



Laniarius

August 2024 | No 152



*BirdLife Northern Gauteng
BirdLife Gauteng-Noord
Image Source: Sacred Ibis
Sean Naudé*



BirdLife
SOUTH AFRICA

Giving Conservation Wings

2024 KOMITEE

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FROM THE EDITOR

Transcendence...

A current buzzword in birding.

Articles on the restorative powers of being in nature, not passively, but, for instance when birding, are everywhere. It was the topic of Conservation Conversations on 14 May 2024 when Dr Matthew Zylstra explored different processes in which birding benefits us in ways we might not realise; the science of 'nature connection' and new research revealing how bird watching promotes well-being as well as motivation to care for nature.

Getting outside is critical for you biologically, and there is so much science to prove it. Studies have shown that trees release chemicals called phytoncides that are excellent for our immune system, while birdsong has been shown to calm our brainwaves. There's also evidence that fractals, complex patterns found in coastlines, leaves, clouds, and ocean waves can relax our brains.

In her book, (featured in National Geographic of April 16, 2024), Tough Broad, Caroline Paul investigates the immense benefits of outdoor adventures such as boogie boarding, sky diving...or birding! She discovered to her surprise that birding had all the hallmarks of an adventure: being on a quest, the anticipation of hearing a bird before you could see it; and the adrenaline rush of then seeing it. There was the physical vitality of being in the elements, as when recently we went on a BLNG birding outing to Suikerbosrand on the coldest day in mid-winter. Forgetting about the piercingly frigid wind at -2° at dawn on the Eendracht Road, we were watching a scarce African Grass Owl hunting.

We were entranced. Adrenaline rushed. We felt a sense of awe.

We realised we were watching a species that is listed as vulnerable, its grassland habitat under severe pressure from veld fires, urbanisation, and agriculture. To may have shared these awe-inspiring few minutes with fellow club members, and celebrating this lifer for most, but also the rest of the wonderful bird species afterwards and landscapes unfolding, built on this sense of awe.

And that brings me to another sense of awe.

I frequently am amazed at the sheer hard work and effort our BLNG committee members put in on behalf of the club – having the vision to steer this organisation to enable our 300+ members to be enriched through outings, camps, meetings, speakers, training courses, the reporting on these, but also to steer the many portfolios, finances and embracing avian conservation while doing so. All do this without expecting remuneration.



Ivonne - Editor

And surely the most important person here is the Chair, who embraces the vision and mission of the club and gives these aspects direction in a fast-changing technological world.

So it is with great appreciation that I bid farewell to our outstanding and dynamic Chair, Elouise Kalmer.

She embodied this visionary and dynamic leadership, and so much more; who with great patience would explain to me as new club member on a camp how to identify and where to find a Caspian Plover.

Elouise, who is such great fun to go with on a birding excursion. I trust we will still enjoy many pleasant and exciting birding excursions together, and we know that we will continue to cherish your friendship, knowledge and humour during club meetings and socials.

Thank you for your hard work and great leadership to make membership of BLNG and birding such an enriching experience for all our club members. These efforts may yet bequeath to our grandchildren this same entrancement, this sense of wonder, this awe.

FROM THE CHAIR

The past seven years as Chairperson of BirdLife Northern Gauteng have been a wonderful experience and a significant personal enrichment.

The time has flown by, and it has been an absolute pleasure to work with and enjoy birding alongside so many old and new friends.

Now, the time has come for me to pass the baton to our new Chairperson, Sean Naude, who has been a dedicated member and committee member of BLNG for many years.

I've had many wonderful experiences over these years, but what I cherish most are the incredible people I've met, and the friendships formed through BLNG. Our members come from diverse backgrounds, yet our shared love of birding has united us as lifelong friends.

The past seven years were not always smooth sailing, as our activities were disrupted by COVID-19 for nearly two years.

Birding in our backyards and neighborhoods became the norm, and we learned so much about the birds in our own environments. Advances in technology during this time also changed how we bird and how BLNG manages its affairs, improving our communication with members.

Zoom meetings were introduced during COVID, allowing us to bring in birding experts, speakers and members from far beyond Northern Gauteng.

The frequent updates to our BLNG website, along with WhatsApp communications, ensure our members stay informed about all BLNG activities. We have also been able to obtain improved feedback and suggestions from our members, using WhatsApp polls.



Being a member of BLNG has always been a life-enriching experience for me.

Learning about birds, where to find them, and understanding their unique needs and behaviour has been truly special. Meeting fellow birders, both seasoned and new, and having the privilege to learn from and share knowledge with them has been invaluable.

Lastly, I want to thank all BLNG members for their continuous support. A special word of thanks to all the BLNG committee members and the Presidents.

I extend my best wishes to our new Chair, Sean Naude. May BLNG soar to greater heights and explore many new horizons under his leadership!

Elouise Kalmer

LANIARIUS - AUGUST 2024

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TRIBUTE TO OUR CHAIR

ELOUISE

KALMER

During our August club meeting on the 13th, Elouise Kalmer announced her resignation as Chair after seven years in this position.



The next day, this was communicated via BLNG Alerts as well, and Sean Naudé, a dedicated BLNG committee member and experienced CTO of his firm, was named her successor. Big boots are waiting to be filled!

There are any number of reasons why it is hard to pay a proper and fitting tribute to Elouise as Chair.

Her humour, grace and dedication made her the ideal leader of a club such as ours. It was important to her to get as many as possible members involved in birding outings and camps to a variety of habitats, so that appreciation could be fostered for the benefits of being a club member in your birding journey. This made BLNG by far the most active and dynamic of all bird clubs affiliated to BLSA. She created emotional bonds within our club, always being available and attending club outings and camps, and then deliberately getting to know, involving and supporting new members or more inexperienced birders.

But equally important, she was a visionary leader who always focused on strategy and goals.

She managed to motivate us as committee members to take charge of and grow our own portfolios, offering suggestions, support, and appreciation to each individual. Her experience in management skills that she gained as executive during her career was visible in the firm way in which she repeatedly steered a meeting away from getting bogged down in unimportant details and emphasised focusing on the goal or outcome.

Her charisma and grace impressed us.

Elouise embraced the move to digitalise all BLNG communication. She steered the club during and after COVID to introduce Zoom meetings and handled the teething problems with unflappable calm and patience. She ensured that bookings for outings and camps and reports on these were digitalised. Communication now happens through BLNG Alerts, BLNG e-mails, dedicated WhatsApp-groups for each outing and camp, Fransie O'Brien doing this in meticulous detail, which in turn makes reporting on these via Lanarius and BLiNG WiNGS easy.

Elouise also had infallible instinct to select exactly the right team members for vacancies on the committee, noticing and nurturing skills and possibilities of which you yourself might not even have been aware. Elouise always had to come all the way from Roodepoort for BLNG meetings and functions or outings. This is highly appreciated!

My fondest impressions of Elouise were of when we went birding together. Her experience, knowledge of birds and humour made that each outing or camp became unforgettable. Zaagkuil drift, Magoebaskloof... I will never forget the way she rushed to me on an overgrown mountain slope when I passed out after drinking contaminated water – only to fall head-long, complete with camera, binoculars and backpack, into an overgrown ditch full of water. She stepped out, wet and cold from top to toe, had the grace to laugh about it and continued birding, full of energy and enthusiasm.

May you retain that energy, humour, and grace – and happy that this is not farewell, but just another phase in your birding bonds with BLNG!



VREDEFORT DOME 19 22 APRIL 2024

CAMP

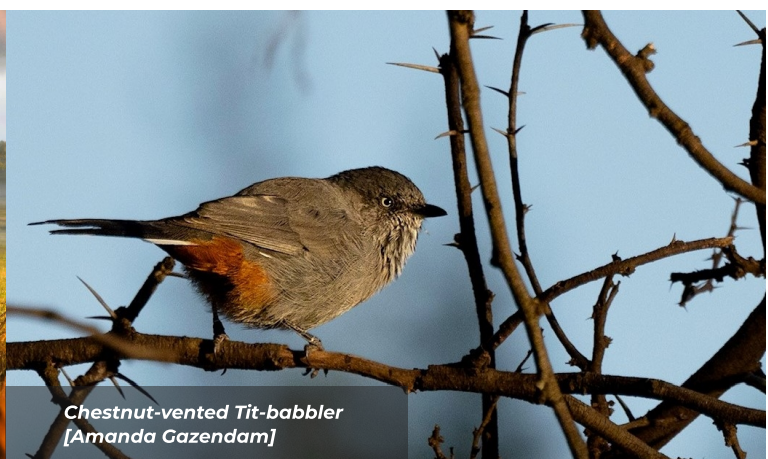
We arrived at Udolpho Rivierplaas just outside Parys on Friday, the 19th of April and spent the afternoon exploring the area around our chalets and along the banks of the Vaal River. We then spent the rest of the weekend (Saturday and Sunday) exploring the Kopjeskraal, Venterskroon and Schoemansdrift Roads (on the North-West and Free State sides of the river). On our last morning, Monday, the 22nd of April, we explored the dirt roads on the Free State side of the Vaal River and around Vredefort. Predominant habitats were riverine along the Vaal, woodland, thornveld and Highveld grassland with rocky outcrops.

Day 1 (Friday):

On our first afternoon, we explored the grassy area around the chalets, where we found Black-throated Canary (Bergkanarie). While walking down to the river, a Gabar Goshawk (Witkruissperwer) surprised us next to the pool. In the mixed habitat (thornveld/mielie fields), we saw Black-chested Prinia (Swartbandlangstertjie) and Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler (Bosveldtjerik). Red-billed Queleas (Rooibekkeleas) and some very hard-to-identify Bishops, Weavers, and Widowbirds flocked around the mielie fields, all looking very similar out of breeding plumage. Other notable species were Southern Grey-headed Sparrows (Gryskopmossie), African Stonechat (Gewone Bontrokkie), African Red-Eyed Bulbul (Rooioogtiptol), Black-winged Kite (Blouvalk), and a Long-crested Eagle (Langkuifarend), which we had magnificent views of. Along the river, we heard an African Fish Eagle (Visarend) and saw African Darters (Slanghalsvoël), Reed Cormorants (Rietduiker), and White-breasted Cormorants (Witborsduiker). Brown-hooded Kingfishers (Bruinkopvisvanger) and Lesser Swamp Warbler (Kaapse Rietsanger) flitted in and out of the reeds.



Wouter Fourie



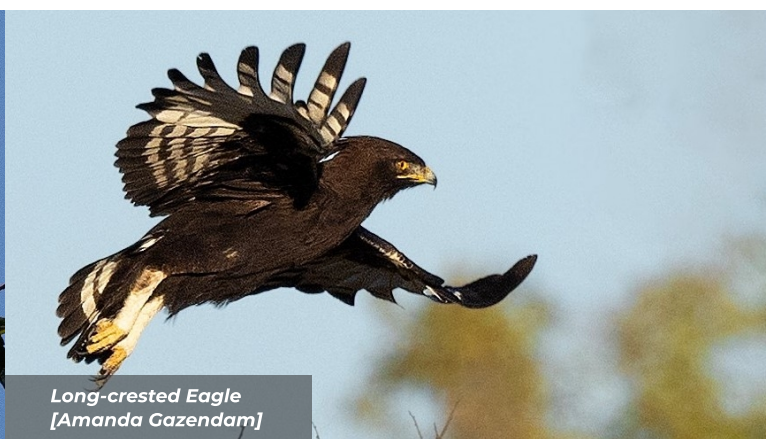
Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler
[Amanda Gazendam]

Black Crake (Swartriethaan) lurked along the water edges while African Palm Swift (Palmwindswael) and Greater Striped Swallows (Groot Streepswael) flew overhead.

An African Harrier-Hawk (Kaalvangvalk) flew past too quickly to get an immediate identification (we later confirmed via photograph). On our way back to the chalets, we spotted the Orange River White-eyes (Gariiepglasogie) for the first time and many noisy White-browed Sparrow-Weavers (Koringvoël).



African Red-Eyed Bulbul
[Amanda Gazendam]



Long-crested Eagle
[Amanda Gazendam]



Orange River White-eye
[Amanda Gazendam]

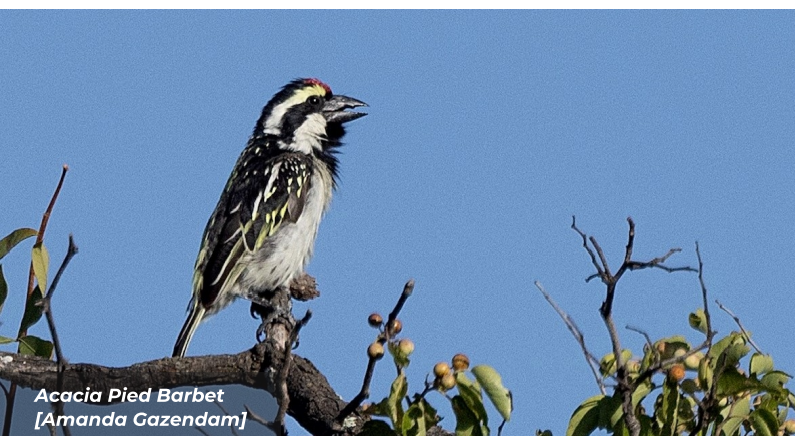


Annette van der Merwe

Day 2 - Saturday:

Our first full day of birding started with a Kalahari Scrub Robin (Kalahariwipstert) sighting and a productive stop next to a small farm dam. Here, a Goliath Heron (Reusereier) skirted the dam's edges and a Purple Heron (Rooireier) perched in a gum tree. A Grey Heron (Bloureier) also joined the heronry. We heard Bokmakerie and Swainsons Spurfowl (Bosveldfisant) and saw other waterfowl in the dam and flying overhead, including a Spur-winged Goose (Wildemakou) and an interesting exotic duck species. In the grasslands opposite the dam, we saw our first African Pipit (Gewone Koester), which brought some laughs when someone mistakenly thought they were looking for a "koeksister".

Over the day, and at many stops under vast blue skies next to open fields, bushveld habitat, and alongside a small bridge, we racked up an impressive list, including the White-throated Swallow (Witkeelswael), Common House Martin (Huiswael), Red-faced Mousebird (Rooiwangmuiskvoël), Bar-throated Apalis (Bandkeelkleinjantjie), and some Blue Waxbills (Gewone Blousysie). We also saw all three species of barbets, including the Crested Barbet (Kuifkophoutkapper), the Black-collared Barbet (Rooikophoutkapper), and many Acacia Pied Barbets (Bonthoutkapper).



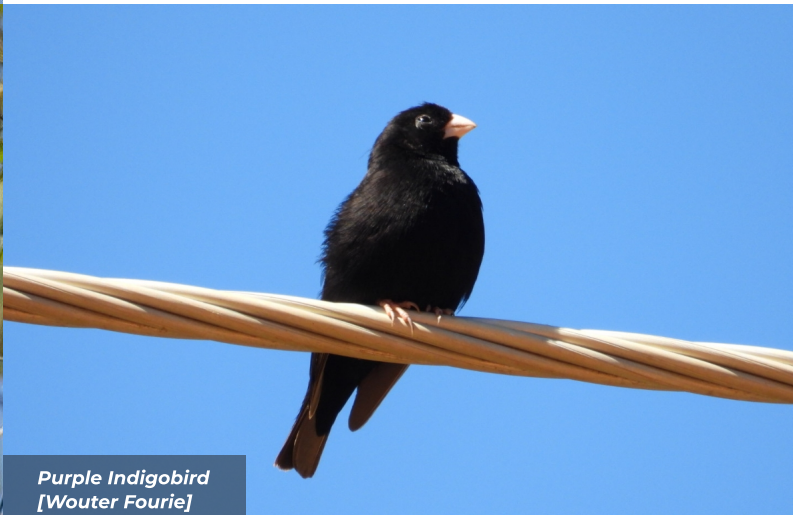
Acacia Pied Barbet
[Amanda Gazendam]

Two key highlights of the morning were following a group of White-crested Helmet-Shrikes (Withelmlaksman) up and down a stretch of bushveld road and seeing not one but two Indigobirds on a power line, i.e. Village (Staalblouvinkie) and Purple (Witpootblouvinkie).

We briefly stopped at Thabela Thabeng to get something to drink and watched a 15-minute video explaining how the famous Vredefort Dome formed. The geological formations in this area are incredible, and there is another "Three Sisters" formation here, too.



White-crested Helmet-Shrike
[Amanda Gazendam]



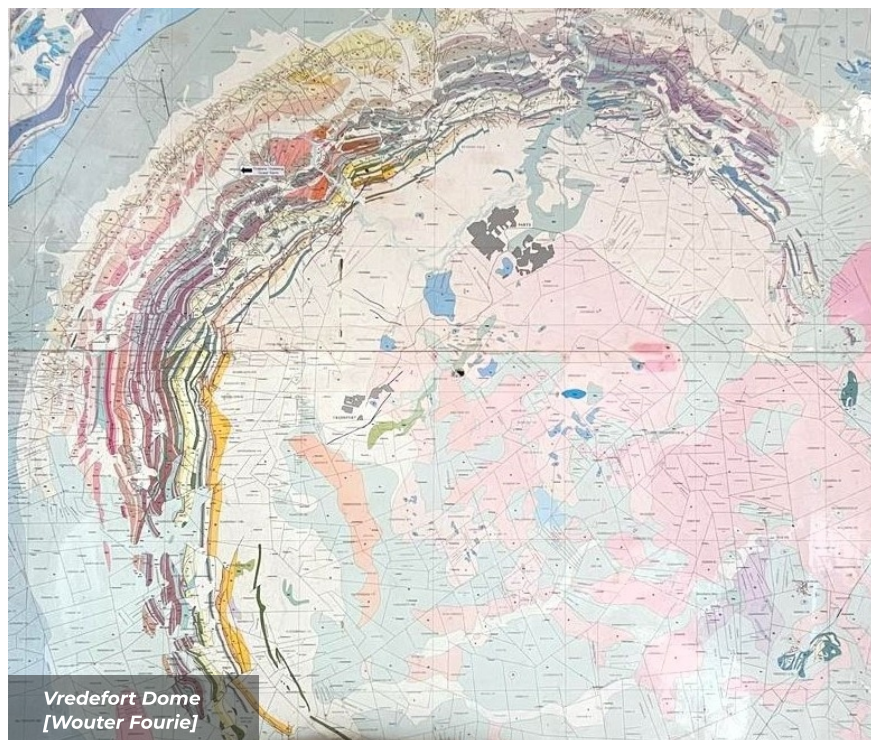
Purple Indigobird
[Wouter Fourie]

In the afternoon, we switched habitats and moved along a cosmos-lined grassland road on the outskirts of Parys. While watching a beautiful, multicoloured sunset, we heard many Northern Black Korhaans (Witvlerkkorhaan) and Orange River Francolin (Kalaharipatrys) in the tall grass. We also watched many Ant-eating Chats (Swartpiek) hovering in the air. A Desert Cisticola (Woestynkloppie) hung briefly on a fence line, and we could hear the mewing of Cape Longclaws (Oranjekeelkalkoentjie) and see them walking through the grass, pausing briefly to show their brightly coloured throats. Other highlights included some Greater Flamingos (Grootflamink) in a distant dam with other waterbirds. We also saw some Common Ostrich (Volstruis) and a raptor-like Hamerkop flying low over the ground in a farming area. Here, we also heard the unmistakable grating sound of Blue Cranes (Bloukraanvoël) in the background. Other birds we spotted along the way included a Yellow Canary (Geelkanarie) and a pretty Namaqua Dove (Namakwaduif), almost hidden among the branches of a bare tree. As the sun went below the horizon and the full moon came into view in the blueish-pink sky around us, we watched African Spoonbills (Lepelaar) feeding along the edges of a small dam. We also briefly saw two Spotted Thick-knees (Gewone Dikkop) flying off into the dark as we began our return journey to Udolpho via the Vredefort Road.

