



Laniarius

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BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord



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From the Editor



Recently, I attended a WESSA-Magalies Conservation morning where Mark Anderson, CEO of BirdLife SA, was the keynote speaker. His topic was: *Why Birds?* His presentation started and ended with the joy or possible silencing forever of the morning chorus; explaining the ecological function of birds and the threats they face, the ongoing efforts and successes of BLSA in this struggle, and our own responsibilities in this regard.

Shortly afterwards we celebrated Earth Day on 22 April. This day may have come and gone with scarcely a nod of recognition from most of us. We blithely continue bagging our groceries in plastic. We loftily criticize local subsistence farmers who break down fences of Isimangaliso Parks and chop down forests for plots, but we don't think twice about ordering a dining-room table topped with a massive slab of indigenous tree trunk. Our weekly trash fills our wheelie garbage bins to overflowing. We throng shopping aisles in malls for the newest fashions, accessories, larger TV screens...

In contrast to this, all around us conservation successes are celebrated, and unsung conservation heroes continue their efforts to save our planet. We recently saw how Indonesia's Forest Man, Yadav Paying, for four decades planted one tree a day on a barren space. This is now a forest and home to elephants, Indian rhino, and tigers. And birds.

In South Africa, too, there are many amazing people who are doing the hard work of investing in our nature and river systems by clearing alien invasive species and planting indigenous trees. Odwa Mantshule led 770 volunteers to clear over 1 500 hectares of invasive trees in 6 months. Their dedication and hard work meant a giant leap towards restoring water and wildlife in the Umzimvubu river catchment area. WESSA-volunteers

started wildlife and ecology programmes in schools to introduce upcoming generations to nurture our natural resources.

SANParks Honorary Rangers sacrifice time and effort for conservation, whether it is volunteering for the Pelican Watch on Malgas Island, anti-poaching night patrols at Rietvlei, or organising fundraisers for the benefit of our parks.

Tireless efforts to conserve green urban areas in our own city continue. For decades volunteers have spent personal finances, time, and energy to restore suburban sections of the Magalies range, Colbyn Wetlands, Moreletakloof and others to their former glory. This involves removing alien plants such as lantana, pom-pom weeds, restoring eroded hiking paths, removing litter and snares. The result? Communities may enjoy environments on their own home patch with restored fauna and flora.

What can you do? What can I do? We need not chain ourselves to a centuries-old indigenous tree about to be chopped off in Kenia for charcoal. But contribute towards conservation efforts in any way you can, be it financially or in time and effort. Join Friends of Rietvlei, Friends of Colbyn, or similar organisations in your community. Be mindful, curtail blatant consumerism and single-use plastic or plastic shopping bags in your own family circle. Re-use, recycle. Educate your children. Tread softly.

*Look up, for instance.
Six suns. The wonder of it.
First one, then the next, eclipsing
the possibility that their world hangs by a
thread. (Karen Skolfeld)*

Ivonne

From the Chair



Winter birding is quite different, but no less exciting than summer birding. We have had one of the most exciting and wettest summers in a long time with many special birds and lifers in the area. We may well wonder what we will be facing this winter.

Winter need not be a time for hibernating. In many ways it is much easier to see the birds in winter when the trees are bare, and grass is shorter. The birds also tend to form bird parties with a variety of mixed species foraging and feeding together.

The special winter migrants into our area and our gardens include the Fairy Flycatcher, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Short-toed and Sentinel Rock Thrush. Suikerbosrand, Devon, and Hoogland Hydro are excellent places to see these migrants and are included in the current program. Blue Cranes move into the Devon area in good numbers and Grass Owls hunting over the grassland can be seen early in the morning and late afternoon.

We encourage our members to join our BLNG Birdlasser Challenge covering the Wider Pretoria area. Birdlasser is an easy-to-use tool to capture and track all your bird sightings by year, region, and area. It allows you to compare your totals to previous years and to track where and when you found specific species. Birdlasser is available as a free application for all smartphone users. You can join the BLNG Birdlasser challenge by sending a mail request to secretary@blng.co.za.

Bird conservation is one of the BLNG priorities, driving many of our activities. The two main

areas on which we focus are Sabap2 atlassing and the Secretary Bird project. We would like to see an increase in the number of BirdLasser cards submitted and members participating in atlassing.

The Secretarybird project is done in conjunction with BirdLife South Africa. BLNG has contributed to the tracking devices that were fitted to four Secretarybirds and we are following their movements and behaviour. We encourage our members to join the Threatened Species cause on Birdlasser and to log all Secretarybird sightings. All details are found in this short video: <https://youtu.be/w0yanWOFt7k>

It has come to our attention that BirdLife South Africa has experienced problems with the club membership system which they run on our behalf. We have been advised that there was a batch of invoices that should have been issued in January that were inadvertently overlooked. If you are experiencing any membership problems or have not received an invoice at the due date of renewal, please let us know so that we can rectify the situation.

Once again, a warm welcome to all the new BLNG members and those that were inactive during the Covid period. We invite you to attend as many of our activities as possible, specifically the monthly evening meetings. This is the place to meet the other BLNG birders and to share knowledge and questions.

Enjoy your birding, it is a wonderful hobby!

E Louise

Laniarius uitleg

Ek beplan om aan die einde van die jaar die tuig neer te lê met die uitleg van *Laniarius* en dit te oorhandig aan iemand met meer entoesiasme. Is daar dalk iemand wat kans sien om dit oor te neem? Ek het 'n punt bereik waar ek opsien om dit te doen. Ek is seker daar is iemand met die nodige kennis êrens onder die huidige lede!

Drinie van Rensburg

Rhenosterkop, Mabusa and Thembisile Dam: 6 March 2022

Keanu Canto

The north-eastern reaches of the Wider Gauteng area provide a wealth of habitats for the birder to explore, and so it is no wonder that this area is a favourite haunt of teams participating in Birdlife South Africa's annual Birding Big Day. On this particular March morning, a small group of BLNG birders met early at the start of the famed Zusterstroom road to sample a little of this diversity.

Instead of heading down into the well-known Wilge River Valley, however, we headed back to the main road and to a less well-known spot – Rhenosterkop. After turning into the nondescript entrance and sorting out some radio troubles, birding began at a slow but steady pace. The calls of cloudscraper cisticolas (those small cisticolas whose males display high in the sky) emanated from the skies above – Zitting and Cloud Cisticolas were everywhere – while a lone male Long-tailed

Widowbird performed his display flight. (Landery- en Gevlekte Klopkloppie, Langstertflap). As we gained altitude, we came across our first Wailing Cisticolas (Huiltinktinkie), who called from a distant scrawny bush. A silhouetted raptor appeared on a distant pole, and when we pulled up to it, it turned into a lovely Brown Snake-Eagle – cold and reluctant to lift off into the still frigid air. (Bruinslangarend)

We soon reached the top of Rhenosterkop. The peak of this impressive mountain – crowned with an equally impressive radio tower – reaches almost 1700 m in altitude, and as such here the calls of Wing-snapping Cisticolas dominated (Kleinste Klopkloppie). As we got out of our vehicles a little Wailing Cisticola called cheerfully from a nearby Stamvrug bush – a little closer this time around. We had a quick view of a pipit which flew off, but, after first being entertained by a few Familiar Chats (Gewone Spekvreter), the pipit returned and perched in a tree, allowing great views. It turned out to be a lovely Nicholson's (Long-billed) Pipit – one of the rocky grassland specialists of Rhenosterkop's slopes.

Two large birds suddenly flew into view – Denham's Bustard! (Veldpou). They quickly disappeared below the horizon and so we headed off in their direction. Whilst surrounded by the calls of Wailing Cisticolas, Robin's sharp eyes picked up one of the bustards at an immense distance, and so no wonder it took a little while to get everyone onto the bird as it slowly walked along a grassy ridge far below. We rounded the tower and stopped a while to take in the impressive view. A number of swifts, swallows and martins moved along the ridge, picking off insects. Amongst them were a good number of Common House-Martins



Brown Snake Eagle



Long-billed Pipit

(Huisswael), and every now and then they would alight on a telephone wire, allowing us to study their interesting little white-feathered feet. It wasn't long before we found another high-altitude Rhenosterkop special – a cheerful little Cape Bunting perched on a fence. (Rooivlerkstreepkoppie).

Having had our fill of some of Rhenosterkop's special birds, we headed downhill, passing the Brown Snake-Eagle again, who seemed to be warm enough by now to take off and head out on his morning activities. We headed off towards Mabusa, leaving the open grasslands behind us and descending into gorgeous broad-leaved woodlands.

A soaring Yellow-billed Kite (Geelbekwou) welcomed us to Mabusa, where we made our way to the main offices. Here, a pair of Yellow-throated Bush Sparrows (Geelvlakmossies) foraged in the canopy, and a Southern Black Flycatcher perched nearby, surveying the ground for insects. The birds just kept on coming, and we were treated to views of Spotted Flycatcher, Brubru, Little Bee-eater, Southern Black Tit, mud-collecting swallows and flocks of Red-throated Widowbirds. (Swart- en Europese Vlieëvanger, Bontroklaksman, Kleinbyvreter, Gewone Swartmees, Rooikeelflap).

A talented songster turned out to be a Mocking Cliff-Chat (Dassievoël) perched on a distant roof. We struggled to pull ourselves away from this productive little spot, but eventually we headed further into the reserve.

Along the road, hundreds of Barn Swallows and Common House-Martins (Europese - en

Sean Naudé



Common House Martin



Cape Bunting

Sean Naudé

Huisswael) crowded into the trees – they seemed to be gathering before their departure to the fields and forests of the northern hemisphere. Little Swift, White-fronted Bee-eater and Wahlberg's Eagle (Kleinwindswael, Rooikeelbyvreter, Bruinarend) were some of the next birds added to our tally before we arrived at the Moses' River bridge which had been washed away not long before our visit. Much to our surprise, however, the washed away section had been hastily filled in, allowing us passage to Thembisile Dam, however not before we had managed a quick glimpse of a shy Half-collared Kingfisher perched over the quiet reaches of the shaded river (Blouvisvanger).



Spotted Flycatcher



Sean Naudé

Brubru

The drive to Thembisile Dam turned up some acacia species – Blue Waxbill and Crimson-breasted Shrike – and a few House Sparrows along the Moloto road! (Blousysie, Rooiborslaksman, Huisbossie).

Soon the large blue stretch that is Thembisile Dam came into view and we headed down to the water along a rather rough little track. South African Cliff Swallows hawked insects around the vehicles as we drove to the dam wall, and from here we spied a number

of waterbirds – Hamerkop, African Swamphen, Levallant’s Cisticola, Yellow-billed Duck and Three-banded Plover to name a few – whilst huge flocks of Pied Starlings flew past, chattering away. (Kransswael, Grootkoningriethaan, Vleitinkinkie, Geelbekeend, Driebandstrandkiewiet, Witgatspreeu).

Back at the cars, a pair of Red-breasted Swallows bade us farewell as we headed back to the Big Smoke – and left us on around 100 species for the morning. (Rooiborsswael). 🐦

The African Bird Fair 2022

Join BirdLife South Africa for the biggest event in African birding this year: The African Bird Fair 2022. Make sure you diarise 22 and 23 July to enjoy an epic line-up of speakers and exhibitors, as well as the opportunity to connect with other avid birders across the continent and around the world.



A highly rewarding jewel of a weekend in Wakkerstroom: 18 – 21 March 2022

Louise Geyser

For many city-dwellers the name Wakkerstroom will most probably conjure up pictures of a remote, dull little country town, which is not worth mentioning. This is a frivolous misperception. From a tourist point of view the charming town of Wakkerstroom markets itself as the Jewel of Mpumalanga with a list of 20 exciting things to do in and around the town, of which birding is one of the highlights. The annual Music Festival is extremely popular, as is the artisan bread course offered at *Country Bread*. The absence of traffic lights and quaint buildings dating back to the 19th century contribute to the unique character of this picturesque town. To create the right mood, one of the jokes at *Thyme Out* in Van Riebeeck Street, when showing you the wine list, is: *Wakkerstroom is a little drinking village with a birding problem!*

Where is Wakkerstroom located? It is the second oldest town in the Mpumalanga province, in a tranquil rural setting on the edge of the great Drakensberg escarpment. Ossewakop towers above the town. It is on the KwaZulu-Natal border, 27 km east of Volksrust, 56 km south-east of Amersfoort and a driving distance of 314 km from Pretoria, which takes an average of 3,5 hours driving time. The current recommended route through Gauteng is via the N4 and N11 past Ermelo. From Ermelo you continue past Amersfoort on the N11 to Volksrust / Newcastle. At the first traffic light in Volksrust turn left onto the R543 to Wakkerstroom. The distance to the BLSA Wakkerstroom Centre is 23 km, about 2 km outside the town of Wakkerstroom.

Birdlife Northern Gauteng's invitation to join a spectacular outing to Wakkerstroom over the long weekend of 18 – 21 March was irresistible. The wording read as follows:

Wakkerstroom has long been known globally as an important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA). It is a birding haven for over 400 listed species with a variety of grasslands, wetlands (vleis, pans and dams), gorges, cliffs and forest habitats and greatly varying altitudes and offers excellent opportunities to see three of the exciting endemic species, which are restricted to Southern Africa's high-altitude grasslands, namely Rudd's Lark (Drakensberglewerik), Botha's Lark (Vaalrivierlewerik) and Yellow-breasted Pipit (Geelborskoester).

To whet the appetite of interested birders, the following potential lifers for many enthusiasts were listed, many of which are vulnerable and endangered due to their threatened habitats:

Wetland species

- Grey-crowned Crane (Mahem)
- African Grass Owl (Grasuil)
- African Marsh Owl (Vleiuiil)
- African Snipe (Afrikaanse Snip)
- African Swamphen (Grootkoningriethaan)
- African Marsh Harrier (Afrikaanse Vleivlak)

Grassland species

- Rudd's Lark (Drakensberglewerik)
- Botha's Lark (Vaalrivierlewerik)
- Yellow-breasted Pipit (Geelborskoester)
- Southern Bald Ibis (Kalkoenibis)
- Blue Korhaan (Bloukorhaan)
- White-bellied Korhaan (Witpenskorhaan)
- Denham's Bustard (Veldpou)
- Buff-streaked Chat (Bergklipwagter)
- Ground Woodpecker (Grondspieg)
- Pale-crowned Cisticola (Bleekkop-klopkloppie)
- African Rock Pipit (Klipkoester)
- Sentinel Rock Thrush (Langtoonkliplyster)

Forest species

- Bush Blackcap (Rooibektiptol)
- Olive Bush-shrike (Olyfboslaksman)
- Olive Woodpecker (Gryskopspeg)
- African Yellow Warbler (Geelsanger)
- Chorister Robin-chat (Lawaaimaker-janfrederik)

As a further enticement the cost of the week-end included three night's accommodation at the Wakkerstroom Birdlife Centre, as well as the professional guiding service for two full days of the resident guide, Lucky Ngwenya and freelance guide, David Nkosi, with the week-end programme to be co-ordinated Pieter Heslinga – at the unbelievable price of R1 650 per person.

The Birdlife SA Tourism and Education Centre is situated within the Grassveld Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), which is regarded as one of the highest priority IBA's in South Africa. The Centre is located on 114 ha of grassland adjoining the internationally renowned Wakkerstroom Wetland. The Centre has magnificent views of the Wetland from all three accommodation blocks, including a large veranda leading off the conference centre, where one can enjoy a cup of coffee while welcoming the morning sun or a sundowner at the end of the day. Accommodation facilities offer the options of en-suite guest rooms, dormitories, or camping/caravan sites.

Our group of nine, ranging from 24 to 74 years of age, stayed in basically equipped dormitory rooms, with adjacent clean communal facilities for ladies and men. The conference/dining area, kitchen and pantry are well equipped with close-by access to a sociable braai-area.

