

THE

# LARK



Club outings  
**Polokwane**  
Wildtuin  
&  
**Moletji**  
Nature Reserve

Turkish Delights  
Birding Turkey

Avitourism  
**GoBirding**

Don't be a  
chicknapper

Melodious Lark range extension to East Africa • Cape Penduline Tit feeding on a bagworm larva • White-breasted Cuckooshrike behaviour and new sounds • Sabota Lark longevity record • Brown Snake Eagles and large snakes • Finnish Common Tern recovery in South Africa • Birds associating with cormorant fishing flocks



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.

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The opinions expressed by contributors in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the editors, the Birdlife Polokwane committee or Birdlife South Africa.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE:

**15 OCTOBER 2022**

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

COVER Brown-throated Martin  
© Jody De Bruyn.

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Attempted murder © Derek Engelbrecht

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## Editors' chirps

What a lovely time of the year it is! The stark barrenness of winter is making way for spring, and everything looks and smells fresh. There is an air of excitement as the birds sing from well before sunrise until well after sunset. The early breeders are already nesting; others are singing, chasing rivals, or trying to find a partner. Some intra-African migrants are back, refurbishing their nests or roosts. We eagerly await the arrival of the first Palearctic migrants.

As usual, we try to cater to everyone's tastes in *The Lark* by sourcing interesting observations of all aspects of birds or birding. It is easy to find interesting material - unfortunately, getting someone to put pen to paper is not always as easy. We would love to hear more about our readers' exciting observations. In this edition, we have reports on two club outings; one to a familiar favourite and the other to a forgotten favourite. Daniel Engelbrecht shares his birding highlights of Turkey, and Derek explains what to do when you find a baby bird. Our popular Bird Briefs section has interesting observations and snippets of different species, including Cape Penduline Tit, Brown Snake Eagle, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Sabota and Melodious Lark, cormorants and a Finnish Common Tern recovered in South Africa. Derek and our late friend Joe were involved in a recently published study that saw southern Africa losing an endemic and East Africa gaining another species. One region's loss is another's gain, as the saying goes. Derek and the lead author of that study, Stratton Hatfield, fill us in on how this all happened.

We hope you enjoy this edition of *The Lark*, and as always, we look forward to receiving your contributions.

Raelene and Derek



'n Klubuitstappie na die

# POLOKWANE WILDTUIN

DEUR Richter Van Tonder



Kortkloulewerik (Short-clawed Lark) © Richter Van Tonder

**D**is nou al 'n geruime tyd terug wat ons laaste klub uitstappie in die Polokwane wildtuin was. So wat 'n plesier was dit nie om weer saam met agt van ons klublede daar te kon draai nie.

Die oggend het begin met 'n digte misbank wat oor die wildtuin gehang het en dit het ook die temperatuur laag gehou in die begin. Gelukkig het dit vinnig gelig en ons kon gemaklik om ons sien. Ons eerste stop was by die bekende Aalwynkoppie se dammetjie. Hier was dit nogal koud en het ons nie veel gesien nie, maar ons kon 'n Laeveldpatrys (Shelley's Francolin) duidelik hoor skree met sy kenmerkende 'I'll-drink-your-beer' roep. Ons het verder aanbeweeg en by die bekende vyeboom gestop vir 'n koffie. Hier het 'n klomp spesies ons aandag getrek en veral die Bruinkeelbossangers (Burnt-necked Eremomela) het ons vermaak en goeie geleenthede gegee vir fotos.

Die tyd van die jaar is die wildtuin maar baie vaal en droog en die stof was erg op plekke. 'n Entjie verder op die hoofroete af was ons verras met 'n paar Bosveldkoesters (Bushveld Pipits) wat ons langs die pad opgejaag het. Hulle het vinnig weer in die grasse verdwyn en wou ons nie weer kans gee om hulle te bekyk nie. Ons was hier in een van die areas waar jy gewoonlik ons welbekende Kortkloulewerik (Short-



Bo 'n Groepie Bruin-keelbossangers (Burnt-necked Eremomela) het eindelose vermaak en genot vir fotografawe gegee © Richter Van Tonder.

LINKS Die Swartmees (Southern Black Tit) is relatief skaars in die Polokwane wildtuintjie © Jody De Bruyn.

clawed Lark) kry, maar in die winter is hulle stil en kruip in die gras weg. Gelukkig het ek ene sien sit op 'n bossie en ons het gestop om dit van nader af te beskou. En wat 'n gemaklike outjie was hierdie een! Hy het sommer vir ons begin sing en ook 'n vertoonvlug gemaak. Almal kon pragtige fotos kry.



Bo Maraboes (Marabou Storks) kan gereeld by die agterste dam in die reservaat gesien word waar hulle bad nadat hulle gevoer het © Jody De Bruyn.

REGS 'n Volwasse Bruinslangarend (Brown Snake Eagle) het ons verras toe dit laag oor ons koppe gevlieg het © Jody De Bruyn.

Ons het van hier af na die 'dawn chorus' koppie beweeg wat meer agter in die wildtuintjie is. Behalwe die mooi uitsig kon ons 'n Grootjagarend (African Hawk-Eagle) optel wat deur 'n Witborskraai (Pied Crow) aangeval word. Ons volgende stop was by die piekniek plek en hier het baie spesies ons vermaak: Ge-





wone Swartmees (Southern Black Tit), Rooiborslaksman (Crimson-breasted Shrike), Baardspeg (Bearded Woodpecker), Kalahariewipstert (Kalahari Scrub Robin), Oranjeborsboslaksman (Orange-breasted Bushshrike), Fiskaalvlieëvanger (Fiscal Flycatcher), Bontroklaksman (Bru-bru) en nog vele meer. Na nog 'n vinnige koffie was ons oppad na die dam agter in die wildtuintjie en daar naby het ons 'n Bruinslangarend (Brown Snake Eagle) gekry wat mooi laag oor ons ge-

sweef het. By die dam self het ons 'n paar Maraboes (Marabou Stork) gekry.

Dit was al naby die middel van die dag en een van ons laaste stoppe was by die Dries Abrahamse Lapa waar ons vir Elize, wat nou onlangs eers begin voëls kyk het, 'n Bospatrys (Crested Francolin) gekry het om af te neem as 'n lifer.

Ons laaste stop was weer by die ingang van die wildtuintjie en hier het ons probeer vir 'n Witkruissperwer (Gabar Goshawk), maar ons was geflous deur 'n Mikstertbyvanger (Fork-tailed Drongo) wat die roep presies na gemaak het.

Baie dankie aan almal wat die uitstappie meëgemaak het.

**Outeur se e-pos:** [richter.mcase@gmail.com](mailto:richter.mcase@gmail.com)

LINKS Baie geluk aan Elize Mostert met haar Bospatrys (Crested Francolin) lifer © Jody De Bruyn.

ONDER Tevrede fotograwe by die Kortklouewerik © Julia Friskin.



# Turkish



# Delights

Daniel Engelbrecht

Krueper's Nuthatch © Daniel Engelbrecht

Turkey is held in high regard amongst western Palaearctic birders; the country is a meeting point of cultures, continents and an impressive diversity of birds. Add to this excellent transport infrastructure, political stability, scenic beauty and delectable cuisine, and you have the perfect recipe for an easy and rewarding birding trip. Over eight days, I covered much of central and western Turkey and managed to walk away with all of my primary target species. As a brief overview, I visited four main areas: 1) Istanbul and its surrounds, 2) Cappadocia, 3) the Anti-Taurus Mountains and 4) the Mediterranean coast (see

below). Given my obvious time constraints, the trip involved late nights and early mornings, an internal flight and an overnight bus trip to access as many sites as possible. Before setting out, it soon became apparent that intel on birding in the country was limited and that I would have to rely mainly on eBird and tracking down Turkish birders on Instagram for up-to-date information. With my 'gen' collected, I boarded the direct flight from Johannesburg to Istanbul.



## Day 1 - Arrival in Istanbul

I touched down in Istanbul at 04:00 (Istanbul Havalimani) and navigated my way to the public transport terminal to catch the bus into Aksaray – a suburb of Istanbul. The bus system turned out to be highly efficient, leaving on time and without any hassles. As we left the airport terminal, I kicked off the trip list with Yellow-legged Gull, followed shortly by Hooded Crow and Eurasian Magpie. Within the city, I used either Uber or the bus service to make my way around this fantastic city of over 15 million people.

After checking in at our Airbnb, we headed to Sultanhamet, an



ABOVE A Hooded Crow with the magnificent Hagia Sofia Mosque in the background..

BELOW Yelkouan Shearwater proved to be easy pickings while on a boat ride on the Bosphorus..



ABOVE A Pygmy Cormorant fly-by on the Bosphorus caused great excitement.

area known for its historical buildings, including the Blue Mosque, Hagia Sofia and Topkapi Palace. Birding here was obviously limited, but additions included Alexandrine Parakeet (introduced), Alpine and Common Swifts and Common Starling.

With the obligatory touristy sights done, it was a short walk down to the Bosphorus - a stretch of water connecting the Sea of Marmara with the Black Sea - to try for Yelkouan Shearwater. The birds proved to be easy as they use the Bosphorus as a passage to pass between the two seas, and within minutes, we had seen hundreds of individuals. A short boat trip on the Bosphorus then delivered greatly improved views of Yelkouan Shearwater in addition to Pygmy Cormorant, Great Cormorant and European Shag. A notable non-birding sighting was that of two Harbour Porpoises.

Day one drew to a close with the prospect of exciting forest birding at dawn.

## Day 2 - Belgrade Forest

Day two saw us up early and heading north of Istanbul to Belgrade Forest - a large protected area of mixed deciduous forest. We started on foot at the entrance to Ayvat Bendi Nature Park (part of Belgrade Forest). The park is free, and facilities include miles of hiking trails, picnic sites, and a small restaurant. The birds started rolling in with sightings of Eurasian Greenfinch, Eurasian Blackcap, Song Thrush, Great Tit and Common Chaffinch. I had five family lifer targets for the trip, three of which had to happen this morning as it would likely be my last morning in the appropriate habitat for



ABOVE One of my family targets for the trip was the Regulidae, to which this Common Firecrest belongs.

the targets. Short-toed Treecreeper (Certhiidae) and Common Firecrest (Regulidae), both family lifers, fell in quick succession. I also managed to complete the sequence for the degrees of comparison of the local 'spotted' woodpeckers, with Lesser Spotted, Middle Spotted and Great Spotted all found at Belgrade Forest. Continued perseverance delivered Eurasian Blue Tit, Eurasian Wren, Eurasian Jay and finally, Long-tailed Tit (Aegithalidae) – my third and final family target for the day. The picnic area at the entrance offered more open forest, producing the first Hawfinch, Spotted Flycatcher, Common Chiffchaff and European Robin of the trip. The drive back to Istanbul offered a quick lunch stop in Kemerburgaz, adding Eurasian Jackdaw to the list.

With all the targets cleaned up, we caught the overnight bus from Istanbul to Göreme in Cappadocia.

