

Laniarius

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BirdLife
South Africa

Giving Conservation Wings

BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

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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

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

Secretary – Sekretaesse

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

Honorary Treasurer – Tesourier

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

PR and 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 Haggitt-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)

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

SABAP2, the current atlas project, enters its second year of duration and after a slow start the project has really gathered momentum. The number of registered atlasers has grown and the experiences and enjoyment of some of the local atlasers that belong to this branch appears in the pages of this edition of the newsletter. It is encouraging to see new participants – many of whom believed they were technologically challenged – take part by learning to use software and becoming familiar with the protocol of the project. If you are not keen on submitting lists on-line via computer remember that it is possible to manually fill out atlas cards and send them to the ADU where the data will be entered, much as happened with SABAP1. As someone involved in vetting out-of-range records, which is very much part of the atlasing process and not as threatening as it may sound, I have an early insight into some of the changes in distribution that have taken place. Moreover, it gives purpose to your birding if you list what you see within a defined area called a pentad whenever you are out birding.

Voëlbevolkings en -verspreiding het nog altyd met die loop van tyd verander. Spesies soos Kwêvoëls en Grysneushoringvoëls het Gauteng meer as 20 jaar gelede gedurende die droogte van die middel-80's begin binne-dring. Hierdie tendens duur nog altyd voort en vandag het voëls soos die Geelbekbosduif na groot dele van Gauteng versprei en is nou redelik volop in sommige gebiede, soos in hierdie nuusbrief berig word. Geelsanger, Geelborswillie, Langkuifarend en selfs Ovambosperwer het toegeneem in ons streek. Hierdie voëls is natuurlik 'n welkome toevoeging tot ons plaaslike avifauna, maar aan die ander kant het sommige voëls 'n afname in verspreiding getoon as gevolg van ontwikkelingsdruk en versteuring; hieronder tel Bloukraanvoël en Witpenskorhaan.

I had to ask around for articles for this edition but in the end received quite a bit of material at the last minute! My thanks to all the regular contributors without whom it will not be possible to produce this quarterly newsletter.

André Marx

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Credits

Front cover: Lilac-breasted Roller/Gewone Troupant (Allen Fraser)

Back cover: White-browed Coucal/Gestreepte Vleiloerie (Dup du Plessis)

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



Chairperson's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

Philip Calinikos

It was with great pleasure, as well as a good measure of trepidation, that I accepted the nomination as Chairman of our club for the current year. The decision was made a lot easier knowing that I would be supported by an energetic and enthusiastic committee. The committee consists of a healthy blend of members experienced in their portfolios together with a couple of new faces.

BirdLife Zululand's loss has been our gain with Amanda Haggitt-Haagner accepting the Programme and Activities portfolio. Amanda has served as Chairperson of BirdLife Zululand and together with her husband, Adrian, brings additional experience to our club. This has also allowed Debbie van Zyl to move to the newly established PR & Marketing portfolio with the important goal of attracting new members to our club and bolstering our membership numbers.

The demanding portfolio of trading activities has been assumed by the energetic Ralda Heyns ably supported by her husband Louis. Ralda, who now operates under the banner of "A Book or Two" has accepted the challenge of a very stiff sales budget with alacrity and is making a vital contribution towards the club's finances which are a little under pressure at present.

As for myself, I cannot really classify myself as a new committee member having served as Treasurer of the club for some years during the late 80's and early 90's. However the club and our parent body, BirdLife South Africa, have changed somewhat since those days and I have much to learn.

One of the challenges our club has been facing over the past few months is the implementation of a new membership system by BLSA. We have been assured that once the system is fully operational it will be a huge improvement on its predecessor. As with any new system however there have been teething problems, which have affected not only the accuracy of our club's membership records but our finances as well. It is quite possible that some members have not received their renewal notices or publications during the year, and should you be aware of any such cases, please do not hesitate to inform our Secretary. We have been communicating with BLSA at the highest level and we trust that all the remaining problems will be ironed out soon.

We had the pleasure of having Mark Anderson, Executive Director of BLSA, as guest speaker at last month's evening meeting. Mark's passion for the Kamfer's Dam Flamingo Project, as well as the many personal sacrifices he has made in that regard, truly moved all our members lucky enough to be present. Mark also expounded on his vision of BirdLife South Africa as an organisation in the future and made a plea to members to make an active contribution in any way they can towards the sustainability of the organisation. Examples that he gave were registering a My School-My Village-My Planet card with BLSA as beneficiary, and by making a bequest to the organisation in our wills and so leaving a lasting legacy of our love of birds.

Yours in birding

Philip

Club News/Klubnuus

BLNG Open Day at the Pretoria Botanical Gardens: Sun 13 September

After the success of our first BLNG Open Day, we are hosting another one on Sunday 13 September at the Pretoria National Botanical Gardens. They have graciously agreed to host us again and we would love to see more club members there this time around. Hopefully the rain and hail will stay away and we will be able to enjoy a sunny spring morning together! Please put this important outing into your calendars and help us boost our club membership.

Laniarius prize

The winner of the prize for the best article in the last issue of the newsletter is Faansie Peacock for his article entitled *The Adventures of a Birder: Looking back on a decade of fun, mischief and brilliant birds*. This highly entertaining account will be rewarded with a R100 prize.

Teba Camp in the Kruger National Park

Check out the programme for a special outing to visit Teba camp near Pafuri picnic site in the northern KNP. This area of the KNP is fantastic often providing many specials and staying at Teba saves you valuable travel time to Crook's Corner first thing in the morning – it is only a few minutes away.

Request for Botanical Literature

I am Allan Tait, a Horticulturist from Pretoria involved with plant propagation, training of students for Tshwane University of Technology and botanical exploration of South Africa.

One of my interests is the conservation and preservation of old botanical and horticultural literature. Currently a lot of material is being lost due to people not being informed and ignorance. Often, when the elderly move to old age homes books end up at the SPCA bookshops or hospice as there is no one interested in these materials. It is of utmost

importance that historical information be preserved. My aim is to build up a reference library of old manuscripts and books including topics like botanical explorers, botanist, botanical works and horticultural books. I would gladly receive any book irrespective of its condition. I am therefore approaching you to ask if you would be willing to place this request in your newsletter. If there is anyone interested in contributing they can contact me. All costs involved to get material to me will gladly be refunded, alternatively a courier could be used and I will pay the cost upon arrival of material. Many thanks.

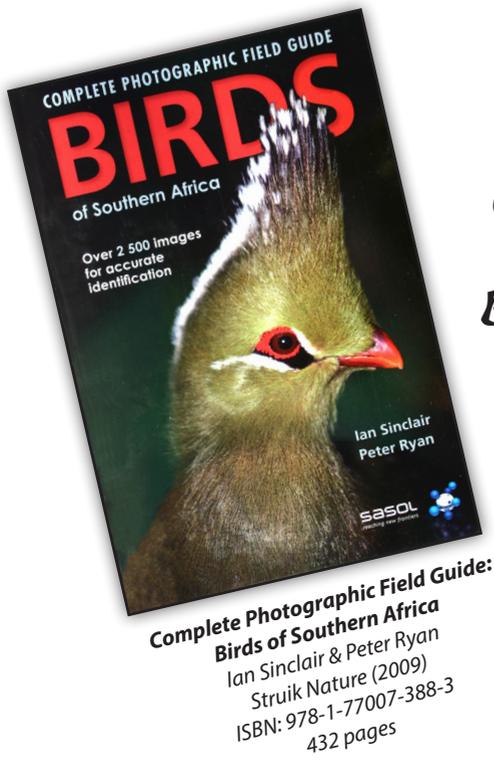
My contact details are: Allan Tait, cell: 082 4159978, Tel (012) 656 8922 A/H, E-mail: allant@tshwane.gov.za

LBJ course with Faansie Peacock

Still struggling with those LBJs and their calls? Why not join us in November for a special course hosted by our own expert, Faansie Peacock. Faansie will be covering those “little brown jobs” and their calls. This time of the year is ideal to learn and test your skills in the field as all the birds are singing and displaying. Costs for the course are only R250 for members. Bookings are now open – book with Rita, our club secretary.

Hunt for the Great Bittern

Have you heard of the Great Bittern? Ever think you'll get a chance to see one? BLNG is on the hunt for this enigmatic bird from 13 to 17 November and are bringing you a special event in Creighton at the height of the breeding season when the booming calls of the Great Bittern echo through the valleys. This is a fully-catered long weekend and includes all meals, accommodation, and transport from Creighton to the special breeding grounds of the GB as well as an expert bird guide for the weekend. Costs are R2400 per person and bookings are now open with Rita. Space very limited so book early.



Book Review – Complete Photographic Field Guide: Birds of Southern Africa

Faansie Peacock

published in 1984, photographs of 55 species weren't available. This time around, only four species are not depicted by photos (Green Tinkerbird, Mottled and Scarce Swifts and Red-capped Crombec). In these few cases, the paintings from the SASOL guides series have been used, with the background skilfully blended in, so that the illustrations hardly stand out, even more commendable, is the actual quality of the book's photographs. Gone are the days of blurry photos, distant shots and grubby hands with unmanicured nails holding mist-netted birds (or even stuffed museum specimens). You will be hard-pressed to find a poor image in this collection – the photographs are consistently sharp, well-lit and accurately reproduced to give very true-to-life colour representation. This applies equally to common and rare species, as well as confiding and elusive targets. The photographs of groups that are difficult to photograph (e.g. swifts), or highly secretive (e.g. rallids) are perhaps the most impressive.

The plates are fairly intuitively arranged, with all the images of a particular species lumped together and more or less in the same chronological order as the textual descriptions on the facing page. Images are numbered in the bottom left corner (linking them to the description) and sex, age and plumage state are provided in abbreviated or symbolic form. The plate layout is very sensible, with groupings of species on the same page. All the images on each page are arranged to show the birds in the same position which helps facilitates identification.

Bold purple text boxes announce the beginning of each family, or where relevant,

Historically birders generally prefer illustrated guides to photographic guides, on the premise that a painting can more accurately depict diagnostic features and field marks. However, the advances in photographic technology – especially the advent of digital media – as well as the massive rise in popularity of amateur bird photography has made available literally hundreds of thousands of quality bird photographs. Sinclair and Ryan put out nationwide requests for photographs over several years (as reflected by the list of contributing photographers in the back of the book) and received a flood of contributions. The final cut was limited to 2500 (!) photographs, which adequately depict a range of plumages and positions for each species, making the book comparable to any illustrated guide. Depending on space and necessity, each species is pictured in juvenile, male/female and breeding/non-breeding plumages as well as in flight.

An interesting example of this is mentioned in the book's introductory chapter – when Sinclair's original photographic field guide was

distinct groups lie within a family (e.g. Petrels, Small Fulmarine Petrels, Prions, Gadfly Petrels, *Procellaria* Petrels, Shearwaters and *Bulweria* Petrels within the family Procellariidae). These text boxes briefly highlight the group's shared morphological and behavioural traits, as well as breeding biology.

Species accounts are in the standard form, with English and scientific names followed by length and mass values, a paragraph on identification (which also touches on the differences between juveniles and adults, or males and females where relevant) and a description of the bird's vocalisations. Each species text is concluded with a short summary of its breeding biology, status and diet. Afrikaans names are also provided. A novel inclusion is a colour-coded status bar, which, at a glance, indicates during which months a species is most common (especially useful for migrants) and when egg-laying occurs.

Updated distribution maps show relative levels of abundance via different intensity colours, as well as seasonal distribution via different colour schemes. The maps of pelagic species extend east to Madagascar and south to Antarctica, thus providing a "bigger picture" of these oceanic wanderers' distribution.

Twitchers will appreciate the wide scope of species included in the book (958 in total), which includes some very recent sightings such as Little Penguin, Elegant Tern, Rosy Bee-eater, Irania and Rose-coloured Starling. On the other hand, taxonomists are likely to have mixed feelings about the rather liberal species definitions applied, with some contentious species making it into the book. Examples include Kimberley and Long-tailed Pipits, Northern and Southern Rockhopper Penguins and Damara Canary. In

other cases a more conservative approach has been applied (e.g. "Bradfield's" and "Agulhas Clapper" Larks). The authors have also included a section on the Endemic Landbirds of the Tristan and Gough Islands (excluding vagrants) which features such oddities as a partly predatory thrush and a flightless rail!

