



Laniarius

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BirdLife Noord-Gauteng
BirdLife Northern Gauteng

Image Source: Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher
(Trochocercus cyanomelas) - Johan Botha


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Giving Conservation Wings

2026 KOMITEE

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FROM THE EDITOR

Much of the time, birding is not so much about the species ticked or even lifers seen but about the landscapes where we venture to bird.

Most of us live in a city. The constant insistence of buildings, pylons, roads and shopping centres batter our consciousness. Our psyches are exhausted by the relentless disruption of noise from traffic, weed-eaters, barking dogs, TV sets and more. All that falls away when you immerse yourself in a landscape to bird and you start focusing on trees, shrubs, rocks, grasses, a mountain ridge nearby, even if it is in your nearest city Nature Reserve.

The most soothing and relaxing colour known to man happens to be green.

Cloud formations, the exact shade of cerulean of the summer sky, a stream's gentle whispers across stones, all these comfort our senses.

Never was this brought home more than during the descent of Sani Pass when a group of our birders witnessed a marvel of nature. The mists and clouds opened momentarily, and a shaft of sunlight played upon the intense emerald and lime greens of the mountainsides. And then – a rainbow. No one spoke; all feasted their eyes on this miraculous scene, a foretaste of heaven.

Aldo remarked that the view they had just witnessed was a most unusual and gorgeous one. It eventually gave birth to a painting by Riaan Prinsloo, one of our club members.

When I contacted the artist about this and other paintings inspired by landscapes where he had birded, this unique "Birder's Eye View" led to an article in this issue. I trust you will enjoy this as much as we did. Isn't this a reflection of our exact sentiments when the most abiding impression of a camp or the top bird is discussed on the last evening – and then all of us agree that it was much more about the overarching nature, the kloofs, the extensive grassy plains, the dripping montane forest, the rocky buttresses and pinnacles of a mountain, than any specific bird?

Many of us have ventured out in early pre-dawn hours, breathed in the aroma of dew on vegetation, enjoyed the hush, the held-in breath of the landscape before sunlight and the dawn chorus does away with the night.



Most of us have been soothed by driving a straight, endless long road in Boesmanland, where dusty plains blend with faraway horizons, distorted by trembling heatwaves.

Many of us have braided through ferns and mosses and massive tree trunks, jumped across streams, and peered up into a canopy for a glimpse of colour of a bird heard calling. Most of us have hiked along a beach, scanning for seabirds and waders, and returned refreshed by the brisk wind and the ozone tang.

How many of us encountered scenery and experiences, equally mind-blowing, when the original pursuit was to tick a new lifer?

Naude's Neck, Swartberg and Gantouws Passes stand to witness. Coney Glen and the incomparable views down into the azure blues and turquoises of the sea passage between the Knysna Heads are far more deeply etched on my heart than the sighting of a Peregrine Falcon that led us there in the first place. Nature heals and soothes and consoles.

*"Let us probe the silent places,
let us seek what luck betide us,
let us journey to a lonely land I know.
There's a whisper on the night-wind,
there's a star a gleam to guide us,
And the Wild is calling... let us go."
(Robert Service 'The call of the wild')*

FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Club Members,

I want to take a moment to express my deep gratitude to everyone who has contributed to our club's success.

The club's continued success is a reflection of the dedication and hard work of our entire committee and all the members who give their time and energy to nurture our shared passion for birds.

Our club thrives because of the remarkable individuals who volunteer behind the scenes, organizing events, sharing their knowledge, and fostering an environment where we can all learn from one another. Your commitment to our mission of promoting birdwatching and conservation is inspiring, and I am excited to build on the strong foundation laid by Elouise.

She has handed over the reins of a thriving club and has graciously agreed to stay on as vice chairperson. This has given me in particular a wonderful position to be able to still draw off her vast experience while growing into this new role.

As we look to the future, I am eager to continue fostering our community spirit and expanding our outreach.

I welcome your ideas and contributions, as I believe that together we can make this club even more vibrant and inviting.

Let us work hand in hand to create memorable experiences, whether that involves birdwatching excursions, educational programs, or simply enjoying the beauty of our feathered friends.

There are some amazing outings planned for 2026 as well as some wonderful camps. Keep looking out for those on our social media platforms.



Sean - Chair

Atlassing and SABAP2 remains a high priority focus of the club as part of our bird conservation activities. Some focused outings will be part of our planned outings and camps in the coming year.

The Secretary Bird project in conjunction with BLSA continues to track the birds we have contributed towards their trackers. We continue to get reports of their movements and activities.

Our warmest welcome to all the new BLNG members. Welcome back to some other members.

I hope you will all be able to join us throughout the remainder of the year for some of our activities.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a wonderful long weekend. If you are travelling, travel safely.

Warm regards,

SEAN

LANIARIUS - APRIL 2026

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SANI PASS & SURROUNDS CAMP

Sani Pass was never a bucket list item for me. It was more of a mysterious power, like an invisible magnet drawing me in. Having done several of Aldo Berruti's online courses, I must admit that I secretly wanted to meet this legend in person. It is safe to say I am disappointed in neither.

With diverse biomes and an elevation of 2,873 m at the top of the pass, this area hosts over 250 bird species, many of which are endemic or nearly so. Included in this number are the critically endangered Wattled Crane (Lelkraanvoël) and Bearded Vulture (Baardaasvoël). When Aldo points towards "The Promised Land," we follow his finger to the gravel zigzag far off in the distance - much, much higher. We've got some climbing to do...



The vehicle Aldo uses to drive us up the pass. [Marna Buys]



Aldo certainly had his hands full with two groups of BLNG campers during January. [Liesi de Swardt, Angela Openshaw]



Aldo said: "That view we had coming down the pass was a very unusual and gorgeous one." [Marlou Schalkwyk]

From the word “Go,” the drive up is an out-of-this-world experience. The road, originally a mule track used by the first pioneers, has since been upgraded substantially. The tar section up to the South African border post was the most expensive road per running kilometer ever built in South Africa. Professional skills and expertise in the building and design are evident in every painstaking detail.

The 8 km between the two border posts is, apart from breathtakingly beautiful, torturous and hair-raising, climbing over 900m in altitude through several hairpin bends. This (serious) 4x4-ing gives another dimension to birding. According to Aldo, any 4x4 vehicle can do this... at least once. He believes a few foreign visitors have learned The Lord’s Prayer on that stretch of road – if not on the way up, surely coming down.

Looking down on the clouds and thunderstorms building lower down, one is filled with a solemn veneration of the incredible beauty that surrounds us. The fog that can roll in virtually any time of the day contributes to the otherworldly experience of this immense landscape.

The lower region of the pass consists mainly of Ouhout (*Leucosidea sericea*). Barratt’s Warbler (*Ruigtesanger*) and Bush Blackcap (*Rooibektiptol*) are the bird species specifically favouring this biome. Drakensberg Prinia (*Drakensberglangstertjie*) replaces our Gauteng Tawny-flanked Prinia (*Bruinsylangstertjie*), with the latter not occurring in this specific region.



Barratt's Warbler
[Marna Buys]



Bush Blackcap
[Pieter Heslinga]



Fantailed Grassbird (Broad-tailed Warbler)
(*Breëstertgrasvoël*) [Marlou Schalkwyk]



Gurney's Sugarbird
[Pieter Heslinga]



Grey Tit
[Pieter Heslinga]



Mountain Pipit
[Elouise Kalmer]

Protea-veld higher up supports hard-to-find species like Gurney's Sugarbird (Rooiborssuikervoël) and Nicholson's Pipit (Nicholsonkoester), with male Malachite Sunbird (Jangroentjie) flashing about like bright little emeralds. Further on the way up, local specials like Drakensberg Siskin (Bergpietjiekanaar) and Drakensberg Rockjumper (Oranjebersberglyster) can be found, with Sentinel- and Cape Rock Thrush (Langtoon- en Kaapse Kliplyster) overlapping here in their similar habitats. On the Karoo-like top of the Lesotho Highland, Mountain Pipit (Bergkoester) and Large-billed Lark (Dikbeklewerik) can be found side by side, accentuating the need for a well-informed, experienced guide to flush them out and help us identify the different, often complex LBJ's.

Bearded Vulture sometimes appears in the distance as a dot, circling closer, allowing for a good look at the spectacular, distinctive features of this king of the highland skies. The outdated name Lammergeier (Lammervanger) refers to the erroneous belief that this bird catches lambs. Decorating the vivid green farmlands surrounding the southern Drakensberg, Grey Crowned Cranes (Mahem) with their aristocratic crowns are found in numbers, their somewhat melancholic "ma-hem" calls often mixed with the vocal honking of South African Shelduck (Kopereend) at the pans.



Wattled Crane at Reichenau Dam
on the Polela River [Marna Buys]



Xumeni Forest
[Angela Openshaw]



*Grey Crowned Cranes
[Marlou Schalkwyk]*

In the far distance, male and female Southern Ground Hornbills (Bromvoëls) take turns to “hum” - the higher booming coming from the female, the male’s resonant and deep. Many people, me included, were unaware that these terrestrial dwellers, with their savanna and woodland habitats in deep trouble, occur outside protected areas such as Kruger National Park. This place never ceases to amaze me.



*Blue Swallow [1. Liesl de Swardt, 2. Ben Espach,
3. Hannes Van den Berg, 4. Jaco den Oudsten]*

*Drakensberg Rockjumper [1. Marlou Schalkwyk, 2. Jaco den Oudsten,
3. Pieter Heslinga 4. Jaco den Oudsten]*



[Liesl de Swardt]

Aldo's number-one-fan club decidedly increased yet again. Sharing his extensive knowledge, going out of his way to show us that special bird that our hearts desire, or just helping to get that extra, better photograph, I think every single club member who met him appreciates him deeply. With his dry humor and obvious passion for what nature has to offer in this splendid setting, we view him as an inextricable part of Sani Pass.



Pale-crowned Cisticola in the grass fields we visited on our last day [Marna Buys]



Denham's Bustard [Hannes van den Berg]



[Marna Buys]

What a delight. What an awe-inspiring place. Sani Pass and its surroundings are so much more than a birding destination. It is sacred. It's a place that invites you, grabs hold of you and strikes right into the heart.

