The Birdlife Polokwane Magazine 68 November/December 2026

# THE LARK



## In the field

Club Ranch

Southern Limpopo

Bird ringing @ UL

## Birding tales

Spotted Flycatcher

## Macaulay Library

Share your media

White-breasted Cormorant prey and parasites • Photoblog: Violet-backed Starling observations • Holding a grudge: Red-winged Starlings • Little Sparrowhawk eavesdropping on Cardinal Woodpecker calls • Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill eating a mouse • White-faced Whistling Duck falls prey to a Southern African Python • Grey Go-away-bird eating Weeping Boerbean seeds • Recognition of individual humans by a Southern Boubou • Arrow-marked Babbler offering a nuptial gift

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 December 2026

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

**Cover page theme 2026: Young Birds**

Cover Kittlitz's Plover juvenile
© Derek Engelbrecht.

# CONTENT

The Lark 68
November/December 2026

## Editorial 4

## Regulars

**Roberts 8 online** 31
Request for information and media contribution

**Birds in Art** 47
Fiscal Flycatcher

**Reflections** 53
Bustards Busted! Birding in Bontebok National Park - Part 1.

**Bird Briefs** 73
White-breasted Cormorant prey and parasites • Photoblog: Violet-backed Starling observations • Holding a grudge: Red-winged Starlings • Little Sparrowhawk eavesdropping on Cardinal Woodpecker calls • Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill eating a mouse • White-faced Whistling Duck falls prey to a Southern African Python • Grey Go-away-bird eating Weeping Boerbean seeds • Recognition of individual humans by a Southern Boubou • Arrow-marked Babbler offering a nuptial gift

**Interesting Sightings** 93

**Upcoming events** 97

## Featured

**Club Ranch** 5
*The club's annual pilgrimage to the Limpopo River valley delivered the goods again.* **Minkie Prinsloo** *reports back.*

**Southern Limpopo** 15
*The province's southern highlands are almost unexplored from an ornithological perspective.* **Jody de Bruyn** *and Richter van Tonder explored the region recently and found some gems.*

**Birding tales** 23
*Everyone has a story or two to share about their memorable birding experiences.* **Derek Engelbrecht** *shares one of his favourites.*

**Bird ringing demonstration** 26
**Derek Engelbrecht** *did a bird ringing demonstration to zoology students at the University of Limpopo and recounts the experience on the day.*

**Uploading media to the Macaulay Library** 33
*Step-by-step instructions on how to upload your photos, videos and recordings for potential use in Birds of the World species accounts.*



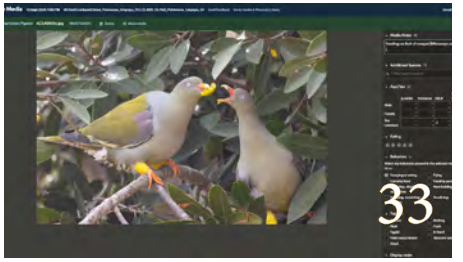












# For a lark ...



Artemis II and a Starlink satellite performing a lunar flyby © Derek Engelbrecht.

P.O. Box 699
Fauna Park 0787
Tel: 015 263 6473
www.birdlifepolokwane.co.za
www.facebook.com/birdlifepolokwane

**Chairperson** Jody de Bruyn • **Deputy chairperson** Mark Friskin • **Secretary** Marcia van Tonder • **Treasurers** Nick Baglow and Julia Friskin • **Website and IT coordinator** Jody de Bruyn • **PRO and venue coordinator** Julia Friskin • **Events co-ordinator** Richter van Tonder • **Research and monitoring** Derek Engelbrecht • **Newsletter editors** Raelene and Derek Engelbrecht • **Additional members** Minkie Prinsloo, Conrad van Tonder, Willem van der Merwe, Les Reynolds, Johan Janse van Vuuren, Lisa Grosel.



# Editors' chirps

Just as spring is a busy time for birds, it was also a busy time in the birding world. The Bearded Vulture was voted as the BirdLife South Africa's Bird of the Year for 2027. A popular choice, indeed! We look forward to celebrate this very special species next year.

In another development, the world's first unified checklist of the birds of the world, Avilist, has been updated and released. The most notable change affecting southern Africa, and indeed Africa as a whole, is the split of the Spotted Flycatcher into two species: the Spotted Flycatcher and the Mediterranean Flycatcher. The distribution and movements of the latter, in particular, remain poorly understood. Most historical records were reported simply as Spotted Flycatcher, without reference to subspecies, making it difficult to determine which records can be attributed to which species. What we do know is that the only confirmed record of the Mediterranean Flycatcher in southern Africa is a bird shot at Büllsport, central Namibia, 86 years ago! Geolocator data have also confirmed its presence in Namibia. So, brush up on your identification skills, and let's see if we can improve our understanding of this species' distribution. You can read more about both species, including how to distinguish them, at Birds of the World.

Turning to this issue of *The Lark*, we have an interesting mix of trip reports, entertaining birding stories, and a guide to sharing your media with the birding community by uploading it to the Macaulay Library. As always, the issue also features fascinating natural history observations in our Bird Briefs section, which continue to expand our knowledge of birds. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Willem van der Merwe and Chris Patton for their popular regular columns, Birds in Art and Reflections, respectively. 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 in 2027!

Raelene and Derek



Birding the border at

# Club Ranch

TEXT Minkie Prinsloo
PHOTOS Jody de Bruyn



African Hawk-Eagle

On 12 September, our bird club held its annual outing to Club Ranch Safaris in the far north of the province. More than 20 eager participants met at our usual spot at 4:30, then set off on the approximately 2.5-hour journey to the farm. Club Ranch Safaris is a 5000-hectare game farm on the Limpopo River bordering Botswana.

As one arrives at the farm, you drive through Mopane bushveld, but as you get closer to the river, it transitions to mixed bushveld and acacia veld on the floodplain. On the banks of the river, the tall riverine woodland with large Sycamore figs, Jackalberry, Nyala Trees and scattered Leadwoods, offering welcome shade.

Upon arrival, we could already feel the African sun beating down on the bushveld, promising a lovely warm spring day. After a quick coffee break, we grabbed our gear and backpacks and headed down to the river. As a result of the recent rains, the water level was higher than usual. The riverbed is normally dry or one has to wade through ankle-



BELOW Crossing the Limpopo River.



ABOVE An African Darter darting past.

RIGHT An unexpected surprise was a small flock of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters.



deep water, but this time the water was knee-deep. We surveyed the area for crocodiles, found the shallowest crossing and headed over to the island.

We were surprised to find a small flock of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters flying overhead. We also added African



White-crowned Lapwing

Fish Eagle, Giant Kingfisher, Black Cuckooshrike, African Green Pigeon and Lesser Masked Weaver to our list. After climbing the steep bank, we began our search for the main target of the day – the elusive Pel's Fishing Owl—and we were not disappointed! Within 10 minutes, we had our first view of this magnificent bird before it disappeared into deeper cover. It was a lifer for many in the group. As we worked our way across the island, we added Common



Meyer's Parrot



Pel's Fishing-Owl





Above One of the Limpopo Valley specials - a Meves's Starling.

Left Golden-breasted Bunting.

Sandpiper, White-crowned Lapwing, Verreaux's Eagle, Brown Snake-Eagle, Common Scimitarbill, African Darter, Water Thick-knee, Wire-tailed Swallow and Yellow-billed Stork to our list. Heading back across the island, we located the owl again, perched high in a bare tree and offering excellent photographic opportunities.



It remained in the open, changing position every now and then. Perhaps to the horror of birders who still need Pel's on their lists, we eventually moved on while the owl continued to pose beautifully. We spent a little more time on the island and even found a roosting fruit bat before attempting the river crossing again, with an African Hawk-Eagle soaring overhead.

Back at camp, we enjoyed a well-earned lunch before heading out for a walk around the camp. Along the way, we added Retz's Helmetshrike, Yellow-throated Petronia, Collared Sunbird, Ashy Flycatcher, Lesser Honeyguide and Meyer's Parrot to our list. The day passed quickly, and before we knew it was 13:00. With the day's total at 85 species, we decided to call it a day and begin the long drive home.

As always, Club Ranch did not disappoint. From the adventurous river crossing to exceptional views of Pel's Fishing Owl, it was a memorable outing. Until next year.

**Author email:** wildlifestudio1@gmail.com

Below Retz's Helmetshrikes are always a hit.



# Club Ranch collage


The Limpopo River


Water Thick-knee


What could they be looking at?


Green Woodhoopoe


Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow


Yellow-billed Stork


Lesser Striped Swallow


Red-billed Buffalo Weaver


White-fronted Bee-eater


Wire-tailed Swallow


Verreaux's Eagle


The Club Ranchers

# Limpopo's Southern Highlands

TEXT AND PHOTOS Jody de Bruyn



On the 3rd of October, Richter van Tonder and I had a morning outing to the Eastern Long-billed Lark stronghold in the Limpopo Province. The site is situated about 160 km south of Polokwane. Access to the area is from the east, through the village of Dindela, with the road then climbing to altitudes well above 1800m. The high altitude rocky grasslands lay the perfect foundation for various species that prefer this habitat.

It didn't take long before we encountered a number of Eastern Long-billed Larks calling from both sides of the dirt road. A calling Rufous-naped Lark added to the chorus, while a few of the high flying cisticola species joined in with their early morning display attempts. The following species also made it onto our sightings list for the day: Quailfinch, Cape Longclaw, African Pipit, Wailing Cisticola, Capped Wheatear, Nicholson's Pipit, Crowned Lapwing and Cape Canary just to name a few.

At some spots we explored the expansive open grassland area on

LEFT The rocky upland grasslands of southern Limpopo — where birding is a test of both eyesight and ankles.





foot. Foraging Large Rock Martins were out in full force, sometimes offering close flybys. They were also joined by Greater-striped Swallows and White-throated Swallows. Wing-snapping and Cloud Cisticola display flights filled the air. Scanning

Above An Eastern Long-billed Lark near the northern limit of the species' range.

Opposite The dapper-looking Buff-streaked Chat .



the rocky outcrops, we managed to get good sightings of Red-capped Lark, Familiar Chat, Buff-streaked Chat, Mountain Wheatear and more Eastern Long-billed Larks. In the areas that allowed for some shrub growth, we managed to add Cape Canary, Common, Cape Grassbird, Neddicky, Cape Weaver and Cape White-eye to our list.

Moving down into one of the gorges, we got Cape Robin-Chat, Tawny-flanked Prinia,





Above Wing-snapping Cisticola, another range restricted species in the Limpopo Province.

Opposite top A male Cape Rock Thrush surveying his territory.

Opposite bottom This is one of the few places in the Limpopo Province where Mountain Wheatear can be seen.



Cape Bunting



Cape Longclaw



Gurney's Sugarbird



Nicholson's Pipit

Bokmakierie, Red-throated Wryneck, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Cape Rock Thrush, Malachite Sunbird and Greater Double-collared Sunbird. At other sports we encountered, Gurney's Sugarbird, Cape Bunting, Southern Boubou, White-bellied Bustard, Southern Fiscal, Long-tailed Widowbird, Lanner Falcon and Brown Snake Eagle, just to mention a few.

As midday approached, the wind started to pick up, and it was time to head back home. For now, this outing confirms that the Eastern Long-billed Lark is doing well in the Limpopo and is possibly one of the long lost and overlooked resident species in the Limpopo Province. We hope that other neighbouring areas will also reveal similar populations.

**Author email:** jmdebruyn@gmail.com

# An apple (or two) a day keeps hunger at bay—

## and a Spotted Flycatcher alive

Derek Engelbrecht



Spotted Flycatcher

Everyone has a story to tell about their birding adventures, and this is one of my favourites—not least because it has a happy ending!

In the early 2000s, I visited the Gundane Woodlands in Venda, South Africa's only patch of miombo woodland. I spent a few days there, setting aside one day for bird ringing, with Pink-throated Twinspots being my main target. I had set up a row of 10 mist nets, each 12 m long, along a narrow track mainly used by local villagers transporting firewood on donkey carts. I set up my ringing station about halfway along the row of nets.

I had just released a bird I had ringed when I noticed a lady approaching with a broad smile. She was holding something in one hand, and as she came closer, I realised it was a small bird. She waved her hand enthusiastically, clearly delighted with her catch.

After we exchanged greetings, I asked what she had in her hand. "A bird," she replied, "and I'm going to eat it."

I found myself—and not least the flycatcher—in a delicate situation and knew I had to handle it carefully. It turned out that the bird had taken flight from a perch as she walked past and flown straight into one of my mist nets. She had simply collected it from the net. After all, you don't look a gift horse (or flycatcher) in the mouth, as small birds are part of the menu in many parts of Africa.

With the bird still in her hand, I cautiously asked if she would give it to me. She repeated that she intended to eat it. I then explained that this was no ordinary bird: a Spotted Flycatcher that had travelled some 11,000 km from Europe to spend the southern summer in her village in Gundane. I could see that this struck a chord. She looked at the bird again, and I sensed that her resolve to have it for lunch was beginning to weaken.

Then I had an idea. Perhaps a little bartering might save the (bird's) day.

I offered her an apple for the flycatcher, but she clearly wasn't convinced it was a fair deal. With the

BELOW The miombo woodland at Gundane.





