



BLiNG WiNGS

Reflections: Club meeting 8 July 2025

We spent an enjoyable evening with sherry and snacks, listening to Leandri de Kock's fascinating account of life on Marion. The preparations, minimal packing, weather conditions, the base itself and especially the days-long hike around the island. Not to mention the photographs of penguins and seabirds in their masses.
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During the Photography Club meeting beforehand, Laetitia Steynberg took us on a tour of her travels to Zimbabwe's birding hotspots over the past two years.

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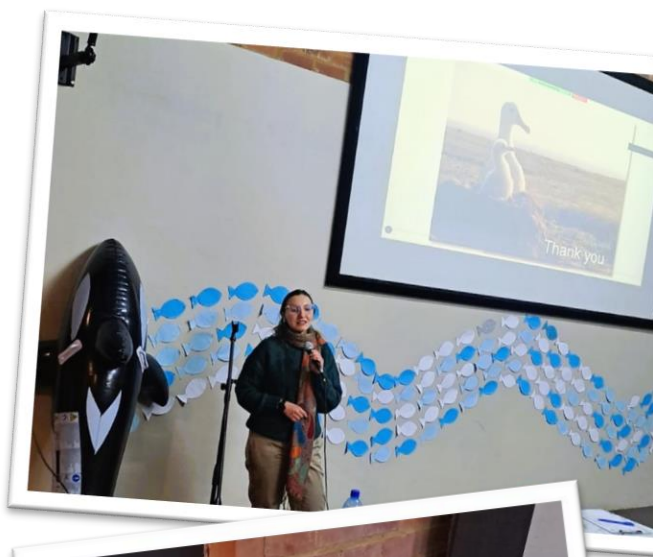
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CLUB MEETING – 8 July

