

# The Lark

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Issue 17

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BirdLife  
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# The Lark

Issue 17, May/June



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### Editors' chirps

Autumn has come and gone, and so have most of the migrants. As you can see, this is a bumper edition with contributions by a couple of first-timers. Thanks to everyone who contributed and we can't wait to hear about your interesting sightings and exciting trips for our next edition.

Please note our new email address for contributions to The Lark: [thelarknews@gmail.com](mailto:thelarknews@gmail.com).

Daniel and Raelene.

The Lark is published bimonthly. Contributions are accepted in English or Afrikaans and are accepted at the discretion of the editors. Contact the editors if a translation of an Afrikaans article is required. Non-members are welcome to contribute if the article is about birds or birding in the greater Polokwane region (100 km from Polokwane). The editors reserve the right to edit articles as necessary.

The opinions expressed by contributors in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editors, the Birdlife Polokwane committee or Birdlife South Africa.

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: 15 JULY 2018**

**Cover page:** Lilac-breasted Roller, Derde Brug, Botswana (17 June 2015) © Johan Viljoen

### Birding at Sebayeng – 2018-03-24

Richter Van Tonder

Na twee dae van goeie reën was die verwagting hoog om 'n baie nat Sebayeng vleigebied te sien. Ons was reeds 05:40 op pad uit Polokwane en het daar aangekom met baie lae wolke en reën teen die agtergrond. Alhoewel dit koelerig was het die voëls stadig maar seker hulself begin wys. Rooiruglaksman (Red-backed Shrike), Gewone Blousysies (Blue Waxbill) en Rooibekvuurvinkies (Red-billed Firefinch) was van die eerstes.



Die Sebayeng soekers.

Die hoofdoel was om die Sprinkaansanger (River Warbler) te kry, aangesien dit dié tyd van die jaar is wanneer hul aktief begin roep voordat hulle terug trek noorde toe. Die eerste sanger wat ons kon kry was 'n Europese Rietsanger (Marsh Warbler) wat vir Quintin Knoetze 'n

nuwe een was vir sy lys. Ons het stadig vanaf die grondpad na die vleigebied begin loop. Hier het ons 'n onverwagte Afrikaanse Naguil (Fiery-necked Nightjar) hoor roep. Ander spesies was Konkoit (Gorgeous Bushshrike), Oranjeborsboslaksman (Orange-breasted Bushshrike) en Bruinkeelbossanger (Burnt-necked Eremomela). Ons het ons koffie en eet goedjies benuttig en toe die nattigheid met waterskoene aangepak.

Met die eerste tree in die vlei het ons Afrikaanse Snippe (African Snipe) opgejaag. Sangertjies wat ons hier gekry het was Kleinrietsanger (African Reed Warbler), Europese Vleisangers (Sedge Warbler), Kaapse Riet- (Lesser Swamp Warbler) en Vleisangers (Little Rush Warbler). Ander mooi spesies was Swartreier (Black Heron) en Grootkoningriethaan (African Swampphen). Ons het toe omgery na die ander kant toe van die vlei.

Net onder die damwal het ons Rooiassies (Orange-breasted Waxbill) gekry wat besig was om nes material te versamel. Almal kon hier goeie fotos kry van hierdie besondere spesie. Ons het toe die bosse ingevaar opsoek na ander sangers. Hier het ons toe 'n hele klomp ander spesies gekry en almal het baie mooi saamgewerk sodat die groep hulle mooi kon sien. Ongelukkig was die enigste



Rooiassies (Orange-breasted Waxbill) het nes materiaal versamel onder die damwal.

sanger wat ons kon opspoor 'n Tuinsanger (Garden Warbler) wat sag geroep het, maar ons kon hom nie sien nie. Van die Sprinkaansanger (River Warbler) was daar geen teken nie.

Op die ou einde was dit 'n goeie dag vir voëlkyk en ons het meer as 130 spesies vir die pentad opgeteken. Van die spesies was: Edelvalk (Lanner Falcon), Swarborsslangarend (Black-chested Snake Eagle), Witpenswindswael (Alpine Swift), Horuswindswael (Horus Swift), Goudgeelvink

(Yellow-crowned Bishop), Gewone Kwartelvinkie (Quailfinch), Kransaasvoël (Cape Vulture), Grys- en Groenrugkwêkwêvoëls (Grey- and Green-backed Camaroptera) bymekaar, en Pylstertrooibekkie (Shaft-tailed Whydah).



Edelvalk (Lanner Falcon).





## Bird ringing report: Polokwane Game Reserve 2018-03-17

Derek Engelbrecht

You would never say the summer of 2017/18 will go down as one of the driest in recent years. First, Birdlife Polokwane's annual Summer Bird Ringing Day on 24<sup>th</sup> February was cancelled due to heavy rains in the week preceding the ringing day, forcing the management of the Polokwane Game Reserve to close the reserve to avoid damage to the roads.

We postponed this popular event to the 17<sup>th</sup> March. As luck would have it, there were clear skies until the day before, but when

Billy Attard and I arrived at the Polokwane Game Reserve at 3:30 am on the day, a misty rain had started to settle in. Not deterred by the rain, we decided to go ahead and get the nets up – they are called mist nets after all. It started raining harder, however, and we were forced to keep the nets closed until about 8 am. This gave us time to have some well-deserved coffee and a breakfast bite while waiting for the



Marianne McKenzie getting some hands-on experience with ringing birds.

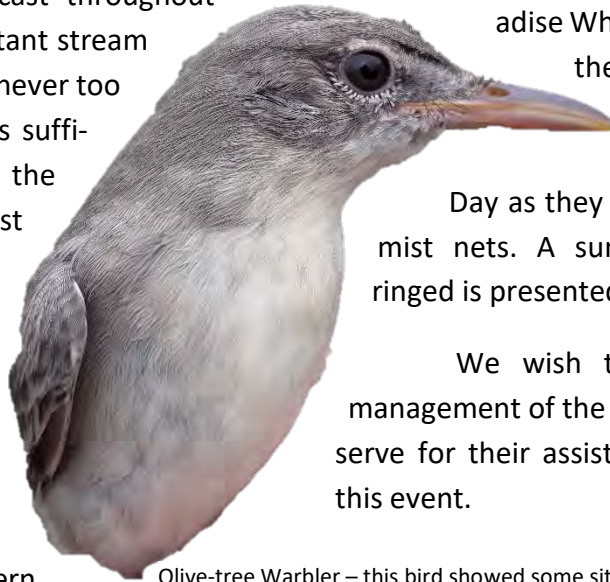


Some of the visitors who made it into the reserve having a closer look at the birds.

rain to subside. Unfortunately, and unbeknownst to us, the reserve management once again closed the reserve due to the wet roads and some of the early birders were not allowed entry into the reserve.

At around 8 am the rain had subsided sufficiently to allow us to open the nets and start catching birds. Trainee ringer, Marianne McKenzie, had joined us at this

stage and was eager to up her numbers. The nets were barely open before we had our first birds of the day: Red-backed Shrike and Green-winged Pytilia. It turned out to be a very nice day for ringing as there was hardly a breath of wind and it remained cool and overcast throughout the day. We had a constant stream of birds in the nets, but never too many, which allowed us sufficient time to process the caught birds and assist Marianne with her training. In the end, we ringed 44 birds representing 18 species. One of the highlights of the day was the first Common Waxbill ringed in the reserve. Southern Masked Weavers dominated the catch with no fewer than 15 birds ringed, followed by Red-backed Shrikes (5) and a group of Arrow-marked Babblers (4 and a retrap).



