



Laniarius

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SOUTH AFRICA

Giving Conservation Wings

2024 KOMITEE

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FROM THE EDITOR

How to explain...?

A few of us close friends were busy birding, early January. Our purpose: kicking off the year's birding with a Home Pentad Birding Bash. We were discussing how difficult it seemed to explain to long-suffering family members exactly why we were, once again, going to bird the regular stamping grounds of our home patch. Why, of all things, were we once again getting up just after 4 am, packing birding gear, charged cell phones and camera batteries, and this just to see the same birds we had seen a gazillion times before! Why hike, again, on the mountain behind our home. Or wading through knee-high wet grass, being bitten by bugs. How on earth could that be so exciting? We laughed, repeating some choice phrases directed at us, but agreed on a few contributing factors:

Number One: Blame it on BirdLasser!!

Trusting that many members who attended our first club meeting in January, where Ernst Retief explained how BirdLasser revolutionised one's birding, are now using it and discovered just how addictive it is: seeing your Year List grow, comparing it to previous year's totals. And, once you start participating in BirdLasser challenges, new horizons open! Your Pentad totals, Provincial totals, city totals and other challenges stoke that excitement.

Number Two: To quote Adam Cruickshank:

It is like a thrilling treasure hunt in nature. Blame it on the breathtaking beauty of an Orange-breasted or Grey-headed Bushshrike or the fanned tail of a displaying Cape Robin-chat; discovering nests of several species of breeding birds in one's garden, seeing the crop of youngsters being fed by their dedicated parents, or the thrill of trying to identify a raptor suddenly soaring above the suburb. Or learning new, interesting facts about birds. It is as exhilarating as opening a series of presents, never knowing when and what it will be.

Number Three: Blame it on the excitement

of discovering a rarity yourself or checking up on some unusual sighting reported by others in our pentads. Other birders on our home patch also seemed to make the most of the last few days of freedom before the start of the official work of the new year. In this way, the pair of Greater Painted Snipe, the Booted Eagle, and even a Green Sandpiper were discovered and reported in the first week of the year – provincial rarities right on our home patch! A local birder displayed spectacular photographs of a Buff-spotted Flufftail taken in our city. Or, not even a rarity, but what a thrill to see not one, but two Little Bitterns on the dam in our pentad, to hear the resident Finfoot's coughs, and see a European Honey Buzzard in flight.



Ivonne - Editor

Number Four: After weeks of unrelenting rain, wind and cold on the coast

or other expensive, far-flung holiday destinations, you suddenly enjoy Gauteng's temperate climate, lovely sunshine, and, above all, the intense greens of the lush grass and trees on our mountain slope, the spectacular freshness of a sunrise, or a far vista over the city.

Number Five: Going birding on your own, alone with your thoughts, emotions and sensations.

This might be needed after the busy holiday season with friends and extended family, socials, get-togethers, or even hard farewells. Nothing mends and exhilarates the soul as this meditation in nature; seeing the scarce Mountain Rheebuck unconcernedly silhouetted against our ridge, noticing the smallest jewel-like flowers at your feet, or the freedom of a bird's flight, the joyous morning chorus. And the lushness of nature, right now. You return home, completely rejuvenated by a spiritual communion with nature.

I think the most important quality in a birdwatcher is a willingness to stand quietly and see what comes. Our everyday lives obscure a truth about existence – that at the heart of everything there lies a stillness and a light.

(Lynn Thomson, *Birding with Yeats: A Mother's Memoir*.)

FROM THE CHAIR

The highlight of the BLNG AGM on 13 February was Mark Anderson's presentation on Saving Marion Island's Seabirds.

Through the Mouse-Free Marion Project, Birdlife South Africa aims to eradicate invasive mice, restoring the island's ecosystem and protecting its biodiversity.

This project, crucial for 19 of the 28 seabird species, including the Wandering Albatross, marks Birdlife South Africa's most significant conservation effort.

Don't miss the opportunity to join the Flock to Marion 2025 event from January 24th - 31st, 2025, and be part of this vital conservation effort while getting to know our seabirds and the birding community.

We're pleased to announce that BLNG is financially stable and experiencing growth with a steady influx of new members!

Our activity program continues to thrive, thanks to strong member support. To enhance communication, we've launched a vibrant monthly newsletter called BLiNG WiNGS.

This publication shares feedback and highlights from outings and events, while also showcasing stunning photos from our talented club photographers. BLNG remains dedicated to conservation through citizen science initiatives.

Our program includes various atlassing activities as well as the BLNG Birdlasser Challenge.



The recent Rooiwal Pentad Bash helped members engage practically with SABAP atlassing and BirdLasser, logging 165 birds across different habitats in the pentad for submission to SABAP.

Additionally, BLNG has raised objections against the proposed Corobrick coal mining adjacent to Rietvlei Nature Reserve, citing its potential adverse effects. We urge all members to support this objection by signing the petition.

BLNG boasts a robust Bird Ringing group, comprising 31 active A-ringers and 6 new C-ringers undergoing practical training.

A member of the bird ringing team is currently conducting a project aimed at determining the DNA of birds through genetic testing. This involves extracting blood samples from the birds being ringed for analysis.

We extend our gratitude to all members, leaders, committee, and sub-committee members for their contributions in making BLNG an exceptional and thrilling birding club.

ELOUISE KALMER

LANIARIUS - APRIL 2024

CONTENTS

CLUB ACTIVITIES

PAGE

Editorial / Redaksioneel

Chairman's Report / Voorsittersverslag

Presidential Address 1

CAMPS

Wakkerstroom 2 - 6

Deale's Rock 7 - 8

Combretum 9 - 10

Mozambique 11 - 16

CONSERVATION

BLSA BOTY 17 - 19

163 Vultures relocated 20 - 22

TRAVELOGUE

Enchanting Namibia 23 - 28

BEST OF BLNG

Birds of Northern Namibia 29 - 30

CITIZEN SCIENCE

The last Secretarybird in Gauteng 31

BLNG-ringershoekie 32 - 38

RARITIES REPORT 39 - 42

COMPETITIONS

Competition 6 43 - 44

BLNG MATTERS 45

ADVERTISEMENTS 46

PRESIDENTS ADDRESS

PHILIP CALINIKOS

Dear Members

I would like to dedicate this, my first President's address, to the memory of Andre Marx whose life was tragically taken away from him last year.

It is the President's prerogative to select whatever topic he wishes to cover in this address. I have decided to focus on something that emanated from the Covid-19 pandemic that we experienced a few years ago. During the pandemic we were subjected to many irritating bureaucratic rules and regulations that we can only laugh about today. We also had to endure a number of lockdowns which varied in severity, the first of which commenced on 27 March 2020 and lasted for just over a month.

The first lockdown was particularly harsh for us as birders, being confined as we were to our residential properties and having only birds in the immediate vicinity to see. Birdlasser launched the first of a number of lockdown challenges and the results were staggering. Across the country 648 different species were recorded with the highest individual tally being 267! I managed to record a modest 81 species, but these included four raptor species, two nightjars and ten migrants.

The positive aspect of the lockdown experience was that it got me thinking about focusing my birding activities back to our local birds instead of constantly chasing around the country trying to get the highest possible annual species count.

The Friends of Colbyn Valley have been running a bird monitoring survey for some seven years now with a count held during every season of the year. The total species recorded over this period is 181. I was intrigued to see how many species could be recorded within a year in the central part of Pretoria. I discussed this with Ernst Retief and we decided to establish a challenge on Birdlasser which we called the 2023 Pretoria Old East Pentad Challenge (or the POEP Challenge for short)!

The challenge ran for calendar year 2023 and the area consisted of four adjoining pentads namely:

2540_2810: This contained the Wonderboom Nature Reserve, The Magalies Mountain Bike and Hiking Trails, Rainbow Junction and Rietondale Farm

2540_2815: This contained Derdepoort Recreation Resort, Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve, Pretoria National Botanical Gardens and University of Pretoria LC de Villiers Campus and Proefplaas

2545_2815: This contained Faerie Glen Nature Reserve, Struben Dam and Moreletakloof Nature Reserve

2545_2810: This contained Groenkloof Nature Reserve, Voortrekker Monument and Austin Roberts Bird Sanctuary. There were 32 participants that entered the challenge, and an amazing 279 species were recorded with Peter Thompson ending the year with the highest individual total of 235 species.



Some of the notable records were as follows:

2540_2810 : Black-faced Waxbill, Sweet Waxbill, Black Saw-wing, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Common Quail and Shelley's Francolin (Magalies MTB and Hiking Trails) Greater Painted-snipe, Blue-billed Teal, Red-billed Teal, Black-winged Stilt, Great Reed Warbler, Half-collared Kingfisher, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, African Swamphen and Little Bittern (Rainbow Junction) European Nightjar, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Booted Eagle, Temminck's Courser, Little Bee-eater (Rietondale Farm)

2540_2815 : African Finfoot, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Gabar Goshawk, Red-billed Firefinch, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Pearl-breasted Swallow, White-fronted Bee-eater, Black Sparrowhawk, Half-collared Kingfisher (Derdepoort Recreation Resort) Common Whitethroat, African Harrier Hawk, Long-crested Eagle, Black Sparrowhawk (Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve) Peregrine Falcon, Little Bittern, Garden Warbler, Booted Eagle, Lanner Falcon

2545_2815: African Yellow Warbler, Black Sparrowhawk, Violet-eared Waxbill (Faerie Glen Nature Reserve)

2545_2810: European Honey Buzzard (Groenkloof Nature Reserve)

We will continue with the challenge this year and I encourage any members residing in or visiting these areas regularly to please participate. It would be wonderful if we could reach the target of 300 species during 2024.

In conclusion I would like to congratulate Elouise Kalmer, our Chairperson, and her committee for the excellent way in which our Club is run and thank them for the long hours devoted to this task.

Philip Calinikos

WAKKERSTROOM, MPUMALANGA 15-18 DECEMBER 2023

CAMP

It's not uncommon to think a trip to Wakkerstroom will focus on the wonderful wetlands there. Coming as a surprise to some, Wakkerstroom birding is actually more about the rare specialties residing up in the high grasslands around the town—though it's possible to find exciting species in all the area's habitats. Thirteen BLNG members made the most of this mid-December weekend under the leadership of Angela Openshaw and BLSA resident bird guide Lucky Ngwenya, exploring grasslands far and wide with fruitful visits to the wetlands at every opportunity.

Day 1 (Friday):

After we trickled in to the BLSA centre just outside of town, the camp began with an unofficial mid-afternoon outing. We drove the short distance to the primary bridge passing over the Wakkerstroom wetlands where we warmed up with plenty of great species, one highlight of which was a Little Bittern (Kleinrietreier) which popped up and gave us fantastic views for quite a while in the late afternoon light. An African Marsh Harrier (Afrikaanse Vleivalk) hunted in the background as we looked out over the wetlands on both sides of the bridge. One particular brown bird gave us quite the run for our money, as the group debated back and forth on whether we were looking at a Squacco Heron or a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron (Gewone Nagreier). Although some might have thought the debate was settled at the time, we found it persisted as a light-hearted theme throughout the weekend! After savouring this first taste of Wakkerstroom birding, we returned to the BLSA centre for a convivial braai and to rest up for the coming day.



Squacco Heron – Ralreier
[Angela Openshaw]



Yellow-breasted Pipit
Geelborskoester [Ben Espach]

Day 2 (Saturday):

The first full day of our camp started off with a bit of a hiccup—a flat tire on the camp coordinator's car! This turned into a real opportunity for me, however, as it meant that I had the honour and privilege of chauffeuring our guide and coordinator as they took us far and wide to see the wonders of the Wakkerstroom area. We started right away with a trip to the Yellow-breasted Pipit fields to the east of town, just where Mpumalanga turns into KZN.

Along the way we easily secured our first lifer for some members of the group—an Eastern Long-billed Lark (Grasveldlangbeklewerik) perched immediately next to the road giving us an up-close-and-personal view as we listened to others calling in the distance.

The fields with our sought-after, Yellow-breasted Pipit were exceptionally misty, obscuring the view for most as we spotted one moving around in the fields and flying from time to time. Disappointed at missing the bird's bright yellow breast, we decided to move on for the moment and possibly return later in the hopes of better weather.



Lanner Falcon – Edelvalk
[Angela Openshaw]

As we passed back through town and to the north, we were lucky to see an African Snipe down in the wet grass and a Lanner Falcon (Edelvalk) staring at us from the top of an electrical pole. Then off on the R543 towards Dirkiesdorp in search of other specials. Our drives along the back roads gave us stand-out species like Common Quail (Afrikaanse Kwartel), Bokmakierie, Drakensberg Prinia / Langstertjie, Malachite Sunbird (Jangroentjie), and Red-winged Francolin (Rooivlerkpatrys). Upon reaching an ouhout thicket we paused to find Bush Blackcap which didn't disappoint, crossing over a clearing to land in some trees just next to the road. We got great looks as we listened to the Blackcap calling near us for quite some time. Not much farther down the road another lifer for some called to us from the roadside vegetation - a loud yet shy Barratt's Warbler. We jumped out to see what looks we could get, but this warbler was quite good at hiding while yelling loudly. Closer to Dirkiesdorp we passed through a wooded habitat that held the likes of African Paradise Flycatcher (Paradysvlieëvanger), Malachite Kingfisher (Kuifkopvisvanger), Dark-capped (African) Yellow Warbler (Geelsanger), and Violet-backed Starling (Witborsspreu). Our lunch break was in an interesting mixed woodland where we shared the company of Greater Honeyguide (Grootheuningwyser), Cape Grassbird (Grasvoël), Fork-tailed Drongo, (Mikstertbyvanger) and a Black Cuckoo (Swartkoekoek) that gave its less commonly heard call that reminds me of whirlwind barrelling through. Unfortunately for Jan, he managed to miss a sighting of his much-sought-after Blue Waxbills (Gewone Blousysie) again, while the rest of us enjoyed their colourful crossing of the road.



Vilette Forwood



*Bush Blackcap – Rooibektiptol
[Angela Openshaw]*

Our target after lunch was in the fields just west of Dirkiesdorp. Continuing in that direction we passed many Yellow-crowned Bishops, Cape Buntings (Rooivlerkstreekoppie), and an occasional Cinnamon-breasted Bunting (Klipstreekoppie). Just before reaching town, we turned off into green fields to the north. In front of us we saw storm clouds looming with sheets of rain showing quite clearly across the fields. In a race against the rain, we drove up into the field and turned to make our way a little lower down towards the small stream that separated the fields from the town. That's as far as we got before the rain was upon us and we had to sit it out for just about 5-10 minutes, unable to see anything beyond the hoods of our vehicles. Sooner than we expected, the rain and clouds broke and we were once again surrounded by blue skies with beautiful white clouds, streams of water running past us in the road ruts of the field. I for one wondered how we would ever find our bird with weather like this... When all of a sudden, after we had just pulled forward a little bit farther, the White-bellied Korhaan sauntered out from behind the bush under which he had sheltered from the rainstorm. What a sight to see!



