



Laniarius

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*BirdLife Noord-Gauteng
BirdLife Northern Gauteng*

Image Source: Narina Trogon by Thinus van Staden


BirdLife
SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings

2025 KOMITEE

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FROM THE EDITOR

2025 marks a decade since I joined BirdLife Northern Gauteng. And what an incredible journey this decade has been!

First of all, on your first outing, you recognise your tribe, all similarly possessed. No explanations are needed for your passion in their company.

Birding breaks down barriers.

No matter your background, qualifications, social standing – on a club outing or camp, we're all equal, united in our pursuit of birds, synchronised in the lifting of our binoculars or our camera lenses.

I've had the privilege of birding with Professors of Ornithology, secretaries, captains of industry, church ministers and nursery schoolteachers through the club, all united in our pursuit of birds – and am so much the richer for it. Sharing the delight of some special sighting becomes a celebration, a high, that carries you far into the next week or month.

Very soon you know, it's not just about the birds we see, but about the people we share those moments with.

A whole new social circle enriches your life when meeting up with kindred spirits who share your passion for birds and all things birding. Some of these contacts have evolved into deep and abiding friendships.

High points were the camps to destinations far and wide, offering opportunities for targeted birding to areas that I, as a novice never even knew about: the riches of Zululand, the high altitudes of Sani Pass, the wilds of the Makuleke Concession in Pafuri, the grasslands of Memel and Wakkerstroom, the tropics of Mozambique, the mistbelt forests of Kaapsehoop... each with its own seductive suite of hard-to-see species.

Day outings in and around Pretoria were a revelation: who knew you could see Bat Hawk, Slaty Egret, Crowned Eagle, White-backed Night-Heron, White-bellied Bustard and African Finfoot near Pretoria during a day trip?

A bonus is that expert leaders guide each camp or day outing. They show enthusiasm and patience, taking new birders under their wing, explaining field marks, distribution ranges, habitat. They are bird call experts, explain nesting habits, or use contacts with landowners to get access to private land. How else would I ever have seen Rudd's Lark, African Broadbill, Short-tailed Pipit, or the Drakensberg Rockjumper?



Ivonne - Editor

And let us never forget – safety lies in numbers. Birds tend to be in wild and sometimes isolated places, far away from gated estates. Where senior citizens can't venture alone, they can and do with the club. A spin-off is that smaller groups may organise their own day birding walks or even trips to far-flung destinations, such as Giant's Castle to see the Bearded Vulture. Read in this issue all about six club members who went on a tour of the Caprivi Strip.

The monthly club meetings introduce us to talks about conservation struggles and successes, to latter-day heroes who save avian life – one bird at a time, against insurmountable odds. The laughter during coffee or a sherry afterwards will mostly be self-deprecating, about vehicles stuck in mud, mistaken identifications, forgetting the padkos.

This is the heart of what makes bird clubs so valuable. They create a space where knowledge and passion are shared, where newcomers learn from experienced birders. They allow us to give back, in my case through BLING WINGS and Laniarius, by encouraging the sharing of images and publishing breathtaking images by our club photographers which might have mouldered in some files on their computers.

So, what's in BLNG, or another bird club, for that matter? Just another way to help you find more species for your lifelist? It is so much more... it is about connection, community, encouragement, and ultimately, enrichment.

"Creative expression, whether that means writing, dancing, or birdwatching, can give a person almost everything that he or she has been searching for: enlivenment, peace, meaning, and the incalculable wealth of time spent quietly in beauty." (Ann Lamott)

FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Club Members,

It is a pleasure to reflect on another outstanding year for our club. My sincere thanks go to the entire committee for their dedication, teamwork, and the countless hours invested in keeping everything running smoothly. Your collective commitment continues to strengthen our organisation and enrich our members' experience.

A major highlight of the year was the successful effort to halt the proposed mining at Rietvlei Dam.

This achievement required determination and consistent advocacy, and we extend heartfelt appreciation to Laetitia for her pivotal role in protecting this important area.

The club itself is thriving, with steady growth of between five and ten new members each month. This momentum reflects the welcoming atmosphere, meaningful activities, and strong sense of community that define our organisation.

Operationally, we owe a special debt of gratitude to Fransie and Annatjie for their tremendous work on the billing system and membership data.

Their meticulous efforts have given us a clear and accurate understanding of our membership, placing the club on a far stronger administrative foundation.

Our planning committee continues to impress with a year filled with extraordinary outings and camps. Their creativity and enthusiasm bring tremendous value to our members and are central to the club's ongoing appeal.



A warm thank-you also goes to JP van der Merwe for his dedication to the photography meetings.

These sessions have become a standout success, adding depth, education, and inspiration to our community. Looking ahead, we remain fully committed to making 2026 another exceptional year in birding, one filled with exploration, learning, and shared passion for our feathered friends.

As the holiday season approaches, I wish everyone a joyful, restful break, and safe travels for those heading out on the road.

Warm regards,

Sean

LANIARIUS - AUGUST 2025

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CARACAL & KAAPSCHEHOOP - SEPTEMBER 2025

CAMP

BirdLife Northern Gauteng se naweek by Caracal Lodge naby Kaapschehoop van 25- 28 September was een vir die boeke! Onder leiding van ons entoesiastiese kampeier, Thinus van Staden – 'n fantastiese mens, fotograaf en birder – het die groep passievolle voëlkykers die pragtige natuur in die omgewing verken.

Die eerste dag het ons 'n kort, maar pragtige staproete deur 'n pragtige kloof op die perseel gedoen. Hoogtepunte by Caracal Lodge het ingesluit die Breëstertsanger (Broad-tailed Warbler), Bosloerie (Narina Trogon), Bergkwikie (Mountain Wagtail), Gevlekte Heuningwyser (Scaly-throated Honeyguide), Europese Windswaai (Common Swift) en selfs die Witkoljanfrederik (White-starred Robin) is vlugtig deur 'n paar groeplede gesien.



Philip Calinikos



Rooiwangtinkinkie
[Philip Calinikos]



Die swaar artillerie 'in aksie'
[Angela Openshaw]

In Kaapschehoop, saam met gids Johan Gouws, het ons die Blue Swallow Nature Reserve en Froggy Pond besoek en is ons onder meer beloon met spesies soos die Rooivlerkpatrys (Red-winged Francolin), Grysopspeg (Olive Woodpecker) en Geelkeelsanger (Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler).



Bergkwikie wat kleintjies in die nes voer
[Hannes van den Berg]



Meneer Bosloerie
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Gevlekte Heuningwyser
[Hannes van den Berg]



Ons leier, Thinus, neem 'n welverdiende breek
– met kamera, natuurlik! [Marlou Schalkwyk]

Tussen al die opwinding deur het ons tyd gemaak om rustig te ontspan – soggens vroeg op vir voëls kyk, middag rustig op eie tempo met 'n laatmiddag birding sessie, en saans gesellige kuier en lag rondom die braaivleisvuur.

Met meer as 110 spesies wat afgemerkt is, nuwe vriendskappe wat gesmee is en herinneringe wat lank gaan hou, was hierdie BirdLife Northern Gauteng-naweek eenvoudig 'n fees vir die siel en vere.

MARLOU SCHALKWYK



Rooivlerkpatrys
[Sean Naudé]



Crysopspeg
[Hannes van den Berg]



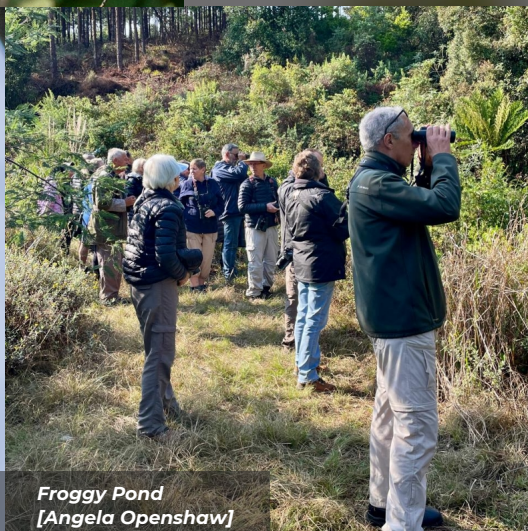
Geelkeelsanger
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Nóg 'n verrassing by Froggy Pond was die
Mooimeisiekoekoek [Marlou Schalkwyk]



Froggy Pond het ook Rooibektiptol (Bush
Blackcap) opgelewer [Hannes van den Berg]



Froggy Pond
[Angela Openshaw]



Die rotsblokke wat buite Kaapschehoop
opgestapel lê, is 'n uitstekende plek vir die
Bergklipwagter. [Kayleigh Marcus]

PUNDA MARIA - KRUGER NATIONAL PARK CAMP

A NIGHT CLAD IN PENNANTS: BIRDING AT PUNDA MARIA, KRUGER NATIONAL PARK



When the brief was “go birding up at Punda Maria in northern Kruger and look for the legendary Pennant-winged Nightjar,” we knew we were in for something special. Thanks to the meticulous timing of our excellent guides, Karel and Christopher, we struck gold. Not once, but two evenings in a row, we watched the Pennant-winged Nightjar in flight, its elegant streamers trailing like ribbons through the dusk woodland, a sight that none of us will soon forget.