Sinclair and Ryan have taken the plunge and opted to include only the new English names – a brave decision, but commendable for the long-term assimilation of the new names into the birding mainstream. Somewhat surprisingly however, the order of the species follows the traditional sequence. An explanation for this choice is given in the book's introduction. The tangled relationships between different orders, families and genera are currently still a big question mark for taxonomists, with the true patterns obscured by convergent evolution and character reversals. Given this uncertainty, the authors opted to stick with the traditional sequence, and place little emphasis on e.g. family names. Given that this book is primarily intended as an identification manual, this will probably be little importance to the average reader.

In summary, the book is an indispensable addition to any bookshelf, and given its fairly compact dimensions can also be carried in the field. In contrast with its fresh and modern visual elements, perusing the text makes it clear that the authors are foremost experts in the field (pun intended).

The book is also available in Afrikaans as *Volledige Fotografiese Gids: Voëls van Suider-Afrika*.

(If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please enquire with Ralda Heyns, her contact details appear at the front of this newsletter – Ed.) □

Website Update

We have upgraded our website and encourage all our members to go and have a look at all the new features. Apart from the new calendar feature (very handy) we have a whole section of the website dedicated to shopping. Shopping via our website will be safe, secure and can be done by the click of a button. I need your help to keep our website exciting and relevant, so please provide me with articles and news that we can feature on our site - Jacques van Zyl, Webmaster.

particularly in both the Northern and Eastern Cape. To encourage atlasers to visit the more remote areas, a sum of money was made available to participants, which went some way to meeting their travel and accommodation costs. Every pentad in Gauteng had been atlased by the beginning of the year and we are well on the way to achieving two or more visits to each pentad. In the Pretoria area, 100 lists or more have been submitted for four pentads.

Migration

One of the objectives of the SABAP2 is to measure the effects of global warming on bird behaviour and the project committee introduced the Long Autumn Migration Project (LAMP), which ran from the beginning of March to the end of May. Atlasers were requested to select one or more pentads and to survey them as many times as possible during this period, with a view to determining when the different migrants left the area. This information will provide a benchmark for repeat surveys in the coming years. Preliminary results show that the Barn Swallow departure pattern this year was much the same as last year. A similar survey will be organised in the spring for returning migrants, and will have the catchy acronym Welcome Home All Migrant Birds (WHAMB).

The Chamaeleon Challenge

When a pentad is first atlased, it is shown in pale yellow on the coverage map. A second

visit will turn it to pale orange, a fourth visit to pale green, a seventh visit to dark green and so on. The colours become brighter as the number of visits to the pentad increases, culminating in a lurid shocking pink for 100 visits. The project steering committee requires not only broad coverage but also multiple visits to pentads – i.e. wide and deep. The Chamaeleon Challenge has recently been introduced to encourage atlasers to go deep and re-visit pentads. Those who cause the pentad to change colour gain points. Those who complete the seventh visit to a pentad and change its colour to dark green gain bonus points. Two of our lady club members, Lisl van Deventer and Sue Oertli, have proved to be formidable competitors and are currently lying fourth and seventh respectively on the national list.

Participation

There is a belief that SABAP2 should not simply be a snapshot of bird distribution over a couple of years but should be a continuous and on-going activity. If funding can be secured, this may well happen.

SABAP2 is very much a data-hungry project and would benefit enormously if we could double the number of active observers. If you feel you would like to get involved, it is not too late, simply contact the Club's SABAP2 Atlas Co-ordinator Ernst Retief on 012 332 3323 or e-mail him on ernst.retief@gmail.com. □

How long do birds live?

Many birds die early in their lives, due to starvation or attack from predators. If a bird survives its first year, then lifespan varies between species: most songbirds live for between 2 and 10 years, waders from about 5 to 10 years, and raptors from 5 to 20 years or even 30 years. Parrots and seabirds are amongst the longest lived, with many species regularly topping 20 years and a few individuals breaking the 50 year barrier. The longest surviving birds are those in captivity which have no predators to face and an unending supply of food. Few wild birds ever reach 'old age'.

Atlasplestertjies

Rynetta Coetzee

Vir 'n hele jaar lank opper ek 'n lang rits besware waarom ek nie aan die Voëlatlas-projek wil deelneem nie: ek is nie rêrig goed genoeg nie; ek is té besig; ek sal nie die sagte-ware baasraak nie en ek het nie 'n GPS nie. Die swakste een van almal is egter dat ek innerlik bang is dat dit my die plesier van voëlkyk sal ontnem en ontaard in "werk".

Vandag, byna 'n jaar later, weet ek van beter en lag ek vir myself oor al die onsin. Een van die grootste voordele wat ek ondervind sedert ek in Augustus 2008 die groot sprong gewaag het en my eerste lys op aandrang van Lisl van Deventer ingestuur het, is dat my kennis van voëls geweldig uitgebrei het veral ten opsigte van habitat en gedragpatrone. Dis aspekte van voëlkyk waarvan ek voorheen bewus was maar my nie te veel aan gesteur het nie. Nou kyk ek in detail na elke voël om seker te maak die regte een gaan op my lys en roepe word iewers

in my brein se databasis van geluide gestoor as verwysing vir 'n volgende keer. Ek is bevrees dat die atlasgogga my nou so erg gebyt het dat ek aan onttrekkingsimptome begin ly as ek die week nie 'n lys ingestuur het nie!

Ek en Lisl het in 'n gedugte spannetjie ontaard; of dalk berugte eerder as gedugte! Sommige van ons voëlkykvriende dink dat ons die kluts behoorlik kwyt is. Die waarheid is egter dat ons atlaskoors in 'n erge graad opgedoen het. Ons stel spesiedoelwitte vir blokke en probeer dan die goed se kleur van geel af verander dwarsdeur die kleurspektrum tot by rooi (As jy nie weet hoe dit werk nie, kyk gerus op www.sabap2.org). In die proses ry ons deur waterstrome en plaashekke, om mynhope tot midde-in industriële gebiede, deur kilometers van amper voëllose grasvlaktes en mielielande en hoop dan desperaat dat ons darem 10 spesies op ons lysies sal hê na twee ure se harde werk. Ons staan lank voor sonop op en kom lank na donker eers tuis. En ons verlustig ons behoorlik daarin!

Lisl oortuig my dat ons op 16 Junie vier nuwe blokke moet gaan atlas in die Kwa-Mhlanga area. Ek beskou die name op die kaarte aandagtig: Vlaklaagte, Vesubuhle, Mgibe, Thokoza. Lisl sê ek moenie bekommerd wees nie, die mense daar is nuuskierig, nie aggressief nie. Ek droom die nag allerhande snaakse goed maar klim die oggend om 5:00 vm in die kar, gestewel en gespoor met mus en handskoene en met genoeg kos en drinkgoed vir ons vir 'n week. Net vir igeval.

Die dag verloop goed. Mense is nuuskierig. As ons stop dink hulle ons het verdwaal en wil help. In die dorpie waai kinders, ma's en oumas vir ons en mans staan die twee blanke vrouens wat so houtgerus tussen hulle rondry verbaas aan. Ons eerste verrassing is 'n **Bergwagter** wat op 'n huis se dak sit, reg in die middel van een van die dorpe. 'n Entjie verder stop ons nog in die woongebied langs

*Hoëveldskaapwagter/
Capped Wheatear:
voorkeur vir
afgebrande veld*



Marin Coetz

'n dam waar ons uitklim om 'n klein swerm **Palmwindswaels** en **Afrikaanse Oewerswaels** te beskou. Daar is toe sommer ook 'n paar **Kuifkopdobbertjies** op die water te siene asook 'n paar jongetjies met hulle gestreepte koppe. Ongelukkig is daar ook 'n yslike groot dooie vark op die rand van die water wat 'n eienaardige suur reuk afgee en ons gou die wyk laat neem! 'n Ent verder draai ons af na 'n rivier. Die pad is nogal besig en Lisl probeer om sover moontlik links te stop, net voor die brug. Sy stop bietjie te stadig na my sin en toe volg die volgende gesprek:

"Lisl, kyk die gat!"

"Ek sien die gat, dis wit!"

"Waar's die wit, ek sien net pad."

"Vergeet die pad, hy gaan vlieg as jy nie nou kyk nie."

"Ek kyk man, al wat ek sien is die gat!! As jy nie nou stop nie is ons in die gat en daarna in die water!"

"Los jy nou die gat en die water en kyk vir die **Witgatspreeu**" (ons eerste vir die dag).

"O"

Dit neem toe 'n hele paar minute om van die lagbui wat volg te herstel.

In 'n ander blok word ons ver buite die dorp deur 'n sekuriteitswag voorgekeer. Hy is oortuig ons het kameras en is besig om fotos van 'n inisiasieseremonie te neem. Nog 'n bakkie met twee mans stop en hulle is van meet af aggressief. Gelukkig kan Lisl hulle na 'n rukkige oortuig dat ons net voëllyste maak en hulle laat ons gaan. Hulle raai ons egter aan om nie verder op die betrokke pad te ry nie, dus draai ons ewe gedwee om. Ons het etlike goeie voëls in die vier blokke wat ons gedoen het gesien: verskeie **Grootrooivalke**, twee **Swartkraaie**, 'n **Grasuil** en 'n **Groot-rooibandsuikerbekkie**. Toe die son al sterk water trek kry ons 'n groepie **Witpenskorhane** saam met 'n **Hoëveldskaapwagter** op 'n stuk afgebrande veld. Toe die korhane skor begin roep, plaas dit die kersie op die koek vir die dag. Doodmoeg oppad huis toe begin ek alreeds wonder waarheen die projek se paaie ons volgende keer sal lei.

Dis lekker verby! Probeer bietjie vir jouself. □

A Great (Local) Birding Adventure

*Etienne Marais**

I have been living in my current home in Centurion since 1999, and as with many birders have kept a garden list, which after nine years just edged 100 species. Our suburb in Wierda Park, Centurion, is well-established with many big trees providing habitat for African Olive-Pigeon, Bar-throated Apalis, and woodpeckers and honeyguides. Pride of place goes to the Little Sparrowhawks that have bred in the street for the last four years.

When the second South African Bird Atlas Project started in July 2007, it was over nine months until I contemplated atlasing my own home pentad. I must admit thinking that the "local pentad" was a small, rather uninviting patch of scarred earth, dominated by those ugly words: development and housing. But there are also golf estates, malls and big plots

which seem to have very little natural vegetation. How could you spend two hours birding in this area and still have fun?

In fact, the "pentad" is a vast rectangle of land measuring 8.3 x 9.1 km, amounting to about 77 square kilometres or 7700 ha – just a little smaller than Ndumo Game Reserve.

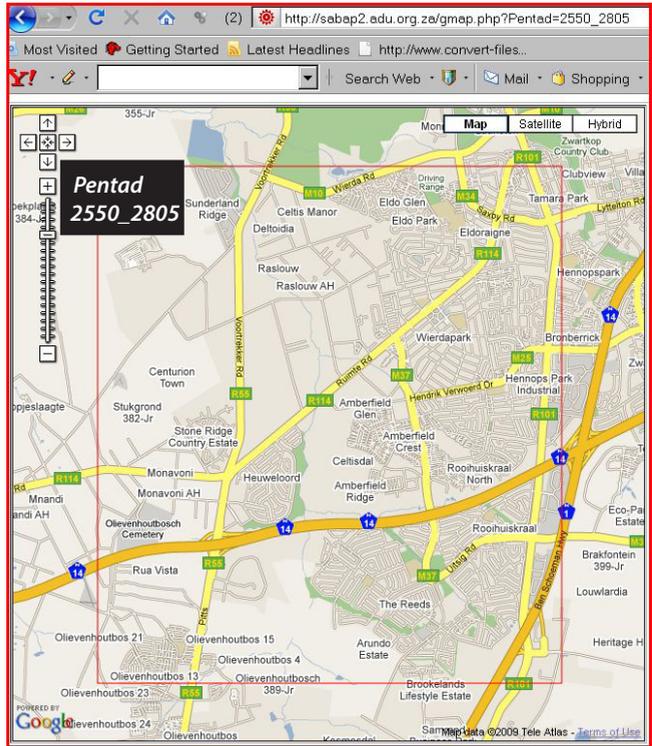
In February 2008 I was exploring the SABAP2 website and noticed that Rihann Geyser had submitted the first list for my home patch. This prompted me to get out and do a list as well, and with the help of the Google map of the pentad which can be accessed from the SABAP2 website I was able to explore a bit. On the northern boundary I noticed a wetland which falls just inside the pentad, and

* Observer number 1692

by looking at Google Earth and zooming in I could see that there was a whole lot of open grassland in the north-west corner. A visit to this grassland produced a variety of grassland species like Cloud Cisticola, Banded Martin, Spike-heeled Lark and Northern Black Korhaan. I drove past the wetland noted on the map, and saw that this was part of Mercedes Benz HQ. Nevertheless, while asking at the main gate about access, I was able to ascertain that it held a herony and had species like cormorants, herons, Common Moorhen and African Black Duck. After five hours of exploring, including a usual 35 minute walk around the suburb, I had recorded 77 species and was pretty impressed with what I had found.