*White-bellied Bustard –
Witpenskorhaan [Johan Botha]*



*Denham's Bustard – Veldpou
[Angela Openshaw]*



After working our way back out of the field through a river of muddy road, we stopped at the bridge into town to enjoy a colony of South African Cliff Swallows (Familieswael), shooting past us as they worked between their nests under the bridge and the fields along the stream. Then it was time to turn back towards Wakkerstroom.

On the return trip from Dirkiesdorp we took the main R543 road, passing by a stand-out mountain that the locals call Sinewane, meaning “Belly Button.” Close to the Belly Button we found a very special bird, the Ground Woodpecker (Grondspieg), high up on a rocky ridge on the southern side of the road. While we admired the Ground Woodpecker we heard a Black-headed Oriole (Swartkopwielewaal) in some tall trees on the northern side of the road. We observed a Nicholson’s Pipit (Nicholsonkoester) displace the Ground Woodpecker from his rocky perch before we hit the road again towards Wakkerstroom. And before we knew it we had another great sighting, as right around the bend a pair of Denham’s Bustards strode up a grassy hill and over the ridgeline as we watched.

One of the real joys of high grassland birding is spotting Southern Bald Ibises (Kalkoenibis), walking along the ground or gliding through the sky. We saw Bald Ibises a few times over the weekend. Of course it’s always a true pleasure to see Blue Cranes and Grey Crowned Cranes (Mahem), too, which we also spotted a few different times throughout the fields each day. We ended Saturday where we started, at the Yellow-Breasted Pipit fields east of Wakkerstroom, trying to get a better view than what we had had in the morning.

In the late afternoon light we saw two stately Secretarybirds (Sekretarisvoël) marching up and over the grass-covered fields. When the pipits remained elusive we passed a bit farther on, crossing into KZN briefly, where we had a Sentinel Rock Thrush (Langtoonkliplyster), two more Denham’s Bustards far off, and a Malachite Sunbird—stunning in the setting sun. With these images still in our eyes we headed back to our accommodations to enjoy another evening of chatting, trading stories, and sharing good laughs.

Day 3 - Sunday:

We started our second full day by heading southeast of town into KZN on the road to Groenvlei. Our goal was high-up farm fields known to have Rudd’s Lark (Drakensberglewierik). Along the P43, it wasn’t long before we encountered Southern Bald Ibis, Red-throated Wryneck (Draaihal), Bokmakierie, and a lifer for some—African Rock Pipit (Klipkoester) (also known as Yellow-tufted Pipit), which we heard up in the rocks above a bend in the road. In the interest of finding Rudd’s Lark as early as possible, we left the African Rock Pipit behind and proceeded on to request permission from the farmer to enter the private farm fields. There at the entrance to the farm, at Groenvlei Dam, we enjoyed Southern Bald Ibis, Pied Kingfisher (Bontvisvanger), Whiskered Tern (Witbaardsterretjie), Wite-winged Tern (Witvlerksterretjie), and White-breasted Cormorants (Witborsduiker) before passing up into the hills.

Upon entering the private farm fields at the intersection of the D154 and P43 rural roads, we came across a variety of swallows along with Ant-eating Chat (Swartpiek), Cape Longclaw (Oranjekeelkalkoentjie), Red-billed Quelea (Rooibekkwelea), Red-capped Lark (Rooikoplewierik), and Spike-heeled Lark (Vlaktelewierik), to name a few species. Around 8 am we arrived at the topmost field where we spread out to walk through the grass in the hopes of coming face-to-face with Rudd’s Lark. Surprisingly quickly we heard the larks, though they were quite elusive to the eye and we kept walking until we reached the top of the hill. We had Red-capped Lark, Spike-heeled Lark, and even Eastern Long-billed Lark as we searched. Finally a male Rudd’s Lark undertook his high-flying display just over our heads and we were able to enjoy observing this special and rare sight for some minutes before the lark dropped back down and landed in the grass. Cameras clattered during the display and after, attempting to get decent shots of this distinct-looking bird.

Flushed with success in finding the Rudd's, we walked back to our vehicles to have a celebratory snack break. We stopped once more at Groenvlei Dam to enjoy the variety of birds there, then returned to the rocky bend in the road to seek out the Rock Pipit that we had heard there. At this roadside stop the Rock Pipit obliged us with great views and clear calling, allowing us all to get to know this special little bird better. We also observed Horus Swift (Horuswindswael), Southern Bald Ibis, Buff-streaked Chat (Bergklipwagter), Drakensberg Prinia (Drakensberglangstertjie), and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting there. Our next destination was Daggakraal to the north, where we hoped to spot Pink-billed Lark (Pienkbeklewerik). Along the way we stopped at a beautiful little wetland amongst the farm fields on the P43 rural road south of Wakkerstroom where we had White-backed Duck (Witrugeend), South African Shelduck (Kopereend), Little Grebe (Kleindobbertjie), Red-collared Widowbird (Rooikeelflap), Banded Martin (Gebande Oewerswael), and African Sacred Ibis (Skoorsteenveër) amongst a variety of other species enjoying this habitat. Passing over the Wakkerstroom wetland bridge we caught a quick glimpse of African Fish-eagle (Visarend) on our way north.

As we made our way north towards Daggakraal we found out what a great spotter Vilette is—she clinched a great sighting for the group: two Blue Korhaans (Bloukorhaan) feeding in a field off to our left. I'm not sure how she caught sight of them as we drove along! They weren't easy to spot and even with the vehicles parked it took quite a lot of describing and pointing to get everyone's eyes focused on the korhaans as they walked slowly through the relatively tall grass. We enjoyed a good sit observing these two very special birds. Continuing on, Common Buzzard (Bruinjakkalsvoël) was frequent on the roadside fence posts, giving good looks as long as we didn't get too close to it. And just before our destination we had a chance sighting of Black-winged Lapwing (Grootswartvlerkkiewiet)—a lifer for many—tucked behind a wooden fence in the farm fields near the road.



Black-winged Lapwing — Grootswartvlerkkiewiet
[Johan Botha]



Sungazer Lizards — Ouvolk [Marjorie Rapp]

Around mid-afternoon we found ourselves in fields outside of Daggakraal. Despite spreading out and walking through the short grass, we didn't manage to come across the sought-after Pink-billed Lark. We did find Eastern Clapper Lark (Hoëveldklappertjie), a lifer for some, which displayed nicely for us and then gave us great views as it walked through the grass and flew low across the ground. Here we also had Spotted Thick-knee (Gewone Dikkop), Red-capped Larks, Spike-heeled Larks, Malachite Sunbird, Cloud Cisticola (Gevlekte Klopkloppie), and lots of African Pipits (Gewone Koester).

When we eventually drove away across the fields we passed by two funny looking creatures staring at the sun in complete adulation—something I had never seen before: sungazer lizards! While the lizards lacked feathers, they were still an incredibly special sight to see. The lizards, also known as girdled lizards, are threatened and losing their Highveld grassland habitat to development just as many feathered species are.

Our northern birding done, we made our way back towards Wakkerstroom. Along the route we added Mountain Wheatear (Bergwagter), another Lanner Falcon, and one particularly exciting little LBJ: the Pale-crowned Cisticola (Bleekkopklopkloppie), a lifer for some of the group. To end the day we had another pause over the Wakkerstroom wetland bridge where we enjoyed a beautiful African Marsh Harrier (Afrikaanse Vleivalk) and two Grey-crowned Cranes in the sunset light along with White-face Whistling Duck (Nonnetjie-eend), Southern Pochard (Bruineend), (the not-squacco) Black-crowned Night Heron, African Rail (Grootriethaan), and Little Rush Warbler (Kaapse Vleisanger) amongst other species.

It was a beautiful way to close out two extremely rewarding days of birding with our great guide, Lucky, and a wonderful group of BLNG members. Back at the centre we ran down the species list, reliving highlight after highlight of the camp, laughing and chatting next to the braai and around the dinner table together.

This was a camp where it felt like we worked hard and played hard, enjoying every bit of the adventure with great camaraderie.

Day 4 – Monday and return home

BLNG's December trip to Wakkerstroom was Angela Openshaw's first outing as a camp coordinator—and it was by all accounts an unequivocal success! In addition to much laughter and pleasant company, we enjoyed 152 delightful species across the weekend.

On Monday morning we dispersed with some group members taking in a few last sights on their way out of town. Individually some of us logged Black Crake (Swartriethaan), African Swampphen (Grootkoningriethaan), Purple Heron (Rooireier), and Blue-billed Teal (Gevlekte Eend).

Wakkerstroom and the surrounding area have a lot to offer when it comes to natural beauty and special birds. Especially given that it's an accessible area for Gauteng-based birders, undoubtedly some of us will make our way back there again sooner rather than later!

Marjorie Rapp



Pale-crowned Cisticola — Bleekkopkloppie
[Johan Botha]



[Angela Openshaw]



[Angela Openshaw]

DEALE'S ROCK, 26-28 JANUARY 2024

CAMP

A WEEKEND OF BIRDING: Tales from Deale's Rock.



Nestled amidst the beautiful landscapes of the Wilgerivier Valley, north of Bronkhorstspuit, lies Deale's Rock, a haven for bird enthusiasts and nature lovers alike. From 26-28 January 2024, a flock of 12 eager birdwatchers from Birdlife Northern Gauteng (BLNG) descended upon this picturesque retreat for a weekend of feathered discoveries and camaraderie.

Despite the absence of many of the sought after avian celebrities, our enthusiastic group managed to tally a count of 113 species – a testament to both our perseverance and the rich diversity of the area.

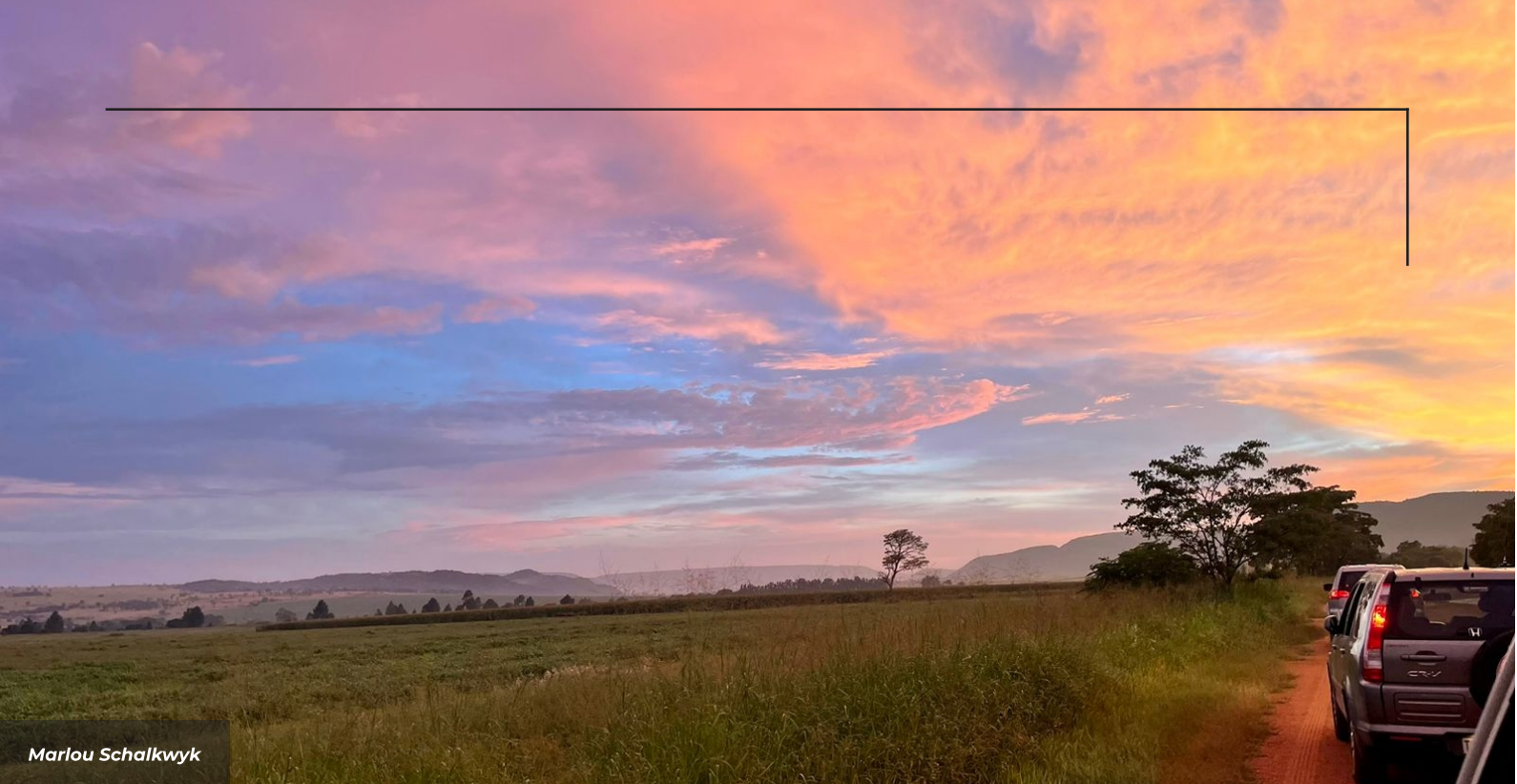
The weekend, led by Marna Buys, kicked off with a leisurely stroll at Deale's Rock that was interrupted by a brewing thunderstorm, prompting a hasty retreat.

Ah, the joys of birdwatching in unpredictable weather!

However, as we made the fire for the braai, we could hear Black Cuckoo and Yellow-bellied Greenbul calling amongst others, followed by the Fiery-necked Nightjar just as the sun set.

Undeterred by Mother Nature's theatrics, we indulged in some nocturnal owl spotting – we blame our limited success on the thunderstorm for dampening the spirits of our feathered friends. Nevertheless, the sighting of a Spotted Eagle-Owl almost fried by a bolt of lightning striking the fence he was sitting on, provided some excitement.





Marlou Schalkwyk

Saturday dawned early as we embarked on a birding expedition towards Hepzibah, greeted by the tranquil beauty of the morning. We had some good views of Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Woodlands Kingfisher, Willow Warbler, and Black Cuckooshrike on our way, followed by a lovely, relaxed walk up and down the valley, with good sightings of Bar-throated Apalis and Lazy Cisticola. Despite the lack of exciting specials, the camaraderie amongst fellow birders kept spirits soaring high. The afternoon was a leisurely affair, followed by a drive through the countryside where we saw European Bee-eaters, Pearl-breasted Swallows, and Fiscal Flycatchers among the other usual suspects. As the sun dipped below the horizon, we gathered around the braai, sharing tales of bird encounters past and present. Everyone decided to call it an early evening and headed to bed by 21:00.

