

THE

LARK

Bird of the Year 2022
Cape Gannet

Lekgalameetse
club outing

Joe's Food Forest
for birds

BBD 2021
Wat-kyk-Jy
Overall winners

BBD 2021
feedback

African Pygmy Kingfisher and Baboon Spiders • A leucistic White-crested Helmet-shrike • Arrow-marked Babbler nesting period – additional observations • White-backed Vulture resightings • Swamp Nightjar. The rarest and most geographically restricted nightjar in southern Africa • Weavers and Sausage Trees • Notes on the breeding of Ashy Tit



Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa



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 FEBRUARY 2022

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

COVER Cape Gannet - Birdlife SA Bird of the Year 2022 © Derek Engelbrecht

CONTENT

The Lark 39 January/February 2022

Editorial 4

Regulars

Birds in Art 37

Blue-spotted Wood Dove

Reflections 43

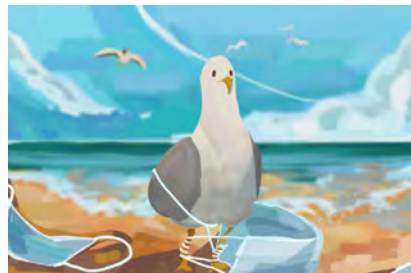
Thulamila and the S93 ...
A Cinderella Story

Bird Briefs 57

African Pygmy Kingfisher and Baboon Spiders • A leucistic White-crested Helmetshrike • Arrow-marked Babbler nestling period - additional observations • White-backed Vulture resightings • Swamp Nightjar. The rarest and most geographically restricted nightjar in southern Africa • Weavers and Sausage Trees • Notes on the breeding of Ashy Tit

Interesting Sightings 93

Upcoming events 101



Featured

Daar bo in die berge 5

Charles Hardy reports back on the club outing to Lekgalameetse Nature Reserve in the Wolkberg.

Food forest for birds 13

While we are still coming to terms with the tragic loss of our friend Joe Grosel, **Monika O'Leary** and the West Rand Honorary Rangers created a Food Forest in Punda Maria in Joe's memory.

Wat Kyk Jy - BBD feedback 19

Crown princes for many years, it was BBD team Wat-Kyk-Jy that got the top spot in the overall category on BBD 2021. **Rowan Van Tonder** tells us about their day.

BBD 2021 29

All the Birdlife Polokwane teams' trials and tribulations.

For a lark ...



It's a scaly neighbourhood © Jody De Bruyn

P.O. Box 699

Fauna Park 0787

Tel: 015 263 6473

www.birdlifepolokwane.co.za

www.facebook.com/birdlifepolokwane



PRESIDENT Joe Grosel • **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 CO-ORDINATOR** Lisa Grosel • **EVENTS CO-ORDINATOR** Richter Van Tonder • **RESEARCH AND MONITORING** Derek Engelbrecht • **NEWSLETTER EDITORS** Raelene Engelbrecht and Daniel Engelbrecht • **ADDITIONAL MEMBERS** Minkie Prinsloo, Conrad Van Tonder, Willem Van der Merwe, Les Reynolds, Johan Janse van Vuuren

Editors' chirps

Like every calendar year, 2021 had its ups and downs. The downs were devastating, with two of our club's stalwarts, Thomas Pretorius and Joe Grosel, passing away during the year. Several other members lost friends or family members, and our thoughts are with all of you. We trust that you will find comfort in the many special memories you have of your loved ones.

As a club, we made headway in 2021, returning to some form of normality. We had several face-to-face club meetings and many well-attended club outings. Clearly, people need nature in these testing times. Quite a few of us added substantially to our life list (or whatever list you keep), and that elusive bogey bird may have been knocked off its pedestal - just to be replaced by a new one! Congratulations to all of you. To many of us, birding is simply our escape to experience the joy of being in nature and appreciating life in all its many forms.

This issue, once again, has something to offer for everyone. Reports of club outings and BBD experiences bear testimony to the Limpopo Province as a world-class birding destination. Our Bird Briefs section is filled with various natural history notes showing fascinating and rarely seen behaviours of the objects of our affection. These natural history notes are of tremendous value to better understand and appreciate our birds. So, if you have something interesting to share with us, then make it one of your New Year's resolutions for 2022. The added incentive is that your note may be cited in the new Roberts Birds of Southern Africa currently under revision and will be available to future birders for generations to come. Make that one of your legacies. Open those folders and start going through your photos and dusty notebooks and start writing.

Raelene and Daniel



Daar Bo in die Berge

Charles Hardy

Lekgalameetse Nature Reserve © Richter Van Tonder

The Lekgalameetse Nature Reserve offers beautiful and dramatic mountain scenery and interesting and diverse birding opportunities. It is for these very reasons that 11 in-

trepid birders made an early morning start on the 26th October 2021 to this unique corner of our province.

We were greeted at the entrance gate by a juvenile African Harrier-Hawk and the ever-present sounds

of a Piet-My-Vrou (Red-chested Cuckoo) and Black-collared Barbet. The group's early morning start was rewarded with excellent sightings along the Selati River in the Lowveld section of the reserve.

A stop at a beautiful waterfall provided a fantastic visual sighting of a pair of the usually secretive Grey Cuckooshrike on a nest in a Matumi Tree. Not to be outdone, a Cape Batis was showing off and doing his



ABOVE Lekgalameetse Nature Reserve is breathtakingly beautiful © Richter Van Tonder.

LEFT A Cape Batis kept us entertained with its mating display © Jody De Bruyn.

OPPOSITE ABOVE *Aloeides swanepoeli*, the Grassveld Russet © Richter Van Tonder

OPPOSITE BELOW A Crowned Eagle - always a great bird to see © Jody De Bruyn.





LEFT The normally shy and skittish Grey Cuckooshrike was one of the highlights of the outing. A pair was constructing one of their exquisite nests in a Matumi near one of the waterfalls © Richter Van Tonder.

BELOW The top end of the Orrie Baragwanath pass is an excellent area for highland birding © Richter Van Tonder.



mating display openly in a nearby tree. Other interesting birds identified were Collared Sunbird, Lesser Honeyguide and Knysna Turaco. This stop also provided the opportunity for our dedicated birders to indulge in their new-found interest in photographing and identifying the numerous butterfly species that abound in this forest habitat.

The drive up the Orrie Baragwanath Pass and into the wilderness area at the top of the mountain pro-

vided spectacular scenery. Here we were treated to a wonderful sighting of a Nicholson's Pipit followed by a Wing-snapping Cisticola displaying before descending and perching on a nearby rock, offering great photo opportunities. A walk up the rocky slope, with many interesting montane plant species, was rewarded with an excellent sighting of a Crowned Eagle and White-necked Raven whilst numerous Cape Vultures, a Jackal Buzzard and a Brown



Snake Eagle dotted the sky. Other species seen were Rock Martin, Common House Martin and Alpine Swift, and the montane special, the Buff-streaked Chat. Also not to be forgotten were the numerous and

interesting butterfly species seen and photographed for later identification.

The day culminated with some folks heading off to seek out more plant species whilst others headed back down the pass, past the rock-fall and back into the Lowveld to check out a few more species before taking the road home.

Special thanks go to Richter and Jody for leading this enjoyable birding day in a unique and beautiful setting with birding friends.

Author e-mail: charlois@mweb.co.za

The highlands delivered the goods with excellent views of some local montane specials, the boulder-loving Buff-streaked Chat (LEFT © Jody De Bruyn) and a grassland special, the Wing-snapping Cisticola (OPPOSITE BOTTOM © Richter Van Tonder).



© Julia Friskin



FLY FREE

This food forest is dedicated to a phenomenal naturalist, ornithologist, teacher and mentor, Joe Grosel.

He imparted his wealth of knowledge about our natural world, and birds in particular, to countless aspiring guides and lovers of nature.

May his spirit live on through each bird that is sustained by these trees, and every birder who delights in them.

11/06/1966 – 14/08 2021.

FOOD FOREST FOR BIRDS

In memory of Joe Grosel

Monika O'Leary

Dedicated: Sunday, 21 November 2021
Punda Maria Rest Camp, Kruger National Park

Five trees were purchased at the Skukuza Nursery and transported to Punda Maria Rest Camp, over the course of 2 days. An effort was made to buy the largest

trees available at the nursery, as no plants may be brought in from outside of the Kruger National Park. The trees that are known to occur in the northern Kruger National Park were chosen primarily



ABOVE A fig tree with the plaque. The inscription on the plaque can be seen OPPOSITE © Monika O'Leary.

for their fruit and to attract birds. Several large trees had died on the upper terrace of Punda Maria camp, and we were kindly offered this space to plant the new saplings.

It had been extremely hot and dry leading up to the 19th November, but luckily the weather broke, and a light drizzle started falling on Friday morning. After marking the sites, the camp Hospitality Manager, Garth Holt, kindly arranged for a big hole to be dug for each of the trees, and several crates of well-composted mulch were placed at our disposal. It drizzled on and off all Sat-

urday morning, making it ideal weather for tree planting. The young plants were protected from grazing antelope and hopefully monkeys by sturdy steel mesh guards.

A short dedication ceremony was held on Sunday morning, during a steady shower of rain to join our tears. This was attended by Lisa and Jade Grosel, John Adamson, Rose and Mike Crouch, Cheryl Haley, Keith and Monika O'Leary.

Altogether, five trees were planted in the memory of Joe, and an information plaque was placed onto a granite block next to the central Knobbly Fig Tree. The remaining trees were placed in a semi-circle, surrounding the fig tree. In an anti-clockwise direction, starting from the tree closest to the road, they are: Pod Mahogany *Azelia quansensis*, Tasselberry *Antidesma venosum*, Blue Sweetberry *Bridelia cathartica*, Knobbly Fig *Ficus sansibarica*, Mitzeeri *Bridelia micrantha*.

Those friends who knew and respected Joe are welcome to visit the Food Forest for Birds when visiting Punda Maria Rest Camp and, if necessary, water them. I'd be happy to get feedback on their well-being and progress.

Sincere thanks to all those incredibly kind donors who made contributions to this project.

Author e-mail: monikaoleary01@gmail.com

BELOW The newly established Food Forest for Birds in Punda Maria Rest Camp. Remember J.O.E. - Just One Earth.



EISH, I DIDN'T KNOW!

Carcasses or parts of carcasses **contaminated with lead from ammunition** and placed at vulture restaurants or otherwise left in the veld may **poison vultures, ground hornbills & other scavengers.**

YOU can help by using **lead-free alternatives** and/or by **removing** any potentially lead-contaminated carcasses from the veld.

Pb LEAD TASK TEAM South Africa

BIRD OF THE YEAR 2022



Cape Gannet
Morus capensis
Regional status:
Vulnerable
Global IUCN status:
Endangered

Daniel Danckwerts

BirdLife South Africa is pleased to announce the Cape Gannet (*Morus capensis*) as Bird of the Year for 2022.

Gannets are spectacular high-speed diving birds. With their unusually narrow-set eyes and exquisitely painted faces, these birds are as unmistakable as they are beautiful. They feed primarily on sardine and anchovy; small schooling fish which form the basis of the food chain.