MARIANA ARNOLDI



Ground Woodpecker [Jaco den Oudsten]



[Liesl de Swardt]

BERGKONINGKRYK CAMP



*Happy campers
[JP van der Merwe]*

Due to an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease on a farm next to Wolfhuiskraal, the Wolfhuiskraal camp was cancelled and a new venue had to be sourced and hence Bergkoningkryk became the replacement. A quick recce was done the Monday before and we were guided by the very experienced Christo Venter. We arrived on Friday just before 12:00, pitched the tent, then started exploring. The rest of the birders arrived during the course of the afternoon. We did a quick drive up the mountain to a lookout point where we spotted an African Harrier-Hawk, European Bee-eaters and Speckled Mousebirds.

Saturday morning we started with a quick session within the venue which was very quiet. The birds we saw and heard were the Palm Swifts who were nesting in a palm close to the pool and a pair of Grey Tit-Flycatchers darting around a dense tree but very difficult to spot.



*Grey Tit-flycatcher
[Robin Naudé]*

We then decided to do the loop. Turning left on the P165 road towards Grootfontein we meandered up the kloof with trees either side and crossed the river a couple of times. We had good views of the Giant Kingfisher, Little Sparrowhawk and Grey-backed Camaropteras being active. Even though we had travelled the same road the day before, it's still amazing to notice how birding could change from one day to the next.

One of the very special sightings on the trip was when Robin spotted an Ayres's Hawk-Eagle at the Buffelskom Ostrich farm turn-off. It circled long enough for all to see. We then continued to the Suikerbosch Fontein turn-off, hoping for some sightings of the White-bellied Korhaan. We saw some Red-billed Oxpeckers and a Flappet Lark. The dams delivered Spurwinged Geese, Cattle Egrets, and a Glossy Ibis.



Little Sparrowhawk [Anna-Marie van der Merwe]



Amur Falcon [Anna-Marie van der Merwe]



Grey-backed Camaroptera (Bleating) [Anna-Marie van der Merwe]



Ayres's Hawk-Eagle [JP van der Merwe]



Coqui Francolin [JP van der Merwe]



Orange-breasted Bushshrike
[Kippie Buchner]



Dusky Lark
[JP van der Merwe]

On this road, there were Amur Falcons and the highlight was the Coqui Francolins. Then it started raining and it was best to drive through to the Jasper road dams, where we could see clear skies and there we spotted the White-backed Ducks, African Jacana, Malachite -, Pied -, and Brown-hooded Kingfishers and of course, the foreigners not to be outdone, Common Myna and Egyptian Geese.

Sunday morning whilst gathering for the finale to Nylsvlei, the Ayres's Hawk-Eagle made a short re-appearance at Bergkoningkryk. We then went to Nylsvlei and travelled the outer parameters with some good sightings including the Black-crowned Night Heron, Squacco -, Goliath - and Purple Herons.

In total we added 152 species over the two and a half days. The venue, Bergkoningkryk, was very well suited for a birding camp and the owners were very accommodating. Both the chalets and the campsite were in good condition. Thank you to all the participants, also to Dave and Osie for lighting the braai fires, Laura for the cake, bringing Saturday evening to a sweet end. A HUGE thank you to Angela and Fransie for all the admin and to still make the weekend happen!

JP VAN DER MERWE



Black-crowned Night Heron
[Anna-Marie van der Merwe]



White-throated Bee-eaters
[Robin Naudé]



African Jacana nest
[JP van der Merwe]

WAKKERSTROOM CAMP CAMP

This camp will be remembered for the number of cars that had to be towed out of the mud! And yes, it will also be remembered for the birds that we saw.

The weather leading up to this camp looked a little gloomy, with a forecast of 60% rain and mostly cloudy all day. Thursday arrived, and so did those lucky campers who made their booking in time to be one of the privileged few. The accommodation was a new venue because the BLSA Wakkerstroom accommodation had been converted into a conservation centre with offices. Forellenhof Guest Farm is a new birder-friendly guest farm and has been accredited by BLSA. We stayed in three lovely houses called The Laughing Duck, The Freckled Frog, and The Old Farmhouse. It is situated on a farm on the Amersfoort side of the town, conveniently just above the main wetland area.

On arrival, we checked into our assigned rooms and took ourselves off for walks around the farmland and up the hills to see what birds could be found there. Laura's cottage saw a Secretarybird in the field below, which seemed to be a good omen. We also went down to the wetlands by the bridge to see what that area had to offer. We saw Fan-tailed Grassbirds, Little Grebe, Moorhen, Blue-billed Teals and Purple Swamphen.



Secretarybird
[Angela Openshaw]



[Angela Openshaw]

Earlier, upon arrival, two gentlemen decided to explore the area behind the BLSA offices despite the warning sign and promptly got stuck in the treacherous mud. The first mud victims were nicknamed "Mud Men". That evening we enjoyed a lovely evening braai on the stoep at The Old Farmhouse and discussed our plans for the next day. It was decided that we meet at 6:30 AM at the bridge over the Woodland while the camp coordinator would go and fetch the bird guide from town.

That was me, and I did exactly that, except that it was later than expected. On my way out of the farm, I managed to drive into a deep and well-disguised "sloot". Thus I became the second mud victim and was named "Gutter Girl". I was towed out of my predicament by Johan (the owner) and his lovely blue tractor.



Southern Bald Ibis
[Angela Openshaw]



Pied Starling
[Angela Openshaw]

I fetched Sifiso, a BLSA-accredited guide, from the Post Office and we went out birding on the Amersfoort Road. The weather was great, the roads were not so, and the birds were satisfying, although they made us work really hard to see them. Sifiso has very sharp eyes and pointed out many birds that were far off on the horizon, leaving us wondering how on earth he managed to see them. We had the radios in our cars and were able to communicate between the cars if we saw something worth mentioning. We saw Fan-tailed, Long-tailed and Red-collared Widowbirds, Starlings, Spike-heeled Lark, Cape Crow, Hadedda Ibis, African Sacred Ibis, and Southern Bald Ibis. A big highlight was seeing the Blue Korhaan and watching a Marsh Owl quartering in search of prey.

We found Pale-crowned, Zitting and Levillant's Cisticolas. Southern Red Bishops, African Stonechat, Red-billed Queleas, Ant-eating Chats and Southern Fiscal were everywhere, while Banded and Brown-throated Martins, Pied Crows, Amur Falcons and several Swallow species flew or sat on the fences. At the water holes we saw an African Spoonbill, Reed Cormorants, Three-banded Plovers, Black-headed Heron, Blacksmith Lapwing, and the inevitable Egyptian Goose. A big treat was the Grey-winged Francolin which gave lead to a huge debate the next day (more about that later). Our last water hole was the Kalkoenkrans Dam where we found Glossy Ibis, Common and Wood Sandpiper, White-backed Duck, Little Stint, White-winged Terns, Great Crested and Little Grebe, and other water birds.



Banded Martin
[Angela Openshaw]



Jackal Buzzard
[Angela Openshaw]



White-bellied Bustard
[Anton Pretorius]

From there we drove to Dirkiesdorp. En route, we found the Black-winged Lapwing which was a lifer for many! We also saw Jackal and Common Buzzard, Black-winged Kites and an African Marsh Harrier. At our destination we found our target birds, the White-bellied Bustard and South African Cliff Swallow. These were lifers for many in the group.

Saturday was another story; it was a day of rain. We tried to dodge the rain, moving from one spot to another, but it followed us. Despite this, we saw some good birds in the five hours that we were able to bird. We saw Buff-streaked Chat, Red-capped Lark, White-rumped Swift, African Snipe, Cape Bunting, Common Waxbill, Mountain Chat, South African Shelduck, Spotted Thick-knee, Cape Canary, and Southern Bald Ibis. The highlight for the morning was the Eastern Long-billed Lark, Drakensberg Prinia, and Blue Crane. We got our target birds, although only one person saw the Yellow-breasted Pipit.



Buff-streaked Chat
[Anton Pretorius]



Blue Crane with chick in the rain
[Laura Jordaan]

The rain finally sent us home, but not before we had decided to make pancakes back at The Old Farmhouse. We spent the afternoon eating pancakes, swapping school stories, looking at our photographs, and debating whether the Francolin that we had seen was a Red-winged or a Grey-winged Francolin. The evening was a wet one but that did not deter us from having another braai and doing the bird list. The species count was 115 for the camp.

Sunday morning was still very wet and overcast. One car chose to leave early and did not get stuck in the farm mud. The Mud Men and two other cars made the wise decision to be towed to a point where there was no mud. Piet Bosch knew his car and successfully navigated his way through the mud and onto solid road. And yours truly finally figured out how to use her 4x4 drive properly and floated across the mud somewhat humbler than when she had driven in.

ANGIE OPENSHAW.



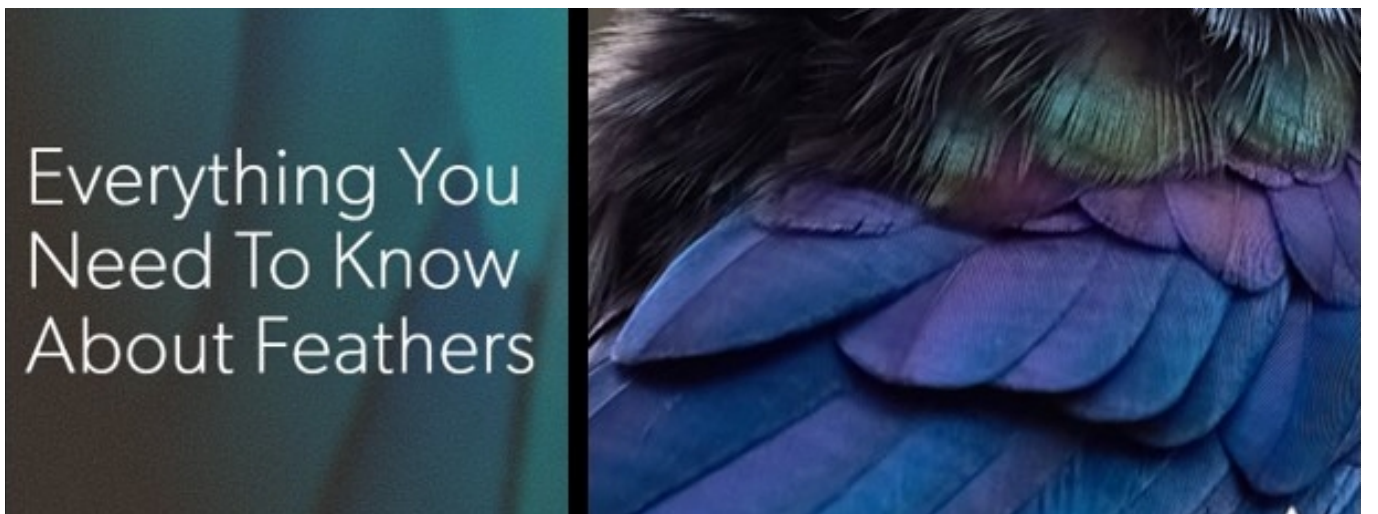
[Angela Openshaw]



