



Laniarius

December 2023 | No 150



BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord

Image Source: "Orange-breasted Sunbird" [Thinus van Staden]


BirdLife
SOUTH AFRICA

Giving Conservation Wings

2023 KOMITEE

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FROM THE EDITOR

To twitch, or not to twitch...

With the discovery of the by-now famous White-breasted Waterhen at a farm dam near Tzaneen, an interesting debate about the 'tickability' of the bird arose. Was it a vagrant, or, more likely, an escapee? Choosing excitement or life-list numbers before caution or moderation, flocks of twitchers rushed there, and beautiful photographs of this stunning bird graced Trevor Hardaker's SA Rare Bird News reports. Validation amongst birder friends behind their trek north was invariably the prime birding to be had in the mist belt forests of Magoebaskloof afterwards, which in the end, proved much more rewarding.

Dr Rob Little's open letter reproduced in this issue: VAGRANTS – An alternative approach to reduce opinion, speculation, and conjecture lends new perspective and a sensible course of action. As the Africa representative: IUCN SSC Galliformes Specialist Group, and retired from the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, UCT, this should be the voice of reason in the fiery debate which followed the discovery of this bird.

Etienne Marais explained in his fascinating talk on Migration, delivered at the September BLNG club meeting, that vagrants were in most cases juvenile migrants whose complex navigation systems might not yet have been established; as well as the difference between true vagrants and nomads.

What then, is the list of functional South African species? Even established birding guides and apps include species with only one or two records, some even cited as "questionable". How to proceed? This dilemma is reflected in a scientific manner in Dr Little's attitude from the article mentioned above: "What is meaningful for conservation biology purposes is to have an inventory of the avifauna of a biogeographical region. This is useful for understanding species richness, biodiversity communities and ecosystem management approaches...The functional species are relatively easy to determine, including residents, regular migrants, established wild breeding populations of introduced and or escaped species."

On that note, BLNG members found amazing species right on our home patch in the middle of Pretoria, which were mentioned on rare bird forums: Ilse Muller found a pair of Sweet Waxbills on a suburban patch of the Magalies, and I myself photographed one of a pair of Black saw-wings at the same locality.

Local birders streamed there after the news hit rare bird forums, and I imagine ticking these nomads



Ivonne - Editor

caused as much pleasure to them as twitching exotic vagrants.

This issue also marks the 150th edition of LANIARIUS. We celebrated the inauguration of a new BLNG president, Philip Calinikos, and are honoured to feature his inaugural address in this edition. It also is the first edition without articles on club outings, as these are now reported in the BLING WINGS newsletter. With BLNG's full and varied club programme, LANIARIUS became more of a tome than a club magazine.

On this note- what directs your birding? Life-list numbers and chasing twitches? Experiencing the rush of finding a vagrant or nomad? Enjoying a lifer, without even keeping count? Close friendships with fellow birders forged and enjoyed? Social occasions such as club meetings? Photographing or just savouring birds? Enjoying new destinations and unspoilt nature?

"Have we forgotten that wilderness is not a place, but a pattern of soul where every tree, every bird, and beast is a soul maker?" [Ian Mc Callum]

FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Members and Friends of Birdlife Northern Gauteng,

We are delighted to welcome Philip Calinikos as the new BLNG President following the tragic passing of André Marx. Philip, a dedicated member of BLNG for nearly four decades, has shared countless entertaining stories from the good old BLNG days during our September evening meeting. We are excited to have Philip back on our committee and look forward to an exciting future under his leadership.

This marks a significant milestone as we celebrate the 150th edition of The Laniarius.

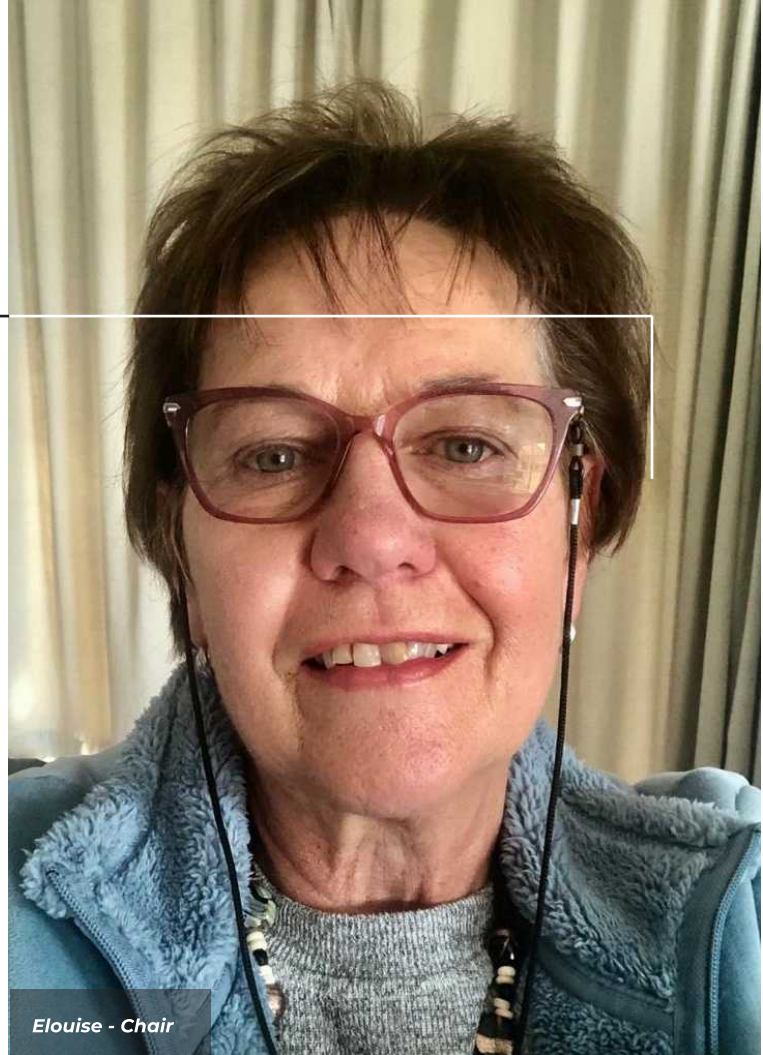
We extend our heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to all the individuals who have contributed to the production of this magazine over the past 38 years. The first issue of Laniarius was published in 1985, and since then, it has played a crucial role in documenting the history of our club and the region's bird biodiversity.

From reporting bird sightings to discussions on conservation, top birding spots and interesting social stories, the Laniarius has been a valuable resource, especially in the years before the age of the internet, Facebook, and WhatsApp groups.

Today, we are fortunate to have a beautiful, high-quality electronic version of Laniarius, thanks to the dedication of our editor, her team and members who submit articles, trip reports, and photos. The wealth of content has grown to such an extent that we introduced a new monthly newsletter called BLiNG WiNGS.

In BLiNG WiNGS, we also share club news, upcoming events, and feedback from our outings. If you happened to miss the BLNG Evening Meeting, you can find all the information in BLiNG WiNGS. A big thank you goes out to Ivonne Coetzee, her team, and all our members for their invaluable contributions.

For those who may have missed a copy of Laniarius or BLiNG WiNGS, both can be found on our BLNG website, Birdlife Northern Gauteng @ blng.co.za under the activities tab. Don't forget to keep an eye out for the Bird of the Month competition.



We invite you to join us at the BLNG year-end function on Saturday, December 8th, hosted at Sheleph & Louis Burgers' residence in Mooikloof. The morning will kick off with a bird walk and on-site Birdlasser assistance for new members, followed by an informal "Bring & Braai" in their beautiful garden.

A friendly reminder that Birding Big Day 2023 is scheduled for December 2nd, 2023. For more information about this event, please visit Birding Big Day 2023. You can register for the event at this link: [**Birding Big Day 2023 Entry Form - BirdLife South Africa**](#). If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to Ernst Retief at bbd@birdlife.org.za.

As always, may your birding adventures be enjoyable and fulfilling.

Best regards,
Elouise

ADDRESS FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am very honoured that the BirdLife Northern Gauteng committee has found it fit to bestow this title on me. It is however a bittersweet occasion knowing that this has only transpired because of the tragic passing of André Marx. Mandie and I joined the club at much the same time as André and I had the pleasure and privilege of sharing birding activities with him both in the field and at committee level for the best part of forty years. I was also very privileged to have presented André with his richly deserved birdlife South Africa Owl Award last year. Andre was only the fourth person to have been nominated as president after the passing of Pauline Leinberger in 2010. I was the chairperson of the club at the time and had the privilege of announcing this to our members. Pauline Leinberger was nominated as president in 1992 and she succeeded Doctor Alan Kemp who served as president from 1974 to 1992. OPM Prozesky had been appointed as the first president when the Northern Transvaal Ornithological Society was relaunched in 1970. This is a wonderful club and Mandie and I have derived so much pleasure from interacting with all the members that we have had the pleasure of sharing our birding with over the years.

The first camp we ever attended will always remain imprinted in my memory; Doorndraai dam. We arrived with very little camping equipment bar a tent, two stretchers and a cooler box. As we struggled to pitch our very user-unfriendly tent (no sewn in ground sheets in those days) we were approached by an impeccably dressed gentleman, complete with jacket and tie who politely enquired whether we needed any assistance. He introduced himself as Mr TC Van Eeden, honorary secretary of the club. Duly humbled we agreed to join him and the rest of the members at the communal fire that evening. Having no chairs, we had to haul our stretchers to the fireplace to sit on.

The communal braai fire was the highlight of each day's birding on these weekend camps. Far removed from the highly organised camps that we expect these days, you were left much to your own devices during the day. You birded wherever you wanted to, mostly on foot. Intrepid folk such as Basil and Blanche Hattingh would disappear for the whole day armed with a day pack containing a water bottle and a couple of sandwiches. Calling the list every night provided an opportunity for one to stun the rest of the party with a rare sighting.... But first one had to run the Pauline Leinberger and Kay Winterton. Are you sure that was what you saw? Not quite the right habitat, don't you think? Maybe it was something else?

The other gauntlet that had to be run was known as the oom Govert Von Drimmelen light meter test. Absolutely no artificial light was tolerated around the communal fire. Paraffin lamps were acceptable and gas lamps were just about tolerated as long as they were tiny and turned down very low. Having passed the test, one would be regaled with the most stirring description of the night skies and wonderful stories on every subject imaginable by oom Govert. The oldest activities programme I have dates back to the period 1 April to 30 June 1985. Some of the venues that we still frequent today, feature on the programme; bird ringing at the Pretoria Botanical Gardens and a day outing to Diepsloot Nature Reserve (now "Northern Farm"). Other venues are unfortunately no longer frequented; Roodeplaat Research Station of the



Department Of Agriculture which was a firm club favourite, the family farm of Mr Constand Hughes-Treherne at Welgevonden and the Baviaanspoort sewage purification works, one of Rodney and Tamar Cassidy's favourite venues. The leaders of the time were noted in the programme as Mrs Pauline Leinberger, Mr TC van Eeden, Mr Constand Hughes-Treherne, and Mr Alan Carr...all very formal indeed! The manner in which outings are run these days is very different and the leaders are expected to be able to identify every bird seen or heard. This is somewhat daunting for a leader, but I have really enjoyed everyone I have led as our members are a joy to bird with. I led an outing at Faerie Glen Nature Reserve in August last year only to discover that one of the members was the son of the very Basil And Blanche Hattingh I had birded with some forty years previously, Dave and Ros Hattingh. The position of president of the club as far as I can ascertain is one more of tradition than anything else. The nomination of president is not even mentioned in our constitution or at least the amended one that I signed off in 2016. Thank you again, Louise and the committee, for the privilege of serving as Club President for Birdlife Northern Gauteng.

- Philip Calinikos

LANIARIUS - MARCH 2023

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ROTSINBOS 4-7 AUGUST CAMP

RotsInBos, a brand new BLNG Winter Camp:

Just a short drive from Pretoria and in the heart of the Brits bushveld is the “RotsInBos” lodge. This brand-new BLNG camp venue is situated on a private 170-hectare farm, with exclusive lodging and access to a remarkable diversity of bird species.

Day 1 (Friday):

Our adventure began on Friday with our arrival at RotsInBos. After settling into our comfortable chalets and unpacking our belongings, we started to explore the lodge’s surroundings. The almost brand-new chalets, boma, and deck are all built into and around huge granite boulders, blending into the environment and making it part of it. The evening was spent sitting around the campfire, getting to know our new camp leader Hanjo Gouws and each other, and of course having a braai for dinner.

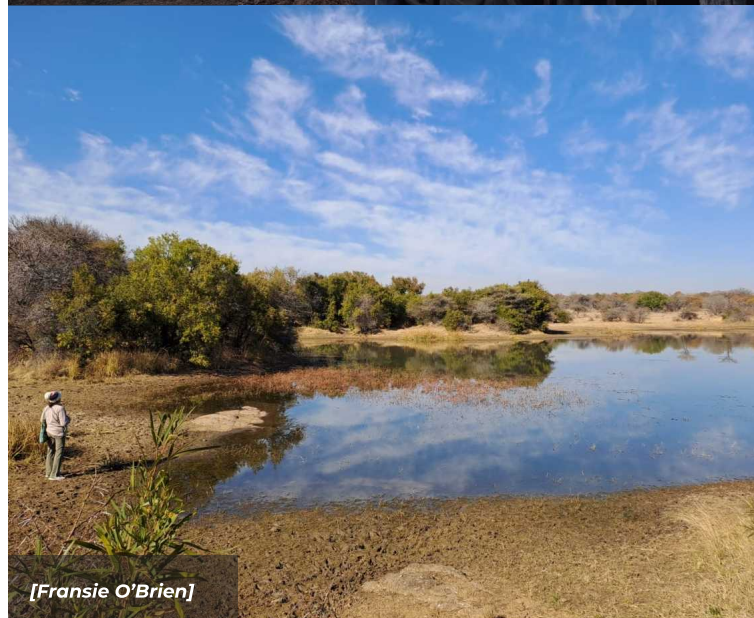
Birds seen on day 1 included Blue Waxbills (Gewone Blousysie), Southern Red-billed Hornbill (Rooibekneushoringvoël), Marico Flycatcher (Maricovlieëvanger), and Chinspot Batis (Witliesbosbontrokkie) to mention but a few.



