



# Laniarius

No 143 July 2021



**BirdLife Northern Gauteng**  
**BirdLife Gauteng-Noord**



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

PO Box 12563, Hatfield, 0028 • secretary@blng.co.za • www.blng.co.za • FB: BirdLife Northern Gauteng  
Banking: BirdLife Northern Gauteng/Gauteng-Noord, Nedbank, Menlyn, Branch Code 198765,  
Acct No.1634010531

## Committee 2021/22 Komitee

### President

André Marx: 083 411-7674; andre.marx112@gmail.com

### Chairperson – Voorsitter

Elouise Kalmer: 083 626-1733; chairperson@blng.co.za

### Secretary – Sekretaresse

Fransie O'Brien: 072 737-0862; secretary@blng.co.za

### Treasurer – Tesourier

Pieter Heslinga: 082 551-0130; piheslinga@mweb.co.za

### Conservation – Bewaring

Laetitia Steynberg: 082 800-6210; lsteynberg24@outlook.com

Sub-committee: Rihann Geyser, Jason Boyce

### Programme and Activities – Program en Aktiwiteite

Sheleph Burger: 082 925-4005; sheleph@blng.co.za

Sub-committee: Ilse Müller, Keanu Canto, Adele van Vuuren, Fransie O'Brien, Jeanette Heuseveldt,

Elouise Kalmer, Frik du Plooy

### Evening Meetings and Courses – Aandbyeenkomste en Kursusse

Karen Birkenbach: 072 453-0595; kbirkenbach99@gmail.com

### Web Services and Communication – Webdienste en Kommunikasie

Sean Naude: 083 391-8946; sean.naude@gmail.com

### Bird Ringing – Voëlberinging

Frik du Plooy: 064 651-3755; jfduplooy@vodamail.co.za

Sub-committee: Wanda du Plooy, Johan Snyman

Training: Chris du Plooy, Martin Steyn, Jan Beukes, Madaleen van Loggerenberg, Johan de Jager

### Laniarius Editor – Redakteur

Tamsyn Sherwill: laniariuseditor@blng.co.za

Sub-committee: André Marx, Jenny Bester, Lin Besaans, Drinie van Rensburg (design & layout)

### SABAP2 Atlas Co-ordinator – Atlaskoördineerder

André Marx: 083 411-7674; andre.marx112@gmail.com

### Trading – Handel

Riana Botha: 082 466-5242; blackeagleprop@gmail.com

## Notice to contributors

*Laniarius* is published three times annually. Articles should be e-mailed to [laniariuseditor@blng.co.za](mailto:laniariuseditor@blng.co.za). Contributions and advertisements are accepted at the discretion of the Editor. Digital photographic images are always welcome. Please submit images at their original resolution/size.

## Kennisgewing aan bydraers

*Laniarius* word drie keer jaarliks uitgegee. Artikels moet aan [laniariuseditor@blng.co.za](mailto:laniariuseditor@blng.co.za) gestuur word. Aanvaarding van bydraes en advertensies word aan die diskresie van die Redakteur oorgelaat. Digitale foto's is altyd welkom. Stuur asseblief foto's in hulle oorspronklike resoluë/grootte.

# Contents

From the Editor .....	2
From the Chair .....	3
<b>AGM</b>	
Financial statements .....	4
<b>50 YEARS</b>	
Happy rebirthday BLNG (NTOS and PBC) .....	8
Memories of an old Chair .....	10
BLNG Ringgroep: Die laaste tien jaar .....	15w
<b>LOCKDOWN LIFE</b>	
Locked down but not out: BLNG meets online.....	19
Lockdown birding .....	20
<b>CLUB OUTINGS</b>	
Mapungubwe – long delay rewarded! .....	22
BLNG camp at Makuleke: 18–21 February 2021.....	28
A birding extravaganza at Makuleke, 4–7 March 2021 .....	31
<b>CITIZEN SCIENCE</b>	
Heuningvlei/Morokweng Atlas Bash in North West Province: 20–24 February 2020.....	35
BLNG assists with University of Pretoria bird census project.....	39
Ringershoekie 2020 .....	41
Aasvoërling by Vulpro .....	47
<b>IN MEMORIAM</b> .....	48
<b>FIELD OBSERVATIONS</b>	
Klaas's Cuckoo being fed by its host.....	50
<b>TRAVELOGUE</b>	
Sani Pass and high-altitude birding: 7–13 February 2020 .....	51
<b>RARITIES</b>	
Rarities and unusual sightings report: 30 November 2020.....	57
Rarities and unusual sightings report: 31 March 2021 .....	60

## Credits

Front cover: Crimson-breasted Shrike, Kgalagadi, by Sheleph Burger

## To order print copies / Om harde kopieë te bestel

*Laniarius* is only distributed electronically. If you wish to receive hard copies please contact Fransie ([secretary@blng.co.za](mailto:secretary@blng.co.za)).

The cost is R80 for 3 issues.

*Laniarius* word nou slegs elektronies versprei. As u die harde kopie wil ontvang, stuur asb' n e-pos aan Fransie ([secretary@blng.co.za](mailto:secretary@blng.co.za)). Die koste is R80 vir 3 uitgawes.

Views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of BirdLife Northern Gauteng or BirdLife South Africa.

# From the Editor

It's been more than a while since a *Laniarius* has landed in your inbox. So much has happened and so much has changed since *Laniarius 142*, except that we are still in some level of 'lockdown' and unlikely not to be any time soon.

Though the absence of any club outings in 'hard lockdown' obviously meant that there were none to write about, I had hoped that the forced confinement of most of 2020 might inspire more people to write about their birding experiences, even if only in their gardens, but it seems that the pandemic subtly or dramatically rearranged priorities and responsibilities, and writing about birds had to make way for juggling a host of new challenges and obligations.

Then, in the space of a few months, we went from almost no articles to far too many, so many of these have now had to be held over to November. And the articles that we couldn't fit into the previous issue are now published here, causing *Laniarius 143* to cover a very large timeframe spanning old and new 'normal'.

We are all aware of the many effects of the pandemic on our human lives, but what has the impact been on the natural world, and the unfolding climate and biodiversity crisis?

A [special issue](#) of the journal *Biological Conservation* documents a range of interesting phenomena. Some of the clearer trends suggest an overall negative impact on conservation efforts, particularly through reduced funding, either directly from governments or indirectly through donations and tourism. Monitoring and research have been interrupted, jobs have been shed, and reduced vigilance has led to increases in poaching and other assaults on protected areas. Lockdowns (aka 'anthropause') and the reduction in travel have had some positive effects on pollution and even noticeable impacts on things like roadkill stats, and having fewer tourists has benefitted some systems, but in some cases a reduced human presence has actually increased the vulnerability of certain species and habitats.

But if it is true that fundamental change can only begin with a shift in values, then there may be a silver lining to this pandemic, via its alleged impact on appreciation for 'nature'. This seems to be unrelated to acknowledging that this and future pandemics are linked to the ongoing destruction of natural areas, but simply a reaction to pandemic-related confinement, stress and grief. Countries like the USA and UK have seen an explosion of interest in gardening, hiking and birding. A quick search online re 'pandemic + birding' revealed headlines like, 'Seeking solace in nature's calendar', 'Soothing souls in a pandemic', 'Birding provides escape for the pandemic-fatigued' and 'Birdwatching the new binge watching'. A spike in interest was noted via increases in eBird users and logs, club membership, use of birding apps and online resources, and bird-feeder sales. Evidence also suggests that interest has continued post-lockdowns – proving claims that 'birding can be a "gateway drug" to so much of nature.'

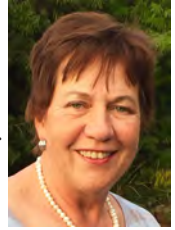
I couldn't find any direct reports of this effect in South Africa, other than my own observations of an extraordinary interest among the general public in visiting Tshwane's nature reserves post-hard-lockdown, and that by Level 4 many of my neighbours had at last noticed the Common Moorhens in the spruit (OK, they called them ducks but at least they could describe them in some detail).

So it seems like a good time to be sharing one's love of birds with the uninitiated, and at the same time to be shamelessly enjoying the mental health benefits of one's favourite distraction (apparently these are, among others, mindfulness, the thrill of discovery, and a comforting sense of order). For example, and partly inspired by Faansie Peacock's opening talk at the recent African Bird Fair, I have started a new list titled 'Birds I've seen while trying to work'.

Safe birding! And please send in your stories for the November issue.

*Tamsyn*

# From the Chair



The year 2020 started the same as any other year... the BLNG committee got together in January for our annual Bosberaad and strategy planning and decided on 'Local is Lekker' as the theme for 2020. We had absolutely no idea how very relevant *Local is Lekker* was going to be.

By the end of March the Covid-19 pandemic had resulted in a full lockdown in South Africa and for about 5 weeks people were not allowed to even leave their homes. The entire country, and the world, basically came to a halt, including all of our club and birding activities.

BLNG turned 50 during 2020, but unfortunately as this coincided with Covid-19 we were not able to celebrate this major milestone. We are, however, dedicating part of this issue of *Laniarius* to marking this event.

During the lockdown our birding was restricted to garden birds. The BirdLasser team was quick to respond and created a Lockdown Challenge, which was well supported by birders throughout the country. During this period we got to really appreciate our garden birds, and learnt a lot about their habits and how their movements changed as the seasons progressed.

With our evening meetings and outings prohibited, BLNG scheduled weekly Zoom sessions with various interesting topics and presenters. This was very well supported initially, but as the lockdown restrictions eased the attendance also decreased. Similarly, BirdLife South Africa started their online series: *Conservation Conversations*, a fantastic opportunity for all bird lovers to learn more about their hobby.

From October onward, the club slowly started doing small birding outings again, adhering to all Covid protocols. In December we were able to have our first camp in over 9 months – the much-anticipated trip to Mapungubwe, originally planned to take place just before lockdown. You can read about this camp in the pages that follow... the mention of Pauline Leinberger's tea basket in this article made me realise once again the importance of the social side of our outings. These days we are often so focused on chasing lifers that we forget how

important the friendships are that are being built at the club.

The second wave saw a return to stricter lockdown levels by the start of 2021, and in February we held our AGM – as with all of our evening meetings since April 2020 – online. We reflected on some of the highlights and challenges of the past year. Dr Melissa Howes-Whitecross from BirdLife South Africa was our guest speaker, and spoke on 'Saving Africa's raptors and large terrestrial birds', with a special focus on Secretarybirds, Ground Hornbills and bustards.

As a club, we are very happy to report that BLNG is still in a healthy state. Membership numbers have stayed stable during the past year due to a constant flow of new members, while on the financial side expenditure has matched income.

We welcome all our new members and are planning training sessions, outings and presentations to help to continually improve your birding experiences.

BLNG continues to focus our conservation activities on the citizen sciences. The ringing group, consisting of 32 active A-ringers and 10 trainees, also had to limit their ringing activities due to lockdown, but they have actively started ringing again. We have also included a number of atlassing activities in our programme, including BirdLasser training and support, and atlas-focused outings and camps. The conservation team is launching a Secretarybird project in conjunction with BLSA, with a plan to identify and tag a young Secretarybird.

With the easing of restrictions under Level 1 we were able to hold our first in-person (combined with online) evening meeting in over a year in May, but this return to 'normal' was unfortunately short-lived and our meetings have for the time being reverted back to 'Zoom'.

Once again, thank you to all our members, leaders, committee and sub-committee members for making BLNG such a special and exciting birding club.

*Elouise*

**BIRDLIFE NORTHERN GAUTENG**

**INCOME STATEMENT  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED  
31 DECEMBER 2020**

	2020	2019
	R	R
<b>INCOME</b>	<b>76,089</b>	<b>75,818</b>
Subscriptions	76,089	75,818
<b>OTHER INCOME</b>	<b>28,315</b>	<b>55,564</b>
Donations received	5,020	8,893
Interest received	10,390	13,926
Nett proceeds from outings and camps	12,461	23,199
Nett proceeds from courses and special events	-	7,322
Nett proceeds from trading activities	234	2,224
Raffle Income	210	-
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>104,404</b>	<b>131,382</b>
<b>LESS: EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>101,322</b>	<b>128,145</b>
Audit fees	5,862	5,362
Bank charges	1,341	2,165
Bird ringing	-	10,000
Committee meeting expenses	3,180	3,520
Conservation expenses	13,000	6,000
Fixed assets written off	3,999	-
Donations made	-	1,000
Evening meeting expenses	2,975	4,679
AGM and function expenses	2,447	4,887
Hall hire	-	8,250
Insurance	5,020	4,950
Leaders expenses	3,680	13,700
Marketing and promotion	1,838	1,651
Printing and stationery - General	-	706
Printing , envelopes and postage - Lanarius	604	2,031
Secretarial fees	50,400	48,000
Twoway radio expenses	6,976	11,244
<b>SURPLUS / (DEFICIT ) FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>3,082</b>	<b>3,237</b>
<b>ACCUMULATED FUNDS - beginning of year</b>	<b>234,535</b>	<b>231,298</b>
<b>ACCUMULATED FUNDS - end of year</b>	<b>237,617</b>	<b>234,535</b>

**INCOME STATEMENT  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED  
31 DECEMBER 2020**

	2020	2019
	R	R
<b>INCOME</b>	<b>76,089</b>	<b>75,818</b>
Subscriptions	76,089	75,818
<b>OTHER INCOME</b>	<b>28,315</b>	<b>55,564</b>
Donations received	5,020	8,893
Interest received	10,390	13,926
Nett proceeds from outings and camps	12,461	23,199
Nett proceeds from courses and special events	-	7,322
Nett proceeds from trading activities	234	2,224
Raffle Income	210	-
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>104,404</b>	<b>131,382</b>
<b>LESS: EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>101,322</b>	<b>128,145</b>
Audit fees	5,862	5,362
Bank charges	1,341	2,165
Bird ringing	-	10,000
Committee meeting expenses	3,180	3,520
Conservation expenses	13,000	6,000
Fixed assets written off	3,999	-
Donations made	-	1,000
Evening meeting expenses	2,975	4,679
AGM and function expenses	2,447	4,887
Hall hire	-	8,250
Insurance	5,020	4,950
Leaders expenses	3,680	13,700
Marketing and promotion	1,838	1,651
Printing and stationery - General	-	706
Printing , envelopes and postage - Lanarius	604	2,031
Secretarial fees	50,400	48,000
Two-way radio expenses	6,976	11,244
<b>SURPLUS / (DEFICIT ) FOR THE YEAR</b>	<b>3,082</b>	<b>3,237</b>
<b>ACCUMULATED FUNDS - beginning of year</b>	<b>234,535</b>	<b>231,298</b>
<b>ACCUMULATED FUNDS - end of year</b>	<b>237,617</b>	<b>234,535</b>

**STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED**

	2020	2019
	R	R
<b>Balance at 31 December 2019</b>	<b>237,617</b>	<b>234,535</b>
<b>Balance at 01 January 2018</b>	<b>234,535</b>	<b>231,298</b>
<b>Net surplus/ ( Shortfall ) for the year</b>	<b>3,082</b>	<b>3,237</b>
<b>Balance at 31 December 2019</b>	<b>237,617</b>	<b>234,535</b>







# Happy rebirthday BLNG (NTOS and PBC)!

*July 2020 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the club now known as BirdLife Northern Gauteng. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting 'lockdown', this was unfortunately very bad timing for a golden jubilee, so though no celebratory events have been possible yet, this issue of Laniarius attempts to mark this occasion with a few articles and photos that reflect the past 50 years and especially the past 10 years, as various special issues of Laniarius have documented previous decades – the most recent being Laniarius 123 (which can be downloaded from the [Laniarius archive](#) on the BLNG website).*

*In July 1970, the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society (NTOS, later renamed Pretoria Bird Club in 1997 and then BLNG in 2004) was established as a branch of the South African Ornithological Society (now BirdLife South Africa), and gave us our initial Constitution, our Crimson-breasted Shrike mascot, and the title of this very newsletter – Laniarius.*

*NTOS rose from the ashes of an earlier club (also known as the Pretoria Bird Club at first), founded in 1949 but, due to dwindling membership and participation, disbanded and absorbed into Wits Bird Club in 1964. There are strong links in membership and activities that traverse the 6-year gap between bird clubs, and various committees have therefore chosen to also celebrate the anniversaries of this earlier club in the past.*

*The following attempts to briefly summarise the history of the various names and achievements of what has, in one form or another, remained for over 70 years now as the only club/s dedicated to the enjoyment of wild birds and birding in greater Pretoria/Tshwane.*

## **The PREQUEL: the first Pretoria Bird Club**

The full story of the club now known as BirdLife Northern Gauteng begins in October 1949, when a Northern Transvaal branch of the South African Ornithological Society (SAOS) was founded in Pretoria. It was known as the Pretoria Bird Club. One of the club's earliest projects was to propose and raise funds for the establishment of a bird sanctuary at Muckleneuk brickfields. The Austin Roberts Bird Sanctuary was opened in 1956, named for the pioneering ornithologist who had lived nearby and often watched birds there.

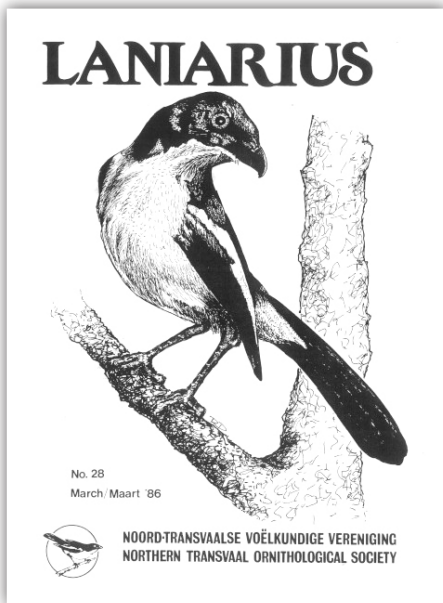
In 1960, based on concerns that the club's name could lead to confusion that its scope included the interests of cage-bird enthusiasts, the Pretoria Bird Club was renamed the Northern Transvaal Wild Bird Society.

Unfortunately, interest in the club's activities began to wane, and in 1964 the decision

was made to incorporate its membership in that of the Witwatersrand Bird Club (WBC). But the Pretoria group never really lost its separate identity and later began arranging its own outings centred around Pretoria, with the consent of the WBC. Local members were also active in the ringing of Barn Swallows at Skinnerspruit, where an estimated 250 to 500 thousand swallows roosted in the reedbeds in summer.

## **The founding of BLNG-by-another-name: the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society**

By late 1969 the activities of the Pretoria section of WBC had developed to such a degree that the idea to again form a separate branch of SAOS was mooted. In May 1970, at a special general meeting of the Pretoria members, approval was given to pursue this idea, which ultimately resulted in the establishment



of the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society (NTOS) in July 1970. The event was reported in the press and the first chairperson, Peter Mendelsohn, was interviewed on Radio Highveld.

The first NTOS committee gave the club its logo, featuring a Crimson-breasted Shrike and designed by Norman Meadows. An informal communique regularly sent to members about club matters and upcoming events was given the name *Laniarius*, after the scientific name of the NTOS's striking emblem (*Laniarius atrococcineus*). In 1975, the more formal publication featuring members' contributions about their sightings and field observations instead took on this title, a name which it proudly bears to this day.

The 1970 committee also delineated the geographical area of the NTOS. This included a large part of the former Transvaal province, which then progressively shrank over the years with the formation of separate clubs in other towns within the region. NTOS camps were held all over this area and beyond, and often

involved camping in very rustic conditions, with intrepid club members traversing the many dirt roads of the old Transvaal in their kombis and other 2-wheel-drive vehicles.

From its earliest days the NTOS was actively involved in conservation. A Watchdog subcommittee was formed to act on reports of threats to the environment, and efforts were made to prevent the construction of a sewage works and fresh produce market by the Pretoria City Council at Skinnerspruit, but these ultimately failed and in 1973 the swallows' roost was bulldozed. Members of the NTOS also made important contributions to bird censuses and atlasing projects, most notably the Magaliesberg census in 1978 and the Transvaal Atlas, which was finally completed in 1985 after 13 years of fieldwork, mostly by members of NTOS and WBC and later also the Lowveld branch.

In 1987, work began on the 5-year Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP), with NTOS responsible for coordinating data collection and collation for 144 atlas squares to the north and west of Pretoria. In 1989, a Conservation subcommittee was formed, through which the club continued to advocate for the protection of important bird habitats in the city and surrounds.