Olive-tree Warbler – this bird showed some site fidelity as it was captured at exactly the same spot in March 2017.

The retrapped Arrow-marked Babbler was ringed by Billy 4 years and 17 days earlier (1<sup>st</sup> March 2014) as an adult at exactly the same site. The Olive-tree Warbler was ringed by me on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2017 during the 2017 Summer Bird Ringing Day, making it 1 year and 13 days between ringing and recapture. This record also provides some evidence that Olive-tree Warblers show some site fidelity on their wintering grounds. The other two retraps, a Green-winged Pytilia and Blue Waxbill, were both ringed during the 2017 Spring Ring on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017 at the

same site, making the time elapsed between ringing and recapture for these two birds 6 months and 6 days.

Catch of the day? There were several contenders such as the Olive-tree Warbler, and the female Long-tailed Paradise Whydah, but we decided the Natal Spurfowl ringed by Billy was the Catch of the Day as they are seldom caught in mist nets. A summary of the birds ringed is presented below.

We wish to acknowledge the management of the Polokwane Game Reserve for their assistance and support of this event.



Natal Spurfowl - the Catch of the Day.





Some of the birds caught at Birdlife Polokwane's Summer Bird Ringing Day in the Polokwane Game Reserve on 17 March 2018. From left to right, top to bottom: Olive-tree Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Arrow-marked Babbler, Long-billed Crombec, Green-winged Pytilia, Common Waxbill, Acacia Pied Barbet, Red-backed Shrike, Chestnut-vented Warbler.

RINGING REPORT SUMMARY							
Ringing site		Polokwane Game Reserve			Date		2018/03/17
GPS		23°56'30.97"S; 29°27'45.70"E			Altitude (masl)		1300
Name of outing leader		Derek Engelbrecht			SAFRING nr.		1245
Other registered ringers		Billy Attard (#1402)					
Habitat types targeted		Acacia thornveld					
Weather conditions		Cool and overcast with rain early in the morning.					
Total number of nets erected		19		Total length (m)		228	
Net lengths		x6m	x 9m	19 x 12m	x20m		
Time first net up		8:00		Time last net closed		13:15	
Height of bottom shellf		1m					
Other traps used		None					
Birds ringed				Birds retrapped			
SAFRING nr.	Species	Immature	Adult	Ring nr.	Roberts nr.	Species	
183	Natal Spurfowl		1	4A62958	432	Arrow-marked Babbler	
316	Cape Turtle-dove		3	AR97291	597	Olive-tree Warbler	
432	Acacia Pied Barbet		1	AR79203	830	Green-winged Pytilia	
533	Arrow-marked Babbler		4	L97103	839	Blue Waxbill	
586	Kalahari Scrub Robin		1				
588	White-browed Scrub Robin		1				
621	Long-billed Crombec		2				
637	Neddicky		2				
654	Spotted Flycatcher		1				
658	Chestnut-vented Warbler		1				
708	Red-backed Shrike		4				
780	White-browed Sparrow-Weaver		1				
792	Lesser Masked Weaver		1				
803	Southern Masked Weaver		15				
830	Green-winged Pytilia		3				
839	Blue Waxbill		1				
843	Common Waxbill		1				
852	Long-tailed Paradise Whydah		1				
Total number ringed			44	Total number retrapped			4
Number of species ringed			18	Species retrapped			4
Total birds caught			48	% Retraps			8.3



## What's on your garden list?

**Jody De Bruyn**

About 10 months back we moved into our new home in Polokwane. It has a small garden and is situated near a busy road and an open veld. On the day we

moved in I started adding birds to my garden list.

Within the first few days I managed to add birds that I expected to find in the area like House Sparrow, Cape White-eyes, Dark-capped Bulbul, Laughing Dove, Karoo Thrush, African Palm Swift, White-bellied Sunbird and Spectacled Weaver just to name a few.



Then, as we started to settle down after unpacking boxes and re-arranging the furniture for the tenth time, I started adding a few unexpected species like a flyby of a Cape Vulture, a Familiar Chat flitting its wings while perched on top of the roof, small groups of Wattled Starlings speeding by, an African Harrier-Hawk doing some low flybys and a Crimson-breasted Shrike calling from the adjacent veld. My list consists of species that I find in and around the garden: these include birds that fly overhead and birds that I can ID on sound – they all make it onto my garden list.

As it was winter when we moved in, I was amazed at the amount of bird activity. There were many bird species passing by the area and new species were added to my garden list on a regular basis. I would think that the main reason for all the bird



Red-headed Finch.

movement would be that they were looking for food. My list was building up quite nicely . . . 30 . . . 40 . . . 50 species. To top it all, summer was still to come, and the opportunity for many migrant species to be added onto my list.

As summer approached, some migrant species started to appear overhead and around the garden. I recorded Red-chested Cuckoo calling its distinctive piet-my-vrou call, White- and Abdim's Stork flying overhead, had brief visits of a Garden-



White Stork.

and several Willow Warblers, and had the late afternoon skies filled with swifts and swallows. Here is a list of some of the more special birds I've seen or heard from my garden: Long-billed Crombec, Yellow-billed Kite, White-browed Sparrow-



Garden Warbler.

Weaver, Cardinal Woodpecker, White-browed Scrub Robin, Amethyst Sunbird, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Egyptian Goose, Marabou Stork, Black-chested Prinia and a Coqui Francolin.

One morning as I got back from a jog around 6 am, I found a Common Buttonquail on the front door patio. I don't

know who got a bigger fright, me or the little buttonquail, but the bird managed to make a well-manoeuvred fleeting escape over the house and into the veld. The last bird I added to my list came at 2 am in the morning. It was a Fiery-necked Nightjar calling at full force from the roof. This was also the 80<sup>th</sup> bird I added to my garden list.



European Bee-eater.

With the days shortening again and winter approaching, make sure that your feeders are stocked up. You will be surprised at the numbers of birds that will be visiting them. This could also be the perfect opportunity to hone your photography skills. What have you seen in your garden?



## Garden birding in Magoebaskloof

Dalena Mostert

When I moved into a house in the Magoebaskloof area about two years ago, there were no birds due to the fact that the previous residents had five cats and no garden except for a lot of alien vegetation. First thing we had done was to clean up the garden and started to plant bird-friendly plants like Wild Dagga and a whole array of *Aloe* varieties. At first it was very frustrating as nothing came to the garden. The quick and easy way would have been bird feeders, but they also attract the monkeys that were already a problem. The beginning of summer brought a pair of Lesser Striped Swallows that bred under the veranda and slowly but surely African Firefinch, Black Flycatchers, Cape White-eyes and lastly some robin-chats arrived. I was so excited to see Chorister Robin-Chat along with White-browed and Cape Robin-Chat at the bird bath. From time to time a raptor or two would pay us a visit of which a Crowned Eagle was undoubtedly the most interesting.

Since the house is situated on a ridge with Georges Valley on the east and Magoebaskloof in the west with water entities on both sides, it is just natural to have African Fish Eagle flying over from time to time or hear it calling at the dam down in the valley. I was most surprised to also have a small flock of six Cape Parrots paying the pecan nut tree a visit for a week or

two. Just after Christmas a pair of Olive Woodpeckers decided that it was a great neighbourhood to raise their chicks. We only found them due to the constant and adamant demand for food by the youngsters and even though they are not resident, you still see and hear them from time to time.

