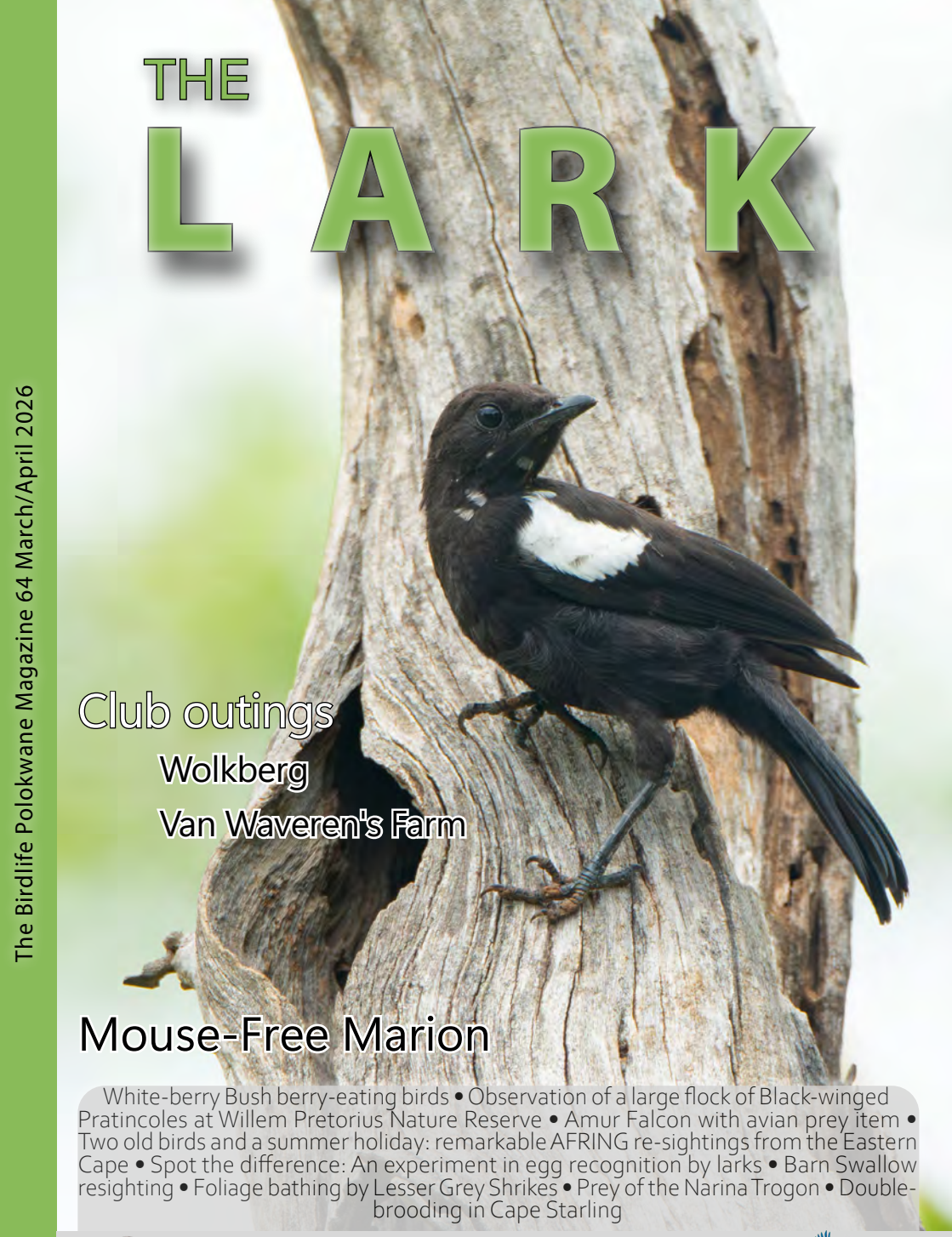
The Birdlife Polokwane Magazine 64 March/April 2026

THE LARK



Club outings

Wolkberg

Van Waveren's Farm

Mouse-Free Marion

White-berry Bush berry-eating birds • Observation of a large flock of Black-winged Pratincoles at Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve • Amur Falcon with avian prey item • Two old birds and a summer holiday: remarkable AFRING re-sightings from the Eastern Cape • Spot the difference: An experiment in egg recognition by larks • Barn Swallow resighting • Foliage bathing by Lesser Grey Shrikes • Prey of the Narina Trogon • Double-brooding in Cape Starling

Birdlife Polokwane

Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA Giving Conservation Wings

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.

The editors reserve the right to edit articles as necessary. All images are copyright protected and the property of the author/s of the article unless otherwise stated. Please send all your contributions to the editors at thelarknews@gmail.com.

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE:

15 April 2026

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

Cover page theme 2026: Young Birds

Cover Juvenile female Arnot's Chat
© Derek Engelbrecht.

CONTENT

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March/April 2026

Featured

For a lark ...

'n Uiltjie (wat) knip © Derek Engelbrecht

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Editors' chirps

As is so often the case, everything seems a little more frenetic in January than in other months. This year was no different. The province hosted several rarities, including the 5th record of the Rosy Starling in southern Africa. The good start to the wet season leading up to December was followed by unprecedented rains, especially in the Lowveld, which caused extensive damage to infrastructure. It also brought with it birds such as a frigatebird (probably Greater Frigatebird), seen on the Olifants River near Hoedspruit. Nomadic species irrupted everywhere, including Monotonous Larks, Wattled Starling, and Red-billed Quelea, but it was especially the skulking Common Buttonquails and Harlequin Quails whose calls resonated from every open clearing. Read more about these and some of the other interesting records in our Interesting Sightings section.

Our club's activities kicked off with two well-attended outings, one to the Wolkberg and another to the van Waveren's farm. Both outings delivered some interesting sightings. The new year also kicked off with a nice surprise for the Mouse-Free Marion Project, but we are not going to spoil the news in the editorial - read about it on page 27. This is a very worthy project, and if you have the means - or no of someone who has - please consider making a contribution to help save our seabirds on Marion Island.

Our Bird Briefs section is, as always, packed with some interesting natural history observations. These range from Black-winged Pratincole super-flocks, new dietary records of the Amur Falcon and Narina Trogon, and several interesting resightings of ringed birds, amongst others. As always, we urge our readers to submit their interesting observations to ***The Lark***. As editors, we are especially grateful for some of the 'outside' contributions we receive from time - see the notes from the Free State province in this issue. Thanks to the Potgieters and a regular contributor, Dawie de Swardt.

We hope you enjoy this edition as much as we enjoyed compiling it, and we look forward to your contributions in future editions.

Raelene and Derek

The mesmerising beauty of the Wolkberg

A rare sight ... the Wolkberg tufa waterfall is flowing © Willem van der Merwe.

text **Willem van der Merwe**

This outing was originally planned for 17 January 2026, but due to the very heavy rains we've had, we postponed it by two weeks to Saturday 31 January ... and it was a wise choice! The rains had stopped for a while, and we had great weather throughout the entire excursion. To boot, we could see the wondrous after-effects of the rains!

The veld was lovely and verdant, and most amazingly, we found the tufa waterfall in full flow! I didn't even realize that the waterfall was still 'active'. We've always seen the tufa formation at the start of the climb into the Wolkberg mountains, but I always assumed it was a 'fossil' waterfall, with the flow no longer being active. A tufa waterfall is one where the water feeding the river or stream flows through dolomite rock – which is plentiful in the Wolkberg – in the process absorbing some of the calcium carbonate from the rocks. Then, as the stream falls over a cliff, some of the water evaporates, leaving behind a precipitate of calcium carbonate. This can, over very long periods, build up 'shelves' of calcium carbonate rock, called tufa, below the point where the water falls; these can, in time cause the point from where the water falls to build itself forward, instead of cutting backward into the mountain slope as you would expect from normal erosion caused by the stream and the falls. In the case of this tufa waterfall, it's clearly visible that a very large amount of tufa has been deposited below the falls, certainly over a very long period of time. But every time thus far, we've only seen the formation, never the actual falls. So, I thought that it dated from an earlier period when the climate was moister or before the stream had changed its course. But this time, for the first time – and I've been to this region many times – I've seen it in its full glory. There was a thin ribbon of water flowing down the slope and cascading over the falls! This made it clear to all how the waterfall was formed and impressively demonstrated how long it must have taken to build the entire formation. And intermittent as the flow might be now, it's still building!

Above The track winding its way down into the isolated Mispah Valley © Willem van der Merwe.

Right A lone *Aloe vryheidensis* guards the Mispah Valley © Willem van der Merwe.

This was an auspicious start to the trip, and driving further into the mountains rewarded us with many more lovely vistas. The Wolkberg includes numerous habitats: thorny savannah, woodland with a variety of trees, mountain grassland, rocky outcrops, and patches of forest in deep valleys. This allows for a very interesting mix of birds and typically a high species total for the day. This time, we were not as fortunate in terms of the total number of species we saw, and we also did not see most of them particularly well. Many ones that we encountered, were the familiar bushveld birds we find on almost any one of our outings: Long-billed Crombec (Bosveldstompstert), Grey Go-away-bird (Kwêvoël), Black-collared Barbet (Rooikophoutkapper), Crested Barbet (Kuifkophoutkapper), Golden-tailed Woodpecker (Goudstertspeg), White-browed Scrub Robin (Gestreepte Wipstert), White-throated Robin-Chat (Witkeeljanfrederik), Fork-tailed Drongo (Mikstertbyvanger), Natal Spurfowl (Natalse Fisant), Chinspot Batis (Witliesbosbontrokkie), the omnipresent Black-chested Prinia (Swartbandlangstertjie), Fiscal Flycatcher (Fiskaalvlieëvanger), groups of Red-faced Mousebird (Rooiwangmuisvoël), Red-backed Shrike (Rooiruglaksman), Spotted Flycatcher (Europese Vlieëvanger), Willow Warbler (Hofsanger), Blue Waxbill (Blousysie), Black-backed Puffback (Sneeubal), Orange-breasted Bushshrike (Oranjeborsboslaksman), and Black-crowned Tchagra (Swartkroontjagra). Deserving of mention here are some of the beautiful or unusual savannah species such as the Long-tailed Paradise Whydah (Gewone Paradysvink), Pin-tailed Whydah (Koningrooibekkie), Barred Wren-Warbler (Gebande Sanger), Grey Tit-Flycatcher (Waaierstertvlieëvanger), Streaky-headed Seedeater (Streepkopkanarie), Red-throated Wryneck (Draaihals), and Common Scimitarbill (Swartbekkakelaar).

Left The veld flowers were showing in all their glory, including this *Salvia disermas* © Willem van der Merwe.

A few species we saw were birds of more well-developed woodlands, not

Right Common Buzzard © Johan Janse van Vuuren.

Above Yellow-breasted Apalises were seen in the woodlands down in the valley © Johan Janse van Vuuren.

often seen in the open savannah that surrounds most of Polokwane, but here they found ample habitat. These include the Yellow-breasted Apalis (Geelborskleinjantjie), Bar-throated Apalis (Bandkeelkleinjantjie), Southern Black Tit (Swartmees), the diminutive Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird (Geelblestinker), Bleating (Grey-backed form) Camaroptera (Kwêkwêvoël), the striking Golden-breasted Bunting (Rooirugstreepkoppie), Black Cuckooshrike (Swartkatakoeroe), and Bearded Woodpecker (Baardspeg).

A particularly memorable sighting was of a Common Buzzard (Bruinjakkalsvoël) perched in a tree close to the road. It didn't seem to be concerned with us but was moving its head and opening its mouth as if retching. But nothing came out. This went on for quite some time. We wondered if it had something in its throat or was casting up a pellet. It didn't seem to be in too much distress, though.

We didn't have any other close raptor sightings, but ones glimpsed in flight included White-backed Vulture (Witrugaasvoël) and Jackal Buzzard (Rooiborsjakkalsvoël).

Sadly, we dipped on the species we were most keen to see, the Tree Pipit (Boomkoester)! We did find it a few times in years past, but in the last few outings, they had become increasingly scarce and difficult to find. Maybe the habitat is changing, because herbs, shrubs, and grasses have recently been invading the open woodland it favours. We did get some pipits in the form of the Bushveld Pipit (Bosveldkoester) and Nicholson's Pipit (Nicholsonkoester), though.

