

FEBRUARY 2014

Welcome back, I trust everyone had a good Festive Season. Some of our club members have been quite busy, have a read and see what they have been up to. Visit our facebook page to share your sightings, identification queries and photos. www.facebook.com/birdlifepolokwane. If you happen to come across anything you would like to see in our next newsletter, or you would like to give feedback you can e-mail me at chantz66@gmail.com

Chantelle

Local bird guides go 'bashing in Giyani'

by Joe Grosel

In late 2013 Prof Les Underhill and his team at the Animal Demography Unit (ADU) identified 12 glaring gaps in the South African Bird Atlas Project's (SABAP2) coverage map. A subsequent request went out to atlasers to fill or reduce these gaps appreciably by the end of 2014. The so-called 'Giyani Gap' centred on the town of Giyani in the far north-east of Limpopo Province posed a particularly challenging and appealing area to cover. The regional atlas committee decided to call in the assistance of several Limpopo bird guides to form part of a Giyani 'atlas bash' team. These Birdlife SA affiliated guides based in the Limpopo Province are continuously mentored through programs run by the Greater Limpopo Birding Routes and it was decided to combine a mentoring session with this very important atlasing initiative. So on the 13th of January 2014 bird guides Christopher Netonze, Paul Nkhumane and Lucas Namanyane joined atlasers Joe Grosel and Charles Hardy on an intensive three-day atlasing challenge to fill the gap between the Kruger National Park and Giyani. This region is remote with only a handful of roads linking several small villages so several targeted pentads demanded a good deal of 'bundu bashing' by foot. The strategy of atlasing the inaccessible pentads involved guides being dropped off at pre-determined points and walking into the interior of the pentad in order to cover as many habitats as possible in two hours, thus completing a full protocol atlasing session.

A total of 23 virgin pentads were atlased during the three-day bash of which five included portions of the Kruger National Park. A combined total of 223 species were recorded and as expected a bunch of out of range forms was received for many uncommon species including Dusky Lark, Lesser-Spotted Eagle, Booted Eagle, Woolly-necked Stork, Harlequin Quail, Olive-tree Warbler and White-headed Vulture. The atlasing session unfortunately also revealed further expansion of the Common Myna's invasion of the Limpopo Province and significant easterly range extension of two 'western' species namely Cape Sparrow and White-browed Sparrow-Weaver. These two species were recorded in villages and fallow agricultural fields in at least seven pentads near Kruger's western boundary.

Directly after this atlasing survey another bash initiated by Anthony Paton dealt the 'Giyani Gap' an additional blow as he and fellow atlaser Barry Fourie managed to cover a further 17 virgin pentads. Jointly these two atlasing initiatives covered 40 virgin pentads and took the Limpopo Province's SABAP2 coverage over the 80% mark on 26 January 2014.

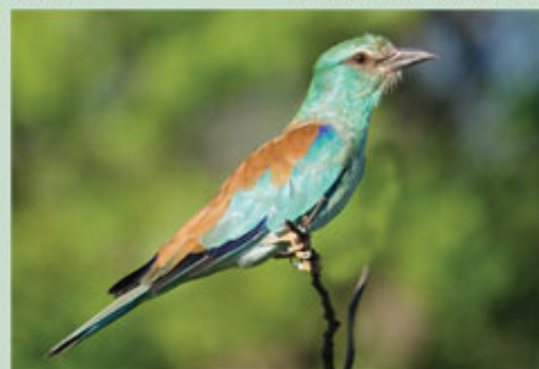
The Limpopo Regional Atlas Committee wishes to thank Lisa Martus from the Greater Limpopo Birding Routes for liaising with the guides and making necessary logistical arrangements, to Mr Charles Hardy who volunteered his services and provided the 4x4 ferry vehicle and to Hanneline Smit-Robinson from Birdlife SA who made much-needed funding available to cover some of the accommodation and travel expenses.



Paul Nkhumane, Christopher Netonze, Charles Hardy, Lucas Namanyane and Joe Grosel at a traditional 'turquoise' Tsonga homestead during the recent Giyani atlas bash.



