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*BirdLife Noord-Gauteng
BirdLife Northern Gauteng*

*Image Source: Lilac-breasted Roller
Marlou Schalkwyk*


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SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings

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FROM THE EDITOR

An ode to birding... If I may.

Is there any other hobby, no passion, which fulfils us in almost every aspect of our human existence?

Let me count the ways.

Birding, and the beauty of birds, nourish the artistic and creative side of our nature. Most birders begin their birding journey by suddenly noticing flashes of beauty in their gardens. The russet swirl of colour of an African Paradise Flycatcher's tail. The iridescence of a sunbird. The bold geometry of a Cape Robin-chat's head. Very soon, they chase more dramatic, colourful splendours in forests. Our photographers brought this to us in BEST of BLNG in this issue.

Birding also speaks to our intellect. Birders find deep satisfaction in categorising, identifying, compiling life lists, regional lists, photographic lifer lists, Kruger lists and later, pentad lists. Blame it on BirdLasser that introduced us to friendly competitions between birders and even cities. But much more, birders may enjoy riveting articles on the miracles of migration, the oldest breeding bird alive, a Laysan Albatross of age 76, and conservation successes.

Read about the valuable scientific data our Ringers provide to track birds over time and space in Citizen Science. But much more, the science of identifying a species flittingly seen, using markers such as beak and leg colour, facial patterns, or birdsong, apparently builds new connections between amygdala in the brain. This prevents aging. Research from neuroimaging studies suggests that regular birding increases hippocampal volume and a surge in BDNF, a protein that grows your brain.

Birding is a quest that brings you to moments of enchantment. We all secretly yearn to see some special species that is imbued with some special magic that drives one to see it. You might at long last see that exquisite Pink-throated Twinspot, or a magnificent Pel's, or a Narina Trogon in the company of a bird guide.

Or that moment of dizzying triumph when you scale an impossibly steep mountain trail and find a Cape Eagle-Owl, sunning itself when mists lift.



Ivonne - Editor

Do read about Pieter and Joelna Heslinga's search over days for the elusive Striped Flufftail at Ntsikeni Wetlands in the Travelogue section.

Birding is also an exhilaration, an adrenaline-pumping escapade at times. Very few adventures could come close to photographing flying seabirds from a wildly rocking boat on a pelagic cruise.

Attempting to stay upright, trying to identify a specific species amongst the madly milling magnitudes behind a trawler, then aiming, focusing, and shooting... You will find one of the most riveting photographic accounts of a pelagic under Birder's Eye View, by our own Johan Croukamp. And a more triumphant spread of photographs of seabird species I have yet to see.

But most of all, birding, especially birding in solitude, on your own somewhere, is a meditation that lifts your soul. A conversation in our hearts with our Creator who put this beauty, this excitement, this deep connection with nature for us to enjoy.

'How do I love thee?
Let me count the ways... '

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING, SONNET 43

IVONNE

FROM THE CHAIR

It is my pleasure to report that the club continues to perform strongly, with sustained growth in membership over the past quarter.

It is encouraging to see both new and returning members actively participating in our activities, which reflects the ongoing appeal and vibrancy of BLNG.

A key highlight for the quarter is the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to atlas the MPTA reserves. This represents an exciting opportunity for our members to gain access to a number of unique and interesting birding destinations, and we look forward to the valuable data and experiences that will come from this initiative.

Our photography evenings continue to be exceptionally well attended. These sessions provide a welcoming space for both birders and photographers, offering engaging topics and lively discussions that benefit all who attend.

The strong turnout is a testament to the value these evenings bring to the club.

Club camps and outings remain extremely popular and are often oversubscribed. We encourage members to book early to avoid disappointment, as demand continues to exceed available spaces.

These events are a cornerstone of our club's activities and play an important role in fostering community and shared experiences.



While rising fuel prices have made travel more challenging, there has been some recent relief, which we hope will continue to ease the burden for members attending outings and events.

Lastly, we remind all members of the upcoming BLSA Bird Fair taking place on 5 September. This is always a highlight on the birding calendar, and we encourage members to attend and support this important event.

Thank you to all members for your continued enthusiasm and support. The club's success is built on your participation, and we look forward to another productive and enjoyable quarter ahead.

SEAN NAUDE

LANIARIUS - AUGUST 2026

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MIDDELPUNT DULLSTROOM CAMP

After an eventful travel to Middelpunt Farm, where a car got stuck in the mud and was assisted by the farmer and his workers, everyone met and packed out their vehicles late Thursday afternoon. Some light birding was done where a few people took a walk around the dam near the rooms and spotted a Secretarybird as well as a few other common birds.



Friday began at 05:00 since the roads were still very muddy and time had to be factored in for any mishaps. The group met Steve in Dullstroom, and he escorted us to Verloren Valley. Some lifers were spotted, including the Buff-streaked Chat and the Sentinel Rock Thrush and a few flying Denham's Bustards also made an appearance.

Although Verloren Valley did not bring as many sightings as we had hoped, the views were breathtaking and simply being in such a majestic part of our country made up for this.



[Iléna Fourie]



[Robin Naudé]



Denham's Bustard
[Johan Croucamp]



Buff-streaked Chat (Female)
[André Taljaard]



African Wood Owl
[Johan Croucamp]

On Friday afternoon we visited the Dullstroom Birds of Prey and Rehabilitation Centre, where we saw several magnificent birds during the demonstration, including an African Wood Owl that sat on a few heads and a Cape Crow that untied some shoelaces.

Saturday, the 18th of April, also started at 05:00 since a light drizzle the previous night had everyone scared that the roads would be a mud pit again. Luckily, we were all able to get through the mud quite easily to meet Steve in Dullstroom at 06:00. He escorted us to Verloren Kloof for the day, and the small roads along the way held many sightings for the day.

An Osprey, Lanner Falcon and a Black-winged Lapwing had everyone properly excited, and we spent quite some time making sure the lapwing identification was correct. Saturday was a long day of birding, and by 19:00 that evening, when we got back to camp, everyone was ready to braai and go to bed.



African Wood Owl
[Johan Croucamp]



Jackal Buzzard
[Geoff Abbott]



Lanner Falcon
[André Taljaard]

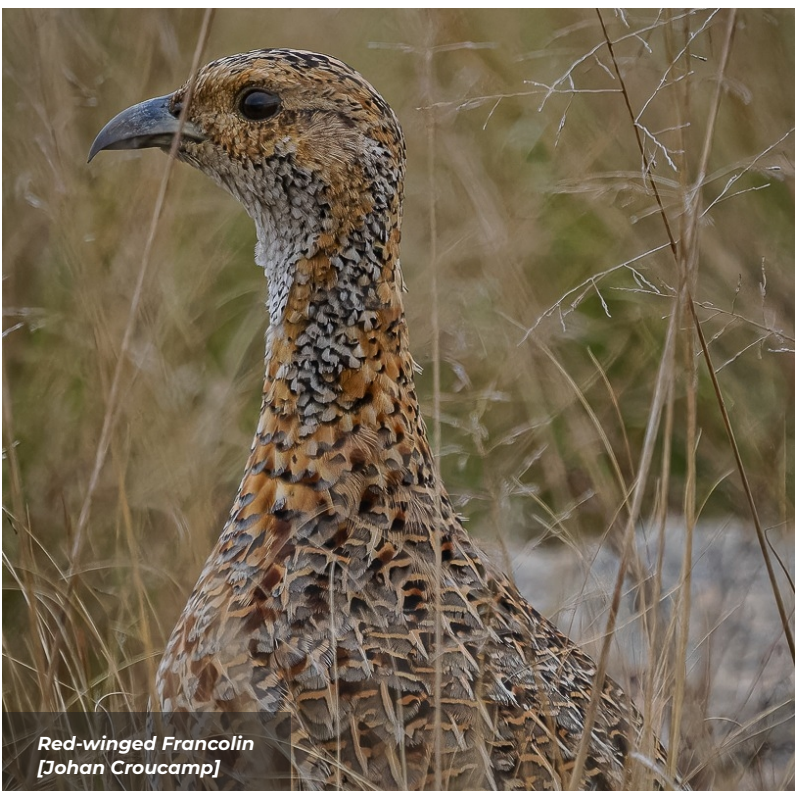


[Johan Croucamp]

