



Laniarius

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BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord



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Credits

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From the Editor

It's been (almost) 5 years, 11 issues, and quite a lot of pages, since I took on the role of editing BLNG's magazine-like informal but formal newsletter. *Laniarius* has a proud history of some very long-serving editors (and one incredibly long-serving layout artist who, even more incredibly, was also the editor for many years). Unfortunately, I will not be making it into this *Laniarius* Hall of Fame, as this is my last issue: it is time for someone new to bring you the BLNG news.

It is safe to say that I know a whole lot more about birds, birding and birders than I did back in January 2017. It would be embarrassing to admit how many bird species I've read about in these pages that I'd never heard of before (though on at least two occasions this was because the birds, or at least the names the authors gave them, did not exist – I can only assume this was a deliberate attempt to rattle the Editor, which it almost did). I have also learnt about many wonderful new places I hadn't realised I badly need to visit.

I was actually not yet a member of BLNG when I first agreed to take a look at what *Laniarius* was all about. I still haven't been to all that many outings or camps, so I have mostly gotten to know the club and its members from an unusual perspective – via your articles, photos and mails. The most striking discovery about BLNG, aside from its formidable collective birding expertise, has been the extremely varied interests of its members, the passion with which they pursue these, and the hardships they are willing to endure. Reading the stories published here

I gained a window on some birding lifestyles I had not encountered before: the ringers, the atlasers, the twitchers, the large-lens-camera luggers, the 4-course-picnickers, the 4x4 adventurers, the 24-hour BBDers... I think you're all slightly crazy – but in a good way, of course.

One of the pleasures and dangers of this job are the random paths I have travelled on the Internet when trying to confirm a fact, find an image, or research an issue. Some wonderful discoveries have been made along the way: for example, have you seen this footage of the [‘snowboarding’ Russian crow \(science can neither explain nor deny the awesomeness of this...\)?](#) Or these [branch-swinging American birds?](#)

The one thing I will NOT miss is having to come up with something to say on this page. And now all that's left for me to say is a heartfelt THANK YOU to everyone who has helped to fill all the pages of *Laniarius* 134 to 144, and especially to everyone I could count on to never say 'no' to my requests for an article or photo or answer to a query, no matter the deadline. Finally, thank you to Drinie – *Laniarius'* long-serving, long-suffering layout artist – who miraculously transforms the collection of words and images I send her into the polished publication you are reading now.

Wishing you a blessed festive season, and may 2022 bring you new hope, new joy and new birds.

Take care!

Tamsyn

From the Chair



This year's birding started slowly due to the Covid lockdown and restrictions. Fortunately, we have been able to resume our full programme of club activities from the second half of the year.

It has been reported that birdwatching is one of the fastest growing hobbies and one of the highlights this year has been the number of new members. We have had more than 50 new birders joining BLNG. Most of them have been supporting our events and getting to know the other members, as well as many new birds. Welcome again to all of you – we wish you a long, exciting and fruitful stay at the club.

In support of the new birders, we hosted an online 'Birding Basics' course in June, followed by practical outings at the Pretoria Botanical Garden to apply the newly gained knowledge and also to get to know one another. This course was so well attended that we had to schedule three outings to accommodate all the attendees while adhering to the Covid-19 health regulations.

We are looking forward to the 'Bird Sounds' course at Sediba Lodge over the first weekend in December, which will also be hosted by Lance Robinson. This should assist us in starting to get to grips with identifying birds by their calls – this skill really enhances one's birding experience.

Following the inspiring talk given by Dr Melissa Howes-Whitcross on the conservation of large terrestrial birds and raptors during the 2021 BLNG AGM, the Conservation team has launched our BLNG Secretarybird project. The main goal of this project is to assist with the conservation of

Secretarybirds by creating an awareness of their special needs and the importance of protecting their habitats. The first milestone in this project was the identification of breeding Secretarybirds in order to have the chicks radio tagged. The first nest was found south of Heidelberg and two chicks were tagged. BLNG had the privilege of naming one of these birds – Egoli. We will be giving regular feedback on specifically Egoli's movements. Our members and friends also identified four more nesting sites, which we are very excited about. We are however lagging behind with the fundraising for Egoli's tracking device.

The BLNG bird-ringing group are still very active with their monthly ringing events and camps. Club members are invited to come and observe their ringing activities on the first Saturday of every month.

The committee is currently very busy planning an exciting year of activities for 2022. We welcome any suggestions and inputs regarding training sessions, interesting outings, camps and presentations, which can assist in creating a better birding experience for all. We will need to be flexible once again, especially in light of the new Covid variant.

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

Happy birding!

ELouise

Ingula kamp, April 2021

Laura Jordaan

Ingula by Van Reenen, uitstappie bespreek vir April 2020. Was nog besig om die kaart te bekyk, toe die algemene ingrendel ons met mening opsluit. Die ekonomie kom feitlik tot stilstand. Net noodsaaklike middels kan gekoop word. Ons beweegbaarheid ernstig gestrem.

2021 bring kennis dat ons lewens weer kan voortgaan. Eindelik is als weer in rat en die beplanning gaan voort. Bak daai dadeloeding, sny en verpak. Koop en vries vleis, broodjies en drinkgoed. Bakkies met al die happies word verdeel en gepak. Net reg vir vat en ry.

Ek ry al vroeg uit Pretoria. Met dagbreek begin die verkeer optel en ek konsentreer om in die vinnige verkeer op koers te bly. Dan Van Reenen se vulstasie en gou by die skerp afdraai. Sjoe. Stop eers en geniet die berge, ooptes en uitsig. Luister na die laksman se skel prosa voordrag, met die langstertjies wat vrolik meedoen. Skoenlappers en sprinkane beweeg oral. Die telefoonroep van die Bokmakierie kondig ontspanning aan. Ek ry stop-stop met die grondpaadjie af na die opstal en gastehuis.

Ons groet, meld aan en gaan pak af. Dis warm. Ek en Antoinette gaan eet by die



Sean Naude

Witrugeend

spruitjie en begin dadelik om voëls af te merk. Ek hoor die Paradysvlieëvanger [African Paradise Flycatcher] en ons vleg deur die lang gras tot by die plaas se dam, sodat ek hulle vir haar kan wys. Daar merk ons vinnig die twee plaasgansse, duiwe, Witpens- en Swartsuikerbekkies [White-bellied and Amethyst Sunbird] vermaak ons met hul roep nou hier en dan weer daar. Die Kuifkophoutkapper [Crested Barbet] en Hadede eers vergeete soos ons die Kuifkopvisvanger [Malachite Kingfisher] oor die dam volg. Voor ons styg 'n swerm Rooibeksysies [Common Waxbill] op en spat oor die dam. Terwyl ons nog vir hulle kyk kom land die Gevlekte Muisvoëls [Speckled Mousebird] in die boom en skree uitbundig. Ek, Antoinette, Christa en Ilse stap deur die plaas en rivier langs. Die LBJ's verskyn en verdwyn in die lang gras. Die vriendelike donkie drentel saam met ons. Dit is so mooi om weer in die veld te wees.

Met die son wat verdwyn is die braaivure aangesteek en die res van die groep kom stuk-stuk nader. Die wind het stil geraak en ons kuier lekker.

Voor dagbreek skarrel ons om die dag te begin en by die afgespreekte plek bymekaar te kom. Oppad kry ons 'n plaasdam met heelwat voëls. Dis vroeg en die mis nog dik, wat sig



Sean Naude

Uitsig van Ingula



Sean Naude

Mahem

moeilik maak, maar ons lys gou die gewone watervoëls. Opgewondenheid bars los toe daar 'n gesinnetjie Witrugeende [White-backed Duck] gesien word. Salome se *scope* kom uit om dit te bevestig... Sean jaag ons aan sodat ons betyds by die saamkompunt kan wees. Ons wag 'n rukkie vir Carina wat stadig ry deur die digte mis. Sy laat ons inteken en begelei ons na die reservaat, waar ons ernstig begin *Lass*, maar met die bewolktheid en koue gaan dit maar stadig. Party se weer *apps* het sonskyn voorspel en min had 'n spaartrui saam. Die motivering van die groep laat ons nogtans toe om verskeie spesies raak te sien. Carina verduidelik hoe die hele sisteem van Ingula werk.

Oorspronklik was die plaas Braamhoek verkry vir die een dam (wat tot 22 miljoen kubieke meter water kan hou), met die Bedforddam 4.6 km verder, sodat die watermassa wat die turbines dryf opgepomp kan word wanneer daar spaarkrag is en afgelaat word wanneer daar meer krag benodig word. Sy het die geskiedenis van die reservaat met ons gedeel waar die waterskeidingpunt is tussen die Vaalrivier wat na die Atlantiese Oseaan vloei en die Tugela Rivier wat in die Indiese Oseaan uitmond.



Rooivlerkpatrys



Sean Naude

Kalkoenibis

Hier kry ons twee Sekretarisvoëls, en 'n Kransvalk [Secretarybird, Rock Kestrel]. Met die verder ry is die opgewondenheid weer hoog met 'n hele paar Mahemme [Grey Crowned Crane] wat na aan die pad wei. Ons konvooi volg Carina na die hoogste punt van die grasveld waar ons wel die Drakensberglangstertjie [Drakensberg Prinia] kry. Soos ons kom staan vir die groepphoto lag ons vir die twee Sekretarisvoëls wat op die randjie voor ons verby loop.



Edelvalk



Rooiborsjakkalsvoël



Sean Naude

Rooiborssperwer

Die Grasveldlangbeklewerik [Eastern Long-billed Lark] roep op 'n paar plekke sy kenmerkende lang fluit.

Ons kry kans om die broeipaer Lelkraanvoëls [Wattled Crane] met kuiken vinnig te sien voor hulle die jongeling uit ons sig wegsteek. Ons kyk hoe die mis plek-plek wegtrek om stukkie blou lug en son te wys.

Carina stop vir die Rooivlerkpatryse [Red-winged Francolin] en al kom ons almal tot amper by hulle kon ons hulle eers sien toe hulle met woerende vlerke opvlieg, oor ons koppe om veel verder te gaan land en in die bossies verdwyn.

In die middag ry party van ons nog 'n draai en vind drie Veldpoue [Denham's Bustard], 'n klompie swaels by die driffie waar Sean uitwys dat daar twee Horuswindswaels [Horus Swift]

tussen hulle is. Naby die pad wei daar weer n paar Kalkoenibisse met hul rooi koppe duidelik bo die kort gras. Met die kronkelpad sit daar sowaar 'n Edelvalk [Lanner Falcon] met sy ete op die paal. 'n Paar Kaapse Kanaries [Cape Canary] op die draad, Skoorsteenvoërs [African Sacred Ibis] in die modderafloop, tussen nog 'n groepie Mahemme. Ons draai terug soos die son nader aan die randjies skuif, maar skielik weer 'n stop vir klein goedjies in die pad. Ons wag geduldig vir die LBJ's om meer sigbaar te word sodat ons kan seker wees dit is die Klipstreekpoppies [Cinnamon-breasted Bunting]. So 'n paar Swartkraaie [Cape Crow] vlieg lui, weg van die pad af. Duiwe, kiewiete en vinke is volop.

Terug by die huis skarrel ons weer om die braaieri te begin en kuier tot laat lekker saam.

Maandagoggend ry party al vroeg, maar vir ons draaiers is die beloning Swartvlieëvanger, Draaihals, Witkruiswindswaels, Mahemme, die Groot-rooibandsuikerbekkie, Rooibekkelakelaars, glasogies, Grasvoël, Bontroklaksmen, Bonthoutkapper [Southern Black Flycatcher, Red-throated Wryneck, White-rumped Swift, Grey Crowned Crane, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Green Wood-hoopoe, white-eye, Cape Grassbird, Brubru, Acacia Pied Barbet] en, die kersie op die koek, die Rooiborssperwer [Red-breasted Sparrowhawk], wat lank genoeg oor ons sirkel, dat Sean 'n mooi foto kon neem. 📸



Sean Naude

Gebande Oewerswael

Wilge River Valley outing, 25 April 2021

Keanu Canto

As the sun began to poke its head out above eastern Gauteng's Gouwsberg mountains, 14 BLNG members met at the start of the Wilge River Valley road, ready for a day's birding.

As we headed through the first stretches of grassland, the birding was particularly quiet as a result of the cold, but things soon started to pick up as we hit the first patch of thornveld, where the songs of White-browed Scrub Robin, Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Brubru [Gestreepte Wipstert, Oranjebosboslaksman, Bontroklaksman] and many others resounded from the trees.

We soon descended into the valley proper, where we were treated to views of a trio of klipspringers high up on the cliffs above us, and a few entertaining Southern Black Flycatchers [Swartvlieëvanger]. As the day began to

warm up, the first raptors started to become active, and we were enthralled by an Ovambo Sparrowhawk [Ovambosperwer] doing some impressive aerobatics above our heads. Their hunting style is rather unique amongst accipiters in that they often perform impressive stoops from height whilst locked onto a target.

We soon entered the agricultural lands around the Wilge River, where Black-winged Kite [Blouvalk] and Black-chested Snake Eagle [Swartborsslangarend] made their appearance. After a quick stop at Qôdesh, we headed over the Wilge River towards Hephzibah. As we drove along, a Lanner Falcon [Edelvalk] streaked past the convoy of vehicles and disappeared in a flash. Everybody was out of their vehicles in an instant, but the bird was nowhere to be seen. Just as we were about to admit defeat, we spotted the bird as well as its mate, and we were treated to the pair courting each other above us and occasionally locking talons for an instant.

It was then on to Hephzibah, where we enjoyed a quick snack under some shady trees



Keanu Canto

Hephzibah scenery



Keanu Canto

Cape Rock Thrush

Keanu Ginto



Long-crested Eagle

before heading out on a walk up the picturesque kloof. We soon locked onto a winter bird party and as we followed it we were able to tick off most of its constituent species – Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Bearded Woodpecker, Southern Black Tits [Goudstertspieg, Baardspieg, Gewone Swartmees], what seemed like hundreds of Cape White-eyes [Kaapse Glasogie], and many others. These 'bird parties',

or foraging flocks, are a common occurrence during the winter when various bird species feed together to both maximise foraging efficiency and keep a better lookout for predators. At one of the chalets a Mocking Cliff Chat [Dassievoël] greeted us cheerfully, and near the river crossing we heard the metallic tinkling calls of African Firefinch [Kaapse Vuurvinkie] and managed to catch a few glimpses of a small group of these birds. It is always a treat seeing this species which is more commonly associated with the Lowveld – and Hephzibah has an impressive amount of these little birds. Further up the kloof, a stunning White-throated Robin-chat [Witkeeljanfrederik] called from a tall tree and Grey-backed Camaropteras crept around secretively in the undergrowth.

We soon had to head back towards the cars, and along the way a lovely male Cape Rock Thrush [Kaapse Kliplyster], a lifer for a few of the group members, foraged at the top of a tall tree. It was not all over yet though, and we were treated to great views of a Long-crested Eagle [Langkuifarend] soaring above our heads. All in all, a great day's birding was enjoyed by all and was a testament to how, even as winter rolls in, there is still some exciting birding to be had on the Highveld. 🐦

Suikerbosrand, 30 May 2021

Tristan Spurway

Suikerbosrand is always a tough but extremely rewarding winter birding destination. As soon as I was asked to lead the outing I couldn't contain my excitement for the incredible birds that we could possibly see. Starting out early on Eendracht road the birding began extremely slowly – the birds appeared to be more cold than us. The best bird along the road was without a doubt a distant Marsh Owl [Vlei-uil]. Moving into the reserve we were greeted by views of the different variations of Mountain Wheatear

[Bergwagter] and some rather confiding Mocking Cliff Chats [Dassievoël]. We made our way to the picnic site and decided that the circular walking route could be a great option. Needless to say we weren't wrong! We had multiple views of Fairy Flycatcher [Feevlieëvanger] along the walk – a target for a lot of birders – and more Familiar Chats [Gewone Spekvreter] than you can count! Moving up the hill we managed to get Cape Bunting [Roovlerkstreepkoppie], Red-throated Wryneck [Draaihals] and an Ashy Tit

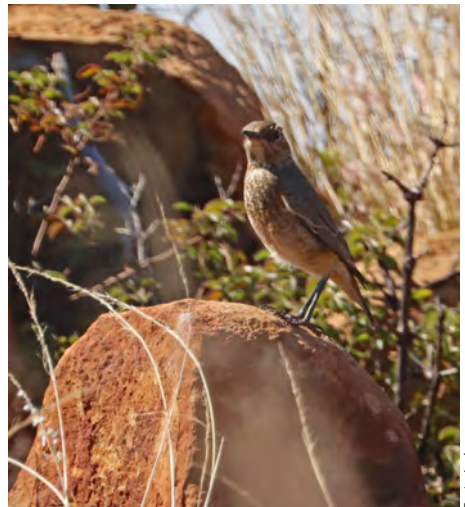


Tritan Spurway

[Akasiagrismees] that almost flew into my face. Not many people got onto the Tit so I tried my best at spishing and within a few moments we had this bird standing right out in the open for everyone to see! Moving on from there, a drive up the mountain provided some breath-taking views of the wintery highveld, as well as full-frame view of a very special altitudinal migrant – Sentinel Rock Thrush [Langtoonkliplyster].

