



Laniarius

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Winter 2013



BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord



Newsletter of BirdLife Northern Gauteng Nuusbrief van BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

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Notice to contributors

Laniarius is published three times annually.

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

Kennisgewing aan bydraers

Laniarius word drie keer jaarliks uitgegee. Spertye vir bydraes is 1 Maart, 1 Julie en 1 November. Artikels moet verkieslik per e-pos aan die redakteur gestuur word, maar kan ook na die klub-adres gepos word. Aanvaarding van bydraes en advertensies word aan die diskresie van die redakteur oorgelaat. Digitale foto's is altyd welkom.

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Credits

Front cover: Green Sandpiper/Witgatruiter by Clive Kaplan, photographed at Northern Farm.
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

The past few months will go down in the memory of all BLNG members as a historic celebration of the sixtieth year of the bird club's existence. First we were treated to that wonderful dinner in a packed dining hall at the St George Hotel. This was accompanied by several very interesting talks about various aspects of our favourite hobby – birding!

For the next event in this memorable sixtieth year we boarded the luxury liner MSC OPERA in Cape Town for a five day cruise to Walvis Bay and back. In the company there were many very knowledgeable birders who identified the seabirds flying around the ship and described their unique habits for the benefit of all the club members (including myself) who had little or no experience of these unique birds. This expert guidance in identifying seabirds has left me with the impression that albatrosses, petrels, gulls and terns that spend most of their lives at sea have habits and appearances that differ significantly from the waders and land birds to which most of us are accustomed. We require time out at sea to become familiar with them and their habits.

The cruise ended with the AGM of BirdLife South Africa. For those not on the ship just imagine joining more than 1100 birders at a birding AGM! Then picture this gathering in a most luxurious theatre with capacity for a thousand people seated row after row. There was also a giant screen on the stage used by the speakers to convey pictures and information to the audience. The atmosphere at this gathering was quite electric and there was much praise from everyone for the thought and organisation that went into this unique cruise event.

It was while we were out at sea and while my wife, Jill, and I were acquiring our 'sea legs' that André Marx, the editor of the *Laniarius*, approached us to inquire whether we would

consider taking over as editors. We decided to accept the invitation though, of course, our knowledge and experience are very much less than that of André. We look forward to this challenge and we will strive to make the magazine as entertaining and informative as it has been in the past.

One aspect of birding that we think might interest quite a number of members is garden birds and perhaps a separate section of the magazine for this group might be appropriate. Most of us have feeding trays of various kinds in our gardens and the numbers and species of birds that visit these 'treats' can be quite remarkable. For example, we recently had a Lemon Dove join a group of Laughing Doves and Speckled Pigeons picking up seeds on the ground beneath the seed tray. This bird was out of normal area of distribution and may well have escaped from captivity. Then too we have a pair of Cape White-eyes that just love apples, rather to my surprise. And we are visited occasionally by Arrow-marked Babblers and a Grey-headed Bush-Shrike. Another important aspect of garden birds is the specific types of trees and flowers that you have in your gardens that attract nesting birds and sunbirds. We hope that members will write to us to inform us of the birds that visit their gardens.

Conservation of endangered bird species is also an important part of the function of the club and more information on this subject will be provided in future editions. For example, the club provided funds to place a radio transmitter on a Secretary Bird in order to monitor the movements of this bird (now proudly known by the name of "BLiNG"). Rion Lerm, committee member for conservation, is also conducting projects in and around Pretoria, as well as a study of the conservation value of a protected forest at Kathu in the Northern Cape.

It would be appreciated if members would let us know if there is a subject dealing with birding that you consider should be added to the magazine.

Phillip and Jill de Moor



AGM: President's Address

" Good evening ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present my address at this year's Annual General Meeting.

It was at this time last year that we were introducing the concept of a 60th anniversary year for this club and it was mentioned that there were a number of events and activities planned for the year. No one of course knew if it would be a success but the will to make sure it was successful was there and now we can report back on some of the events. I could not personally attend a number of the special activities arranged such as the trips to places further afield such as Uganda, but I did network with many people in the club and I was at the very well organized and attended Gala Dinner held in October. That single event stands out as one of the most memorable of the many club events I have attended in my 30 years of membership. My congratulations to all those involved in the many arrangements during the course of the year. Please see more about this in the latest edition of *Laniarius*.

It was when I was finalising the latest *Laniarius* and researching into the history of the club that I had cause to dwell on some of the characters of years gone by, as well as some of the changes that have taken place over the years that have changed the way we approach our hobby. These changes are numerous and cannot all be dealt with here, and many of them are directly the result of advances in technology. We would never have been sitting here with a proxima and presentations that could instantly bring you fabulous visuals featuring the very best digital photographs. It was overhead and slide projectors in the quite recent past when trays of slides were carried around. Our

newsletter has metamorphosed a number of times from a crudely photocopied A4 sheet comprising a few pages to a typed A5 magazine with a different color paper for the cover, to a modern digitally produced and printed offering that contains colour and now is all of 32-52 pages, depending on the content and contributions.

Club outings and camps are very different. Even in my time I have seen these changes, with 4x4 vehicles outnumbering sedans at many outings when as recently as 20 years ago they were hardly seen at all. Birding equipment takes on all forms these days of course and even I now have a smartphone with a full field guide and bird calls a few clicks away and I can communicate with other birders in a variety of ways, not all of which are appealing I might add, but the choice as to whether you want to partake in this communication splurge is yours. Amazing to think that we arranged outings, mailed the programme, travelled to club events and ran them successfully all without the aid of modern communication methods. Today most of us can't do without them and our reliance on these 'communication tools' eats into our birding time and at times takes our focus off our birding hobby, and this is something we should guard against.

I would like to say something about the role of volunteers and what their contribution has meant to the club over many years. Once again, it is probably a consequence of the busy lives that we lead these days, but fewer people are able to volunteer their time and expertise to the club these days. You have to look deep within the club to find individuals who will take on a portfolio on

the committee when it becomes vacant. It is especially important to keep key portfolios in place in order for the club to continue its proud tradition of being a home for local birders, who are able to enjoy the many and varied activities arranged, the newsletter that is produced, being able to support the club's role in conservation initiatives – and these have improved in recent years as our chairman will outline in his address – as well as knowing that the club is soundly managed and kept on a sound financial footing. All this requires the input of members who from time to time are prepared to volunteer their services. As someone who has twice been the chairman of the club I can honestly say that what is needed is the regular rotation of people on the committee who serve a few years each and then step aside for new people who bring fresh ideas and commitment. This seems much harder to achieve these days, so please an appeal tonight: if you think you can contribute to

the club's well being in any way, even if that is just by assisting in the background in a sub-committee role, then please approach someone on the committee to discuss this further. Having said this, some of the most meaningful contributions made by members are when they help arrange proceedings at an AGM such as we have here tonight, or by writing or editing articles for the newsletter, or by taking part in a particular club project; their efforts are just as valuable.

In closing I wish you all a wonderful year ahead in your personal lives, and of course may it be one filled with good birding experiences that will come about from your association with this club.

Please know that I am always willing to discuss any matter relating to birding or any club related matter with any one of you, whether your period of tenure is 50 years or more or just a few weeks.

André Marx



Margot and David Chamberlain

**YOU HAVE THE POWER TO
GIVE BIRDS A BRIGHTER
FUTURE BY MAKING A
LEGACY GIFT IN FAVOUR OF
BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA**

CREATING A legacy

Gauteng-based David and Margot Chamberlain are a dynamic duo, keen birders who respect and admire what BirdLife South Africa does for this country's wild birds and their habitats.

David has taken the considered decision to include BirdLife South Africa in his estate planning.

It is truly encouraging that supporters of BirdLife South Africa are making gifts in their wills in recognition of our organisation's important work. They appreciate that BirdLife South Africa has achieved some significant gains and successes in

the protection of wild birds throughout the region.

Birds are vital indicators of the state of the natural world, and they are an integral and visible part of our existence, wherever we live. They make a huge contribution to the quality of our lives.

You have the power to give birds a brighter future by making a legacy gift in favour of BirdLife South Africa. If you, like David, would like to invest in the future of BirdLife South Africa, contact Pamela Barrett on tel. (011) 789 1122 or e-mail secretary@birdlife.org.za



Chairman's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

INTRODUCTION

I would like to pay tribute to those members who are no longer with us and who made a contribution to our club. I think of in particular, Brenda Clarke, Susan Velthuysen and Theo Meyer. We need to also make a special tribute to Dr Phil Hockey, who made a huge contribution to ornithology in South Africa.

2012 was for me the most exciting and invigorating year since I have been chairman of the Club.

Not only was it a momentous year for our own club, culminating in our gala dinner in October to celebrate 60 years of birding in Pretoria, but our mother organization, BirdLife South Africa, achieved some highly significant milestones to increase public awareness and move towards becoming a financially self-sustaining organisation.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA

Under Mark Anderson's very able leadership BirdLife South Africa's greatest achievement in the past year in my opinion was the launch of our very own birding magazine African BirdLife, the first couple of editions of which have been outstanding. This magazine has quickly become the flagship for the organisation and not only contains fantastic articles and photographs but serves as a mouthpiece to disseminate BLSA's conservation message to the public at large. For those of you who do not currently subscribe to the magazine, I would urge you to do so.

Together with the Jupiter Room (Utopia) advertising agency, some very eye catching and thought provoking advertising and

marketing campaigns were launched during the year, giving BLSA and the plight of our threatened bird species prominent exposure in airports, on prime time television and on billboards around the country.

Huge strides have been made on the conservation front as well with the appointment of more regional conservation managers and the revision of all the Important Bird Area monitoring assessments. In the Cape, the Save our Seabirds Festival is recognized as one of the most important conservation festivals in the country and future plans are to make this an internationally acclaimed event.

On the financial front, the BirdLife South Africa Trust is now in existence and this is linked to a legacy programme whereby we can all contribute to the long term sustainability of the organisation. The Golden Patron programme is gaining momentum at an accelerated rate and contributes meaningfully towards the funding of the head office costs and staff salaries enabling other monies to be used directly in priority conservation programmes. Each and every one of us can also make a contribution by signing up on the 'My Planet/My School' card scheme.

Our club continues to interact with BirdLife South Africa through the Gauteng Regional Forum which is chaired by Lance Robinson, as well as through the activities of our Regional Conservation Manager, Ernst Retief. Two of the initiatives that we supported through the regional forum were the launch of the Vaal Birding Route and an outing leaders' workshop. Besides Ernst, another of our members who has put a significant amount of effort into both these initiatives was Etienne Marais, another one of our longstanding members. It would be really wonderful if a similar Tshwane

or Northern Gauteng Birding Route could be developed in conjunction with our local tourism authorities.

OUR CLUB

Turning back closer to home, I can report that our membership has remained stable over the past year. The statistics can be seen on the slide. The membership system at BirdLife South Africa has shown a vast improvement and even though there are still queries regarding membership status coming from members these are being solved promptly. I would like to remind members to please use your membership number when paying by EFT. Please also mail or fax confirmation of your payment especially if you are making additional donations so that these can be allocated accurately.

Another full programme of activities was organised by our hardworking Programme and Activities Sub-Committee headed up by Wanda Louwrens. They had the demanding task of fitting in all the special 60-year celebratory events into our programme as well. I am happy to say that day outings were well attended during the year and most camps were fully booked. A new initiative that we started last year was midweek outings and these have proven very popular to date.

Our bird ringing group was also active as usual and it is always interesting for us layman birders to interact with the ringers and get close up views and photographs of the birds in hand. I have been receiving copies of the ringing summaries and it is quite amazing how many different species are ending up in our ringers' nets. It is also wonderful to see some of our younger birders taking up the challenges of bird ringing.

We also entered our third Birding Big Day competition last year but unfortunately were not able to defend our title in the community section as this had been done away with in a more streamlined competition. We did however, still manage to finish third in the family section of the competition with 161 species, which is not too shabby at all.

Of course the highlight of the year was our 60-year celebrations which included our first trip into the real Africa, namely a visit to Uganda and some very special local trips such as to Kurisa Moya. Then, we had our photographic course and competition for all the photographers out there, as well as our spectacular Gala Dinner Event at the Saint George Hotel.

