



Laniarius

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BirdLife
South Africa

Giving Conservation Wings

BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

Newsletter of BirdLife Northern Gauteng Nuusbrief van BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

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Notice to contributors

Laniarius is published four times annually, in Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer.

Deadlines for contributions are 1 March, 1 June, 1 September and 1 December. Articles should preferably be e-mailed to the Editor, but may also be posted to the club post box. Contributions and advertisements are accepted at the discretion of the Editor. Digital photographic images are always welcome.

Kennisgewing aan bydraers

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



EDITORIAL/ REDAKSIONEEL

I would like to highlight some of the important advocacy work that BirdLife South Africa carries out in order to protect the interests of its members and the general birding public by becoming involved in the conservation of bird species and sites that are under threat, as much of this work goes unnoticed.

As part of its advocacy work it is BLSA's stated intention to: "participate in the mining application processes (as per the Minerals & Petroleum Resources Development Act) and register as an Interested and Affected Party, provide comments on EIAs/EMPRs and the like, and if necessary institute legal proceedings when processes are not followed and when authorisations are granted for developments at environmentally-sensitive sites (and especially IBAs)."

Two high profile sites that have been in the news recently are Chrissiesmeer and Mapungubwe.

BLSA has become involved in networking with concerned groups who oppose the proposed coal mining in the Chrissiesmeer region, which constitutes an Important Bird Area (SA019) and supports a large number of globally threatened and near-threatened species. BLSA's contribution in this region will be to assist the Mpumalanga Lakes District Protection Group in its fight against the mining in the area.

After the Department of Mineral Resource's decision to grant a mining right to Limpopo Coal Mining Company in respect of the Vele Colliery which is adjacent to the Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site, BLSA registered its opposition as a co-applicant of the proposed coal mining development. A specialist study on the avifauna of the Mapungubwe region was commissioned prior to the preparation of a media release which will highlight the area's avifaunal importance.

Furthermore, the Important Bird Area (IBA) programme is back on track and under new management and since IBAs are a cornerstone of the organisation's conservation drive we are likely to see clubs such as ours become increasingly involved in projects which focus on IBA sites. BirdLife South Africa believes it can make a difference if the organisation focuses on bird species conservation (especially Red Data Species) and site conservation (especially IBAs).

It is good to know that the organisation that we belong to plays a lead role in important initiatives to protect threatened species and habitats in our country.

André Marx

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chairman's Report/Voorsittersverslag.....	2
President's Address	5
From the land of Genghis Khan to Gauteng.....	7
The amazing Green Sandpiper	8
Thick-billed Weaver arrival in Pretoria	9
Our Club Part 3: The people	10
Bleshoender en Kleindobbertjie.....	11
Personal Names Commemorated – Part 2.....	12
Specials at Nylsvley	15
Voëlberinging-verslag.....	16
Some thoughts on atlasng	17
Birding in the area of Balule Camp	18
'n Vinnige Besoek aan Barberspan	20
Rarities and unusual sightings	21
An encounter with a Little Sparrowhawk.....	24
The kill at the coffee shop	25
African bush walk.....	25
'n 'Super-duper-awesome-whopper'-voël	27
The barbet conundrum	30
Club news	31
Trading.....	32

Credits

Front cover: Male Violet-backed Starling/Witborsspreu

by Dup du Plessis

Back page: Lesser Flamingo, Bird of The Year

by Peter Wilgenbus

Birding facts taken from *Everything you Always Wanted to Know About Birds* by Stephen Moss.



Chairman's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

Philip Calinikos

I would firstly like to thank my committee for the excellent support that they have given me during the year. I must say that having a dedicated and experienced committee like this one has made my life as chairperson very easy and it was gratifying to know that every committee member not only took their responsibilities to heart but ensured that things got done with minimal intervention from my side.

Then to you our members, a big thank you. Your wonderful support of our evening meetings, our outings, camps, special events and courses showed what a social and active club we truly are. Without you the club could not prosper as it has done, so thanks again for your support and enthusiastic participation... it is greatly appreciated!

Membership

As reported at the previous AGM, we started the year with 635 members. Of these 536 members paid their subscriptions to us during the year. According to the reports from Birdlife South Africa this was made up of 236 ordinary members, 138 family members, 159 senior citizen members and 6 other types of membership. There are 65 members who are overdue on payment and a further 36 whose membership was cancelled during the year. This is of some concern to me and us as a committee will try and identify the reasons behind this.

The concerns regarding our subscription income and membership raised at the previous AGM have been taken up with Mark Anderson and BirdLife South Africa continually during the year. It appears as if progress has been made at last with the membership system but I am still not comfortable that our membership

records are 100% accurate. This has made life difficult for both our Club Secretary as well as our Treasurer. Although the finance side has improved since we are now receiving proper lists of membership payments, other lists are not forthcoming.

We have also only recently received full data dumps of membership records to enable us to compare the subscription income of the 2008 and 2009 years. After investigating the records I was of the opinion that there had been a serious problem in 2008. I called for a special meeting with BirdLife SA which was held recently. At the meeting BirdLife SA admitted that the invoicing for 2008 had not been complete. New members who had joined the previous year were not reinvoiced and family members did not appear on all the invoices. These errors were only discovered during 2009 and although these members were again added to the invoicing run it was only for the 2009 year and not for 2008 as well. There are therefore members who enjoyed a subscription holiday for a year even though they continued receiving *AB&B* and *Laniarius*. Should you by any chance be one of them you may want to consider a small donation to us with your 2010 subscription to cover the cost of *Laniarius*.

Club activities

Thanks to our hardworking programme and activities sub-committee which consisted during the year of Amanda Hagggett-Haagner, Pauline Leinberger, Anne Shaw, Wanda Lourens and Susan Velthuysen we had another bumper helping of excellent evening meetings, day outings, camps and courses. I would particularly like to thank both Wanda Lourens and Rita

de Meillon for taking over the very important catering arrangements for our evening meetings from the long serving Elma and André van der Walt who previously handled this function so well. I trust that Elma and André are enjoying their well earned retirement.

Without willing and competent leaders and speakers, we would not have been able to host all the activities that we did. Thank you very much to everyone of you and I hope that we can continue imposing ourselves on you in the future.

Our club's special events continue to be very special indeed thanks to the imagination and hard work of Debbie van Zyl. During the year we repeated our popular Eshowe trip as well as a camp at Ndumu. Unfortunately our planned excursion to Creighton had to be postponed as some of the infrastructure had not been completed but hopefully we will be able to fit it in this year. The club also enjoyed a wonderful pelagic trip out of Simonstown which coincided with the one perfect day in two weeks of incredibly poor weather in the Cape. Thank you Debbie, we look forward to more of these special events during the current year. This year the highlight could very well be the special outing being planned to the Okavango Panhandle in Botswana so keep your eyes open for that announcement.

Club trading

If there is to be a special award to anyone this year it would surely go to Ralda Heyns. Aply supported by husband Louis, Ralda's trading activities aptly named 'A book or Two' have been phenomenal. Not only has Ralda been omnipresent at our functions but she has attended many others at the Zoo and Botanical Gardens, far beyond the call of duty. As you will see from the financial report, Ralda managed to achieve a sales value of over R80 000. We are not a profit making organisation so the idea is not to make huge profits for the club but to give members an unbeatable good deal and also to help attract new members to the club as well. Thanks Ralda and Louis. I would also like to thank all our suppliers who allowed us the

privilege of carrying consignment stock which assisted greatly with our cash flow during the year.

Laniarius

Our *Laniarius* sub-committee spearheaded by André Marx and Drinie van Rensburg produced 3 excellent newsletters during the year. I would like to thank all our members who contributed articles and snippets of information for publication. Without your continued assistance our *Laniarius* would not be the flagship that it is for our club. A special feature of the *Laniarius* is the trip and outing reports and I hope that you continue submitting these to André.

Bird ringing

For the first time in many years we have a report from our bird ringers as well as feedback on the financial position of the group that we help to support. Having perused the report I can state that all appears in order and that the club's funding, which currently amounts to R5 000 per annum is being properly utilised. I would like to congratulate Gerrie Jansen van Rensburg on his appointment as chairman of the group and hope that his plans to increase the number of bird ringers materialises. As a club it is vital that we continue to support and promote bird ringing in the future. The bird ringers also made a wonderful contribution to our two open days that were held at the Botanical Gardens and helped to kindle an interest in birds in many of the children that were in attendance.

Finances

Peter Wilgenbus, who has done a very capable job as our Treasurer, will be delivering his financial statements to you shortly so I will not dwell on this other than to say that we have made a small surplus this year and that our financial position is healthy. Thank you Peter for your dedication towards this often time consuming but very important activity.

Marketing and communication

The able husband and wife team of Debbie and Jacques van Zyl continue to look after the BLNG alert and website. I would like to thank them both for their efforts during the year as well as for sponsoring our website which is hosted by them at no cost to the club. E-mail communication and the website are playing an ever increasing role in this technological age and as a club we need to stay at the forefront thereof.

One of the areas that we are specifically looking at developing further is our on-line trading activities as well as the on-line access to *Laniarius* articles and other information by our members.

SABAP2

Our club's contribution to the SABAP2 project is truly phenomenal. The irrepressible Ernst Retief, our regional co-ordinator, has travelled to all parts of the country giving introductory courses to atlasers and this all in his spare time. Thank you Ernst, you continue to do a great marketing job not only for SABAP2 but for our club as well. We have many dedicated atlasers within the membership of our club who have contributed hugely to the project. Based on the latest statistics from Ernst members who have submitted more than 100 lists are:

Name (Total lists/no. of pentads visited)

- Etienne Marais (336/178)
- Lisl van Deventer (284/228)
- André Marx (280/228)
- Willem Boshoff (274/124)
- Stephan Terblanche (256/199)
- Bryan Groom (222/55)
- Rihann Geyser (216/103)
- Ernst Retief (215/95)
- Roger Fieldwick and Pat Tattersall (164/79)
- Rynetta Coetzee (133/99)

This is a wonderful way for us to add something special to our birding and I urge all that haven't already done so to give it a try. It is not at all as complicated as it sounds and the best part of SABAP2 is that there is an absolute gold mine of information that has become available to all

of us via the SABAP2 website. I believe that Les Underhill and his team are doing a fantastic job in allowing us all access to this wonderful data on a real time on line basis. I would also on behalf of Ernst retief and the SABAP2 sub-committee wish to thank all members who have contributed to this very important project.

Our conservation efforts during the year have been limited. We have contributed towards the training of one of the Northern Farm bird guides and have started discussing the possibility of training a bird guide to be stationed in the Kgomogomo floodplain area.

It appears as if the Important Bird Area project may be relaunched by BirdLife SA and we have indicated our commitment to support this initiative as a branch. I would be very interested to hear from any members who would like to assist with our conservation activities going forward.

BirdLife South Africa And regional forum committee

Between myself, Ernst Retief and André Marx we have managed to attend most of the Gauteng regional forum meetings but unfortunately I have not been able to attend any of the BirdLife SA Council meetings. The regional forum under the chairmanship of Lance Robinson has been receptive to the problems we have been having and have supported where they can.

Secretary

In conclusion I would like to thank my committee for their time and efforts during the past year. It is sincerely appreciated. A truly special thank you from me to Rita de Meillon our club secretary for having looked after the club's administration in so many areas that we do not even comprehend. In her quiet way she contributes so much to the smooth running of our club and is always in the right place at the right time and always available on her cell phone. Thank you Rita for your support during the year.

In closing thank you for your attendance and I wish you a wonderful year of birds and birding ahead. 🐦



President's Address

*Pauline
Leinberger*

Hello friends and welcome to you all. I hope you have all rolled up your sleeves and prepared yourselves for the potential chaos of 2010.

This evening I want to say a few words about our club and how you too can get the pleasure out of it that I have in the 33 years I have been involved. I was recently accused of giving someone a motivational speech and I am going to try the same on you this evening.

For years I wondered what our club was all about. Why did people stay, why did they leave and why did they join in the first place? Alan Kemp suggested that it is basically a social club with a focal interest in birds. When I mentioned this to Ernst Retief, he threw his hands in the air in horror, saying that he would never be a chairman of a social club, so this left me not much further in my quest. I can only assume therefore that the bird clubs are to each member what they want it to be. Birding is that kind of interest. The statisticians and other scientists are getting tremendous satisfaction out of the Atlas at the moment and thankfully they are prepared to share their pleasure and expertise with the beginners and other more socially inclined members by using some of the club outings for their activities. Your input is so important and you too can learn by sharing your knowledge.

