The Lark

Newsletter of Birdlife Polokwane

Issue 12 July/August 2017

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In this issue

Editor's chirps

Welcome to our winter issue of "The Lark". It is good to see that our members are still out and about and that the weather has not kept you all indoors! Whilst travelling, keep a lookout for more than just birds – any roadkill that is seen can be very valuable to the Roadkill project -read all about it in our newsletter. We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this month's issue - please never hesitate to submit your trip reports or articles to us no matter how short they are: flufftail1@gmail.com.

It is particularly heartening to see that the Bird Briefs section is growing and we encourage all our members to submit their interesting sightings, of which we are sure there are many. This issue has some fascinating 'firsts' and we hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

Happy Birding

Daniel and Raelene

Cover page: Cape Starling with pollen-stained face © Derek Engelbrecht

NEWS

Mabula Birding and photography long weekend

Mark Friskin

The Mabula birders. ©Mark Friskin

A group of eight enthusiastic people met Joe and Lisa Grosel at Bona Thaba lodge in the Mabula Game Reserve mid-afternoon on the 15th of June 2017. I was surprised by the beauty of the lodge and the sweeping view overlooking the plains with the majestic Waterberg mountains in the distance. Soon after enjoying cake and tea on the impressive veranda, we departed for a late afternoon game drive to the Modjadji plains. All of us were warmly dressed in anticipation of the expected cooler air at sunset, but the blankets provided on the game viewing vehicle still came in handy. A nice variety of game was seen in this section of the approximately 12 000 ha greater Mabula Conservancy. A herd of healthy looking Buffalo confidently approached our game vehicle, inquisitive to find out if we were friend or foe. Zebra, Warthog, Giraffe and Sable were seen and appreciated by all, but I felt that the star of the show that afternoon was the majestic Secretarybird, boldly walking amongst the zebra and other plains game. One of South Africa's 'special' raptors, it forages by striding across open grassland and savannah.

A very obliging Little Bee-eater. © Mark Friskin

We stopped at a beautiful spot to enjoy sundowners - there is always something special and mystical about the African sunset as it causes one to reflect and take a break from

the hectic pace of our daily lives. In the distance, a Pearl-spotted Owlet was calling, just to top off a perfect day in Africa.

Day two, coffee and rusks on the veranda and a 7.30am start. The highlight of this day was stopping right next to a White Rhino and her suckling calf. The driver switched the engine off and the sound of the mother's deep breaths could be heard as she grazed contentedly, not fazed by our presence. The calf was curious and after feeding, kept peeping at us from behind the safety of its mom. I couldn't help but wonder how mankind could be so cruel to kill and hunt these superb creatures, all in the pursuit of wealth.

The sought-after Grey Penduline-tit. © Joe Grosel

We completed two game drives on this day and saw a large variety of game and many new birds for different individuals. Some birding highlights included Flappet Lark, Bennett's Woodpecker, Grey Penduline-tit, White-Bellied Bustard and a very obliging Little Bee-eater. The day was concluded with an excellent meal and chatter afterwards around the fire.

Bennet's Woodpecker at Mabula Game Reserve. © Joe Grosel

Day three was spent exploring the southern section of Mabula where we had some excellent views from the hills, looking down on the open grasslands and plains. Lower down we spotted some Eland, Tsessebe, some more White Rhino and Nyala. After our morning drive we spent time in the gardens at Mabula Lodge, where the birdlife is exceptional. Highlights were Meyer's Parrot, Bearded Woodpecker, Groundscraper Thrush and excellent views of a Bennett's Woodpecker chasing off a Cardinal Woodpecker. We watched the second rugby test against France before heading home to a celebration braai.

The last morning broke with the usual early morning coffee and rusks. I was full of anticipation for our last game drive, as Joe mentioned there was a possibility we could see

Shelley's Francolin. He drove to the spot where he had previously seen these very shy and elusive birds. Lady Luck seemed to smile at us as they were heard calling and, after what felt like an eternity, they finally showed themselves. What a thrill to finally tick this bird off our life list!

After an exciting morning drive, it was time to say our final goodbyes and head off home. Thanks must go to Joe and Lisa for the great long weekend and all the work they put into making this an excellent experience for all.

The Curious Case of the Hooded Pitohui

Daniel Engelbrecht

In 1989, during an expedition to Varirata National Park in Papua New Guinea, PhD student Jack Dumbacher made a discovery that would change the way we think about poison in animals forever. Dumbacher was working on the well-known Raggiana Bird of Paradise in the tropical rainforests of Papua New Guinea, when he came across a common bycatch in his mist-net, the Hooded Pitohui.

The Hooded Pitohui.