Broad-billed Roller
[Anna-Marie van der Merwe]

© Anna-Marie van der Merwe

Tucked into the far north of Kruger National Park lies Punda Maria, a gem celebrated among birders for its remarkable diversity of habitats, from dense mopane woodland to open grassland and rocky ridges. It's the kind of place where you can notch up over 200 species in just a few days, and where the Pennant-winged Nightjar performs its famous aerial dance at dusk. The nearby Mahonie Loop, a birding classic, certainly lived up to its reputation this trip.

From the moment our group assembled, it was clear this would be one for the books. The blend of keen birders, good humour, and a few fresh faces made for the perfect mix of energy and expertise. We were also joined for one of the night drives by Luke, visiting all the way from the Netherlands, whose unfiltered enthusiasm for every new sighting was absolutely infectious and added a burst of excitement to the evening.



Meve's Starling [Sean Naudé]



Denise Roode



Tropical Boubou
[Craig Green]

Our endlessly patient trip guide, Rob Geddes, brought a wealth of birding knowledge to our camp. His sharp ears and quick identifications transformed fleeting glimpses into confirmed sightings time and again. The only thing sharper than Rob's skills, however, was the group's sense of humour, especially when it came to the now-famous "group split" between Sean's group and Rob's group. Despite a few light-hearted mix-ups about who was meant to be following which vehicle, everyone somehow ended up in the right place at the right time.

And, of course, none of it would have been possible without Angela, whose flawless organisation and behind-the-scenes planning kept the whole trip running smoothly. From timing to logistics, she made sure we could simply enjoy the experience and focus on what we came for, the birds.

Both nights brought pure magic. As the sun faded into a dusky orange glow, we waited quietly near a known lek site. Suddenly, as if scripted, the male Pennant-winged Nightjar appeared, gliding low and slow, its long white pennants fluttering behind like delicate silk ribbons, giving us all the chance to take in the fine details of its plumage. For many of us, it was a true once-in-a-lifetime moment, the kind of sighting that sits with you long after you've packed away the binoculars.



Racket-tailed Roller - a lucky find by JP van der Merwe, before we assembled at Punda Maria.



White-crowned Lapwing
[Craig Green]



Pennant-winged Nightjar
[JP van der Merwe]



At the magic Pennant-winged Nightjar spot [Denise Roode]

One of the trip's most unexpected highlights came completely by fluke, when Sean Naudé happened to spot a brilliant flash of yellow while standing at the cell phone signal spot near camp. Sure enough, it was an Eurasian Golden Oriole, perched on the branch of a tree. The timing couldn't have been better, and a quiet thrill passed through the small handful of us lucky enough to witness it. It was one of those magical moments that remind you why birding is equal parts patience and luck.

The birding throughout the weekend was phenomenal, with a rich mix of species that kept everyone's lists, and spirits, full. Some of our standout sightings included the booming Southern Ground-Hornbill, a gorgeous Arnot's Chat, the regal Lappet-faced Vulture, a foraging African Openbill, and the unmistakable Secretarybird, striding through the grasslands with purpose. Smaller delights like the Southern Yellow White-eye and Black-throated Wattle-eye added their own bright notes to the experience, reminding us that beauty comes in all sizes in the birding world.



Eurasian Golden Oriole
[Sean Naudé]

There were so many moments to remember, the hush before dusk as we waited for the nightjar to appear, and the camaraderie that built effortlessly between newcomers and seasoned birders alike.

If this trip could be summed up in one line: *two unforgettable nights beneath the Kruger stars, a Pennant-winged Nightjar dancing through twilight, great friends, and endless laughter.*

Our heartfelt thanks to Rob Geddes for his incredible knowledge and sharp eyes in the field, and to Angela for planning and coordinating the entire trip with such care.

TAMLYNNE TILBURY



Rob Geddes, our guide, enjoying an evening meal with other campers [Angela Openshaw]



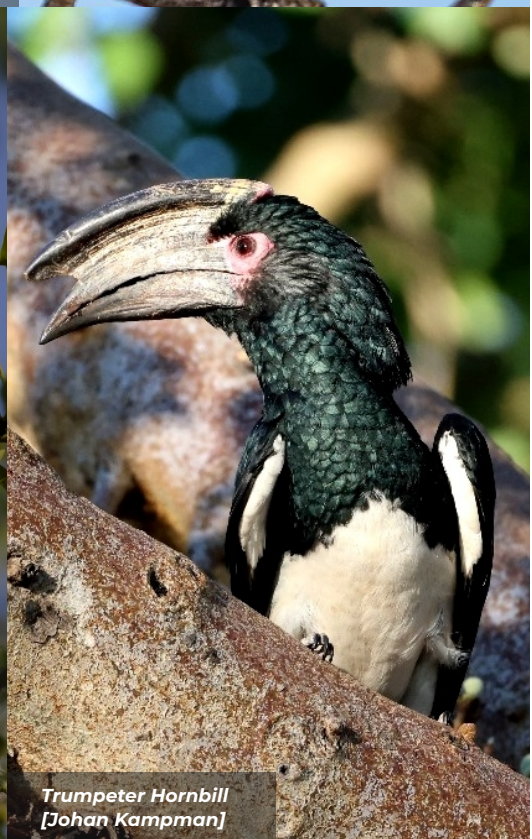
Arnot's Chat
[JP van der Merwe]



Yellow-billed Oxpecker
[Anna-Marie van der Merwe]



Southern Yellow White-eye
[Sean Naudé]



Trumpeter Hornbill
[Johan Kampman]

MEET SOUTH AFRICA'S BIRD OF THE YEAR FOR 2026

CONSERVATION

PUBLIC VOTES ARE IN; SA'S BIRDERS HAVE CHOSEN THEIR BIRD OF THE YEAR.

South Africa (6 October 2025) – After opening public votes for the very first time, BirdLife has crowned its Bird of the Year (BOTY), and it's one that deserves the spotlight – the Black Harrier.

If you've been lucky enough to see one slice across the sky, you'll have an idea of why people call it one of our most elegant raptors. Known locally as the witkruisvleivalk (Afrikaans), mmankgodi-wa-dihlaba (Sesotho), and umamhlangenomnyama (isiZulu), it's a strikingly beautiful bird! It dons coal-black feathers, a bold white rump, a striped tail, and fierce yellow eyes.

Sadly, it's also endangered, with only about 1,000 to 2,000 left in the world, most of them right here in South Africa.

You're most likely to spot a Black Harrier in the fynbos and Karoo of the Western Cape, but they're also wanderers. Depending on the season, they can turn up as far afield as Lesotho or Namibia, following the rains and the prey that comes with them.



Black Harrier
[Overberg Renosterveld Trust]

They're remarkable hunters with fine-tuned abilities to find their catch fast. They fly low and smooth over fields, keeping a sharp eye for rodents, birds, or even the odd reptile. A special facial ruff around their eyes (it's almost like built-in sonar) helps them hone in on the tiniest rustle in the grass.

"The conservation of this magnificent raptor has been overseen for several years by the members of the Black Harrier Task Force, who have greatly increased knowledge and understanding of the Black Harrier." shares BirdLife.

By choosing the Black Harrier, SA's birders have put one of our rarest birds of prey front and centre. The fact that few remain is a concern, and every bit of awareness can tip the scales in their favour. The public vote was close. BirdLife says that honorary mentions are due to the Bearded Vulture and Botha's Lark, who are both getting plenty of love in the voting stage, but BOTY 2026 belongs to the harrier.

SAVANNA DOUGLAS - OCTOBER 6, 2025

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<https://www.goodthingsguy.com/environment/meet-south-africas-bird-of-the-year-for-2026/>



Black Harrier
[Overberg Renosterveld Trust]

RIETVLEI – TRIUMPH AND DISASTER CONSERVATION

BLNG club member, Laetitia Steyberg, reports back on the appeal initiated on behalf of BLNG against COROBRIK.

