



Laniarius

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Notice to contributors

Laniarius is published three times annually. Deadlines for contributions are 1 March, 1 July, and 1 November. 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 drie keer jaarliks uitgegee. Spertye vir bydraes is 1 Maart, 1 Julie, en 1 November. 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 fotos is altyd welkom.

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Credits

Front cover: Cover photo – Male Yellow-crowned Bishop (Goudgeelvink) by Graham Tate.
Birding facts taken from *Everything you Always Wanted to Know About Birds* by Stephen Moss.



Editorial/ Redaksioneel

Creating a bird garden is a wonderful past time that can bring many rewards. Just over 20 years ago I started a garden from scratch and was determined to plant as many indigenous trees and shrubs that would attract the maximum number of birds possible. Needless to say I created a veritable forest that totally transformed my 'sterile' piece of veld and brought in many new birds but at the same time rendered my garden unsuitable for more open country birds. That is an inevitable consequence of living in suburbia however, as with time all the keen gardeners create an artificial woodland that eventually begins to take on forest-like proportions in some areas where large trees have been planted that create an almost continuous canopy.

It was when I started seeing thicket lovers like Marsh and Garden Warbler that I knew my garden had really come of age. For several years running my garden has been visited by Marsh Warblers every summer and there has been at least one Garden Warbler as well. I like to think it is the same birds returning to their favourite wintering patch each year and I await their arrival with eager anticipation. It is very exciting to be able to listen to them and to discern their calls as they move about in the denser trees and shrubs in the garden. They can be difficult to see but with practice and a bit of patience you can learn to approach them stealthily and will eventually be rewarded with good views.

Local birds have also taken advantage of the changes that have taken place in Gauteng, parts of which are now seen as a large woodland by many birds. We have documented the spread of birds like African Green-Pigeon which was formerly confined to a few areas of both Pretoria and Johannesburg where large fig trees grew. Today however they have been found in many parts of both cities and their range has expanded as preliminary results from SABAP2 show. With time we are probably going to see more of the likes of African Goshawk which has already been recorded in Pretoria and which is a bird of forest edge that has shown it will move into suburbia. Interesting times indeed.

This edition contains a couple of very interesting trip reports that are a source of good information to other members in their planning of bird trips, as many of them contain a great deal of information about the sites and attractions other than just the birds found. Take a look at John Fourie's detailed account of a trip around a large part of the country and some of the interesting locations visited and Salomi Louw's account to that great birding destination, Zululand. Be sure to document your next birding adventure and to share it with fellow members on these pages.

May I wish everyone a great 2012 that is filled with superb birding.

André Marx



Chairman's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

Philip Calinikos

As I write this last report for 2011, our Committee is hard at work preparing a host of activities for 2012 which will centre on the Celebration of 60 years of birding in the Pretoria area.

It was initially our intention to celebrate the Club's Jubilee year in 2012 based on our 50th anniversary celebration in 2002. However the Committee has determined that our present Club was only formally constituted in 1970 and that there therefore could not possibly be a Jubilee year celebration next year. This decision was taken after some intensive and detailed research of the history of our Club during which the following facts were determined:

On the 26 October 1949, the first known wild bird club in the region, the Pretoria Bird Club was established at the Transvaal Museum under the chairmanship of Colonel Zinn. It was decided at the meeting that the club be called the Northern Transvaal Branch of the South African Ornithological Society ("SAOS") so that if need be the club could extend its activities throughout the northern part of the province. This name was however seldom used and the club was known as the Pretoria Bird Club for many years. In 1960 a decision was taken to change the name to the Northern Transvaal Wild Bird Society to prevent confusion with another club that was known at the time as the Pretoria Cage Bird Club. Club News Sheets containing interesting information and sightings were fairly regularly issued between 1952 and 1961.

The Northern Transvaal Wild Bird Society only functioned for 4 years. A decision was taken at the Annual General Meeting on 4 December 1964 to affiliate with the Wits Bird Club. This was primarily due to lack of interest as there were only a handful of members at the time. At the meeting it was stated however that the Society should not lose its identity and continue to operate as the Pretoria Section of the WBC (*Laniarius* no. 12 August 1980).

During May 1970 the committee of the Pretoria Section of the WBC resolved to again form an autonomous branch of the SAOS and the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society was founded.

In 1991 the Club celebrated its 21st birthday (*Laniarius* no. 44 September 1991) and this was followed by the 25th

anniversary celebrations in 1995 (*Laniarius* no. 58 September 1995).

On the 28th of February 1997, the Club voted to change its name to the Pretoria Bird Club ("PBC") on the basis that there no longer was a place such as the "Northern Transvaal" in the new South Africa (*Laniarius* no. 64 March 1997). Interestingly, it appears as if the 30 year celebration in 2000 slipped past unnoticed as we were all too busy celebrating the Millennium!

In 2002 the then committee decided to make up for this lapse by issuing a 50th anniversary edition of *Laniarius* on the basis that "there has been a bird club operating more or less continuously for 50 years in Pretoria" (*Laniarius* no. 85 June 2002).

I must also personally take it on the chin and assume blame for the fact that our committee omitted to celebrate our 40th anniversary last year.

Based on the above facts, your Committee has resolved to celebrate 60 years of birding in the Pretoria area in 2012 and to recommend that the committee of 2020 endeavour to celebrate the Club's Golden Anniversary in that year!

Many exciting events are on the drawing boards for next year to coincide with these celebrations. We are planning to follow up our maiden Club outing north of the Limpopo with trips further north into East Africa as well as a possible trip across the Indian Ocean to Madagascar. Closer to home, we are also eyeing exciting birding venues such as Mozambique and Namibia. Further details will be released as soon as possible so keep your diaries open!

Local programme activities will NOT be jeopardised however. On the contrary, our programme and activities sub-committee ably led by Wanda Louwrens, is putting together an even fuller programme than normal. Some very exciting evening speakers have also already been lined up which I am sure will keep on drawing the crowds as has been evident at this year's evening meetings.

In closing I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you all a peaceful Festive Season and a prosperous, healthy and bird-filled New Year !

Yours in Birding

Personal names commemorated in the common names of southern African bird species – Part 7

John Bannon

HOTTENTOT – Hottentot Teal, *Anas hottentota* (Eyton, 1838)

A former name given to the Khoi Khoi people of South West Africa by European colonists in the 17th Century, the name Hottentot mimics the sound of the Khoisan languages and is nowadays considered somewhat derogatory.

Thomas Campbell Eyton (1809-1880) was a typical English naturalist of the Victorian period whose particular interests included cattle, fishes and birds. He succeeded to his father's estate at Eyton Hall near Wellington in Shropshire in 1855 and built his own natural history museum to further his interest. The collection of bird skins and skeletons became one of the finest in Europe and he was very much part of the ornithological and natural sciences establishment of the times. He studied at St John's College Cambridge and was a friend and contemporary of no less than Charles Darwin, although he vigorously opposed Darwin's theories. In 1838 he wrote a *Monograph of the Anatidae, or Duck Tribe* in which the Hottentot Teal is named and described, probably for the first time.

JAMESON – Jameson's Firefinch, *Lagonosticta rhodopareia* (Heuglin, 1868)

James Sligo Jameson (1856 -1888) was born a Scot in Alloa, Clackmannanshire of Anglo-Irish parentage and became a well-known hunter/collector/explorer and naturalist of the mid 19th-century. He undertook expeditions to Borneo, South Africa, Spain, North Africa and the Rocky Mountains in the Western United States. He died aged 32 of haemorrhagic fever contracted on route from Stanley Falls to Bangala on the Congo, taking part in Henry Morton Stanley's expedition to relieve Emin Pasha.

The main reason Jameson had decided to join Stanley was, no doubt, due to his deep sense of patriotic duty; Emin Pasha being one

of General Gordon's (of Khartoum fame) most trusted officers. However, his appetite for acquiring new bird and insect specimens and the opportunities this trip into the deepest, darkest depths of the Congo River presented, where to prove irresistibly fatal to him.

A tribute to his ornithological work is contained within a book based on his diary and illustrated by Charles Whymper based on Jameson's field sketches. Edited by his wife, Ethel Jameson and published in December 1890 '*The Story of the Rear Column of the Emil Pasha Relief Expedition*' graphically portrays the savagery and eventual tragedy of Jameson's short life. His obvious regret at joining the expedition with its appalling weather, the ravages of yellow fever, malaria and a multitude of other debilitating diseases; Arab slave traders; constant disputes with the autocratic Stanley and even a cannibal banquet; is painfully described in a letter to his wife, with only very brief interludes of natural history collecting to relieve his suffering.

His diary entry for June 10 1887, gives details of that day's menu in the bush:
Soup (weevil-eaten beans, flavoured with goat)
Entrée (stewed goat with rice)
Main (roast leg of goat with rice)
Vegetable (rice and fried manioc flour)
Sweet (fried bananas).

He concludes prophetically 'I have never been on any trip where there is so little enjoyment of any kind; it is all so serious, and a sort of gloom hangs over it all!'

Martin Theodor von Heuglin (1824-1876) was a German mining engineer, explorer and ornithologist. His father was a protestant pastor and like him, Heuglin was a very vocal opponent of the new theories of evolution as expounded by Darwin and other scientists. He was Austrian consul in Khartoum and led

expeditions in Abyssinia and the Red Sea area and collected many natural history specimens. He named the newly discovered Firefinch after Jameson in 1868.

KITTLITZ – Kittlitz's Plover, *Charadrius pecuarius* (Temminck, 1823)

Baron Heinrich von Kittlitz (1799-1874) was born into Prussian nobility in Breslau, now Wroclaw, Poland. His father and grandfather were soldiers and the young Heinrich followed in the family tradition and soon after Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo in 1815, he was posted to Mainz-am-Rhine in Germany.

He became a friend of Eduard Ruppell who encouraged his interest in natural history and was eventually to become an accomplished illustrator and writer. In 1821 he set off on an expedition to north-east Africa and the Sinai, periodically despatching collected birds and other zoological items to Dr Cretzschmar, founder of the Senckenburg Natural History Society in Frankfurt.

Through his family connections he was able to gain a place on the Russian expedition to Kamchatka. The three-year round-the-world voyage on the Russian corvette *Senjavin* began in 1826 and took in stops in Tenerife, Brazil and Chile before arriving in the Gulf of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands then owned by Russia.

In May 1828 he landed on Peel Island, one of the previously uninhabited Bonin Islands, 1,000 km south of Tokyo and was the last naturalist to see the endemic Bonin Island Thrush and Bonin Woodpigeon, before their extinction by human settlers and their introduced rats and cats. The summer of 1828 was spent in Kamchatka, where he collected a little known and endangered auk, later christened Kittlitz's Murrelet, one of the two bird species still named after him to this day.

Kittlitz accompanied Ruppell to Egypt in 1831, leisurely collecting specimens along the River Nile that came into range of their shotguns. However, through ill health he had to return home and while waiting for his ship in Alexandria, he shot several small plovers, which he assumed were Arctic bound migrants.



Kittlitz's Plover/Geelbandstrandkiewiet

However they proved to be *Charadrius pecuarius*, a species widespread in sub-Saharan Africa and previously described by Temminck (1778-1858) from specimens collected by Levaillant in the Cape of Good Hope in 1823. The geographically isolated Egyptian population along the Nile Delta was unknown at the time.

He illustrated the plovers in his limited edition book *Kupfertafeln zur Naturgeschichte der Vogel*, now a much sought after collector's item. As a member of the ornithological establishment of the day, Kittlitz's association with the plover in the western Palaearctic thus became established and the common name came into everyday use. He also had four other bird species named after him of which two are now extinct.

KLAAS – Klaas's Cuckoo, *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Stephens, 1815)

Klaas was apparently a native Khoi-Khoi servant of Francois Levaillant (1753-1824) in his Cape Province expeditions between 1781 and 1784 and is presumed to have discovered the cuckoo. However, independently minded Frenchman, Francois Levaillant, did not approve of the Linnean classification system and gave his discoveries his own French names – thus *Le Coucou de Klaas* appears in his six volumes of *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Afrique* (1796-1808) and it was left to others to later reclassify and give English names to his solely French-named discoveries.



Klaas's Cuckoo/Meitjie

James Francis Stephens, an entomologist and classification expert at the British Museum in London, translated Levaillant's unusual name to the cuckoo in the year that the English had defeated the 'old enemy' Napoleon Bonaparte at the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815 – later staging a triumphant march into the heart of Paris. The Museum National D'Histoire Naturelle had brought together one of the greatest ornithological collections in the world, partly due to its curator Etienne Geoffroy St Hillaire, but also because of important ornithological and natural history collections plundered by Napoleon's armies from other museums all over Europe.

At the same time, Stephens also reclassified and named another of Levaillant's discoveries as Narina's Trogon, after a female Khoi-Khoi servant, with whom Levaillant was rumoured to be 'romantically attached'. Levaillant's reputation had already been sullied within the international ornithological establishment at this time, by the discovery of several 'new' species he had himself 'created' using parts and feathers of other species, and narratives of African journeys of discovery he had clearly never even made.