### Day 3 - Göreme and surrounds

Day three dawned on the road; the bus had been an excellent choice as it offered the opportunity to cover distance during the time that would have been spent asleep – preventing wasted travel time during the day that could be used for birding. Roadside birding en route to Cappadocia produced Crested Lark, Black-headed Bunting, Isabelline Wheatear, Long-legged Buzzard, Eurasian Hoopoe, Com-



ABOVE Göreme is in an almost otherworldly setting with dramatic sandstone landscapes and rich human history.

mon Raven, Gull-billed Tern and the only Lesser Kestrel for the trip. We checked in at our Airbnb, collected the rental car and set off immediately. We decided to drive a few of the roads used to access sites such as Imagination Valley and birded at any areas of suitable habitat. Noteworthy records included Western Rock Nuthatch, Finsch's Wheatear, Lesser Whitethroat, Crested Lark, Calandra Lark and several Isabelline Wheatears. An adult Egyptian Vulture and Short-toed Snake Eagle also appeared, offering splendid views of both species.

BELOW Egyptian Vulture was high on my wishlist and I was delighted when we saw this one on the outskirts of Göreme.



#### Day 4 - Göreme and Sultan Marsh

A pre-dawn start saw us heading to one of the major birding sites in central Turkey, Sultan Marshes, a 39 000 hectare RAMSAR site and globally Important Bird Area. The roadside birding was spectacular, and we were soon distracted with Chukar Partridge, Greater Short-toed Lark, Cretzschmar's Bunting, Western Rock Nuthatch and more Gull-billed Terns. Upon arrival at Sultan, we were told that to access the birding at the marsh, it was compulsory to go with a local guide. Thankfully, there is always a guide present, so we set off with Atalay Atasoy on one of several boardwalks penetrating the dense reedbeds. Highlights included Little Owl, Red-crested Pochard, White-headed Duck, Ferruginous Duck, Moustached Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Eurasian Reed Warbler, Reed Bunting, Water Rail and Bearded Reedling (Panuridae – my fourth family lifer for the trip). After an early morning Turkish tea, we set off again, this time in the car towards Sultansazlığı Kuş Cenneti – a large salt pan to the north



ABOVE Western Rock Nuthatches are delightful little birds and were very common in any rocky habitat.

LEFT We were treated to excellent views of a pair of Finsch's Wheat-ears feeding their young. Here the male perched briefly before feeding a hungry fledgling.



ABOVE At 3 900 m above sea level, Mount Erciyes, a volcano, forms an imposing backdrop to the stark landscape at the salt marshes in the Sultan Marshes National Park.

RIGHT A female Bearded Reedling. This striking species was abundant in the reed beds. It's hard to believe, but this species is the closest relative of the of the lark family.

of the marsh. The birding en route to the salt pan produced Eurasian Penduline Tit, Western Yellow Wagtail, Northern Lapwing, Black Stork and several raptors, including Booted Eagle, Western Marsh Harrier (abundant), Eurasian Hob-





ABOVE A Turkistan Short-toed Lark escapes the worst of the heat at ground level by perching on relatively cooler plants and holding their wings slightly away from the body.



LEFT Kentish Plovers were common on the mud flats at the Salt Marsh. This clearly agitated individual was performing distraction behaviour to lure me away from its chicks.



ABOVE White-tailed Lapwing is a good global bird and a rarity in Turkey. We had our work cut out to connect with it, but our efforts were rewarded with excellent views.

by and Eurasian Kestrel. We also worked areas of suitable habitat for Turkistan Short-toed Lark, a recent split from Lesser Short-toed Lark, and were rewarded with saturation views. The salt pans delivered Common Crane, Kentish Plover, White-winged Tern, Whiskered Tern and a variety of waterfowl, including Garganey, Eurasian Teal, Ruddy Shelduck and Greylag Goose. Atalay then took us to one of his stakeouts for several notable species, and we added Collared Pratincole, Spur-winged Lapwing, Citrine Wagtail, Slender-billed Gull, Common Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit and a pair of rare

White-tailed Lapwings (a species with only a handful of records in this part of Turkey).

After a highly successful day birding the Sultan Marshes, we made our way back to Göreme, stopping regularly for roadside birding with additions to the list coming in the form of Rock Sparrow, Corn Bunting, Upcher's Warbler and Eurasian Goldfinch, amongst others.

## Day 5 - Göreme and Aladağlar Milli Parkı

Day 5 saw yet another early start, this time to tackle the arid scrub around Göreme. Thankfully, the main target, Sombre Tit, cooperated well, and we enjoyed incredible views of a pair of this localised species. Additionally, we managed improved views of Chukar Partridge, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Upcher's Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat and both Great and Eurasian Blue Tit. With the main target out of the way, we set off south towards Aladağlar National Park. Roadside birding was again productive, with Syrian Woodpecker, Cetti's Warbler,



Syrian Woodpecker © Daniel Engelbrecht

Common Nightingale, Lesser Grey Shrike and Eurasian Golden Oriole being new trip birds. The drive to Aladağlar took just over 3 hours – with a fair amount of roadside birding in spectacular countryside.



Sombre Tit © Daniel Engelbrecht

The Aladağlar mountains form part of the Anti-Taurus Mountain range and are host to an array of range-restricted species; the highest point, Demirkazık Tepe, towers over 3 700 m above sea level. During the winter, heavy snowfall forces most birds down

to lower altitudes making the primary target species easily accessible. In July, however, the snow is restricted to all but the highest peaks, so any shot at the high altitude specials involves a considerable hike to get as close as possi-



Northern Wheatear © Daniel Engelbrecht

From here, we walked along an unmarked path, reaching a maximum altitude of 2 050 m. The birds rapidly started falling into place with White-throated Robin (Irania), Northern Wheatear, Eastern Black-eared Wheatear, Red-billed Chough, Yellow-billed Chough, Ring Ouzel, Rufous-tailed Rockthrush, Ortolan Bunting, Eurasian Linnet, European Serin and Rock Bunting. The habitat had a distinctly Alpine feel; we were well above the treeline, yet I realised we were still much too low for any of the main target species. Other noteworthy records included a pair of Golden Eagles, Eurasian Skylark and our second Little Owl.

With the afternoon light beginning to fade, we headed back down to the treeline and were treated to mind-bending views of the near-endemic Krüper's Nuthatch. In addition, we found White Wagtail and a breeding pair of Sombre Tits, once again giving rewarding views of this species. Careful planning for this section of the trip was essential as I had one shot at each target spe-

cies, and so far, it was working out splendidly. As the sun set, Eurasian Eagle-Owl and Eurasian Scops Owl were vocal around our accommodation in Çukurbağ.

BELOW Now this is the kind of view one wants of one of your main targets. This Krüper's Nuthatch was extremely obliging, even preening within meters from where I was standing © Derek Engelbrecht.



## Day 6 - Aladağlar Milli Parkı and Mersin

Day 6 was our earliest start yet, and saw us heading up the gravel mountain pass at Su Yalagi in Aladağlar National Park at 03:30 am. Our low clearance Fiat didn't get us far, so we set off on foot in the dark. It was a challenging but enjoyable walk up the mountain, picking up European Nightjar at dawn. I thought of some of my views of the species in South Africa's well-wooded Lowveld, where temperatures regularly top the 40°C mark, and then seeing it here at over 2 000 m with no tree in sight and pretty cold conditions.

Our goal for the morning was to reach a vantage point at just over 2 300 m to try for Caspian Snowcock. As the sun rose, we added Red-backed Shrike, Horned Lark, Eurasian Crag-Martin, Black Redstart, Common Redstart, Chukar Partridge and White-throated Robin (Iranian), to name a few. As we passed the 2 200 m mark, the habitat changed dramatically from short scrub to a tundra-like landscape with almost no vegetation. Slowly, the high-altitude species started showing in the form of Fire-fronted Serin, White-winged Snowfinch, Crimson-winged Finch and Radde's Accentor, the latter being my fifth and final family (Prunellidae) target for the trip. We noticed a rocky knoll in the distance, which provided excellent views of a val-

ley, and hopefully Caspian Snowcock. As we approached our vantage point, we heard the somewhat haunting call of our target echoing from the valley walls. An anxious few minutes followed as we frantically searched the walls, looking for the snowcocks. No luck. More calls, more scanning the valley walls, more anxiety. And then, an excited chuck-chuck-chuck call was followed by a pair flying down to the valley bottom! We got it! The undisputed highlight of the trip – Caspian Snowcock, a range-restricted and seldom-seen species occurring from Turkey to western Iran. I was particularly keen on seeing the snowcocks, so celebrations were in order. In total, we had walked close to 15 kilometres before 9 am and miraculously walked away with our main target at the most challenging time of the year to try and see it.

Our quick success meant we could leave early for Mersin and the southern coast. Mersin is a four-hour drive from Aladağlar, and the roadside scenery was breathtaking, with snow-capped peaks and pine-covered slopes. Upon arrival in Mersin, we unpacked at our Airbnb in the small beachfront town of Yemişkuyu and set off for some afternoon birding in the Mediterranean scrub. Unfortunately, the Mediterranean coast proved to be much hotter than anticipated. Although birding was slow, we



Rock Bunting © Daniel Engelbrecht



Caspian Snowcock © Daniel Engelbrecht



Red-billed Chough (juv) © Daniel Engelbrecht



Wild Goat © Daniel Engelbrecht



Radde's Accentor © Daniel Engelbrecht



**Birds (and some mammals) and birding at Aladağlar National Park**



Fire-fronted Serin © Daniel Engelbrecht



White-winged Snowfinch © Daniel Engelbrecht



Booted Eagle © Daniel Engelbrecht



Crested Lark © Daniel Engelbrecht



White Wagtail © Daniel Engelbrecht



Asia Minor Ground Squirrel © Daniel Engelbrecht



Black Redstart © Daniel Engelbrecht



ABOVE Rüppell's Warbler proved an easy target in the Mediterranean scrub © Daniel Engelbrecht.

managed a few coastal specials, including White-spectacled Bulbul, Rüppell's Warbler (the primary target) and Red-rumped Swallow.

