



# Birdlife Polokwane

# The Lark

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### From the Editor

One can hardly believe that the suspense of the FIFA world Cup is almost over and with it things begin to return to normal, especially on the Polokwane Nature Reserve. During the height of the tournament our local reserve seemed like the Kruger National Park with record breaking entrance takings and hundreds of vehicles everywhere. Even the birds seemed to know that this was their time to impress and a tremendous amount of colour and life was seen especially at the waterholes with feathered friends such as “Melba” finches, Fire-finches, Waxbills and of course numerous Crimson-breasted Shrikes strutting their stuff and really impressing the foreigner visitors. One late afternoon just before the Mexico – France game I arrived back at the reserve entrance gate after completing the last afternoon game drive to the site of hundreds of euphoric Mexican supporters that had moved into the camping ground. The area was swarming with “green, red and white” fans singing, laughing and generally getting psyched up for the match as they were setting up their camp sites. I even spotted the reserve officials assisting fans with pitching tents and even getting involved in various camp ground soccer matches with their new “amigos” – way to go!! This unbelievably joyful and harmonious scene will stay with me for a long time. If this sense of oneness and positive humanity can continue through and beyond this exciting event, what a place South Africa will be.

Once the euphoria of the world cup is over, our bird club events will also get back into full swing during the latter part of July, with bird guide training, an exciting day trip to a new nature reserve, CWAC counts and even a trip to Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Remember that the Mountain Aloes are in bloom again. This is always and exciting birding time in the Polokwane region when thousands of nectar-seeking birds descend on “our valley”. Good sites to view the spectacle are the Polokwane Game Reserve, the ridges beyond Boyne and the Bakone Malapa outdoor museum.

Happy birding and enjoy the last few World Cup matches.

Lisa

### Sabap2 mylpaal (of is dit kilometer klip in ons geval?) bereik.

Danksy ons plaaslike atlassers en talle besoekers van ons naburige provinsies het ons reeds 40.7% dekking vir die Limpopo provinsie behaal. Daar is nou reeds 628 uit die 1543 Sabap2 blokke waarin die provinsie opgedeel is een keer gemonitor. Ons het op die oomblik ongeveer 70 geregistreerde lede in die provinsie en die aantal bly steeds groei namate meer mense van die projek hoor.

Suidelike Afrika as 'n geheel is in 17356 blokke opgedeel en tans is 7232 van die blokke een keer gemonitor wat 41.76% dekking verteenwoordig. In totaal is daar nou 764 waarnemers geregistreer.

In Januarie 2010 is daar 679 spesies opgeteken teenoor 590 vir Junie 2010 wat dus 'n verskil van 89 spesies tussen somer en winter waarnemings beteken.

Koos du Plessis

### Medike Magic

### Derek Engelbrecht

After three weeks of soccer, we decided to take a break and head for the Soutpansberg. We stayed at Medike Mountain Lodge which is situated on the Sand River where it has carved a beautiful “poort” through the Soutpansberg Mountains. Apart from the splendid scenery, there are also lots of short hiking trails and a beautiful rock shelter with some exquisite and very interesting San rock art – and of course lots of birds. Another highlight and Medike speciality is baking your own bread in an anthill!

The variety of habitats – cliffs, the river, forested ravines, mixed woodland etc. – makes for an interesting array of birds. Of course I took my mist-nets along and also did some bird ringing. Considering it is mid winter, birding was excellent and I managed to tick 69 species for the three days that we were there. Several bird parties were encountered and it was nice to tick off eight different species foraging together. Some of the more interesting species seen were Grey Penduline-tit, Gorgeous Bush-shrike, Green Twinspot, Striped Pipit and Verreaux’s Eagle, the latter cart-wheeling above our house. From a ringing perspective it was nice to catch, ring and release only my second ever Narina Trogon (a female) and two Bearded Scrub-robins, amongst others.