[Fransie O'Brien]



[Fransie O'Brien]



[Fransie O'Brien]

Day 2 (Saturday):

was a walk around the immediate vicinity of the chalets and lodge. After that we drove to Mike’s Dam still within the RotsInBos farm to do some more bird watching. Birds seen included Jameson’s Firefinch (Jamesonsvuurvinkie), White-browed Scrub Robin (Gestreepte Wipstert), Grey-backed Camaroptera (Gysrugkwêkwêvoël), Kalahari Scrub Robin (Kalahariwipstert), Crimson-breasted Shrike (Rooiborslaksman), and Golden-breasted Bunting (Rooirugstreepkoppie).

We then left RotsInBos and drove to Roodekoppies Dam on the R511 for further bird watching. Birds seen on the road to, and at Roodekoppies Dam, included

Namaqua Dove (Namakwaduifie), White-fronted Bee-eater (Rooikeelbyvreter), Burnt-necked Eremomela (Bruinkeelbossanger), African Swampphen (Grootkoningriethaan), White-faced Whistling Duck (Nonnetjie-eend), White-winged Widowbird (Witvlerkflap), Black-chested Snake Eagle (Swartborsslangarend) and Kittlitz's Plover (Geelborsstrandkiewiet) to mention a few.

The best sighting of all was the majestic African Hawk-Eagle (Grootjagarend) soaring high above us.

Once back at RotsInBos, we climbed up the huge granite rocks to have sundowners and watch an amazing sunset over the Brits Bushveld. The rest of the evening was spent around the campfire discussing the day's birding and having dinner.



White-faced Whistling Duck [Angela Openshaw]



African Hawk-Eagle [Angela Openshaw]



[Fransie O'Brien]



[Fransie O'Brien]

Day 3 (Sunday):

was a trip to the Vaalkop Dam. We got lost a few times, made several detours and turn-arounds, retraced our steps, and eventually found the correct road.

Google Maps was NOT our best friend that day!

These detours (also known as taking the scenic route) were not wasted however and we saw several special birds including Groundscraper Thrush, (Gevlekte Lyster) Burchell's Starling (Grootglansspreeu), Burchell's Coucal (Gewone Vleiloerie), Red-billed Firefinch (Rooibekvuurvinkie), Red-billed Oxpecker (Rooibekrenostervoël), Marico Sunbird (Maricosuikerbekkie), and my personal favourite, the Pearl-spotted Owlet (Witkoluil).

Just before reaching the dam, we unexpectedly found a lovely water hole filled with waterbirds that



Pearl-spotted Owlet [Angela Openshaw]



Displaying the 'false' eyes [Angela Openshaw]



Spoonbill [Angela Openshaw]

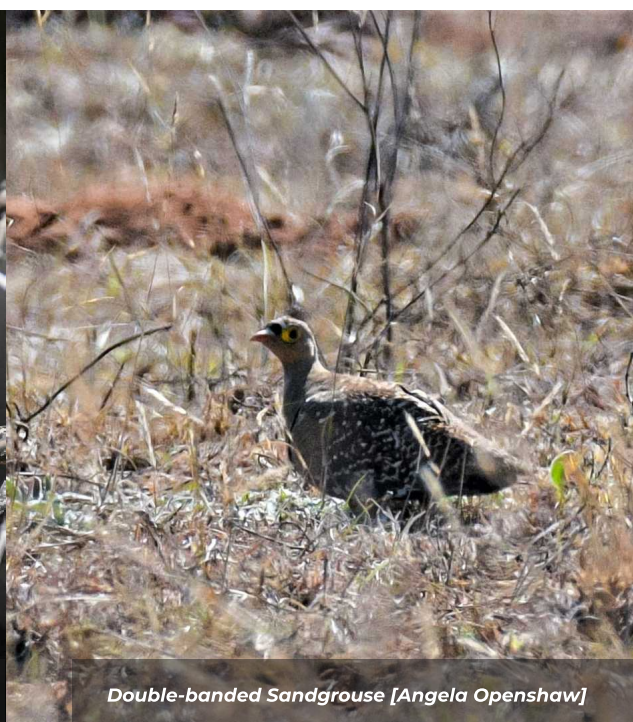
included African Spoonbill (Lepelaar), Grey Heron (Bloureier), Red-billed Teal (Rooibekeend), Pied Avocet (Bontelsie) and Black-winged Stilt (Rooipootelsie), African Pied Wagtail (Bontkwikkie) and even an “outlander” / foreign Teal.

When we finally made it to Vaalkop Dam, we had such a magic time birding there.

Birds seen at Vaalkop Dam include juvenile African Fish Eagle (Visarend), White-crested Helmetshrike (Withelmlaksman), Western Osprey (Visvalk), Double-banded Sandgrouse (Dubbelbandsandpatrys), Violet-eared Waxbills (Koningblousysie), White-throated Robin-chats (Witkeeljanfrederik), Grey-backed Camaropteras and Burnt-necked Eremomelas, Black-throated Canary (Bergkanarie) and Greater Kestrel (Grootrooivalk). After Vaalkop Dam we went back to Roodekoppies Dam for some more birding and eventually returned back to the lodge after a very long day, tired but very happy. Another evening was spent around the campfire discussing the day's birding.



White-crested Helmetshrike [Angela Openshaw]



Double-banded Sandgrouse [Angela Openshaw]



Day 4 (Monday):

was the Quest for the Yellow-throated Sandgrouse. We had to drive to a very specific location called Ikageng to find it with no guarantees that the Yellow-throated Sandgrouse (Geelkeelsandpatrys) would be there either. We made a few more detours (again!) but eventually got to our destination. Within minutes of our arrival we were rewarded with some great sightings of the Yellow-throated Sandgrouse which made it all worthwhile.

Yellow-throated Sandgrouse [Angela Openshaw]



After that we drove back slowly to the lodge, stopping at lots of mixed bird parties along the way. We saw Orange-breasted Waxbill (Rooiassie), Violet-eared Waxbill, Lilac-breasted Roller (Gewone Troupant) and Black-backed Puffback (Sneeubal) to mention but a few.

Back at RotsInBos, we packed up and said our goodbyes. "RotsInBos" was an enriching camp experience that blended exploration (aka getting lost), camaraderie, the thrill of spotting a few lifers, and building friendships with fellow BLNG birders.

We saw a total of 177 different bird species for the whole camp. Not bad for winter birding!

- Angie Openshaw

PARADORS 22-25 SEPTEMBER CAMP



Scarlet-chested Sunbird – Rooiborssuikerbekkie [Angela Openshaw]

Paradors Camp, a paradise indeed!

Paradors Game Ranch is situated in the Mara Valley about 40km past Nelspruit on a road off the N4 highway. It is surrounded by the Barberton Mountains and has self-drive game/bird-viewing and two walking trails. The Paradors Lodge is beautiful and spacious with 7 bedrooms and 6 bathrooms. It is fully equipped for self-catering. There is also a swimming pool at the Lodge, which is perfect for cooling down in after a long day of birding.

We arrived at separate times on Friday afternoon, settled into our rooms and explored the lodge and the gardens. The flowering aloe garden was full of Scarlet-chested and White-bellied Sunbirds offering the photographers amongst us the perfect opportunity to take 1000's of photos of these beautiful flying jewels.

Once a good few of us had arrived, we set off on our first exploratory walk around the lodge. Some of the specials we found include the Pale Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Croaking Cisticola, Yellow-breasted Apalis (Geelborskleinjantjie) and Black-crowned Tchagra (Swartkroontjagra). In the clear blue skies above us flew many swifts and swallows, which had Stephan in his element as he pointed the different ones out to us. In the evening, we made a huge bonfire in the boma and sat around chatting and braaiing our dinner.



Pale Flycatcher – Muiskleurvlieëvanger [Hannes van den Berg]



Yellow-throated Longclaw – Geelkeelkalkoentjie [Hannes van den Berg]



Croaking Cisticola – Grootinkinkie [Hannes van den Berg]

On Saturday morning, we got up at what felt like the crack of dawn (the sun had not risen yet), made a much-needed cup of coffee, and drove off towards the Barberton Geo-trail to find the Gurney's Sugarbird (Rooiborsuikervoël), Buff-streaked Chat (Bergklipwagter) and Cape Rock Thrush (Kaapse Kliplyster).

On our way out of the game ranch we saw a Lanner Falcon (Edelvalk) and were lucky enough to see a second Lanner Falcon at a picnic spot where we found the other specials. That part of our quest being accomplished, we drove onto Pedlar's Bush in the middle of the SAPPI plantations for a bit of forest birding.

Forest birding is hard!! You can hear birds calling from all about you but it's very hard to see them amongst the dense trees and vines. You have to know the bird calls and rely on your ears to get the best possible experience. I need quite a lot of practice with that! Still, we saw quite a few special birds including the African Olive Pigeon (Geelbekbosduif) (which is not even olive coloured), the Knysna Turaco (Knysnaloerie) and the Purple-crested Turaco, Sombre Greenbul (Gewone Willie), Grey Cuckooshrike (Gryskatakoeroe) and Cape Batis (Kaapse Bosbontrokkie) to mention a few. We ate our lunch in the cool and shady forest listening to the sound of the birds in the canopy (it was so soothing that I had a quick nap while the rest of the group wandered further!) After the forest, we headed back home, birding along the way. Another evening was spent sitting around the fire chatting and eating.



Sunday morning started a little later than Saturday and we explored the Paradors Game Ranch in our cars and hopping out of them to explore on foot. We were humbled and awed when we saw two servals (tierboskat), one which calmly walked in front of the lead car without a worry in the world. What a treat to be able to observe such an elusive cat up close.



Serval [Stephan Terblanche]

We found a fantastic early morning bird party not far from the lodge which had us pointing in all directions at once and excitedly calling out

“look there, it’s a”

I found it quite hard to decide which way to look or where to point my camera. So many super birds! African Paradise Flycatchers (Paradysvlieëvanger) with long tail feathers, Black-headed Oriole (Swartkopwielewaal), Common Scimitarbills (Swartbekkakelaar), Croaking Cisticolas, Golden-breasted Bunting (Rooivlerkstreepkoppie), Brown-hooded and Striped Kingfisher (Bruinkop- en Gestreepte Visvanger, Green-backed Camaroptera (Groenrugkwêkwêvoël), Southern Black Tit (Gewone Swartmees) and Groundscraper Thrush (Gevlekte Lyster). A really special bird was the Black Cuckooshrike (Swartkatakoeroe) with its' yellow shoulder patches beautifully displayed. At the dam, we found the Red-faced Cisticola

(Rooiwangtinktinkie) and Black Saw-wing (Swart Saagvlerkswaal). We ate our lunch under a huge tree and were surprised by a flock of Retz's Helmetshrike (Swarthelmlaksman). We heard our first Red-chested (Piet-my-vrou) and Klaas's Cuckoos (Meitjie) for the season. We saw a few raptors, Woolly-necked Stork (Wolnekooievaar), and more Purple-crested Turaco.

On our last day, Monday, we took a short walk on one of the walking trails where we were treated to a myriad of amazing birds again, including a Collared Sunbird (Kortbeksuikerbekkie), Grey-headed Bushshrike (Spookvoël), and an African Cuckoo-Hawk (Koekoekvalk). By my count we saw five different cisticolas, five different sunbirds, swifts, and swallows galore, and two different turacos. It was an incredible experience and if BLNG does another Paradors Camp, I'll be the first to sign up for it. Many thanks to Stephan for being an awesome leader with loads of patience, and to Fransie who did all the arduous work and admin which made it such a successful camp.

- Angie Openshaw



[BLNG]



Cuckoo Hawk – Koekoekvalk [Hannes van den Berg]

SANI PASS 2-5 NOVEMBER CAMP



Grey Crowned Crane – Mahem [Hannes van den Berg]

We settled into our chalets and after meeting our wonderful guide Aldo Berutti, we departed shortly thereafter for our first outing in the Underberg. Luscious green vegetation with spectacular mountainous backdrops were the order of the day and soon a cultivated field with 50+ Grey Crowned Cranes - what an awesome sight to behold!! Few of us had ever seen that many gathered together. We stopped at a small dam and were treated to African Marsh Harrier swooping down low over the Cape and Southern Masked Weaver (Kaapse Wewer en Swartkeelgeelvink) nests, in search of delicacies.

That evening we celebrated Estelle's birthday with her around a large table at the Otter's Den Chalet where most of us were staying. Braai fires were lit, and the wine, conversation and laughter flowed with ease.

The next day we set off under heavy mist for Sani Pass and Stuart joined us as a second guide. Stopping several times along the fantastic new road (worth a gob smacking R800 mil) in the ouhout forests to call up the Bush Blackcap and Barratt's Warblers. The mist soon cleared, and we revelled in the glorious blue skies and emerald mountain slopes, totally contradicting the dire weather predictions. We were blessed with beautiful sightings of Olive Woodpeckers (Gryskopspeg), and Greater Double-collared Sunbirds (Groot-rooibandsuikerbekkie) posing confidently for photos. Sightings of our two target species were somewhat fleeting initially – but improved greatly as the day passed, (Bush Blackcap especially offering us "Olympic views," according to Aldo) blessing Fransie and others with special lifers and good photos. Also spotted Brimstone and Cape Canaries (Dikbek- en Kaapse Kanarie), and Red-throated Wrynecks (Draaihals) in full display.

We all left Pretoria bright-eyed and bushy tailed on 2 Nov for the Underberg, filling the cars with friendly banter. Several of us stopped at the cute little Pickle Pot Cafe for marvellous homemade scones, jam, cream, and coffee. Whilst awaiting these delicious goodies, we spent some time birding in this lovely spot and were blessed with lovely raptors amongst other birds.

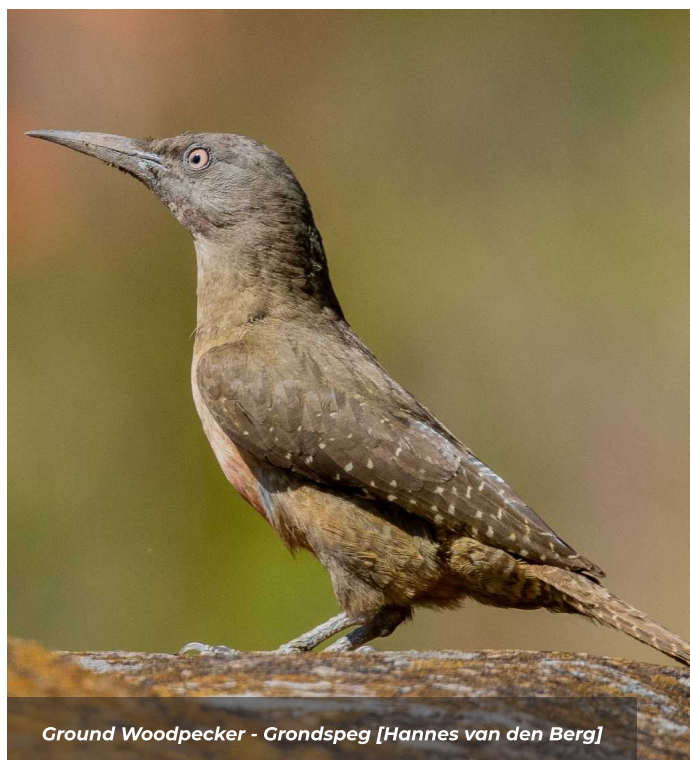
There were also many brightly coloured ladybugs all around, promising us a weekend full of good luck!!