To compete with the many other seabirds, fish and mammals that also chase after these fish, they plunge dive to depths of over 20 metres. To do this they hover some 30 metres up in the air, spot a fish, and

plummet head-first towards it. They can reach speeds of up to 100 km per hour by streamlining their body, extending their wings backwards before literally cutting the water surface with their sharp beaks!

The Cape Gannet is an excellent ambassador to highlight two of the most pressing conservation issues facing South Africa's seabirds. Cape Gannets breed on only six islands across South Africa and Namibia. Their population has decreased by over 50% in the last 60 years, resulting in the species being listed as Endangered. Cape Gannets are threatened by the lack of sardine and anchovy due to the combination

of a shift in the distribution of the fish populations and competition with one of the most important commercial fisheries in South Africa. To compensate, gannets often resort to feeding on hake discards thrown off the back of trawl vessels. This is however a double-edged sword; they are vulnerable to becoming tangled in the fishing nets and, while the discards are enough to support the feeding requirements of adults, the lower fat content of hake is not sufficient to raise healthy chicks.

Throughout 2022, BirdLife South Africa will create awareness about the



© Derek Engelbrecht

Cape Gannet through the production of an informative poster, the development of learning resources for schools that are free to download from the BirdLife South Africa website (www.birdlife.org.za), articles in African Birdlife magazine, social media posts, presentations to interested groups, and the sale of merchandise. Cape Gannet merchandise (t-shirts, pin badges, plush toys) will be on sale through the Shop for the Birds from January 2022 (<https://shop.birdlife.org.za>).

The Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust is the sponsor of Bird of the Year 2022.

Author e-mail: media@birdlife.org.za



WAT-KYK-JY

Birding Big Day 2021 Trip Report

Rowan Van Tonder

MAIN SPREAD The legendary Dawn Chorus Koppie in the Polokwane Game Reserve © Marcia Van Tonder.

This year again, building up towards BBD on the 27th November 2021, weather forecasts for the preceding four days predicted that there

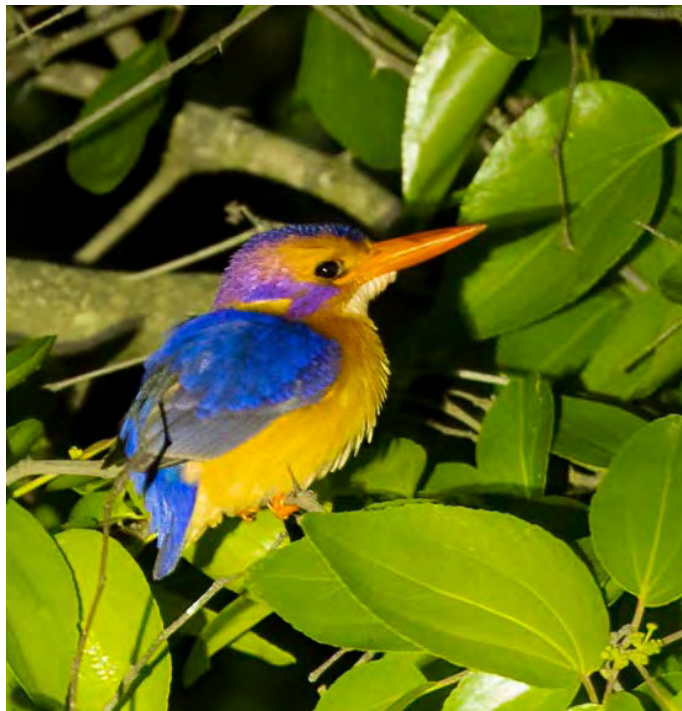
would be a lot of sweating. Fortunately, a moisture influx hit the northern part of South Africa, and with it came much cooler weather. Polokwane and its surrounding en-

vironment through Haenertsburg to the Lowveld, were cold and wet. Polokwane, in particular, experienced strong, cold winds and the occasional *keeza* (meaning light

rain/mist rain). Magoebaskloof, as predicted, was very wet, with the muddiest roads on our route. From Tzaneen, however, and to the end of our route, we were bathed in bril-



ABOVE Common Buttonquail
© Jody De Bruyn.



LEFT African Pygmy Kingfisher
© Jody De Bruyn.

liant sunshine. We did not expect that at all. Richter and Jody mainly did the recce work needed; from the beginning of November until the Friday before the big day. Again, we realised the importance of scoping out the region along our route to be prepared for what to find and where, including back-up spots if needed.



ABOVE We capitalized on an influx of Great Spotted Cuckoos into the Polokwane region this year © Jody De Bruyn.

We decided to start at 0:00 am, gambling with curfew time this year. Yes, 12 o'clock midnight! We all probably got about 3 hours' worth of sleep in, at best. At 0:01am we (Richter, Rowan and Marcia) met Jody and set off to do some owl hunting and anything we could wake/spot at that time. Our first bird of the day was African Sacred Ibis. Again, this particular night route has lived up to being called the 'Owl Road'. Here we found Western Barn Owl, Marsh Owl and Pearl-spotted Owlet in no time. We also got Rufous-cheeked Nightjar on this road. In terms of

owls and nightjars, we smashed all our targeted species, except for Southern White-faced Owl, but this year managed to include Freckled Nightjar. Insane to think this species was under our noses all the time. On our way to the usual gathering haunt of all the teams competing in this area, we stopped at the Dries Abrahamse Lapa's waterhole for a Green Sandpiper that arrived in the area a week before.

No cigar but we managed to find an African Pygmy Kingfisher. From our start at 12 midnight to just before our dawn chorus site at 4:20 am, we managed to get 23 species, 12 species fewer than last year at the same time. That was due to cold weather we were experiencing. As usual everybody 'checked in' at the communal BBD 'Dawn Chorus Koppie'. Unfortunately, this year without Zonke iNyoni. Again, it did not disappoint and we added 40 species to our list.

The Polokwane Game Reserve is a gem when it comes to bird-

ing in a relatively small area. I will advise anyone to visit here if they are keen birders and love nature in general. We managed to get to 141 on our list before leaving the reserve at 8:10 am. It was about the same score as last year, at this stage, with unfavourable weather conditions! Birds of note were: Cape Penduline Tit, Short-clawed Lark, Icterine Warbler, Bearded Woodpecker, Bushveld Pipit, African

BELOW Red-billed Oxpeckers on an Eland in the Polokwane Game Reserve © Jody De Bruyn.



Wattled Lapwing, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Tinkling Cisticola, Short-toed Rock Thrush and Purple Indigobird.

We then covered sections of Polokwane City before heading to our next leg of this race. Unlike last year we decided to skip Sterkloop Dam. In this hour we advanced to 171. Our next stop was at Vencor Feedlot and Abattoir and Doornbult farm. These sites, in our minds, are very crucial areas on our route, and it didn't disappoint. We picked up all our possible waders, raptors, and ducks for the area. Then BAM! We hit the 200-mark at 10 am! Our fastest to 200 ever on BBD, with cold and semi-wet weather. Before

ABOVE A key site on our route is the Doornbult Feedlot and Abattoir © Jody De Bruyn.

leaving Polokwane, we visited the Polokwane Sewerage Treatment Plant. This stage was covered from 10:30 am to 10:55 am, and we managed to stretch our total to 215. With the mercury not really rising and the wind still playing a factor, we ended this leg ten species ahead of last year's total at the same stage of our route. Suddenly we asked ourselves: what is happening that we were just adding to the total no matter the conditions? Our target of breaking our previous best score was taking root. Birds of note were

Marabou Stork, Yellow-billed Kite, Pied Avocet, Marsh Warbler, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Terrestrial Brownbul, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, Abdim's Stork, Black-crowned Night Heron and Yellow-crowned Bishop.

The Makotopong and Sebayeng wetlands were our next stop, reached via a detour on the Solomondale road. At this time, the midday hours were racing past and it gave us a breather for some much-needed refreshments and pick-me-ups handed by Marcia.

BELOW Southern Bald Ibis in Mankweng © Jody De Bruyn.



ABOVE Cape Parrots were seen on the escarpment leg of our route © Jody De Bruyn.



These arid areas with open veld, croplands and wetlands are critical to our success on the day due to its location and the diversity of birds found in and around this area. We covered this part in about an hour and ten minutes and managed to push our total to 227. Birds of note were Lilac-breasted Roller, Ant-eating Chat, Yellow Canary, Red-capped Lark, Shaft-tailed Whydah, Intermediate Egret, Great Egret, Blue-billed Teal, African Snipe and Southern Pochard. We also managed to clinch Southern Bald Ibis on its nest and Little Bee-eater at

the Mankweng Sewerage Treatment Plant.

We then made a bee-line for Randfontein, Veekraal, Silvermist, Haenertsburg and Georges Valley. The time it took was between 1:00 pm to 2:07 pm and in this hour our total moved to 259.

We were astounded when we realized we were about 14 species ahead of our previous year's total at the same point in time. And 2020 was widely regarded as the year with the best conditions ever for BBD in our area. Birds of note were: White-necked Raven, Red-capped Robin-Chat, Lazy Cisticola, Common Buttonquail,

Drakensberg Prinia, Lizard Buzzard, African Yellow Warbler, Alpine Swift, Eurasian Hobby and Wailing Cisticola. We then rushed to some proper forest sections, including the famous Woodbush Forest Drive area and Rooikoppies. Ideally, one would want a bit of mist to come in because then the forest species come alive ... and we had that in spades! We also pondered that it must have stopped raining about half an hour to an hour



ABOVE African Skimmer would be near the top of anyone's BBD list of memorable sightings © Jody De Bruyn.

before we got there. The roads were a testament to that. The species played along beautifully, and we bumped our total up to 290 between 2:10 pm and 3:55 pm, before heading to Tzaneen. Birds of note were: Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Olive Thrush, Olive Woodpecker, Orange Ground Thrush, Black-fronted Bushshrike, Chorister Robin-Chat, Brown Scrub Robin, Cape Parrot (saw 50 of them in one tree!), Barratt's Warbler, Narina Trogon, Grey Cuckooshrike, Red-faced Cisticola, White-starred Robin and Black Saw-wing.

Tzaneen and some of the Lowveld sites further east were next along our route. Now already 15 species ahead of our 2020 total at this stage, we moved along swiftly to our next stop. This leg included Macadamia, the Tzaneen Dam wall, Pierre Homan's farm, Letaba Estates, Taganashoek environs, and Ledzee road. As we entered Tzaneen, the skies cleared, and we had

brilliant sunshine and unbelievable sceneries. With temperatures only at around 20° Celsius, the Lowveld was bursting with activity. When we left the Tzaneen Dam wall to go into the Lowveld proper, we broke the 300-mark - an Emerald-spotted Wood Dove near the Tzaneen Dam Wall. Again, fastest ever to this point! We were starting to believe that we could equal or break the record for this route with the species left to find and even maybe have the highest total for this year's BBD. Our energy levels started to rise again in anticipation. We ended this leg on the Taganashoek road around 7:15 pm and were overjoyed to be on 325! Already 13 species more than our previous best. Birds of note

were: Red-backed Mannikin, Magpie Mannikin, Wire-tailed Swallow, Grey-rumped Swallow, Bearded Scrub Robin, Broad-billed Roller, Yellow-throated Longclaw, African Green Pigeon, Croaking Cisticola, Red-headed Weaver, White-crested Helmetshrike, Gorgeous Bushshrike, African Skimmer, Square-tailed Nightjar and Water Thick-knee.