Sunday morning began a bit later, with a walk around the farm at 06:00 and some amazing sightings were to be had close to camp, including a Lesser Honeyguide, Grey Crowned Crane, Black Crake and Kurrichane Thrush. Some grateful goodbyes were said, and everyone was on their way by 11:00.

Thank you to Robin for the amazing arrangements and all the hard work that goes on behind the scenes. Thank you to each person who went on the trip as well for making it such a memorable experience. And thank you to Bird Life Northern Gauteng for making these trips possible.

SUZAHN DE SOUZA



Red-winged Francolin
[Johan Croucamp]



Greater Double-banded Sunbird
[Johan Croucamp]

BERGKONINKRYK CAMP

This camp was characterised by water, water, water! The unusually late and wet season, coupled with heavy rain on Tuesday night, meant that plans had to be very flexible, and our leader, Christo Venter, spent a lot of time on the phone trying to find farms and roads that were accessible. He had promised us 120 birds for the weekend and was now under pressure to deliver!

The birdlife around the camp on Friday afternoon was quiet and only delivered 15 birds, of which the Terrestrial Brownbul was a highlight.

Relaxing around the fire in the evenings, Christo entertained us with an account of his Southern African Birding Big Year. What a story! By the 2nd Jan he already had 302 birds on his list. As the evening progressed and the wine flowed, it started sounding like a fishing story and the numbers climbed and climbed. By the end of April 591. End July 688. He had set himself a target of 700, but in the end his total was 807 with 49 lifers, finishing with a Southern White-faced Owl he found back on a farm near his home. We were all inspired to try a Big Year at some stage.

Our first stop on Saturday morning was at a little dam near our accommodation which yielded about twenty birds, including African Black Duck, a Malachite Kingfisher and a Burnt-necked Eremomela. From there, we did roadside birding towards Bad-se-Loop, where a Black Cuckooshrike and a Yellow-bellied Greenbul gave us the runaround, moving around a lot and making identification difficult. It was interesting comparing the call of the Cuckooshrike with that of a Brubru (which we later also heard), as they have many similarities. We stopped off at the Bad-se-Loop Jeugkamp, where a friendly manager allowed us the use of the bathrooms. As we were leaving, we heard the characteristic drumming sound of the Bearded Woodpecker. This reminded me again of how important it is to learn the bird calls and sounds. The Firefinch App now has a game called Whistlr, which is fantastic for learning calls.



Vogelfontein views
[Angela Openshaw]



[Christo Venter]

Saturday afternoon we stopped off at a vlei area where we managed to get the total up to 80 birds. This gave Christo hope that we would make his target of 120. It was cooler and the birds were on the move. We saw Crimson-breasted Shrike, Three-banded Plover, Goliath Heron, Purple Heron and Little Egret.

There was much debate on Saturday evening on whether it would be worth driving to Vogelfontein on Nylsvlei, as it was very wet and no one had been allowed in there or in the main gate at Nylsvlei Reserve. Six of us decided to get an early start and take a chance while the other five stayed in their warm beds.

And man, was it worth it!!

The morning started with two African Hawk-Eagles on a pylon. They moved with us, from pylon to pylon and we were able to get good photos.

After another phone call, Christo managed to get permission and the gate code so that we were able to go into Vogelfontein. Christo, Angie and myself had gumboots, while Danie and Hein went through in their shoes and Mariana did the barefoot thing. The paths were often calf-deep in water and there was much hilarity. We were warned that there had been sightings of hippos, so we were all on high alert. When Christo called 'crocodile', we all ran, and then even the gum boots got full of water.

I still suspect that it was a prank!



White-backed Duck
[Nicole Crisp]

Nylsvlei can only be described as a magical place. The abundance of birds is overwhelming, and the sounds around you are spine-tinglingly beautiful, dominated by the whistles of the White-faced Whistling Ducks, and the calls of African Rail. There were Purple and Squacco Herons in their dozens, Jacanas and Whistling Ducks in their hundreds, African Fish Eagles, an African Swampphen, two beautiful African Marsh Harriers interacting, one shy Lesser Moorhen and many Brown-throated Martins flying overhead. My highlights were the White-backed Ducks which I had never seen up close before, and the Fulvous Whistling Ducks. A Yellow-billed Stork also graced us with its presence, and a Little Bittern was spotted for a short while. Close to the hides we spotted about twenty Knob-billed Ducks.



Yellow-billed Stork
[Hein Duvenhage]

On our way back we had a special sighting of a young Southern African Python, about 1.5 m long. Near another of the many little dams we stopped as there was a big puddle on the road and a number of birds had congregated there. A Yellow-billed Stork, Little Egrets, Great Egrets and a Hamerkop. Lovely to see them next to each other and compare their sizes. In this area we also saw 3 different Hornbills – African Grey, Southern Yellow-billed and Southern Red-billed, and a Golden-breasted Bunting.

Our final stop of the day was to enter the Nylsvlei Nature Reserve area. Other than a bathroom break and a Burchell's Starling, this area didn't yield much as it was too flooded for us to get to the hide.

All in all, a wonderful weekend with a total of 135 birds. Three of our group got lifers. A big thank you to Christo for exceeding his expectations.

NICOLE CRISP



Yellow-billed Stork, Little Egrets, Great Egrets
[Nicole Crisp]



Jacana Hide
[Nicole Crisp]



Burchell's Coucal juvenile
[Hein Duvenhage]

BONAMANZI CAMP

The Bonamanzi camp is a much-anticipated camp on the BLNG calendar. This year it was led by Stuart and Glen McLean, a brilliant father-and-son team from Birding and Beyond in Underberg, KZN. The camp was an outstanding success with quite a few of us getting single-digit or double-digit lifers, and one person getting an astounding 30+ lifers.

We arrived at Bonamanzi on Wednesday, 3rd June in the mid-afternoon. The roads from Pretoria to Hluhluwe were not too bad except for some bumpy sections near Pongola (you can't win them all!). The non-campers stayed in The Game Lodge, a lovely house with 5 ensuite bedrooms, large lounge and dining area, large kitchen and even a private swimming pool. The campers stayed at The Oval Executive campsite where they had their own private ablutions and kitchen.

After settling in at the lodge house and setting up our tents, Stuart took us exploring around The Game Lodge and nearby areas. And the lifers started flying in (or so to speak). These included Rudd's Apalis, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Red-capped Robin-chat. Other specials seen were Red-faced Mousebirds, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Trumpeter Hornbills, and a Wahlberg's Eagle that flew over the lodge. What a fantastic start. The evening was spent around the braai getting to know each other.