### More name changes: the second Pretoria Bird Club

The proclamation of the nine new provinces after the 1994 elections, as well as the recasting of SAOS as BirdLife South Africa in 1996, created the need for a new name for the NTOS. The original (but unofficial) 1949 name of Pretoria Bird Club was adopted at the 1997 AGM.

The Pretoria area is well known among birders for the large number of species recorded here. The rich birdlife of the region was celebrated in the club's 2001 Pretoria Birding Challenge, in which members were set the task of recording 400 species within 100 km of Church Square in a calendar year. Two members succeeded – with winner Johnny Wilson logging 411 species.



### Enter BirdLife Northern Gauteng

In April 2004, after much deliberation and consultation, and motivated by a desire for the club's name to clearly convey its affiliation and close association with BirdLife South Africa, the club's current name, BirdLife Northern Gauteng / Gauteng-Noord, was voted into effect. In 2017, the familiar image of an attentive Crimson-breasted Shrike, having served as the club's logo, in more or less the same form, for 47 years, was replaced with a stylised version to create a new, minimalist emblem for BLNG. 🐦

## Memories of an old Chair

Philip Calinikos

Wolhuiskraal on the Zaagkuildrif road will always remain synonymous in my mind not only with exciting birding but also as the venue for the BLNG committee's annual 'Bosberaad'.

It was here early in 2009 that I was persuaded by the strong-willed lady triumvirate of our club, Pauline Leinberger, Debbie van Zyl and Rita de Meillon, to accept the position

of Chairman. Having been absent from committee activities for the better part of 15 years, I wrote in my first Chairman's Report in *Laniarius* that this decision was made with great pleasure as well as a good measure of trepidation. I also had no inkling at the time that this would last for almost a decade but so it did... and I have absolutely no regrets about that.

I enjoyed working with every single one of our members who served on our committees during this time... without exception. Tragically our President, Pauline Leinberger who had been one of my mentors in my early birding days, passed away shortly after I assumed the position, but we were most fortunate to find an excellent replacement in André Marx who has always held the club dear to his heart.

One of the most exciting events to be organised by the club during my tenure was the Gala Evening that was held to celebrate 60 years of birding in Pretoria. The ladies on the committee planned the event with the precision and attention to detail of a full-scale military campaign and it was both a sell-out and a jam-packed evening of entertainment. The lead-up to this event gave me the opportunity of researching the early history of our club and I was most excited to discover that my primary school principal, Miss FD Matthews, had served on the committee of the then Northern Transvaal Wild Bird Society in 1964 when I was in Standard One and a proud member of Canary House (she had named all our school's sport houses after birds).

Part of my passion in those early years of chairmanship was to increase the club's conservation activities and with the enthusiastic support of both committees and members we were able to do so very successfully. The club had always possessed a very active base of bird ringers and atlasers but to this we managed to add other activities by aligning with like-minded third parties. A couple of these stand out in particular for me, namely, our involvement with the Wonderboom Urban Verreaux's Eagle Project (WUVEP) and the Secretarybird project that was being launched by BLSA's Ernst Retief.

The pair of Verreaux's Eagles [Witkruisarend] breeding at the Wonderboom Nature Reserve had been monitored and studied by Pieter and Natasja Saunders for some years prior to our involvement, but always from a frustrating distance away. Our donation of R10 000 towards the installation of a webcam above the nest enabled activities at the nest site to be monitored on a permanent real-time basis and the footage

obtained was astounding. A similar donation in 2014 allowed bird flappers to be affixed to some dangerous overhead cables and spikes to the pylons to protect the eagles from these dangers. In acknowledgement we were given the privilege of naming the chick that hatched during the 2014 season. Ntswi (the Tsonga name for Verreaux's Eagle) was monitored from the date of hatching on 30 July, through her fledging on 8 November, until her last image captured on 3 January 2015.

BirdLife South Africa commenced with the Secretarybird project at the end of 2011. It was anticipated that this project would produce interesting results and obtain new information about the biology of these amazing birds and the threats that they face in trying to survive, especially in their formative years. The major cost associated with the project was that of the tracking devices. These had to be fitted to the young birds while still on the nest and were necessary to record the movement of these birds after fledging. Tracking devices sponsored by our club were fitted to four birds during this project, the first and most famous being BLiNG, who after fledging left his nest outside Bets-Bela and travelled all the way to Sua Pan in Botswana, before returning home almost a year later! A second device was fitted to Artemis, who was tragically killed by a predator soon after, but fortunately the device was retrieved and fitted to Hermes. Shortly thereafter a third device was fitted to Third Time Lucky but unfortunately



BLiNG 3



*Klaus Rust receives his painting from Karin Coetzer*

both these last-mentioned birds perished early in life as well – highlighting the perils being faced by these young birds. A scientific paper was published by BLSA in *Ostrich* in 2019 which illustrated the vast distances that these young birds can travel as well as the age of first breeding.

An amazing offer from one of our members was the undoubted highlight of our 2016 year. Karin Coetzer donated two of her exquisite paintings of our endangered Lappet-faced Vulture [Swartaasvoël] as prizes for a raffle to raise funds for vulture conservation. The paintings were also used on the labels of special commemorative wines which were enthusiastically bought up by our thirsty members. Funds raised were used for a beautiful educational

poster and due credit was given to Karin and the club in the *African Birdlife* magazine.

The last Saturday in November has become known as Birding Big Day. In the early years this competition was the domain of teams made up of four experienced and fanatical birders who spent most of the rest of their year mapping out their BBD route. A welcome change was the addition of the ‘community’ category in which teams of up to 20 could participate in a more leisurely manner. 2010 was not only the year in which the whole of South Africa became soccer (and vuvuzela) mad but also marked our entry into the competition. I had been very impressed with Jackey Deacon who had catered for our family when we had descended en masse on Kruger in July, and together with her we planned the first BBD event in Berg-en-dal Rest Camp. Raymond Khosa, head trails guide of the camp, was appointed as our



Philip Calmicos

*BBD 2011, Skukuza*



Philip Calmicos

*BBD 2010, Berg-en-Dal*



*BBD 2012, Olifants camp*

designated driver and guide. A rain shower drowned out most of the dawn chorus but we were soon Skukuza-bound in our 20-seater vehicle. Needless to say, the day developed into an absolute scorcher which tested our patience on the return journey, but our team, aptly named the Grootbek Camera Operators, still managed to record 159 species, which surpassed the target that we had set of 150.

The following year we reconvened at Skukuza Rest Camp where Jackey's husband Dr Andrew Deacon joined in and he was to prove a hilariously entertaining guide. A non-birding highlight of this trip was our vehicle 'breaking down' during a night drive resulting in us sitting in pitch darkness surrounded by a coalition of three huge, noisy and hungry-looking male lions! We excelled on BBD itself, which included a walk on the picturesque Skukuza Golf Course and a visit to the slightly less appealing Skukuza Water Treatment Works, and our 175 species earned us 1<sup>st</sup> place overall in the Community Category.

It was now time to try our luck further north and Olifants Rest Camp was our chosen venue for the 2012 BBD, where we enjoyed sweeping views of the river far below from our luxury lodge perched at the cliff's edge. We tried hard to emulate our previous year's performance in the less bird-rich habitats but still managed to take 3<sup>rd</sup> place in our category with 161 species. The camaraderie amongst the participants during all three events was an

absolute joy to behold and I felt well rewarded for the little effort it took to arrange them.

Another development during the Year of the Vuvuzela was my introduction to a gentleman named Johnnie Kamugisha by some dear friends, Dawie Chamberlain and Steven Klagsbrun. They had both recently been on separate birding/wildlife tours in Uganda with Johnnie at the helm and they insisted that this was a life-changing experience. I contacted Johnnie and we planned a tour for a small group of friends which lived up to all the hype. Upon my return I discussed this with the committee who all agreed it would be a fantastic opportunity to organise a repeat tour, but this time for club members. With the assistance of one of our members, Lynn Fraser, travel arrangements and visa applications were finalised and, notwithstanding the plummeting Rand, eight intrepid BLNG members landed in Entebbe on 28 July 2012. The mighty Shoebill was our first target and we enjoyed a wonderful time with this bird in Mabamba Swamp. Other highlights were the Green-breasted Pitta and chimpanzees in Kibale National Park; cruising the Kazinga Channel in Queen Elizabeth National Park; gorilla and African Green Broadbill trekking in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Our two-week tour delivered over 350 species with a huge number of lifers and 15 Albertine Rift endemics to boot!

With our international birding appetites suitably whetted, another exotic destination



Philip Calmicos

Madagascar, 2013



Philip Galimikos

*Limpopo Camp, September 2012*



*Malaga Camp, February 2016*



Philip Galimikos

*Tswaing Crater, August 2016*



*African Bird Fair 2016*

had to be found. This time we teamed up with Chris Lotz, the owner of Birding Ecotours, who arranged a mouth-watering itinerary for our tour to the huge island of Madagascar in November 2013. During this tour, Chris and his guides transported us from the rainforests of the east across the island to the spiny forests of the south-east. We immersed ourselves in the uniqueness of the island with its endemic bird and mammal families, including of course the lemurs. We managed to see 149 of the sought-after species with a massive 104 being lifers for the whole group! Eleven lemur species added to our fulfilment.

There were so many more thrilling outings and camps during these years thanks to our superb programme and activities co-ordinators and sub-committees and one was truly spoilt for choice! It is most pleasing to see that

these high standards are still being maintained by the club and hopefully normality will return to our lives soon to allow activities to continue as in the past.

In conclusion I would need to mention another important aspect of the club's focus, which was our PR and marketing activities which were undertaken with a view to attracting new members, especially from the younger generation. An annual Open Day (including the ever-popular bird-ringing demonstrations) became a tradition; there was participation in the African Bird Fair; bird identification courses were organised and presented. The interaction with other recreational clubs and Friends groups was also very successful in this regard and it is important that the club continues with these efforts once circumstances allow. 🐦



# BLNG Ringgroep: Die laaste tien jaar

Frik en Wanda du Plooy

Die ringgroep van BirdLife Gauteng-Noord (BLGN) het die afgelope 10 jaar van krag tot krag gegaan. Vroeër jare was daar nie meer as 10 ringers in die groep nie, maar vandag het dit gegroei tot die grootste ringgroep in die land, met 30 aktiewe A-ringers, 6 onaktiewe A-ringers en 10 C-ringers. 'n A-ringer is 'n gekwalifiseerde ringer volgens SAFRING se standaard. 'n B-ringer is iemand wat 'n projek registreer by SAFRING en 'n spesifieke spesie teiken vir navorsing. 'n C-ringer is nog in opleiding.

Voëlberinging is die proses waardeur geregistreerde ringers wilde voëls ring vir die bestudering van hulle lewensiklusse, habitatte, populasies en bewegings. Om dit te kan doen word permanente metaal ringe (gemerk met 'n unieke nommer) om die voël se been geplaas vir toekomstige identifikasie.

SAFRING was deel van die ADU (Animal Demography Unit) by die Universiteit van Kaapstad, maar in 2017, na finansiële probleme, het hulle oorgeskuif na die FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology. SAFRING is die administratiewe sentrum vir voëlberinging in Suid-Afrika en verskaf ringe en toerusting aan professionele ringers en vrywilligers soos ons. Hulle hou ook die databasis in stand en verskaf voëlringdienste in sommige ander lande in Afrika. Na elke ringsessie word die inligting, soos unieke ringnommer, nuwe of ou ring (hervangste), die datum, ou Robertsnummer, voëlspesie, ringer se ADU-nummer, C-ringer se naam as dit van toepassing is, ouderdom, geslag, koördinate, naam van plek, provinsie en land, gewig, lengte van die vlerk, kop, culmen, stert, tarsus, en ververing, aangedui op 'n databladsy wat dan op SAFRING se databasis gelai word. As iemand van die publiek 'n voël met 'n ring aan optel, kan hulle SAFRING op Google raadpleeg. Elke ring het 'n unieke nommer plus die woorde 'SAFRING University of Cape Town SA'. Die ringe se groottes wissel van 1.8 mm vir 'n Kaapse Glasogie [Cape White-eye] tot 26 mm

vir 'n Breëkoparend [Martial Eagle].

Om voëls te ring is nie net om 'n bydrae te maak tot 'citizen science' nie. Dit is 'n manier om in die natuur te kom, die son te sien opkom en om nuwe plekke te ontdek, waar jy as vakansieganger nooit by sou uitgekom het nie. So was ons die afgelope tien jaar al op plekke soos Bray, Tosca, Upington, Van Zylsrus, en Noenieput in die noordweste van die land om roofvoëls te ring. By Sabie en Magoebaskloof het ons in plantasies van Sappi vir die woudvoëls ringetjies aangesit. Ons het selfs so 'n paar jaar gelede, gewapen met 'n bal-chatri naby Waenhuiskrans, gaan Rooiborsjakkalsvoëls [Jackal Buzzard] vang saam met Johan Snyman.

Die groep ring by verskeie plekke in Pretoria, soos Rietvleidam NR, Voortrekkermonument, Moreletakloof NR, die botaniese tuin, Wonderboom NR, Groenkloof NR, Serene Valley in Garsfontein, Strubendam in Lynnwood Glen, Jan Cillierspark in Groenkloof, Bishopvoëlpark in Wierdapark en Frank Strubendam in Lynnwood. Ons gaan ook vir naweke of langer na Wolfhuiskraal naby Pienaarsrivier, Feather River naby Graskop, Wilton Valley anderkant Lephallale (Ellisras), Nylsvley NR, Paardeplaats NR in die Longtompas, Bushtrails naby Magaliesburg en Hans Hoheisen Wildlife Centre net buite Orpenhek in die Kruger Wildtuin.

Die groep het die afgelope jare 'n groot bydrae gelewer tot die kennis oor voëls in Suid-Afrika – ons het drie ringers, Hein Bantjes (1992), Madeleen van Loggerenberg (1996) en Johan Snyman (1999), wat reeds in die vorige eeu as A-ringers gekwalifiseer het en nou nog saam ring. Die groep het sover 'n allemintige 97 251 voëls gering vanaf rekordhouding deur SAFRING. Daar was ook 7 646 hervangste en 105 voëls is dood aangetref. Hierdie inligting is bekom deur na almal se SAFRING-ringpermitte te kyk. Die ringpermit is nie net 'n toestemmingsbrief nie; dit gee ook info soos ringgetalle vanaf

registrasie, asook die totale vir die laaste tien jaar.

Buiten 'n ringpermit van SAFRING moet elke ringer ook 'n permit by elkeen van die nege provinsies uitneem om te mag ring. Voor elke ringsessie kry die uitstappieleier ook toestemming by die reservaat of private grondeienaar.

Die hervangste is veral belangrik om vas te stel hoe oud 'n voël raak en óf dit in die omgewing bly óf na 'n ander area toe trek – moontlik agter kos aan of as die habitat vernietig word. Sommige voëls sterf uit as hulle spesifieke habitat vernietig word en hulle nie meer kan nesmaak nie. Goeie voorbeelde is die Blouswael [Blue Swallow] en Rooiassie [Orange-breasted Waxbill] wie se habitatte bedreig is. BirdLife SA het gou agtergekem dat daar nie meer oor

hierdie spesies gerapporteer word nie – nie deur SABAP2 of BirdLasser nie, maar ook nie deur die ringers nie. BirdLife SA het daadwerklik opgetree om hierdie spesies te red.

Ons groep het ook 'n uitgebreide opleidingsprogram. Die program is deur ons Opleidingskomitee uitgewerk. Die lede is Madeleen van Loggerenberg, Chris du Plooy, Martin Steyn en Jan Beukes (Hein Bantjes sit uit vir die jaar). Volgens die program word 'n C-ringer die eerste keer getoets sodra hy/sy 150 voëls onder toesig gering het. 'n Nuwe ringer roteer tussen A-ringers om die verskillende tegnieke te bemeester. Die volgende evaluering word op 300, dan 450, en die finale een op 500 voëls gedoen. 'n Vereiste van 50 verskillende spesies word ook gestel. Tydens die opleiding word die persoon ook geleer om voëls korrek uit die nette te haal sonder om hulle te beseer. Die leerling word ook touwys gemaak om self 'n net op te slaan en weer af te takel. Robert Thomson by SAFRING het die opleidingsprogram onder oë gehad. Hy is beïndruk met die formaat van ons opleiding en het selfs voorgestel dat dit vir ander klubs beskikbaar gestel moet word. In Februarie 2018 het Craig Natrass van Wits Bird Club (WBC) toestemming gevra om dit by hulle toe te pas. Craig is koördineerder vir die ringgroep by WBC.

Die afgelope paar jaar werk verskeie A-ringers al om 'n stel sleutels op te bou. Die sleutels help die ringers om die voëls makliker, vinniger en meer akkuraat in die hand te identifiseer. Daar is sleutels uitgewerk vir die identifikasie van naguile, sangers, vuurvinkies, koesters, suikerbekkiewyfies, vlieëvangers, spegte, tinktinkies en klopkloppies, lewerikke, ens. Die voordeel om 'n voël in die hand te hou is dat jy die vlerk, tarsus en bek se lengte kan meet. As jy die vlerklengte het, kan jy bv by die sangers die een van die ander onderskei. So ook kan jy by die wyfie vuurvinkies maklik die wyfie van die Jameson onderskei van ander wyfies deur na die bande onder die stert te kyk (al die boeke dui dit nie aan nie).

Toe ek die eerste keer 'n Bontkiewiet [Blacksmith Lapwing] vasgehou het, was ek verwonderd oor die 2 cm pen wat dit op die skouer van die vlerk het. Toe het ek verstaan hoekom hierdie



Pieter Pienaar

*Annica Pienaar se vreugde oor haar eerste Rooivlerktjagra*



Marthin Steyn

*Julian du Plooy met 'n Edelvalk*

relatiewe klein voël tjie 'n olifant kon aandurf soos in 'n advertensie nie lank gelede nie. As 'n kiewiet se nes bedreig word, sal die ouerpaar alles doen om die kleintjies te beskerm. Hulle is baie aggressief in die broeiseisoen en dreig die aanvalle op enige denkbare manier. Hulle sal selfs lugaanvalle op die oortreder doen, deur af te duik, die skouer te laat sak en die voorwerp van bedreiging met daardie pen op die skouer raak te slaan. Daar is al berig dat 'n persoon wonde opgedoen het, na 'n skermutseling met 'n kiewiet.

Seventien van die A-ringers het ook gekwalifiseer om met 'n bal-chatri roofvoëls te ring. 'n Bal-chatri is 'n draadhokkie met vislyn-lusse bo-op en aan die kante. Muise of rotte word in die hokkie gesit. Sodra 'n roofvoël in sig kom, word die spoed van die bakkie verlaag en sommer in die ry, met die deur oop, word die hokkie langs die pad geplaas. Daar word verder gery en buite sig van die roofvoël omgedraai. Sodra die hokkie en die voël weer in sig is, word daar stilgehou en die verkykers uitgehaal. Nou begin die adrenalien pomp! Sommige voëls kom glad nie af nie. Of hulle kom af en dans vir wat soos ure voel om die hokkie net om mens se senuwees uit te rafel. Sodra die pote van die voël vassit aan 'n lus, word daar inderhaas na die hokkie gejaag. Daar gekom, word 'n handdoek oor die voël gegooi om dit rustig te maak. Die mees ervare ringer in die groep sal dan die voël se vlerke toevou en dit aan die bobene beet kry. Die kloue van 'n roofvoël is sy gevaarlikste wapen – so ons bly uit hulle pad uit! Dan word die voël in die sak geweeë en die nodige

afmetings geneem om dit so gou as moontlik weer te laat vlieg.

Dr FC Bothma, een van ons A-ringers, help Unisa se natuurbewaring-studente met 'n module wat hulle oor voëlberinging moet voltooi. Dit neem die vorm aan van 'n vraelys wat die student moet voltooi deur 'n onderhoud met 'n ringer(s) te voer. By Moreletapark NR het die ringgroep al 20 studente op een oggend hanteer. Die dosent skakel na die tyd met die groep om seker te maak dat al die studente die opleidingsessie bygewoon het.

Versekeie nagraadse studente in ornitologie het al as A-ringers by die groep gekwalifiseer, soos Lion Lerm, Ryno Kemp en Kyle Lloyd. Kyle is tans BirdLife SA se koördineerder vir bewaring en navorsing oor die Witvlerkvloukuiken [White-winged Flufftail]. Hy is in Dullstroom gestasioneer.