LAYARD – Layard's Tit-Babbler, *Parisoma layardi* (Hartlaub, 1862)

Edgar Leopold Layard (1824-1900) was very much another member of the British ornithological establishment. The sixth son of the head

of the Ceylon Civil Service, Layard had the time, inclination and connections to follow his interest in birds. He joined the staff of Governor Sir George Grey in the Cape Colony in 1854 and became curator of the South African Museum a year later – in his spare time!

He not only collected specimens locally, including the tit-babbler, but also received specimens from all over the world. He published '*The Birds of South Africa*' in 1867 describing 702 species but it was not illustrated and from 1875 an updated edition with 12 colour plates was published in parts and edited by Richard Bowdler Sharpe.

After a successful civil service career in South Africa, Layard went on to posts in Brazil, Fiji and New Caledonia, where he became honorary British Consul and like many in the consular and civil service at that time, he contributed important specimens to ornithological collections worldwide.

Karel Hartlaub, who has been featured earlier in this series of articles, was a pillar of the German ornithological establishment and curator of the Bremen Museum. He specialised in exotic and tropical species, particularly in Africa and Polynesia, and by naming the tit-babbler after Layard, who had similar zoogeographical interests, he continued the established international protocol of bird naming. At one time, Hartlaub had no less than a dozen bird species named in his honour by other collectors, curators and classifiers.

LEVAILLANT – Levaillant's Cisticola, *Cisticola tinniens* (Lichtenstein, 1842)

One of the most interesting explorers, collectors and naturalists of the period, Francois Le Vaillant (1753-1824), the correct French spelling/grammar has the Le separated from Vaillant, was born in Dutch Guiana (Surinam), one of the younger sons of a lawyer and French Consul and developed an interest in natural history at an early age.

The family returned to Metz in France, where he continued his interest in collecting birds and learnt the latest taxidermy techniques. Metz Museum had been founded by apothecary Jean-Baptiste Becouer, who is

Aloe Creek

Pristine Gauteng Bushveld, Birding and Fishing



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ACCOMMODATION:
Self-catering accommodation is offered in
two units: Labeo Cottage and Kudu View House.



Situated close to Rust de Winter within the Dinokeng area, 100km from Johannesburg, with good roads leading up to the venue.
A high clearance vehicle is recommended for the latter part of the road to the venue.

R180 per person per night for Labeo for adults, children are free.
There is a minimum charge of R360 per night.

R150 per person per night for Kudu View for adults, children are free.
There is a minimum charge of R750 per night.



accredited with the invention of arsenic soap, later universally adopted as the most effective method of preserving bird skins.

By the late 18th century the world's best bird collections were in Holland and France and the young Le Vaillant was an eager and accomplished taxidermist and met most of the major collectors of the day. One important contact was Jacob Temminck, treasurer of the Dutch East India Company and a keen bird collector and in 1781 the Dutch East India Company commissioned Le Vaillant to undertake an ornithological expedition to the Cape Province.

Shortly after his arrival, whilst Le Vaillant was collecting on shore, his ship sank and he was left with only the clothes he wore, his rifle and ten ducats. He managed to borrow some money to get through until other funds arrived and between April 1781 and July 1784 he made two lengthy expeditions to the Great Fish River and afterwards into Namaqualand.

Klaas's Cuckoo and Narina's Trogon were named after his Khoi Khoi servants (see Klaas's) and when he returned in 1784 with over 2,000 bird skins he had collected for Jacob Temminck, including the cisticola, he had become probably the most famous taxidermist, collector and

ornithologist in France, if not Europe.

As detailed under the previous entry for Klaas's, with the demise of Napoleon Bonaparte, Le Vaillant came to be somewhat discredited in his later years, especially by his 'old enemy'; the English ornithological establishment, who seemed to take great delight in casting doubts upon his morals, relationships with the natives and eventually some of his discoveries.

His six-volume book, *Histoire Naturelle des Oiseaux d'Afrique*, published between 1801-6, is now a very expensive collectors' edition and contains 144 colour-printed engravings. Le Vaillant also gave the very appropriate common name to the Bateleur, which is the old mediaeval French word for an acrobat or juggler.

Martin Hinrich Carl Lichtenstein (1780 -1857) was a German contemporary of Levaillant, who travelled widely in South Africa in the early 1800s. He insisted on giving every species his own unique German name when cataloguing collections for the Berlin Zoo, which he founded in 1815 – causing much confusion in the process. Independent of thought and action, Lichtenstein no doubt admired another non-conforming personality in Le Vaillant and named the cisticola in his honour in 1842. 🐦

Seeing birds with new eyes

Faansie Peacock

How do the experts instantly identify a little brown speck half a mile away? Invariably, they will also rattle off a whole history of the individual in question: “Lesser Featureless Cisticola, first-year male, slightly worn plumage, moulting its penultimate rectrix”. Bewildered beginners might wonder “What books are these guys reading? Who taught them to identify birds in such detail? Do they have supernatural eyesight?” Truth is that birding experts have simply trained themselves to see more, even when looking at the same bird as a beginner. And while time and experience are essential in developing this skill, one must consciously train your eyes and brain to see birds in greater detail.

In this second article in our series to becoming a better birder, I suggest ten easy, fun and helpful steps to seeing birds with new eyes.

Become colour blind: In Africa we are blessed with a wealth of colourful species: kingfishers that seem to have dived into paint cans, neon rollers so bright you can still see them with your eyes closed and bee-eaters fresh from the artist’s palette. As such we are predisposed to try and identify birds based primarily on their colours. Most field guides also place the greatest emphasis on colour. Expert birders know however, that shape and size are often far more important characters for successful identification. Colours are too inconsistent to be infallible field marks – plumage colour is influenced by a bird’s age, sex and the region or habitat where it occurs. Perceived colour is further influenced by feather wear, moult, solar bleaching, staining, weather, time of day, light angle, shadows and reflective light. Even adjacent individuals of the same sex, age and species often show noticeable colour differences. What experts do attach greater value to is...

Seductive shapes: In contrast to a bird’s colour, its shape is remarkably consistent and useful as an identification character. Even within similarly-plumaged groups such as warblers, pipits, pelagics, raptors and waders, subtle differences in shape are often the key to determining their identity. Pay particular attention to wing shape and length. The primary projection (the distance the primary tips extend past the tertials – see point xx if this sounds confusing) easily distinguishes short-winged residents from long-winged migrants for example. Also be sure to note bill length, shape and thickness, tail length and shape and overall body shape (fat, elongated, small-headed, thick-necked, round-crowned etc.). To test your shape skills, try birding at last light or into the sun when colours are less saturated. One useful way of ‘measuring’ relative proportions is to compare the bird to itself: is the primary projection zero, fifty or a hundred percent the length of the tertials? Is the bill longer or shorter than the distance between the bill and the eye? Is the tail really long, or does it just look long because the undertail coverts are short? These sorts of judgements are best practiced on photos before being attempted in the field.

Choose a mascot: If you really want to master the art of seeing birds with new eyes, stop looking at birds and look at a bird. Pick one species (common and conspicuous birds work best) and study it every chance you get. Simply trying to tell individuals apart (for example the different thrushes in your garden) will teach you to look in far greater detail. Try to examine your mascot species at different ages – hatchling, chick, fledgling, juvenile, first-year, adult. Also be sure to note any seasonal differences – even in birds which lack marked colour changes, the seasonal differences between fresh feathers and greyer, tatty,

worn feathers can be discerned. And don't forget your mascot when travelling, as small geographic variations occur in all birds.

See eye to eye: While learning to identify birds at a distance does have great merit, it goes without saying that you'll be able to see more detail the closer the birds are. There are three ways to address this challenge: invest in a scope, bring the birds to you (e.g. by feeding them) or find a way to view birds from close quarters without scaring them off (e.g. a hide). Practical ideas will be discussed in the last instalment of this series, but suffice it to say that there are few greater joys than watching birds from right up close – whether a bird reacting particularly curiously to pishing, one that's disorientated after flying into a window or even just a habituated starling or sparrow at a busy picnic site.

Sketch: The urge to document what we see is engrained deeply in birders' hearts. This documentation may be in the form of a day list, a few scribbles in our field guide or an internet or *Laniarius* report. However, time and time again I have encouraged birders to sketch. While many now opt to photograph birds instead of sketching, the two practices do not

have the same goal, which is an important point to understand – sketching does not necessarily aim to capture what you're seeing like photography. Sketching's aim is to force your eyes to see in greater detail and your brain to concentrate more and retain what you've seen more permanently. If you know you're going to make a sketch of a bird the moment you lower your binoculars, you'll be looking much harder. So don't worry if your sketch looks like a sparrow when you've been watching a sparrowhawk – you might as well crumple it up and chuck it away the moment you're done drawing. The process is what counts, not the product!

Start your own museum – The bottom drawer in our freezer has a special label: specimens. A freshly dead bird – whether on a busy road or between your cat's claws – is a heart-breaking sight. Nevertheless, this does give us the very valuable opportunity to handle and examine the unfortunate victim in unparalleled detail. Living on the West Coast this year, my freezer currently houses a Karoo Scrub-Robin, a Cape Sparrow and a White-throated Canary (as well as a Pygmy Mouse). These are patiently waiting until I get a chance to study, photograph and sketch them. A bird in the hand (wear gloves if you're squeamish) gives you the chance to notice things not shown in any book – count the number of tail and wing feathers; see where the primaries end and the secondaries start; check the colour of the normally obscured underwing coverts, lesser wing coverts and alula feathers; check for patterns on the palate or tongue; and note the concentric circles of tiny feathers surrounding the eye. Once you've had a good look, remember that museums with bird collections always appreciate specimens. If this all sounds too gloomy and morbid, rather attend one of BirdLife Northern Gauteng's regular ringing sessions. But beware; when they're that fresh they bite!

Bird topography – All field guides have them: those diagrammatic pages at the front or back

New members/Nuwe lede

WELKOM NUWE LEDE, ONS HOOP U VOEL GOU TUIS!
WELCOME NEW MEMBERS, WE TRUST YOU WILL ENJOY
YOUR MEMBERSHIP OF THE CLUB!

Anita Michel, Onderstepoort; Helen Pretorius, Arcadia; Mara Raath, Sinoville; Marthinus Heystek, Waverley; Jenny & Paul Smulders, Doornpoort; Cristian Llacer, Morningside; Yolande van Heerden, Eldoglen; Dawid Conradie, Eldoglen; Chris & Ida Kriel, Moreletapark; Anthony Botes, Garsfontein; Dirk Maree, Lyttelton; Melodie & Peter Wheeler, Moreleta Plaza; Sara Lerch Henning, Doornpoort; Philip Henning, Doornpoort; Wilma & Francois Badenhorst, Rietvalleirand; Eben Muller, Waverley; Mariana & Rudolph Steyn, Monumentpark; Willene & Roelof vd Merwe, Waterkloof; Joan de Kock, Clubview.

with bird outlines labelled with hundreds of ridiculous annotations like 'sub-moustachial stripe', 'supraloral spot' and 'median secondary wing coverts'. Everyone ignores these pages when starting out. However, expert birders study these pages harder than they ever studied for their matric exams. Helpfully, almost all birds of all sizes and families, from bateleurs to batisses, have the same basic feather tracts, positions and even numbers. In most passerines for example, the wing has three tertials, six to eight secondaries and nine to ten primaries. But how does knowing this help birders? Consider this example: white or buff outer tail panels are a common feature of many pipits. But why is this so hard to see in the field or on photos? The answer lies in the tail's layout: six symmetric pairs of feathers (twelve rectrices / tail feathers in total) arranged with the central pair on top. When the tail is closed, only the central pair is visible from above. But when you look at the bird head-on, you're seeing only the outermost pair. If the tail is spread, one sees the outer webs on the tail's upperside and the inner webs on the underside. So when looking at pipits, it more useful to look at the tail's underside than its upperside. This is just one of the countless ways knowing bird topography will make you see birds with new eyes.

Drakensberg Holiday Cottage

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Confuse yourself deliberately – Familiarity is the enemy when it comes to observing birds. Don't get me wrong – any and all birders agree that field experience is arguably the most important training exercise in birding. But once familiar with a bird your eyes see only a glimpse and your brain fills in the rest. Combat this by facing the unknown head-on: visit a zoo or bird park with exotic and wholly unfamiliar species. Memorise, sketch or photograph the mystery birds and get a friend to write down the names of the birds (from the information boards). Back home, get ready for an epic Google session. Given sufficient detail, the internet will satisfyingly spew out the identities of your mystery species!

Leave the binoculars at home – Have you ever accidentally forgotten your binoculars at home? A bit embarrassing perhaps, but it has happened to all of us. But perhaps this can be a good thing, on occasion. Sure, you'll miss a lot of the more distant birds, but it will also train your brain to notice different types of identification clues. How high up does the bird sit? How long does it sit still in one place? What hunting or foraging style does it employ? What is the shape of its wings? What flight style does it use? True size is also easier to judge with the naked eye. Simultaneously your mind will automatically consider aspects like habitat, calls and behaviour.

Practice makes perfect – As in the previous article in this series, the final word remains that nothing beats experience. Try to identify every single bird you see, and constantly ask yourself questions. Try to put your finger on what exactly your brain used to determine the bird's identity. Seeing birds with new eyes helps you appreciate species you've seen a thousand times before. But as always, the most important thing is to have fun while birding!

In the final instalment of this three-part series, Faansie Peacock shares some insider's info on field craft. 