As we approached the Old Hatchery Accommodation where we were booked in, we passed a field with several Spurwinged Geese (Wildemakou) and a couple of Grey Crowned Cranes at a local dairy farm – a special sighting for us.



African Marsh Harrier – Afrikaanse Vleivalk [Hannes van den Berg]

Stunning fields of orange watsonias graced the mountain slopes, attracting magnificent green metallic Malachite Sunbirds (Jangroentjie) along with glimpses of orange breasted Gurney's Sugarbird perched atop the Protea Caffra bushes just starting to flower. Ground Woodpecker posed unabashedly right next to the road.



Ground Woodpecker - Grondspieg [Hannes van den Berg]



Bush Blackcap - Rooibektiptol [Hannes van den Berg]



[Ivonne Coetzee]



[Ivonne Coetzee]

Border post entry was a piece of cake and we embarked on an interesting piece of gravel and rocky road in the no-man's land section between the two border posts. The road was heavily eroded in places, creating a bit of havoc for me, especially as a one-armed bandit, (I had broken my arm a week prior and wore a sling) causing us all to hang on for dear life in the Land Cruiser as we bumped up the steep slopes and s-bends to reach the most amazing, stunning views over Sani Pass.

Spotted the gorgeous Drakensberg Rockjumper at the top of the pass, as well as Drakensberg Siskin. Cape Rock Thrush (Kaapse Kliplyster) flitted from rock to rock, boasting their beautiful colours to all of us who so appreciated it.

Once through the Lesotho border post, the road was once again fantastic – built by well-qualified Chinese construction companies for a ‘small fee,’ no doubt. The veld was quite heavily eroded and over-grazed by sheep predominantly, strangely enough with their tails still intact.

We stopped at the Highest pub in Southern Africa...

and spotted numerous cute Sloggett's ice rats scurrying around. Also got to see Grey Tits, Sentinel Rock Thrush (Langtoonkliplyster), Sickie-winged Chat (Vlaktespekvreter) and Mountain Pipits both there and at our breathtaking breakfast stop.

We were treated to a sighting through Aldo and Stuart's scopes of a Bearded Vulture (Baardaasvoël) and chick on the nest high up in the berg. We hoped for some flying but were not rewarded in this manner. But spectacularly pleasant weather and very little wind blessed us with amazing birding all day. The weather proved to be a lifer for Aldo – who kept warning us that this was not normal.

So we saw the BIG FIVE of the high-altitude Drakensberg area...

– the Bearded Vulture, Drakensberg Siskin and Rockjumper, the Mountain Pipit, and the Gurney's Sugarbird – all in one morning! Rock Kestrels (Kransvalk), Karoo Prinia (Karoolangstertjie) and Layard's Warblers (Grystjerikтик) darted around the plateau area, and we even spotted Fairy Flycatchers (Feevlieëvangers), Buff-streaked Chats (Bergklipwagter), Mountain Wheatear (Bergwagter) and Karoo Scrub Robins (Slangverklikker) along our journey.

We returned home that evening – a satiated bunch, some of us with many lifers. We stopped for a drink at the Sani Pass pub before heading down the pass... hot glühwein, G&Ts, and glasses of wine, sherry and beer being the order of the day – standing on the viewing deck, peering over the pass and celebrating the most wonderful day of birding we could ever have imagined. Angie in her haste to get a bird-shot, almost sacrificed her knee protecting her camera as she jumped out while the vehicle wasn't 100% stationery, but apart from a few bruises, she lived to tell the tale relatively unscathed from this ordeal.



Drakensberg Rockjumper - Oranjeboersbergglyster
[Hannes van den Berg]



Drakensberg Siskin - Bergpietjiekanaar
[Hannes van den Berg]



Grey Tit - Piet-tjou-tjougrysmees
[Hannes van den Berg]



Mountain Pipit - Bergkoester
[Hannes van den Berg]



[Aldo Berutti]



[Ivonne Coetzee]

The next morning, we departed for the Marutswa Forest near Bulwer. Once again passing a field of about 80+ crowned cranes.... These birds were fast becoming a “rubbish bird” on our lists (chuckle) being so abundant – even more so than pigeons and crows. Aldo warned us of bad potholes on the road to the forest, but it would probably have been more accurate to warn us of small patches of tar on a bad gravel road than potholes.

Marutswa Forest, although having lost some of its boardwalk charm given that in COVID, the boardwalk mysteriously vanished, still offered well-worn canopied paths into this beautiful indigenous forest, where we were first treated to Emerald Cuckoo (Mooimeisie), then Knysna Turaco

(Knysnaloerie), Green-backed Camaroptera (Groenrugkwêkwêvoël), Dark-backed Weavers (Bosmusikant), and finally a wonderfully obscure sighting of a Red-necked Spurfowl (Rooikeelfisant).

The latter were spectacularly stubborn in showing themselves, calling all around us but staying mostly hidden from sight. After the forest, we travelled to the Buddhist Retreat to try and spot the Blue Swallows (Blouswael) and most of us caught a fleeting glimpse but photos as evidence were rare, given the speed at which they zoomed past down the valley. Wing-snapping Cisticolas (Kleinste Klopklompie), Fan-tailed Widowbirds (Kortstertflap) and Rufous-naped Larks (Rooineklewerik) entertained us as we waited for the swallows to appear overlooking the beautiful valley.



Overlooking the Blue Swallow site [Pieter Britten]



The Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler - Geelkeelsanger that rewarded stragglers on the hike back. [Hannes van den Berg]

After a restful lunch under the trees, we returned to Marutswa Forest to try and spot some of the elusive specials we were seeking such as White-starred Robin (Witkoljanfrederik), Orange Ground Thrush (Oranjelyster) and Grey Cuckooshrike (Bloukatakeroe). Although these fellows didn't show themselves, we were treated to a playful display of Crowned Hornbills (Gekroonde Neushoringvoël), and to Lanner Falcon (Edelvalk) being mobbed, some Olive Bushshrikes (Olyfboslaksman) and Grey Cuckooshrike calling,

and a Southern Ground Hornbill (Bromvoël) – believe it or not – on the way back.

Stopping at a lovely wetland on the way home, we finally got to see Wattled Cranes (Lelkraanvoël) – a regal breeding pair in the swampland – and also a couple of Blue Cranes (Bloukraanvoël) honking from time to time. Some Grey Crowned Cranes were at the same spot. The full suite of South Africa's three crane species in a span of five minutes!

We got many waterbirds such as Little Grebes (Kleindobbertjie), Red-knobbed Coots (Bleshoender), several ducks such as Cape Shoveler (Kaapse Slopeend), Southern Pochard (Bruineend) and Red-billed Teal (Rooibekeend). Whiskered Terns (Witbaardsterretjie) swooped low over the water, and the skies were full of Banded Martins (Gebande Oewerswael). African Marsh Harrier hunted earnestly among the weaver nests, treating us to outstanding sightings of these wonderful raptors.

We ended the day with another “lekker kuier” at Otter’s den – pooped but thoroughly loving the last two days of birding experiences. Aldo totally delivered – met all expectations and more!!

The rain that had promised to fall all weekend finally fell that evening, and we woke on Sunday to a misty rainy day...which luckily lifted just as we packed up to go on our last little jaunt. Although not spotting the Denham’s Bustard (Veldpou) or Southern Bald Ibises (Kalkoenibis) unfortunately, we still managed to add a few more birds to our list – African Pipit (Gewone Koester), Wing-snapping Cisticola, more Blue Cranes, Banded Martin and Red-necked Spurfowl offering good views, this time. We all went our separate ways around 9 am – for the long drive home, exhausted but exhilarated by the awesome birding we were privileged enough to experience.

Thanks to all those who organised this trip and to Aldo for his wonderful wisdom and guidance over the weekend.

- Rose Clark



Wattled Cranes - Lelkraanvoël [Hannes van den Berg]

MAKULEKE 10 -13 NOVEMBER

CAMP

Meves's Starling - Langstertglansspreeu [Johan Botha]



The suspense for Makuleke felt like an eternity, but the hour has come at last. We feel loaded with energy, excitement, and expectation as we meet at Pafuri gate and load our bags onto the trailer, setting off to an unforgettable experience of birding luxury. Sandwiched between the Limpopo- and Luvuvhu Rivers and their respective flood plains, Makuleke offers exceptional birding opportunities. The diverse habitat spreading over 24,000 ha includes semi-arid sandveld, Mopane veld and thorn thickets, alluvial flood plains, riparian forest, wetlands surrounded by palm trees and magnificent baobabs.

Arriving at camp, we are welcomed by the team: Camp Coordinator Melissa Chaney and our two expert bird guides, Ross Hawkins, and Duncan McKenzie. The two of them, as we would find out later, form a formidable team as communication between them is done through single word sentences, hand signals and sometimes just a grimace or a chuckle.

They soon introduce us to the local species found in this far-set corner of the country. It is clear right from the start that Meves's Starling replaces Burchell's Starling (Grootglansspreeu), which is found only further south. The frog-like call in the distance turns out to be Tropical Boubou (Tropiese Waterfiskaal). In fact, everything that is Southern Boubou (Suidelike Waterfiskaal) in Gauteng is replaced by Tropical Boubou here; the crisp call sounding even purer in the hot, dry air.

We are soon introduced to Big Baobab, a thousand-plus year-old tree.

Staring into the luscious greenery and at the elephant-scarred stem, I can't help but wonder what this old giant has seen in its life, providing food and shelter for an abundance of creatures...now long gone.

Baobab [Vilette Forwood]



In the thick branches of the enormous tree, a Wahlberg's Eagle (Bruinarend) is sitting on its nest while a White-Browed Scrub Robin (Gestreepte Wipstert) repeats its angelic little song persistently.

Others join in on the chorus while the sun is setting – Brubru (Bontroklaksman), Black-Backed Puffback (Sneeubal), Burchell's Coucal (Gewone Vleiloerie), Emerald-Spotted Wood Dove (Groenvlekduifie) and several others.

Dusk is perfected by a pair of interacting Broad-Billed Rollers etched against the orange sky on a dry branch.

The Wahlberg's Eagle's mate comes swooping in from behind, make a low fly-past and disappears behind the tree line. Driving back to camp after sunset, it is time for the nightjars to make their appearance. Perfectly camouflaged on the road ahead of us, is the Square-Tailed Nightjar, a little bit further on, the European Nightjar. That gives our guides the perfect opportunity to point out the differences between the two species.

We had our first lesson on Nightjar 101. Somewhere far away, a Fiery-Necked Nightjar (Afrikaanse Naguil) is advertising its imperial presence.

Broad-billed Roller – Geelbektroupant [Johan Botha]



Overlooking Lanner Gorge [Amanda Gazendam]



Visiting the diversity of water bodies forming in the floodplains leads to lavishing sensory overload.

There is a multitude of birds in the water: noisy White-faced Whistling Duck (Nonnetjie-eend), one or two Red-Billed Teal (Rooibekeend) and Knob-Billed Duck (Knobbeleend), Goliath - and Grey Heron (Reuse- en Bloureier), Great Egret (Grootwitreier), Yellow-Billed Stork (Nimmersat), African Openbill (Oopbekooievaar), and African Spoonbill (Lepelaar), scooping up the plentiful source of nutriment.

Apart from the Wood Sandpiper (Bosruiter), Common Greenshank (Groenpootruiter), Ruff (Kemphaan), Black-Winged Stilt (Rooipootelsie) and Three-Banded Plover (Driebandstrandkiewiet) busying themselves with finding food in the shoal water, a Marsh Sandpiper (Moerasruiter) is also spotted on the far side of the pan.



[Amanda Gazendam]



White-crowned Lapwing – Witkopkiewiet [Johan Botha]

In the shallow water to the right of Reedbuck Vlei, the cherished Greater Painted Snipe (Goudsnip) is seen poking the mud with its pinkish, somewhat droopy bill. In this polyandric species, the female is the larger and more colourful, and sings a song to attract the males.

Then, to everyone's astonishment, a Western Yellow Wagtail is spotted by a member of the group. Although not quite as yellow as illustrated in the apps and books, the bird was positively identified by two very excited guides, who consider it an extreme rarity at Makuleke.

In the Ilala palms next to the vlei, the Lemon-Breasted Canaries (Geelborskanarie) are flitting around and give the photographers a rather tough time to get decent pictures. However, patience, courage to face the scorching sun and treading carefully around the palm trees, pays off eventually!

Circling high above is a number of White-backed Vultures (Witruigaasvoël), and among them also a Lappet-faced (Swartaasvoël) or two. Even higher up a single Marabou Stork (Maraboe) is lazily making use of a thermal. A small group of Woolly-necked Storks (Wolnekooievaar) fly in a small circle, barely discernible.

Driving through mopane scrubs and woodland provides plentiful thrilling surprises. A male Red-crested Korhaan (Boskorhaan) starts with its rather loud tongue clicks (sounding a lot like bill-snapping), developing its call into an ear-piercing crescendo. Keeping his head cocked, one eye on the sky, he waits, listening for a response – hopefully, a female who is indubitably impressed with his endeavor. His back is cryptically coloured as these beauties of the bush are high on the menu of many stealthy raptors.



Greater Painted Snipe – Goudsnip [Johan Botha]



Western Yellow Wagtail – Geelkwikkie [Johan Botha]



Racket-tailed Roller – Knopsterttroupant [Johan Botha]

A pitch-black bird draws our attention. A myriad of possibilities, right? But this one has a white wing patch and a crest. Just hear one of my dreams come true when it is confirmed that we are looking at a melanistic Jacobin Cuckoo (Bontnuwejaarsvoël).

To confirm our suspicion, it doesn't just do its Jacobin call but also sweeps right past our vehicle.

We are stunned and jubilant.

