

BLING WINGS

European Nightjar [Sean Naudé]

July 2024

Reflections: Club Meeting – 9 July



This July has turned out to be a great month for training and courses. First, a record number of BLNG-members attended Aldo Berutti's two online courses on *LBJs* and *Planning Kruger Birding Trips*. During our club meeting, expert Stephan Terblanche taught those of us still struggling, how to differentiate between swifts and swallows in flight. He provided us with a simple structure, focusing on the few visual cues unique to each species.

Inside This Issue

PG. 2 Suikerbosrand NR

PG. 4 Boon's Road

PG. 5 Walter Sisulu BG

PG. 6 VulPro

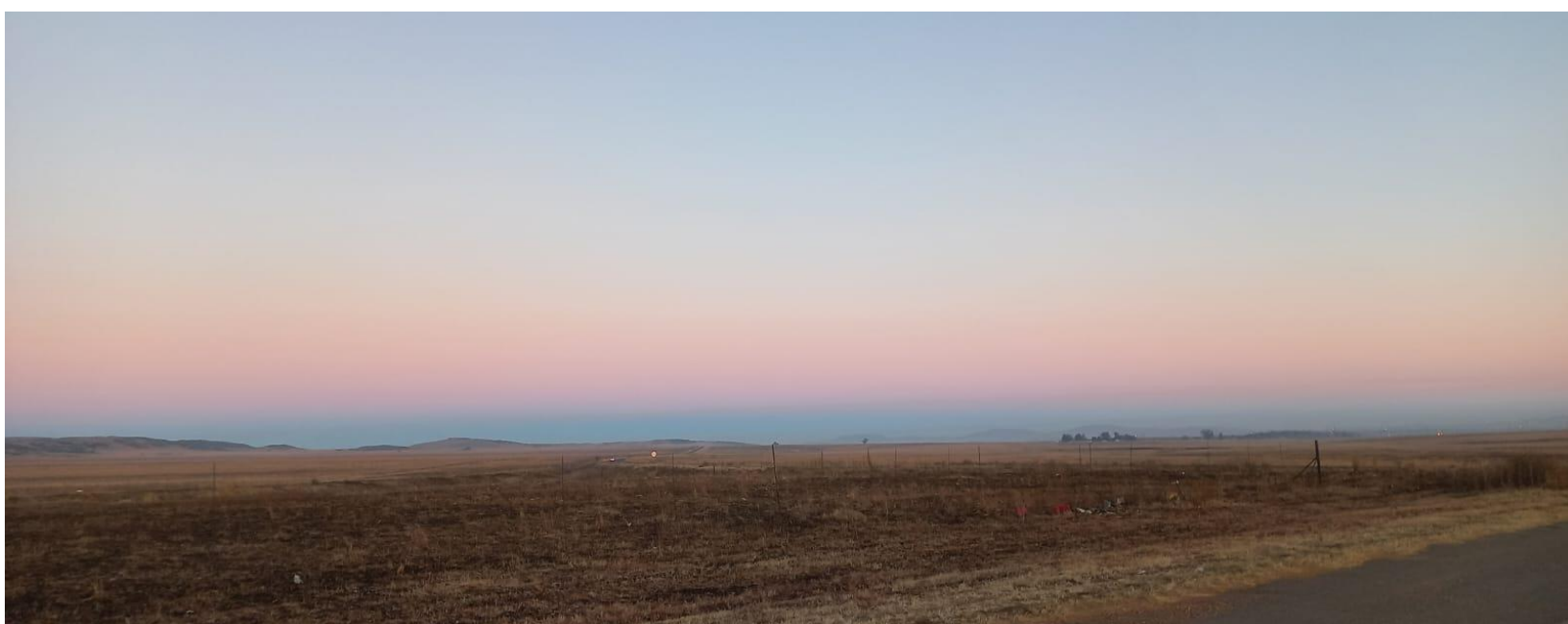
PG. 7 Rarities

PG. 8 Photograph of the month

PG. 9 August Programme

SUIKERBOSRAND NR – 6 JULY

If ever there was a case of inverse birding psychology, to quote Sean Naudé, it was on this outing. Weather predictions promised the coldest day of the winter yet, with sub-zero temperatures and a freezing wind. Leader Stephan Terblanche poured cold water on our expectations when we gathered at dawn at the entry of Eendracht Road: Don't expect to see the same glorious species as in summer, as the widowbirds and weavers have all put on their drab winter garb. With some luck we might encounter winter visitors such as Capped Wheatear, Fairy Flycatcher, and, if fortune smiled upon us, maybe even a Sentinel Rock Thrush. Suitably chastised, we followed his car down Eendracht Road. Very soon, we stopped: groups of Orange-breasted Waxbills, feeding on the road in front of us! At the dry riverbed, we got out again... AFRICAN GRASS OWL! It was flying up and down over the fields before our awe-struck eyes. Icy winds, streaming noses and frozen hands forgotten, we were filled with wonder and awe at the presence of something bigger than us, something scarce and mysterious. Trying not to be outdone, Orange River