What was left was Agatha Forest, where we usually find Bat Hawk, and we did at around 8:18 pm. We also managed to pick up African Wood Owl at this location. Now on 327, the only other bird typically targeted this late at night is Buff-spotted Flufftail. Again, we went to a reliable spot around Magoebaskloof Hotel and, surprise surprise, there it was calling its heart out. On our way back to Polokwane, we decided to try for a Fan-tailed Grassbird in George's Valley one last time - and we succeeded. On 329 at 9:21

pm, we decided to try one last time to find a Southern White-faced Owl near Polokwane and beat the highest previous score by one bird, but we dipped again. We didn't mind as we were dead tired but overjoyed at the same time for reaching this total of 329.

We ended the day back in Polokwane at around 11:15 pm. All in all, it was a fantastic day's birding and reaching that magical 300 again made it so much more special. Thank you to Marcia, who was our scribe and source for sustenance again.

I say it every time, but I'll say it again: I will not easily exchange these team members for anyone. We have been birding this road together for 10 years now, and we are gelling brilliantly together. We all instinctively understand each person's mannerisms and ticks by now. Onward and upward!

Post script: The WAT-KYK-JY team dedicate this effort and BBD 2021 to the late Joe Grosel, a mentor to me and a stalwart of this BBD route.

Author e-mail: rowan.vantonder@gmail.com

BELOW Been there, did it and has a dirty car to show it © Marcia Van Tonder.



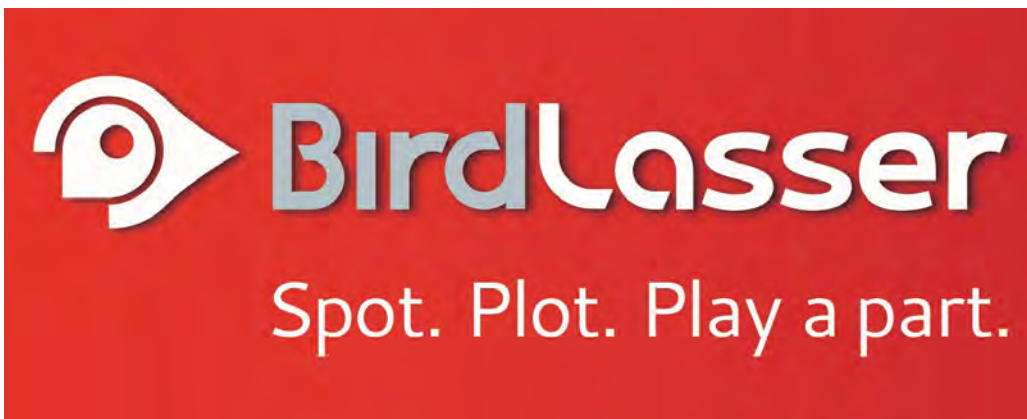


Birding **BIG** day



2021

All the Birdlife Polokwane teams, all the results



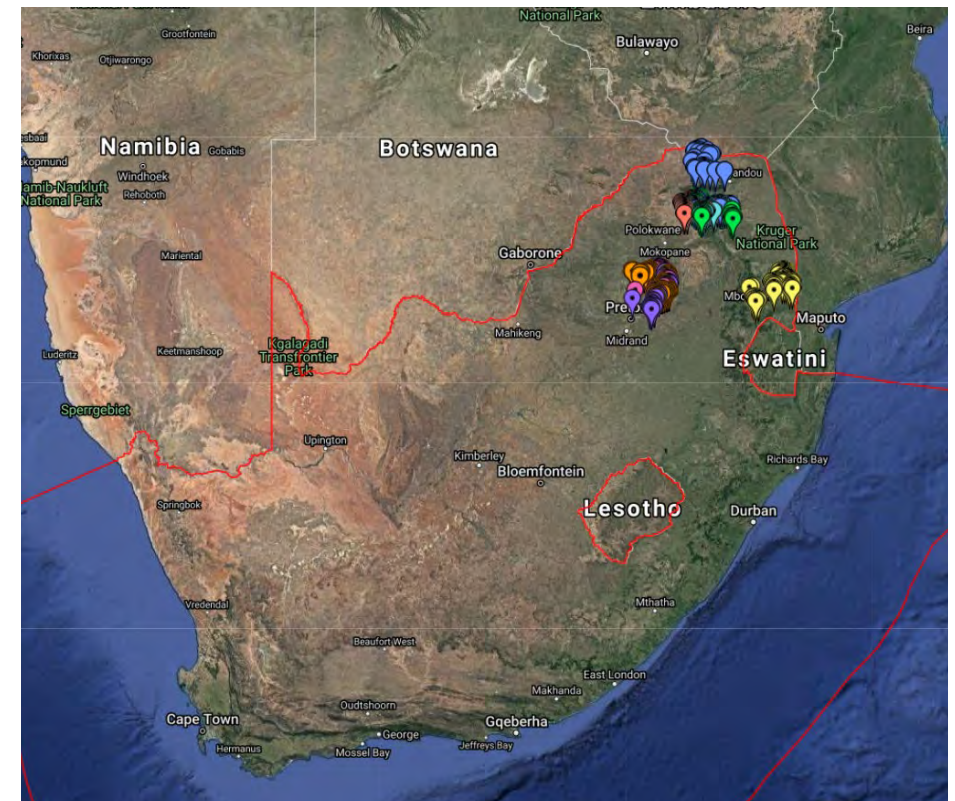
Big Birding Day 2021 on the 27th November 2021 saw five teams from Birdlife Polokwane participating. As always, many teams opted for the popular Polokwane Plateau-Escarpment-Lowveld route. As in 2020, Birdlife Polokwane had three teams in the Top 10 overall: Wat Kyk Jy (overall winners), The E-birders (overall second place) and the Red Billed Rocket Tails (overall eighth place). Four of the Top 10 teams in the country operated along the Polokwane Plateau-Escarpment-Lowveld region, once again showcasing our area as one of southern

Africa's premier birding hotspots. An impressive 402 species were recorded on the day by the teams birding the Polokwane-Escarpment-Lowveld region! What's more, six teams surpassed the 300 mark in 2021, and three of those covered the Polokwane to the Lowveld route.

Well done to all the teams involved, especially to the 2021 national winners, Wat-Kyk-Jy.

A summary of the Birdlife Polokwane teams' results follow.

BELOW The areas covered by the Top 10 teams in BBD 2021.



WAT-KYK-JY

3 2 9



MEMBERS:

Jody De Bruyn, Rowan, Richter and Marcia Van Tonder

AREA:

Polokwane-Woodbush-Letsitele

HIGHLIGHTS:

African Pygmy Kingfisher (Dwergvisvanger), Peregrine Falcon (Swerfvalk), Purple Indigobird (Witpootblouvinkie), Eurasian Hobby (Europese Boomvalk), Crowned Eagle (Kroonarend), African Skimmer (Waterploëer)

Dips:

Southern White-faced Owl (Witwanguil), Yellow-billed Duck (Geelbekeend), Green Wood Hoopoe (Rooibekkekelaar), Little Sparrowhawk (Kleinsperwer), Woolly-necked Stork (Wolnekoovievaar) and Red-chested Flufftail (Rooiborsvleikuiken). Joe Grosel - we missed him and his team on the route as we always met them at certain points.



Pied Avocet © Jody De Bruyn



Lesser Honeyguide © Jody De Bruyn

THE E-BIRDERS

3 2 6



MEMBERS:

Daniel and Derek Engelbrecht, Selwyn Rautenbach

AREA:

Polokwane-Woodbush-Letsitele

HIGHLIGHTS:

Burchell's Sandgrouse, Western Osprey, Arnot's Chat, African Skimmer, Bronze-winged Courser, Eurasian Hobby, improving our previous best score by 21 birds.

Dips:

Green-winged Pytilia (second consecutive year!), African Firefinch, White-necked Raven, Long-crested Eagle, Square-tailed Nightjar, Bearded Woodpecker, Ashy Flycatcher.



Arnot's Chat © Daniel Engelbrecht



Western Osprey © Daniel Engelbrecht

RED BILLED ROCKET TAILS

27-4



MEMBERS:

Mark, Julia and James Friskin, Willie Van der Merwe

AREA:

Polokwane-Woodbush-Letsitele

HIGHLIGHTS:

Knob-billed Duck, Common Quail (unexpectedly while taking a comfort break, so while I was wanting some privacy the entire team ran towards me pursuing the quail and me standing embarrassed in the spotlight), Harlequin Quail, Blue-billed Teal, Tawny Eagle and Red-headed Weaver.

Dips:

Black-headed Oriole, Woodland Kingfisher, Yellow-billed Duck, Red-billed Firefinch, Red-billed Oxpecker, Black-fronted Bushshrike and Square-tailed Nightjar.



Team Red Billed Rocket Tails

THE DIKKOPS

#29

21-5

MEMBERS:

Stan Madden (94) Bruce Goetsch (81) Rob Crosbie (69), Charles Hardy (77).

AREA:

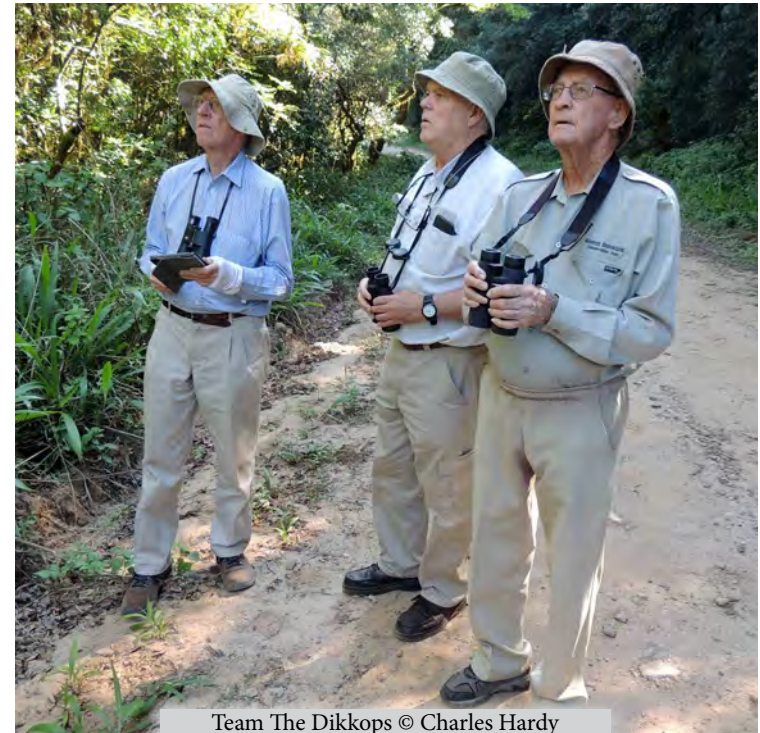
Polokwane-Woodbush-Letsitele

HIGHLIGHTS:

Sighting of the day was a flock of over 40 Cape Parrots flying around and sitting in a dead tree. Other interesting sightings were African Black Ducks on the Doornbult Dam, African Wattled Lapwings and two Knysna Turacos that gave us a great show in the forest.

