



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: Mountain Wagtail/Bergkwikkie photographed at Groenkloof Nature Reserve by Alta Fraser.

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

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



Editorial/ Redaksioneel

The current edition of *Laniarius* (number 128) contains some unique articles that certainly stimulated my imagination and gave me much to think about.

Firstly, there is an article by Debbie van Zyl about atlasing ("To atlas or not to atlas"). In it she has described with great clarity and considerable passion the advantages of atlasing that extend well beyond simply recording the site at which a certain bird may be found. She has emphasised the benefits that she has experienced in improving the accuracy of identification of birds and finding the suitable habitats for certain species which had eluded her before she started atlasing. Furthermore, atlasing contributes to the scientific knowledge about the distribution and population size of birds in South Africa. These benefits could be applicable to anybody who spends time identifying birds and they have certainly persuaded the present editors to take up atlasing.

Then there are several excellent travel articles: notably a detailed description of the trip to Madagascar by members of the BLNG club (Musings on Mad Birding in Madagascar by Ingrid van Heerden). This is not just a record of all the new "ticks" that everybody attained, but also an excellent description of the trials and tribulations that occur to travellers in Madagascar. It would seem that birding in Madagascar would require a good measure of fitness, plenty of

anti-diarrhoea tablets and the ability to ride the sea in a small boat without getting sea-sick!

There are also two most informative articles about travelling and birding in Namibia - one by Salomi Louw and one by Neithard Graf von Durckheim. Anybody planning a trip to Namibia would do well to study these articles which give detailed descriptions of the travel route, accommodation and birding sites.

Then there is the unique article about birding in Ecuador by Ken Logan. This is a country that very few birders will have visited and it would probably require considerable expertise and resources to go birding at such an unusual destination. Mr. Logan gives an excellent description of the opportunities to find the magnificent local birds with the help of guides and his photographs of these birds are enough to make any birder's mouth water!

And then we have an unusual bird article to keep our readers entertained. Stella Hubble describes the love and affection that her Ridgeback dog, Sandy, gave to a family of Fork-tailed Drongos. Sandy helped to summon his mistress whenever the baby drongo fell out of the nest and Stella would then go out to return it to the nest. He also allowed baby chickens to walk all over him as he lay on the ground.

We hope you enjoy the range of articles in this edition.

The editors wish to thank all the contributors to the past three newsletters and the present one and we hope that you will continue writing articles in the future.

Phillip and Jill de Moor



Chairman's Report/ Voorsittersverslag

Those of you who subscribe to BirdLife South Africa's excellent magazine *African Birdlife* would have read Mark Anderson's article on "Special Birding Moments" in the May/June 2014 edition.

Mark described some wonderful moments he has experienced in observing birds and admiring their behaviours. He requested readers to contribute their special moments for publication.

This article set me thinking about special moments that I have enjoyed with our feathered friends. I distinctly remember a weekend away to a trout fishing syndication at Verlorenvlei, between Belfast and Dullstroom. I am a very poor fisherman and do not particularly enjoy standing for hours on end casting a line about. My host was very patient and helpful so I had to feign interest in what I was doing. After a couple of unsuccessful hours next to the dam, my concentration started to flag and my eyes started to wander. I noticed some activity on the far side of the dam which looked interesting. As the movement came closer I realised that I was watching a pair of birds. Oblivious to our presence the birds moved closer and closer and soon I was able to identify them with my naked eye. It was a pair of Wattled Crane. With binoculars nowhere in sight I was able to enjoy the most spectacular performance I have ever witnessed by a pair of birds. They were obviously in courtship mode and the elegance, beauty and utter bliss with which they danced and floated around each other with graceful moving of their wings left me spellbound.

On another occasion in early December one year, my wife Mandie and I were parked at Mpondo Dam north of Biyamiti Bushveld Camp in the Kruger National Camp. It was a perfect early summer's morning and we were

enjoying our coffee with no other tourist in sight. I noticed a pair of raptors flying in from the east and as they reached the dam was able to identify them as a pair of European Hobbies. The birds came swooping over the dam and immediately launched an attack on a Reed Cormorant perched in a dead tree in the middle of the dam. The poor thing flapped and fluttered its way down into the water. The Hobbies did not pursue it any further but turned their attention to the next 'victim' a Pied Kingfisher which they harried and harassed until it also made its escape. It soon became obvious that the Hobbies were purely out to enjoy themselves and were savouring their hunting ability and flying prowess. They were like two fighter jets putting on an aerobatic display. None of the other birds were safe as they launched attacks on African Pied Wagtails, Blacksmith Lapwings, Red-billed Buffalo Weavers and Cape Glossy Starlings. It was obvious that food was not on the menu and that they were just enjoying their superiority over their 'victims'.

The third memorable moment was at Epupa Falls up on the Kunene River. One of the specials along the Kunene is the Cinderella Waxbill which had managed to evade us during the whole trip. Days can get quite steamy in that part of the world especially in late December. We had pitched our tent at the water's edge and were enjoying some refreshments in the shade of the palms. Some reeds and long grasses were growing along the water's edge and we noticed some movement within. After a few seconds out popped a Blue Waxbill which from the light colouration we took for a female bird. "Aw gee" we said. "Could this not have been a Cinderella Waxbill?" We soon forgot about our disappointment as the male bird emerged from the undergrowth.

He had cut for himself a short grass stem with a thick tuft on its end. With his little baton clasped deftly between his beak he perched on a horizontal reed a metre in front of his mate and proceeded to give the most exquisite display. His excited leaps off the perch with fluttering wings were interspersed with the delicate twirling of his little baton as he swung his head from side to side. We and his mate sat riveted as his performance got ever more enthralling.

As Mark mentions in his article one gets so much more pleasure out of birding other than just being able to identify a bird and ticking it off on a list. Birds are such fascinating creatures in so many other ways.

I would appeal to you to share your special birding moments with the rest of us by submitting articles for publication in our newsletter.

*Yours in birding
Philip Calinikos*

It's a Bird Dog

Stella Hubble

For a hunting dog, my Ridgeback called Sandy had some strange ways. He would lie all day in the shed with the day-old chickens climbing all over him while nursing a sick one between his paws. He also loved to sit in the pen with the new-born calves and once they were old enough to venture into the field he would join them there. Sandy also enjoyed playing with the wild Guineafowl, pretending to chase them and then turning around and letting them chase him. And in the garden he could often be found lying on the lawn surrounded by a variety of garden birds.

Fork-tailed Drongos are very clever birds with a lot of character. They love to tease other birds and copy their calls, especially bulbuls which they mimic to perfection. Drongos seem to have different songs for different times of the day. I came to know their early

morning song which was totally different from their evening one. Then, of course, there was their "come quick, we need help!" call.

One day on my small farm in White River in Eastern Mpumalanga, I noticed a pair of drongos building a nest in a tree near the vegetable garden. The female bird laid her eggs and, in due course, produced three hatchlings. Our maid decided they would make a tasty addition to the cooking pot and she was just removing the nest when I stopped her. Unfortunately the nest was damaged and, try as I could to repair it, it remained out of shape.

The parent birds continued to rear their young but, as the babies grew bigger they started falling out of their damaged home. Every time there was a 'man overboard', the parents would come and call me with loud, agitated chattering until I went and picked up the baby and returned it to the nest. If I was in the house they would fly around it making an incredible noise until I went out.

Help came from another direction too. If I was busy and did not respond quickly enough, Sandy would make a point of telling me that I was needed. This happened many times. However, in spite of our best efforts, two of the babies died when they fell out of the nest during the night. The third survived, with much



help from me, my son and, of course, Sandy.

Soon the time came for the lone survivor to learn to fly, and again I was constantly called on for assistance. This time I actually recruited Sandy's help. Whenever the parents sent out their loud distress signal, I would send Sandy off to "find the birdie". He would sniff around until he found where the youngster had 'crash landed', usually hidden in the long grass, and then he would 'point' at it until I could retrieve it and put it on the nearest branch of a tree.

The youngster was surprisingly tame and did not seem at all afraid of Sandy or me. This performance was repeated many times until eventually the young drongo made his first successful flight. Soon after that the family flew away. I remember watching them disappearing up the valley with a heavy heart. I had been personally involved in rearing their offspring

and I missed my feathered friends.

I thought that would be the end of the story, however, months later while I was busy in the kitchen, to my amazement I heard familiar voices outside. I went out and there, in a small tree close to the kitchen door, were the three drongos. They were extremely tame, allowing me and Sandy to go right up to them. Sandy was thrilled to see his little friends again, standing up with his paws on the tree, wagging his tail and whining with excitement. The birds stayed for five minutes or so, chattering away all the time, before finally flying away.

I never saw them again, but I am convinced that they came back to show off their full-grown youngster and to say "thank you". I believe this incident proves that animals, in this case birds, can communicate with us if we just take the time to listen to them. 🐦

Sasol Bird Fair: 7-8 June 2014

Debbie van Zyl

It was with much trepidation that I packed the car with all the goodies I would need to set up the BLNG stand at the annual Sasol Bird Fair. This year it was being held at the Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens and the day before the fair started, winter arrived with a bang. The wind was howling and the temperatures in Joburg dropped well below 10 degrees. I was not looking forward to standing outside in the cold wind for two days with a smile on my face. I spent a good 30 minutes scratching in my winter cupboard for my scarf, beanie and gloves.

Saturday morning dawned to a crisp but windless morning. I was in the car and on my way, well before the sun was up. I arrived at the gardens to a rather packed parking lot and the sight of trolleys packed with goods, being carted into the entrance. Lucky I have a great hubby who bought a new trolley for me to help get all my 'stuff' to the stand. With a bit of help from Jason Boyce I managed to get everything from the car loaded onto the trolley and with a thermos mug of tea in my one hand, off I went.

I was very lucky to have Elouise Kalmer help me to get everything set up. We had our stall up in record time and had enough time before everything started to take a stroll around the garden to look for our target bird, the Fairy Flycatcher. Thanks to a visit from Sue Oertli, we had a guide who walked us to her regular site and voila! – the flycatcher appeared. This was an excellent start to the day. We took a leisurely walk back to the stall, just in time for the gates to open at 8am and have the people start to come in for the day.

The two days turned out to be really wonderful. We had so many members come past the stalls and it was great to catch up with old friends and newer members who had just joined. There was great attendance at the workshops and the photographic courses as the gardens were just packed with people. I have never seen so many 500mm Canon lenses in one location before. The sunbirds in the aloe gardens put on a terrific show for both admirers and photographers alike. After a busy session



at the stall, I could sit down, sip my coffee and look towards the south and see the Verreaux's Eagles in the skies above. The breeding pair put up with Pied Crows and even a Lanner Falcon chasing them in the skies – all added to the spectacle of birding. I saw a lot of great photos posted on BLSA's Facebook page after the weekend so I know everyone really enjoyed themselves.

The venue really was spectacular and a huge thanks from me to everyone who helped out, visited and made the event a huge success. A definite winner! 🐦

Thabazimbi Roofvoëltoer: 26-28 April 2014

Thabazimbi Ringspan

Saterdagoggend die 26ste April het vyf van ons met Johan Snyman se nuwe Ford Ranger die pad oor Brits na Thabazimbi aangedurf. Die groep het bestaan uit Johan Snyman, Ryno Kemp, Marie Ueckermann, Frik du Plooy en Wanda Louwrens. Die doel van ons besoek was om die Waterberg IBA te verken en om Ryno Kemp te help om vertrouwd te raak met die gebruik van die 'balchatri' om sodoende te kwalifiseer om op sy eie roofvoëls te ring. Dit is nogal 'n kuns om te weet waar en hoe om die balchatri uit te gooi om in die eerste plek nie die roofvoël te verjaag nie, maar dit so te plaas dat die voël die muise in die balchatri kan sien. Bleeksingvalke (Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk) word nie so maklik afgeskrik deur 'n voertuig wat stop nie, maar Bruinslangarende (Brown Snake-Eagle) of Swartborsslangarende (Black-chested Snake-Eagle) is baie sentitief en die balchatri moet in die ry uitgegooi word.

Alhoewel ons bestemming Thabazimbi was, het ons by Koedoeskop weggedraai op 'n grondpad op soek na roofvoëls. Ons het in die rigting van die Limpoporivier gery, al langs die Krokodilrivier op pad na Rooibokkraal. By Steenbokpan het ons 'brunch' geëet en toe begin terugdraai op die grondpaaie via

Sentrum na Thabazimbi. Teen half-twee die middag het Ryno Kemp sy eerste Bleeksingvalk (Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk) gering. Dit is nie elke voël wat afkom vir die balchatri nie. Op een plek het ons die balchatri uitgegooi vir twee Grootjagarende (African Hawk-Eagle), maar na 'n eidelose gewag het ons moed opgegee en verder gery. Ryno was gelukkig om nog twee Bleeksingvalke te kon ring voor Sentrum.

Teen sononder het ons by ons bestemming aangekom – 'n treinwa by 'Nader (uitspraak Komma Nader). Die ou SAR-treinwa is langs 'n platform staangemaak met 'n gerieflike kombuis en badkamer. Ons het elkeen ons eie kompartement gehad – wat 'n nostalgiese ervaring. Die breë leersitplekke wat ook as slaapbank dien, het net so gelyk soos 40 jaar gelede. Asook die wasbakke onder die opslaantafel.

Sondagoggend het ons vyfuur opgestaan om die nette op te sit. Ons was nie baie suksesvol nie en na 'n lekker ontbyt het ons weer die grondpaaie gaan opsoek. Dié keer by Marakele NP verby in 'n noordoostelike rigting tot by Vaalwater en met die Melkriverpad tot by Marken (R518).

Die voëls was maar skaars en ons het net

voor Vaalwater die eerste keer kans gehad om te probeer Blouvalke vang. Ongelukkig, as gevolg van die baie verkeer en nuuskierige verbygangers, moes ons tou opgooi na 'n ruk.

Uiteindelik het ons geluk gehad 'n ent uit Vaalwater op die teerpad na Melkrivier (R518) toe ons 'n Akkedisvalk (Lizard Buzzard) kon vang. Dit was 'n groot verrassing, want dis nie 'n algemene spesie nie en Marie was gelukkig genoeg om dit te kon ring. Ons het twee jongmense wat stilgehou het om navraag te doen oor ons bedrywighede in hulle omgewing, ingelig oor Safring en BirdLife Gauteng-Noord se betrokkenheid by voëlringery, asook oor hoekom ons die roofvoëls ring.

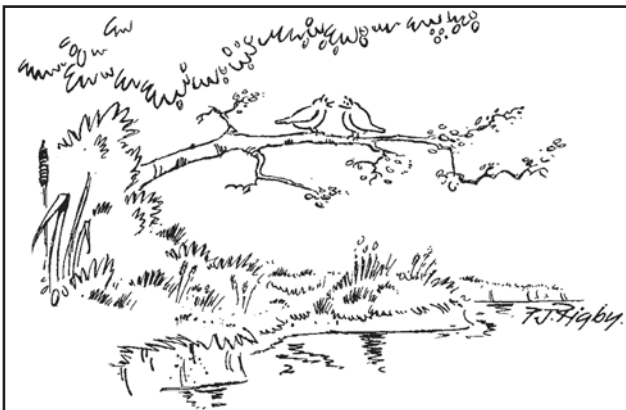
Halfpad tussen Marken en Lephalale (Ellisras) het ons uiteindelik sukses gehad met 'n Blouvalkie (Black-shouldered Kite) na ons 5 keer vir hom probeer uitgooi het. Ryno het hom gering, sy 4de roofvoël van die naweek. Ons was weer so gefassineer deur hierdie volwasse voël se bloedrooi oë!

