yet again, the main impetus came from Dr Bigalke who revived the question of a mammal book at a meeting of the Wild Life Protection Society (WLPS) in December 1940. It was proposed that Lighton should again be seconded to do the colour plates. It seems likely, however, that he was not in favour of another such undertaking, as an arrangement was made with Reverend PJ Smit of Port Elizabeth instead. He was to be compensated with funds donated by three BBF trustee members, Mr and Mrs Niven and Mrs Eileen Orpen, as well as the WLPS. In the meantime, Roberts busied himself with the text of the mammal book, a task that took him at least seven years.

The **Reverend Pierre Jacques Smit** was already 80 years old when he started with the painting of the 230 mammals on 24 plates. It was a task that took him three years to complete. It was arranged that he could work at the Port Elizabeth Museum where he had the advice of the eminent Director, Dr John A Pringle.

Smit was born in the Netherlands, but brought up in London where he was trained by, among others, his father who was a

well known animal illustrator at the British Museum. In 1903 he immigrated to South Africa and was ordained as a minister in the Wesleyan Church in Bloemfontein three years later. He served the church in various centres before retiring in Port Elizabeth in 1932. His son, Bernard, was to become a prominent entomologist in South Africa.

By 1948 Roberts had handed over the almost completed text to the Director of the TM, Dr FitzSimons. His death followed a few months later.

By November 1948 John Voelcker established a “Mammals of South Africa Book Fund” to handle matters as with the bird book. In comparison, this was a much more technical volume which ran into 701 pages, with 129 pages of measurement tables as well as an extensive bibliography. The nomenclature was again developed by Roberts, but he did far less genus-splitting than was the case with birds. Unfortunately, *The Mammals of South Africa* (edited by Bigalke, FitzSimons and Malan, 1951) sold rather poorly, and the Trustees did not contemplate a second edition.

Years after Roberts’ death, Dr Waldo Meester set up the Mammal Research unit (later Institute) at the University of Pretoria. The Institute (MRI) eventually produced the definitive volume *The Mammals of the Southern African Subregion* in 1983. Within the MRI, the Roberts connection was not lost, however, as the Austin Roberts Chair in Mammalogy was established in 1995, of which Professor John Skinner was the first appointee.

Part 7.5: A life fulfilled

During 1947, expecting a very small pension, Roberts and Dora decided to sell the Fehrsen Street house and bought a small 12 morgen

farm at Swartspruit, 13 miles west of Pretoria on the Hartbeespoort Dam road. It came with a rondavel house and large outbuildings, two boreholes, over 300 young fruit trees, two cows and farming equipment – everything Roberts thought could contribute to their being self sufficient after his retirement.

On 3 January 1948 Roberts held a party on the Swartspruit farm to celebrate his 65th birthday. Four months later on the 4th May, Roberts, Flora Gilbert (a friend of his daughter), and a domestic servant set off by car for Pondoland to visit Dora who was recuperating from a goitre operation at the home of their daughter Doreen. They spent the first night in Estcourt before heading south. A few miles from Lusikisiki, Flora saw Roberts suddenly slump over the steering wheel, causing the car to run up the bank and overturn. Roberts appears to have died instantly. Both his passengers survived unscathed. One often reads that Roberts died as a direct result of a “traumatic motor vehicle accident”. The fact of the matter, however, is that he had been having dizzy spells for some time and it was probably the fatal result of one of these that caused him suddenly to slump over and lose control of the steering wheel. Roberts, perhaps also, had a premonition of his death: on the occasion of his 65th birthday he made the



Roberts and Dora in their later years



A quiet moment (1939)

remark that he somehow knew that this would be his last birthday

Unexpected and unfortunate as his death was, the people who knew and loved him could take comfort from the fact that he had accomplished exactly what he had set out to do, and brilliantly so, when he joined the staff of the Transvaal Museum 38 years before.

Roberts was buried in the Rebecca Street Cemetery in Pretoria West. A cornerstone bird-bath bears this verse:

*Beset by human ill and guile
Turn to nature for a while
In its book you're sure to find
Beauty, truth and peace of mind.*

Dora lived for a further 22 years. She died in Addington Hospital in Durban, and lies buried in the same grave as Roberts.

Part 7.6: Posthumous recognition

At the initiative of OPM (Oom 'Proz' Prozesky (of the Bird Department and later Education Officer at the TM) the old brickworks quarry in New Muckleneuk, Pretoria, which allowed for the formation of two small dams, was converted into a reserve, to be named

The Austin Roberts Bird Sanctuary, on 27 October 1956.

After Dr Bob Brain's appointment as director of the TM (1968-1991), it was decided to create the **Austin Roberts Bird Hall**, showcasing a mounted specimen of every species of bird listed in *The Birds of South Africa*. A series of displays depicting bird biology, for example, as well as sound recordings of familiar birds, were also provided for in the Bird Hall. The project which lasted over 4 years, culminated in a ceremony in November 1972 at which Roberts' three children were the Museum's honoured guests.

As a tribute, the TM started a series of **Austin Roberts Commemorative Lectures**, the first being given by Dr Reay Smithers in 1983. The sixth, most recent, lecture entitled "The Hunt for the Reservoir Hosts of Marburg and Ebola Viruses" was given by Prof Robert Swanepoel on 13 November 2008.

References and photographic credits

- Brain, C.K. 1998. *Austin Roberts; A Lifelong Devotion to South Africa's Birds and Beasts*. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.
- Brain, C.K. 1992. Natural History at the Transvaal Museum: 1901-1992. In: Dippenaar, N.J. (ed) *Staatmuseum 100*. Natural Cultural History Museum/Museum of the Geological Survey/Transvaal Museum, Pretoria.
- Various documents kindly made available to the Transvaal Museum by the Robert family members.
- A special word of thanks is due to Tamar Cassidy of the Bird Department at the TM who (always in good cheer) scanned the large numbers of visual material through to the editor every three months or so. □

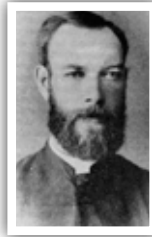
The Woodward Brothers

Pauline Leinberger

Two men who made a considerable contribution to the knowledge of South African – and particularly Natal – birds were the brothers Woodward. Very little is known, positively, about them but it is believed that Richard Blake Woodward was born in Brighton in 1847 and John Deverell Stewart Woodward in Banford in 1849.



The Rev RB Woodward



The Rev JDS Woodward

They arrived in Natal via the Cape in 1871, settling on a farm on the Ifafa River near Umzimto. These men were devout Christians, belonging to the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts and became deacons of St Luke's church in Pietermaritzburg from 1881 to 1885. Later, they worked at Adams Mission near Amanzimtoti. It was during this period that they did most of their collecting from the surrounding bush, travelling deep into Zululand and collecting also on the south coast of Natal.

They had also spent some time in America and wrote a book titled *Wanderings in America*, which gave rise to the assumption that they might be American. The last local reference is given in 1905 when it is believed that Richard settled in Johannesburg after the death of his younger brother. Various reports are given of the demise of brother, John, ranging from drowning in a flooded Tugela River to being trampled by elephants.

These two men were responsible for the

production of a book, "*Natal Birds*" in 1899 which was published while they were working at Adams Mission. Clancy says in his article that they correctly reported the Knysna Woodpecker from the Natal coastal bush, not confusing it with the Golden-tailed Woodpecker which occurs widely in the area. Many of their specimens

were sent to the British Museum where Captain Shelley (who gave his name to a sunbird) became responsible for processing their collection and it was he who named the Woodward's (Green) Barbet in 1895. This is a race of *Stactolaema olivacea*; *S. woodfordii* has yellow-green ear coverts and is restricted to the Ngoye forest in South Africa and parts of Tanzania. Shelley also named Woodward's Batis (*Batis fratrum*) for them in 1900. This species replaces the Cape Batis in the coastal forests of Zululand and Mozambique and according to Roberts is classed as near threatened.

The work of the brothers Woodward is important to us according to Clancy as their book "is the very first regional work on South African birds to have appeared in book form." The frontispiece is of Woodward's Barbet which had been illustrated in the first place by John Keulemans for *Ibis* for Shelley's description in 1895.

Reference

Clancy, P.A. 1983. On the Contribution of the Woodward Brothers. *Bokmakierie* Vol 35 No 3. □

Words derived from birds: crestfallen

Adjective: Dispirited or disappointed by having one's hopes dashed.

Etymology: From allusion to the drooping crest or comb of a bird, such as a rooster. From Latin *crista* (tuft).

