

JULY 2013

Trip report - Birding off the beaten track in the Waterberg 14 – 17 June 2013

Joe Grosel

An enthusiastic party of 13 birders from as far afield as Warden, Umhloti and Mossel Bay met in Mokopane over lunch on Friday 14 June for a quick briefing before setting off on the latest Stretton's sponsored Limpopo Birding Routes event, the 'Birding off the beaten track in the Waterberg' tour.

The convoy of six 4x4 vehicles made its way around the north-eastern foothills of the Waterberg known as the 'Red Beds' so named because of the red sandstone hills and butters which dominate the landscape. A steady climb to the top of the Waterberg plateau via the spectacular 'Kloof Pass' was followed by the first roadside stop of the trip for a chat about the prevailing landscape and habitats.

After settling into our lovely accommodation at the Motseng Lodge in the Lindani Private Nature Reserve the group took a short walk down to the Melk River. The cool conditions didn't make for great birding with only a few species seen. The ones who did make an appearance included Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Rufous-naped Lark, Cape Longclaw, Groundscraper Thrush and Golden-breasted Bunting.

It was an early start today two, with coffee and rusks before the group departed on a morning's bird drive aboard Lindani's Game drive vehicle piloted by Solly Nkumane. The drive incorporated most of Lindani's habitats and thus an impressive list of close on 70 very diverse birds was racked up. Bushveld and Buffy Pipit, Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and African Snipe were among the goodies seen. The drive also produced three new species for Lindani namely Yellow-breasted Apalis (first record for the Waterberg), Flappet Lark and Cape Batis.

After a superb brunch the early afternoon was spent at leisure. A late afternoon walk around Motseng camp produced good sightings of Greater Honeyguide, Lizard Buzzard and Grey-backed Camaroptera before most of the group settled into watching the Springboks take on Scotland. Liberal use of the sponsor's products added extra cheerfulness to the atmosphere. Before dinner the group was treated to some fine music by the very talented Solly.

Day three was a day of exploring the back roads of the Waterberg to take in the scenic splendours of this region. The route took the convoy back over the escarpment and into the Sterkrivier Valley, skirting the Entabeni conservancy before once again ascending onto the plateau near the town of Vaalwater where the group enjoyed lunch at the historic St John the Baptist church (one of the lesser known buildings designed by Sir Herbert Baker). Some of the interesting birds seen along the morning's drive included Black-chested and Brown Snake-Eagles, African Black Duck, Half-collared Kingfisher and Coqui Francolin. The last leg of the day's journey took the group from Vaalwater to the Marakele National Park. This journey of about 70km turned out to be somewhat of a game drive as large concentrations of antelope were seen on the wildlife ranches along the route. A few interesting colour variations including Black Impala, White Blesbok and Black Springbok added some peculiarity to the trip. The birds weren't going to be outdone as Malachite Kingfisher, White-fronted Bee-eater and Secretary Bird were added to the list. Just before reaching our destination we stopped off to chat to Dr Pat Benson at his vulture monitoring station, right next to the road. He has been counting Cape Vultures nesting on the cliffs in the Marakele National Park from this site for over twenty years. The evening was spent at the Griffon's private camp in a concession that is open to the national park. Although the accommodation was fairly rustic here everyone had an enjoyable evening.

Hi everyone, it hardly seems possible, but we are already halfway through this year, the winter is almost over and spring is on its way.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to this month's newsletter. I have received quite a few interesting and insightful articles, including a little something about familiar royalty amongst us.

May July be filled with many unusual sightings and lifers for all :)

Until next time,
Have a good one

Chantelle

If you come across any interesting information or images, please feel free to send it to me at chantc66@gmail.com

The last morning proved to be a highlight of the trip for many as we travelled into the Marakele National Park and drove up the narrow (surfaced) road to the highest point in the Waterberg. On entering the park the vegetation was dominated by Acacia woodland that is typical of the Thabazimbi region. Here species such as Pied Babbler, Red-billed Hornbill, Crimson-breasted Shrike and Violet-eared Waxbill were seen. As we ascended and gained altitude the vegetation quickly changed from wooded thickets to open, grassy, Protea-covered slopes, rocky crags and eventually alpine shrubland on the summit. Here at 2000 metres above sea level some interesting trees were seen such as the Real Yellowwood tree *Podocarpus latifolius* and the Mountain Cypress *Widdingtonia nodiflora*.

On the ascent great close-up sightings of Lazy Cisticola, Gurney's Sugarbird and Greater Double-collared Sunbird were enjoyed. Birds seen up in the highlands included a large flock of African Black and Alpine Swift, soaring Cape Vultures and a hunting Verreaux's Eagle. The group had a picnic in the parking lot at the radio masts and were soon joined by a multitude of birds. Before we knew it there were Buff-streaked Chats, Cape Buntings, Mocking Cliff-Chats, Cape Rock-Thrushes and Familiar Chats hopping around at our feet. What a way to end the trip since it wasn't long before we were down the mountain again and on our way home.

The Greater Limpopo Birding Route wishes to thank the sponsors Stretton's Gin, our hosts at Lindani and Griffon's Camp and our loyal participants for making this another great birding event.



1 - Lenong view point, 2 - Cape Bunting 3 - Cape Vulture in flight 4 - Buff-streaked Chat

'A pat on the back'

A snippet from the SABAP2 website submitted by Billy Attard

"SABAP2, the bird atlas project, continues to improve its coverage statistics. Within South Africa this is getting harder and harder to do, as the remaining unvisited pentads get farther and farther away from most atlases, and more and more difficult to access.

