



Laniarius

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Notice to contributors

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

Kennisgewing aan bydraers

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

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Credits

Front cover: Collared Palm-Thrush/Palmmôrelyster by Salomi Louw.

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



Editorial/ Redaksioneel

Questions! Questions! Questions!

There are surely many readers of *Laniarius* who have questions in their minds about certain aspects of bird behaviour, biology, feeding habits, nesting, anatomy or simply colour variation. We would appreciate it if you would submit these questions to the editors (e-mail lanariuseditor@gmail.com). We will submit them to the experts and publish the replies whenever answers can be found.

My own curiosity has long been stimulated by information about climate change and global warming to be found in various magazines and books. The 'Environment' magazine for spring 2013 had an interesting article about the threats facing the African Penguin on the southern African coast. Due to climate change and warming of the ocean off the Namibian coast as well as overfishing by purse-seine trawlers, sardines and anchovies which have always provided the penguins with their main diet have moved in a south-easterly direction and are now mainly concentrated around Algoa Bay. The penguins have largely moved with them. Fishing is now controlled in this area with no fishing in a specified area around the penguin islands. This has resulted in much improved breeding success by the penguins.

The change in the distribution and concentrations of sardines and anchovies has also affected the breeding colonies of gannets and other seabirds on Malgas and other islands off the Cape coast at Saldanha Bay. This was described in

an article in the 'Toyota Zone' magazine for April 2013. In this region in the past pelicans relied on these small fish as their main diet and with their disappearance the pelicans had to find alternative sources of food. With time they discovered the breeding colonies of gannets, cormorants and kelp gulls on these islands and they began eating the eggs and chicks of these colonies. In the 2006/2007 season pelicans caused total failure of the breeding of cormorants and kelp gulls and had a devastating effect on the breeding colonies of the gannets.

More recently SANParks has stepped in and considerable protection for these seabird colonies has been instituted by arranging for volunteers and honorary rangers to act as 'scarecrows' by actively moving around and chasing the pelicans away from these islands.

There are many books on the subject of climate change, some of which are in my possession. One of the most recent (2011) presents a very unbiased and comprehensive account of the effects of climate change on a variety of life forms, from golden toads on the Tilaran mountains of Costa Rica (now extinct as a result of climate change) to quiver trees in Namibia and the Karoo and many other animals, birds and plants. The book is called *Driven to Extinction* by Richard Pearson. I recommend this book to anybody searching for information on climate change.

Phillip and Jill de Moor



Chairman's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

Philip Calinikos

Another year has literally 'flown' by from under my nose. I cannot believe that we birders keep ourselves so busy with such a variety of birding activities that we hardly notice time passing... at least we notice the change in seasons due to the migrant species that spice up our local birding.

This year has again been chock-a-block full of events, outings, courses, talks and another overseas tour, this time to Madagascar. At our recent end of year event I extended a heartfelt thanks to our Programme and Activities committee under the leadership of Wanda Louwrens who have done us proud... and I would like to take this opportunity of repeating that here. Well done guys!

Another exciting competition was announced at the end of year event. Brian Moreby has very generously donated a limited edition copy of the *Bird Paintings of CG Finch-Davies* to the club together with his full collection of all the issues of *Africa Birds and Birding* which are in mint condition and neatly stored in the original slip cases. We will be holding a raffle early in the New Year with these items as prizes so please look out for this and obtain your tickets from any of the committee

members or at the evening meetings.

The Madagascar tour is still fresh in my memory and a mammoth task lies ahead to sift through the thousands of photographs and hours of video for the report back that will be given to the club early next year. Please don't miss it! Chris Lotz, Mike Nelson and Toki, our guides from Birding Ecotours put together an absolutely fantastic tour. The birding, accommodation and food were all beyond everyone's expectations. Ideas are already being exchanged of other exciting venues that can be visited in the future.

Next year will also see another Flock being organised by our mother organisation BirdLife South Africa. Flock 2014, which will be held in the Drakensberg in March, will be combined with a two day LAB (Learn about Birds) which will consist of lectures, outings with a difference with bird experts and promises to be not only great fun but also of great value. Please book early as places and accommodation are limited.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity of wishing you a peaceful and blessed festive season and a prosperous and bird-filled New Year.

DONATIONS/DONASIES

January – July 2013

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

Baie dankie vir u donasie, u bydrae verseker dat ons 'n groter bydrae tot die bewaring van voëls kan lewer. Ons waardeer dit opreg.

Malan van Rensburg, Ilse du Plessis, Antony Cooper, Jaap Diedericks, Brian & Wilma Moreby, Giel Kotze, Beverley McCormick, Sue Visser, Yvonne Delpport, Thor Maeder, Anand Bauchoo.

Southern Black Korhaan listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List

Sally Hofmeyer

In the latest round of revisions to the IUCN Red List, the Southern Black Korhaan (*Afrotis afra*) was classified as Vulnerable. This species is endemic to South Africa and occurs only in the Northern, Western and Eastern Cape provinces. It is found in Fynbos and Karoo, and prefers the Succulent Karoo and Renosterveld in those biomes. As part of my PhD, in which I analysed data from the CAR project (CAR = Coordinated Avifaunal Roadcounts) and the bird atlas projects (SABAP1 and SABAP2), I found that the Southern Black Korhaan has declined dramatically in abundance over the last 20 or so years. This is what allowed us to motivate for the species to be red-listed.

Although this news may come as a bit of a shock to birders from the north of the country, who know the Northern Black Korhaan and how very common it is, most birders who know the Western Cape farmlands will not be surprised. Many local farmers and birders who participate in the CAR counts and bird atlas have told me that they hardly ever see Southern Black Korhaans any more, even though they used to see them regularly as little as ten years ago. Not all areas are as badly affected, and we do not have very good data for some parts of the species' range yet, but across the heavily cultivated farmlands in what used to be Fynbos, in the Western Cape, the picture looks pretty clear: Southern Black Korhaans are not doing well at all. We think the main reason for this is habitat loss: they really seem to like shelter, and the open fields and pastures of the farmland just do not suit them. It may also have something to do with the massive increases in the crow populations in this part of the country. Crows have been observed eating eggs and chicks of large terrestrial birds, and it is quite likely that the relatively unprotected nests of Southern Black Korhaans just

do not stand a chance against crows, once the crows find them.

An interesting aspect of this story is that it seems the reason it has taken so long for us to become aware of the Southern Black Korhaan's population crash is that until relatively recently (1994 officially, but effectively for most birders Sasol 3/Roberts VII), it was considered to be the same species as the Northern Black Korhaan. The two species look very similar, and the northern species is very common across much of its large range. So no one thought that this species might be in trouble, and when it was split into southern and northern species, it apparently did not occur to ornithologists that one of those species might not be doing as well as the other. But the Southern Black Korhaan has the misfortune of relying on a habitat that has proved to be ideal for conversion to agriculture, whereas the Northern Black Korhaan relies on habitats that have remained much less converted (grassy karoo, Nama Karoo, Kalahari savanna).

As I mentioned above, we do not have such good data for some parts of the Southern Black Korhaan's range, particularly the Succulent Karoo parts of the range, extending up the west coast into the Northern Cape. However, even the relatively scanty data we have for that region seems to indicate a general decline, which is puzzling if the main reason for the decline is habitat loss, since this habitat is much less affected by agriculture. Perhaps the crows are playing a bigger role than habitat loss, in this part of the range at least.

Another important aspect of this story is the critical role that citizen scientists have played in it. If it were not for their incredible efforts collecting data for the CAR project and the two SABAP projects, the ornithological community would still probably not have realised that this species is disappearing before

our eyes. So, if you are already participating in these projects, THANK YOU and PLEASE keep it up!! And if you have not started yet, please do consider signing up -- it's great fun, it helps you to improve your birding skills, leads to

meeting many interesting people, and above all contributes invaluable data to science, which will ultimately help us to conserve our beautiful birds and the environments on which they depend. 🐦

A forest in the Kalahari

Rion Lerm

When driving from Gauteng to Upington via the N14 freeway, Northern Cape, it is hard not to notice the sudden change in vegetation about 50 kilometres west of Kuruman. Those that notice it will see large and dense stands of Camel Thorn trees, evidence of a nationally protected forest called the Kathu Forest.

Proclaimed a Natural Heritage Site in 1995 and a Protected Forest in 2009, this arid forest ecosystem covers the town of Kathu and surrounding properties. It is approximately 4,000 hectares in size and you have to deviate from the N14 if you want to enter the town. At the opposite end of Kathu is its local mall. It is an oasis in the desert for those that enjoy their franchise restaurants, take aways and clothing shops. Most of the town's development is driven by the nearby Sishen Iron Ore mine, a mine employing near 4,500 people. It is also one of the largest producers of iron ore in the world. Kumba's Sishen plant produced nearly 40 million tonnes of final product in 2011.

Nonetheless, my master's degree project focuses on how birds utilise the forest and the findings are interesting. The forest faces many threats including urbanisation, browsing pressure from livestock and even timber harvest. However, my data shows that the forest is more species rich than nearby farms situated outside the forest boundaries despite the pressures from people.

So basically, the birding is good in and around Kathu. A first stop over should be Kalahari Golf and Jag estate (first right after the N14 turn-off). The golf course is rated as

number 22 in the country and the large Camel Thorn trees create a picturesque landscape. Summer is of course the best time to visit this area when many migrants are present. Some of the species to look out for here are Purple Roller that also breeds on the course, a range of Cuculids including African Cuckoo, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Black Cuckoo as well as Jacobin. All these guys are very vocal during the start of summer. I've even seen a melanistic (all black) Jacobin approximately 10 km north outside the forest on a private farm. Eurasian Golden Oriole is present, but difficult to see except when it swoops down between perches. The golf course together with the neighbouring game farm can host up to 140 species of birds covering a very small area. Southern Pied Babbler and Crimson-breasted Shrike breed and forage side-by-side on the course. Other common species include African Grey Hornbill, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver and the Red-billed Spurfowl. Swallow-tailed Bee-Eater and its European cousin frequent the natural forest belts running through the town and are especially evident from the road between the two large traffic circles. Locals speak of *xanthochroic* (yellow instead of red feathers) Green-winged Pytilia and Crimson-breasted Shrike, two oddly coloured birds that eluded me. The former species is also more common around water troughs on livestock farms, areas inaccessible to the public. Another quick stop can be a large dam, next to the road running towards Deben from the N14. Here flamingos and various waders frequent the clear water that results

from the calcrete substrate, but the actual waterbird diversity is at the local sewage works. Apparently Kuruman's sewage works is also good for migrant waders. If the gates are open near the turn-off towards Sishen mine you can drive in and notify any staff member that you're bird watching. Three-banded Plover and many duck species hide amongst the vegetation in the sludge ponds. Cape Teal, Red-billed Teal, South African Shelduck, Yellow-billed Duck, Black-winged Stilt and Black-crowned Night-Heron frequent these small ponds where the opposite banks are just a stone's throw away. However, the interesting sighting here is the Cape Wagtails that are stained red from the mining dust. These are pink birds that look horrid, especially species

with white plumages such as Cattle Egret. The colouration is from the nearby Sishen Mine and its actually just iron oxide giving the dust its red colouration. Iron does not seem to harm birds, from what I've read. Nonetheless, the impacts on the birds' endocrine system (their insides) remains a mystery.

Now for the bad news... Kathu barely has any *reasonably-priced* accommodation and no camping facilities anywhere. All 100+ guest houses cater for mine contractors, so the locals seize the opportunity and over-inflate their rates. However, Kathu makes for a wonderful stop over, approximately 100 km east of Upington and it will be worthwhile your visit. So next time, do not just pass-by, rather pass through! 🐾

Aloe Creek

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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

Ek ring voëls in die suide van KwaZulu-Natal: Oktober 2013

Wanda Louwrens

In Augustus vanjaar het ek die geleentheid gekry om saam met Frik du Plooy te gaan voëls ring by Sithela Lodge in die Munster omgewing. Dit is naby Southbroom op pad na Port Edward. Die uitnodiging het van Graham Grieve gekom wat vroeër hier in Pretoria saam met die klub gering het. Frans, Frik se broer, het ook saamgegaan.

'n Reënbui die vorige nag het gedreig om die ringsessie in die wiele te ry, maar so optimisties as wat die ringers altyd is, het ons in swaar betrokke weer teen vieruur die oggend die pad na Munster aangedurf. Die veld was baie nat, maar 'n paar waterskoene het darem die voete droog gehou.

