

THE LARK

The Birdlife Polokwane Magazine 34, March/April 2021

Tree Pipits

RE-TERN 2 C

My Spring Fling
PART 2

Tagged vulture resightings • The life of the Hooded Vulture • Bird names in Venda
• African Pygmy Kingfisher 'diet' • Sooty Falcon showering • Bronze-winged Courser migration
• Waterberg Wonderland • Whydah and quail feeding behaviour •
Monotonous Lark at Bylsteel – again • Kalahari Spur Grass

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The Lark is the newsletter of Birdlife Polokwane and is published bimonthly. It publishes reports of club activities, trip reports, photographic contributions and any natural history notes of birds or events involving birds. Contributions are accepted in English or Afrikaans and are accepted at the discretion of the editors. Non-members are also welcome to contribute, especially if it is of relevance to birds or birding in the Limpopo Province. When submitting images, please submit high resolution images without any borders, frames or signatures.

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DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE:

15 APRIL 2021

This newsletter is best read in a 'two page view' format.

COVER *Black-bellied Bustard*
© Brian Steele-Drew

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A hopeful twitch turned into a rescue effort of Sooty Terns blown inland by Cyclone Eloise. Read more about **Derek** and **Daniel Engelbrecht's** rescue effort.



FOR A LARK ...



Southern 'Red-bulled' Hornbill © Derek Engelbrecht.

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Editor's chirps

Slow down 2021! Amidst the rush of a new year starting, we had almost non-stop birding action since our last edition. A cyclone, tropical storm, loads of rain in January - it all happened! If specials like Pectoral Sandpiper, Corn Crake, Green Sandpiper, Pallid Harrier, Lesser Jacana and Palm-nut Vulture are only mentioned in passing conversation, you know we had it good up here in the Limpopo Province. A glut of epic rarities such as Northern Wheatear, Collared Flycatcher, Striped Crake, Sooty Falcon and Northern Carmine Bee-eater got the adrenalin pumping. Still, the occurrence of seabirds such as Sooty Tern, Bridled Tern and Great Frigatebird gracing the score sheet in a landlocked province such as ours was really the cherry on top. Roll on 2021 - let's see what else you can offer us. You can read more about these and other exciting sightings from page 83 to 90.

We also had our first club outing of the year, the ever popular visit to the Wolkberg and Iron Crown. Thanks to Amri for your trip report. You can also read part 2 of Daniel's account of how he juggled studying for matric finals with a youth birding challenge, and read about Derek and Daniel's efforts to rescue some Sooty Terns blown inland by Cyclone Eloise. Our Bird Briefs section is packed with interesting notes, as always. A special word of welcome to first time contributor Lindy Thompson for her article about Thea's life.

Finally, a hearty congratulations to the 2021 club committee elected at our first virtual meeting of the year.

We hope all our readers enjoy this issue, and we are looking forward to your contributions.

Raelene and Daniel





escaping covid ... to find Tree Pipit

Tree Pipit © Jody De Bruyn

Amri Van Aarde

On Saturday, 23 January 2021, some Birdlife Polokwane members went exploring to find the Tree Pipit. For me, it was a happy escape from human drama,

the Covid-stress and just reconnecting with nature. Nature has a way of doing just that - taking you away from it all and earthing you as gravity, clean air and sounds pull you back into your authentic

self. As an inexperienced birder, I learned a great deal more than I bargained for. From the names of fauna and flora to the tufa rock formations. How wonderful it was to be surrounded by so many en-

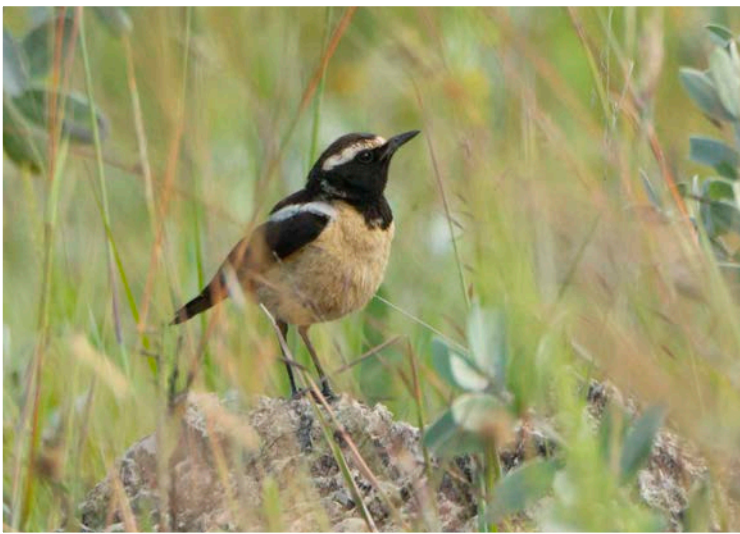
thusiastic people wanting to share their love and passion with me.

We entered the Wolkberg Wilderness area where Willem Van der Merwe shared various plant names and facts - half of



Something for everyone

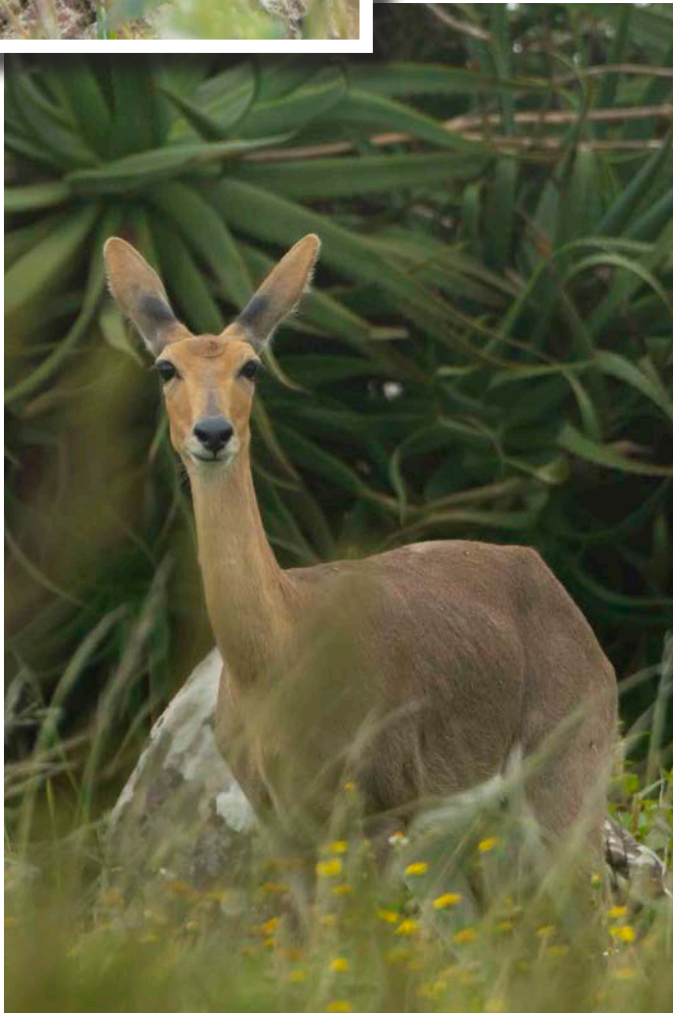
TOP TO BOTTOM. LEFT TO RIGHT, The impressive tufa formation in the Wolkberg Wilderness area © Derek Engelbrecht; The gorgeous Protea roupelliae © Amri Van Aarde; A Citrus Swallowtail © Amri Van Aarde Black-spotted Dwarf Gecko © Ruan Stander; Elegant Grasshopper © Amri Van Aarde; Van Dam's Dragon Lizard © Ruan Stander.



LEFT A male Buff-streaked Chat - one of the highland specials © Daniel Engelbrecht.

BELOW A good view of a very elusive antelope - a Mountain Reedbuck ewe © Daniel Engelbrecht.

which I would probably never remember! We were fortunate to see some Mountain Reedbuck in the distance. Before descending down into the Mispah valley, a stop at some Proteas rewarded us with views of Gurney's Sugarbird, Malachite Sunbird, Buff-streaked Chat, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and a fly-by of African Olive Pigeons crossing the grassland on their way to another patch of forest. The 'herpers' also found some interesting reptiles here, including a Black-spotted Dwarf



Gecko and Van Dam's Dragon Lizard.

Down in the valley we stopped at a spot frequented by Tree Pipits in previous years. We were very fortunate to find them with relative ease, and listening to the others, we were quite fortunate to have seen at least six individuals on the day. After I saw its restricted distribution on my



Black Saw-wing © Daniel Engelbrecht

Roberts Birds application, I realised how privileged I was to be there at that exact moment. A short walk rewarded us with good views of Black Saw-wings, Lesser Honeyguide, Golden-breasted Bunting, Common

BELOW Another highland special - Gurney's Sugarbird - seen at Iron Crown © Derek Engelbrecht.



Scimitarbill, Neddicky and some had good views of an Ovambo Sparrowhawk.

Driving the last stretch up to Iron Crown was a rather bumpy ride. For us ladies this can sometimes be quite a scary thing to endure, but I actually enjoyed it as the adrenaline started flowing a bit. Bouncing along, we came upon a herd of Mountain Reedbuck with their prominent white, furry tails. These skittish antelope quickly leapt away to the safety of some rocks where they kept a wary eye on our convoy of 10 cars. I got to see a male Malachite Sunbird (another lifer!), who shared this

journey with me. I hope to revisit this area shortly, spending more time up there with fluffy-tailed rhebok and sunbirds.

It is an eerie feeling when the mist covers the mountaintops - a different kind of beautiful. Then, suddenly, I heard someone say, 'It has a golden yellow body'. We were looking for snakes now!

This was an incredibly diverse company with whom I found myself. Some people were there to see the Tree Pipit for the first time; oth-

BELOW Our convoy slowly snaking and 'not-so-gently' rocking its way up to Iron Crown, the highest point in the Limpopo Province at 2126 masl.



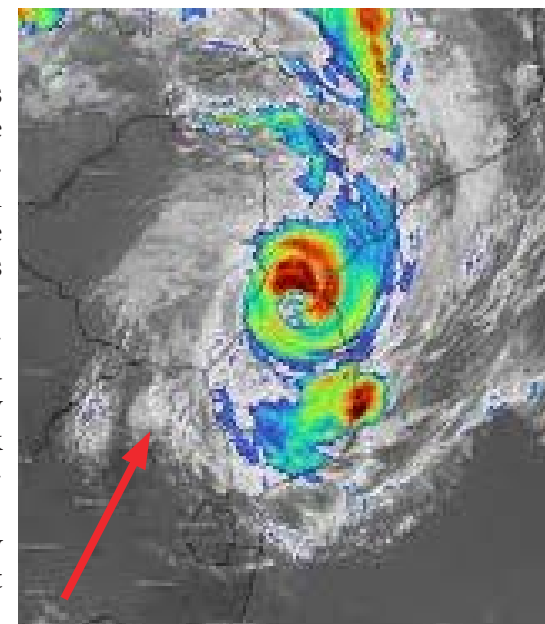
ers to document new flowers, trees or lizards. I just wanted to escape into nature where I can just breathe. How fortunate we are to have such beautiful places to visit to share these wonders that enrich our souls in such diverse ways.

As the warnings about the approaching Cyclone Eloise started to bombard our phones, we knew it was time to head home. We took one last picture of a Common Buzzard on our way home.

I added 11 new lifers for the day and simply can't wait for our next outing. I also realised that birding has no limitations - not age, language, race or financial standing. I had found a company of nature lovers who, for a while, allowed ourselves to forget the heartbreak, sorrow, and fear that Covid had brought into our lives. For a short time, we actually lived and connected with nature once more. I made new friends and learned much more than I had anticipated.

The best part? I have found people that I can now call friends ... and I saw the Tree Pipit.

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ABOVE A Common Buzzard escorted us down the mountain © Bossie Bosman.

TOP With Cyclone Eloise approaching the Limpopo Province, rain and windy conditions put an early end to our first club outing of the year. The red arrow is pointing to the Wolkberg region.

MY SPRING FLING



Grey-headed Kingfisher

This is Part 2 of my Spring Fling Youth Birding Challenge. Part 1 can be read in *The Lark* 33.

Two hundred and ninety four species, 1st place, 72 days remaining. After a day like no other, birding between the forests of Magoebaskloof and the Lowveld of Letsitele (see Part 1), the situation regarding the Spring Fling Challenge was that simple. I spent the next three days around Polokwane, only managing to add two additional species; Shelley's and Coqui Francolin. Things were, however, about to change drastically. I checked the leader board online and was shocked to see that I was down into second place. Jordan Ralph added over 80 species



Black-throated Wattle-eye

PART 2: THE FINALS

Text and Photos Daniel Engelbrecht



Yellow-billed Oxpecker

and was now sitting comfortably on 308 species! My confidence was somewhat taken aback, but what lay ahead was undoubtedly going to be a weekend to remember. I was off to Blouberg Nature Reserve and the Limpopo River valley.

Blouberg Nature Reserve is conveniently placed as it offers some of the best broad-leaved woodland birding within the reserve. It is also relatively close to the Limpopo River where several range-restricted (in South Africa at least) species reside. For the first two days, I spent most of my time birding these woodlands where I added, amongst others, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Bearded Scrub Robin, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Crested Guinea fowl and Grey Penduline



Tit. However, the real specials came on one of the night drives in the reserve. I managed to add an astonishing six owl species including Verreaux's and Spotted Eagle-Owl, Southern White-faced, Western Barn and African Scops Owl as well as Pearl-spotted Owlet. Along with the owls, Freckled and Fiery-necked Nightjar were numerous. I also managed to track down my main target for Blouberg - the elusive Three-banded Courser.