Rudd's Apalis
[Hannes van den Berg]



Attendance register
[Glen McLean]

On Thursday morning we squeezed everyone into four cars to minimise the number of cars on the road and set off to False Bay. We saw a number of interesting birds on our way out of Bonamanzi, including the strange and beautiful Crested Guinea fowl, Crowned Hornbill, Black-bellied Starlings, Common Square-tailed Drongo and noisy Sombre Greenbul who seemed to be calling non-stop from absolutely everywhere. The weather was amazing; False Bay was beautiful, and it did not disappoint.

We quickly added several more lifers to our lists, including Terrestrial Brownbul, Dark-backed Weaver, Southern Yellow White-eye, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Southern Red-fronted and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, and the gorgeous Neergaard's Sunbird. There were two Pink-backed Pelicans cruising majestically on the bay waters (seriously, that's the only way to describe them), Striped Kingfisher, and a Caspian Tern did a few nice fly-bys so the photographers were able to get some great in-flight photos of it. Definitely a treat for the photographers.



Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher
[Hannes van den Berg]



Southern Red-fronted Tinkerbird
[John Truter]

On the road to and from False Bay, we picked up Senegal Lapwings, White-eared Barbet, Red-faced Cisticola, Burnt-necked Eremomela (a KZN lifer for Stuart!), Ashy Flycatcher, White-bellied Sunbirds, and Golden-breasted Bunting amongst others. What an amazing day! The evening was completed with another true BLNG-styled braai, and a huge thank you to Glen who was our Braai Master for the entire camp.

Friday took us to St. Lucia, Isimangaliso Eastern Shores, and Cape Vidal. A long day with lots of driving but so incredible that no one minded. In the forests and surrounding areas of St. Lucia, we discovered Purple-crested and Livingstone's Turaco, the latter being a huge lifer for many. Olive and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds were busy in the tops of the trees, and in the forest we were charmed by a very bold Brown Scrub Robin who completely ignored our presence and merrily hopped on the path very close to us.



Crowned Hornbill
[Angela Openshaw]



Pink-backed Pelican
[Angela Openshaw]



White-eared Barbet
[John Truter]



Forest birding on the Igwlagwala Trail in St Lucia [Ria]



At Cape Vidal [Angela Openshaw]

We discovered Glen's exceptional hearing ability, as time and again, he shushed us as he called out the various bird calls that he picked up. These included African Paradise Flycatcher, Red-capped Robin-chat, Yellow-breasted Apalis, White-starred Robin, Bleating Camaroptera, and Dusky Flycatcher. We could have spent the whole morning there, but the other birding spots were calling us, so we had to go.

On the road through Isimangaliso we encountered Brown Snake Eagle and African Fish Eagle, Black Saw-wing, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Red-billed Oxpecker, Brown-hooded and Striped Kingfishers. At Cape Vidal we explored the area around the wooden cabins and picked up a few more birds, but it was on the beach where we got a great surprise. Far out to sea, on the horizon, we saw an Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross!!

How incredible was that! Hannes managed to get some photos of it and used these together with 5 other logged sightings in the same pentad of an Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross, to confirm its identification. Other great beach sightings were two African Oystercatchers, Greater Crested Terns, White-fronted Plover, and Sanderlings. For me, the Cape Vidal beach was the highlight of camp, and although every day was brilliant, Cape Vidal just stands out a bit more for me.



Brown Scrub Robin [Hein Duvenage]



Pink-throated Twinspot [John Truter]



Grey Waxbill
[Hein Duvenage]

Our final full day on Saturday was spent exploring inside Bonamanzi Nature Reserve. Still more lifers were claimed, including the Pink-throated Twinspot (my one lifer!), Black Cuckooshrike, Olive Bushshrike, Eastern Nicator, Lesser Honeyguide, African Goshawk, Golden-tailed and Cardinal Woodpeckers, Water Thick-knee, Saddle-billed Stork (flying), African Harrier-Hawk, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Tambourine Dove, Bearded Scrub Robin and Grey Sunbird (and many others).

Sunday morning brought some more species that we had not seen yet. These included Grey Waxbills, Yellow-throated Petronia, and White-throated Robin-chat. It was an amazing camp and one that will be a fixture on our BLNG calendar for a few more times. Stuart and Glen are incredible bird guides, and I recommend them highly. We thank them for their skill and patience with us, making sure that everyone saw the specials, and allowing the photographers enough time to get their photos.

Our species count was around 158; only one person did not get a lifer, one person got one lifer, and the rest got five or more lifers, the average was 11-13 lifers. Not bad for winter birding!

ANGELA OPENSHAW



Eastern Nicator
[Anton Pretorius]

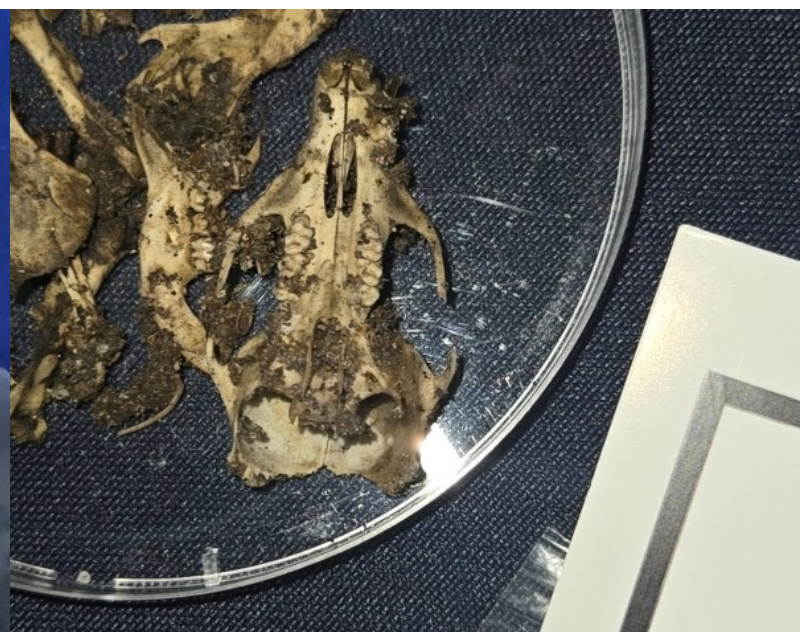
KIDS OWL PROJECT CONSERVATION

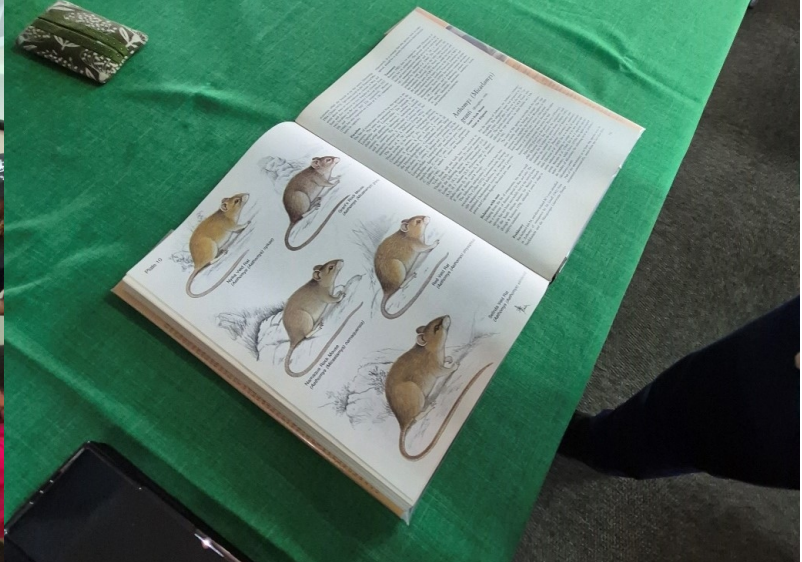


On Saturday 28 March we had the privilege to host Itumeleng Maroga from the Owl Project (www.owlproject.org). Itumeleng gave us a short presentation teaching us about the usefulness of owls and showing the children (and the adults) owl pellets. If you were not aware of it, owls swallow their prey, like rats and mice, mostly whole.