I completed another list in May – just 53 species in 2 hours, and then contacted the head of Security at Mercedes Benz to get access to the small “nature reserve”. My next list, in June ‘08, was a real eye-opener, with an array of waterbirds at Mercedes Benz HQ, Melodious Lark, Plain-backed Pipit and Capped Wheatear in the grasslands, Crimson-breasted Shrike and Black-crowned Tchagra in a small patch of acacia, and several good birds at Bishop Bird Park – a small urban nature reserve just 5 minutes from home. I was amazed that in winter the list total of 83 was more than that recorded in February.

Over the next few months, I tried to vary the route as much as possible and discovered some more gems. A vlei near the SA Mint in Midrand with Red-chested Flufftail and African Rail; another dam on the southern border which often held egrets



and waterfowl, and that a grassland and stream drainage area behind The Reds Mall still holds Clapper Larks, Cape Grassbird and Greater Kestrel. A small dam at the Rooihuiskraal Terrain often held surprises like Black-crowned Night-Heron, while the adjacent trees hid Ovambo Sparrowhawk, which seem to breed nearby.

Having got to know the pentad and all the spots I found I could cover a good variety of habitats fairly quickly and a list in the miserable weather of June '09 still produced 54 species in just two hours. To do it thoroughly requires much more time than that, and in February this year I spent six hours trying to scour the whole pentad for as many species as possible. This list produced 107 species including Orange River Francolin, Garden Warbler, Great Reed-Warbler, African

Reed-Warbler and Marsh Warbler. Melodious Lark, African Quailfinch, Orange-breasted Waxbill and Cuckoo Finch – the latter in the grasslands near Sunderland Ridge. Participation in the LAMP (Long Autumn Migration Project), a seasonal initiative at SABAP2, was a fascinating experience as I found myself learning more about movements of raptors like Amur Falcon, Black Kite and Lesser Kestrel, as well as being fascinated by the departure behaviour of migrants like European Bee-eater and Banded Martin.

I've also ventured into the eight neighbouring pentads that fall within the Quarter Degree Square: 2528CC. What has surprised me is how different they all are, and each has produced some great birds, most notable being Common White-throat (Voortrekker Monument pentad: 2545_2810), Pied Avocet (Centurion CBD Pentad: 2550_2810 – also famous for the

Franklin's Gull), Peregrine (Valhalla Pentad: 2545_2805), Short-toed Rock-Thrush and European Honey-Buzzard (Hoogland Pentad: 2545_2800), and Goliath Heron, (Knoppieslaagte Pentad: 2545_2800).

The experience of getting to know my home pentad has been wonderfully exciting and rewarding, and with over 180 species on the list I now know that these 77 square kilometres hold an amazing amount of diversity. Bishop Bird park has proved to be one of the best spots I have yet encountered for Garden Warbler, and new wetlands, streams and acacia patches, which always have the potential to surprise. Pride of place of course goes to the grassland with my favourite Cloud Cisticolas which can be heard even now in winter, as well as Cuckoo Finches and Melodious Larks. Next year I hope to get a better look at that Harrier that came past in the distance! ☐

Pipped at the Post by Seven Points

*Sue Oertli**

SABAP 2 (the second South African Bird Atlas Project) has nearly completed its second year of bird data collection and is currently running a Winter Challenge from 1 June to 31 August 2009, called the Chamaeleon Challenge.

The challenge

The challenge, for the 530 registered atlasers involves changing the colours on the SABAP2 distribution map, a map which divides the country into 17318 area or grids called pentads. A pentad (approximate distance = 8 x 7,6 km) that has for instance 24 bird lists in the database can have its colour changed from blue to red if only one more bird list is submitted. 4 points can be earned by the atlaser who completes the 25th list with the names of the atlasers and their points status updated on the system every 3 hours. A pentad that has never

been atlased before can change its colour from white to yellow earning the Atlaser who completes the first list 5 points.

Maximising the points

An invitation to do some atlasing at Borakalalo on Saturday 6th June with a fellow atlaser resulted in an outbreak of the infectious disease called "compulsive counting competititis". Two days were spent looking at the SABAP2 Gap Analysis Map, trying to find 2 pentads en-route /around Borakalalo, with the magic bird list numbers of 0, 24 and a potential NINE points as reward. Pentad 2540_2750 around Hartbeespoort Dam and pentad 2505_2755 near Kgomo-Kgomo fitted the bill.

**SABAP2 Observer No: 10768
Fourways*

Data collection

A scientific approach is required if one wants to be ahead of the game and not be “pipped” at the post. Points to ponder:

- Check that these pentads are still the colour blue and white and have not been poached by other atlasers overnight, prior to your departure.
- Leave early, dragging the better half (the Driver) out of bed in the dark.
- Force feed the Driver a cup of tea and a slice of toast and prepare a LARGE thermos of coffee. It's going to be a long day in the field.
- Switch on the car fog lights and drive for an hour in order to be at the start of the pentad just as it is getting light. The GPS must read S 25 49.999 and E 27 50.001 as you drive down the N4 towards Hartbeespoort Dam to enter the southwest corner of the pentad.
- If necessary use your binoculars to read the GPS co-ordinates on the Garmin device. This essential piece of equipment for the

atlaser is usually balanced precariously at an angle on the front window screen. Ignore the freezing wind and refrain from casting wistful glances at the Wimpy next to the Engen Garage, situated 300 metres from the official start of the count.

- Spend a minimum of two hours in the pentad, writing down the names of the birds seen or heard in sequence. Beware of speeding trucks and pedestrians if you are doing a count on any tarred roads and need to stop suddenly as a Black-crowned (or is it Brown-crowned?) Tchagra flies like a bullet across the road in front of the car bonnet. (Please bear in mind that during the winter months, birds are not calling too often, and a visual ID is probably required to add any new bird to the list).
- Check the GPS on a regular basis and if the reading says S 25 39.997 in this case you have overshot the pentad and the list will have to be erased from your notebook and be rewritten.
- Please conduct an in-depth “Google” search beforehand to establish suitable restroom facilities that will not require the climbing of fences or dongas or the undertaking of an Environmental Impact Assessment Study of the habitat you find yourself in. Reversing and making U-turns to verify a sighting are fraught with dangers and could lead to bankruptcy and blacklisting.
- Plan to spend at least one (if not more) additional hours on the count as you navigate the pentad and stop to do some sightseeing, or inject the system with an essential caffeine fix. This is usually achieved whilst precariously holding the binocs in one hand and balancing the coffee cup and rusk in the other. Try not to answer the cell phone at the same time.
- Include at least three erasers and extra pencils to complete the list in the book as you mutter to the Driver about going too fast, not stopping in time and lack of focus.
- Complete the count and try not to become despondent when the list is only 53 birds after 3 hours AND you have ensured that

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

you have covered ALL the habitats in the pentad. Be grateful that it is only 53 birds that now have to be filled in on the field data sheet in order to be e-mailed to the ADU (Animal Demography Unit) at UCT to be included into the database.

- When planning the day's atlassing, be careful not to over extend oneself and decide to complete another 2 hour list in a pentad that has never been atlased in the past.

(Pentad 2505_2755 was counted in the afternoon and produced only 38 birds for a three hour count). Arrive home in the dark with the fog lights on again.

Submitting the data

Important issues regarding the submission of the data:

- Ignore the burning eyes, dust covered face and hands and indigestion caused from eating your dinner too quickly on arrival at home. The submission of the data to the ADU must be efficient and quick in order to maximise the chances of earning the 9 points for the two Pentads counted. It is irrelevant that one has been up since 05:00 and then still work on the computer on to submit the data at 20:15 that night.
- Before filling in the field data sheet, double check that no other atlaser has also counted in "your" two pentads since you left home in the dark that morning. It is possible that their list has been submitted via a laptop and 3G card whilst they were eating their lunch perched on a camping chair up a quiet side road.
- Be vigilant when marking off the birds on the field data sheet for submission. (Egyptian Goose is listed directly above Egyptian Vulture on the Excel data sheet).
- Complaining about sore eyes and a headache will not help when you receive a RARITY FORM to complete due to this typo error. The completion of the rarity form will require a minimum additional 2 years of post-graduate study at a tertiary education institution and the completion of an

advanced photographic course.

- Due to the efficiency of the data capture system at the ADU, it is possible to check the programme shortly after the submission of data, in eager anticipation of visualising one's name on the challenge list with the requisite NINE points for all other atlasers to scrutinise.

Follow up of the Count

In conclusion, after a very long day in the field, one should be safe in the knowledge that the lists have been submitted in time and the proof is there for all to see.

In my case a quick look at the system before crawling into bed revealed the following facts:

- I was listed on the Challenge but I had only TWO points to my name!
- On checking the data for pentad 2540_2750 at about 21:15, I discovered that another atlaser had submitted a list at the same time as myself thereby earning himself the three additional points. I earned only ONE point for the completion of my card.
- In addition, the list I submitted for Pentad 2505_2755 was acknowledged by the ADU with an Out of Range Form (the dreaded ORF) included and I was only eligible to earn ONE point for this count at that stage!
- I went to bed realising that I would have to do another THREE lists of two hours each on Sunday 7th to retrieve the 3 points I had lost!

The Atlaser who poached my 3 points for completing the 25th count in 2540_2750 knows who he is. I am prepared to discuss suitable compensation terms before calling my lawyer to start "defamation of counting" procedures against him and instigating "cyber terrorism" counter measures against his computer.

I would also like those dedicated, brilliant people running SABAP2 to stop smirking and grinning behind their field data sheets when they realise that they have "forced" an atlaser into doing an additional 3 lists to avoid getting "pipited" at the post again. ☐

Urban Raptors

Gareth Hazell

How many raptors live in urban areas without being detected by us humans? This was the question I was asking myself as I walked out of the house one morning on my way to work. The thought had barely crossed my mind when a Little Sparrowhawk flew over... Where had it come from and why don't I see them more often?



Lesser Kestrel catching termites

What had prompted the question was the sporadic visits by various raptors to our garden over the past 15 years. We have had a couple of juvenile Little Sparrowhawks, Lesser Kestrels, Rock Kestrel, Black-shouldered Kites, and even a Black-chested Snake-Eagle hovered over the veld behind the house one Saturday. But it was the Ovambo Sparrowhawks that often hunt from the electricity pylons behind our house that really had me thinking.



*Immature Little Sparrowhawk in the garden.
Note: all photos on this page by the author.*

I first noticed them in July 2008 when one of the birds was sitting on the electricity pylon watching for prey. I sat and watched it for about an hour while it made repeated attempts to catch small birds, with doves being ignored completely but sparrows and especially bulbuls were fair game. Since then I have seen them quite often but August 2008 was the first time I had seen one make a kill. The Ovambo dropped off the pylon chasing after two bulbuls attempting to cross the open veld, forcing one bird to fly into the school fence and that was that, the Ovambo gripped the hapless bird in its talons and flew off towards a stand of gum trees in the distance.



Ovambo Sparrowhawk on the hunt

These small raptors live among us, quietly going about their daily business without being detected. A good time to see them is from August to September when they are busy with courtship displays and nest building.