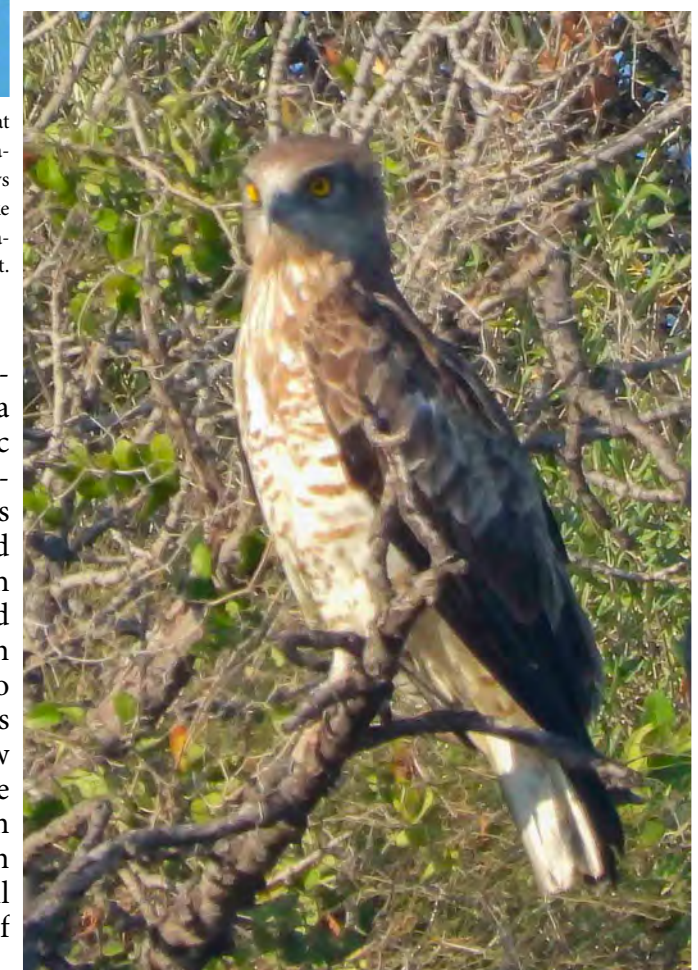
### Day 7 - Mersin to Istanbul (Karaburun)

With a full day of travel ahead of us, it was another early morning out in the Mediterra-

nean scrub, which produced improved views of Rüppell's Warbler, Eastern Orphee Warbler, Masked Shrike, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Syrian Woodpecker and numerous White-spectacled Bul-



A short walk along a small valley at the ancient ruins of the city of Neapolis rewarded us with good views of several warblers, Masked Shrike (ABOVE) and Short-toed Snake Eagle (RIGHT) © Derek Engelbrecht.



bul. Due to time constraints, I sacrificed a number of the classic southern coast targets for species such as Rüppell's Warbler and Masked Shrike with relatively restricted global ranges. We then drove 5 hours back to Göreme, took the bus to Kayseri and flew back to Istanbul before taking a taxi at 10 pm to our accommodation in Karaburun – a small town on the coast of the Black Sea.

## Day 8 - Karaburun

Our final morning in Turkey started with a walk along Karaburun beach. I still needed a number of the regularly occurring gulls, so a seawatch was in order. Unfortunately, things started slowly with large numbers of Yellow-legged Gulls, European Shags and Great Cormorants – none of which were targets for the morning. With no exciting activity, I decided to work through some coastal thickets, which produced Common Nightingale, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Spanish Sparrow and European Robin. The return to the seawatch proved considerably more productive than the first session, and I had excellent views of Mediterranean,

Black-headed and Common Gulls, and Common Tern. With the gulls sorted, we headed into an unnamed forest on the outskirts of Karaburun (an easy 10 min walk from town) for a last attempt at Sardinian Warbler and a few remaining targets. Thankfully, through some perseverance, the warblers cooperated, and we had close-up views of four Sardinian Warblers. Other species seen here included the first Cirl Bunting of the trip, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Nightingale, Red-rumped Swallow, Common House Martin, Hawfinch

BELOW One of seven lifers on my last day in Istanbul - Sardinian Warbler © Daniel Engelbrecht.



ABOVE A common scene in rural Turkey, a top-notch birding destination © Daniel Engelbrecht.

and Common Chaffinch. Additionally, Eurasian Green Woodpecker was heard but unfortunately not seen here. The final day produced seven lifers before catching our return flight to Johannesburg.

To conclude, Turkey exceeded my wildest expectations. Before setting out, I decided that 75 lifers would be a reasonable target, yet I ended up walking away with 110 lifers. The final trip total stood at 164 species; remarkably, not a single major target species was missed. Bird of the trip would have to go to Caspian Snowcock; not only was this the rarest (in terms of total observations on e-Bird) species seen on the trip, but it required the most effort to get to. Overall, Turkey was enjoyable and logistically easy to travel in;

the road network is superb, public transport was efficient and reliable, accommodation was readily available, and food was affordable and delicious. From a birding perspective, most species were readily accessible in a low-clearance sedan and open country birding made for a more relaxed birding pace. The country also presents additional interests to visitors with several historical and touristic sites to distract you along the way, making it the ideal place for those wishing to combine good birding with visiting the touristic areas.

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# Moletji Nature Reserve

A gem in plain sight

BY Christine Wreyford



On a lovely late winter's morning, the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 2022, 14 enthusiastic birders headed to the Moletji Nature Reserve. This small reserve - it is only 246 ha in size - can easily be missed on a map, but it is a real birding gem in plain sight of Polokwane. Unfortunately, very few birders know about its existence, and even fewer have visited it despite the reserve being

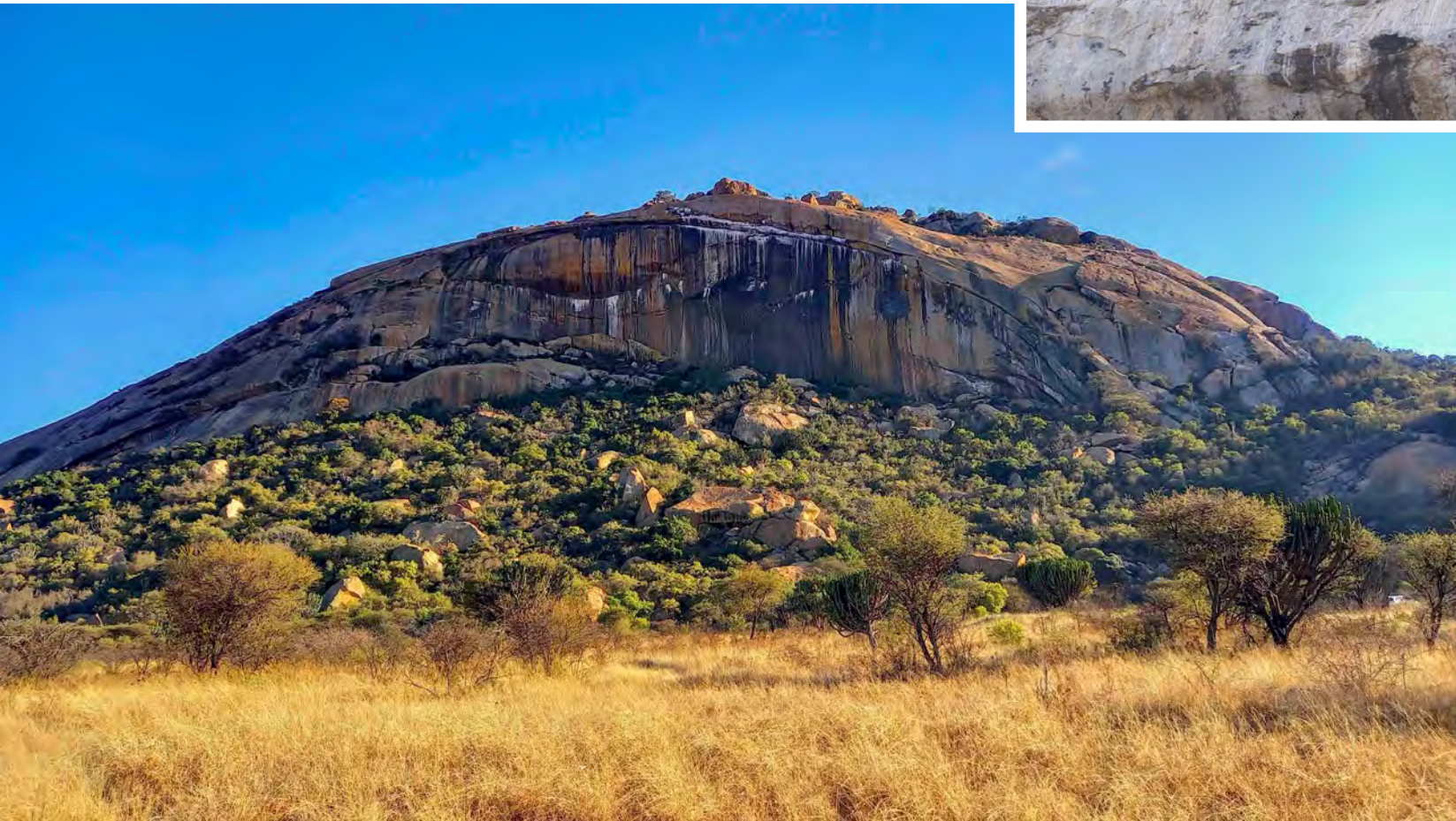
only about 30 km northwest of Polokwane. Needless to say, for most of us it was a first-time visit to this birding spot.

The dominant feature of Moletji Nature Reserve is Mmadikoti Mountain, a granite inselberg rising about 226 m above the surrounding plains. The cliffs support a small breeding population of Cape Vultures. The mountain is such a landmark on the relatively flat Polokwane Plateau, that it



ABOVE Moletji Reserves hosts a small breeding population of Cape Vulture © Jody De Bruyn.

LEFT The whaleback-shaped Mmadikoti Mountain is the dominant feature in the reserve and home to a surprising diversity of cliff-nesting species © Derek Engelbrecht.



also attracts many other species favouring cliffs and rock areas: Rock Kestrel, White-necked Raven, Black Stork, Lanner Falcon, Alpine Swift and Mocking Cliff Chat to name but a few. The reserve also offers an interesting mix of broad-leaved and thornveld savannah in what was historically open grassland. In short, the habitat diversity bodes well for good birding.



ABOVE LEFT It's always and impressive sight to see a Cape Vultures soaring overhead © Jody De Bruyn.

ABOVE RIGHT Rock Kestrel is uncommon around Polokwane, so it was special to see it on our club outing © Jody de Bruyn.

We made a collective decision to travel to Moletji via Larkville (Chebeng), rather than taking the shorter but much busier route via Seshego. This was a good decision as, driving through the grasslands of Chebeng, a few people had good views of Short-clawed Lark and Temminck's Courser. We arrived at the gate just after 8 am, and immediately set off for our three target species: Cape Vulture, Verreaux's Eagle and Black Stork.

We reached a suitable spot where we could have the customary cup of coffee, but also have a good view of the cliff. The Cape Vultures were present in good numbers, sit-

ting on the huge rock ledges or circling above our heads. We also had good views of Alpine and African Black Swifts, a Rock Kestrel, Lanner Falcon, and pair of White-necked Ravens busily carrying nesting material. Much closer to us, a Mocking Cliff Chat was hopping around on the rocks, and a Chestnut-vented

Warbler and some Grey Go-away-birds were feeding at some Mountain Aloes.

After coffee, we made our way around to the eastern side of the mountain for target #2, Verreaux's Eagle. The Verreaux's Eagles

RIGHT Grey Go-away-birds were feasting in numbers on the fruit of Nabooms © Jody De Bruyn.

