

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

July 2015



GURNEY'S SUGARBIRD ALBERT FRONEMAN



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holiday of a lifetime



Feedback from the winners of our *Zambezi Voyager* holiday competition



SA Airlink transported us in style to Kasane, Botswana where we were met by our personal tour guide, Fabian, and ferried up-river to our floating home for the next three days, the *Zambezi Voyager*. The days onboard were idyllic and with the help of our knowledgeable guides we encountered just short of 100 bird species. Left to our own devices, I doubt that we would have been able to untangle the Luapula and Chirping cisticolas, although it did become easier towards the end of the trip.

Drifting gently along the Chobe River, we passed elephant, buffalo and hippos, unconcerned by the passage of the houseboat. A variety of antelope, as well as warthog, emerged from the scrubby bush to drink. Crocodiles abounded, and ungainly water monitors walked unhurriedly through the grass on sandy banks.

What else? Stunning sunsets; too much food; drink a-plenty; excellent coffee; attentive, friendly crew; impeccable accommodation in en-suite cabins; tranquillity. All whilst sharing experiences around the dining-table with a small group of fellow passengers from all over the world. (We politely ignored the Aussies when talk turned to our rugby teams...)

Unforgettable. Our heartfelt thanks to all who made it possible.

Edgar and Shona Nelson, shed@senco.co.za

LUCKY DRAW WINNERS

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

Dave Webster
Glen Carpendale
Eric Hermann
Justus van der Hoven
Christopher Stoebel

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.



SPOT A parakeet!



- Please report sightings of free-flying Rose-ringed Parakeets via:
 1. **Google Forms**. Submit your data online at <http://goo.gl/forms/vc9a6CKl0L>
 2. **Birdlasser**, the technological partner of this project. All data of Rose-ringed Parakeets logged on Birdlasser will be shared with us. This application is available for download on Apple and Android devices. More info at www.birdlasser.com
- Please e-mail any photos of parakeets to urbanparakeets@gmail.com
- Join the group on Facebook (The Rose-ringed Parakeet Project – South Africa)

The Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* is classified as a Category 2 invasive species in the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act. It is well-established in actively breeding, but fragmented populations in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

Researchers from the University of the Witwatersrand have launched the Rose-ringed Parakeet Project to investigate the distribution of this bird in South Africa. The impact of the species on local biodiversity (native species) is also unknown. Detailed information on the distribution and behaviour of this species will improve our understanding of the invasive status of the species, and inform decisionmakers regarding the management of this parrot.



to request a datasheet. For more information, please e-mail urbanparakeets@gmail.com or Elize Fourie at elize.fourie@wits.ac.za

SPOT-A-PARAKEET DAY

Saturday, 22 August 2015

Where: In your garden and/or neighbourhood

Best time: 06:00–08:00 and/or 16:00–18:00

Spot a parakeet and submit the data to us!



BIRDLIFE STAFF MEETING

All staff – excluding Ross Wanless, who was in Nairobi, Kenya and Lucky Ngwenya, who manned the fort at the Wakkerstroom Centre – attended the annual BirdLife South Africa staff meeting on 7 and 8 July. The meeting was held at Glenburn Lodge, one of BirdLife South Africa’s registered birder-friendly establishments. It is always great for staff to spend time together,

both socially and professionally. Being able to hear about the awesome work being done by all programmes and staff members was a highlight for the whole team and made everyone feel privileged and excited to be a part of this committed group of conservationists.

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

SABAP2 AUTUMN ATTACK Murraysburg atlasing expedition

I had the privilege of organising and leading the SABAP2 Murraysburg Atlasing Expedition Autumn Attack over back-to-back long weekends from 25 April to 03 May 2015. In total, an amazing group of 12 seasoned and dedicated atlasers took part in this epic expedition, which resulted in it being a spectacular success.

The area we tackled was a poorly atlased part of South Africa, where the three provinces of the Western, Northern and Eastern Cape meet in the Great Karoo. It provided an opportunity for a concerted attack on as many unatlased pentads in this part of South Africa as possible. I want to thank Birdlife South Africa for their generous donation of R10 000 towards the Murraysburg Atlasing Expedition. Their commitment to SABAP2 is greatly appreciated and without this sponsorship the trip would have been a non-starter.

And what an amazing trip it was, with many highlights. The exceptional hospitality of all

the farmers we linked up with, without exception, was superb. A great bunch of warm and friendly folk, eager to chat, give directions, and share their knowledge of the birds they had on their farms.

Now for some stunning statistics: 70 full protocol atlas cards were submitted during the expedition, with 2 531 records (sightings) being logged by the atlasing teams. One hundred and ninety one sightings of different species were recorded. Had the migrants been around, we probably could have added a further 10 to 15 species to the list, pushing it over the 200 mark. Surely this makes the Great Karoo an undiscovered birding hotspot within our country’s borders?

Well done to everyone involved for making this citizen science expedition such a successful and epic adventure.