Then the big surprise came when we arrived back home from a 3-week holiday and discovered a pair of Bat Hawks had taken up residence in, what we think, are False Mastic Trees. We also have a huge Forest Fever Tree and some mature Kukui (Candlenut Tree) trees in the garden. All these trees are around 30 m tall and in summer these trees, especially the False Mastic Trees, provide thick shade to the garden. Initially, we would see the two hawks flying out to the Magoebaskloof Dam and the dilapidated saw mill area at dusk and then we'd see them returning early in the morning while we were having our coffee on the veranda. The foliage where they tend to roost is so dense which makes it very difficult to see them, but one Saturday morning (14 April 2018) they perched on a lower and more exposed branch which allowed for some photo opportunities.

We often wondered where they would have come from, but then also for years I had been wondering where the offspring of the resident pairs in the area go. Rooikoppies is visible to the west of the garden and for many years, there was a pair breeding in the *Eucalyptus* trees there. Also, Agatha Forest on the Georges Valley side with their resident pair, is only a stone's throw away. Furthermore, there is





Top-notch garden birds - a pair of Bat Hawks!

another pair near Westfalia Estates that had been seen for quite a while and when visiting the guesthouse on the farm at dusk, you would see a pair flying between the Forest Fever trees and the giant *Eucalyptus* a little further away.

We were worried that the monkeys would bother them, but the Bat Hawks seem quite at ease with them and even with our dogs going after the monkeys. Since there is not much disturbance, except for the normal garden activities like mowing the lawn, we hope that they will eventually breed here. The False Mastic Trees will soon start shedding their leaves, but the Forest Fever and Kukui trees will provide enough shelter against the onslaught of winter in Magoebaskloof. Hopefully, by this time next year, we will have

good news of a pair successfully raising a chick.



## Club outing to Hout River Dam and 'Larkville'

**Minkie Prinsloo**

On Saturday 14 April 2018, nine of our club members ventured out to Hout River Dam and 'Larkville' (the Chebeng grasslands), hoping for a good day of birding and, if lucky, some lifers. So, I guess you could say, we got lucky.



Birdlife Polokwane members at 'Larkville'.

We arrived at the dam, put on our gumboots and off we went. On our way towards the inflow of the dam we found a pair of Yellow-billed Ducks, Namaqua Dove, African Stonechat and Cape Longclaw. As we approached the dam we could hear some Lesser Swamp Warblers calling, there were loads of Red-knobbed Coot, Little Grebe, Three-banded and Kittlitz's Plover and we also saw a Purple Heron, a pair of African Swamphen, Red-billed and Hottentot Teal. Searching the reeds produced Orange-breasted and

Common Waxbill as well as Levailant's Cisticola. We were surprised to see a Goliath Heron fly up and perch in a nearby tree. On the way back to the cars, we had excellent views of the Orange-breasted Waxbills, even finding a pair mating.

Back at the cars, we exchanged our gumboots for our 'tekkies' and moved along to the southern shore to enjoy a cup of coffee. Whilst drinking our coffee, we saw Red-capped Lark and Spur-winged Goose and even a glimpse of an African Snipe. As we slowly walked along the dam, we found a lovely pair of Temminck's Coursers. We also walked along the reeds searching for a nice photo opportunity of the elusive Quailfinch - let's just say they were camera shy.



One of the surprises of the day - Goliath Heron.

Off we went to Larkville, with a couple of us hoping for that lifer. On the way we found a beautiful Greater Kestrel. We arrived in 'Larkville', expecting to find ourselves some larks. Instead, we found Plain-backed Pipit, African Pipit, another Plain-backed Pipit, and another Plain-backed Pipit and wait, what's that, another Plain-backed Pipit! I guess we took the wrong road and ended up in



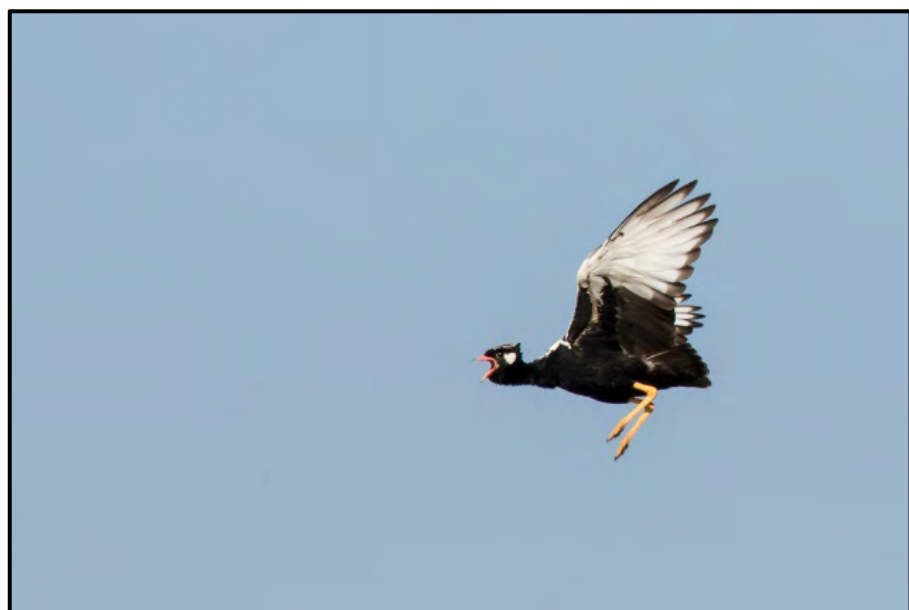


The ever-popular Temminck's Courser was one of the highlights of the outing.

Pipit Plains! We stopped to look at another pipit: what's that on the ground? Probably another... oh, wait... it's a lark! Our first lark, a Spike-heeled Lark, the first of many for the day. We got some good views of them during our walk.

row-Lark, Cape Penduline Tit and along a small valley, a Long-tailed Widowbird. Heading back to our cars we found more Spike-heeled Larks, Sabota Lark and an Ant-eating Chat.

Heading through the grass we found a little surprise - a Northern Black Korhaan chick. We didn't stick around, as we wanted the parents to return before their chick became a meal for something else. Moving along, we found Desert Cisticola, Grey-backed Spar-



Northern Black Korhaan at Chebeng.



We enjoyed a well-deserved cold drink and started heading back to the tar road. We stopped once more on the way out and this delivered Violet-eared Waxbill and a single Short-clawed Lark.

We had a lovely morning of birding, finding more than 70 species, and quite a few lifers for a couple of the group members. As I said, we got lucky. Thanks to Richter Van Tonder for organising the outing.



No trip report to Larkville would be complete without a picture of the stars of the show - larks: in this case a Sabota Lark.



## Bird photography tips:

### flight shots

**Jody De Bruyn**

Birds spend a lot of time flying. Don't miss out on these photographic opportunities and let your photography of birds be limited to birds perched in trees or at a feeder. Here are a few tips to help you. With a bit of practice, you too can get great photos of birds in flight.

**Tip #1: Drop the tripod ... handheld is the way to go!**

There are many advantages to handheld photography. The ability to spot a moving bird and then act swiftly on it, is by far the biggest advantage. If you are stuck behind a tripod waiting for birds to move past your lens, you will miss out on many great opportunities. The speed at which you will be able to react to a prospective situation increases, while your range of motion and flexibility to change your position or angle quickly will allow you to get the shot more readily.

### Tip #2: Equipment

When it comes to the selection of camera equipment, everybody has their favourite manufacturer. Whether you use Canon, Nikon or any other make of camera, most of the modern cameras would have settings that make photographing birds in flight not only possible but also easier. Try to equip yourself with a lens that has a focal length of at least 300 mm and a maximum aperture of F2.8, F4 or F5.6. The smaller the number of the F-stop, the



Little Bittern.

faster the lens will be able to acquire focus on the subject.