1. BLNG's APPEAL TO STOP COROBRIK MINING ACTIVITIES AT RIETVLEI SUCCESSFUL

Earlier in the year, the Department of Environmental Affairs (DMRE) granted a mining permit to Corobrik Ltd on a site adjoining the Rietvlei Nature Reserve's southern border. This raised major concerns for Birdlife Northern Gauteng (BLNG) because of the contamination risk by acid mining drainage into the Rietvlei's catchment area and water courses and the impact it will have on the birdlife of the Reserve. BLNG (with a few other parties) strongly appealed against this decision.

An appeal of this nature is a complicated legal process and BLNG engaged a skilled professional environmental consultant to guide BLNG with the compilation and regulatory requirements for an appeal of this nature, a complicated legal process. The consultant engaged with BLNG on a pro bono basis with no cost to BLNG. All credit to her and a big thank you for her time and effort.

As stipulated, the appeal had to be submitted to the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Environmental Affairs (DFFE) and the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS).

Once the legal process of forward and backward responses by all parties was completed, the DFFE Minister issued its ruling on 15 Sept 25, consisting of a 169-page document stating the following outcome:

- Corobrik's mining permit is revoked.
- The document states that Corobrik was instructed to cease coal mining operations while the appeal has been under consideration and will need to continue to do so until a new permit is issued by DMRE.
- Should Corobrik want to reapply for a new mining permit, it will have to undertake various surveys and studies and resubmit the results to the DMRE.
- This list of surveys/studies required is comprehensive and includes all the surveys/studies that BLNG's appeal pointed out as lacking when the permit was granted.

In other words, BLNG's appeal was successful in stopping Corobrik's coal mining activities on Rietvlei's southern border.

The authorisation to mine has therefore been revoked until such time as the DMRE has issued a decision based on the outcomes of the studies.

LAETITIA STEYNBERG

Laetitia was also instrumental in initiating an even worse battle – BLNG vs Ekurhuleni, as untreated sewage is polluting Marais Dam and outlets.



2. POLLUTION CHOKES RIETVLEI DAM, BIRDCOUNT DRASTICALLY DOWN

Rietvlei Dam's worsening pollution is killing waterlife like fish and birds at an alarming rate. Research led by Dr Michael van der Laan of the Agricultural Research Council reveals soaring phosphorus levels driving toxic algal blooms and fish deaths, threatening biodiversity and posing health risks to nearby Pretoria residents. Bird counts have plunged since 1997.

Once a sanctuary for wildlife and a lifeline for the city's people, Rietvlei Nature Reserve and Rietvlei Dam are facing an ecological crisis that threatens both biodiversity and human health. Thick, foul-smelling water now laps at the bird hides and fish lie dead near the Yacht Club and the skies above the reserve are quieter than ever with bird life declining.

Dr Michael van der Laan, specialist researcher at the Agricultural Research Council (ARC) in Pretoria, has been studying the state of the Rietvlei Dam and the Riet River system for years. Together with Pfunzo Tshilume and Leusantha Mudaly, he co-authored a research paper published on November 4 examining water quality trends and waterbird counts in the reserve. Their findings paint a deeply concerning picture.

"The current water quality in the Riet River and Rietvlei Dam is a serious concern," said Van der Laan.

"Although Rietvlei has experienced water quality challenges for many decades, recent data indicate that pollution levels are extremely high."

Monitoring results taken at the dam wall show that phosphate-phosphorus concentrations are not only elevated, but also increasing rapidly. High phosphorus levels are a strong signal of sewage pollution and a driver of algal blooms, which deplete oxygen and suffocate aquatic life.

The consequences have already reached the birdlife that once drew nature lovers and scientists alike to Rietvlei.

BirdLife Northern Gauteng (BLNG) has received growing reports of fewer birds in the reserve. These observations were confirmed by a detailed analysis of the South African Bird Atlas Project and Co-ordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC), which track long-term population trends.

"The data confirmed that the total waterbird counts declined significantly between 1997 and 2025 on the Marais and Rietvlei dams," said Van der Laan. "On average, there has been approximately one bird leaving (or dying) every two weeks."

The Rietvlei Dam is more than just a wildlife refuge. It is one of Pretoria's most critical water sources, feeding treated water into the city's supply network.

"Rietvlei is an important source of raw water that can be treated and distributed as drinking water to residents of Pretoria," he explained. "While earlier reports suggested it supplied about 18% of Pretoria's drinking water, the current estimate is closer to 5–6%, likely because of water quality issues. The drinking water treatment plant is currently not operational."

Beyond its utility, Rietvlei holds immense social and ecological value. It provides a space for residents who might never otherwise see wild animals such as buffalo, zebra, or rhino, and it is a magnet for birders across the country.

"It is a famous hotspot for many rare and unusual birds," Van der Laan added, "and birders are often willing to travel long distances to visit the reserve."

The question, then, is what has gone wrong?

According to the ARC's findings, the main culprits are clear: sewage leaks, failing wastewater treatment systems, and stormwater overflows.

"Such high phosphorus pollution must be coming from formal and informal settlement sewage, including leaking pipes and non-compliant wastewater treatment systems," he said. "During the rainy season, these systems often spill over because of the large volumes of water moving through and being unable to keep up."

Industrial detergents and soaps, which are rich in phosphates, likely worsen the problem. Agricultural runoff and livestock waste add smaller but still measurable contributions.

To combat this, the ARC and the University of Pretoria have partnered under a Water Research Commission (WRC) project to bring monitoring tools directly into the hands of the public.

"We are assembling a low-cost but accurate water quality test kit that can be used by non-technical people, including citizen scientists," he explained. The data collected can be uploaded through an app and shared publicly via the Water Research Observatory website, creating a real-time picture of water quality across South Africa.

The test kit measures key indicators such as phosphorus, nitrate, electrical conductivity, pH, and E. coli. *"The full kit costs about R6 200," he said. "That is a lot for one person, but if we can share the kit or get support, it is a great investment for a community. The low cost per test means we can monitor our water regularly without breaking the bank."*

Recent months have revealed the visible impacts of Rietvlei's decline.

"Most of the impacts have been aesthetic, with terrible smelling, almost black, greasy water, often with a lot of foam," Van der Laan said. "Fish deaths were observed in late October at the first bird hide overlooking the dam and at the Yacht Club closer to the dam wall."

These changes are not just unpleasant, they are dangerous.

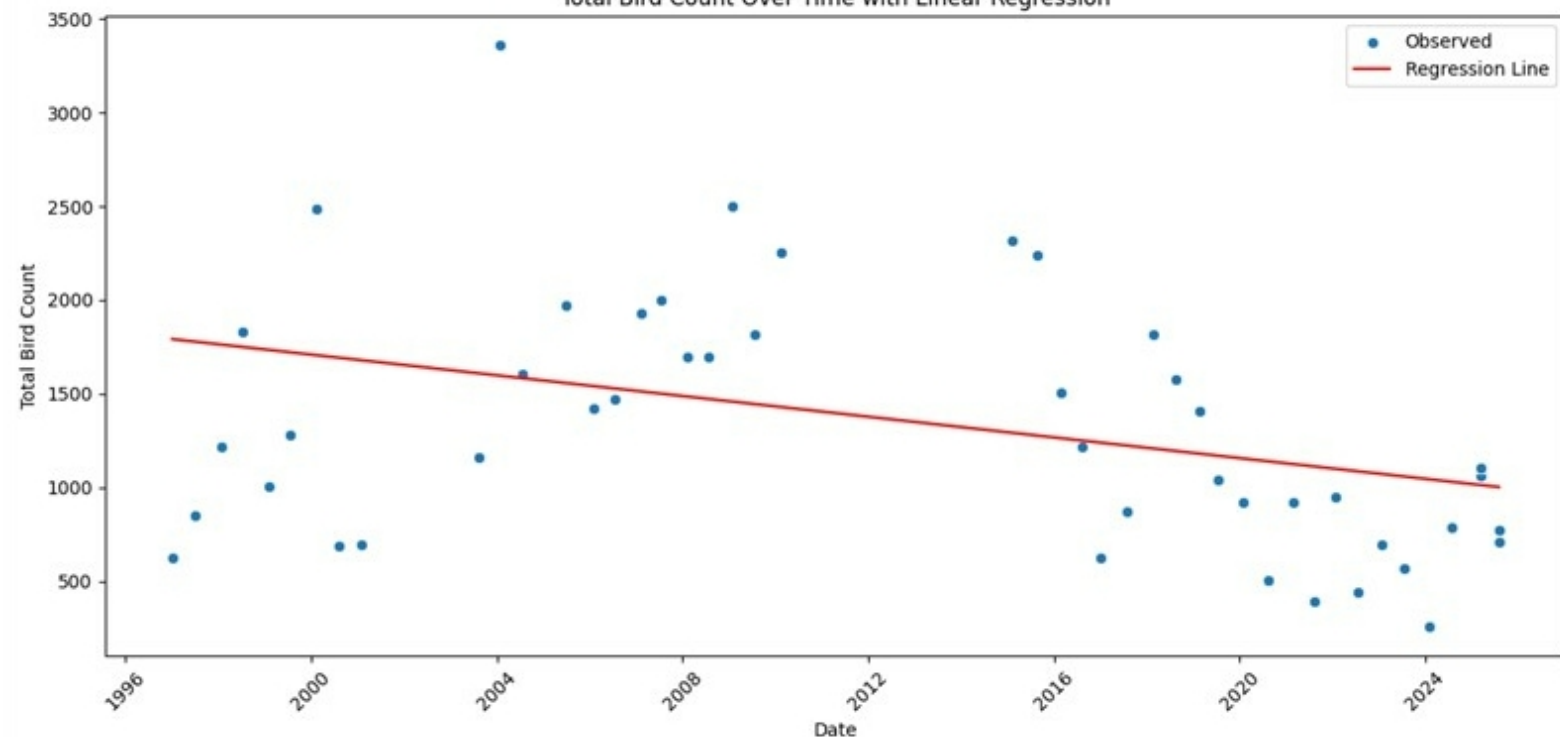
Poor water quality threatens human health and undermines the safety of recreational activities such as sailing or fishing.