The morning of the 26th arrived, and before dawn, we were on the road heading north to the Limpopo River. I had a list of five target species here, and even before we had come to a standstill, I managed to tick off three of them. Tropical Boubous were duetting from the

vines, Meves's Starlings flew across the road in their raucous flocks, and a pair of Meyer's Parrots darted from one of the large Ana Trees. I wasted no time getting ready for the walk as this part of the world gets unbearably hot - at 8 am the mercury was already cresting 34°C. Fortunately, the riverbanks were lined with lush vegetation which provided some welcome shade. Barely five minutes into my walk, a large bird crashed out of one of the towering Nyala Berries above me. I stumbled with excitement to a vantage point and sure enough, on

ABOVE Excitement building at dusk in the Blouberg Nature Reserve - time for Three-banded Coursers to start emerging from their daytime hide-aways.



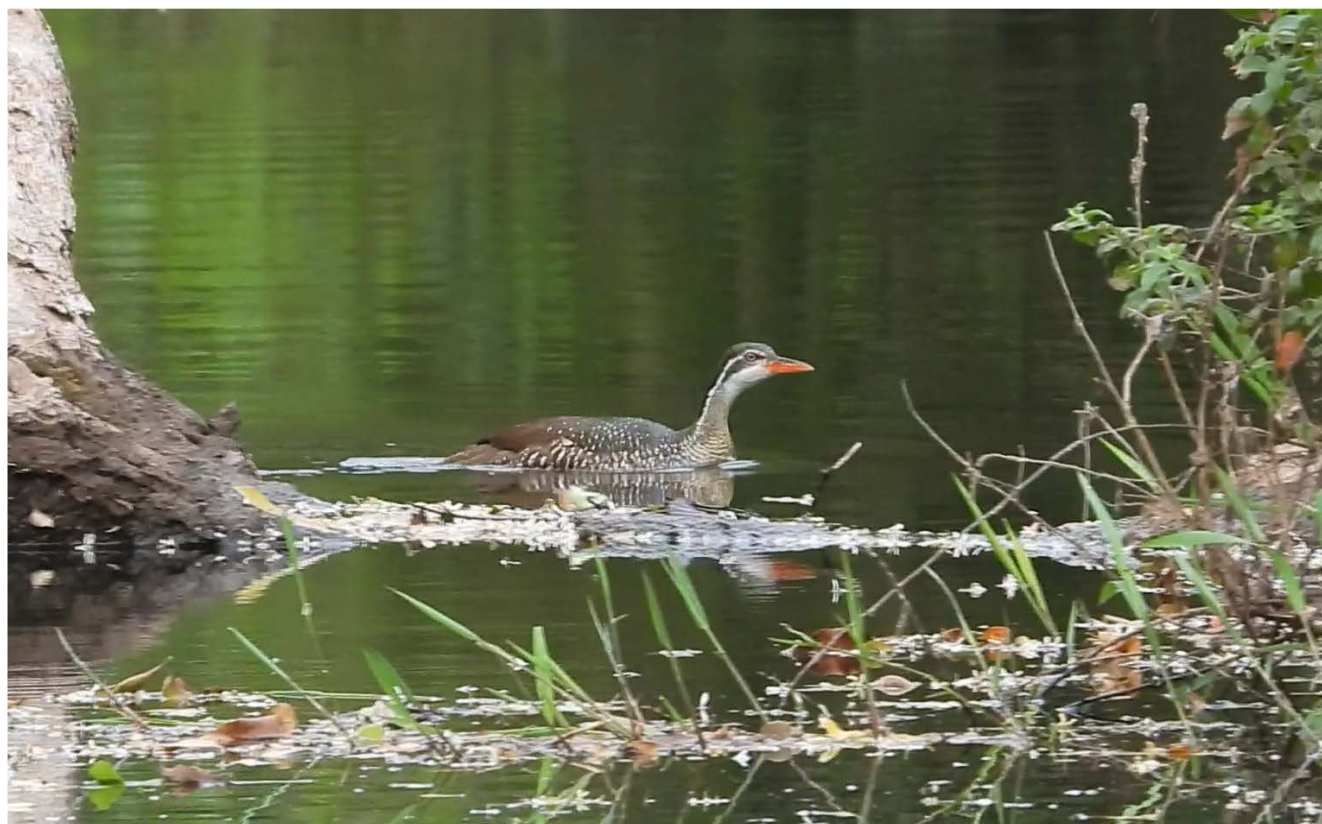
ABOVE The ginger giant - Pel's Fishing Owl - was surprisingly easy to find.

the opposite side of the bank, there was an orange-brown owl- it was a Pel's Fishing Owl and species number 320. The temperature increased rapidly and, thankfully, whilst looking for my fifth target, I added a bonus Southern Ground Hornbill along with the number five on the list of target species - White-crowned Lapwing. We headed back to Blouberg at 11 am, just as the

temperature hit 45°C! All in all, I added an incredible 30 species over the weekend. I had also come to realize that no matter how safe I thought my score was, it was always within reach of my competitors, and so it was time to head into the heart of the Lowveld.

After three hours on the road, the car came to a halt in Hoedspruit. For the next two days, I would focus on connecting with a number of the southern Kruger National Park specials and those more typical of the northern Drakensberg. The sun started setting shortly after our arrival. A quick drive within the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate provided me with sightings of Burchell's Starling, Village Indigobird and a single African Barred Owllet calling from the trees on the banks of a dry riverbed. Day two in Hoedspruit saw us heading west to-

wards the Blyde River. The key target here was African Finfoot, a species that I had failed to locate several times during the challenge. We arrived at the site and waited. An hour passed, still no bird. I moved a few meters upstream, another hour gone. Just as I was about to retreat to the car, a ripple appeared from behind some reeds,



I watched with intent, and sure enough, a female African Finfoot emerged from the foliage. I shakily took a few shots, retraced my steps back to the car, and we were off once again, this time to the east. I added three additional species in the form of Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, African Reed Warbler and Peregrine Falcon with a short detour on our way to Open Gate and the Kruger National Park.

ABOVE A White-headed Vulture was one of the first species on the score sheet as we entered the Kruger National Park.

OPPOSITE A good share of perseverance rewarded me with this female African Finfoot swimming by.

It started raining shortly after we arrived in the park. As a result, most birds of prey were grounded, unable to take off in the poor conditions. For me this was ideal. I added Martial and Tawny Eagle, Bateleur and both White-headed and Lappet-faced Vulture within



*ABOVE Taking a break from the birding
- lions near Orpen, Kruger National
Park.*

the first 5 kilometres. The rain then arrived in earnest. The remainder of my southern Kruger adventure only delivered three new species to my challenge list: Kori Bustard (#350), Woolly-necked Stork and Brown-headed Parrot. The mammals also showed up, with amazing views of eight lions, three cheetahs and several hyenas. I dipped on Senegal Lapwing but arrived in Polokwane on October the 1st with 356 species. I had a marginal lead in the first place, and the eastern Soutpansberg started calling my name.

The eastern Soutpansberg mountains are somewhat of a slice of tropical Africa laid down in the heart of the Limpopo Province. High rainfall and lush subtropical thickets characterize the hilly

landscape. As a result, several elusive yet spectacular birds inhabit the area. We passed through Louis Trichardt and met up with local bird expert Samson Mulaudzi to track down our targets. First on the menu was African Broadbill and boy, did it give us the silent treatment. We ducked through various tangles and vines, walked in and out of riverbeds, and after over an hour, we heard the distinctive “prrrrrrrrrup” call. It took some time before we located the bird, but our patience paid off with not one but three African Broadbill sightings.



ABOVE Having covered some distance to find African Broadbill, I was about to call it a day when we heard its distinctive call. It took quite a while to get a decent view of the male in the undergrowth.

Next up was White-backed Night Heron. As we scanned the Levubu River, we were graced with yet another marvellous African Finfoot sighting. Unfortunately, this wasn't helping my cause. Eventually, we managed to locate one White-backed Night Heron (#364) after it started calling from a patch of papyrus, and on our way back to the car, a pair of Brown-necked (or Grey-headed) Parrots made an appearance (#365).

I knew very well that the final two targets of the day would be the toughest. We drove through several villages and turned off onto a gravel road. On our left, a small patch of thicket lay adjacent to a Macadamia plantation - prime real-estate for

the bird in question. I walked along a small agricultural road between these contrasting habitats. Suddenly I noticed a small dove drinking

from a puddle in the road - yellow tip to the bill, blue spots on the wing. There was no doubt - it was my target, Blue-spotted Wood Dove.

The final target of the day came along with a host of surprises. I found African Pygmy Goose surprisingly quickly and added White-backed Duck, Allen's Gallinule, Squacco Heron and even an African Skimmer, all of which were unexpected bonuses. I had #370 in the bag, but would it be enough to see me through the drought



ABOVE Red-backed Mannikins showed well - and then I had to head back to the books as my matric finals started the next day.

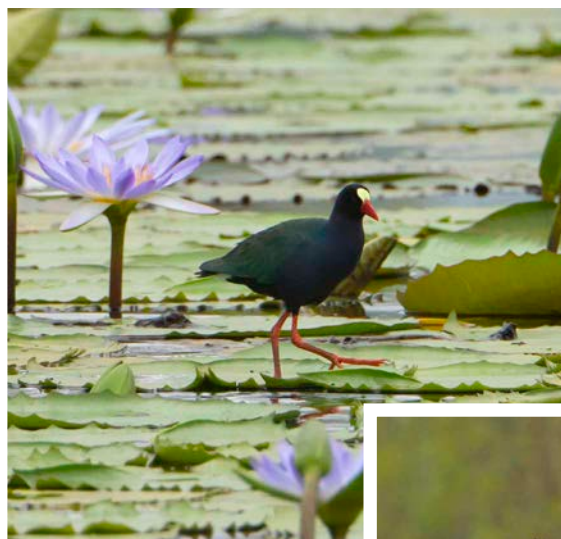
of additions coming up with my final matric exams?

My final exams started on Monday, and I had one day left to target some of the forest species that I had dipped on at the beginning of the challenge. We headed for Kurisa Moya. I quickly cleaned up my forest species with Red-backed Mannikin, Forest Canary, Square-tailed Drongo and White-starred Robin. For the next few weeks, I made a couple of brief sorties around Polokwane. Actually, I added a surprising number of species: Green Sandpiper at a seasonal pond, Flappet Larks displaying in the Waterberg, Fan-tailed Grassbirds calling in the grasslands, and a Shaft-tailed Whydah, amongst others, taking me up to 399 species. What would 400 be

I hear you ask? Well, #400 came in the form of a group of Pied Avocets which decided to show up at a dam east of Polokwane.

The days ticked by quickly and my time was running out. The inevitable then happened ... I checked the scores online and found that I had been overtaken, Jordan Ralph was on 434 species. On the other hand, I was sitting on 402 after a surprise Eurasian Curlew, and Fulvous Whistling Duck pitched up outside Polokwane, the day before my Physics exam!!

I had one last place that I still had to visit - the northern Kruger Na-



My eastern Soutpansberg excursion really paid dividends in the afternoon with views of African Skimmer (RIGHT), Allen's Gallinule (ABOVE) and African Pygmy Goose (TOP).



tional Park. I knew that it could see me past Jordan's total of 434 as I could still add a number of the classic Kruger specials. So we decided to drive north through the park from Phalaborwa Gate to our accommodation at Punda Maria. The species started rolling in with additions of the Kruger classics such as Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Mosque Swallow, Saddle-billed Stork, Steppe Eagle and Goliath Heron. However, the biggest surprise of the trip came in the form of four Caspian Plovers which decided to show up at a heavi-

ly overgrazed waterhole. It was soon apparent that the further north we went, the drier the bush became. My heart sank. This was not what I was hoping for. The drier conditions meant that I would need to work hard for my targets up here and work I did.

We arrived in camp at Punda Maria just after 4 pm. There was still some

RIGHT Arnot's Chat is a perennial favourite on my lists.

OPPOSITE Studying physics or a lifer close to home? The photo gives the answer.



time to target Arnot's Chat – a highly localized specialist of these northern woodlands. It took about an hour before we finally laid eyes on a male sitting atop one of the tall Mopani trees. Still, I managed to add two bonus birds of prey, Amur Falcon and Eurasian Hobby, taking me up to 420 species.

Day two was yet another early start, and as we rolled out of camp before dawn, I spotted a nightjar lying in the road ahead, large and no white in the wings. Could it be Pennant-winged Nightjar? Suddenly, the bird took off and disappeared into the darkness before I could take a photo. The thoughts came rushing in, what if it was a Pennant-winged? But what if it wasn't? I had to accept that there was no way to definitively

ID the bird, so it would need to remain a mystery.

We drove for an hour and a half and arrived at a dismal scene. Pafuri was dry, drier than I had ever seen it before. The birds were quiet, and the elephants had destroyed a considerable amount of what used to be pristine woodland. Surprisingly, however, the specials started rolling in; Böhm's Spinetails fluttered with their bat-like wings along the riverbanks, Trumpeter Hornbills called their wailing calls from the fig trees, Black-throated Wattle-eyes and Southern Yellow White-eye foraged in the canopies and Lemon-breasted

BELOW Southern Yellow White-eye near the Pafuri picnic site in the Kruger National Park.



ABOVE Crowned Hornbill kept us entertained in the Punda Maria Rest Camp in the Kruger National Park.

Canaries came down to drink at some pools in the Levubu River. However, one bird decided not to play along and we spent the better part of more than four hours searching to no avail for Racket-tailed Roller, one of the only target species I dipped on during the challenge. I can confidently say that on the 26th November 2020, there was not a Racket-tailed Roller visible from the road north of the Levubu River in the Kruger.

The next day we left the park and made a slight detour to Maku-leke Dam. This proved to be the right decision as it delivered four unexpected additions: Olive-tree Warbler, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Whiskered Tern and Grey Plover. I was up at 438 species and back into the first place. However, this time I would not relinquish my position in first place again. I spent the final week of what was

probably the best three months of birding I'd ever experienced between Polokwane and Tzaneen. On November the 28th I added my final species for the challenge on the Letaba River. A single Black Sparrowhawk sealed the deal on 450 species.

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I wish to thank Adam Cruickshank and the team at The Birding Life for initiating and supporting the Spring Fling Youth Birding Challenge. It was a great idea and we all enjoyed it. We are looking forward to this year's challenge.