**Tip #3: Camera settings: shutter speed**

Depending on the size of the subject you are trying to photograph, your shutter speed should be set at a minimum of 1/1200<sup>th</sup> of a second for large subjects like herons, large raptors, flamingos, geese, storks and ibises. Many of these birds have large wings and slow flight patterns. For smaller birds or birds with more rapid and erratic flight patterns, your shutter

speed should be at a minimum of 1/2500<sup>th</sup> of a second. At these speeds you should be able to freeze the bird and most of the wing motion. When I try to photograph small, rapidly moving birds, I like to get my



Lanner Falcon.



Yellow-billed Kite.

shutter speed up to at least 1/3200<sup>th</sup> of a second.

**Tip #4: *Camera settings: ISO and F-stop***

Your ISO and F-stop will need to be in line with the shutter speed you are trying to achieve to ensure that you get a correctly exposed photo. If you use a lens with a high maximum F-stop like F5.6 or F6.3, then you would have to raise your ISO levels to accommodate the reduced amount of light entering the lens. This means that you could be looking at ISO 1000, ISO 1200 or even ISO 1600. Lenses that have a F-stop of F2.8 or F4 will allow you to have a lower ISO level, but you will still be able to maintain a high shutter speed.

**Tip #5: *High-speed Continuous shooting***

You want to have your camera set to High-speed Continuous mode. So, once

you press your shutter button all the way down, it starts taking photos as quick as it possibly can. Why are we taking so many photos, you may ask? In many cases, and more so with smaller birds that have a faster wing action, not every photo will be sharp and not every photo will have the bird showing the best wing action or angle. Having many photos to choose from allows you to select the best-looking photo. Digital memory cards are cheap compared to old film technology, so make sure you take lots of photos.

**Tip #6: *AI Servo autofocus mode and focus points***

You want to set your camera to AI Servo mode (Canon) or Continuous/AF-C (Nikon) mode. When your shutter button is halfway pressed down, your camera will





Examples of focus points.

start focusing on the subject you are aiming to photograph. You will be able to follow the subject through your viewfinder and your camera should continuously adjust focus on the subject as it moves closer or further away from you. Having the centre group of focus points (9, 16 or 25 points) enabled makes it easier to keep the bird focused in the viewfinder. As your skill level increase, you can try using only a single centre focus point. This can give you much more accurate focusing, but it can be very difficult to keep focus on the subject as it moves about.

### **Tip #7: *Line up your camera and start shooting***

Get to an area that has a reasonable amount of bird activity. A spot next to a dam, pond or wetland where you have birds flying by at regular intervals are always a good choice. These areas usually attract some of your slower, larger flying birds like herons, geese, ducks, egrets, ibises and cormorants. Stand with the sun at your back as this will give you the best possible light on the subject which in turn will allow you to get your shutter speed high enough to freeze the action in mid-air.

Be aware of your surroundings and the general direction or area from which the birds will fly from and fly to. Once you have your sights on a bird that will pass by your shooting area, start focusing on the bird even though the bird could still be far off. Do not continuously half-press your shutter button to maintain focus, but rather follow the bird through the viewfinder and every so often half-press (tap) your shutter button to get the bird back into focus. By trying to keep focus on the bird while continuously half-pressing your shutter button, I have found that the autofocus system can lose focus on the subject and focus on something else instead, and this in turn will make you lose the prospective shot.

Once the bird enters your shooting area, half-press your shutter button to ensure you are locked onto the bird and start firing away! Start off by taking photos of the birds while they are still relatively small (far off) in your viewfinder. Once you get confident with your new-found ability, you



White-faced Whistling Duck.

can try photographing them at closer distances. But remember, birds that are closer to you are much more difficult to track, as your own tracking movement needs to speed up to match their speed as they fly by.



Grey Heron.

If you know a bird will pass by a specific area, then it can help to pre-focus in that area. This will allow you to lock onto your target much quicker, and you will be able to get the shot. I have taken many photos of birds that are out of focus, with

only legs in the frame or only the head in the frame and a few shots with the whole bird missing from the frame. The only way to get that special shot is to get out in the field and start practicing.

Hoping to see a few of you out and about . . . pointing your camera at our flying, feathered friends.



## A job well done – Abigail Ramudzuli

Derek Engelbrecht

Many of us will know Abigail from the bird outings and meetings she attended the last year or two. Abigail graduated with a BSc (Honours) degree in Zoology from the University of Limpopo on 17 April 2018. As part of her degree, Abigail investigated possible mechanisms responsible for substrate colour-matching in larks. Not only did she pass her research project with a distinction, she also received distinctions for two of the four theory modules!

Abigail recently presented the results of her honours research project at the Learn About Birds (LAB) Conference which



was part of Flock on the West Coast 2018. Here she received the runner-up prize for the Best Student presentation at the conference.

Abigail decided to spread her wings and leave her nest at Turfloop. She registered for an MSc at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town. For her MSc she is attempting to unravel the migration patterns of Woodland Kingfisher through the analysis of moult and stable isotopes.

On behalf of the club, I wish to congratulate Abigail on her excellent work so far and we wish her all the best with her studies. We are looking forward to a talk at the club once you have your results.





**BIRD OF THE MONTH**  
**QUAILFINCH *Ortygospiza atricollis***



A flock of Quailfinches gathering at a waterhole.

The Quailfinch *Ortygospiza atricollis* is certainly one of the most overlooked of the seed-eating birds in the region. Its small size and elusive behaviour makes it easy to miss – but good views of it are extremely rewarding.

Although Quailfinches are notoriously difficult to see, they are more common than one might imagine. Their presence is usually revealed by their distinctive metallic calls, but once their presence has been confirmed, it takes patience and a bit of luck to actually see them on the ground.

The Quailfinch is distributed throughout the grasslands and savannahs of Africa. When it comes to habitat selection, the Quailfinch is not a fussy client: any open grassland or lightly wooded area, including cropland and fallow fields and everything in between suits it down to the ground, as long as there is surface water nearby. Speaking of ground, the name is derived from the bird's habit of spending almost all its time on the ground and exploding from cover, in the manner of a true quail, at the last possible moment when threatened. This is a survival strategy as most of their danger

comes from above. In the face of danger, they have the peculiar habit of presenting their barred undertail coverts towards the source of the threat. It is believed that this helps to breakdown the bird's silhouette making it difficult to see, and perhaps also to disguise the red bill and striking head patterns.

Identification is quite simple and males are rather unmistakable with their all-red bills during the breeding season (two-toned when not breeding), barred breasts, cream-coloured underparts and white 'spectacles' around the eyes. Females are overall drabber in colouration, have a two-toned bill, less barring on the breast and smaller spectacles around the eyes.

During the non-breeding season small flocks of around 10 birds can often be heard and seen flying together in search of water or food. In the breeding season, which is usually from January to April, the groups disperse and pairs can often be seen carrying nesting material during this time of the year. Nest construction is performed by both partners and the nest is a thick-walled ball of grass, lined with feathers and other soft materials. Eggs are laid at 1-day intervals with clutch sizes varying between 3 and 6 eggs. The eggs are incubated for 15 days by both sexes and

chicks fledge after another 18 days. Overall, the Quailfinch is one of the most overlooked, yet fascinating finches, in the region. Keep an eye (and ear) open for them next time you go birding!