Die Maandagoggend het ons met nuwe moed weer die nette opgesit. Wanda kon 'n Bospatrys (Crested Francolin) ring wat Ryno in die nette ingejaag het, plus 'n Blousysie (Blue Waxbill), een Geelbeklyster (Karoo Thrush) en een Rooibeklyster (Kurrichane Thrush). Die eienaar was baie bly dat ons sy geel ontsnapte parkiet (wat baie duur is) weer gevang het. Johan en Ryno het die voëlhok met twee nette

omring en die parkiet het op soek na sy maats in die strik beland. Dit was nie baie maklik om hom uit te haal nie. Hy het Ryno gebyt dat die bloed loop!

Danksy Ryno se kontakte het ons die voorreg gehad om naby Northam by die Gitta-Martula Wildlife Rehabilitasiesentrum drie Gevlekte Ooruile (Spotted Eagle-Owl) en 'n Swartborsslangarend (Black-chested Snake-Eagle) te ring. Ons het groot waardering vir die manier waarop Paula Bradley, die eienaar, en Kara, haar dogter, ons ontvang het. Die voëls sal binnekort vrygelaat word en die sentrum gaan in samewerking met Vulpro 'n sensor op die Swartborsslangarend plaas vir verdere navorsing. Die sentrum het op die oomblik ook 'n steenbokkie, wat deur 'n motor raakgery is, gebande muishonde, 'n njala en eekhorinkies wat gerehabiliteer word. Omdat ons vir Kara moes opplai tot by die hek, het Ryno aangebied om agter op die buffer van die Ranger te staan. Ons het by 'n leeu-kamp verby gery met twee pratige leeus in. Die twee leeus het sweerlik gedink dit is hulle middagete, want hulle het nuuskierig nader gekom toe ons daar stilhou.

Ons het sommer daar op die plaas ons braaibroodjies en biltong geëet en daarna het ons die lang pad aangedurf met die balchatri nog steeds op Ryno se skoot. Ringers is soos vissermanne – altyd optimisties oor die volgende vangst! 🐟



"Then just as they've made a positive identification you make a call like a Fish Eagle."



Bird Ringing

The Bird Ringing Scheme in South Africa was initiated in 1948, so 1998 saw the 50th anniversary of the scheme. During this period over 1.7 million birds of 852 species were ringed. There have been a total of 16 800 ring recoveries since the inception of the scheme. This gives an overall recovery rate for rings in southern Africa of marginally less than 1%, averaged across all species. This probability varies enormously across species.

The traditional objective of SAFRING is to establish a database of recoveries of southern African birds that can be used to establish information about movement and survival. Every bird ringed, no matter what species or where it was ringed has the potential to contribute to the SAFRING recovery database. Since 1982, this database has been supplemented by a retrap database, supplied by ringers on a voluntary basis. This contains ringing and latest retrap details of birds recaptured at least 12 months after being ringed.

The database as a whole is a resource which may be used by researchers, conservation biologists and managers, and primarily provides answers to questions related to movement and survival. Research into bird populations of importance to fisheries, agriculture, conservation and water management authorities involves bird ringing.

Requirements For Bird Ringers

- An aspirant bird ringer's ability to operate independently needs to be assessed by the ringers responsible for the candidate's training, who will ultimately recommend the trainee for an AA-permit. To this end, essential areas of proficiency have been identified as being the minimum standards to be achieved by the trainee.
- A ringer must be competent to operate the equipment used to capture birds in a safe way. This includes the planning, sighting, handling and monitoring of nets and traps in different situations.
- A ringer must be able to capture and handle birds and store them, and fit rings to wild birds, without causing undue stress or injury to the birds.
- A ringer must have a high level of competence in bird identification of the birds in the hand. A ringer shall not normally ring any bird that cannot be positively identified.
- A ringer must be able to undertake accurate, repeatable standard anatomical measurements.
- A ringer must be able to record information accurately, understand and conform to the administrative procedures of SAFRING, submit schedules in good time and store data in the long term.
- Permits to ring birds should be issued on the recommendation of SAFRING, which in turn will act on the advice of experienced ringers.
- The development of the above-mentioned areas of proficiency and competency is partly linked to the numbers of birds and species processed. However, many of the minor 'crises' an independent ringer has to be able to handle occur rather rarely, so it can take a long time before you are fully competent to operate solo. Your trainer will inform you of the requirements in force in the area in which you are training.
- While the preceding standards are very important, the ringing trainer will also assess the trainee's feeling or passion for birds entrusted to his care as well as the trainee's attitude to bird ringing. Should the trainer be of the opinion that a trainee does not have an acceptable attitude towards birds and bird ringing, training can be discontinued if the trainee cannot respond to remedial coaching and advice.

Ringling provides a cost-effective tool for monitoring our environment and commonly draws attention to pollution, poisoning, powerline incidents, longline fishing fatalities and other hazards.

There are currently 130 active ringers operating in South Africa and neighbouring countries such as Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. About 70 000 birds are ringed annually. Ringers, both amateur and professional, have to pay for all rings used. An exception are those rings used on Redbilled Quelea, which are paid for by

the Department of Agriculture. Recoveries of ringed quelea provide data on movements and mortality and contribute to a better understanding of the population dynamics of this explosive species.

BirdLife Northern Gauteng's contact if you are interested in finding out about this great club activity:

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Ringling with Poles: Barberspan Bird Ringling Conference

Marië Ueckermann

The Barberspan Bird Sanctuary is a wonderful site for birding with 365 species having been recorded on and around the pans. This was the site of the Barberspan Bird Ringling Conference held from 28 November to 3 December 2013. A number of BLNG ringers participated in the event that was jointly organised by the Bird Migration Research Station, lecturers and students from the University of Gdansk, Poland and SAFRING (part of the Animal Demography Unit of the University of Cape Town).

The Polish ringers, a number of PhD and other post-graduate students under the leadership of Magda Remisiewicz, were engaged in making detailed recordings on moult and aging of waders and passerines while Dieter Oschadleus was engaged in his study of White-browed Sparrow Weavers. The visiting ringers from as far as Namibia were able to participate in these activities as well as the duck catching and ringling conducted by Joel Avni. We learned a lot about alternative ways of catching birds and using equipment as well as new ways of checking for moult patterns.

A number of interesting presentations were conducted by expert ringers and

scientists on subjects such as wing evolution and the influence of climate change on migration. Derek Engelbrecht demonstrated the



The Polish ringers, a number of PhD and other post-graduate students

advances and application benefits of camera traps. An excellent hands-on presentation was given by Kobie Rajmakers on the ID of reedbed warblers which added to the ID skills of all the ringers. Dieter Oschadleus and Magdalena Remisiewicz gave us an insight of what the power and value is of the SAFRING data all of us are submitting through their presentation of the "Moult patterns of White-browed Sparrowweavers in southern Africa as shown by SAFRING moult records". One of the highlights was the talk by Herman Bernitz on his and Zephné's trip to the north of Poland where they were volunteering at Akcja Baltycka, a permanent ringing station and stop-over site for birds on migration. Every one of us is now making plans for participating in future.

In addition to these activities, the small

group of BLNG ringers went off to ring on their own. Firstly a ringing session of South African Cliff Swallows just outside the Barberspan boundaries close to the inlet of the pan during which the wind caused havoc and bent a pole, but swallows were however captured and ringed for the "Hirundine morphology project" of Steven Evans. A second ringing session was held at a Sociable Weaver colony some 50 km from Barberspan where all of us also managed to ring at least one Sociable Weaver despite our battle with the strong wind.

It was an extremely interesting learning experience and a chance to meet, learn from and talk with people such as prof. Les Underhill and Dieter Oschadleus from the University of Cape Town and we would encourage our Club members to join us in future. 🐦

Wider Gauteng (100K) Birding Challenge

Etienne Marais

Take part in one of the most exciting local birding communities! – and list all the species you have recorded in the Wider Gauteng Region.

The 100K (Wider Gauteng) Challenge first started in 2000 under the auspices of BLNG and is a listing challenge aimed at promoting local birding and discovery of great birds which can be found in a day visit.

The Wider Gauteng 100 km region is defined as an area within 100 km from both the City Centre of Pretoria (Church Square) and Johannesburg (City Hall). Although this area includes South Africa's largest 2 cities, an amazing 521 species have been recorded within the

area. This is due to the wide diversity of habitat from Grassland, wetland, Bushveld and Broad-leaved woodland. With the massive increase in birding interest in the region over the last few years, many rarities and out of range species are also being found.

Thanks to Kevin Ravno, the challenge now has an online listing database – which enables all participants to log their sightings, and see what others have seen! 70+ people are taking part in the challenge.

To register and log in your birds for the wider Gauteng Region visit www.birding.co.za/challenge.htm 🐦

Why are birds so popular in sayings and proverbs?

Probably because birds are the most ubiquitous and visible aspects of the natural world, so people saw them more often than most other creatures, and observed their appearance and habits more closely. Thus sayings such as 'up with the lark', 'bald as a coot' and 'out for a duck' have become part of our day-to-day language, with few people stopping to consider their origins.

To Atlas or Not to Atlas? That is the Question

Debbie van Zyl


I like to tick birds I've seen. I am not obsessive about ticking and don't create list after list to justify the purchase of Microsoft Excel. I keep a life list of my Southern African birds and have not yet migrated to maintaining a world list. Many years ago I tried atlasing but it really didn't work for me as the admin was just too much to juggle. When the opportunity presented itself on BLNG weekend camps I found myself atlasing with my friend Pauline as she liked to keep her clipboard close and didn't mind sitting for hours at home after the outing to enter all the birds we'd seen on some database. In order. With timelines. No way.

Something happened towards the end of 2012 that changed everything for me. A genius created an app (also known as an application on a smart phone or tablet) called Lynx Bird Ticks. This app gave Android atlasers the ability to log all their bird sightings with a date and time stamp as well as location and GPS co-ordinates. With a click of a button, the list could be submitted, all while out in the field. With the swipe of a finger, all post-outing admin disappeared overnight. It was time to start atlasing and making a contribution. Little did I know how it would change my birding forever.

I see birding very differently to how I saw it a couple of years ago. I now think in small blocks and the routes within them. I don't like to see blue or red lines through a block as that means a major highway or tar road could interrupt my birding pleasure. I like yellow lines and I like grey lines because I can watch my birds far away from the noise and danger of traffic. It's dusty and muddy sometimes but it works as I can just get on with it. Blue areas are just the best as a productive farm dam makes all the difference to the bird count and can add as many as 10 additional birds to my list.

Prior to visiting a venue, I look for blocks and coloured lines to actually plan my route. Previously I used to just drive somewhere and enjoy the birds I could find. Now, with a bit of research I can actually predict the birds I could find in the block which helps me to understand the habitat so I'm prepared to bundu-bash, watch from the car, pack my wellies or take my allergy tablets to counter the hayfever from the grasslands. Instead of driving randomly through an area I am obliged to spend two hours searching around inside the block, in all habitats and access points available within that block. This means I see more birds and understand the habitat better than ever. I have a mental list of the minimum number of birds I need to see in those two hours. My identification skills have improved dramatically. An LBJ is a tick now, not always a challenge. My ears pick up the subtle difference in sounds I never bothered to learn previously. I know the common birds like the back of my hand.

Weird words and phrases are now part of my everyday birding life. I talk about going 'Lynxing' with other atlasers. I use phrases like "every bird counts" and "I only need to see one more bird to get to...". The worst phrase ever spoken by a South African birder "I'm desperate to see a Common Myna" is now commonplace in my list of phrases.

If you're keen on improving your general birding knowledge or identification skills and have a slightly competitive streak, then seriously consider getting out there and atlasing. Not only will it enrich your vocab, but you also get to make a contribution as a citizen scientist (closest I'll ever be to being called a scientist) to one of the biggest birding projects ever. For more information, check out <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/> 

Birding & Flowers Trip (Part 1)

– Pretoria to Port Nolloth

Don Reid

The planning

One of the enjoyable aspects of planning a trip is the pleasant anticipation that goes with it. When Koos & Rianda Pauw suggested doing a birding and flower-viewing trip through the northern and western parts of SA in 2013, Gerda and I jumped at the chance and immediately started planning the route, accommodation etc in order to make sure we would get bookings at the preferred spots during the popular flower-viewing season which runs from mid-July to mid-September.

The anticipation was heightened by the fact that we would be travelling through parts of South Africa that we had not experienced before, with places and towns to see for the first time. The bonus was the prospect of seeing the famed Namaqualand flowers for ourselves, not to mention the possibility of a number of lifers along the route. Then there is the all-important atlasing of bird species which we intended to do at each overnight stop as a minimum.

The trip

Day 1: After much intense packing and arrangements, we set off, and headed west along the N14 via Krugersdorp, Klerkskraal (blink and you'll miss it), Ventersdorp and Coligny, at which point we turned south to the farm Ouplaas near Ottosdal in the North-West Province, arriving late afternoon. Coert and Magdalena welcomed us warmly to their guest house and turned out to be excellent hosts and the accommodation proved comfortable enough.

Day 2: An early morning walk was a good start to the day and an ideal time to do some atlasing – the garden was fresh and cool

and lush compared to the dry surroundings. White-browed Sparrow-Weavers (Koringvoël) are one of the signature birds of the area and are plentiful everywhere, made evident by the untidy nests in many a tree – some were busy nest-building at the entrance gate closely attended by Crimson-breasted Shrikes (Rooiborslaksman) in their bright red plumage. Bird calls livened up the garden, announcing the presence of Acacia Pied Barbets (Bonthoutkapper), Cape Robin-Chats (Gewone Janfrederik), Red-throated Wryneck (Draaihal) and Orange River White-eyes (Gariëpglasogje) in between the background calls of Laughing, Red-eyed and Cape Turtle-Doves (Lemoen-; Grootring- en Gewone Tortelduif).

The roads near the farmstead produced Bokmakierie, Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler (Bosveldtjerik), Neddicky (Neddikkie) and Kalahari Scrub-Robin (Kalahariwipstert) and on the way back a Brubru (Bontroklaksman) announced himself with his telephone-ring-like call. With atlasing duties done it was time for a leisurely breakfast after which we headed out to Barberspan some 80 km away, first stopping at the farm's own dam, which had looked promising from a distance. It proved to be a worthwhile stop as we added Lesser Flamingo (Kleinflamink) and a Goliath Heron (Reuserieer) in the shallows as well as an early Wood Sandpiper (Bosruiter) and Kittlitz's Plover (Geelborsstrandkiewiet) along the edge.

From there we made our way to Barberspan which we reached just after midday and immediately started atlasing Pentad 2630_2535 covering the north-east quadrant of the very large pan. Birds were plentiful, visible at a distance from the adjoining road – both Greater and Lesser Flamingos were working the shallows along with another

Goliath Heron and the usual Geese; Egyptian and Spur-winged (Koligans, Wildemakou). Once we entered the Bird Sanctuary itself, we added species at a constant pace with a Common Scimitarbill (Swartbekkakeelaar) being a highlight, before heading through the low grass surrounding the pan where we encountered Spike-heeled Lark (Vaktelewerik) and African Quailfinch (Gewone Kwartelvinkie) amongst others.

Moving along the shoreline on the roadway skirting the pan, we found Black-winged Stilts (Rooipootelsie), African Snipe (Afrikaanse Snip), African Swampphen (Grootkoningriethaan), Wood Sandpiper and newly-arrived Ruff (Kemphaan), all mixing with the Flamingos. From there we moved to the picnic spot for our traditional 'wors-braai' and continued to enjoy the coming and going of the birds that frequent the area, such as Acacia Pied Barbet, Tit-Babblers, Cape Glossy Starling (Kleinglansspreeu) and a charming Fairy Flycatcher (Feevlieëvanger) flitting about busily in the upper branches of the shady trees. Sparrow-Weavers were abundant and by far the dominant bird of the area and a pair of Yellow Mongoose skirted the picnic area and eyed us as we braaied. Our mid-afternoon meal of wors-roll with side salad was simplicity itself but perfect in the peaceful surroundings and with the added pleasure of having the entire spot to ourselves.