Francolin appeared. From then on, a feast of birding unfolded at Suikerbosrand itself. African Swamphen, African Snipe, about five or more different Sentinel Rock Thrushes, Eastern Long-billed Lark, Plain-backed Pipit and even Ashy Tit made this a glorious day filled with wonder and 90 species seen.





Bird of the Day – African Grass Owl [Sean Naudé]



Sentinel Rock Thrush [Angela Openshaw]



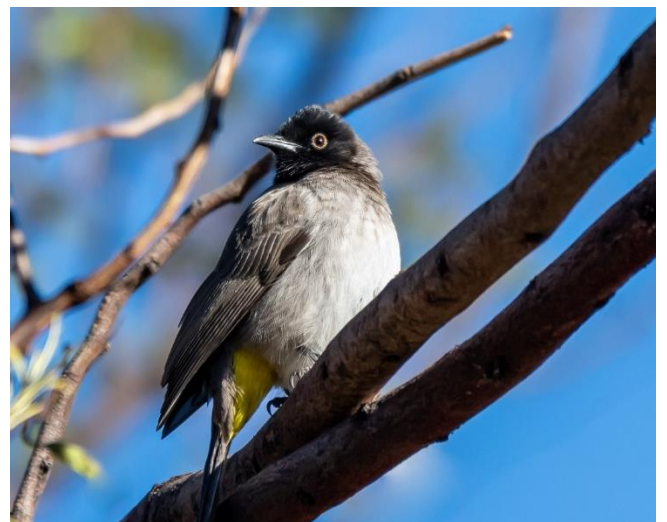
Cape Bunting [Angela Openshaw]



Rufous-naped Lark [Sean Naudé]



Eastern Long-billed Lark [Angela Openshaw]



Hybrid Red-eyed X Dark-capped Bulbul [Angela Openshaw]

BOON'S ROAD – 14 JULY

No-one should ever say winter birding in Gauteng is boring. Similar to Devon grasslands and Suikerbosrand, Boon's road always delivers interesting species during winter months. Keanu Canto guided the group. Highlights were White-bellied Bustard, Quailfinch, Lanner Falcon and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks.



Ant-eating Chat [Mauritz Kotze]



[Jenna van Schoor]



Swallow-tailed Bee-eater [Michael Wescomb]



Buffy Pipit [Michael Wescomb]



Mountain Wheatear [Mauritz Kotze]



White-bellied Bustard [Pieter Uytenweerde]

WALTER SISULU BOTANICAL GARDENS – 16 JULY

This annual outing, led by Martin Benade, is sure to deliver magnificent views of the resident Verreaux's Eagles in the stunning setting of an urban waterfall. The Peregrine Falcon heightened the raptor feast and with a visit to the coffee shop afterwards, a most enjoyable day was had.



[Angela Openshaw]



Verreaux's Eagle [Willie Victor]



Golden-tailed Woodpecker [Willie Victor]



The Peregrine Falcon is the fastest-flying raptor on earth and dives at 380 km per hour. Needless to say, they are a challenge to photograph, but Willie Victor managed to! Apart from the pesky Pied Crows, this Peregrine Falcon also harassed the Verreaux's and their young.