There are two bird hides on the western side of the Wetland, namely the Crane Hide and Iain Drummond Memorial Hide. Another two hides are located on the northern Amersfoort side of the Wetland, at the Paul Kruger Bridge, namely the Clive Beck Hide and the WOW (Wings over Wetlands) Hide.

Spread over two full days of birding – Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 March – our group

was competently escorted by David Nkosi and Lucky Ngwenya to enjoy the following birding highlights:

- Whilst walking in the Groenvlei area (part of the farm of a local farmer) we obtained **two brief visuals of Rudd's Lark in flight** before they disappeared in the grass. According to Lucky Ngwenya there are only about 150 of these critically endangered birds left in nature. A contributing factor to their diminishing numbers is that they no longer breed due to the increasing disturbance of their habitat.
- In the same area a **Yellow-breasted Pipit** posed beautifully on a small termite mound for photographs. Out of the breeding season, its breast was unfortunately no longer yellow.



Pieter Heslinga

Yellow-breasted Pipit – Geelborskoester

- We were fortunate to see limited numbers of **Blue Korhaan and White-bellied Korhaan**, in long grass at a far distance, clearly not wishing to be disturbed.
- **Southern Bald Ibis** were plentiful, and we were also delighted with three close-by visuals of **Secretary Bird**. (Kalkoenibis, Sekretarisvoël)
- An exciting discovery of a **flock of Denham's Bustard** together with Blue Crane was a lifer dream come true for many in our group. Disturbed by our presence, they gave us a beautiful departure flight display. (Veldpou)
- An exquisite closeup visual of a **Bush Blackcap** in an Ouhout-shrub provided a



Bush Blackcap – Rooibektiptol



Eastern Long-billed Lark (Grasveldlangbeklewerik)

Pieter Heilinga



Botha's Lark, adult with red beak (Vaalrivierlewerik, volwasse voël met rooi bek)



Red-throated Wryneck (Draaihals)

totally thrilling moment.

- The ultimate highlight of the weekend was undoubtedly an amazing nearby sighting of a small group of **Botha's Lark** on an open patch of ground at Daggakraal, after a search of 7 km by foot at three previous sites, posing a serious challenge to everyone's fitness.
- Whilst searching for Botha's Lark we flushed an **African Marsh Owl**, which gave us a good visual in flight. (Vleiuiil)
- Wonderful up-close sightings allowed us to indulge in grassveld specials, such as **Eastern Long-billed Lark, Spike-heeled Lark, Red-capped Lark, Yellow-crowned Bishop, Cape Longclaw, Nicholson's Pipit, African Rock Pipit, Cuckoo Finch and Red-throated Wryneck**. It was also fascinating to watch the wing-clapping and characteristic flight pattern of

Eastern Clapper Larks.

- The sharp eyes of our vigilant guides helped us distinguish between the Cisticolas: **Pale-crowned Cisticola, Zitting Cisticola, Cloud Cisticola, Wing-snapping Cisticola, Wailing Cisticola, Levallant's Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola and Neddicky**. (Bleekkop-, Landery-, Gevlekte-, Kleinste Klopkloppie, Huil-, Vlei-, Groottinktinkie)
- A lucky discovery was a single **Black-winged Lapwing** amongst a flock of Crowned Lapwings (Grootswartvlerkiewiet)
- **Red-winged Francolin, Olive Bush-shrike and African Yellow Warbler** were lifers for many in the group. (Rooivlerkpatrys, Olyfboslaksman, Geelsanger)
- Abundant swallows, martins and swifts kept us very busy, and also provided three



Pieter Heslinga

Blue-billed Teal – Bloubekeend

lifers, namely **Black Saw-wing, South African Cliff Swallow and Horus Swift.** (Swartsaagvlerkswael, Kransswael en Horuswindswael)

- A distant sighting of an **African Marsh Harrier** was very welcome. Apparently all five of the South African harrier species visit Wakkerstroom at certain times of the year. (Afrikaanse Vleivalk)
- **Sentinel Rock Thrush, Cape Rock Thrush, Buff-streaked Chat and Mocking Cliff Chat** provided exceptional visuals. (Langtoon- en Kaapse Kliplyster, Bergklipwagter en Dassievoël)
- Beautiful **Common and Jackal Buzzards** displayed themselves proudly on telephone poles. (Bruin- en Rooiborsjak-kalsvoëls)
- Perfect timing revealed the aerial display of a **Lesser Kestrel** and a calculated descent to claim its prey at the slope of a hillside. (Kleinrooivalk)
- A life-long search materialised for me personally to eventually lay eyes on a **Quail Finch**, despite being at a distance at a puddle alongside the road. (Kwartelvinkie)



Pieter Heslinga

Little Bittern – Kleinrietreier

- Although water birds and waders were strangely limited, we were grateful to see **Great Crested Grebe, Maccoa Duck, Cape Shovelers, Yellow-billed Egret, Blue-billed Teal and African Swamphen.** (Kuifkopdobbertjie, Bloubekeend, Kaapse Slopeend, Geelbekwitreier, Grootkoningriethaan)
- At the dam on the northern side of the Paul Kruger Bridge we were entertained by a **Little Bittern** with a fish in its mouth.
- On Sunday afternoon our birding trip culminated in a pristine drive along the



Pieter Heslinga

BLNG-members at Wakkerstroom with guide David Nkosi

39 km long Zaaihoek Dam, built in 1988 with a capacity of 185 million cubic metres. Both the Wakkerstroom River and Slang River (a tributary of the Buffalo River) feed the Zaaihoek Dam. The dam serves primarily for municipal and industrial supply purposes and is used to transfer water to the Vaal system and the Majuba Power Station. Winding up the hill to the Slang River bridge spectacular views of the gorge awaited us together with prime sightings of a **Half-collared Kingfisher** on a rock in the fast-flowing river with its dazzling blue plumage radiated by the setting sun and a pair of **Ground Woodpeckers** perched in perfect setting at the top of the gorge. (Blouvisvanger, Grondspieg)

There were many other special birding moments. In total our group identified **150 bird species** during our intensive two days of birding and everyone in the group was richly rewarded with lifers – from 19 to as many as 48 lifers for one of the beginners. Most of our expectations were met, with the exception of African Grass Owl, African Snipe, African Rail,

Olive Woodpecker, Chorister Robin-chat and the evasive Red-chested Flufftail. Contributing factors could have been the conspicuous silence of many birds with the breeding season behind us, as well as the very high water levels. The limited presence of water birds and waders was a strange contrast to previous visits to Wakkerstroom. Perhaps a return visit should preferably be planned to take place in the breeding season during November and December when the birds are active and more responsive and audible.

To conclude, our weekend outing to Wakkerstroom was a highly rewarding experience and we salute our two excellent guides who are experts in finding the specials, with incredible knowledge of the habitats, behaviour and calls of all the birds in this diverse area. Our sincere thanks to BLNG and everyone who was involved in the arrangements for this special weekend, including our dedicated and ever-friendly co-ordinator, Pieter Heslinga. Thank you also to every participant in our group for your friendliness and kindness in so many ways. Hopefully this will not be our last birding trip together. 🐦

Melodious dorp

Carol Stedall

Over the Easter weekend a group of seven BLNG members visited 'Melodious Dorp'. Where might that be you wonder? Well, it is where the Melodious Larks [Spotlewerik] live on the farm Cyferfontein in the Southern Free State. Garingboom is the guest house on the farm owned by Jan and Riëtte Griesel. Riëtte is a bird guide par excellence as well as being an expert on dragonflies and lacewings, succulents and the nutrient rating of any particular bush for the merino sheep that are farmed on Cyferfontein!

'Melodious Dorp' is the name Riëtte has given to the portion of the farm where the Melodious Larks abound and nest, and also

where we found multiple other LBJs like the Eastern Clapper, Red-capped, the Large-billed, the Spike-heeled, and the Pink-billed Lark, the Rufous-eared Warbler, the Cape Penduline Tit, Cinnamon-breasted Buntings, the southern race of the Nicholson's Pipit, the Buffy Pipit, the Cape Longclaw and the Familiar - and Sickle-winged Chat. [Hoëveldklappertjie, Rooikop-, Dikbek-, Vlake- en Pienkbeklewerik, Rooioorlangstertjie, Kaapse Kapokvoël, Klipstreepkoppie, Vaalkoester, Oranjekeelkalkoentjie, Gewone- en Vlake-spekvreter]. All while standing on the back of the farm bakkie (in the freezing cold!) driven by Jan because the farm roads were too muddy to be passable in our own vehicles. We found that we had an excellent view of the ant heaps, fences, bushes, and farm tracks which made spotting the birds much easier and a lot of fun. A pair of Secretarybirds was also spotted in the distance.

Elouise: "The most special part of the Garingboom camp was Riëtte teaching us how to ID birds by their behaviour and flight patterns:

- The double flick of the Familiar Chat's wings compared to the single flick of the Sickle-winged Chat
- The exaggerated up-and-down tail-wagging of the Buffy Pipit
- The short, white-tipped tail of the Spike-heeled Lark."

The farm boasts several walking trails and on the Saturday afternoon we set off to explore on foot, walking through the paddocks in front of the cottages, through the veld, along a stream, past a lovely pool and small waterfall (which was completely dry when we visited in September 2020) up a rocky ledge via a ladder and through a marshy area to the hide at one of the two dams on the farm.



Hannes van den Berg

Rufous-Eared Warbler – Rooioorlangstertjie



Derek Stedall

Garingboom birders with Jan and Riëtte Griessel



Waterfall at Garingboom



Elouise Kalmer

Sickle-winged Chat



Derek Stedall

Bird hide at one of the dams

On the way we could hear the call of the African Rock Pipit [Klipkoester] but frustratingly could not spot it! The dams and their surrounds yielded South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler, Red-billed and Cape Teal, Little Grebe, White-breasted Cormorant, Black-headed and Grey Heron, Spotted Thick-knee, Hamerkop, Kittlitz's Plover, White-throated Swallow, Orange River Francolin, flotillas of Egyptian Geese and more. [Koper-, Kaapse Slop-, Rooibek- en Teeleend, Kleindobbertjie, Witborsduiker, Swartkop- en Bloureier, Gewone Dikkop, Geelborsstrandkiewiet, Witkeelswael, Kalaharipatrys, Kolgans]. Buffy Pipit and Mountain Wheatear [Vaalkoester, Bergwagter] were spotted on a rocky ridge.

Riëtte's garden around the farmhouse, the paddocks in front of the cottages and the

hilly area behind were alive with the calls of the Bokmakierie, Crested and Black-collared Barbet, Yellow, Black-throated and White-throated Canaries, Fairy Flycatcher, Speckled, Red-faced and White-backed Mousebirds, Red-throated Wryneck, Acacia Pied Barbet, and lovely little Orange River White-eyes. [Kuifkop- en Rooikophoutkapper, Geel-, Bergen Witkeelkanaries, Feevlieëvanger, Gevlekte, Rooiwang- en Witkruisvoël, Draaihal, Bonthoutkapper en Gariepglasogie].

A very special sighting was the Spotted Eagle Owl [Gevlekte Ooruil] which made its appearance promptly at around 6:15 every evening flying between the tall trees in front of the cottages – a talking point over the delicious dinner supplied by Riëtte in the dining room of the farmhouse.



Hannes van den Berg

Yellow Canary – Geelkanarie



White-backed Mousebird – Witrugmuisvoël

On Saturday night we fell asleep to the sound of rain on the roof which made for a good night's sleep but meant that the farm roads were totally impassable on the Sunday morning, so we undertook a very entertaining visit to the Royal Hotel (aka the House of Stories) in Bethulie where owner Anthony Hocking entertained us with stories of Bethulie and its surrounds. The hotel boasts 120 000 books and 80 000 vinyl records which are all duplicates of the collection Anthony keeps at his home over the road from the hotel. He is able to locate any book or record in the collection!

After coffee we drove through beautiful Free State landscapes to the Gariep Dam



Hannes van den Berg

Orange River White-eye – Gariepglasogjie

and Nature Reserve. Along the way we spotted Pale Chanting Goshawk, Greater Kestrel, Blue Crane, and Black-shouldered Kite. [Bleeksingen Grootrooivalk, Bloukraanvoël en Blouvalk].

Unfortunately, the waterline of the dam was so high that the breeding area for the Burchell's and Double-banded Coursers [Bloukop- en Dubbelbanddrawwertjies] was no more. The roads in the nature reserve were also impassable. However, the dam was looking beautiful, and we were able to add several

Pale Chanting Goshawk – Bleeksingvalk



Hannes van den Berg



Elouise Kalmier

Western Osprey – Visvalk



Elouise Kalmier

Little Swift

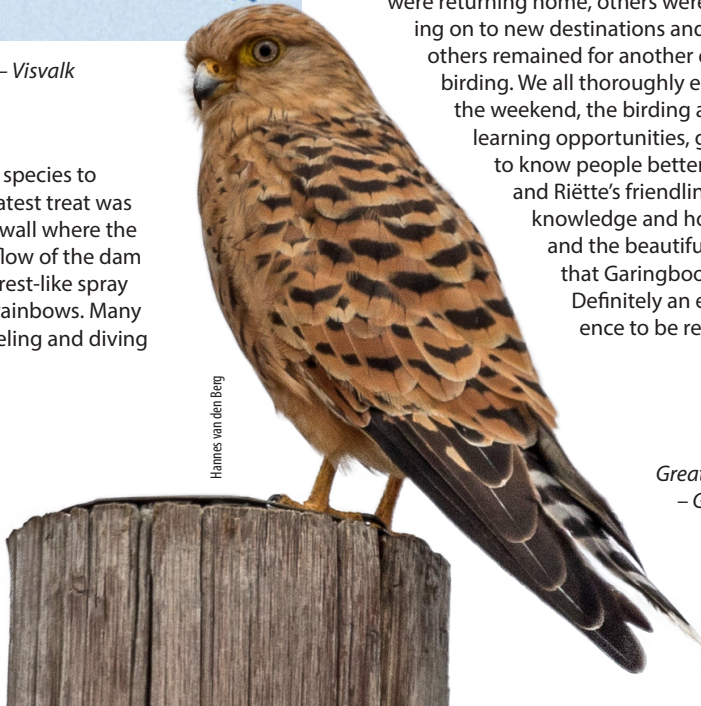
in the spray and perching on the structures below the wall. Grey-headed Gull, a juvenile Fish Eagle (the parents were perched on a tree nearby), Western Osprey, African Harrier Hawk, Black-headed and Grey Heron, Little and White-rumped Swift were among those spotted. [Gryskopmeeu, Visarend, Visvalk, Kaalwangvalk, Klein- en Witkruiswindswael].

Sunday evening's dinner and Monday morning's breakfast (and Jan's excellent coffee) allowed more socialising and discussion of sightings. Some members of the group were returning home, others were moving on to new destinations and yet others remained for another day's birding. We all thoroughly enjoyed the weekend, the birding and learning opportunities, getting to know people better, Jan and Riëtte's friendliness,

knowledge and hospitality and the beautiful place that Garingboom is. Definitely an experience to be repeated!

Definitely an experience to be repeated!

more waterbird species to our list. The greatest treat was below the dam wall where the cascading overflow of the dam created a rainforest-like spray complete with rainbows. Many birds were wheeling and diving



Hannes van den Berg

Greater Kestrel – Grootrooivalk

Roodeplaat Natuurreservaat: 20 April 2022

Ivonne Coetzee

Ons was 'n gretige groep voëlkykers wat Thinus van Staden by die ingang ingewag het, want sy faam loop hom ver vooruit – hierdie is die ou wat 'n paar jaar gelede 'n Boomkoester [Tree Pipit] by Wonderboom-reservaat ontdek het, en onlangs beide Sprinkaansanger en Europese Rietsanger [River Warbler, Marsh Warbler] op die Magaliesberg net oos daarvan raakgehoop het. Op sy beurt was Thinus gretig om sy splinternuwe kamera uit te toets, en watter meer uitdagende en bevredigende onderwerp is daar as voëlfotografie?