There were also other interesting sightings. A first for me was seeing White-crested and Retz’s Helmet-shrikes foraging together in a bird party. The group of Retz’s numbered 12 birds (the biggest group I have ever seen) which included 3 juveniles while the White-crested numbered six birds. It was interesting to see how they interacted in the bird party. The Retz’s were dominant over the White-crested and they were sometimes actively chased by the Retz’s. It was difficult to tell if they were actually dominant over their relatives or just had the superior numbers. The highlight of the weekend was seeing a leucistic White-crested Helmet-shrike. You could spot this bird from a mile away. Interestingly, unlike the rest of its group, this individual seldom ventured out into the open, preferring to remain amongst the denser vegetation. I suspect he has had quite a few near-misses from the resident Gabar Goshawks!



A family of conventional Retz’s Helmet-Shrikes



An ‘unconventional’ White-crested Helmet-Shrike showing partial leucistic plumage. ►

Photos: Derek Engelbrecht

## Hoopoe High Jinks at Tembele (part 2).

Joe Grosel

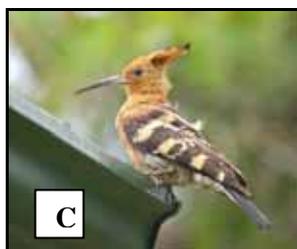
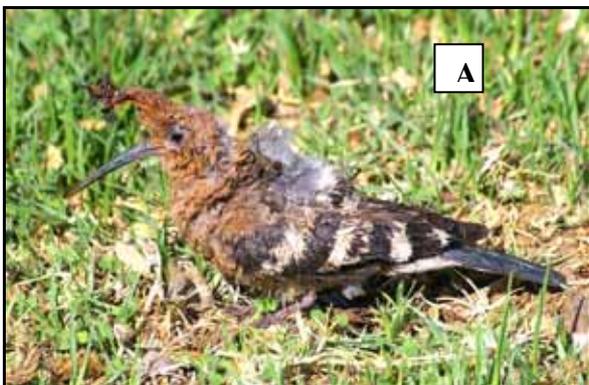
In the "June" newsletter I reported on some interesting African Hoopoe behaviour observed in my garden. Well another entertaining episode from the 'Tembele Hoopoes' took place during the August 2009.

One morning while I was pretending to be working in the office I noticed an unusual looking object moving around the lawn in the far end of the garden. On closer inspection I realised that it was a Hoopoe that looked as if it had the worst hair (feather) day of its life. The feathers on the neck, back and breast looked as if they were badly oiled. The feathers on the back seemed to be turned inside out with the down feathers sticking out all over the place. The crest feathers were all stuck together forming a contorted blob and the facial feathers around the eyes had disappeared altogether (Image A). To make things even worse one of eyelids was badly affected and seemed to be "stuck in the shut position" (Image B). The poor thing looked a real mess. At first I thought that the bird was suffering from some kind of horrible disease or was completely infested with feather-mites, but then I detected bits of sand and dried leaves that were stuck to the feathers. Had the poor Hoopoe fallen into a pot of glue or oil?

Feeling sorry for bird I attempted to catch it for "treatment" but to my surprise it could fly, a little wobbly but alright. I spent a while watching and photographing it before it flew up to the corner of the roof where it was joined by its mate. I then realised that it must be the female that had been incubating its clutch behind the fascia board in the corner of the roof, a nest site that was used the year before. The affected bird confirmed this when she squeezed through the small gap between the gutter and the gable.

On inspection of the nest site I realised what had contaminated the bird's feathers. She had laid her eggs right up against the inside of the gable under the roof overhang. The very same gable that was treated with a waterproofing chemical a few months earlier. The waterproofing liquid which was applied rather liberally by the painters had obviously seeped out of the wall and had not dried properly. The poor Hoopoe had for some reason decided that this was a minor obstacle and continued with her breeding activity. She had been obviously been in contact with this sticky liquid during the entire incubation period.

Well I'm happy to report that this remarkably tolerant bird continued to rear her chicks despite being very sticky and uncomfortable. The pair were successful in raising two (normal) chicks and the state of her plumage recovered progressively. After a good two months or so she was back to looking and feeling like a normal hoopoe.