[Angela Openshaw]

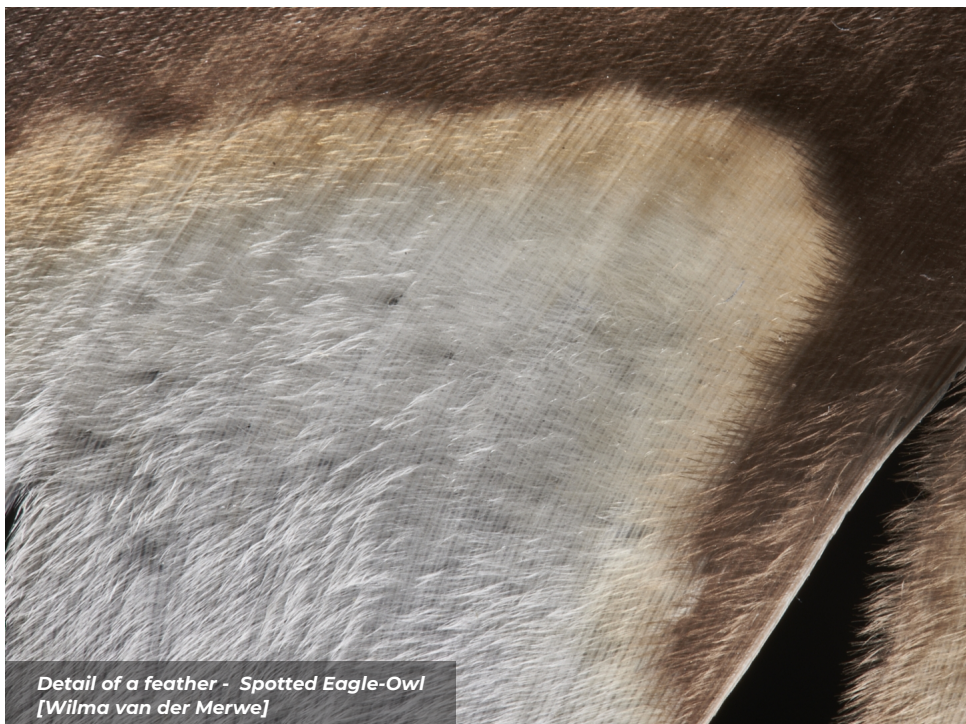
ALL ABOUT FEATHERS

CITIZEN SCIENCE



Feathers are impressive biological structures that come in a surprising diversity of colours and forms. Here, we cover the breadth of feather biology by looking at feathers from a variety of scientific viewpoints including their anatomy, function and development.

From the fluffy down on an egret chick to the brilliant spheres on a peacock's tail, feathers are remarkable not just in the way they look to the naked eye, but also for their intricate microstructure. Understanding feather anatomy at the microscopic level provides insight into how feathers function. For example, the interlocking Velcro-like structure on many bird feathers creates the smooth, flexible, and resilient surface that supports flight and sheds water.



Detail of a feather - Spotted Eagle-Owl
[Wilma van der Merwe]

Various feather types include wing (remiges), tail (rectrices), contour, semiplume, down, filoplume, and bristle, each with specialized structures and functions.

Feather Anatomy: How Do Feathers Work?

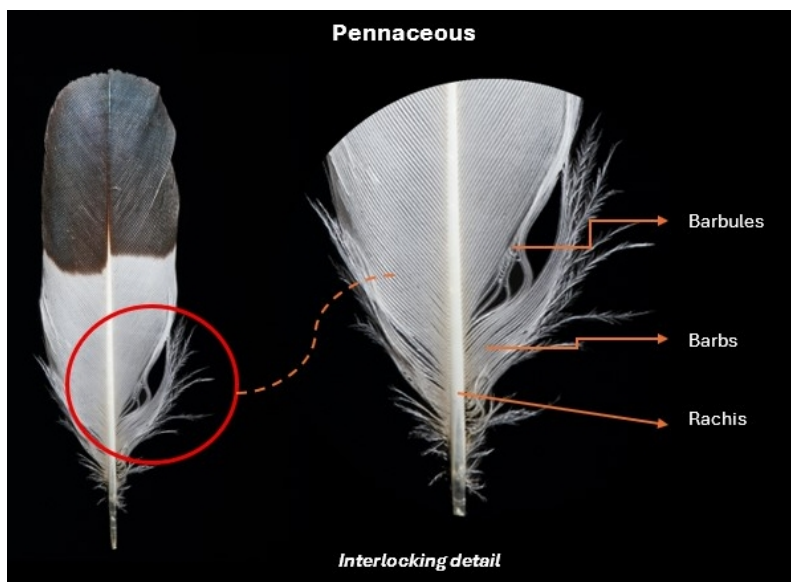
Feather structure

Although feathers come in an incredible diversity of forms, they are all composed of the protein beta-keratin and made up of the same basic parts, arranged in a branching structure. In the most complex feathers, the calamus extends into a central rachis which branches into barbs, and then into barbules with small hooks that interlock with nearby barbules.

Feather structure

Pennaceous

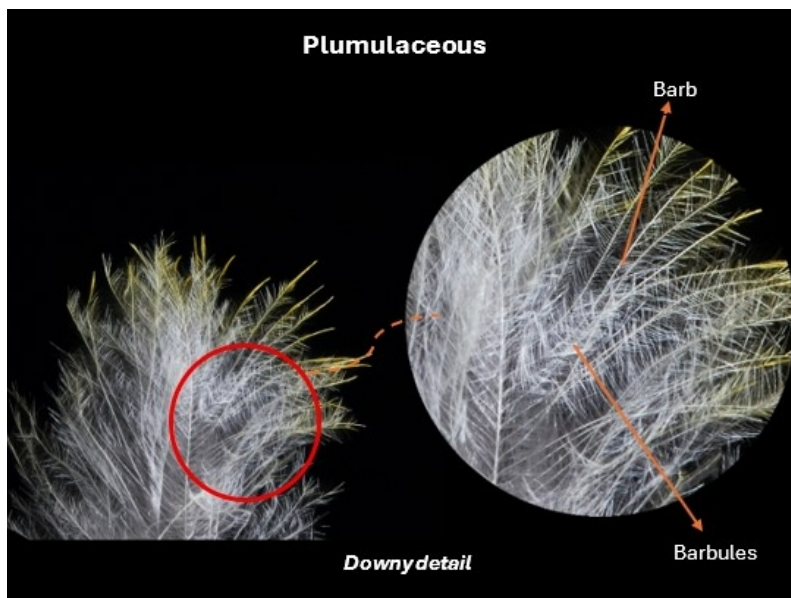
Pennaceous feathers are stiff and mostly flat, a big difference that comes from a small alteration in structure; microscopic hooks on the barbules that interlock to form a wind and waterproof barrier that allows birds to fly and stay dry. Many feathers have both fluffy plumulaceous regions and more structured pennaceous regions.



*Pennaceous - Unidentified
[Wilma van der Merwe]*

Plumulaceous

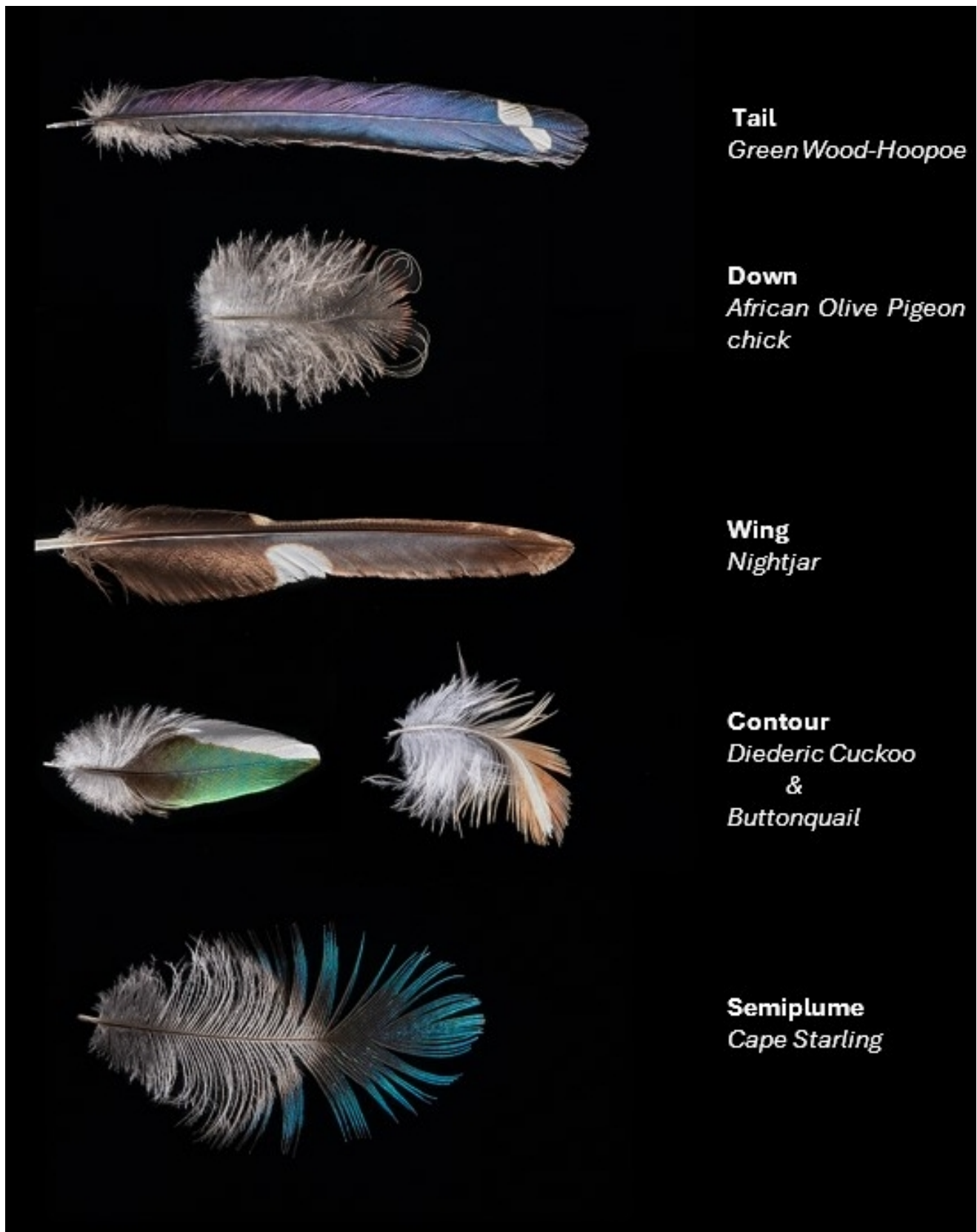
Downy feathers look fluffy because they have a loosely arranged plumulaceous microstructure with flexible barbs and relatively long barbules that trap air close to the bird's warm body.