Dusky Larks were recorded in a number of pentads during the recent 'Giyani Atlas Bash' (Image credit - Derek Engelbrecht)



Large numbers of European Rollers were recorded during the 'Giyani Atlas Bash' (photo Joe Grosel)

Birding hotspot - Sterkloop wetlands

by Joe Grosel

This series of natural springs is situated on municipal land to the west of Polokwane City at the Matlala and Percy Fyfe road junction. As far as can be established it is the only cluster of perennial springs on the Polokwane Plateau and thus hosts a great diversity of wetland and grassland bird species, particularly after good summer rains. A small dam within the drainage line has created open water habitat with the associated rush and sedge beds along its upper reaches where the likes of Maccoa Duck, White-backed Duck, African Swamphen, Great-crested Grebe and Little Bittern have been seen in the past. The marshland itself is home to Orange-breasted Waxbill, Cuckoo Finch, Red-collared Widow and at times Long-tailed Widow while the surrounding grassland host a variety of lark species including the localised Short-clawed Lark and remnants of the extremely fragmented and little known Spike-heeled Lark sub-population which occurs on the Polokwane Plateau. As can be expected a multitude of marsh and grassland plants occur here including many bulbs such as Kniphofias (Red-hot Pokers), Ammocharis (Ground Lily), Nerines, Hypoxis (African Potato), Boophane (Gifbol) and Gladiolus species.

This area is relatively pristine and should be considered a natural asset for Polokwane and has the potential to become an important eco-tourism attraction due to the interesting and varied plant and bird species. In several independent ecological reports to the city council it has been recommended that this entire property, (including the surrounding grassland and savannah areas) be properly fenced off and proclaimed as a Site of Ecological Importance under Schedule 1 of Limpopo Environmental Management Act (2003). Unfortunately this has not happened and the area is now under huge pressure from urban expansion on its borders (Polokwane Extension 44). Poaching of small game, illegal netting of fish, uncontrolled fires, illegal dumping and subsistence crop farming within this very sensitive site are factors contributing to its demise.

As one of the only active public environmental bodies in the city it would be up to Birdlife Polokwane to forward further appeals to the city council in an attempt to save and preserve this important natural feature. Wouldn't it be wonderful to turn this area into a 'Proudly Polokwane' bird sanctuary with walking trails, information boards and bird hides, a place that would not only be enjoyed by birders but which could serve as a wetland/environmental education facility for the broader community of our municipal area.

For those wishing to visit this area it is advised to do so in a group for safety reasons. The entrance gate (which is normally open) is situated on the Percy Fyfe road approximately 450m from the Matlala Road intersection (S23° 54' 15.82" E29° 24' 47.72").



The Sterkloop Wetland after good rains

Bruce het toe ook die 2de lys oor 200 ingedien op 26 Nov tot 30 Nov 2009 vir dieselfde pentad en dit was 212. Die rekord het vir 'n 2 jaar gestaan en is toe gebreek deur Rob Geddes op 26 Nov tot 30 Nov 2011. Dit was gedoen in die westelike pentad van Mkhombo dam. Die telling was 217. Om so groot telling op te stel moet daar 'n paar faktore teenwoordig wees nl. 'n goeie verskeidenheid van habitats, goeie reën en jy moet die pentad baie goed ken.

So dis toe waar ek en Jody besluit het om dit te probeer doen in die Polokwane wildtuintjie pentad van 2 Jan tot 6 Jan 2014. Die pentad begin ongeveer by Suidstras Noord grens en dan gaan dit tot net anderkant die wildtuintjie(as Suid grens. Die wes grens is 'n entjie anderkant die N1 en die oos grens is net anderkant die vliegveld. Ons het hulp gehad vanaf Marcia, Derek, Daniel en Joe. Die eerste poging was nie baie goed gekoördineer nie. Ons wou sleg kyk of dit enigins moontlik is om naby te kom.

