



# The Lark Leaflet

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September 2009

## From the Editor

Dis heerlike lente die winter's verby....

So here we are, happy spring time to you all, let hope that with the icy winter we had this year we will be embracing an early rain season and a rush of migrant bird species in the next few weeks.

Our Mockford farms outing proved to be very successful and enjoyable. For many, a lifer was notched up with the superb views of the Palmnut Vulture and for others a lifer was experienced in our very authentic drive on a tractor and trailer. Thank you to Shaun and Yana Mockford for their wonderful hospitality and to Patsy in her absence for the use of her beautiful gardens where we had our mid-morning picnic.

As mentioned at the last club meeting we would like to enter a Birdlife Polokwane Team for the Relay for life event on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, it will be a wonderful way to honour and support every one affected by cancer and to raise funds for the Polokwane Hospice. The event will also be a platform for us to market Birdlife Polokwane and inform the public of our activities. Please join us on this day and ensure to inform us by the 7<sup>th</sup> September if you will be participating in our team.

As you have noticed, both Joe and I are not at the meeting tonight - we are on tour and send you our warmest regards from the fairest Cape.

We will be back to join you all at the relay for life on the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Happy birding to you all.

Lisa

## International Vulture Awareness Day – 5 September 2009.

Saturday 5 September 2009 has been designated as the first International Vulture Awareness Day. Its aim is to create awareness of the plight of vultures and to highlight the work done by the conservationists who monitor populations. In southern Africa, the Endangered Wildlife Trust and Birds of Prey Working Group (EWT-BoPWG), together with various NGO's, volunteers and landowners, are arranging vulture counts at key colonies and feeding sites across South Africa on this day.



South Africa is home to nine vulture species. Seven of these are considered to be under threat of extinction, namely the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) – regionally extinct, Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) – endangered, Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*), Lappet-faced (*Torgos tracheliotus*), Hooded (*Necrosyrtes monachus*), White-headed (*Trigonoceps occipitalis*) and African White-backed Vulture (*Gyps africanus*) all classified as Vulnerable.

Despite the dire conservation status of vultures, the Limpopo Province hosts all the species found in southern Africa, with the exception of the Bearded Vulture. The closest breeding colony to Polokwane is less than 20km from the city centre, and a number of vulture restaurants around the city regularly attract species such as Cape, White-backed, Hooded and the impressive Lappet-faced Vultures. Most recent records of the regionally extinct Egyptian Vulture were from the Limpopo Province and we also boast regular records of a Palm-nut Vulture. This unusual vulture's diet consists mostly of the seeds of *Raffia* palms, although they will occasionally feed on carrion.

Vultures are faced with various threats including poisoning, persecution, electrocution, collision with powerlines, drowning in farm reservoirs, food shortages, loss of suitable habitat and the muthi trade.

Vulture populations and individual vulture movements are monitored by fitting numbered, coloured tags to the wings of the birds. The method provides researchers with an affordable and safe method of identifying individual birds, and in this way information about local movements and dispersal patterns, survival rates and longevity, causes of mortalities and potential threats can be obtained. Interestingly, vultures tagged in South Africa have been seen in northern Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and even as far north as the South Luangwa National Park in Zambia.

Information about tagged individuals can be reported to the South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING) in Cape Town on +27 (0)21 650-2421/2 or [safring@adu.uct.ac.za](mailto:safring@adu.uct.ac.za). Alternatively, contact the Birds of Prey Working Group directly on +27 (0)11 646-4629 or [andreb@ewt.org.za](mailto:andreb@ewt.org.za).



A tagged juvenile Cape Vulture

## THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS OF WILD FREE-LIVING BIRDS .

Below are some of the amazing record holders in the bird world.

### Largest

Who else? The Ostrich. But are we talking height or weight? The North African subspecies *Struthio camelus camelus* is the tallest at 2.75m! The heaviest is the southern African subspecies with a reputed weight of 156kg!

### Smallest

The Bee Hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*) from Cuba with a wingspan of 6.5cm and weighing 1.6g. Some experts believe the Little Woodstar (*Chaetocercus bombus*) of Colombia is slightly smaller but we have no data.