### **Where and When?**

Quailfinches can be found almost anywhere where there are open grassy areas with lots of bare ground and a source of surface water nearby. Although they tend to be more vocal in the non-breeding season, when individuals in a flock call constantly to maintain contact with each other, they are sufficiently vocal that one would pick them up even during the breeding season. Setting yourself up at a small waterhole in the morning should be best – all you have to do is wait for these cryptic critters to come to you.



Weighing in at less than 0.9 g, a newly hatched Quailfinch nestling fits on a 5c coin with plenty of room to spare.



## REGULARS

### Bird briefs

#### White Stork recovery in Polokwane

Derek Engelbrecht

On 19<sup>th</sup> February 2018, Tomas Prins came upon a sick White Stork on his property out on the Soetdorings Road outside Polokwane. Interestingly, the bird had a ring (ring number V2721) and knowing that Billy Attard is a registered bird ringer, he contacted Billy for assistance. Billy collected the bird and took it to the Wolkberg Veterinary Clinic.



The White Stork's ring. SKB is the ringing scheme in Slovakia.



White Stork V2721. © Billy Attard.

There were no visible injuries to this bird, but the vets noticed some blood in the throat. As this is one of the symptoms of the H5N8 virus responsible for avian flu, they took the cautious approach and sent a sample to the state vet for further testing. In the meantime, the bird was placed on a drip but, unfortunately, died during the course of the night.

Billy asked if I could try and trace the origins of this bird. From the SKB inscription on the ring I could see it was a Slovakian ring. I reported the record to Birdlife Slovakia and I was sent a report a couple of days later.

The bird was ringed as a nestling on 24 June 2015 by Peter Pjenčák in the tiny village of Jastrabie Nad Toplou in Slovakia. The distance between the ringing locality and the recovery site is 8125 km and the time elapsed was 972 days (or 2y 7m 28d). It is possible that this bird may have completed the trans-Africa trip five times in its short life. Well done Billy! Yet another interesting ringing report from our region.





The picturesque village of Jastrabie Nad Toplou in Slovakia where the White Stork was ringed as a nestling in 2015. From <http://www.slovakregion.sk/jastrabie-nad-toplou>.



Google Earth map showing the straight-line distance between the ringing and recovery site of White Stork V2721.



## A sparrow hawking Little Sparrowhawk

Daniel Engelbrecht

One of my favourite garden birds is the local Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter minullus*. It has made a habit of visiting our garden to see what the bird feeder (from the Little Sparrowhawk's perspective) has to offer. Elusive as it may be, it is always a great bird to see.

Whilst putting birdseed out at my birdfeeder one morning, I noticed a small raptor feeding on something in the tree above. I made a quick dash into the house to grab the camera but unfortunately the bird had moved into denser cover in the

tree, effectively concealing itself whilst feeding. Eventually, I managed to get a few photos and saw that the sparrowhawk had caught a female Cape Sparrow *Passer melanurus*.

The unfortunate victim probably came down to feed and instead ended up as a meal herself. It was an interesting observation and it proves just how opportunistic these 'hood hunters' can be. Our garden feeder is now part of the daily foraging route of the sparrowhawk. For a species relying on the surprise element during hunting, I often wonder why it announces its arrival in the garden by calling its distinctive call. Surely its prey would then be on high alert. However, judging by the feathers I sometimes notice at the feeder, the Little Sparrowhawk's visits to our garden are often rewarded.



A true Little Sparrowhawk with its prey – a Cape Sparrow.



## Western Cattle Egret's successful predation of a Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark

Derek Engelbrecht

I read Geoff Goetsch's note in the previous issue of *The Lark*, regarding an unsuccessful attempt by a Western Cattle Egret to swallow an African Pipit, with interest (Goetsch 2018). It reminded me of a similar scene I witnessed a couple of years ago. In this instance, a Western Cattle Egret managed to catch an incubating female Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark and it succeeded in swallowing it. Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks rely on their cryptically coloured plumage to escape detection while nesting. They will remain motionless and typically only flush at the last possible moment. In this instance, the female was incubating when a congregation of egrets were foraging in the field she was nesting in. The female clearly misjudged the speed of the egret's strike and was caught. The egret vigorously shook and pounded the sparrow-lark's body for about seven minutes before orientating the corpse head first and sending it down the gullet.

Although invertebrates form the bulk of the diet of Western Cattle Egrets, they are known to eat small birds such as Cape Sparrows, Cape White-eyes and Red-billed Queleas (Dean 1972; Skead 1997; Hähner 2018). Given that the size of Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks and

African Pipits are more or less equal, it is quite possible that African Pipit falls well within the size range of birds Western Cattle Egrets are capable of swallowing

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Western Cattle Egret preparing a female Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark for swallowing.





## A mouthful of stingers – a scorpion feeding frenzy by Southern Ground Hornbills

Daniel Engelbrecht

The Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* is an opportunistic hunter, feeding on a very large variety of prey items. Up to 30% of these prey items are captured by digging in the ground and the most common captures include termites, dung beetles, grasshoppers, snails, frogs, a variety of reptiles, birds and even

small mammals. Occasionally scorpions are

consumed. Records are, however, relatively sparse and generally only small numbers of these invertebrates are consumed and recorded in their diet.

Whilst out on an early morning game drive from Talamati Bushveld Camp to Skukuza Rest Camp in the southern Kruger National Park on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February



Southern Ground Hornbill with a few scorpions - and a frog.



Mind the stinger!

2018, we came across a foraging party of three Southern Ground Hornbills. The birds

were walking in an orderly fashion, repeatedly stopping to catch prey items. I took a few pictures to see what they were carrying in their beaks and after inspecting the images closely, I soon discovered that the birds were catching frogs and, surprisingly, scorpions. While I was watching the birds (5-8 minutes), at least seven scorpions were caught, along with around five

frogs. The scorpions appeared to all be of the same species (probably *Opisthophthalmus glabrifrons*) and the large pinchers and rather small tails suggest they were relatively harmless.

The hornbills' behaviour puzzled me as I had never seen ground-hornbills catching so many scorpions in such a small area and in such a short space of time before. Were these birds simply the 'scorpion kings' or was it an opportunistic feeding frenzy?

After thinking of some possible answers to their scorpion feeding frenzy, I came to the conclusion that after the previous night's rain, the scorpions may have been more active on the surface. For example, the softer, rain-soaked soil could have allowed them to dig new burrows, perform maintenance activities to existing burrows or, alternatively, they were foraging on other invertebrates that emerged after the good rain. The fact that several frogs were also captured in the same area suggests the scorpions and frogs were probably feeding on invertebrates such as termites when the hornbills found them.

Although not often reported in their diet, it is clear that these opportunistic foragers will not turn a blind eye to a scorpion, despite the risk of injury.

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**Upcher's Warbler:**  
**Southern Africa's second confirmed sighting?**

**Jody De Bruyn**

I scanned the thick bushes and listened intently for the bird's distinctive call . . . but there was nothing. This was what I found when I tried a suitable spot for River Warbler near the village of Makotopong, about 25 km northeast of Polokwane on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2018. As I packed up ready to leave, yet another Rattling Cisticola jumped around in a bush close by and seemed to mock me with its well-known call.

On my way out of the area, the habitat became drier with sparse grass cover, lots of stony bare ground and scattered trees and shrubs. Every few metres I would spot something ... a Marico Flycatcher ... a Red-backed Shrike ... yet another Rattling Cisticola ... and then ... a warbler actively foraging on a bush. Now that seemed a bit strange.