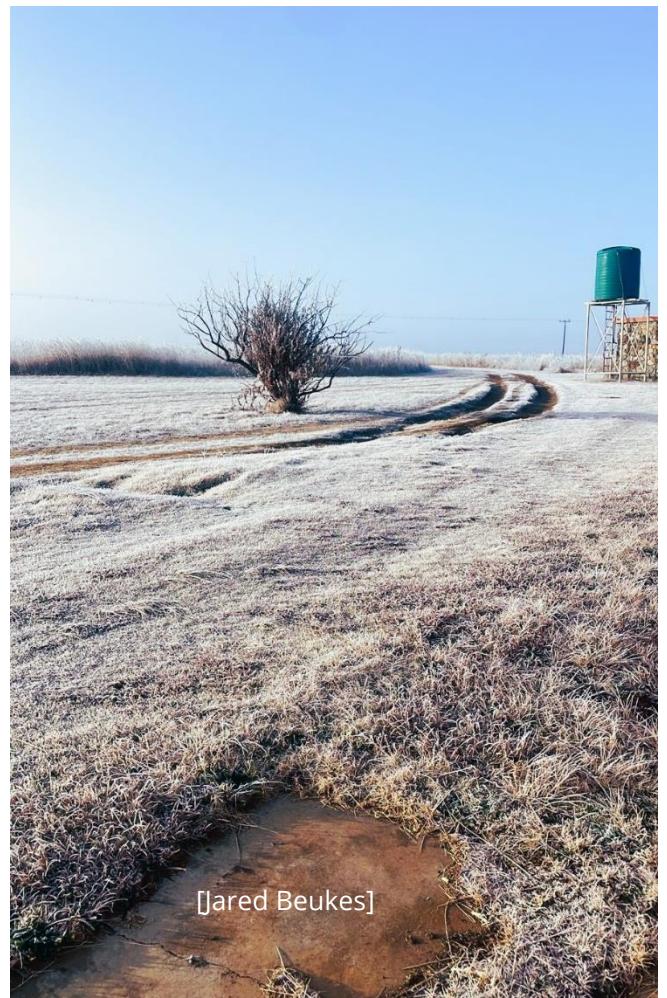


MARIEVALE – 5 July

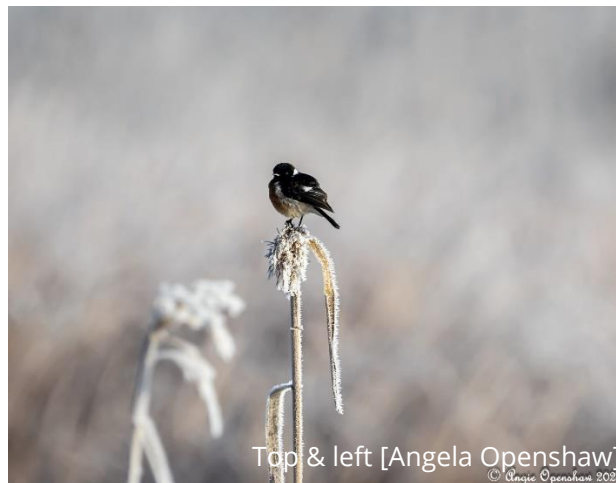
We were scheduled to meet in the car parking area at Marievale at 7 am on Sat, 5th July. I must admit that, when I saw the starting time, I did my best to move it to an hour later, citing all kinds of reasons why it should be later, including that it was going to be so cold that not even the birds were going to be out so early in the middle of winter. Alas, Jared Beukes, our leader for the day, said it was too late to change it.

As we drove to Marievale, I felt vindicated in my reasons for requesting a later start time as I watched the temperature gauge on the car drop to 3°, then -3° the further we drove. When it hit -5° and the mist started obscuring our view, I took a video of the sides of the road which were completely covered in frost and sent it to Fransie, telling her what I thought about this early start in the middle of winter.

When we arrived at Marievale, everyone was waiting in their cars, not that I blame them, it was -5 degrees outside after all. I barely recognised anyone, they were so tightly bundled up in jackets, beanies, scarves and hoodies. It was a great crowd of some familiar and quite a few new people who ventured out on this chilly day.



I could not believe my eyes when we drove into Marievale. I did not recognise it at all. It was a sparkly chilly winter wonderland! Frost and icicles covered everything! It was spectacular! Even the frost-covered blackjacks looked amazing. Every plant, every tree and even the fences were covered in frost. Most amazing of all was that there were birds about. Birds swimming, flying, sitting on fences or hopping in the fields. I forgot about being cold, I forgot about taking photos, I just gazed in amazement at the stunning scenery as we drove along the road to our first bird hide.



African Stonechats (above) and
African Snipe (left)

[Both Candace Kotze]

Jared did an excellent job as leader, calling on the BLNG radios as the lead car spotted the different species. We took an alternate route and came out at the back of the Picnic Spot. There we saw many different duck species swimming about or dredging the shores for food. We saw Red-billed, Blue-billed and Cape Teals, Little Grebes, Cape Shovelers, Egyptian Geese, Common Moorhens and Blacksmith Lapwings. There were Whiskered Terns and Grey-headed Gulls flying above us. As the morning got on, we watched the mist fading away and the frost slowly melted, bringing back the dull winter colours of Marievale. With the mist gone, we could see how much the water levels had subsided by the watermarks on the reeds. It was impressive to see how much water there had been this summer.

With the lower water levels back, the beautiful Greater and Lesser Flamingos were plentiful. Pied Avocets and delicate Black-wing Stilts, Black-winged Kites, African Stonechats, Southern Masked Weavers (still in their winter colours), and gorgeous Glossy Ibises were all over the place. A great surprise was the African Harrier-Hawk and Black Sparrowhawk flying overhead.

Jared led us to all of the bird hides, and we saw African Swamphen, Goliath Heron, Grey Heron, Reed Cormorants, Common Greenshank and many Lesser Swamp Warblers. African Snipe, Three-banded Plovers, Spur-winged Geese and Kittlitz's Plovers were also spotted. He worked very hard at making sure that everyone saw the specials and helped identify the species that we were unsure of.

The last hide that Jared took us to was the Shelduck bird hide near the mine dumps. It is sadly run-down and dilapidated. But there we finally spotted the Great Crested Grebe, which I had been bragging about (and failing to produce). This was a big lifer for many, and I was very grateful for its appearance. A Giant Kingfisher did a very quick fly-by, surprising many of us.

Finally, we went back to the Picnic Area for lunch and to do the bird list for the day. We got over 70 species for the day. Many of the group got 6 or 7 lifers as well. It was an incredible day and one I will remember vividly.

Angie Openshaw.



Pied Avocet [Candace Kotze]



KIMIAD GOLF COURSE – 16 JULY

Several new BLNG members joined this outing, led by Sheleph Burger, whose enthusiasm made for an enjoyable outing. Brown-backed Honeybird, Lesser Honeyguide, and African Black Duck were some of the species seen.