GOING PLACES ... THE LARK IN ANTARCTICA

We are delighted that *The Lark* now has readers on all seven continents, including the frozen one - Antarctica! One of our former members, Makhudu Masotla, sent us this picture of himself

with the latest issue of *The Lark*. He is well-known to some of us. He has written a few articles for *The Lark* and presented a memorable and very entertaining talk to Birdlife Polokwane about his year on Marion Island as a re-

search scientist. Makhudu is currently in Antarctica, conducting aerial censuses of Emperor Penguins and Snow Petrels, studying aspects of the breeding ecology of Snow Petrels, and collecting Emperor Penguin poop!

Thank you for reading *The Lark*, Makhudu, and we trust you enjoyed it. We are all looking forward to reading about your trip in a future edition of *The Lark*.

Raelene and Daniel

re-tern 2 c



Our Sooty Tern rescue effort

Derek and Daniel Engelbrecht

Cyclones always bring a sense of expectation ... where will it go, how much rain will it bring, what damage will it cause, and for birders, what 'fallout' will there be in the wake of the cyclone? Fallout occurs when severe weather such as strong winds, heavy rains or cold conditions, brought about by cyclones or

cold fronts, drive birds into regions where they don't usually occur. Drained of energy to fight the conditions, and their inability to find food on land, these birds become so exhausted that they quite literally 'fall from the sky'. With cyclones in the Mozambique Channel typically making landfall along the central and southern Mozambican coast, there is



always the possibility that birders in the Limpopo Province may find Indian Ocean seabirds blown inland by the strong winds. This allows birders to add some unusual species to their regional bird lists - and birders often 'flock' to areas hit by a cyclone to do just that.

On the 23rd January 2021, Cyclone Eloise made landfall near Beira in Mozambique, bringing about much destruction as it moved west towards Zimbabwe and South Africa. By the time it reached the Limpopo Province on the 24th of January, it was degraded to a tropical storm. However, heavy rains and strong winds still caused substantial

ABOVE There is something about a grounded Sooty Tern which tugs on the heartstrings. These images were posted by various observers on different social media platforms.

flooding and damage to infrastructure in places.

The first birding effects of the storm reached our phones on Monday 25th January. John Adamson, Head Guide at Letaba Rest Camp in the Kruger National Park, reported three Sooty Terns flying along the Mphongolo River near Shingwedzi Rest Camp. On the 26th January 2021, our phones were abuzz as one

report after another came in of sea-bird fallout in the Lowveld and Waterberg region. Most reports were of Sooty Terns, but there were also a few sightings of Great Frigatebird.

We happened to be in the Lowveld at the time when Dalena Mostert reported a stranded and exhausted Sooty Tern found at the Politisi Sawmill. The bird was very weak and in need of veterinary care, or else it would die. We then hatched a plan to use various social media platforms and bird alert groups to report sightings to us. We would then arrange transport of the birds to the Wolkberg Veterinary Clinic where they would be stabilised and receive treatment to regain their strength. Our hope was that they would eventually regain sufficient strength, allowing us to take them to the northern KwaZulu-Natal coast where they would be released - hence the 're-tern 2 c' rescue effort. The public's

response to our request was heartening, and we were surprised how quickly the word spread. The next morning, Lana and Steven Hoffman from Levubu brought us three birds from the Soutpansberg region. By now, our rescue effort was well-known, but we were always going to be in a race against time...

Sooty Terns are essentially pelagic seabirds of tropical and subtropical oceans, well-known for their ability to remain airborne for years and only to return to land to breed. They may occasionally perch on flotsam or floating debris at sea or briefly alight on the water's surface in calm seas. Still, they are regarded as one of the most aerial of all birds globally - yes, even sleeping on the wing! By the time our campaign started reach-

BELOW The four Sooty Terns at the Wolkberg Veterinary Clinic © Nelene Prinsloo.



ing people, it had been three to four days since landfall in Beira. Starved of food for at least four days (possibly more for some birds), dehydrated and exhausted from fighting against strong winds and heavy rains, they were going to run on empty very soon, with no possibility of refuelling. They were so weak that you could simply pick them up without any struggle. Our fears were realised when the first reports of dead Sooty Terns were received on our alert system on the 28th January 2021, five days after landfall at Beira. Sadly, no more live Sooty Terns were reported after this. Any Sooty Terns found at that stage would in all likelihood have been too weak to make a full recovery.

Meanwhile, the four Sooty Terns at the Wolkberg Veterinary Clinic were responding well to their treatment. The national effort had also gained momentum. It was decided that our four birds would join the rest of the rescued birds at the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital in Gauteng. On Saturday the 30th January 2021, our four birds were taken to the JWVH to continue their rehabilitation until they have recovered sufficient strength to be released at the coast and return to their life at sea.



ABOVE Dr. Xander De Kock tube-feeding one of the Sooty Tern © Derek Engelbrecht.

Despite being a common sea-bird and not threatened at all, it was very satisfying to help in a small way to save some of these birds. We undoubtedly missed hundreds, perhaps thousands, of seabirds scattered in the bush all over the province and beyond, but at least we gave it a go with the ones we could find. It was heartwarming how many people were willing to assist in whichever way possible to rescue these birds. Some helped to spread the word on

their social media platforms, some collected birds and brought them to us in Polokwane, others donated food, while some made sure they get fed several times a day. Some people just showed their support by calling or texting to find out how the birds were doing. In these times where our lives are dominated by so much negative news, this feel-good story was a welcome distraction from it all.

We also learned some lessons in all of this. We would start a rescue awareness campaign in advance of an approaching cyclone or severe weather events in future. This should buy us a couple of days and improve the chances of successful rehabilitation and release of stranded birds.

We wish to thank everyone who

posted our call on their social media platforms, Lana and Steven for bringing birds from Louis Trichardt, vets Xander De Kock and Nelene Prinsloo and the other staff at Wolkberg Animal Clinic in Polokwane for all their hard work treating them and Whelmi Chalmers of the Whelmi Chalmers Rehabilitation Centre for donating a whole lot of sardines for food. Also, the staff at JWVH for taking on the next step of the rescue effort. Thank you all so much!

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The Sooty Terns about to leave for the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital. From LEFT TO RIGHT: Daniel Engelbrecht, Dr. Xander De Kock (Wolkberg Animal Clinic) and Dr. Alicia Abbott (Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital).



BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA'S BIRD OF THE YEAR 2021

CAPE ROCKJUMPER

THEY ARE CLASSIFIED AS
NEAR THREATENED

ABOUT
Cape Rockjumpers (*Chaetops frenatus*) are ground nesting birds from the Chaetopidae family. They are found in fynbos habitats.

LOCATION
Cape Rockjumpers are endemic to the fynbos biome of the Western and Eastern Cape provinces of South Africa.

IDENTIFICATION
They have strong and powerful black legs and a black bill. Their tail and wings are also black with a white tip. The **sexes differ in colouration**. Males have a grey and black head and wings, a white stripe above the eye, a white moustache, and a chestnut breast and rump. The females are slightly duller in colour and have a streaked chest.

THE SPECIES HAS A **DECLINING POPULATION**

They are threatened by **habitat loss** and sensitivity to **climate change**.

They are found in mountains of up to 2300m in elevation.

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ROCKJUMPER
HANS HOEISEN
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Caitlin Jodge



Birds in Art

African Swampphen

Text and Artwork

Willem Van der Merwe

Here I present to you a very colourful bird, an African Swampphen *Porphyrio madagascariensis*. Us older birders will remember that it used to be called a Purple Gallinule. It occurs over much of sub-Saharan Africa, and

as you might guess, Madagascar. The genus name '*Porphyrio*' means 'purple one'. In other parts of the world, swampghens are also called



African Swampphen

Reed Hens or Sultan Hens. Purple swamphens (either all lumped with the Eurasian Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, or separated into a few different species) occur from Africa through southern Europe and Asia to Indonesia and into Australia and New Zealand. In the Americas, they're replaced by a smaller relative, the Purple Gallinule (formerly known as American Purple Gallinule).

Over this range, swamphens vary much in colouration, but

generally have some purple or blue plumage, and always the red feet, bill and frontal shield. They're about the size of a small to average chicken. They're not closely related to chickens though! Despite their chicken-like appearance, they are members of the rail Family, the Rallidae, and are reasonably closely related to moorhens and coots. They've long been respected and admired by humans: Egyptians depicted them on their tombs' walls, and the Greeks and Romans kept them as ornamental birds.

Skulkers in the reeds

Another thing you might guess from its name is that the swamphen lives in swamps. Well, any kind of wetland actually, so long as there are plenty of reeds! They live as residents in permanent wetlands but can move around and use temporary wetlands such as might come into existence in otherwise-dry places during years of exceptional rainfall. Despite their bright plumage, swamphens tend to be hard to see. I've only seen them in the wild a handful of times, and then only fleetingly. The exception is a single bird that appeared so tame that I saw it grazing and foraging in the shrubs on the grounds of a local casino! I can only explain it by postulating that the bird was indeed hand-reared from a chick and then left to roam the grounds. It is possible since

there was a 'wild world' section at the casino that kept birds and rehabilitated sick and injured birds and abandoned chicks. Whatever the case, it allowed me to admire the bird's beauty up close.

A wild swamphen, however, tends to stick to dense cover. It uses its huge feet to clamber about reed-beds and over floating vegetation. It doesn't swim much, and will trample and bend down reeds and rushes to form raised, dry walkways, platforms and bridges over short stretches of water. When it does swim, it uses its long toes to propel it through the water like a duck. It sometimes ventures away from the water to graze on the shore in the early morning or evening. It mostly eats vegetable matter: the leaves and stems of reeds and other plants growing along the swamp margins and the float-

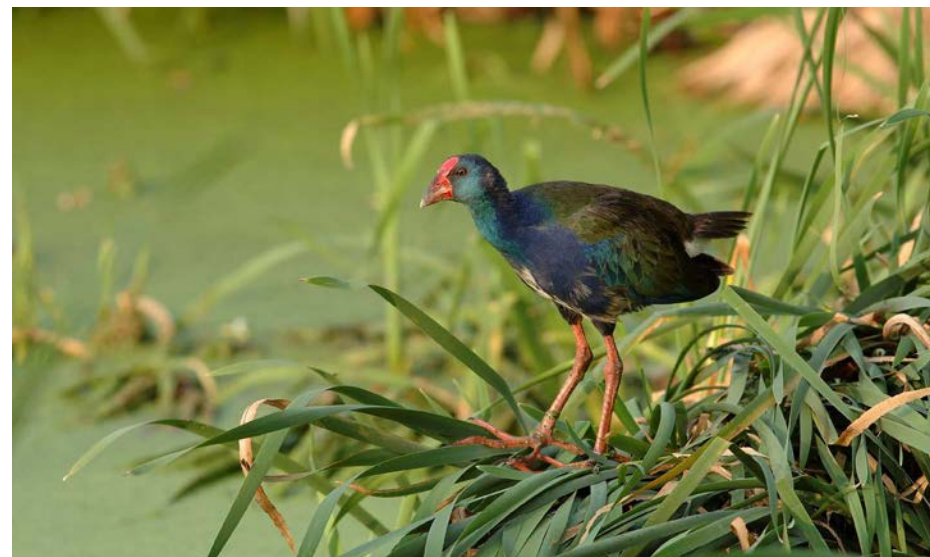
ing leaves, flowers and fruit of waterlilies. It often uproots plants to feed on the soft corms, tubers and rootstocks. It manipulates its food with its dexterous feet and uses its bill to cut up and mash the tough leaves and stems. The bill is also useful for digging, turning over stones, and pulling up plants. It sometimes clambers up into the reeds and other plants to reach their seeds and flowers.

But swamphens are not total vegans. They will pick up and swallow small insects, snails, leeches, crabs and other invertebrates that they come across. That strong bill helps them crack open eggs and catch, kill, and consume frogs, snakes, small mammals,

BELOW African Swamphen - a skulker of note © Derek Engelbrecht.



BELOW An immature African Swamphen briefly showing itself before disappearing back into the reeds again © Derek Engelbrecht.



and the chicks of other wetland birds. They will sneak about the reeds, creeping up on a victim and then lunging and grasping it. They also eat carrion if they can find it.

Though hard to see, swamphens are easy to hear! They are very vocal and raucous, emitting various screams, cackles, croaks, grunts, snores, clucks, whistles, trumpet-sounds, and more. If you're about a wetland and you hear them calling, patience might reward you after a long period of quiet waiting and watching with a brief glimpse of a bird as it flits from one reed patch to another. If you're fortunate, you might enjoy a lasting view of one as it climbs up to the top of reeds to bask in the sun.

In most of South Africa, swamphens breed in the summer, when water levels are high. They make a big mound from reed, sedge and/or grass stems and leaves, either floating and anchored to emergent vegetation, or rising from shallow water, or sometimes on the shore well away from the water. At the top of the mound, there's a small hollow to contain the eggs. The nest is concealed by bending the surrounding leaves and stems of reeds and other plants over it, forming a canopy. A gentle access ramp or two are also built from which the

couple can clamber onto the nest. The female lays two to six eggs, and she and her mate both incubate them. The chicks hatch in about 23-29 days. They're open-eyed, covered in down, and soon capable of activity, but usually remain in the nest for a few days while their parents care for them. Their down is blackish but with some thin, white plumes on their head, neck, back and wings. The chicks also have bright red skin on their foreheads and purple eyelids. Their parents help feed them until they're 25-40 days old, but they also start feeding themselves at 10-14 days. They fledge at about two months. They can begin breeding at the age of one or two years.

African Swamphens are very widely distributed, able to use many different kinds of wetland habitats, including man-made ones, and with their wariness, difficult for humans to persecute. However, they're hunted for food in a few places, but at present they are in no danger of extinction.