Dips:

Bronze Mannikins, Black-backed Puffback and, most unfortunately, we did not get a Water Dikkop. We don't recognise the name Thick-knees!



Team The Dikkops © Charles Hardy

COUNTING CROWS

#36

2017

MEMBERS:

Minkie and Neléne Prinsloo, Riana Odendaal, Amri Van Aarde

AREA:

Polokwane-Woodbush-Letsitele

HIGHLIGHTS:

Spike-heeled Lark, African Wood Owl, African Cuckoo-Hawk, a very photogenic, soaking-wet Long-crested Eagle, Purple Heron and a family of Egyptian Geese being chased by a hippo.

Dips:

The list is way too long but it includes the likes of Cape Wagtail and African Fish-Eagle, need I go on. ...



Long-crested Eagle © Minkie Prinsloo



African Wattled Lapwing © Neléne Prinsloo



VULTURE RESCUE SEASON

PLEASE BE EXTRA AWARE OF
GROUNDED VULTURES



Vulture chicks are starting to take flight & leave their nests for the first time...

... this means that there is an increased chance that they get injured or become grounded



IF YOU SEE AN **INJURED OR GROUNDED**
VULTURE, PLEASE **CONTACT US**
IMMEDIATELY

Emergency number: +27 82 808 5113
Available all hours



Regulars

Birds in Art

Blue-spotted Wood Dove

Text and Artwork

Willem Van der Merwe

Blue-spotted Wood Dove

This is a painting I made to commemorate my first sighting of this delightful little dove in Venda some years ago, thanks to our excellent bird guide Samson Mulaudzi. The Blue-spotted

Wood Dove *Turtur afer* is a very rare species in South Africa, indeed almost exclusively occurring in the very far north-east corner of South Africa. But outside our country, it is more common and widespread, occurring over most

of tropical Africa, as far north as Ethiopia. It is a bird of moist woodland, forest and evergreen thickets. In other countries, it occasionally ranges into gardens, farms and tree plantations, but here in South Africa, it usually sticks to pristine habitats.

Blue-spotted Wood Dove belongs to a group of small doves that are restricted to Africa. Two

other species, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove and Black-billed Wood Dove are extremely similar and they can be difficult to distinguish in the wild if light conditions are poor. Two other species, the Tambourine Dove and the Blue-headed Wood Dove are somewhat dissimilar in appearance but still closely related to it. Finally, the Namaqua Dove is also



The iridescent wing spots on *Turtur* species can change colour depending on the angle of view. Some of the green spots on the Emerald-spotted Wood Dove (ABOVE) appear blue, but compare the colour of the bill with that of a Blue-spotted Wood Dove (LEFT)
© Derek Engelbrecht

related to the wood doves, but differs in being smaller, longer-tailed, and strongly sexually dimorphic. It also occurs outside of Africa on the great island of Madagascar. It is usually classified in its own genus. All of the wood doves and the Namaqua Dove have, in addition to the iridescent wing spots, bright chestnut primary feathers on their wings that show clearly when they fly. In Afrikaans, some decades ago, we also called the wood doves 'rooivlerkduifies'. The wood doves and the Namaqua Dove are possibly related to a group of Asian and Australian doves that often have iridescent feathers on their wings, such as the Emerald Dove and the bronzewings.

Though they can be tame and confiding, these wood doves tend to be humble and shy and thus don't draw much attention to themselves. Most of the time, their presence is given away by their call. All of the wood doves have similar calls, consisting of a series of low hoots, starting slow and then speeding up, ending in a rapid staccato. While this tells you you're listening to a wood dove, determining which wood dove it is, is more tricky. There are subtle differences between the timing and the pitch of the calls, but this is not very reliable in the field. To some degree, habitat helps: the Blue-spotted Wood Dove inhab-

its moister woodlands and forests than the Emerald-spotted Wood Dove does, but not the dense forests that house the Tambourine Dove. But there's some overlap between all three. Thus, it's best to see the dove and note its visual features. The tambourine dove has a striking dark brown and white facial pattern, distinguishing it immediately. That leaves, in South Africa, the Emerald-spotted and the Blue-spotted, which look incredibly similar. The Blue-spotted Wood Dove can, in good light, be seen to have iridescent dark purplish-blue spots on its wings, whereas those of the Emerald-spotted Wood Dove are dark green. The Blue-spotted also has a reddish bill with a yellow tip, while that of the Emerald-spotted is black. We were lucky when we saw our dove that all these features were indeed visible so that we could confirm its identity.

Although it inhabits woodland, thickets and forests, the Blue-spotted Wood Dove feeds mainly on the ground. Walking placidly about open spots such as clearings or forest paths, it pecks up seeds of grasses and some other plants, including the invasive castor oil bushes. It can sometimes feed in fallow fields of cassava and other crops. It also feeds on some animal food, such as insects and small snails. It typically feeds singly or in pairs. When



feeding is good in a particular area, doves may congregate in small flocks. When frightened, these doves will rise with loud wing claps and rapidly fly directly away into dense vegetation, ducking and diving amidst the branches and leaves.

ABOVE The objects of many a local birder's affection - the brilliant sapphire spots of a Blue-spotted Wood Dove © Derek Engelbrecht.

Loud wing claps also feature in the wood dove's display flight. Indeed, it is similar to the dis-

play flights of many larger dove and pigeon species. First, audibly clapping its wings, the wood dove flies upwards at a steep angle; then, it stops clapping, instead extending its wings out sideways and keeping them stiff as it glides down again. This show is visible to other wood doves to inform them of the identity of the territory holder. Wood doves tend to be resident, but in some African countries, they are migratory, moving into certain areas only during the rainy season, such as Mali, which is mostly a dry country, retreating southwards to moister regions when the dry season commences.

In their breeding behaviour, wood doves are similar to other doves and pigeons. Pairs are faithful to each other, strengthening their bond by mutual preening and bill-touching. They build stick nests that look flimsy but are surprisingly stable, in trees or bushes not very high from the ground and typically at the edge of the forest. The nest can be lined

with rootlets and soft animal hair or plant fibres. The female lays two cream-coloured eggs, and she and the male both incubate them. The chicks are fed on 'pigeon milk', a special secretion from the lining of the crop, which is a unique feature found in the entire pigeon and dove family. Pigeon milk is rich in fats and proteins. The chicks are given progressively more insects and seeds to eat as they grow older. They fledge at the age of about two weeks.

In the whole of southern Africa, the Blue-spotted Wood Dove is rare and restricted to small regions of suitable habitat. It is vulnerable to deforestation, but at least in South Africa, forest and woodlands are fairly well protected. It is common in the rest of tropical Africa, only avoiding dry and treeless regions. It is not threatened with extinction.

Acknowledgements I thank my friend Jody De Bruyn for permission to use his photo as a reference for this painting.

Author e-mail: willemsvandermerwe@gmail.com

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:

Reflections

REFLECTIONS

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

Thulamila and the S93... A Cinderella Story

TEXT AND PHOTOS Chris Patton

It seemed appropriate that in this post-festive season edition of *The Lark* we should look for a good pantomime story ... and what better than a real Cinderella location.

Among the birding community, the far north of the Kruger National Park is rightly hailed as one of the best and most accessible destinations to see a wide variety of subtropical bushveld and woodland species, both resident and summer migrants. Punda Maria Rest Camp and surrounds and the entire Pafuri area have local and international renown as top birding locations, and rightly so, as they both rarely disappoint.

But many birders entering Kruger National Park at the Punda Maria Gate (8 km southwest of the camp)

will head straight for the Camp on entering the Park. Granted, they are probably tired from a long road trip and just want to get to the sanctuary of their accommodation, and if time in the Park is limited may then turn their attention to drives to Pafuri, Klopperfontein, Babalala, or around the Mahonie Loop ... but so that readers know in that short distance of eight kilometres they are passing a real hidden gem just 1 km from the Gate. If time allows one should dedicate a morning or afternoon to explore this 'Cinderella' gem.

And that gem is the S93 to Thulamila (Venda for 'a conspicuous slope' (of the hill)). Thulamila should not to be confused with the similarly named Thulamela (Venda for 'that which grows out on top of a mountain' because of the ruins on



top of this hill) in the Pafuri region, where archaeological ruins were re-discovered as recently as 1981. Thulamila is a cultural heritage guided tour that visitors can book through Punda Maria Camp.

ABOVE The lie of the land in the Punda Maria region of the far northern Kruger National Park.

BELOW Flocking Amur Falcon can be found in the initial parts of the S93 in mid to late summer





Two reliable species that will be seen along the S93 are the Little Bee-eater (ABOVE) and the Golden-breasted Bunting (LEFT).



The turn-off onto the S93 gravel road to Thulamila from the tar road is only 1 km from Punda Maria Gate. But even in this first kilometre inside the Park, birders should have their wits about them. The steep hillside on the north side of the road can produce some

exciting stuff. I've seen Narina Trogon, Crowned Eagle and African Barred Owlet in this stretch, and once curiously had a male and female Black Cuckooshrike and a White-breasted Cuckooshrike in the same roadside tree.

The first kilometre of the S93 is a dead straight road on a relatively flat gradient. The hill slope on the left is not as close as that adjacent the tar road, and on the right is open grassy woodland. There is good general birding, particularly in summer, with migrant cuckoos, several rollers species, Violet-backed Starlings, Red-backed Shrikes and Rattling Cisticolas all likely to be prominent. Between mid-December and March, the

area is favoured by Amur Falcons in their non-breeding hiatus in Africa from the Amur Basin in Asia, apparently the non-pelagic bird with the longest migration flight over the open ocean.

Then after the initial flat stretch, the road comes to a dip, and invariably Little Bee-eater can be found here, and with their propensity for returning to the same perch, make excellent photographic subjects. Golden-breasted Bunting will also be around, and they too light up any camera lens.

BELOW Yellow-billed Oxpeckers are frequently encountered on wallowing buffaloes on the S93.





ABOVE The magnificent Sycamore Fig by the first loop on the S93 has a steady stream of avian activity.

After the dip, the road gradient increases and takes travellers up the slope of Thulamila ... but before that, there is a loop off to the right (east) of the road that navigates around a copse of trees

overlooking a marshy area with a magnificent Sycamore Fig. Even if there is nothing in sight at first, find a suitable place to stop, turn off the engine, sit and wait. You will not be disappointed.

The marshy area is created by a water seepage that is an absolute favourite with old buffalo bulls, and if they are not there when you arrive, the chances are they will

appear before too long and very likely plonk themselves down for a rest. These battle-scarred bovines have paid their dues and will sit quietly for hours on end ... and of course, where there are buffalo, there are always oxpeckers, sometimes Red-billed, but frequently Yellow-billed, and sometimes both together.

But the buffalo and the oxpeckers will not be the only attraction. There will be some action in the copse itself, but fo-

BELOW The water seepage by the loop around the copse of trees on the S93 will invariably have buffalo bulls and offers excellent chances of seeing both oxpecker species



cus your attention on the mighty Sycamore Fig that dominates the clearing. Many fruit-eating birds will be flying into the tree or will already be there and feeding furiously. Most prominent will be the African Green Pigeons which will provide non-stop traffic. Often they are obscured by the foliage of the tree, but with a bit of patience, some of them should move into view and show off their amazing colours.