Well satisfied with the birding and our catering efforts, we left Barberspan Bird Sanctuary, but before heading back to our guest farm we decided to have a quick look at Leeupan a couple of kms north of Barberspan. By this time the sun was getting low and causing a glare on the pan so not much was visible, but just as we were about to turn around Koos spotted a large bird in the veld on the opposite side of the road and excitedly called us to have a look. It turned out to be a real surprise – a Eurasian Curlew (Grootwulp) in the veld hundreds of meters from the water. This exciting find capped an excellent day all round.

Returning to the guest house we came across a Spotted Eagle-Owl (Gevlekte Ooruil)

silhouetted against the already dark skies.

Day 3: We spent virtually the whole day travelling the 700 km to Augrabies National Park, via towns such as Delareyville, Vryburg, Kuruman, Olifantshoek, Upington, Keimoes and Kakamas – all towns we had never seen before, but unfortunately we did not have time to stop and explore any of them. Maybe next time. We arrived at Augrabies by late afternoon and settled into the lovely chalet, after which we enjoyed a good meal in the park restaurant. By this time we were getting into the swing of packing and unpacking our loaded vehicles and the whole process was much quicker.

Day 4: After a good night's rest we had a leisurely breakfast before taking a walk around the camp and along the extensive network of board walks which lead to the various viewing decks, in the process building up an interesting array of birds for our ongoing daily and trip list.

We soon saw that Pale-winged Starlings (Bleekvlerkspreeu) and African Pied Wagtails (Bontkwikkie) were the signature birds of the camp with Orange River White-eyes being almost as prominent. Over the gorge below the falls, a short walk from our chalet, many Alpine Swifts (Witpenswindswael) appeared to be revelling in the spray thrown



Don Reed

The Augrabies Falls

high into the air by the tumbling torrent of water and with some patience I managed to get some photos of these fast-flying swifts, which look for all the world like miniature jet-fighters as they swoop past.

A feature of the viewing areas is the localised Augrabies Flat Lizard (*Platysaurus broadleyi*) with its bright colouring – it apparently depends on the black flies that congregate in their millions along the Orange River and they also feed on the figs from the Namaqua Fig Tree. Dassies were plentiful and in the vegetation that skirts the board walks African Reed and Namaqua Warblers (Kleinrietsanger, Namakwalangstertjie) could be heard but both stayed out of sight. The call of an African Fish-Eagle (Visarend) was loud enough to be heard above the constant rumble of the falls.

The camping area was alive with starlings, thrushes, scrub-robins and bulbuls. At the outdoor section of the well-run restaurant, a Dusky Sunbird (Namakwasuikerbekkie) announced himself loudly as we enjoyed a cappuccino and on the walk back we checked the skies and found other Swallows (Greater-striped / Grootstreepswael), Martins (Brown-throated / Afrikaanse Oewerswael) and Swifts (Little, African Palm- / Kleinwindswael, Palmwindswael) had joined the abundant Alpine Swifts catching flying insects in the air.

After lunch we went for a drive through the park proper to the viewpoint called Ararat, which has spectacular views up and down the river gorge. During the short trip to the viewpoint we managed to spot some good specials including a group of Namaqua Sandgrouse (Kelkiewyn), Swallow-tailed Bee-Eaters (Swaelstertbyvreter) hunting from low branches, numerous Lark-like Buntings (Vaalstreepkoppie), Acacia Pied Barbet and then my first lifer for the trip – a lone Pygmy Falcon (Dwergvalk), a raptor so small and un-fierce-looking that it elicited a “shame” from us. At the viewpoint we enjoyed a picnic coffee while enjoying the view and scanning the gorge for birds – a Verreux’s Eagle (Witkruisarend) in the distance and Reed Cormorants (Rietduiker) far down in the river were our reward.

Back at the chalet it was time to braai the evening meal and prepare for our next long stretch down to the west coast at Port Nolloth.

Day 5: We had targeted an 8 am departure knowing we had another lengthy drive ahead to Port Nolloth and wanting to fit in some roadside birding along the ‘back road’ between Pofadder and Aggenys, as described so well in the *Southern African Bird Finder* book. We duly left just after 8 am and stopped briefly in Pofadder to fill up our vehicles with diesel, whereafter we followed the book’s directions to the P2961 secondary road which was to take us through a part of Bushmanland known for some of the sought-after ‘specials’ of the area. Our first stop was just 1,6 km along the road as directed, where we found Karoo Long-billed Lark (Karoo langbeklewerik) and Tracrac Chat (Woestynspekvreter) (another lifer for me) without too much trouble. Spike-heeled Larks were spotted a couple of times and a group of Namaqua Sandgrouse obligingly waited for us at the roadside to allow close-up views, before scurrying away into the scrub.



Don Reid

Pygmy Falcon/Dwergvalk, Augrabies NP

We progressed slowly along the dusty road, stopping frequently in search of the special larks of the area but without much further success as it was by now the middle of the day when birds are less visible. At one point we took what we thought was the turn-off to the Koa dunes where Red Lark is known to be found, but we realised after some time that the landmarks were not as described in the book and retraced our steps back to the 'main' road and continued until we came across other Gauteng birders in search of the Red Lark, who advised us on the correct route. We duly followed their directions and found the Koa dunes close by where we spent a good hour-and-a-half scanning and listening but to no avail as the lark eluded us. Perhaps another day? By this time it was getting late so we made haste to Port Nolloth via Springbok and Steinkopf, arriving as the sun was setting over the town with our overnight destination at McDougall's Bay a few kilometres south of the town. The beach house accommodation was right on the beach with a small rock-protected lagoon directly in front of the house, with a variety of birds present to whet our appetites for the following day.



Don Reid

Namaqua Sandgrouse/ Kelkiewyn, Augrabies NP

Just as significantly, we had started seeing scattered patches of flowers in the veld as we approached Springbok, which augured well for the days ahead. So far each day had been an adventure with new places seen, new birds added to our growing trip list and regular roadside stops for coffee and refreshments without the hassle of heavy traffic to disturb the sense of tranquility that we were developing. 🐾

'n Bitter Koue Wintersdaquitstappie te Bronkhorstspruit Gholfklub

Amanda le Roux

Dis 'n koue oggend met ons vertrek uit Centurion met temperature van ses tot sewe grade om kwart oor vyf en minus twee grade wanneer ek en Pieter kwart oor ses opdaag by die Bronkhorstspruit Gholfklub. Daar is sowaar alreeds een entoesiastiese voëlkyker; Christiaan wat vinnig uitklim om te groet en dan vinnig weer in sy voertuig terugklim om die koue te besweer.

Die son sit skaars op die horison of ons word begroet met 'n stewige duiwe koor van 'WORK HARDER' en 'SIT-'N-BIETJIE-SOONTOE'. Dalk sêrie* hulle uit dankbaarheid vir die gholfjoggies

in die parkeerarea wat onder 'n boom in 'n groot kring om 'n lekker warm vuur sit.

Ses en twintig brawe voëlkykers daag op om die koue te trotseer en onder my en Pieter en Rion se leiding voëltjies te kyk. Koffie word gedrink voor ons begin.

Rion Lerm (bestuurslid van ons klub en nagraadse student by TUT) wat betrokke is by 'n bewaringsprojek waaronder die plan is om die plek te omhein, die rivier skoon te maak en voëlskuiling langs die rivier te bou, hou 'n kort inleidende praatjie. Die mense word in twee spanne ingedeel, een groep onder Pieter, en

een groep onder my en Rion se leiding. Die twee groepe begin stap in teenoorgestelde rigtings oor wit geyste gholfgrasperke al langs die Bronkhorstspruitrivier.

My tone en vingers verander spoedig in ysblokkies ten spyte van leerhandskoene en digte stewels. Ek beny die voëltjies wat goed aangepas is om die koue te trotseer en langs die rivierstroom sit en bak in die vroeë oggendson of reeds in die ysige water rondjaag agter kos aan. Swartkeelgeelvinke, Gewone Tortelduiker en Grootringduiwe is volop. So hier en daar ook 'n Rooiborsduif. Twee Afrikaanse Oewerswaels vlieg kris-kras oor die rivierstroompie en gaan sit op 'n tak op die oorkantste wal. Ek merk 'n Kaapse Rietsanger op teen die wal wat hom wonderbaarlik oop en bloot vir ons wys. 'n Rietduiker vlieg oor en gaan land ver stroom af. Kolganse en Bontkiewiete vlieg ook luidkeels oor. Onder 'n bruggie fladder 'n Rooikopvink inspekterend voor swaeltjieneste rond waarskynlik op soek na 'n geleentheid om in te kruip vir beskutting teen die vroeë oggendkoue. 'n Groep Rooivinke kom land op takke op die oorkantste wal. Daar is ook 'n paar Dikbekwewers, Vleitinktinkies en Gewone Kwikkies langs die stroom. 'n Groep besige Gewone Frette gaan sit op 'n struik oorkant die stroom. Rion merk nog 'n Kaapse Rietsanger op en dan interessant genoeg 'n Kleinrietsanger reg langs die Kaapse Rietsanger wat mekaar daar en dan ook verjaag. Ook hoor ons duidelik in die verte 'n hele paar Gryskopmeeue skree. 'n Gewone Bontrokkie en Bruinsylangstertjie word opgemerk teen die wal van die stroom asook 'n Bruinlyster wat in 'n boom gaan land.

Ons stap na 'n tweede bruggie wat ons moet oorsteek. 'n Lagie ys lê op die rubbermatte op die brug en ons moet versigtig trap. Oorkant die stroompie kom ons by lang en kort grasvelde en verskeie kere fladder-fladder Landerykloppies waarskuwend uit en gaan sit verder in die lang gras. Sonja, een van die groeplede, noem 'n interessante feit naamlik dat in Afrikaans 'n oulike onderskeid gemaak word, naamlik Tinktinkies (langerige stertjies) en Kloppies (kort stertjies), terwyl die Engelse benaming slegs praat van 'Cisticola'.

'n Rooineklewerik hardloop tussen die kort gras rond. Ons merk Kroonkiewiete op wat in die kort grasse rondstaan. Ons stap hoopvol nader aan 'n gebrande grasvlakte, maar vind dit heel verlate. Nadat ons nog 'n ent gestap het, merk Rion 'n groot groep Lelsprees op wat op 'n telefoondraad sit. 'n Witborskraai vlieg daar doer in die verte. Ook 'n Skoorsteenvēer en raserige Hadedas vlieg oor.

Rion het met sy aankoms 'n Vlei-uil gesien en hy stap oor die grasvlaktes na langerige gras waar hy meen die uil dalk kan skuil. Ongelukkig sonder sukses. Voor ons weer oor 'n brug terugstap, word Swartoogtiptolle gekry. Ons sien 'n Groot Waterhoender en Rooiwangmuisvoëls by 'n dam terwyl ons terugstap na die klubhuis toe.

Terug by die klubhuis verneem ek van Pieter dat sy groep interessante voëls gekry het wat ons nie gesien het nie. Byvoorbeeld die Witborsduiker, Slanghalsvoël, Blouwalke, Gewone Janfrederik, Gewone Koester en Swarteende, asook Grasvoëls wat deur Renate opgemerk is.

Ons word verwelkom met 'n warm kaggelvuur in die eetsaal waar ons 'n heerlike ontbyt nuttig. Op die proteïenryke spyskaart: maalvleis, hoenderlewer in 'n rissiesous, wors met 'n tamatie en uismoor, roereier, roosterbrood, broodrolletjies en koffie of tee.

Die voëllys wat ons na die ontbyt roep, lewer 'n goeie 49 voëls op. Graag wil ek namens almal vir Wanda op die programkomitee en ook vir Rion asook die Bronkhorstspruit Gholfklub bedank vir die interessante uitstappie wat ons so geniet het. Dit was 'n heerlike leersame ervaring en ek dink dat dit in die somer 'n fantastiese plek kan wees om weer so 'n uitstappie te reël.

**Amanda verduidelik: "Sêrie". Dit is studente "slang" wat kom van die woord "serenade". Dit het die manstudente voor die dameskoshuise gedoen of selfs voor die koshuisvader-/moeder se wonings. Daar word ook deesdae sêrie-konserte by skole of deur studente gehou. Die diuwe by Bronkhorstspruit het so in hul massas gekoer dat dit soos 'n koor geklink het en dit was nog nie behoorlik lig nie. Ek het eintlik die gevoel gekry dat hulle in die bitterkoue temperature dankbaar was oor die lekker groot vuur wat die gholfoggies gemaak het en dus 'n serenade gesing het. 🐦*

Easter Camp at Blaauboschpan Game Lodge

Edna Murphy

The lodge is situated south of Bloemhof, off the road to Christiana, surrounded chiefly by cattle farmers. We received a warm welcome from Wanda accompanied by Frik du Plooy as well as Amanda and Philip, Dalien and Danie, while Diana and Jenny were due to arrive later.

The weekend accommodation was a comfortable double room with a co-shared shower facility with a huge lockable patio surrounding all rooms leading down to the built in braai area. The braai area included provision of ample firewood. As a self-catering lodge, the kitchen is very well equipped for at least ten people right down to the thoughtfulness of a corkscrew.

The scene was set for a wonderfully relaxed birding weekend.

On the first afternoon we all dispersed in motor vehicles to discover the farm terrain, animals and bird life. We were saved at the waterhole by Danie who kindly pointed out that the mystery birds were in fact Wattled

Starlings without wattles. Good sightings of Violet-eared Waxbills, Red-headed and Scaly-feathered Finches, and Shaft-tailed Whydahs were easily recognised by the student birders.

Rhus (Searsia) lancea (Swart Karee) abounded in most of the flat sourveld grassland with a few alien blue gums and some acacias. The Blaauwbos, Blue-berry Bush, after which the farm is named, is seen in some areas. *Boscia albitrunca*, the Shepherd's Tree, is also dotted around the farm with a few alien Syringa berry trees. Hundreds of Golden Orb Spiders strung their securing web lines to chiefly *Acacia karoo*, Sweet Thorn, and *Acacia erioloba*, Camel Thorn, which is no wonder we drove rather than hiked since their orb web has been known to be strong enough to capture small birds.

The moon rose like a huge red rubber ball as the fire was being lit reflecting some of the sand particles in this dry area.

The following day 'Vinnige Frik', so named for travelling 120 km/h in a clearly demarked 80 km/h zone, led us toward the Sandveld Nature Reserve for our first integrated birding day.

Bloemhof Dam water looked like a golden pond illuminated by the rising sun.

We drove very slowly and stopped often to adding to our bird list including Crimson-breasted Shrike, White-browed Sparrowweaver, Goliath Heron, Cape Teals, Kalahari Scrub-Robin, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Northern Black Korhaan, amongst many more giving us a weekend total of over 160 different species.

The mammals were not disappointing with Sable Antelope, Vervet Monkey, Giraffe, Red Hartebeest, Zebra and White Rhino being seen.

A picnic lunch was enjoyed at the resort's facility where we were entertained by good sightings of the Acacia Pied Barbet as well as



Blaauboschpan BLNG group

the Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler. On the trip back to the lodge we were all supposed to meet at the Saltpan, but 'Vinnige Frik' disappeared on the horizon while Philip turned in at the Bloemhof service station centre.

The actively functional coarse salt retrieval operation at the Saltpan yielded its own birding species some of which are only to be found at a saltpan.

