



# BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

March 2016

AFRICAN HARRIER-HAWK ALBERT FRONEMAN



## bird of the year 2016

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Sociable Weaver

MARK D. ANDERSON

The Bird of the Year for 2016 is the Sociable Weaver, an icon of southern Africa's arid zones and one of the draw-cards that bring people to the Kalahari. These weavers are small birds with big

personalities and they have a complex social life, living in colonies that can be hundreds strong. The colonies are like villages, made up of nuclear families organised into close-knit societies with strict social hierarchies.

Although Sociable Weavers are not found throughout South Africa, other weavers are more widespread, so the learning materials provided as part of the Bird of the Year initiative relate to weavers in general. They look at, among other topics, the birds' intricate weaving skills and the diversity of their breeding systems, which may be monogamous or polygamous and solitary or colonial.

The Bird of the Year 2016 poster was sent out with the March/April issue of *African Birdlife*. Posters are available free of charge, and on request, from BirdLife South Africa's head office, Isdell House. Please call 011 789 1122 or e-mail [info@birdlife.org.za](mailto:info@birdlife.org.za). The learning resources and activity sheets are on CDs available from BirdLife South Africa or they can be downloaded by visiting the BirdLife South Africa website on [www.birdlife.org.za/events/bird-of-the-year](http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/bird-of-the-year)

The Bird of the Year 2016 initiative is proudly sponsored by Builders Warehouse.  
Nikki McCartney, [marketing@birdlife.org.za](mailto:marketing@birdlife.org.za)

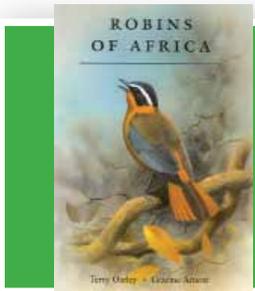


### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL COMPETITION

The lucky draw has been done for BirdLife South Africa members who renewed their membership in January 2016. We congratulate the five members who will each receive a copy of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa* coffee-table book:

- Alan Sampson • Anthony Marx
- Marylin Rein • Veronica Hanger
- Johan Eksteen

Thank you to everyone who renewed their membership.  
Shireen Gould, Membership Manager, [membership@birdlife.org.za](mailto:membership@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](mailto:membership@birdlife.org.za)

Attention BirdLife South Africa members

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

# festival fun 2016



above *The team. Kishaylin Chetty (Eskom), Hanneline Smit-Robinson (BLSA), Grant Pearson (Rand Water), Linda van den Heever (BLSA), Warren Funston (Eskom), Sizwe Mndawe (Rand Water), Meagan Donnelly (Rand Water), Seugnet Terblanche (BLSA), Elaine Cherrington (BLSA), Themba Nkuna (Rand Water) and Karen Lingerfelder (Eskom).*

above, left *The maze showing the five stations.*

left *Fun in the photo booth.*

far left *Manzi the Tapduck.*

**B**irdLife South Africa, Rand Water (Water Wise) and Eskom hosted the annual Flufftail Festival at Cresta Shopping Centre from 2 to 8 February 2016. The festival is linked to World Wetlands Day, a global event celebrating wetlands worldwide on 2 February. Its aim was to raise awareness about a critical resource (water), threatened habitat (wetlands) and endangered birds (especially the White-winged Flufftail), and with drought currently gripping our country there was no better time to do this.

At least 1300 visitors came to the 2016 Flufftail Festival, which this year took the form of a giant maze. The entire family was encouraged to collect an entry form and wander through the maze, stopping at five different stations to answer questions. Each correctly completed entry stood a chance to win one of many incredible sponsored prizes. Almost 1000 completed entry forms were received.

The Tapduck character, Manzi, was a great attraction and very popular among young people, our target audience.

People (individuals, families or groups) who visited the festival at the weekend could also have their photograph taken 'in a wetland' wearing various props (such as gumboots, butterfly nets and binoculars). They received these images, both electronic and hard copies, for free.

