



# BLiNG WiNGS

## *Reflections*

### **What made the BLNG year-end function such a success?**

Was it the bird walk beforehand? The lovely setting of huge trees, shaded lawns, and laughter? The meeting of old and new friends? Reinforcing bonds with fellow birders through shared experiences at bird camps? Keanu's fascinating Bird Quiz? Was it the wonderful food?

Read all about it on p3.

## *Inside This Issue*

PG. 2 Hazeldean VT

PG. 3 Year-end Function

PG. 5 Birding Big Day

PG. 9 Photograph of the month

PG. 10 New beginnings

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## HAZELDEAN VALLEY TRAILS – 6 DECEMBER

Keanu Canto guided this annual outing at the eastern outskirts of Pretoria. 11 Members pitched up, and a few scored lifers out of the 88 total species seen. Especially pleasing was the presence of the club's mascot, the Crimson-breasted Shrike.



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**MOOIKLOOF ESTATE – YEAR-END FUNCTION – 9 DECEMBER**



Keanu guided the bird walk through the lovely Mooikloof Estate. 73 species were seen, with the highlights a Black Sparrowhawk and Greater Honeyguide.



Sheleph and Louis Burger once again hosted this club year-end function in their lush garden.



Salads, potbrood, home-made trifle, ice-cream and chocolate sauce teamed up with meat from the braai. Perfect!

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Keanu prepares materials for the Bird Quiz which had these groups competing on twenty fascinating questions on birds and birding. It ended in a draw.



The Bateleurs had just the right mix of contestants that could balance bird facts and trivia.

Fransie giving her group, the Hamerkops, a pep talk.



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## BIRDING BIG DAY – 2 DECEMBER

You cannot enter BBD, hoping to win Gauteng's 6 km radius, without careful selection of your team members, your radius, some prior recces close to the date, and meticulous planning – this last, Marna's main task. Members should have superior listening skills, and Marna and Peter Thompson, the valuable new member of us Tinktinkies, both excel here. Just as important is choosing your radius. It should include a range of habitats to find as wide a selection of species as possible.

You must also know your competition. And we were up against the very best: Philip Calinikos and his team, no less! Den Pao Pouthena (*I'm staying right here*) is the title of a song, but in this case was a direct reference by Philip and his team that they would bird mostly their own home patch. Our own radius almost overlapped theirs, being the main green belts or patches in our area: Friends of Magalies Hiking Trail, Rainbow Junction with the Apies River north of Wonderboom NR, Rietondale Experiential Farm for its dependable Little Bee-eaters, LBJS, owls and nightjars; and Derdepoort Regional Park for quirky species we would find there – mainly its five kingfisher species, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Southern Black Flycatchers and Burnt-necked Eremomelas. Philip's group chose to do LC de Villiers Sports Grounds and Colbyn NR while we decided to bird the new Bosveld venue instead which has varied habitats.

Our day started at 4 a.m., and we clocked up several species heard in the dark. We made a slight detour and found that our dependable Spotted Eagle Owl was at home. At the entrance to the Magalies MBT, we met Philip and his team who were coaching a fledgling team embarking on their very first BBD. Flappet Lark obliged us with its noisy display flight even before sunrise, and the Peregrine Falcon Peter had seen previously on the pylon on the ridge was right where it should be. Shelley's Francolin was quiet, unfortunately, but other species were mostly obliging. We couldn't stay as long as we would have liked, though, as our entry at Rainbow Junction was arranged for before 6 a.m. The highlights were the Little Bittern Peter spotted there, Namaqua Dove, as well as Yellow Canary, the latter a new species in our pentad. We added four heron, different reed warblers and grassland species. Strangely, some water birds such as Red-billed Teal and Black-winged

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Stilt had fled mysteriously, and worse, even our very dependable Barn Owl had defected. Common Buzzard, Black-winged Kite and Ovambo Sparrowhawk made an appearance. A lovely variety of swallows and swifts were swirling overhead.



Coffee, snacks, and meals are taken on the go on BBD. No leisurely dunking of rusks or munching of muesli is possible, so we had our breakfasts in the car en route to our sure Mountain Wheatear spot. The drive through suburban Montana yielded some good but unexpected bushveld species such as Long-tailed Shrike and Ground-scraper Thrush. Marna sneaked a look at BirdLasser's live updated BBD site: we were one species ahead of Den Pao Pouthena and currently no 1 in Gauteng! The pressure was on!! We were overjoyed to see the news that they had spotted a Yellow-bellied Greenbul at the Magaliesberg fountain, another pentad first.