"We trust that drinking water providers treat water to the extent that it is safe to consume," he cautioned. "But contaminants of emerging concern, such as pharmaceuticals, personal care products, microplastics, and pesticides, are being found in rivers and dams. These are not yet well understood, and the high phosphorus levels suggest that many other contaminants are likely present."

The ecological risks extend beyond birds and fish. Contaminated irrigation water can transmit pathogens to crops, especially those eaten raw.

"There is a high risk of irrigating with this water," Van der Laan warned, "especially for crops that are consumed raw as this can make people very sick."

Total Bird Count Over Time with Linear Regression



Rietvlei and Marais dams Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) between 1997 and 2025. Acknowledgement: Tania Anderson – SABAP2 Project Communications for the Co-ordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) data.

Responsibility for cleaning up Rietvlei’s water is complicated by municipal boundaries. The polluted water originates in Ekurhuleni and flows into Tshwane, requiring co-ordination between local governments and the national Department of Water and Sanitation.

“Currently, governance structures need to ensure money is correctly spent on improving water treatment plants,” he stressed. “This should be treated as an environmental emergency.”

Residents are understandably worried about whether the water in their taps remains safe. Van der Laan’s response is measured but cautious.

“From my viewpoint, water is safe to drink once it has passed through a properly managed treatment plant. However, there is a concept of acute and chronic health risks,” he said.

“Some pollutants may make a person very sick immediately, while others such as heavy metals have effects that only appear later in life due to long-term exposure. Access to drinking water quality data is not easy to obtain, so we do not know many of the risks.”

He added that the growing number of bottled and filtered water shops in Pretoria is a sign that public confidence in municipal water has waned.

“Many people in Tshwane do not trust the drinking water sources,” he noted.

While the Rietvlei drinking water plant is not currently in operation, it is not directly responsible for the pollution.

“It is the wastewater treatment works upstream that are emitting high levels of untreated or partially treated sewage,” he clarified. “The water treated by the plant at Rietvlei is pumped into the drinking water pipe network and not back into the dam.”

BirdLife Northern Gauteng has expressed its deep concern over the situation. *“We are aware of the situation and we are deeply concerned and saddened by it,”* the organisation stated. *“We know that it is being investigated and will see how we can help once we have more information.”*

DA ward councillor Henning Viljoen said he has investigated on site the possible sources of the pollution with DA activist and candidate councillor from Faerie Glen, Jaco Geyser.

He added that they will soon attend a presentation with the Ekurhuleni Water Care Company (ERWAT) on what the company is doing to prevent polluted water from being dumped into streams feeding the Riet River and streams feeding into the reserve and the dam.

Source: <https://www.citizen.co.za/rekord/news-headlines/local-news/2025/11/10/pollution-chokes-rietvlei-dam-birdcount-drastically-down/>

40 LIFERS IN THE CAPRIVI

TRAVELOGUE



African Skimmer
[Marna Buys]

Itinerary overview: From Pretoria, we drove up to Martin's Drift, crossed the border and stayed near Francistown for the night. We then spent a night outside Kasane. After that we spent two nights at Katima Mulilo, two nights near Rundu and then three nights at Mahangu Lodge along the Kavango. To get home we crossed the border near Mahangu and drove down through Botswana to Maun, where we took a flight via Gaborone back to Johannesburg.

Our trip began with a very productive stop somewhere outside Ellisras/Lephalale. Recent rain had filled up the spaces on both sides of the road, and it was difficult to know where to look first. Some highlights were watching Yellow-billed Storks flying gracefully, and not so gracefully, through the air, and seeing a Large Skimmer dragonfly on the sand next to the car.

After a fairly smooth border crossing, we started to take in Botswana's arid scenery, happy to see from the puddles on the side of the road that there had been some rain. Soon after arriving and settling in at Woodland's Stopover, I saw my first lifer, a Verreaux's Eagle-Owl sitting majestically in the canopy of a tall tree above the dry Tati riverbed. That night we also enjoyed a brief glimpse of the Double-banded Sandgrouse coming to drink, from the specially crafted bird hide.

The next morning, we woke up early to take a walk around the grounds before heading to Kasane. Some of the highlights were puffbacks displaying and a pair of Orange-breasted Bush-Shrikes. The sound of a Burchell's Coucal calling in the background, which I eventually saw, reminded me I'd be looking for different types of coucals soon.

En route to Senyati, our first goal for the day was to find Boulder Chat in some rocky outcrops just outside of Francistown. The area was very dry, and after looking for a while, I started to accept that we might not see them. Grahame, our guide, had warned us that they weren't there the year before, as it was too dry.



Boulder Chat
[Marna Buys]



Senegal Coucal
[Marna Buys]

However, after taking a moment to listen for their call next to some star chestnut trees, we heard the whistle, although it wasn't clear where it was coming from. We then decided to cross the road to another rocky outcrop, where we soon heard a lot of activity, and saw a Meyer's Parrot perching in a tree, as well as some Black-faced Waxbills flitting around in the scrub.

And just like we hoped, the Boulder Chats were there, moving around the vegetation. Not a lifer for me, as I was fortunate enough to see them at Limpokwena, but still a special sighting, especially to see them at a close distance. Further along the road, at a short stop where there was unfortunately no water as expected, we spotted the bright yellow Eurasian Golden Oriole.



Collared Palm Thrush
[Marna Buys]



Schalow's Turaco
[Marna Buys]

The next lifer on the list was a Bradfield's Hornbill, which we saw fly over the road and into a tree while on one of our many "Stop! Turn around. It's a raptor!" stops. Another target on the way to Senyati was the Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, but sadly, while we stared incredibly hard at the black cotton soil fields in Pandamatenga for a good while, to the point where we were starting to see visual distortions, we didn't pick them up.

Our arrival at Senyati brought a whole lot of birds into the picture though, quite literally, with Marna using her incredible eyes to pick up a Pearl-spotted Owlet in a tree on the way into the camp. After dumping our bags, we went to explore the open area around the unfenced waterhole. We saw our first Red-billed Spurfowls, as well as giraffe and jackal. Getting up close to a shaving brush combretum to appreciate its flowers was also a moment I'll remember.

At one point, Marna and I froze when we saw a Collared Palm Thrush and a Senegal Coucal on either side of us at the same time. Marna tried to call out to the others but only attracted the attention of a Dutch lady standing nearby, who I think might have been a bit disappointed when we told her we were looking at birds.



Senyati
[Liesl de Swardt]



[Liesl de Swardt]

That night, eating gigantic bagel burgers overlooking the floodlit waterhole, it felt like the trip had really begun. And it was only going to get better on the Chobe river cruise the next morning.

We'd had to drive into Kasane the previous day to pay for the boat trip, so we had already been to look for the Northern Grey-headed Sparrow. We didn't find it, but seeing our first Schalow's Turaco in a tree on the way to the cruise was a sign of many lifers to come. Isaac, our guide on the Chobe cruise, got us right up close to all the special birds we wanted to see, including Long-toed Lapwings, as well as a Little Bittern creeping stealthily through the reeds.

Marna's impressive spotting skills got us right up to a Lesser Moorhen (lifer), and a Luapula Cisticola hiding in the reeds. The highlight of the cruise was seeing African Skimmers resting on the exposed sandbanks, which was incredible in itself, but being able to manoeuvre so easily on the boat, we also got to see them in action, chasing a Yellow-billed (Black) Kite.