Om die nette op te slaan was maklik. Daar is geen doringbome waaraan die nette kon vashaak nie en die grond was ook nie so klipperig soos hier by die Botaniese Tuine of die Monument nie. Ons het die nette in die middel van 'n pad opgeslaan. Met so min hande (Graham en Frans het in 'n ander paadjie naby 'n dam hulle nette gaan oprig) moes ek vir Frik help met die palesak en pennehouer. Hy het ook die sak met die nette en hamer op sy rug gedra. Die weer het saamgespeel en ons kon al die nette in droë weer opslaan. Hierna het ons 'n welverdiende koppie koffie en beskuit geniet. Ons wag altyd tot dit goed lig is voordat ons weer die nette besoek.

Met die eerste gaan haal slag was daar 'n 'retrap' – 'n pragtige Nataljanfredrik (Red-capped Robin-Chat). 'n 'Retrap' is 'n voël wat reeds gering is. Die prosedure met so 'n voël is om die nommer op die ringetjie aan die been neer te skryf en dubbel te kontroleer saam met 'n ander ringer. Met die nommer kan mens by Safring (dit is waar alle A-ringers moet registreer) navraag doen oor die oorsprong van die ring – waar, wanneer en deur wie dit gering is. Met hierdie inligting is daar al vasgestel dat

'n Gewone Janfrederik tot sewentien jaar oud kan word. Ek het die res van die data op die vorm aangeteken soos die gewig, grootte van die kop en bek en die lengte van die vlerk, stert en been.

Daar word ook altyd gekyk of die voël nie verveer nie. Voëls verloor voortdurend ou vere en dan groei daar nuwes uit. Om die verveering aan te teken is 'n proses op sy eie. Net die 10 (in sommige voëls is daar 9 of 11) primêre vere word in ag geneem. Die meeste voëls verveer van binne na buite. So as die derde veer van buite af kort is, word daar aangeteken dat vere 1 tot 7 nuwe vere is, no. 8 kom nog uit en vere 9 en 10 is dus ou vere. Al hierdie inligting word op die datavorm in kodes aangedui. Elke A-ringer is verplig om die data na elke ringsessie na Safring te stuur. Safring is die oorkoepelende liggaam wat toesig hou oor alle ringaktiwiteite in Suid-Afrika.

Die volgende verrassing in die nette was 'n Olyfsuikerbekkie (Olive Sunbird) – nie net 'n



Graham Grieve, Wanda Louwrens en Frik du Plooy

nuwe voël om te ring nie, maar ook 'n 'lifer' vir my. Die beste uitkenmerk is die geel klossies onder die vlerk wat duidelik sigbaar was. Dit is 'n baie klein voeltjie – net agt gram in gewig. Sels kleiner as 'n Gewone Fret (Bronze Mannikin), wat maar 10 g weeg. Hierna het nog 'n Nataljanfrederik gevolg, asook 'n Gewone Willie (Sombre Greenbul) wat ek al voorheen gesien het, maar nie van so naby af nie. Dit is 'n wonderlike gevoel om in sy of haar roomkleurige ogies te kyk. Die geslagte is eenders, so mens weet nie of dit 'n mannetjie of wyfie is nie. Die geslag van die voël word ook op die datavorm per kode aangeteken. 'n Groenrugkwêkwêvoel (Green-backed Camaroptera) was die volgende voël in die net. Ek het hierdie voeltjie nog net een keer in my lewe op 'n klubuitstappie na Shakawe (Botswana) in Maart 2011 gesien en daar by Munster kon ek dit in my hand hou en van nader beskou. Hierdie sku voeltjie skuil meestal in die ondergroei van woude. Die bos by Munster was dus die ideale habitat.

Na nog 'n Nataljanfrederik was die volgende verrassing 'n Witborsduifie (Tambourine Dove). Dié het ek laas by Roodewal naby Thohoyandou gesien saam met Samson. Hierdie duifie weeg 'n bietjie ligter as 'n Rooiborsduifie (Laughing Dove) en is maklik om te hanteer. Dit byt mens glad nie. Nie soos wat 'n Swartkeelgeelvink

(Southern Masked-Weaver) kan byt nie. 'n Vink byt jou vandat jy dit uit die nette uithaal tot jy dit weer laat los!

Nog 'n 'lifer' het gevolg – 'n Swartblestinker (Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird). Hierdie voël het my nog altyd ontwyk omdat dit in kus- en bergwoude voorkom – habitatte wat ek selde besoek. Aan daardie voeltjie kon ek 'n nuwe ring sit! Ek gebruik natuurlik nie my eie ringe nie. Ek het Frik se ringe gebruik, want ek is nog 'n C-ringer ('n ringer in opleiding). Om te kwalifiseer moet ek 500 voëls ring, waarvan 50 verskillende spesies moet wees. Om 50 spesies te kry is nie moeilik nie, maar dit neem 'n hele paar jaar om 500 voëls te ring. Daar is elke maand 'n klubring (waarna almal uitgenooi word), maar soms is daar baie C-ringers (ons is nou 18) wat ring en kry jy miskien net vier of vyf voëls om self te ring. Ander kere is jy gelukkig om 30 te kry. As ek die dag kwalifiseer mag ek my eie ringe en nette by Safring koop.

Nog twee Olyfsuikerbekkies het gevolg. Ek was doodtevrede met ses nuwes op my spesielys en tien nuwe voëls. Graham het ook talle voëls gering waarvan die Groenkolpensie (Green Twinspot) die mooiste was.

Teen elfuur het dit sag begin reën en moes ons die nette laat sak. Maar wat 'n voorreg om daar te kon wees, op die regte tyd en op die regte plek! 🐦

Met vakansie (punte)

Salomi Louw

Baie van ons het vakansiepunte met jaarlikse 'administrasiefooi' – soms aangeskaf omdat ons met 'n slap riem gevang is – wat ons per jaar 'gratis' verblyf in 'n aantal vakansieoorde gee. Jy 'betaal' vir die huisvesting deur 'n sekere hoeveelheid punte af te staan aan die oord. 'n Sekere aantal punte kan oorgedra word na die volgende jaar, maar dan moet dit gebruik word of jy verloor dit.

Omdat ek in 2012 'n vol reisprogram gehad het: Nylsvlei, Rametsi, Punda Maria na Pafuri River Camp, Tumuga en Golwe met BLNG;

en ook Mauritius, Suid-Oos Kaap, Uganda en Kenia, en boonop kampeer waar ek kan, het ek min van my vakansiepunte gebruik.

Toe moes ek na my besoek aan Namibië in Mei vanjaar haastig 'n plan beraam om van my opgehoopte punte te gebruik want Madagaskar in November (BLNG) en Zambië met Joe Grosel lê nog voor. Op kort kennisgewing is min plekke by sodanige oorde beskikbaar en boonop minder moontlik as jy nie té ver van Gauteng af wil reis nie, en daarby plek soek vir één mens. Dit geluk my egter om einde Augustus plek te kry by

Sudwala Lodge vir 'n naweek en 'n middeweek by Mount Sheba; naby genoeg aan mekaar om 'n uittoeg in daardie rigting te regverdig.

Sudwala, met sy grotte waar ek nie ingegaan het nie weens griep, was 'n verrassing: aan die een kant die bykans loodregte kranse en aan die ander kant die vinnigvloeiende en skoon Houtbosloopspruit (waar ek seker is die Watertrapper ook sal voorkom); die eenhede is skoon, gerieflik en netjies en in groepe van sowat 10 hutte rangskik, en elke groep het sy eie swembad. Die omgewing is mooi, en talle paaie in die omgewing bied toegang tot voëlkykgeleenthede in plantasies en klowe met inheemse bosse. Eers stap ek in die oord rond en die uiters steil bergpaadjie op tot by die grotte, met talle flitsende voëls wat net so vinnig verdwyn as wat hulle verskyn. Ek weet somer hier gaan wonderlike voëls te siene wees al is dit nie wat ek verwag het nie. 'n Rooiduiker staan my eers rustig kouend en beskou voor dit die bosse inglip en bobbejane kom drink teen skemer ongeërg water uit die swembad voor my hut voor hulle die kranse invaar om te gaan 'bob in die berge'.

Ek ry die volgende dag oor Kaapsche Hoop na Barberton en terug (sonder om uitsonderlike voëls te sien, maar darem die bekende 'wilde perde'), en stap laatmiddag weer in die oord rond. Eers is daar die Afrikaanse Sperwer wat stroom-op vlieg na ek hom verras het, maar wat darem so gaan sit dat ek hom mooi kan beskou; dan ook die Swartoogtiptolle, Kaapse Glasogies, Grootstreepswael, Byvangers, drie spesies mossies, Rooibeklysters en Dikbekwewers wat op die oewer kerjakker. Die Bergkwikkie wip van klip na klip in die stroompie terwyl die Gewone Willie die bos vol roep. Suikerbekkies is die tuine vol.

Daarna stap ek met die grensdraad langs verby die hutte teen die kranse. Hier kom, sonder dat ek dit hoegenaamd verwag het, 'n Bosloerie met my flankeer, flits voor my verby, sit rustig op 'n tak, roep my verder, en poseer weer. Saam met hom beweeg 'n Kaapse Bosbontrokkie.

"... echoes/Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?/Quick, said the bird, find them, find them,/"

Round the corner. ... /Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind/Cannot bear very much reality./ Time past and time future/What might have been and what has been/Point to one end, which is always present." (T.S. Eliot, 1963. 'Burnt Norton', *Collected Poems 1909-1962*. London: Faber and Faber).

'n Gestreepte Koester kom sit op my stoep, maar word verjaag deur 'n mamma-aap sonder kleintjie wat weet die hutte verskaf kos en dus die skuifdeur probeer oopmaak. 'n Swartblestinker stel homself ten toon en vier voëlvangerspesies ondersoek die witsinkhoute wat reeds bot. Dan is daar natuurlik die Rooivlerkspreus wat die oord vul met hul 'ter-leupse'-gesang.

Sondagoggend ry ek na die grotparkeering en staan en stap daar rond, veral waar 'n wildevy in drag is. Die hoeveelheid en verskeidenheid voëls hier is betowerend, met die beste die Geelbekbosduif en Gryskopspeg.

Oor Sabie, Blyderivier en Ohrigstad waar ek twee Witkruisarende sien, ry ek Maandag tussen groen landerye, bergrante en uitsigte op bergreekse wat lyk soos gekreukelde, deurskynende deurslagpapier na Mt. Sheba.



Bosloerie/Narina Trogon

Salomi Lowry



Kaapse Bosbontrokkie/Cape Batis

Afgesien van die hotelgedeelte net 20 eenhede so versprei dat niemand jou privaatheid kan binnedring nie en jy uitsig het oor die groen bosse; 'n skemerontvangs met sjerie en snoeperye; vriendelike personeel wat met elkeen 'n geselsie kom aanknoop en bydra tot kennismaking met ander toeriste – te heerlijk!

In die slaap- en sitkamer is daar kaggels en die oord verskaf gratis vuurmaakhout en antrasiet vir die koue aande en veral vir die dae as die mis in die klowe opkruip soos 'n spook wat sy sleep dan hier, dan daar, oor die woude uitbrei. Toerusting in die hutte is van uitstekende gehalte, met selfs warmwatersakke wat voorsien word en waarvan ek kwistig gebruik gemaak het.

Mount Sheba se verskeidenheid stap-roetes in inheemse woude en grasvelde, en waar die bome ID-kaartjies aan het, is enige stadsontvlugter se droom met *Podocarpus falcatatus* en *P. latifolius*, Assegaibos, Rooi- en Swartstinkhout en ander tipiese Afro-montane bome wat bo jou uittroon, jou nek krampe gee en verkykerarm lam maak, is dit 'n wonderwêreld vir natuur liefhebbers en voëlkykers. Net rustig sit in die groen omarming van die bome, is hemels. Om dan die Bloukuifvlieëvanger te sien waaierstert in die woud as silhoeëet teen

die ragfynkantwerk van blare teen die lug, die Witkoljanfrederik wat homself eers aanmeld met 'n silwerige verbyvlug en dan sommer voor jou op 'n paadjie na die oord kom wei, die Suidelike Swie met sy chiffonswart wange en rooi bekkie wat op die ooptes by die foreldam wei, is klaar die moeite werd. (Al is forel nie op die spyskaart nie, het hulle spesiaal vir my 'n smaaklike forelaandete voorberei.)

In die hoër en oper staproetes met grasveld kry jy talle ander voëls en die Groot- en Kleinrooibandsuikerbekkie word oral algemeen aangetref, terwyl die Jangroentjie, Bontrokkie, Drakensberglangstertjie, Ruygtesanger, Bandkeelkleintjie (die *spelonkensis* subspesie) en Grasvoël ook te sien is. Teen laatmiddag met die uitsig oor die vallei as die son agter jou ondergaan, bring 'n rustigheid in jou gemoed. Terwyl ek die eerste middag op dié roete is, kom onverwags 'n Rooiborssperwer skielik bo my verbygeseil, so winnig dat ek nie eens daaraan dink om 'n foto te probeer neem nie.