Prizes for the lucky draw were sponsored by Barnyard Theatre, Birding Ecotours, Briza Books, Cape Town Fish Market, Cape Union Mart, Guy Gibbon, Mr Price, Mugg & Bean, The Food Café, Trappers, Warwick Tarboton and Woolworths.

Smaller contributing partners included Cresta Shopping Centre, Redefine Properties (R20 000 towards the photo booth), Sappi (paper and printing of entry forms), Utopia, Be Photographed (Belinda Ferrando) and SANParks Honorary Rangers: West Rand Region. The design of the entry form box was sponsored by Jalapeno Advertising and Promotion and its printing by House of Print.

**Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Manager: Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme/Oppenheimer Fellow of Conservation, [conservation@birdlife.org.za](mailto:conservation@birdlife.org.za)**

# gardening

## FOR BIRDS

**H**urrah for aloes! My ambition is to have a different species flowering each month of the year and I'm slowly getting there. As my *Aloe cooperi* fades out of the picture, *A. greenii* and *A. pruinosa* flowers are standing tall and the rambling *A. tenuior* has a couple of flowering spikes too. The book notes that 'flowering (of *A. tenuior*) does not appear to be restricted to any particular time of the year' and I can vouch for that. Generous gardeners often give me aloe plants and I really welcome them, but the names are often a mystery. Many of the aloe species sold in nurseries are from outside South Africa, and even within our borders aloes cross-breed with gey abandom. So aloe nurseries are the prime spot for 'extra-species affairs' and I have long ago stopped worrying about specific names! I just enjoy these wonderful, nectar-offering plants.

*Syncolostemon densiflorus* (pink plume) is a mass of gorgeous pinkish-purple flowers right now, to the delight of the sunbirds. This is a great shrub for gardens both large and small; it never gets taller than two metres, with a spread of up to a metre, and you can always prune it back when it has finished flowering. The leaves have a delightful herby smell when crushed. It's quite happy with a fair amount of frost, but it really doesn't enjoy serious drought. Nevertheless, my strict policy of 'no watering of the garden' hasn't deterred it at all.



*Aloe cooperi*



*Grewia occidentalis*

Also looking good in pink is *Grewia occidentalis* (Cross-berry), with its four-lobed, shiny orange-brown fruits that give it its common name and are starting to ripen. Although the flesh round the seeds is thin, it has a delicious date-like flavour and the birds just love it. In its natural state this plant tends to be a multi-stemmed shrub, but I have chosen a single-stemmed specimen and pruned it carefully into a delightful little tree.

Because of its creeping, spreading and suckering habits, I don't often endorse *Tecoma (Tecomaria) capensis* (Cape honeysuckle), but I have to admit it is a great sunbird plant. It does tend to wander and pop up here and there unexpectedly, but if you are prepared to be vigilant and make it do what you want, then it's a great bird plant. The original, natural colour of the flowers is

reddish-orange, but the plant is also available in yellow, although this variety is less robust than its red cousins. I have also seen a dark red version.

As I am sure many of you do, I toss expensive bird seed into the garden each morning and enjoy the flurry of happy granivores. The seed has attracted a new visitor: the dearest little striped field mouse, which has emerged from the thicket and feeds happily with its feathered friends. Welcome to the garden, Stripey, but please don't come into the house and cause trouble in the kitchen!

Sally Johnson, [sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com](mailto:sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com)

# fishy business

## IN PLETT

**B**irdLife South Africa is leading the investigation into finding a site for a new African Penguin colony. Based on a tip-off from Mark Brown of the Nature's Valley Trust, I looked at the spit of land at the Keurbooms River mouth in Plettenberg Bay. Despite some challenges that we'll have to overcome, it is one of the best sites for a new colony that I've seen. But the most important aspect of deciding on a site is to ensure that there is enough food, both sardine and anchovy, in the area for the penguins.