Seeing an African Fish Eagle catch a fish in the river and bring it up to its nest also felt like a privilege to see. But honestly, apart from all the incredible birds, just being on the river felt so peaceful, it was worth it just for the experience of being there, and getting to see all of the wildlife, including elephant and lechwe, and the rare Puku antelope.



Long-toed Lapwing
[Marna Buys]

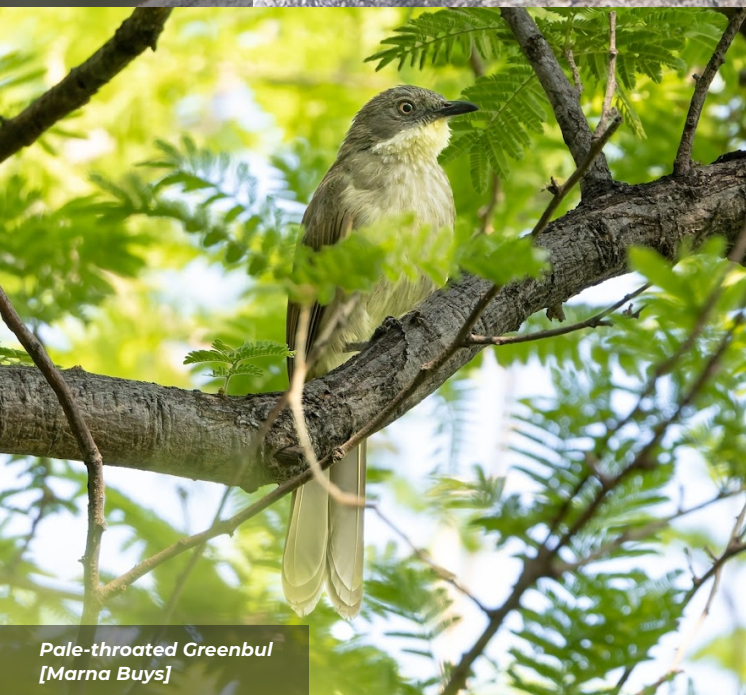
Our first boat cruise done, the next stop was Caprivi Houseboat Safaris along the Zambezi River in Katima Mulilo. In the beautiful, lush garden, we saw the resident Schalow's Turaco, along with its grey and slightly scruffy-looking chicks, which were adorable. White-browed Coucal was also on the grounds, and we had a lovely lookout from the lounge deck area over the river, where Ilze spotted our first Osprey, and we saw Eurasian Hobby flying overhead for the first time.

Birding in the Katima Mulilo area brought many other highlights, like Hartlaub's Babbler and Racket-tailed Roller, which we found when pulling over from the main road. Our first Rock Pratincole sighting was from far away, on the banks of the shore at the Protea Hotel, where we also tasted some very tart but delicious mangosteen fruit.

One of the top targets in the area was the Pale-throated Greenbul, which we watched fly from one side of the Caprivi River Lodge grounds to the other, eventually getting a great sighting of two birds sitting side by side in the canopy. Elba was also elated to finally see African Finfoot from the Namwi Island camping grounds, which were filled with beautiful shady trees, where we also found some Trumpeter Hornbills.



Rock Pratincole
[Marna Buys]



Pale-throated Greenbul
[Marna Buys]

As if birding from the riverbanks wasn't productive enough, a boat trip on the Zambezi gave us a brief view of a nesting family of White-backed Night Herons, as well as many more African Finfoot, which we also saw roosting every evening in the water berry tree at the lodge below the deck. Other highlights from the Zambezi boat trip were the Okavango race of Hadedda, with its painted face, and some of the other coucals on the list, including the larger Coppery-tailed Coucal.



Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony
[Marna Buys]

Our time in Katima Mulilo also happened to coincide with the spotting of a Northern Carmine Bee-eater in a Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony. It was quite surreal to stand on the edge of their nesting sites on the ground (their other nesting site had collapsed), and see them burrowing away, as well as flying in a massive swarm overhead. It took a while to see the fully-green face of the Northern Carmine, but the guides who had been keeping watch over the area eventually spotted it, having become quite well accustomed to its movements.



Northern Bee-eater
[Marna Buys]

With our productive time along the Zambezi drawing to a close, it was time to change course and head along another river, the Kwando. We stopped at Camp Kwando en route to try and see the Chirping Cisticola in the reedbed next to the hotel dining area, but unfortunately these had all collapsed. We did see a slightly different race of vervet monkeys though, with different lighter colouring, but the same level of cheekiness. Moving on from our short stop along the Kwando, we came to our first stop along the Okavango River at Kayova Lodge. On the Namibian side, this is called the Kavango, and we spent quite a bit of time after arriving, checking out the gardens, which were home to some Black-faced Babblers, as well as Black and Levillant's Cuckoos.

We would be looking for our targets the next day with our local guide Cosmos, but first went to say hello to him and confirm arrangements. At this point, we had great sightings of the Sharp-tailed Starlings flying in the trees alongside the road. That night, back at the lodge, we listened to the sounds of hippos, and looked out for owls. We saw a Western Barn Owl flying around the property, and had some up-close sightings of a Southern White-faced Owl and an African Barred Owlet making its incessant "purrrrr" call.

Another side quest in this area was the Okacuito riverside lodge and campsite, where we got to see a Southern Brown-throated Weaver displaying in the reeds, as well as a close-up view of at least two Angolan green snakes in the riverside vegetation next to one of the riverside jetties.

The next day was one of the most anticipated days of our trip, where we would get to spend time with Cosmos, whom Grahame had been telling us about the whole trip. In the early morning, we met Cosmos outside his homestead near Rundu, and he guided us into the miombo woodlands behind his home. While much of the miombo forest in the Capivi strip is being cut down for firewood, this community-owned piece of land is still intact. We spent a lot of time just appreciating being around all the African Teak and Manketti trees, just taking in this habitat.

We unfortunately dipped on the Rufous-bellied Tit, which I'm convinced wasn't on the Namibian side of the river, but we did get a decent sighting of Souza's Shrike on the top of a Teak tree, as well as Arnot's Chat, flitting in and out of what I think was a False Mopani. In addition to the target birds, we also saw a Fawn-coloured Lark fluttering above us like a moth, and an African Cuckoo Hawk as we were leaving Cosmos' homestead.



Souza's Shrike
[Marna Buys]



Black-faced Babbler
[Marna Buys]



Hartlaub's Babbler
[Marna Buys]

Cosmos also told us a lot about the local uses of trees like the False Mopani, one of which was leaking thick black sap that we watched fall in slow motion from the trunk. Cosmos explained that the bark is used medicinally. On our last morning with Cosmos, in a last-ditch attempt to find the tit, he brought one of his brothers along, and showed me how to eat a Manketti fruit, which was dry but had a bit of a sweet, sherbety taste.

Other lifers that I found in the dry miombo forests were Tinkling Cisticola and Mosque Swallow. With our time with Cosmos at an end, we moved on to our last stop, Mahangu Lodge along the Kavango. The next few days were spent in and out of the Bwabwata National Park, where you can see the remains of the Koevoet military grounds, where we spotted the northern race of Bennet's Woodpecker. We also spent a morning in the Mahangu National Park, where I saw a Purple-banded Sunbird.

In both parks, we managed to get right up close to the water, where we looked for cisticolas and other birds in the reeds, and spotted larger birds like the special Wattled Crane in between the red lechwe and crocodiles along the bank.

More highlights included a Great White Pelican, a Rufous-bellied Heron, a Greater Painted-snipe flying out over the water, and many Collared Pratincole soaring through the air, along with many Knob-billed Ducks.

Seeing an Ayres's Hawk Eagle diving down from the sky was another epic sighting, as well as both Lappet and White-headed Vultures. On our last two boat trips, both along the Kavango, we saw several Grey-headed kingfishers, as well as another Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony along the bank, with Swamp Boubou lurking in the riverside thickets. Other highlights in the area were seeing the Greater Swamp Warbler and the Chirping Cisticola, after many attempts to find the right spot with our bird guide, Christopher.

Coming face to face with the cruel realities of nature, we also saw the pathetic and upsetting display of Water Thick-knees trying to draw attention away from their chicks, while a very placid-looking African Fish Eagle sat on the bank in front of them. We sadly dipped on Pel's Fishing Owl, but we saw many Crimson-breasted Shrikes in the parks and Common Swifts soaring through the air everywhere we drove. In the Mahangu grounds we also found Brown Firefinches near the solar panels. We eventually managed to spot one Northern Grey-headed Sparrow at a Shell garage, right above us in the roof, while we were filling up.