Things became slightly quiet towards the middle of the day, with a few notable species such as Wailing Cisticola, Cape Canary, Black Sparrowhawk and Cape Rock Thrush [Huiltinkintkie, Kaapse Kanarie, Swartsperwer, Kaapse Kliplyster]. As midday dragged on and the excitement calmed down a bit, the excitement was once again lit with a small flock of Grey-winged Francolin [Bergpatrys], a lifer for me and others in the car! Finally it was time to hit the bushveld portion of the reserve and we picked up nearly 30 new species, including many lifers for those in the group. A few highlights were Crimson-breasted Shrike [Rooiborslaksman], Acacia Pied Barbet [Bont-houtkapper], a Common Scimitarbill [Swart-bekakelaar] that put on a mighty display, and countless White-browed Sparrow-Weavers

[Koringvoël]. The day was immensely enjoyable, with us hitting a total of 78 species, which isn't bad considering the time of year, and the fact that the cars communicated via radio. I would also like to extend congratulations to Michael van der Laan for reaching 200 species on his life-list on the trip! 🐦



Benita Jordan

Female Sentinel Rock Thrush

Outing to Hoogland Health Hydro, June 2021

Ilse Müller

Hoogland is a firm favourite birding destination every year, in summer or winter. It is a private nature reserve just east of Centurion. The scenery is beautiful, with the Schurveberg to the one side and the Hennops Valley to the other. A variety of hiking trails criss-cross the reserve.

A small group of us were stranded without a guide – two guides had to cancel due to corona-related issues. But we felt we could not just drop this special birding event!

Guides familiar with the area would have taken us to specific points and would have pointed out specials of the area. Now we – like headless chickens – went off, pre-dawn, in the wrong direction. We ended up walking 14 km. A young family was part of the group and we all were very impressed that they did not complain – not once.

44 species were logged – among the highlights: Golden-breasted Bunting, Black-headed Oriole, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Coqui Francolin, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Jameson's Firefinch, Bokmakierie, Short-toed Thrush, Lazy Cisticola, Red-throated Wryneck, Mocking Cliff Chat [Rooirugstreekpoppie,

Swartkopwielewaaal, Geelblestinker, Swempie, Pêrelborrswael, Jamesonvuurvinkie, Bokmakierie, Korttoonkliplyster, Luitinkinkie, Draaihals, Dassievoël].

In the end we all agreed that it had been a wonderful winter's day outing, and we will be back – one day. 🐦



Rose Clark



BLNG camp to Lajuma, 16–20 June 2021

Ivonne Coetzee

Lajuma... the very word resonates with the mystery, legend and beauty of that mountain kingdom which we were allowed to share for a few days.

While waiting for our safari-vehicle at the parking spot at the bottom of the Soutpansberg, a confiding Bearded Scrub Robin, Yellow-breasted and Bar-throated Apalis, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Chinspot Batis [Baardwipstert, Geelbors- en Bandkeelkleinjantjies, Geelborswillie] prepared us for the exciting birding that awaited us.

With our Groot Trek-like loads of luggage at our feet, blankets on our laps, we started up the rough 7 km track, up and up the mountain – a trip of 45 minutes – go figure!

When we entered the mist-belt forest to go round a hairpin bend, a stunning Narina Trogon [Bosloerie] on an overhanging branch welcomed us to its kingdom. On this high note we arrived at Wilderness Camp, high up on a cliff. Samson Mulaudzi, renowned BLSA-guide, was waiting for us. To him, the eight of us must have seemed like escapees from an old age home – the lame, the halt and the deaf, our average age 69. But did we surprise him... 82- and 77-year old Elmiën and Cecilia daily in the lead!



Montane forest vegetation and sparkling streams



One of the many dramatic rocks with rock fig



First hike to the bridge across the stream

We enjoyed supper together in the lapa after Nicole lit up both the hot-water donkey and the boma braai fires. We went to our warm beds to the calls of the Freckled Nightjar [Donkernaguil]. We should have gone looking for African Wood Owl [Bosuil] which goes to sit on the dirt track at night, but with six leopards roaming the 500 hectares around us, we postponed it to another night. We slept like logs – no noisy traffic, barking dogs or revelling holidaymakers – just the sounds of the forest surrounding us.



Ivonne Coetzee

The enchanting homestead gardens...



Nicole Crip

...with resident Narina Trogon

We set out at 7 the next morning to hike down to the river far, far below us, hoping for views of the Mountain Wagtail [Bergkwikkie]. Southern Boubou, Purple-crested Turaco, Cape Batis, apalis, Terrestrial Brownbul [Suidelike Waterfiskaal, Bloukuifloerie, Kaapse Bosbontrokkie, kleinjantjie, Boskrapper] and a variety of sunbirds – Collared, Double-collared, White-bellied and Amethyst [Kortbek-, Dubbelband-, Witpens- en Swartsuikerbekkies] – accompanied us everywhere. Samson pointed out Olive Woodpecker, White-starred Robin, and Olive Bush-Shrike [Olyfस्पेग, Witkoljanfrederik, Olyfboslaksmen] en route, but the highlight was brief views of the Gorgeous Bush-Shrike [Konkoit], notorious skulker, which had taunted us with its *'konkoit'* calls along the way. At the gorge's bridge we enjoyed magic views of a

Yellow-bellied Greenbul [Geelborswillie] on a rock at the waters' edge, basking in a single shaft of sunlight.

After the stiff climb back to camp, during which we stopped for Dusky and Ashy Flycatcher [Donker- en Blougrysvlieëvanger], the Cape Batis, various sunbirds, Green-backed Camaroptera [Groenrugkwêkwêvoël] and even Klaas's Cuckoo [Meitjie], most of the group rested tired legs and aching backs. All relaxed during the lunch break – except the one suffering from a serious case of *FOMO*, the only one to eventually see the Crowned Eagle [Kroonarend] twice as it circled above. And even though Samson and some of the others heard it afterwards, and even though we climbed up a gully to the nesting site, it stayed hidden for the rest of the time.

The afternoon saw us birding in another direction, past the old homestead with its enchanting gardens of huge boulders with rock figs, flowering pink tulip magnolia and camellia, a glade with a little stream, exotic creepers, and elephant ears. The resident Narina Trogon called but did not show itself again. We did see Lanner Falcon and, later, a circling Jackal Buzzard [Edelvalk, Rooiborsjakkalsvoël]. On the way back to camp Samson was stopped in his tracks by a Buff-spotted Flufftail's [Gevlekte Vleikuiken] mournful hoots. We stood frozen to the spot, poised for views – but instead a White-starred Robin [Witkoljanfrederik] became the star of the show, affording stunning views within metres from us, hopping around in a shrub with the little white stars visible in the fading daylight.

Samson led us on a stiff hike to the Waterfall Lodge the next morning. When we crossed some drainage lines in a gully, he heard and pointed out Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher [Bloukuifvlieëvanger], and we were awarded brief views of this beauty. Also participating in the mixed bird party was Grey Tit-flycatcher [Waaierstertvlieëvanger], and minutes later a beautifully displaying Red-capped Robin-chat [Nataljanfrederik]. Crested Guineafowl, Grey Cuckooshrike, cuddling Little Sparrowhawk and Eastern



Cuddling pair of Little Sparrowhawks

Nicator [Kuifkoptarentaal, Gryskatakoeroe, Kleinsperwer, Geelvlknikator] were other highlights of this walk. We also enjoyed views of nyala, bushbuck, samango and baboon, and saw spoor of brown hyena, but thankfully never spotted either leopard or bushpig.

The last day dawned windy, cold and drizzly, but to our relief cleared up. We had arranged to meet Jabulani, manager at Lajuma, to point out the Crowned Eagle's nesting site up a kloof. To see 82-year old Elmien scaling up that steep ravine was such an inspiration!

The climb up there was wonderful, with Jabulani pointing out interesting plants to our four avid botanists and the rich cultural-historic background of the walled remains, high up,



Ivonne Coetzee

Climbing up the ravine to the Crowned Eagle's nesting site

at the base of the cliff – this was where the VhaVenda hid from Shaka's marauding hordes during the Mashakane.

It is clearly now the bushpig's lair, with any number of wallows and trunks used as rubbing stations. That same afternoon, Jabulani picked us up for a sunset drive to the extensive wetlands high up in the mountains. Never did OBs taste better than when braving the cold wind on the ridge above the wetlands, trying to listen out for the resident Red-chested Flufftail's [Rooiborsvleikuiken] calls. The anthropologist in me thrilled to the archaeological site with its Morabaraba board game, carved in a slab of sandstone. Who sat there and played it centuries ago?



Afternoon hike: different habitats for diverse birding



Ivonne Coetzee

Remains of the VhaVenda sanctuary against the cliff face at the top



Morabaraba game board, carved in stone centuries ago

During our last night around the lounge's Jetmaster, the fire again lit by Nicole, we each tried to pinpoint the highlight, the top bird of the trip. In the end we all agreed – though the forest birding, especially under guidance of Samson, was superb – the most abiding impression to take home was the landscape: the breath-taking views, spectacular cliffs, the moss-draped forests, sun-dappled glades and sparkling waterfalls. We were all so thankful to Ilse, our co-ordinator, who proposed Lajuma to the BLNG club for a camp, and for organising Samson Mulaudzi, expert forest birding guide, for three days. We also extend our gratitude

Ilse Müller, our co-ordinator, on the final evening at the wetlands



Ivonne Coetzee

Ivonne Coetzee



The high-altitude wetlands with Lajuma behind, the highest peak in the Soutpansberg

to Fransie O'Brien's organisation behind the scenes.

But – our time at Lajuma was too short. We will be back to bird that wetland and adjoining savannah. We will be back for good views of the Scaly-throated Honeyguide [Gevlekte Heuningwyser] that taunted us daily with his rasping call but never showed itself. We will be back so all of us may see the elusive Lemon Dove and Orange Ground Thrush [Kaneelduife, Oranjelyster], to spot those flufftails, and to maybe even tick off the Orange-winged Pytilia [Oranjevlerkmelba] which Samson says is down at the parking area. Lajuma, we will be back! 🐦

Ngoye camp, August 2021

Hannes van den Berg

The BLNG camp to Ngoye, held in August 2021, was attended by 9 people. Our guide was Sakhamuzi Mhlongo, who did a great job in finding the 'specials'. Highlights for the weekend were Mangrove Kingfisher, Spotted Ground Thrush, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Olive Sunbird, Yellow (Eastern Golden) Weaver, Western Osprey and Palm-nut Vulture [Manglietvisvanger, Natallyster, Geelstreepboskruiper, Olyfsuikerbekkie, Geelwewer, Visvalk, Witaasvoël]. We did a lot of birding in and around Mtunzini and the Umlalazi Nature Reserve. We visited the Ngoye forest where the Green Barbet [Groenhoutkapper] occurs

and also visited the Dlinza forest/boardwalk in Eshowe. Due to rain for a great part of the weekend, we only heard the Green Barbet but



Spotted Ground Thrush



Mangrove Kingfisher



Olive Sunbird



Trumpeter Hornbill



Yellow-streaked Greenbul

All photos: Hannes van den Berg



Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird



Eastern Golden Weaver

did not manage to see it. The Green Malkoha [Groenvleiloerie] also didn't show. To conclude, it was a great birding weekend, and the

accommodation was excellent. And the birds we didn't manage to find? Well, we definitely need a reason to go back to this great birding area! 🐦

Paradors Game Ranch, 22–26 September 2021

Ilse Müller

Some 24 km east of Nelspruit, just off the N4 highway, we find ourselves turning onto a gravel road leading us to the Paradors Game Ranch. We are greeted by European Bee-eaters [Europese Byvreter], yes: summer is finally here!

The road winds through the valley along the river. We are surrounded by the Barberton mountains and towering granite boulders. Somewhere, we are told, is a nest with a pair of Black Storks [Grootswartooievaar].

The lodge is welcoming: spacious and neat. We park under two sausage trees (*Kigelia africana*) in full bloom and cannot believe our eyes, as we watch 20 or more Scarlet-chested Sunbirds [Rooiborssuikerbekkie], obviously intoxicated by the abundant nectar, flitting around in these trees. We settle in, greeting all our fellow birders, and are soon off on our first walk. The Lizard Buzzard [Akkedisvalk] in a nearby paperbark tree is not disturbed by our presence.

The marulas are in flower and there are birds everywhere – we could have walked on forever.

Back at the Ranch, the bonfire lit in the evening at the boma is impressive, and much later the African Wood Owl [Bosuil] calls...

The next morning, we drive out and onto the Kaapmuiden road to meet Garth Batchelor. He is the unofficial custodian of the Crowned Eagles [Kroonarend] in the area. He tells us that he has mapped out 60+ nests in the region.



Rose Clark

The Lodge



Bemita Jordaan

Scarlet-chested Sunbird



Rose Clark

Around the campfire



Rose Clark

Birding Paradors



Rose Clark

Red-throated Wrynek

We are taken to see a nearby nest by the road – the eagle is sitting low, with just the head visible. Her mate is in the sky giving us a regal performance.

We drive a little further to a Wahlberg's nest [Bruinarend], where eggs are obviously being incubated, and are surprised by the mate (a beautiful pale morph) who is – not far – on guard.

At a nearby farm we stop for coffee, and there we catch a glimpse of a group of Pink-throated Twinspots and Jameson's Firefinches [Rooskeelkopsensie, Jamesonvuurvinkie]. Garth tells us a lot about the raptors and the many concerns over their wellbeing in the area, especially how many are indirectly threatened by the growing orchards of macadamia trees and the impact of crop spraying. He explains

that he is working closely with the farmers, who are very open to finding new methods of pest control.

On Friday we drive out towards Barberton onto the renowned geotrail, and at one of the picnic spots we soon spot Gurney's Sugarbird, Buff-streaked Chat and Cape Rock Thrush [Rooiborssuikervoël, Bergklipwagter, Kaapse Kliplyster]. Red-throated Wrynecks [Draaihals] call as we drink our coffee.

We continue to Pedlar's Bush, a pristine little patch of natural forest among the Sappi plantations. There are sounds of forest birds calling all around, but as usual for forests, very difficult to spot. Specials from this site are the Olive Woodpeckers [Gryskopspeg] and Olive Bush-Shrikes [Olyfboslaksman] who flit around us. A Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler



Benita Jordaan

Pale Flycatcher



Benita Jordaan

Emerald-spotted Wood Dove

[Geelkeelsanger] finally shows himself – what a treat! He darts back and forth across the road – much to our delight. On our way home, we are lucky enough to spot an African (Holub's) Golden Weaver [Goudwewer] – a real special for some of us.

On Saturday morning, we again depart on a walk on Parador's Ranch. The Gorgeous Bush-Shrike [Konkoit] steals the show (and our hearts) with its call and display! For many this is their first proper sighting of this beautiful bird. In the afternoon, we take a drive to Malelane Gate bridge and are treated to a wide variety of water birds, including the stunning Saddle-billed Stork [Saalbekoovievaar].

On our last morning, a pair of Black Storks circle high above us in their Sunday best! What a sighting! And Philip recognizes the call of a Purple-banded Sunbird [Purperband-suikerbekkie] once again, a last chance for several of us to see it. Our total count is 180 birds!

Thank you to all our birding friends for the good times we shared at Paradors, to those who endured some challenges along the way, and to Fransie for making it all happen!

A big round of applause to Philip Calinikos for patiently guiding us and sharing his seemingly bottomless well of birding information. 🐦

BLNG uitstappie, Crocodile River Reserve

Stephan Terblanche

BLANG het op 13 November 2021 die eerste keer 'n uitstappie in hierdie reservaat onderneem. Dit is in 2019 geproklameer. Toegang vir privaat individue is beperk, maar die bestuur verwelkom klubs soos BLNG. Meer besonderhede oor die reservaat en maniere om daarby betrokke te raak is beskikbaar op hulle webtuiste: <http://crocodileriverreserve.co.za>.

Ons uitstappie is deur 11 ywerige en

belangstellende lede bygewoon. Aanvanklik is die pragtige sonskynweer geniet, maar soos die son hoogte gewen het, het dit goed begin bak. Die habitat is hoofsaaklik grasveld, met verspreide kolle bome. Ons het baie kans gehad om vergelykings te tref tussen voëls soos Landery- en Woestynkloppie [Zitting, Desert Cisticola], Pêrelbors- en Europese Swael [Pearl-breasted, Barn Swallow], en Hoëveld- en



Afrikaanse Naguil

Stephan Terblanche

Laeveldklappertjie [Eastern Clapper, Flappet Lark]. Die klappertjies het feitlik langs mekaar vertoon – iets wat nie dikwels gebeur nie. Ons is ook vergas deur 'n familie Hoëveldskaapwagters [Capped Wheatear]. Die jongeling lyk amper meer na 'n koester – in elk geval totdat hy opvlieg en sy swart-en-wit stertpatroon blootlê. 'n Paar Bosveldkwarteltjies [Kurrichane/Common Buttonquail] is deur almal goed gesien, omdat hulle so gaaf was om in kort gras te probeer wegkruip. 'n Gebande Sperwer [Shikra] wat 'n draai of twee in die lug bokant ons gemaak het, het 'n taamlike uitkenningsuitdaging gebied, veral omdat dit oënskynlik reguit vir die son gemik het.

