

# The Lark

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## Letter from the editor:

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this month's newsletter with your articles and reports on the club outings. Please contact me should you wish to share your story or sighting with us at [labmarcia@gmail.com](mailto:labmarcia@gmail.com).

Happy birding! **Marcia**

## Uitstappie na Pierre Homan – 13 Augustus 2016

Artikel deur Willie van der Merwe

Ons was 'n effens klein groepie wat Saterdag 13 Augustus vir die uitstappie opgedaag het: Richter van Tonder, Mark en Julia Friskin en Jody De Bruyn, en ek. Die plaas is so 12-15 km anderkant Tzaneen, en die habitat is goed ontwikkelde laeveldboomveld, met onder andere: verskeie spesies Combretum, asook Dopperkiaan (*Pterocarpus rotundifolius*), Kiaat (*Pterocarpus angolensis*), Kameelspoor (*Ptilostigma thonningii*), Grysappel (*Parinari curatellifolia*), Rooiessenhout (*Trichilia emetica*), Maroela (*Sclerocarya birrea*), Geelwortelboom (*Steganotaenia araliacea*), Jakkalsbessie (*Diospyros mespiliformis*), Worsboom (*Kigelia africana*), en 'n hele klomp groot, pragtige wildevye – Besemtrosvy (*Ficus sur*), Gewone Trosvy (*Ficus sycomorus*), en Gewone Wildevy (*Ficus burkei*). Die voëls was ook tipiese spesies van die laeveld. Noemenswaardige spesies was: 'n swartooievaar wat verbygevlieg het; gestreepte visvanger; geelborswillie; gewone willie; boskrapper; baardspieg; papegaaiduif; bontroklaksman; rooirugstreepkopie; geelborskleinjantjie; swartmees; kleinheuningwyser (net gehoor); kleinbyevreter;bloukuifloerie; rooiwangtinktinkie (ek het hom ongelukkig nie gesien nie – sou 'n lifer vir my wees.)

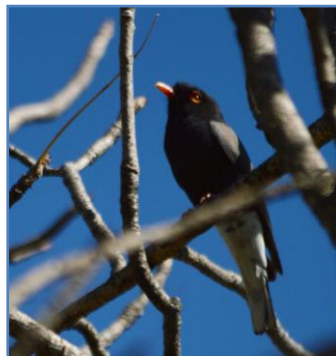
It was a good day for flycatchers: at one spot, we found southern Southern Black, Ashy and Pale.

Raptors were: African Goshawk, Little Sparrowhawk, and Lizard Buzzard – several Lizard Buzzards, or one who kept following us around! We also saw one with prey, but couldn't tell if it was a lizard or not.

Richter saw Swee Waxbills –outside of their normal distribution and habitat. We also saw a flock of mannikins flying by, not the bronze but the Redbacked! Later we did find Bronze Mannikins too. A highlight for me was a Yellow-throated Longclaw perched relaxedly in a tree – a lifer!

Another highlight were Helmetshrikes: White-crested as well as Retz's. Richter said it's the first time he'd seen Retz's within 100 km of Polokwane. It was also special to see both species in one place. They're very cute and inquisitive birds: They do everything together: if one flies the others follow it, with a light, butterfly-like wingstroke. We were seeking Thickbilled Cuckoo which is reportedly in the environment, but today we did not find it. We were also unfortunate with the Green-capped Eremomela, which ought to occur in this habitat. We heard Gorgeous Bushshrikes, but did not see any.

Ná ons die plaas deeglik verken het, het Jody ons verlaat, maar die res van ons het nog 'n bietjie in die omgewing rondgery, en onder andere by die Tzaneense Konferensiesentrum gestop, waar ons pragtige rooikeelsuikerbekkies en 'n kortbeksuikerbekkie gesien het. Ons het ook 'n draai by die Magoebaskloofdam gemaak, op soek na blouvisvangers en watertrappers, maar dié het ons nie gevind nie. Ons het wel 'n paar wolnekooievaars in 'n veld daarnaby gesien. Ander hoogtepunte was 'n gryskruisswael wat rondom 'n dam gevlieg het – 'n 'lifer' vir my! – 'n grootinktinkie wat Richter uitgelok het en wat lank op 'n bos vir ons gesit en kyk het, en 'n paar eende op 'n klein dam langs die pad, insluitende knobbeleend. Heel laaste was ons by die grasveld bokant Haenertsburg, op soek na die drakensberglangstertjie – wat ons gekry en baie mooi gesien het! Dit was 'n hoogtepunt waarop ons die uitstappie afgesluit het. Ons spesie-totaal vir die Pentad was 90, en dan nog 'n paar ander wat ons buite die gebied gesien het. Baie dankie Richter en almal!



