

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

August 2015



GURNEY'S SUGARBIRD ALBERT FRONEMAN



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LUCKY DRAW WINNERS

A lucky draw was done for all BirdLife South Africa members who renewed their membership in June 2015, and we congratulate the five members who will receive a copy of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa* coffee-table book:

Shane Jeycocke
Helgo Kahle
Megan Louw
Werner van Goethem
Dawid Appel

We are sure you will enjoy the wonderful illustrations by Graeme Arnott and interesting accounts by Terry Oatley.

Thank you to all who renewed their membership with BirdLife South Africa.

building a home for our waterbirds

The Vergenoegd Water Bird Habitat Rehabilitation and Water Quality Project was recently launched at the Vergenoegd Wine Estate in the Western Cape. The project is being led by NCC Environmental Services through a partnership with BirdLife South Africa, with funding from the Table Mountain Fund.

After years of utilising Indian runner ducks as an eco-friendly pest control method at Vergenoegd Wine Estate, estate manager John Faure decided he needed to assist the conservation of their indigenous cousins. An idea was born around the fact that while many farm dams are sterile and polluted, they still hold much potential to become biodiverse habitats for an assortment of wildlife, particularly waterfowl.

The project's initial step has involved designing and testing different prototypes of floating islands to be placed in farm dams. Locally indigenous plants are being propagated to be used on these as well as the nearby dam walls and banks. As the project gains momentum the next steps will include training farm workers as bird guides and monitors, while also teaching them to grow plants and build the islands themselves, contributing towards socioeconomic growth. The pilot project will also produce a guideline document to be distributed to farmers to encourage, guide and assist them in rehabilitating their dams using these tools, thereby increasing biodiversity and improving water quality and hydrological functioning in the agricultural landscape.

Dale Wright, Regional Conservation Manager: Western Cape, dale.wright@birdlife.org.za



Red-knobbed Coots at Vergenoegd Wine Estate.

IS CONSERVATION going to the dogs?

Our pesky pooches have a remarkable ability to sniff out that tasty morsel you forgot in your jacket pocket last winter, or a rotting remnant of a dead seal on the beach, and they somehow always know when you have been sharing your affections with another hound. Conservationists are putting these sometimes-frustrating skills to good use.

BirdLife South Africa, the Endangered Wildlife Trust and BioInsight recently co-hosted a workshop on using dogs in conservation. We learned about how dogs have been used to combat rhino poaching, to detect smugglers, and even to help count tortoises, but BirdLife South Africa's main aim was to promote discussions around the feasibility of using dogs to find bird (and bat) carcasses beneath wind turbines.

Dogs have been used to find carcasses at wind farms in Spain and Portugal, with promising results. Dogs can cover a large area quickly and are far more effective than people in finding evidence of mortalities. In one study, dogs found 78 per cent of placed carcasses, compared to human searchers who found just 21 per cent. Since dogs rely on smell and not sight, they are also much better than people at finding small carcasses, regardless of the state of decomposition.

Estimates of total bird and bat fatalities at wind farms must account for detection rates; low detection rates mean a large margin of error (i.e. a wide range of potential values). The vastly improved detection rates that can be achieved using dogs will yield much more accurate figures. Obtaining more accurate figures is in the interests of both wind farm developers and conservationists alike. Using dogs makes sense.

There are some challenges though, and it will take a while before dogs become the norm at



most wind farms in South Africa. Using dogs does cost more than the current survey methods, and wind farms (and the authorities) need to be convinced that the added certainty is worth the investment. Finding suitable dogs and handlers is also a challenge. Shannon McKay from BioDogs is currently investigating a certification scheme to help ensure that dogs and their handlers have the necessary skills.

Another potential downside is that monitoring bird and bat fatalities at wind farms creates employment for semi-skilled people. We wouldn't want to replace people with dogs, but wouldn't it be wonderful if local staff could be trained to use dogs (possibly even rescue dogs) at wind farms? There could be multiple benefits in terms of skills development, animal welfare and conservation. Working with dogs must surely be more rewarding than wandering beneath turbines looking for carcasses with only our pretty-useless human senses to rely on? And who knows, that pesky pooch could have a greater purpose in life.