Above The tale of two apples, a Spotted Flycatcher, one happy villager, and a relieved bird ringer.

Art of the Deal falling flat and few alternative options at my disposal, I made a better offer.

"OK, I'll give you two apples!"

That did the trick. She agreed to the exchange, although she was clearly a shrewd negotiator. She insisted on one additional condition: I had to take a photograph of her with *her bird* and her apples!

Phew! A deal was struck. She handed over the flycatcher, I ringed it, and then released it unharmed to continue its remarkable journey. The woman left with her two apples and a photograph to commemorate her successful morning's bargaining.

I was delighted to have saved the bird, and she seemed equally pleased. It was a small encounter, but I'll never forget it.

The lesson? Conservation doesn't always begin with a lecture, a poster, or a lengthy explanation about biodiversity. Sometimes, it begins with a friendly conversation, a little patience, and two apples.

**Author email:** faunagalore@gmail.com



# University of Limpopo BIG RING 2026

## 17 September 2026

Derek Engelbrecht

Every September, I conduct a bird-ringing demonstration for my second-year Zoology students as part of their ornithology practical. This year's demonstration took place on 17 September, with my regular ringing partner, Billy Attard, joining me once again.

We used our usual ringing site at the northern end of VC Lane on campus. The site is mainly characterised by medium to tall *Vachellia* trees, with a small granite outcrop adding some habitat diversity. The rocky outcrop supports a variety of broad-leaved trees, including Weeping Boer-bean (*Schotia brachypetala*), White Pear (*Dombeya rotundifolia*), and Buffalo-thorn (*Ziziphus mucronata*).

We arrived on campus at 03:45 and immediately began setting up the mist nets, aiming to have them raised and open by dawn. Everything was going according to plan until I was distracted by a nearby Freckled Nightjar calling. I promptly excused myself so that I can get a recording, leaving Billy to continue with the nets. Shortly afterwards, a pair of Spotted Eagle-Owls began vocalising at our ringing site, and I managed to obtain a good recording of them too. We had a particularly productive start to the morning from a nocturnal bird perspective, also recording Fiery-necked Nightjar, Western Barn Owl, and Spotted Thick-knee. Despite these distractions,



Above A beautiful sight - the nets up and open at sunrise © Derek Engelbrecht

we had all the nets up and open by dawn, with a few minutes to spare! As we made our way towards the ringing station for a well-deserved coffee, the first bird flew into a net, followed by a second, a third, a fourth … and so it continued. Thoughts of coffee were quickly shelved as we set about extracting the birds. There was a steady stream of captures, and we never quite managed to find a sufficiently quiet spell to enjoy our now long-overdue coffee and something to eat.

The students received a practical demonstration of the bird ringing procedure, followed by a discussion of its value in ornithological research, including the study of bird morphology and moult.

As the day progressed, temperatures rose and the wind picked up, bringing our capture rate down. We finally called it a day at 14:00, having processed 52 individual birds representing 21 species between us. There were





Above The zoology students being told about bird ringing © Modjadji Lebepe.

three recaptures, the details of which follow:

**Chinspot Batis FB50339**

First ringed as an adult male on 2025-09-10 at UL VC Lane by Derek Engelbrecht. The distance between the initial ringing site and retrap site is 0 km. The days elapsed is 372 days (1 yr, 0 m, 7 d).

**Burnt-necked Eremomela N12282**

First ringed as an adult on 2025-09-10 at UL VC Lane by Derek Engelbrecht. The distance between the initial ringing site and retrap site is 0 km. The days elapsed is 372 days (1 yr, 0 m, 7 d).

**White-bellied Sunbird M15359**

First ringed as an adult female on 2024-09-12 at UL VC Lane by Derek Engelbrecht. The distance between the initial ringing site and retrap site is 0 km. The days elapsed is 735 days (2 yr, 0 m, 5 d).

There was no obvious Catch of the Day. The Acacia Pied Barbet might qualify as a contender, but the real highlights were perhaps the numbers of certain species we caught: Chinspot Batis (5), Burnt-necked Eremomela (3), African Firefinch (4), Scarlet-chested Sunbird (4), and White-bellied Sunbird (6).

**Author email:** faunagalore@gmail.com



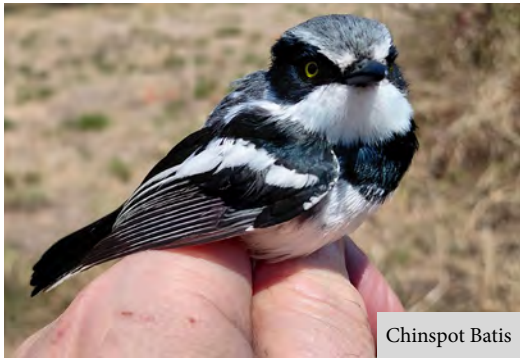
Fiscal Flycatcher



Blue Waxbill



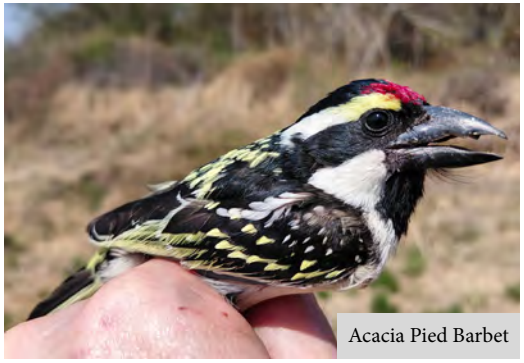
White-winged Widowbird



Chinspot Batis



Violet-eared Waxbill



Acacia Pied Barbet



Burnt-necked Eremomela



Kalahari Scrub Robin

## RINGING REPORT SUMMARY 2026-09-17

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Ringing site** | University of Limpopo | | |
| **GPS** | 23°56'30.97"S; 29°27'45.70"E; 1300 masl | | |
| **Name of outing leader** | Derek Engelbrecht (#1245) | | |
| **Other registered ringers** | Billy Attard (#1402) | | |
| | | | |
| **Habitat types targeted** | Acacia thornveld | | |
| **Weather conditions** | Fine, with moderate breeze. | | |
| **Total number of nets erected** | 8 | **Total length (m)** | 96 |
| **Nets open** | 05:30 - 14:30 | | |
| **Height of bottom shellf** | 1m | | |
| **Other traps used** | Flap traps | | |

| Birds ringed | | | | Birds retrapped | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Species** | **Number** | **Species** | **Number** | **Species** | **Number** |
| Barbet, African Pied | 1 | Puff-back, Black-backed | 1 | Batis, Chinspot | 1 |
| Batis, Chinspot | 5 | Robin-Chat, White-throated | 2 | Eremomela, Burnt-necked | 1 |
| Boubou, Southern | 2 | Scrub Robin, Kalahari | 1 | Sunbird, White-bellied | 1 |
| Bulbul, Dark-capped | 2 | Sunbird, Scarlet-chested | 4 | | |
| Camaraoptera, Bleating | 1 | Sunbird, White-bellied | 6 | | |
| Eremomela, Burnt-necked | 3 | Waxbill, Black-faced | 2 | | |
| Firefinch, African | 4 | Waxbill, Blue | 1 | | |
| Flycatcher, Fiscal | 1 | Waxbill, Violet-eared | 1 | | |
| Mousebird, Speckled | 2 | Weaver, Southern Masked | 6 | | |
| Prinia, Black-chested | 2 | Widowbird, White-winged | 4 | | |
| Prinia, Tawny-flanked | 1 | | | | |
| **Number of species ringed** | | | **21** | **Number of species retrapped** | **3** |
| **Number of birds ringed** | | | **49** | **Number of birds retrapped** | **3** |
| **Total number of species processed (ringed + retrapped)** | | | | | **21** |
| **Total number of birds processed (ringed + retrapped)** | | | | | **52** |



Scarlet-chested Sunbird










# 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.

**Steppe Eagle**
- Habitat
- Interspecific interaction and other behaviour
- Feeding/Diet

**Brown Snake Eagle**
- Habitat
- Interspecific interaction and other behaviour
- Feeding/Diet
- Nest, eggs, and nestlings

**Bateleur**
- Habitat
- Interspecific interaction and other behaviour
- Feeding/Diet
- Nest, eggs, and nestlings

**Flufftails (all southern African species)**
- Nests, eggs, chicks, and different age categories
- Behaviour, including feeding/diet
- Typical habitat

**Babblers (Southern Pied, Black-faced, Bare-cheeked, Hartlaub's, Arrow-marked)**
- Typical habitat
- Group behaviour, including allopreening
- Nests, eggs, and nestlings

## Recently published species accounts

Chestnut Weaver
Spotted Flycatcher
Mediterranean Flycatcher
Black Harrier
Green Tinkerbird (update)
Green-headed Oriole (update)

# Uploading media to eBird and the Macaulay Library

**Derek Engelbrecht**
email: roberts8revision@gmail.com

Registering a single account with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology makes it easier to participate in several of its birding, sound-recording, and citizen-science platforms, which includes eBird, Merlin Bird ID, Macaulay Library, Birds of the World, and Bird Academy. Rather than creating a separate account for each service, you can use your Cornell Lab login to access supported platforms and contribute observations, photographs, and sound recordings to its research databases.

You can create your free account here. You will need your first name, surname, a unique username, a password of at least eight characters, and an email address. If you already have an account for any of the supported Cornell Lab projects, use your existing login instead.

One important point for South African birders: the Cornell Lab account itself is free, as are eBird and Merlin, as well as access to Birds of the World.

Assuming you already have a Cornell account, uploading your media, such as photos, videos, and sound recordings, to eBird is straightforward. Once your images are on eBird, it is also immediately archived in the Macaulay Library (ML), a digital multimedia wildlife archive. In addition to showcasing your media, the ML also provides you with a secure way to organize and store your media. What's more, the media you add may be used in tools such as the Merlin Bird ID app, Birds of the World, and All About Birds.

Read more about the general media guidelines, photo specific and recording specific guidelines here.



## How do I upload my media?

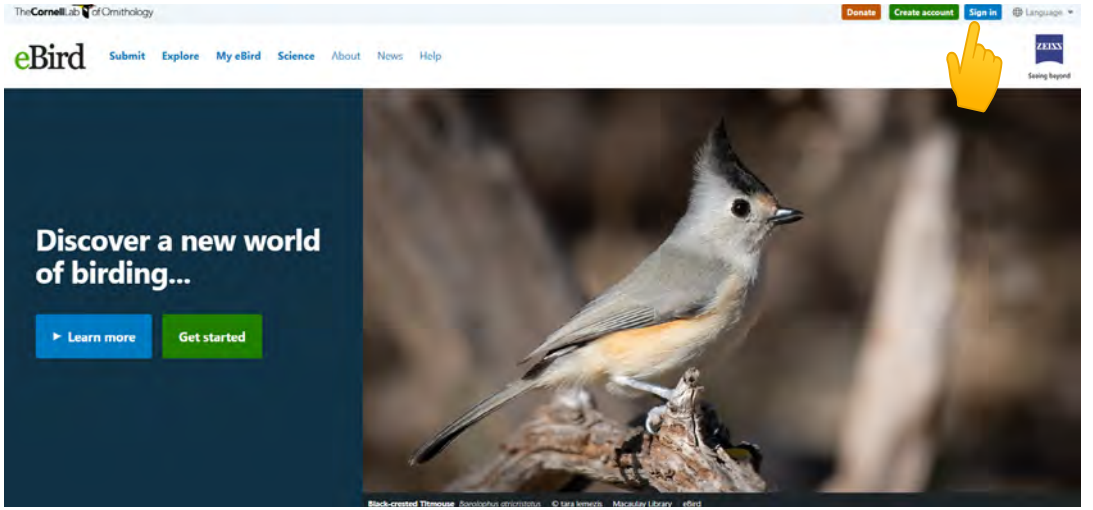
All media are linked to a checklist, and there are two ways of adding media, and which one you use will depend on whether you already have an eBird checklist, or if you are going to create a 'new' checklist from scratch.

### Option 1: I have an existing eBird checklist

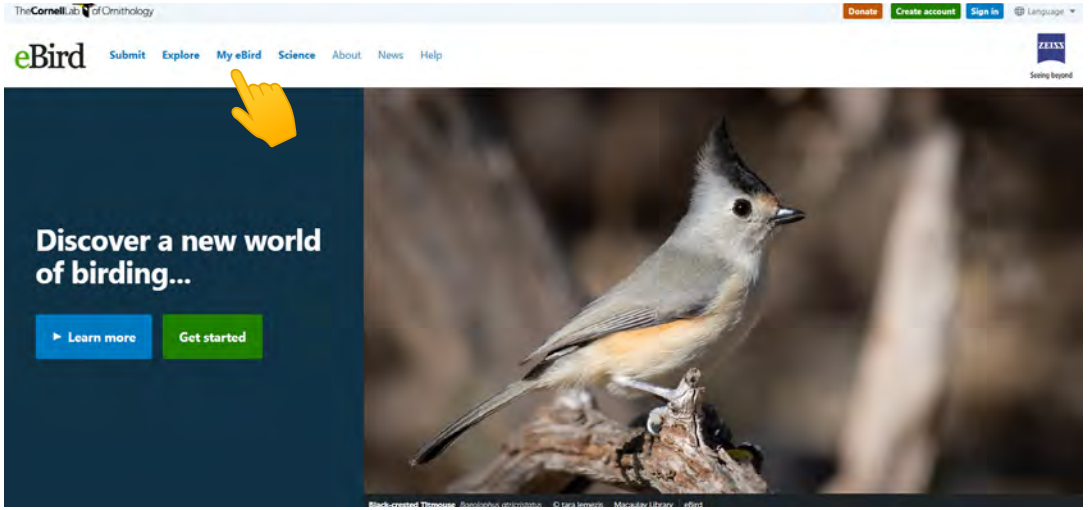
You've been birding, created a checklist of birds, and took some photos or recorded vocalizations (or video, but I'm not covering uploading videos here) and you want to add the media to your eBird checklist.