But what we mainly came for were the mountain specials! We saw some quite early in our outing, as a large flock of Red-winged Starlings (Rooivlerkspreeus) flew past. These are indeed seen around Polokwane, where they often nest on tall buildings, but here they are amidst the cliffs that form their natural nesting grounds. We also encountered Mocking Cliff Chat (Dassievoël), which is regularly seen in rocky hill habitat. The

Below Bushveld Pipits are real stalwarts in the Mispah Valley © Richter van Tonder.

first true Wolkberg special, that we encountered quite soon, was the handsome Gurney's Sugarbird (Rooiborssuikervoël). The mountain grasslands host extensive stands of protea trees and bushes, many of which were in flower, providing nectar for them. Also frequenting the proteas was the Malachite Sunbird (Jangroentjie), the male sporting fabulous, shining green plumage. Another mountain special is one that frequents the numerous rock outcrops and formations. This is the Buff-streaked Chat (Bergklipwagter), which can frequently be seen perching on big boulders or sitting on top of a large bush or scrubby tree, uttering its rich warbling song. Another species associated with the rocky terrain is the Cape Bunting (Rooivlerkstreepkoppie), often announced by its nasal call. Here we found it together with the Cinnamon-breasted Bunting (Klipstreepkoppie) as well!

The mountain grassland supported some well-known species, such as Rufous-naped Lark (Rooineklewerik), Cape Grassbird (Grasvoël), as well as the showy Red-collared Widowbird (Rooikeelflap), of which we got some good views. A charming mountain special was the Cape Canary (Kaapse Kanarie) with its grey head and sweet song. More associated with forest or dense bush were the Red-chested Cuckoo (Piet-my-vrou) and African Firefinch (Kaapse Vuurvinkie).

We had some good views of swallows, mainly Greater and Lesser Striped Swallow (Grootstreepswael and Kleinstreepswael), Western House

You know you're in high country when you get to see Gurney's Sugarbird (ABOVE) and Buff-streaked Chat (RIGHT) © Johan Janse van Vuuren.

Above Some of the Horus Swift and White-fronted Bee-eater nests in an earth embankment © Johan Janse van Vuuren.

Martin (Huisswael), Barn Swallow (Europese Swael), Large Rock Martin (Kransswael), and Black Saw-wing (Swartsaagvlerkswael).

It was also a good day for cisticolas, with our tally including Lazy Cisticola (Luitinktinkie), Neddicky (Neddikkie), Zitting Cisticola (Landeryklopkloppie), Rattling Cisticola (Bosveldtinktinkie), and Wailing Cisticola (Huiltinktinkie).

At the end of our day in the Wolkberg, we drove down again and took a final detour to look at a large breeding colony of Horus Swifts (Horuswindswaels)! They were nesting in a tall earthen bank next to a large excavation from which people were digging river sand. There were also White-fronted Bee-eaters (Rooikeelbyvreters) nesting in the same bank. Likely, the swifts were taking over abandoned bee-eater tunnels, since their small bills and feet are not very good for digging. It was amazing to see so many swifts breeding together! This species usually breeds individually or in small groups; here, there looked to be dozens of them actively nesting. They displayed their expert flight skills in directly flying into the small tunnel entrance, barely big enough to fit through, at full speed, just folding their wings in at the last second!

All in all, though the total number of bird species was not as high as in previous outings, our Rheebokvlei trip was rewarding and memorable as always.

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BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings

FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology

LAB
Learn About Birds

Learn About Birds (LAB) Conference 2026

7th Learn About Birds Conference

20-23 May 2026 | Bonamanzi Game Reserve

BirdLife South Africa and the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology invite you to one of South Africa's premier birding destinations for the 7th **Learn About Birds** conference and **BirdLife South Africa's** 97th Annual General Meeting (AGM - the AGM will take place at 16h00, Friday 22 May 2025). Nestled in the heart of spectacular sand forest and moist savannah, Bonamanzi Game Reserve offers unparalleled opportunities to observe some of South Africa's rarest bird species, including the elusive Green Malkoha and African Broadbill. Whether you're a scientist, seasoned twitcher or just beginning your birding journey, this conference offers something for everyone. Experience the thrill of logging that elusive lifer, learn cutting-edge conservation techniques, and contribute to citizen science projects that protect our rich avian diversity. See here for more details.

Short-clawed Lark.

Verassings by die

Van Waverens

teks Richter van Tonder

fotos Marcia van Tonder

Ons idee van ‘n Valetynsdag was om dit saam met ons geveerde helftes deur te bring. Ons het vroeg weggespring. Die weer was koel en gedeeltelik bewolk. Dis sou later warm word. Die son was nog nie eers op nie, toe ons by die plaas stop. Die plaas is ‘n paar kilometer suidwes van Polokwane langs die semi droë Sandrivier geleë. Die habitat wissel tussen rivierbos met groot bome en breëblaarbosse tot groot gedeeltes ‘grasveld’ met doringbome. Daar is heelwat damme op die plaas wat die diversiteit van die spesies vermeerder. Met al die reën in die laaste maand was daar redelik water in die omgewing, asook ‘n groot deel van die veld wat onder water was.

Met ons aankoms het ons groep van 15 eers langs ‘n landery gestop om koffie te geniet. Hier het ons vinnig ‘n paar goeie spesies opgetel. Onder andere was daar ‘n paar Oostelike Rooipootvalkies (Amur Falcons) wat gejag het. Baie Witvlerkflappe (White-winged Widowbird) het rondgevlieg, wat almal mooi kon sien. Dis natuurlik die mannetjie met sy swart lyf en wit

Bo Die plaas spog met 'n groot verskeidenheid habitatte, en heirdie vlei is ideaal vir 'n goeie verskeidenheid voëls.

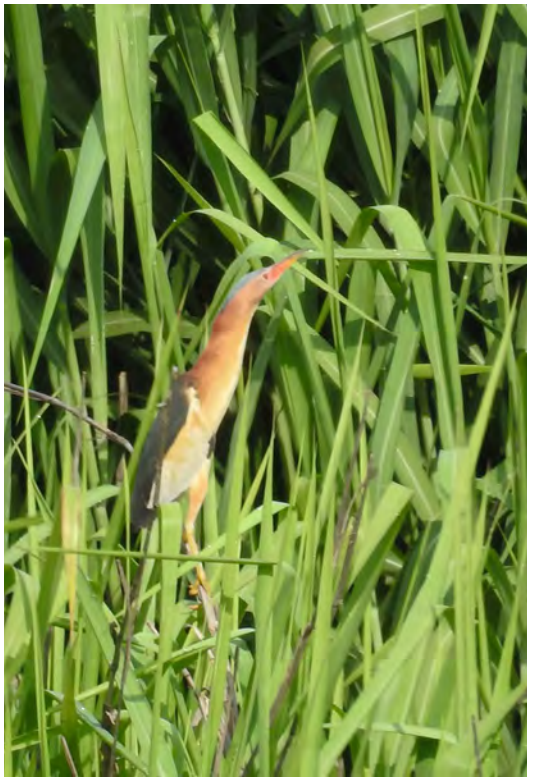
vlek op die vlerk wat die aandag trek. So entjie nader aan die hoofhek was daar ‘n Grasvoël (Cape Grassbird) wat konstant geroep het. Almal kon hom mooi sien.

Daarna het ons stadig dieper in die plaas inbeweeg. Die eerste deel van die pad neem jou deur die Sandrivier en oewerbos. Spesies soos Witpootblouvinkie (Purple Indigobird), Geelborskleinjantjie (Yellow-breasted Apalis), Jamesonvuurvinkie (Jameson’s Firefinch), Spotsanger (Icterine Warbler), Europese Rietsanger (Marsh Warbler) en Grysrugkwêkwêvoël (Bleating [grey-backed form] Cameroptera) is hier gesien. In die pad en rivierbedding is drie Hamerkoppe (Hamerkop) gekry. Hierna beweeg jy oor ‘n stuk grasveld/vlei gebied met water. Goudgeelvink (Yellow-crowned Bishop) en Landeryklopkloppie (Zitting Cisticola) het mooi vir ons vertoon. Hier het ons die eienaar Anke van Waveren gekry wat vir ‘n rukkie by ons aangesluit het. Sy stel baie belang in voëls en mag dalk in die toekoms by ons klub aansluit.

Bo 'n Grasvoël het mooi saamgespeel en almal kon hierdie enetjie mooi sien.

Ons het toe eers na die noordoostelike deel van die plaas beweeg waar meer grasveld is en ook ietwat hoër geleë is as die res van die plaas. Die gebied het heelwat goeie spesies opgelewer soos Rooineklewerik (Rufous-naped Lark), Woestynklopkloppie (Desert Cisticola), Donkerkoester (Plain-backed Pipit), Kortkloulewerik (Short-clawed Lark), Gryslaksman (Lesser Grey Shrike), Witvlerkkorhaan (Northern Black Korhaan) en, een van die hoogte punte, ‘n paar Sekretarisvoëls (Secretarybird). Dit lyk ook asof hulle wil nes maak of reeds ‘n nes het. Dis goeie nuus, want hulle is bedreig.

Hierna het ons terugbeweeg na die suidwestelike deel van die plaas, maar ons het eers ‘n draai by die dam by die hoofhuis gaan maak. Die dam lewer gewoonlik ‘n hele paar interressante spesies op en dit het nie terleurgestel nie. Die volgende is gesien en gehoor: Gewone Troupant (Lilac-breasted Roller), Kuifkopvisvanger (Malachite Kingfisher), Kleinrietreier (Little Bittern), Rooibekrenostervoël (Red-billed Oxpecker) en, nog ‘n besondere hoogtepunt, ‘n



Bo 'n Paar Sekretarisvoëls sal maar altyd 'n hoogtepunt wees.

Links 'n Kleinrietreier het mooi vertoon.

Waterdikkop (Water Thickknee), wat buite sy bekende verspreiding was.

Ander spesies wat ons gehoor het was: Kleinrietsanger (Common Reed Warbler), Kaapse Rietsanger (Lesser Swamp Warbler), Kaapse Vleisanger (Little Rush Warbler), en Grootrietsanger (Greater Reed Warbler).

Ons het redelik rustig beweeg tot op die punt, maar dit het vining warmer begin raak en, met nog 'n groot gedeelte van die plaas wat ons nog nie besoek het nie, het ons besluit

Grootwitreier

Oostelike Rooipootvalk

om die pas so bietjie te versnel. Ons volgende stop was in 'n gedeelte met baie doringbome. Hier het die aantal spesies weer begin optel. Ons het Swartkatakoeroe (Black Cuckooshirke), Swartkroontjagra (Black-crowned Tchagra), Rooivlerktjagra (Brown-crowned Tchagra), Rooivlerkstreepkoppie (Golden-breasted Bunting), Hofsanger (Willow Warbler), Europese Vlieëvanger (Spotted Flycatcher), Langstertlaksman (Magpie Shrike) en die "Voël van die Dag", 'n jong Breëkoparend (Martial Eagle) gesien!

Ons het toe nog by verskeie ander damme op die plaas 'n draai gaan maa ken ook weer al langs die Sandrivier terugbeweeg. Ongelukkig het die spesie lysie heelwat stadiger gegroei met die dat dit baie warm begin raak het. Dis toe dat ons besluit het om klaar te maak.

Baie dankie aan almal wat die uitstappie kon meemaak. Ek glo hierdie ene gaan nog baie jare op die uitstappierooster wees. Ons het die dag afgesluit met 150 spesies! Dis 'n ongelooflike aantal spesies vir slegs 'n oggenduitstappie.

Baie dankie aan Anke wat vir ons toestemming gegee het om hulle plaas te kon besoek.

Outeur se epos: richter.mcase@gmail.com

Oorkant bo Een van drie Hamerkoppe wat ons gesien het.

Oorkant onder 'n Jong Breëkoparend was die "Voël van die Dag".

Onder Die groepfoto.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA
BIRD OF THE YEAR 2026

Circus maurus

BLACK HARRIER

Black beauty

With a mere 800 or so adults of this magnificent raptor remaining, many people are not even aware that this special bird exists. The Black Harrier is essentially endemic to South Africa (meaning it is found nowhere else in the world), with the exception of a small proportion of the population that occurs in north-western Namibia and in Lesotho. Unlike other raptors that breed on cliffs or in trees, most of the 16 harrier species nest on the ground. Their nest comprises a bowl-shaped stick structure placed in vegetation and lined with soft grasses.