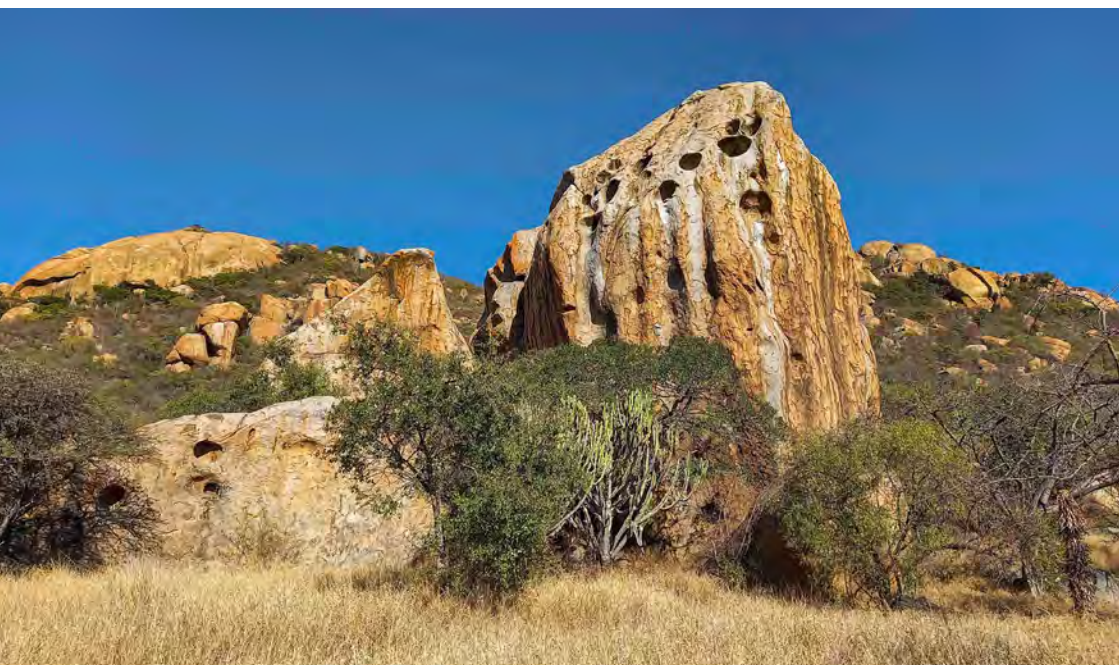
BELOW Red-winged Starlings were feeding on the nectar of the last few flowering Mountain Aloes © Jody De Bruyn.





ABOVE A Rock Hyrax keeping a keen eye on the Verreaux's Eagles circling overhead  
© Jody De Bruyn.

BELOW The holes of Pothole Rock supported the northernmost breeding colony of Southern Bald Ibis until it was abandoned sometime in the late 1980s to the early 1990s  
© Derek Engelbrecht.



had two nests on one side of a huge rocky outcrop. We were so privileged to see one of them landing in the nest with a prey item in its claws and then feeding its chick bit by bit. We also visited the pothole rock, a former breeding site of a small colony of Southern Bald Ibis, but sadly not anymore. We all enjoyed watching the beautiful rock formations and exploring the area on foot. Willie van der Merwe helped us identify some interesting plants.

Returning to our vantage point for a short break, we were excited to see target #3, the Black Stork, passing overhead and into the distance. Our second walk took us to the western side of the reserve. On this walk, we recorded Little Bee-eater, Yellow canary,



ABOVE The resident Lanner Falcons put on a spectacular display of regular fly-by's, chasing other birds and even engaging in an aerial combat  
© Jody De Bruyn.

Lesser Honeyguide, Jameson's Firefinches, more Mocking Cliff Chats, Namaqua Dove, Kalahari Scrub Robin, and Common Scimitarbill. An interesting record was a Southern Red-billed Hornbill, an uncommon species this close to Polokwane.

It was getting hot and bird activity dropped, so we decided to call it a day around 11:30. On our way out, we found a Greater Honeyguide calling, at exactly the same spot

Derek recorded it calling more than 25 years before!

We ended the day with a tally of 80 species amongst us. It was a lovely relaxing outing with good company, spring in the air and beautiful birds.

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# Don't be a chicknapper



**A BABY BIRD'S BEST CHANCE OF SURVIVAL  
IS WITH ITS PARENTS**

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY Derek Engelbrecht

**W**ith the breeding season already in full swing for some birds and most others to follow within the next few weeks, I thought this would be an excellent time to raise awareness about what to do when you find a seemingly abandoned baby bird. Human compassion to rescue a seemingly helpless baby bird drives us to 'save' it, while in most instances, its best chance of survival would have been to leave it where you found it – as hard as it may seem. To begin with, let me distinguish between the two stages of the early life of a young bird, as knowing the approximate age of the bird will, to a large extent, determine the approach to follow.

### **I found a nestling**

The nestling period refers to the first few days of a bird's life when it is nest-bound. For many songbirds, this period lasts between 11 and 18 days, depending on the species. Towards the end of the nestling period, some of the young birds may leave the nest for short periods from time to time but always return to the nest. It is easy to tell if a bird is a nestling as,

depending on the species, it may or may not possess down, and the contour and flight feathers are either absent or still growing, quite often with the feather sheaths still visible. In the very early stages of the nestling period (usually up to day 3 or 4, depending on the species), the chick is blind and still dependent on the parents for warmth (or shade), an activity known as brooding. After this highly demanding first few days, the chick starts to regulate its own body temperature, and the eyes start opening as slits before fully opening about two days later.

There are many reasons a nestling would be found outside its nest, but the primary causes are either accidents or natural causes. Storms may cause trees to fall or branches to break or sway fervidly, causing the nest to be dislodged or its contents (eggs or nestlings) to fall out. Sometimes when a nest is predated, it may cause a nestling to fall to the ground or 'explode' from the nest in an attempt to escape the predator. A nestling may be naturally weak or perhaps ill, and the parents may dispose of it to save the chances of survival of the remaining brood. If food avail-

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

Move or shepherd it to a **safe location.**

**It is OK to handle the baby bird,** the parents won't abandon it if **touched by humans.**

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

Yes

No

**Contact a wildlife rehabilitator,** the SPCA or a veterinary surgeon **for advice?**

**Do not feed or give it water; place the bird in a dark box with ventilation and some padding for warmth.**

**Is the bird bleeding or visibly injured?**

Laboured breathing; weeziness when breathing; appearing sleepy/drowsy; puffed-up feathers; flopping

No

Yes

**What does it look like?**

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

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

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



**Can you see the nest?**

Yes

No

**Is it in immediate danger?**

Yes

No

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

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

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

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



LEFT Sometimes, a nestling is naturally weaker than its siblings. These two nestlings are of the same age, yet there is a remarkable difference in the size. To save the brood, it is not unusual for parents to dispose of the weakest nestling in a brood, a phenomenon known as brood reduction.

ability is reduced for some reason or another during the nestling period, parent birds may be forced to reduce the brood to maximise the chances of survival of the stronger chicks. This may involve evicting the youngest or weakest chick of a brood. If you return the chick to its nest, you may soon find it back on the ground.

I encourage you to familiarise yourself with the flow diagram in this note. Always remember that the gold medal result would be for the chick to be raised by its parents. I believe in the good nature of people and that people only want to help a seemingly abandoned baby bird. However, raising a nestling is arduous, requiring lots of patience, dedication and time! It is best left to an

experienced animal rehabilitator who knows how often and what to feed the chick at every stage of its development. If you are not up to the task, you can always do your bit for your baby bird by donating food or money to the rehabilitator or centre responsible for raising the bird.

### I found a fledgling

The fledging period refers to the period after a young bird leaves the nest (the bird is called a fledgling) until it can forage and fend for itself. During this period, the young bird still depends on its parents for food and protection against predators and the elements, e.g. shading when it is hot. At this point, it is important to mention that most nestlings are

incapable of sustained flight upon fledging, although some may hop or flutter-fly short distances. It may take another 1–3 weeks before it can fly sufficiently strong to achieve a reasonable flight distance.

The approach followed when you find a fledgling is essentially the same as for nestlings – the bird's best chance of survival is if you leave it up to its parents. Let's first answer the question often asked: "Why do chicks fledge before they are able to fly?" The short answer is that birds don't like to put all their eggs in one basket. Birds suffer high predation rates, and early fledging is a strategy to split the brood and reduce the likelihood of a predator preying the entire brood while they are still in the nest. But don't worry, the parents know the whereabouts of each of their young. Quite often, if you sit quietly and listen carefully, you will hear the incessant high-pitched calls of a fledgling, alerting its parents to its position.

It is easy to tell if a bird is a fledgling. Recently-fledged birds usually have short wings and tails as the feathers are still growing. Tufts of down may still be present on some feathers, and the contour (body) feathers have a somewhat fluffy appearance. A tell-tale sign is the presence of a gape – a fleshy area (often pale in colour) at the base of the bill where the upper



ABOVE A recently fledged lark. Like most fledglings, the pale, fleshy gape is clearly visible, the wings and tail are short, it frequently rests on its 'haunches' and the body feathers appear rather fluffy.

and lower mandibles meet. When they walk, they often appear to shuffle, and when resting, they seem to sit on their haunches. This is because the leg muscles are still developing and are not strong enough to support the body. This is normal, and within a few days after fledging, the fledgling will be able to walk and run strongly.

Unless a fledgling is visibly injured or ill (see flow diagram



for signs), leaving it where you found it and keeping pets and people away from that area would be the best thing to do. If discovered, the fledgling will soon move off to a safer place and call or beg from there to alert its parents to its new position. People often say they watched the fledgling for a

ABOVE When nestlings or fledglings are in danger, the parents may perform a distraction display to lure a predator away from the young birds. Here, a Kit-tlitz's Plover is performing a broken wing distraction display. The predator will be distracted by a seemingly easy target with a broken wing, but the displaying parent will stay just clear of harm's way while luring the predator away from the nest or fledgling.

while and never saw the parents. In all likelihood, the parents were around but wary about the presence of a human. If you are attuned to bird calls, you may hear the parents calling a specific contact call to urge the fledgling away from potential danger. Sometimes, the parents are perched nearby but will only 'intervene' if you are too close to or handling the young bird. The parents' response may range from alarm calling to distraction displays such as the broken wing display and even physical attack! Also, depending on the age of the fledgling, the time be-

tween feeding bouts may last from several minutes to several hours. The best approach is to leave the scene and return an hour or two later to check if you feel the need to, but in all likelihood, everything would be OK.

Although there may be reasons to intervene in some instances, a baby bird's best chance of survival is with its parents, and all avenues should be explored to ensure this is done before hand-rearing is considered. As hard as it may seem to be to turn your back on a baby bird, don't be a chicknapper!

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# MEDIA RELEASE

## Launch of 'GoBirding'



**GoBirding**

[www.gobirding.birdlife.org.za](http://www.gobirding.birdlife.org.za)

**BirdLife**  
SOUTH AFRICA  
Giving Conservation Wings

**B**irdLife South Africa launched a new website called GoBirding ([www.gobirding.birdlife.org.za](http://www.gobirding.birdlife.org.za)) during their AGM in May 2022. The site features an interactive map with information available for over 400 birding sites, 60 accommodations, and 50 local guides, with 40 local bird clubs soon to be added. The objective of the site is to catalyse the avitourism sector in South Africa by providing

"GoBirding takes all of our accumulated information and brings it into a user-friendly, interactive digital space and makes it accessible to all. The integrated map is easy to navigate and puts birding sites into context with local service providers like our Recommended Accommodations and our Community Bird Guides, creating the links needed to energize avitourism in South Africa."

– Andrew de Blocq, Avitourism Project Manager, BirdLife South Africa

key information for both local and international birders. The site was launched in late May and by the end of June had been visited by nearly 3000 unique users. The bulk of the visitors to this point are from South Africa, with several hundred from other parts of the world, particularly the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Australia, which reflect the key inbound source markets for avitourism in South Africa.

'Each of the over 400 birding sites has a dedicated web page with all the necessary information, including what birds to look out for and where, details on the important habitats, access information such as gate times and fees, etc. All of the sites were revised and updated by professional bird guides during the national lockdown while travel was muted, meaning that this is a site built by birders for birders.'