Ringuitstappie: Rustenburg 12 November 2011

Frik du Plooy

Op Vrydag 11 November 2011 vertrek ses ringers van BLGN na Rustenburg op uitnodiging van Mike Durrant van BirdLife Rustenburg (BLRTN). Mike was 'n lid van BLGN se ringgroep voordat hy na Rustenburg verhuis het. Ons het Vrydagaand by lede van BLRTN tuis gegaan. Om 03:45 het ons mekaar by die Kroondaldamme ontmoet. Hierdie damme is deur 'n voëlvriendelike boer tot die beskikking van BLRTN gestel. Teen 05:00 het ons 360 m nette opgesit en die gebruiklike koffie en beskuit geniet. Met die eerste voëltjie-uithaal rondte het ons 'n aangename verrassing gekry

met die groot hoeveelheid voëltjies wat daar in die nette was. Ons het al die voëls uit die nette gehaal en die nette toegemaak en begin ring. Om 10:00 toe dit al baie warm geword het was ons klaar met die ringery. Ons het 'n totaal van 280 voëls gering. Ons het Woudapies, Kleinrietsangers, Kaapse Rietsangers, Grootrietsangers, Vleitinkinkies, Bruinsylangstertjies, Kleinheuningwysers en die gewone kwota wewers, flappe en kweleas gering. Om 11:30 het ons terug vertrek na Pretoria. Ons hoop om volgende jaar BLRTN na Pretoria te nooi na ons groot bederf op Rustenburg. 🐦

De Tweedespruit Conservancy - 23 October 2011

Rion Lerm

The day started off at 06:30 a.m., cool, with a beautiful sunrise and the air still. Together with Jason Boyce I had spent the previous day familiarising myself with the area and its amazing diversity of avifauna. The previous evening we recorded three Caprimulgids: **Freckled**, **Rufous-cheeked** and **Fiery-necked Nightjar**. During the day we recorded both **White-throated Robin-Chat** and its apparent mimic at the time, the **Fiscal Flycatcher**. So that was a good end to a day preceding this outing. A route planned in an attempt to cover most of the habitats (syringa woodland, new and old agricultural fields/tall grassland and two large dams with adjacent wetland vegetation) in the area delivered good results, considering we did all the bird watching – on foot and by vehicle via public roads – within 2.5 km from our centre location on Tony Munro's farm.

With a convoy of no less than five vehicles behind myself and Jason (consisting of all young at heart birders and no actual youngsters, i.e. students, school kids), we stopped regularly pointing out evident and interesting bird activity. The first stop was at a stream feeding the dams to be visited later on this day. Here we focused on

Village Weaver activity and their nesting colony situated some distance away on a neighbouring farm. The **Rattling Cisticola's** “che-che-che-CHRRRRRR” song attracted our attention to the opposite side of the wide dirt road where it was singing as usual from an elevated observation point. The attendees were quickly told that they must also be on the lookout for any butterflies as Jason and I were also conducting the biannual butterfly census for the Lepidopterist's Society of Africa.

Just after the first turn-off onto a two-track road we heard the characteristic call of the **Coqui Francolin**, however 'Murphy' came along as well and the moment everyone alighted from their vehicles this species was not to be heard again until later this day. This section of woodland we passed through was characterised by massive Protea trees where the **Common Fiscal** frequently dived down into the grass attempting to catch unsuspecting invertebrate prey. The highlight bird species in this habitat however, was a pair of **Violet-backed Starlings**. These two were in search of a nesting site and the female was very interested in making use of a nearby swing-gate's anchor poles,



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constantly peering down the pipes on either side of the gate.

The moment we moved into tall, open grassland the characteristic low, slow-flapping, but fast flight of **Banded Martins** caught the eye. In the distance a **Rufous-naped Lark** was advertising itself from the top of an *Ochna* tree and the small **Desert Cisticolas** performed their display flights starting off with a high-pitched “so-si-si-si”.

We made a ‘U-turn’ at the bottom of the field, travelling back through thick, red sand with our low vehicle. Right opposite the tall grassland (now on our left-hand side), an over-grazed patch of grassveld delivered a surprising **Plain-backed Pipit** perched erect and motionless on top of a small shrub, while two **Fawn-coloured Larks** were singing from overhead powerlines. And lastly, in the distance two **Ant-eating Chats** were identified by their uniform dark plumage colouration and the grassland-dominated landscape they inhabit.

After driving back to Tony’s farm we parked the vehicles, took a quick sip of water and headed off to the dams hoping to build on our species list. On the way however, we heard a jumbled call in a *Bougainvillea* thicket. Assuming it was the familiar sound of the White-throated Robin-Chat, I remembered about the previous day’s ordeal with the Fiscal Flycatcher. So I warned everyone that unless we see the source of the song whatever species we thought it was, shouldn’t be added to the list. A very odd and conspicuous bird caught our attention though on top of a bamboo bush, the male **Mocking Cliff-Chat**. The guy was singing aloft a bamboo shoot at least 20 metres high. Continuing onto the dams we came across a flock of **Blue Waxbills** emitting alarm calls while flushing into the usual sicklebush they prefer so much to perch in. A definite Fiscal Flycatcher caught our attention chasing a **Southern Grey-headed Sparrow** in and among the shoots of another bamboo thicket. Down the two-track dirt road a **Neddicky** caught our eye briefly apart from hearing their squeaky wheel-barrow calls all day. Passing the first (or middle) dam we made our way past to the bottom dam, both situated on neighbouring properties (don’t worry we didn’t have to climb fences or gates). It was at an open grassland area and we heard the croaking call of a

Coqui Francolin with a **Swainson’s Spurfowl** male advertising its territory a short distance away. Then suddenly an all-black bird flushed from a tree next to the group and I mentioned to Philip we should be on the look-out for Black Cuckooshrike. But it turned out to be a **Southern Black Flycatcher** perched high above us in a patch of tall Eucalyptus trees. I had to ask one of the ladies for directions to the bottom dam as I didn’t see the apparent track Jason spoke of leading through the tall *Thatch Grass* (aka *Hypparrhinia hirta*), as he left me to my own devices earlier the morning for more important business. She quickly took the lead (‘young at heart’ or not) and I had to be quicker so as not to be led on my first outing as a leader. Eventually, we reached the periphery of the dam with two **Yellow-billed Ducks** slowly paddling away from the group gawking at them from the dam’s edge. I pointed out the beautiful jumbling call of the **Levaillant’s Cisticola** that eventually perched on some anchor cables of a nearby electricity pylon. **Red-collared Widowbird** males were in eclipse plumage, a half-way mark between breeding and non-breeding feathers. **Southern Red Bishop** females were also quietly perched next to a pair of **Tawny-flanked Prinias** in a dry bush on the dam wall.

The whole morning I was going on about all the swallow species we would see at the middle dam, but ‘Murphy’ didn’t stay behind at the Coqui’s so once again...disappointment. The previous day Jason and I had debated about whether **Red-chested Flufftails** could occupy the wetland areas between the dams. When we found a half-eaten bird in the road with only the head intact that question had been settled! At least now I know what a flufftail looks apart from what I saw in field guides. Carrying on towards the dam wall ironically we could see a non-apparent **Common Moorhen**, **Purple Heron** and no less than three **Spurwing Geese** all at the bottom dam we just came from. By now everyone was tired and near heat stricken and it was only 10 a.m. Walking the same road back was tiring with only the **Streaky-headed Seed-Eater’s** call to finish off the list.

A good and HOT day was had by all and the initial idea of chasing after Tinkling Cisticolas quickly faded as the picnic came to an end and the heat grew stronger. 🐦

Greater Gauteng: SABAP2 compared with SABAP1

Roger Fieldwick

When SABAP2 started in 2007, I wondered how the species totals would compare with those recorded in SABAP1. The data collection phase of SABAP1 lasted from 1987 to 1991 and in the intervening period, much development has taken place in the greater Gauteng area, agricultural practices have changed, and many watercourses have become polluted and contaminated by waste water from mining and agricultural run-off. I feared that we might see a reduction in species diversity.

SABAP2 has been running for more than four years and I judged that we now have enough data to start to make comparisons between the two surveys. The grid size used in SABAP1 in South Africa was the quarter-degree cell (QDC). SABAP2 uses a much finer grid, the pentad, which is one-ninth the area of the QDC. Very fortunately, the SABAP2 website produces constantly updated tabulations for each pentad. These are listed in groups of nine, corresponding to the QDC. For each QDC, the SABAP1 number of cards submitted and the species total is given. From the SABAP2 pentad data, the number of cards and species total for the QDC are also calculated and listed

The study area comprises the four one-degree cells 2527, 2528, 2627 and 2628. Latitude 26 deg S is recognised as the southern boundary of the Savanna biome and the northern boundary of the Grassveld biome. A greater number of species are found in the Savanna biome than in the Grassveld.

In SABAP1, 16 300 cards were submitted but the surprise was that 5 300 only were for the northern pair of one-degree cells; the balance of 11 000 were in the southern pair. In SABAP2 11 900 cards have been submitted (as of 22 November) and the split between the northern and southern cells is much more even – 6 300 and 5 600 respectively.

This is almost certainly owing to the 4 deg G project conducted in 2010 and 2011 and more recently, the ongoing 747 Challenge, which sought initially to achieve a minimum of four cards per pentad over the whole study area and latterly, seven cards per pentad.

The number of species recorded in a QDC is dependent upon the number of cards submitted – the more cards, the more species. However, the relationship is not linear but logarithmic. Therefore the approach adopted was to determine the four general relationships between the number of cards for each QDC and the corresponding number of species, for SABAP1 and SABAP2, for 2527 and 2528 combined (savanna biome) and for 2627 and 2628 combined (grassveld biome). The next stage was to estimate the number of species from the relationships for a given number of cards. I have used 200 cards, which is a realistic number.

The results are shown in the table below. The SABAP2 predictions are similar to those of SABAP1 but are slightly lower. The models also estimate about 60 fewer species per QDC in the grassveld than in the savanna.

As can be imagined, species richness can vary markedly from one QDC to another and there was a lot of scatter in the data. Although the models gave consistent results, I do not believe that one can confidently assert that the SABAP2 number of species per QDC is lower than the corresponding SABAP1 number.

	Predicted number of species per QDC for 200 cards	
One-degree cells	SABAP1	SABAP2
2527 and 2528	314	309
2627 and 2628	256	248

Cor blimey – stone the crows!

John Fourie

Late September found us en-route to Vryburg on our great expedition to explore South Africa from West to East. Heeding the AA's advice that the N14 was far too potholed to contemplate, we took the road via Zeerust, through Mafikeng via Stella to Vryburg.

Vryburg was once the capital of the swashbuckling 1883 Republic of Stellaland, created by some 400 white mercenaries under the command of Sarel Celliers, who assisted the Koranna Tribe to defeat the Tlapin Clan. The mercenaries were rewarded with 416 farms, as well as a share of all the loot. Gerrit van Niekerk was the first and only President of Stellaland. In those days Vryburg, which was laid out in the shape of a star, had its own postal service and a handsome flag with a dark green background and a central shield surmounted by a star, with a white hand holding a korhaan, the Koranna emblem, and a sword impaling two fish, representing the totem of the defeated Tlapin.

The Republic of Stellaland was short-lived. President Kruger of the Transvaal annexed the area, the British intervened in 1885 and Sir Charles Warren with an expeditionary force "to remove filibusters and restore order to Bechuanaland" retook the Republic which was henceforth known as British Bechuanaland. The Stellaland flag was displayed in Windsor Castle until 1934 when King George V returned it to Vryburg. After a prolonged search which eventually took us to the Mayor, we managed to view both the flag and the handsome bronze bust of President Gerrit.

On our early morning walk through the Vryburg concentration camp cemetery we were saddened to see the 113 graves of little children, with their headstones mostly carved by their mothers. This was a sombre and unhappy memorial to the futility of war.

In keeping with history we did see a Northern Black Korhaan near Vryburg, but right from the start of our journey we were puzzled by the complete absence of Black-shouldered

Kite, which are usually so ubiquitous. Instead all we kept on seeing was crows!

We then proceeded to Kuruman and the mystifying Wondergat, a huge cave which has been occupied by humans for 800,000 years. Under the auspices of the McGregor Museum in Kimberley, archaeological excavations continue in the Wondergat at their exactly slow pace. All we managed to see were various bits of pottery and the dark cave ceiling blackened by ancient fires, before a frustrating Eskom power failure put paid to any further interesting discoveries.

Fortunately the cave entrance had been home to the San for about 80,000 years. Here we were able to study ancient paintings of lion, giraffe, gemsbok, buffalo, leopard and elephant, some undoubtedly painted during San rituals, while the magnificent 50 km view from the cave face kept them enthralled, allowing nothing to pass without taking careful note with their legendary eyesight.

After an entertaining morning we were soon on our way to our next overnight stay at Danielskuil. Here we were lucky enough to see the remains of a huge dolomite sinkhole, used by the Griqua as a depository for prisoners, asbestos, diamonds, marble and lime, the source of their wealth. Legends say that prisoners thrown into the sinkhole, which was so big that massive trees have taken root, were allowed out if they survived a night of snakes and spiders. Other tales declare that these unfortunates were left to starve, unable to escape because of the unclimbable lips of dolomite that curled over their prison.