If you would like a copy of the workshop proceedings, please e-mail Sam Ralston-Paton at energy@birdlife.org.za

Sam Ralston-Paton, Birds and Renewable Energy Manager, energy@birdlife.org.za



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To look through a pair of Zeiss binoculars is to get closer to your quarry than you ever thought possible. Suddenly, there is no forest too dense or too dark in which they can hide. You can purchase Zeiss binoculars directly through the BirdLife South Africa website and support bird conservation. Visit: www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/zeiss-optics



talking wind

in Windhoek



BirdLife South Africa's successful lobbying for the effects of wind energy on birds to be adequately assessed and monitored is largely thanks to the input and advice from our BirdLife partners that have more established wind energy industries. It was South Africa's turn to pass on this knowledge when BirdLife South Africa (Hanneline Smit-Robinson and Sam Ralston-Paton)

and Andrew Jenkins (lead author of BirdLife South Africa and EWT's Best Practice Guidelines for avian monitoring and impact mitigation at proposed wind energy development sites) were invited to speak at a workshop on birds and wind energy in Namibia. Namibia's wind energy industry is in its infancy, but NamPower/Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) Strategic Partnership and Environmental Assessment Professionals of Namibia (EAPAN) are wise to be pro-active and put things in place early, as this can help avoid all sorts of problems later on. They will consider adopting BirdLife South Africa and EWT's Guidelines, or may request changes to be made to the Guidelines to address their specific needs. They might even decide to develop their own guidelines, but either way, it was a pleasure to pass on the global goodwill and help renewable energy develop more sustainably.

Sam Ralston-Paton, Birds and Renewable Energy Manager, energy@birdlife.org.za

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS: OWL AWARDS 2015

The BirdLife South Africa Owl Awards ceremony acknowledges companies and individuals who donate their time and money to the organisation, which makes it possible to continue all our conservation programmes and projects. Please visit the BirdLife South Africa website www.birdlife.org.za.

birdlife.org.za/events/owl-awards for more information on the criteria for these awards and to download the nomination form. For more information, contact Nikki McCartney on 083 636 1060 or events@birdlife.org.za
Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing Manager, events@birdlife.org.za

WE WANT YOUR VIEWS ON VULTURES!

Why? We want to help them and your views will help guide our work to save them from extinction.

Please complete this quick online survey for BirdLife International, for vultures: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PKX6PN3>

The survey consists of six questions, and will only take a few minutes to complete.

Thank you for helping BirdLife International.

Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing Manager, events@birdlife.org.za



LAPPET-FACED VULTURE MARK D. ANDERSON

gardening

FOR BIRDS

It's that time of year when one is simply waiting for spring before attempting anything major (or even minor!) in the garden. Hopefully you have all done your planning and changing of things that weren't quite right and soon the longer days and warmer weather will jump-start your spring garden. It has been really cold here in Howick and many plants that I thought were reasonably frost-hardy have succumbed to the icy fingers – I hope most of them will recover. The sight of frozen birdbaths always conjures up a picture in my head of birds with little skates on their feet waltzing up and down to the music of Strauss!

Swirling smoke and flickering flames have dominated our view for some weeks now as the final firebreaks are burnt and this got me thinking about the birds that nest in the dry winter grass. The Marsh Owl and the African Grass-Owl spring immediately to mind, both large owls that nest on the ground. For reasons that are not at all obvious from reading about these two in the many bird books we have, the African Grass-Owl is listed as 'vulnerable' while the Marsh Owl is widespread and relatively common. The African Grass-Owl looks very similar to the well-known Barn Owl, having the same white facial disc, but the upper parts are dark brown as compared to the much paler, grey-brown upper parts of the Barn Owl.

The African Grass-Owl prefers tall, thick grass or sedges as a nesting site, where it lays its eggs on a thin pad of grass stems at the end of a long, roofed tunnel. The female alone incubates the eggs for 32 days; once hatched the chicks remain in the nest for up to 35 days and only fly at around 50 days. As the eggs are laid from late summer well into winter, the chicks are very vulnerable to the veld fires that often sweep through the dry grasslands and there are many



Grass Owl chicks

(far too many) records of chicks being burnt by grass fires, even the controlled ones. I know of one happy ending when a farming friend of ours found a young African Grass-Owl flopping around on a dirt track following a fire – it was too young to fly, but had managed to get itself away from the flames onto the road. This little youngster was helped to maturity and happily returned to its natural home.

