



# Laniarius

No. 121  
Autumn 2012



BirdLife Northern Gauteng  
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord



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

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## Notice to contributors

*Laniarius* is published 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:** Kurrichane Thrush/Rooibeklyster by Paddy Bell - see article on p 47.

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

Cartoons from *The Crazy World of Bird Watching* by Peter Rigby.



## *AGM: President's Address*

*[The President's address at this year's Annual General Meeting will feature as the editorial in this edition – Ed.]*

It is my pleasure to present my address at this year's Annual General Meeting. Our chairman will be dealing with the wellbeing of the club and a report of the activities over the last year so I will concentrate on a few different aspects, namely the participation and contribution to bird monitoring and conservation projects whilst enjoying the birding activities arranged by the club, and in addition, I also wish to comment on the plans for the 60th anniversary of birding in the Pretoria area.

We are now in the fourth year of the SABAP2 project that has brought a great deal of enjoyment to all who have participated in this great project. It has contributed a great deal to local conservation efforts as the information gained has been available online and has provided invaluable information on the state of our local birds. The decline in abundance of some of our larger ground dwelling birds such as Secretarybird and White-bellied Korhaan has been suspected for some time but can now be confirmed as early results are showing a worrying decline in occurrence. But who could have predicted that results will show that Barn Owl, Hamerkop and the innocuous Orange-breasted Waxbill are starting to show a decline in abundance will not really be undergoing a range contraction. What is important to note is that the data that made these early conclusions available was contributed by a group of dedicated observers around the country who have embraced the atlas project because they believe it gave meaning to their birding and was their way of making a contribution to science as 'citizen scientists'.

This project is likely to continue in some capacity even after the initial five years for which there has been funding so it is not too late to enrol. It adds a completely different dimension to your birding! As I am involved in the vetting of records I am able to see some of the range changes that are taking place and these I share with members in the unusual sightings column in the pages of our newsletter.

As you already know this is the 60th year of birding in the Pretoria area. In one way or another there has been a club operating here continuously for 60 years and that is a reason to celebrate our achievement! I have been a member of the club for only 29 of those 60 years but in my time I have met many people in local birding circles and have taken part in many club activities and events. Some people who made a great contribution to this club's wellbeing have departed forever and we have fond memories of them, but there is a great spirit in this club and I have enjoyed being part of it for all these years now. This presents me with the opportunity to look back and contemplate on the role a club like ours plays in the life of the average member.

How does a birder benefit from being a member of a club like ours? I firmly believe that clubs play a big role in the development of an individual as a birder. We all learn by being out birding with other more experienced birders, be it identification tips or learning about the birders' code of conduct, information about equipment, birding locations and the like. A lot of what I know today I learned through club channels, mixing with other birders and visiting many great birding sites scattered around the country. Just having a peer group who can discuss and compare

identification challenges is extremely beneficial as many club members will attest to. Today I meet independent birders who don't have the depth of knowledge that many club members possess and are lacking in matters such as birding etiquette and have never worked with peer groups in the birding world. The proliferation of cameras and social media networks has aided this process and these birders believe they are on the right track. But belonging to an organisation like BirdLife Northern Gauteng, and particularly because of the important association with BirdLife South Africa, is of immense value to ourselves as a voice in conservation circles. It goes without saying that the greater our numbers the greater will be our clout and influence.

As BirdLife South Africa's profile has grown in stature so our club has benefited through the association we have with BLSA. I can remember when I attended meetings of the SAOS (the predecessor to BLSA) when there was no permanent staff aside from a secretary, and when national conservation issues took up one item on the agenda and were left to clubs to tackle on their own. The budget was miniscule in comparison to today's and was debated over endlessly as there was no money and no sponsors worth mentioning. How different it is today! We are a leading voice amongst conservation NGOs and are the lead organisation dealing with all matters relating to the wellbeing of our birds, and are taken seriously. Most importantly we are able to attract sponsors and organisations that are prepared to forge long-term partnerships with BLSA.

I would like to think that BLNG has played a role in that development through our support of BLSA and by maintaining our role as one of the

country's leading clubs in terms of our membership numbers and involvement in certain projects. Our club has a proud tradition of being 'pathfinders' and was one of the first to undertake online bird monitoring when we started our own local atlas project and when we established an internet birding forum and a club website. We have always visited interesting birding locations and have unearthed tremendous sites that have benefited all birders, not just those based here in the Pretoria area. Examples that come to mind are Zaagkuil drift and Kgomo-Kgomo and Mkhombo Dam.

Club members will have the opportunity to celebrate 60 years of birding by participating in a number of events this year that will include trips to special locations like Uganda and possibly even destinations like Namibia and Madagascar over the next year. There will be a few functions and local events and weekend birding trips to more local venues, all designed to make this a special year. Our chairman will outline more details about that.

It just remains for me to thank everyone on the committee for their dedication and selfless commitment to the club and to all the members that I have come to know over the years, going back to the beginning when I met people like Philip Calinikos, our current chairman, and to some of the newer members who have arrived on the scene and added colour and variation to the club. May you all enjoy your tenure with this great club and maybe 20 years from now we will compare notes from the past 40 years that some of us have been together, when we celebrate the 80th anniversary of birding in our region.

***Yours in birding***  
***André Marx***



## Chairman's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

*Philip Calinikos*

I have just returned from BirdLife South Africa's Flock 2012 which was held in Port Elizabeth this year. The event was hosted by BirdLife Eastern Cape and was preceded by an Ornithological Conference that was extremely well attended. The venue for Flock 2013 was also announced at the Annual General Meeting. This will be a very special event to celebrate our seabirds and will be held at sea during the first week of March on the MSC Opera. Keep your diaries open as the price for the voyage, Cape Town/Walvis Bay/Cape Town, will be heavily discounted and will offer exceptional value for money.

The migrant species have left or are about to leave our shores and the daily bird count numbers are dropping. For a few months now I have been recording the sightings in our suburb on MyBirdPatch and where I was averaging well above 60 per weekend, I am starting to struggle to get to that number now. Most of this birding gets done whilst "on the run" and I have named my patch "My Jogging Track". Binoculars are definitely not part of the jogging equipment, so I have to rely a lot on bird song and calls. To date I have managed to record 114 species in an area which is probably not much more than a few square kilometres. I find it very exciting when logging unusual new sightings like the flock of 32 Spur-winged Geese that flew overhead this morning. If you have not yet tried this ADU project please visit the website please give it a bash. It will definitely add a bit more spice to your everyday birding!

Another birding related activity that I have recently re-adopted is that of photography. After having switched to video when everything went digital and my beloved equipment became obsolete overnight, I have eventually acquired a DSLR camera. I realised how little I

could remember and how much I need to learn when attending the recent course presented by Burger and Niel Cillié. What is of prime importance is not only to understand the workings of your camera but also the software that is available to enhance (**not** manipulate) your images! Elsewhere in this edition you will find the announcement of our exciting photographic competition which will give both DSLR users as well as "mik-en-drukkers" an opportunity to win and earn some great prizes. I would particularly like to thank Rion and Lisa Lerm for their boundless enthusiasm in organising both the course as well as the competition.

On a recent visit to the BLSA website I noted that there has been some considerable activity in connection with IBA's (<http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/iba>). The monitoring and protection of these Important Bird Areas forms a focal point of the conservation activities of BLSA and offers us as a club an opportunity to contribute to this critically important objective. Our own Regional Conservation Manager, Ernst Retief has updated the survey of the Suikerbosrand IBA and has also worked on the Magaliesberg & Witwatersberg and Blesbokspruit (Marievale) IBA's. Through the Regional Committee we hope to assist Ernst and BLSA where we can and should you feel you could help with these activities please contact Rion Lerm, who heads up our Conservation Sub-committee.

In conclusion, I would like to thank our President, André Marx for editing yet another edition of *Laniarius*. The next edition will be a very special one to coincide with our 60 year celebrations and André could really do with some urgent editorial assistance. Please give him a call if you can help out.

***Yours in Birding***

# *AGM: Chairman's Address (21 February 2012)*

Under the very able leadership of Mark Anderson, BirdLife South Africa is transforming itself into a meaningful and self-sustaining conservation organisation. Unfortunately there has been some hiccups caused primarily by illnesses to some key staff members as well as an unwieldy administration system but Mark and his team are making excellent progress and starting to achieve the results that their blood sweat and tears deserve. One of Mark's biggest successes has been the vastly improved communication between BLSA, the clubs and the members. There is not only the BLSA website which has now been completely revamped, but also Facebook sites, e-newsletters as well as Mark's personal weekly update.

The Gauteng Regional Forum chaired by Lance Robinson is also an excellent forum through which clubs can discuss mutual issues of concern as well as serving as a direct link to the BLSA management structures. The Regional Forum has recently been expanded to include clubs from North West and Limpopo Provinces. Ernst Retief, a member of our club and the BLSA Conservation Manager for our region, also plays an important role in the Regional Forum.

The biggest challenge facing any NGO is the raising of finance and this has been one of Mark's priorities up to now. The ideal situation would be for BirdLife South Africa to have sufficient capital to generate enough annual income to be self-sustaining. One of the initiatives in this regard is the drive to sign up corporate membership. A competition has been launched with a couple of mouthwatering prizes of weekend accommodation at the Thorny bush Game Lodge. Even by signing up only one corporate member you will qualify for the lucky draw prize. Just imagine what could happen if every bird club member signed up just one company for the benefit of BirdLife South Africa!

This year BirdLife South Africa is holding

its AGM or it's Flock as it is now called, in Port Elizabeth, and you are all encouraged to attend. Even if you cannot attend, you can still make a meaningful contribution to BLSA's IBA Wetlands Fund by purchasing an electronic raffle ticket for the beautiful painting by Graeme Arnott of a pair of African Fish Eagles, the nominated Bird of the Year for 2012. The winner will be announced at Flock 2012 on the 17 March.

## **Membership**

Turning our attention closer to home, our membership numbers appear to have decreased over the year which is a concern. As reported at the previous AGM, we started the year with 591 paid up members. According to the latest reports from BirdLife South Africa, our membership is currently made up of 444 (401) ordinary and senior citizen members and 114 (190) family members giving us a total of 558 (591) paid up members. The biggest decrease appears to be in the family member category and this is a matter that we will ask the BLSA membership division to investigate. We will also hopefully soon be receiving arrears membership lists for follow up purposes from the BLSA administration system.

Our Facebook site has also been increasingly active and we currently have many registered members on the site.

## **Programme and club activities**

Another full programme of activities was organised by our sub-committee this year. I would like to thank Wanda Louwrens, Susan Velthuysen, Tana Coetzer, Frans van Vuuren, Rob Geddes and Amanda Haggert-Haagner for dedicating their time to this demanding task. I would also like to thank our tea and catering sub-committee for looking after us so well again this year. A sincere thank you must also go to Elize Venter and

Rene Ehlers who have helped arrange our evening meeting venue as well as to the University of Pretoria for continuing to allow us the use of the Sci-Enza Hall at a nominal cost.

Without willing and experienced leaders and knowledgeable speakers, we would not have been able to organise the activities that we did. Thank you very much to everyone of you and I hope that we can continue imposing ourselves on you for your services in the future. I would like to extend a special thank you to those leaders and presenters who graciously donated their gratuity fees back to the club during the year.

I know that there is a bumper programme of activities being planned for this year. The programme for the first quarter includes highlights such as the Easter Weekend trek to Mark Anderson's home town Kimberley, as well as a couple of camps in the north along the Mutale and Limpopo Rivers.

Later in the year we will be going for our hat trick in the community section of the Birding Big Day Competition. Our base camp this time will be Olifants Camp in the Kruger National Park which will also give us an opportunity to see some exciting birds further north.

Our club continues making a significant contribution towards the SABAP2 project and we are very proud of the dedicated atlasers within our membership. Ernst Retief will be running a SABAP2 course at Vulpro in March for those of you who would like try your hand at atlasing.

Another development launched by the ADU last year was MyBirdPatch and I encourage all of you to at least participate in this simpler atlasing programme if SABAP2 appears too daunting. Les Underhill and the ADU need to be congratulated for the way that these projects have been run especially for the fact that the data collected is so readily available to all of us.

### **Celebrating 60 years of birding in Pretoria**

**B**ack in October 1949 the first wild bird club was formed in our area called the Pretoria

Bird Club. In 1960 the name was changed to the Northern Transvaal Wild Bird Society but unfortunately this only survived for four years and in 1964 it was affiliated with the Wits Bird Club. In 1970 members of the Pretoria Section of the Wits Bird Club founded our current club which was then called the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society. This subsequently became the Pretoria Bird Club in 1997 and later became BirdLife Northern Gauteng.

During 2011 our committee took the decision to dedicate 2012 to Celebrating 60 years of birding in Pretoria. With this in mind a special programme of activities is being planned which will include some very special birding trips within as well as outside the country, a photographic competition, a special celebratory function, and commemorative bottles of wine.

The first event is our photographic competition which will be launched at a photographic course which will be presented by Burger and Niel Cillie on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> March here at the Sci-Enza Building. Please keep your diaries open for this one. More details will be supplied within the next week.

A trip to Uganda has also been planned which is almost fully booked although we do have vacancies for one single lady and one single gentleman...obviously not to share with each other, as well as one extra couple.

### **Conservation projects**

**O**ur club is involving itself to a larger extent in conservation projects and a number of them kicked off during the year. I would like to particularly thank Rion Lerm, who is handling our Conservation portfolio, and his wife Lisa for their enthusiasm in this regard.

We were able to make two donations of R10,000 each to BLSA, towards the projects that Hanneline Smit is managing for the purchase of tracking devices. The first donation which was sponsored by Nic Efthimiades of Ocean Breeze Distributors was for a tracking device to be fitted to a White-bellied Korhaan. This project is still in its infancy and the challenge currently seems to be to find and catch



one of these elusive birds. The second donation was towards the Secretarybird project which is progressing well. A device has been fitted to a bird in captivity and tests are being carried out which are very promising. The test device has been able to accurately track the movement of the bird. The final trackers to be purchased will be costing over R20,000, however and it will be up to our new committee to decide whether we can assist BLSA a little more by sponsoring an additional amount for a device to be fitted to our "own bird".

Another project that we hope to contribute more to is the Urban Verreaux's Eagle Project established by Pieter and Natasja Saunders at the Wonderboom Nature Reserve. This will be initially be by way of monitoring assistance but could also expand to financial assistance in the future.

Rion and Lisa also came up with the interesting idea of a nesting log project and have opened a dedicated FaceBook site for it. The ultimate aim is to collect and log data of nesting log records in South Africa.

I would like to appeal to any of you who would like to get involved in these projects to please contact Rion. By doing so you can assist us in making a valuable contribution to citizen science!

### **Bird ringing**

**T**he report from our bird ringing group has been handed out tonight.

I would like to thank Gerrie and the bird ringing group members for the excellent contribution they make to our club especially with the young birder outings, our open days and other outings.

It is obvious that the financial contribution we make towards the bird ringing group is money well spent.

### **Young birders**

**L**ast year saw the launch of our initiative to grow the number of young birders in the

club. The inaugural outing took place at the National Botanical Gardens with an excellent turnout. The youngsters were ably led around the gardens by Jason Boyce and then were enthralled by the happenings at the ringing site. A further outing at De Tweedespruit led by Rion and Jason was well attended.... by 'young at heart' birders. Hopefully the next outing at Bushbaby Place will be more successful. I would like to encourage all members with children to participate in these outings to foster an interest in bird watching amongst our youth.

Initiatives that we are looking at in the future are the interaction with schools and their internal conservation groups.

### **Club trading**

**I**t is with sadness that I have to announce that Ralda Heyns has decided to hang up her boots and will no longer be handling our club trading under her banner of "A Book or Two". Ralda, and her able assistant, hubby Louis, will both be sorely missed. Ralda on behalf of the club please come forward and accept a small gift in appreciation of your sterling contribution to the Club over the past few years. Ralda will be assisting us in an unofficial capacity for a couple of months to wind down our trading because at this stage we do not have anyone who is prepared to take over from her. If any of you are interested in helping the club with trading in the future, even if it is on a much more limited basis, please let me know.

All of our club activities continue to be well supported and I have to thank you the members for that. It is highly gratifying for us as a committee to see so many of our members actively participating. Thank you very much!