Na 'n kort verposing onder 'n afdak, met goeie geriewe vir verskeie behoeftes, het ons na 'n ander deel van die reservaat geloop. Heelwat somerbesoekers was te siene, soos Diederikkie [Diederik Cuckoo] en Europese Byvreter [European Bee-eater]. Een van die dag se hoogtepunte was om 'n Afrikaanse Naguil [Fiery-necked Nightjar] te vind waar dit, amper perfek gekamoefleer, in die blare onder 'n bos gerus het. Of dalk op 'n nes gesit het... Uiteindelik is 67 spesies aangeteken, wat nie sleg is nie, aangesien ons nêrens naby water was nie. Dít sal met 'n opvolgbesoek 'n prioriteit wees – die reservaat sluit immers die Krokodilrivier in. 🐾

BLSA Secretarybird conservation project

Laetitia Steynberg

Secretarybird numbers in South Africa have plummeted over the past decade and, as a result, its conservation status was up-listed in 2020 from Vulnerable to Endangered. BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) is conducting a range of scientific investigations to assist in ensuring that this icon and endemic African raptor does not go extinct. This requires ongoing collection and evaluation of the bird's breeding habits, movements, numbers, habitat changes and other ecological aspects. One of the most efficient ways to obtain the data is from trackers

fitted onto the birds. The data obtained is used to update the national database on nest sites and to assist with the refinement of conservation initiatives, such as the creation of stewardship areas and providing advice to landowners where birds occur and breed on how to protect these birds.

A few years ago (2013) BLNG was involved in the fitting of a tracker to a Secretarybird – it was named BLiNG. Earlier this year, the club decided to relaunch this project, with input and guidance from BLSA, and with a wider scope



Laetitia Stenberg

Secretarybird



Obtaining biological data from the chick

BLSA Secretarybird Conservation Project



BLSA Secretarybird Conservation Project

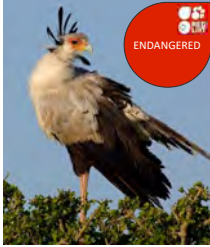
Extracting the chicks from the nest for tracker fitting. Experience from all previous tracker fitting operations on Secretarybird chicks has proven that, although the hen will fly away during the operation, she will return as soon as the chick is put back in the nest. No evidence of chicks being abandoned after a tracker has been fitted has ever been recorded.



than the club's previous initiative.

The aims of the project are: firstly, to find active nests and evaluate their accessibility, and then for BLSA to fit trackers onto the chicks to monitor their movements; secondly, to create awareness amongst members and other stakeholders of the predicament that the birds find themselves in. To this second end, BLSA has compiled an information pamphlet outlining the motivation for the project and which

A. Franeman

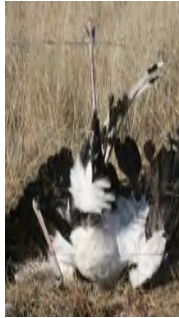


Secretarybird Conservation Project

In 2020 the Secretarybird was uplisted to **Endangered** due to significant population declines over the last three decades. Secretarybirds require large open, intact natural areas, preferably grasslands. Their preferred prey is locusts, but they also hunt snakes and rodents. **BirdLife South Africa** is conducting a range of scientific investigations to assist in ensuring that this endemic African raptor does not go extinct.

Suspected causes of declines

- Habitat loss
- Excessive burning regimes suppressing prey populations
- Overgrazing leading to degraded habitats
- Disturbance of breeding birds
- Fences (become entangled)
- Powerlines (collisions or electrocutions)
- Secondary poisoning (pesticides/rodenticides)
- Drowning in farm reservoirs



I. Rushworth

How can you help?

- ✓ Protect suitable habitat
 - combat bush encroachment
 - improved grazing and burning
 - Reduce disturbance - breeding birds
- ✓ Improve fence line management:
 - remove non-essential fences
 - use non-barbed wire for top strand
 - ensure fences are taught
 - Use flappers and reflectors on problem fences
- ✓ Don't use poisons
- ✓ Contribute to our sightings and breeding database

BirdLife South Africa's Activities

BirdLife South Africa is aiming to improve our understanding of the ecology of these birds. Tracking Secretarybirds (example below) is one of the most efficient ways to get detailed data towards this goal. This information allows us to effectively advise landowners in our biodiversity stewardship network on how to manage their properties to benefit Secretarybirds and maintains healthy grasslands. We are also compiling and managing a national database on nest sites. This helps us to identify candidate birds to put trackers on and enables us to monitor breeding and population health at a national level. For further information, read the back of this page and scan the QR code below. Please assist us in reporting any Secretarybird nest sites or mortalities you come across.



H. Kruid



FOUND A NEST?

Help BirdLife South Africa grow their database of Secretarybird breeding events by sending your sighting to

christiaan.brink@birdlife.org.za

+27 81 731 7643 (WhatsApp)

Please include the following information:

- Date and time of sighting
- GPS location of nest

Any additional information you can gain without disturbing the birds

- Number of eggs/chicks
- Approximate age of chicks



Yellow lines: Tracker readings on a chick's movements around the nest... clearly venturing not too far away from the nest

The chicks have just been fitted with trackers and are back on the nest. They will be 'playing dead' until the hen is on the nest again. This behaviour is probably used to escape the attention of other predator birds and is not necessarily related to the trackers having been fitted.



BLNG can assist in distributing to birders and landowners to educate readers on the plight of the birds and what can be done to minimise fatalities.

To date our club has already identified 5 active nesting sites, simply by encouraging our members to network with landowners far and wide and then provide details on the location of active nest sites to BLNG's Conservation Committee.

One tracker has since been fitted to a chick in a nest south of Johannesburg. The club launched a competition amongst members, coupled to a fund-raising drive, to name this bird. The winning name was Egoli – in reference to the gold reefs in the area.

Funding for the tracker was partially raised by BLNG and the balance provided by BLSA. The chicks in the other 4 nests that have been identified are being monitored and have been earmarked to be fitted with trackers when they are strong enough, usually around 8 weeks.

More active nests are required to ensure that the sample size of birds with trackers fitted is sufficiently robust to provide adequate data. We request members to continue to be on the lookout for active nests and to provide the location and landowner details to BLNG's Conservation Committee. 🐦

Tracking technology gives new insights into the behaviour of migrating birds

[Kiran Dhanjal-Adams](#), Postdoc, Centre for Ecology & Hydrology

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Disclosure statement

Kiran Dhanjal-Adams works for the Swiss Ornithological Institute which developed the multisensor loggers described in the article, and is a member of the Queensland Wader Study Group, Birdlife Australia, the Society for Conservation Biology and the British Ecological Society. This study was co-authored with S. Bauer, T Emmenegger, S Hahn, S Lisovski, F and Liechti. M. Schulz and P. Tamm provided field assistance and long-term monitoring. The Swiss National Science Foundation 31003A_160265 funded two of the study co-authors (S. Hahn and S. Bauer). The Swiss federal office for the environment (FOEN) contributed financial support for the development of the tags (grant UTF 400.34.11). SOL-GDL3pam loggers were fitted under licence LAU 43.17-22480-58/2015.

Partners

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Though much is known about where and when birds travel, a lot less is known about the composition of flocks and how long they stay together. Do birds come together in flocks

by chance? Do they actively choose flock members?

It's difficult to understand groups without being able to observe them directly. But advances in technology are changing this. Individual birds can now be fitted with small tracking devices called [geolocators](#) which store data from one breeding season to the next. When the bird is recaptured, the data is then downloaded and used to reconstruct the bird's migratory pathway.

Geolocators are useful for tracking the location of individual birds. But they lack the spatial precision to investigate their behaviour. So researchers at the [Swiss Ornithological Institute](#) added pressure sensors to geolocators. That's because pressure is an indicator of altitude, and rapid changes in pressure can tell us when a bird is flying and how high.

In a [study](#) published in the journal *Current Biology*, we used these pressure loggers to track the behaviour of groups of migrating bee-eaters. We were able to monitor how these birds moved as flocks, something which was impossible until the development of the new loggers.

The technology records how the individual birds are behaving. It allows researchers to see which ones are doing the same thing at the same time – in other words, which ones are making decisions together and coordinating their flight, and therefore belong to a flock.

Most surprisingly, we found that birds can spend long periods travelling together with the same individuals, even rejoining each other after separations.

What the data showed

We fitted 29 loggers on European bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) in 2015 and 2016. The species is very sociable. They [breed in large colonies](#). They also sometimes [raise young](#) that

Tamsyn Sherwill



European Bee-eater

are not their own, deciding which birds to help and how much assistance to offer. The species has also been shown to cooperate with other bee-eater species [to mob predators and search for food](#).

So we hypothesised that they were also likely to socialise during migration.

The data confirmed this theory. We noticed that not only were some of the tracked birds flying and stopping at the same time, but they were also hitting the same altitude simultaneously.

This meant the birds were sharing the decision to fly or not; to go up, or down, to make slight shifts or to remain at the same altitude. And this wasn't happening occasionally over the course of a few hours; the behaviour was noted over months at 30-minute intervals.

Such patterns could only occur between birds interacting within the same flock.

Data also showed that 49% of the tagged birds migrated 14,000km together from Germany to the Congo Basin and back. The rest split while crossing the Sahara. But 89% came back together again in Sub-Saharan Africa, locating each other despite a month spent travelling 5,000km separately.

In Africa, all bird groups would repeatedly separate for one to five days, then come back

together again before migrating back to Europe together. The birds that reunited were individuals that had previously spent time together.

Even in the breeding grounds, we found that European bee-eaters preferred the company of some individuals over others - and these tended to be the individuals with whom they would migrate.

Most surprisingly, none of these birds had previously been caught in the same burrow as chicks or adults ([over 95% of the population was monitored by researchers](#)), and were not part of the same family unit.

Two pairs of birds also bred together after migrating to Africa in the same flock.

Beneficial behaviour

This is some of the first evidence we have of birds remaining in long-term flocks with non-family members of mixed age and sex.

Waterbirds such as cranes and geese [can also migrate in stable multi-family flocks](#), but later separate into family or juvenile groups once they arrive at their destination. Bee-eaters, however, remain with the same non-family members throughout the year. In a manner of speaking, they form cliques.

Most likely, younger birds benefit from the [knowledge and guidance of older birds](#), allowing them to share information on migratory conditions, to [change their behaviour accordingly and to adapt to changes in conditions](#).

Furthermore, the species [soar-glides during migration](#). Birds identify thermal updrafts, navigate within these to gain altitude, and leave at the right moment to make it to the next thermal. Young birds, however, often leave thermals [at the wrong moment](#) and lose momentum.

In fact, it is [remarkably difficult](#) for birds with different experience levels to remain together for [longer than a few days](#), unless they compromise and wait for each other.

So staying together appears to be a deliberate strategy in bee-eaters, and it is likely that cooperation brings benefits beyond migration. Cooperating could also allow bee-eaters to search for food, defend territories and fend off predators.

A deeper understanding

Previously, most birds were thought to be guided by their genes during migration: any birds taking “bad” migratory routes would die, while the ones taking “good” routes would survive to pass their genes onto their young. How else could a cuckoo find its way across Europe and Africa when it had never met its biological parents?

Our research, however, shows that the picture is a little more complex, and that there

is a spectrum of migratory behaviours ranging from genetically-driven (as is the case of the cuckoo) to experience-driven (as is the case of cranes). Knowing that some bird species prefer to migrate with “friends” changes the way we think about the mechanisms that shape migratory behaviour.

The ability of birds to survive changing conditions will be clearer when we understand what drives their movement from one environment to another. 🐦

Ringershoekie: November 2020 – Oktober 2021

BLNG Ringgroep

Die volgende ringessies het nie plaasgevind nie, weens die inperking:

Serene Valley, Garsfontein, 21 November 2020; Wonderboom NR, 9 Januarie 2021; Rietvleidam NR, 23 Januarie 2021; Colbyn Valley, 6 Februarie 2021, terwyl Rietvleidam NR (5 Desember 2020) uitgereën het.

Hans Hoheisen Wildlife Research Station: 2–4 Januarie 2021 (Leier: Anita Michel)

Die eerste kamp van die jaar het by Tukkies se navorsingsentrum naby Orpenhek plaasgevind. Tien A-ringers en drie nuwe C-ringers het die geleentheid bygewoon. Ons het in die woonstelle op die perseel tuisgegaan en twee gesinne het gekamp. In die aande het ons lekker vleis gebraai en oor die draad na lees en olifante gekyk. Die vangste vir die drie dae was 169 in total, met 15 hervangste (8.9%). Ons ring net een keer in 'n jaar by hierdie ringstasie. Interessante spesies was: Afrikaanse Sperwer [African Goshawk], Groenvlekduifie [Emerald-spotted Wood Dove], Gestrepte Nuwejaarsvoël [Levaillant's Cuckoo], Swartbekkelaar [Common Scimitarbill], Gewone Willie [Sombre Greenbul], Groenrugkwêkwêvoël [Green-backed Camaroptera], Bontrokklaman [Brubru], Witpootblouvalkie

[Purple Indigobird], asook Klip- en Rooirugstreekoppie [Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Golden-breasted Bunting].

Doorie voël in Moreletapark gevind: 29 Januarie 2021

Wanda Louwrens het uit die bloute 'n e-pos van Safring ontvang om haar in kennis te stel dat 'n persoon van die publiek, Herman Saayman, op 29 Januarie 2021 'n Swartkeelgeelvink [Southern Masked Weaver] dood opgetel het in Van Gogh Crescent, Moreletapark. Wanda het hierdie voëljie op die 4de Maart 2017 by Moreletakloof Natuureservaat gering – dit is 3 jaar, 11 maande en 2 dae nadat dit gering is. Die oorsaak van die dood is onbekend.

Nylsvlei NR: 29–31 Januarie 2021 (deur Johan de Jager gereël)

Die tweede kamp vir hierdie jaar was by Nylsvlei, die immer gewilde natuureservaat net noord van Modimolle (Nylstroom). Elf A-ringers en sewe familieede het een van die huise (dormitories) volgemaak. Nylsvlei was nat. Ons moes elke dag deur die water ry om by die ringstasies uit te kom. Die getalle was nie so hoog nie – 136 vir die twee dae. Nicole de Jager wat in Januarie gekwalifiseer het as A-ringer, het 7 nuwe spesies



Joseph Heimans het die groep by Nylsvlei besoek. Hy is van Limpopo Natuurbewaring en teken ons permitte. Voor sit Wanda en Frik du Plooy, terwyl Arrie Kloppe (links agter) met hom gesels.

of 'lifers' gekry (dit is as jy 'n nuwe voël vir die eerste keer ring). Ons het 40 verskillende spesies gekry, waarvan die volgende die interessantste was: Bosveld- en Bruinkopvisvanger [Woodland and Brown-hooded Kingfisher], Grysneushoringvoël [African Grey Hornbill], Goudstertspieg [Golden-tailed Woodpecker], Swartkoekoek [Black Cuckoo], Boskrapper [Terrestrial Brownbul], Geelborswillie [Yellow-bellied Greenbul], Grysrugkwêkwêvoël [Grey-backed Camaroptera], Paradysvlievanger [African Paradise Flycatcher], Oranjebors-boslaksman [Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike], Langstertlaksman [Magpie Shrike], Grootglansspreeu [Burchell's Starling] en Gewone Vleioerie [Burchell's Coucal].

Bushtrails, naby Magaliesburg: 13–14 Februarie 2021 (Leier: Elba Swart)
Net 5 A-ringers het Magaliesburg toe gery

vir hierdie ringnaweek. Alhoewel die groep klein was, het hulle tog meer as 200 voëls gevang, waarvan 33 verskillende spesies. Omdat daar dikwels op die plaas gering word, was die hervangste goed – 10 in totaal. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke [Southern Masked Weaver] het voorgeloop wat getalle aan betref, met 56 voëls vir die naweek, met die Rooivinke [Southern Red Bishop] kort op hulle hakke met 44 voëls wat hanteer is. Die groep was gelukkig genoeg om 11 Kolganse [Egyptian Goose] te ring, wat nie sommer elke dag gebeur nie. Ander mooi spesies was Kleinbyvreter [Little Bee-eater], Gestreepte Wipstert [White-browed Scrub Robin], Kleinriet- en Kaapse Rietsanger [African Reed Warbler, Lesser Swamp-Warbler], Vlei- en Luitinkinkie asook Gevlekte Klopkloppie [Levaillant's, Lazy and Cloud Cisticola], Swartvlievanger [Southern Black Flycatcher], Rooikeel- en Witvlerkflap [Red-collared and White-winged Widowbird], asook 'n Staalblouvinkie [Village Indigobird].