That evening Theuns, the farm owner, collected us for a game drive with 'Vinnige Frik' as co-driver. We sped off into the late afternoon light to visit his Barn Owl breeding house. En-route we were treated to a Serengeti-style migration chase across the veld with Blue Wildebeest and herds of antelope running for dear life, most probably thinking the trophy hunters were on board.

Wanda had arranged with Hennie du Toit of Christiana to escort us to the private farm of the Weideman family where we had been invited to join the family for breakfast. What a welcome from total strangers and what a wonderful spread of amazing boerekos. The jammerlappie (sad cloth) was passed around the table for a hand wipe prior to enjoying the feast.

Werner, the farm owner, took us all for a tour to his Barn Owl breeding sight and kindly spent some time explaining his carrot reaping machine as well as his environmentally friendly, natural farming additives.

Hennie led us off to the banks of the Vaal River on the farm, to see his bee keeping operation and to try and flush out the Grass Owl. Wanda, Hennie and Philip took off like stalwarts in the burning heat of the day into the grassland nearby. We waited patiently on standby with Mandy ably introducing us to the growing lucerne on the farm field with the calls of the African Fish Eagle cheering the owl hunters on.

The owl hunting team was returning when suddenly Philip was gesturing madly, so off we went to see his new binocular vision discovery, but alas to hear that the elderly Hennie had disappeared and was nowhere to be seen with his bright orange hat. He had fallen down a



Philip Calnikos

Temminck's Courser/Trekdrawwertjie

hole but thank heavens was strong enough to emerge overheated, ashen and tired. Not to be beaten physically by these younger townies he took us off to the farm dam and pump station where we hiked upstream to flush out the Easter Scrub Hare and see a number of new water birds.

Easter Sunday dawned and we undertook our promise to our hosts Theuns and Santie to make a bird checklist of the farm species. The most notable species were good sightings of both the Greater and Lesser Kestrels with very accommodating Temminck's Coursers.

We were joined at our last braai by our hosts and the final bird counts were tallied with the farm realising some nearly seventy different species.

Our dinner table held two new surprises. Philip and Mandy had gone to Christiana on the pretext of visiting some ancient family member's stomping ground but actually returned with pigeon sized Easter eggs while Santie had made us all an asynpoeding.

Sadly we all packed up the next morning to wend our ways back to the Gauteng area via a few hours of birding as we left, adding some further species to our lists.

Thank you to one and all for making this a very memorable Easter experience. 🐣

Musings on Mad Birding in Madagascar

Ingrid van Heerden

No country has a more appropriate name than Madagascar, because it is indeed a mad place and visitors who throw caution to the winds to travel through its varied landscapes are as mad as hatters.

It is difficult to define travel in Madagascar. One does not go there for a holiday unless you fly in to one of the exclusive lodges in the North-East which wraps tourists into a cocoon of luxury cutting them off from the hard realities of a country so impoverished that it makes Mozambique look like Manhattan.

Touring Mad is hard work, very hard work, and is probably best suited to strong young people under the age of 35, who hike, climb and dive regularly. Birding in Mad is also tough and you work very hard to see the incredible birds that hide out in little niches of unspoiled tropical, dry, or spiny forests or skulk besides the endless rice paddies that are rapidly swallowing up this lovely land. When one has at last struggled to the very top of the original 'slippery slope to hell' in the steaming forests of Ranomafana and you do get a decent sighting of Rufous-headed or Pitta-like Ground-Roller or even of that rare creature called a Grey Emutail, it takes your breath

away. And who can forget the sight and sound of the Cuckoo-Roller screeching at us out of the bright blue sky while we shuffled through the dry, deciduous forest in temperatures hot enough to addle our brains? Like childbirth, the horrors and pain and indignities of travelling in Mad are forgotten in those wonderful moments when you see these amazing birds and the endearing large-eyed mammals and chameleons.

Unspeakable ablutions

Madagascar has been called by many names (The Lost Heart of Africa, a Mini-Continent, The 4th Largest Island, etc.), including the rather uncomplimentary ones I thought up when I stood in the unmentionable leavings of the human race in the so-called toilets one is sometimes forced to use in this country. My acquaintance with these most primitive abluion facilities has convinced me that Dante must have visited Mad before he penned his 'Inferno'. Despite valiant efforts not to breathe the noxious vapours emanating from these portals to the nether world, I lost the mucous membranes inside my nose after the first few days, which was probably a blessing. I often also heaped maledictions on the French colonisers of this island for their cavalier attitude to hygiene. No wonder Mad is so primitive, what with the French and a more recent Communist regime – that's enough to strip a country and its resources to the very bone.

If you take on Mad, do so with a large supply of toilet paper and hand sanitiser, a sturdy peg or a gasmask and beef up your travel insurance. Despite precautions like drinking the bottled water supplied so thoughtfully by Birding Ecotours every day, most of the participants and even our guides developed what I call 'Cruel Queen Ranavalona's Revenge' or gyppo guts.



Ingrid van Heerden

Mike Nelson and Philip Calinikos

Guides are a Godsend

So if you are not under 35, very fit and strong, hardened to extreme heat, humidity, and highly unsanitary conditions, then don't go to Mad on a birding tour. You also need to speak French to stave off starvation and communicate with the flocks of local guides who are a godsend if you can make them understand what type of assistance you need.

Some of our guides had the most beautiful names. I still have very fond memories of Lala who pulled me up that hill in Perinet and thus helped me to see the Black and White Ruffed Lemurs reclining nonchalantly in a towering tree, munching scarlet blooms for their elevenses, while we poor sweating humans stood panting and dizzy with heat gazing up at some of our ancient ancestors.

Seraphim and Christian, two other guides at Ranomafana, were also amazing. The former prevented me from falling off the crumbly surrounds of the rice paddies into the ripe, rich mud that nurtures the rice seedlings (among other things), during the three attempts at 'The Great Madagascar Snipe Hunt' (see below) and the latter accompanying me on my return down the mountain after our efforts to see the elusive Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity. To make

this descent bearable we counted the endless wobbly, slippery steps – first in French 'Un, deux, troisdix' and then in English "one, two, three all the way to ten", over and over again until we reached the blessed strip of tarred road that winds through Parc Nationale de Ranomafana and skirts a rushing river providing a brief glimpse of the beauty of the natural tropical forests of Madagascar.

While we are on the subject of local guides it is important to note that they are more abundant than the lemurs! Besides Mike Nelson, our official birding and tour guide provided by Birding Ecotours (who deserves separate mention), we had whole troops of Madagascans aiding and abetting our travels on most days. There was dear Andriamora Toky Manasoa, who accompanied us everywhere to provide an essential interface or liaison between us and the authorities, the hotels, the parks and the population. He also filled us in on local habits, some of the history of the island and was a jolly good birder in his own right. With our trusty bus came Henri our driver, who negotiated the endless winding roads of varying quality (nothing so bad as to ruffle South Africans who have recently travelled the road between Lydenburg and Ohrigstad!) and a factotum Eric, who helped pack the luggage and on one horrid occasion my walking shoes onto the top of the bus. In the latter case this was to prevent all the passengers dying of asphyxiation. Ah the joys of Mad!

Whenever we stopped at a viewpoint or national park or rice paddy to scout for feathered friends, we were immediately joined by a bevy of local guides. In each case, they were headed up by a Senior Local Guide who was an expert on the area and could usually pinpoint the location of the eagerly sought after avian species we were hoping to see. In addition, there were the assistants who help to flush and drive the birds towards the tourists (a practice that I can understand, but could not get used to because for me this rather disturbing routine conjured up visions of hunting parties during the Raj). They also prop up frail birders like me with gammy knees to survive the pitfalls of the



Ingrid van Heerden

Birders transported in a Zebu cart

terrain and not get lost. It is logical that the use of these local guides is protected by government decree to help the local economy. In my opinion they were angels, not only in name, but also in deed and earned their remuneration over and over again.

Mike Nelson, Mad Birder par excellence

Mike Nelson, our official Birding Ecotours Guide, from Knoxville, Tennessee in the US of A, is one of the best birders and photographers and kindest human beings I have ever had the privilege to meet. Mike is a walking encyclopaedia of knowledge about birds, their calls, their habitats, the country one is visiting (he is accredited for guiding from Alaska to Papua New Guinea), and every aspect of travelling that can make one's experience more insightful, pleasant and rewarding. To see him loping off into the jungle, blond pigtail bobbing under his peaked cap, while toting a massive load of photographic, recording and ocular equipment, bird books, and emergency supplies of potable water, or standing up to his knees in a rice paddy trying to find the elusive Madagascar Snipe for the umpteenth time, was always an amazing experience. He was always cheerful, polite and helpful. Always up to date with his information regarding the endless arrangements and rearrangements of the tour, the accommodation, the food, the currency, and the birds and beasts. If you ever get the chance to go on a tour with Mike as your guide, grab the opportunity, these special events happen only once or twice in a lifetime. If you want to see examples of his meticulous modus operandi, visit his Flickr link* and feast your eyes on the birds he has photographed and recorded, including most of the birds we saw in Mad.

A tsunami of impressions

It is impossible to recount the waves of wonderful and unpleasant impressions that constituted our 14 day visit to Mad in these few short pages. Some of my favourite things were those first two days of wonder when we visited

the Perinet Indri Reserve and the Mantadia National Park. I had this eerie feeling as if we had joined Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and everything was new and special and exciting. It's like the first few outings as a novice birder when every sparrow is lovingly recorded. In those two days we saw so many new species with exotic names like Ground-Roller, Coua, Asity, Vanga, Blue Pigeon, Vasa Parrot and a host of Madagascar morphs of birds that occur on the parent continent of Africa. When in doubt in Mad, just look confident and say, "Oh, that's a Madagascar X or Y" and you will probably be correct most of the time.

For me, the fact that the forests in these reserves and surrounding our hotel echoed with the haunting calls of the indri, a large lemur, also kitted out in elegant black and white fur, made our visit to the Andasibe region unique. To sit on the steps of our little wooden chalets as the heat of the day slowly dissipated and the relief of evening stole over the lush gardens of the Eulophiella Lodge and hear those eerie cries recalling a time much closer to our origins than we as a species remember, was pure magic. I carry the indris around with me thanks to Mike who loaded his recording of an indri in full cry onto my cellphone and every time it is activated, my heart skips a beat and I am back in Mad with my beloved lemurs.

Probably my favourite moment on the tour was on one of the last days when we were exploring the wonders of the spiny forest near Ifaty with its amazing spiky octopus trees and strangely shaped, slender baobabs. It was mind-blowingly early (non-negotiable because all our viewing had to be completed by about 10:30 before the merciless sun in this Western part of Mad would have fried us alive) and as we stumbled through the soft, red sand of the tourist track, I tried hard to justify this entire adventure in my befuddled, sleep-deprived mind. And then we came to a baobab and there were a row of seven Subdesert Mesites peering at us in utter horror that we could appear at such an early hour. It was so comical. I could hear those birds with their long beaks saying to each other, "What do these humans want? We

have not even had a chance to preen our feathers or sip some dew and here they are already taking photos of us in our deshabelle!" The Hooked-Billed Vanga peeping out of her nest in a baobab tree, which had the most beautifully patterned bark, was another joy to behold and suddenly I too was awake and happy to have experienced this very special early morning outing. Our total haul for the few short hours we spent in the spiny forest came to 12 species, done and dusted.

A desert isle and a disturbed luncheon

Our visit to the tiny island of Nosy Ve (not to confused with Nosy Be which is in the North and very upmarket) on the Western side of Mad near the town of Tulear, was probably the day with the most varied emotions of our tour. It was highly stressful, breathtakingly beautiful and chillingly hazardous for some. The stressful bits were partly due to the mode of transport used to ferry us to and from our boat. Patient Zebu cattle were used to pull the rickety carts which we gingerly sat on out to the boats. The beasts struggled through the waves until they were standing chest-deep in the salty water. For those of us who love animals and have active imaginations like me, this was pure torture. I would have rather waded out to the boat than allowed these patient beasts to stand in the sea water all day developing all manner

of foot rot and not being able to slake their raging thirst. The second rather problematic aspect was that travelling by boat on the bosom of the deep may unsettle individuals who suffer from balance problems. My heart bled for those intrepid members of our group who suffer from such maladies and had to put up with the choppy seas and the wildly bobbing boat. But seasoned birders are made of stern stuff and we all survived the trip to the sandy little island and lived to tell the tale.

The island itself consists of a thin strip of dazzlingly white sandy beach and some low sandy humps covered in spiky bushes under which the glorious Red-tailed Tropicbirds make their nests. Just to watch these masters of the sky come swooping in out of the sun and then tuck themselves under the umbrella of their home bush was worth all the prior agonies. The Tropicbirds were just so beautiful and free and their lovely offspring looked like large snowflakes under the knobbly grey bushes – what a joy!

In addition to the Tropicbirds, we were also spoiled with sightings of Crab Plover, Greater and Lesser Crested Terns, White-fronted Plover, a Madagascar Cisticola on an outing to the beach, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey Plover, a Kelp Gull and Dimorphic Egrets. The latter appear to be found all over Mad, from Tana to Nosy Ve.

The hazardous part of the adventure was provided by the snorkelling exercise which all the brave birders (age notwithstanding), except me, participated in. Thanks to the inexperience of the extremely young dive master my fellow birders were dropped off in an area where there was supposed to be a good reef and before you could say; "Tropicbird", they were being swept away on a strong current. The dive master had his work cut out to rescue those birders who were not strong enough to swim against the current and hoist themselves back into the boat. For once my lack of sporting ability proved to be a great advantage, but it was an unsettling experience to see Steve, who is a strong swimmer, battling against the current. The injury he sustained to his thumb, has



Ingrid van Heerden

Happy birders in the bus

thankfully been resolved after a repair to his torn tendon and lots of TLC.

But birders are made of sterner stuff as became more and more evident on this adventurous day and we continued by boat to one of the most attractive settings for a beach hotel I have ever seen. Our lunch at Anakao at the Safari Vesu Hotel was straight out of those travel brochures which feature balmy climes, white beaches, thatched umbrellas, azure seas and bars where weary sea dogs come to exchange improbable tales over a pint of rum!

What should have been a relaxed luncheon after our exertions of the morning, kept on being disturbed by sightings of special birds. No sooner had we sat down and the waitresses were taking our orders for drinks, than there was a shout of "Littoral Rock Thrush" and all of us rushed outside for a wonderful view of this

iconic species. Then when we had received our drinks and tasty fish kebabs, someone yelled, "Sakalava Weavers" and an avalanche of birders clutching binocs flowed out of the dining room again to feast their eyes on these birds that look like orange bon-bons. The final avian interruption occurred as the dessert was being served when the call "Madagascar Buttonquail" echoed through the room. It was really such a treat to see these quaint little birds parading around like tiny tame chickens on the white sand between the contorted grey shrubs that constitute the garden in this desert landscape. Ah, I would love to return to that beautiful place where the spiny forest meets the sea and the special birds all come to lunch.

Hunting of the Snipe

As promised earlier in this abbreviated report, our visit to Mad was typified by what I called "The Hunting of the Snipe" episodes, which occurred at regular intervals. As usual, Mad has its own Snipe, and everyone in our group wanted to add this tick to the list. When we reached Ranomafana and surrounds the hunt commenced. Initially we spent a few hours teetering on the crumbly walls of the rice paddies in the area while the beaters with the ecclesiastical names and Mike tried to flush the birds out for us. When a bird did whiz over our heads nearly causing us to topple over into the glutinous mud we were 'guttered' as the Ozzies say, to be told that this was a Greater Painted Snipe and not our prized Mad quarry. I take my hat off to anyone who can Id. a bird at that speed. Thereafter, whenever we had a spare hour or so, off we would go to 'Hunt the Snipe' which remained totally elusive and resisted all attempts to find it. Eventually I started getting that Lewis Carroll feeling whenever anyone said the word 'Snipe'. It can thus be said that the BLNG group remained 'Snipe-less' for the entire trip.