After digesting the meat, the undigestible parts, like the fur and bones, are regurgitated and spit out as dry owl pellets. Owls play an integral part in biological pest control of rodents. Note: there is no such thing as a 'safe poison'.

Every child received a kit containing one owl-pellet, a petri-dish, two gloves, a mask, and a tweezer. The children proceeded to dissect the owl pellets to reveal the bones and skulls of the prey that the owls ate. Some of the species were identified, based on the morphology of the teeth using a book by Dr Gerrit de Graaff (my grandfather).



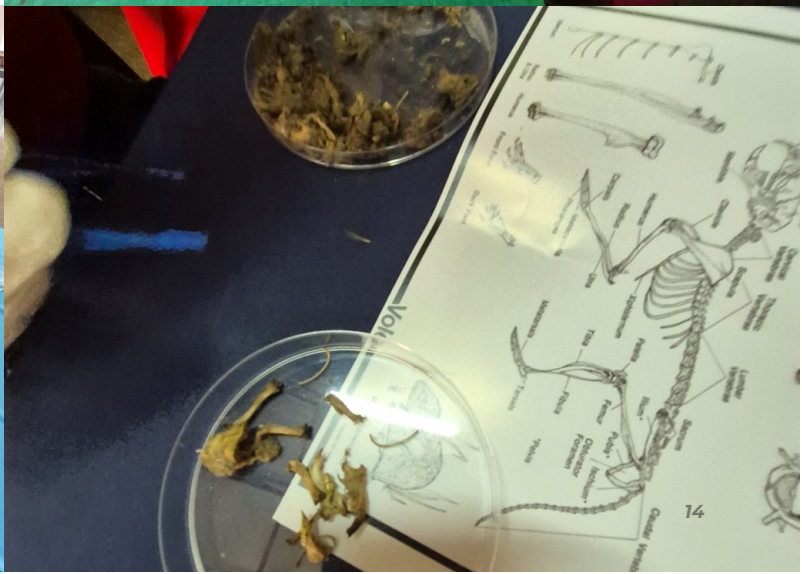


Every pellet came with a slip of paper with the identity of the owl species, e.g. Western Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) and GPS coordinates from where the owl pellet was collected. The dissected bones were returned in the petri dishes to the Owl project and will be further analysed by graduate students from Wits University. I was really impressed with how well the children did their dissections.

Most of the rodents from the pellets that we dissected were identified as either House Rat (*Rattus rattus*) or House Mouse (*Mus musculus*), neither of which are indigenous to Southern Africa but introduced by people. We also found another potential pest namely the Common mole rat (*Cryptomys hottentottus*) (pictured below). This dissection proved the fact that the owls are vitally important in biological pest control. This small sample even stresses the importance of owls, because it demonstrates the preference that owls have for pest species above indigenous prey.

Interestingly we identified one indigenous species namely Highveld Gerbil (*Tatera brantsii*). Studying owl pellets is a way of knowing which rodents occur in an area. It was a memorable morning. We really enjoyed it and we will definitely schedule it again in the future.

LIESL DE SWARDT



MY FIRST PELAGIC TRIP

BIRDERS EYE VIEW

JOHAN CROUKAMP

My first pelagic trip was with Trevor Hardaker and Zest for Birds during May. And what an outing it was!! It was an unbelievable adrenaline rush, a most enjoyable experience.



Departure was from Houtbay – a journey of some seven hours.



Johan Croukamp

Photographs include the outbound journey to find the right fishing trawler and show some of the visual chaos surrounding these trawlers (what an eye opener it was ... to have seen the videos beforehand; but to be caught in that moment ... unbelievable).



Johan Croukamp

It took some skills to get THE shot of individual birds in between all the visual chaos that surrounded us; this was complicated by the experts calling special visitors to our boat, which proved to be fairly difficult to spot within the volume of birds around.

ALBATROSSES

The albatrosses primarily were Shy Albatross, Black-browed Albatross, and Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross (the smallest albatross in our waters).



Shy Albatross
[1 m. in size]



Black-browed Albatross



Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross

LARGER BROWN PETRELS



Southern Giant Petrels flanked by Black-browed and Shy Albatrosses



Northern Giant Petrel



Size comparison: Northern Giant Petrels vs. White-chinned Petrel



White-chinned Petrel



White-chinned Petrels in food dispute



Brown (Subantarctic) Skua

SMALLER SEABIRDS



Pintado (Cape) Petrel



Sooty Shearwater



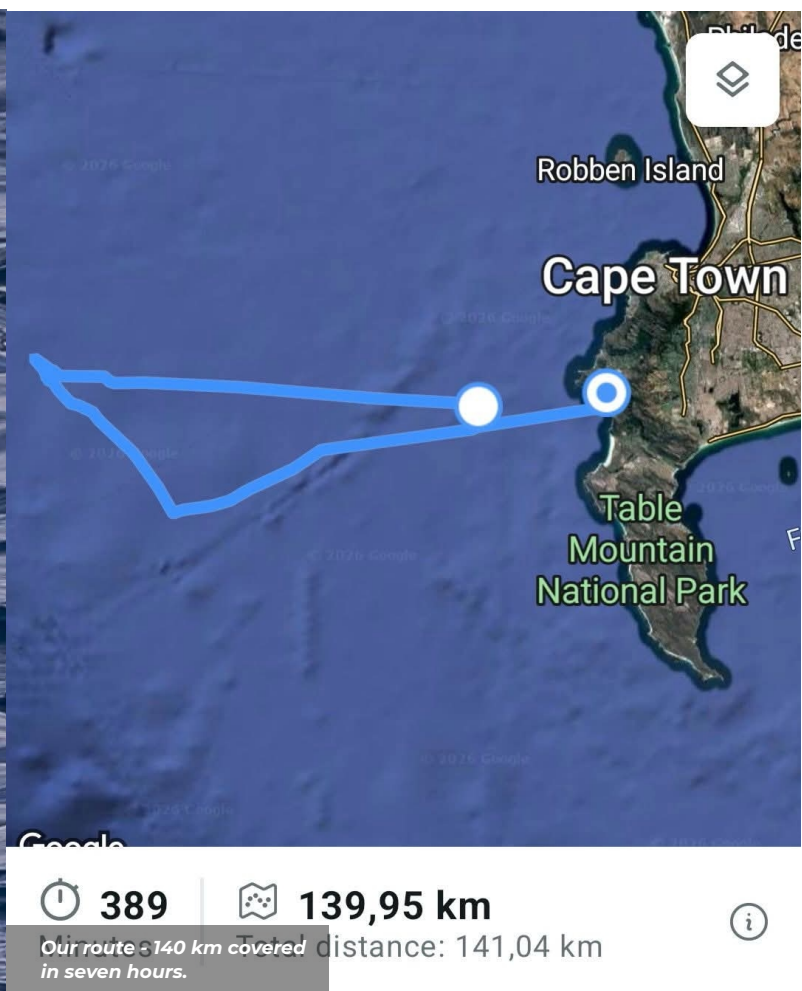
Great Shearwater



With the help of Trevor and the other experienced birders on the boat calling the birds spotted, and with me on aim, focus and shoot, I have been able to add 12 photographic lifers to my list!!