What I saw was a warbler with an overall grey colour and white underparts. The tail seemed long and dark. The bill was two-toned and intermediate in size. The legs and feet were grey in colour. My mind raced, baffling to place the ID. It couldn't be any of the reed warblers as the habitat was totally wrong and the colour of the bird didn't fit. Ahhh ... a Marsh Warbler, no no! Wrong colouring again. Not a Garden Warbler - shape and bill size didn't match.



Upcher's Warbler at Makotopong.



Icterine Warbler - wrong colour again. What about an Olive-tree Warbler? Although the Olive-tree Warbler has an overall grey colour, it has a large, robust bill and long elongated looking head with a low gradient slanting forehead. The Olive-tree Warbler is also a large bird, and the warbler I was looking at wasn't large at all.

So, what was the bird I was looking at? Fortunately, I managed to get a few pictures of this mystery bird and these were sent to warbler experts around the world (and locally). The majority of replies came back with the same conclusion – UPCHER'S WARBLER. This makes it only the 2<sup>nd</sup> substantiated sighting of an Upcher's Warbler (Vaalspotsanger) in the southern African region, although it still has to be accepted by the South African National Rarities Committee!!

Below follows a couple of features that were highlighted by the experts and that may aid in future to identify Upcher's Warbler.

- i) It has a large broad dark square tail, with white tail edges and white tips on the tail feathers, (see below),



- ii) The bird projected white wing panels (see image below),



- iii) The spacing of the tertials were uneven (see below),



- iv) It has a relatively short primary projection past the secondaries,
- v) The bill is of a moderate size,
- vi) The slope of the forehead is much steeper compared to an Olive-Tree Warbler (*Ed. See the forehead of a handheld Olive-tree Warbler on page 6 in this issue*),
- vii) The bird also appeared 'thick-necked',
- viii) It had a pale eye-brow stripe that doesn't extend past the eye,

- ix) It had pale, unmarked cheeks and face (see below),



- x) The bird's foraging method was also typical of an Upcher's Warbler as it was foraging on and around the outside of bushes, and frequently descended to forage on the ground.

Upcher's Warbler is a Palearctic migrant that spends its winter (our summer) in semi-arid savannahs of East Africa, e.g. Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania. But why would a little warbler overshoot its wintering grounds and travel an extra 3 500 km's down to the Polokwane area? Was this a one-time occurrence? Could there have been more than one bird that made this journey? Interestingly, the first record of Upcher's Warbler in southern Africa was in September last year, when a single individual provided the twitch of a lifetime when it was seen by many people at the Tankatara Saltworks near Port Elizabeth.

So, when you're out and about, birding or just enjoying nature, keep your eyes peeled as you could be the next person to spot something out of the ordinary.



## Return of the lost lark –

### Polokwane's Melodius Larks

Derek and Daniel Engelbrecht

If there is an equivalent to Bigfoot or the Lochness Monster in South Africa, then the Melodius Larks of the Limpopo Province must be contenders. The only difference, is that these elusive birds are at least seen from time to time and, fortunately, we can provide credible evidence for their existence.

The first known records of Melodius Larks in the Polokwane region date from February and March 1906 when Captain Claude HB Grant, an ornithologist at the British Museum of Natural History, collected birds in the area. He managed to collect five specimens at Witkop, what is now the quarry next to the Polokwane Game Reserve (see Sclater and Grant 1911). Below is a short extract from the text about the Melodius Larks from Polokwane: *'This lark was found only on the flat open grass veld near Witkop Hill, close to Petersburg. There some numbers were seen, always singly; and the striking habit of the bird, soaring and singing in the morning and late afternoon, much after the manner of A. arvensis [Eurasian Skylark], at once drew my attention to it. During the heat of the day it is found among the longish grass and can also be seen feeding on open sandy spots. The food, apparently, is principally of grass-seeds. As only males were secured, the bird must have been breeding, but no females could be flushed. The soft parts are: Irides bright brown; bill upper*



*mandible horn-brown, cutting-edge of upper and lower mandibles pale yellowish horn-colored, legs and toes fleshy brown*. These specimens are now in the ornithological collection of the Natural History Museum at Tring in the United Kingdom.

A few years after Grant collected the Witkop specimens, hunter, author and professional specimen collector, Frederick Vaughn-Kirby, collected a female on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1909 on the farm Blinkwater near present-day Morebeng (Soekmekaar), about 86 km northeast of Polokwane. This specimen is now in the collection of the Ditsong Museum of Natural History in Tshwane (Museum number: 7484).

I recently went to Blinkwater to see firsthand what the habitat at Blinkwater looks like – and of course hoping to see a Melodius Lark. Well, you couldn't imagine a more unlikely area for Melodius Lark: the rolling foothills of the northern Drakensberg mountain range, trees like Knobthorn, African Teak and even Baobabs, and birds like Southern Black Tit, African Green Pigeon and Croaking Cisticola are combinations not usually mentioned in the same breath as Melodius

Lark. I was told the name Soekmekaar (translated as 'looking for each other') stems from two land surveyors who got lost in the mist which so frequently envelops the area. After visiting Blinkwater and seeing such atypical Melodius Lark, I couldn't help but think that Mr Vaughn-Kirby perhaps also got lost in the mist and got his collection locality mixed up.



The Blinkwater Melodius Lark is in the collection of the Ditsong Museum of Natural History. © Tersia Perregil

After Vaughn-Kirby's collection, the species then went unrecorded in the Limpopo Province for about 80 years before it was recorded in the SABAP1 years (1987-1991) in grasslands somewhere

between Kuschke and Bergnek, southwest of Polokwane. Unfortunately, the details of the observer and locality of this record is now lost, but we know the record is from the month of July.



Blinkwater in 2018. Not what one would describe as prime Melodius Lark habitat.



History repeated itself and after the SABAP1 record, the species seemingly vanished until Joe Grosel rediscovered a few individuals in July 2013 near Moletzie, about 20 km to the northwest of Polokwane.

The now familiar pattern of ‘now you see me now you don’t’ then repeated itself. Despite some search efforts to relocate *Melodius* Larks in that area and the Chebeng grasslands since 2013, we failed to record the species until Daniel and I heard a single bird in song flight in January 2018. This bird was displaying over grassland west of Perskebult, about 15 km northwest of Polokwane.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2018, Daniel and I were birding at the Sterkloop Wetlands

just outside town. We were trying to get recordings of a Short-clawed Lark when we flushed a little brown bird. It was small and had very distinctive, white outer tail feathers. My first impression was that it was a Bushveld Pipit, but I wasn’t 100% sure, so we tried to flush it again. This time around we could see a distinctive rufous wing panel. That excluded Bushveld Pipit and suggested we were dealing with a *Mirafra* lark. There is only one *Mirafra* lark known to occur in our area which fits the size and white outer tail feathers of the bird we saw – *Melodius* Lark. As if to confirm our identification, the bird burst into the distinctive song flight of *Melodius* Larks and we actually managed to get a recording of the bird performing a song flight. After an absence



Just as grainy as any good picture of Bigfoot or Nessie, but this photo shows the *Melodius* Lark in song flight at Sterkloop Wetlands, with the city in the background.

of nearly four years, the lost Melodius Larks of Polokwane were seen again! Our record of the 30<sup>th</sup> March was less than 3 km from town and less than 10 km from Witkop, where Grant first collected the Houdini of larks in the Limpopo Province.

From these records, it appears as though Melodius Larks may potentially occur over quite a large area centred on open, grassy areas on the Polokwane Plateau, but in all likelihood, they are extremely sparsely distributed and it may require more than a little bit of luck to meet with them.