Sunday morning heralded another early start as we ventured towards Renosterkop, our binoculars poised for action. Philip Calinikos took over as leader from Marna for the remainder of the morning. On the way we stopped at bird parties and had sightings of an Common Reed-Warbler and Little Rush Warbler. Renosterkop didn't deliver in terms of the Melodious Lark we were after, but the pretty views on top made up for it.

By midday, our weekend had drawn to a close, leaving us with cherished memories and a longing for more. Sure, we may have missed out on spotting those sought-after specials, but hey, there's always next time, right? In hindsight, our weekend may not have been adorned with the best sightings, but it was a testament to the joy of birdwatching – the thrill of the chase, the beauty of nature, and the bonds forged amidst feathered friends. Until next time, Deale's Rock!

Marlou Schalkwyk



Cape Longclaw – Oranjekeelkalkoentjie
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Brown Snake-Eagle – Bruinslangarend
[Marlou Schalkwyk]

NYLSVLEY / COMBRETUM PARK 23 - 26 FEBRUARY 2024

CAMP

Combretum Park Nature Reserve is a private camping site some 15 km south of Modimolle, set within a broadleaved woodland. The facilities were basic but totally adequate for our needs. It is impressive the way care was taken by the owners to leave the natural surroundings as unspoilt as possible.

On Friday we all settled in. In the afternoon Christo Venter, our guide for the weekend, took us across to the adjacent farm where a Barn Owl greeted us from an old shed. The drive through Acacia woodland with tall and lush grass cover took us to two full dams. Although very few birds were spotted on the water, the second dam at Roos Vlake yielded two adult Red-knobbed Coots which according to Christo was a very special sighting, given their scarcity in the area! Some of us were also lucky to view the African Crane amongst the Crested Francolins before it scurried off.

The next day we set off early to the Nylsvley Nature Reserve, some 40 km to the north. Vogelfontein presented itself with lots of water and very lush vegetation. The call of a Red-chested Flufftail had our hopes up for a sighting, but it remained obscured. Towards the first hide a small group of Amur Falcons were enjoying the feast of gnats in the sky, and from within the second hide we could see a very far-off Harrier swooping over the reeds.

The hoot of an African Jacana leading four little chicks along the water's edge was very endearing. Overall, the number of visible birds was disappointing, but the vastness of this unique Wetland was very impressive! After driving through some parts of the Reserve to the Jacana hide, where the Great Reed Warblers called very enthusiastically but remained hidden, we headed home for a well-deserved siesta.



Woodland Kingfisher - Bosveldvisvanger
[Amanda Gazendam]



Common Buzzard - Bruinjakkalsvoël
[Amanda Gazendam]



African Hawk Eagle - Grootjagarend
[Amanda Gazendam]



Vogelfontein [Nicole Crisp]

In the late afternoon Christo led us far and wide to show the amazing birding spots around Modimolle.

One of the many highlights was an African Hawk Eagle about to take off with powerful wingbeats from a wooden post. That evening the tone was set for the most enjoyable campfire-braai-chat-and-dinner-gatherings that was repeated with much anticipation each day.

On Sunday morning we drove quite a distance towards the little town called Settlers, along a rough but scenic farm road with many interesting stops. A large group of Black-winged Pratincoles feasting in a huge sunflower field next to the road, caused great excitement and was ticked as a lifer for many of us. Eremomelas, Larks, Cisticolas and many other species entertained us further along the way. Close to our target destination, a huge farm dam near Settlers, we nearly got bogged down in the treacherous turf. Luckily, Harry's 4x4 came to the rescue and transported us all to within walking distance of the dam wall. By then the late morning sun was very hot, and the glare off the water made it difficult to distinguish the many duck species on the water. Christo set up his spotting scope and a small group of Southern Pochards and a larger group of Spur-winged Geese were identified. We unfortunately could not identify the small raptor that took off as we approached the only large shade tree on the dam wall. Despite that, the number of sightings for the first two-and-a-half days was 158. Sunday afternoon we spent on the Modimolle golf course! On the way there, at a little bridge in town, Wire-tailed Swallows, White-throated Swallows, Striated Heron, Purple Heron, and a Little Bittern was spotted. On the golf course the melanistic Jacobin Cuckoo was a surprise, and to Christo's delight we also saw his-pentad-evading Mocking Cliff Chat. On Monday morning we birded on foot inside the Combretum nature reserve, through the woodland and along the edge of an old cropland. There we realized how many birds were not visible and yet very vocal. Christo logged many new species and was very chuffed that his species number now stands at 80 for this pentad.



[Christo Venter]



[Ilse Müller]



Striated Heron - Groenrugreier
[Amanda Gazendam]

Nylsvley, including the surroundings, is still, after all these years, a very important birding destination. During our stay, the weather conditions were very hot and dry which made for tough but rewarding birding. By 10:00 on Monday morning we had logged 172 birds! According to Christo's records, we have added species to 17 pentads of which 4 pentads had full protocol status. New records for pentad 2450_2840 were: Yellow Crowned Bishop, Pied Crow, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Black-winged Pratincole, White-backed Vulture and Pin-tailed Whydah. In Pentad 2445-2830 only the Common Quail was a new record.

Thank you to the BLNG team for organizing this great outing and to all who participated so enthusiastically. Also, a big round of applause to Christo Venter for leading us, sharing his home turf with us, and showing us all these wonderful, feathered treasures. Your enthusiasm, knowledge and dedication was inspirational!

Ilse Müller & Amanda Gazendam



Neddicky - Neddikkie
[Amanda Gazendam]



Rufous-naped Lark - Rooineklewerik
[Amanda Gazendam]



African Fish Eagle - Visarend
[Amanda Gazendam]



White-backed Vulture - Witrugasvoël
[Amanda Gazendam]

SOUTHERN MOZAMBIQUE TRIP – 15 - 27 MARCH 2024

CAMP

Overview:

Our trip started on Friday, March 15th, 2024, with an overnight stay at Mopani in Kruger National Park. On Saturday, the 16th, we crossed the border into Mozambique at Giryondo. We then drove across southern Mozambique and up north to the peninsula around Inhambane, staying at Bay View Lodge.

We birded in the Ponta da Barra and Panda forest for the next two days (17th and 18th March). After that, we went to Morrungulo, a bit further north along the coast. In this area, we focused on exploring the forests for Green Tinkerbird (19th, 20th, and 21st March). We also spent an evening exploring the palm forest close to Morrungulo Lodge.

From there, we started to make our way south towards Maputo, spending two nights at Nascido do Sol in Chizavane, north of Xai Xai. While at Nascido do Sol, we explored the surrounding coastal forests (22nd and 23rd of March). After that, we moved on to our final stop, Tan 'n Biki resort in Macaneta, but not before diligently looking for birds on the beach and floodplain in the pouring rain (24th and 25th of March).

On the 26th of March, we returned to Pretoria with a thankfully not-too-long stop at the Ressano Garcia/ Lebombo Border post. It was an incredible trip filled with many off-road adventures, wet weather, banter, and, of course, many, many birds! We were fortunate to have many photographers on the trip who captured some of the many unique species in the area.

We highly recommend this trip if you're up for some adventure, off-roading, and going off the beaten path to learn more about birds, plants, and life in Mozambique! Thank you to all the trip organisers, including our humorous and knowledgeable guide, Rob Geddes.



Lesser Jacana [Sean Naudè]



Montagu's Harrier [Sean Naudè]

Mopani Rest Camp, Kruger National Park:

We saw many water birds at the Pioneer Dam and nearby hides. One of the afternoon's highlights was seeing a Lesser Jacana walking along the lily pads and showing its characteristic wings in flight.

A needy juvenile Jacobin Cuckoo was also hounding a tired-looking Dark-capped Bulbul, and some of the group saw a Jameson's Firefinch and an African Pygmy Kingfisher roosting in the trees outside one of the chalets.

On our way to the border, we spotted Montagu's Harrier, White-backed Vulture and African Green Pigeon. We also spotted some Temminck's Coursers and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks on the open plains at Mooiplaas.



Birding at Barra [Robin Geddes]

PONTA DA BARRA (INHAMBANE) AND PANDA FOREST



Terek Sandpiper [Sean Naudè]



Great Frigatebird [Ansie Dee Reis]



Mangrove Kingfisher [Ansie Dee Reis]

Our first official day of birding was spent on the beach just a short drive from Bayview Lodge, towards the end of the Inhambane peninsula. We saw many waders, including Lesser Sand Plover and Terek Sandpiper. The day's highlight was seeing a Great Frigatebird, which we first saw in the distance above the water chasing a tern. Later, we saw (presumably) the same bird come to land in a palm tree just a stone's throw away from our accommodation! Other highlights included a close-up sighting of a Mangrove Kingfisher along the Barra boardwalk and Black-throated Wattle-eye, Brimstone Canary and Lemon-breasted Canary in and around Bay View Lodge. The next day, we left early to get to Panda Forest, about a 3-hour drive on donga-filled dirt -and potholed tar roads. Highlights of forest birding in this miombo habitat included Olive Bee-eater, a group of White-crested Helmet-Shrikes, Brown-headed Parrot, a Pale Batis, a Böhm's Spinetail, a Red-headed Weaver (unfortunately not Olive-headed), Southern Yellow White-eye and Red-backed Mannikin.

We also made a brief stop at Chicane Wetland, where we saw an African Marsh Harrier and a Rufous-bellied Heron.

On our way back to Bayview, what looked like a dove on an electrical wire turned out to be an African Cuckoo, which was unexpected. Another bird-on-a-pole we mistook for a common Pied Crow was a Dark Chanting Goshawk instead!

At this point, we started to appreciate how prolific Lizard Buzzards, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Lilac-breasted Rollers, and Isuzu bakkies are in this part of the world.



Black-throated Wattle-eye [Sean Naudè]



Olive Bee-eater [Sean Naudé]



Ready for Panda!

Morrungulo Lodge and surrounds

Now settled into our daily routine, we left Bay View Lodge to explore the baobab and other mixed forest habitats south of Vilanculos. But only after taking one last look for birds on the beach and seeing African Hobby and a juvenile Lanner Falcon in another palm tree.

Once settled at Morrungulo after negotiating the dirt road down to the beach, which had almost washed away in the recent Filipo storm, we set out to find the elusive Green Tinkerbird. No dirt road was off-limits, and we spent the next few days looking for any prime habitat. We caught a brief glimpse of “Tinkerbell” but unfortunately didn’t get a good look. However, we fortunately did get to see a few Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, Livingstone’s Flycatchers and Rudd’s Apalises.

We also spotted many Crowned and Trumpeter Hornbills flying around the baobab trees and more Böhm’s Spinetail and Mottled Spinetail. Other sideroads added birds like the Spectacled Weaver, Blue Waxbill, Collared Sunbird, and Black Sparrowhawk to our growing trip list. While in bird-spotting mode, we also saw some interesting raptors, including Ayres’s Hawk Eagle and European Honey Buzzard.

On our last evening at Morrungulo, we went on another off-road adventure to a Borassus palm forest, where we were fortunate to spend some time with the resident Collared Palm Thrushes. We also saw a Green-backed Woodpecker, a Grey-headed Bush-Shrike, some more Black-backed Puffbacks and a few cute Grey Waxbills. We lost one of the number plates in one of the deep dongas/river but returned to the lodge otherwise unscathed.



Mottled Spinetail [Sean Naudé]



Birding in the tropics [Annetjie Barkhuizen]



Livingstone’s Flycatcher [Ansie Dee Reis]



Rudd’s Apalis [Sean Naudé]



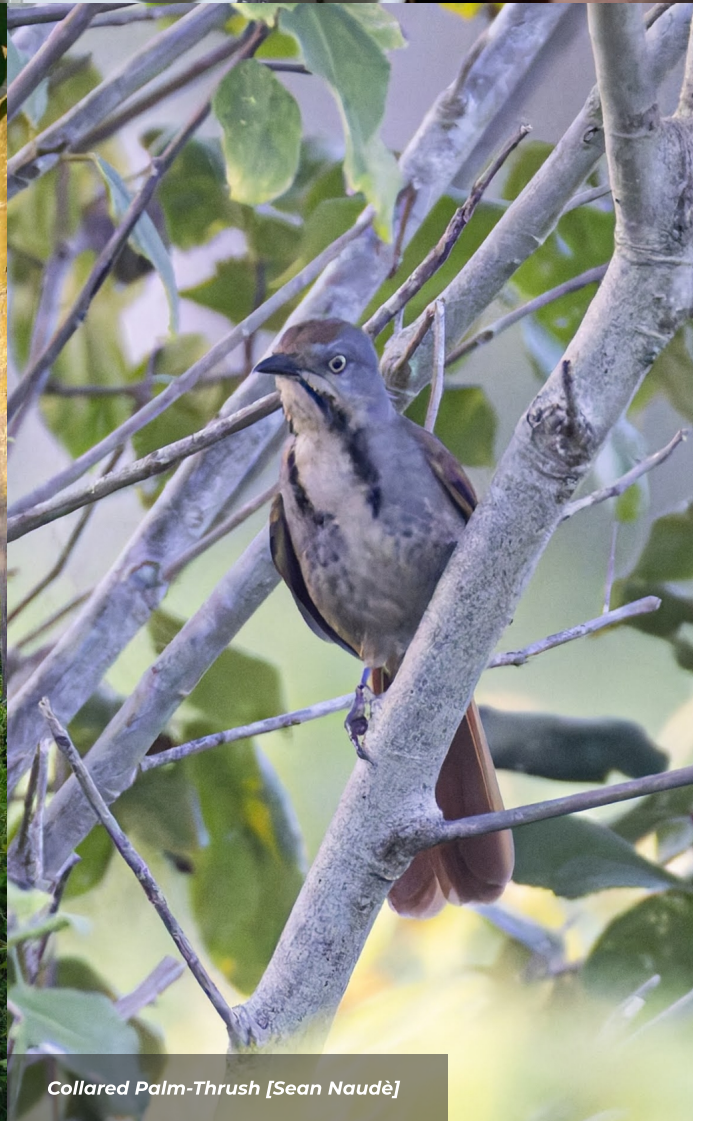
Borassus Palm Forest [Liesl de Swardt]



Barra fare [Elouise Kalmer]



Borassus Palm Forest [Annetjie Barkhuizen]



Collared Palm-Thrush [Sean Naudè]

Nascer do Sol, Chizavane:

After another morning of driving, we arrived at Chizavane and stopped at one of the in-shore lakes at the dunes. We saw African Pygmy Geese, White-backed Ducks, and other waterbirds. A highlight on the first evening included seeing a Square-tailed Nightjar on the sand road on the way back from the Zona Braza restaurant.