The Adventures of a Birder: Looking back on a decade of fun, mischief and brilliant birds

Faansie Peacock

When fellow birders communicate, we tend to beguile each other with short-hand statements of bird names coupled with places and dates, leaving the element of awe, discovery and adventure linked with these factual statements implicit. Let me explain – when a birder might ask me what the highlights of my birding career were, my answer would probably be something rather short and to-the-point, like “finding Southern Africa’s 2nd Great Knot at Inhambane, Mozambique” or “cracking 300 species during Birding Big Day” or “ticking my 800th bird – a Sooty Falcon 200 km offshore in the Indian Ocean”. However, when non-birders ask me “what’s so great about birding?” I know that they will not be able to understand or appreciate the unspoken build-up and background to bird names and places. Therefore, I take joy in explaining to them the bizarre situations we, as birders, so often find ourselves in, and how we ended up there.

With that in mind, I have thought about the highlights and associated misadventures of my birding during the last decade. As I’m sure you’ll be able to confirm, humorous and

memorable birding situations spring to mind thick and fast when thinking of your own birding career. How about January 22, 1999? On this occasion, I spent the afternoon after school wading through ankle-deep flooded grassland trying to flush crakes. To my surprise, I managed to step into what was apparently a quarry of some sorts (completely overgrown by grass and thus indistinguishable from the shallowly flooded surrounds). Without warning, I was no longer wading, but rather more swimming, holding my binoculars above my head. Try explaining to your mother why your school clothes are wet and muddy to your collar! That little anecdote brings to mind 10 February 2001, Impaila Island, Namibia. Again I was forced to undertake a mid-birding swim, this time across a 3 m wide canal. Although my brief swim was by choice this time, it was not a wise choice – I had seen several crocodiles just a little further downstream. After poking the floor of the canal with a stick several times and chucking some big rocks in the water, I threw my backpack across the gap and took the plunge – only to find that I had locked the keys in the car when I got to the other side! Staying with the swimming theme, how about the time we cooled off in Mozambique in a river so raging that we had to tie our waists to a rope not to be swept away (it was really hot!). Or how about lying in the warm waters of Inhambane Bay, with tiny fish hiding in the shadow of your body, watching Lesser Crested Terns and Crab Plovers?

Allow me to indulge in a stroll down memory lane...

Vaalkop Dam, north-west of Brits, has played a major role in my birding in the last few years, and as of last December, our personal



Dup du Plessis

Red-billed Quelea/Rooibekwelea: eye level encounter

list for Vaalkop has now surpassed 300 birds, including some spectacular species such as Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Square-tailed Nightjar, Martial and Long-crested Eagles, Osprey, African Rail, White-bellied Korhaan, Eurasian Curlew, Dusky Lark, Grey-backed Sparrowlark, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Lark-like Bunting and 11 species of warblers. However, the absolute Vaalkop highlight for me is not one of these megaticks, but rather the world's most abundant land bird – the Red-billed Quelea. On one memorable occasion, we had dug 1 m deep holes to plant some trees around the house, and taking advantage of this, we erected a makeshift hide with some shade netting and poles over one of the holes. Ronel and I then scattered some seed in front of the hide, and soon had eye-level views of thousands of bustling queleas. And when I say 'eye-level' I mean it quite literally: the masses of little feathered bodies were so close to our faces that we could hear their bills snapping the shells of the seeds! When the flocks took flight, the combined force of the wind produced by their thousands of wings showered us with seeds and that 'birdy' smell of pet shops or aviaries! Wow! What an experience! During these quelea 'infestations' there was more often than not a quelea or two inside the house, fluttering about the rafters and trying to get out again. Perhaps pursuing one of these disorientated prey items, a Pearl-spotted Owllet also found its way into the house, and I had to carefully catch this feisty little predator with a towel, to free it outside again!

Another interesting, although perhaps more ethically questionable owl experience at Vaalkop involved a dead Spotted Eagle-Owl which I picked up at the roadside. With the owl still in pristine condition (excepting a heartbeat), I propped it up on a dead tree with some wires, and parked the car right next to it. Within minutes, hordes of babblers, sparrows, finches and sunbirds were going berserk at this owl so blatantly 'perched' in the open, providing superb photo opportunities!

Another star bird that characterises



Clive Kaplan

Black-winged Pratincole/Swartvlerksprinkaanvoël: allowed close approach

summers at Vaalkop is the migrant Black-winged Pratincole. Although these elegant aerial waders visit the dam annually, their numbers swell to several thousand during some years, providing a spectacle second to none. During one such period, all the pratincoles were roosting on a small island at the onset of a major thunderstorm, and I took the opportunity to study them closely by setting out in a kayak on the water. I slowly paddled closer (bearing in mind the presence of hippos and crocs in the water), and eventually reached the island where I stealthily disembarked, sitting down on the mud, surrounded by thousands of pratincoles, chattering softly to each other. Mind-blowing! A final mention worthy Vaalkop moment was on Valentines Day 2008, when Ronel and I took an evening drive, but soon got utterly stuck in deep clay, in pouring rain! As a consolation however, two African Crakes appeared out of the long grass and proceeded to forage unconcernedly in the flooded track! All worth it!

We have always had a love-hate relationship with the town of Memel in the eastern Free State. Don't get me wrong – if you're looking for breathtaking mountain scenery, pristine landscapes and unbeatable endemics birding, Memel is the place to go. However, for some reason, we have always seemed to run into trouble there. We have had the privilege of visiting Memel about


15 times in the last decade, staying on a friend's cattle farm near the famous 'silver cattle pens' birding spot on the high plateau. It is a wonderful location, and it's possible to hear Rudd's Lark from the farmhouse while watching Grey-winged Francolins scratching around the lawn, or a Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk circling overhead.

However, given the old infrastructure and remote location, it is perhaps not surprising that we've run into a few problems. Whether the farmhouse will have running water remains a surprise until you actually get there and open the tap. On one occasion, we got so desperate that we strained and boiled water from a nearby cattle trough for an early morning cuppa! The other major Memel obstacle for us has always been vehicles. Through the years we've lost count of the number of flat tyres (including one memorable time when we had two flats simultaneously). We've also had three breakdowns, gotten stuck innumerable

times and one evening, on the way back from Seekoeivlei Wetland, we managed to virtually roll a Hilux bakkie on the treacherous dirt roads. Seeing the impending doom, we opted instead to ramp over the roadside fence, landing dazed and confused, but mercifully unharmed, in a farmer's mielie land. And then I'll rather not get into the odd phenomena we've experienced while birding around the supposedly haunted graveyard on the farm...

Birding highlights at Memel have been many and diverse, but a moment that sticks out was my face-to-face encounter with a Cape Eagle-Owl. We had discovered a pair of eagle-owls roosting in a small ravine near the house, and I decided to approach them quietly for a closer look. Taking off my shoes, I crept on hands and feet down the slope, jumped over the stream and scrambled up the rocky slopes (reminding myself very much of The Lord of the Ring's Gollum). I approached the spot where we could see the owl sitting on a rock, surveying the setting sun and planning its nightly activities. Remarkably, the owl did not hear me approach through the undergrowth, and eventually I was right under the boulder it was sitting on. Heart pumping, I very slowly inched upwards, until I was staring into the blazing orange eyes of a fully grown Cape Eagle-Owl about 50 cm from me. We made eye contact for a second (during which I thought the owl had a rather disbelieving expression), before it spread its huge wings and glided off for the night.

All birders can entertain you with these types of stories. Tales about enraged farmers, unexpected encounters with snakes or driving hundreds of kilometres for a twitch (and then dipping!). And how about the frustration of seeing a really interesting bird at an impromptu moment (like the U-turn I made for a Dusky Lark on the way to my wedding). To me, it's these stories-behind-the-stories that make birding so addictive. The memories, smells and sights that come flooding back behind the pages of lists and dates and names. It's then when I realise that *birds* are only a part of the adventure that is *birding!* ◻



Buffelsdrif Inheemse Kwekery

LOK VOËLS NA JOU TUIN !!

Ons kweek 'n groot verskeidenheid
inheemse bome teen

GROOTHANDELPRYSE!!

Vaderlandswilg, Akasias, Wilde Pruim,
Worsboom, Rooi Essenhout ens.

Ons het **groot gevestigde** bome.
Persoonlike advies oor bome in
Pretoria en omliggende areas.