Turning to conservation matters, I am proud to say that our initiatives are starting to pay off. We are still waiting for the White-bellied Korhaan programme to get off the ground but we had some great news recently regarding the Secretarybird project and I am proud to announce that our own bird was successfully fitted with a tracking device at Sondela Nature Reserve recently. Rion Lerm, who is in charge of our conservation sub-committee, was present on the auspicious day. He was duly interviewed by a team from 50/50 and we are looking forward to both the flighting of the programme on TV as well as the data from the tracking device. We now need to find a name for our bird, so please watch out for an exciting competition that we will launch soon about this.

During the past year we have also been involved with Pieter and Natasja Saunders who are running the Wonderboom Urban Verreaux's Eagle Monitoring Project (WUVEP) at the Wonderboom Nature Reserve.

Our club made a donation of R10,000 towards the purchase of a webcam to be mounted above the nest. This challenging task has also been completed successfully and the webcam is now in operation with images viewable on the WUVEP website. We look forward to a continued involvement with this very important project as the conservation of these eagles in an increasingly hostile urban environment will be enhanced with the footage obtainable from the camera.

We have also tried wherever possible to get involved in conservation projects with other organisations and to date have been able to assist the Friends of Waterkloofspruit with a bird census, as well as with recommendations on how to manage the area. I would specifically like to thank Rion for his efforts

in this regard. Other projects that have been started are bird walks and censuses at both the Bronkhorstpruit Golf Course and Pretoria Country Club. Our involvement with the Southdowns community in Centurion also continues and there is now a new opportunity for us to get involved with the Friends of Colbyn Valley which is another threatened wetland site and where the club has historically carried out ringing and birding activities.

Our initiatives to attract younger birders to the club are also slowly paying off as we attune ourselves to the specific needs of the younger people. A couple of exciting outings were held last year and we will continue with this in the future.

We were all very spoilt with the number of new books that were launched this past year and I would like to thank Ralda Heyns of Ralie's Goodies for continuing to provide her trading services to our members at such affordable

prices. As you will see when our treasurer presents her report, Ralda continues to make a sizeable contribution to our finances as well.

To my hard working committee and our President, all the volunteers on our sub-committees a heartfelt thank you, you really take the cake! Without you this club would not be able to keep functioning and running as it does. I would also like to appeal to any of you who have the time and the energy to assist us in our endeavours to please come forward. There is an existing need in our *Laniarius*, Programme and activities and conservation sub-committees where there is always extra work that has to be done and too few hands to do it.

In conclusion, I would like to extend a special thank you to all our outing leaders who have helped us again this year as well as to our members for your loyal support.

Philip Calinikos

Aloe Creek

Pristine Gauteng Bushveld, Birding and Fishing



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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



BIRDLIFE NORTHERN GAUTENG

**INCOME STATEMENT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED
31 DECEMBER 2012**

	2011 R	2010 R
INCOME	60,160	49,895
Subscriptions	60,160	49,895
COST AND DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLICATION	25,141	18,085
Laniarius	25,141	18,085
GROSS INCOME	35,019	31,810
OTHER INCOME	36,762	89,173
Donations received	5,776	17,341
Advertising	-	925
Interest received	6,332	6,486
Nett proceeds from gala events	1,123	-
Nett proceeds from outings	2,695	10,262
Nett proceeds from courses and special events	8,657	40,340
Nett proceeds from trading activities	12,179	13,819
TOTAL INCOME	71,781	120,983
LESS: EXPENDITURE	83,305	83,142
Audit fees	3,537	2,641
Bank charges	3,010	3,374
Bird ringing	6,500	6,685
Conservation	20,000	20,000
Evening meeting expenses	5,122	8,504
Functions	917	2,996
Course and Leaders expenses	8,375	10,620
Printing and Stationary	890	74
Secretarial fees	30,000	24,000
Sundry expenses	2,929	169
Telephone & postage	975	1,504
Small Assets	-	1,499
Insurance	1,050	1,076
(LOSS)/SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR	(11,524)	37,841
ACCUMULATED FUNDS - beginning of the year	197,271	159,430
ACCUMULATED FUNDS - end of year	185,747	197,271

Committee: Philip Calinikos (Chairperson), André Marx (Vice-Chairperson), Hanlie Bedford (Treasurer), De

**BALANCE SHEET AS AT
31 DECEMBER 2012**

	2011 R	2010 R
ASSETS		
Non current assets	1	1
Office equipment	1	1
At costs	4,851	4,851
Less: Accumulated Depreciation	4,850	4,850
Current assets	190,816	204,597
Bank Balance	43,731	18,439
Fixed deposit	136,223	130,291
Cash on hand and pre payments	10,862	36,089
Stock	-	19,778
TOTAL ASSETS	190,817	204,598
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves	185,747	197,271
Accumulated funds	185,747	197,271
Current liabilities	5,070	7,327
Creditors	5,070	7,327
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	190,817	204,598

The increased spread of avian malaria in the northern hemisphere

Phillip and Jill de Moor

An interesting and significant article about avian malaria appeared in the March edition of *Bird Watching*, a British magazine. Until recently avian malaria was considered a disease of birds in the tropics similar to the distribution of malaria in humans. However, global warming has changed this situation quite dramatically.

Malaria is caused by a blood parasite called *Plasmodium*. It can be identified quite easily in the laboratory in blood specimens taken from captured birds.

Mosquitoes that carry and transmit avian malaria reside in warmer and wetter parts of the world. Tropical birds that carry the disease migrate to Alaska in the summer months. Scientists from the United States have confirmed for the first time that *Plasmodium* malaria can be transmitted to other birds even in the frigid climate of the Alaskan Arctic.

The Arctic has been warming faster than anywhere else on the planet and, as the permafrost melts and periods of warmer

weather cause snowfall to melt into rain, the conditions arise which allow the parasite to multiply. Scientists took blood samples and found the parasite in the bloods of birds as far north as 67 degrees north.

Avian malaria in immunologically non-resistant birds can cause death, reduced reproductive capacity or reduced number of chicks. In Hawaii avian malaria has devastated bird populations with the extinction of some species.

At London Zoo last year six Humboldt Penguins died of avian malaria transmitted to them from wild birds.

British birds are affected in increasing numbers. Nearly 30% of House Sparrows are infected compared to less than 10% in 1990.

It would perhaps be important to measure the rate of avian malaria infection in different parts of South Africa and to keep a record of any increases that occur over the next five or ten years. This disease could perhaps become a serious threat to some species of our birds. 🐦

Birding: Getting started

Annali Swanepoel



Once I reached the newly acquired status of being a 'proud pensioner' I decided to pursue an eco-friendly, green, socially satisfying and intellectually challenging pastime before

I was in the prime of senility. So I became a birder.

I soon found out birding is the one hobby where you can be a birder without ever having identified a single bird yourself. In fact you can 'bird' by paging the 'LBJ's' fieldguide and without ever having set foot in the field. (This is called armchair birding). I also found out that particular book is as close as many a birder will ever gets to some of those pesky little twitters.

Armchair birding is not unlike armchair golf. Armchair golf is when you call yourself a golfer if you stretch out on the coach, sporting

your Metallica T-shirt, stuffing popcorn while watching Ernie sink the ball on TV at the Masters. If you play a 'freshie' you have to count the shot. The avian equivalent is when you only heard the bird singing, yodeling, screeching or whatever sound it makes. You can now list the bird. It actually puts you one step ahead and not one behind as a 'freshie' does.

The downside of armchair birding is that it is similar to reading braille with gloves on. The upside of armchair birding is that one won't be tempted to lie in the 100km Birding Challenge because you never left the house. Then again birders aren't tempted to lie. They are made of morally sterner stuff. They are more honest than golfers. Golfing liars are par for the course. (Tomorrow my opinion may have changed but not the fact that I am right about this).

My first step towards birding in the great outdoors started with a planned visit to every shop stocked with binoculars. I reasoned if I dress like an expert birder no shop assistant was going to slap last year's model on me and tell me 'it is on special' because they already have this year's model in stock.

In front of the mirror on went the High-Tec boots which 10 years and 50 kg ago walked the Camino. On went old Chinos. On went a faded Camo shirt and last, the 'piece de resistance', a safari hat with a crumpled Guinea fowl feather nonchalantly piercing the bowl. I must add, my grandson sat on the hat by mistake which only added to the weathered look. Admittedly the hat pulled my forehead down to minutes before moron, but I figured the LBJ book pinched under my elbow would dispel any notion that I was not capable of making an astute binocular purchase. So with moulting plumage I ventured out to spend twelve months worth of sweets, theatre tickets and whiskey money on the lens magic that would bring every avian ecstasy in high-resolution 3-D Technicolour, right up to my nose.

Six months later, including a Wakkerstroom mud bath, many new friends and a lifer list I am not sharing with you, I can honestly say armchair birding has nothing on the fresh outdoors and a live bird in view.

[A wonderful start Annali. We hope to hear a lot more about your birding experiences! – Ed.] 🐦

Die verhaal van elf klein Nonnetjieseende

Eben Muller

Die ringgroep het op 15 April 'n versoek ontvang om vyf jong Nonnetjieseende (White-faced Ducks) in Brits te gaan ring. Iemand het 'n ma met 11 kleintjies gevang en na die veearts toe gebring. Louise, die veearts se vrou, het hulle toe op die werf grootgemaak. Ses van hulle is ongelukkig in die proses dood.

Wat mense nie besef nie, is dat Nonnetjieseende nie altyd naby die water broei nie. Eers nadat die kleintjies uitgebroei is, neem die ouers hulle water toe – baie keer oor lang afstande. Dit is dan dat mense hulle sien en vang.

Die ma het op 'n stadium weggevlug en Louise-hulle het toe die kleintjies grootgemaak.

Hulle is nog nie volgroeid nie. Ons het toe ooreengekom dat ek hulle sal saambring Hartbeespoort Dam toe en hulle liever by die water sal vrylaat.

Louise het die kos wat sy hulle gevoer het saamgegee. Ek was bekommerd dat hulle nie op hulle eie by die dam gaan oorleef nie. Die man en vrou wat by die dam woon het al Kolgansies wat iemand ook daar aangebring het grootgemaak. Ek het toe besluit om hulle te ring en die twee mense was maar net te bly om die eendjies in 'n hokkie te sit en hulle te voer totdat hulle groter is en op hulle eie dam toe kan gaan.

A Mountain Wagtail in Pretoria

Faansie Peacock

At 05:30 on Tuesday 19 February 2013 Greg Davies and I found ourselves standing in semi-darkness at the gate of Groenkloof Nature Reserve in Pretoria. As dawn broke we were treated to many excellent sightings, including Marsh Warblers, Brown-backed Honeybirds and Jameson's Firefinches. A calling Half-collared Kingfisher lured us down to the nearby Apies River, and upon approaching a small dam we flushed a wagtail that flew to a nearby stump.

Even before the wagtail had landed we were struck by the unusual soft powder-grey colour of its upperparts and the large amount of white in its tail. Upon closer inspection we discerned its narrow black breast band, strong white supercilium, white underparts and extraordinarily long tail, and we somewhat incredulously had to conclude that it was not a Cape Wagtail as expected, but a Mountain (Long-tailed) Wagtail, *Motacilla clara*!

The Half-collared Kingfisher forgotten for the moment – despite his best efforts to impress us with continued tail wagging, calling and fly-bys – we studied the wagtail in detail. It soon became accustomed to our presence

and started giving soft, sweet trilling whistles. From a Mountain Wagtail's perspective the habitat was not unlike its usual haunts. The bird patrolled the shore of a 0.29 hectare dam, foraging mostly on wet mud but also on half-submerged rocks and stumps. It made occasional short sorties upstream and downstream on the surrounding channels.

What was a specialist of forested mountain streams in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal doing in a public park in Pretoria, a mere 3.5 km from the CBD? In most parts of their range Mountain Wagtails are resident and sedentary, and are not prone to regular, altitudinal or erratic movements over long distances. Nevertheless, birds in the Eastern Cape reportedly breed along ephemeral streams in summer and move to larger perennial streams in winter. In other parts of the species' fragmented Afrotropical range regular movements do occur: in West Africa it is a seasonal migrant, while birds in East Africa undertake altitudinal movements.