Hierdie provinsiale natuurreservaat aan die oostelike oewer van Roodeplaatdam is 'n versteekte en onderbenutte juweel, so naby aan Pretoria. Die infrastruktuur is puik, met geteerde paaie, besondere netjiese stormwaterslote, asook opsionele grondpaaie. Daar is wild soos sebras, koedoes, waterbokke en kameelperde, en lekker staproetes deur 'n verskeidenheid habitatte. Dis 'n voëlkykparadys met talle besondere bosveldspesies soos Rooiborslaksman, Grysrugkwêkwêvoël, Gestreepte Visvanger, Bruinkeelbossanger en verskeie spesies lewerikke en koesters. [Crimson-breasted Shrike, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Striped Kingfisher, Burnt-necked

Eremomela, larks and pipits.] Gewoonlik is daar 'n verskeidenheid watervoëls soos duikers, reiers en selfs nagreiers. [cormorants, herons and night-heron]. 'n Mens kan besondere roofvoëls soos Wespedief, Koekoekvalk, Akkedisvalk, Witkruis- en Swartsperwer en Bruinjakalsvoëls daar raakloop, en daar is volop swaeltjies in die somer, by name Europese Oewerswael wat gereeld daar afgemerkt word. [European Honey Buzzard, Cuckoo Hawk, Lizard Buzzard, Gabar Goshawk, Black Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Sand Martin.] Hierdie reservaat is ook bekend vir sy verskeidenheid koekoek, fisante en patryse soos Swempie en Bospatrys. [Cuckoos, spurfowl and francolin, such as Coqui and Crested Francolin]. Bronsvlerkdrawwertjies [Bronze-winged Courser] kom ook soms in die reservaat voor.

Ons het na 'n lekker beker koffie stadig begin ry en kort-kort gestop en uitgeklim om die omgewing te bespied. Besondere spesies op pad na die verlate opleidingsentrum was Gestreepte Wipstert en 'n Swartkatakoeroewyfie, wat sommige die eerste keer te sien gekry het. [White-browed Scrub-robin, Black Cuckooshrike.] By die opleidingsentrum self het Oranjeborsboslaksman, Witborsspreu en Geelblestinker mooi vertoon,



Annefje Barkhuizen



Thinus van Staden

Groepleier Thinus van Staden en klublede

Mikstertbyvanger – Fork-tailed Drongo

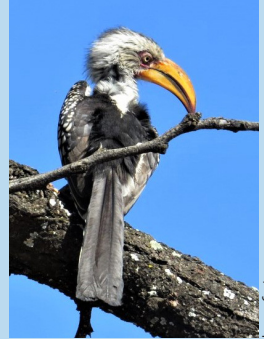


Voël van die Dag – Maraboe



Thinus van Staden

Rooirugstreepkoppie



Ivonne Goetze

Geelbekneushoringvoël

met 'n Geelbekbosduif en Papegaaiduiwe wat oorgevlieg het. [Orange-breasted Bushshrike, Violet-backed Starling, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, African Olive – and Green Pigeon]. Daar was eenaardig genoeg baie min watervoëls by die dam se inloop, buiten duikers en Slanghals, maar die vlieënde Witkruissperwer wat Thinus blitsig kon identifiseer, het later daarvoor vergoed. [Gabar Goshawk]. Ons kon ook beide Geelbek- en Grysneushoringvoëls afmerk. [Southern Yellow-billed - and African Grey Hornbill].

VVV's (vervelige vaal voëltjies wat alles behalwe vervelig is) was Kalahariwipstert, Landeryklopkoppies, Bosveldtinkinkie en Sabotalewerik. [Kalahari Scrub-Robin, Zitting - and Rattling Cisticola, Sabota Lark]. Die groot verrassing het by die pieknieklek gewag toe Antoinette ons aandag op 'n reusagtige voël bokant ons vestig – 'n Maraboe!

Op pad huis toe kon ons Grysrugkwê-kwêvoël, Bonthoutkapper, Bospatrys, Rooivlerktjagra, Gewone Troupant en selfs Witkeeljanfrederik by ons lyste voeg, wat op 78 spesies 'n mooi aantal vir die oggend was. [Grey-backed Camaroptera, Acacia Pied Barbet, Crested Francolin, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Lilac-breasted Roller, White-throated Robin-Chat].



Thinus van Staden

Blouvalk



Ivonne Goetze

Sabotalewerik



Wilge River Valley: 23 April 2022

Keanu Canto

Birdlife Northern Gauteng's regular trips to the Wilge River Valley north-east of Bronkhorstspuit provide a chance to see birds more typical of escarpment forests and the lowveld, and this trip was no exception.

After meeting at sunrise at the start of the Zusterstroom road, the group headed east and made a quick stop at a productive spot of Acacia thornveld. Here the never-ending procession of birds included Red-breasted Swallow, Bearded Woodpecker, White-browed Scrub-Robin, White-throated Robin-Chat and Southern Black Tit. [Rooiborswael, Baardspieg, Gestreepte Wipstert, Witkeeljanfrederik]. We soon entered the valley proper, and a Lesser Honeyguide [Kleinheuningwyser] displayed nicely as it flitted over the road, showing off its bright white outer tail feathers, whilst a small group of klipsspringers were spotted high up on a rocky ridge.

Our next stop turned up a confiding Striped Pipit [Gestreepte Koester] in a dead tree and a flypast of two Hamerkops, while Grey-headed Bushshrike and Black-headed Oriole [Spookvoël, Swartkopwielewaal] serenaded us from either side of the road. Soon thereafter I picked up an Ashy Flycatcher [Blougrysvlieëvanger] calling from the bottom of the valley – this is always a nice Lowveld species to get in the area – although this time around the bird wasn't eager to be seen.

As the day warmed up, the raptors became more active, and we were lucky to see African Fish-Eagle, a pair of Verreaux's Eagles and a Brown Snake-Eagle all over Qodesh. [Visarend, Witkruisarend, Bruinslangarend]. We then shot through to Hephzibah, a special kloof which often turns up some special birds. After putting on our hiking boots and hats, we headed up into the kloof. It wasn't long before a massive eagle headed in our direction over the ridge line and after a quick look through the binoculars my scream went out to the group "Crowned Eagle!". The bird circled once over us before heading

off as quickly as it had appeared, back over the ridge. What a bird for Wider Gauteng!

The rest of the walk up and down the kloof turned up a few more special birds, including African Firefinch and Greater Honeyguide. [Kaapse Vuurvinkie, Grootheuningwyser]. It was then time to head back to Pretoria, or perhaps enjoy a refreshing milkshake at Qodesh on the way home. 🐦



Helen Canto

The Wilge River Valley Group



Helen Canto



Keanu Canto

Crowned Eagle – Kroonarend

Kaapsehoop birding trip

Rose Clark

On Freedom Day, a bunch of keen birders arrived at Salvador's Restaurant in Kaapsehoop at 2 pm to start a wonderful weekend of Lowveld birding. Amazingly, on this trip, the guys outnumbered the girls. We met our very competent and entertaining guide, Johan Gouws there, and tucked into some delicious pizzas as we discussed our plans for the coming five days. We then left to drive the bumpy 10 km through the nearby forest to our rustic home for the week – *Kaapsehoop Adventures* – probably quite an apt name in retrospect – for it was indeed quite an adventure! On seeing our camp – comments such as “interesting”, “alternative”, “basic” and “cool” were bandied about as we were greeted by the suite of teepees and rooms that were originally transformed from mule stables. The venue was eclectic to say the least – but really quite an amazing experience as well – with awesome views over the valley. We were assigned our “rooms” and packed out our stuff, congregating a little later over glasses of wine and G&Ts in the braai/kitchen area. Fires were stoked and the atmosphere mellowed as we all got to know one another round the fires.

On the first day of birding, we drove to Froggy Pond in the nearby Berlin Forest. We were greeted on the way by the sounds of a Cape Grassbird, Cape Robin-Chat, Bulbuls and the “covid bird” – “sit-'n-bietjie soon-toe” (namely the Red-eyed Dove). [Grasvoël, Gewone Janfrederik, Swartoogtiptol, Grootringduif]. We hauled out camp chairs and settled down at the pond to wait for the sun to touch the vegetation. It was “tjoep-stil” initially, sending our bird guide into fits of panic and self-doubt. But slowly as the dawn broke over the pond, the bush came alive with sounds and sightings of Olive Woodpeckers, Olive Bushshrikes, Bush Blackcaps, Yellow-throated Woodland-Warblers, and wonderful sightings of the Barratt's Warbler. [Gryskopspeg, Rooibektiptol, Geelkeel- en Ruigtesanger].



Rose Clark

Our teepees and view



Sean Heurdt

Olive Bushshrike – Olyfboslaksman

Small river frogs chirped cheerily in between, and Pietro and Rose were intermittently renamed “Ronel” for the day by our guide!

After several hours of wonderful birding at Froggy Pond, we left for the nearby caves on adjacent Berlin forestry land in search of an elusive Barn Owl. [Nonnetjiesuil]. Sadly, we didn't get to see it but thoroughly enjoyed the scenic area where it resides within the sandstone caves. We spotted Black Saw-wings and Red-throated Wrynecks while we scanned the area. [Swartsaagvlerkswael, Draaihals]. From there, we drove to the famous Blue Swallow reserve (where no Blue Swallows reside anymore) but saw very few of the birds our guide was seeking... so we were a bit low on seeing birds but



Forest Canary – Gestrepte Kanarie



Sean Naudé

White-browed Robin-Chat – Heuglinjanfrederik

big on impressive views over the escarpment. We ended the day with another social evening around the fires discussing the special sightings of the day.

On Day 2, we left around 5:30 am to travel to Skagen bridge where we spent several hours above the rushing river. They have had plenty of rain, so the river was flowing fast and furiously. We had lovely sightings of White-browed Robin-chats, Collared Sunbirds, Green-backed Camaropteras, Chorister Robin-Chats, Knysna and Purple-crested Turacos, Common and Swee Waxbills. [Kortbeksuikerbekkie, Groenrugwêkwêvoël, Lawaaimakerjanfrederik, Knysna- en Bloukuifloerie, Rooibeksysis, Suidelike Swie].

Later in the day, we moved along a dust road near a railway line through dense bush and were chased off a property by an unfriendly resident. We took an alternative route with bumpy roads, and Hannes's bakkie picked up an interesting screeching noise that caused concern to its occupants. Aply assisted

by the other birds, it was decided that it wasn't anything too serious and fortunately the problem resolved itself in due course. We spent the afternoon walking within the Kaapsehoop area...strolling among the boulders to find Double-collared Sunbirds, Malachite Sunbirds – the first of the season... and the first Gurney's Sugarbird. [Groot-rooibandsuikerbekkie, Rooiborsuikervoël]. Atop of the boulders, Cape Rock-Thrushes were in abundance along with Buff-streaked Chats – amazing sightings everywhere of these beautiful birds. After sundowners at Silver Mist hotel, being entertained by Johan Gouws' unbelievable life stories, we ventured back to our camp to find that the donkey warming the water for showers had given up the ghost... and we needed to rely on gas... which allowed for intermittently hot and cold showers – all part of *Kaapsehoop Adventures!*

On Day 3, we started off down the Kaapsehoop pass towards Nelspruit and were rewarded with a stunning sunrise. We searched without luck for Red-backed Mannikins. We drove through macadamia farms finding Arrow-marked Babblers, White-fronted Bee-eaters, Holub's Golden Weavers, and African Green Pigeons and at a lovely dam on a nearby farm, we were rewarded with lovely sightings of White-backed Ducks, Black Crakes, Common Moorhen and Little Grebes. Brimstone Canaries and a Pied Kingfisher also made an appearance. As we drove back, an African Fish Eagle graced us with a fly-by over a nearby dam. [Roorugfret,



Sean Naudé

Purple-crested Turaco – Bloukuifloerie



Malachite Sunbird – Jangroentjie



Sean Naudé

Buff-streaked Chat – Bergklipwagter

Pylvekkatlagter, Rooikeelbyvreter, Goudwewer, Papegaaiduif, Witrugeend, Swartriethaan, Grootwaterhoender, Dobbertjie, Dikbekkanarie, Bontvisvanger, Visarend].

Some of the group opted for a glass of ice-cold wine at the Nagkantoor local pub while others returned to camp for a siesta. Some birders strolled during late afternoon through the Kaapsehoop boulders once again in search of the Malachite and Gurney's Sugarbirds. As storm clouds gathered on the horizon – we opted for another glass of wine rather than potentially getting wet while walking, and then headed back to camp to find our solar battery power exhausted by 7:30 pm. A bit problematic with all the devices and camera batteries that needed charging. So, it was early to bed in the

darkness for all our birders that evening. We realised how reliant one is on power these days and although it's laudable to be off the grid, it does come with constraints in times when things fail.

Day 4 broke as another beautiful day. We were blessed with several Mountain Wagtails [Bergkwikkie] in a nearby river as we set off on our morning drive towards Houtboschhoek. On the way to some beautiful cliff faces nearby, we had stunning sightings of a Long-crested Eagle and Olive Woodpeckers. [Gryskoppeg].

At the cliff, Peregrine Falcons were elusive but after bundu-bashing through thick undergrowth with prolific blackjacks, we were rewarded by Ashy Tits [Akasia-grysmees] and four different Bushshrikes



Cape Rock Thrush – Kaapse Kliplyster



Sean Naudé

White-backed Duck – Witrugeend

Seam Haurde



Long-crested Eagle – Langkuifarend

(Olive, Gorgeous, Orange-breasted, and Grey-headed). [Olyfboslaksman, Konkoit, Oranjeborsoslaksman en Spookvoël]. On this day, Bill was renamed “Ben” by our enthusiastic guide, now causing several of us to suffer from identity crises. After a scrumptious breakfast break at the foot of the cliffs, we set off for the Blue Swallow reserve to successfully track down a pair of Black-winged Lapwings that another birder had spotted earlier. [Grootswartvlerkkiewiet]. That was a lifer for several of us! Later that afternoon, a smaller sub-group set off to walk to the escarpment lookout and were rewarded with unbelievably stunning views over the Barberton valley and surrounding areas. Aloes scattered around were starting to flower, attracting the sunbirds and

the veld was alive with beautifully coloured wildflowers, resembling Spring veld rather than Autumn. After this “exhausting” stroll, we hastened back to the Bohemian Groove café for drinks and a selection of their delicious cheese-cakes and milk tart. Our final evening at camp was blessed with power – as well as homemade thin-based pizzas courtesy of our hosts, with a delightful selection of toppings back in the outdoor pizza oven. Absolutely delicious, and this turned the evening into quite a joyous occasion of stories and idle banter around a crackling fire. As we stumbled off to our tents, Ilse decided to visit William and Jan spontaneously in their tent – much to their surprise and delight. It was giggles all around as she found her way back to her own tent.

On the morning of Day 5, our guys ably assisted Stewart to start his bakkie as he needed to go back to White River to open his shop. Those who had not headed for home yet, did an unscheduled drive down the left side of the Blue Swallow reserve, and were rewarded with a flock of Cape Batises, as well as a Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher. [Kaapse Bosbontrokkie, Bloukuifvlieëvanger]. A few stragglers ended this wonderful weekend after giving heartfelt thanks to Johan Gouws for his excellent guiding by having a hearty breakfast at the Bohemian Groove café before driving back to Gauteng. All in all, an excellent weekend of birding all round. 🐦

Rose Clark



BLNG-members scanning the cliff face for Peregrine Falcon

Ocean wanderers: The Cape Gannets of the Malgas Island Pelican Watch

Sally Sivewright

A chorus of excited “*warra-warrra-warrra*” erupts from the bustling gannetry below: fishing parties returning, circling aeroplane-style overhead, while the grounded birds, necks stretching skywards, search the slate-coloured clouds for the arrival of their partners. My senses are engulfed by the scene surrounding me – the colony in a constant state of motion as partners bow and preen in greeting; the sky swirling with Cape gannets elegantly coming into land. Dropping effortlessly, almost angel-like, from above is, however, where their gracefulness ends. I am struck by the harsh contrast of their final contact with the ground. Their epic journeys of up to 240 km daily in search of churning baitballs, the speed and precision of their plunge-diving displays, and the streamlined curves of their silhouettes clash jarringly with their clumsy crashlandings as they faceplant into the guano-covered earth.