So next time you hear the bulbuls making a fuss in the garden go over and have a look. You never know what you may find!

(Interestingly, the alarm call of the Dark-capped Bulbul, more than any other species, is a sure sign that something is amiss in my garden and on more than one occasion has drawn my attention to the presence of a raptor, or of a marauding cat – Ed.) □

Wader Populations Decline Faster Than Ever

BirdLife International News Release: 04-06-2009

According to a new publication by Wetlands International, more than half the populations of waders in Europe, West Asia and Africa are declining at an accelerating rate. Waders are a group of relatively small waterbirds including species like lapwings, plovers, godwits, curlews and sandpipers. Many of them undertake long distance migrations from their Arctic breeding grounds to wintering areas as far away as Southern Africa. Some concentrate in huge numbers at just a few sites, making these wetlands critical for their survival.

The new *Wader Atlas* is the first comprehensive overview of key site networks for waders in Europe, West Asia and Africa, and the publication highlights a need for better protection of the key wetlands along their flyways, especially in Africa and the Middle East. The authors outline that whilst many European Union (EU) Member States have established a fairly comprehensive network of protected areas for waders, many of which are Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified by the BirdLife Partnership, the protection and management of key sites is still far from adequate beyond the EU's borders.

"Waders such as Ruff [*Philomachus pugnax*] are heavily protected in the EU; farmers receive thousands of Euros for nest protection", said author Simon Delany. However, the new publication outlines that resources outside the EU urgently need to be increased – helping to conserving waterbirds at all stages of their lives.

The wetlands of the African west coast are under enormous pressures. The sparse water resources in the Sahelian zone are tapped by dams which have turned formerly shallow wetlands into permanently dry lands. Irrigation schemes for growing human population disrupt the water flow in wetlands such as the shrinking Lake Chad. The atlas also outlines that wetlands themselves are often converted to agricultural use – such as in the Tana River Delta

in Kenya, which is threatened by conversion to sugar cane plantations.

"Migratory waterbirds can only be effectively conserved through international cooperation along their entire flyway", said Dr Vicky Jones – BirdLife's Global Flyways Officer. "BirdLife Partners are focusing on joining up site-based action at critical sites for waterbirds within the African-Eurasian area".

BirdLife is a key partner in the Wings over Wetlands (WOW) project which is making an enormous difference to the understanding of migratory waterbirds and their needs, demonstrating best practice in the conservation and wise-use of wetlands, and increasing cooperation along the African-Eurasian flyway.

BirdLife is also involved in a new 'WetCap' project to help strengthen waterbird conservation and build capacity for wetland management activities at key sites in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Mauritania. "WetCap will promote the wise-use of wetlands which benefit local people by providing clean water and opportunities for fishing, agriculture, recreation and tourism", said Dr Jones.



Male Ruff in breeding plumage

On the ground, IBA Caretakers and Site Support Groups are working to protect and monitor key sites for migratory birds. "A wide range of activities are being implemented by the BirdLife Partnership to support the development and growth of this local approach to site conservation, through capacity building, networking, sharing experience and provision of seed-financing", added Dr Jones.

BirdLife recognises that despite their importance, wetlands are amongst the world's

most vulnerable ecosystems. "In response to these worrying declines, BirdLife has launched the Born to Travel Campaign to protect migratory waterbirds, soaring birds and songbirds along the African-Eurasian flyway", said Ania Sharwood Smith – BirdLife's European Coordinator for the Born to Travel Campaign. "Born to Travel is a perfect example of how effectively our unique BirdLife Network meshes together as a united force to take action for conservation". □

Thoughts on Birding Mozambique – Uncovering the Wonder of Unspoilt Africa

*Etienne Marais**

Most South Africans who visit Mozambique travel only as far as Ponto de Ouro or the coast north of Maputo, which is now ridden with new resorts and visited by large numbers of "quad-toting" South Africans. It is thus not surprising that the majority of South Africans have the following misconceptions:

- Mozambique has little natural habitat left and the forests have been mostly wiped

out by illegal logging.

- Mozambique is rife with corruption, and any visit there requires plenty of handy cash to facilitate.
- Mozambique is not a safe country. Not a nice place for a holiday.
- Most remote areas are riddled with mines and one cannot walk off existing well-used paths and roads anyway.
- You need a serious 4x4 which is fully equipped and have to be completely self-sufficient to visit Mozambique.
- Zimbabwe is a no-go, which means you have to visit central Mozambique via the long and tortuous route which includes Komatipoort and Maputo.

Given these preconceptions (prejudices?) about the country, why would people want to go on holiday there, even if to get a few more lifers? The reality is that everyone who visits Mozambique is blown away by the birds, the beauty, the variety of the habitat, the gentleness of the people and most are genuinely impressed by the progress the country is making.

*Indicator Birding; www.birding.co.za



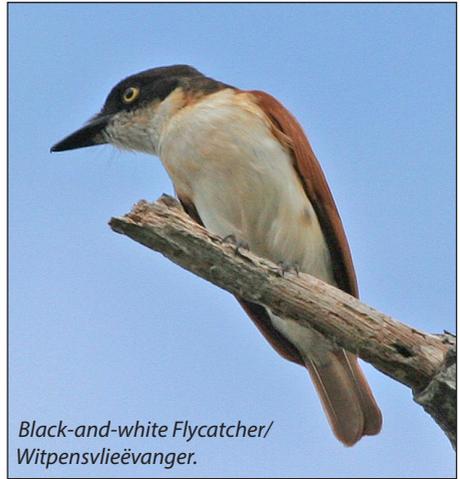
Gorongosa Mountain: site for excellent afro-montane and lowland forest species.

The state of the habitat

There is no doubt that logging and slash and burn agriculture have taken an immense toll and that forests north of Beira are much reduced in the last two decades. Today the forests on Gorongosa Mountain continue to diminish due to slash and burn agriculture and sites like Chinizua are a shadow of their former glory. Nevertheless, there are still vast amounts of excellent afro-montane and lowland forest accessible to birders, and even larger areas of relatively undisturbed miombo woodland. To put it in perspective, Gorongosa Mountain is nearly 70 km long, and has huge areas (far larger than Magoebaskloof) of pristine forest. Mozambique is a vast country and most of the population is concentrated along the coast, rivers and in the most fertile areas. Coutada 12, where we typically do a lot of birding is over 200 000 ha in extent. Catapu is 25 000 ha in extent and an area of less than 1 000 ha is affected by sustainable timber harvesting each year. In fact, I've come to the conclusion that protection of forests and habitats is more advanced in Mozambique than in South Africa. Take a look at www.envirotrade.co.uk for information on a highly innovative project involving community forestry and carbon credits at Nhambita, outside Gorongosa National Park.

Corruption and officialdom

Over the last few years huge progress has been made in reducing corruption in the country, and visitors to central Mozambique are unlikely to encounter much to write home about. On my last trip we were not stopped at one road block in Mozambique, and hardly at all in Zimbabwe. Law enforcement does exist and I have a speeding fine from Zimbabwe to prove it. Officials are generally polite and friendly – certainly more so than in many parts of South Africa. I would go so far as to say that other than around the tourist hot-spots in the south, you are more likely to encounter corrupt officials in South Africa than in Mozambique, and more recently even Zimbabwe.



*Black-and-white Flycatcher/
Witpensvlieëvanger.*

Patrick Cardwell

Crime and safety

The statistics speak for themselves. I have led 77 birders to Mozambique and I am only aware of two incidents – one the theft of a cell phone in “Villainculos”, which due to the influence of rich tourists has become a hot-spot for petty thieves and con artists. I unknowingly left 300 Mets in my pocket when giving in laundry at one of the stops and it was returned to me. Overall people in Mozambique are gentle in disposition, and crime is at a much lower level than in South Africa.

Mines

Mines pose a continued threat to humans in Mozambique, but in a far more limited area than is generally believed. The total area identified as still requiring clearing in Mozambique in 2008 is just 12 square km. After looking at maps used by mine-lifting units, read official reports and spoken to hundreds of locals about this issue, I am sure that there are vast tracts of Mozambique that are safe with regard to mines. Most of the areas birders spend time in (such as Panda, Catapu, almost all of Coutada 12 and the lower Chinizua road) have no known risk of mines. Where even a slight doubt remains, one

must always observe the basic rule of only walking on used paths and roadways.

Access

Birders who visited Mozambique 8 years ago are amazed at the quality of many of the roads. Granted there are many roads that are badly potholed and some areas that require 4x4 vehicles, but one can now drive to several great birding localities in an ordinary car.



Augur Buzzard/ Witborsjakkalsvoël

Patrick Gribwell

Honeyguide, Speckle-throated Woodpecker, African Pitta, Tiny Greenbul, White-chested Alethe, East Coast Akalat, Black-headed Apalis, Short-winged Cisticola, Red-winged Warbler, Black and White Flycatcher, Livingstone's Flycatcher, Anchieta's Tchagra, Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrike, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Black-winged Bishop, Lesser Seedcracker, Locust Finch, Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah and Twin-spot Indigobird.

The unexplored

Zimbabwe

I travel through Zimbabwe regularly, and the change there in the last year is remarkable. The fact that the local economy now uses Rands and Dollars has completely changed matters, because money is now flooding in from all the Zimbabweans working in South Africa. You can buy items in the supermarket, fill up with fuel and eat at a restaurant – all in Rands. Harassment of tourists has almost completely disappeared in the last year and if you pick your time and day the border is a lot easier than in the past. When I returned from Seldomseen in June it took us about 30 minutes to get through both border posts at Beit Bridge!

The birds

The biggest motivation of travelling to Mozambique is to find the number of new birds that can be seen there. About 105 species are restricted to this area, or most easily seen here. This includes species like Ayres's Eagle and Racquet-tailed Roller which are either very localised or rare in SA, but much more common and regular in Mozambique. Mozambique offers a chance of the following wonderful birds: Crab Plover, Great Knot, Great Snipe, Great Bittern, Blue Quail, Madagascar Cuckoo, Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Pallid

One wonderful aspect of Mozambique is how much unexplored birding terrain remains. It has been a great experience to explore the area on and around Mount Tsetsera where high forest edges hold many Red-faced Crimsonwings, and nearby miombo woodlands hold surprises like Tree Pipit, Whyte's Barbet and Spotted Creeper. This July I'm licking my lips at the prospect of exploring yet another virtually unknown wilderness area: The Chimanimani Conservation area in Mozambique. Here high mountains meet miombo woodland and it will no doubt spring a few surprises.

I'd encourage birders to go to Mozambique – probably the last frontier of Southern African Birding. You will not regret it! ☐

Packing them in

The country with the highest number of recorded species is Colombia with 1 795, closely followed by Peru (1 780), Brazil (1 701), Ecuador (1 589), and Indonesia (1 549). Six of the 12 countries with over 1 000 species are in South America. The USA is in 18th position, the UK only manages 67th place, though does come top of the European league with about 560 species. [South Africa has 841 species – Ed.]

Wilhelm Peter Eduard Rüppell (1794-1884)

Pauline Leinberger

Born in Frankfurt-am-Main, the son of a wealthy German banker, Rüppell was destined to follow in his father's footsteps. This was not to be however, as after a visit to the Sinai in 1817 he became interested in natural history. After studying botany and zoology he undertook his first expedition in 1821. His group travelled through the Sinai Desert where they were the first Europeans to reach the Gulf of Aqaba. They then made their way to Alexandria via Mount Sinai, collecting extensively in this area but unfortunately had their journey cut short through ill health.

Returning to Africa in 1830, Rüppell became the first naturalist to travel through Ethiopia where he was assisted by Abdim Bey, the Turkish governor of the Wadi Halfa area of the Sudan (Abdim's Stork was named after him by Lichtenstein in 1823). Rüppell was also accompanied on his travels by his friend Von Kittlitz and was the first foreigner to win a gold medal from the Royal Geographical Society; his name became well known through his books and maps.

Bird species bearing Rüppell's name:
Rüppell's Bustard (Wahlberg 1852)



Drinke van Rensburg

Rüppell's Griffon Vulture (Brehm 1852)
Rüppell's Long-tailed Glossy Starling (Verreaux 1857)
Rüppell's Parrot (GR Gray 1849)
Rüppell's Robin-chat (Rüppell 1837)
Rüppell's Shrike (Bonaparte 1853)
Rüppell's Warbler (Temminck 1823)
Rüppell's Weaver (Rüppell 1840). □

Ek wonder maar net...