Die wind waai hier by Mt Sheba van alle kante en op en af in die klowe, en met die kilheid rondom my ry ek die volgende dag om te gaan kyk hoe Pelgrimsrus homself reggeruk het. Op die piekniekterrein loop Kalkoenibisse tussen die mense rond en met die terugry kom 'n Witkruissperwer laag en tydsaam langs my verbygevlug terwyl 'n oorbietjie op 'n afgewende land iets te ete soek. Terug by Mt Sheba pak ek oor die volgende paar dae stukkie van die woudroetes aan. Griep en lae energievлакke beperk egter my aktiwiteite. Twee Knysnaloeries kom met luide aanmelding hulle rooi vlerke vertoon. Die Bloukuifvlieëvangers laat hulself ook geld en die Geelstreepboskruipers vroetel volop en tydsaam – seker maar hul aard – in die misomgewe bome waar hulle in die Oumansbaard selfs onderstebo hang om insekte te verorber.

Op 'n oggend langs die plaaspad wat deur die woud loop, hou ek Klein- en Grootrooibandsuikerbekkies dop wat in 'n hewige argument betrokke is en 'n Grysopspeg kom besleg die geskil. Laer af wip die Groenrugkwêkwoëls rond.

Laatmiddag volg ek (meer as half-pad

doof) duidelike voëlroepe in die Ouhout. Dis Olyfboslaksmante wat 'n Bokmakierie verwilder. Vroegoggend op my laaste dag hier stap ek in ligte mis, wat later baie dig sou word, op die paaie in die oord en die Oranjelysters, wat vergadering hou op 'n draai in die pad, is 'n vreugde om te aanskou, maar laat my nie toe om nader te kom nie voor hulle weer in die digte bosse verdwyn.

Terwyl ek vroegoggend die laaste dag op die stoep sit en kyk hoe die opkomende son die klowe verkleur, kom doen die Samango-ape die rondte van Vader Cloete: kyk of hulle die skuifdeur wat op 'n skrefie oop is, verder kan oopbeur; ruik en voel aan die verkyker wat aan die stoelleuning hang; klim deur die diefwering

om te kyk of daar nie dalk 'n oop venster êrens is nie; en lê dan rustig rondom my om mekaar se vlooië uit te kam.

Met die terugtog na Gauteng het ek 'n kort draai gemaak in Verloren Valei (*sic*) naby Dullstroom en tussen rooi- en vaalribbokke kon ek die Bergwagter en Langtoonklyplyster ook op my voëllys aanteken.

My uitgangspunt met hierdie kort uittog was om vakansiepunte te gebruik en ek het geen verwagtinge gehad nie. Verblyf oral was uit die boonste rakke en ek kon 104 voëlspesies aanteken, waarvan talle ongewoon en besonders was. Ek was baie gelukkig met die keuse van oorde. Vakansiepunte het dus wel bygedra tot my voëlvreugde. 🐦

Trees and plants that attract birds

Jill de Moor

When we see a bird flying into a tree or bush, we generally focus our binoculars on the bird and the vegetation receives little or no attention. This is how I have done my birding until recently and I am sure that the majority of birders do the same.

However, I have now noticed that certain trees and shrubs are visited by a great variety of birds while other plants attract more specific types of birds.

Let me give you an example of a particular tree in my kitchen courtyard which is favoured by a great variety of birds during the months of late August to November.

The tree is known as the Weeping Boerbean (Huilboerboon) *Schotia brachypetala*; SA Number 202.

These birds are attracted to the sticky nectar of the new leaves and flowers as well as the tiny fruits and aphids; White-bellied Sunbird (Witpenssuikerbekkie), Dark-capped Bulbul (Swartoogtiptol), African Green Pigeon (Papegaaiduif), Cape White-eye (Kaapse Glasogie), Crested Barbet (Kuifkophoutkapper), Black-collared Barbet (Rooikophoutkapper) Green Wood-Hoopoe (Rooibekkekelaar).

Aphids and other insects use the flowers, sticky nectar and small fruits on the ground and they then attract Cape Wagtail (Gewone Kwikkie), Karoo Thrush (Geelbeklyster), and Cape Robin-Chat (Gewone Janfrederik).

Now let us turn our attention to a couple of indigenous trees in the Dinokeng Game Reserve only 50 km from Pretoria. Weeping Wattle tree (Huilboom) *Peltophorum Africanum*; SA Number 215. The following birds were observed feeding on the flower nectar; White-bellied Sunbird (Witpenssuikerbekkie), Greater Double-collared Sunbird (Grootrooibandsuikerbekkie), Olive-tree Warbler (Olyfboomsanger), Icterine Warbler (Spotsanger).

On a Silver Terminalia tree (Vaalboom) *Terminalia sericea*, SA Number 551, we came across Black-throated Canary (Bergkanarie) feeding on the flowers extracting what appeared to be a kind of cottonwool which adhered to their bills.

We would be happy to receive your observations regarding the interaction of birds and plants. Please forward to: lanariuseditor@gmail.com. 🐦

Facing the storm

Annali Swanepoel

Saturday the 21st of September 2013 will go down in meteorological history as the day nobody saw coming. A week earlier three elite birds of a feather and myself set up an expedition to find the sandgrouse that was spotted at Rietvlei Dam.

The night before a double-jointed TV weatherman indicated on a map craftily positioned behind him that Pretoria was in for a typhoon, as his arm flapped wildly behind him. I was convinced he channeled my mother who passed away 30 years ago. I grew up thinking only my mother could flip an arm at the speed of light backwards, while surveying the world through the back of her head. No faking Pearl-spotted Owlet, cruising 80 miles an hour down Church Street, she would out of the blue grab her handbag perched on the seat next to her and throw it straight at me. This often left me dazed for days and taught me a valuable lesson – “don’t get clever”.

Fifty years later, on the day of the planned expedition, the Himalayas had moved south. The sky was an ominous grey. An icy blizzard swept across Pretoria, ripping the tops off trees and upending monumental oaks.

At Rietvlei’s northern gate our stratagem was “We are all pensioners” although we only had two bona fide pensioners in the group. “Coming from which side?” the puckered face at the ticket booth cheekily asked as she sized us up and demanded to see our pensioner cards. Of course we didn’t have pensioner cards. The fuel to get to the Department of Senior and Senile costs more than the R10 penalty for not having cards. I did my passable impersonation of an elderly Churchill in drag. Our oldest birder flashed her credit card, her passport, her driver’s license, her medical aid card, a parking ticket and eventually told a finger telling Druella de Vulture she will also grow old one day. Eventually our coffee lady got out of the car to show Druella her very close veins, but

it didn’t help either, we still had to pay the full R20 each.

In spite of the gale force wind all the windows were open. One companion admitted to an over indulgence of garlic the night before, the next friend was in the traumatic and unpredictable throws of mental pause, flushing hot flushes, and the driver apologised that the gardener didn’t have time to wash the car that was spectacularly decorated by a colony of Hadedas, robbing us all of 20/20 vision.

As we turned north sulking gusts of wind propelled us to the fishing village that sprouted every weekend along the water’s edge. Unrecognisable in combat paraphernalia rabid humanoid shapes tied down tents, checked on fishing rods and generally tossed about in the wind. An Egyptian Goose made his way across the dirty sky loudly voicing his dissatisfaction with the weather. Next a ruffled White-breasted Cormorant streaked across our line of vision. I have been craving to ID birds on my own since I started birding 10 months ago. So what if I was being clever. I had Roberts on my lap, Sasol under my arm and a photographic field guide of birds on the seat next to me. It was going to be a breeze.

In spite of the incessant prodding of a 500 mm lens that was fondly cradled in the driver’s lap I was in heaven and on a high. In the full flush of a novice’s achievement I cried out – “White-throated Martin, lifer, Gossipy Starling, Palm Swift, lifer, Albatross, lifer, Dodo, lifer, overhead Blacksmith’s Lover!” Of course they were all taken aback by my prowess. I was most certainly not the featherbrained retiree they had taken me for. Impervious to comments such as “New species visiting Rietvlei”, I soldiered on. I was perfectly familiar with the fact that jealousy could turn the most gentle of us nasty and ugly.

I thought if it weren’t for my sightings it would have been a boring visit for the other

birders. But then we arrived at Otter Bridge and a blustery day became even more exciting. Right on the bridge we spotted a Giant Kingfisher minding its own business in a tree right next to the bridge.

What followed wasn't the finest moment for some of us. Solidly and neatly filling the space on the bridge with her 4x4 our photographer-birder got out of the vehicle to take that once-in-a-lifetime shot of the kingfisher. Shortly after she set foot on terra firma another vehicle approached from the opposite direction, flicking its lights. I still wanted to shout a la Miss World, "in the interest of world peace" please retreat. Of course the other driver had no way of knowing that such a short woman was lightning fast on her feet

and had a temper to match. He just never saw it coming. And whatever lit the fuse is now immaterial. It doesn't matter now if she had an issue with people flicking lights. In a matter of breaths she bounced across to the other vehicle, grabbed the driver's throat, bloodied his nose and spit into his face: 'Can't you see I am busy taking a photo?' I left out the expletives and the rest of the bitter vilification. In the chaos that ensued she never did get that special picture.

Well we all had a lifer to tick off. None of us has ever had to bail anybody out of a police cell on account of disorderly and disruptive conduct.

Come to think of it, we never saw the sandgrouse. 🐦

Personal names commemorated in the common names of southern African bird species – Part 11

John Bannon

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

TEMMINCK – Temminck's Courser, *Cursorius temminckii* (Swainson 1822), Temminck's Stint, *Calidris temminckii* (Leisler 1812).

Temminck trained to become a skilled taxidermist and a close family friend, Dr JPA Leisler, another skilled collector, obtained the first specimen of a newly identified wader on the River Main in Germany, naming it in honour of the Temminck family in 1812.

Coenraad Temminck wrote many of the first important books on European birds including his famous *Manuel d'Ornithologie, ou Tableau Systematique des Oiseaux qui se trouve en Europe* which became the standard reference on the birds of Europe until the late 19th century. He

also collaborated with Baron Meiffren Laugier de Chartrouse on the publication of a lavishly illustrated 102-part publication on all the world's birds, to which Swainson (see above) contributed the courser, also named after Temminck.

Although much of his time was spent classifying and writing up species accounts, he did manage to travel widely, including a tour of Europe in 1817 in a specially adapted carriage in which to store his skins and specimens. He called in on many of the leading naturalists of the day, including Johann Natterer, Franco Bonelli, Hinrich Lichtenstein and J F Naumann.

Several Dutch and other European Societies bestowed their medals and honours upon him, but as he became older he became more and more irascible, even preventing his assistants from maintaining any of the birds and mammal specimens originally collected at his and his father's instigation from the Dutch East Indies.

Consequently, over the years the collections decayed and became damaged. Coenraad Temminck died at the ripe old age of 80 in 1858.

VERREAUX – Verreaux’s Eagle, *Aquila verreauxii* (Lesson 1831)

One of the more controversial natural history trading families, Jules Pierre Verreaux (1807-1873) was one of three brothers who ran a huge establishment *Maison Verreaux* in Paris, full of stuffed birds and animals. At one time their emporium at 9 Place Royale, contained over 3,000 mammals and 40,000 birds! The three Verreaux brothers, Jules, Edouard and Alexis all collected in southern Africa, being particularly active in the Cape colony.

Jules became a close friend of the Scottish surgeon, Sir Andrew Smith, who was the first superintendent of the South African Museum and even stood in for Smith when he went on collecting expeditions to Namaqualand and elsewhere. In 1848 he returned to Paris to look after the *Maison Verreaux* but also managed to visit Australia and Tasmania to seek out more new and exotic specimens for their collections, to replace those lost in a shipwreck.

He was appointed assistant naturalist at the Paris Museum, escaping to London in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War, where he became one of the original honorary founders of the

British Ornithologist’s Union, many of the members, especially Bowdler Sharpe, being close personal friends. He returned to Paris after the war and died there in September 1873; his two younger brothers had both died in 1868.

The Verreaux brothers also brought back the stolen body of an African tribal chief after attending his burial in Bechuanaland. Edouard stuffed the body in the Cape colony and it was sent back to Paris for exhibition. In 1888, as part of the *Maison Verreaux* collection, it was sold off to the Spanish naturalist Darder, where it was displayed in a museum in Gerona. Known locally as ‘El Negro’ the ‘exhibit’ was the cause of great controversy before the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. After considerable pressure from African nations, the remains were repatriated to Botswana in October 2000 and were given a public burial at Tsholofelo Park in Gaborone. The grave of ‘El Negro’ has since been declared a national monument and is safeguarded by The Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery and The Botswana Monuments and Relics Act.