***Steps***

1. Download your media to your computer. See the photo and recording guidelines for details.
2. Edit and crop your photos and recordings (see guidelines)
3. Go to the eBird site and **Sign in** using your username and password.



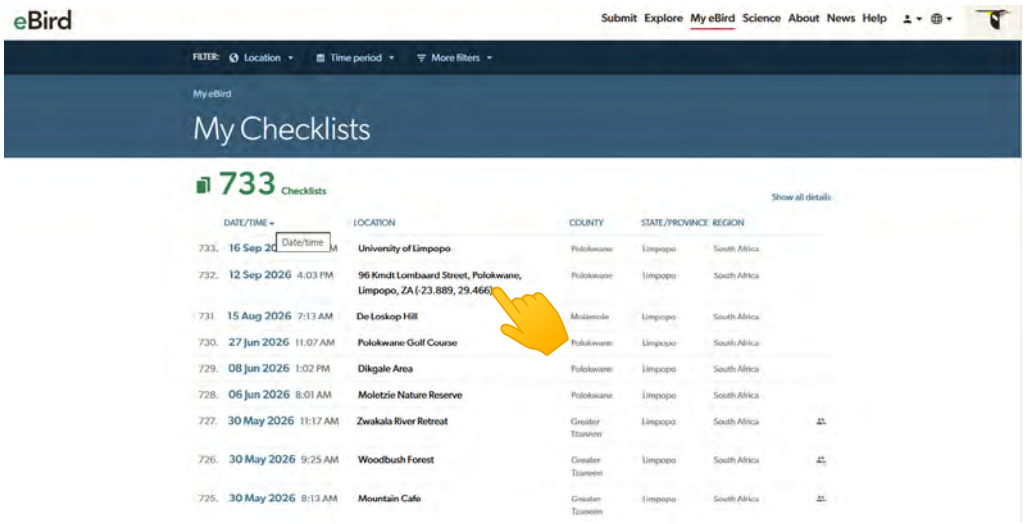
4. Once you are logged on, go to **My eBird**.



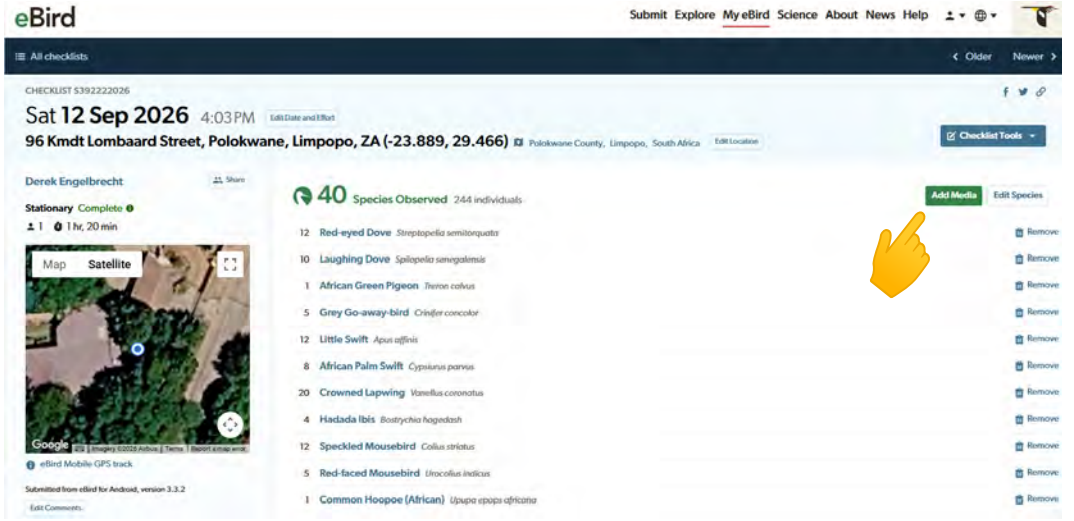

5. Then **Complete Checklists**.



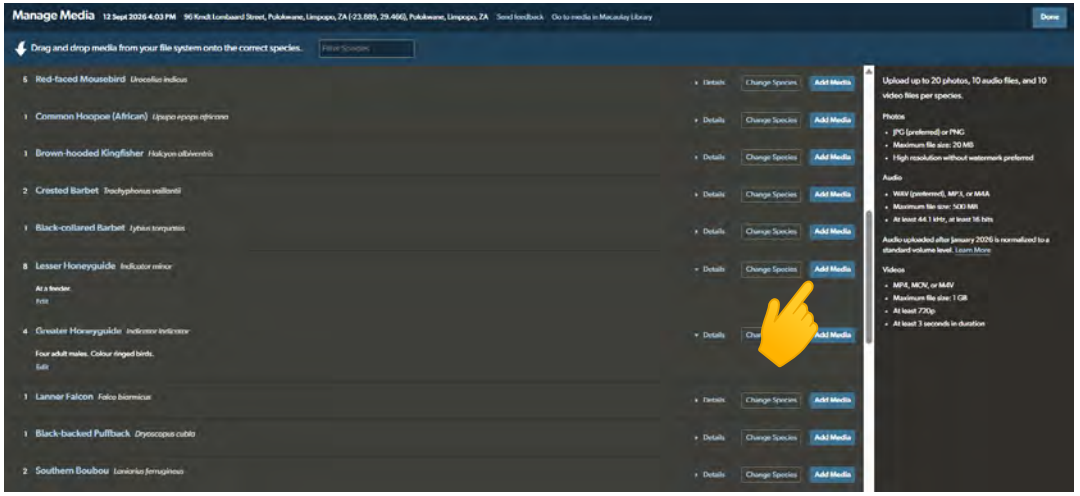

6. Find the relevant checklist you want to upload your media to by scrolling through your checklists. Open the relevant checklist by clicking on the **Date**.



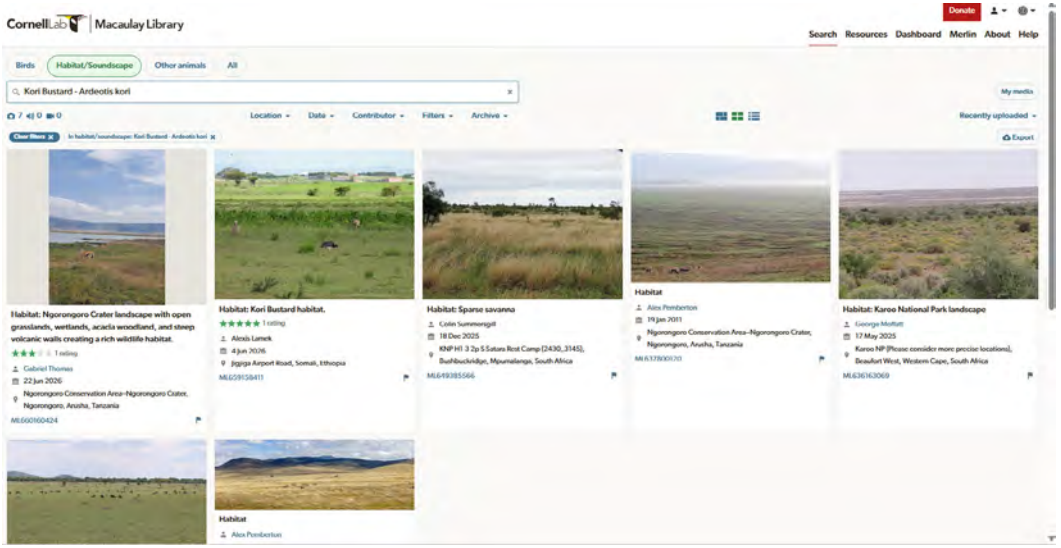

7. The checklist with all its details like date, location etc. and the species you recorded will open. Click on the **Add Media** or **Manage Media** button. If it is the first time you are uploading media to this checklist, the **Add Media** button will be displayed. If you already uploaded images to this checklist and you want to add additional ones, then the **Manage Media** button will be displayed.



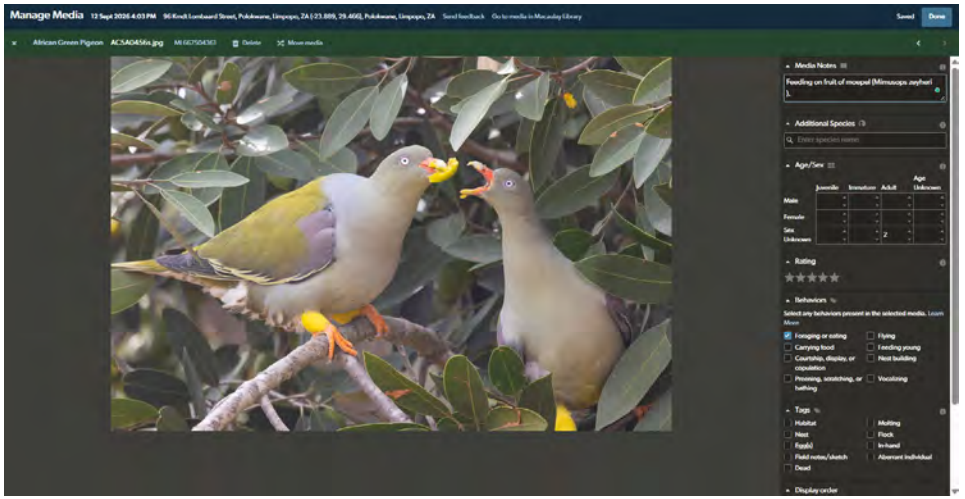
8. Find the species that you want to upload media for by scrolling through your checklist, then click the **Add Media** button.



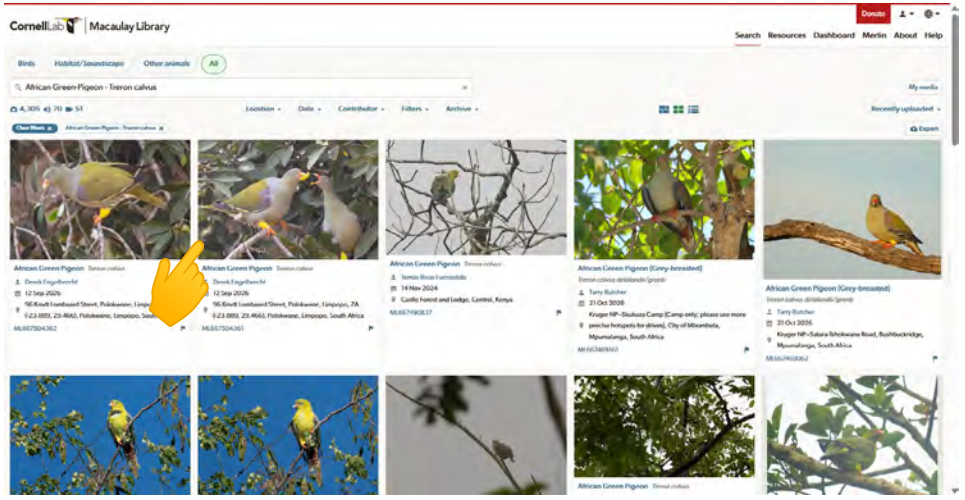

9. This will open a screen where you can browse to select your media OR drag and drop the file/s from your computer. You can upload up to 10 files per species but try to include as many as possible photos that show different individuals, angles, or behaviours of the species. The same holds for recordings. If you have images of the habitat or the general landscape, nests, eggs, a bird in the hand (for bird ringers), it can also be added here, provided it was photographed/recorded during this checklist. Below are examples of images of the habitat of Kori Bustard.




10. Once the media is uploaded, there will be a sidebar on the right to add ratings (see eBird's guidelines for rating media), comments, behaviours and background species, and more. Please tick the relevant tags as it facilitates archiving and searching. Once you are finished uploading, click the **Done** button. And that's it!




A few minutes later, your uploads will show up in the Macaulay Library.