Oop Ma-Son op afspraak
Plot 33 Bosbok Straat Buffelsdrif Pta
Kontak Rob by: 082 393 8870

BirdLife Northern Gauteng Photographic Competition

2008

1st Place

Category: Local Wild Birds

Awarded to: *Kevin Ravno*

Date: 14 February 2009



3rd Place - Ken Logan



2nd Place - Kevin Ravno

**LOCAL WILD
BIRDS**

**Overall
Winner**



1st Place - Kevin Ravno

BirdLife Northern Gauteng Photographic Competition

2008

1st Place

Category: General

Awarded to: *Debbie*



GENERAL



2nd Place - Kevin Ravno



3rd Place - Des Bignaut



1st Place - Debbie van Zyl

AMUSING & FUN

BirdLife Northern Gauteng
Photographic Competition

2008

1st Place

Category: Amusing & Fun

Awarded to: Susan Velthuisen



3rd Place - Elke Geggus



2nd Place - Kevin Ravno



1st Place - Susan Velthuisen

Spot Prizes



Debbie van Zyl



Tineke Malan



Ken Logan

Judges:

Toni Ballotta (non-member)
Rynetta Coetzee
Drinie van Rensburg

All entries and details available
on our website: www.blng.co.za

Bird Distribution and Latitude 26 Degrees South

Roger Fieldwick

SABAP1

The first Southern African Bird Atlas Project culminated in the publication of the two-volume *The atlas of southern African birds* (Harrison *et al*, 1997). Each bird is described and its distribution illustrated on a map of the region. Areas where the species were more frequently observed (a high reporting rate) are shown in a darker shade of colour than areas where the bird was less commonly found (a lower reporting rate). Four gradations of shade are shown and it is easy to see areas where a particular species was most commonly observed, and at the other end of the scale, where there were just a few scattered records.

Latitude 26 degrees

If you page through the atlas, looking at the bird distributions of the different species in the greater Gauteng region, you will be struck by how many of these species display an abrupt change of reporting rate from north to south at the 26 degree latitude. Indeed, this phenomenon extends east and west well beyond our region, as far west as longitude 26 degrees (Lichtenberg) and as far east as longitude 30 degrees (Carolina). (Pretoria and Johannesburg lie roughly midway between.) Latitude 26 degrees passes through Midrand and, between longitudes 26 and 30 degrees is generally recognised as the boundary between the savannah biome to the north and the grassland biome to the south.

Thus, we have this distinct change in reporting rate of many species at latitude 26 degrees over a distance of 400 km. This is a remarkable occurrence!

Further analysis

By inspection, 159 species were identified that showed a markedly different reporting rate along latitude 26 degrees between longitudes 26 and 30 degrees. This is nearly

one-third of the species occurring within 100 km of Pretoria and Johannesburg. Of the 159 species, 91 showed higher reporting rates north of latitude 26 degrees and 68 species had higher reporting rates south of 26 degrees.

Of the former, 17 species were not recorded south of latitude 26 degrees; there were a few scattered records of 27 species south of latitude 26 degrees and lower reporting rates for the remaining 47 species.

All 68 species with higher reporting rates south of 26 degrees were also found to the north, 50 species comprising a few scattered records and 18 species with a lower reporting rate.

SABAP2

SABAP1 was mapped at a QDC grid (15' x 15') whereas SABAP2 is being mapped at a finer grid of 5' x 5', termed a pentad.

The boundary between two biomes is very important and birders might consider giving special attention to atlasing a two-pentad deep continuous strip on each side of the 26 degree latitude from longitudes 26 to 30 degrees. Professor Les Underhill, Director of the ADU, has previously stated that a continuous strip of atlased cells in one direction, one or more pentads wide (termed a *caterpillar*), is extremely important from a biological point of view. He would like to see each pentad of a caterpillar atlased at least 11 times, and visited annually. Many of the pentads along this route in our area have been already been visited several times, some of them many times.

Reference

Harrison, J.A., Allan, D.G., Underhill, L.G., Herremans, M., Tree, A.J., Parker, V. and Brown, C.J. (eds) 1997. *The Atlas of Southern African Birds*. Vols 1 and 2. BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg. □

Greater Gauteng's Commonest Birds

Roger Fieldwick

Introduction

For the past six years, Pat Tattersall and I have been atlasing in the greater Gauteng region within 100 km of Pretoria and Johannesburg. In each grid cell we have recorded the time spent and have counted the number of birds of each species seen and heard. Initially we visited many localities in the region but have recently concentrated more on eastern and north-eastern Gauteng and adjacent Mpumalanga. We visit cells on an *ad hoc* basis and there is no particular pattern in our selection of which cell to atlas.

We record our data in a notebook; at the head of the page we enter the date, grid reference of the cell and the start and end times. We record each new bird on a new line as we encounter it and update the species totals as we move through the cell. Collecting the numbers of birds takes a little longer than just recording whether a bird is present, but not by very much.

I am frequently surprised at the end of a day's atlasing at the numbers of some species recorded. I believe that one *has* to record whilst atlasing and not merely pencilling in an estimate of the totals of each species at the end of the day.

A spreadsheet for each year was constructed, which contains all the birds of the greater Gauteng region. The number of birds of each species seen and heard in the study area was entered for each visit and the time spent recorded. The number recorded of each species was summed to give an annual total. The total time spent in the field during the year was also calculated.

These annual data were copied to a consolidation spreadsheet and the total field time was divided by the six-year totals of each species to give *hours per bird*, which is an indication of the time one could expect to

spend in the field to record the species.

The hours per bird for each species was in addition allocated to one of five separate bins, each an order of magnitude larger than the previous one: less than one hour per bird (*very common*); between one and 10 hours per bird (*common*); 10 to 100 hours per bird (*uncommon*); 100 to 1 000 hours per bird (*rare*); over 1 000 hours per bird (*very rare*). For an individual, *very common* means several birds of that species in a morning; *common* is one or more per day, *uncommon* is one or more in six months, *rare* is one or more in five years and *very rare* a few in a lifetime.

Results and analysis

So far, we have recorded 167 000 birds of 398 species in 1 500 hours.

Of the 398 species, 22 are *very common*; 108 are *common*; 145 are *uncommon*; 98 are *rare*; 25 are *very rare*. Two species, Red-billed Quelea and Barn Swallow, could qualify as *abundant* (<0,1 hours/bird) but I have elected to retain them in the *very common* category.

Table 1 lists the 30 most common birds that we have recorded, ranked in descending order. With the exception of the White-winged Widowbird, all are found throughout Gauteng, although some may be more common on the Highveld than in the Bushveld, and *vice versa*. It is noteworthy that the first 27 birds are gregarious to some degree, many of them highly so. It is only when we get to the Reed Cormorant (which feeds solitarily but roosts and breeds communally) and the Zitting Cisticola (which is found singly or in pairs), do we find species that do not form parties or flocks. This suggests that flocking behaviour can confer a benefit on some species, resulting in a higher population.

Many of the birds are tolerant of a variety

of habitats, another contributory factor to a large population.

The construction of sewage works, large dams and the many farm dams in the greater Gauteng area is undoubtedly responsible for the presence of eight waterbirds on the list.

Only the Barn Swallow and the Amur Falcon are Palaearctic migrants, the remainder are resident or intra-Africa migrants. Both these species, however, seem to cope successfully with the stresses of long-distance migration.

The presence of the Wattled Starling in the top 30 was a surprise; we do not see them very often but when we do, we see a lot of them. The appearance on the list of the White-winged Tern at number 25 was also unexpected. It owes its position to a flock of 800 birds recorded at Rooiwal Sewage Works in December 2003. We were also surprised at the lowly 22nd position of the Cape Turtle Dove on the list.

Discussion

Some shortcomings in the execution of this project are listed below.

This was not a designed project but was undertaken using data already collected. All our atlasing was done during daylight hours and nocturnal birds are seriously under-represented.

Not all areas were visited equally, or during each season of each year, leading

to sampling bias and possibly inconsistent results.

Birds with loud and distinctive calls (Rufous-naped Lark, Black-collared Barbet), birds that perched prominently outside the tree canopy (Fork-tailed Drongo, Lesser Grey Shrike) and larger birds are probably over-represented: birds with the opposite characteristics were undoubtedly overlooked.

We have difficulty identifying short-tailed Cisticolas when they are not calling, and find identifying some species within mixed flocks of grassland birds in non-breeding plumage a problem. These factors are a further source of sampling bias.

When we first started counting birds, it was hoped that the annual data could be used to show population changes of species over time. I am now of the opinion that a minimum of 100 observations of a species is required each year to give consistent results – 1 000 would be better. For most species, this is beyond the scope of two part-time birders making weekly visits to the study area.