Derailed too!

Our group also managed to get thoroughly "Derailed"! At one stage during



Birders hunting the elusive snipe



Ingrid van Heerden

our explorations we climbed down another slippery slope to a marshland to look for the Madagascar Rail and other wetland birds. After what felt like hours of standing in the boiling sun, a few of us less hardy souls creaked up the hill and returned to the bus to cool off slightly.

From this elevated position we watched in delight as a band of Ring-tailed Lemurs appeared on the banks of the stream leading into the marsh. Although these lemurs are not indigenous to the area, Toky told us that because the surrounding land was a private reserve, the species had been imported to boost tourism. This was soon illustrated when some boats came drifting down the river and the jolly lemurs with their zebra tails leaped aboard to mingle with the guests and receive offerings of fruit. The contrast between the cool, relaxed visitors in the boats who were in touch with some of the most endearing fauna of the island and the rest of our group who continued their search of the marshland getting hotter and sweatier by the moment, was great.

We had already had the most satisfying sighting of White-throated Rail on our first day at Perinet, but our marshland adventure left us totally “derailed” and filled me with an insatiable desire to see more lemurs close up. To this end I very nearly derailed Chris Lotz, the owner of Birding Ecotours and one of SA’s leading ornithologists, who joined us on our tour and contributed greatly to the fun and enjoyment.

When at a later stage, Chris informed me solemnly that we would not see any more lemurs, I threatened to put a Mediterranean curse on him which would come into effect if he did not find me one more species of these wonderful creatures.

The next day as we plodded through the spiny forest near Ifaty, I regularly turned around and fixed this dear man with a baleful eye. I could see he was getting more and more nervous as the morning progressed. But lemurs are gallant creatures and what should we discover high up in an octopus tree clutching a little bundle of fur in its mouth, but a White-footed Sportive Lemur. The bundle of fur was a baby, which totally delighted me and instantly nullified the curse. Chris was saved, even if only at the 11th hour!

L’envoi

Ah I could write for hours about the mysterious Island of Madagascar and our adventures searching for rare birds and animals for 14 days, which will always retain a slightly surrealistic aura for me. There are so many special events and places that should be mentioned, so many very special and unique birds, the Great Coua who came to join us at our picnic at Zombitse, the chameleons both large and small, the strange rock-formations at Isalo, or the wonderful luxury of the Les Dunes d’Ifaty hotel, the food, the people, the climate, those carbo-laden breakfasts before the crack of dawn, our team of dedicated helpers from Chris, Mike and Toky all the way to Eric and the local guides in every area, but time does not permit me to ramble on and on. It was magic and it was tough – and if I could, I would return to that Mad Island torn from the heart of Africa, because it also captured my heart, like a favourite child, no matter how hard the labour, all is forgotten afterwards and only the wonder remains.

*Mike (Madbirder) Flickr Link:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/madbirder/sets/72157637682873454/> 📷



Ingrid van Heerden

Brave birders en route to Nosy Ve

Namibia Birding: 10 March – 1 April 2014

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

During 2013 we had planned a long overdue birding trip to Namibia, but it was not to be. When we planned 2014 it looked promising. So I dusted off the programme we had made. Our programme was based on birding hotspots, guided by Cohen, C., Spottiswood, C., Rossouw, J. 2006. *Southern African Birdfinder*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town.

On 10 March 2014 we left at 05:30 after having packed and loaded the off-road trailer and SUV. We passed through Zeerust and on to the Lobatse Border post on the Trans-Kalahari Highway. We stopped at Kalahari Rest, 21 km West of Kang, where we booked into a chalet, had a drink and some supper and did some superficial birding, casually ticking species, including a juvenile Crowned Eagle, Red-billed Francolin, Ant-eating Chat and others. On the second day stretch, we wanted to reach Windhoek, with the next border crossing Botswana – Namibia at Buitepos included. Stopping at some of the most welcome picnic spots next to the road, we saw Icterine Warbler singing sweetly, Red-backed Shrike, Cape Crow and a number of other birds.

Again, we were lucky with the border crossing and within 40 minutes we were in Namibia. We stopped at the Daan Viljoen Reserve, West of Windhoek for 3 nights of camping. The camp sites and specifically the ablutions are truly magnificent and 5-star quality, most modern and immaculately clean, a mere 30 km outside of Windhoek. African Scops Owl, and Pearl-spotted Owlet serenaded for us at night. The next day we got down to some serious birding. Lesser Masked Weavers were at the reception area in large numbers in the Camel Thorn tree, Ostrich were walking the camp-site, with White-browed Sparrow-weavers everywhere in their tatty nests.

It became clear to us that the breeding season had commenced later in Namibia than

at home. On walking we saw Diederik Cuckoo, Fork-tailed Drongo, Cinnamon-breasted and Cape Bunting. Then on our first walk, mother-luck struck and we saw Carp's Tit, very busy all over the trees, calling and flitting about busily. This was followed by Marico Flycatcher, Brubru, Black-faced Waxbill, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Familiar Chat, Black Cuckoo, Groundscraper Thrush displaying and singing beautifully. Acacia Pied Barbets were very active, calling frequently, European Roller sitting openly on trees and Bearded Woodpeckers were hammering their staccato messages against tree trunks. Mountain Wheatear, Common Scimitarbill and African Red-eyed Bulbuls accompanied us. A very pretty sighting was a Shaft-tailed Whydah. On a late afternoon walk, we saw a Verreaux's Eagle Owl perched patiently on a low rock and surveying its surroundings.

The next day saw us again walking and also driving the circular 4x4 route which as not at all difficult we were treated to some more specials: Monteiro's Hornbill called and flew past and perched in a tree some distance away. This was a lifer we had hoped for. We also saw Great Spotted Cuckoo, and a Barred Wren-Warbler entertained us with its screeching "free-drink,



Groundscraper Thrush singing

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

free-drink" call (it had obviously forgotten the other parts of the calls recorded on the Roberts PDA). It was calling overhead, but it drove us almost insane to spot it. Then we had another super sighting: a Cape Penduline Tit at a nest site, the nest light-grey and finely constructed from what looked like spiderweb, well camouflaged with a false entrance and the true entrance being a flap that it lifted to enter the nest. A welcome and unplanned lifer.

Reluctantly, we left for our next destination: Bernabe de la Bat camp in the Waterberg Plateau Park, South-east of Otjiwarongo. Then we saw rain precipitation in the distance. We had planned to also camp at Bernabe de la Bat... not exactly a pleasant thought with the soil wet. We turned off the main road, onto the C22 to Okakarara and shortly thereafter the heavens opened and it rained heavily. Some ± 50 km later we turned off on to the gravel road to the Waterberg Plateau Park. Gravel road? It was more like a low river with mud tracks. I engaged 4-wheel drive and we slid along the 18-odd km to the Park. Our SUV and off-road trailer were splashed with mud from top to toe. We stopped to look at the camp site. Well... it was very wet. We then opted for a chalet (N\$1080 per night, BB).



Neilhand Graf vom Durchheim

Monteiro's Hornbill/ Monteirose Neushoringvoël

We were still enjoying a cosy drink when the rain had momentarily stopped when we heard parrots calling, very close to our chalet. We grabbed our binoculars and dashed outside. At first I thought we were seeing Meyer's Parrot, but then I saw the marked differences. No yellow on the front/forehead and distinct blue on the bottom and belly. Here was our next lifer, Rüppell's Parrot. I went back to get the camera, but on my return they had left. We saw Rüppell's Parrot on three more occasions on the trip (Kunene, Brandberg and Spitzkoppe) but on neither occasion could I get a photo.

We slept dry and comfortable and went for a paid game drive up the plateau the next day. The drive was pleasant but no new birds showed, although we had good sightings of Bradfield's Hornbill, Violet-backed Starlings, Rock Kestrel, Crimson-breasted Shrike. The guide gave us some advice about where to find the Rockrunner and Hartlaub's Spurfowl. We followed his advice and walked a trail along the western side of the escarpment. It was not an easy route with many boulders to climb. We saw plenty of Pale-winged Starlings as well as some more Rüppell's Parrots and Rosy-faced Lovebirds. On playing the calls on the PDA the Rockrunners responded but despite all efforts we never got to see them. The same went for Hartlaub's Spurfowl, which we also 'dipped'. The Park has a wonderful setting with the sheer cliffs of the plateau towering above the camp, with the chalets closest to the plateau.

We birded in the camp and came up with a number of good sightings: Karoo Eremomela showed as a welcome lifer. We also saw Grey-backed Cameroptera, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Kalahari Scrub-Robin and others. On the last day, and shortly before leaving, we spotted Bradfield's Swift.

We left for Etosha with good memories and an empty purse. We passed by Otjiwarongo, fuelled up and drew some cash. The drive to Etosha was pleasant. We entered Andersson's gate and drove on to Okaukueji and from there to Halali, the camp in the

centre of Etosha, where we had booked a camping site for 4 nights. We had some good sightings on the way: Black-bellied Bustard, Crowned Plover, Kori Bustard and others.

The next day we started birding seriously. The greater camp area came up with some good sightings: Greater Blue-eared Starling, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Wood Sandpiper at the waterhole, and Red-billed Hornbill. An African Hobby showed well and was a good addition to our list. Purple Roller, Little Sparrowhawk and Red-billed Buffalo-weaver were in the camp. Then we heard a cackling sound and had two of our 'wish-list' sighting in succession: a group of Violet Wood-Hoopoe were moving around inside the campsite, in trees and on the ground. This lifer was so easy to spot, we almost felt it was too easy! Some birds had an almost black bill, just the base of the bill was red. Thereafter, we saw the Bare-cheeked Babblers we hoped to see – or did we mistake them? After closer inspection, they turned out to be juvenile Southern White-crowned Shrikes by their dark eyes, different colouration and lack of the babbler calls. What a disappointment! We never got to see these babblers at Halali, although from previous reports, they were an almost guaranteed tick. (We only managed to see them at Kunene River Lodge later on). We saw really large numbers of birds at Etosha, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Red-capped Lark, Greater Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Rufous-naped Lark and a number of others. We decided to make an early morning start and drive to the North of Okaukuejo camp, which is reputed as the 'Lark Capital'. En route from Halali, luck struck again and we spotted Ludwig's Bustard, a bird we had been trying to locate since years – happiness is finding such a tick. It was rather far off though. Also on the way, some 12 km east of Okaukuejo we saw Rufous-eared Warbler sitting on low scrub vegetation, but the wind was very strong and my attempts to get a photo failed. We were very happy about this lifer. At Okaukuejo we saw Red-headed Finch and Capped Wheatear in fair numbers.

Driving North towards Okondeka, we were treated to some superb displays; a number of Eastern Clapper Larks were performing for us, climbing up into the sky steeply while constantly wing-snapping, then opening and spreading their wings and dropping down like a dive-bomber calling weeeee-tshirreo. We could have stayed to watch all day, this was one of our highlights. Another nice tick was Pink-billed Lark also around the 'Lark Capital'. We also saw African Pipit, Temminck's Courser, Double-banded Courser, Scaly-feathered Finch and Sociable Weavers on the trip.

We entered camp, deciding to have sundowners at the flood-lit waterhole. After a short while, heavy rain came pouring down and we dashed for our off-road trailer tent where we sat and waited for the rain to subside. After 4 nights we departed from Halali, having seen very few mammals: Black Rhino, Cape Fox, Springbok, Oryx, Eland, Blue Wildebeest, Plains Zebra and four Cheetah, not to forget the Honey Badger which trotted through the camp from dusk to dawn and overturned all rubbish bins. We concluded that with the good rains, the mammals were dispersing and did not need to come to the waterholes. We drove north-east, via Namutoni Camp and saw a number of waterbirds and waders in the pans next to the road: Pied Avocet and Black-winged Stilts in good numbers, as well as Black-backed Puffback, Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove, African Wattled Lapwings and a number of Blue Cranes.



Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

Double-banded Courser/Dubbelbanddrawwertjie

We drove through Ovamboland, passed Ondangwa and Oshakati where we fuelled up, drew money at the bank and pushed on, direction Ruacana. The distance to be covered that day was 570 km. We had misjudged the road. Every few kilometres, there was a village and we had to slow down to 60 km/h. We just could not maintain a steady speed and our fuel consumption went through the roof. Having arrived at Ruacana, we fuelled up again, this being the last reliable fuel station before exiting civilisation. The road to Swartbooisdrif (sorry for the mistake, did I say ROAD?) was rough and 4x4 country for many parts. Maximum speed approx. 45 km/h, the terrain was very hilly at first, the road went steeply up and steeply down, for kilometres on end. After some 35-40 km, we hit a river crossing. I got out to survey the crossing. The water was flowing quite strongly and I could not judge the depth. A bombed-out police bakkie appeared, the driver wearing an old T-Shirt, who looked puzzled, charged into the crossing, the water reaching a third up his door and scurried on. Well... I engaged 4-wheel-drive high ratio and drove steadily and consistently through the wide crossing, the off-road trailer behind throwing up the water dramatically. We arrived at Kunene River Lodge well past 20:00, rather tired and hungry. We had booked three nights' camping. Well, at this time of the night, I was not going to pitch camp, not for all the beer in Windhoek! The management was kind enough to swap out one night camping for a chalet, with us only having to pay the difference.

The next day we pitched camp, after going out on early-morning birding. We birded in the camp as well as either side on the banks of the Kunene River. This was very productive and we spotted a number of lifers; Red-necked Spurfowl, Chestnut Weaver, and the 'real' Bare-cheeked Babblers, inside camp, but not only that, they sat on the outside mirrors of my vehicle, issuing their typical babbler call. They were allo-preening each other on low branches right next to our camp-site. We also saw the sought after Rufous-tailed Palm-Thrush inside

the camp. It was calling and singing sweetly. What a day! We were jubilant!

We also saw African Golden Oriole, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Woodland Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Greenbul which were very vocal and calling all over the camp, Swamp Boubou was sitting on its nest breeding a few metres away from the kitchen door in some dense palm scrub.

Several of the birder groups had booked guided walks with Pete to spot the Cinderella Waxbill, a local special, which we also wished to see dearly. Two groups went out, at different times, but none of them saw the Waxbill. We tried as the third group and despite Pete's best efforts, we were unsuccessful. Pete mentioned, that after the recent strong rains and many grasses seeding, that the Waxbills might have left their territory for another. Also, he speculated, whether the Waxbills had high mortality rates during the past three years of drought. We shall have to return to hunt for this Kunene special.

We also saw Meves's Starling, White-browed Coucal, Madagascar (Olive) Bee-eater, Grey-rumped Swallow and another lifer, the White-tailed Shrike, which Pete claimed, was closer to a Batis than a Shrike.

In all, Kunene River Lodge can be recommended for its birding and accommodation. This camp is right on the bank of the Kunene River and the views are spectacular. I recommend not to tackle the road with a sedan vehicle, a high ground clearance and 4x4 is desirable.



Heithrad Graf von Dürckheim

White-tailed Shrike/ Kortstertlaksman

Pete recommended not to take the route to Ruacana but rather the road from Swartbooisdrif via Epembe to Opuwo, which they travel every week to do their purchases. Pete warned us to be careful at the many dips in the road, which are formed by the very hilly terrain. All went well until we saw the road covered by water from one of the dry river beds. Rain had fallen in the catchment area and turned one dry river bed into a 30 metre wide obstacle. I saw rocks sticking out downstream and drove downhill to the sandbank at the water's edge. Kathrin got out to test the water: when it very soon reached her shorts, she turned back. I tried to reverse, but the break of my trailer locked and the SUV just dug into the sand. My newly purchased sand mats looked very good but proved useless – the wheels just kept spinning on them. The off-road trailer was too heavy to uncouple and turn by hand, despite some local folk assisting us. Then another vehicle arrived behind us and the gentleman was so kind to tow the off-road trailer back up from my vehicle and assist me with a kinetic strap to get out of the sand. The gentleman then decided to test the depth of the water. The water was just under the top of his shoulder at the deepest point and he said there were many loose rocks.

