The Birdlife Polokwane Magazine 48, July/August 2023

THE LARK

Birding

Koedoes River valley

Winter birding - Witvinger

Cheringoma Biodiversity Survey

Roberts 8

Birding with a purpose

Birds and windows

Rare plumages · Leucistic Cut-throat Finch in Polokwane · A field study of the Short-toed Rock Thrush · Brown-backed Honeybird observations · Bushveld Pipit song flight · The elusive White-backed Night Heron · The wing claws of Hadada Ibis chicks

Birdlife Polokwane

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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 August 2023

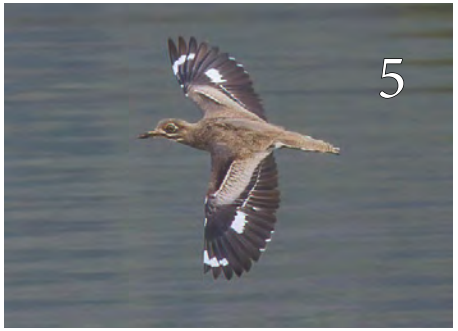
This newsletter is best read in a 'two page view' format.

CONTENT

The Lark 48 July/August 2023

Cover Cape Bunting © Daniel Engelbrecht.

Featured



For a lark ...

Mirror, mirror on this door, who's the fairest hornbill of them all?
© Derek Engelbrecht

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Editors' chirps

In the previous issue, we wrote that winter is the time to expect the unexpected. Well, call us the Prophets of Birding because the unexpected happened. Firstly, Fatima Cachalia reported an African Scops Owl in the gardens of Cycad Estates - yes, right here in Polokwane's suburbs! The closest confirmed records of the species are over 100 km away, making this also a 100K lifer for the listers. But there is more ... the Polokwane Game Reserve boasts a new species on its already impressive bird list. Daniel Engelbrecht found a male Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark in the reserve. Not to be outdone by our smallest owl or a sparrow-lark, Richter Van Tonder found another rarity near the golf club - a fully leucistic male Cut-throat Finch. You can read about this on page 61 of this issue. We are also amid an irruption of Lark-like Buntings and Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks in the province. Who knows what other goodies we'll find during the stark winter months - did anyone pick up the 'dark humour' in this question?).

On a different note, Derek found an injured African Harrier Hawk and took it to the Wolkberg Veterinary Clinic. X-rays revealed the cause - the bird was shot with an airgun, and the pellet was lodged in its leg (see image). In an earlier issue of *The Lark*, Derek wrote about the 'pellet problem' (see *The Lark* 33). Unfortunately, the bird had to be euthanised. We request our readers to educate people about the responsible use of airguns.

Have a look at our new regular column, Roberts 8 (page 33). It will feature updates about the project, and you'll also find requests for information and media of species that are under revision.

We hope you enjoy this issue, and we look forward to receiving your contributions to the next issue.

Raelene and Derek

Exploring the Koedoes River valley

Black Sparrowhawk © Jody De Bruyn.

TEXT AND PHOTOS Jan Fourie

Alan and I met up with 19 other members of Birdlife Polokwane at Greener Tidings opposite the Mall of the North at 05:30 on the 13th of May 2023.

Wian Haddad, the ecologist at ZZ2, arranged access for us to their farm Vreedsaam situated in the Koedoes River valley near Mooketsi. This is an interesting area as lots of different types of habitats come together here … and habitat diversity means bird diversity. For example, you'll get a lot of Lowveld-type species, and then as you move into the valley and towards the mountains, some forest species can be seen.

Overcast conditions and misty weather on the way did not dampen the enthusiasm of the members, who looked forward to exploring some new birding areas (at least for Alan and I). Because of the size of our group, we walked most of the time in and around the local dams. There were lots of activity around, and at the first dam, we managed to find a Lizard Buzzard (Akkedisvalk) hunting from a nearby tree. It was a bit shy and flew off whenever we got close. The thick bush made it difficult to see

Above One of the many dams at Vreedsaam © Jan Fourie.

the skulking birds, but we managed to get views of African Firefinch (Kaapse Vuurvinkie), Grey Tit-Flycatcher (Waaierstertvlieëvanger) calling its heart out, Bar-throated Apalis (Bandkeelkleinjantjie), and Gorgeous Bushshrike (Konkoit). Lots of Wire-tailed Swallows (Draadstertswael) were flying around, and among them was Black Saw-wing (Swartsaagvlerkswael). As we approached the first dam, a pair of African Black Ducks (Swarteend) swam into view and then took off to give us good views as they circled around us. We then moved across the dam wall towards our vehicles, and at several places where the vegetation got dense, we could hear the diagnostic call of the Red-capped Robin-Chat (Nataljanfrederik). A large area of grassland near the parking area offered several Yellow-throated Longclaws (Geelkeelkalkoentjie) calling and giving all of us excellent views. Another special bird here was Croaking Cisticola (Groottinktinkie) - a lifer for both Alan and me.

From here, we went on to the next dam, a little further upstream. This dam has a very old but interesting dam wall. According to Wiam, the dam

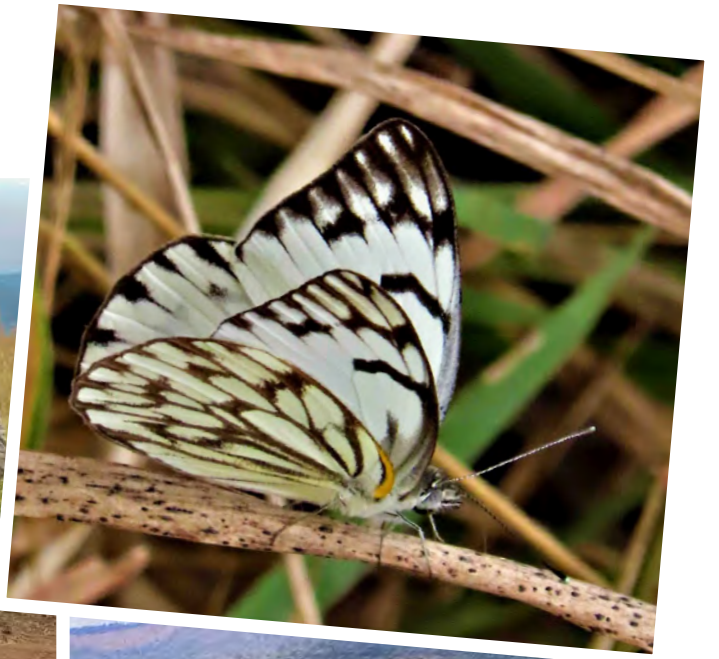
Above Cape Batis © Jody De Bruyn.

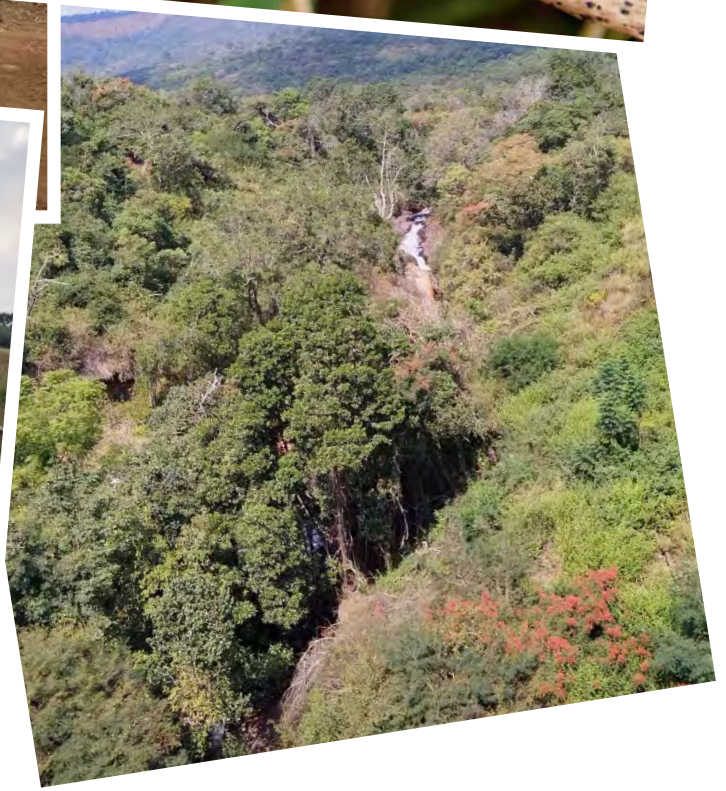
Left Croaking Cisticola © Jody De Bruyn.

rarely overflows, but on this day, it was, and it created a small waterfall - a good indication of how much rain had fallen this season. As we stood there and observed it all, a beautiful large Black Sparrowhawk (Swartsperwer) flew overhead, giving us excellent views of it. It was also lifer #2 for Alan.

How pleasing it was to hear all the bird calls from the bush, but most frustrating not to be able to see all of them. Still, we were lucky to have the experts close by to interpret the calls for us - thanks to Jody and Richter! To me, one very pleasing call was that of the Purple-crested Turaco (Bloukuifloerie).

Photo Book





Opposite Wire-tailed Swallow fly-by at one of the many dams on the farm © Jody De Bruyn.

Right Yellow-throated Longclaw © Leonie Kellerman

Below The Vreedsaam group © Jan Fourie.

Our final stop was even further upstream and was characterised by more forest-like habitat. Here we saw Cape Batis (Kaapse Bosbontrokkie) and also got Terrestrial Brownbul (Boskrapper). A Yellow-breasted Apalis (Geelborskleinjantjie) completed the trio of lifers for Alan on the day. We walked to where the river created a natural pool in the rocks. As one of our members took some photos of it with his cellphone, it fell into the pool! With great determination, Quintin managed to find his phone in this dark 2 m deep pool and, to everyone's surprise, it still worked! What a lucky guy.

The spectacular birding aside, of equal interest was the flora and insect life. We saw the most colourful butterflies and dragonflies. After what was a very successful birding excursion with 76 species recorded for the morning, we left this beautiful area and headed back home. We hope to return to this place sometime in the summer months. Thank you, Richter, for organising and leading this outing.

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Winter birding

TEXT Minkie Prinsloo

PHOTOS Jody De Bruyn

This year our June club outing was to the Mashashane Dam and the areas around the Witvinger Nature Reserve and towards the Percy Fyfe Nature Reserve. As usual, we departed early morning from the Polokwane Golf Club towards our destination, and nine members were brave enough to face the cold winter's morning.