In a broader sense, each time we share our enthusiasm with the uninformed we make a small impact on conservation and protection of our birdlife. Recently I took my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to the Kruger Park. (A bigger bunch of city orientated young people you couldn't wish to find). After a while I had

them spotting kites and eagles for themselves and Jamie the smallest was still calling out "impala" as we left the gate on our way home. Mind you a sign of my failure, I confess, could be demonstrated by my son who asked me the other day what those black birds are with the long tails that look as if they can't fly. This was from someone who was born and brought up on the highveld...

Have you signed the petition to stop the hunting of birds over Malta yet? Perhaps you haven't heard of this scandal. There was a message from BirdLife Malta containing a short video which showed a cemetery on a hillside on this island where corpses of birds had been hidden under rocks. These appear to be mainly raptors of varying stages of decomposition which had been killed probably on migration over this country. Philip sent it to all members on an e-mail alert on the 25th January and I still have it if you are interested in signing. There is the matter closer to home which concerns open cast mining at Mapungubwe which also involves signing a petition. What difference can a signature make you might say. Well, if you don't sign it, it is as good as saying you approve, not so?

Your club is run as you know by a committee of hard-working volunteers and my appeal to you this evening is to get involved and help out. The portfolio we most like to take for granted is that of our newsletter *Laniarius* and I do believe that André has made a very fine job of it. You might well say "what can I do to help? I can't write!" How about photographs, I had a Christmas card from Malcolm showing a herd of elephants grouped under a large tree, entitled "an African Christmas tree". Short reports of interesting bird behaviour and amusing anecdotes are so pleasant to read and really don't take much writing. Instead of sharing with your friends rather share them with us all. How frustrating is André's job as he sits waiting for contributions which don't turn up.

The programme also needs your input. If our activities don't appeal to you, tell us about it and don't just stay away. Amanda tries her best to give you variety in her programme, trying to please people of various incomes and

requirements. She can only do this if you tell her what you like. Criticism we can handle as long as it is constructive. We apologise for some accommodation that has not been to your liking in recent times but short of going to inspect it, it is very difficult to assess the condition of rooms and still keep costs affordable. This is one of the largest portfolios. Not only does the programme coordinator put together the schedule of outings but she also arranges for the speakers for the evening meetings, liaising with Elize for the use of the hall. Then there are the socials. It makes me breathless to think of it all. So here we need, not only ideas, but people to help out on the sub-committee. A big thank you goes to Wanda for making herself responsible for refreshments at evening meetings.

Jacques is also urgently in need of help to keep his website up to date. I think you must all agree that he has made a very good job of designing our new website but keeping it topical is very time consuming so if anyone feels they would be capable of lending a hand here they would be very welcome.

Gerrie has been carrying two portfolios;

those of Ringing and Conservation and here in particular we need someone who would interest him or herself in the latter. It is a portfolio which could supply as much stimulation as you would wish in these times full of challenge. So please think about that one.

Ringing has undergone challenging times but under Gerrie's leadership is doing fine now, but needing more potential ringers I should imagine.

Debbie arranges the open days at the Botanical Gardens and keeps us informed on the alert and who together with Tana arranges special events, has done a great job. Ralda as well has made an excellent job of the shop with the help of her husband Louis.

Finally, thanks is a most inadequate word to use in gratitude for the work done for us by Philip, Rita and Peter. They carry out their tasks efficiently, going the extra mile with a smile and dedication.

In conclusion I must just bid farewell to our friend Erik who, while he never served on the committee, still held our club and birding very close to his heart. We will miss you always. 🐦

New Members/ Nuwe Lede

2010 uiteindelik! Wat'n wonderlike jaar voorsien ons nie vir ons sport hierdie jaar nie, en die energie speel ook oor na BLNG. Met soveel nuwe lede kan ons die klub versterk sodat ons nie net voorsien in ons klublede se voëlkykgenot nie, maar ook 'n substansiële bydrae tot die bewaring van voëls kan lewer. Raak asseblief betrokke by ons projekte.

A warm welcome to our new members! We trust your association with the club will be a long and happy one. Join us in the fun of evening lectures, day outings and weekend camps, ensuring you get the full benefit of your membership. Please engage in our projects.

Robbie, Cornia, Ryno en Clarise Kemp, Faerie Glen; Elaine Smith, Faerie Glen; Willie Saayman, Garsfontein-Oos; Tonie en Mathilda Heystek, Moreleta Plaza; Delien Vosloo, Garsfontein; Johan Joubert, Waterkloof; Gawie Marais, Kloofsig; André Taljaard, Annlin; Dina Crawford, Lydiana; Helena Theron, Lynn East; Jan van Wyk, Rayton; Matt Pretorius, Lynnwoodrif; Anne-Claire and Sylvian Leprivey, Muckleneuck; Alvarez Pereira Arjona, Highveld; Joan Faiola, Bromhof; Hilton (Butch) James, Newlands; Walter & Veronika Reissner, Sunnyside; Pieter Heslinga, Menlopark; Petro van Zweel, Lynnwood; Ron Searle, Vorna Valley; Annatjie Coetzee, Menlopark.

Membership administration is carried out by BirdLife SA and any queries relating to membership payments, invoices and the Africa Birds & Birding magazine, can be directed to Ntombi Stungu at memadmin@birdlife.org.za, telephone 011 789 1122.

I am always available to help with any queries or problems, e.g. not receiving the club programme and Lanarius, BLNGalert e-mail messages, camp bookings, outings, and the like. Please do not hesitate to contact me.

Rita de Meillon

Secretary BirdLife Northern Gauteng/Sekretaresse Gauteng Noord

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From the land of Genghis Khan to Gauteng

John Bannon

When it comes to good birds, South Africa has many, but one that really sets my pulses racing and I think I am speaking on behalf of most European birders, is the charismatic Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*). That's not to take anything away from its close relative, the (Western) Red-footed Falcon (*Falco vespertinus*), but somehow the very name Amur Falcon has a ring of the exotic Orient.

You should know that the Amur Falcon is hardly ever recorded in Europe, with only very few vagrant birds being recorded over the years. The first for Britain, in Sept 2008, was a first year male in East Yorkshire and was so unexpected that it was put out as a Red-footed Falcon and ticked as such by all concerned. (Not me however, as I was in South Africa). However photos taken on the last day it was seen, after a stay of some 32 days, clearly showed the characteristic white under-wing coverts... and the awful truth dawned on the UK twitching community.

As the (Western) Red-footed Falcon is a fairly regular migrant, sometimes 20-30 birds turn up in spring, many 'heavy twitchers' didn't bother to make the trip to see this particular bird and thus missed a British lifer in the process. Shame! Not that any of those who did see it knew what they were looking at anyway.

The Amur is named after the Amur River and Amurland in eastern Asia, which is located almost at the centre of its huge breeding range which extends from eastern Siberia, east through Amurland and Ussuriland and south to north-east Mongolia, Manchuria, North Korea and parts of northern and eastern China. It has an estimated population of up to 1 000 000 birds and is classified as Least Concern on the IUCN database.

Like Redfoots they often nest in small colonies, taking over the used nests of colonial Rooks and other corvids, feeding their three to four young mostly on larger flying and terrestrial

insects, including locusts, grasshoppers, beetles and especially flying termites and ants. This food source is also especially abundant in the Amur's only wintering grounds, which are centred on Malawi, central Zimbabwe and southwards to include the old eastern Transvaal, where they arrive *en masse* in late November/early December.

But the really amazing migration feat of the Amur Falcon is that it flies across the entire width of the Indian Ocean. Setting off from the coast of western India in large flocks it covers the 4 000 km or more in one hop, arriving on the east coast of Africa virtually undetected. A few strays are recorded in Pakistan, India, Oman, Yemen and the Arabian Gulf states each year, but this remarkable migration has never been properly documented. This trans-Indian Ocean flight is only the last lap of their journey and some birds from the extreme east of their home range, from North Korea for example, will have travelled almost 12 500 km to sit on a power line or fence post on your local patch.

On a late February atlasing trip to the Free State, covering mostly 'virgin' pentads west of Memel, these dashing little falcons were abundant, with thousands being seen over the long weekend. They were gathering in parties of several hundreds or more, feeding up on the prolific bounty of termites, dragonflies and grasshoppers, putting on the vital fuel necessary to make their daunting return journey out across the Indian Ocean, skirting the southern foothills of the Himalayas and back to their breeding sites on the steppes of eastern Asia.

South African birders are so used to seeing Amurs that they may take them for granted. I must tell you, I never will. 🦅



Amur Falcon/
Oostelike
Rooipootvalk

Martin Goetz

The amazing Green Sandpiper

John Bannon



Clive Kaplan

Green Sandpipers are mid-summer visitors to the Northern Farm Nature Reserve, near Diepsloot, just beyond the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. I ticked one there for my SA list in summer 2006/7 and at least one bird was present and well photographed at this almost regular over-summering site in December/January 2009/10.

They are also currently 'over-wintering' on my other local patch, near Southport in SW Lancashire, in the UK, not two kilometres from my house but an astonishing 9 325 km north of Northern Farm. During my tetrad (2 km x 2 km) surveys for the BTO winter atlas project I have come across at least two birds and they were both in muddy ditches with flowing water, remarkably like the narrow ditches and enclosed waterways of Northern Farm; habitats normally shunned by other waders except for our respective Common and African Snipe species.

The Green Sandpiper/Witgatruiter (*Tringa ochropus*) is called the Skogsnappa (Woodsnipe) in Sweden where it is a very common breeding bird. They call the Wood Sandpiper, another abundant breeding wader, the Gronbena (Greenlegs) and the Greenshank something else, so as usual, you can rely on us Poms to make the English names of other nation's birds as confusing as possible. Only one or two pairs of Green Sands nest in Scotland,

but around 500-1 000 birds spend the winter in the UK, presumably from the huge breeding populations in Fennoscandia and Russia.

It's estimated that between 1,2 to 3,6 million pairs of Green Sandpipers nest in the boreal forests of northern Europe right across the Palearctic to around 160 degrees east in Eastern Siberia, between 50-65 degrees latitude, mostly just below the Arctic Circle. Their main wintering range is in the Mediterranean Basin, sub-Saharan Africa, India and S. Asia as far east as the Phillipines; with lower numbers in western and central Europe, depending on the mildness of the winters. Surprisingly, I have had more records of Green Sands this winter than in most previous years; possibly these are birds which normally winter further east which have been forced to move on by the extreme conditions of this, the coldest winter in Europe for some 30 years.

Green Sandpipers are remarkably faithful to their wintering sites and I know of local areas where they turn up almost every winter, just like Northern Farm. They shun coastal and estuary sites and instead prefer more enclosed habitats, with fresh(ish) flowing water, often favouring commercial watercress beds in the UK. The current Hertfordshire Winter Atlas project for example, has at least 32 sites listed, where they are spending the winter.

Their regular wintering range in southern Africa includes flooded undergrowth in Senegal; cattle kraals in Zambia; hidden forest streams in Zaire; sewage farms and flooded ditches in Zimbabwe and it's usually the only wader regularly found in wet, wooded areas. However, although odd birds have been recorded in the Cape and KZN, Green Sands are decidedly uncommon south of Zambia. The 'summering' birds at Northern Farm in Dec/Jan are probably the furthest south to be found in Africa on a regular basis, while those 'wintering' on the Lancashire mossland peat ditches at the

same time, are some of the most furthest north.

With fossil evidence dating back to c 500 000 years ago, Green Sandpipers have had plenty of time to establish a unique ecological niche; not least their amazing breeding behaviour. Green Sandpipers nest in TREES, in mature pines, larches, aspens and alders; an evolutionary trait shared with its species pair, the Solitary Sandpiper of North America. Sometimes as high as 20 metres, Green Sandpipers make use of the old nests of pigeons, thrushes, jays and crows as well as natural platforms of pine needles on high branches. They also use tree stumps and very occasionally nest amongst tree roots or among fallen trees. Their 3-4 eggs hatch after 21 days incubation and the young birds fledge 28 days later – presumably hurling themselves into the void from their nesting trees on that first fateful flight.

Also, they don't probe for food with their bills like most other waders, but rather pick on the surface for terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates, such as mosquito and dragonfly larvae, annelid worms, ants, water bugs and beetles,

small crustaceans, spiders and even small fish.

As forest dwellers, they have the ability to rise almost vertically, so when you hear the loud lilting 'klu-weet' of a steeply rising Green Sandpiper flushed from a wet ditch at Northern Farm or Kgomo-Kgomo, marvel at the wonderful 'Skogsnappa' – perfectly adapted to a secret world of tall pines and larches and the overgrown streams and bogs of the dark boreal forests of the Northern Hemisphere.