Rene Primevere Lesson (1794-1849) was probably one the most productive French ornithologists of his day. A distinguished naval surgeon, he combined fighting the British in various Napoleonic campaigns with a life of natural history fieldwork, museum study, authoring several classical ornithological and medical works and was also an extremely talented artist. He travelled the world, especially the southern oceans and is credited as being the first naturalist to see the spectacular Birds of Paradise alive, in the Moluccas in 1823. These expeditions helped to swell the bird collections at the Natural History Museum in Paris, of which he was a great supporter and he named the eagle after Verreaux in 1831.

The well-known collector Lord Lillford was scathing in his criticism of the cataloguing procedures at *Maison Verreaux* ... ‘I was with Edward Verreaux (egg dealer) in Paris, when there arrived a large consignment of skins and eggs from South Russia. I was asked to assist in the unpacking of the first two cases. There was no list or invoice of any kind. The first case contained perhaps two



Doug du Plessis

Verreaux's Eagle/ Witkruisarend

*hundred eggs, of should I say perhaps fifty or sixty species beautifully packed and with the names of the species in Russian, written on each egg; no date, no locality. A big notebook was produced and the two brothers proceeded to separate and name the eggs in the book, as it seemed to me purely as fancy dictated. I was consulted now and then and prevented some eggs of Little Bustard being put down as a gull (*Larus melanocephalus*), but I held my tongue except when questioned, and a lot of eggs of Redshank were named and priced in the book, as a rare plover's...*

VICTORIN – Victorin's Warbler, *Bradypterus victorini* (Sundevall 1860)

Johan Fredrik Victorin (1831-1855) was a young Swedish traveller/naturalist/hunter who visited the Cape Colony in 1853, but who died of tuberculosis aged only 24 in 1855.

Very little is known about Victorin, but he did write two journals for posterity; *Resa i Khapländet Aren 1853 – 1855* and *Jakt och Naturbilder* which were published in 1863 by Johan Wilhelm Grill. The first is a 160 page narrative recording Victorin's travels throughout the Cape and at least one copy is still available in antiquarian bookshops for around 600 US Dollars.

That very active 'bird namer' and fellow Swede Carl Jacob Sundevall (see Wahlberg below) named the warbler in his memory in 1860.

WAHLBERG – Wahlberg's Eagle, *Aquila wahlbergi* (Sundevall 1851)

Johan August Wahlberg (1810-1856) was a Swedish explorer naturalist and collector who travelled widely in southern Africa, especially in Natal and Namibia from 1838 until his death, sending back thousands of samples to the Swedish Natural Sciences Museum in Stockholm. His letters and journals of the day, graphically detail his travels throughout Africa ...*'continued hunting hippopotamus; no luck. In the evening, accompanied only by one Hottentot Bastard we came sufficiently near to hippopotamus. Two bullets went whistling at the same moment, and found their mark in the head of a*

young sea-cow. She came to the surface several times, spouting blood high in the air. An adult now appeared; once again our shots sounded as one; it showed the whole of its body above water, dived, a strong furrow appeared in the water, moved rapidly towards the shore, and soon the whole body of the monster was visible above the surface, in form and attitude like a gigantic pig. With incredible swiftness it hurled itself once more into the stream, and rose several times in succession, each time spouting blood. Darkness fell; and we were forced to return.'

He was typical of the many hunter naturalists of the 19th century and was exploring the head waters of the Limpopo when he was trampled and killed by a wounded elephant – a fitting end without doubt, as it was probably he who shot it. Wahlberg's real claim to fame is that he is the only man ever to be elected to the prestigious Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences **after** his death, as the news of his demise did not reach Stockholm before his election.

Carl Jacob Sundevall (1801-1875) was head of the vertebrate section of the museum in Stockholm and catalogued Wahlberg's specimens as they came in.

WHYTE – Whyte's Barbet, *Stactolaema whytii* (Shelley 1893)

Alexander Whyte, FLS (1834-1905) was employed as a government naturalist in Nyasaland (now Malawi), where he collected specimens between 1891-1897 under the patronage of his boss, Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston (1858-1927), the first High Commissioner of the British protectorate of Nyasaland.

Apart from Shelley naming the barbet after him, very little is known about Whyte, but his superior Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston, is another matter altogether. Only five feet tall 'Tiny Giant' Johnston was a man of many talents and seemingly inexhaustible energy, who was an accomplished photographer, cartographer, linguist, naturalist, explorer, author and full time colonial administrator. His paintings of African wildlife are exceptional; he spoke over 30 African languages as well as

Arabic, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Italian. He was knighted by Queen Victoria in 1896 and retired in 1904 to continue his interest in natural history. He personally discovered over 100 new species of reptiles, birds, mammals and insects, the most notable being the Okapi *Okapia johnstoni* and made the very first Edison cylinder recording in Africa – so his voice has survived into perpetuity.

Captain George Edward Shelley (1840-1910) has already been featured extensively in this series and named the barbet after Whyte in 1893.

WILSON – Wilson's Storm Petrel, *Oceanites oceanicus* (Kuhl 1820), Wilson's Phalarope, *Phalaropus tricolor* (Viellot 1819)

Alexander Wilson (1766-1813) was born in Paisley near Glasgow, Scotland, in 1766 and was baptised by Reverend John Witherspoon, who later emigrated to America. Witherspoon became a signatory of the Declaration of Independence and in 1796 Wilson was to later join him in the new world, the United States of America. He had worked as a weaver, interspersing the hard labour on the loom with travels around the lochs and moors, studying nature and walking many hundreds of miles. He also wrote well and a satirical poem against the mill owners proved to be the catalyst for the 27-year-old Wilson to emigrate to America. His poem, *The Sark or Lang Mills Detected*, sold more than 100,000 copies, but the establishment branded him as a revolutionary and so he and his nephew, William Duncan, sailed for America.

With nothing more than a 'few shillings, a fowling piece and a flute' they walked to Philadelphia, where Wilson obtained employment as a schoolteacher. He was thrilled to see the vast numbers of migrating wildfowl and waders along Delaware Bay and although always interested in nature it was the abundance and variety of American birds that really sparked his interest. He longed to paint and publish a book on American birds and was helped by friends such as William Bartram, who had a fine library that he made freely available to Wilson.

In 1804 he became a proud citizen of the new country and was more determined than ever to get his *Birds of America* project started. He met the publisher Samuel Bradford who agreed to publish his work in ten volumes, with ten colour plates in each issue. He was also fortunate in discovering that Bradford's 17-year-old apprentice Robert Leslie was a gifted artist and colourist.

The first volume of *American Ornithology*, illustrated by Leslie, appeared in 1808 prompting Wilson to set off around the country to find new birds and publicise the new work. In Washington, the president Thomas Jefferson subscribed to the series and by his return he had 250 new subscribers. On travelling through North Carolina he came across three Ivory-billed Woodpeckers, which he promptly shot! One was only slightly injured so he took it back to the inn where he was staying, intending to draw it from life, which he much preferred. However, when he returned from attending to his horse, the woodpecker had already drilled through to the outside wall and his room was full of plaster. By tying it to a table by one leg with the bird setting about the fine mahogany, Wilson wisely decide to paint the bird without any further delay, receiving several gashes from its powerful ivory bill for his trouble.

Among the most memorable birds he painted were the now extinct Carolina Parakeets: once so common that the fields turned scarlet, green and yellow as huge flocks alighted in them, feeding on their favourite food cockle burr. Of course he shot many, but one slightly wounded bird was to become his pet; *Poll* travelled everywhere with him, wrapped up in a silk handkerchief. She learned to talk and to come to him when called, but his faithful companion was lost overboard and drowned from his boat in the Gulf of Mexico.

During these pelagic voyages, his boat was often followed by small, white-rumped petrels, which Wilson assumed to be just storm petrels. Later Charles Bonaparte realised that they were a different species and named them *Procellaria wilsonii*, in his honour, entirely unaware that they had already been described and named by

talented German zoologist Heinrich Kuhl (1797-1821) some four years earlier.

Kuhl published several ornithological papers, including the first ever monograph on the petrels and was assistant to the famous Coenraad Temminck. He was on an expedition to Java, collecting for the Leiden Natural History Museum when he died of a fatal liver disease contracted on his travels. So our most abundant and widespread seabird, with an estimated 50 million pairs was named after Wilson without him even realising he had seen it!

Wilson's real legacy however was the superb and extremely valuable nine-volume *American Ornithology*, which describes and illustrates all the American birds known at the time, including five now considered extinct such as the Ivory-billed Woodpecker; Eskimo Curlew; Labrador Duck; Carolina Parakeet and the Passenger Pigeon.

The last two volumes were completed after his death by his close friend George Ord (1781-1866) who had inherited a prosperous ship-chandlery, but retired in 1829 to live as a gentleman of leisure. Ord had enough material to finish off the series, including a specimen and painting of a Wilson's Phalarope, which Wilson had collected.

Due to an oversight by Ord, the phalarope was not included in his classical work and shortly afterwards was independently described and named by French ornithologist Louis Jean Pierre Vieillot (1748-1831). The error was corrected by Edward Sabine (1788-1883) who, ignorant of the fact that the phalarope had previously been described, named it as *Phalaropus wilsonii* as a token of his enormous respect for the 'Father of American Ornithology' as Wilson was to become known.

WOODWARD – Woodward's Batis, *Batis fratrum*, (Shelley 1895)

The Reverend Robert B Woodward (1848-1905) and his brother the Reverend John D S Woodward (1881-1905), were both Anglican missionaries in Natal, who undertook ornithological expeditions in search of new and interesting birds.

Their ox wagon trips into Zululand took in Ngoye Forest and the Lebombo Mountains and they were to send sent many specimens to Bowdler Sharpe in London, including the type specimens for Woodward's Batis and Woodward's (later Green) Barbet. Shelley considerably used the latin term *fratrum*, meaning



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brothers, for the second part of the scientific name.

They co-authored *Natal Birds*, the first book on the birds of KwaZulu-Natal which was published in 1899 at a cost to readers of three shillings and sixpence! Their extraordinary introductory paragraph sets the scene for the marvellous birding experience that South Africa offers – which holds true to the modern day. ... *There is perhaps, no better place in the world for birds than this country. Even in the tropics there are few birds that excel some of our own in*

elegance and beauty of plumage and we have an unusually large number of species considering the smallness of the area they inhabit.'

[This has been a magnificent series that has been featured in Laniarius for the past few years. The club is very grateful for the dedication and attention to detail John Bannon has shown in researching and presenting this series. It has attracted attention from many quarters as our journal is referenced in libraries across the country – Ed.] 🐦

Rietvlei Natuurreserve uitstappie: 21 Augustus 2013

Elke L Geggus

Toe die Rietvlei-uitstappie in die program aangekondig is, was ek die eerste een om my naam op die lys van deelnemers te sit want so 'n geleentheid kon ek net nie laat verbygaan nie. In al die jare wat ek al voëls kyk, het my Rietvlei voëls en dié van my vriendinne van 20 spesies per dag tot 80 spesies (in die somer) gevorder. Om nou die paadjies wat ons nie mag ry nie, te sien en boonop nog te kon stap, sou wonderlik wees.

Dit was toe meer as wonderlik, alles het mooi saamgespeel – die lekker weer, die oulike mense wat saam gestap het en die fantastiese gids, Madeleen, wat ons op die staptoer begelei het. Voor ons vertrek het Madeleen die jongste inligting bekom oor die plekke waar die wonsters en buffels hulle bevind.

Terwyl ons stap, het Madeleen elke nou en dan interessante feite oor Rietvlei vertel, in die rooierige grasse skuil die Grasulie en as sy in die nag patrollie ry, sien sy baie Vlei-uile. Die grafte waar ons verby gestap het, kom uit die tyd toe die damwal in 1934 gebou is, en is van die werkers wat toe oordele is. Die diep slote wat ons naby die grafte gesien het, is ook destyds gegrawe en gebruik om die grond te bou.

Madeleen het ons vooraf gewaarsku dat dit uit die oogpunt van voëlkyk maar baie stil is, en

dit was toe ook so. Ons het teen die son gestap, so al die voëls was net silhoeëtte en baie van hulle kon ons nie uitken nie. Veral die vinke en wewers, en daar was baie van hulle, was moeilik om onder hierdie omstandighede uit te ken, Maar die mooi gefluit van die Rooineklewerik was onmiskenbaar en 'n duidelike bewys dat die lente op pad was. Ons het ook baie Lel- en Kroonkiewiete gesien.

