



Laniarius

No. 123
Summer 2013

Celebrating 60 Years of Birding



BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord



Newsletter of BirdLife Northern Gauteng Nuusbriëf van BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

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

Bank account: BirdLife Northern Gauteng/Gauteng-Noord,
Nedbank, Hatfield.
Branch code: 160245
Account number: 1634010531

Committee 2012 Komitee

President

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

Chairperson – Voorsitter

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

Secretary – Sekretaresse

Rita de Meillon; 012 807-4002/ 083 391-2327; secretary@blng.co.za

Honorary Treasurer – Tesourier

Hanlie Bedford; 082 488-1731; hanlieb@vodamail.co.za

PR and Website – Skakelbeampste en Webtuiste

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

Conservation – Bewaring

Rion Lerm; 076 913-8381; austringerever@yahoo.co.uk

Programme and Activities – Program en Aktiwiteite

Wanda Louwrens; 083 632-3846; louwrlj@mweb.co.za

Sub-committee: Susan Velthuysen, Tana Coetzer, Frans van Vuuren, Rob Geddes,

Amanda Haggett-Haagner,

Frik du Plooy, Jason Boyce, Lynn Fraser, Jeanette Heuseveldt

Evening Meeting arrangements: Wanda Louwrens, Delien Vosloo, Jeanette Heuseveldt

Bird Ringing – Voëlberinging

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

Laniarius Editor – Redakteur

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

Sub-committee: Ingrid van Heerden, Faansie Peacock, Roger Fieldwick, Drinie van Rensburg (design & layout)

Young Birders – Jong Voëlkykers

Jason Boyce; 082 585-2252; jasonkyleboyce@gmail.com

Other Portfolio Holders

SABAP2 Atlas Co-ordinator – Atlaskoördineerder

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

Trading, Bookshop – Verkope, Boekwinkel

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

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 advertise-

ments 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 redak-

teur gestuur word, maar kan ook na die klub-

adres gepos word. Aanvaarding van bydraes en

advertensies word aan die diskresie van die redak-

teur oorgelaat. Digitale foto's is altyd welkom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial/Redaksioneel	2
Chairman's Report/Voorsittersverslag	3
Club news	4
Birding by ear.....	5
The evolution of birds and feathers.....	8
Personal names commemorated in the common names of southern African bird species – Part 6	9
Die Pyn en Plesier van Ringsessies: Botaniese Tuine en Southdowns	11
Ringersnuus	12
BirdLife Northern Gauteng trip to Okavango, Botswana and Namibia.....	13
Easter Magic.....	17
Weaver colonies in Gauteng.....	22
Wonderboom Urban Verreux's Eagle Project.....	23
Breëbekke, suikerbekkies en horingbekke.....	24
Ndumo Game Reserve.....	28
Alleen deur Botswana	31
Back from Africa	36
Kolganse in Nederland	38
My lucky day	38
Voëlkyk in Siyabuswa	39
A 'not-so-sacred' Ibis	41
Rarities and unusual sightings	42
Erecting an owl box for a pair of Spotted Eagle-Owls.....	44
PHOTO SPOT: Saddle-billed Stork	45
PHOTO SPOT: Ontwikkeling van die Dubbelbanddrawwertjie.....	46
You might be a birder if... ..	48

Credits

Front cover: Cape Teal/ Teeleend by Anton Pretorius; overall winning photo for the 2012 Photographic Competition.

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.



Editorial/ Redaksioneel

How I love the enjoyment of going out birding on a magnificent summer's day. Like many birders I have a few favourite birding spots that I can visit at a moment's notice to check out the local birds. Time and again a surprise will pop up. This summer it was finding a Wailing Cisticola in a nondescript rocky area that has never produced much and hearing Red-chested Flufftail in a small reedbed after speculating about its occurrence and then being able to confirm it is there. Whether you are in your local birding spot or in the vast swathes of bush in the Kruger Park where I am typing this, there are always birds around that will be able to brighten your day. We truly have one of the very best interests that life can provide!

This *Laniarius* edition reaches you after a memorable year during which time the club arranged a number of activities in recognition of reaching the milestone of being at the centre of birding activities in and around the Pretoria area for the last 60 years. I must say, as someone who has only been witness to 29 of those years, I was very impressed with the programme of activities arranged and particularly with the very well staged Gala Dinner – it really was a superb evening. Well done to all and what a magnificent achievement for the club! May we continue to develop the

interest of new birders and be a home to longstanding members whilst playing an important role in all local birding matters, whether that be to provide activities that promote the enjoyment of birding, or through our involvement in the conservation of birds and their habitat.

After editing the last 22 editions I have decided to hand over the reins as editor to someone else, although I will continue to help with the sourcing of material and will write the occasional article and maybe keep producing the rarities report. I have been producing that report for so long now that it almost seems second nature to have to put it together. I really value the contribution made by a great many people over the last five years or so, too many to name here, but it goes without saying that it is the tremendous input by our members that has helped fill the pages of *Laniarius* time and again when I thought that I was not going to get enough material to finish the next edition. I think it will be better to have an editor with more time on his or her hands who can ensure that the newsletter reaches you timeously, something I have struggled with recently.

May I wish everyone a wonderful year filled with good health and happiness and good birding!

André Marx

Chairman's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

Philip Calinikos



What an exciting year 2012 has been! At the last committee meeting of the year we all sat and looked at each other not believing that we were all still alive and kicking. With the bulk of our 60 year celebrations now behind us, we can take some time and reflect on what we have achieved and experienced.

The main event of the year was undoubtedly our Gala Dinner held at the Saint George Hotel in late October. By all accounts, the evening was a great success and a suitable reward for all the effort that went into the planning and preparations; a great team effort! We had some fantastic financial support from our corporate sponsors and I would like to extend a big thank you to them. Our heartfelt thanks also to the Leinberger family for their special support! It was very sad to hear that Jo Leinberger's husband, Mike, eldest son of Pauline, passed away soon after the event and I would like to extend all our sincerest condolences to Jo and her family.

Before and after dinner we were addressed by some well-known figures in our birding community and our thanks go to Mark Anderson, Warwick Tarboton, Alan Kemp and Geoff Lockwood.

Another wonderful gesture on the night was the presentation to the Committee of a lovingly prepared, home baked, celebratory cake complete with our *Laniarius* logo by Ulrich Oberprieler and Anna Ferreira.

The winners of our raffle and photographic competitions were announced on the night and it was wonderful to see what great support we received for both. There were also some lucky draw prize winners for some fortunate attendees. A successful auction was held for a pair of limited edition Minox binoculars and the proceeds are being donated to BirdLife South Africa to be used towards the Secretarybird Project. Henfre Nel of Fotacs, the distributors of Minox binoculars in South Africa, was present to hand over the winning prizes as well as to answer questions about the binoculars on display. Our

donation from the proceeds of the auction will enable BLSA to purchase a tracking device on our behalf and we will have naming rights on the target bird, so you can look forward to another interesting competition next year around a suitable name for "our own Secretarybird".

To add to the excitement of the evening we had three authors talking about their most recent publications; Johan Knobel on the '*Eagles of Africa*', Ulrich Oberprieler on the '*Raptors of Southern Africa*' and Faansie Peacock on the '*Chamberlains LBJs*' book.

Leading up to the Gala Dinner, there were some other really special events to keep us all busy as well. A highly successful trip into Uganda in search of the Shoebill, Green-breasted Pitta, African Green Broadbill, Chimpanzees and of course the Mountain Gorillas was tackled by eight enthusiastic club members under the able leadership of our local guide Johnnie Kamugisha.

Wonderful hospitality and superlative birding was also enjoyed up at Kurisa Moya in the Magoebaskloof thanks to Lisa Martus, David Letsoala and Paul Nkhumane. This proved to be so popular that we have arranged a further trip in February and we are even aiming at a third trip in the second half of the year.

Now it is time to look forward into the New Year and another exciting overseas trip awaits us. We have arranged with Chris Lotz of Birding Ecotours for a special BLNG birding and nature safari to Madagascar for two weeks at the beginning of November! This promises to be something really special so if you are interested please send me a mail as soon as possible.

I wish you a prosperous, healthy and bird-filled New Year.

Yours in Birding

Club news / Klubnuus

BLNG alert e-mail announcements

BLNGalert is 'n belangrike metode wat ons gebruik om met ons lede te kommunikeer. As u hierdie *Laniarius* ontvang het, en nie alert boodskappe per e-pos ontvang nie, stuur asb vir Rita 'n e-pos om haar in staat te stel om u naam op die sisteem by te voeg.

BLNGalert is an important means of communicating with members. If you have received this copy of Laniarius and you have not received the club e-mail alerts, then please mail Rita to let her know and she will arrange to include your e-mail address in the database.

Updating of membership details

Hiermee word 'n beroep gedoen om asb te alle tye veranderinge van adres en e-posse aan Shireen by BLSA te stuur by membership@blsa.org.za. BLSA hanteer die lede-administrasie en as hulle nie die korrekte besonderhede het nie verloor ons ook op klubvlak kontak met ons lede.

This is a request to timeously advise Shireen at BLSA about any change of postal address or e-mail address at membership@blsa.org.za as they handle the membership administration. Without the correct contact details the club loses the ability to communicate with members.

Trading

Here is a message from Ralda Heyns regarding club trading:

Iam still handling BLNG Trading. I have a Facebook page called Ralie's Goodies and the launch of BLNG's Facebook second hand book sales kicked off on Monday, 22 June 2012; you can add me as a friend on Facebook if you want to join. See the club webpage at www.blng.co.za for more.

Soos in die verlede, hanteer ek steeds BLNG Trading. Ek het 'n Facebook bladsy geopen: [Ralie's Goodies](#) om almal se nuus te kan volg en ook om aan julle die nuutste voorraad en spesiale aanbiede hierin bekend te stel. Sien ook die klub se webblad www.blng.co.za

Susan Velthuysen

The club received the very sad news early in January that one of our stalwart members, Susan Velthuysen passed away after a short illness. We would like to take this opportunity of honouring her contribution to our club and especially to our Programme and Activities Sub-committee. On behalf of everyone in the club we extend our sincerest condolences to her family. 🐦

Eggstraordinary!

The largest egg laid by any living bird is that of the Ostrich, whose egg measures an average of 16 cm long and 13 cm in diameter, and weighs about 1.5 kg – roughly 24 times the size of an average hen's egg. The largest egg ever laid was that of the extinct Elephant Bird of Madagascar, whose egg weighed up to 12 kg and measured 38 x 30 cm – about eight times the size of an Ostrich egg. It is also thought by some scientists to have been larger than any dinosaur egg.



Launch of 'Chamberlain's LBJs' by Faansie Peacock

Ingrid van Heerden

On the 21 November 2012, bird lovers, authorities and experts descended on the massive new Silver Lakes branch of Chamberlain's Hardware for the launch of the latest bird book sponsored by the company, namely *Chamberlain's LBJs* by Faansie Peacock.

Since 1903 when Frank Fewster Chamberlain "opened his trading store in Riviera, a village north east of Pretoria", the venerable Chamberlain's Company has for more than a century helped hundreds of thousands of humans build 'nests', and now they are supporting other nest builders in a very tangible way by sponsoring the publication of leading bird books. The beautiful volume that is the culmination of four years of full-time effort and a lifetime of dedication by Faansie to our less flamboyant feathered friends, will fill a vital role in encouraging birders like me (see below), to spend time identifying what has to date been a bewildering array of drab little brown or grey birds.

Birders like me are enchanted by birds that are large, brightly coloured, vociferous and easy to identify. While I have always been in awe of fellow birders who take one look at a dowdy

ball of fluff and pronounce, "Ah, a Kimberley Pipit!" I have never had the nerve to emulate them. Now that Faansie has published this book on LBJs and I have paged through its amazing and detailed, though muted (?) colour plates and have read some of the descriptions, a new world has opened up for me.

This definitive guide to Southern Africa's Little Brown Jobs will make bird identification so much easier and exciting. Anyone who has ever hesitated to identify a bird soaring in the sky when walking through a grassland or has spent ages peering at dust-coloured side-of-the-road birds, will find this book not only useful, but inspiring.

As Faansie says in the preface, the primary aim of the book is simply to help birders with field identification of Southern African LBJs. However, Mark Anderson rightly points out in the foreword, that 235 species of birds in our region are LBJs. Therefore, this new book will aid not only novice birders and experienced twitchers, but also avitourists, scientists, conservationists and BirdLife South Africa in their endeavour to protect our precious birds.



Members of BLNG at the launch of Chamberlain's LBJs by Faansie Peacock.

At the launch, David Chamberlain, Executive Managing Director of Chamberlain's and a driving force in Southern African birding, suitably decked out in birding gear, introduced Faansie and the new book to the appreciative audience. If you have ever been in doubt about an LBJ, then this the book makes essential reading.

As a club, BLNG can be proud of one of our most prolific members. At the age of thirty, Faansie has already authored or co-authored five books, numerous scientific papers and popular articles on birds, who together with Ronél, his wife, are the pivot of his life.

Copies of *'Chamberlain's LBJs'* by Faansie

Peacock will be available to members of BLNG from Ralda Heyns.

For copies, queries & comments, please contact:

Faansie Peacock, Mirafr Publishing, PO Box 39910, Moreleta Park, Pretoria, 0044.

Tel: (+27) 84-515-1207; Fax: (+27) 86-55408867;

Email: info@LBJs.co.za

Web: www.LBJs.co.za

Reference

History of Chamberlain Trading; Accessed on 24/11/2012. 🐦

BirdLife Northern Gauteng Gala Dinner 26 October 2012 Celebrating 60 Years of Birding in the Pretoria Area

Debbie van Zyl

“Let’s go big!” Words I would regret later when the planning of our gala dinner started. The committee started planning superb outings to coincide with the 60 years’ celebrations and we did not want to let the year end without a huge celebration for birders, by birders, with a little extra flair. We were lucky that Philip knew the owner of the Saint George Hotel and after visiting them we decided that would be the perfect venue. The committee met many times in the months leading up to the gala dinner during the planning and the plan was also to hold the awards for the winners of the photographic competition on the same night. Not only did we need to come up with idea for the evening itself, but we need to find sponsors and encourage our members to enter the competition with their excellent photos.

We really worked well together as a team and this ensured the evening turned into a great success. Many ideas for speakers were considered in order to cover the club’s past and recent history while keeping it entertaining. It was also apparent that new books were being launched around the time of the gala dinner and this provided us with an opportunity to

showcase the new books for the benefit of our members on the evening. Philip put a tremendous amount effort in arranging the sponsorship for the evening. A number of tables were sponsored; there were prizes for the photographic competition, lucky draw giveaways, as well as an auction that was held at the end of the evening to raise money for the BLSA Secretary Bird project.

Somehow the team managed to get everything done on time! Some of the matters that had to be finalised in time included: Spouses were roped into last minute table decorating and technical assistance; midnight deliveries of memory sticks containing competition entries; flowers and helium balloon-blowers arranged; hundreds of books covered with silver paper; many phone calls and trips to the printer for programmes and raffle tickets; winners’ certificates designed and printed; payments to suppliers; collection of prizes and deliveries of boxes containing suet bird feeders especially designed for the club; many metres of ribbons tied to prizes and giveaways; internet searches for poems and design ideas; ensuring the DJ had directions to the venue; a Saturday



morning trip to China Mall in the south of Joburg to look for decorating ideas, and multiple trips to Flower Spot for candles, confetti and motive holders. And so the list goes on...

A really big thank you to everyone involved in making the event a big success. Special thanks for Ulrich and Anna for the delicious cake they presented to the

committee at the end of the evening!

[Everyone in the club is very grateful for what you and all those on your committee achieved Debbie! It was a memorable evening and in the words of Mark Anderson, CEO of BirdLife SA, we certainly raised the bar regarding the organisation of club celebratory events – Ed.] 🐦

BirdLife Northern Gauteng Corporate Gala Dinner Sponsors



New Members / Nuwe Lede

Ons verwelkom die volgende nuwe lede en hoop dat julle gou tuis sal voel by ons. Ons sien uit daarna om julle by ons uitstappies en aandvergaderings te leer ken.

A warm welcome to all our new members. We trust you will enjoy your birding with us and look forward to seeing you at our evening meetings, day outings or weekend camps.

Jean Kimble, Glenstantia; Louise and Christo Kalmer, Honeydew; Simon Lessing, Pretoria-Noord; Thor Erik Maeder, Brooklyn; Magdaleen Bertolani, Faerie Glen; Marna Buys, Wonderboom; Kobus Reyneke, Waterkloof; Bodo Haar, Silverton; Michiel Basson, The Reeds; Clem Coleman, Centurion; Gerald & Sybil Hazelhurst, Erasmuskloof; Philippa Meldrum, Faerie Glen; nEleen Strydom, Weavind Park; Bernice Fletcher, Wierda Park; Serah de Klerk, Montana Park; Mellissa Kriek, Annlin; Annali Swanepoel, Menlo Park

Personal names commemorated in the common names of southern African bird species – Part 10

John Bannon

This is the penultimate article in this series, which has detailed the colourful and sometimes surprising lives of the characters and the circumstances, by which the common names of several southern African bird species have come to be named.