Day 3 - Sunday:

Another day of birding began with an awe-inspiring daybreak view over a misty valley and a sighting of a Scaly-feathered Finch (Baardmannetjie) at the top of a tree. Another stop, further along, produced a lonely Brown-throated Martin (Afrikaanse Oewerswael) flying over a fenced-off hole and some Thick-billed Weavers (Dikbekwewer) passing overhead. We also got a better look at another African Harrier-Hawk (Kaalvangvalk).

A stop along the river at Hadeda Creek, close to a rocky hill, gave us close sightings of Yellow-billed Ducks (Geelbekeend), African Black Ducks (Swarteend), and two beautiful South African Shelducks (Kopereend). A Cape White-eye (Kaapse Glasogjie) and two Red-billed Firefinches (Rooibekvuurvinkie) moved in and out of the trees along the riverbank.



In the surrounding bushveld habitat, we spotted a Red-throated Wryneck (Draaihals), a Diederik Cuckoo (Diederikkie), and a Common Scimitarbill (Swartbekkakelaar). We also saw a Neddicky (Neddikkie) and some Streaky-headed Seedeaters (Streepkopkanarie) in the grassy patches along the road. After that, we followed a Cinnamon-breasted Bunting (Klipstreepkopkie) as it flitted in and out of the dirt road before stopping alongside the river at the Schoemansdrift bridge. Here, we saw many common waterbirds, a Giant Kingfisher (Reusevisvanger) in a blue gum tree and an African Pied Wagtail (Bontkwikkie) on a rock in the shallows. After lunch at Elgro River Lodge near Skandinawiedrift, some of our group left to return home. Later, we spotted some unique birds on an afternoon walk around Udolpho with the remaining crew, including Levillant's Cisticola (Vleitinktinkie) and Jameson's Firefinch (Jamesonvuurvinkie). We also glimpsed a Malachite Kingfisher (Kuifkopvisvanger) resting on a dead log in the river. On our way back to the chalets, we heard White-faced Whistling Ducks (Nonnetjie-eend) flying above us and the unmistakable grunting of lions from a nearby game farm. We also spotted a Red-throated Wryneck (Draaihals) disappearing into its nest beside the Udolpho offices.

Our last morning of birding began with an epic sunrise over the grasslands, with a Black Sparrowhawk (Swartsperwer) flying overhead. Instead of the very common Red-faced, we saw some Speckled Mousebirds (Gevlekte Muisvoël) in the trees along the road and another Diederik Cuckoo (Diederikkie) hiding in the foliage, which looked like a juvenile.

At a productive roadside stop next to a lucerne farm, we saw Red-capped Larks (Rooikoplewerik) on top of the hay bales and even a Secretarybird (Sekretarisvoël) amongst cattle along the horizon. It took a while to identify, but we could pick up some diagnostic features with a photograph. Spike-heeled Larks (Vlaktelewerik) showed us their white tail-feathers while flying around rocks in grassy patches, and we saw flocks of starlings, both Pied and Wattled (Witgatspreeu and Lelspreeu), flying over and resting on power lines.

While briefly stopped at a bridge, we were surprised to find a Bar-throated Apalis (Bandkeelkleinjantjie) flitting in the reeds. It even jumped onto the parapet right in front of us! Here, we spotted a Pied Kingfisher (Bontvisvanger) and got another quick view of a Black Crake (Swartriethaan) hiding along the stream edges below.

At our final stop, a small dam in Vredefort, we saw a Black-headed Heron (Swartkopreier) and some African Swampheens (Grootkoningriethaan), including a greyish juvenile. Just before we drove back to Udolpho, we saw a content-looking flock of White-faced Whistling Ducks (Nonnetjie-eend) resting in the shade.

Overall, it was a peaceful but exciting weekend, with 138 bird sightings. We all enjoyed immersing ourselves in such a beautiful and varied environment and learning more about the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site. Thank you to Stephan Terblance for guiding us!

Jenna Van Schoor



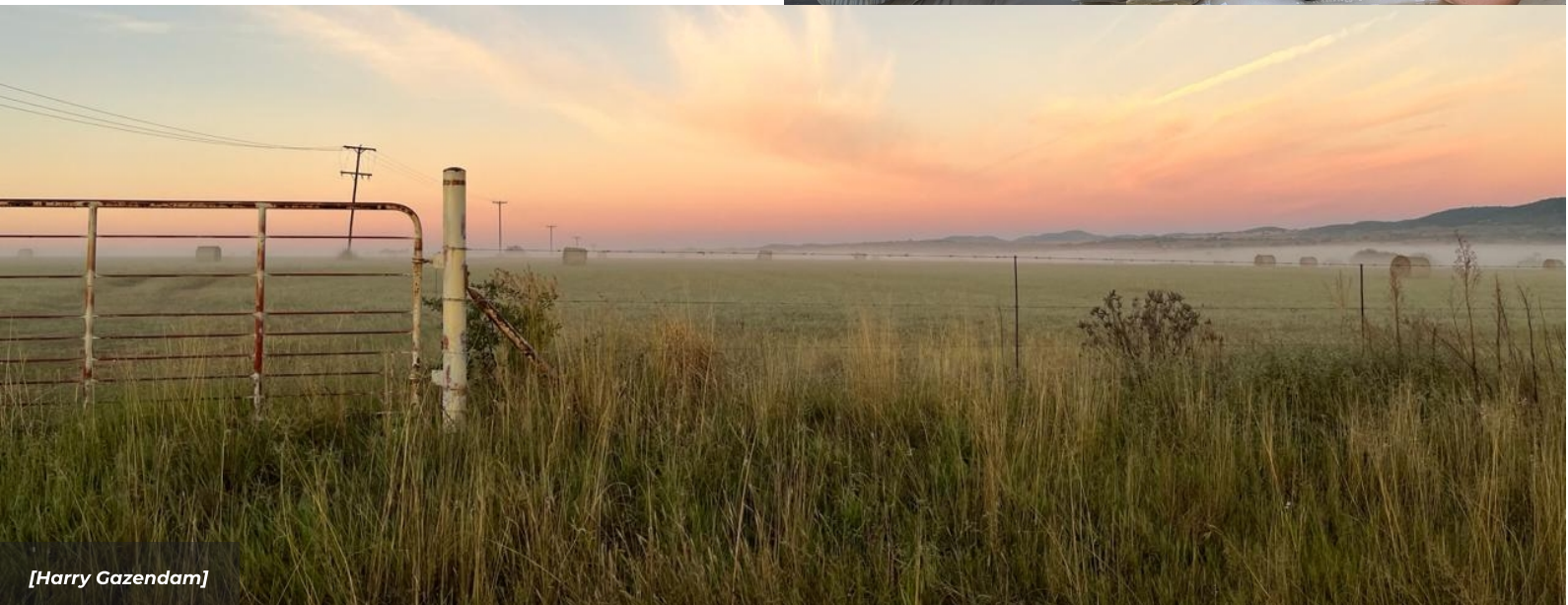
African Shelducks
[Wouter Fourie]



Schoemansdrift bridge
[Amanda Gazendam]



Lunch [Amanda Gazendam]



[Harry Gazendam]

MTUNZINI 5 – 9 JUNE 2024

CAMP



Within minutes of arriving at Ngoye Lodge in Mtunzini, many of us were thrilled to spot our first lifer, the White-eared Barbet (Witoorhoutkapper).

In the lodge's lush coastal garden, with its majestic fig trees, we also saw resident Trumpeter Hornbills (Gewone Boskraai) and Purple-crested Turacos (Bloukuifloerie).

Other garden highlights were Black-throated Wattle eye (Beloogbosbontrokkie), Olive Sunbird (Olyfsuikerbekkie), African Olive Pigeon (Geelbekbosduif), a Golden-tailed Woodpecker (Goudstertspieg), and a Little Sparrowhawk (Kleinsperwer). All of this before we had even met our guide!

Day 1

Our first full day of birding was under the expert guidance of BirdLife Guide Sakhamuzi Mhlongo.

It began with a visit to Ngoye Forest, spotting our first Palm-nut Vulture (Witaasvoël) en route. We started by exploring the forest edges along the road that runs through the reserve, looking for the endemic Green Barbet (Groenhoutkapper).

We didn't spot it immediately, so we walked through the ancient forest full of Shaka-era secrets. We caught sight of specials like Black-bellied Starling (Swartpensglansspreeu) and Yellow-streaked Greenbul (Geelstreepboskruiper) flitting in and out of the canopy.





Green Barbet
[Marlou Schalkwyk]

We spent the rest of the first day searching for the Spotted Ground Thrush (Natallyster) in the Umlalazi Nature Reserve. This reserve consists of a large lagoon and mangrove forest, which separate the town of Mtunzini from the sea (which we could hear from our lodge, too!). Unfortunately, we couldn't find the elusive thrush. However, we did happily tick off two other regional specials, the Mangrove Kingfisher (Manglietvisvanger) and the Green Malkoha (Groenvleiloerie), although we had to strain our necks to look up and see the Malkoha in the canopy!

Other interesting sightings from the first day were African Fish Eagle (Visarend), Black Saw-wing (Swartsaagvlerkswael), Lesser Honeyguide (Kleinheuningwyser), Caspian Tern (Reusesterretjie) and a pair of Klaas's Cuckoos (Meitjie).

Day 2

We left early on our second day to get to Dlinza Forest in Eshowe to meet Sakhamuzi at the forest gate. It was a bit cold and windy at the top of the forest viewing deck, but we did get an early morning sighting of our target special, the Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon (Withalsbosduif). As we watched a bronze-naped female sunning herself in the early morning light, we also saw a Grey Cuckooshrike (Bloukatakeroe) flying between the forest trees in the distance. Wanting to escape the cold and explore more of the forest, we climbed down from the viewing tower and walked along one of the forest trails. Unfortunately, it was very quiet, and the Spotted Ground Thrush was still nowhere to be seen.



Dlinza [Jenna van Schoor]



Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon (f)
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Amatikulu [Jenna van Schoor]

But, we did see a Cape Batis (Kaapse Bosbontrokke) and a Grey headed Bushshrike (Spookvoël) and heard a Scaly-throated Honeyguide (Gevlekte Heuningwyser) and a Narina Trogon (Bosloerie) somewhere in the forest shadows. We spent a bit of time in one of the hides on our way out, but unfortunately, there was no activity, so we pressed on to our next stop, the Amatikulu Nature Reserve, to find the Swamp Nightjar (Natalse Naguil).

From densely wooded forests, we moved into coastal grasslands, right next door to where Sakhamuzi grew up and where he listened to the nightjar's calling every night. On Sakhamuzi's instruction, we set to work, trying to form a straight line while trampling through the thick grassy vegetation to try to flush the nightjar. After going up and down one or two hills, seeing a few Yellow-throated Longclaws (Geelkeelkalkoentjie) and getting very out of breath, we eventually saw one of the nightjars fly up.

It then took quite a bit of manoeuvring in different directions, keeping very quiet, and slowly encircling the nightjars to get them to finally show themselves. Once they did, we saw not one but three of them. Seeing them felt like a privilege, as their future is uncertain due to livestock grazing pressures and other environmental concerns. It's incredible how good they are at disappearing into the long grass!

Feeling like we deserved to turn the physical exertion down a notch, we moved on to our next stop, the Emoyeni Wetlands. It was incredibly windy, but we managed to get decent sightings of several birds while walking around the dam, including the Dark-capped Yellow Warbler (Geelsanger), Yellow Weaver (Geelwewer), White-backed Duck (Witruggeend), the adorable African Pygmy Goose (Dwerggans), and another Palm Nut Vulture, posing perfectly on top of a raffia palm tree.



Swamp Nightjar
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Dark-capped Yellow Warbler
[Angela Openshaw]

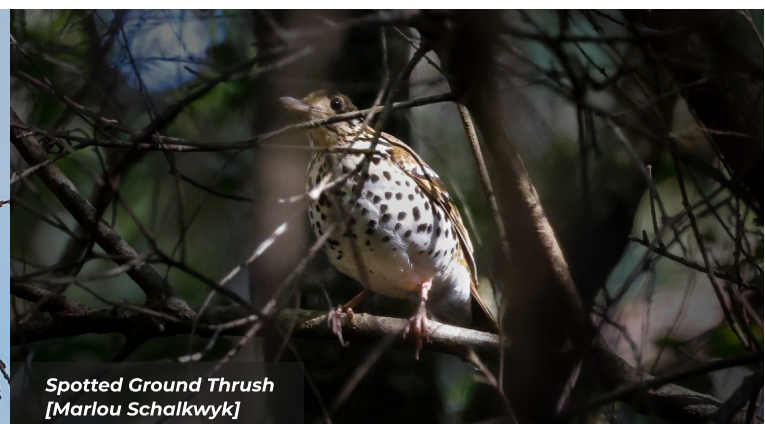
Day 3

Our last full day of birding began with a sighting of a Giant Kingfisher (Reuse Visvanger) and another Caspian Tern flying over the lagoon in the Umlalazi Nature Reserve. We also spotted a Grey Sunbird (Gryssuikerbekkie) and some Grey Waxbills (Gryssysie) while walking around the roads in the reserve. On one of the muddy flats, we also took some time to check out a Common Ringed Plover (Ringnekstrandkiewiet), one of the few waders in the area.

After that, we began our final afternoon mission: to find the Spotted Ground Thrush. We had been unsuccessful in the Twin Streams forest area before, but something told me we would get it right. It took a while and a lot of patience, but with Sakhamuzi's expert diligence and supreme skills at carefully rolling Angie's tiny "eyeball" speaker into the forest, we eventually caught sight of this gorgeous forest phantom.



Palm-nut Vulture
[Marlou Schalkwyk]

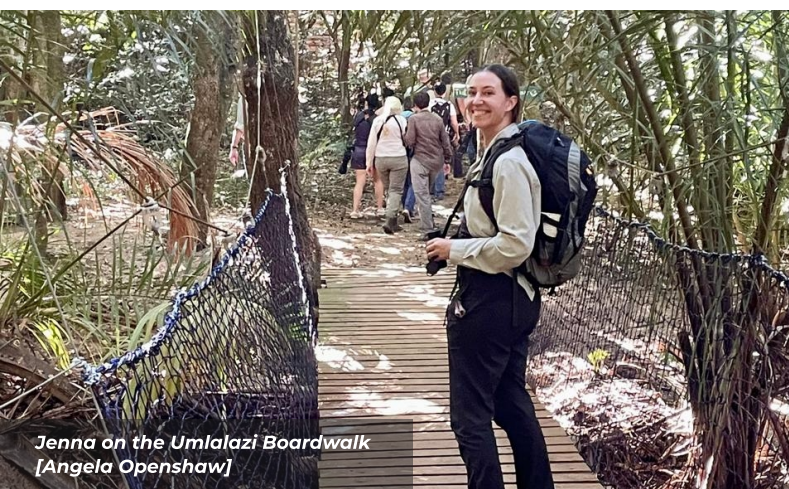


Spotted Ground Thrush
[Marlou Schalkwyk]

It was quite a magical moment to finally see this well-camouflaged bird hopping around on the leaf litter. Johan, a seasoned birder, got goosebumps as we stood for a while, quietly making sure everyone had seen it. Luckily, we managed to get even closer views of it moving in and around the trunks of trees. And if that wasn't enough, when we decided to move on, someone spotted a Narina Trogon sitting nonchalantly on a branch above us. It felt like the forest was finally on our side!

To make sure we had tried our hardest to get all the specials, we also spent some time in the Twin Streams plantation area, looking for Southern Banded Snake Eagle (Dubbelbandslangarend). Unfortunately, we dipped on that one but saw many other birds in the area, including Red-backed Mannikin (Rooirugfret), Scaly-throated Honeyguide (Gevlekte Heuningwyser) and Brown-throated Martin (Afrikaanse Oewerswael).

Our final stop was the mangrove forest in Umlalazi, where Sakhamuzi and Kayleigh were the only ones to get a quick glance at an escaping African Finfoot (Watertrapper). If one kingfisher wasn't enough, we saw the enigmatic Half-collared Kingfisher (Blouvisvanger) hiding in the mangroves and another Mangrove Kingfisher further on. It was exciting to learn more about the intricacies of this mangrove habitat, which is full of red-clawed fiddler crabs and long climbing whelks (snails).



Jenna on the Umlalazi Boardwalk
[Angela Openshaw]

Unfortunately, it was time to part ways with Sakhamuzi, but only after we took our first walk on the windy beach and some pics of a White-fronted Plover (Vaalstrandkiewiet) in the dunes. Just before leaving, we saw yet another Palm-nut Vulture flying over the sand. It seemed like a fitting end to an incredible trip.

Thank you to everyone on the trip for such a memorable holiday, huge gratitude to all of the BLNG team for organising the trip, and high praise to Sakhamuzi for his patience and master guidance. I can definitely recommend a trip to this part of the world, even just for the warmer winter climate!



Narina Trogon
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Mangrove Kingfisher
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Marlou Schalkwyk celebrates her 500th lifer.

WAGON DRIFT 8 11 AUGUST 2024

CAMP

Birders are tough cookies. We proved it again this past long weekend. From the outside, many of our group could be mistaken for slightly deranged doddering pensioners. But this belies the reality: we would get up long before dawn, donning scarves, balaclavas, and coats, but taking these off as the day and the heat and excitement progressed; then putting them on again in reverse order as soon as the sun set.

Where non-birders took leisurely long-weekend drives in air-conditioned cars, we crawled for hours over the ruts and potholes of gravel roads, all windows wide open despite the sharp cold of early morning or the boiling heatwave at midday; choking in clouds of dust (yes, you guessed right, we were the last car in the birding train). We were constantly on high alert, hour after hour, the better to spot the next species on the next bush.

Add to this the strenuous exercise of lugging heavy cameras and lenses, binoculars, water, and food packs, while crawling through thorn bushes or scanning endless furrows in a field. And, typical, our highveld winter, having had enough of our complaints, turned from overnight frosts into scorching heat with no graces of spring in between.

But would we do it again? YESSS!

