

Letter from the editor:

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

Happy birding! **Marcia**

Sebayeng wetland outing – 09 April 2016

Article by *Willie van der Merwe*

The morning started out cloudy, and at six o'clock when we arrived at the wetland, we were greeted by the day's first light as well as a huge flock of cattle egrets (Veereier) flying overhead! We rapidly logged a number of species including an impressive, perched fish eagle (Visarend), and comb ducks (Knobbeleend) flying by, showing their unique profiles. Quite interesting to see at the spot were Wire-tailed Swallows (Draadstertswael), a species more characteristic of the lowveld.

Moving on we stopped at a spot where a previous expedition had seen a Baillon's Crake (Kleinriethaan), which unfortunately didn't turn up this time. The spot did reward us with European Sedge Warblers (Europese Vleisanger), Lesser Swamp Warblers (Kaapse Rietsanger), Purple Swampheens (Grootkoningriethaan), Hottentot Teal (Gevlekte eend), and White-backed Ducks (Witrugeend) (which I unfortunately didn't see). Other wetland species we saw over the course of the day included Cape Shovellers (Kaapse Slopeend), Yellow-billed Duck (Geelbekeend), Egyptian Geese (Kolgans), Red-knobbed Coot (Bleshoender), Moorhen (Grootwaterhoender), Dabchick (Kleindobbertjies), Black Crake (Swarriethaan), Blacksmith Lapwing (Bontkiewiet), both White-breasted and Reed Cormorants (Witbors – en – Rietduiker), and Darter (Slanghalsvoël). Both the Giant and Pied Kingfishers (Reuse – en - Bontvisvanger) were seen in flight.

We took a detour into the riverine bush to seek the elusive Gorgeous Bush Shrike (Konkoit)! Though calling loudly all the time, it teased us with nothing more than glimpses through the dense foliage. No attempt to lure it out by playing call backs seemed to make the slightest impression upon it. We were similarly teased by Terrestrial Bulbul (Boskrapper). Some of us (but again not me personally!) did net a satisfying sighting of a Garden Warbler (Tuinsanger) here. Davin Letsoalo led us into some dense bush in search of it, and we did manage to see and photograph a warbler, but Richter assured us that it was merely a Willow Warbler (Hofsanger)! The call-playback technique also did succeed in drawing a Lesser Honeyguide (Kleinheuningwyser). Owl calls brought us an excited-looking Common Scimitarbill (Swartbekkelaar).

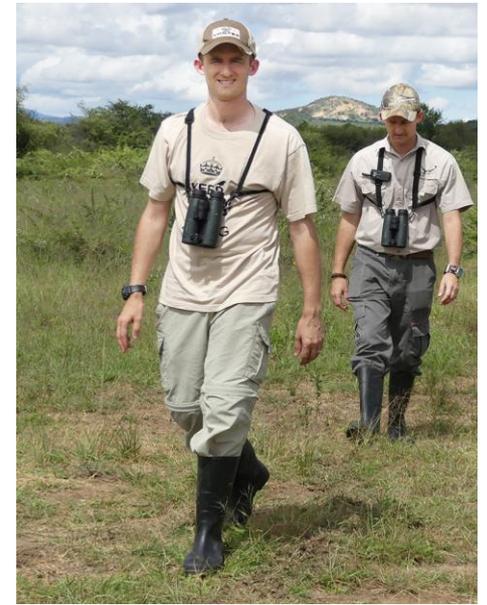
Back to the reeds and the water, we moved through some squelching mud which almost ate one of Mark's shoes! We glimpsed a Painted Snipe (Goudsnip) as well as an African Snipe (Afrikaanse Snip) flying past. We also saw a Three-banded Plover (Driebandstrandkiewiet) and Wood Sandpiper (Bosruiter) at the spot. African Black Swifts (Swartwindswael) flew overhead and treated us to a display at their prowess of skimming drinks from the water surface.

We were teased some more, by the African Rail (Grootriethaan), and Red-chested Flufftail (Rooiborsvleikuiken), calling from the reeds but refusing to show themselves! Again attempts by Richter and Rowan to lure them out by playing call backs, failed to make any impression on them. I was happy enough to hear them call as I had never encountered them before. A special sighting, and a lifer for some of us, was a Little Bittern (Woudapie/Kleinrietreier) perched peacefully in a tree by the waterside. A wonderfully pretty bird, and also a lifer for some of us, and a great sighting was a Pygmy Kingfisher (Dwergvisvanger). Snazzy White-winged Widows (Witvlerklap) were conspicuous all over the place.