*Plumulaceous - Unidentified
[Wilma van der Merwe]*

Feather Types

Feathers fall into one of seven broad categories based on their structure and location on the bird's body.



Wing feathers

The wing feathers specialized for flight are characterized by uniform windproof surfaces, or vanes, on either side of the central shaft that are created by an interlocking microstructure. Also called remiges, these feathers are asymmetric with a shorter, less flexible leading edge that prevents midair twisting.



African Green Pigeon
[Wilma van der Merwe]

Tail feathers

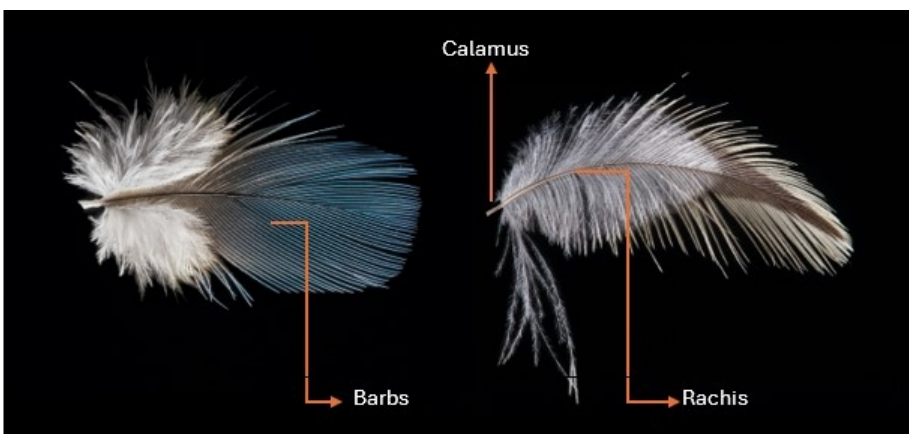
Most tail feathers, or rectrices, feature an interlocking microstructure similar to wing feathers. Arranged in a fan shape, these feathers support precision steering in flight. Typically, birds have six pairs of feathers on the tail, which display increasing levels of asymmetry toward the outer pairs. In some birds, tail feathers have evolved into showy ornaments that are useless in flight.



Nightjar
[Wilma van der Merwe]

Contour feathers

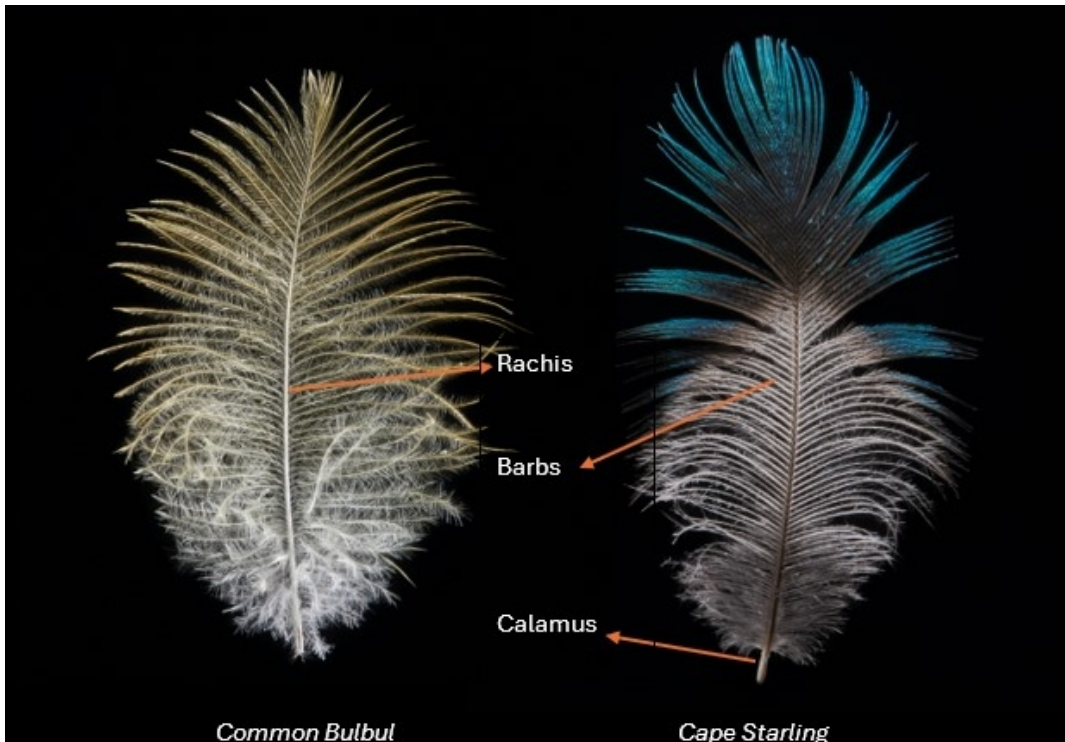
Contour feathers are what you see covering the bird's body and streamlining its shape. Arranged in an overlapping pattern like shingles, the waterproof tips are exposed to the elements and the fluffy bases are tucked close to the body. Sometimes brilliantly coloured or uniformly drab, contour feathers can also help the bird show off or stay camouflaged. Contour feathers on the wing, called coverts, shape it into an efficient airfoil by smoothing over the region where the flight feathers attach to the bone.



[Wilma van der Merwe]

Semiplume

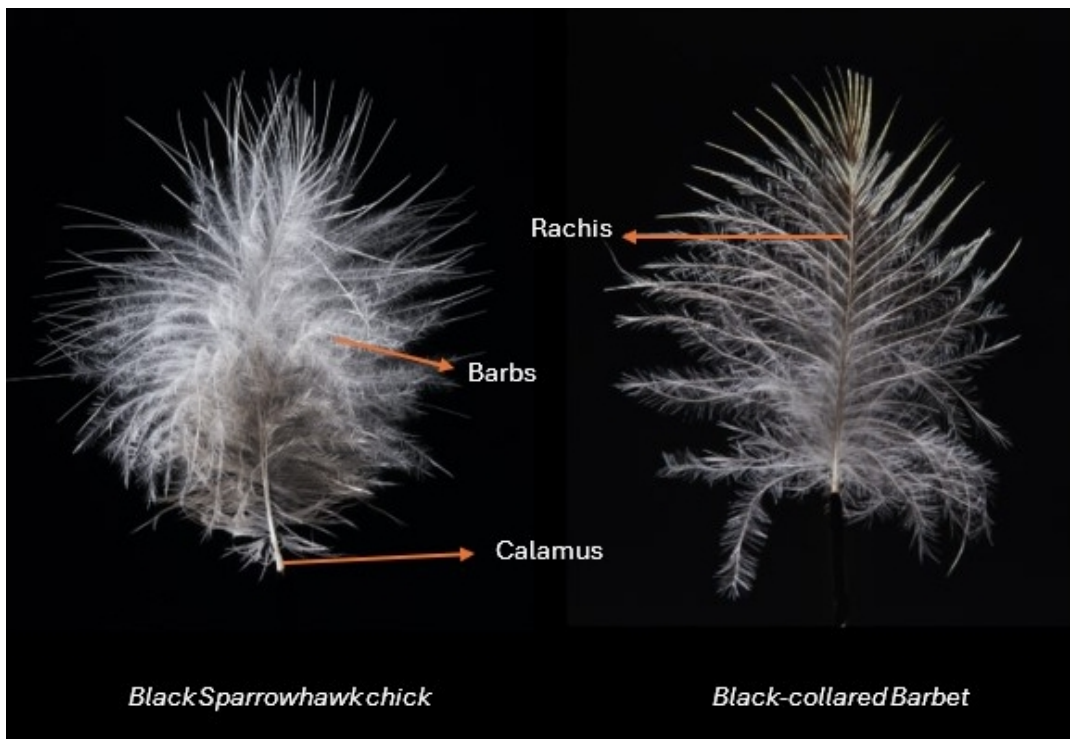
Mostly hidden beneath other feathers on the body, semiplumes have a developed central rachis but no hooks on the barbules, creating a fluffy insulating structure.



Semiplume
[Wilma van der Merwe]

Down

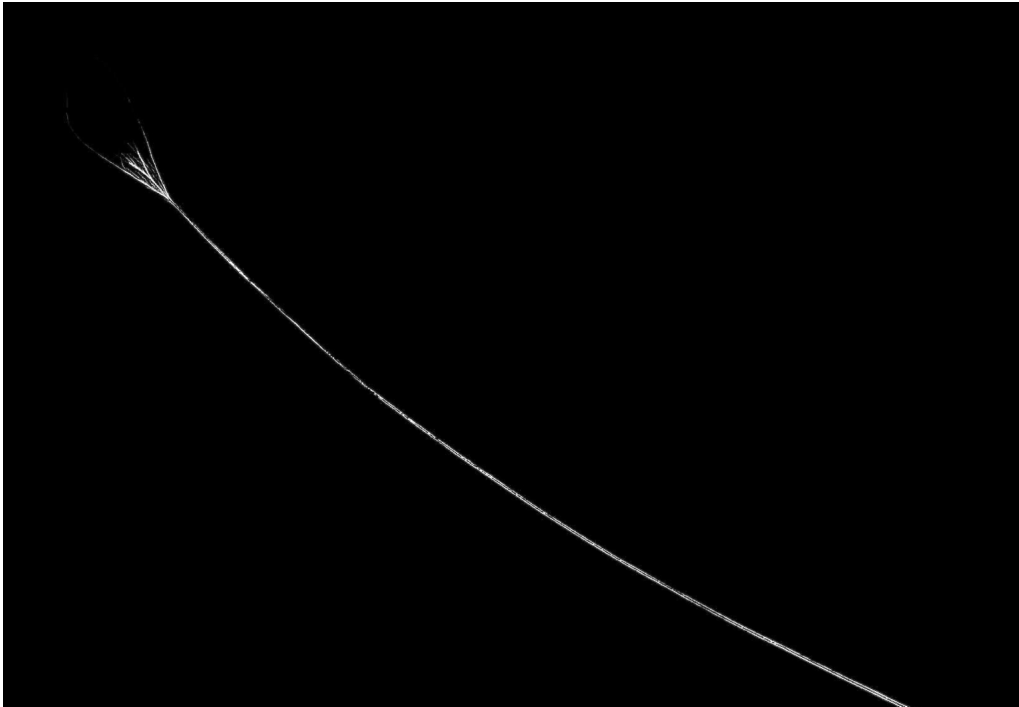
Similar to semiplumes with an even looser branching structure but little or no central rachis, down feathers are relatively short and positioned closest to the body where they trap body heat.