An adult harrier is a sight to behold with its piercing yellow eyes, striking black-and-white plumage, conspicuous white rump and barred tail. Its wingspan of up to 39 centimetres and its very long tail (about 25 centimetres) make it appear much larger than it really is. In fact, female Black Harriers weigh about 550 grams on average; while males clock in at a mere 380 grams – that's little more (female) or less (male) than a block of butter!

Although it is often confused with a Black Sparrowhawk, the Black Harrier is a completely different bird. Whereas the much larger, bird-hunting sparrowhawk is a raptor in forest and plantations, the harrier is mostly a rodent specialist in open country. Although it is not related to owls, it is sometimes referred to as a 'day owl' because it hunts as owls do, flying low over vegetation and relying not only on sight, but also on sound to locate prey. This it does with the aid of a 'facial disc' that directs sound to its ears, helping it to hear mice scuttling in the vegetation.

Sky dancers

Harriers are renowned for spectacular 'sky dancing' displays, performed mainly at the start of the breeding season. The display typically starts with a slow, measured wing beat as the male builds up speed and gains height. Several seriously impressive U-shaped dives follow, as he seems to twist and tumble with each downward fall, turning and flashing his black-and-white plumage while uttering a short 'squeal' at the top of each undulation. The crescendo often ends with a steep dive that almost culminates in a crash-landing before he recovers and flutters to a potential nest site for the mate he is trying to impress.

FAST FACTS

- The **global population** of Black Harriers stands at about 1900, but is **declining** at 2.3 per cent annually.
- Birds move from west to east following the rains, **travelling on average 250 kilometres a day** to find suitable habitat.
- Of 65 tracked birds, the **cause of death** for 11 could be determined: three were killed at wind farms, three on power lines, three from natural causes; one was chopped up by a harvester at night; and one was believed to have been poisoned.
- The **major threats** to Black Harriers are the degradation and loss of habitat, in the long term; climate change; and, ironically, the renewable energy measures designed to address climate change.
- A **lack of genetic diversity** found in a sample of 50 birds suggests that they are poorly equipped to handle future rapid environmental changes.

On the move

Black Harriers are highly nomadic and migratory, travelling great distances to find the best foraging or breeding sites, which may vary from year to year. It is clear that these movements are influenced by rainfall and vegetation (as they impact mouse numbers), yet no two birds are alike, as different individuals undertake radically different journeys in different years.

Black Harriers often leave their breeding grounds in the Western Cape at the end of the winter rains to seek the summer rains in the east. Traversing the Great Karoo is one of the biggest obstacles and the journey is often done fast and at height. One bird covered 523 kilometres in 12 hours of continuous flight from Piketberg to Klerksdorp and kills often reported between 400 and 600 metres above the ground. Harriers also sample sites hundreds of kilometres apart and may then return to these sites with uncanny accuracy months later to breed.

Maximum continuous flight on a single day was 525 kilometres (across the Karoo) and **maximum travel speed** was 80 kilometres per hour.

Did you know?
This was the first BirdLife South Africa Bird of the Year to be chosen by the public, in a voting process in September 2025.

Black Harrier conservation

Black Harrier research started in earnest 25 years ago and while many of the species' secrets have been revealed since then, recent monitoring has provided the most alarming outcomes of all: if just five additional adults are killed annually through manmade causes, the species will go extinct in the next 75 years.

Conservation action is critical and urgent. In order to pool knowledge and resources, several specialists, state organisations (CapeNature) and NGOs (including BirdLife South Africa, the FitzPatrick Institute, the Overberg Renosterveld Trust, the Endangered Wildlife Trust and Hawkwatch International) have formed a partnership known as the Black Harrier Task Force and generated a Conservation Action Plan to guide future conservation priorities. These range from the expansion of protected areas to improved mitigation measures for wind farm developments.

Adult Black Harriers train their fledglings early to take aerial food passes, but attempts are not always successful.

The two to four tiny (20-gram) harrier chicks are at their most vulnerable in the nest. They will take wing in just over five weeks.

ODETTE CURTIS-SCOTT (3)

Harrier habitats under threat

The Cape Floristic Region encompasses lowland and montane fynbos, coastal strandveld and renosterveld, and is recognised globally as the smallest plant kingdom – one that harbours extraordinary biodiversity and exceptional numbers of rare, range-restricted and threatened plants. This is the core of the Black Harrier's breeding distribution, but the species also breeds in Karoo and grassland habitats when conditions are suitable – in other words, when mice are abundant following good rains.

Although Black Harriers nest in a variety of fynbos habitats, from the coastal belt to fynbos-covered mountains, the highest breeding densities occur on South Africa's west coast in structured vegetation and in the Critically Endangered renosterveld habitat of the Overberg. Worryingly, these habitats have experienced major losses. Coastal habitats have been significantly transformed by development, and by invasive alien plants, which have altered thousands of hectares of montane habitats and catchments. In the fertile renosterveld lowlands, as much as 95 per cent of the area has been converted for agriculture.

Habitat loss is therefore a major cause of this species' decline. As it selects only the largest, most intact and contiguous remnants of natural vegetation to breed in, the Black Harrier is considered a flagship species for many habitats within the Cape Floristic Region.

Juvenile Black Harriers face an uncertain future in a rapidly warming and habitat-limited world.

Threats from renewable energy

In addition to habitat loss, a more recent threat comes from the generation of wind power to help combat climate change. For many birds, and raptors in particular, the spinning blades of large wind turbines may be difficult to detect because of birds' surprisingly poor ability to detect contrast (10-fold poorer than ours). This essentially renders the white blade invisible to birds passing through wind farms, and raptors, despite their excellent eyesight, are most affected.

The Black Harrier is no exception and, like the Cape Vulture and Verreaux's Eagle, it suffers a significant number of collisions with turbines. With the global movement towards renewable energy, this threat is likely to increase exponentially in the coming years, unless effective mitigation measures are put in place by wind farm developers.

Research in this field is urgent and ongoing, and several promising options are in place, starting with the avoidance of wind farm developments in and around breeding or other high-use areas. Another promising mitigation is to pattern turbine blades to make them more visible. The four-year Hoperfield experiment with colour-patterned blades has shown a significant reduction in all bird strikes and a median 80 per cent decline in fatalities compared to unpatterned turbines. Importantly, no more Black Harriers or Jackal Buzzards have been killed.

Another less tangible but equally alarming threat is the impact of climate change on the species. Research models have predicted that as temperatures rise, Black Harriers will be forced from their preferred habitats to remnants of coastal renosterveld and strandveld. By 2080, only about 20 per cent of currently suitable habitat will remain for this species. With more erratic rainfall and longer periods of drought, prey numbers will also be affected.

TEXT BY DR ODETTE CURTIS-SCOTT & DR ROB SIMMONS

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
HANS HOHEISEN charitable trust

25 February 2026

Tarryn Havemann

Mouse-Free Marion Project Development Officer

We are delighted to share exceptional and highly encouraging news for Saving Marion Island's Seabirds: The Mouse-Free Marion (MFM) Project.

The project has secured a transformational pledge of US$10 million from a Swiss-based international foundation. This commitment represents the largest contribution received to date and marks a major milestone in the journey towards restoring Marion Island to its former ecological condition.

With this pledge, the MFM Project has now secured approximately 60% of its overall funding target. This donation brings us significantly closer to delivering one of the most ambitious island eradication operations undertaken in the sub-Antarctic, and to safeguarding Marion Island's globally important seabird populations for generations to come.

Beyond its financial significance, the pledge carries considerable symbolic weight. It signals clear recognition by a major philanthropic foundation that the MFM Project is robustly designed, responsibly led, well governed, and positioned to deliver meaningful and lasting conservation impacts. Such endorsement provides powerful validation of the years of careful planning, partnership-building and due diligence that underpin the initiative.

Above At risk to the onslaughts of the introduced mice: an adult Wandering Albatross and chick on Marion Island © Stefan Schoombie.

The MFM Project presents a rare conservation opportunity: the ability to address a severe biodiversity threat through a single, decisive, once-off intervention.

By eradicating invasive House Mice from the island, the project aims to secure extraordinary and enduring conservation gains, restoring ecosystem functions and protecting internationally significant seabird colonies, preventing the local extinction of 19 of the 29 bird species breeding on the island. Few conservation initiatives offer the prospect of achieving outcomes that are both profound and permanent at this scale.

Renowned seabird author and illustrator and MFM Project Patron, Peter Harrison MBE, welcomed the announcement, saying: "This is a huge step forward in what I have always considered the single most important conservation project in the world today."

This is a pivotal moment. Leadership gifts of this scale create momentum, but it is the collective commitment of partners, donors, advocates and champions, both large and small, that will carry the project across the finish line.

We invite individuals, foundations, companies and conservation leaders to join this effort. Contributions at all levels will help unlock the remaining funding required. Equally important are introductions to potential supporters, corporate partners and philanthropic networks who may be inspired to be part of this landmark conservation achievement.

Together, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to remove invasive House Mice from Marion Island and secure the future of its globally important seabirds, permanently.

To discuss how you can support, partner, or advocate for the MFM Project, please visit www.mousefreemarion.org or contact us directly at tarryn.havemann@mousefreemarion.org.

We are immensely grateful to the many people and organisations who have made donations and sponsorships. Every contribution, irrespective of its size, is greatly appreciated.

Left This once-off intervention will restore island biodiversity and prevent the local extinction of iconic species like Grey-headed Albatrosses © Ben Dilley (left) and Michelle Risi (right).

Below Grey-headed Albatrosses, seen here during a snowfall on Marion, are also at risk to the island's mice © Kim Stevens.

ROBERTS 8 WISH LIST

Derek Engelbrecht
roberts8revision@gmail.com

Do you have any unpublished data, observations, images or sound recordings of any of the species below you'd like to share with the world? Please email me at roberts8revision@gmail.com.

All tinkerbirds
- Photos showing behaviour
- Photos showing diet
- Photos at nests

Goliath Heron
- Nests and nestlings
- Behaviour
- Diet
- Typical habitat
- Young birds
- Recordings

White and Black Storks
- For White Stork, a nest in southern Africa
- Typical habitat
- Nests, eggs, and nestlings

Southern Double-collared Sunbird
- Different age classes
- Photos showing diet
- Photos showing behaviour, interactions, birds at nests, nestlings, etc.
- Photos of nests

Palmut Vulture
- Photos showing behavior and diet
- Habitat photos.

Recently published species accounts

Yellow-billed Stork
Southern Brown-throated Weaver
Great Egret
Cape Weaver
Pale-winged Starling
Green-headed Oriole

Regulars

Birds in Art

African Pygmy Kingfisher

Text and Artwork

Willem van der Merwe

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:

DEVIANT ART

African Pygmy Kingfisher

Here you have a painting of the African Pygmy Kingfisher, *Ispidina picta*! This is South Africa's smallest kingfisher, reaching about 12 cm in length. The Malachite Kingfisher, *Corythornis cristatus*, is slightly longer but similar in body size. When not displaying its large crest, it can be told from the African Pygmy Kingfisher by the blue of its crown extending down to reach its eye, and by lacking the violet wash on the cheek feathers of the pygmy kingfisher. Both species are extremely pretty, but I have a special love for this tiny kingfisher, having only seen it a few times, but on all occasions quite clearly! I first encountered it when I became actively involved in bird watching in the late 1980s. It was on a trip to the Geloftefeesterrein, right next to the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary, on which my dad accompanied me. It was in the dense trees growing next to the stream where I was alerted to its presence by its high-pitched, thin '*tsip-tsip*' calls, and after seeing it flying about, I finally found it perched and got a good look at it. Subsequently, I saw it a few more times, including once while out seeking nocturnal reptiles and frogs with my friend Ruan Stander, finding one asleep on a twig within hand's reach, and most recently, in my own garden, where it sat perched on a branch above my compost heap! All of these sightings made a big impression on me.

African Pygmy Kingfishers live in well-wooded country, from lush savannah and woodland to evergreen forests. They are found all over sub-Saharan Africa, except in desert or semi-desert areas, treeless grasslands, or rugged mountain regions. In equatorial Africa, they are resident year-round. In southern Africa, they are migrants: birds from northern regions of Africa flying south to a region stretching from South Africa to the southern DRC. Sadly, because they tend to migrate by night, many die by colliding with buildings. Sometimes they are stunned but survive. In South Africa, they arrive in September and October, and leave again in March and April.