The following day, we explored the area and had some brilliant sightings on our way to the main road, including the Swynnertonii subspecies of Red-necked Spurfowl, a Black Saw-wing, and a Shikra (in yet another palm tree).

We also managed to spot a Grey Sunbird and some other forest birds while adventuring into the coastal scrub. Many female Purple-banded Sunbirds were also flitting in and around the tree canopy above busy nests of fire ants and massive flying ant-lions. A cute painted reed frog was also spotted on a pole and seen in multiple shades of camouflage.

Tan 'n Biki, Macaneta (Maputo):

The last stretch of our trip began with waking up to no power at Nascer do Sol and a rainstorm, which was still going strong when we arrived in Maputo, where we met up with another bird fundi, Dave Minney.

In the downpour, we managed to spot the Greater Sand Plover in and amongst some other waders, as well as Grey-headed and Kelp Gulls. As the rain continued, the group split up slightly after some car troubles. One group explored in the inclement weather, and the other went straight to Tan 'n Biki.

The group braving the rain and the wetlands spotted an African Snipe and a Rosy-throated Longclaw. The other group spotted some Fulvous Whistling Ducks, a Woolly-necked Stork and a Banded Martin.

The next day began with even worse weather, with some birding along the floodplain under cover of a bus shelter. Highlights included views of several inland waders, Blue-billed Teals, and, later on, an unexpected pair of Cape Shovelers.



Green-backed Woodpecker [Ansie Dee Reis]



In-shore lake [Annetjie Barkhuizen]



Red-necked Spurfowl (ssp. Swynnertonii) [Angela Openshaw]



Greater Sand Plover [Sean Naudè]

Thankfully, it cleared up over the morning, and we tried our luck at the beach at Costa do Sol once again. We enjoyed seeing waders in full breeding plumage (Grey Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, and Curlew Sandpiper) and saw Pink-backed Pelicans and Lesser Flamingos.

Our last evening's walk through the Macaneta floodplain was spectacular. We saw close-ups of Rufous-winged and Pale-crowned Cisticola and several Pied and Malachite Kingfishers fighting and hunting.

As the evening drew to a close, we briefly glimpsed a Black Coucal, saw another African Marsh Harrier, and got some close-up views of a Western Yellow Wagtail subspecies. A fitting end to an epic trip!

Jenna van Schoor



Eurasian Curlew [Sean Naudè]



Curlew Sandpiper [Sean Naudè]



Ruddy Turnstone [Ansie Dee Reis]



Macaneta, with Rob Geddes [Robin Geddes]

INTRODUCING THE BATELEUR: BIRD OF THE YEAR 2024

CONSERVATION

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA IS THRILLED TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE BATELEUR (TERATHOPIUS ECAUDATUS) IS BIRD OF THE YEAR 2024!



Also known as the Berghaan (Afrikaans), ingqungqulu (isiZulu), and ingqanga (isiXhosa), this magnificent raptor is famous for its striking appearance and remarkable aerial behaviour. Surely a Bateleur soaring high above the African bushveld, with its rocking, gliding motion, is one of the most iconic sights of our country and indeed our continent?

The Bateleur is a truly charismatic and eye-catching bird of prey, with its distinctive plumage – a combination of black, white, and vibrant red-orange on the face and legs.

Its common English name, Bateleur, was coined by famed French explorer, writer and ornithologist François Levillant, and is said to be French for a “tumbler” or “tightrope walker”, which aptly describes this bird’s graceful, aerial acrobatics.

Its isiZulu name, ingqungqulu, is onomatopoeic, referring to the sounds of battle drums due to the species relation to war in the Zulu culture. Also very fittingly, its scientific name, *Terathopius ecaudatus*, is a celebration of its marvellous face, and its short tail.





Female Bateleur [Sean Naudè]

This species is equally at home in the bushveld of the Kruger National Park, or the arid Kalahari. It is sexually dimorphic, meaning males and females can be differentiated based on their plumage or appearance. This is most easily done when they are in flight by looking at their underwing pattern. Males have all-black secondary and inner primary feathers, while females have broad white bases to these feathers.

As bold, majestic and strong an image as these birds portrays, unfortunately they are classified as regionally Endangered, with an estimated population reduction of over 50% over the past three generations (40 years), leaving a regional population size of less than 1000 mature individuals. It is suspected that this is due to habitat transformation, which has led to a decrease in the available prey base for Bateleurs, especially outside protected areas. Its tendency to scavenge also puts this species at particular risk from indiscriminate poisoning, especially by small-stock farmers. Illegal harvesting of this species for use in the muthi trade is another recent trend, which needs to be further investigated.



Male Bateleur [Sean Naudè]

Join us in celebrating the Bateleur and supporting the conservation of these incredible birds and their habitats. Together, we can ensure that future generations can marvel at the beauty of the Bateleur in the wild.

<https://www.birdlife.org.za/bird-of-the-year-2024/>

Bateleur

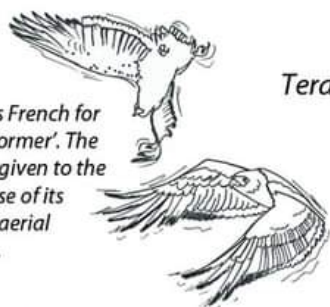
Terathopius ecaudatus

Teras - marvelous; ops - face; e - without; caudatus - tail.

Afrikaans: *Stompstertarend* or *Berghaan*.

Zulu: *iNgqungqulu*. Xhosa: *iNgqanga*.

'Bateleur' is French for 'street performer'. The name was given to the bird because of its distinctive aerial acrobatics.



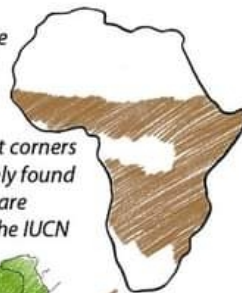
François Levaillant, a French naturalist and explorer, gave the Bateleur its common name.

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Family: Accipitridae
Subfamily: Circaetinae
Genus: *Terathopius*



The Bateleur is a medium-sized eagle and is considered a relative of the snake eagles.

The Bateleur occupies a large range through sub-Saharan Africa. The southern distribution stretches down into the north and north-east corners of South Africa. They are rarely found outside protected areas and are considered 'Endangered' in the IUCN Red Data Book.



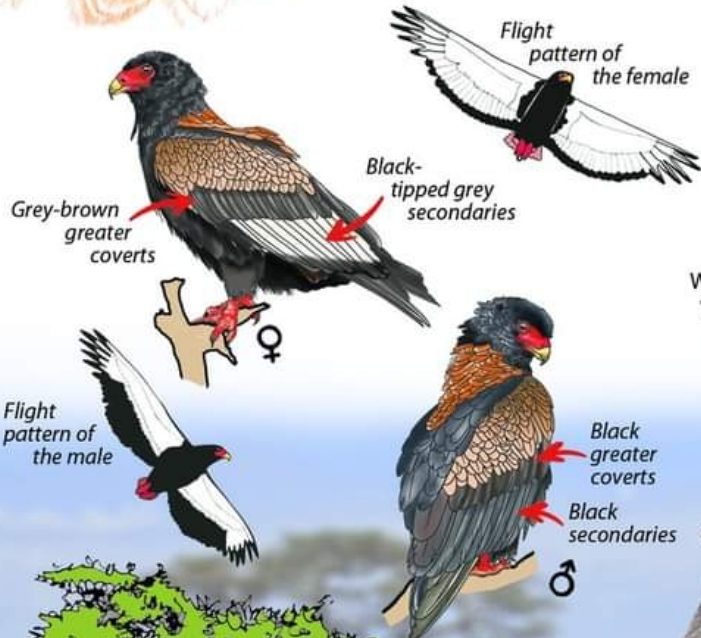
The head of the juvenile Bateleur is paler and tawnier than elsewhere on its body, with dull rufous to creamy edging on some areas. The eyes are brown, the cere is a unique greenish-blue and the feet are whitish in colour. The young Bateleur takes 8 years to develop its adult plumage.



The Bateleur has a thick neck and a very large, cowled head with a proportionately short yellow bill and a very red cere.

The bare parts of adult Bateleurs are bright red. They can fade to pink, or yellowish when they are perching in the shade or bathing. When excited the skin flushes very red.

Total length: 55 - 70 cm
Wingspan: 168 - 190 cm
Weight: 1,8 - 3 kg



Listen to the call of the Bateleur on ebird.org:



Bateleurs prefer savanna and woodland habitats, such as arid Acacia Savanna and Miombo Woodland (*Brachystegia*) and Mopane Woodland (*Colospermum mopane*), especially where there is long grass. They are never associated with forest habitats.

Design and illustrations by Di Martin.
Photographs used as reference for the illustrations from Frank Wouters, Helen Davies and taken from Wikipedia and Ecophoto.



They have short legs and the shortest tail of all birds of prey. Juvenile Bateleurs have a longer tail than the adults.

163 VULTURES RELOCATED

CONSERVATION

METICULOUS EASTERN CAPE EFFORT TO KEEP VULTURES FROM EXTINCTION

Vulture numbers in Africa have plummeted so severely that every individual bird counts to reduce the risk of extinction.

One of the biggest threats to the endangered birds is collisions with powerlines. A new facility has been opened in the Eastern Cape where these disabled vultures can still breed successfully. It is hoped a new captive breeding facility at Shamwari game reserve in the Eastern Cape will help stem plummeting vulture numbers across southern Africa and prevent their imminent extinction.

Earlier this week, 163 majestic White-backed Vultures and Cape Vultures took an arduous 18-hour overnight journey from their previous home near Hartbeespoort in the North West Province, to a meticulously planned new captive breeding facility at Shamwari Private Game Reserve midway between Gqeberha and Makhanda.



Photo:

A committee of Cape Vultures explore their new surroundings soon after their arrival at Shamwari game reserve in the Eastern Cape.

[John Yeld]

Photo:

DHL was responsible for the transportation and security of 163 birds from VulPro Hartbeespoort, to VulPro in Shamwari Game Reserve.



Photo:

Miraculously, not a single bird was lost en route in a move involving more than 50 people, constituting the largest vulture relocation operation ever undertaken.



Although the birds have the enviable ability of soaring effortlessly over thousands of kilometres across the entire sub-continent – none of these particular birds had the option of flying on this trip. Most of them are maimed and disabled and can either not fly at all or are unable to fly sufficiently well to survive in the wild. Some were still too young to fly. Their new enclosures have been built to house these endangered birds that are at the heart of an effort to stem plummeting vulture numbers across the sub-continent. So instead of flying, the vultures' journey was undertaken in individual, colour-coded, and very carefully constructed and stacked designer crates.

Urgent task

The new captive breeding initiative is a joint venture between non-profit VulPro, the only organisation in Africa dedicated to vulture conservation and research, and Shamwari, one of the largest privately owned game reserves in the country and an Eastern Cape pioneer in the reintroduction of indigenous species that have been lost for various reasons. VulPro will continue to operate its well-known vulture rehabilitation facility at Hartbeespoort, but all its captive breeding efforts will now be permanently located at Shamwari, due to increased poaching activities at their North-West facility.

Despite being disabled, the birds in this breeding programme are still able to produce eggs and raise chicks, and these offspring will be released into the wild. The task is urgent: of the 16 vulture species in Africa, eight, including the White-backed Vulture, are classified as “critically endangered” and three, including the Cape Vulture, are “endangered. Only the Griffon Vulture and Palm-nut Vulture are not threatened. There are only 4,000 breeding pairs of the Cape Vulture, southern Africa's only endemic vulture, which has already gone extinct as a breeding species in Namibia, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. Some other vulture species have declined by up to 97 percent over the past 30 years.

“We are facing an African vulture crisis,” Vulpro founder and chief executive Kerri Wolter told the small crowd who gathered at Shamwari to witness the successful arrival of the birds and the opening of the new facility. She said the threat of some African vultures going extinct in our lifetime was “very real.”

Major threats to vultures

Shamwari has carefully planned and constructed four large enclosures for the birds, each designed to meet the needs of the inhabitants. Two enclosures accommodate badly injured birds that require constant attention – the two species are kept separate to prevent interbreeding – while a third, adjacent to the reserve's existing wildlife rehabilitation centre, includes an artificial cliff to provide optimal conditions for Cape Vulture breeding pairs. The fourth is a pre-release enclosure built on high ground near the centre of the reserve, from where healthy young Cape Vultures will be released. Further enclosures will be added over the next three years.

Wolter said most of the birds were disabled as a result of powerline collisions. Some had experienced such severe trauma that bones were sticking through their flesh and their wings had to be amputated. She said in these cases the choice to amputate rather than euthanise was because vultures are so endangered that “every single individual counts.”

Poisoning incidents, while not as frequent as power line collisions, could be catastrophic, she said. “One incident can wipe out an entire vulture colony. This is [currently] the biggest threat to vultures in Africa and on a global scale.” She said the muti trade was also a threat. She believes poaching for this purpose will become the biggest threat to vultures in Africa.

One of the reasons for moving and expanding the facility to Shamwari was the growing risk of poaching at the Hartbeespoort Dam site. “In order to keep the birds safe, we needed a safe haven. Housing the largest captive population of African vultures in the world, it's never a good thing to have all your eggs in one basket.

“With every single individual vulture that we can save, we make a difference. And by saving every single individual, we can save a population. This has been done very successfully in Europe, and in America with the Californian Condor, and I do believe this is the future of vultures in Africa.” Vulpro has already released 80 birds from its captive breeding programme into the wild.

Bringing species back to the Eastern Cape

Shamwari general manager Joe Cloete said the initiative was a very important element in the conservation landscape of South Africa. “In our opinion, the relocation of 163 vultures back to the Eastern Cape is as important as the relocation of 163 rhinos, or 163 wild dogs,” said Cloete.

He said he had spent his childhood in the north-eastern Cape, near the rural village of Lady Grey.

“In this area there’s the Karmmelkspruit River and on the cliffs in that massive gorge there was a very successful breeding population of Cape Vultures. And more than 40 years ago, my brother and I started meeting farmers in that area to convince them to change their farming methods to do away with putting poisons out for vermin control. So, when Johan [Shamwari vet Dr Johan Joubert] approached me just over a year ago with this new idea, I had no hesitation. On a personal note, it’s been a very special and emotional time for me.”

But it was also a very important for Shamwari, he added.

“We’re all about conserving a vanishing way of life, bringing back all the species that used to occur in this area, and this is just another step in that continuing conservation journey. It’s a massive feather in our cap, we’re very proud to have these birds back here, and we thank the Vulpro board for putting their trust in us.”