[Wilma van der Merwe]

Filoplume

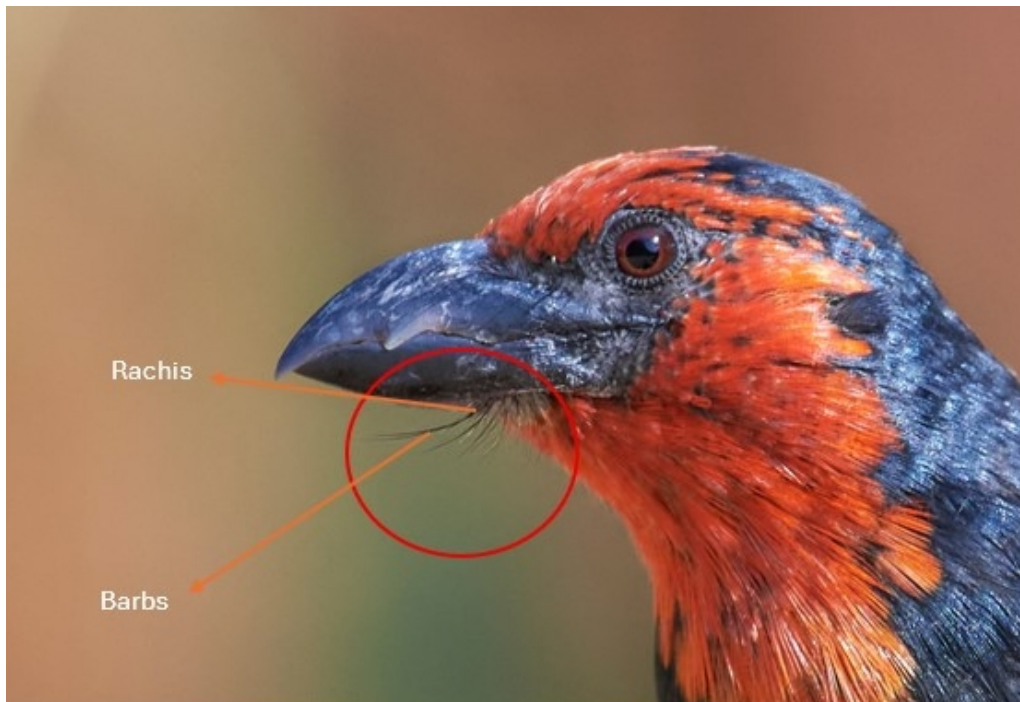
Short simple feathers with few barbs, filoplumes function like mammal whiskers to sense the position of the contour feathers.



Filoplume
[Esha Munshi]

Bristle

Bristles are the simplest feathers, with a stiff rachis that usually lacks barb branches. Most commonly found on the head, bristles may protect the bird's eyes and face.



Bristle
Black-collared Barbet
[Wilma van der Merwe]

FEATHER FUNCTION: WHAT DO FEATHERS DO?

Each feather on a bird's body is a finely tuned structure that serves an important role in the bird's activities. Feathers allow birds to fly, but they also help them show off, blend in, stay warm, and keep dry. Some feathers function as specialized airfoil for efficient flight.

Flight



Cuckoo Hawk
[Marna Buys]

The primary and secondary wing feathers, or remiges, permit birds to take to the skies. Unlike other feathers, remiges are anchored to bone with strong ligaments so they can withstand the demands of flight and be precisely positioned. The primaries are longest of the flight feathers. They occupy the outer half of the wing, can be controlled and rotated like rigid fingers, and provide most of the bird's forward thrust. While secondaries cannot be controlled as extensively, they provide most of the lift by overlapping to form an efficient airfoil. Tail feathers, or rectrices, are also classified as flight feathers. They are essential for steering, but only the two most central feathers attach to bone.

Of course not all birds fly; the wing feathers of flightless birds like the Common Ostrich have evolved to be fluffy and ornate rather than tightly interlocking to support flight.

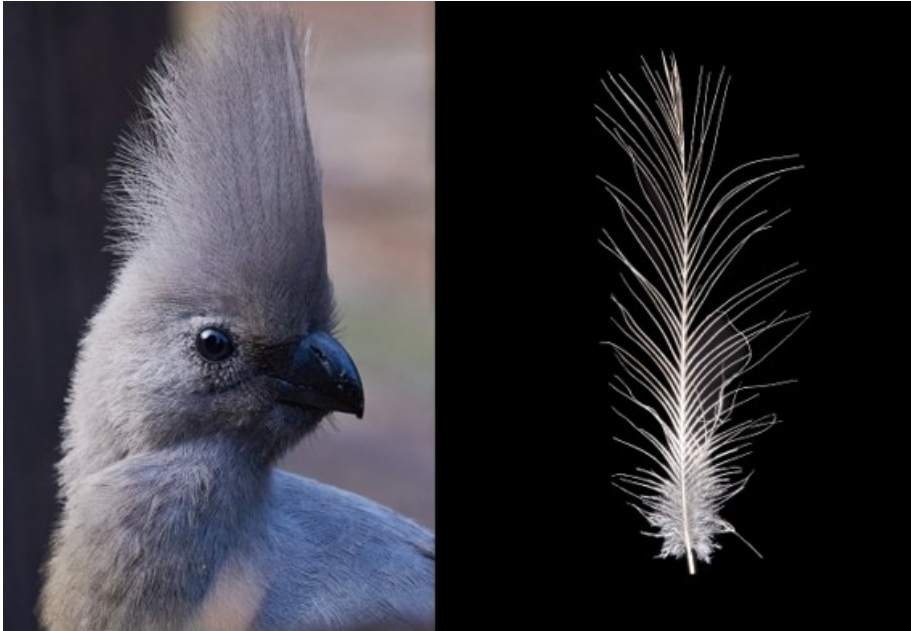
Display



Northern Black Korhaan
[Wilma van der Merwe]

Modified contour feathers on the head are also commonly used in courtship displays or when the bird is alarmed. For example, the Common Hoopoe crest forms a colourful fan that completely changes its head shape. During this transformation, the bird elevates thousands of tiny feathers in unison by manipulating muscles just under the skin.

Not all fancy feathers are used to woo a partner; some are used in displays of aggression. For example, Crested Barbets and Grey- Go-Away-Birds keep their crests lowered when they are at rest or with family and flock members, but raise them during aggressive interactions.



*Grey Go-away-bird
& crest feather
[Wilma van der Merwe]*

Insulation

Have you ever wondered why some birds hatch naked while others are covered in a coat of fuzzy feathers? Many young water birds must be able to swim and forage alongside their parents almost immediately after hatching. These precocial chicks hatch with a full coat of natal down to keep them warm in cold water. Young ducks for example, hatch with a fuzzy coat of natal down and after a few weeks, replace the natal down with an inner layer of adult down and an outer coat of contour feathers. In contrast, the young of many songbirds are born completely naked.

These altricial species stay warm by absorbing heat from attending parents and huddling together in an insulated nest. Utterly dependent at hatch, altricial species require lots of parental care.



*African Jacana (chick)
[Marna Buys]*

Weatherproofing

Arranged in an overlapping pattern on a bird's body to expose the waterproof tips, contour feathers allow water to roll right off a bird's back. Birds constantly maintain their waterproof coat through extensive grooming, or preening to ensure that every feather is in good shape. The interlocking structure is so important that any disruption to it, (such as if spilled oil coats the feathers) leaves the bird waterlogged and helpless. For ducks and species that spend most of their time in the water, maintaining a waterproof coat is critical for survival.



*Yellow-billed Duck
& contour feather
[Wilma van der Merwe]*

Still a mystery

Some feather functions remain a mystery. The feather tufts on the heads of Eagle Owls are often mistaken for ears. These modified contour feathers are completely separate from the ear and do not help owls hear, yet there is no scientific consensus on the function of these tufts. Some have proposed that the horns are for display or that owls use them for more complete camouflage while roosting in daylight, but other functions are also possible.



*Verreaux's Eagle-Owl
[Marna Buys]*

Feather Growth: How do feathers develop?

Feathers are dead structures that cannot repair themselves when damaged. Because a healthy and functional coat is critical to survival, each year birds shed their old feathers and then grow a whole new set. This molting process is a carefully timed affair in which feathers are shed and regenerate in turn over a period of weeks so the bird can maintain its protective outer layer and ability to fly. Once the new set of feathers has matured, molt is complete and new growth only occurs before the next molt cycle when feathers are accidentally lost.

Molting



A. Unidentified
B. Black-collared Barbet
[Wilma van der Merwe]

Once the feather unfurls, its interlocking structure is fully formed. Throughout the year, the bird maintains its mature feathers through regular care, or preening. Whenever the barbules become disturbed, the bird uses its beak to carefully guide them back into place. By the following molt season, many of the bird's feathers have experienced enough wear and tear that preening can no longer maintain their structure. Fortunately, during molt the bird grows a completely new set.

Feathers, with their intricate microstructure, indeed are impressive examples of natural engineering.

With great appreciation to Wilma van der Merwe, BLNG club member, who allowed us to use her exquisite photographs as featured in her Instagram page, @traces_of_a_bird

The following persons donated feathers for this project:
Janneke Botha, Liesl de Swardt, Laura Jordaan, Fransie O'Brien, Ilse Müller, Petro Steytler and El-Marie van Rooyen

Shortened and adapted from:

Everything You Need To Know About Feathers | Bird Academy • The Cornell Lab (Free Library)

<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/feathers-article/>

RINGERSHOEKIE DESEMBER 2025 - MAART 2026

CITIZEN SCIENCE

In 2025 het die ringers van BirdLife Noord-Gauteng 'n allemintige 9 735 voëls hanteer, waarvan 1 113 "retraps" was.

