


Flock
The Annual Gathering of Members of BirdLife South Africa
to the Wilderness 2023

FEATURING
LAB
LEARN ABOUT BIRDS



6th Biennial Learn About Birds (LAB) Conference
Layman's LAB Speaker Booklet
24 – 26 May 2023



White-starred Robin-Chat (Photo: Mike Bridgeford)

LAYMAN'S LAB



LEARN ABOUT BIRDS PROGRAMME

Day 1: Wednesday, 24 May 2023

Time	Venue	Detail	Speaker
7:00 – 18:00	Hotel lobby	Registration	
14:00 – 16:00	Protea	PAID WORKSHOP: Forest Birding	Mike Bridgeford & Cassie Carstens
17:00 – 18:30	Protea	Cape Bird Club 75th Anniversary Lecture	Mike Buckham

Day 2: Thursday, 25 May 2023

Time	Venue	Detail	Speaker
07:00 – 18:00	Palm Lobby	Registration/ Networking/ Refreshments	
08:00 – 08:10	Palm	Welcome and conference rules	Dr Melissa Whitecross
08:10 – 08:25	Palm	Welcome address	Mark D. Anderson
08:25 – 09:25	Palm	Science LAB Plenary Lecture: The Science behind a Mouse-Free Marion	Dr Anton Wolfaardt
SESSION 1 Chair: Andrew de Blocq			
09:30 – 10:10	Protea	Garden Route National Park and the profile of the birds and birding of the Knysna Section of the Park	Christopher Patton
10:10 - 10:30	Protea	Youth birding in the Lakes District of the GardenRoute	Justin Ponder
10:30 – 11:00		Morning Tea	
SESSION 2 Chair: Dr Melissa Whitecross			
11:00 – 11:45	Protea	10 Years of the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust	Dr Odette Curtis-Scott
11:45 – 12:30	Protea	Cape Vulture Conservation in the Overberg	Kevin Shaw
12:30 – 13:30		Lunch (Loerie Restaurant)	
13:30 – 14:15	Protea	CWAC-ing and Conserving our Western Cape Estuaries	Dr Giselle Murison
SESSION 3 Chair: Cassie Carstens			
14:30 – 15:00	Protea	African Crowned Eagles of the Garden Route	Melanie de Morney
15:00 - 15:45	Protea	The impacts of the Knysna fires on the local landscape and birds	Willem Matthee

15:45 – 16:15	Afternoon Tea		
SESSION 4 Chair: Alistair McInnes			
16:15 – 16:45	Protea	Saving the African Penguin from Extinction	Dr Cloverley Lawrence
18:00 – 19:00	Palm	LAB Special Session: Bird Name IQ/QI	Prof Ian Glenn

Day 3: Friday, 26 May 2023

SESSION 1			
Time	Venue	Details	Speaker
09:00 - 09:10	Palm	Welcome and housekeeping	Dr Melissa Whitecross
09:10 – 09:30	Palm	Conserving birds in a complex world	Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson
09:30 – 10:30	Palm	Science LAB Plenary Lecture: Pollinators	Dr Anina Coetsee
10:30 – 11:00	Morning Tea		
SESSION 2 Chair: Dr Melissa Whitecross			
11:00 – 11:45	Protea	Why ring birds? Trust	Dr Mark Brown
11:45 – 12:30	Protea	Conserving Beach Breeding Birds in a Dynamic Urban Context	Brittany Arendse
12:30 – 13:00	Protea	Long-term changes in the abundance of waterbirds in the Wilderness Lakes Complex	Dr Ian Russell
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch (Loerie Restaurant)		
14:00 – 15:00	Palm	Science LAB Panel Discussion: Advancing African Ornithology	Chair: Chevonne Reynolds Panel: Susie Cunningham, Alan Lee, Martina Scacco, Kamran Safi, Res Altwegg, Shamiso Banda

Saturday, 27 May 2023

Time	Venue	Details
7:00 – 18:00	Palm Lobby	Registration
11:00 – 13:30	Palm	BirdLife South Africa Annual General Meeting
13:30 – 17:00	Loerie Restaurant	AGM Luncheon

Sunday, 28 May 2023

Time	Venue	Detail	Speaker
7:00 – 10:00	Protea Lobby	Registration	
09:00 – 12:00	Protea	PAID WORKSHOP: Canon Photography Workshop	Richard Flack
13:00	<i>End of Flock to the Wilderness 2023</i>		