Ons nuutste C-ringer, Sascha Dueker, is 'n nagraadse student van Duitsland wat sy meestersgraad in Duitsland by die Universiteit van Goettingen oor Afrika se gryspapegaaië in Kameroen gedoen het. Hy werk nou onder Dr Rowan Martin verbonde aan die Universiteit van Kaapstad, wat 'n kenner is op die navorsing oor papegaaië. Sascha is juis nou oppad na Zambië waar hy vir 'n maand navorsing gaan doen oor die parkiete (lovebirds) daar, in samewerking met die World Parrot Trust. Die projek vir sy PhD-graad is: 'Phylogeography of *Aganornis* spp. in the Zambia River Basin'. Hy het by SAFRING aansoek gedoen vir 'n B-permit om in Afrika voëls te mag ring. Op versoek van Robert



Wanda du Plooy

*Johan de Jager en Elba Swart elkeen met 'n Rooiborslaksman*

Thomson het die skrywers en Marina Pienaar hom vir 'n ringsessie geneem op 'n plot in Centurion om hom vertrouwd te maak met ons metodes en om sy identifikasie van Afrika-voëls te toets. Hy het met vlieënde vaandels geslaag.

Robert Thomson, nou hoof by SAFRING en senior lektor by UCT, en ander bekendes in voëlkringe soos Rihaan Geyser en Riaan Marais, het ringers in Pretoria opgelei. Lede van BirdLife SA se span, Ernst Retief, Janine Goosen en Kyle Lloyd is of was vroeër deel van die ringgroep in Pretoria. Twee van ons lede, Ryno Kemp en Claudia Hannweg, werk nou by Vulpro.

Sascha Michel was pas 18 toe hy as A-ringer in Januarie 2014 gekwalifiseer het. In September 2015 is hy benoem vir BirdLife SA se Owllet Award vir daardie jaar. Hy het die toekenning gekry omdat hy op so 'n jong ouderdom as A-ringer gekwalifiseer het en vir sy bydrae tot 'citizen science' deur sy voëlringaktiwiteite. Dit is gedoen tydens 'n funksie by die Southern Sun Hotel in Hyde Park in Johannesburg op 22 Oktober 2015.

Nog 'n jong ringer, Julian du Plooy, was slegs 16 toe hy in Maart 2017 'n A-ringer geword het. Dit was op voorwaarde dat hy saam met sy pa, Chris du Plooy, moet ring tot hy 18 is. Ons het nog 'n meisie, Imé van Coller, wat vanjaar op 21

klaargemaak het en Nicole de Jager (18) moet nog net geëvalueer word. Die jongste C-ringer, Annica Pienaar, is maar 13 jaar oud. Ons is baie bly oor die groot aantal jongmense wat by die groep aangesluit het. Verder bestaan die groep uit nege persioenarisse en die res van die groep wissel tussen 30 en 60 jaar.

Vandag se ringers baat nog steeds by ringers wat in die vorige eeu gering het. Dorothy Hall van Mbombela (Nelspruit) se seun, Andrew, het sy ma se ringe en toerusting aan BLGN-ringers geskenk. Dorothy het Langkuifarende [Long-crested Eagle] in die Laeveld gering. Martin Johannsmeier, redakteur van *Laniarius* in 1972, was ook 'n ringer. Hy en sy vrou Liz het in 2017 ringe, boeke en toerusting geskenk aan die ringgroep. So ook Frans en Lana du Plooy (2 170 ringe en toerusting), Siegfried Wolff en John Bunning toe hulle die tuig neergelê het.

Die ringers kom uit al die lae van die samelewing – van 'n huisvrou tot mediese dokter, veearts, ingenieur, sielkundige, natuurbe-waarder, verkoopsman, student, skolier. Almal is welkom!

Daar is geen groter vreugde as om hierdie wonderlike stokperdjie te deel met entoesiastiese vriende nie. As jy 'n nuwe stokperdjie soek – kom woon 'n ringsessie by! 🐦

## WELCOME TO BLNG!

Aan alle nuwe lede – baie welkom! Ons sien daarna uit om julle by ons aandvergaderings, daguitstappies of tydens 'n naweekkamp te leer ken.

*We trust you will enjoy your birding with us. Please contact Fransie at [secretary@blng.co.za](mailto:secretary@blng.co.za) or 072 737 0862 if you have any queries or requests.*

### March 2020 – May 2021

Corlien Lambrechts (The Willows), Sumarie Slabber (Hatfield), Hannie Bloem (Ninapark), John van den Berg (Brooklyn), Hannes van den Berg (Elarduspark), Susan Pieterse (Wonderboom), Danie Bosman (Wierda Park), Carel Aucamp (Monumentpark), John Gawler (Lynnwood Ridge), Nicole Crisp, Christoff Snyman (Lyttelton), Reinhardt Fowler (Menlo Park), Faure Bosman (Totiusdal), Koos & Anna-Marie van der Merwe (East Lynne), Johan & Christa Hattingh (Lynnwoodrif), Riaan & Corné Prinsloo (Queenswood), Faure & Marlene Bosman (Totiusdal), Charles & Lucia Dickinson (Woodhill), Jan Petrus & Mary-Ann van der Berg (Woodhill), Deon van der Hoven, Pietrou Gie (Wapadrand), Johan & Christa Hattingh (Lynnwood Ridge), Marjorie Rapp (Waterkloof Ridge), Mariette Oelofse, Tanja van der Walt (Silver Lakes), Antoinette de Beer (Olympus), Reinier Meyjes (Pinegowrie), Len & Tami Backhouse (Elarduspark), Craig & Annalize Green (Wonderboom), Robyn Arnold (Brooklyn), Sascha Dueker (Central Pretoria), Hannelie Marais (Amberfield Crest), Tiana Nigrini (Doornpoort), Lorinda Naude (Weavind Park), Elsa Loots.

# Locked down but not out: BLNG meets online

Laetitia Steynberg

The Club was quick to respond to the Lockdown announcement at end-March to ensure that members did not miss out on birding and nature experiences during the period at home. A series of Zoom webinars, by knowledgeable and high-calibre presenters, were lined up, with the first webinar launched shortly after commencement of Lockdown Level 5. It was a fortnightly series and continued until mid-September when the lockdown was relaxed to a level that permitted members do their own birding trips.

The topics in the series were varied and included:

- Insights into new birding conservation initiatives, such as the new **Ingula NR in KZN**, an oversight of the conservation programmes of the **Martial Eagles in the Karoo**, the **White-winged Flufftail and cranes**.
- Learning experiences with webinars on **bird ID tips, bird sounds**, and a peep into

new avitourism initiatives.

- The webinars also took us (virtually) to exciting birding spots in Southern Africa with a talk on the specials recorded during a young birder's **Big Birding Year** and a **trip through the Caprivi** – these were undoubtedly the next best after the 'real' thing.
- Webinars on the status of the **Verreaux's Eagles in Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden** and the **cheetah metapopulation project** were very well received: the latter was a particularly interesting talk in which the return of cheetahs to Rietvlei was discussed.

The feedback from members about the webinar series was very positive and this is a medium that the club may want to use again, hopefully not during a further harsh lockdown, but to bring out-of-town specialists 'into the room' for evening meetings. 🐦

2020/04/16	Ingula NR	Carina Coetzer (BLSA)
2020/04/30	White-winged Flufftails	Robin Colyn (BLSA)
2020/05/14	ID tips and tricks	Jason Boyce
2020/05/28	Martial eagles in the Karoo	Gareth Tate (EWT)
2020/06/11	Verreaux's eagles at WSBG	Ernest Porter
2020/06/25	Blue Cranes	Christie Graig (EWT)
2020/07/09	BLNG Caprivi trip	Dawie Rotteveel
2020/07/23	Big birding year	Anton Schultz
2020/08/06	Learn the birds	Etienne Marais
2020/08/20	Cheetah metapopulation project	Vincent van der Merwe (EWT)
2020/09/10	BLSA avitourism	Andrew de Blocq (BLSA)

# Lockdown birding

Klaus Rust

We were reminded of the seriousness of the lockdown just a few days after its start on 27 March when we dared to venture onto the lawn in front of the house and the neighbour's 6-year-old daughter shouted from across the road, "Tannie, julle mag nie op straat wees nie, julle is in kwarantyn!" So we realized we needed to be vigilant not only of Big Brother, and the police, but also of Small Sister from across the road. So we turned to lockdown birding where we were sure that our little feathered friends were not going to remind us of our imprisonment. From now on it was a hunt not to miss any movement in the trees and bushes in our garden, up in the air, or any bird call around.

In the beginning the bird list grew quickly with all the usual urban garden suspects and regulars like Cape Robin-chat, Karoo Thrush, Southern Boubou [Gewone Janfrederik, Geelbeklyster, Suidelike Waterfiskaal], various sparrows, doves and pigeons, barbets, weavers, mousebirds, canaries, bulbul, Hadeda, Cape White-eye, White-bellied and Amethyst Sunbird, Green Wood-hoopoe, Arrow-marked Babbler, Grey Go-away-bird, Cape Glossy Starling, Red-headed and Cut-throat Finches [Kaapse Glasogie, Witpensuikerbekkie, Swartsuikerbekkie, Rooibekkelelaar, Pylvlekatlagter, Kwêvoël, Kleinglanspreeu, Bandkeelvink, Rooikopvink] and many more. The last of the summer migrants added to the list, like European Bee-eater, Greater Striped Swallow and White-rumped Swift [Europese Byvreter, Grootstreepswael, Witkruiswindswael]. Less common visitors were African Grey Hornbill, Bar-throated Apalis, Cardinal- and Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Burchell's Coucal, Black-backed Puffback [Gryneushoringvoël, Bandkeelkleinjantjie, Kardinaalspeg, Goudstertspieg, Gewone Vleiloerie] and Black-headed Heron [Swartkopreier] on top of our cedar tree,

which, in spite of being exotic, does attract a lot of birds – because of its height it makes it a very useful vantage point. Scanning the sky delivered African Palm and Little Swifts, Egyptian Goose and Yellow-billed Duck, Pied Crow, Crowned and Blacksmith Lapwings [Palmwindswael, Kleinwindswael, Kolgans, Geelbekeend, Witborskraai, Kroonkiewiet, Bontkiewiet]. At night the call of the Spotted Thick-knee [Gewone Dikkop] added to the list. And then there was a pair of Spotted Eagle-Owls [Gevlekte Ooruil] who one evening alerted us with their *hu-hooo* call to their presence on a street light in front of the house. Another memorable sighting was of a 'kill' in our garden. A Little Sparrowhawk [Kleinsperwer] caught one of our regular visitors to the bird feeder, a Red-headed Finch, as a snack and enjoyed his meal calmly in the tree.

Although during lockdown we were allowed to do essential shopping only, some of my shopping trips were extended into shopping-cum-birding trips to places where there were more birds than shops. In this way I could add birds to the list like Cattle Egret, African Wattled Lapwing, Bronze Mannikin, Helmeted Guineafowl, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Common Waxbill, Black-crowned Tchagra, Blue Waxbill, Fiscal Flycatcher, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Grey-headed Bush-Shrike and others [Veereier, Lelkiewiet, Gewone Fret, Gewone Tarentaal, Bruinkopvisvanger, Rooibeksyie, Fiskaalvlieëvanger, Bruinsylangstertjie, Spookvoël].

During the first week of lockdown Ria remembered that she was the proud owner of a very old and totally under-utilized sewing machine, which she then dusted off to make some beautiful face masks for us. Since then the sewing machine has disappeared in the depths of a cupboard again. We also discovered the TV Sofa Safari channels 180 and 183



Klaus Raut

*A 'kill' witnessed in the garden*

and enjoyed the outdoor adventures of others indoors. Ria also tried her hand at baking an apple tart, which I really enjoyed, but according to her would not win any Master Chef prizes. Since that there has been no other attempt at baking. Reading good books was of course another useful way of spending time in virtual confinement. I enjoyed reading the adventures and experiences of several of our past rangers in our national parks.

And then came the 1<sup>st</sup> of May and we were let out on parole from 6 to 9 in the mornings. What a joy to walk around freely for a couple of hours, not feeling guilty. But close to 9 o'clock and still out on the street and that changed quickly. Some mornings while still doing birding minutes before 9 and kilometres from home, a police car always seemed to appear from nowhere. It took seconds only for us, and others, to be in their cars with guilty expressions on the face and pounding hearts. The permitted 5 kilometres we were allowed from home had of course also to be stretched a little bit from time to time to suit the birds we wanted to see. But it was also possible to meet some old birding friends again for a few hours. And so the bird list grew with sightings not possible in

the confines of the backyard. So we added Black and Ovambo Sparrowhawk, African Harrier-Hawk, Half-collared Kingfisher, Giant Kingfisher, Little Bittern, Greater Honeyguide, Kurrichane Thrush, Southern Black Flycatcher, Fork-tailed Drongo, African Sacred Ibis [Swartsperwer, Ovambosperwer, Kaalwangvalk, Blouvisvanger, Reusevisvanger, Kleinrietreier, Grootheuningwyser, Rooibeklyster, Swartvlieëvanger, Mikstertbyvanger, Skoorsteenveër], herons and various other waterbirds.

In the middle of May the lockdown was relaxed further and we stopped adding to the list, which had grown to about a 100 ticks – nothing award-winning, but for backyard birding good enough for us. For a few weeks keeping a lockdown bird list had kept us busy and entertained with what nature had to offer us in the confines of the city environment, and had distracted our thoughts away from the daily bombardment of news about death and illness, politics and police and a faltering economy. And I also realized that the vocabulary of our youngest generation today is far bigger than mine at the age of 6 years – I would not have known about the meaning of *kwarantyn*.

# Mapungubwe – long delay rewarded!

Ingrid van Heerden

There are certain names that conjure up the dreams of my childhood and are full of the promise of adventure. Mapungubwe is one such name. It was, therefore, with great excitement that we made a booking for the BLNG Camp to be held at Mapungubwe from 19 to 23 March 2020. It was the chance of a lifetime to visit this area of our country. There was some discussion between my husband and myself centring on my inability to stand the heat in March! I promised him that I would do or die, but I just had to see Mapungubwe, its birds, elephants, trees and other wonders.

## Lockdown

We had already packed some of the essentials for the trip and our excitement was building, when the first rumours of the Covid-19 lockdown started to circulate. It's a long way to drive to the north-eastern border of South Africa, so we stopped preparations and waited with bated breath for the President to make his announcement. As it turned out, the Level 5 Lockdown commenced on 27 March 2020, but with rising concern over the spread of Covid-19 in SA, BLNG decided to abandon their plans to visit Mapungubwe shortly before

the camp. Our Mapungubwe dreams shattered into a thousand pieces, but we realised that at the time no responsible person would hazard a group visit involving driving around in a communal vehicle for 2 days and that BLNG could not be expected to take responsibility for such a venture.

Luckily Rita de Meillon, BLNG Secretary, and her helpers, persuaded SANParks to shift our booking instead of cancelling it outright. The new dates for Mapungubwe were 13 to 17 December of 2020. My husband and I once again had our discussion about my ability to handle great heat and humidity, and I once again assured him that if I had survived the Tembe Pafuri BLNG Camp in December 2004 with its blazing days and steaming hot nights, I would endure Mapungubwe too. Hope springs eternal! We settled down to wait.

## The long wait

It was a long wait, highlighted by the periodic Presidential announcements as the country slowly crept from Level 5 to 2 by November. Another development was the SANParks e-mail informing us that instead of staying at the Limpopo Forest Camp and the Mazhou



Leokwe

Steffel Boothe



camping site, we would be housed at the Leokwe Main Camp, at no extra cost except the daily conservation fee, because “primates had badly damaged the tented camp during the Covid-19 lockdown.” I, for one, was thrilled, because Leokwe Main Camp is a great deal more comfortable and fitted out with all the mod-cons (electric light, air conditioners, etc.), that are not part of the camping scene, which has never appealed to me.

When Sean Naude, our camp leader, started sending out WhatsApps (WA) and e-mails about the long-awaited camp, we could at last allow ourselves to believe that we would see the wonders of Mapungubwe.

### Potholes

One last hurdle remained – which road would be the best and safest, to take to reach the park, particularly in relation to potholes? Rather startling photos of potholes the size of large elephants did the rounds on WA and many a phone call was made to fellow travellers to discuss the merits of Routes 1 or 2. Steve decided to use Route 2 via Polokwane, Alldays and the R521. Route 1 was via Polokwane and Musina. The prime joke of our WA group was “Beaches are closed, but potholes will remain open for you to enjoy!”

*Martial Eagle/  
Breëkoparend*



Sean Naude

### The Great North Road

Our spirits lifted as we at long last left the city behind and turned onto the Great North Road. Adventure lay ahead! We revelled in the sight of the countryside decked in glorious green with lush grazing and trees covered in abundant foliage. This was a sight that we had not enjoyed for a period of nearly 5 years, while a merciless drought battered South Africa.

Although there were scary sections on the rural part of Route 2, we kept a sharp lookout and slowed down to spare the car’s tyres and suspension every time we were confronted with a lake-sized pothole or oncoming traffic in our lane trying to avoid the dongas on the other side of the road. Comparing notes with our fellow drivers who had taken Route 1, the only conclusions that could be reached were that the rural roads in northern Limpopo are extremely hazardous and that both routes were equally challenging.

### Leokwe Main Camp

When we at last reached our destination and had booked in at the Main Gate in the eastern part of the park (a rather lengthy process), we drove the 11 km to our magic camp cradled in the arms of the great sandstone rocks that surround the banks of the mighty Limpopo.

I was enchanted by the sturdy 2-bed chalets boasting a kitchen, well equipped with a fridge, hotplate, microwave, crockery, and cutlery, as well as a table and chairs for dining, a comfortable bedroom with a ceiling fan and plenty of windows to allow circulation of cool air, plus an air conditioner to combat the soaring temperatures and humidity of summer. The chalets also had bathrooms with quirky outdoor showers, that were either a blessing in the heat of the day or a chilling experience at night.

Our stoep faced a circle of golden rocks 4-storeys high, on which a family of dainty



Ingrid van Heerden

*Steve on our stoep*

klipspringers foraged for a late afternoon snack and Blue Waxbill [Blousysie] and Red-Winged Starling [Rooivlerkspreu] kept us entertained while they swooped to catch insects. The prize birds of the rocks were the Mocking Cliff Chats with their striking black and rufous colouring. Busy Swainson's Spurfowl [Bosveldfisant] clucked around doing their late afternoon food gathering. It was so relaxing to put up our feet and absorb the Great Silence of the Limpopo valley and know that we had at last, after a 9-month wait, made it to Mapungubwe.

### Our group

Summoned to the swimming pool in the centre of the camp, we went to meet our fellow birders and receive instructions for the following day. We were happy to meet Lenie, Lia and Daniel, birding friends who had been



Sean Naude

*Monotonous Lark/Bosveldlewerik*

with us in Madagascar, and to see many other members of BLNG whom we had missed for all the dreary months of the lockdown. It was disappointing to hear that Sean and Robin Naude had not yet joined us, being held up by voluntary Covid-contact quarantine. Elouise Kalmer, our BLNG Chairperson, welcomed us and explained that we would be taken for extensive bird drives on the following two mornings by Leonard Luula, our designated guide. The drives were scheduled to start at 05:30 from the main gate, so we would have to leave Leokwe at least 20 to 30 minutes prior to the departure time as the 11 km strip road between the main gate and the main camp winds its way through rocky terrain where no one can hurry.

In view of the long, hot, relatively tiring journeys most of us had made and the proposed early start the next day, we all decided



Sean Naude

*Greater Painted-snipe/Goudsnip*



Sean Naude

*Marsh Sandpiper/Moerasruiter*



Sean Naude

*Black-chested Snake Eagle/  
Swartborsslangarend*



Sean Naude

*Double-banded Sandgrouse/  
Dubbelbandsandpatrys*

not to have a communal braai, but to make supper in our chalets.

After a ready-made meal, Steve and I sat in the moonlight on our stoep listening to the pinging of bats and the haunting calls of Square-tailed Nightjar [Laeveldnaguil] and Water Thick-knee [Waterdikkop], before we braved the outdoor shower (it had cooled down considerably and a nippy wind whistled through the wooden poles that surround the showers). Most bracing!

### Communal drives

For two days we rose in the chilly darkness of the African pre-dawn and struggled to get dressed, drink coffee, munch rusks, collect our birding and snacking kits, as well as rain gear, before we drove the 11 km to the main

gate as the sun slowly crept over the horizon, turning the world into a beautiful place. On both days, the weather cooled down considerably, clouds obscured the sky and occasionally rain or lighter drizzle kept us cool. We were certainly not 'fried' as we had expected. Not all December trips to the north-eastern boundary of our country need be a problem when it comes to heat and dust!