Bishopvoëlpark, Wierdapark: 20 Februarie 2021 (Leier: Marina Pienaar)

Ses A-ringers en een C-ringer het hierdie weggesteekte voëlpark in Wierdapark besoek vir 'n ringsessie. Dit was Pieter du Plessis en sy vrou, Paula, se eerste ringsessie by hierdie voëlpark. Hulle het al die pad van Kensington in Johannesburg af gekom om saam te kom ring. Die vangste was nie baie goed nie – net 87 voëls is hanteer, waarvan 18 verskillende spesies. Omdat ons dikwels (elke 3 maande) daar ring was die hervangste nogal hoog – 14 voëls (16%). Die Kaapse Glasogies [Cape White-eye] was die meeste – 15 in getal, met die Swartkeelgeelvinke [Southern Masked Weaver] en Swartoogtiptolle [Dark-capped Bulbul] tweede met 12 elk. Van die skaarser voëls was die sangers die volopste – 4 spesies is gering: Tuin-, Hof-, Kleinriet- en Europese Rietsanger [Garden, Willow, African Reed and Marsh Warbler]. Daar was ook 2 soorte langstertjies, naamlik Bruinsy- en Swartband- [Tawny-flanked and Black-chested Prinia], asook 2 suikerbekkies – Witpens- en Swart- [White-bellied and Amethyst Sunbird]. Verder is die getal van 87

opgemaak met spesies soos, onder andere, Bosveldtjerkittik [Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler], Bandkeelkleinjantjie [Bar-throated Apalis] en 9 Gewone Janfrederikke [Cape Robin-chat].

Paardeplaats, naby Lydenburg in die Longtom-pas: 19–21 Februarie 2021 (Leier: Janine Goosen)

Nege A-ringers het berge toe vertrek om die Rooiborssuikervoëls [Gurney's Sugarbird] te teiken in hierdie gebied. 'n Rekord getal suikervoëls is gevang, naamlik 30. Die doel van die besoek was om die voëls se bloed te trek om genetiese toetse op hulle bloed uit te voer. Die projek is 'n samewerking tussen Mnr Dawie de Swardt van die Nasionale Museum in Bloemfontein en navorsers van die Universiteit van Pretoria. Die doel van die toetse is om die genetiese diversiteit van die spesie te bepaal en om te kyk of daar geen vloei tussen die geïsoleerde lokaliteite van die spesie voorkom nie. Die oes was nie groot nie – net 70 voëls is hanteer, waarvan 12 verskillende spesies. Die hervangste was goed – 11.4%, waarvan 4 Rooiborssuikervoëls was. Die een is 2 jaar terug deur Frik du Plooy op dieselfde plek gering en een 1 jaar terug deur Arrie Klopper. Nicole de Jager, een van ons nuwe A-ringers, het 9 'lifers' gekry. Ander voëls is ook in die nette gevang, soos 13 Grootrooibandsuikerbekkies [Greater Double-collared Sunbird], asook 2 Swartsuikerbekkies en 5 Jangroentjies [Ame-thyst and Malachite Sunbird], 'n Drakensberg-langstertjie [Drakensberg Prinia] en een Kaapse Kliplyster [Cape Rock Thrush].

Wolhuiskraal, naby Pienaarsrivier: 5–7 Maart 2021 (Leier: Wanda Louwrens)

Agt A-ringers het die naweek op 'n lowergroen Wolhuiskraal tuis gegaan om by die Boskamp en oorkant die pad by die Pompstasie te gaan ring. Dit was te nat om tot by die rivier te kom. 'n Mooi getal van 282 voëls is in die nette en ander vangtoestelle gevang. Ons het 53 spesies gekry, met 14 hervangste (11.3%). Ons ring ten minste twee keer 'n jaar daar. Een van die voëls – 'n Bosveldtjerkittik [Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler] is op 'n paar dae na 4 jaar gelede

op 10 Maart 2017 deur Me. GA Schaum by Wolhuiskraal gering en Wanda het dit nou weer gevang! Die spesie wat by die Boskamp gevang is, was die meeste Gewone Blousysies [Blue Waxbill], Gewone Melbas [Green-winged Pytilia] en Rooibekkweleas [Red-billed Quelea], met 10 elk. Die Veereier [Cattle Egret] was 'n 'lifer' of nuwe spesie vir Frik du Plooy – wat nie elke dag gebeur nie – hy ring al 20 jaar lank wilde voëls. Die jong manne het die Veereier naby die nette gesien, dit in die nette ingejaag en dadelik uitgehaal. Johan de Jager het ook 'n 'lifer' gekry – 'n Nonnetjieuil [Western Barn Owl] wat hy een aand in 'n 'kestrel trap' met muise gevang het. Arrie Klopper het sommer 4 'lifers' die naweek gekry – 'n Bospatrys [Crested Francolin], Kleinsingvalk [Gabar Goshawk], Spotsanger [Icterine Warbler] en 'n Kwêvoël [Grey Go-away-bird]. Nicole de Jager het, het sommer 25 'lifers' gekry, onder andere Bronsvlerkdrawmwerdjie [Bronze-winged Courser], Witkeelsanger [Common Whitethroat] en Gewone Dikkop [Spotted Thick-knee]. Ander spesies wat nie dikwels gering word nie, is Rooibekkakelaar [Green Wood-hoopoe], Langstertlaksman [Magpie Shrike] en Rooibekneushoringvoël [Southern Red-billed Hornbill].

Feather River, 'n plantasie tussen Sabie en Graskop: 19–22 Maart 2021 (Leier: Chris du Plooy)

Agt A-ringers het hierdie woudervaring meegemaak. As gevolg van 'n orkaan wat die woud 3 dae voor ons aankoms getref het, kon ons nie by ons gewone plekke uitkom nie. Groot bome het die paaie versper. Om die beste van 'n slegte saak te maak, het ons so 500 m van 'n ou plek af die werkstasie gemaak – ironies genoeg is die plek bekend as 'Two Dead Ends'. Drie van die ringers – 'the sick, the lame and the lazy' was nie in staat om veel te doen nie. Die ander vyf ringers (Chris en Julian du Plooy, Johan en Nicole de Jager en Arrie Klopper) moes die 500 m met sakke vol nette, pale, penne en hamers aandurf om die nette te gaan opslaan – oor boomstompe en los takke wat die pad versper het. Die manne en Nicole

Chantluka van Nieuwenhuizen



By Feather River is daar 'n lekker groot stoep

moes boonop elke nou en dan weer teruggaan oor hierdie onbegaanbare pad om die voëls uit die nette te gaan haal. Die moeite is tog beloon met baie interessante spesies soos Bosuil [African Wood Owl], Geelkeelsanger [Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler], Witkoljanfrederik [White-starred Robin], Geelstreepboskruiper [Yellow-streaked Greenbul], Afrikaanse sperwer [African Goshawk], Bloukuifvlieëvanger [Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher], Suidelike Swie [Swee Waxbill] en 'n Olyflyster [Olive Thrush]. Ander plekke op die plantasie het ander mooi spesies opgelewer – Bruinkop- en Blouvisvanger [Brown-hooded, Half-collared Kingfisher], Gevlekte en Kleinheuningwyser [Scaly-throated, Lesser Honeyguide], Swartsaagvlerkswael [Black Saw-wing], Groenkolpensie [Green Twispot] en Goud- en Brillwewer [African (Holub's) Golden Weaver, Spectacled Weaver]. Die totaal vir die naweek was 152 voëls hanteer waarvan 44 verskillende spesies was. Nicole de Jager het weer goed gedoen met 26 'lifers' in haar sakkie. Die Bosuil was 'n 'lifer' vir Frik du Plooy. Net 6 voëls is weer gevang (3.9%). Die meeste van hierdie voëls is in September 2019 vir die eerste keer gering.

Pretoria Botaniese Tuin: 3 April 2021 (Leier: Paula Steyn)

Nege A-ringers en twee C-ringers (waarvan een nuwe ringer) het die Tuin op hierdie Saterdagoggend besoek. Weens Covid-19 kon ons eers 04:00 van die huis af vertrek. Tog



Chantluka van Nieuwenhuizen

Frik du plooy se 'lifer' by Feather River



'n Orkaan het die bos getref drie dae voor ons by Feather River gaan ring het

kon ons daarin slaag om die nette op te sit voordat dit lig geword het. Ons is beloon met 170 voëls in die nette, waarvan 32 verskillende spesies, en 15 hervangste (8.8%). 'n Gewone Janfrederik [Cape Robin-chat] is op 'n maand na 11 jaar gelede op 8 Mei 2010 deur Gerrie Jansen van Rensburg gering en is nou weer gevang deur Janine Goosen. Die voëltjie vir die dag was beslis die Skerpbekheuningvoël [Brown-backed Honeybird]. Dit is jare terug



Fransie O'Brien

Peter Hamming met Skerpbekheuningvoël, Botaniese Tuin



By die Botaniese Tuin was BLSA en BLNG goed verteenwoordig. Fransie O'Brien (links) is pas aangestel as sekretaresse by BLNG en Janine Goosen werk vir BLSA.

dat daar een van hulle gering is! Wat getalle aanbetref het die Kaapse Glasogies [Cape White-eye] los voorgeloop met 21 voëls, terwyl die Rooiwangmuisvoëls [Red-faced Mousebird] kort op hulle hakke was met 19 in getal. Ander mooi spesies was die 5 Rooibeklysters [Kurrichane Thrush], 'n Swartsuikerbekkie [Amethyst Sunbird], Bandkeelkleinjantjie [Bar-throated Apalis], Hofanger [Willow Warbler], Suidelike Waterfiskaal [Southern Boubou] en Bosveldstompstert [Long-billed Crombec].

Wilton Valley Lodge, naby Lephalele (Ellisras): 2–11 April 2021 (Leier: Elba Swart)

Verseker 'n kamp wat 'n hele paar rekords laat spat het. Die langste kamp sover by Wilton Valley – Elba en Madeleen was vir 10 dae daar. Gelukkig kon almal wat verlede jaar al betaal het en agv die Covid-19 se grendeltyd nie kon gaan nie, vanjaar geakkommodeer word. Die groep het 'n totaal van 418 voëls hanteer in dié tyd met 84 verskillende spesies!!! Dit was die eerste keer dat die groep op Twee Riviere (die plaas langs die Limpopo) gaan ring het – River End het 27 voëls van 17 spesies en die Jagkamp 44 voëls van 21 spesies opgelewer – die vangs van die dag by River End was verseker die Gryskopvisvanger [Grey-headed Kingfisher]. Die Jagkamp het nie teruggehou op sy spegte nie, met Baard- en Bennettspegte [Bearded, Bennett's Woodpecker]. Plekke waar ons

verseker in die toekoms weer sal ring.

Die Lodge is op die map gesit met Julian wat toegewyd probeer het tot hy die Reuse-Ooruil [Verreaux's Eagle-Owl] op 'n bal-chatri gevang het, en vir sy pa, Chris du Plooy gegee het om te ring. Dit was 'n besondere belewenis vir elkeen wat die aand daar was. Die Dwergrietreier [Dwarf Bittern] was ook 'n besondere dagvangs vir die Lodge-area. Dit is die eerste keer dat dit in daardie pentad gerapporteer is volgens SABAP2. Agtien is die meeste Bronsvlerkdrawwertjies [Bronze-winged Courser] wat nog op Wilton in die nag gevang is en daarby nog vyf hervangste. 'n Paar dikkoppe (Water- en Gewone) [Water Thick-knee, Spotted Thick-knee], en twee soorte naguil – Rooiwang- en Afrikaanse [Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Fiery-necked Nightjar] het die nagvoëltotaal tot by 24 gedruk. Die spesie waarvan die meeste gevang is, is die Gewone Blousysie [Blue Waxbill] (54). Die meeste van 'n spesie op een plek is 34 Gewone Melbas [Green-winged Pytilia] by die Platsuiping en die spesie wat by elke ringplek gevang is – die Gewone Tortelduif [Cape Turtle-Dove]. Roofvoëls was uit die boek uit met 17 Bleeksingvalke [Pale Chanting Goshawk] wat op bal-chatris gevang en gering is en die ander spesies niks minder as 'n Grootjagarend [African Hawk Eagle] en 'n Bruinslangarend [Brown Snake Eagle]. 'n Goeie hervang is 'n Bleeksingvalk, wat vroëer deur



Marie Ueckermann

Arrie Klopper ontvang sy sertifikaat van Frik du Plooy. Hy het onlangs gekwalifiseer as A-ringer.

Chris du Plooy gering is, en nou na 11 jaar, 8 maande en 8 dae weer deur FC Bothma gevang is. Madeleen van Loggerenberg het olv Elba Swart by Wilton gekwalifiseer om roofvoëls met 'n bal-chatri te vang – dit was regtig'n besondere ervaring vir albei van hulle. Bykans elkeen het een of meer 'lifers' gekry – voorwaar 'n suksesvolle 10 dae.

**Voortrekkermonument: 17 April 2021
(Leier: Elba Swart)**

Nege A-ringers en twee C-ringers het hierdie koue oggend getrotseer om voëls by hierdie geskiedkundige plek te gaan ring. As gevolg van die koue is min voëls gevang – net 108 in totaal, waarvan 32 verskillende spesies. Die hervangste was goed: 11 voëls (10.2%). Die voël wat die langste terug gering is, is 'n Swartkeelgeelvinke [Southern Masked Weaver] wat op 2 April 2016 deur Paula Steyn gering is – meer as 5 jaar gelede. Dit is nou weer gevang deur FC Bothma. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke het die koek gevat met 13 voëls, met Gewone Melbas [Green-winged Pytilia] en Swartoogtiptolle [Dark-capped Bulbul] kort op die hakke met 10 voëls elk. Ander mooi spesies het ook uit die nette gekom – Kleinheuningwyser [Lesser Honeyguide], Witkeeljanfrederik [White-throated Robin-chat], Grysrugkwêkwêvoël [Grey-backed Camaroptera], Rooivlerktjagra [Brown-crowned Tchagra], Indiese Spreu

[Common Myna], Streepkopkanarie [Streaky-headed Seedeater] en twee soorte tinkinkies, naamlik Neddikkie en Bosveldtinkinkie [Neddicky, Rattling Cisticola].

**Ringvergadering: 24 April 2021
(Koördineerder: Frik du Plooy)**

Vyftien lede van ons ringgroep het die vergadering bygewoon en vyftien het verskoning gemaak. Ons het om 9 uur by Johan en Danel Muller se huis in Lynnwood Glen bymekaar gekom. Daar is wyd en syd gesels oor alles wat die ringgroep raak en die vergadering is afgesluit met 'n fees van eetgoed.

**Bishopvoëlpark in Wierdapark: 1 Mei 2021
(Leier: Marina Pienaar)**

Dit was 'n heerlike winderige dag wat die koue ingewaaie het. Maar die geselskap was warm en vol vreugde. Agt A-ringers en drie C-ringers het die koue trotseer en al hulle nette opgesit nog voor die dag gebreek het. As gevolg van Covid kon ons eers teen 4 uur ons huise verlaat, so die eerste nette het eers teen 04:45 verrys. Ons het 21 verskillende spesies gevang en 91 voëltjies hanteer. Die hervangste was 9.9%, wat nogal hoog is. Wanda het 'n Swartoogtiptol [Dark-capped Bulbul] gevang wat Hein Bantjes in 2013 gering het – 7 jaar, 6 maande en 16 dae (of 2 751 dae) gelede! Die groep was gelukkig genoeg om twee Hoepoepe [African Hoopoe] in die nette te kry – iets wat nie elke dag gebeur nie. Ander spesies was Rooikopvink [Red-headed Finch], Geeloo- en Bergkanarie [Yellow-fronted and Black-throated Canary], asook Witpens- en Swartsuikerbekkie [White-bellied and Amethyst Sunbird].

**Rietvleidam, Celtis-laning: 8 Mei 2021
(Leier: Paula Steyn)**

Natalie Vos en Madeleen van Schalkwyk, albei werksaam by Rietvlei NR, het die ringers versoek om 'n inligtingsessie en demonstrasie by hierdie gesogte natuurreservaat te kom gee vir die personeel en natuurbewaringsstudente, wat hulle prakties by Rietvlei doen. Paula skryf: Dit was 'n heerlike oggend se ring en 'n voorreg om ons passie met die vriendegroep van

Natalie en Madeleen te deel. Vier A-ringers en een C-ringer het op hierdie reënigerige dag by 'n nuwe terrein in Rietvlei gaan ring, naamlik, Celtis-laning. Die vangste was nie groot nie – net 41 voëls is gevang en gering, waarvan 12 verskillende spesies. Die Bruinsylangstertjies [Tawny-flanked Prinia] was die volopste met 11 voëls (omdat dit 'n nuwe plek is, was daar geen hervangste nie). Ander mooi spesies was: Grasvoël [Cape Grassbird] (4), Swartvlieëvanger [Southern Black Flycatcher] (1), Gewone Janfrederik (Cape Robin-chat) (6) en Gewone Bontrokkie [African Stonechat] (1).