Opposite top A hand-held African Pygmy Kingfisher to show the facial features, including the mauve ear coverts © Derek Engelbrecht.

Opposite bottom A hand-held Malachite Kingfisher to show the facial features. Note that the blue feathers of the crown reach the eye, and the ear coverts are chestnut coloured © Derek Engelbrecht.

The kingfisher family, the Alcedinidae, has three subfamilies: the Halcyoninae, the largest, which includes the Woodland Kingfishers and their kin; the Ceyxinae, which hunt mostly insects or small vertebrates rather than catch fish; and the Alcedininae, which includes the Asian Kingfishers and their kin. The smallest subfamily, the Cerylinae, contains kingfishers specialised for fishing. The Alcedininae lie between the other two in terms of species numbers and include species specialised for fishing as well as more insectivorous ones. It is among these that the African Pygmy Kingfisher takes its place! It mostly eats a variety of insects that inhabit woodlands and forests, as well as other invertebrates such as spiders, millipedes, pill bugs, and small crabs, but will also take small vertebrates such as geckos, frogs, and tadpoles. It hunts from a twig, usually not very high above the ground, where it scans its environs, swooping at detected potential prey and attempting to grab it in flight. If successful, it will crush its prey in its bill or beat it against its perch. While perched, it will occasionally bob its head or flick its tail.

Like other kingfishers, African Pygmy Kingfishers nest in holes, most often in vertical earth banks, but sometimes in termite nests, or even in the walls of aardvark burrows. They may use pre-existing cavities or dig new ones using their bills. Sometimes they nest in colonies of up to 20 pairs at a suitable site. The female lays 3–6 eggs per clutch. Both sexes feed the chicks, bringing, on average, 8 food items to them each hour. The young fledge at 18 days of age and are independent after another five days. A pair can raise several broods each year if enough food is available.

Fortunately, this delightful little living gem of a bird is not endangered, as it is very widespread and able to thrive in a variety of habitats. A closely related species, the African Dwarf Kingfisher, occurs in the African equatorial rainforest belt. The very similar Asian dwarf kingfishers are placed in a different genus, *Ceyx*. At the same time, the Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher is a close relative of the Malachite Kingfisher and thus placed in the genus *Corythornis*.

Author email: willemsvandermerwe@gmail.com

Opposite A juvenile misjudged the size of this Cape Dwarf Gecko, but managed to swallow it in the end © Derek Engelbrecht.

Reflections

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

Expect the Bizarre and Magical at Crooks' Corner

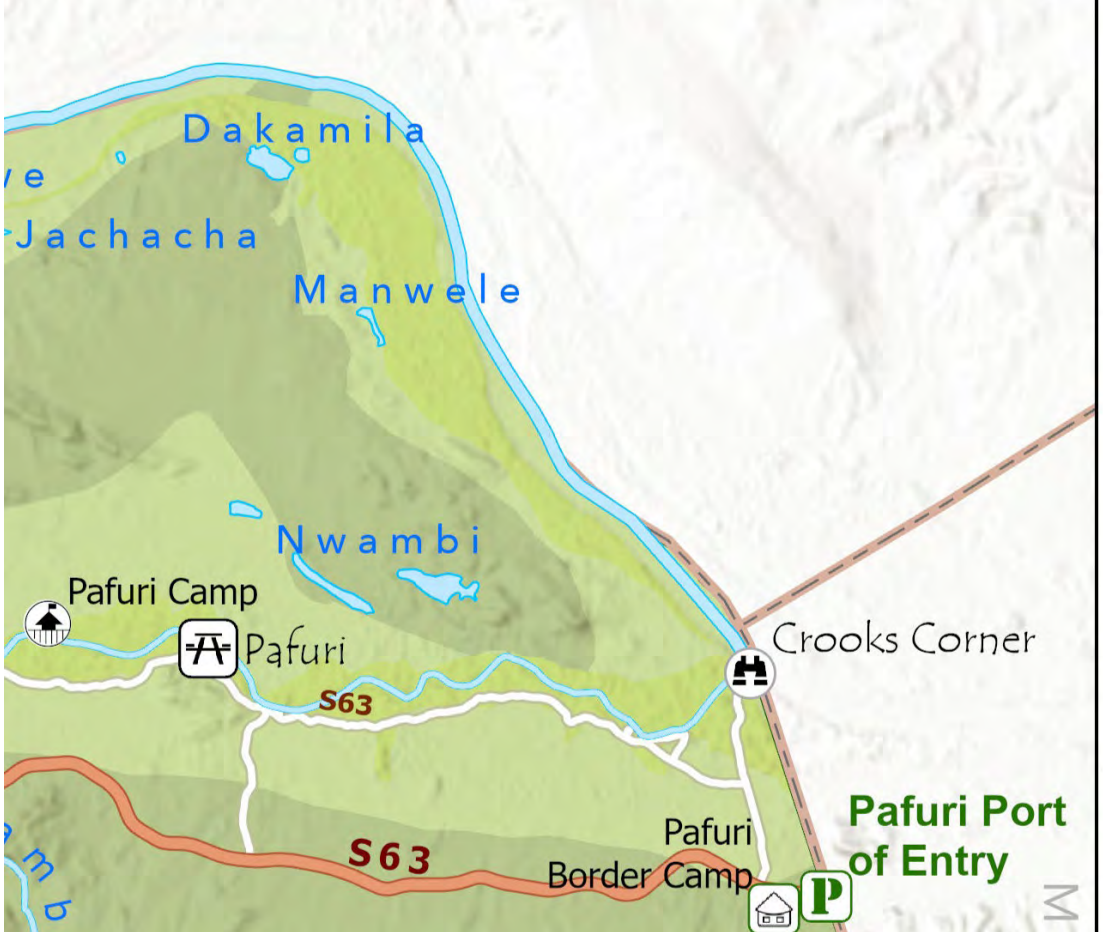
Despite the location's name… THIS IS NOT A SCAM!

Chris Patton

The name Crooks' Corner is mystical, and the area is shrouded in legend, and conjures up images of ivory hunters, outlaws and vagabonds, all because (as can be seen on the map) it is one of 175 tripoints in the world, where 3 countries meet, and this made it a convenient haven for ivory poachers, illegal labour recruiters for the mines in the Witwatersrand, gun-runners and various other "shady" characters that were characterized as out-laws, and could skip from one country to another if they were being pursued by the 'law' of one of those countries.

Such practice was in its pomp before the area was designated as a national park in 1926. Perhaps the most famous ivory poacher was a rascal known as Bvekenya (Stephanus Cecil Rutgert Barnard) who first settled in the Pafuri area in 1910 and was immortalised in TV Bulpin's book "The Ivory Trail" along with other characters like William Pye and Hendrik Hartman, before a bond with a big tusker called Dulamithi made him leave his hunting days behind him for a more sedentary farming life.

But for birders, Crooks' Corner is equally mystical and legendary because, like the rest of the Pafuri area, it hosts an abundance of subtropical avian specials, and it also keeps turning up birds not normally found in the Kruger National Park. One such bizarre record that stands out is the 20?? Record of a Cape Gannet!! Part of the reason for this is that the Limpopo River and its tributaries act as flyways between the Mozambique Coast and the interior of landlocked countries like Botswana and Zimbabwe. Large water birds like flamingos and pelicans that breed and thrive in the rainy season, when conditions are right in the Makgadikgadi Pans, will use the Shashe and then the Limpopo Rivers to get to the coast when the pans dry



Above A close-up of Crooks' Corner – the lookout icon is where the Luvuvhu and Limpopo Rivers merge.

up. Along their route, they might find temporary ideal conditions along the Limpopo or by turning up some of the tributaries that run through the northern half of Kruger.

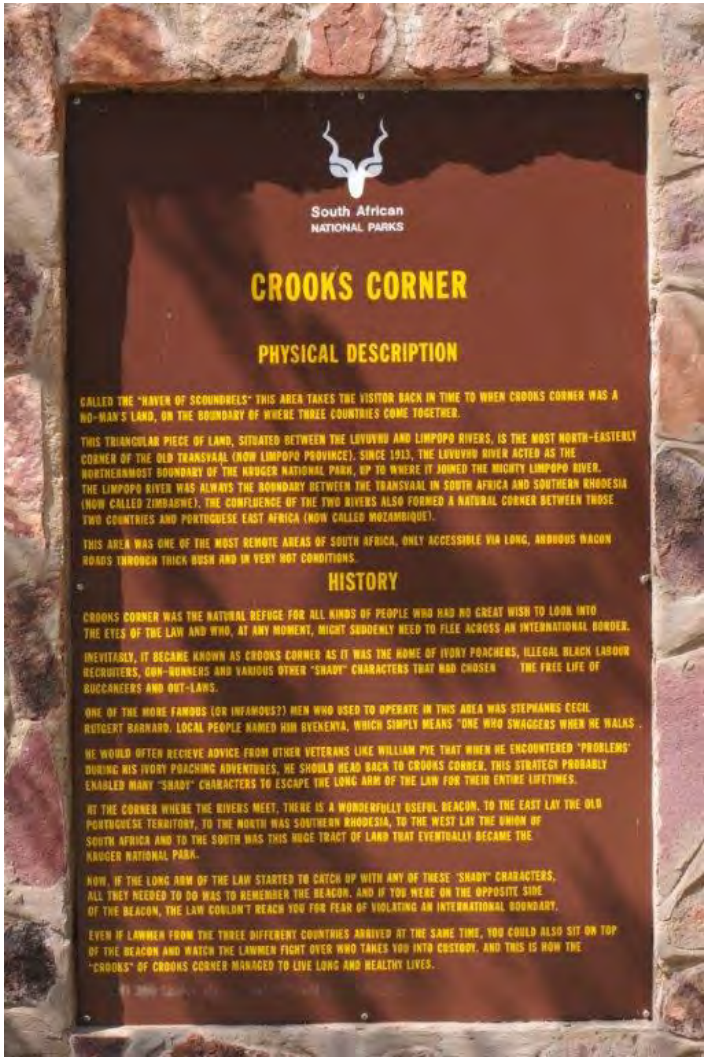
The actual location of Crooks' Corner is on an island in the Limpopo River, near where the Luvuvhu River flows into it. There used to be a beacon on the island marking the spot, but floods washed it away. Nowadays, the celebrated Crooks' Corner location is where the cairn and interpretation sign are, in the cleared parking area at the end of the cul-de-sac at the eastern end of the S63 Pafuri River Road.

For me personally, 'Crooks' starts at the T-junction along the S63 where the road turns north and transitions out of the open floodplain and heads into the riverine forest. At the T-junction is an ephemeral pool and clumps of Lala Palm shrubs, where Lemon-breasted Canaries and Village Indigobirds are reliably seen (described in Reflections 'Fun in the Floodplain' in ***The Lark 61***).

One of my favourite memories from travelling to Crooks' Corner was early on the morning of 6 February 2010… There were issues

LEFT Crooks' Corner… the confluence of the Luvuvhu and Limpopo Rivers © Joep Stevens.

BELOW Pink-backed Pelicans can sometimes be seen using the Limpopo as a flyway © Scott Chalmers.



Above Crooks' Corner with the cairn on the right and a close-up of the interpretation signage © Joep Stevens.

of civil unrest that year in some of the communities on the Park's periphery. As a consequence, the two Kruger rangers who would ordinarily make up two of the four 10-seater bird guides on Punda Extreme weekends, and who usually called first dibs on Crooks' Corner as their chosen Dawn Chorus site (see Reflections article from ***The Lark 60*** 'A Symphony of Sound' on the Luvuvhu River Bridge for more details on the respective merits of the best place in Pafuri to experience the Dawn Chorus) were required to be on duty in their sections further south and had to cry off last minute. Tertius Gous and I, the two other guides, usually worked the Bridge as our dawn chorus site, but we both decided to take the opportunity to try Crooks Corner. My vehicle, driven by Nyalaland Trail guide Job Shabangu, was first on the scene, and it was a wonderful, misty morning… As we turned left at the T-junction and headed towards the riverine forest and 'Crooks', we were halted by two young male lions that had felled a zebra and were busy gorging on the carcass. Now we were a safari vehicle full of birders on a birding weekend, trying to count as many species as possible, but a lion kill is a lion kill. It must be appreciated

and 'consumed' so to speak through binocular and camera lenses.