SABINE – Sabine's Gull, *Larus sabini* (J Sabine 1819)

General, Sir Edward Sabine (1788-1883) combined a 70 years military career in the Royal Artillery with exploration of the Arctic and significant achievements in physical and natural sciences, particularly with relevance to the earth's magnetic field and the quest to discover a reliable method of determining longitude. Born in Dublin of a prominent Anglo-Irish family, he later founded the oldest scientific institution in Canada, the Toronto Observatory and also has a crater on the moon named after him.

His brother Joseph actually found the bird, naming it after his younger sibling, when they were both members of Ross's first expedition in 1818 to find the fabled Northwest Passage, to the north of Greenland and Canada. Incidentally, the voyage was under the direction of John Ross, uncle of James Clark Ross, after whom the Ross's Gull was named.

Sir Edward was the expedition's astronomer and zoologist, but as a keen ornithologist he was also expected to keep the official zoological list. However he disagreed with the leader Ross, after they turned back too soon (in Sabine's opinion) and the task fell to the ship's surgeons, later edited by William Leach of the British Museum, after whom Leach's Petrel is named. So at least three people connected with Ross's first expedition to find the Northwest Passage, Sabine, Ross and Leach, have had birds named after them or their relatives - surely some kind of a record.

Sabine published his own account of the ornithological notes of the voyage in the transactions of the Linnean Society, entitled *A Memoir of the Birds of Greenland* in which he details 24 species of Arctic bird species. He examined several tern skins in which he commented "*there is a remarkable difference between the Greenland Common Terns and those of the European coasts, in their bills and legs; the bills of the Greenland birds are one-third shorter than the European ones, and the tarsi of the former are only half of the length of the latter.*" He was in fact describing some of the noticeable differences between Arctic and Common Terns, which at that time were not separated. His brother described the new species of gull in the same edition.

Sir Edward Sabine was yet another senior member of the Victorian scientific establishment, becoming President of the Royal Society from 1860 to 1871. Likewise, his elder brother Joseph Sabine (1770-1837) was a co-founder of the Linnean Society and became President of the Royal Horticultural Society.

SCLATER – Sclater's Lark, *Spizocorys sclateri* (Shelley 1902)

William Lutley Sclater (1863-1944) was the ornithologist son of Dr Philip Lutley Sclater (1829-1913), a father and son team who between them had over 20 bird species named after them, at one time or another. Perhaps the reason that the Sclater name was so popular for newly discovered species is that in 1858 the father founded and was first editor of the *Ibis*, the official journal of the British Ornithological Union. Between them – apart from a gap of 12 years – they edited the journal for over 50 years, until 1930.

The Sclaters obviously wielded enormous influence in the ornithological establishment

of the day, and as most new species were first described in the *Ibis*, naming a newly discovered bird after the renowned editor of the leading ornithological journal of the day may have been helpful in its wider acceptance.

Most of the 20 species so named refer to the father, but Sclater's Lark was surely named by Shelley in honour of the son, William, who had been appointed as the Curator of the South African Museum at its present site in Cape Town in 1896. He was also one of the first Presidents of the South African Ornithologists' Union, before returning to a senior post as Curator of the Bird Room at the British Museum until his retirement. His wife was killed in the London Blitz in 1942 and coincidentally Sclater was also killed by a German V1 flying bomb in London in 1944.

Sclater's Lark was first described by Captain George Ernest Shelley (1840-1910), a nephew of the famous poet – Shelley's Francolin was however named after his relative, Sir Edward Shelley (1820 -1890) – see entry below. The species was first collected by C J Andersson in 1862 and presented by Richard Bowdler Sharpe to the British Museum.

During his time in South Africa, Sclater completed several books, now desirable collectors' items, including the *Birds of South Africa*, the *Flora & Fauna of South Africa* and the five-volume *Birds of Africa* (current value in excess of \$10,000) begun by Capt George Shelley and finished by Sclater after his death.

SHELLEY – Shelley's Francolin. *Francolinus shelleyi*, (Ogilvie Grant 1890)

Captain Sir Edward Shelley (1827-1890) was an English aristocrat, worldwide traveler, hunter and occasional bird collector who traveled widely in Africa, where he lived for a number of years amongst the local people, even visiting Kuruman in 'Kaffirland', where David Livingstone was the missionary in residence.

He was very much a Victorian 'Remittance Man' described in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'colonial parlance, for a 'ne'er do well' - often the independent sons of well-to-do families

who never had to work and thus able to travel at will, enjoying and experiencing life to the full, funded by regular remittances from home. Richard Bowdler Sharpe (see Sclater above) mentions him as 'my good friend' and of presenting the British Museum with birds for their collection.

As a 4th Baronet, close to the family fortune but not close enough to inherit, he had two choices – join the Army or join the Church. At the age of 15 Shelley chose the Army and by 1849 he had requested two months leave from his cavalry regiment, the 16th Lancers, then based in the Cape and then extended it for several years while he explored Africa!

In his later military career he became involved in recruiting Arab and Albanian irregulars (Bashi-bazouks) to fight in the Crimean War (1853-1856), afterwards the subject of complicated and embarrassing parliamentary inquiries. To escape the political infighting he began a trip around the world; crossing the Andes; experiencing the revolution in Mexico; sleeping on the top of a volcano in Hawaii and accompanying the British and French armies into China. He wrote a journal of his travels and experience, which were published as a book in 2005, *Edward Shelley's Journals 1856-1861 - a Victorian Remittance Man*.

William Robert Ogilvie-Grant (1863-1924) worked at the Bird Department of the British National History Museum, later becoming Curator. He wrote a *Handbook of Game Birds* in 1895, so it's probable that freelance hunter/collector Shelley sent him the first specimen of the francolin, later named after him.

SOUZA – Souza's Shrike, *Lanius Souzae*, (Bocage 1878)

Jose Augusto de Souza (1837-1889) was a Portuguese ornithologist who became Curator of the Museu Nacional de Lisboa. Although he wrote many articles and books on African birds he was never known to have visited the principal Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique, or indeed anywhere in Africa.

Jose Vicente Barboza du Bocage (1823-1907) was the head of the Zoological section



**Souza's Shrike/
Soulalakman**

Clive Kaplan

of the museum and published taxonomic works on the vertebrates and sponges of Portugal. Specimens were sent back to Bocage for classification and he produced a guide to their preparation for collectors. He is especially noted for his *Ornithologie d'Angola* (1881).

SWAINSON – Swainson's Spurfowl, *Pternistis swainsonii* (A Smith 1836)

William Swainson (1789-1855) was a naturalist, author and noted bird illustrator, who was brought up in Hoylake, near Liverpool, only some 20 miles, as the crow flies, from where I am writing this today. He became a junior clerk in the Liverpool Customs Office, where his father was a high-ranking official; his mother had died when he was very young.

He had always been interested in natural history and as a boy had sketched his father's shell collection. When he was 18 he joined the army commissariat in the Eastern Mediterranean, most of the time based in Sicily and although the Napoleonic Wars were raging throughout Europe at that time his garrison was not involved, so Swainson had plenty of time to indulge in his passion for sketching nature and landscapes.

On returning to Liverpool in 1815, he found it very difficult to fit into established English society. So in 1816, after not being able to engage sponsorship from museums or horticultural societies, the young Swainson financed

his own trip to Brazil, where he collected and sketched his way down the South Atlantic coastline from Recife to Rio de Janeiro. He was to return to England in August 1818, with a collection of over 20,000 insects, 1,200 plants, 120 drawings of fish and around 760 bird skins. He was already an accomplished collector before his South American expedition and had produced a guide for Liverpool Museum, entitled *Instructions for Collecting and preserving Subjects of Natural History* – later expanded and published in 1822 as the *Naturalist's Guide*.

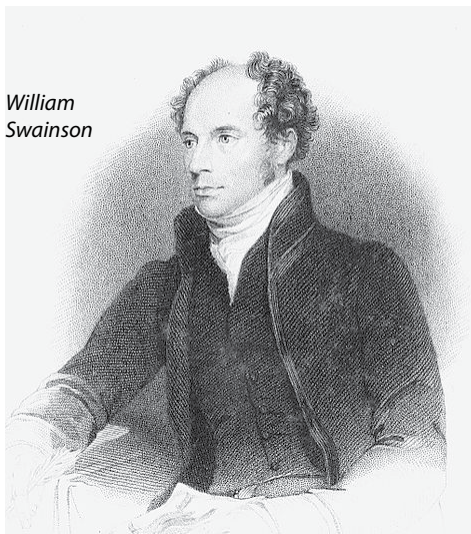
As a keen artist and illustrator, William Swainson decided to move to London to learn all there was to know about a new printing process, known as lithography. He was the first to produce a bird book using this new process; *Zoological Illustrations*, (1820-1823) containing Swainson's sketches drawn directly onto a limestone plate, without requiring the services of an engraver.

Swainson's pioneering of the 'litho' process was a key factor in its later adaptation by many other artists and illustrators. For example, John Gould (1804-1881), another renowned bird illustrator, was to take full advantage of the artistic and cost benefits by producing a series of major zoological publications. He and his wife also provided the illustrations for Charles Darwin's *Zoology of the Voyage of HMS Beagle* (1839-1843).

His practical expertise and pioneering techniques in keeping and displaying birds saw Swainson's recording methods being more widely adopted by many museums and in 1836 he observed... "*The last and best method of arranging birds is by leaving them, as it is technically called, 'in their skins'. It is now 20 years since we began this plan (at Liverpool Museum), to the great surprise and disapprobation of our scientific friends; but the practice has now become almost general.*"

At the beginning of the nineteenth century most museums had displayed their bird and zoological collections in sealed glass cases, which meant that more detailed, in-hand examination was virtually impossible. Swainson urged that bird skins should be kept in drawers

William Swainson



and that tags should record the original colour of the soft parts, details of the plumage, sex and age and where and when the specimen had been obtained. Thus, museums were to transform their bird collections from primarily public exhibits into vital storehouses of invaluable scientific data and specimens.

Perhaps the most important of Swainson's ornithological works was the second volume of *Fauna Borealis-Americana; or the Zoology of the Northern Parts of British America* (1831) for which he wrote the major part of the text and provided all the illustrations. Nuttall was to name a newly discovered thrush after him in 1840 and no less than another 16 bird species, at one time or another, have been named in his honour.

He moved to New Zealand in 1841, where his innate wanderlust had taken him after he had lost most of his money speculating in Mexican silver mines. He didn't publish any further books on birds, only a series of landscape sketches. 50 years after his death, his daughter sold his correspondence to the Linnean Society, which contained letters from almost all of the prominent naturalists of the day.

It's fair to say that Swainson's ongoing legacy, besides the several bird species named after him, was his pioneering record keeping and collecting methodology, which is still in use today and his early adoption of the 'litho' process, which is still used for the highest quality printing and reproduction.

Dr Sir Andrew Smith (1797-1872) was a contemporary of Swainson, who became Director General of the British Army Medical Services. He is considered the father of South African zoology and led one of the first scientific expeditions into the interior from 1834-6, sponsored by the Cape Of Good Hope Association for Exploring Central Africa. Afterwards he wrote the monumental five-volume *Illustrations of the Zoology of South Africa*.

Renowned for his accuracy and attention to detail it's possible that Smith named the spur-fowl after Swainson, (who never ever visited South Africa) in admiration of his pioneering collecting and recording methodology and also for his pioneering book publishing use of lithography. 🐦

Do birds know when to migrate?

The notion that birds somehow 'know' when to migrate goes back at least as far as the Old Testament, where it is written that "the turtle-dove and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming". Especially in spring, it does seem that some species arrive on preset dates – as can be seen from the widespread folklore on the arrival times of familiar species such as the barn Swallow and the Common Cuckoo. But birds don't follow a calendar – at least not in the sense that we understand it. Instead they respond automatically to certain natural stimuli.

Bird of The Year 2012 – African Fish-Eagle by Peter Wilgenbus



Cry of the African Fish-Eagle The sound of Africa



Haliaeetus vocifer is Africa's most romanticized bird.

Haliaeetus is derived from the Greek words **halieos** meaning fisherman and **aetos** meaning eagle. **Vocifer** refers to its loud, vociferous call.

Visarend in Afrikaans, **iNkwazi** in Zulu,



The larger female is 68 cm tall and weighs 2,5 kg. She has a broader white breast patch and a white head and neck, extending as 'V' down centre of mantle.

The remainder of mantle, scapulars, back and rump are blackish brown. The tail is white and the lesser upper wing coverts chestnut.

The eyes are pale brown to hazel and the legs and feet are yellow.



African Fish Eagles call most often from the nest tree, both at dawn and dusk, and especially at the start of breeding season. The call is a ringing, loud, far-carrying weee-ah, hyo-hyo-hyo, often in duet with its mate. The female voice is deeper; calls more often and initiates more duets than the male.

The head is flung back while calling, both at rest and in flight. A piercing, echoing call that symbolises the sound of Africa.

These eagles are locally common with a world population estimated at 100,000. It has a life expectancy of 16 to 24 years. They are usually associated with large water bodies, either flowing or still, including estuaries; and sometimes along open coastline.

They specialise on fish caught 150-300 mm below water surface in a graceful sweeping dive, with feet thrown forward to grasp fish. Fish up to 2 kg are lifted from water and carried into nearby tree. 2 to 3 kg fish are planed across water surface and fish bigger than 3 kg are dragged to shore, using wings as paddles. Most frequent prey are surface-swimming fish such as tilapia, Cichlidae and catfish, *Clarias* spp; as well as mullet, Mugilidae, which are frequently taken in estuaries.

A triumph of old fashioned technology

Johan Slabbert

During a recent birding trip to Uganda, many hours were spent in transit between venues, mostly cramped up in a converted Land Cruiser.

The close quarters with several fellow-birders gives one the opportunity for 'mutually exclusive observation' of behaviour and appearances on a trip of this nature. This is the art of checking out your trip companions while pretending not to do so, while they are doing exactly the same thing to you. A report on the behaviour can be a most interesting article on its own, however not without risk to all concerned.

As far as appearances go, one is on much safer ground for a published article.

Firstly, the clothes people wear, are mostly made of modern materials with all sorts of breathing slots and quick drying anti sweat coatings with handy pockets up the yin-yang. Nowadays long trousers and long sleeved shirts provide comfort and protection better than any military bush-wear could. No more 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume...' khaki clothes with short pants and rolled up sleeves. Secondly, the modern shoes and sandals are equally amazing compared to just a few years ago, when the field dress code of the day considered Bush-Suede Veldskoene to be more fashionable than a pair of Grashoppers. One can now wade through shallow toxic waste at the Hartbeestpoort Dam with impunity, no bacteria or fungus can penetrate. All this without having sweaty feet, or getting tired from walking with a heavy pair of Wellington boots. To top it all, these modern shoes don't require regular polishing to maintain the quality.

Thirdly, we get to the (birding) equipment. The latest generation of cell phones (smart phones) is used so easily and without any thought that mobile e-mail on the fly was not possible just a few short years ago. There is only one thing quicker than a Mynah that spotted an airgun, and that is the speed with which a picture taken of a Shoebill in a remote swamp appears on Facebook. Consider this against the fact that Alexander Graham Bell patented the telephone in 1876.

Cameras are becoming a subject for experts when one dares to progress beyond the 'mik en druk'. More settings are possible than was used in a Boeing 747 cockpit when first released to service. Best to leave the camera to decide for itself what and how your photo should look, unless you want to confuse the hell out of it by making non-matching selections.

Lastly, we get to the prime mission equipment, the lowly pair of binoculars. No need to use the onboard inverter to charge it like phones and cameras, it is just there to be used whenever required. Much less care is practiced, they can dangle around and take quite a hammering from your fretting fellow passengers before you become concerned. The same does definitely not apply to the two ugly sisters, camera and smartphone.

If you Google 'history of binoculars' there is a wealth of information. Suffice to say that the first binocular was built in 1608, and the first Zeiss binoculars were released in 1894. Optical coatings have been introduced in recent times, but the binoculars we use today is essentially the same piece of equipment designed in the mid 1800s, more or less the same time as the telephone. One could still bird without a phone or a camera, but the binoculars are prime mission equipment, if they are not available the mission gets cancelled. I recently had the opportunity to use a pair of WW2 military binoculars. The quality of view was amazing, on par with modern ones. They did, however, weigh more than what we are used to today. Compare this with the vast difference in capability between modern and WW2 phones.

So next time you study your fellow birders, while pretending not to do so, and envy their expensive equipment that match the modern clothes and shoes, spare a thought for the humble binoculars, a true 'cinderella' and a triumph of old fashioned technology!

[Astute observations, Johan! The pace at which change has taken place, particularly with phone technology, is astounding – Ed.] 🐦

Kurisa Moya – Special event camp: October 2012

Philip Calinikos

There could not have been a worse start to any birding weekend. After pulling off at the first fuel station north of Pretoria to meet up with Nick, I inadvertently lock my car keys in the vehicle! Nick takes me home to get the spare key and we lose an hour. As we pass the Carousel an almighty hail storm hits us. With vehicles diving off the road all around us trying to find shelter we soldier on; ten minutes later we are through but the bonnet on Nick's new Jeep looks like the surface of a golf ball.