Our cheerful guide, Leonard Luula, was waiting for us at the collection point with a safari vehicle with canopy, which was large enough to accommodate most of us on single seats to maintain social distancing. Some couples chose to sit next to each other. Sanitiser was also readily available wherever we went so that we could disinfect our hands.

During the drives we actively shared in bird spotting to assist Leonard to stop when we saw interesting birds, particularly raptors. Mapungubwe National Park is famous for its 46 raptor species and during our 4-day stay we managed to see African Fish Eagle, Cuckoo Hawk, Harrier-Hawk, and Hawk Eagle, imposing Martial Eagle, Brown Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Common Buzzard, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Yellow-billed Kite, regal Verreaux's and Wahlberg's Eagle [Visarend, Koekoekvalk, Kaalwangvalk, Grootjagarend] the brave, long-travelled Amur Falcon [Oostelike Rooipootvalk] and two species of vulture – White-backed and Lappet-faced [Witruugaasvoël, Swartaasvoël].



Ingrid van Heerden

*Peering into the bushes at the top of a vast cliff*



Thea Jenkins

*Pel's Fishing Owl/Visuil, immature*

Sightings of the Lesser Spotted Eagle [Gevlekte Arend] were particularly plentiful, probably due to the profusion of insects that breed in very wet seasons.

We were all pleased when Sean and Robin Naude managed to join us on Day 3 of our camp.

A total of 16 species of raptor, which represents more than a third of the raptor species found in the area, is a tidy haul.

### Viewpoints

We were thrilled to experience the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers in full flood. For people who live in drought-stricken, El Niño-devastated countries, the sight of two major rivers full from bank to bank flowing strongly is a rare delight. How often have we stood on the crumbling banks of rivers in South Africa in recent years and stared at a mighty stream reduced to a few muddy pools? Countless times. The bounty of the plentiful rains in this part of the country (more than 1 000 mm by some reports) created what was perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime sight.

The banks of the Limpopo and the Confluence Lookout where the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers meet, afforded excellent water-bird viewing. Another viewpoint, the Treetop Boardwalk, was no longer high up in the trees, but relatively close to the water, because of the

vast increase in the water levels. It was here that we realised how close Botswana and Zimbabwe really were. While we were watching Green-backed (Striated) Heron [Groenrugreier] and ungainly Marabou Storks [Maraboe] from the Boardwalk, a herd of donkeys, led by a beast wearing a clanging bell, waded across the river and proceeded to graze on the South African side just below us. The herders and washer-women who were following the donkeys decided to wait on the Botswana shore until we departed.

### Our lifer

When we reached the Limpopo Valley viewpoint, our guide set off to find that elusive creature known to birders as Pel's Fishing Owl [Visuil]. Over the years, we have been persuaded to attend many a camp and outing with BLNG based solely on the promise that the location in question was guaranteed to produce sightings of the secretive Pel's. In nearly 20 years of BLNG birding, from the Limpopo to Ndumo, we had as yet not seen these owls. In addition, after two decades most birders have a relatively substantial bird list and finding a new lifer without leaving the country is practically impossible. So, when the guide called us to come and see what he had found, I could feel my heart pounding in my chest and I dared to hope that we might see a Pel's. Peering up into the tall trees, I initially saw what looked like a bundle of off-white washing, and then suddenly the washing turned into the most beautiful fluffy young Pel's Fishing Owl! I nearly fainted with excitement and could not get enough of absorbing the maximum number of images into my brain. Thank goodness, other members of our group had top-class cameras with massive lenses to capture the beauty and fragility of these amazing birds. Steve and I were grinning from ear to ear, "We have a lifer! We've seen a Pel's! At last!" Only another birder will understand the great satisfaction and contentment we feel when a lifer is added to a relatively long bird list. It is a most amazing feeling.



Mapungubwe Hill



Interpretive Centre



Golden Rhino replica

### Birding notes

The birding at Mapungubwe in the high summer, when all the migrant species are busy gorging on insects, fruit and seeds, is magnificent. My advice to visitors would be to brave the heat and humidity, and do your birding in summer to see the maximum number of species. We found many of the special species listed in our invitation to attend this camp, ranging from the gorgeous array of bee-eaters (Southern Carmine, European, White-fronted, Little and the rare Blue-cheeked [Rooibors-, Europese, Rooikeel-, Klein- en Blouwangbyvreter]), to larks (Flappet, Rufous-naped, Sabota, Fawn-coloured, Monotonous [Laeveldklappertjie, Rooinek-, Sabota-, Vaalbruin- en Bosveldlewerik) in the savannah veld, to a bevy of cuckoo species (African, Black, Diederik's, Jacobin, Klaas's [Afrikaanse Koekoek, Swartkoekoek, Diederikkie, Bontnuwejaarsvoël, Meitjie) and the ubiquitous Red-chested Cuckoo [Piet-my-vrouw] in the riverine forests.

We reached a combined number of 218 species during our three-and-a-half-day stay at Mapungubwe. Seeing that the current bird count amounts to 456 species, we did well to identify nearly 50% of the grand total.

In addition to the awe-inspiring scenery, the unique vegetation dominated by ancient

baobabs, stellar birding and sightings of elephant, baboon and vervets, giraffe and a variety of buck, such as impala, steenbuck, and klipspringer, Mapungubwe is a site of great historical and archaeological significance. It was declared a World Heritage Site in September 2004. Visitors to Mapungubwe should include an extra day to take the guided tour to Mapungubwe Hill where, to quote the official brochure "South Africa's first kingdom was established just prior to 1300 AD. It was home to a powerful tribe that flourished on trading with Eastern cultures such as China and India." A visit to the Interpretation Centre which is housed in a celebrated architectural building, is also enlightening and features replicas of the golden artefacts excavated by the University of Pretoria after the discovery of the Golden Rhino in 1932.

As history enthusiasts, Steve, Lia, Daniel and I embarked on the guided tour with Johannes Masalesa, an accredited guide, and Jan, an armed ranger. The need for the latter became evident when we encountered elephants roaming the forested plains that surround Mapungubwe Hill. I prudently decided not to scale the steep, slippery Hill when it started to rain steadily, but sat under a tree with Jan while the other three intrepid adventurers and Johannes climbed to the summit. They later reported that the view from the Hill is magnificent and must have afforded the King of Mapungubwe great pleasure as he surveyed his rich kingdom stretching as far as the eye could see, bordered in the North by the great Limpopo and Shashe Rivers.

### Serendipity

After our visit, Steve happened to meet Big Nev Constable, a birding friend. When Big Nev heard that we had visited Mapungubwe National Park, he told Steve that in 1994, as a member of the Northern Transvaal Bird Society (Pretoria Region), he, Malcolm Canova and our dear Pauline Leinberger, among others, were tasked by President Mandela to compile a bird list for what was then still the Vhembe Army Camp. The establishment of Mapungubwe as a World Heritage Site was no doubt based on a great deal of ecological, cultural and archaeological evidence, but it is fascinating to think that the bird count conducted by members of our bird club nearly 30 years ago probably contributed to this positive step in the conservation of the area that is Mapungubwe. It would be tragic in the extreme if uncontrolled

coal mining within a stone's throw of this national treasure would undo all the hard work initiated by a far-seeing leader and teams of experts in every field, who worked so hard for Mapungubwe to be granted World Heritage status.

### Beneficial delays

One of the most significant advantages of the 9-month delay in the timing of our BLNG visit to Mapungubwe, was the fortuitous change in accommodation. Another bonus was the cooler weather induced by clouds and rain that tend to build up in mid-summer. Possibly our sighting of the Pel's chick was also thanks to arriving at the right time at the right spot. Good things are usually worth waiting for and this also applies to the wonders of Mapungubwe. They were unforgettable. 🐦

## BLNG camp at Makuleke: 18–21 February 2021

Hannes van den Berg

Thursday 18 February 2021: it's almost 14:00 and we're all waiting at Pafuri Gate for the Makuleke weekend to begin. At 14:00, two game-viewing vehicles arrive at the gate. After meeting our field guides, Ross and Caroline, we load our luggage onto the trailer and get onto the vehicles. Then, off we go, leaving our vehicles at the gate. The weekend had begun and we were ready for a great birding experience.

Arriving at the Makuleke camp, the 'whit, wit-wit' call of the Harlequin Quail [Bontkwartel] was all around us in the grass as we settled into our allocated tents. It is a beautiful camp set in the middle of the bush amongst tall shady trees. It gives you a true Out-of-Africa feel. At 15:00 we had a short briefing on the programme for the weekend, and were introduced to Duncan, who would also be sharing his knowledge with us over the

weekend. After a light lunch, we were off on our first birding drive.

The weekend was jam-packed with activity and excellent birding. Every morning at 04:30 we were wakened by the drums. Everyone would then get ready and enjoy coffee/tea and rusks on the dining deck before leaving for our morning drive. Around 10:00 we would return to camp for a hearty healthy breakfast. Then there were about two to three hours when everyone could rest or do whatever they liked. At 15:00 it was lunch time and at 16:00 we would be off for the afternoon drive which extended into the night. Around 20:00 we would return to camp, whereafter we would enjoy dinner on the deck. Then off to bed. This was the routine set for the weekend. The meals served were outstanding and everyone, even those with special dietary requirements,



*African Pygmy Goose/Dwerggans*



Hannes van den Berg

*Lemon-breasted Canary/Geelborskanarie*

enjoyed them very much. Compliments to Caroline the German student, Margret and the whole cooking team!

Makuleke has a rich variety of habitats, from floodplains, riverine bush, and open grassy plains to tall Mopani woodland. The heavy rainfall and floods in the area resulted in the floodplains being filled with a water and thus abundant birdlife. The drives were well planned to visit many different places and areas and to cover many different habitats. This resulted in great birding and many species being seen. Our two guides, Ross and Duncan, are extremely knowledgeable and the amount of information they shared with the group was mind-blowing. The group was dynamic and everyone participated and shared their knowledge. Off course, you should not dare try to argue with Jaco on a topic. You just might end up losing the debate six–love.

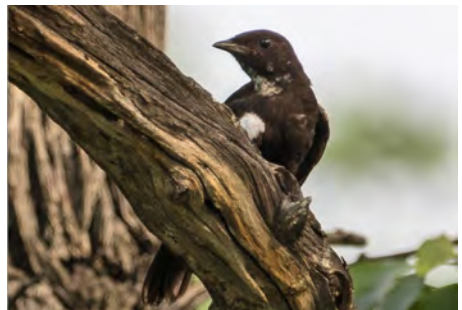
The number of species seen and recorded was just wonderful. The highlights for Thursday were African Harrier-Hawk, Greater Painted-snipe, Dwarf Bittern [Kaalwangvalk, Goudsnip,

Dwergrietreier] and the Eurasian Golden Oriole [Europese Wielewaal], although this was seen just briefly in flight.

There were many raptors around in the area, especially the Lesser Spotted Eagle [Gevlekte Arend], which was quite in abundance, and thus, after numerous sightings, called the Often Spotted Eagle. Friday morning highlights were African Pygmy Goose, Allen's Gallinule, African Openbill and Lemon-breasted Canary [Dwerggans, Kleinkoningriethaan, Oopbekooievaar, Geelborskanarie]. The late afternoon drive took us to the bridge over the Luvuvhu River, where Böhm's Spinetail [Witpensstekelstert], very bat-like in flight, was the highlight. And the sunset at the bridge was spectacular. On our way back to camp we saw European Nightjar, Square-tailed Nightjar and Fiery-necked Nightjar [Europese Naguil, Laeveldnaguil, Afrikaanse Naguil] and Ross was just too eager to explain in detail how to



*Square-tailed Nightjar/Laeveldnaguil*



Hannes van den Berg

*Arnot's Chat/Bontpiek*



Hannes van den Berg

Sunset at Luvuvhu Bridge



Visiting an old giant

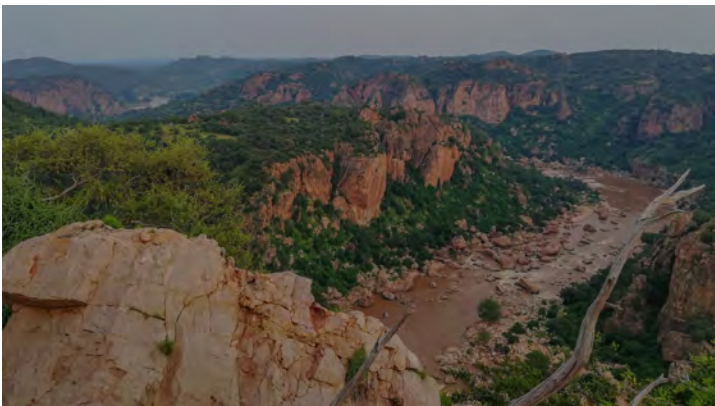
distinguish between the various species of nightjars in the veld. One was caught by hand by Duncan in the headlights – very informative.

The Saturday morning drive also rewarded us with more highlights, with a Grey-headed Kingfisher, Mosque Swallows and some Arnot's Chat [Gryskopvisvanger, Moskeeswael, Bontpiek] in typical tall mopane woodland. The afternoon drive took us to the lookout over Lanner Gorge and what an amazing view from there! With all the rain that had fallen and the river flowing strong, it was such a spectacular place to be at sunset (and have a sundowner). On our way back, we saw a Spotted Eagle Owl [Gevlekte Ooruil] (according to Ross extremely rare around there) and once again a number of nightjars.

Sunday morning, on our last drive, we were once again rewarded with more special sightings: Senegal Coucal, Broad-billed Roller and Grey-headed Parrot [Senegalvleiloerie,

Geelbektrouphant, Savannepapegaa]. At 08:00 we were back at camp and it was time to leave for Pafuri Gate. The Racket-tailed Roller [Knopsterttrouphant], on most participants' wishlists, had eluded us this time, but some of us still managed to add some lifers to their lists, with a total of around 160 species recorded. The weather and the rain during our visit also played along and did not interrupt any of our birding activities, though it was definitely hot. Sadly, such a great birding weekend had to come to an end, but some of us will definitely be back for another visit in future.

The EcoTraining personnel at Makuleke were excellent hosts and deserve a big 'thank you' – everybody had a great and unforgettable weekend. 🐦



Hannes van den Berg

Lanner Gorge



# A birding extravaganza at Makuleke, 4–7 March 2021

Rose Clark and Anton Bekker

On 4 March 2021, eight BLNG members embarked upon an amazing birding adventure to the Makuleke Concession, a 24 000-hectare area in the Pafuri region, situated between the Limpopo and Luvuvhu Rivers in the northern sector of the Kruger National Park. We all arrived at the Pafuri Gate in sweltering heat and did some quick introductions before our game drive vehicle arrived from EcoTraining's camp in Makuleke. Our group, all hailing from Pretoria, included Johan and Christa Hattingh, Anton and Madeleine Bekker, Ingrid and Steve van Heerden and Max and Rose Clark. After a brief false start... where we had to turn back to collect Ingrid's binoculars (whoops – the most critical item to forget on a birding trip), we set off for the camp enjoying the cool breeze on the open vehicle with our hosts, Alexa and Caroline, volunteers at EcoTraining. During the 45-minute drive to camp, we were already fortunate to encounter Lesser Spotted Eagle [Gevlekte Arend] and Red-crested Korhaan [Boskorhaan].

We arrived at the camp and were warmly welcomed by the camp director, Vicky, and our birding guide, Ross Hawkins. We were shown to our comfortable, albeit rustic, tented accommodation under the nyala and apple-leaf

trees, all nicely spaced out among the bushes and trees. A light lunch was served around 3 pm with ice-cold refreshments from the fridge. Christa and Madeleine, while on their way to their tents after lunch, 'woke' us all up with a shriek as they encountered a slender, 1 metre long, Western Yellow-bellied Sand Snake crossing the path, much to the amusement of the rest of us!

There was a slight delay in our first afternoon game drive, as one of the vehicles had a problem with its steering and a second vehicle needed to be sourced. We occupied ourselves birding in the camp and spotted birds such as Meve's Starling, Arrow-marked Babbler, Grey-headed and Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Spotted Flycatcher, Bennett's Woodpecker and Tropical Boubou [Langstertglansspreeu, Pylvelekatlagter, Spookvoël, Oranjeborsboslaksman, Europese Vlieëvanger, Bennettse Speg, Tropiese Waterfiskaal]. We eventually departed to a nearby floodplain as the sun set, and while being nibbled on by various insects, we spotted Burnt-necked Eremomela, Diederik's Cuckoo, Bearded Scrub Robin [Bruinkeelbossanger, Diederikkie, Baardwipstert] Black-crowned



Rose Clark

*Square-tailed Nightjar/Laeveldnaquij*



Rose Clark

*Bronze-winged Courser/Bronsvlerkdrawwertjie*



Rose Clark

*Double-banded Sandgrouse/  
Dubbelbandsandpatrys*



Rose Clark

*European Roller/Europese Troupant*

Night Heron [Gewone Nagreier] in large numbers, Greater Painted-snipe, Dwarf Bittern and Eurasian Hobby [Goudsnip, Dwergrietreier, Europese Boomvalk]. We were also lucky enough to experience close encounters with Fiery-necked and Square-tailed Nightjars and a Bronze-winged Courser [Afrikaanse Naguil, Laeveldnaguil, Bronsvlerkdrawwertjie] on our drive back to camp. We returned to a wholesome meal at the camp and toasted our great start to the trip.

At 4:30 am, we were woken by the beating of drums, a camp custom, and arrived at the food tent at 5 am for coffee and rusks. We left at 5:30 for the Banyini Pan located on the western side of the concession, amidst the calls of many Common Buttonquail and Harlequin Quail [Bosveldkwarteltjie, Bontkwartel]. We encountered many common birds as well as the rarer Double-banded Sandgrouse, Red-crested Korhaan, Dwarf Bittern, Brown-crowned Tchagra, European and Lilac-breasted Roller, Grey- and Brown-headed Parrots, Yellow-billed Stork, Jacobin Cuckoo [Dubbelbandsandpatrys, Boskorhaan, Dwergrietreier, Rooivlerktjagra, Europese en Gewone Troupant, Savannepapegai, Bruinkoppapegai, Nimmersat, Bontnuwejaarsvoël] and a variety of raptors: Brown Snake Eagle, African Harrier-Hawk, and Lesser Spotted,

Steppe and Wahlberg's Eagles [Bruinslangarend, Kaalwangvalk, Gevlekte Arend, Stepparend, Bruinarend]. Ross's ability to identify these birds circling far above us was remarkable – and he proved to be a fountain of knowledge on each bird species, constantly explaining the various features required to identify them. We were treated to frequent sightings of Southern



Anton Bekker

*Large baobab hosting Mosque Swallows*

Carmine and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters [Rooiborsbyvreter, Blouwangbyvreter], as well as Greater Honeyguide [Grootheuningwyser], and managed to see a Goliath Heron [Reuserier] nesting on the fringe of Banyini Pan. We also identified Lemon-breasted Canary, Namaqua Dove, African Openbill, African Cuckoo, African Palm Swift and Mosque Swallows [Geelborskanarie, Namakwaduifie, Oopbekoovieaar, Afrikaanse Koekoek, Palmwindswael, Moskeeswael], the latter nesting in the magnificent baobabs dotted all over the area. Some of us (not all), were lucky enough to spot Allen's Gallinule and Lesser Moorhen [Kleinkoningriethaan, Kleinwaterhoender]. Johan, with his greying sideburns and unwitting ability to position his head in front of Ingrid's camera lens, soon enough earned the title of Grey-backed Camaroptera (more fondly known to us all as the grysrugkwêkwêvoël or 'camera operator'). We constantly heard them while driving around, together with a host of other vocal birds, such as Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Brubru, Woodland Kingfisher, Rattling Cisticola and White-browed Robin-chat [Groenvlekduifie, Bontroklaksman, Bosveldvisvanger, Bosveldtinktinkie, Heuglinse Janfrederik].

We returned to camp for a scrumptious hot brunch and a rest prior to the afternoon drive. We decided to revisit Banyini Pan in the afternoon to explore the western side of the pan. Specials on that drive included Senegal Coucal, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl and the rare Three-banded Courser [Senegalvlleioerie, Reuseooruil, Driebanddrawwertjie]. Max managed to lose his phone on the way to the pan, shortly after we encountered a large herd of buffalo. Fortunately, we found it again on the road back to camp – and celebrated over a lovely lamb potjie and some very welcome ice-cold drinks.