As we watched the scene, a couple of the local hyenas emerged through the undergrowth and began announcing their presence with whoops to rally more of the clan. The young lions responded with snarls and the occasional rushing at the gathering hyenas. But two young lions are no match for the assembling malevolent forces of a hyena clan, and in time, the two young potential future kings were driven off the carcass and vanquished; they slunk off into the undergrowth themselves. It was an incredible and mesmerising scene, and one that one wouldn't normally want to leave, but this was a birding weekend, and the clock was ticking, and the prime dawn chorus period in situ at 'Crooks' was passing us by… Job and I exchanged a couple of whispered apprehensions, while the 7 or 8 guests on the 10-seater were still oohing and aahing and lapping up the battle through their cameras and binoculars…

Below When a lion kill threatens to derail Kruger Birding Big Day © Chris Patton.

And then Job, with amazing comic timing honed through leading many patrons on Wilderness Trails through the years, suddenly blurted out… "Hey, look over there, it's a Blacksmith Lapwing!" Everyone burst out laughing and realised it was now time to move on…after all, they were all eager birders on a Punda Extreme adventure… and so we did…(Tragically, most of my photos were out of focus in the early morning mist, but the one here hopefully gives readers an idea of the scene as the road transitions from Luvuvhu floodplain into riverine forest, with an infusion of Lala Palm thickets.)

But back to birding at 'Crooks' and what a regular visit can produce. From the lion kill image, readers will get a feel for entering the riverine forest, and the entrance road to 'Crooks' takes visitors right through the forest for a couple of hundred metres. On the left, on the way in, is a creek from a secondary tributary of the Luvuvhu, almost at the point where it flows into the Limpopo. This creek, adjacent to the 'Crooks' access road amongst a plethora of prevalent bird species, is the best place in the entire Kruger National Park, in my opinion, to reliably find Tambourine Dove, not a typical Kruger bird, and is also a regular haunt of Pel's Fishing Owls and Narina Trogons.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the road is a cornucopia of tangled vegetation, shrubs and creepers, which are loved by skulking species like robin-chats, Eastern Nicator, Thrush Nightingale, and, in late summer, various Palearctic migrant warblers including Garden, Marsh, Icterine, Willow Warblers, and one year we even found a Common Whitethroat. The dominant creeper in these tangles is the flame creeper *Combretum microphyllum*, which will be in full bloom in spring around September/October, and then becomes a magnet for sunbird species like Collared, Marico, Scarlet-chested, and White-bellied, with always the possibility of something rarer coming upriver from the Indian Ocean coastline.

A very lost Cape Gannet (but a photo was revealed on Trevor Hardaker's South African Rare Bird Network), Eleanora's and Sooty Falcon, African Hobby, White-throated, Swallow-tailed and Olive Bee-eater, and African Skimmer are just some of the rarities or out-of-range birds reported from 'Crooks' over the years. I haven't recorded any of them

The tunnel of forest and vegetation in the approach to 'Crooks' (TOP) and a tangle of flame creeper in spring (BOTTOM) © Joep Stevens.

there myself, although there was one year we thought we might have an Eleanora's, but in the end, we couldn't rule out that it may have been a Eurasian Hobby.

We did find a Long-crested Eagle one year, which is not a regular Kruger species, and watched with delight as it caught itself a mouse of sorts, but one of the birds to target at Crooks' Corner when the water level is low, and there are large expanses of river sand, is the White-fronted Plover. These are, of course, regulars along beaches around the South African coastline, but this is the best place to see them in Kruger, although they can be found along most of the large rivers

A Common Whitethroat (TOP) © Tommy Liversage, one of many Palearctic migrant warblers found in the tangled vegetation in late summer, and an Eastern Nicator (RIGHT) © Scott Chalmers skulking in tangles all year round.

Opposite top Long-crested Eagles are rare visitors to Kruger, and are usually recorded in the extreme southwest of the Park © Scott Chalmers.

Opposite bottom The Limpopo/Luvuvhu confluence in dry periods provides wide stretches of sand where White-fronted Plovers can reliably be found © Derek Engelbrecht.

Below Blue-cheeked Bee-eater is a special part of the Crooks' Corner Bee-eater Bonanza © Chris Patton.

when extensive dry sandbanks are exposed.

A Bee-eater Bonanza

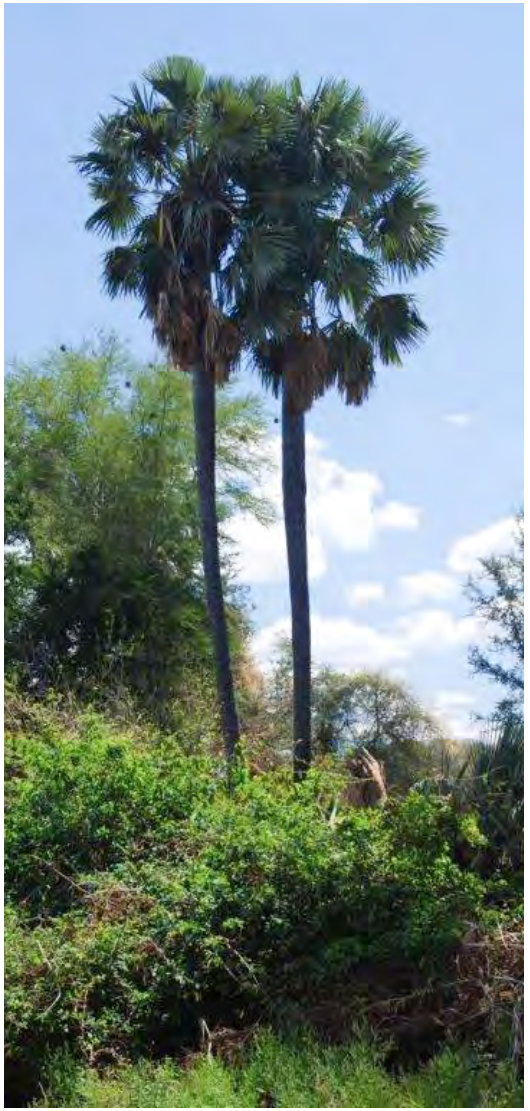
So I've already mentioned the three rare or out of range bee-eaters reported from 'Crooks', but I suspect it may be the only place in South Africa, where every single bee-eater species recorded in South Africa has been recorded because the common Kruger bee-eaters in Little, European, White-fronted, and Southern Carmine are all easy to find there. It is also one of the more reliable places to find Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, particularly out over the riverbed.

Squadrons of African Openbill are another regular feature of Crooks, and there is usually a company of other members of the stork and heron families, with African Fish Eagles also serenading their presence.

Now the profusion of Lala Palms in the 'Crooks' area has already been mentioned. The palms occur in both shrub and tree form, and when one is partaking in a Punda Extreme birding weekend, and the idea is to maximise species count, the trees are nesting sites to the African Palm Swift, which can easily be overlooked over the rest of the day's route. But over the last two years, 'Crooks' has also become home to another palm-dependent species in the form of Collared Palm Thrush. I have seen this species elsewhere in the Park at Shingwedzi and Ntandanyathi, but, having not been to 'Crooks' since 2018, I'm yet to see it here. Still, it is a highly localised and cherished rarity to see anywhere within Kruger, so for this to be a reliable haunt for it for an extended period is always pleasing.

Dawn Choruses at 'Crooks' are, like at the Bridge, a manic affair, with so much sound and movement all happening at once, that it is somewhat overwhelming. Yellow-breasted Apalises, Green-capped Eremomelas, Tropical Boubous,

Lala Palms are key to a few palm-dependent species at 'Crooks' (BELOW) © Joep Stevens, such as this Collared Palm Thrush, perched on one of the demarcation poles in the Crooks Corner parking area (LEFT) © Daniel Engelbrecht.



Above Who knows, maybe Southern Yellow White-eyes will join the dawn chorus © Derek Engelbrecht.

Opposite Black-throated Wattle-eye © Christiaan Daniels.

two helmet-shrikes, Black-backed Puffbacks, Bleating Camaropteras (the grey-backed morph), Southern Black Tits, Terrestrial Brownbuls, and Yellow-bellied Greenbuls will be some of the vocal cast members, but being Pafuri, there is also a strong chance that specials like Black-throated Wattle-eye and Southern Yellow White-eyes will have starring roles too.

So, in summary, Crooks' Corner is a must visit place, for its geographic significance, its colourful history, its changing vegetation and water level throughout the year, but most of all because it is a birding treasure trove and will always produce quality sightings and leave its visitors greatly satisfied and not short changed, like they've had something stolen from them.

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More White-berry Bush berry-eating birds

Derek Engelbrecht

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Try saying this title quickly...! In 2023, Pietman Muller and I started compiling a list of birds eating the ripe berries of the remarkable White-berry Bush *Flueggea virosa* (Muller and Engelbrecht, 2023, Muller 2023). The list is growing steadily, and anyone spending a few minutes at a bush with ripe berries will almost certainly add novel observations to the list. To illustrate my point, in 11 minutes on 27 December 2025 in Hoedspruit, during the hottest part of the day (13:39–13:50), I added three new species to the list of birds recorded feeding on its berries. The three species are Common Bulbul, Burchell's Starling, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow. In addition to these three, on 7 December 2025, also in Hoedspruit, I recorded a small flock of Lesser Masked Weavers feasting on the berries.

The complete list of species known to feed on the berries of the White-berry Bush now stands at 16 species (Table 1), which is likely still a gross underestimation of the true number of species feeding on them. Images of the four new additions can be seen in Figures 1–4.

Should you come across any new species feeding on these fruits, please take a photo and send it to thelarknews@gmail.com.

References

Muller, P. (2023). Additions to the White-berry Bush berry-eating bird list. The Lark 47:55–56.

Muller, P., and D. Engelbrecht (2023). Birds and the White-berry Bush. The Lark 46: 73–76.

Note

This is a lovely plant for a bird-friendly garden, attracting a host of insects and birds. Plants are available at our local indigenous nursery, Callidendron, but the plant is dioecious (male and female flowers on separate plants), so it would be a good idea to get a few.

Contact Cornie Odendaal at:
083 501 1039.

Table 1. Species recorded feeding on the fruit of the White-berry Bush *Flueggea virosa*.

Order	Family	Species
Bucerotiformes	Bucerotidae	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill
Columbiformes	Columbidae	African Green Pigeon
		Laughing Dove
		Ring-necked Dove
Galliformes	Phasianidae	Natal Spurfowl
		Swainson's Spurfowl
Musophagiformes	Musophagidae	Grey Go-away-bird
Passeriformes	Leiothrichidae	Arrow-marked Babbler
	Muscicapidae	Spotted Flycatcher
	Passeridae	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow
	Ploceidae	Lesser Masked Weaver
	Pycnonotidae	Common Bulbul
	Sturnidae	Burchell's Starling
		Cape Starling
		Violet-backed Starling
Psittaciformes	Psittacidae	Brown-headed Parrot

Figure 1. Southern Grey-headed Sparrow.

Figure 2. Burchell's Starling.

Bird Briefs

Bird Briefs

Figure 3. Common Bulbul.

Figure 4. Lesser Masked Weaver.

Bird Briefs

Observation of a large flock of Black-winged Pratincoles at Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve

TEXT AND PHOTOS Martin and Melanie Potgieter

email: potgiemp@gmail.com

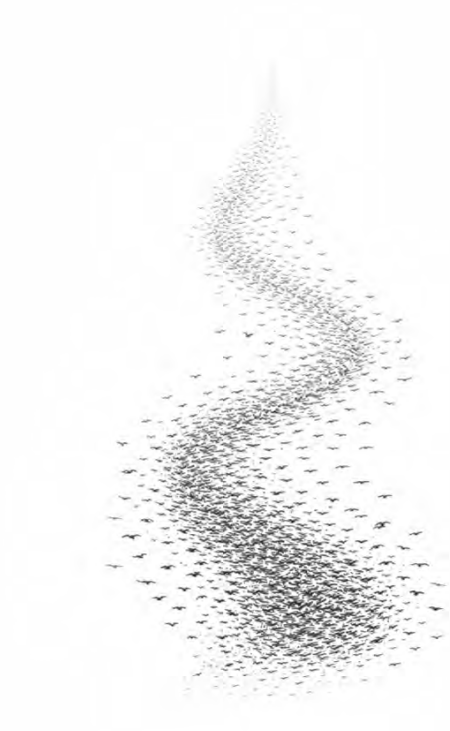
On 18 January 2026, a large aggregation of Black-winged Pratincoles *Glareola nordmanni* was observed at Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve (Free State), in the upper reaches of the Allemanskraaldam, where the Sand River flows into the dam. While the species is known to occur irregularly in the region, the size of this specific flock made the sighting noteworthy.