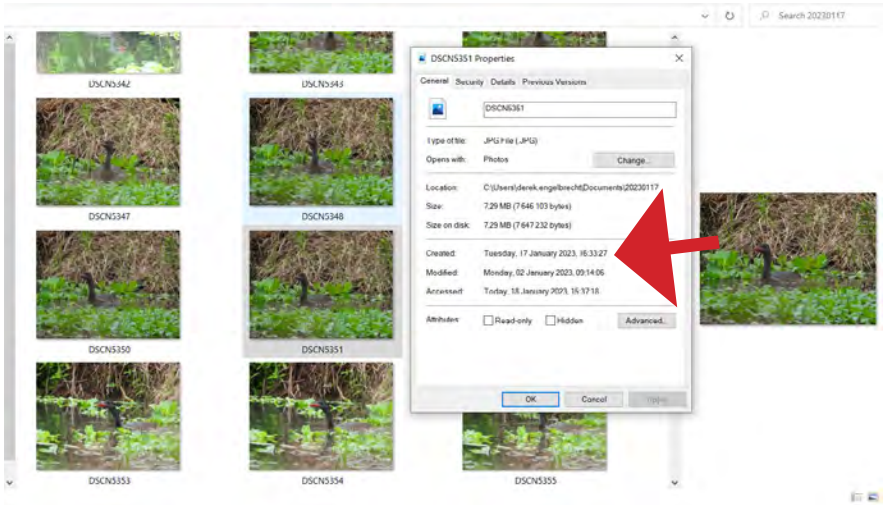


## Option 2. My media is not linked to an eBird checklist.

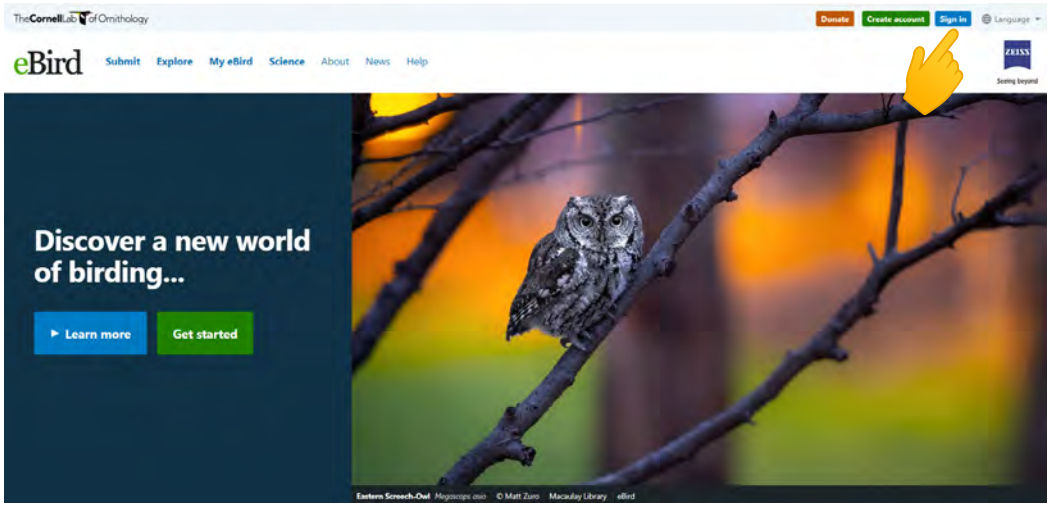
Example. I found a Temminck's Courser nest in 2005. I took some photographs at the time and thought nothing much of it until, one day, I scrolled through the images of the species on the Macaulay Library website and noticed that there are no photos of a Temminck's Courser nest in the ML. How can I upload my images to the ML?

*Steps*

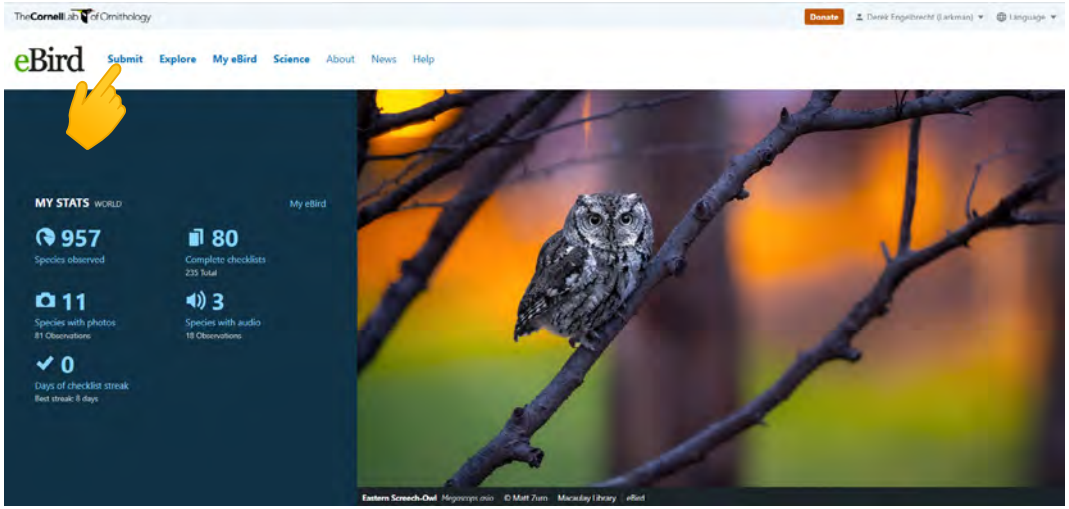
1. Go to the folder on your computer that contains the media you want to upload. See the photo and recording guidelines for details in the link provided above.
2. Lightly edit and crop your photos and recordings (see the link to guidelines above)
3. At this point, it would be worthwhile to note the date (and time, although not necessary) the media was created. This can be obtained in several ways, e.g., by hovering your cursor over the file name, right-clicking and looking under Properties at the Date Created or Date Modified information (but be aware that this information may at times be incorrect if you had worked previously on the file), or you can get it from some photo editing and viewing programs such as Photoshop.



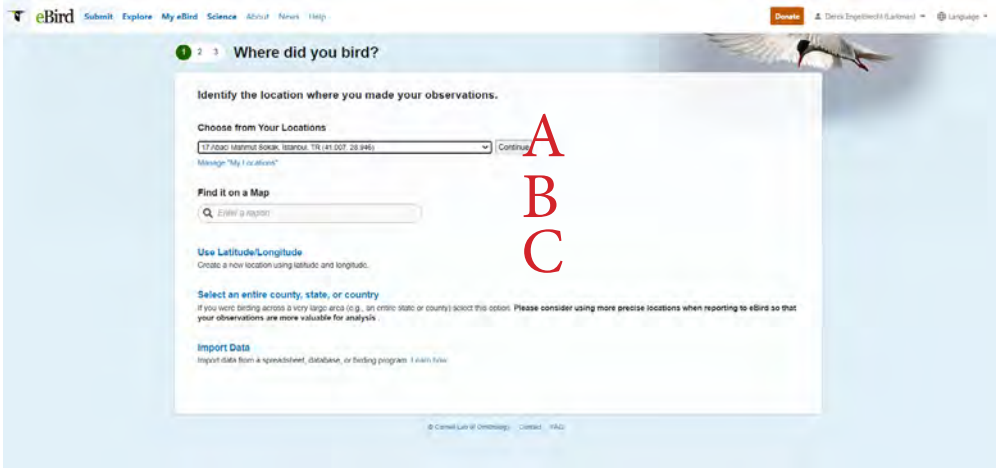

4. Go to the eBird site and Sign in using your username and password.



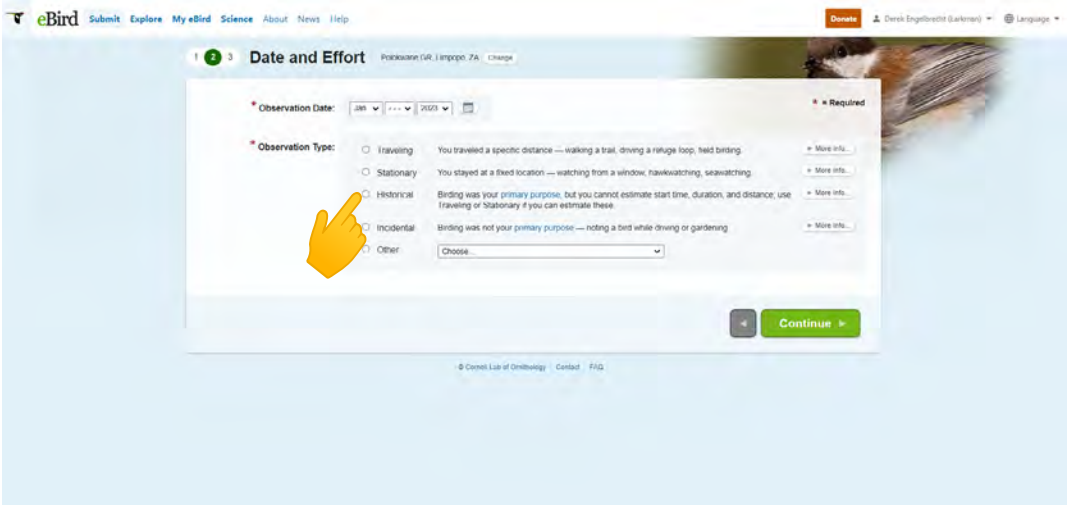

5. Click the **Submit** button to start creating a new checklist.



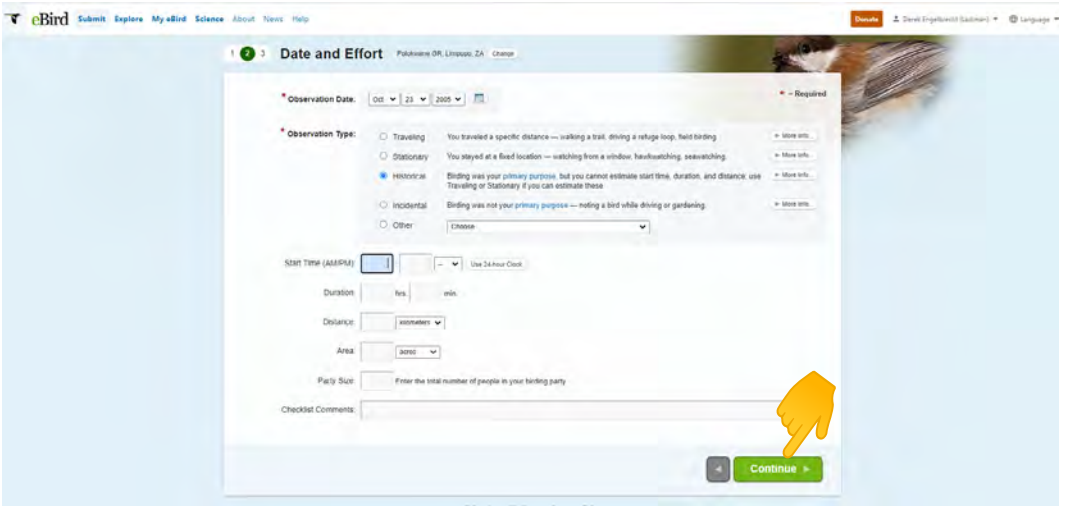
6. This will take you to a page where you can enter the location of your sighting using various ways. If you are a regular eBirder, your locality may already exist, and you can select it from one of Your Locations (see A). You can also find it on a map by entering the region, e.g., South Africa, Lesotho, or Zimbabwe (see B). This will take you to a map, where you can zoom in to get as close as possible to the locality where your media were recorded. I find it easier to find my localities in satellite mode, but if you are comfortable with map mode, then feel free to use it. If you have the coordinates of the locality, you can also enter latitude and longitude (see C), either as decimal degrees (remember latitude is negative [-] in the southern hemisphere) or in degrees (°), minutes ('), and seconds (").



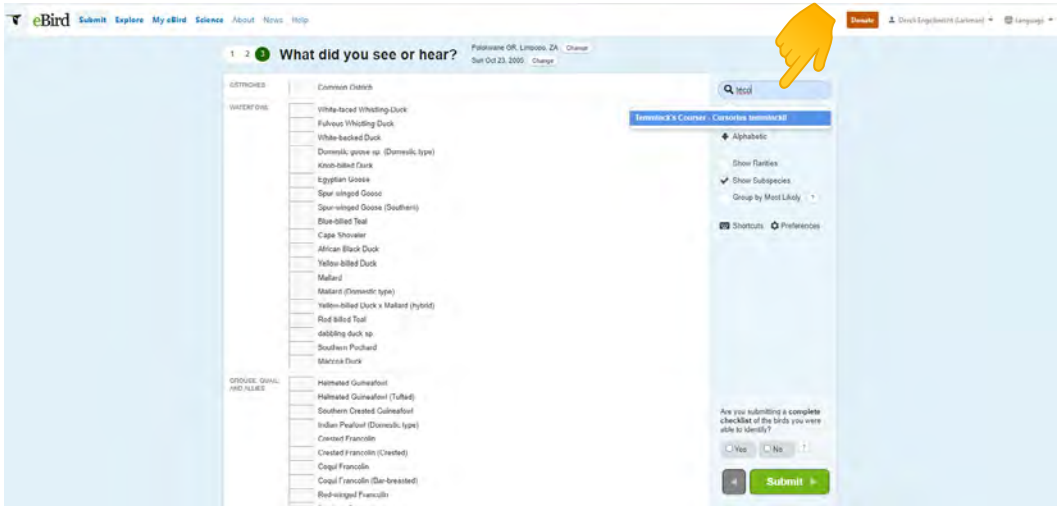

7. After you enter your locality information, you will be taken to the **Date and Effort** page. Fill in the **Observation Date**, making sure it is the actual date of your media recording, not subsequent dates (See point 3 above). Under **Observation Type**, select **Historical** and click **Continue**.