Our first stop was Mashashane Dam. We already had species such as Cape Crow, Pied Crow, Hamerkop, Kalahari Scrub Robin, and Grey Heron on the list. We had a slow start as the wind was freezing, but luckily it was not long before we spotted a lovely pair of Lanner Falcon hanging around the koppie. We had hoped to find some Southern Bald Ibis as this koppie is one of the areas where

ABOVE A Swainson's Spurfowl stand sentinel n one of the rocky koppies © Jody De Bruyn.

Above Marico Flycatcher.

Left Little Bee-eater.

this species used to breed, but today we missed out on these amazing birds.

We moved along the dam, finding the ever-present Blacksmith Lapwings, Three-banded Plover, Cape Wagtail, Little Grebe, and Southern Red Bishop. The shrubs around the dam yielded Marico Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Marico Flycatcher, and Little Bee-eater. The area was quiet, but we attributed it to the cold morning temperature and the icy wind.

We decided to move from the dam towards a nearby koppie which, fortunately, offered us shelter from the wind. I am always amazed by the number of species one can find around a koppie, and some of the species we got here included White-throated Robin-Chat, Speckled Mousebird, a very large flock of Rock Martin, Mocking Cliff Chat, Familiar Chat, Bar-throated Apalis, Rock Kestrel, Blue Waxbill, and a Swainson's Spurfowl basking in the morning sun. Personally, the large flock of Rock Martins basking in the sun on the rock face and the beautiful fly-by views we had of them was one of the highlights of the morning.

Below Rock Martins showed particularly well.

Above Mocking Cliff Chat - a delightful bird.

After our walk along the koppie, we headed back to our vehicles for a cup of well-deserved coffee and a quick bite to eat. From here we headed in the direction of the Witvinger Nature Reserve. As we drove through the village, we added some of the more common species such as Black-throated Canary, House Sparrow, Red-eyed Dove, Namaqua Dove, and Common Myna. We stopped at a little patch of over-grazed farmland where we found Buffy Pipit, Groundscraper Thrush, Crowned Lapwing, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill.

We continued to head towards the Percy Fyfe area, stopping every so often. One such stop delivered Golden-breasted Bunting, Bushveld Pipit, Southern Black Tit, Chinspot Batis, Bearded Woodpecker, Grey-headed Bushshrike, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, and Neddicky. At another stop, we got White-crested Helmetshrike, Green Wood Hoopoe, Red-winged Starling, White-fronted Bee-eater, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Ashy Flycatcher, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, and a juvenile African Harrier-Hawk. By now, it had warmed up considerably, and we stopped for lunch before heading off again.

On one of our other stops, this time at a bridge over a stream, we added Natal Spurfowl, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, and Grey-backed Camaroptera, and we had a flock of no less than 40 Marabou Storks flying overhead.

Moving on and continuing our stop-bird-stop approach to birding, our last couple of stops produced Black-winged Kite, Sabota Lark, Jameson's Firefinch, Common Waxbill, Red-billed Firefinch, Emerald Spotted Wood Dove, Purple Roller, and Cape Vulture. With our tally of 109 species for the morning, we called it a day and headed back to Polokwane. This trip yet again proves that it is always worth it to go birding, even on a cold winter's day.

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Below The Witvinger "Ysbere".

Cheringoma Biodiversity Survey

Gorongosa National Park, Mozambique

TEXT AND PHOTOS Derek Engelbrecht

PING! Voice note: "Would you be willing to participate in a biodiversity expedition to the poorly known Cheringoma Plateau in Central Mozambique?" Kris Bal asked. Trying to hide my excitement at this prospect, I answered in my best 'poker voice', "Yes, when?". And so this great adventure started. From the 15th to the 29th of April 2023, I was part of an international team of biodiversity experts surveying plants, invertebrates, fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, and, of course, birds. The team's focus was the Cheringoma Plateau on the eastern perimeter of Gorongosa National Park, a region that is underexplored from a biodiversity point of view.

I left Polokwane International Airport on the 13th April, and three flights later, I landed in Chitengo, the Park's headquarters. Here I spent a few days waiting for the rest of the team to arrive, getting all our gear together, and, of course, birding. On my first morning out birding in camp, I was surprised to see two cyclists exercising along

Sunset over Lake Urema, Gorongosa NationaL Park, with Mount Gorongosa in the background.

Above A workout, Gorongosa style. The wild dogs were intrigued by the cyclists but otherwise went about their own businees.

the perimeter of the runway, a pack of inquisitive wild dogs in tow. Interesting place, I thought. I opened my birding account with Collared Palm Thrush, with White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Lizard Buzzard, White-headed Vulture, Pink-backed Pelican, Saddle-billed Stork, Crowned Hornbill, and the local race of Red-necked Spurfowl being some of the other highlights at Chitengo and surrounds. The migratory Woodland and Grey-hooded Kingfishers were also still plentiful.

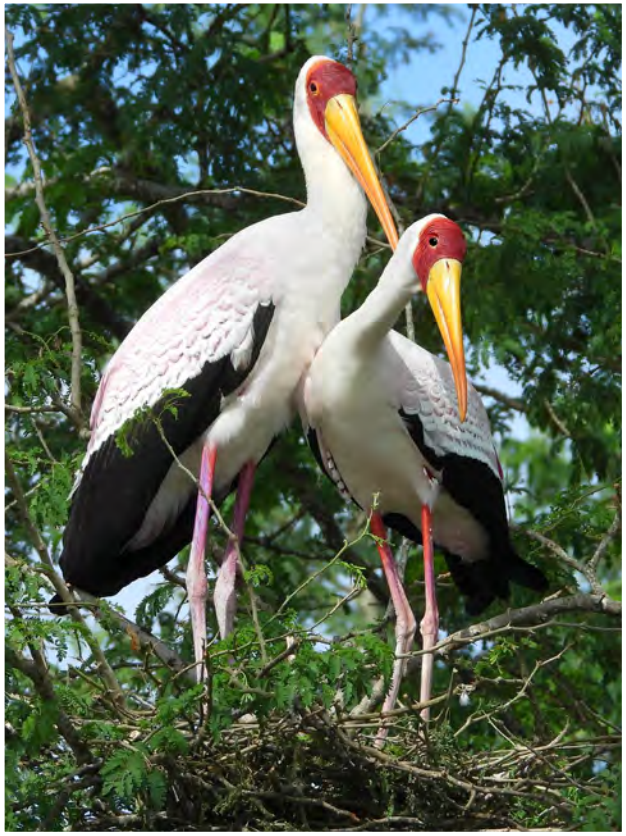
On the 15th of April, I joined some of the Gorongosa personnel to do a nesting stork survey at the nearby Lake Urema. This impressive lake is situated at the southern extreme of the East African Rift Valley, and the lake is situated in the Urema Rift. It is of tremendous ecological importance, and the lake and its shores attract large concentrations of game and spectacular numbers of waterbirds. A striking feature of this lake is its extreme fluctuation, ranging in size between 10 km² and 200 km², depending on the

Above Collared Palm Thrush - a common resident at Chitengo Camp.

Right The local race of the Red-necked Spurfowl, also known as the Northern Red-necked Spurfowl.

season and the amount of rainfall received.

A 45-minute boat ride got us to the nesting colonies where we were greeted by about 1 000 nesting pairs of Yellow-billed Storks, as well as smaller



Above African Darter with chicks at the nesting colony.

Left We conted just under 1 000 Yellow-billed Stork nests.

but still impressive numbers of African Darters, White-breasted Cormorants, Open-billed Stork, and Great Egret, to name some. On our way back to camp, we came upon a squad of Southern Ground Hornbills, more White-headed Vultures, a flock of 30 or so Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, some obliging Retz's Helmetshrikes, and the *orientalis* race (with white underwing coverts) of Black Sawwing flying over the woodland.

Our expedition left Chitengo on the 16th, heading to our first destination, the Kodzue Caves. As the crow flies, Kodzue is about 70 km north-east of Chitengo. However, much of the road was still too wet and muddy to attempt to drive the 'short-cut', and we were forced to go via Gorongosa town, Ihamitanga, and Inhaminga to reach Kodzue. And so started an epic 19-hour trip to travel just over 300 km! We left Chitengo at 8 am and arrived at Kodzue at 3 am the next day, having gotten stuck 5 times. The trip there, however, delivered several goodies, including good numbers of Grey-headed Parrot, an African Golden Oriole at the Nhandugue River, many Black-winged Red Bishops, and a few Broad-tailed Paradise Whydahs being noteworthy sightings en route.

Having finally gone to sleep at about 4 am, I woke a few hours later, greeted by East Coast Akalat singing a few metres from my tent, with Collared Palm Thrush providing backup vocals. I also didn't realise that my tent was placed right underneath a favoured perch of the resident pair of Pale Flycatchers. This was going to be good. I went for a short, pre-breakfast walk, adding Red-faced Crombec, Black-eared Seedeater, Red-winged Prinia, a guiding Greater Honeyguide, Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah, Pale Batis, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, and more Grey-headed Parrots. Later that morning, I decided to explore some Miombo woodland where I added Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Brubru, Common Scimitarbill,

Below A pair of Pale Flycatchers had a favourite perch above my tent.

more *orientalis* Black Saw-wings, and Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow, amongst others. The rest of the day was all about exploring, and looking for sites to do some mist netting.

Limestone gorges and caves characterise the Kodzue region, and on one of the days the expedition went to explore some of the gorges, the mammologists looking for potential bat roosts, and the rest, well, for anything that either produces or consumes oxygen. Trekking down one of the gorges I added some nice species, including Mountain Wagtail, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Southern Yellow White-eye, Common Square-tailed Drongo, Green Malkoha, Livingstone's Turaco, and Lowland Tiny Greenbul. Closer to camp, there was another mind-blowingly stunning gorge, created when the roof of one of the caves collapsed. The upstream part of this gorge ends in a cave, and while waiting for the resident finfoot to show, I watched an African Goshawk picking off bats from their roost in the ceiling of the cave. The African Finfoot showed up later that afternoon. I must say that this must rate as one of the most bizarre settings to have seen an African Finfoot.

An early morning walk the next day yielded all three regional

The rewards of a pre-breakfast walk.
Top Black-eared Seedeater.