Because I did not mention that we were on a quest, and shared the excitement of spectacular finds, the congeniality, the laughter, the mutual support, the sheer enjoyment of doing what we love: the thrill of the hunt, the adrenaline rush of the find, the elation, the celebration, and gaining the emotional well-being of a day spent in nature with friends.



Gabar Goshawk
[Jan Pretorius]



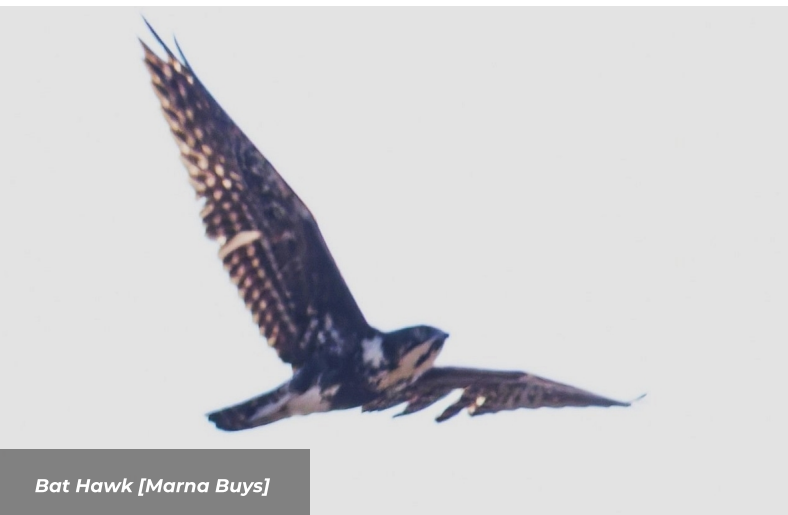
Great Egret
[Marna Buys]



Yellow-bellied Eremomela
[Marna Buys]



Wire-tailed Swallow
[Marna Buys]



Bat Hawk [Marna Buys]



Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark [Marna Buys]



Bat Hawk [Marna Buys]

Wagon Drift Game Farm has an interesting mix of bushveld, seringveld, grassland and two dams which, in turn, offer an exciting variety of bird species. Not that our long weekend's birding was restricted to the farm alone, as Wagon Drift is within easy reach of Rust de Winter, currently bristling with larks and pipits on recently burnt fields, and Mkhombo Dam, which always delivers some surprises. Then, of course, there was the possibility of getting to see Meyer's Parrot at nearby Camp Discovery. Throw in three game (read "birding") drives, and you have some happy campers.

On our first day, we struck out for Mkhombo Dam at dawn. To me and the few other rookies who before had only associated Mkhombo Dam with reports of national rarities in terms of visiting waders, and vehicles stuck in mud, a lovely surprise unfolded. The size and beauty of the dam, and the sheer numbers of water birds took my breath away. Surely this must be the central and only breeding spot of the African Jacana!

We must have seen twenty or more pairs the morning we spent there. The vegetation on the shore offered its own surprises: apart from the expected bushveld species, we ticked Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Wire-tailed Swallows, both Wider Gauteng Rarities. The fly-by of a Caspian Tern was special, too. By then, we had already enjoyed three raptors in quick succession: Gabar Goshawk, Black Sparrowhawk, and African Fish Eagle.

We had been overjoyed to see both Lesser- and Greater Striped Swallows, and even one White-throated Swallow – early migrants and sure harbingers of longed-for summer! Which very quickly became a summer too hot to bear and Jan de Wet's car, trundling behind the group birding on foot, became the "ambulance" where some of us took refuge from the blazing sun, long walk, and heat.



Northern Black Korhaan [Jan Pretorius]



*Looking for the Bearded Woodpecker at Camp Discovery.
[Ivonne Coetzee]*



*Juvenile Black-headed Oriole
[Ivonne Coetzee]*

Mkhombo Dam had a Southern White-crowned Shrike when we left, and hard on its heels White-crested Helmet-Shrikes at Rust de Winter. Fransie had arranged that we could enter the private ATV Bird Sanctuary and campgrounds next to the Elands River. In the riverine trees, we spotted a fourth raptor – an African Harrier-Hawk. But immediately yet another raptor started circling overhead, constantly disappearing behind branches and leaves, but enough to allow all of us excellent views. It even perched momentarily. The slender wings and dark hood pointed towards falcon, but the yellow eyes, white underparts streaked dark brown, and even a chin stripe, threw us in confusion, until Hanjo, our expert, called Bat Hawk.

Marna and Craig's lightning-fast trigger fingers caught the bird on camera, and their screens confirmed the impossible: BAT HAWK, indeed! Totally Out of Range! This species, scarce at the best of times in its tropical lowveld and forested escarpments habitat, was hunting in broad daylight in the bushveld, a mere 50 km north of Pretoria. We were incredulous, delighted, no, awe-struck. To half of our group's members, even our experienced leader Fransie, this was a lifer. No words can describe the feeling of joy that even a seasoned birder feels upon such a gift from nature.

I should mention here that belonging to the club and going on guided bird excursions has a great many advantages. On my own, I would never have been able to even begin identifying this mystery raptor, neither would I have been able to capture it on camera. Never mind getting permission to enter this and then another private property, as we did immediately after.

This nearby farm belongs to friends of Hanjo, who co-led our group. Hanjo and Fransie had scouted it out on their pre-camp recce a week or two before and found both Chestnut-backed and Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks on the fields. The latter, another Wider Gauteng Rarity, we found after some hard scanning and searching in fallow fields, and it pushed up our count of regional rare birds to four for the day. Three Northern Black Korhaan were flushed just before we headed back.

We headed home, covered in dust and sweat, for a welcome shower and some quick refreshments. Then we departed on a night drive on a game vehicle, compliments of Wagon Drift. Our target: Owls!! Apart from day-time sights of the Pearl-spotted Owlet and the resident Western Barn Owl, we had heard Spotted Eagle-Owl and Fiery-necked Nightjar. I also secretly held out some hopes for Marsh Owl or even African Grass Owl, because of the extended marshy areas near the dam where the grass looked exactly right.

Our young driver, Kendra, just as the young driver of our game vehicle at Camp Discovery the next day, obviously understood the assignment: slow and careful driving with a multiplicity of stops, reversing a bit, patiently allowing us photographs and long-winded debates on tricky IDs. However, the owls had not received any memo. They stayed in hiding.

Camp Discovery is the site of the success story of the re-establishment of Meyer's Parrots in the Dinokeng area. The owner, Wouter van Deventer, started a successful breed-and-release programme there, some two decades ago. He also planted aloes and other indigenous fruiting trees on the property, which the wild parrots come to visit almost daily. But...the next morning saw us entering the Camp Discovery grounds in dismay, high hopes dashed.

Where two weeks ago, when arrangements were made for us to visit with a 50/50 chance of seeing Meyer's Parrots, seeing that Camp Discovery had no bookings over the long weekend, we found a huge soccer tournament in full swing. A blaring PA system, about 8 teams playing simultaneously, and eager supporters and staff made Camp Discovery's win our loss. No Meyer's Parrot would brave this! Still, the guide, Dylan, who was provided, courteously showed us more secluded spots with flowering aloes and took us for a spectacular 360° rooftop view over the bushveld. The incredible five-star facilities and staff had us amazed.

A wonderfully slow and leisurely birding drive on Camp Discovery came next. We visited some dams where Fulvous Whistling Ducks and Grey Heron, swallowing an impossibly large fish, were the highlights. Another dam served as a breed-and-release facility for selected aquatic species and Knob-billed Duck, flamingos and African Pygmy Geese offered some great photo opportunities.

During the drive, a birding conundrum presented itself: were the two Flycatchers we had just seen, Ashy and Pallid, or neither? And what about the mystery Cisticola seen at Mkhombo? The discussions went back and forth, with phrases such as colour of gape, length of tail, subterminal band, supercilium, and juvenile playing prominent roles.

After Camp Discovery we headed to bird the Uitvlucht Road. Birding was rather slow, with most birds hiding from the relentless heat. Some seed-eaters kept to the few shaded spots of a driveway. On the way back home to Wagon Drift, Black-chested Snake Eagle and Coqui Francolin with three chicks lifted our spirits.

Another convivial braai, tall stories, and much laughter around the campfire that evening strengthened our bonds.

Fransie did the bird count: 174 species!!

A third game drive awaited in the morning, which would be our third and last day there, and with a few other species added, the count went up to 180 species. Ten different species of raptor, three types of eremomela, ten types of shrikes. A feast of birding, the likes of Kruger. And what wonderful memories were made in the process!

Ivonne Coetzee



Grey Heron [Craig Green]



Pallid Flycatcher [Marna Buys]



Black-chested Snake Eagle [Craig Green]



Laura Jordaan

PROTECT AND SAVE RIETVLEI'S BIRD LIFE CONSERVATION

BLNG VS COROBRIK

BLNG APPEALED AGAINST THE APPROVAL OF A COAL MINING LICENSE TO COROBRIK'S COAL ON RIETVLEI PERIMETER.



Pretoria REKORD, 15 November 2023

The aerial photo was presented by a farmer during the public participation meeting on the possible granting of an extension to Corobrik's mining license to include coal. The farmer's land and fields with vegetables and crops lie to the left and adjacent to the site with Corobrik's operations.

Background:

Corobrik started some months ago with illegal mining of coal at their quarry on land adjoining Rietvlei Nature Reserve on the south, in the upper catchment area of the wetland. Diligent citizens noticed this, and they reported Corobrik's illegal activities to the Department of Mineral and Energy (DME) affairs. Corobrik was stopped in their tracks and compelled by the DME to follow the regulatory and public participation process to obtain a license to mine coal.

The regulatory process requires various environmental studies by the applicant to identify risks and propose mitigation measures. Such measures are to be introduced to prevent any environmental pollution and water contamination, a common consequence of coal mining. The most dangerous water contamination risk is the seepage of Acid Mine Drainage (AMD), a pollution risk strongly associated with the mining of coal.

The results of Corobrik's environmental studies were presented in a public participation process during December 23 and January 24. Based on this, the DME granted them a conditional approval for a license to mine coal on 6th February, subject to:

- Approval by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE).
- Obtaining a water license from the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS).

BLNG's position:

BLNG was greatly concerned about the risk and effect of pollution that will be caused by the mining of coal and seepage of polluted water into the wetland – any seepage of contaminated water will have a devastating impact on the birds of Rietvlei that use, roost and breed in the wetland.

BLNG's action:

BLNG's Committee registered as an affected party in the public participation process. A window period was available for the public to appeal to DFFE and submit motivations and reasons why the license should not be approved.

The committee felt strongly that Corobrik's actions put Rietvlei's birdlife at risk and that their coal mining activities must be stopped. The committee engaged an astute environmental consultant, Dr Olivia Allen, to guide and assist the club to formulate and motivate an appeal. She agreed to assist on a pro bono basis for which BLNG is incredibly grateful.

Dr. Allen is well-versed in the regulatory requirements for coal mining licensing and determined that Corobrik's application, consultants and environmental studies were deficient on various aspects. An appeal was compiled on behalf of BLNG and timeously submitted to the DFFE on 7th March. Several other affected parties also submitted appeals including City of Tshwane, Afri-Forum, and others.

Corobrik then had an opportunity to respond to the concerns raised by affected parties within a specified time frame. They failed to respond within the deadline on 7th May and requested an extension which was granted by DFFE.

DFFE appointed a technical consultant group to review Corobrik's response and to make a recommendation by 10th July. This recommendation is under consideration by the (new) DFFE Minister. Our consultant will monitor progress and update the committee.

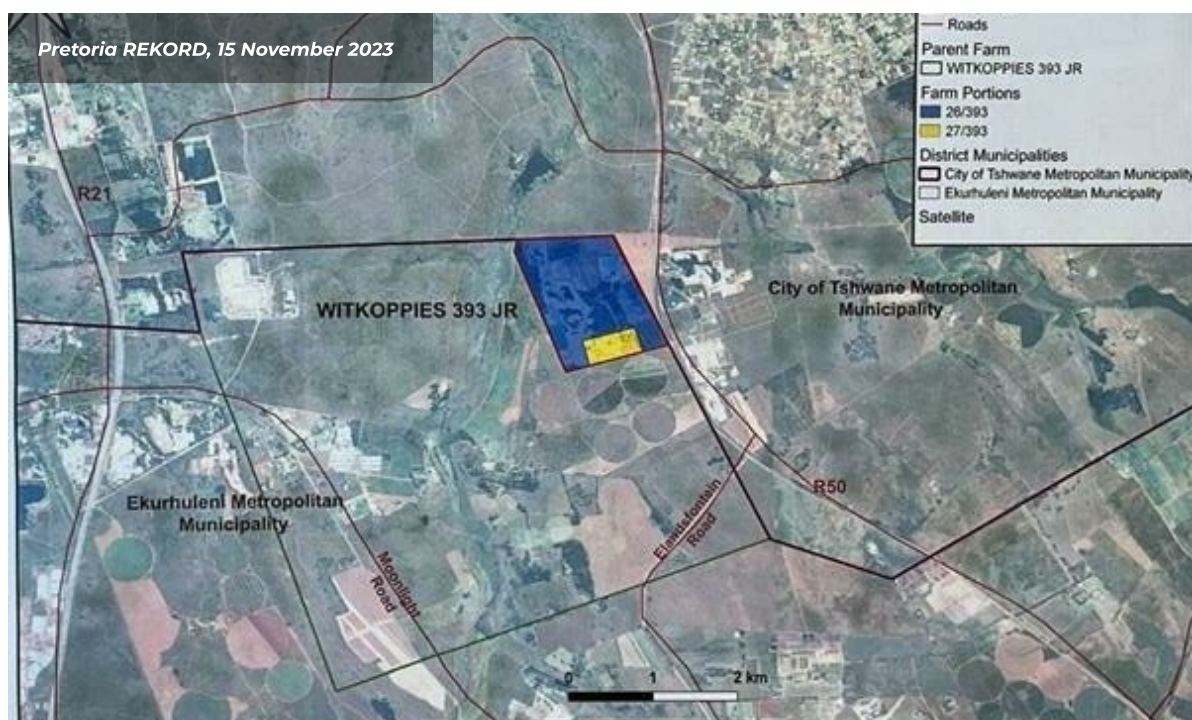
Other parties supporting BLNG's appeal:

Petition:

BLNG launched a petition during April against the granting of a coal mining license to Corobrik based on specific reasons why the license should not be granted. The petition was distributed to members and other concerned parties and attracted close to 190 signatures. It was also submitted to the DFFE as an input into their review.

Image 2

The map submitted by environmental impact practitioner, Licebo, to indicate the area of the Witkoppies site covered by Corobrik's application.



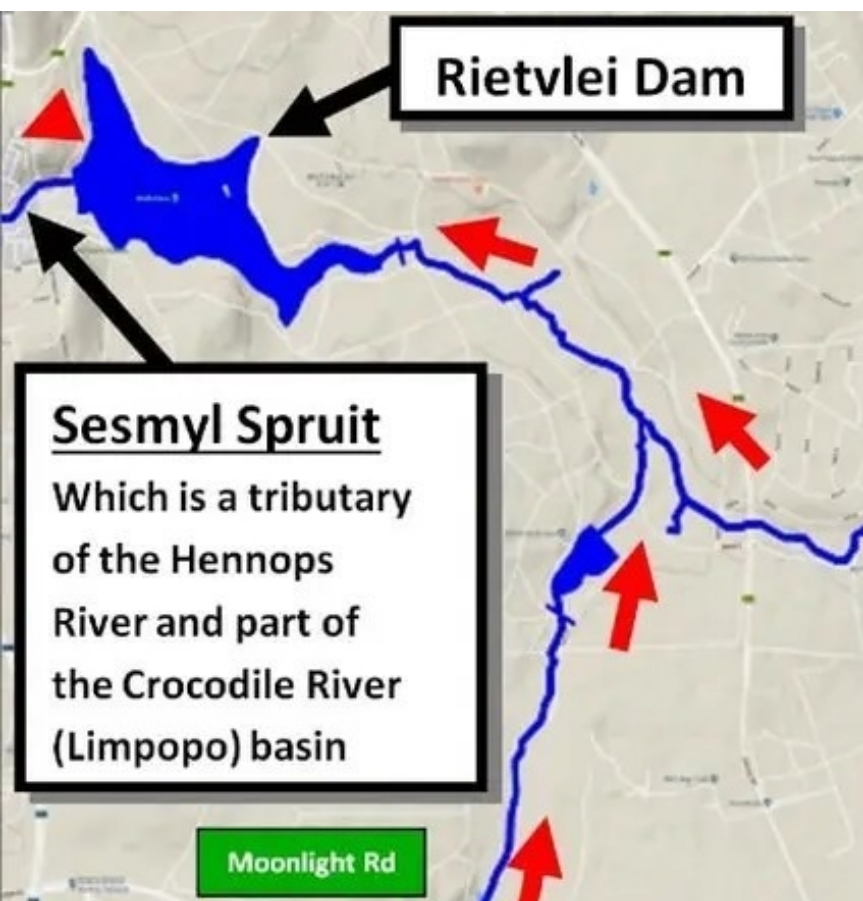


Image 3

<http://www.wildlifeincrisis.org.za>

Press coverage:

BLNG's actions against Corobrik received wide coverage in the press during recent months. It raised the profile of the risks of probable contamination of the wetland in Rietvlei. As a result of the press coverage, BLNG received messages of support for its campaign from readers and listeners.

Greenpeace:

The law firm Cullinan and Associates, representing Greenpeace, approached BLNG during July to potentially partner with BLNG in its initiative to overturn DME's conditional approval of the coal mining license. It is very encouraging that a movement of this stature approached and supports BLNG's campaign, their potential involvement will add weight to our club's voice.

Should the DFFE approve the license, BLNG will consider appealing against DFFE's approval of the license. In this scenario the committee may consider joining up with Greenpeace. Dr Allen will guide BLNG on the way forward.

Agricultural Research Council in association with the University of Pretoria:

Michael van der Laan, a club member, offered to assist BLNG to conduct independent water pollution tests under the umbrella of his employer, the Agricultural Research Council (ARC). The tests will be done in association with the University of Pretoria and will be done upstream to determine whether any AMD pollution or other toxins that originated from coal mining, may have already seeped into the Rietvlei Wetland.

Michael may even be able to motivate funding of the tests by the ARC and the test results may potentially be a critical input into BLNG's appeal.

Green Scorpions:

Michael also has connections within the Green Scorpions who may be able to assist BLNG should the test results justify their involvement.

It is our view that the support that the club has received to date will strengthen the club's hand to stop Corobrik's coal mining activities. BLNG will play its part to protect and save the Rietvlei Wetland from AMD contamination and the risks that it poses to Rietvlei's bird life. This is a serious threat to a favourite birding spot close to home.

The committee will keep our members informed.