As the Groenkloof bird demonstrates, some individuals are prone to occasional vagrancy. But where did this lone individual come from? The main distribution lies along the Mpumalanga Escarpment, approximately 200-250 km to the east, and it is perhaps most likely that the Groenkloof bird derives from that area, having perhaps found its way to Gauteng along the Olifants or another major river valley. A small isolated population occurs in the vicinity of Modimolle (Nylstroom), where there are pairs resident on at least three of the tributaries feeding the Nyl River according to Warwick Tarboton. The closest of these lies approximately 130 km north of Pretoria. Finally, Mountain Wagtails have occasionally been recorded in some of the deeper wooded kloofs in the Magaliesberg, such as Tonquani Gorge, about 70 km due west of Pretoria.



Sue Oertli

Interestingly, the migratory Grey Wagtail was considered a very rare vagrant to southern African before 1989, but the number of records has increased markedly since the 1990s and several birds are now recorded each year. Whether this is due to an actual increase in the numbers visiting southern Africa, or if it is a case of more birders on the lookout, is unknown. The Grey Wagtail and Mountain Wagtail are ecologically very similar, and often

feed together with limited aggressive interactions. It will be interesting to see whether more vagrant Mountain Wagtails will also be recorded in the coming years, and we urge birders to keep an eye open for this distinctive species.

Subsequent to its discovery, the Groenkloof wagtail stayed at the site for at least a week, during which time it was enjoyed by numerous local birders.

In search of serendipity

Adele van Vuuren

“One at a time,” Amila grabbed me by the arm and pushed me down. “Look about four metres into the bush, the bird looks like a leaf.” I felt the pressure of seeing the bird really fast, weighing down on me. Frans and Theo were waiting quietly but impatiently for their turn. “Do you see it,” Amila hissed. My heart sank into my dirty boots. “No, I just can’t see it, no... yes, yes. Got it!! It looks just like an autumn leaf” I whispered happily. Minutes passed and the tension did not abate until Theo and Frans found the bird and had a good look. The little owl sat patiently, allowing us stunning views. At times it opened its eyes ever so slightly and it had a charming, squinting look. Realising that we couldn’t stay all day looking at the little owl we left the bird to rest in peace.

It was our second day of our Sri Lanka tour with Amila Salgado as our guide. An early morning walk around the well-wooded gardens ‘easy’ birds were quickly seen and ticked. Spot-winged Thrush (very casually pointed out to us by Amila while he chatted to a neighbour), Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Bright Green Warbler, Dark-Fronted Babbler, to name but a few.

But the very important part of the day was still to come. We were hoping to see the Sri Lanka Spurfowl and the Serendib Scops Owl.

Neither guaranteed nor easy, but the owl was very, very high on our wish list. To do that we had to cross the Kelani River in a most peculiar canoe. It was a tree that was hollowed out and the opening where you must put your legs was about six inches wide! I could manage to sit but Frans and Theo had no choice. They had to stand like an Egyptian -- one leg in front of the other!

We climbed up and down slippery and wet hillsides, crossed little streams and were left at a point by Amila so that he could look for the Serendib Scops Owl. And we were not bored for a minute because the leaches kept us entertained!

Hearing the Sri Lanka Spurfowl – an elusive game bird – Amila paused in the search for the owl and summoned us hurriedly. Another frantic climb up a steep slope into the dark, dense forest and Amila found a good spot where everyone had a good view of the area above. Making sure that we were comfortable he asked us to be very quiet and patient. A fifteen minute vigil near the crossing path of this elusive game bird had us getting decent views at last. A beautiful bird and a great tick!

But back to the main event. Amila left us again to search for the Scops Owl. By then we were so pumped-up that we just knew

he would not disappoint and sure enough after about 30 minutes, Amila came with two thumbs up to say he had found the bird.

In February 1995 a local bird guide, Deepal Warakagoda, heard and taped an unfamiliar owl-like call in the wet rainforest of Kithulgala. He searched for the bird but could not find it. For six years he searched and, although he heard the call again and again, he was unsuccessful in locating it. Then in January 2001 he found the owl in the Sinharaja Rain Forest. He could clearly see that it was different from all the owls found in Sri Lanka. The owl was photographed in February 2001 and a male mist-netted in August 2001. The photographs and studies done on the bird caught in the net were sent to ornithologist, Pamela Rasmussen. After thorough research she could not find any similarities to any other owl found in Sri Lanka. But to be certain that this was a new species a

specimen had to be obtained for further studies. After locating 24 individual birds, they got permission to obtain a specimen to study.

The small, short-tailed, rufous scops owl has very distinct habits and habitat. It roosts and hunts very close to the ground. It will call as soon as dusk falls, but only starts to hunt insects such as beetles and moths when it is dark. Its legs and claws are delicate and weak, the eyes yellow or orange and its beak is an ivory colour. It is described as having no apparent ear tufts and this is probably due to initial sightings being at night when it shows no sign of ear tufts. But during the day when it roosts and feels threatened by an intruder, ear tufts are very visible! This is a clever guise to transform into a dead leaf, stuck in a thicket!

Serendib is the Arabic name for the Island of Sri Lanka and was used as early as 361 AD. An 18th century English novelist, Horace Walpole, wrote a fairy tale called *The Three Princes of Serendib* in which the three princes were making fortunate discoveries by accident. He coined a word for this attribute: serendipity.

Considering the serendipitous nature of the discovery of the owl, the bird was aptly named Serendib Scops Owl. There are an estimated 250 birds of this scops-owl found in just five rain forest sites. So its conservation status is 'Endangered'. We were very lucky to have seen this rare species, as not all birders see it on their tour. According to Amila those who fail to see it have to put it down as a *Serendip Scops Owl*!

Amila is a very good guide, finding the endemics fast. He is very quick in finding the birds in his Swarovski scope for better viewing, which was very helpful with forest birding. One could also curtail the tour to 10 days or so and still get the endemics, which number 30-33, depending on your taxonomic take. We saw 234 species in 13 days. 57 were lifers and a further 48 potential lifers were amongst the 129 lifers seen in the previous two weeks in WS India. 🦉



Amila Delgado

Serendib Scops Owl

Geographic variation: What's it all about?

Rion Lerm

Recently, David Allan (co-author and bird curator at the Durban Natural Science Museum) presented a workshop at the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens, on his latest publication: *Roberts Geographic Variation of southern African Birds*. I wanted to write this article as it may serve as a synopsis of the actual workshop and book as most of us now own the publication but might struggle to understand the scientific lingo. I will attempt to rectify this, so that birdwatchers can appreciate this new challenge of identifying subspecies.

These variations (identified and included in this book through studying phenotypic variations, i.e. expression of organism characteristics as interaction between its genetic makeup and the environment: examples are plumage colour and body size) over geographical space have been documented before the time of Darwin's publication on the *Origin of Species* in 1859. This phenomenon baffled scientists since the 19th century and southern Africa also had its fair share of naturalists/taxonomists who changed the way we identify our feathered friends today with the names of species and subspecies provided in the many field guides we use. The following persons deserve mentioning: Dr. A. Roberts (deceased), Dr. PA Clancey (deceased) and MPS Irwin who all made a huge contribution to avian (bird) taxonomy in southern Africa. It is worthwhile reading their biographies which are summarised in the book.

Back to the birds! Geographic variation, or aka the subspecies concept, is a result of evolution over time (thousands or even millions of years). Time and space however, should be looked at collectively as the separation of communities/populations (within the same species) due to climate change or changes in habitat structure and even the appearance of physical barriers such as mountain ranges or large rivers (as common examples) may result in eventual phenotypic differences between

these split populations of the same species. The question behind why differences develop is explained later. But as said, this occurs over a large temporal scale, i.e. it (climate change or the appearance of a physical barrier etc.) takes a long time and as time goes on (another few million years or so) subspecies will eventually become distinctly separate species, as long as the different populations remain apart with no flow of genes between them (exchange of individuals between the different populations). A typical example is the two distinct populations of Knysna Turaco *Turaco corythaix* (page 68). One population occupies the montane forests of north-eastern South Africa, and the second lives in a variety of forests including that of riparian nature (next to rivers). The latter ranges from KZN down to the Western Cape. Hence, we may argue that some thousands of years ago these two populations were connected and man or geology resulted in the creation of unfavourable conditions where the unoccupied area exists today. The response of the two remaining populations was for each to adapt to their own suite of different environmental conditions. These pressures on the



Dup du Plessis

The Brown-crowned Tchagra/Roovierlertjagra

populations can include different communities of predators, climate, food resources and the like, that steer plumage variations, e.g. colour and tail length differences (in the case of the Knysna Turaco). These differences might be an anti-predator defense in the one subspecies and less so in the other. Or the one population of birds might require a longer tail to manoeuvre better in the denser forest habitat they subsequently occupied. This is pure speculation though in much the same way as the *Big Bang Theory* or theories explaining the dinosaur demise, but not all subspecies evolved through the isolation of populations of the same species. The *cline* concept is also illustrated in the book where the Cape Grassbird *Sphenoeacus afer* (page 192) is a good example. The four subspecies (mostly the three in South Africa) exhibit a gradual change in plumage over geographical area and Hugh Chittenden's photos illustrate the two extremities very well in the beginning of the book. The prevalence of streaking on the underparts in this species gradually becomes more prominent in subspecies closer to the southern tip of Africa (i.e. further from the equator). The subspecies located latitudinally between the northern and southern subspecies in South Africa is conveniently named *S. c. intermedius* (defining its intermediate plumage colouration).

The phenomenon described above coincides with the next part of the subspecies concept: ecogeographical rules, which are mentioned in the book. Scientists always ponder about observations such as the subspecies concept, hence they subsequently defined a suite of *rules* in the 20th century, attempting to explain these phenotypic (observable and measurable) differences in animals, specifically birds. Even though these rules apply to some species, other patterns in subspecies cannot be explained by any rule such as the case of the Knysna Turaco and the two subspecies of Cape Eagle Owl *Bubo capensis*. One of these rules caught my attention in the past and is probably the oldest, most debated and controversial of rules: (1) Bergmann's Rule. It was first defined by Carl Bergmann in 1847 and it relates to the geographical variation in the body sizes of animals. Basically, it states that members of the same species are larger further away from the equator than those living around more tropical latitudes (closer to the equator). The rule is based on the principle of heat dissipation: smaller individuals lose heat easier than larger ones. Animals want to lose heat in warmer areas, but need to conserve it in cooler areas thus, the larger individuals are found in cooler areas. These individuals are also heavier, containing more fat in order to conserve heat. This phenomenon (prevalent only in some species) is illustrated in the book using Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus importunus* (pages 5 and 155) and Brown-hooded Kingfisher *Halcyon albiventris*, but Bergmann's Rule is well known and applies to many other animals including reptiles and mammals. This rule even applies to the common Southern Masked-Weaver *Ploceus velatus* (page 225), where birds in the Western Cape weigh more and possess longer wings than those residing in the warmer climes of South Africa. Experienced bird ringers will concur with this phenomenon and the above unpublished results were obtained from years of ringing data. (2) Allen's Rule is another ecogeographical rule based on the same heat conservation/dissipation theory. This rule states that populations of the same species have



Dun da Plessis

Rufous-naped Lark/Rooineklewerik

shorter legs and/or bills in colder climates than those living in warmer regions. These extremities (legs and bill) lose heat quickly due to a lack of feathers, thus in colder climates a bird cannot afford to lose as much heat as his conspecifics in the warmer areas and an adaptation is shorter extremities (less bare skin equals to less heat loss). An example of Allen's Rule is the vulnerable White-bellied Korhaan *Eupodotis senegalensis barrowii* (page 55). A third rule that is mentioned in the book is (3) Gloger's Rule, which states that members of the same species living in more tropical/humid conditions possess darker feathers. The latter is more resistant to feather-eating bacteria. The Brown-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra australis* (page 115) and Kurrichane Thrush *Turdus libonyana* (pages 13 and 201) are examples of this rule.