As a SANParks Honorary Ranger, I have the privilege of doing duty in in South Africa’s incredible nature reserves and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and as such, recently spent a week with the gannet colony on Malgas Island as part of the Pelican Watch Programme. The programme is a SANParks management strategy that was launched in 2007 with the aim of alleviating the catastrophic impact on the breeding success of Cape Cormorants (Jutten Island) and Cape Gannets (Malgas Island) caused by the Great White Pelican predation on young chicks and eggs. This species of pelican is primarily a freshwater-fish eater and seabirds have historically not formed part of their diet outside of their southern African range. In the past there had been occasional reporting of pelicans preying on seabird chicks within this region, but this relatively uncommon phenomenon did not pose a threat to the populations of species that were taken.

Until the breeding season of 2005/06 that is, when the pelican predation on West Coast seabird breeding colonies intensified.

Driven by an expansion in the pelican population, because of the safe breeding environment on Dassen Island, seabird predations have increased at an alarming rate and, because cormorants and gannets (their main prey species) are already under severe stress from commercial overfishing, this additional load on their numbers threatens their survival on the Cape’s West Coast.

The 2006/07 breeding season was disastrous for West Coast seabirds with a total failure of the breeding effort of the Cape Cormorant, Swift Tern and Kelp Gull colonies on several offshore islands. Pelican predation on these seabird species sees a sharp increase during their breeding season, in response to the increased energy needs experienced while raising chicks between October and January/February. Hence the establishment of the Pelican Watch Programme on Malgas Island, a key breeding colony for a seabird already under severe stress from overfishing, during this time. It is clear when viewing old photos of the Malgas colony that the gannetry on this outpost has



Sally Sivewright

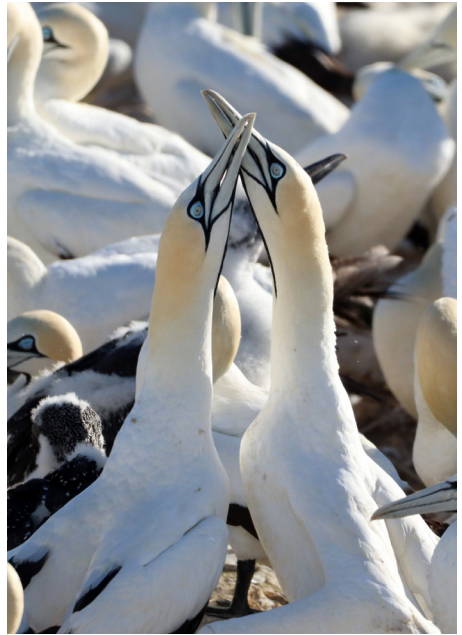
Cape Gannet – Malgas Island

substantially shrunk over recent years. The overall gannet population has decreased by more than 50% over the last 60 years, due to a calamitous blend of a south-eastward shift in prey distribution (resulting in a mismatch in the distributions of breeding localities and prey) and the competition with the South African purse-seine fishery for anchovy and sardine (Sherley *et al.* 2019).

Teams of SANParks rangers and volunteers work from dawn to dusk for their seven-day duty shift of reducing this predation pressure and so allowing as many Cape Cormorant and Cape Gannet chicks to fledge as possible. The effectiveness of the Pelican Watch chasers was demonstrated through a study carried out on Jutten Island during the 2007/08 breeding season. Breeding success was monitored by splitting the island into two zones- a 'pelican-free area' (landing pelicans were actively chased) and a "pelican territory" (pelicans were left undisturbed). Results showed that 0.72 Cape cormorant chicks fledged per nest (within normal fledging rates for this species) in the "pelican-free area" whereas no Cape cormorant chicks survived in the "pelican territory".

Volunteers now ensure that both islands are "pelican-free areas" by being on watch for a twelve-hour shift and chasing off any landing pelicans for the duration of breeding season, with mornings starting at 4 am.

The overexploitation of marine resources is causing irreparable damage to ecosystems which are already under great strain from threats such as climate change, habitat loss and pollution. This became a standard topic during our mealtimes on Malgas – human behaviour has directly and indirectly resulted in so many ecological disasters. Is it too late now to undo




Sally Siewright

Cape Gannet - Malgas Island

the already done?

Our days that week were filled with watching the gannet colony, which was mesmerising – individuals blurring into one body of perpetual motion as they arrive from and depart on fishing expeditions; recording sightings, swimming in bone-chilling water, seeing a pod of humpback whales, fur seals, kelp gulls, dusky dolphins and some of the most dramatic sunsets that I've ever seen.

On day eight, after an early morning patrol and a last couple of tower-top monitoring sessions, we cleaned and packed, readying the house to welcome the next shift of Watchers. We begrudgingly departed the island, on a calm sea, all quite sad to leave a place that had become so special to us. No doubt about it, we will be back.

To read the full account, visit <https://scientistinlimbo.com/2022/04/25/ocean-wanderers-the-cape-gannets-of-the-malgas-island-pelican-watch/> 



BirdLife Northern Gauteng Secretarybird: Monthly movement report

Dr Christiaan W. Brink
2022-05-10

BirdLife South Africa's Secretarybird Project Background

The Secretarybird is a charismatic and familiar species and uses a variety of habitats across its range in sub-Saharan Africa. It occurs in all nine provinces in South Africa. The Secretarybird is assigned to its own family, Sagittariidae – an endemic African family found nowhere else on earth.

In South Africa there is considerable concern about the conservation status of the species. A preliminary analysis of SABAP1 and SABAP2 data shows a considerable reduction in the areas this species previously occupied. This is probably mostly due to habitat loss and habitat degradation, but other threats such as power lines collisions are also taking their toll.

BirdLife South Africa's Secretarybird Project started in 2011, with the initial main aim of obtaining movement data for immature and

adult birds and to identify and implement priority conservation actions for Secretarybirds and larger ecosystems.

The second phase of this study investigates the habitat requirements of Secretarybirds, differences in birds foraging in different habitats, and climate change. To enable this, additional Secretarybirds have been added to the tracking study, some with devices sponsored by BirdLife Northern Gauteng.

BLiNG2

BLiNG2 is a male Secretarybird whose device was fitted while he was still a chick on its nest on 2021/12/21 on Sondela Nature Reserve near Bela-Bela, Limpopo. Since the deployment of his device BLiNG2 has travelled roughly 715.76 km (Figure 1 & 2).

The following photographs by Laetitia Steynberg were taken at Sondela during the fitting of the tracker.



Laetitia Steynberg

Protective gloves are needed to avoid painful pecks and pricks from thorns



Pre-assessment: Obtaining measurements and other checks



Laetitia Steynberg

The tracking device is fitted and the chick ringed



The chick is returned to its nest

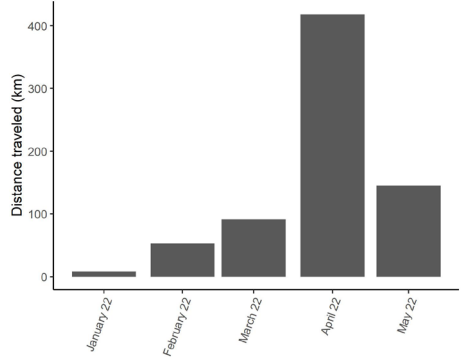


Figure 2: Monthly total distances travelled by BLiNG2 since his device deployment

Egoli

Egoli's tracking device was sponsored by BLNG, who also gave him his name. Egoli is a male Secretarybird whose device was fitted while he was still a chick on his nest on 2021/09/09 near Heidelberg, Gauteng. Since the deployment of his device Egoli has travelled roughly 2778.93 km (Figure 3 & 4).

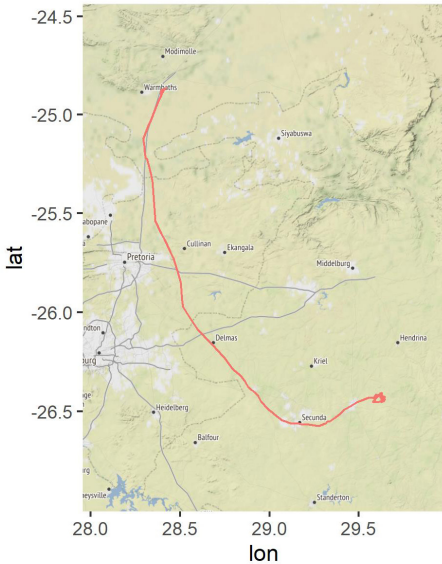


Figure 1: Movements of the Secretarybird, BLiNG2, since the deployment of his device at his nest site in Sondela Nature Reserve, Limpopo

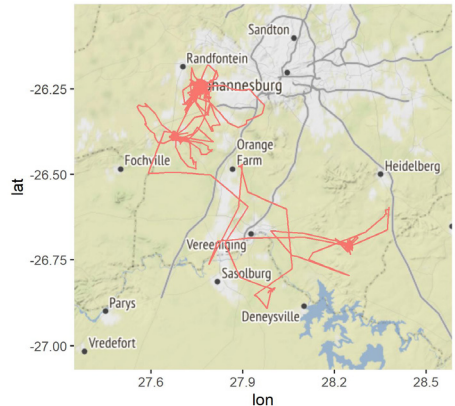


Figure 3: Movements of the Secretarybird, Egoli, since the deployment of his device at his nest site near Heidelberg, Gauteng

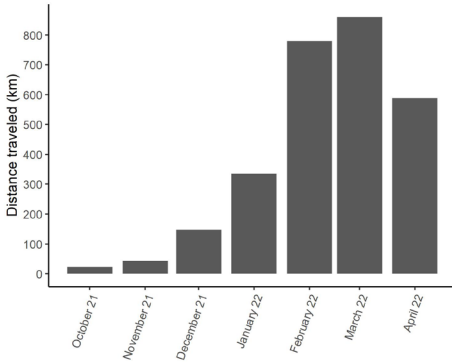


Figure 4: Monthly total distances travelled by Egotli since his device deployment

Nico

Nico is a male Secretarybird whose device was fitted while he was still a chick on his nest on 2021/12/16 in Randfontein, Gauteng. Since the deployment of his device Nico has travelled roughly 1642.93 km (Figure 5 & 6). His proximity to Soweto puts him in particular danger of flying into power lines or fences and it is hoped Nico will soon move to rural areas where there are more open spaces.

We are grateful to the many partners and sponsors of the BirdLife South Africa Secretarybird Project including the Ingula Partnership, Nick and Jane Prentice, Francois van der Merwe, Laetitia Steynberg, BirdLife Northern Gauteng, and Ekapa Minerals. We are also grateful to the landowners, supporters and collaborators of this project including Dr Patrik Byholm, Craig Natrass, Craig Whittington-Jones, Conservation Outcomes, Brent Coverdale and Dawie de Swardt.

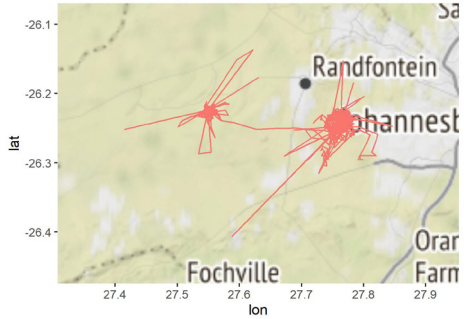


Figure 5: Movements of the Secretarybird, Nico, since the deployment of his device at his nest site near Randfontein, Gauteng

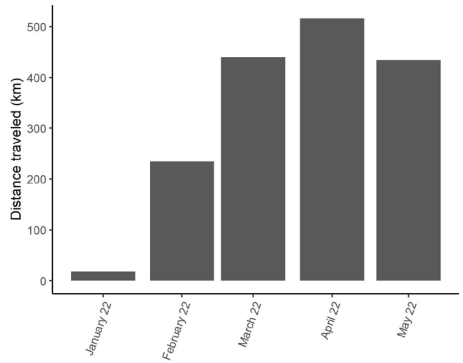


Figure 6: Monthly total distances travelled by Nico since his device deployment

SANBI

The South African National Biodiversity Institute leads and coordinates research and monitors and reports on the state of biodiversity in South Africa. It provides knowledge and information, gives planning and policy advice and pilots best-practice management models in partnership with stakeholders. SANBI engages in ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation, leads the human capital development strategy of the sector and manages the National Botanical Gardens as 'windows' to South Africa's biodiversity for enjoyment and education.

Migration in a time of war: through the battle zone

Les Underhill

During late-April and May, and again in August and September, Curlew Sandpipers, and lots of other migrant waders, migrate through Ukraine. They will be joined by many passerine migrants, such as the warblers. There will also be some of the migrant raptors, such as Common Buzzard and the big eagles (such as Lesser Spotted Eagle), and the small falcons (such as Lesser Kestrel). They will be on their way to or from their breeding grounds in the Russian tundra, the taiga and the steppes.

Most Curlew Sandpipers breed in a relatively small area in northern Asia, the tundra zone of northern Siberia. They don't spend long on their breeding grounds. They arrive near the beginning of the thaw, in June, and they leave at the end of July/beginning of August, when cold and snow return.

Once on the breeding grounds, there is quite a lot of variability in the start of egg-laying due to inter-year fluctuations in the timing of the thaw. The incubation period is 20 days, and the

fledging period is an incredibly short 15 days. So the period from laying eggs to independent young is little more than a month. Males play no role in incubation and chick-rearing, so they leave on southwards migration around the end of June. Females leave as soon as their chicks have fledged. These immature birds head south a week or two later, without parental guidance! This ordering of migration is observed at bird ringing stations on the migration route: males first, then females, and finally the juveniles.

After the breeding season, arrival on migration at the southern end of Africa starts near the end of September, and numbers at wetlands build up in October-November.

Not all birds migrating from their non-breeding grounds in Africa to and from the breeding areas in Siberia follow the same route. But the total number of really good wetlands for refuelling on their route is small.

One of the best is the Sivash, in the disputed territory of the Crimean Peninsula, in the Ukraine. Sivash is a great refuelling site. It is a complex area of shallow lagoons with extensive areas of mud and sand becoming available, pending wind direction which changes daily.

In studies which started in 1974, it is known that northward passage of birds through the Sivash starts in mid-April. Peak migration is in the period 11-20 May, and it tapers off by the end of the month. From mid-June, some of the males will be leaving again on their southwards migration, followed by females and juveniles in the months thereafter.

So in a few weeks, birds, probably counted in millions, are going to migrate through the battle zones of the eastern half of Ukraine. It will be migration in a time of war. We simply have no idea of whether the habitats they used in May and will use again have been impacted by military activity.



This Curlew Sandpiper was in full breeding plumage in Richard's Bay, South Africa, and would have been about to leave for the breeding grounds. (BirdPix_CuSa_25818_crop_Richard_Johnson)

The media coverage of armed conflict and war rightly tends to focus on the humanitarian impacts. But it is important to grasp that war also has impacts on biodiversity. The land over which the war is fought is frequently degraded (think defoliants, bomb craters, soil compaction and chemical contamination from weapons such as tanks), so that important habitats are damaged and species loss accelerated. Conservation initiatives fall by the wayside. Research stops. In some parts of the world,

war leads to increases in wildlife poaching and human encroachment on protected areas. Sadly, the impacts of war on biodiversity are so widespread (and so poorly understood) that a subdiscipline of ecology known as “warfare ecology” has come into existence. (Machlis, G.E. & Hanson, T. 2008. Warfare ecology. *BioScience* 58: 729–736).

<http://thebdi.org/2022/04/07/migration-in-a-time-of-war-through-the-battle-zone/> 🐦

FIND THE SINGER: Simple tricks that will help you locate a singing bird

Spring is the season for birdsong but seeing the singer can sometimes be a challenge. Here are simple tricks that will help you locate a singing bird.