Elke Geggus

Ek wonder of die nuutste modegier vir tuine, nie tot nadeel van die voëltjies sal wees nie? Waar 'n mens kyk is tuine en sypaadjies met klippe uitgelê, in plaas van struik of ander plante. Met tuine wat al hoe kleiner word en baie van die meenthuise se tuine in elk geval net uit plaveisel bestaan word die spasie vir ons voëls al hoe kleiner! Moet alles dan so netjies wees?

Terwyl ek daarvoor dink, het ek ook aan ons tuin gedink. Dit is groot, al 20 jaar oud en is taamlik wild, waar die plante, voëltjies, paddas

en goggas hulle eie ding kan doen. Maar in sommige plekke het die grondbedekkers so die oorhand gekry dat daar ook nie meer plek is vir die Janfrederikke en Lysters om in die grond te krap op soek na wurmpies nie! So, na al die lekker reën van nou die dag, het ek die meeste van hierdie grondbedekkers verwyder, en dit voel nou of die grond weer kan asemhaal. Ek was ook skaars terug in die huis, toe die voëls die nuwe spasies herontdek het! Dus sal ek poog om in die toekoms my wilde tuin so 'n bietjie in toom te hou! □

Voël-sendeling...

Johan Slabbert

Gedurende Mei 2009 het ek die voorreg gehad om 'n leraar van ons plaaslike gemeente te vergesel op 'n sendingsafari na die Ngorongoro area in Tanzanië. Op pad soontoe het ons by 'n sendeling-gesin in Noordwes-Mosambiek, naby die dorp Lichinga in die Niassa Provinsie aangegaan vir drie dae. Die gebied is redelik hoog bo seevlak, met 'n hoëveldse lang tipe gras wat ruig in die omgewing groei. Verder verbou die plaaslike

mense sorghum en mielies vir eie gebruik, wat ook die lang skraal gewasse van die omgewing aanvul. Wat voëls betref, is dit 'n ongelooflike plek om flappe en vinke te sien, Kortstertflappe, Goudgeelvinke, Paradysvinke, Rooikeelflappe, oral waar jy kan kyk!

Tydens ons besoek het ons saam met die sendeling-gesin die hoofman of "Regulo" van die stat besoek waar hulle beplan om 'n huis te bou. Die Afrikaanse gesin praat vlot Portugees wat hulle moes aanleer, en is besig om die Yao-volk van die omgewing se taal aan te leer. Ons het saam met die "Regulo" en 'n plaaslike inwoner wat ook Portugees kan praat, gaan kyk na die beoogde erf en bouverseel.

Terwyl die bedrywigheid aan die gang was, het ek sommer vir interessantheid vir die "Regulo" en tolk gewys hoe lyk 'n Rooikeelflap wat naby ons gesit het, in my veldgids. Hierdie mense het nog baie min boeke gesien, wat nog te sê 'n voëlboek. Die aangehegte foto vertel die verhaal van verwondering en opgewondenheid wat hom afgespeel het toe hulle die Rooikeelflap in die boek herken; en nou het die sendelinge nog 'n aanknopingspunt met die plaaslike bevolking! □



Our Club: An Introduction

Pauline Leinberger

The South African Ornithological Society was reborn in 1930 after a shaky start. The Hon Secretary was Austin Roberts and he remained very much in control until his death in 1948. Its mouthpiece was the *Ostrich*, a very highly respected scientific journal.

Our club was started as a branch of the SAOS in 1949 and our first newsletter was produced in 1952. Consisting of one A4 page, the contents were put together at the Transvaal Museum by two ladies, Mrs. Thomas and Mrs.

Campbell, both working in the library of the organisation at that time. The club struggled to maintain its identity until 1964, its membership having dropped to 46, when it became affiliated to the Witwatersrand club and was led by a youthful Neels Roos and Peter Lor.

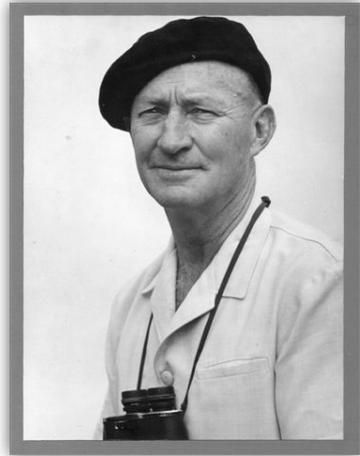
The Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society came into being in 1970 led by Peter Mendelsohn and with OM Prozesky, a well respected ornithologist from the Transvaal Museum, as its president. Its membership then was 42.

The active core of members at that time consisted mainly of retired people who had all the time in the world to attend camps and outings, participate in projects and generally indulge their hobby. There will be more about them later. They were ably supported by a young Alan Kemp of the Transvaal Museum, who succeeded Proz as the president of the club. Neels Roos, Banie Penzhorn, Joe van Heerden and Nick van der Merwe were all vets from Onderstepoort who preceded the legendary and much loved Prof van Drimmelin in their active participation in our activities at that time.

This group was involved in ringing thousands of Barn Swallows at their roost at Skinner Spruit. It was estimated that 500 000 swallows roosted there in the summer and up to 800 could be ringed in a night. This roost was bulldozed in 1973 to make way for the “new” Pretoria market and a sewage works. On the subject of birds (which is only right and proper) I notice from a club newsletter that Grey Go-away- bird and Green Wood-Hoopoes were considered remarkable enough in 1974 to report them in the club news. Was this the beginning of the population of birds that were about to inhabit our developing urban forests?

Our club was at that time enthusiastic about any project that was going on. *Birds of the Transvaal* was an atlas of the birds of an area bounded by the Lebombo Mountains in the east, the Vaal River in the south, the Limpopo River in the north and the Kalahari in the west. This is a vast area of widely varying habitats that calls itself home to more than 640 species of birds. This project was closely followed by a census of the birds of the Magaliesberg and then SABAP1. These major projects were followed by a survey of the birds of Masebe and monthly counts at various venues.

I was lucky enough to come on the scene when these projects were on the go and there is no better way to learn your birds than by list making, having to be accurate and generally showing a willingness to be involved. Atlasing teaches you good habits with that maxim “when in doubt leave it out”. Of course there are many people who refuse to confess to any doubt.



OM Prozesky, president of the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society in 1970

The Birds of the Transvaal by WR Tarboton, MI Kemp and AC Kemp, which is now out of print, was published by the Transvaal Museum in 1987. It contains a great deal of very valuable and sometimes startling information. On page 10 I discovered a report of a Red-tailed Tropic bird that had been picked up exhausted in Pretoria in October 1975, apparently after a cyclone on the east coast had blown it off course. Further to a report of a Pink-backed Pelican seen at Rooiwal in 2009, there were reports of an attempt by these birds to breed at Austin Roberts Bird Sanctuary in 1970/1971 and at Vaalkop Dam in May of 1971.

The report of the Magaliesberg Bird Survey was compiled by Warwick Tarboton and published by the Nature Conservation division of the TPA in January 1981. In this survey we not only counted species but the individuals as well so we had to look at every wretched pipit and there were lots on the mountain. We recorded 267 species of birds excluding waterbirds occurring on the mountain chain. This total was made up of 136 resident species while the rest were migrants and vagrants to the area. Our club visited 37 farms in the area during a 2-year period and 15 of our members made

more than 5 visits, led by the indomitable Kay Winterton.

Many of the projects today, such as the Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC), Birds in Reserves Project (BIRP) and others are run by the Animal Demographic Unit (ADU) based in Cape Town and this, up to now, has seemed very far away with all our records disappearing into limbo. In the case of SABAP1, if you wanted any information pertaining to the Atlas you had to buy it. The transparency of the current atlas project, SABAP2, is remarkable and commendable. I am sure that is why there are so many enthusiastic atlasers out there providing so much excellent and invaluable information. Great doubt was cast on the accuracy of information provided by amateur and voluntary birders at the beginning of SABAP1 in 1987, but the value of their contribution was soon accepted when the enormity of the task ahead and the limitations of the few professionals was finally appreciated. Of course birding today has changed dramatically since then with the numerous, well illustrated field guides and audio and computer aids available today.

The other major project we undertook in 1986 was a survey of the birds of Masebe Nature Reserve (Haakdoordraai as it was known then). This area is in Limpopo Province, some 300 km away. The project was run by the brave young men of the club but I visited the area every month for 2 years accompanied by anyone who happened to be available at the time. Once it was only Doreen and me in my little Peugeot 305. Our cars in those days all had identity crises, braving sandy, stony roads which would make many of our 4x4 drivers pale.

1986 – could it have been 23 years ago? – was the year we recorded a Red Phalarope at Bronkhorstspuit Dam. Four of us, Kay, Doreen, Harry and I, had gone out for our monthly visit and were driving along the waters edge quite calmly until we spotted a little bird whizzing in circles near a patch of reeds. It looked just like the pictures I had been eyeing in my Roberts for some years. We couldn't contain ourselves until we got home (the days before cell phones)

to tell others of our find. The Transvaal Museum team of Tony and Rodney rushed out and commandeered a canoe from a cooperative fisherman to get to the bird which had moved to the other side of the dam. They had it swimming right under their noses so were able to confirm our identification. Alan and Pat Carr sped out in their brand new 4x4 and in passing an oncoming car at the small bridge with windows open (it had been raining) had their car and themselves doused in red mud. I think if they had seen the bird they would have considered the mess worthwhile.

1987 was a momentous year for our club. The committee of retired people was replaced by younger members with Constand Hughes-Treherne as chairman and our present chairman, Philip Calinikos as Treasurer. *Laniarius* took on a new look and Christine Lambrechts joined the committee as the coordinator of SABAP1. I really don't think she suspected what she was getting into and it was to be a long five years of hard slogging to reach fulfillment in 1992.

Another project undertaken by members of our club by Peter Milstein of Nature Conservation and Jeremy Cooke of the Department of Hydrology, was the matter of Austin Roberts Bird Sanctuary. This sanctuary had been developed in a disused brickfield in memory of Roberts and opened by his widow in 1956. The condition of the water became a cause for complaint, however, in 1976 and birds deserted the area in favour of the sports fields of the University of Pretoria. Peter and Jeremy did an intensive study of the wetland and made a detailed report to the Pretoria City council in 1988. Dewald Visser and his band of hackers spent time there in 1993 but the real achievements were made by the Friends of Austin Roberts formed in 1997 and later the City Council when a good many exotics were removed and many of Peter and Jeremy's recommendations were carried out. At the request of "The Friends" we donated a notice board which now stands at the entrance to the Blue Crane Restaurant. Jeanette Rens started a fund raising scheme in

2000 when she became secretary of the club. Even the not-so-fit tried a little walk to win a medal in our Run/Walk for Feathers, which “ran” successfully for several years until there was a parting of the ways.

And so we carry on. Our main purpose, however, is to help our members to see, hear and learn about the birds which have kept our interest going for so many years. With our camps and outings we try to take members to the far corners of our area, visiting as many

habitats as possible so that they can see as many species as possible. We try to bring in speakers who can stimulate their interest. We try to act as a catalyst so that they can cement new friendships with like-minded people. With all these objectives we hope to play a role in the conservation of BIRDS and to carry on where those who went before left off.

In further articles I intend to pay tribute to those, some of whom are no longer with us, who have played a part in moulding this club of ours. □

Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve: 21 June 2009

Bryan Groom

A crisp, icy morning on the shortest day of the year welcomed eight members of the club at the main gates to the Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve. At the gate we encountered quite a number of species, including: Black-shouldered Kite, Rufous-naped Lark, Green Wood-Hoopoe, Northern Black Korhaan, a Marsh Owl perched on a pole about 200 m away, as well as the call of Orange River Francolin coming from the surrounding grasslands.