At Kurisa Moya our group patiently awaits our arrival for the first walk of the weekend, which we make with five minutes to spare. Fortunately our wonderful hosts, Lisa, David and Paul, are on hand to sort out the tricky accommodation arrangements as we have overbooked by a few people. A great introduction to forest birding follows as we follow David and Paul to the Green Twinspot feeder site where a lucky few get a glimpse of this elusive species. A little easier to see are the African Firefinches which also visit the feeder. The pair of Rufous-chested Sparrowhawks is also breeding in the pine forest and we get to see the nest and the tip of the tail of one bird. Unfortunately the birds elude us all weekend long, except for Bets who patiently waits below the nest site and is eventually rewarded with a sighting. With the weather building up ominously we return to the beautifully appointed farmhouse for a lovely catered braai thanks to Lisa and David, and then early to bed for the 04h30 start the next morning.

We drive over the pass in the direction of Woodbush and the road gets mistier as we go along. A grey landscape greets us at the Cape Parrot site. We are fortunate to see a couple of noisy birds as they fly in and perch on their favourite dead tree and with the aid of a spotting scope we manage to make out the colours of these beautiful birds. A walk up the forest road enables us to enjoy sightings

of Orange Ground-Thrush, Grey Cuckooshrike and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher before the troublesome logging trucks start roaring up the mountain. Working our way down the pass we bump into BirdLife Harties who are also birding the area and we leapfrog each other all the way down. As we get to the bottom, a pair of Mountain Wagtails entertains at the stream crossing.

The weather has not improved, but the birding is exciting and we head off to New Agatha where the Bat Hawk patiently sits and waits to give us close-up views. Then into Tzaneen which boasts one of the best urban birding experiences ever with Broad-billed Roller, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler and of course, Pied Mannikin within the town.

Upon our return to Kurisa Moya, we bird around the farmhouse where some very tame Red-backed Mannikins and Sweet Waxbills visit us.

Early the next morning the forest at Kurisa Moya provides beautiful views of Narina Trogon, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Olive Woodpecker and Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler amongst others. Piling into our cars we decide to brave the worsening weather with a trip up to Great Heads for Gurney's Sugarbird, Wailing Cisticola and Long-billed Pipit. We follow this up with a refreshingly wet walk around the Mamabola Grasslands where the birds are actively hawking termites and through our misted-up binoculars we get views of Short-clawed Lark and Temminck's Courser amongst the other bushveld birds.

The weekend finishes off with a lovely sit down dinner in front of the roaring fireplace where the wine and hilarious stories flow well into the night. Kurisa Moya must rank as one of the best forest birding experiences in the country and with Lisa, David, Paul and the rest of the team on hand, most definitely the most hospitable and friendly. 🐦

My early years of birding with BLNG

Philip Calinikos

The exact date of our joining what was then the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society is shrouded in the mists of my fading memory, but it was probably late '83 or early '84.

Our first will always remain imprinted in my memory though; Doorndraai Dam. We arrive with very little camping equipment bar a tent, two stretchers and a cooler box. As we struggle to pitch our very user unfriendly tent (no sewn in ground sheets in those days) we are approached by an impeccably dressed gentleman, complete with tie who politely enquired whether we needed assistance. He introduces himself as Mr TC van Eeden, Honorary Secretary of the Club. Duly humbled we agree to join the communal fire that evening.

The communal braai fire was the highlight of each day's birding on these weekend camps. Far removed from the highly organised camps that we expect these days, you were left much to your own devices during the day. You birded wherever you wanted to, mostly on foot. Intrepid folk such as Basil and Blanche Hattings would disappear for the whole day armed with a day pack containing a water bottle and a couple of sandwiches. Calling the list every night provided an opportunity for one to stun the rest of the party with a rare sighting, but first one had to run the Pauline Leinberger and Kay Winterton gauntlet. "Are you sure that was what you saw?" And: "Not quite the right habitat, don't you think?" Also: "Maybe it was something else?"

The other gauntlet that had to be run was known as the 'Oom Govert von Drimmelen Light Meter Test'. Absolutely no artificial light was tolerated around the communal fire. Paraffin lamps were acceptable and gas lamps were just about tolerated as long as they were tiny and turned down very low. Having passed the test, one would be regaled with the most stirring description of the night skies and

wonderful stories on every subject imaginable by Oom Govert.

The oldest *Laniarius* that I have on file is number 26 of June 1985 which consisted of twenty A4-sized pages. I was fortunate to have my first article published in *Laniarius* 30 of June 1987 when I reported sightings of Woodland Kingfisher in the Colbyn Wetland. I noted other species that were recorded in the wetland at the time and it is sad to note that the Bokmakieries, Long-tailed Widowbirds, Cape Weaver and Orange-breasted Waxbills have since disappeared.

The oldest activities programme I have dates back to the period 1 October to 31 December 1985. Some of the venues that we still frequent today featured on the programme; bird ringing at the Pretoria Botanical Gardens and a day outing to Diepsloot Nature Reserve (now 'Northern Farm'). Other venues are unfortunately no longer frequented; Roodeplaat Research Station of the Department of Agriculture which was a firm club favourite, the family farm of Mr Constand Hughes-Treherne at Welgevonden and the Bavianspoort Sewage Purification Works, one of Rodney and Tamar Cassidy's favourite venues. The leaders of the time were noted in the programme as Mrs Pauline Leinberger, Mr TC van Eeden, Mr Constand Hughes-Treherne, Miss Tamar Salinger (now Mrs Cassidy) and Mr Alan Carr... all very formal indeed!

One of the projects that the club became involved in at the time was a bird survey at the Haakdoorndraai Nature Reserve (now Masebe) in the then north-western Lebowa, for the Lebowa Government. The reserve, which was not open to the general public at the time, was located 100 km north-west of Potgietersrus in the foothills of the Waterberg and we enjoyed many exciting camps in this remote 5,000 ha wilderness. The Club programme promised campers 'a chorus of Cape Eagle Owls as you sit

around the camp fire in the evening. This made up for the lack of facilities at the remote camp site where campers had to be pretty much self-sufficient! It was hoped that the list of recorded birds would eventually be published as an edition of 'Southern Birds'. I wonder if this ever happened?

I was very proud to be asked to join the list of experienced leaders assisting the Club in July 1988 with my first outing being at the Rooodeplaar Research Station. I was joined on the same programme (3/1988) by another young up and coming birder by the name of André Marx who was to lead an outing to the Rust de Winter area, most probably Coetzee's Farm which was the favoured spot of the time. On the same programme was a camp to Langjan Nature Reserve in the Northern Transvaal which was to be led by Davidine Milstein and Pauline Leinberger, another venue that has unfortunately fallen to the wayside. No camping was allowed by the authorities unless the four terribly hot, stuffy and very basic huts were paid for, at the princely sum of R4.48 per hut. We paid for the huts and all camped any way. If my memory serves me right, this is where Bill Thomas claimed he saw a Malachite Sunbird. When faced with 30 disbelieving faces around the camp fire, and lots of muttering about out of range and lack of suitable habitat, Bill rushed off in a huff to get his copy

of Roberts. Opening to the Sunbirds plate and pointing directly at the illustration of the Marico Sunbird he said "and that is exactly what I saw, a Malachite Sunbird".

Dr Kay Winterton unfortunately passed away on 31 July 1987. My wife and I had learnt so much about birds and birding from both Kay and Pauline, a lot of the knowledge having been gained listening to them chatting away over their tea basket. A memorable occasion, on a camp near Gravelotte, was the appearance of a bird in the far distance during the afternoon tea break. The two ladies, without lifting any visual aids of any kind, concurred that it was a Thick-billed Cuckoo. Upon lifting our binoculars we were presented with one of the many lifers that we experienced on these camps, a Thick-billed Cuckoo indeed!

Kay and Pauline were also avid 'square-bashers' as this was the time of the implementation of the first SABAP Project. There was very little technology to assist atlasers in those days. Cards had to be completed in hard copy and posted or handed into the SABAP Regional Atlasing Committee. I remember having committee meetings at the house of the Co-ordinator of the project at the time, Christine Lambrechts, and being amazed by the piles of cards stacked all over the place; at one stage I believe that there was a backlog of over 2,000 cards that had to be checked and vetted



"Well eat it Walter. We don't want to offend him."

and Christine and her volunteer helpers spent many, many hours getting the data logged.

My first stint on the committee was in the late eighties and early nineties when I served as treasurer for about eight years. Around that time, Indian Mynas (now Common Mynas) were starting to be seen in and around Pretoria and there were sporadic reports by club members in the newsletter. By the time André had assumed the position of Chairman in 1989, the Myna issue had turned into quite a hot potato. Many members called for the authorities to take action and eradicate the aliens while other members threatened to resign if any action was taken at all! The club sent a letter to the Directorate of Nature and Environmental Education of the TPA but they decided to do what most authorities do when confronted with a prickly problem... nothing! Their view was that the Mynas were "entirely commensal with man and therefore posed no threat to the natural environment".

Another bird that had started colonising Pretoria at the time was the Thick-billed Weaver which proved to be a much more wholesome subject for us birdwatchers. It is quite amazing that this bird is now seen on a daily basis where I live, whereas twenty years ago it did not feature at all.

The club established a Conservation sub-committee early in 1989 to deal with the many conservation issues that were being raised at the time. One of the most pressing problems had to do with the Austin Roberts Bird Sanctuary which had just about been deserted by all the birds previously nesting and roosting there. A comprehensive ecological report was drawn up under the leadership of Jeremy Cooke and submitted to the Pretoria City Council. This prompted some action, with the assistance of a few hardy volunteers, and eventually some of the birds were tempted to return. Other issues that the sub-committee were involved with at the time, was the pollution of the Walkers Spruit above Austin Roberts, Rooiwal Sewage Works, Faerie Glen Nature Reserve and Onderstepoort Nature Reserve.

Conservation projects undertaken by the club at the time included the adoption of the pair of Black Eagles at Skeerpoort and a donation of R700 was given to ARIC. The wheel has turned full circle with the club donating R10,000 last year towards the Wonderboom Verreaux's Eagle Project!

Another extremely popular venue of the time was Zoutpan (now Tswaing Crater) which the club had started visiting in the 1960s and I personally enjoyed many wonderful outings there. The club maintained detailed records of the birds that occurred at Zoutpan and members such as the Late Erik de Villiers knew the venue intimately. In 1993 the ownership of Zoutpan changed hands and for a while there were grave doubts as to whether the area would survive as a birding venue. Fortunately it was eventually decided to transfer ownership to the National Cultural History Museum and the area was officially re-opened as the Tswaing Crater Museum in March 1996. Unfortunately it is not as easy to move around the venue these days, as it previously was, but this is understandable as there is currently a serious poaching problem there.

Closer to my heart were the goings on with the wetland in the Colbyn Valley which was another venue that the club used primarily for bird ringing activities. Talk was that the wetland would be turned into a mini golf course, but again sense prevailed and even though a small section was developed into a golf park (driving range) the bulk of the area was set aside to be developed as an urban environmental park with nature trails. Unfortunately this noble plan was never carried out and there is again a major threat of development for the area. Action is however being taken with the establishment of a 'Friends' group to support City of Tshwane Nature Conservation Department to protect the area.

In 1994 I passed the treasurer baton to my partner and fellow bird fanatic, Clive Kaplan. This coincided with other social and work commitments which limited my participation in Club activities for a number of years. Fortunately once bitten by the birding bug one tends to not stray too far so I was soon back for more! 🐦

Pretoria birding in the 70s

Alan & Meg Kemp

When we came to live in Pretoria at the end of 1969, we did not realise that the then Transvaal Museum (TM, now Ditsong – Museum of Natural History) had witnessed the start of bird clubs in South Africa and would form the core of our professional lives, that birding in Pretoria was in a state of flux, or that we would end up spending the rest of our lives here (so far). I had just finished 2.5 years on my first post-university job in the Kruger Park, working as research assistant to Prof. Tom Cade, from Syracuse and then Cornell Universities, and where, within a year, I had married my university sweetheart Meg. I came first to the TM because Cade had spent an earlier sabbatical there, working with the legendary 'Oom Proz' Prozesky, and because my schoolboy mentor from Zimbabwe, Dr Bob Brain, had just become Director and was one of my thesis supervisors. Loaded with data for my doctorate studies on hornbills, Brain and Proz offered me workspace and, most importantly, an electrical calculator that could do long division! However, in mid-1970, new second research posts opened in each scientific department at the TM, my application was successful, and 18 months later, when Oom Proz moved to head the Education Department, Meg joined me as second ornithologist in the Bird Department.

We found ourselves in the exciting position of working in the very rooms occupied previously by Austin Roberts, whose 1940 book had, from our schooldays, been our primary reference and ornithological 'bible', and whose many specimens and wonderful library were now ours to study. We did not know then that Roberts had been involved from the start of birding in South Africa. Aged 21, he and his father had attended the inaugural meeting of the South African Ornithologist's Union, whose journal of the same name ran until the First World War.

The Union was then amalgamated with the Transvaal Biological Society in 1916, to form the South African Biological Society, with Roberts Jnr. as Honorary Secretary/Treasurer and later President, but by 1930 he ensured that birds emerged alone again, as the South African Ornithological Society (SAOS) along with the first volume of its scientific journal *The Ostrich* which continues to this day (Brain, C. K. 1998. *Austin Roberts: A lifelong devotion to South Africa's birds and beasts*. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Johannesburg).

We also found that locally there had later been a branch of the SAOS, the Pretoria Bird Club, which had recently dwindled in support, moved south of the Jukskei River and amalgamated with the Wits Bird Club (WBC). By the time we arrived in Pretoria, northern independence had just been re-established, with formation of the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society (NTOS) and the Crimson-breasted Shrike (*Laniarius atrococcineus*) as its emblem and newsletter. We have only partial recall of all the NTOS role-players at this time, since our professional and recreational activities were so intertwined, but we remember Peter Mendelsohn, chair of the NTOS, as providing the main energy, supported by keen committee and club members that included Theuns van Eeden, Neels Roos, Percy and Brenda Clarke, Gerry de Graaf, Bernie Penzhorn, Jo van Heerden, Peter Aps, the indefatigable outing and atlassing quartet led by Kay Winterton and including Pauline Leinberger, Doreen Goetz and Lillian, and sometimes ourselves. Peter's long-suffering wife, Marjorie, played host and sometimes caterer to the NTOS committee at their home in Burnett Street, and his son John brought a bevy of young friends, including Duncan Christie, Philip Meredith, Tony Harris and Digby Cyrus to provide muscle and stamina on field outings, especially the Sunday evening

swallow ringing at the sewage works near the new market. We were even joined briefly by Ian Sinclair when he first arrived in the country and before he headed off to be taxidermist at the National Museum in Bloemfontein!

Peter Mendelsohn worked as a horticulturalist at the University of Pretoria's Proefplaas, where he and his bee-keeper colleague and NTOS member Martin Johannsmeier spent much time mist-netting and ringing birds on the kopje behind their offices. Our American boss in Kruger, and his student, our colleague John Snelling, were also falconers and had taught us the skills of raptor trapping, which we imported to Pretoria and soon had a keen following. In those days vehicles were simple (we had a second-hand 2-door VW panel van with an 1100 cc engine and the Mendelsohn's a Peugeot 404 station-wagon) but fuel was cheap, so we all spent weekends and holidays roaming out from the city, mainly onto the Springbok Flats and into the Waterberg and Magaliesberg, but also back into Kruger. This was before the big raptor declines of the 1980s, so we ringed many individuals and species, and soon devised careful protocols for measuring and photographing our quarry so that the statistics of group members were comparable. Raptor ringing spread to the WBC, and later we had our own planning and information sessions in the tearoom of the TM on Saturday afternoons, with students Harry Biggs and Rina Grant and businessmen Frank von Maltitz and Manfred Schmitt among the keenest participants.

Our professional involvements expanded steadily, so that we spent less and less time on NTOS affairs as the 1970s progressed, only attending talks, camps and outings as time allowed but continuing well into the 1980s, even after our two children, Lucy and Justin, arrived and were 'baptised' as naturalists at various camps. In 1973 I took on editorship of *The Ostrich* for three years, after completing my doctorate, and, by 1975, was luckily elevated to the less-onerous role of President of the NTOS. We had made the TM Bird

Department an open house to bird watchers, ringers and artists, so that they could share the reference collections and literature, and we could enjoy their company and keep ourselves involved with birders and birding, and the TM was often used as the venue for NTOS meetings and its roneo machine to produce *Laniarius* newsletters. In 1969, the 3rd Pan-African Ornithological Congress had been held at Pretoriuskop in Kruger and we were asked to compile our sightings for the Park into a roneoed tome for delegates. This formed one of the foundations for Ken Newman, one of 'our' artists, to compile his field guide to the birds of the Park, the first comprehensive local guide since the Roberts era, surpassing the earlier guides of Gill, and Prozesky and Findlay, and ushering in the start of modern birding in the country. Soon after, we were also able to help Ian Sinclair with the compilation of the first of his series of quintessential national and Afrotropical field guides.