In closing I would like to thank my dedicated committee for their much needed support during the past year. Each and every one of you continues to make a fantastic contribution towards making this club the special one that it is. Thank you! 🐦

## BIRDLIFE NORTHERN GAUTENG

### INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2011

	2011 R	2010 R
<b>INCOME</b>	<b>49,895</b>	<b>53,432</b>
Subscriptions	49,895	53,432
<b>COST AND DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATION</b>	<b>18,085</b>	<b>28,311</b>
Laniarius	18,085	28,311
<b>GROSS INCOME</b>	<b>31,810</b>	<b>25,121</b>
<b>OTHER INCOME</b>	<b>89,174</b>	<b>50,104</b>
Donations received	17,341	1,834
Advertising	925	550
Interest received	6,486	5,908
Sundry Income	-	240
Nett proceeds from outings	10,262	16,297
Nett proceeds from courses and special events	40,340	11,293
Nett proceeds from trading activities	13,819	13,982
- Sales	98,283	88,184
- Cost of sales	(84,464)	(74,202)
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>120,983</b>	<b>75,225</b>
<b>LESS: EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>83,142</b>	<b>65,579</b>
Audit fees	2,641	3,568
Marketing and publication relations	-	-
Bank charges	3,374	2,423
Bird ringing	6,685	6,000
Conservation	20,000	10,000
Evening meeting expenses	8,504	5,958
Functions	2,996	4,487
Course and Leaders expenses	10,620	6,550
Printing and Stationary	74	1,001
Secretarial fees	24,000	23,000
Sundry expenses	169	1,067
Telephone & postage	1,504	1,525
Small Assets	1,499	-
Insurance	1,076	-
<b>(LOSS)/SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>37,841</b>	<b>9,646</b>
<b>ACCUMULATED FUNDS - beginning of the year</b>	<b>159,430</b>	<b>149,784</b>
<b>ACCUMULATED FUNDS - end of year</b>	<b>197,271</b>	<b>159,430</b>

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# Club News/Klubnuus

## Celebrating 60 years of Birding in Pretoria

As mentioned in the Chairman's report, the next edition of *Laniarius* will contain a comprehensive review of our celebrations. Our celebrations have commenced with a highly successful and informative photographic course hosted by Burger and Niel Cillié. Our exciting photographic competition has also been launched which will give all of you an opportunity to win some lovely prizes in many different categories. Special events that are linked to our celebrations include a fantastic trip to Uganda which will include a mokoro expedition to find the Shoebill as well as Gorilla and Chimp Trekking. Another very exciting event will be the extended weekend trip to the birder friendly Kurisa Moya Lodge in the Magoebaskloof area during October. This weekend will be jam packed with outings and we will be led by the very capable Kurisa Moya guides when we hope to see birds such as Bat Hawk, Cape Parrot, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Gorgeous Bush-shrike, Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk, Green Twinspot and Magpie Mannikin. Bookings for this very special weekend have already opened and as numbers are limited, you are encouraged to get your names on the list as soon as possible. Events will also extend into 2013 and one of the other exciting trips we are busy investigating is a birding and wildlife trip to Madagascar towards the end of next

year so keep your diaries open for this one too!

## Payment of Subscriptions

Due to the increasing danger of cheques being intercepted by unscrupulous individuals, members are requested not to make payment to BirdLife South Africa using this medium. You are encouraged to pay your subscriptions by Electronic Funds Transfer. Please ensure that you use your Membership Number as the reference to appear on the beneficiary's (BirdLife South Africa) bank statement. This is the only way to ensure that your subscription payment is accurately linked to your account. Please also ensure to fax or scan and mail a copy of your subscription form to BirdLife South Africa's subscription department if you have added any additional items to your payment such as donations to BLNG etc. If you do not do this the additional funds will not be accurately allocated.

If you have not received your subscription form on the due date, please contact either Ntombi or Shireen at BirdLife South Africa's membership department. There are still some remaining teething problems that are being sorted out and by calling them you will ensure that your membership is kept current so that you can continue receiving the relevant publications like *Africa Birds and Birding* and *Laniarius*.

**BirdLife South Africa – Tel (011)7891122;  
e-mail – membership@birdlife.org.za** 🐦

## 2012 Photographic Competition for BLNG members

### Calling on all BirdLife Northern Gauteng (BLNG) members!

Celebrating 60 years of birding in-and-around Pretoria calls for a photographic competition, so...

...join this exciting new activity that will span over most of 2012. Whether an amateur point-and-shoot camera user or if you take

your photos through the lens fitted on a DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex) camera, this competition is for you with no less than three categories to enter your photos into.

The focus will be on indigenous (e.g. resident, migrant and vagrant species) and non-captive birds (please ensure that the bird you are photographing is not an escapee). Submit your best photographs of birds taken

within South Africa's borders. Attempt to submit as many photos of birds within or outside Pretoria's boundaries, however photos capturing special moments inside our national parks, private reserves, when atlasing, or inside your garden will be accepted as well!

### Entry classes

- **Point-and-shoot** camera users ('mik-en-druk' cameras)
- **DSLR** (Digital Single Lens Reflex, i.e. cameras with interchangeable lenses) users

Each class participant may enter a maximum of three photos (one photo per category).

### Submission categories

Each class participant may enter one photo into each of the following categories:

- **Portrait shot** (a full-frame photo shot/crop of a bird on a branch, rock, drinking, feeding, on nest etc., showcasing the bird as the only subject i.e. no interaction behaviour showcased nor a bird in a landscape setting)
- **Action shot** (an interaction or action photo showcasing a bird/s flying, fighting, playing, take-off, bathing, landing etc.)
- **Natural shot** (a photo showcasing the bird/s in their landscape i.e. the bird/s would typically make up a smaller portion of your photo, in contrast with the portrait shot)

### What you need to know before submitting photos to us!

- A maximum of 3 photos can be submitted by any one participant, 1 photo per category;
- Photos must be submitted in JPEG (e.g. .jpg/.jpeg) format and in the highest resolution prior to exceeding the size limit;
- Photos may not exceed a size of 1MB;
- Each of your photo files must be renamed as follows:
  - Camera body
  - Entry class
  - Photo submission category
  - Your first and last name
  - Bird species
  - Locality where photo was taken

e.g. Canon EOS 7D, DSLR, Action, Rion Lerm, White-fronted Bee-eater, Montana, Pretoria

- Do not add your initials, first, last or any name on the actual photos as a signature
- Photos must be e-mailed to the following address: **photos@blng.co.za**
- Photos will be adjudicated by three professional bird photographers, taking into account the equipment your photos were taken with.

### Some rules!

- Only paid-up BLNG members will be eligible to enter this competition
- Please, no professionals (any one who derives >10% of their income from photography)
- Your photographs must be taken during the competition time-frame, i.e. from April 2012 to 25 September 2012
- Do not attempt to cheat and enter into the wrong class purposefully
- Photos you submit may not have been published elsewhere
- Photographs must be original, taken by the respective participant
- Submitted photographs must not violate the copyright or any other personal or property right of any third party. You have also obtained any and all releases and permissions necessary for our intended use.
- By submitting your photographic entries, you provide the club with permission to publish your photograph/s on our club website in *Laniarius* and shown at the Gala event (end of 2012) where the winners will be announced (some great prizes up for grabs).
- You may apply your skills learnt at the photographic course presented earlier 2012, but no manipulation through (e.g. removing of branches or physical subjects etc. from the actual photo)
- Your photographs will be sent as anonymous to the judges
- The judges decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into
- The closing date for this competition is 25 September 2012



## *Obituary for Brenda Clarke; 24 November 1917 - 3 March 2012*

**M**y mother, Brenda Clarke, who has died peacefully at her home in Brooklyn, Pretoria, aged 94, was a gifted and accomplished scientist and artist.

She felt herself to be lucky in many ways, through her upbringing, home, garden, and her family on both sides; she was especially close to her father, and often reminisced about her beloved aunts on her mother's side, who were influential as she grew up. Throughout her life she cultivated a circle of friends through her work, her horticultural and other interests, and kept in close touch with family members in South Africa and abroad; visits and letter writing were a routine part of her daily life.

She had a fascination with, and comprehensive knowledge of her family history, researching and drawing up family trees which traced her Dutch, Huguenot and English origins, some as far back as the 17th century. These have been passed down to us in her compact, beautiful handwriting – as have all the records of her life, work and family which she kept assiduously. Books and reading were another passion; she learned to read at the age of three and read voraciously all her life. She also read very fast, and her cherished book collection reflected the depth and breadth of her

knowledge and interests.

She was born in Johannesburg, the daughter of Edna Olive (nee Taylor) and Frederik Casper Stiemens; her brother Bernard was born in 1922. She attended Arcadia Primary School in Pretoria, and Pretoria High School for Girls. Her university education started at the age of 16 at the University of Pretoria, where she graduated in 1939 with a MSc in applied botany with a strong emphasis on agriculture.

Between 1939 and 1944 she worked at the Low Temperature Research Laboratory in Cape Town, mainly on food spoilage. The Western Cape mountains provided her with the opportunity to enjoy climbing and hiking, and botanizing.

At university she had met a fellow student, Percy Clarke, who was studying agronomy, and they married in 1944. His work took them first to Marandellas in what was then Southern Rhodesia (now Marondera in Zimbabwe), then to Cedara, Barberton and finally Pretoria.

She returned to work, once her four children were of school age, employed part-time



between 1958-1977 at what in 1959 became the Margaretha Mes Institute for Plant Physiology and Biochemistry, University of Pretoria, working mainly on legumes and nitrogen fixation. During this time she co-authored and published a number of papers, and presented a paper at the S<sub>2</sub>A<sub>3</sub> conference in June 1960.

She always had an interest in indigenous flora, and once their family were grown, she and Percy travelled widely in their camper, visiting areas of natural beauty where she collected, painted and drew plants, Percy painted and sketched landscapes, and they could share their interest in bird watching. Some of these trips were made with members of the then Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society, now BirdLife Northern Gauteng, of which they were founder members. They were always accompanied by their much-loved dogs.

Part of her legacy is the considerable body of work she produced as a botanical artist. She drew and painted prolifically, not only for specific projects or works, but to give to family and friends, which she did generously. The last 15 years of Brenda's life, and the last 5 years of Percy's, were enriched by the happy times they spent with Berenice and Theo at Hartelus in the Waterberg, where the bushveld, especially the trees, inspired her both artistically and botanically. The watercolours she continued to paint into her nineties were typically elegant compositions

of flowers, leaves and grasses, or of individual flowering plants.

This work formed the basis of a second career; her pen and ink illustrations for Mavis Skene's *Making pot-pourri in South Africa* (1985) were followed by her illustrations in watercolour, and pen and ink, for books by Eve Palmer, with whom she had a close friendship founded in their shared plant and horticultural interests. Four books resulted from this collaboration: *The South African herbal* (1985), *Under the olive* (1989), *Return to Camdeboo* (1992) and *A gardener's year* (1995). In 2003, a collection of more than 600 watercolours of wild flowers which had been collected and painted between 1984-1990 was published with Gerrit Germishuizen's text as the *Illustrated guide to the wild flowers of northern South Africa*. Her work as a botanical illustrator received recognition from the Botanical Society of South Africa in 2005.

She was a keen and very knowledgeable gardener, raising many plants from seed and sharing both her knowledge and plants with characteristic generosity. In later life she pursued her passion for patchwork, creating beautifully designed pieces which will become family heirlooms.

Percy died in 2001. She is survived by her children John, Berenice, Vivienne and Anne, her grandchildren and great grandchildren.

*Vivienne M. Stiemens*  
April 2012

### **New Members/Nuwe Lede: January – April 2012**

WELKOM NUWE LEDE, ONS HOOP U VOEL GOU TUIS  
WELCOME NEW MEMBERS, WE TRUST YOU WILL ENJOY YOUR BIRDING WITH US

Hein Bantjes, Wapadrang; Nico Scholtz, Lynnwood; Habib & Ayesha Karimulla, Laudium; Anton Pretorius, Southdowns; Lisa & Cornel Moll, Garsfontein; Ernst & Martie Fischer, Faerie Glen; Ilona Viljoen, Garsfontein; Eric & Isobel Rycroft, Colbyn; Saretha van Tonder, Lynnwoodrif; Dup du Plessis, Sinoville; Anna Marie Steyn, Meyerspark; Sarel Venter, Hercules; Elize Zybrands, Maroelana; Elmi van Niekerk, Waverley; Sita Rootman, Gezina; Marius & Marita Blom, Centurion; Helen & Trevor Robins, Arcadia

# *Personal names commemorated in the common names of southern African bird species – Part 8*

*John Bannon*

## **LIVINGSTONE – Livingstone’s Turaco, *Tauraco livingstonii* (G R Gray 1864); Livingstone’s Flycatcher, *Erythrocerus livingstonei* (G R Gray 1870)**

Undoubtedly the best-known British explorer of the Victorian period, David Livingstone (1813-1873) was a Scottish doctor and congregational minister who was the first European to see *Mosi-oa-Tunya*, (the smoke that thunders) and christened it ‘Victoria Falls’ in honour of his queen.

He was born in very humble surroundings in the mill town of Blantyre, Lanarkshire, and worked from the age of 10 in the local cotton mill. Determined to better his lot, he still found time to attend school and aged 26 went on from the mill to study religion and sciences, at what is now Glasgow University.

Livingstone strongly empathised with poor working people and joined the London Missionary School who sent him to Kuruman in the Northern Cape. As a prominent anti-slavery campaigner, he saw it as his lifetime’s duty to bring the word of God to as many indigenous Africans as possible. However, unlike many European travellers of the period, he was always careful to respect local customs and cultures and as a result often gained the trust and hospitality of tribal chiefs and elders, previously considered hostile to Europeans.

His slogan became ‘Christianity, Commerce and Civilisation’ and believing exploration was his true spiritual mission he resigned as a missionary and with the support of the Royal Geographic Society, set out to explore the Zambezi.

Unfortunately, he was not the best leader and administrator and his first expeditions were heavily criticised by his European colleagues. But as usual, he was undeterred and in 1866 returned to southern Africa for what

was to be his last expedition to seek out the source of the Nile. Constantly ill from tropical diseases and deserted by many of his party, Livingstone was to effectively disappear off the map for almost six years. In 1869 the *New York Herald* commissioned Henry Morton Stanley to find him and two years later, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, he did. Stanley’s words “Dr Livingstone, I presume?” is one of the most famous questions ever asked - although there is some debate as to whether it WAS ever said.

Livingstone died in what is present-day Zambia in 1873, from the combined effects of malaria and dysentery and although his body was returned for burial in Westminster Abbey, his friend Chief Chitambo ordered that his heart ‘remain in Africa’ and it was buried under a Marula tree, near the place where he died.

He never did find the source of the Nile but Livingstone’s real legacy was for the close relationships he established with native Africans, whom he treated as equals. His humanity and Christian attitudes earned their long-lasting respect and this lasting goodwill towards one of their fellow countrymen helped the British to better establish their African empire.

George Robert Gray (1808-1872), was the younger brother of John Edward Gray, after whom Gray’s Lark is named. He was the Assistant Keeper – Ornithology at the British Museum and named the turaco in Livingstone’s honour in 1864, after his earlier expeditions when he had ‘discovered’ Victoria Falls.

George Gray also named the localised Livingstone’s Flycatcher of coastal Mozambique and Zimbabwe after him in 1870, when he was still missing in the wilds of darkest Africa.

## **LUDWIG – Ludwig’s Bustard, *Neotis ludwigii* (Rüppell 1837)**

Baron Carl Friedrich von Ludwig (1784-1847)



arrived in Cape Town in 1805, where he soon became a prominent member of the German community and a well-known collector, sending his specimens back to German Museums.

As a botanist and chemist, his estate 'Ludwigsberg' on Kloof Street was full of indigenous and exotic plants. Apparently his daily journey to town in his carriage was a much-anticipated local event; with six beautiful white stallions hauling his carriage to his office in the now-restored Heerengracht, South Africa's oldest thoroughfare.

Wilhelm Rüppell (1794-1884) was a fellow German collector and contemporary of Ludwig, who co-founded the Senckenberg Natural History Society in Frankfurt, now one of the world's foremost natural history museums and research establishments. He named the bustard after Ludwig in 1837.

#### **MEVES – Meves's Starling, *Lamprotornis mevesii* (Wahlberg 1856)**

Friederich Wilhelm Meves (1814-1891) was a German ornithologist who worked as a curator in the Rijksmuseum's Zoological Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, for 36 years.

He took part in many expeditions, both in Sweden and overseas, making many valuable additions to the museum's collections in the process.

He was a contemporary peer of Johan Wahlberg (1810-1856), the Swedeish naturalist and active field collector in southern Africa, who no doubt had sent specimens back to Meves in Stockholm. Wahlberg named the starling after Meves in 1856, just before he (Wahlberg) was killed by an enraged elephant.