Another rare cousin from the Roller family group, the Racket-tailed Roller, also prefers this dryer, scrub-like thornveld. Opposed to the Lilac-breasted (Gewone Troupant) and European Rollers (Europese Troupant) who prefer sitting in the open, the Racket-Tails perch quietly within the canopy or middle strata. Although very hard to find, with only thirty pairs left in Kruger, enough are seen to give the photographers in the group the gratification of immortalising these shy birds through their lenses.

As if not wanting to be overlooked by the small group of humans staring into the sky, a Lilac-Breasted Roller gives an impeccable display of its rolling, tumbling dance, complete with the harsh, rasping call. We feel honoured and humbled.

The camp itself is full of surprises. A large Nyala tree in the middle of the camp lodges the camp's own, very-well behaved, troop of baboons. Staring long enough into the leaves, one can eventually find a Bennett's Woodpecker (Bennettspeg) pecking at the bark or a multitude of smaller birds scrambling for food.

The quaint little bird bath offers ample opportunity to admire the African Firefinch (Kaapse Vuurvinkie), Grey-Backed Camaroptera (Gysrugkwêkwêvoël), Green-Winged Pytilia (Gewone Melba), Yellow-breasted Apalis and even the shy Terrestrial Brownbul (Boskrapper) from close by.

I have to end with a very big thank you to each and every person who has made this unforgettable trip possible. Specifically, the whole Makuleke team who paid attention to all the nuances and details needed to make the experience as delightful and comfortable as possible. And a special thanks to Ross and Duncan - what an honour to be guided by such an insightful class of birding experts. We came back innumerable more relaxed and much wiser.

- Mariana Arnoldi



The camp's communal lounge [Liesl de Swardt]



Trumpeter Hornbill – Gewone Boskraai [Johan Botha]

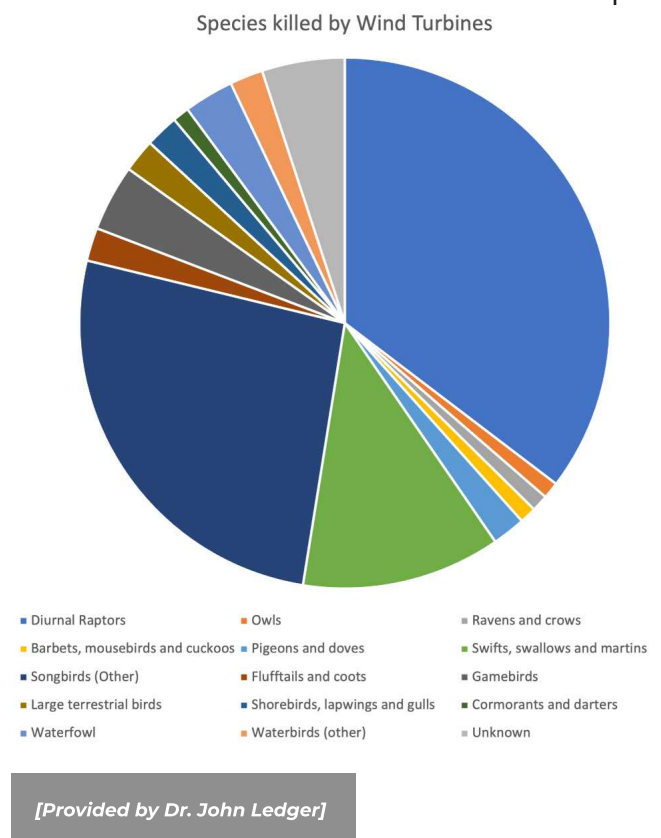
WIND TURBINES - ON A COLLISION COURSE CONSERVATION

The large diversity of birds killed by wind turbines in SA.

- The vision of birds has not evolved to perceive large moving structures in their environment, like wind turbines.
- To address birds colliding into wind turbines, painting or patterning turbine blades could improve their visibility.
- The South African Wind Energy Association and conservation group BirdLife SA are encouraging wind farms to trial this method.

Wind energy is a clean, renewable alternative to fossil fuel-derived energy sources, but many birds are at risk from collisions with wind turbines.

In 2012 South Africa had 8 wind turbines. By May 2019 there were more than 1,365. SAWEA targets thousands more in the future. Unfortunately, our bird and bat populations are the ones paying for this 'Clean and Green' energy.



Monitoring of 20 Wind Energy Farms (WEF) in South Africa between 2014 – 2018 delivered 848 bird carcasses across all 20 WEFs. A striking result was the high diversity of birds killed: 130 species from 46 families, totalling 30% of bird species recorded at and around WEFs, including some species not recorded by specialist surveys at WEF sites. Species of concern killed include endangered Cape Vultures and Black Harriers, both of which are endemic to southern Africa.

Every effort must be made to site wind energy facilities away from important areas for birds, particularly raptors. To deal with bird collisions with wind turbines, industry and bird conservationists are encouraging wind farms to trial the effectiveness of painting or patterning turbine blades to improve their visibility.

Local wind farms are to test the effectiveness of the method, which is part of a tranche of other measures to prevent collisions and improve the environmental impact of wind turbines, explained South African Wind Energy Association (SAWEA) and BirdLife SA.

The organisations have issued a briefing note on the method for wind farm developers, environmental consultants, and other decision-makers for consideration. This followed a study at a wind farm in Norway – which “showed a significant reduction in annual fatality rates”.

Some measures are relatively simple. A paper published to *ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION* in June 2020 studied the effects of painting one blade of a turbine black.

Researchers hypothesised that the paint would allow birds to notice and avoid turbines sooner.

A trial at the Smøla wind power plant in Norway gathered results over 11 years, until July 2020.

After painting, the trial turbines killed 72% less birds. The authors noted that painting the blades in-situ took considerable resources, but that painting during construction would minimise costs. The idea is that painting or patterning a wind turbine blade with a high-contrast colour would make it more visible to birds, and they would avoid it.

A pilot project has been started at South Africa's Umoya Energy Wind Farm (UEWF) on the West Coast of the Western Cape. The briefing note indicated that there are low fatality rates recorded at the facility. Among these is the endangered Black Harrier.

Other wind farms in South Africa are also considering introducing patterning. "Marking blades is also now often included as a potential mitigation measure in environmental impact assessments for proposed wind farms in South Africa," the organisations said. But patterning or painting blades is not just a simple matter.

The wind turbines should not add risk to aircraft safety. The South African Civil Aviation Technical Standards have already put in place standards for the marking of turbines for this reason. There are also technical considerations to make – for example, the physical weight of the paint may impact the blades and whether turbine suppliers would allow the painting of blades given warranties. It may also be costly for operating wind farms to halt operations to allow for the painting in safe conditions. "Painting under windy conditions can be challenging and present health and safety risks to workers. Moreover, this can have cost implications for the wind farm if they need to fund and procure the necessary professional services to paint the blades. There will also be operational costs and losses if the turbines need to be stopped for any amount of time when energy production is required," the briefing note highlighted. For new wind farms, the costs would be negligible if the blades could be painted at a factory beforehand.

In a first for the African continent the first test to determine if painting a single blade will increase the visibility of the spinning turbine blades for raptors has been produced at the Hopefield (Umoya) wind farm in the Western Cape.

Following discussions between Sabri Abrahams, manager at Hopefield and SA Civil Aviation and Birds & Bats Unlimited (with input from Birdlife South Africa's Sam Ralston), the CAA approved the first test of the idea, championed by Dr Roel May and colleagues in Norway. Wind farming is one of the best ways of combatting climate change with renewable energy, but it has its costs. By testing this idea at numerous wind farms across South Africa it is hoped to not only gauge its effectiveness in an African setting but reduce the high toll on our raptors and other threatened collision-prone species.



https://www.birdlife.org.za/what-we-do/landscape-conservation/what-we-do/birds-renewable-energy/?fbclid=IwAR0x9DcpcGgrcLuEIJ_V_eJRr8DJyLdFqoAUFWBH9vpK0Cs_I8T_2GA6K3M

https://www.birdlife.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Wind_Energy_and_birds.pdf

<https://www.birdlife.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Wind-Energy-and-Birds-Impacts.pdf>

<https://www.power-technology.com/analysis/wind-turbines-birds-bats-fatalities-nature-protection-conservation-power-environment/>

https://www.news24.com/fin24/climate_future/environment/wind-farms-to-try-painted-turbine-blades-in-a-bid-to-stop-killing-birds-20231003?fbclid=IwAR2WkPI_R6B-TA1M1eMouxqFru6nwmShkK4bc962Ud24XR1k80AxO2d1grk

V Perold, S Ralston-Paton & P Ryan, *Ostrich – Journal of African Ornithology*, Volume 91, 2020

HERWONNE PARADYS / PARADISE LOST AND REGAINED CONSERVATION

Drie dekades gelede het ons gesin teen die hang van die Magalies gewoon, net mooi waar een ingang na die Vriende van Magalies-staproete tans begin. Die area was toe nog nie omhein nie.

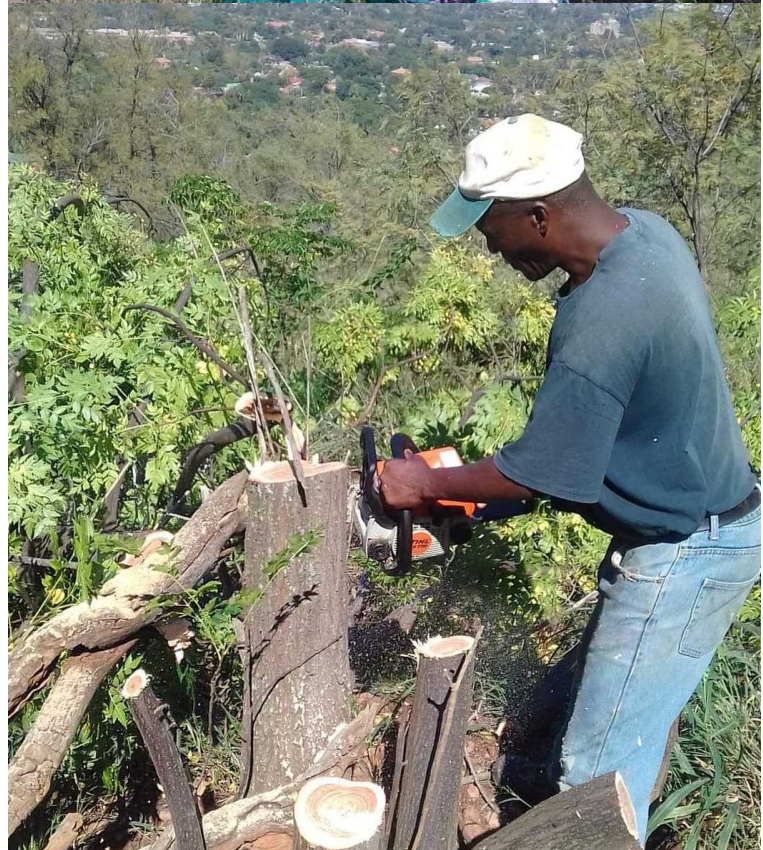
Die oop toegangspad na die reservoir is gereeld gebruik vir die onwettige storting van bourommel, huishoudelike gemors en tuinvullis.

Boonop was dit onveilig daar, met 'n klomp sluipslapers daar. Ons het soms met ons honde op die berg gaan stap, en die mooi uitsig oor Pretoria van die kruin af bewonder; maar die goor deel van die situasie het ons maar gelate aanvaar – en nie 'n vinger gelig om dit te verander nie.

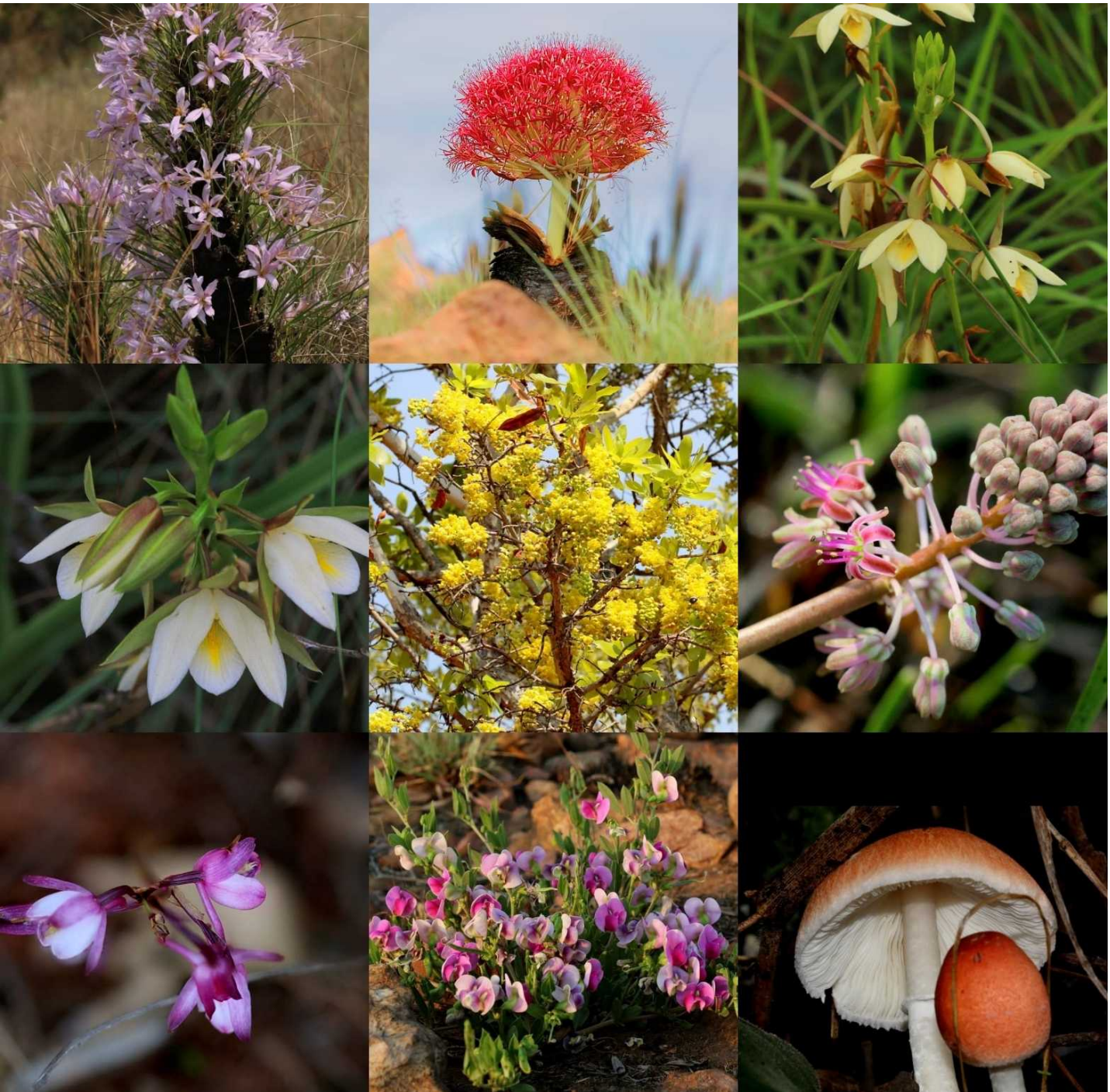
Gelukkig nie Hilko Lubbinge, nou diep in sy sewentigs, nie. Met sy aftrede sowat twintig jaar gelede het hy en 'n paar belangstellendes Vriende van Magalies gestig en 'n stuk van sowat 8 km van die Magalies bokant die Moot-gebied by WESSA, 'n omgewingsorganisasie, geregistreer. Dit is geleë tussen Steve Biko (voorheen Voortrekkerweg) en 32ste Laan.