Next month sees the celebration of Arbor Day and the two trees chosen as Trees of the Year 2015 are *Combretum kraussii*, the Forest Bushwillow, and *Heteromorpha arborescens* (previously *H. trifoliata*), the Parsley Tree. The Forest Bushwillow is not a frontline bird tree, but birds need trees of all sorts to provide perches and shelter during bad weather. As a plus, the seed of this tree is often parasitised and this in turn attracts the attention of Southern Black Tits. *Combretum kraussii* is densely leafy for most of the year, having about a month where the leaves are sparse, especially in dry conditions. The seasonal change in leaf colour is one of its attractions; new leaves appear whitish and as the season progresses the chlorophyll bulks up and mature leaves are dark green. Throughout the year there is the occasional red leaf, more in autumn, and the small, winged fruits blush pink in late summer. This tree can grow up to 9 x 9 metres, making it a great shade or screening tree.

The Parsley Tree makes a fantastic accent tree with its unique, shiny bark, regularly marked with horizontal bands. Tall and thin and fairly fast growing, with attractive trifoliolate or compound, aromatic leaves and small greenish-yellow flowers, *Heteromorpha arborescens* will make a great addition to your garden and the gorgeous bark will have all your friends wanting one too. And it is not at all afraid of frost!

Sally Johnson, sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com

turning kruger green

Interesting facts relating to bird status

We are halfway through the study period and already data collected is showing interesting results relating to bird status in the Greater Kruger National Park. The ADU submitted a report to SANParks Scientific Services in May and many changes in abundance of certain species between the first and second bird atlas projects, two decades apart, have become evident.

There are some alarming decreases in abundance since SABAP1 and SABAP2 of certain prominent species, including Secretarybird, Marabou Stork, Southern Ground-Hornbill, Kori Bustard, Cape and Lappet-faced vultures and Martial Eagle. There are also smaller birds showing a decrease, such as Coqui Francolin, Namaqua Dove, Striped Kingfisher, Little Bee-eater, African Hoopoe and White-crested Helmet-Shrike.

Habitat change is a probable cause, attributed to the loss of large tracts of grassland within the savanna woodland mosaic, which could be the result of overgrazing, bush encroachment and the loss of suitable nesting trees linked to elephant population densities. The closure of numerous artificial water points is also a factor, plus heavy pollution of rivers and streams flowing into KNP from densely populated areas outside the western boundary. Disturbance of foraging vultures and associated species (Marabou Stork and Bateleur) may also be taking place as a direct result of the increase in rhino poaching.

It will be of great interest to see the findings at the completion of the Turning Kruger Green project at the end of December 2016.

Peter Lawson, Project Leader, peter@lawsons-africa.co.za

SASOL BIRD FAIR 5 & 6 SEPTEMBER 2015 Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden



Pack a picnic and soak up the magnificent scenery at the Sasol Bird Fair. Activities include guided bird walks, a bird photography workshop, interactive entertainment, face-painting and educational activities for kids. There will also be an exhibition area of everything related to birds and birding, from books, birding apps, binoculars, spotting scopes and bird feeders to birding holiday destinations and tour operators, as well as displays by a variety of conservation organisations.

Workshop: Processing bird images in Photoshop
Presented by Robbie Aspeling

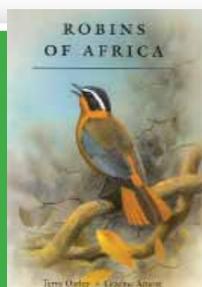
- What elements make a good avian image?
- Processing images with the RAW converter within Photoshop.

- Opening images in Photoshop and following a proven workflow to finish post processing.
- Sharpening and resizing images for print and social media.
- Adding borders and watermarks to images.

Cost: R100 per person, by booking only. Sessions limited to 30 people.

Guided bird walks: There'll be something for everyone, from beginners and kids and learning bird calls to the importance of bird atlasing and some serious twitching. All guides are registered with Birding Ecotours.