#### **MEYER – Meyer's Parrot, *Poicephalus meyerii* (Cretzschmar 1827)**

Dr Bernhard Meyer (1767-1836) was a German physician and ornithologist who wrote *Naturgeschichte der Vogel Deutschlands* in 1805 and *Taschenbuch der Deutschen Vogelkunde* in 1810.

Meyer never travelled to South Africa and certainly never saw a live specimen of 'his' parrot, but as an important and respected member



Doug du Plessis

of the German ornithological establishment and valued supporter of the Senckenberg NHS, the parrot was named in his honour by the institute's founder, Cretzschmar, in 1827.

#### **MONTAGU – Montagu's Harrier, *Circus pygargus* (Linnaeus 1758)**

George Montagu (1753-1815) is perhaps one of the most remarkable men to feature in this series. He was described in contemporary accounts as a 'peculiar man' with 'peculiar tastes' and he was even court marshalled and discharged from the British Army for 'provocative marital skirmishing!' – whatever that entails!

However, when it came to another one of his passions, natural history, he was brilliantly methodical and exacting, setting the benchmark for accurate recording and cataloguing for his peers to emulate.

As one of 13 siblings within a wealthy and privileged family, with connections at the highest levels of British society, the young George

was able to pursue his early interest in natural history on the family's extensive estate in Devon.

A military career beckoned, but a clandestine marriage to the young daughter of an illustrious family in 1773 was to set the tone for Montagu's later life. He inherited the family estates when his elder brother died, but the terms of the will stated that he should live in one of the manor houses with his wife and children. Instead, he moved to Knowle House in Devon with Mrs Elizabeth Dorville, the wife of a London merchant, which both scandalised Regency society and set his own children against him. His eldest son pursued an expensive and long disputed claim against him that was eventually to see the loss of most of the family estates.

To top it all, Lt-Col George Montagu was 'invited' to leave his regiment, the Wiltshire Militia when a charge against him was brought by fellow officers whose wives disliked his behaviour and lifestyle. This was probably the best thing that could have happened to the non-conformist Montagu because it allowed him the time to concentrate all his energies on his other passion for natural history at Knowle House in Devon.

In 1802, just four years after his discharge, he produced the two-volume *Ornithological Dictionary: or Alphabetical Synopsis of British Birds* with his soulmate and partner Eliza Dorville producing most of the illustrations. His further studies of British birds showed that the inclusion of several accepted species was invalid and that these supposed new species were in fact, just the females or juveniles of already described species. Thus the 'Greenwich Sandpiper' was really a Ruff in winter plumage and the Ash-coloured Sandpiper was the same bird as the Knot.

Such direct criticism obviously upset the ornithological establishment of the day, but Montagu later went on to identify and accurately describe the first British records of Montagu's Harrier, Cirl Bunting, Cattle Egret, Little Gull, American Bittern and Gull-billed Tern.

Until Montagu proved otherwise, the female Hen Harrier was known as the Ring-tail

Hawk, a separate species to the male, but by keeping young birds in captivity, Montagu showed how they moulted into adults and assumed their separate plumages.

The Montagu's Harrier had already been described and classified as early as 1734 and was fully described by Linnaeus in 1758 as *Falco pygargus* - the 'Ash-coloured Falcon'. Montagu was the first to find them breeding in southern Britain and also to clear up the confusion between the two grey harrier species.

Subsequently, two European ornithologists, Temminck and Viellot, acknowledged his expertise, by using the vernacular name 'Le Busard Montagu' and in 1836, the Scottish ornithologist and artist William MacGillivray, referred to the species as Montagu's Harrier for the first time and that name then became into common usage worldwide.

Montagu also had a great interest in marine and freshwater natural history and added over 100 new species of mollusc to the British list and even described the Lesser Horseshoe Bat for the first time.

Much misunderstood and even maligned at the time, George Montagu never attained his deserved status as probably the most accomplished field ornithologist and naturalist of his day. His lack of academic status, non-conformist behaviour and 'scandalous' lifestyle, were no doubt held against him by the desk-bound British ornithological establishment.

In 1815, he stood on a rusty nail at Knowle House and died slowly and tortuously from 'lockjaw', now better known as tetanus.

### **MONTEIRO – Monteiro's Hornbill, *Tockus monteiri* (Hartlaub 1865)**

Joachim Joao Monteiro (1833-1878), was a Portugese mining engineer, who collected natural history specimens in Angola from 1860 until 1875, writing a book on his experiences in 1876 entitled *Angola and the River Congo*.

He obviously supplied specimens to Karel Hartlaub (see earlier entry), curator of the Bremen Museum, presumably including the hornbill, which Hartlaub named after Monteiro in 1865.

Very little information can be found on Monteiro, but the principle of museum curators naming birds after those who regularly supplied their establishment with specimens, especially those new to science, was already well established at the time.

**NARINA – Narina’s Trogon, *Apaloderma narina* (Stephen 1815)**

Named after a beautiful Khoi Khoi girl by Francois Le Vaillant (see earlier entry), the suggestion has been made that she was his mistress. Le Vaillant is reported to have said that “I found her name to be difficult to be pronounced, disagreeable to the ear and very insignificant according to my ideas. I therefore gave her a new one and called her Narina, which in the Hottentot language signifies a flower”.

As described earlier under the entry for Le Vaillant, James Francis Stephens, was an entomologist and classification expert at the British Museum in London. He translated and reclassified Le Vaillant’s ornithological discoveries including Narina’s Trogon and Klaas’s Cuckoo (see under that entry).

It would appear that Levaillant’s (anglicised) dubious reputation and morals were

readily brought into question by the British establishment at this time, who had just defeated Napoleon at Waterloo. This could be shown by the fact that Levaillant named one of his birds after a native girl with whom he had a romantic attachment and the other after his black manservant – just not the done thing ‘old boy’ in those days.

After all, he was French and 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, did not help.

**NEERGAARD – Neergaard’s Sunbird, *Nectarinia neergardi* (C H B Grant 1908)**

Not many species were unnamed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but as a ‘local’ assistant to Capt Claude Henry Baxter Grant (1878-1957), a well-known British ornithologist and specimen collector, P Neergaard, an unknown Witwaterstrand mining official, was so honoured in 1908.

CHB Grant also collected Rudd’s Lark and Rudd’s Apalis, naming them both after the man who financed his collecting trips in southern Africa. 🦋

## *Birding field craft*

### *Faansie Peacock*

In the first two articles in our series on becoming a better birder, we discussed birding by ear and seeing birds with new eyes. While these are important skills, they won’t be of much help if you can’t manage to find birds to listen to or look at. Worse perhaps, is if you do spot something but it flies off before you’ve managed to even raise your binoculars. Having the latest field guide, the best binoculars and the most megapixels won’t be of much help without good field craft. And we’re not talking about a 4x4 or rental car that can drive over any mountain and through any swamp. Field craft is the manner in which you locate, approach, observe

and interact with birds in their environment. It is planning, preparation, attitude, creativity, common sense, intelligence and experience. It’s knowing when to let your hunting instincts take over, and when to stand back. In this article I suggest some helpful tips to practicing better field craft - a talent that will allow you to find more birds, see them better and identify them with more confidence.

**Binoculars 101** – A trusted pair of binoculars is a birder’s foremost ally in the field. The very first step after you’ve bought a new pair is to discard the protective, padded case they came

in: experienced birders agree that speed is critical in the field, and your binoculars should be quickly and easily accessible at all times. I recommend keeping them in one of three places: in the car, on the kitchen table or, preferably, around your neck. Practice quickly locating an object through binoculars until this coordinated movement becomes second-nature. Make sure the diopter is properly adjusted before venturing out. In some circumstances it can also be beneficial to pre-adjust the focus ring to a certain distance—for example, the distance you're hoping a crane will flush at; likewise, when scanning for thermalling raptors, make sure the focus is set to roughly the right distance. For distant sightings, remember that a fence post, car roof, low branch or even a friend's shoulder can make a sturdy support to rest your binoculars on.

**Seek and you shall find** – Once bitten by the birding bug, you'll soon find your eyes automatically scanning prominent perches such as dead trees, fence posts, telephone wires, rooftops, boulders and the like, or constantly glancing upwards for birds passing overhead. Finding birds in open habitats is largely a matter of checking suitable perches or meticulously scanning homogenous surfaces such as waterbodies or agricultural lands. Pay particular attention to edges—the reed-fringed shorelines of dams, sunlit vegetation along forest edges, the fringes of bare fields, or even the verges of dirt roads—which are often more bird-rich than habitat interiors. When looking for birds in dense vegetation, start by scanning broadly for movement with the naked eye, before raising your binoculars. Once you do spot motion, lift your binoculars smoothly (not through an abrupt, exaggerated movement that might scare off the bird), while keeping your eyes on your quarry. Once you've managed to lock onto a moving target, try to anticipate in which direction it will move; if you do lose sight of it, rather lower your binoculars and quickly scan with the naked eye again.

**Play it by ear** – To some degree birdwatching could, probably more accurately, be called bird-listening. Expert birders can accumulate a lengthy day list tally without lifting their binoculars once, solely by identifying birds from their songs and calls. For the beginner, or the advanced birder in an unfamiliar environment, it is not critical to be able to identify the species—simply listening for birds will reveal where the most bird activity is concentrated. Learning the loud and characteristic territorial song of a species is an excellent start; with practice you'll also become familiar with the softer, shorter and less distinctive alarm calls, contact calls and other subtle communications in birds' repertoires, and the functions they fulfil.

**Stay alert, stay alive** – To truly get attuned to my surroundings while birding, I often imagine that I'm being stalked by a lion. This helps to increase your sensory awareness and simultaneously encourages you to move slowly, carefully and noiselessly. Some guidelines go without saying: do not wear bright or noisy clothes, avoid sudden movements, speak softly and in a low voice, and bird alone or in smaller groups. Avoid stepping on crunchy leaves, dry twigs and loose gravel but don't spend all your time looking at your feet. Move slowly and stop often to scan the surrounding vegetation carefully. Listen for the tell-tale rustling of leaves on the forest floor or the soft flutter of unseen wings, and be alert for a quick movement seen from the corner of your eye or a shadow passing briefly overhead.

**Check the weather forecast** – Opportunistic (and hardy) birders can make the best of virtually all weather conditions. During strong onshore winds try your hand at seawatching for pelagics blown close inshore. During a cold front, search for swallows and other small birds resting in warm, secluded spots sheltered from the wind. During hot conditions wait at a shaded pool and enjoy the constant stream of drinking and bathing seedeaters. After a storm, head out to check for wet warblers, soaked cisticolas and other bedraggled birds drying out

in the morning sun. After another storm, don a pair of gumboots and check for any tropical waterbirds that might have arrived. After yet another storm, check for storm-petrels.

**Easy does it** - Birds have extraordinary eyesight and soon realise when they are being pursued. Some birds will allow a close approach while others are wary when approached. This is also influenced by the season, habitat and species and the bird's sex and age; flocks are generally more skittish and cannot be approached as closely as singletons for example. Learn to read the situation and assess a bird's temperament by noting its calls, behaviour and posture. It is better to observe it from a distance rather than having it fly off before you've had a decent view. Instead of moving directly towards a bird, rather try a nonchalant, gradual approach by walking diagonally past it. Raptors perched on roadside telephone poles will invariably take off if you suddenly stop right alongside them; however, they are usually less concerned if you keep driving slowly by. Try to keep the sun at your back; this will provide you with better views of the birds while they will have more trouble seeing you approach. Disrupt your outline by remaining partly behind cover and try not to break the skyline; conversely, low-flying

birds are often more visible against the sky if you squat down. Avoid disturbing birds at all as far as possible, especially when they are breeding or roosting.

**Location, location, location** – Every bird species is just one component of a diverse and complex ecosystem. Getting to know birds' habitat preferences gives one a more in-depth understanding of birds' life cycle, ecology and status—experienced birders can predict, often with amazing accuracy, which subset of birds is likely to be found in any one area. Then finding birds largely becomes a question of finding the right habitat, and there are few things more gratifying than saying "this area looks good for..." only to have your predicted species appear a few seconds later! Understanding habitats entails far more than just looking at dominant plant species—also consider the vegetation height, density and structure, as well as the soil type, geology, slope angle, altitude, latitude, climate, rainfall season, proximity to water, food sources, competitive species, predators and potential nest sites, amongst other factors.

**Join the party** – Particularly in winter, many birds form mixed foraging flocks, also called



bird parties or bird waves. Such assemblages can leave birders wondering where to look first and it is not unusual to find twenty or so species, especially insectivores, in close proximity. If you do come across such a productive phenomenon, try to follow the flock or anticipate where the birds are headed until you've ticked off all the constituent species—this can be challenging as the birds tend to move through the vegetation rapidly. Be sure to investigate the canopy, mid-levels, understorey and ground-level. Similar groupings can be found at locally abundant food sources such as fruiting trees, fields being ploughed, recently burnt grassland, termite alate emergences, schools of fish, rubbish dumps, busy picnic sites and so forth. A third reason for a temporary alliance by different species is to mob predators such as snakes, owls and mongooses; the presence of a predator is signalled by frantic alarm calls (which are often mimicked by birders practicing pishing or spishing, in the hope of attracting birds into view).

**The Golden Rule** – Birding has only one unbreakable rule: *the welfare of the birds must come first*. Birders should never threaten, harass or harm birds through direct disturbance,

by overuse of sound playback, by approaching nests too closely or through other detrimental activities. Exhibiting common courtesy towards fellow birders, land-owners and the general public is also important. Apart from these requirements, you are free to practice your birding in whichever way you find rewarding. You are welcome to bird alone or socially, occasionally or constantly, reservedly or obsessively. Do not be discouraged by birders bickering about the merits of old vs. new names, ornithology vs. twitching or this week's controversial topic on the birdnet. Remember that everyone, even the foremost experts, makes mistakes—these should be viewed as valuable learning opportunities rather than embarrassments. The length of someone's lifelist or camera lens is not necessarily a reflection of their birding prowess. Listen to expert opinion but verify facts for yourself. Birding is not a competition, although many birders, including myself, relish the optional competitive component thereof. The things that do count are asking questions, being honest with yourself and others, setting personal challenges, gaining experience, making memories, supporting conservation, having a passion for birds and above all, having fun! 🐦

## *Cuckoos in South Africa*

*John Bannon*

**I** find SABAP2 atlasing is always interesting whatever the time of the year, but it's when the cuckoos arrive in November that local atlasing really starts to hot up.

Southern Africa has 14 recorded cuckoo species, but late spring and early summer sees the noisy arrival of 10 regular breeding cuckoo species from their wintering areas in tropical Central Africa plus one regular non-breeding migrant (Common Cuckoo) from the Northern Hemisphere. The scarce and elusive Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo is also recorded in eastern Zimbabwe and the Zambezi valley, where its

suspected host species is the African Broadbill.

Another Palearctic species, the Lesser Cuckoo from Asia usually only occurs further north in Malawi but occasionally 'overshoots' as a vagrant to E Zimbabwe. However, the fourteenth southern African species, the Madagascar Cuckoo, only occurs as a rare winter (April – Sept) visitor to Mozambique and E Zimbabwe.

Warwick Tarboton's new book, *Roberts Nests & Eggs of southern African birds* is an absolute treasure trove of information about their fascinating breeding behaviour and their hosts. Much of the content of this article and

the sequence of cuckoo species are based on this book and I really cannot recommend it too highly to you as a 'must have' publication.

When they first arrive, male cuckoos, especially the more obvious species, patrol their chosen territory seeking out potential host nest sites, often perching prominently and calling continually, so that their prospective hosts and female cuckoos know where they are. When paired up, the male continues with this behaviour and is often mobbed by the host species, which allows the much less noticeable female to deposit her egg unobserved.

### **Black Cuckoo (Swartkoekoek) *Cuculus clamosus***

Black Cuckoos can be found calling in woodlands and bushveld, wherever their host species, *Laniarius* shrikes, commonly occur. In our area that's principally the Crimson-breasted Shrike and the Southern Boubou, with Tropical and Swamp Boubou's elsewhere.

Surveys have shown that an estimated 4-36% of all Crimson-breasted Shrike nests are parasitised each breeding season. The female Black Cuckoo lays up to 22 eggs, (usually one per nest) each year after first removing one of the host's eggs. Like most cuckoo eggs, they hatch earlier than their hosts and the young Black Cuckoo then proceeds to evict the remaining eggs, so it can be exclusively fed by both unwitting foster-parents.