Ons het buitekant om die hooflapa gestap en selfs hier was daar min voëls. Daarna kry ons die eerste klompie bome, almal inheems en sonder blare maar tog te pragtig ingeskaal in die bruin, geel en vaal landskap en afgebeeld teen die helder blou hemel. Ons het op die eerste vlei afgekom en gemaklik, met die bruggies en oorspring stompe wat daar gelê en gebou is, verder gestap. Later het ons langs die oewer van die dam gestap en in die hoë bloekombome oorkant die water het ons die Visarend se nes gesien. Een van die arende het op die nes gesit terwyl die ander een in 'n boom daar naby op wag was. Ook hier het die Witborskraaie die groter voëls verskriklik gepla. Toe het ons in die uiterste hoek van die dam oorblyfsels van 'n ou filmstel waargeneem. Alles interessantheide van Rietvlei wat ek nie van bewus was nie.



Elke Gegagus

Tien uur was dit tyd vir 'n ruskans en ons het heerlik op stompe en klippe onder skadu bome piekniek gemaak. In die bome het Glasogies, 'n Geelbeklyster en Gryskopmossies rond beweeg.

Ons is verder al langs die dam se oewer, waar baie riete groei. Dit is die tuiste van die reservaat se seekoeie, maar ons het hulle gelukkig (want ons was mos te voet!) nie gesien nie. Maar verder langs, presies op die paadjie wat lei na die Otterbrug het 'n trop buffels gelê. Madeleen het gesê dat dit die buffel teeltrop is en dat hulle baie rustig is, en dat ons moes net om hulle moet stap. Terwyl ons 'n groot boog om hulle gestap het, het hulle opgestaan en nader beweeg. Madeleen het in hulle rigting gestap en die heel tyd met die buffels gepraat. Die buffels het blykbaar die rustige stem van Madeleen erken en net daar bly staan. Wat 'n verligting!

By die Otterbrug het 'n Rietduiker in die hoë

bome gesit en daar was ook 'n Groenrugreier en die mak eend. Veertig minute later het ons die restaurant bereik en was dit weer tyd vir 'n ruskans. Mooi Gevlekte Lysters en 'n Hoefphoep het hier rondgespring.

Dit was amper twaalfuur toe Madeleen ons op die wildritvoertuig na ons motors teruggevat het. Ook daarmee is ons bederf want ons het oor die damwal gery, waar mens gewoonlik nie mag ry nie. By die oorloop van die dam was daar baie voëls, veral baie Waterhoenders en tot my verbasing 'n paar Bontkwikkies – 'n eerste vir my Rietvlei voëlly.

Dit was 'n heel besondere uitstappie waar ons 'n paar geheime van die Rietvlei Natuurreservaat leer ken het, maar ek is seker daar is nog veel meer om uit te vind. Baie dankie aan die voëlklub dat hulle die uitstappie gereël het en aan Madeleen van Schalkwyk dat sy so 'n wonderlike gids was. 🐦

How high do birds fly?

Anything from just above sea level to an altitude of several thousand metres – depending on the species, and weather it is travelling a short distance or undertaking a long migratory journey. Most birds seldom have any cause to rise above 500 metres or so. But extra-efficient respiration, plus the ability to survive extremely cold temperatures, allows some to reach extraordinary altitudes if required. Vultures, swans and geese have been recorded flying at jet airline heights, in conditions that no mammal could possibly survive.

Ringessie by die Voortrekkermonument: 16 November

Marika Brown

Op Saterdag 16 November het die Ratelspan (Graad 5) van die Kaptein Jack Hindon Voortrekkerkommando die voorreg gehad om saam met BirdLife Northern Gauteng (BLNG) te gaan voëltjies ring by die Voortrekkermonument. Die seuns was somer al vroeg uit die vere en teen half vier die oggend het ons by die Voortrekkermonument aangekom. Die groep van BLNG het ons somer gou onder hulle vlerk geneem en ons het saamgestap en gehelp penne en toue aangee terwyl hulle die nette opgestel het. Eers het die nette vir ons maar bietjie laag gelyk maar ons het gou agtergekom die ogte word met nog twee pale verleng. Dit het vinnig begin lig word en voor ons oë kon uitvee was dit heeltemal lig en was al die nette gespan.

Daarna het ons rustig gaan sit en koffie drink waarna oom Johan Snyman ons bietjie agtergrond oor voëlidentifikasie gegee het. Oom Johan het vir ons geleer van die verskillende kenmerke waaraan voëls uitgeken kan word insluitend die kleur, grootte, bou en vorm van die voël, die snawel se lengte en vorm, die bene, pote en tone, die kleur van die oog en bovenal die voëls se gedrag en roep asook die habitat, en laastens hul nesbou en broeigewoontes.

Die opgewondenheid was groot toe die ringers met die eerste voëltjies terugkom van hul rondte af. Die seuns was vreeslik nuuskierig en het behoorlik die mense omsingel. Hier het hulle vir die eerste keer gesien hoe die voëltjies gemeet, geweeg, geïdentifiseer, en gering word. Dit was vir hulle baie snaaks om te sien hoe die voëltjies kop eerste in 'n houertjie gesit word om geweeg te word. Almal van die ringers het ons so vriendelik gehelp en gewys waar ons in die boeke moes kyk om die voëltjies te identifiseer. Oom

Johan het met al die ringers gereël om nie die voëltjies self vry te laat en sodoende vir ons span elke voëltjie gewys en interesantheide omtrent die voëltjies met ons gedeel. Die heel lekkerste vir die seuns was die voorreg om die voëltjies vry te laat. Vir die meeste van hulle was dit 'n eerste keer wat hulle so naby aan 'n voëltjie gekom het. Dit was vir hulle net so spesiaal om die voorreg te hê om die voëltjies te kon vashou en hulle dan vry te laat.

Van die voëls wat vir ons vreeslik mooi was, was die Diederikkies en Witliesbosbontrokkie. Een van die ander baie spesiale voëls wat ons gesien het was die Europese Naguiltjie – en het die outjie nie 'n groot bek nie! Op 'n paar van die rondtes het die seuns saamgestap en kon hulle ook sien hoe die voëltjies uit die nette uitgehaal word. Hulle was nogal bekommerd want dit het partymaal gelyk of die voëltjies nie weer uit die nette gaan kan vrykom nie, maar oom Johan het hulle weereens iets geleer toe hy 'n hekelpen uithaal en die net se toutjie handig met die hekelpen oor die voëltjie se koppie trek.

Ons het elke oomblik saam met BLNG se ringers vreeslik baie geniet en die feit dat hulle ons span so hartlik ontvang en deel gemaak het van die proses het hierdie uitstappie die mees besonderse een van die jaar gemaak wat beslis uitstaan as 'n hoogtepunt in hul graad 5 jaar. Intendeel dit was vir ons almal so lekker dat ons graag eendag weer 'n voëlring sal wil bywoon.

Baie dankie vir oom Johan, oom Chris, tannie Elba, tannie Marie en al die ander van BLNG vir julle bydra tot spesiale herinneringe wat ons altyd sal kan koester.

Uit die mond van die kinders die volgende "tannie dit was so lekker ons moet dit elke jaar doen!" 🐦

Do you know of a Secretarybird nest?

Ernst Retief

Conservation Manager: Gauteng and Limpopo, BirdLife South Africa

The Secretarybird is one of South Africa's most attractive and well known birds. Their characteristic crest feathers, black leg pipes and behaviour of striding through the veld, as they search for insects, small mammals and snakes, makes them very easy to identify. During the last few years, these charismatic birds have unfortunately become less easy to find. It has been suggested that their numbers have declined considerably, not only in South Africa but also across their range elsewhere in Africa. This situation is of great concern to BirdLife South Africa, and a research project has therefore been initiated to determine why their numbers are declining.

Possible reasons for decline:

- Habitat fragmentation and degradation through the spread of agricultural development and commercial forestry
- Collisions with power lines
- Collision with farm fences
- Killed by cars
- Excessive burning of grasslands may suppress populations of their prey
- Intensive grazing by livestock can lead to veld degradation
- Disturbance by humans is likely to negatively affect breeding
- Secondary poisoning
- Capture and trade of small numbers of birds.

The aims of the BirdLife South Africa research project are to determine:

- The size of the area used by Secretarybirds for feeding
- The type of habitat used by the birds; for example, pristine or degraded grasslands, agricultural lands or a combination of these habitat types
- How long immature Secretarybirds stay

at the nest and where they move to when they leave the nest area.

BirdLife South Africa has already fitted three Secretarybird chicks with GPS satellite tracking devices and subsequently obtained very useful information about these birds' movements. The first bird in the Free State moved about 100 km in an easterly direction after leaving the nest. The second bird moved from Bela Bela to Botswana, a distance of about 270 km. The third bird moved from Warden in the Free State to the KwaZulu-Natal south coast before moving inland to Ixopo. For more information about these birds' movements and other aspects of the project, see the BirdLife South Africa Facebook Page and website (<http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species/secretarybird>).

BirdLife South Africa would like to fit tracking devices to more Secretarybirds. For this, BirdLife South Africa needs the assistance of



Figure 1

Photo taken by a camera trap donated to a land owner by BirdLife South Africa

all birders and land owners. Please be on the lookout for Secretarybird nests. Secretarybirds usually nest on Black Thorn, Umbrella Thorn, Sweet Thorn, Common Hook Thorn trees, but also sometimes use alien trees. Trees up to a height of 5 m are used for nesting. The best way to find a nest is to look out for adult birds standing on the nest tree and then to investigate closer. If you find a nest, please contact Ernst Retief at ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za or 072 223 2160.

BirdLife South Africa would also like to learn about Secretarybird mortalities, especially so that the human-caused mortalities can be addressed.

This project will make a considerable contribution to our knowledge of Secretarybirds

and thus assist with their conservation, and you can contribute to the conservation of this charismatic bird species.

At the time of going to print in late December 2013 news came to light that BLiNG, the Secretarybird sponsored by our club, had moved back into South Africa after spending several months in eastern Botswana. BLiNG had originally been ringed as a chick in the Sondela area near Bela-Bela. On 21 Dec 2013 Phillip Calinikos accompanied Ernst and Natasja Retief to a spot near the Voortrekker Monument just outside Pretoria as the satellite tag indicated the bird was in that area. There they managed a sighting of the bird! An amazing story and testament to the wonders of satellite tracking.

BLNG Great Bittern hunt and local Creighton birding: 14-18 November 2013

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

To start with, the announcement in the BLNG programme was enticing: 'This one is going to blow your socks off...' Kathrin and I had never been to that part of the country before and what a pleasant way to reconnoiter South Africa by going birding in parts of the country we had not seen before? Also, the programme of activities sounded great.

On Thursday 14th November 2013 we left at 05:00 to miss the morning traffic past Johannesburg and the East Rand. I was able to engage the cruise control and coast along. According to my GPS the distance is 630 km. Advice provided from Malcolm Gemmel our guide for the weekend: "Even if I drive like Windgatwillie-van-Wakkerstroem it takes me 6 hours to one of our daughters in Parkhurst" (in Johannesburg). The first item on the programme was: '15:30 to 17:30 Guided Sanctuary walk with Malcolm'. So time was of the essence as we first wanted to check into our accommodation.

After 4 hours of driving we stopped somewhere before Harrismith for breakfast. We continued to Howick where we turned off from the highway and proceeded to Bulwer, then drove through the metropolis of Donnybrook and on to Creighton. Creighton is a quaint village in a picturesque setting in a wide fertile valley, set in a dairy farming community.

After re-fuelling at Donnybrook, we arrived at Smithfield Guest House situated just 2 km from Creighton where Malcolm and Gail Gemmel are based (also known as Button Birding). Lush gardens in front of the revamped 100 year-old farmhouse greeted us and we were welcomed by Gail Gemmel, our hostess, and shown to our room. We stayed in one of three *en-suite* garden cottages.

We unpacked, had some quick lunch, while enjoying the birds on the feeders in the garden, the most prominent of which was a Pin-tailed Whydah which was 'throwing its weight around with the other birds'.

At 15:30 we departed for a guided sanctuary walk with Malcolm, who proved to be not only a good guide but was also very knowledgeable of the birds in the area. African Stonechat and Village Weavers crossed our way; a Red-throated Wryneck popped out of a wooden fence post where it had made its nest; Common Quail darted up just before one trod on them; Blue Cranes and Grey Crowned Cranes were seen in the distance. We also saw Levillant's and Wing-snapping Cisticola. Then we saw three 'very yellow birds with large heavy bills' on low lying vegetation and there was a commotion amongst the birders present. Kathrin and I and some of the other 8 birders saw our first Cuckoo Finch. A nice lifer! Common Moorhen, Cape White-eye, Southern Masked Weaver, Common Fiscal, Southern Boubou, as well as African Harrier-Hawk were spotted in the gardens on our return. We sat down to a delectable dinner prepared by Gail and her staff. Gail's cooking is outstanding and we were treated like royalty, with excellent food, nice rooms, and friendly hosts who were happy to spoil us amidst the peace and quiet on the farm.