This approach to monitoring long-term changes in population of species seems to have merit but requires to be carried out for several more years yet to reduce the effects of both sampling bias and year-to-year fluctuations due to environmental factors, such as drought, masking long-term trends. □

Ranking	Species	No. observed	Hours per bird	Ranking	Species	No. observed	Hours per bird
1	Red-billed Quelea	20177	0,07	16	Long-tailed Widowbird	2061	0,72
2	Barn Swallow	15757	0,09	17	African Sacred Ibis	1958	0,76
3	Speckled Pigeon	9931	0,15	18	Wattled Starling	1781	0,83
4	Cattle Egret	6873	0,22	19	Glossy Ibis	1775	0,84
5	Laughing Dove	5309	0,28	20	Amur Falcon	1718	0,86
6	Red-knobbed Coot	5199	0,29	21	Yellow-billed Duck	1664	0,89
7	White-faced Duck	5132	0,29	22	Cape Turtle Dove	1507	0,99
8	Southern Masked-Weaver	4753	0,31	23	South-African Cliff-Swallow	1359	1,09
9	Southern Red Bishop	3780	0,39	24	Little Grebe	1322	1,12
10	Helmeted Guineafowl	3359	0,44	25	White-winged Tern	1269	1,17
11	White-winged Widowbird	2570	0,58	26	Dark-capped Bulbul	1267	1,17
12	Blacksmith Masked-Lapwing	2841	0,60	27	Hadedda Ibis	1253	1,19
13	Little Swift	2284	0,65	28	Reed Cormorant	1244	1,19
14	Egyptian Goose	2254	0,66	29	Zitting Cisticola	1162	1,28
15	Crowned Lapwing	2232	0,67	30	Southern Pochard	1124	1,32

Uitstappie na Montle Metse

Adele van Vuuren

Al beplan 'n mens ook hoe sorgvuldig aan 'n uitstappie om alles vlot te laat verloop, gebeur dinge wat alles deurmekaar krap!

Ons het 'n chalet vir Saterdagmiddag bespreek sodat ons Saterdag op ons tyd die twee plase, Montle Metse en Kameelrivier, kon gaan verken om seker te maak die paaie is rybaar en waar die voëls is. Die eerste rit tweeuur die middag op Montle Metse het danksy die hitte maar min opgelewer. Nietemin, 'n **Swartreier**, **Sabotalewerik** en 'n verstommende **Bosveldkwartel**, meters voor die motor in die pad, maak dit die moeite werd! Pauline noem ook dat Montle Metse, met oorwegende Combretum-veld, minder voëls sal hê as Kameelrivier wat oorwegend akasia-bosveld is. Pauline, Verona en ek het so vyfuur die middag oor Kameelrivier gery en veel meer aktiwiteit onder die voëls gekry. Op pad terug gaan ons gou by die bestuurder, Jan, se huis aan en ontmoet die eienaars van Montle Metse. Pauline kom agter dat haar kleinseun en hulle seun groot maats is en ons kry toestemming om verby hulle huise te ry, te stop, rond te loop en voëls te kyk. Dit het vir ons veilige toegang tot 'n deel van die rivier gegee.

Die reëling met Jan was dat die eerste groep Sondagoggend so gou as moontlik op die vlot sou uitgaan. Ongelukkig het die storm wat Pretoria Saterdagmiddag vyfuur getref het, ons vieruur die oggend wakker gemaak. Die blitse was baie erg en die reën het op die sinkdak geraas asof ons sal verdrink as ons dit buite sou waag. Ons kon net wonder in watter toestand die paaie sou wees en of almal gaan opdaag! Wel, almal het toe opgedaag (wat baie sê vir die entoesiasme van ons lede) en terwyl die groep van 29 klublede nog die bywoningslys invul kry ons **Kleinstreepswaels**, 'n verbyvlug **Glansibisse**, **Wipootblouvinkie**, **Buffelwewers**, **Kransduiwe** ens.

Omdat die weer nog dreigend geblits het, het Jan en Frans besluit dat, om op water op 'n staalvlot te vaar dalkies nie so 'n goeie idee sou wees nie!! Dus het ons die nat modderige pad en nat gras te voet aangedurf. Ons het onder andere **Grootstreep-** en **Europese Swaels**, **Witkeeljanfrederik**, **Diederikkie**, **Witborsspreu** en die altyd teenwoordige **Bosveldtinkinkie** gesien.

Ons het in twee groepe verdeel vir die vlotrit en die opwindig vir die dag was die drie pare **Kleinkoningriethane** wat ons groep gesien het. Ook twee **Reuserieers** en **Kuifkopvisvangers** is van naby beskou. 'n **Oostelike Rooipootvalk** in die verte het ons aan die raai gehad – dan lyk dit soos 'n Kwêvoël (sonder 'n kuif), dan soos 'n Reusevisvanger. Lisl van Deventer het op die ou end die muffin gewen, want ek het haar “**Amur Falcon**” hoor roep. Later het sy gebieg dat dit eintlik Eran was wat eerste die voël reg ge-ID het. Harder skree Eran!!

'n Totaal van 151 voëls is gesien (met nog 8 wat ons op die Uitvlug ringpad gesien het), onder andere 'n melanitiese **Witkruissperwer**, **Geelblestinker**, **Gewone-**, **Witpoot-**, en **Staalblouvinkies**.



Clive Kaplan

Kleinkoningriethaan/Allen's Gallinule: opwindig vir die dag

Ten spyte van die erge hitte, die groot groep gaste wat die kamp met ons gedeel het en 'n visvangkompetisie op die dam, het almal die dag geniet. Die venue sal lekker wees vir 'n naweekkamp, veral as 'n mens sesuur die oggend al op die vlot kan wees! Die Uitvlugt ringpad is deur en deur die moeite werd vir 'n voëlkykrit en die twee

plase, rivier en dam kan 'n voëlkyker 'n hele naweek besig hou. (Ons het hierdie keer nooit eers tot by die dam gekom nie!)

Die laaste "slegte" ding wat gebeur het, was dat Elba Swart se bakkie op pad huis toe oorverhit het. Deon van Tonder en Eduard de Koning het hul bes probeer om die fout reg te stel, maar die bakkie moes ingesleep word. □

Rarities and Unusual Sightings Report

Compiled by André Marx

A number of very interesting records surfaced during the summer months and my thanks go to all who regularly submit records. Several local rarities were noted during atlasing efforts from people taking part in SABAP2 and there were also a few interesting garden bird observations.

National Rarities / Nasionale Rariteite

Slaty Egret. Rooikeelreier: one bird was found at MKhombo Dam where it remained for a period of several weeks with several people seeing the bird, 29 Nov 08 (BLNG, RGd); with probably the same bird still there, 11 Dec 08 (CK, KR); this species was sighted again at Marievale, one of the few regular localities for it, 06 Jan 09 (DD).

Western Marsh-Harrier. Europese

Vleivalk: a sub-adult bird was observed at Marievale, 29 Jan 09 (DD); one bird was seen over the floodplain at Kgomo-Kgomo, 09 Feb 09 (AH, ABe); with another bird sighted here, 23 Mar 09 (DD).

Green Sandpiper. Witgatruiter: one bird was at Northern Farm where it remained for a couple of weeks, 10 Jan 09 (J&J); one bird was seen on the Zaagkuildrift road where this and possibly at least one other bird was seen over a few weeks, 15 Feb 09 (DD).

Thrush Nightingale. Lysternagtegaal: this species was encountered again on the Zaagkuildrift road when one bird was heard and briefly seen, 15 Feb 09 (RGy).

Regional Rarities / Streeksrariteite

Marabou Stork. Maraboe: one bird visited the vulture restaurant near Hartbeespoort Dam, no doubt attracted by the feeding activity, 28 Dec 08 (KW).

European Honey-Buzzard. Wespedief: a bird was seen soaring above the hill at Aloe Ridge, near Muldersdrift, in pentad 2555_2750, 06 Dec 08 (AM, JB); a pale form bird was at Delta Park, Johannesburg, 28 Dec 08 (GLd); this species was seen soaring at Northern Farm during the club visit, 10 Jan 09 (BLNG); one bird was found in the Amanzintaba valley, north-east of Bronkhorstspruit, 21 Feb 09 (KR, RGd, RC); a sighting was had of one bird on the Schurveberge road west of Pretoria in pentad 2545_2800, 22 Feb 09 (EM). *This species has been downlisted from national to regional rarity, but reports are still noteworthy.*

Pallid Harrier. Witborsvleivalk: a male bird was seen quartering the grassland in the area of the Waaikraal Road in pentad 2555_2830, east of Pretoria, 30 Nov 08 (PT, RF); a female bird was seen in a field at Marievale where the



*European Honey-Buzzard/Wespedief:
cracking bird from Centurion area*

grass was being cut, 13 Feb 09 (DD).

Corn Crane. Kwartelkoning: one bird was seen crossing the Zaagkuildrift road on Bird-ing Big Day, 29 Nov 08 (L&HK).