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Thick-billed Weaver arrival in Pretoria

H. Dieter Oschadleus

Dr. Alan Kemp gave some great examples of new arrivals of birds in Pretoria (*Laniarius* 113:10-12). He suggested that Thick-billed Weavers became established in about 1998. This is likely to have been earlier, however, if one extracts all *Laniarius* records.

The first record from Pretoria was from Roodeplaats Agricultural Research Station on 24 June 1982 (and again on 4 July). The next records were from Onderstepoort (Nov 1988), Irene (1989) and Val de Grace (August 1989). During the 1990s onwards there were many records as indicated by these firsts: Botanic Gardens and Baviaanspoort sewage works (1991), Austin Roberts (1993), Lynwood, Menlopark, Moreletaspruit, CSIR and Queenswood (all in 1994), Morelettakloof and Wonderboom (1995). Some of these sites have repeat records on subsequent dates. These

records indicate that the Thick-billed Weaver first arrived in Pretoria in the 1980s and was well established by the early 1990s.

Additional data sources were also searched. The Nest Record Cards were not helpful as there are no cards from Pretoria. The first ringing records are of several individuals from the Botanic Gardens in September 1989 by Tony Harris and Walter Naser – I suspect these birds were breeding.

The first record in Gauteng was in August 1960 in Johannesburg, followed by many records from 1961 onwards. There is at least a 20 year gap in this species moving from Johannesburg to Pretoria. This is probably because a certain number of birds need to arrive in a new area for breeding to be successful and the bird to become resident. 🐦

Our Club Part 3: The people

Pauline Leinberger

It must not be forgotten that Austin Roberts was one of the men responsible for establishing the South African Ornithological Society in 1930, serving as Honorary Secretary of this organisation until his death in 1948, a year before the Pretoria Bird Club was formed at the Transvaal Museum. Since then the staff at the Museum has played a very active role in the running of our society. The first secretary was none other than OM Prozesky or Oom Proz as he was known and two ladies from the Museum library, Madames Thomas and Campbell produced the first A4 single page newsletter. Alan Kemp served as our President until he felt he couldn't spare the time any longer and it was his wife Meg who got the Transvaal Bird Atlas under way. This publication, *Birds of the Transvaal*, was edited by Alan and Meg Kemp and Warwick Tarboton and contains a great deal of very valuable information, holding its own with the wealth of information which is available today from SABAP2. Those of us in the club at the time were able to contribute in a small way to this publication and in so doing learned a lot and derived a great deal of pleasure from it.

Tony Harris and Meg Kemp produced a new-look club newsletter around 1987. Tony also started a ringing group at Pretoria Botanical Gardens, which fitted in with the research he was doing at that time for his shrike books. Tony and Judy turned up on one occasion at a camp at Marievale. (In those days we tented where the picnic place is now. It was a memorable campsite in that the Cape Turtle Doves called from their roosts in the tall Eucalyptus trees right through the night). They arrived with all their camping equipment on Tony's motorbike and all went fine, but then we passed them on the way home standing forlornly next to the bike which had broken down.

Museum children also played a part in the club activities in those early days. I can still

picture little Barry playing in the sandy road outside the Harris' tent at Blouberg and Lucy Kemp at a camp at Zandrivier. I think the Kemp family had cause to regret this excursion as I heard the whole family went down with tick bite fever a few days later. The Cassidy's have also played their part in making our club what it is today. Rod served on the committee in the eighties and he tried in the early days of the communication explosion to start a rare bird information service in much the same way that Trevor Hardaker has today, but twitching hadn't quite taken off at that time and communication was in its infancy.

The other group who played a very active role in the formation of the club in the early days, were the vets based at Onderstepoort. Neels Roos served as secretary when the society was reborn in 1970 after the six year period when it had amalgamated with the Wits Bird Club. He extended his activities to the editing of the newsletter and acted as chairman until Banie Penzhorn, another OP vet, took over. Banie remained in that role until 1987. Jo van Heerden was editor of the newsletter until 1980, and remained active in the club until he left Pretoria. Nick van der Merwe also left his mark on our newsletter as he was part of the editorial committee who produced the smaller version with the red cover of the 1980s. Pete Irons, also an OP vet, served on the committee for a while, introducing us to the Dinokeng Bird Bash. He was instrumental in introducing us to the Seringveld Conservancy with its resident population of broadleaf woodland birds. A distinguished group of people you all are, and we thank you for the part you have played in the formation of this society.

You are probably wondering when I am going to get around to the best known vet of them all. Here is where legends are made and I'm sure Nick as one of his students must have a few stories to tell about Oom Govert as he

preferred to be called (you didn't dare call him Prof). Govert van Drimmelen entered wholeheartedly into the activities of the club from the moment he joined in the late seventies. He loved the people, the birds and the bush. He was well travelled, and knowledgeable on a great many subjects, but his main interest was astronomy. He would keep us enthralled for many hours at the campfire with his observations and his stories. Woe betide anyone who produced a bright light at the campfire as he maintained that he was blinded by the brightness.

We missed him one evening during a camp at Doordraai Dam. The coals were cooling and there was no sign of Govert. On investigation, he was found a short way down the road, seated on a stool with nightjars fluttering around him. He was highly indignant that we should have been concerned and that we had disturbed him, causing us to retreat in confusion.

Govert had an arthritic back which led to several tales, one of which was caused by his regime of treatment. He had to exercise for 30 minutes and rest flat on his back for 20 minutes. We were on a walk at Coetzee's farm when Govert dropped back to have his mandatory 20 minutes in the middle of the road. He joined us a few minutes later a little out of breath. His rest had been cut short by the appearance of

a vulture which perched on a nearby tree to inspect, according to Govert, this rather stringy meal which had presented itself.

Govert always travelled alone as his car was usually full to the brim with assorted camping equipment. There was one memorable camp he attended at Blouberg which Nick also attended in his precious VW beetle. On one of his drives on the reserve Nick drove into an ant bear hole and had to abandon his car. What was to be done? He was rescued by Govert who at that time was driving a combi. Nick was able to relax and enjoy the rest of the camp in spite of the loss of his much loved beetle. The two started for home two days later. They weren't gone long. The game ranger turned up at the camp an hour or so later with his bakkie piled high with Nick's and Govert's camping equipment. Govert's combi's clutch had burnt out in Dendron and also had to be abandoned. Somehow our heroes fitted their goods into our cars and I only remember feeling rather guilty as I took off in a cloud of dust when I saw Govert approaching my already heavily laden car carrying a large red basin.

The stories are legion and I wish anyone who remembers this much loved character would share their memories.

My next chapter in the saga of our club is the birth of the 'Galloping Grannies!' 🐾

Bleshoender en Kleindobbertjie

Lambert van Sitterd

Ons was Desember in Stilbaai. Net buite die woongebied is daar 2 damme met vars water. Ons het die volgende gesien: Ongeveer 20 m van mekaar af was daar 'n nes van 'n Bleshoender (Red-knobbed Coot) en 'n Kleindobbertjie (Little Grebe). Toe kom die Bleshoender en breek die nes van die Kleindobbertjie, asook die eiers. Later het die Kleindobbertjie gekom en 'n stuk eierdop opgepeik en daarmee weggeswem. Toe kom

die Bleshoender weer en vreet die inhoud van die eiers. Die eiergeel kon duidelik gesien word soos dit drup van die Bleshoender se bek.

(Bleshoenders sal nie normaalweg die nes van 'n Kleindobbertjie vernietig of hulle eiers vreet nie. In hierdie geval was dit waarskynlik die gevolg van kompetisie omdat die twee neste so na aan mekaar was, en die Bleshoender as die sterker spesie het as wenner uit die stryd getree! – Ed.) 🐾

Personal Names Commemorated in the Common Names of Southern African Bird Species – Part 2

John Bannon

Continuing with the series on how personal names came to be used in the common names of birds; this article deals with Baillon to Bradfield.

BAILLON – Baillon's Crane, *Porzana pusilla* (Pallas, 1776)

Jean Francois Emmanuel Baillon (1744-1802), was a French lawyer, collector and naturalist from Abbeville, whose son Louis was also a naturalist and collector. His contemporary and correspondent was Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811), a German zoologist and one of the giants amongst 18th-century naturalists. Pallas gave his own name to at least a dozen bird species, some of which still survive. Interestingly, in 1776 he named the crane after both himself and Baillon, but as Pallas still has six species bearing his name, it's only fair that only the one named after Baillon remains in use today.

BAIRD – Baird's Sandpiper, *Calidris bairdii* (Coues, 1861)

Spencer Fullerton Baird (1823-1887) became with John James Audubon, one of the leading lights of American ornithology in the mid 19th-century, eventually becoming secretary of the prestigious Smithsonian Institute. He befriended Audubon and sent him his 'collected' specimens. One of his collectors was Dr Elliot B Coues (1842-1899), (pronounced Cows), one of the co-founders of the American Ornithologists' Union, who named the sandpiper after his patron in 1861. As a member of the elite worldwide 'naming club', Coues himself has three North American bird species named after him.

BARAU – Barau's Petrel, *Pterodroma barau* (Jouanin, 1964)

Only 'discovered' in 1964, Barau's Petrel is one of

South Africa's rarest seabird visitors, nesting in burrows in the high elevation forests of French territory Reunion, at around 2 500 m. Although known to local people previously, Armand Barau (1921-1989), a local agricultural engineer, was the first to detail its habits and field marks. His friend and correspondent was no less than Christian Jouanin (born 1925), the denizen of French seabird experts, who as perhaps to be expected, also has a petrel named after him. In recognition of Barau's work, he named the newly described petrel after his friend and correspondent in 1964.

BARLOW – Barlow's Lark, *Calendulauda barlowi* (Roberts, 1937)

Charles Sydney 'Punch' Barlow (1905-1979) was a distinguished South African business magnate, remembered as a great entrepreneur, philanthropist, conservationist, bibliophile and sportsman. He was chairman of one of the country's largest mining houses, Barlow Rand, the descendant of which Barloworld, is still a major SA business today. He was one of the founders of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund that was instrumental in financing the publication of the *Birds of Southern Africa*. Barlow was a great friend of Dr. Austin Roberts, the original author, and often accompanied him on bird discovery expeditions. So it was fitting that Roberts should name the newly separated lark after him in 1937.

BARRATT – Barratt's Warbler, *Bradypterus barratti* (Sharpe, 1876)

F A Barratt (c1847-1875) was an English collector in the Transvaal, who sent a specimen of a new warbler to the British Museum in 1875. He also wrote several articles for *Ibis*, the journal of the BOU.

Richard Bowdler Sharpe (1847-1909) was a senior assistant at the Department of Zoology at that time, with a particular interest in classification of species and phylogeny and their relationship to evolution. He had just started his 27-volume *Catalogue of Birds of the British Museum* and in 1892, founded the British Ornithologists' Club. Sharpe still has seven full species and numerous sub-species named after him, but gracefully named the warbler after Barratt in 1876, the year after Barratt's death.

BENNETT – Bennett's Woodpecker, *Campethera bennettii* (Smith, 1836)

Edward Turner Bennett (1797-1836) was an English naturalist, who was behind the establishment of the London Entomological Club in 1822. In conjunction with the Linnean Society, this became The Zoological Society of London in 1826 and Bennett was its Hon. Secretary until his early death at the age of 39.

With Bennett's premature demise, the woodpecker was named after him, by Dr Sir Andrew Smith (1797-1872), an ex-ship's surgeon from Scotland, who had become Director-General of the British Army's Medical Services during the Crimean War. He led the first scientific expedition from the Cape Colony into the interior in 1834, returning with an undescribed woodpecker specimen. Bennett was never in South Africa to see or hear the bird, that still bears his name today.

BOEHM – Boehm's Bee-eater, *Merops boehmi* (Reichenow, 1882)

Boehm's Spinetail, *Neafrapus boehmi* (Schalow, 1882)

Dr Richard Boehm (1854-1884) was a German zoologist and particularly a plant collector, who travelled through Tanzania and Zaire in the late 1800s, until his premature death in 1884 from malaria. His book *Von Sansibar zum Tanganjika* was published after his death and presumably he was well thought of as a fellow German natural scientist, by Dr Anton Reichenow (1847-1941), who named the bee-eater after him in 1882. (His surname is also spelt as Böhm's).