Fairly chuffed with my sea legs!

JOHAN CROUKAMP



NTSIKENI VLEILAND, HIER KOM ONS !!

TRAVELOGUE

Ek het vir die eerste keer kennis geneem van die Ntsikeni Vleiland Natuurreservaat (Ntsikeni) toe Hanneline Smith-Robinson tydens 'n Birdlife Regional vergadering 'n paar jaar gelede 'n aanbieding oor natuurbewaring gedoen het en ek onthou spesifiek oor die Ingula en Ntsikeni Natuurreservate uitgewy het. Sedertdien het daar ook 'n artikel oor Ntsikeni in die Julie/Augustus 2023 African Birdlife verskyn en dit het my net meer en meer aangespoor om daar uit te kom .

Ntsikeni lê min of meer in die middel van Underberg, Swartberg, Franklin en Creighton in die Suidelike Drakensberg. Daar is verskeie roetes om by die park te kom. Die laaste klompie kilometers vleg dit deur die berge en verby bergbewonerhuisies om by die park se hek uit te kom. Vanaf die park se hek dan nog ongeveer 12 km om by die lodge te kom.

Hoe Ntsikeni tot stand gekom het is alreeds in verskeie artikels beskryf. Maar net vir agtergrond: Die gebied is reeds in 1950 deur die Regering van die dag as belangrike water opvanggebied geïdentifiseer en waarvan sy unieke fauna en flora beskerm moes word. Agt plase is van blanke boere uitgekoop vir hierdie doel. Ongeveer 50 jaar later in 1997 is Ntsikeni as 'n natuurreservaat geproklameer. Dit is ongeveer 9200 hektaar groot, waarvan 1200 uit 'n vleiland bestaan en lê gemiddeld 1800 m bo seevlak. As gevolg die belangrikheid van hierdie vleiland in internasionale terme is dit in 2010 as 'n "Ramsar Site" verklaar (Ramsar verwys na 'n internasionale konvensie oor vleilande wat in 1971 wat by Ramsar in Iran goedgekeur is om die wêreld se vleilande te bewaar en in 1975 in werking getree het). In 2003 is twee lodges gebou om toerisme te bevorder. May Lodge is gebou vir skoolgroepe en konferensies en Ntsikeni Lodge vir toerisme. In 2023 is 'n uitgebreide "Nature Reserve Protected Area Management Plan" vir Ntsikeni opgestel en goedgekeur. Die Ntsikeni Community Trust is tot stand gebring om die natuurreservaat en die lodges te bestuur. Befondsing was deurentyd maar 'n probleem en instandhouding van lodges en paaie in die park is nagelaat. May Lodge is intussen gesluit maar die Ntsikeni Lodge is nog in bedryf.

Om Ntsikeni te besoek het vir my en Joelna, my vrou, 'n obsessie geword en toe die Paasaweek vroeg April 2026 vir ons oopgaan besluit ons daar en dan, dis nou sulke tyd. Ek het met Thando Ndaba en John Kinghorn by Birdlife se kantoor begin praat en ons besprekings vir akkommodasie en 'n gids gedoen.

Ntsikeni het 'n indrukwekkende voëllys. Daar is nie net meer as 170 spesies op sy voëllys nie, maar daar kom ook fantastiese voëls voor soos Baardaasvoëls, Sekretarisvoëls, Veldpoue, Lelkraanvoëls en Bromvoëls. Ook 'n broeipaar Witkruisvleivalke (Black Harrier) en dan natuurlik Gestreepte en Rooiborsvleikuikens, verskeie soorte riethane, Oranjeborsberglysters, grondspegte, kwarteltjies, Geelborskoesters, en baie ander.



Ons het Vrydagoggend vroeg uit Pretoria vertrek. Die pad Ntsikeni toe vanaf Pretoria was lank, ongeveer 750 km, 9.5 uur se ry. Die laaste 12 km lodge toe het 'n uur geneem maar ons word beloon met pragtige Sekretarisvoëls en later Veldpoue langs die pad. Die paaie in die park is maar baie sleg en 'n 4X4 voertuig is verkieslik as mens orals in die park wil rondry. Daar is nie selfoonopvangs by die lodge nie en mens moet ongeveer 500 m terugry of stap om na boodskappe te luister en/of oproepe te maak.

Ons het ongeveer 5 uur Vrydagmiddag by die lodge aangekom en is hartlik verwelkom deur Daluxolo (Dalu) Ngcobo, wie nie net ons gids sou wees nie, maar ook somer kampkommandant, die Ntsika (pilaar) van Ntsikeni. Die lodge bied twee duet oopplan-chalets wat elk 'n dubbelbed onder en twee enkelbeddens op die oop loft bo het, met 'n volledige badkamer met stort. Skoon linne en handdoeke. Dalu skakel sesuur in die middag 'n generator aan om krag en ligte te voorsien en sit dit weer nege-uur saans af. 'n Mens moet 'n kamplig saamneem om lig in die chalet te hê as die krag afgaan. Die chalets het nie eie braaigeriewe nie. Daar is 'n groot gebou tussen die duette wat uit 'n gesamentlike kuierplek en volledig toegeruste kombuis bestaan met gasyskas, vrieskas en stoof en volledig toegerus is met breekware en messegoed. In die vertrek is daar 'n vuurmaakplek om die gebou warm te maak in koue, nat weer, maar wat ook gebruik kan word om vleis te braai. Daar is egter 'n baie lekker buite-braai met 'n fantastiese uitsig oor die berge en 'n bergpiek wat die Ntsika genoem word (vanwaar Dalu sy bynaam van gekry het).



Ons het in pragtige weer aangekom en die eerste aand somer dadelik gebraai. In die verte hoor ons Kaapse Ooruide duidelik roep. Daar was twee ander egpare wat die Saterdagoggend vertrek het. Dus was Dalu gids net vir die twee van ons. Ons groot doelwit was natuurlik om die Gestreepte Vleikuiken te sien, (dit sou vir ons 'n lifer wees), maar ook die Rooiborsvleikuiken en ander vleivoëls. Saterdagoggend sesuur is ons af vleie toe. Dalu het ons na drie van sy "spots" geneem. Daar aangekom, het beide die vleikuikens telkens geroep en dit het ons skoon opgewonde gemaak. By die eerste spot kry ons gou 'n Rooiborsvleikuiken wat kom loer. Dit was nog half donker maar ek kon 'n herkenbare foto kry. Daarna het ons vir die Gestreepte Vleikuiken geroep. Dalu het 'n gangetjie van so 10 meter in die vleigras oopgetrap, sy mikrofoon op die onderpunt met gras bedek en die vleikuiken probeer nader roep. 'n Paar van hulle het telkens antwoord gegee maar nie uitgekom nie. Na 'n uur is ons na 'n tweede spot en 'n derde spot. Ons hoor hulle maar kry hul nie gesien nie. Dalu verduidelik dat ons eintlik te laat in die seisoen gekom het. Meeste van die trekvoëls is al weg of besig om reg te maak vir vertrek. Daar is nie meer kompetisie tussen hulle nie en as hulle roep is dit maar net om hulle teenwoordigheid aan te dui. Teen agtuur is ons terug lodge toe om vinnig iets te eet.