As we started to reorganise and expand the TM bird collections, we realised the need to document the birds of the old Transvaal, our area of responsibility, but that we could no longer do it ethically just by shooting or netting more and more specimens. Meg, who was in charge of this task, started the first atlas project in the early 1970s, led initially by the NTOS but joined later by the WBC and Lowveld branches and ending with >300 contributors. It was all done by hand, on filing cabinets full of sighting sheets and species maps, and we were honoured that Digby (with Nigel Robson) adopted our grid symbols for their Natal atlas, and beat us to publish (1980) before we joined up with Warwick Tarboton from the then Transvaal Provincial Administration's Nature Conservation Division to complete our task in 1987.

We hope this brief overview conveys the excitement and pleasure that we all experienced over this phase of our own young lives, of developments at the TM, and especially of the development of birding in Pretoria and the rest of the country. 🐦

A Progression of Birding

Greg Lock

I received a mail from André Marx yesterday asking me to help him fill this issue of *Laniarius* with some of my recollections of the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society / Pretoria Bird Club / BirdLife Northern Gauteng. Having muddled up my travel arrangements and missing the Gala Dinner, I decided that I needed to make some contribution regarding the celebration this year of 60 years of birding in Pretoria. It's probably more than that, as the presidents of the society have a way of letting you know what your obligations are!

My association with the society started almost exactly 24 years ago in December 1988. As a then SABAP1 atlasser together with my friends Jonathan and Timothy Boucher, I had been taken under the wing by the co-ordinator for the Northern Transvaal atlas region, Christine Lambrechts. After a few lone atlassing expeditions with Christine, I was press-ganged into going along to an NTOS outing at the Hadeco bulb farm near Bekker Schools in the Magaliesberg. Within hours I

had started learning new things about birds from others on the outing and been introduced to the first of the many birding personalities that I would meet over the years. Pauline Leinberger was the leader of the outing and I was astounded by her knowledge of birds and the environment around her. Oom Govert van Drimmelen was there in his denim shorts with the green rope belt. I remember the wide eyes of Christine's daughters Billy and Danny as Oom Govert reclined on the rocks with everything on view up the leg of his shorts – they weren't the first or the last wide eyes that Oom Govert caused!

Within a few months Jonathan and I were taken along by Christine to our first camp at Masebe in the north-west of the Waterberg. This was a traditional NTOS camp – tents; one toilet shared amongst many (I was spared the hole digging duty and collapsible toilet seat that has become part of the NTOS folklore); no showers; a do-it-yourself approach to birding; everyone around the bonfire at night and the midnight clatter of



*De Hoop:
an early
camp on the
Limpopo
in search
of the Pel's
Fishing-Owl*

Oom Govert rearranging his camp. Everyone spread out and covered the reserve during the day and then got together in the evening to share where they had been and shared what they had seen. The next day saw everyone heading off in search of the birds and places they had missed the day before. To meet our atlasing obligations we set off one day into the wilds of the then Lebowa in Christine's VW Syncro Combi. What an adventure that was! Wide-eyed villagers watched these crazy visitors tumbling out the Syncro, binoculars in hand, scanning the bush, hopping back into the Syncro and roaring off to the next stop. We made some amazing finds that day, including a Mountain (Long-tailed) Wagtail next to the Seepabana River in the middle of a village, miles away from the nearest typical mountain stream habitat. I was instantly hooked on the NTOS camp lifestyle and exploring unheard of places looking for birds. With the advent of today's instant gratification approach to birding, I really miss the camaraderie and shared experiences of those camps.

Our first camp without Christine was to Rankin's Pass. There I started my friendship with Pauline. We arrived latish on the Friday afternoon and Pauline was already holding court outside her tent. As everyone arrived and set up camp, they would make their way to chat to Pauline, find out about what to do in the area and what birds to look for. As she was one of the few people on the camp that we knew, we also gravitated to Pauline's campsite to get the gen on the area and then sat with her around the campfire that evening. That was enough for Pauline to take me under her wing. I think that there were ulterior motives involved though, as I'll share with you later. The Saturday afternoon of that camp started a third NTOS friendship that has resulted in this article; on the Saturday afternoon André Marx was looking for someone to go walking with him and Laureen, Jonathan and I set off up the hill behind the camp with him. We quickly discovered why there hadn't been a whole lot of other takers for the walk as André route-marched us up the hill from one bird sighting to the next! Amongst

the birds we saw on that walk was our first Grey Tit- (Fan-tailed) Flycatcher which had alerted André with its call. To this day whenever I hear that call I remember that first afternoon's birding together with him.

Those first outings, camps and the friendships formed around them set the basis for the next fifteen odd years of birding for me. I'm not going to tell you in detail how I met each of my great Pretoria birding friends, but I can remember the first camp or outing where I met each of them: Thalia Barnes and Jeanette Rens on a Sunday outing at Vaalkop Dam; Liesel Erasmus at the Hoedspruit Airforce Base; Drinie and Koos van Rensburg at one of those unforgettable Vhembe (now Mapungubwe) camps; Paul Tyler at Barberspan; Verona Veltman sitting at the kitchen table at Bivack feeding online cats on her laptop at the kitchen table – I think I have the chronology correct. André and Elma van der Walt break the mould as I first met them through involvement in the committee and still remember the evenings at their home stuffing *Laniarius* and the outings programme in envelopes, stamping the NTOS address on the back of the envelope, sticking an address label on the front and then the interminable licking and sticking of postage stamps... These friendships have transcended the society and we have travelled together all over South Africa to Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and to South America, Antarctica and New Zealand together. The global nature of our modern world has kicked in and Laureen and Jonathan are in Auckland, Timothy in Washington DC, Christine in Hobart and Paul in London. Yet we all still stay in touch over the Net and cherish those birding trips together. I still get scans of old photographs from Jonathan asking me where they were taken and updates from Paul of the birds that he has seen on his various travels. I have a few tears in my eyes as I remember the impact that Pauline had on all of our lives...

Beyond the good friends there were a multitude of characters that made outings and camps unforgettable. So many people were associated with the vehicles that they

(continued on p 27)

BirdLife Northern Gauteng *Celebrating 60 Years* of Birding in Pretoria

2012 Photographic Competition Results





Action Category

Compact Class



Winner: Feridoon Barraghi



Runner Up: Anne Shaw



Winner: Anton Pretorius

DSLR Class



Runner Up: Feridoon Barraghi

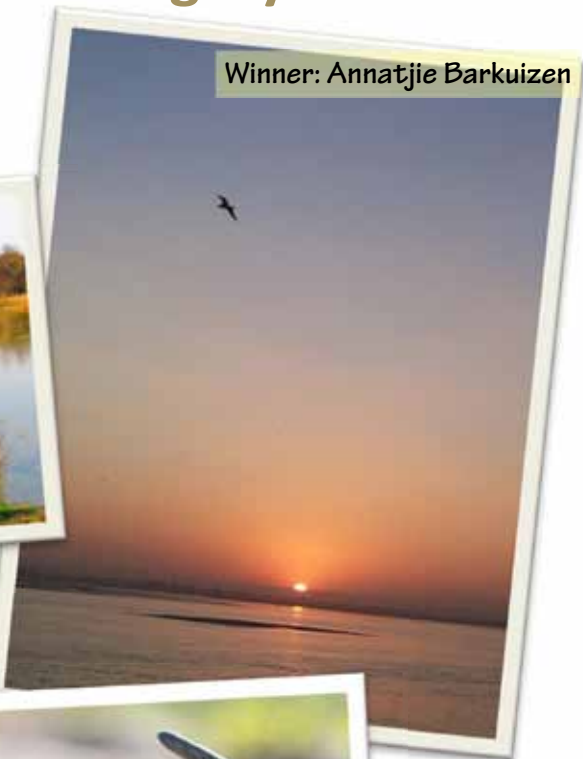


Natural Category

Compact Class



Runner Up: Feridoon Barraghi



Winner: Annatjie Barkuizen

DSLR Class



Winner: Jan Niemandt



Runner Up: Dup du Plessis



Portrait Category

Compact Class

Winner: Habib Karimulla



Runner Up: Jan van Wyk

DSLR Class



Winner: Dup du Plessis



Runner Up: Jan Niemandt

drove. Although they were before my time, Pauline's stories of Kay Winterton's station wagon, Nick van der Merwe's Beetle and an aardvark hole at Blouberg and Oom Govert's combi still stick with me. The most memorable vehicle from my time was the 'Green Peril', Erik de Villiers' green BMX 728i. That vehicle could go anywhere, do anything and survive obstacles that had most 4x4 drivers pondering how to tackle them. I remember encountering Erik and the 'Green Peril' at Shenandoah with the vehicle literally suspended across a donga between two hand operated winches. There was no way that Erik was going to drive the long way round to get to the other side of the donga! As the various obstacles took their toll, a second, almost identical, 'Green Peril' was purchased and the two vehicles were variously cannibalised to keep one or the other running. I was never sure which invocation of the 'Green Peril' I had encountered. Erik's ability to consume beer was legendary. The 'Green Perils' had welded beer can holders installed all over them; enough holders to allow Erik, Mieke and the passengers to always have several beers immediately to hand. Sadly these vehicles eventually had to be replaced by a blue Sani. Not quite replaced – when Erik passed away there was still one of the 'Green Perils' ensconced under the carport in the garden.

Thinking of the 'Green Perils' reminded me of Dirk Bloem who was a regular passenger in them. Dirk was a master fire maker and at most camps would ensure that there were beds of coals to braai on and a good bonfire to socialise around afterwards. Dirk and Erik would regularly arrive with whole tree stumps in tow behind the 'Green Peril'. Dirk's little red and white Nissan 1400 bakkie was a regular sight at camps and outings. In the time I knew her Pauline drove two VW Jettas. The first of these had a very appropriate registration – LBR 447 T. In the Roberts 5 numbering scheme a Lilac-Breasted Roller is number 447. I have never forgotten that registration number. Then there was Lynn Morris's red Combi that found its way all over with a load of passengers. It had its moment when it collected a Red-crested Korhaan through the windscreen on the way home from a camp.

At the Vhembe camp in 1994 André van der Walt's Sani sprung a leak in its fuel tank. No amount of advice and bush ingenuity from the assembled campers could stem the leak. The van der Walts had open containers of fuel rescued from the leaking tank strewn around their camp. For the return journey to Pretoria the rescued fuel was poured back into the leaking tank and André and Elma sped off to Alldays hoping that the leak rate would not overtake



*Potlake:
SABAP1
atlasing trip*



Vhembe: a favourite from early days now known as Mapungubwe

them and leave them stranded. This was in the days before ubiquitous cell phones and coverage and the rest of us on the same return journey followed their progress not by phone calls, but by seeing them as we passed them when they stopped for fuel in each town, only to be passed by them in turn as they raced past us to the next fuel station. On that Vhembe camp we encountered some of the roughest roads of our various travels. There were only two 4x4s present – Nick van der Merwe and André van Wyk's bakkie. For the rest our two wheel drive sedans got us everywhere we wanted to go with very few hiccups. There were my three punctures, two of which were repaired at the army camp on the hill. Shirley Venter's minibus got stuck in some deep sand, but the 'Galloping Grannies' dug away with the cups from their Thermos flasks and rescued themselves. That Vhembe camp prompted me to buy my first bakkie, a Nissan Hi-Rider. In 1998 Constant Hughes-Treherne and Dave Sole arrived at the Bivack camp in their Land Rovers. I had always hankered after owning a Land Rover and it took me only a few weeks of soul searching after Bivack to take the plunge and buy my own Landy that is still going strong 14 years later. Today every outing and camp is a procession of 4x4s and SUVs and no venue is too rough or remote. I think even the car park

at the last evening meeting that I attended was filled with SUVs!

I mentioned the 'Galloping Grannies' and must elaborate a bit. I think the name was coined somewhat before my time and for a different group of members. In my time this was a group of elderly ladies with Pauline as their matriarch. The members changed over time, but I remember Pauline, Doreen Goetz, Shirley Venter, Maureen Roux, Lynn Morris as regulars. Not only would they arrive at the most remote camps together and set up camp, but they would set off into the wilds of Africa on their own adventures. They also knew how to ensure that they had the correct help and protection along on these journeys. André Marx and I were drafted in for a two week journey to eastern Zimbabwe in 1997 and Neil Menzies was a regular honorary granny.

In September 2012 I was with Verona, Koos and Drinie at Mapungubwe. Yes, it's a very special place with some very special memories. Along the road from Alldays I couldn't help but notice how every few kilometres there was an entrance to a game lodge or game farm. In the early 1990's these were few and far between and one of the advantages of joining NTOS or PBC outings and camps was that you gained access to venues and private farms that were otherwise off limits. Through a network

of contacts built up by the society over the years, members' friends and acquaintances and by using projects like SABAP, CWAC and IBAS as a means of introduction we got access to some spectacular places. I could fill this issue of *Laniarius* with stories about each one of them. Some that spring to mind are Vhembe, Mariepskop, Hoedspruit and Louis Trichardt Air Force bases, Shenandoah, Sandrivier, Coetzee's Farm, De Hoop, Madimbo, Dwarsberg, Grootegeluk, Bewaarkloof, Ditholo, Roets's Farm and Diepsloot/Northern Farm. The list goes on and on. I'm sure that there are many of you reading this with wonderful memories from those camps and outings.

I mentioned how André taught me the call of the Grey Tit-Flycatcher. Similarly, on an SABAP1 square bashing expedition near Steilloopbrug Pauline introduced me to the real value of listening to bird calls. We had stopped next to the road and Pauline immediately picked up the call of an Olive-tree Warbler. We hopped over the fence and tracked the bird down in a clump of acacias. Not only was this a lifer for me, but also the first time I started focusing on bird calls. The only available bird call recordings at that time were Len Gillard's tapes. Who remembers how frustrating it was to fast forward and rewind repeatedly until you eventually found the correct call on the tape

or rewound too far when you wanted to replay a call? You had to set the call clearly in your mind because by the time you had found the correct place on the tapes the bird had stopped calling and was long gone and all the mis-cued calls on the tapes would have confused you! I can still hear Guy Gibbon's monotone announcements of bird numbers and names in my mind! Having experienced birders around you who could point out the call, allow you time to listen to and assimilate the sound and then tell you which bird had been calling, was invaluable. The society provided me with an irreplaceable opportunity to learn and appreciate bird sounds. Today it almost too easy to simply troll through bird calls on the various mobile applications until you find the correct call. Think too how the quality of field guides has improved. I started birding with a Ken Newman field guide. I was astounded at how Pauline, Dirk and many of the other birders I was learning from had learnt from the illustrations in the 1978 fourth edition of Roberts that had changed little in 30 years and bore little resemblance to what you had seen. I think current generation birders must think the same about my first Newman's.

As all the new field guides, CDs, DVDs and PDAs appeared in the 1990s the society played a big role in distributing these. Sometime in



*At Malalotja
in Swaziland
with Pauline*

the early 90s I joined André Marx running 'trading'. Carol Cook, as the secretary of the then SAOS, would buy books in bulk from the publishers and producers and distribute them to the various branches. Being Johannesburg-based, André and I would pick up the stock from the SAOS offices in Delta Park. For years we travelled around with boxes full of books, tapes, CDs, posters and sisal nesting logs in our cars. At every outing, camp and evening meeting we would conduct our trade from these boxes. When the first Sasol field guide appeared, we must have sold literally hundreds of them as we had access to them long before they appeared in bookshops! In many cases we were the only easily accessible source for birding paraphernalia. When André and I tired of lugging our boxes around, Thalia Barnes took over in her own inimitable style. Today Ralda has taken up the cause for the club once again.

I said I would come back to Pauline taking me under her wing at Rankin's pass and her ulterior motives. In 1994 we were camping at Martin's Dam at Wakkerstroom, before there was group accommodation outside the town. On the Sunday morning while we were all packing up I was taken aside by Pauline. We sat on the low stone wall looking out over the dam and Pauline gave me the lecture that she has given so many of us: You have been involved with club for quite a while, you know how things work, you have a skill that the club needs and it's time you gave something back to the club. Those of you who have received this lecture know that it was an instruction and not a request. Within weeks I had been co-opted onto the committee as program co-coordinator and was producing my first of nearly 20 quarterly programmes. At the first committee meeting that I attended I met Philip Calinikos who was treasurer at the time. Nearly twenty years later, Philip is still involved in the club as its chairman. The long-term involvement of dedicated committee members has been one of the great strengths of the society. I'll name a few of them: Pauline as president and in arranging the activities programme;

André Marx as chairman twice, arranging the activities programme, outing and camp leader and *Laniarius* editor; Drinie van Rensburg who has edited, proofread, done the layout and arranged printing of *Laniarius* in various different roles for 17 years. The chairmen and committee members that I have had the privilege of knowing have done a sterling job in retaining the adventurous spirit and willingness to share knowledge about birding that first attracted me to the NTOS, while adapting to the changing requirements of the society's members. Constant Hughes-Treherne, André Marx, André van der Walt, Neil Menzies, Liesel Erasmus, Etienne Marais, Ernst Retief, Rynetta Coetzee, Philip Calinikos and all those who have served on the committee in various roles have done us all proud. Talking about the strengths of the society brings me to the leaders of outings and camps. This dedicated group of people happily shares their knowledge of birds and their environment with members on outings and camps. I cannot even begin to count how many of them there are. Every one of them has contributed in their own way to 60 years of birding in Pretoria.