At 15:30 we turned back, past Kunene River lodge and on to Ruacana. The river crossing we had negotiated four days earlier was decidedly deeper and the current was a lot stronger. Whilst I was discussing the matter with a kindly gentleman who was working at a road repair camp, two local Himbas appeared, walked into the water and beckoned us to drive where they showed us. The water was deep enough to wet their shorts... I engaged 4-wheel drive high ratio and drove steadily and consistently, keeping the revs high to avoid choking the vehicle as the exhaust was well below the water line. We made it, but Kathrin was somewhat paler and very quiet. After two hours we reached Ruacana, fuelled up and pushed on towards Kamanjab on the C35, the first 85 km being under construction and with detours virtually all the way. At last,

after many more hours of driving, we reached Opuwo in streaming rain, the GPS did not negotiate us to the lodge and we had to ask some friendly police officials who guided us.

We pushed on the next day after breakfast to Brandberg. Yes, we wanted to see the 'White Lady' San rock paintings (it is actually not a white lady but a male shaman). Brandberg is also a prime birding destination. We did some birding on the way and spotted Steppe Buzzard and South African Cliff Swallow. The next morning saw us out birding before first light. There were large numbers of Stark's Lark calling and flying about the peculiar rock outcrops which so characterise that area. A nice lifer to tick. There were large numbers of Lark-like Bunting, Mountain Wheatear and Grey-backed Sparrowlarks in the early morning coolness and the early morning light before the sun appeared had a special quality. Then on one of the higher rocky koppies, we saw and laboriously identified a Karoo Long-billed Lark. The weeeeeoooo call certainly helped us with the identification. We also saw Karoo Chat, Cape Bunting and others. In the camp, not far from our 'luxury tent' we saw our first Damara Hornbill. Kathrin decided to stay in camp after lunch. We were a bit concerned about the safety of our belongings as all our toothpaste, toothbrushes, showergel and other goodies had been scattered all over the bathroom, which was only an enclosed wall, with no roof, behind which the donkey boiler was fired by the staff. The intruder promptly arrived again and to Kathrin's amazement, a large Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill flew in, chewed on our toothpaste tubes and attacked its own image in the mirror!

In the meanwhile I drove back onto the road to Uis, as I hoped to see Herero Chat. This trip was very rewarding. I saw an Augur Buzzard flying about over some higher lying ridges, I saw the Herero Chat and then I heard another 'Long-billed Lark' calling. I stopped and took out the binoculars, it looked a lot lighter than the Karoo Long-billed Lark we had seen that morning. A vehicle stopped, and to my pleasure, it had WWF markings, one of

the gentlemen being a keen birder. We went through a 30 minute process of identification and elimination, using three different bird books and concluded that we were looking at a Benguela Long-billed Lark. I was thrilled. We also saw a 'Bradfield's Lark' (later I was told that the bird had not yet been split as a separate species).

The next morning we were out again at first light, this time to take the 50 minute walk to the 'White Lady' rock painting site. It was a pleasant walk so early in the morning, crisp and fresh and we only saw one more visitor later on, the mandatory guide having caught up with us halfway up to the site. On the way back we saw four Rüppell's Parrots, but before I got the camera out of the rucksack, they were gone again. We also saw Dusky Sunbird and others.

Our next destination was Erongo Mountain. We stayed at Onduruquea Guest Farm. There is some good birding to be had and we saw Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Shikra, Jacobin Cuckoo and a host of other birds we had seen before. We also got good pictures of a Damara Hornbill. The next day we travelled to the Erongo Mountains, not far away. The round rocky domes of the mountains are very impressive and the bush in the reserve was green and dense. We birded on the route along the mountain and saw Black-crowned Tchagra, Tawny Eagle, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Klaas's Cuckoo and got some pictures of Monteiro's Hornbill. We had hoped to see Hartlaub's Spurfowl, but unfortunately dipped it.

The last birding spot we wanted to visit was Spitzkoppe. We were prepared up-front; campsites with only a fireplace and a longdrop toilet in the vicinity, no water, no electric power points. After some mishaps, we found a nice site next to a sheer cliff face under a Camel Thorn tree *Acacia/Vachellia erioloba* which supplied shade for most of the day.

At first light the next morning we drove to the western side of the Spitzkoppe, parked the vehicle and birded on foot. The absolute beauty of the surroundings was stunning. The

early morning light had a very special quality, even when the sun rose some time later it was obscured by the high mountain peaks and the area was covered in shade. Silky Bushman Grass and small shrubs, many with delicate yellow flowers dominated the vegetation. We birded along the foot of the mountain and over the western plains. Larks, larks and again larks showed; Monotonous Lark were all over, sitting exposed on shrubs and trees, calling a somewhat different call than I had heard in SA. Stark's Lark were everywhere to be seen, we also saw Black-chested Prinia and many Grey-backed Sparrowlarks and Lark-like Buntings.

There was a signboard, directing visitors to the area, where Herero Chat can best be spotted. In that vicinity we were also lucky and spotted one bird perching on a very low shrub, the streaky breast and belly showing. We took some pictures of Chestnut Weavers in full breeding activity, building nests in such numbers that some Camel Thorn trees were full of them, the inflorescence of the Silky Bushman Grass protruding from the nests.

We returned for breakfast and then in the heat of the midday, drove out on to the road to Henties Bay. We were surprised about the large numbers of birds to be seen at this time of day. We saw Sclater's Lark (we were very lucky) and again Stark's Lark was so abundant,



Heinrich Graf von Dürckheim

Rüppell's Korhaan/ Rüppellse Korhaan



*Magical
Spitzkoppe in
Namibia*

with its diagnostic crest and a creamy/almost yellowish rump when flying off. We had long given up hope to see Rüppell's Korhaan, it was just too hot. At 12:29 in the heat of the day Kathrin spotted a single bird. After taking some pictures, we drove back onto the gravel road to Spitzkoppe. Kathrin saw more Rüppell's Korhaan, this time a pair with two chicks, which were carefully shaded by the adults and partially obscured by the grass. We took pictures of this welcome lifer, the camera showing the time as 13:12 up to 13:26, right in the heat of day. I could not believe our luck. To crown our luck, we managed to spot Gray's Lark on the return trip, after having unsuccessfully looked for it at Brandberg. What a day! We returned at 14:00 and as nobody was at the showers at that time of day we had a very pleasant shower and returned to our camp site. That afternoon we drove around the area and admired the absolute beauty of

the natural surroundings, despite their dry harshness.

We had had an excellent birding trip and we enjoyed the relaxation over sundowners with our lantern pointed towards the rocks, providing indirect light.

The next day we drove East direction Gobabis. We were following the rains, heavy cumulus clouds were in front of us, the road was wet. As the last bird on this trip we spotted Common Swift. We arrived back in Pretoria two days later, after having slept over at Buitepos in Namibia and Jwaneng in Botswana, having travelled 6,443 km. Despite her initial doubts, and her telling me that she really is not a camper, Kathrin managed very well in the off-road trailer. We had spent some quality time birding, spotting 192 species on the trip, with 29 lifers. Of our initial 'wish-list' of 32 birds, we managed to see 22. We will have to return some other day for the 10 dips. 🐾

What makes migrant birds depart on migration?

The main impulse for departure both from winter quarters and breeding grounds is tiny changes in day length, which affect the bird's brain. The brain triggers the bird's endocrine system to produce hormones that stimulate it to prepare for the long journey ahead – for example, by feeding hard in order to build up fat reserves. Even cage birds may show signs of restlessness during spring and autumn, when migration is in the air.

Dekselse Demone

Salomi Louw

Na vorige besoeke aan Namibië wat die Caprivi en die Noorde tot by Walvisbaai gedek het, het ek gedink dié keer gaan verken ek die suid-weste. Ek was nog nie voorheen in Lüderitz of Sossusvlei/Sesriem nie.

Vyf keer binne vier jaar se besoeke aan Namibië is miskien bietjie dik vir 'n daalder en dis waarom esoteriese kragte my omring het met demoniese gebeure. Terwyl ek in Karasburg met die pompjoggie praat, steel kinders my vanuit die ander oop venster. Van nou af hou ek my vensters dig in 'n dorp. Die eerste dag by Canyon Lodge kry ek die Karoolangbeklewerik duidelik in die oog en stap spesiaal die volgende dag weer die klipkoppies in om hom met geluid te roep sodat ek 'n foto kan neem: die Robertsprogram op my PDA is uitgewis. Geen foto van dié voël nie!

Van Ai-Ais af ry ek met die C37 na die Gariep en volg die roete na Rosh Pinah oor die klipperige pad langs die rivier. Die wa het nog genoeg brandstof vir 790 km. Na sowat 50 km kom ek agter die verbruikersgids bly staan op 7,7 ℓ/100 km, of ek nou vinnig of stadig ry. Die brandstofwyser daal ook onrusbarend vinnig. Ek hou stil en klim uit. Agter my lê 'n nat streep sover ek gery het, diesel gemeng met stof bedek die wa só dat die agterruite nie eens sigbaar is nie, en die hele onderstel is sopnat. Nou ry ek vinnig sodat ek Rosh Pinah kan haal – of so na moontlik – voor die brandstof klaar is. Die waarskuwingsliggie gaan aan, maar ek hou my voet op die pedaal deur die sand en dongas wat hulle 'driwwe' noem, verby myne waar hulle werk dat die stofwolke die lug donker maak. Toe die groen teken van die brandstofpomp aankom, besef ek my kans is verby en hou stil waar 'n myn redelik naby die pad is en stap soontoe. Hier sal tog seker 'n werktuigkundige wees, dink ek, maar dis 'n 'doeie myn'. Net drie jong mans wat die voorraad oppas, is beskikbaar en hulle weet niks van motors af nie. Dis so afgesonder hier dat hulle nie radio- of

selfoonontvangs het nie. Terug by die wa stop ek die eerste voertuig wat verbykom. Dis buitelandse toeriste wat beswaarlik Engels kan praat. Na 'n lang verduideliking onderneem hulle om in Rosh Pinah na 'n garage te gaan en te vra dat 'n insleepvoertuig gestuur word. Ek wag. Die ure gaan (on)rustig verby.

Drie uur later kom 'n tweede bakkie aangery in die regte rigting. Ek stop hulle met dieselfde versoek. Nou sit ek maar en lees. Ironies genoeg is die enigste twee leesboeke wat ek by my het *Afstande* deur Dan Sleight en *Infamy* (John Toland); heel gepaste titels. Dan kom die een Ovambo, die 'supervisor', by my hurk en gesels. Later stap ons, geweer in sy hand, na die rivier waar ek hom bekend stel aan die Visarend – van wie hy die geluid herken as omroepsein vir die Namibiese Omroepdiens, maar nog nooit kon eien nie. Hier gee ek 'n eko-les oor Kokerboom, Naaldekoker, Rooivlerkstreepkoppie en Draaikewers, onder andere.

Nadat ek meer as vyf uur gestrand was, daag die enigste polisievoertuig wat op Rosh Pinah gestasioneer is, op. Hulle mag my nie insleep nie. Een van die polisiemanne het 'n bakkie en sal my kom insleep, maar ek moet



Vaalstreepkoppie/ Lark-like Bunting

Salomi Louw



Woestynspekvreter/ *Tractrac Chat*

eers saam die 45 km na die dorp toe om geld te trek sodat die Ovambo, Nico, petrol kan ingooi, en sommer 'n werktuigkundige genaamd Cowboy oplaai. Teen donker is ons terug by my wa en Nico se 1600-bakkie begin die swaar VW Transporter 2.5 sleep. Hy het aanvanklik lekker gelag toe ek op pad dorp toe ge-oe het vir die diep driwwe, maar nou kom hy agter hoekom: die sleeptou breek 'n paar keer; en teen een steilte spin sy wiele en ons begin almal agteruit beweeg. Cowboy, wat agter die wa se stuur sit terwyl ek saam met Nico ry, het aanvanklik die alarm- en hoofligte aan, maar die battery raak pap. Rosh Pinah is 'n myndorpie en die storie het gou versprei. Waar die wiele so tol, wag 'n vriend van Nico met 'n 4x4 om ons teen die steiltes uit te help. Dis 23:00 toe hulle die wa in Cowboy se 'jaart' instoot: meer as 12 uur nadat ek stilgehou het.

Ses-uur die volgende oggend is ek pas aangetrek toe ek voel die wa begin lig. Die mense is al aan die werk! Die eerste twee pogings op herstel is nie suksesvol nie, maar hulle slaag uiteindelik daarin om die gat in die pyp herstel te kry. Nou moet die wa met 'n ander voertuig se battery aan die gang gesit word sodat ek tot by vulstasie kan kom. Die werkers gaan saam om te verduidelik dat ek nie die wa kan afskakel nie, en daar ontdek hulle 'n stuk van die aluminiumpyp in die linkeragterwiel. Nou moet dit ook nog met die spaarband vervang word terwyl die wa nie afgeskakel mag word nie.

In die Namib Rand Natuurreserveaat hou ek 'n paar dae later stil om foto's te neem. Kort na ek wegtrek, sien ek in my regtertruspieël hoe 'n band die veld inrol en besef ek is die enigste mens in die streek en dit moet dus myne wees. Flardes! Hierdie keer kom daar gouer mense aan: Franse toeriste, bejaard (soos ek), wat nie eens weet hoe om 'n domkrag te gebruik nie. Onder groot gelag en geselligheid het die drie mans die wiel vervang terwyl hulle vrouens staan en foto's neem het van die gedoente.

Sesriem het gelukkig 'n band van dieselfde grootte al is dit nie die spesiale 'Panel Van'/'Commercial'-band wat ek nodig het nie, maar ek kan met geruste hart en baie gebede voortgaan nadat ek R1760 betaal het, R1010 meer as wat dieselfde band in Suid-Afrika kos. 'n Seer toon – ek vermoed 'n liddoring wat onder die nael ontwikkel – verhoed my ook nog om so veel en ver te stap as wat ek sou wou. Dit ten spyt het ek darem tydsaam alles bereik.

Die wind het elke dag verwoed gewaai. Langs die kus was dit digte mis – soms die hele dag lank. By die soutwerke van Walvisbaai en Swakopmund was daar min voëls te sien, en selfs nadat ek die Volkswagen gewas het, het die nag se doukondensasie soutkorse gevorm op die grond rondom.

Soos die boek* sê, is ek na Rooibank om die Duinlewerik te soek. Ek het hom gekry, maar só dat niemand my sal glo nie, en ek wonder soms self.

Toe ek die oggend van Walvisbaai af wou vertrek, lê die voorste regterwiel plat op die grond. Die kompressor wat ek spesiaal gekoop het, blaas geen lug uit nie. Eienaars van die kampeertrein kom my te hulp met 'n silinderkompressor, maar dié se pyp is gebars. Dis met groot moeite dat hulle die band só kan pomp dat ek darem by die naaste bandherstelplek kan kom. Gelukkig moet net die klep vervang word. En in Swakopmund spoeg my gasbottel sy laaste asem uit.

Waar ek in Swakop na die mond stap en die Kleinrietsanger wil afneem, is mense agter 'n bos besig met onheilige dinge en ek voel nie veilig nie. Die oordbestuurder sê hy sal die

volgende oggend saam met my dié omgewing besoek, maar dit is toe so toegemis dat 'n mens niks kan sien nie.