Brown Firefinch
[Marna Buys]

On our last afternoon, we very aptly found my fortieth lifer for the trip, a Slaty Egret, while drinking beers from the deck at Nyime Safari Lodge, where I also spotted my first Piet-my-vrou for the season, and we watched a herd of elephant come down from the hills to drink.

It's impossible to capture everything we saw, and the incredible feeling of exploring this part of the world. But, if you are interested in doing a trip of your own, I would recommend Grahame from Reach Africa Birding and Getaways, who can also put you in touch with Cosmos if you are looking for birds in the Rundu area.

JENNA VAN SCHOOR

BEST OF BLNG

BLNG'S BEST – ZULULAND MARVELS

The most unique species of South Africa – these appear in the upper eastern corner of Kwa-Zulu-Natal. They are on the very southern edges of their distribution range and you won't find them anywhere else in the country. Enjoy these stunning images from BLNG's top photographers.

Kindly submit your special photographs to ivonnecoetzee@outlook.com. You will never know when they might be selected for this section!



Rudd's Apalis
[Marna Buys]



Woodwards' Batis
[Johan Croukamp]



Spotted Ground Thrush
[Johan Croukamp]



Green Malkoha
[Johan Croukamp]



Palm-nut Vulture
[Johan Croukamp]



Green Barbet
[Johan Croukamp]



Mangrove Kingfisher
[Marna Buys]



Neergaard's Sunbird
[Johan Botha]



Livingstone's Turaco
[Pieter Heslinga]



Pink-throated Twinspot
[Steve Stevenson]

BREEDING IN OUR GARDEN

BIRDERS EYE VIEW

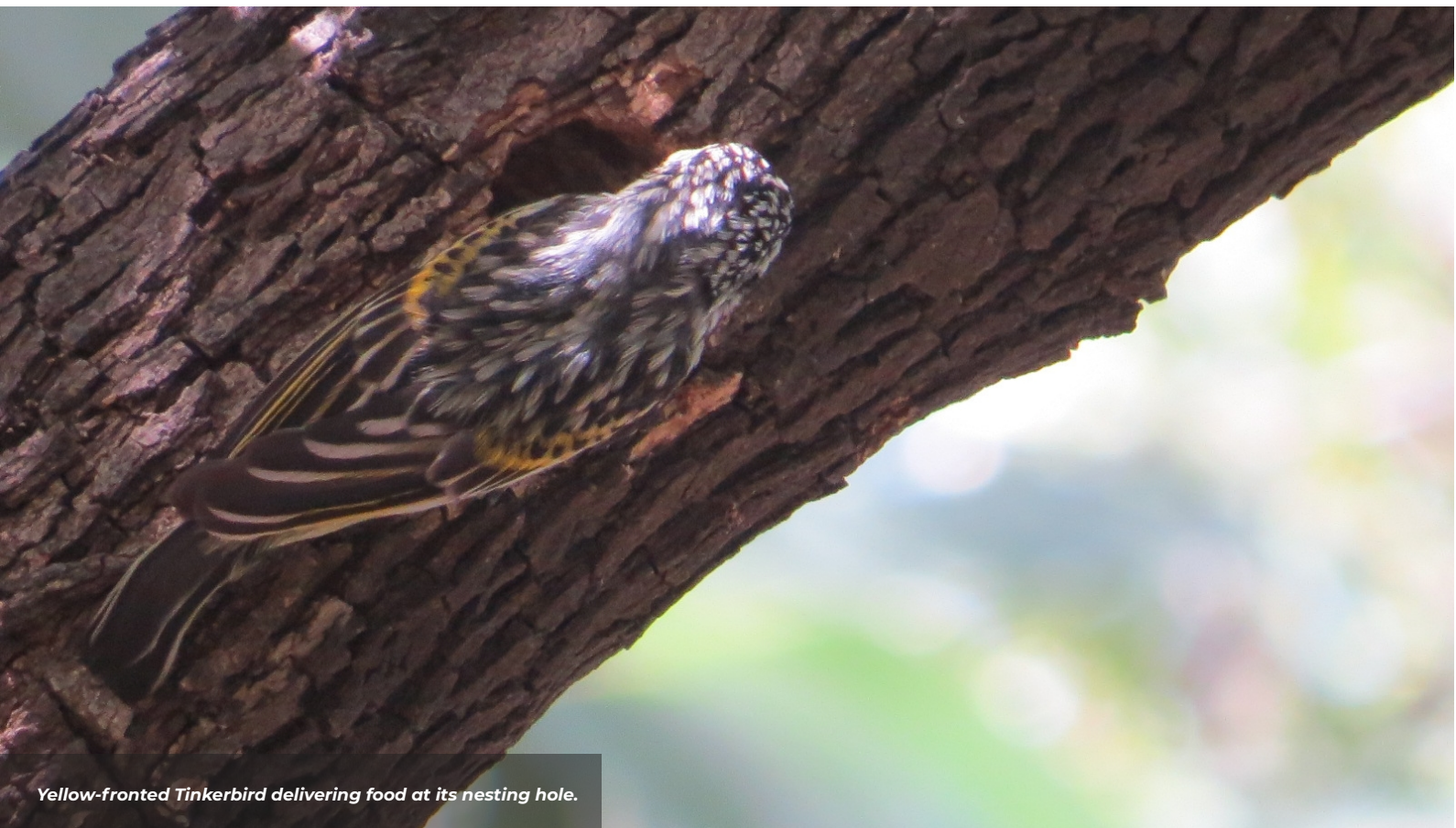


Little Sparrowhawk, guarding its nest.

To put it mildly, our garden is a bit wild and overgrown. We do have more than our fair share of mature trees: some indigenous, such as the Ficus Sur (Broom Cluster Fig), Celtis Africana (White Stinkwood), the Scotia Brachypetala (Weeping Boer-bean), but also aliens such as fan palms and even a Jacaranda, this being Pretoria.

Why don't I have these invasive species removed? It turns out that they are important breeding sites. Every spring, the tall, ugly fan palm has several pairs of African Palm Swifts breeding in its skirts of dead leaves. There is also a family of seven or more bushbabies living in its crown. How could we interfere? The Jacaranda, especially, is a generous host.

First, a pair of breeding Little Sparrowhawks chose it for three glorious consecutive years, and before them, a pair of Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds during COVID, just as special. More recently, Black-collared Barbets return to the same dead branch, riddled with nesting holes, summer after summer. These Barbets and Tinkerbirds have had to be constantly vigilant – Lesser Honeyguides are pestering them persistently, trying to deposit their eggs.



Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird delivering food at its nesting hole.



A baby Tinkerbird peeking out.



Black-collared Barbet in the nesting hole. I'm hoping to again see a juvenile barbet with its comical pink beak to re-assure me that the Lesser Honeyguide has not been successful.

To tell the truth, the very first bird that we spotted nesting in our garden happened to be a Black Sparrowhawk, of all things. We only discovered this late one afternoon while we were relaxing on the patio. I had only recently discovered that many raptors are cannibals and catch other birds for lunch and was busy informing my husband of this. Incredibly, as a perfect demo, a juvenile Black Sparrowhawk caught a dove right in front of us and flew to a tree on the garden's perimeter. I grabbed my camera and eventually spotted it on its nest, tearing the dove apart. Blame it on our demanding careers that we never even realised that this magnificent breeding spectacle had been going on, unbeknownst, right under our noses, for weeks!



Lesser Honeyguide trying its luck at the Barbet's nest.



Juvenile Black Sparrowhawk with prey, on its nest in the garden



A magnificent African Paradise Flycatcher male on its nest.

Last year, we were overjoyed when a pair of African Paradise Flycatchers built a nest right outside our lounge window. We had ringside seats.

This year, a Laughing Dove bred in the crown of a Ponytail Palm. Our study is on a mezzanine floor, and we had excellent views to see the eggs first, then the two babies, and lastly the juveniles before they left the nest.



Laughing Dove on her nest



Laughing Dove fledglings.

Recently, a Cape Robin-chat bred in a cycad next to the front door. There were three eggs. I found it strange that a pair of juvenile Cape Robin-Chats were around at the same time, being taught the ropes. Could it be a second clutch of eggs by the same parents? It was interesting to note that the single surviving chick fledged and left the nest exactly 15 days after hatching as per my most trusted source: Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa.

And then, waiting to see whether the Lesser Honeyguide might get an opportunity to enter the Barbets' nest, just this week, I spotted a Karoo Thrush with nesting material in the tree. He neatly delivered it to the nest where the female was breeding in another palm species.



Cape Robin-chat nest.



Cape Robin-chat chick.



Juvenile Cape Robin-chat.



We first noticed Hadedas wheeling to a tree with nesting material. Now they are tending their chicks.



Karoo Thrush delivering nesting material.