Laetitia Steynberg

BLNG Committee - Conservation Portfolio

27 July 24

ON THE BRINK CONSERVATION

WITHOUT CONSERVATION ACTION, THE BOTHA'S LARK, SOUTH AFRICA'S MOST THREATENED TERRESTRIAL BIRD SPECIES, FACES EXTINCTION AS EARLY AS 2025. WITH AN ESTIMATED 340 INDIVIDUALS LEFT IN THE WILD IN SOUTH AFRICA, THE SPECIES POPULATION HAS DECLINED BY 90% OVER THE PAST DECADE.



Photo:

Botha's Lark
SA's most threatened terrestrial
bird species likely to become
extinct as early as 2025

Warwick Tarboton

The Botha's Lark, a small brown bird with an orange-pink conical bill, endemic to South Africa and found in grasslands along the escarpment of southwestern Mpumalanga, is under serious threat of extinction. The species is not sufficiently protected in nature reserves and grasslands are not adequately preserved as a vegetation type. Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, head of conservation at BirdLife South Africa, told Daily Maverick, "If we look at the decline, unless there's a serious intervention, the species could be extinct as early as 2025." The species, *Spizocorys fringillaris*, has a tiny and limited distribution in the grasslands of South Africa, of which 34% have been irreversibly transformed with less than 2% being formally protected, according to an article in the South African Journal of Science.

This somewhat nondescript bird used to be most present around the Wakkerstroom Highveld, with a small population historically located in the Daggakraal community region in southern Mpumalanga. However, bird guides from this area have noted its complete disappearance for two years now. Dr David Ehlers Smith, science and spatial planning project manager at BirdLife South Africa, said this may not be the most charismatic of bird species or the easiest to identify, but the conservation of the Botha's Lark is the most pressing issue facing South Africa's terrestrial fauna.

Smit-Robinson said, "The potential extinction of the Botha's Lark looms as an imminent possibility, marking a dire milestone for a South African bird species that occurs nowhere else on the planet. Urgent and focused action is imperative to address this crisis, with the time to act swiftly dwindling."

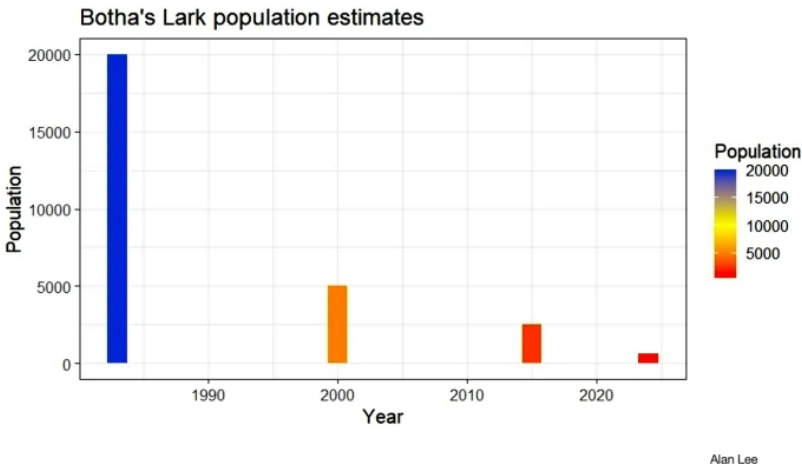
The impending extinction of the Botha's Lark was discovered only towards the end of 2023 and early 2024 when surveys and scientific analyses were done by Robin Colyn, former BirdLife South Africa staff member and a PhD student at the University of Cape Town. Smit-Robinson said his work indicated the situation was worse than they could have imagined. The population was estimated at 20,000 individuals in 1983; in 2015 it had declined to under 2,500.

Now, in 2024, it has declined to 340 individuals, and advanced remote sensing analyses indicate a 29% reduction of suitable habitat within its already tiny, historic distribution. The decline will trigger the uplisting of the Botha's Lark to Critically Endangered based on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List assessment – one step away from extinction.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE BOTHA'S LARK WAS A PROMINENT TOPIC AT THE SPECIES EXTINCTION CRISIS PRE-FORUM OF THE IUCN'S FIRST AFRICA CONSERVATION FORUM IN NAIROBI LAST WEEK, AS MEMBERS DISCUSSED IMPROVEMENTS IN THE LINKAGES BETWEEN SPECIES' RECOVERY EFFORTS AND THE BROADER CONSERVATION AGENDA IN AFRICA.

Photo:

Botha's Lark showed a decline of 90% over the past decade.
(Graph: BirdLife South Africa)



Lack of political will.

The Botha's Lark faces a myriad of threats, but according to experts, one of the greatest is the lack of political or economic will to safeguard species, resulting in a dearth of funds to address and mitigate the threats. The major threat facing the species is the fragmentation and loss of habitat. Smit-Robinson said the habitat area for the species was decreasing through an increase in monoculture and agricultural expansion for soy and maize in the area.

Additionally, a shift in grazing from sheep to cattle appears to be changing the grass conditions upon which the Botha's Lark relies.

"Our assumption at the moment, about why there's this change from sheep to cattle, is because there've been many incidents of stock theft in that area. But in addition, because of climate change, the crops are actually bringing in more money to the farmer – that's why they're changing from cattle grazing only. Historically, this was just grassland for grazing," she said. Smit-Robinson said they needed to work with landowners to protect the environment in areas where the species occurs, through habitat management plans.

There's a large area of habitat already protected – the Sneeuwberg Protected Environment which overlaps with the distribution of the species and lies within a strategic water source area, feeding rivers that provide water for our cities. It is also rich in fauna and flora and falls within the grasslands' Important Bird and Biodiversity Area.

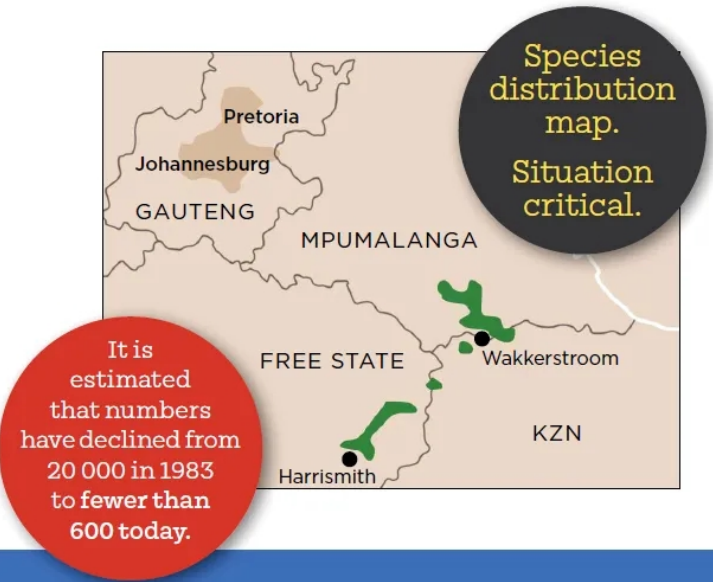


Photo:

Botha's Lark showed a decline of 90% over the past decade.
(Graph: BirdLife South Africa)

From the initial discussions, BirdLife South Africa believes they can come up with a good working relationship with landowners and farmers to increase the protected environment for the species that overlaps with their land, and take into account economic benefits as well.

"The beauty of having a protected environment will also be the signing of an agreement with the landowners where there will be a habitat management plan and a bigger management plan for that protected environment, where we would be able to limit this kind of ploughing of grasses and planting of crops," Smit-Robinson said.

She added that these threats not only affect the Botha's Lark species but others in the ecosystem. "All the work that we'll be doing will actually focus on grassland conservation. There are more than 20 threatened bird species that will benefit from this intervention, in terms of having a more protected environment and influencing management regimes for the species."

WITHOUT CONSERVATION ACTION, THE BOTHA'S LARK, SOUTH AFRICA'S MOST THREATENED TERRESTRIAL BIRD SPECIES, FACES EXTINCTION AS EARLY AS 2025. WITH AN ESTIMATED 340 INDIVIDUALS LEFT IN THE WILD IN SOUTH AFRICA, THE SPECIES POPULATION HAS DECLINED BY 90% OVER THE PAST DECADE.

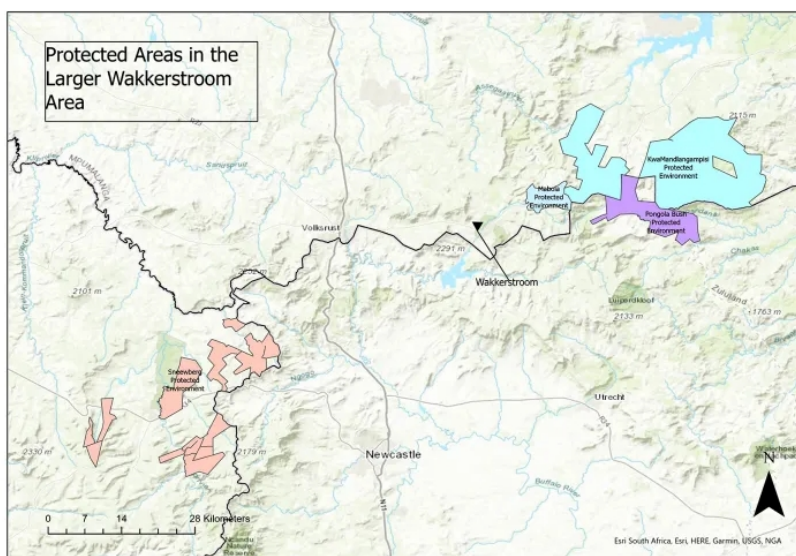


Photo:

Botha's Lark
SA's most threatened terrestrial
bird species likely to become
extinct as early as 2025

Warwick Tarboton

Plan of action

In an interview with Daily Maverick, BirdLife South Africa set out their plan to arrest the alarming decline in the Botha's Lark population.

In response to these threats, the Botha's Lark specialist working group was started two years ago by BirdLife South Africa, the Endangered Wildlife Trust, the Universities of KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Cape Town and the Free State, as well as BirdLife International.

The group came together to find innovative and sustainable solutions for conserving the Botha's Lark and its habitat, while engaging with affected landowners and communities throughout its range.

"We began the working group thinking that these threatened grassland species such as the Botha's Lark, Rudd's Lark and the Yellow-breasted Pipit really needed our attention. When we got the news of 340 individuals remaining, we realised that we had to jump into action immediately.

"There was no time to waste. It's a bit of a difficult situation because we know, to some extent, what we need to do... we have to conserve the habitat for the species, but then there's also a number of questions we still need to answer," she said.

The first thing to do is conserve the habitat, which includes formal protective environments, engage with landowners, and do stakeholder engagement for having the right habitat management practices and grazing regimes.

Second is to do more research, monitoring and surveys to understand the threats; why there has been a change from sheep grazing to cattle grazing and to what extent that influences the species, and to what extent climate change is a threat to the species.

BirdLife South Africa has proposed a dedicated Birding EcoTours Fellow of Grassland Conservation project manager to engage with landowners throughout the historic distribution of the Botha's Lark to identify survey regions; understand, support and champion sustainable land-use practices that allow for both economic and ecological viability, and promote awareness among affected parties.

Smit-Robinson said this project manager would hopefully be on the ground in September this year, engaging with landowners to maintain habitat management (grazing) regimes that benefit the Botha's Lark's ecology, and liaise with the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency and the Endangered Wildlife Trust to declare the Highveld a protected environment.

They will implement surveys across seasons and within localities and conduct camera-trap and AudioMoth surveys at artificial water bodies to confirm population estimates and document the species. Smit-Robinson said camera-trap surveys at identified nesting sites will also quantify nest predation and sensitivity to disturbance. Finally, the coordination of conservation efforts and the drafting of a species action plan to measure and monitor their success.

"Every species has a critical role in the ecosystem. We may not fully understand which other species are very dependent and linked to the Botha's Lark. If this is the situation for this species, it's probably an indicator of ecosystem collapse," Smit-Robinson said.

BirdLife South Africa is in the process of updating and revising the Red List for birds of South Africa, Eswatini and Lesotho. This is undertaken every 10 years using the IUCN Red List criteria, but on a regional level. "We have a pretty good idea of what the decline is for all species that we're working on, and the Botha's Lark is by far leading the pack in population decline," Smit-Robinson said.

There's been no concerted effort for the conservation of the species until now, she said, except for the few protected environments declared, with habitat management plans that theoretically should benefit its conservation.

Smit-Robinson said they began an awareness project with the community and schools in Daggakraal in 2023, one of the direct sites where the species occurred two years ago – this used to be the most popular site to view the species.

"There's not been a single species that's gone extinct on the African mainland – we've had some island species, like the Dodo, that's gone extinct in terms of a bird species. So this is really a cause for concern, and we take this very seriously.

"We will do our absolute best to turn the situation around. We hope that once we have more people on the ground doing analysis of what we're facing, the situation will be less dire than we think.

"But for now, we have to realise that we cannot introduce any additional threats to the species — that's avitourism, because when a species is so close to extinction, there's suddenly more demand to view it.

"We are working on a code of conduct where we're going to be asking birders to respect the species and to avoid its known sites," Smit-Robinson said.

Dr Ehlers Smith said BirdLife South Africa needed help to secure the future of the Botha's Lark and other threatened grassland species.

Kristin Engel was sponsored by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to attend the IUCN Africa Conservation Forum in Nairobi from 24-28 June as a media delegate.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-07-04-bothas-lark-sas-most-threatened-terrestrial-bird-species-likely-to-become-extinct-as-early-as-2025/>

ZIG-ZAG BIRDING TRIP

TRAVELOGUE

My 2023 ended on a high note when I managed to connect with a long list of specials on a zig-zag trip that started in Mtunzini on the KZN Coast in the south to the Lower Zambesi Valley in northern Zimbabwe with the Pafuri/Northern Kruger in between. Two BLNG friends joined respectively on these trips – Ronel Viljoen who was rolling up her photo count for the Kruger400 Photo Challenge, joined me in Kruger and KZN, and Ilse Müller joined the Zim/Pitta Trip. It is so much more fun to share unique birding sightings with birding friends.

Northern Kruger:

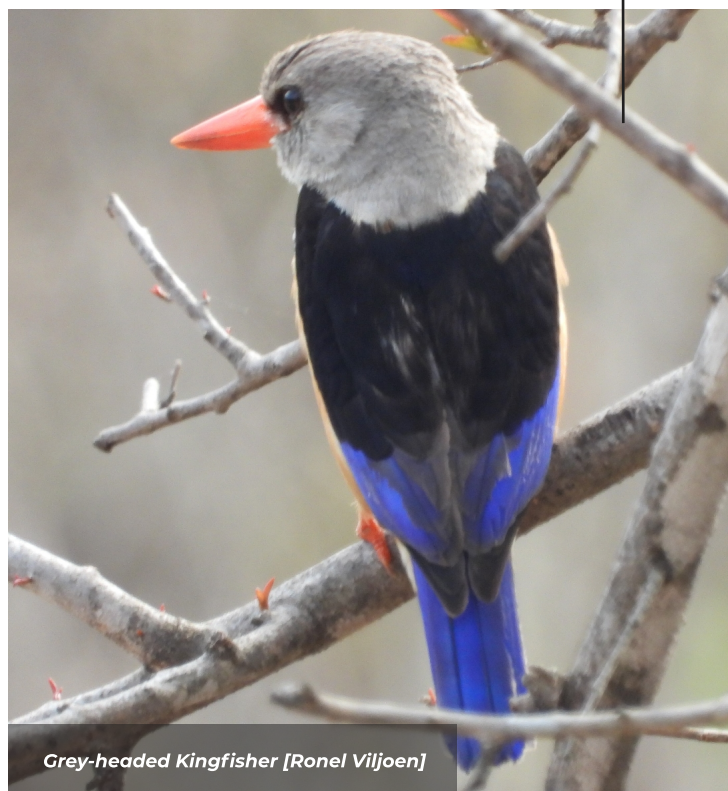
We headed to the ever-popular Pafuri area in northern Kruger and spent a few nights en route at the Bundox River Camp on the bank of the Olifants River. Apart from the easy birding from our tent's deck, we also had lion roaring a few meters from our tent – spine thrilling. Our days at Punda were filled with many long and productive drives to the Levubu bridge, the Pafuri picnic spot, Klopperfontein Dam and Crooks Corner. One of the most memorable sightings was at a spot close to the Punda Maria Camp where two male Pennant-winged Nightjars displayed in showman mode to lure a female – Fred Astaire may have copied a few swings and sways from them.

Other specials included Purple Roller, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Dickinson's Kestrel, Mosque Swallow, Tropical Boubou, Yellow-billed Oxpeckers, Greater Honeyguide, Coqui Francolin, and Lappet-faced Vultures on a kill with approximately 40 White-backed Vultures jostling for munching rights

Unfortunately, the Cuckoos had not yet arrived; our count was 164 species. Shortly after Kruger, we headed south-east to a few selected birding spots in KZN. To break the journey, we stayed over in Clarens and had a fly-over of a Bearded Vulture at the Golden Gate hide.

Mtunzini:

Our first multi-day stop was in Mtunzini and what a special surprise this village was – clean, organized, safe and with no potholes, all thanks to an active and clearly well-managed community association that takes care of most aspects of municipal management – it was heartwarming to witness what can be done if everyone does his bit for the bigger good. Sakhamuzi Mhlongo, our guide for two days, took us to Ongoye Forest and the Dlinza boardwalk. What exceptional sightings we had in these two spots. To mention but a few – the Green Barbet (one sighting was of four birds jostling), Striped Pipit, Black-bellied Starling, White-eared Barbet, Narina Trogon, Rufous-winged Cisticola, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Collared Sunbird, Spectacled Weaver, Spotted Ground Thrush, Chorister Robin-Chat, Palm-nut Vulture, Red-headed Quelea, White-backed Duck, African Pygmy Goose, Broad-tailed Warbler, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Emerald Spotted Cuckoo, Tambourine Dove, Holub's - and Eastern Golden Weaver.



Grey-headed Kingfisher [Ronel Viljoen]



Southern Banded Snake Eagle [Ronel Viljoen]



Half-collared Kingfisher
[Ronel Viljoen]



Rufous-bellied Heron
[Laetitia Steynberg]

St Lucia:

St Lucia was next on the itinerary. The village, forest walk, estuary and the Eastern Shores once again lived up to expectations and delivered specials such as Croaking Cisticola, Grey Cuckooshrike, Southern Banded Snake Eagle, Woodward's Batis, Purple-banded Sunbird, very close and good sightings of the Rufous-bellied Heron and Lesser Moorhen, Black-tailed Godwit on the estuary, Green Twinspot and a Lesser Jacana which was a big wow and lifer for me. This small and elusive long-toed bird has been on my 'want-to-see-list' (the learned term is a 'target species') for many a year, and the most joyful part is that I found and identified the bird myself (without a guide). It was very far away on a pan on the lilies amongst the reeds, but I even managed to get a reasonable photograph of the bird with my tiny camera. A day later I also photographed mating Green Malkohas which is according to Ian Ferreira, a local guide, a unique photo record.