Our brain determines the direction of a noise based on when the sound reaches each ear. A sound coming from the right will reach your right ear a fraction of a second sooner than your left ear. Your brain calculates the difference and pinpoints the direction. Listen to a singing bird for a minute or two and focus on direction. You can often get a better fix by turning your head, rather than holding it still. If you think a sound is coming from one direction, turn your head slightly and see if the sound remains where you expect it.

If the bird is moving as it sings, finding it will rely mostly on catching a glimpse of movement. If the bird seems to be stationary, chances are good it is on a favourite perch and will stay for several minutes or even longer. In that case, you can try to locate it by gathering more information on distance and height.

To determine distance, try using a technique known as triangulation. Listen from one spot, get a precise fix on the direction, and take note of landmarks along the line between you and where you think the bird might be — a distinctive tree trunk or bush, for example. Then move 10-20 feet to either side, pinpoint the direction of the singing bird again, and look along that line, checking against the landmarks from the first line. The point where the new line crosses the old one should mark the location of the bird. It will also give you an idea of the distance.

To determine the height of a sound, use your brain’s natural directional ability again, but turn it on its side. Face the sound and then lean sideways so that your head is horizontal. In that position, the lag between the sound reaching your two ears will tell you the vertical direction of the bird, rather than the horizontal direction. Finally, anticipating the location of the singer is one of the most useful skills to develop. It will come with practice; the more you learn, the more you will see.

<https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/birds/david-sibleys-id-toolkit/>



The ugly me that I don't want to see...

Adam Cruickshank

Ronald Reagan: *"We must have the courage to do what we know is morally right."*

The call of the Red-chested Flufftail ran out steadily through the valley in the middle of a local farm.

Eyes were glued on the area where it hopefully would show itself. Just a quick glance would suffice. A tick for a list. A photo for the 'gram'.

'Chee-ya, Chee-ya' – the call continued. A soundtrack. Waiting for the star of the show to emerge. The resulting photo would bring that rush of dopamine as the likes and comments flood in on social media.

I would love to say that the call was from the bird. I would love to say that it was all natural. But, instead, it blasted from a small army green Bluetooth speaker. The call played again and again. The sound was a lot less like a flufftail, and instead screamed out loud like some oversized prehistoric bird looking for an opportunity to find a mate and 'multiply after its own kind'.

I would have loved to have taken to social media and taken the opportunity to name and shame this horrendous birder. *'Put the birds first'* would have been my virtuous post. A smug self-righteous look would have been glancing at the screen.

The problem is...that horrendous birder – that self-absorbed 'no-gooder' was me!

Hopefully, I have grown since then and matured as a birder. Hopefully, I can say that lessons have been learnt over time. But I am honest, there are times when my enthusiasm to see a bird and get that 'National Geographic' photo, have caused me to step over lines that I should not have as a birder.

The term 'ethical birding' is thrown around quite often in birding circles – and deep down inside many birders know that this is something that is important. Birdlife South Africa's Birding Code of Ethics says the following, *'advise birders*

to put the interests of the birds first at all times.'

The problem is that most birders will nod their head in agreement with that notion that birds, and their well-being should be always put first. But all too often in the field – the beliefs of birders do not always line up to their behaviour. Now before you get ready to send me a nasty comment – I am not directing this article at the reader, instead I am directing this at myself.

The 'mine-field' of ethical birding is sometimes decimated with the desire to get that next tick and a photo that will notch up likes on Instagram. The only way that we will start to see ethical birding becoming a reality, is where we stop looking at what everyone else is doing wrong, and we examine our own behaviour.

I know people that say that they are against the use of call back and have given me a hard time when they heard that I had used it, but have used it when they needed a bird for their list. All too often the 'rules' are bent when they are convenient – and if you were to challenge these birders, they would justify their behaviour with a petty excuse.

But like I have said, this is not an email to point fingers at others, instead a self-examination. Where have I gone wrong? Where have I bent the 'rules'? When had my behaviour not represented the birding community well?

Ethical birding will not happen on Facebook and the battle will not be 'won' behind the keyboard. Instead, it will happen when each one of us takes the time to look at ourselves and our birding habits. What changes do we need to make?

Ethical birding is a lot more complex than just the use of call back – it involves things such as flushing birds, the use of artificial light for filming and photography, laser pointers, our carbon footprint as birders (something to think

about before that next twitch), and getting proper permission from landowners before assessing their property (to some time to read The Birding Life South Africa Code of Ethics - <https://www.birdlife.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/BirdLife-South-Africa-Birding-Code-of-Ethics-Position-Statement.pdf>).

It's easy to restrict ethical birding to those areas that we feel we can conform to and agree with – but when one looks at the full scope of what it covers – all of a sudden, we may all have areas that we need to look at and address. Ethical birding starts with me – and well, it starts with you. What areas do you need to change and address in your own birding journey?

There may be some readers that 'have it all together' – but I am birder on a journey. Trying to be as honest as I can about what I need to work out. Will I always get it right? Probably not, but I am going to do my best to practice ethical birding.

For a start, if you are going to use playback, here are six important tips

- Don't play the call excessively – most birds do not call continuously, so playing the call over and over does not sound natural to the birds. Play it a few times and then stop.
- Don't play call back in the breeding season or near nesting sites. Don't use call back for critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable or near-threatened species. This can distract the birds from other important parental duties, cause them to burn vital energy reserves, and leave eggs or chicks vulnerable to predators waiting nearby for just such an opportunity.
- Watch the bird – stop using call back if you see the bird is getting agitated. Imagine a bird that is repeatedly called in throughout a day, every day, for weeks on end. Think about the energy demands that puts on the bird, and the interruption to its daily rhythms and important life processes like feeding or tending to family.
- Don't blast the call through speakers – play the call back at the same volume or softer than the bird would use to call.
- Respect other birders around you – before using play back, make sure that the birders around you are okay with it being used.
- In many areas, such as national parks and national wildlife refuges, the use of recordings is illegal.

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info@thebirdinglife.com 

WANING WATERBIRDS

Waterbirds, which are dependent on freshwater and estuarine ecosystems for foraging, tend to be excellent indicators of the health of the ecosystems upon which they depend. Encouragingly, there has been a small decrease in the number of waterbirds considered to be threatened since the 2000 regional Red List assessment, with just 20 (13%) of the 141 members of this group falling within the threatened or Near Threatened categories. The genuine change in status of certain species such as the near-endemic African Black Oystercatcher are encouraging and, in contrast to the other groups examined, the proportion of Vulnerable and Endangered species is more in line with what one would predict. While there has been some improvement some worrying trends are, however, coming to light. Some species are restricted to very few breeding locations (e.g. Yellow-billed Stork, Pink-backed Pelican), which make them intrinsically vulnerable to detrimental change.

<https://www.birdlife.org.za/media-and-resources/state-of-south-africas-bird-report/>

BLGN-ringershoekie 2022 (2)

Feather River, tussen Sabie en Graskop (17-20 Feb) (o.l.v. Chris du Plooy)

Chris skryf: *Dankie aan Bernardus Meyer en SAPPI vir die geleentheid om daar te mag ring. Met die weer in ag geneem en dat dit baie nat was, is die 119 nuutgeringde voëls, 25 'retraps' en 'n totaal van 144 voëls nie te sleg nie. Indrukwekkend is die 37 spesies met nuwe ringe vir die naweek! 'Retraps' was 17.4%, wat omtrent elke vyfde voëltjie was. Dankie aan almal wat bygewoon het en wat dit net 'n plesier gemaak het! Tot 'n volgende keer!*

Net tien A-ringers en een C-ringer het hierdie plantasie, wat tussen Sabie en Graskop geleë is, besoek. 'n Plantasie is baie geskik om voëls in te ring, omdat die plantasie-eienaars verplig is om 'n sekere persentasie van die inheemse woud ongeskonde te laat. Dit was die natste wat ons hierdie ringplek nog beleef het. Dit het die eerste dag so gereën dat ons glad nie kon nette opsit nie. Die tweede dag het dit nog gedrup, maar ons kon darem die nette langs die rivier gaan opslaan. Alhoewel die grond deurweek was, was die paaië teen die berg af gangbaar. Ons het teen twaalfuur die nette afgeslaan en probeer terug ry – berg op. Dit het nie gewerk nie – ons het vasgesit ten spyte van een 4x4-voertuig en twee ander bakkies wat toegerus is met “dif locks”. Arrie Klopper het noodgedwonge twee van die bakkies in trurat terugbeweeg tot waar ons kon omdraai om 'n ompad terug huis toe te kry. Maar die tweede dwaling was toe erger as die eerste – daar was 'n boom wat die pad versper het! Boonop het ons nie selfoonontvangs gehad nie, so ons kon nie hulp ontbied nie. Dit was net 'n bestiering dat Martin Steyn net die vorige week 'n saag gekoop het om permanent in sy bakkie te laat. Met baie manne- en vrouekrag is die boom afgesaag en uit die pad verwyder en kon ons die ompad aandurf. Dit het ons 10 km anderkant Graskop by 'n teerpad uitgebring, waarmee ons kon terugry na ons blyplek – 40 km ver.

Interessante spesies was: Bosjakkalsvoël (Forest Buzzard), Kaneelduifie (Lemon Dove),

Swart- en Witkruiswindswael (African Black and White-rumped Swift), Bosloerie (Narina Trogon), Blouvisvanger (Half-collared Kingfisher), Boskrapper (Terrestrial Brownbul), Geelstreepboskruiper en Gewone Willie (Yellow-streaked and Sombre Greenbul), Lawaaimaker- en Witkoljanfrederik (Chorister Robin-Chat and White-starred Robin), Olyflyster (Olive Thrush), Bloukuiwiefvanger (Blue-mantled Crested-Flycatcher) en Groenkolpensie (Green Twinspot). Die voël wat die volopste was, was die Kaapse Glasogie (Cape White-eye) met agtien voëls en tweede die Klein-rooibandsuikerbekkie (Southern Double-collared Sunbird) met nie minder nie as twaalf individue wat gevang is.

Botaniese Tuine (2 April) o.l.v. Paula Steyn

Tien A-ringers en twee C-ringers het hierdie lieflike herfsdag in die natuur meegemaak. Die getalle was goed. Die totaal vir die dag was 171 voëls wat hanteer is. Dit verteenwoordig 29 spesies en 17 voëls wat weer gevang is. Hervangspersentasie was 9,9%. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked-Weaver) was die meeste met 32 voëls en die Gewone Janfrederikke (Cape Robin-Chat) tweede met agtien in totaal. Ons was teleurgesteld om twaalf Indiese Spreeus (Common Myna) ook te vang. Heeltemal te veel vir so 'n klein reservaat!

Ander mooi spesies was: Rooi- en Geelbeklyster (Kurrichane and Karoo Thrush), Fiskaallaksman (Fiscal Flycatcher), Bosveldstompstert (Long-billed Crombec), Pylvlekkatlagter (Arrow-marked Babbler), Gewone Fret (Bronze Mannikin) en Gevlekte Muisvoël (Speckled Mousebird).

Wilton Valley, anderkant Lephale (6-11 April) o.l.v. Elba Swart

Die groep het 'n baie suksesvolle ring-naweek op hierdie wildsplaas naby die Limpoporivier en omgewing gehad.

In totaal het ons 230 voëls hanteer, waarvan 56 verskillende spesies, wat 'n fantastiese verskeidenheid is.

Natuurlik was die Rooibekkeleas (Red-billed Qwelea) die meeste. Ons het darem die groot gros gemis en net 32 gevang. Namakwa-duifies (Namaqua Dove) was tweede met 26 en dan die 14 Bleeksingvalke (Pale Chanting Goshawk). Dis 'n eerste keer dat 'n roofvoël-spesie in die top drie is!! Die hervangpersentasie was maar laag – net 1,3%. Dit is omdat ons nie so dikwels daar ring nie – net so een keer per jaar.

Ander goeie spesies was: Gevlekte - en Dubbelbandsandpatrys (Burchell's and Double-banded Sandgrouse), Bronsvlerkdrawwertjie (Bronze-winged Courser), Roofarend (Tawny Eagle) en Groenrugreier (Green-backed Heron).

Wolffhuiskraal, naby Pienaarsrivier (8-10 April) o.l.v. Wanda Louwrens

Daar is 80% reën voorspel vir die naweek, maar ons positiewe denke het ons aangespoor om tog te gaan. Dit het die hele naweek gereën! Ons het nie eers een net opgesit nie. Ons maak dit toe maar 'n lekker kuernaweek – ons het gesels, geëet en geslaap! Saterdagand het ons onder die gazebo's gebraai – want eet moes ons eet!

Een aand het die jonges van gees tot gery vir nagvoëls en vier voëls gekry – drie Gewone Dikkoppe (Spotted Thick-knee) en een Bronsvlerkdrawwertjie (Bronze-winged Courser) is weer gevang. Om nagvoëls te vang is weer 'n ander tegniek. Ons ry op die plaaspaai en sodra daar 'n voël in die pad gewaar word, word die voertuig se ligte afgeskakel, terwyl die motor bly lui. Een persoon, gewoonlik Julian, sal dan met skepnet en flits in die hand die voël bekrui. Die flitslig word ongeveer 'n meter van die voël af geskyn. Terwyl die voël na die lig kyk, kan mens die skepnet net oor die voël plaas. En siedaar! Dit is gevang! Dan word dit geweeg en gemeet en weer laat los.

Hervangste? Doen dit enige skade aan 'n voël!

Vir die soveelste keer is 'n Gewone Janfrederik (Cape Robin-Chat) weer by Strubendam gevang deur Leon Lötter. Die verslag op Safring se webblad (hieronder) wys dat hierdie

Ring	Code	Date	Species	Ringer	Age	Sex	Mark	Condition	Location Code
FB91384	1	2016-02-20	Robin-Chat, Cape (Cossypha caffra)	Mrs M Pienaar	4	0	0	0	25-46S2816E
FB91384	2	2016-12-21	Robin-Chat, Cape (Cossypha caffra)	Mrs M Pienaar	4	0	0	0	25-46S2816E
FB91384	2	2017-12-23	Robin-Chat, Cape (Cossypha caffra)	Mr JF du Plooy	4	0	0	0	25-46S2816E
FB91384	2	2018-02-24	Robin-Chat, Cape (Cossypha caffra)	Mrs W Louwrens	4	0	0	0	25-46S2816E
FB91384	2	2018-09-01	Robin-Chat, Cape (Cossypha caffra)	Mr GJ Opperman Snr	4	0	0	0	25-46S2816E
FB91384	2	2019-11-16	Robin-Chat, Cape (Cossypha caffra)	Mr JF du Plooy	4	0	0	0	25-46S2816E
FB91384	2	2020-03-14	Robin-Chat, Cape (Cossypha caffra)	Christo Siebert	4	0	0	0	25-46S2816E



Wanda Louwrens

Lucia Lotter met 'n Blouvisvanger wat by Strubendam gering is



'n Grootrietsanger by Strubendam

Janfrederik met ringnommer FB91 384, sedert Februarie 2016 nou al sewe keer weer gevang is en toe was dit alreeds 'n volwasse voël (die "4" onder die opskrif "Age" dui op 'n volwasse voël). En die voël is gesond! Net nog 'n bewys dat die vang van voëls selde skade doen aan die voël se welstand!

Half-collared Kingfisher at Moreleta Kloof Nature Reserve?

On the 25th of April 2022 Christo Siebert from the ringing group at BLNG wrote this letter to Kim at SAFRING (South Africa Bird Ringing Unit) at the University of Cape Town (SAFRING administer our rings and keep up the website):
*Dear Safring Team,
 The Functional Head: Nature Conservation at the City of Tshwane, is currently busy with an application to have Moreleta Kloof reserve, situated on the eastern side of Pretoria, proclaimed. As part of the process, they are currently drawing up amongst others, a list of birds ringed in the reserve. According to one of the department's officials, a Half-collared Kingfisher (Blouvisvanger) was ringed there in the distant past.*

I have been ringing actively at Moreleta Kloof with Bird Life Northern Gauteng (BLNG) since

2010 and have no recollection of a Half-collared Kingfisher being ringed there during this period. The same applies to a few of our ringers that have been ringing there over a longer period.