Layman's LAB Speakers



Michael Buckham is a fanatical birder and photographer, living in Cape Town. He has been actively birding for over 40 years (since he was 6 years old) and have travelled most of Southern Africa to see as much of the birdlife that we have on offer in our sub-region. His real passion is for our endemic bird species, with the Cape Rockjumper as the beacon of those and certainly his favourite bird on the planet. He is also a lover of birdsong and has focused on that skill to improve as a birder. Outside of our sub-region, he has been fortunate to travel to a few overseas birding destinations such as Panama, Brazil, Peru, Ethiopia, Turkey, Uganda, the Caribbean and the United States

and he hopes to do a lot more of that in the future. On all these trips, it is the endemic birds in each of those countries that he treasures the most. He is married to Jeanie, who is not really a birder, however she tolerates (and sometimes supports) his birding fanaticism. He has four children (3 boys and a girl) aged between 11 and 19 and has been very fortunate that his middle son, Adam, has become just as fanatical birder as his dad. Michael's favourite birding experiences are certainly those where his son is by his side, with his camera clicking just as much as his camera does. Michael is a Chartered Accountant and work as a Financial Consultant to several Financial Services companies. But he likes to swop financial spreadsheets for his binoculars as often as he can. He loves to talk about birds and share his experiences and so as running several webinars as part of the Better Birding webinar series with his good birding friend, Dave Winter. The Cape Bird Club also must listen to him a little more regularly than they probably would like. He has an Instagram account and a website, and a lot of his birding experiences are shared there.

Venue: Protea

Date: 24-May-2023

Time: 17:00 – 18:30

Title: My Western Cape Top 20 Birds

Abstract

The Western Cape is a phenomenal birding region, which is strangely often treated as the poorer cousin to the bird rich areas in KZN, Mpumalanga and the Limpopo Province. Although we have fewer species on offer on a birding trip to our region, it is hard to compete with the Western Cape when it comes to endemic bird species. We have Karoo, Strandveld, Fynbos, Coastal Forest, and Afromontane Forest and much of this unique habitat diversity produces unique birding diversity. In addition, we boast one of the world's top pelagic birding launching ports with access to a spectacle that is hard to believe. He will present his top 20 birds of the WesternCape and share some of his experiences along the way and perhaps a few tips of where to find some of the tougher species. Not all his best birds will be endemics, but that will be the dominant theme.



Blue Cranes (Photo: Warwick Tarboton)



Christopher Patton was born in Northern Ireland, but his parents emigrated to South Africa when he was 11. His earliest birding memory was lying on the grass at the top of a sea-cliff with his dad, looking down on nesting auks, and other sea-birds. That set the tone for a life-long interest in birds. He has an MSc in environmental and geographical science plus an undergraduate degree in English, both from UCT. He has

worked for SANParks since 1998 in several capacities, in Kruger and SANParks Head Office, but done project work in all of the parks over that period, birding in all of them. He is currently based in Knysna in Garden Route National Park, where he has been since 2017, and works in the Visitor Services Unit reporting to SANParks' Head Office as Content Manager working on Visitor Interpretation, Visitor Management, Universal Access and Tourism Research across all the parks. Bird wise he has written many articles and social media and website

material about birds and birding in SANParks. While at UCT Chris fell off Table Mountain and has lived as a paraplegic for over 30 years. He is married and has a daughter. He also plays lawn bowls, and even got a medal for South Africa at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, so he spends a lot of time doing that too, curtailing his free time to bird. Garden Route National Park, and the Birds and Birding in the Knysna Section. His talk will share a brief history of Garden Route National Park and its 3 sections of Wilderness, Knysna and Tsitsikamma, with reference to birds, and bird conservation and research.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 09:30 – 10:10

Title: Garden Route National Park and the profile of the birds and birding of the Knysna Section of the Park.

Abstract

Everyone attending LAB is here because they love birds. Birds are all around us and because of their power of flight, their sometimes-spectacular plumages, beautiful vocal range, and their often incredible behaviours, they have forever fascinated the human race. Because of their ability to fly (most of them), many of their ranks are tremendously resilient and adaptable and thrive alongside humans. Knysna (and the Garden Route as whole) may not have the abundance of the sub-tropical provinces further north and east, or the endemism of the fynbos and succulent Karoo biomes further west, but is still blessed to have a plethora of different species and bird families and many locations and amenities that mean observing birds is easily achievable and Chris will share his own experiences observing birds, both as a SANParks employee, and as a person with mobility challenges using a wheelchair to get around, his talk will be interesting to anyone concerned about not being able to bird in challenging terrain, as well as those who are more mobile. His talk will deal with the habitat diversity in and around Knysna and highlight what to expect in estuarine, fresh water, marine, cliff, fynbos, forest, thicket, grassland, urban and sub-urban habitats, and will then pay extra attention to the unique birds of Knysna, Knysna's birds of prey, the area's nocturnal species, and then recognize those species that have only just colonised the town and surrounds, before paying tribute to those species that have sadly disappeared from the Knysna Pentad, perhaps forever.