Not thinking much of it, he removed the bird from his mist-net and started ringing it. While working with the bird, Dumbacher started sneezing and experienced a numbness and burning sensation in his mouth and nose. When one of his colleagues also reported the same feeling, Dumbacher knew that he had made a breakthrough. The next year he returned to Varirata and started studying the birds more intensively. He soon established that the locals knew all about the Pitohui and they called the bird *'wobob'* which means 'the bird whose bitter skin puckers the mouth'. To his utter amazement he also discovered that the locals knew of another distasteful bird that they called *'slek-yacht'* meaning 'bitter bird' - the bird is known in English as the Blue-headed Ifrita.

He took some feather samples from the birds and in a lab discovered several new batrachotoxins that were similar to those found in poison dart frogs. The next step was to discover just how poisonous these batrachotoxins were. When a concentrated extract of the poison obtained from the feathers of the pitohui were injected into a mouse, the animal experienced tonic convulsions and died within 15 minutes - rather conclusive evidence of its toxicity. According to the native New Guinea tribesmen, a variety of potential Pitohui predators avoid preying on this species. These include Green Tree Pythons, Brown Tree Snakes, a variety of raptors and arboreal marsupials. According to hunters, this species is a 'rubbish bird' as its bitter taste and acidic smell renders it practically inedible unless skinned and prepared in a very particular manner. Since Dumbacher's initial ground-breaking discovery, poison has been ascribed to at least four species of Pitohui, the Blue-headed Ifrita, the European Quail, the Red Warbler and the Spur-winged Goose and is thought to be present in at least another six species.

This 'accidental' discovery shows there is still so much to learn and discover about birds and other animals around us and who knows what will come up next?

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An investigation into avian roadkill in the Limpopo Province

Thabang Teffo and Ali Halajian

Birds are important role players in the ecosystem and contribute to the economy through ecotourism. The Limpopo Province has a particularly rich avifauna with about 75% of South Africa's birds having been recorded in the Limpopo Province. These include some rare species and regional specials that are not found elsewhere in South Africa. Although many factors pose a threat to this province's avifauna, observations by Dr Ali Halajian (Senior Researcher at Department of Biodiversity, University of Limpopo) since 2012 have revealed that roadkill is a significant, but under-reported, cause of death of many birds. Recently Mr Thabang Teffo joined Dr Halajian's group as a BSc Honours student to investigate avian roadkill in the Limpopo Province with the aim of mitigating this impact on our avifauna.

The loss of an individual bird through a collision with a vehicle may seem trivial and most people wouldn't even take notice of a roadkill. However, a dead bird may contain a wealth of information which can be used by scientists. For example, scientists in the Department of Biodiversity at the University of Limpopo collect data about the parasites, diet, moult and feather structure, amongst others, of 'fresh' roadkill birds. In this way, we improve our understanding of these species without having to kill birds.

Thabang Teffo collecting data from a roadkill bird.

Thabang's project involves analysing avian roadkill data collected mainly by Dr Halajian, but supplemented by data from the EWT's Wildlife and Roads Project and various people in partnership with University of Limpopo. In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of avian roadkill, several parameters are recorded at an incident, including identification of the species (preferably with a photo), date, vegetation structure at the site, position of the roadkill in the road, and speed limit, amongst others. The aim of this study is to determine the diversity of avian roadkill, the species most affected, and to identify potential hotspots where avian roadkill is most common. Of course, this is all futile if we cannot suggest possible mitigation measures to reduce the occurrence of avian roadkill. Another outcome of this study will be to establish a long-term database of avian roadkill for the Limpopo Province which will assist agencies such as the Limpopo Department of Roads and Transport, Roads Agency Limpopo (RAL), the EWT, Birdlife South

Scientists in training: Abigail Ramudzuli and Thabang Teffo collecting parasites and analysing the stomach contents of a roadkill bird.

Africa, The Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET) to proactively monitor and manage the impact of vehicle collisions on birds.

Apart from collecting data directly related to the roadkill, Thabang also collected parasites, both endo- and ectoparasites, from suitable roadkills. This has produced some interesting results and the preliminary findings will be presented at the 3rd International Congress on Parasites of Wildlife and the 46th annual meeting of the Parasitological Society of Southern Africa (PARSA) which will be held in the Kruger National Park in September 2017.

Thabang hopes to identify roadkill hotspots to mitigate the impact of avian roadkills in the Limpopo Province .