Is it at all possible to determine whether there are any records of a Half-collared Kingfisher being ringed at Moreleta Kloof in the distant past? Any assistance will be much appreciated.

*I look forward to your comments.
 Regards, Christo Siebert*

Her reply came on the 5th of May:
Dear Christo, I have just checked our records and I found one record, Ring number: E44310: https://safring.birdmap.africa/ring_info.php?ring=E44310&project=SAFRING

Let me know if you are not able to access the link.

I hope I haven't missed anything because the location was called by a different name. I searched everything that contained 'Moreleta'.

Warm regards, Kim

The link reflected the following info:
 E44310, 2009-01-17, Half-collared Kingfisher, Mr S van Stuyvenberg, 2548S 2817E, Moreleta Kloof Nature Reserve.

Christo looked at the link and answered the same day:

Perfect – thank you. I met the specific ringer Mr S van Stuyvenberg during a ringing session when I joined BLNG 12 years ago. He left the club shortly thereafter.

I am sure that Tshwane’s Nature Conservation sector will be happy to confirm a Half-collared Kingfisher being ringed at Moreleta Kloof Nature Reserve.

Best wishes, Christo

Voortrekkermonument, 23 April (o.l.v. Martin Steyn)

Agt A-ringers en vyf C-ringers het op hierdie wintersoggend die koue trotseer en nette opgesit by hierdie historiese plek – en dit teen vieruur die oggend! Party nette is langs die pad opgeslaan en ander weer op die koppie oorkant die nisse. Die werkstasie was langs die toilette naby die nisse ingerig. Dr. Danie Langner, Besturende Direkteur van die Voortrekkermonument het toestemming gegee dat ons daar mag ring. (Ons het ook ringpermitte van Gauteng Natuurbewaring.)

Ons kry dikwels besoek van die publiek. Op dié dag het Marné Scholtz, Kommunikasie-beampte by die FAK, ook kom inloer by die ringers om te kom kyk wat ons doen. Annette Boshoff het ook kom gesels.

Daar is 211 voëls aangekeer, wat 31 spesies verteenwoordig. Die hervangpersentasie was 5,2%, want daar is 11 voëls weer gevang. Dit was die dag vir Swartoogtiptolle (Dark-capped Bulbul) – nie minder nie as 53 voëls is in die nette gevang. Nie ver agter nie was die Kaapse Glasogie met 41 individue.

Arrie Klopper het vir die eerste keer ‘n Geelbekbosduif (African Olive-Pigeon) by die Monument gevang.

Ander goeie spesies was: Kleinglansspreeu (Cape Starling), Witkeeljanfrederik (White-throated Robin-Chat), Geelblestinker (Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird), Klein- en Grootheuningwyser (Lesser - and Greater Honeyguide) en Rooikeelflap (Red-collared Widowbird). 🐦



Wanda Louwrens

Arrie Kloppers by die Geelbekbosduif wat by die Voortrekkermonument gering is



Arrie Kloppers

Elba met ‘n Blouvalk

Iris colour in birds

Compiled by Ivonne Coetzee



Ivonne Coetzee

Pied Starling – Witgatspreeu



Pieter Heiliga

Cape Gannet – Witmalgas

When I put together the stunning photographs for our first competition, I became intrigued by the reasons and functions of iris colour in birds. An article on this topic appeared in the March/April edition of *African Birdlife*, “The Eyes have it”, offering some, but not nearly all, answers to this question.

The colour of a bird’s eye results from both pigments and diffraction of light. Colours range from dark brown and yellow through red, blue, and green to metallic silver and gold. In some species, eye colour changes as the bird matures. In some species the bare pigmented skin surrounding the eye (sclera) are other ways of highlighting eye colour, such as in helmetshrikes.

Most birds have a brownish iris, but brightly coloured pigments in the irises of many birds make the eye more conspicuous. An initial survey of iris colouration in passerine birds showed that a brightly pigmented iris is much more common in southern African and Australian birds, than in those from Europe, temperate North America, and Venezuela.

A coloured iris was correlated with ground feeding or cooperative breeding in some groups, such as starlings and weavers. The

Pied Starling is a cooperative breeder, in which normally only adults breed, while juveniles and subadults fill the role of helpers. Other southern African species known to be cooperative breeders also have brightly coloured irises: Cape and Pale-winged Starling, as are the Yellow-billed Oxpecker and Red-billed Oxpecker.

In weavers with a coloured iris, the colour of the head is always darker than the iris, while a dark iris is typically combined with a head that is lighter in colour. Thus, the eye is usually conspicuous. Habitat, feeding, social system and breeding in this family show strong correlations, so it is not surprising that iris colour is correlated with all four traits. Eyes are commonly pale in perched feeders, red in ‘gleaners’, and dark in ground-feeding species. In South Africa there is a strong correlation between pale eyes and pale-coloured bills in females or non-breeding males.

There are other monogamous birds in which the sexes do not differ in plumage but are dimorphic in iris colour, such as the Saddle-billed Stork, in which the male has dark eyes and the female a bright yellow iris.

A brightly coloured iris contrasting with the surrounding head area may serve as a ‘badge’



Greater Blue-eared Starling
– *Groot-blouoorglanspreeu*



Mama Buys

Red-billed Oxpecker – *Rooibekrenostervoël*

that distinguishes age class, or as a variable signal during social interactions.

However, despite descriptive information for many bird species, the functions of iris colouration and that of the surrounding sclera remain mostly unclear. More information may

be found at the links below.

<https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC96183>

https://web.stanford.edu/group/stanfordbirds/text/essays/Eye_Color.html

AFRICAN GRASS OWL

The African Grass Owl is a habitat specialist restricted to open, grassy marshes, wetlands and floodplains. It is estimated that there are fewer than 5 000 of these secretive birds left in southern Africa. Pressures such as unfavourable burning and grazing regimes, habitat transformation, road casualties and entanglement with fences put severe pressure on this species. The Endangered Wildlife Trust initiated work on this nocturnal predator in order to address growing concern about habitat decline and the current lack of knowledge with regard to managing Highveld grasslands for this threatened species. Coal mine rehabilitation sites represent a potential tool for the restoration of African Grass Owl habitat and may be very important for the future conservation of this species in light of the current prominence of coal mining on Highveld grasslands. This project therefore aims to investigate the requirements of the African Grass Owl with respect to habitat use and diet where they occur naturally on Highveld grasslands in order to compare and assess the current state of various coal mine rehabilitation sites as potential Grass Owl habitat. Ultimately, the project aims to develop habitat management guidelines and propose practices that would encourage the re-establishment of African Grass Owl populations and ensure their persistence on such sites.

<https://www.birdlife.org.za/media-and-resources/state-of-south-africas-bird-report/>

KOMPETISIE 1

Identifiseer die spesies waarby die oë pas . Stuur jou antwoorde, genommer soos die foto's, aan lanariuseditor@blng.co.za.

Foto's: Marna Buys

COMPETITION 1

Identify the bird species to which these eyes belong. Send your answers, numbered according to the numbers of the photographs, to lanariuseditor@blng.co.za



Sea Pie in Plett

Don Reid

Sea Pie?

If I have touched your curiosity button and you are wondering what an article about culinary matters is doing in a birding magazine, let me set things straight right away. I was looking for some background information about the bird which was the subject of my recent twitch of a rarity and my extensive research (OK, I just googled a bit) came up with something unexpected.....

The bird in question is the Eurasian Oystercatcher, the unexpected fact is that the Oystercatcher was originally known as the "Sea Pie" but was renamed in the 1730s when a naturalist observed one eating oysters. The name "Sea Pie" seems to be a shortened form of Sea Magpie, due to its pied (black and white) appearance, (not applicable to our better known African Black Oystercatcher which has all black plumage).

Just a little background

At the risk of boring you, let me mention my criteria for contemplating a twitch of a rarity: if the rarity in question is within maximum 2 hours travel time by car from where I happen to be, I will consider going for it. I have been known to break this rule now and again, so let's just say it is a guideline rather than a rule.

Once again, the trigger came from the SA Rare Bird News report (SARBN) which is published by Trevor Hardaker twice a week with updates in between – in this case it was the report of 3 December 2021 that piqued my interest with a report of a Eurasian Oystercatcher on the Keurbooms River estuary at Plettenberg Bay in the southern Cape.

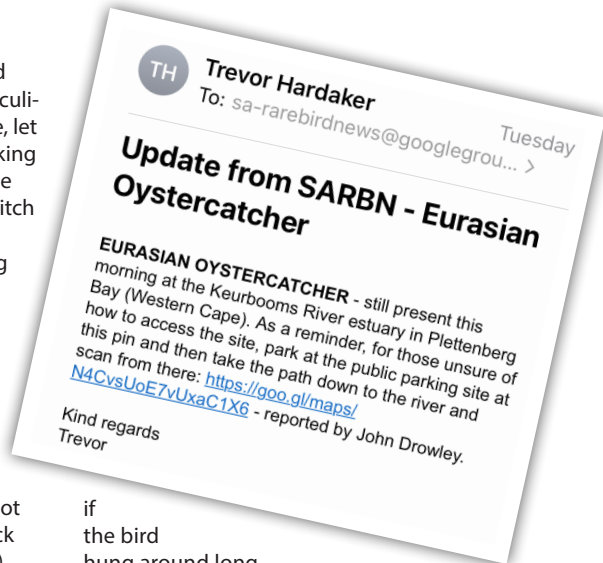
We were still in Pretoria at the time but were readying ourselves for a mid-December road-trip to our other home in Mossel Bay, so

if
the bird
hung around long
enough, there may be a chance to
twitch it...

I kept an eye on the reports coming through and as our departure date got closer, and the Oystercatcher remained in the same area, my hopes of being able to twitch the species started rising.

Now, I should mention that I had in fact seen this species in Europe several years ago, but the circumstances were rather bizarre and the sighting somewhat unsatisfactory, so I was keen to get a better sighting and of course to be able to add it to my list of Southern African birds seen.

At the time we were travelling to the UK via Amsterdam Schiphol airport and while taxi-ing after landing at Schiphol early morning I spotted, from my window seat, a Eurasian Oystercatcher at the edge of a concrete water channel along the perimeter of the airport – the sighting was brief but there was no





Dan Reid

Pathway leading to Keurbooms estuary

mistaking the bird with its black and white plumage and distinctive bill.

As I said, an unusual way to add a lifer and not what I consider fulfilling...

Time to Twitch

We arrived in Mossel Bay on Wednesday 15 December 2021 after a road trip spread over three days and, once settled in to our "Southern Cape" routine, my thoughts returned to the Eurasian Oystercatcher, which was still hanging around in the same area on the Saturday, so we decided to do the trip to Plett on the Sunday.

150 kms doesn't usually sound like a challenging distance to drive for a day but Google Maps put it into perspective by estimating that a 1 hour 57-minute drive awaited us, fortunately just making it into my (admittedly arbitrary) 2-hour drive time limit for a twitch.

With time to prepare I made a note of the instructions provided about the location, where to park and how to access the estuary and the recommendation that any attempt to find the bird be done at low tide. The tide tables indicated a low tide around 10 am for the Sunday so it seemed quite reasonable to leave home at about 8 am.

Another recommendation was to have a scope handy if available, as the bird was likely to be a fair distance from the closest viewing spot, so my well-used scope and tripod were the first items to be loaded into the car. I had recently purchased a new ball head for the scope to replace an old one that had become difficult to manoeuvre and I was looking forward to seeing how it functioned in the field. (I'm glad to say it performed perfectly).

We duly got to the pin-drop spot at the small parking area, which had a full complement of cars but fortunately one was just pulling out and I slotted my SUV into place and set off down the narrow track, scope and tripod slung over my shoulder, leaving Gerda to enjoy the peace and quiet with her knitting (after making sure it was safe for her to stay there of course).

The track initially wound its way through bush, then over a narrow wooden foot bridge and onto the sands of the estuary. A birder heading the other way turned out to be Rudi, another Mossel Bay birder and after greeting each other he pointed me in the general direction of where he had just seen the Oystercatcher.

Armed with that knowledge, I found a spot to set up the scope, taking care to avoid the softer sands which would have swallowed my sandals if I wasn't wary (all proof of how hazardous twitching can be). I scanned the distant river close to a tern roost and within a minute had found the Oystercatcher and locked onto it with the scope. I allowed myself a little victory punch in my imagination – success!

For the next 40



Eurasian Oystercatcher
– Bonttobie

Mike Bridgford



Mike Bridgerford

Eurasian Oystercatcher in flight

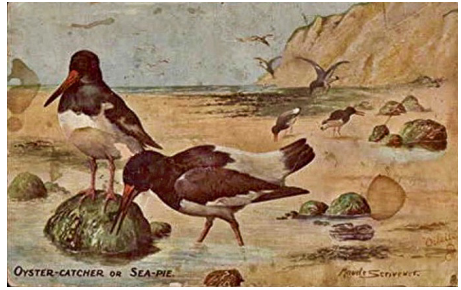
minutes I tried getting closer to where the bird was moving about, with some success although the soft mud of the estuary at low tide thwarted my attempt constantly as I picked my way across the drier parts to a better vantage point.

Satisfied with the views I had enjoyed, I made my way in hopscotch fashion to the main pathway back to the car, passing a group of birders who had just arrived but were less fortunate as a passing helicopter had caused the tern roost and surrounding birds to rise and fly off.

My only regret was not having my camera, which I left in the car as the scope and tripod was quite a burden without a camera dangling from my shoulder as well. Plenty of excellent photos have been posted on various birding groups and the superb images included here are published with the photographer's kind permission. They went to some trouble to get closer to the bird, renting a canoe and paddling some distance to where the Oystercatcher was hanging out.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* (Bontobie)

This species is a rare but annual visitor to southern Africa from its breeding grounds across t – those found in southern Africa are



Sea Pie Illustration

thought to originate from Siberia. The Eurasian species prefers to feed by probing for invertebrates on mudflats, having a longer bill than the African Black Oystercatcher which generally feeds on mussels taken from rocks exposed by changing tides.

The image of Eurasian and African Black Oystercatchers side by side shows the unmistakable pied appearance of the Eurasian Oystercatcher compared to the all-black plumage of the African Black Oystercatcher.

On our way back home, we stopped at a roadside restaurant for a light lunch of their home-made pie and salads – it crossed my mind that I had seen a Sea Pie in Plett and eaten a Pie near the Sea in Plett, all in the same morning.....



Mike Bridgerford

Eurasian Oystercatcher and African Black Oystercatcher

A tale of serendipity...

Etienne Marais

In March of 2017 I was leading a birding tour to Southern Mozambique. On 3 March, while searching for the Green Tinkerbird some 30 km inland from Inhassoro, I became aware that there were swifts overhead. Without giving it too much thought I recorded Common Swift on Birdlasser but did pause to think that it was odd that they were calling – and calling a lot. I have not heard the call of Common Swift often as they're mostly silent in Africa, so the calls were unfamiliar.

Later that afternoon – we were back at Billfish Lodge, Inhassoro, overlooking the ocean, when I became aware that a big flock of Swifts was above. Probably about 50 birds and they were calling a lot. Looking up they looked like Common Swifts in their GISS and flight action, although they seemed lazier than usual. After a very long day my birding group had dispersed and no camera capable of capturing the swifts was at hand!! Initially on hearing the calls, African Black Swift came to mind – since I am familiar with them screaming in groups around a nesting cliff, but no – these calls were deeper in tone and seemed more mellow. Although the light was going some swifts flew to the east and with the setting sun on them, they looked quite pale compared to what I am used to on Common Swift – perhaps the *pekinensis* race? They seemed to have prominent pale throats.... something that seemed odd. Almost as an afterthought, I realized I should record the calls of the swifts and stuck my voice recorder in the air. Shortly afterwards the swifts seemed to be heading out to sea in a NE direction... bizarre?