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View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:



REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

LEMON-BREASTED CANARIES IN THE PAFURI REGION OF THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Chris Patton

When I was a scholar, often idly dreaming of birds I hadn't seen, the northern parts of KwaZulu-Natal was where I'd need to go to see Lemon-breasted Canary within South Africa. If one looked in the Kruger Bird Field Guides of the 1980s and 1990s it was not a species that even cracked a mention as occurring in the Kruger National Park, but a couple of years after I started working for SANParks towards the end of the 1990s, I became aware of the species occurrence in the Pafuri region of the Park, invariably in association with lala palms.

The Roberts Field Guide for the birds of Kruger and surround-

ing Lowveld by Hugh Chittenden and my ex-colleague Dr Ian Whyte, published in 2008 does acknowledge this species though, and describes their status as 'Generally uncommon and localised near endemic, recorded only in the Northern Lala Palm *Hyphaene petersiana* groves in the Pafuri area where it is probably sedentary... Entire s. African distribution linked to that of Lala palms on which it breeds and from which it obtains nesting material. In pairs during the breeding season, and in small flocks the rest of the year, sometimes with Yellow-fronted Canary. Found only where there are Northern Lala Palms in mixed lowland woodland at Pafuri'.



On regular annual pilgrimage to Punda Maria to lead a vehicle on the Honorary Rangers Birding Weekends in late January and early February between 2005 and 2018 between the four participating trucks this species was invariably seen. Personally through this period I found them in five different places in Pafuri, almost always in close proximity to the Lala Palms on which they depend... These locations were:

ABOVE Lemon-breasted Canary at the Levubu River bridge at Pafuri on 21 November 2020 © Daniel Engelbrecht.

1. At the junction between the Pafuri River Road S63 and the cul-de-sac road to Crook's Corner – there is a roadside puddle just north of the junction that fills with water in the rainy season, and has palms next to it. In one year there was signs that the birds were nesting in those palms.

2. In the plains just east of the now greatly reduced Fever Tree Forest - only a few hundred metres west of location 1.
3. In the vicinity of the ephemeral pans along the partition road back to the tar section of the S63 just east of Pafuri Picnic Site,
4. On one of the river islands in the Levubu River at the Pafuri Picnic Site, and
5. Around the ephemeral flood plain pans as the H1-8 approaches first the Levubu and then the Levubu Bridges.

So, while their numbers are low they do seem fairly widespread and well established...

So my questions are:

1. Were Lemon-breasted Canaries always in Kruger and just overlooked before the 21st Century? That would seem unlikely, so...
2. When did they colonize the Pafuri region, and what triggered their colonization?
3. Is it a sustainable population? By the evidence of regular sightings it would appear that they are... 😊

4. If they did colonize the Pafuri region relatively recently, what is stopping them from expanding to suitable Lala Palm areas along other Limpopo tributary rivers like the Shingwedzi, Mphongolo and Letaba/Olifants Rivers?

Only time will tell ...

BELOW And that's it. This SABAP2 maps shows the current global distribution of this mysterious canary (Data retrieved on 7 January 2021. Credit SABAP2).



CAPE ROCKJUMPER



Bright and bold

The Cape Rockjumper is a medium-sized bird with a long, black tail that is white at the tip. The male is particularly striking, with a broad white moustache cutting across his black face, a grey-and-black-patterned back and wings and, in bold contrast, a rufous belly and rump. The plumage of females and juveniles is less bright. Whereas adults have red eyes, in young birds the eyes are dark brown. The bill and legs are black.



MIKE BUCKHAM

A cut above

Fynbos, the principal natural vegetation of south-western South Africa, is renowned for its plant diversity: of the more than 9000 species, 6000 are endemic, or found nowhere else on earth. It is perhaps best known for its beautiful proteas, but other plants that dominate this vegetation type include ericas, pincushions, cone bushes and reed-like restio species. While fynbos supports several endemic bird species, such as the Cape Siskin, Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Victorin's Warbler, Protea Seed-eater and Fynbos Buttonquail, the Cape Rockjumper is associated with higher-altitude rocky slopes and is endemic specifically to the mountain fynbos that occurs in such landscapes.



MOUNTAIN FYNBOS IS RENOWNED FOR ITS HIGH PLANT DIVERSITY

Warming warning

Many scientific studies in recent decades have provided evidence of the impact of climate change on the environment. In the case of the Cape Rockjumper, its population decline may be driven in part by the warming of its habitat on the mountain slopes of the Western Cape and Eastern Cape, the 'sky islands' of south-western South Africa. At higher temperatures, research has shown, Cape Rockjumpers breed less successfully: their nestlings do not grow as well as in cooler temperatures and nest predation, mostly by snakes (boomslangs in particular), is more of a limiting factor.



CAPE ROCKJUMPER MALE

In a class of their own

There are two rockjumper species, Cape Rockjumper (above) and Drakensberg Rockjumper (below), and they split off from the rest of the songbirds roughly 22 million years ago. Although their closest relatives are the two species of rockfowl (*Picathartes*) that are found in the rainforests of West Africa, the relationship is actually not very close. For a long time taxonomists weren't sure where to place rockjumpers; with the thrushes (*Turdidae*) perhaps, or the babblers (*Timaliidae*)? Then, in the 1990s, research into the two species' DNA suggested they should be the sole members of the family Chaetopidae.



DRAKENSBURG ROCKJUMPER MALE (LEFT) AND FEMALE

RICHARD DU TOIT

STRANGE BUT TRUE

- Cape Rockjumpers must disperse between mountain ranges to avoid inbreeding, but there are no records of one being seen between ranges.
- Although they are expert at gliding down-slope, Cape Rockjumpers never appear to fly up-slope, preferring to bound over the ground.
- When feeding their young, adult rockjumpers are very cautious when approaching the nest and take up to 15 minutes to cover the final 10 metres.
- Young males stay with their parents for up to three years, helping to raise the following season's young, before they move to a new territory.
- Colour rings fitted to Cape Rockjumper nestlings at Blue Hill Nature Reserve in the Western Cape have shown that when a young male moves out of his parents' territory, he'll become the dominant male in a territory nearby. Where do young females go? That has yet to be discovered.
- While rockjumpers forage mainly for arthropods such as grasshoppers, they will eat any creepy-crawly they find in fynbos, including geckos, chameleons, butterflies and spiders.

Daily routine

Cape Rockjumpers are most easily seen as they run along the ground or hop up onto a boulder. They forage throughout the day, scouring the vegetation mainly for insects, but from time to time they interrupt their search to scan for predators from the vantage point of a large rock. They are especially wary of snakes, notably Cape cobras and boomslangs, as well as ravens, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawks, Rock Kestrels and Cape grey mongooses. Boulders also make a good stage for whistling and calling to maintain contact with other family members. When the group reunites, the birds celebrate by fanning their tails and continuing to call. They maintain year-round territories, although the boundaries may shift slightly, determined by infrequent 'turf wars' between neighbours. Since rockjumpers obtain water solely from their food, on particularly hot days they keep cool by foraging mostly in the shade of rocks rather than by panting as some birds do, and thus they lose less water.



CAPE ROCKJUMPER FEMALE

PETER SPYAN (3)

Family matters

August to December is the main breeding season for Cape Rockjumpers, although nests have also been found in early July and even in January. Located on the ground and generally under a rocky overhang, the nests are constructed primarily of sticks and lined with either fur (that of red rock hare is favoured) or the seed fluff of proteas. The female lays two or three eggs per nest and if the first breeding attempt fails she'll keep trying throughout the season, sometimes for up to five times. Both sexes incubate the eggs and all the adults in a territory help to look after and feed the chicks. From egg to fledgling takes about 40 days, which is a long time to be so vulnerable. Mongooses, honey badgers, snakes and rats have been recorded preying on nests, but it's possible other predators may include ravens, crows and baboons.

TEXT BY KRISTA OSWALD



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BIRD BRIEFS

Tagged vulture resightings Daniel and Derek Engelbrecht

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The following tagged vultures were recently photographed in the Limpopo Province.

TAG A260: HOODED VULTURE

The bird was photographed at Mahela near Letsitele on 28 November 2020. It was tagged on 14 April 2017 by André Botha, on Timbavati Private Nature Reserve in Limpopo

(see full report on pages 49 to 52 in this issue).

The straight-line distance between the tagging locality and the resighting was ~96 km and the days elapsed were 1 324 days (3y, 7m, 19d).

TAG 404: WHITE-BACKED VULTURE

404 was photographed at Mahela near Letsitele on 28 November



Hooded Vulture © Daniel Engelbrecht

2020. It was tagged as an adult on 16 March 2019 in the Olifants River Nature Reserve by Kerry Wolter. Since then it has been seen on:

- 11 July 2019 at the Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre's Vulture Restaurant;
- 27 August 2020 in the Klaserie; and
- 30 October 2020 in the Timbavati.

The straight-line distance between the tagging locality and this resighting was ~63 km and the days elapsed were 623 days (1y, 8m, 18d).

TAG M056: WHITE-BACKED VULTURE

M056 was photographed at the Vencor Abattoir north of Polokwane on 22 December 2020. It was tagged on 24 June 2020 by Brent Coverdale in Camperdown, KwaZulu-Natal. The straight-line distance between the tagging locality and the resighting was 665 km and the days elapsed were 181 days (0y, 6m, 1d).

Acknowledgements Our appreciation goes to Lindy Thompson (Project Co-ordinator: Vulture Conservation and Research, Endangered Wildlife Trust) and Kim-Kelly Hunt (SAFRING intern) for providing us with the details of the tagged vultures.



ABOVE White-backed Vulture 404 © Daniel Engelbrecht



ABOVE White-backed Vulture M056 © Derek Engelbrecht

Hooded Vulture update – the life of 'Thea'

Lindy Thompson

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On 14 April 2017, a subadult Hooded Vulture (called 'Thea') was trapped on Timbavati Private Nature Reserve (farm Caroline) by Dr Lindy Thompson, John Davies and André Botha (Endangered Wildlife Trust). The bird was named 'Thea' after the wife of the person who tagged it, but a blood test later showed that

Thea was indeed a male. This bird was ringed with a metal leg ring, and fitted with yellow wing-tags (one on each wing) and a tracking device.

The reason we fit birds with a tracking device as well as wing-tags, is because sometimes the tracking device stops working, and that is exactly what happened here – Thea's tracking device stopped



ABOVE 'Thea', photographed at Mahela farm on 28 November 2020. You can see the transmitter's aerial poking out from Thea's back, and his yellow wing-tag © Daniel Engelbrecht.

working in 2018. If the bird also has wing-tags, then at least we can still get resightings data from the public. We received nine records of Thea's whereabouts since its initial tagging, providing us with valuable information about the movement of Hooded Vultures.

- 28 June 2017 (Balule Game Reserve);
- 27 July 2017 (Balule Game Reserve - Grietjie);
- 10 September 2017 (Balule Game Reserve - Pel's Loop);
- 20 January 2018 (Balule Game Reserve);

- 22 March 2019 (Timbavati);
- 19 August 2019 (Balule Game Reserve);
- 29 September 2019 (Balule Game Reserve - Olifants River); and
- 17 April 2020 (Hoedspruit)
- 28 November 2020 (Mahela farm).



ABOVE This bird, 'Thea', was wing tagged with tag #A260 on 14 April 2017.

RIGHT Thea also had the 'standard' metal leg ring, with a unique code (ring number 9A41245), just like a person's ID number.



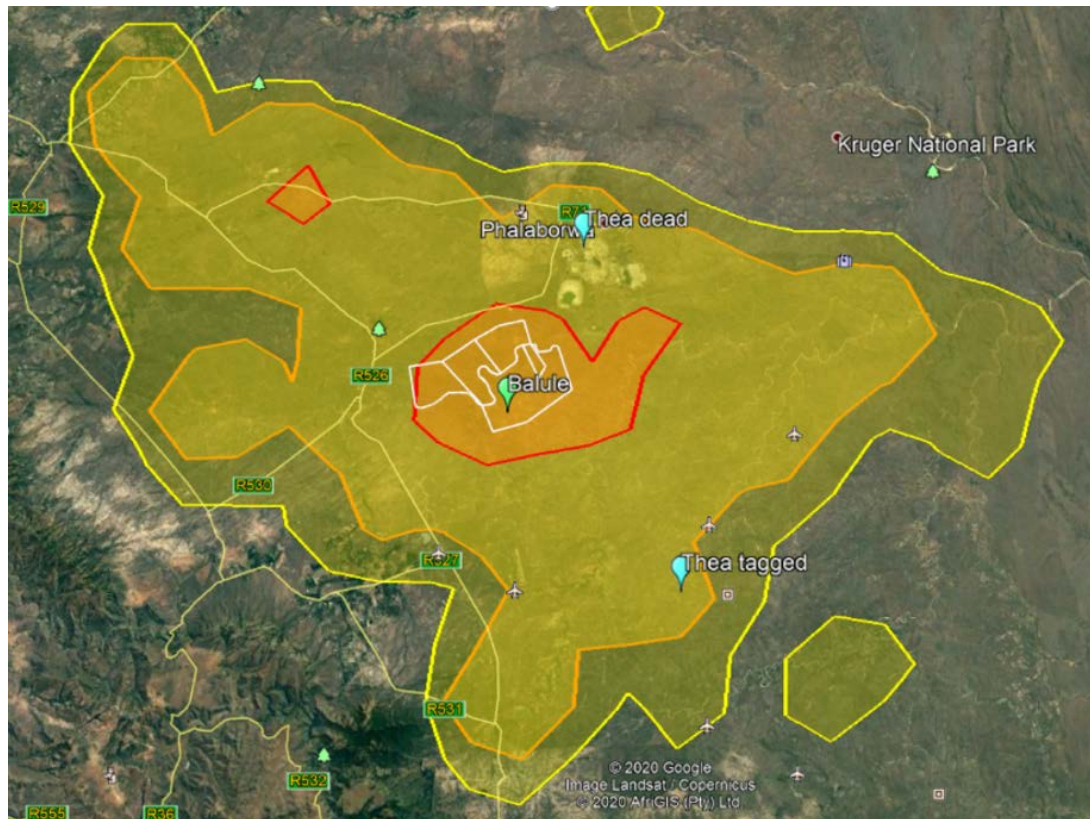
Unfortunately, Thea was found dead on the 4th January 2021 at Foskor, Phalaborwa. The decomposed carcass was found near some pig enclosures, where it must have been visiting to feed. The days elapsed since the initial tagging as a subadult and the discovery of Thea's carcass was 1380 days (3y, 8m, 22d) and the distance between the ringing and recovery site was approximately 46 km.