The Limpopo Roadkill Project is an ongoing project that will need the help of citizen scientists to assist us with getting a better understanding of roadkill and to develop mitigation plans to reduce its impact on our wildlife. We therefore urge anyone interested in assisting us with this project to contact us for more information. For more details about this project or if you would like to assist the team with their roadkill project or volunteering opportunities, please contact:

Dr Ali Halajian (E-mail: ali_hal572002@yahoo.com; Mobile: 071 832 1739) or

Mr Thabang Teffo (E-mail: thabang.jeany@gmail.com; Mobile: 072 827 7909).

The team would like to thank GreenMatter for funding Thabang`s study, as well as the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) for their support and sponsoring Thabang during the project. Also his co-supervisors, Prof G Derek Engelbrecht (University of Limpopo) and Mrs Wendy Collinson (EWT) for their input.

Did you know?

A recent study of roadkill in the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area recorded 85 bird species as roadkill! The three species most often recorded were Helmeted Guineafowl, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar and Black-crowned Tchagra. It is interesting to note that about 80% of the bird species recorded as roadkill were diurnal birds. Furthermore, roadkill rates were higher on paved roads compared to unpaved (gravel) roads and it was also higher in summer compared to winter.

Source: Collinson et al. 2015. An inventory of vertebrate roadkill in the Greater Mapungubwe Transfrontier Conservation Area, South Africa. African Journal of Wildlife Research 45(3): 301–311.

A free download is available at http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/51170.

Happy hour at the Ndutu bird bath!

Joe Grosel (text and photos)

Ndutu Safari Lodge is situated in Tanzania's Ngorogoro Conservation Area and lies in the southern section of the famous Serengeti Plain. In May 2017, I was privileged to have spent two nights at this delightful place nestled under the canopies of giant Umbrella Thorns with lovely views of Lake Ndutu. This area is best known as the place where the migrating Blue Wildebeest come to calve and also for its resident populations of Cheetah, Lion and Spotted Hyeana. During my stay there we certainly had marvellous and multiple sightings of big carnivores but it was the hour or so that I spent at the lodge's unassuming little cement bird bath that I enjoyed most. During the heat of the day when most of my group took a well-earned siesta, I placed myself about four meters from the bird bath and had a ball watching and photographing the many species that came in for a drink or a bath. I was later joined by an eager group of birders who sat there in the midday sun like mad dogs and .....!

A few intrepid birders braving the midday heat to enjoy the passing parade at Ndutu Safari Lodge's bird bath!

Below are a few of the many photographs I took at the bird bath showing some of the 23 species that showed up during that 'happy hour' at Ndutu Safari Lodge.

The most common visitors to the bird bath were the delightful little Blue-capped Cordon-bleus with their bright pink bills. The other bird in the image is a female Vitelline Weaver.

White-bellied Canaries surround an innocent looking little Speckle-fronted Weaver.

Stars of the show were undoubtedly the vivid Fischer's Lovebirds who never spent more than 10 seconds at the water. The bird on the far left of the image is a Crimson-rumped Waxbill.

Lovely Blue-naped Mousebirds cautiously joined in on the action.

The Aloe Bonanza Challenge

Derek Engelbrecht

It is that time of the year when the dry and dusty bushveld is transformed into a spectacle: the 'Umpteenth' Annual Aloe Bonanza. This is a festival much loved by birds and birders, as many different bird species flock (excuse the pun) to the stands of flowering Mountain Aloes *Aloe marlothii*. I have been visiting flowering stands for many years and the thrill of seeing birds of all shapes and sizes - and dietary preferences – indulging in a sip or two of nectar has never waned. But the secret is out: both amateur and professional photographers have now discovered the wonderful photo opportunities this spectacle presents, so its game on to get that special image. And game on to get a new bird species feeding on Mountain Aloe nectar.

A couple of years ago, Joe, Daniel and I collated all published records as well as our own records of birds recorded feeding at flowering Mountain Aloes. That list included a staggering 105 bird species that have been recorded feeding on Mountain Aloe nectar. Some of these records include species one won't expect to have a 'sweet tooth', e.g. Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Red-billed Oxpecker, Marico Flycatcher, Southern White-crowned Shrike and Pied Babbler, to name but a few. However, we are convinced that there are more opportunistic nectarivores out there. So here is the **challenge**: photograph a species that is not on our list and stand in line to win a prize.