Later that evening when I updated my Birdlasser list from the day, I pondered what to record? Nope, I don't know what they were. I recorded nothing on Birdlasser.

An active birding life is filled with many unanswered questions, and although the experience entered my mind a few times in the months that followed, I just never got around

to doing much with that recording. I did listen to it after the trip, and I remember thinking that the recording was too faint to do much with.

Fast forward 3 years

Sometimes in birding, serendipity plays a role – on 29 March I was chatting to my good friend (and birding legend) Gary Allport about “nocmig” and we got talking about an odd snipe I saw last year in Moz. For some reason the conversation turned to swifts, and something called a Forbes-Watson's Swift which breeds in Somalia, Socotra and southern Arabia and winters on the Kenya coast. Gary mentioned that Neil Baker in Tanzania had suggested they might come further south, and we should be looking out for odd swifts on the coast in Mozambique. Suddenly that weird experience at Inhassoro floated back into my memory.

What if?..... and then it was a hard-drive search for ancient sound files – I sent it to Gary and of course my other birding mentor, Faansie Peacock.

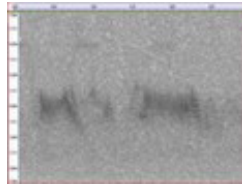
Gary put us in touch with swift expert Guy Kirwan as well as Brian Finch in E Africa. We all thought the recording sounds like Forbes-Watson's!

What followed was then an in-depth project to measure aspects of the Inhassoro recording and compare with data from other recordings of all the likely possibilities. A fascinating deep dive into the vocal world of Swifts!! Thanks to Gary Allport and Faansie Peacock for huge support and input in this process, the results of which will be submitted in a comprehensive paper to the BOC Bulletin in the next few weeks; and then we await peer review.

The sound file of the Inhassoro birds has been loaded onto Xeno-Canto: <https://www.xeno-canto.org/543748> so do go listen. I have labelled it as Forbes-Watson's Swift in anticipation!



Inharosso – Etienne Marais



*Sound File
(Etienne Marais)*



*Forbes-Watson's
Swift (Photo
courtesy of
Jiri Haureljuk -
Tanzania 2017)*

There is also a set of tagged recordings of "Large Brown Swifts" on Xeno-Canto, <https://www.xeno-canto.org/set/5842> so that you can listen to the comparison species more easily. I am also working on a 'medley' recording run at slower speed to help interpretation.

Meantime, all large dark swifts seen in Mozambique (especially near the coast) should

be checked out for this species. If you have any photos, or better still recordings, then do dig them out. With luck we will be able to understand the patterns of occurrence of all these large, dark and rather mysterious birds better in the future.

(This article was written in April 2020) 🐦

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.

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

Please contact Fransie at secretary@blng.co.za or 0727370862 if you have any queries or requests.

Jo-Anne Hay, Brooklyn; Isabel and Paul Thomson, Menlopark; Gustav and Chané Pretorius, Centurion; Gabby Sykora, Vereeniging; Petro Vlok, Roodepoort; Ben and Lorraine Espach, Doornpoort; Luca Tomlinson, Magaliessig; Fritz van Deventer, Hennospark; Derek Leon van Rensburg, Rietfontein; Derik and Germaine Janse van Rensburg, Faerie Glen; Piet Bosch, Queenswood

Birthday Bird Bash: 18 February – 5 March 2022

Ivonne Coetzee

For the past few years, I have been fortunate enough to choose as birthday present a holiday at a birding destination of my choice. The first and very memorable birthday birding holiday was at Kurisa Moya and included a guided day trip with the phenomenal David Letsoalo in Magoebaskloof.

The year after was on the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast with Zakamusi Mhlongo pointing out the Green Barbet at Ongoye Forest and, afterwards, the incomparable Dlinza Forest Boardwalk.

Memorable birthdays on the Wild Coast followed. An exciting birthday holiday was spent camping at Mazou in Mapungubwe's riverine forest on the banks of the Limpopo. Another birthday saw me in Pafuri, and yet another at Hluleka. Incredible, unrivalled birding in isolated and spectacular destinations.

This year's annual birthday trip to the Cape was our first extended road trip after prolonged lock-down restrictions. We planned to use roads less travelled between destinations; 4x4 mountain passes; routes that had been on our bucket lists for years.

As birder I had planned this road trip meticulously as I hoped to cover as many Cape habitats and bird species as possible for my photo list. Blame this on some of the weekly Conservation Conversation Zoom-sessions that BirdLife South Africa has offered since lock-down and beyond. The episodes where several national parks were broadcast, made me realise anew – what a stunning, breath-taking country we live in! What amazing variety of scenery and habitats, each with its own suite of birdlife. I cannot think of any better, more diverse birding destination in the world.

We departed Pretoria in high spirits. The route through Gauteng and the Free State into the Northern Cape was magnificent after all

the wonderful rains. Emerald pastures made way for fields of waving golden grass in the Karoo. Shining, brim-full pans or dams and myriads birds were everywhere. I was kept so busy recording bird species on BirdLasser that I feared missing a special bird next to the road while doing so. I managed to atlas a beautiful male Montagu's Harrier [Blouvillevalk] and Hamerkop as 'Road-side Birds' on the new and contentious trip card I had created on my BirdLasser app. Contentious, as my excited shouts when whizzing past such magnificent birds at first scared my non-birder husband into thinking an unseen truck was bearing down on our car. I received strict instructions to enjoy these sightings soundlessly and without undue drama.

Karoo birding

Our first stop was an overnight stay at New Holme in the Karoo Gariep Nature Conservancy, well-known in birding circles. Lesser Kestrel and Amur Falcon welcomed us at the entrance. [Kleinrooivalk, Oostelike Rooipootvalk].

We arrived at New Holme on the conservancy in a storm. Luckily, the rain then held off for an hour or two and, armed with directions to find my target species, I struck out. The first birds I spotted were Spoonbills and Shelducks on the dam. [Lepelaar, Kopereend]. Several other waterbirds kept me entertained for a while. I managed to photograph Greater Kestrel [Grootrooivalk] on its nest, and was delighted to find a lively new lifer, Rufous-eared Warbler. [Rooioorlangstertjie].

I kept a sharp eye out whenever a Korhaan called, and though I heard Blue Korhaan, only Northern Black Korhaan showed itself when flying above the knee-high grass. A trio of

All photos Ivonne Coetzee*Eastern Clapper Lark - Hoëveldklappertjie**Large-billed Lark - Dikbeklewerik*

different larks posed unabashedly. Then the rain returned in full force, but the scrumptious home-made pies, lamb chops, salads, and the generous hospitality we received, made our evening unforgettable.

It rained throughout the night, however, and the next morning, the Karoo Khoisan Conservancy, where I expected to easily log their famous four of Blue Korhaan, Burchell's Courser, Double-banded Courser and Karoo Korhaan [Karoo- en Bloukorhaan, Bloukop- en Dubbelbanddrawwertjie], became a horror episode of trying to keep the car from getting stuck in the slick swamp into which that area had turned. For the first time, palaeontologists' claims that the Karoo used to be a vast lake with frolicking dinosaurs, made perfect sense. No further birding was possible.

Our next destination was Camdeboo National Park near Graaff-Reinet. Here we stood in awe at the Valley of Desolation viewpoints, watching the enormous rock columns turning gold in the setting sun. We enjoyed a 'lifer'- the comical but endangered mountain zebra en route. Their colouring, markings and whole demeanour seemed so different from the Burchell's zebra which we know so well. There were only a handful left in the 1930s by virtue of habitat loss and having been hunted to near extinction, but intensive conservation efforts have seen their numbers gradually rise over the years.

*Spike-heeled Lark - Vlaktelewerik**Mountain zebra - Bergkwagga*



Along the R339

Garden Route National Park

Our next 4x4 adventure was calling – the dramatic R339. This 80-km-long gravel road winds from Uniondale along the Kamanassie River gorge via the stunning Prince Alfred Pass over Avontuur, De Vlugt, and Diepwalle forests to Knysna. This pass is probably one of Thomas Bain's most remarkable projects. We kept stopping for photographs of the mountain scenery, rock formations jutting into the road, and quirky bridges. To my great joy, this also meant we could stop for photo lifers of Swee Waxbill and, near Diepwalle, Forest Buzzard. [Suidelike Swie, Bosjakkalsvoël]. The latter was sitting on a dead bluegum tree branch, one of many skeleton trees that remain standing after the devastating fires that swept through the area a few years ago.

We then enjoyed a week-long stop-over on the Garden Route, starting at Sedgfield. The bird species changed from Karoo to fynbos species and shore birds such as oystercatchers, plovers, cormorants, terns, and seagulls. Our daily walk took us past Swartvlei lagoon, fynbos and then the beach. We also enjoyed hiking the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail at Ebb & Flow near Wilderness, with its boardwalks and ferry river-crossing.

BLSA's weekly Conservation Conversations are available on YouTube, and I downloaded and studied the episode by Mike Bridgeford on the Garden Route National Parks. What a wealth of information! A visit to Knysna to see the Peregrine Falcon [Swerfvalk] nesting at Coney Glen's parking lot cliffside did not deliver the bird but instead the most beautiful scenery of turquoise seas and lagoon and dramatic cliffs. At Coney Glen I managed at long last to capture satisfactory photographs of both male and female Olive Woodpecker and even Black Saw-wing. [Gryskopspeg, Swartsaagvlerswael]. Many thanks go to BLSA's episode on the Garden Route's National Parks to stake out here for Peregrine Falcon, because it brought us to the high viewpoint above Knysna Heads, which we might never have enjoyed otherwise. This is one of the greatest advantages of birding – the

When driving up the park's Koedoeskloof 4x4 route, we found a small concrete dam in the kloof, the perfect place to stop for some refreshments. In that arid environment it was no surprise to see a variety of birds flocking to it. We were kept entertained by Dusky Indigobird, Black-headed and White-throated Canary, both Red-eyed and Cape Bulbul, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and even Sombre Greenbul, and many others, coming to drink. A Martial Eagle glided on the thermals while Pale Chanting Goshawk stood sentinel. [Gewone Blouvinkie, Swartkop- en Witkeelkanarie, Rooi-oog- en Kaapse Tiptol, Klipstreepkoppie, Gewone Willie, Breëkoparend, Bleeksingvalk].

Early morning strolls in and around our Lakeside tented camp, which was all but deserted, delivered good sightings of more Karoo species such as Karoo Scrub Robin, Karoo Prinia, and Dusky Sunbird. [Slangverklikker, Karoolangstertjie, Namakwasuikerbekkie]



Olive Woodpecker - Gryskopspeg



Coney Glen viewpoint

stunning settings, landscapes and thrilling views sometimes makes one stop and take in the surroundings and actually forget about birding for a bit!

We also visited Rondevlei Bird Hide on Mike Bridgeford's advice and, as promised, photographed all three grebe species there. De Vasselot Camp site, ardently recommended by the presenter, lived up to its reputation. In an unrivalled welcoming ceremony, Half-collared Kingfisher perched for 20 wonderful minutes just metres from our forest cabin. How we enjoyed its jewel-like colours and intense concentration on a possible catch below. During our delightful stay there, a variety of forest species seemed to jostle for attention and photographs.

One evening, my husband alerted me to a very confiding dove around the braai, which turned out to be Lemon Dove! A lifer photograph of the final dove I needed for the full suite of South Africa's 14 doves... at last! Not such a brilliant photograph due to the poor light, but very satisfactory indeed. [Kaneelduifie].

On our last morning at Nature's Valley, I heard and saw, briefly, Knysna Warbler, [Knysnaruigtesanger] but it was, as ever, skulking and too fast for a photographer of my standard. I caught only its back half. I was consoled by getting Grey Cuckooshrike though, and over the moon to get a photo-lifer of the near-threatened Knysna Woodpecker. The glare of overcast skies made them nowhere good



Half-collared Kingfisher – Blouvisvanger



Knysna Turaco – Knysnaloeerie



Crowned Hornbill – Gekroonde Neushoringvoël

enough for public scrutiny, but both were target species I was very happy to see again. [Gryskatakoeroe, Knysnaspeg]

After visiting Storms River Mouth to walk the iconic suspension bridge, we turned the car north-east towards the eastern end of Baviaansklouf, near Hankey. I had long hoped to visit InniKloof, revered amongst birding enthusiasts and home to some very special birds. The entry road winds a few kilometres along a stream into a narrow, wooded gorge. Four chalets and a lovely, intimate camp site ensure that this is and will stay a bird haven. Very soon I realised that a two-night stay would be much too short. Incredible forest birding delivered Tambourine Dove, Cape Batis, Crowned Hornbill, Jackal Buzzard, Crowned Eagle, and more. [Witborsduifie, Kaapse Bosbontrokkie, Rooiborsjakkalsvoël, Kroonarend].

When Catherina Wait, our hostess, learned that I am an ardent bird watcher, she casually mentioned that the elusive Finfoot usually appears at about 4 pm, after swimmers have left, in the rock pool near the main campsite. I stationed myself on the riverbank, behind some bushes and the tractor inners on which I had drifted amongst the waterlilies just earlier



African Finfoot – Watertrapper

that afternoon. I was delighted to first see a Cape clawless otter, and then a Finfoot paddled past, swimming up and down, sometimes clambering up onto the bank with its fleshy bright red feet, not much bothered by me getting up for a better shot. Afterwards, I noticed that the reflections of sharp sunlight on the water had made for blurry photos, but very few occasions in my birding career can rival the magic of the leisurely time I spent with this sought-after bird.

Addo and Mountain Zebra National Parks

I unashamedly admit that I had one main birding reason for visiting Addo – and that was to tick lifers Southern Tchagra and Red-necked Spurfowl. The elephants were beautiful and more amiable than those of Kruger; a hyena appeared at dawn; there were Shelduck, flycatchers and heron at the waterholes. We had a rarity sighting of Dwarf Bittern visiting the Red Bishop Hide at the main camp. This was where I also found Southern Tchagra, but Red-necked Spurfowl failed to make an appearance. [Dwergrietreier, Grysborstjagra, Rooikeelfisant]. I did not expect to see European Roller in Addo! [Europese Troupant]. There were various starlings, sunbirds, Bokmakierie, and other bird species familiar to us in Gauteng. It was searingly hot and very dry in Addo though, so birding was slow. Time



Vista Mountain Zebra NP – Bergkwagga NP

constraints prevented us to visit the bird-rich Zuurberg region.

Next on our itinerary was Mountain Zebra National Park. Wesley Gush had made an excellent presentation on BLSA's Conservation Conversations of this awe-inspiring park with its spectacular mountain vistas and mouth-watering birding, so we were keen to go.

This park more than surpassed our expectations in birding, in scenery, in mountain passes, in magnificent open vistas, and high-altitude plateaus. Lovely herds of mountain zebra and eland grazed high in the uplands. The springbok kindergarten was up there too. We even found two lion, right next to the road, ample consolation for my non-birder husband who was getting bored by countless stops for LBJs. Top bird sightings included the nesting Double-banded Courser I had to forgo at Karoo Khoisan, right next to the road, and Denham's Bustard which suddenly flushed – how did we miss this spectacular bird so close to us? What an impressive sight to see it striding away so majestically, pretending that it had never lost its cool.

Raptors such as Verraux's Eagle, Pale Chanting Goshawk, African Harrier-Hawk, Rock Kestrel, and buzzards could be seen daily. [Witkruisarend, Bleeksingvalk, Kaalwangvalk, Kransvalk, jakkalsvoëls]



*Double-banded Courser
– Dubbelbanddrawwertjie*



Denham's Bustard – Veldpou

Various species of bunting, batis and chats were seen, scores of Scaly-feathered Weaver [Baardmannetjie] and several species of larks, as well as pipits such as Plain-backed, Long-billed and Rock Pipit. We even saw out-of-range Chestnut-backed Sparrow-larks. [Donker-, Nicholson- en Klipkoester, Rooiruglewerik]. We will be back to this beautiful park!