There are so many other things I wanted to cover; the progression from the SAOS to BirdLife South Africa and the prominent and growing role that it is playing in conservation; many more memorable camps and personalities; the diversity and geographic spread of the outings and camps that the society has arranged; all the people I have met across the South African birding community through my involvement in the society; how much birding has changed and how much easier it is to both share and gain access to birding information. I think it's time to stop though... Thank you to everyone who has made my part in the 60 years of birding in Pretoria such an enjoyable and fulfilling one.

[Thank you Greg for sharing these memories; they are a great insight into how the club has changed and will now be archived in the pages of this newsletter – Ed.] 🐦

Rhino Park Uitstappie: Woensdag 14 November

Elke Geggus

Omdat my klein voëlgroepie met wie ek 14 jaar voëls gekyk het nie meer bestaan nie (die leier van ons groep het Kaap toe getrek), was ek nogal ongelukkig omdat ek so selde kon gaan voëls kyk. Toe het ek gedink dat die Woensdag voëluittappies wat die klub aanbied net die regte ding sal wees om weer by uitstappies met ander mense betrokke te wees. Omdat die rigtingaanwysings in die klubprogram altyd so duidelik en noukeurig is, was dit ook nie 'n probleem om by die Rhino Park naby Donekhoek, oos van Pretoria, uit te kom nie.

Die dag het nie goed begin nie, met 'n swaar bewolkte hemel en sterk wind om vyf uur die oggend. Maar al die voëlkykers is maar optimiste want daar was saam met Alta Fraser 18 mense wat aan die uitstappie deelgeneem het. In die gebied waar ons gestap het, was drie groot damme en baie uitheemse swartwattel, *Acacia mearnsii*. Van vroeg die oggend het ons baie koekoekes gehoor, en ek het sommer dadelik geleer dat die Swartkoekoek wyfie 'n ander soort roep het as die mannetjie. Die Diederikkie was baie kere baie duidelik sigbaar, maar ons

het ook nog die Piet-my-vrou gehoor en van die ander voëlkykers het die Nuwejaarsvoël gehoor. Dit was vir ons baie opvallend dat daar vir die baie koekoekes maar min wewers was. Waar gaan hierdie voëls nou hulle eiers lê?

Die grond op hierdie gebied is baie versteur, dit het tot gevolg gehad dat daar 'n baie hoë vertikale wal van klei ontstaan het. Tot Alta se vreugde was die Rooikeelbyvreters hier baie bedrywig (Alta het hulle vir ons belowe). Saam met hulle was daar 'n hele aantal Witgatspreeus wat ook in hierdie wal hulle neste gehad het. Net voor die wal was telefoondrade en dit was net die regte plek vir al hierdie voëls om hulleself te vertoon. 'n Koningrooibekkie het die prentjie voltooi.

Vroeg die oggend het ons ook twee roofvoëls sien vlieg en oor hulle gewonder, later toe ons hulle van nader kon sien, het ek weer geleer hoe moeilik dit is om jong roofvoëls reg te identifiseer. Frans het ons almal gehelp en die diagnostiese terminale swart band op die wit serte van die jong Visarende uitgewys. Alta het gesê dat sy nog nooit



Gauteng se 'strand'

Alta Fraser

Visarende in hierdie gebied gesien of gehoor het nie. So, waar kom die jonges vandaan?

Die groot swerm Rooibeksysties was vir my 'n groot plesier asook 'n Gevlekte Lyster wat sy jonge gevoer het, sowel as die groot hoeveelheid Geelbekeende. Ongelukkig het ons nie die Papegaaiduiwe en die Afrikaanse Snip gesien nie, en daar was ook nie 'n enkele Oranjekeelkalkoentjie nie. Die afwesigheid van hierdie voëls was miskien te danke aan die redelike sterk wind wat net aanhou waai het.

Hierdie gebied het ook 'n strand, en Alta wou vir ons almal hierdie strand in Gauteng wys. Toe was dit die mooiste, witste skoonste strand wat ek in 'n lang tyd gesien het, en die dik sand het ook so moeilik geloop soos enige strandsand! Geen wonder dat almal daarna kortpad gevat het na die piekniek plek toe, al

was die kortpad deur 'n gebied van modder. Toe het ek nog iets geleer, hoe 'n mens deur modder stap! Klein treetjies gee, het almal wat geweet het aangeraai, en dit het toe ook gewerk, niemand het pens en pootjies in die modder beland nie.

Ons het lekker piekniek gehou, onder die hoë bloekombome wat weens die onlangse sterk hael baie van hulle blare verloor het. Die blare was toe 'n mooi sagte tapyt onder ons voete. Daarna is die lysie gelees, en ons was almal tevrede met die 64 voëls wat daarop verskyn het.

Dit was 'n wonderlike uitstappie saam met vriendelike voëlkykers wat ek baie geniet het. Baie dankie aan Alta wat hierdie uitstappie vir ons gereël het, en so mooi na ons gekyk het en so behulpsaam was, wat die uitstappie baie interessant en opwindend gemaak het. 🐦

My naweek saam met die ringers: November 2012

Wanda Louwrens

Dit was nog altyd in my agterkop om by die ringers aan te sluit, maar ek het nog nooit so ver gekom nie. Tot daardie Sondag dat daar 'n Alert van Debbie af gekom het. Die ringers het 'n naweek by Nylsvlei gereël en Lynette van den Heever het 'n ope uitnodiging aan almal in die klub gerig om die kamp by te woon. Ek het net besef – dit is my kans.

Na 'n paar oproepe het ek 'n oplaai gekry om saam te ry na Nylsvlei. Gerrie, Marietjie en ek het net so na drie die Vrydagmiddag daar gearriveer. Dit was baie warm, maar die 'dormitories', waar ons tuisgegaan het, was lekker koel binne. Gerrie het sommer dadelik in die veld ingestap om na 'n geskikte plek te soek om die nette die volgende oggend op te slaan. Aanstons het al die A- en C-ringers opgedaag, behalwe Johan S wat eers die volgende oggend vroeg daar was. 'n A-ringer is iemand wat al 500 voëls gering het, waarvan 50 verskillende spesies was, terwyl die C-ringers nog in opleiding is. Nou wonder ek of daar ook

B-ringers is? Daar geld baie streng reëls – geen C-ringer mag sommer op sy eie ring nie, dit moet onder toesig van 'n A-ringer plaasvind.

Teen sonsak was die meeste kampingangere daar en is die braaivleisvure aangesteek. Dit was heerlik om die son te sien sak en die koeligheid van die aand te beleef met die Pietmy-vrou se roep in die agtergrond. Lynette het gereël dat elke vrou 'n slaai bring en die mans het die hout verskaf. Wat 'n fees! Die res van die klub kan gerus by die ringers leer hoe dit gedoen word!

Almal het vroeg gaan inkrui, want die wekkers moes vir drie uur gestel word. Ek het sommer 'n wekker en my selfoon gestel – te bang ek verslaap. Die waarnemers – dis nou ek – het die keuse gehad om laat te slaap en later by die ringers aan te sluit, maar ek wou niks mis nie! Ek was nog voor die wekker wakker! Het van kwart oor twee die wysers begin dop hou. Uiteindelik het dit gelui en was ek op en aan die gang. Daar was darem tyd vir

'n vinnige koppie tee en beskuit, en gewapen met 'n koplampie en waterskoene (dit het die vorige nag gereën) was ek reg om te help met die opsit van die nette. Ek het meer gekyk as wat ek gehelp het, want ek het gou gesien dit is 'n ingewikkelde saak. Maar teen dagbreek was die nette op en kon ons weer breek vir 'n koppie tee of koffie. Hoe wonderlik tog vir hierdie stadsjapie om die dag te sien breek! Die oes was die oggend maar skraal – elke ringer het maar so twee of drie voëls gering, maar daar was interessante spesies soos Swartsuikerbekkies en 'n Bosveldvisvanger. Wat 'n belewenis om 'n visvanger in die oog te kyk en daardie pragtige kleure van naby te sien. Dit is net nie dieselfde om dit deur 'n verkyker dop te hou nie! Die Here het hulle so mooi gemaak!

Hier teen twaalfuur die oggend het die vroegopstaan my ingehaal en het ek bietjie gaan skuins lê. Die min slaap het sy tol geëis – ek het soos 'n liggie afgeskakel. Na rustyd het ek beseft die ringers kom nie tot ruste nie – hulle was alweer uit om 'n plek te soek vir die volgende oggend se ringery. Ek het maar rustig in die lapa gaan sit en kuier – weg uit die warm son. Marietjie het met die heerlikste versnaperings vorendag gekom, wat saam met 'n 'sundowner' geniet is. Daardie aand is die vure vroeër aangesteek en na 'n lekker kuier om die vuur en 'n stuk braaivleis en slaai agter die blad, is almal vroeg bed toe.

My twee wekkers het die een na die ander afgegaan om drie uur die Sondagoggend! Daar was nie tyd vir koffie of tee nie, want dit het nog 15 minute geneem om na die Jacana-voëlskuiling te ry waar die dag se ringery sou plaasvind. Ek was weer gewapen met my koplampie en waterskoene. Drie van die A-ringers, Gerrie, Johan S en Eben het gou elkeen 'n span bymekaar gekry vir die opslaan van die nette. Ek het weer probeer hand bysit, maar het meer rondgestaan en gesien hoe flink dit gedoen word! Jan, nog 'n waarnemer, het gou 'n gasbottel en -plaat opgestel en met in sy aluminium keteltjie water gekook vir die dorstiges. Daar was nie baie tyd vir koffie drink nie, want met ligdag het hordes

Swartkeelgeelvinke in die nette begin vasvlieg. Sasha, die jongste onder die C-ringers, het uit sy vel gespring toe hy en Marietjie 'n paar Pylvlekkatlagters in hulle nette kry. Hy het sommer dadelik begin ring! Die ander ringers het die vinke fluks uit die nette gehaal en ek kon nie voorbly om sakkies aan te dra nie. Die loperie na die nette toe met waterskoene aan, het maar moeilik gegaan – toe skop ek hulle maar uit. Dit het vinniger gegaan en die stapskoene was gemakliker. Die spesie telling was nie so hoog nie, maar die C-ringers, soos Sasha, Martin, Paula, Sarel, Johan M en James, wat nog getalle najaag, het bladsye vol geskryf aan al die data wat hulle moes opteken. Sasha het meer as dertig op sy kerfstok vir die naweek. Voorwaar 'n prestasie!

Die aanvanklike stormloop by die nette het opgedroog en ons het maar opgepak en teruggekeer na die kamp. Daar het ons iets geëet en toe huiswaarts begin keer.

Wat 'n belewenis! Wat 'n naweek! Ek is nou so begeesterd – ek wil net gaan voëls ring. 🦉



Johan Müller

Bosveldvisvanger/ Woodland Kingfisher

Birding northern Kruger over Christmas, a birthday and New Year

Rion Lerm

I had the privilege of spending Christmas and New Year in the Kruger Park with my family for two weeks. The unforgiving climate was hot and humid with few overcast days and little rain; however the bird diversity was excellent in the northern parts. We camped at Tsendze, a rustic camp with many sites placed in a riverine setting with large Apple Leaf *Lonchocarpus capassa* and Mopane *Colophospermum mopane* trees, providing much-needed shade to the campers. These northern parts, as many visitors will know, are characterised by shrub Mopane, a green desert hosting few biota and an area we also don't visit too often. Nonetheless, we made many discoveries in this boring landscape where some areas received more rain than others did, breaking the shades of grey underlying the green bifoliolate Mopane leaves.

Two hundred and five bird species were recorded, with some lifers in there as well, during our stay, although only a handful are worth mentioning. Only three members of the cuckoo family were recorded: **Diderick's, Jacobin and Levillant's Cuckoo** but, all four owlets made up for this at Tsendze: **African Barred Owlet, African Scops-Owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet and Southern White-faced Scops-Owl**. The former three called simultaneously on some evenings with the 'scopsy' perching at times where residents could take close-up photographs during the daytime, in similar fashion to the bird at Afsaal picnic site in the South of Kruger.

Yellow-billed Oxpeckers were uncommon but widespread near their favourite host, buffalo, with these bulk grazers being abundant throughout the monotonous Mopane shrub. This generally uncommon species was found as far south as Letaba Camp.

Temminck's Courser was spotted feeding on the short grass area in between the stretches of Mopane at Mooiplaas waterhole and *en route* to Stapelkop Dam, south-west of Mopani Camp. These open areas with short grass also hosted **Dusky Lark** next to the S146 gravel road leading to the dam. Mooiplaas waterhole offered other great sightings such as Cheetah and **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark**, the latter also found at most other water bodies and at our greatest discovery during this trip, the Tihongonyeni waterhole. The only **Comb Duck** and two **Red-billed Teals** of the trip were sighted here amongst the frenzy of large herbivores. The vulnerable **Lesser Kestrel** was seen *en route* to Tihongonyeni, hunting in burnt Mopane veld next to the S143 gravel road east of the waterhole. This specific 'oasis in the green desert' looks like the National Geographic documentaries of the Serengeti plains. It is a vast, open, short grass area in the Mopane with 20 or so Elephant bulls and nearly a hundred Plain's Zebras occurring sympatrically with Blue Wildebeest and Tsessebe, all drinking water and feeding from the palatable grasses offered by this plain.

One of the more exciting discoveries was **Rufous-winged Cisticolas** singing amongst the tall, seasonal wetland grasses at the N'shawu waterholes which lie east of the S50 gravel road. A very skulking species when not singing its piping notes, but possibly the only spot in Kruger where one will be able to see it early mornings. The near-threatened **Black-bellied Bustard** was seen twice next to the roads east of Mopani, a species easy to detect when one's ears are tuned into its peculiar popping call. The Mooiplaas picnic site, south of Mopani hosted an **African Crane** that lurked through the Tsendze River's



Southern White-faced Scops-Owl/ Witwanguil

vegetated banks, however the local dams and waterholes hosted far more wading birds and waterfowl. A single **Black Stork** was spotted on a rocky bank of the Tsendze River at the Tsendze Loop immediately south of Mopani Camp. We missed out on sightings of Abdim's Stork, but the remaining stork species (most of which are Red Data species) were all recorded, including **African Openbill** which is also a near-threatened species (Barnes, 2000). The endangered **Saddle-billed Stork** was seen on three occasions.

The most coincidental sighting was that of a **Pallid Harrier**, a male bird taking a drink for a few minutes at Pioneer Dam bordering Mopani Rest Camp. It perched afterwards in a Mopane tree next to the water where it would have gone undetected had we arrived a few minutes later at the dam's westward-facing hide. Other speciality species identifiable only through a spotting scope, was

a pair of **White-fronted Plovers**, sharing the shoreline with **Common Greenshank**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Little Stint**, **Ruff** and the abundant **Wood Sandpiper**. The general area is probably the best area to view **Collared Pratincole**, where these birds occurred in loose flocks on the banks of most larger dams where animal disturbance was low.

The Punda Maria-Pafuri area provided few additions to the list with **White-crowned Lapwing** making its appearance near the picnic site and at Crook's Corner. A single **Eastern Nicator** called profusely from within the canopy of a tall Marula tree opposite the restaurant at Punda Maria Rest Camp, with reports of Arnot's Chat, Racket-tailed Roller and White-breasted Cuckooshrike occurring not far from camp. A local **White-browed Robin-Chat** also entertained us through breakfast with its jumbling song. Of the five lark species recorded, **Monotonous** was most intriguing with its 'purple jeep'-rendered song echoing through the veld where Red Bushwillow *Combretum appiculatum* invariably occurs. Their calls were heard most frequently along the Shongololo Loop, north-west of Mopani.

Last but not least was a single **Western Osprey** perched next to the Leteba River, north of the S47 road, number 205 on the list and a farewell not to be forgotten.

Unconfirmed species included possible Alpine Swifts circling granitic outcrops east of the H14 (the tarmac linking Phalaborwa Gate with Mopani Rest Camp) and the swift 'fly-by' of African-/Common Cuckoos. I believe the Meve's Starling doesn't exist in Kruger, but a lack of rain resulting in no ground cover could explain their absence around the Pafuri area.

Everyone had an exceptional holiday and the total amount of birds we recorded was not possible without my family's keen observing skills and their love for nature. Special thanks also go to Roger and Elina, the Tsendze Rustic Camp caretakers, who embraced us with their hospitality and friendliness, providing campers with a unique camping experience not encountered too often. 🦉

'n Kaal kol in die Oos-Kaap

Stephan Terblanche

Die Atlasprojek maak dit maklik om verskillende tydverdrywe met mekaar te kombineer. Vakansiehou is vir my en my vrou 'n ideale tydverdryf. Die ideale vakansie is iewers ver weg van alles op 'n vakansieplaas. Al hierdie ideale toestande pas noodwendig baie goed in by SABAP2, want dit bring mens van tyd tot tyd uit by afgeleë plekke binne bereik van groot wit areas in die Gap Analysis. Die grootste probleem is natuurlik dat hierdie ideale toestande veels te selde opduik.

