

THE LARK

Club outings

Nagude

Moletzie

Meet George Birdy beadwork artist

Between the tides: African Oystercatcher breeding at Cape St Francis • Bronze-winged Courser at Florisbad, Free State Province • Birds and the White-berry Bush • Biometrics and moult of two southern African subspecies of the Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark • Photoblog: The secretive Buff-spotted Flufftail • Further Cape Penduline Tit/weaver nests associations • Birds probing Weeping Boerbean pods

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

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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 AUGUST 2026

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

Cover page theme 2026: Young Birds

COVER Lappet-faced Vulture chick on the nest
© Derek Engelbrecht.

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Winter birding at its best. **Derek Engelbrecht** reports on an unforgettable outing to a Lowveld birding paradise.



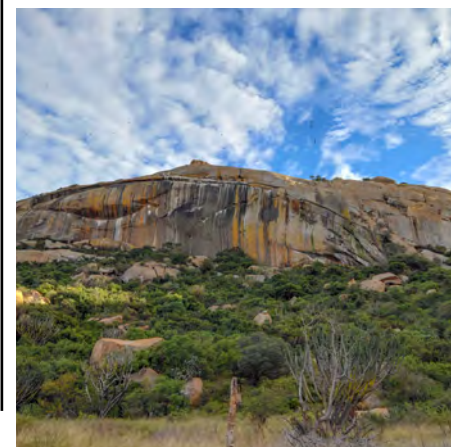
Hello Georgie!

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Bird lovers travelling through Magoebaskloof should keep an eye out for George, a skilled bead-work artist whose bird-inspired creations have become a local attraction. From striking garden ornaments to thoughtful gifts, his work is well worth a look.



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The club returned to this bird-rich "island" near Polokwane, renowned for attracting a host of special birds. **Willie van der Merwe** shares his experience of the outing.



For a lark ...



Afrikaans is beautiful 😊 © Rowan van Tonder
(It reads: "This car stops for Scaly-feathered Weavers, apalises, and Emerald Cuckoos", but the word play in Afrikaans is excellent).

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Editors' chirps

Winter has settled across South Africa, bringing with it crisp mornings—or, more recently, crisp days as well! While winter may not be the season for rare vagrants, it is certainly not a time to retreat from birding. Many resident species undertake local movements during the colder months, often appearing in places where they are not regularly encountered. Keep an eye out for Southern Red-billed Hornbill, African Grey Hornbill, Capped Wheatear, Fairy Flycatcher, and many others as they move across the landscape and sometimes into Polokwane's suburbs in search of food and favourable conditions.

It's only a few days after the winter solstice, but you may already expect to see some of the first returning migrants, such as the Lesser and Greater Striped Swallows, and Red-breasted Swallow, within the next few weeks. This is always an exciting time, and each new arrival is a mini-milestone towards summer. Keep your eyes open and please report your first arrivals on the club's 100k WhatsApp group.

This issue revisits two remarkable nearby birding destinations. Moletzie Nature Reserve, a small island of granite bushveld near Polokwane, supports diverse birdlife and is important for biodiversity conservation. Meanwhile, a trip to Nagude in the Lowveld rewarded us with regional specials like Arnot's Chat. Both excursions prove every birding trip is a memorable experience.

In addition to these outing reports, we were fortunate to have a wealth of contributions for our *Bird Briefs* section. We thank all our contributors for sharing their observations and insights. In this issue, readers can learn more about a diverse range of species, including African Oystercatcher, Bronze-winged Courser, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, Cape Penduline Tit, and Buff-spotted Flufftail. We also feature notes on birds feeding on two indigenous plant species.

We hope you enjoy this edition as much as we enjoyed compiling it. Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to receiving your contributions for future issues.

Raelene and Derek

Nagude



A Lowveld Birding Paradise

text **Derek Engelbrecht**

What better place to do winter birding than in the Lowveld? This year, we kicked off the winter birding itinerary with a visit to one of our favourite birding destinations—Nagude farm, also known as Mahela, east of Letsitele in the Lowveld. The bird list on this farm is, to say the very least, impressive. With birds like Arnot's Chat, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Thick-billed Cuckoo, Orange-winged Pytilia, no fewer than 30 birds of prey species,

eight owl species, and all but one of the southern African kingfisher species (Mangrove Kingfisher goes without saying), you get an idea why this is such a popular outing on our annual calendar.

Upon our arrival at Nagude, we stopped at a small drainage canal where we opened our account with Black Crake, Purple Heron, Grey-backed Camaroptera, and White-browed Robin-Chat, to name but

a few. We then entered the farm, where we all duly adhered to the now-familiar-to-us Foot and Mouth Disease protocol for visiting farms and sprayed our cars and dipped our shoes. While each of us and our cars got “treated”, we were treated to a smorgasbord of seed-eaters feeding in the open areas, including Jameson’s and Red-billed Firefinch, Village Indigobird, Blue Waxbill, Yellow-fronted Canary, and Southern Grey-headed Sparrow.

Our next stop was on the dam wall, where we enjoyed our customary coffee and some snacks. Here we added a lone African

Spoonbill, Common Waxbill, Red-headed and Spectacled Weavers, Collared Sunbird, African Pied Wagtail, Water Thick-knee, Pied and Giant Kingfishers, Lesser Swamp Warbler, Little Rush Warbler, some Wire-tailed Swallows, and Red-faced Cisticola. A Martial Eagle landed in a tree on the far side of the dam and saw everyone grabbing their binoculars and cameras – what an impressive bird!

BELOW A Water Thick-knee
welcoming us with a close fly-by
© Jody de Bruyn.



We then proceeded to one of my favourite spots on the farm, the “Serengeti” woodland. This is a beautiful parkland landscape of tall Mopane and Mountain Syringa trees, and there is always a sense of anticipation when

TOP A Yellow-fronted Canary
© Jody de Bruyn.

RIGHT Martial Eagle
© Jody de Bruyn.



one approaches it. To adapt an adage from F1, “anything can show up, and usually does”. It took us only a few minutes before we heard the characteristic high-pitched fee call of Arnot’s Chat. Three birds showed beautifully and entertained a few of us for quite a while – they really are characters.

Our group split up, allowing space for the recordists, photographers and “number

crunchers” to go about their own business. My focus was on collecting as many voice recordings as possible as part of the [Big Year of African Sounds](#) project. It proved extremely rewarding as I got some excellent recordings of various calls and songs of a pair of Arnot’s Chats, with equally good recordings of a particularly vocal pair of Purple Rollers – frustratingly “audio bombing” some of my other

recordings with their raucous calls. I also had Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Green-capped Eremomela calling—at one point, they were in the same tree. Other species showing up and calling nicely were Bearded Woodpecker, Black Cuckooshrike, Brubru, an obliging group of the diminutive Grey Penduline Tits, Southern Black Tit, Striped Kingfishers, Chinspot Batis, and Bushveld Pipit.

BELOW The three tiny tenors, Green-capped Eremomela (LEFT © Derek Engelbrecht), Yellow-bellied Eremomela (MIDDLE © Derek Engelbrecht, and Grey Penduline Tit (RIGHT © Jody de Bruyn), not only showed beautifully, but they also sang their hearts out, giving the recordists much joy and satisfaction.





ABOVE The Marabou Stork has a wingspan of ~3 m! © Derek Engelbrecht.

RIGHT A Saddle-billed Stork joined some vultures and Marabou Storks soaring overhead © Jody de Bruyn.

We left “Serengeti” and made our way to a shallow dam with some excellent riverine woodland along it. This is a favourite roost for storks, and we quickly picked up about 40 Marabou Storks and some Woolly-necked Storks, while numerous vultures, including Hooded, White-backed, and a single Cape Vulture, as well as a lone Saddle-bird Stork, started filling the sky above us.





The gorgeous African Barred Owlet
© Jody de Bruyn.

We explored the riverine woodland below the dam wall, where we added Bearded Scrub Robin, Terrestrial Brownbul, some African Green Pigeons, Black-collared Barbet, and, to our surprise, an African Barred Owlet, which showed beautifully. This was a lifer for some, so there was a great sense of achievement when everyone managed to get lovely views of it. Another surprise was a flyby of a Tambourine Dove. There were also some Yellow-bellied Greenbuls around.

Satisfied with our haul at this dam, we headed deeper into the farm, encountering Pale Flycatcher, Retz's and White-crested Helmetshrike, Red-billed Oxpecker, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Bateleur, Lizard Buzzard, Little Sparrowhawk, three hornbill species (Southern Yellow-billed, Southern Red-billed, and African

BELOW A pair of Pale Flycatchers gave us the run around, but in the end some of us got decent views - and recordings!
© Derek Engelbrecht.



Grey), Stierling's Wren Warbler, and Southern White-crowned Shrike.

We then went to check out another open woodland in the south of the reserve, where we encountered another group of Arnot's Chat, as well as Bennett's Woodpecker, Cut-throat Finch, more Bushveld Pipits, and a host of seed-eaters, including Village and Purple Indigobirds, Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow,

canaries, Golden-breasted Buntings, and, of course, Blue Waxbills.

We wish to thank the Vorsters and Sias van Rooyen for allowing us access to visit this very special farm.

Author email: faunagalore@gmail.com

RIGHT A male Bateleur
© Derek Engelbrecht.

BELOW A male Cut-throat Finch
© Derek Engelbrecht.



nagude collage



© Derek Engelbrecht.



© Derek Engelbrecht.



African Spoonbill © Jody de Bruyn.



Woolly-necked Stork © Jody de Bruyn.



African Palm Swift © Jody de Bruyn.



© Richter van Tonder.



Malachite Kingfisher © Jody de Bruyn.



Marabou Stork © Derek Engelbrecht.



Hooded Vulture © Jody de Bruyn.



Striped Kingfisher © Richter van Tonder.



Bennett's Woodpecker © Jody de Bruyn.



© Marianne McKenzie.

Hello Georgie!

Based at the charming [Magoebaskloof Farmstall and Café](#) along the scenic Magoebaskloof Pass in the Limpopo Province, George is a talented local artist with a passion for bringing birds to life through beadwork. If you're looking for the perfect gift for a "bird nerd" friend—or yourself!—consider supporting his craft. George offers a wide selection of species and happily takes custom orders for your favourite birds. He also arranges deliveries for your convenience. For more information or to place an order, contact George at [+27 \(0\)837676672](#).



ABOVE A weaver colony.

RIGHT A hoopoe feeder.

OPPOSITE George at work.





Verreaux's Eagle © Jody de Bruyn.

MOLETZIE

A gem on our doorstep

text **Willem van der Merwe**

On Saturday, 6 June 2026, 21 of us set off for the Moletzie Nature Reserve. This reserve, about 30 km northwest of Polokwane, is set amidst rural settlements, screening off a patch of savannah and rocky hills. The main feature is Mmadikota Mountain, a hill the crest of which runs in a west-to-east direction across the centre of the reserve. The top of this hill is an enormous, rounded, single mass of rock. Near the top of this rock, there is a long, horizontal fissure forming a ledge, and this is both a roosting and nesting site for a small colony of Cape Vultures/Kransaasvoëls. The reserve was primarily established to safeguard them and preserve



© Julia Friskin.



ABOVE Jody de Bruyn, club chairperson, and Richter van Tonder, events organiser, thanking the reserve manager, Mr. Tshepo Mamabolo, for facilitating the outing © Derek Engelbrecht.

the natural environment of the hills, which hold cultural and spiritual significance for the local community. The mountain's long-standing importance to the people is also evidenced by the ruins of an old church built there and by several graves dating back to the 19th century.

