



BLiNG WiNGS

Eurasian Hobby [Sean Naudé]

Edition 31 February 2026

AGM 2026



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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 10 February

58 Club members attended our AGM and several others via Zoom. Our Chair, Sean Naudé, provided an overview of BLNG successes regarding communication, programme, camps and outings. Pieter Heslinga handled the Treasurer's Report next. As has been the norm, our president, Philip Calinikos, gave a humorous President's Address, "Surviving the Twitcher Pandemic" or "How to be a bad birdwatcher" with several photographs showing how to find the magic and awe in commonplace birds and emphasised the incredible avian riches found within the city limits. He also proved that Pretoria and surrounds beat all major South African metropolises in terms of species seen, as recorded on BirdLasser the past three years. The keynote address was next, when Dr. Hanneline Smit-Robinson gave an inspiring overview of BirdLife South Africa's 2025 Conservation Achievements.



From efforts to establish a breeding colony of African Penguins at De Hoop, celebrating the closure of fishing activities near their breeding points, the Albatross Task Force which had great successes in bycatch mitigation, Landscape Conservation such as Lakensvlei, Ntsikeni, Cape Fynbos biomes and Wakkerstroom and surrounds, Species Conservation focusing on Red Data species such as Secretarybirds, Botha's Lark, White-winged Flufftails;

and the Empowering People Programme to equip and promote community bird guides, schools programmes, and more.

The AGM was concluded with a wonderful array of snacks, juice, and wine, prepared by some of our club members.



[Annatjie Barkhuizen]



[Annatjie Barkhuizen]

MARIEVALE - 8 February

Marievale is one of the top birding hotspots in Gauteng, and several rare birds have been reported there recently – Spotted and Baillon’s Crakes, Greater Painted-snipe, and sightings of both African and Western Marsh Harriers are possible. Add to this wonderful photo-opportunities and the expert guidance of Hannes van den Berg, and you have a winning recipe.



African Sacred Ibis [Marietjie Louw]



African Marsh Harrier [Hannes van den Berg]



White Stork [Hannes van den Berg]



Reed Cormorant [Marietjie Louw]



Wood Sandpiper [Geoff Abbott]



White-throated Swallows [Geoff Abbott]

WILGE RIVER VALLEY – 15 February

Wilge River Valley always has some surprises – with Narina Trogon, Crowned Eagle and African Finfoot, some of the species seen there in the past.

The weather did not play ball, though... it was cool and heavily overcast with intermittent rain squalls. Nevertheless, a Jackal Buzzard, Grey Tit-Flycatcher and Yellow-bellied Greenbul saved the day. Keanu Canto, the leader, finalised the bird count at a respectable 102 species for the day.



[Laura Jordaan]



Amur Falcon [Willie Victor]



Rock-loving (Lazy) Cisticola [Willie Victor]

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE (FMD) AND US BIRDERS

Dear Members,

We are currently facing a national crisis with Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). While there are many reasons for the severity of this outbreak, I would like to take this opportunity to share some important facts about FMD and how we, as birders, can help prevent its spread.

FMD is a highly contagious picornavirus that presents with high fever and the formation of blisters (vesicles) in the mouth, on the teats, and between the hooves. These blisters can rupture, leading to painful ulcers. The virus affects cloven-hooved animals (including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and cloven-hooved game). Although the virus does not usually kill adult animals directly, the painful ulcers prevent them from eating and moving, often resulting in starvation and dehydration. Young animals (and occasionally adults) may also die if the virus attacks the heart muscle (myocarditis).

It is important to note that Hand, Foot, and Mouth Disease (HFMD), common among children, is caused by enteroviruses (e.g., Coxsackie A16) and has nothing to do with FMD.

The FMD virus is extremely contagious and can survive in the environment for weeks. It spreads through airborne particles, saliva, semen, ruptured blisters, and faeces. Pigs are particularly effective amplifiers of the virus. Virus particles inside faecal matter are protected from UV radiation and desiccation, meaning they can survive and be carried long distances—such as on vehicle tyres and undercarriages, as well as footwear and clothing.

The State Veterinarian of the greater Moretele area (amongst others) has declared farms on Crake Road and Kgomo-Kgomo to be under quarantine due to FMD outbreaks.

What can we birders do to help?

- Respect requests from farmers and landowners to stay out of affected areas.
- Avoid driving through faeces.
- Do not climb over fences or gates and avoid leaning on or over them.
- Bird from public roads whenever possible.
- Stay away from pig farms.
- Disinfect your vehicle: wash with a high-pressure hose (>200 psi) and allow it to dry. Then disinfect wheels, rims, and undercarriage with an appropriate disinfectant (normal soap is ineffective). Recommended products include F10 SC or Virkon (available on Takealot) – just ensure the correct concentration is used. Undiluted household vinegar (Acetic acid, 4 – 8%) could also be used.
- Disinfect footwear in the same way – surfaces must first be thoroughly cleaned with warm soapy water before application of vinegar for effective results. Remove any organic material first with a stick or knife.

