



Birdlife
Polokwane

The Lark

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From the Editor

September has been quite busy on the birding front, with a number of interesting sightings reported and a Bird Atlassing Workshop that was presented by BirdLife South Africa.

About 15 of our Birdclub members attended this workshop. We learned about the protocol of atlassing and how to submit our data. We also learned about a more informal way of recording and submitting data, called "My Bird Patch". This might be easier for members to start with, as it is a fun tool to get involved in atlassing. The data captured on this system, is also used to form part of the SABAP2 database of the Animal Demographic Unit (ADU). Data can be entered on-line, and you can add onto your list, as and when you see birds in your "patch". You can even use your garden or the neighbourhood where you live as a bird patch.

We have a wonderful story from Ari and Lourie of Sandford Heights in Magoebaskloof: A relative of theirs has got an African Grey Parrot, who heard a Fish Eagle calling over head and he started to mimic the Fish Eagles call. A few weeks later, three Fish Eagles swooped down to see who the interloper was; the poor Parrot almost fell of his perch and has never mimicked a Fish Eagle again!

Happy birding
Wilna

Limpopo Specials (5): Three-banded Courser (Drieband-drawwertjie) *Rhinoptilus cinctus* compiled by Joe Grosel

In South Africa, this secretive species is only found in isolated pockets along the Limpopo River and the far Northern Kruger National Park. It generally prefers Mopani or Acacia-dominated alluvial soils with sparse grass cover along some of the larger Lowveld Rivers. Being a nocturnal species this courser, which is mostly found in pairs, spends the majority of the day in the shade of low bushes. When disturbed, it may first freeze, then run away and finally taking off with silent, somewhat owl-like flight, seldom for more than about 20 m.

The Three-banded Courser is unique among coursers in that its eggs are incubated in a partially buried position and are never rotated, as is normal amongst most birds. New born chicks have colouring and markings that camouflage them effectively against the pale sandy soils on which they are reared. The best sites to locate this bird in the Limpopo Province are Mapungubwe National Park, and along the Levubu River floodplain in the Kruger National Park.



Interesting Observations made in the Polokwane area during August & September 2011

by Joe Grosel

1) Returning migrants:

The return of the famous Polokwane Nature Reserve **Wahlberg's Eagle** (*Bruinarend*) pair is always a keenly anticipated event. On the 13th of August, Almari Robbertse spotted the female bird sitting near the nest site, patiently waiting for her mate to join her. Previous year's "first sightings" of this particular pair were all in August (15th, 8th, 19th 16th & 13th).

Derek reported several "first sightings of the season" from his study site at the Deloskop Farm, near Dendron. Notable records are: **White-rumped Swift** (*Witkruiswindswael*) and **Common Sandpiper** (*Gewone Ruiter*) - 18th Aug; **Little Stint** (*Kleinstrandloper*) and **Ruff** (*Kemphaan*) - 23rd Aug; and **Lesser-striped Swallow** (*Kleinstreepswael*) - 09th August.

The first record of the season for **Red-breasted Swallow** (*Rooiborsswael*), was on the 6th of August while the earliest sighting of **Greater-striped Swallow** (*Grootstreepswael*), was on the 8th of September. Both records are from the Tembele Country Estate outside Polokwane (JG).

Brenda Scott did not have to go far to record the first **Yellow Wagtails** (*Geelkwikkie*) of the season. Two birds briefly stopped in her garden in Flora Park, Polokwane on the 4th of September before presumably continuing with their migration southwards.

2) Other interesting sightings

On the 27th of September, an adult **Martial Eagle** (*Breëkoparend*) was seen near the Aloe Ridge waterhole in the Polokwane Game Reserve (JG).

Wilna and Chris Campbell had great views of 5 White-bellied Korhaans (*Witpenskorhaan*) near the Nobody settlement east of Polokwane. An excellent record for the region as numbers of this species have dwindled on the Polokwane Plateau over the past 20 years, due to habitat change.

On the 13th of August, Almari Robbertse reported two **Black Stork** (*Grootswartooievaar*) and two **Marabou Stork** (*Maraboe*) from the Polokwane Nature Reserve.

A rather interesting observation was made by Derek at Deloskop Farm. A large aggregation of hornbills were seen "trekking" north, consisting of over 50 **Grey Hornbills** (*Grysneushoringvoël*), 24 **Red-billed Hornbills** (*Rooibekneushoringvoël*) and 20 **Yellow-billed Hornbills** (*Geelbekneushoringvoël*). What do they know that we don't?