Die ringgroep het die afgelope somer baie goed gedoen by die volgende ringplekke wat besoek is: Rietvlei NR, Voortrekkermonument, Colbyn-vallei, Paardeplaats (Long Tom-pas), Moreleta NR, Botaniese Tuine (Pretoria), Bishop Voëlpark (Wierdapark) en Wilton Valley (anderkant Lephalale).

Pieter du Plessis doen verslag oor die navorsingsprojek by Barberspan: Dr Jonah Gula (UKZN) is besig met 'n projek oor die beweging van binnelandse populasies van verskeie watervoëlspesies regoor Suider-Afrika. Glansibisse (Glossy Ibis) is een van 'n klompie spesies wat "GPS-transmitters" ontvang. Al die voëls kry 'n SAFRING-ring, en sommige van hulle kry ook 'n unieke kombinasie kleurringe. Toegang tot die data word op die oomblik baie streng beheer en sal later van tyd gepubliseer word. Dit is 'n baie interessante studie en dit is 'n groot voorreg dat van ons ringers en veral Barberspan Natuurreserveaat hierby betrek word.



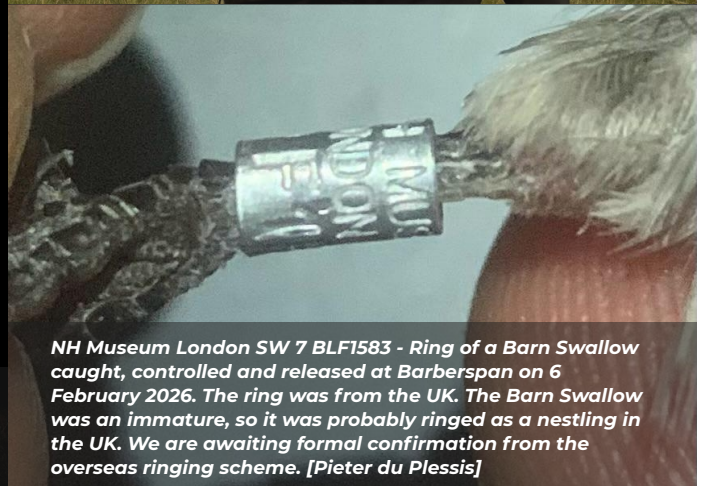
Reinhardt Fowler hou 'n Europese Naguil vas. Dit is by Bishop Bird Park in Pretoria gering. [Laura Jordaan]



Deaan de Kock met 'n Gryskopmeeu (Grey-headed Gull). Dit is die eerste Gryskopmeeu wat in meer as 'n dekade by Barberspan gering is. [Pieter du Plessis]



Nog 'n "lifer" vir Deaan de Kock. Hy het hierdie Glansibis (Glossy Ibis) by Barberspan gering, waar dr Jonah Gula navorsing doen op verskeie watervoëls. [Pieter du Plessis]



NH Museum London SW 7 BLF1583 - Ring of a Barn Swallow caught, controlled and released at Barberspan on 6 February 2026. The ring was from the UK. The Barn Swallow was an immature, so it was probably ringed as a nestling in the UK. We are awaiting formal confirmation from the overseas ringing scheme. [Pieter du Plessis]

Die sewe Rooiassies (Orange-breasted Waxbill) wat by Rietvlei in Februarie gevang is, was spesiaal. Amper almal in die groep het 'n "lifer" gekry. Nog 'n verrassing was die 26 Gewone Kwikkies (Cape Wagtail) wat gevang is. Dit is ook die ringplek met die meeste voëls wat op een dag hanteer is, naamlik 514 individue.

Die Botaniese Tuin (in Pretoria) het die meeste spesies opgelewer, naamlik 33. Dit het spesies ingesluit soos Skerpbekheuningvoël (Brown-backed Honeybird), Swartkatakoeroe (Black Cuckooshrike) en Sneeubal (Black-backed Puffback).



Daniël Keyter was so gelukkig om hierdie Rooiassie (Orange-breasted Waxbill) by Rietvlei NR aan die einde van Februarie te ring. Dit was een van agt voëls wat gevang is. Foto: David Keyter



By die Botaniese Tuin het Reinhardt Fowler beleef dat mens nie net voëls in die nette vang nie – hierdie is 'n Wahlberg se Witkolvrugtevlermuis (Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat). [Lerina Fowler]



In Januarie het Julian du Plooy en Hanneke van Loggerenberg, sy verloofde, hierdie Lekiewiet (African Wattled Lapwing) gering op 'n nagrit in Rietvlei NR. Foto: Daniëlle du Plooy



Madeleen van Loggerenberg was bevoorreg gewees om 'n Europese Koekoek (Common Cuckoo) by Swebe-Swebe in die noorde van die Waterberg te ring. Dit is die tweede Europese Koekoek wat op die reservaat gevang was en die 14de een vir Suid-Afrika. 'n Bloedmonster van die voël was geneem deur Arrie Klopper vir genetiese studies. [Arrie Klopper]



David Keyter het hierdie Rooiborssuikervoël (Gurney's Sugarbird) by Paardeplaats in die Long Tom-pas gering. Dit is deel van Dawie de Swart (Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein) en Arrie Klopper (Universiteit van Pretoria) se Suikervoëlprojek. Foto: JC Kruger



Hierdie was een van die Bronsvlerkdrawwertjies (Bronze-winged Coursers) wat Arrie Klopper in Maart by Wilton Valley gering het. Foto: Arrie Klopper



Hierdie Rooibekeend (Red-billed Teal) was 'n 'lifer' vir Johan de Jager. Hy het in Maart by Wilton Valley (naby Lephalale) gering. Foto: Nicole de Jager



Nicole de Jager moes in die water by die misnette werk. [FC Bothma]



Hierdie Groenrugreier (Little Heron) is deur Nicole de Jager by Wilton Valley-wildsplaas (naby Laphalale) gering. Dit was 'n 'lifer' vir haar. Foto: FC Bothma.



In Februarie het die ringgroep ook deelgeneem aan Wêreldvleiday by Colbyn Valley NR. [FC Bothma]

WORLD WETLANDS DAY - 7 FEBRUARY 2026

CONSERVATION

TSHWANE CHILDREN CELEBRATE WORLD WETLANDS DAY IN COLBYN WETLAND NATURE RESERVE, 7 FEBRUARY 2026

On Saturday, 7 February, around 130 children visited the Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve in Pretoria to learn about the wonders of wetlands.

This was the 11th edition of this annual event held by the WESSA-affiliated Friends of Colbyn Valley and the Agricultural Research Council to celebrate World Wetlands Day. The format and activities have evolved since the first offering in February 2014, but the aim of the day remains the same: to instil an understanding and appreciation of wetlands and all they do for us, with a focus firmly on the next generation of wetland warriors, citizens, scientists, policy makers and CEOs.

The event would not be possible without its volunteers. A number of environmental professionals and students from, amongst others, the Southern African Young Geomorphologists (SAYG), the Agricultural Research Council, and the Departments of Water and Sanitation as well as Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, shared their expertise through the activities on offer. Attendance by the various school and youth groups was free of charge, thanks to the generous sponsorship of the event by Ocean Breeze Food Merchants.

The programme, aimed at children aged 8–13, is designed to create awareness about the value of wetlands, how they function in the landscape, and how to restore and protect them. Participants were taken on a guided walk into the Colbyn Wetland, and built a simple model to show how healthy wetlands capture and store water. In the miniSASS (mini stream assessment scoring system) session, they used a 'citizen science' tool to classify the water quality of a stream based on the kinds of invertebrates ('goggas') they found living there. Finally, in a new activity introduced this year, the children played a game that illustrated how invasive alien species displace indigenous ones and negatively impact biodiversity.



*Crossing the Hartbeesspruit
on the wetland walk.*



Looking for clues in the landscape to explain how and where wetlands are formed.

Wetlands are particularly important as habitats for birds, and those who rose early for the day's popular pre-event, a bird ringing demonstration, were rewarded with close-up views of some of the Colbyn Wetland's feathered fauna. The bird ringers from BirdLife Northern Gauteng set up mist nets in the reserve before dawn, and visitors were able to see how the birds are caught, measured, ringed and released.



miniSASS – searching for invertebrates in the water sample.



Playing a game to show how alien invasive plants displace indigenous species over time.



A ringed Brown-hooded Kingfisher is weighed.



Catch of the day: a Burchell's Coucal or 'rainbird', a species seldom caught in mist nets

World Wetlands Day marks the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands (also known as the Ramsar Convention) on 2 February 1971. The day unites people across the globe in recognising the critical importance of wetland ecosystems and the essential services they provide: regulating floods, storing carbon, filtering water, supporting livelihoods and hosting biodiversity.

The theme for World Wetlands Day 2026 is 'Wetlands and traditional knowledge: Celebrating cultural heritage.' This highlights the deep-rooted connections between wetlands and cultural practices based on traditional knowledge, sustaining wetland ecosystems and in turn preserving cultural identity.

The Colbyn Valley Wetland, situated in the heart of Pretoria, is a hotspot for urban biodiversity and offers residents a unique educational and recreational resource. In particular, the Colbyn Valley Wetland includes areas of peat, a relatively rare occurrence in South African wetlands. The wetland is conserved within the Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve, proclaimed in June 2014 and managed by the City of Tshwane. The reserve is open daily from 6 am to 6 pm.

Issued by:

Friends of Colbyn Valley

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BEST OF BLNG

THE WARBLERS OF ZAAGKUILDRIFT

From early February to end March, every single BLNG-member goes warbling on the Zaagkuil drift Road. The goal: to not only hear, but actually see these drab birds. The ultimate prize, of course, that well-nigh impossible photograph which will be cherished, widely and proudly shared, and hoarded as treasure afterwards. While the rest of us can only look on, green with envy. Enjoy!