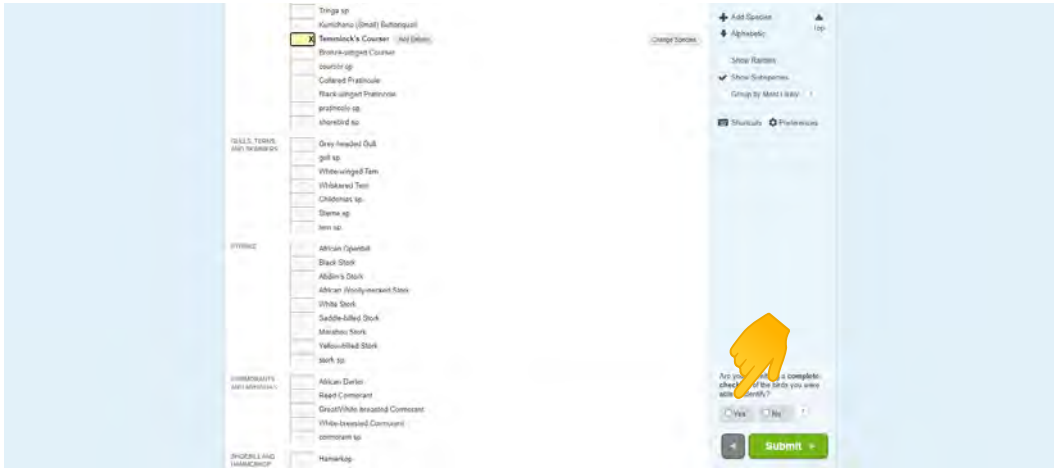

8. When you select the **Historical** protocol, it will request some information about your effort. Please complete as much as possible and provide comments if you have any. If you cannot recall much information about the day of your recording, leave the section/s blank. When you are done, select **Continue**.



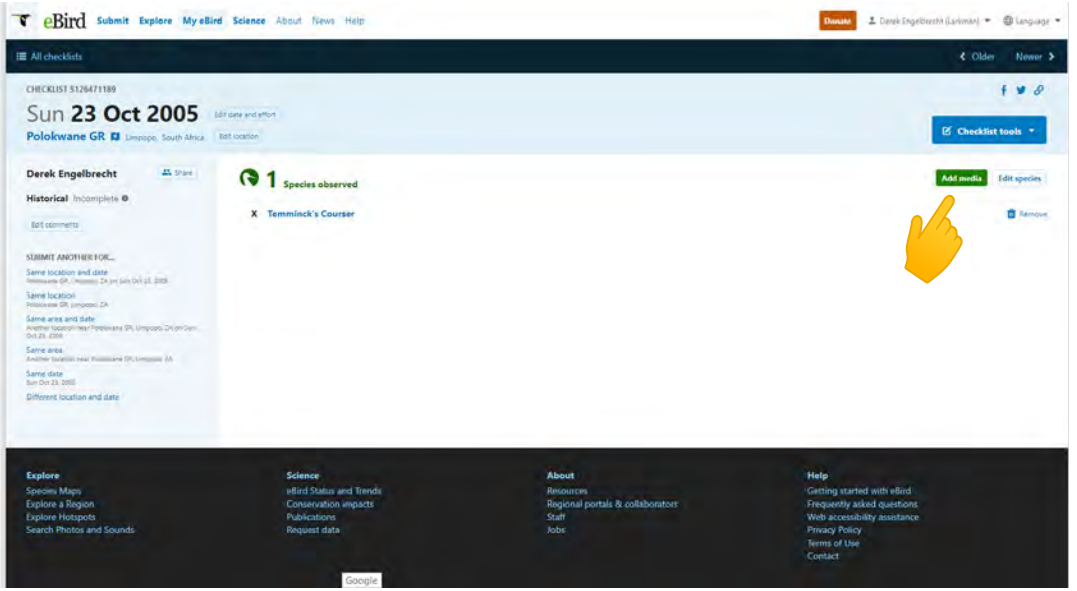
9. Your checklist will now appear. Select the species you want to add to the checklist. You can either scroll to your species using your mouse, or enter the species name or an abbreviation in the **Jump to Species** box. Add an X next to your species name and any background species in photos or recordings. Unless you specifically recall how many individuals were present, all species included in your checklist should be added with "X" as the count. This includes both focal species and background species.




10. When your checklist is completed, answer "**No**" to the question "**Are you submitting a complete checklist?**" just above the Submit button. Select **Submit** to continue. You can always add additional species or comments later by selecting the checklist as described in Step 6 above.




11. You created a checklist using the Historical protocol! You can now add your media by selecting Add Media/Manage Media, i.e., continuing from Step 7 of Option 1.




Take note that although your images will be almost instantly available for viewing in the Macaulay Library, sound recordings can take a while longer as sound files first have to be processed to be displayed in eBird checklists and the Macaulay Library search results, and creating the visual representation of the audio (i.e., playable spectrogram) also takes time.

As of 2026, sounds recorded using the Merlin Bird ID app can be uploaded directly to the Macaulay Library via an eBird checklist. See here.

# USEFUL INFORMATION

**eBird Data Privacy and Data Use**

**Cornell Media Licensing Agreement**

# I found a baby bird ... now what?

**Is the bird in immediate danger?**
Traffic, pets or people

Yes

Move or shepherd it to a safe location.
It is OK to handle the baby bird, the parents won't abandon it if touched by humans.

No

**Is the bird bleeding or visibly injured?**
Laboured breathing; weeziness when breathing; appearing sleepy/drowsy; puffed-up feathers; flopping

Yes

Contact a wildlife rehabilitator, the SPCA or a veterinary surgeon for advice?
Do not feed or give it water; place the bird in a dark box with ventilation and some padding for warmth.

No

**What does it look like?**

Hatchling to about 3 days old; Chick naked or it may have down; eyes closed.



Nestling, 4-16 days old; Eyes open, initially as slits; body and flight feathers emerging but feather sheaths still visible.



Fledgling; may flutter or fly short distances, hops or shuffles on the ground; wings and tail short.



**Can you see the nest?**

Yes

If possible, return the chick to its nest. If not, follow the instructions under 'No' or contact a wildlife rehabilitator, the SPCA or a veterinary surgeon for advice.

No

Construct an artificial nest, fill it with grass or natural soft lining and place near the nest; monitor the nest from a distance to see if the parents attend to the chick.

**Is it in immediate danger?**

Yes

Move or shepherd it to a safe location; keep cats, dogs and people away

No

Leave the bird where you found it, the parents know where it is and will continue to look after it.

# Regulars

# Birds in Art

## Fiscal Flycatcher

Text and Artwork

**Willem van der Merwe**

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:

DEVIANT ART



Fiscal Flycatcher

This is an acrylic painting I made of a Fiscal Flycatcher (*Sigelus silens*). First, I want to thank Jody de Bruyn for giving me permission to use his photo as a reference. This flycatcher gets its name from its similarity to the Fiscal Shrike, which is also black above and white below, but with white shoulder patches rather than white on the wings, and no white in the tail. The shrike is much larger and more aggressive, and the flycatcher may gain some safety by resembling it, a phenomenon called Batesian mimicry. Unlike the shrike, it is mild-mannered, with a soft contact call and a song of thin whistles and chirps. Sometimes it mimics other birds, such as sparrows, whistling-ducks, or bulbuls. It typically hunts from a perch, often more than 4 m above the ground, but sometimes as low as 1 m, feeding not only on flying insects but also gleaning some from leaves or swooping down to peck them from the ground. It may even eat earthworms! It can remove caterpillars' stinging hairs by beating or rubbing them against branches or the ground. It also occasionally eats small fruits, and may drink the nectar of aloe flowers.

What is amazing about the Fiscal Flycatcher is that its range is almost identical to South Africa's borders! It occurs almost everywhere in our country, but only marginally outside of it, such as in southern Botswana and southern Mozambique. It may occasionally move farther north in Botswana seasonally but is not resident there. In some regions of South Africa, it is also a seasonal migrant, moving from higher altitudes in summer to lower altitudes in winter. This is notable in KwaZulu-Natal, where it is found mostly inland in summer but commonly near the coast in winter. It naturally occurs in open terrain with grass and spaced-out trees and shrubs but can also use man-altered environments and may even have spread into some regions because people planted trees and shrubs there. It sometimes enters gardens.

The sexes differ slightly. The male is a dark, glossy black above and clean white below, while the female is more brownish both above and below. The juvenile is similar to the female but even browner, with dark blotches on its underparts, and





Below A Fiscal Flycatcher (left) and Common Fiscal (right). Note the absence of a white shoulder patch and the much weaker bill of the Fiscal Flycatcher © Derek Engelbrecht.



Above A Fiscal Flycatcher taking nectar of the Mountain Aloe © Derek Engelbrecht.



Left A nest containing a clutch of three eggs © Warwick Tarboton.

light blotches on its upperparts. Adults are more boldly patterned than any other local flycatchers except the collared flycatcher, which is smaller, has a complete white collar around the back of its neck, and is a rare, nonbreeding visitor in southern Africa. Because of its uniqueness, the Fiscal Flycatcher is the only member of the monotypic genus *Sigelus*.

Fiscal Flycatchers breed mainly in summer. They're monogamous. The female builds the cup nest from thin plant stems, grasses, and other materials. She lines it with a dense, soft layer of down from plant seeds such as members of the daisy or milkweed family, or Old Man's Beard (*Galium tomentosum*), along with fine grasses and feathers. On the outside, she may plaster it with some lichens to help conceal it. It is usually situated in a tree or shrub 1–7 m above ground. She lays 2–4 eggs. She incubates alone, for about 13–16 days, but once the chicks hatch, the male helps with feeding them. Sometimes Jacobin Cuckoos (*Clamator jacobinus*) or Red-chested Cuckoos (*Cuculus solitarius*) parasitise their nests. When not parasitised, they raise their chicks to fledging over 15–17 days, but keep feeding them for a while longer. Ringing studies have shown that Fiscal Flycatchers can live to the age of at least nine years. Because they are widespread and reasonably common, they're considered of least conservation concern.

**Author email:** willemsvandermerwe@gmail.com



# Waterberg

## Limpopo, South Africa

## Bioquest / Biosoektog

A fascinating website that documents the fauna, flora, geology, and history of the Waterberg region in Limpopo, South Africa. A must visit for every naturalist and historian. Click here to visit.



# Reflections

## Birding in SANParks

*Chris Patton has worked for SANParks for three decades. He is also a birder and shares his memories and insights on birding in National Parks for readers to enjoy and perhaps use to plan trips to the various parks.*

# Bustards Busted!

## The Western Cape's Bontebok National Park - Birding Memories and Insights
## Part 1 – The open plains and fynbos areas

Chris Patton

Looking for a great place to visit and bird on your travels, whether passing through, staying for a short time, or using it as a base to explore the greater Overberg region? Bontebok National Park is the smallest national park in the country, being only 27.86 square kilometres. But it packs a big punch in terms of conservation significance and was proclaimed to stop the Bontebok antelope from following the Bluebuck into extinction; crucially, it conserved some highly endangered coastal renosterveld, one of South Africa's most threatened habitats. It also offers fynbos and riverine thicket habitats. The combination of habitats falls under the Cape Floral Kingdom (officially inscribed as the Cape Floral Region Protected Areas) as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. I will split my reflections on birding into 2 parts – this article about memories of birding in the **open plains and fynbos**, and the next one about birding on the Breede River part of the Park, and in particular at the fabulous Lang Elsie's Kraal rest camp that makes Bontebok NP the ideal transit stopover, or as a comfortable place to stay to base yourself at to explore the Overberg.



Above It may not be a bird, but the conservation efforts made to save the strikingly coloured antelope the park is named after have led to some key bird species being conserved in coastal renosterveld © Chris Patton.

I first became aware of Bontebok NP as a bird-mad schoolboy in Johannesburg, reading the 1980s publication, "***Where to watch birds in Southern Africa***", by Ian Sinclair and Aldo Berutti. The main attraction, it read, was as a reliable site to find



Above A strutting Denham's Bustard in Bontebok in September this year, not quite in full lek plumage, but getting in the mood © Chris Patton.

what was then known as Stanley's Bustard (now Denham's Bustard). And because of that, in the 1990s, when I was at university in Cape Town, one of my birding mates and I drove out to this magic little park one weekend to try to see them, and the Park did not disappoint. I have fond memories of finding a couple of males all puffed up and strutting in a lek (a communal area where male animals gather to perform competitive courtship displays to attract females).

Bontebok NP is flanked in the west by the Breede River and surrounded to the east and south by agricultural lands, to the north by the N2, and the town of Swellendam, with the town itself in the shadow of the Langeberg Mountain range. The park is a little island of renosterveld in a sea of surrounding agricultural lands. Coastal renosterveld is critically endangered mainly because its rich, shale-derived clay soils and flat, accessible terrain make it ideal for commercial agriculture, such as wheat, cereal crops, and artificial pastures. Over 95% of its original






habitat has been destroyed, leaving only tiny, isolated fragments.