Dup du Plessis

Bradfield's Hornbill/Bradfieldse Neushoringvoël

Reichenow dominated German ornithology for many years and was widely regarded in his time, as the foremost authority on African birds, although he only visited the continent once, on a collecting expedition to W Africa in 1872/3. However, such was his academic knowledge, as the curator of the Berlin Natural History Museum, that he later published the three-volume handbook, *Die Vogel Africas*. At one time Reichenow had 18 African bird species named in his honour, including in 1896, Reichenow's Woodpecker, which had already been described by Andrew Smith (and named after Edward Bennett), some 60 years previously.

Hermann Schalow (1852-1925) was a Berlin banker and ornithologist, who worked with both Reichenow and Reichenow's father-in-law, Jean Louis Cabanis (1816-1906), one of the most influential European ornithologists of those times – see Cabanis's Bunting. He was also closely involved with the Berlin Museum and the library there is called the Schalow Library. He named the spinetail after Boehm also in 1882, and not surprisingly perhaps has a turaco named after him by his friend and colleague Reichenow.

BOTHA – Botha’s Lark, *Spizocorys fringillaris*

(Shelley, c 1902-06)

General Louis Botha (1862-1919) was the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1910 to 1919, having previously been the Prime Minister of the Transvaal. He signed the peace treaty on behalf of the Boers, at Vereeniging in 1902.

Capt George Shelley, ex-Grenadier guardsman and geologist cum-ornithologist, named the lark in Botha’s honour, but the exact circumstances are still unclear. It’s possible that Shelley, as a military man, decided to award this accolade to Botha, a determined and respected opponent, sometime after the end of the 2nd Anglo-Boer War in May 1902, but before his (Shelley’s) paralysing stroke in 1906.

The lark had already been described and classified in 1850, but not given a common name, by the Swedish zoologist and ornithologist Carl Jacob Sundevall, who was the author of *Svenska Faglarna*, published in 1856.

BRADFIELD – Bradfield’s Hornbill, *Tockus bradfieldi* (Roberts, 1930)

Bradfield’s Swift, *Apus bradfieldi* (Roberts, 1926)

Rupert D. Bradfield (1877-1949) was a South African farmer, naturalist and ornithologist who collected many species in the Okavandja, Namib and Swakopmund regions, of what was then South West Africa, now Namibia. He collected the first specimen of Bradfield’s Hornbill in 1930, near his farm, Quickborn in the Waterberg and sent it, as was his custom, to Austin Roberts at the Transvaal Museum. After earlier naming the new species of swift after Bradfield’s wife in 1926, he also named the hornbill after Bradfield himself in 1930.

However when Roberts declined to name further species or sub-species after Bradfield, he stopped sending specimens, publishing instead his own manuscript in 1935, entitled *Descriptions of New Races of Kalahari Birds and Mammals*. Despite being a founder member of the South African Ornithological Society, Bradfield never contributed to their journal *Ostrich*, nor did he publish any other field notes. 🐦

Bird Words:

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

For hundreds of years, people in many languages have developed proverbial ways of saying that it is better to enjoy what one has than to worry or dream about something that may be impossible to attain. In English, the most common way of expressing this idea is in the old proverb a bird in the hand (or a bird in hand) is worth two in the bush. The exact origin of this expression, as with most proverbs, is buried in the dim past. Some language authorities see a precursor in the Bible, first translated into English in 1382, which has a passage that looks similar: “*a living dog is better than a dead lion*” (Ecclesiastes 9:4). Other researchers believe that the expression comes from medieval falconry, where the bird in hand (the falcon) had more value than the birds in the bush (the falcon’s prey). However, the earliest recorded versions of the expression actually date from about 1530 (according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*): “*A byrde yn honde ys better than three yn the wode*” (Richard Hills); “*A byrd in hand...is worth ten flye at large*” (Hugh Rhodes). These versions were already regarded as proverbs, so they undoubtedly originated long before 1530. The modern form of the proverb was in print by 1833. Again, people probably began using it much earlier than that date.

Sprint finish

On the ground, the world’s fastest running bird is the Ostrich, which typically runs at around 45-50 km/h and can reach speeds of more than 70 km/h over short distances – faster than most birds can fly! The fastest mammal, the Cheetah, can sprint at more than 100 km/h over short distances. The fastest runner amongst flying birds is the Greater Roadrunner, which far prefers running to flying, and can reach speeds of up to 40 km/h.

Specials at Nylsvley (22-24 January 2010)

Imme Shipham and Charles Gilfillan

We had two nice surprises when we visited Nylsvley the second last weekend of January: the accommodation and the special birds we spotted.

The buildings are still the 'old' asbestos prefabs, but the interior has been spruced up: new bathroom fittings, and new and much improved beds from what I remember from a few years back. The school dormitory feeling has gone and the improved interior was much appreciated by the 'crowd' from Pretoria. This group was a nice mix of shall I call them long-standing members, in particular Pauline Leinberger, and new members.

The obvious thing to do on the Saturday morning was a visit to Vogelfontein – there was plenty of water about following the good rains in the Nyl River catchment area and the Nylsvley flood plain came into its own. From one of the hides we saw three White-backed Ducks. Waterbirds were plentiful, including all four white egrets i.e. Great White, Yellow-billed, Little and Cattle Egrets, numerous Black-crowned Night-Herons, Squacco Heron and a few Dwarf Bitterns. There was also a Black Egret (now known as Black Heron), which some people tried to change into a Slaty Egret without success. Another special sighting was the Pied Kingfisher fishing from a perch, compliments of the full flood plain.

Following the 42°C temperature that was measured the Saturday afternoon, not surprising most people spent that afternoon lazing in the shade of the trees at the camp, but it produced the sighting of a female Black Cuckooshrike on a nest. Well done, Elsa and Tersia!

On Sunday morning we visited a private farm; after a dry start to our trek to the flood plain to find the African Finfoot, surprise surprise we hit water again. It was hard work walking in the water that was knee deep in places. Efforts in keeping feet, boots and socks

dry soon went out the window. Pauline had sensibly decided to stay behind and try her luck doing some arm chair birding.

But the intrepid hikers were not deterred and were rewarded not only in spotting at close range the GREATER WATERTRAPPER, but also a group of WET FOOTED BABBLERS.

But in the end we had a combined list of 160 birds and everybody returned home with happy memories. 🐦



Two new species discovered: The Greater Watertrapper (top) and Wet-footed Babblers (bottom)!

Voëlberinging-verslag

Gerrie Jansen van Rensburg

Hierdie jaar is ook besig om teen 'n spoed te vorder. Laas jaar die tyd was dit nog Januarie en soos ek nou hier sit en tik is dit reeds middel Februarie. Ons ringers het maar 'n stadige begin gehad of het ons regtig al begin? Toe ons 16 Jan 2010 by Rietvlei Natuurreseervaat moes ring was die vleiland onder water en die keerwalle het nie meer gekeer nie.

Begin Februarie moes ons by Buffelsdrif gaan ring, maar wat 'n modderspul. Toe ons in Desember daar gering het, het ons 'n nuwe ringer in ons midde gehad. Arme Dina moes met haar karretjie deur modderplasse en toegegroeide tweespoorpaai langs 'n kanaal kophou en dit om 04:00 in die oggend. Terug in die beskawing sê sy dat sy nou baie meer van haar karretjie dink en nog meer van haar bestuursvermoë. Enige 4x4 sou jaloers op hulle gewees het. Begin Februarie wou die 4x4s nie eens meer daar ry nie so onbegaanbaar was die plek. Daar is darem nog 'n swaeltjie ringeleenheid later in die maand. Dan kan ons dalk met 'n 'bang' begin. Meer hieroor later.

Ons ringjaar is deur die ADU (Animal Demographic Unit) van Kaapstad Universiteit verander. Dit het altyd gestrek van 1 Jul tot 30 Jun die volgende jaar. Dit is nou 'n kalenderjaar Jan tot Des. In die 08/09 ringjaar het ons 'n total van 5 734 voëls gering. Dit is 1 079 voëls minder as die vorige jaar. Regs is 'n tabel met 'n opsomming van die aantal voëls wat deur spesifieke individue gering is.

Daar word gereeld aan my gevra "wat kos dit om voëls te ring?" 'n Twaalf meter net kos net onder die R500. 'n Volledige stel ringe kos in die omgewing van R5 000. Dit kos gemiddeld R22 om 'n kleinerige roofvoël te ring. Groot roofvoëls soos aasvoëls en arende tussen R38 en R40 per voël. Indien kleurringe bygevoeg moet word verdriedubbel die

koste. Gelukkig is roofvoëls skaars en moeiliker om te vang met 'n "balchater" as om nette te span. Die kleiner tipe voëls soos wewers en kleiner kos net oor 'n Rand per voël. Kom ons by groter voëls soos duiwe dan beloop die koste R1.20 per voël. As ons 'n goeie oggend beleef kan ons tot 500 voëls vang.

Reis- en verblyf koste word nie in berekening gebring nie want enigiemand wat voëls gaan kyk ervaar dieselfde koste. Soos Colin altyd sê dis ons stokperdjie, ons kon ook gekies het om te gaan golf speel het met aansienlik meer koste.

Die ervaring om 'n voël in die hand te hou en eerstehands al die detail te sien – die kleure, kleinste veertjies en die kleurvolle vel om die oë is iets wat geen geld kan koop nie.

Indien daar enige iemand is wat wil kom kyk wat en hoe ons dit doen: die datums, plekke en tye is in die program. Ons wil julle graag daar hê!

(Die klub dra R5 000 per jaar by tot die koste, wat deur die ringersgroep gebruik word om ringe te koop en 'n deel van die genoemde koste te dek. – Red.)

Voëls gering per jaar per ringer		
	2007/08	2008/09
Frik du Plooy	789	247
Colin de Kock	642	794
Chris du Plooy	794	288
Graham Grieve	807	570
Karen van Stuyvenburg	855	911
Dirk van Stuyvenburg	857	917
Stefan van Stuyvenburg	858	904
Gerrie Jansen van Rensburg	771	808
Johan Snyman	440	295
	6 813	5 734

Some thoughts on atlasing

Antony Cooper

I'm not entirely sure that I am actually good enough to contribute to the Second South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2) – at best, I am only ever likely to detect and identify 80-90% of the species that a good birder will. This is not just a speculative number, but something that I have estimated from the opportunities I have had to do a head-to-head comparison against the records of good birders.

Nevertheless, since September 2007, I have been able to submit over 50 full-protocol cards (field sheets) for over 40 pentads, plus a few *ad hoc* and incidental records. This is a drop in the ocean, of course, when compared to the contributions of the many prolific atlasers there are in South Africa, some of whom are members of our club (e.g. Etienne Marais, André Marx, Lisl van Deventer and Stephan Terblanche, who have all submitted over 250 field cards!).

From the beginning, I decided to go and atlas where the better birders would be less likely to atlas, because it would mean that no matter how limited my field sheets might be, they would still be contributions and would be of data that would otherwise not have been gathered. The result is that I have a high ratio of pentads (the geographical units by which the atlas data are recorded – 5' by 5', about 8 km by 8 km) to submitted cards, and there are several pentads for which I have been the only atlaser. So even my modest contribution has unique data and is of value.

It is not just a mechanical grind of citizen science, of course! Thanks to atlasing, I saw an African Grass-Owl at Coalville, deep in the grubby, acrid, smoggy coal fields of Mpumalanga (though the atlas committee did not accept my sighting!). I logged Yellow-throated Petronias in the industrial area of Clayville, Pink-backed Pelican in Port Alfred,

and Ludwig's Bustard and Black-headed Canary in the Karoo. I have also found areas away from the well-known birding haunts that offer great birding in terms of diversity and abundance, such as the grasslands north-west of Devon and south-east of Bronkhorstspruit. In total, I have logged 319 species to date.

However, it is not the specials that really count in SABAP2, because of the paucity of data on them. The real value lies in the data on the common birds that even I can identify readily – the Barn Swallows that are a marker for changes in migration patterns, the Hadedda Ibises and Egyptian Geese and African Palm-Swifts that are expanding their ranges, and the aliens such as Common Mynas and Rose-ringed Parakeets. Even the data on our ubiquitous residents, such as Cape Turtle-Doves and Laughing Doves, are valuable to detect subtle changes.

The atlasing results are made available on the Web – see: <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/>. Just the other day I was helping a non-birding colleague who needed data on bird distributions, and she was astonished at the volume of valuable data available from SABAP2 and similar citizen-science projects, such as the Coordinated Waterbird Count (CWAC).

Now, you knew that this advert was coming! :-). Nevertheless, here is the appeal for those of you who have not yet been atlasing to start, and for those of you who have lapsed, to resume atlasing again.

(Thanks for your efforts to date Antony. The vetting of out of range records is not as daunting as it may sound, since adjudication is based on the information submitted of the observation, and most records are in fact accepted.