Lesser Moorhen
[Laetitia Steynberg]



Southern Brown-throated Weaver
[Laetitia Steynberg]

Mkuze:

Our next stop was Mkuze Game Reserve. Initially I hesitated to book in Mkuze after reading a handful of non-complimentary comments on social media about the deterioration of the park. I had visited the park many years ago and had such good memories of its unique habitat and birdlife that I eventually decided to take the risk and booked a chalet for 3 nights with a back-up plan, should it be necessary.

What a pleasant surprise it was – the park roads were fine, the hides were upgraded, and the accommodation was acceptable, if understandably old. Furthermore, as the KZN Wildlife's teams were busy with various maintenance works on chalets and tents, Mkuze warrants a visit. The birding from the Insumo Dam hides, other hides and in the Fig Tree Forest was as good as it was many years ago. (Am holding thumbs that BLNG may organise an outing to Mkuze combined with Ndumo?)

Some of the specials were African Cuckoo Hawk, Southern Yellow White-eye, Pink-throated Twinspot, Pink-backed Pelican and a Bearded Scrub Robin that showed itself at the chalet. We also had a visit by a pair of Thick-Tailed Bushbabies just after sunset when we were still enjoying our sundowners; the pair was very relaxed and moved slowly, almost in sleuth-like manner, past our chalet.

Phinda:

Our last stop on the KZN leg was Phinda Private Game Reserve where we stayed in the Mountain Lodge. Phinda is a true wilderness area and an exceptional example of successful conservation by the private sector, paid for by tourists keen to experience true African wilderness areas with low-density tourism. The main purpose of our second visit to Phinda was to connect with wild pangolin, which I managed to do after having to search for it in the company of the researcher for three hard and hot days of serious bundu bashing and through the thick KZN bush, sometimes on all fours. Somehow pangolins have no affinity for roads or animal footpaths; needless to say, I picked up ticks and some nasty thorn scratches – it was all worth it for the experience to see a pangolin from very close and to assist with its weighing. Unfortunately, I dipped on the Lemon-breasted Canary – a ‘want-to-see’ bird which I also dipped on earlier in Pafuri. During the KZN leg, our bird count was 190.

Zimbabwe:

Shortly after KZN, Ilse and I departed to Zim aiming to find the African Pitta. This colourful elusive bird with rainbow colours had been on my ‘want-to-see-list’ for around 30 years. It all started soon after the time I attended my first birding course at the Pretoria Zoo, presented by Ulrich Oberprieler. For the course, the students had to buy a field guide, as this was long before online courses became commonly available. My choice was the Kenneth Newman field guide, simply known as ‘Newmans.’ Newmans had a sketch of an African Pitta on the front cover; it caught my eye and instantly became a ‘want-to-see-bird’ of the highest order. Over the ensuing years I never had (nor created) an opportunity to visit either of its strongholds in Moz and Zim. As I aged, it moved up my ‘want-to-see’ ranking and developed into a bucket list bird.

Pitta Trip to Lower Zambesi Valley:

An opportunity came my way early in 2023 when I received the 2023 tour program from karoobirdingsafaris.com. A Pitta Trip to Zim was listed for mid Dec. I immediately booked my spot and paid the deposit. Two days of guided birding in and around Harare were subsequently added to the Zim trip. A while later Ilse became tempted and decided to join and what a trip we had with a load of special sightings and birding experiences.

Our group of eight spent 4 nights in the Murara camp, a rustic camp in one of the many hunting concession areas in the Lower Zambesi Valley, of which the camp accommodates six guests and at a stretch eight guests. To reach the camp from Harare it is an 8-hour drive, halfway in a kombi and the last stretch in 4x4. Our guide, Derek Adams, has been running these trips from Murara for about 6 years in the non-hunting season. He allegedly knows where close to 30 Pitta breeding sites are – clearly a man that knows his turf.

Lady Luck was on our side. We had our first sighting of a small party of 3-5 Pittas on our way into the camp. This is how it happened – the vehicles stopped on the road where it crosses a narrow dry rivulet bed and we walked about 80 metres, sat down on the ground, and once everyone was settled, the guide used a call-up, and we waited. It did not take long for a Pitta to respond with its frog-like “blueep” call. To describe the excitement of waiting for the bird to show (or not) itself is difficult to describe, for me it was something between anxiety and jubilation when one of the birds eventually responded to the call. Will we see it? It took another 15-20 minutes to show itself and then more appeared a short distance away.

It was impossible to tell how many birds we actually saw as they moved in and out of vision amongst the dry leaf-cover on the riverbank. We could not get enough and spent around an hour crawling down the riverbed to follow and photograph these birds whilst they continued to appear and disappear on the bank just above us, only a few metres away. The guides estimated that we saw between three to five different Pittas. For me, it was an exhilarating experience to see this bird after so many years of yearning. I was goose-fleshed when it happened, these birds are notably more stunning than the Newmans sketch depicted that put me on this journey to connect with this “holy grail” of birding. It was Ilse’s second Pitta sighting.



African Pitta [Laetitia Steynberg]



African Broadbill [Laetitia Steynberg]

During our stay, the guides tried daily at different spots to again connect with the Pittas. The method used was that the guides would take us by 4x4 to a spot where they knew there would be a good chance to see the birds. It was always deep inside a bushy area close to a river with dense undergrowth and thick leaf-cover on the ground. We then made ourselves comfortable on camp chairs (nogal!) with our cameras ready for action. The guide would then intermittently use a soft call-up and we then waited. Sometimes we were 3-4 hours stationary in the same spot. During this time, many other special birds were spotted, some at very close range. The guides were always armed just in case an elephant or lion surprised us.

As it turned out, the first sighting on the way into camp was our vehicle's (4 guests per 4x4 plus a guide), the other vehicle managed to get more sightings later on during our group's stay at Murara, one of a Pitta displaying. I hope to return soon to get a photograph of a displaying Pitta. Many more specials followed during our stay at Murara such as the Red-throated Twinspot, European Roller, Mottled Spinetail, Shelley's Francolin, Meyer's Parrot, Orange-winged Pytilia, Temminck's Courser, Eastern Nicator, White-browed Coucal, Black-winged Red Bishop (in non-breeding plumage), Livingstone's Flycatcher, Holub's Golden Weaver, Böhm's Spinetail, Lilian's Lovebird, five male Pennant-winged Nightjars displaying to females at a waterhole, Dickinson's Kestrel, Senegal Coucal and African Broadbill at close range, which was a nugget of a moment.



Orange-winged Pytilia [Laetitia Steynberg]

Harare and environs:

On our first day we headed to Gosha Park, an unspoilt Miombo woodland reserve about 100km east of Harare – this is a must destination for Miombo specials and endemics. We added White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Whyte's Barbet, Miombo Tit, Black-eared Seedeater, Miombo Rock Thrush, Wood Pipit, Southern Hyliota, Tree Pipit and African Spotted Creeper to our list. To find the Spotted Creepers took several hours of following insectivorous bird parties – who said finding a Spotted Creeper is easy? We eventually spotted a family a few metres away from the picnic spot where we had lunch a short while earlier. They allowed us around 40 minutes of close viewing whilst they moved around in the Miombo habitat. As Murphy would have it, it was too big a moment for my camera battery which failed me and I missed an opportunity to get a shot – a good reason to return.

Photo 10 – Whyte's Barbet [Laetitia Steynberg]

Our last day in Zim entailed birding in various habitats in and around Harare. Sightings included African Goshawk, Tropical Boubou, Abdim's Stork, Boulder Chat, Black Stork, Rosy-throated Longclaw, around 20 Marsh Owls in a small wetland adjoining a small grass-surfaced airfield, African Rail, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Broad-tailed Warbler – all in one day.

My count for Zim was 194 species.

Although I am not a bird number chaser, my heart bounced a few times when I counted that the Zim trip added 19 lifers to my life list – it was sheer joy to see all these birds in their natural environments.

It was a memorable few weeks of birding in special spots with special birds, I am so grateful.

LAETITIA STEYNBERG



Whyte's Barbet [Laetitia Steynberg]

‘N BONDIGE GIDS VIR ‘N NIE-VOËLKYKER

BIRDERS EYE VIEW



Vir voëlkykers is daar nie medisyne nie, sê Schalk Kotzé. Daarom deel hy 'n paar wenke met die oog op 'n gelukkige huwelik.

In byna elke buitelewetydskrif sien 'n mens foto's of artikels of briewe oor voëlkyk. Maar niemand dink ooit aan die voëlkyker se maat, wat nie noodwendig die passie deel nie.

My liewe vrou is al 16 jaar 'n voëlkyker en ek dink ek het goeie raad vir wederhelftes oor hoe om steeds lief te bly vir die voëlkyker in hulle lewe, al het hulle nog nie, probleme nie. Dalk help dit 'n paar mense...

Die eerste simptome. Jy sal agterkom jou vrou (vorentoe beteken dit ook man, maat, vriend...) begin "anders" word. As sy die sosiale soort is, raak sy al hoe meer asosiaal, en, vreemd genoeg, as sy asosiaal is, raak sy meer sosiaal. Sy sal vriende maak met vreemdelinge.

"As sy die sosiale soort is, raak sy al hoe meer asosiaal, en, vreemd genoeg, as sy asosiaal is, raak sy meer sosiaal."

E-posse, SMS'e en oproepe vlieg heen en weer oor 'n nuwe geveerde wat sy gesien het, en waar die ander een 'n skaars avis gesien het.

En sy wil skielik meer stap. Oupa se verkyker is nie meer goed genoeg nie, en klein boekies word aangeskaf vir "boodskappe" (wat later blyk voëllysies is). Vroeër het sy dalk nie haar oog in 'n boek gesit nie, maar in die mall beur sy na al wat 'n boekwinkel is.

En dis net die begin – die ergste lê voor...

Nuwe woorde en taalgebruik.

In gesprekke sal jy dikwels name soos “Roberts”, “Newman”, “Burger” en Sasol” hoor. Dis nie skelmpies se naam nie, en sy het nie begin speel op die aandelemark nie – dis die naam van die skrywer of uitgewer van Voëlbybels. Jy sal ook ’n nuwe taal moet aanleer. Die volgende is ’n voorbeeld van voëlkykerstaal: “Wa! Top! Hy hiekie tug! Hiekie voontoe! Top! Heg so.” In Afrikaans beteken dit: “Wag! Stop! Ry bietjie terug! Bietjie vorentoe! Stop! Reg so.”

Jy sal dié taal die vinnigste aanleer as jy jou dogter vra om ’n potlood dwars in haar mond te sit, effens weg te kyk van jou af – effens opwaarts naby aan ’n ruit – en dan te praat. Vra haar ná die tyd wat sy gesê het. Jy kan ook self ’n potlood in jou mond sit en met jouself in die huis praat as die kinders onwillig is. Dis ’n belangrike aspek, want dit kan tot kwade gevoelens lei as jy nie jou vrou verstaan en nie stop as sy ’n voël sien nie.

Vakansies.

Hartenbos, Stilbaai, en Hermanus, en selfs kuier by Oupa- en Ouma-hulle, is uit vir Desember. Sy sal jou vertel hoe mooi dit is op plekke soos Pafuri, Ndumo, Chobe, Sebengo en ander plekke wat sy vroeër nie eens kon uitspreek nie. Soos ’n mot na ’n kers beur sy juis na die hitte toe, want dis glo die tyd wanneer die geveerdes uit Europa en Rusland land.

“Soos ’n mot na ’n kers beur sy juis na die hitte toe, want dis glo die tyd wanneer die geveerdes uit Europa en Rusland land.”

Ek het nie raad hiervoor nie. Miskien sal dit help om in ’n tent op die grasperk te oefen om in die somer sonder lugreëling te slaap.

Die groot inpak.

Kos en tasse sal nie meer voor in die inpakry staan nie. Wees gereed vir hope boeke (die Newman, Roberts en Burger waarvan ek vroeër gepraat het) en ’n klomp Africa Birds- en birding-tydskrifte. En kaarte, al het jy ’n GPS. Moenie dink jy kan dit in die waentjie of agterin die kar pak nie. Nee, dit moet alles in ’n halwe armlengte van haar af wees. Gewoonlik op die handrem, onder by haar voete (waar die padkos altyd gestaan het), onder jou voete, op die dashboard...

Maak vrede, broer, maak vrede. Moenie aanstoot neem as jy moet ry met ’n boek op jou skoot nie. ’n Outomatiese ratkas help baie, want dit sukkel dikwels om die rathefboom te kry onder die Newman en Roberts. As jy jou gholfstokke wil saamneem, beveel ek aan jy versteek dit die vorige aand, nadat sy gaan slaap het, onder die tent, in die waentjie.

O ja, en maak maar self seker daar word ’n boks met kos ingepak.

Op pad.

Moenie die fout maak om te dink sy begin eers voëlskyk as jul eers by julle bestemming aankom nie. Dis niks ongewoons om op die ooppad, teen 120km ’n uur, wanneer jy gereed is vir die nuushoof trekke, skielik “Tô-ôôp!” te hoor nie. Teen die tyd behoort jy te weet dit beteken: “Stop dadelik, ander is daar moeilikheid! Ek het ’n voël gesien.”

Hier is nog ’n paar nuttige oppadwenke:

- Jou GPS se funksie wat jou ’n idee van hoe laat jy kan verwag om by jou bestemming te wees, is nutteloos. Die nuwe formule is veel ingewikkelder as die een wat Graeme Smith gebruik as hy moet besluit om die beurt te sluit. Afhangende van die voëldigtheid in die omgewing (nog ’n formule), jou vrou se voëltelling, die weer en nog ’n paar dinge kan jy rofweg die verwagte reistyd verdubbel, en dan nóg 10 minute bytel vir elke voëlstop. Van een ding kan jy baie seker wees: jy gaan nie vóór daardie tyd by jou bestemming uitkom nie.
- Sit die aand voor die vertrek reeds die “Ons kyk voëls” in die agterruit (al is dit nie “ons” nie). En maak seker jou motor is verseker – veral sy agterkant.
- Maak besprekings eerder vir ’n dag later, en maak haar :”Verwag ons vir middagete” na “aandete”.
- As jy nie ’n outomatiese motor het nie, laat versien jou motor se eerste en trurat, en skryf die onderdelennommers af vir ’n moontlike vervanging. ’n Paar ekstra remblokke kan ook handig te pas kom. En gooi sommer ’n koppelaar ook in. Maak seker jou motor het elektriese vensters, behalwe as jy ’n behoefte het aan sterk (linker- én regter-) armspiere. Sy skiet met daardie verkyker ewe maklik links as regs, en die ruite moet oop vir beter sien. En ’n mens kan glo nie ’n venster oopdraai as jy ’n verkyker het nie.
- Haal voor die tyd die sitplek se nekstut af en oefen in jou oprit tot jy die kar binne 30 sekondes van 40 km/h tot stilstand kan bring, dan terugstoot, stop, weer 4 m vorentoe en 1 m terug, al twee kante se ruit afdraai, stilsit sodat die kar nie kan roer nie, en dan gereed wees om te hoor: “O, dis net ’n tortelduif.”

- Dit sal beslis help as jy die potloodtaalbevele kan opneem en dit luister terwyl jy oefen. Dié oefening kan 'n huwelik maak of breek.
- As dit kom by jou begroting vir brandstof, werk die gewone berekenings ongelukkig nie. Jy sal by jou dierbare moet uitvind hoeveel voëls sy verwag om te sien.
- Dan werk jy op nuwe voëls per tenk (nv/t). Aanvanklik behoort jy 'n goeie klompie nv/t te kry, maar Broer, as sy oor die 300-merk gaan, kan dit maklik verander in t/hv (tenk per nuwe voël).

Sosiaal.

Gewoonlik is die Vereklub se lede nie juis saamkuiermense nie. Nie- voëlkykers voel dikwels in die pad. Sê dankie daarvoor.

Maar dit mag dalk net gebeur dat jy jou op 'n aand tussen verkykermense bevind. As jy 'n vriendelik mens is, gaan dit baie moeilik wees, maar hou jou mond sover as moontlik styf toe. Plaas 'n bataljon wagte voor hulle en vervang hulle gereeld. Maar as dit gebeur dat jy iets noem van 'n voël wat jy per ongeluk gesien het, en hulle kyk jou vraend met arendsoë aan, met hulle hande op hulle voëlbybel (gereed om op te soek), dan het jy net twee kanse om met behoud van jou selfbeeld deur te glip.

Memoriseer hierdie twee antwoorde:

- “O, ek is nie heeltemal seker nie; die roofvoëls maak my mal. Hulle het mos almal verskillende kleure.” En dan bly jy stil.
- “Die son was agter die voël en dan was dit nog 'n juvenile (jong ene) ook – baie moeilik om hom te kon sien.” En dan maak jy of jy jou selfoon hoor lui.

Ek sou seker nog 'n paar dinge in hierdie verband kon sê, maar as jy die basiese dinge bemeester het, kan jy dalk net eendag hoor: “Ag my ou man, jy is dierbaar. Wat wil jy die vakansie doen en waarheen wil jy gaan?” Net 'n laaste waarskuwing – onthou wat geskryf staan: “Daarom, wie meen dat hy staan, moet oppas dat hy nie val nie.”

Ek het pas 'n maand met my dierbare vrou in die Krugerwildtuin gekamp, agter voëls aan, en nou voel dit vir my of ek 'n effense sagtheid teenoor die diertjies begin ontwikkel. Ek is effens bekommerd...

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RAPTORS IN FLIGHT BY OUR MEMBERS

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 of raptors in flight were sent in by various BLNG members.



Black Sparrowhawk
[Roel Jonkers]



Tawny Eagle [Marna Buys]



Little Sparrowhawk
[Roel Jonkers]



Spotted Eagle Owl
[Marlou Schalkwyk]



Black-winged Kite
[Sean Naudé]



Jackal Buzzard
[Elouise Kalmer]

WHY RING BIRDS

CITIZEN SCIENCE

The value of bird ringing to research and conservation.

What do we learn from bird ringing?

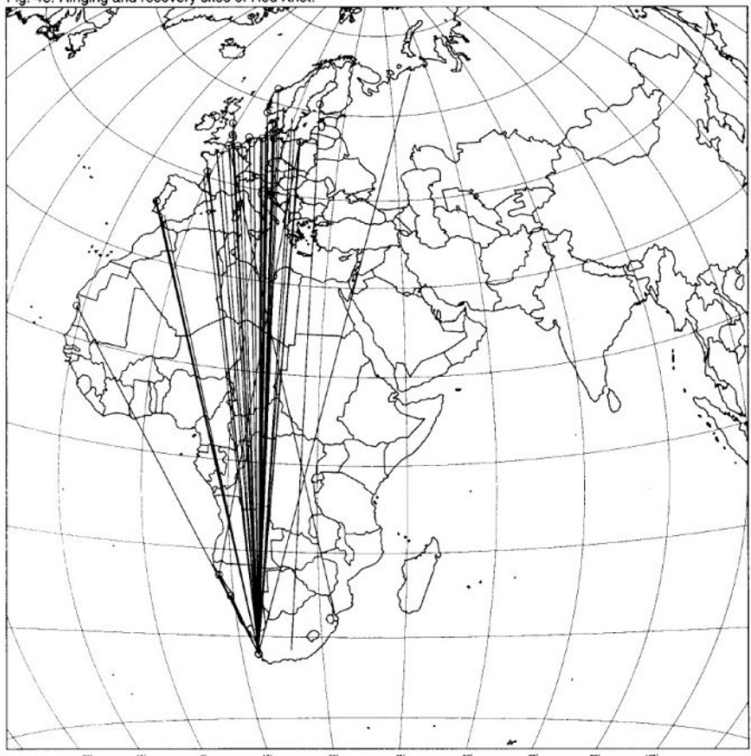
The first, quick and obvious answer is that ringing helps us understand movement patterns of birds. The more subtle answer is that it provides estimates of survival rates; these are estimated by statistical methods and are important because they help us understand the balance between births and deaths. The third answer lies in the data we collect off the bird while we are handling it. Fourthly, when bird ringing is conducted for many years at a single site, we discover trends; for example, we learn how the timing of migration through Europe is changing in response to climate change. The value of bird ringing is awesome.

