



# Birdlife Polokwane

# The Lark Leaflet

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### From the Editor

Our first bird club meeting proved to be a very informative, insightful and eventful one, with us hosting our annual AGM and a talk on Climate change.

Thank you Dr Dave Thompson's for making us review what we as individuals can do to lessen our carbon footprint. With that I hope that our bird club members took cognizance of the various surveying projects such as "the birds eye view, climate buddy and turning a new leaf" that we can get involve in to assist scientist with monitoring climate change. Any of you that did not take the info leaflets regarding these programs are welcome to ask me about them.

Again congratulations to the elected committee members – not much changes from last year.

Our bird ringing weekend proved to be very enjoyable for both members and the public with all three local newspapers affording us some publicity on the event. Thank you to Derek, Billy and Koos for all the effort put in to making the weekend a success!

February also saw the annual summer C.W.A.C count been done with good counts on an array of aquatic birds. Read all about it in this newsletter.

Happy birding to you all.

Lisa

### Changing numbers

Here is some very interesting information about the history of ornithology and how our knowledge of birds has expanded. Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) named 140 bird "forms". 1500 years later, Thomas de Cantimpré added 4 more (Good going guys!). By 1555 Belon and Gessner both listed around 200 and in 1676 John Ray and Francis Willughby increased the list to 500. Interestingly, at one stage John Ray estimated that the global bird list would be around 670 species. By 1760, Mathurin Brisson listed 1 500 species and by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the global list of species stood at around 7 000 species. Confusion and disagreement about what a species was, resulted in many species being described solely on the basis of their appearance without regard for sexual dimorphism and geographic variation. In the end numbers peaked at around 19 000 in the early 1900's. By the early 1940's some sanity prevailed as some consensus was reached regarding the biological notion of a species and numbers dropped to about 8 600 species. Since then, numbers have increased slightly, partly due to the discovery of new species but largely because of the taxonomic re-evaluation of certain groups using advanced techniques such as DNA analysis. The total number of species known today is around 10 000 species. (Source: The Wisdom of Birds by Tim Birkhead).

\*The most recently discovered and described bird species is the Río Orinoco Spinetail (*Synallaxis beverlyae*) which is restricted to scrubby river island vegetation and adjacent river edges that are subject to seasonal inundation in the main channel of the Orinoco River in Venezuela. (Auk July 2009).



Carmen Bann making her debut in bird ringing.

### Bird Ringing Bonanza

by Derek Engelbrecht

Birdlife Polokwane had another very successful bird ringing demonstration on the weekend of 20-21 February 2010. Two qualified bird ringers, Derek Engelbrecht and Billy Attard, took two trainee bird ringers (Louis Sauer and Carmen Bann) under their wing (excuse the pun) and demonstrated the finer points and skills of bird ringing: how to remove a bird from a mist-net, identification skills, how to fit a ring, how to perform the various measurements and the data entry procedures. The weekend was well attended with several people visiting the ringing station over the two days to see for themselves why ringing is such a wonderfully rewarding activity.

A total of 21 nets were erected totalling 258 metres! Most of the nets were situated in the *Acacia* thornveld with a few nets placed at a waterhole. At the end of the weekend, we ringed 123 birds of 32 species. The tally also included five recaptured birds. We were lucky to catch a number of the homeward bound palearctic and intra-African migrants, including several Willow Warblers, Red-backed Shrikes, and a few Diderick Cuckoos. A Brubru Shrike proved popular with many people and a male Violet-eared Waxbill drew its fair share of attention, as usual.

The catch of the weekend was hotly debated. The initial contenders were a pair of Barred Wren-warblers, a Brown-backed Honeybird and a Common Cuckoo. In the end most agreed that the Common Cuckoo should get the honours as this was only the 12<sup>th</sup> record of the species in the SAFRING database. However, there was a twist in the tale. We also recaptured a Sabota Lark. This turned out to be a very interesting recapture. It was ringed by Karel Killian on 15 September 2002 as an adult bird at exactly the same site. The elapsed time of 7 years, 5 months and 6 days makes it the oldest record of a lark in the SAFRING database and as far as we can establish, the oldest record of a lark in Africa! Following an appeal, the Common Cuckoo was relegated to second place (it is a Common Cuckoo afterall!) and the Sabota Lark was crowned the "Catch of the Weekend". For more pictures, see our website at [www.birdlifepolokwane.co.za](http://www.birdlifepolokwane.co.za).

## Nocturnal birding outing

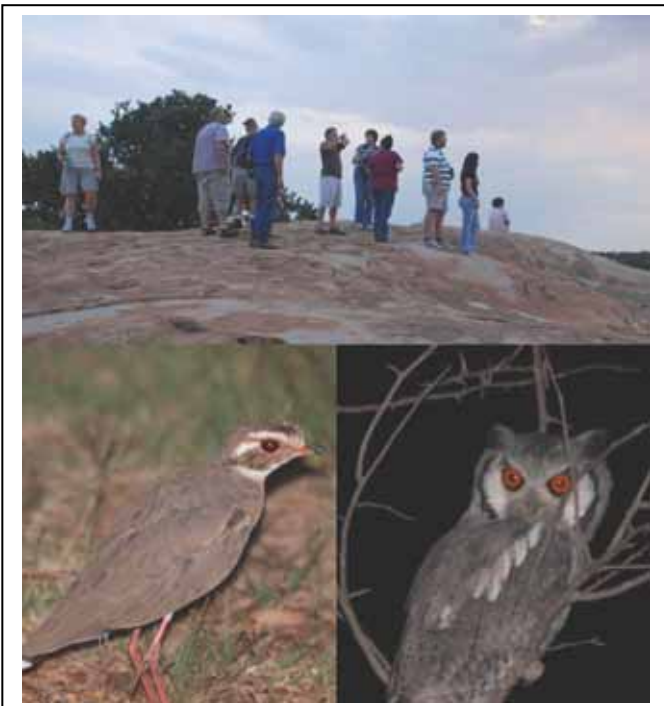
by Nick Baglow

The first club outing of the year was the popular night drive with Joe in the Polokwane Nature Reserve, held on Friday 12 February, and as usual each seat on the safari vehicle was taken. The early part of the drive takes place in the late afternoon which gives one the opportunity to catch the both the birds and the mammalian residents preparing to settle or become active, whatever the case may be.

