



AFRICAN HARRIER-HAWK ALBERT FRONEMAN

# BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

May 2016



## secretarybird STUDY

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### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL COMPETITION

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

- Mrs SK Horne
- Sue Scheepers
- Harry Hill
- Robbie Kemp
- Ruthette du Toit

Thank you to everyone who renewed their membership. *Shireen Gould, Membership Manager, membership@birdlife.org.za*

For the past 17 months BirdLife South Africa has supported Eleen's Strydom study on the diet and productivity of the Secretarybird in the greater Wakkerstroom area. We congratulate Eleen and her main supervisor, Prof. Gerard Malan, on the completion of Eleen's BTech report and the upgrade of this project to an MTech at the Tshwane University of Technology.

In summary, Eleen's study showed that, despite the extreme weather conditions, a large and productive Secretarybird population lives in the Wakkerstroom area. The productivity rate of 1.6 young per territorial pair indicated that a pair can replace itself every two years, demonstrating that the area acts as a source population for the region.

The study also found that prey selection in the species is very heterogeneous and included both terrestrial and semi-aquatic species. The most dominant reptile species in the Secretarybird's diet was the endemic rinkhals snake and the most prevalent mammal was the semi-aquatic vlei rat. Since both these species are associated with wetlands, the role of this habitat in the foodchain should not be underestimated. The most numerous prey taxa, i.e. coleopterans, orthopterans, scorpions and shrews, were associated with wet grasslands. We wish Eleen success with the completion of her MTech study and look forward to our further involvement in and support of the project.

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

*Eleen Strydom hands her BTech report to Mark Anderson at Isdell House. In the front are (from left to right) Mark Anderson, Eleen Strydom and Gerard Malan, and at the back are Hanneline Smit-Robinson (left) and Ernst Retief.*



# SUCCESSFUL fledging

It is with mixed emotions that we bid farewell to Mmatjie Mashao, who joined BirdLife South Africa through the WWF Graduate Internship Programme in April 2015. The aim of the internship programme is to help graduates bridge the gap between university and the workplace. By hosting interns, organisations such as BirdLife South Africa help expand interns' networks, build their knowledge of career opportunities, give them workplace experience and ultimately help them find their niche in the world of biodiversity conservation.

Mmatjie, who received her MSc from the University of Limpopo, was mentored at BirdLife South Africa by Bronwyn Maree, Christina Hagen and Sam Ralston-Paton. She spent the first nine months of her internship with the Seabird Programme and during this time she went to sea, compiled bird-mitigation plans and honed her communication skills. In January she transferred to Sam's team to immerse herself in the complex



world of helping to ensure that renewable energy is developed in harmony with nature. She commented on impact assessments for proposed renewable energy facilities and studied reports to glean data that will be used in BirdLife South Africa's guidelines for impact assessment, monitoring and mitigating the impacts of wind energy on Verreaux's Eagle, Black Harrier and Cape Vulture.

Mmatjie proved to be an asset to both teams and her calm, positive attitude will be sorely missed. It has been a pleasure to watch her confidence grow and although we are sad to see her go, it feels good to know that BirdLife South Africa has been instrumental in helping her to achieve her goal of finding a secure position in bird conservation. Mmatjie will be joining the Durban Natural History Museum and we are confident that she will continue to make a meaningful contribution to our natural environment.

*Samantha Ralston-Paton, Renewable Energy Manager, [energy@birdlife.org.za](mailto:energy@birdlife.org.za)*

## SPREADING THE WORD

The Overberg wheat belt Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) is home to some of the more charismatic birds of the Western Cape, including the Blue Crane (South Africa's national bird), as well as the Black Harrier, Secretarybird and Denham's Bustard.

Many of the landowners and farmers in this area are unaware of these jewels of the region, which also houses one of South Africa's, and indeed the world's, most diverse plant groups: renosterveld.

In order to bridge the knowledge gap and empower

farmers to better understand and manage this remarkable landscape, the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust (ORCT), together with BirdLife South Africa and other partners, has produced a fauna and flora booklet for the region. It covers mammals, birds, reptiles, insects and the incredible plants and bulbs that make the Overberg so special. It is being distributed to landowners across the region; interested members are welcome to contact Dale Wright for more information.