Middle Red-winged Prinia.

Left Pale Batis.

Right Exploring one of the gorges

helmetshrike species, and at this site, the Chestnut-fronted Helmetshrikes were certainly more common than either their White-crested or Retz's cousins. Other nice birds at Kodzue included Little Spotted Woodpecker, Red-throated Twinspot, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Grey Penduline Tit, Orange-winged Pytilia, Green-capped Eremomela, Crowned Eagle, Southern Hyliota, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Southern Ground Hornbill, Crowned and Silvery-cheeked Hornbills, Tropical Boubou, an African Harrier-Hawk hunting for prey in rock crevices, and large numbers of Swallow-

ABOVE The Kodzue Caves looks like a scene from a fairy tale. This 'gorge' was formed when the roof of the original limestone cave collapsed. At the back (centre), the rest of the original cave can be seen, and this is where an African Goshawk (INSERT) was plucking roosting bats for lunch, and later the same day an African Finfoot was seen here.

Chestnut-fronted Helmetshrike

Orange-winged Pytilia

Western Violet-backed Sunbird (female)

Red-throated Twinspot (female)

Lowland Tiny Greenbul

East Coast Akalat

tailed and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters above. Nocturnal birds too were well represented, with Square-tailed and Fiery-necked Nightjars, and five owl species, namely African Barred Owlet, African Scops Owl, African Wood Owl, Western Barn Owl, and Verreaux's Eagle-Owl to keep us company at night.

I also set aside some time for bird ringing here, and East Coast Akalat, Red-winged Prinia, and Lowland Tiny Greenbul were ring lifers to me. Some of the others birds ringed at Kodzue were Pale Flycatcher, Red-throated Twinspot, Yellow Bishop, Red-capped Robin-Chat, and the reddish-crowned race of African Firefinch (race *haematocephala*), to name a few.

After five days and 111 species on my list at Kodzue, it was time to pack up and go to our next destination, Nhagutua, inside the Gorongosa National Park. But more about this part of the expedition in the next issue of *The Lark*.

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Editors' note: *This article was first published in* ***Promerops*** *325 of 2023, but it is such an important paper that we felt the need to share it with our readers too. Fiona Jones, editor of* ***Promerops: Magazine of the Cape Bird Club****, kindly granted us permission to publish the note in* ***The Lark****. Bird mortality resulting from collision with windows is a significant threat to birds, killing billions of birds annually. Please distribute this information to your contacts.*

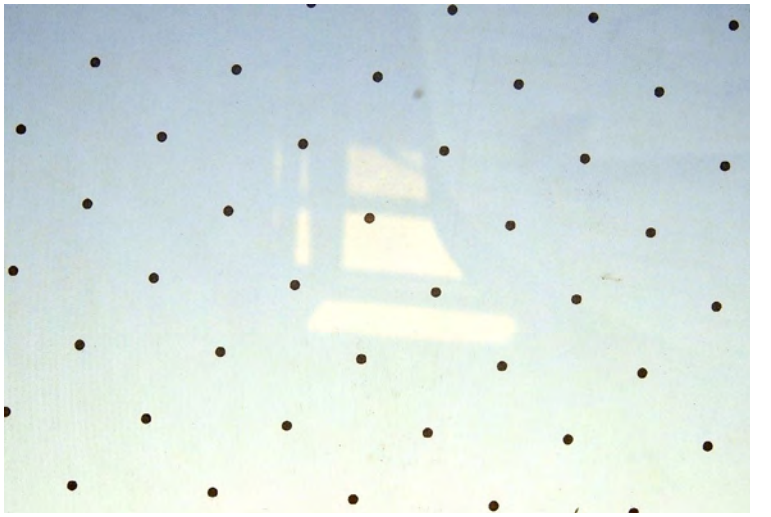
Can we prevent birds from colliding with our windows?

TEXT AND PHOTOS John Fincham

In January 2022, we had a sunroom consisting of glass panels in an aluminium frame installed at our home in Bellville. While this was a pleasant addition to our home, the risk of injuring or killing birds due to collisions with the glass was high, especially as numbers of birds of various species are fed in the mornings only about 10m away.

BELOW The sunroom - with its sizeable expanse of glass.

Despite our concern, there were no collisions for several months, and we were becoming complacent when suddenly tragedy struck – fatal collisions with the glass by an adult male Cape Sparrow and three Cape White-eyes happened almost simultaneously. As a hurried temporary measure, we strung up Xmas decorations inside the glass to create a clearly visible deterrent to flying birds.

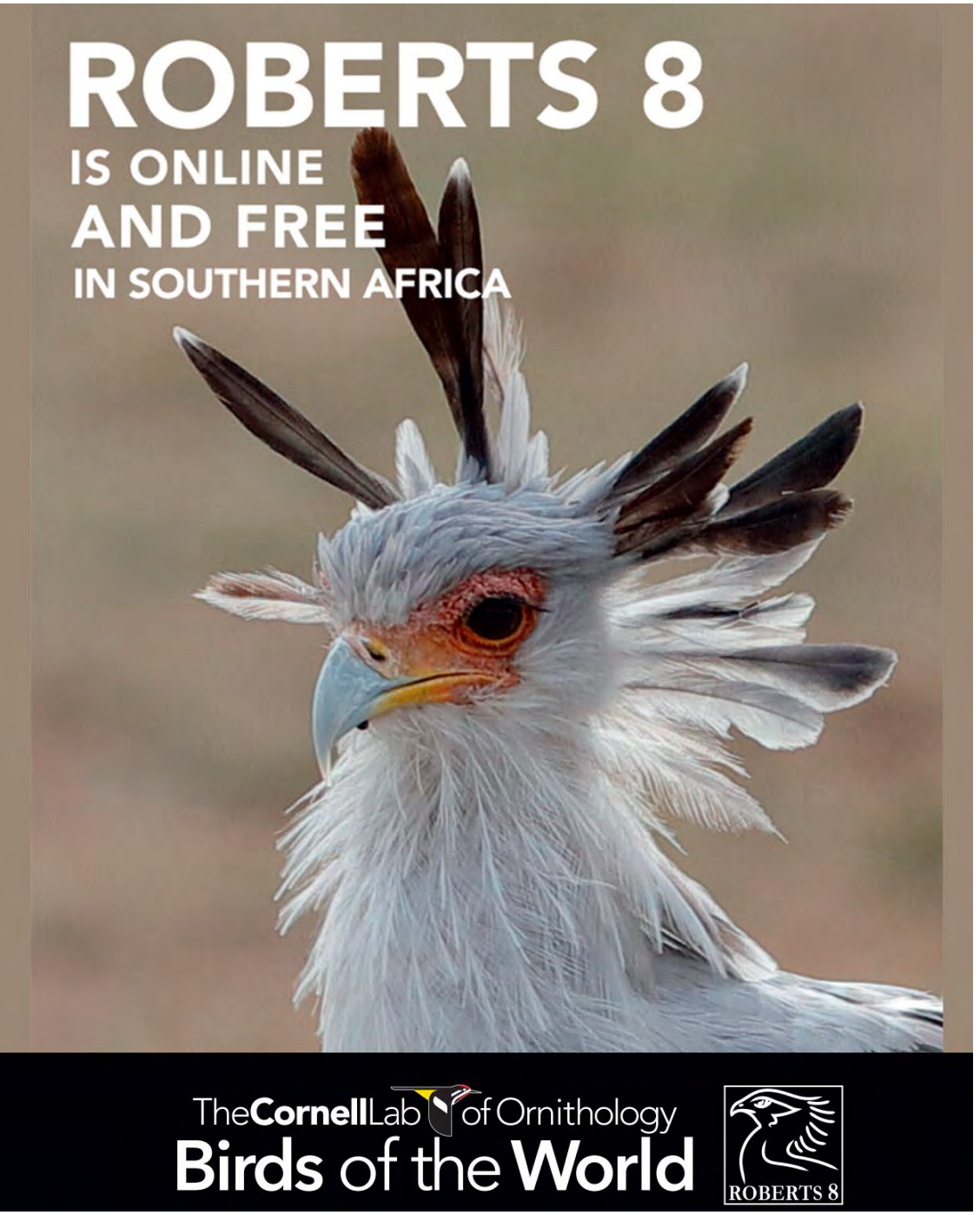


ABOVE The dots are on the outside of the glass and are alleged to prevent fatal collisions by flying birds.

We then contacted a firm that had been recommended for tinting the windows to block UV light, to find out if tinting the glass would also prevent bird collisions. We were advised that tinting is not effective – but there is a specific product for this purpose. A pattern of 5mm diameter dots can be applied to the outside of the glass to deter birds from flying into the windows. Three days must be allowed for the adhesion of the dots to the glass to strengthen. Thereafter, the dots are guaranteed to resist window washing and the weather for up to ten years.

The photo above has been edited to emphasise the dots; in reality, they are almost transparent. Vision from the inside through the windows is not seriously impaired by the dots. Our windows were treated on 12 November 2022, and since then, there have been no more bird collisions, which is promising. The dots are still there after window washing and rain, but a longer trial period, in various kinds of weather, may be needed to prove the efficacy of this product. Other readers who have the problem of fatal bird collisions on their windows might like to investigate this product. Please feel free to contact me at 082 370 8499 or the email below.

email: fincham04@gmail.com



Birding with a(nother) purpose:

reporting unusual bird behaviour

Derek Engelbrecht[1] and Duncan McKenzie[2]
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Have you seen unusual bird behaviour in your garden or while out birding? Or discovered a bird in an unusual locality or at an unusual time of year? Then please contribute to our collective bird knowledge and assist towards the revision of Roberts 8, which is currently underway!

It is a well-known fact that amateur birders make a massive contribution to science and conservation (just look at the success of SABAP2), as scientists and bird book authors cannot be everywhere at once. Informal observations of bird behaviour and occurrence are vital to supplement more formal studies. But how to publish your observations?

There are several formal ways to do so, such as writing your observation up and submitting it to a peer-reviewed journal, such as the online Afrotropical Bird Biology: Journal of The Natural History of African Birds. However, this process is not for everyone and requires at least some scientific writing skills.