To find the fish, we needed a boat with an acoustic fish finder on board and that is where Mark Brown assisted again. He found the ski-boat *Pescatore Too*

(run by Enrico's Fishing Safaris) and skippers Rudi and Patrick, as well as Gwenith Penry, a post-doctoral researcher working on Bryde's whales, to help us perform acoustic surveys in the bay. Alistair McInnes, who is in the process of writing up his PhD thesis on his survey of fish populations in Algoa Bay, completes the team. He has been instrumental in setting up the survey, designing the route and knowing what settings are needed on the fish finder.

Our first survey took place in mid-February on a calm, misty morning with a relatively flat sea. It took more than 10 hours to cover the approximately 100 kilometres, at times at a painstakingly slow speed of seven knots (about 13 kilometres per hour). But the day was a great success: all the equipment worked smoothly and we saw loads



above Alistair McInnes measuring water visibility.



left The echo-sounder used in the survey.

GWEN PENRY (2)

of seabirds, including Cape Gannets and White-chinned Petrels. Even Cory's Shearwater, Parasitic Jaeger and two sub-adult African Penguins put in an appearance. Most importantly, though, we saw several large schools of fish! We cannot generalise from just one survey and will be continuing the surveys monthly, but this is a very encouraging and hopeful sign.

Thanks go to African Penguin Patron Pamela Isdell for funding this work.

Christina Hagen, Pamela Isdell Fellow of Penguin Conservation, [christina.hagen@birdlife.org.za](mailto:christina.hagen@birdlife.org.za)



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# tracked albatross

## in South African waters



JEAN PURDON

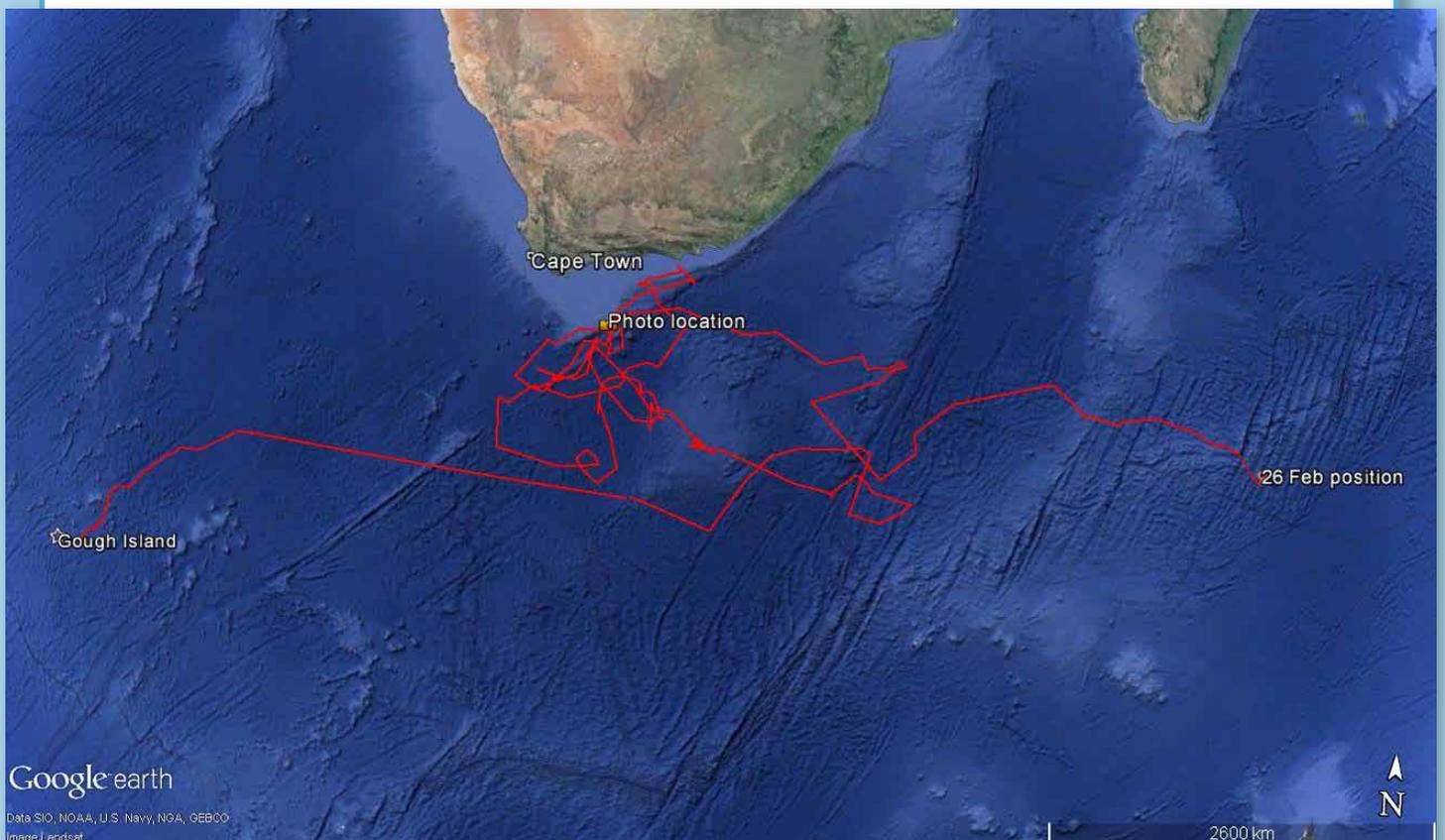
**W**ith only 1700 pairs remaining, the Critically Endangered Tristan Albatross is one of the most threatened seabird species in the world. Ross Wanless and Peter Ryan have been tracking juveniles using satellite transmitters over the past few years. The tracking was continued in December 2015 when Derren Fox and Chris Taylor fitted six juvenile albatrosses with satellite tracking devices.