While the majority of passerine species (examples are chats, finches, larks, orioles, pipits, shrikes, sparrows, sunbirds, waxbills, weavers etc.) display geographic variation, the Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* (page 17) is an example of a monotypic bird, i.e. no subspecies are recognised. My opinion is that their nomadic behaviour results in continental populations overlapping annually where genetic material is exchanged. This gene exchange is probably not preceded by females favouring

any specific trait in males (e.g. larger size or larger wattles) hence, the lack of a subspecies with e.g. larger body size or wattles than the remaining population does not exist.

A phenomenon where the plumages of some bird species match soil colour is often seen among southern African birds. The larks are good examples of this phenomenon and the book illustrates this with the Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafra africana* (pages 12 and 133). However, subspecies boundaries are rarely clearly defined and the distribution maps in this publication should be used prudently.

There are many more types of variations in the book I have not covered and I only used one or two examples where I explained certain phenomena, but this publication unlocks a new dimension for birdwatching as well as answering and raising interesting questions regarding geographic variation in southern African birds.

A special thanks goes to Ernst Retief (BirdLife SA), who organised the workshop at Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens.

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Rus en vrede het uit ons tuin verdwyn! Nog waarnemings by Kuifkophoutkappers se nes

Elke Geggus

Vier jaar gelede het bye in 'n ou houtkapper nesstomp in ons tuin ingetrek. In die somer het hulle floreer maar in daardie jaar se koue winter het hulle baie swaar gekry want 'n groot gedeelte van hulle nes was aan die elemente blootgestel en uiteindelik het die hele byenes uitgesterf. Dis toe dat ek vir die eerste keer die Kleinheuningwyser in ons tuin opgemerk het. Hulle het al die was uit die nes gevreet. Uiteindelik was daar drie Kleinheuningwysers

en hulle het die houtkapper nes silwerskoon gevreet. Ek het die nesstomp toe aan die eenkant met 'n deksel toegemaak en hom op 'n lysie op die muur van die woudgedeelte van ons tuin vasgemaak, en gehoop Gryskopmossies of Kleinglansspreeus sou daar kom nes maak.

Maar niemand het daar kom nes maak nie en 'n jaar later het daar weer bye ingetrek. Omdat hierdie nes nou baie meer beskut

is floreer die bye weer, ook in die winter. Omtrent dieselfde tyd het ons weer 'n nuwe nesstomp vir ons houtkappers opgehang en die inwonende Kuifkoppe het die nes toe ook dadelik uitgehol en begin broei.

Die winter daarna het ek agtergekom dat die Kleinheuningwyser weer in die tuin was en dat die Kuifkophoutkappers baie ongelukkig daaroor was. Hulle het by ons bure in die agterste hoek van ons tuin op 'n baie hoë boom gesit. Daarvandaan kon hulle die nesstomp goed dop hou. As hulle die Kleinheuningwyser naby hulle nes gewaar het hulle met 'n histeriese geskreeu – 'n mens kan dit nie anders noem nie – deur die hele tuin gevlieg en die Kleinheuningwyser probeer wegjaag. Dit was nie altyd maklik nie want die Heuningwyser was baie hardnekkig en al drie voëls het baie keer om en om die boom gevlieg waar die nesstomp gehang het, terwyl die houtkappers nog steeds geskreeu het. Dit was elke dag dieselfde storie gedurende die hele winter.

Dit was toe dat ek die waarnemings oor die

Kuifkophoutkapper, geskryf deur Ken Hattingh op die Internet gelees het en later ook in die *Laniarius* no.122.

Hierdie artikel het my belangstelling geprikkel en ek het besluit om die Kuifkophoutkappers meer noukeurig dop te hou. Alhoewel ek hulle nes met die verkyker deur 'n venster in ons huis kon dophou was hulle baie geheimsinnig. Waar ek vroeër altyd geweet het, wanneer die voëls begin broei het en wanneer die kleintjies reg was om die nes te verlaat, het ek hierdie keer geen idee gehad wat by die nes aangegaan het nie. Die Kuifkophoutkappers het nog steeds met groot geskreeu hulle nes, eiers of kleintjies verdedig. Uiteindelik het die aktiwiteit by die nes afgeneem, maar ek het nog steeds nie geweet of hulle suksesvol was om 'n kleintjie groot te maak nie. Gelukkig het ek agtergekom dat die Kuifkophoutkappers altyd kos van my voertafels af saamvat, dus moes daar èrens 'n kleintjie wees! Maar ek het gesukkel om daardie kleintjie gesien te kry. Hy was of op die dak as ek binne was of hoog in 'n boom as ek buite was. Maar eendag was ek tog gelukkig om te sien hoe die ouers 'n Kuifkophoutkapper voer. Groot was my verligting om dit te sien, al die moeite om hulle nes te verdedig het toe vrugte afgewerp.

Die jong voël het toe later ook by die voertafels opgedaag en ek kon hom mooi bekijk. Net dat daar nie 'n enkele kolletjie op sy swart borslappie was, het weggegee dat hy 'n jong voël was. Groot en vet gevoer was hy 'n pragtige mengsel van sy twee ouers. Waar die een ouer 'n ligter kleur voël was met 'n amper suurlemoen kleurige maag, was die ander een mooi oranje, ook was hy baie kleurvoller en meer helder in sy gesig. Die jong voël was lig gekleur op sy maag en het die mooi oranje in sy gesig gehad. So al twee ouers se gene mooi vermeng.

Daar is nog iets snaaks aan hierdie houtkappers se storie. Lank gelede met ons eerste paar inwonende Kuifkophoutkappers, het hulle gebroei en sodra die kleintjies die nes verlaat het, het hulle die kleintjies vir nog 'n week gevoer en toe weer begin broei. Die paartjie het ongelooflik baie kleintjies by ons uitgeborei tot een van hulle tot 'n tragiese einde gekom



Elke Geggius

Die houtkappersnes wat oor 'n paar seisoene deur bye oorgeneem is.

het. Maar dis 'n ander storie. Maar ons huidige Kuifkophoutkappers het hulle jongeling ten minste drie weke lang gevoer nadat hy die nes verlaat het.

Maar daar is nog steeds nie rus en vrede in ons tuin nie. Nou sit die Kuifkophoutkappers in 'n groot boom oorkant die boom waar hulle nes hang en daar is steeds 'n histeriese geskreeu elke dag wanneer die Kleinheuningwyser in die tuin sy verskyning maak. Maar ek kan steeds

nie vasstel of die paartjie weer begin broei het nie en ek wag in spanning of hulle hierdie keer weer hulle nes en kleintjies suksesvol kan verdedig!

Hierdie storie het ek in Februarie geskryf en daarna was ons vir twee weke met vakansie. Met ons terugkeer was daar wel weer "Rus en Vrede" in ons tuin, want dit het gelyk asof die houtkappers vir hierdie somer besluit het om nie meer te broei nie. 🐦

Voor, tydens en na die Flock 2013-bootvaart

Salomi Louw

Om Kaap toe te ry sodat ons vier nagte op 'n boot kan slaap, en dan weer terug na Pretoria, het vir ons buitensporig geklink; dus het ek en Sanette Heymans besluit om voor én na die tyd 'n bietjie tyd te steel.

Op die Sondag voorafgaande die 'Flock 2013'-bootvaart is ons vroegoggend weg sonder om te weet waar ons dié aand gaan oorslaap. Die verkeer was rustig, die padoppervlak goed, en ons kon rustig ry: alreeds met vakansie. Ons stop by elke poeletjie en water-tjie langs die pad, sien 'n groot verskeidenheid voëls – selfs 'n Afrikaanse snip sommer van die pad af naby die eerste tolhek – en Sanette sê later sy het nooit gedink om soveel water- en waadvoëls in die Vrystaat te sien te kry nie.

Met 64 voëls reeds op ons lys bereik ons Colesberg laterig die middag. Aangesien ons nie geweet het hoe ver ons gaan vorder nie, het ons nie slaapplek bespreek nie. Sanette stel voor ons slaap in die dorp in 'n gastehuis, maar ek sê 'nee'. Ons het voor die tyd talle moontlike oornagplekke op die internet opgespoor en ek wil nie in 'n dorp slaap nie; liever by een van die vakansie-oorde of plaasverblyfplekke. Teen amper 5 nm, nadat ons pas Bloukraanvoëls gesien het, ry ons tussen Colesberg en Hanover verby 'n plaashek met 'n naam wat vir ons bekend is, en, ja, dit is op ons lys van moontlike oornagplekke. Sanette skakel op haar selfoon, maar die eienaar is nie baie gretig nie, want

dis 'n gesinsaand en hulle kan nie etes bedien nie omdat sy personeel die middag/aand af het. Ons bel sy skoonma, maar sy sê dat sy die volgende oggend baie vroeg Bloemfontein toe vertrek en ons dus nie kan akkommodeer nie. Ons bel weer die plaaseienaar (PC Ferreira, info@karoogariiep.co.za) wat uiteindelik half teësinning inwillig dat ons dan maar daar kan oornag, maar sonder aandete.

Vanaf die teerpad is dit 8 km tot op die plaaswerf. Ons was pas op die grondpad of



Salomi Louw

Ludwigpou/ Ludwig's Bustard

ons sien 4 Bloukorhane – o grote vreugde! En kry kans vir die eerste Bloukorhaanfoto's ooit, al is hulle skugter en maak hulle vinnig uit die voete. Ludwiggoue wat blykbaar broei, gee vir ons ook goeie fototeenthede. Op die 8 km-lange grondpad was daar soveel ander voëls ook te sien dat ons sowat 35 minute nadat ons PC gebel het, eers op die werf aankom. Hy was so te sê op pad om ons te gaan soek, want dit kan nie so lank duur om 8 km af te lê nie!

PC, 'n entoesiastiese voëlkyker, verwelkom ons hartlik toe hy agterkom voëls is ook ons groot belangstelling, wys ons deur die ou plaashuis wat omskep is in 'n gastehuis – met 'n 'Birder Friendly Establishment'-bordjie op 'n buitepilaar, en neem ons byna dadelik op 'n rit langs die groot dam gevorm deur die opgestote Seekoeirivier en na die rivier self, om vir ons die voëls en seekoeie te gaan wys. Dis die enigste plaas in die Karoo met seekoeie en ek herroep 'n artikel in *Weg* (Nov. 2011) waar daar van dié plek vertel is. PC is voëlbesot: telkens wanneer hy 'n voël sien, skakel hy die veldvoertuig af, spring agter by ons op, ID en vertel vir ons die spesie se geskiedenis in die Karoo (sy gesin, wie se 'naweek' dit is, vergeet by die huis). Kolganse (Sanette sê dis die meeste wat sy in haar lewe nog by mekaar gesien het), Kopereende, Flaminke, verskeie

reiers, Kempmaan, Snip, Rooioor-, Karoo- en Swartbandlangstertjie, Sekretarisvoël, Swartmees, Witkeelkanarie en Witvlrkkorhaan is van die voëls wat hier te siene is. Vir een-en-'n-halfuur het ons die veld en voëls agter op (en af van) die veldvoertuig geniet en totdat dit amper donker was, het ons lys aanhou groei. 'n Gevlekte Ooruil paartjie het die werf hul tuiste gemaak en ons kon foto's neem van bykans 'mak' uile.

PC het ons die ontvangsarea gewys, met 'n kaart van die beplande bewarea wat strek vanaf Nieu-Bethesda tot die Van der Kloofdam, en die vryheid van die plek aangebied: ons moes net ons gebruik opskrif in 'n boek by die toonbank. Hy en sy gesin sou die volgende oggend vroeg vertrek na Bloemfontein en ons sou hulle dus nie weer sien nie, maar ons was só beïndruk met die plek dat ons dadelik bespreek het om weer hier oor te slaap op pad terug na Pretoria. Interessant genoeg val dié plaas met sy rivier midde in die IBA wat op die MSC Opera gewys is as een wat geïdentifiseer, maar nog nie ontgin is nie. PC het reeds verskeie voorleggings gedoen aan voëlklubs vir naweke aldaar teen spesiale tariewe. Dit sal die moeite en geld werd wees om dit op te volg.

Na 'n heerlike en omvattende ontbyt is ons die Maandagoggend op pad na die Kaap, maar eers sien ons o.a. die Vaalkorhaan, Hoëveldskaapwagter, en weer die Blou- en die Witvlrkkorhaan en die Witkeelkanarie voordat ons die teerpad bereik.