Allen's Gallinule. Kleinkoningriethaan: this species was seen during the club visit to Montle Metse, on the southern side of Rust de Winter Dam in pentad 2515_2825, 18 Jan 09 (BLNG,LvD); this species was present at the Kgomo-Kgomo wetlands, 09 Feb 09 (AH,ABe); with several birds still at this locality, 28 Feb 09 (FREEK).

Kori Bustard. Gompou: one bird was seen in a field together with several Abdim's and White Storks in pentad 2450_2855, about 50km east of Settlers in Limpopo Prov., this sighting being 200 km from the known range of this species and probably represents a relict population in the region, 08 Feb 09 (AM,JB).

Square-tailed Nightjar. Laeveldnaguil: during a night drive at Rietvlei NR one bird was again caught and photographed, being the second confirmed record for the reserve, considerably out of the known range, 22 Feb 09 (BLNG,RGy).

River Warbler. Sprinkaansanger: during the club camp to Bosveld Paradys, near Marble Hall, a bird was ringed in the late afternoon and could be observed at close quarters before being released, 07 Feb 09

(BLNG,GJvR); one bird was seen over a period of at least 3 weeks in a garden in Buffelsdrift, north-east of Pretoria, 22 Mar 09 (BLNG,RGd).

Other Interesting Observations / Ander Interessante Waarnemings

Black Stork. Grootswartooievaar: a single bird on an electricity pylon on the Kleinsonderhout dirt road east of Pretoria in pentad 2555_2830, 30 Nov 08 (PT,RF) is further south than usual; one bird was at a farm dam in pentad 2555_2720, which lies to the west of Magaliesburg village in North West prov., 16 Dec 08 (AM,ED).

African Cuckoo Hawk. Koekoekvalk: one bird was observed in Valhalla, Centurion, 07 Feb 09 (L&HK).

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle. Kleinjagarend: a good sighting at eye level was enjoyed of a bird along Tom Jenkins Drive in the vicinity of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, 11 Feb 09 (ZB).

Long-crested Eagle. Langkuifarend: a pair of birds was seen near Aloe Ridge in pentad 2555_2750, 06 Dec 08 (AM,JB); one bird was observed in Irene, 22 Feb 09 (MG).

Ovambo Sparrowhawk. Ovambosperwer: one bird was seen in Equestria, in eastern Pretoria, 23 Nov 08 (RF); one bird perched obligingly out in the open at Roodeplaat NR, 19 Dec 08 (F&RP).

African Marsh-Harrier. Afrikaanse Vleivalk: 2 birds were at Marievale, 29 Jan 09 (DD).

Montagu's Harrier. Blou vleivalk: 2 male birds were seen flying over a field where the grass was being cut at Marievale, 13 Feb 09 (DD); a female bird was identified as being this species in the Marievale area, 22 Feb 09 (GLd).

African Harrier-Hawk. Kaalwangvalk: a single bird was seen in Doringkloof, Centurion, 24 Feb 09 (MG).

Osprey. Visvalk: one bird was at Rust de Winter Dam, 02 Nov 08 (LvD).

Peregrine Falcon. Swerfvalk: an adult

bird perched in a tree and could be observed in detail during the club visit to Groenfontein, near Bronkhorstspuit Dam, 16 Feb 09 (BLNG); one bird was seen on an electricity pylon where the R55 meets the Erasmus road in Centurion, in pentad 2545_2805, 22 Feb 09 (EM).

Red-footed Falcon. Westelike Rooipootvalk: a solitary female was present amongst a large group of Amur Falcons at Northern Farm, 02 Jan 09 (AM); a male bird was at Mkhombo Dam, 21 Feb 09 (MG).

Natal Francolin. Natalse Fisant: one bird was seen in a garden in Faerie Glen, Pretoria, an area where this species is not known from, 04 Apr 09 (SP).

African Crake. Afrikaanse Riethaan: this species was a surprising find in a field adjacent to a dam at Northern Farm, south-west of Pretoria, 10 Jan 09 (BLNG).

Lesser Moorhen. Kleinwaterhoender: one bird was at Rietvlei NR, 24 Jan 09 (RGy); a number of birds were on the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain, 09 Feb 09 (AH,ABe); two juvenile birds were seen in the Seringveld Conservancy, north-east of Pretoria, in pentad 2535_2825, 02 Apr 09 (EM,LvD,RGd).

Greater Painted-snipe. Goudsnip: a road killed bird was found near Pienaarsrivier in pentad 2545_2825, 10 Nov 08 (PLm); a male bird was a first record for Northern Farm, 31 Jan 09 (RvS).

Water Thick-knee. Waterdikkop: one bird was at Elandsvlei, near Bapsfontein, in pentad 2555_2825, 29 Nov 08 (WB); this species was a surprise find and first record for Northern Farm, 28 Dec 08 (JH).

Bronze-winged Courser. Bronsvlerkdrawertjie: this species was at Rietvlei NR, 24 Jan 09 (RGy); one bird was in the road at midday near Rust de Winter Dam NR, 05 Feb 09 (F&AvV).

African Cuckoo. Afrikaanse Koekoek: this species was a surprise find at Marievale, 14 Jan 09 (DD).

African Grass-Owl. Grasuil: 2 birds were in a field at Marievale, 13 Feb 09 (DD).

European Roller. Europese Troupant: a



Dave Deighton

Green Sandpiper/Witgatruiter: Zaagkuildrift road; showing dark underwing coverts

single bird was a first for Delta Park, Johannesburg in 37 years, 24 Dec 08 (GLd); one bird in pentad 2605_2715, on the western edge of Gauteng, is further south than normal for this species, 03 Jan 09 (AM,ST).

Lilac-breasted Roller. Gewone Troupant: one bird was an unusual sighting at Marievale, 14 Jan 09 (DD); a single bird was in pentad 2550_2755, just to the north of Northern Farm, and further south than usual for this species, 14 Feb 09 (AM,JB,RS).

Melodious Lark. Spotlewerik: the nest of this species was an interesting find in grasslands west of Centurion in pentad 2550_2805, 20 Jan 09 (EM,FP).

Dusky Lark. Donkerlewerik: this species was found on the De Wagendrift Road, north-east of Pretoria, 31 Dec 08 (DD); a single bird was at Northern Farm, south-west of Pretoria, where it remained for at least two weeks, 03 Jan 09 (KL); with possibly the same bird seen here again, 10 Jan 09 (J&Jl); this species was at Dikhololo, near Brits, 21 Mar 09 (JJ).

Pink-billed Lark. Pienkbeklewerik: one bird was found on the Kleinsonderhout road, east of Pretoria, 21 Nov 08 (PT,RF).

Garden Warbler. Tuinsanger: one bird was sighted in a Monument Park, Pretoria, garden for the first time in 20 years, 25 Jan 09 (F&AvV).

Dark-capped Yellow Warbler. Geelsanger:



Ntali Perrins

Slaty Egret/Rooikeelreier: present at Mkhombo Dam

at least one and possibly two birds were seen and heard in riverside vegetation near Fochville, representing a new locality for this species, 17 Jan 09 (LvD,RCO).

Lesser Grey Shrike. Gryslaksman: one bird was a rare sighting at Delta Park, in Johannesburg, 28 Dec 08 (GLD).

Wattled Starling. Lelspreeu: a record of a single bird at Delta Park, Johannesburg, is an uncommon sighting, 24 Dec 08 (GLD); with a flock of 15 birds seen here, 28 Dec 08 (GLD).

Cuckoo Finch. Koekoekvink: a male bird was observed in a mixed flock of bishops and widowbirds in pentad 2550_2820, just east of Rietvlei Dam NR, 04 Dec 08 (FP); a male and female bird were near Skeerpoort, west of Hartbeespoort Dam, 04 Dec 08 (AB); a

juvenile bird being fed by a cisticola species (not clearly identified) was seen by a number of club members at Northern Farm, 10 Jan 09 (BLNG).

White-winged Widowbird. Witvlerkflap: a male bird was an unusual find at Delta Park, Johannesburg, 28 Dec 08 (GLD).