Far left - The boys!

Left – The bird (Retz's Helmet-Shrike)

## Bearded Vulture Flies to Romania, seen 1<sup>st</sup> time in decades

Article submitted by Nick Baglow via MyNews 24

Bucharest - Romania's Ornithological Society says a bearded vulture has flown into the country, the first time it says the rare bone-eating bird has been spotted here in more than 80 years. The large two-year-old male bird, named Adonis, was born in the Czech Republic as part of a European breeding programme. It was then moved to France's Massif Centrale mountains, where a tracking device was attached.

Ornithological Society spokesperson Ovidiu Bufnila told The Associated Press on Friday the organisation was told that Adonis was in Romania, had come to a standstill and could be in trouble. Scientists located the bird on July 19, perched high, waiting for a dog's corpse to be eaten by other birds in far northwest Romania.

Bearded vultures feed on bones, which are digested in their highly acidic stomachs.

### The Mogalakwena River Nest Project – an update of results after the first season

Article by Derek Engelbrecht

In 2015, Dr Ralf Mullers of the Mogalakwena Research Centre, Prof Mark Stanback of Davidson College in the United States and I started a project investigating interspecific competition for cavities. To this end, we placed 80 nest boxes at various densities in different habitats at Mogalakwena River Lodge near Alldays.

The long-term aim of the study is to develop a nest web that will describe the interspecific network of cavity producers and users in the area.

The nest boxes were visually inspected every 3 weeks, a seriously laborious task – thanks a million Ralf! The aim is to determine which boxes are occupied and by who? Trail cameras were also placed at a sample of boxes to record species visiting the nest boxes. The severe drought experienced in the area this season resulted in a poor breeding season. Nevertheless, we got some fascinating results. A brief summary follows: 17 boxes were occupied by Lesser and Greater Bushbabies, 3 by Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, 2 by Red-billed Hornbills, 1 by African Grey Hornbills, 3 by Tree Squirrels, 1 by Green Woodhoopoes and 5 boxes by African Honey Bees. Some boxes appear to be real estate and were used by more than one species at different times. The results so far also suggest that bees are significant and underestimated competitors for cavities.

Some other interesting findings were of a European Honey Buzzard, a first for the reserve, captured on camera showing great interest in one of the nests. We also had a camera at an active nest of African Grey Hornbills.

The camera captured visits by 3 mammal species (Greater and Lesser Galago and Tree Squirrel) and 7 avian cavity-nesters! - Southern Black Tit, Red-billed Oxpecker, Violet-backed Starling, Crested Barbet, Woodland Kingfisher, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow and Green Woodhoopoe.

A camera placed at an active beehive in one of the boxes captured visits by Greater and Lesser Honeyguide entering the active beehive!

Once the bees left, several species came to inspect the box with some appearing to feed on the remains of the comb or honey. These included Southern Yellow-billed and African Grey Hornbills as well as Tree Squirrels and even a Slender Mongoose.

This was just a very brief summary of our first season's yields. Some discoveries are new to science and I hope to give you some more information on these later. I cannot wait to see what surprises our second season will bring.

*Image-1 below- A male Greater Honeyguide at the entrance to an active beehive.*

*Bottom image - European Honey Buzzard at one of the nest boxes.*



### CLUB OUTINGS / UITSTAPPIES:

- 08 Sep – Monthly Club meeting
- 10 Sep – Club Ranch Safaris: Pel's fishing owl/Visuil (**RvT**)
- 08 Oct – Last Post N/Reserve (**RvT**)
- 05 Nov – Night drive at PLK G/Reserve (**RvT**)

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