But we went mostly for the birds! The early winter morning started off chilly—the car registered a breezy 3°C at one point—but the sun was out, and soon it was quite comfortable. Upon our arrival, we were greeted by the reserve manager, who wanted to learn more about birding and accompanied us. We

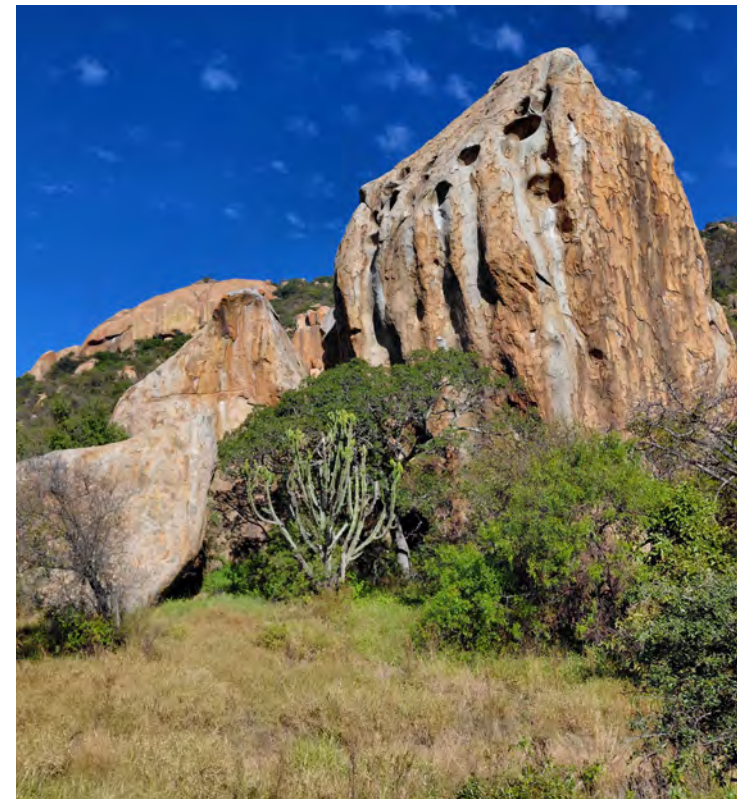
drove through a lovely patch of *Vachellia* woodland towards the southern slope of the hill where we parked our cars. After a quick cup of coffee, we set off walking in an easterly direction, hugging the foothills of the dome. Where the rocks begin to outcrop from the surrounding flat land, the vegetation changes significantly. Between the rocks, the trees and shrubs grow densely and are often evergreen.



ABOVE The "dome" of Moletzie, with some Cape Vultures soaring above the nesting cliff © Derek Engelbrecht.

RIGHT The "pothole" rock. A small Southern Bald Ibis colony nested in the holes in the 80s © Derek Engelbrecht.

Apart from the big rock, there are many smaller (but still huge) rocks and boulders strewn around. Then, there's the big rock and its ledges. On the eastern edge of the



hill is a tall, stand-alone, rock with numerous pothole-like cavities in it – a former Southern Bald Ibis breeding site.

So basically we were looking at bird communities associated with the following kinds of habitats: first, the normal, grassy, thorn-tree savannah, the grass being particularly lush after this year's abundant rains; then there's the dense trees and shrubs between the rocks, which in some areas are lush and dense enough to constitute mini-patches of forest; then there is the irregular landscape of rocks and boulders along the slopes and on the

top of the top of the hills; then there are the special sites such as the ledges and the potholes, that are valuable to cliff-nesting birds.

Our savannah birds included typical ones like White-browed Sparrow-Weaver/Koringvoël, Laughing Dove/Rooiborsduif, Ring-necked Dove/Gewone Tortelduif, Red-eyed Dove/Grootringduif, Pied Crow/Witborskraai, Dark-capped Bulbul/Swartoogtiptol, Marico

BELOW A group of the tiny Cape Penduline Tit caused much excitement © Julia Friskin.



Flycatcher/Maricovlieëvanger, Kalahari Scrub Robin/Kalahariwipstert, Black-chested Prinia/Swartbandlangstertjie, Namaqua Dove/Namakwaduif, Grey Go-Away Bird/Kwêvoël, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow/Gryskopmossie, Cape Starling/Kleinglansspreeu, Streaky-headed Seedeater/Streepkopkanarie, Brown-crowned Tchagra/Rooivlerktjagra, Speckled Mousebird/Gevlekte Muisvoël, Lesser Honeyguide/Kleinheuningwyser, Green-winged Pytilia/Gewone Melba, Black-cheeked Waxbill/Swartwangsysie, Common Waxbill/Rooibeksysie, Red-billed Firefinch/Rooibekvuurvinkie, Jameson's Firefinch/Jamesonse Vuurvinkie, Blue Waxbill/Blousysie, Arrow-marked Babbler/Pylvelekkatlagter, Common Hoopoe/Hoephoe, Golden-tailed Woodpecker/Goudstertspeg, Crimson-breasted Shrike/Rooiborslaksman, Fork-tailed Drongo/Mikstertbyvanger, Swainson's Spurfowl/Bosveldfisant, Natal Spurfowl/Natalse Fisant, Chestnut-vented Warbler/Bosveldtjeriktik, Yellow-fronted Canary/Geeloogkanarie, Little Bee-Eater/Kleinbyvreter, Long-billed Crombec/Bosveldstompstert, Common Scimitarbill/Swartbekkakelaar, Fiscal Flycatcher/



Jameson's Firefinch © Leonie Kellerman.



Chestnut-vented Warbler © Leonie Kellerman.



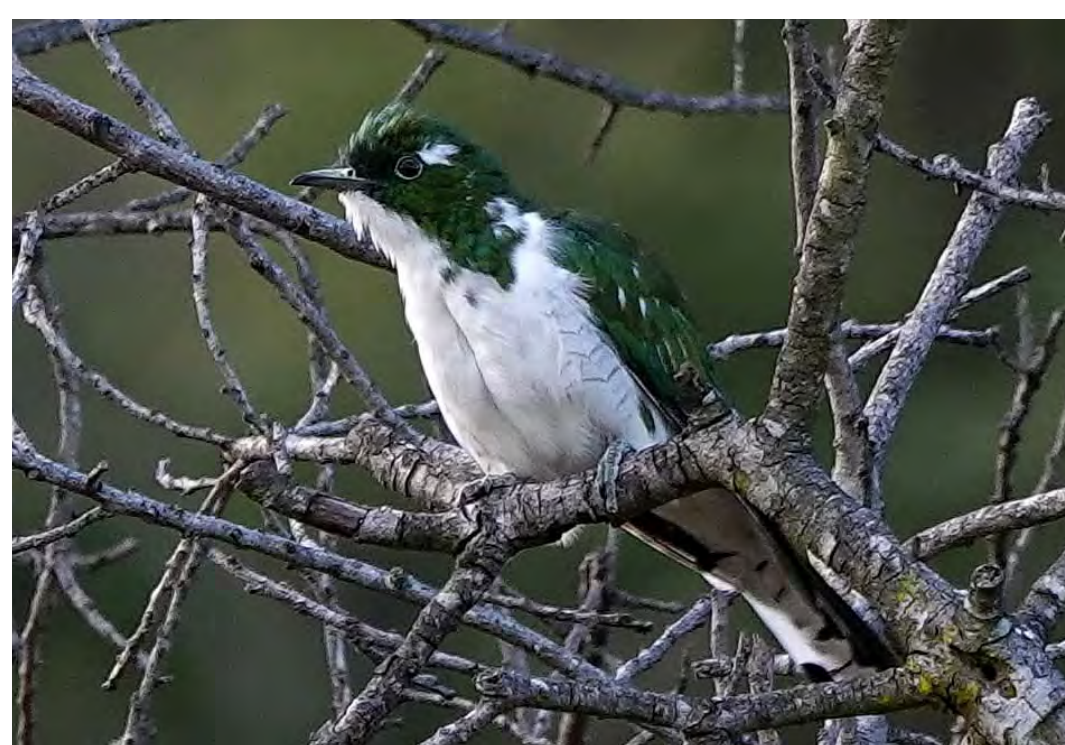
Cape Robin-Chat © Jody de Bruyn.



Fiskaalvlieëvanger, Crested Barbet/Kuifkophoutkapper, Tawny-flanked Prinia/Bruinsylangstertjie, Burnt-necked Eremomela/Bruinkeelbossanger,

ABOVE The star of the show - the Cape Vulture © Jody de Bruyn.

BELOW An inquisitive Dwarf Mongoose © Leonie Kellerman.



Bronze Mannikin/Gewone Fret, Scaly-feathered Weaver/Baardmannetjie, Chinspot Batis/Witliesbosbontrokkie, Rattling Cisticola/Bosveldtinktinkie, Acacia Pied Barbet/Bonthoutkapper, and Coqui Francolin/Swempie.

An unusual sighting was an adult male and juvenile Klaas's Cuckoo/Meitjie! What was so special about it was that it was still hanging around despite being a migrant to warmer climes further north in Africa, and should have been well on its way by now. Another very special sighting was of a little Cape Penduline Tit/Kaapse Kapokvoël, one of South Africa's tiniest bird species. We were

alerted to its presence by its high-pitched whistling calls. We had great views of it as it perched and flitted about roadside trees.

Birds inhabiting the dense bush and thicket around the rocks and boulders included Bar-throated Apalis/Bandkeelkleinjantjie, Terrestrial Brownbul/Boskrapper, Yellow-bellied Greenbul/Geelborswillie, Grey-backed

ABOVE An unusual sight on the Polokwane Plateau in winter - Klaas's Cuckoo. What's more, a juvenile accompanied this male © Leonie Kellerman.

Camaroptera/Grysrugkwêkwêvoël, Orange-breasted Bushshrike/Oranjaborsboslaksman, Black-backed Puffback/Sneeubal, Cape Robin-Chat/Gewone Janfrederik, Spectacled Weaver/Brilwewer, Grey-headed Bushshrike/Spookvoël, Southern Boubou/Suidelike Waterfiskaal, and White-throated Robin-Chat/Witkeeljanfrederik. Amidst the bushes, there were flowering trees and shrubs, particularly Cape Honeysuckle/Kaapse Kanferfoelie, (*Tecomaria*

capensis), that attracted nectar-feeding sunbirds, in particular the Marico Sunbird/Maricosuikerbekkie and the White-bellied Sunbird/Witpensuikerbekkie.

Then there were the birds that are typically associated with rocky hills. These are the Lazy Cisticola/

BELOW The "slayer" - the Grey-headed Bushshrike is a formidable hunter — just look at that bill
© Jody de Bruyn.



Luitinkinkie with its distinctive, wheezing call, and the Mocking Cliff Chat/Dassievoël. We saw several pairs of the latter, which was quite unusual for this reserve.

ABOVE And one for the eyes... We saw several groups of Little Bee-eaters on our walk © Jody de Bruyn.



into the sky. Once high enough, they can soar for hundreds of kilometres with hardly a beat of their wings, scanning the ground far below for any signs of carrion. When we see such large gatherings of vultures, we have to remind ourselves that these are actually still highly endangered species.

But it is not just vultures who nest on the big rock. We have other cliff-nesters represented as well! Most notably, there was a pair of Verreaux's Eagles/Witkruisarende, who nested separately from the vultures on large rocks to the east

LEFT Some of the Cape Vultures on their nesting cliff © Leonie Kellerman.

BELOW A Black Stork being harassed by one of the many Pied Crows in the general area © Derek Engelbrecht.

Finally, the most special birds were the cliff-nesters. These, of course, were mainly the vultures! We saw them in record numbers, perhaps about a hundred in total. When we started out, lots of them were already in the air, but there were also dozens still roosting on the main ledge. Others had tried their best to get airborne, but it was still early and cold, and they ended up sunning themselves on some of

the large boulders on the eastern side of the reserve. Over decades of vultures nesting on the main ledge, the cliffs around and below it have developed large patches of white from their droppings, visible from far away. As the day heated up, more vultures were ascending into the sky above the hill. These giant rocks heat up rapidly, and from them the warm air rises, forming updrafts that the vultures can use to soar effortlessly up





of the main rock. They also later ascended to soar in the sky. Another seen soaring, which might also be nesting somewhere, was a Black Stork/Swartooievaar. This stork, though it nests in trees in some regions, mainly nests on rocks and cliffs in South Africa. Another cliff-nester that we saw flying about was the Lanner Falcon/Edelvalk.