Met die hulp van familielede, kerkgroepe, vriende, helpers uit die gemeenskap en gehuurde werkers het hulle begin om hierdie deel van die berg tot sy eertydse glorie te herstel. Staproetes is uitgesit en indringerplante verwyder. Dele is omhein en hekke en borde opgesit. Baie male het kosles maar uit hul eie sakke of via skenkings gekom.

Hilko is selfs nou nog elke dag besig op die berg. Tot vandag toe nog is hy besig met die stryd teen indringers soos spaansriet, lantana, pom-poms en ander uitheemse plantegroei. Inheemse plante wat voorheen uitgeroei is, is bekom, gekweek en geplant – alwynspesies soos Aloe Peglerae en - Mutabilis, sowel as die pragtige Scadoxus puniceus (die rooi poeierkwas, ook bekend as gifbol). Dit het Hilko se lewenstaak geword om hierdie lappie aarde te herstel tot die ongerepte glorie van sy jongdae. Soos ledetalle toegeneem het, word ledegelde van Vriende Van Magalies nou gebruik word om gehuurde helpers te betaal, plantgifstowwe te bekonds, sowel as die oprig van borde met kaarte van die staproetes by ingange.



Elke seisoen kom die Vriende van Magalies bymekaar vir 'n werksessie om veral pom-pom-onkruid aan te pak. Lidmaatskapwerwing word gekombineer met staptogte vir boomuitkenning. Voëlkykuitstappies vir beginners word gereël en op die Vriende van Magalies se Facebook-blad adverteer. Studente van TUT doen die praktiese deel van hul Omgewingstudiekursus hier onder Hilko se leiding. 'n Wonderlike fotograaf, Tjeerd de Wit, dra weekliks pragtige foto's van seisoenale flora by tot ons Facebook-blad. Sy fenomenale kennis van plantspesies het daartoe bygedra dat die uiters aggressiewe indringerspesie, *Praxelis Clematidea*, vir die eerste keer in Suid-Afrika uitgekien en opgeteken kon word toe hy dit op een van sy plantfotografiesessies op die berg raakgeloop het.



Hilko se droom het gelukkig nie by die herstel van die natuurlike plantegroei geëindig nie. As jong seun het hy gereeld by 'n poel op die berg gespeel. Die fontein wat dit moes voed, was egter dekades lank kurkdroog. Indringer-lantanas tussen die inheemse bome bokant hierdie fontein het dit so met die jare saam heeltemal laat opdroog en die hele area was toegegroeï. Hilko moes eers weer die oog van die fontein van sy jeugjare opspoor.

Maande van kap en uitsaag van Lantana en ander indringerspesies bokant die fontein het gevolg. Hy het toe sy troepe, hoofsaaklik familieleden, vriende en kleinkinders, opgekommandeer. Die oog van die fontein is oopgegrawe, 'n keerwal op die helling gemaak, en plantegroei op die bodem van die eertydse dam is skoongemaak.

Stadig maar seker het die fontein se water begin uitsyfer. Die dammetjie het begin vol word. Hilko hulle het selfs 'n bankie by die fontein se oog opgesit. Twee jaar later borrel die fontein aanhoudend en bly die poel vol. Dit het 'n gunsteling-rusplek vir stappers geword, en 'n oase vir die troppie rooibokke. Die skaars ribbokke, jakkalse, ystervarke en meerkatte kom drink gereeld daar. Die vlak afloopvoortjie ondertoe is so geliefd onder die voëls dat 'n voëlkyk- en voëlfotografie-mekka geword het.

Voëlfotograwe het op die bultjie bokant die oorloop van die poel later begin uitkyk vir allerhande onverwagte spesies wat by die gewones aansluit: Klein- en Grootheuningwysers (Lesser and Greater Honeyguides) Grys- en Geelbekneushoringvoël (African Grey and Southern Yellow Hornbills), Jamesons-, Rooibek- en Kaapse Vuurvinkies (Jameson's-, Red-billed- and African Firefinch), selfs die buitengewone Gryskop- en Dwergruisvangers (Grey-headed and Pygmy Kingfisher), en Swartwangsysies (Black-faced Waxbill).

Die VvM voëllys staan tans op 175 spesies en die nuutste toevoeging is sowaar die twee Swart Saagvlervragswaels (Black Saw-wing) wat onverwags een oggend tussen ander swaels rondgevlug het.

Hilko en sy span het 'n maand gelede besluit om 'n voëlskuiling op die bultjie by die dammetjie te bou.



Hul moes die loodswaar teerpale, planke en gereedskap sowat 'n kilometer van die parkeerarea af teen die berg op dra. Nie lank daarna ontdek Ilse Müller die sterspesie daar op: 'n pragtige Suidelike Swie-paartjie (Swee Waxbill)! Voëlliefhebbers het van oraloos ons nuwe skuiling kom besoek om foto's van hulle te kom neem. Hierdie skaars spesie kom gewoonlik net op woudrande en in tropiese, vogtige dele van die land voor. Hilko se visie, vasberadenheid en harde werk het vir ons almal 'n verlore paradys herwin en gewys hoeveel die dryfkrag en deursettingsvermoë van 'n paar toegewyde mense kan bereik. Dis sowaar 'n lewende monument wat ons hele gemeenskap bevoordeel. Wat 'n wonderlike nalatenskap!

- Vriende van Magalies

BIRD'S EYE VIEW



Dark-Capped Yellow Warbler – Geelsanger

A heavy mist covered most of Midrand as I made my way to Northern Farm.

I believe we all have a spirit bird, once we have departed, this is probably because I am a birder and supplemented by the touching scene in the movie “The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel”. My Dad’s is a Cattle Egret whilst my mother-in-law is a Ring-necked Dove and they become the connection for us between the living and departed and bring a happy reminder when sometimes their memories fade a little when life becomes all encompassing.

I have been struggling to connect with a bird for my friend André Marx. Initially I thought it could be the White-backed Night Heron that we discussed often, but never found the time to visit Cedar Lakes to locate it or was it the Kurrichane Thrush that was the last bird we saw together at the Farm – neither had an emotional connection – so his spirit bird was yet to manifest for me...

The mist was just as thick after arriving at the farm and there weren’t many birds to be seen, although they could be heard singing. A Cape Longclaw was foraging on the side of the road on the way to the quarry.

The quarry was where André and I always started our birding when we visited the farm. When I got out the car, the mist seemed thicker and heavier and I stood in the road contemplating where to go, when out of the mist a single Yellow Warbler flew in and landed in the shrub very close to where I was standing. It appeared to be watching me and then all of a sudden broke into song – in the middle of June! The hairs on my arms stood up and I just teared up as I felt an emotional or even spiritual connection to what was happening in front of my eyes. I wasn’t sure if I should sit down to appreciate this special moment, but I picked up my camera so that I could also record and share with others who knew André.

Suddenly the morning felt a little brighter and lighter, even though the mist was still all engulfing, my question was now answered and André’s spirit bird for me now is the African Yellow Warbler. I can’t remember how long we were ‘engaged’, but once the singing stopped the Warbler flew back across the road disappearing back into the mist and from where it came...

The Dark-Capped (African) Yellow Warbler was found at the Farm by André in 2022 (if memory serves me) and he had great delight in showing it to me when we visited together and on subsequent visits, we found it more often than not. I make no excuse for the number of images below which I hope will convey what I felt...



Dark-Capped Yellow Warbler – Geelsanger

My emotions were still high, so I remained in the quarry way longer than I would normally stay.

Amethyst Sunbirds were feeding on the remnant flowers of the Wild Dagga.

A Little Rush Warbler called and suddenly popped out and I had some of the best views and photographic opportunities ever of this species, as well as showing me its really broad tail.

I checked the shrub where the Yellow Warbler had appeared hoping for a second glimpse, but that was perhaps asking too much.

By now the mist was rising and dissipating, so I continued feeling buoyant knowing that André was perhaps even birding with me. I took a detour on the way to the cattle pens, as I thought I heard an Apalis calling.

I didn't find the Apalis but was rather rewarded with a dainty Fairy Flycatcher which is a great record for the Farm.



Amethyst Sunbird – Swartsuikerbekkie



Little Rush Warbler – Kaapse Vleisanger



Brown-crowned Tchagra



Long-crested Eagle – Langkuifarend

I then drove to where we normally stopped for coffee, where a distant Long-crested Eagle surveyed its domain from atop a Syringa Tree.

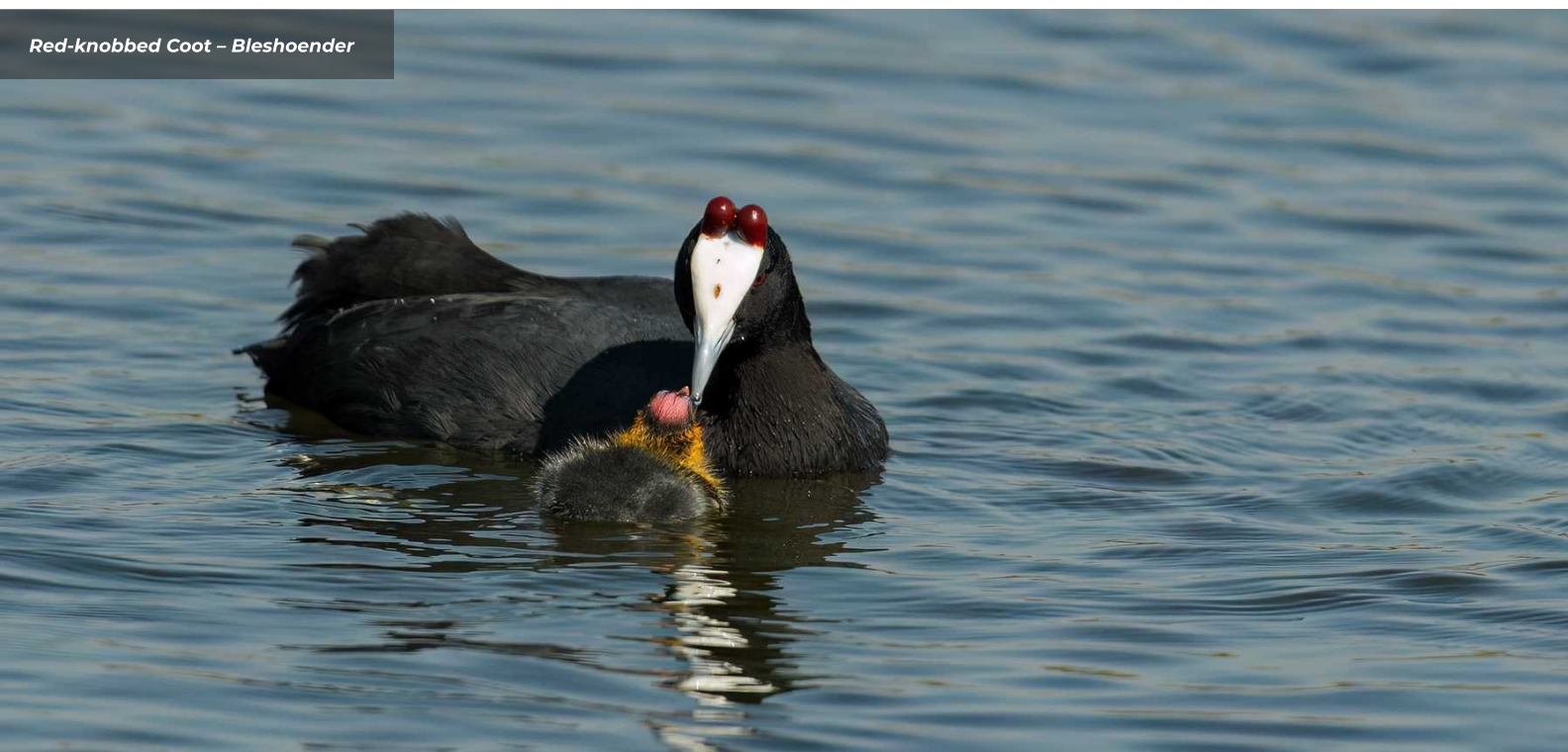
And Red-knobbed Coots with young in June! Their young must qualify for the ugliest baby award...

I drove slowly back to the main dam where a pair of Blue-billed Teals were close to the side and in glorious sunshine.

I then headed home, this time leaving the Farm without a heavy heart but rather with a contented smile...