What do we learn about bird movements from ringing?

Until quite recently, bird ringing was the only way to discover the secrets of migration. Where does a Barn Swallow that breeds in Denmark go to escape the northern winter? This is an important question for Danish conservation biologists because, if they want to maintain the breeding population in their country, they need to know what part of the non-breeding range they should motivate for conservation resources to be invested in order to protect “their” swallows. This question applies in the opposite direction too. If we are going to maintain populations of Barn Swallows in KwaZulu-Natal, we need to know where they breed, so we can motivate for their protection. Even though these questions of linkages between breeding, staging and non-breeding areas are also answered by satellite tracking and geolocators, bird ringing remains an important source of movement information. Compared to other methods, ringing is inexpensive and relatively non-intrusive.

There are so many examples of movements of Barn Swallows between Europe and Africa that when you use lines to join the places where the bird was ringed and where the ring was “recovered” (ie the bird was retrapped or found dead), the map is a total mess. So we use the Red Knot *Calidris canutus* to illustrate the patterns that emerge. Most ringing of Knots in South Africa was done at Langebaan Lagoon, West Coast National Park, Western Cape. The lines join the places of ringing and recovery, and do not imply that the bird flew along this route!

Fig. 46. Ringing and recovery sites of Red Knot.



What is striking about this map is that there are no recoveries of Red Knots in the Middle East or around the Black Sea. The map suggests that they are migrating along the west coasts of Africa and Europe and then heading east via Scandinavia. The breeding area that they are heading for is in Siberia, which has extremely few people so it is not unexpected that there are no “recoveries” during the breeding season. The results emerging from the ringing of other waders (e.g. Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea* and Little Stint *Calidris minuta*) shows that they migrate to Siberia through the Middle East.

So we know a huge amount about bird migration between Eurasia and Africa. By comparison, we know rather little about the movement patterns of species such as White-throated Swallow *Hirundo albigularis*. This swallow arrives in southern Africa in August and September, breeds mostly from October to December, and then heads off north in March and April. We know they go to “central Africa”, but that is really vague. There are no recoveries of ringed birds, even though large numbers have been ringed in southern Africa. Cape Sugarbirds *Promerops cafer* are endemic to the Fynbos Biome of the Western Cape, South Africa. This is a habitat which is dependent on fire; if Fynbos doesn't burn, it becomes moribund after about 15 years. Fire resets the Fynbos clock, with the first years after the fire being the most productive.

Almost wherever and whenever a patch of proteas is in flower in the Fynbos, there are sugarbirds present. When the flowering period is over, the sugarbirds move off. But we have no idea where they go. And we have no idea of the patterns of movement that get them from one flowering patch to the next over a year. One possibility is that there is a collection of say six or more patches where proteas are flowering in succession through the year, with the sugarbirds moving from patch to patch in an annual rotation.

But what happens when there is the inevitable fire, and the grove of yellow pincushions that they have come to rely on in October and November gets burnt? How do they adapt to this disruption? Knowing how they do this is an important conservation concern for sugarbirds. It is remarkable that we know the details of bird movements between the continents, but remarkably little about movements at small scales!



Once this yellow pincushion stops flowering this male Cape Sugarbird will need to find nectar food somewhere else. We don't yet understand their patterns of movement! Kleinmond, Western Cape, 24 December 2022

How does bird ringing help us estimate survival rates?

Professor George Seber at the University of Auckland in New Zealand did the complicated mathematical statistics to show how numbers of retraps of ringed birds over a period of years could be used to make estimates of the annual survival rates. Subsequently, an academic industry has been developed, making improvements and refinements to the original method. For example, an early extension enabled us to obtain separate survival estimates for young birds, which are almost invariably considerably less than adults. Another extension modified the statistics so that survival estimates were available for each calendar year, so it became possible to discover the impact of a drought (in Africa) or a particularly cold winter (in Europe) on survival. These statistical methods produce better answers if the number of birds ringed is large (and consistent between years), and if the ringing operation is kept going for many years.

The importance of having survival rates is that it enables conservation biologists to investigate whether the production of fledglings is sufficient to balance mortality, and to work out whether the population of a species is increasing or decreasing. For example, Phil Hockey estimated that every breeding pair of African Oystercatchers needs to produce, on average, 0.35 young per year in order to maintain a stable population. In practice, this means that a pair of oystercatchers needs to raise one chick every three years!

The African Oystercatcher is one of a tiny number of species for which this really valuable statistic has been worked out. The annual survival rate for adult African Oystercatchers is 96%. We are still, in 2023, seeing oystercatchers on Robben Island which we know were ringed in 2002, 21 years ago. Is this a surprise? The proportion of oystercatchers which survive 21 years is estimated by multiplying the survival rate (expressed as a proportion, i.e. 0.96) by itself 21 times: $0.96 \times 0.96 \times \dots \times 0.96 = 0.42$. So an annual survival of 96% is equivalent to a 21 year survival of 42%. This means that 42% of the African Oystercatchers which were breeding 21 years ago are still breeding. Because the survival rate is so large, they have (on average) lots of breeding seasons, and don't need to be very successful at breeding to keep the population stable.

In contrast, the adult survival rate for African Penguins is about 80%. This means that if you have 1000 penguins in January 2002, you can expect 800 to still be alive in January 2003. A year later, January 2003, there'll be 640. Only nine of these 1000 birds would still be expected to be alive in January 2023. A survival rate of 80% is alarmingly small for a bird as large as an African Penguin, and it is this low survival rate which is at the heart of the conservation problems of this species. Breeding productivity is not matching the mortality rate.



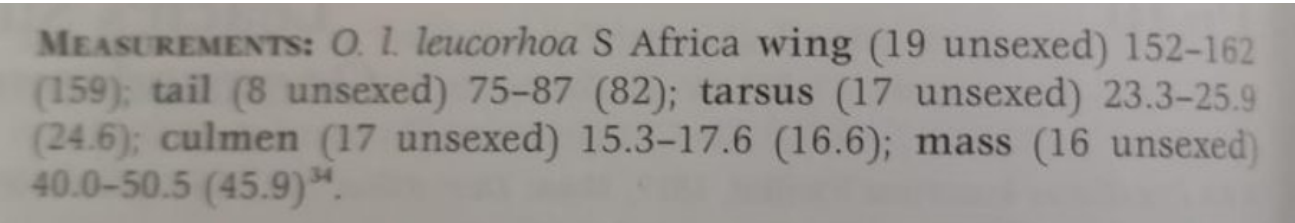
The ring was put onto this African Oystercatcher in 2001. It was still on the same territory on Robben Island on 21 January 2023. (Oystercatchers are ringed above the “knee” because, if the ring is placed on the tarsus between the “knee” and the “foot”, the ring numbers wear away as a result of abrasion with the rocky shore! This happens even with stainless steel rings.)

Why is important to know the age at which birds of a species start breeding?

Age at first breeding is one of the really critical bits of information for the conservation of a species. Suppose the survival rate of breeding adults of a bird species is 90%. If you have 1000 adult birds of a species at the start of the year, 900 survive, and 100 die. How many fledglings need to be produced each year so that when they reach breeding age, there are 100 recruits into the adult population? This is what is needed to maintain a stable population. Suppose 400 fledglings are produced in a year. Suppose survival to age one year is 25%. There will be 100 left after the year. If these birds are recruited into the adult breeding population, we will have replaced the birds that have died. But if they breed for the first time after two years, or three years, then there will be fewer than 100 birds to recruit into the breeding population, and overall numbers will steadily decrease. So age at first breeding is an important piece of information. The easiest way to find this out is by ringing young birds and doing the hard follow-up work to check when they enter the breeding population. Even though it is the “easiest” way, it requires dedicated fieldwork by ringers to discover this nugget of information.

What information can we obtain while we have the bird “in the hand”?

This information is on p 640 of Roberts 7. It provides the measurements and mass of Leach’s Storm Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*:



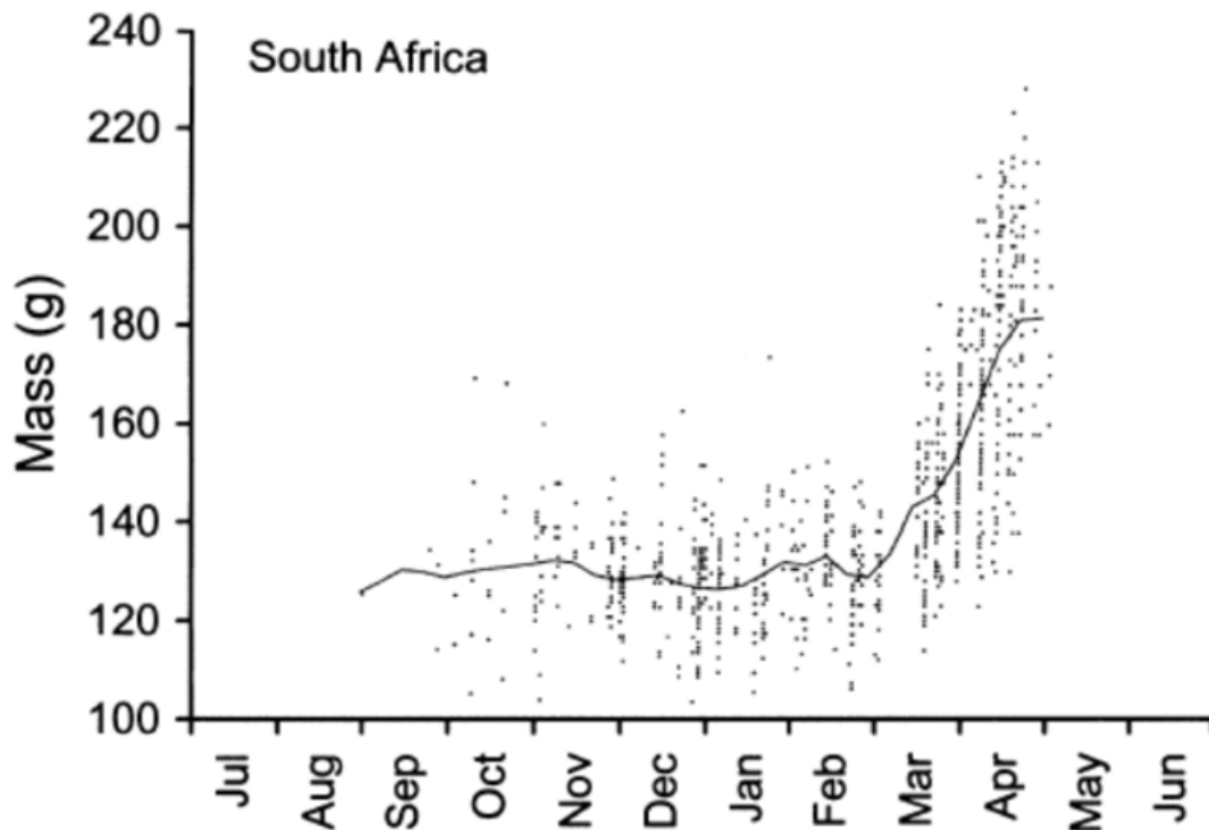
Where does this information come from? There was a period in the late 1990s when Leach’s Storm Petrels were discovered breeding for a few years on Dassen Island and Dyer Island. We made a special effort to ring these birds, and the results were published in a paper in a journal caldde the Transactions of the Royal Society of South Africa; you can download it. This table, which summarizes the measurements made during ringing, comes out of the paper:

Table 2. Summary statistics of biometric measurements (mm) and masses (g) of 19 Leach’s storm petrels breeding or thought to be breeding on the offshore islands of South Africa. Mass was measured using a Pesola balance to the nearest gram. Bill, head and tarsus were measured to 0.1 mm, foot to 0.5 mm, and wing, tail and tail fork to 1 mm. Not all measurements were made on all birds

	mean	SD	min	max	median	N
mass	45.92	3.11	40.0	50.5	46.7	16
wing	158.8	2.2	152	162	159	19
bill	16.58	0.57	15.3	17.6	16.5	17
head	41.51	0.99	39.8	43.3	41.5	15
tarsus	24.55	0.72	23.3	25.9	24.6	17
foot	49.25	1.18	47.5	51.5	49.0	15
tail	81.7	3.4	75	87	81.5	8
tail fork	17.9	2.7	15	25	18	15

The information in this table was carried over into Roberts7 (with the appropriate acknowledgements!). Ultimately, most of the measurement data in ornithological handbooks globally is summarized from data collected by bird ringers.

One of the standard measurements collected by ringers is mass. We assembled all the masses collected by members of the Western Cape Wader Study Group from Red Knots *Calidris canutus* while they were being ringed, and plotted them:



*Masses of adult Red Knots *Calidris canutus* in South Africa*

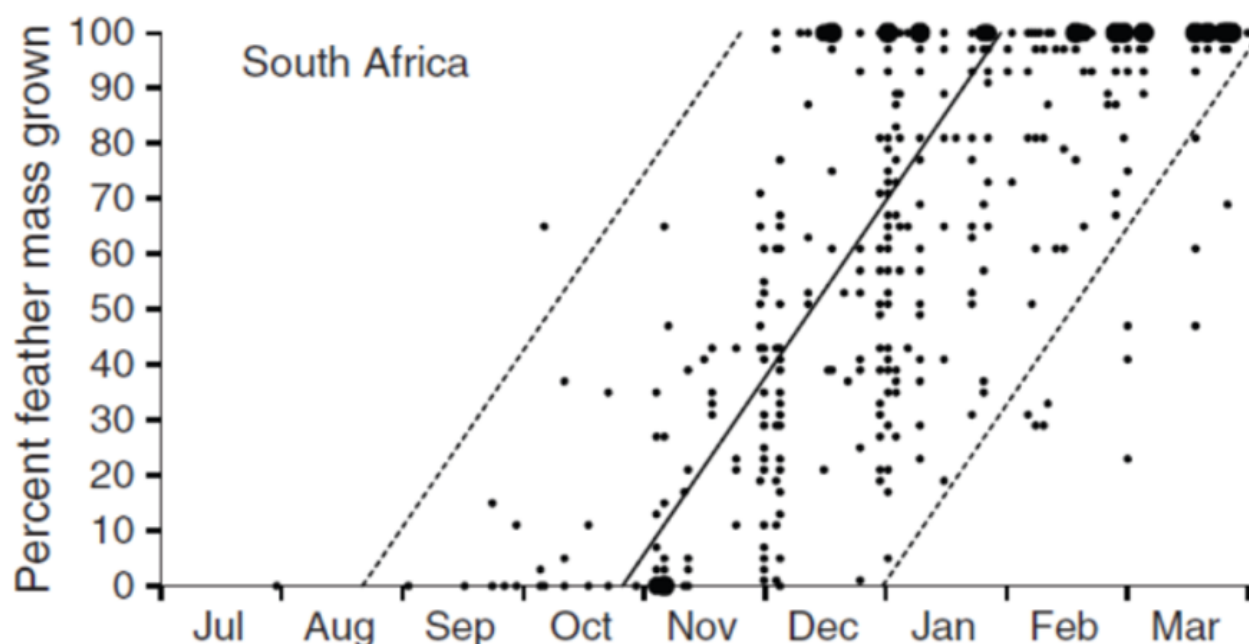
The Red Knots that visit South Africa breed on the Siberian tundra, about 13,000 km from Langebaan Lagoon, in the West Coast National Park, where most of these birds were caught. They are long distance migrants. The line in this plot is a statistical “smoother”, designed to lead the eye through the “message” that the plot conveys. From the time they arrive until around the end of February, the average mass hovers around 130 g. Then, quite suddenly, they start increasing in mass. This is mostly fat, fuel for the arduous journey to the Siberian tundra that lies ahead of them.



A Red Knot, in full breeding plumage, on its nest on the Siberian tundra. Lake Pronchishcheva, Taimyr Peninsula, Russia, July 1991

Moult

Feathers are light and strong, but they are steadily degraded by exposure to sunlight and by flight. For most bird species they are replaced on an annual basis, a process called moult. Part of the training to become a bird ringer is to learn how to record moult, and how to score the progress of moult of the primaries, the feathers on the outsides of the wings, the ones that are most important for flight. Most species have either 9 or 10 conspicuous primaries. Those that are old are scored a 0, and those that are new are scored 5. Scores of 1 to 4 are given to growing primaries, so the moult score of a bird near the start of moult might look like 55410 00000; the first two primaries are new, the next two are growing, and the rest are old. For a species like the Red Knot, the outer primaries are much larger than the inner primaries, so we did the arithmetic to convert the moult score into “percent feather mass grown”, and we came up with a plot that looks like this:



Primary moult of Red Knots in South Africa

Each dot represents the progress with moult for a bird ringed on a date. The Underhill-Zucchini moult model then estimates the average starting date for the primary moult of Red Knots in South Africa as 25 October, the duration as 95 days, with an average end date of 28 January. The dotted lines ought to enclose about 95% of the moult scores. Comparing this plot with the one above for mass, it is clear that the average Red Knot migrating to South Africa has about a month of “holiday” between the end of primary moult and start to fuel for migration. This information all contributes to our understanding of the conservation requirements of this species ... and all of it comes from bird ringing.

Lots more paragraphs could follow here! Sometimes there is a need for samples to be collected for genetic studies. Ringers are excellently placed to help! Two citizen scientist bird ringers, Felicity Ellmore and Ursula Bryson, were recruited by an international team of researchers to collect tiny feather samples from “African Reed Warblers” for South Africa and Namibia respectively. The upshot of this project was the decision to merge the “African Reed Warbler” and the “European Reed Warbler” into a single species, the Common Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*. Here is the link to the paper.

What is the value of having a long-term ringing station?

Bird ringers in Europe (and bird banders in North America) are familiar with the concept of a “bird observatory”. The concept even has an article in Wikipedia; no bird observatories in Africa are listed. Most bird observatories are also ringing stations.