Pied Babblers are new additions to the list of opportunistic nectarivores at Mountain Aloes. © Derek Engelbrecht

The list can be viewed or downloaded free of charge at: http://oo.adu.org.za/pdf/OO_2014_05_049-074.pdf. You can send your photos to me at faunagalore@gmail.com and the winner, (if there is one ☺), will be announced at the September bird club meeting. Remember, this is not a photo competition to get the best picture. However, the bird must be identifiable and it must be seen feeding on nectar or show evidence of feeding on nectar, e.g. a pollen-stained face such as the Pied Babbler above or the Cape Starling on this issue's cover page.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileata*

Capped Wheatear

The Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileata* is a relatively common winter visitor to the Limpopo Province and for this reason we decided to make it our Bird of the Month. Wheatears make up their own genus *Oenanthe* and are most closely related to the chats. The Capped Wheatear is a medium-sized terrestrial bird with a strong preference for burnt areas and other habitats with short grass and bare ground. Adult birds are most easily identified by their pied plumage and chat-like behaviour, so look out for a broad, black breast-band, a white eyebrow, black cap and off-white underparts. Juveniles are much more challenging to identify and are very drab in colour with a speckled breast and brown body. The key identification feature with the Capped Wheatear is its inverted black 'V' shape on the tail which can easily be seen in the field. This 'V' distinguishes and separates it from all other chat and wheatear species in Southern Africa. The bird also provides some behavioural clues such as tail bobbing and wing flickering (key identification feature for chats across the world) while it scurries around searching for ants, termites, spiders, millipedes, cicadas and other small insects. When it comes to breeding, the nest is usually constructed on the ground in a shallow cup using rootlets, grass and leaves and is lined with feathers, hair and other fine material. Nests of these birds have even been found in Aardvark burrows, termite mounds and under old railway sleepers. Its' clutch size varies from 2 to 5 white, pale greenish-white or bluish-white eggs but surprisingly little is known about its breeding success, incubation and nestling periods or the development of the young. The Capped Wheatear generally makes a short series of peeps and chuckles when calling but is known to mimic a wide range of birds such as the Crowned Lapwing, Temminck's Courser, Little Bee-eater and Yellow-throated Longclaw.

Where and When? The Capped Wheatear is most easily found in the dry winter months in areas with burnt or very short grass. The species is prone to substantial local movements in our area and for this reason it is impossible to tell where they will end up next. Around Polokwane, the Chebeng and Moletsi areas generally bring good results when one is searching for this bird, but sightings in some areas in the Polokwane Nature Reserve are not uncommon.

REGULARS

Bird briefs

Interesting note on the diet of the Lanner Falcon

Jody de Bruyn

It is well known to me that the Sasko building in Ladanna is a hotspot for birds of prey and for this reason I try to visit this site as often as possible. On a recent visit to the area I came across two Lanner Falcons flying low over the buildings. I quickly realised there was one adult and a juvenile. At first, I was unsure as to what the birds were doing, as they were soaring and gliding at speed between the buildings, but soon the adult left and the juvenile was left to fend for itself.

After staying and observing the juvenile falcon, I came to the conclusion that it was actually hunting insects. I kept on watching for another hour as the bird deftly caught insect after insect. The prey seemed to be grasshoppers, probably the Common Stick Grasshoppers *Acrida acuminata*. Once the falcon committed to catching an insect, it never missed and was accurate with all its strikes.

This was a particularly interesting observation, as insects are only occasionally consumed by Lanner Falcon. Birds comprise the dominant prey item of Lanner Falcons, but they are opportunists and will exploit an abundant source of food such as a local eruption of invertebrates, e.g. termite alates or grasshoppers, as in this case (Ferguson-Lees and Christy 2001). Below, are some images of the young falcon approaching, catching and eating its prey. All of this is good practice for when it will start hunting larger prey which may present a greater challenge than a grasshopper.

A few questions remain unanswered. Was it normal behaviour for adult birds to train and teach their offspring to hunt prey? Or could this have been an opportunistic incident guided by an abundance of these grasshoppers? Or, alternatively, could this be a localized phenomenon, where the industrial buildings and night lights bring an abundance of insects to the area allowing the falcons to feed here daily?

No matter what the answer is, it was still a privilege to witness these awe-inspiring raptors hunt at close quarters. Perhaps future visits to the area will provide us with the answers to our questions.