Grey-headed Sparrow feeding its young

Then we've noticed a Southern Grey-headed Sparrow here, feeding its young, a group of Arrow-marked Babbler with a fledgling, the delicate nest of the White-bellied Sunbird, woven of spider webs and ferns, Cape White-eyes hopping on our lawn with a baby in tow, which couldn't yet fly... A Crested Barbet, busy excavating its nest in a Lala palm stump, met up with a Golden-tailed Woodpecker with the same idea. Both left in a hurry.

Open your eyes and start noticing the quiet breeding revolution right under your noses. What a joy and revelation this has been for us!

IVONNE COETZEE

RINGVERSLAG, AUG - NOV 2025

CITIZEN SCIENCE

In die winter het die ringers maar laag gelê. Ons het vergadering gehou en 'n opleidingssessie gehad. Dit was net te koud om die voëls aan sulke lae temperature bloot te stel. Hulle verkleum gou as hulle te lank in die nette bly.

Van Augustus af was ons weer bedrywig. Die plekke wat besoek is, was Voortrekkermonument, Bishopvoëlpark in Wierdapark, Pretoria se Botaniese Tuin, Wolfhuiskraal naby Pienaarsrivier, Van der Walt se plaas by Krokodilspruit, Soetdorings-plaas naby Cullinan, Strubendam in Lynnwood Glen en Moreleta NR in Moreletapark.

Ons het sedert die 2de Augustus 1447 voëls gering, waaraan 1181 nuwe ringe gekry het en 266 'retraps'. Die beste vangs in die vier maande, was die Rooiassie (Orange-breasted Waxbill) wat David Keyter op die plaas Soetdorings naby Cullinan gevang het.

Die plek met die meeste spesies was Wolfhuiskraal waar ons 48 spesies gekry het. Die interessantste vangs was 'n Kremetartlaksman (Southern White-crowned Shrike) wat Johan de Jager daar as 'lifer' gering het. 'n Eerste vir Wolfhuiskraal volgens SABAB2.

Strubendam is 'n weggesteekte juweel in Lynnwood Glen, Pretoria. Dit is 'n voëlparadys. Ons het die meeste voëls op een dag daar gekry. Ons het 'n allemintige 341 voëls (23 spesies) dié dag hanteer, waarvan 289 nuwe ringe gekry het en 52 'retraps'.

WANDA LOUWRENS



Die groot Apiesdoringboom by die Botaniese Tuine was die ideale plek om te ring tydens die 'Bird Fair' in September. Die tafels is druk besoek deur klublede, sowel as die publiek. [Arrie Kloppe]



Hierdie Rooiassie (Orange-breasted Waxbill) was 'n 'lifer' vir David Keyter op 'n plaas in Krokodilspruit op die Moloto-pad. [Daniël Keyter]



First ever Little Egret fitted with a GPS tracker in South Africa. Pieter du Plessis posed with a Little Egret at Barberspan on 25 October 2025. [Dr Jonah Gula]



Julian du Plooy en Pieter du Plessis het by Barberspan elkeen 'n Kaapse Slopeend (Cape Shoveler) gering. Dit vind hoofsaaklik in die nag met spesiale nette plaas. [Chris du Plooy]



Dit was die eerste keer dat Daniël Keyter 'n Kleinsperwer (Little Sparrowhawk) gering het. Hy was deel van die groep wat in September by Wolfhuiskraal gering het. [Mari Ueckermann]



Justin Ponder, een van ons jongste 'trainees' het hierdie Gewone Troupant (Lilac-breasted Roller) in 'n 'kestrel trap' en 'n muis gevang naby Wolfhuiskraal. [Nicole de Jager]



Hierdie Kremetartlaksman (Southern White-crowned Shrike) was nie net 'n 'lifer' vir Johan de Jager nie, maar volgens Safring ook die eerste een wat ooit by Wolfhuiskraal gering is. [Mari Ueckermann]



Nog 'n 'lifer' vir Pieter du Plessis! Hy het dié Grootmossie (Great Sparrow) by Wolfhuiskraal in September gering. Dit is 'n spesie wat ons selde in 'n net kry. [Mari Ueckermann]



David Keyter het in September hierdie Grootjagarend (African Hawk Eagle) net noord van Pienaarsrivier gering. [Daniël Keyter]



While working on the Socialable Weaver Project at Benfontein NR, Kiley van Meer, a BLNG trainee ringer, ringed this Pygmy Falcon (Dwergvalk) in October. [Natacha Planque]



Nanet Pieters het hierdie Gevlekte Ooruil (Spotted Eagle-Owl) baba in Oktober by Van der Walt plaas (Moloto-pad) gering. [Marina Pienaar]



Reinhard Fowler met 'n Hadedas [Moreleta Kloof NR]



Daar was groot belangstelling by die nette toe die voëls afgehaal word. [Moreleta Kloof NR]

BROOD PARASITES AND PERFECT EGGS

CITIZEN SCIENCE

MATERNAL GENES HELP CUCKOOS LAY PERFECT IMPOSTERS

The common cuckoo is an infamously absent parent. Instead of raising its own young, this brood parasite secretly deposits its eggs into the nests of other bird species. These counterfeits closely resemble the appearance of other eggs in the nest, leaving the host blissfully unaware that it is incubating an imposter.

After hatching, the cuckoo chick efficiently disposes of its step siblings, eliminating any competition.

Because cuckoos parasitise the nests of over 100 different host species, their eggs come in a wide variety of colours and patterns. But how does the cuckoo evolve eggs that mimic so many hosts while still remaining a single species?

To find out, scientists analysed genomes from nearly 300 European and 50 Oriental cuckoos, then checked which gene variants were associated with different eggshell hues. *"The question was: How can a cuckoo reliably pass on the right egg colour?"* study corresponding author Jochen Wolf explained in a press release. *"After all, a female might not know what her own egg looks like."*

The analysis revealed that egg colour is passed down almost exclusively through the female sex chromosome, thus ensuring that daughters always lay eggs with the same base colour as their mothers. As a result, a female can mate with any male without losing their adaptation to a specific host, preventing populations from splitting off into different species.

Patterning, by contrast, is more influenced by genes from both parents. In other words, as evolutionary biologists Michael Sorensen and Claire Spottiswoode noted in a related *Science Perspective*, *"maternal inheritance alone does not account for the diversity of cuckoo egg phenotypes."*

(Re-published under Common License from Science Advisor (06/11/2025))

Read the science paper here:

[Genomic architecture of egg mimicry and its consequences for speciation in parasitic cuckoos](#) | [Science](#)



The common cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) has evolved egg features (top row) to mimic eggs of different host species (bottom row). [Swetlana Meshcheryaginao]

CLUB RARITIES

REGIONAL AND LOCAL RARITIES AND INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

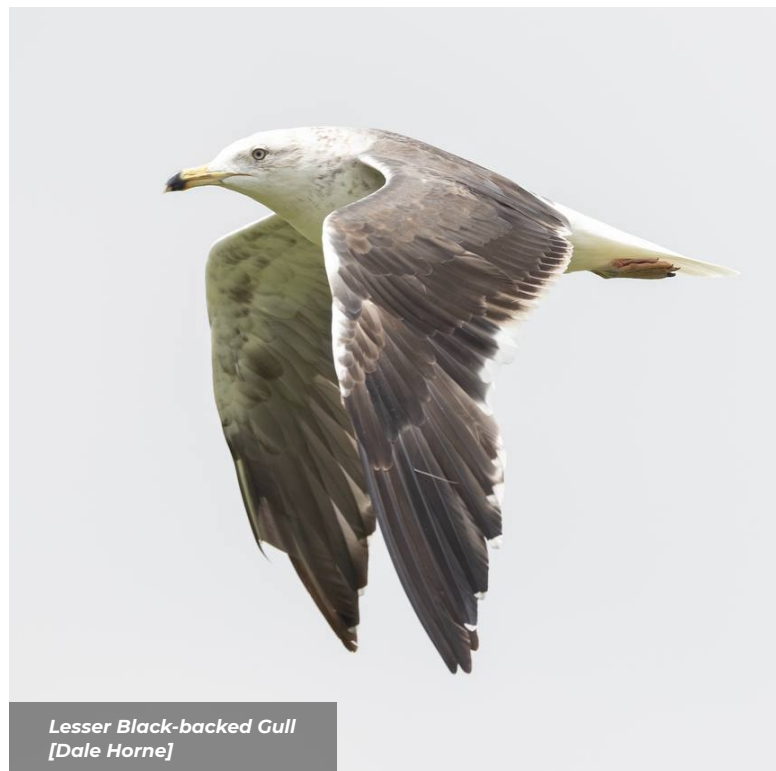
NATIONAL

The returning **Slaty Egret** was seen at Walkhaven Dog Park and Gnu Valley again during this period and was a popular drawcard amongst birders. (Tertius Gouws).