Limpopo is the province that has made the greatest progress in the past 12 months. It is the only province that has managed to increase coverage by 10% within the past year. Today we celebrate Limpopo passing 70% coverage. Well done to everyone who has atlased in Limpopo, we value your contributions.

Seven of the nine provinces now have coverage exceeding 70%. The two provinces still to reach this level are the two largest, the Eastern Cape on 58% (with a 9% increase over the past year) and the Northern Cape on 31% (with a 5% increase over the past year)."

Professor LG Underhill - Director: Animal Demography Unit

Larking around South Africa with the Lark Kings of South Africa.

by Charles Hardy

"We saw 17 species and what did we get? Another day older and deeper in debt! So Derek & Joe don't you call us cause we can now say, We've seen every damn lark in the RSA"

These are words of the song Bruce and I sang whilst on a wonderful trip with the Lark Kings of South Africa namely our very own Joe Grosel and Derek Engelbrecht.

Our trip took us through the drier regions of our country to the Northern Cape's enchantingly beautiful Bushmanland and ended in the stunning Namib Desert surrounding Walvis Bay. En route to Cape Town we visited Dronfontein near Kimberley and spent 3 days on a farm outside Brandvlei before journeying to Veldrift on the coast.

Our Southern Africa region boasts the greatest diversity of larks in the world and the areas we visited were home to many endemic species which our intrepid Joe and Derek identified and ticked off with remarkable ease. Most times Derek and Joe had identified the species before Bruce and I had even seen the bird.

Outings / Uitstappies

20 - 21 July - LBJ Identification course - Plk GR
25 - 26 July - Winter CWAC counts around Plk
27 July - Winter CWAC counts Plk Bird Sanctuary
8 - 11 Aug - GLBR Blouberg & Magoebaskloof birding adventure

Ancient Lesser Flamingo

sent in by Derek Engelbrecht, adapted by Chantelle Venter. Original article by Colin Jackson

It has been reported by The Ringing Scheme of East Africa that a Lesser Flamingo was found freshly dead at Lake Baringo on 13th February this year with a BTO ring (British Trust for Ornithology) used on a batch of Flamingo chicks that bred at Lake Magadi in 1962!

This particular bird was ringed by Leslie Brown on 1st November 1962 making it 50 years old! It may be the oldest recorded Lesser Flamingo and quite stunning that it lived for so long. A few years ago there was one recovered also at Magadi that was about 45 years old - there may be one or two more out there with rings from that time!

The person who found the flamingo is Nick Armour of Swavesey, England, to whom we are indebted for reporting the ring. The distance from ringing site to recovery site is 242kms."

Highlights of the trip were Derek becoming the first person in the world to ring a Black-cared Sparrowlark and more importantly to witness him ringing a Stark's Lark and thus breaking the world record for the most different lark species ringed by any ringer.

Apart from the wonderful birding, many unforgettable moments were spent discussing the day's adventures over sundowners whilst enjoying magnificent sunsets over vast open plains.

The beers were cold, the braai fires were hot and the company was warm whilst larking with Lark Kings.

Thank you Joe and Derek.



Contact Persons

Contact numbers for enquiries & reservations:
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Voëltuin (Deel 2)

Cornie Odendaal

Soos belowe, maak ons nou tuin om insekvtrende voëls te lok. Om dit te kan doen, moet ons verskeie insekte lok. Alle goggas is nie peste nie. Daar is nie net "bad guys" nie, maar ook "good guys". Baie goggas beheer juis die lastige soorte. Dink maar aan "ladybirds" en hotnotsgotte wat luise eet. En wat 'n plesier om die voëltjies te sien luise af-pik van die plante af. Niemand wil plantluise hê nie - so, lok maar die voëls en voordelige goggas. Weereens is dit belangrik om weg te bly van gif af. Ons noem die hele skare - voëls inklusief - wat help om die peste in toom te hou die "BBBB" - "beautiful bug busting brigade".



Lid van die BBBB op patrollie

Daar is verskeie bome en struik wat spesifiek by heuningbye gewild is: onder andere Deurmekaarbos (Ehretia rigida), Enkeldoring (Acacia robusta), Blompeer / Drolpeer (Dombeya rotundifolia) en pragtige Doppekiaat (Pterocarpus rotundifolius). Met kruie en doodgewone blommetjies, soos kappertjies, word die lys heelwat langer.

Deurmekaarbos



Kurkbos

Dan is daar etlike bome wat vlinders en 'n verskeidenheid ander insekte lok: Wildeperske (Kiggelaria africana), Wildekastaiing (Calodendrum capense), Geelkeur (Calpurnia aurea), Kurkbos (Mundulea sericea), Laventelboom (Heteropyxis natalensis), Bosbeeskloou (Bauhinia tomentosa), Huilboerboon (Schotia brachypetala), Pietersielieboom (Heteromorpha arborescens), Witoliën (Buddleja saligna) en Transvaalliguster (Galpinia transvaalica) - om die lys nie te ellelank te maak nie.

Voor ons by die vrugtevreter uitkom, moet ons ook net aan die grassaadvreter tjies aandag gee. Dis maklik genoeg om hulle kos te gee met saadjies of krummels, maar wat 'n vreugde om hulle te sien eet op 'n stingel van 'n lang veldgras soos rootgras. Ons het nie almal die voorreg om 'n stuk grasveld van ons voorstoep af te sien nie, maar as jou tuin 'n droë hoekie het wat genoeg son kry, oorweeg dit om 'n paar polle veldgras daar te laat groei.

Nou moet die vrugtevreter ook kos kry - en nie jou vye en perskes nie. Ons hou dit dan vir volgende keer.