## My besondere ervaring tydens die laaste voëlringessie in die wildreservaat - deur Frik Snyman

Die Europese byvreter is 'n voël wat nog altyd vir my 'n persoonlike bekoring ingehou het. Sy kenmerkende roep in die oggende wanneer hy op pad is na sy weiveld vir die dag en dan weer dieselfde roep wanneer hy terugkeer na sy gemeenskaplike slaapplek in die laatmiddag, asook sy kenmerkende duik-, sweef- en styg-vliegroetine het hom 'n spesiale voël by my gemaak.

Groot was ons verbasing toe Derek met 'n lekkerkry-uitdrukking op sy gesig tydens dié Sondagoggend se voëlringessie 'n pragtige Europese byvreter uit die sakkie haal wat hy so pas van die vangnette afgehaal het.

Wat 'n pragtige en besondere voël is dit net nie! Sy besondere grootte is verrassend, die lang, skerp snawel is indrukwekkend en sy uitsonderlike kleur maak hom 'n volmaakte goddelike skepping. Wat die voël so besonders maak is die baie mooi kontras van kleure - die oorheersende seegroen lyf, die goudbruin rug wat aansluit by die bokant van die kop, heldergeel keel en die swart streep oor die oog wat in lyn aansluit by die swart snawel.

Derek het ook aan my uitgewys dat die Europese byvreter 'n verdere uitsonderlike eienskap het, naamlik dat twee van sy tone vorentoe en twee agtertoe wys.

Die Europese byvreter is 'n somerbesoeker, broei in Europa, Rusland en Noord-Afrika en hier by ons slaap hulle saam in kolonies in groot bome.

Ek wil graag van hierdie geleentheid gebruik maak om namens myself en alle ander belanstellendes vir Derek, Billy en ander helpers te bedank. Die voëlklub en die publiek is bevoorreg om tydens dié voëlringessie die geleentheid te kon hê om in hul kennis te deel.

### Leucism explained!

Leucism is the partial loss of pigment from a bird's feather, making the plumage look lighter than normal, but not pure white as with albinism. It is the result of a genetic mutation which prevents melanin (the dark brown/black pigment) from being deposited normally in the body. Leucism comes in two forms: *paleness* which is an equal reduction in melanin in all feathers, and *pied* which is an absence of melanin in some patches, particularly in the feathers. Leucistic birds do not have the red eyes and pink legs of albinos. Leucism has been recorded in many bird species and generally does not appear to affect their chances of survival. However, due to their increased conspicuousness they may be more vulnerable to predation. Other factors which may affect their survival is that the reduction of pigment may weaken their feathers and makes them wear out more quickly which has an energetic cost, and their eyes may be more sensitive to light which may affect their vision. Otherwise, leucistic birds are normal in every other aspect and can breed and rear "normal" young successfully. (Derek Engelbrecht)

This leucistic Brown-hooded Kingfisher was photographed by BirdLife Botswana member Ian White near Gaborone recently. Fortunately it was together with its normally coloured mate, otherwise it would have been difficult to identify positively!  
Editor of Birds & People - Pete Hancock



### Upcoming events

- 1) **12 – 15 July** – Limpopo Bird Guide Training at the Kudu Guesthouse (Polokwane Nature Reserve). Club members are welcome to join in. **L.G.**
- 2) **14 July** – Winter C.W.A.C counts around Polokwane. Bird Sanctuary, Vencor, Hout River and Deloskop farm dam. **CH**
- 3) **17 July** – Outing to the Sand River Hills Nature Reserve near Bylsteel. **KdP**
- 4) **21 July – 01 August** – Eastern Zimbabwe & Central Mozambique birding tour with Eden Routes. **L.G.**
- 5) **04 August** - Birdlife Polokwane - monthly meeting at "Die Koraaal"
- 6) **05 – 08 August** - Greater Limpopo Birding Routes & the Limpopo Honorary Rangers present an exclusive Birding Long-weekend in the Mapungubwe National Park. **CH.**
- 7) **28 – 29 August** – LBJ identification course at Tembele Country Estate with practical session in the Polokwane Nature Reserve. **LG**

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