In September 1960, an undergraduate student at the University of Warsaw, named Przemysław Busse, initiated standardized bird ringing to study southward migration along the coast of the Baltic Sea, Poland. A year later it was called Operation Baltic. The project grew and expanded to study both spring and autumn migration at three ringing stations along the Polish coast. The young student graduated through the academic hierarchy to become Professor Busse, Head of the Bird Migration Research Station (BMRS), in the Faculty of Biology, University of Gdańsk, Poland. When he retired, Dr Magda Remisiewicz, who had been a PhD student of Professor Busse's and then a post-doc at the University of Cape Town, took over as Head of the BMRS. One of her first initiatives was to turn the early paper records into files on computers! It is a rich database.

It is well known that northwards migration through Europe to the breeding grounds of the small warblers, for example, is getting earlier. All this is true at the ringing stations in Poland as well. But Magda spotted that there is also a huge amount of annual variation in the timing of migration. Magda wanted to understand this. We developed an index of earliness/lateness in the migration each year for the Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, and then tried to relate this to the large scale climate indices which the warblers had experienced during their travels in the previous 12 months. We used things like the South Oscillation Index, which drives El Nino/La Nina, and which plays a key role in how much rain falls in southern Africa. We quickly hit the jackpot, and found a statistical model that “explained” two-thirds of the annual variation in the timing of the passage of Willow Warblers through Poland. There is more detail in this blog. The paper itself is open access, and so are a second and third of the same theme. These papers make a valuable contribution to understanding the impact of climate change on bird migration.



*In the non-breeding season, Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus* spread out over much of Africa south of the Sahara Desert. This photo was taken by Tony Archer in November 2017 in Klerksdorp, North-West Province, South Africa. It is BirdPix record 46564*

What made these papers possible was systematic and consistent bird ringing over a period of decades at a bird ringing station. This is what we need to emulate!

The value of bird ringing

Ultimately, the fundamental question runs like this: “Does bird ringing make an important contribution to bird research and conservation? Or is it simply a kind of hobby for a select group of bird watchers?” The problem is with the word “OR”. The answer to both questions is YES. Bird ringing makes a vital contribution to the study of the population dynamics and movements of birds, and how these things are changing as a result of development and climate change. A lot of the data for this research is collected by a carefully-trained group of citizen scientists, whose passion is working with birds for the ultimate objective of conservation. They consider working with birds to be a privilege and a responsibility.



Bird ringers are mostly citizen scientists who make a huge contribution to research and conservation through pooling their data. For long-distance migrants, this information needs to be shared internationally

Bird ringing courses

The Biodiversity and Development Institute runs bird ringing courses in South Africa. You can read about them [here](#) and find out when the next ones are taking place.

If you find a bird with a ring ...

... please report it to the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING). There is a website with a form to fill in all the information needed. Within a few weeks, you will be informed about the date and place where the bird was ringed.

More reading!

Here are two papers in scientific journals with the same theme as here, the value of bird ringing:

Anderson GQA, Green RE 2009. The value of ringing for bird conservation. *Ringling & Migration* 24: 205–212.

Baillie SR 2001. The contribution of ringing to the conservation and management of bird populations: A review. *Ardea* 89: 167–184. (You get asked for your email address; then the download of the pdf is free.)

Here is an account of how bird ringing developed in South Africa:

Oschadleus HD 2018. Bird ringing (banding) in South Africa – a short history. Biodiversity and Development Institute. Available online at <https://thebdi.org/bird-ringing-in-south-africa-a-short-history/>

Re-published with permission from Prof. Les Underhill from his blog: The value of bird ringing to research and conservation | BDI (thebdi.org) on 31 March 2023

RINGERSHOEKIE CITIZEN SCIENCE

AFSTERWE VAN LEON LÖTTER

Dit is met skok dat ons verneem het dat Leon verlede week op 65 jaar oorlede is na 'n kort siekbed. Hy het 'n operasie ondergaan en is na verskeie komplikasies op 7 Augustus oorlede. Hy het voor sy aftrede verlede jaar by Gauteng Natuurbewaring gewerk en was die beampte wat ons ringpermitte geteken het.

Hy en sy vrou, Lucia het saam gekwalifiseer as ringers in Januarie 2019. Hy het tot op hede 840 voëls gering, waarvan 108 verskillende spesies was, en wat 92 'retraps' ingesluit het.

Leon was 'n ywerige ringer en saam het hulle twee verskeie ringuitstappies gereël. Die groep sal sy besadigde manier van doen baie mis.

Ons as BLNG-ringers wil graag ons meegevoel betuig met Lucia, wat hom die laaste maand so getrou bygestaan het.



Leon Lotter



C-ringer, David Keyter, het hierdie Goudgeelvink (Yellow-crowned Bishop) by Rietvlei gering.
[Daniël Keyter]

20 Januarie, Rietvlei NR, Witkoppies (Julian du Plooy)

Rietveldam is 'n gewilde natuurreseervaat om voëls te ring. Die getalle stel nooit teleur nie! Ons het verskeie plekke in die reservaat waar ons nette kan opsit.

Hierdie keer was dit in die vlei by Witkoppies. Twaalf A-ringers, ses C-ringers en ses besoekers het opgedaag vir die ringsessie. Die plek was baie ruig as gevolg van 'n goeie reënseisoen en elke ringer moes maar stoei om tussen die riete 'n plekkie te kry om nette op te slaan.

Dit was 'n dag van oorfloed! Honderde Rooivinke (Southern Red Bishop) en Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) het in die nette beland! Om presies te wees: 267 Rooivinke (Southern Red Bishop) en 116 Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) het die nette vol gehang. Die meeste van die A-ringers moes gaan help om te 'ring & fling'. Dit is 'n proses waar die ringer, net gewapen met 'n tang en 'n string ringe, langs die net staan en byvoorbeeld al die Rooivinkmannetjies (Southern Red Bishop) uithaal, dit ring en dadelik laat vlieg. Daar was net nie genoeg tyd om elkeen in 'n sakkie te sit, dit na die ringstasie te neem om al die afmetings te neem nie. Die welsyn van die voël kom altyd eerste!

Die voëls wat nuwe ringe gekry het, was 594, met 'n rekord getal hervangste: 114 voëls (16,1%), 'n rekord tot op hede! Daar was ook ses Gewone Bontrokkies (African Stonechat), sewe Kaapse Rietsangers (Lesser Swamp Warbler), agtien Kleinrietsangers (Common Reed Warbler) en vyf Kortstertflappe (Fan-tailed Widowbird) om maar 'n paar te noem.

Die 29 spesies het die volgende ingesluit: Rooiassie (Orange-breasted Waxbill), Afrikaanse Snip (African Snipe), Kuifkopvisvanger (Malachite Kingfisher), vier sangerspesies naamlik Groot-, Kaapse- en Kleinrietsanger, asook Kaapse Vleisanger (Great Reed, Lesser Swamp, Common Reed and African Reed Warbler). Buiten die Swartkeelgeelvink (Southern Masked Weaver) was daar nog drie wewerspesies wat die Bontrug-, Dikbek- en Kaapse Wewer (Village, Thick-billed and Cape Weaver) ingesluit het. Ook drie spesies flappe: Witvlerk-, Kortstert- en Langstertflap (White-winged, Fan-tailed and Long-tailed Widowbird), asook 'n Goudgeelvink (Yellow-crowned Bishop). Hierdie ringsessie was 'n groot sukses!

17 Februarie: Bishopvoëlpark (Marina Pienaar)

Hierdie voëlpark is weggesteek tussen meenthuise en min mense weet daarvan. Vyf A-ringers en vier ringers, wat nog in opleiding is, het op hierdie fris oggend in Wierdapark by die voëlpark bymekaar gekom vir 'n ringessie. Daar was ook een besoeker wat navraag oor die ringery gedoen het, terwyl ander hulle verwonder het oor die gemak waarmee ons die voëls hanteer. Die veertien spesies het bestaan uit onder andere 'n Bospatrys (Crested Francolin), Gewone Janfrederik (Cape Robin-Chat), Hofsanger (Willow Warbler), Europese Rietsanger (Marsh Warbler), Suidelike Waterfiskaal (Southern Boubou), Kleinglansspreeu (Cape Glossy Starling) en Geelbeklyster (Karoo Thrush). Daar is 88 voëls gevang waarvan die Kaapse Glasgies (Cape White-eye) die meeste was met 33 individue. Die vier hervangste het 4,3% van die totaal uitgemaak.

23-25 Februarie, Nylsvlei-kamp (Johan de Jager)

Die ringgroep het twee werkstasies gemaak, die eerste dag by Kruispad en die volgende dag by Maroelakop. By Kruispad is dié dag 1,1 km se nette opgesit deur tien A-ringers en vier C-ringers. Dit was die moeite werd, want ons het 81 nuwe ringe vir die 36 verskillende spesies aangesit. Die volgende dag by Maroelakop het ons 61 nuwe voëls gering. Daar was 28 verskillende spesies. Dit het die totaal vir die naweek op 153 voëls gebring, waarvan elf hervangste was.

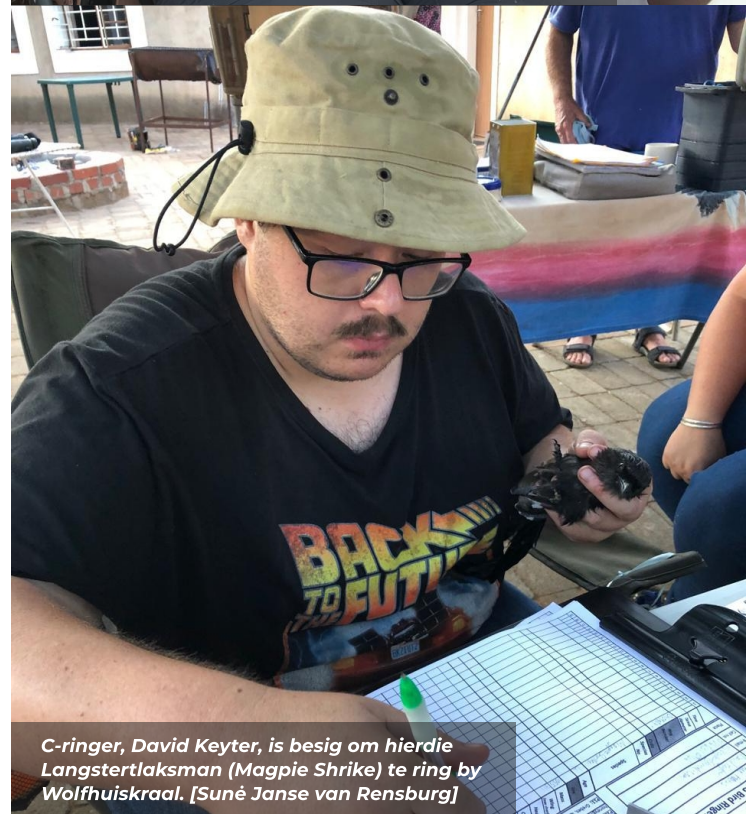
Ons was 'n groot groep. Daar was nie plek vir 'n muis in die 'dormitory' naby die lapa nie. Die ringers, saam met hulle aanhangsels, het die nege kamers volgemaak. Die groep is in twee spanne verdeel om bykosse te maak. Saam met 'n stukkie braaivleis het ons albei aande heerlijk geëet. Die kuiers in die lapa om die vuur was onvergeetlik.

Die 36 verskillende spesies wat by Kruispad gering is, het interessante voëls opgelewer: Die Kleinrietsanger (Common Reed Warbler) het die eerste prys behaal met die meeste individue, terwyl die ander spesies een of meer opgelewer het. Twee voëls wat mens eerder in 'n woud sou verwag, naamlik die Boskrapper (Terrestrial Brownbul) en die Geelborswillie (Yellow-bellied Greenbul) is hier gering.

Drie visvangers soos die Bruinkop-, Kuifkop- en Bosveldvisvanger (Brown-hooded, Malachite and Woodland Kingfisher) het ook in die nette beland. Ook tipiese Bosveldvoëls is gevind soos Bosveldfisant (Swainson's Spurfowl), Bontkiewiet (Blacksmith Lapwing), Bosveldtjeriktik (Chestnut-vented Warbler/Tit-Babbler), Bosveldtinkinkie (Rattling Cisticola), Bruinsylangstertjie (Tawny-flanked Prinia), Grysrugkwêkwêvoël (Grey-backed Camaroptera), Oranjeborsboslaksman (Orange-breasted Bush Shrike), Witwanguil (Southern White-faced Owl) en Rooiwangnaguil (Rufous-cheeked Nightjar), asook 'n Goudstertspeg (Golden-tailed Woodpecker).



By Nylsvlei het Elba Swart hierdie Witwanguil (Southern White-faced Owl) gering. Dit was 'n 'lifer' vir haar. [Nicole de Jager]



C-ringer, David Keyter, is besig om hierdie Langstertlaksman (Magpie Shrike) te ring by Wolfhuiskraal. [Suné Janse van Rensburg]

Die 28 spesies wat ons by Maroelakop gekry het, was net so spesiaal: Gestreepte Nuwejaarsvoël (Levaillant's Cuckoo), Witkoluil (Pearl-spotted Owllet), Dwergringvisvanger (African Pygmy-Kingfisher), Swartkatakoeroe (Black Cuckooshrike), Sneebul (Black-backed Puffback), Bosveldvisvanger (Woodland Kingfisher), Grysneushoringvoël (African Grey Hornbill), Boskrapper (Terrestrial Brownbul) en Rooivlerktjagra (Brown-crowned Tchagra).

2 Maart, Moreleta Kloof NR (Hein Bantjes)

Hein doen verslag:

Baie dankie vir 'n lekker ringessie, vertrou julle het dit net so geniet. Dankie ook aan Adelene Marais en Johan Pietersen van Tshwane Natuurbewaring vir die geleentheid en hulle reëlins. Ons het in totaal 381 voëls hanteer, waarvan 44 (11.5%) 're-traps' was. Die aantal spesies was 24. Lekker besige oggend en in my mening 'n mooi klomp voëls as jy in ag neem dat ons net vyf A-ringers en een C-ringer was. Daar het 'n paar interessante 're-traps' uitgekom. Die "oudste" een was 'n Kaapse Wewer (Cape Weaver) wat op die 1ste November 2014 gering is deur Elba Swart. Daarna is dit deur Vincent Ward by dieselfde koördinate weer hanteer, ongeveer drie maande later. En dit is nou deur Arrie Klopper gevang, nege jaar en ongeveer vyf maande, sedert dit die eerste keer 'n ring gekry het. 'n 'Re-trap' wat al die meeste kere hanteer is, sedert die eerste keer wat hy/sy 'n ring gekry het, was 'n Gewone Janfrederik (Cape Robin-Chat) wat al, insluitend die eerste keer, sewe keer gevang is. Dit het die eerste keer in 2020 in die nette beland. Ander opwindende spesies was: Blouvisvanger (Half-collared Kingfisher), en vyf sangerspesies, naamlik Tuin-, Hof-, Kaapse Riet-, Europese Riet- en Kleinrietsanger (Garden, Willow, Lesser Swamp, Marsh, Common Reed Warbler). Ander spesies was: Gewone Fret (Bronze Mannikin), Pylvlekkatlagter (Arrow-marked Babbler) en Bonthoutkapper (Acacia Pied Barbet). Die vinke (weavers) het los voorgeloop wat getalle aan betref: Swartkeelgeelvink (Southern Masked Weaver) (179), Dikbekwewer (Thick-billed Weaver) (32), Rooivink (Southern Red Bishop) (33) en Bontrugwewer (Village Weaver).



Hierdie Gestreepte Nuwejaarsvoël (Levaillant's Cuckoo) was 'n 'lifer' vir Johan de Jager by Nylsvlei. [Nicole de Jager]



Suné Janse van Rensburg en Julian du Plooy het elkeen 'n Afrikaanse Naguil (Fiery-necked Nightjar) by Wolfhuiskraal naby Pienaarsrivier gering. Foto: [Suné Janse van Rensburg]

8-10 Maart, Pienaarsrivier, Wolfhuiskraal-kamp (Wanda Louwrens)

Agt ringers het hierdie plaas in die Bosveld besoek. In November verlede jaar kon ons maar net vir 51 voëls nuwe ringe aansit, as gevolg van die Pienaarsrivier wat in vloed was. Dit het ons verhoed om by die pomphuis uit te kom. Die area rondom die pomphuis is by verre die beste ringplek op die plaas! Hierdie naweek was egter 'n ander storie! Ons het 'n allemintige 327 voëls gekry.

Dit was gewis die naweek van die suikerbekkies en kweleas! Die veldaalwyne was in die blom en dit het baie suikerbekkies gelok. Drie spesies is in die nette gevang: negentien Marico- (Marico), twaalf Witpens- (White-bellied) en sewentien Swartsuikerbekkies (Amethyst Sunbird), asook 172 Rooibekkweleas (Red-billed Quelea).

Die 45 spesies het ook die volgende ingesluit: Kleinsperwer (Little Sparrowhawk), Gewone Dikkop (Spotted Thick-knee), Witkoluil (Pearl-spotted Owlet), Afrikaanse Naguil (Fiery-necked Nightjar), Groot- en Kleinheuningwyser (Greater and Lesser Honeyguide), Bruinkeelbossanger (Burnt-necked Eremomela), Grysrukwêkwêvoël (Grey-backed Camaroptera), Grootmossie (Great Sparrow), Bergkanarie (Black-throated Canary), Langstertlaksman (Magpie Shrike), Gebande Sanger (Barred Wren-Warbler), Suidelike Waterfiskaal (Southern Boubou), Rooivlerktjagra (Brown-crowned Tchagra).

Daar was 314 voëls wat nuwe ringe gekry het en dertien was hervangste. Die 4,0% 'retraps' het bestaan uit spesies soos Bosveldtjeriktik (Chestnut-vented Warbler), Langstertlaksman (Magpie Shrike), Rooibekakelaar (Green Wood Hoopoe) en twee tinkinkies naamlik Neddikkie en Bosveldtinkinkie (Neddicky and Rattling Cisticola).

16 Maart, Botaniese Tuin (Arrie Kloppe)

Arrie doen verslag:

Op 'n stil vroeë herfsoggend in Maart 2024 ontmoet tien van ons lank voor sonop vir 'n heerlike dag se ring. Vir die eerste keer in 'n lang tyd is daar so bietjie onderhandelinge oor wie gaan waar nette opsit. Maar met net vyf A-ringers is die totale aantal nette maar min. Die werkstasie was onder 'n reuse Apiesdoringboom wat skadu bied vir 'n honderd mense!

Die beringing vir die dag begin heel rustig met die verwagte spesies soos Swartoogtiptolle (Dark-capped Bulbul), Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) en Dikbekwewers (Thick-billed Weaver) in die nette. Hoewel aantalle maar min was, was daar genoeg om die vyf C-ringers mee besig te hou. Dit beteken ook dat daar baie tyd was vir kuier. Behalwe vir een Swartoogtiptol (Dark-capped Bulbul) wat twee ringe aan gehad het, was daar nie enigiets wat uitgestaan het nie. Dit was net 'n heel lekker rustige ring.