We also visited a small British fort constructed during the Anglo Boer War, from which a 21-year-old Afrikaner girl was shot and killed while herding cattle. The British forces hastily explained this incident as a "stray bullet". Her grave and tombstone speak of great sorrow and bitterness.



Blackshouldered Kite/Blouvalkie

We also heard the intricate saga of the often bureaucracy-stalled prospecting of the wonderful Finsch diamond mine, which started in 1930, causing suicides and ruin to many on the way. The mine was eventually backed by the Postmasburg local café, which was stony broke by the time the first wash in 1962 rewarded them with 26 diamonds in the first two sieves — the long suffering café owners were no doubt delighted to sell their shares to De Beers for a cool R4.5 million shortly thereafter.

The mystery of “Crows for Africa” continued as we wound our way to Witsand. This 9 km long and 2 km wide enigmatic tongue of desert is well known for its 60 m high roaring sand dunes surrounded by a border of red Kalahari iron oxide. Witsand is situated between the Langberg and Doringberg mountain ranges, and its granite base holds 3 million cubic metres of underground water, which is purer than any raindrop. This ancient dune island of bleached white sand has its own unique ecosystem of plants, birds and insects – a truly stunning vista. We admired Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks aplenty, together with massive Sociable Weaver nests in the 4x4 pass to the nature resort, plus the bonus of a displaying Kori Bustard and a lone soaring Verreaux’s Eagle.

And so.....on we trekked across a beautiful scenic dirt road, past Niekerkshoop to our next overnight stop at Prieska. Here we visited a British fort, which to our amazement was built of Tigers Eye. Unfortunately the escape route tunnels to the nearby Gariep (Orange) River were closed because of vagrant damage, but the poorly looked after little fort conjured up

memories and thoughts of the stiff upper lip mentality of the garrison, which must have been sorely tested, in that hellishly hot little guard post with its “sinkplaat dak”.

The nearby military/early pioneers graveyard provided further insight into those early times. Many of the graves of the English, German, Jewish and even Moslem inhabitants are also covered with Tigers Eye. This is one of the few areas in the world where this semiprecious stone is found.

We then continued to the little 18th century village of Victoria West, which used to be an airport for the first flights from Britain to Cape Town. We stayed at De Oude Scholen B&B in classroom No 6 and spent two hectic days seeing all the sights: streets full of handsome 1843 Victorian houses, and the beautiful museum which boasts the only complete fossil ever found of the 250-million-year-old *Atherstonia seelyi* fish, which had no backbone but did already have scales, the huge fossils of the herbivorous massively toothed *Bradysaurus* and money printed for use during the Anglo Boer war.

The little town is also famous for its Apollo Theatre, the only surviving and operating art deco cinema in South Africa. It was completed in 1928 to coincide with the advent of the first sound films, and is thus also known as the “talkies theatre”.

We even had the chance to chat to Manneljies Roux who now owns antique shops in Victoria West. Another treat was our visit to the Victoria West Nature Reserve, although we had to argue a bit to be let in. Huge herds of nervous springbuck and black wildebeest raced back and forth past our 4x4, giving us a good idea of what this area looked like in times gone by. For once, our relaxed afternoon presented us with plenty of bird life such as unbelievably large flocks of Red-knobbed Coots, White-faced Ducks, African Black Duck, Little Grebes, Spur-winged Goose, a few Greater Flamingos, Sacred Ibis, Ostrich and Grey Herons. We also got our first good long look at the crowning glory of a Great Crested Grebe. Certainly a place not to be missed by birders.

We then ambled along the very quiet and very beautiful R63 tar road, known as “the Blue

Crane route" over the Remhoogte Pass cradled between the Skeurberg and the Blouberg.

Now the mystery of the crows really struck us. On almost every telephone pole were nests constructed by Pied and Cape Crows, as well as numerous Ravens. We also saw endless road kills along this 180 kilometres of the R63, but although one has to zigzag to avoid the carcasses of jackals and civet etc., there is not a single other raptor or scavenger in sight, just crow upon crow winging lazily along. It seems evident that these crows now completely dominate this area to the detriment of any other birds of prey. This ascendancy of crows must have serious implications for our birdlife – in fact we would guess this is a problem that will, sooner rather than later, require serious conservation efforts to try and restore the original raptor populations.

After a seemingly short three hour drive we arrived under the shadow of the 2,500 m Kompasberg, so named by Governor Joachim van Plettenberg in 1778, in the southern foothills of the Sneeberg for our overnight stay at Ganora farm, which is next door to Nieu Betheseda.

The atmosphere of the little village of Nieu Betheseda is amicable and it is a pleasure to walk through its streets, or take a donkey cart tour, to see the interesting houses and old waterwheel mill which houses a Buddhist retreat for meditation training. Of course there is the reclusive Helen Martin's Owl House steeped in Oriental mysticism expressed in her unique art form. She had a special empathy with light and its reflections as evidenced in her creations of owls, camels, human figures and other devious creatures of fantasy. We avoided the visiting motorcycle crowd and eventually found an almost dilapidated little brewery, specialising in their own cheese and beer. Honey beer with various cuts of cheddar, camembert, brie, goatsmilk cheese and a variety of biscuits is not something to sneeze at.

At the gate of the Ganora Guest Farm we were greeted by a roosting African Harrier-Hawk (Gymnogone). This is the place to stay with its "fossilised river stone" stoeps and luxurious converted cattle stall suites together with its

huge collection of fossils, all discovered on the farm by the palaeontologist owner who gave us an enthralling explanation of their origin. His wife, Susan, showed us really interesting San art which together with her expert interpretation gave us fresh insight into the lives of these little people.

Just after getting back to Granora farm a massive hail storm covered the surroundings with a thick layer of glittering ice, which was most unusual for that time of year especially in the Karroo. Here our birding took a change for the better with good sightings of Verreaux's Eagle, Helmeted Guineafowl, Hadedda Ibis, Yellow-billed Duck, African Black Duck, and lo and behold, our first Black-shouldered Kite since Vryburg.

The Dreamland of Ganna was our next destination, named after the plentiful, succulent *Sceletium* and *Salsola* plant species which when chewed, cause hallucinations and intoxication. These effects were first discovered by wild animals, especially eland and ostrich, and quickly adopted by prehistoric people who made their homes in the basins between the mountain ranges. By chewing dry Ganna leaves, humans found a quick way to dreamland and an escape from reality.

On our way to the luxurious Samara Private Game Reserve we were fortunate to drive



John Fourie

Displaying Blue Cranes (Bloukraanvoëls)



Spotted Eagle-Owl (Gevlekte Ooruil) nesting on the stoep!

past several flocks of Blue Cranes foraging in the fields next to the road. The 70,000 hectare Samara Reserve was started by an Englishman and a South African lady who shared a dream of recreating what the Great Karroo looked like before modern man destroyed the landscape and ecosystems.

It is situated right next to “Cranemere” the farm where Eve Palmer grew up and wrote her remarkable book “The Plains of Camdeboo”. The book recounts the experiences of her family, who were among the first pioneers in this area and had to create a totally self sufficient life for themselves in these great open silent spaces of droughts, intense heat and bitter cold winters. Eve Palmer wrote about the time when the Karroo was considered the border of South Africa before any white people had even ventured into the Northern interior.

Our home for the next three nights was at the Lodge Camp where all the accommodation is in large separate Victorian-style suites, each complete with its own lounge, stoep, bedroom and bathroom. We had the extra luxury of a Spotted Eagle-Owl nesting on our stoep. “Our owl” was completely fearless and just stared at us through squinted eyes remaining unperturbed on her nest.

While having tea on the huge veranda of the main house we spotted another first, a Wattle Starling, the original locust bird, which long ago, in flocks of millions used to keep massive locust swarms in check.

On the morning of the 3rd of October we woke up to find that it had snowed during the

night, turning the entire Sneeuberg range into a white wonderland. In this fascinating place we were very fortunate to have an excellent guide who helped us track aardvark, find our own fossils, and stalk cheetah to within 5 m. The guide had a wealth of knowledge about local trees and plants and their huge variety of uses, (even a tree shaped like a beehive hut which is so dense that it is a ready-made house). He also showed us how the original vegetation was slowly recovering. We got stuck in flooded rivers, drove up huge mountains and found mountain reed-buck on the massive grass plateaux on these lonely heights. We saw many black wildebeest, springbuck, eland, giraffe, zebra, kudu, gemsbok, aardwolf, jackal and even an aardvark during a night drive. In addition we saw plenty of birds, Blue Cranes doing their mating dance, Brown-hooded Kingfishers, Fish Eagles, Three-banded plovers, Black-headed Oriole, Denham’s Bustard, Secretary Birds, Ostrich and to crown it all a soaring Verreaux’s Eagle being continually harassed and tormented at close quarters by none other than a Pied Crow.

The next day was “long haul time” all the way from Graaff Reinet to Somerset East, Bedford, Adelaide, Fort Beaufort, Alice, Dimbaza, over Keiskammahoek to Stutterheim, Komga via Butterworth, to Wavecrest on the Wild Coast. This long road is certainly very scenic although many of the once thriving and picturesque little towns are in a bad shape.

Wavecrest is an isolated little hotel close to some mangrove swamps and the ideal place for long walks and fishing. We were fortunate to see Grey Crowned Cranes doing their mating dance on the beach, as well as White-fronted Plovers, Sanderlings, Swift Terns, Lesser Striped Swallows, Black-winged Lapwings, Black Saw-wing Swallows, African Black Oystercatchers, White-throated Swallows, Steppe Buzzard and while on a boat trip through the mangrove swamps, Little Stint, Woodland, Giant, Brown-hooded, Half-collared and Pied Kingfishers, and another first in the form of a pair of the rare Mangrove Kingfisher. Our list also included Red-winged Starlings, Trumpeter Hornbills, Green Wood-Hoopoes and Crested Barbets.

We continued our Wild Coast trip driving to Umtata and past the village of Centane which features prominently in the history of South Africa as the scene of many clashes between the Xhosa and British forces including the last battle of the ninth, and final, Frontier War.

A little further along the dirt road we reached the very pleasant Kob Inn, which is situated on the sea. We once again enjoyed plenty of walks, especially along the Emsengeni trail on the Qora river and the beautiful beaches to where the *Idomene*, a 1,400 ton fully rigged iron ship, from Rangoon bound for London, ran onto the rocks with the loss of the captain and 12 crew members in November 1887.

Our birding yielded Yellow-billed Kites, Yellow Weavers, Spotted Thick Knees, Speckled Pigeons, Red-billed Queleas, Dark-capped Bulbuls and Little Egrets.

Our final stop on the Wild Coast was at the luxurious Umgazi River Bungalows, situated south of Port St. John's. This hotel provides excellent service, lovely rooms, and delicious food and is wonderfully situated close to the most spectacular beaches and lush mountain forests. But this was not always the case. Umgazi, means "the place of blood", commemorating the tribal battles that took place here in former times.

It was an absolute joy to walk over the very steep mountains to see whales breaching in numbers, as well as big pods of dolphins surfing the waves.

The most memorable walks were along the spacious, almost deserted beaches. Here we saw massive flocks of Sanderlings, which allowed us to walk up close before huge numbers flew away in sequential waves of colour looking as if the sea and the sky had changed places. The same happened with large foraging flocks of Little Stints which peeled away in stripes of white and greys when we approached.

On one occasion we were puzzled by a dark motionless spot in the sky just above the grasses and forest trees abutting the beach. When we got closer we could see that it was a hunting Jackal Buzzard, perfectly balanced and completely stationary in the light sea breeze with just its head moving as it looked for a

meal. When it had satisfied itself that there was nothing that it could float down and pounce on, the wings would narrow ever so slightly and it would glide to the next probable hunting spot, spread its wings and continue with its motionless hunt. Needless to say after about 40 minutes of watching with unbelievable admiration, the bird all of a sudden did spiral down rapidly and caught a meerkat looking for lunch. Pure magic! Of course we were also entertained by the blurring little legs of White-fronted Plovers as they zipped along the sands pecking up their morning tea. Our bird list increased with: Cape Glossy Starlings, Bokmakierie, White-necked Raven, Spectacled Weaver, Yellow-billed Egret, Cape Cormorant, African Darter, Black-headed Heron, Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, White-browed Scrub-Robin, Red-necked Francolin, Yellow Canary, Red-collared Widowbird, Cape Gannet, Black-collared Barbet, Greater Double-collared Sunbird and Speckled Mousebirds.

After three memorable nights we were sorry to leave but the long road called again and we were soon on the beautiful winding route past Lusikisiki heading to Champagne Castle. We had last visited this idyllic hotel about 27 years ago, and what a surprise awaited us. The modest rondavel rooms built by Italian Prisoners of war in 1941 are still there, but very smart double-storey guest units have also been added. These have wonderful views of the majestic Champagne Castle and Drakensberg Mountains, while the dining room is just as elegant with big picture windows and a tasty menu.

This is hiking country and we were soon tramping up to the Fern Forest and Mikes Path and Crystal Falls. Fortunately the weather turned in our favour! This meant that we could select isolated spots next to mirror-like lakes and small dams and just sit and watch the kaleidoscope of clouds and sun as they slowly blew incredible vistas of light and shadows over these beautiful mountains. Families of Little Grebes slowly made deep V-lines over the still waters as they busily went about their business of doing grebe things; so tranquil and relaxing. We saw Yellow-billed Kites, Jackal Buzzard, Pied Starlings,

Crowned Hornbills, Cape Robin-Chats and Rock Martins as well.