Over my 36 years visiting the Park, the entrance gate and reception offices have been repositioned. When I first visited the Park in 1990, and even in my early years with SANParks, the gate was in the lower-lying central part of the Park, and the rest camp was only a campsite and a collection of 3 chalavans (a combination of chalet meets caravan). The upgraded rest camp was only built in 2007, while the current reception office and entrance gate only opened in May 2020. This upgrade transitioned primary access to the park through the western **Die Stroom** gate, moving visitor services away from the old, legacy reception building. The old reception offices are shown on the map below as Environmental Education Centre, but I'm not sure if that is currently an active facility… nevertheless, the Park's circular drive takes one past the old offices, and there are gardens and trees there that offer good birding… but more on that presently.

The Park is accessed almost directly off the N2 as one enters Swellendam from the west. The short drive through the entrance gate to reception and administration offices should produce Karoo Prinia and Karoo Scrub Robin, and the reception building itself guarantees Speckled Pigeon, Cape Sparrow, Large Rock Martin, and Laughing Dove.

When one leaves the reception building en route to the rest camp, or following the circular drives, the road initially descends from a higher plateau down to a lower-

lying plain via a very steep descent. The road is bricked in this steep descent, which passes through an area with a profusion of proteas, and here one will see Cape Sugarbird, Malachite, Greater and Southern Double-collared Sunbird, and occasionally Orange-breasted Sunbirds too, although this species is easier to find a few kilometres further north in the foothills and southern slopes of the Langeberg. At the crest of the descent is the start of one of the mountain bike trails, but it also currently hosts a **Prompt to Pause** sign, which visitors will be increasingly seeing in all the National Parks. This is part of an ongoing campaign between SANParks and the University of Pretoria, as part of 'sense of place' research. The Prompt to Pause project demonstrates strong effectiveness as an interpretive intervention in protected areas and in encouraging visitors to engage with their environment.

But of course, as birders, we need little excuse to "look around", and that is the key to finding good stuff; as you descend to the lower-lying plains, things can start to get interesting. On my last two visits to the Park (in August 2025 and September this year), I found Black Harrier on this short stretch before the turn-offs to the circular game drive and the rest camp. The August 2025 sighting was particularly interesting, as it revealed a seemingly aggressive interaction in a 3-way Mexican stand-off between a Jackal Buzzard, a Black-winged Kite, and what, for many of us, is South Africa's most strikingly beautiful bird of prey. Having just driven to the Park from my Garden Route National Park base, we'd committed the birders' ultimate sin: leaving my camera in an inaccessible place, and by the time we got it out, the kite and buzzard had departed, while the harrier settled on a nearby shrub…




Left Prompt to Pause signage in Bontebok National Park © Chris Patton.





Above Black Harrier is another special of the Park and regularly recorded between reception and the rest camp © Mike Buckham.

Right Cape Grassbird © Derek Engelbrecht.



As it was the only one left, I guess he/she was the winner...12. This was reinforced in September this year, when I again found a Black Harrier in the exact same location.

On a person's right as one drives from the park entrance and reception offices is the

Breede River. The Park endured chronic flooding in May this year, and much of the riverine thicket was washed away. I will delve more into this habitat in the follow-on article in the next edition. Here we will deal with the birds along the Park's game drive, and birds you should also find between the reception and rest camp include Bokmakierie, Yellow Bishop, and Cape Grassbird.

Another "special" bird that one can see in the area is a type of lark. I've put "special" in inverted commas because it's not currently a bona fide species on the official South African bird list. It wasn't in the 1980s when that "***Where to watch birds***" write-up just reflected Long-billed Lark, and it isn't today, but the Agulhas Long-billed Lark was recognised as a bona fide species (*Certhilauda brevirostris*) for over two decades, based on 1990s genetic research; however, key global taxonomic authorities recently lumped it back into the Cape Long-billed Lark (*Certhilauda curvirostris*) complex as a subspecies.

As you follow the road clockwise around the Park, you come to a flattened area on your left. This area used to be an old horse racing track. Now overgrown and reclaimed by its rightful owner, renosterveld, it is a good area to see some of the larger terrestrial birds the Park protects. In August 2025, I found crouching female bustards here, but more likely to be recorded are two common medium- to large ground birds that make their home in the Park: the Grey-winged Francolin and Southern Black Korhaan.



Left The Agulhas subspecies of the Cape Long-billed Lark © Daniel Engelbrecht.

The old reception buildings (still used by the Park) are dominated by an imposing dead gum tree which is a magnet for raptors and corvids and where, without fail, I have found the likes of Rock Kestrel, Black-winged Kite, White-necked Raven, Lanner Falcon, Jackal Buzzard and once, famously on a visit in the early 2000s, a Martial Eagle.





Above A Southern Black Korhaan (left) and Grey-winged Francolin (right) are two of the common mid-sized ground birds likely to be seen in Bontebok © SANParks archives.



Below The raptor magnet dead tree at the old reception offices (can you spot the raven?) © Chris Patton.



Above Brimstone Canaries hang out in the gardens of the old reception offices in the central north of the Park © SANParks archives.

While general visitors cannot currently access any facilities at the old reception (this may change in the future), the gardens around the buildings are still maintained and offer a different suite of birds from the open plains. Fiscal Flycatchers, Large Rock Martins, Acacia Pied Barbet, Red-faced and Speckled Mousebird will all be around, but the bird I most associate with the gardens here is the Brimstone Canary. The following photo from the SANParks archives in 2008 could have been from my most recent visits last August and this September, as they are very obliging models and posed nicely while feeding obsessively on some of the seeding plants in the gardens, but mine didn't come out as good.

Passing through the old reception precinct, the game drive continues (there are a couple of 4x4-only route options in addition to the main track), and the sedan-friendly route itself becomes quite stony. One of the Park's most prominent bird species, and another obliging "model" from a photographic point of view, is the African Stonechat. They will be seen throughout the open plains of the Park, but the eastern loop is particularly good for them

In fact, birding in general gets very interesting on this eastern loop. From August to November the air will chime with the characteristic calls of Cloud and Zitting Cisticolas. I took the following photo of a Cloud in November 2019, and as usual I had no visual way to distinguish it from the Zitting, but this one was displaying profusely, so its identity was not in doubt…

Other birds to look for in this eastern part of the Park include Cape Longclaw and Capped Wheatear. The eastern section of the Park has a pair of small dams (called Skilpad and Mooi), and on one of my visits I saw a flock of around 50 Blue Cranes standing in one of them. I heard Common Quails calling when I was in the Park in September, and excitingly I've read that Fynbos Buttonquail also occurs,







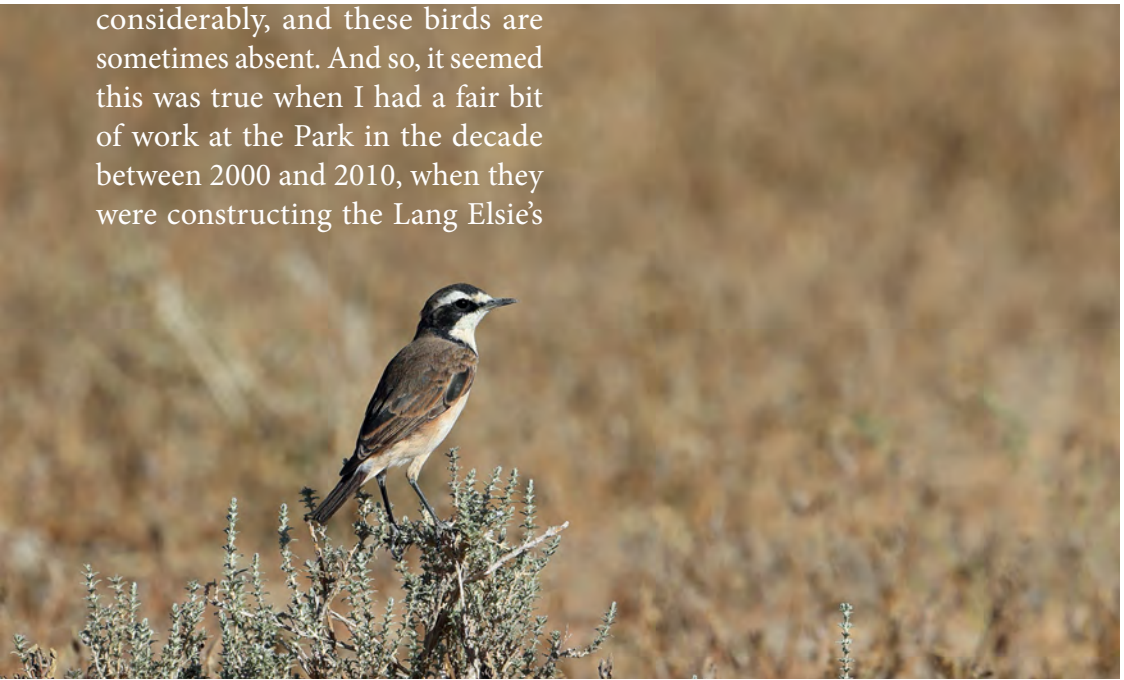
Right African Stonechats (male = top; female = middle) are prominent in the Park and have to be one of the most photo friendly of species (© Scott Chalmers), while Cloud Cisticola (bottom) are vocal between August and November in the Bontebok National Park © Chris Patton.

and SABAP2 records back that up for the Park pentad, but I have yet to see this species anywhere.

Secretarybirds and Spur-winged Geese are other heavyweights this part of the Park is likely to produce, but I want to return to the subject of this article's title: the Denham's Bustard… Based on my recent visits, the eastern section of the Park seems to be the most reliable place to find them, although I have seen them, as mentioned, at the old racecourse and along the link road to the rest camp from the eastern loop. But, while in birding terms the Park is best known for its population of South Africa's second-largest bustard, the Where to watch birds' book's write-up from the 1980s cautions, "numbers fluctuate considerably, and these birds are sometimes absent. And so, it seemed this was true when I had a fair bit of work at the Park in the decade between 2000 and 2010, when they were constructing the Lang Elsie's Kraal rest camp, and didn't see any on visits in 2002, 2003, 2007 and 2010. But on my last three visits to the Park, in November 2020, August 2025, and September 2026, I've got them every time… but perhaps it was a time-of-year thing… I'd also like the article to include another photo I took of a male this past September, as an excellent illustration of why the renosterveld habitat, with its fertile soils, is so endangered… Look at the agricultural landscape in the background.

Another cherished bird I found on the link road between the eastern loop and the rest camp was the African Quailfinch, which I found along this stretch in November 2019. I was atlasing my trip at the time, and a couple of months later an atlasser contacted me because he needed that species for his Western Cape list and wanted precise details of where I found them. I sent him the information, and a couple of weeks later he contacted me again to say he found them exactly where I said I got them.

Another species I associate with this stretch is Pearl-breasted Swallow. In my experience, this species is usually seen singly as the second photo shows, in pairs, or at most in small groups, so I found it very unusual in that same November 2019 visit, when just before the link road connects with the road into the rest camp it passes through a copse of thorn trees, and a group of around 10 birds were perched together in the one thorn tree as seen in the first photo.



Below Capped Wheatears seem to like the stony ground of the eastern loop © Scott Chalmers.



Above This photo of a Denham's shows how the Park is an island of renosterveld surrounded by agricultural lands © Chris Patton.





Above Bontebok NP is the only place where I have seen Pearl-breasted Swallows congregate in small flocks © Chris Patton

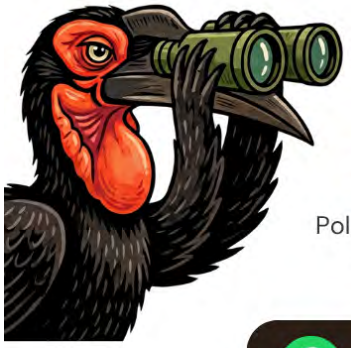
My final observation for the open plains of Bontebok was also from my recent September visit. On most previous visits to the Park, the park's surface water is limited to the Breede River and two small ephemeral pans on the eastern loop, but because of the heavy rains that wreaked havoc in the Park this past winter, additional ephemeral surface water formed along the link road. I took this photo of a Yellow-billed Duck, which you wouldn't reliably see in the Park. I suspect this additional water attracted many other species, but that seems like a good place to end this article and link to the next article on Bontebok's birds found along the River and in the rest camp.

**Author email:** chris.patton@sanparks.org



Left Ephemeral pans in the Park after recent heavy rains produced some birds not often easy to see in the Park © Chris Patton.