Bushtrails: 15–16 Mei 2021 (Leier: Elba Swart)

Elba skryf: Weereens baie dankie dat julle daar was, veral vir Elzaan Bierman, Pieter en Paola du Plessis wat vir die eerste keer saam was. (Elzaan en Pieter is C-ringers – ringers wat nog in opleiding is.) Liz en Bert, dankie dat julle dit soos altyd laat voel of ons huis toe kom. Ons waardeer julle gasvryheid baie. Ons maak DV in November weer so. Ons het 'n totaal van 75 voëls gering plus 9 hervangste. Soos altyd het Bushtrails nie teruggehou met spesies nie – 'n totaal van 24 is gelys! Die Swartoogtiptolle [Dark-capped Bulbul] was die meeste van gering (19) en natuurlik die meeste Afrikaanse Naguile [Fiery-necked Nightjar] (4) waarvan ek weet wat al ooit op een ringsessie gevang is. Die oudste hervangs was 'n Bandkeelkleinjantjie [Bar-throated Apalis] wat Marié al in 2015 gering het – nie alleen die oudste 'retrap' nie, maar ek dink ook die rekordhouer vir die meeste kere al ge-'retrap' (6 keer!).

Serene Valley: 22 Mei 2021 (Leier: Christo Siebert)

Christo writes: Serene Valley is situated on the 50-year floodplain of the Moreletaspruit in the Garsfontein area. The area is characterized by lush vegetation comprising trees and reedbeds. As a consequence, it attracts a large variety of birds, especially in the summer months. Apart from the parks department that keeps the paths along the river relatively open, an active group of supporters known as the Friends



Janine Gosen

By Paardeplaats het Marlien Bantjes en Paula Steyn sommer die waterketel en kan bygedam nadat hulle nette afgeslaan het

of Serene Valley, under the auspices of Carol Martin, spend many weekends keeping the area tidy and removing invading trees and vegetation. Our specific ringing area, which is situated where the smaller Constantia Spruit joins the Moreletaspruit, is relatively confined and as a consequence can support only a small group of ringers at a given time. This notwithstanding, Serene Valley serves as a very appropriate and convenient ringing venue to those ringers who are unable to get away during the club's formal ringing weekends away from Pretoria. Our ringing activities are coordinated with the Friends of Serene Valley and attract many local inhabitants who appreciate the importance of bird ringing as well as seeing birds at close range.

Op hierdie koue dag in Mei het Leon en Lucia Lötter vir Christo gaan help met die demonstrasie. Hulle het 20 voëls gevang waarvan 5 verskillende spesies was, en een hervangs. Die Geelbeklyster [Karoo Thrush] het die koek gevat met 9 in totaal, asook 'n paar Janfrederikke [Cape Robin-chat], 4 Swartoogtiptolle [Dark-capped Bulbul] en een



Arrie Klopfer

Barberspan: Chris se Geelborsstrandkiewiet

Bruinsylangstertjie [Tawny-flanked Prinia] – tipiese tuinvoëls.

Barberspan, 21–25 Mei 2021 (Leier: Arrie Klopfer)

Hierdie uitstappie na Barberspan is baie vinnig gereël te danke aan Joel Avni, en dit het alle verwagtinge oortref. Die groep het bestaan uit 7 A-ringers en een C-ringer en een atlasser. Die groep het 'n pragtige getal van 444 voëls gering oor die 5 dae, plus 4 'retraps', en 'n hele 52 spesies! 'n Totaal van 140 spesies is waargeneem in die 4 pentads om die pan, insluitende eerstes soos 'n Maricosuikerbekkie [Marico Sunbird] in Pentad 2630_2535. Die ringsessie in die begraaftplaas was 'n eerste vir hulle almal en staan loshande uit in terme van aantal (273) en spesies (34). Die spesies wat uitgestaan het was: Rooioogtiptol [African Red-eyed Bulbul] (46), Garipegglasogie [Orange River White-eye] (39) en Swartbandlangstertjie [Black-chested Prinia] (37). Selfs die Rooibekkwalea [Red-billed Quelea] (29) is uitgestof. As ons nog langer by die begraaftplaas gesit het, sou die Lelspreeus [Wattled Starling] (18) seker bo geëindig het. Dit sal lekker wees om hulle in broeikleure te kan bestudeer. Die Swartbandlangstertjie [Black-chested Prinia] was die enigste spesie wat by al die hoofringplekke gering was. Daar was 'n volle 16 spesies waarvan daar net een gevang is. Van hulle was die Prritbosbontrokkie

[Prrit Batis] seker die een wat almal voor gehoop het. Die Geelborsstrandkiewiet [Kittlitz's Plover] het die groep ook getart. Daar was nou nie so baie Vlei-uile [Marsh Owl] nie, maar dit was ook 'n goeie vang, en lekker om dit te kon ring. Die Vlei-uil was ook 'n eerste aantekening in dié pentad (2635_2530). Die tinkinkies en klopkloppies [cisticolas] (5 spesies, 28 individue) was lekker om te ring en sommige het die groep goed laat kopkrap. 'Retraps' was maar skaars – hier staan die Groot-rooivalk [Greater Kestrel] uit, wat Johan de Jager nou weer gevang het. Dit is oorspronklik deur Chris du Plooy in Maart 2017 gering.

Roofvoëlopleidingsessie: 5 Junie 2021

Sewentien A-ringers het die koue trotseer en hierdie opleidingsessie by Eastside Community Church in Garsfontein bygewoon. Die opleiding het ook praktiese demonstrasies ingesluit.

Lubbestlust naweek, naby Alldays: 14–16 Augustus 2021 (Leier: Hein Bantjes)

Hein het nege A-ringers en een C-ringer na hierdie jagplaas naby Alldays genooi. Hy het die plaas leer ken op sy vele jagekspedisies daar. Dit is ook die naweek waar sy vrou, Marlien, gekwalifiseer het as A-ringer. Dit was vreeslik koud, want 'n koue front het besluit om juis daai naweek oor die plaas te beweeg. Ten spyte van die koue het ons tog sukses gehad met die vang van voëls – in misnette, in 'flat traps' en op 'n bal-chatri. Oor die 3 dae is 294 voëls hanteer, waarvan net een 'n 'retrap' was. Die hervangste is so laag want Hein ring nie so dikwels daar nie. Die Rooibekkwaleas [Red-billed Queleas] het die koek gevat met 133 voëls wat in die nette gevang is. Die Buffelwevers [Red-billed Buffalo Weaver] was tweede met 22 voëls. Die Reuse-oruil [Verreaux's Eagle-Owl] was 'n 'lifer' vir Frik du Plooy. Sy kleinseun, Julian, het hierdie uil laat in die aand vir sy oupa op 'n bal-chatri gevang. Die aas was twee wit muise. Ander mooi spesies was Groenvlekduiwe [Emerald-spotted Wood Dove], Witkoluil [Pearl-spotted Owl], Rooiborslaksman [Crimson-breasted Shrike], Rooivlerk-, Rooirug- en Klipstreepkoppie [Cape,

Golden-breasted and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting], Rooibekneushoringvoël [Southern Red-billed Hornbill], Paradysvlieëvanger [African Paradise Flycatcher], Rooikopwewer [Red-headed Weaver], Geelvlekmossie [Yellow-throated Petronia] en Kremetartlaksman [Southern White-Crowned Shrike].

Wolfhuiskraal, Pienaarsrivier: 27–29 Augustus 2021 (Leier: Wanda du Plooy)

As gevolg van Covid-19 het net 7 A-ringers en een C-ringer hierdie naweek meegemaak. Marlien Bantjes, wat in Augustus by Lubbeslust gekwalifiseer het as A-ringer, het gemaai onder die 'lifers' – elke voël wat sy gering het, was 'n 'lifer' vir haar. As C-ringer moes sy 500 voëls onder toesig ring. Gedurende hierdie tydperk het sy die A-ringers se ringe gebruik. Nou het sy haar eie ringe gekoop (net voor die naweek uit die Kaap ontvang) en begin sy weer by nommer een. Ons het goed gedoen met 216 voëls en 29 spesies. Die hervangste was baie hoog – 12.5% (27 voëls). Ons het baljaar onder die Gewone Blousysies [Blue Waxbill] – altesaam 71 van hulle is in die misnette gevang, asook 30 Melbas [Green-winged Pytilia]. 'n Paar roofvoëls is ook aangekeer: Kleinsingvalk [Gabar Goshawk], Gevlekte Ooruil [Spotted Eagle-Owl] en 'n Witkoluil [Pearl-spotted Owllet]. Johan de Jager het die ooruil op 'n bal-chatri naby die Boskamp gevang. Ander oulike spesies was: Swartwangsysie [Black-faced Waxbill], Langstertlaksman [Magpie Shrike] en Gebande Sanger [Barred Wren-Warbler].

Skova Biodiversity Rehab Centre, Hazyview: 15 September 2021

Frik du Plooy, ons ringkoördineerder, is deur Lianda Naudé gekontak om die uile wat vrygelaat gaan word, te gaan ring. Sy rehabiliteer hoofsaaklik uile. Gert Opperman, wat in Desember 2020 oorlede is, het altyd hierdie takie verrig. Die uitnodiging het 'n gratis nag in die Kruger Park Lodge in Hazyview ingesluit. Frik, Wanda en Chris, Frik se seun, het van die geleentheid gebruik gemaak en 9 uile, onder andere Nonnetjie-, Gevlekte Oor- en Vleiuil [Western Barn Owl, Spotted Eagle-Owl and

Marsh Owl] gering. Wanda kon ook vir 'n jong Kogans [Egyptian Goose] 'n ring aansit.

Moreletakloof NR: 18 September 2021

(Leier: Hein Bantjes)

Net vyf A-ringers en een C-ringer het vir hierdie ringsessie opgedaag. Daar was 102 voëls in die nette, wat 21 spesies verteenwoordig. Daar was 18 hervangste. Dit was hoog (17.6%) omrede ons probeer om drie keer 'n jaar daar uit te kom. Die inligting wat ons so versamel is waardevol vir navorsers, wat wil weet hoe oud die voëls word, of hulle rondtrek, of die getalle konstant bly of dalk daal. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke was die meeste met 46 voëls wat gevang is. Ander interessante spesies was: Kleinheuningwyser [Lesser Honeyguide], Kardinaalspeg [Cardinal Woodpecker], Suidelike Waterfiskaal [Southern Boubou] en Bergkanarie [Black-throated Canary].

Strubendam, Lynnwood Glen: 24 September 2021 (Leier: Johan Muller)

Volgens die aandklokkeël het 9 A-ringers om 04:00 van hulle huise af gery vir hierdie ringsessie. Dit is hopeloos te laat vir nette opsit in die somer, maar die ringery bly vir ons lekker – so ons pas maar aan. Ons het nogtans 231 voëls in die nette gekry, waarvan 20 verskillende spesies. Hervangste was ook goed – 27 voëls, wat 11.7% verteenwoordig. Ons ring 'n paar keer 'n jaar by hierdie weggesteekte dam in 'n bekende woongebied en daarom is die hervangste altyd hoog. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke [Southern Masked Weaver] was bo aan die lys met 87 voëls en die Bontrugwewers [Village Weaver] tweede met 37 in getal. Ander oulike spesies was: Kuifkopvisvanger [Malachite Kingfisher], Goudstertspieg [Golden-tailed Woodpecker], Europese Swael [Barn Swallow], Kleinrietsanger [African Reed Warbler], Gewone Fret [Bronze Mannikin] en Bergkanarie [Black-throated Canary].

Ringvergadering: 30 Oktober 2021

Vyftien A-ringers het op hierdie lentedag by Madeleen en Johan van Loggerenberg se huis in Pretoria-noord vergader. Tien het verskoning

gemaak. Ons het sommer in die tuin bymekaar gekom, waar Johan krag aangelé het vir die waterketel en rekenaars. Ons het vrugbare gesprekke gehad en teetyd was weer 'n fees met elkeen wat 'n bordjie eetgoed gebring het.

Magalies Raptor Rehab Centre (Leier: Natasha Saunders)

Verskeie van ons ringers het vanjaar al by hierdie rehabilitasiesentrum 'n roofvoël of twee gering. Net roofvoëls wat vrygelaat gaan word,

kan gering word. Natasha probeer om die beseerde voëls so gou as wat hulle herstel het, weer te laat gaan op dieselfde plek as waar dit gevang of opgetel is. Voëls wie se vlerke beseer is, neem tot 'n jaar om te herstel. Die voël se vlerke moet sterk genoeg wees om weer self te kan jag. Natasha hanteer die roofvoëls met soveel gemak, mens sou sweer sy is met een in die hand gebore. Haar kennis oor en behandeling van siektes onder voëls is verstommend. Sy is ook 'n ywerige valkenier. 🦅

Feather River, Mpumalanga

Madeleen van Loggerenberg

My first visit and connection with this magical place called Feather River goes back to 1994. Located deep within the heart of Sappi's pine and eucalyptus forests, nestles this small indigenous forest that is a silent (although rich in birdsong) testimony of what this area used to look like years ago. The forest is located within the Sappi Venus Plantation near Graskop in Mpumalanga. I am not sure of the origins of the name 'Feather River', but the Mac Mac River runs through the forest and is absolutely beautiful.

The small advertisement in the magazine *Birding in Southern Africa* immediately got my



Johan van Loggerenberg

Feather River

attention. All of the mentioned species were still on my to-see list by then. I made a booking and my husband and I stayed over for one night on our way back from a Kruger vacation. Thanks to my husband's good driving skills we managed to reach the campsite with a sedan vehicle (would not try it again today). The birding was excellent even though we only had a few hours of daylight. The resident Wood Owls [Bosuil] welcomed us that night with their call, which can be quite a scary sound, as it gets so dark between those tall trees at night that you can almost feel the dark. An even more unsettling sound was the call of the Buff-spotted Flufftail [Gevlekte Vleikuiken] – very difficult to determine where it comes from and almost impossible to see this secretive bird.

In 1996 I qualified as a bird ringer, but it was not until 1999 that I was able to return to this forest to do my first bird ringing there. Rihann Geyser joined us on this first of many ring camps to Feather River. Three things stood out for me from this first camp: It rained almost nonstop; the expression on Rihann's face the first time he held a White-starred Robin [Witkoljanfrederik] in the hand; my feeling of sheer joy when I caught a Bush Blackcap [Rooibektiptol] in the net.

We visited again in November 2000 with

Rihann Geysler, the late Riaan Marais and his wife Vanessa and C-ringer Johnny Wilson. On this occasion our group had the privilege one night to see thousands if not millions of fireflies on display in the dark forest – truly a memorable sight.

We visited and ringed birds on a few more occasions after the year 2000, but it was only in 2017 that the BLNG ringing group started to ring there annually. Unfortunately, the original overnight facilities do not exist anymore, but we use these now as one of our ring sites.

In September 2020 my husband and I saw a juvenile Crowned Eagle [Kroonarend] in the forest. African Goshawks [Afrikaanse Sperwer] are often heard displaying high above the treetops.

Over the period that I have been keeping records of the birds ringed at the Sappi Venus Plantation area 1 731 birds were ringed, representing 72 species.

Cape White-eye [Kaapse Glasogiej] is the champion, with 354 individual birds caught.

The table below list the species and number of birds caught, ringed and released from 1999–2020.