John Yeld

GroundUp | News | Eastern Cape | 25 January 2024

Photo:

From left, Shamwari general manager Joe Cloete, Vulpro founder and chief executive Kerri Wolter, and Shamwari veterinarian Dr Johan Joubert inside the new Cape Vulture breeding facility.

[John Yeld, Ground Up]



ENCHANTING NAMIBIA, 11 SEPTEMBER - 5 OCTOBER 2023

TRAVELOGUE

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim

Namibia has a chequered history. The earliest inhabitants were with some certainty the San people, who were hunter-gatherers (refer to the “white lady” rock paintings in the Brandberg, which was later identified as a male figure (Lewis-Williams, D, Dowson, T: 7) possibly a Shaman, not a white lady), the Damara, and later the Nama/Khoikhoi who had clan-systems and were more advanced as they kept sheep, later cattle (pastoralists) who, according to some sources displaced the San, and later on the current peoples of Namibia appeared. In 1485 Diego Cão, a Portuguese navigator, landed at Cape Cross and erected a cross, a replica of which can still be seen there. In 1486, the Portuguese navigator Bartholomeus Diaz planted a cross at Lüderitz. In 1878 Walvis Bay and surrounding area was annexed by Britain. Germany placed Lüderitz (Bucht) under its protection in 1884 and Germany for a short period until 1915 colonised the country, until South African-Allied forces took control during WW1. After the First World War, the League of Nations gave South Africa a mandate to administer the territory. Namibia gained independence on 21 March 1990. The straight borderlines between Namibia and Botswana never cease to amaze me as testament to zealous land surveyors.

We departed early on 11th September 2023, border crossing to Botswana at Pioneer Gate/Lobatse and on to Kang for the first night's stopover. The vastness of the sandy plains of Botswana struck us once again – no fences along the very good road (Trans- Kalahari Highway). There were plenty of Red-crested Korhaan next to the road, White-browed Sparrow-Weavers tending their tatty nests, Common Ostrich next to, and even crossing the road, Black-winged Kite were in abundance, Ant-eating Chat, Pied- as well as Cape Crow were spotted; and cattle, goats and donkeys, the latter which don't give way, whether you blow the horn or not, with proverbial stubbornness. We arrived at Kang, fuelled up and checked into our accommodation for the night at Kalahari Rest, where we had supper and birded the area: our own BLNG mascot, the Crimson-breasted Shrike were hopping around on the ground next to Kalahari Scrub Robin (very confiding), Cape - and Burchell's Starlings, Southern Red-billed and African Grey Hornbills, to name but a few. The “donkey-boiler” outside our chalet was quietly fired up by the staff at 05:00, allowing us a nice hot shower. It was very cold outside, and we were happy to switch on the heating in the SUV. (Who of the readers knows a donkey-boiler?) On the journey went to Windhoek after the border crossing to Namibia at Buitepos. Here we got a very unpleasant surprise. Police were welcoming us and asked if we had any foodstuffs: meat, vegetables (potatoes, onions, fruit), these would be confiscated and burnt. Never before in all our numerous travels to Namibia had such a rule existed. Naturally, we had stocked up on food as we were camping for some 11 days.



Violet Wood Hoopoe — Perskakelaar



Bare-cheeked Babbler — Kaalwangkatlagter



Hoba Meteorite

The booking information for Etosha had informed us that fresh meat could be brought into Etosha National Park but not taken out at the exit, we had prepared for this. We were bewildered. It took all my wits and much effort to “bluff myself out of this situation”. We purchased some Windhoek Draft beer in Windhoek, which comes in 500 ml cans and tastes better than the SA brewed-under-licence-product. Daan Viljoen Reserve outside Windhoek is just so nice: it provides dedicated super-modern ablutions for each campsite.

Only the Chacma Baboons are a problem – one had the audacity to jump right into our offroad trailer and steal our potato salad, our meal for that evening and all of Kathrin’s chocolates, even making off with a bag containing a bedsheet. Common Ostrich welcomed us at the campsite, Red-billed Spurfowl were scurrying around, Groundscraper Thrush and Southern Pied Babblers watched us pitch camp. That night, at a merrily blazing campfire, Pearl-spotted Owlet was serenading for us. The next day we walked around the camp area to the dam and beyond, Egyptian Goose, Red-billed Teal, Little Grebe, Red-knobbed Coot, Reed Cormorant, Three-banded Plover and other waterbirds showed well, Cape Wagtail was “bobbing around”, and on the circular road trail we spotted some magnificent Kudu next to White-throated Canary, Familiar Chat, Lilac-breasted Roller, Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler/Warbler and the “normal” savanna birds. Windhoek was exceptionally cold, and we put on all clothing we had brought, to stay warm.

Two days later we departed for Etosha National Park, and Halali Camp birding started with a big bang. We pitched camp on a very convenient concrete block, designed for camping and immediately were greeted by the “wee-wee” calls by a group of (Southern) White-crowned Shrikes. White-crested Helmetshrikes were attentively watching us pitch camp, and shortly thereafter a noisy cackling group of Violet Wood Hoopoes were flying from tree to tree, landing below a dripping tap where some considerate person had cut a Coke bottle in half to act as a bird-basin. WOW, a magnificent sighting. The flock consisted mainly of sub-adults with black bills and off-pink feet/legs, and it took me some days to get pictures of the adults which have red bills and legs/feet.

That evening we heard and spotted a Southern White-faced Owl calling in a tree nearby, how magic can it get? Early the next morning we birded the large camp area. Swainson’s Spurfowl called and showed well, as well as Red-billed Spurfowl, Red-eyed Bulbul, large numbers of (Cape) Glossy Starlings, Grey-backed Camaroptera (at last I got some reasonable pictures of one). Halali has a lovely flood-lit waterhole on the perimeter fence and that was most productive, even in the midday heat; (breeding) herds of Elephant, Zebra, Springbok, Black Rhino, Spotted Hyena, Gemsbok and Impala were spotted, and the birds: Red-headed Finch, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, and to my delight White-throated Canaries; Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark, Black-chested Snake-Eagle overhead, and at the waterhole, waders like Black-winged Stilt and Blacksmith Lapwing, and Acacia Pied Barbet.

At the office, I requested one of the guides for information about Bare-cheeked Babblers, which according to literature should occur at Halali Camp – reply: “they are not here, I have never seen them around”. We had “dipped” them last time and only found them at Kunene River Lodge west of Ruacana. Back at our campsite, the midday temperature was 34° and went up to 37° the following days. The pool had been drained and was being cleaned from black algae, no swimming or cooling off during the high mid-day temperatures. We took our camping chairs inside the laundry, which was slightly cooler. After some time, I walked around the laundry to the enclosure next door where washing lines are situated and as “lady luck” would have it, there sat three Bare-cheeked Babblers in the shade, panting with open gapes to dissipate the heat, they flew up and perched in an overhanging tree. I fetched my camera and got some pictures of this excellent rarity. During the following days, I spotted the Babblers on numerous occasions, even two opposing family groups issuing their cackling babbler calls from adjacent trees. So much for “expert” advice. Halali Camp certainly lived up to its excellent birding reputation.



Black-faced Babbler - Swartwangkatlagter



“Bush Telegraph” at Roy’s Camp

During the next few days, we visited various of the waterholes within a radius of 40 km from camp. In the dry season, Etosha Pan dries up and all animals trudge off to the waterholes to hydrate. We parked the SUV in the best-possible position and waited. There was a constant coming-and-going of all and sundry, from Elephant to Zebra, Springbok and Spotted Hyena; and birds: Kori Bustard, Northern Black and Red-crested Korhaan, South African Shelduck (at Goas waterhole) Tawny Eagle in the trees and a host of seedeaters from canaries to Southern Grey-headed and Great Sparrows, various doves, and Namaqua Sandgrouse. Pretty Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters were swooping down from their perch to catch breakfast... the bird list just grew and grew. Our list further included some excellent sightings of Damara Red-billed Hornbill, African Scops Owl which entertained us at night with its sleepy "pruuup" calls, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Spotted Eagle Owl, Carp's Tit (I was happy to get an unclear far-away picture of this little bird, which is always on the move and never sits still), Namaqua Dove, Double-banded Sandgrouse, as well as a Gabar Goshawk live kill at the Halali waterhole, the kill was over in a flash, we hardly noticed it, then the Goshawk sat under a shrub to enjoy its breakfast.

One day we decided to visit the "Lark Capital" north of Okaukuejo Camp, which is 70-odd km from Halali, and another 30 km to Okondeka. We stood in line for the Camp gates to open, and en route spotted various birds, Pale Chanting Goshawk in trees, Sociable Weavers, canaries, and regular sightings of Red-crested Korhaan, as well as Little Swift, White-browed Sparrow-Weavers. We breakfasted at Okaukuejo Camp and pushed on towards Okondeka, (the topography being flat as a pancake, dolomitic white calcrete soil), the road to Okondeka is excellent to spot Larks. En route were plenty of Ant-eating Chats and Double-banded Coursers. We were not disappointed: Sabota-, Spike-heeled, Eastern Clapper, Pink-billed, Red-capped and Stark's Lark were spotted. Quite amazing. The last night at Halali we had a sand-storm with mega-strong winds, the tent poles were kicked out from under the awning, which was flapping in the wind so vigorously, that I feared, it may tear off from the tent, so Kathrin and I hung on to the awning on all sides and two neighbours even came to render assistance, this carried on for more than an hour, and the tent was filled with fine sand and dust. It took us some time to vacuum clean the tent inside, and that night was restless with all the wind shaking the tent as if we were in a little boat on high seas. We hardly slept and were exhausted.

After eight days we left Halali and Etosha National Park, heading for Roy's Camp north of Grootfontein. En Route we wanted to view the world-renowned Hoba Meteorite again. The off-road trailer was still hooked onto the SUV. I wanted to open the tailgate of the SUV to get my camera, stepped over the A-frame of the trailer with one leg and lost my balance and fell over the A-frame onto the hard and stony calcrete ground. I hurt myself badly. The Hoba Meteorite struck the earth approximately 80,000 years ago, it is 3 meters long and one meter high and consists of 82% iron, 16% nickel and some other elements. It possibly originates from the core of a dying/imploding/exploding star. We took some pictures of the Hoba Meteorite and pushed on to Roy's Camp, where we had luckily booked a chalet and not camping for the next two nights.

Roy's Camp is renowned as an excellent location to spot the Black-faced Babbler. We unpacked and were immediately welcomed by Long-billed Crombec, and a Little Sparrowhawk. Over a sumptuous dinner with four fresh salads, (after some time in the bush you crave fresh salads), Game Stroganov and Chicken Cordon Bleu, Kathrin and I did some serious introspection. There was no way that we could continue camping, as my shoulder was not capable of any work, including pitching or packing away the heavy trailer tent. We had two options: either regrettably to cancel the remainder of the trip and travel back to Pretoria to obtain specialist medical care, or to continue, but then we had to try and get chalets or other non-camping accommodation. We luckily succeeded. I have to make mention of Nico, one of the staff at Roy's Camp – he actively assisted me with contacting the follow-up establishments, and when my mobile phone with international roaming did not make contact, he phoned with his private phone. A most friendly and helpful person, and I owe him a great gratitude.

The next day we were out birding at the crack of dawn. The lodge was fully booked out and the camping area was overflowing with two buses of European tourists, and as there was too much activity, birding was difficult. However, on the well-kept lawns in front of chalet No.10 we were in luck; we spotted a busy group of Black-faced Babblers, hopping on the ground, keeping vocal contact with the remainder of the group and foraging, flying short bouts, just to settle down again. They also issued babbler-like calls. WOW, what a magnificent sighting, and I got better pictures than at the previous occasion. Damara Dik-Dik were grazing inside camp, these tiny antelope were very confiding...and the birds: Golden-breasted Bunting, Violet-eared- and Blue Waxbill, Red-billed Spurfowl, Crested Francolin, Black-chested Prinia, Green-winged Pytilia, Pirit Batis, and at the waterhole and walking the larger camp area: Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Namaqua Sandgrouse, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Acacia Pied Barbet, Red-billed Quelea, we just could not get enough of the simply excellent birding at Roy's Camp. At al-fresco breakfast on the patio we were visited by Red-eyed Bulbul and Rosy-faced Lovebird. I cannot but marvel at the birding opportunities at Roy's Camp.

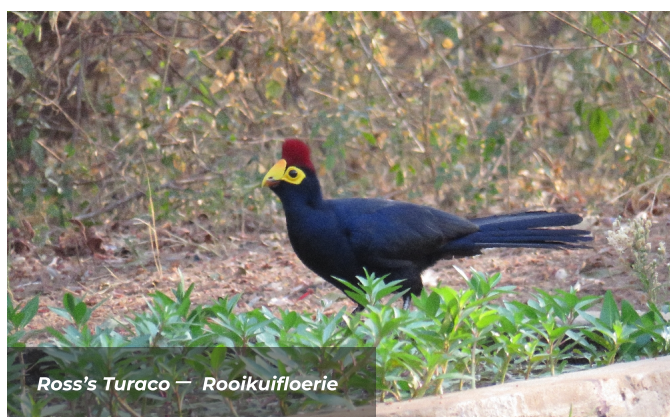
Regrettably we had to depart from Roy's Camp after two days, heading for Taranga Safari Lodge, some 35 km west of Rundu on a recently tarred section of the old C45 road (now called B10), running parallel to the Kavango River (called Okavango in Botswana). Due to my injury, we had to swop camping for a "luxury tent", lacking air conditioning, but this lodge does not come cheaply.

We enquired about a bird guide, who kindly took us on a brief walk around the camp, but he mentioned that he had been booked by overseas tourists for both days of our stay. We were wanting to spot Ross's Turaco. He showed us a large densely-leafed tree at tent No. 10 and said that it perched there quite often – the foliage was so dense, that we could not spot it and getting pictures would be impossible. He then recommended we go to the little waterhole early next morning to try and spot it there. After unpacking we walked around in the lodge grounds and the camping area. A very confiding White-browed Robin-Chat (Heuglin's) showed, Yellow-bellied Greenbul were so many that they almost became "trash-birds", Violet-backed Starling (male and the drab heavily streaked female), Burchell's Starling were equally plentiful, Swamp Boubou was calling and showing well, followed by Marico Sunbird, Kurrichane Thrush, and more. That evening at dinner we heard Fiery-necked and Square-tailed Nightjar calling. We went to the waterhole, more like a pond, very early at first light on the next morning. A hosepipe had been fixed next to the stem of a tree which stood in the middle of the pond, and water was slowly dripping down into the pond. Very little was happening in the way of bird sightings.