The value of wing-tags

People often only report vultures that have wing-tags, because they realise

these are 'special' birds. This is one of the reasons that wing-tagging is so important. The person who found this vulture carcass on Foskor mine told us he would not have reported it if the bird was not wing-tagged.

BELOW Movements of male Hooded Vulture 'Thea' from 14 April 2017 to 11 October 2018 (the tracking device stopped working in 2018). Thea was tagged on Timbavati (farm Caroline, marked on the map in blue) on 14 April 2017, and found dead at Foskor (also marked in blue), on 4 January 2021. The 'heatmap' above shows his home range, with the areas outlined in red/orange being where Thea spent most of his time. You can see that his bird spent most of his time in Balule (outlined in white).



How to report wing-tagged vultures

If you see wing-tagged vultures, please report them to: lindy@ewt.org.za or WhatsApp: 072 241 4611. This information lets us keep track of vultures that have been through rehabilitation (e.g. for poisoning), and also the wild birds that we trap. It is also possible to document changes in birds with age, e.g. plumage changes or changes in bill or eye colour. This information is very valuable to us.

How did 'Thea' die?

We suspect Thea may have eaten some poisoned meat elsewhere, then flew to Foskor to eat there near some pig pens, when he died. We think this, because Thea was not skinny (his breastbone was not very prominent), which suggests

he was not hungry as one would expect if a bird was ill. There were no green droppings, which would have suggested lead poisoning. There were no other dead animals at Foskor, suggesting that if it was indeed poisoning, then it did not happen at Foskor, it must have happened elsewhere. Unfortunately, Thea's carcass was too old to send samples for testing.

Is Thea's death important?

Thea was tagged as a subadult back in 2017, and by now he will have been an adult. There are estimated to be only 100-200 adult Hooded Vultures in South Africa (they are Critically Endangered), so the loss of this one individual vulture represents a loss of 0.5 – 1% for this species in South Africa. So yes, his death is important.



Bird Names in Venda (Tshivenda)

Johan Meyer

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Venda, or Tshivenda, is one of South Africa's 11 official languages. It is spoken by about 1.2 million people in the northern part of Limpopo Province, mainly in the Vhembe District. However, about 23% of the Venda speakers live in Gauteng. It has the second smallest number of speakers of all the official languages of South Africa, at just 2.4% of the population.

Venda is a southern Bantu language with its closest relative being Kalanga spoken in Zimbabwe. A small number of people in Zimbabwe also speak Venda.

Venda bird names have not been recorded in any bird book. This study aimed to record bird names in Venda as found in various sources.

Methods

The sources used were mainly dictionaries, as well as personal notes of Diether Giesecke. Together with his wife, he started the first secondary school as well as the Teacher Training College in Venda, where he served from 1942 to 1964. After that, he did missionary work at the Tshakhuma Mission Station. He was a birdwatcher and, if there was a Venda name for a bird, he noted the

names of the birds he saw in Venda. His notebooks are now part of the Archives of the Berlin Mission (Hesse Collection of German Africana) at the UNISA Library Archives. I consulted his notebooks at the archives.

A full list of the sources used can be found in the reference list at the end of the article.

A database was created from the information found during the literature research. All the names found were entered into the database. With each entry, the following was recorded:

1. The name in the specific language
2. The name in the language found in the source (mainly English or Afrikaans)
3. The source name
4. The family of birds to which the name belongs
5. The scientific name if it was found in the source.

The total number of entries refers to the actual number of names in the database. A name can be repeated several times in the database from different sources, and each time it will be counted as an individual entry. The number of names therefore, does not equal the number of bird species.

After this database was constructed, the loan words from English and Afrikaans, the names of domesticated birds or birds not found in the Venda speaking areas were removed from the database. The remaining names in the database were then analysed and sorted into three categories, namely:

1. A name used for only one species, i.e. species-specific name
2. A general name used for more than one species in the same family
3. A general name used for more than one species in different, sometimes unrelated, families

The final database was then analysed to determine the number of entries, the number of unique entries and the percentage that the unique names represent of the total number of entries for each category.

Results and Discussion

A summary of the analyses of the names is presented in Table 1. A list of the species-specific names found, together with the bird's scientific

name and name in English, can be found in Table 2.

The total number of entries was 575. Of these entries, 12 were of unidentified birds. Although the total number of entries is high, there was considerable repetition in the data entries, and only 187 unique entries were found. Of the unique entries, 23 (12.3%) were general names for more than one species in different families. These birds typically look the same although they are not related. An example is *Begwa*, which is used for both hawk and falcon. Another interesting example is *Thamba-madi*, used for both swallows and swifts (similar looking species) and bee-eaters.

The number of general names for more than one species in the same family was 60 (32.1%) of the total number of unique entries. The number of names used for only one species (i.e. a species-specific name) was 104 (55.6%), which is more than half of the unique names.

Birds representing 44 families have Venda names. The majority of

Table 1. A summary of the results of the analysis of bird names in Venda.

Category	Number of entries	Number of unique entries	% out of unique entries
Only 1 species (species-specific name)	260	104	55.6
General name for >1 species, same family	178	60	32.1
General name for >1 species, different families	125	23	12.3
Name of unidentified birds	12		
Total data entries	575	187	

these birds (59%) are non-passerines, the balance made up by the passerines.

It is mainly the larger species or species of cultural or economic value which have Venda names. Examples include the Common Ostrich, Helmeted and Crested Guineafowl and doves. Interestingly, passerines like the Southern Boubou had various names.

Two species, the Pin-tailed Whydah and the Yellow-crowned Bishop, have different names for the sexes. This may be due to the striking difference between the males' breeding plumage and the plumage of the females. However, this was not recorded for all sexually dimorphic species.

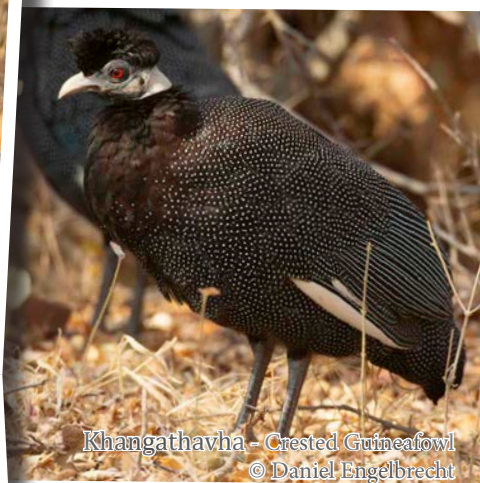
Conclusion

Although there are many bird names in Venda, the use of their names should be encouraged in publications. Fieldwork should be conducted to trace more names, especially for those birds found in Venda that do not have a recorded name yet. Descriptive parts, like adjectives, need to be added to the available names to make them species-specific. Once this is done, it will greatly facilitate the promotion of birdwatching and bird conservation among Venda-speakers.

Acknowledgements - I wish to thank the staff at the UNISA Library Archives for their assistance with the research.

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Bird names in Tshivenda			
Family	Scientific name	English	Tshivenda
Struthionidae	<i>Struthio camelus</i>	Common Ostrich	Mphwe, Nkhwe, Phou
Numididae	<i>Numida meleagris</i>	Helmeted Guineafowl	Khanga
	<i>Numida pucherani</i>	Crested Guineafowl	Khangamusimbiri, Khangathavha
Phasianidae	<i>Ortygornis sephaena</i>	Crested Francolin	T̃hadzia
Anatidae	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	Egyptian Goose	L̃igaakaa
Ciconiidae	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>	Marabou Stork	Dumbulazhou
Threskiornithidae	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>	Hadada Ibis	L̃inaanaa
Scopidae	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	Hamerkop	Khondo, Mai-la-u-sumbwa, Tshiruxwe
Ardeidae	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Western Cattle Egret	Mulisa, Mut̃wa-na-vhalisa
Sagittariidae	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>	Secretarybird	T̃hame
Accipitridae	<i>Gyps coprotheres</i>	Cape Vulture	D̃anga
	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>	African Fish Eagle	Khuwadzi
	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>	Long-crested Eagle	L̃ilaulane, Tshilaulane, Tshilaule
	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>	Bateleur	Nnzu
Sarothruridae	<i>Sarothrura elegans</i>	Buff-spotted Flufftail	Marubini
Gruidae	<i>Grus paradisea</i>	Blue Crane	L̃imilap̃owa
Scolopacidae	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Wood Sandpiper	Murorwane
Columbidae	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>	Ring-necked Dove	Phokhole, Tshiihvampembe
	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>	Red-eyed Dove	Khopola
	<i>Treron calvus</i>	African Green Pigeon	Khut̃hu
	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>	Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	Tshiivapfure
	<i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>	Grey Go-away-bird	Mukuwe
Musophagidae	<i>Tauraco corythaix</i>	Knysna Turaco	Khurukhurutavha
	<i>Tauraco porphyreolophus</i>	Purple-crested Turaco	Khurukhuru
	<i>Centropus cupreicaudus</i>	Burchell's Coucal	Bwibwi
Cuculidae	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>	Diederik Cuckoo	Mutovholwa

Bird names in Tshivenda			
Family	Scientific name	English	Tshivenda
	<i>Clamator levaillantii</i>	Levaillant's Cuckoo	T̃hathamulubi
	<i>Cuculus solitarius</i>	Red-chested Cuckoo	Mamvulela, Nwamvulela, Nyamvulela, Wamvulela
Strigidae	<i>Bubo lacteus</i>	Verreaux's Eagle-Owl	Gwithathavha
	<i>Ptilopsis granti</i>	Southern White-faced Owl	Tshikitwamwondo
	<i>Strix woodfordii</i>	African Wood Owl	Tshikitwañombe
Tytonidae	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Western Barn Owl	Tshikwitha-mpembe
Caprimulgidae	<i>Caprimulgis pectoralis</i>	Fiery-necked Nightjar	Lukombambudzi
Coliidae	<i>Colius striatus</i>	Speckled Mousebird	T̃honzhe
	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>	Red-faced Mousebird	Tswiavhavha
Meropidae	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	European Bee-eater	Kwerukweru
Upupidae	<i>Upupa africana</i>	African Hoopoe	Khororo
Bucerotidae	<i>Bycanistes bucinator</i>	Trumpeter Hornbill	L̃ilidzavhana
	<i>Lophoceros alboterminatus</i>	Crowned Hornbill	Mugotwe
	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>	Southern Ground Hornbill	Dandila
Lybiidae	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>	Black-collared Barbet	Tshihwaa
Indicatoridae	<i>Indicator indicator</i>	Greater Honeyguide	T̃haḍu
Prionopidae	<i>Prionops plumatus</i>	White-crested Helmetshrike	L̃igaraba
Malaconotidae	<i>Laniarius ferrugineus</i>	Southern Boubou	Bwimbwili, Gwingwili, Mambwili, Mangwili, Tsha-gombo
Laniidae	<i>Lanius collaris</i>	Southern Fiscal	Dzhuga
	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>	Black-crowned Tchagra	Mugubane
Oriolidae	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>	Black-headed Oriole	Khunweu, Muguḍou
Monarchidae	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	African Paradise Flycatcher	Dzwee, Ludzwee, Nyadzwee
Corvidae	<i>Corvus albus</i>	Pied Crow	Tshihunguvhufa
Pycnonotidae	<i>Phyllastreus terrestris</i>	Terrestrial Brownbul	Gorokoro
	<i>Pycnonotos tricolor</i>	Dark-capped Bulbul	Gwede, Tshigwede

Bird names in Tshivenda

Family	Scientific name	English	Tshivenda
Cisticolidae	<i>Apalis thoracica</i>	Bar-throated Apalis	Lunegule, Lutiitii, Negule, Twetwetwe
	<i>Prinia subflava</i>	Tawny-flanked Prinia	Damukulu, Luidimukulu, Tshidamukulu
Leiotherichidae	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>	Arrow-marked Babbler	Zhokozha
Zosteropidae	<i>Zosterops virens</i>	Cape White-eye	Lulangane
Turdidae	<i>Turdus libonyanus</i>	Kurrichane Thrush	Mudodoma, Ngwinzhi
Muscicapidae	<i>Cossypha caffra</i>	Cape Robin-Chat	Lufhorwe
	<i>Erythropygia quadrigata</i>	Bearded Scrub Robin	Tshelevhete
Passeridae	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow	Mathandaphalishi
	<i>Passer melanurus</i>	Cape Sparrow	Lupuṭula, Malegeni
Ploceidae	<i>Amblyospiza albifrons</i>	Thick-billed Weaver	Tswirigonde
	<i>Euplectes ardens</i>	Red-collared Widowbird	Sisibundu
	<i>Euplectes afer</i>	Yellow-crowned Bishop	T̃hongola, Matunde (for male)
	<i>Euplectes progne</i>	Long-tailed Widowbird	Munuge
	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>	Village Weaver	Mathaha, Taha
	<i>Ploceus intermedius</i>	Lesser Masked Weaver	Dzhere
	<i>Ploceus ocularis</i>	Spectacled Weaver	Phaṭhela
	<i>Quelea quelea</i>	Red-billed Quelea	Ndiane
Estrildidae	<i>Estrilda perreini</i>	Grey Waxbill	Nṭimba
	<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>	Blue Waxbill	Luṭikizimba, Luṭimba
Viduidae	<i>Vidua macroura</i>	Pin-tailed Whydah	T̃hongolalukole, Nyamudade (for male)
Motacillidae	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>	Cape Wagtail	Mantekuteku
Fringillidae	<i>Crithagra mozambica</i>	Yellow-fronted Canary	Ludahambanzhe

An African Pygmy Kingfisher biting off more than it could chew

Derek Engelbrecht

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I experienced what is best described as a typical Chris Patton 'Bloody Hell' moment on 12 February 2021. While photographing honeyguides at their feeder in my garden, my attention was distracted by what at first appeared to be a reddish-brown moth flying and landing near the feeder. The 'moth' turned out to be a juvenile African Pygmy Kingfisher with something in its beak. A closer inspection revealed it had caught a Cape Dwarf Gecko. However, it somehow misjudged its prey

and also 'captured' part of the twig the gecko was sitting on. It appears as if it captured the gecko but then impaled the twig with its beak, but was battling to dislodge the twig and still keep a hold of its prey. This is what caused the odd flying pattern that first caught my eye.