Observers / Waarnemers:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Adrian Haagner (AH) | André Bernon (ABe) |
| André Botha (AB) | André Marx (AM) |
| BirdLife Northern Gauteng members (BLNG) | |
| Clive Kaplan (CK) | Dave Deighton (DD) |
| Ehren Eksteen (EEK) | Eran Dvir (ED) |
| Eric Ehlers (EE) | Etienne Marais (EM) |
| Faansie & Ronel Peacock (F&RP) | Faansie Peacock (FP) |
| Geoff Lockwood (GLD) | Frans & Adele van Vuuren (F&AvV) |
| Gerrie Jansen v Rensburg (GJvR) | Jane & Joe Irvine (J&JI) |
| John Bannon (JB) | Jannie Jansen (JJ) |
| Ken Borland (KL) | John Hill (JH) |
| Kevin Ravno (KR) | Kerri Wolter (KW) |
| Lisl van Deventer (LvD) | Leon & Helen Kay (L&HK) |
| Pat Tattersal (PT) | Michal Groenewald (MG) |
| Rihann Geyser (RGy) | Petro Lemmer (PLM) |
| Rod Cassidy (RC) | Rob Geddes (RGd) |
| Ron Searle (RS) | Roger Fieldwick (RF) |
| Rynetta Coetzee (RCo) | Rudi von Staden (RvS) |
| Stephan Terblanche (ST) | Sonia Pretorius (SP) |
| Zephné Bernitz (ZB) | Willem Boshoff (WB) |

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 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 □



Hannelore Hammay

River Warbler/Sprinkaan-sanger: surprise find in the nets

Notes on Cuckoo Finch Behaviour

Clive Kaplan

I was very excited some weeks ago when I was able to photograph a Cuckoo Finch for the first time on an outing near Dullstroom. A week later Gareth Hazel and I found a Cuckoo Finch at the start of Zaagkuildrift Road and we were fortunate to get some more pictures of this bird. During the last week of February 2009 Phil Penlington contacted me with the news that there were Melodious Larks displaying on a field in the Centurion area. We never found the larks but had a wonderful sighting of a few Cuckoo Finches with one difference, there were females or juveniles around as well as male birds and we managed to get some great photographs.

We visited the field three or four times and it became clear that the birds were very skittish, spending a great deal of the time perched where they were visible, but flew off at the slightest noise. However, on a subsequent visit by myself and Gareth Hazell, we noticed that there were many individual birds flying together with a big flock of bishops and I cannot help wondering if these birds are not also parasitised by the Cuckoo Finches? Furthermore, when these birds are disturbed

they seem to fly away for some distance but somehow return to the bishop flock. We also found some birds returning to a favourite observation post on top of some tall weedy plants and this proved a good spot for photographs. □



Clive Kaplan

Cuckoo Finch/Koekoekvink: found amongst flocks of bishops

Diderick Cuckoo vs. Lesser Masked-Weaver

Lee Goss

My husband and I spent a few days over Christmas with family in Botswana. The house overlooks the Limpopo River and we watched an amazing variety of birds from the sun-deck. One evening I observed a number of Lesser Masked-Weavers busily building nests in a tree over the river. From nearby a Diderick Cuckoo perched on a neighbouring tree would aggressively fly towards one of the

weavers and attack, then go back to the tree and wait a while before launching another attack. This carried on and on and each time the weavers gathered together and fought back even though the cuckoo's aggression was aimed at the one specific weaver nest. Eventually the cuckoo's efforts waned and she disappeared for the night. This continued each evening, and the cuckoo kept trying to

chase the weaver away from the same nest. I realise this is probably conducive to the cuckoo's characteristic parasitic behaviour but it was really fascinating to watch.

Alongside the tree where the new weaver nests were under construction, was a huge dead looking log with bare tangled branches – a lovely silhouette over the water. Fairly low down on this log close to the water in a hollow, was a Green-Backed Heron sitting quietly on a nest – watching all the action. A beautiful site.

Diderick Cuckoos will generally only enter the nests of their hosts when the chance presents itself. In a weaver colony it is not uncommon to see weavers engage in a mob attack to chase the female cuckoo away, often pursuing it for some distance away from their nests, but the cuckoos always return and through sheer persistence will eventually lay their egg or eggs. They will seldom target only one nest and what you probably witnessed was not an 'attack' by the cuckoo, but rather a determined effort by the bird to get to one of the nests that probably already contained eggs - Ed. □

War and Peace in the Garden

Elizabeth Gevers

Theo and I live in a Retirement Village in Garsfontein, and are blessed with beautiful gardens within the high walls of security. When being developed, as many *Acacia karoo* (Soetdoring trees) were left as was possible, two little streams were designed, strelitzias and clivias adorn the pathways, all

creating a mini-paradise for residents, birds and beasts alike.

The beasts include an occasional slender mongoose, no doubt rushing to cross a path back to the adjacent Moreletta Spruit, feral cats being illegally fed by dear little ladies feeling sorry for them, and of course the usual rats and mice one finds near homesteads. Up in the trees we now have at least one family of Lesser Bushbabies (South African Galago), more commonly known as Nagapies.

Dotted throughout the village, many residents have erected nesting logs. My nesting log is about 5 metres from my front door, not very secluded at all, but the Crested Barbets and Black-collared Barbets have both used it successfully. Early last winter I walked out of my front door and on glancing up at the nest which I had presumed empty, saw two big eyes glaring at me, and then suddenly ducking back into the nest. This was no bird in a nesting log, and I sat with my binoculars on my stoep, determined to ID what I had seen. Surprise, surprise! Just as it was getting dark, two huge eyes and a nose peered out of the nest, and not one but two Bushbabies climbed out of the log nest and jumped through the trees where it was difficult to see



Gina Wilgenbus

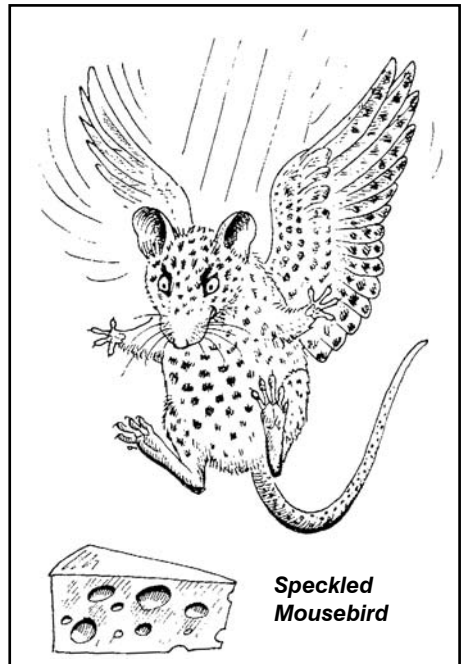
Crested Barbet/Kuifkophoutkapper: determined breeders

them as night fell fast. We started putting out sliced bananas and nuts for them, enticing them to eat from the bird table. Indeed, it became an evening ritual to watch these darling little creatures pounce upon a piece of banana, leap back onto a branch, and often come back for more. We became so conscientious, that my next door neighbour, who is at home far more than us, took over the feeding regime with an amazing display of love and diligence. We had hoped that this pair would breed, and our expectations were realised when one day in October we saw two new little pairs of eyes peering out of the nest. It turned out that they had actually produced and bred a family of three. Early in November, just before the first summer storm struck, we were fortunate to see how the parents grabbed the youngsters one by one by the neck, and simply jumped with them into adjacent trees going we knew not where. Of course we worried about the weather and had to remind ourselves that this was 'nature' taking its course.

The very next day after the nest had been evacuated the Crested Barbets started quizzing around the nest once again. This must be a very high profile nesting log, as in spite of another two logs within eye distance, this one was the five-star choice. Early the next morning, our attention was drawn to a hullabaloo going on in our garden. On peering through a window we saw that, unbeknown to us, the Bushbabies had returned to inhabit the nest once again. The Crested Barbets were not so easily ejected from their potential nesting log, and I am sure the empty log had stimulated their hormones to mate and nest. One Bushbaby was peering out of the hole of the log and was being attacked by the strong beak of the Crested Barbet. Our attention was drawn to the fight by the noise the latter made, and by the defense mechanism of all the local birds, flying in and out of the tree, observing the fight. The Dark-capped Bulbuls called continuously, whilst the Cape Sparrows objected to the fight with their loud chirupping. The Southern Masked-Weavers flew in

and out, and even the Laughing Doves came down and sat on the branches, like spectators at a bull fight. Eventually the Bushbabies took cover within the nest, the Crested Barbets not daring to enter, and peace descended upon the garden.

The next morning did not see the return of the Bushbabies, and the Crested Barbets took turns in actually being in the nest all the time, possession being nine tenths of the law. The barbets seemed to incubate successfully, and less than three weeks later we realised that the eggs must have hatched as rigorous feeding was taking place. About two weeks later, after we had been out one morning, we found a dead nestling under the tree. The first wing weathers had just started to grow, otherwise it was still naked. The next day we found two more similar nestlings having been thrown out, both being smaller than the first one. The parents had literally disappeared. They didn't even come and take the paw-paw



**Speckled
Mousebird**

we had put out, giving the Grey Go-away-birds and bulbuls a wonderful opportunity to monopolise the bird table. I examined the little nestlings, but could find no outward trauma marks, as we had wondered if it was possible that the Bushbabies had bitten them. I also wondered about the cleanliness of the nest, considering the fact that the Bushbabies had monopolised it for about five months, and there must have been fleas or other undesirables. However as there were no real feathers on the bodies, I should have been able to see anything untoward, but I did not. This remains a mystery, and perhaps one of our learned friends could give us real answers. In the meantime, six weeks later, I see both the Crested and Black-collared Barbets taking food once again, and hopefully the much sought after but still unoccupied property will

produce good results.