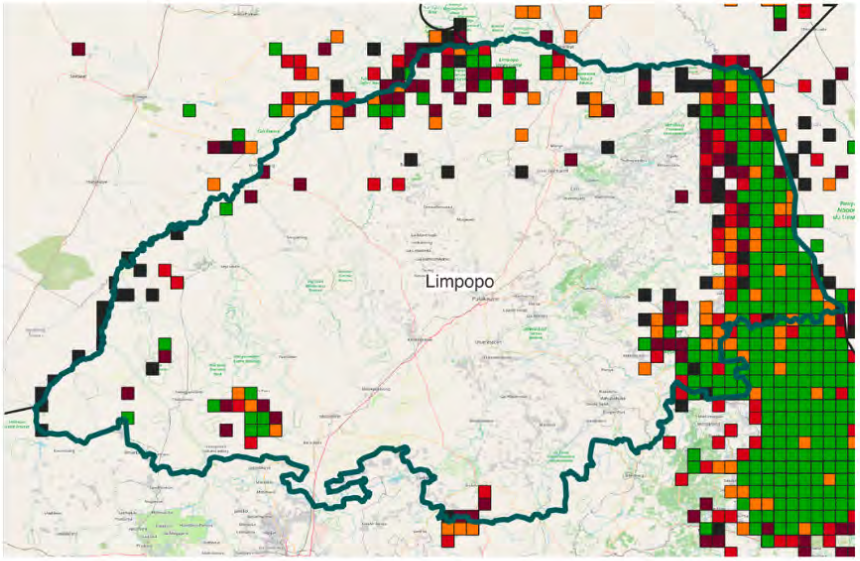




# Have you seen a ground-hornbill?

Polokwane birders, **we need your help!** Every sighting you log helps us fill the gaps on the map below and protect them.

HORNBILL HOTLINE · WHATSAPP
+27 (0) 79 754 6234




## Do you see ground-hornbills on your birding trips?

Help us fill the gaps on our map to fully understand what is happening with our ground-hornbill population at a national scale. Send a WhatsApp message or email with as much information as possible.

**Save our number to your phone as "Hornbill Hotline" to send GPS pins on the go.**

### 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



# Saving Botha's lark

## a story of hope




**Watch the documentary here.**







*We specialize in the following:*
* Property Rental Management
* Body Corporate Management

*Rental Services Include:*
* Rent out and manage the property *
* Pay levies and/or rates & taxes *
* Do general maintenance *

**Tel: 015-298 8151 / Cell: 071 925 9829**
**Email: hensarentals4@gmail.com**




CALLIDENDRON

www.callidendron.co.za
**INDIGENOUS NURSERY**

# ADVERTISING
SPACE AVAILABLE

Contact Raelene Engelbrecht
082 468 9042

Now available at:
Pick n Pay Cycad
Woolworths Mall of the North
Woolworths The Greenery
TotalEnergies Tzaneen



KOEDOESRIVIER CONSERVANCY

INKONKA GAME FARM

whelmi chalmers

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION CENTRE

268 CASTANEA STR, BROADLANDS, POLOKWANE, 0700
CELL: 082 777 0291
E-MAIL: whelmi.chalmers@gmail.com

Sweet & Sweet

'Bee Haven'

We specialize in
Bee Removal Services

072 438 1387 / 082 532 5701
23120sweetandsweet@gmail.com

MAGOEBASKLOOF

NATURE WALKS

LIFELONG LEARNING




NTY STEEL WORKS

LIMPOPO SCAFFOLDING

MABULA GROUND HORNBILL PROJECT

ADVERTISING
SPACE AVAILABLE
Contact Raelene Engelbrecht
082 468 9042

# White-breasted Cormorant prey and parasites

TEXT AND PHOTOS Willem Smit

email: willem.smit@ul.ac.za

The Great (White-breasted) Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus*) is widely distributed throughout sub-Saharan Africa, inhabiting a broad range of aquatic environments, including freshwater, estuarine and coastal ecosystems. Specimens of this species were collected as part of the MSc research of Hermina Thobejane at the University of Limpopo, who is investigating the parasites of these piscivorous birds. Cormorants can harbour several groups of helminths, including digeneans (flukes), nematodes (roundworms) and cestodes (tapeworms), in their intestinal tracts. The larval stages of many of these parasites occur in fish, which serve as intermediate hosts, while cormorants become infected as definitive hosts when they consume infected fish. Their diet includes a variety of fish species, such as tilapia, catfish, and yellowfish. In one study along the Atlantic coast, the remains of 34 fish species, as well as a crab, were identified from the gut contents of a cormorant population.

During parasite examinations, partially digested fish measuring between 5 and 15 cm are commonly recovered from the stomachs of these birds. The winter survey for this project was conducted at Loskop Dam in August 2026. In addition to the numerous parasites recovered, one cormorant contained an unusually large, partially digested fish in its stomach. The fish measured 33 cm in total length and was identified as a Large-scale Yellowfish (*Labeobarbus marequensis*), a noteworthy finding given its size relative to the fish remains typically recovered from these birds.



ABOVE Remains of fish and numerous *Contracaecum* roundworms in the stomach of a White-breasted cormorant.



BELOW A partially digested Large-scale Yellowfish measuring 33 cm ingested by a Great Cormorant at Loskop Dam.

# Photoblog: Violet-backed Starling observations

TEXT AND PHOTOS Hugh Chittenden

email: hugh@rarebirds.co.za

Although Violet-backed Starlings are omnivorous feeders (fruit and invertebrates), they are specialist termite feeders, capable of delivering large beakfuls to feed their chicks. Once they've picked up and collected 5–10 termites, how do they continue to collect more (often exceeding 50!!!)? Remarkable! Their nests are regularly lined with green leaves. They also have an interesting habit of waving their wings (one, or both simultaneously).



LEFT An adult female with a berry in her beak.



BIRD BRIEFS

BIRD BRIEFS



ABOVE The iridescent plumage varies from deep purple (plum) to a dark ruby depending on the angle of the light, the latter especially vivid in overcast conditions.



BIRD BRIEFS







Bird Briefs

Bird Briefs



Above and right
The nestlings hatch blind and naked, with a prominent pale yellowish gape and a brighter yellow tongue.

Opposite, Above, and right, The nest is lined with fresh green leaves, even during the nestling period.





Bird Briefs





Both sexes provision the young, and, as specialist termitovores, they are remarkably adept at collecting and carrying beakfuls of termites. How is it possible to collect so many termites without dropping them?

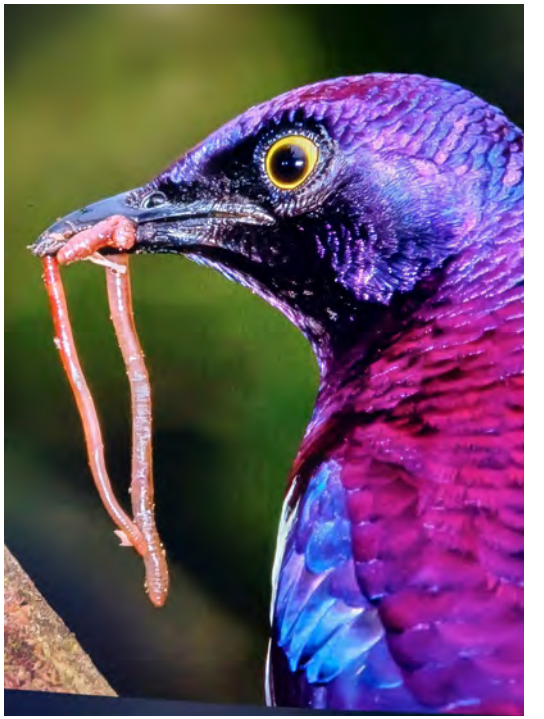


Bird Briefs





Left and below The nestings are fed a mixed diet of fruit, seeds, and invertebrates.















Above and opposite Males perform a "waving" display, alternately raising and lowering their wings, either one at a time or both simultaneously.



Bird Briefs

Bird Briefs



Bird Briefs

# Holding a grudge: Red-winged Starlings

Derek Engelbrecht

email: faunagalore@gmail.com

Red-winged Starlings are exceptionally aggressive nest defenders, and can single out individuals that have earned their enmity (Craig and Feare 2009, Engelbrecht 2024a, Engelbrecht 2024b). There are several records of pairs swooping at or attacking individual humans that caused them distress, even a year after the initial encountered (Rowan 1955, Engelbrecht 2024a, Engelbrecht 2024b).

Before I continue with this note, allow me to recap. In October 2023, I monitored an accessible Red-winged Starling nest on the campus of the University of Limpopo. This involved weighing and measuring the nestlings and describing their plumage development. During every subsequent breeding season (there is a ceasefire during the non-breeding season!), this pair has singled me out and attacked me whenever I pass their nest on my way to or from the parking lot where my car is parked. Of late, I have tended to use another parking lot (although not because of the starling attacks!). On 15 October 2026, however, I had to park in my "old" parking lot, which meant facing my old foes once again. As I approached the nest, I had the eerie feeling that I was being watched - and sure enough, perched on a staircase was the male following my every move. Before I had even seen the nest, I knew that they must be nesting at their usual spot on top of an air conditioner. As I reached the nesting area, the female left the nest, and the male immediately swooped past my head before landing on a ledge. The pair then repeatedly made short sallies as they escorted me away from their nest, following me for approximately 40 m and occasionally giving a harsh *kraaa* call.

Later that afternoon, as I left my office building, which is more than 100 m from the nest, the male, acting as a sentinel, spotted me and immediately flew towards me to escort me again. As I approached the nest, they resumed their swooping attacks, uttering a harsh *cssh* call as they whisked past my head.

As I had established in my earlier account, the pair could distinguish me from other people, even when I was accompanied by colleagues. They consistently singled me out, leaving my colleagues alone, and ignored them when they passed the nest without me. This time was no different: I was once again singled out from among the hundreds of people who walk past their nest daily.

Craig and Feare (2009) wrote: "*Clearly, some Red-winged Starlings can recognise individual humans, and one may perhaps be permitted to surmise, anthropomorphically, of course, that they can also bear personal grudges*". Having endured their attacks during the last three breeding seasons, I'm inclined to conclude that Red-winged Starlings not only recognise individual humans, but they can also bear personal grudges lasting at least three years!

**References**

Craig, A. J. F. K., and C. J. Feare (2009). Family Sturnidae (Starlings). In Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 14. Bush-shrikes to Old World Sparrows (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, and D. Christie). Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain. pp. 654–758.

Engelbrecht, D. (2024). Red-winged Starling breeding observations Part 2: The bomb squad. The Lark 55:82–83.

Engelbrecht, D. (2024). Angry Birds - Red-winged Starlings. The Lark 56:89.

Rowan, M. K. (1955). The breeding biology and behaviour of the Redwinged Starling *Onychognathus morio*. Ibis 97:663–705.



## Behaviour: Predation

### Little Sparrowhawk eavesdropping on Cardinal Woodpecker calls

A female Golden-tailed Woodpecker was calling from a palm tree in our garden in Polokwane on 11 October 2026. I approached, hoping to record her calls. These are typically well-spaced, sometimes with several minutes between successive calls, so patience is the name of the game. When she eventually called again, I noticed a Little Sparrowhawk, which I had not seen previously, fly towards the side of the tree nearest to me. It perched and began looking around (A). The woodpecker must have spotted the sparrowhawk and, in typical woodpecker fashion, moved to the far side of the trunk, keeping it out of sight (B). After a while, she appeared to relax, looking around and even moving about again. However, when she called once more, the sparrowhawk almost instantaneously flew closer. Once again, she retreated to the far side of the trunk and froze, clinging tightly to the bark. It was apparent that the Little Sparrowhawk was using the woodpecker's calls to pinpoint her location. Fortunately for the woodpecker (but unfortunately for my recording attempt!), a bird party had gathered to mob the sparrowhawk, which eventually left the area.

Derek Engelbrecht • faunagalore@gmail.com (received 15 October 2026).













## Diet and Foraging: Diet

### Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill eating a mouse

On 23 August 2026, while on a safari at the Makalali Private Game Reserve, in the Lowveld of the Limpopo Province, we came upon a Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill with a mouse in its beak. The mouse was already dead, so it is not known if the hornbill had caught the mouse, or if the mouse was already dead when the hornbill found it. We did not see it slamming its prey, which suggests the prey was already dead, but it clearly required some processing before it was able to swallow the mouse.

Charles Hardy • charlois@mweb.co.za (received 1 October 2026).



Above The Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill with the mouse - clearly a sizeable prey item.

## **Behaviour**: Predation

### White-faced Whistling Duck falls prey to a Southern African Python

While doing an avifaunal survey at Amandelbult Mine near Thabazimbi on 28 October 2006, I witnessed a Southern African Rock Python capture and swallow a White-faced Whistling Duck at one of the dams .

I first noticed movement in the water, but from a distance I thought it was a terrapin and didn't take much further notice. There was a paddling of ducks about 10 m from the "terrapin". I completed my count and had just turned to head back to my car when all hell broke loose. One of the ducks had been caught by something (my first thought was a small crocodile), but then I saw the unmistakable shape of a python forming as it started coiling around the hapless duck as it started constricting it (A; 8:43). The capture-and -constriction phase lasted about 2–3 minutes. I ran to the car to grab my camera and was back just as it started to position the duck so that it can be swallowed head first (B; 8:46). I then watched as it started swallowing the duck (C; 8:56). The whole process from capture until the last bit of duck could be seen as it passed down the snake's gullet lasted 20 minutes (D; 8:59).

Derek Engelbrecht • faunagalore@gmail.com (received 26 September 2026).