### Avitourism in South Africa

A study by the Department of Trade and Industry in 2010 estimated that avitourism is worth up to R2.25 billion per year, equivalent to R4 billion in today's economy. Avitourists spend more, stay longer, and travel wider than most other types of tourists, making them an attractive tourism demographic. South Africa has over 870 species of birds and nearly 50 are found nowhere else on earth. We also have enviable tourism infrastructure, competitive pricing, and prevalent English, making it a top global avitourism destination.

'BirdLife South Africa has long been looked up to by birders as an authority on birds and birding in South Africa,' says Andrew de Blocq, Avitourism Project Manager and driving force behind the project. 'GoBirding takes all of our accumulated information and brings it into a user-friendly, interactive digital space and makes it accessible to all. The integrated map is easy to navigate and puts birding sites into context with local service providers like our Recommended Accommodations and our Community Bird Guides, creating the links needed to energize avitourism in South Africa.'

'The timing of the launch is significant with South Africa looking to grow international tourism again post-pandemic. We anticipate that GoBirding will become to go-to trip-planning tool for both visiting and local birders.'

BirdLife South Africa would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Chamberlain Foundation which made the development of the site possible.

For further information  
Andrew de Blocq, Avitourism Project Manager ([andrew.deblocq@birdlife.org.za](mailto:andrew.deblocq@birdlife.org.za))  
Andy Wassung, Communications Manager ([andy.wassung@birdlife.org.za](mailto:andy.wassung@birdlife.org.za)).

# Regulars

## Birds in Art

### Yellow-billed Duck

Text and Artwork

**Willem Van der Merwe**

Today we look at a Yellow-billed Duck, *Anas undulata*. The scientific name means 'wavy/waved duck', the application to this duck which I don't understand, as nothing about it is wavy. It is a medium-sized duck, reaching about 1 kg in weight. Its body is greyish-brown with a scaled pattern, resulting from the body and wing feathers having light edges. Like many other ducks, it has a shining blue-green panel, called a speculum, in its inner wing feathers, most easily seen when it flies. Its distinctive feature is its bright yellow



**Yellow-billed Duck**



low bill. The bill seems to glow from a distance and demand all your attention. Visible from closer up are the two black patches, one at the tip of the bill and a 'saddle' on the top. No other wild duck in South Africa has a similarly bright yellow bill. Yellow-billed Ducks also occur in East Africa. In the Horn of Africa, they might be confused with migrating Mallard ducks, which look similar outside of the breeding season, but their bills are not as bright yellow.

In South Africa, yellow-billed ducks are common to abundant, and I'm sure many of you have seen them. They typically occur in pairs or small groups, but can form large flocks outside the breeding season. The species is most common in the Highveld, which originally was covered in extensive grassland, but today supports a huge human population which has

significantly altered the landscape. The ducks have taken advantage of this by populating the many artificial waterbodies farmers have created by damming rivers and streams. Elsewhere they also occur in Fynbos (a shrubby vegetation type mainly of the south-western Cape) and Karoo (shrubby to grassy semi-desert) and on the water in all other habitats. They prefer fresh, still, or slow-flowing water and are not seen at sea or in fast-flowing inland streams. In times of drought, when their living rivers or lakes shrink or dry up, they'll fly out as far as 1000 km to seek new living space. But most of the time, they stick to a fixed territory.

In its lifestyle, this is a fairly typical duck. It paddles over the water surface, pecking up water plants from the surface or dipping its head into the water to take submerged

parts. It also feeds on plants on the river banks and lake shores. It is primarily vegetarian but will eat a small number of insects and invertebrates. It will even enter farmlands to feed on fallen grains. But it isn't considered an agricultural pest. It feeds mainly in the morning or evening, spending most of the day just relaxing on the water. Like other ducks, they undergo an annual moult after breeding, losing some of their wing feathers and spending three or four weeks flightless.

Yellow-billed Ducks, at least in South Africa, can breed at any time of the year, so long as there's water and food available. They have a greater variety of displays than most ducks, with seven main displays recognised by ornithologists. These displays include chasing, preening, skilful flying, and synchronised

ABOVE The striking sapphire blue speculum of a Yellow-billed Duck in flight adds to the beauty of this duck © Derek Engelbrecht.

swimming. Several males will perform to attract females, swimming, nodding their heads, and whistling; females will then throw their heads backwards and quack. A female will choose her male, after which they'll stay together for the whole breeding season. The nest, built by the female, is typically sited in rank vegetation close to the water. It is just a shallow bowl lined with soft grass and leaves, often with vegetation arching over it to hide it from above. The female lays four to twelve eggs. She incubates alone, and when she leaves the nest to feed, she'll cover the eggs with some of the nest lining. The ducklings hatch open-eyed and can swim

with their mother. They're able to fly at the age of about 68 days. Their flight is swift and direct, sometimes quite high, and their wings make a whistling sound. The life expectancy is slightly over four years for drakes and three years for ducks.

While still abundant, this duck nevertheless does face some threats. They do suffer from water pollution, which is bad in some of its South African range. They're hunted by humans, but not at a very intensive level. Their greatest potential threat actually comes from some of their close duck relatives! Domestic ducks are descended from Mallards, a species genetically close to the Yellow-billed Duck. In captivity, they can breed and produce fertile offspring with our Yellow-billed Ducks. In many farm and urban regions, some domestic ducks have escaped into the wild. If these, as happened in other countries with introduced Mallards or domestic ducks, interbreed with the wild Yellow-billed Ducks, it might lead to 'genetic pollution' in which the wild ducks lose some of their characteristic original features. For many years, it was suspected that Mallards were hybridising with

wild Yellow-billed Ducks. However, concerns raised by conservation organizations about the threat of hybridisation were often dismissed as there was no firm evidence of hybridization, only anecdotal observations. Hybridization (and the parties involved) can only be confirmed by means of a genetic study. Recently, Stephens and colleagues, using genetic markers, confirmed hybridisation between Yellow-billed Ducks and Mallards in South Africa. The same study also showed high genetic connectivity in Yellow-billed Duck populations, sometimes several hundred kilometres apart. This means hybrid genes from a small farm dam may have the potential to spread across the subregion and beyond. So, one of the biggest threats facing our Yellow-billed Duck is genetic contamination – the invisible threat.

For more about this, the following article will be of interest: Stephens K, Measey J, Reynolds C, Le Roux J. 2020. Occurrence and extent of hybridisation between the invasive Mallard Duck and native Yellow-billed Duck in South Africa. *Biological Invasions*. 22. 10.1007/s10530-019-02122-6.

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View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:



## SOUTHERN GROUND-HORNIBILLS

### 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.



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# Reflections

*REFLECTIONS*

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

## Don't dodge Dzungwini

Chris Patton



In the last edition, *The Lark* 42, I reflected on birding in Kruger's Northern Plains. If you're driving north through the Plains on the tarred H1 from Shingwedzi towards Punda Maria or Pafuri, the endless open landscape is jarred by a seaming juggernaut of a mountain that, to corrupt a line from Toto's song Africa, "rises like Olympus above the Northern Plains of Kruger". This is Dzungwini Hill, which is situated 15 km east of Punda Maria Gate and, at 601 m above sea level, dominates the horizon in the far-northern section of the Park. Dzungwini Hill is the highest point in the Park north of the Sabie River! In Xitsonga, Dzungwini (often erroneously spelt Dzungwini in publications) means "at the land belonging to the Chief and his people, and cultivated by his people".

The quickest way to get to Punda Maria if you're in a hurry is to remain on the tar past the S58 junction that takes travellers directly to the Hill in a gravel road loop that gives a 5 km equidistant alternative to the H1/H13 junction route leading to Punda Maria Gate and Camp. The same route also has a cul-de-sac offshoot that goes up the slopes of Dzungwini to a look-out point giving a vista of the surrounding plains and access to an interpretive display.

I know this is a bird chronicle, but for those interested in the history of the Park, in 1836 when Louis Trichardt passed through this area to Mozambique, he named this hill in his diary "Matibeetuin" possibly meaning "Matibee se tuin" or Matibee's garden. The area was at the time well-populated and under the rule of a Chief Matibee. This was also one of the well-known routes to Mozambique (then Portuguese East Africa) at the time and even further back in history, even prior to Portuguese settlement of the African east coast in 1505.

LEFT Dzungwini Hill  
© Joep Stevens.



ABOVE View of surrounding Plains from Dzundwini Hill © Joep Stevens.

Fred Jeppe (a German explorer) referred to it as Dzondwen and Zundo in 1892; while Paul Berthoud (a Swiss missionary active in the area) called it Dzundwen, but Stevenson-Hamilton (the first warden of the Park) preferred to call it Zundo. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of people came to live in the vicinity of the Hill. Many springs can be found in this area during good rainy seasons. One can assume that the rainfall during those early years may have been better than now to enable the springs to provide water for so many people.

But we're here to reflect on birds... When you leave the H1 onto the S58, the road soon de-

scends to a ford through a stream where on the north side of the road the water ponds and from one's vehicle you are at eye level with the water and get some excellent sightings of water birds. Black Crakes and African Pied Wagtails will be two of the commoner protagonists, but I have seen rarer and more unusual birds here for the Park, like Red-billed Teal and Little Bittern. The Little Bittern encounter was particularly memorable because it was one of those occasions where I was able to watch their remarkable ability to extend their neck like

they were in an Inspector Gadget cartoon.

Leaving the ford behind heading towards the Hill, the vegetation gets quite dense, making viewing of birds difficult, but there are resident Verreaux's Eagle-Owls in the area that are often surprisingly obliging with their viewability, or picked up in late afternoons or overcast mornings by their stuttering grunts.

After 2 km the loop has a branch to the left that takes vehicles up the hillside, and the vegetation leaves the mopane woodland behind and becomes a dense thicket with a variety of shrubs and trees all matted together on the slopes. If the sun is not yet too hot, it is always productive to stop the car, listen and let the birdlife come to you. There will be a melody of sounds, but prominent will be Black-collared Barbet, Purple-crested



ABOVE Little Bittern © Chris Patton.

When the ford is full of water, travellers will get excellent close range encounters with African Pied Wagtail (BELOW LEFT) and Black Crake (BELOW RIGHT) © Derek Engelbrecht.





Turaco, Sombre and Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Eastern Nicator.

But the highlight of the 2 km drive up to the top of Dzundwini is the view of the surrounding plains, which of course gives one an outstanding opportunity to scan for large raptors and other soaring birds using the uplift generated from the Hill to aid their elevation. Vultures, eagles and storks will be on the menu.

But descending back down the Hill to along the loop section of the gravel S58 road, readers will find next to a hollow that holds water in the rainy season, is a giant sausage tree *Kigelia africana*. Back to the history lesson; for centuries the shade of this tree has been used as a

LEFT Verreaux's Eagle-Owl along the S58 © Joep Stevens



ABOVE Coetzer's Sausage Tree © Joep Stevens.



LEFT Yellow-bellied Greenbul feeding in Coetzer's Tree at of Dzundwini © Derek Engelbrecht.

meeting place by the locals living in the area especially when visitors passed through. Before Punda Maria Camp was completed in 1919, JJ Coetzer, the first game ranger posted to the far north, resided in the area at the base of Dzundwini. There is a plaque along the route under that very sausage tree.