A walk around the main parking area, and the path up the hill behind the environmental centre, added to the growing list of observations: African Red-eyed Bulbul, Crested, Black-collared and Acacia Pied Barbets, Cape Rock-Thrush, Familiar Chat, Red-throated Wryneck and Mocking Cliff-Chat. Following a short break for some hot liquids and a bite to eat we hit the road for the circular drive in the reserve. Regular stops along the way added the following to our list of observations: Mountain



and Capped Wheatears, Ant-eating Chat, African Stonechat, Sentinel Rock-Thrush, Levillant's, Wailing and Cloud Cisticolas, Fiscal Flycatcher, with African and Plain-backed Pipits as well as

Cape Longclaw being located in some of the burnt firebreaks.

On arrival at the south-western gate, we stopped and called a list of the birds seen, since some members had to leave at that stage. The rest of the group continued with the drive, and the afternoon gave us quite a few more birds to add to the ever-growing list. Other birds found were Brubru, Bokmakierie, Cape Bunting, Lesser Swamp-Warbler, African Snipe, Cape Shoveler, African Darter and Little Grebe.

All in all a very enjoyable outing, with a species list totalling 71 for the day, with a number of SABAP2 lists for the pentads making up the reserve also being compiled. □

Great Garden Birding at Roodeplaat

Mark Froneman

I stay in Burkea Park/Pebble Rock, close to the Seringveld Conservancy. I have not allowed my exotic garden to grow and my garden consists of bushveld trees with *Acacia*, *Burkea*, *Ziziphus* and other indigenous trees. When we first built our home about seven years ago there were far more bushveld species than now, a sign of the times, as more building is taking place. But still, a walk through the complex is quite rewarding in the morning. In just my area of one hectare I have seen 105 species, without forcing myself. Here is an account of some of those birds.

In the morning there are Dark-capped Bulbuls, Southern Masked-Weavers, while doves are represented by Cape Turtle, Red-eyed, and Laughing, at least three barbets – Crested, Black-collared and Acacia Pied, Arrow-marked Babbler, Crested Francolin, Crimson-breasted Shrike, and Southern Boubous make up the dawn chorus, with White-throated Robin-Chat contributing. It can sometimes be quite a session in the height of summer. Cuckoos and woodpeckers call all the time, with cuckoos represented by Black, Jacobin, Diderick, Klaas's, and Red-chested.

In the evening both Spotted and Water Thick-knees fly overhead, calling. Later Pearl-spotted Owlets can occasionally be heard and Barn Owls call almost every night.

Greater Striped Swallows breed underneath our overhangs and White-rumped Swifts follow them, with Amethyst Sunbird breeding in our garden trees. White-bellied and Marico Sunbirds are on the flowering plants. A number of other species are regularly seen including: Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Chinspot Batis, Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Black-throated and Streaky-headed Canaries, Cut-throat Finch, African Paradise Flycatcher, Spotted and Fairy Flycatchers, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Grey Go-away-birds, African Grey and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Bronze Mannikin, Black-headed Oriole, Cape Robin-Chat, Black-backed Puffback as well as a host of other birds are present, depending on the time of the year. Bennett's Woodpecker breeds in one of the trees in our garden.

Recently I have seen Black-faced Waxbill, Violet-backed Starling, Red-backed Shrike, Woodland Kingfisher, Golden-breasted Bunting, Kurrichane and Karoo Thrush. The lawn in front of the house has Crested Francolin and Helmeted Guineafowl. To the rear are Coqui and sometimes Shelley's Francolin, which are hard to see, and African Hoopoe.

Overhead fly Sacred and Hadeda Ibis, Cattle Egret, White-faced Duck, White-fronted and European Bee-eaters, Fork-tailed Drongo, White-throated, Red-breasted and Barn Swallow, Speckled Pigeon, and a really special bird, Ayres's Hawk-Eagle, which provided very good views as it circled overhead last year.

I am now planning to move out of my office in the city and build another one here – why not!

(The majority of us can only wonder what it must be like to wake up to these birds every day. And to have Ayres's Hawk-Eagle to boot! – Ed.) □



Acacia Pied Barbet/
Bonthoutkapper

Ndumo Camp: 1-5 May, 2009

Debbie van Zyl

Little did I realise that when Tana and I first started talking about arranging the Ndumo camp that we would have such an overwhelming response. What a sight on the first day of May when over 45 club members descended on Ndumo Game Reserve's chalet accommodation and campsite!

During April, I had sent out lots of info for everyone to start their research on wish-list birds, where to go and what activities they could take part in. Everyone seemed prepared and the guided walks and drives were quickly filled with birders of all shapes and life lists of varying lengths.

My first walk was on day two. We awoke to a cool and misty morning which was great for walking but really bad for birding. We tackled the Northern Pongola walk and after 3 hours still had less than 10 species on our list. Clearly another plan was required and Jacques focused our birding activities in the camp that afternoon. For the second afternoon in a row we had **Rudd's Apalis** come for a visit to the thickets behind our tent. An afternoon activity was born...one of pouring a sundowner, swing around one's camping chair, watching and waiting.

On one of the days we had arranged an outing to the locally-managed Tshanini Reserve where we met our leader, Amos Thembe. On the way there we also discovered that Garmin isn't always right and the shortcut you're taking might just guide you along a road that has been washed away and straight into a 100 metre wide roaring river. What a delightful day! We were greeted with great big smiles and travelled deep into the reserve where we were met by our guides for the day. Whilst driving into the reserve it was confirmed that we were the first officially guided group. The roads were narrow and the dense sandveld forest was trying to reclaim the thick, sandy road. It was hard to ignore the scraping sounds of the bushes on the side of the bakkie but it was worth coming

out on the other side. We enjoyed forging paths through the pristine forests and hearing sounds of **African Broadbill**, **Pink-throated Twinspot** and **Neergard's Sunbird**. We travelled with the guides out of the forest and into vast grasslands dotted with the odd palm, grazing Nguni cattle and many grassland birds. There we were greeted by **Grey-rumped Swallows** flying overhead and the gentle sounds of **African Quailfinch** hopping around in the grass just ahead of us. We lucked out on the Rosy-throated Longclaw but with more than 20 of us at one stage combing the grass for any movement it was a sight to behold.

Unfortunately the weather didn't play along with us for the remainder of our stay. We had quite a downpour on the third night (that's the night we had to find out we had a leak in our new tent!) which resulted in most of the roads in Ndumo being closed. Four of us decided to tackle the road to Red Cliffs and



Dimp du Plessis

Gorgeous Bush-Shrike/ Konkoit: patience rewarded with excellent sighting

after a few hundred metres on the 4x4 trail along the river, we had to give up and stick to the main road. Ben and Cindy showed me the advantages of patience when they stuck it out next to a bush for almost 20 minutes and enjoyed an excellent sighting of a **Gorgeous Bush-Shrike**. By then we were almost back at the camp ready for our 'sundowner and Rudd's show'.

When we called the list on the last night we were astounded by the number of species the group had seen. In all 219 species were found,

an excellent total considering the time of year and the poor weather conditions we endured. I will definitely look at putting Ndumo back onto the special events calendar for 2010; it is such a special place where I leave a piece of my heart every time I visit.

(Ndumo is a treasure, with two successful trips undertaken by the club now. Judging by the level of interest it is a good idea to plan a return visit soon – Ed.) □

Crystal Springs 23-29 May, 2009

Pauline Leinberger

I had the good fortune to be offered Don and Irma's time share week at this spectacular resort near Pilgrim's Rest in Mpumalanga. Of course I jumped at the offer and with Rita and Fanie providing the transport we set forth on the morning of Saturday the 23rd.

The resort consists of a club house with numerous facilities and 162 chalets, which were perched along the edge of the escarpment facing west, and looking down the deep valley towards the nature reserve. Our house, No. 59, was delightfully luxurious, in fact we only

discovered the dishwasher just before we came home.

The first day, Sunday, we spent exploring the nature reserve. We were armed with pentad maps and managed to atlas quite adequately without a GPS. The reserve consists mainly of montane grassland with some proteas, dipping down into a deep valley of mixed bushveld. The map boasts of two dams but we found only one as the larger one must have been washed away. The small dam had a comfortable hide, not far from a picnic site.

Before we set off on this excursion we were treated to our first mountain specials. Foraging in the garden of the lodge was a small bird party, consisting of some Sweet Waxbills together with Cape Canaries and a Cape Wagtail, and Stonechats were common throughout the area. On the drive down the mountain into the reserve the grass was too long to see any of the species that should occur there but a Striped Pipit did make an appearance on the road. The birds of the valley were mainly bushveld species but we were alerted to Yellow-breasted Apalis by their noisy chattering at the dam where two immature Little Grebes were hiding in the grasses on the water's edge. It was here, three days later, that we heard the raucous call of the White-bellied Korhaan coming from the long grass on the hill opposite.



Dup du Plessis

Buff-streaked Chat/ Bergklipwagter: enjoyed banquet of roast insects

On the way home a Jackal Buzzard gave us a moment of indecision until it took off from its perch to show us its fine orange tail.

The following day saw us on the road to Graskop via Pilgrim's Rest to find a cord for Fanie's coffee maker, and it was next to an overgrown shed that we found our first Buff-streaked Chat of the trip, foraging near a Drakensberg Prinia, a Golden Weaver and an African Firefinch. The road to Graskop is very beautiful with its loops and bends. We must have enjoyed it very much as Fanie discovered when we arrived home, longing for a cup of real coffee, that this time we had a cord but no coffee pot.

Stephan had told us about a dirt road that took off opposite the entrance to the lodge which ran next to a small dam and it was here that we found a pair of African Black Duck swimming. A little further along was a grey granite krans with the occasional small tree and numerous bright red *Aloe arborescens* growing on it and where we found a Gurney's Sugarbird, the only one seen on the trip. This road followed the edge of a pine plantation on the left with open rolling grasslands on the right. Foraging on the edge of the pines was a flock of Yellow Bishops, easily identified even though they were in eclipse plumage with their yellow rumps and shoulder patches. At a small waterfall next to this road we enjoyed watching a small flock of Cape Canaries splashing in the cold water of this mountain stream. Further on and on the grassland side of the road a Lazy Cisticola flew onto a fence, behaving in its usual hysterical fashion, flirting its tail and flicking its wings and on the same fence was a Wailing Cisticola. Nearby a group of Cape Crows was foraging in the recently burnt veld.

On our trip to Mount Sheba the following day we found the forest very quiet but what a treat to find an Olive Woodpecker accompanied by a Cape Batis in a small bird party. Greater Double-collared Sunbirds were common, foraging along the forest edge. In the same pentad we found a stretch of plantation that had been cut and sitting on a stump was an African Olive-Pigeon looking quite lost. Further along was

a Secretarybird striding through the grassland with a Brown Snake-Eagle soaring in the clear blue sky.

To complete the pentads we had set out to do Rita and I visited the Ohrigstad Dam Nature Reserve the next day. We recorded mainly bushveld species among which was a Black-chested Prinia that I suspected might be too far east and sure enough I had an out-of-range form to fill in.

The next day, our last, we again took the road to the nature reserve where the long dry grass had been burnt. This of course gave us problems as the area was teeming with pipits! We recorded Plain-backed Pipit and Long-billed Pipit positively with Cape Rock-Thrush, Buff-streaked Chat and Familiar Chats enjoying the banquet of roast insects.

We had a most enjoyable and rewarding few days. Fanie had 20 lifers among the trees he identified and Rita and I completed 4 pentads that we were able to submit to SABAP2, and all in the lap of luxury once we had solved the case of the reluctant fireplace and resolved the coffee pot problem.

Our grateful thanks again to Don and Irma – wish you were there. ☐

NEWSFLASH!

Birding with GPS / GoogleEarth.

The Chamberlain Guide to Birding Gauteng by Etienne Marais and Faansie Peacock has revolutionised birding in the Greater Gauteng region. The book features 101 birding sites, with most sites accompanied by birding maps with multiple birding points. A corresponding set of GoogleEarth files can now be downloaded to "browse" these sites by way of satellite imagery overlays and really get a feel for the sites and the habitats there. In addition, GPS data can be downloaded and imported into your GPS to use in the field. The files can be downloaded for free at www.gauteng-birding.co.za under 'downloads'. Signed books can be ordered directly from the same site.