BirdLife South Africa is proud to be a partner of



the ORCT. In four years this small NGO has made great strides in conserving the birds of the Overberg wheat belt. Learn more at <http://overbergrenosterveld.org.za/> Dale Wright, Regional Conservation Manager: Western Cape, [dale.wright@birdlife.org.za](mailto:dale.wright@birdlife.org.za)

# gardening

## FOR BIRDS

It's getting to that time of year when you can sit back and enjoy all the hard work you put in during summer. The weeds should be slowing down, it isn't really a good time for planting and many of your aloes will be sending up their glorious orange spires. Sit back, enjoy the parade of sunbirds and pat yourself on the back for making such a great bird-attracting garden!

I have been blown away by the speed at which *Aloe arborescens* flowering spikes shoot up. I wish that I had put a marker on one or two and then checked the following day – I am going to do just that and will let you know in my next article! One or two other aloe species are trying to compete with the *A. arborescens* but I don't think they have a chance of winning. Luckily for the sunbirds, the *Leonotis leonurus* (the winter-flowering variety) is in full bloom, offering a new set of furry, orange or white tubes every day. Nature is so careful not to offer all the reward at once – a little bit each day ensures that the pollinators keep returning.

This is the time to assess the plants you have grown with such care. Are they doing what you meant them to? Now is not the time to 'plant-hug'; if the plant is not doing what you thought it would, then it must go... Of course, if it simply hasn't achieved its final height or width, or hasn't yet started fruiting because it is still too young, then it stays. The smaller your garden, the harder the plants need to work for you. Gardens are getting smaller and smaller as we move into more secure, gated complexes and thus plants have to tick lots of boxes to retain their place in your garden.

Those of you lucky enough to have large gardens can try things out and if they fail it doesn't



really matter as there is always space to plant something better. But the rest of us need to be very picky, taking careful note of height and width and preferred conditions.

Remember that scale is a very important component of a successful garden. You can't simply cut the top off a tree that grows too tall as that won't look either good or natural; rather choose a tree that is not going to reach any great height. Sometimes it is better to train a gangling shrub into a little, single-stemmed tree or, in a very small garden, use something like a sturdy single stem of that delightful succulent, *Crassula ovata*. A sculptured piece of driftwood could work well in a tiny garden; everything else could be flowers and spindly sedges or grasses. Planning your garden is half the fun – and if the first plan doesn't pan out, well, there is always next year. That is why gardening is so enjoyable and rewarding!

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



### ORDER ZEISS PRODUCTS & SUPPORT CONSERVATION

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 birds 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](http://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/purchase-zeiss-products)



# helping hand

## FOR HAMBURG BIRD CLUB

**H**amburg is situated on the estuary of the Keiskamma River, between East London and Port Alfred in the Eastern Cape. The estuary, coastal bush and shoreline support a large number of bird species.

In December 2015 Hamburg Bird Club held an outing, led by Ann Williams from Kleinemonde. Among the participants were a number of young artists and embroiderers from the Keiskamma Art Project, who produce tapestries based on the Intsikizi Tapestries, originated and directed by Carol Hofmeyer. The Keiskamma Tapestries, which depict a Xhosa hunt for the Southern Ground-Hornbill in times of drought, were exhibited at the Grahamstown Festival in 2015. To create their artworks, the artists had drawn and embroidered the birds, copying their images from books.

The outing in December was an opportunity for these young artists to see the birds in the wild. We had a couple of pairs of binoculars which we shared among the group, but unfortunately



*A Hamburg Bird Club outing, with binoculars and bird books donated by BirdLife South Africa.*

many of the artists did not manage to see any ground-hornbills. To rectify this situation, I approached BirdLife South Africa for assistance, and it came up trumps by donating old binoculars and books to our club. Thanks to BirdLife South Africa we can now go birding in Hamburg without having to share binoculars and books, and we have had a couple of excellent outings.

*Jane Spriggs, Hamburg Bird Club, spriggs@telkomsa.net*

## BIRD OF THE YEAR 2016 SOCIABLE WEAVER

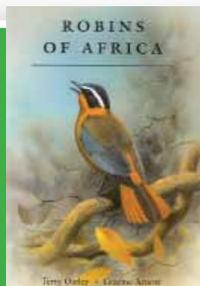


*Sociable Weaver nest.*

WARWICK TARBOTON

**S**ociable Weaver nests are very impressive. Find out more about what is probably the largest nest made by any bird by downloading the Bird of the Year 2016 learning resources from the BirdLife South Africa website [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 poster (free of charge), CDs containing the learning resources (free of charge) and pin badges (R25 per pin badge, excluding postage) are available on request from BirdLife South Africa's head office, Isdell House, in Johannesburg; telephone (011) 789 1122 or e-mail [info@birdlife.org.za](mailto:info@birdlife.org.za)

The Bird of the Year 2016 initiative is proudly sponsored by Builders.



### 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)