- Mike Pope

Shortened and printed with permission. Here is the link to Mike Pope's Blog: <https://www.birding-adventures.com/>



Red-knobbed Coot – Bleshoender



Blue-billed Teals – Gevlekte Eend

BEST OF BLNG BIRD'S EYE VIEW

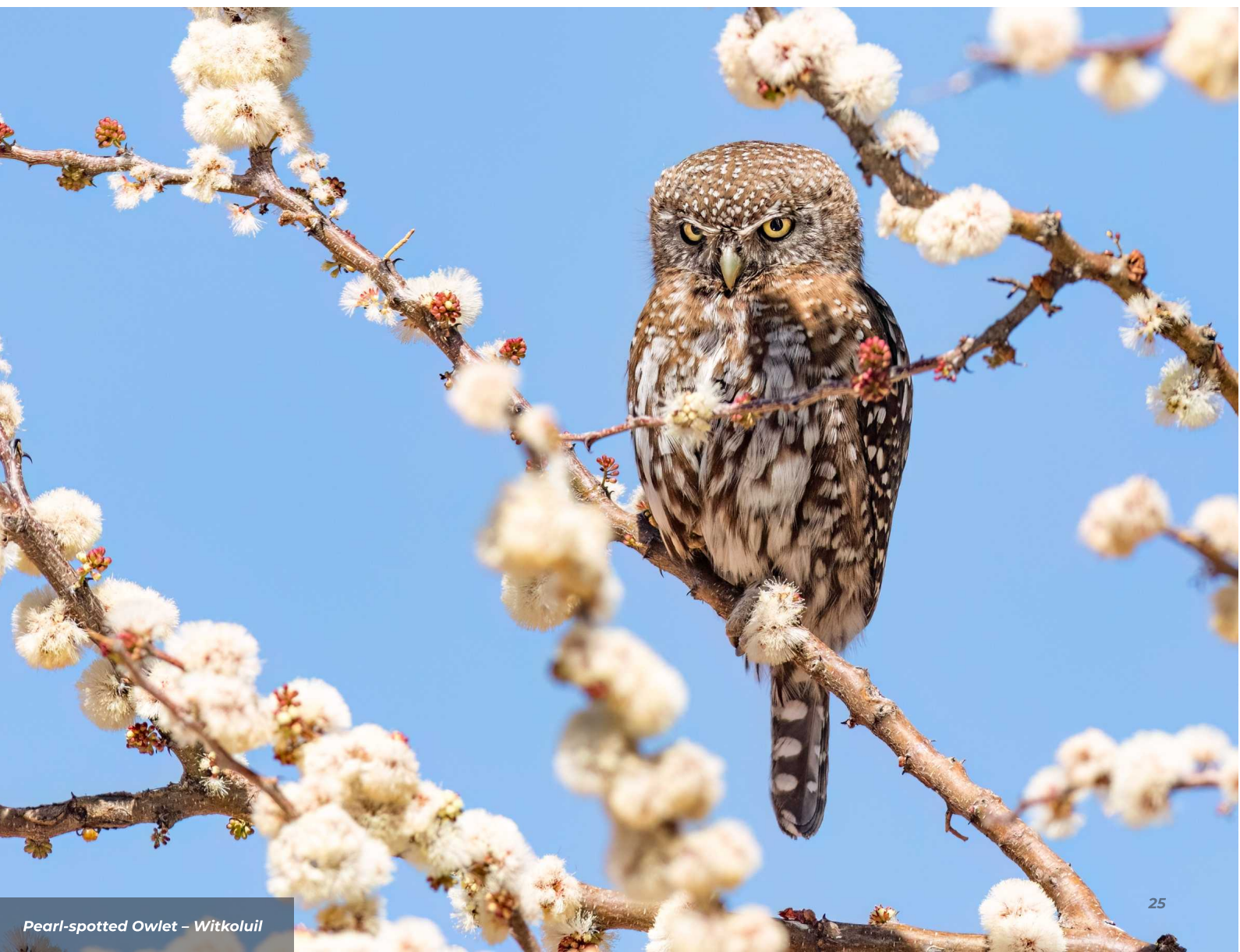
We regularly receive stunning images from BLNG members which are not necessarily part of a camp, club outing or travelogue.

The BEST OF BLNG forum was created for just this niche. Any thematic collection of 4 – 8 photographs of birds, eg, raptors seen on holiday, or when out birding on your own, garden birds, or any series of birds in flight photographs which you might want to share with our readers are more than welcome.

BIRDS IN THEIR LANDSCAPE

In this edition, a series of breathtaking photographs from birds from our arid western regions were sent in by JP van der Merwe.

What immediately drew the eye were the indigenous flowers providing a breathtaking setting to these area-specific birds — an exciting start to this new category showcasing the Best of BLNG.





Spike-heeled Lark – Vlaktelewerik



3.

Gabar Goshawk – Witkruissperwer



Red Lark – Rooilewerik



Martial Eagle – Breëkoparend



Pale Chanting Goshawk – Bleeksingvalk



White-throated Canary – Witkeelkanarie

IN SEARCH OF THE BEARDED VULTURE TRAVELOGUE



View from our chalet [Ivonne Coetzee]

Annetjie Barkhuizen started it all. To begin with, she invited Dr Sonja Krüger, head of the Bearded Vulture Recovery Strategy and Action Plan, to the monthly BLNG club meeting during February. Her presentation describing the heroic work of harvesting 'second' eggs from cliff faces in the Drakensberg and hatching and breeding Bearded Vulture chicks for eventual release, was as gripping as it was tragic, in a way.

The Bearded Vulture is on the Red List of critically endangered species, with an estimated only 300 – 480 individuals left in the wild.

When Annetjie issued the invitation to fellow BLNG Committee members to join her on an outing to Giant's Castle where the famous (Bearded) Vulture Hide could be booked, we jumped at the chance. Our accommodation and the bird hide were booked for mid-July, as the Bearded Vulture breeds during winter and their need for easily accessible food, and our chance of spotting it, would be higher.

It had been my dream to see this beautiful bird at close quarters for some years, and Sonja's talk and presentation changed this dream to an obsession.

I had seen Bearded Vultures long before, in my late teens, when we went camping at Golden Gate. Daily the shout: "Lammergeier!" would go up, and campers would rush outside for a view, for even then, it was special. It was believed by some that they would snatch lambs and drop them from great heights to get at the bones, which is their sole diet, and which may have aided and abetted in their great-scale poisoning and dramatic decline in numbers. But now, I might experience them in another way, at close quarters, and, fervently hoped for, get some photographs.

We left for the Drakensberg a day or two after a bitter cold front which had swept over the country – it had even snowed in Johannesburg!

We had been warned to bring extra charged camera batteries, warm clothing and possibly blankets to survive the cold in the hide high up on a cliff. In the car on our approach to the Drakensberg, we kept exclaiming over the beauty of the Giant's Castle cliffs with their sugaring of snow, first from afar but once we entered the Nature Reserve's outer gate, close enough to see the reclining giant in all its grandeur.



Gurney's Sugarbird – Rooiborssuikervoël [Elouise Kalmer]

Not that we were kept looking at the far sights, as we immediately happened upon a veritable feast of birds. Several mixed bird parties were all enjoying the first warm rays of sun on the cliffside next to the road after days of clouds and snow. We spotted any number of high-altitude birds on those last few kms to the resort, right next to the road – Ground Woodpecker (Grondspeg), Buff-streaked Chat (Bergklipwagter), Cape Rock Thrush (Kaapse Kliplyster) ... And then, suddenly, magic! Our exciting first sighting and photograph of a Bearded Vulture happened while we were still in the car, en route, on that very entry road to the Giant's Castle Rest Camp!

White-necked Raven (Withalskraai) and Cape Crows (Swartkraai) could be seen just above us, in an altercation with a giant bird: none other than the Bearded Vulture! We stopped for this spectacle and to our surprise, spotted the Vulture Hide above the contending birds, atop a cliff.

Ah, so that was the explanation for our incredible 'good luck'.

Our luck held when we inspected our accommodation. We had been allocated a lodge on the edge of the gorge at the rest camp, with a view of the valley with its river, but even better, the famous Giant, almost close enough to touch.

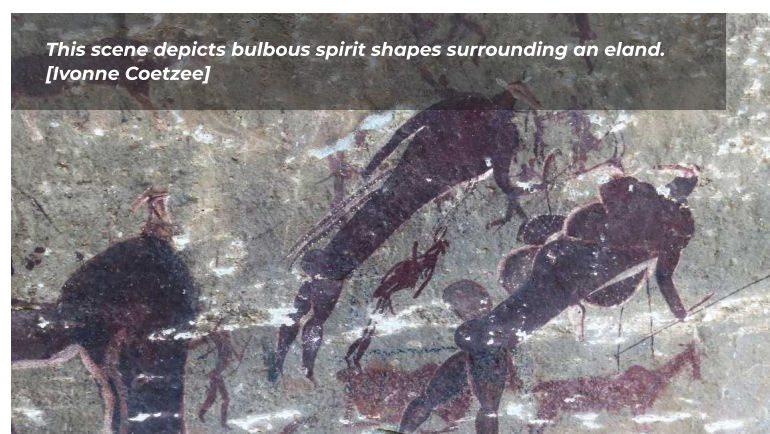
The living area had been built incorporating a huge boulder with San rock art. Authentic or not, we were delighted with our unique place, its privacy, and the fireplace where Christo, Elouise's husband, soon had a roaring fire going.

We enjoyed our first spectacular sundown, Ilse's glühwein, a hearty broth and some more wine and conversation before we staggered off to bed.

The next day, we had an equally spectacular but freezing sunrise, which we enjoyed on our patio with some of Ilse's excellent coffee brew. Here we spotted Southern Bald Ibis (Kalkoenibis) and a pair of Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk (Rooiborssperwer) flying across the valley. On our way to the first of the daily scrumptious breakfasts in the resort's restaurant, we found Sweet Waxbill (Suidelike Swie), Bokmakierie, Greater Double-collared Sunbird (Groot-rooibandsuikerbekkie), and even Gurney's Sugarbird in the gardens. Annetjie also spotted Olive Woodpecker (Gryskopspeg).

We spent the morning on a bracing hike to the Main Caves Museum. On the hike, we watched a pair of Verraux's Eagle (Witkruisarend) floating on thermals and spent time using photographs and sound clips debating the ID of a Cisticola, which was decided to be a Wailing Cisticola (Huiltinkintjie), before crossing the river and entering a patch of forest. Here, I had my only second ever sighting of a Yellow-throated Woodlands Warbler (Geelkeelsanger), a few Bar-throated Apalises (Bandkeelkleinjantjie) and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher (Bloukuifvlieëvanger).

The caves proved to be well worth the hike with Bushmen displays and truly stunning San Rock art.

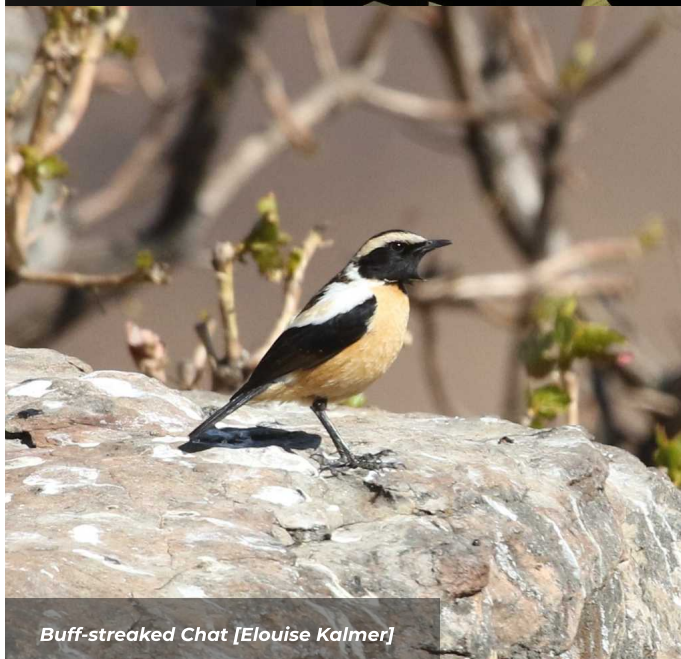


This scene depicts bulbous spirit shapes surrounding an eland. [Ivonne Coetzee]

Annetjie had booked the Vulture Hide for two successive days in the middle of our five-day stay. The Parks official handed her the keys the day before and encouraged us to be at the hide by 6:00 at daybreak, so as not to miss the vultures. A container with bones would have to be picked up before we started the 7 km 4x4 road up to the Vulture Hide. Nothing could have prepared us for the spectacle of the view from up there, icy as it may have been.



The hide was roomy enough and quite comfortable, and after setting out some of the bones, we started the wait. A number of White-necked Raven, some Cape Vultures, Familiar Chat (Gewone Spekvreter), Red-winged Starlings (Rooivlerkspreu), and Buff-streaked Chat all tried for their share. Our cameras clicked away.



Then the first of many thrilling calls: “Bearded Vulture!” as it would approach in all its majesty and beauty.

An indescribable moment, to first see this bird of prey, its wingspan of almost 3 m, coming ever closer, gliding over the hide against the spectacular backdrop of the mountains and snowy cliffs. It set the adrenaline pumping, in my case, at least. One could compare it to shooting ducks, my trying to capture that flying bird on camera.

First and foremost, my modest camera’s batteries would run out much too quick if I kept my camera switched on or even by setting it on continuous shooting mode. No electricity in the hide to re-charge. So, when the cry: “Here it comes!” rang out, I would switch on my camera with trembling fingers, wasting precious seconds, and then try and focus on the flying bird, wasting more time. It would have crossed over the hide’s roof before I was even ready. This happened again and again. In the meantime, Elouise’s camera fired away in machine-gun mode, and she came away with some spectacular images.



Bearded Vulture – Baardaasvoël [Elouise Kalmer]

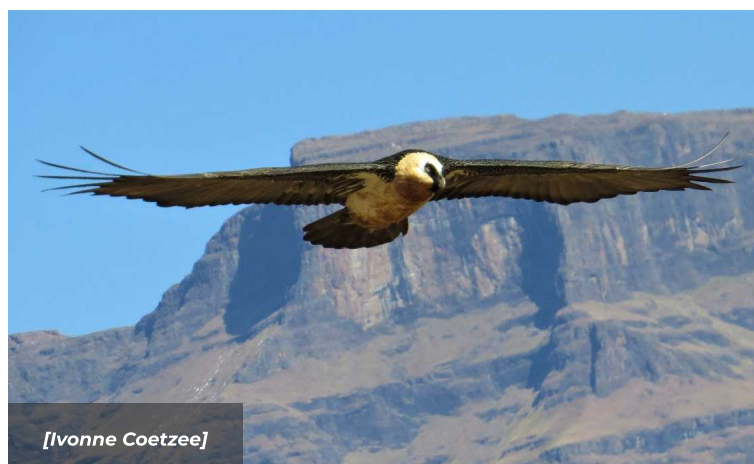


[Elouise Kalmer]

My few were much less satisfactory but enjoying the splendour of especially the vultures and the interaction of the various other species and the drama of the landscapes more than made up for this.

The hide was built overlooking a long stretch of grass and rocks on a cliff where the bones were put out, which would lend us the opportunity to take photographs when the Bearded Vultures would land to pick up the bait. But as for actually landing, our Bearded Vultures just would not, despite countless photographs in the media proving that this does happen.