On Saturday morning, after our usual 4:30 drum-roll wake-up call, we set off for Lanner Gorge. Lanner Gorge is in the far north of the Kruger and forms the boundary between Kruger to the south and the Makuleke Concession to the north. On our way to the gorge, we managed to spot African Hawk Eagle, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and Crested



Anton Bekker

Sunset over Banyini Pan



Anton Bekker

Morning coffee stop: Lanner Gorge



Rose Clark

Birding Lanner Gorge

Guineafowl [Grootjagarend, Klipstreepkoppie, Kuifkoptarentaal] – nice finds so early in the morning. After strolling through the most beautiful Lebombo ironwood forests, we scrambled up a rocky outcrop to view the awesome

gorge carved out by the Luvuvhu River, which was still flowing determinedly after all the rains. We enjoyed coffee on the rocks while spotting a pair of Verreaux's Eagles [Witkruisarend] soaring across the gorge, European Honey Buzzard, Black Sparrowhawk, Martial Eagles [Wespedief, Swartsperwer, Breëkoparend], as well as plenty of African Black and Little Swifts [Swartwindswael, Kleinwindswael]. The entire trip to the Gorge was interspersed with sightings of the most beautiful massive baobab trees. On our way back to camp we were treated to sightings of Levaillant's Cuckoo and Mottled Spinetail [Gestreepte Nuwejaarsvoël, Gevlekte Stekelstert].

In the afternoon we visited another unbelievably beautiful spot called Reedbuck Pan, which is usually just a marshland... but after the wonderful recent rains and because of water push-back from the Luvuvhu, it was transformed into a huge lake encircled by a forest of green fever and ana trees. On our way to Reedbuck Pan we spotted Yellow-billed Oxpecker and Wattled Starlings [Geelbekrenostervoël, Lelspreeu]. A honey badger also made a brief appearance. We arrived at dusk for sundowners and watched Black Stork, African Cuckoos, Common Greenshank, Wattled Starlings, and White-crowned Lapwing [Grootswartooievaar, Afrikaanse Koekoek, Groenpootruiter, Lelspreeu, Witkopkiewiet] foraging for food at the edge of the water. We trundled home after enjoying a most stunning African sunset over the lake. On our way back we were treated to a pair of Spotted Eagle Owls, European Nightjar, and an African Scops Owl [Gevlekte Ooruil, Europese Naguil, Skopsuil]. Just before reaching our camp, we drove into a herd of elephant. As the first trumpeted a warning to the rest of the gang, one ellie reversed into the bush and then charged our vehicle trumpeting loudly – a lucky escape due to the great driving skills of our able birding guide. The ellie charge produced buckets of adrenalin (and perhaps a need for some new under-clothing?) for us birders on the back of the vehicle. A little too close for comfort!

On our final morning, we departed shortly after 5:30 to a floodplain section of the



Rose Clark

*The last morning drive – floodplain near the Limpopo*



Anton Bekker

*Exploring the floodplain*

Limpopo where we again enjoyed coffee whilst combing the vegetation with our binoculars. On the way... our dreams came true – as our fearless birding guide identified the long-anticipated Racket-tailed Roller [Knopsterttrouphant] in a nearby tree. We had been waiting anxiously to spot one all weekend and had virtually given up hope! What an awesome sighting – albeit not the most photographically easy subject to capture. The whole truck was bubbling over with joy as we moved towards the river floodplain. As the mist slowly rose over the marshland area, the Limpopo River and South African border became visible, and we were able to watch a Broad-billed Roller (somewhat obscurely), and a group of Crowned Hornbills

[Geelbektroupan, Gekroonde Neushoringvoël]. Many warblers were identified in the reed beds together with a host of storks and herons crossing overhead. Several of the bird species we had seen on previous days were also identified. An awesome and productive birding location and the most appropriate way to end our birding adventure at Makuleke.

We returned to camp for a light breakfast and were taken back to Pafuri Gate... everybody on an incredible 'high' having seen plenty of colourful bee-eaters, all five roller species (including the highly valued Racket-tailed Roller), so many raptors and different warblers, and many of us adding several (between 15 and 60) lifers to our lists. We counted a group

total of about 180 birds for the weekend... and all thanks to Ross Hawkins – our remarkable, knowledgeable guide – who was happy to share so much with us all, including helpful practical descriptors like 'the eagle with stove-pipe jeans' being the Lesser Spotted Eagle and the 'flying barn door' being the Martial Eagle. Makuleke is undoubtedly a special place offering unmatched and unforgettable birding opportunities, to see sought-after species in one of the most biologically diverse areas in South Africa. Although we did not manage to see the elusive Pel's Fishing Owl or Arnot's Chat [Visuil, Bontpiek], we returned home delighted by the most amazing birding and nature experience. 🐦

## Heuningvlei/Morokweng Atlas Bash in North West Province: 20–24 February 2020

André Marx

In February 2020 BLNG held an atlas bash in the far west of North West Province, near the Northern Cape boundary. For too long this hole in the SABAP2 atlas coverage had been staring at us and the decision to arrange an atlasing trip to go there was made more than a year earlier. A group of 10 birders from Joburg and Pretoria in 5 teams travelled the 600-odd kilometres to reach this area. We were based on a farm to the north of the town of Morokweng, in Pentad 2600\_2345, and our atlasing took place in the surrounding area, as far west as Heuningvlei. The region had received good rains in the weeks preceding the visit – the first decent rains after 6 years of drought according to local farmers, who were rejoicing at their change in fortune. The veld and the birds had rebounded and we arrived to find grassland and bushed areas that were filled with displaying birds in full song.

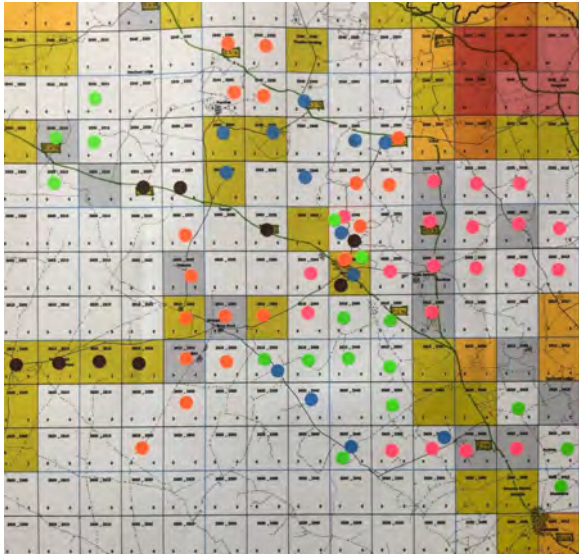
This is a remote area that is somewhat off the beaten track, so there were not many

roads to traverse, but from our base just north of Morokweng town we manage to access a number of pentads that had not been atlased before. Each day started with a team of two people setting out to reach a number of target pentads. Master map-maker Andy Featherstone had produced a large-scale map that was used to plot each day's activities, an essential tool for a large-scale atlasing effort.

Here are some of the statistics for the atlasing trip:

- A total of 65 pentads were atlased
- 78 cards in total were submitted
- 45 pentads were atlased for the first time
- 13 ad-hoc cards were completed
- 6 421 records were logged on BirdLasser
- 202 bird species were seen
- 292 out-of-range forms (ORFs) by my count were generated

The habitat was typical of Kalahari thornveld in some areas with well-developed *Acacia*



*Battle map prepared by Andy Featherstone*

woodland that harboured a number of familiar species, but in addition there was a great deal of open grassland country with more stunted *Acacia* woodland that was less species-rich but nevertheless contributed to the bird diversity of the region.

We were expecting to see some of the birds that the western arid bushveld and grassland region is known for and these were duly noted in good numbers. Cape Penduline-tit, Pririt Batis, Yellow Canary, Dusky Sunbird, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, White-backed Mousebird, Violet-eared Waxbill, Lark-like Bunting, Red-billed Spurfowl [Kaapse Kapokvoël, Priritbosbontrokkie, Geelkanarie, Namakwasuikerbekkie, Swaelstertyvreter, Witkruismuivoël, Koningblousysie, Vaalstreepkoppie, Rooibekfisant] huge numbers of Lesser Grey Shrike [Gryslaksmán] with fewer Red-backed Shrike [Rooiruglaksmán], Northern Black Korhaan [Witvlerkkorhaan] in full cry, several cuckoos, including Black, Diederik, Klaas's, Jacobin, African [Swartkoekoek, Diederikkie, Meitjie, Bontnuwejaarsvoël, Afrikaanse Koekoek] and the superb Double-banded Courser [Dubbelbanddrawwertjie] were encountered, to name a few of the interesting birds seen.



*Typical scenery*

André Marx



*Typical habitat: grassland with ephemeral pans*

André Marx

Antony Cooper



*Heuningvlei pans*

Elouise Kalmer



*Cape Penduline-tit/Kaapse Kapokvoël*

Elouise Kalmer



*Gabar Goshawk/Witkruissperwer*

With a trip like this to a fairly remote area there will always be some surprises. Burchell's Sandgrouse [Gevlekte Sandpatrys] was a pleasure to see, as was a single Namaqua Sandgrouse [Kelkiewyn] that was seen flying overhead one day. A solitary Black-winged Pratincole [Swartvlerksprinkaanvoël] turned up on one of the days, as did a Eurasian Golden

Oriole [Europese Wielewaal] and a somewhat out-of-range Ludwig's Bustard [Ludwigse Pou]. Because of the recent rain many ephemeral pans in the region had started to fill and this no doubt meant that many waterbirds could find new habitat, but there were dozens of South African Shelduck [Kopereend] at the main Heuningvlei Pan, along with other duck species and several Pied Avocet [Bontelsie]. It was encouraging to find several raptors over the four days, and this included many Pale Chanting Goshawks, Martial Eagle, Common Buzzard, several Gabar Goshawks [Bleek-singvalk, Breëkoparend, Bruinjakalsvoël, Witkruissperwer], an impressive number of Lanner Falcons, Tawny Eagle, Lesser and Greater Kestrel, Wahlberg's Eagle and Black-chested Snake Eagle [Edelvalk, Roofarend, Kleinrooi-valk, Grootrooi-valk, Bruinarend, Swartbors-slangarend]. In late summer one must always keep an ear open for warblers and sightings of Willow, Olive-tree and Icterine Warbler [Hofsanger, Olyfboomsanger, Spotsanger] were enjoyed in some areas.

Perhaps the most enduring memory for the group was the condition of the grassland in parts of the district with the attendant display of larks, cisticolas and pipits in full song. I cannot recall when last I experienced such an explosion of activity after good rains. In arid areas the response of birds to seasonal rain is possibly more pronounced as the good rain events are less frequent and the birds have to make the most of their bounty in a relatively short time period. An amazing 10 lark species were identified; namely Rufous-naped, Sabota's, Fawn-coloured, Monotonous (in great numbers), Red-capped, Eastern Clapper, Melodious, Spike-heeled, and Chestnut-backed and Grey-backed Sparrowlark [Rooineklewerik, Sabotalewerik, Vaalbruinlewerik, Bosveld-lewerik, Rooikoplewerik, Hoëveldklappertjie, Spotlewerik, Vlaklewerik, Rooiruglewerik, Grysruglewerik]. On one morning 9 larks were found in one 2-hour visit to a single pentad! One of the birds of the trip was a cisticola. Tinkling Cisticola [Rooitinkinkie] was evident in a number of pentads and I personally enjoyed



Elouise Kalmer

Fawn-coloured Lark/Vaalbruinlewerik



Elouise Kalmer

Montonous Lark/Bosveldlewerik



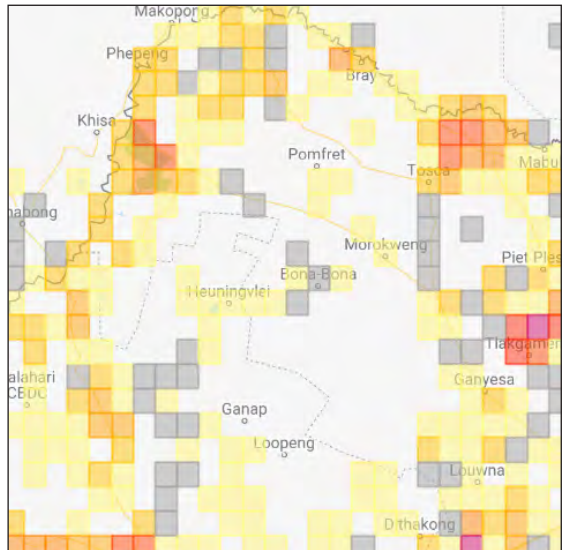
Elouise Kalmer

Tinkling Cisticola/Rooitinkinkie

Bosveldtinkinkie, Indiese Spreeu, Palmwindswael, Edelvalk, Rooibekrenostervoël, Rooitinkinkie, Vaalstreepkoppie, Grootringduif, Grootstreepswael, Bruinjakksvoël, Rooibekkelelaar]. Some of those species are relatively common and easy to identify and the fact that they were out-of-range has more to do with the relatively poor coverage of SABAP1 in relation to SABAP2 (a difference in nearly 30 years), than actual range changes, although there has been some range extension on the part of some species. There

getting to know their song a little better, which differs from the song presented on some of the bird apps that are available. It really is a wonderful bird to encounter.

It is my task to vet SABAP2 records in Gauteng and North West Province and thankfully most of the ORFs that were generated were for common species. The ORFs that led the way were Grey Go-away-bird, Monotonous Lark, Black Cuckoo and Jacobin Cuckoo, Rattling Cisticola, Common Myna, African Palm Swift, Lanner Falcon, Red-billed Oxpecker, Tinkling Cisticola, Lark-like Bunting, Red-eyed Dove, Greater Striped Swallow, Common Buzzard, and Green Woodhoopoe [Kwêvoël, Bosveldlewerik, Swartkoekoek, Bontnuwejaarsvoël,



SABAP2 coverage before the trip







Laura Jordaan



Laura Jordaan

*Above and left: Miertjie le Roux experimental farm*



Hannes van den Berg

*Male Cuckoo Finch/Koekoekvink*

Campus Services) and led by BLNG’s Philip Calinikos. Despite the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown, 37 people attended.

The birders were divided into groups to cover different sections, and then walked along the Hartbeesspruit recording the various bird species found. The data were compared in terms of number of individuals and species, and the specific species identified during similar events in the previous three years. At the October 2020 outing 903 birds were counted, compared to 1 217 in October 2019, 889 in November 2018 and 737 in November 2017. The 2020 count delivered 13 new species, including Gabar Goshawk, Goliath Heron, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Neddicky [Witkruiisperwer, Reuserseier,

Bruinkopvisvanger, Neddikkie].

The 2020 census also recorded an increase in species associated with riverine zones (Willow Warbler; African Reed Warbler [Hofsanger, Kleinrietsanger]). This is a very positive sign suggesting the success of the rehabilitation of the urban riverine ecosystem.

#### **Baseline survey of Miertjie le Roux campus**

**M**iertjie le Roux is an experimental farm of the University of Pretoria, near Rayton east of Pretoria. On Saturday, 27 February 2021, the Facilities Management Department (Division Campus Services) invited BLNG to visit the farm. The purpose of this initial outing was to register as many bird species as possible in order to create a database for any future planned bird census events at Miertjie le Roux. It was the first time that a birding event had been hosted at Miertjie le Roux and also the first time that BLNG had visited this venue. Thirteen people attended the event, again led by Philip Calinikos from BLNG.

The birders walked routes across the farm in several different directions, and managed to record a total of 73 bird species. An exciting find was four male and one female Cuckoo Finch [Koekoekvink]. Another special sighting for the day was European Honey Buzzard [Wespedief].

*Information provided by Ilze Ueckermann, University of Pretoria* 🐦

# Ringershoekie 2020

## BLNG Ringgroep

### **Bishop Voëlpark, Wierdapark: 15 Februarie 2020**

Tien A-ringers, een C-ringer en een helper het olv Marina Pienaar opgedaag vir die dag se ring. Omdat die erdwurmtelery ook die dag 'n opedag aangebied het by hierdie voëlpark, was daar heelwat meer belangstelling as gewoonlik by ons ringstasie. Die vangste was baie goed vir hierdie park binne 'n beboude gebied. Ons het 255 voëls hanteer, waarvan 16 hervangste was (6.3%). Dit was die oggend van die Kaapse Glasogies [Cape White-eye]. Ons het altesaam 34 van hulle gevang. Ander interessante spesies was: Natalse Fisant [Natal Spurfowl], Tuin-, Europese Riet- en Hofsanger [Garden, Marsh and Willow Warbler] en Kleinglansspreeu [Cape Glossy Starling].

### **Naweekkamp by Paardeplaats NR naby Lydenburg: 22–24 Februarie 2020 (Leier: Marié Ueckermann)**

Hierdie naweek is beplan om veral die Rooi-borssuikervoëls [Gurney's Sugarbird] te teiken in hierdie reservaat, wat sommer langs die pad is op pad na Sabie. Die nette word by die piekniekplek en bo-op die Jesus-koppie en by die Lodge self opgeslaan. Daar is baie suikerbosse wat spesifiek hierdie spesie suiker-voëls lok. Vyf A-ringers en twee C-ringers het die geleentheid bygewoon. Die doel is bereik deurdat 15 suikervoëls gering is, asook 9 Groot-rooibandsuikerbekkies [Greater Double-collared Sunbirds], 10 Jangroentjies [Malachite Sunbirds] en een Drakensberglangstertjie [Drakensberg Prinia]. Die totaal vir die naweek was 40 voëls. Een Rooiborssuikervoël is op 23 Februarie 2019 vir die eerste keer deur Wanda Louwrens gering en nou weer gevang.

### **Serene Valley, Garsfontein: 22 Februarie 2020**

Terwyl 7 lede van ons groep Lydenburg toe is hierdie naweek, het 3 A-ringers olv

Christo Siebert hierdie spruit in Garsfontein besoek. Christo bied demonstrasies aan vir die Vriende van Serene Valley en daar is altyd groot belangstelling uit die woongebied. Alhoewel die getalle maar klein was, het hulle die oggend tog 23 voëls hanteer, waarvan 2 hervangste (8.7%) was van die vorige jaar. Een Swartoogtiptol [Dark-capped Bulbul] het reeds 'n ringetjie aangehad. Dit is op 12 Julie 2015 deur Christo aangesit. Dit is nou weer deur Lucia Lötter gevang. Swartkeelgeelvinke [Southern Masked Weaver] was die meeste met 10 in getal, met Swartoogtiptolle tweede met 4 voëls. Ander spesies was Gewone Janfrederik [Cape Robin-chat], Hofsanger, Bruinsylangstertjie [Tawny-flanked Prinia] en Rooivink [Southern Red Bishop].

### **Naweekkamp by Wolfhuiskraal, Pienaarsrivier: 28 Februarie–1 Maart 2020**

Agt A-ringers het hierdie wegbreeknaweek abenut. Onder leiding van Chris du Plooy en Elba Swart was dit die suksesvolste naweek in 'n lang tyd. Nie minder as 523 voëls is gevang, waarvan 14 hervangste was. 'n Witkoluiltjie [Pearl-spotted Owllet] is op 14 Oktober 2018 deur mnr MP Kirk op die Zaagkuil drift-pad gering en nou weer gevang. Oulike spesies was: Bruinkop-, Dwerg- en Bosveldvisvanger [Brown-hooded, African Pygmy and Woodland Kingfisher], Bonthoutkapper [Acacia Pied Barbet], Gebande Sanger [Barred Wren-Warbler] en Staalblouvinkie [Village Indigobird], en die groep het op 'n nagrit die Gewone Dikkop [Spotted Thick-knee] en Afrikaanse Naguil [Fiery-necked Nightjar] gekry.

### **Moreletakloof NR: 7 Maart 2020**

Sewe A-ringers het vroegoggend by hierdie natuurreservaat olv Hein Bantjes bymekaar gekom. Hein en sy span het goed gedoen met 271 voëltjies vir die oggend. Die 28 hervangste (10.3%) bewys dat Moreleta se voëls so



Jan Swart

*Wilton Valley: Elba Swart het hierdie twee Bleeksingvalke gelyktydig op 'n bal-chatri gevang*

lekker daar bly dat hulle nie groener weivelde gaan soek nie. Buiten die 206 Swartkeelgeelvinke was daar ook 8 Gewone Janfrederikke, 8 Rooivinke, 7 Swartoogtiptolle en 2 Kuifkop-houtkappers [Black-collared Barbet] in die nette, asook 'n enkele Rooiwangmuivoël [Red-faced Mousebird], 'n Hof- en Europese Rietsanger en 'n Kaapse Wewer [Cape Weaver].