An easier and more convenient alternative is to submit your observations, in ordinary language, to your local bird club newsletter. All the bird club newsletters published in southern Africa are gleaned on a regular basis by the editors and authors of Roberts 8 species accounts, and applicable information is incorporated into the revised species accounts. Here are a few examples of observations that would be of value:

- Unusual food/prey items of birds,
- Interesting courtship displays,
- Unusual vocalisations,

- An overwintering summer migrant,
- Observations of a rare species,
- Nesting behaviour,
- Nest material used,
- Foraging behaviour,
- Social interactions within and between species,
- Documenting a large gathering of a species not known to do so,
- Causes of mortality.

But how do I know that what I am observing is unusual?

Well, document first, make notes, take photographs if you can, or even do a sound recording with your mobile phone. Then check the observation against the text in Roberts 7 (either on the Roberts Birds of Southern Africa application or in the printed handbook) or speak to an expert. If your observation is either absent, poorly documented, or different from what is known, write it up and send it to the editor of your local bird club newsletter. Be sure to include any photographs or even a sound recording that the editor can verify or have verified.

BELOW Two Burchell's Starlings having a good old scrap. Photos of interactions amongst individuals are always of interest © Derek Engelbrecht.

Editors of bird club newsletters are crying out for interesting snippets, so please send them in. The editors of the newsletters will, in turn, make sure your note gets seen by the editors of Roberts 8. And who knows … your observation or media may be included in the revised species account, which is showcased on the Birds of the World platform. In this way, you share your experience with the global birding community.

In addition to sharing unusual behaviour, you could also help the editors and authors of Roberts 8 by sharing your photos or sound recordings with a scientific archive such as the Macaulay Library.

Photos

Nowadays, there are many people out there taking stunning photos, but beyond the beauty and aesthetics of a good photo, the photographer may also have captured a wealth of information about the individual or the species, e.g., signs of moult, ageing and sexing criteria, plumage features, etc. Moult, for example, is an important event in the annual cycle of a bird, and we can learn a lot about a species biology by examining photos of moulting individuals. Most photographers, rightly so, are looking for that 'wow' factor in their photos, and, for many species, it means focusing (excusing the pun) on males. As a result, online photos of many species are biased towards

BELOW A chance encounter with an African Cuckoo Hawk over lunch one day added a new addition to the species diet - Painted Reed Frogst © Derek Engelbrecht.

males, with few or sometimes no photos of females, juveniles, or birds in eclipse plumages. There is a dire need for photos of birds other than adult males in fresh plumage. Some examples of photos the editors of Roberts 8 may find valuable include:

- Photos showing behaviour such as preening, wing-stretching, singing, social interactions,
- Photos showing feeding and foraging behaviour, including the fruit, flowers, or prey, where applicable,
- Photos of nests and breeding birds (but please do not disturb the birds while breeding),
- Both sexes and different age categories from different angles, including the side, back, and front of the bird,
- Unusual plumages,
- Different subspecies,
- Habitat photos – general habitat photos but also micro-habitat photos, if possible, of habitat specialists, e.g., the understorey of a sand forest.

Below This photo is never going to win any photographic competitions, but it says a lot about the moult strategy of the poorly known Bocage's Sunbird. This photo, taken in May in Angola, shows a male in advanced primary moult, the secondaries in early moult, moulting tertials, and the bird undergoing a complete moult of the contour feathers © Derek Engelbrecht.

Above Habitat of White-chested Alethe and East Akalat in Central Mozambique © Derek Engelbrecht.

Sound recordings

Recording of bird vocalizations is the 'new frontier' in birding. Nocmigging (yes, it's an activity!), for example, is changing the way we see (or rather hear) some birds. Recording bird calls can be just as much fun and as exciting - and cheaper - as getting a good photograph. As a recordist, you very quickly realise how noisy our world can be! Although the song of many species is well known, birds typically have a far greater array of calls, most of them unknown to science. For example, Derek has recorded calls new to science of several species from his bedroom window, quite literally! Calls can be uploaded to the Macaulay Library, Xeno-Canto, or any of the other online repositories for bird calls.

By uploading your media, including photos and sound recordings, to the Macaulay Library, you stand a chance that your photo/s or recording/s may be featured in the revised Roberts 8 species accounts on Birds of the World. Your photos may, therefore, not only be visually pleasing, but it is also a great way to contribute to our knowledge of birds.

Regulars

Birds in Art

African Broadbill

Text and Artwork

Willem Van der Merwe

African Broadbill

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:

DEVIANT ART

This issue, I bring you a very unusual bird I'm fortunate to have seen in the wild. It's an African Broadbill *Smithornis capensis* ('Smith's bird from the Cape'). The genus is named for Sir Andrew Smith, a Scottish surgeon, zoologist, explorer and ethnographer, and for the Cape Province, where it doesn't actually occur, only entering South Africa in the far north. I saw one with my friend Ruan Stander, in the Mphaphuli Nature Reserve in Venda. It was fairly close, and was giving a display, which we heard before seeing it. I'll write more about that later.

Above It's all in the name - the broad bill of an African Broadbill © Derek Engelbrecht.

Broadbills are suboscines (also called Tyranni), a group of songbirds with somewhat less intricately developed vocal organs than the oscines, which are the most numerous of the songbirds. Most suboscines live in South America, but a few occur in Africa and Asia, including the Pittas and the Asities. The Broadbills used to be classified as a single family, but they're now divided into two, the Eurylaimidae, which is mainly Asian with a single African member, and the Calyptomenidae, three of which are African, including this broadbill, and three Asian.

So, the African Broadbill is actually not the only broadbill in Africa. Two of the others are closely related and similar, though one is a bit larger, while the African member of the Eurylaimidae, Grauer's Broadbill, is smaller and mostly green in colour. Broadbills are rather rare and all live in forests. They're not easily seen, and few people know about them. They're named for the fact that indeed their bills are broad, especially their gapes. That's because they mostly hunt insects in mid-flight, which they gulp up in their bills. They also pick insects off the surface of leaves and tree bark. When first discovered, they were thought to be members of the flycatcher family, the Muscicapidae; now we know any similarities between them and flycatchers are due to convergent evolution. In actual fact, they are very distantly related to flycatchers, which are oscines.

In Africa, this broadbill has a broad range: it is mainly in south-central and south-eastern Africa, with a smaller population in central and west-central Africa. Throughout its range, African Broadbills live in forests or densely wooded areas. In South Africa, they occur in the coastal forests of KwaZulu-Natal, and in the forests of Venda, in the far north of the Limpopo Province. This bird sticks to shady and secluded spots in the middle layer of the forest, mostly sitting unobtrusively on a perch where its streaky brown plumage camouflages it well. From there it sallies forth to catch insects like flies or moths. It will also glean insects from foliage, or sometimes pick them off the forest floor.

Broadbills breed at the start of summer, when insect populations are high. The male and female then engage in displays. The one Ruan and I saw, is the typical display mostly given by the male. It sits on a branch, from where it

Below A male (left) and female (right) African Broadbill. Note the black cap and white back of a male, compared to the greyish-brown crown of a female and the absence of the white dorsal feathers © Derek Engelbrecht.

repeatedly flies out a short distance, and returns to its perch, giving a frog-like '*prrrup*'-call. Only, it's not actually a call! It's been determined that this sound is made by its wing feathers, as it rapidly vibrates them in flight. There are actually more birds than most people would think, that use their feathers for making prominent sounds for display purposes. But they're still few compared to the majority of birds who sensibly use their actual voices to sing. The '*prrrup*'-sound is surprisingly loud and far-carrying, which is why it helped Ruan and me to locate our bird. Apart from the sound, the displaying bird also fluffs up its back feathers, as shown in my painting, revealing a bright white patch, which is visible from a good distance in the dim forest light. This all makes it easier for its mate to find it. Once the pair is together, they give a mutual display, first sitting about 45 cm apart on a branch, flicking their wings, then

BELOW The distinctive 'call' of the African Broadbill is produced by the wing, especially primaries 6 and 7, through a mechanism known as aeroelastic fluttering © Derek Engelbrecht.

hanging upside down for about 30 seconds, still flicking their wings, and uttering calls which so far I'm not sure are actually calls or still wing-sounds.

African Broadbill nests are also very characteristic. They look like masses of moss or debris hanging from tree branches. From top to bottom, they can reach a length of almost 1 m. They're built from lichens, grasses, rootlets, leaves and twigs which are slung over a branch and then matted together around a central cavity, with a small entrance hole in the side with a bit of a 'porch' hanging over it. The female lays up to three eggs. She incubates, while the male guards her and the nest and brings food to her and, after they hatch, the chicks.

The African Broadbill is widely distributed and not in overall danger of extinction. But in South Africa, it has much suffered from destruction and fragmentation of its coastal forest habitat, and is currently a rare species, in need of stringent protection of its remaining habitat.

ABOVE An incubating female warily peering from the nest © Derek Engelbrecht.

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Reflections

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

Klopperfontein – Oasis of the North

Chris Patton

So, in my previous *Reflections* article, I detailed the birds one is likely to see along the S60 and S61 en route to Pafuri from Punda Maria… I had originally intended to share some of my memories from Klopperfontein Dam/Weir, Spring/Fountain and Borehole/Windmill in the same piece, but the article was already long enough, so I signed off after describing the initial southerly portion of the S61 and indicated I would pick up the northern stretch in the next edition…

The northern section of the route runs along the easterly flow of the Shinkuwa (spelt Shikuwa on some maps) Creek… Shinkuwa is Tsonga for little Sycamore Fig, and the creek is a tributary of the Madzaringwe River, which is itself a tributary of the Levhuvhu River. In terms of Klopperfontein, there are actually three landmarks that bear that name, a tribute to Hans Klopper, a hunter from Louis Trichardt/Makhado (the Limpopo town on the southern slopes of the Soutpansberg Mountains away to the west), who often camped in this area around 1900 AD.

From the H1 tar road, the first landmark is Klopperfontein Spring, some 17.5 km northeast of Punda Maria Camp, situated in the upper reaches of the Shinkuwa Creek, that only visibly flows during high rainfall cycles. But a very short distance further west is Klopperfontein Dam, a concrete weir, built by Percy Stephenson in 1955; while the third Klopperfontein landmark is a borehole 16 km from Punda, right next to the Shinkuwa Creek, a little downstream from the spring – the original well was replaced by two boreholes in 1939.