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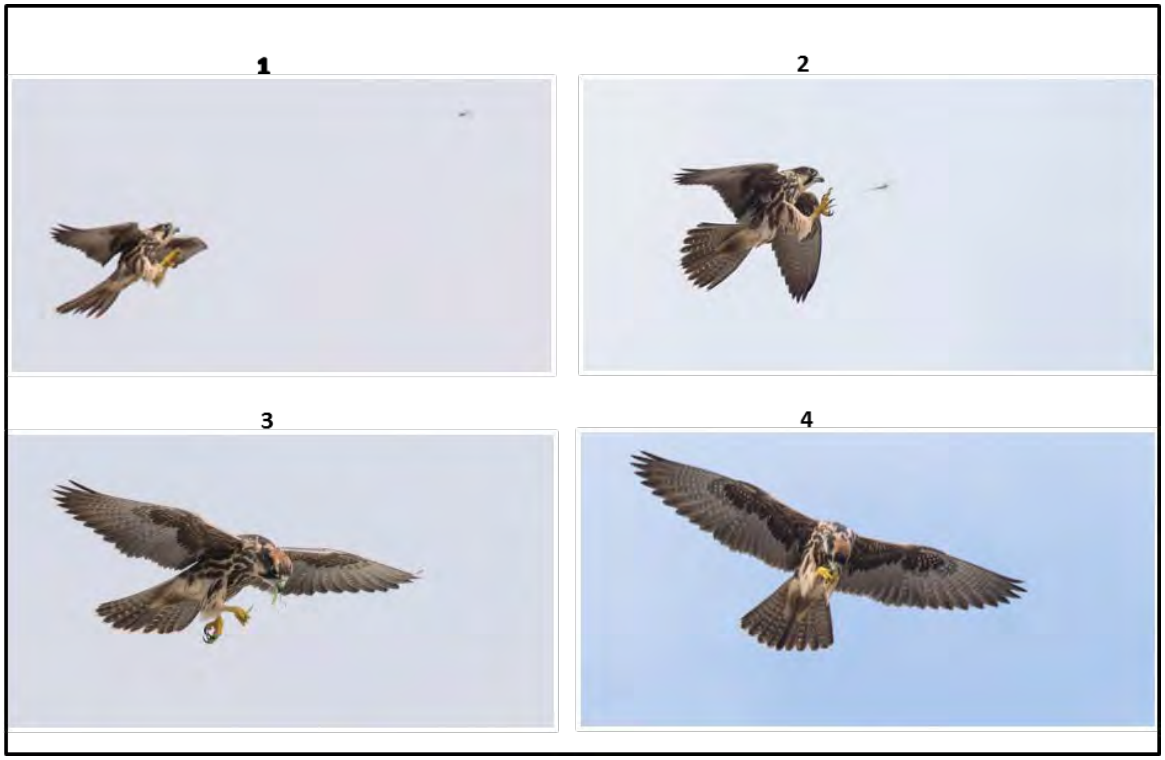

1 – The Lanner Falcon approaches the grasshopper with its eyes fixed on its prey,
2 – The moment before the falcon locks-on and catches the grasshopper,
3 and 4 – The falcon is now feeding on the grasshopper, first using only a single foot and then switching to both talons to consume its prey.

Symmetrical leucism in a Laughing Dove

Daniel Engelbrecht

Leucism is an aberrant condition that affects the plumage colouration in animals. It is caused by a partial or total lack of melanin in the feathers. Leucism may have a genetic origin, i.e. it is inherited, when the melanin-producing cells fail to migrate to all or some areas of the skin, or it may be triggered by non-heritable, external factors such as disease or nutritional stress (van Grouw 2013).

Whilst ringing birds in my garden in Polokwane, I came across a common catch, an adult Laughing Dove. At first it seemed perfectly normal, but once I had the bird in the hand I realised that it had several white feathers scattered across its body. On closer inspection, I realised that not only were the feathers white, but they were in the same position on both sides of the body, meaning that they were symmetrical. I took some photos and once I had downloaded the images I started reading up on partial leucism in Laughing Doves. I discovered that this was an uncommon phenomenon with only a handful of records. The Birds with Odd Plumages (BOP) database in the Animal Demography Unit's Virtual Museum have three

records of symmetrical leucism in Laughing Doves (BOP #214, 300 and 333; see http://vmus.adu.org.za for more records of leucistic Laughing Doves). It is also interesting that symmetrical leucism is common in most leucistic birds. Melanin serves to strengthen feathers and leucistic birds experience high levels of wear on the affected feathers. This can clearly be seen in the image: the white feather is considerably shorter compared to the normal melanised feathers. Below I have included some images of the partially leucistic Laughing Dove.

In these two images, one can make a clear comparison between the normal feathers of a Laughing Dove on the left and the affected feathers of the leucistic Laughing Dove on the right. In the leucistic dove, the sixth primary, fist secondary and six of the secondary coverts on both wings were effected by leucism.

In this magnified image, the amount of degradation as a result of leucism is clear. Note how much shorter and more worn the white feather is compared to the rest of the feathers.

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Prickly prey of a Red-tailed Tropicbird

Daniel and G Derek Engelbrecht

Whilst on a pelagic outing off Mauritius, we encounted a new and interesting observation about the prey items of tropicbirds. Approximately 16 km off the coast of Grand Baie, we came across an adult Red-tailed Tropicbird feeding on a pufferfish (family Tetraodontidae). Most pufferfish species are extremely poisonous and there are only a handful of confirmed cases in the world of birds feeding on pufferfish.