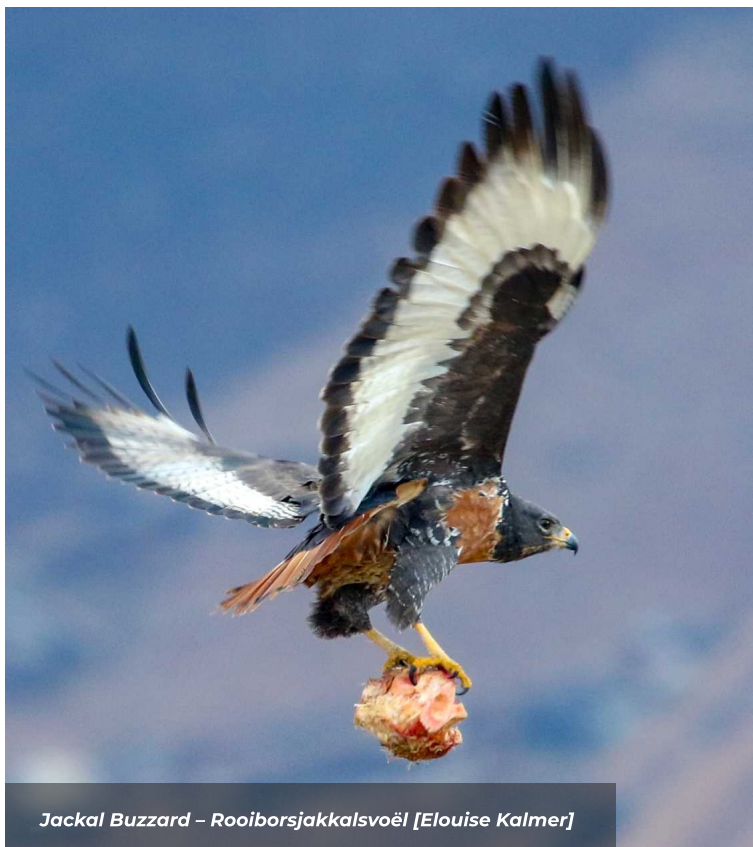
On the second day in the hide, I chose a lower chair and managed to track the flying Vultures more easily, getting a few photographs of the kind that might be called: ‘habitat shots’. But one just couldn’t go wrong, not with that awe-inspiring scenery and those breath-taking fly-bys. At least three different adults and one, or possibly two, juvenile Bearded Vultures were seen on the two days during numerous flights over our hide, sometimes soaring high amongst the clouds or over far-away peaks, sometimes even gliding right below our cliff-top hide to pick up fragments of bone that had been pushed by raven, or which were dropped by Cape Crows when the chunks of meat they scrounged, became too heavy.



[Ivonne Coetzee]



[Ivonne Coetzee]



Jackal Buzzard – Rooiborsjakkalsvoël [Elouise Kalmer]

Yet, the most spectacular display of these two unforgettable days at the hide might just possibly belong to a Jackal Buzzard, which managed to carry away such a weighty chunk of meaty bone that did not seem feasible.

Elouise managed to capture this in her prize-winning photograph.

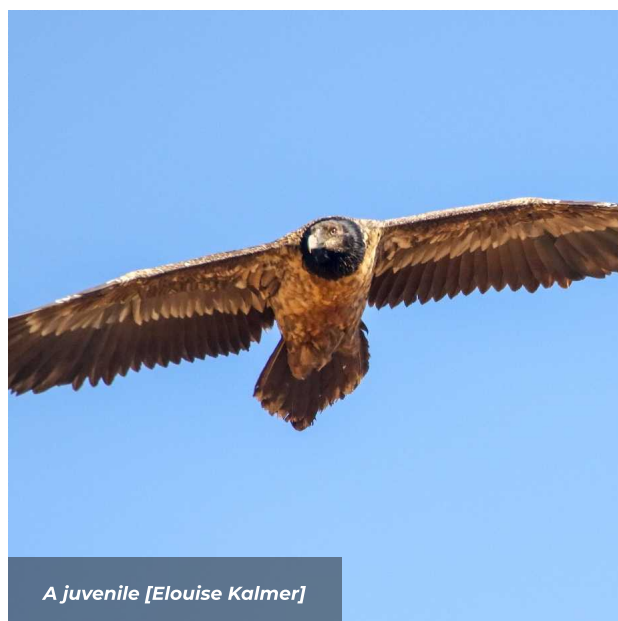
I must be honest, we just couldn't sacrifice those sumptuous breakfasts, and Christo, Elouise's husband, patiently fetched us up and down twice daily at 9 o'clock to enjoy a break in front of the cosy fire in the restaurant after the early freezing dawns up on the cliff-side. Then up back to the hide we would go, for more thrills and spills, hot chocolate, cheese, and biscuits to keep us going. We enjoyed some walks up there on the plateau, checking cliffs for nesting holes, alpine flora, and lichen on the rocks.

We would go birding the gardens in what was left of the afternoons, picking up Terrestrial Brownbul (Boskrapper), Forest Canary (Gestreepte Kanarie), Rock Kestrel (Kransvalk), and Red-throated Wryneck (Draaihals). A group of eland against the burnt mountainside made for spectacular photographs.

Evenings around Christo's fires with glühwein, hearty shared meals and experiences were cut short, despite conversation and laughter – we were exhausted by all the excitement, fresh air and hikes and would sink in our beds around eight.

By the end of our stay, temperatures had become mild, the snow on the mountains had all but melted, and we had had been spoiled with amazing sights and scenery. We could return home content and with the satisfaction of a dream fulfilled, in a way that had surpassed our expectations.

- Ivonne Coetzee



A juvenile [Elouise Kalmer]



Ilse and Annetjie enjoying a cup of breakfast coffee on the restaurant veranda [Ivonne Coetzee]

VAGRANTS - AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH CITIZEN SCIENCE

VAGRANTS – An alternative approach to reduce opinion, speculation, and conjecture

I have found the commentary by Trevor and Derek on the life history of White-breasted Waterhens interesting and applaud the effort put into the literature review entailed. However, with regards to the potential origin of the individual bird recently found near Tzaneen, and for that matter of many vagrant individual birds found in Southern/South Africa, I think we need to take a step back and consider the biological relevance.

What is meaningful for conservation biology purposes is to have an inventory of the avifauna of a biogeographical region.

This is useful for understanding species richness, biodiversity communities and ecosystem management approaches.

The currency for this is largely taxon based and often at the species level, although sub-species may also be important. In any event, to engage with species richness and avian community representation in a rigorous manner we need only to consider functional species present.

The temporary occurrence of individuals from species which do not otherwise occur in the region is largely irrelevant. That is whether they are rare vagrants or escapees.

Although their occurrence may be fascinating and should be recorded in case their occurrence status changes in the long term, they should not be included in the biodiversity assessment of any region. I thus suggest that both for conservation biology and listing purposes there should be two separate lists – one for functional species and one for vagrants.

The functional species are relatively easy to determine, including residents, regular migrants, established wild breeding populations of introduced/escaped species and even extralimital species, such as the Yellow-throated Leafloves and Angola Cave Chats in northern Namibia for a Southern Africa list. The single Ross's Turaco near Rundu is questionable.

The vagrants should include species which occur only as occasional individual records. The debate around whether these individuals occur because of natural self-movement or as escapees can then be given consideration.

A somewhat more rigorous approach to this debate rather than speculation and conjecture might be to use stable isotope or other tested approaches to investigate their origin. But at the end of the day the occasional occurrence of single individuals of a species should not be regarded as a functional component of biodiversity.

Can I end by reiterating that I think it would be beneficial to separate the listing of functional species from vagrants for the presentation of Southern / South African avian biodiversity / species richness. This should also be reflected in both the compilation of bird field-guide books and for personal listing purposes.

I am also baffled why the birds of Marion Island are included in the South Africa avian species richness list, surely birds don't carry passports. I hope my comments offer a broader biologically based approach to listing and thereby reduce the importance of opinion, speculation, and conjecture. Perhaps the rarities committee could consider convening a workshop of interested parties to interrogate these issues and to develop an appropriate bird listing protocol for Southern / South Africa.

- Dr R.M. Little

Trustee: Wild Bird Trust

Board: Mabula Ground Hornbill Project

Africa representative: IUCN SSC Galliformes Specialist Group

Retired: FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, UCT

BLNG - RINGERSHOEKIE CITIZEN SCIENCE



Elba Swart met haar Feevlieëvanger

Wonderboom NR (Madeleen van Loggerenberg) - 3 Junie

Sewe A-ringers en Johan van Loggerenberg het die vroeë wintersoggend aangedurf. Die pad wat aan die suidekant deur die reservaat loop, was pragtig oopgesny, wat nette opslaan redelik maklik gemaak het.

Op hierdie koue Saterdag is 116 voëls hanteer (25 spesies), waarvan 110 nuut gering is en daar was ses hervangste, wat 5,2% verteenwoordig.

Die kampioene van die dag was die ou staatmakers, veertien Geelbeklysters (Karoo Thrush), veertien Gewone Janfrederikke (Cape Robin-Chat) en 13 Swartoogtiptolle (Dark-capped Bulbul).

Die vangs van die dag was 'n Feevlieëvanger (Fairy Flycatcher), wat Elba as verjaarsdag geskenkie van Arrie ontvang het. Dankie Elba, vir die heerlike eetgoed wat ons kon geniet.

Nog 'n hoogtepunt was die Gevlekte Vleikuiken (Buff-spotted Flufftail) wat vroeg oggend in die reservaat geroep het, die spesie is ook tydens die ring van 4 Februarie 2023 in die reservaat gehoor, definitief 'n spesie om voor uit te kyk met toekomstige ring-uitstappies daar.

Die hervangs van die dag was CA38224, 'n Suidelike Waterfiskaal-wyfie (Southern Boubou). Oorspronklik gering op 26 Oktober 2019 deur Janine, toe weer gevang deur Madeleen op 3 Oktober 2020 en nou weer deur Elba Swart ge'retrap'. Ongelukkig was daar ook 'n negatiewe voorval, toe Pieter du Plessis se 'speaker' by die net gesteel is. Dankie vir 'n heerlike oggend en almal wat dit meegemaak het.

Moreleta Kloof NR (Hein Bantjes) - 19 Augustus

Baie dankie vir 'n lekker ringsessie. Vertrou julle het dit net so geniet. Ons het in totaal 223 voëls hanteer waarvan 43 (19.3%) hervangste was; aantal spesies was 24. Die Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) het weer eerste gekom met 132 voëls.

Dit was 'n lekker besige oggend. Daar het 'n paar interessante 're-traps' uitgekom,

Die twee oudste 're-traps' van dieselfde jaar, 2014, was 'n Swartkeelgeelvink (Southern Masked Weaver) wat die 5de April 2014 gering is deur Rion Lerm, deur Marlien Bantjes by dieselfde koördinate nege jaar en ongeveer twee maande later weer hanteer, asook 'n Rooivink (Southern Red Bishop) wat die 1ste November 2014 gering is deur myself, en weer hanteer is deur Janine Goosen by dieselfde koördinate agt jaar en ongeveer nege maande later.

'Re-traps' wat al die meeste kere hanteer is sedert die eerste keer wat hy/sy 'n ring gekry het, was 'n Gewone

Janfrederik (Cape Robin-Chat) wat al, insluitend die eerste keer, sewe keer weer gevang is — die eerste keer in 2018.

'n Ander 're-trap' wat die tweede meeste kere hanteer is sedert die eerste keer wat hy/sy 'n ring gekry het, was ook 'n Gewone Janfrederik wat al, insluitend die eerste keer, vyf keer gevang is, die eerste keer in 2017, dus 'n ouer 're-trap' as die vorige Gewone Janfrederik.

'n Ander interessante vangs was 'n Swartkeelgeelvinkmannetjie (Southern Masked Weaver) wat die eerste keer by Moreleta Kloof NR gering is op die 22ste Januarie 2022 deur Martin Steyn, toe 'n draai by die Botaniese Tuine gaan maak het, waar hy die 2de April 2022 van dieselfde jaar weer deur Martin hanteer is, en nou weer terug is by Moreleta waar Marlien Bantjes hom hanteer het op die 19de Augustus 2023.

Interessante spesies was Feevlieëvanger (Fairy Flycatcher), Bandkeel- en Rooikopvink (Cut-throat and Red-headed Finch), Kaapse Wewer (Cape Weaver), Oranjeborsboslaksman (Orange-breasted Bushshrike), Swartkroontjagra, (Black-crowned Tchagra) en Suidelike Waterfiskaal (Southern Boubou).

Uit die tabel blyk dit dat in Januarie 2022 die meeste Swartkeelgeelvinke op 'n oggend gering is. In Maart 2020 was 76% van die dag se vangste Swartkeelgeelvinke.

Ubali, Bynespoort, Pretoria (Marina Pienaar) - 26 Augustus

Marina het 'n ringdemonstrasie by hierdie oord aangebied vir die publiek. A-ringers, Nanet Pieters en Reinhardt Fowler het haar gaan help.

Die publiek was gaande oor die 24 voëlstaafte verskillende spesies — wat hulle gevang het. Dit het spesies ingesluit soos Vleiloeie (Burchell's Coucal), drie lyster spesies soos Geelbek-, Rooibek- en Gevlekte Lyster (Karoo, Kurrichane and Groundscraper Thrush) en twee vlieëvangerspesies naamlik Swart- en Fiskaalvlieëvanger (Southern Black and Fiscal Flycatcher).

Botaniese Tuine (Arrie Kloppe) - 2 September

On a dry and dusty morning on the second day of September 2023, with the promise of spring in the air, we deployed our nets in the Pretoria National Botanical Gardens with high hopes. With some exciting species calling around us, like Brown-backed Honeybird (Skerpbekheuningvoël) and Red-throated Wryneck (Draaihals), the chance to ring one of them pumped through our veins. But from the first round it was clear that it is a day of mixed results, at least some of the nets delivered every round.

From all my visits this was by far the lowest number of birds (108) and species (20) we captured in the gardens. Based on the overall trends the "spring" ringing event tends to have lower numbers and a higher retrap rate than the autumn one.

As usual the Southern Masked-Weavers (Swartkeelgeelvink) did not hold back with 25 new rings and eight retraps. They were followed by the Dark-capped Bulbuls (Swartoogtiptol) with seven new rings and three retraps.

A Brown-crowned Tchagra (Rooivlerktjagra) is always a great bird to catch, but in my opinion the "bird of the day" is the Kurrichane Thrush (Rooibeklyster) (CA19472) retrapped for a fourth time. It was ringed as an adult in 2014 and has been around as a regular retrap since. The second oldest retrap is a Dark-capped Bulbul (Swartoogtiptol) (BE70385) ringed in 2016 and only retrapped once in 2017.