First to show were Red-eyed Dove, Chestnut-vented Warbler (Tit-Babbler) and Red-billed Spurfowl accompanied by one little chick, too sweet for words, and as it got later and warmer, the birding-fun started with birds coming for a drink: Black-collared Barbet, and to my delight an active little flock of Southern Yellow White-eye (which I did not yet have pictures of) drinking and bathing in the water; Grey-backed Camaroptera, Orange-breasted Bushshrike, Black-headed Oriole and weavers and sparrows followed. We sat behind a sort of a hide, looking more like a bench with a table in front of it, the bottom of the table screened with reeds, but our upper bodies were not concealed. We were enjoying the many good bird sightings but after one-and-a-half hours it was getting warmer and our chances of spotting the Turaco were swiftly diminishing. At 07:44 I saw the bright-red flash of turacin-red wings, and Ross's Turaco settled in a tree next to the pond. I heard and felt my own heart beat – LIFER!! It had turacin-red (crimson) wings/primaries, the same colour crown/crest, a bright-yellow frontal shield and bill and also bright yellow around the eyes, the feathers looked violet-purple. What a stunningly pretty bird! It then proceeded to look around inquisitively, and to our utter delight, started preening itself. In my experience, if birds preen themselves, they are relaxed, and this fellow certainly was relaxed.

After a while, it flew into the "hosepipe" tree in the centre of the pond, more preening followed, but it was sitting behind branches and the pictures I took were no good, only "record shots"; however, it then flew down to the pond's edge and had a good drink and my camera went mad. In the foreground of the pond were Burchell's Starlings and Grey Go-Away Bird, the latter looking almost the same size as the Turaco. After some elaborate drinking, it flew up into the "hosepipe" tree again, and there I was lucky to get two good pictures, before it departed. We were lucky enough to watch the Turaco for almost 15 minutes which seemed like an eternity and more than 50 pictures were taken. We hurriedly left, so as not to miss breakfast, but we were delighted and in happy spirits. We walked the grounds of the lodge and the camping area again before it got too hot and Acacia Pied Barbet and Purple-banded Sunbird (only mediocre record-pictures taken) were spotted. As the "luxury tent" did not have an air-conditioner, and the thermometer reached 37°C we lazed the afternoon around the pool and enjoyed the scenery, as Taranga has a very nice setting on the bank of the Kavango River. The next day we went to the pond once again very early and added some more birds to our list: Wattled Starling, Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Arrow-marked Babbler, but never saw Ross's Turaco again. We had been very lucky the day before.

Our next stop was Caprivi Houseboat Safari Lodge, and Curt-Ingo Sagell welcomed us like old friends (we had been staying there before some years back). The chalets were all booked out by a group of birders accompanied by a well-known bird-guide, but Curt-Ingo "had made a plan" as he had promised and we were given a very neat tent with two beds and a dedicated bathroom right next to it, magic! He told us that he would be attempting to show the birding-group the Yellow-throated Leaflove the next day, starting at 06:30, I thought it would be inside his lodge grounds, as I had seen the bird there a few years ago (and poor Kathrin had "dipped" it). We were almost ready to go out when Curt-Ingo called and said: "get into your car, we are leaving". We hurried and drove past a brick factory and into the grounds of what looked like some empty town houses, disembarked, and started searching. Curt-Ingo played a short burst of the bird's call, and after some minutes, a Yellow-throated Leaflove came flying overhead and settled down, moved, and perched again, giving us good views of it and all we heard were sighs of excitement from the birders in the group and cameras clicking out a staccato. I was lucky to get some pictures also. This was certainly an excellent rarity and I gathered from one of the birders that this was a "lifer" for many of them.



Ross's Turaco — Rooikuifloerie



Yellow-throated Leaflove - Geelkeelwillie

Other birds followed: Orange-breasted Bushshrike, Holub's Golden Weaver, and a host of other birds. Over the three days we spent at Caprivi Houseboat Safari Lodge we birded inside the larger lodge grounds and the area outside: Red-billed Firefinch, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Collared Sunbird, Striated (Green-backed) Heron, African Green Pigeon, Bearded Woodpecker, African Wood Owl called at night, as did Fiery-necked Nightjar to name a few. For the last afternoon we had booked a birding and sundowner boat cruise on the mighty Zambezi River, that dwarfs both the Kunene and Kavango Rivers. Looking out from the bar-area of Caprivi Houseboat Safari Lodge, which has a fascinating setting overlooking the river and is built right onto the bank of the Zambezi, I estimate the Zambezi to be between 350 and 500 meters and wider in places. Wood Sandpiper, Rock Pratincole, a juvenile/sub-adult White-backed Night Heron, African Finfoot, White-crowned Lapwing were some of the many excellent birds spotted. This was "next-level-birding". The sunset over the Zambezi viewed from the boat was magic and unforgettable, the setting sun's rays reflecting bright orange on the dark water of the river. It is impossible for me to describe in words this magnificent atmosphere. On the morning of the last day, we managed to spot Schalow's Turaco.

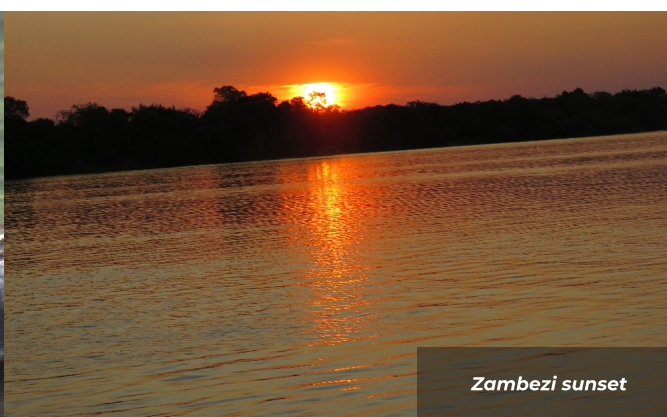
Our last destination in Namibia was Zambezi Mubala Lodge (a Gondwana-Kingfisher), where we occupied a very nice, spacious safari tent, with full self-catering facilities and this one had an evaporative cooler/air-conditioner (at a far better price than the "luxury tent" at Taranga), and the camp is situated directly on the bank of a side-arm of the Zambezi River, with crocodiles and birds frequenting the sandbanks. That afternoon we spotted Little Sparrowhawk inside the camp and on the river and the sandbanks were Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, White-crowned Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Coppery-tailed Coucal in the reeds (which I at first mistook for a Burchell's, which doesn't occur there, soon noticing my mistake), Goliath Heron, Giant Kingfisher and a host of other birds, seen previously on this trip. We booked a guide called Jimmy, a nice fellow, for an early morning boat-and-walking birding trip, which again turned out to be excellent. Plenty of African Skimmers were very active and when Jimmy parked the boat and we walked some sand banks, he showed us the nests of the Skimmers, just a hollow scrape in the sand with one or sometimes two sand-coloured-and-brown-speckled eggs, entirely exposed. I saw the ominous tracks of Hippo crossing the sand bank coming from the river to go and feed, these tracks passed close to some Skimmer nests.

We continued with the boat trip and Jimmy again parked it and we walked to a most productive wetland: Squacco Heron, Lesser Jacana, Rufous-bellied Heron, Saddle-billed Stork, Marsh Owl, African Marsh Harrier, Malachite Kingfisher, Common Sandpiper and Black-crowned Night Heron were some of the many birds we spotted. How much better could this get? — this was truly "next-level" birding. AND we walked some distance to a breeding colony of Southern Carmine Bee-eaters: bare patches of soil, where these hole-nesting birds had constructed their nest holes no further than 70 cm apart, and there were flocks of literally thousands of the Bee-eaters in the early morning sky, flying up, circling and landing again, the whole flock would all of a sudden fly up, it looked like a swarm of bees, they circled the nesting area a few times only to settle down again one-by-one or in small groups, all the while issuing their characteristic calls, the noise-level was quite intense. I had seen some other Southern Carmine Bee-eaters constructing their nest holes in the steep bank of the Zambezi River; somewhere I had read, that the Nile (Water) Monitors were digging up the nest to feed on the eggs and chicks, this caused the birds to construct nest holes away from the riverbank on bare soil. We watched this spectacle with amazement, until Jimmy urged us to continue the boat trip, as our time was up, and we had to return to the lodge. Later that afternoon we met up with friends from Pretoria who were also staying at Mubala, and we had relaxing sundowners together while watching the orange-golden sun slowly set over the horizon, illuminating the water of the Zambezi in front of us with soft colours. This was unforgettable quality-time. That evening after dinner, we sat dreaming in front of our nice tent, listening to African Barred Owlet serenading.

The next day we at first birded in the larger camp area again, and I was lucky to get pictures of Hartlaub's Babbler, which we had first seen many years ago, but omitted to take pictures of. Later that afternoon we went "bundu bashing" in the SUV, wanting to visit the Southern Carmine Bee-eater breeding colony again. I had tried to take some videos of these stunning birds the day before but had been shaking too much; now I had removed the spotting scope from the tripod and mounted the camera. At first, I lost my way, as I was driving on narrow unmarked cattle tracks, but eventually we got to the site. The Southern Carmine Bee-eaters were almost more plentiful in the late afternoon, and we stood there in awe for close to an hour, watching the kamikaze-style flypasts of huge flocks of these birds; I was surprised that some of the birds did not collide with one another in their daring manoeuvres.



Rock Pratincole — *Withalssprinkaanvoël*



Zambezi sunset

On the way back to the lodge, we spotted a Red-necked Falcon perched in front of us on the ground. The list at Mubala ended with a Tropical Boubou.

The return journey took us through Botswana where we slept over at Drotsky's Cabins, a newly constructed camp with lovely chalets. Amongst the birds we added to the list were Mourning Collared Dove and Southern Brown-throated Weaver.

We passed Ghanzi, the "cattle-ranching capital" of Botswana – watch out for the eight foot-and-mouth-disease checkpoints – at the last one, we had to drive the SUV and trailer through a bath filled with chemicals, step with our shoes onto a similar sponge-like bath and were also instructed to remove all shoes from our bags and also disinfect these. We slept over at Tautona Lodge outside Ghanzi and at Kareespruit Game Ranch at Zeerust, the latter which I can highly recommend – it is situated well outside the run-downtown and is equipped with very good (and reasonably priced) accommodation and tasty food.

We spent twenty-five days on this trip, drove just over 5,500 km, enjoyed some mind-blowing scenery, listed 205 bird species some of which are red-hot specials, and we got one "lifer". Namibia is such an enchanting birding- and tourist destination.

Neithard Graf von Dürckheim



African Skimmers — Waterploëer



*Southern Carmine Bee-eaters
Rooiborsbyvreter*



Hartlaub's Babbler — Witkruiskatlagter



Red-necked Falcon — Rooinekvalk

Tips and Recommendations:

1. In Botswana there are no fences next to the road and goats and donkeys stand on the highway and roads and don't move, even if you blow your horn – it is dangerous to drive at night as these animals' colour blends in with the road.
2. Fuel is much cheaper in Namibia (and Botswana) than in South Africa, as it is not as heavily taxed.
3. Beware of the border controls from SA-Botswana to Namibia at Buitepos border post: police may confiscate all your foodstuff, meat, fruit, and vegetables.
4. The roads in Namibia are very good, no potholes, this puts our own Government to shame with the pitiful state of many roads in SA.
5. No "load shedding" in Namibia.
6. When booking at a Gondwana lodge, get a Gondwana Card online for R300 pp as SADC citizens, this gives you a discount of 40% on accommodation and 25% on guides-fees.

Reference:

Lewis-Williams, D, Dowson, T: Images of Power – Understanding Bushman Rock Art, 1989. Southern Book Publishers, Johannesburg

BIRDS OF NORTHERN NAMIBIA

BEST OF BLNG

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

This forum was created for just this niche. Any special species seen on holiday or when out birding on your own, garden birds, or any arial photographs which you might want to share with our members are more than welcome.

In this edition, a selection of photographs from Northern Namibian birds were sent in by Neithard Graf von Dürckheim, Alan Bedford-Shaw and Pieter Heslinga.



Ross's Turaco
[Neithard Graf von Dürckheim]



African Skimmer
[Neithard Graf von Dürckheim]



Rufous-bellied Tits
[Alan Bedford-Shaw]



Rock Pratincole
[Pieter Heslinga]



Northern Carmine Bee-eater
[Pieter Heslinga]



Bare-cheeked Babbler
[Pieter Heslinga]



Collared Palm Thrush
[Pieter Heslinga]



Schalow's Turaco
[Pieter Heslinga]

THE LAST SECRETARYBIRD IN GAUTENG?

CITIZEN SCIENCE

The grasslands of Gauteng are probably one of the most threatened habitats in the entire country. The economic heart of South Africa continues to develop at breakneck speed and the last natural pieces of the Highveld are quickly disappearing. This was illustrated recently when Egoli returned to the City of Gold. This male Secretarybird, tracked since 2021 and one of the four remaining individuals still being monitored by the BirdLife South Africa Secretarybird Project as part of a long-term movement study, is usually found along the Vaal River near Sasolburg in the Free State.

But in late December 2023 he flew north and stopped in a small patch of grass between Soweto and Randfontein. There, amid mine dumps and old gold shafts, this lone strider wandered across an area of just under 10km².

On New Year's Day, however, he tried something new. He went first north and then north-east, heading across the Jukskei River and all the way to the N4 highway in Atteridgeville. But, it seems, Pretoria wasn't really to his liking and he turned around, heading to The Cradle Nature Reserve for a brief overnight visit before returning to the small patch of grass next to the mines and remaining there.

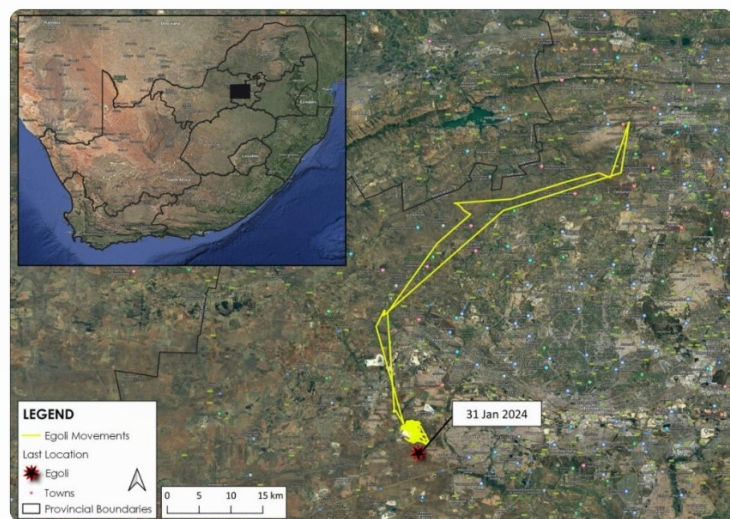
Beyond the wonder of a Secretarybird taking a day trip to see Pretoria, there is the fact to consider that, despite travelling almost 200km across the least developed parts of Gauteng, Egoli still found no suitable habitat! Could he be the last Secretarybird in the province?