Bosveld had Hamerkop in addition to the Coots, Common Moorhen and even the Black Crake at the dam. Sadly, the Barn Owl that Ilse had seen there just the previous day, had deserted its roost, but bushveld species such as Yellow-billed Hornbill, Grey Camaroptera, Crested Francolin, Woodlands Kingfisher and Plain-backed Pipit boosted our count. A mixed-bird party added woodpeckers, Fork-tailed Drongo and a lovely Great Spotted Cuckoo. But now our main enemy started being felt – a blazing sun and heat of 36° started to slow the birds and our count down.

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Onwards to Derdepoort Regional Park. Ilse had had the foresight to arrange prior payment and a different access gate there. Neither the Moreleta nor the Hartbeesspruit yielded any new birds, and gallingly, the Half-collared Kingfisher we discovered there just the day before, was seen by Philip and his group, but not by us, half an hour later. In fact, from this point onwards, our birding count seriously slowed down. It was very hot. Bergtuin's Mocking Cliff Chat was in hiding. Even the Little Bee-eaters which had been at their specific spot at Rietondale for weeks, up to late Friday still, were gone.

According to our strategy planning, we went back to Friends of Magalies MBT during this anticipated 'hot, dry spell' to see all manner of species coming to slake their thirst at the fountain in the worst heat of the day. But...disaster!! The pipe next to the fountain was blocked and the little stream bone dry. No birds. Ilse unblocked it, and after water started trickling and half an hour later, some birds slowly returned, and we started logging again. Valuable time and species were forfeited, but we were still one up on Philip's team and first in Gauteng. It was getting late. Peter decided to try and find the Common Quail, hoping to flush it, while we three ladies struggled up-mountain hoping to see it from above. No Quail but oh, the beauty of the setting sun and backlit golden grass!





A last traversing of Rietondale Experiential Farm to scout for the third possible Barn Owl – but they must have had a clan meeting elsewhere. Nightjars were silent and stayed hidden. It was time to call it a day. It was 8 p.m. In any case, we had been birding non-stop for 16 hours.

Meanwhile, Philip's team had found a Fiery-necked Nightjar and heard Grassbird at Colbyn NR – now we were even!

Sharing the win for Gauteng with the club's president was infinitely sweeter than beating them. Even more amazing, our combined position placed us in the Top Five country-wide out of 101 teams participating in the 6 km radius challenge. 154 species ticked, and this in suburban Pretoria! We went to bed, mission accomplished.

*Ivonne Coetzee*

*(P.S. The next day, Philip sent me a message to find another bird for our list, as they had skipped an Egyptian Goose and adding it, would beat us. Yes, there was a Hoopoe which Marna heard, I missed photographing a Lesser Masked Weaver by a second and couldn't persuade the others of it, two African Black Swifts disappeared too fast to be convincing, we had seen two Long-crested Eagles far away but weren't sure... so we just said: Long live the President!)*



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## *Photograph of the month*

*Only BLNG members' photographs are featured here. Please submit photographs of Wider Gauteng bird species to be featured here.*

*A photograph from Rose Clark this time - a beautiful Knob-billed Duck.*





JP van der Merwe

*The BLiNG WiNGS team wishes you and your loved ones a blessed Christmas. A warm thank you to Fransie, who organises club outings and does the distribution of BLiNG WiNGS, and to every outing leader and club member for contributing photographs and more. You make this newsletter possible.*

## January Club Meeting

### *Ernst Retief – Birdlasser for Beginners (and tricks for the know-it-alls)*

Ernst will show us the how-to of Birdlasser, and the immediate advantages to every birder and scientific databases. The more complex functions will also be explained – such as building a year list, provincial list, a Kruger list, or even a garden list. Or you might want to add a bird species to your life list – BirdLasser may help you to find the when and where of the most recent sightings.

Ernst's main responsibility is to manage the various bird datasets within BirdLife South Africa such as the Southern African Bird Atlas Project and BirdLasser, and to make them available to the conservation planning sector in South Africa.

PROGRAMME	
	6 January – Rietvlei Bird Ringing
	13 January – Colbyn NR
	16 January – Club Meeting
	24 January – Mooikloof
	26 - 28 Jan – Deale's Rock Camp
Bookings:	<a href="mailto:secretary@blng.co.za">mailto:secretary@blng.co.za</a>



For future placements: Ivonne Coetzee  
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