The ripe fruit also attracts insects, and so too the frugivorous birds are matched, or perhaps su-

perseded by insectivorous ones and other species that love the stately boughs and the many crevices of the tree. And not just birds, but reptiles, mammals and many invertebrates provide such a diverse and busy ecosystem in the life of a wild fig.

This being the Far North of Kruger, some of the birds that pass

BELOW The African Green Pigeon has amazing colours that often get overlooked in their explosive and direct flights in and out of fruit trees.



ABOVE The pair of Mosque Swallow on the loop on the S93, the bottom bird with nest material.

through the fig will be the subtropical specials that make this part of the Park so popular. I haven't seen it there myself, but I know one of SA's top birders from Cape Town once spent a morning watching Southern Hyliota in this tree.

But one special I have spent a lot of time watching at this spot is the Mosque Swallow which nest in the area and will provide excellent views and photographic opportunities as they go about nest building.

And if you can tear yourself away from the delights of the Sycamore Fig Loop, the road up Thulamila itself still needs to be made, and although the surrounding growth can be a little dense and compromise the viewing potential of the incline, the rewards are worth it. Red-faced Cisticola

will be loud and raucous. In summer White-winged and Red-collared Widowbirds will be seen, the latter in particular not always the easiest species to find in the Park. The species to look out for as you scale this hill is the Eurasian Hobby. This migrant falcon can be seen throughout the Park, but in my experience, this is one of the most reliable places to see it in Kruger.

At the top of the incline is a communication mast and the road splits with a no-entry road leading further north along the Park's north-western boundary. Having travelled this road with



ABOVE The Eurasian Hobby on the slopes of Thulamila.

the local rangers a couple of times, I can share that it becomes quite a rough track. But the accessible split of the S93 on Thulamila ends in a loop in dense hillside vegetation. Travellers will now be on the Park's border with neighbouring Limpopo Province, and like the loop down below, the trick is not to be put off by any lack of obvious activity and to turn the engine off and wait. And you should not have to wait too long before some of the Park's more skulking birds of dense thickets start to call. Eastern Nicator with their rich watery warble will almost definitely

be heard, but so too should Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Bearded Scrub Robin, White-throated Robin-Chat and Orange-breasted Bushshrike.

Thulamila, like the Cinderella metaphor suggests, definitely deserves a lot more attention than it has traditionally got from birders, and I hope readers will be inclined to stake out this special little drive.

Author e-mail: chris.patton@sanparks.org



SOUTHERN GROUND-HORNBILLS

ON YOUR PROPERTY?

DO

- **Do** report any sightings with GPS coordinates.
- **Do** share any information and photo's.
- **Do** report and protect natural nests.
- **Do** cover all windows when left unattended for long periods.
- **Do** chase birds away from homesteads.
- **Do** report any sick or injured ground-hornbill to us so we can attempt to rehabilitate it as each and every one is precious.

DON'T

- **Don't** feed the birds.
- **Don't** use lead ammunition when hunting or remove all offal from the veld as lead is a neurotoxin
- **Don't** use pesticides in any other way than what is on the label.
- **Don't** disturb their nest site.
- **Don't** touch any dead ground-hornbill before you have made contact with us as it may be poisoned and as such a risk to you.



+27 (0) 83 289 8610

+27 (0) 79 754 6234



RENTALS



HENSA
PROPERTIES

TO LET / TE HUUR

MARCIA - 071 925 9829

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



Birdlife Polokwane merchandise

- Shopping bags @ R30-00
- Key rings/bottle opener @ R30-00
- Car license discs @ R10-00

Contact Julia Friskin
Mobile: 0839968841



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





www.birdingandwildifesafaris.com



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




<https://www.thebirdinglife.com/>



**'n Ware skatkis
van ou en nuwe
voëlname in
Afrikaans**

Kontak Billy Attard

 066 191 6708
vir jou kopie

**slegs
R20**

**ADVERTISING
SPACE AVAILABLE**

Contact Raelene Engelbrecht
082 468 9042

BIRD BRIEFS

African Pygmy Kingfisher and Baboon Spiders.
Hugh Chittenden

E-mail: hugh@rarebirds.co.za

A minor point regarding prey of the diminutive African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta*, but an interesting one. With the return of migrant African Pygmy Kingfishers from their winter grounds (central Africa) in October, I'm remind-

ed of their remarkable ability to successfully prey upon and regularly feed their chicks on baboon spiders!

BELOW One of the adult African Pygmy Kingfishers delivering baboon spider prey to its nestlings © Hugh Chittenden.



ABOVE The African Pygmy Kingfisher nest that was placed in a small bank within a *Eucalyptus* plantation © Hugh Chittenden.

In January 2017, I had the opportunity to photograph the prey being fed to African Pygmy Kingfisher nestlings on the outskirts of Mtunzini, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The nest was about one kilometre from the sea. The number of baboon spiders being delivered to the nest came as a complete surprise. Although I never recorded prey details at the time, it seemed that baboon spiders made up approximately 10% of the prey collected for the nestlings. Only one other spider species was brought to the nest. Judging by prey size, the nestlings were well developed when I located the nest.

Prey for the nestlings was collected in the adjacent coastal dune forest and then flown 100 meters through the plantation to the nest site. At no stage were the kingfishers observed hunting for prey within the *Eucalyptus* plantation.

The rate at which baboon spiders were delivered came as a surprise as these spiders seldom move far from their burrows, inhabit leaf litter (eastern KZN), and aren't the sort of invertebrate that one comes



This minute 13 g kingfisher is the smallest of our migratory non-passerines. It is not the smallest African kingfisher though. This honour befalls the African Dwarf Kingfisher, weighing in at between 9 and 11 g. After breeding they migrate north to central Africa, as far north as South Sudan. This equates to a round trip of 4 000 to 6 000 km per year!



across very often in eastern KZN. The kingfishers, however, have a remarkable ability to catch these cryptic ground-dwelling spiders, and it seems with relative ease. Also, I have never seen any other kingfisher, or bird species in the area, feeding baboon spiders to their nestlings!

ABOVE AND TOP I was amazed at the frequency at which they delivered baboon spiders to the nest © Hugh Chittenden.

RIGHT A baboon spider caught approximately 100 m away from the nest site. Before entering the nest cavity, the adults with prey would arrive at the nest site, perch for a minute or two to see that there were no predators in the vicinity © Hugh Chittenden.





ABOVE The bulk of the prey delivered to the nestlings, however, comprised of various other vertebrates and invertebrates, including small lizards, skinks, praying mantids, crickets and grasshoppers.

© Hugh Chittenden.

A leucistic White-crested Helmetshrike

Derek Engelbrecht

E-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

Plumage aberrations in birds come in a confusing array of forms. It is not always possible to unequivocally know the underlying cause or even what type of colour abnormality it is (Van Grouw 2013). All the most common colour aberrations can be traced down to a reduction in pigment, usually melanin. It gets complex as there are different types of melanin, and a mutation may only affect one type and leave the other unaffected. In short, describing a colour abnormality can be more tricky than generally realized.

On the 5th July 2010, I came upon a mixed flock of Retz's Helmetshrikes and White-crested Helmetshrikes in the Sand River gorge in the Soutpansberg. My attention was immediately drawn to an unusually pale White-crested Helmetshrike. This individual lacked any melanin in the remiges, rectrices and dorsal contour feathers. Apart from a pale bill (which I thought was also unusual), the head region appeared unaffected with re-

BELOW The leucistic White-crested Helmetshrike (LEFT) and one with normal plumage (RIGHT) © Derek Engelbrecht.



gard to the melanin production. The recurved crest and crown had the usual pale grey appearance, and the partial black collar was also unaffected by the reduction in melanin. The other bare parts, i.e., the eye wattles and legs, were also not affected. This individual was a lot wearier than his bolder family members and preferred to forage in denser vegetation. This was probably a survival strategy as it would be an easy visual target for any predator.

I failed to find any other records of leucistic helmetshrikes, so this observation seemingly presents the first record of a leucistic individual in this species.

References

Van Grouw H. 2013. What colour is that bird? The causes and recognition of common colour aberrations in birds. *British Birds* 106: 17–29.



A leucistic Violet-backed Starling

Jan-Louis Pretorius

E-mail: jlpretorius91@gmail.com

On Saturday 27 November 2021, my son Jan and two daughters Klara and Amelie proudly made our debut in the 2021 edition of BirdLife SA's Birding Big Day. Being complete novices, we decided to enter the 5 km radius challenge, focusing our efforts in the familiar surrounds of our citrus farm outside Letsitele, along the beautiful banks of the Letaba River.

Despite the unseasonably grey, cold and wet weather, we

set off with determination to record the full and diverse array of birds we are blessed to see regularly on the farm. Shortly after midday, with the sun breaking through the clouds and the tempo of new sightings for the day rapidly declining, our attention was suddenly drawn to a bird that immediately looked both familiar and unfamiliar at the

BELOW The partially leucistic female Violet-backed Starling © Jan Pretorius.



same time. Knowing that every bird counted, the pressure was on to make a quick and decisive identification.

My son, chief-in-charge of the camera, managed to capture a good photograph in the split second before the bird disappeared out of sight. Our initial state of excited confusion soon turned into disappointment as we zoomed in on his picture, only to realise that our mystery bird was in fact just a partially leucistic Violet-backed Starling!

Now although the dear starling was neither a lifer, nor a new sighting to add to our BBD list, it was the first time any of us had ever seen a wild bird with this rare condition. And, with inquisitive young birders making up the majority of our team, it presented us with a wonderful opportunity to read up on this condition and so improve our general understanding and appreciation for these incredible creatures. All that remains now is for the BBD organisers to award us a Bonus Point, don't you think? ;-)



Arrow-marked Babbler nestling period - additional observations

Derek Engelbrecht

E-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

In the previous issue of *The Lark*, I described the growth and development of Arrow-marked Babbler nestlings (Engelbrecht 2021). My observations of the duration of the nestling period (~13 days) seemed at odds with other records of the duration of the nestling period of this species (18–21 days, Monadjem et al. 1994). However, my findings were based on observations at a single nest and I conceded that 'despite my well-designed field protocol to minimize disturbance at the nest during data collection, my activity at the nest may have contributed to earlier than usual fledging'.

While I was writing that note, a pair of Arrow-marked Babblers were nesting in my garden. This time, the nest was inaccessible - approximately 6–7 m high in a *Strelitzia nicolai* bush. Frustratingly, I would not be able to get near the nest for monitoring purposes, but it didn't stop me from watching the parents go about their nesting duties.

On Sunday the 7th November 2021, I saw the tell-tale sign that the nestling/s must have hatched

- parents ferrying small invertebrate prey items to the nest. This continued until the morning of Sunday the 21st November 2021 when I found a drowned fledgling in our pool, about 5 m from the nest site. I inspected the dead bird, and using the development of the primaries (~60–75% in brush) as an indication of the age of the bird (see Engelbrecht 2021), it confirmed that the bird was about 13 days old. The parents were last seen taking food to the nest late in the afternoon of the 20th November 2021. These observations would suggest a 13–14 day nestling period, still about a week shorter than Monadjem et al's. (1994) records, but more or less in line with Engelbrecht (2021) - this time without any interference.