Smaller cliff-nesters that were out and about included the African Black Swift/Swartwindswael, Alpine Swift/Witpenswindswael, Little Swift/Kleinwindswael, and Large Rock Martin/Kransswael. Amazingly, these little birds were

flying about the big rock, showing little fear of the large raptors! Mid-sized birds associated with cliffs but also often present in flat terrain were the Red-winged Starling/Rooivlerkspreeu and Speckled Pigeon/Kransduif.

To the very east of the main hill, there is a large, round rock, and

OPPOSITE The resident pair of Verreaux's Eagles at their nest
© Julia Friskin.

BELOW Fiscal Flycatcher
© Jody de Bruyn.



numerous deep, round, pothole-like cavities are excavated in its sides. Once upon a time, these were used as nesting sites by a small colony of Southern Bald Ibises (Kalkoenibisse) (see Engelbrecht 2018 [here](#)). Sadly, they haven't been there for many years now. It is likely not due to the presence of the vultures and the raptors, but because the ibises no longer have suitable feeding sites available in the region. These ibises forage mainly in open grassland, and the

grasslands have greatly shrunk from their original extent due to the ever-increasing human population and expanding settlements. The ibises may return one day, if we can secure enough suitable habitat for them. For now, though, the species is mainly seen farther to the east and south, in lush, open grasslands and near the cliffs of the Drakensberg and other ranges forming the escarpment. Though now ibis-free, the pothole rock may still be used by other cliff-nesters,

and a Lanner perched above this rock may point to a potential candidate. The potholes are also ideal for owls such as Spotted Eagle-Owl and Western Barn Owl.

Apart from the birds, we also sighted butterflies, grasshoppers, and mammals: tree squirrels, dwarf mongooses, and hyraxes/dassies! The landscape was very scenic, and it was great to enjoy a pristine bushveld atmosphere so close to dense human habitation. This reserve has become a staple destination for our club, a little

natural jewel of Limpopo, and I hope it is managed well enough to remain so.

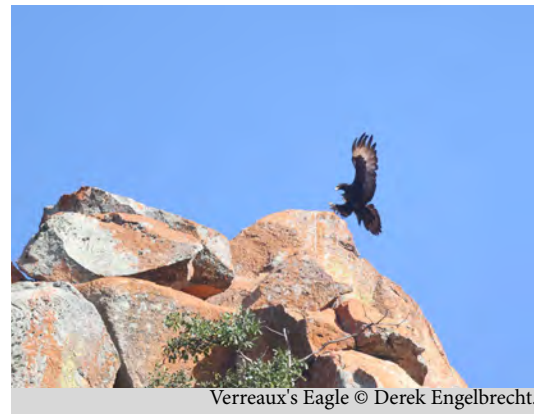
On behalf of Birdlife Polokwane, I wish to thank Mr. Tshepo Mamabolo for facilitating access to the reserve.

Author email: willemsvandermerwe@gmail.com

BELOW Moletzie is a beautiful little reserve amidst all the development around it. This is the view from the east of the reserve looking west
© Johan Janse van Vuuren.



Moletzie collage



For the love of birds, and their future



KNYSNA TURACOS JO GROBLER



AFRICAN JACANA THINUS VAN STADEN

“

Birding has brought me great joy over the years, from quiet garden moments with a Cape Robin-Chat, to the call of a Fiery-necked Nightjar on a summer night, to the flash of a Crimson-breasted Shrike in the bushveld. Each encounter has deepened my appreciation for South Africa's birds and wild places.

I want to give back and help ensure that species such as the Botha's Lark, African Penguin, and Secretarybird continue to inspire future generations. That is why I have chosen to leave a legacy gift to BirdLife South Africa – so that the wonder of birds endures.

Leaving a gift in my will is my way of protecting habitats, supporting research, addressing threats to birds, and ensuring that the joy of birding continues beyond my lifetime.

”


BirdLife
SOUTH AFRICA

Giving
Conservation
Wings

Thinking about the future of birds?

After taking care of your loved ones, you might consider leaving a gift in your will to BirdLife South Africa. Even a small portion can help ensure that birds – and the joy of birding – endure for generations to come. For more information, visit birdlife.org.za/support-us/leave-a-legacy/



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.

Spotted Crane

- Showing behaviour
- Photos showing diet
- Photos at nests

Eurasian Golden Oriole

- Habitat
- Interspecific interaction and other behaviour
- Handheld images
- Diet

Flufftails (all southern African species)

- Nests, eggs, chicks, and different age categories
- Behaviour
- Diet
- Typical habitat

Bearded Vulture

- Typical habitat
- Feeding or dropping bones
- Interesting behaviour

Martial Eagle

- Photos showing typical habitat
- Photos showing behaviour, interactions, birds at nests, nestlings, etc.
- Photos of nests, eggs, or nestlings.
- Photos showing behaviour and diet

Recently published species accounts

[Double-banded Courser](#)

[African Finfoot](#) (update)

[Monteiro's Hornbill](#) (update)

[White-chested Alethe](#)

[Three-banded Courser](#)

[Great Egret](#)

Regulars

Birds in Art

Squacco Heron

Text and Artwork

Willem van der Merwe

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:



Squacco Heron

To begin this note, I want to thank Leonie Kellerman for permitting me to use her photo as a reference for this painting. This is a Squacco Heron/*Ralreier* (*Ardeola ralloides*). The English name apparently comes from a local Italian name, “sguacco”, while the scientific name, meaning “small, rail-like heron”, and the Afrikaans

name both refer to its resemblance to a rail. This species is widespread, occurring in sub-Saharan Africa, Madagascar, southern, central, and eastern Europe, the Middle East, and western Asia. Those from the northern regions are migrants, moving to tropical Africa for the northern hemisphere winter, while the more southern ones, mostly in Africa, move around in response to

climate, seeking out wetlands. In South Africa, this species is not very frequently seen, but if you’re a regular birder, you’re sure to see them now and then. They occur in the moister, warmer, northern and eastern parts of the country. They prefer wetlands with still or slowly flowing, shallow water and some grasses, reeds or sedges to hide and hunt in. In our region, if seen well, they are unlike

any other similarly sized herons except for immature night herons or nonbreeding Malagasy Pond-Herons (*Ardeola idae*), both of which have much darker streaking. The latter is a rare vagrant in our region.

The individual in my painting is in its nonbreeding plumage, which is how they are most often seen. The brown, streaky feathers of the back hide the all-white wings, rump and tail, which become a prominently visible feature when this heron flies. But amidst the reeds, the heron is camouflaged very well. In the breeding season, the plumage is less streaky, but a more uniform reddish buff over the upperparts and breast, with the belly and wings still white. The bill becomes bluish with a black tip, and the legs and feet turn pinkish. They assume their breeding colours rapidly upon the onset of favourable breeding conditions.

Squacco Herons are small, about 45 cm in total length, and weigh 230–370g. Like some other small herons, they “hide” surprisingly long necks by keeping them folded



LEFT An adult in breeding plumage. Note the long occipital plumes that only form during the breeding season
© Warwick Tarboton.

in underneath their loose, shaggy feathers. The neck can be rapidly extended to help them catch prey.

Squacco Herons are hunters of aquatic invertebrates, such as mayfly and dragonfly larvae, and vertebrates such as frogs, tadpoles and fish. They may eat terrestrial invertebrates such as grasshoppers, beetles, butterflies, spiders, or earthworms if they encounter them among the wetland vegetation. They're crepuscular, mainly active around dawn or dusk, but may also feed during the middle parts of the day or night. They either stand still amidst the reeds, keeping an eye out and lunging at prey that comes within reach, or they slowly walk about in shallow water. They may use insects as bait, catching one live and carefully placing it in the water, waiting for fish to investigate it, which they will then try to catch. (This is similar to what the Little (formerly Striated) Heron (*Butorides atricapilla*) and its relatives may do with other props like feathers or bits of bread.) Like Western Cattle Egrets (*Ardea ibis*), they may follow large mammals to catch small prey they flush out.

They breed on platform nests built of sticks or reeds, either concealed between reeds and other vegetation or at a low level in a dense shrub or tree, the base of which is

submerged. They nest in colonies, often with other herons, egrets, ibises, cormorants, pelicans or other wetland birds. While there are usually only a few Squacco Herons per colony, there may sometimes be as many as 2000. They are seasonally monogamous—the male and female choose each other each season—then mate and build their nest, defending a small territory around it. The male is mostly responsible for collecting the nest

material. The female lays 2–4 eggs, uniformly coloured greenish blue. She incubates them mostly by herself. The incubation period can be as long as 22–24 days in Europe, but shorter in Africa, and as little as 15–18 days in Madagascar. The chicks hatch in the order in which the eggs were laid, and the earlier ones have a greater chance of reaching adulthood and being in good health than the later ones. They fledge at 35–45 days of age.

Squacco Herons are still widespread and not of any particular conservation concern, but depend on the protection and health of the wetlands where they occur.

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BELOW The head profile
of a breeding adult
© Derek Engelbrecht.



Reflections

Reflections

Birding in SANParks

Chris Patton has worked for SANParks for 3 decades. He is also a birder and shares his memories and insights on birding in National Parks.

Going for Gold

Golden Gate Highlands National Park

Birding Memories and Insights

Part 1 – Around the Accommodation

Chris Patton

For readers who don't know, Golden Gate (Golden Gate Highlands National Park in eastern Free State province protecting high-altitude grassland habitat, important water catchment areas and an extraordinary fossil history, nestled in the foothills of the Maluti Mountains on the Lesotho border, and renowned for its sandstone cliffs that glow brilliant shades of gold, orange, and red. It is just over a 3-hour drive from both

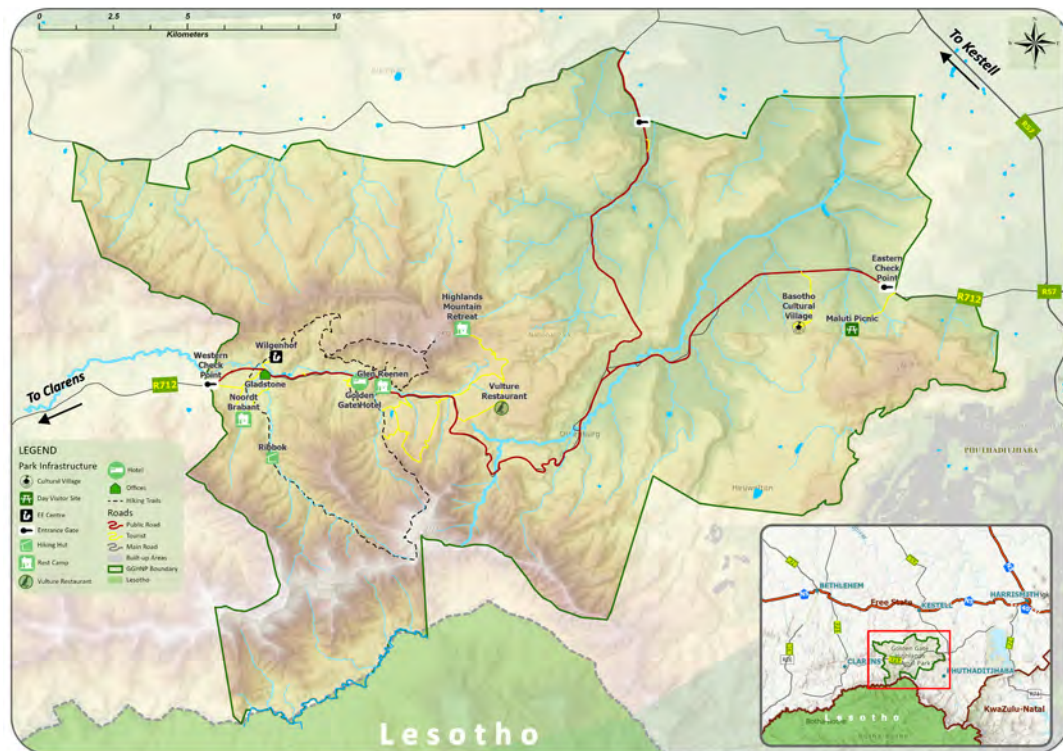


ABOVE Brandwag (The Golden Gate Butte) – iconic landmark of Golden Gate Highlands National Park © SANParks' Archives

Johannesburg and Bloemfontein, and around 4 hours from Durban. It has a public road running through it, the R712 regional route that links the town of Clarens, 40-odd kilometres to the west of the Park, and Harrismith, some 55 km to the east—see its location [here](#).