Tydens 'n staptog deur koppies op 'n plaas naby Grünau hoor ek 'n waarskuwende gegrombrom. Ligdag die volgende oggend is vier jagters daar om die 'ongedierte' wat hul skaaplammers vang, te kom skiet. My selfverwyt en gebede het gehelp, want hulle kon die Bruinhiena nie opspoor nie.

Met my tuiskoms in Pretoria het my ander voertuig se battery die gees gegee en moet vervang word; dit nadat ek kort voor my vertrek oor die R17,200 moes betaal om een of ander elektroniese affêre te vervang. Die hekklokkie en die swembadpomp werk nie, en die toon – kom ek agter – is seer omdat 'n doring daarin versweer het.

En voëls? Ja, wel, tussendeur het ek darem 'n paar besonderse voëls raakgeloop. Waar die wilde perde kom suip tussen Aus en Lüderitz was die Woestynspekvreter heel kontant en met die wegyr stap twee Bloukopdrawwers

en hul jong spruit voor my oor die pad. Die Barlowlewerik is presies waar genoem word op bl. 210 van *Southern African Birdfinder**, sowat 47 km voor Lüderitz, en tree op volgens dié beskrywing. Tydens die katamaranvaart na Penguin Island sien ons 'n albino- of leukistiese pikkewyn: moeilik om te bepaal, aangesien die gesig steeds die pienk vlek van die volwasse Brilpikkewyn het. Woestyn- en Vaalkorhane is weer gesien. By Betta is die Grystjerik en Bontkopkanarie gesien en Keetmanshoop lewer ongesoek en onverwags die Kaneelborssanger op. Vaalstreepkoppies, Gryslewerikke en Gewone Mossies is die wêreld vol in omvangryke swerms. Op my Namibiese lys vir hierdie rit is 136 spesies aangeteken.

Wat ek misgeloop het, moet nou agterweë bly. Na die demone my beetgehad het, is ek klaar met Namibië.

*SASOL *Southern African Birdfinder*, comp Cohen, C; Spottiswoode C; & Rossouw, J. 2006. Cape Town: Struik Publishers. 🐦

A Walk in the Park

Margarita Krusche

A 'walk in the park', that is what Bruno and I thought of the invitation from the SANParks Honorary Rangers; and eagerly made the booking and payment. Our place as a team, with the ticker and Bruno the photographer to verify any discrepancies, was assured. As pensioners, we could extend the visit and thus arrived on Thursday at Orpen Camp – which has improved tremendously since our last visit – with Bruno's German family almost 20 years ago. On Friday we were warmly welcomed by Francois van Rooyen with some complimentary gifts from SASOL, the sponsors. I could already enter 43 species on the provided checklist, being especially proud of a pair of Kori Bustard, listed as scarce, walking in a dignified manner across the road. What a magnificent bird! The most prevalent road side species seemed to

be the Lilac-breasted Roller and the European Roller, hawking from good vantage points. We observed how a Lilac-breasted Roller was vigorously bashing a small tortoise on the tarmac. And how one was killed by a passing car, obviously too engrossed in targeting his prey. The most vocal was the Woodland Kingfisher with its strident, but melodious trill. On Friday night we were welcomed and treated to a delicious meal, but work was expected in return! The modus operandi was explained and we trundled off to fetch torches and other necessities.

At 20:00 we climbed into the viewing vehicle with Patrick our driver. It had started to drizzle and warm clothes and rain jackets were the recommended attire. Some of us were the spotlight operators. Owls and night jars were on the wanted list. Many eyes were spotted,

belonging to bushbabies, cats or genet. At last on a large, bare tree: a Verreaux's (Giant) Eagle Owl. All spot lights on THE owl! But the owl was getting agitated with all the attention and started to shuffle around on his branch. To us it was comical, almost like the delightful Madiba Shuffle! Well, that was the sum total of owls and we returned to camp.

At 04:00 the next morning all aboard again. Night jars were spotted at regular intervals on the tarmac, but gave us no chance to identify them. So that is when I became familiar with non-identification bird-speak: "another mystery Nightjar" or "brown Wahlberg."

We came across a small pride of lions, genet and wild cat.

Soon, at first light, the loud, penetrating whistle of the Pearl-spotted Owlet was heard. Binoculars up and trained on the likely spot. A light tap on my shoulder and Janet mouthing the words "Rob Geddes". Well, well our leader with such talent and being most knowledgeable and patient to share his knowledge. Every so often the vehicle was stopped for another decoy call and eager spotting and ticking all around. Four hours later and no indication of a breakfast stop. A mildly grumbling stomach prompted me to ask the question: When are we having a coffee break?" An embarrassed silence followed. All around me birders were silently and daintily having a few snacks and sips of coffee. Our breakfast basket needed a table!

At long last we turned into Timbavati Picnic spot. Guess who was sitting on a branch above our picnic table? A Pearl-spotted Owlet looking ever so peeved that a human could mimic his call so perfectly!

On the return route we marvelled at the courage of a Fork-tailed Drongo harassing a Bateleur, even landing, albeit briefly, on its head. The next exciting sighting was a bare tree occupied by several species of vulture. Now the instructions to our patient driver came thick and fast. A little more forward, to the right, back please. Eventually everybody had a good view, also of the lion kill underneath a tree. The result: a large viewing vehicle parked slantingly across the



Dup dar Plessis

Pearl-spotted Owlet/Witkoluil

road! Ten minutes later a road-rage approach in the form of a shiny brown SUV, driver in dark glasses, sporting a menacing beard. A dialogue in international sign language ensued: "What the frikadelle do you think you are doing blocking the road for law-abiding citizens like me with your carload of binocular wielding idiots?" Patrick's answer with a shy smile "So sorry my mate, these idiots are all harmless, enthusiastic, bird watchers, with the appropriate winging sign of tweet-tweets! But I shall move my vehicle so that you may pass." A broad smile on road-rage's face signaled: "OK my mate you have my sympathy." From now on, everybody who passed and asked the right question: "Which vultures are those?" got the bonus information "and there is a lion kill under the tree to the right".

We were treated to another scrumptious meal provided by the SANParks Honorary Rangers. Francois was honoured for his 50 years' active service in the organisation. We were treated to the sighting or call of owls. However, I always have to suppress the question: "Is it ethical to agitate creatures in the wild by artificial voice recordings?" As I also participate in the excitement.

The following morning we drove to the N'wanetsi picnic spot. On our way there we

drove through expansive grasslands with ample proof of buffalo and elephant herds on the tarmac. The elephant dung being liberally laced with Marula pips. I idly wondered whether I would ever see a Marula-drunk elephant, or was that another myth in "The Gods Must be Crazy"? At the N'wanetsi picnic spot is further evidence of the SANParks Honorary Rangers work in the form of bricked paths, one leading to the ostentatious viewing amphitheatre looking onto the confluence of the Nwanetsi and Makongolweni Rivers with their many tributaries and in the background the Lebombo Mountains. Far below a lone Grey Heron was struggling to swallow a fish.

We planned our return journey via Pretoriuskop, exiting Numbi Gate. After the first cool days in the park, temperatures rose to 35°C. However, a thunder storm during the night brought considerable relief the following day. We changed our minds and turned north

to exit Phabeni Gate. 10 km further on the gravel road an elephant leisurely walked in the middle of the road seemingly going nowhere slowly. We followed cautiously at a safe distance. But the elephant had no intention of abandoning his walk on the soft sand. Another 15 minutes and we decided that caution was the better part of valour, the horrific elephant road-rage photos still fresh in our minds.

We turned around, doing a detour of about 20 km. We chose the return route via the Long Tom Pass, marvelling at the beautiful St Joseph lilies which, apparently, have become a roadside pest. How I used to struggle to get them to grow in my garden. The temperature was now dropping dramatically, down to 13°C, a difference of 22°C from the afternoon before.

The group's 24 hr tally was 129 (still counting?). My own total ticks stood at 162.

A walk in the park? Certainly not, but much pleasure none the less! 🐘

Magic Birding in Ecuador

Ken Logan

Next morning we spent birding the famous Nono-Mindo Road, bird of the morning being the difficult to find Plushcap, arriving at Tandayapa lodge around lunchtime. Tandayapa is located at 5800 feet-in Andean Cloud forest. Plenty of hummingbird feeders (up to 15 species) and fruit feeders for the many tanagers. Best birds for me were the Toucan Barbet and Plate-billed Mountain Tanager.

Our next destination was San Jorge Milpe Eco Lodge, the jewel in their crown of 3 lodges, located just 1.5 hours from Tandayapa next to Mindo. The lodge is built high above the tropical rain forest giving great views of the feeders in the canopy of nearby trees. The trails here are difficult, extremely steep and in places quite wet and slippery. But the birds are brilliant. There were only 4 of us on this part of the circuit, ourselves and a Canadian couple which makes a big difference when you are forest birding. Despite this Stephanie missed

the Banded Ground-Cuckoo when it crossed the forest trail just 4 metres in front of us. I think it was as surprised as we were as it hesitated for just a moment before leaping into the forest on the far side of the trail. Rufous-fronted Woodquail come to grain feeders at the old lodge which is no longer used along with brush finches, and Orange-billed Sparrows.

Tityras come to the fruit feeders chasing off the myriad Tanagers, Euphonias, Aracari's and Honeycreepers while the hummingbird feeders bring in White-whiskered Hermit, Tooth-bellied Violet-bellied and Purple-chested Hummingbirds, along with dozens of White-necked Jacobin.

We were here for 3 nights giving us time to visit Angel Paz's famed Antpitta feeding stations at Refugio Paz de las Aves. He is also blessed with a Cock of Rock lek on his property. We were there at daybreak and the birds were very active while it was almost still dark tending



Ken Logan

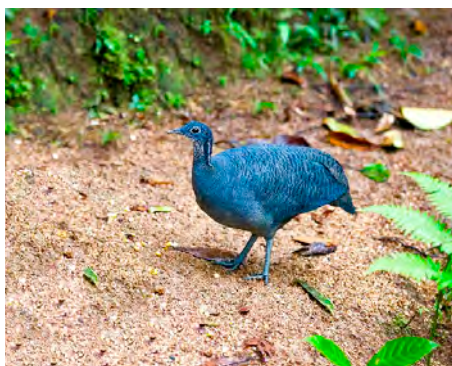
Flame-faced Tanager

to disperse just as the light got good enough for photography. (As an aside you are not allowed to use flash practically anywhere in Ecuador).

The Giant Antpittas were not around having moved to higher elevations at that time of year. Angel feeds the offspring of the world-famous 'Maria' who was unfortunately taken out by a forest falcon a couple of years ago. That left us with three species. Moustached, Ochre and Yellow breasted. Unfortunately Moustached didn't put in an appearance but great views were had of the two smaller Antpittas. Got great shots of Olivaceous Piha with her fledgling on its nest and more great hummers; Wedge-billed, Violet-tailed Sylph and Velvet-Purple Cornet.

The next day we visited Rio Silanche – lowland tropical rain forest – not that there is much of it left now; just the odd isolated patch among the many plantations. The weather was poor and we seemed to drive for hours without an awful lot of birding. Had a high species count but nothing really special.

Our next excursion was to the Long-wattled Umbrellabird lek (one of the trip's top five birds). Using a community guide again we were in place at daybreak and just as the birds flew in, down came the mist leaving us with ghostly shapes flitting from tree to tree. Fortunately we had a second opportunity at Buenaventura down in the South-west where we had great views of this enigmatic bird inflating its wattle



Grey Tinamou

and calling its deep reverberating call, not too dissimilar to a Bittern.

Then it was time to return to Quito and travel the next day to Antisana. We had a great day here capturing all the high elevation specials: Andean Condor, Carunculated Caracara, Black-faced Ibis, Paramo Pipit, Seedeater and Ground Tyrant, Tawny Antpitta, Bar-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Andean Teal and Andean Ruddy-Duck, Silvery Grebe and Yellow-billed Pintail, Ecuadorian Hillstar and Andean Lapwing, Andean Gull and Aplomado Falcon.

We then headed for the Eastern slopes. The San Jorge lodge on the Eastern slopes is still under construction and we stayed in the small town of Borja, birding El Olin and Sumaco from there.

It would have been better to stay at Sumaco Lodge itself (professional rivalry?) and I felt this was the one place the tour didn't really do justice to the birds of the eastern slopes.

Returning to Quito we birded the Cayembe-Coca Reseve and Papallacta Pass. Driving up to the communication masts at the top we reached 4,200 metres, our highest elevation on the trip and were rewarded with Andean tit-Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero and Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe.

You always have concerns when you travel with people you don't know – how good are your guides going to be? How serious will the birding be? Who will you be travelling with?



Ken Logan

White-necked Jacobin

Well I would say The Magic Birding Circuit met with 90% of our expectations. The guides knew their birds but didn't really try hard for the difficult stuff – the Tapaculo's and the skulkers but we were travelling with a couple who liked their birds but were not serious birders, so their wishes had to be taken into account and some compromise made.

The next morning we were back with Juan Carlos on the long drive south. The roads in Ecuador are good but the topography means you can't drive quickly so it took all day to drive the 700 kilometres down to Buenaventura.

The three Jocotoco Foundation lodges we stayed at were great. Ideally positioned on great birding reserves, they are run by the local communities who benefit through employment and part of proceeds goes to bird conservation. It is amazing what has been achieved since the Jocotoco Antpitta was first discovered by Robert Ridgely in 1997. BirdLife South Africa could learn much from trying to follow this model.

Our one full day at Buenaventura was one of the best of the trip. The hummingbird feeders here have to be seen to be believed. 20-30 birds can be feeding at one feeder at a time and the air is full of diving hummers making you duck as you walk up the stairs to the deck. The lodge is home to a small band of Coati's who feed on the fruit feeders; they quickly became



Amethyst-throated Sunangel

firm favourites with Stephanie.

We were up early and off to see the Umbrellabird in the dark early morning light. A fine start to a brilliant days birding giving us over 20 lifers. Lekking Club-winged Manakins, El Oro Parakeets in the mist, Whooping and Rufous Motmots, Scarlet-backed Woodpecker, Barred Puffbird, Ochraceous Attila, Long-billed Gnatwren, Grey and gold Warbler, the list seemed endless.

Back at the breakfast table and we stop eating in amazement as a Collared Forest Falcon perches 20 metres away and was still there 5 minutes later with dozens of photographs under my belt.

Rufous-headed Chacalacas were next, sitting so close to me I could only get their head and shoulders in the camera frame. Grey-backed Hawk was the next special, soon followed by Tawny-throated Leaf-tosser, Slaty Spinetail and Slaty Antwren.

Would have loved another day here but we were off to the Tumbes region and the dry forest habitats of the Jorupe Reserve. We had seen many of the Tumbesian specials in Peru and the reserve was very dry and pretty quiet. The feeders had White-tailed Jay, Scrub Blackbird and Whooping Motmot plus the very impressive Guayaquil Squirrel. We picked up Watkins Antpitta and Grey-cheeked Parakeet on the trails and worked hard for Blackish-headed



Whooping Motmot Jorupe

Spinetail which we got and Scaly-throated Foliage-gleaner which we didn't.

We birded Utuana reserve (Black-crested Tit-Tyrant, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta, Jelski's Chat -Tyrant and more great sunbirds) on our way to Tapichalaca – another stunning lodge, set in one of the wettest parts of the Andes (it rains 300 days a year) and boy did it rain on our full day there. The hummingbird feeders had more different species here including those little stunners Flame-throated and Purple-throated Sunangels.