Then it was time to head back to the “big smoke”. At least our selected little dirt road route took us past Kestell and Reitz where we saw some really magnificent sandstone homes and even better, all of a sudden, our little friends the Black-shouldered Kites were plentiful again. HOME AT LAST!

Our trip lasted 21 days, during which we drove and walked 3,947 and over 100 km, respectively. Would we do it again? In a flash!

Reference

TV Bulpin. *Discovering Southern Africa*, 1980.

[Your observations about Pied Crows being more common in some parts of the country are accurate John, as this is a major talking point in the country at present, with some people advocating control in the form of culling because of the impact their numbers have had on the breeding success of other species including raptors – Ed.] 🦅

Dwergarende broei in Namakwa Nasionale Park

Salomi Louw

Dis selde dat ‘n mens sien dat indringer- plante in ‘n Nasionale Park beskerm word, maar by die Skilpad ontvangskantoor in Namakwa Nasionale Park (NNP) staan sowat agt bloekombome (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) wat die enigste groot bome in hierdie gebied is. Die sandolien (*Dodonaea angustifolia*) is ‘n skraal struik van hoogstens twee meter; sy yl takke en kroon bied nie juis nesplek vir groter voëls nie. Verder is daar in die omgewing heelwat struik- gewas soos die Namakwakoenie- of taajibos (*Rhus/Searsia undulata*) en by die administrasie- blok enkele jong, aangeplante olienhoutbome (*Olea europaea s. africana*), onder andere een voor my kamervenster waar ‘n Fiskaallaksman tydens my sesweke-verblyf, tot my vreugde, ‘n broeisel grootgemaak het.

Die bloekombome word spesifiek behou terwille van die Dwergarende wat jaarliks hierheen kom om te broei en hulle nes is gou aan my uitgewys, maar daar was tydens my aankoms begin Augustus geen sodanige aktiwiteit nie. Wat eerste opgeval het van hierdie bome, is die groot bedrywigheid van Kaapse Wewers wat neste bou vir die vale, en ‘n paar Witborskraaie en ‘n paar Swartkraaie wat ook in dié bome nesmaak.

Die namiddag van 7 Augustus hoor ek ‘n “kie-kie-kie”-geluid in die bloekoms, maar niemand kan dit identifiseer nie en ons sien niks.

Die volgende middag is daar wel ‘n ligte-vorm Dwergarend teenwoordig in een van die bome naby die ou nes. Op hierdie stadium kon ons nie die geslag bepaal nie, maar het dit later as die mannetjie identifiseer.

Vroeg die daaropvolgende oggend sien ek hoe die Witborskraai paar en ‘n Swartkraai die arend jaag oor die blomryke laagtes voor die kantoor totdat hulle buite sig raak. Beide kraai- soorte is intussen ook besig om aan hul neste te bou en die Dwergarend hou hom vir ‘n paar dae skaars, maar slaap saans in ons bloekoms.

Op 19 Augustus is daar ‘n vreemde ver- skynsel: ‘n donker-vorm Dwergarend sit in ‘n bloekom voor die kantoor; aanvanklik rustig besig om vlerke te tooi, maar word skielik aangeval deur die eerste aankomeling. Dit het gelyk na ‘n aanval, maar kon ook die begin van ‘n hofmakery wees; hy het onverwags op haar afgeduik en met sy kloue na haar rug gekap ter- wyl sy net haar kop intrek. Tussen sy aanvalses- sie het hy in ‘n ander bloekom gaan sit, en dan skielik weer dieselfde taktiek uitgehaal. Later die middag het hy ‘n wye draai oor sy gebied gevlieg en kon ek vir die eerste keer duidelik sy ‘landingsliggies’ sien afsteek teen die skemerlig.

Tussen werk deur het ‘n mens nie altyd kans om ‘n besondere voorwerp in die oog te hou vir waarneming nie en dit was eers die oggend van 27 Augustus wat ek die donker

Dwergarend bedrywig gesien het by die nes. Op hierdie stadium het ons steeds nie geweet wat die geslag van die onderskeie kleurvorms is nie. Teen laatmiddag sien ek egter hoe die ligte-vorm Dwergarend 'n koggelmander aan sy maat gee en selfvoldaan langs haar sit terwyl sy dit tydsaam vreet: hy lyk nie net asof hy die 'Jackpot' gewen het nie, maar enkele kere tydens die lang etenstyd bestyg hy haar. Teen 29 Augustus is die huwelik blykbaar bevestig en begin die arende stokke heen-en-weer dra: van die ou nes na 'n ander in 'n bloekom sowat 100 m weg; en bloekomtakkies word ook afgebreek en heen-en-weer karwei. Ek weet steeds nie of hulle in die ou of die nuwe nes sou broei nie, aangesien ek teen 9 September daar weg is en hulle toe nog steeds aan nesbou was.

Niemand weet of dit dieselfde twee Dwergarende is wat jaarliks terugkeer nie, en ook nie waarvandaan hulle onderskeidelik kom nie. Twee studente van TUT wat hul praktiese jaar daar doen, probeer toestemming kry om die twee arende te ring in 'n poging om 'n profiel vir hulle saam te stel.

Die honderde foto's wat ek geneem het, is deur die blare – letterlik en figuurlik. Dit het sowat vier weke geduur voor ek 'n herkenbare foto kon neem van 'n vlieënde Dwergarend omdat die broeigebied so klein is tussen die geboue en hulle skielik bo jou verskyn met 'n tak in die bek. Dit was opwindend om die proses te aanskou, net jammer ek kon nie die



Salomi Louw

Dwergarend (Booted Eagle) with nesting material

nageslag ook leer ken nie.

Tussen die werk deur en die beheptheid met die Dwergarende het ek darem ook enkele ander oulike voëls gesien (en soms kon afneem), soos die Dikbeklewerik, Vlaktelewerik, Piet-tjou-tjou-grysmees, Kaapse Flap, Karoolangstertjie, Rooikoplewerik, Jangroentjie, Witkeelkanarie, (mak) Rooivlerk-streepkoppie en Huismossie, Kleinrooiband- en Namakwasuikerbekkie, Bergwagter, Kaapse Tiptol, Kalahariwipstert, Slangverklikker, Swartpiek, Rooikoplewerik, en Kaapse Klappertjie wat gereeld vertoonvlugte onderneem het.

Dan was die blomme in NNP vanjaar die beste sedert 2006: ek het my tyd om daar te wees goed gekies – net jammer dit was vir werk en nie vakansie nie! 🐦

Pratincoles on the Chobe River

Graham Tate

I was fortunate to be able to take a photographic safari trip with a group of friends to the Chobe River during October 2011. Over and above the pleasure of the company and being away from the Gauteng rat race with its freeway congestion issues, the hot dry air and scenery of northern Botswana made a welcome change.

Our accommodation for the photographic safari was a house boat called the Nguni

Voyager which was a novel experience as the river at this time of the year is at its lowest level and the Voyager had to use a fish finder to navigate the deeper channels on the Chobe. The cool breeze off the river kept the daytime temperatures of over 35°C at bay and made the trip bearable. During the day whilst the Voyager moved down the Chobe River to its next night time berth, we used small outboard motor boats to get to the most suitable

vantage points to view the birds along the river in the best light and position for photography.

For me the aim of the trip was to see and photograph as many of the Chobe River specials as possible. The first thing that strikes one is the sheer numbers of birds along the riverbanks and in the thermals above the whole Chobe Floodplain area. One is used to seeing one or two African Openbills along the rivers of the Kruger National Park, but on the Chobe the thermals are alive during the days with hundreds of Openbills and Yellow-billed Storks. In the evening virtually every tree stump is covered with storks, cormorants, Darters and anything else small enough to squeeze in and get a perch. Of course the sounds of the African Fish-Eagles scattered along the winding course of the river are the musical accompaniment of the Chobe River safari. There were a number of lifers for me in the many birds on the banks of the river such as the Black-crowned and White-backed Night-Herons, African Skimmers, Long-toed Lapwings, amongst others, and of course the subject of this article, the pratincoles.

Strangely, the rapids between Kasane on the Botswana side of the river and Impalila

Island on the Namibian side, where there is a very busy immigration and Police post, is home to a few pairs of Rock Pratincoles. What is amazing is that besides the busy human traffic at that point in the river there is an incredible amount of avian traffic with large colonies of roosting Yellow-billed Storks and White-breasted Cormorants coming and going in the course of raising their brood. The rapids are also strewn with crocodiles sunning themselves on the exposed rocks and the area is also scattered with other waterfowl and larger birds like Water Thick-knees. In amongst this, the exposed rocks of the rapids become the nesting ground for the Rock Pratincoles, who need to be quick about this breeding process as once the summer rains arrive the Chobe River's rapids will become submerged and the crevices they use to breed in disappear under water. We were fortunate in that while we were photographing the incoming storks, we noticed that a pair of the Rock Pratincoles were very attentive around a particular rock in the rapids and deduced that they must have a nest in a crevice on the rock. Dodging the crocodiles, I nervously jumped off the boat with heavy camera in hand to find and photograph the nest without upsetting the parents too much, which was in a crevice with two chicks in it.

Later in the same day our guide took us to a wetland area upriver where the Collared Pratincoles were in residence. Unfortunately the mud and shallow water did not allow us to get much more than within binocular range of viewing these birds. Patience was rewarded and one eventually came closer to the water's edge within my big zoom lens's range to get a decent shot of the bird for the record.

The joy of our adventure to Chobe is relived as I work my way through the many thousands of digital photos taken on the river safari, contemplating how some of the shots could have been better with different angles or light and happily realising that I will definitely have to go again to have another chance at improving them. 📷



Graham Tate

Rock Pratincole/ Withalssprinkaanvoël

Birding at Mabula: 2011

Ingrid van Heerden

Steve and I have been visiting Mabula since 1988, when in a moment of madness we purchased a timeshare week at this private game reserve near Bela-Bela (Warmbaths), in Limpopo. We have never regretted our purchase and over the years Mabula has provided us with wonderful sightings not only of large and small mammals, including the rare aardvark and aardwolf, but has contributed significantly to our life list.

Mabula Private Game Reserve is situated in the foothills of the Waterberg and encompasses 10,000 hectares of Bushveld habitat where up to 300 bird species have been recorded. Being malaria-free and a mere 90 minute drive from Pretoria, this is an ideal get-away for us when we want to recharge our batteries.

There are four timeshare camps, namely Modjadji on the plains where the kudu, warthogs, bush pigs and hippos pay regular visits, Sunset Hill perched on the top of one of the gentle hills with its endless vistas and stunning sunsets, Bush Lodge which is tucked into a rocky kopje populated by dassies and klipsspringer, and Main Lodge which forms part of the Mabula Lodge Hotel. Timeshare guests also have access to all the amenities of the hotel, including restaurant, sport and spa facilities. The timeshare chalets provide comfortable self-catering accommodation for 4 to 10 guests per unit.

By October 2011, we had reached breaking point with our respective jobs and duties, so an escape to the magic of Mabula was called for to regenerate our energies for the last lap of the year. As this was a timeshare exchange and not our standard week at Modjadji, we were pleased to be allocated accommodation at Bush Lodge for a change. Our chalet was completely surrounded by large granite boulders populated by an army of dassies, squirrels, rock agamas, and even a Great Plated Lizard. We were delighted at the plentiful bird life in the area, which included Ashy Tit, Grey Go-away-bird, Black-headed Oriole, flocks of amazingly tame Tawny-flanked

Prinias and chattering Green Wood-Hoopoes. Specials were the Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and an African Green-Pigeon, which paid us fleeting visits. The dassies caused confusion on our first day when we heard a loud alarm call which had us rushing out onto the patio and scanning the trees for a mystery bird. Only when we were convinced that there were no birds around did it dawn on us that the calls were being made by a fat dassie sunning itself on one of the rocks. A bird call identification refresher course is clearly called for!

Mabula offers daily game drives in open vehicles, guided walks, night walks, communal braais, picnics, game spotting on horseback and bird drives for avian enthusiasts. Over the years, our bird drive experiences have varied between frustration and delight, as determined by the birding knowledge of the various game rangers assigned to this task. Sometimes the bird drive rangers have been very knowledgeable, while in other years expertise has been sadly lacking. This once again illustrates the discrepancy which we have encountered so often in our visits to a variety of game reserves in South Africa. Game rangers are trained to identify mammals, their droppings and spoor, as well as reptiles, amphibians, insects, every tree and plant growing in the veld and their medicinal uses, but when it comes to birds, the knowledge of the majority of these otherwise well prepared guides, is woefully lacking. One wonders if BirdLife SA could not have some input in the many different game ranger training courses that are offered all over South Africa. Perhaps a minimum, but standardised bird identification course could be made available to these educational organisations to train the trainers? If bird watching is supposed to be the fastest growing eco-activity worldwide, then our rangers need to be prepared to provide an informed bird identification service to local and international tourists.