Salomi Louw

Kaapse Fisant/ Cape Spurfowl



Salomi Louw

Witpelikaan/ Great White Pelican

This oasis in the dry Karroo is entitled 'New Holme' and is indeed a 'new home' for birders *en route* between Gauteng and Cape Town/ Southern Cape. PC's bird list for 'New Holme' comprises 193 species. The trip back from the farmstead to the national/tar road took an equally long time as we scanned the veld for more species and were fortunate in not only finding the Blue Korhaan again, but also encountering the Karoo Korhaan. By the time we arrived in Melkbosstrand, where we were accommodated by family, we had 133 birds on our list. Our plans for birding in the Cape Town area, however, did not materialise as family (with whom you are lodging) have their own plans, like visiting shopping malls and having tea/coffee at farm stalls, playing with the kids and the usual family things: after all, you are beholden to them for a place to sleep and store the baggage not wanted on the boat, for a place to leave your vehicle, and for dropping you off (and picking you up) at the harbour. Their house in a golfing estate, however, provided us with decent views of Cape Spurfowl, Long-billed Crombec, Amethyst and Malachite Sunbird, amongst others. With the family we managed a visit to the beach (African Black Oystercatcher), and Inthaka Island at Canal Walk. The highlight here was a close-up view of a Red-knobbed Coot's nest, with three chicks. Now we know why the Afrikaans name is 'Bleshoender'; the shiny red, featherless crowns of the little ones illustrated this clearly. Thoughts of visiting the Peninsula had to be shelved but on the last day before boarding the boat we were told that the family could not manage another day out and it was suggested that we should visit the West Coast National Park on our own – which we did, although it was already quite late in the morning. We once again saw flamingoes, terns and the usual gulls, but also Ruff, Black Harrier, Cape Clapper Lark, Grey-winged Francolin, Red Knot, and Ruddy Turnstone amongst other species.

Die bootvaart self is 'n lang storie wat deur ander, kundige voëlkykers vertel sal word: ek volstaan egter deur te sê dat dit

elke sent werd was; dat die voëlkykessies en –stories en –lesings goed beplan was; dat die seevoëlgidse en hul manewales en roepe 'n permanente vreugde was om te ervaar; en dat ons (afhanging van wie jy is van die 1116 voëlkykers) sowat 17 – of self meer – nuwe voëls op die vaart kon aftik, soos 'n verskeidenheid van Albatros, Roofmeeu, Pylstormvoël, Nellie, Bassiaan, Malbaartjie, Stormswael en Knopstermeeu – alles deur kundiges geïdentifiseer.

In Walvisbaai en Swakopmund was daar ook geleentheid vir voëlkyk en die Namib-lewlerik en Woestynspekvreter, van naby gesien, was juweeltjies, net soos die Mikstertmeeu en Damarasterretjies. Die Rooipootruiter, Duinlewlerik en Fraaiingpote was egter net vir sommige mense beskore. Beide flaminkspesies, pelikane, talle sterretjies en duikers was ook van die voëls wat hier te siene was.

Die terugvaart was deurgaans in digte mis. Aankoms in Kaapstadhawe was vertraag; óns kontakpersoon het nóg later by die hawe opgedaag; en ons moes haastig oppak en teen hoogste versnelling ry na ons volgende paar aande se oornagverblyf naby Mosselbaai, met



Gevlekte Ooruil /Spotted Eagle Owl

Salomi Low

die Bergpatrys hier skitterend op ons lys. Hier kon ons nóg meer spesies by ons lys voeg, soos die Veldpou, en toe ons die volgende Saterdagoggend hiervandaan vertrek op pad terug na Gauteng, het ons lys reeds op 193 gestaan.

Oor die Robertsonpas, in mistige weer, het ons kort-kort stilgehou om te soek na endemiese voëls en was gelukkig genoeg om die Oranjeborssuikerbekkie en die Kaapse Suiker-voël te kry. Deur Oudtshoorn en Meiringskloof; ontbyt by 'n plaasstal op pad na Beaufort-Wes; en, weereens, *New Holme* as oornagplek. Hier kry ons dadelik nie net die Bloukraanvoëls,

Bloukorhane en Ludwigse poue nie, maar ook die Vaalkorhaan en honderde Kleinrooivalkies. Aandete en ontbyt was heerlik, maar ons het nie gebruik gemaak van PC se aanbod om op die bodek met sy teleskoop na sterre te gaan kyk nie.

Ons kon 213 spesies vir ons Flock 2013-uit-tog opteken – dis te sê: met die heen en terug.

Afgesien van voëlkyk het ons net elke oomblik van hierdie vakansie geniet.

[Dit klink na 'n wonderlike trippie, Salomi. Baie voëlkykers steun jou mening oor die bootvaart wat altyd iets sal wees om te onthou – Red.] 🐦

Great Spotted Cuckoo raised by Common Mynas

Sascha Michel

On 26 December 2012 on a cloudy day, two A-ringers from BLNG (BirdLife Northern Gauteng) visited our plot (30 km north of Pretoria) for a morning of close-up birding. As the day progressed, we were eager to catch and ring the Indian/Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) that was breeding in the nest box situated in a Fever Tree in our garden. When we finally decided to remove the breeding bird

from the box and ring it, what I saw surprised us all. In the box there were 5 light-blue eggs; one was approximately 30% larger than the others and it also had fine brown speckles. We assumed that this was a Cuckoo-infested nest, and our best guess was a Red-chested Cuckoo (*Cuculus solitaries*) as it was calling all day. I was assigned to 'monitor' this nest throughout the course of the breeding season.



Figure 1

The 3 Common Myna eggs clearly smaller than the speckled Great Spotted Cuckoo egg



Figure 2

Great Spotted Cuckoo chick on the left and Common Myna chick on the right



Figure 3
Great Spotted Cuckoo (left) much larger than
Common Myna (right)



Figure 4
The ringed Great Spotted Cuckoo on
20 January 2013

I decided to check on the nest every few days. On 30 December 2012, I discovered that there were only 4 eggs remaining - 3 pale blue eggs and the larger blue speckled egg. To this day I do not know what had happened to that 5th egg. During my inspection on 7 January 2013 I found two naked chicks, one Myna and what was presumably the Red-chested Cuckoo. As time passed both chicks grew greatly in size and received considerable feather cover. The smaller chick was obviously the Common Myna with its brown plumage and yellow bill and face. The 2nd chick, however, was not as previously believed a Red-chested Cuckoo, but a Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*) instead. This was evident by its buff throat, breast and underparts, spotted back and reddish-brown eye ring.

Both chicks remained in the nest box for the following days. The remaining two eggs

never seemed to hatch. The chicks quickly grew to a considerable size and from then onwards I noted that the adults visited the nest less frequently.

On 20 January 2013, the A-ringers returned to finally put a ring on the very special cuckoo as by then it was an appropriate size for the job. I ringed the bird with great enthusiasm and released it back into the nest for further development. The very same day I observed as the cuckoo make a few attempts to exit the nest box, but seemed not yet ready for the adventure.

[What an excellent field observation Sascha! It is interesting to observe that the pugnacious and aggressive Common Myna can be parasitised as well. – Ed.] 🐦

What is the earliest known fossil bird?

Most scientists seem to agree that the first bird was the celebrated *Archaeopteryx*, specimens of which were discovered in Bavaria during the 19th century. Dating from roughly 150 millions of years ago, *Archaeopteryx* appears to be the missing link between reptiles and birds, having a reptilian skeleton and teeth, and bird-like feathers. However, other fossil discoveries suggest that *Archaeopteryx* may have been an evolutionary 'dead end', and there are several other contenders for the title of the world's first bird.

Unusual food tray visitors

Ron Searle

Having recently moved into Waterfall Estate in Midrand (August 2012) it has taken us some months to arrange for the encouragement of birds to our tiny new garden which overlooks about 6 or 7 acres of highveld grassland, which thankfully has been spared the attentions of the developers.

A natural bird bath and tray feeder has been located in a flower bed no more than 5m from our patio, which also overlooks the Jukskei River and we have been delighted with a surprising number of species attracted to the feeder including the following:

- Mountain Wheatear pair
- Familiar Chat pair
- Swainson's Spurfowl with 5 chicks
- Long-tailed Widowbird male
- Cape Longclaw
- Orange River Francolins; 4 including 2 adults and 2 chicks (December 9th 2012)

The latter was a complete surprise although I have heard and often seen the francolins in the immediate vicinity on numerous occasions. I heard the unmistakable loud call of the francolin, seemingly from the inside of the

house. I scrambled to our bedroom window which overlooks the flower bed with the feed tray and was puzzled to observe a pair of Swainson's disappearing down the slope away from our house. It was drizzling at the time and no sooner had the Swainson's departed, but the Orange River Francolin family arrived. The 2 chicks had already fledged and unfortunately they did not linger for very long.

The view we have from our patio has also been productive with both Grass and Marsh Owls quartering the veld, a variety of raptors soaring overhead including: European Honey and Steppe Buzzard, Black-shouldered and Yellow-billed Kite and Ovambo Sparrowhawk as well as White Stork. Numbers of African Snipe seem to have located a damp area in the grassland to their liking and a small dam downstream of us on the estate has produced a surprising 2 national rarities, Buff-breasted and Green Sandpipers apart from a lone and lost Greater Flamingo.

The estate is at this stage only partly developed and so I wonder for how long this wonderful variety of birds is likely to continue! 🐦

BLNG alert e-mail announcements

BLNG alert 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 stelsel by te voeg. BLNG alert 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

'n Beroep word gedoen om asb te alle tye veranderinge van adres en e-posse aan Shireen by BLSA te stuur by membership@birdlife.org.za aangesien BLSA die lede-administrasie hanteer. 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@birdlife.org.za as they handle the membership administration. Without the correct contact details the club loses the ability to communicate with members.

Hunt for the Yellow-throated Sandgrouse: February 2013

Ilona Viljoen

I was extremely excited to be able to join the hunt for the Yellow-throated Sandgrouse near Sun City. We set our alarms for 03:45 which in itself was a shock to my 'frail' constitution! We left Pretoria at 04:30 and arrived at the Engen Garage rendezvous at 06:00 where we enjoyed some refreshments. There were 13 enthusiastic birders all raring to go on the hunt. Stuart Groom was our leader for the day and he had apparently spent quite some time ensuring that he knew where to find these evasive birds.

We drove to where Stuart had seen the Yellow-throated Sandgrouse on a farmland where sunflowers had recently been harvested. By this time it was already extremely hot. Unfortunately I had decided it would be too hot to wear my walking shoes and wore sandals instead. This proved to have been a mistake!

But nevertheless, I pressed on. We walked for quite a distance when we spotted them in flight and by the time we reached the spot where we had seen them, they had flown away again.

By 10:30 we realised that we would not be able to locate them and started heading back when we spotted movement in the grass right next to the road and to our great excitement saw between 30 to 35 of the elusive Yellow-throated Sandgrouse! The smile on Stuart's face was priceless as he had given up all hope of finding them by then. Although we were hot and tired we were well rewarded for our efforts – thanks to Stuart!

[It is always a pleasure to see this special bird, Ilona. We are fortunate that it occurs within our region and that we have guides like Stuart Groom who know the bird. – Ed.]



"I don't know about you, but when they're in their winter plumage, I'm damned if I can tell the difference."

'n Interessante Rietvlei NR uitstappie

Elke Geggus

My vriendinne en ek probeer om elke tweede maand op 'n rustige Rietvlei uitstappie te gaan. Ons was toe Vrydag 10 Mei weer daar en soos altyd het Rietvlei 'n paar interessante dinge opgelewer.

By die 'Coots Corner' skuiling was daar min voëls, soos altyd vandat die laaste boomstomp voor die skuiling in die water verdwyn het. (Kan die Vriende van Rietvlei nie 'n nuwe een daar in die water sit nie?). Maar daar was wel 'n hele paar Kaapse Rietsangers wat baie besig was om elke klein goggatjie uit die water te gryp.