SPECIE NAME	NUMBER CAUGHT, RINGED, RELEASED
African Dusky Flycatcher	15
African Firefinch	39
African Goshawk	5
African Pipit	1
African Pied Wagtail	1
African Wood Owl	2
African Pygmy Kingfisher	1
Amethyst Sunbird	7
Ashy Flycatcher	6
Bar-throated Apalis	66
Black Cuckooshrike	1
Black-backed Puffback	8
Black Saw-wing	15
Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher	16
Barret's Warbler	1
Brimstone Canary	4

Brown-throated Martin	1
Bush Blackcap	1
Cape Batis	62
Cape Robin-chat	12
Cape White-eye	354
Chorister Robin-chat	159
Cape Weaver	1
Cape Wagtail	1
Collared Sunbird	9
Common Waxbill	8
Dark-capped Bulbul	118
Drakensberg Prinia	3
Forest Canary	4
Giant Kingfisher	1
Green-backed Camaroptera	53
Greater double-collared Sunbird	7
Green Twinspot	30
Gorgeous Bush Shrike	1
Grey Cuckooshrike	3
Half-collared Kingfisher	11
Horus Swift	5
Jameson's Firefinch	1
Kurrichane Thrush	5
Knysna Turaco	3
Lazy Cisticola	7
Lesser Striped swallow	2
Lemon Dove	33
Mountain Wagtail	17
Narina Trogon	4
Olive Bush Shrike	13
Olive Thrush	39
Olive Woodpecker	2
Orange Ground Thrush	19
Rattling Cisticola	1
Red-collared widowbird	1
Red-capped Robin-chat	8
Scaly-throated Honeyguide	10
Sombre Greenbul	63
Southern Boubou	11
Southern Black Flycatcher	1
Southern Double-collared Sunbird	131
Speckled Mousebird	16

Spectacled Weaver	6
Striped pipit	1
Swee Waxbill	8
Tambourine Dove	28
Tawny-flanked Prinia	1
Terrestrial Brownbul	51
Thick-billed Weaver	2

White-fronted Bee-eater	3
White-starred Robin	137
Yellow-fronted canary	5
Yellow-breasted Apalis	3
Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird	6
Yellow-streaked Greenbul	44
Yellow-fronted Woodland Warbler	17

Sixty-six retraps were recorded. A few retraps of note are:

SPECIES	RING NUMBER	DATE RING	RINGER	RETRAP DATE	TIME LAPSE	RETRAPPED BY
Sombre Greenbul	BD81493	2000/11/09	Madeleen van Loggerenberg	2006/11/03	6 years	Madeleen van Loggerenberg
White-starred Robin	GA10406	2000/11/07	Riaan Marais	2006/11/02	6 years	Madeleen van Loggerenberg
Chorister Robin-chat	F99424	1999/11/07	Rihann Geysler	2007/11/02	7 years	Madeleen van Loggerenberg
Sombre Greenbul	F99432	1999/11/02	Rihann Geysler	2007/11/04	8 years	Madeleen van Loggerenberg
Chorister Robin-chat	BE23563	2006/11/04	Madeleen van Loggerenberg	2019/09/22	12 years 11 months	Dr Johan de Jager
Sombre Greenbul	BE23559	2006/11/03	Madeleen van Loggerenberg	2017/10/01	17 years	Gert Opperman snr.

This valuable data collected through bird ringing helps scientists and other bird enthusiasts to better understand the dynamics of some of these secretive forest birds.

Thank you to everyone who has experienced this remarkable place with me and my family over the years! 🐦

DONATIONS

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.

Anton Ackermann (April), Manie Barnard (April), Heidi Muller (April), Michael Heyns (May), Desiré Kantor (May), Con Fauconnier (June), Sue Visser (July), Anthony Cooper (July), Stephani Walters (July), Madeleine & Anton Bekker (July), Martie van Jaarsveld (July), Gideon & Marlene Coetzee (July), Jenny Smulders (August), Nicole Crisp (October)

Special thanks for your donations toward the Secretarybird Conservation Project:

Elouise Kalmer, Laetitia Steynberg, Sean Naude, Laura Jordaan, Pieter Heslinga

Kaapsehoop birding, 8–12 March 2021

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

I had long-past heard of the little village of Kaapsehoop (or Kaapschehoop) with its 'romantic history'. Kaapsehoop originally gained fame as a gold-mining town once known as the Duiwels Kantoor – the Devil's Office – towards the end of the 19th century, when gold was discovered in 1882 in a small creek running through the town. This led to a portion of the original township layout being cancelled and opened up for gold diggings. However, the earlier, better paying discoveries of gold at both Pilgrim's Rest in 1873 and Barberton in 1881, followed by the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, led to the Kaapsehoop 'gold rush' being aborted.

Romantic history? In nearby Barberton there were at one stage 4 000 claims laid out and bars and saloons were so many that it is claimed there was one for every 15 inhabitants! Those were rough men, a rough environment and rough times.

We needed a break away from home – we were tired of the Covid-19 lockdown – I couldn't hear the word 'Covid' anymore! Just get away and re-gain our sanity. Anywhere! And Kaapsehoop sprang up in my mind. After consulting some birding books like Southern African Birdfinder, I found that good birding could be had there also.

We left for what we hoped would be a leisurely trip of three hours. I had



Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

Kaapsehoop equipment of yesteryear

forgotten the skills of Minister of Roads Mr Pothole Slaggate and his secretary-general Mr Roadworks Detour. From Witbank/ Emalahleni to Middelburg to past Belfast we drove on detours and past roadworks. At last, we reached the Sappi Ngodwana mill, and some 12 km on, after climbing a substantial 650 m in altitude, we reached Kaapsehoop village at 1 626 m above sea level (at least, that's what my GPS claimed). We had booked accommodation for four nights at Panda's Guest House, which used to be the Kaapschehoop Hotel in the 'rough days gone by'. Laetitia and Des Drake are now the very civilized and gracious hosts and the breakfasts were out-of-this-world. We had a lovely cottage with full self-catering facilities and very private.

We stopped in front of Panda's having arrived a bit too early, before check-in time. Kathrin pulled out a flask of coffee and some rolls for lunch and we immediately spotted a male Greater Double-collared Sunbird flitting about some flowering creepers. Out came the camera and our first bird was recorded.



Long-crested Eagle

According to the 2011 census, Kaapsehoop had a total of 186 inhabitants in 68 households. We explored the village after unpacking and immediately spotted some of the wild horses that have adapted to small-town life. The fences around properties are not designed to keep out the Gauteng criminals, their sole function being to keep the horses from making a meal of carefully tended flowerbeds and herb-gardens. There are numerous theories about the origin of the horses: one is that they were released by British military after the second Anglo-Boer War. Many of the houses in the village are still constructed in the original style: corrugated iron outside and clad with wood panelling inside. The gardens are small but well kept. Peace reigns. Life has a relaxed quality. People are extremely friendly. Everyone is greeted when walking on the few roads through the village.

On our walk around the village we saw Speckled Pigeon [Kransduif], and Red-winged Starlings [Rooivlerkspreeu]; Cardinal Woodpecker [Kardinaalspeg] greeted us as did African Olive Pigeon [Geelbekbosduif], and Amethyst Sunbird [Swartsuikerbekkie]. We took a walk to the end of the village and on part of one of the hiking trails to the hiker's hut, past some derelict buildings of yesteryear, and were pleased to spot Black Saw-wing, Little Swift, Cape White-eye, Cape Robin-chat, Speckled Pigeon, Cardinal Woodpecker, Red-winged Starling and Black-headed Oriole [Swartsaagvlerkswael, Kleinwindswael, Kaapse Glasogie, Gewone



Heithard Graf von Dürckheim

Dusky Indigobird

Janfrederik, Kransduif, Kardinaalspeg, Rooivlerkspreeu, Swartkopwielewaa]. I took some time to call out a Sombre Greenbul [Gewone Willie], calling "Willie" consistently, but refusing to pose for a picture. Natal Spurfowl [Natalse Fisant] were issuing their explosive calls and Southern Boubou [Suidelike Waterfiskaal] were singing their melodious duet. After a lovely walk we returned to our nice cottage for a rest and then went for a meal at a local eatery.

The next day we had booked Johan Gouws, a local bird guide. The Blue Swallow Reserve is now temporarily closed to the public. Some inconsiderate people had cut the lock on the gate and had thundered through the reserve with their 4x4's, causing much damage to the ecology. Now, nobody except for some rangers is allowed. What a pity. And the Blue Swallows [Blouswael] are no more. After Dr Steve Evans had researched the Blue Swallows for his doctoral thesis, they departed some time after, possibly due to habitat loss. They require high-altitude mist-belt grasslands with burrows, in this case not aardvark burrows, but disused mine-shafts, in the ceiling of which they made their cup-shaped nests from mud, grass and lined with grasses and feathers. Now many of the mist-belt grasslands have had to make way for tree plantations, many thousands



Jackal Buzzard



Heithard Graf von Dürckheim

Drakensberg Prinia

of hectares thereof: end of Blue Swallows – the greatest threat to their survival is destruction and fragmentation of sour grassland habitat by commercial forestry (Roberts VII).

Johan has good contacts among local farmers, on whose land he is allowed to take clients for birding excursions. We were keen to connect with Broad-tailed Warbler (now mysteriously called Fan-tailed Grassbird [Breëstertsanger] – what a pity that some powers-that-be are hell-bent on confusing the birding fraternity with an incomprehensible stream of name changes), and Striped Flufftail [Gestreepte Vleikuiken]. The latter, we were told, had not been spotted in the area for some considerable time.

At 6 the next morning we picked up Johan, who was perched on a rock at the entrance to the village. We drove about 12 km down the escarpment towards Nelspruit/Mbombela, and turned onto a farm road 20 minutes later: citrus plantations on one side, and rank grassland on the other. We walked into the grassveld and our trousers were soon soggy from the dew. We immediately spotted Fan-tailed Widowbird [Kortstertflap], a Black-winged Kite on a telephone wire; Croaking Cisticola [Groottinktinkie] were entertaining us with their frog-like calls; Levaillant's Cisticola [Vleitinktinkie] was abundant

and actively calling; Green-backed Camaroptera [Groenrugkwêkwêvoël], and Village Weaver, African (Holub's) Golden Weaver, Southern Black Flycatcher and White-necked Raven [Bontrugwewer, Goudwewer, Swartvlieëvanger, Withalskraai] were also spotted. We also heard and saw Purple-crested Turaco, Black-collared and Crested Barbets, and Yellow-throated Longclaw [Bloukuifloerie, Rooikophoutkapper, Kuifkophoutkapper, Geelkeelkalkoentjie]. Suddenly I heard the unmistakable call of an African Cuckoo Hawk [Koekoekvalk], but we couldn't get to see it. Johan spotted the target-bird, Broad-tailed Warbler, but we were looking west-to-east with the sun in our eyes. I suggested to Johan the guiding-rule: move in a wide circle around and approach with the sun behind us; that we did and we were now able to get three different sightings of the bird, albeit far off. Voilà! Lifer! I wanted to get closer to get some pictures, but the bird was always perched on long grass-stems, but down in amongst the vegetation and my camera refused to focus quickly enough before it flew off again. Needless to say, my pictures look like an abstract painting of a rank grassveld landscape with some dark-brown blotch inside bearing a very broad tail...

The list of sightings went on: Brown-hooded Kingfisher [Bruinkopvisvanger] was



Heithard Graf von Dürckheim

Sombre Greenbul

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim



Buff-streaked Chat

followed by the honking call of Egyptian Goose, White-rumped Swifts and Barn Swallows [Kolgans, Witkruiswindswael, Europese Swael] were overhead, a Pin-tailed Whydah [Koning-rooibekkie] was dancing around in the air, waving its tail and mobbing other small seed-eaters. A very good sighting was also a Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk [Rooiborssperwer] quartering around over higher ground. We spotted 33 bird species within our time in the grassveld.

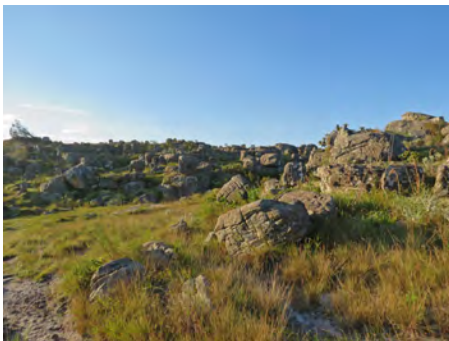
Eventually we got in the car and returned to Kaapsehoop. On the way back, we had two magnificent sightings of raptors perched

on telephone posts: a Long-crested Eagle [Langkuifarend] and, a kilometre or so on, a Jackal Buzzard [Rooiborsjakkalsvoël].

Back in town, we sat down to a lovely but belated breakfast prepared for us by Laetitia. Thereafter we took another walk on the first part of the hiking trail, leading up to the hikers' hut. Bar-throated Apalis [Bandkeelkleinjantjie] was followed by Familiar Chat, African Olive Pigeon, and Red-capped Robin-chat [Gewone Spekvreter, Geelbekbosduif, Nataljanfrederik] and to my delight I was able to get some good pictures of the Drakensberg Prinia [Drakensberglangstertjie], which we had first spotted on Sani Pass, but could not get any meaningful pictures of at the time.

On the other side of the village, bordering on the boulder-strewn landscape, a Dusky Indigobird [Gewone Blouvinkie] had established its territory in and around a cabbage tree (*Cussonia spicata*), which had lost much of its leaves. I had never sensed that this brood parasite was so territorially dominant – as soon as I played just a short burst of its call from the Roberts2 app, it came charging up with speed and aggression, even though it was 50 or more metres away, and scouted the surroundings. I got some good pictures in the process.

The following day we left at 6 am and tackled the Escarpment Walk which starts in the middle of the village, next to the stream which bisects it. The Kaapsehoop Escarpment



Neithard Graf von Dürckheim



Rock-strewn scenery on Escarpment Walk

Walk offers hikers a maze through which to negotiate their way, with fascinating and unique rock formations en-route. These rocks and boulders consist mainly of sandstone/ quartzite and are strewn over a vast area covering most of the hillside. Upon reaching the edge of the escarpment, the views are breathtaking – simply spectacular – as the ground falls away some 1 000 metres to the magnificent Barberton Valley below, although there was a lot of mist/fog which made taking pictures difficult.

The hiking trail takes one hour to reach the escarpment and, on a circular route, back to the village another hour. As we progressed, the sun rose over the Swazi mountains, an unforgettable experience. There was some good birding to be had en-route: Cape Rock Thrush, Wailing- and Wing-snapping *Cisticola* [Kaapse Kliplyster, Huiltinkinkie, Kleinste Klopkloppie] were calling although late in the season, numerous sightings of Buff-streaked Chat [Bergklipwagter] which were very vocal and singing sweetly perched on top of the large boulders; Cape Wagtail [Gewone Kwikkie] were also on top and in between some boulders, as were Cinnamon-breasted Bunting [Klipstreeppoppie]. The different coloured lichens on the rocks and boulders were also very interesting, consisting of a symbiotic association of algae or cyanobacteria and fungi.

On returning to the village, we were greeted by several other birds, including Neddicky, Olive Thrush, Red-faced Mousebird and Burchell's Coucal [Neddikkie, Olyflyster, Rooiwangmuisvoël, Gewone Vleiloerie] to name but a few. Later that day we drove on the gravel road through logging activity in the direction of Barberton. But it was too hot for good birding and the logging activities scared away the birds.

On our last day, we at first walked up to the hiking hut again very early, hoping to get some pictures of the south-eastern race of the Red-necked Spurfowl [Rooikeelfisant], but they were far off in a deep incline with rank vegetation, and we had to content

ourselves with the calls. We then walked to the Battery Creek Waterfall, on the other side of the village, which is very nice to see, but the birding en-route was not notable. We passed the cemetery and some plantations which had been completely harvested, and spotted some Natal Spurfowl, Dark-capped Bulbul [Swartoogtiptol] and other common bird species. We also drove up and past the entrance to the Blue Swallow Reserve, a high-altitude grassveld, but it was too late in the day and too hot for good bird sightings.

We had four excellent and relaxing days of peace and quiet in tranquil surroundings, the scenery is great, we had some very interesting birding and the hikes were most pleasant in very scenic surroundings.

There are a good number of bed & breakfast establishments and even more offering self-catering. I can certainly recommend Panda's for nice accommodation and excellent and friendly hosts; Laetitia has a good sense for detail and the cottage has everything you could wish for, including mozzie repellent. There are several eateries, where one can have a pleasant dinner, even one that serves trout, which was indeed tasty. And there is no crime; it is safe. All these attributes make for a relaxing birding excursion. And of course there are also the wild horses, which are pretty confiding – they are everywhere to be seen in the village, as are their droppings.

Contacts

Panda's fully equipped self-catering guest cottages with optional breakfast: Laetitia 082 688 9475

Bird guide, Johan Gouws: 083 294 3370

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Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, 4–15 October 2021: Savanna birding and jackals

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

Die Kalahari is:
'n man se Hemel
'n vrou se Verdriet
'n motorkar se Hel

The Kalahari is:
a man's Heaven
a woman's Chagrin
a motor car's Hell

This saying is attributed to Elias Le Riche, one of the previous park wardens.

The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park lies in the large sand-filled basin known as the Kalahari. The history of the park and its early settlements is summarised on the SANParks website (<https://www.sanparks.org/parks/kgalagadi/tourism/history.php>). The Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa was established on 31 July 1931, with the main aim of protecting the migrating game from poaching and hunting, especially the gemsbok (*Oryx gazella*). An amalgamation of this park with Botswana's Gemsbok National Park, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park was officially opened on 12 May 2000. The park, simply put, is colossal. At nearly 38 000 square kilometres it is larger

than many countries and is one of the largest national parks in the world. Approximately three-quarters of the park lies in Botswana and one-quarter in South Africa. *Kgalagadi* means 'place of thirst'.