Luckily Sam Mcuny, the ranger who accompanied us on our most recent bird drive, was well trained and knew his birds. The bird drives set off from the Main Lodge and Hotel complex, which always ensures ample sightings thanks to a natural rock pool and the many large trees providing food and shelter, which are found in this area. We ticked off Hadeda Ibis, Speckled Pigeon, African Paradise-Flycatcher, a bevy of starling species including Cape Glossy, Violet-backed and Red-winged, Groundscraper Thrush, African Hoopoe, Long-billed Crombec, Lesser Masked-Weavers frantically building nests, Red-headed Weaver, and three of the newly arrived cuckoos, namely Red-chested, Diderick's and Klaas's, before we had even left the hotel grounds.

We then drove out onto the plains, where the grassland and scrub birds came into their own with Rufous-naped Lark, three species of hornbill, namely Red-billed, Southern Yellow-billed and Grey, Lilac-breasted Roller and European Bee-eater, Red-crested Korhaan and both Natal and Swainson's Spurfowl all adding to the enjoyment of the drive. Probably the most exciting ticks were Meyer's Parrot, a superb Lizard Buzzard, and breeding Secretarybird. The male Secretarybird gave us a display of his hunting skills in the long grass by stomping on his prey before swallowing it, while his mate perched on top of their large nest admiring his prowess.

Mabula is also well known for its Southern Ground-Hornbill Conservation Project which has been running since 1999. This species is seriously

threatened and the project is one attempt to preserve the species. By collecting second-hatched chicks in the wild which would normally die of starvation, and then hand-rearing them at Mabula without habituation to humans, such chicks can be returned to expand wild groups without females or a lack of male helpers to counteract the decline of this special species. Unfortunately the breeding rate of Southern Ground-Hornbills is very low with an average of 1 fledged chick per 9.3 years for each family group comprising the dominant breeding pair and up to 9 helpers.¹ This low breeding rate combined with loss of nesting trees, habitat degradation and hunting for use in traditional medicine, has decimated our local populations, so that they are now regarded as 'Critically Endangered'.

There is no greater treat for a birder than to see a flock of Southern Ground-Hornbills sedately pacing through the grass. With their long seductive eyelashes, scarlet facial and throat skin, and mincing gait, they always remind me of older film stars, slightly past their prime, but keeping up appearances. The Mabula Southern Ground-Hornbill Conservation Project deserves our support.

Despite the heatwave that scorched the bushveld during our Mabula break, we managed to tick 100 bird species - not a bad record for the period immediately preceding the final arrival of all the migrants. On previous trips to Mabula in January, we have recorded more cuckoos and raptors, but we were well satisfied with our bird count and can recommend Mabula as a pleasant and productive birding venue. A timeshare swop is probably the most economical option as the hotel rates are high.

Reference: 1) Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds), 2005. *Roberts Bird of Southern Africa VIIth ed.* Southern Ground-Hornbill, pp: 158-9. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.

Contact details:

Ground-Hornbill Conservation Project:
<http://mabulagroundhornbillconservationproject.org.za/>



*Southern
Ground-Hornbill
(Bromvoël)*

Dirnie van Rensburg

My introduction to the birds of Northern Queensland, Australia

George Cox

During our recent visit to our daughter in Sydney, she treated my wife Elsie and me to a four-day trip (9-12 September) to Northern Queensland. We flew to Cairns, where we stayed one day with friends of hers (a South African couple) and three days at a B & B near the small town of Daintree, north of Cairns.

We also drove further north as far as Fort Tribulation (so named by Captain Cook after his ship had hit nearby reefs) to explore the exceptional tropical rain forest and mangrove forests. The peaks of the nearby mountain range are amongst the highest in the country and their eastern slopes reportedly have the highest annual rainfall in Australia. The large, brightly coloured butterflies are an additional bonus. Although we looked for and enquired about them, we unfortunately did not see a Southern Cassowary alongside the road.

Even though it was essentially a sight-seeing trip, I did try to do as much birding as possible wherever we stayed or went. We did go on an early morning birding cruise on the Daintree River. The migrants from places like Papua New Guinea had just started to arrive. The crocodile spotting cruises seem to be very popular amongst the tourists. Of the birds that are mainly restricted to Northern Queensland (the distribution range of some extend to Northern Territory, Southern Queensland and Western Australia), we managed to see the following:

Black Butcherbird (large for a butcherbird, measuring 38-44 cm), Gould's Bronze-Cuckoo, Helmeted and Silver-crowned Friarbird (their heads have a prehistoric appearance), Shining Flycatcher, Large-billed Gerygone (one of Australia's smallest birds), Papuan Frogmouth

(quite a queer looking bird), Bridled, Dusky, Macleay's, Yellow and Yellow-spotted Honeyeater, Little Kingfisher, Yellow Oriole, Pied Imperial-Pigeon, Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Metallic Starling, Olive-backed (Yellow-bellied) Sunbird, and Australian (White-rumped) Swiftlet. Other birds seen, but which also occur in other parts of Australia, were: Rainbow Bee-eater, Australian Brush-turkey, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Pied Currawong, Little Pied Cormorant, Barred Cuckoo-shrike, Bar-shouldered, Diamond, Emerald and Peaceful Dove, Spangled Drongo, Pacific Black Duck, Cattle, Great and Little Egret, Australian Figbird, Nankeen Night, Striated

(Mangrove) and White-faced Heron, Brown-backed and Lewin's Honeyeater, Australian White and Straw-necked Ibis, Nankeen Kestrel, Azure and Forest Kingfisher, Black Kite, Laughing Kookaburra, Masked Lapwing, Rainbow Lorikeet, Australian Magpie (quite aggressive when breeding – targeting pedestrians and cyclists, with unpleasant results), Fairy Martin, Mistletoebird (a beautiful little bird), Welcome Swallow, Varied Triller, Willie Wagtail (it does not bob its tail, but waves it sideways), and White-breasted Woodswallow.

On our two visits to Australia (the first one was restricted mainly to the Sydney and Canberra areas), I have managed to tick off 121 species. We hope to visit relatives in Perth as well next year, so the chances are good to add another couple of species. The fruit-bats or flying foxes are also worth a mention. They are huge, with the larger species having a wingspan of up to a metre and weighing around a kilogram. It is quite eerie seeing them flying around while the light is still fairly good. 🦇

What is 'sexual dimorphism'?

Simply the difference between the male and female of the same species, which may be expressed in size, colour, plumage features, or a combination of all three.



Birding Events and Tours in 2012 - with Etienne Marais

5-6 February Birds of Prey Identification Course

An intensive course on both theory and practice of Raptor Identification. Includes interesting material on all Southern African birds of Prey. The course takes place over a full Saturday and a Sunday morning. A very extensive slide library is used to highlight the key things to look for in all the "raptor-choices" you are faced with, and this is a great time of year for the practical field outings! Venue: Northern Farm.

18 April – 2 May – Northern Namibia, Caprivi and Shakawe

Join Etienne Marais for one of the must do Southern African trips! This 16 day trip includes the Okavango Panhandle, Victoria Fall, Caprivi Strip, and Northern Namibia. Top birds include Rock Pratincole, Coppery-tailed Coucal, Bradfield's Swift, Racket-tailed Roller, Pel's Fishing Owl, Violet Wood-Hoopoe, Monteiro's Hornbill, Benguela Long-billed Lark, Dune Lark, Rufous-bellied Tit, Black-faced Babbler, Bare-cheeked Babbler, Herero Chat, Souza's Shrike, White-tailed Shrike, Sharp-tailed Starling, Shelley's Sunbird and African Skimmer.



24 May – 9 June Mozambique/Zimbabwe Autumn Classic

With a later rainy season than in SA, central Mozambique is best visited in autumn/winter. Most of the specials are easier to see at this time of year, and top birds include Great Bittern, White-chested Alethe, Anchieta's Tchagra, Blue Quail, Livingstones Flycatcher, East Coast Akalat and many more. Includes the Bvumba Highlands for all the forest specials.



2 – 18 August Mozambique 4x4 Birding Adventure – off the beaten track

Most birders visiting Mozambique, visit the same well-trodden localities, yet Mozambique has vast areas of uncharted birding territory to explore. This 4x4 adventure starts at Pafuri and visits Banhime National Park, Zinave, Moribane Forest, The Chimanimani Transfrontier Park (Moz) and Mount Tsetserra and the Lower Zambezi (Boat Trip) to name a few! We do expect to see most of the Mozambique specials normally seen on our trips and some surprises as well!

2 – 18 December 2012 – Pitta Season

Various options are available to go to Central Mozambique and see the African Pitta (and lots of other specials) This year we plan to allow for a fly-in option, which cuts out all the border posts and means that the Pitta trip can be done in just 5 days.

Customised private tours also available!

Watch our web-site for the Shoebill trip to Zambia – possibly August/September!

For more information and updates contact Etienne Marais on info@birding.co.za

or visit our website: <http://www.birding.co.za>

Voëlkyk in Zululand, November 2011

Salomi Louw

In November 2010 was ek en twee metgeselle tuis by Mtunzini Forest Lodge van waar ons verskeie voëlorde besoek het wat deur Zululand Birding Route (ZBR) aanbeveel is in hul publikasies. Groot was ons teleurstelling met die toestand van dié plekke; met die feit dat die ZBR-kantoor in Richardsbaai toegemaak het; en die toegangsmoontlikhede tot die hawe waarvoor jy ten minste twee dae voor die voorgenome besoek aansoek moet doen om 'n permit. My aangename besoek aan hierdie omgewing, insluitend Richardsbaai en die destydse ZBR-kantoor in 2009, het my nie op so 'n ondervinding voorberei nie.

Die berig wat ek oor ons onbevredigende besoek van 2010 aan *Laniarius* gestuur het, is nie gepubliseer nie, maar *via* kanale deurgegee aan Duncan Pritchard van ZBR. Nou begin die akkolades: eerstens het hy ons twee nagte gratis verblyf in die Ongoye Forest Birders Camp aangebied; op elke e-pos wat ek gestuur het, was daar onmiddellike reaksie; toe hy hoor ons gaan in Mtunzini tuis, het hy roetes aanbeveel wat 'n groot moontlikheid van voëls sou oplewer; en hy het gereël vir voëlgidse tydens ons besoek.

Ek, Anneke en Betsie het dus vanaf Mtunzini (waar ons ongelukkig nie die Witaasvoël te siene gekry het nie) die omgewing platgery, na Thessin-eiland, Cape Vidal en St Lucia, en Amatigulu. Die weer was ongelukkig nie gunstig nie en ons het min besonders gesien. Toe pak ons die pad aan na die woud. "Jy het te ver gery," sê Anneke toe ek terugstap na haar en Bets nadat ons bykans die hele 'Ongoye Forest' deur gery het en ek besef het hier is fout. "Kyk", wys Bets die selfoonfoto wat sy by die ingang geneem het: "Jy moes hier kort na die hek links gedraai het na die kamp." Ek het dié afdraai gesien waar 'n teken aantoon 'Visitors Only' en ek nie eintlik gedink het ons is 'visitors' nie; boonop het die asbestipe strukture

wat 'n mens van die pad af kon sien, nou nie juis gelyk na ordentlike huisvesting nie – behalwe as jy wil tent opslaan.

Die rit tot dusver was egter asemrowend mooi tussen granietkoppies deur, wuiwende groen, lang suurgras en klowe lowerryk van inheemse woude. Op 'n plattevlak van gras draai ek om met Anneke en Bets agterna: nou moet my VW (en ek) weer die klipperige open-afdraandes hanteer; wydsbeen oor die hoë middelmannetjies probeer padhou; en glip-n-gly en swaai deur die waterplasse en modderpoele terwyl ek verbeter aan die stuurwiel klou. Ek weet darem dat my medevoëlkykers met hul 4-trek my sal kan bystaan indien iets verkeerd gaan.

Met ons aankoms – uiteindelik – by die 'Ongoye Forest Birders Camp' word ons begroet deur Sbo wat nie net 'n voëlgids vir Ongoye is nie, maar blykbaar ook verantwoordelik is vir die huisvesting. Die pragtige skoon huis is nuut ingerig en in 'n grasoopte in die woud, met oopplan sit-/eetkamer en kombuis, drie slaapkamers met elk ingeboude kaste en twee



Die borde by die 'Ongoye Forest Birders Camp'



Saloni Lowy

Die akkommodasie was skoon en gerieflik

enkelbeddens (die beddegoed is so nuut dit ruik nog na winkel en is miskien nog nie eens gewas nie!), en volle badkamer met toilet, wasbak en bad/stort. Hiervandaan is daar ook staproetes wat jou in die kloof aflei. Dit is iets wat 'n mens werklik met groot vrug sou kon aanpak.

Na sy groet vra Sbo of ons weet wat die heel belangrikste ding in die lewe is. Anneke waag: "A wife?". "Nee," sê hy; "Food, and I'm hungry". Terwyl hy gaan water pomp sodat ons die krane kan oopdraai, word daar dus onbepaald kos voorberei (wat ons darem ook geniet het!). Anneke, wat graag 'n biertjie wil drink maar dié man nie in die gesig wil vat nie, vra of hy wil bier hê. "Nee," sê hy, "Maar na ons uitstappie". Teen 15:00 ry ons na 'n gedeelte van die bos waar voëls voorspelbaar voorkom en Sbo die Groenhoutkapper vir ons naderroep. Tuisgekome was daar 'n probleem met die watertoevoer: al het Sbo vroeër die dag water gepomp, was daar geen water in die huis nie. Anneke se e-pos na Duncan het daarvoor gesorg dat Sbo en vriende dié nag opgedaag het om die fout op te spoor – 'n lekkende pyp onder die huis, wat gou reggemaak is. Daar was egter geen warm water beskikbaar nie, ten spyte van die donkie wat goed gestook was.