But it's also a good place to look for birds. There are often indigobirds in the area, potentially all three of the Kruger species, which means firefinches are around too... But there will be a profusion of many birds. In the summertime, look for Violet-backed Starlings and Broad-billed Rollers. There is a large colo-



ABOVE Dzundwini Hill's Red-headed Weaver colony © Chris Patton.

ny of Red-headed Weavers too... it's always a delight to spend time observing their comings and goings.

With the hillside to the west of the road and the many large trees, there can be sightings of specials like Narina Trogon and White-breasted Cuckooshrike, and all three Kruger orioles. And I'd like to share a reflection of one of my colleagues. Don English is the current Regional Ranger of the Northern Section of Kruger. He is also a third-generation ranger in the Park and has lived there all his life and birding all the way. He arguably knows the birds of the Park better than any other person, but until about January 2013

he had never seen African Golden Oriole in the Park and I think was always a little sceptical and grudgingly accepting of those of us who had seen it on the Mahonie Loop, or the mopane woodlands on the road to Klopperfontein... Now January 2013 was a year when floods meant that the road to Pafuri was washed away... but the end of every January and early February every year also sees the West Rand Honorary Rangers host their wonderful Kruger Birding weekends in pretty



ABOVE They don't often perch out in the open, but Purple-crested Turaco are common on Dzundwini Hill © Chris Patton

much all the camps in Kruger. The weekends run from Punda Maria are most iconic and known as Punda Extreme Birding weekends... extreme because of the non-stop birding on the Saturday, leaving camp at 02h00 and some of the four trucks only returning at 19h00 that evening, birding non-stop. On most years the reason trucks leave Punda at 02h00 is to give time to drive 40-odd kilometres to Crooks' Corner to do the dawn chorus there by 04h00, allowing time to do serious night birding along the way. On this particular weekend doing the normal route to Pafuri was out of the question. The four team

leaders held a think tank the night before and decided on different locations where each of us would take our individual vehicles with around 6-8 guests for an alternate dawn chorus. Don, and I think one of the other teams elected to head out and do it at the base of Dzundwini, and there triumphantly he found his first Kruger African Golden Oriole, but what made his team's sighting all the more special is that it was



ABOVE The flood damage to the Pafuri Road that led to Don English finally getting to grips with an African Golden Oriole © Chris Patton.

foraging in a tree alongside the two other oriole species Eurasian Golden and Black-headed... Every year at the closing dinner on a Saturday evening, each team leader shares their account of their top sighting of the day with the larger group, and Don was as delighted as I've ever seen him recounting his oriole odyssey, which I'm sure he will not mind me sharing.

The stretch of the S58 loop from where it is split by the road up the Hill to the H13 Punda Maria tar road is about 3 km... After one leaves the base of the Hill the vegetation turns to tall mopane woodland with an infusion of other mixed species. Because it is dense, birding is difficult, but both Retz's and White-crested Helmetshrikes may be encountered. But some personal reflections of this stretch from travelling on it at dusk, usually hus-

tling back to Camp before gate closing time, is coming across an African Barred Owlet that had pinned a Southern Grey-headed Sparrow to the gravel road right in front of our vehicle and allowed us to come much closer than would normally be allowed. I also once found a four-toed sengi/elephant-shrew on this stretch, a highly localised and vulnerable species in the Park.


So in conclusion I repeat the title don't dodge Dzundwini... It offers plenty of magic and birding attractions... but mind you the tar route can also be productive, and I'll share some of the delights of that option in another edition...

Author e-mail: [chris.patton@sanparks.org](mailto:chris.patton@sanparks.org)

## BIRD OF THE YEAR 2022


# THE CAPE GANNET

### A SUPREME DIVING BIRD




**SHARP-EYED**

In order to see long distances while searching for shoals of fish, these supreme hunters of the sea have **binocular vision**. Their eyes are situated forward on their heads allowing them to see far ahead to pinpoint their prey and judge distances accurately as they dive.



**CRASH TEST DUMMIES**

Cape Gannets are **social foragers**, hunting during the day in large, conspicuous groups. When diving, they sometimes collide with one another in their frenzy to catch fleeing fish.



**FUN FACT**

The Cape Gannet can drop out of the sky just like a jet fighter pilot, plummeting towards the sea at speeds of up to 100 km/h! A human diver would do some serious damage at that speed.

**ADAPTED TO DIVE**


**How does the gannet prevent injury when diving at high speed?**

A reinforced skull and specially adapted neck muscles help absorb impact with the water.

Gannets have special **air sacs** under the skin of the head, neck, and chest, which act like bubble-wrap, helping to cushion their entry into the water.

By tucking in their wings, and extending their long necks when diving, their **streamlined, missile-shaped** bodies help minimise the impact with the water.

**PLUNGE DIVE FROM HEIGHTS OF UP TO 30 M**



**UNDERWATER HUNTERS**

Excellent underwater **predators**, Cape Gannets use their powerful, partly folded wings and large, webbed feet to swim quickly underwater in pursuit of fish.


To avoid being robbed of their meal by fellow gannets, they usually eat it on the way back up to the surface.

**FIZZING BULLETS**


The gannet's streamlined body helps it maintain **momentum** under water by reducing drag. They are propelled up to 10 m under the water, with a stream of air bubbles trailing behind, just like fizzing bullets.

To prevent water shooting up their nostrils during high speed plunges, their nostrils are concealed by a covering of hard tissue.

**DIVE UP TO 10 M UNDERWATER**



**SWIM TO DEPTHS OF UP TO 20 M**



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 Ryan, P. (2016) Crash-test dummies: Foraging ecology of Cape Gannets. *African Birdlife*, September/October 2016: 23-30  
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# BIRD BRIEFS

## I kid you not. How a bird dropping solved a 35-year-old Melodious Lark mystery

Derek Engelbrecht and Stratton Hatfield

E-mail: [faunagalore@gmail.com](mailto:faunagalore@gmail.com)

**T**his note is about a 35-year-old mystery that was solved using good observational and listening skills, cutting-edge forensic technology, and a multi-national team of 16 larkophiles representing seven countries.

One day, long, long ago, at the dawn of the internet era, in 1987 to be precise, Brian Finch noticed a small lark in the Maasai-Mara, Kenya. The mysterious lark resembled White-tailed Lark, but its song was completely different. Although people were aware of the existence of this mystery lark in the Maasai-Mara and Serengeti (Tanzania) for many years, it was only in 2020 that the pieces of the puzzle started to fall in place.

Early in 2020, Adam Scott-Kennedy started connecting the dots and made an outrageous suggestion – the so-called ‘Mara Lark’ is, in fact, a Melodi-

ous Lark! I say outrageous because the nearest known population of Melodious Lark is in Zimbabwe, nearly 2 000 km away, and the bulk of the species distribution is nearly 3 000 km away in the Highveld of South Africa! But suggestions are not good enough. To put the mystery to bed, Adam’s suggestion would need solid evidence.

In September 2020, Stratton found the solid evidence – well, as solid as a fresh bird dropping gets. Stratton was photographing one of the Mara Larks at the exact moment it defecated on a rock. Like any good biologist would do, he collected the faecal sample, dried it, and gave it to Peter De Knijff. Peter is a passionate birder and, important to solving the mystery of the Mara Lark, a world-renowned forensic geneticist. He is always willing to assist with the identification of diffi-



ABOVE AND RIGHT One of the mysterious ‘Mara’ larks photographed in the Naboisho Conservancy in the Mara, Kenya, just after it defecated on a rock. This bird dropping helped to solve a 35-year-old lark mystery  
© Stratton Hatfield.



cult groups of birds, such as warblers and chats using DNA from faecal samples.

From here, it gets a bit technical, but the short ver-

sion of the saga is that the genetic analysis showed the Mara lark was genetically distinct from White-tailed Lark, and yes, you guessed it, genetically almost identical to Melodious Lark from South Africa! Although only based on the DNA obtained from a single specimen, analyses of songs of multiple individuals of Melodious Lark from South Africa and East Africa, scrutiny of photographs taken in the field of White-tailed and Melodious Lark (both Southern and East African populations), and behavioural and habitat preference observations all support the genetic data. And with all this evidence, Southern Africa lost one endemic, and East Africa gained another species.

The study also raises other questions. What is the range of East African Melodious Larks? Are there more relict populations? The core range of Melodious Lark is the Highveld of South Africa. Isolated populations are

found on the Polokwane Plateau in South Africa's Limpopo Province and the highlands of central Zimbabwe. These relict populations form a 'stepping stone' distribution to East Africa, although the last step heading north involves a 2 000 km jump! Is it possible that there are more relict populations of Melodious Lark hiding in plain sight in highlands somewhere between Zimbabwe and the Serengeti? Perhaps the highlands of Malawi, northern Zambia or south and central Tanzania? Birders and larkophiles, now there is a challenge for you. □

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Finch BW, Hatfield RS, Colombo S, Kennedy AS, Te Raa M, Irestedt M, De Swardt D, Grosel J, Engelbrecht D, Cohen C, Olsson U, Donald PF, Njoroge P, Frahnert S, De Knijff P, Alström P. 2022. Disjunct resident population of Melodious Lark *Mirafra cheniana* discovered in East Africa. *Journal of Ornithology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10336-022-02013-z>

OPPOSITE The present distribution of Melodious Lark. The possible existence of a relict population in northwestern Botswana needs to be confirmed. Are there more relict populations between East and southern Africa?



# Cape Penduline Tit feeding on a bagworm larva

Les Reynolds

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On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, I was photographing a Cape Penduline Tit on the southern side of the Hout River Dam west of Polokwane. The photos were taken from a distance and, to my surprise, when I downloaded the images, I saw I captured a sequence of images showing the bird feeding. I was amazed to see how it extracted a bagworm (Psychidae) larva from its distinctive thorn-covered cocoon. A description follows:

1. The bird first separated the cocoon from the twig it was attached to in order to manipulate it to be able to reach the larva.

2. In typical penduline tit style, it used its feet to manipulate the cocoon to get the ideal angle to be able to reach the larva (Skead 1959).

3. It eventually succeeded in extracting the larva.

Judging by the deftness it managed to extract the larva, this penduline tit was quite experienced in dealing with this somewhat unusual source of food. □

## Reference

Skead CJ. 1959. A study of the Cape Penduline Tit *Anthoscopus minutus minutus* (Shaw and Nodder). Ostrich Suppl. 3:274–288.



LEFT The distinctive cocoon of a bagworm moth.



# Some observations of White-breasted Cuckooshrike, including the description of two undescribed sounds

Derek Engelbrecht

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Cuckooshrikes are mostly rather unobtrusive birds, and their inconspicuous calls can easily be lost amongst the medley of other bird calls in the forests and tall woodlands they inhabit. For this reason, they present a considerable challenge to birders and are usually amongst some of the most sought-after birds on a trip. Of the three southern African species, Grey, Black and White-breasted, the latter has assumed an almost legendary status as one of the most challenging birds to find, at least in South Africa. Here, you don't go and look for a White-breasted Cuckooshrike; it will find you. And it is a shame it is so uncooperative because it is a strikingly beautiful bird.

In South Africa, the species stronghold is the far northern regions of the Kruger National Park, from Shingwedzi to Pafuri, and the central Lowveld (Harmony Block, Gravelotte and Letsitele) of the Limpopo Province. Within its

range, it prefers tall, mixed woodland, especially mature Mopane woodland.