Melodius Larks seem to have a reputation for wandering widely and hiding in plain sight. For example, Davies (2011) confirmed the presence of Melodius Larks on the Patlana Flats near Lake Ngami in Botswana, based on a detailed study of museum study skins. The Patlana Flats bird was collected about 600 km from the nearest populations of this species in South Africa. Although no Melodius Larks have been recorded in that area in the 50 years since it was collected, Davies (2011) is of the opinion that Melodius Larks may well still exist in the Lake Ngami area. To back his argument, he cites Vernon's (1982) note about the rediscovery of Melodius Larks in the Bedford and Queenstown area in 1981, nearly a century after the last bird was recorded in that area! Masterson and Parkes (1993) were also puzzled by the unexpected appearance and breeding of



Melodius Lark photographed at Sterkloop Wetlands, just outside Polokwane City.

Melodius Larks near Felixburg in central Zimbabwe. The general consensus about these birds, is that the birds were more than likely present in the area all along but were simply overlooked. Melodius Larks seldom take to the air unless they display, and when they are flushed, they seldom stay around to offer a second chance of a look. There is also a possibility that these isolated populations (e.g. central Zimbabwe, the Lake Ngami region, Eastern Cape and the Polokwane Plateau) away from the species' core distribution range in South Africa's grasslands, may be nomadic, appearing in an area when suitable conditions arise, stay for a season or two and then move elsewhere.

The Melodius Larks have rightly been referred to as the Walter Mitties of the lark family (Vernon 1990). It is well worth getting familiar with its call and to get out there to help us track down this elusive species so that we can better understand the movements of this enigmatic, isolated population.

**Acknowledgements:** I wish to thank Greg Davies for providing me with some of this information and Tersia Perregil at the Ditsong Museum of Natural History for taking pictures of the Blink-water specimen and also assisting with some information about it.

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# BIRDING SAFARIS

## 1989

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<p><b>BOTSWANA</b>  <b>7 to 12 November</b> with Ken Newman          the Okavango Delta staying at Tsaro Lodge, Xaro Lodge          and Jedibe Island Camp. <span style="float: right;">BWP2 400,00</span></p>	<p><b>MALAWI</b>  <b>15 November to 1 December</b> with Geoff Lockwood          Viphya, Nyika, Chintheche, Cape Maclear, Liwonde,          Mt Mulanje and Lengwe. <span style="float: right;">±R2 900,00</span></p>
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## 1990

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<p><b>MALAWI</b>  <b>17 to 28 March</b> with Geoff Lockwood          Dzalanyama, Lengwe, Mulanje, Liwonde and the lake. <span style="float: right;">±R3 000,00</span>  <b>17 October to 2 November</b> with Ian Davidson          Dzalanyama, Nyika, Misuku Hills and northern          lakeshore. <span style="float: right;">±R3 300,00</span>  <b>5 to 23 November</b> with Ian Davidson          Lengwe, Liwonde, Cape Maclear, Chintheche, Nyika,          Viphya and Dzalanyama. <span style="float: right;">±R3 400,00</span></p> <p><b>MOZAMBIQUE</b>  <b>6 to 12 April</b> with Ian Davidson          Bazaruto and Margaruque Islands in lodges. <span style="float: right;">±R3 150,00</span></p>	<p><b>NAMIBIA</b>  <b>10 to 24 March</b> with Ian Davidson          Waterberg, Etosha, Damaraland, Swakopmund and          the Erongos. <span style="float: right;">±R3 200,00</span>  <b>26 November to 12 December</b> with Ian Davidson          Waterberg, Popa Falls, Etosha, Damaraland,          Swakopmund and the Erongos. <span style="float: right;">±R3 200,00</span></p> <p><b>BOTSWANA</b>  <b>25 to 31 March</b> with Ken Newman or Peter Steyn <span style="float: right;">±R3 600,00</span>  <b>11 to 17 November</b> <span style="float: right;">±R3 600,00</span>          3 lodges in the Okavango Delta.</p>
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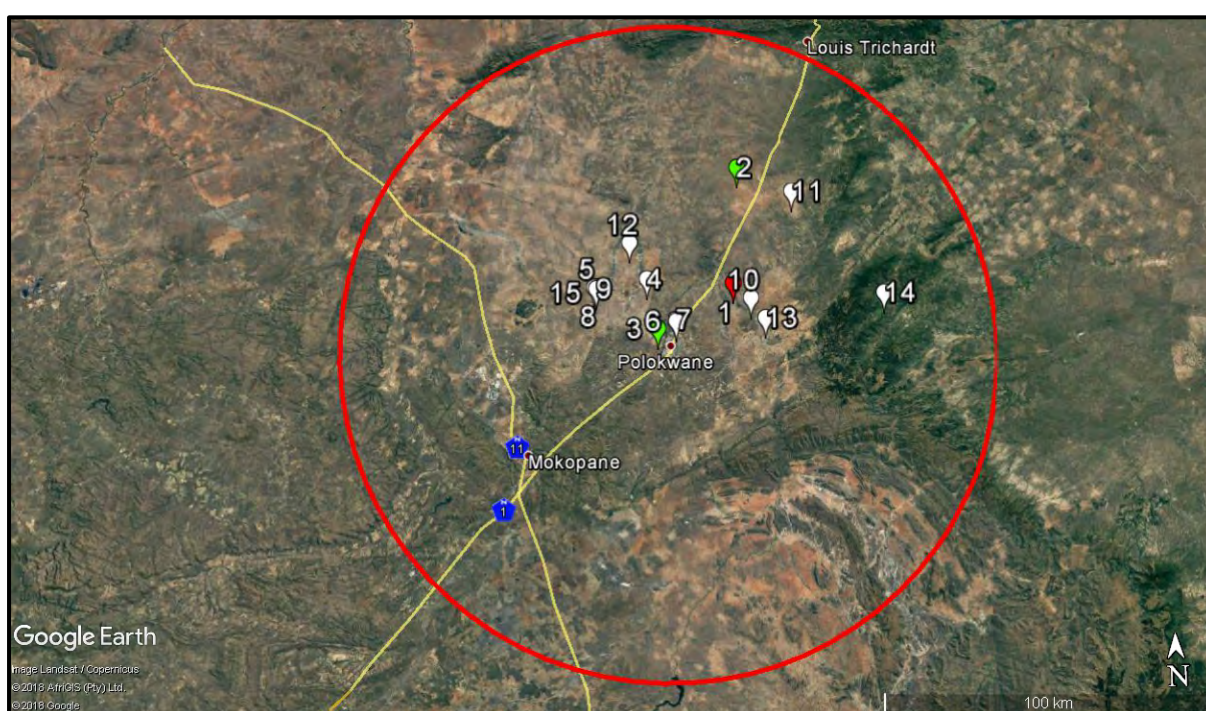




## Interesting recent sightings in the Polokwane 100 km

**15 February – 15 April 2018**

Share your interesting sightings, interactions, behaviour etc. seen in your garden or elsewhere within a 100 km radius of Polokwane. Please submit your sightings to [thelark-news@gmail.com](mailto:thelark-news@gmail.com) and include the date, locality and a brief write-up of your sighting. Photos are welcome but will be used by the discretion of the editors.



### National rarities

1. Upcher's Warbler - 29 March 2018. A single bird seen near the village of Makotopong east of Polokwane. See article in this issue (Jody De Bruyn).

### Regional rarities

2. Burchell's Sandgrouse - 27 March 2018: A single bird flushed in short grass at the village of Sekakene (Derek Engelbrecht).

3. Melodius Lark - 30 March 2018. A single male seen at the Sterkloop Wetlands west of Polokwane City. See article in this issue (Derek and Daniel Engelbrecht).

