



BLiNG WiNGS

Banded Martin [Sean Naudé]

Edition 19, March 2025

Reflections: Club meeting 11 March 2025



“What the Duck” was the topic of our excellent speaker, Chris Hines, at our March club meeting. Where do waterbirds go when wetlands dry up?

Michael van der Laan came to give feedback about the illegal Corobrik mining seepages and wastewater treatment works of Hartbeesfontein and Kempton Park contaminating the water quality of Rietvlei dam.

Inside This Issue

PG. 2 Moreleta Park NR

PG. 3 Eugene Marais Park

PG. 4 Zaagkuil drift

PG. 6 Suikerbosrand NR

PG. 7 Marievale

PG. 8 Rarities

PG. 9 Photograph of the month

PG.10 April Programme

MORELETAKLOOF NR – 1 March

The first messages that flew between group members before this walk was about the rain. Roelof Jonkers, the dedicated guide, decided to continue – “a light drizzle is normally not a problem.” The time and expertise he shared with the group made it a wonderful experience, despite the overcast conditions. 69 species were recorded, amongst others Brown-backed Honeybird, Black- and Brown-crowned Tchagras, Cardinal Woodpecker and Fork-tailed Drongo, the latter not generally around. Trevor Schefermann commented: “Thank you for a most enjoyable and informative morning. We were blessed with a cooler, cloudy morning, maybe not conducive for birdwatching but still we learnt a lot. The Moreleta NR has much to offer, not only birds but amazing trees and diverse vegetation. Also plenty to offer from a photographer’s view.”



Roelof Jonkers with his camera





[Brigette Hamilton]



All photographs above by Trevor Schefermann, below left by Brigette Hamilton.

EUGENE MARAIS PARK – GROENKLOOF 5 March

Eugen Marais Park is a hidden gem with scenic trails. During this short bird walk, led by Liesl de Swardt, indigenous trees, wildflowers, and weird rock formations made the day. 35 Bird species were seen, with Burchell's Coucal the highlight.



Collage: Liesl de Swardt

Rock formations by Trevor Schefermann

ZAAGKUILDRIFT & KGOMO-KGOMO – 9 March

Pieter Uitenweerde, the outing leader, arranged for the group to meet at Kgomo-Kgomo bridge before sunrise. And what magic – the sunrise over the floodplain, and hundreds of birds becoming visible, taking to the air, or wading. Here Jenna van Schoor celebrated her 500th lifer: Black-winged Pratincole!



[Charmaine Engelbrecht]



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater [Charles Gilfillan]

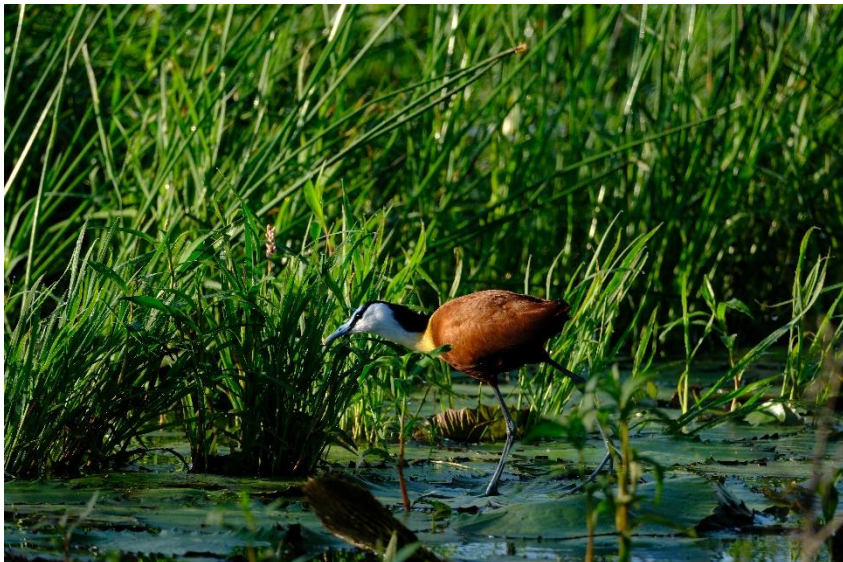
Waiting at the Platte River brought its own rewards: Pieter Uitenweerde heard the bill-clattering song of the Striped Crake for the first time.



Charles Gilfillan could take this photograph of the Lesser Moorhen, his top sighting of the day.