I've been lucky to have had several close encounters with the species in the Central Lowveld since 2019. One aspect of its behaviour that always strikes me, is that it is a very confiding species and will allow for a surprisingly close approach.

Just after 10 am, on the 12th of August 2022, on a farm about 15 km east of Letsitele, I had an epic encounter with a male White-breasted Cuckooshrike I was able to follow for about 45 minutes. It all started when I found a bird party that included Fork-tailed Drongo, Red-headed Weaver, Long-billed Crombec, Chinspot Batis, Brubru and Yellow-throated Bushsparrow. Initially, I was drawn to a Retz's and White-crested Helmetshrike sharing the same perch. While scurrying to get the camera set up, the helmetshrikes flew off and the photo opportunity was lost, but out of the corner of my eye, I



noticed a relatively large whitish bird. Could it be a White-breasted Cuckooshrike? I followed on foot in the general direction the bird flew, and in no time, I had

ABOVE White-breasted Cuckooshrikes are very obliging birds and will continue with their activities unperturbed by a human's presence © Derek Engelbrecht.

tracked it down - yes, the ghost, White-breasted Cuckooshrike. It followed the other birds in the same general direction the bird party was moving in, but always on the fringes and on its own. At no stage did it call while it was in the bird party.

Once I had the cuckooshrike in my sights, my focus shifted to following it, rather than the bird party, to see what this secretive species gets up to. After about 10 minutes, it was clear it had lost

interest in the bird party and was now foraging on its own.

### Behaviour

The woodland at the spot was tall (6-8 m), mixed woodland, with a clear understory. Some tree species it was foraging included Marula, Red Bushwillow, Mo-

BELOW AND OPPOSITE While it was foraging, it would stare intently at the leaves, looking for prey such as caterpillars. © Derek Engelbrecht.



pane, Knobthorn and Mountain Kirkia. It would fly slowly from one tree to the next, usually landing on a branch clear of obstructions about two-thirds up in the tree and consistently below the canopy. From this vantage point, it would sit still, searching intently for prey on the bark or leaves for a few seconds, before jumping or flying to another perch in the same tree and repeating the sequence. It consistently foraged in the sub-canopy of trees, never descending below the leaf line.

Prey items were generally picked off from a leaf or stem if it was within reach, but if not, it

would clumsily (and somewhat comically) 'crash' (it really is the best way to describe it) into the leaves to seize the prey item. I was able to follow it for about 45 minutes before I had to leave, but during this time, it remained in a relatively small area of about 700 m<sup>2</sup>. However, most of its time was spent in a much smaller core area (~200 m<sup>2</sup>) it repeatedly returned to if it ventured too far while foraging. The fact that I never saw a female further supports my suspicion that a nest was in the vicinity. I tried to find a female or a nest but regrettably failed.

It was silent almost the en-

tire time. Only towards the end did I hear it call the typical high-pitched *peeu* whistle, twice in quick succession while in flight. After this call, it landed in a tall Mopane and started foraging, unperturbed by my presence right below it. The foraging then gradually morphed into preening and other self-maintenance activities. And then ...

### Sounds

While standing below the tree with the male performing self-maintenance activities, I heard a rapid *clack-clack-clack-clack* sound. I wasn't sure where it came from, but while watching it through the camera's viewfinder, I noticed the male cuckooshrike snapping its bill repeatedly in quick succession. I could not record the sound, but it lasted less than a second and was repeated at least four times in about two minutes. I could not find any reference to a non-vocal sound used by White-breasted Cuckooshrike (or any cuckooshrike, for that matter) in the literature. The purpose of the bill snapping is unknown, but I am convinced another cuckooshrike must have been nearby or within earshot of the male.

While the male was still in the same tree, I heard a soft *shhh-hhhhh* sound. Again, I wasn't sure where the sound came from, but

this time I immediately fixed my eyes on the male cuckooshrike. It was leaning slightly forward (as if it was going to take off), and with its beak open, produced a soft, drawn-out *shhhhhhhh*. It repeated it once more. Once again, the behaviour suggested the male was either directing the call at a conspecific, perhaps the female, or it was some kind of a threat posture and call directed at a potential predator. I scanned the tree in the direction the bird was looking, but once again I didn't see anything from where I was standing - not another bird, nor a potential predator. As I mentioned above, I am convinced there was a nest in the vicinity and the bill clapping and hissing *shhhhhhhh* vocalization was for the female's benefit.

I consider myself very fortunate to have had the opportunity to spend some quality time with a White-breasted Cuckooshrike. Although they are very secretive and almost impossible to go and look for, once discovered, they are some of the most obliging birds I have come across. This male allowed me to spend 45 minutes with it, and during this relatively short time, I could record two undescribed sounds. Imagine what other secrets this ghost of the woodlands may unveil if you are able to spend more time with White-breasted Cuckooshrikes. □

## The oldest Sabota Lark on record

Derek Engelbrecht

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It seems Polokwane is good for larks. It boasts the oldest known lark on record in the world, the well-known Mokgalaje that lived in the Polokwane Game Reserve for at least 15 years, 8 months and 1 day (Engelbrecht 2021).

The reserve also holds the longevity record for Sabota Lark. Going through some of my ringing records recently, I found an interesting recapture record of a Sabota Lark in the Polokwane Game Reserve. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2002, Carel Kilian ringed an adult male Sabota

Lark (ring number BD96242) at the Aloe Ridge ringing station in the reserve. The bird was recaptured by me at the same locality on 21 February 2010. The days elapsed between the ringing and recapture were 7 years, 5 months and 6 days, easily surpassing the previous record of 4 years, 6 months and 18 days of a bird at Vaalkop Dam in the North West Province in the 1990s. □

### References

Engelbrecht D. 2021. Missing, presumed dead: Mokgalaje the Short-clawed Lark. *The Lark* 36: 87-92.



Handheld Sabota Lark © Derek Engelbrecht

# Fearless Brown Snake Eagle

Pietman Muller

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The following photos show that Brown Snake Eagles sometimes target surprisingly large - and dangerous - snakes, sometimes successfully, and sometimes not.

First, is an attempt that did not succeed. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2022, my neighbour called to say a large eagle is in a tussle with a Snouted Cobra on the main road

outside my property. I rushed to the scene which was only about 400 m from my house. The eagle was a Brown Snake Eagle, and it had the cobra's head in its grip. I had just finished setting up my camera and started taking photos when a car full of people arrived on the scene. Unfortunately, the excitement got the better of them, and the driver approached too close. This distracted the ea-



gle, and it lost its grip, giving the snake the opportunity to free itself from the eagle's clutches. Although the snake was clearly badly injured, it immediately went on the attack, spreading its hood. The eagle showed little fear of the intimidating pose of the snake,

but the noisy crowd drove closer, causing the snake to take off and alight on a nearby pole. The injured snake took the opportunity to escape into the bush, not to be seen again. The snake eagle stayed put for about 10 minutes before it too left the scene.



The one that succeeded happened on the 10th of January 2021 at the corner of the S28 and H4-2 in the southern Kruger National Park. I first noticed the Brown Snake Eagle perched in a dead tree and decided to watch it for a while. It was early

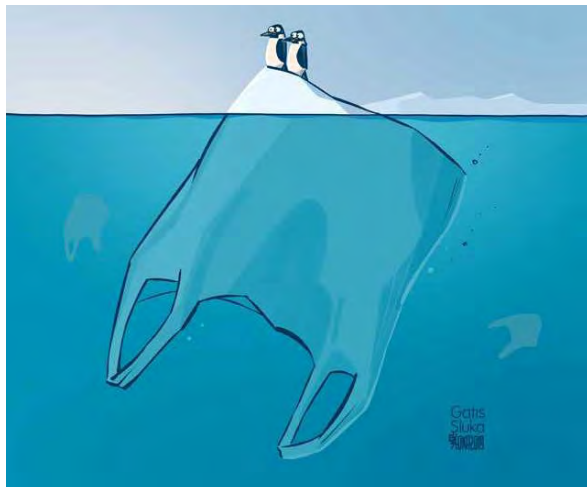
in the morning, and after about 45 minutes, it suddenly took off and dove into some long grass on the opposite side of the road. I approached slowly where it was sitting in the grass and noticed a snake curled around the eagle's body. Once again I was unable





to see the snake's head as it was firmly gripped in the eagle's talons. And it was a good idea that the snake had a firm grip on the eagle's head as an expert later identified the snake as a Black Mamba, one of the most venom-

ous snakes on the planet. It took about 10 minutes for the eagle to subdue the snake. The eagle then dragged its prey under a bush where it started feeding on it, out of view of scavengers and robbers. □



## Common Tern recovery

Daniel Engelbrecht

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While birding at Strandfontein in the Western Cape on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August 2022, I found a freshly dead Common Tern. I noticed the bird was ringed (ring number AT268453). It soon became evident that the ring sequence was not a local ring sequence. I reported the recovery and ringing details to Euring and received the following feedback a few days later.

The bird was ringed as a fledgling on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2021 at a ringing station near the town of Hamina, about 145 km east of Helsinki, in south-eastern Finland. The days elapsed between ringing and recovery was 404 days (1y 1m 8d) and the distance between the ringing and recovery site was 10 516 km. □



TOP The dead Common Tern. The ring is visible on the right leg.

RIGHT A Google Earth image showing the straight line distance between the ringing site at Hamina, Finland, and Strandfontein, South Africa.

# Birds associating with cormorant 'bream runs' in the Limpopo Province

Derek Engelbrecht

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**K**waZulu-Natal has the Sardine Run; in the interior, we have the 'Bream Run'. Cormorants occasion-

ally hunt cooperatively, forming large fishing flocks that drive fish into schools or shallower water near the shore for easier catching (Whitfield and Blaber 1979; Van Eerden and Voslamber 1995). This behaviour has been reported for both inland cormorant species in southern Africa, namely Reed and White-breasted Cormorant (Ryan 2004). Both species occasionally associate with other communally foraging fish-eating bird species, e.g. pelicans, forming multi-species fishing parties (Ryan 2004).

I have witnessed many Bream Runs at Letaba Estates east of Tzaneen. Here, White-breasted Cor-

LEFT Little Egret and Grey Heron gather patiently in the shallows as a Bream Run is heading their way © Derek Engelbrecht.



morants initiated all but one of these feeding flocks. Only one feeding flock was dominated by Reed Cormorants, but this was at a dam on the property where no White-breasted Cormorants were present. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of cormorants in a feeding flock due to individuals diving and surfacing at different times and points. Still, conservative estimates range from 5 to about 30 cormorants. From their behaviour, it is clear that their aim is to drive the fish to shallow water, either to see the fish better or, more

likely, corralling them into a smaller, shallower area for easy pickings. The strategy seems to work as the birds frequently surface with a fish in the beak before swallowing it.

A Bream Run also benefits piscivorous bird species that are unable to swim, but that can wade in the shallows. It is amazing to see opportunistic species

ABOVE A few Little Egrets following a feeding flock of Reed Cormorants, hoping to catch a small fish herded to the shallows © Derek Engelbrecht.



such as herons, egrets, kingfishers and Hamerkop fly in from all over to join the feeding frenzy. At Letaba Estates, I have recorded the following species associated with cormorant fishing flocks:

1. Little Egret (regular),
2. Intermediate Egret (occasionally),
3. Grey Heron (regular),
4. Hamerkop (seen once, but probably more regular),
5. African Darter (infrequent, but also probably more regular), and
6. Pied Kingfisher (regular).