Sandy Neveling found another national rarity, a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at South Bay on the Vaal Dam in August. Dale Horne found another **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Marievale end of November. Though erratic, this species seems to be now more commonly seen in Wider Gauteng.



Slaty Egret
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Lesser Black-backed Gull
[Dale Horne]

REGIONAL RARITIES

AUGUST

Verena Road had both **White-bellied Bustard** and a pair of **Denham's Bustard** at the beginning of August.



White-bellied Bustard [Marna Buys]



Denham's Bustard [Ivonne Coetzee]

David Broom and Kevin du Plessis reported **White-bellied Bustards** near Magaliesburg.

Faerie Glen NR's long-staying **African Finfoot** was seen by various BLNG members.

On a visit to the Devon grasslands, Marlou Schalkwyk recorded both **Black-necked Grebe** and a flock of **Blue Crane**.



African Finfoot [Marna Buys]



Black-necked Grebe [Marlou Schalkwyk]

Keanu Canto and the BLNG club found a **Water Thick-knee** at a badly overgrown Vaalkop Dam. They also spotted **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse** near Pilanesberg.

The relaxed **Red-chested Flufftail** at Albert's Farms drew a number of photographers keen to see this species out in the open.



Blue Crane [Marlou Schalkwyk]



Red-chested Flufftail [Sheleph Burger]

Roelof Jonkers found **Allen's Gallinule** which seem to be resident and breeding at Rust de Winter Dam.

Christo Swart reported a single **Cape Vulture** at Suikerbosrand, and Jason Boyce heard a **Ground Woodpecker** calling near Balfour. A **Martial Eagle** was seen in Dinokeng (Andrew Pike).

A BLNG group, guided by JP van der Merwe, found an **African Hawk Eagle** at Borakalalo during a club outing at the end of August. They also found **Meyer's Parrot**.



Allen's Gallinule [Roelof Jonkers]

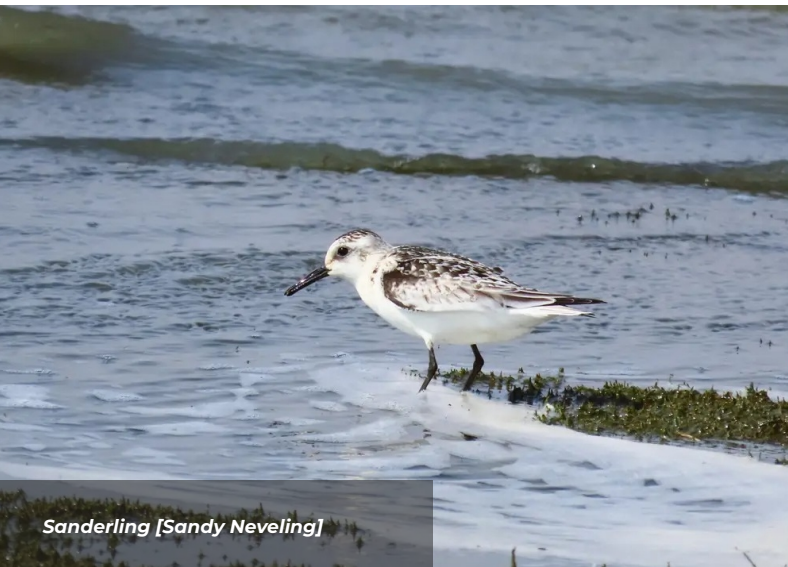


Meyer's Parrot [JP van der Merwe]

SEPTEMBER

The **Red-chested Flufftail** continued to draw interested birders to Albert's Farms

A single **Sanderling** was found at the South Bay on the Vaal Dam. [Sandy Neveling]



Sanderling [Sandy Neveling]



Yellow-throated Sandgrouse were found near Chaneng in the North-West. [Sarel van der Westhuizen]

An **African Finfoot** was found by BLNG members at the Elands River crossing near Rust de Winter on the Bronkhorstspuit Road.

Boon's Road area continued showing several **Rufous-eared Warblers**, one of the few localities where this species can be found during winter in Wider Gauteng.

Hanjo Gouws and the BLNG club spotted an **African Black Stork** over the Seringveld area.

A single **Baillon's Crake** was found at Marievale Bird Sanctuary.



Rufous-eared Warbler [Richard Crawshaw]



Baillon's Crake [Michelle van Niekerk]

OCTOBER

The male **Narina Trogon** had returned to Deale's Rock in the Wilge River Valley. An **African Finfoot** was seen in the Wilge River valley.

Lappet-faced, White-backed and **Cape Vultures** attended a carcass at Kgomo-Kgomo. (Thea Jenkins)

NOVEMBER

The popular **Slaty Egret** remained at Walkhaven Dog Park and Gnu Valley and was reported by various birders. (Tertius Gouws).

Dale Horne found another **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Marievale.

Keanu Canto with BLNG reported a **Blue Crane** overhead in Olympus. Selwyn Rautenbach and Mark Wadley also saw a couple of **Blue Crane** at Suikerbosrand.

Harlequin Quail were found twice, in both cases dead, unfortunately, after flying into windows of a shopping mall in Krugersdorp and later, an industrial complex in Midrand.



Lesser Black-backed Gull [Mark Wadley]



Harlequin Quail [Andy Featherstone]

Peter Thompson had a great sighting of a male **Montagu's Harrier** over the Friends of Magalies MBT Trail area. He also found a **Common Buttonquail** there.

A **Pale-crowned Cisticola** in full breeding colours was picked up on private property near Centurion by Pieter Verster. Andrew Pike found another **Pale-crowned Cisticola** at Devon.



Pale-crowned Cisticola [Pieter Verster]



A Eurasian Hobby was seen mid-month over Randburg [Jacques Jordaan]

The hybrid **Red-eyed x Common (Black-capped) Bulbul** of Suikerbosrand is fairly well-known amongst birders. This possible **hybrid Southern Red Bishop x Long-tailed Widowbird** found there poses a new conundrum.

Michael Johnson reported some interesting species seen at Loodswaai Game Lodge: **African Cuckoo Hawk**, **Grey Penduline Tit**, and a single **Wire-tailed Swallow**.

Rietvlei NR delivered some interesting species. There was a single **Marabou Stork** on Gwarrie Route, **Temminck's Coursers** and **Cuckoo Finches**. The reserve delivered a wonderful surprise when Corrie Barnard encountered a **Grey-headed Kingfisher**.



Southern Red Bishop x Long-tailed Widowbird [Ben Wadley]



Grey-headed Kingfisher [Corrie Barnard]

Marievale also yielded a **Grey Crowned Crane**.

More news was the **Grey Plover** spotted at Leeupan, Benoni, by Michael Johnson. This bird stayed several days.

The popular twitch of 2024, a **Green Sandpiper** at the Jukskei river in Helderberg Estate, returned but left two days later after the sandbanks were flooded.

A **European Honey Buzzard** was seen in Benoni.

Reinard Haywood reported an **African Harrier Hawk** over De Tweedespruit Conservancy, while Sandy Neveling met up with a pair of **Double-banded Coursers** with a youngster in tow near Deneysville.

All these sightings were reported on various social media forums. Some records were sourced from EBird or Sabap2 records.



LANIARIUS NEW MEMBERS: AUGUST TO DECEMBER 2025

BLNG MATTERS

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 phone her on cell number 072 737 0862 for any queries or information.

Annalie Swanepoel	Monumentpark	Tiaan Geldenhuys	Centurion
Adele van Vuuren	Lytteton	Marina vd Merwe	Elarduspark
Stephen & Marianne Brown	Irene	Kai Rynners	Faerie Glen
Ignus & Kobie van Eeden	Sinoville Ext 6	Jan van Biljon	Montana Tuine
Amori Gerber	Douglasdale	Thomas van Deventer	Hatfield/Hillcrest
Martie & André Zybrands	Môregloed	Dale & Sarah Horne	Rynfield, Benoni
Tertius & Delene Murray	Die Wilgers	AK Saib	Centurion
Tamlynne Tilbury	Centurion	Gawie & Jolene Meyer	Rietvalleirand
Lizzy & Brett Thornton-Dibb	Beaulieu	Paul Venter	Standerton
John Grobbelaar	Wierdapark	Hein Duvenhage	Centurion

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BUFFELSDRIFT

Rust de Winter

ACCOMMODATION

R700/adult/night;

R350/child 12 years and younger/night;

Day visitors R100/person/day



BOOKINGS

Please call Donald

on 082 885 5577;

or e-mail

bookings@birdhiking.co.za

Website: www.birdhiking.co.za