We left on 2 October 2021 at the crack of dawn, with my SUV towing our robust off-road camping trailer, fully laden with supplies and the 60-litre water tank filled to capacity, as the water in the Kgalagadi is brackish, and tastes salty to the point of not being palatable. The first spring rains had set in, and it was pouring down for the first 100-odd kilometres. We managed the 813 km to Upington, being our first stop, where we slept over. Many birds were spotted en route: Pied Starlings in substantial numbers, Pied Crow, Red-billed Quelea, Red-crested Korhaan, Black-winged Kite [Witborskraai, Rooibekkwalea, Boskorhaan, Blouvalk] on the telephone posts, Swainson's Spurfowl [Bosveldfisant] dashing across the road just missing our SUV, Red-collared Widowbird and Long-tailed Widowbird [Rooikeelflap] were flapping about, dragging their tailcoat behind them. And not to forget the Ant-eating Chats [Swartpiek] with the lighter-coloured wings, Little- and Palm Swifts [Klein-, Palmwindswael] overhead.

The next day we took a leisurely trip to Kgalagadi Lodge, some 260 km from Upington, and on the way we made an excursion to some of the salt pans in the area west of Askham. Birds were very active and we were particularly interested in the White-backed Vultures [Witrugasvoël] (tree-nesters) which occupied every possible camelthorn tree (*Acacia/*



Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

Burchell's Sandgrouse

Vachellia erioloba) with their sprawling nests, many already with chicks peering over the nest-edge. Sociable Weavers [Versamelvoël] were spotted around their nest, a sight which never ceases to amaze me – how can such tiny birds build such an elaborate structure? White-browed Sparrow-Weavers [Koringvoël] became Kathrin's favourite bird of the trip with their explosive melodious call. We spotted Kalahari Scrub Robin [Kalahariwipstert] singing sweetly, Fork-tailed Drongo [Mikstertbyvanger], our first Namaqua Doves [Namakwaduijie], and a pleasing sighting were Red-billed Buffalo Weavers [Buffelwever]. Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill [Geelbekneushoringvoël] were in attendance as were Crimson-breasted Shrikes [Rooiborslaksman] (our *Laniarius*), which were to be our steady companions for the next two weeks in the Kgalagadi. Another good sighting was Swallow-tailed Bee-eater [Swaelstertbyvreter], which is such a pretty, colourful bird. We slept over at Kgalagadi Lodge which is just 5 kilometres outside Twee Rivieren Camp, with the intention to make an early entry into the park and make for Nossob Camp in good time to be able to pitch camp and settle down.

Hello Mr Murphy! The first 60-odd kilometres of road, of the total distance of 160 km from Twee Rivieren to Nossob, were in reasonable condition, albeit very bumpy with some corrugation which slowed down our travelling speed. Chestnut-vented Tit-Babblers [Bosveldtjerikik] were about (now called a warbler in Roberts 2), Scaly-feathered Finch (now called a weaver) [Baardmannetjie], Secretarybirds [Sekretarisvoël] were striding through the grassy landscape with dignity and pride, and then we spotted our first raptors – Pale Chanting Goshawk [Bleeksingvalk] – of which we spotted specimens every other day, as well as Kori Bustard [Gompou] and Ostrich [Volstruis], which seemed to me larger than the specimens I am used to elsewhere. Before reaching the Dikbaardskolk picnic site the road deteriorated drastically: the corrugation was deep and wide, my SUV as well as my camping trailer were shaken up terribly and we were subjected to some teeth-rattling driving. At



Lanner Falcon with sandgrouse kill



Black-backed jackal with sandgrouse kill

many a time I had to reduce speed to 10 km/h as not to damage both the SUV and the trailer. This rough road condition continued up to Nossob, where we arrived after 5 and a half hours of back-aching driving, making one comfort stop only at Dikbaardskolk. When Kathrin disembarked to open the gate to Nossob Camp, she came back with bad news: the brake-rod of my trailer had broken loose the retaining bolt, and was now dragging *behind* the trailer – for how long we will never know. As a result, the brakes had been permanently engaged and the drums were so heated that the grease of the wheel bearings had melted and run off, leaving the bearings in a perilous state and at risk to run dry and strip, which would have locked

the wheels and voided any further travel. Eish. We reported the matter to the reception, who called in the technical team, who were able to fix the brake-rod back into position with another bolt the next day. That did not solve the problem of the wheel bearings though. Very kind Parks staff indeed. We pitched camp and, after a quick snack, relaxed from the day's travel.

That night in our comfortable spacious Howling Moon Trailer Tent, we heard the reassuring calls of three owl species: Western Barn, Southern White-faced and Spotted Eagle-Owl [Nonnetjie-uil, Witwanguil, Gevlekte Ooruil]. We had booked a 'premium campsite', i.e., we had a kitchen-area (without utensils), a shower, washing basin area and toilet all to ourselves, the nearest of the ten premium campsites was some 20 metres away. Sheer bliss.

The next day saw us out early and on the road to one of the waterholes. It was at these waterholes that we had most of our sightings – birds as well as mammals. We drove north and on the way we spotted some Black-winged (shouldered) Kites (we saw many of them during our stay), Pearl-spotted Owlet [Witkoluil] was calling, and every 50 metres there were

larks – we spotted Sabota Larks [Sabotalewerik] but mainly Fawn-coloured Larks [Vaalbruin-lewerik], which we saw very often. We stopped at Cubitje Quap waterhole. Shortly afterwards we heard them calling: *kikkivee – kikkevee*, before swarms of Namaqua Sandgrouse



Martial Eagle



Western Barn Owl

Heithard Graf von Durchheim

[Kelkiewyn] came flying in. They circled the waterhole, on occasion several times. They dashed into the water, hastily gulped mouthfuls (beakfuls) of water, thoroughly drenched their belly feathers, and off they dashed again. Flocks of 3 to 4 birds, and up to 40 to 50 birds, came flying in. The Namaqua Sandgrouse were followed by Burchell's Sandgrouse [Gevlekte Sandpatrys] with their *chok-chok-chok-lit*-calls, displaying the same behaviour. The sandgrouse soak their belly feathers with water (mainly the male birds, according to Hockey et al., 2015) and carry the water back to their chicks, who stick their beaks into the belly feathers and in this way get to drink water. We sat and watched in amazement at the steady flow of arriving and departing flocks of both species of sandgrouse.

The trees around the waterhole were full of small passerines, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow [Gryskopmossie], but mainly Cape Sparrow [Gewone Mossie], single sightings of Yellow Canary [Geelkanarie], some Scaly-feathered Finches and Sociable Weavers. These small birds showed interesting behaviour: single birds would fly down to the water; others would join from the trees until a steady flow of birds arrived at the water. They would sit at the water's edge, drink, and, all of a sudden, a large group would break away and dash

back into the tree. The reason for this nervous behaviour became very clear some time later. From 'nowhere', a Lanner Falcon [Edeľvalk] came swooping down – we heard a dull thud, and the Lanner Falcon sat down in the grass some 30 metres from the water hole to consume the sandgrouse it had caught in its talons. A 'live kill' right in front of us!!! On the days that followed we saw Lanner Falcons, Red-necked Falcons, Gabar Goshawks and Shikra [Rooinekvalk, Witkruissperwer, Gebande Sperwer] engaging in similar feeding behaviour. The Red-necked Falcons and the sub-adult Gabar Goshawk seemed more interested in the smaller passerines, as was the Shikra. We stayed the whole morning watching this 'coming and going'. It was hugely interesting and amazing to watch. And the black-backed jackals were there also – a young animal who was making attempts to catch sandgrouse by charging at them, without success. He made a fool of himself. At lunch-time we returned to camp. There we spotted Great Sparrow [Grootmossie] (which was very confiding, hopping on the 'kitchen' floor in front of us), Marico Flycatcher [Maricovlieëvanger] was hunting from its perch and a Pirit Batis [Piritbosbontrokkie] was calling incessantly from a neighbouring campsite, giving me an opportunity to get some pictures.

That afternoon we travelled north again, stopping briefly at Cubitje Quap, and driving on to Kwang waterhole. Here we were greeted by a superb lion sighting of a female, larger than I have ever seen in Pilanesberg National Park where I am regularly on duty. The lioness was having a drink at the waterhole and then calmly walked between the cars and over the road into the bush. A Kalahari Scrub Robin [Kalahariwipstert] was hopping around, and black-backed Jackals were there too. On the way back to camp we had a good sighting of a Kori Bustard, walking majestically next to the road, and closer to camp we saw a Spotted Eagle-Owl perched in a tree with two juveniles sitting close by posing for photos. What a productive day! That evening, whilst sitting by the fire I had lit in the braai, we listened to the barking geckos advertising their territory.

Kalahari evenings are so special!

The next day we returned to Cubitje Quap waterhole. There were three black-backed jackals around. As the sandgrouse circled above, the one jackal lay down and watched. At the crucial moment when the sandgrouse were in the water soaking up the supplies in their belly-feathers for their chicks, the jackal charged forward and jumped right into the water. The sandgrouse were very slow to take off – being in the water and heavy with the load in their belly feathers. The jackal just grabbed one Burchell's Sandgrouse and had a meal while still half-way in the water. This spectacle was repeated four times while we were watching. The other sandgrouse circled above, but left again without being able to drink or carry water to their chicks. The Kalahari is a rough environment for sandgrouse.

That afternoon we drove south and were treated to a great sighting of an adult Martial Eagle [Breëkoparend], perched in the open on a tree. We marvelled at the size of the bird, its bill and also the powerful talons. A Secretarybird [Sekretarisvoël] strode very self-consciously around a waterhole, and Red-billed Queleas were in the trees next to the waterhole. Driving off from Marie se Gat waterhole, we



Swallow-tailed Bee-eater

Heithard Graf von Dürckheim



Bateleur



Heinhard Graf von Dürckheim

Spotted Eagle Owl

got excellent pictures of a Western Barn Owl, perched inside a broken tree-trunk.

The following day we had planned to drive north as far as we could, possibly up to Unions End. The sunrise was magnificent to watch. Very soon, we spotted a Greater Kestrel [Grootroovalk] perched on a tree. Crowned Lapwing [Kroonkiewiet] were spotted on the way; along with Pale Chanting Goshawks [Bleeksingvalk], adults as well as juveniles/sub-adults which were at times challenging to ID; large herds of blue wildebeest were grazing; a Black-winged Kite was consuming a rodent, perched on a tree; Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters were hunting from their perch. We stopped for breakfast at Lijersdraai picnic site, where other visitors had also stopped. They put out a shallow plate of water on one of the concrete tables. The result was immediate: scores of birds came down to have a drink: Sociable Weavers in vast numbers, Scaly-feathered Finch, Violet-eared Waxbill [Koningblousysie] and Cape Glossy Starlings [Kleinglansspreeu]. We were not surprised. The grassveld from between Kwang and Bedinkt waterholes northwards had been burnt and no mammals and very few birds were spotted. We drove on to Polentswa and Lijersdraai waterholes and spotted so little that we decided to call it a day and turn back. En route, we were

treated to an excellent sighting of a juvenile/sub-adult Bateleur [Berghaan], and I must admit that I at first battled with the ID (Tawny Eagle [Roofarend], perhaps?) until I forced myself to look at the bird holistically – very short tail, bare bluish bill and face, etc. A Lappet-faced Vulture [Swartaasvoël] was found further on and at Cubitje Quap we were rewarded with four Bateleurs (males and females) which were right in the water, drinking and just standing in the water. At night, Southern White-faced Owls serenaded us.

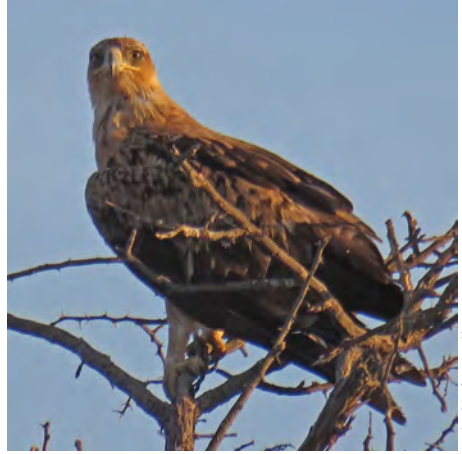
The next day, after returning from our morning drive, we did some birding in the Nossob Camp area. We visited the hide in front of a water hole. The 'regular' birds showed, and Cape Crow [Swartkraai] were actively striding around the waterhole, Burchell's Starlings [Grootglansspreeu] were calling and showed well, all the small passerines, with Cape Sparrow and Sociable Weavers as the most abundant, were doing their daily routine – fly down to the water in singles and small droves, congregate by the water's edge, drink, lose their nerve and swarm back into the trees in a cloud of panicking birds. Violet-eared Waxbill were also present and very pretty at that. We walked the entire camp, past the pool and to the 'general camping area', to find some puzzled park officials looking at a

Cape cobra up a camelthorn tree, right next to a campsite. Hmm, I would not cherish neighbours like that. According to Johan Marais, an authoritative author of reptile books, "...it climbs into trees on search of prey" (in the Kgalagadi it raids Sociable Weaver nests). The venom is potently neurotoxic. In South Africa this cobra is responsible for more human deaths than any other snake (Marais, 2011 p. 24)

Back at our campsite for breakfast, the very confiding Kalahari Scrub Robin waiting for us, as were Crimson-breasted Shrike, a striped mouse, Swallow-tailed Bee-Eater, Marico Flycatcher, Great Sparrow (all of which visited us every day), and later at the hide/waterhole we saw yet another Spotted Eagle-Owl. That evening we had booked a sunset game-drive. We spotted a Black-chested Snake Eagle [Swarborslangarend], MANY black-backed jackals, and a tribe of bat-eared foxes, but not much else, other than admiring the stars and observing Scorpio on its 'last leg' before making way for Orion, the hunter, in October/November. The low species diversity of mammals is quite striking in the Kgalagadi.

I got some pictures of a very vocal Brubru [Bontroklaksmen] in camp before we drove out north, en route taking pictures of three delightful sub-adult Spotted Eagle-Owls perched next to each other in the open. We spotted a pair of honey badgers and again Fawn-coloured Lark, Namaqua Dove and, later in the afternoon when going south to Marie se Gat, a magnificent kudu bull made a fantastic picture standing silhouetted on top of a dune in the late afternoon light. A pride of four lionesses was also walking up the very same dune – the kudu wisely vacated the premises and a lioness took his place, its silhouette clearly seen from down below.

We got nice pictures of Pirit Batis in the camp at Nossob calling, Western Barn Owl at the hide/waterhole with flood lights on until 10 pm, and a very vocal Common Scimitarbill [Swarbakkelaar] (what is so 'common' about it?). One more topic about Nossob Camp needs mentioning: The jackals do have a reputation at Nossob. One night we were woken by a commotion; it sounded like a heavy object being



Heithard Graf von Dürckheim

Tawny Eagle

dragged on the ground. Upon further investigation, we saw that black-backed jackals had dragged a crate with foodstuff from the kitchen area of our neighbouring campsite. When the neighbours came charging out in their pyjamas, the jackals left (in a hurry) but taking with them a packet of rusks. Beware of the jackals when visiting Nossob, they are cunning and sly as a fox (although, taxonomically, black-backed jackals are classified as 'true dogs').

As always, I had taken my 'scorpion light' along. The carapace of a scorpion lights up white to light green in the rays of an ultra-violet light. With a normal torch light, you can hardly observe them at night. I had not spotted one single scorpion during our stay in the Kalahari, despite looking for them every evening. Kathrin was really very pleased with my lack of finding any!

And then the temperature gradient: at night a freezing 7°C and daytime 37°C, a full 30° difference. At Mata Mata the temperature rose to a sweltering 40°.

After 8 days, we broke camp and departed for Mata Mata Camp, after a most friendly gentleman 'Pieter' of the technical parks staff had removed my trailer's perilously damaged wheel, packed the wheel bearing with grease and replaced the wheel. They used my extensive



Martial Eagle sub-adult

Neilhand Graf von Dürckheim



Pygmy Falcon

toolbox as they had no suitable tools. The friendliness of the SANParks staff at Nossob can be commended. Without their help, we would have been marooned. A big “Thank-you” to them.

The road from Nossob to Mata Mata leads over the dunes, weaving up and down through the dune landscape. We did not spot many animals, but it was an interesting drive. Red sand dunes and calcrete ridges, very white soil – the dust which was everywhere in our SUV and

trailer. The road was better, after a grader and a tractor dragging some gigantic tyres behind it had smoothed the road surface somewhat. We spotted some huge Sociable Weaver nests; it was great to admire the elaborate structures of the Sociable Weaver nests with their multi-chambered air-conditioned apartment blocks. We were also lucky to spot an adult Tawny Eagle, a magnificent raptor. We took up residence in a chalet. Mata Mata is a small camp, it has five oldish chalets and ten river-front chalets, which are really very nice and luxurious, and a small but crowded campsite. The Namibia border post is approximately 200 metres from the camp’s reception.

You can only drive south from Mata Mata as it is situated right on the South Africa–Namibia border. The next day we drove out and soon spotted a coalition (pride) of four cheetah, obviously on a hunt. This sighting was followed by Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, a further Tawny Eagle, the ubiquitous Pale Chanting Goshawk, a ‘temporary association’ of giraffe on top of a dune, and then a good sighting of a juvenile raptor, which looked to me like a young Martial Eagle, but another visitor claimed with great authority that this was a young Crowned Eagle [Kroonarend]. I thought that would be very much out of range. A few days later, my ID was confirmed by an authoritative source. A very dark Dusky Sunbird [Namakwasuikerbekkie] was found at the Craig Lockhart waterhole and, as on every day, blue wildebeest, gemsbok (oryx) and springbok.