The next day, Friday, was planned for: '06:00 – 07:00 Tramp wet grasslands (Black-rumped Buttonquail); Tour of Creighton valley for local endemics; local species by car; Blue Swallows by car'. We went to look for the Black-rumped Buttonquail in a grassland close to a river system, not far from tribal land settlements. We received our instructions from Malcolm:

spread out 2 metres apart, walk forward at the same pace and stay in one extended line, focus your binoculars at 10 metres and shout/call the direction if the Black-rumped Button Quail takes to flight in front of you; it does not call when it takes off, after being flushed. We walked and walked. Twice a bird darted up from the grass, twice Malcolm called "Common Quail". Everyone was quite tense with anticipation. Then the 'real' Black-rumped Buttonquail flew up. I could just swing my binoculars to the left to have a reasonable sighting before it dropped into the grass. Not all of the group saw it and nobody (including myself) had 'called'. The sweep operation swept on. At last, another of the sought after birds was flushed and the others in the group saw it. I just had a short glimpse of the last 3 metres of its flight. A difficult bird to spot, but all were elated with the sighting. The request for another try was turned down by Malcolm as he did not want to scare the birds away from this site. Very understandable indeed!

We returned to Smithfield Guesthouse for a splendid brunch that was presented by Gail.

Then the heavens opened and the rain came pouring down, much needed for the farmers but changing our birding programme for ever. We drove to different sites, *en route* having sightings of Cape Robin-Chat, Southern Bald Ibis in good numbers quite close to the road in a field, a very good sighting indeed, the ever present Hadedea Ibis, Zitting Cisticola, White-winged Widowbird, Long-tailed



Scanning the landscape for birds.



A typical Creighton area landscape.

Widowbird in good numbers, as well as Fan-tailed Widowbird.

We went to another site, driving up a mountain track that had been made by Eskom workers. This was the first of a number of 4-wheel drive paths we followed. The scenery changed as did the vegetation and the birds and the natural surroundings were actually very pretty and pleasing. We were treated to good sightings of Mountain Wheatear, Ant-eating Chat (which Kathrin sweetly calls "Aunt-eating Chat"), and Bokmakierie displaying beautifully and singing. Then we had another stroke of luck and were treated to a splendid Ground Woodpecker sighting, this being a lifer for a number of friends in the group. Alpine Swifts were careering overhead and the hillsides were dotted with Common Sugarbush, a really pleasant sight.

The rain came and went intermittently, the soil was being drenched and our cars were being splashed with muddy water. But we had more birding to do so we persevered! On the way we made several stops, seeing Cape Rock-Thrush, Barn Swallows in good numbers and Pied Crow. We made a stop at a dam in the area and searched for waterfowl and waders. Wood Sandpiper, Yellow-billed Duck, Egyptian Goose, African Jacana, Little Grebe, Hottentot Teal, Cape Teal, Fulvous Duck, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler, African Snipe and many more were seen. At another site and *voila!* we had a good sighting of a single Denham's Bustard walking

on a field close to a ridge in a very purposeful, serene and graceful way as though surveying its private territory, 'a really smart gentleman'. Further on we were treated to the sighting of a Black-bellied Bustard.

Later on after having returned to the guesthouse for midday rest and a snack we left, again in the rain, to look for Blue Swallow in a specific field. We trudged out of the cars, wielding umbrellas borrowed from Malcolm and raincoats and some with 'wellies' on. We walked along an old disused narrow gauge railway track which overlooked a valley with a fairly large expanse of grassland. Our binoculars were wet and we were standing like wet chickens, but no Blue Swallows were seen.

We drove on, again stopping in between, spotting or hearing the calls of Red-chested, Diderick and Black Cuckoo, continuously calling its melancholy "I'm so sick, I'm so sick..." It was nearly sunset when Malcolm decided to take us to a site we had been to before to see the Cape Eagle Owl, a species which a number of us had not seen yet. We stopped the vehicles, hauled out the spotting scopes, and after somebody with sharp eyes had located the bird, focused the scopes and were rewarded with a good view. Shortly thereafter the mist moved in and our view was obscured. Wet, but happy, we got into the vehicles and left for the guesthouse, where dry rooms, a glass of wine and once again a sumptuous meal in Gail's dining room was waiting for us.

Day three, Saturday, was planned as:
05:00 – 09:00 Dawn chorus with Cape Parrots followed by forest walk. Well, there was rain but no dawn chorus for us. Malcolm was very flexible and discussed his rescheduling proposals with us. He made arrangements with some neighbouring farmers to gain access to their property to try and spot Striped Flufftail. We surveyed the gardens early that morning and walked to two further sites without success. We saw African Olive Pigeon, Olive Thrush, Black-headed Oriole, African Paradise Flycatcher, Red-collared Widowbird and Greater Double-collared Sunbird. We drove to yet another large dam where we saw an array of water birds, Spur-winged Goose and Jackal Buzzard.

After returning to the guest house for another excellent brunch we packed an overnight bag, the vehicles were loaded with all the food for that evening and breakfast/brunch the next day, and off we went to Ntsikeni Nature Reserve which is about 65 km from Creighton. The largest part of the drive was through tribal land most of which was loosely built up with many rondavel-type dwellings, but very little if at all agricultural activity save for a few cattle. Ntsikeni was the place where we would 'hunt' for the Great Bittern. We turned off the main road and travelled for a few kilometres all on a gravel road, the rain being our constant companion, with the sides of the road shrouded in mist. At last we reached the entrance to Ntsikeni Nature Reserve and from here the gravel road turned into what one could call at best two tracks. All was wet and slippery. We all engaged four wheel drive and pressed on, albeit at much reduced speed. Many deeper water puddles were crossed, and hills were climbed, most drivers waiting very professionally until the vehicle in front had cleared the climb at a safe distance, before negotiating the climb themselves. Needless to say the vehicles were covered in a muddy splash from top to bottom. The drive was approximately 12 km but it felt much further. We saw some really large herds of Black Wildebeest, typical 'plains antelope' on the way. The rain stopped before we

reached the lodge, where we were welcomed by the resident caretaker.

Ntsikeni is situated between Franklin and Creighton on a high plateau and the colder temperature reminded us thereof. After unpacking we left on foot to a wetland some kilometres away. The grass was typical high rainfall sourveld, very thick but luckily did not contain Three-awn (*Aristida*) grasses, when the awns can get lodged permanently in one's socks. We carried stools, rucksacks with water and extra warm clothing, binoculars, cameras and spotting scopes. It looked as we were an expeditionary force. After arriving at the wetland, we were placed in different positions by Malcolm and started scanning our arc of observation. What struck me was that there were very few other waterfowl and waders to be seen. Malcolm's opinion was that this was due to the relative altitude. It was very peaceful and quiet, the wetland radiating a calming atmosphere.

While scanning the wetland with my spotting scope I picked up another lifer: four Wattled Cranes feeding on the far side of the wetland. Not far off there was a flock of Grey Crowned Cranes and the males were displaying beautifully, spreading their wings gracefully and slowly dancing around the females in narrow circles. This was a stunning sighting. We saw and heard Croaking Cisticola and heard Pale-crowned Cisticola, without being able to spot them. Only on our walk back to the lodge did we spot them a short distance away – another nice lifer for Kathrin and I, which we had hoped to see on this trip. We also saw Banded Martins, and some of the cisticolas and widowbirds we had seen before. Regrettably no Great Bittern was seen nor heard.

Gail had packed all the food for our stay at Ntsikeni and some of the kind friends took it upon themselves to prepare and cook the food. We all settled into the chalets. The temperature was a lot cooler than Pretoria and also Creighton for that matter. We had very comfortable beds with good duvets so a good sleep was guaranteed.

We left early at 05:00 the next day, Sunday, as Malcolm wanted to be at another part of the wetland to look for the Great Bittern before sunrise. We had a quick cup of coffee and rusks and departed in our vehicles. We left the vehicles on the track over a hillside and walked down to the wetland, only about 750 metres. We were again positioned along a wide arc along the bank of the wetland, sat down and scanned the area. We saw and heard Little Rush Warbler, Blue Cranes, and Grey Crowned and Wattled Cranes again. To the right of us on a hillside surrounding the wetland we saw a Denham's Bustard displaying. It was too far off to photograph, but in the spotting scope I could see the large patch of its white breast feathers puffed up like a king size bib while gracefully and slowly striding along the hillside. Quite amazing! The sun came up from behind the hill where our vehicles were parked and the light shifted the shadow away in a slow but systematic movement. This was a magic moment and we just stood and stared with amazement at this spectacle of nature unfolding. I cannot describe the atmosphere well enough!

But alas, we were unable to spot the Great Bittern. We left reluctantly, went back to the vehicles and drove on. After some kilometres of hilly and rocky terrain where we saw Black Wildebeest in large numbers, Reedbuck and Oribi and Grey Rhebok we drove down a steep road and disembarked after some distance. Before us lay a deep valley and on the other side was a large mountain with rocky outcrops. Through spotting scopes on a ledge on the top left hand side we saw an adult Bearded Vulture and a juvenile sitting side by side. Malcolm had spotted the nest site from the white droppings forming streaks on the rocks below. Whilst I looked at the birds, the adult raised itself on its feet, looked around for a while, and then spread its broad and long wings as though it wanted to stretch. All of a sudden it just dropped off the ledge and into a thermal which was obviously rising up against the mountain. It locked its wings and just soared away without a single wing beat.

What a majestic bird! I just stood and watched in awe.

A short drive away we came upon the next surprise. Malcolm had spotted a Yellow-breasted Pipit. We tumbled out of the vehicles and were treated to a good sighting on the steep hillside.

After we returned to the lodge and some friends again prepared a lovely brunch from the goodies packed by Gail. One of the friends wandered off with his camera. He came back extremely excited and showed us photos of a Striped Flufftail, which had responded to the call he played and he photographed it at 5 metres! We all charged to the site, but the bird did not honour the rest of us with an appearance. I stayed and played the call on my PDA, one bird responded further off and then one called some 5 metres away in the thick grass. I was unable to see it. Those are the frustrations of birding.

After leaving for Creighton, Malcolm again made a change of plan and we went to another of the sites where he expected to see Blue Swallow. The weather was good but there was a cloud build up in the distance. We stood and looked down from a gravel road bordered by blue gum tree plantations. There was a farmstead in the distance below interspersed with rolling grassland. Blue Swallows appeared out of nowhere and we watched them careering by at high speed! At one stage two birds met in flight and engaged in a small display. Another bird dropped into a hollow, only to fly out again seconds later, obviously a male feeding its nesting female. What an impressive sighting!

We also saw Wailing Cisticola and some more birds we had already seen.

We returned to the guest house on Sunday evening, where Gail had kindly arranged for a very enlightening presentation on the Blue Swallow by Dr. Steve Evans from the North West University, who did his doctoral thesis on the Blue Swallows at Kaapse Hoop in Mpumalanga. Blue Swallows are uncommon to rare, *critically endangered* breeding intra-African migrants. Their habitat is moist mistbelt

montane grasslands and their nests are a half cup of mud mixed with grass, lined with dry grass and feathers, positioned mainly in the roof of holes or hollows in the ground, often disused Aardvark (*Tubilidentata*) burrows. In these hollows, Dr. Evans' research has shown a relatively stable temperature compared to large fluctuations in outside temperature. Possibly 22 breeding pairs remain in South Africa. (*Personal comment*). After the presentation we had another lovely meal and chatted away over a glass of wine.

Malcolm was so kind to arrange for another chance at the Cape Parrots the next morning. We decided to rather get up a bit later and take an unhurried drive back to Pretoria, having seen and photographed the Cape Parrots on

the BLNG Trip to Kurisa Moya in February 2013.

On the way back we passed by Morutswa Forest in Bulwer, where we saw a number of forest birds as well as Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk. One of the friends accompanied us back to Pretoria and we arrived back in the city with a good list of birds sighted, 10 lifers, some nice photographs and fond memories.

I wish to thank BirdLife Northern Gauteng organisers Rita de Meillon and Wanda Louwrens for all the trouble they took to arrange this trip. I can warmly recommend this as a future destination. A sincere thank you to Gail and Malcolm Gemmel. We were treated like VIPs, with excellent birding, pleasing accommodation and mouthwatering meals. I can highly recommend this venue to all other birders. 🐦

Groot Heuningwyser in Woodhill

Pieter Heslinga

Ons woon in Woodhill Golflandgoed, Pretoria, en ons erf front op die golfbaan, aan die agterkant naby die St. Bernardhek.

Ons het verlede jaar 'n garingboomstomp in ons tuin opgesit om Rooikophoutkappers te lok. Hulle het daar ingetrek en lank daarin gewoon toe ek so 2 maande gelede opmerk dat 'n swerm bye daar ingetrek het. Ek het geglo die bye sou weggaan maar hulle het nie. Omdat ons kleinkinders het wat in die tuin rondspeel het ek die bye toe een aand uitgerook, die volgende dag was hulle weg.