The veld is looking good after the recent rains, and this is reflected in the condition of the animals, with youngsters present within almost every species seen. Even the jackals we saw were no doubt new to fending for themselves. Birdwise we enjoyed good sightings of **Black-throated Canary**, **Great Sparrow**, **Lesser Grey Shrike** and **Red-breasted Swallow**, the latter's colours catching the late afternoon rays beautifully. Sundowners were then enjoyed atop a low granite whaleback outcrop as we watched the sun set and awaited the descent of darkness. Our first good sighting after dark was of a baby Flap-necked Chameleon who's sleep was rudely interrupted by the bright spotlight.

The actual night drive was broken by enjoying a shared starlit supper, with one ear paying attention to the varied conversation that such occasions generate, and the other, listening for the sounds of nocturnal friends. Species encountered on the drive included **Rufous-checked**, **Fiery-necked** and **European Nightjars**, **Bronze-winged Courser** and **Spotted Thick-knees**, and three owl species – **Spotted Eagle Owl**, **White-faced Scops Owl** and **Marsh Owl**. Plus of course a few birds that thought they'd settled down for the night, with a little **Icterine Warbler** being of particular interest.

And for next year, as reward for push-starting the vehicle without complaint, we have been 'promised' a pangolin...so watch this space!



Photos, clockwise from top: the group viewing the landscape while awaiting nightfall, a delightful White-faced Scops Owl, Bronze-winged Courser.

## Summer 2010 C.W.A.C count report

Joe Grosel

For the uninitiated C.W.A.C is the quirky acronym for Coordinated Wetland Avifaunal Counts, a water bird monitoring project run by the University of Cape Town's Avian Demography Unit and the South African Biodiversity Institute. The bi-annual counts of selected wetland areas are performed by volunteers throughout the country. In early February and at the end of July members of BirdLife Polokwane count the water birds at seven sites in the Polokwane region. The prominent sites in this area are: the **Sterkloop Wetlands** (situated on the Percy Fyfe Road beyond Westernburg this is one of a handful of perennial natural springs on the Polokwane Plateau), **Turfloop Dam** (situated a few kilometres east of the University of Limpopo this is a fairly large body of water fed by two streams that originate from the Woodbush hills), the **Rondepan Farm Dams** (a series of small reservoirs near the Vencor cattle feedlot), **Kalkfontein Dam** (a large irrigation dam in the Hout River on the northern of the Polokwane Plateau, approximately 30km north of Polokwane), **Polokwane Bird Sanctuary** (a series of settling dams that are fed by the neighbouring water purification works) and the **Deloskop Farm Dam** (a fairly large but erratic earth dam located at the southern base of the Deloskop hill on the Dendron road).

The 2010 summer counts were carried out by Joe Grosel, Charles Hardy, Derek Engelbrecht, Koos du Plessis and Bruce Goetsch. As a result of excellent rains during December and January water levels were high and most sites had tall, dense vegetation along the shorelines. This is great habitat for the rallids (crakes, gallinules etc) but not for shorebirds and only two dams showed good numbers of waders.

The highlight of this year's count was the vast numbers of Marabou Storks seen. Well over 800 birds were counted on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Feb at Rondepan, Kalkfontein and Deloskop Farm Dams. This is likely to be one of the largest concentrations of this species ever recorded in South Africa. Here follows a summary of other highlights at the various sites:

**Rondepan** - 143 Comb Duck, 156 Abdim's Stork, 280 Sacred Ibis and a Lueticistic (white) Three-banded Plover. **Kalkfontein** - 320 Egyptian Goose, 47 Red-billed Teal and 470 Marabou. **Sterkloop** - no great numbers but quality birds including Maccoa Duck, White-backed Duck and Great Crested Grebe. **Deloskop** - 5 Greater Flamingo, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 6 Cape Teals, 1 White-fronted Plover and 1 Common Ringed Plover. **Turfloop Dam** - many Waders including 145 Wood Sandpipers, also good numbers of Ruff, Greenshank, Little Stint and a single Common Ringed Plover.

### What's on?

- 1) **13 March** - "Warblers & Waders" birding, ringing and atlassing in the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary. **KdP**.
- 2) **19-21 March** - BirdLife South Africa AGM at Wakkerstroom. For bookings contact BLSA on 011 789 1122 or via e-mail at [agm@birdlife.org.za](mailto:agm@birdlife.org.za)
- 3) **26 Mar - 07 Apr** - Namibian Birding Safari with Eden Routes **LG**.
- 3) **07 April** - Bird club meeting at "Die Koraal" 18h30
- 4) **17 April** - Day outing to Deloskop and Dendron **KdP** & **San3**.
- 5) **30 April** - 02 May - Birding in Mapungubwe National Park. **CH**.
- 6) **01 - 02 May** - National Cape Parrot Count **KdP**

Contact Koos du Plessis - **KdP** (082 772 5293), Lisa Grosel - **LG** (083 380 2322) Charles Hardy - **CH** (083 457 1721) and San3 de Wet - **San3** (0824532754) for enquiries & reservations.