

BLING WINGS



Black Crake [Thinus van Staden]

Thinus van Staden
Photography

Edition 16, December 2024

Reflections: BLNG COMMITTEE 2024

A word of appreciation goes to each BLNG committee and sub-committee member at the end of 2024. Each plays a vital part in making our club the success that it is. Club members, whether in leading a day outing, promoting photography in the newly formed club, joining a camp, writing an article, submitting photographs or promoting conservation efforts – thank you all!

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EAST RAND PANS – 4 DECEMBER

Despite the pans being extremely low at Bullfrog and Korsman's Pans, the group recorded 60 species for the morning.



[Sheleph Burger]



Great Egret [Angela Openshaw]



Squacco Heron [Angela Openshaw]



[Sheleph Burger]



Greater Flamingo [Angela Openshaw]

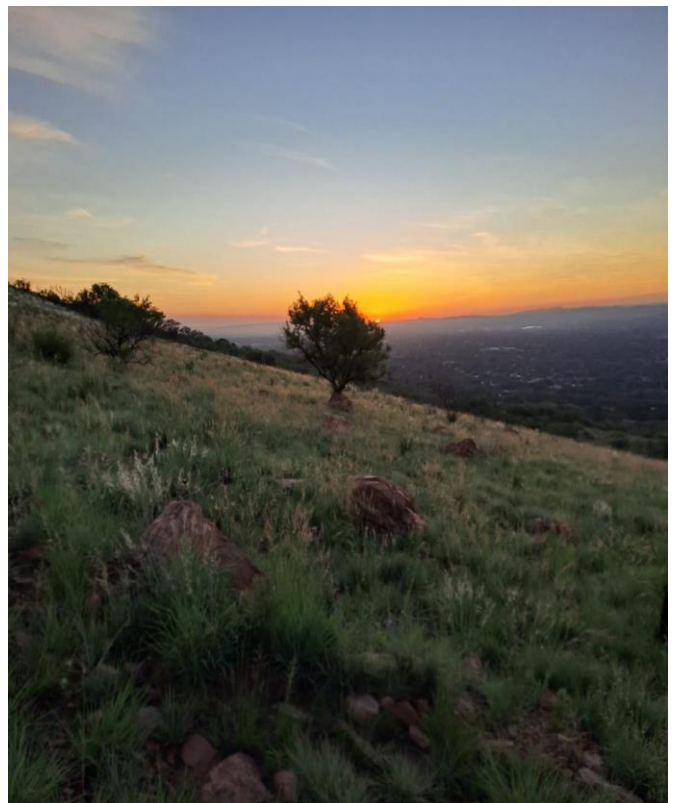
BIRDING BIG DAY 2024 – Suburban Triumph in Pretoria

Viva the 6 km radius BBD! It is always utterly rewarding to bird in and around your own pentad. Aren't these our familiar stamping grounds? Knowing exactly where to spot the regulars, where the skulkers might be hiding, and where surprises may await. Our goal? Improving on our 2023 count of 154 species. The persisting heatwave would reach a high on BBD, so we focused on a strategy: the sequence in which to visit our five hotspots.

Our day started when we met up at 3:20 am and headed straight to Rietondale Proefplaas. Now for the nightjars! First, Fiery-necked. Barn Owl called. Then off to our beloved Magalies mountain to catch more owls and spend the cool hours of the day at this rewarding hotspot. En route, we encountered the first of many Spotted Thick-knees and clocked up several other species. At the start of the Magalies MBT, in the dark, Flappet Lark obliged us with its noisy display flight. We stumbled up the path, and soon flushed another Nightjar – European! Below us, lights of the Moot suburbs still twinkled but dawn was breaking in deep reds. Pure magic.



We headed towards the ridge.
Cinnamon-breasted Buntings hopped
between the rocks, and near the ridge.
Striped and Nicholson's Pipits and
Wailing Cisticola.



The dawn chorus kept our fingers busy logging. Swallows and Swifts swirled and swooped through the skies, even a group of Glossy Ibis, and later, Peregrine Falcon. What an excellent move was visiting the Magalies during this most productive period of the day!



When at long last sightings slowed down somewhat, we headed towards Derdepoort Regional Park, picking up two targets on the way there – African Olive Pigeon feeding on the last of the Bauhinia seeds and Mocking Cliff Chat, a pair sunning themselves exactly where expected. Our count was on 100 species!

Derdepoort was a welcome opportunity to grab some breakfast on the hoof. Plenty of White-fronted Bee-eaters and the Burnt-necked Eremomelas and Greater Honeyguide were exactly where they should be. But what riches awaited at the dam! Striated, Purple and a first for this pentad, Black-crowned Night Heron. The trusty Common Buzzard, as each summer, was perched on its favourite pylon and a surprise Long-crested Eagle hastened us on our way to our next destination. Quirky species ticked and in the bag! We shot away just as the cool box-and-boombox crowd started to enter, so grateful that Ilse had bought our tickets ahead of time and had arranged an alternative entry and exit gate. It was getting extremely hot and Wonderboom Junction around the Apies River would boost our waterbird count.