Ons het toestemming gekry om by die lapa te gaan voëls kyk en soos altyd was hierdie plek 'n belewenis. Kort voor lank het ons die skril geskreeu van voëls gehoor. Dit was vir ons 'n onbekende geluid, maar dit was maklik om die voëls op te spoor. Dit was toe Ringnekparkiete wat hoog in 'n boom sade gevreet het. Ek het hulle ook al vantevore oor Moreletapark sien vlieg. So, ek wonder of Pretoria nou saam met Durban en Johannesburg sy eie swerm Ringnekparkiete het? By die lapa was ook 'n Rooiborslaksman wat soos gewoonlik as ons hom sien, ons dag gemaak het.

By die Otterbrug was ons volgende verrassing. 'n Volgroeide Waterhoender met die mooi donker kop van 'n volwassene, maar met 'n gewone swart snawel en sonder skild. Miskien sal hy dit later wel nog kry, maar hy was baie interessant en opvallend sonder sy skild. By die brug was ook 'n baie vreemde eend, amper soos 'n Bruineend maar sy kop was groen en sy oog nie rooi nie. Die hartseer omtrent hierdie eend was, dat hy kom bedel het en heel waarskynlik nie in Rietvlei tuis gevoel het nie.

By die 'Island View' skuiling het ons die nesbouvaardighede van die Witborsduikers met plesier dopgehou. Nadat een van hulle 'n groot tak onder op die eiland opgetel het, moes

hy eers 'n groot draai vlieg om genoeg hoogte te kry om by sy nes uit te kom. Van hulle het ook die kuikens in hulle nes met klein vissies gevoer. Die gepiep van die kuikens het ook die hele omgewing oorheers.

Vandat die ou plaashuis en sy tuin oopgestel is aan die publiek, het ons in hierdie habitat, wat vreemd is aan Rietvlei, al baie mooi voëls gesien. So was dit ook hierdie keer, ons voëllys vir die dag het sommer met 12 spesies gegroei. Besonder mooi was die Draaihals, en saam met hom op die grond, amper nie sigbaar tussen die herfsblare, was 'n Rooivlerktjagra. Die Tjagra saam met 'n Sneebal en die groepie Ringnekparkiete was nuwe voëlspesies vir ons Rietvleilys. Al drie soorte Lysters, Gevlekte-, Rooibek- en Geelbek- was ook daar, en die Kuifkophoutkappers het oorlog verklaar teen die Rooikophoutkappers. Baie Janfrederike, Glasogies en Tiptolle het in die bome baljaar, daar was Rooiwangmuisvoëls wat by die mooi watergat gedrink het, en die Kransduiwe het van die dak af gekoer. Bokmakeries se bekende roep was ook hier hoorbaar, maar ons kon ongelukkig die voëls self nie sien nie.

By die mooi nuwe Panoramaskuiling het ons die uitsig geniet en by die Marais Dam piekniekplek was ons die enigste mense wat daar piekniek gehou het. Vanuit die skuiling het ons net hier en daar 'n Slanghalsvoël en duikers gesien, baie Geelbekeende en 'n enkele Dobbertjie.

Ons het ook die Lel-, Kroon- en Bontkiewiete gesien maar geen enkele tinktinkie nie, en net een Gewone Koester. Die mooi Visarend het ons ook nie gehoor of gesien nie.

Baie vinnig het die dag na sy einde toe gestaan en met 65 voëlspesies op ons dag se lysie was ons baie tevrede en gelukkig. 🐦

BirdLife South Africa Secretarybird Project – April 2013 report

Ernst Retief
Regional Conservation Manager: Gauteng & Limpopo

Considerable progress was made with the Secretarybird project during the first few months of 2013, and herewith a short report on project progress during this period.

Aims of the project

A short reminder that the primary aims of this project are:

- To determine the foraging range of the Secretarybird by obtaining movement data for the species;
- To determine how different habitats influence foraging range by obtaining the data in different types of grasslands, for example healthy grassland, grasslands mixed with agriculture (crop and livestock farming) and grasslands near urban areas. The different vegetation units within the Grassland Biome should also be taken into consideration; and
- To determine post-natal dispersal and survival.

Sondela Secretarybird

The highlight was the fitting of a tracking device to a Secretarybird at Sondela Nature Reserve in January. The event was filmed and broadcasted on the SABC's 50/50 environmental programme on 25 February 2013. The tracking device for this bird was funded by BirdLife Northern Gauteng. We also bought a camera trap which has been used to photograph the birds at the nest. Below are some photos of the field trip and a map showing the movements of the bird. I visited the nest on 11 March, found the fledged bird, and determined that the tracking device was sitting nicely on the bird's back. It moved, flew and soared without any problem. We are satisfied with the smaller and lighter tracking device we used on the bird at Sondela.



Figure 1

The fitting of the tracking device showing myself, Joseph Heymans and Faye Peters (the 50/50 presenter).



Figure 2

I had to climb up the tree with the ladder to retrieve the bird.

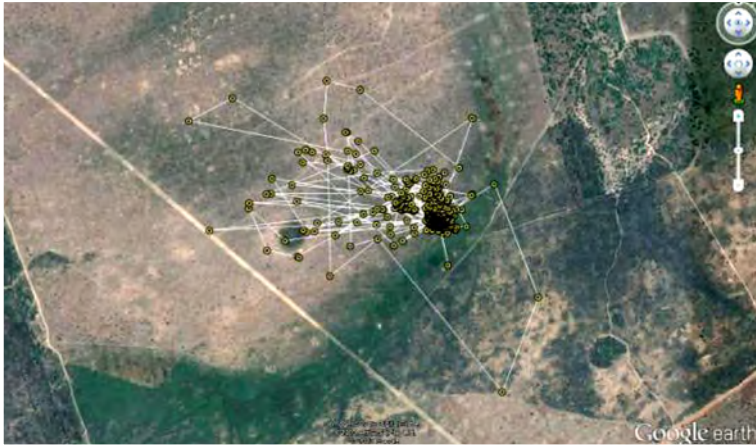


Figure 3
This map shows the movement of the Sondela Secretarybird since it left the nest. It spends time walking and foraging in the vicinity of the nest during the day and returns to the nest at night.



Figure 4

The parents have been photographed bringing new nesting material to the nest.

High temperatures

One thing we learnt from the tracking device is the amazing heat these birds endure on the nest. The tracking device, which has a temperature reader, reached temperatures of up to 65°C. Although the ambient temperature was close to 40°C, it does show that the bird, which sits on the open nest, must endure extreme temperatures! One can

speculate that increasing temperatures, through climate change, may result in the birds enduring higher temperatures and that this may have a negative effect on breeding success. These are certainly avenues for interesting future research.

Warden Secretarybird

We can now also report that we managed to successfully fit another tracking device to a Secretarybird on a farm near Warden in the Free State. We will provide more information about this bird in the next report, but for now can let you know that the bird is doing well and left the nest within two days of us fitting the device. The tracking device for this bird was sponsored by De Beers.

Rebuilding a nest in the Eastern Cape

A few days ago, I received a call from a very angry farmer in the Eastern Cape. He had a pair of Secretarybirds which were nesting in a pine tree on his farm. After Working for Water cut down the tree (they did not know that there was a nest in it), the farmer decided to “rebuild” the nest. I told him that I did not think it would work, but he proved me wrong. Within hours after the nest was rebuilt, the pair was back on the nest!



Figure 5
The nest going up!



Figure 6
The birds are back on the nest!

Financial Support

BirdLife South Africa would like to acknowledge the financial support received from our two Species Champions, Petra Diamonds and the Airports Company South Africa. These two companies will support the programme for three years. We appreciate their financial contributions, as well as the contributions received from a number of companies, individuals and bird clubs.

Conclusion

We will keep you informed of progress with the project. It remains a struggle to find nests with suitably-aged nestlings, and the red tape required to obtain permits delays the work. Progress is therefore slower than anticipated, but we remain hopeful that we will receive fantastic data over a period of time. Please remember that we will also post project updates on the BirdLife South Africa Facebook page.

Thank you again for your support. 🐦

New Members/ Nuwe Lede: January – May 2013

Ons verwelkom die volgende nuwe lede en hoop dat julle gou tuis sal voel. Ons sien uit daarna om julle by ons aandvergaderings, daguitstappies of tydens 'n naweekkamp 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 trips.

Russell Stevens, Garsfontein East; Janien Wilkens, Hatfield; Brendan and Debbie Beeton, Moreleta Park; Maxwell van Os, Sinoville; Judy Parsons, Silver Lakes; Rassie and Lelanie Bruwer, Bonaero Park; Kobus, Salome and Estee Liebenberg, Newlands; Gert Opperman, Tasbet Park; NJ van Zyl, Garsfontein; Rina & Chris de Jager, Woodhill; Marieke & Marchant Fourie, Wingate Park; Christine & Pieter Bezuidenhout, Hatfield; Maryke van den Heuwel, Waterkloof Hoogte; Johan Oosthuizen, Birchleigh; Athol Emmett, Wierda Park; Yolandie Venter, Faerie Glen; Elizabeth Arcus, Moreleta Park; Elize and Spike Henning, Theresapark; Neil Dittrich, Cornwall Hill; Alic, Rosemarie, Michael, Carla Jacobsz, Waterkloofhoogte; Lynn Walton, Lynnwood Ridge; Christiaan Ahlers, Danie Perold, Garsfontein; Jan Andrew Diedricks, Lyttelton; Glenda Bezuidenhout, Lyttelton.

BLNG birding trip to Kurisa Moya: 15-18 February 2013

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

When the Kurisa Moya trip at the end of October 2012 was announced in the BLNG programme Kathrin and I hesitated just too long for a few weeks, finding that the trip was fully booked. So we requested our kind Club Secretary, Rita de Meillon, to “book us first for any future outing” to that sought-after destination.

Our chance came in 15-18 February 2013. Rita had made good her promise, we were first on the list! Two weeks before, Rita published a list of the fourteen participants as well as all the details. Ten people/five couples (some ladies shared a room) were booked into the farmhouse built in 1937 (rather before my time) and two couples stayed in the forest log cabins, some distance away. One of our participating friends asked me what birds I would like to see on this trip. I replied: “I hope we can just go and have a good time birding. If we can see the Green Twinspot, it will be a bonus”.

Kurisa Moya Lodge is situated on a 422 hectare property, close to Magoebaskloof, 45 minutes drive from Polokwane. We decided ‘to take Friday off’ and make a start at 09:00. We took an unhurried 4-hour drive and admired the landscape and the ever changing vegetation and arrived just after 13:00. We had the pick of the rooms and had a nice and quiet room with an *en-suite* bathroom with shower, basin and WC. After unpacking we had some lunch and went outside to admire the sheer beauty of the surroundings. The farmhouse is situated rather high on an outcrop with spectacular views of the surrounding mountains and countryside. Magoebaskloof and the Woodbush Forest is part of the smallest of the seven biomes of Southern Africa. The Forest Biome is defined as ‘...(Natural

indigenous) forests that are small, isolated and often fragmented, the largest area found in the Western Cape in Tsitsikama and Knysna, while other relatively large forests occur in the mountains of the Eastern Cape (Hogsback), KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo Province. A narrow strip of almost continuous coastal dune forest stretches from just south of St Lucia to the northern border of KZN.’ (Hine G & G, 2006. *Field Guides Association of Southern Africa – Level 1 Nature Guide Learner Manual*). Magoebaskloof and Woodbush Forest is reportedly the second largest forest fragment after Knysna Forest (information booklet at the farmhouse).

A walk had been scheduled the Friday afternoon and we were met by David Letsoalo who turned out to be a first class guide, giving us a broad friendly smile and Paul Nkhumane (both BLSA-trained guides). We walked through indigenous/natural forest with huge and stunning trees; we saw reportedly the largest Natal Forest Cabbage Tree *Cussonia sphaerocephala* in South Africa.

Forest birding is not easy. The guides were well trained to locate the birds by call and song. But to spot the birds in the high trees and dense foliage is a different matter. The guides used green laser pointer pens to show us the location of the birds (one lady’s standard call was “keep it there, keep it there...”). The birds did not seem to be put off by the laser pens. I was also surprised that the birds did not react to the relatively high noise levels of excited talking, some of the friends making no effort to keep their voices low.