For more information, contact Nikki McCartney on 083 636 1060 or events@birdlife.org.za



RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP AND STAND A CHANCE TO WIN!

Renew your membership in the month that it is due and stand a chance to win one of five copies of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa*, a celebration of the African robin and its world in all its variety. Please remember to use your membership number as the reference when making your payment.

Shireen Gould, Membership Manager, membership@birdlife.org.za

what's on?

FLOCK TO LAYMAN'S LAB 2016 IN KRUGER

Whether you are a beginner birder, weekend ornithologist or seasoned twitcher, our programme has something for you. We have confirmed a sterling line-up:

Presenter	Topic
Ian Whyte	The return of Yellow-billed Oxpecker to Kruger after an absence of more than a century
Joe Grosel	Identifying Kruger's brown raptors
	Identifying larks
Peter Ryan	Saving our seabirds
Derek Engelbrecht	The hidden world revealed by nest cameras
Rowen van Eeden	Saving the Martial Eagle from decline
Peter Lawson	SABAP2 and 'Turning Kruger Green'
Leigh Combrink	Kruger's Southern Ground-Hornbills
Garth Batchelor	Mpumalanga's Crowned Eagles
Andrew Jenkins	Conservation status of South Africa's diurnal birds of prey
Lucy Kemp	Mabula Ground Hornbill Project
Peter Zietsman	History of the SANParks Honorary Rangers and their connection to Kruger
Sharon Thompson	Past and current avian research in Kruger: identifying the gaps

For more information, please contact Linda van den Heever on 011 789 1122 or linda.vdheever@birdlife.org.za



FLOCK AT SEA AGAIN! 2017

A reminder that in order for BirdLife South Africa to secure the Flock at Sea AGAIN! 2017 voyage exclusively for its members and other interested parties, we need to confirm bookings for 680 cabins by 30 September 2015.

To date, more than 620 cabins have been booked. Balcony cabins and balcony suites are sold out. Only restricted-view outside cabins and inside cabins left.

Book your berth by calling the MSC Cruises Call Centre on 011 798 3600 and quote BirdLife.

For more information about prices, deck layout, programme of events etc, visit www.birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-at-sea-again-2017 or contact Nikki McCartney on 083 636 1060 or events@birdlife.org.za

BIRDING 'OFF THE BEATEN TRACK'

Greater Limpopo Birding Routes - Blouberg and Makgabeng

17 to 20 September 2015

Cost: R3 500 per person sharing (includes three night's accommodation, meals, snacks, guide fees, tourism levies and entrance fees). The roads in the Blouberg Nature Reserve and on the Makgabeng plateau will require high-clearance and 4x4 vehicles.

Please contact Lisa Martus for more information and to book at info@krm.co.za or call 082 200 4596

Attention BirdLife South Africa members:

Please use your membership number as a payment reference when paying your membership fees.

snippets



Armchair Waders Course

Held online over two evenings, this course is live and interactive. Attend from wherever you are – your lounge, your office, your holiday home, and on any device that has internet. No traffic, parking troubles, or late-night driving.

Simply kick back, relax and let's talk Waders.

Our Armchair courses are a real family affair – you pay one price, and your partner and kids get to join in the fun.

Lecturers: Geoff Lockwood, Duncan McKenzie
Dates: Sept 10 and 14, 2015
Times: 6pm to 7.30pm
Cost: R240 for the two evenings

To book, contact kim@montybrett.com, or 082 824-9378
 Website: www.montybrett.com



Birder-friendly Establishment CRAB APPLE



The perfect spot to stop awhile and twitch, the Crab Apple AA Highly Recommended self-catering cottages are set on the edge of the Dargle Conservancy in the KwaZulu-Natal midlands. With over 200 bird species, including White-starred Robin, Crowned Eagle, Narina Trogon, Knysna Turaco and Cape Parrot, it is a birder's haven. For more information, visit www.crabapple.co.za or e-mail info@crabapple.co.za

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Roberts VII Multimedia Birds of Southern Africa

Spring Special on birding apps
1–30 September 2015

Android app	R499	R399
iPhone/iPad app	R499	R399
Windows PC app	R399	R299

See www.sabirding.co.za for details