By January this year, five of the six had made it all the way into South African waters and one

even came within about 100 kilometres of Durban! Imagine our delight on 4 February when an observer, Jean Purdon on the survey vessel *MV Atlantic Explorer* about 300 kilometres offshore at the edge of the Agulhas Bank, sent us a photo of a bird with a tracker on it and asked if we knew who was working on 'Wandering Albatrosses' (Tristan and Wandering albatrosses are notoriously difficult to differentiate at sea). The photo location matches up almost perfectly with the satellite data and we were happy to be able to tell her that she could now tick Tristan Albatross on her list!

This study was funded by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, the Charl van der Merwe Trust (through BirdLife International's Preventing Extinctions Programme) and Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels.

[Christina Hagen, Pamela Isdell Fellow of Penguin Conservation, \[christina.hagen@birdlife.org.za\]\(mailto:christina.hagen@birdlife.org.za\)](#)



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# snippets

## BirdLife South Africa Bird Clubs FACEBOOK PAGES

BirdLife Trogons: [www.facebook.com/groups/birdlifetrogons/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/birdlifetrogons/)

West Coast Bird Club: [www.facebook.com/West-Coast-Bird-Club-629764187056868/](http://www.facebook.com/West-Coast-Bird-Club-629764187056868/)

BirdLife Northern Gauteng: [www.facebook.com/groups/103620696347643/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/103620696347643/)

Witwatersrand Bird Club: [www.facebook.com/groups/105301356298256/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/105301356298256/)

BirdLife Harties: [www.facebook.com/groups/BirdLifeHarties](http://www.facebook.com/groups/BirdLifeHarties)

Cape Bird Club: [www.facebook.com/groups/263638220371252](http://www.facebook.com/groups/263638220371252)

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BirdLife Northern-Natal: [www.facebook.com/groups/524166147725399/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/524166147725399/)

## Flock and LAB in Kruger 2016

The 3rd biennial LAB (Learn About Birds) conference took place on 10 and 11 March 2016 at Skukuza in the Kruger National Park. The 87th BirdLife South Africa AGM also took place at Skukuza and was held on Saturday 12 March 2016.

For those who did not attend the AGM in person (or watch the livestreaming of the AGM), you can see it at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXEoyYanobY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXEoyYanobY)

Very grateful thanks go to John Bowey (and Phoebe Barnard) for making the livestreaming and video recording possible.

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