### **Red-chested Cuckoo (Piet-my vrou) *Cuculus solitarius***

Usually the first to arrive, the repetitive and often continuous 'piet-my-vrou' call of the Red-chested Cuckoo can be heard wherever woodland and veld occurs, sometimes in quite small patches throughout suburban gardens and even in downtown Joburg itself.

This widespread distribution reflects the Red-chested Cuckoo's more catholic choice of host species; robin-chats, thrushes, chats and wagtails. The Cape Robin-Chat is the number one target, with between 4-22% of their nests parasitised each year, followed by the Cape Wagtail, but even the Dusky Flycatcher has been recorded as



*Red-chested  
Cuckoo juvenile  
(Onvolwasse  
Piet-my-vrou)*

Dirk du Plessis

a host species. Often, the Red-chested Cuckoo's single egg does not even closely match its host's eggs, but it doesn't seem to make any difference. As with almost all cuckoo species, the young Red-chested Cuckoo hatches earlier and is able to evict its host's eggs from the nest.

### **African Cuckoo (Afrikaanse Koekoek) *Cuculus gularis***

Somewhat more elusive and decidedly less obvious than its congeners, the African Cuckoo specialises in parasitising only the Fork-tailed Drongo which is possibly why it keeps a much lower profile than other cuckoos.

The aggressive and intelligent drongos have evolved a counter-strategy by laying a wide variety of egg colour-types. The African Cuckoo's single egg must very closely match the colour of the chosen Fork-tailed Drongo's eggs or it will be immediately ejected. Female African Cuckoos successfully raised by one particular colour-type foster-parents then seek out the same colour-type hosts when they return to lay their own eggs in successive years.

Once laid, the single egg hatches earlier and the young African Cuckoo proceeds to eject its host's eggs.

### **Great Spotted Cuckoo (Geflekte Koekoek) *Clamator glandarius***

Often found in established monogamous pairs, Great Spotted Cuckoos work together to find the nests of their principal hosts, starlings and crows. The female lays two to three eggs in the



Martin Goetz

African Cuckoo  
(Afrikaanse Koekoek)

host's nest without removing any eggs and although hatching earlier, the young Great Spotted Cuckoos make no attempt to evict the other eggs or nestlings.

Within the nests of smaller host species such as the Common Myna, or the eight starling species, the host's young are usually crowded out and die. However, in nests of Pied and Cape Crows the mixed brood can often be raised together and fledge successfully; the fledged chicks sometimes remaining with their foster parents for up to 33 days.

**Levaillant's Cuckoo (Gestreepte Nuwejaarsvoël) *Clamator levaillantii***

A specialist in parasitising the babbler species throughout the bushveld, the Levaillant's Cuckoo also occurs in pairs and like the Great Spotted Cuckoo is probably also monogamous. The female lays only one egg after removing one of the babbler's eggs, but the faster hatching young cuckoo makes no attempt to evict the eggs of its host.

Up to 7% of Arrow-marked Babbler's nests are parasitised each breeding season, but as the young of both species are of comparable size and proportions, mixed broods of

Levaillant's Cuckoo and Arrow-marked Babbler's are often mutually successful.

Some babbler groups are parasitised more than once in a breeding season, but it would appear that unlike other cuckoo species, the breeding behaviour of the Levaillant's Cuckoo and its single young have a limited detrimental effect on the breeding success of their chosen hosts – possibly because of their communal lifestyle. The young Levaillant's Cuckoo remains with its foster parents for up to five weeks after fledgling.

**Jacobin Cuckoo (Bontnuwejaarsvoël) *Clamator jacobinus***

The Jacobin Cuckoo prefers to seek out the nests of the Common Fiscal, Dark-capped, Cape and Red-eyed Bulbuls and the Sombre Greenbul, but as it lays a single white unmarked egg, it has also been recorded laying in the nests of many other species including the Cape Grassbird, Bokmakerie, Brown-crowned Tchagra and both African Paradise and Fiscal Flycatchers.

An estimated 25 eggs are laid over the 10-weeks breeding season and although no attempt is made to disguise its small white egg, none of the hosts reject it. The young Jacobin Cuckoo also makes no attempt to eject the hosts' eggs, but because of its disproportionate size and voracious demands, usually only the cuckoo is raised to fledgling.

**Thick-billed Cuckoo (Dikbekkoekoek) *Pachycoccyx audeberti***

A lowveld specialist, the Thick-billed Cuckoo has only one host for its single egg, the unfortunate Retz's Helmetshrike. The female Thick-billed is not at all subtle about its method of gaining access to the host's nest, it just barges the sitting female Retz's Helmetshrike off its nest and lays its single egg before it returns. In one five-year study, some 50% of Retz's Helmetshrikes were parasitised in this way.

The single young cuckoo also ejects the host's eggs from the nest and female Thick-billed Cuckoos have also been observed ejecting fledgling Helmetshrikes later in the breeding season. If disturbed young Thick-billed



Cuckoos vomit a foul-smelling liquid and as they also grow to be twice the size as their foster-parents and hang around for up to 50 days after they have fledged, surely this species deserves to be known as the 'cuckoo from hell'.

**Diderick Cuckoo (Diederikkie) *Chrysococcyx caprius***

With more potential host species recorded than any other southern African cuckoo, the Diderick Cuckoo is one of our more familiar species, even in suburbia. Its principal hosts; weavers, sparrows and Southern Red Bishop are very common and widespread and accordingly so is the distribution of the Diderick.

The choice of host species varies both seasonally and regionally, with for example a principal host species in one area being hardly affected in another. Different tribes of Diderick also lay different-coloured eggs to closely match their preferred hosts, with some specialising in weavers, others in sparrows and so on.

Whichever tribe the female fledgling was born to, she later returns to lay her tribe's coloured eggs in subsequent seasons, although occasional variations are found.

The young Diderick nestling is also very skilled in ejecting the host's eggs and if necessary other fledglings with its back and remains with its chosen foster parents for up to 25 days after fledgling.

**Klaas's Cuckoo (Meitjie) *Chrysococcyx klaas***

Klaas's Cuckoo is very similar, both in its appearance and breeding behaviour to the closely-related Diderick Cuckoo, but has an entirely

different range of preferred host species, which includes 11 sunbirds, three batises and four warblers. Consequently, its distribution is less widespread than the Diderick and although a pan-African migrant, some Klaas's Cuckoos do remain through the winter along the milder east coast.

Depending on the location, the female Klaas's Cuckoo specialises in parasitising those species which best match its own eggs, laying up to 24 eggs throughout the breeding season.

As with the Diderick, it lays one egg and the nestling is similarly proficient in disposing of any other eggs and nestlings. The eggs of both species are similar in size and shape, but can be specifically identified by the host chosen as there is no overlap between the preferred species.

**African Emerald Cuckoo (Mooimeisie) *Chrysococcyx cupreus***

The distinctive 'prittee georg-ie' call is usually the only way of locating the forest-loving Emerald Cuckoo, as it calls from its perch from within the woodland canopy of mature forests in the lowveld, KZN and the east coast.

As yet, only two hosts have been definitively identified; the Green-backed Camaroptera and Barratt's Warbler but putative Emerald Cuckoo eggs have also been found in White-starred Robin and Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler's nests, without further confirmation after hatching.

Like its congeners, only one egg is usually laid and the host's eggs are ejected by the fledgling cuckoo and up to 20 eggs are laid in a season. 🐦

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BAIE DANKIE VIR U DONASIE, U BYDRAE VERSEKER DAT ONS 'N GROTER BYDRAE TOT DIE BEWARING VAN VOËLS KAN LEWER. ONS WAARDEER DIT OPREG.

Kurt Zsilavecs, André Zybrands, Jan Meyer, Ryno Scribante, Jenny Smulders, Philip Calinikos, Anand Bauchoo, Dup du Plessis, Anthony Botha, Habib Karimulla.

# The A to Zen of birding

Philip Calinikos

*"It's a skylark that he is watching through the binoculars, a skylark larking in the sky in the English countryside on a perfect summer morning. He listens to its seemingly inexhaustible repertoire, its rolling, its whistling, its chirruping, it does impressions this bird. Why should it do impressions but for the joy of life and the love of existence?"*  
(Obstacles to Young Love – David Nobbs).

**B**irder, birdwatcher, birdlover, observer, twitcher, atlasser, lister, ringer, ornithologist, citizen scientist, conservationist, photographer, artist; who are we and what gives us such pleasure?

According to the dictionary, the bland definition of a birdwatcher is somebody who watches birds, who observes birds in their natural habitats as a hobby. But is this really what we do? This simple little hobby of ours has so many facets, so many nuances that appeal in so many ways to so many different people.

I recently attended BLSA's Flock 2012 down in Port Elizabeth and had the opportunity to spend a few days with my wife at Storms River Mouth... an area we remember fondly from our early holidays as a married couple. We resolved to spend our time recharging our batteries and doing very little except sit and watch the days go by... no checklists, no field guides, no cameras... only a pair of binoculars at hand, just in case!

Yet somehow the birds still found us in our sedentary state. The small family of Red-necked Spurfowl that pecked and scratched their way down the path outside our chalet every morning just after sunrise; the Southern and Greater Double-collared Sunbirds that frequented the same patch of vegetation, virtually the same flowers, that made you wonder why they had evolved into separate species; the cheerful ringing tones of the inquisitive Bar-throated Apalises peeking at us as we nibbled our breakfast; the delicate pair of Black Saw-wings that floated into our vision at precisely the same time every morning soon to be followed every time by a pair of contrastingly direct and purposeful White-rumped Swifts; the sweet

burbling of the Red-winged Starlings who popped in to check our eaves for a possible roost; the loving pair of Kelp Gulls who mercifully defended their rocky outcrop against all comers; the vast flocks of Cape Gannets quartering up and down the sea front diving like missiles into the water. All of this without even leaving our armchairs. In between we were visited by other animals; a pair of tiny, beautifully marked Striped Mice; a pair of larger, hungry Vlei Rats; a school of Dolphins that spent one whole day in front of us, joyfully teaching their youngsters how to ride and dive through the waves crashing into the rocks. And the butterflies...! But then again we did miss out on the opportunity of possibly nailing down a Knysna Woodpecker on one of the myriad trails, or zooming off down to the outskirts of Plet for the Sooty Falcon, or...?

The time between visits from our avian and other friends allowed me to mull over this hobby of ours, bird watching. It has been so much part of our lives for the past thirty years, has provided us with so many memories of not only the birds, but of people and places, moments of exhilaration and disappointment. In the beginning it was all about the counts. How many species did you see today? How many lifers? How many out of range birds? How many, how many, how many! And then there were the rarities, whole trips designed around one or two species.

Thinking back on those times, however, I realise now that my favourite moments came so totally unexpectedly. Yes it was wonderful to have that guide find that African Pitta at that national park in Zim. But these moments of sheer joy and delight surpass even that.

Sitting in the shade of the palm trees on the banks of the Kunene River above the Epupa Falls after a murderously hot morning searching for non-existent Cinderella Waxbills. Trailing our feet in the water between the exposed roots of the overhanging trees as the afternoon cools off. A movement to our left ... oh, sigh... only a pair of Blue Waxbills... boring! But then the little song commences, and then he was off, soon to return with a length of grass stem which he had expertly cut. The ensuing performance surpassed the most superlative ever given by Herbert von Karajan. Settling onto his perfectly horizontal branch, gripping the grass stem that was topped with a beautiful plume, he proceeded to woo and win his bride. She sat quietly, but attentively, a metre away, as he spun and twirled his baton with his beak, giving little jumps and hops, whistling his captivating little song. We sat as enchanted as his bride hardly daring to breathe.

Being invited by a business associate to his trout farm outside Belfast for a weekend's fishing. Rising early to start the confusing and amateurish battle with flies and rods and casting, relieved to be distracted by a movement across the dam on the open field. Two large birds greeting each other with elegant bows... and then the dancing began! Beautifully choreographed, perfectly formed patterns of wings and limbs, lifting and floating, bouncing and pirouetting. The sheer expression of joy, tangibly filling the air as the pair of Wattled Cranes danced their way into each other's hearts. Even

my friend, a fanatical fisherman downed his rod at the sight!

My favourite area in South Africa is the Kruger National Park. A perfect summer's morning, just enough moisture in the air to pair the heat of the rising sun. Mpondo Dam, slightly remote, and not easy to reach from the larger camps so early in the morning, one of my favourite spots in Southern Kruger. The only vehicle parked at the water's edge, we enjoy our morning coffee and rusks and watch the water birds feeding...nothing special just the usual suspects. But the light was perfect, the bush was awakening with the birth of a new day....and then they were there. Absolute and total panic ensued amongst the residents of the dam. They chased everything in sight from the Blacksmith Lapwings on the shore to the Pied Kingfishers on their submerged perches, from the Red-billed Buffalo-weavers, to the Reed Cormorants and the Cape Glossy Starlings. They were not hungry; they were not hunting for food. They were doing what they did best just for the sheer joy of doing it. The pair of Eurasian Hobbies expertly banked and dived one last time and then they were gone, leaving us with a vivid memory of a moment never to be repeated.

So that is why I watch birds, why I am happy to sit anywhere at any time and see what they have in store for me. I have yet to be disappointed!

*Reference: How to be a bad birdwatcher – Simon Barnes, 2004 – Published by Short Books* 🐦

### **Which senses help birds to find food?**

Mainly eyesight – either for spotting food, or for watching the actions of their fellow birds and following them to it. However some species, such as nocturnal owls and nightjars, hunt mainly by hearing; while a few including Turkey Vultures and storm-petrels, do so by smell. Turkey Vultures and their relatives have 'see-through' nostrils, which improve the flow of air through their nasal cavity and enable them to pinpoint the source of rotting food even more effectively. Finally, some birds which probe deep into the mud or earth, such as snipe and woodcock, find their prey by touch, using sensitive nerve-endings at the tip of their bill.

# Die vere maak die voël, of maak die vis die voël?

Johan Slabbert

Hieronder is n opsomming van interessante voëls wat ek al gesien het, hoofsaaklik omdat ek op daardie stadium besig was om te hengel met kunsvlieg, op plekke waar die voëls voorkom.

Watertrapper	Geelvis	Blyderivier naby Hoedspruit
Witvlerkvleikuiken	Forel	Elandsrivier naby Machadodorp
Oranjaborsboslaksman	Geelvis	Blyderivier naby Hoedspruit
Draaihals	Forel	Elandsrivier naby Machadodorp
Rooiborssuikervoël	Forel	Stroom in berg – Nylstroom
Kalkoenibis	Forel	Stroom naby Machadodorp
Rooiborsbyvreter	Tiervis	Zambesi Rivier – Zambië
Waterploëër	Tiervis	Chobe Rivier – Botswana
Baardaasvoël	Forel	Rhodes – Drakensberg

Noudat almal wat 'boffins' is die Witvlerk gedeelte van die vleikuiken sit en betwyfel, moet ek sê elkeen van hierdie geleenthede is vir ewig in my geheue vasgelê, met al die detail wat nodig is.

Vliegengel vind gewoonlik plaas op mooi en ongerepte plekke, waar mens soms net met

heelwat moeite uitkom. Die mooi omgewing word dan die agtergrond wanneer so 'n spesiale voël verskyn, en n mens vergeet so iets nie maklik nie.

Terug na die Witvlerkvleikuiken. Daar het 4 voëls uit die lang gras oor 'n veldpaadjie gestap, terwyl dit gereën het. Gelukkig het ek my verkyker byderhand gehad ek kon ek hulle mooi beskou. Ek sal wel toegee dat dit die eerste en enigste keer was, waar ek normaalweg 'n paar keer 'n spesie sien voordat ek doodseker is en dit afmerk.

Natuurlik is daar baie ander voëls ook te sien tydens die hengelry, byvoorbeeld sterretjies, Visarende, ens. Die lysie hierbo is maar net spesiaal omdat die voëls die eerste keer gesien is a.g.v. die vliegengel.

Ontspan nou maar oor die vleikuiken, wat sou jy dink as ek sê ek het 'n Groot Fregatvoël gesien terwyl ek tuna vang het? Wel ek het, in die Mosambiëkanaal. Dit was net nie vliegengel nie, so dit tel nie.

Is daar enige beter komplimenterende stokperdjies? 🐦

## Another young-at-heart birders' outing: Bushbaby Place 25 February 2012

Rion Lerm

The Bushbaby Place outing started off cool and partly overcast, with the sun only appearing brightly later that day. Lynette (the owner) received all of us with a smile at her wonderful retreat situated within the Leeuwkloof Conservancy, an area where game viewing supplements a usual bird watchers outing. A flock of **Groundscraper Thrushes** welcomed me to Bushbaby Place

where six birds perched awkwardly on top of an electricity pylon opposite our venue's entrance gate, at 06h10 that morning.