We saw Cape Batis, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Bar-throated Apalis, Blue-mantled (Crested) Flycatcher and the ever present Sombre Greenbul calling “Willie! Come out

and fight – or are you scared...”. We returned from the forest to the farmhouse, where the guides lit a fire under the braai and we were supplied chicken wings and lamb chops which we grilled. Salads and rolls were also supplied. We sat down to a nice meal and chatted the evening away over a glass of wine.

The next morning, Saturday, had a full programme, so we were told to be ready to leave with a ‘brunch box’ packed by 05:00. It was still pitch dark when David Letsoalo got into our SUV and we drove off to Woodbush Forest. On the way we chatted about a wide variety of topics and he struck me as an intelligent and well-read individual, having acquired many a book for self-study. Woodbush Forest is in the heart of Magoebaskloof, with breathtaking indigenous forest scenery, interspersed with plantations of mainly pine trees. We left the vehicles and walked, hearing the shrieking calls of Cape Parrots. A small population of these birds frequent a tiny area of habitat exactly at this location, and are endemic to South Africa as well as being on the

Endangered Red Data list (Rare and localised; total population ca 500 to 1 000). The guides tried a number of known locations, eventually finding them on some dead Bluegum trees. Binoculars were shaking with excitement. Cameras were clicking away. I was too shaky to get a decent photo. Next we found the Olive Woodpecker, also quite vocal but at first difficult to spot. Other good sightings were Grey Cuckoo-shrike and Knysna Turaco, which at times was very vocal.

We moved to a different location to find Barratt’s Warbler. It was very vocal but very difficult to spot in the dense, grassy undergrowth, moving in the lower strata not far from ground level. The guides cautioned us to take up positions and not to move, as this warbler is sensitive to movement. For some of our friends the pressure to get yet another lifer proved too much and the movement drove the bird off. When everybody had departed I returned to the site, playing the call on the PDA and standing dead still – I was rewarded with a good, albeit short sighting.

How do birds learn to sing?

Scientists have long debated whether birds learn their ability to sing, or whether they learn their repertoire by imitation and practice. As with human language, the answer is that they do both. Like us, birds are born with a basic ability to vocalise, but need to be exposed to full-blown song in order to learn it properly.

So captive birds kept isolated from their fellow songsters develop a poor imitation of their ‘proper’ song; while those exposed to the song of a different species may adapt elements of it into their own song pattern.



Off we went to another site and heard the Orange Ground-Thrush with its sweet and persistent song. Status: uncommon and Red Data Book, Near-threatened. This bird was singing away in dense foliage, and all efforts to see it failed. We were lucky later on to see it in some dense undergrowth, but it was quite a mission to spot it. Another bird difficult to see was the Black-fronted Bush-Shrike. We heard it on a number of occasions but were not able to spot it.

We drove to another area, 'Greatheads', a mountain strewn with rocks, no trees but grassy vegetation and a great diversity of succulent plants, most in full bloom. It looked like the proverbial 'nature's garden' itself, very pretty indeed. Here the guides hoped to spot Long-billed Pipit, without any luck though. We drove on, the wind still blowing very hard until we reached some dense patches of Common Sugarbush *Protea caffra* in full bloom. I finally spotted Gurney's Sugarbird here (after having hunted after it for probably five years unsuccessfully). I was surprised that the sugarbirds did not seem troubled at all by the strong wind. We returned to the farmhouse, happy about all the special sightings, but tired and hungry. The evening dinner was a sit-down affair, and Grace (fiancée to David) had prepared a scrumptious spread and we feasted in style. That evening we were taken on a night-walk to spot the African Wood-Owl, regrettably without luck.

The next day took us back to Woodbush Forest for an unplanned further search for the Black-fronted Bush-Shrike. The guides had phenomenal hearing skills and heard it in a patch of plantation forest, albeit further off inside the forest away from the road. Without hesitation they led us through the forest up to a point where we had some superb sightings of the bird, also spotting a juvenile in close proximity. Locally uncommon to fairly common, Woodbush Forest is reportedly the only spot to see this bird in South Africa. *[It actually can be found further south in well forested sections of the Drakensberg escarpment, but is highly localised – Ed.]*

We proceeded to Tzaneen in search of Magpie Mannikin as well as Grey-rumped Swallow at the Tzaneen Dam, neither of which we spotted. David even took us to the house of the local chiropractor ("to treat the stiff necks from staring up at the tree tops") which the Pied Mannikins frequent but without success. On we went to Mamabolo Grasslands where we had a good sighting of the Short-clawed Lark, hearing it singing from a low young Sweetthorn *Acacia (Vachellia karoo)* and also flying up and displaying. We were also taken to a Bat Hawk nesting site, high up in large Bluegum trees where we had some excellent sightings of an adult and one juvenile Bat Hawk. Luckily, three of the friends had brought spotting scopes.....

We returned to the farmhouse early afternoon for lunch, relaxing and with each of the friends writing up their list of sightings. I went to the feeding site again on my own, hoping to find the Green Twinspot – no luck! The one bird I was hoping to see had eluded us again!

Although Kathrin and I 'only' saw some 50 bird species that long weekend, what we saw was special – Square-tailed Drongo, Forest Canary, European Honey-Buzzard, Kurrichane Thrush, Yellow-fronted Canary, Mountain Wagtail, Eurasian Hobby, Wire-tailed Swallow, African Dusky Flycatcher, Sweet Waxbill, Malachite Sunbird, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow Bishop, Bronze Mannikin, Purple-crested Turaco, Steppe Buzzard to name but a few. Many of us were able to add new sightings to our life list.

Monday we were taken for a short walk through the forest on the property of Kurisa Moya, before departing. The two guides had given us excellent service and went out of their way to provide us with interesting sightings. Without hesitation I can highly recommend this birding venue. I shall return, if only to see the elusive Green Twinspot...

PS: We were contemplating doing the trip in Kathrin's new sedan vehicle which is far more fuel efficient than my 4x4 SUV. Luckily we opted for the SUV; Kathrin's nice sedan would never have been the same again! 🐦

Birding Big Day: Birds, beasts and delightful people

Philip Calinikos

For the past three years our club has been participating in the Birding Big Day competition which is held every November. The Kruger National Park has been our venue of choice and we have had three magical experiences in the camps of Berg-en-Dal (2010), Skukuza (2011) and Olifants (2012).

Our support team has remained pretty stable throughout and we are deeply indebted to our KNP guides Raymond Khoza (head guide Berg-en-Dal) and Dr Andrew Deacon, who was Head of Small Mammal Research in the Park for many years until his recent retirement. His wife, Jackey Deacon, kept us well nourished throughout with her tasty meals.

There were many highlights during these events... not only of the feathered kind. The Berg-en-Dal event was held in particularly sweltering conditions and we were close to losing a few participants due to heat stroke and severe sunburn on the day itself. Fortunately the excitement of the mounting count helped to

ease the pain. After our recce trip on the Friday, most participants were pretty exhausted by sunset and there were few takers for the night drive, which Raymond had arranged exclusively for us by using his considerable contacts. We drove out on the tar road towards Malelane in high expectation...but saw absolutely nothing. We expected the same boring trip back and the hardy few on the back of the vehicle were nodding off when all of a sudden there was movement ahead. A lioness was padding slowly down the road, growling softly! And then we noticed the mewing sounds coming from the road verge and a whole litter of cubs came tumbling onto the road towards her. We followed mother and cubs for almost a kilometre and had them all to ourselves. Absolute bliss! Reluctantly we moved on, only to run into a huge male leopard patrolling and scent marking his territory down the same road!

Obviously everyone was on board for the night drive the following night. And what did



*The team
of 2010 at
Berg-en-Dal*



*The team
of 2011 at
Skukuza*

we see...absolutely nothing! Birding highlights on that first trip were Eurasian Hobby, Retz's Helmet-Shrike, Red-faced Cisticola displaying in the reeds in front of camp, Monotonous Lark, a full-house of vultures on a kill and of course the African Scops-Owl which seemed nailed to its perch at the Afsaal picnic spot. Our BBD count allowed us to win the community section of the competition and our total count for the trip amounted to 179 species.

Although a beautiful and bird-rich camp, Berg-en-Dal had proved to be a little too isolated for a relaxing BBD experience. Skukuza proved to be a much better bet with its plethora of loop roads around the camp allowing us convenient midday breaks at the lodges. And the lodges were superb with fantastic river frontage which allowed us to carry on birding non-stop. Andrew and Raymond again pulled out all the stops and we were treated to exclusive walks around the golf course and even a visit to the Skukuza sewerage works.

And what about breaking down on a night drive and sitting in total darkness with three huge male lions within touching distance roaring their hearts out! Birding highlights included an exciting glimpse of African Finfoot just east of Nkhulu picnic spot, Little

Bittern, White-crowned Lapwing, Red-backed Mannikin, Greater Painted-snipe, Broad-billed Roller and Mosque Swallow, giving us a total of 175 species for BBD and winners again of the community section of the competition!

Last year we decided to move further north and Olifants was selected as our base. Our two luxurious lodges had the most spectacular views across the wide Olifants River valley. Logistics were a little trickier but our team excelled themselves yet again. Dawn chorus at 04:30 on the high level bridge was a particular highlight with huge flocks of swallows and swifts swirling overhead. Birding highlights were Grey-rumped Swallow, a pair of majestic Steppe Eagles with their huge gapes, Black-bellied Bustard, a very confiding Martial Eagle, hordes of Temminck's Courser, large flocks of Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, and Collared Pratincole. The community section of BBD had been done away with for 2012 but we were still able to finish third in the Family category with 161 species.

But the real highlight for me resulting from these BBD events has been the delightful people that I have been privileged to share these experiences with. Having twenty people



The team of 2012 at Olifants Camp

confined to a vehicle, even a large one, for hours on end can be tricky. But the camaraderie and good humour displayed by everyone was heart-warming and I must thank each and everyone of my BBD partners for their wonderful contribution to making these events such a success. Jackey and our guides Raymond and Andrew displayed fine humour under sometimes trying conditions...listening to twenty commands and opinions at once is not easy! Andrew penned this little speech which summed the situation up perfectly:

"I need to say a few words for my compatriot, Raymond. Poor him! I was trying to be a buffer between him and the crowd, but then he got a 'co-driver' and the buffer collapsed... Stop, stop! Reverse! Switch off the engine! Go forward! Stop-stop! A little more! Blerrie skorra-skorra!"

"Raymond, what is that little bird calling 'tjit-tjirrrr?' Hamba gahle shosolozha aikona kuphela!"

"Go faster Raymond! Stop-stop...please?"

"Excuse me, what are you looking at?"

"We are looking at birds, sir. To be more precise we are looking at a Southern Black Tit! Raymond, Go nowww!"

"Ag ek wil soo graag 'n gompoutjie sien. Toe, ag toe, agge toeee!"

"Raymond, when are we having a pit stop? Everybody on the bus go glug-glugg and I need a smoke and Andrew needs some silence-sebenza shongolo amahotsi eish!"

"Raymond, go nowww!"

And then all that poor Raymond can do is now and then stop and point....and then the whole bus will go: "Noooo! It's another Sabota Lark, Raymond!" 🐦

Donations, Oct 2012 – March 2013

A huge thank you for your donation. Your contributions help us to 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 voels kan lewer en word opreg waardeer.

Elba Swart; Dr J Niemandt; Brian Moreby; André Marx; Dr R Scribante; Dr A Ackermann; Anand Bauchoo; Kurt Zsilavec; Jan Meyer; Russell Stevens; Elzine Smuts; Elmien Adendorff; Mev A Haarhoff; Maryke van den Heuwel

Rarities and unusual sightings report: 30 April 2013

Compiled by André Marx

Several excellent rarity reports continued into the later part of summer from January to April 2013. African Skimmers appeared once again, this time at Vaalkop Dam and an immature Lesser Black-backed Gull was at a very accessible pan in Midrand for a while, to name just two national rarities. The spate of Pectoral Sandpiper records abound and could mean that species' rarity status may have to be reviewed. SABAP2 records contributed a great deal once again to this report, as can be evidenced by the reference to pentads (5 minute squares) in the report, as did the Wider Gauteng 100km Challenge with a number of birders coming up with some specials in their pursuit of a 400+ total for the region for this year. My thanks to everyone who contributes records directly to me at the e-mail address given below.