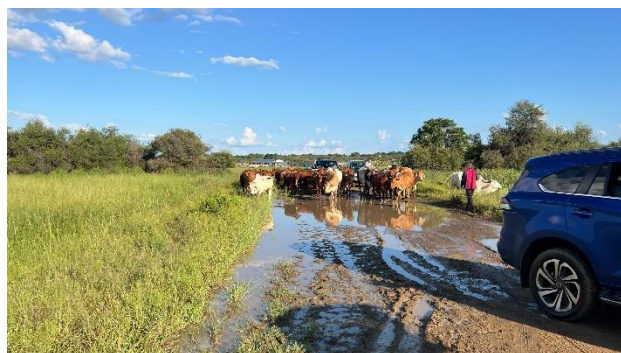
[Jenna van Schoor]



African Jacana [Charles Gilfillan]



Great Spotted Cuckoo enjoying breakfast [Charles Gilfillan]



Kgomo-Kgomo! [Charmaine Engelbrecht]

The species count for the day was an impressive 134, with lifers ticked by a number of club members.



Lilac-breasted Roller [Charles Gilfillan]

SUIKERBOSRAND NR – 23 March

When, just after six, the first species seen is Orange River Francolin, you just know it is going to be a great day. And so it proved to be, under guidance of Cleo Artemides. South African Cliff Swallow, White-backed Duck, Great Reed and Garden Warbler, Wailing and Cloud Cisticola, Orange-breasted Waxbills, Eastern Long-billed Lark, African Snipe and Cuckoo Finch sealed Suikerbosrand NR's status as a birding paradise.



[Liesl de Swardt]



South African Cliff Swallows [Charles Gilfillan]



Cuckoo Finch [Charles Gilfillan]



Mountain Chat [Charles Gilfillan]



Red-collared Widowbird [Charles Gilfillan]



Banded Martin [Charles Gilfillan]

MARIEVALE – 29 March

Hannes van den Berg was the leader on this outing. Marievale was wet, the pans full, and had, as usual, enough to offer – waders, waterfowl, and widowbirds. A magnificent sighting was the ballet of the Great Crested Grebes.



[Mike Wentzel]



Blue-billed Teal [Geoff Abbott]



White-throated Swallow [Geoff Abbott]



Reed Cormorant [Angela Openshaw]



Great Crested Grebe [Gerdus Heydenrych]



African Swampphen [Gerdus Heydenrych]

These **four warbler species** were all seen and heard – the call being the only way to clinch the ID of similar-looking warblers. Lost? Register for the April bird call camp!



Lesser Swamp Warbler. The mainly white underparts, whitish supercilium, and brown-black legs are good markers. Still, the very best method to ID reed warblers will always be song. [Geoff Abbott]



Sedge Warbler – the streaked back and dark crown, together with the broad creamy supercilium are good pointers towards this species with the relatively short tail and contrasting rufous rump – just visible here. [Hannes van den Berg]



Common Reed Warbler – this small brown reed warbler has a dull white throat; the breast and flanks are washed rufous, and the absence of a clear supercilium are helpful pointers. [Hannes van den Berg]



This is probably a young Little Rush Warbler – note the yellow gape in the bill – plus the pinkish feet, short wings, dark back and supercilium, according to our experts, Stephan Terblanche and Etienne Marais. [Hannes van den Berg]

REGIONAL AND CAL RARITIES AND INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

Zaagkuil drift and Kgomo-Kgomo are currently rarity hotspots and almost daily reports flooded in of a variety of crakes, warblers, bitterns and more. Deneysville and Marievale also kept birders busy and cameras clicking to record special sightings.

Marlou Schalkwyk and Kayleigh Marcus went to Deneysville with Sandy Neveling. **Double-banded Courser**, **Eurasian Curlew** and **Pink-billed Larks** made for an exceptional outing.



Pink-billed Lark [Marlou Schalkwyk]



Eurasian Curlew [Kayleigh Marcus]

Trevor Hardaker reported **African Openbill** along Zaagkuil drift Road. Unusual numbers of **Dwarf Bitterns** and **African Crakes**, and even **Striped Crakes** (more heard than seen) were still common around Zaagkuil drift Lodge and the Zaagkuil drift Road.



Double-banded Courser at Deneysville [Marlou Schalkwyk]