In addition to these six spe-

cies, two other species were recorded following a Bream Run. However, I am unsure if their presence was incidental or if they benefited from the fishing flock's activities. African Jacanas are often seen in the shallows. Although I have seen them lunge into the water during a Bream Run, I never saw one that successfully caught a fish. An African Skimmer was once seen skimming along the shore ahead of a fishing flock. Once again, I am unsure if its presence was incidental or deliberate. For the record, the skimmer didn't catch a fish while I was watching it.

It would be interesting to hear from others what species they have seen associating with a cormorant fishing flock. □

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ABOVE A fishing frenzy in a small bay at one of the dams at Letaba Estates. Little Egrets and Grey Herons have joined the White-breasted Cormorants, catching fish trapped in the shallows of this bay. Although the African Jacanas in the image appeared to be joining the others and seemed to be 'fishing' too, I couldn't confirm this unequivocally © Derek Engelbrecht.



Interesting sightings  
**16 June 2022 - 15 August 2022**

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SABAP2 Out of Range; Regional Rarity; National Rarity, †Unvetted

COMPILED BY Derek Engelbrecht

NON-PASSERINES

**African Grey Hornbill** - 11 July 2022. An adult female seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht).

**Emerald-spotted Wood Dove** - 25 June 2022. One seen at Moletji Nature reserve (Richter Van Tonder).

**Lilac-breasted Roller** - 27 July 2022. One bird seen in open veld at HTS Tom Naude (Derek Engelbrecht).

**Martial Eagle** - 5 July 2022. An adult seen in Tzaneen near the Tzaneen Dam wall (Ross Hawkins).



African Grey Hornbill © Daniel Engelbrecht

**Purple Roller** - 16 July 2022. One seen near Kuschke (Jody De Bruyn).

PASSERINES

**Brubru** - 22 July 2022. A single bird seen in Grobler Street, Sterpark (Willem Van der Merwe).

**Lazy Cisticola** - 25 June 2022. Several seen at Moletji Nature Reserve (Richter Van Tonder).

**Olive Bushshrike** - 19 July 2022. One individual at farm Schurwewkloof east of Polokwane, a considerable distance (70 km) from the nearest known population (Jan Fourie).



Olive Bushshrike © Corné Harrison



Lazy Cisticola © Jody De Bruyn

**BEST OF THE REST  
 LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

NON-PASSERINES

**African Skimmer** - 7 July 2022. A single adult seen at Grootvlei Dam in the Kruger National Park (Luke Van den Heever); 7 August 2022. A pair seen at Weipe (Louis De Wet).

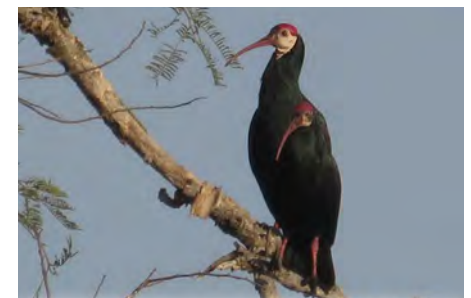
**Great White Pelican** - 16 July 2022. A group of three birds flying over Phalaborwa (Leonie Kellerman).

**Southern Bald Ibis** - 30 July 2022. Four birds seen in burnt grassland at Elandsdoorn near Mabusasa Game Reserve (Stephan Terblanche).

**Southern White-faced Owl** - 1 July 2022. One heard near All-days (Richter Van Tonder).



African Skimmer © Luke Van den Heever



Southern Bald Ibis © Stephan Terblanche

**Wahlberg's Eagle** - 28 July 2022. A very early arriving bird seen near Satara (Jeremy Brown).

**Western Osprey** - 9 July 2022. One seen at Sable Dam, Kruger National Park (Jeremy Brown).

**White-bellied Bustard** - 30 July 2022. A male and two females in burnt grassland 3 km north of Dennilton (Stephan Terblanche).



Western Osprey © Rene Van der Schyff

## PASSERINES

**African Red-eyed Bulbul** - 7 July 2022. A single bird seen near Marken (Ryno Rademan).

**Bearded Scrub Robin** - 25 June 2022. A single bird seen at Mahe-la (Daniel Engelbrecht).

**Greater Blue-eared Starling** - 25 July 2022. Several birds seen at Northam (Ernest Davis).

**Kalahari Scrub Robin** - 28 June 2022. One seen near Nwambi Pan in the far east of the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Ross Hawkins).

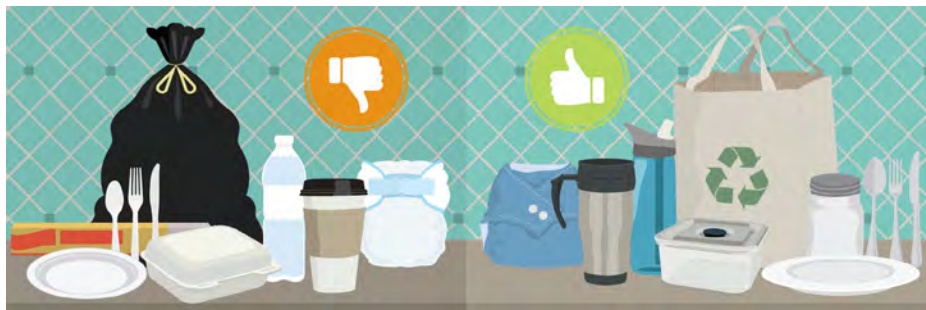
**Wood Warbler** - 1 July 2022. A new species for southern Africa seen at Sefapane Lodge, Phalaborwa (Nick Addey).



White-bellied Bustard © Stephan Terblanche



Wood Warbler © Jody De Bruyn



Learn more about albatrosses



## WHY IS THE SOOTY ALBATROSS ENDANGERED?

[Scientific name – *Phoebastria fusca*]



Agreement of the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels  
Saving Marion Island's Seabirds  
The Mouse-Free Marion Project  
<https://mousefreemarion.org>

1. Sooty Albatrosses breed on sub-Antarctic islands in the South Atlantic Ocean on the Tristan da Cunha – Gough group, and in the southern Indian Ocean on Marion and Prince Edward, Amsterdam and the Crozet group, with less than 10 pairs each on Saint Paul and Kerguelen



c. 11 000 – 14 000 breeding pairs



Sooty Albatrosses eat fish, squid, crustaceans and small seabirds



2. Risks at sea: Sooty Albatrosses are hooked and drown on longlines, causing a rapid population decline

3. Risks on land: introduced House Mice kill chicks on Gough and Marion Islands. Feral cats and introduced rodents are present on some Indian Ocean islands. Infectious diseases (Avian Cholera and Erysipelas) pose a threat on Amsterdam Island



4. At-sea and on-land risks make the Sooty Albatross Endangered, defined as "facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild". Fishery-caused mortality needs to be reduced by enforcement of best-practice mitigation measures, including on the high seas outside territorial waters

The Mouse-Free Marion Project aims to eradicate the island's mice in 2024; the attempt to eradicate mice on Gough Island in 2021 was unsuccessful. Nearly all the breeding islands are nature reserves, most are World Heritage sites.

Read the ACAP Species Summary for more information; <https://www.acap.aq/world-albatross-day/species-summaries>



HELP SAVE OUR SEABIRDS

**B**irdLife 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/>



Marion Island Sponsor Map  
20 June 2022  
Percent of target reached: 17.39%  
Sponsored Hectares: 5217 ha  
Sponsors: 1689

Marion Island Sponsor Map  
25 August 2022  
Percent of target reached: 17.97%  
Sponsored Hectares: 5393 ha  
Sponsors: 1748

# UPCOMING EVENTS



**Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting**  
Date: 06 September 2022  
Time: 18:30  
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

**Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting**  
Date: 11 October 2022 (not the first Tuesday of the month)  
Time: 18:30  
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

**Birdlife Polokwane Year-end Function**  
Date: 23 November 2022  
Time: 18:30  
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

**Club outing**  
 Where? Club Ranch  
 Date: 17 September 2022  
 Contact: Richter van Tonder  
 Cell: 082 213 8276



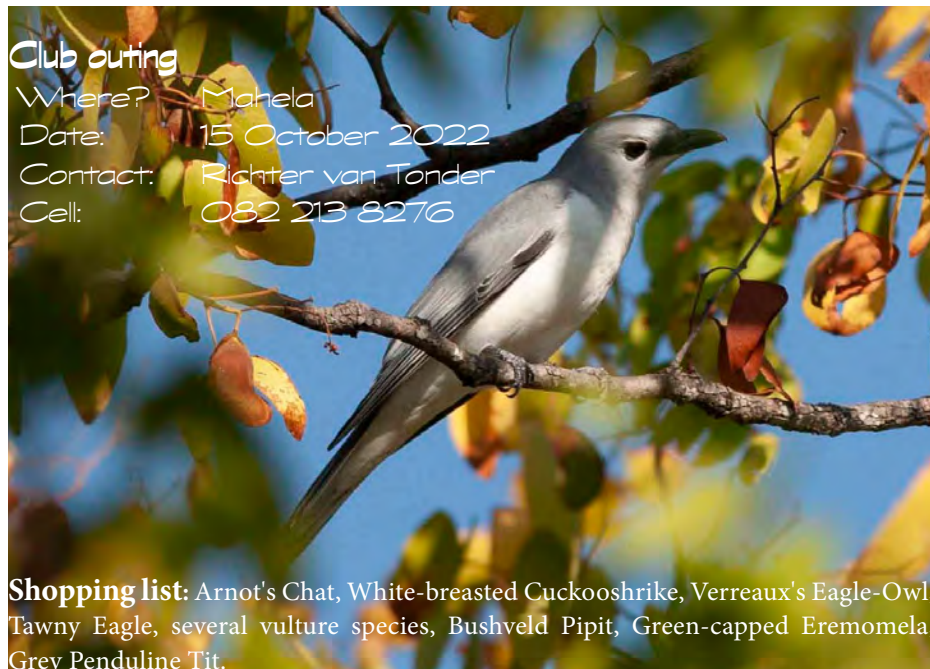
**Shopping list:** Pel's Fishing Owl, Meyer's Parrot, Meves's Starling, White-crowned Lapwing, Tropical Boubou, Saddle-billed Stork, Temminck's Courser, Kori Bustard

**Club outing**  
 Where? Golwe-Vhurvhuri  
 Date: 12 November 2022  
 Contact: Richter van Tonder  
 Cell: 082 213 8276



**Shopping list:** African Broadbill, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Pink-throated Twinspot, Black Sparrowhawk, African Wood Owl, Grey Waxbill,

**Club outing**  
 Where? Mahela  
 Date: 15 October 2022  
 Contact: Richter van Tonder  
 Cell: 082 213 8276



**Shopping list:** Arnot's Chat, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Tawny Eagle, several vulture species, Bushveld Pipit, Green-capped Eremomela, Grey Penduline Tit.

**BIRD OF THE YEAR 2022**



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

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA  
 Giving Conservation Wings

# Cinderella's page

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



Chirping Cisticola © Derek Engelbrecht