### SABAP2 ORFs



2 © Derek Engelbrecht

4. Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark - 31 March 2018: Small flocks seen in the grasslands at Ramongwana and Vencor (Derek Engelbrecht).

5. Goliath Heron - 14 April 2018. A single bird seen by all during a club outing to Hout River Dam (Richter Van Tonder).



5 © Richter Van Tonder

#### **Best of the Rest**

6. African Crake - 20 February 2018. A single bird seen in a garden in Eduan Park, Polokwane (Charles Hardy).



6 © Charles Hardy

7. Common Buttonquail - 28 February 2018. One was seen and photographed in Billy Attard's garden in Eduan Park, Polokwane (Billy Attard).



7 © Billy Attard

8. White-fronted Plover - 18 March 2018. A single bird seen at Hout River Dam (Daniel Engelbrecht).



8 © Daniel Engelbrecht

9. Grey-headed Gull - 18 March 2018. A single bird at Hout River Dam (Daniel Engelbrecht).

10. Horus Swift - 24 March 2018. A few individuals seen at the University of Limpopo Experimental Farm (Richter Van Tonder).





9 © Daniel Engelbrecht



12 © Derek Engelbrecht



10 © Richter Van Tonder

11. European Honey Buzzard - 27 March 2018: A single individual was seen in the village of Eisleben northeast of Polokwane (Derek Engelbrecht).

12. White-bellied Bustard - 31 March 2018. A flock of three birds seen next to the tar road near the village of Ga-Matamanyane (Derek Engelbrecht).

13. Southern Bald Ibis - 10 April 2018: Two individuals foraging on the sports fields of the University of Limpopo (Susan Dippenaar).

14. Bat Hawk - 14 April 2018: A pair roosting in a garden for the past three weeks. See article in this issue (Dalena Mostert).



14 © Dalena Mostert

15. Black Heron - 15 April 2018. An individual doing its umbrella-thing at Hout River Dam (Daniel Engelbrecht).





## SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Derek Engelbrecht

This series features an old (30+ years) and a new (less than five years old) bird-related article.

### Something old

I came across this letter to the editor in Honeyguide 50 of 1967. Unfortunately, the Pillans' solution to the problem is still all too familiar even in this day and age. There are many innovative but sometimes surprisingly simple solutions to problem birds and animals, without having to resort to killing the problem animal. Just speak to a few people and you are bound to find a 'green' solution to the problem. The fact that Mrs. Pillans was willing to put pen to paper and write to the editor of an ornithological journal to express her dismay at the egg thief, demonstrates that she probably had the best interest of the bird in mind. Let's hope the harrier-hawk survived and the Pillans were not 'forced' to shoot the bird.

#### Unusual behaviour of a Gymnogene.

Dear Sir,

According to Roberts' "The birds of South Africa" a Gymnogene "subsists only upon small animals like frogs, mice and large insects that are easily captured", Perhaps they do, but we have one frequenting our property which is taking a great toll of hen's eggs! Two years ago this bird came to our property, and started tearing one of the Hammerheads' nests to peices. We frightened it away with the .22, and saw it no more for a long time. Some weeks ago it appeared again, and has been seen just about every day since.

This morning it ate about half a hen's egg which had been laid outside the fowl-house, and then went up into a tree and cleaned off its beak on the branch. Later, when my husband was collecting the eggs (we are poultry farmers) he found the bird right inside the fowl-house on the nest eating another egg. He pecks a smallish hole on the side of the egg to get at the contents.

We have been puzzled for a long time about this birds apparent tameness and the way it frequented the fowl runs, and was often to be seen perched on the top of the houses. Now the mystery is explained, and we do not know how many eggs he steals each day. We are most reluctant to shoot it, but it would appear that we shall be forced to. So far it has only been the Pied Crows that have entered the fowl-houses and stolen the eggs.

Mrs. O Pillans.

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## Something new

While driving through the Karoo on our way to Flock on the West Coast, we saw quite a few Karoo Korhaans and we were delighted to also see a Ludwig's Bustard. The paper below paints a gloomy picture for the future of these stunning birds.

Shaw JM, Reid TA, Schutgens M, Jenkins AR and Ryan PG 2018. High power line collision mortality of threatened bustards at a regional scale in the Karoo, South Africa. *Ibis* 160: 431-446.

### Abstract

Quantifying avian collisions with power lines at large spatial scales is difficult, but such mortality is of serious conservation concern for many bird species worldwide. To investigate effects on the Endangered Ludwig's Bustard *Neotis ludwigii* and two other bustard species, mortality surveys were conducted quarterly along high-voltage transmission lines at five sites (total length 252 km) across the Karoo for 2 years and one low-voltage distribution line site (95 km) for 1 year. Thirty bird species were found, with Ludwig's Bustards constituting 69% and other bustards a further 18% of carcasses ( $n = 679$  birds). Significant explanatory variables of Ludwig's Bustard collisions were season (collisions more likely in winter), rainfall (less likely in drier areas) and year on transmission lines (highlighting variability between years). Season and proximity to roads were significant variables on distribution lines, with collisions more likely during winter and away from roads. Ludwig's Bustard collision rates (corrected for survey biases) were higher on transmission (1.12; 95% confidence interval (CI) 0.40–2.58 bustards/km/year) than on distribution lines (0.86; 95% CI 0.30–1.96), but these smaller lines are four times as extensive in South Africa and so probably kill more birds. Despite being much less abundant, Kori Bustards *Ardeotis kori* were the second most commonly recovered species, with collision rates of 0.10 (95% CI 0.05–0.19) on transmission lines in the Nama Karoo alone. Collision rates are highly variable but suggest mortality suffered by these two species is worryingly high. This adds to growing concern about the impacts of power lines on bustards globally, so given ongoing expansion to the power grid, collision mitigation measures should be implemented at all new power lines.

For more information, you can e-mail the author at [shawmjessica@gmail.com](mailto:shawmjessica@gmail.com).



Ludwig's Bustard © Jody De Bruyn



## IMPORTANT ENVIRONMENTAL DATES: May/June 2018

Date	Event
22 May	International Day for Biological Diversity
23 May	World Turtle Day
05 June	World Environment Day
08 June	World Oceans Day
17 June	World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought



## UPCOMING CLUB EVENTS

Date	Event	Contact
08 May	Birdlife Polokwane monthly meeting, Polokwane Golf Club, 18:30	LG
12 May	Club outing to Iron Crown	RVT
19-20 May	LBJ Course – Grincourt Nature Reserve and in the Polokwane Game Reserve	LG
05 June	Birdlife Polokwane monthly meeting, Polokwane Golf Club, 18:30	LG
09 June	Club outing to Mockford Vulture Restaurant	RVT
03 July	Birdlife Polokwane monthly meeting, MotoX Clubhouse on the Silicon Road, 18:00	LG
19-22 July	Limpopo Honorary Rangers Mapungubwe Birding Experience	CH
26-29 July	The 'Art of Tracking' course – Thornybush Game Reserve	LG

Lisa Grosel – LG (083 380 2322); Richter van Tonder – RVT (082 213 8276); Charles Hardy – CH (083 457 1721)



<b>Birdlife Polokwane</b>	
P.O. Box 699	
Fauna Park	
0787	
Tel: 015 263 6473	
<a href="http://www.birdlifepolokwane.co.za">www.birdlifepolokwane.co.za</a>	
<a href="https://www.facebook.com/birdlifepolokwane">www.facebook.com/birdlifepolokwane</a>	
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