In the last edition, I briefed readers on the link between birds and dinosaurs and waxed lyrical about visiting the Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Interpretation Centre in Golden Gate Highlands National Park. I promised to continue and describe some of the actual birds that visitors to the Park can expect to see in the next edition of Reflections.

Having given this some further thought I've determined I will need to do so over a couple of articles as there is too much to condense into one, so I've elected to focus one article on the birds one can expect to see from the Western Check Point entry to the park on the R712 (see map), past the Gladstone offices, the picnic site area above the Gladstone Dam, and importantly around the Park's



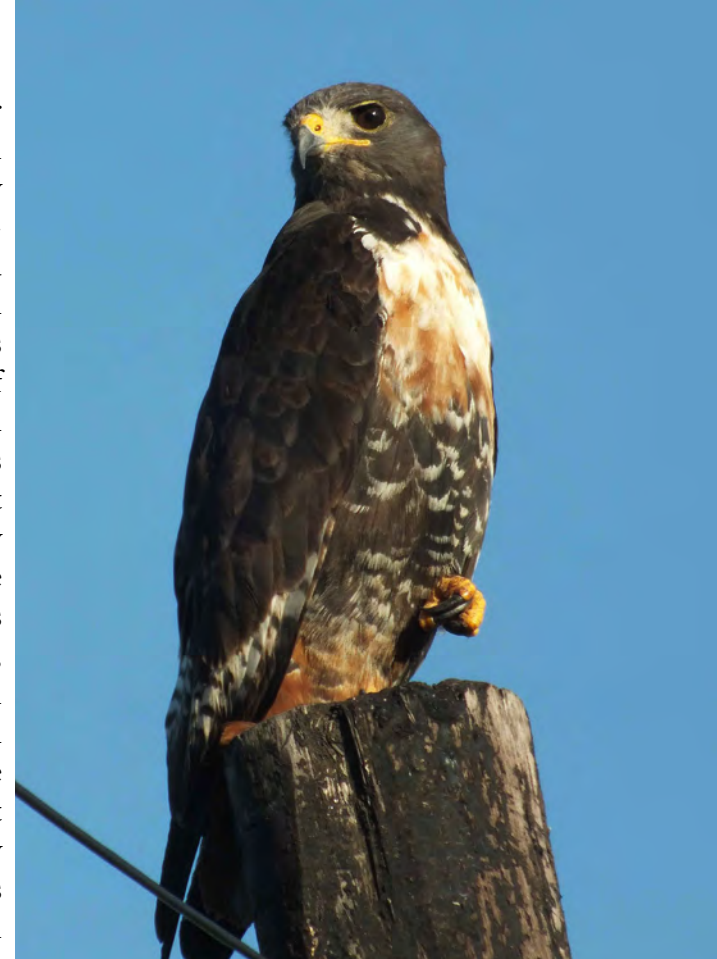
ABOVE Map of Golden Gate (pre-completion of the Dinosaur Centre, which is not shown here, but by Glen Reenen)

main accommodation facilities at the Golden Gate Hotel and Chalets, and the nearby Glen Reenen Rest Camp and Campsite, which are adjacent the Dinosaur Centre. Then in Part 2, I will describe the birds one can find on the Park's drives along the Blesbok and Oribi Loops, around the Vulture Hide, up by the Highlands Mountain Retreat Camp and along the road to the Basotho Cultural Village. For those unfamiliar with the Park, it always helps to look at a couple of maps. First, to put the Park's location in the country in perspective, and then to show the areas in the Park I have described above on the map below.

Because one is driving on a public tar road as one approaches the Park, and after one enters through the checkpoint, in a valley flanked by mountains on both sides of the road, birding is mostly roadside. It is not unusual to see several large species, such as corvids (ravens and crows) and raptors, and even the Black Stork. The raptors will often perch on roadside telephone poles. In one of my first trips to the Park, after

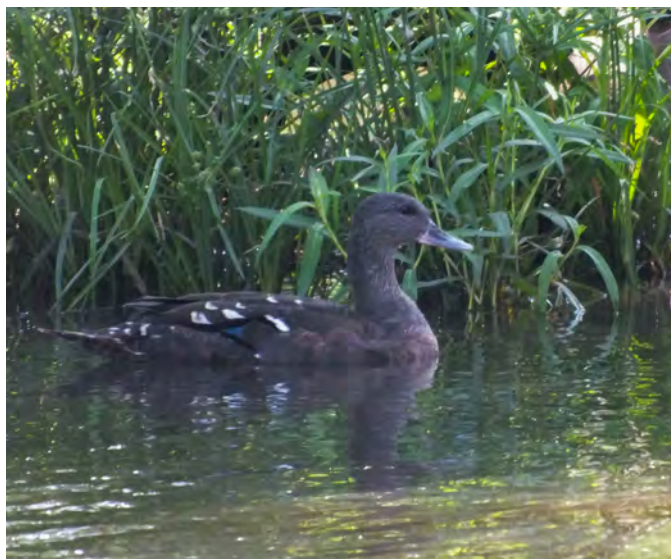
I started working for SANParks, sometime in the late 1990s, I was very excited to spot a Long-crested Eagle perched on one such pole. In recent years, this species has colonised much of Gauteng, the southern Cape, and other parts of the country, but at the time, this was a very exciting record. These days, the species seems entrenched in the area, along the Little Caledon River, that flows parallel to the R712 both inside and outside the Park. But the eagle is not the only roadside raptor visitors can expect to see; both Jackal and Common (summer only) Buzzards, and Rock Kestrels are very likely to be seen, and Lanner and Peregrine Falcons are options too (the latter more on the wing than perched on a roadside pole).

So as one drives east along the R712, the river (a tributary of the Caledon River and, in time, the Orange River, and more like a stream in this portion of its journey) will be on your vehicle's left, and some rolling hills will be on your



ABOVE Jackal Buzzards are often quite confiding and seen in and around the rest camps and along the public road that runs through the Park © Chris Patton.

right. There are opportunities to walk into these habitats from the accommodation base. Species like Barratt's Warbler, Bush Blackcap (especially where there are patches of Ouhout [Old-wood *Leucosidea sericea*]) are some of the specials to search for along the watercourse. At



LEFT African Black Duck is a regular at the Gladstone Dam
© Chris Patton.

is after here are the regular and quality sightings of things like Purple Heron and African Black Duck. Giant Kingfishers are often in attendance, too, but perhaps the best bird to frequently find here is the

the same time, up on the slopes of the hillside, birds like African Pipit, Buff-streaked Chat and Ground Woodpecker can be found.

But the first place I want to describe in detail is the Gladstone Dam, which is overlooked by the Park's picnic site for day visitors, and used for various environmental education activities and water sports. But the vantage point of the picnic site (in the past, one could even drive one's vehicle to look over the dam, but I think that set-up has been changed in recent years). This dam is the best place to tick off water birds in the Park. Red-knobbed Coot and Common Moorhen are ubiquitous, while in summer the reed beds buzz with breeding Southern Red Bishop, and the strident calls of Lesser Swamp and Little Rush Warblers and the softer call of Levaillant's Cisticola, but what one

African Rail. These skulking birds are difficult to see but easier to hear, and, as they are crepuscular, early morning and late evening, or overcast days, offer the best chance of some sightings.

My first trip to Golden Gate Highlands National Park was in December 1982. It was simply called Golden Gate National Park in those days, and it was on a camping trip with my parents and grandparents. Yes, 44 years is a long time ago, but we were big into hiking, and I have two vivid memories of birds we saw on that trip as we walked up to the top of the Brandwag/Golden Gate Butte. The first is of large numbers of swifts wheeling and screaming above us, and my first ever memory of Alpine Swifts with their bold white chests and large size, making them different from the other, darker swifts. As a child, I



ABOVE The hotel from the valley below on the northern side
© SANParks Archives.

don't think I was yet aware that the other, all-dark swifts prevalent in greater numbers around the cliffs and rock faces are African Black Swifts. The park is also very good for seeing Horus Swift, and indeed the other two white-rumped South African swifts in Little and White-rumped (a summer visitor). The Horus Swift is unlike most other swifts (with the notable exception of African Palm Swift) that nest on cliff faces or buildings, as Horus Swifts show a preference for aardvark burrows, road culverts and the like, and there are plenty of suitable nesting sites within the Park. My second childhood memory from hiking up to the top of Golden Gate

Butte is of Verreaux's Eagle (then called Black Eagle) soaring above us. It was breathtaking, and the image has stayed with me until today.

The Golden Gate Hotel is an impressive building overlooking the R712 and the Little Caledon River. Rather than describe it, the following photos will give readers a clear visualisation of what the hotel looks like from the valley below and the hillside above, as well as the surrounding scenery.

Birding at the hotel and chalets is not that prolific, but one should always be on the lookout for something special. Speckled Pigeon, Large Rock Martin and Cape Wagtail will be ever-present. In the summer months, Greater Striped Swallow, but earlier this year, I was at the hotel for a conference and saw a South African Cliff Swallow keeping the more regular swallows and martins' company. Most of us will know this species from their colonies nesting under bridges on the N1, and I was very pleasantly surprised to see one away from their more well-known haunts.

If you are staying in one of the rooms in the hotel and there are aloe plants outside your window, if you are on the right level of the building, then you might get treated to close-ups of either Southern or Greater Double-collared or Malachite Sunbirds, and even Gurney's Sugarbirds. However, these are more regular in protea groves up the slopes or further east. Another charming bird often seen around the hotel is the Rock Kestrel; I suspect they may even nest under the eaves of the building.

Just to the east of the hotel is the adjoining Golden Gate Chalet complex, where there is much more vegetation in and around the accommodation units. Red-winged Starling and Cape Robin-Chat are very prominent, but I have also seen Ground Woodpeckers around the chalets. Like the hotel and throughout the Park, Speckled Pigeon is very prominent. Still, when trees in the Park are bearing fruit, they are periodically

LEFT A South African Cliff Swallow was a surprise sighting in the Park earlier this year © Chris Patton.



ABOVE Rock Kestrels are common throughout the Park and even use the buildings of the hotel and rest camps to roost and nest © Chris Patton.

joined by their larger cousin, the African Olive Pigeon, which I always prefer to call by its old name, Rameron Pigeon. This name sounds more vibrant and apparently derives from the French word "ramier" for the European Wood Pigeon, which early French biologists in Africa were reminded of when naming this species. These birds are particularly attracted when the Wild Olive (*Olea europaea africana*) is in fruit. These trees grow in the Park's steep talus

slopes, ravines, and gorges alongside other indigenous trees like the Sagewood (*Buddleja salviifolia*) and the Blue Gwarrie (*Euclea crispa*).