[Brigette Hamilton]

Cape Robin-chat [Willie Victor]



African Black Duck [Liza Wassenaar]

Brown-backed Honeybird [Willie Victor]



Lesser Swamp Warbler [Willie Victor]

[Brigette Hamilton]

HOOGLAND HYDRO – 20 JULY

Hoogland Hydro lived up to its promise – and more! The caves and highveld vistas made up for the bracing cold, and Philip Calinikos, the leader, pointed out several exciting species: Fairy Flycatcher (a winter visitor), Klaas's Cuckoo, and the two stars of the show, making it hard to choose the Bird of the Day: Short-toed Rock Thrush and Malachite Sunbird.



[Fransie O'Brien]



[Fransie O'Brien]



Fairy Flycatcher [Wihan Barnard]



Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird [Wihan Barnard]



Black-chested Prinia [Anne-Marie van der Merwe]



Klaas's Cuckoo [JP van der Merwe]



Short-toed Rock Thrush [Anne-Marie van der Merwe]



Malachite Sunbird [JP van der Merwe]

BOONS ROAD – 26 JULY

We met at the N14 & Boons Road intersection at 07:30. At that time, the birds had started the morning chorus, with the temperature a chilly 3°C. The group, strangely enough, consisted of mainly photographers. Initially the birding was slow, with birds visible but far away, except for the Dark-capped Bulbuls, of course. We were also entertained by Ant-eating Chats along the route. Keanu stopped the convoy at some key landmarks and deployed his bionic ears, identifying the different species with great success. The Orange River Francolins were quite elusive – we all heard them, but spotting them was challenging, never mind getting a decent photograph.



BLNG's top photographers joined this outing with the leader, Keanu Canto



Common Moorhen chick [Mizelle Janse van Vuuren]

The weather was quite overcast, and we even had some scattered showers. The temperature remained quite cool throughout the day, giving us great opportunities to take pictures of the various birds without heat haze interference. The downside was that light levels were not always great, and we had to use quite high ISOs.



Black-winged Kite [JP van der Merwe]



Violet-eared Waxbills [Zak Croukamp]

We did have good photo opportunities with the Buffy Pipit and Spike-heeled Larks on the road and close to the fence. Of course, we dipped on some targeted birds such as the Swallow-tailed Bee-eater. But the prize of the day made up for it – most of us managed to get excellent views and images of the Bird of the Day, the White-bellied Korhaan. This was almost at Boons itself, at the R509 interchange, and with reports of the R509 in a terrible state, most called it a day.



© JP vd Merwe

White-bellied Korhaan (Bustard) [JP van der Merwe]



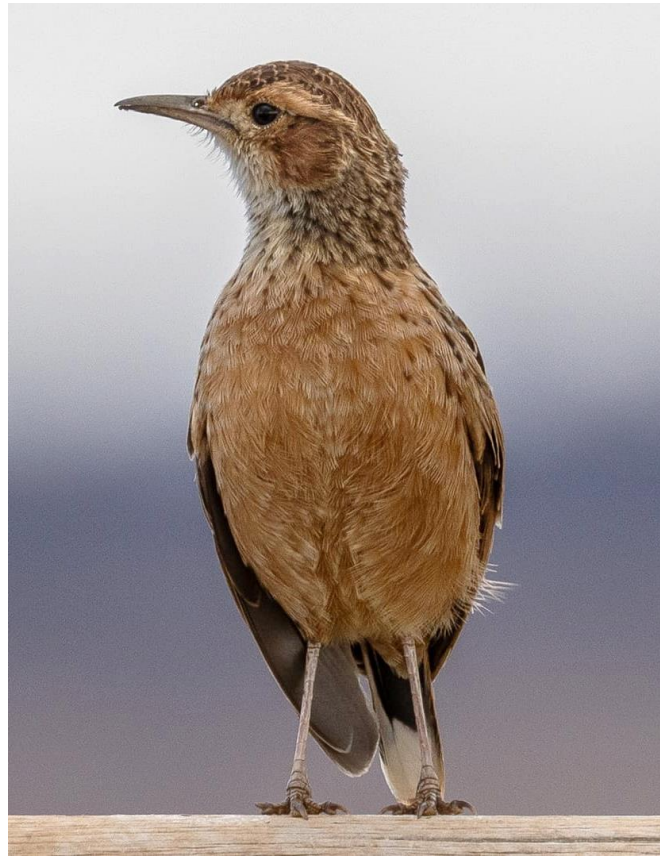
Spike-heeled Lark [Sheleph Burger]



Eastern Clapper Lark [Zak Croukamp]



White-bellied Korhaan (Bustard)



Spike-heeled Lark [both Hannes van den Berg]

Some of us thought that there was still enough daylight left, and we turned around, trying to get a glimpse of the Marsh Owl seen about half an hour before. En route, we were entertained by a Red-capped Lark in the middle of the road, in beautiful light.

