



BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

October 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 August 2015, and we congratulate the five members who will receive a copy of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa* coffee-table book:

Gillian Isaacs
Carel Viljoen
Angus MacNair
Glynnis Shewan
Mike Oates

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.

BirdLife South Africa's Bright Young Things and the tuluver

'Give a task to a busy person and it will get done on time and with perfection', is what people say. Well, we say: 'Call upon the Bright Young Things.'

Our call upon the talented, creative and passionate team at Utopia – our pro bono advertising agency – meant that something very special would happen: the message to conserve our vultures was painted across the world's skies in spectacular fashion. The Tuluver Campaign was art of the finest order. It communicated with grace and elegance. It communicated with wit and a certain deftness. Utopia painted our message across the sky; colours flew and screamed; the call was unique: 80 000 000 people listened. Yes, EIGHTY MILLION people!

The Utopia team received complimentary membership in exchange for their contributions to BirdLife South Africa.

Thank you Utopia, thank you!

Vernon Head, vhjarch@kingsley.co.za



The Utopia team (L to R): Jessica Stromin, Carl Cardinelli, Beatrice Willoughby, Sean Creighton and James Atkins.

Attention BirdLife South Africa members:

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

birding big day

takes on a whole new look

Saturday 28 November 2015

Events such as Birding Big Day are essential to BirdLife South Africa's success and growth. To keep us soaring each year, it is vital that we continue to increase awareness about birds and bird conservation, while raising much needed funds for our essential conservation work. So grab your binoculars and bird books and take part in BirdLife South Africa's 31st Birding Big Day!

There are a number of categories to suit the needs of all birders, including the Open Category, the Handicap Category and the Bird your 'Hood category. There are also two exciting new developments this year. The first is the challenge to collectively tally as many of South Africa's 846 bird species in a single day, with help from birders across the country, from midnight on Friday 27 November to midnight



on Saturday 28 November 2015. The second is to create awareness for the importance of citizen science with the help of BirdLasser. This easy-to-use app for both beginner birders and twitchers enables you to record your sightings with GPS precision and share them with friends and research causes, such as SABAP2 and BirdLife South Africa, giving them a better picture of what's happening to our birdlife.

BirdLife South Africa encourages teams and individuals to record their Birding Big Day sightings using BirdLasser – your progress throughout the day will be tracked and displayed on a dedicated website. To download the BirdLasser app or to get more information about it, visit www.birdlasser.com. The app is free and easy to install!

For more information about Birding Big Day, visit www.birdlife.org.za/events/birding-big-day or contact Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing Manager, on 083 636 1060 or events@birdlife.org.za.

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

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* available for iPhone and Android



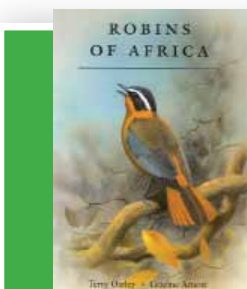
Record your sightings

BirdLasser makes it easy and convenient to log, manage and share your sightings.



Supporting your cause

We support conservation. Contact us to hear how we can support your cause.



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

gardening FOR BIRDS

Gardening in KwaZulu-Natal at the moment is 'for the birds'... in the nasty, derogatory sense! It is hot, dry and very windy, and I seem to be forever filling my 10 birdbaths; the rate of evaporation is difficult to keep up with right now. I feel really sorry for birds that catch their food in the air – the prey will either have been blown away or with wind-assisted flight will be awfully difficult to catch. The poor swifts, with their inability to land on the ground or perch in trees, have probably flown up and up to great heights – let's hope that lots of insects have been blown up there too.