And so we were up early, fully kitted out against the weather and ready for our hike to the Jocotoco Antpitta feeding station. This is truly an iconic bird (for me the bird of the trip). It is fed daily at 8.00 am, and we (fortunately just us) were duly in place on time. The ranger had his worms ready and called the bird by name "Panchito, Panchito". No sign of the bird. Five minutes passed and then another five. "Panchito, Panchito" still no bird. Quarter past eight and now I was seriously worried about a no-show. We gave it another five minutes and then out of the forest appeared what appeared to be a pair of white headlights, actually its white lores under the eye, and there in all its glory was the Jocotoco. Its mate was apparently on the nest close by and he disappeared to feed her a couple of times, and then was back for more. This bird had a serious attitude. You could tell this was his patch as he paraded in front of us. One of the highlights of my birding career!



Ken Logan

Pale-mandibled Aracari

Despite the weather the forest birding was good: White-throated Quail-doves by the grain feeders, Bearded Guan, White-eyed Parakeet, Andean Potoo, Speckled Hummingbird, Montane Foliage-gleaner, Chestnut-naped Antpitta, Pale-naped Brush Finch and mottled-backed Elaenia to name but a few.

Our final lodge after birding the Old Zamora Rd was the Copalinga lodge on the edge of the Podocarpus reserve in the south near Zamora. The major attraction here was that after two years of trial and error they finally had a Grey Tinamou coming to their feeder. This is a seriously difficult bird to see, let alone photograph. I was told that I am the first South African to photograph this bird. That plus the Grey-fronted Doves feeding alongside it made for a magic half hour.

The following day we had a full morning in Podocarpus Reserve. A beautiful easy paced forest trail and great birds; White-breasted Parakeet, Green Hermit, Highland Motmot, Black-streaked Puffbird, Smokey-brown Woodpecker, Rufous-tailed Foliage-gleaner, Black-billed Treehunter, Russet Antshrike, Yellow-breasted Antwren, White-backed Fire-eye, Fulvous-breasted Flatbill, Yellow-breasted Chat-Tyrant and Striped Manakin.

That afternoon we headed back to Loja and the following morning birded the high altitude Acanama Reserve on our way to a late afternoon flight from Cuenca to Quito. So a final days birding and a few more special birds;

Glowing Puffleg, Viridian Metaltail, Mouse-coloured Thistletail, Rufous Antpitta, Andean Pygmy-Owl, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, Black-headed Hemisphingus and our very final bird was... an Ash-coloured Tapaculo.

Truly a great trip, close to 800 species seen, and 240 lifers under our collective belt. More than 80 species of Tanager. Same for the Hummingbirds and nine species of Antpitta. Good roads, mostly good lodges but to be honest I wasn't particularly impressed with the food. I lived without rice and beans for a month on our return.

Apart from the birding Ecuador offers spectacular scenery; including snow-capped volcanoes to lush tropical and cloud forests, tumbling waterfalls and mountain streams. The butterflies vary from tiny coloured jewels to those the size of birds, with impressive iridescent wings. We did not know the species,

but just enjoyed their company along the trails. Likewise the brilliant flowers; some look like escapees from a sci-fi movie set, which we often staked out waiting for the hummingbirds to visit on their feeding circuits.

So a trip to Ecuador comes highly recommended. You can't miss the Galapagos, it's a lifetime experience and a privilege to have such up close and personal encounters with wildlife. Watching the playful sea lion nurseries, snorkelling alongside the penguins, turtles, rays, sharks and eyeballing the giant tortoises are unforgettable memories.

If you prefer birding with fewer people you can do it with a little planning at very little more than you would pay with the bigger birding companies, and have personalised guiding with a degree of flexibility if birds and weather conditions suggest alternative options to a set schedule. 🐦

Besoek aan Marakele Nasionale Park: 19-22 Junie 2014

Salomi Louw

Op een na het die voëlkykers almal Donderdag met goeie tydsordeel opgedaag en die meeste van ons kon naby mekaar kamp inrig. In Bontle (die karavaan- en kampeerplek) was reeds heelwat voëls te sien, soos die Witliesbosbontrokkie (Chin-spot Batis), die twee algemene Neushoringvoëls (Geel- en Rooibek) en Waaiertertvlieëvanger (Grey Tit-Flycatcher). Dit was ook groot opwindend om die renosters deur die kamp te sien loop tussen die kampeerdere deur! Die aand het ons saam gebrui en mekaar 'n bietjie beter leer ken.

Die GPS-blokke wat ons geteiken het, was onbereikbaar en ons moes ander planne beraam vir die naweek, dus is 'n groepie Vrydagoggend berg-op na die Torings waar die Kransasvoël (Cape Vulture) laag bo-oor jou kop kom sweef; die Bergklipwagter (Buff-streaked Chat) en 'n wyfie (gering deur Gerrit Jansen van Vuuren), Rooivlerkstreepkoppie

(Cape Bunting) en Kaapse Kliplyster (Cape Rock-Thrush) 'n algemene gesig is. Ander kykers het die gewone paaie aangedurf en is beloon met Witkatlagters (Southern Pied Babbler), Rooiborslaksman (Crimson-breasted Shrike), Withelmklaksman (White-crested Helmet-Shrike), Pylvlekkatlagters (Arrow-marked Babbler), Maricovlieëvangers (Marico Flycatcher) en algemene bosveldvoëls. By Bolonotle, die voëlskuiling, is Grootwaterhoender (Common Moorhen), Kaapse Rietsanger (Lesser Swamp Warbler), Melbavink (Green-winged Pytilia), Groenvlekduifie (Emerald-spotted Dove) en Blousysie (Blue Waxbill) aangetref tussen ander voëls, en Philip en Jill het selfs die Kleinwaterhoender (Lesser Moorhen) hier aangeteken.

Vrydagmiddag het die meeste van ons uitgeroy op die Almapad en gekyk na die witbespate kranse waar die ongeveer 800 broei-pare Kransasvoëls hou en daarvandaan na 'n

deel van die Park wat nie vir gewone toeriste toeganklik is nie. De Ridderhuis, 'n ou plaas wat deur SANParke aangekoop en geïnkorporeer is, word deur die SANParke Ereveldwagters verbeter, bestuur en gebruik. Ons was gelukkig genoeg om toegang tot dié kloof te verkry en het gesamentlik hier atlaswerk gedoen terwyl ons in dié besondere en buitengewoon mooi habitat kon beweeg. Hier was – soos elders in die wintermaande – nie besonder baie voëls nie, maar ons kon darem dig by die twintig aanteken, soos die Gewone Vleiloerie (Burchell's Coucal), Rooibekvuurvink (Red-billed Firefinch) en Kleinheuningwyser (Lesser Honeyguide).

Saterdagoggend is 'n groepie op na die Torings vir atlaswerk, met Rita as leier. Die gewone (en mak) bergvoël is afgemerk, maar ook die Grasvoël (Cape Grassbird), Rooibors-suikervoël (Gurney's Sugarbird), Kransvalk (Rock Kestrel) en Natalse Fisant (Natal Francolin) met 'n swerm jeugdige. Die Dassievoël (Mocking Cliff Chat) en Jangroentjie (Malachite Sunbird) is ongelukkig nie gesien nie.

Die olifante was Saterdag baie bedrywig en daar was niemand wat nie ten minste één olifant gesien het nie; Brian en Louise reken hulle het 'n gesamentlike trop van so dertig gesien. Anton en Elsie, aan die anderkant, is deur 'n aggressiewe bul verplig om om te draai en terug



Salomi Louw

BLNG-lede by De Ridderhuis

te ry tot op 'n veilige afstand.

Soos die vorige aande het ons Saterdag-aand saam gebrui en lekker gekuier voor die lys gelees is. Ons totaal was 95, wat nie sleg is vir 'n winternaweek nie, en heelwat van die groep het nuwes op hul voëls kon aanteken.

Ten minste vyf kykers in die groep was nog nie voorheen in Marakele Nasionale Park nie en is só beïndruk dat hulle onderneem het om weer dié park te besoek. Dit sal ons help om 'n beter verhouding met die bestuur op te bou en beter samewerking lê dan hopelik vir ons voor in die toekoms. 🐾

BLNG alert e-mail announcements

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

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

Updating of membership details

'n Beroep word gedoen om asb te alle tye veranderinge van adres en eposse aan Shireen by BLSA te stuur by membership@birdlife.org.za aangesien BLSA die lede-administrasie hanteer. As hulle nie die korrekte besonderhede het nie verloor ons ook op klubvlak kontak met ons lede.

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

Rarities and Unusual Sightings Report: 15 August 2014

Compiled by André Marx

A couple of significant sightings to report from the winter months when migrants are absent and birding activity is less. A Lesser Black-backed Gull in Benoni was probably the most twitched bird in the period and the find over the last few months has to be the Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk near Hekpoort; just check a distribution map to see how significant that record is! Other rare records for Gauteng were Lappet-faced Vulture and Mountain Wagtail, which once again appeared at Fountains in Pretoria. My thanks to all who submit sightings and photos to me or via SABAP2 and the various Internet forums.

National Rarities/ Nasionale rariteite

Gull, Lesser Black-backed. Meeu, Kleinswartrug:- an immature bird was located at Korsman Bird Sanctuary, Benoni, 30 May 2014 (AR), where it remained for a number of weeks and could be observed by many local birders. This bird appeared to belong to the nominate *fuscus* race which most inland records can be assigned to.

Regional Rarities/ Streeksrariteite

Chat, Sickle-winged. Spekvreter, Vlakte:- one bird was found at Suikerbosrand NR where it



Sickle-winged Chat/Vlaktespekvreter

Jason Boyce



Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk/
Rooiborsperwer

Andrew Keys

remained for several weeks, 17 May 2014 (JB). An uncommon winter visitor to the region.

Sparrowhawk, Rufous-breasted. Sperwer, Rooibors:- a remarkable sighting is of one bird photographed near Hekpoort in pentad 2550_2725, west of Pretoria, 10 Aug 2014 (AK). While there are occasional sightings of this species on the eastern edge of the 100 km radius within Gauteng in the Rhenosterkop area, this is the first photographic evidence of this species' occurrence in the region and the first known record in the west of Gauteng. A species that in all probability is colonising the province due to ongoing habitat changes.

Starling, Common. Spreeu, Europese: two birds were at Northern Farm, south-west of Pretoria during the club outing there, 17 Jul 2014 (BLNG).

Vulture, Lappet-faced. Aasvoël, Swart:- a record of one bird near Hekpoort, west of Pretoria, in pentad 2550_2730 is the first record of this species in the region since the start of SABAP2 in 2007, 2 Aug 2014 (AK). Another sighting in the De Tweedespruit area north-east of Pretoria in pentad 2530_2835 on 7 Aug 2014 possibly represents the same individual or another wandering bird, (SO, AW, JD).



Lappet-faced
Vulture/
Swartaasvoël

Wagtail, Mountain. Kwikkie, Berg--: after a long absence this species was once again found at the Groenkloof Nature Reserve in Pretoria, 27 Jul 2014 (JN). *This sighting is possibly of the same bird that was first recorded in Feb 2013 and again in Oct 2013, each time remaining for a few weeks.*

Other Interesting Observations/ Ander Interessante Waarnemings

Buzzard, Lizard. Valk, Akkedis--: a sighting of one bird at the Groenkloof Nature Reserve in Pretoria is unusual for that locality, 7 Aug 2014 (AF).

Eagle, Long-crested. Arend, Langkuif--: one bird was seen again at Onderstepoort 10 May 2014 (MdlR).

Harrier, Black. Vleivalk, Witkruis--: an unusual sighting of one bird in pentad 2635_2725 near Fochville is noteworthy and is further west than other records for this winter visitor, 5 Jul 2014 (JR, LS).

Rock Thrush, Sentinel. Kliplyster, Langtoon--: one bird was on a rocky koppie in pentad



Sentinel
Rock Thrush/
Langtoonkliplyster



Lesser Black-
backed Gull/
Kleinswartrugmeew

2620_2740 just south of Westonaria, 21 Jun 2014 (RVdS, DV, LS). A sighting of a male at the Pienaarsrivier off-ramp from the N1, north of Pretoria, is most unusual with this species not known from the area at all, 19 Jul 2014 (EM). *This may represent a wandering individual as this species is known to move locally during winter.*
Stork, Black. Ooievaar, Swart--: 3 birds were seen next to a small dam in pentad 2635_2810 south of Suikerbosrand NR, 13 Jul 2014 (RVdS).

Observers/ Waarnemers

Allan Ridley (AR)	Alta Fraser (AF)
Amanda Walden (AM)	Andrew Keys (AK)
BirdLife Northern Gauteng members (BLNG)	
Dylan Vasapolli (DV)	Etienne Marais (EM)
Jason Boyce (JB)	Joël Roerig (JR)
John Drowley (JD)	Justin Nicolau (JN)
Leon Spies (LS)	Morné de la Rey (MdlR)
Richard Van der Spuy (RVdS)	Sue Oertli (SO)

This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made in the greater Gauteng region, defined as 100km 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. 🐦

You know you are a birder if...
(some more anecdotes in this series)

- ...you like to go gull watching.
- ...you bird landfills!
- ...when you keep so many bird lists that you have to keep a list of lists.
- ...if you wash dishes with binoculars around your neck.
- ...if you forward weird bird mail to other people ☺
- ...when on the Internet you spend more time browsing rare bird sites than reading the latest birding journals.
- ...your parents have all but disowned you because you will drive two hours to see a rare bird rather than drive 30 minutes to see them.
- ...there is a strange, but distinct correlation between the last time your house was thoroughly cleaned and the development of your birding interest.
- ...books about birds take up about 90% of your shelf space.
- ...your friends always complain "Why can't you talk about anything else besides BIRDS?"
- ...you have co-workers calling you on the phone to come by their office to ID a bird out their office window.
-you are divorced because your spouse said "It's either me or the birds" and of course you chose the birds.
- ...when 90% of the gifts you receive are bird related.
- ...you're hopeless at remembering people's names, yet you know the scientific names of many birds you have seen in your region.

**New Members /
Nuwe Lede:**
May 2014 – July 2014

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

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

Kristin Davis, Hatfield;
Etienne Nortje, Lynnwood Ridge; Vincent Ward & Susan Miller, Onderstepoort; Gary & Amanda Boyle, Lynnwood Ridge; Marissa & Ian de Villiers, Moreleta Village; Leslie Wilton, Doornpoort; Juan Acevedo Azula, Montanapark; Annemarie de Munnik, Arcadia; Joe & Meryl-Lynne Harwood, Kilnerpark; Pieter, Marina, Jessica, Pieter jnr & Annica Pienaar, Rooihuiskraal

Donasions / Donasies

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

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

R Sprenger de Rover; Vic Cruger; Anthony Botes; Charnelle du Toit; Jurgen Helass; Frikk du Plooy; Deryck Smith; Rieneke Verlinde; Etienne Nortje; Sariza de Jager; Leslie Wilton



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Pafuri

is in the most northern part of the Kruger National Park known for its high bird count. Pafuri has a long list of rare birds and is situated in the best part of the park. This area is not very big but hosts a high bird count allowing you to see more here than any where else in the park. The riverine vegetation of the Luvuvuhu and the Matule rivers host excellent birding.

Mkuze

also has one of South Africa's highest check lists with a count of over 400 bird species. This is a wetland park in the northern part of Kwazulu Natal. The park has a large diversity of habitats ranging from acacia thornveld, riverine and sand forests including pans and swamp areas which is the reason for this extraordinary count.

Ndumo

game reserve is situated in Maputoland Kwazulu Natal, and is known for its diversity of spectacular bird life with a count of over 430 species. This park has habitats ranging from acacia savannah, wetland, pans and sand forest which is why there is an abundance of bird life. Ndumo also has spectacular views of yellow fever trees and sycamore forests.

Tony Fernandes 082 449 2402 or tony@macimage.co.za

BUFFELSDRIFT Rust de Winter

**ACCOMMODATION
(R350/p/night)**



PHOTOGRAPHY



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