BELOW Black-winged Pratincole.

The flock was first detected at approximately 11:35, when Melanie noticed a faint, almost indistinct mass of birds at a very high altitude, barely visible to the naked eye from ground level. The flock swirled, broke into smaller groups, reformed into a massive ball, and eventually began to descend. During the descent, the formation resolved into a striking corkscrew-shaped column, denser towards the lower portion and stretching hundreds of metres vertically.

ABOVE A small portion of the flock observed.

RIGHT Illustration of the corkscrew-shaped column formed during descent.



As the flock neared the ground, it fragmented into multiple smaller groups that settled at different points along exposed banks. The dam was almost at full capacity, resulting in numerous inlets, oxbows and small islands in the area. By around 12:15, the majority of birds had settled on the ground, many standing on open mud and sand patches adjacent to the water, some wading in shallow water. In contrast, others intermittently took flight to hawk insects over nearby grassland and open water before resettling. When we left the area at approximately 13:30, most birds were still present on the ground.

Below One of several sub-groups coming in to settle on the shoreline.

Bottom Another sub-group in a different location.

Above Black-winged Pratincole - dorsal view.

To estimate the flock's size, I photographed several smaller groups. With the assistance of AI, the number of birds in each group was calculated, and, based on conservative counts of these groups and extrapolation across approximately ten similarly sized groups, the total aggregation was estimated at approximately 8,000–10,000 individuals.

A large thunderstorm, with associated rainfall, passed over the area the previous night. It remains unclear whether this weather system played a role in concentrating birds at the site or whether the reserve represents a more regular, but under-reported, stopover locality for the species.

Conservation status and population context

The Black-winged Pratincole Glareola nordmanni is currently classified as Near Threatened by BirdLife International. Earlier global assessments estimated the total world population at only 10,000–25,000 individuals, reflecting severe historical declines linked primarily to the cultivation

Above The area at the eastern end of the Allemanskraal dam where the observation was made

and degradation of steppe grasslands across much of the species' breeding range. More recent large-scale surveys in Kazakhstan, however, have revised these estimates substantially upwards, suggesting a global population of approximately 76,000–95,000 breeding pairs (roughly 150,000–190,000 individuals). In parts of central and north-eastern Kazakhstan and south-eastern Russia, populations are now stable or increasing, possibly linked to changes in land use following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and to the increased availability of suitable breeding habitat.

Despite these revised estimates, the species remains of conservation concern. Threats include ongoing loss and degradation of steppe grasslands, agricultural practices such as ploughing and intensified grazing, increasing predation pressure from corvids, and potential impacts of pesticide use on non-breeding grounds in Africa. Large non-breeding flocks in southern Africa are considered sporadic. However, historically notable aggregations have been recorded,

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including ~10,000 birds at Lake Ngami in 1989, more than 250,000 pratincoles (including unknown numbers of *G. pratincola*) in the northern Free State in 1991, and 76,500 birds at the Vaal Dam in 2006.

From a global perspective, the presence of approximately 8,000–10,000 Black-winged Pratincoles on this day at Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve is significant, particularly given that this number constitutes a notable proportion of the species' estimated world population.

Large flocks have been observed at Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve on previous occasions, suggesting that such events may occur more regularly than is currently reflected in the literature. However, these aggregations may go unnoticed or unreported owing to the size of the reserve, low visitor numbers, and general under-reporting. This raises the possibility that the reserve functions as an important stopover or refuelling site for the species during the austral summer. If confirmed through further monitoring, this would substantially increase the conservation significance of the reserve. Given the species' erratic occurrence and the resulting difficulty in accurately assessing population trends, there is a clear need for continued reporting of large pratincole aggregations in southern Africa. Greater efforts to encourage birders to report all sightings of these charismatic birds would therefore be valuable.

Postscript: During the summer CAR survey of route FN52 on 31 January 2026, three smaller flocks of Black-winged Pratincole were recorded at different points along the route, ranging in size from approximately 50 to 200 individuals. All sightings occurred near large pans.

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Amur Falcon with avian prey item

TEXT AND PHOTOS Dawid H. de Swardt

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While conducting SABAP2 bird atlas surveys on 7 February 2026 in grassland areas east of the Tierpoort area, Bloemfontein, I encountered several Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis* and Lesser Kestrels *Falco naumanni* perching on roadside fences or hunting in surrounding grasslands. The habitat had open patches suitable for various lark and pipit species. In the Plaatjiesfontein area (-29.530°; 26.337°), I encountered a few falcons and kestrels perched on fences and attempted to photograph them. Some were seen flying with unidentified food items, and I managed to photograph one female Amur Falcon perched on a wooden fence post.

Upon my return, I usually submit my SABAP2 data and download the morning's images from my camera. While examining my pictures, I noticed that the Amur Falcon sitting on the wooden pole had a bird in its talons! (Figure 1). It appeared to be a Spike-heeled Lark *Chersomanes albfasciata*. It was a medium-sized bird, with brownish plumage (which match grassland lark or pipit species) and, characteristic of Spike-heeled Lark, had white tips to its tail feathers. The hind claw also resembled the distinctive hind claw of the Spike-heeled Lark.

The Amur Falcon's diet comprises mainly invertebrates, including locusts, grasshoppers, termite alates, beetles, and bees (Jenkins 2005). Although birds have been recorded in the diet, these records lack species-specific details and are merely described as "small birds", "fledgling birds", or "passerines" (Pienaar 1996, Kopij 2009, Jenkins 2005, Clarke and Davies 2018). However, the occurrence of birds in the species' diet may be under-represented because falcons pluck feathers and consume mainly the meat, and meat is, of course, not regurgitated in pellets (Kopij 2009). Apart from this record, I am only aware of one other record where the avian prey species is known: A Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* was captured by a male Amur Falcon in the Kimberley area, Northern Cape, on 19 January 2025 and reported on Facebook (Doug Harebottle, see here). The record reported here is the first confirmed record of the Amur Falcon preying on Spike-heeled Lark. Observers are encouraged to take note of an photograph prey items of birds of prey.

Figure 1. The female Amur Falcon perching on a wooden pole with its Spike-heeled Lark prey item in the Tierpoort area, south of Bloemfontein, Free State, on 7 February 2026.

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Two old birds and a summer holiday: Remarkable AFRING re-sightings from the Eastern Cape

TEXT AND PHOTOS Martin Potgieter

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A summer holiday in the Eastern Cape usually delivers a few good sightings, but in February 2025, it produced something entirely unexpected: two re-sightings of ringed birds that turned out to be among the oldest individuals of their species in the AFRING database.

1. The drongo that stayed home

In St Francis Bay, on the 17th of February 2025, the antics of a recently fledged Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* kept us (my wife Melanie and I) entertained (Fig. 1); its persistent begging kept the adult birds fully occupied. It was during one of these food deliveries that we noticed that the one adult bird was ringed. Since we have been conducting ringing sessions at this location since 2004, we were interested to know when this bird was ringed. Luckily, the chick used the wooden garden fence as its begging post, which allowed me to try to photograph the adult bird as it came in to feed it. With a bit of patience, I was able to capture clear photographs of the ring from different angles, which enabled us to read the full ring number, i.e., CV49593 (Fig. 2).

We checked our ringing records and the AFRING database and were pleasantly surprised to find that we had ringed it as an adult on 14 November 2014 at the same location. This meant the bird was more than ten years old (10 yr, 3 mo, and 28 d since we ringed it). We were very excited to find that a decade later, this bird was still occupying the same patch, apparently thriving and successfully breeding. What was of further interest is that when we queried the AFRING database, we found that this is currently the second-oldest retrap or re-sighting of a ringed Fork-tailed Drongo. The same bird was seen on our most recent visit to the Eastern Cape on 22 February 2026, making it at least 11 yr, 3 mo, and 4 d old.

Figure 1. Fork-tailed Drongo fledgling begging for food.

Figure 2. Fork-tailed Drongo, ring visible.

.

AFRING stats: Fork-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*)

- **Total ringed**: 3,313
- **Retrapped**: 177
- **Recovered**: 15

[accessed on 26 February 2026].

2. The Cape Sugarbird with a secret

The second re-sighting took place on 26 February 2025 at the Van Staden's Wild Flower Reserve, near Gqeberha. We were doing an atlas count of pentad 3350_2510 on a blustery, cool afternoon when we came across a small group of Cape Sugarbirds (*Promerops cafer*). One bird was perched close to the road on a protea bush. Because we are ringers, we tend to keep a lookout for ringed birds and in this case, we were not disappointed. Not only was the bird ringed with the standard AFRING metal ring, but it was also colour-ringed, i.e., it had a green ring above the metal ring and a black ring below, on the right tarsus (Fig. 3). Again, I tried to photograph the ring but was not lucky enough to get it from various angles, so we could only read a partial ring number. Although a bit disappointed that we could not get the full ring number, we were hopeful that we could still uncover the history of this bird,

Figure 3. Cape Sugarbird showing partial ring and colour ring..

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since colour-coded rings usually signify that the bird is or was part of a specific study. On returning home, we reached out to contacts in the ringing community. We were quickly directed to Dr. Alan Lee of BirdLife South Africa, who not only identified the specific individual (AFRING ring number CA28419) but also turned out to be the original ringer. He was quite excited about the re-sighting and provided us with the bird's history.

This bird was part of a group of birds colour ringed as part of Jerry Mokgatla's MSc project titled "Foraging Behaviour And Thermal Physiology Of Cape Sugarbirds; Sex-Specific Responses To Temperature". The team had limited colour rings, which is why this individual was ringed with two colour rings rather than the usual three. This bird was ringed as a juvenile male on 8 January 2015, only about 200 m from where we re-sighted it—10 yr, 1 mo, 12 d later. According to the AFRING database, this is the 5th-oldest Cape Sugarbird on record.

AFRING stats: Cape Sugarbird (Promerops cafer)

- **Total ringed**: 12,484
- **Retrapped**: 1,310
- **Recovered**: 48

[accessed on 26 February 2026].

3. What these two birds tell us about ringing data

These two observations, made just a couple of days apart, highlight a few key points about ringing and re-sighting.

Longevity records are rare and valuable

Most birds are never seen again after ringing. When an individual reappears, sometimes years later, it provides rare insights into survival, site fidelity, and age structure.

Tables 1 and 2 summarise the ten greatest longevity records, currently in the AFRING database, for each of these species.

Ring re-sightings rely heavily on good photographs

In the absence of birds retrapped during the ringing session, re-sighting of live ringed birds relies heavily on clear photographs. If you do spot a ringed bird, try to get clear images of the ring, preferably from different angles, to be able to read the full ring number. If the bird is colour-ringed, get photos of the colour rings showing the sequence. As with the Cape Sugarbird, the project-specific colour ring enabled identification even when the metal ring number was only partly readable.

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Table 1. Fork-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*) longevity records [data accessed on 26 February 2026].

Ring #	Initial ringing date	Retrap/re-sighting date	Age
4H09527	1999/09/01	2011/10/19	12 yr 1mo 21 d
CV49593	2014/11/14	2026/02/22	11 yr 3 mo 4 d
4H27914	2003/04/27	2013/03/24	9 yr 10 mo 19 d
CC81448	2007/09/26	2015/12/31	8 yr 3 mo 18 d
CC88907	2008/01/06	2015/12/31	7 yr 11 mo 6 d
CC79197	2015/03/26	2023/02/19	7 yr 10 mo 7 d
CC81448	2007/09/26	2015/01/03	7 yr 3 mo 16 d
CC54217	2003/12/12	2011/01/29	7 yr 1 mo 25 d
BH97271	2014/12/20	2021/11/21	6 yr 11 mo 8 d
4A11607	1997/05/04	2003/07/28	6 yr 2 mo 26 d

Table 2. Cape Sugarbird (*Promerops cafer*) longevity records [data accessed on 26 February 2026].