Let us all act responsibly and be part of the solution, not the problem. Together, we can help protect our wildlife, livestock, and communities.

Dr. Liesl de Swardt (B.SC, BVSc.)

REGIONAL AND LOCAL RARITIES AND INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

With excellent rains over wider Gauteng continuing during February, reports of rare birds in our region came in at a fast pace. Zaagkuildrift held on to first place with no fewer than two **National Rarities** reported: **Slaty Egret** and **Streaky-breasted Flufftail** (heard), both at Platte River (Deaan de Kock). The Muldersdrift **Slaty Egret** was still showing as well.

Regional Rare bird sightings:

Another out-of-range sighting was when a **Grey-rumped Swallow** was seen from the Kgomo-Kgomo bridge (Keelai Fraser), a **Rufous-bellied Heron** near Roets's Farm on the Zaagkuildrift Road, with **Lesser Moorhen** and **Allen's Gallinule** also regularly reported. **Red-footed Falcon**, **Common Cuckoo** and **Grey-headed Kingfisher** turned up on Crake Road.

Rietvlei NR also delivered the goods with a **Greater Painted-snipe**, while Richard Thornton photographed a **Red-footed Falcon** there.



Greater Painted-snipe [Lize Stassen]



Red-footed Falcon [Richard Thornton]

Eric Jonck Found both **Common Cuckoo** and **Eurasian Hobby** at Rietvlei, while an **African Rail** with chicks also provided great photo-opportunities. (Mohammed Jinna)



Common Cuckoo [Eric Jonck]



Eurasian Hobby [Eric Jonck]

Suburban Pretoria had **Ayres's Hawk Eagles** on two occasions. A juvenile was seen in Brooklyn by Isebrand Naudé, while Reinhardt saw another over Friends of Magalies MBT.



Ayres's Hawk-Eagle [Isebrand Naudé]



Terrestrial Brownbul [Dirk Maartens Human]

Other interesting sightings were an **Alpine Swift** at Magalies MBT trail (Fransie O' Brien) and a **Terrestrial Brownbul** at Faerie Glen NR. **Common Cuckoo** was also seen at Roodeplaat NR.

Dinokeng delivered an excellent sighting with a single **African Skimmer** seen at Mongena Dam. The bird unfortunately did not stick around. **Bronze-winged Courser** was also seen. Doug Newman spotted a **Southern Carmine Bee-eater** on the Rust de Winter Road.



African Skimmer [Stefan de Jager]



Bronze-winged Courser [Johan Botha]

Sandy Neveling found **Double-banded Coursers** and **Red-footed Falcon** near Deneysville. Sightings of **Red-footed Falcon** were particularly numerous and they were seen at Suikerbosrand, Serengeti Estate and Vlakraagte.

Vlakraagte also had reports of **Black-rumped Buttonquail** and **Montagu's Harrier**.



Double-banded Courser [Sandy Neveling]



Montagu's Harrier [Marna Buys]

All these sightings were reported on various social media forums. Some records were sourced from EBird or Sabap2 records. You are invited to share information about an interesting or rare bird with us.

Photograph of the month

A beguiling photograph... The soft russets and reds of the back- and foreground complement the colour of the head and wings of this handsome juvenile Violet-backed Starling. The stippled bright white of the underparts is emphasised by the contrast with its surroundings. But it is The Look our starling gives us that lifts this photograph out of the ordinary – partly challenging, partly enquiring, and placed near-central in this image. It hints at that secret conversation between bird and photographer. The perfect placement, adhering to the rule of thirds, also serves to make this photograph special. Thank you, Philip Calinikos, for this superb image!





Club meeting – 10 March 2026

Elaine Reed

Feeding Garden Birds

Come and join us!



PROGRAMME – March 2026



7 Mar – Bishop’s Bird Park



15 Mar – Ezemvelo Nature Reserve



18 Mar – Faerie Glen NR



28 Mar – Kids Owl Project



27 Feb - 1 March – Bosberaad

Compilation and layout by I Coetsee
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	Membership type	Membership fees	Notes
Main member	Individual Adult	R 405.00	Choose only 1
	Senior Citizen (60+)	R 260.00	
	Student with student card (18-25)	R 195.00	
Family member	Spouse	R 175.00	Choose as many as applicable
	Child 1 (12-18)	R 75.00	
	Child 2 (12-18)	R 75.00	
	Child under 12	Free	

Please note that payments made after March will include pro-rata fees up to February 2027

BLNG Membership allows you to participate **free of charge** in bird walks and outings with experienced leaders. Camps and courses come at an extra fee.

BLNG Membership does **NOT** automatically qualify you to be a member of **BirdLife South Africa**.

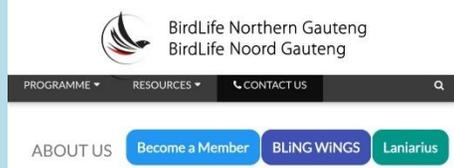
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