Die Saterdag daarna haal ek die stomp toe af en grawe ek die heuningkoek uit wat al mooi in die nes gegroei het. Ons het so muurtjie by die swembad wat uitloop op ons voorstoep en wat uitkyk op die gholfbaan, waarop ons vrugte en kossies vir voëls uitsit, en ek besluit om die stukkende heuningkoeke daar te gaan neersit. Dit was nie 'n uur nie of 'n Grootheuningwyser het daar kom sit en vreet en vreet en vreet aan die larwes en heuningkoek-was. Water gedrink en weer gevreet. Dit was so mooi!

Aangeheg 'n foto of so wat ek kon neem. Deesdae hoor ek hulle roep ('Victor, Victor, Victor'), maar nog nie weer gesien nie. Sal weer vir heuningkoeke wil gaan soek om hulle weer te lok. Hulle moet baie goed kan ruik en sien. 🐦



Die Groot Heuningwyser by die heuningkoek.

Tinkerbell is a boy!

Debbie van Zyl

When I first heard the reports of the Green Tinkerbird earlier this year, I was blown away that so special a bird could be rediscovered in our region after so many years. I had often stopped at the barbet page in my field guide, wondered about the bird and then paged on as it was one of those: 'yeah right, someone my grandmother's age went on a twitch and for some silly reason, the bird is still in the book'. Now I realised 'Tinkerbell' was real and I wanted to meet her. I knew Etienne Marais would make the perfect guide for this trip as he believes in fairies along with his newly discovered passion of low-carb eating whilst out birding...

On Thursday 10th of October, Elouise Kalmer, Sue Oertli and I set our alarm clocks for 3 am. We had to get to Etienne's place and be ready to leave by 5 am as we had a very long drive ahead of us all the way to Mozambique. Thanks to Elouise's hubby we arrived on time and we soon had the bakkie packed, with the border at Komatipoort in our sights.

We were three odd passengers. Sue was looking for the Eurasian Bittern and Tinkerbell and as many photos of the local birds as possible. I had a long list with the top three being Racket-tailed Roller, Crab Plover and Tinkerbell. Elouise said she just needed to see everything in the book. Etienne looked mildly entertained when we discussed our lists while we waited at our fourth stop/go near the border, but made no comment.

I can go into the first few days of our trip in detail or I can mention numerous low-carbs discussions that took place in the car, over brekkie and during lunch along the road. Refusing to be intimidated, Elouise and I continued to each have two Provitas each for brekkie with our boiled egg and another two at lunchtime with our tuna. Sometimes we would even have another two with a piece of cheese. Dinner included rice or chips and a salad. Mmmm...

Sue was very quiet and refused to get drawn into any debates on the subject which was probably the wiser choice.

Day two we dipped on the Bittern and day three wasn't much better when the Olive-headed Weaver won a game of hide-and-seek after five hours. The only real winner was Elouise who continued to clock up the lifers one after the other. Her excitement kept us sane. The birding locations and our accommodation remained spectacular with the four happy travellers transitioning from birders to friends the further north we travelled.

Day four arrived and we were up at 3 am ready to get to 'Hugh's Coffee Spot' by dawn as that is when and where the fairies supposedly come out to play. There were many feathered distractions along the way and in between searching, Elouise managed to clock up more lifers starting with the Red-throated Twinspot. We did not have a very lucky morning with regular stops, forays into the bush on tiny paths, calling, waiting, sighing and driving on. Thankfully we had the pleasure of atlasing while we spent hours on our search so we had much to do, see and record. We also took time to scare the local children (that was Etienne of course) who kept following us around and dashing off into the thick bush when we turned around to smile at them. Eventually it was Elouise and her camera that won them over when she took photos and spent 20 minutes showing them the results on her tiny screen.

We did not want to turn around and kept egging Etienne on for another kilometre and another. Around 9 am Etienne thought he heard an Alethe calling. This had the potential of being a huge find so far south so we decided to give it a go and put our fairy search on ice for a bit. We grabbed cameras and headed into the roadside forest in record time, scrambling over and under the vegetation before getting

comfortable and keeping as still as possible while we quietly played the contact call. After 15 minutes of listening, calling and debating, we realised the contact call sounded suspiciously like that of the Green Malkoa so staying with the green theme, we called it up. Within seconds we had a response and got excellent views right above our heads with Elouise picking up another tick for her life list.

Dejectedly we left our spot in the thickets and moved back to the road. We were about three hours into our search by then. It was hot and we were tired. It was getting late. Suddenly Etienne froze. He looked at me and together we heard a "toot to doo". We couldn't get to the mp3 quick enough to let him know we were nearby. We were standing peering into the trees above us when Sue asked innocently about the small bird in a tree behind us. Four pairs of binnies shot to four pairs of very greedy eyes. There HE was! The sense of relief was incredible.

The speed at which Etienne got the scope out of the bakkie was phenomenal. He had the tripod standing upright in seconds and his right eye on the scope with his right hand

furiously working on the focus wheel. Under a minute and all four of us had seen the bird through the scope. Team work at a time like this is critical especially when you have to negotiate tripod legs, deep sand and each other. We managed beautifully without even thinking about it. Sue and Elouise got clicking with their super lenses and I got my 'mik-ndruk' up to the scope's eye piece to get my Tinkerbell shot. We enjoyed Tinkerbell for about 10 minutes before he flew off back to 'Neverland and the Lost Boys'.

I think after those 10 minutes, I knew how Wendy felt on the very first night when Peter grabbed her hand near the open window and flew up into the night. Excitement, incredulity, shock and absolute delight. The grins on our faces seemed to last forever. Knowing we were a group of less than 50 local birders who had been able to tick this bird made us feel really special. All four of us look pleasure in selecting or writing down 'Green Tinkerbird' on our atlas card. I have never had a thrill like that tick in my Lynx phone app when I made it and know I will glow in that for a while to come.

The rest of our trip was just as eventful with highs and lows (not just carbs) almost daily. We loved staying for two nights on the beach at Barra while we chased after Sand Plovers, Crab Plovers and Lesser Crested Terns. We changed our schedule to have a second go at the Olive-headed Weaver on the way home. During the breakfast stop on our last birding day we eventually had enchanting views of a pair of these weavers dancing in the canopy along with Neergaard's Sunbirds who skipped from tree to tree like excited 6-year olds full of sugar at ballet class for the first time.

Etienne could not have chosen a better venue for our last night just north of Xai-Xai. A sea view to die for, an indigenous coastal forest, a huge freshwater lake covered with White-back Ducks, delicious locally caught fish for dinner, ice cold 2M beers, gorgeous chalets and the pleasure of counting 7 different pods of Humpback Whales from our chalet's deck. You can do a trip like this on your own with friends but there is something personal about



Elated birders after finding Tinkerbell.

spending 7 days locked up with three other people in a vehicle where you emotionally move from being strangers or acquaintances to friends. After that time together we understood Etienne's passion for his new eating plan, the dreamy outcome for Sue when she doubled up on her malaria tablets, Elouise's ability to nod off with her chin on her chest without making a sound and my ability to get carsick after just a few kilometres on a bumpy dirt road.

I can only thank Etienne for his never-give-up attitude and my companions for keeping me entertained for a super fabulous week. I came home with 11 lifers while Elouise beat all records with 52 new ticks. Sue got 1 lifer to tick but loads of photo lifers which ready made this trip worthwhile for her too. Etienne of course was the overall winner as he got to spend 7 days imprisoned up with the three nicest ladies on this side of the Jukskei. 🐦

Heavenly birding in Scotland

Jill and Phillip de Moor

If you have ever hoped to find in this life a heaven for birders I have just the place for you. It is the highlands of Scotland under the guidance of the Heatherlea organisation. Accommodation in the Mountview Hotel, owned by Heatherlea, is very comfortable and the meals are superb – just what is needed for a day of concentrated birding under the guidance of Johnny or Dave, the expert and very knowledgeable birding guides.

We have twice been to the Heatherlea Hotel – the first time for three days of birding in August 2012 and recently for six days at the beginning of September 2013. Both trips exceeded our expectations and we are looking forward to another visit next year!

Our recent trip started with a train journey from Edinburgh on the east coast to Aviemore situated near the Cairngorms National Park which is a mountainous area more or less in the middle of Scotland. The train journey while enjoying a cup of coffee and a scone provided by the train service is a great way of getting a feel for rural Scotland with its beautiful lochs, rivers and mountains, some of them pine forested and others covered in heather.

But enough of the hospitality and scenery, now down to the birding.

After a sumptuous breakfast, we joined five other guests, most of whom lived in Scotland,

and set off in a Combi driven by Johnny who proved to be an exceptionally knowledgeable, patient and helpful guide. Our first destination was Loch Garten Osprey Hide. Here we saw Treecreepers, Common Tits and Chaffinches at the feeders as well as Great-spotted Woodpeckers. The Ospreys had left for warmer climes.

After looking for crossbills unsuccessfully in a nearby pine forest, we saw a family of Red-breasted Mergansers on the River Spey. On the way back to the hotel we saw a couple of Golden Eagles in flight and afterwards a Red Kite and then a Merlin being mobbed by small birds.

On the next two days we visited various sites on the seashore to look for waders and sea birds. At Findhorn Bay and Burghead Bay we had good sightings of Dunlin, Curlew Sandpipers, Sandwich Terns and the occasional Arctic Tern. We took lunch at Spey Bay and watched commoner waders such as Oystercatchers, Curlews, Redshanks and several Goosanders. At the Black Isle we saw Arctic Skuas chasing Sandwich Terns as well as Sanderlings, Ringed Plovers and Turnstones foraging about in seaweed. Finally, four Bottlenosed Dolphins, specials for this part of the world, surfaced near the shore.

On the fourth day we were taken to the Cairngorm Mountain, the highest in Scotland, where we all boarded a funicular train that took



Crested Tit

us most of the way to the summit. The objective here was to spot a Ptarmigan, one of the Scottish specials. And sure enough, by braving an icy wind on the exposed viewing platform, we had a clear view of a Ptarmigan through our telescopes even though the scopes shook with the shivery cold wind. To top this exciting day, as we drove around the estate a cock Capercaillie flew up from the ground and a short while later a hen Capercaillie flew from a tree and, to everyone's delight, we all saw them clearly. The Ptarmigan and the Capercaillie with, perhaps, the Scottish Crossbill are the 'must see birds' of Scotland like our Common Ostrich and Southern Ground Hornbill.

Now comes the highlight of the whole trip: a sea voyage off the west coast of Scotland some 26 miles out at sea to the Burma Bank, a shallow submerged reef, frequented by various sea birds searching for fish as well as being frequented sometimes by whales and dolphins. The harbour is situated at Gairloch and on the way at Dorback we spotted a couple of Black Grouse and Pheasants that popped their heads out of long grass in a field.

We set out in a fibreglass bottomed boat with inflatable pontoons and two powerful engines. There were fourteen of us in this party and the boat was full with every seat taken and no room to move. Everybody was given heavy waterproof gear to wear and this proved essential as the sea was very choppy and there was



Red Grouse

a cold wind blowing. Without the waterproof clothing we would have been soaked to the skin! The boat was capable of some 25 knots per hour (about 35 km per hour) and the skipper, Nick, did not spare the horses. It took about an hour's travel through choppy seas to reach our destination at the Burma Bank, but, much to our disappointment there were no birds or dolphins in evidence.

However, the skipper was not about to give up showing his passengers some of the birds for which they had travelled so far. So he cruised across to the Shiant Islands where a few Fulmars and Kittiwakes went by. Then a White-tailed Eagle glided out from a high cliff followed by a second and third eagle. Unfortunately, they quickly disappeared around the back of the island.

Next, we sped across towards north Skye Island and, on the way, the occasional Kittiwake or a Gannet went past. Suddenly Nick slowed down at a spot he called "the middle of nowhere". Approaching us at a close distance was a small gull with the characteristic wing markings of a Sabine's Gull. This was a new one for us all. It joined a small group of Arctic Terns and Kittiwakes and we were able to get excellent sightings of this rare gull.

On our way back to the harbour near to the Rona Bank area Great Skua and Arctic Skua both made their appearance and then a petrel that flew towards us turned out to be not the

expected Storm Petrel, but it was Leach's Petrel. We also saw several Storm Petrels and, in the Bay of Loch Gairloch we came across a Black Guillemot. Altogether, the magnificent scenery around the islands, the boating experience and the sea birds that we found with the help of the skilful and knowledgeable skipper, Nick, made this sea trip one to remember and cherish.