Maar dan word die rustige ringdag omgedop deur een vaalbruin voëltjie, wat so 'n langerige stertjie het. Ten spyte van gebrek aan uitstaande identifikasie kenmerke was dit 'n baie kenmerkende voël. Jip! 'n Sprinkaansanger (River Warbler) in Pretoria! WOW, what a catch! Volgens SAFRING is dit die sesde een wat in Gauteng gering is en die agtiende een in Suid-Afrika. Baie geluk aan Nanet Pieters en Daniël Keyter! Toe die opgewondenheid bedaar het, het die res van ons maar opgepak en huis toe gegaan!

Naas die besonderse vangs het ons geëindig met 89 voëls vir die dag, 77 nuwe ringe en twaalf hervangste. Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) (12 + 2) en Swartoogtiptolle (Dark-capped Bulbul) (11 + 3) was soos gewoonlik die algemeenste vangste van die dag. Onder die hervangste was daar nie enige besonderse ou vangste nie. Ander mooi spesies, wat dié dag gevang is, was: Palmwindswael (African Palm Swift), drie houtkapper spesies soos Kuifkop-, Bont- en Rooikophoutkapper (Crested, Acacia Pied and Black-collared Barbet), Goudstertspeg (Golden-tailed Woodpecker), twee lysterspesies naamlik Rooi- en Geelbeklyster (Kurrichane and Karoo Thrush) en twee vlieëvangers soos Europese en Paradysvlieëvanger (Spotted and African Paradise Flycatcher). Voorwaar 'n onvergeetlike ringdag. Foto's van die Sprinkaansanger (River Warbler) is in die vorige uitgawe geplaas.

21-24 Maart, Bushtrail-kamp (Martin Steyn)

Hierdie opleidingssessie naby Magaliesburg is deur vier A-ringers en vier C-ringers bygewoon. Daar is nie baie nette opgesit nie, so die getalle was maar laag, net 92 voëls is die naweek hanteer.

Daar was nege hervangste (9,8%). Onder andere 'n Rooikophoutkapper (Black-collared Barbet), twee Kaapse Glasogies (Cape White-eye), twee Gewone Janfrederikke (Cape Robin-Chat), twee Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver), 'n Swartoogtiptol (Dark-capped Bulbul), asook 'n Rooikeelflap (Red-collared Widowbird). Van die 83 voëls wat nuwe ringe gekry het, was daar die volgende interessante spesies: Afrikaanse Naguil (Fiery-necked Nightjar), Luitinkintkie (Lazy Cisticola), Neddikkie (Neddicky), Sneebal (Black-backed Puffback), Klipstreepkoppie (Cinnamon-breasted Bunting), Goudstertspeg (Golden-tailed Woodpecker) en Bontrugwewer (Village Weaver).

Daar was negentien Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver), veertien Swartoogtiptolle (Dark-capped Bulbul) en nege Gryskopmossies (Southern Grey-headed Sparrow), terwyl die ander spesies net een of twee opgelewer het.



C-ringer, Mijke Müller was maar skrikkerig vir hierdie Goudstertspeg (Golden-tailed Woodpecker) wat sy gering het by Bushtrail. [Wanda Louwrens]



Charl de Bruyn het hierdie Afrikaanse Naguil (Fiery-necked Nightjar) vroeg een oggend by Bushtrail gering. [Wanda Louwrens]



27 April, Rietvlei NR (Moerbeiboombrug) (Chris du Plooy)

By hierdie ringplek is daar nie baie plek om nette op te sit nie, so die getalle vir hierdie herfsoggend was nie baie hoog nie. Net 95 voëls het nuwe ringe gekry. Die agtien nuwe spesies het die volgende ingesluit: Gewone Tarentaal (Helmeted Guineafowl), Bokmakierie (Bokmakierie), drie flappe naamlik Kortstert-, Witvlerk- en Rooikeelflap (Fan-tailed, White-winged and Red-collared Widowbird), Kaapse Wewer (Cape Weaver), Bruinsylangstertjie (Tawny-flanked Prinia) en Kaapse Rietsanger (Lesser Swamp Warbler). Die elf hervangste (10,4%) het spesies soos 'n Kuifkopvisvanger (Malachite Kingfisher) ingesluit, asook ses Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver), twee Rooivinke (Southern Red Bishop), 'n Swartoogtiptol (Dark-capped Bulbul), asook 'n Gewone Janfrederik (Cape Robin-Chat). Die Swartoogtiptolle (Dark-capped Bulbul) het hierdie keer as weners uit die stryd getree, daar was 29 van hulle in die nette, terwyl die Swartkeelgeelvinke (Southern Masked Weaver) tweede was met negentien voëls. Ons kon ook dertien Rooivinke (Southern Red Bishop) vang. Genoeg voëls om die drie C-ringers mee besig te hou.

Hein Bantjes het hierdie Gewone Tarentaal (Helmeted Guineafowl) nog nie voorheen gering nie. [Lirina Fowler]

18 Mei, Strubendam (Marina Pienaar)

Dit was 'n koue herfs oggend toe BLNG se ringgroep by hierdie dam bymekaar gekom het. Die agt A-ringers en vyf C-ringers het altesaam 78 voëls hanteer. Dit sluit sewentien verskillende spesies in.

Die oudste hervangs was 'n volwasse mannetjie Swartkeelgeelvink (Southern Masked Weaver) wat ses jaar gelede in Augustus 2018 vir die eerste keer gering is, in Oktober 2020 is dit ge-'retrap' en hy is nou weer in die nette gevang. Die dertien hervangste het 16,7% van die groototaal uitgemaak. 'n Bietjie goeie nuus is dat ons twee Dikbekwewers (Thick-billed Weavers) ge-'retrap' het, met die nuwe CB-ringe. Hierdie 3,5 mm ringe is spesiaal vervaardig vir die Dikbekwewer-wyfies. Hulle tarsisse is heelwat kleiner as dié van die mannetjies.

Ons het 'n rekord aantal Dikbekwewers (Thick-billed Weavers) gekry dié dag, 31 in getal. Die volgende spesies het elkeen net een opgelewer: Gewone Dikkop (Spotted Thick-knee), Kleinheuningwyser (Lesser Honeyguide), Pylvlekkatlagter (Arrow-marked Babbler) en Kaapse Rietsanger (Lesser Swamp Warbler). Daar was ook vier Gewone Frette (Bronze Mannikin), asook vier Bruinsylangstertjies (Tawny-flanked Prinia).



Reinhardt Fowler het nog nooit voorheen 'n Gewone Dikkop (Spotted Thick-knee) gering nie. Dit was 'n 'lifer' vir hom by Strubendam. [Wanda Louwrens]



Nicole de Jager was ingenome met haar Kuifkopvisvanger (Malachite Kingfisher) in Lynnwood-Glen by Strubendam. [Wanda Louwrens]



Wanda moes haar hele 'wardrobe' aantrek vir die ringsessie op die berg by Bushtrail. Die ringers het die koesters getelken, wat insekte in die as van die voorbrand kom soek het. [Frik du Plooy]

28-30 Junie, Bushtrail-kamp (Elba Swart)

Hierdie plaas naby Magaliesburg is gebruik vir 'n kamp in die middel van die winter. Die eienaars, Liz Palthe en haar broer, Bert Palthe, laat weet ons altyd wanneer daar voorbrand gemaak gaan word. Die dag na die brand, kom die omgewing se insekvetende voëls om goggas in die as te soek. Reiers (herons), kiewiete (lapwings), koesters (pipits), wewers (weaver), Bokmakeries en laksmanne (fiscals) maak gebruik van hierdie onverwagse meevallertjie. Dit is om hierdie rede dat Elba 'n groep A-ringers bymekaar gemaak het om op hierdie plaas te gaan ring. Nege ringers het die Saterdagoggend sesuur die koue aangedurf om die wippe bo-op die berg te gaan stel. Die teikengroep was die koesters (pipits).

Arrie Klopper, 'n Genetikus by Tukkies is besig met 'n DNS-projek op voëls. Hy versamel 'n druppel bloed om DNS van 'n voël te kan kry vir sy 'DNA barcoding'-projek. Dus het hy van die geleentheid gebruik gemaak om bloed van koesters (pipits) te kry. 'n Voordeel vir ons is dat die genetiese toetse ons identifikasie van die koesters sal bevestig. In hierdie omgewing kom die Gewone, Vaal-, Nicholson- en Donkerkoester (African, Buffy, Nicholson's and Plain-backed Pipit) voor. Die Nicholsonkoester (Nicholson's Pipit) was die volopste. Ons het nege geïdentifiseer met behulp van 'n uitgebreide sleutel wat deur Johan de Jager opgestel is. Hy het ook Faansie Peacock se insette gevra.

Ons het ook elders op die plaas gering. Die Kaapse Glasogies (Cape White-eye) was die volopste met twaalf voëls. Chris du Plooy en Wanda Louwrens het elkeen 'n Oranjekeelkalkoentjie (Cape Longclaw) gekry om te ring, wat vir albei 'n ring 'lifer' was. Ander spesiale spesies wat gering is, was Gewone Koester (African Pipit), Kleinheuningwyser (Lesser Honeyguide), Grasvoël (Cape Grassbird), Groot-rooiband- en Swartsuikerbekkie (Greater Double-collared and Amethyst Sunbird) en Rooikeelflap (Red-collared Widowbird).

Winter is nie 'n goeie tyd om voëls te ring nie, so die getalle was maar laag. Net 81 voëls is hanteer, waarvan 10 hervangste was (12,3%). Die hervangste het spesies soos Vaalkoester (Buffy Pipit), Suidelike Waterfiskaal (Southern Boubou), Bandkeelkleinjantjie (Bar-throated Apalis), Pylvlekkatlagter (Arrow-marked Babbler) en Bruinsylangstertjie (Tawny-flanked Prinia) ingesluit. Elba was baie ingenome met haar Vaalkoester (Buffy Pipit) 'retrap'. Sy het dit die eerste keer in 2019 gering en toe ook as 'n Vaalkoester geïdentifiseer en nou hoop ons die DNS-uitslae sal die identifikasie bevestig.

CLUB RARITIES

APRIL – JULY 2024

Regional and Local Rarities / Streeksrariteite and interesting sightings

National Rarities/ Nationale Rareiteite

There were no national rarities to report in this period.

APRIL - Regional and Local Rarities / Streeksrariteite



Lark-like Bunting [Anne-Marie van der Merwe]

April started with several records of Lark-like Bunting – in this case, another provincial rarity at the fountain on the Magalies MBT & hiking trail.

Walter Sisulu BG also hosted one during this reporting period, (Hennie Storm), as did Suikerbosrand NR which continued delivering rarities during April, such as Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Pale Chanting Goshawk and late departing European Honey Buzzard, all reported by Niall Perrins. A Lark-like Bunting was seen by Etienne Marais, as well as a flock of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters at Rietvlei NR, on 11 April. He also reported a fly-over of a Black Stork at Dinokeng. Of interest in the 100 km Wider Gauteng region, Etienne submitted sightings of Pink-backed Pelican at Rockwall Dam which were present for some weeks and seen by several birders. This dam also hosted Pink-backed Pelican in July 2021.



Short-clawed Lark [Wimpie van Zyl]

Etienne reported Short-clawed Lark in North-West, this locality about a 100 km east of its known distribution range on the Botswana border and south of the population occurring in the Polokwane region. There seems to be a small, isolated population of this species which have been present at this site for some years.

Another great sighting for Gauteng was an African Openbill at Korsmans Bird Sanctuary on 28 April. (Raymond Campling)



Pink-backed Pelican [Pieter Verster]

A pair of **Swee Waxbills** were again seen at Magalies MBT trail. [Daan van de Wetering]. This seems to be the same pair which was seen for some weeks at this same locality.

Mike Pope reported a **Dwarf Bittern** at Northern Farm mid-April. Zaagkuil drift had a **Pale Chanting Goshawk**, as well as a **Lizard Buzzard**, spotted by BLNG members. A **Pink-backed Pelican**, flying over the Kgomo-Kgomo bridge, saw Pieter Verster ready, as always, to catch the action.



Grey-headed Kingfisher [Ian Vos]

Although May started rather quiet on the Gauteng provincial rarities front, Zaagkuil drift continued delivering excellent records. Ian Vos had excellent views of this Grey-headed Kingfisher at Zaagkuil drift Lodge. Grey-headed Kingfishers are seen with some regularity in this area.



Black Stork [Farrah Hatting]

Farrah Hatting had excellent views of this Black Stork at the start of Zaagkuil drift Road on 6 May. A Black Stork was seen at Hekpoort by Allen Weideman.

The Boons Road area had some great records, reported by Michael Johnson: **Rufous-eared Warbler**, an excellent bird for Gauteng, **Lark-like Bunting**, an adult pair of **African Hawk-Eagles**, as well as a single **White-backed Vulture**, roosting on a pylon.



Sickle-winged Chat [Klaus Schmid]

Winter migrants are moving to more temperate areas. Selwyn Rautenbach found a Sickie-winged Chat in Rietvlei NR, and Klaus Schmid a pair near Devon.



Pink-billed Lark [Lloyd Nelson]

This Pink-billed Lark was photographed on the Pantiki Road mid-May.

The pair of **African Pygmy Geese** remained at Rust de Winter Dam.

At least five **Chestnut-banded Plovers** were spotted by Peter Thompson at Leeupan.



Swallow-tailed Bee-eater [André Thomas]

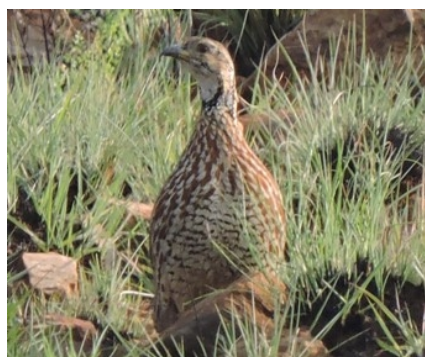
Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters continued to be seen, and both Thea Jenkins and Peter Thompson spotted a pair at Rietondale Proefplaas which seemed to roost there.

Reinhard Haywood was surprised by the interesting find of a possibly overwintering **Ayres's Hawk Eagle** on the Magalies MBT trail.



Orange River White-eye [Cameron Blair]

Cameron Blair reported the amazing sighting of a single Orange River White-eye at Kloofendal NR. This is an excellent record for the region, with an extremely low reporting rate in our region



Shelley's Francolin [Attie Hartsliet]

Two species, not rarities per se: a group of seven White-crested Helmet-Shrikes were at Cradle NR, by Grant Egen, and Shelley's Francolin at the Magalies MBT trail.

June kicked off with a **Bush Blackcap** reported from a private residential garden in Bordeaux, Randburg. Unfortunately, the bird could not be located again. This report of a Bush Blackcap is the second in three years, following the single bird that hung around a few days near the admin offices of Suikerbosrand NR in May 2021.



Cape White-eyes [Johann Roos]

There was some controversy over the exact identification of a few grey-bellied Cape White-eyes, winter visitors, seemingly, that stayed at the fountain on Magalies MBT trail for some days.

Deale's Rock and the Zusterstroom Road delivered several surprises mid-month.

First, a couple of **Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters** was found along the Zusterstroom Road. Other sightings at Deale's Rock itself, were a small number of **Sweet Waxbills** up and down the mountain trail. A **Red-capped Robin-Chat** was heard there as well.

The stars of the month, however, also at Deale's Rock, was when Juan van den Heever and Jandré Verster were surprised by at least three **Narina Trogon** in a wooded area up the mountain trail.

Patrick O'Brien found **Sickle-winged Chat** near Deneyville – numerous individuals were present. Lastly, regular reports of **Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters** at various localities continued to flow in.

July was a dismally quiet month on the rare bird front. However, Suikerbosrand delivered more **Lark-like Buntings**, while a BLNG group on an outing spotted **African Grass Owl**, not a rarity for the region but an interesting sighting and keeping this nature reserve one of the top spots to be birded, especially during winter months.

Deale's Rock proved once again why it should be visited, especially during winter months: Selwyn Rautenbach reported an **Ashy Flycatcher** near the chalets. Ashy Flycatchers have been reported with some regularity in this area.



Narina Trogon [Levi Bass]

The Narina Trogon seemed content to stay there as well. Levi Bass provided this photograph of the female.

Still in Wilge Rivier valley, Michael Johnson saw a **Black Stork** flying over from the road.

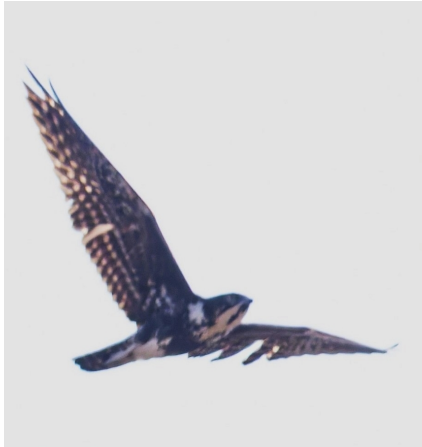
Philip Yiannakou spotted a pair of **Double-banded Coursers** between Vereeniging and Deneyville near the Vaal Dam. These birds were seen by numerous birders afterward. This seems to be one of the few sites in the region where this species can be found, at the very northern edge of their distribution range.



Deneyville also delivered Black Harrier. [Marlou Schalkwyk]

Fransie O'Brien and Hanjo Gouws reported that the **Wire-tailed Swallows** remained at Mkhombo Dam during a foray there at the end of July. They also found both **Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks** near Rust de Winter.

A pair of **Denham's Bustards** were seen near Ezemvelo NR by Selwyn Rautenbach. Apparently, these birds are regulars that fly in near dusk to roost in the reserve.



Bat Hawk [Marna Buys]

A great record was a Bat Hawk found by a BirdLife Northern Gauteng group at Rust de Winter ATV Bird Sanctuary. One previous record from the area was of one found near Kwalata Game Reserve.

Ivonne Coetzee.

Compiled from dedicated Wider Gauteng Rarities WhatsApp and Telegram Forums.

LANIARIUS NEW MEMBERS: APRIL TO JULY 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.*

Gerdus Heydenrych	Garsfontein-East
Lynne Heydenrych	Garsfontein-East
Toriso Tlou	Glenstantia
Glyn Davies	Vorna Valley, Midrand
Michael Wescomb	Rietfontein
Mauritz & Simoné Kotze	Lynnwood
Jean-Jac du Plessis	Zwawelpoort
Martie & Mechiel Brandt	Moreleta Park
Brigette Hamilton	Queenswood
Renate Reiff	Faerie Glen
Johan Croucamp	Midstream Estate
Gerne van Niekerk	

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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 (MARCH TO JULY 2024))

Antony Cooper	March 2024	Mauritz & Simoné Kotze	May 2024
Anton Ackermann	April 2024	Philip Calinikos	June 2024
Michael & Lizanne Heyns	May 2024	Manie Barnard	June 2024
Desire Kantor	May 2024	Ivonne Coetzee	July 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

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