Nietemin, aan die einde van Januarie 2011 kuier ons in die Winterberge in die Oos-Kaap. Nie baie mense weet eers van hierdie berge nie, maar Groot-Winterberg is 2369 m hoog en 'n voël moet honderde kilometers in alle rigtings vlieg om by 'n hoër berg uit te kom. Ons blyplek is die Redcliffe gasteplaas, hoog aangeskryf in verskeie bronne, en met goeie rede.

Om by die punt uit te kom: die omgewing verskyn op die 3126CA kaart 'Spring Valley'. Teen die tyd dat ons daar aanland het een dapper atlasser een van die 9 atlasblokke (pentades) gedoen en 11 spesies gevind. Die grond lê dus braak.

Ons betree die Winterberge vanuit die suide. Die opbou is 'n mosaïek van bosveld, grasveld, riviervalleie, klowe en kranse. Na ooglopende swaar reën in die nabye verlede lê die reste van omtrent 'n hele populierbos in 'n wanhoop teen 'n laagwaterbrug-gie opgestapel. AFRIKAANSE KWARTELS se "wit wit-it" klink omtrent oral op. Verder lewer die bosveld vir 'n Pretorianer 'n interessante verskeidenheid gewone voëls op, soos NEDDIKKIE, KLEINGLANSSPREEU, GEWONE SWARTMEES, GRYSKOPMOSSIE en GEEOLOGKANARIE. Die teenwoordigheid van PARADYSVLIEËVANGER, GEWONE WILLIE en PIET-MY-VROU dui op digter ruigtes plek-plek. Teen die bult uit is die habitatmosaïek baie duidelik uit die voëls wat opgeskryf word: 'n GRASVELDLANGBEKLEWERIK se dalende

fluit gaan gekras van 'n KNYSNALOERIE vooruit, onmiddellik gevolg deur 'n FISKAAL-VLIEËVANGER en 'n GRYSBORSTJAGRA sommer naby die pad. Die pad styg egter vinnig bo die bosveld uit en bereik terrasse grasvlaktes van sowat 1 300 m af. Nou domineer die geluide van GEWONE KOESTERS, KLEINSTE KLOPKLOPPIE en ORANJEKALKOENTJIE. Roofvoëls word skielik meer algemeen en ons sien herhaaldelik BRUINJAKKALSVOËL, voordat die telefoon- en kragrade versier word met stringe OOSTELIKE ROOIPOOTVALKIES. Met al die reën wat oor 'n wye gebied geval het is water volop, maar watervoëls skaars. Die vleie huisves darem KAAPSE FLAP en VLEITINKINKIE. Tydens 'n opvolgbesoek om die 2 ure vol te maak is voëls soos WITPENSINDSWAEL en WITKRUISAREND by die lys gevoeg, vir 'n totale aantal spesies van 49 (atlasblok 3225_2615). Daar is geen twyfel dat hierdie blok 'n baie groter potensiaal het, veral wat bosveldspesies betref.

Die volgende atlasblok (3220_2615) lei die pad met 'n kombinasie van strepe en kronkels bo-oor die Winterberge. Die geaardheid van landskap en plantegroei is totaal anders as die vorige een, en die voëllys weerspieël dit baie duidelik. Die omgewing word gedomineer deur hoogliggende grasveld (hoofsaaklik tussen 1500 en 1800 m bo seespieël), 'n paar bosse uitheemse bome, vleierige gebiede en 'n rotsband wat die hoogste dele uitmaak. Daar is 'n vlakkerige kloof in die een hoek, maar dié was nie toeganklik nie. Die algemeenste voëls was meesal trekvoëls, soos GROOTSTREEPSWAEL en OOSTELIKE ROOIPOOTVALKIES, maar standvoëls soos KAAPSE KANARIE, BOK-MAKIERIE en WITGATSPREEU was ook dikwels te sien en te hoor. Die grootste opwinding gebeur eers in die laaste oomblikke voordat ek moes aanskuif, toe 'n paar ORANJEBORSBERGLYSTERS hulleself in my teleskoop wys. Getrou aan hulle standaardvoorkeur is hulle bo-op die rotsrif te sien.



Oostelike Rooipootvalk/Amur Falcon

Dup du Plessis

Een van die uitdagings van die omgewing is om tussen GRYSRUG- en HUILTINKTINKIE te onderskei. Verspreiding help mens nie hier nie, en die ooreenkomste in voorkoms en geluid is so groot dat mens dikwels nie weet wat om aan te teken nie. Dit het niks gehelp dat ek die voëljie meesal net hoor roep het, maar dan nie te sien kon kry nie, of dat dit nog steeds te ver was om te koue of warm kleur van die onderkant te onderskei. Uiteindelik aanvaar mens maar, op grond van habitat, dat meeste eenvoudig HUILTINKTINKIE is.

Van die OOSTELIKE ROOIPOOTVALKIES gepraat: ek moes vir feitlik elke atlasblok waarin

hulle aangeteken is 'n ORF (Out of range form) voltooi. Ons het hierdie voëls oral in goeie getalle in die Winterberge en plek-plek elders in die Oos-Kaap gekry, maar hulle was tydens SABAP1 nie dikwels so ver suid en wes gevind nie. Groot dele van hierdie omgewing is met SABAP1 egter nie veel beter as met SABAP2 gedek nie en mens kan maar net spekuleer of die valkies regtig nou meer algemeen is. Die goeie reën in die omgewing skep natuurlik gunstige omstandighede in 'n area wat tydens droë jare dalk nie geskik is nie. Die boere van die omgewing het ook gereken hulle is nuwe toevoegings, wat net die laaste paar somers daar te sien is. (Dieselfde boer het 'n Piet-my-vrou 'n Diederikkie genoem, maar dis dalk 'n verstaanbare glips.) 'n Bykomende faktor is dat Januarie 2011 geweldig baie reën oor die hoëveld van Mpumalanga en die Vrystaat gesien het en dit heeltemal denkbaar is dat die valkies verder as normaalweg getrek het na gebiede waar daar darem meer sonskyn was, en in die Winterberge 'n geskikte omgewing gevind het.

Hierdie storie sou op dieselfde trant kon voortgaan, maar die kern is vertel. Daar is nog baie braak grond in die Oos-Kaap. En dis regtig nie 'n straf om in daardie plekke te gaan voëls kyk nie. 🦅

Uitdagings van voëlkyk in die USA

Stephan Terblanche

Sommige van ons kry nou en dan die geleentheid om vir werk oorsee te gaan. Uit die aard van die saak gaan mens se verkyker saam. As dit nie gebeur nie, is jy hoogstens 'n semi-voëlkyker. My verkyker is dus in my rugsak op pad na Washington DC in Amerika, in Oktober 2012. Verkykers is belangrik genoeg om saam met jou binne-in die vliegtuig te wees, en nie in jou tas in die bagasieruim nie. Netnou is daar 'n bagasiehanteerder in 'n lughawe wat 'n nuwe verkyker soek, omdat hy ook deur die voëlkykgogga gebyt is.

Amerika is nie 'n land om aan te pak sonder hare op jou tande nie. Amerikaners is luidrugtig; die advertensies op TV dryf mens die mure uit; alles daar is die beste in die wêreld, al het die gemiddelde Amerikaner nie 'n idee wat in die res van die wêreld aangaan nie. Al hierdie irritasies word op die spits gedryf deur die presidentsverkieping, wat plaasgevind het net 'n paar dae nadat ek daar weg is. Dit is die storm van eeu, Sandy, wat egter ook bewys het hoekom Amerika gekom het waar dit is. Daar is miljoene mense in hierdie land wat baie kundig



American Robin

is, en wat baie tyd aan hulle medemens in nood afstaan.

Op my eerste vol dag in Washington DC mik ek vir die natuurlike reservaat een kant in die stad. Dis nie so maklik om by Rock Creek Park uit te kom nie. Mens ry eers met die ondergrondse trein, en dan vang jy 'n bus. Dit voel bietjie soos in Suid-Afrika: die hele bus is vol swartmense. Al die passasiers is besig met hulle selfone. Die aantal iPhones help bewys dat ek is nie in Suid-Afrika nie. Kort nadat ek die oorvol bus verlaat en buite hoorafstand van die besige strate gestap het, het ek die park vir myself. Dis pragtig – in Suid-Afrika sou ons dit 'n woud genoem het. Dis herfs en die blare begin verkleur. Daar is oral iets te hoor: dit is nie 'n stil woud met amper niks voëls nie. Maar die patroon word vroeg-vroeg reeds gevestig: baie voëllewe beteken nie groot verskeidenheid nie. Eers is dit 'n TUFTED TITMOUSE wat by herhaling in my verkyker se beeld verskyn, en dan een na die ander AMERICAN ROBIN. Die Titmouse is 'n klein, valerige meesagtige voëltjie met 'n prominente kuifie; die American Robin is hulle weergawe van ons Geelbek-/Olyflyster. Dit is 'n tipiese lyster, maar mooi kleurvol: grys rugkant, swarterige kop met wit ring om die oog; geel snawel; en wisselend diep rooibruin onderkant. Ek sou in die loop van twee weke derduisende van hulle sien. Soms, soos by 'n boom vol bessies, kom en gaan hulle nimmer-eindigend. Grasperke in landelike gebiede is

dikwels oortrek deur honderde. Ek vind dat my gretigheid om die verkyker op te tel vinnig-vinnig negatief beïnvloed word. Mettertyd groei die voëllys darem aan. Spegte is goed verteenwoordig. Die RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER is 'n valerige speg met 'n helderrooi kop en amper niks rooi op die pens nie. (Daar is 'n swart speg met 'n rooi kop wat die naam Red-headed Woodpecker gekry het.) Die DOWNY WOODPECKER en HAIRY WOODPECKER is ook 'n paar keer te sien. Die twee is nogal soos ons Kardinaal- en Goudstertspegte: die algemeenste spegte en nie so maklik te onderskei nie, maar die Downy is heelwat kleiner, met 'n kleiner snawel. Nog 'n algemene spesie is die DARK-EYED JUNCO, 'n streeplose streepkoppe wat oorwegend grys is, met 'n wit pens en buitestertvere. Die dag word vinnig warm – buitengewoon vir einde Oktober. Om die waarheid te sê was die eerste week gereeld so 10°C bo gemiddeld.

Twee weke later het alles dramaties verander. Daar waai 'n ysige wind vanuit die weste oor Chesapeake Bay en die landskap toon oral tekens van baie reën en stormwinde. Orkaan Sandy is verby en die nuus is steeds vol berigte oor die skade aan New York en New Jersey. Waar ek rondloop op die Delmarva skiereiland, is dit suid van waar Sandy aan land gekom het, en die see het nooit oor land gespoel nie. Maar eintlik is alles nie anders nie. Die voëls het nie veel verander nie. Daar is steeds TURKEY VULTURES wat bo-oor die woude seil, steeds AMERICAN CROWS wat met 'n karakteristieke "kraa-kraa-kraa" so 10 meter bo die grond langs roei, steeds plate American Robins op die grond langs, steeds Juncos soos Rooivinke aan die wei. Dis met opgewondenheid dat ek 'n nuwe spesie vir hierdie reis waarneem: YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER. Nou is bietjie agtergrond nodig oor Amerika se sangertjies. Hulle maak 'n groot groep voëls uit wat tegnies as New World Warblers bekend is. Feitlik almal migreer noordwaarts in die (noordelike) lente en dan weer suid in die herfs, baie tot in Suid-Amerika. In die lente is hulle kleurvol en reg om te broei; mannetjies en wyfies se voorkoms verskil beduidend. In die herfs is almal hulle beduidend valer,

en die getalle aansienlik aangevul deur die jong voëltjies wat in die broeiseisoen bygekom het. Die jong voëltjies lyk amper meer na mekaar as na hulle ouers. Die enigste ekwivalent waarvan ons in Suid-Afrika weet is die Hofsvanger. Die *Yellow-rumped Warbler* deel dan ook baie van die vorm van die Hofsvanger, maar met die kleure van 'n helder-gekleurde Bergkanarie. Die opgewondenheid het nie lank gehou nie: die sangertjie sit soos 'n vlieëvangertjie op takke; soos spekvreters op dakke en mure; hang soos mese aan boomstamme; wei soos mossies op die grasperke; hang aan riete in die vleie soos rietangers. Al waar hulle nie is nie, is in die water.

Van water gepraat: op pad na die skiereiland ry mens oor een van daardie infra-struktuurdinge van die Amerikaners wat mens werklik beïndruk. Die mond van Chesapeake Bay is 30 km breed. Daar is 'n brug wat die mond oorsteek. Die brug moes egter nie in die pad wees van die reusagtige skepe wat hierdie mond moet gebruik nie; die Amerikaanse vloot moet immers daar kan verbykom. Om dit moontlik te maak gaan die brug by twee geleenthede onder die water in met tunnells van elkeen 1 myl lank. Vir die oorgang van brug na tunnel is daar mensgemaakte eilande. Mens kan vooraf reël vir toestemming om op hierdie eilande stil te hou om voëls te kyk, maar ek het dit te laat uitgevind. Dit is wel moontlik om op die suidelikste eiland stil te hou. Hier is ook 'n restaurant en kuriowinkel en die eienaars

probeer regtig hard om mens behoorlik te bedien. Dit was van die eiland af dat ek my enigste *lifer* van die besoek gesien het, 'n groepie BLACK SCOTER. Dit is seelewende eende, basies swart. Mens onderskei hulle van hulle ander familielede deur se kyk waar presies hulle wit kolle sit en wat die presiese snawelvorm is. 'n Ou bekende het die klippe van die eiland vir kos deursoek: 'n RUDDY TURNSTONE, of ons Steenloper. Amerika het ook 'n Black Turnstone, wat oorwegend langs die weskus voorkom. Hier was ook Tuinduiwe en Huisbossies te sien, en 'n groot swerm LAUGHING GULL. Hulle was te lui om te lag. Die enkele bekendes bevestig weer dat daar min ooreenkomste is tussen Suid-Afrikaanse en Amerikaanse voëls. Maar daar is telkens 'n Amerikaanse weergawe van ons spesies, soos 'n SNOWY EGRET, wat baie soos die Kleinwitreier lyk, behalwe dat die bene meer geel aan het, of die GREAT BLUE HERON, wat nogal verrassend baie soos ons Bloureier is.

'n Hele dag se voëlkyk op die skiereiland, met 'n wye verskeidenheid habitatte, insluitende baie water, het met harde werk 50 spesies opgelewer. En dis nie omdat ek die voëls nie ken nie. Maar dis ook nie dat Amerika nie sy kwota vaaljapies het nie. Hulle vlieëvangers is 'n nagmerrie, selfs vir plaaslike mense. Verder is hulle mossies soos tinkinkies, en ek het heeltyd omtrent net die Vleitinkinkie gesien.

Was dit darem alles die moeite werd? *You bet*. Dit gaan immers oor voëls. 🐦

Why do birds moult?

Because if they didn't, their plumage would get so worn and tatty they would have trouble finding food, coping with the elements, breeding – and ultimately surviving. Flight, in particular, is hampered by broken feathers and worn plumage. Birds also moult to adopt a more showy plumage for courtship and breeding. This may simply be a brighter version of their usual plumage, or in some cases – for example, in many waders – a completely different looking plumage just for the breeding season. Extreme examples include the African widowbirds and whydahs, whose males exhibit breeding plumes with incredibly long tails, yet outside the breeding season become nondescript streaky-brown, with short tails.

Birding Finland and Norway – Part Two

John Bannon

Thursday June 14

This was the day of our 722 km drive from Kuusamo to Vestre Jakobselv on the shores of the Varangerfjord in N Norway, so we breakfasted early and were on the road by 7am.

Antti had advised us of a local site to pick up both Waxwings and Rustic Bunting and within 10 minutes we had successfully found both species, with everybody enthralled by the Waxwings in particular. As we resolutely headed northwards we soon crossed the Arctic Circle (circa 66,33 degrees and called Napapiiri in Finnish) and a quick pit stop at Sodankyla meant I actually got to look around one of Finland's oldest wooden churches (1679) for the first time.

At Kaamanen, north of Inari, the Neljan Tullan Tupa cafe had both male and female Pine Grosbeaks on its feeders, just as it did in June 2009, plus Bullfinches, Siskins, Greenfinches and Common Redpolls and we spotted our first Elk, next to the roadside, on our way to Utsjoki.

From Utsjoki we kept to the Finnish side of the Tana River and at the EU's most northerly village, Nuorgam, headed into the fjells to check out one of the remotest areas, but apart from Northern Wheatears, Yellow Wagtails, Redstarts and Pied Flycatchers, little else showed on a bitterly cold, grey evening.

We reached our accommodation, the Pikkitskiti Lodge, on the harbour wall at Vestre Jakobselv around 8pm and co-owner Leena soon appeared to show us around. The fish drying racks, so characteristic of the immediate area, are no longer used – the 'fresh' cod is now probably imported from China, like virtually everything else nowadays.

A wander around the local area was decided upon, so we headed inland following the river and soon came across a very helpful lady jogger called Gunn. She asked if we would like to see some young owls and within five minutes we were watching two hungry juvenile

Hawk Owls, one of which had just been fed a large rodent by an adult, while the other one begged loudly for his supper. Welcome to Varangerfjord!