7 Junie 2009: 'n Dag in St. Lucia

Elke Geggus

Agt-uur op Sondagoggend is ons drie vrouens in die inheemse bos net buitekant die pragtige dorpie St. Lucia. Dit is 'n warm sonskynoggend, al sê die weervoorspelling nie so nie. Ek was nogal bang vir die voëlkyk storie in die bos want ek sukkel partykeer om 'n voël in 'n groot boom in ons eie tuin te sien. Maar hier was dit anders, daar was baie oop spasies vanwaar 'n mens die hoë bome kon bekyk. Die voëlgeluide is verstommend en bo alles roep die **Visarende** daar by die rivier aanhoudend, en die **Boskraaie** en die verskillende loeries is ook nooit stil nie. Die **Boskrapper** terg ons, die **Willie** "willie" die hele tyd en die **Kaneelduifie**, wat ander voëlkykers vir ons uitgewys het, en die **Gryssies** betower ons!

Nege-uur sit ons op 'n bankie in die bos en maak 'n voëllyisie, daar is al 21 voëls op die lys. Maar daar is nog baie om te sien, en ons stap aan! Daar is baie **Rooi-eekhorings** in die bome, maar ewe skielik is die voëls kwaad vir een spesifieke eekhorinkie en daar is groot konsternasie in die boom! Maar nou moet 'n mens jou voëls ken, want hulle maak net vinnig hulle verskyning. Daar is **Bosmusikante**, 'n **Swartvlieëvanger**, **Nataljanfrederik** en die

Natallyster. 'n **Konkoit** en die **Oranjabors-boslaksman** flits vinnig verby, en wonder bo wonder die **Groenvleioerie** wat 'n bietjie langer in die boom rondklouter. Ons groepie van drie sien nie almal dieselfde voëls nie, ek sien nog 'n **Gevlekte heuningwyser** en die ander **Bloukuifvlieëvangers**. Die eekhorinkie het ons regtig 'n groot guns bewys! Net 'n paar treë verder is daar weer iets besonders aan die gang, 'n vergadering van **Mosambiekloeries**. Elke keer as 'n nuwe loerie sy opwagting maak word daar "hard gesels", op die ou einde is daar 7 van hulle bymekaar, en net 'n oomblik gelede was dit vir my 'n eerstelingvoël.

Maar tussen dit alles deur word dit donkerder in die woud en dit begin saggies reën, die weervoorspelling was toe tog reg! Ons skuil agter die bome want die baadjies lê by die woonstel. 'n Halfuur later hou die reën op, ons stap uit die bos want die bome drup nog sulke groot druppels op ons. Ons is nou naby die rivier by 'n groot grasveld. Ons sien drie verskillende visvangers en twee **Visarende**. In een van die groot bome sit 5 vlieëvangertjies, hulle is besig om hulle vere reg te skud na die reën. Is dit gryses, nee bloues, en uiteindelik kom ons op hulle naam, **Blougrysvlieëvangers**, tog so mooi!

Dit begin weer reën en ons is ver van die huis af. Dit hou nie op reën nie, en ons stap sonpat maar doodgelukkig huis toe.

Na middagete kyk ons voëls in die tuin. Daar is twee pragtige groot bome met baie pers druivekorrel-grootte vrugte waar baie voëls kom kuier. Die **Boskraaie**, die **Gekroonde-neushoringvoëls**, en selfs 'n **Bloukuifloerie** kom loer in. Die Boskraaie gaan sit dan tweek-twee bymekaar in 'n ander groot boom en met hulle groot snawels krap hulle versigtig mekaar se koppe. Daar is ook **Geelwewers** en oorkant die straat in 'n klein parkie hardloop die **Bontkwikkies**, en ek het gedink 'n mens kry hulle net naby water.



Southern Banded Snake-Eagle/ Dubbelband-slangarend rustig in 'n boom.

Ons gaan weer voëls kyk, maar hierdie keer ry ons want dit reën nog altyd elke nou en dan. By die parkeerplekke by die see is orals groot bome en klein staproetes en by een van hulle sien ons die **Dubbelbandslangarend** heel rustig op 'n boompie naby ons sit. Ons het tyd om hom goed te bekyk. Vir ons almal 'n eerste-ling-voël! Daar is ook baie verskillende soorte suikerbekkies almal by 'n blommende **Natalse Koraalboom**. Die **Gryssuikerbekkie** wys sy rooi vereklossies en die **Olyfsuikerbekkie** sy geles, goeie hulpmiddels om hulle reg uit te ken. Pragtig vertoon die baie **Kortbeksuikerbekkies** en daar is ook nou en dan 'n **Rooiborsuikerbekkie**.

Maar vyfuur gaan die son onder en die voëls raak stil en ons is dankbaar vir 'n wonderlike dag in die natuur. Ons het 65 voëlspesies vir die dag op ons lysie maar net voëlkykers sal seker kan waardeer watter ongelooflike mooi dag dit vir ons was! ☐

Breeding Frenzy

The World's most numerous wild bird is the Red-billed Quelea from the dry savannah region of sub-Saharan Africa. It occurs in flocks of at least 100 million, and its total population has been estimated at several **billion** individuals. Quelea colonies cover several hundred hectares, and contain up to ten million nests. Their success can be attributed to their breeding rate: pairs breed up to four times a year, and take less than four weeks from laying eggs to fledging their chicks. Queleas are a major agricultural pest, and millions are killed by aerial spraying each year.

African Olive-Pigeon in Pretoria

Philip Calinikos

Upon moving house in August 1995, almost the very first bird seen at our new residence in Doreen Street in Colbyn was a single African Olive-Pigeon feeding on a large *Strelitzia* planted next to our entrance door. This was my first sighting of this particular species in the suburb of Colbyn and as far as I can recall in the greater Pretoria area.

I was recently sitting at the Club Sociale Italiano Restaurant in Groenkloof on a Sunday afternoon enjoying a glass of wine with some friends prior to the Confederations Cup soccer match between Italy and Brazil, when three large birds alighted on a dead Eucalyptus tree next to the Virgin Active Gym. Fortunately I had a pair of binoculars with me and identified the birds as three African Olive-Pigeons. This has been my tenth sighting of these birds in Pretoria since last November. My most memorable sighting

of this species was not far away at my office near the Austin Roberts Bird Sanctuary. During a consultation with a client, there was a loud explosion like a gunshot outside the plate glass window and upon investigation we found an African Olive-Pigeon with a broken neck lying below the window. This bird now occupies pride of place in the skin collection at the Bird Department of the Transvaal Museum!

The African Olive-Pigeon (I am told its name is derived from a favoured food rather than its colouration) is primarily a bird of highland forest but appears to be adapting itself very well to the man-made forests in Johannesburg, Centurion and Pretoria. According to the "*Chamberlain Guide to Birding Gauteng*" nine localities are given where there is a good chance of recording this species in this area and the authors, Etienne Marais and Faansie Peacock,



Gareth Hazell

African Olive-Pigeon/ Geelbekbosduif: has adapted to feeding on exotic seeding trees in Pretoria.

classify it as “resident and adapted to urban forest”.

The African Olive-Pigeon is primarily frugivorous and feeds on fruits of a wide variety of indigenous trees such as Yellowwoods, Wild Olive, Wild Peach, White Stinkwood and Cape Chestnut. The birds wander over their ranges in reaction to fluctuations in their food supply which coincides with the fruiting seasons of these trees. The species has also been recorded feeding on fruits of alien plants. According to the seventh edition of “*Roberts Birds of Southern Africa*” these include the fruits of privets, Mexican Cherry, inkberries, bugweed, forget-me-not bush and red arils. Hard seeds of rooikrans, black wattle and umbrella pine are also taken.

Most of my sightings in Pretoria, however, have been in association with a tree species not mentioned in any of the text books I have, namely *Bauhinia variegata*, also known as Indian Ebony Wood or the Orchid Tree. This tree has been used to line a number of streets in

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 verbintenis met die klub sal baie genotvol en waardevol wees. Woon asb die aandpraatjies en uitstappies by want so leer ons mekaar beter ken en kan julle ten volle voordeel trek uit julle lidmaatskap.

Carmen Colyn
Niel Louw
Benita Boshoff
Tokkie Loubser
Karl Röhrs
Marius & Ingrid du Toit
Graham Tate
Johan & Sulene Toerien
Phillip and Jill de Moor
Frans Rossouw
Wanda Louwrens

Sinoville
North Riding
Eldoglen
Lynn East
Hatfield
Silverlakes
Lynnwood Ridge
Brooklyn
The Willows
Dunnottar
Garsfontein

Geraldine Wilkes
Craig, Sheila &
Juliet Summers
Nic Efthimiades
Lukas & Juanita du Plessis
Naas Blaettler
Johan Marais
Rienie Wilken
Adriaan & Anila van Wyk
Heide Davel and Dean
Lynn en Angela Fraser

Lynnwood Manor

Hatfield
Lynnwood
Moreletarif
Garsfontein
Bonaeropark
Lyttleton Manor
Birchleigh
Broederstroom
Lynnwood Manor

Pretoria. It bears very beautiful pure white or pink flowers. In Pretoria these trees develop long seed pods in summer which crack open as they dry out. I have seen the pigeons feeding in flocks of up to six birds on these pods. The birds mostly hang on to the trees and flap around upside down in their characteristic feeding method. Occasionally I have seen them feeding on the discarded pods lying on the ground beneath the trees accompanied by Red-eyed Doves and Rock (Feral) Doves. Glyn Street North in Colbyn was a particularly favoured feeding site for them this summer, until the Tshwane Council in its wisdom sent out its pruning teams who proceeded to cut off all the vegetation from the trees depriving the birds of their food source! Other streets where I have recorded the birds are Klip Street in Lukasrand near Magnolia Dell, as well as

Festival Street in Hatfield where the birds were contentedly feeding early one week day morning, unperturbed by the peak hour traffic jam around them.

Even though *Bauhinia variegata* is a very attractive tree it is an alien species and is listed as a Category Three invasive species which means that no further plantings are allowed although existing plants may remain. Club members wishing to attract African Olive-Pigeons to their gardens will therefore have to resort to some other tactic besides plantings of this tree!

(The spread of this species in the Greater Gauteng area has been very interesting to observe. A look at the distribution map on the SABAP2 website www.sabap2.org (go to Summaries and Species distribution maps) shows that these birds are now widespread in Gauteng.) □

Rarities and Unusual Sightings Report

Compiled by André Marx

Regional Rarities / Streeksrariteite

Pink-backed Pelican. Kleinpelikaan: a solitary bird at Rooiwal was a surprise find, 22 Apr 09 (DSO,LvD,RCO). *Previously bred in the Pretoria area about 25-30 years ago and now very much a vagrant to the region.*

European Honey-Buzzard. Wespedief: one bird was observed flying over the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain whilst being harrassed by lapwings, 10 Apr 09 (A&AH).

Black Harrier. Witkruisvleivalk: a sighting of one bird was enjoyed in the grasslands in south-eastern Gauteng in pentads 2625_2845 and 2625_2850, 24 Jun 09 (LvD,RCO); with another bird sighted in this area, 02 Jul 09 (EM,PP).

Bush Blackcap. Rooibektiptol: a fascinating report of one bird came from a garden in Heidelberg, where the bird stayed for at

least three weeks happily feeding on fruit put out for it, 24 Jun 09 (WW). *There have been 3 or 4 previous records for Gauteng, and it is just possible that individuals (maybe younger birds) may wander during winter in search of food.*

Yellow-bellied Greenbul. Geelborswillie: a pair of birds was found near Rust de Winter township in an area where reports are becoming more regular, and confirming this species' spread southwards into Gauteng, 14 Jun 09 (PT,RF).

Sickle-winged Chat. Vlaktespekvreter: one very out of range bird was seen in pentad 2630_2840, 13 Jun 09 (NP); with another bird (the same one?) found in pentad 2630_2850, 02 Jul 09 (EM,PP). *It is possible that this is also a species that undertakes movements in winter into more favourable areas where food may be more readily available.*

Orange River White-eye/ Gariiepglasogie: more widespread in Gauteng than initially believed?



Tobias Muller

Orange River White-eye. Gariiepglasogie: a couple of birds identified as this species on photographic evidence were seen in the same garden as the Bush Blackcap in Heidelberg, 02 Jul 09 (EM et al). *The range of this species is only becoming known as more records come to light and it is quite likely that it occurs in much of southern Gauteng.*

Other Interesting Observations / Ander Interessante Waarnemings

South African Shelduck. Kopereend: a group of 5 birds were at Rietvlei NR, a locality where this species is seldom observed, 08 Jul 09 (AW).