Ons volgende missie was af na die groot vlei toe, so 45 min te voet tussen die vleigras en wildspaadjes deur. 'n Paar jaar gelede was daar Grasvlei, maar omdat die vlei 'n paar jaar na mekaar gebrand het, is hulle weg. Dalu glo hulle sal weer terugkom. Ons loop moeilik en ons word moeg maar hou die pose. By die vlei gekom is alles doodstil. Dalu verduidelik weer dat die Klein-(Baillon's) en ander Riethane reeds weg is, en die besef word al duideliker dat Aprilmaand die verkeerde tyd is vir Ntsikeni. Mens moet tussen Desember en Februarie kom, uiters Maart. Ons was gelukkig om twee baie mooi Afrikaanse Vleivalke te sien en aan die oorkant van die vlei drie Lelkraanvoëls – pa, ma en jongeling.

Daarna terug lodge toe. Daar aangekom, vinnig ontbyt geëet en dadelik in my Cruiser veld toe. Ons ry met 'n bergpaadjie na pragtige kranse in die berge waar Baardaasvoëls 'n nes het. Dit was toe al tienuur en ons is helaas te laat om hulle te kry. Hulle was nie meer tuis nie, seker gaan kos soek. Middagete terug by die lodge en tyd vir iets eet en ruskry. Intussen het die wind opgesteek, die wolke het versamel en die lug het toegetrek, dit het ook koud geword. Dalu kom met ons ooreen om vyf uur reg te wees om weer vir die Gestreepte Vleikuiken te gaan soek. Die mis het reeds laag gelê op die gras. Ons volg dieselfde roetine as vanoggend. Ons roep, hulle roep vanuit die vleigras, ons roep, niks. Toe skielik in 'n flitsende oomblik, 'n kop en 'n stert en weg! Baie opgewonde dat die kans goed is om hulle die volgende dag, Sondag, te sien sal kry.

Die volgende oggend, Sondag, het die mis steeds laag gelê. Die hele vlei gebied was toe onder die mis. Ons het sesuur weer na die Gestreepte Vleikuiken gaan soek terwyl die mis laag gelê het maar was weer onsuksesvol. Teen agtuur is ons terug by die lodge en eet ons gou ontbyt. Gelukkig het die mis oor die berge gelig en het ons lekker bewolkte weer die res van die dag gehad. Ons klim in die motor en ry saam met Dalu om ons by ander plekke in die park uit te bring. Daar is nie baie oopgetrapte paaie nie. Op pad vlieg twee Veldpoues (Denham's Bustard) langs ons op en ek was net betyds om hulle van agter af te neem. By 'n groot alleenstaande bloekomboom stop ons. Ons was in die omgewing waar 'n paar Witkruisvleivalke (Black Harrier), hulle nes in die gras het. Gelukkig sien ons een van hulle wat voor ons op die tweespoor-paadjie sit. Die voël vlieg op toe ons naderkom, maar ek was gelukkig om ook van hierdie voël 'n foto te kry.





Daarna ry ons na 'n gebied toe waar Dalu die dag tevore Swartrugkwarteltjies (Black-rumped Butte) opgejaag het. Ons het die omgewing platgeloop en later tonguit moed opgegee, nie hierdie keer gekry nie. Daarna ry ons na 'n stukkie natuurlike woud net buite die park op soek na Woudpapegaaië maar ons was ook te laat vir hulle en kry hulle nie. Ons word egter beloon met twee pragtige Bromvoëls wat ek kon afneem. Dit was al etenstyd en ons is terug logde toe, ons het middagete geneem en gaan rus. Die middag begin dit te reën maar hou later op. Dalu kom ons weer vyfuur haal vlei toe om nog 'n keer na die Gestreepte Vleikuikens te gaan soek. Ons wou darem baie graag 'n foto kon neem. Die mis het weer toegesak en behalwe dat die vleikuikens saam geroep het, het ons niks te sien gekry nie.

Ons plan was om die Maandag terug te ry Pretoria toe, maar omdat die weer so sleg was en die lodge geen ander besprekings gehad het nie besluit ons om 'n dag langer te bly en eers Dinsdag te ry. Dan sou ons ook die Paasnaweek verkeer terug Pretoria toe vryspring. Dit begin weer reën en Dalu maak vir ons vuur in die gemeenskaplike vertrek. Ons kon daar ook ons vleis braai maar die reën klaar op en ons kry kans om weer lekker buite te braai. Dalu was bly dat ons 'n dag langer kon bly.

Maandagoggend herhaal die roetine homself. Die mis lê weer laag oor die vlei, miskien sou die vleikuikens in hierdie weer uitkom. Sesuur stap ons in digte mis vlei toe, maar weer niks. Terug by die lodge gaan ry ons weer. Hierdie keer neem hy ons op 'n byna onsigbare tweespoor-paadjie die berge op, op en op en op. Later wys my GPS ons is ongeveer 1950 m bo seevlak. Die mis hang om ons. Ons klim uit op 'n plek wat baie rotsagtig is. Hier kry ons Grondspette (Ground Woodpecker) en Bergklipwagters (Buff-streaked Chat). Hier kry ons ook Langtoonkliplysters (Sentinel Rock Thrush). 'n Entjie verder word gestop vir Geelborskoesters (Yellow-breasted Pipit). Dis doodstil, nie 'n voël wat roep nie. Dalu noem weer, ons is te laat, die voëls het ophou roep. Gelukkig vlieg 'n voël uit die gras voor ons, hy roep Yellow-breasted Pipit! Ek kry 'n foto van agter wat dit bevestig. Ons ry aan en aan en aan op 'n byna onsigbare tweespoor-paadjie. Dan stop ons om uit te kyk vir Grasveldlangbeklewerikke (Eastern Long-billed Lark). Ons hoor een ver af in die klowe maar kry niks te sien nie. Ons kry weer Sekretarisvoëls en ook Lelkraanvoëls maar besef terdeë dat ons te laat is in die seisoen.

Dalu gesels deurentyd en wys ons waar sy ouers 'n kraal gehad het en hy groot geword het. Hy ken die berge soos die palm van sy hand. Ver in die oorkant hardloop 'n troppie swartwildebeeste vir ons weg, so ook 'n klomp blesbokke. Hy bring ons op 'n plek hoog bo die berge waar mens 'n geheelbeeld van die 2100 hektaar vleiland kry. Vir die eerste keer sien ek en Joelna hoe 'n rivier ontstaan. Eers die wydtegestrekte vleigebied wat dreineer en later klein waterstroompies vorm, dan al breër en breër en aan die einde van die vleigebied 'n klein riviertjie vorm, wat uiteindelik in die grote Umzimkulurivier vloei. Daarna is ons terug lodge toe. Dit reën steeds aan en af. Laat middag vyfuur gaan ons vir oulaas na die vleikuikens soek. Weer niks nie en ons besef opnuut ons het op die verkeerde tyd gekom.