Inside the camp, I was lucky to get pictures of a pair of Black-faced Waxbill [Swartwangsysie] feeding actively on the flowers of the tree in front of our chalet. The Mata Mata campsite is small and crowded – tents are hardly more than 1 to 2 metres apart. Somewhat in the middle there is a large camelthorn tree. To my surprise a Southern White-faced Owl had made its nest there. Three fully feathered chicks peered inquisitively over the nest’s edge. The one adult was perched some distance away and seemed un-interested in all the commotion going on below, including birders like myself trying to get some pictures of them.

Craig Lockhart, Dalkeith waterholes and 14th and 13th boreholes were quite productive. One day we spotted a Lilac-breasted Roller [Gewone Troupant] aggressively mobbing a Pale Chanting Goshawk, who after some evasive action departed. On the last kilometre or so before returning to camp, we spotted a rather dull specimen of a Namaqua Dove, possibly race *anonyma* (Hockey et al., 2015). They were at the same spot every day.

We were also searching for Pygmy Falcon [Dwergvalk]. None to be seen at Nossob. The local guide told me that we might spot them at Mata Mata. The guide at Mata Mata was rather evasive. We were lucky to spot a single male bird south of Mata Mata in the entire time we were in the Kgalagadi. I asked several people “why the scarcity?”, but no satisfactory answers were forthcoming.

The last dwelling we stayed in was a riverfront chalet at Mata Mata, very luxurious and with a superb view of the dry river-bed and a waterhole constructed especially in front of the ten riverfront chalets. Here a pair of very confiding Rock Martins [Kransswael] greeted us, perched on an outside electrical plug box. On our last day, we visited the Aucherlonie museum, a restored homestead of one of the borehole-guards, with kraals, a well which was dug by hand with the aid of the odd stick of

dynamite, and an outside cooking kraal. Judging from the restored buildings, it must have been a hard life, of deprivation. It is also said that one of the early Le Riche wardens stayed here until a more suitable dwelling was constructed for him.

We had a most interesting time in the Kgalagadi. We spotted raptors every single day of our stay... and black-backed jackals – every single day. They seem to be masters of survival. What concerned us was that we spotted an abundance of ground squirrels, but not a single suricate (meerkat), although this is their preferred habitat. Our bird list for the trip came to 88 species, 73 thereof in the Kgalagadi Trans-Frontier Park itself, with 4 species of owls: Southern White-faced Owl, Western Barn Owl, Spotted Eagle-Owl and Pearl-spotted Owlet.

If you want to spot an abundance of raptors, including watching their hunting behaviour, and be rather certain to spot lions, the Kgalagadi is the place to find them... and jackals.

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Neilhard Graf von Dürckheim

Waterhole scene

Ducks in the pool

Klaus Rust

I am quite used to the honking of Egyptian Geese [Kolgans], because they often fly over our house to an old quarry filled with water, next to the estate where we live, and where currently a retirement village is being developed around the quarry. On an April Sunday, late afternoon, I was sitting with my customary gin and tonic on the stoep when again I heard the familiar honking of Egyptian Geese coming closer, but looking up into the sky I could see nothing. Still the honking carried on and came slowly closer, and then I saw them. Daddy and mummy goose rounded the corner of the house, followed by 10 little goslings. They walked calmly past me across the lawn and headed straight to our pool. There the whole family jumped happily into the water for a refreshing bath. When mum and dad climbed out of the pool the goslings tried to do the same. Unfortunately the water level was too far below the rim of the pool, and all the honking

encouragement by the parents did not help. The little ones just could not manage to get out. So I put a wooden plank into the shallow section of the pool to entice the youngsters to use it like a ladder. Two of them climbed out, but the others did not catch on. Then the two jumped in again and later forgot how they had got out before. So I had to get my garden hose and fill up the pool. After half an hour the pool was almost filled to the rim and with a lot of honking the parents enticed the whole family out of the pool. And there they stayed, next to the pool, and entertained us for the rest of the night with their constant coarse *hur-hur-hur* honking. The neighbour's dogs, who were apparently not used to these strange sounds, added their voices to the chorus.

The next morning I observed the parents leaving for an early morning flight, which I was sure was a reconnaissance to find the best way to the lead the little ones to the quarry.



In the pool

Klaus Rust



Klaus Rüst

Stuck behind the retirement village wall

When they came back the whole family left the pool, following the same route they had taken through the side gate. And then they marched towards the quarry in the retirement village. Unfortunately a high wall has been built between our estate and the village, and the goose family walked up and down along the wall, wandering how to overcome that obstacle. As did a couple of the residents of our estate, who had witnessed the desperate long walk to freedom of the goose family. Eventually a hole was made underneath a security fence separating us from the retirement village, and the whole goose family was gently herded through this escape tunnel. But there was another hurdle for the geese to overcome, because another fence, on the building site, barred their way to the promised water. Fortunately some helpful construction workers came to the rescue, and later that day the happy goose family had reached their new home, the quarry, where they can now entertain the retirees in the village.

I heard from friends in our estate that the goslings had hatched that Sunday morning on the roof of the church about one kilometre away from our house and had jumped from the



Klaus Rüst

In the quarry

roof to take their first walk into an unknown world. Which streets the geese family had taken to reach our pool is unknown to me, but I am delighted that the goslings had their first taste of water and their first swim in our pool. It shows how resilient and tough these little creatures are, having had to walk so far and overcoming all the obstacles in their way in the first few hours of their life. And I did not mind cleaning the mess on the pool paving the next morning, left behind by the well-fed parent geese. (It is not worse than cleaning up after the Hadeda who also enjoys being next to the pool.) My neighbour called the next day to find out what the disturbance in my yard was that had given his dogs and him a sleepless night. He was relieved to hear that it was nothing more serious than a happy family of Egyptian Geese in my pool. 🦆

In memoriam: Bryan Groom

I was saddened to hear that Bryan Groom passed away recently after a short illness. Bryan was a member of our club for many years, together with his wife Hilary. Despite living in Edenvale, he regularly attended club events and it was always a pleasure to see Bryan and Hilary at evening meetings and at social events, when they used to drive through to Pretoria. Bryan once told me that he enjoyed the spirit and vibe at BirdLife Northern Gauteng and that he felt he belonged to our club and that he saw no reason to change his affiliation. A happy person who was always smiling and ready to assist and support in his gentle and humble way, he had a great passion for birding and nature, and this was evident when you engaged him in a discussion about where to find birds or the topic of bird atlasing, which he eagerly participated in.

A club like ours is greatly reliant on voluntary contributions and Bryan was always willing to help wherever he could at club events or to lead an outing, especially to Marievale, which was like his local patch. A thorough birder who always kept a keen eye on what was going on, Bryan would share his observations and experience with all those around him, always friendly, always being helpful. His infectious smile and calm demeanour will forever be etched in my memory. Our thoughts and condolences are with Hilary, Catherine, Graham, Craig, Stuart and family.



André Marx

Rarities and unusual sightings report: 30 November 2021

Compiled by André Marx

This report covers the period of August–November 2021. Spring and early summer is the time of year when many migrants arrive and there was a plethora of wader sightings. Two localities that stand out in this regard are Mkhombo Dam and Bronkhorstpruit Dam Nature Reserve. The dams have open areas of shoreline that provide good habitat for shorebirds. Excellent records during the period were the ongoing presence of

a Slaty Egret in the Muldersdrift area, a Baird's Sandpiper (the first record for many years for our region), Chestnut-banded Plover, White-fronted Plover, and Pectoral Sandpiper, all at Mkhombo Dam, and Bar-tailed Godwit at Bronkhorstpruit Dam. Perhaps the most unexpected sighting was a Eurasian Oystercatcher that appeared at Mkhombo Dam for a few hours; this species has not been recorded in the region previously to my

knowledge. A *Tambourine Dove* in the Wilge River Valley on the north-eastern edge of the Greater Gauteng region is a bird unknown for our region.

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

National Rarities/ Nasionale rareiteite

Egret, Slaty [Rooikeelreier]

Reports were received of one bird that was present for several weeks at Walkhaven Dog Park and Gnu Valley in the Muldersdrift area, being reported by several birders in Sep 2021 and still present into late Nov 2021 (GBird). *For at least the last 7 years this species has been recorded at this locality, and could possibly be the same bird that is being seen.*

Sandpiper, Baird's [Bairdstrandloper]

A major find was of one bird at Bronkhorstspruit Dam, first seen on 6 Nov 2021 (RM). *A very rare bird for the region; this individual remained at the site for a number of days in which several local birders managed to see it.*

Regional and Local Rarities / Streeksrareiteite

Dove, Tambourine [Witborsduifie]

A record of one bird in the Wilge River valley, north-east of Bronkhorstspruit on the edge of our region, is a very interesting find, 20 Nov 2021 (MJ). *A bird that is not known from the Greater Gauteng region, and possibly a first confirmed record.*

Godwit, Bar-tailed [Bandstertgriet]

One bird was at Bronkhorstspruit Dam, 13 Sep 2021 (JvW). *Highly unusual away from coastal sites and probably a bird stopping over at a local wetland on migration; this one stayed only a couple of days.*

Heron, White-backed Night [Witrugreier]

A sighting of one bird at Cedar Lakes Estate in northern Johannesburg confirms the presence of the species at this locality for the second year running, 14 Nov 2021 (PCo).

Ibis, Southern Bald [Kalkoenibis]

An unusual record was of one bird near



Richard Montinaro

Baird's Sandpiper, Bronkhorstspruit Dam



Johan van der Walt

Bar-tailed Godwit, Bronkhorstspruit Dam



Robi Leslie

Southern Bald Ibis, Selcourt, Springs



Leon Badenhorst

Western Osprey, Roodeplaat Dam



Johan van der Walt

Eurasian Oystercatcher, Mkhombo Dam

Selcourt, Springs, in an area of grassland, 15 Aug 2021 (SMa & RL).

One bird at Rietvlei Dam on 6 Nov 2021 was a surprise find (PCr).

Osprey, Western [Visvalk]

A solitary bird was at Roodeplaat Dam, 22 Aug 2021 (LB).

Oystercatcher, Eurasian [Bonttobie]

A possible first for the region was the discovery of a Eurasian Oystercatcher at Mkhombo Dam on 9 Nov 2021 (JvW). *Normally occurring at coastal sites, this is a most unusual record away from coastal habitat.*

Pelican, Pink-backed [Kleinpelikaan]

One bird was present at Rockwall Dam, north of Rustenburg, in Pentad 2530_2710 for several weeks from 27 July 2021 (SMc, photo JJ).

Pipit, Bushveld [Bosveldkoester]

A single bird was at Moreleta Kloof NR, Pretoria, 10 Oct 2021 (KC).

Plover, Caspian [Asiatiese Strandkiewiet]

At least 12 birds were at Mkhombo Dam on 9 Nov 2021, with more records in the following days of up to 32 birds (GBird).

Plover, Chestnut-banded [Rooiborsstrandkiewiet]

One bird was at Mkhombo Dam on 7 Nov 2021 (GBird).

Plover, White-fronted [Vaalstrandkiewiet]

2 birds were at Mkhombo Dam, 20 Sep 2021 (GBird).



Jamie Jansen

Pink-backed Pelican, Rockwall Dam

Pratincole, Collared [Rooivlerksprinkaanvoël]

At least 20 birds were at Mkhombo Dam, 20 Sep (GBird). *This is one of the few sites in the region where this species can be found.*

A record of one bird at Marievale Bird Sanctuary is most unusual, 31 Oct 2021 (SY).

Sanderling [Drietonstrandloper]

A single bird was at Bronkhorstspruit Dam, 25 Oct 2021 (JvW).

Sandpiper, Pectoral [Geelpootstrandloper]

One bird was at Bronkhorstspruit Dam, 25 Oct 2021 (JvW).

Two birds were found at Marievale Bird



Steve Stevenson

Caspian Plover, Mkhombo Dam

Sanctuary, 13 Nov 2021 (GBird).
An occasional visitor in summer to local wetlands, but still a very uncommon species.

Shrike, Orange-breasted Bush [Oranjeborsboslaksman]

An out-of-range bird was found in Pentad 2625_2725, at Mponeng (Western Deep Levels Gold Mine), 26 Oct 2021 (JR).

Sparrowlark, Grey-backed [Grysruglewerik]
 One bird was at Kgomo-Kgomo, north of Pretoria, 18 Sep 2021 (TvW).

Turnstone, Ruddy [Steenloper]

One bird was present at Mkhombo Dam, 16 Oct 2021 (KC).

Whimbrel, Eurasian [Grootwulph]

A solitary bird was at Mkhombo Dam, 7 Nov 2021 (VD).

Observers/ Waarnemers:

Gauteng birders (GBird)
 Jannie Jansen (JJ)
 Johan van der Walt (JvW)
 John Randell (JR)
 Keanu Canto (KC)
 Leon Badenhorst (LB)
 Michael Johnson (MJ)
 Paul Counihan (PCo)
 Pieter Cronje (PCr)



Johan van der Walt

Collared Pratincole, Mkhombo Dam



Richard Montinaro

Pectoral Sandpipers, Marievale Bird Sanctuary

Richard Montinaro (RM)

Rob Leslie (RL)

Shannon Young (SY)

Shaun McGillewie (SMc)

Stan Madden (SMA)

Tjaart van Wyk (TvW)

Viandr  Delport (VD)

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 Andr  Marx at andre.marx112@gmail.com or 083 411 7674. 🐦

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 or 0727370862 if you have any queries or requests.

Lin Besaans (Menlo Park), Marit Greenwood (Hatfield), Michael van der Laan (Groenkloof), Willem & Mari Malan (Constantiapark), Desiré Kantor (Doornpoort), Trevor & Jill Schefermann (Garsfontein), Nadine Venter (Hatfield), Nicole Wreyford (Hatfield), Schalk van der Merwe (Hatfield), Gideon & Marlene Coetzee (Garsfontein), Gerdus Heydenrych (Garsfontein), Hantie Vermeulen (Eldoraigne), Hanjo & André Steyn, Johan Fourie (Wierdapark), Veredith van Dijk (Halfway House), Louma de Bruyn (Olympus), Johan van Heerden (Midstream), Llelani Nel (Midstream), Ina Visser (Wierdapark), Zanet Swart, Paul & Doreen Theron (Moreleta Park), Darren Johnston (Moreleta Park), Willemien van Niekerk (Valhalla), Daniel & Adelle van Zyl (Valhalla), Lynette Viljoen (Olympus), David & Rosalind Hattingh (Mooikloof), Madelaine J van Rensburg (The Reeds), Johan Botha & Vilette Forwood (Riviera), Tarrant Butcher (Lynnwood Ridge), Ansie Reis (Pretoria North)

Stronger together: why do birds sing duets?

Duetting, when two birds, usually a paired male and female, call or sing together, is mostly found in the Tropics, Subtropics and arid regions of the world. In temperate species singing is generally only done by males at the onset of the breeding season. The most sophisticated form of duetting is termed 'antiphonal', i.e. alternating – one member of a pair starts a song and the other completes it (in polyphonal duetting both birds sing at the same time). The timing of the joint song is so perfect that it can easily be mistaken for the song of a single bird.

A number of Southern African birds perform antiphonal duets, notably the Bokmakierie, whose duets have highly localised dialects, boubous/*Laniarius* spp., tchagras, Magpie Shrikes, Brubru, South African Shelduck, Crested and Grey-winged Francolin, Helmeted Guineafowl (during breeding, and initiated by the female) and Hartlaub's Spurfowl.

Various theories have been proposed to explain the purposes duetting may serve, and why these benefits would generally only occur in the warmer parts of the world.

- One suggests that maintaining a vocal pair bond is useful in dense vegetation like tropical forests, where it is difficult to keep an eye on one's mate.
- Duetting may advertise a territory, and has been shown to be most common in species where the sexes are identical, pair for life and maintain territories for most of the year.
- Tropical/subtropical bird species have lower mortality rates resulting in stronger pair bonding and territoriality than temperate species.
- Unlike the strongly seasonal breeding in temperate zones, birds living in more arid conditions must take advantage of favourable conditions whenever these occur, resulting in aseasonal irregular breeding – singing by males and females, particularly through duetting, can serve to stimulate the simultaneous development of breeding condition in both sexes.
- Forming part of a duet could be a way to avoid being ousted from a partnership and to signal commitment to a mate. A study of Happy Wrens in Mexico found that singing antiphonal duets is a perceptually and cognitively challenging task – which can only be achieved through constant and careful attention to one's partner... an observation borne out by Bokmakieries – who have been shown to be able to complete the singing of an antiphonal duet on their own after losing their mate.

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