Geography and history lesson over, the birding significance of the Klopperfontein network is that between the Shingwedzi and Levhuvhu Rivers, there are not many waterholes in the huge

expanse of mopane woodland and scrubland that dominates the northern half of Kruger National Park. As the only waterbody in the Far North that is publicly accessible is what makes Klopperfontein Dam so special. It is literally an oasis in the 'desert' of the mopane, and while as mentioned most travellers visiting the dam will be en route to Pafuri from one of either Shingwedzi, Sirheni or Punda Maria, where the rewards are alluring. To get the most out of a daytime visit to Klopperfontein, one should really sit, turn the engine off, and let the wildlife come to you.

There invariably will be resident Little Grebes in the water, and Three-banded Plovers, Blacksmith Lapwings, Water Thick-knees, African Pied Wagtails, and, in summer, Wood Sandpipers along the water's edge… but sitting in a shady spot

Top Klopperfontein Spring/Fountain, not much more than a stone's throw from the Dam of the same name will also have a magnetic pull on the local wildlife when it flows © Derek Engelbrecht.

Bottom Different-angled views of Klopperfontein Dam from the parking area during the wet season © Dries De Wet.

keeping vigil over the Dam, sooner or later there will be a stream of game, particularly waterbuck, elephant, and buffalo, but also of seed-eating birds, particularly Blue Waxbill, Red-billed Queleas, firefinches and often accompanying parasitic species like whydahs and indigobirds.

Rare Waterfowl

My own first-ever visit to Klopperfontein was in April 1984. The same trip I fondly reminisced about in the first article on the Mahonie Loop. I had read in Newman's Birds of Kruger National Park that Fulvous Duck was recorded as an uncommon visitor to the Park, most often from well-vegetated pans in the north-east (I suspect in hindsight they probably meant pans like Matlakusa), and sure enough there were a few birds mingling with their whistling cousins, a few White-faced Whistling Duck. In the four decades I have been visiting or working in the Park, I have encountered Fulvous Ducks on only three or four occasions, but two of them have been from Klopperfontein, and so it was on my debut visit.

Duck diversity is not a feature of the Kruger bird profile, with only White-faced Whistling and Knob-billed Ducks reliably and regularly recorded. All other duck species are regarded as irregular visitors or vagrant species to the Park, but Klopperfontein is definitely a location that turns up consistent records of various species. Apart from Fulvous Whistling Duck, I've seen Red-billed Teal there, and there are records from others of all three South African teal species from the Dam.

Below Fulvous Whistling Duck – a rarity anywhere in Kruger © Daniel Engelbrecht.

Above An aberrant female Southern Pochard, or an escapee hybrid? this duck was a bit of a mystery at Klopperfontein in early 2015 © Chris Patton.

Top A flock of Red-billed Teals – another Kruger duck rarity seen at Klopperfontein © Chris Patton.

But on one of the Punda Extreme birding weekends (in January 2015 to be precise), in one of the years where we went to the dam in daylight hours, we encountered a very strange-looking duck indeed. The consensus among the many birders that were involved with the weekend was that it was an aberrant female Southern Pochard… but I'm not so sure… the bill shape was to me more similar to the fish-eating sawbill duck bills of the northern hemisphere… such as the mergansers… so I always wondered if it was not instead an escapee hybrid duck… either way it was something unusual and typical of the kind of thing that turns up at Klopperfontein.

Roaming Raptors

The Klopperfontein area is not only good for rare ducks, but uncommon raptors too. Dickinson's Kestrel appear to be resident in the area, while in

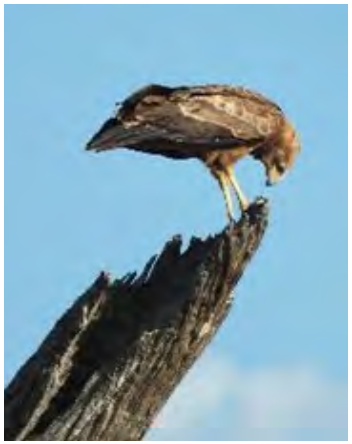
Left A Booted Eagle - note the diagnostic landing lights on the shoulder in the centre photo © Daniel Engelbrecht.

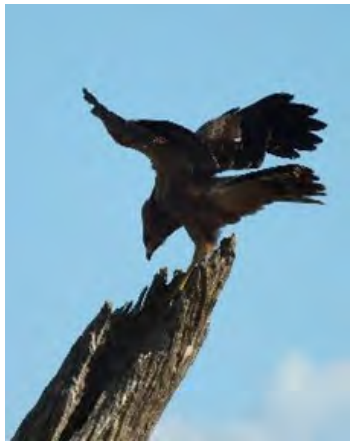
the summer months Red-footed Falcon, Pallid and Montagu's Harrier and Booted Eagle are all fairly regularly reported from the area, along with a plethora of other commoner birds of prey.

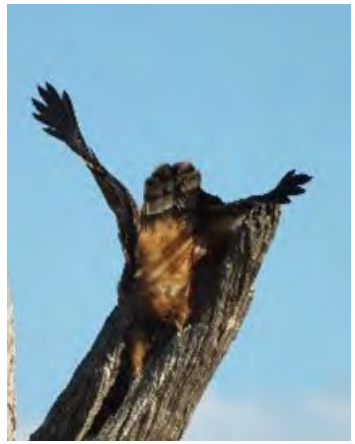
One of my favourite memories from just next to Klopperfontein Dam was a raptor - not so much a rarity, but not one of the commoner ones in the Park… it was watching a juvenile Gymnogene explore all the crevices of a dead tree. Now I know it is officially called the African Harrier-Hawk these days, but for me, the old name is one of the most evocative names for a bird, and as a personal choice I always use it. There is a dead tree (a leadwood I think) on the south side of the turn-off on the S61 down to the dam which is often used by a variety of the commoner bird species of the area, but on this particular day back in January 2013 the young raptor had claimed it not as a vantage point perch, but as the source of a potential meal. It was remarkably non-plussed by the presence of our vehicles and fixated on exploring the various nooks and crannies of the late tree.

In the Heat of the Night

Before 2007 all my visits to Klopperfontein had been diurnal, and this is what most visitors to the Park will learn to love. But from 2007 to 2018, as I have written about in several of my previous *Reflections* articles, I was lucky to be included as one of the bird specialist guides on the Honorary Rangers Punda Extreme Birding Weekends, and for those 12 years at least two of my visits to the Dam every year were at around 03:00 in the morning. The open veld in the vicinity of the Dam was always ideal for courser, thick-knee, buttonquail, nightjar, and owl sightings. Readers are referred to the July 2020 edition of *The Lark*, and one of my two debut articles







Above and top The young African Harrier-Hawk looking for breakfast near the Klopperfontein Dam © Chris Patton.

in the publication recalling with great fondness my encounters with Marsh Owls, and one marvellous sighting of African Grass Owl in this very area.

Even though the Dam itself in the dark is not as productive as during the day, it was always an important stop at point at night too en route to Pafuri, because it was the only place during the weekend where one could almost guarantee a Little Grebe and Three-banded

Above The roll-call of rollers one can see in the Klopperfontein area: Purple (left), European (middle), and Lilac-breasted (Right) © Daniel Engelbrecht.

Plover, which the teams might not encounter over the rest of the weekend.

And it was not just nocturnal birds that entertained the participants during the drive past Klopperfontein during a Punda Extreme. We've had wonderful night-time encounters with mating lions, skittish cheetahs and the increasingly rare for the Park roan antelope and Lichtenstein's hartebeest.

Now one of the most bizarre birds we ever encountered at Klopperfontein Dam during a nocturnal visit was an African Finfoot, and never have I received as much raised eye-brows and borderline derision by the other team leaders, and some of the more vociferous participants.

And I had to concur with the all-round scepticism because the Dam itself is not your usual finfoot habitat… it is a secretive bird typically of well-vegetated rivers and streams… But the Dam of course is in the upper reaches of the Shinkuwa Creek, a tributary of a tributary of the Levhuvhu River, where they are relatively frequently encountered, so my theory is this particular bird made its way up the network of streams, and as we descended down to the Dam on this particular night the bird was foraging on the bank (which I read they are quite adept at doing) and as our 10 seater open safari vehicle rumbled closer, the bird in a panic scuttled into the water and began swimming away from us to the other side of the dam. My driver on this occasion was Job Shabangu, one of the Nyalaland Trail Wilderness Guides who would regularly see finfoot along the Levhuvhu, while I knew the species well from my time at Skukuza. We both simultaneously splurted out FINFOOT when we saw the bird with its scarlet beak, spotted back and distinctive posture in the water, and the eight or so participants on the vehicle scrambled for a sighting through their binoculars in the searchlight beam while it was still close to the vehicle in its frantic swim to escape the giant beast that had emerged in the darkness. So, we did cop a lot of abuse at the closing dinner about 14 hours later that day, but I have no doubt what we saw, as unusual as it might seem.

But whether by night or by day the northern section of the S61 along the Shinkuwa Creek passing the various Klopperfontein landmarks is a journey worth making. During the day the open veld will produce things like Common Ostrich, Magpie Shrike, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, Lilac-breasted, Purple, and European Rollers (the latter in summer only), and, when veld conditions are right, local explosions of Harlequin Quail, Monotonous Lark, Wattled Starling, Red-billed Quelea, and a myriad of other species. It is always a pity that the lure of the Pafuri region to the north means that most of us do not spend enough time along the S61 as it undoubtedly deserves.

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Bird Briefs

Rare plumages

Charles Hardy

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Rare plumage morphs are always exciting to see, and I was fortunate to come across two rare morphs recently.

The rare yellow-throated morph of the White-fronted Bee-eater was photographed at Pelo Camp in the Okavango Delta on the 23d of March 2023. This region seems to be a hotspot for this particular morph.

While doing a CWAC count north of Polokwane, Bruce Goetsch and I came upon a partially melanistic Blacksmith Lapwing was seen in the company of some ' normal' individuals at Marlo Farm north of Polokwane on the 4th of March 2023.

Above A partially melanistic Blacksmith Lapwing in the company of others showing the usual plumage © Bruce Goetsch.

Left The rare yellow-throated White-fronted Bee-eater © Charles Hardy

Leucistic Cut-throat Finch in Polokwane

TEXT AND PHOTOS Derek Engelbrecht

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The rarity of plumage colour abnormalities is a fascinating but surprisingly complex phenomenon. There are many different types of colour abnormalities, with albinism and leucism arguably the most common of the lot - but still, they are very rare phenomena.