A visit to a keen gardener-friend in Pietermaritzburg introduced me to *Lycium acutifolium*, which has the delightful Afrikaans name of Wolwedoring and the rather stilted English names Thicket Honey-thorn or Soft-leaf Box-thorn, which don't really roll off the tongue. Let's just call it *Lycium*! This is a shrubby plant with a tendency to scramble and lean if there is something there to lean on. It has tiny, dark green leaves and equally small white flowers with lilac veins, followed by tiny red, slightly ovoid fruits in early summer (or late spring, depending on how you look at it). With its dense foliage and sharp spines it is a marvellous ever-green barrier plant, and the frugivores think it is simply the best. Even the smallest of these birds can feast on the delicious fruits and there are so many that there are always enough left to decorate the bush for human enjoyment. This is a plant that doesn't mind a hot summer, even a dry summer, and copes with a fair amount of frost too.

Something you cannot garden for, but you can certainly hope for, is that one of your garden birds will choose your garden in which to build its nest. We were lucky last year when 'our' Cape



Lycium acutifolium

Robin-chats built their nest in the shade of a *Clivia*, right on the ground. It took us ages to pinpoint the nest as the birds always took a circuitous route around the back when bringing food to the youngsters. This year, sadly, they have chosen to nest elsewhere, although they still expect the meal-worm supply to continue!

Others on our estate have been lucky – Cape Wagtails nesting in a pot plant right next to the front door, and Amethyst Sunbirds hanging their beautifully woven homes from a hanging basket in one instance and from the satellite dish in another. The satellite dish nest hangs right outside a window, allowing unhindered views of the parents coming and going and of the little chick peeping out. Don't be tidy and brush away spiders doing their thing under your windowsills or other nooks and crannies – spiders not only provide the tough web so necessary in the building of sunbird nests, but they are also a great protein diet in a form soft enough for the sunbirds to manage. Although the adult sunbirds partake of a lot of nectar in their diet, this is not something they can transport to their chicks.

In the strong wind we had today I learnt the hard way that *Leonotis nepetifolia* is better treated as an annual. I had cut one plant back hard (as you do for the common *L. leonurus*) but the shoots were not strong enough to withstand the swirling gusts of wind and snapped off where they joined the old main stem. Oh dear, now the gorgeous Malachite Sunbird will have to go elsewhere – this plant was right against the window of our morning coffee spot. Luckily the new plants from last season's seeds are growing apace and will soon be producing flowers.

Sally Johnson, sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com

secretarybird productivity in Wakkerstroom

The IUCN has recently upgraded the Secretarybird's conservation status from Near Threatened to Vulnerable as a result of a decrease in reporting rates over the species' range. The Wakkerstroom Secretarybird Project was started to determine this drastic, but unconfirmed decline. Studies on productivity and diet had never been done on population level before.

After 17 months (one-and-a-half breeding seasons) in the greater Wakkerstroom area – in between numerous cups of coffee, a waist-size worth of homemade cookies, and with assistance from Wakkerstroom's friendly farmers – I located 22 nests in an area of 8 976 square kilometres. Six nests were active in the 2013/14 breeding season and eight nests in the 2014/15 breeding season, and overall 18 young were produced. In the first breeding season, 87% of nests were successful and in the second, all the nests were successful. This nesting success equates to a productivity of 1.29 young per pair per year. We are thus pleased to report that this result indicates a source population of Secretarybirds in Wakkerstroom.

At this stage of the study, not all pairs breed every year and the spatial arrangement of breeding and non-breeding pairs is also unclear. To get an even better understanding of the productivity of this population, BirdLife South Africa and the Tshwane University of Technology decided to study the breeding habits of this population for another year.

In addition, we will carry out further studies on the diet through isotope analysis. This process measures the ratios of naturally occurring stable isotopes (mostly carbon, nitrogen and oxygen) within chemical compounds such



as feathers. To compare the diet of the Secretarybirds from this area to others, we need to collect Secretarybird feathers from throughout South Africa and we need your assistance. Only the first 15 cm (from the shaft's side) are required for the longer wing or tail feathers, or you can combine the feathers collected at a nest. A GPS position of where the feathers were collected and a date is also required. Please note that these collections may not harm or disturb the birds in any way. Please post the feathers to Eleen Strydom at Department of Nature Conservation, Private Bag X680, TUT, Pretoria, 0001, or e-mail StrydomME@tut.ac.za to make an arrangement for collection.