BELOW African Pygmy Kingfishers are uncommon around Polokwane, so having one in the garden is a real treat. Their main prey items are invertebrates and they only rarely catch vertebrates, so having witnessed a kill in my backyard made it a doubly special sighting.



A showering Sooty Falcon

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My joy at seeing my first Sooty Falcon in the Kruger National Park in March 2016 was slightly dampened by heavy rain (excuse the pun) and poor light. With conditions conspiring against me, any thoughts of getting decent photo-

graphs went down the drain (no pun intended - again). I decided to make the best of a disappointing situation and just savoured the moment watching this local rarity.

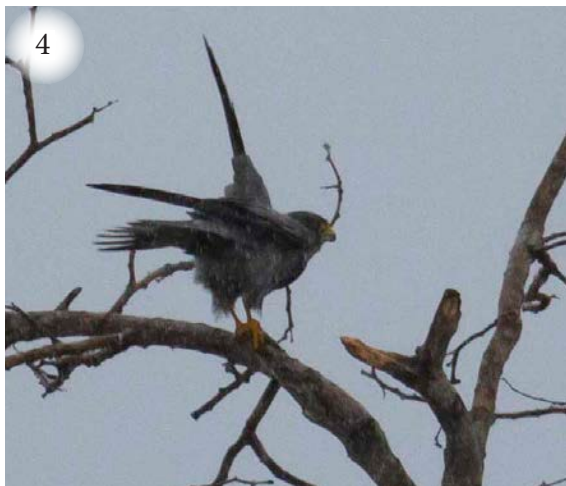
As the rain pelted down, the falcon started moving around on its perch. I thought it was about to fly off in search of a less exposed site, but no, it was getting ready to take a shower!

A brief description follows.

1. As good as it got. The Sooty Falcon perched in a dead tree as it started to rain.
2. Take a bow ... It took a deep bow, raising its tail almost vertically, and fluffed out its contour feathers so that the rain can get between the feathers and to the skin.



3. Shaking to distribute the water between the feathers.
4. Up next was getting water under the wings, first raising the left wing ...
5. Then the right wing ...
6. Followed by a general rinse.



I always love watching birds going about their daily lives, but watching a Sooty Falcon taking a shower was quite unexpected but highly entertaining.

The unique migration strategy of juvenile Bronze-winged Coursers

Hugh Chittenden and Greg Davies

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The southward migration of juvenile Bronze-winged Coursers is unique among southern African birds. The summer influx of Bronze-winged Coursers from the north of our region has been well documented (Hockey et al. 2005, Tree 1997, Carlyon 2011), but none of these publications mention that the southbound migratory birds are made up mostly of juveniles. The majority of the birds recorded during the summer months in the Free State, northern KwaZulu-Natal, North West Province, Gauteng and southern Mpumalanga, appear to be juveniles.

Bronze-winged Coursers are unique in that the juveniles of this species migrate on their own to areas south of their recognised breeding zone. These juveniles probably represent the only African bird species south of the equator, that undertakes this southward, post breeding migration, without the company of the adults.

BELOW An adult with black cheeks, photographed in June at Jozini, northern KwaZulu-Natal (left) and a juvenile with brown cheeks, photographed in February at Amatikulu, KwaZulu-Natal.



ABOVE Adult/juvenile differences. The adult with the black cheek patch (left), was photographed at Jozini in June, and the juvenile with the brown cheek patch (right), was photographed in the Kruger National Park in February.

Southern Carmine Bee-eaters also move south after breeding, but in this species, both the adults and juveniles move together to spend the summer in regions south of their recognised breeding range.

Recognition of adults and juveniles is important. The key field difference is the cheek patch colour. Adults have blackish cheek patches and in juveniles this is brown. Also, breeding adults have brighter red legs, compared to the much paler, and more pinkish-brown legs of the juveniles.

Using these head pattern differences, it has become apparent from the many photos taken and published in recent years, that virtually all the birds recorded

between November and March in the south of their range, are juveniles. In KwaZulu-Natal, adults are occasionally recorded in the north of the province, including two breeding records, but neither of the two authors have ever seen an adult in KwaZulu-Natal, and few have ever been photographed.

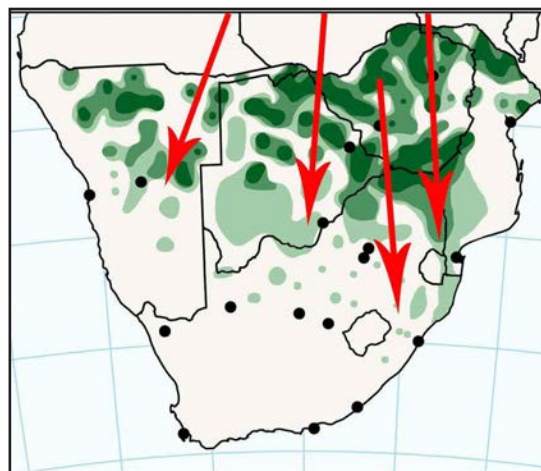
During the past two to three decades, virtually all the Bronze-winged Coursers' photographic records from the southern limits of their range, have been of juveniles.





ABOVE Two juveniles photographed in KwaZulu-Natal, south of the normal breeding range (© Hugh Chittenden). Left: Amatikulu, February. Right: Mtunzini: December.

BELOW The southern African distribution of Bronze-winged Courser, the arrows showing the influx of birds from the north of the subregion.



The summer of 2020/2021 has had a very pronounced influx of juveniles in the Free State, central and southern KwaZulu-Natal where birds were found in areas not normally associated with this species.

It seems that the resident southern African population is supplemented by the influx of non-breeding birds from the north of our region during the summer months (see map), and that these summer visitors are predominantly juveniles. Virtually all the birds that end up in KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State (southern end to their distribution range in Africa) are brown cheeked juveniles. Southern and Eastern Cape records are considered as vagrants.



© Hugo Voigt

ABOVE A juvenile photographed near Paddock, KwaZulu-Natal, in late December 2020 (© Hugo Voigt). This is possibly the most southern photographic record for KwaZulu-Natal.

"What still remains a mystery is the function of the violet-tipped inner primaries, after which the bird is named! It seems possible that these violet-tipped primaries may be used in breeding displays but to date, no one has ever seen how the coursers put their stunning wing features to use. The late Phil Hockey hypothesized that they may function as a beacon between migrating pair members during nocturnal migrations (Hockey 2005). Only by somebody spending time in the bush watching these

birds at night will the mystery be solved!

Most breeding records in southern Africa originate from Zimbabwe, the Kruger National Park and central Mozambique with peak egg-laying from mid-September to early October soon after the spring fires have burnt through the

Waterberg Wonderland

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A recent and much-anticipated Christmas 2020 break up in the Modimolle area was rewarded with many Waterberg specials. Good rains had turned the beautiful woodlands green and the vleis deafening with froggie celebrations. The rocky ridges were festive with showy *Stamvrugt Englerophytum magalismontanum* bushes heavy-laden with vermilion fruit such as the locals had not seen for many years during the drought. The resurrection bushes with their feet in the rock pools had also done their amazing 'thing' and resurrected!

Two years before at the same locality, I had photographed Com-

mon House Martins mingling with the Barn Swallows, and I was keen to get better photos. However, Hirundines were few and far between on this occasion. It was several days of searching before a flock was encountered perching on the game-fence in the late afternoon light. The flock comprised of only two Barn Swallows and to my delight, the balance of about 20 birds all appeared to be Common House Martins. The light was not too good, so when I got home, I scrutinized all the birds in my photos, and was taken aback to find my Common House Martins

BELOW Part of the flock of 20 Pearl-breasted Swallows.



open woodlands. A single nest was found with three eggs on the 26th September 2020 on Zebra Hills in Manyoni Private Game Reserve by Ryan Tyrer. This appears to be the most southern confirmed breeding record on the continent. No other nest has ever been found in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, but adults with small chicks have been seen at Mkhuze Game Reserve and Hlekani in Manyoni Private Game Reserve. Once hatched, the downy chicks have a remarkable plumage. Along the back, wings and head are dense, bristly blackish and brown feathers that exactly mimic the appearance of a grass tuft charred by a bush fire when the chick crouches down!

Acknowledgements We thank Derek Coley and Adam Riley for the supply of information. Graham and Trish McGill, and Hugo

Voigt are thanked for the use of their photographs.

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ABOVE The violet-tipped secondaries of the Bronze-winged Courser © Hugh Chittenden.



ABOVE Cinnamon-breasted Buntings were partial to the salt licks.

all had little naked grey feet. My first thought was, oh NO, our South African bird guides have got it illustrated all wrong, and the diagnostic little fluffy white booties get shed during their moult upon arrival in warmer climates!! I could not make out the back view rump colour, so did not initially realize I had a flock of 20 stunning Pearl-breasted Swallows. This is a rare species in my home province of KwaZulu-Natal, and therefore even more special for me personally. I did not come across Common House Martins at all on this occasion.

Everywhere the rocks and krantzes were a warm rust brindled grey colour, rendering Klip-springers invisible until they moved, and driving home at night revealed sightings of the very special Jameson's Red Rock Rabbits in

the headlights of the car. This is a range-restricted and seldom seen or photographed species. Cinnamon-breasted Rock Buntings abounded everywhere one looked during the day, and we were intrigued to see how fond they are of salt licks. On one occasion, Grey Go-away-birds and mousebirds flew up from a salt lick before we could see what they were doing. However, it is possible they were dust-bathing in the rich red bare soil around the lick, rather than eating the salt. In contrast, the buntings clearly enjoyed pecking at the salt and were photographed doing this on several occasions.

Long-tailed Paradise Whydah and Harlequin Quail feeding behaviour

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During a birding outing with Greg and Janine Goosen to the Zaagkuilsdrift area near Hammanskraal north of Pretoria in Limpopo Province on 20 December 2020, the following observations are of interest. While doing atlas surveys along the road, we observed a pair of Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs. The birds were feeding on grass seeds on the road verge, probably Signal Grass *Urochloa* spp. seeds. The area also received significant rains with puddles in the road and the grass still

moist after the last shower. The male paradise whydah was observed jumping to get hold of the higher seed stalks to feed on it. Upon grabbing a grass stem with its bill, it held it down with one foot to feed on the seeds. The female paradise whydah also arrived on the scene and started feeding on the grass seeds in a similar manner.

BELOW Male Long-tailed Paradise Whydah holding grass seed stalk with its feet on the ground to feed on it





ABOVE A female Long-tailed Paradise Whydah also observed stepping on seed stalks like the males while feeding.

Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs' diet consists of grass seeds, and they feed mostly in bare or sparsely covered ground along tracks, paths and roadsides (Dean and Payne 2005). No references are made of the behaviour of birds jumping to get hold of the grass stalks and holding with their feet on the ground to feed on the seeds. This behaviour was observed a few times where both the male and female performed this feeding behaviour.

A bit further on we observed a Bushveld Pipit on the side of the road. While watching the pipit's behaviour, we observed a smallish bird crossing the road.

The bird turned out to be a Harlequin Quail which also start-

ed feeding on the grass seeds on the road verge. The quail also grabbed grass stalks with its bill or stepped on it with one foot and feeding on the grass seeds. We observed (and photographed) the quails foraging behaviour for a while.

Harlequin Quails are known to forage in vegetation where large seeds are abundant. They usually feed within cover provided by vegetation, sometimes venturing into more open areas such as the edges of roads and tracks (Taylor 2005). Their diet consists mostly

of invertebrates but also includes grass seeds such as bristle grass and other grasses. The roadside grass on which the birds at Zaagkuil drift fed was mostly Signal Grass (*Urochloa* spp.).

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BELOW The harlequin Quail was observed pecking to the grass seeds on the grass stalks hanging above its head. At one stage he also steps on the seed stalk to feed on the grass.



Another irruption of Monotonous Larks at Bylsteel

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Monotonous Lark is generally considered a nomad. In years of good rains in suitable habitat, they may irrupt in their thousands, breed, and then not return there for many years. During these irruptions, thousands of males repeat the same call incessantly, day and night (Engelbrecht and Grosel 2011). This has given rise to the common name of this species, Monotonous Lark. However, the name is a bit of a misnomer as each irruption has a unique 'signature' call which is different from other irruptions, past and present (Engelbrecht 2020). In this sense, its call

is probably more variable than for example the call of a Rufous-naped Lark!

The Bylsteel region (~23° 38'S, 29° 31'E) north of Polokwane has become a hotspot for Monotonous Larks on the Polokwane Plateau in recent years. There had been three irruptions at this site in the last four breeding seasons. The 2017/18 breeding season was followed by a consecutive irruption at the same site in 2018/19, followed by a hiatus in 2019/20, but they were back breeding at the same site in December 2020 and January 2021. Typical for the species, each irruption had its distinctive signature (Fig. 1).