The area is rich in bird diversity and we recorded a good number of our feathered friends, 63 species to be exact. A pleasant stroll through Lynette's property delivered some interesting birds. The area was well-populated this time of year with both **Desert** and **Zitting**



*Desert Cisticola (Woestynkloppie)*

**Cisticola** calling repeatedly throughout our morning walk. The **Coqui Francolin** evaded us visually; however the male call did catch our attention. The Lesser Grey Shrike also didn't show, but a **Levaillant's Cuckoo** wasn't shy, perching on top of a low *Karree* and uttering its loud *kreeu kreeu* call which we were all familiar with. A **Sabota Lark** caught Philip's eye amongst a flock of pipits, presumably **African Pipit**. Some **Black-collared Barbet** and **Cape White-Eye** was present in a feeding frenzy low down in a beech tree, not noticing the curious onlookers, whilst a **White-browed Scrub-Robin** could be seen for once. Three kingfisher species entered the bird list on this

day; **Brown-hooded, Striped and Woodland Kingfisher**. The bird list compiled on Lynette's 21 hectare property reached high numbers. We finished off here with the monotonous call of the **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird**.

After leaving the gates we travelled a small distance in the conservancy, spotting interesting birds such as a female **Amur Falcon** and a good sighting of a single **Red-billed Quelea** male in full breeding plumage. The moment we reached a rocky outcrop all could hear the diagnostic call of the **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting**. This first stretch of the route took us to the top of a hill overlooking Dinokeng and other nearby conservancies. Here, we noticed a bird party where the **Rufous-naped Lark** and both tchagra species entertained us together with three **Crested Barbets**. Both the **Black-crowned and Brown-crowned Tchagra** could be clearly seen foraging on the road and in nearby *Vachellia/Acacia* trees. As BLNG's chairman reached into his car, I spotted an off-white coloured raptor circling above us. By the time I reached Philip 'my' Booted Eagle had evaded us. However, two **Steppe Buzzards** could be added to our list.

The return trip past the conservancy's entrance gate delivered a brief look at an **African Paradise-Flycatcher** and a Woodland Kingfisher. At the gate itself we spotted a juvenile **Black-head Oriole**, and two **Cut-throat Finches** perched above a conservancy resident's cycad garden finished off a wonderful morning's bird watching. 🦉

## 'n Besoek aan Khutse Nasionale Park in Botswana

Pieter Heslinga

Ons groepie van vier gesinne wat al jare saam vakansie hou, het in die week van 17 tot 25 Maart bietjie gaan kyk hoe dit in die Khutse Nasionale Park, Botswana lyk. Ons was goed toegerus om die terrein met twee Land Cruisers, 'n Isuzu en 'n Pajero aan te durf. Om Khutse te besoek, bespreek mens by Bigfoot Tours, Botswana, en nie by die Botswana Parkeraad nie. Die wildreservaat is so 700 km

van Pretoria en ons rondomtalie het ongeveer 1750 km behels. 'n Mens kan deurry in een dag maar ons het Vrydagmiddag vertrek en anderkant die Lobatsi grens by 'n gastehuis met die naam Warm Hands Guest House in die dorpie Kanye oorgeslaap. Ons het toe gerieflik die volgende dag verder gery en vroegmiddag Saterdag al kamp opgeslaan.

Khutse is 'n kleinerige wildtuin direk

aangrensend en direk suid van die welbekende Sentraal Kalahari Nasionale Park, Botswana. Ons het vier dae by die Molose kamp en drie dae in die Mahurushele kamp gebly. Daar is geen omheining om die kampe nie, net basiese toilet- en emmer-stortgeriewe, maar dis netjies en skoon. Mense wat Khutse besoek, moet ten volle selfversorgend wees. Die kampplekke het nie water nie en dit moet saamgery word. Net buite die park kan mens egter goeie water kry by 'n gehuggie met die naam Kaudwane, waar 'n San gemeenskap woon.

Die Molose kamp is bekend vir sy plaaslike leeu-gemeenskap, maar dié was met vakansie en ons het hulle nie teëgekom nie. Ons het wel leeus by die Khutse panne gekry.

Die week pas voor ons besoek het die park reën gehad en die tweespoor sandpaaie was lekker om op te ry. 'n Vierwiel-aangedrewe voertuig is seker verkieslik, maar 'n goeie bestuurder sal ook met 'n tweewiel-aangedrewe bakkievoertuig regkom. Ons het ook geen probleme gehad om ons sleepwaentjies te sleep nie.

Dit was 'n fantastiese week van ontspan en uitrus. Molose het 'n watergat wat ons vroegoggende en laat smiddags besoek het. Omdat ons lief is vir diere en voëls het ons die park deurkruis. Die omtrek van paaie is maar ongeveer 150 km. Daar is drie ander kampe in die park, Moreswe in die suidweste, Khutse 13 km van die hek af en Khwankwe so 17 km noord van Mahurushele. Beide Khwankwe en Mahurushele is eintlik in die Sentraal Kalahari Nasionale Park geleë maar hierdie kampe word saam bestuur.

Ons beloning was groot met al die rondry en kyk. Ons het baie mooi troppies diere soos gemsbokke, baster-rooihartbeeste, en springbokke gesien, maar ook enkele kameelperde, vlakvarke, rooi- en bakoorkakkelse, steenbokkies, koedoes, ens. En baie eekhorinkies.

Om nie eens van voëls te praat nie! Dit was 'n behoorlike fees van Kalahari voëls. Ons is nie voëlkenners nie, maar stel baie belang en leer vinnig. Daar was 'n hele aantal verskillende lewrike en koestertjies maar die hoogtepunte vir ons was onder andere die Bleeksingvalke, Roofarende, Dwerlgarende, Witkruissperwers, Berghane (Bateleurs), Sekretarisvoëls,

Swartaasvoëls en selfs 'n Grootrooivalk. Dan die Dubbelband- en Trekdrawwertjies en die pragtige Pylstertroubekkie en talle Witvlerkkorhane. By ons kampplek by Mahurushele was daar 'n plaaslike Nonnetjiesuil, en ons het ook die Afrikaanse Naguile hoor roep. Nog 'n hoogtepunt was vroegoggende by die Molose watergat waar honderde Gevlekte Sandpatryse gelyk kom water drink het. Van ver af hoor mens hulle geroep "tjoklit, tjoklit, tjoklit," maar so vinnig as wat hulle verskyn en kom water drink, so vinnig verdwyn hulle weer in die verte, en wanneer daar 'n roofvoël op 'n boomtak digby die watergat sou sit, is daar nie 'n voël in sig nie. Ons het meer as 70 verskillende spesies kon aanteken, en ek glo voëlkenners sou veel meer kon identifiseer.

Ons sal definitief Khutse weer besoek. Weer by Molose slaap, miskien Mahurushele los en dan by die Khwankwe kamp slaap. Hoewel daar nie 'n watergat is nie, lê die kamp op 'n hoogtetjie en kyk mens ver en wyd oor die panne uit. Maart was 'n goeie tyd vir ons, maar tog steeds goed warm in die middel van die dag. Ek glo om in die winter Khutse toe te gaan sal ook baie lekker wees maar dan sal die wêreld wit en droog wees terwyl dit in Maart mooi groen en vogtig is. Ons voertuie en sleepwaens het geen probleme opgelewer nie en ons raai elkeen wat die voertuie en toerusting het om die Khutse ervaring te oorweeg. Dit was ongelooflik – 'n ware wildernis ervaring! 🐾



*Gevlekte Sandpatrys (Burchell's Sandgrouse)*

Pieter Hestlinga

## *Atlasing with the Boyes (and girl)*

*John Bannon*

Thursday November 24<sup>th</sup> saw us setting off early for a long anticipated atlasing weekend near Marnitz in northwestern Limpopo; us being Jason Boyce, André Marx, Bets Lategan and myself.

We stayed at the Baobab Farm Cottages, near the Groblersburg border post with Botswana and as the heavy rain over the previous week had resulted in flooded roads and luxuriant green bushveld, we had high hopes for excellent birding. En route to our accommodation, we had seen and heard several displaying Monotonous Larks and I even glimpsed my former bogey bird, Pygmy Kingfisher.

Meeting up with our co-atlaser John Sowards, we set about making ourselves comfortable in the more than spacious cottages, remarking upon the abundance of animal heads and skins. However, our hosts Anel & Henk Malan were hospitality personified and as the African dusk came down like a blanket I decided to try and snatch a much-needed nap. My head had only just hit the pillow, when I was rudely awoken to what I can only describe as absolute pandemonium! Torrential rain was noisily lashing the tin roof and windows and I could hear someone shouting – what the hell was going on!

Staggering to the front door I was immediately enveloped by millions of termite alates, busily emerging from under the verandah. It wasn't rain – it was insects! They flooded inside and even though I quickly closed the door it was to no avail. Within minutes our cottage was filled to the rafters by thousands of transparent wings as they crawled under the door and through the windows, determined to 'emerge' come what may. But that was only the start.

A multitude of 'alate-eaters' had followed them in. Skinks, frogs, spiders, scorpions and various assorted beasties of all shapes and



John Bannon

*André cleaning the termite alates off the car*

sizes, such as enormous black 'helicopter' beetles with loud 'whirring' wings, added to the overall effect of total mayhem.

Pulling the sheets over my head to try and get some sleep it crossed my mind that what we really needed was a couple of nightjars to help us out, but if they weren't calling would I be able to identify them?

Next morning, we crunched through hordes of dead and dying insects, now cemented to the carpets and no doubt much valuable protein was inadvertently added to our sarmies. However, we had somehow survived the night and now the anti-climatic pursuit of bird atlasing could begin.

The birding WAS excellent with over 220 species over the weekend, including five bee-eater species, Lesser Spotted, Booted and African Hawk Eagles, even more Monotonous Larks, Cape Penduline Tit and a Grey Foam-nest Tree Frog. But it was for the amazing termite emergence, that this particular atlasing trip will always be remembered – at least by me. 🐛

# The elusive Magpie Mannikin

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

According to Newman's *Birds of Southern Africa* the status of the Magpie (Pied) Mannikin *Lonchura fringilloides* is described as a rare, localised resident. My wife Kathrin and I needed a break badly and the South Coast was just the place to relax and forget the stresses and strains. But birders are a different breed – they have the habit of always packing extra equipment. Now what would you do with binoculars and a bird on the beach?

Secretly, I had the hope of possibly being able to get a glimpse of the Magpie Mannikin. In the *Southern African Birdfinder* by Cohen *et al* I had read that a reliable place to see it is at the small village of Southport on the South Coast. We had a spell of bad weather, and Kathrin and I took the tough decision, having no other choice but to go birding. Southport here we come! We searched the spot as quoted by Cohen. A very pretty quaint village, some noisy Olive Sunbirds, but no Magpie Mannikins. We stopped at a little kiosk selling local fare, purchased some very tasty bananas and asked for information about our elusive bird. The good lady had never heard of it, but just then some local folk entered and one kind lady knew very well – they fed in her garden! *Voilà!* This is an easy one! We drove up to her house where her husband, forewarned by a phone call, expected us. No Magpie Mannikins to be seen but there were plenty of Bronze Mannikins though. But let's try the friends and neighbours across the road. What friendly people! We landed up on the verandah of Elaine and Ron Whitham, members of the local bird club, BirdLife Trogons. After an unsuccessful hour, we felt it was time to leave, reluctantly though. Elaine was kind enough to put us in touch with Andy Ruffles, who led a birding outing to Lake Eland on the Sunday, organised by BirdLife Trogons. We joined the outing and were welcomed like old friends. We got in some good birding, seeing Bronze and Red-Backed Mannikins, Black

Saw-wing Swallow, Cape Longclaw, Familiar Chat, Bokmakiere, Black-crowned Tchagra, Red-backed Shrike, Croaking Cisticola, Wingsnapping (Ayers') Cisticola, Wahlberg's Eagle, Sombre Greenbul, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, and Jackal Buzzard to name a few, but no Magpie Mannikin.

Our birding is normally left to chance – what we see is what we get. Chasing a particular species or going birding with a 'wish-list' is very different! Andy Ruffles was so kind to put us in touch with Andrew Pickles, who would possibly have Magpie Mannikins in his garden. We phoned Andrew, also a very kindly gentleman. The next day, he had to work on a big job, but why not phone him at 13h00? The saying: "Sweet hope, ethereal balm upon me shed" (Keats) came to mind. We spent the morning on a windy beach and consoled ourselves with a doughnut. I phoned Andrew, expecting him to be unable to help us. "Pied Mannikins are very rare this time of year for some reason but meet me at my farm at 15h30" he said. We drove to Umzumbe where Andrew lives in a tranquil setting with a wonderful view and sat on his verandah for close on two hours, chatting about his passion for birding and a roost of 1.5 million Barn Swallows, within sight distance



Dup du Plessis

Magpie Mannikin (*Dikbekfret*)



of his house. But again no Magpie Mannikins. Plenty of Bronze Mannikins at the feeders though.

The shadows were growing long and the sun was well on its path to the west. We sighed in despondent fashion and made arrangements to leave. At that precise moment, there they were, a pair of Magpie Mannikins at the bird feeder! Larger by far than the Bronze Mannikins, looking 'neat' in their dark brown, black and white plumage. We noticed the heavy bill and how agile the birds were and watched them for possibly 15 minutes, during which time Andrew's father took Kathrin into the garage to take a closer look through the window. A very welcome 'lifer', but we really

had to look hard for it!

Our sincere gratitude goes to our newly found friends of BirdLife Trogons, to Elaine and Ron Whitham, Andy Ruffles and Andrew Pickles.

Ps. when we arrived back at our home in Pretoria there was a message on the answering machine: "This is Ron, shortly after you left, the Magpie Mannikins arrived..."

### Reference

Cohen, C. *et al.* 2006:113. *Southern African Birdfinder*. Struik, Cape Town.

*[Well done Neithard and Kathrin. This is a notoriously difficult bird to connect with and many people have come up empty handed before! – Ed.]*

## Mauritius so skelmpies

### Salomi Louw

'n Onverwagse uitnodiging van my seun, op korttermynkontrak werksaam in Mauritius, het my binne tien dae op die vliegtuig gesien om by hom aan te sluit en sy erfposisie te laat verklein.

Alhoewel hy in die natuur in die algemeen belang stel, is sy fokus nie op voëls nie en ek het geen verwagting gehad om iets besonder te sien nie. My snorkeltoerusting is egter saam, want hy gaan elke middag na werk met sy onderwaterkamera snorkel by Trou aux Biches, drie minute se stap van sy grondvloerwoonstel in 'n ou herehuis. Op die (natuurlike) gras voor sy huis, het ek met eerste lig van die eerste dag mooi, maar onbekende voëls gesien: 'Madagaskar Fody' (Madagaskarse rooivink?); 'Mauritian Fody' (Mauritiusrooivink?); RooiwangtIPTOL (Red-whiskered Bulbul, blykbaar 'n invoer vanuit Indië); en 'n Sebraduifie – wat in vlug lyk soos 'n Namakwadui, maar van naderby 'n blou kop en fyngestreepte lyf vertoon met 'n lang stert wat wit buiterande het. Dié duif se sang klink soos 'n nostalgiese en hartseer hondjiegebal en ek wens ek kon dit sáám met 'n foto vaslê. Die Indiese spreeu (Common Mynah) kom ook algemeen voor en, so dink ek, hiér in Mauritius hoort hulle eerder tuis as by ons.

Ek het dit vir 'n verandering geniet om hulle en hul eskapades dop te hou! Dit voel, of lyk, vir my egter asof daar 'n subtiele verskil is met dié wat ons in die RSA teëkom.