– Ed.) 🐦

Birding in the area of Balule Camp (Kruger NP) February 2010

Lisl van Deventer

I was fortunate to be able to stay at Balule Camp for the February 2010 West Rand Honorary Rangers weekend. Although Balule is a very basic camp with no electricity and no fans or proper ventilation in the huts the area more than compensates with the excellent birding opportunities on offer.

Balule is ideally situated to explore a number of habitats as both Balule and Olifants camps fall in the Olifants Rugged Veld; to the east lie the Lebombo Mountains bordering Mozambique, and to the south one finds open moist grassland dotted with pans and scattered trees (mostly *Acacia* and Marula), and to the north drier grassland dominated by shrub Mopane occurs.

On our arrival on Friday afternoon we barely had time to unpack as birds popped up all around the camp. We had 'crippling' views of a male Eurasian Golden Oriole, Violet-backed Starling, Red-faced Cisticola, Common Cuckoo, Red-breasted Swallow and Hooded Vulture, amongst other birds.

Late in the afternoon the ranger appointed for Friday and Saturday took us for a walk along

the Olifants River. After good rains in the catchment areas higher up the water level of the river was quite high, preventing access to the islands to find a Pel's Fishing-Owl. We were not daunted, however, and were very lucky to flush a Pel's Fishing-Owl which flew to a dead tree, after searching for one for more than an hour. On our way back some hyenas trying to join our ranks caused some commotion, but repeatedly yelling "VOETSEK" held them at a distance.

On Saturday we started our 'morning' drive at 3:30 in a game drive vehicle, planning for a dawn chorus close to the foot of the Lebombo Mountains via a 'no entry' access road. After half-an-hour our plan was slightly modified by a young elephant bull blocking the road. In this case we knew "VOETSEK" would not help us, and revving the vehicle had the opposite effect with the bull turning around and storming us. So after reversing quite a distance (and nearly ending up at Balule camp again), we decided to wait patiently and let the bull be. This proved to be an excellent decision...

Driving slowing down the S90 (trying to keep our distance from the obstinate bull ahead of us) allowed us to find Square-tailed, Fiery-necked and European Nightjar as well as Bronze-winged Courser. A Barn Owl was flushed and a Verreaux's Eagle-Owl was perched high up on a dead tree. At first light (still on the tar road and not yet remotely close to our 'no entry' turn-off), we stopped for coffee and rusks at a marshy 'vlei' area. While enjoying some excellent birds such as Monotonous Lark, Klaas's Cuckoo, Lesser Grey Shrike, Comb Duck, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Chestnut-back Sparrowlark and Woolly-necked Stork, we suddenly heard a Black Coucal calling some way back. After another commotion of flying saucers and flying rusks, we made a sharp u-turn and



found a very obliging Black Coucal close to the road.

We were now in full swing with the birding, as the dawn chorus was followed by birds actively pursuing their breakfasts, including a pair of Double-banded Sandgrouse crossing the road. After turning off on our 'no entry' gravel road some Kurrichane Buttonquails and Common as well as Harlequin Quails gave some brief views crossing the road or flushing up from the long grass. The area was filled with clouds of Red-billed Queleas and hordes of caterpillars, and numerous raptors including Lesser Spotted, Wahlberg's and Tawny Eagle, Black-shouldered and Yellow-billed Kite, Shikra, Lanner, Amur and Red-footed Falcon and Eurasian Hobby were catching caterpillars or raiding the Red-billed Quelea nests, some even walking on the ground from nest to nest, much to our amusement.

The Lebombo Mountains had good rains and we found Dusky Lark, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Flappet Lark. We missed the Shelley's Francolin that are occasionally spotted in the area as well as the Freckled Nightjar. In a pool on top of the mountains three elephants were romping around in the water while Red-billed Teals, Three-banded Plover, Egyptian Goose, Ruff and Wood Sandpiper were having nervous discussions on the edge of the pool.

From the Lebombo Mountains we took a 4x4 route to the Olifants Trail camp east of Olifants Camp. We missed Grey-headed Kingfisher but Saddle-billed Stork, Hamerkop, African Jacana, Green-backed Camaroptera and Familiar Chat posed for us in and around the camp.

A visit to the area directly east of Balule produced surprises such as White-headed Vulture, Mosque Swallow, African Reed-Warbler, African Pygmy-Kingfisher, Yellow-throated Petronia, Great Spotted Cuckoo and the largest flock of Temminck's Coursers I've ever seen.

We concluded Saturday with a late afternoon sundowner visit to the tar road bridge crossing the Olifants River. We spotted Wire-tailed Swallow, Goliath Heron and

You might be a birder if...

- ☛ The word covert doesn't mean under-cover to you.
- ☛ You have sharp eyesight, acute hearing, physical endurance, a disregard for hot and cold, and extreme patience.
- ☛ Your children are named after birds.
- ☛ You know all ducks don't quack.
- ☛ You know the real name for shopping centre pigeons.
- ☛ You rise before 4 a.m. to see a dull brown bird that doesn't even sing well.
- ☛ You can't keep from interrupting normal conversations with non-birders by commenting on every bird you see or hear as it passes or calls.
- ☛ You need to get out for a little fresh air, so you head for the sewage treatment plant.
- ☛ You have a trip list from your honeymoon.
- ☛ Your co-workers excitedly take you to see dead birds they find outside the building so you can tell them what kind of bird it is.
- ☛ When on a business trip you tell your co-workers you are going to look for the Red-footed Booby, and have to bring in a field guide to prove to them you are not making this up.

Answering "yes" to any of these questions qualifies you as a birder.

Source: various websites on the web

White-crowned Lapwing close by and a lone African Marsh-Harrier flew across the bridge. Just before the sun finally set, two Eurasian Hobbies emerged, hunting bats with such speed and acrobatic movements in mid-air that we were barely able to follow them with our binoculars.

The Kruger National Park has again exceeded my expectations and Balule camp has proved to be a gem worth including in a future visit to the Park. 🦉

'n Vinnige Besoek aan Barberspan

Salomi Louw

Na 'n besoek aan Mokala Nasionale Park (reën, sterk wind en koue) middel November, het ek op pad na Barberspan in Kimberley oorgeslaap. Kamfersdam is regtig so oorstrom soos berigte ons vertel; klein groepies flaminke is hier en aan die verste oewer te sien, maar nie naastenby in die getalle waaraan 'n mens gewoon is nie. Die duikweg onderdeur die treinspoor is nie net oorstrom nie – die water stoot tot bykans halfpad op na die deurpad.

My plan was om, ten spyte van berigte van besoedeling, twee nagte by Barberspan te kampeer en *Chamberlains Bird Guide* se spore te volg. Op die pad verby die pan was daar wel Swartnekdoobertjies, verskeie eend- en reiersoorte en Kolganse te sien, sowel as sterretjies – maar in klein getalle. Met die inry oor die bruggetjie het ek 'n Ralreier, Groenrugreier en 'n Witrugnagreier opgejaag. Daar was niemand by ontvangs nie en op dié Saterdag geen teken van amptenare êrens nie; wel was daar 'n kennisgewing op die kantoordeur om te waarsku teen *E. coli*-besmetting (Toegang van R50 is dus ook nie betaal nie). Die afwesigheid van amptenare het ook veroorsaak dat ek nie 'n sleutel vir 'n skuiling kon kry nie. Al die paaie (aangedui in *Chamberlains*) is gesluit 'weens vloedskade'.

Die enigste huis wat beset was, het gepronk met sewe motors voor die deur. Omdat ek vermoed het dis dalk die amptenare, is ek daarheen. Dié 'Weaver's Nest' is reg langs die kampeertrein en uit die geparkeerde motors het musiek gedawer wat tot oorkant die pan gehoor kon word. Die kampeertrein is heel skaflik, maar die lapa was beset deur wat ek aanneem plaaslike mense was. Die Tswanas (?) het 'n *moewiese* groot vuur aan die gang gehad – seker vir middagete – en daar was géén kampeerdere nie; ek het daarom besluit om

liever die aftog te blaas en op pad terug na Gauteng te kyk vir (veilige, rustige) kampeerplek vir twee nagte. Op pad uit het ek darem die Grootkoningriethaan by die bruggetjie gekry.

Dit lyk asof daar ten spyte van alle pogings om ekotoerisme te bevorder, bewaringswerk te doen, voëlkykaktiwiteite aan te wakker en – waarop gehamer word – te beplan vir 2010, algaande agteruitgang en verval merkbaar is in belangrike (voël) habitate. Dit vul my met angs en ontsetting. Nog meer so nadat ek later oor die nuus moes verneem van mense wat in die omgewing van Koster beroof word terwyl hulle by padversperrings vir tot 30 minute op 'n keer moet wag, soos ek moes doen. Een genade: tydens een so 'n wagperiode het 'n swerm van sowat 40 Swartvlerksprinkaanvoëls uit die aangrensende land opgevlieg en ek kon hulle rustig dophou met en sonder my verkyker. As entoesiatiese voëlkyker kan ek nie meer sê: 'Vanwaar Gehasi?' nie, maar 'Waarheen Gehasi?' 🐦



Salomi Louw

Rarities and unusual sightings

Compiled by André Marx

National Rarities / Nasionale Rariteite

Western Marsh-Harrier. Europese Vleivalk:

a female bird was at the Kgomo-Kgomo wetlands, 17 Jan 10 (LH); with a male and female bird sighted again at this locality, 28 Feb 10 (RGd).

Green Sandpiper. Witgatruiter: 2 birds that were still present at Northern Farm were photographed on this day, 09 Jan 10 (DD).

Regional Rarities / Streeksrariteite

White-backed Night-Heron. Witrugnagreier:

one bird was sighted at the low level bridge at the Moretele River, Borakalalo NR, during the club visit, 31 Jan 10 (BLNG).

African Openbill. Oopbekooievaar: 2 birds were seen flying over Northern Farm, 10 Jan 10 (AT); a single bird was at Rietvlei NR, 15 Jan 10 (SO); 3 birds were observed in Brits, 16 Jan 10 (JJ); with another sighting of one bird at Northern Farm, 07 Feb 10 (LS); a single bird was present in the Kyalami area, 01 Mar 10 (RS). *The astonishing irruption of this species into areas far outside its normal range continued with several additional sightings in the Gauteng area, some of which are reported here.*

European Honey-Buzzard. Wespedief: a single bird was at Northern Farm, 09 Jan 10 (DD); 2 birds were at the Sammy Marks Museum, east of Pretoria, 10 Jan 10 (RGy); one bird was photographed at Midstream Estate, Centurion, 10 Jan 10 (JZ via DvR); one bird was present about 24km north of Witbank along the Klipspruit River, 02 Feb 10 (ST); one bird seen soaring over the Fountains area of Pretoria, 12 Feb 10 (ST).

Steppe Eagle. Steppe-arend: one bird was seen on the Zaagkuildrift road (about 70km north of Pretoria), 28 Feb 10 (RGd).

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle. Kleinjagarend: an immature bird that was the unfortunate victim of a road kill was found in Hamilton Street,



Jan Zeebergen

*Honey Buzzard in Midstream Estate/
Wespedief in Midstream Estate*

Arcadia, in Pretoria, 04 Feb 10 (MS via WB).

Sooty Falcon. Roetvalk: a sub-adult bird was observed perched for a period of 20 minutes at Delta Park, Johannesburg, 05 Jan 10 (GLd). *There are very few known records of this species for Gauteng; an injured bird was taken to FreeMe from the Muldersdrift area last summer, and there is an old record from Marievale from more than 25 years ago.*

Tree Pipit. Boomkoester: 2 birds were first observed at Kgaswane NR, Rustenburg, 20 Feb 10 (ST). *Several additional records of this uncommon species in South Africa were received from this same locality over the next 2 weeks and at one stage up to 10 birds were seen together!*

Other Interesting Observations/ Ander Interessante Waarnemings

White Stork. Witooievaar: one bird was seen flying over Delta Park, Johannesburg, 26 Jan



*Male Violet-backed Starling/Witborsspreu
mannetjie*

10 (GLd); a single bird was in a field in pentad 2600_2800 at Leeukop Prison, unusual for the locality, 14 Mar 10 (AM,RS).

Glossy Ibis. Glansibis: a field of cut and baled grass held a large group of about 600 birds in pentad 2605_2835 west of Delmas, 08 Mar 10 (PT,RF).

African Cuckoo Hawk. Koekoekvalk: a juvenile bird was at Smuts House, in Centurion, 24 Mar 10 (TG).