Knysna Woodpecker (Photo: Mike Bridgeford)



Justin Ponder is an 18-year-old nature enthusiast, based in the Garden Route of South Africa. He had always been interested in nature, but as he entered his teens he realised he had a particular interest in birds. With help from many friends and other birders, he was able to grow this passion until he got to where he is today. He recently finished high school, and he plans to pursue a career either in guiding or nature conservation somewhere in South Africa.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 10:10 – 10:30

Title: Youth birding in the Lakes District of the Garden Route

Abstract

Birding isn't usually looked upon as a Youth activity. However, Justin has discovered at a young age that it was something he really enjoyed. With help from the local bird club, friends, and many other birders, he was able to pursue this passion. In this talk, he will be sharing some of his experiences growing up as a youth birder, and how it is most definitely a hobby, or even a career that young people can enjoy.



Ground Woodpeckers (Photo: Justin Ponder)



Dr Odette Curtis-Scott holds a PhD (2013) in Botany from the University of Cape Town (UCT), an MSc Zoology (2005) and a B-Tech in Nature Conservation (CPUT). During her seven years spent in raptor research at the FitzPatrick Institute of Ornithology, UCT (since 2000), she ran the Black Harrier Project with Dr Rob Simmons and colleagues, as well as a project on Black Sparrowhawks, and subsequently spent two months as a

Leadership Intern at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Pennsylvania USA. Her research on Black Harriers involved

surveying renosterveld remnants for breeding pairs, and through this she became aware of the plight of this poorly understood and severely threatened habitat which, at the time, was receiving almost no conservation attention. As a result, she was contracted by CapeNature's Stewardship Programme from 2007-2011 to negotiate stewardship contracts with key landowners. At the same time, she initiated a research project on renosterveld management, which later formed the basis of her thesis work. In 2012, she started the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust (ORCT), an NPO with the sole purpose of working with landowners towards securing the last remnants and corridors of remaining renosterveld in the Overberg for long-term conservation. In 2014, she received both the Flora Conservation Award from the South African Botanical Society, and the CAPE Fynbos Conservation Award for 'her passion, dedication and innovative approach towards the conservation of critically endangered biodiversity.' Along with Dr Rob Simmons, she and the ORCT are recognised by BirdLife South Africa as the species custodians for the Black Harrier. Odette lives in Napier, the heart of the Overberg, Western Cape, South Africa.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 11:00 – 11:45

Title: 10 Years of the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust

Abstract

Renosterveld is an extraordinarily biodiversity-rich ecosystem that falls within the Fynbos Biome. While fynbos soils are generally sandy and poor, renosterveld occurs on the richer, more fertile soils, rendering it highly suitable for agriculture. Consequently, renosterveld has been subjected to the damaging impacts of extensive land transformation to make way for commercial agriculture. As much as 95% of this ecosystem has been converted for large-scale crop farming. Yet within the remnants that remain, we find an extraordinary number of endemic species that are entirely reliant on the persistence of these patches for their survival. Essentially all remaining renosterveld islands occur on privately-owned, commercial farms, making the conservation of these habitats challenging. We established our NPO, the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust, in 2012, for the sole purpose of working with landowners across the Overberg towards securing renosterveld for long-term conservation, while assisting with the implementation of critical management interventions and restoration initiatives. In this presentation, I will share some of the highlights of the Trust's work over the last decade. These include securing over 4500 ha of renosterveld through our Conservation Easement Programme, publishing a field guide to renosterveld of the Overberg which features over 1100 species, and the establishment of our own Nature Reserve with a research centre and herbarium. More recently, we initiated a research project on Black Harriers: While some renosterveld remnants in the Overberg are breeding hotspots for this Endangered, ground-nesting raptor, the area is also recognised by government as a Renewable Energy Development Zone, resulting

in a flood of windfarm development plans and applications. If these windfarms are placed within harrier foraging areas, with no mitigation measures in place to prevent collisions, they pose a very serious threat to the species: something the birds cannot afford, with a population of just 1300 adults remaining. The Trust, in collaboration with Dr Rob Simmons, is undertaking a GPS tagging project to improve our understanding of the species' foraging patterns in the Overberg wheat-belt, which we hope will assist with the informing the best placement of windfarms, as well as the appropriate mitigation measures that should be implemented on these sites.