Monotonous Lark © Derek Engelbrecht

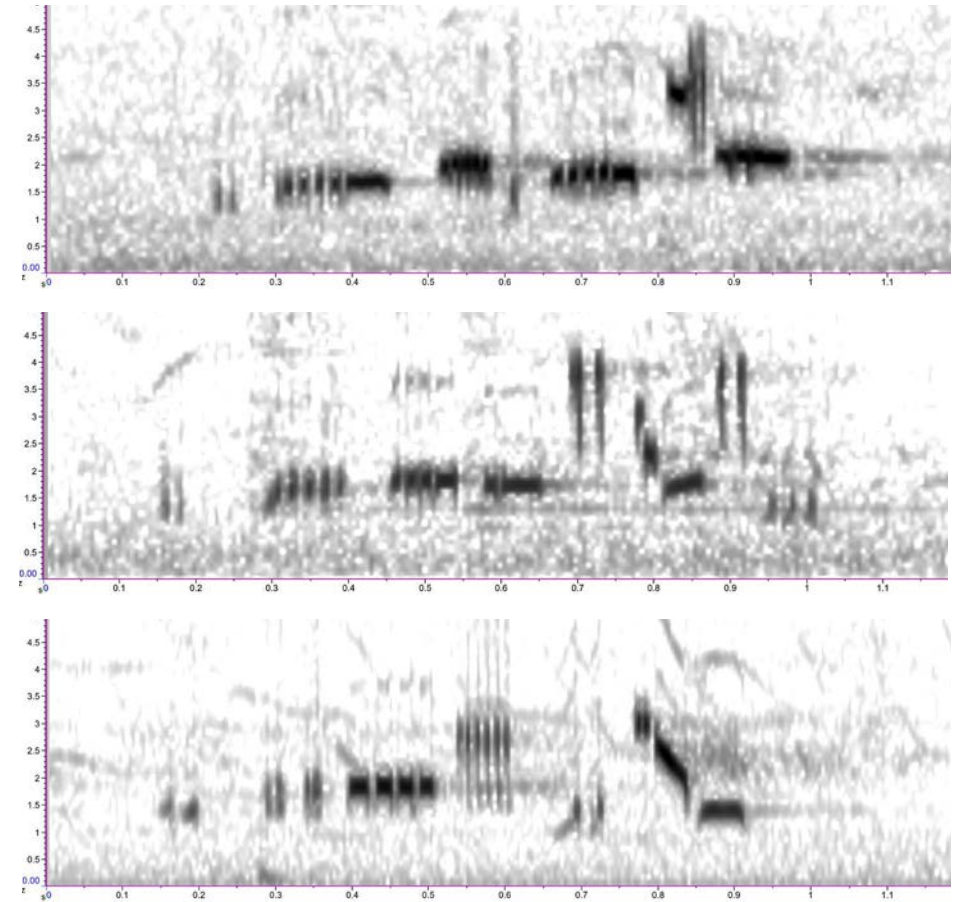


FIG. 1. Sonograms of the calls of Monotonous lark at Bylsteel. The Class of a) 2017/18, b) 2018/19 and c) 2020/21. Note the unique signature of each irruption.

Despite being so conspicuous during an irruption, finding Monotonous Lark outside of their breeding season borders on the impossible. For many years, its 'absence' in southern Africa during their non-breeding season led authors to suggest the species was an intra-African migrant (Thompson 1983, Penry 1994). The problem was there was no evidence to back this as Monotonous Lark has never been recorded outside its breeding

range. But where do they go outside their breeding season?

Monotonous Lark is very conspicuous when calling or in song flight, but on the ground they possess a quail-like demeanour. They will either scurry away like a rodent, or remain motionless, only flushing

from underneath your feet when you practically step on it. Frustratingly, you won't easily flush it a second time! So, you need quite a bit of luck to encounter one by chance. Over the years, I have flushed Monotonous Lark on a few occasions in winter and spring at various localities in the Limpopo Province. This confirms they are resident in the region in the non-breeding season. I have also flushed individuals in the non-breeding season in areas where a breeding irruption occurred in the preceding summer. This suggests that at least some adults - and possibly some immature birds too - remain in the area post-breeding. These birds form the 'stock' for a new breeding irruption at the same site, should suitable conditions prevail at the start of the next breeding season. This could explain why one may find several irruptions 'clustered' over a couple of years, and then nothing for many years again. For example, my interest in Monotonous Lark was sparked by an irruption in the Polokwane Game Reserve in the breeding season of 2003/04. They then disappeared for a few years but returned in 2006/07, were absent in the following season, but then returned for the two consecutive breeding seasons of 2008/09 and 2009/10 - a pattern very reminiscent of the Bylsteel irruptions of recent years. There have been no

irruptions of Monotonous Lark in the Polokwane Game Reserve since the 2009/10 irruption.

So, although they are known to occupy the same general area in successive years as long as good conditions prevail, the erratic nature of rainfall in southern Africa's semi-arid savannah woodlands, means this is seldom the case. However, an exceptionally good wet season may have a knock-on effect on the veld condition for at least the subsequent season, sometimes more. This means that it may be worthwhile for birds overwintering at an irruption site to 'sit it out' and see if the next season may also yield good conditions for another breeding irruption. The cyclical climatic patterns of the region therefore seems to be matched by a similar cyclical pattern of irruptions in a given area.

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Kalahari Sour Grass

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ABOVE The Kalahari in February 2021 after an exceptionally good wet season.

After excellent rains in the Kalahari during the summer of 2020 - 2021, magnificent spectacles of blanketed grass in the Nossob and Auob River valleys in Kgalagadi National Park were the talk on social media sites. Tall, knee to waist-high stands of lush, green grass in the park's river beds would probably only be seen once in a lifetime by most South Africans.

The most dense and prolific stands are of a grass species called Kalahari Sour Grass *Schmidtia kalahariensis*. For those who were there to see the 'Green Kalahari' during January/February 2021,

you may have noticed that, while this dominant grass species is in its tall, green and flowering stage, it is left untouched by the herbivores in the park. This grass is only fed on later in the season when it is in a drier and post flowering stage.

During the growth and flowering stages, Kalahari Sour Grass secretes microscopic droplets of an acid that can cause severe irritation of the facial skin, muzzles and lower limbs of mammals, causing dermatitis, eczema and alopecia.



LEFT The dominant grass Schmidtia kalahariensis, standing almost wall to wall in the Auob and Nossob River beds in the Kgalagadi National Park after the above-average 2020/2021 rainfall season.

OPPOSITE BELOW Kalahari Sour Grass in full flower. This grass is a good indicator of poor veld condition and will soon become dominant in over-utilized veld, forming dense 'monostands' as though it was sown for agricultural purposes.

BELOW Most mammals in the Kgalagadi learn to avoid this grass species during the acid secretory growth stage, as can be seen in the photo where stands of Schmidtia kalahariensis in the background, are avoided by the Gemsbok!





LEFT A Secretarybird chasing prey in Kalahari sour grass.

BELOW LEFT An example of a relatively clean plumaged Secretarybird, photographed in the Kgalagadi before the onset of lush, green grass growth.

BELOW RIGHT The result of weeks of hunting in and around Kalahari Sour Grass .

INSET A close-up image of the matted breast and belly feathers of a Secretarybird.

After exceptionally good rains however, Secretarybirds often find themselves having to hunt for prey that take shelter in the dense grass stands, resulting in their breast, flank and wing coverts getting coated and stuck together with the sticky organic acidic secretions of the grass.

And so, beneath the aesthetically appealing lush greenness of the Kalahari, lie hidden problems with vegetation that most of us wouldn't even think of!

Acknowledgements I thank Willi Schurmann for alerting me to the unpalatable and toxic nature of this dominant Kalahari grass species.



Southern African Rare Bird News

Hi everyone,

Even although SARBN has been running for more than 12 years now, I'm still amazed at just how many birders out there are not aware of it yet and I am constantly asked by people how they can join the group once they eventually hear about it. So, if you have any birding friends who you think might be interested in getting the news and reports shared via SARBN, please do consider forwarding this e-mail

challenging for themselves, they are also welcome to e-mail me directly at hardaker@mweb.co.za to ask to be added to the group and I will then manually add them to the group.

And, also for many of the newer members, the best way to actually report your rarities and updates through to me are on my phone at +27 82 780 0376 (WhatsApp, Telegram, SMS or phone call if you prefer) or via e-mail at hardaker@mweb.co.za. Using the messaging services

ing shared via SARBN is as factual and correct as possible when you get it.

It would be really great to grow the membership base of SARBN even further (we have just over 4 900 subscribers at the moment) as, the more birders that we have right across the Southern African subregion that are aware of SARBN and are reporting their sightings through to be shared, the more chance we all have of possibly catching up with those mega rarities...

We've already experienced an incredible last few months of mouth-watering rarities, so just imagine if there were even more people involved reporting even more juicy rarities – it would just be mind-blowing...

That's all for now... stay safe everyone and happy birding and twitching!

Kind regards

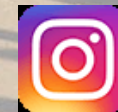
Trevor Hardaker

on to them so that they can join the group.

It's very easy to join and the simplest way is just to go to the website at <http://groups.google.co.za/group/sa-rarebirdnews> and apply for membership. I can then approve the application once they have applied and they will then automatically start receiving all of the news. If people find that too technologically

like WhatsApp or Telegram is preferred (just easier to deal with when I'm out in the field) and, if you can include a back of camera photo with your message of the bird you are reporting, that is always useful as well, just to confirm the actual species. Obviously, errors do creep in occasionally, but I do like to try and make sure of things, so that you all know that the news that is be-

PLEASE CONSIDER FOLLOWING ME ON SOCIAL MEDIA BY
CLICKING ON THE LINKED ICONS BELOW:





Interesting sightings

16 December 2020 - 15 February 2021

Share your interesting sightings seen within a 100 km radius of Polokwane. Please submit your sightings to thelarknews@gmail.com and include the date, locality and a brief write-up of your sighting. Photos are welcome but will be used at the discretion of the editors.

SABAP2 Out of Range record; Regional rarity; National Rarity; First for season. †Record not vetted. COMPILED BY Derek Engelbrecht

NON-PASSERINES

Abdim's Stork - 6 January 2021. Two seen of sports fields of Pietersburg Hoërskool (Sean-Christopher Slattery).

African Crane - 22 December 2020. An adult seen at Tembele, Tweefontein (Joe Grosel); One bird flushed in the frog reserve, Eduan Park (Derek Engelbrecht).

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle - 17 January 2021. A adult bird seen near Pietersburg Country Club (Sean-Christopher Slattery).



African Crane © Joe Grosel

African Pygmy Kingfisher - 20 January 2021. A juvenile bird seen in a garden in Welgelegen, Polokwane (Derek Engelbrecht).

Baillon's Crake - 22 December 2020. A bird flushed at Pansondernaam near Moletzie (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Black Stork - 8 January 2021. A single bird seen on the Bylsteel road (Minkie Prinsloo); 11 January 2021. Seen near Vencor (Sean-Christopher Slattery).

Blue-billed Teal - 25 January 2021. Several seen at the Sterkloop Wetlands (Derek Engelbrecht); 13 February 2021. At least two seen at a roadside dam near Meropa Casino (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Booted Eagle - 15 February 2021. A pale morph individual flying over Bendor, Polokwane (Jody De Bruyn).

Bridled Tern - 6 February 2021. A juvenile bird seen at Hout River Dam (Richter Van Tonder).

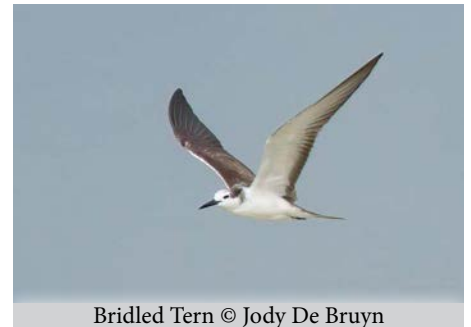
Bronze-winged Courser - 16 January 2021. An individual seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Minkie Prinsloo).

Dwarf Bittern - 22 December 2020. A bird flushed at Pansondernaam near Moletzie (Daniel Engelbrecht); 28 December 2020. Several birds flushed at Makotopong (Jody De Bruyn).

Eurasian Hobby - 30 December 2020. A single bird seen at Stanford Lake (Derek Engelbrecht); 26 January 2020. An individual seen at Politsi (Daniel Engelbrecht).



Bronze-winged Courser © Leonie Kellerman



Bridled Tern © Jody De Bruyn



Dwarf Bittern © Derek Engelbrecht



Eurasian Hobby © Derek Engelbrecht

European Honey Buzzard - 31 January 2021. A bird seen in a garden in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

Goliath Heron - 27 December 2020. A single bird seen in wetland at Makotopong (Richter Van Tonder).

Greater Painted-snipe - 28 December 2020. Good numbers seen at a wetland at Makotopong (Richter Van Tonder).

Green Sandpiper - 27 December 2020. A single bird seen at Makotopong (Jody De Bruyn); 8 January 2021. A single bird at the Aloe Ridge, Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Grey-headed Gull - 6 February 2021. Three birds seen at Hout River Dam (Richter Van Tonder).

Lappet-faced Vulture - 14 February 2021. One soaring over Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

Lesser Moorhen - 23 December 2020. Several birds flushed at Pansondernaam, Moletzie region (Daniel Engelbrecht); There appears to be an irruption of this species around Polokwane (and beyond) in December 2020 and January 2021, and will not be reported here in detail.

Lilac-breasted Roller - 11 January 2021. A single bird seen in grassland at the Magoebaskloof Hotel (Joe Grosel).

Ovambo Sparrowhawk - 16 January 2021. An immature bird seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve



Greater Painted-snipe © Daniel Engelbrecht



Green Sandpiper © Daniel Engelbrecht



Grey-headed Gull © Richter Van Tonder



Ovambo Sparrowhawk © Minkie Prinsloo

(Minkie Prinsloo); An adult and an immature bird seen in the Rhebokvlei Valley (Derek Engelbrecht).

Sooty Tern - An exhausted bird found at a sawmill in Politsi. This is a first record for the Polokwane 100K (Dalena Mostert).

Whiskered Tern - 25 January 2021. A single bird seen at Hout River Dam (Daniel Engelbrecht); 11 February 2021. One seen at Hout River Dam (Derek Engelbrecht).

White-backed Duck - 25 January 2021. Four birds seen at the Sterkloop Wetlands (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Woodland Kingfisher - 22 January 2021. An adult in a garden in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

PASSERINES

Bush Blackcap - 29 January 2021. An adult seen on Forest Drive, Woodbush Forest (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Dusky Lark - 25 December 2020. A single bird seen near the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary (Carel Robinson).