Long-crested Eagle. Langkuifarend: a solitary bird was at Rietvlei NR, 16 Feb 10 (JBo); a single bird was observed in pentad 2600_2800 in northern Johannesburg at Leeukop Prison, 14 Mar 10 (AM,RS).

Shikra. Gebande Sperwer: a record of this bird at Delta Park, Johannesburg, is most unusual, 10 Jan 10 (GLd).

Montagu's Harrier. Bloulevalk: this species was present in the Zaagkuil drift area, 29 Jan 10 (CK); a male and female bird were seen separately in pentad 2555_2840 at Bronkhorstspuit Dam, 12 Feb 10 (AV).

Eurasian Hobby. Europese Boomvalk: 2 birds were at Delta Park, Johannesburg, 26 Jan 10 (GLd); an immature bird was in the Zaagkuil drift

area, 29 Jan 10 (CK); with an adult bird again at Delta Park, 09 Feb 10 (GLd).

Crested Francolin. Bospatrys: this species was at Leeukop Prison in an area of intact bush, and probably exists as an isolated population in pentad 2600_2800 in northern Johannesburg, 31 Jan 10 (AM,SO).

Buff-spotted Flufftail. Gevlekte Vleikuiken: the distinctive call of this species was heard from a garden in Rietfontein, Pretoria; the bird responded to playback, 11 Jan 10 (AV).

Lesser Moorhen. Kleinwaterhoender: a pair of birds with 4 chicks was at Sefudi Dam, Borakalalo NR, 31 Jan 10 (BLNG).

White-bellied Korhaan. Witpenskorhaan: a group of birds on the edge of Centurion in the Wierdapark area is most unusual, 13 Feb 10 (EM).

Black-winged Pratincole. Swartvlerk-sprinkaanvoël: a large flock of over 700 birds was foraging over a field of recently cut grass in pentad 2605_2835 west of Delmas, 08 Mar 10 (PT,RF).

Alpine Swift. Witpenswindswael: this species was seen at UNISA, Pretoria, during an oncoming thunderstorm, and was present again a few days later, 02 Feb 10 (ST).

Grey-headed Kingfisher. Gryskopvisvanger: one bird was at Borakalalo NR, 30 Jan 10 (DSO).

Cape Crow. Swartkraai: 2 birds circling overhead in pentad 2605_2805 in the Edenvale area is an unusual occurrence, 25 Mar 10 (BG).

Dark-capped Yellow Warbler. Geelsanger: a single bird was seen in pentad 2550_2755 just east of Northern Farm in the Rhenosterspruit Conservancy, a new locality for the species, 05 Mar 10 (JB,RS).

Bokmakierie. Bokmakierie: a record of a bird near Brits is most unusual, 01 Mar 10 (JJ).

Violet-backed Starling. Witborsspreu: 3 birds were in a garden in Magalieskruin, Pretoria, 02 Feb 10 (HA); 2 birds were observed in the Kyalami area, 25 Mar 10 (RS).

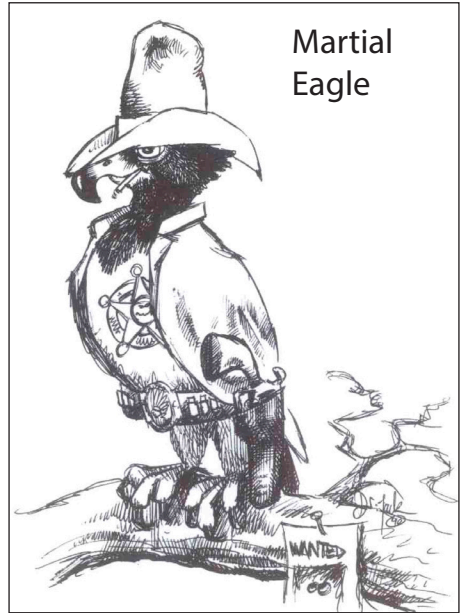
Cuckoo Finch. Koekoekvink: a single bird was at Northern Farm, 14 Feb 10 (EM).

Red-collared Widowbird. Rooikeelflap: a displaying male bird was at Delta Park, Johannesburg, an unusual occurrence at this locality, 16 Jan 10 (GLd).

Observers / Waarnemers:

Allon Traub (AT)
André Marx (AM)
Anneke Vincent (AV)
BirdLife Northern Gauteng members (BLNG)
Bryan Groom (BG)
Clive Kaplan (CK)
Dave Deighton (DD)
Dave Sole (DSO)
Drinie van Rensburg (DvR)
Etienne Marais (EM)
Geoff Lockwood (GLd)
Hennie Aucamp (HA)
Jan Zeederberg (JZ)
Jannie Jansen (JJ)
Joey Botha (JBo)
John Bannon (JB)
Lia Steen (LS)
Louis Heyns (LH)
Maryna Steyn (MS)
Pat Tattersal (PT)
Rihann Geyser (RGy)
Rob Geddes (RGd)
Roger Fieldwick (RF)
Ron Searle (RS)
Stephan Terblanche (ST)
Sue Oertli (SO)
Tertius Gous (TG)
Willem Boshoff (WB)

This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made within a 100 km radius of Pretoria, however observations made further afield are also welcome. While the majority of reports are included it is sometimes necessary to exclude some depending on 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



Martial
Eagle

Vroeë vreugdes van 'n nesstomp *Banie Penzhorn*

Ek het in Februarie vanjaar uiteindelik daad by die woord gevoeg, 'n nesstomp aangeskaf en dit op 'n Saterdag teen die hoofstam van 'n karee in ons tuin in Magalieskruin aangebring. As mens in die bed lê, het jy 'n goeie uitsig op die nesstomp. Praat van gerieflike voëlkyk! Teen Donderdag was die Kuifkophoutkapper daar en reeds fluks besig om die nes uit te hol. Vroeg die volgende oggend het twee Kleinglansspreeus en 'n Rooikophoutkapper kom ondersoek instel, maar die Kuifkop het hulle gou verjaag. Ek het ook reeds twee keer gesien dat 'n kleinerige bruin voëltjie, met opvallende wit buitenste stertvere, probeer om die nes binne te gaan, maar deur die houtkapper verjaag is. Dit kan net 'n heuningwyser wees. Ongelukkig was die verkyker nie byderhand nie, en kan ek dus nie met sekerheid sê watter een dit was nie. Ek was egter salig onbewus dat daar heuningwysers in ons kontrei is.

An encounter with a Little Sparrowhawk

André Marx

My garden has grown into something of a forest in its 19 years of existence, as the many indigenous trees that I planted have matured and created suitable habitat for an ever changing group of birds. There is usually an assortment of birds feeding on the fruiting and seeding trees and shrubs and many also find nesting opportunities. From time to time an accipiter will put in an appearance, presumably attracted by the smaller birds in the garden, and to date I have recorded Gabar Goshawk, Ovambo Sparrowhawk and Little Sparrowhawk. It is the Little Sparrowhawk in particular that finds a passerine filled garden like mine rich pickings indeed and is the bird that is the subject of this note.

I am quite used to the 'normal' contact calls of the common garden birds that occur and have found that when there is danger lurking in the form of a predator such as a raptor or a Burchell's Coucal, or even a marauding cat, the birds will switch to more strident alarm calls. That's when it is time to investigate to see what the cause of the danger is. On Sunday 14 March 2010, my attention was drawn to the persistent alarm calls of a pair of Cape White-eyes from one corner of the garden. As I walked out a pigeon-sized bird flashed past me and alighted again in a different tree. I quickly established it was one of the accipiters and with binoculars determined it was a Little



Little Sparrowhawk (Kleinspewer)

Dup du Plessis

Sparrowhawk. In its talons was a quite dead Cape White-eye, which it then proceeded to feed on. A pair of Cape White-eyes had raised a chick in my garden and I had seen them foraging together with the juvenile on a number of occasions in the preceding days

and I wondered whether the sparrowhawk's victim was their offspring. The fury of the white-eyes was obvious as they flew to within less than a metre of the feeding sparrowhawk, never stopping their scolding. Their actions attracted most of the local birds, who joined the fray, with Cape Robin-Chat, Karoo Thrush, Dark-capped Bulbul and even a White-bellied Sunbird coming to investigate.

The sparrowhawk was undeterred and carried on feeding for about another 20 minutes. Afterwards it flew to another tree in the garden and began to preen, seemingly totally at ease with life in general. I was able to walk to within a few metres below the bird without scaring it. It was a magnificent adult with fine rufous barring on its underparts, soft grey upperparts, dark tail with white spots, and fierce yellow eyes and talons. All the while the distraught white-eyes screamed at it. I felt sorry for them and hoped it was not my resident pair. But that encounter with a Little Sparrowhawk was very special and is something I will remember for a long time. 🦅


The kill at the coffee shop

Dawie Chamberlain

A bunch of sweaty runners sitting outside the Mug & Bean at Brooklyn Circle recently witnessed a dramatic kill. A dove-sized bird had landed in a small tree a metre above the coffee drinkers. "Cover your cup" came the warning and then: "but that's a raptor!"

The Little Sparrowhawk had his bright

yellow eye fixed on a house sparrow perched just below it and within seconds it swooped down, just missing the transfixed athletes and grabbing it's victim in it's talons before flying away over the road.

A stunned silence, and then "another cup of coffee please"...

African bush walk

Elizabeth Gevers

The oppressive heat descended upon us like a wet blanket. We were walking along the banks of the now over-flowing Olifants River in the Kruger Game Reserve. A pod of hippo, sheltering at the side of the fast flowing river, grunted to one another. Occasionally one would open his mouth and emit a great roar of ownership. I was envious of their ability to keep cool by submerging themselves in the water. The swiftly flowing flood waters were tainted orange by the African soil. We trod quietly through the riverside bush, trying not to break sticks, not uttering a loud word, but only making the occasional whisper.

There were three of us out in the African bush. The Olifants Camp game ranger, John, his assistant, Promise, and myself, a birder with a mission. John and Promise were both armed with guns, every now and then wiping their sweaty hands on their trousers enabling them to be able to shoot accurately if the need arose. I had no fear of anything whilst we walked; perhaps it was a matter of 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread?'

John and Promise had given me the run-down of safety once we were in the bush –

- No talking
- No quick movements or gesticulations
- If we were stormed, "don't run" as the rush

of adrenaline would stimulate any animal. I wondered if I could have possibly obeyed the latter command if an elephant or warthog did storm us.

Apart from the sound of the great river rushing past us, guiding the storm water from the highlands to its ultimate destination at the sea, I heard the sound of the apparently endless bush, enveloping me with peace, a sharp contrast from the faraway city which was my home. My city eyes were piercing the bush for any movement which could belie animal, bird or reptile.

We had a specific reason to be in this area, apart from just experiencing a bushveld walk. On arrival at Olifants Camp I had enquired about the possibility of going on a bushveld walk as I wanted to try and sight the elusive Pel's Fishing-Owl. The people at the camp reception warned me that sighting that particular species was not always guaranteed. The previous week an Argentinean had come with the same request, as he had apparently sighted all the owls of the world, with the exception of the Pel's Fishing-Owl. After two attempts there had been no sighting, and he returned to his homeland empty handed, and apparently very disappointed. But that is the nature of birding.

With our binoculars we scanned the tall trees of the river forest which are known to be the preferred habitat of the owl. We saw a group of White-backed Vultures squabbling high up in the trees, and then we heard and saw a lone Fish Eagle calling from a partially submerged tree not quite staying upright in the flooded river. John told me that the Fish Eagle was 'bad news' as they were notorious for mobbing the gentle-natured Pel's Fishing-Owl, and if, during daytime, the owl was spotted with a fish in its talons, the eagle could easily rob the owl of its prey.

It was getting hotter and hotter with the sweat pouring down our necks, with occasional malevolent flies buzzing around. I stopped to rehydrate from the bottle of water I was carrying in my back pack. Around one bend of the river we came across two young bull elephants munching on the leaves of a tree. Silently we slid back into the bush, away from the river, and only when John and Promise deemed it safe could we return to our river walk. A huge water monitor, no doubt intent on looking for eggs, ran past us on the muddy banks of the river. Then suddenly, right in front of us a third of the way up a huge fever tree, we saw the magnificent full span of the Pel's Fishing-Owl's wing, lit up by the sun, and painted with the extraordinarily beautiful

colour of soft brownish tan, dotted with spots. That was all... It flew into the thick forest. John suggested that we carefully walk around the next bend of the river as it may have flown into a tree which John knew as a favourite haunt. Step by step we moved stealthily forward. Just as we rounded the bend, in one instant I saw this magnificent creature again just before it again flew back into the dense riverine bush. Although we could no longer see it, I felt that this bird and perhaps its mate as well were watching us intently from the safety of the depths of the trees.