Black Harrier (Photo: Odette Curtis-Scott)



Kevin Shaw initially worked as a conservation planner on the catchment and drift sand areas of the Western Cape. He was appointed as Ornithologist for the provincial conservation authority in 1995 after obtaining his MSc in Conservation Biology, retaining this post until 2019 when he was appointed as a senior ecologist. He took over the monitoring and conservation strategy for the Cape Vultures in the Province shortly after being appointed as an ornithologist and continued to do so until just short of his retirement. During this period he has worked with students, conservationists researchers, land owners and organisations to conserve the Cape Vulture specifically within the Western Cape, but also within the global distribution range of the

species. He has served (and still does) on the IUCN's Vulture Specialist Group since its inception in April 2011. Prior to this Kevin was part of the then Vulture Study Group facilitated by the Endangered Wildlife Trust, which coordinated Vulture Conservation within the southern African region.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 11:45 – 12:30

Title: Cape Vulture Conservation in the Overberg

Abstract

The last remaining breeding colony Cape Vultures within the Western Cape Province is situated in a ravine in the Potberg mountains. This is the southernmost breeding colony of the Cape Vulture and possibly the most isolated, barring the extinct colony in the Waterberg Mountain of Namibia. The colony is situated within the De Hoop Nature Reserve and is completely surrounded by transformed habitat of small grain (wheat, barley and oats) and planted dry-land pastures. The species forages entirely within this agricultural landscape and the existence of the Potberg Cape Vulture colony depends very much on the mind-set of the surrounding landowners. A simple conservation strategy was developed in the mid 1980's and is still applicable today. This together with supporting landowners and passionate conservationists has been key to this success story.



Cape Vultures (Photo: Chris van Rooyen)



Dr Giselle Murison is the Project Manager for BirdLife South Africa's Western Cape Estuaries Conservation Project. Dr Giselle Murison is responsible for facilitating improved protection and appropriate management of priority estuaries, their catchments and threatened fynbos habitats in the Western Cape, in partnership with government organisations, other NPOs and local stakeholders. This includes relevant policy input and support, and the initiation, implementation, and support of conservation initiatives to benefit estuarine ecosystem health, including habitat management and rehabilitation projects, environmental

awareness and education, and scientific research and monitoring in key estuarine IBAs/ KBAs. She achieved her PhD in ecology and environmental management at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, following her postgraduate studies at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, and worked as the Biodiversity Coordinator for West Yorkshire for several years before joining BirdLife South Africa in 2015.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 13:30 – 14:15

Title: CWAC-ing and Conserving our Western Cape estuaries

Abstract

For those of us who are passionate about seabirds, shorebirds and other waterbirds, including those elusive 'rarities', estuaries offer some of South Africa's top birding destinations. Supporting birds and marine wildlife in extraordinary numbers, they provide essential resources for the fishing and invertebrate industries, contributing to local and national economies, as well as performing a myriad of essential ecosystem services. Estuaries are home to communities with deep cultural ties to coastal resources, and are centres of natural beauty, recreation, health and well-being. Sadly, they also face significant pressure from a variety of sources, and are among some of South Africa's most threatened, yet least protected habitats. In this presentation, we look at the findings of Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWACs) from several key estuaries and ask, "what does it take to conserve South Africa's estuaries for our waterbirds?". Dr Giselle Murison (BirdLife South Africa) will share with you some of the outcomes of South Africa's part in the 2023 International Waterbird Census, Total Count of the East Atlantic Flyway, and the work being undertaken throughout the Western Cape to safeguard the vital but vulnerable systems of this flyway.