### Largest wingspan

Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) at 3.63m! The Marabou Stork (*Leptoptilos crumeniferus*) has the largest wingspan amongst land birds with the largest wingspan recorded being 3.2m. The Andean Condor is a close contender for this title but the average wingspan is smaller.



Marabou Stork

### Longest feathers

Amongst flying birds, the tail feathers of Reeve's Pheasant (*Syrnaticus reevesii*) of central China has reached 2.43m. The longest feathers relative to body size belong to the male Ribbon-tailed Astrapia (*Astrapia mayeri*), a Bird of Paradise. Its central tail feathers measure 90cm, and quadruple the 27cm of the owner.

### Most airborne

Sooty Tern (*Sterna fuscata*). After leaving its nesting grounds as a youngster, it is reputed to remain aloft for 3-10 years until it is old enough to breed. As long as there is enough food available, it does not even have to settle on the sea to feed, preferring to catch prey by picking them up from the surface.



Sooty Tern

### Most valuable nest

Edible-nest Swiftlet (*Aerodramus fuciphagus*). Top-grade nests can fetch R32 000/kg! It takes two nests to make own bowl of soup.

Source: Animal Records by M. Carwardine.

Photos: Derek Engelbrecht

## Interesting sightings from the Polokwane area during August 09 By Joe Grosel

### 1) Returning migrants:

The return of Polokwane Nature Reserve's **Wahlberg's Eagle** (*Bruinarend*) pair is always a keenly anticipated event. On Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> of August Joe and Derek saw the male circling above the nest. Last year the male (who always seems to return ahead of his mate) was first seen on the 08/08 and in 2007 he was spotted on the 15/08. Quite remarkable – do they carry a calendar around with them? The first report of the season for **Red-breasted Swallow** (*Rooiborsswael*) was on the 1st of August along the R71 eastern bypass. Incredibly this same pair arrived back during the first week of August in 2008 & 2007. The season's opening sighting of a **Greater-striped Swallow** (*Grootstreepswael*) was on 15/08 along the N1 near Mookgophong (Naboomspruit). Other returning migrants recorded were as follows: **Yellow-billed Kite** (*Geelbekwou*) seen on 13/08 on the N1 south of Polokwane; **Greenshank** (*Groenpootruiter*) – 5 birds seen on the Farm Rondepán on 03/08 and **Wood Sandpiper** (*Bosruiter*) – 18 birds seen at the Polokwane Birds Sanctuary on the same day.

2) During the CWAC count at the Sterkloop wetlands along the Percy Fyfe road on 03/08 some uncommon species were recorded namely **Maccoa Duck** (*Bloubekeend*), **Cape Teal** (*Teeleend*), **White-backed Duck** (*Witrugeend*), **Great-crested Grebe** (*Kuifkopdobbertjie*).

3) A young **Saddle-billed Stork** (*Saalbekooievaar*) was seen and photographed by Jan Coetzee on the Sand River outside Polokwane on 08/08.

4) Derek got his first visual of the **White-bellied Korhaans** at De Loskop on 20/08. Four individuals were spotted in a fallow land.

5) Koos recorded a Cuckoo Hawk (*Koekoek Valk*) in the Polokwane Nature Reserve on 27 August.

6) A pair of **Secretary Birds** (*Sekretarisvoël*) paid a surprise visit to the Tembele 'Polocrosse' field on Sunday 23/08. This is quite an odd occurrence and out of character for this species to happily forage around a semi urban area. The birds spent approximately 4 hours in the area.



Please report any unusual sightings to Joe Grosel at 082 415 5250

## What's on?

1) **11 – 12 September** CANSAs Relay for Life event. **LG**.

2) **19 – 20 September** – L.B.J identification course at Tembele Estate and the Polokwane Nature Reserve **LG**.

3) **02 – 11 October** Chobe & Caprivi birding tour with Eden Routes **LG**.

4) **07 October** – Birdlife Polokwane - monthly meeting at "Die Koraal" 18h30.

5) **15 – 18 October** – Honorary Rangers raptor identification course at Letaba in the KNP. **Charles Hardy 0834571721**

Contact Koos du Plessis - **KdP** (082 772 5293) or Lisa Grosel - **LG** (083 380 2322) for enquiries & reservations.