Less than 2 km by road but out of sight and through an imposing sandstone ravine is the Glen Reenen Rest Camp, which is a collection



ABOVE Glen Reenen Camp rondavel parking area, a mixture of lawn, exotic poplars and willows and natural vegetation © Chris Patton.

of rondavels and family cottages, depending on the size of one's travel party. On the cliffs on the way there, keep an eye out for African Harrier-Hawks (*Gymnogenes*) scouring the nooks and crannies of the cliffs for any morsels they can find. The following photo of Glen Reenen will show readers that while the camp is a combination of grassy lawns, exotic and indigenous trees and shrubs, it is infinitely beautiful.

Perhaps the biggest attraction of the camps in Golden Gate, ornithologically speaking, is that they are in an ornithological convergence zone. Never mind the Twilight Zone; in bird terms, it is a convergence zone where several closely related species overlap, making for interesting observations and a chance to see hybridisation or intergradation between these

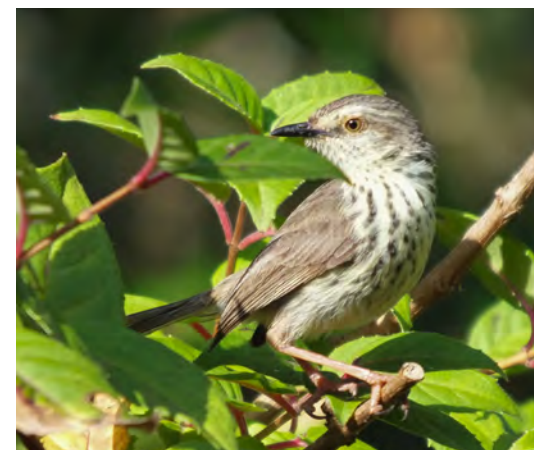
species. Olive and Karoo Thrush; African Red-eyed Bulbul and Common Bulbul; and Karoo and Drakensberg Prinia are the notable examples. The thrushes and the prinias were regarded as a single species when I first visited the Park in the 1980s, but now are split, with the species characteristics seeming quite distinct.

One of my favourite memories of Glen Reenen birds is hearing the African Wood Owl at night, whether staying in the rest camp units or across the road in the campsite. I was very excited to learn that they were recorded at the camp during my early days with SANParks, but figured they might

just be a vagrant record. During the early 2000s and early 2010s, I regularly heard them during my stays when working in the Park. I feared that they might no longer occur there, but when I check SABAP2 records, the Glen Reenen pentad, and a nearby pentad in Clarens are the only places in the Free State where they have been recorded, so hopefully they're still around.

I most recently stayed at Glen Reenen last year for the launch of the Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Centre and shared one of the larger family cottages with colleagues. These units are higher up the hill than the rondavels, and there were two birds that one couldn't miss, mainly because of their vocalisations. One has a melodious whistle... the Bokmakierie, the other a less tuneful but equally striking for its repeated nasal honking, the Red-throated Wryneck.

When it comes to the sounds of Glen Reenen Camp, particularly down at lower levels from the tops of the exotic trees, there is an ongoing whistling and twittering. This is the handiwork of Cape Canary, and their foraging parties are regularly found on the lawn areas of the Camp, where



ABOVE Karoo Prinia (© Chris Patton) with whiter underparts and bolder streaks, is common around Glen Reenen, while Drakensberg Prinia (TOP), which has yellower underparts and finer streaking, as the name suggests, is more easily found on some of the higher slopes.

they may be joined by Sweet and Common Waxbills and even Bronze Mannikin.

Several walking trails from Glen Reenen provide access to more heavily vegetated areas,



Bokmakierie (ABOVE) and the Red-throated Wryneck (LEFT) are common and tame in Glen Reenen Camp © Chris Patton.



often along watercourses. Here, visitors can look for species like Barratt's Warbler, Bush Blackcap, and a suite of Capes in Cape Weavers, White-eyes, Buntings, Robin-Chats and Batis, and in the summer months African Paradise Flycatcher, Red-chested and Diederik Cuckoos. But many of these listed species are also found in the camping site, which is just across the road

from the camp itself. But the species to target at the campsite is the Half-collared Kingfisher, which nests just downstream from the campsite and, with a little patience, should be seen by keeping your eye on the stream. I have also seen them at Gladstone Dam, but more regularly along the campsite's stream.



ABOVE Cape Canary song is a feature of the trees at Glen Reenen and the neighbouring Kgodumodumo parking lot © Chris Patton.

LEFT Half-collared Kingfishers nest along the stream that runs through Glen Reenen Campsite © Chris Patton.



So that's it for in and around the accommodation. Next time I'll get into birds of the mountainous areas and open grassland, with many of the specials the Park is renowned for.

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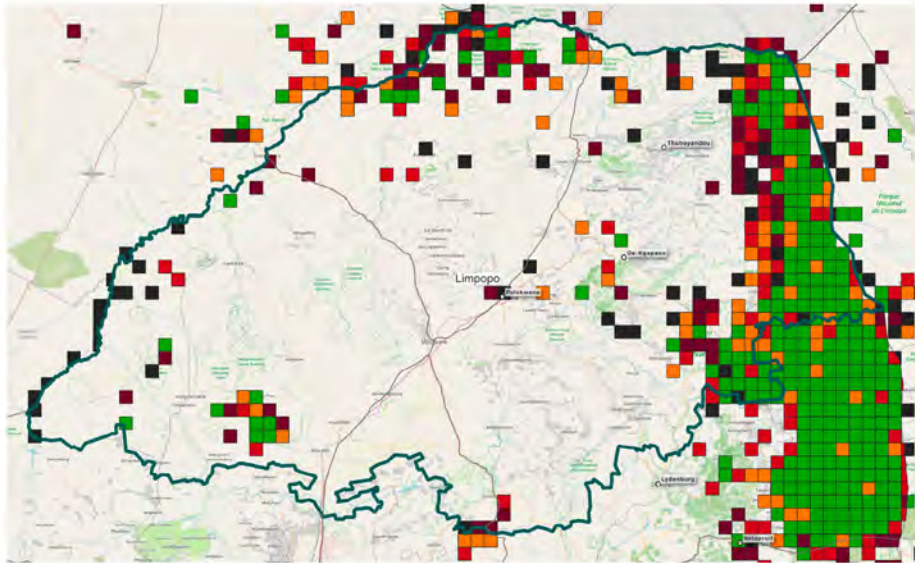


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WHAT TO INCLUDE

- 1 GPS pin or WhatsApp location
- 2 Number of birds in the group
- 3 Age & sex if known (adults, juveniles)
- 4 Photos or video – even distant shots help

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Between the tides: African Oystercatcher breeding at Cape St Francis

TEXT AND PHOTOS Martin Potgieter and Melanie Potgieter

email: potgiemp@gmail.com

Along the southern and western coasts of South Africa, the African Oystercatcher (*Haematopus moquini*) is a familiar sight. For inland birders, it is rather less so, and while on holiday, our late afternoon walks along the beach at Cape St Francis have given us a welcome opportunity to observe it at close quarters over many seasons.

It is a bird with a conservation story worth knowing. Until recently, the species was regarded as threatened with extinction, driven by increasing human activity and unsustainable practices along the shore. By the mid-1990s, breeding success along parts of the Eastern Cape coast had effectively collapsed, with researchers finding no evidence of breeding across 60 km of coastal habitat (Underhill 2014). Three factors combined to reverse this decline. The 1979 arrival and rapid spread of the alien Mediterranean mussel (*Mytilus galloprovincialis*) along the South African shoreline proved unexpectedly beneficial, as

these mussels now constitute the bulk of the oystercatcher's diet. A second turning point was the nationwide ban on vehicles driving on beaches, implemented in December 2001. The response was immediate: breeding numbers, nesting pairs, and productivity all increased in the first season following the ban (Williams et al. 2004). Improved predator management on offshore breeding islands completed the picture (Underhill 2014). The species was subsequently downlisted from Near Threatened to Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, a rare conservation success story that BirdLife South Africa celebrated by naming the African Oystercatcher its Bird of the Year for 2018 (Brown et al. 2019).

Yet the recovery remains fragile. Human disturbance and coastal development remain key threats, and the narrow breeding zone between the spring high-tide level and the coastal vegetation leaves little margin for error. Our observations at Cape St Francis, spanning more than a decade, illustrate both the resilience



Figure 1. African Oystercatcher chick with adult, Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape, 8 February 2023.

of this species and the ongoing pressures it faces.

On 8 February 2023, we encountered a pair of African Oystercatchers with a single chick at 34°11'38.62" S, 24°51'18.82" E (Figure 1). During the previous breeding season, we observed what was presumably the same pair at this locality, accompanied by two smaller chicks, suggesting site fidelity.

With African Oystercatcher chicks, the remiges and back feathers appear at approximately 14 days, and the rectrices by around 18 days (Hockey 2005). Based on plumage development (Figure 2),

we estimated the chick to be about 20 days old at the time of our first observation.

The site consisted of a narrow dune belt with sparse vegetation, transitioning to a mixed shingle, sand, and low rock shoreline. The adults showed a clear preference for keeping the chick among the rocks on the landward side, away from the surf. This provided both shelter and a degree of concealment.

The parental strategy employed was notable. One adult always remained close to the chick. The area is popular with anglers and dog walkers, and when people



Figure 2. African Oystercatcher chick, Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape, 8 February 2023.



Figure 3. African Oystercatcher pair (female left, longer, more pointed bill; male right, shorter, blunter bill), Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape, 8 February 2023.

or dogs approached too closely, the attending adult would give a repeated “pic...pic...pic...” alarm call (Hockey et al. 2021). The chick would then move stealthily away to hide among the rocks, while the adult positioned itself in a conspicuous, exposed location, continuing the alarm calls until the perceived threat had passed.

With both adults present (Figure 3), it was possible to compare morphological differences. Males typically have shorter, blunter bills, while females have longer, more pointed bills (Hockey 2005).

However, because of overlap in bill measurements, this method alone is not always reliable. A more dependable feature is the presence of a prominent dark fleck in the iris, which appears to be characteristic of females (Figures 4a and b), although a small proportion of males may show a reduced version of this marking (Hockey et al. 2021).

On 13 February 2023, the male was observed foraging on mussels on a wave-washed rock. Despite repeated inundation by waves, he persisted, briefly flying off when waves crashed near him, but returning as soon as the wave retreated. Once a mussel was dislodged, he carried it to a nearby rock close to the chick,

wedged it securely into a crevice, and hammered it open. After extracting the flesh, he flew to the chick, placed the food on a flat rock, and gave a soft contact call. The chick responded by approaching and feeding, while the adult stood guard (Figure 5).

On another occasion, the female was seen feeding on storm-cast red bait (*Pyura* spp.) along the high-tide line. She probed repeatedly to penetrate the tough outer tunic, extracting small pieces of flesh. It was not clear whether any of this food was offered to the chick (Figures 6).

During a spring high tide associated with the new moon on 20 February 2023, the usual rocky refuge was inundated. The family group moved into the dunes, foraging among sparse vegetation some distance from the shoreline. Here, both adults probed the sand in a manner reminiscent of snipe, although the prey items could not be identified. This behaviour aligns with occasional records of the species feeding on dry sandy flats up to 100–200 m inland (Hockey et al. 2021). The group later returned to the drift line, where the chick closely followed the adults and mimicked their foraging behaviour (Figures 7a and b).



Figure 4. a) African Oystercatcher male (shorter, blunter bill, no iris fleck) and b) female (longer, more pointed bill, large iris fleck), Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape.



Figure 5. African Oystercatcher male bringing food to chick, Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape, 13 February 2023.



Figure 6. African Oystercatcher female feeding on red bait, Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape.



Figure 7a and b) African Oystercatcher family group foraging on the drift line, Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape, 20 February 2023.



Figure 8. African Oystercatcher fledgling, Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape, 22 February 2023.

Our final observation of this chick was on 22 February 2023 (Figure 8), when we estimated its age to be approximately 34 days. African Oystercatcher chicks remain dependent for an extended period and only become independent 2–6 months after fledging (Hockey 2005).