Cape Cormorants (Photo: Ian Russell)



Melanie de Morney completed her BSc in Biodiversity and Conservation Biology at the University of the Western Cape in 2010. She worked at Stellenbosch University within the Centre for Invasion Biology, first as an intern with SANBI doing DNA barcoding with ants and springtails (Collembola) and then as a technical officer with the Imbovane Outreach Project doing ant research in combination with environmental education. Currently she works as a biotechnician for SANParks Scientific Services (since 2015) based in the Garden Route National Park. She assists with the implementation of terrestrial fauna related research and monitoring, with a particular focus on

ants and bees as well as SANParks species of special concern which includes African Crowned Eagle, the Knysna Elephant and Blue Duiker. She is passionate about biodiversity conservation and environmental education and in her spare time she is involved with the Knysna Animal Welfare doing outreach in the local communities.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 14:30 – 15:00

Title: African Crowned Eagles of the Garden Route

Abstract

African Crowned Eagles (*Stephanoaetus coronatus*), a SANParks Species of Special Concern, are Near Threatened on the global IUCN redlist and Vulnerable regionally. Being forest apex predators and with Garden Route National Park managing the biggest forest complex in southern Africa, we need to know more about their population status within their southern-most distribution limit. Melanie will delve into the monitoring efforts undertaken to date and provide insights and updates on current findings.



African Crowned Eagle (Photo: Chris van Rooyen)



Willem Matthee completed his studies in Nature Conservation at the NMU George Campus, graduating with his BTech in Nature Conservation in 2011, and MSc (Nature Conservation) in 2014. An active birder since age 7, he has spent the past five years collecting data on forest bird distribution in the forest-and-fynbos landscape of the Southern Cape, and the factors that drive this distribution. His main interests include amphibian diversity and conservation, bird distribution and ecology, forest ecology, and insular biogeography.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 15:10 – 15:55

Title: The impacts of the Knysna fires on the local landscape and birds

Abstract

During June 2017, and again in October 2018, large parts of the Southern Cape landscape were ravished by fires fueled by high temperatures and wind speeds. Though large areas of natural vegetation were "destroyed" during these fires, it has fueled regeneration in many areas, and the impacts thereof on the local avifauna would be temporary. Now, 5-6 years after the fires, many areas have returned to a pre-fire state, while others have been invaded by exotic plant species. The long-term impacts of the fires will depend on how these areas are managed over the course of the next few years. In this presentation, we will explore the immediate and long-term impacts of the fires on the local birds, including how birds are adapted to survival in a landscape that is likely to burn during the course of their lifetimes.



Olive Bushshrike (Photo: Mike Bridgeford)



Dr Cloverley Lawrence is a marine scientist working in the Garden Route and Addo Elephant National Parks. Her broad research focus is aimed at understanding marine ecosystem processes and drivers of ecosystem change. Her research and monitoring efforts are directed towards enhancing our understanding of natural systems and the influence of conservation and management actions in maintaining the healthy functioning of ecosystems particularly within protected areas.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 16:30 – 17:00

Title: Saving the African Penguin from Extinction

Abstract

Decision-making with regard to saving the African penguin from extinction has been challenging for managing authorities. The penguin population had plummeted from five million breeding pairs in the early 1900s to <10 000 in 2022 placing it on the IUCN Endangered list in 2010. Despite several management interventions over the last two decades, the population continues to decline at an alarming rate. This talk describes the process of engagement between key government, scientific and fisheries stakeholders with the aim of reaching a compromise that balances socio-economic considerations with the need to save a critically endangered species. Following an appeal from SANParks requesting the DFFE Minister to implement closure of penguin foraging grounds to fishing – one of the few interventions to be implemented effectively - a team of scientists was tasked with synthesising the scientific evidence to support this intervention. Representatives from DFFE: Oceans and Coasts and Fisheries Management, and SANParks navigated published literature and scientific opinion on the validity of food scarcity being the key driver of current penguin declines to derive at justifiable management recommendations. Communication and negotiations were approached through the lenses of individual and institutional value systems that required skills in identifying and understanding biases and nuances in varying interpretations of scientific results. Negotiations benefited from independent facilitation to reach compromise and find common ground. However, expanding consultation with other interested parties with specific agendas had arrested progress leading to delays and inaction. Efforts to implement decisions to conserve threatened species in the marine space require management agencies engaging and consulting with stakeholders despite an area being legislated as formally protected. Decision making is fraught with challenges and requires strategic and sensitive engagement at all levels.



African Penguins (Photo: Cloverley Lawrence)



Prof Ian Glenn is Emeritus Professor of Media Studies at UCT and Research Fellow in Communications Sciences at UFS. He has published widely on Francois Levillant, including *The First Safari*, and is working on a translation and abridged edition of Levillant's *Birds of Africa* with the original illustrations. His *Wildlife Documentaries in Southern Africa: from East to South* was published in 2022.

Venue: Protea

Date: 25-May-2023

Time: 18:00 – 19:00

Title: Test Your Bird Name IQ / QI

Abstract

This talk, with a format based on the BBC TV show *QI*, will take a fairly light-hearted look at Levillant's names for Southern African birds and argue that his influence has been underestimated (to quote George W. Bush). Prof Ian Glenn is the esteemed author of *The First Safari* and will share his insights into the history of Francois Levillant's influence on South African ornithology.