Ons het gedink R500 die vorige middag om net die Bruinhoutkapper te sien, was

biertjie dik vir 'n daalder!

Dinsdagoggend ontmoet ons vir Sakhmuzi Mhlongo op pad na Richardsbaai. Hierdie gids het ons onmiddellik beïndruk: netjies geklee in 'n ZBR-uniform; kundig; hoogs behulpzaam; en intelligente geselskap. Hy het selfs sy eie eet- en drinkgoed saamgebring! Eers ry ons 'n draai na Entambeni, waar hy gou besluit dis nie die moeite werd om tyd deur te bring nie, aangesien die waterplante die rivier versmoor, maar ons (buiten Anneke) darem die Groenkolpensie in vlug sien. Na tydverspilling by die hawe-ingang (weens 'n probleem met 'n ID-nommer wat baie professioneel deur Sakhi opgelos is), is ons eers na 'n skuiling voordat ons na die riviermond is. Anneke het haar Kowa opgestel en ons kon rustig kyk na die Grysstrandkiewiet, Visarend, flaminke, ens., en – sowaar – daar sien ons toe twee Krapvreters. Vir Sakhi was dit die eerste van die seisoen; hy was so opgewonde soos 'n kind by 'n Kersboom, en het die inligting dadelik per e-pos versprei. Anneke en Betsie was net so in hul noppies! (Ek darem ook). Talle van die voëls wat ons graag sou wou sien, is blykbaar – volgens Sakhi – eintlik te vinde by Amatigulu, waar ons die vorige dag in die reën was.

Terug by Ongoye het Betsie tevergeefs probeer om die Withalsbosduif op te spoor, dus moes ons net eenvoudig die volgende oggend Dlinza toe, maar ook hier het dié voël haar ontwyk.

Hier het ons van mekaar afskeid geneem: hulle is terug na Gauteng en ek het verder gereis na Vryheid, Utrecht, Loskopdam en Marakele NP, terwyl ek voor die tyd ook reeds besoek afgelê het aan Mt. Everest tussen Harrismith en Verkykerskop, Golden Gate, Bushmansnek en Sanipas, en Glenmore, met al die moontlike stap- en kykroetes tussenin. Dit was oral bewolk en reënerig met sterk wind. November is miskien nie die beste tyd vir voëlkyk in dié streke nie!

Ek, Anneke en Betsie is beïndruk deur Duncan Pritchard se hantering van ons navrae en probleme en wil ZBR sterkte en sukses toewens. 🐾

Rarities and Unusual Sightings Report: 31 December 2011

Compiled by André Marx

This summer brought a number of interesting rarities once again with customary visits from birds such as Green and Pectoral Sandpiper, which are now recorded annually. But it was also noticeable that atlasing for SABAP2 was turning up some very interesting records as birders explored pentads that were somewhat off the beaten track in areas that may never have been explored by birders before. Examples of this are Rufous-eared Warbler, Chestnut-banded Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, and Spectacled Weaver, all very rare birds in the region. Thank you to all who send in records, either directly or on atlas cards.

National Rarities / Nasionale Rareiteit

Pallid Harrier. Witborsvleivalk: an adult male was at Ezemvelo NR, 19 Nov 2011 (EM); a male bird was in pentad 2620_2710 on the south-eastern Gauteng boundary, 04 Dec 2011 (MC). **Green Sandpiper. Witgatruiter:** one bird was at Northern Farm where it is seen annually, 27 Nov 2011 (RS); two birds were at Northern Farm during the BLNG club outing there, 10 Dec 2011 (BLNG).

Pectoral Sandpiper. Geelpootstrandloper: one bird was located at Mkhombo Dam in Mpumalanga (within the 100km range of Gauteng) where this species was found last summer, 17 Nov 2011 (RW). *In the weeks following at least two birds were at times seen by a number of observers at this locality.*

Regional Rarities / Streeksrareiteit

White-backed Night-Heron. Witrugnagreier: this species was sighted at Borakalalo NR, 03 Sep 2011 (LvD). *An uncommon bird in the greater Gauteng area (100 km radius of Joburg and Pretoria).*

European Honey-Buzzard. Wespedief: this

bird was found in the Kwaggafontein area in pentad 2515_2855 north-east of Pretoria, 28 Nov 2011 (ST).

Montagu's Harrier. Blouvilleivalk: an adult male was observed at a pan just west of Kwaggafontein in pentad 2515_2855, 28 Dec 2011 (ST).

Chestnut-banded Plover. Rooibandstrandkiewiet: a juvenile bird was discovered at Borakalalo NR, and extremely rare bird in the greater Gauteng area, 26 Nov 2011 (RB,HP).

Caspian Plover. Asiatiese Strandkiewiet: one bird that was identified alongside similar juvenile Kittlitz's Plovers was at Mkhombo NR in pentad 2505_2845, 26 Nov 2011 (LvD).

Collared Pratincole. Rooivlerksprinkaanvoël: a sighting of one bird at Vaalkop Dam is considerably west of this species' normal range; the sighting was verified by a photo, 26 Dec 2011 (JJvR).

Rufous-eared Warbler. Rooioorlangstertjie: this species was found during an atlasing trip in pentad 2610_2715 just west of the Gauteng boundary, considerably east of its known range and being a first record within the 100km range of the greater Pretoria-Joburg area, 01 Oct 2011 (AF, JM, JBy).



Hennie Peters/Reiner Balt

Chestnut-banded Plover/Rooibandstrandkiewiet

**Other Interesting Observations /
Ander Interessante Waarnemings**

Booted Eagle. Dwergarend: good views were had of a soaring pale phase bird at Leeukop Prison, Johannesburg, an unusual bird for the city, 27 Dec 2011 (AM,RS).

Osprey. Visvalk: one bird was at Ekandustria near Bronkhorstspuit, 09 Oct 2011 (PT,RF).

Lanner Falcon. Edelvalk: one bird was in pentad 2530_2840 near Sybrandskraal east of Pretoria, 06 Oct 2011 (PT,RF).

Red-winged Francolin. Rooivlerkpatrys: at least 3 birds were at Northern Farm during the BLNG club outing there, 10 Dec 2011 (BLNG).

Black-bellied Bustard. Langbeenkorhaan: a record of this species at Telperion near Ezemvelo NR on the Gauteng/Mpumalanga boundary is far west of its normal occurrence, 24 Sep 2011 (DSw).

Grey Plover. Grysstrandkiewiet: one bird was at Borakalalo NR, 04 Oct 2011 (AV); at least two birds were at Mkhombo Dam, 20 Nov 2011 (NP). *In the ensuing weeks up to five birds were at this locality and were observed by a number of birders.*

Ruddy Turnstone. Steenloper: a find of this species at the Flag Boshielo (Arabie) Dam during the BLNG club visit there is an unusual record at this inland locality, 24 Sep 2011 (BLNG, AFr); this species was at Mkhombo Dam in Mpumalanga, 17 Nov 2011 (RW).

African Green-Pigeon. Papegaaiduif: 22 birds were observed in Queenswood, Pretoria, 04 Sep 2011 (P&MC); a few birds were present in an Erasmuskloof, Pretoria, garden, 06 Sep 2011 (ES); a record of this species seen



Alta Fraser

Ruddy Turnstone/Steenloper

at Korman Bird Sanctuary on the East Rand is most unusual, 04 Dec 2011 (BG); 3 birds were at Menlyn Retail Park, Pretoria, 12 Dec 2011 (G&EC). *More records at new localities continue to come to light and it is evident that this species continues to colonise new areas in Pretoria and Johannesburg.*

Livingstone's Turaco. Mosambiekloerie: one bird was observed in a Lynnwood Manor, Pretoria, garden and in all probability was an escapee from an aviary, 11 Oct 2011 (SVI).

Violet Turaco. Rooikuifloerie: one bird was photographed at The Willows in eastern Pretoria, 02 Aug 2011 (via SV); one bird was photographed in a Wapadrans, Pretoria, garden, 02 Oct 2011 (KS); one bird was in Faerie Glen, Pretoria, 27 Dec 2011 (DBI).

Great Spotted Cuckoo. Gevlekte Koekoek: this species was a first record (in pentad 2625_2725) at Fochville in nearly thirty years of bird observations in the area, 20 Nov 2011 (J&MR).

Grey-headed Kingfisher. Gryskopvisvanger: a sighting of one bird in a Parktown, Johannesburg, garden is a very unusual record for this species in the city, 11 Oct 2011 (B&GF).

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater. Swaelstert-byvreter: 4 birds were at the summit of the Magaliesberg just east of the point where Voortrekker Road crosses the mountain in Pretoria, 14 Aug 2011 (MvL,RGy).

Dusky Lark. Donkerlewerik: a single bird was at Rietvlei NR, 31 Dec 2011 (BR).

Black Cuckooshrike. Swartkatakoeroe: a sighting of an adult bird at Emmarentia Dam in pentad 2605_2800 is an unusual bird for suburban Johannesburg, 11 Sep 2011 (GLD).



Andy Featherstone

Rufous-eared Warbler/Rooioorlangstertjie



Louis Legat

Violet Turaco/Rooiuifloerie

Eurasian Golden Oriole. Europese Wiele-waal: a record of a female bird at Delta Park, Johannesburg, is a first for pentad 2605_2800 during SABAP2, 12 Dec 2011 (GLD).

Yellow-bellied Greenbul. Geelborswillie: 2 birds were at Borakalalo NR in pentad 2502_2745, a first record during SABAP2 at this locality and further evidence of the range extension of the species, 20 Oct 2011 (AW,SO).

Yellow Wagtail. Geelkwikkie: large numbers of 20 + birds at a time were found at Mkhombo Dam where this species was present for several weeks, 20 Nov 2011 (Gbird).

Wattled Starling. Lelspreeu: a solitary bird seen at Random Harvest in north-west Johannesburg is an unusual record for the area, 19 Nov 2011 (AM).

Spectacled Weaver. Brilwewer: this species was found in pentad 2535_2855 in the Wilge River valley, north-east of Bronkhorstspuit, and is one of very few localities in the greater Gauteng area where it is known to occur, 24 Jan 2012 (LvD).

Cuckoo Finch. Koekoekvink: one bird was seen near Kwaggafontein in pentad 2515_2855, 28 Nov 2011 (ST); a solitary male was found at Northern Farm during the BLNG club outing there, 10 Dec 2011 (BLNG); at least 6 birds were at Rietvlei NR, Centurion, for at least two weeks during which time several people reported them present, 17 Dec 2011 (Gbird); a male bird was observed in pentad 2500_2830 north of Pretoria, 18 Dec 2011 (ST).

Yellow Canary. Geelkanarie: a pair of birds was observed in the Garankuwa Industrial area north of Pretoria in pentad 2530_2755, in an area where several records for this species have come to light recently, 10 Aug 2011 (KP).

Observers / Waarnemers:

Alta Fraser (AFr)	Amanda Walden (AW)
André Marx (AM)	Andy Featherstone (AF)
Anneke Vincent (AV)	BirdLife Northern Gauteng members (BLNG)
Brendan Ryan (BR)	Bryan Groom (BG)
Bruce & Gill Fordyce (B&GF)	Déwald Swanepoel (DSw)
David Black (DBI)	Etienne Marais (EM)
Elba Swart (ES)	Geoff Lockwood (GLD)
Gauteng birders (Gbird)	Hennie Peters (HP)
George & Elsie Cox (G&EC)	Jason Boyce (JBy)
Jake Mulvaney (JM)	John & Moira Randall (J&MR)
Johan Janse van Rensburg (JJvR)	Kristian Smed (KS)
Koos Pauw (KP)	Madeleen v Loggerenberg (MvL)
Lisl van Deventer (LvD)	Niall Perrins (NP)
Michael Clacey (MC)	Philip & Mandy Calinikos (P&MC)
Pat Tattersal (PT)	Rihann Geysler (RGy)
Renier Balt (RB)	Roger Fieldwick (RF)
Robert Wienand (RW)	Stephan Terblanche (ST)
Ron Searle (RS)	Sue Visser (SVI)
Sue Oertli (SO)	
Susan Velthuysen (SV)	

This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made within a 100 km radius of Gauteng, 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 André Marx at 083 411 7674, e-mail turaco@telkomsa.net



Brendan Ryan

Dusky Lark/Donkerlewerik



Dirnie van Rensburg

Breeding Thick-billed Weavers

Stewart Lane

The following field observation was submitted by Stewart Lane: Roberts VII has the Thick-billed Weavers breeding from November to March, but I had incompletely fledged chicks coming to my

bird feeder in Kameelfontein in August - first noticed on August 18th, which means that they were hatched in July. The males were in breeding dress at that time. I don't know where they are breeding but the colony has at least 3 males.

Dieter Oschadleus of the ADU comments:

"The breeding season for Thick-billed Weaver in Gauteng is certainly longer than indicated in Roberts VII. Stewart's record will help correct this. I also found eggs in mid October this year, at the National Botanical Gardens (see http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown_vm.php?vm=1371).