When we revisited the area in February 2026, we again encountered a pair occupying the same stretch of coastline. Whether this represents the same pair returning annually is uncertain, but the repeated use of the site suggests that it forms part of an established breeding territory.

What was immediately apparent, however, was a noticeable increase in human disturbance. While the area has long been popular with anglers, there appears to have been a shift towards more sustained, possibly subsistence-driven fishing activity. As a result, more people are present on the rocks for extended periods, increasing the likelihood of disturbance during the breeding season.

Additional pressures include beachgoers walking too close to chick hiding sites, as well as off-leash dogs that actively chase the birds. In several instances, adults were seen



Figure 9a and b. African Oystercatcher chicks being washed off the rocks, Cape St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape, 27 February 2026

making repeated alarm calls while attempting to distract approaching threats, often eliciting little response from the people involved.

In one particularly concerning observation on 27 February 2026, two chicks were sheltering among rocks during an incoming spring tide while people inadvertently blocked their access to safer ground. As the waves washed over the rocks, the chicks were washed repeatedly between them while the adults called loudly nearby. (Figures 11 and 12) Although both chicks survived and were seen again a few days later, the incident illustrated how easily disturbance can translate into direct risk.

These observations raise an uncomfortable question: are such disturbances the result of a lack of awareness, or simple disregard? This is especially pertinent given that members of the local birding community have erected signage in the area indicating that African Oystercatchers are breeding and should not be disturbed. The effectiveness of such measures ultimately depends on public understanding and cooperation. For those of us who travel to the coast with binoculars in hand, there is perhaps a small but meaningful role to play, not only in watching these

birds, but in speaking up when we witness behaviour that puts them at risk. Awareness, after all, travels with the people who carry it.

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Bronze-winged Courser at Florisbad, Free State Province

TEXT AND PHOTOS Dawid H. de Swardt

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The Florisbad Quaternary Research Station (FQRS), Soutpan was visited from 22-24 April 2026 for bird ringing fieldwork by the Ornithology Department, National Museum, and the Curator (Dina Fagir) and Technical Assistant (Nomcebo Ndlovu) of the Durban Natural Science Museum. Upon arriving and getting our ringing station ready, I saw a plover-like bird fly past me and drop into the grass. On closer inspection, it was identified as a Bronze-winged Courser (*Rhinoptilus chalcopterus*), a rare bird to the central parts of the Free State. The habitat at FQRS is mainly open karroid veld near Soutpan (salt pans in the area) and scattered *Vachellia* trees in drainage lines or *Vachellia* woodland along the nearby Modder River, which are their preferred habitat (Hockey 2005).

Later in the day, presumably the same individual observed earlier, was captured in one of the mist nets and processed and ringed (ring no:

4H79653) (Figure 1). Bronze-winged Courser has iridescent tips on its primary feathers, which are mainly visible in hand and seldom visible in the field (Figure 2). While handling the bird and taking measurements, the possible reason for “dropping” to the ground was noticed. The right tarsus appeared to have an old injury near the foot, possibly involving a break that has healed in a way that prevents the bird from standing. The bird weighed 125.9 g, lower than the body mass cited for unsexed individuals (Hockey 2005), and I could feel its breastbone, suggesting it may be struggling to forage while possibly standing on one leg. However, when the bird was released, it flew well.

Bronze-winged Coursers are known to exhibit considerable movement in response to rainfall and may occasionally appear at places beyond their usual distribution range (Hockey 2005). As the Bloemfontein area experienced heavy rainfall in March and April in both 2025 and

Table 1. Sightings of Bronze-winged Coursers in the Bloemfontein area, Free State, during SABAP2 (2007 to present). FP = Full Protocol. See [SABAP2](#) for details.

Date	Locality	Pentad	Notes
2005-12 to 2006-01	Soetdoring Nature Reserve	2850_2600	pre-SABAP2
2009-01-28	Dealesville region	2840_2545	SABAP2 FP
2017-01-01	Brandfort region	2850_2620	SABAP2 FP
2020-12-28	Bainsvlei, Bloemfontein	2900_2605	SABAP2 Ad Hoc
2026-04-22	Florisbad, Soutpan	2845_2600	SABAP2 FP



Figure 1. The immature Bronze-winged Courser in the hand, captured in karroid bushveld with scattered *Vachellia* tree species at Florisbad, Soutpan. (ML655563334).



Figure 2. The Bronze-winged Courser iridescent tips on its primary feathers visible in the hand and which is seldom visible in the field (ML655563340).

2026, the presence of this individual suggests possible movement following these rainfall events. The last sighting near FQRS was during December 2005-January 2006 in recently flooded Vachellia woodland where the water had started to recede along the shore of Krugersdrift Dam in Soetdoring Nature Reserve (personal observation). Since the inception of SABAP2 in 2007, the species has only been recorded, and vetted, in

13 pentads (see SABAP2 map [here](#)) in the Free State. Table 1 summarises the six records of Bronze-winged Coursers in the Greater Bloemfontein region (Table 1).

Reference

Hockey, P. A. R. (2005). Bronze-winged Courser *Rhinoptilus chalcopterus*. In Roberts Birds of Southern Africa (P. A. R. Hockey, W. R. J. Dean, and P. G. Ryan, Editors), Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town, South Africa. pp. 422–423.

Birds and the White-berry Bush

John Burchmore

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During a stay at Klaserie Private Nature Reserve from 3–25 November 2026, I observed birds feeding on the berries of the White-berry Bush (*Flueggea virosa*). Engelbrecht (2026) called for information about birds feeding on this plant. Table 1 presents a

list of new additions to the list of birds feeding on *F. virosa*, including three mammals. This bring the list of *F. virosa* frugivores to 30 species.

Reference

Engelbrecht, D. (2026). More White-berry Bush berry-eating birds The Lark 64:59–60.

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

Order	Family	Species
Bucerotiformes	Phoeniculidae	Green Woodhoopoe Common Scimitarbill
Galliformes	Phasianidae	Crested Francolin
Passeriformes ²⁵	Malaconotidae	Brubru Black-backed Puffback
	Oriolidae	Black-headed Oriole Eurasian Golden Oriole
	Ploceidae	Southern Masked Weaver Red-headed Weaver
	Pycnonotidae	Yellow-bellied Greenbul
	Sturnidae	Wattled Starling Greater Blue-eared Starling
Piciformes	Lybiidae	Crested Barbet Acacia Pied Barbet
Other		
Artiodactyla	Giraffidae	Southern Giraffe
Artiodactyla	Suidae	Common Warthog
Rodentia	Sciuridae	Smith's Bush Squirrel

Biometrics and moult of two southern African subspecies of the Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark

Derek Engelbrecht

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Introduction

The genus *Eremopterix*, the sparrow-larks, comprises eight sparrow-like larks, seven of which are highly sexually dichromatic, and one, the Madagascar Sparrow-Lark (*E. hova*), is the only sexually monomorphic species in the genus. The Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark (*E. leucotis*), hereafter CBSL, has the widest distribution among its African relatives, inhabiting the short, open grasslands and semi-arid savannas of sub-Saharan Africa. In southern Africa, two distinct subspecies are recognised: *E. l. smithii* (southeastern Zambia, southern Malawi, western and central Mozambique, eastern Zimbabwe, eastern Botswana and eastern and central South Africa, Eswatini, and Lesotho) and *E. l. hoeschi* (southern Angola, western Zambia, north-central Namibia, northern Botswana, and northwestern Zimbabwe). Although Rose et al. (2020) summarised biometric data of the CBSL in the AFRING database,

their analyses did not distinguish data of the two subspecies. The aim of this note is to report biometric and moult data for the two southern African subspecies.

Methods

Biometrics

Biometric data were recorded from i) live birds captured at the De Loskop farm in Limpopo Province, South Africa (representing *smithii*) ii) mass and wing length records in the AFRING database (both subspecies), and iii) museum study skins loaned from six regional natural history museums (both subspecies): Bloemfontein National Museum, Iziko Museum of Cape Town, Ditsong National Museum of Natural History, Durban Natural Science Museum, East London Museum, and the McGregor Museum in Kimberley. Standard techniques, as described by de Beer et al. (2000), were used to measure the following: body mass, wing length, tail

length, tarsus length, bill depth, and bill width.

Welch's t-test was used to test for statistically significant differences between the sexes. This t-test is more robust than the Student's t-test since it does not assume equal variances between the sexes. All statistical analyses of the biometric data were performed using SPSS version 30 (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, Illinois). A result was considered to be statistically significant if $p < 0.05$.

Moult

Moult was assessed in live birds, museum specimens, and from AFRING records. Because museum skins are difficult to examine without causing damage, its assessment focused on moult timing and patterns. Feathers on the head, body, wings, tail, and wing coverts were inspected, and birds were considered to be in moult when two or more feathers were actively growing in a body region.

Wing morphology

Wing morphology was assessed on birds in the hand using the folded-



Adult female (TOP) and adult male (BOTTOM) Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark.

wing method. Primaries (pp1–10, numbered from the innermost to outermost) were examined visually and by gentle manipulation. Primary lengths were ranked to determine the wing formula, and the wing point was identified as the feather or feathers extending furthest beyond the others. Primaries were

also inspected for emarginations, and their presence and extent (E = strong, e = weak) were recorded.

Results and Discussion

Biometrics

The combined data revealed small differences between the sexes, but the direction of the size difference between males and females depends on the parameter measured.

Flight Apparatus: Male-biased dimorphism

Data from all three datasets consistently show that males have significantly longer wings and tails (see Table 1 for data from De Loskop and museum study skins). Using data from the AFRING database, mass did not differ significantly between *smithii* and *hoeschi*. Male *hoeschi* had a mean mass of 18.8 g $\pm$ 1.00 SD (range 17.0–21.0, n = 18), compared with 18.9 g $\pm$ 3.40 SD (range 12.0–24.5, n = 9) in *smithii* (p = 0.89). Similarly, female *hoeschi* averaged 18. g $\pm$ 1.47 SD (range 16.0–22.0, n = 28), whereas female *smithii* averaged 17.8 g $\pm$ 1.51 SD (range 15.1–20.0, n = 11); this difference was also not significant (p = 0.09). Wing length was analysed only for *hoeschi*, with males having significantly longer wings (p < 0.001): 84.3 mm $\pm$ 2.17 SD (range 82.0–89.0, n = 17) and

females 82.1 mm $\pm$ 1.75 SD (range 79.0–86.0, n = 26). Wing length was not analysed for *smithii* because sample sizes were too small (n = 1 male and n = 3 females).

It is possible that the longer wings and tails of males provide an aerodynamic advantage to males when they engage in song flights.

Body Mass: Female-biased dimorphism

Conversely, females tend to be heavier than males, but this phenomenon may be tied to the breeding cycle.

At De Loskop, where many females were captured at their nests, females were significantly heavier than males (Table 1). In contrast, data from the AFRING database—which includes records that were randomly collected throughout all months of the year—showed no significant mass difference between the sexes (p = 0.89).

The difference between the two datasets (De Loskop and AFRING) reflects a temporary physiological shift in mass. Breeding females rapidly accumulate vital nutrients and fat reserves required for egg production, as well as undergo the physical development of the ovaries and associated tissues during the nesting season, which likely increases the mass.

Table 1. Summary of biometric data for adult Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks. DLK = De Loskop (*smithii*) and MSS = Museum Study Skins; Cu-na = culmen nare.