Op die eerste dag het ek my geoefende roete gery om die grootste gros spesies neer te skryf. Ek het 'n hele paar interessante spesies gesien wat nie altyd so maklik is om te kry nie. Onder andere 'n hele paar sangertjies. By die aalwynkoppie dammetjie is daar tans 'n paar Olyfboomsangers. Luister uit vir 'n heeserige, krasserige geluid wat aanhoudend roep. Binne die eerste uur was my lysie reeds op 62 spesies. Ek eindig toe op 153 vir die oggend sessie. Ons reël toe vir 'n nagrit om die nag spesies te probeer optel. Hier was dit ek, Marcia en Jody. Die spesies wat ons gekry het was Gewone Dikkop, Vlei-uil, Rooivannagui, Afrikaanse nagui, Gevlekte Ooruil en Nonnetjie-uil. Na die eerste dag staan die lysie op 164.



Afrikaanse Naguil - Richter van Tonder



Witsoeraar - Macia van Tonder

Die tweede dag het goed begin met ons gereelde besoeker aan die gholfklub nl. die Wespedief



Wespedief - Richter van Tonder

Met die dat die meeste makliker spesies gesien is, moes ons begin konsentreer op spesifieke plekke waar spesifieke spesies mag voorkom. 'n Paar goeie idees vir dié plekke vanaf Jody het die telling vir dag 2 opgeskuif na 179. Een van die mooi spesies vir die dag was 'n Trekkawertjie.

Dag 3 het begin saam my vrou Marcia, Derek en Daniel in die wildtuintjie. Met ons eerste sessie in gumboots in een van die oorvol damme kry ons toe besondere skaars somerbesoeker nl. Kleinwaterhoender! Dit is ook die eerste keer wat dit in die wildtuintjie opgeteken word. Met Derek se hulp kon ons toe 'n hele paar van die uitstaande spesies kry. Ons sessie in die wildtuintjie sluit af met 'n baie opwindende Rooiborsvleikuiken. Nie 'n maklike outjie om te sien nie. Aan die einde van die dag staan ons op 193. Die moontlikheid om 200 te maak was besig om waar te word!

Dag 4 lewer slegs 6 spesies, maar dit beteken ons is op 199! Dag 5 het dit byna heeldag gereën en die hoop om 200 te kry was besig om te kwyn... Maar toe kry ek 'n sms van Derek wat sê hy het Rooibekvuurvinkies gekry en Charls het 2 dae terug op die gholfbaan 'n Gewone Troupant gesien!! 2011! Dis toe ook die finale telling en slegs die 4de keer wat 'n lys oor 200 is. Met die dat ons wel 'n paar makliker spesies gemis het lyk dit goed dat ons wel die rekord mag breek in die nabye toekoms. Hou ons dop...

Poging 1 om pentad rekord te breek in Polokwane Wildtuintjie

Deur Richter van Tonder

Die Tweede Suid-Afrikaanse Voël Atlas Projek het 1 Julie 2007 begin. Sedert die begin was daar slegs 3 keer dat 'n lys vir 'n enkele pentad oor 200 spesies ingedien is. Daar is tot op datum van skrywe reeds 97310 lysie ingedien en dit word net meer elke dag. Die eerste keer was deur Bruce Lawson op 1 Jan tot 5 Jan 2009 vir 'n pentad naby Pafuri en dit was 202.

Onthou as jy 'n lys begin vir 'n pentad, mag jy slegs oor 'n maksimum van 5 dae kyk en minimum 2 volle ure. 'n Pentad is 5min by 5min groot, dis rofweg 'n 9km by 9km blok.

Outings / Uitstappies

- 07 Feb - Night drive and picnic in the Polokwane Game Reserve (LG)
- 14 - 16 Feb - Tolwe Atlas Bash on the farm Lyons near Baltimore (JG & RvT)
- 27 Feb - Arrival of a new bird in town! (JG)
- 01 - 02 Mar - Bird Ringing Day in the Polokwane Game Reserve with Derek Engelbrecht and Billy Atard (RvT & DE)
- 04 March - Monthly meeting at the Golf Club
- 08 March - Day outing to GomoGomo near Pienaarsrivier (RvT)
- 14 - 16 March - Bushveld Tree Identification at Shonodoro Lodge near Nybostroom, (LG)
- 20 - 23 March - Limpopo Honorary Rangers present the Shimuwini Banda Birding Bash in the KNP (CH)

Contact Persons

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