National Rarities/ Nasionalerariteite

Western Marsh Harrier. Europese Vleivalk: one bird was at Marievale on 13 Jan 2013 where it normally occurs annually (LvD, AV).

Black-tailed Godwit. Swartstertgriet: the bird reported in the previous rarities report was still



Dylan Vosapollit

Pectoral Sandpiper/Geelpootstrandloper



Niall Ferrins

Lesser Black-backed Gull/Kleinswartrugmeeu

present at Marievale Bird Sanctuary for most of January when it was observed by a number of birders, 10 Jan 2013 (GBird). Another bird appeared at Dickens' Pan at Elandsvlei near Bapsfontein, 12 Feb 2013 (SR).

Pectoral Sandpiper. Geelpootstrandloper: at least one bird continued to show at the margins of wetlands at Kgomo-Gomo, North West Province for a considerable period of time into March 2013 when several reports were received, 5 Jan 2013 (GBird). One bird was at Dickens' Pan at Elandsvlei near Bapsfontein, 16 Feb 2013 (MA), with another record of a bird at this locality, 1 Apr 2013, (AB).

Lesser Black-backed Gull. Kleinswartrugmeeu: an immature bird was present at the Glen Austin Pan, Midrand, remaining at this locality on and off for two weeks when a number of local birders reported it, 18 Jan 2013 (GBird).

African Skimmer. Waterploëer: four birds were found at Vaalkop Dam on 22 Apr 2013 and were subsequently seen in the days following by several birders (FP). *This is an extremely unusual occurrence as these birds normally occur as solitary vagrants in South Africa.*

Regional Rarities/ Streeksrariteite

European Honey Buzzard. Wespiedief: *There were several sightings of this species for the period; a pale phase bird was seen circling over the Delta Environmental Centre, Johannesburg, 4 Jan 2013 (GL); one bird was at De Wildt, 20 Feb 2013 (JW); at least one bird was at Northern Farm again when it was observed on 24 Feb 2013, being present for at least a few weeks, (RS); one bird was at Kgomo-Kgomo in pentad 2505_2805, 30 Mar 2013, (NP).*

Ayers's Hawk Eagle. Kleinjagarend: one bird was observed in flight just east of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, 20 Apr 2013, (LvD).

Pallid Harrier. Witborsvleivalk: a male bird was seen in pentad 2525_2850 east of Kwamhlanga near the Mpumalanga/Gauteng border, 9 Feb 2013, (ST, ER). Another bird was in pentad 2610_2715 north of Carletonville, 29 Mar 2013, (AV). An immature male was in pentad 2530_2855, just south of Verena on the Gauteng/Mpumalanga boundary, 1 Apr 2013, (ST, AM).

Corn Crake. Kwartelkoning: one bird was seen in the Groenkloof Nature Reserve, Pretoria, 16 Jan 2013 (VP). Another record was of one bird on the edge of a vlei near Brackendowns in Alberton in pentad 2620_2805, 18 Feb 2013 (DV).

Terrestrial Brownbul. Boskrapper: a group of birds were found in pentad 2505_2805 in dense woodland on the edge of the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain, 2 Mar 2013 (EM, AV). *A very*



Manna Buys

River Warbler/Sprinkaansanger

interesting record and confirmation that this species is present in this area (about 75km north of Pretoria), as well as providing further evidence that this is a species that may slowly be colonising areas south of its usual range.

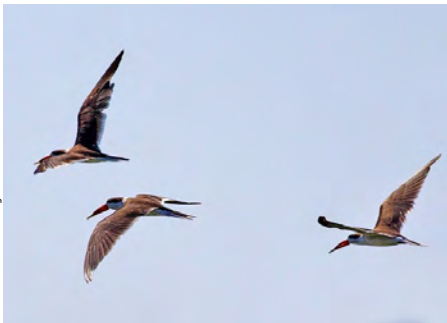
Yellow-bellied Greenbul. Geelborswillie: one bird was present in pentad 2525_2730, west of Roodekoppies Dam, 22 Mar 2013, (ST). *This represents another new locality for this species.*

River Warbler. Sprinkaansanger: during a BLNG club ringing session at Buffelsdrift, north-east of Pretoria in pentad 2535_2815, this species was a surprise find in one of nets when it could be seen close at hand by many club members present, 12 Jan 2013 (BLNGBird). At least 3 and possibly up to 5 birds were heard singing distinctly at Waterfall Estate, Midrand, in pentad 2600_2805, on 21 Mar 2013 and one was still present at least 10 days later, (RS, AM). Another bird was at Helderfontein Estate, northern Johannesburg in pentad 2555_2800, 31 Mar 2013, (AM, RS).

Mountain Wagtail. Bergkwikkie: a single bird was a surprise find at Fountains Valley, Pretoria, 19 Feb 2013; the bird remained at this locality for a number of weeks (FP, GD).

Other Interesting Observations/ Ander Interessante Waarnemings

Black-necked Grebe. Swartnekdoobertjie: two birds were at Mkhombo Dam in pentad



Johan Jansen van Rensburg

African Skimmer/Waterploëer



Lance Robinson

Eurasian Golden Oriole/Europese Wielewaal

2505_2845, 27 Apr 2013, (JA, RG).

Dwarf Bittern. Dwergrietreier: one bird was seen in the Florence Bloom Bird Sanctuary at Delta Park, Johannesburg, in pentad 2605_2800, 7 Mar 2013, an unusual bird for suburban Johannesburg and only the second record for the locality, 7 Mar 2013, (GL).

African Cuckoo Hawk. Koekoekvalk: this species was recorded in pentad 2615_2720 at Abe Bailey Reserve near Carletonville when one bird was present, 17 Jan 2013 (CWR, ID).

Lesser Spotted Eagle. Gevlekte Arend: an immature was seen in the Devon area where this species is not normally encountered, in pentad 2625_2840, 12 Dec 2012, (CWJ). One bird was still in this pentad when it was photographed 12 Jan 2013, (DV).



Stephan Terblanche

Lark-like Bunting/Vaalstreepkoppe

Long-crested Eagle. Langkuifarend: one bird was seen again at the grounds of Delta Environmental Centre, Johannesburg, 6 Jan 2013 (GL). Another bird was seen just off the Zaagkuil drift road north of Pretoria, 10 Feb 2013 (LR). One bird was present at Hennopsrivier near the Hartbeespoort Dam, 6 Apr 2013 (RvD).

Buff-spotted Flufftail. Gevlekte Vleikuiken: The distinct call of this species was heard over the course of a couple of days from an area of woodland on the Jukskei River in River Club, Sandton, 15 Jan 2013 (BA via HSR).

Bronze-winged Courser. Bronsvlerk-drawwertjie: a road killed bird was found at the top of the CSIR hill, Pretoria, 4 Feb 2013 (AK).

European Nightjar. Europese Naguil: one bird was discovered by local birder Malcolm Wilson in his Robindale, Randburg, garden, 28 Jan 2013, this being the same garden where the Collared Flycatcher was discovered last year! The bird roosted in the garden for a number of days during which time many local birders were able to see it, 28 Jan 2013 (MW).

Woodland Kingfisher. Bosveldvisvanger: at least two birds were in pentad 2630_2800 in Henley-on-Klip, south of Johannesburg, where they have been known to breed in recent years, 5 Jan 2013 (LR).

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater. Swaelstertyvreter: a solitary bird was at the Delta Environmental Centre in pentad 2605_2800, 7 Apr 2013 (GL).

Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill. Geelbek-neushoringvoël: a single bird was at the Klipriviersberg NR in pentad 2615_2800, 10 Mar 2013, (RvdS); with another record in the same locality of probably the same bird 16 Mar 2013 (KL).

Grey-backed Sparrowlark. Grysruglewerik: at least 20 birds were at the grassland plains at Kgomo-Kgomo in pentad 2505_2805, 29 Mar 2013, (RB).

Eurasian Golden Oriole. Europese Wielewaal: one bird was at Suikerbosrand NR in pentad 2630_2815, 5 Jan 2013, (LR).

Dark-capped Yellow Warbler. Geelsanger:

one bird was photographed in pentad 2625_2810 at a wetland next to the R550 adjacent to Suikerbosrand NR, 24 Feb 2013, (RvT). *This is a new locality for this species, which is not known south of Johannesburg.*

African Rock Pipit. Klipkoester: one bird was positively identified at Suikerbosrand NR where this bird appears to occur occasionally, 23 Dec 2012, (D,K&SvS).

Red-backed Mannikin. Rooirugvret: up to 6 birds were present at Fountains Valley, Pretoria, and were viewed on and off for a few weeks by several birders, 21 Feb 2013 (AR). *Collective opinion from the local rarities committee is that these birds are unlikely to have dispersed to Gauteng without assistance and are in all likelihood escaped birds from an aviary; any breeding activity should be noted.*

Lark-like Bunting. Vaalstreepkoppie: *There were a number of records for this species in the latter part of summer; several birds were recorded in the Carletonville area in four different pentads in the vicinity of 2605_2720, 9 Mar 2013 (NP); three birds were in pentad 2650_2800 just west of Deneyville, 12 Mar 2013 (JA); 5 birds were observed near Moloto, 17 Mar 2013, (JA); one bird at Klipriversberg NR, pentad 2615_2800, 28 Mar 2013, (RvdS); in pentads 2505_2820/2825, both situated just north of Rust De Winter Dam, a few birds were present on 31 Mar 2013 (ST, ER); one bird was east of Ekangala near Bronkhorstspuit in pentad 2540_2845, 29 Apr 2013, (DR).*

Observers/Waarnemers

Alan Kemp (AK)	Allan Ridley (AR)
André Marx (AM)	Andy Branfield (AB)
Anneke Vincent (AV)	BirdLife Northern Gauteng birders (BLNGBird)
	Craig Whittington-Jones (CWI)
Butch Abbott (BA)	
Dirk, Karen & Stefan van Stuyvenberg (D, K & SvS)	Don Reid (DR)
Dylan Vasapolli (DV)	Ernst Retief (ER)
Etienne Marais (EM)	Faansie Peacock (FP)
Gauteng birders (GBird)	Geoff Lockwood (GL)
Greg Davies (GD)	Hanneline Smit-Robinson (HSR)
Ian Davidson (ID)	Jerome Ainsley (JA)
John Wesson (JW)	Kevin Lavery (KL)
Lance Robinson (LR)	Lisl van Deventer (LvD)
Matthew Axelrod (MA)	Renier Balt (RB)
Richard van der Spuy (RvdS)	
Rita van Dyk (RvD)	Rob Geddes (RG)
Ron Searle (RS)	Rowan van Tonder (RvT)
Ryno Kemp (RK)	Selwyn Rautenbach (SR)
Stephan Terblanche (ST)	Vincent Parker (VP)

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. 🐦

How do birds know when to breed?

Birds cannot possibly know when the food supply will reach its peak. Their decision to begin the whole process of breeding is usually governed by changes in day length. These stimulate chemicals in their brain and trigger the cycle of courtship, finding a territory and so on. However, birds can also be fooled by periods of very mild weather in late autumn or winter, which may stimulate some to begin breeding at the 'wrong' time of year. Sadly this can have disastrous consequences, as a hard frost or heavy snowfall may wipe out the food supply just when the chicks need feeding.



Trumpeter Hornbill

Chilled Out

The most southerly bird is the aptly named South Polar Skua, which has been sighted at the Russian base of Vostok in Antarctica. This is officially the coldest place in the world, where temperatures have dropped to as low as -89.2°C . However, the world's hardest bird is surely the Emperor Penguin. Not only does it spend its whole life on the Antarctic ice, but it even chooses to breed in winter, when temperatures can drop lower than -45°C . The most southerly bird is, perhaps surprisingly, not Emperor Penguin, but Antarctic Petrel, which has been recorded nesting at $80^{\circ}30'$ South.

How well do birds hear?

By and large, pretty well. Although vision is the best developed sense amongst birds, most also have fairly sharp ears. For songbirds, hearing is obviously critical, enabling them to find a mate. Songbirds can also hear more complex sounds than we can, by 'slowing down' the sequence of notes in order to interpret the signal. Owls also have incredible aural ability: having one ear positioned slightly lower than the other gives them 'binocular hearing', enabling them to pinpoint the exact position of their prey, even in total darkness.

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