**Strubendam, Lynnwood Glen: 14 Maart 2020**

**A**gt A-ringers en een C-ringer het olv Johan Muller douvoordag by hierdie weggesteekte dam in Lynnwood Glen bymekaar gekom vir 'n ringsessie. Hulle het goed gedoen: 233 voëls is hanteer, waarvan 18 hervangste (7.7%). Een hervangst van 'n Blouvisvanger [Half-collared Kingfisher] was besonders. Marina Pienaar het dit op 24 Februarie 2018 vir die eerste keer daar gering. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke het koning gekraai, met 67 individue gevang. Ander spesies met groot getalle was Swartoogtiptol (24), en Dikbekwewers [Thick-billed Weaver] en Gewone Janfrederik met 19

elk. Ander visvangers wat ook gevang is was Bont, Kuifkop en Bosveld [Pied, Malachite and Woodland Kingfisher].

**Naweekkamp by Wilton Valley naby Ellisras: 20–24 Maart 2020**

**E**lba Swart het 'n jaar voor die tyd vir die groep plek bespreek by hierdie lodge naby die Limpoporivier. 'n Week voor die President se toespraak was daar al sprake dat ons ingeperk gaan word. Vrees vir die Covid-19 virus het die getalle laat daal tot net vier. Elba het egter deurgedruk en die kamp het voortgegaan. Die getalle was maar min: 107 voëls is gevang en gering en daar was 2 hervangste, want Elba ring al sedert 2014, toe sy as A-ringer gekwalifiseer het, voëls op hierdie plaas. 'n Interessante hervangst in die omgewing was 'n Bleeksingvalk [Pale Chanting Goshawk] wat in die omgewing van Wilton Valley gevang is. Dit is op 26 Januarie 2017 vir die eerste keer deur Mnr JA Heymans naby Stockpoort gering. Ander roofvoëls was twee Swartborsslangarende [Black-chested Snake Eagle], asook twee Bleeksingvalke wat gelyktydig op 'n bal-chatri gevang is. Ander oulike spesies was Bronsvlerkdrawwertjie [Bronze-winged Courser], Gevlekte Sandpatrys [Burchell's Sandgrouse], Rooiwangnaguil [Rufous-cheeked Nightjar], Grootglanspreeu [Burchell's Starling] en Grootmossie [Great Sparrow].

**Frank Struben Bird Sanctuary, Lynnwood: 16 Junie 2020**

**I**n die middel van die grendeltyd het 'n paar A-ringers by hierdie park gaan ring – met maskers en al. Hulle het nie baie voëls gekry nie, maar dit was heerlik om net weer in die veld te kom. Net 7 spesies is in die nette gevang, wat 25 voëls verteenwoordig. Die hervangspersentasie was hoog (16%), want 4 voëls is weer gevang. Een van hulle, 'n Bruinsylangstertjie [Tawny-flanked Prinia], is op 9 November 2019 deur Johan de Jager vir die eerste keer daar gering. Dit is al 'n paar jaar gelede dat Johan hierdie plek ontdek het. Dit is nie oop vir die publiek nie, maar hy kry elke jaar spesiale toestemming van die Stadsraad om daar te ring. Ander spesies soos

Witpensuikerbekkie [White-bellied Sunbird] en Geelbeklyster [Karoo Thrush] is daar gevind.

### **Naweekamp by Bushtrails naby Magaliesburg: 7–10 Augustus 2020**

**E**lba Swart het hierdie kamp gereël toe die inter-provinsiale grense nog nie oop was nie. Gelukkig is Bushtrails binne Gauteng en 5 A-ringers het hiervan gebruik gemaak, naamlik Paula en Martin Steyn, Johan de Jager, Arrie Klopper en sy gesin, en Elba. Alhoewel dit bitter koud was die naweek, het die groep tog goed gedoen, met 158 voëls gevang, waarvan 15 hervangste was. Die hervangste persentasie was hoog – 9,5% – want die ringgroep ring dikwels op daardie plaas. Die Rooikeelflappe [Red-collared Widowbird] was die volopste met 22 voëls. Ander oulike spesies was Oranjekeelkalkoentjie [Cape Longclaw], Swartkopwielewaal [Black-headed Oriole], Grasvoël [Cape Grassbird], Rooivlerkstreepkoppies [Cape Bunting], Kleinheuningwyser [Lesser Honeyguide], Gestreeppte Koester [Striped Pipit], asook 'n paar tinkinkies, naamlik, Lui- en Huil tinkinkie en Neddikkie [Lazy and Wailing Cisticola and Neddicky].



Elba Swart

*Bushtrails: vroegoggend op die berg; almal skink eers 'n koppie koffie in die koue*

### **Naweekamp by Wolfhuiskraal naby Pienaarsrivier: 28–30 Augustus 2020**

**O**ns eerste kamp nadat die provinsiale grense oopgemaak is! Dit was salig om weer die pad met die N1 noord te vat en net te ry! Tien A-ringers het van die geleentheid gebruik gemaak en heerlik by hierdie ou plaashuis gaan ring. Die lekkerste was om weer langs 'n bosveldvuurtjie te sit! Sosiale afstand is deurentyd gehandhaaf! Byna 300 voëls is hanteer. Naby die huis is 11 hervangste gekry, waarvan die een Blousysie [Blue Waxbill] 3 jaar terug vir die eerste keer daar gering is, wat daarop dui dat dit daar in die omgewing bly en ten minste 3 jaar oud is. Twee Witkoluile [Pearl-spotted Owlet] wat verlede jaar vir die eerste keer gering is, is ook weer gevang. Die een is deur Kyle Lloyd gering en deur Frik du Plooy ge-retrap. Ander interessante spesies was: Grys- en Geelbekneushoringvoël [African Grey and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill], Kardinaalsspeg [Cardinal Woodpecker], Grysrugkwêkwêvoël [Grey-backed Camaroptera], Namakwaduiwe [Namaqua Dove], Bruinkeelbossanger [Burnt-necked Eremomela].

*Links: Julian du Plooy het hierdie Gewone Dikkop in die aand somer met die hand by Wolfhuiskraal gevang*





Chris du Plooy

*Julian du Plooy was so gelukkig om hierdie Geelbekneushoringvoel by Wolphuiskraal in 'n net te vang. Hanneke van Loggerenberg kyk nuuskierig toe.*

**Pretoria Botaniese Tuin: 5 September 2020**

Op hierdie lieflike lente oggend het 11 A-ringers na 4 uur by hierdie mooi tuine bymekaar gekom vir 'n ringsessie. Paula Steyn het die sessie gelei en die groep moes streng Covid-19-protokol handhaaf. Die tafels is wyd uitmekaar geplaas, sodat sosiale distansiering gehandhaaf kon word. Dit was 'n baie suksesvolle oggend met 224 voëls hanteer, waarvan 24 hervangste was (10.7%). Die Swartkeelgeelvinke was die meeste met 33 en tweede was die Gryskopmossies [Southern Grey-headed Sparrow] met 'n syfer van 32. 'n Mooi spesie was 'n Kroonkiewiet [Crowned Lapwing] wat deur Arrie Klopper in 'n flat trap gevang is. Ander spesies was Bonthoutkapper, Sneeubal [Black-backed Puffback], Rooivlerktjagra [Brown-crowned Tchagra], Bandkeelvink [Cut-throat Finch], Bosveldtjerkittik [Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler] en Bospatrys [Crested Francolin].

**Bishop Voëlpark in Wierdapark:**

**19 September 2020**

Veertien A-ringers en een C-ringer het onder leiding van Marina Pienaar op hierdie lieflike lenteoggend om half-vyf by die voëlpark byeengekom. Marina het toestemming by die Stadsraad gekry en onder streng Covid-regulasies kon ons daar ring. Agv die aanklokreël kon ons eers 4 uur vanaf ons huise vertrek, met die gevolg dat ons later as gewoonlik eers begin het om die nette op te slaan. Die dag het al gebreek toe die laaste nette op was. Ten spyte daarvan het ons 102 voëls gevang, waarvan 18 hervangste was (17.6%). Spesiale spesies was: Kardinaalspeg, Pylvlekkatlagter [Arrow-marked Babbler], Kleinheuningwyser, Suidelike Waterfiskaal [Southern Boubou] en Kleinglanspreeu.

**Opsomming: Januarie–September 2020**

Ek het 'n opsomming gemaak van die voëls wat die ringgroep in 2020 gering het tot en met 19 September. Interessante inligting het daaruit te voorskyn gekom. Die meeste spesies, naamlik 57, is by Nylsvlei in Januarie oor 'n naweek gevang. Die meeste voëls gering gedurende 'n naweek was by Wolphuiskraal in Maartmaand – 509 in totaal. Die plek met die meeste hervangste was naby Rietveldidam se groot lapa, naamlik 34 voëls. By Bushtrails naby Magaliesburg is die hoogste hervangspersentasie aangeteken (30.8%). Die totaal voëls hanteer tot 19 September is 4 675.

**Feather River, Graskop: 23–27 September 2020 (Leier: Madeleen van Loggerenberg)**

Hierdie lekker kamp in die plantasies tussen Habie en Graskop is deur 'n groot groep van 21 persone bygewoon. Alhoewel daar net slaapplek vir 8 persone in 3 rondawels is, het die groep met tente, daktente en boswaens die erf vol gemaak. Dit was 'n suksesvolle ring met 373 voëls wat oor 'n tydperk van 3 dae deur 13 A-ringers hanteer is. Die spesie wat die meeste gevang is, was die Kaapse Glasogie [Cape White-eye] met 47 voëls in totaal. Die tweede meeste was die Lawaaimakerjanfrederik

[Chorister Robin-chat] met 38 voëls wat gevang is, terwyl die Kleinrooibandsuikerbekkie [Southern Double-collared Sunbird] 33 altesaam was. Die hervangspersentasie was 17.7%. Die beste spesies was 2 Knysnaaloeries [Knysna Turaco], Gevlekte Heuningwyser [Scaly-throated Honeyguide], 'n Bosuil [African Wood Owl], 2 Bosloeries [Narina Trogon], 1 Reuse- en 3 Blouvisvangers [Giant and Half-collared Kingfisher], 4 Bloukuifvlieëvangers [Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher] en 11 Geelstreepboskruipers [Yellow-streaked Greenbul].

### **Wonderboom NR, Pretoria: 3 Oktober 2020 (Leier: Madeleen van Loggerenberg)**

**S**ewe A-ringers het hierdie geleentheid bygewoon. Die vang was nie so goed soos verlede jaar nie, maar daar was tog 81 voëls in die nette, waarvan 23 spesies en 11 hervangste (13.6%). 'n Geelbeklyster wat Johan Snyman in 2013 gering het, is nou weer deur Janine Goosen gevang – 7 jaar later. Die lysters trek maar rond in die stad, want in 2018 het Gert Opperman Sr 'n Geelbeklyster by Moreleta NR gering en dit is nou by Wonderboom weer deur Martin Steyn gevang. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke het die prys gevat vir die meeste voëls, naamlik 19. Daar was ook 14 Swartoogtiptolle gevang. Ander mooi spesies was Afrikaanse Naguil, Kleinheuningwyser, Witkeeljanfrederik [White-throated Robin-chat], Palmwindswael [African Palm Swift] en 'n Gewone Melba [Green-winged Pytilia].

### **Strubendam in Lynnwood Glen: 17 Oktober 2020 (Leier: Johan Muller)**

**B**y hierdie weggesteekte munisipale dam in Lynnwood Glen het ons goed gedoen. Twaalf ringers het net na half-vyf by die dam bymekaar gekom en die Hadedas versteur. Die vangste was goed – 281 voëls vir die oggend. Die hervangste was 15.3%. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke het weer die prys gevat vir die meeste voëls, naamlik 92, en die Rooivinke was tweede met 42 voëls. Ander spesies was Blou- en Kuifkopvisvanger [Half-collared and Malachite Kingfisher], Hof-, Kaapse Riet-,

Kleinriet- en Kaapse Vleisanger [Willow, Lesser Swamp, African Reed and Little Rush Warbler].

### **Ringvergadering: 31 Oktober 2020**

#### **(Leier: Frik du Plooy)**

**S**estien ringers het hierdie vergadering in Pretoria-Noord by Madeleen en Johan van Loggerenberg se huis bygewoon. Dertien lede kon dit nie maak nie. Ons het vrugbare gesprekke gehad en die geleentheid met 'n bring-en-braai afgesluit. Rihaan Geysler, 'n ringer wat baie van ons ou ringers opgelei het, het ook 'n draai kom maak.

### **Moreleta NR: 7 November 2020 (Marié Uckermann het ingestaan vir Hein Bantjes)**

**D**aar het min A-ringers opgedaag vir hierdie Ringsessie – net vyf en een C-ringer, maar tog het hulle 'n allemintige 344 voëls hanteer, waarvan 19 verskillende spesies. Die hervangste was maar min – die 8 voëls verteenwoordig maar 2.3%. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke het los voorgeloopt met 'n getal van 258 voëls. Die meeste van hierdie voëls is ge-ring and fling. Dit beteken om die massa voëls so gou as moontlik weer te laat vlieg; het elke voël net 'n ring gekry, sonder om enige afmetings te neem. Dit word by die nette gedoen. 'n Ervare ringer sal byvoorbeeld net die mannetjies van een spesie uit die net haal (gereed met 'n tang en 'n string ringe), 'n ring aansit en dit laat vlieg. Op die databladsy word al daai ringe dan weergegee as mannetjies van daardie spesifieke spesie wat gering is. Die tweede meeste voëls wat gevang is, was 17 Dikbekwevers. Ander interessante spesies was Bosveldfisant [Swainson's Spurfowl], Kleinriet- en Kaapse Vleisanger, Kleingeelvink en Bontrugwewer [Lesser Masked and Village Weaver] en Rooikeelflap.

### **Bushtrails, Magaliesburg-omgewing: 20–22 November (Leier: Elba Swart)**

**N**et 4 A-ringers en een C-ringer het hierdie kamp wat oor 3 dae gestrek het, bygewoon. Net 56 voëls is hanteer, maar die hervangste was die hoogste nog – 23.2%. Dit is omdat die ringers hierdie plaas dikwels

besoek en die voëls nie juis rondtrek nie. Die verrassing vir die naweek is die twee Swart-sperwers [Black Sparrowhawk] wat in 'n 'kestrel trap' gevang is. Daar word 'n lokaas (gewoonlik wit muis) in die hokkie gesit met 'n sneller wat die hok laat toeslaan. Sodra die roofvoël probeer om die aas by te kom word die sneller afgetrap. Ander oulike spesies was Europese Byvreter [European Bee-eater], Neddikkie, Bruinsylangstertjie en Swartvlieëvanger [Southern Black Flycatcher].

**Frank Struben-voëlpark: 28 November 2020 (Leier: Johan de Jager)**

**V**ier A-ringers en een C-ringer het opgedaag vir hierdie weggesteekte voëlpark in Lynnwood. Dit is nie baie groot nie, so ons het nie baie voëls daar verwag nie. Dit het tog verras met 76 voëls gevang (4 hervangste), wat 18 spesies verteenwoordig. Ons ring so een keer 'n jaar daar. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke het weer gewen! Daar was 19 in die nette en tweede was die Gevlekte Muisvoëls [Speckled Mousebird] met 8 in getal. Ander spesies was Bruinkopvisvanger, Diederikkie [Diederik Cuckoo], Gewone Fret [Bronze Mannikin] en Gewone Vleiloeie [Burchell's Coucal].

**Voortrekkermonument: 26 Desember 2020 (Leier: Elba Swart)**

**T**waalf A-ringers het die dag na Kersfees die Voortrekkermonument besoek om voëls te ring en die jaar van ring af te sluit met 'n gesellige braai. Die vangste was goed – ons het 200 voëls hanteer wat goed was vir 'n ring-sessie in die stad. Die hervangste was groot, omdat ons probeer om ten minste twee keer 'n jaar daar uit te kom om te ring. Die totaal was 23 (11.6% hervangste). Die verskeidenheid van spesies, wat 38 was, het ingesluit: Meitjie en Diederikkie [Klaas's and Diederik Cuckoo], Tuin-, Spot- en Hofsanger [Garden, Icterine and Willow Warbler], Kleinheuningwyser, Bonthoutkapper en Kleinglansspreeu. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke het die koek gevat met

58 voëls vir die dag, met die Kaapse Glasogies tweede met 22.

**Interessante hervangste**

**I**n Februarie vanjaar het 'n onbekende voëlyker 'n Bruinjakalsvoël [Common Buzzard] in die Zaagkuil drift-omgewing naby Pienaarsrivier opgemerk. Hy het navraag gedoen by Safring, nadat hy 'n plastiekring met die nommer MW10 op die voël se been opgemerk het (seker met 'n verkyker of kamera). Safring hou rekord van elke voëlring: waar en deur wie dit die eerste keer gering is en alle hervangste daarna. In hierdie geval het Safring berig dat Malcolm Wilson dit op 19 Februarie 2017 by Zaagkuil drift gering het (2 jaar, 11 maande en 24 dae later). Malcolm het ook 'n metaalring met Ringnommer 798232 destyds vir hierdie voël aangesit. Alle voëls kry gewoonlik net 'n metaalring. Hierdie voël was heelwaarskynlik deel van 'n projek wat Malcolm by Safring geregistreer het, daarom het dit ook 'n plastiekring aangehad. Die vorige jaar, op 2 Maart 2018, het nog 'n lid van die publiek die voël gesien en vir Safring laat weet van die resighting (1 jaar en 11 dae vandat die voël die eerste keer gering is). Dit beteken dat hierdie Bruinjakalsvoël al vir 3 jaar in dieselfde omgewing bly en oorleef.

Voëls kan verstomdend ver vlieg soos hierdie hervangs bewys: 'n Tuinsanger is op 25 Augustus vanjaar deur 'n lid van die publiek naby Hall, in Saudi Arabië, dood aangetref. Dit is deur Chris du Plooy verlede jaar op 28 Desember by die Voortrekkermonument gering – 6 092 km en 241 dae (ongeveer 8 maande) later!

Ons ring voëls onder andere om vas te stel hoe oud hulle word. Chris du Plooy het 'n jong Swartkeelgeelvink by Moreletakloof NR gering op 7 Februarie 2015 met Ringnommer FB79387. Vanjaar op 20 Julie het 'n lid van die publiek so 5 km daarvandaan in Van Manenstraat, Elarduspark, die voël dood opgetel. Dit was 5 jaar, 5 maande en 15 dae later. 🐦

*Ed: Ringshoekie 2021 will follow in the November issue.*



# Aasvoëlring by Vulpro

Elba Swart

Saterdag 12 Desember 2020 het nege A-ringers die grootse voorreg gehad om een van ons mees bedreigde spesies, die Krans-aasvoël [Cape Vulture] te kon ring.

Ons het mekaar om 8-uur by Vulpro se perseel net oos van Hartbeespoortdam ontmoet waar Ryno Kemp, wat Vulpro se navorsingsbestuurder is en self ook 'n gekwalifiseerde A-ringer, ons ingelig het van die prosedure tydens die ringsessie.

In een van hulle massiewe groot hokke word 'n karkas geplaas. Die voëls weet al daar word 'n lekker bederfie spesiaal vir hulle gelos en dit is genoeg om hulle vertrou te gee om in die hok in te gaan. Sodra daar dan genoeg voëls

in is, word die hek toegemaak. Soms kom daar ook Witborskraaie [Pied Crow], Skoorsteenveërs [Sacred Ibis] en selfs Maraboes [Marabou Stork] in die hok in, maar hierdie keer het die ander spesies die aasvoëls voorrang gegee.

Vulpro-personeel help om die voëls te vang en ons het aan die buitekant die beringing gedoen. Daar is ook bloed getrek vir 'n studie wat gedoen word op loodvergiftiging en om die vlakke waaraan die voëls blootgestel is, te toets.



Janine Goosen

Janine Goosen op pad om die geringde voël vry te laat. Die kop moet baie stewig en weg van jou gesig af vasgehou word.



Paula Steyn

Hier is die aasvoëls in die hok



Elba Swart

Ryno Kemp is besig om van die eerste aasvoël se bloed te trek. Vulpro-personeel (links) en Johan de Jager en Arrie Klopper (regs) kyk aandagtig toe.



FCBotma

Hein Bandjes (links) doen hier die 'Vulture releasing dance'. As die geveerde maat se skerp kant nie meer onder beheer is nie, moet jy sorg dat jy buite bereik is. Ryno Kemp is duidelik baie meer gewoond aan die proses.