VULPRO - 27 JULY

The valuable and tireless efforts of Keri Wolters and her team in the conservation of Vultures was once again highlighted when 15 BLNG members visited VulPro near Hartebeestpoort. For the first time in decades, two Egyptian Vultures joined VulPro's breeding programme. This programme marks a historic step towards reintroducing Egyptian Vultures into the wild, aiming for a sustainable breeding population in South Africa, according to Keri Wolter, founder of VulPro.



Clarence explaining some of the strategies VulPro employs to save vultures from extinction [Liesl de Swardt]



The undeniable star of the show was this Egyptian Vulture. [Wouter Fourie]



Cape Vulture tending its chick, part of VulPro's breeding programme, for eventual release in the wild. [Wouter Fourie]



A special treat to see one of these at close quarters: a White-headed Vulture [Gerdu Heydenrych]

REGIONAL AND LOCAL RARITIES AND INTERESTING SIGHTINGS

July was a dimly quiet month on the rare birds front. However, Suikerbosrand delivered more **Lark-like Buntings** at the start of July, seen by Michael Johnson.

As reported above, and not rarity, but interesting quite the same, Suikerbosrand also had **African Grass Owl** on the same date, photographed by Sean Naudé. (BLNG)



Deale's Rock proved why it should be visited, especially during winter months: Selwyn Rautenbach reported an **Ashy Flycatcher** near the chalets. This species is reported with some regularity from Deale's Rock and nearby Hepzibah. In the same area, a single **Black Stork** was seen flying over the Wilgerivier Valley road.

Deale's Rock's **Narina Trogon** also seemed in no hurry to depart. This photograph of the female was captured by Levi Bass.



Pieter Verster found a single **Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark** on a farm near Settlers, but still within the Greater Gauteng reporting area.

Philip Yiannakou spotted a pair of long-staying **Double-banded Coursers** between Vereeniging and Deneyville near the Vaaldam. This area seems to be the most northern area of their distribution and more records of similar sightings there have been posted in the past.

Deneyville also delivered **Black Harrier**. Marlou Schalkwyk managed to take this photograph.



A pair of **Denham's Bustards** were seen near Ezemvelo NR by Selwyn Rautenbach.

Fransie O'Brien and Hanjo Gouws found that the **Wire-tailed Swallows** were still at Mkhombo Dam near the end of this month. They also found several **Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks** as well as **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks** near Rust de Winter. **This place will be on the menu in two weeks' time, 8 - 11 Aug, on the Wagondrift BLNG camp!**

Photograph of the month

Bill Gie's photograph of a critically endangered Lappet-faced Vulture at VulPro graces this spot. Only a small, very rapidly declining population remains, owing primarily to poisoning, as well as ecosystem alterations. The rate of decline equates to 84% over three generations; the largest conservation area in Southern Africa (Kruger National Park) had fewer than 50 nests a decade ago. Intentional poisoning accounts for 60% of vulture mortalities. The most devastating losses are when poachers poison carcasses in Kruger Park, who fear that circling vultures will alert authorities to the position of a poached animal.



REFLECTION ON BLNG'S JULY

BLNG offered **four outings** to varied destinations which gave club members the opportunity to see birds in different settings and landscapes. There were **two Online Courses: LBJs made simple** and **How to plan your Kruger Birding Trip** with Aldo Berutti. These included online quizzes and Pdf course material to download. The two July courses combined were attended by a record number of 70 BLNG members.

*A warm thank-you to all our club's organisers, outing leaders, and our eager photographers, for your support.
You make BLING WiNGS possible!*

PROGRAMME



3 August – Moreleta Kloof NR



13 August – Special Club Meeting



17 August – Boekenhoutskloof



21 August – Wolwespruit Trail Park



24 August – BLSA Bird Fair



31 August – Marievale

13 August - SPECIAL GENERAL CLUB MEETING

1. Tabling the proposed Amendments to the BLNG constitution and voting.



Hera, the European Roller [BLSA]

2. European Roller Migration:

Most of us have been following Hera and Royal Wasi's 5000 km long-distance migration with something close to trepidation this autumn. Only Hera made it...

Jessica Wilmot from BLSA, our guest speaker, is leading a pioneering study to learn more about European Roller Migration, in the hope that key locations can be identified and protected, thereby making migration a less risky undertaking for these epic flyers.

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