Vir die twee naweke wat ek daar was, het my seun 'n motor gehuur en omdat ons nie strandlêers is nie, het ons die eiland platgery en alles gedoen, gesien en ervaar wat moontlik was in so 'n kort tydjie. Die eerste dag na my aankoms is ons na die Black River Gorges Nasionale Park waar ons in die bosse gaan stap het en heelwat voëls gehoor het, maar dit was nie so maklik om hulle te sien te kry nie. Nuut hier was ek onmiddellik kon eien as 'n vlieëvanger; 'n pragtige klein voëltjie met 'n 'sneebal' op sy assie. Uit die kloof onder ons het daar skielik en swart twee swaels opgeduik, bo ons koppe gedraai, en dadelik weer die dieptes afgeval. Later, by die Alexanderwaterval roep Gustav my ongeduldig om gouer te loop want daar is voëls wat rondvlieg. En sowaar, hier sien ons ons eerste Witpysterte (White-tailed Tropicbird)! Enkel of in groepe van tot vyf beweeg hulle af in die vallei, vlieg skielik sonder waarskuwing bo jou kop verby, dartel met wimpelende stert tot naby die rotse van die

waterval en styg dan hoog of vryval die vallei af. Alles gebeur so skielik en onvoorspelbaar dat ordentlike foto's moeilik bekombaar is. Hierdie vlieërs is die Madonnas van die geveerde wêreld: hulle moet soggens vroeg reeds begin om aandag te gee aan hul voorkoms; soos dames van ouds met volstruisvere, is die langste en witste stertvere alleenlik van belang om aandag te trek; en dit lyk asof hulle ure spandeer aan grimering want die oë is swart omlyn en die wimpers so dik asof dit vals en opgeplak is – te pragtig vir woorde! 'n Mens raak skoon verlief op hulle.

Op pad terug is ons aan by die rumkelder en verder op pad na Le Morne, waar ons gestop het vir die uitsig, en kom 'n Roderiguese vrugtevlermuis in die helder middag bo ons verbygevlieg: volgens die Natuurhistoriese Museum in Port Louis die tweede grootste vlermuis (naas die 'Flying Fox', ook eie aan dié wêrelddeel), met 'n vlerkspan van gemiddeld 1,2 meter.

Ek is vertel van die reiers wat langs die kus voorkom en toe ek Maandag 'n vreeslike lang staptog na die Noorde langs die kus onderneem, kry ek talle reiers: nie net ons bekende Groenrugreier nie, maar ook die 'Striated Heron' (Gestreepte reier?), sowel as telkens Kleinwulpe (Whimbrels). Dié voëls blyk almal heel gewoon te wees aan mense aangesien hulle opvlieg en verskuif van standplaas slegs as jy té naby kom. Die Sebraduifies en Gespikkelde duif (?) (Streaked Pigeons) loop rustig die strandgebiede vol. Ook Rooibeksysies (Common Waxbill), Huiskraaie (House Crow) en Huissossies (House Sparrow) is volop.

My hele (heerlike, maar té kort) vakansie hoef nie hier beskryf te word nie. Hoogtepunte sluit egter in 'n snelbootreis na die sogenaamde '3-eilande': tydens dié rit sien ek beide die Groot- en Kleinbruinsterretjies (Brown & Lesser Noddy). Kans om foto's te neem is daar nie tydens die snelvaart en waterbespating nie. By dié eilande is die Witpilstert weer eens baie bedrywig en hier sien ek ook vir die eerste keer die Rooipilstert (Red-tailed Tropicbird).

Tydens my tweede naweek in Mauritius neem my seun my onder andere na Rivulet Terre Rouge, 'n riviermonding naby Port Louis wat 'n Ramsar site' is. 'n Verskeidenheid voëls



word hier aangetref, soos die Krapvreter (Crab Plover), Grysstrandkiewiet (Grey Plover), Grootstrandkiewiet (Greater Sandplover), Mongoolse Strandkiewiet (Lesser Sand Plover), Bandstertgriet (Bar-tailed Godwit), Groenpootruiter (Common Greenshank) Witgatriuter (Green Sandpiper), Kempahaan (Ruff), Steenloper (Ruddy Turnstone), Gewone Ruiter (Common Sandpiper) Drietoonstrandloper (Sanderling) en 'n verskeidenheid sterretjies. Tot verstomming van die personeel sien – en neem ons ook foto's – van sterretjies met geeloranje bekke: sowaar Kuifkopsterretjies!

Die dag na my vertrek snorkel my seun saam met 'n seeskilpad, en die volgende dag neem hy met sy onderwaterkamera 'n Grootbruinsterretjie af op 'n vlot sowat 120 meter vanaf die strand waar ek nog twee dae tevore gesit het om visse te voer sodat hy onderwaterfoto's kan neem!

My tyd in Mauritius was seker goed beplan, want kort na my vertrek was daar 'n waarskuwing van Sikloon Giovanna, is die lughawe gesluit en al die bote uit die water gehaal. Die sikloon is egter verby na Madagaskar. Toe Gustav net hierna weer gaan snorkel, swem hy tot sy ontsteltenis met 'n haai.

Ek is bly ek het dít misgeloop, maar die nuwe voëls wat ek op my Suider-Afrikaanse voëllys kon afmerk, het – naas 'n wonderlike tyd met my kind – die besoek aan Mauritius die moeite en geld werd gemaak (al is sy erfporisie nou soveel kleiner). 🦋

# A Girl Guide, a Voortrekker and a Pioneer

Debbie van Zyl

The crazy notion of jumping on a plane to a far off destination for just a day and then doing something relatively small before jumping back on the plane, is exhilarating. Very exhilarating, if the small thing is really small. About the size of a small dove. Longer legs though. Has the word 'little' in its name. Isn't from here. Many people want to see it. Is a female happy in her solitude? She has a whole pond to herself. She has lots of admirers. She is unique. Her world has been turned upside down. She is bliss. She is a **Little Crake!**

After reading one email after another about the Little Crake in Kalk Bay, I just couldn't take it anymore and sent a message to Betsie Lategan. I had barely tweaked her rubber arm when I was online checking out flight prices and accommodation in the area. My problem was at work. My boss was in meetings, it was quarter end and I still had a revenue target to meet. I waited an hour, rechecked the flight prices and they had gone up by a hundred rand. Oops... I checked with Betsie and she said we needed to make sure we got the flight as there wasn't another day we could do this. I was worried that she was having second thoughts. Earlier that morning Thalia had asked if we were going. It was like she was reading my mind. "Absolutely", I said. Her rubber arm wouldn't be tweaked. Damn. Lisl wasn't chasing tweets. Double damn. Tana had stuff on so couldn't get away. Anneke was still away and wouldn't be back in time. André was still on his way back from Vietnam. More damnation took place. So it was just the two of us.

By lunchtime, the boss wasn't back and the tickets were two hundred smackeroos more than when I started. "Be bold" is my personal motto so I went ahead and made the bookings. Betsie was at the grocery store so I bought her ticket too. I called a lovely lady named Madeleine and booked accommodation just up the road from where the bird had been seen.

I went into the HR system and put leave in for the day. I waited with one eye on the corner office.

Turns out that as a nature photographer, my boss fully understood my urges and happily gave me the day off with the proviso that I left my phone switched on (not during flights of course). We were set. It was time to talk about packing, what to take, what to leave behind. A few frantic BBMs were exchanged. [*Blackberry messages – Ed.*] A few quarter end meetings moved. I started my mental packing list. Out of office notification was set.

We flew down from Lanseria (officially my favourite airport in the world) on Tuesday evening of 27th March. I had an 'Aeroplane Jane' flight down with a rather interesting lady sitting next to me on the way. Thankfully we landed much earlier than expected and were soon whizzing off in our cute Chevy Spark aka Sparky. TomTom on the iPad was great and in no time we were shoving our baby up the steep inclines that are part of Kalk Bay's charm to find our home for the night. Our accommodation was excellent and once the luggage had been dumped we went looking for dinner. Not an easy feat at 9 pm on a Tuesday night out of season. We ended up in Simonstown at Bertha's Restaurant which is right on the edge of the charming little harbour. I remembered from a few years ago how great it was – we had eaten there after completing a rather harrowing BLNG pelagic trip with Trevor Hardaker. The snoek and hake fish cakes were delicious. We were barely back at Castle Hill when we both jumped into our beds to recharge those batteries for the next day.

"Is jy wakker?" were the first words I heard the next day. "Mmmm" was the response. Realising it was already 7 o'clock we were up in no time. We took enough time to enjoy the incredible sunrise from the inn's balcony overlooking the sea before the final pack, checkout



Little Crane

Dave Deighton

and heading down to see Sparky. We had mapped out the fastest route to Clovelly so were there within minutes. Several cars parked on the side of a quiet road were enough to tell us where 'Lady Luck' was hiding. Cameras and binocs were hastily grasped from the boot. Along the short path to the pond, we encountered a couple who were just walking back to their vehicle shaking their heads. They looked up, smiled at us and mumbled something which sounded like, "It's just a tame chicken". Betsie and I glanced at each other, eyebrows raised, both not sure it was going to be that easy.

The pond is in a beautiful setting. It is part of the Silvermine Wetland Conservancy, bordering on Main Road just across from the sea at Kalk Bay. I'd like to say we looked at the surroundings but we didn't. We plonked ourselves down next to three gentlemen who were staring at the pond as if it contained some sort of magic. Turns out they were right. Two minutes after propping ourselves up on the wooden fence, this tiny gem of a creeping bird comes casually walking out from the reeds a couple of metres from where we were sitting. Was it? Maybe? Yes!

A tame chicken really was the only way to describe her. She was small; the size of a dove; brown; a couple of black streaks down her back; darkish eye. She looked comfortable in her feathers; fearless and hungry. Right in front of me!

The excitement that shoots through your body is almost physical. The thrill runs from your toes all the way to the hairs on the back of your neck. Instant reaction is to plaster a grin on your face and immediately look to your friend. The grin gets wider from both of you when you realise you both have the same grin and eyes lit up like altar candles. Contact established and mutual enjoyment is taking place. The sound of cameras clicking furiously reminds you that just 90 degrees away is something so special that you have to snap your eyes back to the front.

We were so blessed with the most incredible views of the tame chicken walking right past us on the vegetation she seemed to be so perfectly adapted to. Long toes and a skulking-shaped body come in handy when you need to move silently through the reed beds searching for insects. A girl needs her protein after all. She moved quietly, just a few steps away from us, barely glancing around while she stayed focused on her targets. Breakfast never saw her coming.

We must have watched her for half an hour before chatting to the three guys who were as enthralled as we were. One had also just flown in from Gauteng. We moved off down the path to start making those important calls to spread the word and share the excitement. By then my camera needed a fresh battery and we needed to take a moment to let it all settle in and come down from the high. Locals trundled past with their best friends holding tennis balls in their mouths, occasionally stopping to ask what the fuss was all about. I am sure they walked off thinking strange thoughts about crazy birders.

We went back for a second look. Sun beams had hit the pond by now and she posed beautifully for some photos in the morning light. Perfect, serene, and content.

After a delicious breakfast at Boulders overlooking the penguins, we just had to go back for another look. A different set of faces and lenses this time around. Another Sparky parked in the road. The pond was in full morning sun and our tiny pioneer was still strutting her stuff. More vision captured on virtual film. We tear

ourselves away as there's more to do today.

The thrill doesn't go away. We spend the rest of the day in a bit of a daze. We find ourselves randomly smiling for no reason. The birding must continue. We take the scenic route to Tokai to get Betsie a much better view of the Chaffinch population. They were scattered everywhere and like our newest acquaintance, just a few metres away. A beautiful drive to Kirstenbosch with a magical walk around the gardens was the perfect way to spend the rest of the afternoon.

Before long we were off to the airport again. We gave Sparky's keys back to the man in

green, checked in at the green counter, then sat in the green lounge waiting for the green aeroplane. We, on the other hand, were no longer green thinking of everyone who had seen the pioneer. We had experienced a tiny piece of heaven. Someone else's turn to be green.

*\* Aeroplane Jane - check out the lyrics from Karen Zoid's very entertaining song*

*\* Pioneer - "one who is among those who first enter or settle a region, thus opening it for occupation and development by others".*

*Dictionary.com* 🐾

## *Birding in Bergen*

*Annemarie Dessler & Marli Venter*

When I started planning our winter trip to Norway in 2010, I knew it was going to be a holiday with a difference. This time there were no buildings and top ten sights on the agenda, but more personalized excursions such as hunting the Aurora beyond Tromsø, curling\* in Stockholm, birding in Bergen, and staying in the Ice Hotel in Jukkasjärvi.

To arrange these adventures I scoured the internet for leads and eventually found a web-site for the Natural Born Birder, run by a guide called Julian Bell. He was the only guide I could find on the internet crazy enough to take two South Africans out on a day of birding at temperatures well below freezing. Totally forgetting that it would be in the depths of winter by the time we got there, I mailed him a wish list of birds that I had selected from our book called *"100 birds to see before you die"*. The list included birds such as the Red Crossbill, a bird with a uniquely adapted bill that can release conifer seeds out of their cones, Rock Ptarmigan, White-throated Dipper, a bird that can walk underwater to catch prey, and last, but not least, the Snowy Owl and Gyr Falcon.

Our holiday took us to Scandinavia during the coldest winter in 60 years. We arrived in

Bergen a few days before Christmas and could hardly sleep with excitement. We mailed Julian Bell to confirm our excursion and the next day



*Birding in the snow!*

he arrived right on time in his truck to pick us up. The weather was atrocious - extremely cold (-16° Celsius) with a high wind-chill factor. We drove through the picturesque town to the edge of a small lake and started hiking. Within minutes our feet were wet and freezing but then we started seeing little flashes of colour as birds appeared. We continued birding and at the end of the day we had ticked 27 species including a flock of Crossbills that flew over our heads in a flash of orange. Returning to Bergen when the light started to wane we stopped at a little stream and there was the Dipper - my ultimate wish bird. Although we only saw two of the birds on our list the experience of birding in those extreme conditions will stay with us forever. We concluded our tour having achieved all but the top wish on our list – seeing the Aurora Borealis. So I



White-throated Dipper

guess we will have to go back for more birding in Bergen!

*\*Curling is an ancient sport which involves sliding stones across a sheet of ice towards a target area. 🏏*

## Op soek na 'n Amerikaanse Goue Strandkiewiet

Leon Kay

Ons het beplan om werk met plesier te kombineer, en ons huwelikshedenking einde Maart in Port Elizabeth te gaan vier. Toe die berigte in Maart begin deurkom dat 'n verdwaalde Amerikaanse Goue Strandkiewiet hom by Cape Recife bevind, het ons gehoop dat hy tot einde Maart daar sou vertoef, sodat ons hom ook sou kon sien. Ons het hierdie voëls tydens ons wittebrood in Hawaii gesien, en gedink dat dit baie toepaslik sou wees om weer een tydens die herdenking op ons eie bodem te kon aanskou.

By die ingang na die Cape Recife reservaat het ons gehoop dat die hekwag ons dalk aanduidings kon gee oor waar om die voël te vind. Hy het ons egter apologeties ingelig dat hy nie van die voël weet nie, omrede hy nog net 'n paar dae daar werk, want hy is eintlik van Pretoria! Binne die reservaat het ons gehoop om dalk ander voëlkykers teë te kom. Daar opgedaag, was niemand egter in sig langs die paar kilometer lange strand nie. Seker omdat 'n

Klein-/Dwergriethaan (Little Crake) intussen sy opwagting in Kaapstad gemaak het!!

Geleidelik bekyk ons die honderde waadvoëls van alle kante, maar kom tot my frustrasie gou agter hoe eenders 'n Grysstrandkiewiet en Amerikaanse Goue Strandkiewiet in nie-broei-drag vertoon. Mettertyd besef ons ook dat Port Elizabeth sy reputasie as die tweede wonderigste stad in die wêreld verdien het (die wonderigste een het blykbaar weggewaai!). Asof dit nie uitdagend genoeg is om die massas voëls deur te kyk nie, maak die wind dit boonop moeilik om jou verkyker stil te hou.

Ek merk uiteindelik een op wat na 'n goeie kandidaat lyk. Tevergeefs probeer ons hom van nader te beskou, net om te sien hoe hy opvlieg en in die verte verdwyn. Nadat ons Port Elizabeth se wind en weer vir 'n lang tyd getrotseer het, en dit laatmiddag begin raak, besluit ons maar om die stryd gewonne te gee. Terwyl ons regmaak om te vertrek, daag daar egter 'n plaaslike voëlkyker op. Hy was

goed toegerus met 'n kamera met 'n 800 mm lens. Die vriendelike kêrel vertel ook dat hy die strand al vir die afgelope paar dae lank fynkamp vir die voël, maar sonder sukses. Hy onderneem egter om my dadelik te skakel indien hy die Amerikaanse Goue Strandkiewiet gewaar. Ons was skaars terug by die hotel, toe ek 'n oproep van hierdie man ontvang, waar hy my opgewonde meedeel dat hy die voël in sig het. Ons lê die afstand terug na Cape Recife in rekordtyd af. Daar aangekom, word ons deur die teleurgestelde man vertel dat daar intussen mense opgedaag het wat 'n gerehabiliteerde pikkewyn vrygelaat het, en in die proses die

Amerikaanse Goue Strandkiewiet verjaag het. Ons skandeer egter weer die hele strand terwyl die fotograaf foto's van elke moontlike kandidaat vir 'n Amerikaanse Goue Strandkiewiet neem. Terwyl ons die foto's van die een bekyk terwyl hy sy vlerke lig, sien ons duidelik dat hy effekleurige grys ondervlerke vertoon, wat die Amerikaanse Goue Strandkiewiet van die Grys Strandkiewiet onderskei!