Our Bushbaby family of five still return from somewhere out there for their evening tidbits, and have only served to enhance the paradise we live in.

[Faansie Peacock comments: Crested Barbets are very aggressive about occupancy of territories and will evict other hole-nesters from occupied nests. Could it have been a rival pair of barbets that evicted the chicks? As a matter of interest, Crested Barbets are more omnivorous than other barbets and supplement their fruit diet by insects. They have also been recorded robbing nests of eggs and nestlings. It is tempting to suggest a link between the bushbabies and barbets, but perhaps the cause of death was accidental or external (e.g. mynas?)] □

A Cape Robin-Chat Caught in a Hailstorm

Gareth Hazell

In the spring of 2008 we had a Cape Robin-Chat that made a nest in a palm tree close to our front door which allowed for some great photo opportunities, then on 25th October we had a serious hailstorm that shredded the leaves from all the trees in our garden. I was concerned about the robin's plight and went to check that she was alright as she had been sitting on two eggs just before the storm. On close approach I thought that the robin had been killed by the thumb-nail sized hailstones which covered the nest completely, all that remained visible was the head of the adult sitting on the nest. But as I climbed up and reached out to check, she pulled herself through the pile of stones and flew off to a nearby branch. I then carefully removed the eggs, put them in my breast pocket for safe keeping and emptied the nest of hail-stones. After all the hailstones had been removed I replaced the eggs and moved away to watch for the female's return, which she

subsequently did. About twelve days later the eggs hatched and the adults were kept busy feeding their hungry chicks. Unfortunately one chick was weaker than the other and died before fledging, the second chick also disappeared just before it would have fledged. Destiny perhaps? □



Cape Robin-Chat/Gewone Janfrederik: extraordinary dedication

Breeding Habits of the Southern Masked-Weaver

Neels Roos

During several successive breeding seasons a male Southern Masked-Weaver established a small nesting colony in a large Fever Tree in our garden. The nests were easily identified by their shape and suspended from near the ends of long slender branches fairly high up. Thorny trees or tall shrubs seem to be preferred, probably because these offer better anchoring facilities. What a feat it must be for the females to stay put on their eggs when their nests are oscillating around violently and in all directions during a severe storm, and what utmost faith they must have in the capabilities of the male to securely anchor his nests!

Being satisfied that they were the nests of this particular species, I never bothered to observe their daily activities more closely. The lawn underneath was often strewn with the dried remains of demolished nests and once a dead nestling was found. Early in September last year he was at it again and had finished constructing two nests, both of which were already occupied by females, and was busy on a third nest when I observed something that stimulated my interest. The females were leaving and arriving back at their nests at surprisingly short but variable intervals and not brooding for prolonged periods as one would have expected. In quasi-scientific fashion I then twice spent some hours jotting down the times they spent in and away from their nests. These varied from 1-27 minutes in, and from 1-11 minutes away from, the nests with no apparent correlation between the two.

When consulting various books subsequently I discovered the wealth of factual information already available concerning their breeding behaviour. Females get no help whatsoever from the male when brooding, or feeding of the nestlings and, presumably, the fledglings as well! Small wonder therefore

that they come and go so frequently – after all they also have to feed themselves! When one comes to think about it, it is only logical that a male colonial breeder will not be able to feed all his brooding females and assist in the feeding of their numerous offspring. Nature exonerates him from these duties but to make up for this compels him to do his fair share by becoming a compulsive nest builder!

He spends his days building nests and being constantly on the lookout for “roving” females arriving within his territory. He easily and unfailingly distinguishes between approaching incumbent females and roving females and never gets excited when the former return to their nests. To us humans they all look the same but the male weaver instantly knows the difference! Could it simply be due to the fact that incumbent females will fly directly to the nest when returning and not perch inquisitively on a branch in the vicinity from which they can watch his nest building activities?

Free females seem to be attracted by the nest construction process. Building a nest is an important part of his courtship*. New females are only attracted by fresh and green nests and will ignore faded brown ones, which are never re-used*. Whenever spotting a roving female, and he does so instantly, he immediately becomes excited, starts his display consisting of flapping his wings and swaying from side to side on his lookout branch. He will also rapidly shuttle to-and-fro between his lookout branch and the nest under construction from which he would briefly hang upside down and continue with his displaying act. He may also try to impress her by having a quick peep into the unfinished nest pretending to be putting the finishing touches to it before returning to the lookout branch and continuing with his winging act. If she approaches the nest to inspect



Dimp du Plessis

Southern Masked-Weaver/Swarfkeelgeelvink: practices successive polygyny

it his excitedness shifts into overdrive and he sometimes becomes so importune that she beats a hasty retreat without even daring to come close to it. If she tries to inspect an already occupied nest he will deftly shepherd her away from it and show her which nest he is preparing especially for her. If she does enter the partly completed nest and lingers for a while before departing he probably assumes – often wrongly so – that she was most impressed by it and he will hastily proceed to add the porch part.

Colonial weavers, like this species, practice successive polygyny⁷. This means that once a female has been successfully courted and has laid in the nest the male will immediately set about building the next nest to attract another female. If however, after a few days, the new nest has not succeeded in attracting another incumbent female his instinct will cause him to destroy the nest by vigorously pulling it apart with his bill in a matter of 10 to 15 minutes – and to promptly start on building a new nest, but not necessarily in the same spot.

Whenever there was a lull in his courting and construction activities he would inspect the active nests, especially after the brooding females have left them to forage, by hanging upside down just below the nest and peeping into the brooding chamber, assumedly to check on the progress being made. He also

occasionally took a time-out to drink some highly needed energy-replacing nectar from the flowers of a nearby “Teardrop” hibiscus or a *Hamelia* shrub. He would pluck the narrow tube-like flowers of the latter with his bill and hold it down firmly on a branch with one foot while sipping the wee drop of nectar contained within the severed end.

How does one know when the eggs have hatched and nestlings are present? While still brooding the eggs the female will arrive back at the nest after a temporary absence and rapidly disappear into the nest. When nestlings are present she will only partly disappear and the tip of her tail will protrude from the porch opening while she is feeding the chicks inside. This development is unfortunately also observed by nest raiders like the Grey-headed Bush-Shrike. One was regularly seen in, and heard calling from, trees in the immediate vicinity of the colony before disaster suddenly struck. One female was seen to be feeding nestlings late one afternoon and the next day about midday the male Masked Weaver was observed frenziedly destroying the empty nest. The other active nest suffered a similar fate a few days later. The real culprit was unfortunately not identified. These raids are probably responsible, at least partly, for the number of free females which appear to be constantly moving around.

After the above setbacks he tenaciously persevered with the construction of further nests but eventually abandoned the effort altogether and destroyed all the nests before starting anew in a *bougainvillea* in a neighbouring garden. There he was apparently more successful and some old dry, brown, but intact nests remain as evidence. I did observe a female feeding nestlings in one of those nests but never bothered to make regular observations.

Surprisingly he is currently (January) back at his original site in the Fever Tree, again constructing nests. Three of these are brown and old but not apparently occupied. A more recent fresh nest (still greenish) is occupied by a female and a further nest is under

construction. The poor fellow must be utterly exhausted by the end of such a long and busy breeding season! Steyn* quotes a study in which a single male constructed 204 nests over an 8-year period. Most of the nests were incomplete (probably did not attract females and were therefore not finished before being destroyed again). Only 82 lasted for more than 10 days and of these 24 were used for breeding; in only 17 of them were young raised successfully (a success rate of just over 8%!).

Where does the male sleep at night? One naturally expects him to sleep in a completed or semi-completed nest within the colony. According to some books they do. I made a point of watching every evening just after sunset to find out. Before calling it a day he would make doubly sure, from his regular vantage point, that the odd free female who may have shown an interest in a new nest during the course of the day had changed her mind and was definitely not going to move in for the night, then peep into the occupied nests to ensure that the incumbent females are settled in and comfortable before finally flying off in the same direction every evening, not to return before early the next morn-

ing. I tried unsuccessfully to find out where this nest or roosting place was but it was located somewhere beyond the confines of my property. Only once did he spend the night in a nest of which the brooding chamber had been completed and this, if I remember correctly, was just after the above-mentioned disaster.

We often see avian parents of various species feeding their fledglings in our garden but not once in all the years that we have been staying here have we observed fledglings of this species moving around and being fed by females. I am wondering what the reason for that could be?