References

- Engelbrecht D. 2021. Growth and development of Arrow-marked Babbler nestlings. *The Lark* 38: 57–62.
- Monadjem A, Owen-Smith N, Kemp AC. 1994. Position of nest, incubation period and nestling period of the Arrowmarked Babbler. *Ostrich* 65: 341.

White-backed Vulture resightings

Derek Engelbrecht

E-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

The following tagged White-backed Vultures were resighted recently.

TAG A701: WHITE-BACKED VULTURE

This individual was a victim of poisoning in the Kruger National Park. It was rescued and rehabilitated at the Moholoholo Animal Rehabilitation Centre before its release on 28 May 2021. A resighting of the same bird was reported from the HESC Vulture Restaurant near Hoedspruit (15.2 km from the tagging site), 12 days after release. The bird was seen by Derek Engelbrecht

on 24 and 25 November 2021 about 13 km west of Polokwane. The straight-line distance between the tagging and resighting locality was 173.4 km and the days elapsed were 181 days (0y, 5m, 28d).

TAG A301: WHITE-BACKED VULTURE

The bird was ringed by Lindy Thompson at the Hoedspruit Air Force Base on 16 September 2019. It was then seen again on the 3^d March 2020 at Phalaborwa, 29 km from the tagging locality. The bird was then reported by Derek Engelbrecht on 24 November 2021, 13 km west of Polokwane. The



White-backed Vulture A701 © Derek Engelbrecht



White-backed Vulture A301 © Derek Engelbrecht

straight-line distance between the tagging and resighting locality was 180.5 km and the days elapsed were 801 days (2y, 2m, 9d).

TAG A703: WHITE-BACKED VULTURE

The bird was tagged by Lindy Thompson in the Selati Game Reserve on 11 June 2021. It was then seen again by Derek Engelbrecht on

27 November 2021. The straight-line distance between the tagging and resighting locality was 29.2 km and the days elapsed were 170 days (0y, 5m, 17d).

Acknowledgements Thanks to Dr Gareth Tate, Manager: Birds of Prey Programme of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, for sharing the ringing details of these birds.



White-backed Vulture A703 © Derek Engelbrecht

VULTURE FLEDGLING SEASON IS UPON US

South Africa is home to over 7 350 mature White-backed Vultures and 338 mature Lappet-faced Vultures, not to mention immature individuals, and it is thus incredibly important to preserve and protect each individual. White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures need all the help they can get because they are listed as critically endangered and endangered, respectively.

Protecting each individual is vital to the species continued survival and thus, we need to keep abreast of all vulture happenings throughout their home and foraging ranges. Vultures breed during our winter months; incubation is between 54 to 56 days and each nestling remains with its parents for almost 5 months. Once the nestlings reach fledgling age, they take their maiden flight which can take place anytime from mid-October through to January each year. Once these fledglings are ready to fly and explore their surroundings in the hope of foraging on their own, they often get into 'tricky' situations and find themselves in dangerous areas or areas where they cannot retake flight. This is all due to a reduction in open natural spaces across their distribution.

For this reason, VulPro is once again appealing to the public to please keep a watchful eye for any grounded vultures and contact us immediately. Please also remain with the bird or secure the grounded bird, as a bird with a broken wing can walk away and disappear – never to be found again. Our contact number 24/7 is 082-808-5113 should you come across a vulture.

Ryno Kemp



Swamp Nightjar
The rarest and most geographically restricted
nightjar in southern Africa

TEXT AND PHOTOS Hugh Chittenden

E-mail: hugh@rarebirds.co.za

Although Swamp Nightjars may be found sitting in the open on gravel roads and tracks, they are generally confined to the margins of damp lowland grassland along the coastal littoral.

Swamp Nightjar was first collected at Durban nearly 200

years ago by Andrew Smith (1832). This species no longer occurs near Durban, as urban sprawl and, in particular, night lighting is such that there is little suitable habitat left for this damp lowland grassland species. Bright lights adversely affect the hunting abilities of this sensitive bird.



ABOVE Short, damp coastal grassland is home to this elusive nightjar species.

LEFT These relatively rare birds can be sexed by the white margins to the outer tail feathers. In this case, the broken narrow white edge to the outer tail feather shows that this is a female as males display a broad and conspicuous white edge to their outer tail feathers. Note the black spotting to its dorsal plumage.





ABOVE The species exhibits geographic variation in plumage colouration. On the FAR LEFT is the greyer inland form, treated as a subspecies, *Caprimulgus natalensis carpi*, by some authors and regionally found in northern Botswana, Caprivi and western Zimbabwe. On the RIGHT is the browner eastern coastal form, treated as another regional subspecies, *Caprimulgus natalensis natalensis* by some authors.

FAR LEFT Distribution of the eastern subspecies of Swamp Nightjar.

LEFT All nightjars have large, owl-like eyes, but those of Swamp Nightjar appear to be larger than any of the other nightjars in the region.



ABOVE A male with white throat feathers extended, giving its *choc, choc, choc* call from a bare, grassless patch of ground.



FAR LEFT An adult male showing the white outer margin to its tail.



LEFT A juvenile female that lacks the darker breast feathering.



ABOVE They are early spring/summer breeders, so most calling takes place during August, September and October. Eggs are laid on the bare ground or on the grass between tufts that provide concealment and shade for the incubating birds.

RIGHT It is unusual for Swamp Nightjars to venture onto busy roads with traffic, but occasionally they are found as collision victims. Should you ever come across a road fatality, the key ID features are the combination of:

1. An all-white outer edge to its outer tail feathers
2. The white spot on the emargination (kink) to the second to leading wing feather. Fiery-necked Nightjar has similar white wing spot positioning but only has white tips to its outer tail feathers.



male



male



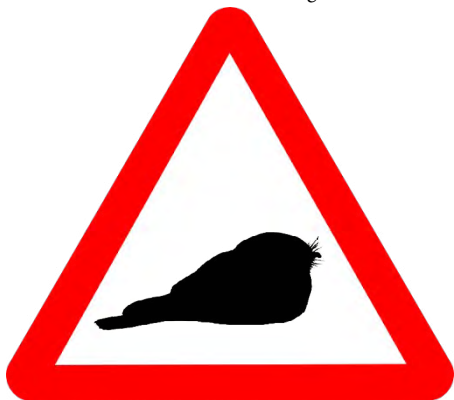
female



ABOVE A road accident victim with minor injuries from a passing vehicle. All nightjars have enormous gapes, necessary for catching nocturnal aerial insects.

RIGHT The pectinated margin to the inner edge of the central toes.

FAR RIGHT All nightjars possess this special apparatus that is apparently used to brush off, or comb, cobwebs from their feathers after flying low over grassland or between trees.





LEFT A male in moulting, showing new growth to the outer tail feathers.

BELOW A rare and vulnerable species in rapid decline throughout most of its habitat-specific coastal distribution.

The largest remaining population is now confined to the protected areas of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park near St Lucia.

CAUTION When photographing nightjars, the welfare of these birds is paramount. When using a spotlight, DO NOT direct a strong beam directly into the birds' eyes so that it is dazzled! Instead, use a soft torch or penlight to locate the exact position for focus, followed by the camera flash, which is momentary.

Acknowledgements Adam Riley is thanked for helping facilitate some of the above photographic opportunities, and Crystelle Wilson kindly helped with the supply of distribution information.



Weavers and Sausage Trees

Dieter Oschadleus

E-mail: doschadleus@gmail.com

Derek Engelbrecht summarised records of nectarivory of Sausage Tree *Kigelia africana* flowers but noted that relatively few birds species had been recorded thus far (Engelbrecht 2021). I searched a bibliography, Nest Record Cards (NRC) and PHOWN (PHOTOS of Weaver Nests) records, to see if any weavers have been recorded feeding on the nectar of Sausage Trees, or nesting in these trees.

Weaver records of nectar-feeding in Sausage Trees

Holub's Golden Weaver *Ploceus xanthops*

J.S. Jameson found Holub's Golden Weaver in Umvuli, Zimbabwe, and noted that the weavers were 'feeding amongst the blossoms of the Sausage tree' (Shelley 1882).

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*

Hewitt (1962) collected diet records from club members, and one record was of Village Weavers feeding on the flowers of Sausage Tree, *Kigelia pinnata* [=africana].

Alex Zaloumis recorded a Village Weaver colony in fever trees near Hoodspruit on 16 August 2013 (PHOWN 6992). Alex noted that the breeding weavers were sipping nectar from the flowers of a nearby Sausage Tree.

Namah et al. (2019) found Village Weaver and Southern Masked Weaver

Ploceus velatus feeding on the nectar of a Sausage Tree near Skukuza in the Kruger National Park, as cited by Engelbrecht (2021).

Spectacled Weaver *Ploceus ocularis*

Butchart (2005) noted nectar-feeding in a Sausage Tree in his Nelspruit garden by Spectacled Weavers (and eight other species - Amethyst, Scarlet-chested, Collared and White-bellied Sunbirds, Cape White-eyes, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Bar-throated Apalis and Black-backed Puffback).

Southern Masked Weaver

Namah et al. (2019) found Village and Southern Masked Weavers feeding on the nectar of Sausage Tree. A photo of a Southern Masked Weaver feeding was included in the paper.

Weaver records of feeding on Sausage Tree seeds

Thick-billed Weaver *Amblyospiza albifrons*

Dave Elphick noted Thick-billed Weavers feeding on the seeds of fallen ripe fruit when the fruit was broken open by passing cars (Elphick 2010).

Weaver records of Sausage Trees as nest sites

Heuglin's Masked Weaver *Ploceus heuglini*

Chapin (1954) noted a colony of Heuglin's Masked Weaver nesting in the up-

Table 1. Number of records of weavers using Sausage Trees for feeding (nectar or seeds) and nesting.

Species	Nectar	Seeds	Nest site
Holub's Golden Weaver	1		1
Village Weaver	3		
Spectacled Weaver	1		
Southern Masked Weaver	1		1
Thick-billed Weaver		1	
Heuglin's Masked Weaver			1

per branches of a Sausage Tree near the nest of a Red-necked Buzzard.

Southern Masked Weaver

R.C. Long recorded two Southern Masked Weaver nests with young about 7 m high in a Sausage Tree near Port Herald in Malawi on 8 March 1962 (NRC 803-804 and 803-805).

Holub's Golden Weaver

Carl Huchzermeyer photographed three Holub's Golden Weaver nests 4 m high in a Sausage Tree in the Bangweulu Wetlands, Zambia, on 2 February 2016 (PHOWN 18864).

Discussion

Two weavers can be added to Engelbrecht's (2021) list of birds feeding on the nectar of Sausage Trees, namely Holub's Golden Weaver and Spectacled Weaver. It is also interesting to see in what other ways birds (here weavers) use different tree species (here Sausage Trees), i.e. Thick-billed Weavers feeding on the seeds and three weaver species nesting in Sausage Trees (Table 1).