Members of the Birdlife Polokwane, attending the SABAP2 Workshop

Dedicated to the Bulbul by James Clarke

I woke at four one morning,
The earth lay cool & still,
When suddenly a bulbul,
perched on my windowsill.

He sang a song so lovely,
So carefree & so gay,
That slowly all my troubles,
began to slip away.

He sang of far-off places
Of laughter and of fun,
It seems his very trilling,
Brought up the morning sun.

I stirred beneath the covers,
crept slowly out of bed,
Then gently shut the window
And crushed his bloody head.



Submitted by Lisa Martus de Boer

Our First Bird Atlassing Experience

by Chris & Wilna Campbell

After attending a SABAP2 workshop earlier in September, we got our act together and went for a practical atlassing session on Saturday 24 September. We found "our" designated virgin pentad, 2355_2940, not far outside town, just east of Polokwane, in the Nobody area.

We arrived on station at exactly 14h00. We stopped to get our bearings and decide our plan of attack. Having confirmed we were in the right area, we looked to our right and there was a group of three White-Bellied Korhaans, namely two adults and a somewhat smaller one. This was such a surprise that we were still looking to get pictures, but they disappeared before we could get any. So we took to the farm tracks to try and find them, but without any luck. As we returned to the main dirt road, they started calling. We followed their sound and this time we managed to see five of them!

We were still not convinced as we thought they are not supposed to be in this area, so we played the CD track of their call and that was it! Eventually, we got a decent picture and carried on with our first ever pentad. What an amazing start to bird atlassing!

For the afternoon, we saw 30 species in a total of three hours. We continued the area of the pentad we had not covered, the following day and saw 35 species, during three hours in the morning, as well as beautiful views of koppies in this area that we have never explored before. This was time well spent and we are looking forward to explore many more virgin pentads in future.



A beautiful view of a koppie, with the Wolkberg in the background in pentad 2355_2940

The White-bellied Korhaan (abstracted from BirdLife SA website)

The White-bellied Korhaan, a species that is restricted to grasslands and open thornveld, is listed as Vulnerable in the South African Red Data Book. It prefers tall, undisturbed grassland and is thus threatened by human population pressure and inappropriate farm management. The main threats that affect this (and other korhaan and bustard) species appear to be habitat loss due to afforestation, crop farming, overgrazing, burning and habitat modifications, as a result of growing human populations.

There has been much debate as to whether the South African population is a separate species (i.e. Barrow's Korhaan) and, if so, there is even more of an obligation for South African conservationists to attend to the numerous threats that are impacting on this threatened species.

Through funding from E. Oppenheimer and Son, a Bustard Working Group has been formed under the auspices of BirdLife South Africa. The group will have several aims, but will focus at least initially, on disseminating information about bustards to relevant authorities and stakeholders, prioritising research needs and determining urgent conservation interventions.

A PhD project is being undertaken to study the biology, taxonomy and population demography of the White-bellied Korhaan (*Eupodotis senegalensis*). The PhD student, Dewald du Plessis, is being supervised by Dr Craig Symes from the University of Witwatersrand and Dr Hanneline Smit, from Birdlife South Africa.

In order to support this project, any sightings can be reported to Dr Hanneline Smit at conservation@birdlife.org.za.



White-bellied Korhaans in the Nobody area (photo by Chris Campbell)

Upcoming events

- 1) **Wed, 5 October** - Monthly meeting at "Die Koraal" at 18:30 **S3**
- 2) **Sat, 22 October** - Day Outing to Limpopo River - Pel's Fishing Owl & Atlassing Vivo area - **SV & AR**
- 3) **20 - 23 October** - Raptor Identification Course - Letaba Camp **KNP CH**
- 4) **27 - 30 October** - Nature Photography Workshop - Mabula Game Reserve **LG**
- 5) **04 - 06 November** - Forest Birding Course and Excursion - Kurisa Moya Nature Lodge. **LG**
- 6) **02 November** - Last monthly meeting of the year at "Die Koraal" at 18:30 **S3**
- 7) **11 - 13 November** - Weekend outing Golwe Camp, Venda (Broadbill) - **SV & AR**
- 8) Day Outing Bramasole Lodge, Magoebaskloof & Heanertsburg grasslands - **Date to be confirmed - SV & AR**
- 9) **Sat, 26 November** - Big Birding Day

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.