Die hele proses is 'n spanpoging. 'n Mens kan dit nooit alleen aanpak nie. Dis 'n ongelooflike voorreg om 'n klein deeltjie in hierdie enorme program te kon wees.

Die voëls het elkeen 'n metaalring met die unieke Safring-nommer gekry, asook 'n kleurring met 'n nommer groot genoeg sodat dit selfs van 'n afstand af gelees kan word. Aasvoëls vlieg baie kilometers ver op soek na kos, so as jy êrens is en jy sien 'n aasvoël met 'n turkoois ring met 'n swart nommer daarop, neem asseblief 'n foto en stuur dit aan Valpro – dit kan dalk een van hierdie groep wees wat gering is. 🐦

## In memoriam: Leon Croucamp (1966 – 2021)

Leon Croucamp is gebore op 29 April 1966. Hy het van jong af belangstelling getoon in die natuur en betrokke geraak by die Voortrekkers. Hier het hy die natuur as laerskool- en hoërskoolstudent leer ken.

Nadat hy sy militêre diensplig voltooi het, het hy BSc Biologiese Wetenskap, met plantkunde en dierkunde as vakke gaan studeer aan die RAU (deesdae UJ). Hier het hy Dr Pieter van Eeden leer ken en hulle het hulle liefde en kennis vir die natuur met staproetes, kampe en voëlring uitgebrei. Onder leiding van Dr Van Eeden het Leon as C-Ringer gekwalifiseer en na die ongelukkige dood van Pieter het Leon al die voëlring toerusting geërf en ingeskryf as A-Ringer. Nadat hy as A-Ringer gekwalifiseer het, het voëlring sy passie geword.

Hy het oral waar ons as gesin gegaan het, dadelik uitgevind of hy mag voëls vang. Hy het tot ons Venter sleepwaentjie permanent met sy voëlgoed ingerig en kon hom net haak om te gaan voëls vang. Twee van sy beste vriende en ons twee kinders is oral ingesluit en genooi om saam te gaan. Hy het by die Voortrekkers in sy kursusse voëls gering om die kinders bewus te maak van die skoonheid en kosbaarheid van diere (voëls in die algemeen).

Sy algehele liefde en passie vir mense, kinders en die natuur sal beslis gemis word. Beide Leon se ouers is onderskeidelik op 8 en 10 Julie 2021 oorlede en tot ons as gesin se skok is Leon ook ongelukkig oorlede op 14 Julie 2021 a.g.v. Covid.

Elke veertjie wat ons optel sal ons altyd herinner aan die passie wat hy tot sy dood uitgeoefen het.

Tania Croucamp



## In memoriam

Gert Opperman (18 Februarie 1950 – 18 Desember 2020)

**G**ert Opperman, een van ons ervare A-ringers, is na 'n kort siekbed op 18 Desember 2020 oorlede. Hy het in sy ringloopbaan 7 175 voëls gering, waarvan 'n mooi totaal van 386 verskillende spesies was.

Kotie, sy tweede vrou, self ook 'n A-ringer, het hierdie huldeblyk vir hom geskryf:

Ek en Gert was sewe jaar saam. In daardie tyd het hy my lewe verryk met wonderlike belewenisse. Hy het vir my ons land gaan wys, asook Botswana, Caprivi, Swaziland, Lesotho en Mozambiek. Ek is dankbaar vir die tyd wat ek met hom kon deurbring. Hy het my geleer van voëls en my opgelei om voëls te ring. Die roofvoëls het ek baie geniet, veral die baie rondry! Almal wat Gert geken het, het geweet van sy fantastiese kennis van voëls en die natuurlewe oor die algemeen.

Ek mis hom baie, maar glo ons sal weer saam wees.

*Met liefdevolle herinneringe, Kotie Opperman*



### Donations (January 2020 – March 2021)

A sincere thank you for your generous donations. Your contributions help us to support bird conservation projects, and are greatly appreciated.

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

JA Meyer (Jan 2020)

LA Lötter (Mar 2020)

RL Sprenger de Rove (Apr 2020)

A Ackermann (May 2020)

MA Heyns (May 2020)

V Schmidt (Aug 2020)

De Klerk household (Feb 2021)

R Meyjes (Mar 2021)

AR Marx (Oct 2020)

K Zsilavec (Oct 2020)

A Bauchoo (Oct 2020)

Meyer household (Jan 2021)

Dickinson household (Jan 2021)

# Klaas's Cuckoo being fed by its host

Rose Clark

I was fortunate to spend a bit of time birding down at the Wilderness Lakes just after the serious lockdown was lifted in 2020 and spotted this little fellow being fed by a Cape Batis [Kaapse Bosbontrokkie]. Klaas's Cuckoo [Meitjie] (*Chrysococcyx klaas*) is a pretty familiar migrant cuckoo in this area, with its well-known call "meit-jie meit-jie". They seem to enjoy caterpillars, butterflies and larvae and smallish birds like batises, warblers, and sunbirds are often their brood-parasitic hosts. The batises and cuckoos love similar habitat and occur commonly in these more temperate forest and Afromontane areas along the southern Cape coastline. These cuckoos are obligate brood parasites and don't complete their lifecycles without taking over the nests of unsuspecting hosts, tossing out the host eggs and laying their own eggs to be raised by these often tiny little birds. Quite a cheeky lifestyle, where they often use mimicry to match their eggs's colour to those of the host birds and fool them into thinking that they are raising their own chicks! Seeing this scene and being able to capture these few shots was definitely a highlight of this trip. 🐦



Rose Clark



Rose Clark



# Sani Pass and high-altitude birding: 7–13 February 2020

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

I wonder how many of our birders keep a 'bucket list' of birds to spot, of special sites and places to visit and view, places of natural beauty and mountains to climb. I believe we all have the urge to see extraordinary places and natural features.

Sani Pass had been on my bucket list for a long time (equally so Naude's Nek), but somehow I never got around to going. It was only after the valued Treasurer of BLNG posted some excellent photos of Sani birds that triggered my mind – Pieter Heslinga was also so kind as to provide me with details of the guide he had used.

We departed on Friday, 7 February 2020, taking an early-morning trip down to Howick, turning off south-west towards Bulwer and Underberg, passing much forestry activity and arriving at Underberg where we had booked a B&B just 1.4 km out of town, on the road to Himeville. The scenery of the Drakensberg was majestic viewed from the window of the breakfast-room and was beckoning us to take a closer look.

Our guide, whom we had booked for Monday to tackle Sani Pass, had given us some

tips on where to find some of the birds on our wishlist, and also where to find pleasant hiking trails, on the preceding days. Saturday saw us out after an early breakfast, but the weather was overcast with drizzle-rain on and off. We drove the short distance to Himeville, which was established in 1893 as a police post. The Border Mounted Rifles were billeted there to police the area, which ranked among the favourite haunts of gunrunners and rustlers. The road from Underberg to Himeville, and the streets in the town, are lined with old oak trees which were planted very long ago. Just outside Himeville is a wetland bordering the Pholela River, and we had been advised to bird that area. Despite the miserable weather we saw several species of birds: African Darter, Great Egret, Grey Heron, Glossy Ibis, Yellow-billed Duck, Red-knobbed Coot [Slanghalsvoël, Grootwitreier, Bloureier, Glansibis, Geelbekeend, Bleshoender], among other waterbirds, and Black-winged (shouldered) Kite [Blouvalk] on telephone wires but also hovering, as is its characteristic behaviour. Greater striped-, Lesser striped- and White-throated Swallows [Grootstreepswael, Kleinstreepswael, Witkeelswael] were darting about, busy with aerial feeding and also darting under the bridge, as were Sand- and Rock Martins [Europese Oewerswael, Kransswael]. Levillant's Cisticola [Vleitinktinkie] were calling non-stop "chick-cherrick" and Lesser Swamp Warbler [Kaapse Rietsanger] was issuing its mellow warble. Peace and contentment reigned. At last we connected to one of the species we had come for: Dark-capped (African) Yellow Warbler [Geelsanger]. But even through the spotting scope the distance was so great and the sighting so short-lived, as it flew off again, that we wanted to get a better view. We also spotted prinias, hoping for Drakensberg



Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

*Long-crested Eagle/Langukuifarend*



*Drakensberg formation of layered lava*

Prinia [Drakensberglangstertjie], but could not properly make out the markings on the chest, so we decided it was a 'no-bird'.

Later that afternoon we took a trip on the good tarred road in the direction of Sani Pass and admired the scenery: the rounded foothills with grass greener than green, huge valleys with rivers flowing in the lower-lying areas, a large dam to complete the picture, with the majestic Drakensberg in the background. The geology interested me intensely. The mountains showed clear horizontal layers of rock formations from bottom to top. This is characteristic of the Drakensberg. Some 182 million years ago a mantle plume rose under southern Africa, causing rupturing of the earth's crust and outpouring of vast quantities of basaltic lava/magma (molten Rock) from fissures over tens



*White Stork/Witooievaar*

of kilometres, to flow away in huge sheets of molten rock. Flow after flow erupted from the fissures, each layer 10 m to 20 m thick cooling and the next layer deposited on top, building up a pile of lava over 1 600 metres thick/high, reaching its greatest thickness in what is today Lesotho (McCarthy et al., 2005, p. 210).

A Yellow-billed Kite [Geelbekwou] was gliding effortlessly in front of our vehicle, its tail twisting from side-to-side as it balanced in the breeze, Helmeted Guineafowl [Gewone Tarentaal] were feeding in the grasses next to the road, and then we spotted a Long-crested Eagle [Langkuifarend] perched on a telephone post, looking very relaxed. We marvelled at the sheer size and obvious strength of its feet, toes and talons. A Southern (Common) Fiscal [Fiskaallaksmen] was perched on a fence, and Southern Red Bishops [Rooivink] with many females in the flock were flying around busily in the wetland vegetation bordering the road, the males puffed-up in display-mode.

We returned to Underberg searching for an eatery to have dinner. The establishments recommended to us were closed. We searched far and wide to find a restaurant that served fresh trout, but alas none to be had, although the area is well known for its trout-fishing in the clear mountain streams. In the only restaurant that did serve trout, it had been frozen and was dry and lacked flavour. Of the eateries we visited over the next few evenings, the best was the Underberg Country Club – no trout though.

The next day, Sunday, greeted us with clear skies, sunshine and glorious views of the Drakensberg from the breakfast room. We departed for Cobham Forest, driving to Himeville and in town taking a small but reasonably good gravel road for 30-odd km. We drove past a number of livestock farms with hundreds of dairy cows feeding in rich green pastures, with many birds in attendance: the ubiquitous Cattle Egret (or Western Cattle Egret – when will the powers-that-be find an end to changing bird names? Maybe we should just resort to Latin/taxonomic names), some very confiding White Storks [Witooievaar] were striding in the tall grass next to the feeding



*Bush Blackcap/Rooibektiptol*



*Dark-capped (African) Yellow Warbler/Geelsanger*

Heithard Graf von Dürckheim

cows, Fork-tailed Drongo [Mikstertbyvanger] perching low in the alleys of trees lining all the farm-fences. After arriving at Cobham reserve, we commenced hiking on a well laid out hiking trail, which was surprisingly easy to walk, (we had feared that in the Drakensberg reserves, there would be steep gradients and strenuous hikes, though, agreed, we had chosen an easier trail). The trail passed through a 'forest' of old-wood/ouhout, *Leucosidea sericea*, from where Bokmakierie were calling lively and many seed-eaters showed, among these Yellow-fronted Canary, Cape- and Southern Grey-headed Sparrow [Geeloogkanarie, Gewone Mossie, Gryskopmossie]. The trail then led us down to where the Pholela River snaked its way through a long and wide valley, and continued along open green grassveld, with the mountains beckoning from the distance. From the mountains on the far side, clear streams of water flowed down, presumably from fountains. Flowers and flowering forbs dotted the grassveld in a pretty display. We reached a point where the river bank was steep and high; here we spotted some Brown-throated Martin [Afrikaanse Oewerswael] nests dug into the river bank, with the birds flying in and out with surprising speed, and aerially feeding low over the river. The grassveld was excellent for LBJs like Wailing-, Levallant's-, Cloud- and Wing-snapping *Cisticola* [Huiltinkinkie, Vleitinkinkie, Gevlekte Klopkloppie, Kleinste Klopkloppie] which were spotted and heard. Long-tailed

Widowbird [Langstertflap] males were dragging their long tails over short distances, only to perch on tall grasses, and Cape Longclaw [Oranjekeelkalkoentjie] were showing well and issuing their "mew" calls. Southern Boubou [Suidelike Waterfiskaal] were calling and Grey Crowned Cranes [Mahem] were walking about with self-conscious stride. We returned to Underberg after having had a lovely hike.

That evening the weather changed and Heaven's floodgates opened with purpose; heavy rain was falling for hours. We were booked to drive up Sani Pass the next day. I sms'd our guide, Dr Aldo Berutti (the past-past CEO of BLSA), who replied that we should try to tackle the drive, as Sunday had been such a pleasant day.

Sani Pass is the mother of all South African mountain passes. Statistically and in every sense, it out-distances, out-climbs, and out-performs all its competitors with consummate ease, to have become the most iconic gravel pass in SA. It starts at 1 544 m and rises 1 332 metres to summit at 2 876 m above sea level. This altitude gain is almost 300 metres more than its nearest competitor – the Naude's Nek Pass in the Eastern Cape. The Sani's average gradient is only 1:20, thanks to the long easy gradient section in the foothills of the Drakensberg, but certain sections are as steep as 1:4 and it is here that most drivers come unstuck when the going gets slippery. The large number of car wrecks



Nethard Graf vom Durchheim



*Ground Woodpecker/Grondspeg*

*Glacial scouring*

down the ravines bear mute testimony to the dangers. (<https://www.mountainpasses-southafrica.co.za/find-a-pass/kwazulu-natal/item/410-sani-pass.html>)

Once you have cleared (South African) customs and made use of the immaculate toilet facilities at the border control point, the adrenaline part of your trip begins. The first half is just a casual drive, compared to what is waiting higher up the pass. Very steep gradients of up to 1:3, with loose rocks, mud, ice, and snow can all be encountered on this section.

Aldo arrived before 6 am and we loaded his gear into my SUV. It was foggy with a light drizzle. The first stretch of road was tarred and in good condition. Thereafter it went over to a gravel road (we had heard that there had been plans to tar the Sani Pass road – that seems to be a myth, as we only saw some contractors on the first few kilometres of gravel road trying to repair certain sections). The fog and drizzle prevailed. The road was wet, muddy and slippery. I engaged 4x4-low ratio, thinking that the better traction than 4x4 high ratio would pay off. It certainly did. We spotted some wet birds along the way: Ground Woodpeckers [Grondspeg] on rocks next to the road perching in their characteristic manner of sitting squat on their belly with feet protruding from underneath, a very wet Jackal Buzzard [Rooiborsjakkalsvoël] perched some distance off, a nice sighting of a Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk [Rooiborssperwer] flying overhead. We reached the South African border

post, which is on the lower reaches of the road, constructed there for practical reasons, although South African territory stretches up the pass all the way to the Lesotho border post. We disembarked to do passport and customs formalities, which Aldo kindly undertook, and immediately spotted some excellent birds: several Bush Blackcap [Rooibektiptol], Drakensberg Prinia [Drakensberglangstertjie] (now we had our lifer! but the pictures were bleak with fog and bad light) and, to our delight, we also spotted and photographed the Dark-capped (African) Yellow Warbler, a lifer we had seen two days earlier.

We continued our journey. The 'road' became steeper and steeper, and Aldo told us that it had deteriorated in the last number of years, even with Lesotho people trying to fill up some holes with rocks. It was wet, slippery and quite treacherous. The distance from the South African to Lesotho border posts is about 9 km, with the last number of kilometres consisting of roughly 14 (or 12 depending how you count) switchbacks or hairpin bends. Most of the hairpin bends are 180 degrees or close to that number. Some of them allow sufficient space for one vehicle to stop. Most don't. On one side the mountain went high up, on the other side, it went steep down. Very steep and far down. Four streams of water on different sections of the road were running down from the mountain on the left, and over the road, as there are no drainage pipes under the road, and falling to the depths below on the right.





Methard Graf von Dirckheim

*Common Buzzard/Bruinjakkalsvoël*

At the 6th switchback, disaster struck: there was a large old 5-ton truck which had broken down, immediately in the 180° left bend, with a large rock behind its left-rear wheel and no driver in sight, and brake fluid oozing from the wheel. Aldo and I disembarked to survey the situation. There was insufficient space for two vehicles from opposite directions to pass under normal conditions. Now there was the truck. The switchback made a sharp left bend and climbed up a steep gradient with a wet and slippery surface. To the right the road ended some 3 m behind the truck and the mountain fell off drastically. I decided not to drive front-and-back, trying to manoeuvre my SUV next to the truck and then drive up the incline as I was concerned about slipping back. So I headed as far right as possible, while Aldo directed me from the outside, drove as close to the truck as possible, then swung the steering wheel sharp left and accelerated to gain momentum and pulled clear and up the ascent for some 20 m where I waited for Aldo. That was a close shave!

We spotted some good birds along the route: Cape Rock Thrush, Gurney's Sugarbird, Fairy Flycatcher, Greater Double-collared Sunbird and Cape Bunting [Kaapse Kliplyster, Rooiborssuikervoël, Feevlieëvanger Groot-rooibandsuikerbekkie, Rooivlerkstreekoppie].

Higher up on a straight section between switchbacks Aldo showed us our next lifer: we had good sightings of Drakensberg

Rockjumper [Oranjeborsberglyster]. The pictures I took of the female bird came out as 'Gorillas in the mist'. Aldo explained that the special birds we were looking for occur only at high altitudes, above 1 900 m, and that this was one of the few spots in which to find them.

We reached the Lesotho border post, at 2 876 m and an excellent tarred road which ended on the Lesotho side of the border post. We continued for a short distance to Sani Mountain Lodge, with its famous 'Highest Pub in Africa'. The buildings were hidden in dense fog – it was damp, and cold. The temperature gradient was: Underberg 26°, Sani 10°. Luckily we had done our homework and brought warm jackets and jerseys. We stopped for a quick breakfast snack 'on the run' and resumed birding. Drakensberg Siskin [Kaapse Pietjekanarie], our next lifer, was very confiding; the female looked drab in the bad light. We wanted to spot Mountain Pipit [Bergkoester], but this proved difficult. We disembarked multiple times to walk up to higher ground where Aldo thought he heard the pipits calling. Cape Bunting [Kaapse Kliplyster] were spotted as well as a flock of Southern Bald Ibis [Kalkoenibis]. Intermittently drizzle fell in addition to the fog. Large-billed Lark [Dikbeklewerik] were spotted and almost fooled us into believing we had spotted the pipit. White-necked Raven [Withalskraai] were flying about. The vegetation was desperately over-grazed and many goats with long fur were roaming about feeding on what was available. At last, after we had almost given up, Aldo was able to show us Mountain Pipit. They were far off, and very mobile, and pictures were not possible. But we were very chuffed with this limited-range high-altitude lifer.

We had a spot of lunch and some Basotho people passed us leading some donkeys. They all had hats of some sort, mostly balaclavas, and all wore a sort of a poncho made from blankets, as well as wellies (gumboots). They were very courteous and engagingly friendly. The dwellings of the local people were rondavels constructed from natural rock, which is in abundant supply, with thatch roofs. We drove to the highest point, sign-posted as 3 240 m –

it was again raining and foggy. We decided to call it a day and return. On the lower reaches of Sani Pass, where some rudimentary road repairs were in progress, the 'road' had turned into a mud-bath resulting from the loose soil and continuous rain. My SUV was splashed with mud from top to toe. An oncoming construction vehicle lost control in the thick mud and headed straight for us. Aldo waved at the driver to back-off, to no avail. The vehicle however stopped when I blew my hooter loud and long. I accelerated past him before he could change his mind. Despite the unpleasant weather conditions, we had been able to spot most of the birds on our wishlist. We were cold and tired but very pleased. And I was happy at having driven Sani myself and returned safely.