	Parameter	Males	Females	p
DLK				
	Mass	17.9 g $\pm$ 0.84 SD (range 16.1–19.5, n = 69)	18.5 g $\pm$ 1.26 SD (range 15.6–21.9, n = 85)	<0.002
	Wing	85.5 mm $\pm$ 1.75 SD (range 82.0–90.0, n = 72)	83.7 mm $\pm$ 1.57 SD (range 80.0–87.0, n = 85)	<0.001
	Tail	47.0 mm $\pm$ 1.68 SD (range 43.0–50.0, n = 70)	45.0 mm $\pm$ 1.72 SD (range 40.0–49.0, n = 79)	<0.001
	Culmen	14.0 mm $\pm$ 0.55 SD (range 12.7–15.1, n = 69)	14.0 mm $\pm$ 0.53 SD (range 12.4–15.1, n = 73)	0.831
	Cu-na	8.9 mm $\pm$ 0.36 SD (range 8.1–9.8, n = 67)	8.6 mm $\pm$ 0.35 SD (range 7.9–9.4, n = 73)	<0.001
	Tarsus	17.6 mm $\pm$ 0.65 SD (range 15.8–19.0, n = 67)	17.6 mm $\pm$ 0.74 SD (range 15.9–19.3, n = 75)	0.740
	Bill depth	6.8 mm $\pm$ 0.28 SD (range 6.1–7.3, n = 53)	6.9 mm $\pm$ 0.25 SD (range 6.3–7.4, n = 60)	0.396
	Bill width	6.1 mm $\pm$ 0.27 SD (range 5.5–6.7, n = 47)	6.1 mm $\pm$ 0.27 SD (range 5.6–6.8, n = 54)	0.482
MSS				
<i>smithii</i>	Wing	82.4 mm $\pm$ 2.50 SD (range 77.0–87.0, n = 27)	80.6 mm $\pm$ 1.92 SD (range 78.0–85.0, n = 23)	<0.001
	Tail	45.9 mm $\pm$ 2.08 SD (range 41.0–49.0, n = 27)	45.0 mm $\pm$ 2.06 SD (range 42.0–49.0, n = 23)	0.006
	Culmen	12.4 mm $\pm$ 0.59 SD (range 11.3–13.6, n = 27)	12.5 mm $\pm$ 0.58 SD (range 11.8–13.6, n = 21)	0.620
	Cu-na	8.5 mm $\pm$ 0.44 SD (range 7.9–9.2, n = 27)	8.6 mm $\pm$ 0.48 SD (range 7.3–9.2, n = 21)	0.670
	Tarsus	18.2 mm $\pm$ 0.94 SD (range 16.9–20.2, n = 27)	17.9 mm $\pm$ 0.62 SD (range 17.0–19.0, n = 21)	0.190
<i>hoeschi</i>	Wing	83.6 mm $\pm$ 2.73 SD (range 80.0–87.0, n = 11)	79.5 mm $\pm$ 1.38 SD (range 77.0–81.0, n = 6)	<0.001
	Tail	47.5 mm $\pm$ 2.58 SD (range 44.0–52.0, n = 11)	44.0 mm $\pm$ 2.10 SD (range 40.0–46.0, n = 6)	0.011
	Culmen	12.7 mm $\pm$ 0.69 SD (range 11.0–13.6, n = 11)	12.78 mm $\pm$ 0.56 SD (range 12.0–13.4, n = 6)	0.881
	Cu-na	8.7 mm $\pm$ 0.55 SD (range 8.0–9.6, n = 11)	9.0 mm $\pm$ 0.45 SD (range 8.6–9.9, n = 6)	0.132
	Tarsus	6.7 mm $\pm$ 0.44 SD (range 6.0–7.2, n = 8)	6.8 mm $\pm$ 0.39 SD (range 6.1–7.3, n = 6)	0.586

Monomorphic parameters

Outside of flight feathers and seasonal mass changes, the sexes are remarkably uniform in size (Table 1). Measurements for culmen length, bill depth, bill width, and tarsus length showed no statistical difference between males and females. This structural uniformity suggests that both sexes utilise the same foraging niches and feed on similar food resources in their environment.

Furthermore, comparisons between the *smithii* and *hoeschi* subspecies using AFRING and museum study skin data revealed no significant size differences in any of the analysed traits, despite the two subspecies occupying geographically distinct zones varying greatly in aridity ($p > 0.05$ for all parameters).

Moult strategies

Feather maintenance is a critical, highly demanding process for birds. Sunlight, abrasion, e.g. by vegetation or wind-blown sand constantly degrade feather quality. Because growing new feathers requires tremendous amounts of energy and protein, birds typically separate their moulting schedules from other high-energy phases of life, such as breeding.

Like several other lark species, e.g., Short-clawed Lark (*Certhilauda*

chuana) (Engelbrecht 2024) and Gray's Lark (*Ammomanopsis grayi*) (Craig 1983), amongst others, the CBSL undergoes two moults during the course of its annual cycle.

1. *The Complete Post-Breeding Moul*
AFRING records show that *hoeschi* birds near Okaputu, Namibia, were in advanced primary moult during December and early January. As this coincides with the onset of the wet season in that region (November to the end of March), moult likely begins at the end of the dry season, consistent with a dry-season breeder undergoing post-nuptial moult.

Study skins of *smithii* from Zimbabwe and South Africa show heavily worn plumage from July to September, with moult commencing in late September and ending by early to mid-January. The study skins showed moulting starting towards the end of September in most individuals, with completion by early to mid-January, which, like *hoeschi* shows a post-breeding moult during the wet season. Although there is no information on the duration of moult in an individual, the moulting "season" lasts 3–4 months.

Moult begins on the head, with rectrix replacement starting once about 50–65% of the primaries have been replaced and ending when the tail is fully renewed.



ABOVE Secondaries of the Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark. Note the "giant" s7, which shields the underlying primaries and secondaries and protect them from solar radiation and abrasion.

RIGHT Spread wing of an adult in the hand.



2. The Mid-Winter Partial Moul

Several specimens also showed replacement of the inner three secondaries (ss7–9/10) and some contour feathers during June and July, indicating a partial mid-winter moult in addition to the complete summer post-nuptial moult. In larks, these inner secondaries are disproportionately large and function essentially as a protective "cloak" over the rest of the folded wing. This cloak shields the underlying flight feathers from intense ultraviolet (UV) radiation and abrasion. Because these shield feathers

Figure 1. Mean dry mass (g) of the primaries of male (n = 2) and female (n = 8) Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks.

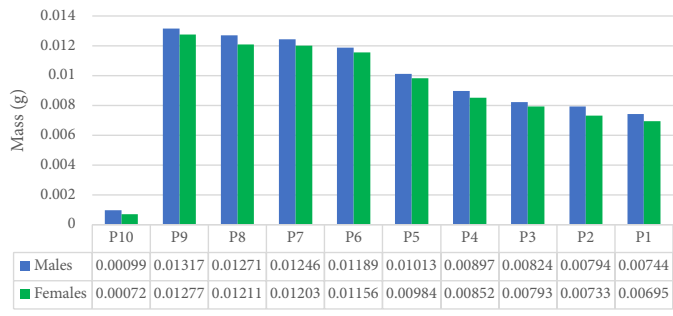


Figure 2. Mean dry mass (g) of the secondaries of male (n = 2) and female (n = 8) Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks.

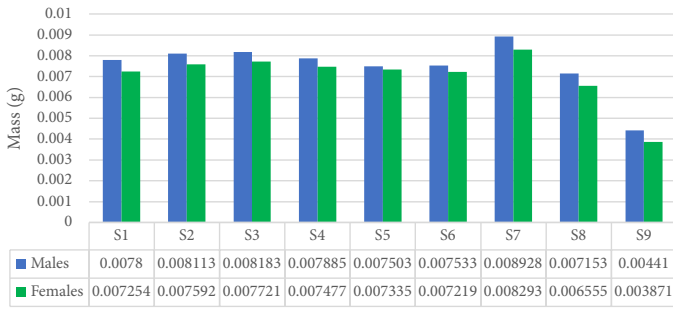


Figure 3. Mean dry mass (g) of the rectrices of male (n = 2) and female (n = 8) Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks.



take the brunt of environmental wear, they degrade much faster than the rest of the wing. From an evolutionary standpoint, it is far more energy-efficient for the sparrow-lark to replace only these three protective feathers mid-year rather than undergoing a costly wing moult of all 19 remiges halfway through its annual moult cycle.

Wing Structure

In *smithii*, p7 is the longest primary in both juveniles and adults, p10 is reduced to ~21–22% of the length of p7, and pp6–8 are emarginated on the distal vane, although p6 is only weakly emarginated. The wing formula is: p7 E>p8E≥p6e>p9>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1 >p10. The wing point is formed by p7. Primary p10 is approximately 22.5% of the length of p9. Secondary s7 is the longest, approximately 6–8% longer than the next longest secondary, s2, covering the more distal feathers in the folded wing. The tail is weakly notched with r1 ~88–91% of the length of the longest rectrix, either r4 or r5. A typical tail formula is t5≥t4>t6>t3>t2>t1. Summaries of the mass of the primaries, secondaries, and rectrices collected as part of another study (UL Animal Research Ethics Clearance Certificate: AREC/01/206:IR) is presented in Figures 1–3.

In conclusion, while the sexes are strikingly different with regard to plumage colouration, there are subtle differences between the sexes for some parameters. These differences may be attributed to physiological (reproductive) and behavioural (song flights) demands acting differently on the sexes.

Acknowledgements. I thank the management of Al3 farm, De Loskop, for permission to conduct the study on the farm, and the curators of the following museums: Bloemfontein National Museum; Iziko Museum of Cape Town; Ditsong National Museum of Natural History; Durban Natural Science Museum; East London Museum, and the McGregor Museum; and the African Bird Ringing Unit for providing ringing data of Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks.

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Engelbrecht, G. D. (2023). Short-clawed Lark (*Certhilauda chuana*), version 2.0. In *Birds of the World* (D. G. Allan, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA.

Photoblog: The secretive Buff-spotted Flufftail

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Buff-spotted Flufftails are nowhere particularly common, but Mtunzini (KwaZulu-Natal) is home to a reasonably good population. These highly secretive, partly nocturnal, rodent-like birds, occupy well-wooded gardens and thickets and are notoriously difficult to see! Territories invariably include small streams or bird baths, as they love to bathe in shallow water. Their mourning and haunting call is most often heard during the rainy season (November to

February). All the photos were taken in Eshowe and Melmoth.

Editor: Cats are the number one predator of Buff-spotted Flufftails in gardens. Please be a responsible cat-owner and take the necessary precautions to safeguard flufftails and other birds in your garden. Also read: Chittenden, H. (2018). Buff-spotted Flufftail—Special birds. The Lark 20:45–48, available [here](#).

BELOW A female turning her eggs.



Both sexes incubate.





ABOVE, TOP RIGHT AND RIGHT
Buff-spotted Flufftails love
bathing, and this love for water
starts at a very young age.

OPPOSITE A doting father with
one of his chicks.





ABOVE A male brooding his chicks.

Behaviour: Social and Interspecific Behaviour

Further Cape Penduline Tit/weaver nests associations

This note follows on from my note on this interspecific association reported in the previous issue of *The Lark* (Weiersbye 2026). I observed the same behaviour just three months later at Daan Viljoen Game Reserve near Windhoek.

In the midday heat, I spotted a flock of six small birds methodically inspecting a line of inactive weaver nests along the water's edge. Though they were quite far away, photographs confirmed they were Cape Penduline Tits. They appeared to be either searching for invertebrate prey or assessing the nests as future night-time roosts.

Reference

Weiersbye, I. (2026). Unexpected night-time visitors to weaver nests. *The Lark* 65:73–74.
Ingrid Weiersbye • ingridw@polka.co.za (received 13 June 2026).

BELOW One of the Cape Penduline Tits at the entrance to the Southern Masked Weaver nest
© Ingrid Weiersbye.



Diet and Foraging: Diet

Birds probing Weeping Boerbean pods

In a recent edition of *The Lark*, Engelbrecht (2026) documented the avian nectarivores associated with the Weeping Boerbean (*Schotia brachypetala*). While the tree attracts an impressive diversity of nectar-feeding birds, few people know that its pods also support a rich diversity of invertebrate fauna. As the seed pods mature, they are colonized by various invertebrates—particularly lepidopteran larvae. This infestation creates a vital, nutrient-rich food supply during late summer and winter, especially for probing species that are equipped to extract them. At my home in Modimolle, two probing species, the Cardinal Woodpecker using its long, spear-tipped tongue, and the Green Woodhoopoe using its long slender, decurved bill, are regularly observed feeding on the invertebrates living within these pods.