I felt satisfied. I knew the owls were there and had no inclination to try and see them again as I felt we would be infringing on their own privacy. From a birder's point of view I am not so sure whether it is ethical to tick this off as a 'sighting', but from a lover of nature's point of view I shall never forget this almost spiritual experience. One day I may see the elusive Pel's Fishing-Owl face to face, but then again that is no longer important anymore. The memory of that enormous and beautiful wing experienced during my African bush walk has been etched into my deepest memory.

(An interesting and descriptive account Elizabeth. This is a species that most people only get to see after more than one attempt... - Ed.) 🦉

Laeveldpatryse in die Magaliesberg

Banie Penzhorn

Ons woon al amper 30 jaar in Magalieskruin, teen die noordelike hang van die Magaliesberg, en het nog net enkele kere Laveldpatryse gehoor. Teen die einde van Februarie het ons teen sononder in Edelweisstraat, die hoogste een teen die berg, gestap toe ons skielik taamlik naby die skril "I'll drink yer beer!" van die Laeveldpatryse hoor. Minstens twee ander patryse, effens verder weg, het geantwoord. Die lyk dus asof die bevolking nie te sleg vaar nie.

Twee skaars voëls Banie Penzhorn

Dit bly maar opwindend om skaars voëls raak te loop. Ons was vroeg in Januarie 2010 op 'n kort besoek aan die Krugerwildtuin. Op die S112, suid van Skukuza, het ons 'n Goudsnipwylie by 'n nie-standhoudende waterpoel te sien gekry. Op die S1 (Doispanpad) was daar 'n Kleinswartvlerkkiewiet-paar met twee opgeskote kuikens direk langs die pad. Ons kon hulle behoorlik bekry.

'n 'Super-duper-awesome-whopper'-voël (met apologie aan Déwald Swanepoel)

Stephan Terblanche

Saterdag, 6 Maart 2010 sien 'n groepie voëlkykers by die Kgaswane Natuurresewaat (voorheen Rustenburg Natuurresewaat). Soos dit maar in die hedendaagse Suid-Afrika gaan moes ons op pad eers 'n paar nuwe paaie en name trotseer. Dis veral my eerste ervaring met die N4 verbypad deur Rustenburg.

Die dag is vinnig warm en die bome en kranse drup nie juis voëls nie. Nietemin groei die atlaslys stadig aan. Teen die kranse is daar 'n paar Oostelike Rooipootvalke (Amur Falcon) te sien, en 'n paar Witkruisarende (Verreaux's Eagles) maak 'n vinnige draai. Die piekniekplek is stillerig, in elk geval wat voëls betref ('n paar jong mense het hulle mobiele hoëtroustersel op 'n kampuittappie kom uittoets). 'n Draai deur die res van die resewaat produseer ook nie te veel nie. 'n Paar skerp oë sien darem 'n paar Korttoonklyplysters (Short-toed Rock-Thrush) en 'n paar skerp ore vind 'n Kaapse Klyplyster (Cape Rock-Thrush).

Dit is wanneer ons die dagbesoekers se piekniekarea betree dat die voëllewe betekenissvol toeneem. Ek hoor 'n Tuinsanger (Garden Warbler) en stel voor dat 'n paar verspieders daarvoor gaan soek. Dit werk eenvoudig nie vir tien mense om een bos in te vaar in die hoop dat enigiemand so 'n skugter dingetjie te sien sal kry nie.

Dit is toe dat sake 'n dramatiese wending neem. Iets land in die boom bo my met 'n onbekende, skerp roepie. Ek kyk op en deur 'n gaping sien ek die klein koestertjie op 'n tak sit, terwyl hy my beloer asof hy nie wettige immigrasiedokumente vir Suid-Afrika het nie. Die strepe tot op sy flanke is genoeg om my te laat besef dis 'n Boomkoester (Tree Pipit) hierdie. Uiteindelik lok ek vir Lisl-hulle uit die bos met die Tuinsanger in, maar toe is die koester natuurlik weg. Die volgende oomblik merk ek 'n voël 'n ent weg in 'n droë boom op. Weer is dit duidelik die Boomkoester: die strepe

op die bors is baie duidelik en breed en kom in 'n halssnoer op die bo-bors byeen. Die donker snorstrepe rond 'n skoon, ongestrepte keel af. Nou soek ek vir Elaine, wat 'n kamera met 'n Meneer Lens het. Weer is ta weg toe sy by ons aansluit. Maar, wonder sy, is die onbekende voël wat sy eenkant op die grond onder die bome afgeneem het nie dalk maar wat ek nou soek nie? En sowaar, toe ek nog rustig besig was om my toebroodjie te eet, het sy heel moontlik die eerste foto van 'n Boomkoester in Suid-Afrika geneem. Ons verskuif dus ons aandag na die omgewing waar haar foto geneem is. Oor die volgende halfuur of wat word ons vergas met waarnemings van die voorkant, bokant, agterkant, onderkant en ander kante van drie van hierdie voëls. Dit val my op hoe klein hulle is, hoe vaal hulle is wanneer hulle opvlieg in 'n boom in, hoe mooi die strepe op die bors is, hoe opvallend die strepe op die rug is, en hoe onopvallend die bietjie wit in die stert (ek sou later in foto's sien dat die buitestertvere aan die verveer was en pas begin uitgroeï het).

Nadat Lisl op die Sondag oor die waarneming op PretoriaBirds berig het, is 'n konstante stroom van voëlkykers Rustenburg



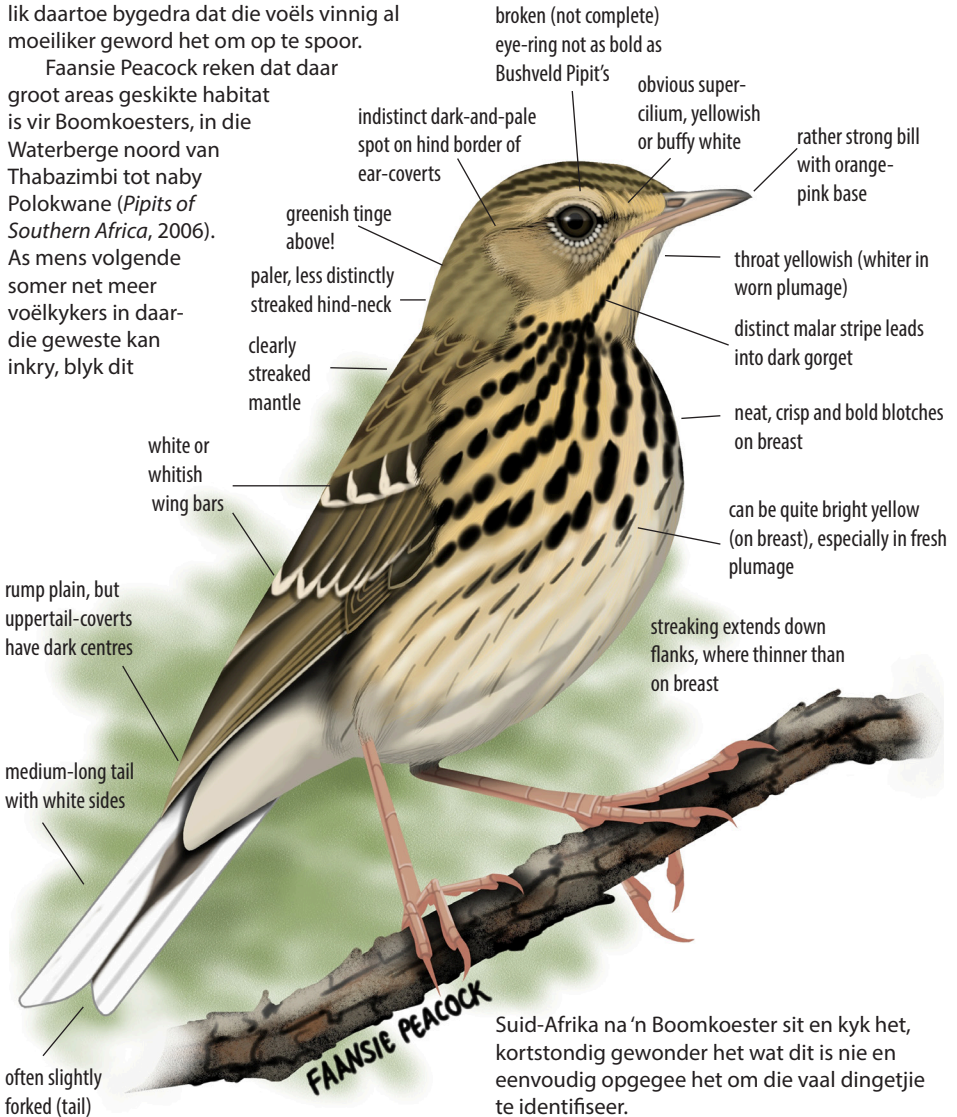
Tree Pipit/ Boomkoester

Elaine Smith

toe. Etienne Marais het sewe van die koesters in een boom gekry en vermoed daar is minstens 10 in die onmiddellike omgewing. Ongelukkig was daar verskeie "twitchers" wat met hulle klankopnames op die area toegesak het en sonder enige inagneming van BirdLife SA se etiese kode oor die gebruik daarvan waarskynlik daartoe bygedra dat die voëls vinnig al moeiliker geword het om op te spoor.

Faansie Peacock reken dat daar groot areas geskikte habitat is vir Boomkoesters, in die Waterberge noord van Thabazimbi tot naby Polokwane (*Pipits of Southern Africa*, 2006). As mens volgende somer net meer voëlkykers in daardie geweste kan inkry, blyk dit

dalk net dat 'n heelwat groter getal Boomkoesters elke jaar in Suid-Afrika kom besoek aflê. Dit is ongelukkig waar dat dit 'n maklike voël is om mis te kyk en 'n moeilike voël om uit te ken. Ek kan nie help om te wonder hoeveel keer in die verlede mense al in



Suid-Afrika na 'n Boomkoester sit en kyk het, kortstondig gewonder het wat dit is nie en eenvoudig opgegee het om die vaal dingetjie te identifiseer.

Faansie Peacock comments:

The Tree Pipit, *Anthus trivialis* was originally described by the well-known 18th century Swedish botanist, Carolus Linnaeus in 1758. Despite its scientific name (“trivialis” = commonplace, ordinary) this species is much sought-after by local birders. When it was thus reported from Kgaswane Nature Reserve near Rustenburg on 6 March 2010, a massive influx of birders resulted. The birds remained cooperative for several days, allowing most observers the rare opportunity to study, photograph and enjoy them at leisure.

The Tree Pipit's breeding grounds cover a vast area of the Palearctic: from Scotland to Russia for the nominate *trivialis* subspecies, which winters in Africa south of the Sahara; and the Himalayas for the subspecies *harringtoni* which winters in India. Tree Pipits rank amongst the most numerous of all migratory passerines moving between Eurasia and Africa, but only marginally extend into our subregion.

In Southern Africa, the Tree Pipit is most regularly encountered in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands and Mashonaland Plateau. Further south, they are on the whole very uncommon and patchily distributed. They show a preference for wooded, hilly or mountainous areas and are most frequently reported from the Magaliesberg (including Kgaswane), Soutpansberg, Wolkberg and Pilanesberg, and probably also occur widely in the Waterberg. As is to be expected from a migrant, many vagrancy records also exist, including Kimberley, Durban, Inhaca and Benqueria islands in Mozambique and Etosha, Swakopmund, Luderitz and Hobatere in Namibia.

Given their relatively small size, woodland habitat and semi-arboreal habits, Tree Pipit are perhaps most likely to be confused with Bushveld Pipits. Both species forage in the woodland understorey, take refuge in a tree when flushed and walk along the branches. Compared to Bushveld Pipit however, Tree Pipit has a colder, greener (not golden-brown) dorsal colouration; yellow-washed (not brownish-buff) underparts; bolder, broader streaking on the underparts; a more distinct malar stripe; a paler, less speckled hind-neck; longer, broader tail; and more obvious white (or whitish) wing bars formed by the paler tips of the median and greater coverts. Also note the face pattern of the two species: Tree Pipit has an obvious paler supercilium, and indistinct dark mark under the eye and (usually) a dark-and-pale spot on the hind border of the ear-coverts. Conversely, Bushveld Pipit shows a speckled face, lacking any distinct facial markings except for a broad, white, unbroken ring around its large eye. The two are perhaps most easily separated by their behaviour: Tree Pipit regularly performs gentle, rhythmical tail “pumping”, while Bushveld Pipit does not habitually wag its tail. When flushed, Bushveld Pipit gives a nasal, buzzy flight call, while that of Tree Pipit is higher in pitch, thinner and more hissing.