Ring #	Initial ringing date	Retrap/re-sighting date	Age
484931	1990/10/06	2005/05/20	14 yr 7mo 0 d
484931	1990/10/06	2004/06/30	13 yr 8 mo 6 d
484931	1990/10/06	2003/05/02	12 yr 6 mo 1vd
454098	1987/03/28	1999/06/10	12 yr 2mo 17 d
CA28419	2015/01/08	2025/02/26	10 yr 1 mo 12 d
CV72004	2014/07/19	2023/01/14	8 yr 5 mo 11 d
CC71792	2006/01/27	2014/06/11	8 yr 4 mo 27 d
BC94098	2010/12/28	2019/02/11	8 yr 1 mo 27 d
BC94498	2014/12/16	2023/01/22	8 yr 1 om 19 d
CC03934	1991/11/02	1999/12/02	8 yr 1 mo 12 d

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AFRING data is powerful—but must be interpreted with care

As with all large citizen-science datasets, the AFRING database contains occasional errors. Ringers upload coordinates and measurements manually, and there is currently no second-tier vetting before entries go live. To err is human, and an innocent typing error can skew the data. This point is illustrated in Figures 4 and 5 below, where some ringing records plot at offshore positions. Another case in point is with the Fork-tailed Drongo, where the AFRING species summary page reflects the longest distance record for this species as 222km. However, when analysing the data, it is evident that a typing error occurred in the retrapped bird's coordinates: one digit was mistyped, but the location name remains the same. If this error is removed, the genuine longest known movement for a Fork-tailed Drongo is only 56 km.

These nuances don't diminish the value of the database; rather, they highlight the need to upload data accurately and to interpret the database with care, particularly when exploring longevity or dispersal records.

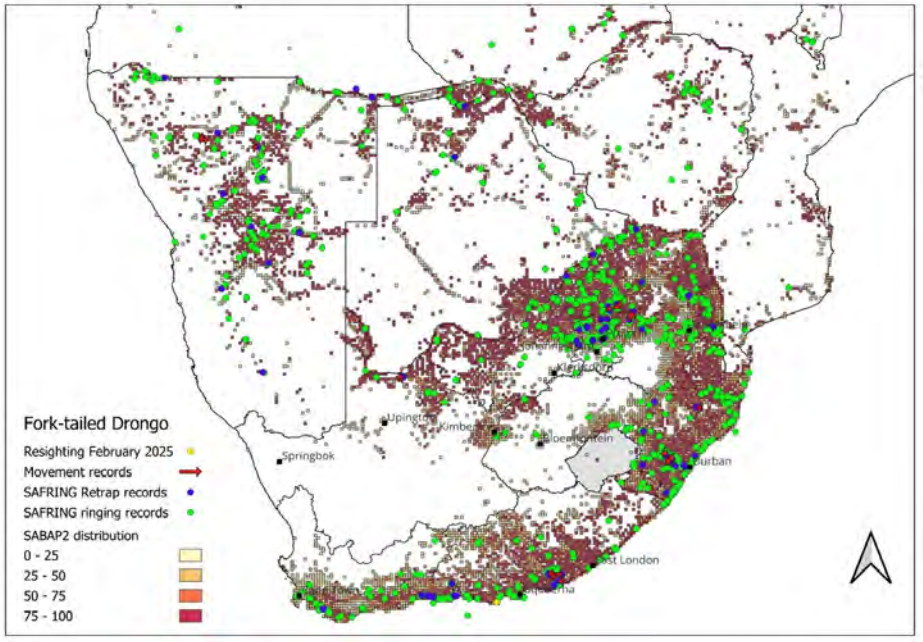

Figure 4. Cape Sugarbird showing partial ring and colour ring..

BIRD BRIEFS

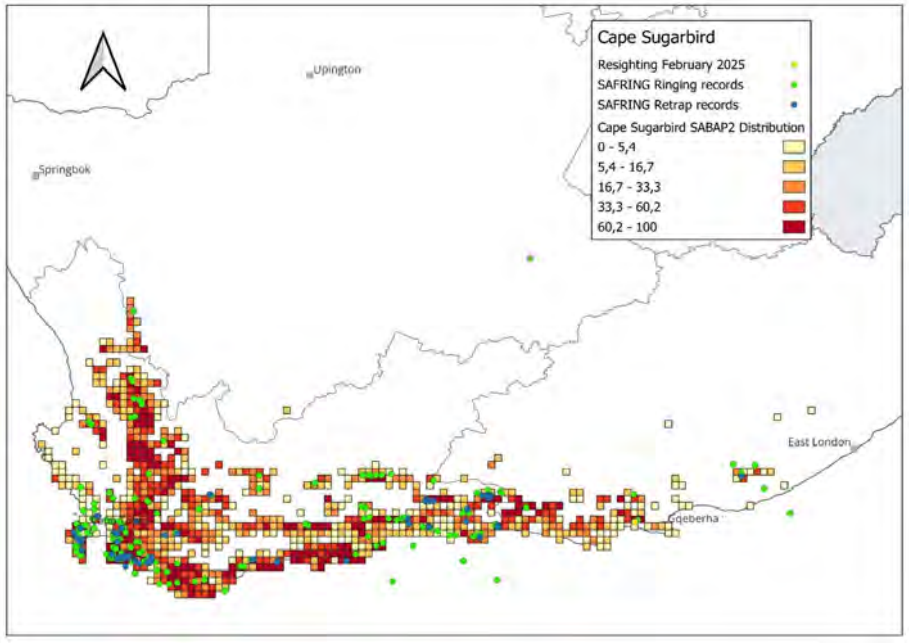

Figure 5. Cape Sugarbird SAFRING ringing and retrap points over SABAP2 distribution.

4. Why These Moments Matter

Re-sightings like these are a reminder of the long-term value of ringing work. We ring thousands of birds, knowing full well that we may never encounter them again. Yet every so often, one individual returns to the story, sometimes years later, linking two moments separated by time, projects and people. Every re-sighting, however small, contributes to a dataset that grows in value with each passing year. This is the quiet magic of citizen science.

The message is therefore simple: If you see a ringed bird, take a photo and send the details to AFRING. You never know what hidden biography you might help uncover.

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Spot the difference
An experiment in egg recognition by larks

Derek Engelbrecht

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Larks (Alaudidae) generally experience low levels (<1%) of heterospecific brood parasitism, but interspecific parasitism has been recorded for a few species and is suspected for several more (De Juana et al. 2004, Hegeman and Voesten 2011). This may be due to the lark's preference for nesting in open habitats, often away from suitable perches, such as trees, that heterospecific brood parasites, such as cuckoos (Cuculidae), use to find and monitor nests (Antonov et al. 2010). According to the spatial habitat structure hypothesis (Røskaft et al. 2002), host species that always breed near trees should be strong rejecters, those showing no pattern of breeding near or far from trees should be intermediate rejecters, and species that always breed in areas devoid of trees should be acceptors. I tested experimentally the egg-recognition and rejection abilities of three lark species nesting in areas away from trees (> 50 m), namely the Pink-billed Lark (PbLa) *Spizocorys conirostris*, the Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark (CbSL) *Eremopterix leucotis*, and the Red-capped Lark (RcLa) *Calandrella cinerea*.

Methods

The study was conducted on the farm Al3 De Loskop in the Limpopo Province in 2015. Egg addition and exchange experiments using fresh eggs and highly non-mimetic plasticine eggs were exchanged between PbLa, CbSL, and RcLa nests. The median clutch size of all three species in the study area is two. Only nests found during laying or early incubation were used in the study.

Host responses were monitored for 3–5 days after experimental parasitism, and a digital video recorder was used to record parental behaviour during the day. If a nest was still active by the end of this period and the foreign egg/s were intact,


Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks at their nest.


Pink-billed Larks at their nest.


Red-capped Lark at its nest.

Table 1. Treatment options to test for egg recognition in three lark species. Values in parentheses indicated number of predated nests. CbSL = Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, PbLa = Pink-billed Lark, RcLa = Red-capped Lark.

Treatment	CbSL	PbLa	RcLa
+1 intraspecific egg	8 (2)	6	3 (1)
+1 interspecific egg	6	5 (1)	2 (1)
+1 plasticine egg	7 (2)	4 (1)	2
-1 host, +1 intraspecific egg	14 (3)	12 (3)	6 (2)
-1 host, +1 interspecific egg	6 (2)	4	2
-1 host, +1 plasticine egg	6 (1)	4 (1)	2

the reaction was classified as acceptance. If no parents were observed at the nest and the eggs were cold on at least three successive visits, the nest was considered deserted. If foreign eggs disappeared but the host clutch remained attended, it was classified as ejected. If the foreign egg was still present at the end of the observation period, it was returned to its original nest, if it was still active. See Table 1 for a list of treatments.

Results and discussion

The results showed that none of the three lark species rejected highly non-mimetic artificial eggs, or fresh foreign eggs, even of conspecifics. Experimentally increasing the clutch size also failed to elicit egg-recognition or egg-rejection responses. There were two cases of desertion, which are similar to the desertion rates of these species in the study area (Engelbrecht, unpublished data), and several nests were lost to predation.

The findings of this study support a previous study on Eurasian Skylarks *Alauda arvensis*, which shows that larks are unable to discriminate eggs and lack egg-recognition abilities (Antonov et al. 2010, but see Hegemann and Voesten (2011) for possible nestling discrimination). Furthermore, the results suggest that the spatial structure of larks' breeding habitats limits the accessibility of brood parasites, and that larks never evolved any defences to avoid brood parasitism (but see Hegemann and Voesten 2011), thus

From left to right: Plasticine egg, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, Pink-billed Lark, and Red-capped Lark

lending support to Røskaft et al.'s (2002) spatial habitat structure hypothesis.

I do concede that not all egg recognition leads to rejection, and rejection may include subtle responses such as moving parasitic eggs to less favourable positions in the nest. It would be interesting to investigate the survival of 'parasites' during the nestling period, as there may well be post-hatching rejection responses in these species, e.g., tongue spots.

It would be interesting to determine whether the responses of larks in lightly wooded areas, e.g., Sabota Lark *Calendulauda sabota*, Monotonous Lark *Mirafra passerina*, or Rufous-naped Lark *Corypha africana*, where cuckoos are more common, are the same as those of these open-country species, or if they have evolved egg-recognition abilities.

To conclude, the results of this study show that PbLa, CbSL, and RcLa can't spot the difference between their own eggs and foreign eggs … and they can't count either.

BIRD BRIEFS

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Egg of a Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark (top) and Pink-billed Lark (bottom) in the nest of a Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark.

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BIRD BRIEFS

Barn Swallow resighting

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I have received details of the ringed Barn Swallow that I photographed on the 28 December 2025 at Mtunzini. The bird was ringed as a nestling at Ilmajoki in Finland on 4 July 2023. The number of days elapsed between the initial ringing and the re-sighting was 908 days (2 yr, 5 mo, 24 d). That means that this swallow is presently on its 3rd trip to southern Africa and is two and a half years old! The straight-line distance from the initial ringing site to Mtunzini is 10,233 km!!

Acknowledgements I thank Dom Rollinson and SAFRING for helping to track down the details.

RIGHT The Barn Swallow when photgraphed on 28 December 2025 at Mtunzini, showing close-ups of the ring details © Hugh Chittenden.

ABOVE Ilmajoki in Finland where the Barn Swallow was ringed as a nestling in 2023 © https://ilmajoki.fi/ilmajoki-tietoa/.

ABOVE Google Earth map showing the straight-line distance between the ringing and resighting sites.

Foliage bathing by Lesser Grey Shrikes

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Bathing forms part of the routine self-maintenance of several shrike species. Although this usually takes the form of bathing in puddles of water, an alternative form of bathing, foliage bathing, has only been reported in a few species, e.g., Southern Fiscal (*Lanius collaris*) (Skead 1995) and Northern Shrike (*Lanius borealis*) (Paruk et al. 2020). Foliage bathing involves a bird rubbing against or moving through wet vegetation, such as after rain or dew droplets, to wet the feathers, usually followed by vigorous preening as part of the bird's feather maintenance regime.