Reference

Engelbrecht, D. (2025). New additions to and an update of the list of Weeping Boer-bean *Schotia brachypetala* nectarivores *The Lark* 62:78–94.

Joseph Heymans • josepha.heymans@gmail.com (received 26 May 2026).

BELOW Cardinal Woodpecker (left) and Green Woodhoopoe (right) probing Weeping Boerbean pods © Joseph Heymans.



Interesting sightings 16 April 2026 - 15 June 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

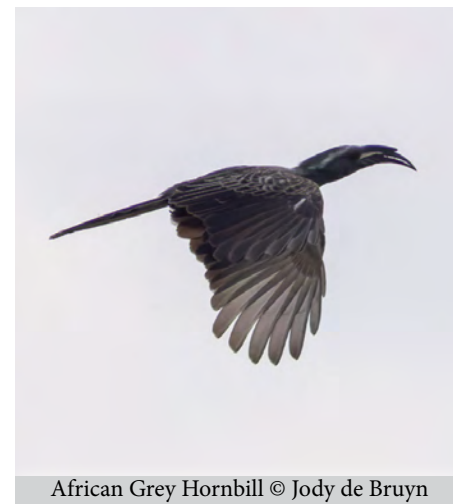
NON-PASSERINES

African Grey Hornbill - 16 May 2026. A pair seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Jody de Bruyn).

Black Stork - 6 June 2026. An adult seen at the Moletzie Nature Reserve (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).

Great Spotted Cuckoo - 16 May 2026. A late leaver or an overwintering bird seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Jody de Bruyn).

Klaas's Cuckoo - 6 June 2026. An adult male and a juvenile seen



African Grey Hornbill © Jody de Bruyn

at the Moletzie Nature Reserve (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).
Lappet-faced Vulture - 5 June 2026. One flying over the Polokwane Game Reserve (Derek Engelbrecht).

Ovambo Sparrowhawk - 16 May 2026. One in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Jody de Bruyn).

Red-throated Wryneck - 15 May 2026. One seen on the campus of the University of Limpopo (Derek Engelbrecht).

Shelley's Francolin - 18 April 2026. A few heard calling at Koppie Alleen (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).

Shikra - 16 May 2026. One seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Jody de Bruyn).

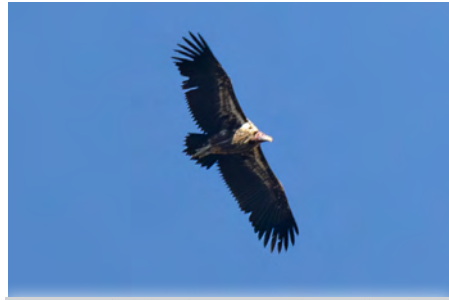
Southern White-faced Owl - 17 May 2026. Once seen and heard calling in Eduan Park (Pieter Mulder).

Striped Kingfisher - 16 May 2026. Seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Jody de Bruyn).

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater - 26 April 2026. A flock of about 8 flying over Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

Verreaux's Eagle - 30 May 2026. One seen flying over the Polokwane Game Reserve (Jody de Bruyn).

Verreaux's Eagle-Owl - 2 May 2026. One seen in Welgelegen (Lizle Venter); 14 June 2026.



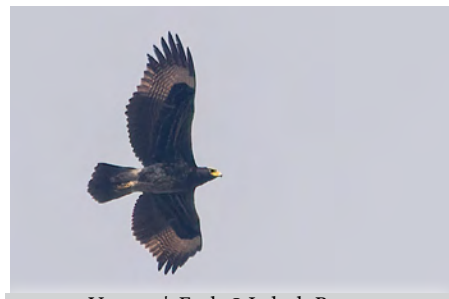
Lappet-faced Vulture © Derek Engelbrecht



Ovambo Sparrowhawk © Jody de Bruyn



Shikra © Jody de Bruyn



Verreaux's Eagle © Jody de Bruyn

One seen in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

PASSERINES

African Paradise Flycatcher - 22 May 2026. An overwintering female seen at the University of Limpopo. This is the second year that one is observed at the same spot on the campus (Derek Engelbrecht).

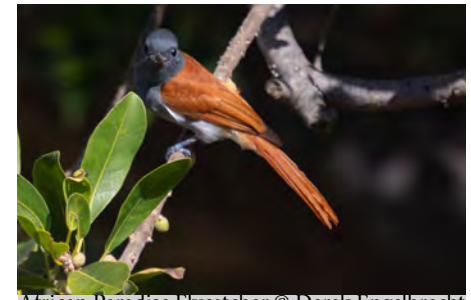
Lazy Cisticola - 18 April 2026. One seen at Koppie Alleen (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).

Mocking Cliff-Chat - 18 April 2026. One seen at Koppie Alleen (Birdlife Polokwane club outing); 6 June 2026. At least three pairs were recorded at Moletzie Nature Reserve (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).

Pale Flycatcher - 25 April 2026. A pair seen about 10 km southeast of Bandelierkop (Richter van Tonder).



Verreaux's Eagle-Owl © Lizle Venter



African Paradise Flycatcher © Derek Engelbrecht



Pale Flycatcher © Richter van Tonder



Bronze-winged Courser © Daniel Engelbrecht

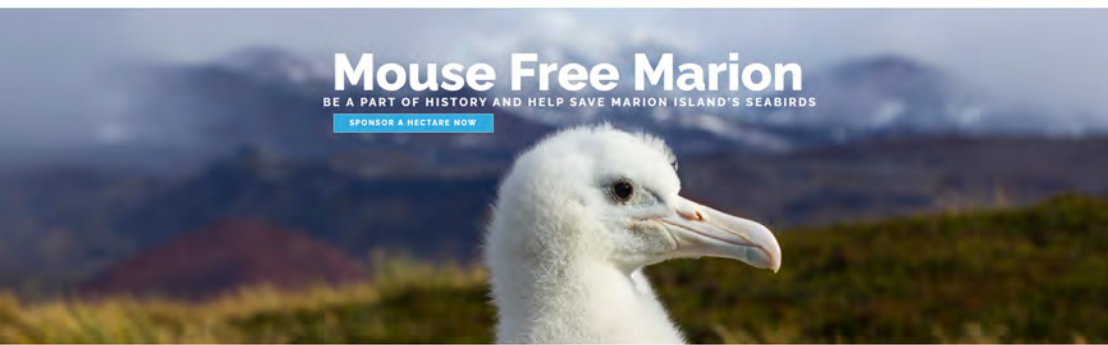
BEST OF THE REST LIMPOPO PROVINCE

NON-PASSERINES

Bateleur - 9 May 2026. One seen at Nagude Farm (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).

Bronze-winged Courser - 17 May 2026. One seen in the Hoedspruit Wildlife Estate (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Saddle-billed Stork - 9 May 2026. One seen at Nagude Farm (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).



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://mousefreemarion.org/>



27 February 2026

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



21 April 2026

Percent of target reached: 45.3%
Sponsored Hectares: 13592 ha
Sponsors: 2717

UPCOMING EVENTS



WINTER BREAK

No club meetings in June and July



STAY WARM!



Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 4 August 2026

Time: 18:30

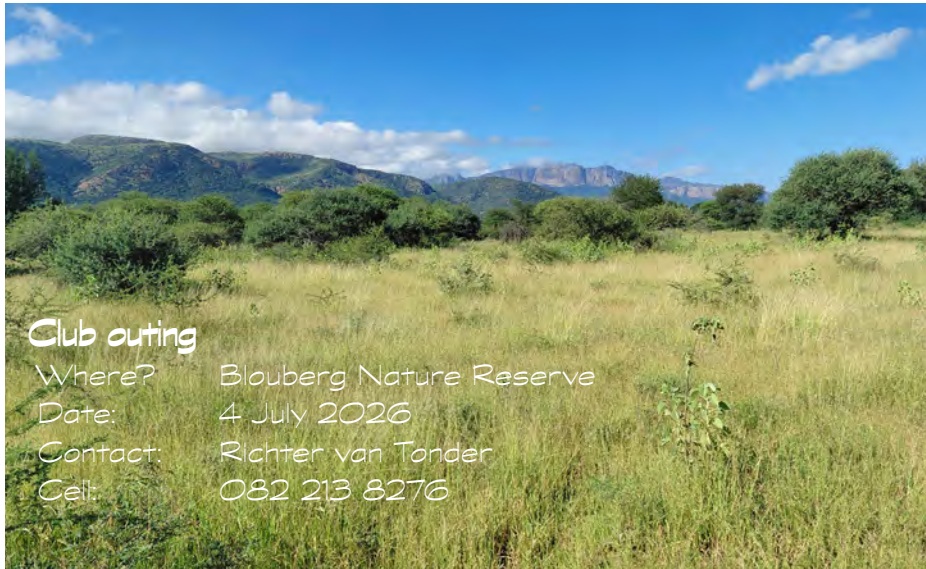
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 1 September 2026

Time: 18:30

Venue: Polokwane Golf Club



Club outing

Where? Blouberg Nature Reserve
Date: 4 July 2026
Contact: Richter van Tonder
Cell: 082 213 8276

Shopping list: Cape Vulture, Three-banded Courser, Grey Penduline Tit, Retz's and White-crested Helmetshrike, White-crowned Shrike, Striped Kingfisher, Southern Crested Guineafowl, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Shikra, Greater Honeyguide, Ashy Flycatcher.

Club outing

Where? Club Ranch
Date: 5 or 12 September 2026 - TBC
Contact: Richter van Tonder
Cell: 082 213 8276



Shopping list: Pel's Fishing Owl, Meves's Starling, Tropical Boubou, White-crowned Lapwing, Meyer's Parrot, Temminck's Courser, Kori Bustard, White-backed Night Heron, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Southern Ground Hornbill, and many more.



Club outing

Where? Polokwane Game Reserve
Date: 8 or 15 August 2026 - TBC
Contact: Richter van Tonder
Cell: 082 213 8276

Shopping list: Short-clawed Lark, Bushveld Pipit, Shelley's Francolin, Coqui Francolin, African Wattled Lapwing, Lizard Buzzard, Striped Kingfisher, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Violet-eared and Black-faced Waxbill, and Crimson-breasted Shrike.

IVAD 2026
Blouberg Natuurreservaat
SATURDAG 29 AUGUSTUS 2026
08:00 TOT LAAT
Middagete ingesluit
Bring-en-braai na die dag se verrigtinge

BEGELEIDE STAP:
* **UITDAGENDE STAP**, 11km na die aasvoël-broeikolonie, stappers moet fiks wees! Maksimum van 40 persone teen R400 p/p. (Begin reeds 06:00)
* **VLAKESTAP**, 5km sloerstep deur die veld. Maksimum van 20 persone teen R400 p/p.

VOERTUIG GEBASEERDE SKATTEJAG!
Volwassenes R150 p/p
Skoolkinders R50 p/p

BEPERKTE KAMPPLEK EN CHAETS OOK BESKIKBAAR - BESPREEK VROEGTYDIG!

Navrae : Lené Pretorius 072 120 9492

SOUTH AFRICAN birdfair
Brought to you by BirdLife South Africa in partnership with
CHAMBERLAIN FAMOUS FOR HARDWARE since 1903

Save the Date!
Saturday, 5 September 2026
09h00-16h30
Pretoria National Botanical Garden
For further info, email birdfair@birdlife.org.za

Icons: Guided Bird Walks, Informative Workshops, Exhibitors, Unique Talks, Kids' Activities

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA Conservation Partners

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.



Bleating Camaroptera (grey-backed form) © Jody de Bruyn.