



Birdlife  
Polokwane

# The Lark

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## From the Editor

Spring is in the air... and so all are the migrants, as well as a number of exciting events that are going to take place during September and October (see "Upcoming Events").

The cuckoo's on which we reported in the August Newsletter, have now reached Africa – it is reported that the bird that has travelled furthest, Chris, has already flown almost 5 000 km to Chad. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, he was tracked in southern Chad and seemed to be settled in this location (information made available by British Trust for Ornithology - <http://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking/chris>).

The first week of September is **National Arbour Week**, thus remember to plant a tree or shrub in your garden, to contribute towards the greening of our environment.

Further, there is a **National Recycling Day on Friday 16 September**, and local communities, schools and groups throughout South Africa are encouraged to plan and host their own clean-up and recycling activities during **Clean-Up South Africa Week**, that will take place from 12 to 17 September 2011. In Polokwane, there are recycling plants that are taking materials, such as glass, tins, plastic bottles, cardboard and newspapers.

Be friendly to the environment and enjoy your birding!  
Wilna

## Limpopo Specials (4): Mottled Spinetail (*Gevlekte Stekelstert*) *Telacanthura ussheri* Compiled by Joe Grosel

The characteristic feature of Spinetails is the unique tail of these swift-like birds. Their individual tail feathers are sharply pointed and the feather shafts extend 2 to 3 millimetres beyond the vanes.

Characteristic features of the Mottled Spinetail are a square tail, a broad white rump, mottled throat and a broken white line across the vent. In Southern Africa, the Mottled Spinetail is a localised resident and occurs in the subtropical lowveld regions of Zimbabwe, the Limpopo Province and adjacent parts of Mozambique.

Their habitat preference is determined by the presence of large hollow Baobab trees, in which they roost and nest. In South Africa, this species is considered as one of our rarest resident birds. The Segole Big Tree in north-eastern Venda, which is regarded as the largest Baobab in the world is home to approximately 12 pairs. Mottled Spinetails can also be seen in the far-northern Kruger National Park, where there are at least two known nesting sites.



Mottled Spinetail distribution



## Talented Guide Rewarded

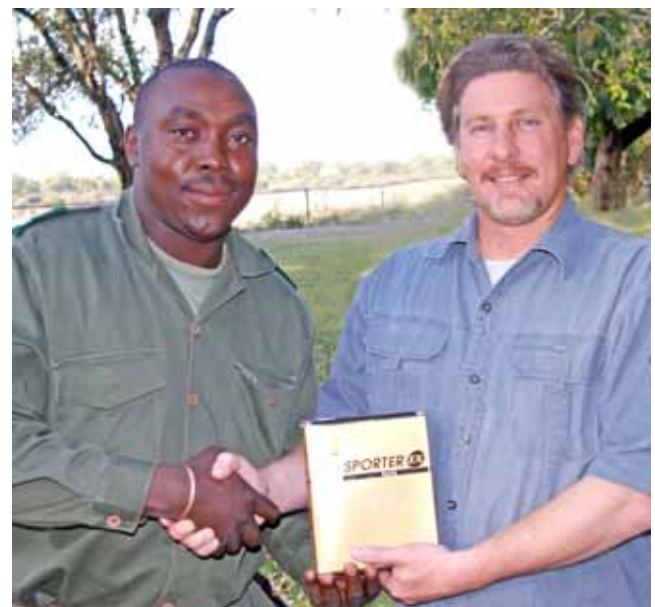
by Lisa Grosel

Jobe Shabangu is an Assistant Trails Guide, based at Punda Maria in the Kruger National Park, where he leads visitors on the famous Nyalaland Trail. When in camp (Punda), Jobe also conducts day walks, game drives and night drives.

One of the recent projects of the Limpopo Honorary Rangers, is to provide the Kruger Guides with short courses, specifically targeting birding. It was during one of these courses, led by Joe Grosel, that Jobe's enthusiasm and special birding talents became apparent. This was also evident during several visits to Punda Maria by Joe and Birdlife Polokwane. Despite using a very old and ineffective pair of binoculars, Jobe was able to locate and identify many of the region's speciality birds, such as Pink-throated Twinspot, Mottled Spinetail, Thick-billed Cuckoo and Lemon-breasted Canary. Although Jobe's home is in Bushbuckridge (close to the southern end of the Park), he apparently prefers working in the far-north where, as he correctly states, "there are many more interesting plants and birds".

As a result of this heartening attitude and his enthusiasm on the birding front, the Birdlife Polokwane Committee decided to reward Jobe with a brand new pair of binoculars that was handed over to him at a recent advanced bird identification course, held in Letaba Camp.

Birdlife Polokwane wishes to thank the Honorary Rangers of the Limpopo region for their ongoing support of the Kruger and Mapungubwe National Park Guides, by providing much needed, specialist training.



Jobe Shabangu receiving his new pair of binoculars from BLP chairman Joe Grosel.