On Wednesday, the 31st of May 2023, I received a phone call from Richter Van Tonder, telling me he was looking at a leucistic Cut-throat Finch near the Polokwane Golf Club. Now, I have a long-standing interest in the two *Amadina* finches, with both Cut-throat and Red-headed Finches regulars at my bird feeder. Over the years, I've had some rare Cut-throat morphs of the Red-headed Finch (or is it a Cut-throat x Red-headed Finch hybrid?) and a partially leucistic Cut-throat Finch at my feeder. I've seen captive albino Cut-throat Finches for sale on the internet, but I have never seen photos of free-ranging leucistic or albino Cut-throat Finches. I was, therefore, very keen to see the bird Richter had found.

BELOW A frontal view of the leucistic Cut-throat Finch male in Polokwane.

ABOVE One can appreciate how the male stands out when you see him next to his mate.

As luck (or rather misfortune) would have it, I couldn't get there that afternoon, but I was gambling on seeing it the next day. Richter and I agreed to meet at the spot the following afternoon. Fortunately, we had no trouble finding the leucistic male and his mate at the same place Richter had seen them the day before.

The male was 100% leucistic, with only a small amount of washed-out melanin pigmentation visible on the forehead, crown, and tips of the flight feathers. Since carotenoids are unaffected by a mutation affecting melanin production, the red throat was unaffected.

A field study of the Short-toed Rock Thrush

Sheila Blane[1] and Warwick Tarboton[2]

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The Short-toed Rock Thrush *Monticola brevipes* is one of four *Monticola* thrushes occurring in southern Africa. It is near-endemic to this region and has a recorded range that extends from southwestern Angola through Namibia and southeastern Botswana to the Northern Cape and the central parts of the former Transvaal Province, South Africa (Terblanche 1996, Harrison 1997). Eastern and western populations are subspecifically, and perhaps specifically, distinct, and they are distinguished, in males, by having either a white crown (in the west) or a blue-grey crown (in the east). The blue-grey-crowned eastern race is treated by some authorities as a separate species, *Monticola pretoriae* Gunning and Roberts 1911 (Farkas 1962, White 1967, Monroe and Sibley 1990). It was this, and the fact that, besides Farkas's (1962) study, relatively little is known of the life history of the Short-toed Rock Thrush complex, that prompted the study described here. Furthermore, its status is described in contradictory terms, some references claiming it to be resident (e.g., Tarboton et al. 1987, Maclean 1993) while others (e.g., Harrison 1997) state that 'it has definite movements and is clearly not resident'.

The study, which lasted four years, was undertaken over weekends and public holidays, and its focus was to attempt to elucidate the species' status in the area, and its social, territorial, and breeding behaviour by watching individual birds in the field for extended periods and recording their movements, interactions and behaviour. Nineteen birds were colour-ringed, and most of the observations were made on one or more of these individuals. At the time this study was conducted, Richard Dean was revising the Short-toed Rock Thrush account for the 7th edition of Roberts Birds of Southern Africa, and some of the preliminary findings of this study was incorporated into the species account (see Dean 2005).

A total of 176 bird species was recorded in the area during the study period and this list included both the Cape Rock Thrush *Monticola rupestris* and the Sentinel Rock Thrush *Monticola explorator*, the former a resident and the latter a winter visitor. When the word rock thrush is used hereafter, it refers specifically to the Short-toed Rock Thrush.

Above One of the male Short-toed Rock Thrushes from the Skurweberg hills captured and fitted with colour rings during this study © Sheila Blane.

The only other detailed study of this species was by Farkas (1962) who studied this species both in captivity and in field (in the Kuruman district, Northern Cape Province).

ABOVE The Short-toed Rock Thrushes preferred the lightly wooded mid- to upper slopes of hills in the study area © Sheila Blane.

Study area

The study area was located 25 km south-west of Pretoria in the hills of the Skurweberg range, on a 400 ha property known as the Hoogland Health Hydro. This area is underlain by dolomite and chert, has a rugged topography with extensive areas of rocky outcrops, and ranges in altitude between 1 390 and 1 480 m above sea level. Topographically, the area consists of successive plateaus fringed by rocky ridges that slope into well-wooded valleys and kloofs. The mid- to upper-slopes of this landscape, i.e., the areas that were frequented by the rock thrushes, are lightly wooded, with scattered trees (dominated by *Senegalia caffra*, *Ziziphus mucronata*, *Cussonia paniculata*, and *Ozoroa paniculosa*) and shrubs underlain by a dense grass cover. The rock thrushes did not venture into the densely-wooded valleys. During most of the study period (October 2000 to November 2004), the areas occupied by the rock thrushes were heavily grazed by introduced ungulates such as eland, impala, zebra, and blue wildebeest.

Methods

The study site was visited weekly throughout the year, with 145 visits being made during the 4-year study period, and a total of 1 100 hours being spent in the field. The birds were only kept under observation for a small proportion of this time, though, because of the difficulty of locating them in the rough terrain. When found, they were kept under observation from distances of 5–40 m using binoculars and a telescope. Calls and song were recorded using a directional microphone and video camera. A total of 13 adults (males = 8; females = 5), two juveniles, and four nestlings were colour-ringed with

RIGHT One of the colour-ringed adults © Sheila Blane.

Above Head profile of one of the adult Short-toed Rock Thrushes in the study area © Sheila Blane.

individually recognisable colour combinations. These birds were caught using mist nets and flap traps baited with mealworms. Nests and eggs were measured with vernier callipers.

Results

Plumage and morphometrics

The head plumage of eight adult male rock thrushes that were captured for ringing were closely examined, and all were found to have uniformly blue-grey crowns. On occasion, though, while watching the same birds in the field, it was noticed that their crowns - sometimes - appeared to be paler than the rest of the head (i.e., silvery-grey, see above), and it was assumed that this was the result of the tilt of their head at that moment, and/or the angle of the sun. Also, for a short period of the year (August, when *Aloe marlothii* was in full flower), many of the rock thrushes had orange faces as a result of picking up pollen while probing these plants for nectar.

The mass of eight males and four females ringed during this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mass data of birds ringed in this study, compared to mass data from two sources in Namibia.

Source	Mass	
	Male	Female
This study	8.8 g ± 3.2 SD (range 34.0–43.0, n = 8)	36.3 g ± 2.6 SD (range 33.0–41.0, n = 4)
Tim Osborne (unpublished data) (Namibia)	33.2 g (range 30.1–39.4, n =25)	31.5 g (range 25.4–40.5, n = 15)
Paijmans and Bryson (2023) (Namibia)	35.5 g (range 29.3–39.0, n = 8)	36.2 (range 34.6–37.8, n = 2)

Dispersion, territoriality, displays, and vocalisations

At least one individual male in the rock thrush population under observation was resident year-round in the study area: this male

Below An adult with the wing stretched open © Sheila Blane.

(M1), ringed in August 2001, was monitored during 2001–2004 and it remained within an area of about 10 ha for at least 39 successive months, encountered here every month, and on virtually every visit made to the study area. The male lived close to the site that was used as a base for the study, and once its favoured perches became known, it could be relocated on each visit with relative ease. This individual was the exception, though, as other rock thrushes in the area were not easily located, except in the breeding season when the males sang from vantage points. Females, especially, were very unobtrusive and generally proved more difficult to locate. Some of the birds that were colour-ringed were not seen again after trapping, and others were seen for only a few weeks or months before disappearing: it is not known whether they moved away or were subsequently overlooked. Various unmarked birds were, however, recorded in all months of the year.

Male M1 occupied a central territory in the area, and during the summer breeding seasons, this male and its mate were one of an estimated 12 nesting pairs within an area of 300 ha. In 2001, this pair's nest was 350 m from the nest of the adjacent pair to the north, and in 2003 their nest was 340 m from the nest of an adjacent pair to the south: on this basis, these three pairs had an average nesting density of about 1 pair/12 ha. In the study area as a whole, the estimated density was 1 pair/25 ha, the difference in densities probably being attributable to there being sections of the 300 ha that were not frequented by the birds.

Outside of the nesting period, the rock thrushes were usually encountered singly, and perhaps because females are less conspicuous than males, they were much less frequently encountered than males during winter. During summer, males and females maintained a pair bond at least until the young were 1–2 months post-fledging (September to February), but it seems unlikely that the pair bond persisted once the young became independent, given that pairs were not observed together until the following September.

There were a few occasions when groups of rock thrushes were seen together. In one instance, three males and two females were seen feeding with other bird species on termites (at an early morning emergence in September). On another occasion, seven rock thrushes were seen feeding together on the fruit of a Solanaceae shrub *Withania somnifera* (which fruits briefly in January), and on a third occasion, in February, at least three rock thrushes were seen feeding together on the fruit of a *Searsia pyroides*. No aggression between individuals was observed when such groups gathered to feed on these temporarily abundant food sources. This was in contrast to behaviour during the breeding season, when males chased other males from the territory when they came too close to the nesting area, before returning to a favourite perch.

Males typically perched on the tops of smallish trees, especially dead trees, on hillsides, and they typically selected a branch for this purpose 2–4 m up from the ground. Male M1 had three favoured perches on trees 15 m apart and, in the last 12 months of the study, it could usually be located on one of these at any time of the year. During the early stages of the breeding cycle, males sang from these sites and they launched from them into brief aerial display flights, flying up to a height of about 20 m, then fluttering down at an angle of 45°, with tail fanned and calling while doing so. Display flights were observed from late September to mid-November, and male M1 was seen displaying in this way at a time when its mate was known to be incubating. No copulations were observed.

Outside of the breeding period, males were not heard singing, but they occasionally uttered a contact call; a brief, high-pitched, one-syllabled whistled note. Their alarm call, which appears not to have been described in the literature, is 3–6 notes run together: *chu-chu-chu-chuk* or a slower *choop-choop-choop*, or combined as *choop-choop-chu-chu-chu-chu*. Descriptions of the Short-toed Rock Thrush's song mention that it includes mimicry of other birds (Farkas 1962, Dean 2004); M1 occasionally mimicked the introductory notes of the whistling call of the Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus* and, occasionally, Dark-capped Bulbul P*ycnonotus tricolor* and Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas*, but mimicry was not an important element of his song.