Terwyl ons koud, nat en windverwaaid na die hotel terugkeer, wonder ek wat my vrou Helen van die hele voëlsoek episode dink. Haar opmerking was egter "Sjoe, dit was opwindend"! 🐦

## Die vreugde van ons tuinvoëls

### Elke Geggus

Ons bly al 26 jaar in Moreletapark. Ons tuin is redelik groot en oor die jare het dit verander van 'n tuin met jong bome en mooi roosplante na 'n tuin met redelik baie skaduwee, en net hier en daar 'n roosplant. Hoe meer ek in voëls belang gestel het, hoe meer inheems het ek probeer plant! Dit het nie altyd gewerk nie, want 'n Kruisbessie (*Grewia occidentalis*) wat 'n mens moet snoei, lyk nie so mooi nie! Maar ons het 'n pragtige Wildefuchsia (*Halleria lucida*) en baie mooi Kaapse Kanferfoelie (*Tecomaria capensis*), Wilde dagga (*Leonotis leonurus*) en Kraanvoëlblomme (*Strelitzia reginae*). Teen die grensmure staan talle uitheemse struik, maar aan die weste kant rank 'n Trots-van-DeKaap (*Bauhinia galpinii*) oor al die struik en vorm 'n mooi woud effek. Om dit meer aanloklik vir die voëls te maak, het ons baie water in die tuin. Daar is twee dammetjies en vyf gewone waterbakke. Nadat die Hadedas en Hamerkop al die goudvissies opgevrete het, het ons nou net inheemse Tilapias in die dammetjies.

Ek voer die voëls met vrugte, broodkrummels, en mielies op die grasperk, en fyn saadjies in 'n houër wat in 'n boom hang, as ook vleis-saagsels van die slagter. Die saagsels sit ek in 'n bak wat voor ons kombuisvenster hang! Oor

die jare het hierdie stelsels vir mooi voëlstories gesorg! Die een oor die Grysneushoringvoëls is vir my op die oomblik die mooiste.

### Die Grysneushoringvoëls

Die laaste twee jaar het twee Grysneushoringvoëls hulle opwagting in ons omgewing gemaak en ook later die saagsels by die kombuis 'ontdek'. Die wyfie en mannetjie het gereeld elke oggend 'n draai kom maak, 'n paar happies saagsels kom vreet en toe in ons en ander tuine gaan kos soek. In Oktober 2010 het die wyfie verdwyn en die mannetjie het gereeld met saagsels weggevlug na 'n groot boom redelik ver van ons. Dit was 'n senuter-gende tyd vir ons want in 'n voorstad kan so 'n mooi neushoringvoël gou iets oorkom en dan sit die wyfie toegemessel in haar nes, sonder kos. Maar die mannetjie het getrou kos in die oggende kom haal. Een middag daag hy toe onverwags op en kyk met 'n oop bek na my waar ek in die kombuis besig was. Die boodskap was duidelik, 'ek soek kos'! Die saagsels was nog gevries vir die volgende oggend, en toe het ek probeer uitvind wat hy nog sou wou eet. Na 'n rukkie was daar 'n hele spyskaart op die vensterbank en hy het nog steeds oopbek na my gestaan en kyk. Daar was gerasperde

kaas, ham, droë katkos en sagte katkos en hy het nog steeds net vir my gekyk. Rudi, my man, het toe besluit om die gevriesde saagsels met sy elektriese saag by te dam. Die gemors wat dit veroorsaak het kan 'n mens amper nie beskryf nie. Maar Neushoringvoël het sy happie saagsels gekry en hy is gelukkig daar weg!

Tot ons groot vreugde het die wyfie toe in Desember weer haar opwagting gemaak en so pragtig gelyk in haar splinternuwe verekleed. Kort voor lank het drie jonges hul by hulle ouers aangesluit. Gedurende die jaar het hulle nie so gereeld gekom nie en later ook sonder die jonges. Maar in Oktober verlede jaar was hulle weer gereeld elke oggend daar en om dinge meer spannend te maak, was daar 'n nuwe paartjie wat ook sy opwagting gemaak het. Die weke het verbygegaan, en die wyfie het nog steeds nie gaan broei nie. Maar teen die einde van Desember het sy toe weer

verdwyn. In die weke daarna het die mannetjie al hoe meer gehawend begin lyk, sy stertvere het uitgeval en die voël wat altyd so netjies geklee was, se vere was nou heeltemal deurmekaar. Ek het gewonder of hy ook in 'n stryd met die ander Grysneushoringvoël gewikkel was vir dominansie in sy gebied. Hy was ook eenkeer vir meer as 'n week weg. In die tyd het die ander paartjie ook verdwyn. Maar toe 'ons' mannetjie teruggekom het, was hy weer pure voël, met stertvere wat besig was om te groei en 'n mooi netjiese verekleed! In Februarie het die wyfie ook weer teruggekeer, en ons kon weer asemhaal. Twee jonges, duidelik uitkenbaar aan hulle dun nekke en kleiner snawels sonder die boonste rif, het ook vir ons kom kuier. 'n Week later was daar nog 'n kleiner een, maar al drie was nooit saam nie, so ons kon nie met sekerheid sê dat daar drie jonges was nie.

Nou gaan die jaar weer rustig sy gang (vir die Grysneushoringvoëls), en ons sit en wonder wat aan die einde van die jaar weer met hulle gaan gebeur.

### Voor- en nadele?

Benewens die vreugde wat die voëls in ons tuin verskaf, is daar egter ook een of twee nadele.

Omdat ek die voëls so gereeld voer, is dit natuurlik 'n probleem as ons met vakansie gaan. Op die oomblik is ons gelukkig dat een van ons buurvroue met graagte vir ons instaan. Die ander nadeel, is dat dit wil voorkom dat 'n wanbalans van voëls deur die voer in ons tuin geskep word. Daar is so baie klein voëltjies, mossies, vinke en tiptolle, dat baie van die groter voëls soos die waterfiskale, spreesus en lysters nie meer so gereeld na die voerplekke kom nie. Maar wie kan nou "Nee" sê vir 'n oulike Gewone Mossie? Die Janfrederik hou glad nie van die baie voëls nie en het na die grensmure van ons tuin uitgewyk. Dit is die Janfrederik wat ek oorspronklik met 'n bietjie ekstra kos wou bederf! Maar al hierdie voëls verskaf vir ons groot vreugde. Hulle is die hele dag besig en die baie waterbakke word gereeld besoek. Dit is inderdaad die moeite werd om voëls in jou tuin welkom te laat voel – hulle vra min, en gee volop terug. 🐦



Elle Ceguis

*Grysneushoringvoël wyfie*



Elle Ceguis

*Ons tuin*



# The Shannon Diversity Index, Rietvlei NR and Speckled Pigeons

Roger Fieldwick

## Introduction

Shortly before last Christmas, I was looking at the coverage maps on the SABAP2 website <http://sabaps.adu.org.za/>, in particular the two maps at the foot of the menu: *Species Richness and Species Diversity*.

The Species Richness map was easy to understand, it is the number of species recorded in each pentad, divided into seven differently coloured categories for plotting purposes. Although quite useful, it is very dependent upon birding effort. (A cynical view is that this map shows where birders live and take their holidays.) Its other shortcoming is that it takes no account of the commonness of the different component species in the list.

The Species Diversity map was less clear to me. It was an index of some kind, with a range of <4,293 to >4,855, divided into differently coloured sextiles for plotting. It seems that the index has been calculated only for pentads that have been atlased a certain minimum number of times (possibly four times).

I wrote to Les Underhill at the ADU asking for further information about the species diversity index used in their map. He replied that this index shows how diverse the community of species in a grid cell is, in a way that does not depend on the number of checklists. The ADU claims that the calculations become reasonably good once a pentad has four checklists and fairly stable from about seven checklists onwards, thus doing away with the need for a large number of lists. He went on to say that the species richness map is a simple count of the number of species, and includes all the vagrants that occur as the number of checklists gets larger and larger. For some purposes this is the measure one needs, but mostly, one requires a measure that is not

distorted by the vagrant species, which have very low reporting rates.

Les ended by saying that the species diversity index method was derived from information theory, a lot of which is readily obtainable by googling *diversity indices*. The ADU's application of the diversity index is non-standard.

I enjoy a bit of science in my atlasing, so I googled!

## Species diversity

The diversity of species within an ecosystem is used by biologists as a gauge of the health of that ecosystem: the greater the number of species, the healthier the system. Ecosystems that are under stress through poor management, changing agricultural practices, development and so on will usually lose species. Often, rare species will disappear and the common species will become more common.

Several diversity indices have been developed over the years but the index most widely used by biologists is probably the Shannon Diversity Index. (If a veil descends across your eyes whenever anything mathematical is described, skip the next couple of paragraphs.)

$$\begin{aligned}n_i &= \text{the number of individuals of species } i \\N &= \text{total number of individuals of all species} \\p_i &= \text{relative abundance of species } i \\S &= \text{total number of species} \\H &= \text{the Shannon Diversity Index} \\p_i &= n_i / N \\H &= - \sum_{i=1}^S p_i (\ln(p_i))\end{aligned}$$

In words, the proportion of species  $i$  relative to the number of species ( $p_i$ ) is calculated

and then multiplied by the natural logarithm of this proportion ( $\ln(p_i)$ ). The resulting product is summed across species and multiplied by -1 to make the index positive. Although this may sound complicated, it is quite easy to carry out these calculations in a spreadsheet.

The value of the Shannon Diversity Index  $H$  is usually found to fall between 1,5 and 3,5 and only rarely surpasses 4,5. The Index is higher with increasing number of species; is maximised when the numbers of each species are equal (which rarely happens in real life); is lower when the numbers of one or more species are much higher than the rest.

The prerequisite to using this index is that the number of individuals of each species must be counted. The SABAP2 protocol does not require that we count the numbers of birds. However, over the years, Pat Tattersall and I have recorded the number of birds of each species whilst atlasing.

I guess that Diversity Indices are first year topics for biological and ecological students but to me, a civil engineer in a previous life, this was a completely new field. I decided to investigate this subject further.

### Rietvlei Dam NR

This well-known and popular municipal reserve lies south of Pretoria, within pentad 2550\_2815. It has been well-birded since the start of SABAP2 and has a large bird species list – 317 lists and 300 species at the time of writing. The terrain is mainly rolling grassland, with patches of woodland. There are two large dams within the reserve that are well-populated with water birds. The reserve is carefully managed and, from the variety of flowering plants in the grasslands, it has a diverse plant life.

Since 2004, Pat and I have atlased Rietvlei on 25 occasions and these lists became the dataset.

My first task was to calculate the Shannon Index  $H$  for each list. The results were very scattered, ranging from 1,0 to 3,8. I looked for the cause of this large variation.

### Speckled Pigeons

One of the features of Rietvlei Dam NR is that it lies on a flyway of Speckled Pigeons between their roosts in Pretoria, or further north, and their feeding grounds to the south of Rietvlei. In the morning, the flocks fly southwards, returning northwards from midday onwards. Large flocks start appearing in April and continue to the end of October. These flocks are irregular, depending on the suitability of the feeding grounds (whether the mealies have been harvested, the grasslands have been burnt, the fields have been ploughed, for example).

On 24 August last year, we recorded 1600 Speckled Pigeons in two hours, flying southwards over Rietvlei NR. The numbers were so great that we found it difficult to atlas the other bird species adequately so we stopped counting the pigeons at 08:30. It was this visit that yielded the low value of the Shannon Index  $H$  of 1,0. A plot of  $H$  against the observed number of Speckled Pigeons (not illustrated) showed that the greater the number of pigeons, the lower the value of  $H$ .

We have irregularly recorded only small numbers of Speckled Pigeons actually in the Reserve, perched in trees or foraging on the ground. One can argue that Speckled Pigeons contribute little or nothing to the species diversity of the reserve, they are just flying over. As a consequence, all observations of Speckled Pigeons were removed from the dataset,  $H$  was recomputed for each list, resulting in values that were much more even, ranging from 2,9 to 3,8.

### Further results

The recomputed Diversity Index  $H$  was plotted against month and is shown in Figure 1. There is considerable scatter but  $H$  has a small value in the winter months of July and August. Intuitively, this seems logical, summer migrants are absent and many grassland birds are out of breeding plumage and are not calling, resulting in smaller species totals.

In autumn (April and May) and in spring (October), the value of  $H$  attains its peak values with the departure and arrival of summer migrants. In mid-summer the Index falls and this may possibly be the result of the presence of large numbers of Barn Swallows roosting and feeding in the reserve, but this has not been tested.

So far, we have calculated  $H$  for individual lists only. The next step was to calculate  $H$  for the combined first and second lists (with Speckled Pigeons removed). The third list was then added and  $H$  recomputed. This was repeated until all 25 lists were combined. The value of  $H$  was plotted against the number of combined lists and is shown in Figure 2.

The first list's  $H$  had a value of 3,3, which climbed rapidly to 3,8 after four lists. It became stable at 4,1 after nine lists, confirming that Rietvlei NR supports a high diversity of birds.

Indexes in general are an attempt to represent a large amount of data by a single number and they often have shortcomings. In the case of applying the Shannon Diversity Index to birds, it seems counter-intuitive that by removing a species from the list (in this case Speckled Pigeons) a marked increase in the Diversity Index can be achieved. Likewise, if I record a flock of 500 Red-billed Queleas in a pentad, I know that this will cause the Diversity Index to fall.

This Index does not satisfactorily handle birds that form large flocks.

### The Diversity Index used in SABAP2

In subsequent correspondence with Les Underhill about the Index used by the ADU, the following emerged.

In the original Shannon Diversity Index,  $p_i$  (the relative abundance of species  $i$ ) =  $n_i / N$  where:

- $n_i$  = the number of individuals of species  $i$
- $N$  = total number of individuals of all species.

Because the SABAP2 protocol does not record either  $n_i$  or  $N$ , the ADU has redefined  $n_i$  and  $N$  as:

- $n_i$  = the number of records of species  $i$
- $N$  = total number of records of all species.

This simple modification was found to work satisfactorily and the ADU is now able to compute the Diversity Index of a pentad by using the numbers of records instead of the numbers of birds. To do this, a minimum of four lists per pentad are required, seven are better and 11 lists are better still. The other great advantage of this modification is that it solves the problems of dealing with birds that form large flocks.

Figure 1

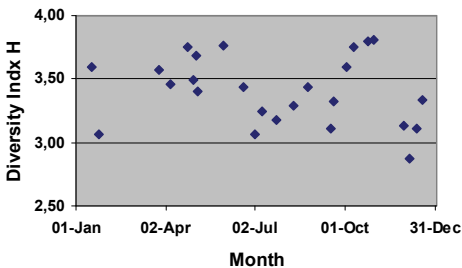
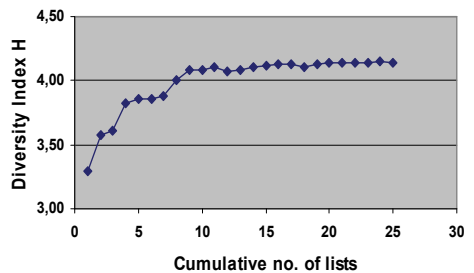


Figure 2



# The Egyptian Invasion!

Elke Geggus

One Saturday morning early in December 2011, we experienced our own 'Egyptian Invasion'. Two adult Egyptian geese and 6 goslings came walking down our street. After much consultation with the neighbours the visitors were shooed into the only dog-less garden to keep them safe.

But about one hour later all 8 of them appeared in our back garden. How they got past the dogs we were looking after for our grandchildren, is a mystery. The geese did not look happy, so I locked up the dogs to allow the geese to settle down and use the swimming pool.

We estimated that the little goslings were only about 3 weeks old. They all looked exhausted and especially one little one just slept and slept on the edge of the pool while the parents kept guard, talking softly to their tired youngsters.

My husband, Rudi, made a ramp for the goslings so that they could get out of the pool. The clever little birds got the hang of it in no time at all. They all enjoyed the mealies and drinking water we provided as refreshments. Every time we came into the garden the goslings jumped into the pool. They could already



Elke Geggus

dive perfectly and always came up bone dry.