References

- Butchart D. 2005. Bird plants of the Lowveld. Sausage Tree. Hornbill 79: 22-23.
- Chapin JP. 1954. The birds of the Belgian Congo. Part IV. Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History 75B: 1-846.
- Engelbrecht D. 2021. Opportunistic nectarivory of Sausage Tree *Kigelia africana* flowers. Lark 38: 87-90.
- Elphick D. 2010. Thick-billed Weaver behaviour. Hornbill 97: 41.
- Hewitt J. 1962. Feeding habit. Witwatersrand Bird Club News Sheet 42: 1-5.
- Namah J, Midgley JJ, Kruger LM. 2019. Reproductive biology of the sausage tree (*Kigelia africana*) in Kruger National Park, South Africa. Koedoe 61(1), a1512. <https://doi.org/10.4102/koedoe.v61i1.1512>
- Shelley GE. 1882. On a collection of birds made by Mr. J.S. Jameson in south-eastern Africa, with notes by Mr. T. Ayres. Ibis 4(6): 349-368.

PHOWN records:

- http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown_vm.php?vm=6992
- http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown_vm.php?vm=18864



Notes on the breeding of Ashy Tit

Derek Engelbrecht

E-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

African parids (tits) are relatively poorly known compared to their northern hemisphere relatives. Most of our knowledge of this fascinating group of birds in Africa stems from studies on Southern Black Tit by Tarboton (1981), Ashy and Carp's Tit by Wiggins (2001) and Stripe-breasted Tit by Shaw (2003). Wiggins (2001) studied aspects of Ashy Tit breeding in Namibia, e.g., breeding phenology, clutch size, incubation and brooding behaviour, and nestling provisioning rates. Here I report on the growth and development of Ashy Tit nestlings but

also share some incidental observations made during data collection at seven nests in the Polokwane Game Reserve between 2003 and 2017.

Laying dates

Egg-laying started in November at five of the nests, laying at one nest only starting on the 4th January 2004. This is unusually late for the species as Tarboton (2011) lists South Africa's laying dates as October and November. Although I found no evidence of

BELOW An adult Ashy Tit
© Daniel Engelbrecht



repeat-brooding attempts, this record may have been a replacement-brooding attempt. Indirect evidence of a replacement-brooding attempt was found at a nest lost between 15 and 18 November 2003. The male was seen inspecting nest holes on the 20th November 2003 by hovering in front of cavities and cautiously peeping in.

Breeding system

According to Dean (1989), Ashy Tit may be a facultative cooperative breeder in parts of its range, e.g., the Northern Cape region. However, no evidence of such a breeding strategy was observed by Wiggins (2001) in Namibia, nor was it observed at my study site in the Central Limpopo Province.

Nest site

Three of the seven nesting attempts in this study were in nest boxes. The remaining three were in previously excavated cavities (barbets or wood-

peckers), all in Mountain Aloe *Aloe marlothii*. The lowest and highest natural nests were 1.1 m and 1.95 m above ground level. The artificial nest boxes included a sisal log, a commercial nesting log as used for small parrots, and a nest constructed of a plastic pipe.

Nest preparation and nest material used

Only the female was seen carrying nesting material, but she was closely followed by her partner during nest construction. The bulk of the nesting material comprises animal hair. Other materials recorded included bits of a plastic sachet, a few soft grass culms, pieces of snakeskin (in 4 of 7

BELOW An artificial nest made from a plastic pipe. The 'steps' to the nest hole on the top right of the image are roughened areas to assist the birds when exiting the nest
© Derek Engelbrecht



ests), small feathers (rarely) and small amounts of plant material. The snake-skin may serve as a deterrent to a nest inspector as it is likely to be the first object an intruder might notice in the gloom of a cavity.

Interestingly, more often than not, the plant material used was rather aromatic, e.g., the leaves of the Lemon Bush *Lippia javanica* and Black Jack *Bidens formosa*. The use of aromatic plants by birds nesting in enclosed/ domed nests or cavities improves the health and survival of nestlings and fledglings (Milton and Dean 1999).

The nest material forms a thick pad, about 5–8 cm deep in which a cup is formed. Known sources of hair for nest lining include recycling of nest material from a previous nesting attempt, sometimes even of another species - a kind of kleptoparasitism. I once found an Ashy Tit leaving a Red-billed Oxpecker nest (the oxpeckers had completed their breeding) with a beak full of fur. This would be an easy source of hair as oxpeckers collect nesting material directly from their hosts! Another known source of hair is regurgitated vulture pellets (Dean 2005). Although no vultures nest in the Polokwane Game Reserve, Secretary-bird, a few raptors, and a host of small carnivores are resident within the reserve. Their pellets and faeces may be potential sources of nest lining.

Eggs and clutch size

In seven nests, the clutch size ranged from 4 (n = 6) to 5 (n = 1), mean =

4.7 eggs. This is slightly more than the mean for South Africa (mean = 4, n = 6 nests) but similar to the average clutch size in Namibia (mean = 4.7, n = 21). The egg shape and colouration match the description of Tarboton (2011). The egg dimensions (min-mean-max) of 18 eggs were as follows: 17.4-18.59-19.7 x 13.9-14.35-15. The fresh egg mass (i.e., eggs weighed within three days of laying) of six eggs were $2.08 \text{ g} \pm 0.11$, range (1.92–2.23 g).

Incubation

Females appeared to be solely responsible for incubation. Males occasionally provisioned the incubating females. Full contact incubation started after the penultimate egg in a clutch was laid. The incubation period was reliably established at 13 and 15 days (n = 2).

The female performs a distraction display similar to that described for Southern Black Tit (Tarboton 1981). I once peered into a natural nest in a Mountain Aloe using a penlight and dentist's mirror. I had the fright of my life when the female hissed loudly and struck the sides of the nest with her wings, resembling a striking snake. Needless to say, I jumped backwards, thinking there was a snake in the nest. After I composed myself, I attempted to see what she did. I noticed that the female hisses and sways from side to side, resembling a snake. The wing-strike creates a rather loud drumming sound. She also lunged at



ABOVE AND RIGHT The eggs are laid within a cup made in a thick pad of mainly animal hair, but also smaller amounts of soft plant material, feathers and, quite frequently, snakeskin. The plant material (visible in both images) used are often aromatic and may serve to repel unwanted nest parasites and improve the overall health of nestlings and fledglings © Derek Engelbrecht.



the nest entrance with a beak full of the lining. The distraction display is remarkable for its resemblance to a striking snake and enough to deter any potential intruder - or curious ornithologist!

Development and care of nestlings

Nestling development is summarised in Table 1. The female will brood for 7–12 days, but

the male provisions his mate as well as the nestlings. Both sexes provision the nestlings and assist with nest sanitation by removing faecal sacs. The nestling period ranged from 19–22 days, and the fledglings can fly well at fledging.

RIGHT Ashy Tit nestlings have a well-developed gape and the pale edges are clearly visible in the gloom of a nest cavity © Derek Engelbrecht.

BELOW Ashy Tits hatching. Incubation starts after the penultimate egg in a clutch is laid, resulting in an asynchronous hatching pattern as can be seen here © Derek Engelbrecht.



Table 1. Growth and development of Ashy Tit nestlings.

Age	Description
0 (hatch day)	Newly hatched naked, skin flesh-coloured with sparsely distributed, wispy, grey tufts of down on the dorsal, humeral and capital pterylae. No feather tracts visible below the skin. Eyes closed. No callouses on heels. Claws white. Lacks tongue spots. Inside of mouth and tongue yellow-orange. Gape thick and white to pale yellow. Bill yellow. Neosoptiles of primaries, secondaries and rectrices visible.
2	Feather tracts visible below the skin, eyes closed.
3	First primaries may emerge in pin. Eyes still closed.
4	Subcutaneous pins visible below the skin. Primary and some secondary pins have just emerged. Eyes begin to open but only as slits. Nestlings are strong and can lift head and body into vertical position to gape for food, sometimes falling backward.
5	Eyes still open as slits. All tracts except the capital tract have at least some feathers in pin.
6	Eyes open. All the feather tracts now in pin but no feathers in brush yet. The bill is getting darker and more horn-coloured. Nestlings are incredibly strong for their size, able to lift into a vertical position and maintain it. They are also able to crawl quite well.
7	Pin feathers continue growing.
8	All feather tracts have at least some feathers in brush. The ventral feathers are only just in brush. The bill is now a greyish-horn colour but with a pale yellow tip.
9	More feathers in brush, including the first ones on the capital tract. The secondary coverts and some secondaries are in brush. The first primaries and primary coverts may also appear in brush, but usually only on Day 10.
10	Some more feathers on the capital tract in brush. All secondaries and secondary coverts in brush, most primaries in brush but only a few primary coverts. Tufts of down still visible as are remnants of the egg tooth.
11	All feathers in brush except a few primary coverts.
12	All feathers in brush. Egg tooth no longer visible.
14	Primaries and secondaries approximately 33% in brush. All coverts in brush. Rectrices between 33% and 66% in brush.
16	Primaries between 33% and 66% in brush.
18	Primaries and secondaries about 70% in brush. Nestlings able to vocalize like adults.
20	Primaries 80% in brush to fully grown.



Day 0 - hatching day © Derek Engelbrecht



Day 4 © Derek Engelbrecht



Day 14 © Derek Engelbrecht



Day 18 © Derek Engelbrecht



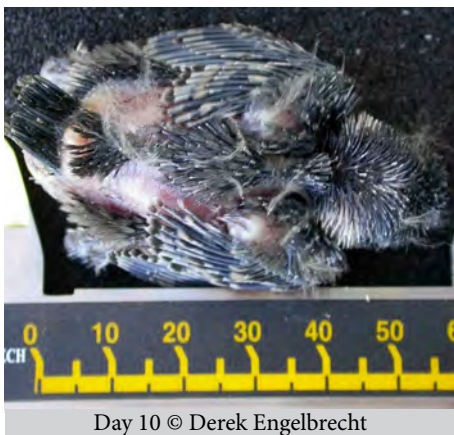
Day 6 © Derek Engelbrecht



Day 8 © Derek Engelbrecht



Day 20 © Derek Engelbrecht



Day 10 © Derek Engelbrecht



Day 12 © Derek Engelbrecht

References

- Dean WRJ. 1989. Ashy Tit. In Ginn PJ, McIlleron WG, Milstein PleS (eds). *The Complete Book of Southern African Birds*. Cape Town: Struik/Winchester. p. 459.
- Dean WRJ. 2005. Ashy Tit. In Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG. (eds). *Roberts birds of southern Africa*. 7th Edn. Cape Town: The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund. p. 742.
- Milton S, Dean WRJ. 1999. Nesting thyme. *The use of aromatic plants in Cape Sparrow nests*. *Africa Birds and Birding* 4(1): 37–39.
- Shaw P. 2003. Breeding activity and provisioning rates of Stripe-breasted Tits (*Parus fasciiventer*) at Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, Uganda. *Ostrich* 74: 129–132.
- Tarboton WR. 1981. Cooperative breeding and group territoriality in the Black Tit. *Ostrich* 52: 216–225.
- Tarboton W. 2011. *Roberts Nests and Eggs of Southern African Birds*. Cape Town: The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund.
- Wiggins DA. 2001. Low reproductive rates in two *Parus* species in southern Africa. *Ibis* 143: 677–680.

Breeding success

Of 29 eggs laid in the seven nests under observation, 13 eggs hatched (44.8%), and all 13 nestlings fledged, giving a crude breeding success rate of 45%. Known causes of nest failure included predation by an egg-eater snake (regurgitated eggshell found in the nest) and eviction by Cape Starling. The starling removed the eggs from the nest and dropped them outside.



