



Birdlife
Polokwane

The Lark

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From the Editor

March has been a busy month for our bird club, once again, with a weekend outing to Nylsvlei (on which Nick reports) and an atlassing outing to Bosbult. During this outing, 52 species were recorded and the members enjoyed a peaceful day of birding, being taken around in an open 4 x 4 vehicle.

I have travelled to Louis Trichardt quite a few times this month and it was remarkable to notice how little birds you see along the road. I passed a Steppe Buzzard and an European Roller, literally on the same spot each day for 2 weeks in a row, but apart from these the bird life was very scarce.

Our bird list for the 600-challenge is standing on 401 species at the moment (as on 31 March), with species such as the Black Stork, Cape Shoveler, Tawny eagle, Rock kestrel and Red-crested Korhaan still not recorded, to name a few of the "bigger" species. Where are they, have you seen them?

Keep sending your sightings, news and pictures.

Happy autumn birding!
Wilna



Hierdie foto, van 'n swartborsslangarend, is geneem en ingestuur deur Annamarie Wilson. Dit is geneem tydens Saterdag 19 Maart se Bosbult-uitstappie.



Bosbult-uitstappie, Saterdag 19 Maart – foto ingestuur deur San3 de Wet.

White-winged Flufftail "Twitch"

Extracts from an article in Nat Geo News Watch, written By Leon Marshall
Extract compiled by Joe Grosele

It is a relatively small bird, no bigger than a dove, and extraordinarily shy. It is merely a summer visitor to South Africa, but even so the White-winged Flufftail (witvlerkvleikuiken) carries enormous weight.

It has come to be known by the country's conservation fraternity as "the little bird that stopped a multi-billion rand project". Ten years ago, it brought to a halt a pumped-storage scheme which Eskom constructed on the eastern seaboard Drakensberg escarpment, at a site named Ingula. It is also at the centre of a remarkable trans-Africa conservation project whereby local environmentalists have teamed up with Ethiopian villagers to protect the wetlands, where it goes to breed in the Northern Hemisphere summer.

It is pretty, with white wing patches, from which it takes its name, and greyish and lighter and darker chestnut colourings over most of the rest of its body. It is so secretive that even its muffled "woop-woop-woop"-call is seldom heard by birders.

It is a mega-tick on a lifers' list, as birdwatchers call their marking-off of species they have positively identified for the first time.

I got to see for myself just what a novelty it is when I recently joined a crowd that went looking for it in an extensive wetland system, called the Lakenvlei that meanders through rolling hills in the high inland regions about 225 kilometres north-east of Johannesburg.

It was sighted there the week before in a reserved area called Middelpunt, which a trust by the same name leases from the local farmer to protect the bird's habitat. The trust was set up in 1994 when the bird was seen there for the first time.

The birdwatchers paid a tidy donation for the off-chance of spotting it. They trooped for a long distance through thick grass and mud in the hot mid-morning sun, following a line of flushers armed with sticks, who struggled through the waist-high foliage along the banks of the stream. They had two water spaniels assisting them whose heads every now and then bobbed up comically as they tried to get a fix on where they were.

The flushers were about to give up when the bird flew up from under the feet of one of them. It took but a few quick seconds before it dived for cover, but its white wing patches were clearly visible. A wild cheer, followed by a lengthy applause resounded across the marshland. There were expert birders in the crowd with lifers' lists of well over 800 southern African birds to their name, but none of them had seen the white-winged flufftail before. It was truly a day every one present would remember.



This rare picture of a captured white-winged flufftail was taken by Warwick Tarboton, a trustee of the Middelpunt Wetland Trust.

Club Outing to Nylsvley

by Nick Baglow

The club held a very successful family weekend outing to Nylsvley Nature Reserve from 4 to 6 March, staying in recently revamped hostel accommodation with individual rooms and communal bathroom, kitchen and braai area. This is a perfect spot to enjoy a clear night sky and impress others with your satellite-spotting abilities if you had failed to get to grips with identifying yet another LBJ.