Peter Nupen, Western Cape SABAP2 Coordinator,
pnupen@iafrica.com

gardening

FOR BIRDS

Gardening for birds (or for anything else for that matter) is not a winter thing. Yes, it is a good time for planning, but I think it would be cruel to actually plant anything right now. That's my excuse, anyway, for not doing much out there in the cold right now!

In summer rainfall areas, birdbaths become even more important now that there are no handy puddles to drink from and bathe in (I know in the Cape areas you have rain now, so just put this into your 'summer thoughts'). You might even consider adding one or more drinking spots to your garden. So far, I have nine different watering holes in my little garden – different heights, different depths, some in the sun and some in the shade. It is important to remember that most of our garden birds have very short legs and they don't particularly like to wade into water above their ankles (their ankles are what a lot of people think are their knees). Watch a bird bathing and you will see that they like to flutter and splash and even squat down into the water, but actual swimming is usually a no-no. Hadedas have much longer legs and for them I have a much deeper, artificial rock pool, and in the hot weather they often just stand in it with a sort of far-away look on their faces, seemingly enjoying the coolth and occasionally squatting



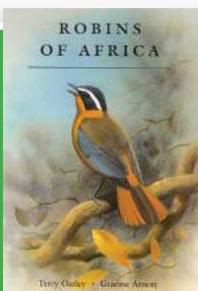
Blue Waxbills

down and getting really wet. If possible, place your birdbaths in positions where you can enjoy the spectacle from a favourite sitting place, a garden bench or stoep chair.

Winter is a time for browsing through books and I am fascinated by the derivation of both bird and plant names. The scientific names of birds, although seldom used by us ordinary folk, are often beautifully descriptive. The Southern Bald Ibis has the proper name of *Geronticus calvus* – *geronticus* is Latin for old or aging; *calvus* is also Latin and means 'bald'. Many people's favourite bird, the African Fish Eagle, goes by the name *Haliaeetus vocifer* – *halieos* is Greek for fisherman and *aetos* is Greek for eagle. The specific name *vocifer* is Latin for vociferous, a perfect description of this special bird.

Keep warm, make lots of plans and keep those birdbaths full.

Sally Johnson, sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com



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

no easy task

Redefining the Grasslands IBA



One of the major challenges of the Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas (IBA) Programme is to decide where IBAs should be located and where their boundaries should be. Ideally, the IBA network should be extensive enough that it can cater for all threatened bird species in South Africa, from small species living in forest patches to large birds of prey who can move hundreds of kilometres in a single day. No easy task!

In order to achieve this, the IBA team needs to constantly re-evaluate the IBA network and determine where improvements can be made. I recently spent three days in the eastern Free State to evaluate if the Alexpan and Murphy's Rust IBAs should be expanded to include nearby farms, which will add to these sites' conservation value.

I did the assessment together with Bradley Gibbons from the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), who has an amazing knowledge of the area. We saw mountains and koppies with the most interesting names, including Platberg, Drie Susters, Aasvoëlkop, Nelson's Kop, Tandjiesberg (they really do look like 'tande') and Mount Everest. We saw over 500 Blue Crane, 200 Grey Crowned Crane, Denham's Bustard, Secretary-bird, a few Cape Vulture, lots of Southern Bald Ibis, and waterbirds by the hundreds. We did not record Botha's Lark, but we know they are regularly recorded in this area. We met farmers and lodge owners, who all talk passionately about their farms, the environment and 'their' cranes. A main topic of discussion was the new N3 extension which, if approved, will destroy so much of this beautiful area and many hectares of pristine wetlands. You can hear the concern in their voices and see the frustration on their faces as they feel all their comments and objections are simply ignored.

This area is an absolute gem that should to be conserved and protected. The whole area from Harrismith to Ingula and up to Memel consists of mostly pristine and intact grasslands, so based on this site assessment we decided to



The beautiful grasslands of the eastern Free State.

re-evaluate the boundary of the entire Grasslands IBA (for more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/iba-directory/item/161). On the other extreme, some areas to the north of the IBA in Mpumalanga consist largely of exotic plantations and many transformed areas, so they should be excluded from the IBA. We also need to do an assessment of the grasslands in the eastern Free State to determine how much of these we want to include in the IBA network. We also need to determine if we will amalgamate all the IBAs in the area into one or have two IBAs, i.e. the current Grasslands IBA and a new IBA in the south, which will amalgamate the current Alexpan and Murphy's Rust IBAs. These are all important questions and, to get answers, many factors will have to be considered. This is something that can only be done after a detailed assessment of the area has been completed, which I will embark on in the coming months.

What is clear is that the beautiful, intact grasslands of the eastern Free State must be protected as these, and the species they host, are becoming very, very scarce.

Ernst Retief, Regional Conservation Manager:

Mpumalanga and Free State, ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za

IBA Team takes it to the waterberg

Don't let anyone tell you that the Waterberg has poor winter birding! The Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas (IBA) team at-lased over 80 species in two days on the Bateleur Nature Reserve, including Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Yellow-throated Petronia, and the orange forecrown morph of the Yellow-fronted Tinker-bird. Of course, we did a little more than just awesome bushveld birding. The purpose of these IBA team meetings is to share lessons learnt and to strategise for the future. This meeting also included special celebrations for completing the assessment of all 124 IBAs and publishing the revised IBA Directory and first ever South African IBA Status report (both due out in August 2015).