Dis Dinsdagoggend. Ons is vroeg opgepak, ons groet vir Dalu weemoedig, neem nog 'n paar afskeidsfotos van die berge, die lodge en Dalu. Ons sweer by Dalu dat ons verseker weer sal kom. Nou ken ons die opset, ons sal die regte tyd van die jaar kom. Ons het baie voëls gemis. Maar sal volgende keer halfpad oorslaap by plekke soos Nottingham Road of so, dat die dag nie te lank word nie. Was die trip 'n vermorsing van tyd en geld? Vir seker nie. Ons het vriende gemaak met 'n wonderlike mens, Dalu, ons het verlief geraak op 'n wonderlike landskap, die Ntsikeni Vleiland Natuurreservaat.

Baie dankie vir die hulp wat ons by John Kinghorn en Thandu Ndaba van Birdlife SA met ons beplanning gekry het, vir Simon van die Ntsikeni Gemeenskap wat die akkommodasie met die lodge gereël het, en dan vir Dalu, dat hy die lodge so netjies en skoon aan ons besorg het en krag voorsien het. Ook aan hom as mens vir sy vriendelikheid, vir sy ondervinding, sy kundigheid van die omgewing en bo alles sy kennis van die voëls van die park. Hy is voorwaar die Ntsika van Ntsikeni 😊. Die lodge en die paaie in die park het egter ernstige instandhouding nodig, en sal besoekersgetalle aanhelp as dit kan aandag kry.

PIETER EN JOELNA HESLINGA

April 2026

BEST OF BLNG

PHANTOMS OF THE FOREST

Forest birding is notoriously hard. Birds seem to be more secretive, flitting with flashes of brilliant colour through bars of sunlight, often high up in the canopy.

BLNG's top photographers still managed to capture these breathtaking images for us to enjoy.

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





Black-throated Wattle-eye
[Sean Naudé]



Black-fronted Bush-shrike
[Anna-Marie van der Merwe]



Brown Scrub Robin
[Hannes van den Berg]



African Broadbill
[JP van der Merwe]



Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird
[Sheleph Burger]



Gorgeous Bush-shrike
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Eastern Nicator
[Angela Openshaw]



Green Twinspot
[Marna Buys]



Narina Trogon
– The undisputed king of the forest!
[Marlou Schalkwyk]

RINGERSHOEKIE DESEMBER MAART - JULIE 2026

CITIZEN SCIENCE

Die BLNG-ringgroep was baie besig die afgelope paar maande. Meer as 3600 voëls is hanteer by verskillende plekke in die land. Daguitstappies is gereël by plekke soos die Voortrekkermonument, Strubendam (Lynnwood Glen), Moreleta NR en Bishop Voëlpark (Wierdapark). 'n Opleidingsessie is in Junie by Strubendam gehou, waar nege voornemende ringers opgelei is. Naweekkampe het Wolfhuiskraal (naby Pienaarsrivier), Zimbali Estate Nursery (Ballito in KwaZulu-Natal) en Bushtrail (nie ver van Magaliesburg af nie) ingesluit. Laasgenoemde kamp is in Junie in die koudste tyd van die jaar gehou, waar die koesters (pipits) geteiken is. Die weeklange kamp aan die einde van Maart by Wilton Valley, langs die Matlabasrivier het goed afgeleëp.

Die dagsessie wat die meeste voëls opgelewer het, was in Mei by Moreleta NR. Die verrassing van die oggend was 'n Meitjie (Klaas's Cuckoo). Meer as 200 voëls het nuwe ringe gekry.



Frik en Wanda du Plessis het Kaapse Kapokvoëls kon ring by Wolfhuiskraal. [Mari Ueckermann]



Reinhardt Fowler met 'n Meitjie by Moreletakloof. [Jeannie de Jager]

Op die ringkamp by Wilton Valley was daar 272 voëls gering van 63 spesies en tien was hervangste. Een van die hervangste was 'n Rooiruglaksman (Red-backed Shrike), een van sewe, wat in 2025 'n kleurring gekry het as deel van 'n projek deur Lyndon Roberts en wat weer op dieselfde plek gevang is. Ander besonderse vangste sluit 'n Rooibekeend (Red-billed Teal), vier Bronsvlerkdrawwertjies (Bronze-winged Courser), twee Europese Troupante (European Roller) en 'n Rooiborsbyvreter (Southern Carmine Bee-eater) in.

By Zimbali Estate Nursery by Ballito het die ringgroepe van BLNG en Wits 'n verstommende 295 voëls hanteer. Die groep was ingenome met die 28 Natallysters (Spotted Ground Thrush) wat gevang is, omdat dit die onderwerp vir dr Jonah Gula (Postdoctoral Fellow, University of KwaZulu-Natal) se navorsingsprojek is. Ander besonderse woudspesie was die Kleinbyvanger (Common Square-tailed Drongo), Groenkolpensie (Green Twinspot), Baardwipstert (Bearded Scrub Robin) en die Knysnaruigtesanger (Knysna Warbler). Wat laasgenoemde spesie so besonders maak is dat daar twee van hulle by Zimbali gering is die jaar, terwyl Roberts 7 van die spesie rapporteer: "Formerly near Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, but not recent records from the area".

WANDA DU PLOOY



Madeleen van Loggerenberg skryf: "Ek het op 23 April 1996 my amptelike dokument vanaf SAFRING ontvang dat ek as A-ringer gekwalifiseer is. 1 Junie 1996 het ek die eerste voël met my eie ringe gering. Dit was 'n Huismossie. Om my 30 jaar as ringer te vier, het ek op 1 Junie 2026 'n Rooiborssuikerbekkie (Scarlet-chested Sunbird) in Witrivier, Mpumalanga gering. Dit was die eerste een vir my. Ring lifer." [Michael Steyn]



Pictured are members of a larger group of 56 UNISA students studying towards a Diploma in Nature Conservation, who participated in a practical bird-ringing training session presented by Dr F.C. Bothma. The session formed part of their Work-Integrated Learning and gave students valuable field-based exposure to bird-ringing theory, handling procedures and applied conservation practice. This practical experience supported the students in developing essential skills for their qualification and future work in the nature conservation sector. [F.C. Bothma]



Hierdie Afrikaanse Sperwer (African Goshawk) is deur Johan de Jager by Zimbali Estate Nursery by Ballito gering.