Some of the keen birders who participated in the Sebayeng wetlands outing on the 9th of April

Birds not specifically associated with water, included Black-Chested Snake Eagle (Swartborsslangarend), Gabar Goshawk (Witkruissperwer), Little Bee-Eater (Kleinbyvreter), and Quail Finch (Gewone Kwartelvinkie) flushed from the grass by Richter (or was it Rowan?) We also spotted some Orange-Breasted Waxbills (Rooiassie) flying by. The dense vegetation also hosted Common (Rooibek-), Blue (Gewone Blou-) and Black-Faced Waxbills (Swartwangsysie), Melba Finch (or Green-Winged Pytilia/Gewone Melba), Red-billed (Rooibek-) and Jameson's Firefinch (Jamesonse Vuurvinkie). A cute sighting was a Yellow-breasted Apalis (Geelborskleinjantjie). We got good sightings (and for some of us, photo's) of active little Burnt-necked Eremomelas (Bruikeelbossanger). Always elegant Paradise Flycatchers (Paradysvlieëvanger) were also around. We spotted some female (or maybe non-breeding male) Pintailed Whydahs (Koningrooibekkie) and also a perched Shaft-tailed Whydah (Pylstertrooibekkie). In all, it was a very rewarding morning's birding. Thanks to everyone involved, including David for his diligence in leading us to elusive birds; Richter of course for organising this outing and his all-round expertise; for Mark and Julia to allow me to travel along with them; and Susan Chapman for allowing me to play around with her camera!



Above: The morning outing to the Sebayeng Wetlands proved very popular with the Birdlife Polokwane members. The outing was lead by Richter van Tonder, capably assisted by his brother Rowan and Kurisa Moya guide David Letsoalo.

Left: The van Tonder twins in full birding (combat) gear.

Photos by San3 de Wet

African Broadbill display flight study

Article submitted by Joe Grosel

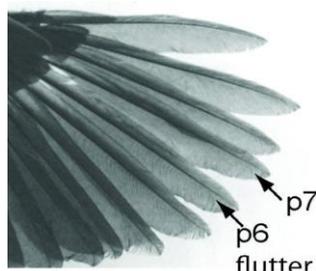
Broadbills produce a startlingly loud sound that they make with their wings to mark territory and possibly to attract females. Males fly abruptly in a tight circle, landing where they began, and produce a klaxon-like sound – *brreeeeet!* Researchers have hypothesized that it is the outermost wing feathers that make the sound, but no studies have been conducted to verify this hypothesis.

Recently, a team of researchers led by biologist Christopher J. Clark of the University of California, Riverside conducted a study in which the results show that it is not the outermost wing feathers but the ones just inside of these feathers that make this unique sound.

The researchers used high-speed video cameras to film African Broadbills displaying in Uganda and tested the primary feathers in a wind tunnel in an attempt to reproduce the sound. What they discovered was that it is the two primary feathers named P6 and P7 that are responsible for the sound and not the outermost three wing feathers.

In most species of birds that use their feathers to make sounds, the feathers are distinctly modified. But the high-speed videos and the other tests showed that the sound-producing feathers in broadbills are not modified at all. The P6 and P7 feathers are not narrow, twisted or stiffened in any way and as Clark says “Indeed, there is nothing remarkable about their shape and nothing about them betrays their role”. “The broadbill is using its wings as an instrument, yet when we look at the wing feathers, there is no obvious modification to the feathers to make them into a musical instrument.”

The synchronized high-speed video and sound recordings of displays in the field that Clark and his colleagues took showed that the P6 and P7 feathers flutter a thousand times per second to make the sound. The sound pulses are produced during the downstroke. During the short display flight, the klaxon-like sound only lasts about a second but can travel more than 100 metres through the forest.



Calling all young birders!

By: Joe Grosel

An exciting new e-bird club for young South Africans has just seen the light. Bird guides John Kinghorn, Dylan Vasapoli and Jason Boyce came up with the idea of promoting birding as a pastime amongst younger South Africans and have used the social media network as a platform. The interest in Youth Africa Birding (YAB) is growing by the day and the young bird club members of the Limpopo Province are encouraged to join the gang. While reading through the first issue of YAB's newsletter 'The Fledgling' I realised that anyone older than 30 is considered to be a "Ballie"! Well from this 'ballie' congratulations to the YAB Chairman John Kinghorn and his team for coming up and developing this great initiative.

Anyone interested in joining YAB can go onto the youth-africa-birding@googlegroups.com link or look them up on Instagram or Facebook.



CLUB OUTINGS / UITSTAPPIES:

- 14 May – Day outing to Kurisa Moya (**RvT**)
- 20-22 May – Wildlife tracking & bush observation skills workshop in th Thornybush Game Reserve (**JG**)
- 02-05 June – ‘The Mapungubwe Birding Experience’ with the Limpopo Honorary Rangers (**CH**)
- 04 June – Heanertsburg Grasslands Day outing (**RvT**)
- 07 June – Birdlife Plk monthly meeting at Plk Golf Club
- 09 July – Vulture Restaurant outing (**RvT**)

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