[Eleen Strydom, StrydomME@tut.ac.za](mailto:StrydomME@tut.ac.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/purchase-zeiss-products



newsflash

Western Cape Estuaries Conservation Project

Bot River Estuary, Fisherhaven

Three of the most important estuaries in South Africa for conserving birds and biodiversity are receiving attention through a new project from BirdLife South Africa's Western Cape Estuaries Conservation Project.

The sites, the Berg River Estuary Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) at Velddrif on the West Coast, and the Klein River and Bot-Kleinmond River estuaries near Hermanus, which form part of the Cape Whale Coast IBA, are some of South Africa's most valuable, but vulnerable estuaries.

Funded by WWF South Africa's Elizabeth Harding Bequest, this new project seeks formal protection and sustained conservation action for these sites. The project will explore various tools for formal protected area expansion, including Biodiversity Stewardship. It is hoped that future designations will provide benefits for the private landowners involved, including a legal framework, incentives and political backing for the conservation and sustainable use of these estuaries. Preventing activities that could damage them and safeguarding their natural legacy into the future is a major focus.

A haven for several internationally and nationally important bird species populations, including African Black Oystercatcher, Cape Cormorant, Greater Flamingo, Caspian Tern and Great White Pelican, as well as significant populations of congregatory waterbirds, such as Red-knobbed Coot, these estuaries are some

of the most valuable in the country for nature conservation, particularly with respect to their bird and fish fauna. All three estuaries are IBAs; places of international significance for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity. The estuaries' rich birdlife offers substantial tourism and recreational potential, as do their natural settings, if managed appropriately. They are vital as a nursery for juvenile fish, many species of which form the basis of employment for the local communities, as well as being fundamental to supplying the wider commercial fishing industry.

The Western Cape Estuaries Conservation Project seeks to preserve the natural heritage of these sites and fulfil the purpose of the Elizabeth Harding Bequest by providing 'a sanctuary for indigenous and migratory birds in the Western Cape where these birds may live in unrestricted natural surrounds.'

Giselle Murison, Western Cape Estuaries Conservation Project Manager, giselle.murison@birdlife.org.za

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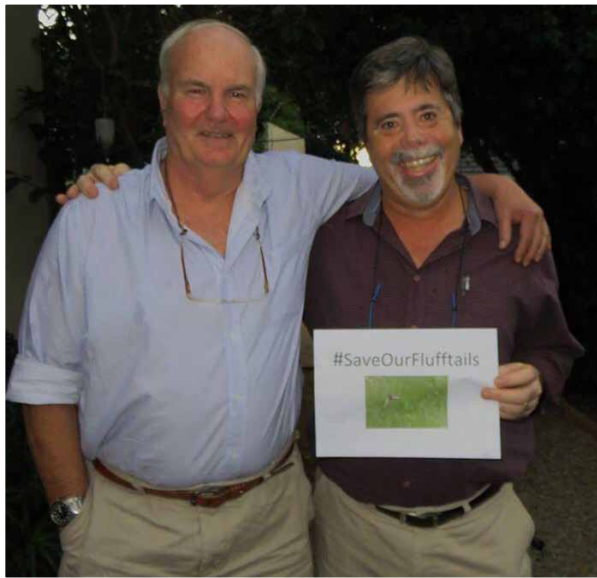


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#saveourflufftails

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Roger Wanless, Chairman of BirdLife South Africa with Mark Anderson, BirdLife South Africa's CEO.



Trevor Hardaker with Jason Boyce and Chris Lotz from Birding Ecotours.