If you do see a Secretarybird – not just in Gauteng but anywhere in the country – please log the encounter on the BirdLasser app or report it to info@birdlife.org.za

CASSIE CARSTENS, SECRETARYBIRD PROJECT MANAGER, BLSA



Secretarybird
[Marna Buys]



The movements of Egoli between Soweto and Pretoria in January 2024.

[Cassie Carstens]

BLGN-RINGERSHOEKIE. CITIZEN SCIENCE

7 Oktober, Voortrekkermonument (Reinhardt Fowler)

Agt A-ringers en twee C-ringers het op hierdie lieflike lentedag gaan voëls ring by hierdie historiese terrein. Die Monument se ligte was aan en wat 'n gesig! Daar was heelwat besoekers soos Amanda Gazendam wat net kom kyk het wat ons doen, asook twee lede van die Pretoriase Dieretuin, Jacek Zawada en Khathku Neshunzhi, wat vermonsters kom neem het van die voëls wat ons gevang het. Arrie Klopper, een van die ringers, het weer bloedmonsters geneem vir genetiese toetse.

Altesaam 58 voëls is gevang, waarvan agtien 'retraps'. Die spesie getal was veertien en 31,1% van die voëls is weer gevang.

Spesiale spesies was: Draaihals (Red-throated Wryneck), Neddikkie (Neddicky), Bosveld-tjeriktik (Chestnut-vented Warbler), Suidelike Waterfiskaal (Southern Boubou), Kleinglansspreeu (Cape Glossy Starling) en Streepkopkanarie (Streaky-headed Seedeater).

7 Oktober, Moerbeiboombrug, Rietvlei NR (Chris du Plooy)

Drie A-ringers en een C-ringer het op hierdie lentedag by Rietvlei 'n demonstrasie gegee vir die Vriende van Rietvlei olv Mads van Schalkwyk. Daar is dié dag sestig verskillende spesies hanteer, waarvan 83 voëls nuwe ringe gekry het, en daar was 21 hervangste, 'n totaal van 104. Die 'retrap' persentasie was redelik hoog, 20,2%, want daar word dikwels daar gering.

Interessante spesies was: Kleinrietsanger (Common Reed Warbler), Jamesonvuurvinkie (Jameson's Firefinch), Vleitinkinkie (Levaillant's Cisticola), Kuifkopvisvanger (Malachite Kingfisher), Bontrugwewer (Village Weaver). Die Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) was die meeste met 39 voëls. Die meeste 'retraps' was ook Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver).

20-22 Oktober, Feather River, Graskop (Madeleen van Loggerenberg)

Agt A-ringers en drie famielielede het saamgegaan op hierdie ringnaweek in die plantasies tussen Graskop en Sabie. Die weer het mooi saamgespeel en ons kon vir drie dae aanmekaar ring, sonder dat die reën ons ringery in die wiele gery het. Ons het by die Steengroef, Ou Kamp en langs die Rivierloop nette opgeslaan. Die Rooikeelbyvreter (White-fronted Bee-eater) maak nes in die grondwalle by die ou steengroef en ons was gelukkig genoeg om tien van hulle te ring, die meeste van een spesie!

Die totaal vir die naweek was 152 voëls, waarvan 124 nuwe ringe gekry het en 28 voëls is al voorheen gevang. Die 23 spesies sluit in: Kleinsperwer (Little Sparrowhawk), twee duifspesies naamlik Witbors- en Kaneelduifie (Tambourine and Lemon Dove). Drie visvangerspesies, Reuse-, Dwerg- en Kuifkopvisvanger (Giant, African Pygmy and Malachite Kingfisher).

Ook Boskrapper (Terrestrial Brownbul), Geelstreepboskruiper, (Yellow-streaked Greenbul), Oranjelyster (Orange Ground Thrush en Gewone Willie (Sombre Greenbul). Vier Janfrederikke: Lawaaimaker-, Natal-, Heuglin- en Witkoljanfrederik (Chorister, Red-capped and White-browed Robin-Chat and White-starred Robin). Daar is ook 'n Geelsanger (African Yellow Warbler) gering.

28 Oktober 2023 (Ringvergadering)

Tien ringers het hierdie vergadering by Johan en Madeleen van Loggerenberg se huis in Pretoria-Noord bygewoon. Negentien ringers het verskoning gemaak. Belangrike besluite is geneem wat die ringers raak. Frik du Plooy, koördineerder van die ringgroep, het Nanet Pieters verwelkom by haar eerste vergadering as A-ringer, en aan haar 'n sertifikaat oorhandig.

4 November, Moreleta NR (Pieter du Plessis)

Agt A-ringers en ses C-ringers het hierdie natuurreservaat besoek vir 'n ringessie. Ons het ook besoekers ontvang - die Madeliefies, dogterspan van die Garsvallei Voortrekkers het kom kyk wat ons doen. BLGN se Keanu Canto en Laura Jordaan het by die ringstasie aangedoen op hulle voëlkykuitstappie.

Daar is dié dag 315 voëls hanteer, waarvan 'n allemintige 47 hervangste was, wat 'n hervangspersentasie van 14,9% reflekteer.

Die 29 verskillende spesies het bestaan uit: 155 Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver), 32 Rooivinke (Southern Red Bishop) en tien Kleinrietsangers (Common Reed Warbler). Van die ander spesies was daar net een of twee - soos Hadede (Hadede Ibis), Swartkoekoek (Black Cuckoo), Diederikkie (Diederik Cuckoo), Witkeelswaël (White-throated Swallow), Hofsanger (Willow Warbler), Kaapse Rietsanger (Lesser Swamp Warbler), Grasvoël (Cape Grassbird) en Suidelike Waterfiskaal (Southern Boubou).

'n Swartkeelgeelvink-mannetjie (Southern Masked Weaver) met ringnommer FH56580 is amper dertien jaar gelede by dieselfde koördinate gevang deur mnr D van Stuyvenberg op 26 Maart 2011. Later in Maart 2016 weer gevang deur mnr IM Viljoen en nou weer deur Pieter du Plessis.

10-12 November, Wolfhuiskraal, Pienaarsrivier (Wanda Louwrens)

Vyf A-ringers en drie C-ringers het op hierdie plaas naby Pienaarsrivier gaan ring. Bernard Coetzee en sy familie het gekamp, terwyl die ander almal óf in die ou plaasopstal óf in die buitekamers geslaap het.

Die getalle was nie so hoog soos ander jare nie. Dit was te wyte aan die feit dat die rivier in vloed was - ons kon nie deurgaans na die Pompstasie aan die anderkant nie, ons beste plek op die plaas! As tweede beste het ons die Saterdag naby die beeskrale ons nette opgerig.

Daar het ons 27 voëls gekry vir die oggend. Sondagoggend voor ons huis toe vertrek het, het ons nog 24 naby die Boskamp gering. 'n Totaal van 56, saam met die 5 'retraps' (8,9%).

Van die 28 spesies wat gering is, verdien die Dwergvisvanger (African Pygmy Kingfisher) en die Bennettspeg (Bennett's Woodpecker) spesiale vermelding, 'n eerste vir Wolfhuiskraal!

Ander spesiale spesies was: Witkoluil (Pearl-spotted Owllet), Akasiagrismees (Ashy Tit), Bosveldstompstert (Long-billed Crombec), Gysrugkwêkwêvoël (Grey-backed Camaroptera), Europese Vlieëvanger (Spotted Flycatcher), Grootglansspreeu (Burchell's Starling), Buffelwewer (Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver) en Rooiborslaksman (Crimson-breasted Shrike).

'n Interessante 'retrap' was die Pylvlekkatlagter (Arrow-marked Babbler) wat op die 9de April 2016 deur me M van Wyk by dieselfde koördinate gering is, en nou weer deur Frik du Plooy gevang is, amper sewe jaar gelede.



Foto 1: Pieter du Plessis and a female Giant Kingfisher
[Lucia Lötter]



Hierdie Oranjelyster (Orange Ground Thrush) was 'n 'lifer' vir Leon Lötter by Feather River. [Julian du Plooy]



Hierdie Swartkoekoek (Black Cuckoo) was 'n 'lifer' vir Reinhardt Fowler by Moreleta. [Arrie Kloppe]



Wanda Louwrens het hierdie Nataljanfrederik (Red-capped Robin-Chat) gering - 'n 'lifer' vir haar. [Julian du Plooy]



Sonya de Bruyn het hierdie Grasvoël (Cape Grassbird) by Moreleta gering. [Arrie Kloppe]



Hierdie jong Skerpbekheuningvoël (Brown-backed Honeybird) het Arrie Kloppe by Moreleta gering. [Arrie Kloppe]



Die spie se tarsis word noukeurig deur Wanda gemeet om te bepaal watter grootte ring benodig word. [Suné Janse van Rensburg]

17-19 November, Bushtrail, Magaliesburg (Elba Swart)

Ses A-ringers en drie C-ringers het Magaliesburg toe gery om saam te gaan ring. Elba doen verslag:

Ons het 'n klompie baie mooi spesies gering en ek dink die Koningrooibekkie (Pin-tailed Whydah) in hulle verskillende verkleed het ons almal iets geleer. Die Hadedda (Hadedda Ibis) was 'n groot verrassing en die Gewone Blouvinkie (Dusky Indigobird) was ook een wat ons nog nie baie keer gevang het nie.

Daar is 132 voëls hanteer (25 spesies), met 98 voëls wat nuut gering is en 34 is ge'retrap'; 25% van die voëls is dus weer gevang.

Ander interessante spesies was: drie spesies visvangers naamlik Kuifkop, Dwerg en Bruinkopvisvanger (Malachite, African Pygmy and Brown-hooded Kingfisher) is gevang en gering. Ook Kleinheuningwyser (Lesser Honeyguide), Swartsuikerbekkie (Amethyst Sunbird), asook Swart- en Paradysvlieëvanger (Southern Black and African Paradise Flycatcher).

Wat die 'retraps' betref, dink ek die Kaapse Glasogie (Cape White-eye) en Gewone Janfrederik (Cape Robin-Chat) wat albei in 2013 die eerste keer gering is, wen die groot vermeldings. Nie net omdat dit al tien jaar gelede is nie, maar ook omdat dit die heel eerste ringgeleentheid was, wat ons by Bushtrail gehad het. Ek was toe nog 'n C-ringer en het Paula en Martin Steun en Hein Bantjes genooi om die naweek vir my en Marie Ueckermann 'training' te gee en die plek as potensiële ringplek te verken. Lekker om te kan sê dit was die begin van vele ringgeleenthede en fenomenale vriendskappe wat daar gesmee is. Soveel 'memories', waarvan ons nog baie sal maak.

Dan moet ons ook ou 'faithful' vermeld, die Bandkeelkleinjantjie (Bar-throated Apalis) is in 2015 gering en sedertdien maak hy seker hy kom sê gereeld 'hallo'. Hy is ge-'retrap' in 2016 (twee keer), 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021 en nou weer, dit was dus die tiende keer dat hy in 'n net gevang is.

2 Desember, Rietvlei NR (Chris du Plooy)

Agt A-ringers het hierdie reservaat besoek om voëls te gaan ring in die vlei by Witkoppies. Arrie Kloppe het weer bloedmonsters geneem en die twee manne van die Dieretuin, Jacek Zawada en Khathku Neshunzhi, het weer veremonsters geneem.

Die vlei het nie teleurgestel nie! 'n Allemintige 524 voëls is hanteer, waarvan 462 nuwe ringe gekry het. Die hervangste was 62 voëls, 10% van die totaal.

Die Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) was los voor met 121 voëls, met die Rooivinke (Southern Red Bishop) kort op hulle hakke met 120 individue. 'n Verrassing was die 101 Kleinrietsangers (Common Reed Warbler) wat die derde plek ingeneem het. 'n Rekord vir hierdie spesie!

Ander goeie spesies wat gevang is, is Kleinrietreier (Little Bittern), Kuifkopvisvanger (Malachite Kingfisher), drie swaelspesies: Europese Swael, Europese en Afrikaanse Oewerswael (Barn Swallow, Sand Martin, Brown-throated Martin), drie sangerspesies naamlik Kaapse Riet-, Kleinriet- en Kaapse Vleisanger (Lesser Swamp, Common Reed, Little Rush Warbler), twee flapspesies: Kort- en Langstertflap (Fan-tailed and Long-tailed Widowbird), asook 'n Koningrooibekkie (Pin-tailed Whydah).



Wanda Louwrens het hierdie Bennettspeg by Wolfhuiskraal gering—'n 'lifer' vir haar. [Suné Janse van Rensburg]



Nanet Pieters kyk met liefde na hierdie Witkoluil (Pearl-spotted Owlet) wat sy by Wolfhuiskraal gering het. [Suné Janse van Rensburg]



Bernard Coetzee met 'n Rooiwangmuisvoël [Hanrie Coetzee]

15 Desember, Ubali, Bynespoort, Pretoria (Marina Pienaar)

Marina het vir Reinhardt Fowler en Nanet Pieters, twee A-ringers, genooi om by Ubali te gaan help met 'n ringdemonstrasie. Hulle het 19 voëls gevang en nuwe ringe aangesit, terwyl een voël reeds 'n ring gehad het. Dit is nie die eerste keer dat Marina daar ring nie; vandaar die 'retrap'!

Interessante spesies was: Bosveldvisvanger (Woodland Kingfisher), Geelblestinker (Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird), Kardinaal-, en Baardspieg (Cardinal and Bearded Woodpecker), asook 'n Swartsuikerbekkie (Amethyst Sunbird) om maar 'n paar te noem.

17-20 Desember, Hans Hoheisen (Anita Michel)

Drie A-ringers het Orpen toe gery vir hierdie ringgeleentheid. Dit is 'n navorsingstasie, net buite die Orpenhek van die Kruger Wildtuin, wat o.a. deur die Universiteit van Pretoria gefinansier word. Anita werk gereeld daar en het die uitstappie moontlik gemaak. Die voordeel van die ringstasie is dat dit so na aan die Wildtuin is dat mens sommer kan inry en bietjie kan gaan wild kyk ook.

Die drie dae by hierdie "Wild Life Centre" het 68 voëls opgelewer, 55 het nuwe ringe gekry en daar was 13 'retraps', dit is 19,1% van die totaal. Die Rooiborsduifies (Laughing Dove) was die meeste met vier individue, terwyl die ander spesies een of twee opgelewer het.