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



Olive-tree Warbler
[Johan Croukamp]



River Warbler
[Johan Croukamp]



Icterine Warbler
[Marna Buys]



Thrush Nightingale
[Angela Openshaw]



Garden Warbler
[Christo Swart]



Common Whitethroat
[Attie Hartsief]



Barred Wren-Warbler
[Sean Naudé]



Sedge Warbler
[Marna Buys]



Willow Warbler
[Marna Buys]

VOËLKYK LEI NA KUNS BIRDERS EYE VIEW

RIAAN PRINSLOO

Ek en my vrou Corné is al ongeveer vyf jaar lede van BLNG, maar het al vir baie jare daarvoor op ons eie voëls gekyk. Ons voëlkykstokperdjie het egter ernstig begin word in 2016 toe ons by die Ere-Veldwagter voëlkyk-naweke in die Kruger Nasionale Park, aan die einde van Januarie, betrokke geraak het. Ons het op 'n ander manier begin vakansie hou en was gefokus op plekke waar ons nuwe voëls kon sien. Dit het ons die geleentheid gegee om deur ons land te reis en baie mooi plekke te sien.

In 2019 was ons op 'n toer deur die Noorde van Namibië tot in Kaokoland. Die landskappe is oorweldigend, om elke draai is daar 'n mooier toneel as die vorige. Ons het verskeie foto's geneem en ek het gedink dat ek dit eendag sal wil skilder.

Gedurende 2020 het ek 'n loopbaan-verandering gedoen. Nadat ek vir 23 jaar in 'n korporatiewe omgewing gewerk het, het ek begin mikrogroente groei vir 'n restaurant, 'n inheemse kwekery begin gefokus op skaduplante en orgideë gekweek om te verkoop wanneer hulle blom. In 2022 het ek begin skilder sonder enige formele opleiding. Ek het Gerrit Pitout, 'n bekroonde landskap kunstenaar, bevriend en onder sy leiding het hy my op 'n informele manier begin leer. Gerrit is ongelukkig oorlede aan die einde van 2024.

Ek het begin met die Namibië landskappe, daar was soveel foto's om deur te werk en daar is nog verskeie verskuilde skilderye tussen die foto's. Die droëer dele met hulle oneindige horisonne en aardse kleure, rotsformasie, stilte en eensaamheid trek my en het sy eie bekoring. Tog as jy bietjie nader kyk is daar volop lewe en baie mooi en spesiale goed om te sien.



Marienfluss, Kaokoland



Kokerbome



Kokerbome

In 2021 is ons na die Noord-Kaap saam met Bustards Birding-toere om al die lewerike en ander voëls van die area te gaan soek. Die area was in 'n jarelange droogte gewikkel. Dit was verstommend om in die harde droë omgewing steeds lewe te kry en ons het al die teikenvoëls gesien behalwe die Namakwalewerik. Ons het hulle die volgende jaar in 'n netso droë Karoo naby Loxton gesien. Die Kokerbome met hulle sterk strukturele lyne was asemrowend. Daar het verskeie skilderye ontstaan van foto's geneem tydens die toer.

Ons was gelukkig om twee keer saam met BLNG die Makuleke-area in die Kruger Nasionale Park te besoek. My gunsteling-bome om te skilder is Kremetart en Kokerbome. Daar is verskeie mooi Kremetartbome in die Makuleke-area en ons was gelukkig om op plekke te kom waar die gewone toeriste nie toegang het nie. Weer het ek baie landskapfoto's geneem saam met foto's van voëls. Een middag laat het ons skemerdrankies geniet op die Levuvhubrug met 'n asemrowende sonsondergang. Ek het dit geskilder. Die skildery het verkoop en is tans in China.



Sonsondergang vanaf Levuvhubrug

Ek het ook die Lanner Gorge, die koorsboomwoud, Nwambi pan en verskeie kremetartbome geskilder.



Lanner Gorge



Kremetart



Kremetart

Gedurende ons Ere-Veldwagter naweke het ons baie nuwe voëlspesies gesien, geleer van voëls en goeie vriende gemaak. Ons het die kans gekry om dele van die wildtuin te besoek wat gewone toeriste nie sien nie, wat baie spesiaal was. Ek het onder andere skilderye gedoen van die Satara-area.



Satara-omgewing



Bosveld

Na en van die Kruger Nasionale Park het ons ook verskeie plekke besoek om voëls te soek byvoorbeeld: Mariepskop buite Hoedspruit, die bosveld naby Vaalwater, Nylsvlei en Zaagkuildrift . Mariepskop was spesiaal. Dit is so hoog dat daar fynbos voorkom bo op die deel van die Noordelike Drakensberg met die warm bosveld 1400m laer. Die uitsig vanaf Mariepskop is na die agterkant van die Drie Rondawels en die Blyderivierspoort. Die keer wat ons daar was in Mei was die Kransaalwyne in volle blom.



Drie Rondawels vanaf Mariepskop



Waterberge naby Vaalwater

Een middag laat was ons op die Kgomo-Kgomo brug naby Pretoria opsoek na 'n Gestreepte Riethaan. Die sonsondergang was so mooi dat ek dit moes skilder. Die skildery het ook verkoop en is tans in Kalifornië in die VSA.

Meer onlangs was ons in Januarie die jaar saam met BLNG vir 'n naweekkamp na Sanipas en Lesotho. Daar beleef jy al vier seisoene in een dag. Op pad na bo was die lug skoon maar toe ons terugkeer uit Lesotho het dit op die pas gereën. Die eerste gedeelte na ons Lesotho verlaat het, was daar digte mis. Net toe ons deur die misbelt kom lê die vallei oop met die son wat deur die wolke skyn en 'n reënboog vorm.



Kgomo-Kgomo sonsondergang



Sanipas



Sonsopkoms oor die Drakensberge



Kokerbome

Gedurende 'n vorige besoek aan die Drakensberg het ons by die Witsieshoek-hotel tuis gegaan om die Baardaasvoël te sien. Die oggend het die son oor die Drakensberge opgekom en dit was die uitsig uit ons kamer.

Daar is nog baie plekke om te besoek in ons mooi land en baie lifers om te gaan soek. Ek kan nie wag om dit te ontdek nie. As dit nie vir ons voëlkykstockperdjie was nie, sou ons so baie gemis het.

Vir meer skilderye is julle welkom om my Facebook of Instagram-blaai te besoek:

Facebook: [Riaan.Prinsloo.5243](#)

Instagram: [RiaanP74](#)

My skilderye is beskikbaar by die FAK Galery by die Voortrekker monument asook vanaf April tot Junie 2026 by Pro Frame van Gogh Art Gallery in Murrayfield Pretoria.

DESERT DETOUR

TRAVELOGUE



*Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark Female.
The black belly patch helps with identification.*

When there is only one birder in a marriage, wily planning, petitions, and, yes, subterfuge from the birder's side meet patience and compromises from the non-birder, especially when planning routes and destinations. This time, we would make a week-long detour through Boesmanland and Namaqualand en route to Gordon's Bay.

My goal: photographing endemic and range-restricted bird species, which I had dreamt of seeing for many years. My husband's: to meet up with an old school friend in Hondeklip Bay, and a school reunion at Riebeeck-Kasteel with the Cape contingent from his boarding school years. Our first overnight stop would be at Olifantshoek, portal to the Kalahari. My better half does all the driving since the day I opened a "Road-side Birds" card on BirdLasser. According to him, he sleeps far better behind the steering wheel than he would in the passenger seat when I drive, birding merrily all the way.

Our Olifantshoek guest house was far away from the noisy national road, was cool and had a lovely garden with mature trees. While Theo sank down on the bed for a well-deserved afternoon nap, I skulked around in the garden where Orange River White-eyes and various species of sunbirds visited a Bottlebrush in full bloom. Some swifts and swallows were swirling overhead... suddenly, I noticed two mousy, grey-brown, bulky swifts amongst them: Bradfield's Swifts! My first lifer of the trip.

The next day saw us turning onto a gravel road of some 200 km near Aggeneys. Yes, you read that correctly. 189 kms, to be precise, in what promised to be a three-hour-long, dust-choked, tortuous trip. Destination: Platbakkies Farm Retreat, near-mythical venue in birding circles. It is on BLSA's GoBirding platform as an accredited birding destination and recommended with great enthusiasm by various club members and on social media. No birder, apparently, had ever left there before seeing the Red Lark.



A Pygmy Falcon was perched near a Sociable Weaver nest, icon of this arid landscape.

I had weighed up this long, dusty detour and an overnight stay at a farm in the middle of nowhere, in the desert of Boesmanland, against Theo's school reunion and visits with friends. I came out evens. In the event, the gravel road with its unending vistas which stretched out to the far horizons through trembling heat waves, was a delight and a revelation. We drank in the silence, the sheer detachment from city life and busy national highways, the magnificence of the endless landscapes. This road was broad, well-maintained, and studded with windmills, sheep troughs, and scores of Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks.



[Marna Buys]



Large-billed Lark

Our hostess at Platbakkies immediately got down to business: which farm tracks to take for the Red Lark, Black-eared Sparrow-Larks (skittish and only seen when they flew up), where the Cinnamon-breasted Warblers were breeding (disappearing between rock crevasses as soon as they noticed you, very secretive now of their nests and impossible to photograph) and other valuable birding nuggets such as a comprehensive Platbakkies bird list. Theo gratefully grabbed an ice-cold lager and went to lie down in our comfortable accommodation after the long, dusty drive. For me, there was not a moment to lose – we would be here only one scant night, so I had only a few hours of birding here at best. This, with a list of targets as long as my arm.

I wandered around the farmstead where I found Pale-winged Starling, Grey Tit, Lark-like Bunting, and Karoo Chat, and some White-throated and Black-headed Canaries. Spike-heeled and Large-billed Larks also were around. Several targets and three endemics in the bag!



Rufous-eared Warbler

I was now bristling with impatience for the main quest of the day – operation Red Lark! Soon after opening and closing some farm gates, we understood what our hostess had told us about the Black-eared Sparrow-Larks: while we were still some distance away, they would burst up into the sky and playfully tumble around, much like butterflies. One flight shot even showed the male bird tumbling upside down during his display.

What a joyful acrobat!

A shrub had a Rufous-eared Warbler, beautifully posing, for once, and I could photograph some other species which I jubilantly identified as Karoo Erememola, hard to find, and Chat Flycatcher. This was far beyond what I had hoped for.



Black-eared Sparrow-Lark



Karoo Erememola

We left the restios behind and found ourselves in the desert proper. And then... Red Lark! A moment wished for and dreamt about for many years. The setting sun made it glow, eerily red.

How seamlessly it blended in with the red desert sands here in the Kalahari. Unforgettable.



The next morning saw me creeping out at first light to see the Cinnamon-breasted Warblers heralding the new day – another lifer I had been dreaming about. Drat! A large ginger cat insisted on accompanying me, however much I tried shooing it away. Now I would have zero chance to see any bird, never mind a skittish warbler. Ahead of me, countless round boulders glowed crimson in the chilly dawn.