BIRD BRIEFS









## Diet and Foraging: Diet

### Grey Go-away-bird eating Weeping Boerbean seeds

I recently reported on two birds species, the Cardinal Woodpecker and Green Woodhoopoe feeding on invertebrate larvae in the seed pods of the Weeping Boerbean (*Schotia brachypetala*) (Heymans 2026). The pods are heavily parasitised by seed-boring caterpillars, and I have yet to find a pod that is not infested. The accompanying photos show a seed that had been occupied by a caterpillar and the caterpillar itself. Accessing these larvae may favour birds with specialised feeding adaptations, such as the Cardinal Woodpecker's long, spear-tipped tongue with its backward-pointing barbs, or the Green Woodhoopoe's long, slender, decurved bill. However, I recently recorded a rather unexpected addition to this group of pod-exploiters: the Grey Go-away-bird, a much less specialised feeder, extracting seeds from the *Schotia* pods.

**Reference**

Heymans, J. (2026).Birds probing Weeping Boerbean pods. The Lark 67:95.

Joseph Heymans • josepha.heymans@gmail.com (received 31 July 2026).

Below *Schotia* seed pods (left) and an open pod showing the caterpillar and the entry hole it bored into a seed (right) © Joseph Heymans.







Bird Briefs

Bird Briefs





Above Grey Go-away-birds extracting seeds from *Schotia* seed pods © Joseph Heymans.

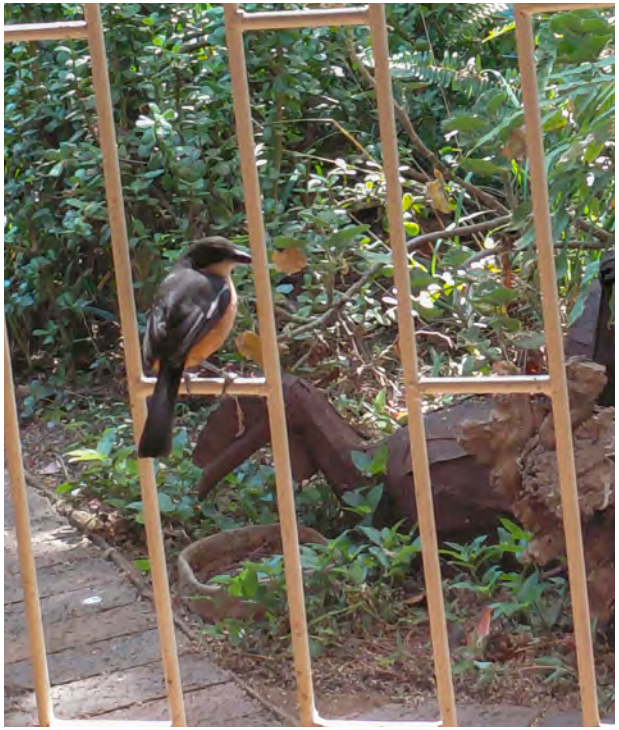


Bird Briefs

## **Behaviour**: Social and Interspecific Behaviour
### Recognition of individual humans by a Southern Boubou

A female Southern Boubou is a regular visitor to a feeder outside my study. She has become semi-habituated and often perches on the security gate or burglar bars, calling her characteristic *clac-clac* contact call to alert me that she is around and would like a reward. She can be quite insistent! If I am in the lounge, she will often perch on the windowsill or burglar bars and call repeatedly. As soon as I get up, she flies to the study to meet me there. During the long weekend of 24 September 2026, I was looking after some friends' dogs while they were away. They stay about 200 m from ours, as the boubou flies. Knowing that a Fiery-necked Nightjar often roosts in his garden, I walked around to its regular day-time roosting site to see if it was there. As I approached, I heard a familiar *clac-clac-clac* coming from a dense bush. I caught glimpses of movement as the bird worked its way down through the foliage before finally emerging into full view at eye level. I immediately recognised my Southern Boubou friend, having ringed her about a year earlier. She had clearly recognised me, too! She came right up to eye level, calling persistently, as if to remind me that she was there and that a reward was in order. Do Southern Boubous recognise individual humans? In my experience, they certainly do!

Derek Engelbrecht • faunagalore@gmail.com
(received 2 October 2026).



RIGHT The female Southern Boubou perched on the security gate of my study.







## **Behaviour**: Sexual Behaviour
### Arrow-marked Babbler offering a nuptial gift

A group of three adult Arrow-marked Babblers made an early nesting attempt in my neighbour's garden in Welgelegen, Polokwane, at the beginning of September 2026. One nestling fledged in the first week of October. Approximately 7–10 days later, on 15 October, while the group was still observed feeding the fledgling, I witnessed courtship feeding associated with copulation. The birds regularly visit a feeder outside my study, and, during a break, I tossed a superworm onto the ground which was snapped up by one of the adults (which turned out to be a male). It then called a *ratatatatata* call while running after another bird (the female). I lost sight of the pair for s split second, but just in time to see the pair copulating on the ground. The male had his tail fully fanned, while the female held her head tilted slightly backwards and upwards, with the worm firmly grasped in her bill. Copulation lasted approximately 3 seconds. Unfortunately, the split second loss of a visual contact turned out to be at a critical time in the courtship ritual as I couldn't tell if the male first presented the worm before mounting the female, or whether he mounted her first and presenting the food immediately before copulation. After dismounting, the male called a loud *kow-kow-kow-kow* call, and then the pair preened vigorously.

About 5 minutes later, the same sequence was repeated, but this time the pair disappeared below a Plumbago bush and it was impossible to see what happened. Nevertheless, the loud *kow-kow-kow-kow* call preceded their re-appearance, followed by allopreening.

Courtship feeding has been observed in the Southern Pied Babbler (Tyler 2002), but, to the best of my knowledge, it has not previously been documented in the Arrow-marked Babbler .

**Reference**

Tyler, S. J. (2002).Observations on the breeding biology, biometrics and food of Pied Babblers *Turdoides bicolor* in southeast Botswana. Ostrich 73:171–172.

Derek Engelbrecht • faunagalore@gmail.com (received 14 October 2026).

POLOKWANE 100 KM

... and a bit beyond

# Interesting sightings

## 16 August 2026 - 15 October 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

***Black Cuckoo*** - 9 October 2026. Returning migrant: One in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

***Blue-spotted Wood Dove*** - 3 October 2026. One seen in a garden in Tzaneen (Leigh-Ann Hoets).

***Black Sparrowhawk*** - 21 September 2026. One flying over Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

***Freckled Nightjar*** - 17 September 2026. A few heard calling on the campus of the University of Limpopo (Derek Engelbrecht).



Blue-spotted Wood Dove © Leigh-Ann Hoets



***Jacobin Cuckoo*** - 15 October 2026. One calling in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

***Klaas' Cuckoo*** - 6 September 2026. Returning migrant: One in Mokopane town (Bruce Goetsch).

***Peregrine Falcon*** - 29 September 2026. One flying over Cycad Estate (Jody de Bruyn).

***Red-chested ' Cuckoo*** - 6 September 2026. Returning migrant: One in Mokopane town (Bruce Goetsch).

***Striped Kingfisher*** - 26 September 2026. One heard calling in Ster Park (Minkie Prinsloo).

***Water Thick-knee*** - 26 September 2026. Seen at the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary (Richter van Tonder).

***Black Kite*** - 24 August 2026. Returning migrant: Two near Mankweng (Derek Engelbrecht).

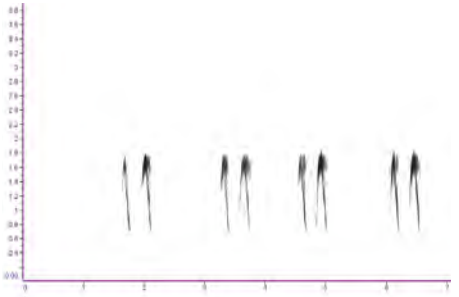
### Passerines

***African Paradise Flycatcher*** - 4 October 2026. Heard in Dalmada (Loren Bronkhorst).

***Black-faced Waxbill*** - 13 October 2026. In Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

***Southern Black Flycatcher*** - 26 September 2026. A pair seen at the Tom Naude Dam (Richter van Tonder).

***Thick-billed Weaver*** - 1 October 2026. A male seen in a garden in Welgelegen, Polokwane (Derek Engelbrecht).



Freckled Nightjar © Derek Engelbrecht



Black Kite © Derek Engelbrecht



Southern Black Flycatcher © Richter van Tonder



White-browed Robin-Chat © Richter van Tonder

***White-browed Robin-Chat*** - 26 September 2026. One in the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary (Richter van Tonder).

### Best of the Rest
### Limpopo Province

#### Non-passerines

***Caspian Plover*** - 25 September 2026. One seen on the Capricorn Loop at Tihongonyeni Waterhole (Johan Janse van Vuuren).

***Palmnut Vulture*** - 27 August 2026. An immature bird seen near on the Levhuvhu River near Crooks' Corner in the far northern Kruger National Park (T. Hardaker, SA Rare Bird News Report 31 August 2026).

***Ruddy Turnstone*** - 23 September 2026. One seen at a waterhole Marataba Conservation Cam in the Marakele National Park (Matt Lailvaux).

***Slaty Egret*** - 6 September 2026. One seen at Vogelfontein, Nylsvley Nature Reserve (Anke van der Linde).

***Swallow-tailed Bee-eater*** - 12 September 2026. A small flock flying over the Limpopo River near Platjan (Birdlife Polokwane club outing).

#### Passerines

***Black-bellied Starling*** - 7 October 2026. One seen at Blyde Wildlife Estate, Hoedspruit (Tristan Silver).



**Caspian Plover © Johan Janse van Vuuren**



Ruddy Turnstone © Matt Lailvaux

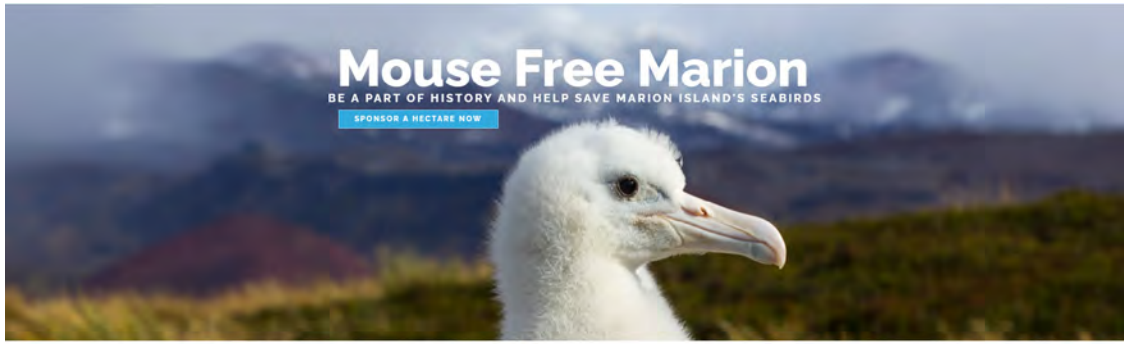


Swallow-tailed Bee-eater © Jody de Bruyn



**Black-bellied Starling © Tristan Silver**






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.

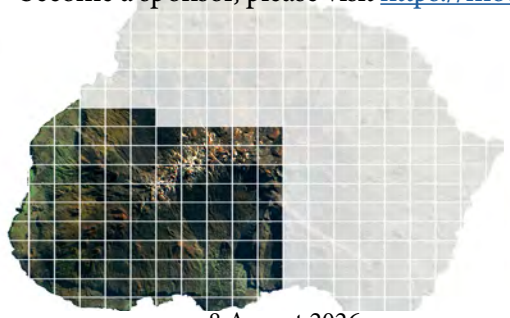
To help raise the necessary funds, please would you consider sponsoring one or more hectares of land on Marion Island.

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://mousefreemarion.org/



8 August 2026
Percent of target reached: 46.4%
Sponsored Hectares: 13905 ha
Sponsors: 2755



3 September 2026
Percent of target reached: 46.7%
Sponsored Hectares: 14019 ha
Sponsors: 2761

# UPCOMING EVENTS



**Birdlife Polokwane Year-end Function**

Date: 18/25 November 2026
Time: 18:30
Venue: TBA

**Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting and AGM**

Date: 2 February 2027
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

**Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting**

Date: 2 March 2027
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club






**Shopping list:** Striped Pipit, Bushveld Pipit, Grey Penduline Tit, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Freckled Nightjar, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Flappet Lark, Verreaux's Eagle. Pearl-breasted Swallow, and many more.

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings

Birding BIG DAY

In partnership with

RETURN AFRICA

BirdLife South Africa's Birding Big Day (BBD) 2026 will take place on 05 December 2026.
Register for Birding Big Day by clicking **here**.




**Shopping list:** The ever-popular Wolkberg outing is ideal to start off your birding year with Tree Pipit probably the most sought-after. Other specials include Gurney's Sugarbird, Nicholson's Pipit, Striped Pipit, Buff-streaked Chat, Cape Rock Thrush, Short-toed Rock Thrush, Red-winged Francolin, Cape Bunting, and many more.




Flock
TO PAFURI 2027
KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

**Flock to Pafuri with Duncan McKenzie**

RETURN Africa's Pafuri Camp and Baobab Hill House

25 February, 2027 | 12:00 am

For more information, visit Flock 2027

Flock
TO PAFURI 2027
KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

**Flock to Pafuri with Prof. Peter Ryan**

RETURN Africa's Pafuri Camp and Baobab Hill House

4 March, 2027 | 12:00 am

For more information, visit Flock 2027

# 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.



Bennett's Woodpecker female © Jody de Bruyn