Food and foraging behaviour

The rock thrushes appeared to be mainly insectivorous, supplementing this seasonally with berries and aloe nectar. The birds

hunted invertebrates by perching motionless on branches for long periods and watching the ground below, dropping briefly to the ground when prey was sighted. Larger items, such as small lizards, were beaten against a branch before being eaten. The range of invertebrate food taken, most of it seen being fed to nestlings or fledglings, included caterpillars (n = 9) and butterflies, including a *Beleonis* sp. (n = 3) (order Lepidoptera), a grasshopper (order Orthoptera), a centipede (order Chilopoda), and various 'grubs' and 'worms' (n = 6). Also included in the food brought to nestlings were two small lizards (order Squamata). In September, they were twice seen, along with other birds, hawking *Trinervitermes* termites emerging after showers of rain. The black berries of *Ozoroa paniculosa* appeared to be available year-round and were clearly an important food source as the birds were seen eating these (on at least 17 occasions) from June to September and in November and March; the fruit was both picked from the trees and collected on the ground, and one bird was watched regurgitating the seeds 20 min after feeding on the fruit. Fruit of a Solanaceae shrub *Withania somnifera,* was also eaten during the brief period (in January) when it fruited (n = 3 occasions) and, in February, the fruit of *Searsia pyroides* was seen being eaten (n = 1 occasion). *Aloe marlothii* came into flower in late July and August, and the rock thrushes frequently probed these flowers for nectar then, evidenced by their orange faces from the plant's pollen.

The birds were seen drinking and bathing at a leaking pipe on many occasions, and they were also reported to come regularly to drink at a garden bird bath on the property (Petro Kruger, pers comm).

Parasites

Thirty six small ticks were collected off the rock thrushes that were trapped for colour-ringing, and these were identified as being nymphs of a *Hyalomma* sp., probably *Hyalomma marginatum rufipes* (A Kemp, in litt).

The breeding cycle

Seven nests were located and kept under observation during the study, one in 2001 (Nest 1), three in 2003 (Nests 2, 3 and 4) and three in 2004 (Nests 5, 6 and 7). By backdating records, the clutches in these nests were completed in October (3) and November (4), indicating that the rock thrushes in the area had a relatively short breeding season. One of the November-laid clutches was a replacement clutch by male M1 and his mate. This pair's first clutch (Nest 5), completed on 1 November 2004, disappeared a few days after laying. The female then built a new nest (Nest 7), and the clutch was completed on 18 November.

Hatching success was high, with eggs hatching in six of the seven clutches (86%), but nestling success was less so: six pair-years yielded 7 fledged young (i.e., 1.2 young/pair-year; 3 young fledged from Nest 1, 1 young from Nest 2, and 3 young from Nest 7). In two instances, nestlings were found dead in, or next to, the nest, and in one instance, a compressed (regurgitated) eggshell was found next to a depredated nest, suggesting a snake as being the likely nest predator.

Nest-building behaviour was observed at one nest (Nest 5) which was found on 24 October when its construction had just commenced. The female alone collected nest material and constructed the nest. While the female built the nest, the male (M1) perched 10–15 m away and sang frequently. On this day, the female collected mostly bulky items, especially twigs, and the sheath of *Xerophyta retinervis,* and took these to the site, making 3 trips in 8 min, 6 trips in 24 min and 5 trips in 27 min (total of 14 trips in 59 min). One twig in the base of a nest measured 150 mm x 7 mm in diameter. Nest material was collected from within a 20 m radius of the nest, and a beak-full of material was collected each time. Twenty-four hours later, the nest appeared near-complete, the cup already being built into the base by then and lined with fine rootlets. The first egg was laid in the nest on 30 October, indicating that the nest took five days to build, and the first egg was laid in this nest on the sixth day.

All seven nests were concealed under rocks on sloping ground, five on south-facing slopes and two on east-facing slopes. All the sites had an overhanging ledge which concealed the nest from above and provided shelter from rain, and all were built on a rock base with a rock forming the back wall. Five nests had grass tufts that partially concealed the nest from the front, two lacked this. None of the nest sites found were reused in successive years. In the case of the M1 pair, their nests in successive seasons were 60 m and 82 m

Two typical nests of Short-toed Rock Thrush set against a rock, with the rock providing shelter against the elements and concealing the nest from above © Sheila Blane.

from the previous year's nest, and the replacement nest in the third season was 40 m from the first nest that failed.

The nest is a rather bulky pad of dry plant material that supports a finely-lined open cup. Four nests had the following dimensions (min–mean–max ± SD): outside diameter 12–13.9–16 cm (± 1.7 SD), cup diameter 6–7.3–8 cm (± 0.8 SD), cup depth 4–5–6 cm (± 0.7 SD), height of entrance 11–12.3–13 cm (± 0.8 SD). The outside rim of the two nests measured 3 and 5 cm. The base of the nest comprised pieces of coarse dry grass, fire-charred sheaths of *Xerophyta*, twigs, roots, and wood chips. The nest cup was neatly lined with fine rootlets and fine dried grass.

In all seven cases, the clutch probably comprised three eggs (4 x 3 eggs, 2 x 3 young, 1 x 1 egg plus 2 young); in Nests 2 and 5, the eggs were laid at 1-day intervals in the morning. The eggs were uniformly sky-blue with a slight gloss. Seven eggs measured 22.6–24.1–25.5 mm x 18.0–18.8–19.3 mm (min–mean–max). At Nest 2, the incubation was done by the female only, and during a 7 ½ hr continuous watch, three incubation recesses were taken lasting 18 min, 2 min, and 56 min (i.e., nest attendance during incubation was 83%). During the

Below A clutch of three Short-toed Rock Thrush eggs © Sheila Blane.

time she was away from the nest, she was accompanied by the male. While she incubated, the male perched for long periods in the vicinity of the nest, singing from time to time. One incubation period, measured from day of last-laid egg to the day of hatching, was determined to be 14 days (Nest 2).

Nestlings were brooded by the female only and for about the first six days of the nestling period. The male, however, did assist in feeding the nestlings, and in three nests observed, the males shared this almost equally with the female (male = 36 feeding visits, female = 41 in 890 min, see Table below). The overall feeding rate, at two nests with broods of three young aged 7–10 days old, was one feeding visit every 13 min and this did not vary by time of day. In one session of 210 min, it dropped to 1x/30 min, but in this instance, the birds were agitated during much of the time (possibly a potential predator in the vicinity?), and this may have influenced their rate of food delivery to the nestlings.

Faecal sacs were removed from the nest by both parents, this averaging once every 5 feeding visits (14x/67 visits, 6 by male, 8 by female). The parent bird flew some distance (up to 150 m) from the nest before dropping the sac. The parents brought food items independently and only occasionally arrived together, one then waiting its turn while the other fed. Most feeding trips during these observations were brief (<1 min), and the female did not brood the 7–10-day-old nestlings in the 14.8 hours of observation.

The nestling period was not determined.

Discussion

Territorial behaviour while nesting, a monogamous breeding system, and the specific roles of the sexes during the breeding cycle (female builds nest, incubates and broods young without male assistance while male guards nesting area, but both sexes feed nestlings and fledglings) are consistent with the known behaviour of the other *Monticola* species (see Hockey et al. 2005). It also builds a similarly structured nest to other *Monticola* species and lays similar plain blue eggs. Like other rock thrushes, its breeding habitat is also specific; it favours lightly-wooded, rocky hillsides - and in most situations (in summer) it does not occur alongside its two congeners in the region.

Biometric data revealed that the birds in this study area tend to be slightly heavier than Namibian birds (Table 1), but sample sizes are small and should be interpreted with caution.

The field observations strongly suggest that, in this species, the pair-bond does not persist outside of the

Above A nest containing a clutch of three Short-toed Rock Thrush eggs © Sheila Blane.

Table 1. Summary of provisioning data to a brood of three, 7–10-day-old nestlings in two nests. sources in Namibia.

Nest, date	Nr of young, age	Time	Duration	Total nr of feeds	Feeds by male	Feeds by female	Feeding rate
Nest 1, 18/11/01	3Y, 10 d old	12:10–13:50	100 min	8	4	4	1x/12.5 min
Nest 6, 12/11/04	3Y, 7 d old	06:10–11:55	345 min	33	15	26	1x/10.5 min
Nest 6, 12/11/04	3Y, 7 d old	14:15–15:10	55 min	4	3	1	1x/13.8 min
Nest 6, 14/11/04	3Y, 9 d old	08:10–11:40	210 min	7	3	4	1x/30.0 min
Nest 6, 14/11/04	3Y, 9 d old	12:20–15:20	180 min	17	11	6	1x/10.6 min
Totals			**890 min**	**67**	**36**	**41**	**1x/13.3 min**

Above Three nestlings in their nest at the base of a rock © Sheila Blane.

breeding season. What happens in winter, in terms of the extent to which the birds leave the breeding territory is unclear. That one marked individual in our study population remained in its breeding territory all year round, and other unmarked birds were seen in the area during winter is proof that not all individuals migrate or disperse to other areas, as has been suggested by Harrison et al. (1997). This notion is also supported by observations at a site east of Polokwane in the Limpopo Province, where two pairs are resident throughout the year with no indication of local movements in winter (Derek Engelbrecht, pers comm). However, the higher incidence of records of the eastern race, *M. b. pretoriae*, in winter as shown for the eastern taxon in the Atlas of Southern African Birds (Harrison 1997), their disappearance from a breeding site in winter in Gauteng, their appearance on flat ground around Gaborone in winter (Andrew Hester, pers comm), and other movements suggested for elsewhere in the former Transvaal (Terblanche 1996), requires explanation. Juvenile dispersal would contribute to some extent to an increase in winter records, especially if they move to open country where they'd be more detectable. However, there is evidence of local movement by some adults too: if they can move locally out of their breeding territory to feed on *Ozoroza* fruit in a neighbouring territory in winter, as observed in this study, they can move more widely too. Two records of adult males recorded in flowering *Aloe marlothii* stands on the Polokwane Plateau, but leaving these areas after flowering, lend support to the suggestion that some individuals may exhibit at least some degree of local movements (Grosel and Engelbrecht 2021, Engelbrecht 2023). The extent to which they do this is probably driven by local food availability, with conditions being more conducive to this in some winters than in others.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks go, firstly, to the Kruger family, especially Abrie and Petro, for their interest, and for allowing us free access to their property. Secondly, our grateful thanks to the following people for assisting with field work - Craig Nattrass, Horst Kohler, Joan Faiola, Ken and Anne Ayres, Lance Robinson, Maarten and Erica Grabandt, Rob and Farren Herbst, Willie Mailer; for ringing - Gail Schaum, Jumbo Williams, Karen Dixon, Lyn and Ari Williams, Murrie Slotar, Pat Cochran, Rihann Geyser; for plant identification - Kevin Balkwell; for parasite identification - Alan Kemp, Lisel Solms; for information from other areas - Andrew Hester, Bill Braine, Callan Cohen, Hendri Coetzee, Koos Van Dyk, Mark Anderson, Mostert Kriek, Nigel Fernsby, Richard Dean, Richard Liversidge and Tim Osborne.