Then onwards to the Southern Drakensberg area. We landed on another 'interesting' 4x4 route between Cradock and Aliwal-North, the R390 and R391 via Hofmeyr and Klein Strydpoort through the Bamboes Mountains. Like the previous gravel roads between towns, these were quiet, bird-rich routes and again we enjoyed new landscapes, albeit from a desolate and rough road which deteriorated to a mere track. Kudu jumped across the road. Springbok rushed ahead of us. Here I saw both Pallid and Black Harriers, with their typical flap-glide flight, quartering a series of vleis and pastures. Since it was a tense drive and to preserve marital harmony, I did not request photo-stops, wistfully watching both harriers winging away without any lifer-photographs. [Witbors- en Witkruisvleivalk].

Naudè's Nek Pass

Our last booking was at a secluded mountain cabin on Naudè's Nek pass. We found nearby Rhodes quaint, and a delight. What a charming hotel, and the tiny café with its antique glass display cabinets took me straight back to my childhood's corner shops. And fittingly, when we were still unpacking at our cabin, a curious Drakensberg Prinia was the first bird to welcome us to its domain.

The challenging Naudè's Nek gravel pass, the third highest in SA, had been on our wish-list for many years. But, seemingly to bracket our holiday trip in mud, it rained overnight. A lot. My husband was quite dubious about driving the pass in wet conditions. I moped around morosely on the sodden deck, despondently checking the leaden skies. Just as well, as suddenly I spied the school taxi coming down the mountain. If they could, so could we, not so?

Apart from the magnificent scenery of the Southern Drakensberg, I had been looking forward tremendously to visit Tenahead Lodge at the summit, mythical in birding circles. My fervent birding goal for years had been to tick the charismatic Drakensberg Rockhopper.



Naudè's Nek pass



Grey-winged Francolin – Bergpatrys



Ground Woodpecker – Grondspeg

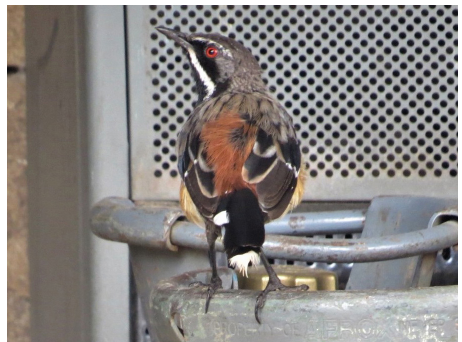
I had missed it on a previous trip up Sani Pass. Maybe... just maybe... today would be the day.

The drive up Naudè's Nek pass was as spectacular as it was exciting. It fulfilled all our expectations and more. It was a thrill to stand on the roof of the world and take the obligatory photograph at the summit. I was privileged to tick all the high-altitude species I had hoped for, and more. Grey rhebok was near the summit, as well as Grey-winged Francolin, Ground Woodpecker, Mountain Pipit, Drakensberg Siskin, Sentinel Rock Thrush and, at Tenahead Lodge itself, the cheeky Drakensberg Rockhopper, both male and female. [Bergpatrys, Grondspeg, Bergkoester, Bergpietjiekanaar, Langtoonklip- en Oranjeborsberglyster].

Now I could relax and really enjoy our tasty brunch there. Unfortunately, the weather worsened. The long drive down was a very tense episode of dense mist, rain, and slippery road surfaces which made the sheer drops and hairpin bends nerve-racking. It didn't help to spot some car wrecks deep down a sheer cliff. Still, the pass was nothing compared to the 70 km stretch back between Rhodes to Barkley-East where each kilometre of sliding through thick, slick mud on mountainsides felt like an eternity. But my heart was full on the long drive home to Pretoria, and I could not stop smiling when I considered this wonderful trip, the awe-inspiring vistas, and the spectacular avian riches of our country. 🐦



Mountain Pipit – Bergkoester



Drakensberg Rockjumper – Oranjeborsberglyster

Rarities and unusual sightings report: 31 May 2022

Compiled by André Marx

The wettest summer in more than 30 years according to my statistics transformed wetland areas, resulting in an influx of birds that were not regularly reported in our region. Top of the list must be the extraordinary record of a Eurasian Bittern at Mongena Dam, but records of Slaty Egret, Streaky-breasted Flufftail, Black Coucal, and a number of different crakes to name some, is testament to the exceptional conditions. There were a few first records for the region, with Great Snipe and Scaly-throated Honeyguide being most noteworthy sightings that came about due to the dedication of observers who take the trouble to photograph and document their observations of anything unusual.

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

Bittern, Eurasian [Grootrietreier]

A great find was one of one bird that was seen over a period of two days, on 9-10 Jan 2022, at Mongena Private Nature Reserve in Dinokeng, north-east of Pretoria, (WvZ). The bird reappeared at this venue on 18 Mar 2022. *There are*

no records of this species in the Greater Gauteng region and this is an exceptional occurrence.

Egret, Slaty [Rooikeelreier]

One bird was at Marievale Bird Sanctuary, 7 Dec 2021, with another record on 13 March 2022, (GBird).

The long-staying bird was still present at Walkhaven Dog Park and Gnu Valley in the Muldersdrift area, 7 Dec 2021, (GBird).

Another bird was reported from the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain, 12 Dec 2021, being seen here again on 23 Feb 2022, (GBird).

Flufftail, Streaky-breasted [Streepborsvleikuiken]

At least two birds were heard calling at the Kgomo-Kgomo wetland, 20 Feb 2022, (GBird). *A species that has not previously been recorded with certainty within the region.*

Snipe, Great [Dubbelsnip]

A record of single bird at Marievale, 13 Mar 2022, (LuR), is a significant find. *There is no confirmed photographic record of this species for the Greater Gauteng region.*

Wagtail, Grey [Gryskwikkie]

A single bird was found along the Bloubankspruit, north of Krugersdorp, on 6 Dec 2021, (MdR).



Wiaan van Zyl

Eurasian Bittern [Grootrietreier]



Ludwig Beel

Great Snipe [Dubbelsnip]

Regional and Local Rarities/Streeksrariteite

Bee-eater, Southern Carmine [Rooiborsbyvreter]

One bird at Zwartkops, Centurion, was somewhat out of range, 13 Jan 2022, (JM).

Brownbul, Terrestrial [Boskrapper]

One bird was again found at Moreleta Kloof NR in Pretoria, 18 May 2022, (KC).

Coucal, Black [Swartvleloerie]

One bird was visible at Kgomo-Kgomo on 18 Feb 2022, after a period of very good rains, (GBird), with at least two birds reported in the following days. (Photo MT). *A very rare species within the region.*

Crake, Baillon's [Kleinriethaan]

At least 4 birds were present at Marievale, 19 March 2022, (IG).



Richard Haywood

Corn Crake [Kwartelkoning]



Philip Yamakou

Spotted Crake [Gevlekte Riethaan]



Keanu Ganto

Terrestrial Brownbul [Boskrapper]



Mark Tittley

Black Coucal [Swartvleloerie]

Crake, Corn [Kwartelkoning]

This secretive species was found and photographed at Rooiwal, north of Pretoria, in pentad 2530_2810, 4 Jan 2022, (RH).

Crake, Spotted [Gevlekte Riethaan]

Marievale turned up one bird on 7 March 2022, (GBird), (photo PY), with two birds being present at this locality in the following weeks.

Crake, Striped [Gestreepte Riethaan]

One bird was at Kgomo-Kgomo, 1 Jan 2022, with several birds present on 5 Feb 2022, (GBird).

Gallinule, Allen's [Kleinkoningriethaan]

A single bird was at Marievale Bird Sanctuary, 20 Dec 2021, (MK).

Goose, African Pygmy [Dwerggans]

At least two birds were at Mongena Dam, in Dinokeng, 10 Jan 2022, (GBird).

John Rendell



Lesser Jacana [Dwerglangtoon]

single bird at Cedar Lakes Estate, near Fourways, was a major surprise, 14 Jan 2022, (NM).

Goshawk, African [Afrikaanse Sperwer]

This species was recorded once again in Fairland, Johannesburg, 3 May 2022, (LaR).

Heron, Rufous-bellied [Rooipensreier]

At least one bird was at the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain on 19 Dec 2020, with two birds present on 3 Jan 2022, (GBird).

Heron, White-backed Night [Witrugnagreier]

Two birds were once again seen in Cedar Lakes Estate, near Fourways, where they have been present and confirmed to be breeding for at least two years now, 13 Dec 2022, (NM).

Honeyguide, Scaly-throated [Gevlekte Heuningwyser]

A record of one bird in the Wilge River valley, north-east of Gauteng, is most noteworthy, 29 May 2022, (MJ).

A new species confirmed for the region, defined as being 100 km from the centre of Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Ibis, Southern Bald [Kalkoenibis]

An immature bird was seen in pentad 2635_2725, in the Fochville area, on 6 Feb 2022, (JR).

Jacana, Lesser [Dwerglangtoon]

This species was a surprise find in pentad 2630_2730 in the Fochville area on 6 Mar 2022, (JR).

Oxpecker, Red-billed [Rooibekrenostervoël]

One bird was noted during the BirdLife



Anthony Paton

Red Phalarope [Grysfraaingpoot]



Jamnie Jansen

Tree Pipit [Boomkoester]

Northern Gauteng outing to Faerie Glen NR flying from a small herd of zebra, 12 Mar 2022, (BLNG).

Phalarope, Red [Grysfraaingpoot]

One bird appeared in a temporary puddle brought about by storm water in pentad 2600_2710, near Boons in NW Province, 21 Feb 2022, (AP).

Pipit, Tree [Boomkoester]

One bird was located in Kgaswane Mountain Reserve, near Rustenburg, 12 Feb 2022, (GBird).

Sandpiper, Pectoral [Geelpootstrandloper]

A single bird was at Marievale NR, 4 Jan 2022, (GBird).

Stork, Saddle-billed [Saalbekooievaar]

An immature bird was at Klipdrift Dam on the boundary of Gauteng and North West Province in pentad 2635_2720, 2 Jan 2022, (JR).

3 birds were at the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain on 20 Feb 2022, (GBird).

Vulture, Hooded [Monnikaasvoël]

One bird was a surprise find at the Vulpro Rehabilitation Centre near Hartbeespoort Dam, 28 Dec 2021, (MK). *A most unusual record; this species has undergone a major decline outside of its stronghold in the Kruger National Park and adjacent areas.*

Warbler, African Yellow [Geelsanger]

This species was found at Darrenwood Dam in Randburg in pentad 2605_2755, on 11 Jan 2022, (HN).

Observers/ Waarnemers

Anthony Paton (AP)
 BirdLife Northern Gauteng (BLNG)
 Gauteng birders (GBird)
 Henk Nel (HN)
 Ian Grant (IG)
 Jannie Jansen (JJ)
 Jason McCormick (JM)
 John Randell (JR)
 Keanu Canto (KC)
 Lance Robinson (LaR)
 Ludwig Roell (LuR)
 Magda Kets (MK)
 Mark Tittley (MT)
 Martin Knoetze (MK)
 Michael Johnson (MJ)
 Morné de la Rey (MdR)
 Nicholas Mulder (NM)
 Philip Yiannakou (PY)



John Randell

Saddle-billed Stork [Saalbekooievaar]

Reinardt Haywood (RH)
 Wian van Zyl (WvZ)

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 reports on the internet and from SABAP2 records. Members are invited to submit details of sightings to André Marx at e-mail andre.marx112@gmail.com or cell number 083 4117674. 🐦

DONATIONS

A sincere thank you for your generous donations. Your contribution help us to reach our goal toward bird conservation projects. We really appreciate it.
Baie dankie vir u donasie. U skenkings verseker dat ons 'n groter bydrae tot die bewaring van voëls kan lewer. Ons waardeer dit opreg.

Heidi Muller (February 2022); Sal du Venage (February 2022); Leon Lötter (March 2022); Elba Swart (March 2022); Marco Gagiano (March 2022); Daniel Knipe (March 2022); Jeanette de Beer (March 2022); Anton Ackermann (April 2022); Manie Barnard (April 2022); Ivonne Coetzee (April 2022); Isabel and Paul Thomson (April 2022); Philip Calinikos (June 2022); Roelof Jonkers (June 2022).

BIRDLIFE NORTHERN GAUTENG/GAUTENG NOORD

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT AS AT 28 MARCH 2022

	Budget	Actual 1 Jan to	Budget	Actual
	2022	28 March 2022	available	2021
INCOME				
MEMBERSHIP FEES	86500	17350	69150	82460
COURSE FEES	5000	0	5000	9914
DONATIONS	6000	0	6000	5980
INTEREST	8500	1398	7102	7842
ADVERTISING INCOME	2000	0	2000	1600
OUTINGS AND CAMPS INCOME	155000	23580	131420	139121
NET GENERAL TRADING INCOME	0	0	0	0
SUNDRY	0	0	0	0
TOTAL INCOME	263000	42328	220672	246917
EXPENDITURE				
AUDITOR REMUNERATION	5750	-611	6361	5367
BANK CHARGES	2500	261	2239	2215
BIRD RINGER EXPENSES	7500	0	7500	7500
CONSERVATION PROJECTS	12000	0	12000	15000
COURSE FEES	2500	0	2500	0
LEADERSHIP FEES	12000	2660	9340	11710
DONATIONS	0	0	0	0
EVENING MEETINGS AND SPEAKERS FEES	6000	600	5400	5307
FIXED ASSETS PURCHASED WRITTEN OFF	0	0	0	0
FUNCTIONS and AGM EXPENSES	2500	2365	135	1393
HALL HIRE	7650	2250	5400	3000
LANIARIUS PRINTING	2000	0	2000	1623
LANIARIUS ENVELOPES AND POSTAGE	0	0	0	0
MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS	1000	0	1000	0
OUTINGS AND CAMPS EXPENSES	141000	13417	127583	126066
PRINTING AND STATIONERY	750	370	380	123
SECRETARIAL FEES	48000	12000	36000	48400
COMMITTEE MEETING EXPENSES	5000	0	5000	0
2 WAY RADIO EXPENSES	1500	850	650	0
TELEPHONE & FAX & INTERNET	500	0	500	0
INSURANCE	5500	0	5500	4608
PHOTO COMPETITION EXPENSES	0	600	-600	0
TOTAL EXPENSES	263650	34762	228888	232312
INCOME LESS EXPENDITURE	-650	7566	-8216	14605
BALANCE SHEET				
NON CURRENT ASSETS				
OFFICE EQUIPMENT AT COST	27450	27450		27450
ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION	-27447	-27447		-27447
RADIO EQUIPMENT AT COST	36708	36708		36708
ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION	-36707	-36707		-36707
CURRENT ASSETS				
INVESTMENTS	218877	218877		217479
PREPAYMENT AND ADVANCES	0	0		3612
TRADE AND OTHER RECEIVABLES	0	0		0
BOOKSHOP ADVANCE	2000	2000		2000
CASH AT BANK	70316	70316		50947
PETTY CASH RITA	436	436		436
TOTAL ASSETS	291633	291633	0	274478
ACCUMULATED FUNDS BEGINNING OF YEAR				
	252222	252222		237617
CURRENT YEAR (PROFIT)/LOSS	7566	7566		14605
CURRENT LIABILITIES				
CONSERVATION FUND	0	0		0
RINGERS FUND ACCOUNT	6655	6655		6655
TRADE AND OTHER PAYABLES	4790	4790		11041
PREPAYMENTS RECEIVED	20400	20400		4560
TOTAL LIABILITIES	291633	291633	0	274478

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Full page	R480	R900	R1200
Half page	R300	R540	R750
Quarter page	R180	R330	R450

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BUFFELSDRIFT

Rust de Winter

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