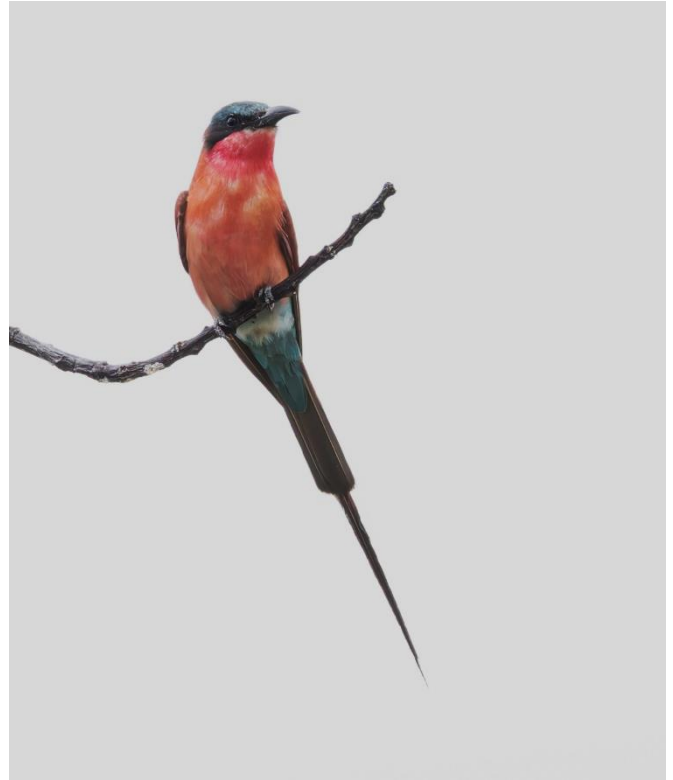
Meyer's Parrot on Zaagkuil drift Road [Doug Newman] and **African Hawk Eagle** seen at Kgomo-Kgomo [Douglas Ross]

Etienne Marais described the many warblers at Zaagkuildrift as the best concentration since 2004. These included great views of **Olive Tree, Icterine, Marsh and River Warblers**, as well as **Common Whitethroat** and **Thrush Nightingale**.

Rietvlei NR had **European Honey Buzzard** and **Cuckoo Finch**, while Dirk M Human reported **African Finfoot** in Faerie Glen NR, not seen subsequently.



Marievale also delivered: a **Grey Crowned Crane** was seen flying over by Justin Rhys Nicolau, and this **Verreaux's Eagle Owl** was found there by Andrew Pike.



Marna Buys photographed this **Southern Carmine Bee-eater** at the start of Zaagkuildrift Road in Mid-March.

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 should you prefer not posting on any social media right away.

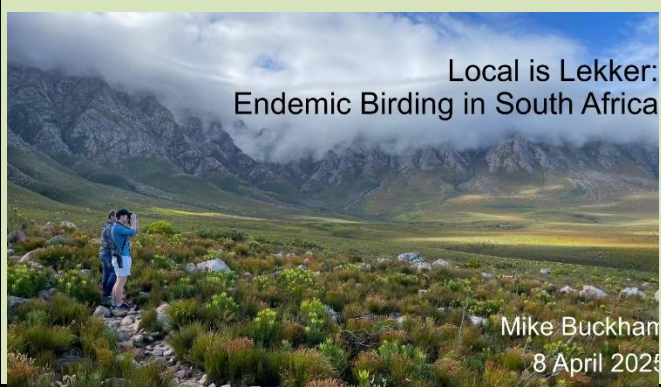
Photograph of the month

Swee Waxbill is not a species we could expect to find a Greater Gauteng, much less in suburban Pretoria. Nevertheless, they are intermittent visitors to Wilgerivier Valley and even the Magalies MBT, beguiling birders with their exquisite colours. This photograph of BLNG member, Marlou Schalkwyk, shows why these tiny birds generate so much excitement when they are spotted. This photograph's appeal lies not only in the luminous colours, and micro-fine barring on the back, but more in the accents of vibrant reds on the rump, repeated on the lower bill, and the jewel-like red glint in the eye of this stunning male.

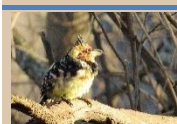


BLNG Club meeting – 8 April

Well-known bird expert, **Mike Buckham**, and owner of Buckham Birding is going to expound on a topic about which we are all passionate: **Local is lekker!** Mike will give a few pointers as to where some of the best places are to find the trickier bird species. It will be a journey through some of South Africa's most beautiful places in search of some of our most treasured birds. Come and join via zoom!



PROGRAMME – APRIL 2025



4, 5 & 6 Apr – Sediba Lodge Camp



8 Apr – Photography Club meeting
"Flock to Marion, Again!" 18:00



12 Apr – Magalies MBT



19 Apr – Modderfontein



26 Apr – Wilge River Valley



Raffle funds for penguins

A local vet has raised R8300 to support BirdLife South Africa's African Penguin conservation work.

(Source: BLSA Newsletter, March 2025)

Our own Liesl de Swardt, BLNG Committee member, started this initiative at the Faerie Glen Veterinary Clinic. Raffle tickets were sold during December and January for R50, R100 or R150. Two hampers were donated by Bravecto MSD and Nextgard pharmaceutical companies. Mr. Fatman, a client, donated the plush penguin as a prize. A total of R8300 was raised. The draw was held on 11 February – please see their Facebook page.

Well done, Liesl and team, we are proud of you!

All invoices for annual **BLNG** membership fees were sent out early March.

You need to pay **BLSA separately** for membership if you so wish. Contact BLSA at membership@blsa.org.za

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