My breath made white puffs. Birds around the homestead had their feathers fluffed up. The cat was still following me, doggedly, as I entered the maze of red lava rocks. I ignored it and chose a high rock to scramble onto in the hope of locating my target – and just as I was settling down, I saw the bird out of the corner of my eye, flashing past behind me.

I sat, without moving, trying to become one with the landscape. The cat was still stalking around, but mostly sitting, and weirdly, I had noticed that none of the birds on our way had seemed scared of it. The cat ignored them, and vice versa. Clearly, it wasn't in hunting mode.



Dramatic red granite and gneiss rocks behind the farmhouse, forming the foothills of Kamiesberg Pass and entry into Namaqualand



A true endemic and second main target: Cinnamon-breasted Warbler

Suddenly, a Cinnamon-breasted Warbler appeared on a rock quite close to me. It seemed to check out the cat's movements and started to hop ever closer, berating the cat. I couldn't believe my luck. Trembling with excitement, I took stunning photographs of this skittish and highly sought-after species. No words can describe my elation. The solitude, the scarlet rocks, this beautiful, tiny part of creation singing its heart out. How seamlessly its colours made it blend in amongst the rocks. I could have enjoyed it for hours, but couldn't allow myself to stay any longer – the cat and I should leave, as these were nesting birds.



I wondered afterwards – how could this diminutive species survive heat conditions here when temperatures went up to 40°C or more? Those boulders would become glowing with heat, and little or no shade would be available. Even Red Larks are known to suffer in the relentlessly increasing heat conditions caused by earth warming.

Once back at our chalet, I was jubilant about the wonderful birds I had seen, excellent photo-opportunities, the views of the glowing russet rocks at dawn, our proposed drive down a second farm road. Like yesterday, I was soon back at opening and closing farm gates. We once again enjoyed the tumbles of the Black-eared Sparrow-Larks. Various Red Larks were out and about. Common Quail flushed beside the road, not once, but twice, and the second time I even managed to get some in-flight shots.

At a windmill deep into the farm, we could enjoy more Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks, Mr. and Mrs. Namaqua Sandgrouse, and even a bonus Stark's Lark – aptly named Woestynlewerik.

But it was time to leave wonderful Platbakkies, with unbelievably, all my targets and more ticked in these short few hours. Of course, late afternoon and early morning are periods of grace here in this hot desert climate, and birds more active. An exhilarating drive through the Kamiesberg Mountain Pass to the Namaqua National Park lay ahead of us. My heart was full. Birding brings us a world of wonders.

IVONNE COETZEE



Namaqua Sandgrouse



Stark's Lark

CLUB RARITIES

REGIONAL AND LOCAL RARITIES AND INTERESTING SIGHTINGS DEC 2025 – MAR 2026

NATIONAL

Zaagkuildrift held on to first place in Wider Gauteng this past summer with no fewer than two National Rarities reported: **Slaty Egret** and **Streaky-breasted Flufftail** (heard), both at Platte River (Deaan de Kock). The well-known **Slaty Egret** of Walkhaven Dog Park and Gnu Valley was seen again during this period and was a popular drawcard amongst birders. (Tertius Gouws).



Slaty Egret
[Marlou Schalkwyk]

REGIONAL

Ayres's Hawk-Eagles were spotted in Randburg and in Pretoria (Isebrand Naudé and Daan van den Wetering). Tristan Spurway reported the first of more **European Honey Buzzards** of the season at Sandton – others were subsequently seen at Roodeplaat NR and Rietvlei NR.



Ayres's Hawk-Eagle [Jacques Jordaan]



Allen's Gallinule [Pieter Lombaard]

A **Common Cuckoo** was seen at Dinokeng, while Hugo le Roux found **Allen's Gallinule** at Rust de Winter Dam, and Doug Newman spotted a **Southern Carmine Bee-eater** on the Rust de Winter Road. Dinokeng delivered more with an excellent sighting of a single **African Skimmer** seen at Mongena Dam. The bird, unfortunately, did not stick around. **Bronze-winged Courser** was also seen. Other finds were **Lesser Moorhen** (Akil Ramcharan), and **Eurasian Hobby** (Anthony Paton).



African Skimmer [Stefan de Jager]



European Nightjar [Ivonne Coetzee]

The Wilge River Valley continued to deliver species not found anywhere else in Greater Gauteng. Klaus Schmid reported that a **Red-capped Robin-Chat** and a **Yellow-bellied Greenbul** were at Deale's Rock, Selwyn Rautenbach saw an **African Goshawk**, while a male **Narina Trogon** had also been present early during this reporting period.

A BLNG group found various out-of-range and interesting species at Markon River Lodge, also situated on the Wilge River. A **European Nightjar** was seen and later, a **Booted Eagle** [Pieter Heslinga].

The floodplain at Zaagkuil drift was bristling with birds after excellent rains. Christo Swart saw **Saddle-billed Storks** at Kgomo-Kgomo, while Doug Newman reported that **Dwarf Bitterns** had started breeding again at the bird hide at Zaagkuil drift Bird Lodge. **African Crake** and **Greater Painted-snipe** were also present.



Dwarf Bittern [Doug Newman]



Grey-headed Kingfisher [Akil Ramcharan]

Sightings of **River Warbler**, and **Common Whitethroat** rang in warbler season at Zaagkuil drift. (All Doug Newman).

The by now regular annual summer season rare bird sightings of **Allen's Gallinule** (Ilse Müller) and **Lesser Moorhen** were seen at Kgomo-Kgomo. Another out-of-range sighting was when a **Grey-rumped Swallow** was seen from the Kgomo-Kgomo bridge (Keelai Fraser), and Etienne Marais reported both **Water Thick-knee** and **Eurasian Golden Oriole** there. Max van Waasdingen found a **Collared Pratincole**, also regularly reported thereafter on the floodplain.



African Finfoot [Pieter Heslinga]



Rufous-bellied Heron [Michael Johnson]

Stephan Terblanche found a **Dusky Lark** on the Zaagkuil drift Road. Both Dale Horne and Pieter Heslinga managed to see **African Finfoot** at Crake Road. **Red-footed Falcon**, **Common Cuckoo** and **Grey-headed Kingfisher** also turned up on Crake Road. A **Rufous-bellied Heron** was near Roets's Farm on the Zaagkuil drift Road. The Seringveld Conservancy had its share of rare bird sightings when Michael Johnson reported a **Rufous-bellied Heron** – which, unfortunately, wasn't seen again, and Selwyn Rautenbach a **Black Saw-wing**, which was more cooperative and seen again on later days. A **Dusky Lark** as well as a **European Honey Buzzard** also turned up in the vicinity.

A group of birders visiting Winterveld were treated to sightings of **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Dusky Lark** and a surprise **Monotonous Lark**. Suburban Pretoria recorded several special sightings. Rietondale Proefplaas once again hosted various interesting species during this reporting period. Reinhard Haywood reported finding **Bronze-winged Courser**. A **Booted Eagle** was also seen there and what appears to be annually returning, a pair of **Dusky Larks**.



Dusky Lark [Philip Calinikos]



Bronze-winged Courser [Thea Jenkins]

A **Pennant-winged Nightjar** had a number of birders rushing to Groenkloof NR, but sadly, it didn't stick around after Thomas Steynberg found it. [Thomas Steynberg]

Madelein van Schalkwyk reported a **Bronze-winged Courser** at Rietvlei NR and Dave Reinecke found **Greater Painted-snipe**. A **Red-footed Falcon** and a **European Honey Buzzard** were also photographed while Eric Jonck found both **Common Cuckoo** and **Eurasian Hobby** at Rietvlei.



Booted Eagle [Abri Jordaan]



Pennant-winged Nightjar [Thomas Steynberg]

Other interesting sightings within Pretoria city limits were an **Alpine Swift** at Magalies MBT trail (Fransie O' Brien), a **Terrestrial Brownbul** (Dirk Maartens Human) and even a **River Warbler** (Rob Cliff) both of which were found at Faerie Glen NR. **Common Cuckoo** and **European Honey Buzzard** were seen at Roodeplaat NR. Suburban Pretoria also had **European Nightjar** at Bishop Bird Park (BLNG) as well as an **Icterine Warbler**.



Greater Painted-snipe [Lize Stassen]



Red-footed Falcon [Trenly Meacham]

Etienne Marais found three **Double-banded Coursers** near Deneyville, and Sandy Neveling photographed a **Booted Eagle** over the area. He found **Double-banded Coursers**, a **Black-necked Grebe** and a **Red-footed Falcon** in this area as well.



Double-banded Courser [Sandy Neveling]



Pallid Harrier [Ludwig Roell]

Marievale also offered a feast of rarities: **Spotted Crake**, **Baillon's Crake** [Danny Hitge], **Bronze-winged Courser**, **Western Marsh Harrier** and a **Lesser Moorhen**.

One report of a **Buff-spotted Flufftail** heard calling and a **Common Cuckoo** at WSBG were posted on social media. The latter could be the same individual that was seen there in January 2025.



Montagu's Harrier [Ludwig Roell]



Spotted Crake [Martin Brits]

Sightings of **Red-footed Falcon** were particularly numerous and were seen at Suikerbosrand, Serengeti Estate and Vlaklaagte.

Vlaklaagte also had reports of **Black-rumped Buttonquail** (Marna Buys), **Pallid** and **Montagu's Harriers** (JP van der Merwe).

Joshua Winter reported a **Dwarf Bittern** at Onderstepoort while Tristan Silver found **Swee Waxbill** at the Vergenoeg Hiking Trail.



Western Marsh Harrier [Ed Urban]



Common Cuckoo [Bruce Long]

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

BLNG COMMITTEE 2026 2027

BLNG MATTERS



Phillip Calinikos

Back: Liesl De Swardt, Elouise Kalmer, Angela Openshaw, Sheleph Burger, Ivonne Coetzee, Fransie O' Brien, JP van der Merwe, Pieter Heslinga.

Front: Sean Naudé

LANIARIUS NEW MEMBERS: DECEMBER 2025 TO MARCH 2026

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.

Frik Ernst	Krugersdorp North	Karen & Sean Cox	Rietondale
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Stephanie Walters	Faerie Glen	Micheline Moore	Faerie Glen
Sarel Venter	Mountain View	Aline, Dale, Thomas & Juliette	Waterkloof Ridge

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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

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