The Red-tailed Tropicbird feeding on a pufferfish off the coast of Mauritius. Note the inflated body and spikes on the body of the pufferfish.

The diet of most tropicbirds includes mostly small fish (especially flying fish from the family Exocoetidae) and small squid species. Prey items are usually caught with a swift dive

into the water or, in the case of flying fish, in mid-air. In general, pufferfish are avoided by birds for two reasons: firstly, they are virtually impossible for birds to swallow as they inflate as soon as they feel threatened and the body becomes covered in sharp spines, and secondly, all pufferfish are toxic and may well cause the death of a bird should it manage to swallow it. All eight species of pufferfish found in Mauritian waters are highly toxic and would cause the death of a human within minutes after consumption as the poison is 1 200 times stronger than cyanide (Bane et al. 2014)! The pufferfish in this case was relatively large and, as it was inflated, the bird initially experienced difficulties swallowing it. Nevertheless, it eventually managed to manoeuvre the fish into the head first position for swallowing but, due to the distance between us and the bird at this stage, we couldn't confirm unequivocally if the bird indeed managed to swallow its prickly prey.

This interesting observation raises several questions. For example, do pufferfish comprise part of the regular, but under-reported, diet of Red-tailed Tropicbirds or was this a case of mistaken identity or perhaps opportunism? Even if the tropicbird managed to swallow the pufferfish, what would its survival prospects have been or do tropicbirds exhibit some kind of immunity to the toxins of pufferfish? The answers to these questions are any ones guess and with relatively little known about the diet of tropicbirds this still remains a mystery.

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Possible Dark-capped x Red-eyed Bulbul hybridization in the Limpopo Province

Joe Grosel

Over the years there's been a fair amount of debate about hybridization between the closely related Dark-capped *Pycnonotus barbatus* and Red-eyed *P. nigricans* Bulbuls in areas where their ranges overlap. A significant amount of support for the theory that hybridization between the two species does occur is to be found in southern African ornithological literature. This phenomenon has been observed in north-eastern Botswana (Irwin 1958 and Lawson 1962), the Highveld of South Africa (Clancey 1960, Lawson 1962 and Markus 1967) and in the Eastern Cape (Lloyd *et al.* 1997)

During a recent visit to the Palala Game Lodge on the farm Melbourne near the Groblersbrug border post (north-eastern Limpopo Province), I came across a bulbul with a

narrow, but distinctive orange eye ring. This bird was in the company of a 'conventional' Dark-capped Bulbul. The two birds were moving around together in close association in the distinctive manner in which bulbul pairs or family groups operate. I managed to get a few photographs before the birds moved out of sight (see image below).

The possible Dark-capped x Red-eyed Bulbul hybrid. © Joe Grosel

Could this be an individual aberration or a Red-eyed x Dark-capped hybrid? If the latter is true then this area could be another region where this phenomenon has occurred and possibly the first record for the Limpopo Province. Whatever the case, Palala Game Lodge should be revisited with the aim of collecting more 'bulbul' evidence!

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A melanistic Spotted Eagle-owl in Polokwane

G Derek and Daniel Engelbrecht

Melanism is a condition characterized by abnormal deposits of melanin in the skin and feathers and may be the result of either a change in the distribution of melanin or an increase in the production of melanin (van Grouw 2017). The affected bird appears black or very dark brown, but not necessarily always so, as different melanin pigments are responsible for different colours. For example, eumelanin is responsible for black, grey and/or dark brown feathers, whereas phaeomelanin produces colours in the brick-red, rufous to pale buff colour range. It is an extremely rare phenomenon in owls and there are only around 14 records of melanistic owls in the world, all from the northern hemisphere (Mikkola 2013; Van Grouw 2017)!

A very rare sighting and a first for the southern hemisphere: a melanistic Spotted Eagle-owl photographed just outside Polokwane. © Suzaan van Staden.

We were therefore extremely excited when Mrs. Suzaan van Staden sent us a picture of a melanistic Spotted Eagle-owl they photographed on the Tweefontein Road (23°49'S; 29°31E) outside Polokwane on the evening of 13th May 2017. This is not only the first record of a melanistic Spotted Eagle-owl, but also the first record of a melanistic owl for the southern hemisphere! Although we have been out to see if we can find it again, it has so far eluded us, but finding a melanistic owl in the black of the night is probably easier said than done.

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A close-up of the melanistic Spotted Eagle-owl. © Suzaan van Staden.