What a fascinating and many-faceted hobby we have! Even a laidback birdwatcher not intent on chasing rarities all over the country for his life list can spend many pleasurable hours leisurely discovering so much of interest about the common birds in our gardens.

Reference

*Steyn, Peter. 1996. *Nesting Birds: The breeding habits of southern African birds*. pp 207-212.

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 for your membership.

Baie welkom aan al ons nuwe lede! Ons vertrou julle verbintenisse 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 en Audrey van der Merwe, Pretoria Noord; Hildi en Elias van Dyk, Menlopark; Paula en Martin Steyn, Lyttelton; Dr Cliff Johnston, Waterkloof; Louis en Ralda Heyns, Villieria; Alwyn Prinsloo, Clubview; Dr Charles Vermeulen, Dalview; Dr Jan Beukes, Wingate Park; Charles en Una Moolman, Centurion; Annemarie Dressler, Lynnwoodrif; Prof Nick van der Merwe, Onderstepoort; Henk en Mariki Roos, Cullinan, Dennis Witham, Brummeria; Diana Callear and Jenny Evans, Lynnwood Glen; Jan en Gerda de Wagenaar, Highveld; Sannie Booyens, Die Wilgers; Antoinette de Beer, Die Wilgers.

A Book or Two

Herewith a list of books (which will soon expand) as well as other items currently in stock. The list is also on the BLNG website. Other interesting books on topics such as Nature, Gardening, Grasses, Frogs, Snakes, Butterflies, Trees, as well as items like Nesting Logs, Bird feeders, exiting new field guide book covers and sling bags, BLNG gift vouchers, harnesses, etc, now in stock! I will gladly do my utmost to hunt down 'wanted' books. Suggestions on books and other items are welcome.

Breaking news:

Ulrich Oberprieler and Burger Cillie are currently compiling a new guide to the raptors of Southern Africa. The book is due to be launched in June or July this year. The Raptor Guide of Southern Africa is a must for every birdwatcher and raptorophile ... "Pre-launch orders can now already be taken: Special price until launch: R180.00 each.

And, if anyone knows of more 'secrets' about books, please let me know!

I am available for trading during office hours (Brooklyn, Pretoria) as well as during reasonable after hours (Villieria, Pretoria). As always, trading will take place during BLNG evening meetings. I will also bring the birding stuff along to outings!!

NB: A lucky member will receive a mystery gift on every 100th sale!!

Snippets / Brokkies:

"In Nov 2005 sleep Louis my saam op die Madagaskar "Pelagic". In die begin van die toer het iemand die arme vermaaklikheidsman haastig gaan stilmaak toe hy begin met "Good Morning Madagas....." en ek was heilig oortuig dat iemand hom sou bydam sou hy weer iets oor sy mikrofoon sê. Ek het die vreemde mense met ronde oë aangestaar. Een van die uitkykers het periodiek iets geroep; hierna STORM die hele kaboedel mekaar omtrent onderstebo om eerste by dié kant aan die boot te kan kom. Dan word daar geroep aan die anderkant,

en die hele petalje herhaal homself. Sjoe, het ek by myself gedink, kan die boot nie dalkies omkantel nie? Boonop mis ek die Barau's Petrel tydens 'n OGGEND-slapie. Min het ek geweet wie is al hierdie mense rondom my en ek gaan staan ewe gemaklik op die trappe vir 'n mik en druk sessie. Maar by hierdie tyd behoort almal seker al die detail te weet.....

Om 'n boek as geskenk te kry, het nog my nog altyd laat skitter van vreugde. Ek kry 'n Engelse Sasol Veldgids as geskenk (nou ken ek heelparty voëlname net in Engels!!). So stil-stil bekruij die voëlkykgogga my... Ek word geleer om behoorlik deur 'n verkyker te kyk én hoe om die harnas oor my kop te kry sonder om dit in my hare te koek. Letterlik honderde vrae word aan my gevra; oor en oor luister ek na voëlklanke – ek het naderhand gedink dat voëltjies in my slaap gaan begin sing. Partykeer het ek selfs die voëlklanke met die PDA of selfoon en sommer die ware jakob, verwar!

Hierna het ek die voorreg gehad om duisende kilometers te reis agter nuwe voëlspesies aan. Plekke soos Namibië, 'n haastige toer saam met Etienne deur Mosambiek wat eindig deur Zimbabwe, sirkels deur SA, Botswana, Caprivi, ens. Die 'verslawing' raak net al erger. Dit word my beurt om te vra (en selfs gereeld nou nog): "wat is dit dié en wat is dit daardie" en "hoekom sus en hoekom so" en "wanneer, waar"! 'n Ander wêreld het vir my oopgevou en vandag storm ek ook agter voëls aan. Heelwat later besef ek eers hoe bevoorreg ek was om die voëls op die "pelagic" te kon sien. Wat 'n lewe!"

E-pos aan my jou 'brokkie' boeknuus e.a. vir moontlike publikasie in die volgende *Laniarius*!!!

Ralda Heyns

BLNG Trading
Tel: 012-452-8762
Cell/Sel: 082 4727 027
Fax/Faks: 0866 820 860
ralda1@law.co.za ☐

	BOOKS	Price		OTHER ITEMS	Price
1	Robert's VII Field Guide (only 3 left at this price) out of print	R160	1	Binocular Harnesses	R110
2	Sasol Birds (NE), Soft	R210	2	Binocular Harnesses - with BLNG Badge	R150
3	Sasol Voëls, Soft	R210	3	Binocular Harnesses - with BLNG Leather patch	R150
4	Sasol Birds of Prey Africa - Kemp	R210	4	License Holders (only 9 left at this price)	R25
5	Sasol Large, English	R230	5	SA Birdlife Cloth Badge (only 1 left at this price)	R10
6	Sasol Groter Gillustreerde Veldgids	R230	6	Birdlife Pins (only 3 left at this price)	R8.25
7	Newman's Voëls, Soft	R200	7	BLNG Cloth Badges (within 3/4 weeks to be back in stock!!)	
8	SA Birds of Prey, Africa	R55	8	Nesting Logs (soon to be in stock)	
9	SA Birdfinder	R210	9	Bird Feeders (soon to be in stock)	
10	Pipits of SA	R170	10	BLNG Golf Shirts (Grey) (only 4 left at this price) M	R110
11	Chamberlains Field Guide to birds of Africa	R340	11	(only 2 left at this price) L	R110
12	Birds of Namibia	R70	12	(only 5 left at this price) XL	R110
13	Roberts Bids Guide: KNP & Adjacent Lowveld	R135	13	BLNG Golf Shirt (Green) (only 10 left at this price) M	R110
14	Roberts Voëlgids: KNP & Laeveld	R145	14	(only 10 left at this price) L	R110
15	Photogr Guide (Oberprieler) Afr	R200	15	BLNG Hats (Beige) (only 1 left at this price) 57 cm	R70
16	Photogr Guide (Oberprieler) Eng	R200	16	(only 12 left at this price) 60 cm	R70
17	Raptor Guide (Oberprieler) Only for Pre-orders until launch	R180	17	BLNG Caps (only 7 left at this price)	R60
18	Roofvoëlgids (Oberprieler) Slegs vir vooraf-bestellings tot bekendstelling	R180	18	BLNG Jackets (Beige) (only 1 left at this price) XL	R225
19	Prime Kruger	R80	19	Ordinary Poster (only 3 left at this price)	R20
20	Birding Spots (Marais)	R180	20	Sasol/Roberts Cover - Ripstop	R150
21	Greater Limpopo Route	R45	21	Sasol/Roberts Slingbag - Ripstop	R150
22	Attracting wildlife to your garden	R200	22	Sasol/Roberts Cover - Leather	R300
23	Lok natuurlewe na jou tuin	R150	23	Sasol/Roberts Slingbag - Leather	R300
24	Great Garden Birds	R70			
25	Field Guide Animals Kruger - Oberprieler	R125			
26	ID guide Animals Kruger - Oberprieler	R155			
27	Pilanesberg Animals - Oberprieler	R120			
28	Voël Sagids - Oberprieler	R95			
29	Field Guide: Mammals of SA	R210			
30	Frogs & Frogging	R170			
31	Identify Trees of SA	R180			
32	Identifiseer Bome van SA	R170			
33	Remarkable Fly Fishing Destinations	R190			
34	Reptiles of SA	R210			
35	SA Wild Flowers: Jewels of the veld	R250			
36	Veldgids Soogdiere	R210			
37	Watter Slang is dit	R110			
38	What's that Snake	R120			
39	What's that Butterfly	R140			
40	Biography of Austin Roberts (Dr Brain)	R40			

Please see the BLNG website for updates!!!!