The Thick-billed Weaver was listed as one of the species to give particular attention to in PHOWN (Photos of Weaver Nests, <http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown.php>). An interesting study would be to compare colony sizes of this species at the edge of its expanding range with those in the core of its range. So any PHOWN records from Gauteng and surrounding areas would be most welcome (see more at <http://weavers.adu.org.za/newstable.php?id=163>). These records could also provide a more accurate assessment of its breeding season." 🐦

A lucky escape

Chris Siebert

After almost a century of diamond mining activities in the "Kimberley Region" of South Africa, attention shifted to the diamond potential of the continental shelf off Namaqualand. Research findings by De Beers indicated that some 250 tons of diamonds have been "lost" from Kimberley's "Big Hole" alone as a result of erosion. These diamonds including those from the other kimberlite pipes in the region, have been transported westwards to the sea since the late Cretaceous Period (100 million years ago), via the Orange River and its precursors. As a result of numerous requests to mine the seafloor, the State divided the west coast into a series of "Sea Concession Areas" in the 1970s, thereby allowing numerous mining institutions to apply for prospecting and mining permits.

During the 1980s I was the geologist in

charge of Rio Tinto's sea diamond prospect along the Namaqualand coast. The object of the project was to map the seafloor by means of side-scan sonar and other geophysical equipment, in order to identify seabed features such as buried river channels, fossil beach lines, gullies and potholes where enriched diamondiferous gravels were expected to occur.

It was during the month of May 1987, while conducting a survey on the vessel "Gemini Star" approximately 2 km from the shore near Hondeklip Bay, that I noticed a group of agitated gulls in the sea ahead of us. To our amazement, the flock turned out to be a group of Kelp Gulls and Subantarctic Skuas surrounding a waterlogged Secretarybird. I immediately jumped into the water and placed the hapless bird who did not offer any resistance, on board the vessel. 🐦



After drying the bird in the warm engine room and confident that its temperature had returned to normal, we took it ashore by means of a dingy, where it was released to fly off, apparently none the worse for its experience.



That evening, in an attempt to explain what had happened to the bird, we came up with the following likely scenario:

Whereas the last couple of weeks had been characterised by on-shore northwesterly winds, the wind on this fateful day had shifted to a strong off-shore "Berg Wind". While searching for vermin and snakes from a vantage point high in the sky, the Secretarybird was blown out to sea by the wind that had increased in intensity. Although it attempted to get back ashore, it could not make it and landed exhausted 2 km from its destination in the cold Atlantic waters. On the verge of drowning and surrounded by gulls and Subantarctic Skuas (the latter being renowned for scavenging other birds), it was rescued not a moment too soon.

During the course of my career in the bush, I have been fortunate to come to the aid of numerous feathered friends, but this incident remains the most memorable. It was a question of being at the right place at the right time.

Indeed a very lucky Secretarybird!

[What an amazing and heartwarming story from 25 years ago Chris. And you still have the photos to go along with it! – Ed.] 🐦

Babette's Feast in Brooklyn

Ingrid van Heerden

Spring in the Highveld is often a fleeting affair, but this year we were treated to a slightly longer cool period before being catapulted into summer. With the more clement weather, our neighbour's giant mulberry tree provided us with a veritable Babette's Feast for nearly a month.

The mulberry is vast and every year it bears abundant juicy purple fruit, which is irresistible to all our fructivorous garden birds. When we

sit at our dining room table we have a grandstand view of the mulberry tree and our feasting feathered friends.

Grey Go-away-birds, Speckled Mousebirds, Dark-capped Bulbuls, Cape White-eyes, Cape Glossy and Red-winged Starlings, both Crested and Black-collared Barbets, and Karoo Thrushes tucked in with gusto every day and ate until they were nearly too heavy to fly. Babette would have been proud of them.

Hadeda, à la MasterChef!

Ingrid van Heerden

Earlier in the year I spent most afternoons glued to the TV watching 'MasterChef Australia'. One of the most dreaded tests the poor contestants had to pass, was being faced by a row of so-called cloches* (what used to be called silver salvers in more gracious times), concealing mystery ingredients which the hapless participants had to identify.

For example, one episode had them presented with different types of eggs varying from tiny quail eggs (how anyone could eat one of these beautiful dainty little eggs, boggles the mind) to a monstrous ostrich egg. The clincher in this line-up was a large, dark-green egg which stumped most of the aspirant chefs. This Emu egg which looked more like an avocado on steroids than an egg, is purported to measure 134 by 89 mm, weigh 700 to 900 g and equal 10-12 hen's eggs.

On a hot afternoon a few weeks ago, I

noticed that the top of our one bird bath had once again been tipped over (like a cloche or asbestos salver) and that it was bobbing up and down! Lurking in the bushes watching this phenomenon was a rather worried looking Hadeda.

Intrigued by the sight, I went outside and inverted the bird bath to find another frantic, soaked and bedraggled Hadeda trapped underneath the garden cloche. The irate bird, shook his wet plumage and with an indignant 'Ha-Ha-Ha' launched himself awkwardly into the air. Heaving a hiss of relief, his worried mate followed suit. The birds were not amused that I burst out laughing at the thought of what those MasterChef contestants would have said if they had been asked to ID a wet Hadeda in a poultry test!

*Cloches = Steel covers for plates, used in restaurants 🍴

Nie onder 'n kalkoen uitgebroei nie...

Willie en Nora Grabow

Wanneer ons by die kinders in Australië kuier het ons groot plesier aan die unieke, interessante en kleurryke voëllewe daar.

Een van die voëls wat ons bewonder is die "Australian Brush-turkey" (*Alectura lathami*).

Dit is amper so groot (60-70 cm) soos die algemeen bekende huis-kalkoen (*Meleagris gallopavo*) en kom hoofsaaklik aan die Ooskus voor, onder andere Brisbane omgewing.

Hulle leef tipies in woude en digte bosse met baie blare en ander plantmateriaal op die grond waarin hulle skrop op soek na kos. Die lyf is oorwegend swart, die kop en nek is rooi en sonder vere, soos by 'n aasvoël. Rondom die basis van die nek is daar 'n helder geel lel („wattle“).

In teenstelling met die huis-kalkoen staan die prominente stertvere kenmerkend vertikaal omtrent soos by 'n hoenderhaan. Die voël is grondlewend en sal slegs met moeite vlieg as hy nie vinnig genoeg kan wegdraf na skuiling toe nie. Hulle word baie mak en beweeg ewe rustig tussen mense rond in parke, tuine en parkeerplekke.

Hierdie kalkoene het die interessante eienskap dat hulle nie eiers uitgebroei deur eie liggaamshitte nie. Hulle bou letterlik 'n komposhoop (mied) van blare, gras en grond wat sorgvuldig uitgesoek en in die regte verhouding gemeng word met die korrekte voginhoud. Die mied is tot 5 m in deursnee en 1,5 m hoog, sowat 12,7 m³, en weeg ongeveer 6,8 kg. Die mannetjie

versorg een of meer van sulke komposhope vir so lank as nege maande van die jaar. Die wyfie lê sowat 20-50 eiers (92 x 63 mm) per seisoen in een of meer van hierdie hope. Die eiers word uitgebroei deur energie (warmte) wat deur mikrobiëse fermentasie van die plantmateriaal in die komposhoop vrygestel word. Die son dra ook hitte by. Die mannetjie hou die temperatuur van die eiers deurgaans akkuraat by 33°C, met omgewingstemperatuur van gemiddeld 18°C, deur baie sorgvuldig kompos rond te skuif met ligter en swaarder bedekking van die eiers na gelang dit warmer of koeler word. Volgens wetenskaplike berekeninge word ongeveer 100 watt energie deur die kompos vrygestel tydens die broeityd, wat sowat 20 keer meer is as wat deur 'n enkele ouer vrygestel kan word. Dit beteken in die "komposhoop broeikas" kan baie meer eiers uitbroei word as in 'n konvensionele nes waar net een ouer op 'n slag broei. As so 'n broeikas eenmaal gestabiliseer is in 'n ewewig toestand waar eweveel energie geproduseer en vrygestel word, bly die temperatuur vanself konstant sonder beheer deur die kalkoenmannetjie vir etlike weke.

Wetenskaplike besonderhede oor die hele proses laat mens verstom oor hoe 'n kalkoen dit regkry om hierdie broeikas so akkuraat saam te stel en te beheer; maar, hy is darem mos nie onder 'n kalkoen uitgebroei nie...

Na sowat 50 dae broei die kuikens uit op die mees volwasse stadium van alle voëls waarna verwys word as "superprecocial". Die kuikens het byvoorbeeld nie 'n eiertand nie maar breek die dop oop met kloue wat reeds sterk ontwikkel is. Wanneer hulle uit die eier breek is die oë reeds oop, spiere is

gekoördineer, die meeste vere is bykans volledig ontwikkel, hulle kan dadelik hardloop en kos soek, en party vlieg reeds op dieselfde dag wat hulle uitgebroei het.

Die kuikens grawe hulleself dadelik uit die komposhoop en val in die pad om voort te gaan met hulle lewe sonder enige verdere versorging deur die ouers.

In sekere gebiede van Australië kom daar ook nog twee ander spesies voor met soortgelyke gedrag, teweete die "Malleefowl" (*Leipoa ocellata*) en die "Orange-footed Scrubfowl" (*Megapodius reinwardt*). Hierdie voëls is bietjie kleiner as die "Australian Brush-turkey" en word nie so mak nie. Die "Orange-footed Scrubfowl" se mied kan tot 7 m hoog wees met stewige buite-wande van grond en 'n deursneë van 10 m.

Hierdie voëls behoort tot die familie Megapodiidae wat algemeen bekend staan as "incubator birds" of "mound-builders". Hulle kom in beperkte gebiede van die Australasiëse area insluitende eilande van die westelike Stille Oseaan voor. Ongelukkig het hulle reeds uitgesterf in baie van die oorspronklike verspreidingsgebiede.

Na die beste van ons wete kom daar nie voëls met soortgelyke broei-gedrag in Suid-Afrika voor nie. Dit mag tot 'n mate vergelykbaar wees met die uitbroei van eiers by ander diere soos see-skilpaaie en baie insekte. Hierdie is egter koudbloedige diere en die ouers speel geen rol in die beheer van die broei-temperatuur nie.

['n Fassinerende kykie na die interessante broei-biologie van die Megapode voëlfamilie. Dankie dat jy dit met ons gedeel het – Red.]

Donations/Donasies (June – September 2011)

A huge thank you for your donation, your contribution ensures we are better able to conserve our local birds. It is much appreciated. Baie dankie vir u donasie, u bydrae verseker dat ons 'n groter bydrae tot die bewaring van voëls kan lewer. Ons waardeer dit opreg. Emily Esther de Villiers, Wim Fourie, Sonia van Wyk, Dorette de Jager.

Rita de Meillon

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PHOTO SPOT: Shoebill

Pieter Heslinga

During a recent trip to the Bangweulu Swamps by Pieter Heslinga and friends the following photographs of the much sought after and endangered Shoebill were taken. (Photos by Pieter Heslinga, Dr Con Fauconnier and David Lachman).



Shoebill in flight



An adult Shoebill



Shoebill in typical wetland habitat



Shoebill chick on nest

Laniarius advertising rates (cost shown in rands)					
Print ads:					Notes
	1 insert	2 inserts	3 inserts	4 inserts	For printed ads: 1. advertiser to supply print-ready artwork 2. ads can be placed in alternate issues 3. must be paid in advance
Back page	600	1 000	1 300	1 500	
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Loose insert	300	500	650	750	
Smalls	50	90	120	140	5 lines/ad
The committee maintains the right not to accept any advertisements					

Klubleiers/club leaders

Die insette van uitstappieleiers, kampeleiers en sprekers by die aandvergaderings is blng se ruggraat. Ons wil langs hierdie weg weereens ons opregte waardering uitspreek vir julle bydrae want sonder julle sal die klub nie kan funksioneer nie.

The contribution of outing leaders, leaders at camps, and speakers at evening meetings is the very backbone of the club. We would like to express our sincere appreciation once again for your contributions as without you the club will not be able to function.

Adrian en Amanda Haggett, Frans en Adele Van Vuuren, Stuart Groom, Rob Geddes, Eran Dvir, Gerrie J van Rensburg, Rob Bruyns, André Marx, Greg Lock, Philip Calinikos, Déwald Swanepoel, Johann Grobbelaar, Ernst Retief, Craig Symes, Debbie van Zyl, André en Elma van der Walt, Stephan Terblanche, Jason Boyce, Ulrich Oberpreiler, Lukas Niemand, Elba Swart, Neithard Graf von Dürckheim, Dup du Plessis, Bryan Groom, Rion Lerm, Ken Logan, Dave Sole.

Leiers wat hulle leiersfooie in 2011 as donasie aan die klub teruggegee het – baie dankie!
Leaders who donated their gratuities to the club in 2011 – many thanks!

Eran Dvir, Elba Swart, André Marx, Stephan Terblanche, Philip Calinikos, Ernst Retief, Bryan Groom, Neithard Graf von Dürckheim, Debbie van Zyl, Rob Geddes, André van der Walt

BUFFELSDRIFT **Rust de Winter**

ACCOMMODATION



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