Long-crested Eagle. Langkuifarend: one bird was in the Branbach Conservancy area in pentad 2535_2835, 28 May 09 (AW); with another sighting of this species in the same pentad, 09 Jul 09 (PT,RF).

Peregrine Falcon. Swerfvalk: a sighting of an adult bird flying over Delta Park, Johannesburg, is an irregular occurrence at that locality, 29 Mar 09 (GLd).

Kurrichane Buttonquail. Bosveldkwarteltjie: one bird landed on the third floor balcony of a home in Groenkloof, Pretoria, after which it was given water and released in the nearby nature reserve the next morning, 22 Apr 09 (MKr).

Blue Crane. Bloukraanvoël: 2 birds were present in grassland adjacent to the Rhino & Lion Reserve in pentad 2555_2745, 01 May 09 (AM, JB); large flocks of Blue Cranes continue to be found in the grasslands near Devon in south-eastern Gauteng, with 142 birds in a single flock, 30 May 09 (CK,GH,PP); two birds were found in the Branbach Conservancy area, east of Pretoria, where they have reportedly bred this past summer, 05 Jul 09 (PT,RF). *This species is uncommon outside of the regional stronghold in south-eastern Gauteng.*

African Finfoot. Watertrapper: one bird was a surprise find at one of the dams at Northern Farm, 04 Jul 09 (GO et al).

Blue Korhaan. Bloukorhaan: at least one and possibly two different birds were heard at Bronkhorstspuit Dam NR, where this species has been recorded as a winter visitor, 17 May 09 (PT,RF).

Jacobin Cuckoo. Bontnuwejaarsvoël: an immature bird in Fourways Gardens, northern Johannesburg, was an unexpected garden visitor, 27 Apr 09 (AM).

Freckled Nightjar. Donkernaguil: the call of

Bush Blackcap/ Rooibektiptol: surprise occurrence in Heidelberg.



Roelef van der Breggen

this species was heard in suburban Groenkloof in the early evening, 09 Apr 09 (MKr).

Pink-billed Lark. Pienkbeklewerik: large numbers were observed feeding in a burnt field in grasslands in the Devon area, 09 Jul 09 (EM,PP).

Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler. Bosveld-tjerik: a solitary bird was seen in Delta Park during the course of a few weeks, an uncommon bird for suburban Johannesburg, 30 Jun 09 (GLd).

Dark-capped Yellow Warbler. Geelsanger: this species was seen in riverside vegetation along the Osspruit near Welbekend in pentad 2555_2830, 08 Mar 09 (PT,RF); at least one bird was present at Rietvlei NR during the SABAP2 gathering there when it was reported by a number of people, 03 May 09 (SABAP2); one bird was in pentad 2535_2835, east of Pretoria, this being another new locality for this species, 05 Jul 09 (PT,RF). *A species that has seemingly extended its range into parts of Gauteng since the data collection period of the last atlas project, nearly 20 years ago.*

Wattled Starling. Lelspreeu: a male bird was recorded for the first time in a Waverley, Pretoria, garden, 27 Apr 09 (ER).

Cut-throat Finch. Bandkeelvink: 6 birds were observed in pentad 2555_2835, further south than usual for this species, 12 May 09 (PT,RF).

Observers / Waarnemers:

Adrian & Amanda Haagner (A&AH)
Amanda Walden (AW)
André Marx (AM)
Clive Kaplan (CK)
Dave Sole (DSO)
Ernst Retief (ER)
Etienne Marais (EM)
Gareth Hazell (GH)
Geoff Lockwood (GLd)
Gisela Ortner (GO)
John Bannon (JB)
Lisl van Deventer (LvD)
Margarita Krusche (MKR)
Niall Perrins (NP)
Pat Tattersal (PT)
Phil Penlington (PP)

*Sickle-winged Chat/ Vlaktespekvreter:
first confirmed record for Gauteng?*



Niall Perrins

Roger Fieldwick (RF)
Rynetta Coetzee (RCO)
SABAP2 participants (SABAP2)
Wollie Wolmarans (WW)

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

Words derived from birds: pied

Adjective: Having patches of two or more colours; multicoloured.

Etymology: From pie (magpie), referring to a magpie's black and white plumage, from Latin pica (jay or magpie). The Pied Piper of legend owes his moniker to his multicoloured attire.

How to See an African Quailfinch

Rynetta Coetzee

From the moment I first saw the picture of a beautiful African Quailfinch in my Sasol Field guide, the little bird fascinated me. It somehow reminded me of Elton John sporting oversized white-rimmed spectacles. I was a beginner birder in those days and knew nothing about giss, habitat and behaviour, aspects that I nowadays regard as very important. The first few words of the text in Sasol read: *rarely seen on the ground*. I read no further and I thought it might just one day peek at me from behind a leaf in a tree!

It was only several years later, after I joined BLNG that my hopes of seeing a Quailfinch flared up again. On several club outings André Marx mentioned that the birds were passing overhead, much to my dismay. I either did not see them at all or only caught a glimpse of a few black blobs disappearing as fast as fighter jets.

Birding law no. 4 then came into practice: *"If you don't see a bird within a certain amount of tries, it becomes insulted and deliberately avoids you from then on."*



Clive Kaplan

African Quailfinch/ Gewone Kwartelvinkie: elusive quarry.

At long last my luck took a turn for the better during a club outing to Kgomo-Kgomo in January 2004. We heard the finches calling, intermingled with the song of a male Pin-tailed Whydah. The whydah was harassing a male finch, trying to chase it off and prevent it from settling down to drink at the dam next to the road. Eventually the little finch just plonked down on the ground, totally exhausted. It just sat next to the water's edge, not moving at all. I could not believe my eyes. It was quite far off but luckily Charl Viljoen had his scope on hand and for the first time I had a glimpse of a Quailfinch, even if it was just through a scope. It was quite an exhilarating feeling after searching for so long.

During April 2004 I joined Frans and Adele van Vuuren on a trip to Kgalagadi NP and en route we stayed over at Barberspan for two nights. The first morning we scouted around the pan and all of a sudden there were Quailfinches everywhere, calling, dropping into the grass then disappearing like little ghosts. I badly wanted to have a close-up view and I tried my utmost just to get a glimpse of one, but to no avail. The moment I thought I had one in my view, it would either make a desperate dash for the next tuft of grass, never to be found again, or take off at high speed. Needless to say, I was tearing my hair out in frustration.

Lisl van Deventer and I joined the club on a camp to Sandveld Nature Reserve near Bloemhof over the past Easter weekend. Our main aim was to atlas as many pentads as possible because only one had been done in the whole area. We found Quailfinch in every one of our designated pentads but they performed their usual vanishing tricks and could only be recorded on call. The Monday morning before we returned home, we decided to visit the adjacent Bloemhof Nature Reserve to see the Double-banded Coursers that were apparently

numerous all over the reserve. It was while watching a courser casually sauntering down a dirt road that we decided to stop and switch the car off. The courser was a delight to watch. I never realised its feet were so small and was wondering how it could possibly support its body. I suddenly became aware that something had landed next to the road about 50 m away from us. It was a Quailfinch and was totally unaware of our presence. It started feeding in the grass. Eventually it ventured out in the open and just kept on feeding on the seeds. It was a male. I held my breath in anticipation, as this was the closest I had ever been to the little bird. I was too scared to drop my binocs in case I missed something and just kept on watching. "I'm sure it's going to come closer," I whispered to Lisl. She just laughed. The next moment it flew off, but instead of flying away from us, it came straight towards us landed about 15 m away. We both shrieked hysterically. I couldn't focus my binocs though the windscreen, so eventually I was sitting almost on Lisl's lap,

desperate to get a better view. By now chaos reigned in the car.

When I sat back in my own seat, I jokingly said: "It's going to come even closer".

"Now, how close *do* you want to see it" Lisl said and laughed.

At that very moment the finch flew up. "It's going to land on the car!" she shouted.

Well, it missed the car and landed just over a metre away from the passenger door. I was too scared to move. It was much too close to focus with my binocs but Lisl offered her Zeiss to me and low and behold.... a brilliant male Quailfinch filled the *whole* field of view. I could see almost every feather, the little red beak, white chin, the barring on the sides and chest and salmon belly, as well as the minute white feathers forming the little spectacles around the eyes. I was totally mesmerised. It stayed a minute or two and then it was gone, a little black dot disappearing over the grass. I was speechless but at last managed a weak: "Now *that* is how you should see a Quailfinch!" ☐

Information Regarding Membership Subscriptions

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

If payment is not received before the end of your cycle, your membership will be terminated as well as your subscription to Africa Birds & Birding. BLSA prints the address labels so you will also be excluded from the mailing list for Lanarius and the Club Programme.

LSA will send a third reminder to the Secretary and they will, in turn, send you a letter of request to you. Late payment often results in missing the latest club information.

My request is that you make sure your membership subscription is renewed immediately, saving us a huge amount of administration.

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

Rita de Meillon
BLNG Club Secretary
June 2009

Don't Have the Knowledge to Take Part in the Atlas Project?

Lisl van Deventer

I have heard many reasons why fellow birders don't participate in the current atlas project. "I'm not good enough"; "I don't have expert knowledge"; "Will I add any birds to the pentads?" and "I'm afraid to receive ORFs" (Out-of-range forms).

During the June (winter!) excursion to Tswaing, I added the following birds while atlasing:

- Pentad 2520_2800: African Sacred Ibis, Black Crake, Black-headed Oriole, Common Fiscal, Egyptian Goose, Green-winged Pytilia (Melba Finch), Jameson's Firefinch, Red-knobbed Coot, Yellow-fronted Canary and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird.
- Pentad 2520_2805: African Darter, African Pipit, Amur Falcon (Eastern Red-footed

Kestrel), Black-collared Barbet, Common Myna, Goliath Heron, Helmeted Guineafowl and Pied Kingfisher.

Most of the birds listed above can be identified by non-experts! Atlasing requires a passion for birds, a notebook and pencil, and the pentad number (which is provided on the program). Print the map of the pentad from <http://sabap2.adu.org.za> and make a list for one pentad at the next outing you attend, or when next you go out birding. Even if you don't add birds to a pentad, your contribution is very valuable since all records contribute towards compiling more data on the distribution and movements of birds. □

A Book or Two

Ralda Heyns

The usual field guides, book covers, harnesses, nesting logs, poly fleece jackets, rain jackets and many other items are in stock. I will do my best to hunt down 'wanted' books and items! Car magnets will be available during July/August. Exciting T-shirts will be launched in Spring. Please see the trading section in our newly updated web page for more details. You can contact me at trading@blng.co.za or call 0824727027.

Aandvergaderings by Sci-Enza: Dinsdagoggend worstel ek deur die verkeer. Daar is hope padwerke om Loftus en Tukkie en ek vorder voetjie vir voetjie. Ek probeer die winter ignoreer en maak die motorruit net so 'n klein stukkie oop. En daar hoor ek dit! 'n Bruinkopvisvanger roep braaf uit tussen al die stads-

geraas. Ek vergeet van die stad en kyk vinnig in die bome rond, maar die voëltjie ontwyk my. Motors toet en ek moet gou my ry kry. By die werk aangekom is dit soos elke oggend vandat ek met BLNG Trading begin het; vriendelike e-posse, gawe mense wat skakel, ander wat bestellings kom afhaal en heerlik gesels oor ons gesamentlike belangstelling: Voëlkryk. Dan word dit 18:30. Boeke e.a. lê die hele tafel vol. Die vriendelike gesig van JD (Danie) Malan arriveer nie vanaand soos met elke Dinsdag-aand-vergadering nie. Ek is bekommerd, sou daar fout wees? Ek skakel die volgende oggend. Gelukkig gaan dit goed met (Oom) Danie. So mis ek jul gesigte by die vergaderings! 'n Hartlike dankie vir al jul vriendelikheid. Hoop om jul almal te sien by die vergaderings, kursusse en uitstappies. □

	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 Sakgids - 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!!!!