Dr Mark Brown is a biologist and most of his research in some way relates to birds, as ornithology is his primary field of interest. He enjoys providing hands-on opportunities for students to gain field experience in South Africa. In essence, most of his current work involves understanding the impact people have on biodiversity, developing programs to mitigate these effects, and then measuring the success of those intervention programs. His company Discover Eden brings international students to gain field experience in our magnificent countries' biodiverse areas.

Venue: Protea

Date: 26-May-2023

Time: 11:00 – 11:45

Title: Why ring birds?

Abstract

Despite advances in technology, ringing still remains one of the best and most cost effective ways to study several aspects of the biology of the birds we all love. In this presentation, Mark introduces you to how and why bird ringing is done, and examines some examples of how ringing data can be used to assist in research areas that are topical around the world. The talk includes photos of many amazing birds in the hand, and the various techniques used to trap them for study.



Forest Buzzard (Photo: Patrick Raymond)



Brittany Arendse is a Conservation Scientist and Creative Director at Nature's Valley Trust. She completed her tertiary studies at the University of Cape Town, majoring in marine biology and ecology during her undergraduate degree and obtaining her MSc. in pollination biology. Before starting at NVT she spent a year with CREW (Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers), SANBI, where she gained a plethora of practical botanical experience. Brittany started at NVT as a WWF-SA intern and upon completion of this 18-month development programme was offered a permanent position. She manages NVTs various long-term fynbos projects and the shorebird monitoring component of the #ShareTheShores coastal impact programme. While at NVT she has become captivated with birds and has consequently qualified as a bird ringer.

Venue: Protea

Date: 26-May-2023

Time: 11:45 – 12:30

Title: Conserving Beach Breeding Birds in a Dynamic Urban Context

Abstract

As tourism and urban development increase in coastal areas, competition for space between people and beach biodiversity is increasing. The disturbance by people and companion animals on shorebirds, particularly when breeding on beaches has resulted in dramatic declines in breeding success, and reporting rates for some species. We present results from our #ShareTheShores programme, showcasing how conservation intervention work done in a positive inclusive manner, coupled with research-driven changes in local beach management plans, can effectively enable birds, dogs and people to co-exist on beaches in the greater Plettenberg Bay region.



White-fronted Plover (Photo: Brittany Arendse)



Ian Russell conducts research on aquatic ecosystems, and particularly the linkages between biotic changes and ecosystem manipulation and management. Current research focuses mainly on identifying the drivers of spatio-temporal changes in water quality, aquatic plants and waterbird communities in intensively utilised estuaries, and how these are influenced by management actions. He has served on the national Ramsar committee since 2012.

Venue: Protea

Date: 26-May-2023

Time: 12:30 – 13:30

Title: Long-term changes in the abundance of waterbirds in the Wilderness Lakes Complex.

Abstract

The Wilderness Lakes Complex is a nationally and globally important mosaic of wetlands, regularly supporting populations of up to 68 waterbird species, of which eight periodically occur, or have occurred, in globally significant numbers. Periodic assessment of waterbird abundance has been undertaken over a period of 32 years. In this time, several directional physical and biological changes have occurred in the wetland environment, including reduced water level variability, loss of some exposed shorelines, changes in water chemistry increases of reeds and domination of some previous wetland areas with terrestrial vegetation and proliferation of new and established alien fishes. Shorter-term variability has also occurred in the abundance of submerged aquatic plants. The main objectives of this study were to identify long term trends for frequently occurring and abundant bird species, where possible identify potential causes for observed trends, and consider the conservation implications of observed spatial and temporal changes. Changes in the abundances of several waterbirds are substantial, and for most species are directional and ongoing. Most concerning are declines in the abundance of several herbivorous waterfowl, and Palearctic migrants. Overall, there are multiple likely local, regional, and international factors acting accumulatively rather than in isolation affecting waterbird changes in the Wilderness Lakes.



African Darter (Photo: Trevor Barnett)

We are grateful to our speakers for giving up their time to present at the 6th Learn About Birds (LAB) Conference.
If you require any further information about LAB or Flock to Wilderness, please email lab@birdlife.org.za
We look forward to hosting you in May 2023.



LAB
LEARN ABOUT BIRDS

*An interactive series of lectures, presentations and discussions
co-hosted by BirdLife South Africa and
the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology*