While a major focus of the IBA Programme since its revitalisation in 2010 has been reassessing the entire IBA network, we intuitively began to understand where the immediate priorities lay in terms



The IBA team out atlasing.

of needing conservation intervention (and it turns out the IBA Status report agrees with our intuition). Our presence in the grasslands has resulted in the publication of best-practice management guidelines for burning and grazing, and the formal protection of the Chrissies Pans IBA. We continue



IBA team from L-R: Ernst Retief, Dale Wright, Candice Stevens, Rina Theron, Nick Theron (holding young David Theron), Kristi Garland and Daniel Marnewick. Seated: Sam Schroder.

to drive the proclamation of two other IBAs in Mpumalanga and Free State.

Two gems have also been discovered, with the Devon IBA now added to the IBA network, and the future expansion of the Grasslands IBA to include high-value areas between Memel and Ingula. We recently started work in the KZN Mistbelt Grasslands IBA to proclaim these protected areas, specifically to conserve the Critically Endangered Blue Swallow.

Our estuaries are one of the most threatened habitat types, which is why they became a focus in the Western Cape. We have been working since 2014 to proclaim the Verlorenvlei Estuary IBA a protected area, and recently received funding to do the same in two other estuaries.

The above highlights only some of the work we are busy doing. We continue raising awareness, education and partnering on research, climate change monitoring and habitat restoration. We have now also partnered with bird clubs to form five Local Conservation Groups, each taking responsibility for working in their local IBA.

All this work paves the road for future IBA conservation, and it is essential that this IBA team remains cohesive, focused, skilled and, most importantly, passionate about conserving IBAs. This is the purpose of our biannual IBA Team meetings.

Daniel Marnewick, Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas Programme Manager, daniel.marnewick@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



turning kruger green

June 2015

As at 30 June 2015, we were halfway through the registered duration period of the SA-BAP2 Greater Kruger National Park project. The total area has 447 pentads and the set target is for all 447 pentads to turn green (i.e. have a minimum of four atlas cards each) by the time the project expires at the end of December 2016.

We are pleased to announce that halfway through the project a total of 359 pentads have been turned green, which makes the project a massive 89.75% towards completion. Much of the work done so far has been by enthusiastic citizen scientists in areas open to the general public, and

those who have contributed to date are commended, especially members of BirdLife Lowveld.

A big thank you to all individuals, clubs and business enterprises who have dipped into their pockets to make contributions to the TKG fund. This is an expensive project to run and without your valued assistance it most certainly would not be in the healthy position it stands at to date.

Lastly, we must commend the part played by the Kruger Park staff in providing advice on access to remote pentads and to SANParks Scientific Services for their co-operation and willingness to assist.

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

subscribe & WIN



AN UNFORGETTABLE HWANGE HOLIDAY WORTH R26 000!

Everyone who subscribes to the print edition of *African Birdlife* between 1 May and 31 October 2015 will be entered into the lucky draw to win this fantastic holiday for two to Wilderness Safaris' Davison's Camp in Hwange National Park. For more information, or to subscribe to the magazine, visit www.birdlife.org.za



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what's on?

FLOCK TO LAYMAN'S LAB 2016 IN KRUGER

Layman's LAB forms part of BirdLife South Africa's biennial Learn About Birds (LAB) conference, which will take place from 10 to 11 March 2016 at Skukuza in the Kruger National Park. We have confirmed a sterling line-up, and irrespective of whether you are a beginner birder, weekend ornithologist or seasoned twitcher, our programme will have something for you. You can download the programme from www.birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-in-kruger-2016

The SCIENCE LAB programme will only be available once scientific abstracts have been received. 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 to enable 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, over 480 cabins have been booked. Balcony cabins and balcony suites are sold out.

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



GOLDEN GATE BIRDING WEEKEND

**Free State Region:
SANParks Honorary Rangers**

12 to 14 February 2016

For more information, including registration forms and accommodation details, please visit www.sanparksvolunteers.org/free-state-region or contact Elinda Meintjes on 082 820 5212 or elinda@vodamail.co.za

NDUMO BIRDING WEEKENDS

**The Game Rangers Association
of Africa: KwaZulu-Natal Region**

November and December 2015

5 to 8 Nov • 12 to 15 Nov • 19 to 22 Nov
26 to 29 Nov • 3 to 6 Dec

For additional information, please contact Drummond Densham on 033 330 4039, 083 321 7959 or densham@sai.co.za, or Martin Schofield on 033 347 2161, 083 789 1588 or schof@sai.co.za



SAVE THE DATES! 5 & 6 September 2015

Sasol Bird Fair at the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden, Johannesburg
For more information, please contact Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing Manager, events@birdlife.org.za

Attention BirdLife South Africa members:

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