Nanet Pieters ontvang A-ringers sertifikaat met Frik d Plooy wat haar gelukwens [Wanda Louwrens]

They were followed by two 2017 ringed birds, a Kurrichane Thrush (4A85217) and a Southern Masked-Weaver (Swartkeelgeelvink) (BE87987) that were both retrapped in 2018 and they decided to visit the garden again in 2023. The last mention goes to the resident Southern Boubou (Suidelike Waterfiskaal) (CA36927) that was ringed in 2018 and now retrapped for a third time.

Several of the recently qualified ringers managed to get a few lifers on their list, and we wish them many more. David Keyter opened his account as a trainee with twelve birds from six species. Welcome David, may there be many more birds, but most importantly, enjoy the journey!

What we lacked in numbers of birds was made up with the number of visitors at the ringing station. We had a bumper day with Peter from the UK joining us at the start, followed by five more visitors at 6 o'clock and a visit from the BLNG birding group a bit later on. They all had a great time and expressed their gratitude towards the ringers' hospitality and willingness to share information.



BLNG members at the bird ringers

Bishopvoëlpark (Marina Pienaar) - 16 September

Agt A-ringers en drie C-ringers het hierdie lente-oggend benut en kom voëls ring in Wierdapark. Suné Janse van Rensburg, wat by Wits gekwalifiseer het, het kom kyk hoe ons dit in Pretoria doen en saam gering. Frans Burger en Daniël Keyter (David se broer) het vir die eerste keer by ons aangesluit. Welkom aan dié twee manne!

Ander besoekers was Wally Moll en Jonathan Wilken van die Vriende van Bishoppark, asook Wanda se suster, Louisa en swaer, Kleyntjie Kleynhans.

Die getalle was nie baie groot nie - net 71 voëls is hanteer, waarvan ses hervangste was. Dit verteenwoordig 8,5% van die voëls wat gevang is.

Die vangs van die dag was voorwaar 'n Feevlieëvanger (Fairy Flycatcher), wat Marina vir Frik du Plooy gegee het om te ring - 'n lifer vir hom!

Die spesie wat die volopste was, 31 voëls, was die Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) met dertien Gewone Mossies (Cape Sparrow) in die tweede plek.



Daniel Keyter se eerste ringessie - Bishop Bird Park

Ander mooi spesies was Grysrugkwêkwêvoël (Grey-backed Camaroptera), Rooikopvink (Red-headed Finch), Geelbeklyster (Karoo Thrush) en Kuifkophoutkapper (Crested Barbet).



Reinhardt Fowler with a female Black-backed Puffback that he ringed at Roodeplaat Nature Reserve. [Lucia Lotter]

Roodeplaat NR, Zeekoegat (Leon Lötter) - 23 September

Vier A-ringers en twee C-ringers het op 23 September 2023 by Roodeplaat Natuurreservaat se hek ontmoet vir 'n ringessie. Die samekomstyd was om 04:30 aangesien die nette 'n halfuur voor sonsopkoms reeds moes staan.

'n Totaal van 26 voëls is gering en twee hervangste is aangemeld. Van die voëls wat hanteer is, was die meeste Swartoogtiptolle (Dark-capped Bulbul) (6) en tweede meeste Gewone Janfrederikke (Cape Robin-chat) (5). 'n Geelblestinker (Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird), Rooibeklyster (Kurrichane Thrush), Bruinkopvisvanger (Brown-hooded Kingfisher), Gysrugkwêkwêvoël (Grey-backed Camaroptera), Sneeuwal (Black-backed Puffback), Mikstertbyvanger (Fork-tailed Drongo) en Bontrugwewer (Village Weaver) is ook gering. Lucia Lötter, 'n A-ringer, het selfs 'n Gewone Tarentaal (Helmeted Guineafowl) in haar net gevang en gering. Tarentale is redelik groot en kan maklik 'n net beskadig, maar die net was gelukkig hierdie keer ongeskonde. Interessant is dat geen Swartkeelgeelvink (Southern Masked Weaver) gevang is nie — 'n voël wat gewoonlik volop is by ringessies.

'n Waterfyskaal (Southern Boubou) en Gewone Janfrederik (Cape Robin-chat) is hervang. Interessant van die Gewone Janfrederik (Cape Robin-chat) is dat dit oorspronklik op 4 Augustus 2018 by die Botaniese Tuine gering is en moontlik omtrent vyftien kilometer moes vlieg tot by Roodeplaat oor die vyf jaar tydperk.

Lephalale, D'Nyala NR (Arrie Kloppe) - 1-5 Oktober

Arrie het 'n projek geregistreer om bloedmonsters by verskillende voëlspesies te neem vir genetiese toetse. Hy het lede van die ringgroep genooi om te gaan help met nette opsit en om voëls te ring by hierdie natuurreservaat. Sy vrou, Ronell, Leon en Lucia Lötter, Frik du Plooy en Wanda Louwrens het hom vergesel.

Op 'n warm droë maanbeligte "lente" oggend begin ons die versameling in die middel van die bos met geen idee wat om te verwag nie. Teen 9 uur moet die nette af, want die hitte van die dag is vinnig besig om ondraaglik te word. Maar ons is tevrede met 'n goeie begin van 28 voëls, 12 spesies, vir die oggend.

Die hoogtepunt, die Dubbelbandsandpatrys (Double-banded Sandgrouse), een van Lucia se vele 'lifers' vir die paar dae. Die volgende oggend is daar 'n groot verandering in die weer, egter nie vir die beste nie en die wind waai ons en die voëls weg vir die dag. Na 'n harde dag van voëls lok met sappige wurms het ons net twee voëls, van 2 spesies, om te wys vir al ons moeite.

Dag 3 begin somer baie beter en met die nette naby water is daar hoop.

Die Bontkiewiete (Blacksmith Lapwing) kan nie die wurms weerstaan nie, maar uiteindelik kon ons net die helfte van hulle vang. Driebandstrandkiewiete (Three-banded Plover) trek egter duidelik hulle neuse op vir sappige wurms en het draaie om die traps geloop - so leer ons. Verder was daar genoeg voëls van 'n lekker klomp spesies om ons besig te hou. 'n Grootlangtoon (African Jacana) en 'n Waaiertertvlieëvanger (Grey Tit Flycatcher), is die sterre vir die dag.

In totaal 34 voëls gering, 17 spesies. Die aand se Donkernaguil (Freckled Nightjar) in die kamp, was vir seker een van die hoogtepunte vir die paar dae in die bos.

Die laaste oggend ring ons by Tsetsebe-pan, met 'n vinnige 29 voëls wat gering is, 12 spesies.

Weereens is dit die Dubbelbandsandpatryse (Double-banded Sandgrouse) wat die hoogtepunt is.

Ongelukkig was ons nie suksesvol om enige voëls, wat voorheen by D'Nyala gering is, weer te vang nie, maar ek is seker daar vlieg nog 'n paar rond.

Maar ons doel van die paar dae in die droë bos was om bloed te versamel van voëls en met 49 monsters van 28 spesies was dit 'n heel suksesvolle uitstappie.

Baie dankie vir almal se bydrae tot die projek, dit word baie waardeer!



Arrie Klopper het hierdie collage saamgestel uit voëls wat by D'Nyala NR gering is en waarvan hy bloedmonsters geneem het vir genetiese toetse.

CLUB RARITIES

Regional and Local Rarities and interesting sightings

When considering the amazing rarities and special sightings reported in our region the past four months, we cannot but feel extremely fortunate to live here. A few birders have managed to reach the magic count 400 of different species seen in Wider Gauteng, but the number of rarities reported and seen by many twitchers afterwards surely may be regarded as extraordinary.



Lesser Jacana / Dwerglangtoon [Elandré Scherman]

A Lesser Jacana was found on a pan on a private property near Bapsfontein on 31 July and drew several birders. (JRN, SR)

Pink-billed Lark / Pienkbeklewerik [Marlou Schalkwyk]

A Grey-backed Sparrow-lark, White-bellied Bustard, Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, and Pink-billed Larks were found on Boons Road and photographed by Marlou Schalkwyk. (DN, MS)

Swee Waxbill and Mountain Wagtail

Deale's Rock in the Wilgerivier Valley had Swee Waxbill and Mountain Wagtail early August. (TS)

Black-bellied Bustard and Martial Eagle

Ezemvelo delivered besides Black-bellied Bustard also a Martial Eagle (Breëkoparend). (CH). Two Martial Eagles were recorded at Suikerbosrand as well. (TS)



Slaty Egret / Rooikeelreier [Hannes Swanepoel]

The Slaty Egret returned to Walkhaven Dog Park at Muldersdrift and continuous to draw birders. (SR)

Black Stork / Grootswartooievaar [Ivonne Coetzee]

Two Black Stork were at a dam on DeWagon Drift Game Farm near Dinokeng mid-August. (IC).



Rufous-bellied Heron / Rooipensreier [Astrid Pretorius]

Dinokeng also delivered a great record of a Rufous-bellied Heron at Kwalata Game Lodge on 15 August. (AP)



Grey Penduline Tit / Gryskapokvoël [Pieter Verster]

A Grey Penduline Tit was photographed en route to Mkhombo dam. (PV)



Ruddy Turnstone / Steenloper [Ivonne Coetzee]

With winter changing to spring, interesting movements of species were seen with a Ruddy Turnstone turning up near Rietvlei Sailing Club (JK).



Sweet Waxbills / Suidelike Swie [Ivonne Coetzee]

A surprise find by Ilse Müller was a pair of Sweet Waxbills in suburban Pretoria at a spring on the slope of the Magalies, which entertained local birders the next few days.



Black Saw-wing / Swartsaagvlerkswael [Ivonne Coetzee]

A week later, two Black Saw-wings seen and photographed at the same locality caused a stir amongst local birders. (IC)



Common Cuckoo / Europese Koekoek [Elouise Kalmer]

A number of birders were entertained by a Common Cuckoo at Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden mid-October.

Of interest were the **Curlew Sandpipers** seen at Marievale (CH) and **Leeupan, Pygmy Geese** and **Wire-tailed Swallows** and **Common Tern** at Mkhombo Dam (PV, EM, DK) **Yellow-bellied Greenbul** in Dinokeng (DN) and Derdepoort Regional Park (MB) and a **Southern Bald Ibis** near Krugersdorp at Brandvlei. (PY)

Mabusa delivered besides **Black-bellied and White-bellied Bustards**, also multiple **Grey-headed Kingfishers** on 21 Oct. (DN)

An exciting sighting, independently reported by two experienced birders, was that of an adult **Bateleur** flying over Elardus Park and Colbyn on 25 October. (MvR, RN)



Grey Plover / Grysstrandkiewiet [Lloyd Nelson]

A Grey Plover was spotted at Bronkhorstspuit Dam early November. (LN)

White-backed Night Heron

A White-backed Night Heron sighted on 6 November at the second bridge at Mabusa established this NR as one of the top “rarities” destinations in or near Gauteng.(TS)

Narina Trogon, Red-capped Robin-Chats, Swee Waxbill and Olive Woodpecker

Wilgeriviervallei lived up to its good reputation when a pair of Narina Trogon, two Red-capped Robin-Chats, Swee Waxbill and an Olive Woodpecker were found at Deale’s rock 18 November. (PV).



Green Sandpiper [Lance Robinson]

A Green Sandpiper drew a number of birders when it was found at Helderberg Estates near Fourways on 18 November. (LR)

Thick-billed Cuckoo [Yoricka van der Merwe]

The Friends of Magalies hiking trail, produced a mouth-watering rarity when Yoricka van der Merwe photographed a stunning Thick-billed Cuckoo on her home patch on 25 November.

Eurasian Hobby [Glen Barnes]

One birder, Glen Barnes, was rewarded with a juvenile Eurasian Hobby on The Friends of Magalies hiking trail.

Observers / Waarnemers:

Justin Rhys Nicolau (JRN)	Ivonne Coetzee (IC)	John Kinghorn (JK)
Doug Newman (DN)	Etienne Marais (EM)	Michael van Riel (MvR)
Celia Human (CH)	Marlou Schalkwyk (MS)	Ryan Nawn (RN)
Tristan Spurway (TS)	Astrid Pretorius (AP)	Deaan de Kock (DK)
Selwyn Rautenbach (SR)	Pieter Verster (PV)	Lloyd Nelson (LN)
Celia Human (CH)	Philip Yiannakou (PY)	Lance Robinson (LR)

This column is mainly concerned with observations of rarities and interesting sightings made in the Greater Gauteng region, defined as being 100km from the centre of both Johannesburg and Pretoria. While the majority of records are included it is sometimes necessary to exclude some depending on whether the subject matter has already been well reported. Most records are sourced from reports on the internet or dedicated social media forums.

- Ivonne Coetzee

CLUB COMPETITION

Competition / Kompetisie 4 – Answers / Antwoorde (Laniarius July 2023)

WHAT DO THESE KRUGER BIRDS HAVE IN COMMON?

Answer: They are Kruger's BIG SIX to search for and tick. Everyone knows about the Big Five, but these Big Six are the birder's goal to find in Kruger.

Patrick O' Brien won first prize with the correct answer after his first two tries were close:

- All six are the largest of their species.
- All six are endangered.



CAPTION THIS / GEE 'N BYSKRIF

THREE winning captions share first place:

- "It must have been a HUGE one!" - Anneke van Heerden:
- "Mamba on board!" - Laura Jordaan
- "The eagle has landed." - Attie Hartsliet



Competition / Kompetisie 5

What do all of these species have in common, except that they can fly? / Wat het al hierdie voëls in gemeen?

Solution to lanariuseditor@blng.co.za or WhatsApp to **082 052 7402**



All photographs by M Buys en I Coetzee

Competition / Kompetisie 5

Caption this:

Caption to laniauseditor@blng.co.za or WhatsApp to **082 052 7402**



Picture taken on Zaagkuil drift road

LANIARIUS NEW MEMBERS: JULY TO OCTOBER 2023

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.*

Annette van der Merwe	Leeuwfontein, Kameeldrif-Oos
Rulien & Michael Erasmus	Magalieskruin
Pieter du Toit	Waterkloof Ridge
Marlou Schalkwyk	Petersfield Ext, Springs
Mari Pretorius	Menlo Park
Carmen Pöhl	Mooikloof
Frans Burger	Wonderboom
Candace Kotze	Valhalla
Elmien & Willem le Roux	Groenkloof
Anna-Marie Steyn	Die Wilgers
Riaan Janse van Rensburg	Florida Glen, Roodepoort

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Con & Beverley Fauconnier	August 2023
Wilhelmina & Willem le Roux	September 2023

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Rust de Winter

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