Friday June 15

We awoke to bright glorious sunshine and light winds, with the temperature rocketing to 17 degrees centigrade. Such days are not very frequent on Varanger, where you can get all the seasons in one day, so we made another early start along the peninsula towards Vadsø and Vardo.

Vadsoy (island) was superb as usual with many Red-throated Pipits, Common Redpolls, Scandinavian Rock Pipits and dozens of spinning Red-necked Phalaropes on the pool. The newly arrived local Greenfinches were also much admired along with Arctic Skuas, Redshanks and the local Oystercatchers.

Our next stop was at the Kittiwake cliffs at Storre Ekkeroy, where a Little Stint, Black Guillemots and a distant Red-throated Diver were also present. A superb male Shorelark was scoped right next to the road gathering food for his young and he was so close even his horns could be seen well. The local Red-throated Pipits flitted around the rooftops and a Common Gull had made its nest on the rusting engine block of an old fishing boat. Our first four Northern Golden Plovers, in glistening summer plumage, produced gasps of admiration.

The 2,9km long FREE tunnel from the mainland took us onto Vardo Island, to find that most of the seabirds were on the farthest side of the channel, in the lee of Hornoya Island. With some difficulty we all eventually got passable views of the numerous Guillemots, Razorbills, Puffins, Shags and Kittiwakes, but the Brunnich's Guillemots, were just too far away to be certain of. A nearby colony of nesting Arctic Terns made sure we kept our heads

down, but they all erupted as one, when Arctic Skuas and the marauding Great Black-backed Gulls came near.

Deciding to return on Sunday, we set off for the lighthouse, recording passing Northern Gannets and a few Northern Fulmars. But by god it was cold on the headland, so we clambered for shelter into our van and the drive to the end of the world, aka Hamningberg.

The famous Hamningberg road starts by Vadso Airport and heads north through amazing lunar-like rock formations for some 37 km before reaching the desolate hamlet on the edge of the Arctic Ocean. This remote location was used as the set for the moon walks in the James Bond film *Moonraker*. As we had already started to run out of time if not sunlight, we decided to only bird the first 15 km of the road, but still added nesting Rough-legged Buzzard, Arctic Redpoll, Ruff, nesting Red-throated Diver and Long-tailed Ducks to our list. A new hide overlooking the best area of wet mires and fjells looked interesting as we soon became blasé about the multitude of Arctic Skuas on their nest mounds beside the road.

The weather steadily deteriorated into low cloud and cold rain. We had already experienced spring and summer earlier in the day, autumn was now upon us, and no doubt winter would arrive before we got back to our base in Vestre Jakobselv.

Saturday June 16

Our first three White-tailed Eagles were seen on route to Varangerbotn, where at 7:30 am the Sami Museum WiFi facilities and toilets were very much appreciated. The low tide mudflats held a few Shelduck and Widgeon but little else and there was also no sign of the Hawk Owls reported to be nesting in the area.

The Tana River valley beckoned and at milepost 28,5 we pulled over to look for the long gone Gyr Falcons on the towering cliffs. A flyover Golden Eagle mobbed by Ravens was a bonus, but was only got onto by a few of the group. The very active Ring Ouzels 'chacked' constantly, especially when a Rough-legged Buzzard hung above the cliffs for a few



moments. A very strange song was eventually pinned down to a Willow Warbler; perhaps the Tana Valley birds have their own local dialect. We looked out for King Eiders, trying hard to turn a female Common Eider into the rarer species, but found only two Spotted Redshanks on a nearby estuary – possibly females already returning south, after having left the male sat on the eggs high on the fjells.

As we traveled on into the fjells, a roadside Oystercatcher was nesting inches from the tarmac, exactly where one had nested in 2009. We soon reached the magnificent snowfields, lakes and Arctic tundra of Kongsfjordfjellet, just before the road junction to Batsfjord and Berlevag. It was very cold but dry as we set off in different directions to explore the area.

Norway Lemming tracks were everywhere and apparently this year was a good year, which probably explained the presence of several pairs of the very handsome Long-tailed Skuas. At least two distant Rough-legged Buzzards were seen and the lakes held Red-throated Divers, Long-tailed Ducks, displaying Temminck's Stints, Red-necked Phalaropes, Ringed and Golden Plovers but only one Lapland Bunting was seen briefly in flight. Not so with Shorelarks, which seemed to be everywhere, almost as common as the numerous Rock Pipits calling and display flighting. This year, 'spring' seemed at least two weeks late



Northern Hawk Owl chick

and the local willow beds were only just in bud, so perhaps the lack of Dotterel meant they had not yet arrived.

The lakes at the road junction held both divers, plus phalaropes, and several pairs of Greater Scaup, but our best sighting was of 15 'lekking' Ruff - uniquely described by Bets as 'looking like very strange Chinamen!' Leaving the unusual Orientals to their pugilism, we took the road towards Batsfjord and soon came across more Lapland Buntings, several Willow Grouse and... two Snow Buntings! One of André's best finds, and a very desired lifer for all of the party. It was also very strange to watch the small flockettes of displaying Common Ringed Plovers calling and landing on the mini icebergs to pick off insects as they thawed from the ice.

The high road descended into the fishing port of Batsfjord, with Russian trawlers in the harbour and huge numbers of Goosanders and Goldeneyes on the lake just outside the town. I left our group to have my customary cherry-flavoured cigar and started to scan the nearby seaweed-covered shoreline to find it was crawling with very close, summer-plumaged Purple Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones, yet more lifers for some.

Heading back we stopped briefly on the fjells to look for roadside Dotterel, before reaching the Tanamungen Estuary, which was

now bathed in glorious evening sunlight. It was full of displaying Temminck's Stints, and the fast flowing waters were teeming with more Red-breasted Mergansers, Goldeneye and Goosanders. We witnessed the amazing sight of some 30 Common or Harbour Seals, leaping from the water heading upstream, aquaplaning and chasing after fish, presumably Atlantic salmon. Another memorable end to another memorable day!

Sunday June 17

Our second day of unbroken sunshine and another early start meant that we were rapidly heading eastwards again with the specific intention of completing our journey to the very end of the road to Hamningberg.

Briefly delayed by a small party of 15 *taiga* Bean Geese very close to the road below Krampen Bridge we were further delayed by more Snow Buntings at various sites, nesting Arctic Skuas, flyover waders, a fine cock Merlin close to the road and a large colony of *Scandinavian* Lesser-blacked Gulls on the hillsides. 11 more Bean Geese flew over as we stopped at an area of riverside willows to check for Bluethroats. Within a few minutes a stonking male 'red-spotted' Bluethroat was in full song from the tops of a nearby willow bush and we all had excellent views of this amazing little chat through the scope.

The end of the road at Hamningberg was less productive than on previous visits with only fly-past Gannets, Fulmars, various auks and Kittiwakes. A Dipper hurtled under the bridge at Sandfjord, but conscious of our date with the harbourmaster's boat to Hornoya, we decide to head back to Vardo, passing through the 2,9 km long Ishavstunnelelen (Arctic Ocean tunnel) once again, before it was too late to join the only sailing on a Sunday, at 12:00 noon.

Scrambling around the bird island of Hornoya is a superbly unmissable experience, even at Euros 45. You get very close views of all the nesting seabirds, including their vomit and excrement, but the sounds and the visual delights are stunning.

Hordes of Puffins, Kittiwakes, Shags,



On the fjells near Båtsfjord in search of Dotterell and Snow Bunting

Guillemots including many bridled forms, Razorbills and harder to find Brunnich's Guillemots, crowded the cliffs and grassy banks, studded with wild flowers. A path wound right around the island, which André and I decided to follow. We were rewarded by panoramic vistas of the Barents Sea, plus nesting Twites, Meadow, Rock and Red-throated Pipits, Ravens and 12 Bean Geese, which flew along the cliffs. Red-legged Black Guillemots were pottering around the harbour as we returned.

Vardo is the only town in Europe truly within the Arctic Climatic Zone and Hornoya is the most easterly point of Norway. It has an average July temperature below 10 degrees centigrade and with the northerly winds coming straight in from the Arctic icecap I can see why. It also has an 18th century fortress and is infamous for burning 80 of its female citizens as witches, between 1620 and 1692. Not a good place to be at the time if you happened to be a reclusive old lady with a black cat. It's now home to 2,500 inhabitants with a sizeable population of Russians and apparently Sri Lankans! So it says in the Lonely Planet guide!

Our seabirds appetite sated, we set sail for our adopted 'home' at the Pikkiskitsi Lodge and as Sandy and I took a stroll in the midnight sun, our shadows stretched out 15 metres before us, a beautiful Little Stint called in flight and then displayed over the tranquil harbour.

Tomorrow we would be leaving magnificent Varangerfjord behind to return to the 'real' world.

Monday June 19

We said goodbye to the Pikkiskitsi Lodge to head south, deciding to cross the Tana at Tanabru and head up the north side of the river to Utsjoki in Finland. There are no border formalities and still looking for Dotterel, we tried the Aigas Fjell area just east of the town. No luck, although two Finnish birders advised us that they had seen one the day before. Later that day they found a Finnish mega-rarity at Nuorgam, in the shape of a Corn Bunting – only 1,500 km north of its normal range.

Our next stop was at Pilopaa Fjell south of Ivalo, for potential Dotterel, Arctic Warbler and Ptarmigan, but no luck... However, André was on a roll and made up for our mutual lethargy by finding an absolutely stonking 100% Parrot Crossbill at the top of a nearby spruce. We watched a glorious male for some time, calling and giving his distinctive 'trriiii!'. Mega bird and only the second I have ever seen in Fennoscandia and definitely one of my top birds of the trip!

Gradually we shepherded everyone back on board and headed for Oulu, stopping only at the official Santa Claus Village, just north



Tundra landscape with Vardo in the background

of Rovaniemi, for the obligatory Arctic Circle certificates and Saami souvenirs.

Delayed further by traffic and in deteriorating weather we didn't reach Liminingahti until after 10 pm, almost two hours later than we had planned. Luckily we had kept in constant touch with Jari Hannus, the very obliging chef and accommodation manager, so he still made us very welcome despite the late hour. The excellent dinner was very soon 'wolfed down' and totally 'knakkeridd' (my contribution to the Finnish language) we all staggered into our rooms to sleep like the proverbial logs.

Tuesday June 19

Our last day and still no Cinnamon Buns to be had anywhere. We lay in until 7am before visiting the various *lintutornos* around the Liminingahti reserve.

To be honest, Liminingahti was a great disappointment. The former extensive, mature, reed beds have all been destroyed; as the ice floes moved in previous severe winters, they sliced them all away. The new green reed beds will eventually replace those lost, but it might take years before its former glory is restored.

Returning to the reserve centre we packed up for our return flights to Helsinki and visited the lake adjacent to the airport, where a pair of Common Scoters potted around in the middle.

As my flight was slightly earlier than my South African compatriots we parted

regretfully, vowing to repeat the experience one day. They had a couple of hours to kill before their flight departure and after scouting some of the sites in the bay area around Oulu, a female Hen Harrier was spotted being actively mobbed by a very determined Eurasian Curlew.

Meanwhile I had checked in and went to sample the delights of the Hello Café in the departures lounge and there they were in all their glory... Cinnamon Buns (*Korvapuustii*)... well Cinnamon Rolls actually, but close enough, so I SMSed my fellow travelers with the good news!

SUMMARY

Species that we missed, which were available, or had been very recently seen prior to our trip, included both Steller's and King Eider; White-billed Diver; Glaucous Gull; Gyr Falcon and both 'night-time' displaying waders, Jack Snipe and Broad-billed Sandpiper.

Quite why we never came across any Dunlin on Varanger is a complete mystery to me and certainly the very distant view of the usually noisy and obvious Black-tailed Godwits in Oulu, was also untickable for my colleagues.

Ptarmigan were as invisible as ever and only a few of us managed to get a glimpse of the tail end of a Hazel Grouse, but if we had had the strength to put in more 'overnight' birding time, they were certainly there to be seen. Both Black and Willow Grouse were relatively easy but any cock Capercaillie had long disappeared into the depths of the forests.

Only one small family party of Siberian Jays was seen, which was just as well because the usual feeder sites at Valtavaara car park are no more. This species can be very easily missed in mid-June. Around 400 established territories of the increasing Red-flanked Bluetail meant, that this year at least, this superb bird was much easier to come across than Siberian Jay!

Excluding Dotterel, the tundra species were all seen well, with very close Purple Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstones, almost common Shorelarks and many more Snow Buntings than on previous visits. Scandinavian Rock Pipits and Red-throated Pipits were also widespread and abundant, but perversely Lapland Buntings were more difficult to find than Rustic or Little Buntings. The almost total lack of voles, except on Varanger, meant that without Finnature's superb guiding services, we would probably

have only recorded Hawk Owl – which is usually the most difficult to find! We also 'jammed in' on Pallid Harrier, White-backed Woodpecker, Citrine Wagtail, Parrot Crossbill and Penduline Tit – so we can have no complaints at all.

Mammals were not common as usual, except for Red Squirrels, Mountain Hares and Muskrats, mostly in the north. A solitary Elk was seen near Inari, where Reindeer became abundant. I did glimpse a Flying Squirrel on my nocturnal visit to Nuksio NP near Helsinki, where they are apparently fairly regular.

Thanks to all my compatriots for their good company, good humour, bird finding expertise, food preparation and the overall *craic*. The Finns and Norwegians we met with were invariably friendly and helpful and I would do it all again tomorrow, given the slightest opportunity. 🐿

Aloe Creek

Pristine Gauteng Bushveld, Birding and Fishing



Tel: 082 334 3471

Fax: 086 647 1078

mail@alocreekfarm.co.za

www.alocreekfarm.co.za



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

SELF-CATERING ACCOMMODATION IS OFFERED IN TWO UNITS

Lebeo Cottage: R450 per night for a maximum of 2 persons. R150 per extra person per night. Children between the ages of 2 and 12 years pay half price

Kudu View House: R750 per night for a maximum of 4 persons. R120 per extra person per night. Children between the ages of 2 and 12 years pay half price

Birding in the Eastern Cape: 23-30 October 2012

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

Why is it that at least some of us feels tired towards the end of the year and in need of a break? "What a good idea to get away" said Kathrin my wife. There is always a good reason to look into the *Southern African Bird Finder*. Where have we not been birding yet? Eastern Cape, here we come! I know from business trips that Port Elizabeth is always windy... but there must be *some* birds there! I had at least one bird on my "wish-list" which had eluded us thus far; the Bar-tailed Godwit. But you know how wish-lists go – same as New Year's resolutions...

We landed in PE on 23rd October, and yes, it was windy. We had booked an apartment in Jeffrey's Bay, just to be away from the city. It was raining, so the next day we drove to Wilderness, to see our old friends who had retired down there. *En route* we passed Humansdorp and had a good sighting of a Red-capped Lark. The Garden Route was in pristine condition, and we enjoyed beautiful views of the natural surroundings. We made a breakfast stop at the impressive Storms River Bridge. After walking around, binoculars in hand, came our first surprise: a Black Cuckooshrike, which 'always got away' previously. A very nice lifer indeed. We spent a lovely day with our friends, observing several African Black Oystercatchers. They always appear 'as perfectly dressed gentlemen'. We also saw Black Saw-wing, Barn and White-throated Swallows, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, and various weavers.

The next day was one of those perfect days, no wind, clear skies. On our way back to Jeffrey's Bay, we visited the Storms River mouth, which our friends had recommended to us. A very pretty nature reserve, with walking trails and a long suspension bridge across the Storms River. In the thickets, we saw several birds, as well as a Chorister Robin-Chat.

Next we visited the Gamtoos River estuary. The wind was blowing, but we saw Pied

Bar-tailed Godwit/ Bandstertgriet



Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, several lapwings, and Common and Pied Starlings nesting in holes in a steep bank next to the road. This was very interesting to us, seeing different starling species nesting in holes in a bank in close proximity to one another. Further on our journey took us to Seekoei estuary between Aston and Paradise Beach. We saw a large flock of Ruff, Three-banded Plovers, Common Sandpiper, Kittlitz's Plover, Common Greenshank, and a very nice sighting of a Common Whimbrel, as well as several duck species. Our next stop was the Kabeljous River estuary outside Jeffrey's Bay, which does not feature in the *Southern African Bird Finder* but is a most worthwhile destination, with really vast flocks of waders, albeit quite far off, so a spotting scope is essential. We saw large flocks of Greater Flamingo, Little Stints speeding up and down the shores, African Spoonbills, Sacred Ibis, various lapwings and Kelp Gull *en masse*. But no godwit.

The following day we travelled to Cape Recife on the outskirts of Port Elizabeth. Also a good location, if you can bear the wind – I now understand why locals shave their hair short...

Despite the spotting scope quivering and shaking in the wind, we saw Caspian, Damara, Swift, Little and Sandwich Tern; Grey, White-fronted and Common Ringed Plover; and plenty of Kelp Gulls. Ruddy Turnstones were scuttling around, turning over pebbles and debris as their name implies. I can certainly recommend Cape Recife as a birding spot. But regrettably, no godwit was to be seen anywhere. Next and close to Port Elizabeth, we visited Sea View Forest Nature Reserve. This is a less-known very pretty little reserve. We saw a number of forest birds, Collared Sunbird, Black-headed Oriole, Black Cuckoo (the female gave its diagnostic “vurrr-vurrr” call) and of course the ever-present Sombre Greenbul giving its “willi” call. Another lifer came with a White-starred Robin which responded to the call from my PDA.