Of course there were many other birds that we saw and recorded, but the ones that we have mentioned are those that made particular impressions on us. A few more notable birds to add to our list included Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, Spotted Redshank, Red Grouse, Red-throated and Black-throated

Divers and a Common Eider. The total number of species recorded by the guide, Johnny, was 114. Perhaps this may seem a small number by comparison with a trip of seven days in Africa, but the excitement of the search, the magnificent scenery and the comradeship of our party of birders and the guide made this one of the most rewarding trips that we have ever done.

The Heatherlea organisation arranges birding trips to Scotland as described above, but also to many other parts of the world. Heatherlea can be contacted by E-mail at info@heatherlea.co.uk or by telephone at +44-1479821248. The website is www.heatherlea.co.uk 🐦

Finding the White-breasted Cuckooshrike in Groenkloof Nature Reserve

Rowan Jordaan

On the 12th of October, Nicholas Pattinson and I decided to visit Groenkloof Nature Reserve in Pretoria to try and see the first of the summer migrants as well as to get away from the books for a much needed break. We spent the early morning walking around the reserve and were blessed with expected sightings such as the Brown-crowned Tchagra, Red-chested, Diderick and Black Cuckoo as well as the local Sable Antelope. We were quite content with our mornings work and the break we were getting away from the city which did not appear to be close at all to this reserve. On our way back to the car we were trying to find a calling Diderick Cuckoo amongst the canopy of trees near the river when Nick saw her. I couldn't believe it when he said "White-breasted Cuckooshrike!" as it was a first for me. We watched and photographed her for a good 30 minutes much to the amusement of the on-looking picnickers. We left her in peace and returned home happy with a successful morning.

Only later on that day after checking our books did we realise that this cuckooshrike

did not occur in the Gauteng area but did not think much of it and it was only on Monday that I decided to confirm the identity of the bird. I uploaded some of the photos I took to a group on Facebook not knowing what would arise from it. Within minutes I had a surprised response confirming the identity of the bird and emphasising the magnitude of the finding. From here the news went viral and many people were extremely interested in what we had found. Some people rushed out that same afternoon to try to find the bird.

Word spread quickly and many decided that they would be going to the reserve early the next morning to try to locate the bird, so we decided to go along again to help find her again. We found the bird the next morning along with a large group of avid birders who excitedly followed the bird around trying to get a decent photo to commemorate that rare sighting. Over the course of the next few days we received news that many birders from all over Gauteng congregated in the reserve in search of the White-breasted Cuckooshrike.



Rowen Jordaan

White-breasted Cuckooshrike/Witborskatakoeroer

This was an amazing experience to be part of and great for us to observe how passionate some people are about birding and the joys involved with it. We felt at home and proud to be associated with bird-watching, something that does not happen often considering that

we are students and that birding is not thought to be a hobby for 'young people'. We are just happy that we got to share this experience with many birders and apologise for not sharing the sighting at an earlier stage as we had no idea how significant it was and how interesting such a little bird would generate. We look forward to many years of happy birding filled with unforgettable memories.

[The birding community is grateful to you and Nicholas as well Rowan, as it was because the two of you decided to photograph and report something unusual that this special sighting came to the public's notice once again. What was almost certainly the same individual was first reported on 7 July 2013 at the same locality, after which it remained undetected for 3 months. Birding is a growing past time, for younger and older people! – Ed.] 🐦

Red-billed Oxpeckers at Libangeni, Mpumalanga

Seakle Godschalk

On 16 August, when conducting an inspection of the Libangeni landfill I was pleasantly surprised to note a number of Red-billed Oxpeckers, about 5-6, on donkeys and cattle grazing at the landfill. This is the first time I have observed oxpeckers outside conservation areas. The Libangeni landfill is situated in a rural area

approximately 120 km north east of Pretoria on the southern border of the Libangeni town (S 25°9'37" E28°51'28").

[In recent years this species has been seen in many rural areas that it had been absent from for some time, at the stage when toxic dips were used to treat livestock – Ed.] 🐦

Nuwe lede/New members

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.

Vic & Helana Cruger, Faerie Glen; Ross Louis Garcin, Centurion; Wouter & Yolande Cromhout, Clubview; Stoffel & Riana Botha, Karenpark; Warren & Carol Ingram, Centurion; Andor Gradwell, Faerie Glen; Dudley Gradwell, Faerie Glen; Michael Raum, Edenvale, Johan, Louis, Nicole de Jager, Montanapark.

Rarities and unusual sightings report: 30 November 2013

Compiled by André Marx

National Rarities/ Nasionale rareiteite

Sandpiper, Green. Ruiter, Witgat-: a single bird was at Rietvlei NR, 6 Oct 2013 (JdW), with two birds reported at this site on 10 Nov 2013. One bird was reported from Mkhombo Dam, 5 Oct 2013 (...). Another bird was present at Waterfall Estate in Midrand and was first reported 26 Oct 2013 (RS). *The Rietvlei bird proved to be popular and was reported by several birders in the following weeks leading up to mid-November 2013.*

Regional Rarities/ Streeksrareiteite

Corncrake. Kwartelkoning: a single individual was reported from the wetlands to the south of the Pienaars River in Buffelsdrift, north east of Pretoria, (RG).

Crane, Grey Crowned. Mahem: a single bird was seen at the Weltevrede Resort on the Vaal River, near Parys in the Free State, 27 Oct 2013 (BE).

Cuckooshrike, White-breasted. Katakoeroe, Witbors-: the bird first reported on 7 July 2013

at Groenkloof NR was relocated at the same locality on 14 Oct 2013 and confirmed to be a female from the many photographs taken (RJ, NPa). *This species is approximately 350-400 km from the nearest known locality and probably represents a wandering bird. Hundreds of birders were able to twitch this bird in the following weeks when it was present until at least mid-November 2013.*

Curlew, Eurasian. Wulp, Groot-: one bird was at Mkhombo Dam together with a number of other waders, 5 Oct 2013, where it was present for a few weeks (JB, MAX et al).

Godwit, Bar-tailed. Griet, Bandstert-: one bird was found at a wetland near Rust de Winter Dam 26 Oct 2013 (RGd), with one bird also present at Mkhombo Dam in the following days.

Harrier, Pallid. Vleivalk, Witbors-: a juvenile bird was photographed at Rietvlei NR, (JdT).



Green Sandpiper/Witgatruiter, Rietvlei NR



White-breasted Cuckooshrike/Witborskatakoeroe, Groenkloof NR



GBird

Bar-tailed Godwit/Bandstertgriet, Mkhombo Dam

Honey-Buzzard, European. Wespiedief:

a single bird was reported north of Bronkhorstspuit, 23 Nov 2013 (EM). Another bird was at the entrance to Rietvlei NR, 23 Nov 2013 (SC).

Ibis, Southern Bald. Ibis, Kalkoen:- two birds were a surprising find at Mkhombo Dam, 4 Oct 2013, (JB, MAx et al). A solitary bird was in pentad 2535_2830 north of Cullinan, 1 Nov 2013 (SM).

Pipit, Short-tailed. Koester, Kortstert:- one bird was initially seen in pentad 2525_2900 in the Verena area, 30 Nov 2013 (EM), with several more birds reported from this general area in the days following by other birders. *This is a highly localised and difficult to find species that may occur in small numbers at certain higher altitude grassland localities in the region.*

Plover, Chestnut-banded. Strandkiewiet, Rooiband:- two birds were at Mkhombo Dam during the braai and get together there for the Wider Gauteng Challenge group, 14 Sep 2013 (GBird).

Plover, Grey. Strandkiewiet, Grys:- one bird was at Borakalalo NR, 2 Nov 2013 (JA, LvD).

Plover, White-fronted. Strandkiewiet, Vaal:- one bird was at Mkhombo Dam, 7 Sep 2013 (JB, FdP, MAx). *This is a very uncommon bird at inland localities.*

Sanderling. Strandloper, Drietoon:- one bird was at Mkhombo Dam, 5 Oct 2013 (RGd), with several birds present at this locality on 3 Nov 2013. A single bird was at Kgomo-Kgomo,



Warren Ingram

Sanderling/Drietoonstrandloper, Mkhombo Dam

2 Nov 2013 (NPe).

Wagtail, Mountain. Kwikkie, Berg:- a solitary bird was again found at Groenkloof NR at the same time that the White-breasted Cuckooshrike was at this site, 15 Oct 2013 (MK). **Whimbrel, Common. Wulp, Klein:-** one bird was present at Mkhombo Dam when it was reported by a number of birders, 27 Oct 2013 (GBird).

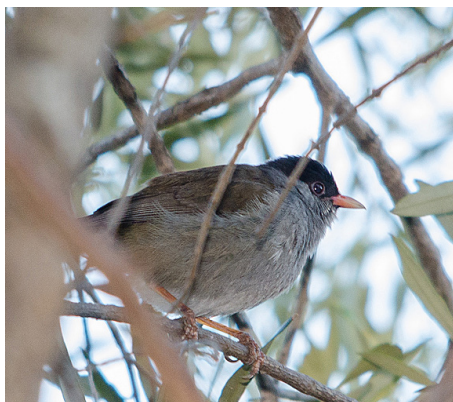
**Other Interesting Observations/
Ander Interessante Waarnemings**

Blackcap, Bush. Tiptol, Rooibek:- An exciting record, first of one bird and subsequently of two birds, came from a garden with superb indigenous trees in Robin Hills, Randburg, 7 Oct 2013 (GO); this bird was observed by many birders in the following days. *A very uncommon*



Warren Ingram

Common Whimbrel/Kleinwulp, Mkhombo Dam



Bush Blackcap / Roibektiptol, Randburg

bird in Gauteng, this is only the fourth known record in the province since it was confirmed as occurring in 1999.

Bunting, Lark-like. Streepkoppie, Vaal-: one bird was in pentad 2625_2725 near Fochville, 19 Nov 2013 (RGe).

Cuckoo, Great Spotted. Koekoek, Gevlekte: a juvenile bird was photographed in pentad 2545_2710 in the Olifantsnek area just south of the Magaliesberg, 25 Oct 2013 (GF).

Cuckoo, Jacobin. Nuwejaarsvoël, Bont-: one bird was at the Klipriviersberg NR in southern Johannesburg, a first record for the reserve, 23 Nov 2013 (LR).

Eagle, Long-crested. Arend, Langkuif-: one bird was in pentad 2550_2835 southwest of Bronkhorstspruit, 27 Oct 2013, with another bird found in nearby pentad 2545_2840, 4 Nov 2013, (RF & PT).

Falcon, Red-footed. Valk, Westelike

Roopoot-: one bird was observed near Rust De Winter NR, 2 Nov 2013 (DV).

Fringin, Orange River. Patrys, Kalahari-: a first record of one bird in pentad 2605_2755 at Alberts Farm in Johannesburg, just south of Northcliff Hill, is an unusual record for the city, 27 Oct 2013 (SC).

Hawk Eagle, Ayres. Arend, Kleinjag-: a bird in heavy moult was photographed flying over Groenkloof NR, 29 Oct 2013 (KR).

Plover, Caspian. Strandkiewiet, Asiatiese:

one bird was at Mkhombo Dam during the braai and get together there for the Wider Gauteng Challenge group, 14 Sep 2013 (GBird), with as many as 6 being reported on 13 Oct 2013.

Sandgrouse, Namaqua. Kelkiewyn: one bird, a male, was found at Rietvlei NR in Centurion, 18 Sep 2013 (MAT). *The only known locality in the Greater Gauteng area for this species is in the south west of the region, some distance from Centurion.*

Starling, Common. Spreeu, Europese: one bird was found at Northern Farm in pentad 2555_2755, 6 Nov 2013 (RS).

Turnstone, Ruddy. Steenloper: a solitary bird was at Mkhombo Dam amongst many other waders, 7 Sep 2013 (JB, JdP, MAX), with up to 3 birds being reported in the ensuing weeks.

Observers/ Waarnemers

Barend Esterhuizen (BE)	Marj Atkins (MAT)
Dylan Vasapolli (DV)	Mark Kirk (MK)
Etienne Marais (EM)	Matthew Axelrod (MAX)
Francoise du Plessis (FdP)	Niall Perrins (NPe)
Gauteng Birders (GBird)	Nicholas Pattinson (NPA)
Geoff Finney (GF)	Pat Tattersall (PT)
Jan de Wet (JdW)	Rihann Geyser (RGe)
Jan du Toit (JdT)	Rob Geddes (RGd)
Jason Boyce (JB)	Roger Fieldwick (RF)
Jerome Ainsley (JA)	Rowan Jordaan (RJ)
Kevin Ravno (KR)	Ron Searle (RS)
Lance Robinson (LR)	Shaun Chamberlain (SC)
Lisl van Deventer (LvD)	Stuart McKernan (SM)

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. 🐦

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