At 4 pm it became very quiet and when we looked our Egyptian visitors were gone. We did catch another glimpse of them after 6 pm when they marched out of our neighbour's garden. All we could see were two long necks and 6 little dots disappearing into the sunset at an incredible speed. Rudi, said it was like a fairy tale (all that remained was a lonely feather in the pool), almost unbelievable, but exciting and fun while it lasted. 🦢

## Indiese spreus maak nes in die Krugerwildtuin

Banie Penzhorn

Ek was altyd onder die indruk dat Indiese spreus (Common Mynas) net in stede, dorpe of ander blyplekke van mense voorkom. Dit lyk my nou dat dit 'n wanindruk was. Ons was in November 2011 in Onder-Sabie in die Krugerwildtuin. By die bekende 'Sunset Dam', net wes van die kamp, was daar soos gewoonlik heelwat bedrywigheid. Ek was verbaas om 'n Indiese Spreeu paar op te merk, wat opsigtelik nesmateriaal aandra na een van die

Buffelwewerneste in 'n groot dooie boom. Hulle was dus nie net besoekers nie, maar was besig om hulle in te burger. Ek het nooit voorheen Indiese Spreus in die Krugerwildtuin opgemerk nie. Hoe wyd is hulle versprei?

*[The SABAP2 project has indeed shown an unwelcome range expansion of this species Banie, and this has included records in a few localities in the KNP unfortunately] 🦢*

# Vleiloeries en slakke

*Elke Geggus*

**V**andat die plante en bome in ons tuin groter geword het, het die Vleiloerie nou en dan ons tuin kom besoek. 'n Paar jaar terug het hulle ook êrens in die tuin 'n nes gebou. Dit was lekker om al twee dop te hou terwyl hulle meesal in die oggende nesmateriaal aangedra het. Tussen in het hulle baie keer hoog in die bome gesit en ons met hulle borrelende geluide vermaak. Ek weet nie of hulle suksesvol was met hulle broeipoging nie, want ek het nooit kleintjies gesien nie. Maar in ander jare het hulle wel 'n jong voël na ons tuin gebring, kos gesoek en weer aanbeweeg.

Verlede jaar het die een Vleiloerie redelik mak geword en ook saagsels by die kombuisvenster kom haal. Sy het dan in 'n boom naby die venster gesit en wag tot ek vir haar 'n happie gegooi het. Dan het sy die happie gevat en met haar rug en stert teenaan 'n muur beweeg, en so met haar bek na al die ander voëls, klein stukies saagsels van haar happie afgebyt en gevreet! Elke nou en dan het sy nie gereageer wanneer ek vir haar kos gegooi het nie, en ek het gewonder hoekom sy die môre so dom was. Eers later het ek besef dat dit wel verskillende Vleiloeries was, die wyfie en die mannetjie! Hulle het weer gebroei, maar nie in ons tuin nie. Hulle het wel later 'n baie jong voël na ons tuin gebring. Die jong voël het die hele dag in ons struik weggekruip en net deur sy aanhoudende geroep het ons geweet dat hy nog daar was.

Die ouers het baie slakke vir die kleintjie gebring. Die volgende dag was die kleintjie en haar ouers weg, maar 'n week later was die drie van hulle weer daar, en ek het selfs gesien hoe die jong Vleiloerie in die een dammetjie, ver van die huis af, gebad het! Ek het al lankal gewonder

wie my daglelies so verwoes en toe ook gesien hoe die Vleiloerie sommer bo op die plante spring en binne in na slakke soek!

## Waar is al die slakke?

Drie jaar gelede was ons tuin in die aande na 'n goeie lui reën oortrek van slakke, dan kon ek nêrens loop sonder om op hulle te trap nie. Maar in die oggende het die leë slakdoppe al langs die beddings gelê, en ek het geweet die Vleiloeries of die Kuifkophoutkappers was weer van baie vroeg af besig om slakke te vreet! Ek het egter geleidelik agtergekom dat die slakke verdwyn, en nou sien ek hulle glad nie meer nie. Dit is 'n probleem want die slakke was 'n groot deel van die voedselketting in ons tuin. Die Kuifkophoutkapper wat nie van saagsels hou nie, is byvoorbeeld baie lief vir slakke. Wat met die slakke gebeur het, weet ons nie, want ons gebruik geen gif in die tuin nie. Miskien was die Vleiloeries te deeglik en het die slakke uitgeroei? Ons veearts het vir my 'n klompie slakke belowe, want ek dink sonder hulle sal die Vleiloeries en Kuifkophoutkappers minder in ons tuin kom kuier.

## Die skadukant

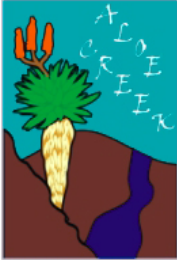
Die Vleiloerie het nie net vreugde na ons tuin gebring nie, want ons en die arme ouers van Janfrederik kuikens moes hulpeloos toekyk hoe die Vleiloerie die klein voëltjies verskeur het! Die aanhoudende harde gewaarsku van die Janfrederik het my laat besef dat daar fout was, maar ek moes maar die natuur sy gang laat gaan! Die Vleiloerie sou tog later weer terug gekom het om die jong voëltjie op te vreet! 🐌

## Air miles

The world's longest migratory journey is undertaken by the Arctic Tern, from its sub-Arctic breeding grounds to and from the Antarctic, an annual round trip of up to 35 000 km. During its lifetime, a single bird may travel more than 800 000 km, more than any other species. As a result the Arctic Tern experiences more daylight than any other living creature.

# Aloe Creek

Pristine Gauteng Bushveld, Birding and Fishing



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A high clearance vehicle is recommended for the latter part of the road to the venue.

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## Rarities and Unusual Sightings Report: 31 March 2011

Compiled by André Marx

A number of interesting records emerged during the peak summer months, when many unusual sightings are made with all the migrants here and with conditions changing locally in response to rainfall. Marievale produced no less than three crakes in one week, Baillon's, African and Spotted, and it was interesting to note that it was the heightened interest that led to many more birders visiting the locality that in turn led to more rarities being found! The African Skimmer at De Pan near Carletonville was the top rarity in the period, however the bird only stayed for one day and could not be located again, disappointing a number of people; but there will probably be another again, they seem to pop up every 15 to 20 years!

### National Rarities / Nasionale Rareiteite

#### Western Marsh-Harrier. Europese Vleivalk:

one bird was observed at Marievale by a number of birders on this day, 07 Jan 2012 (DN,Gbird).

**Spotted Crake. Gevlekte Riethaan:** one bird was flushed at Marievale, 15 Jan 2012 (NP).

**African Skimmer. Waterploëër:** a single bird was a surprise find at De Pan near Carletonville during a CWAC count at this venue, the bird only remaining the one day when a number of local birders still managed to see it, 14 Jan 2012 (KvD). *This was the first record in the*

greater Gauteng region since the long-staying bird at Roodekoppies Dam north of Brits which remained at that locality for several months during the year 2000.

**River Warbler. Sprinkaansanger:** one bird was at Bishop Bird Park in pentad 2550\_2805, 5 Mar 2012 (EM).

### Regional Rarities / Streeksrariteite

**Lappet-faced Vulture. Swartaasvoël:** a single bird has been present at the vulture restaurant at Skeerpoort in the Magaliesberg for several weeks, 29 Mar 2012 (JW).

**European Honey-Buzzard. Wespedief:** one bird was observed at Barbecue Downs, near Kyalami, 08 Jan 2012 (RS); one bird was photographed in a Wierda Park, Centurion, garden where it was seen over a number of days, 09 Jan 2012 (EM); another bird was seen on the De Tweedespruit road east of Pretoria, 18 Feb 2012 (ST); one bird was seen near Lindequesdrift on the Vaal River in extreme south-eastern Gauteng, 11 Mar 2012 (EM, JA).

**Pallid Harrier. Witborsvleivalk:** a male bird was recorded in pentad 2550\_2830 east of Pretoria, 12 Feb 2012 (RF&PT).

**African Crake. Afrikaanse Riethaan:** one bird was flushed near the gate to the main entrance at Marievale NR, 03 Jan 2012 (DN); two birds were at Delta Park, Johannesburg, these sightings representing the first at this locality in 18 years, 08 Jan 2012 (GLd).

**Corncrake. Kwartelkoning:** one bird was at Buffelsdrift, north-easting of Pretoria where it remained for a few weeks and was seen by a number of people, 25 Mar 2012 (RG).

**Terek Sandpiper. Terekrutter:** one bird was photographed at De Pan near Carletonville on the day that several birders gathered there to see the African Skimmer, 14 Jan 2012 (YO).

**Collared Pratincole. Rooivlerksprinkaansvoël:** one bird was photographed at Vaalkop Dam, 26 Dec 2011 (JJR). *This is probably another record of a bird wandering into the region, however this remains a very rare bird locally.*

**Pale-crowned Cisticola. Bleekkopkloppie:** this species was confirmed as being

present at Marievale by several birders at Marievale, 12 Jan 2012 (DN, Gbird).

### Other Interesting Observations / Ander Interessante Waarnemings

**White Stork. Witooievaar:** a record of one bird at Delta Park, Johannesburg is unusual for the locality, 21 Jan 2012 (GLd).

**Abdim's Stork. Kleinswartooievaar:** a few birds were present again on the sport fields at the Pretoria Boys High School, 07 Feb 2012 (DD); a group of 20 birds were seen flying over the Eagle Canyon area near Honeydew, 6 Mar 2012 (JI).

**Martial Eagle. Breëkoparend:** a sighting of one bird east of Cullinan is good for the area, as this is a species that is becoming increasingly rare in the region, 11 Mar 2012 (E&NR).

**Brown Snake-Eagle. Bruinslangarend:** a bird recorded on one of the pylons at Leeukop Prison in northern Johannesburg is very unusual for the location, 02 Jan 2012 (RS).

**African Cuckoo Hawk. Koekoekvalk:** a pair of birds was at Northern Farm, 18 Mar 2012 (RS).

**Long-crested Eagle. Langkuifarend:** one bird was seen in the vicinity of Barbecue Downs in the Kyalami area, 28 Jan 2012 (RS); the nest of this species with a large chick present was discovered at Northern Farm, north-west of Johannesburg, 29 Jan 2012 (RS). *The chick subsequently fledged and was still being seen in the company of the adult birds in April.*



Dave Deighton

Abdim's Stork (Kleinswartooievaar) at Pretoria Boys High School



Martial Eagle  
(Breëkoparend)

Drimie van Rensburg

**African Harrier-Hawk. Kaalwangvalk:** one bird was seen in Queenswood, Pretoria, 02 Jan 2012 (AA); a pair of birds were seen in Equestria, eastern Pretoria, 28 Feb 2012 (A&AH).

**Eurasian Hobby. Europese Boomvalk:** two birds, an adult and sub-adult bird were observed in scope detail at Barbecue Downs in the Kyalami area, 28 Jan 2012 (RS).

**Baillon's Crake. Kleinriethaan:** one bird was photographed at Marievale NR, 04 Jan 2012 (DN). *Over a two week period following the initial sighting up to 3 birds were reported at times by many different observers.*

**Red-chested Flufftail. Rooiborsvleikuiken:** a record of one bird calling from a reedbed at Delta Park, Johannesburg, is a first record at this locality in 20 years, 09 Jan 2012 (GLd).

**Bronze-winged Courser. Bronsvlerk-drawwertjie:** one bird was seen during a ringing outing at Tswaing Crater north of Pretoria, 22 Jan 2012 (LH).

**Black-winged Pratincole. Swartvlerk-sprinkaanvoël:** during the CWAC count at Groenfontein Pan near Bronkhorstspruit a total of 295 birds were counted, the highest number recorded at the locality, 4 Feb 2012 (AM, BLNG).

**Levaillant's Cuckoo. Gestreepte Nuwejaarsvoël:** this species is at the southern edge of its range in northern Johannesburg; two

birds were at Golden Harvest Park, 09 Jan 2012 (NP).

**Grey-headed Kingfisher. Grys-kopvisvanger:** one bird was at Roodeplaat Dam near Pretoria where it stayed for a few weeks and was reported on a couple of occasions, 25 Feb 2012 (MS).

**African Pygmy-Kingfisher. Dwergvisvanger:** one bird was seen to be taking a dip in a swimming pool in Risidale, in the Northcliff area in Johannesburg, an unusual bird for the city, 2 Mar 2012 (PS).

**Violet Turaco:** another record of one bird (an exotic species) has come from the eastern suburbs of Pretoria when it was seen from at least late January to 14 Feb 2012 (JVT).

**Dusky Lark. Donkerlewerik:** one bird was found in pentad 2525\_2830 during an atlasing outing north of Pretoria, 14 Jan 2012 (E&NR).

**Cuckoo Finch. Koekoekvink:** at least one bird, a male, was at the John Nash private reserve in pentad 2550\_2745, 25 Feb 2012 (AM, JB).

**Purple Indigobird. Witpootblouinkie:** a record of a male in breeding plumage at Northern Farm north of Johannesburg is a first at that locality and an unusual bird for the area, 20 Feb 2012 (JB, RS).

**Lark-like Bunting. Vaalstreepkoppie:** a group of birds was on the Zaagkuil drift road north of Pretoria, 25 Mar 2012 (Lvd).

### Observers / Waarnemers:

Amanda & Adrian Hagggett-Haagner (A&AH)  
 André Marx (AM)  
 Anton Ackermann (AA)  
 BirdLife Northern Gauteng (BLNG)  
 Dave Deighton (DD)  
 Doug Newman (DN)  
 Ernst & Natasja Retief (E&NR)  
 Etienne Marais (EM)  
 Gauteng birders (Gbird)  
 Geoff Lockwood (GLd)  
 Jane Irvine (JI)  
 Jerome Ainsley (JA)  
 Johan Janse van Rensburg (JJR)  
 Johan Verloren van Themaat (JVT)  
 John Bannon (JB)



John Wesson (JW)  
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Louis Heyns (LH)  
Mariana Steyn (MS)  
Niall Perrins (NP)  
Peter Sharland (PS)  
Rob Geddes (RG)  
Roger Fieldwick & Pat Tattersall (RF&PT)  
Ron Searle (RS)  
Stephan Terblanche (ST)  
Yolande Oelsen (YO)

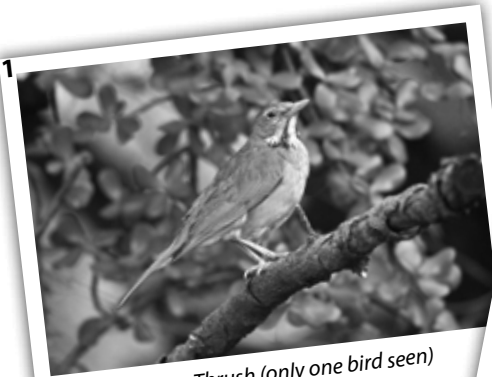
*This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made within a 100km radius of Gauteng, however observations made further afield are also welcome. While the majority of reports are included it is sometimes necessary to exclude some depending on whether the subject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

## **PHOTO SPOT:** **Woodland Kingfisher vs. Kurrichane Thrush**

*Paddy Bell*

**P**addy Bell was able to photograph the interaction between a pair of Woodland Kingfishers and a Kurrichane Thrush in his garden at Sandalwod Lodge, north-east of Pretoria.

The kingfishers were breeding in a nesting box and reacted very aggressively when a Kurrichane Thrush was feeding its nestlings nearby. The following photos tell the story.



**1**  
The Kurrichane Thrush (only one bird seen) had a nest in the garden and was feeding nestlings.



**2**  
A pair of Woodland Kingfishers had established a territory nearby and had occupied a nesting box that had been erected in the garden.

3



The kingfishers attacked the thrush and in the process the nest was thrown onto the ground.

6



Tragically the Woodland Kingfishers were determined to have their way and the chick was eventually killed.

4



Then it was noticed that there was still one nestling underneath the nest. The nest was placed at the base of a tree to try to conceal it from the kingfishers; whilst this was happening the thrush approached to within a few metres as if to say "that's my chick!"

7



Throughout this process the Kurrichane Thrush remained vigilant but could not intervene against the kingfishers, which are much stronger birds.

5



The Kurrichane Thrush continued to feed the chick despite repeated attempts by the Woodland Kingfishers to destroy the nest and its contents. The chick seen in the nest begging for food from the attentive parent.

8



The Woodland Kingfishers at their nesting box. Perhaps they just did not want any other bird breeding in their territory?

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