Goliath Heron welcomed us there, and Squacco flushed. Some duck species, Sandpipers and even Brown-throated Martin amongst other swallows added to our count. A pity that Half-collared Kingfisher wasn't here – this was a dependable spot for them! But wait! Ilse, who had walked ahead of us, flushed an African Crake. BBD rules are firm: a minimum of three group members need to have positively identified a bird before it may be logged.

Peter, ever ready to venture where we four ladies wouldn't, but also keen to add to our pentad's species, waded through boggy mud up to his knees – but the crane stayed well hidden. No Little Bittern either or even the Great Reed Warblers seen by another BBD team there minutes before.



The sun reached its zenith and the temperature exactly what the weather apps had threatened – 38, 39 degrees. After some more bashing through reeds and grasses, we decided to move on towards nearby residential complexes for Mountain Wheatear. It led us a merry dance before we located it, but as consolation a Groundscraper Thrush also joined the party. We left for Proefplaas again, with our count up to 150. Five birds to go! And we yet had to encounter even one single Grey Go-away-bird or Crested Barbet.

Proefplaas delivered the expected Cisticolas and African Pipit. And, thankfully, the lovely Little Bee-eaters. But we still needed at least one species – off we went to LC de Villiers and its lovely dam. It was noisy with various year-end party groups but at least yielded Red-knobbed Coot. 155! Jubilation!! Target reached! It was 6 pm. We headed home.

The next day with BBD results out, we were overjoyed to have won the Gauteng 6 km Radius title and no.11 countrywide. While other 6 km Radius teams in positions 1-10 had birded in the countryside and nature, we had managed this wonderful count right in busy suburban Pretoria, in our own pentad and on its fringes.

VIVA TINKTINKIES!

REGIONAL AND LOCAL RARITIES AND INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

After November's national rarities which truly reinforced Mkhombo Dam's 'magic' status (Broad-billed Sandpiper and Slaty Egret), nobody would have expected another mega – but this is exactly what happened when Pieter Scholtz discovered the celebrity of the month, **Red-throated Pipit**, a rare vagrant with only two previously recorded sightings in South Africa. Then the Patagonian Picnic Table effect (to quote Trevor Hardaker) was in evidence – rarity after rarity was picked up by twitchers in the vicinity of the Red-throated Pipit.



Red-throated Pipit. [Pieter Scholtz]



Pieter Scholtz also photographed **Caspian Plover** there.

Then, in quick succession, **Pink-backed Pelican**, (Patrick O'Brien) and **Allen's Gallinule** (Juan van den Heever) were reported.



Pink-backed Pelican [Angela Openshaw]

Next was **Pectoral Sandpiper** by Eduard Teichert.



Pectoral Sandpiper [Richard Crawshaw]

Osprey (Doug Newman) as well as **Saddle-billed Stork** were reported.

Twitchers at Mkhombo continued to be entertained by the **Slaty Egret** and **Grey Plover**, first reported during November.

Shaun van Rooyen found **Spotted Crake** at Mkhombo, but the bird was not seen again afterwards.



Spotted Crake [PG Oosthuizen]

Not to be outdone, Mark Freeman photographed this **Gull-billed Tern** there.



Moving away from Mkhombo, a pair of **Lesser Spotted Eagles** were seen over Irene Country Club (Eduard Teichert) while Pieter Verster saw Grey Plover at Mongena Dam.

A **Broad-billed Roller** (Stefano Haarhof) and **Dwarf Bittern** were seen in Pretoria East, while an **African Crake** was near the entry gate at Rietvlei NR.

Zaagkuil drift added to the excitement with the flushing of a **Pennant-winged Nightjar**.

Marina Elburg photographed this **Western Yellow Wagtail** at Bronkhorstbaai.



A **Booted Eagle** was seen over Wilge River Valley, another at Rietondale Proefplaas (Ilse Müller).



[Ivonne Coetzee]

A private residential garden in Centurion held onto its **Buff-spotted Flufftail** [Elandré Scherman].



Photograph of the month

When BLSA announced the 2025 Bird of the Year, the Red-billed Oxpecker, for once it was a bird which may be seen in Gauteng. Laniarius will run an article which highlights the amazing re-establishment of this species after decimation by agricultural poisons. Dom Rollinson's beautiful photograph of BOTY 2025 graces this spot in December.



You are welcome to send me your photographs of Wider Gauteng species for placement here. Technical data is welcome.

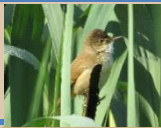


Verreaux's Eagle [Roelof Jonkers]

Fly high in 2025! Our very best wishes for a blessed and prosperous new year.

BLNG COMMITTEE

PROGRAMME – January 2025



11 January – Colbyn NR



14 January – Evening Meeting: **Quiz Eve** to kick off our birding year!



19 January – Magalies MBT



21 January – Faerie Glen NR



24–31 January – Flock to Marion

For bookings:

<mailto:secretary@blng.co.za>

Compilation and lay-out by I Coetzee

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SANI CAMP 15 - 17 DEC

Some birds of Sani Camp



[Louis Burger]



[Sheleph Burger]



[Sean Naudé]



[Craig Green]