Interessante spesies was: Groenvlekduifie (Emerald-spotted Wood Dove), Boskrapper (Terrestrial Brownbul), Geelbors en Gewone Willie (Yellow-bellied and Sombre Greenbul), Witkeeljanfrederik (White-throated Robin-Chat), Groenrugkwêkwêvoël (Green-backed Camaroptera), Grootheuningwyser (Greater Honeyguide), Tuin en Hofsanger (Garden and Willow Warbler) en Piet-my-vrou (Red-chested Cuckoo).

30 Desember, Voortrekkermonument (Reinhardt Fowler)

Agtien A-ringers, vyf C-ringers en ses besoekers het hierdie ringessie, ons jaarlikse afsluitingsfunksie by die Monument bygewoon. Reinhardt het gasbraaiers voorsien en elkeen het 'n worsie of twee gebrui. Dit was heerlik om die jaar so saam met ons ringersvriende af te sluit.

Reinhardt het verslag gedoen oor die ringessie:

Heelwat meer voëls is dié keer gevang, 130 in vergelyke met Oktober se 58. Omrede ons gereeld by die Monument ring was die hervangste hoog; 23,1%! Honderd voëls het nuwe ringe gekry en daar was 30 verskillende spesies.

Nuwe spesies wat nog nooit by die Monument gevang is nie (sover ons weet) is die Koringvoël (White-browed Sparrow-Weaver) (gering deur Nanet Pieters) en die Skerpbekheuningvoël (Brown-backed Honeybird) wat deur Hein Bantjes gering is.

Interessant ook dat daar so baie Kaapse Glasogies (Cape White-eye) was; 34 meer as die Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) se 21.

Ander mooi spesies was: Afrikaanse Naguil (Fiery-necked Nightjar), Tuin- en Hofsanger (Garden and Willow Warbler), Kleinglans- en Indiese Spreeu (Cape Glossy Starling and Common Myna), Gewone Melba (Green-winged Pytilia), en Klipstreepkoppie (Cinnamon-breasted Bunting).



Wanda Louwrens het 'n 'lifer' by Bushtrail, naby Magaliesburg, gekry! [Elba Swart]



Voortrekkermonument: hierdie Skerpbekheuningvoël (Brown-backed Honeybird) was 'n 'lifer' vir Hein Bantjes. [Wanda Louwrens]



Die ringers het die area naby die nisse by die Voortrekkermonument heeltemal ingeneem vir die ringessie. [Wanda Louwrens]

27 Januarie 2024, Strubendam, Lynnwood Glen (Johan Muller)

Agt A-ringers en ses C-ringers het by hierdie weggesteekte dam in Lynnwood Glen die nattigheid met waterstewels trotseer om nette al om die dam op te slaan.

Die getalle was nie sleg vir 'n dam hier in die middel van die stad nie, 213 voëls is hanteer waarvan 187 nuwe ringe gekry het. Die hervangste was hoog; 26 van die voëls is weer gevang; 12,2%.

Die 22 spesies het 'n goeie oes opgelewer soos: Skerpbekheuningvoël (Brown-backed Honeybird), drie visvangerspesies naamlik: Kuifkop-, Bruinkop-, en Bosveldvisvanger (Malachite, Brown-hooded, Woodland Kingfisher), Pylvlekkatlagter (Arrow-marked Babbler), twee sangers: Kleinriet- en Kaapse Vleisanger (Common Reed and Little Rush Warbler, Koningrooibekkie (Pin-tailed Whydah) en Rooibeklyster (Kurrichane Thrush).

Die eerste prys met die meeste voëls het aan die 55 Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) gegaan met die 31 Rooivinke (Southern Red Bishop) in die tweede plek en die 28 Dikbekwewers (Thick-billed Weaver) in die derde plek. Die ander spesies het een of meer opgelewer.

Hoe oud word 'n Swartkeelgeelvink (Southern Masked Weaver)? Klink sewentien jaar onmoontlik? Wel, ons het hier by Strubendam, in die middel van die stad, 'n vink gekry wat op 20 Desember 2006 vir die eerste keer deur me K van Stuyvenberg gering is. Tussen nou en toe is dit net nog een keer weer gevang in Oktober 2020 deur Paula Steyn. Nou het dit in Wanda Louwrens se nette beland, 17 jaar, 1 maand en 7 dae later vanaf die eerste vangs!



3 Februarie 2024, Colbyn Vleiland, Colbyn (Ig Viljoen)

Ses A-ringers het vir Ig gehelp om 'n ringdemonstrasie by hierdie vleiland te lewer. Dit was deel van Wêreldvleilanddag. Die voëlringery was maar 'n klein deeltjie van die kinders se opleiding. Hulle het ook kennis gemaak met paddas, insekte en indringerplante.

Net drie van die ringers het nette opgesit met die gevolg dat die getalle nie baie hoog was nie, net 69 voëls is hanteer, waarvan 67 nuwe ringe gekry het, en twee was hervangste. Dit is 2,9% van die totaal.

Die Dikbekwewers (Thick-billed Weaver) het los voorgeloopt met sewentien voëls, terwyl die Kaapse Glasogies (Cape White-eye) die tweede meeste was met twaalf voëls.

Ander mooi spesies was Streepkopkanarie (Streaky-headed Seedeater), Fiskaallaksman (Common Fiscal), Hofsanger (Willow Warbler), Kleinrietsanger (Common Reed Warbler) en Vleitinktinkie (Levaillant's Cisticola).

So ver ons weet, was dit die eerste Koringvoël (White-browed Sparrow-Weaver) wat ooit by die Voortrekkermonument gering is — 'n 'lifer' vir Nanet Pieters. [Wanda Louwrens]



Foto:

'n Skaars Sprinkaansanger (River Warbler) is op 16 Maart in die Pretoria Nasionale Botaniese Tuine gering. Volgens die SAFRING data is hierdie slegs die 6de een wat in Gauteng gering word, en die 18de in Suid-Afrika. [Arrie Kloppeers]

Foto:

Die onderstertpatroon is wat die identifikasie bevestig. [Arrie Kloppeers]

Foto:

Ig Viljoen het die kinders van Pretoria ingelig oor die belangrikheid van vleilande tydens die Wêreldvleilanddag wat in Colbyn Vallei gehou is. [Wanda Louwrens]

CLUB RARITIES

Regional and Local Rarities / Streeksrariteite and interesting sightings

National Rarities/ Nasionale Rariteite

There were no national rarities to report in this period.

Regional and Local Rarities / Streeksrariteite



Pectoral Sandpiper [Pieter Uitenweerde]

Pieter Uitenweerde found a Pectoral Sandpiper at Mkhombo.



Short-tailed Pipits [Rob Cliff]

Emile Blanchè reported several African Pygmy Geese at the same locality. At Mabusa NR Red-faced Cisticola and White-backed Night Heron were reported, and at Verena, displaying Short-tailed Pipits.



European Honey Buzzard [Michael Wescomb]

Reports of sightings of European Honey Buzzard seem to feature particularly prominent during late summer on provincial rare bird forums – this beautiful specimen was photographed at the Friends of Magalies Trail in Pretoria.



Ayres's Hawk Eagle [Elmarie Hirschhorn]

The Ayres's Hawk Eagle which has been a fairly regular visitor at Pretoria University Proefplaas, returned mid-January, and was reported by Philip Calinikos.

Monotonous Lark & Dusky Lark - Dinokeng

Dusky Larks & Eurasian Hobby - Rietvlei NR

A pair of Dusky Larks was also discovered at Rietvlei NR (Michael Mason), as well as the annually returning Eurasian Hobby, seen intermittently by several birders.

Rock Pipit & Lark-like Bunting - Suikerbosrand

Adrian Haagner spotted a single Rock Pipit at Suikerbosrand, while a Lark-like Bunting was seen there by Dom Rollinson and Fransie and Patrick O'Brien.

Lesser Moorhen & European Roller - Brits Golf Course

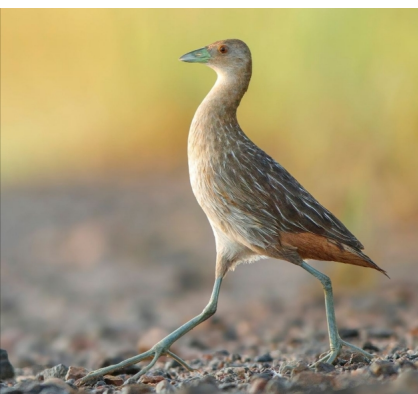
A Lesser Moorhen was recorded north of Brits Golf Course by Philip Yiannakou, while Andy Featherstone saw a European Roller.

Green Sandpiper & Painted Snipe - Rainbow junction

A special find by Peter Thompson was a Green Sandpiper at Rainbow Junction, north of the Magalies NR, beginning February. An interesting find at the same locality, also by Peter Thompson and Philip Calinikos, was a lovely pair of Greater Painted Snipe.

Booted Eagle - Zaagkuil drift

A Booted Eagle was seen at Zaagkuil drift by Rena van Wyk on 25 February.



Striped Crake [Jandre Verster]

Zaagkuil drift is cooking during late summer. A Striped Crake was photographed on the aptly named Crake Road at Zaagkuil drift on 23 January.



African Openbill [Thomas Mourez]

An African Openbill was reported at OR Tambo airport by Ronel Steenkamp, and a few days later, by Lydia Durand, at Rietvlei NR.



Buff-spotted Flufftail [Jandr  Verster]

Probably the most exciting discovery of this period, if not the coming year, was a Buff-spotted Flufftail by Jandr  Verster in Pretoria, near a local restaurant.



Dusky Lark [Stefan Els]

Zaagkuil drift continued delivering rarities. Bronze-winged Courser, Collared Pratincole, Dusky Lark, Dwarf Bittern, Red-footed Falcon, and Thrush Nightingale were reported by Pieter Verster, Etienne Marais, and others throughout February.

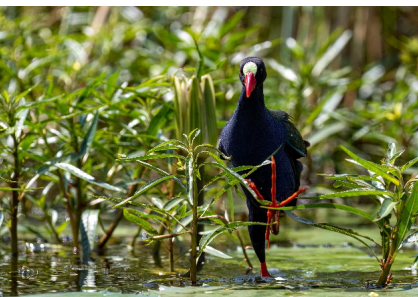


Thrush Nightingale [Angela Openshaw]



African Pygmy Kingfisher [JP van der Merwe]

Even though not a provincial rarity, an African Pygmy Kingfisher juvenile on the Friends of Magalies MBT caused some excitement under local birders. JP van der Merwe captured the image.

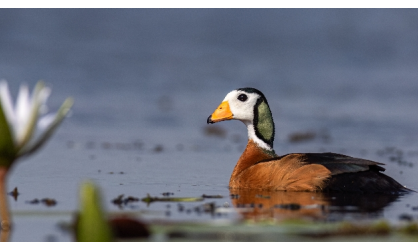


Allen's Gallinule [JP van der Merwe]



Red-footed Falcon [JP van der Merwe]

JP van der Merwe photographed Red-footed Falcon at Zaagkuil drift while Mike Pope reported a pair of Red-footed Falcon at Northern Farm during the first week of March. Reports of Red-footed Falcon kept trickling in during March, not only at Zaagkuil drift, but from further afield as well.



African Pygmy Geese [JP van der Merwe]

JP van der Merwe went on to find several rarities at Rust de Winter Dam early March – Allen's Gallinule with chicks, African Pygmy Geese as well as a juvenile White-backed Night Heron.



White-backed Night Heron [JP van der Merwe]



European Nightjar [Reinardt Haywood]

Reinardt Haywood reported the European Nightjar was still at the Rietondale Proefplaas, while Ilse Müller encountered Common Whitethroat on the ever-productive Friends of Magalies MBT Trail.



Common Whitethroat [Attie Hartsliet]



Lark-like Bunting [Thea Jenkins]

Thea Jenkins reported a Lark-like Bunting close to Zaagkuil drift Lodge, while Jandrè Verster found a Square-tailed Nightjar in the vicinity.

Other Rarities:

Philip Yiannakou had an exciting find for Gauteng near Northern Farm mid-February: Woolly-necked Stork. A few Black Kites were at the same locality.

Justin Rhys Nicolau found at least four Olive Tree Warblers near Winterveld on 9 March and soon after, a Lark-like Bunting. He also spotted Eurasian Golden Oriole later in the same vicinity. Michael Johnson later added a Yellow-bellied Eremomela to the variety of March specials in the northern Winterveld area.

Doug Newman reported a Grey-headed Kingfisher at Zaagkuil drift, while BLNG members on a club outing to Zaagkuil drift found three late-staying Dusky Larks.

Ivonne Coetzee .

Compiled from dedicated Wider Gauteng Rarities WhatsApp and Telegram Forums.

CLUB COMPETITION

SOLUTION COMPETITION 5 (Laniarius Nov. 2023)

All birds had “red” as part of their species name.

There were a number of correct entries, but first prize to **Hanjo Gouws**, whose entry landed first in my mailbox.





















CLUB COMPETITION

COMPETITION 6

6.1 Match these species to their habitat.

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

Photos: Ivonne Coetzee

SPECIES			HABITAT		
					
1	2	3	A	B	C
					
4	5	6	D	E	F
					
7	8	9	G	H	I

LANIARIUS NEW MEMBERS: NOVEMBER 2023 TO MARCH 2024

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.*

Iléma & Wouter Fourie	Olympus
Rita Glenewinkel	Florauna
Kayleigh Marcus	Fairmount, JHB
Jenna van Schoor	Brooklyn
Wihan Barnard & Liezl Dawson	Wapadrand
Kippie Buchner	Aston Manor, Kemptonpark
Daleen Verster	Moreleta Park
Karen Olsen	Groenkloof
Willem & Rebekka Strydom	The Willows
Ian Strydom & Madelien Wooding	Lynnwood Manor
Saskia Thomas	Lynnwood Ridge
Amanda Schoonderwoerd	Villieria
Philip Loots	Lynnwood

IMPORTANT NOTICE/BELANGRIKE AANKONDIGING

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DONATIONS / DONASIES:

A sincere thank you for your generous donation. Your contributions help us to reach our goal toward bird conservation projects. We really appreciate it.

Ons opregte dank aan almal vir donasies gemaak. U donasie verseker dat ons 'n groter bydrae tot die bewaring van voëls kan lewer. Ons waardeer dit opreg (October 2023 to February 2024))

Nicole Crisp	October 2023	Heidi Muller	January 2024
RCD Franzen	November 2023	Marna Buys	January 2024
Leon & Lucia Lötter	January 2024	Ivonne Coetzee	February 2024
Jan & Hannalien Meyer	January 2024		

BUFFELSDRIFT

Rust de Winter

ACCOMMODATION

R700/adult/night;

R350/child 12 years and younger/night;

Day visitors R100/person/day



BOOKINGS

Please call Donald

on 082 885 5577;

or e-mail

bookings@birdhiking.co.za

Website: www.birdhiking.co.za