The next day we drove to yet another of the nature reserves, this time Garden Castle. One has a choice of various hiking trails, from those for the very fit to the ones which we opted for, in this case Hidden Valley. At the office where we obtained our permit we immediately heard and spotted Black-headed Oriole, Pin-tailed Whydah and Speckled Pigeon as well as Cape Robin-chat [Swartkopwielewaal, Koningrooibekkie, Kransduif, Gewone Janfrederik]. As a result of the rains, most hiking paths were wet and rainwater had swamped many parts of the paths. And it was cool to cold. But the scenery was most pleasing and the clean mountain air was refreshing. The rivers in the area were flowing strongly and there were many streams and fountains running down the mountains in silvery sheets of water, and we crossed or walked beside many a murmuring stream. The birdlife was somewhat subdued but again we saw and heard many cisticolas – Wailing, Lazy, Zitting and Levaillant's [Huiltinkinkie, Luitinkinkie, Landerykloppie, Vleitinkinkie]. Cape Longclaw were also to be seen and heard, African Rock Pipit [Klipkoester] and Bokmakierie were calling melodiously, Cinnamon-breasted Buntings [Klipstreepkoppie] and Familiar Chat [Gewone Spekvreter] were about and Rock Martin were flying overhead.



*Long-billed Pipit*

The rock formations on this trail are most interesting. There were long and wide sheets of very flat rock with smooth surfaces and very straight lines in them. It looked as though these had been planed and sanded down. And exactly that happened, I presume – the effects of glaciers moving across rock surfaces causing striations by glacial ice scouring the ancient bedrock over which it moved, some 300 million years ago (McCarthy and Rubidge, 2005 p. 197)

On the final day we visited Lake Naverone hiking trails and did the Three Pools Hike. It was a very pleasant hike, but although the weather had improved, the soil was still very wet and the paths were partially filled with water. We again spotted a group (flock) of Ground Woodpecker perching on rocks next to the trail and had an excellent sighting of a Long-billed Pipit.

I ask myself why we did not bird the Sani Pass area earlier: we spotted excellent birds which only occur at that specific high altitude, we spotted some very welcome lifers, the hiking trails can be recommended, and the natural surroundings are most pleasing and interesting. The drive is not prohibitively far and there are a number of B&Bs to choose from. The only down-side was that the restaurants did not serve fresh trout!

#### References:

McCarthy T and Rubridge B (2005). *The Story of Earth & Life*. Struik Publishers, Cape Town. 🐦

# Rarities and unusual sightings report: 30 November 2020

Compiled by André Marx

*The first report since the start of Lockdown brings a number of interesting rarities being reported as local birders emerged from the enforced period of inactivity to find what is out there. The discovery of a Narina Trogon on the edge of the region in the Wilge River valley is significant as it shows once again how important it is to explore important areas of habitat in our region. Other significant reports include new localities for Dark-capped Yellow Warbler as well as African Dusky Flycatcher in winter, another species that may move into the region and be present in small numbers at certain times of the year, but goes undetected. An interesting record worthy of mention is the ongoing presence of a pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls at the Royal Johannesburg Golf Course in the Linksfield area of Johannesburg, as well as the occurrence of Dwarf Bittern at Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden, which serves to illustrate how unexpected sightings can take place right in the heart of the city, if you just look out for them!*

*Thank you for the reports received. Please send any interesting and out-of-range records together with a photo where possible to the address given below.*

## National rarities / Nasionale rareiteite

### Egret, Slaty [Rooikeelreier]

Possibly the same bird that has been recorded in recent years appeared at Gnu Valley and Walkhaven in the Muldersdrift area, 15 Sep 2020 (GBird).

### Gull, Lesser Black-backed [Kleinswartrugmeeu]

One bird was at Rockwall Dam near Rustenburg, 19 Mar 2020 (GF), and remained there for several days afterwards.

## Regional and local rarities /Streeksrareiteite

### Bittern, Dwarf [Dwergrietreier]

A surprise sighting was of one bird at the Sasol Dam in Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden, first seen on 2 Nov 2020 and subsequently reported by many birders in the next two weeks (GBird).

### Brownbul, Terrestrial [Boskrapper]

At least two birds were at the Tswaing Crater Nature Reserve in the Soshanguve area north of Pretoria, in Pentad 2520\_2805, on 19 Mar 2020 (PdC). *This is another new locality for this species in the region.*



Paul da Cruz

Terrestrial Brownbul, Tswaing Crater,  
Soshanguve area



Etienne Marais

Buff-streaked Chat immature, Rhenosterkop

Etienne Marais



*African Dusky Flycatcher, Loodswaai*

**Bustard, Denham's [Veldpou]**

Three birds were observed in Pentad 2555\_2845, south-east of Bronkhorstspuit, on 10 Jun 2020 (DdP).

**Chat, Buff-streaked [Bergklipwagter]**

At least 2 birds were found to be present at various times at Rhenosterkop in Pentad 2535\_2855, (Gbird, photo PH 19 Sep 2020). *This is the only Gauteng locality to date where this species can be observed.*

**Flycatcher, African Dusky [Donkervlieëvanger]**

A surprise sighting was of one bird at Loodswaai in Pentad 2515\_2835, north-east of Pretoria, on 16 Jun 2020 (EM). *This species is not known in Gauteng Province and this is the first confirmed photographic record. It is noteworthy that this is a winter record.*

**Harrier, Black [Witkruisvleivalk]**

One bird was in Pentad 2625\_2725 on 27 Oct 2020 near Western Deep Levels in the Fochville area, a new record for the pentad (JR).

**Hawk Eagle, Ayres's [Kleinjagarend]**

An interesting observation is of a bird soaring over Fellside, Johannesburg (in the Houghton/ Orange Grove area), in Pentad 2610\_2800, on 12 Sep 2020 (PdC).

**Ibis, Southern Bald [Kalkoenibis]**

The birds at Luipardskloof, which lies north-east of Bronkhorstspuit in Pentad 2545\_2855 and



Paul da Cruz

*Ayres's Hawk Eagle, Fellside, Johannesburg*



Sue Oertli

*Southern Bald Ibis, Luipardskloof*

within the Gauteng boundary, were found to be at their nest sites again at this locality on 25 Jul 2020 (SO), with 14 birds present on 1 Aug 2020 (DT).

**Osprey [Visvalk]**

During a visit to Marievale on 21 Nov 2020 a single bird was seen (SM).

**Owl, Verreaux's Eagle [Reuse-ooruil]**

A pair of birds have been resident at the Royal Johannesburg Golf Course in recent times, and were seen again on 8 Jul 2020 as well as in the ensuing weeks (Gbird, photo TB).



Sire Oerfli

*Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Royal Johannesburg Golf Course*

### **Phalarope, Red [Grysfraingpoot]**

One bird was at Marievale, 21 Nov 2020 (SM).

### **Plover, Grey [Grysstrandkiewiet]**

A solitary bird was found at Bronkhorstpruit Dam on 14 Nov 2020 (JvW).

### **Pratincole, Collared [Rooivlerksprinkaanvoël]**

A single bird was seen flying over a wetland system near Thokoza, in the East Rand, in Pentad 2620\_2805 on 5 Mar 2020 (JB, DV). *An unusual record for south-eastern Gauteng; this is a species that is occasionally seen at major wetlands and associated floodplains in areas beyond the northern and eastern boundary of the province.*

Several birds were reported at various times at Mkhombo Dam from 15 Oct 2020 and were still present on 30 Nov 2020 (GBird).

### **Sanderling [Drietoonstrandloper]**

One bird was at Bronkhorstpruit Dam on 14 Nov 2020 (MJ), with up to 10 birds present at the same locality on 28 Nov 2020 (GBird).

### **Sandpiper, Green [Witgatruiter]**

A single bird was along the Jukskei River at Waterfall Estate, Midrand, 27 Nov 2020, where it appears annually (RS).



Owen Oerfli

*Narina Trogon, Wilge River Valley*

### **Stork, Black [Swartooievaar]**

A sighting of one bird soaring in the Northcliff area of Johannesburg on 13 May 2020 in Pentad 2605\_2755 is unusual for the city (RvB).

### **Thick-knee, Water [Waterdikkop]**

One bird was at a farm dam in the Moloto area in Pentad 2520\_2830, north-east of Pretoria, on 20 Mar 2020 (PH).

### **Trogon, Narina [Bosloerie]**

A sighting of one bird in the Wilge River valley in north-eastern Gauteng in Pentad 2535\_2855 is exceptional (CvW, MJ, photo OO). *This is not a species known from Gauteng Province and this is the first record in a number of years.*

### **Warbler, Dark-capped Yellow [Geelsanger]**

One bird was found at Modderfontein Nature Reserve on 19 Sep 2020 in Pentad 2600\_2805, representing another new locality in Gauteng Province for this species (AH). Another bird was seen in Pentad 2600\_2750, in the Muldersdrift area, 24 Sep 2020 (MB, CV).



Martin Benadie

Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Muldersdrift

**Weaver, Lesser Masked [Kleingeelvink]**

A small colony of these weavers were found breeding in Mooikloof Estate, Pretoria East, on 13 Sep 2020 (KC, SB). An uncommon species with few records of breeding colonies in the city.

**Observers / Waarnemers**

Andrew Hester (AH)  
BirdLife Northern Gauteng members (BLNG)

- |                              |                      |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Christo Venter (CV)          | Corrie van Wyk (CvW) |
| Dries du Plessis (DdP)       | Duard Teichert (DT)  |
| Dylan Vasapoli (DV)          | Etienne Marais (EM)  |
| Gauteng Birders (GBird)      | Geoff Finney (GF)    |
| Jason Boyce (JB)             | John Randell (JR)    |
| Johan van der Walt (JvW)     | Keanu Canto (KC)     |
| Martin Benadie (MB)          | Owen Oertli (OO)     |
| Paul da Cruz (PdC)           | Pieter Heslinga (PH) |
| Roelof van der Breggen (RvB) |                      |
| Ron Searle (RS)              | Sheleph Burger (SB)  |
| Stan Madden (SM)             | Sue Oertli (SO)      |
| Trevor Barnett (TB)          |                      |

*This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made in the Greater Gauteng region, defined as being 100 km from the centre of both Johannesburg and Pretoria. 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 Internet reports and from SABAP2 records. Members are invited to submit details of sightings to André Marx at [andre.marx112@gmail.com](mailto:andre.marx112@gmail.com) or 083 411 7674. 🐦*

# Rarities and unusual sightings report: 31 March 2021

Compiled by André Marx

*The good rains as summer progressed from late 2020 into early 2021 resulted in favourable conditions for a number of rarities in the region. Without the shackles of a hard lockdown many birders took advantage of the bounty and dedicated observations led to the discovery of some very rare birds. Three particularly noteworthy records that are also firsts for the region in modern times, was the remarkable finding of Streaky-breasted Flufftail, Black Coucal and Northern Wheatear, with the first two species initially detected due to their distinctive vocalisation. Many of the records in this report are from the Zaagkuil drift/Kgomo-Kgomo area, where*

*seasonal flooding of the local wetlands brought about the arrival of many rain migrants such as Lesser Moorhen, Allen's Gallinule, and Striped Crake, in addition to the aforementioned rarities. An event worthy of mention is the stormy weather brought about by Cyclone Eloise to the north and east of South Africa. While it did not affect us much, the occurrence of several storm-blown Sooty Terns is noteworthy. Within the confines of Pretoria and Johannesburg interesting records included Buff-spotted Flufftail and Ayres's Hawk Eagle, as reported below. New localities continue to be found for species expanding their range, such*

as Long-crested Eagle and Dark-capped Yellow Warbler.

Thank you for the reports received. Please send any interesting and out-of-range records together with a photo, where possible, to the address given below.

### National rarities / Nasionale rariteite

#### Egret, Slaty [Rooikeelreier]

The long-staying bird was still at Gnu Valley/Walkhaven in the Muldersdrift area, reported again from 1 Dec 2020 until at least 27 Dec 2020 (Gbird).

#### Flufftail, Streaky-breasted [Streepborsvleikuiken]

A major find for the region was the discovery of two birds calling at the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain, 15 Feb 2021 (EM). *This species has not been recorded in South Africa for a number of years and this is a very significant find.*

#### Wheatear, Northern [Europese Skaapwagter]

An adult male bird was found along the Zaagkuildrift road on 17 Jan 2021 (NH), remaining there for a day during which time a number of local birders were able to see it. *A rare bird for the country with very few records to date, and not previously recorded in the region.*

### Regional and local rarities / Streeksrariteite

#### Coucal, Black [Swartvleiloerie]

A remarkable record was of at least one bird



Owen Oertli

Northern Wheatear, Zaagkuildrift Road



Sue Oertli

African Crake, Panorama, Roodepoort

calling from the floodplain at Kgomo-Kgomo when its distinctive 'popping' call was heard, 4 Mar 2021 (PdC). In the following days the call was confirmed by other observers but no visuals were obtained.

#### Courseur, Bronze-winged [Bronsvlerkdrawwertjie]

One bird at Rietvlei Dam Nature Reserve was an unusual record for the reserve, 30 Jan 2021, where it was present for a few weeks (Gbird).

#### Crake, African [Afrikaanse Riethaan]

An unexpected sighting was of one bird in Pentad 2605\_2750 at a small wetland adjacent to the Panorama Cewwwwww, Roodepoort, on 28 Mar 2021 (SO).

#### Crake, Baillon's [Kleinriethaan]

This species was confirmed to be present at Kgomo-Kgomo, 25 Feb 2021 (JK), and was reported in the following weeks by a number of observers.

#### Crake, Striped [Gestreepte Riethaan]

Two birds were first heard at the bridge over the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain on 15 Jan 2021 (EM), and subsequent to that adult birds with chicks were reported by several birders, 25 Jan 2021 (Gbird). In the following weeks to end



Pieter Verster

Striped Crake, Kgomo-Kgomo



Blaine Venter

Striped Crake with chicks, Kgomo-Kgomo

March 2021 there were several more sightings of this elusive species. *A bird that is found in the region during good rainfall years when it is present at localities such as the floodplain at Kgomo-Kgomo.*

**Hawk Eagle, Ayres's [Kleinagarend]**

One bird was seen near Bokfontein Mine in the Brits area, 20 Dec 2020 (SM). Another sighting was of one bird in Fellside, Johannesburg, 7 Feb 2021, where this species



Paul da Cruz

Ayres's Hawk Eagle, Fellside, Johannesburg



Ruth Pike

Tawny Eagle, Rhino & Lion Park

had been present for a number of months during summer (PdC).

**Eagle, Lesser Spotted [Gevlekte Arend]**

Whilst atlasing in Pentad 2525\_2820 in the Wallmanstal area north of Pretoria, one bird was observed on 2 Jan 2021 (ST, KP).

**Eagle, Long-crested [Langkuifarend]**

One bird was observed at Kgaswane Mountain Reserve near Rustenburg, 17 Jan 2021 (BT). *This is a species that is undergoing an ongoing range expansion and continues to turn up at new localities in the region.*

**Eagle, Tawny [Roofarend]**

An unusual sighting for the region was of one bird feeding on carrion at the Rhino and Lion Park in Pentad 2555\_2745, 13 Mar 2021 (A&RP).

**Flufftail, Buff-spotted [Gevlekte Vleikuiken]**

A single bird was heard from a suburban garden in Garsfontein, Pretoria, in Pentad 2545\_2815, 28 Nov 2020 (DH).

**Gallinule, Allen's [Kleinkoningriethaan]**

At least 3 birds were present at Kgomo-Kgomo on 27 Dec 2020 (CA), and on 25 Feb 2021 adult birds with chicks were observed by several birders.

**Moorhen, Lesser [Kleinwaterhoender]**

Large numbers of this species were heard and seen at the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain from





Sue Derfl

*Allen's Gallinule, Kgomo-Kgomo*

early Dec 2020, being present for several weeks after the good rains in the region (Gbird).

#### **Nightingale, Thrush [Lysternagtegaal]**

At least one bird was on the Zaagkuil drift road when it was heard, 15 Feb 2021 (MG).

#### **Nightjar, Square-tailed [Laeveldnaguil]**

One bird was on the Zaagkuil drift road, 24 Feb 2021 (EM).

#### **Osprey [Visvalk]**

A single bird was present at Roodeplaat Dam in Pentad 2535\_2820, 26 Dec 2020 (SvS), with one bird also at this locality on 21 Feb 2021 (RvT). Mkhombo Dam had one bird on 13 Feb 2021 (MJ).

The Kgomo-Kgomo area had one bird on 21 Feb 2021 in Pentad 2505\_2800 (RvT).

#### **Owl, Cape Eagle [Kaapse Ooruil]**

Brief views of one bird were had at Breedtsnek Pass in the Magaliesberg in Pentad 2550\_2725, confirming the presence of this species in the district, 28 Nov 2021 (LR). *This is a highly localised species in the region, only being observed in the Magaliesburg and at Suikerbosrand in recent times.*



Jannie Jansen

*African Skimmer, Rockwall Dam*

#### **Owl, Verreaux's Eagle [Reuse-ooruil]**

Two birds were on the Zaagkuil drift road, 25 Feb 2021 (JK, TG).

#### **Pelican, Pink-backed [Kleinpelikaan]**

One bird was at Mkhombo Dam, 13 Feb 2021 (MJ).

#### **Pratincole, Collared**

##### **[Roovlerkspringkaanvoël]**

A single bird was seen together with a large group of Black-winged Pratincoles at the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain, 25 Dec 2020 (NP). On 25 Feb 2021 several hundred birds were reported to be present at this locality (JK).

#### **Skimmer, African [Waterploëër]**

Two birds were at Rockwall Dam near Rustenburg, 24 Jan 2021 (SM, GF, JJ). Another bird was at Mkhombo Dam, 13 Feb 2021 (JK).

#### **Tern, Sooty [Roetsterretjie]**

Several birds were recorded in the region over the period of a few days; one bird initially at Finfoot Lake Reserve at Vaalkop Dam, 25 Jan 2021 (SvdW) and subsequently at least three more at this locality.

One bird was at Roodeplaat Nature Reserve, 26 Jan 2021 (P&JV), and seen by several local birders. *The passage of Cyclone Eloise caused strong winds and heavy rain primarily further north and undoubtedly resulted in these birds being blown off course and landing up at inland localities.*

#### **Warbler, Dark-capped Yellow [Geelsanger]**

A single bird was photographed in



Eduard Tschert

Sooty Tern, Roodeplaat Dam



Jannie Jansen

Sooty Tern, Vaalkop Dam

Montgomery Park, Johannesburg, in Pentad 2605\_2755, 21 Feb 2021 (AP).

**Warbler, River [Sprinkaansanger]**

This species was once again heard and briefly seen on the Zaagkuil drift road, 29 Mar 2021 (Gbird).

**Observers/Waarnemers:**

- Andrew Hester (AH)
- Andrew and Ruth Pike (A&RP)
- Anthony Paton (AP)
- Bernard Tabane (BT)
- BirdLife Northern Gauteng members (BLNG)
- Cleo Artemides (CA)
- Dirk Human (DH)
- Etienne Marais (EM)
- Gauteng Birders (Gbird)
- Geoff Finney (GF)
- Jannie Jansen (JJ)
- John Kinghorn (JK)
- Koos Pauw (KP)
- Lance Robinson (LR)



Anthony Paton

Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Montgomery Park, Jhb

- Michal Groenewald (MG)
- Michael Johnson (MJ)
- Niall Perrins (NP)
- Nicholas Harding (NH)
- Paul da Cruz (PdC)
- Pieter & Janelle Verster (P&JV)
- Rowan van Tonder (RvT)
- Sarel van der Westhuizen (SvdW)
- Shaun McGillewie (SM)
- Stephan Terblanche (ST)
- Stefan van Stuyvenberg (SvS)
- Sue Oertli (SO)
- Tionette Geddes (TG)

*This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made in the Greater Gauteng region, defined as being 100 km from the centre of both Johannesburg and Pretoria. 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 Internet reports and from SABAP2 records. Members are invited to submit details of sightings to André Marx at [andre.marx112@gmail.com](mailto:andre.marx112@gmail.com) or 083 4117674. 🐦*

### ***Laniarius* advertising costs**

	1 issue	2 issues	3 issues
Back cover	R600	R1100	R1500
Full page	R400	R750	R1000
Half page	R250	R450	R625
Quarter page	R150	R275	R375

Advertiser to supply print-ready artwork.

Back cover is printed in full colour. Inside pages are printed in black and white but appear in full colour in electronic publication.

The BLNG committee reserves the right not to place an advertisement.

# **BUFFELSDRIFT**

## **Rust de Winter**

### **ACCOMMODATION**

**R500/adult/night;**

**R250/child 12 years and younger/night;**

**Day visitors R100/person/day**



**BOOKINGS**  
Please call Donald  
on 082 885 5577;

or e-mail  
[bookings@birdhiking.co.za](mailto:bookings@birdhiking.co.za)  
Website: [www.birdhiking.co.za](http://www.birdhiking.co.za)