Melodious Lark - 6 February 2020. A single bird seen near Setotolwane (Richter Van Tonder).

Tree Pipit - 23 January 2021. Several birds seen in the Rhebokvlei Valley (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).



Sooty Tern © Derek Engelbrecht



White-backed Duck © Daniel Engelbrecht



Bush Blackcap © Daniel Engelbrecht



Dusky Lark © Jody De Bruyn

BEST OF THE REST - LIMPOPO PROVINCE

NON-PASSERINES

African Crane - 22 December 2020. A single bird seen near Letaba Rest Camp, Kruger National Park (Don Reid).

African Skimmer - 25 January 2021. Three birds seen at the Letaba River high water bridge, Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).

Amur Falcon - 22 December 2020. A flock of six birds in the Limpopo River valley near Swartwater (Tania Anderson).

Corn Crane - 27 January 2021. One seen near Punda Maria (Joshua Olszewski, Darren Van Eyssen and Nick Schaller); 30 January 2021. Seen at Reedbuck Vlei in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).

European Honey Buzzard - 17 January 2021. An individual seen on the Zaagkuil drift road (Daniel Engelbrecht); 20 January 2021. A single bird seen at Island Camp, Limpokwena Nature Reserve (John Davies); 6 February 2021. One seen at Island Camp, Limpokwena Nature Reserve (Derek Engelbrecht).

Great Frigatebird - 25 January 2021. A bird seen over the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate in the wake of Cyclone Eloise (Jaco Scheepers).

Green Sandpiper - 23 December 2020. A single bird seen near Letaba Rest Camp, Kruger National Park (Robert Wienand).



African Skimmer © Marc Cronje



European Honey Buzzard © Derek Engelbrecht



Great Frigatebird © Jaco Scheepers



Green Sandpiper © Robert Wienand

Lesser Jacana - December 2020. This popular bird continues to draw attention at its roadside pool on the R36 (Reported by several observers).

Northern Carmine Bee-eater - 4 January 2021. A single bird seen near the confluence of the Marico and Crocodile Rivers (Dave De Vos). This is the first record of the species for the Limpopo Province, South Africa and only the second record of the species in southern Africa!

Pallid Harrier - 3 January 2021. A single bird seen near Babalala (Simon Geldenhuys).

Palm-nut Vulture - 29 January 2021. A single bird seen at Mahela (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Pectoral Sandpiper - 30 January 2021. A single bird seen in the at Reedbuck Vlei in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).

Red-footed Falcon - 22 December 2020. Two birds in the Limpopo River valley near Swartwater (Tania Anderson).

Sooty Tern - 24 January 2021. Three birds were seen in the Shingwedzi region of the Kruger National Park following Cyclone Eloise (John Adamson); Birds were then reported by a number of people from various localities all over the Limpopo Province in the aftermath of Cyclone Eloise. Known localities included Let-sitele, Politsi, Levubu, northern



Lesser Jacana © Daniel Engelbrecht



Northern Carmine Bee-eater © Dave De Vos



Pallid Harrier © Simon Geldenhuys



Pectoral Sandpiper © Marc Cronje

Kruger National Park and the Waterberg region.

Spotted Eagle-Owl - 27 December 2020. A bird photographed in the Limpopo River valley near Swartwater (Mark and Tania Anderson).

Sooty Falcon - 20 January 2021. A single bird seen at Sable Reservoir in the Olifants River Game Reserve (Shaun Dunlop).



Sooty Falcon © Shaun Dunlop

Striped Crake - December 2020. Two birds seen near Letaba Rest Camp, Kruger National Park (Dylan Vassopoli); December 2020. A bird seen outside Punda Maria Rest Camp, Kruger National Park (Dylan Vassopoli); 26 January 2021. A bird seen at a wetland near Klopfontein (Joshua Olszewski).



Striped Crake © Dylan Vassopoli

Whiskered Tern - 25 January 2021. A single bird seen at Hout River Dam (Daniel Engelbrecht).



Arnot's Chat © Daniel Engelbrecht

PASSERINES

Arnot's Chat - 29 January 2021. A family seen at Mahela (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Orange-winged Pytilia - 11 January 2021. Two pairs observed on S60 near Punda Maria, Kruger National Park (Garth Shaw).

Collared Flycatcher - 20 January 2021. A single female seen at Island Camp, Limpokwena Nature Reserve (John Davies).

Dusky Lark - 13 February 2021. At least two birds seen at Nylsvley Nature Reserve (Leonie Kellerman).



Collared Flycatcher © Daniel Engelbrecht

Fan-tailed Widowbird - 30 January 2021. Seen at Reedbuck Vlei in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).

Fulvous Duck - 13 February 2021. Good numbers seen on club outing at Nylsvley Nature Reserve (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).

Northern Wheatear - 17 January 2021. A male seen on Zaagkuil drift road (Nicholas Harding).

Red-collared Widow - 30 January 2021. Seen at Reedbuck Vlei in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).

White-browed Sparrow-Weaver - 30 January 2021. Seen at Reedbuck Vlei in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).

Yellow-crowned Bishop - 30 January 2021. Seen at Reedbuck Vlei in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).



Northern Wheatear © Derek Engelbrecht



Yellow-crowned Bishop © Marc Cronje

BELOW Birders at the 4th South African Northern Wheatear twitch on the Zaagkuil drift road © Derek Engelbrecht.



UPCOMING EVENTS



Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 02 March 2021

Time: 18:30

Venue: Virtual meeting

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 06 April 2021

Time: 18:30

Venue: To be confirmed

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 04 May 2021

Time: 18:30

Venue: To be confirmed

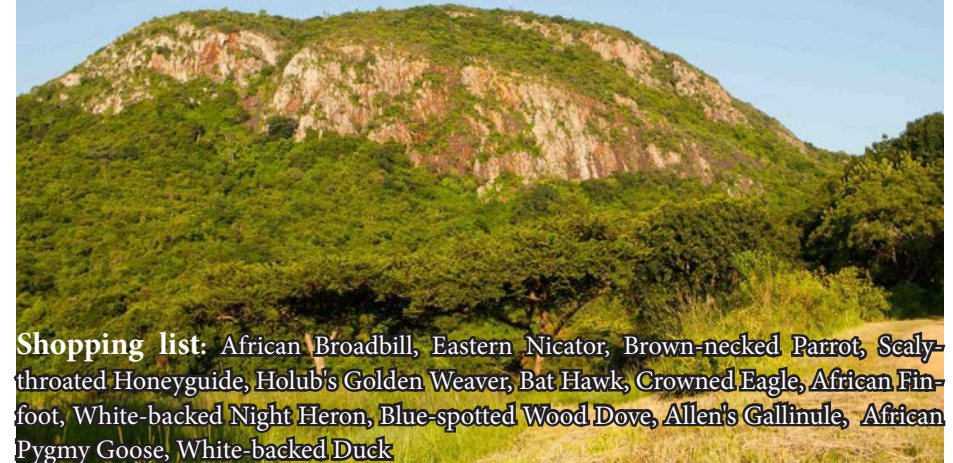
Club outing

Where? Roodewal and eastern Soutpansberg

Date: 13 March 2021

Contact: Richter Van Tonder

Cell: 082 213 8276



Shopping list: African Broadbill, Eastern Nicator, Brown-necked Parrot, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Holub's Golden Weaver, Bat Hawk, Crowned Eagle, African Fin-foot, White-backed Night Heron, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Allen's Gallinule, African Pygmy Goose, White-backed Duck

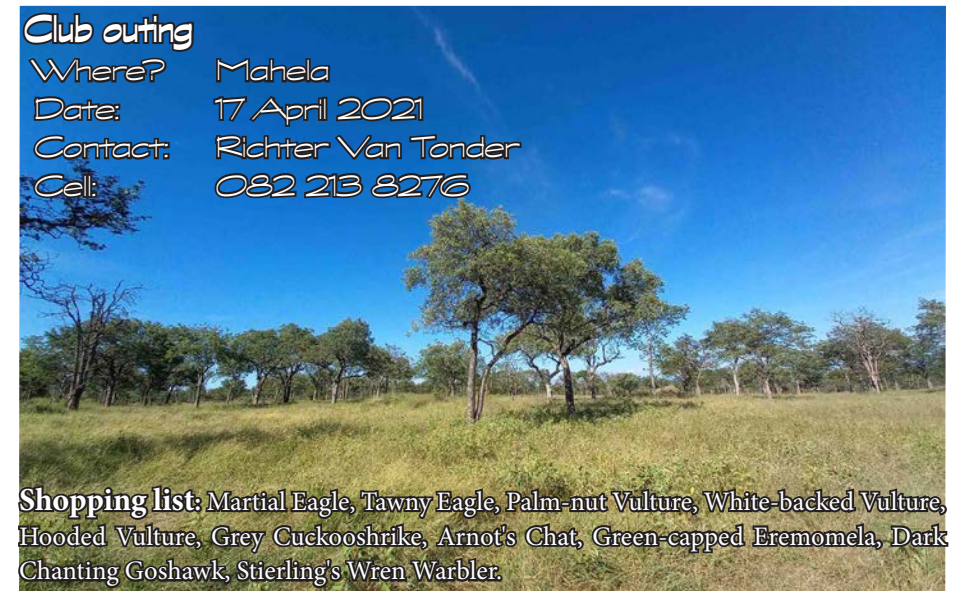
Club outing

Where? Mahela

Date: 17 April 2021

Contact: Richter Van Tonder

Cell: 082 213 8276



Shopping list: Martial Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Palm-nut Vulture, White-backed Vulture, Hooded Vulture, Grey Cuckooshrike, Arnot's Chat, Green-capped Eremomela, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Stierling's Wren Warbler.



BirdLife South Africa is collaborating with the Department of Environmental Affairs and the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology to rid the island of mice and restore it towards its once-pristine beauty.

The bait required to cover the island alone will cost upwards of R30 million. To help raise the necessary funds, please would you consider sponsoring one or more hectares of land on Marion Island.

At R1000 (US\$90), you can aid us in ensuring that this monumental project will be successful.

Once completed, Marion Island will be the largest island from which mice have successfully been eradicated.

Be a part of history, and sponsor one (or more) hectares of this beautiful oceanic gem.

For more information about this very worthwhile project and how to become a sponsor, please visit <https://mousefreemarion.org/about/>

Percent of target reached: 5.73%

Sponsored Hectares: 1741 ha

Sponsors: 657





Flocking in 2021

Flock to the Wilderness will take place in Wilderness, Western Cape, from 27-30 May 2021. The Learn about Birds (LAB) conference, which we host in collaboration with the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, will take place on Thursday 27 and Friday 28 May. BirdLife South Africa's AGM will take place at 10h00 on Saturday 29 May. The LAB and AGM will be held at the Wilderness Hotel. In collaboration with BirdLife Plettenberg Bay, Lakes Bird Club and the Nature's Valley Trust, there will be a series of interesting bird outings during the four days.

For further information about Flock to Wilderness, please contact Isabel at FLOCK2021@birdlife.org.za. For more information about LAB, please email LAB2021@birdlife.org.za.



An interactive series of lectures, presentations and discussions
co-hosted by BirdLife South Africa and
the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology



Marietjie Froneman

Virtual Conference 27 & 28 May 2021



The Virtual African Bird Fair is back on 31 July 2021 for its second edition!

Make sure not to miss the biggest event in African birding. This virtual event includes a star-studded line-up of speakers, opportunities to interact with exhibitors and online stores, networking with other birders on the continent and around the world, and even an online auction.

The proceeds from this event are put straight back into supporting BirdLife South Africa's important conservation work.

For details on how to register, please see BirdLife South Africa's website and social media, or email birdfair2021@birdlife.org.za

APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

COMMUNITY BIRD GUIDE RELIEF FUND

BirdLife South Africa has trained upwards of 200 community bird guides. Those who are still actively guiding are currently being denied all guiding work by the national lockdown. Local and international tourism is expected to slump for several months, even after the lockdown is lifted. This is a devastating blow to our community bird guides who rely on local and international ecotourism (i.e. non-essential travel) in order to support themselves.

BirdLife South Africa is raising relief funding for guides who need to sustain themselves and their families through this challenging period. We are appealing to all our supporters, especially those who have experienced the wonderful skills of our guides, to contribute to the pooled funds. If you would like to reach out to a specific guide you are welcome to do so privately. All funds received will go directly to the guides.

BirdLife South Africa is contributing R20,000 in seed funding to this initiative in solidarity with our community bird guides.

How To Donate

Donations to the Community Bird Guide Relief Fund can be made to the general BirdLife South Africa bank account using the reference format “BG_ initials_surname”. All donations are eligible for a Section 18A tax certificate (please email proof of payment to bookkeeper@birdlife.org.za including your full name, postal address, and the date and value of your donation).

BirdLife South Africa bank details:

Account Name: BirdLife South Africa

Bank: First National Bank, Randburg

Branch Code: 254005

Account Number: 62067506281

SWIFT: FIRNZAJJ

Visit <http://www.birdlife.org.za/birdlife-guide-relief-fund/> for more details and the application procedure.



About the Journal

Afrotropical Bird Biology (ABB) is a free, open-access, online journal for articles that describe aspects of the natural and cultural history of birds in the Afrotropical region, including its offshore islands. These include, but are not restricted to, identification features, sounds, distribution and demography, movements, habitats, diseases and parasites, general habits, foraging and food, breeding, interactions with humans, human cultural beliefs and practices as they pertain to birds, moult and biometrics of birds. ABB publishes original contributions focused on presenting information about the natural history of Afrotropical birds. This includes short communications (<2 500 words, including references) and data papers. All contributions will be reviewed by at least one editor and external, independent referees may also be employed at the discretion of the editors.

For more info or to submit a paper, click on the logo.



Cinderella's page

Birdlife Polokwane honours the LBJs of this world which may never make it onto a cover page.



Lesser Honeyguide © Leonie Kellerman