It was with this in mind that I thought a 'social media storm' would help to generate more awareness of the White-winged Flufftail's ever-growing predicament. Thus I began to encourage Facebook friends and the wider birding community to take a picture of themselves holding a piece of paper with the hashtag '#SaveOurFlufftails' on it and to post, share and forward it to everyone they knew to help spread awareness of the plight of these magnificent birds.

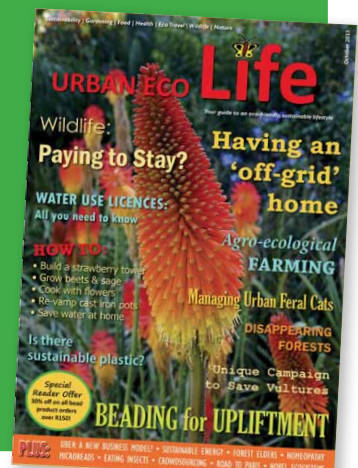
John Kinghorn, jobirding@gmail.com

URBAN ECO LIFE

Planet Earth is in a state of emergency, experiencing species and biodiversity loss, habitat degradation, climate change, deforestation, increasing exploitation... Yet all is not lost. Well-known figures, including Al Gore (founder of the Climate Reality Project), author Naomi Klein and Pope Francis, all agree that there *is* an answer. Humans need to reduce their planetary footprint and live simpler, less consumptive lives. But how?

Urban Eco Life is a digital magazine focusing on eco-friendly, sustainable living. Chock-full of information and practical know-how, it provides inspiration for planet-friendly lifestyles, demonstrating how to create a better world through articles from numerous sources and experts. We cover topics ranging from renewable energy and climate change to green buildings, organic growing, natural health and conservation initiatives – to name but a few. Subscribe today and start creating a new Earth, for birds, animals and human beings. Subscriptions cost R140/year for 12 fabulous, informative issues with great photographs.

To find out more and to subscribe, please visit www.urbanecolife.biz
Bronwyn Howard, Editor *Urban Eco Life*, urbanecolife@gmail.com



snippets

ETHIOPIA BUDGET BIRDING TOUR

with Rockjumper Birding Tours

Tour Dates: 23 February – 6 March 2016

Tour Price: US\$3 700 per person sharing
(approximately R50 030*)



Blue-winged Goose

RICH LINDIE

This exciting tour to one of the African continent's most productive birdwatching destinations covers a vast array of bird species and almost all of the country's sensational endemics in only 13 days. To boot, you'll be exposed to a kaleidoscope of cultures that grace this ancient land. All of these factors combine to ensure a fascinating experience of not just Ethiopia's birds, but also its amazing mammals, including troops of incredible Gelada and the highly endangered Ethiopian Wolf!

For more information, please e-mail info@rockjumperbirding.com or visit www.rockjumperbirding.com/tourinfo/ethiopia-budget-birding

*Please note: these prices are subject to foreign exchange fluctuations.

Birder-friendly Establishment

PROTEA HOTEL MALAGA

Protea Hotel Malaga is situated at the foot of the Drakensberg mountain range in Emgwenya (Waterval Boven), Mpumalanga. The hotel is surrounded by waterfalls, dams and rivers, making the area ideal for bird lovers.

Just a 2.5-hour trip from Pretoria and Johannesburg along the N4 highway towards Mbombela (Nelspruit), the hotel has a Spanish look and feel, surrounded by lush gardens chirping with bird-life. A swimming pool, hikes, mountain-bike trails,

kiddies' activities, a spa with sauna/Jacuzzi and fishing are available to all our guests.

Should you wish to explore the area, the quaint village of Kaapsehoop is nearby and is famous for its wild horses and the Adam's Calendar, South Africa's 'Stonehenge'.

Protea Hotel Malaga is offering birders an exclusive special of R900 per person sharing, including breakfast, lunch and dinner. This offer is valid until 31 December 2016. To make a booking, please e-mail fom@malagahotel.co.za or call 013 257 5300.

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