Mokgalaje the Short-clawed Lark turns (at least) 12

Derek Engelbrecht

A couple of years ago I wrote a short note about a very special Short-clawed Lark - I know they all are, but this one is exceptional. This bird is affectionately known as Mokgalaje, meaning 'Old Man' in Tswana.

I ringed this bird as an adult on 24 May 2005 and on 24 May 2017, it was still singing and displaying at exactly the same spot it was ringed 12 years earlier! What's more, he hasn't lost any of his charm as he was seen in the company of a new female friend when I visited his territory on the anniversary of his 'ringday'.

Mokgalaje is now the oldest known lark on record in the world. The previous record was held by a Crested Lark from Germany which was found dead 11 years and seven months after it was first ringed. Long live Mokgalaje!

For more details about Mokgalaje's story, click on these links:

http://safring.adu.org.za/content?php?id=14

http://safring.adu.org.za/downloads/afrn_43_23.pdf

Mokgalaje the Short-clawed Lark photographed on the anniversary of his 12th 'ringday' in the Polokwane Nature Reserve.

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Derek Engelbrecht

This series features an old (40+ years) and a new (less than five years old) bird-related article.

Something old

The conservation of raptors has been at the forefront of conservation efforts for many years, but few of us will know to what extent these masters of the skies were persecuted in years gone by. For this issue's 'Something Old', I decided on this note in the Bee-eater Vol 2(2) of 1951 published by an anonymous author. The numbers of raptors that were killed are staggering.

For more information or to get involved, contact the Birds of Prey Working Group:

Tel. +27-(0)11-4861102; Fax. +27-(0)11-4861506

Website: www.ewt.org.za ; E-mail: andreb@ewt.org.za (André Botha).

417 EAGLES DESTROYED IN THE CAPE PROVINCE.

In a recent issue of the Provincial Gazette the number of vermin destroyed in the Cape Province, between 1st January and 31st December 1950 was published. It is with astonishment and regret that we see that eagles are classed as vermin and that a total of 417 were destroyed in the province during this period. The details for the various divisions are as follows:-

Division		Eagles. Arends	(Bateleur) Berghane	Tawny Eagles. Kouvoels.	Martial Eagles Lemmervangers
Beaufort West		-	19.	-	2
Bedford	x	-	-	-	67
Calvinia.		-	14	-	12
Carnarvon		-	1	1	-
Cathcart		7		-	-
Cradock	x	-	-	-	12
De. Aar		5	-	-	-
Graaff Reinet	x	17	-	-	-
Hay		-	19	-	-
Heidelberg		-	-	-	4
Herbert		-	-	-	6
Humansdorp	x	-	-	-	30
Jansenville	x	35	-	-	-
Pearston	x	-	-	-	37
Philipstown		-	-	-	7
Piketberg		-	8	-	-
Prince Albert		-	7	-	-
Riversdale		-	-	-	3
Somerset East	x	24	-	-	-
Steynsberg	x	-	-	-	3
Steytlerville	x	-	-	5	10
Stutterheim		-	12	-	-
Sutherland		-	4	-	-
Swellendam		4	-	-	-
Tarka	x	8	-	-	-
Willowmore	x	-	31	-	-
Wodehouse.		-	-	-	3

x Divisions within the area covered by the E.C.W.B.S.

Side by side with the eagles is the tally of dassies killed in the same period - a total of 393,760 - eight divisions having registered totals between 20,000 and 45,000. Yet the Black Eagle is known as the Dassie-vanger and the Crowned Hawk-Eagle also takes dassies and a simple calculation will show that 100 Eagles, catching a dassie a day, would account for a good percentage of the dassies for which bounties were paid during 1950.

We can of course sympathise with the farmer who sees a lamb carried off in an eagles' talons, but how many farmers have actually seen this? Are there any reliable figures which show that a farmer can honestly claim to have suffered a substantial loss in this way? Here again we know all too little about the life history and feeding habits of these, our most majestic, birds.

It is of interest to speculate whether a farmer who has systematically destroyed eagles can put away his gun and turn naturalist to watch and see what prey eagles take. It is not right to assume, without evidence, that they have changed their feeding habits so radically since the introduction of sheep to South Africa that they must be exterminated. For at the present rate of destruction it has become a serious matter whether the various species are in danger of extermination or not. We know that farmers in South Africa possess a wide and varied knowledge of natural history but unfortunately they do not realize the value of their knowledge. Notes and records,

however brief, if sent in to a society such as ours, can be accumulated and eventually turned to some useful purpose in answering the numerous questions which arise as to how the balance of nature works. How many eagles nest in the distric how many times have they been seen to take lambs and so on.