## Soutpansberg Birding Festival

by Nick Baglow

The festival, presented by Greater Limpopo Birding Routes in association with Stretton's Gin, was held over a long weekend from 18 to 21 August, attracting a few local stalwarts, plus birders from Gauteng and Cape Town. Based at Shiluvuri Lakeside Lodge on Albasini Dam, we were blessed with fantastic Limpopo end-of-winter weather. We were treated to exciting birding around the lodge premises as well as at a number of Venda birding hotspots, fascinating insights into many aspects of the region's ecology and history, and delicious cuisine. We also experienced an unexpected meteor (shooting star) at 9pm, expected meteors that weren't (4am), good roads that were (Gundani) and shortcuts that weren't (Golwe), sunset cruising (lubricated with the sponsor's product) and even a game of rugby thrown in for another good measure of the same product.

The lectures and presentations – *Habitats and Biodiversity of the Soutpansberg* (Joe Grosel), *Blouberg's Griffons* (Dawid Pretorius), *Leopards of the Western Soutpansberg* (Ian Geiger), *Baobabs* (Sarah Venter), *Secret Lives of Broadbills* (Derek Engelbrecht), *Soutpansberg History; the Road less travelled* (Michel Geradin), *Tree Identification Workshop* (Peter Straughan) – were all detailed, informative and thoroughly invigorating. It really was encouraging to experience examples of the variety, passion and depth of research going on across so many disciplines, over these lesser known northern reaches of our Province.

As for the birding (and atlassing), we totalled 97 for the lodge environs, and 143 for the weekend as a whole – not bad for winter (thanks to Joe, Derek and Samson)! Highlights included **Gorgeous Bush Shrike** popping out into the open after eluding us for a good half-hour, **Osprey** (apparently having sensibly given the long trek to Scotland a break), **Half-collared Kingfisher**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Bat Hawks** near the nest, **Crowned Eagle** on the nest, **Pink-throated Twinspot**, **Retz's** and **White-crested Helmet Shrike**, **Crested Guineafowl** and **African Wood Owl**. Oh, and a **Buff-spotted Flufftail** that, as is usually the case, was a rumour to most of the group! And with Derek putting up his nets on the Sunday, we were able to get up close and personal to a variety of the more common species that nevertheless always impress with their beauty. This was a great event all round.



Beauty of the Bearded Scrub-robin can be appreciated up close



Birding in South Africa's only tract of *Brachystegia* Woodland

## NEWS SNIPPET FROM THE BIRDLIFE SA NEWSLETTER

BirdLife South Africa is launching a special project towards the conservation programme for our National Bird, the Secretarybird, this September. They are suggesting a special gift for Secretaries, this Secretary's Day, on 7 September 2011, one that not only shows the boss's appreciation of his/her secretary, but also supports a worthwhile conservation programme, in the form of donations towards the conservation project.

The popular origin of the name, "Secretarybird", comes from Victorian times, as it resembles the secretaries of that time (mostly men), who traditionally carried their quill pens sticking out behind their wigs. This charismatic bird is easily recognised by its large upright stature and grey waistcoat, with black upper legs and skinny lower legs.

In South Africa, today, the Secretarybird is declining in range and numbers, with the most pronounced and drastic disappearance in the Grasslands. It is threatened by a number of factors throughout its range, including habitat fragmentation and degradation through agricultural and commercial forestry development, as well as collisions with power lines.

Consequently, Secretarybirds are listed as *Near-Threatened* in South Africa, and the species was recently updated to *Vulnerable* on the International Red Data List.

BirdLife South Africa is undertaking a scientific project in the Grasslands, with the aim being to use sophisticated tracking devices to monitor Secretarybirds' daily movements and thus gain valuable insights into their lives.

BirdLife South Africa is calling on the country's bosses to give their secretaries a gift with a difference this Secretary's Day, one that is particularly special and will ultimately contribute to the conservation of the Secretarybird.

To donate towards the purchase of a tracking device, contact [secretary@birdlife.org.za](mailto:secretary@birdlife.org.za) or visit <http://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/secretarys-day>.

For more information on the conservation of Secretarybirds in Grasslands, or if you'd like to make a donation to contribute to Threatened Species Conservation, please contact Hanneline Smit at 011-7891122 or [conservation@birdlife.org.za](mailto:conservation@birdlife.org.za)

### Upcoming events

- 1) **Wed, 7 September** - Monthly meeting at "Die Koraal" at 18:30 **S3**
- 2) **Sat, 10 September** – South African Bird Atlas Project Workshop – Dries Abrahamse Lapa, Polokwane Game Reserve – presented by BirdLife South Africa
- 3) **Sat, 10 September** – Day Outing to Limpopo River – Pel's Fishing Owl - **SV & AR**
- 4) **16 – 18 September** – Culinary Safari – Mabula Game Reserve. Learn how to prepare Safari-style gourmet delights at a private game lodge. **LG**
- 5) **24 September** – Heritage Day
- 6) **23 – 25 September** – Weekend – Lekgalameetse Reserve, Tzaneen, 18 people (R135 pppn), 4 x 2 bed chalets; 3 x 3 or 4 bed chalets - **SV & AR**
- 7) **Wed, 05 October** - Monthly meeting at "Die Koraal" at 18:30 **S3**
- 8) **7 – 9 October** – Weekend Golwe Camp, Venda (Broadbill) - **SV & AR**
- 9) **22 October** – Day Outing Bramasole Lodge, Magoebaskloof – **SV & AR**
- 10) **20 – 23 October** – Raptor Identification Course – Letaba Camp KNP **CH**
- 11) **27 – 30 October** – Nature Photography Workshop – Mabula Game Reserve **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.