That afternoon late we returned to the Kabeljous River estuary, to take a walk on the beach and there in the distance, we saw some large waders probing in the mud in shallow water. Could it be? We first saw a Eurasian Curlew, a large wader and a very good sighting indeed. We were discussing the sizes of the different waders, that fact that the Bar-tailed Godwit is smaller than the Curlew. Then we saw another group of waders. We reached for our binoculars, but the sun was blinding us, it certainly looked as though it could be godwits. We made a large detour to get behind the birds with the sun in our back – YES! 5 Bar-tailed Godwits probing away in the muddy water, the larger female in front. The lifer I was hoping for been found!

The next day was windy and rainy, so we decided to pay Addo Elephant Park a visit. The nearest gate is only some 70 km from Jeffrey’s bay. We had never been there before and it was interesting to see the very different vegetation types. Addo’s habitat is made up of 5 of the 7 South African vegetation biomes. At first, the scrub was so dense that we only saw a solid wall of vegetation on the sides of the road, and we only saw the road ahead. As is Murphy’s Law, down the road came an Elephant, a large solitary bull. As an Honorary Officer of the North West Parks and Tourism Board, I know the

Elephants of Pilanesberg well and what they can get up to with cars which are blocking their way and I felt uncomfortable with this 6,000 kg animal heading down the road straight for us. I backed down the road, but eventually had to stop as there was no way to get into the scrub on the side of the road. Fortunately, the Elephant passed. We saw some good birds, Desert Cisticola, which was very vocal, a Forest Canary and Southern Tchagra were all lifers for us; furthermore Black-headed Heron, Rufous-naped Lark, Bokmakierie, Cape Canary, Cape Weaver and a number of other birds put in an appearance.

The following day we were to fly back to Johannesburg. The weather was very unkind and it was raining cats and dogs. At 09h30 the rain subsided and we decided to take a last walk on the sandy shores of the Kabeljous estuary. The clouds opened, the sun came through and the weather changed markedly. At that stage, we saw another Bar-tailed Godwit wading in shallow water, probing away in the muddy water with its long, slightly up-curved bill. This time I had taken all equipment along, a spotting scope and a camera – and all you heard was the clicking sound of my camera!

In all, it was a good birding experience. It became clear to Kathrin and me, that if one wants to see new birds, one must travel. Through birding, we’ve seen interesting places we would never otherwise have seen, wonderful places I would not like to have missed. We saw 115 birds in total with 7 lifers. 🦋

Are any birds completely silent?

Although most birds have some kind of song or call, a few groups, such as New World vultures and storks, lack the vocal mechanism to make complex sounds, so apart from the occasional hiss, grunt or croak are usually silent. Incidentally, the name ‘Mute Swan’ arose because this species does not call in flight, unlike Bewick’s and Whooper Swans.

Rarities and unusual sightings report: 31 December 2012

Compiled by André Marx

The summer started off with a bang when a few really good rarities popped up in the region, with probably the biggest being the remarkable find of a Collared Flycatcher in a suburban garden in Randburg; this is probably the biggest twitch in Gauteng for a number of years with a few hundred birders from all over the country managing to see and photograph it. Other excellent local rarities included Black-tailed Godwit at Marievale and African Skimmer at Mkhombo Dam.

National Rarities/ Nasionale Rariteite

Black-tailed Godwit. Swartstertgriet: one bird located at Marievale on 23 Dec 2012 remained at the locality for a few weeks when many birders managed to see it (SR).

African Skimmer. Waterploëër: an immature bird was found on the shore of Mkhombo Dam, north-east of Pretoria, where it remained for a few days, 17 Dec 2012 (EM).

Pectoral Sandpiper. Geelpootstrandloper: up to 3 birds were present at various times at Mkhombo Dam from 30 Sep to the time of

this report at end Dec 2012 (Gbird); at various times from 23 Nov 2012 at least two birds were at Kgomo-Kgomo when a number of birders reported this species (Gbird).

Collared Flycatcher. Withalsvlieëvanger: a male in non-breeding plumage was discovered in the garden of Malcolm Wilson in Robindale, Randburg, 4 Dec 2012 (MW). This rare bird was enjoyed by many birders when it remained in and around the garden where it was present for a few days, before disappearing after a storm.

Below and right:
Collared Flycatcher/
Withalsvlieëvanger

Tony Archer,



Jenome Ainsley



Andy Bramfield

Green Sandpiper. Witgatruiter: a single bird was seen along the Jukskei River in Waterfall Estate, Midrand, where it was present for several weeks, 3 Nov 2012 (RS); one bird was at Northern Farm once again, 11 Nov 2012 (DV).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Taanborsstrandloper: a solitary bird was observed at a small dam at Waterfall Estate, Midrand, 8 Sep 2012 (RS, AM).

Regional Rarities/ Streeksrariteite

European Honey-Buzzard. Wespedief: one bird was at Waterfall Estate, Midrand, in pentad 2600_2805, 13 Oct 2012 (RS); one bird was at the Boschkop koppie in Randburg, 20 Oct 2012 (AB); with another bird (maybe the same one?) being seen at Delta Park, 20 Oct 2012 (GL); a solitary bird was at Eikenhof south of Joburg, 26 Nov 2012 (KL).

Striped Crake. Getreepte Riethaan: one bird was seen near Rust de Winter village, 15 Dec 2012 (LvD, NP).

Corn Crake. Kwartelkoning: a single bird was at Mkhombo Dam, 17 Dec 2012 (EM).

Collared Pratincole. Rooivlerksprinkaanvoël: at least one bird was at the western section of Mkhombo Dam in pentad 2505_2845, 27 Oct 2012 (LvD).

Common Whimbrel. Kleinwulp: two birds were present on the shoreline at Mkhombo Dam for a few days, 17 Nov 2012 (Gbird).

Bar-tailed Godwit. Bandstertgriet: two birds were present at Mkhombo Dam from at least 30 Sep 2012 when a number of birders reported the species (Gbird).

Caspian Plover. Asiatiese Strandkiewiet: two birds were photographed at Kgomo-Kgomo, north of Pretoria, in pentad 2505_2805, 5 Oct 2012 (DV).

Chestnut-banded Plover. Rooibandstrandkiewiet: two birds were on the shore of Mkhombo Dam in pentad 2505_2845, 17 Nov 2012 (LvD).

River Warbler. Sprinkaansanger: at least one bird was found at Mkhombo Dam, 17 Dec 2012 (EM).



Common Starling. Europese Spreeu: a flock of 9 birds was seen flying over Delta Park, Johannesburg, 16 Sep 2012 (GL). *This species has in recent times being recorded in a number of new localities in Gauteng and is undoubtedly in the process of colonising the province, so any further records will be of interest.*

Other Interesting Observations/ Ander Interessante Waarnemings

Black-chested Snake-Eagle. Swartbors-slangarend: at a WBC club outing one bird was seen at the Klipriviersberg NR in southern Joburg, where this species is generally



**Caspian Plover/
Asiatiese
Strandkiewiet**

uncommon, 15 Sep 2012 (LR, WBC members).

Long-crested Eagle. Langkuifarend: one bird was at Delta Park, Johannesburg, 24 Nov 2012 (CJ).

Natal Spurfowl. Natalse Fisant: this bird was heard and briefly seen on Northcliff hill in Johannesburg, where they may be a small, relict population of the species, 25 Dec 2012 (LR, HSR).

Red-billed Oxpecker. Rooibekrenostervoël: a single bird was seen at Kalkheuvel near Broederstroom in pentad 2550_2750, 2 Dec 2012 (LR).

White-crested Helmetshrike. Wilhelm-laksman: 4 birds were seen in bush adjacent to the Jukskei River in Waterfall Estate, Midrand, 15 Sep 2012 (RS).

Lesser Masked-Weaver. Kleinswartkeelvink: a group of birds in breeding plumage were found with nests in palm trees at the Totiusdal Post Office, Waverley, in Pretoria, where this species is generally uncommon, 10 Sep 2013 (AV).

Spectacled Weaver. Brilwewer: a sighting of one bird in riverine growth near Kgomo-Kgomo is a new record for the area, 29 Dec 2012 (DvZ, EK). *This could be another species that is extending its range further south and west from where it is traditionally recorded.*

Observers/ Waarnemers

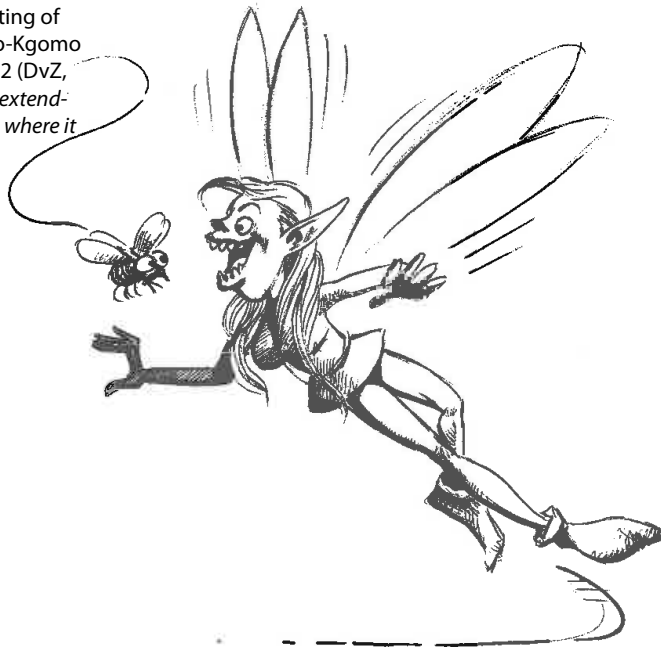
André Marx (AM)
Andy Branfield (AB)
Anneke Vincent (AV)
Charles Johnstone (CJ)
Debbie van Zyl (DvZ)
Dylan Vasapolli (DV)
Elouise Kalmer (EK)
Etienne Marais (EM)
Gauteng birders (GBird)
Geoff Lockwood (GL)
Hanneline Smit-Robinson (HSR)
Kevin Lavery (KL)
Lance Robinson (LR)
Lisl van Deventer (LvD)
Malcolm Wilson (MW)
Niall Perrins (NP)

Ron Searle (RS)

Selwyn Rautenbach (SR)

This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made in the greater Gauteng region, defined as 100 km from the centre of both Johannesburg and Pretoria, however observations made further afield are also welcome. While the majority of records 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. Members are invited to submit details of sightings to André Marx at e-mail turaco@telkomsa.net or 083 4117674. 🐦

Fairy Flycatcher



The Nesting Log Saga continued

Ingrid van Heerden

Readers of *Laniarius* may remember my article on the nesting logs in our Brooklyn garden that after initial enthusiasm, have been mysteriously shunned by all local species of barbet. Well, because I am not a person to give up easily, I inspected the two nesting logs in the front garden in early spring. As one of the logs was badly cracked and probably leaking, I replaced it and settled down to once again roll out the red carpet for the barbets that inhabit our suburb.

Within 24 hours, a Crested Barbet had appeared, inspected the new log, hacked out the opening and presumably a nesting cavity, and disappeared! Well, I was flabbergasted and resigned to another season without any nesting birds. But like so many things in life, the vagaries of our local avian population never cease to surprise me. About a week after the barbet had excavated and spurned the new nest, I noticed that a male Southern Grey-headed Sparrow was tirelessly patrolling both nesting logs and the entire front garden. Intrigued, I read up about the nesting habits of these sparrows in Roberts.

I had always believed that common sparrows such as Cape and House Sparrow make

untidy nests in trees and under the eaves of houses. However, according to Roberts¹ and as described in Peacock², Southern Grey-headed Sparrow will nest in holes in trees, old barbet nests, pipes, nesting boxes and other structures.

From the start, the proud sparrow father has kept up an incessant chirping for weeks on end. He perches in the trees above the nesting logs and utters a loud, "Chirp, chirp" every second or so, 20 times a minute. Needless to say, I am starting to suffer from "Sparrow chirp fatigue". If those babies don't hatch soon, this little bird is going to drive me dotty. I have heard of Chinese water torture, and death by chocolate, but not of 'insanity by sparrow'!

References

1. Hockey PAR, Dean WJR, Ryan PG (eds) 2005. *Roberts - Birds of Southern Africa*, VIIth ed. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.
2. Peacock F. 2012. *Chamberlain's LBJs*. Mirafr Publishing, Pretoria. 🐦

Donations / Donasies ((July – September 2012)

A huge thank you for your donation. Your contribution will help us reach our goal towards supporting bird conservation projects and is much appreciated.

Baie dankie vir u donasie. U bydrae verseker dat ons 'n groter bydrae tot die bewaring van voëls kan lewer en word oreg waardeer.

Helen Robins
Maria Putter
Sita Rootman
Habib Karimulla
André Marx
Anonymous: 4 Dec

Marinda Boonzaaier
Jan Niemandt
Dup du Plessis
Brian Moreby
Bernice Fletcher

Marsh Owls and a Grey-headed Gull

Ron Searle

I have recently taken up residence in the Waterfall Retirement Village in Midrand in a home that overlooks the Jukskei River and about 10 hectares of indigenous grassland. Although the whole of what was Mia's Farm, and what was a great birding destination, is planned largely for residential development, there remains a small remnant of the birdlife that once prevailed on Mia's farm for much of my birding life.

Almost every evening we have the privilege of watching a pair of Marsh Owls quartering the grassland for prey. Participating in the SABAP2 project ensures that I monitor, on an almost continuous basis, the birds occurring in the Waterfall Estate and the late afternoon of 13th October was an occasion for adding Marsh Owl to my field card list for this particular pentad.

On cue at 18:15 I noticed a Marsh Owl and then its mate but instead of quartering at 2 or

3 metres above ground level, the owls were flying at a relatively high altitude and I then concluded, by their flight movements, that they were hawking alates (flying ants). My wife and I then enjoyed 15 minutes of watching this rather unusual owl activity before the owls were joined by the only other bird species present, a single lone Grey-headed Gull, which likewise joined in the alate feast. As far as I can establish, the owls used both talons and bill for purposes of catching the ants, whereas the gull, which was surprisingly agile in its movements, only used its bill.

I have consulted my Roberts tome which confirms that both species feed on insects from time to time, but no specific mention of alates. This is the first time in over 50 years of birding that I have had the privilege of observing these species at an alate emergence. 🦉

A thank you to the leaders of club events / Dankie aan die leiers van BLNG

Weereens baie dankie aan al die wonderlike mense wat optree as uitstappie leiers, kampleiers en sprekers by die aandvergaderings. Ons wil langs hierdie weg ons opregte waardering uitspreek vir julle bydrae want sonder julle sal die klub nie kan funksioneer nie. Hierdie jaar was 'n besonder bydrag jaar, en ons sê baie dankie, elkeen van julle is spesiaal!

A special thank you to all the wonderful people who act as leaders of outings and camps and speakers at evening meetings. Without your contribution the club will not be able to function. This last year was an exceptional year, and we say a special thanks as each one of you is special!

Pieter & Natasja Saunders, Gerrie J van Rensburg, André Marx, John Bradshaw, Peter Greaves, Rion Lerm, Rob Geddes, Etienne Marais, Bryan Groom, Gisela Ortner, Andrew McKechnie, Neithard Graf von Dürckheim, Philip Calinikos, Dewald du Plessis, Frans en Adele van Vuuren, Jonathan Leeming, Déwald Swanepoel, Niall Perrins, Amanda & Pieter le Roux, André & Elma van der Walt, Julio & Erna Balona, John Wesson, Stephan Terblanche, Eben Muller, Annatjie & André Barkhuizen, Clive Hopcroft, Ernst Retief, Alta Fraser, Jason Boyce.

A special thank you to all the leaders who donated their gratuities back to the club.

André Marx, John Bradshaw, Bryan Groom, Neithard Graf von Dürckheim, Gisela Ortner, Philip Calinikos, Amanda & Pieter le Roux, André & Elma van der Walt, Stephan Terblanche, Annatjie & André Barkhuizen, Ernst Retief, Alta Fraser, Jason Boyce.

BirdLife Northern Gauteng					
Laniarius advertising costs (cost shown in Rands)					
Print ads	1 insert	2 inserts	3 inserts	4 inserts	
Back page	600	1000	1300	1500	full colour
Full page	400	700	950	1150	
Half page	250	400	500	675	
Quarter page	125	200	250	275	
Loose insert	300	500	650	750	
Smalls	50	90	120	140	5 lines/ad
Notes					
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advertiser to supply print-ready artwork 2. Ads can be placed in alternate issues 3. Ads must be paid in advance 4. Ads are in black & white except back page which is in full colour 5. For loose inserts advertiser to supply insert 6. The committee maintains the right to accept any advertisements 					

MINOX
VISIBLE INNOVATION



76 YEARS OF GERMAN PRECISION ENGINEERING.

fotacs

Tel: 012 653 0775
www.fotacs.co.za
www.minox.com