On 27 November 2019, I came upon three Lesser Grey Shrikes (**1**) on the farm Doornbult, approximately 10 km north of Polokwane. What first drew my attention was that the three birds were all in the same bush, a Puzzle Bush (*Ehretia rigida*). Although Lesser Grey Shrikes are common on the Polokwane Plateau in summer, individuals are usually well-spaced, so seeing three in one bush was unusual. I observed them for several minutes, thinking they were feeding on something, but at no stage were any of the birds seen feeding or carrying prey in their beaks. It then dawned on me they were foliage bathing amongst some weeds on the ground (**2**). A bird would land amongst the weeds, then dip its head under the leaves of the weeds and flutter its wings to wet it, constantly shuffling forwards as it does so. Once its feathers were thoroughly wet, it would return to perch in the Puzzle Bush and start preening and drying them by vigorous shaking (**3**). At least one of the birds had a second bout of foliage bathing. After about 15 minutes of observations, they dispersed.

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2


3

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

Diet and Foraging: Diet

Prey of the Narina Trogon

If you had to choose an interesting bird species, which would you choose? I'd include Narina Trogon, not just because its striking plumage, but because of its elusiveness and interesting behaviour. Below is a collection of some of this species' prey range, that, surprisingly, includes fast flying dragonflies!

Hugh Chittenden • hugh@rarebirds.co.za received 9 November 2025).

Demography: Number of Broods Normally Reared per Season

Double-brooding in Cape Starling

According to Craig (2005), recently fledged Cape Starlings are fed for at least a week after leaving the nest. Furthermore, this species is not known to double brood. On 27 December 2025, I found a pair adding nesting material to a nest in the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate, Limpopo Province. Nothing unusual about that ... While one of the parents was ferrying nesting material, it was constantly accompanied by a young bird noisily and incessantly begging for food, although actual feeding of the young bird was never observed. Assuming the young bird was one of their offspring from the previous brood, the addition of lining to the nest indicated that the pair was about to initiate a repeat brood. Breeding was confirmed on 30 December 2025 when, presumably the male allofed its mate a grasshopper, who was in the nest at the time.

References

Craig, A. J. F. K. (2005). Cape Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis nitens*. In Roberts Birds of Southern Africa (P. A. R. Hockey, W. R. J. Dean, and P. G. Ryan, Editors), The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Fund, Cape Town, South Africa. pp. 963–964.

Derek Engelbrecht • faunagalore@gmail.com (received 18 November 2025).

ABOVE A young Cape Starling following and begging for food from an adult carrying nest lining. Perhaps the young bird thought the nest material was prey © Derek Engelbrecht.

BIRD BRIEFS

Interesting sightings

16 December 2025 - 15 February 2026

Share your interesting sightings seen within the Limpopo Province. 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; Regional Rarity; National Rarity, †Unvetted

COMPILED BY Derek Engelbrecht

NON-PASSERINES

African Crake - 1 January 2026. A pair seen at De Loskop (Richter van Tonder).

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle - 30 December 2025. One seen in Dorp (Mark Friskin).

Black Stork - 28 January 2026. Dries Abrahamse Lapa in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht); 12 February 2026. A pair seen at Sebayeng (Derek Engelbrecht).

Booted Eagle - 8 February 2026. A pale morph individual soaring

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle © Julia Friskin

just east of Dalmada (Derek Engelbrecht).

Bronze-winged Courser - 1 February 2026. An immature seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Marcia van Tonder).

Common Buttonquail - 1 January 2026. An irruption at De Loskop (Jody de Bruyn).

Eurasian Bittern - 11 January 2026. One heard at Vogelfontein (Wian van Biljon).

Dwarf Bittern - 1 January 2026. One seen at Tom Naude Dam (Jody de Bruyn); 11 February 2026. One seen at a small dam at the Sand River Bridge on the Soetdorings Road (Derek Engelbrecht).

Eurasian Hobby - 7 February 2026. One seen at Akademia Reformia near Woodlands Estate (Richter van Tonder).

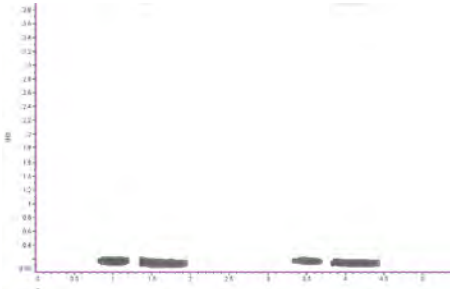
European Honey Buzzard - 1 January 2026. One seen on the Geyser Road west of Polokwane (Leonie Kellerman).

Freckled Nightjar - 5 January 2026. Two roosting on a roof in Cycad Estate (Fatima Cachalia).

Fulvous Whistling Duck - 5 February 2026. One seen in the Soetdorings area (Minkie Prinsloo).

Great Spotted Cuckoo - 20 December 2025. At least one in the Welgelegen neighbourhood for several weeks (Derek Engelbrecht).

Bronze-winged Courser © Marcia van Tonder



Eurasian Bittern © Wian van Biljon

Dwarf Bittern © Derek Engelbrecht

Freckled Nightjar © Fatima Cachalia

Harlequin Quail - 1 January 2026. An irruption at De Loskop (Derek Engelbrecht); 12 February 2026. One seen in farm fields at Sebayeng (Derek Engelbrecht); 12 February 2026. An irruption at farm Kalkfontein on the Rietgat road north of Dikgale (Derek Engelbrecht).

Jackal Buzzard - 29 January 2026. The long-staying individual seen in Welgelegen (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Lesser Spotted Eagle - 28 January 2026. One in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Martial Eagle - 4 February 2026. An adult seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Susan Dippenaar); 14 February 2026. An immature seen at the Van Waveren's Farm (Birdlife Polokwane club outing)..

Red-throated Wryneck - 25 January 2026. One seen in Bendor (Jody de Bruyn).

Southern Pochard - 3 January 2026. At Tom Naude Dam in Eduan Park (Jody de Bruyn).

Verreaux's Eagle-Owl - 25 January 2026. One heard calling in Dorp (Richter van Tonder).

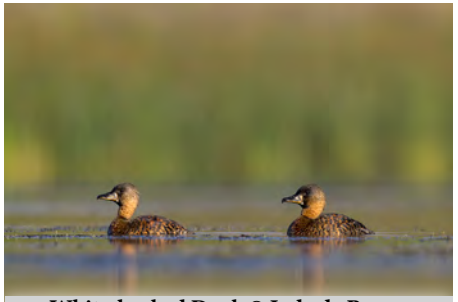
Water Thick-knee - 14 February 2026. Seen at the Van Waveren's farm during a club outing (BirdLife Polokwane).

White-backed Duck - 5 January 2026. Seen at Sterkloop Dam (Jody de Bruyn).

Harlequin Quail © Derek Engelbrecht

Jackal Buzzard © Derek Engelbrecht

Martial Eagle © Marcia van Tonder



White-backed Duck © Jody de Bruyn

Yellow-billed Stork - 26 December 2025. One at Tom Naude Dam in Eduan Park (Jody de Bruyn).

PASSERINES

Cuckoo-finch - 5 January 2026. Seen at Sterkloop Dam (Jody de Bruyn).

Cut-throat Finch - 2 January 2026. After a long absence of a few years, a few have been seen in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

Olive-tree Warbler - 12 February 2026. One bird seen at farm Kalkfontein on the Platkoppies road (Derek Engelbrecht).

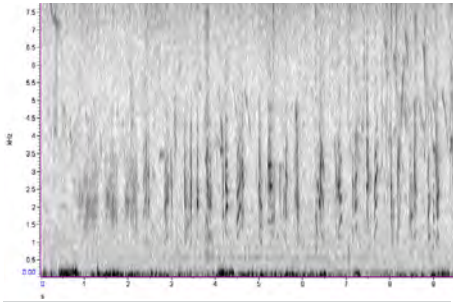
Pink-billed Lark - 12 February 2026. At least two males in song flight over a fallow field at farm Kalkfontein on the Rietgat road north of Dikgale (Derek Engelbrecht).

Red-collared Widowbird - 5 January 2026. Seen at Sterkloop Dam (Jody de Bruyn).

River Warbler - 28 January 2026. Seen near Dries Abrahamse Lapa (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Thrush Nightingale - 7 January 2026. One seen at Sterkloop Dam (Richter van Tonder).

Yellow-billed Stork © Derek Engelbrecht



Olive-tree Warbler © Derek Engelbrecht

River Warbler © Jody de Bruyn

Black-winged Pratincole © Duncan McKenzie

BEST OF THE REST
LIMPOPO PROVINCE

NON-PASSERINES

Black-winged Pratincole - 2 February 2026. A single bird at the Boyela waterhole in the Kruger National Park (Duncan McKenzie).

Greater Frigatebird (probable) - 15 and 19 January 2025. Two sightings of an all-dark frigatebird, probably the same bird, at Three Bridges (Jan Graf) and Lissataba Private Game Reserve (Craig and Karin Nelson).

Greater Painted-snipe - 25 December 2025. A male seen at a dam in the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate (Derek Engelbrecht).

Harlequin Quail - 27 December 2025. Several heard calling in the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate (Derek Engelbrecht).

Lesser Flamingo - 21 January 2026. One seen near Gravelotte (Roelof Niemann).

Greater Painted-snipe © Derek Engelbrecht

Lesser Flamingo © Hannes Swanepoel

PASSERINES

Dusky Lark - 27 December 2025. A pair seen in the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate (Derek Engelbrecht).

Golden Pipit - 20 January 2026. One seen at Jejane Private Game Reserve near Hoedspruit (Gerda Nel).

Northern Wheatear - 16 December 2025. One seen at Tihongonyeni Waterhole in northern Kruger national Park (Hannes Swanepoel).

Rosy Starling - 13 January 2026. Southern Africa's 5th record of this species was seen along the R71 near Letsitele (Tyrone Glenn).

Northern Wheatear © Hannes Swanepoel

Rosy Starling © Tyrone Glenn

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA Giving Conservation Wings

environmental affairs
Department: Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

HELP SAVE OUR SEABIRDS

The Mouse-Free Marion Project is a partnership between the South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and BirdLife South Africa, which established the Non-Profit Company (MFM NPC) to help restore Marion Island to its once-pristine beauty by eradicating the invasive mice plaguing the island.

To help raise the necessary funds, please would you consider sponsoring one or more hectares of land on Marion Island.

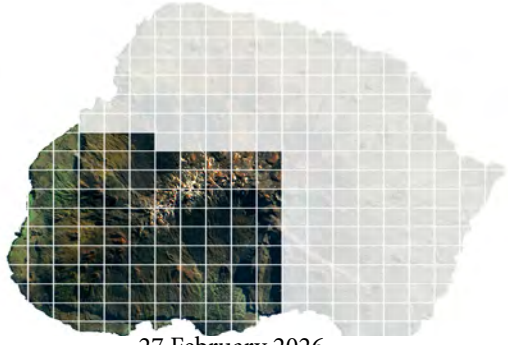
At R1000, you can aid us in ensuring that this monumental project will be successful.

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

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://m

4 November 2025
Percent of target reached: 42.3%
Sponsored Hectares: 12817 ha
Sponsors: 2587



27 February 2026
Percent of target reached: 43.7%
Sponsored Hectares: 13122 ha
Sponsors: 2479

UPCOMING EVENTS

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting and AGM
Date: 3 March 2026
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting
Date: 7 April 2026
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Year-end Function
Date: 5 May 2026
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Korfball Courts

Shopping list: Black-fronted and Olive Bushshrikes, Barratt's Warbler, Orange Ground Thrush, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, African Yellow Warbler, Wailing and Levaillant's Cisticola, Black Saw-wing, Brown Scrub Robin, White-starred Robin, Cape Parrot, African Black Duck, Green Twinspot and more.

Shopping list: Various bushveld birds, including the likes of Shaft-tailed and Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Groundscraper Thrush, Pale Chanting Goshawk, various thornveld waxbills and canaries.

Shopping list: Hooded, White-backed and Cape Vultures, Tawny Eagle, Shikra, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Arnot's Chat, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Bushveld Pip-it, Green-capped Eremomela, Grey Penduline Tit and many more.

All birds are equal

In 2026, the front covers of **The Lark** will be dedicated to Young Birds and the back cover to other special birds.

African Crake male © Jody de Bruyn.