Johan Croukamp and his son Zak stopped after spotting a Pink-billed Lark right at the fence, a lifer for them both and a target bird fervently hoped for. But it then moved about 15 m into a ploughed field where it disappeared for some minutes. However, it then re-appeared and we all managed to get some photographs. The last 5 km of Boons Road turned out to be the most productive of the day. In the end, we found the R509 in to be good shape, with all potholes recently repaired.

And, yes, we eventually did get some photos of the Marsh Owl – in near-darkness. In summary, the Boons Road trip was a great success. We had a good variety of birds. Thanks to all participants in the group and BLNG Admin for a GREAT outing.



Pink-billed Lark [Johan Croukamp]



Marsh Owl [JP van der Merwe]

JP van der Merwe

REGIONAL AND LOCAL RARITIES AND INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

July was very quiet month as far as regional rare birds were concerned.

Maccoa Duck was seen near Bapsfontein and Glen Austin Pans. The **African Finfoot** was seen again in Faerie Glen.



African Finfoot [Pieter Heslinga]



Maccoa Duck [Ivonne Coetzee]

Keanu Canto and the BLNG club on an outing to Boons Road found **Spike-healed Larks**, and later the star of the show, a **White-bellied Bustard**, showing well. A single **Pink-billed Lark** was another special bird seen on this outing. David Broom also reported a **White-bellied Bustard** near Magaliesburg.



White-bellied Bustard [Johan Croukamp]



Pink-billed Lark [Johan Croukamp]

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 at

Photograph of the month

Another gem from Anne-Marie van der Merwe. Its appeal lies not only in its perfect composition regarding placement of this White-throated Robin-chat on its perch, applying the rule of thirds, but even more so the delicate curves of the twig, leading the eye to its vibrant underparts and outer tail-feathers. The highlights of white on the wing, throat and supercilium reinforce the pleasing composition of vibrant bird against the muted out-of-focus background. Note the pose, with the eye turned towards the viewer and the face fronted towards the right of the frame.



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



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Club meeting – 12 August 2025 BLSA's Empowering People Programme

Nandi Thobela is responsible for the implementation of northern KZN community conservation and related projects such as the AviTourism project.

Protected area management, environmental education with a strong focus on training and learning material development. Come and join us!

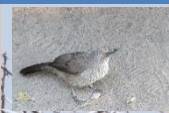
PROGRAMME – AUGUST 2025



3 August – Devon Grasslands



9 August – VulPro



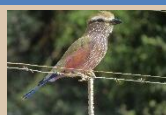
15–17 August – Camp-Tula Baba
Game Reserve



19 August – Walter Sisulu Botanical
Gardens

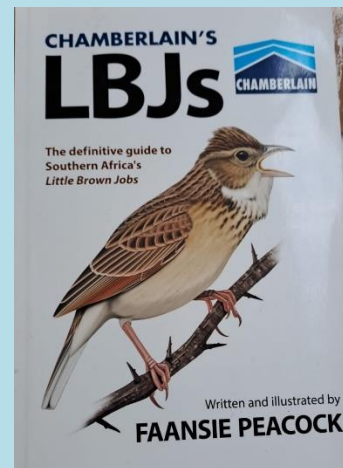


24 August – Oxbow Country Estate

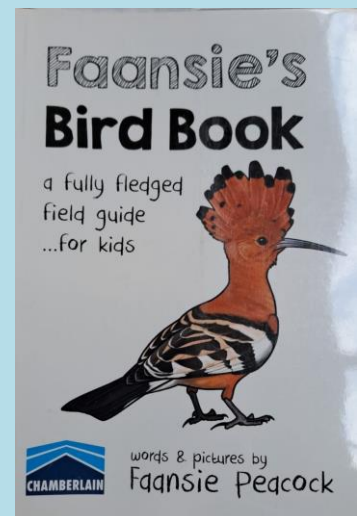


30 August – Borakalalo NR

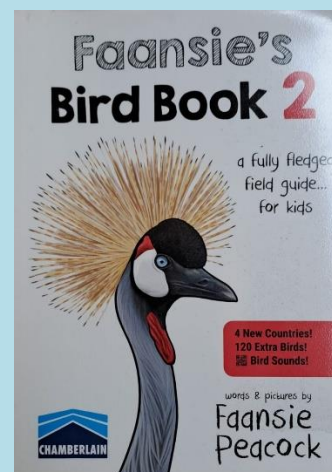
BIRD GUIDES FOR SALE



@ R400



@ R280



@ R450

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