Interesting sightings

16 October 2021 - 15 December 2021

Share your interesting sightings seen within a 100 km radius of Polokwane. 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

NON-PASSERINES

Abdim's Stork - 9 December 2021. Returning migrant: Several hundred near Roedtan (Jody De Bruyn).

African Cuckoo - 31 October 2021. One heard at Flag Boshielo Dam (Richter Van Tonder).

African Emerald Cuckoo - 3 December 2021. One seen in a garden at Naboom Nature Reserve (Tiaan Van Heerden)†.

Amur Falcon - 9 December 2021. Returning migrant: A few individuals near Roedtan (Jody De Bruyn).

COMPILED BY Derek Engelbrecht



Black Sparrowhawk © Mark Friskin

Black Cuckoo - 23 October 2021. Returning migrant: Seen on Randfontein Road (Schalk and Annette van Schalkwyk).

Black Sparrowhawk - 20 November 2021. One seen at the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary (Mark Friskin).

Broad-billed Roller - 16 October 2021. Returning migrant: One seen near Lushof (Derek Engelbrecht).

Common Ringed Plover - 13 November 2021. Makotopong Wetland (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Curlew Sandpiper - 31 October 2021. A single bird seen at Piet Gouws Dam (Richter Van Tonder).

Corn Crane - 15 December 2021. Returning migrant: Two birds flushed at De Loskop (Derek Engelbrecht)

Diederik Cuckoo - 16 October 2021. Returning migrant: One heard calling in Welgelegen (Daniel Engelbrecht).

European Honey Buzzard - 10 December 2021. One flying in Bendor (Derek Engelbrecht).

European Roller - 9 December 2021. Seen near Roedtan (Jody De Bruyn).

Great Spotted Cuckoo - 1 November 2021. Returning migrant: One seen at Makotopong Wetland (Derek Engelbrecht).

Greater Painted-snipe - 23 November 2021. A male seen on Bylsteel road (Leonie Kellerman).

Green Sandpiper - 24 October 2021. The long-staying bird was seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Derek Engelbrecht).



Common Ringed Plover © Daniel Engelbrecht



Curlew Sandpiper © Richter Van Tonder



Great Spotted Cuckoo © Derek Engelbrecht



Greater Painted-snipe © Leonie Kellerman

Hooded Vulture - 24 November 2021. Two seen at Ibis Piggery (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Lesser Kestrel - 9 December 2021. Seen near Roedtan (Jody De Bruyn).

Rock Kestrel - 24 November 2021. A pair seen at the University of Limpopo (Derek Engelbrecht).

Sanderling - 6 November 2021. One seen at Hout River Dam (Jody de Bruyn); One seen at Spies Dam (Cameron Meyer).

Southern Bald Ibis - 24 November 2021. A single bird seen at the University of Limpopo (Derek Engelbrecht).

Whiskered Tern - 4 November 2021. Three birds seen at Letaba Estates (Derek Engelbrecht).

PASSERINES

Banded Martin - 21 November 2021. A small flock feeding in grassland at Dikgale (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Cape Bunting - 30 November 2021. Two birds caught in a mist net near Rheebokvlei (Dawie De Swardt).

Garden Warbler - 21 November 2021. Returning migrant: a bird seen at the University of Limpopo (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Icterine Warbler - 21 November 2021. Returning migrant: Two birds showed well on the Platkoppies road (Derek Engelbrecht).

Monotonous Lark - 11 December 2021. An irruption on the Bylsteel road (Derek Engelbrecht).



Red-backed Shrike - 21 November 2021. Returning migrant: Several birds seen on Tweefontein Road and Eduan Park (Derek Engelbrecht).

Spike-heeled Lark - 27 November 2021. A small group seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Minkie Prinsloo).

Spotted Flycatcher - 24 November 2021. Returning migrant: Several seen at the University of Limpopo (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Tree Pipit - 13 December 2021. Returning migrant: Two birds seen near Mispah (Derek Engelbrecht).

Thick-billed Weaver - 18 October 2021. Seen in a garden in Ster Park (Willie van der Merwe)

Violet-backed Starling - 17 October 2021. Returning migrant: A flock seen near Politsi (Dalena Mostert).



BEST OF THE REST LIMPOPO PROVINCE

NON-PASSERINES

Abdim's Stork - 15 December 2021. A few birds seen in a field at Weipe (Derek Engelbrecht).

African Black Duck - 14 December 2021. A single bird seen at Mahela (Derek Engelbrecht).

African Cuckoo - 27 November 2021. Returning migrant: several seen and heard near Letsitele (Daniel Engelbrecht).

African Hobby - 30 November 2021. One seen at The Outpost, Kruger National Park (Joe Bodenstein).

African Pygmy Kingfisher - 19 November 2021. Returning migrant: one seen at Mahela (Derek Engelbrecht).

African Scops Owl - 15 December 2021. A few birds heard calling at Weipe (Derek Engelbrecht).

African Skimmer - 5 November 2021. Five birds at Weipe (Kenneth Gamble).

Baillon's Crake - 15 December 2021. One seen at Weipe (Derek Engelbrecht).

Black Kite - 14 December 2021. Two birds seen near Letsitele (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Black-winged Pratincole - 15 December 2021. Four birds seen at the Samaria Wetlands (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Eurasian Hobby - 27 November 2021. One seen near Letsitele (Derek Engelbrecht).

Cape Shoveler - 7 November 2021. A female seen at Raptors View, Hoedspruit (Chris Gregory).

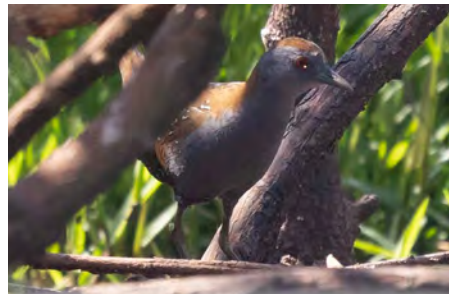
Great Spotted Cuckoo - 29 October 2021. Returning migrant: one seen at Kranskop (Derek Engelbrecht).

Green Sandpiper - 28 October 2021. One seen on Ngobeni Loop off the H14 (Jeremy Brown).

Grey-hooded Kingfisher - 14 December 2021. Returning migrant: Several birds seen near Letsitele (Craig and Christine Widdows).

Lesser Jacana - 15 December 2021. One seen at the Samaria Wetlands (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Pectoral Sandpiper - 16 October 2021. One seen at Rooibosrant Dam, Kruger National Park (Derek Engelbrecht).



Baillon's Crake © Daniel Engelbrecht



Black Kite © Daniel Engelbrecht



Black-winged Pratincole © Daniel Engelbrecht



Lesser Jacana © Daniel Engelbrecht

Red-backed Shrike - 19 November 2021. Returning migrant: A female seen at Mahela (Derek Engelbrecht).

Ruddy Turnstone - 25 October 2021. Returning migrant: one seen at Rooibosrant Dam (Jens Reissig).

Spur-winged Goose - 15 December 2021. Several birds seen at Weipe (Derek Engelbrecht).

Thick-billed Cuckoo - 14 December 2021. One seen at Thornybush Game Reserve (Greg Moran).

Western Osprey - 27 November 2021. One seen near Letsitele (Daniel Engelbrecht).

White-breasted Cuckooshrike - 14 December 2021. A female seen carrying nesting material near Letsitele (Derek Engelbrecht).

Woodland Kingfisher - 19 November 2021. Returning migrant: several heard and seen at Mahela (Derek Engelbrecht).

PASSERINES

Banded Martin - 25 October 2021. Three birds seen in tall grassland in the Makuleke Concession (Ross Hawkins).

Black-throated Wattle-eye - 15 December 2021. One seen at Weipe (Craig Widdows).

Collared Palm Thrush - 27 October 2021. Seen at Weipe (Eduard Teichert and Wouter Cromhout)†.

Spotted Flycatcher - 19 November 2021. Returning migrant: At least three birds seen at Mahela (Daniel Engelbrecht).



Ruddy Turnstone © Jens Reissig



White-breasted Cuckooshrike © Derek Engelbrecht



Black-throated Wattle-eye © Daniel Engelbrecht



Collared Palm Thrush © Eduard Teichert

WANTED: HONEYGUIDE SIGHTINGS

Have you seen a Greater Honeyguide?



1. Record its location



2. Adult or juvenile?



JUVENILE



ADULT MALE



ADULT FEMALE

3. Did it guide you?

tjrr-tjrr-tjrr



4. Anything else to add? (optional)



Honeyguide Research Project

SUBMIT YOUR SIGHTING
www.honeyguiding.me



Mouse Free Marion

BE A PART OF HISTORY AND HELP SAVE MARION ISLAND'S SEABIRDS

SPONSOR A HECTARE NOW



HELP SAVE OUR SEABIRDS

BirdLife South Africa is collaborating with the Department of Environmental Affairs and the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology to rid the island of mice and restore it towards its once-pristine beauty.

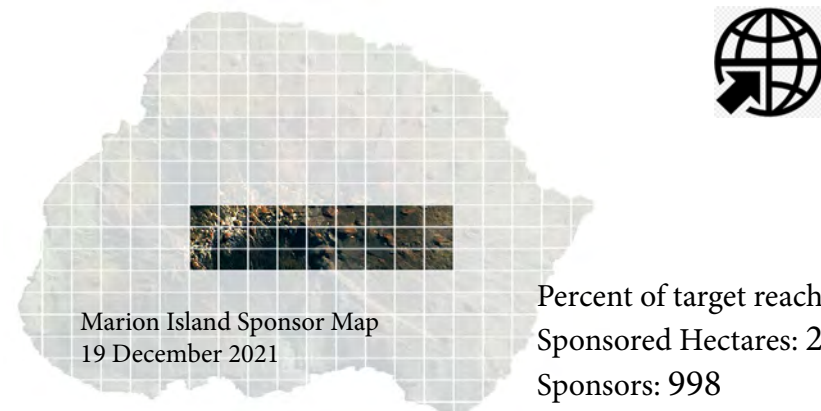
The bait required to cover the island alone will cost upwards of R30 million. To help raise the necessary funds, please would you consider sponsoring one or more hectares of land on Marion Island.

At R1000 (US\$90), 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.

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/>



UPCOMING EVENTS



Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting and AGM

Date: 1 February 2022

Time: 18:30

Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 01 March 2022

Time: 18:30

Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 05 April 2022

Time: 18:30

Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Club outing

Where? Wolkberg and Iron Crown

Date: To be announced - January 2022

Contact: Richter Van Tonder

Cell: 082 213 8276

Shopping list: Buff-streaked Chat, Gurney's Sugarbird, Nicholson's Pipit, Malachite Sunbird, Booted Eagle, Wailing Cisticola, Tree Pipit, Cape Bunting, Striped Pipit, Bushveld Pipit

Club outing

Where? Makotopong

Date: To be announced February 2022

Contact: Richter Van Tonder

Cell: 082 213 8276

Shopping list: Very much rain dependent, but Dwarf Bittern, Greater Painted-snipe, African Snipe, Allen's Gallinule, Lesser Moorhen, Great Reed Warbler, Pied Avocet, crakes, rails, waders and waterbirds.

Cinderella's page

Birdlife Polokwane honours the LBJs of our world which may never make it onto a cover page.



Icterine Warbler © Daniel Engelbrecht