Despite the relaxed atmosphere generally, Derek - the taskmaster - had us on the road just after first light in the mornings so that we could get into the serious business of atlassing (weekend list 137) before anyone else. The flood plains were drier than expected in terms of surface water, though the dense lush green reeds attested to good rains earlier in the season. So we dipped somewhat on the water bird specials but did pretty well on the **warblers (Willow, Icterine, European Marsh, Cape and Great Reed, Little Rush and Barred Wren-)**. A good sighting of 3 **Marsh Owls**, leisurely searching for prey, was a confirmation that we really were back in the veldt. Raptors were relatively scarce but cuckoos were present in numerical if not species abundance, with one of the highlights a great sighting of a **Common (Eurasian) Cuckoo**.

Overall, an enjoyable aspect about being out with a mixed group of birders is that not everyone is necessarily fixated on the same bird at the same time; one person's excuse for taking a break and pouring a cup of coffee, or observing some obscure bug is another's thrilling lifer experience! These serious early morning patrols were followed by brunch and impromptu midday bird call quizzes orchestrated by San3. Some of our number, though, managed to ignore the persistent chirping emanating from her phone and engage in more leisurely dreamy pursuits (see opposite).

The reserve is a little larger than expected, or so we surmise, as the group vehicles managed to get separated during the course of an afternoon excursion and never saw each other again until back in camp. The apparent differences in bird lists for the period caused a few raised eyebrows, but luckily nothing suspect was quite out of range! And the juvenile **Red-billed Oxpeckers** were still sitting on the windmill the next morning to allay all suspicions.

As commonly happens at prime sites towards the end of summer, we were not the only birders plying our trade, so to speak. Friends from Soutpansberg and Naboomspruit Bird Clubs were encountered on the walkways. The latter hosted a talk, by Herman van Niekerk, on butterflies the Saturday evening and our club members, not obsessed with Blue Gnus, were invited. We were reminded (as if one can ever forget) how amazing nature is, and how these little creatures display even more diversity worldwide than our birds and suffer from similar threats in terms of habitat destruction, climate change, etc.

So, if you don't want to miss out on the next weekend outing, speak to Almari!



Burchell's Coucal were a common sight in the vlei areas (pic Nick), with the woodland birding yielding other familiar species, such as this handsome **Chin-spot Batis** (pic Annamarie).



There was ample opportunity to plan the next trip (pic San3).

The Clever Chameleon

by Chris Campbell

On Friday the 18th of Feb, I was on my way to work on my Triumph Bonneville. Approaching the 4 way stop street of Bayman and Die Meer, a very green chameleon was crossing the road using the telephone lines! He was visited by a speckled mouse bird, some scaly feathered finches and a cape sparrow. The scaly feathered finches had quite a bit to say (twit) about it. I hope they were encouraging him and praising him for his cleverness!



Upcoming events

- 1) **Wed, 6 April** – Monthly meeting at “Die Koraal” at 18:30 **LG**
- 2) **Sat, 9 April** – Day outing for birding and atlassing to Dendron AI3 Boerdery/ Legkraal **SV & AR**
- 3) **29 April – 02 May** – Birding long weekend at Mapungubwe hosted by the Limpopo Honorary Rangers and presented by the Greater Limpopo Birding Routes **CH**
- 4) **Wed, 04 May** – Monthly meeting at “Die Koraal” at 18h30
- 5) **7 – 8 May** – Parrot Count Magoebaskloof **SV & AR**
- 6) **12 – 15 May** – Greater Limpopo Birding Routes presents the Venda 4 x 4 birding long weekend. Contact Lisa Martus De-Boer at 072 397 9624 for info and reservations
- 7) **20 – 22 May** - Weekend outing to Sebikwe, Soutpansberg **SV & AR**
- 8) **Wed, 1 June** - Monthly meeting at “Die Koraal” at 18:30 (our annual soup and sherry evening) **LG**

Contact Lisa Grosel -**LG** (083 380 2322), Charles Hardy -**CH** (083 457 1721), Saartjie Venter -**SV** (083 653 0475), Almari Robbertse -**AR** (0837404803) and San3 de Wet - **S3** (0824532754) for enquiries & reservations.