Interestingly, Mostert Kriek and the Sandton Bird Club recorded a group of 5 Tree Pipits at the exact same locality in Kgaswane, 10 days before the latest record. That is, 25 years and 10 days ago. Surely, the birds must have been present, or passed through, in the intervening period, but remained undetected despite many search attempts. It is clear that there remains much to be learnt about this elegant and confident yet unobtrusive migrant. 🐦

Muisvoëls wat sout vreet

Banie Penzhorn

Ons was in November 2009 op 'n dagbesoek aan die Pilanesberg Nasionale Park. By die watergat voor die Pilanesberg Sentrum word daar nou ook soutlekke aan die wild voorsien. Die lekke is nogal gewild, en dit is kostelik om te sien hoe kameelperde hul voorpote uitsprei en die lang nek buig om die sout by te kom. Groot was my verbasing toe 'n swermpie Rooiwangmuisvoëls aangevlieg kom en by die soutlek gaan sit. Hulle het nader geloop en begin om aan die soutblok te pik. In die gesaghebbende “*Birds of Africa*” is daar geen verwysing na sodanige gedrag nie. 🐦

The barbet conundrum

Ingrid van Heerden

We have been living in Marais Street in Brooklyn for nigh on 13 years and thanks to the lush alien vegetation of this suburb, have many interesting and exciting opportunities for watching our feathered friends, which range from a Southern White-faced Scops-Owl to Woodland Kingfisher (the latest visitor) to swarms of Bronze Mannikins. However, there is one bird that has us totally stumped, namely the Black-collared Barbet.

When we moved into the premises all those years ago, we provided a nesting log in one of our large trees and were soon the proud 'parents' of a whole team of Black-collared Barbets who faithfully reared multiple broods every year for about 6 years. Then the dreaded Crested Barbets took over the nesting log and also bred happily for about 2 years. Needless to say, the Black-collared Barbets and quite a few other bird species were efficiently chased out of our garden by the ever vigilant and bossy Cresteds.

About 5 years ago, we were alerted to a great and fierce battle taking place between the Crested Barbets and a female Lesser Honeyguide. This carpetbagger was trying to lay her egg in the nesting log and the parent barbets put up a valiant fight to prevent the interloper from succeeding. The noise was unbelievable and the battle raged for about 3 days. We could not ascertain who won, because Madame Honeyguide eventually departed and the barbets did continue nesting.

Once the Crested Barbets had completed that breeding attempt they understandably disappeared from the violated nest and never returned. But the puzzling aspect of this saga is that since that day the Black-collared Barbets have also never completed a breeding attempt.

We replaced the nesting log more than once and also changed its location to another tree and every time a new log was offered, the

Black-collared Barbets came to inspect the log, spent a few days hollowing it out and then disappeared. This year the same thing happened again – new log, careful hollowing out (see photo), much "Too puddlying" and activity and then off they went to breed somewhere else. To add insult to injury, a veritable flock of Black-collared Barbets of up to 7 birds, appears in the late afternoon nearly every day. They sit in the tree that houses the log, churr and sing, drink our water, eat our fruit, but scorn our accommodation! Dr Alan Kemp recently told Steve that barbets will happily roost at night in unoccupied nesting logs, even if they do not breed in them, a sort of get-up-and-go arrangement.

My questions are as follows: Has the one incident with the female honeyguide tainted our garden for ever more in barbet society? And if so, how do these subsequent



Ria Holman

Black-collared Barbet hollowing out another new nesting log in 2010

generations know about the parasitism? And how do the Black-collared Barbets know about the incident if it happened to Crested Barbets? A family of bushbabies is snugly ensconced in one of the abandoned nests, and other birds have shown interest in our nesting logs, the latest being the African Grey Hornbill, a frequent sight in Brooklyn nowadays, but both local species of barbets are firmly boycotting our nesting facilities. A conundrum indeed.

I would be interested to know if anyone has an explanation for this behaviour.

(It is unlikely the Black-collared Barbets are avoiding the nesting log in your garden because they are wary of parasitism attempts by honeyguides. This is a threat they will face wherever they breed. The birds that have visited the new nesting log recently in all probability are not the

same birds that previously visited your garden, as pairs will roam around a large area in search of suitable nest sites. Sometimes it happens that barbets will not breed in a particular nesting log for a year or so (my personal experience), but the fact that they – and other birds – are still using the log even if it is just for roosting purposes, means that there is a reasonable chance that a secondary hole nester such as Cape Glossy Starling, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, or even Red-throated Wryneck or African Grey Hornbill will breed in the log. It is important to make sure the log does not have a major crack that can lead to a water leak, that it is not in the north facing sun, and that the approach is not obscured by leaves and branches so that birds can enter and leave without being ambushed by predators such as cats. – Ed.) 🐦

BLNG Open Day

As part of national birding week, the club will be hosting another Open Day on the 8th of May at the Pretoria National Botanical Garden. We will have the usual activities of guided walks and bird ringing along with a large trading and enquiries table. We need your support on the day please. This is part of our big drive to gain as many new members as possible this year and by having not just the committee members but rather members of the club around to answer questions, it makes a huge difference. Please come along from 8am to join us for a walk or just to chat. 🐦

Laniarius prize

Congratulations to Stefan de Meillon and Tilana van der Westhuizen for their comprehensive account about travelling to Angola and about birding opportunities and conditions there. They are the prize winners for the best article in the last edition of *Laniarius*. 🐦

New membership competition 2010

Birdlife SA is hosting a competition open to all clubs and the winners will be the club that signs up the most new members during 2010. The prize for the winning club is a 4 day getaway for 12 people to a lodge in Mpumalanga. BLNG have taken up the challenge for the prize as we want to win it so we need your help. We need new members and you can help by getting involved in various club activities and bringing your friends along too. At evening meetings, stay for tea and chat to someone you don't know. On an outing, offer a stranger a rusk. Encourage friends and family to join our varied activities. Encourage them to join up as members if they have an interest in birds and joining others in this wonderful hobby. Think of all the lovely times you have had with the club and share those memories with those around you. If you want to get more details around this project, please contact Debbie van Zyl. 🐦

Trading

IB#	Item	Outeur	PRYS: 2010
IB-022	Identification Guide to the Animals of the Greater Kruger Park	Christo Joubert, Ulrich Oberprieler, Burger Cillie	R 160.00
IB-029	Animals of Pilanesberg, an identification guide	Burger Cillie, Ulrich Oberprieler, Chris Jordaan	R 125.00
IB-011	Austin Roberts Biography	CK (Bob) Brain	R 50.00
IB-028	Bird guide of Southern Africa	U. Oberprieler; B. Cillie	R 220.00
IB-019	The Chamberlain Guide to Birding Gauteng	Etienne Marais, Faansie Peacock	R 190.00
IB-013	Birds of Africa South of the Sahara	Peter Ryan; Ian Sinclair	R 370.00
IB-014	Birds of Namibia	Ian Sinclair; Jackie Sinclair	R 100.00
IB-040	Sasol Magazine: Birds of Prey, South Africa		R 55.00
IB-027	Die Voelgids Van Suider-Afrika	Ulrich Oberprieler	R 220.00
IB-016	ID Guide to the Animals of the Greater Kruger Park	Burger Cillie, Ulrich Oberprieler, Chris Jordaan	R 35.00
IB-017	Remarkable flyfishing destinations of Southern Africa	Malcolm Meintjies	R 205.00
IB-018	Frogs & Frogging	Vincent Carruthers	R 185.00
IB-021	Greater Limpopo Birding, self drive Routes	Uitgegee deur: BLSA	R 50.00
	Identifiseer Die Bome Van Suider Afrika	Braam Van Wyk; Piet Van Wyk	R 175.00
IB-048	How to identify trees in Southern Africa	Braam Van Wyk; Piet Van Wyk	R 190.00
IB-024	Mammal Guide of SA	Ulrich Oberprieler	R 160.00
IB-025	Mammal Pocket Guide of SA	Ulrich Oberprieler	R 100.00
IB-046	Field Guide to Mammals of Southern Africa: Revised Edition	Chris Stuart; Tilde Stuart	R 225.00
IB-026	Newman se voels van Suider Afrika	Kenneth Newman	R 220.00
IB-093	The complete photographic guide birds of Southern Africa: Birds of Southern Africa	Ian Sinclair; Peter Ryan	R 280.00
IB-030	Pipits of Southern Africa	Faansie Peacock	R 170.00
IB-012	Sakgids tot Suid-Afrikaanse Voëls	Burger Cillie; Ulrich Oberprieler	R 105.00
IB-031	Prime Kruger	Brett Hilton-Barber, Prof Lee R Berger	R 80.00
IB-034	Raptor Guide (Oberprieler)	Burger Cillie; Ulrich Oberprieler	R 230.00
IB-035	A guide to the reptiles of Southern Africa	Johan Marais; Graham Alexander	R 250.00
IB-037	Roberts Bird Guide	Hugh Chittenden; Guy Upfold	R 190.00
IB-036	Roberts Bird Guide: Kruger National Park and Adjacent Lowveld	Ian Whyte; Hugh Chittenden	R 150.00
IB-038	Roberts Voelgids	Hugh Chittenden	R 190.00
IB-032	Roofvoëls van SA	Burger Cillie; Ulrich Oberprieler	R 230.00
IB-055	Pocket Guide to SA Birds	Burger Cillie; Ulrich Oberprieler	R 105.00
IB-042	Sasol birds of prey of Africa and its Islands	Alan Kemp; Meg Kemp	R 230.00
IB-043	Sasol Birds of Southern Africa	Ian Sinclair; Phil Hockey; Warwick Tarboton	R 230.00
IB-044	Sasol groter geïllustreerde gids tot die voels van Suider Afrika	Ian Sinclair; Phil Hockey	R 250.00
IB-045	Sasol larger illustrated guide to birds of Southern Africa	Ian Sinclair; Phil Hockey	R 250.00
IB-050	Sasol voels van Suider-Afrika	Warwick Tarboton; Norman Arlott; Ian Sinclair; Phil Hockey; Peter Hayman	R 250.00
IB-052	Die Soogdiere van Suider-Afrika	Burger Cillie	R 160.00
IB-054	Veldgids Soogdiere van Suider Afrika	Stuart, Chris & Tilde	R 225.00
IB-039	Southern African Birdfinder	Callan Cohen; Claire Spottiswoode	R 225.00
IB-057	Watter slang is dit?	Johan Marais	R 130.00
IB-058	What's that Butterfly	Steve Woodhall	R 170.00
IB-059	What's that snake?	Johan Marais	R 150.00
IB-041	Southern African wild flowers: Jewels of the veld	John Manning	R 270.00
IB-084	Field Guide to Butterflies of South Africa	Steve Woodhall	R 250.00
IB-085	Roberts VII Large		No price available yet
IB-080	Binocular Harnesses (Ordinary)		R 140.00
IB-082	Binocular Harnesses (Leather)		R 180.00
IB-061	Birdlife, SA (Cloth Badge)		No price available yet

...and much more!! Contact Ralda Heyns

Tel: 012-452-8762; Sel: 082 472 7027; Faks: 0866 820 869; trading@blng.co.za

A sea of Flamingos



Bird of the Year 2010

Flamingos are tall, ranging from about 90 to 150 cm pink wading birds with thick down curved bills.

The word Flamingo is derived from **Phoenicopterus**, Greek **phoinikopteros**, flamingo, from **phoenix**, crimson or purplish red and **pteron**, a feather or wing. Flamingos are highly nomadic birds and their presence usually depends on suitable water conditions.



Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus ruber* is derived from Latin meaning red or ruddy. They are large, pale pink or white bird with long slender legs and long graceful necks. The wing coverts are bright salmon pink, but are often hidden beneath the feathers on the back when the bird is feeding. In flight however, they are clearly visible and contrast with the black flight feathers of the wings.



The bill is deep pink with a broad black tip and turned sharply downwards after about two thirds of its length. They have a very specialized feeding process. The call is a gooselike double "honk-honk", often in chorus. The alarm call is a nasal "kngaaa" and grunts when feeding.



Lesser Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus minor* is derived from Latin meaning smaller. Lesser Flamingos are smaller and pinker than Greater Flamingo. The bill is dark red and looks almost black at a distance.



They forage in calm water, walking or swimming with head swinging from side to side, filtering food from surface of water with bill upside-down. The air-filled lower jaw acts as float. They rarely feed on bottom like Greater Flamingo.