In this matter we may profit by the experience in other countries that have been civilized longer than our own. The maps given below are taken from the "Natural History of the Kite." by James Fisher, published by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in 1949. - In Shakespear's time London was " a city of Crows and Kites". By the turn of the 17th century a bounty of twopence a head was being paid for kites. In Victorian England with its extensive grouse moors and ruthless gamekeepers the position of the kite rapidly became precarious, 1870 being the last record of a kite nesting in England. By 1900, in the whole of Great Britain only three pairs were known to be nesting, all three in a tiny valley, now referred to as Kite Valley, in Wales. The Kite has thus become one of Britain's rarest breeding birds. It is only through the efforts of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and two other similiar societies, in co-operation with the Kite Preservation Fund, that the small sanctuary in Wales has been preserved. Any tenant of land upon which a pair of Kites safely rares at least one young in a season is paid a bounty of £20. Thus the secret of the sanctuary is secured. Even so in 1948 there were only six kites nests in Wales, of these one and possibly two, were disturbed by human beings, thought to be egg collectors.

Distribution of the Kite in Great Britain about one hundred years ago.

IS THIS TO HAPPEN TO EAGLES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Distribution of the Kite in Great Britain today.

Something new

With our 'Man on Marion' Deo Masotla back on mainland Africa after getting 'intimate' with some albatrosses, and the feast of albatrosses seen on the recent Flock at Sea trip still fresh in our memories, I thought this article combining satellite technology with a real conservation need is very interesting.

Fretwell PT, Scofield P and Phillips RA 2017. Using super-high resolution satellite imagery to census threatened albatrosses. *Ibis* 159: 481-490.

Abstract

This study is the first to utilize 30-cm resolution imagery from the WorldView-3 (WV-3) satellite to count wildlife directly. We test the accuracy of the satellite method for directly counting individuals at a well-studied colony of Wandering Albatross *Diomedea exulans* at South Georgia, and then apply it to the closely related Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi*, which is near-endemic to the Chatham Islands and of unknown recent population status due to the remoteness and limited accessibility of the colonies. At South Georgia, satellite-based counts were comparable to ground-based counts of Wandering Albatross nests, with a slight over-estimation due to the presence of non-breeding birds. In the Chatham Islands, satellite-based counts of Northern Royal Albatross in the 2015/2016 season were similar to ground-based counts undertaken on the Forty-Fours islands in 2009/2010, but much lower than ground-based counts undertaken on The Sisters islands in 2009/2010, which is of major conservation concern for this endangered albatross species. We conclude that the ground-breaking resolution of the newly available WV-3 satellite will provide a step change in our ability to count albatrosses and other large birds directly from space without disturbance, at potentially lower cost and with minimal logistical effort.

The article is free and can be downloaded at:

http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ibi.12482/full .

Deo Masotla with a Wandering Albatross on Marion Island.

IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENTAL DATES: July/August 2017

Month	Event
07–11 July	World Population Day
31 July	World Ranger Day
08–10 August	World Lion Day
12 August	World Elephant Day
19 August	World Honey Bee Day

UPCOMING CLUB EVENTS

Month	Event	Contact
04 July	Monthly club meeting (Polokwane Golf Club)	LG
08 July	Outing to the Mockford Farms and Vulture Restaurant	RvT
01 August	Monthly club meeting (venue to be announced)	LG
19 August	Day outing to Kurisa Moya - bring and braai for lunch	RvT
26–27 August	Identifying LBJ's (weekend course in Polokwane)	LG
31 August–03 September	The Art of Tracking course – Thornybush Game Reserve	JG
02-03 September	Club Ranch/Eshowe – Pel's Fishing Owl/Boulder Chat	RvT
05 September	Monthly club meeting (venue to be announced)	LG
07–10 September	Limpopo Birding Routes - Eastern Soutpansberg self-drive birding excursion	LG, MM
08–09 September	Spring Ring – Bird ringing demonstration in Polokwane Nature Reserve	DE
05–08 October	Mapungubwe Birding Excursion with the Limpopo Honorary Rangers	CH
12–15 October	Raptor Identification Course – Letaba Camp, KNP	CH
19–22 October	Birds and Forest Festival – Magoebaskloof Hotel	MM

Charles Hardy – CH (083 457 1721); Derek Engelbrecht – DE (082 200 5277); Joe Grosel – JG (082 415 5250); Lisa Grosel – LG (083 380 2322); Marianne McKenzie – MM (082 835 4185); Richter van Tonder – RvT (082 213 8276).

Birdlife Polokwane	
P.O. Box 699	
Fauna Park	
0787	
Tel: 015 263 6473	
www.birdlifepolokwane.co.za	
www.facebook.com/birdlifepolokwane	
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