Zimbali ringing data: We ringed an astonishing 295 birds. With 2,1 km of nets, we put up 175 nets in total. We found an astonishing number of 28 Spotted Ground Thrushes! (Natallyster) [Suné Janse van Rensburg]



Buff-spotted Flufftail (Gevlekte Vleikuiken) [Craig Nattrass]



Conservation of all species: here a python that got entangled in fencing. Hier is die redders van die luislang wat in 'n elektriese heining verstrengel geraak het by Zimballi NR, Ballito. Vlnr Arrie Klopper, Suné Janse van Rensburg, Jonah Gula en Craig Nattrass. [Justin Ponder]



Tambourine Dove (Witborsduifie) [Craig Nattrass]



Collared Sunbird (Kortbeksuikerbekkie) [Craig Nattrass]



Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher (Bloukuifvlieëvanger) (V) [Craig Nattrass]



Chorister Robin-chat (Lawaaimakerjanfrederik) [Craig Nattrass]



Een van BLNG se A-ringers, Sonya de Bruyn, is vir drie weke op die Somkhanda Wildresersvaat naby Mkuze. Sy leer kinders van so ver as Kroasië en Oostenryk hoe om navorsing in Afrika te doen. Dit is onder die vaandel van Operation Wallacea (Lincolnshire, VK) en WEI (Wildlife & Ecological Investments) in SA. Foto: Bernice Hyette (OpWall)



Arrie Klopper het hierdie Knysnaruigtesanger (Knysna Warbler) gering.
[Arrie Klopper]



[Sonya de Bruyn]



[Sonya de Bruyn]



Withelmlaksman (White-crested Helmet-Shrike) [Sonya de Bruyn]



Kwêkwêvoël (Bleating Camaroptera) [Sonya de Bruyn]



Bruinwipstert (Brown Scrub Robin) [Sonya de Bruyn]



Pink-throated Twinspot [Sonya de Bruyn]



Geelvleknikator (Eastern Nicator) [Sonya de Bruyn]

CLUB RARITIES

REGIONAL AND LOCAL RARITIES AND INTERESTING SIGHTINGS APRIL - JULY 2026

NATIONAL

Most migrants had departed, but we still had many riches and surprises in Wider Gauteng during autumn and winter.

The bird that drew most attention and stayed around for this reporting period was the national rarity, **Lesser Black-backed Gull** (Sam van Zwieten) at Cowles Dam near Springs. It then moved on to Marievale. A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** has also been at Manten Marina on the Vaal Dam near Deneysville the past few months (Sandy Neveling).



Lesser Black-backed Gull
[Marlou Schalkwyk]

REGIONAL

Another highly unusual bird and a first record for Gauteng, generating much local excitement, was the discovery of a male **Collared Sunbird** at Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens (Dale Horne). The bird attracted several keen provincial birders during April and stayed there throughout the winter months.



Collared Sunbird [Dale Horne]



Black Stork [Etienne Hinrichsen]

Zaagkuildrift and Kgomo-Kgomo held on to first place with a number of Wider Gauteng Rarities reported: **Black Stork (Etienne Hinrichsen)** and **Grey-headed Kingfisher, Allen's Gallinule, Lesser Moorhen** and **Greater Painted-Snipe** (all JP van der Merwe).



Grey-headed Kingfisher [JP van der Merwe]



Allen's Gallinule [JP van der Merwe]

Mike Pope found a **Black-necked Grebe** family at Glen Austin Pan. Suburban Pretoria had a **Swallow-tailed Bee-eater** and a pair of **Bronze-winged Coursers** at Rietondale Farm.



Bronze-winged Courser [Philip Calinikos]



Swallow-tailed Bee-eater [AK Saib]

Rust de Winter had a **Black Stork** and a pair of **African Hawk Eagles** (Akil Ramcharan).

A **Double-banded Courser** was still in more or less the same vicinity it had been spotted during March at Deneyville.



Double-banded Courser [Hannes van den Berg]



Red-faced Cisticola [Marna Buys]

MAY

The month of May was characterised by slim pickings in the Rarities section.

The celebrity of April, the single **Collared Sunbird** at Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens, continued to draw birders during May. A small flock of **Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters** was seen in Ethel Gray Park in Johannesburg (Paula da Cruz) and at Rietondale Farm (Thea Jenkins).

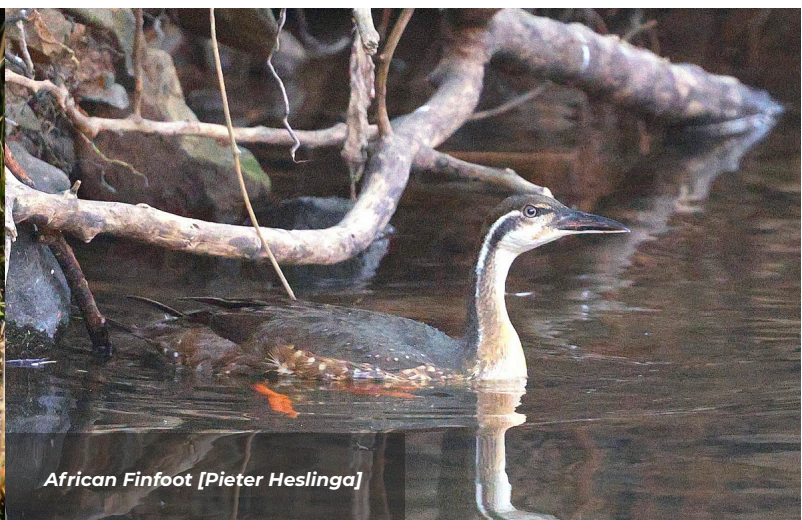
Mabusa NR had a **Red-faced Cisticola** (BLNG group).

JUNE

Michael Johnson had a calling **Water Thick-knee** flying past in Boksburg. Zaagkuildrift had a record of a **Bronze-winged Courser** (Luca Tomlinson). Deneyville held on to its **Double-banded Courser** and **Pink-billed Larks**.



Pink-billed Lark [Sandy Neveling]



African Finfoot [Pieter Heslinga]

JULY

The beginning of July saw in icy cold conditions. Surprisingly, the **Collared Sunbird** remained at Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens. An **African Cuckoo Hawk** at Northern Farm was reported by Philip Yiannakou.

Happy news indeed came when Pieter Heslinga reported that an **African Finfoot** was seen again at Faerie Glen NR. Alex Brown spotted a **Cape Eagle-Owl** at Suikerbosrand NR.



Cape Eagle-Owl [Alex Brown]

This was not the only interesting owl seen in the reporting area, as a **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl** was at Huddle Park in Johannesburg.

A single **Sickle-winged Chat** was found at Devon (Anton Schultz) while **Namaqua Sandgrouse** were reported near Boons (Sabap2).

(These records were compiled from various sources such as social media platforms, the SABAP2 website and EBird applications.)

IVONNE COETZEE

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, Frik du Plooy.

Front: Sean Naudé

LANIARIUS NEW MEMBERS: APRIL - AUGUST 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.

Gary Donian	Randpark Ridge	Geoff Relton	Clubview
Nicky Thomson	Midrand/Kyalami	Clara Ludwick	Naboomspruit
Valentina & Brett Duncan	Boardwalk Meander	Marga Smith	La Montagne
Alexia & Blake	Boardwalk Meander	Sean Masson	Johannesburg
Martie Goddard	Montana	Helene van der Merwe	Waterkloof
Kevin & Sonja James	Garsfontein	Simon Gear	Wapadrand
Anfi Strauss	Centurion	Andrea Buys	Waterkloof Ridge
Alma Swartz	Rooihuiskraal North	Carina Malherbe	Sinoville
Menno and Laura Klapwijk	Brooklyn	Eugene Mc Arthur	Centurion
Lorraine Duvenage	Rooihuiskraal	Marius Willemse	Wapadrand
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A sincere thank you for your generous donation. Your contributions help us to reach our goal toward bird conservation projects. We really appreciate it.

Ons opregte dank aan almal vir donasies gemaak. U donasie verseker dat ons 'n groter bydrae tot die bewaring van voëls kan lewer. Ons waardeer dit opreg.

Andrea Buys
Clem & Gloudi Coleman

Ingrid & Dries de Bruyn
Helene van der Merwe

Toriso Tlou

BUFFELSDRIFT

Rust de Winter

ACCOMMODATION

R700/adult/night;

R350/child 12 years and younger/night;

Day visitors R100/person/day



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