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Brown-backed Honeybird observations

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The Brown-backed Honeybird is usually seen singly, occasionally in pairs. However, Friedman (1955) quotes a record in a paper by Austin Roberts, published in 1930 (we couldn't trace this paper), of three birds seen feeding in a mixed species foraging flock in an apple tree. This record appears to be the only published record of >2 birds seen together that we are aware of.

On the 24th of June 2023, we were birdwatching at Letaba Estates east of Tzaneen when we noticed a Brown-backed Honeybird foraging in a white-stem thorn *Senegalia polyacantha*. We took the opportunity to get some photos as the bird seemed quite unperturbed by our presence while it was busily foraging in the canopy of the tree. We soon realised there was more than just the one bird that initially drew our attention. During the about 15 minutes of observations, we counted no fewer than eight birds, all foraging in the same tree. There was quite a bit of threat posturing, manifested mainly as a bulging of the throat, and occasional (about three times during the observation period) chasing of a conspecific.

The honeybirds' foraging strategy had elements of the busy warbler-like foraging and a perch-and-sally strategy reminiscent of a Narina Trogon. It would typically perch on a twig from where it would carefully scan the leaves and twigs for prey by slowly turning its head from one side to the other, or even up and down. If it didn't find anything during one such stint, it would fly to another perch and repeat the sequence. If it saw prey, it would sally forth and typically pick it up from the vegetation, sometimes hawking the prey in flight. Once, we saw it hanging on a small twig while feeding on what appeared to be a soft-bodied worm. Some of the birds were also seen probing the flaky bark on some of the larger branches for prey, a behaviour also mentioned by Friedman (1955).

BELOW A sequence of photos showing the slow head rolling behaviour when looking for prey © Derek Engelbrecht.

Above The bulging throat is a threat display directed at conspecifics © Daniel Engelbrecht.

Top An individual would carefully scan the vegetation for prey and then make a short sally to capture it © Daniel Engelbrecht.

Above Success! This bird caught a small, soft-bodied worm © Daniel Engelbrecht.

Another interesting observation, unrelated to feeding or foraging, was the interest some individuals showed when a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird landed in a nearby tree and started calling. At least two birds left the tree and flew towards the tinkerbird. There appeared to be very little interaction between the two species, but when the tinkerbird flew off, it seemed as if the honeybirds were pursuing it. Both species landed in the same tree, the honeybirds stayed for a short while before returning to the foraging tree. The Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird is not a known host of the brood-parasitic Brown-backed Honeybird, and only one cavity-nesting species, Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow, has been confirmed as a host. A bird like a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird would most certainly make a suitable host for Brown-backed Honeybird. It would be worthwhile to monitor Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird nests in future to establish if it is perhaps an unrecorded host of the Brown-backed Honeybird.

Reference

Friedman, H. (1955). The Honey-guides. United States National Museum Bulletin 208:1–292.

Bushveld Pipit song flight

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Bushveld Pipit is a generally uncommon to locally common resident or nomad of open, broad-leaved woodland or mixed savannah. It is small and unobtrusive, but its presence is usually revealed by its distinctive call, a nasal 2–3 note call, or its rather harsh *zreeeet* alarm call when flushed.

Given its unobtrusive nature, it is not surprising that many aspects of its natural history is either poorly documented or still unknown.

Below A male Bushveld Pipit in song flight © Daniel Engelbrecht.

Any observations to improve our knowledge of the species should therefore be published to obtain a clearer picture of its biology and ecology.

On the 24th of June 2023, we came upon a bird party in mixed but mopane-dominated woodland at Mahela, near Letsitele in South Africa's Lowveld. There were at least two Bushveld Pipits in the party, which also included Black-crowned Tchagra, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Neddicky, Rattling Cisticola, Long-billed Crombec, Fork-tailed Drongo, and Black-headed Oriole. The two Bushveld Pipits were calling regularly. However, our attention was drawn to another individual singing in flight above us. Trying to find it, we scanned the sky just above the canopy, but eventually located the bird performing a song flight at a height of at least 50 m above the canopy.

Bushveld Pipit song flights have been reported by Stronach (1990) in the Serengeti. The author observed song flights on two occasions, one in late September and another in late October, suggesting song flights are performed just before the onset of the breeding season (November to April in that region). Stronach (1990) gave no further details about the nature of the song flights.

The singing bird we observed flew in fairly large erratic circles, constantly dipping with closed wings and then ascending in a laboured, butterfly-like flight. We watched this bird displaying for about 2 minutes before we lost our visual of it. Unfortunately, we don't know for how long the bird performed the song flight before we located it, nor did we see its descent.

The phenology of the song flight we observed was somewhat at odds with Stronach's (1990) observations. This song flight was performed in mid-winter, several months before the onset of the species' peak breeding season in southern Africa, i.e., November, suggesting an extended pre-breeding display season. However, more information is needed from across the species range before definitive conclusions can be made.

Our observations, despite being somewhat scanty, nevertheless improve our knowledge of song flights of this species.

Reference

Stronach, N. (1990). New information on birds in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania. Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club 110:198–202.

The elusive White-backed Night Heron

TEXT AND PHOTOS Hugh Chittenden

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Without hesitancy, you'd agree that the two most uncommon breeding herons in southern Africa are White-backed, and Rufous-bellied. Of the two nocturnal night heron species, White-backed is more elusive and uncommon than Black-crowned. And yet, White-backed Night Herons aren't really rare, they are just uncommon and tremendously secretive and shy, seldom venturing out into the open, and importantly, strictly nocturnal.

I have been fortunate to have been able to photograph at two White-backed Night Heron nests. The first was north of Eshowe on the edge of Goedetrouw Dam in the Nkwaleni valley, KwaZulu-Natal. The following three photographs were taken in the late 1980's using slide film!

BELOW An adult White-backed Night Heron, photographed at night on the Mtunzini mudflats in April 2012.

ABOVE An adult arriving to feed 3 nestlings.

ABOVE The nestlings being fed small fish and shrimps..

Left Nestlings at two different ages. To obtain these photographs, a boat was required to get to the site, a hide was erected just before nightfall near the nest, then a small tent was set-up in thick undergrowth 40 m away so that I could get some sleep after midnight! Presumably a fairly safe locality - except for a leopard heard grunting in the distance!

Above In 2007 a friend showed me a nest near Gingindlovu, KwaZulu-Natal. Nests may not necessarily be placed over water, but preferred sites are usually within 5 m of still, slow-moving water bodies.

Below Age comparisons. On the left is a sub-adult that has white spotting to its wings, and on the right is an adult. Sub-adult birds have browner backs than adults.

Above In early April 2023, this sub-adult was photographed feeding in shallow water at the Mtunzini mudflats. Although these birds do have white lower back plumage (partially visible above), but it's a feature that is usually hidden by the folded wings, and seldom seen infield.

Above The young bird on the hunt, with small fish scattering ahead.

Above Success shortly after nightfall.

Above A small Mullet *Chelon richardsonii* caught in shallow water.

Above A large mud crab moves onto the mudbank. The wary night heron is alarmed and moves away!

Above Reflections of a beautiful still evening where the silence is disturbed only by the occasional plunge of the night heron, the sound of distant frogs and crickets, and the continuous buzzing of mosquitoes!

The wing claws of Hadada Ibis chicks

TEXT AND PHOTOS Derek Engelbrecht

email: faunagalore@gmail.com

In *The Lark* 45, I wrote about the vestigial wing claws of the African Finfoot. Although interesting structures, they are seldom seen, and in many species are only present in nestlings or juveniles.

While monitoring a nest of Hadada Ibis in the Polokwane Game Reserve in December 2013 and January 2014, I noticed the chicks have two claws per wing. Three species of ibis have vestigial wing claws, namely Hadada, Scarlet and African Sacred Ibis. It is not known if these claws serve any purpose at present, or whether it is a relic from its evolutionary past when the species may have used it to move through dense vegetation.

Below and bottom Head profile of a chick - note the straight bill - and a wing showing the two vestigial wing claws

POLOKWANE 100 KM

... and a bit beyond

Interesting sightings

16 April 2023 - 15 June 2023

Share your interesting sightings seen within the Limpopo Province. Please submit your sightings to thelarknews@gmail.com and include the date, locality and a brief write-up of your sighting. Photos are welcome but will be used at the discretion of the editors.

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

Compiled by Derek Engelbrecht

Non-passerines

African Scops Owl - 27 May 2023. A single bird in Cycad Estate, Bendor, Polokwane (Fatima Cachalia). A new record for the Polokwane 100K.

African Wattled Lapwing - 12 May 2023. A small group in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Charles Hardy).

Burchell's Sandgrouse - 8 May 2023. One seen at Mashashane (Leonie Kellerman).

African Scops Owl © Jody De Bruyn

Cape Eagle-Owl - 22 April 2023. A pair heard calling from a rocky ridge in montane grassland in the Wolkberg (Darren Pietersen).

Passerines

Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark - 14 June 2023. A male seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve - a new record for the reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Lark-like Bunting - 23 April 2023. One seen on the Soetdorings road (Jody De Bruyn).

Best of the Rest Limpopo Province

Non-passerines

African Skimmer - April/May 2023. Between 2 and 8 birds regularly reported from the Matambeni Hide near Letaba Reset Camp (SA Rare Bird News Reports).

Greater Flamingo - 6 June 2023. Four in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (SA Rare Bird News Reports).

Lesser Flamingo - 20 May 2023. One seen near Letaba Rest Camp, Kruger National Park (SA Rare Bird News Report).

Slaty Egret - 4 May 2023. A bird seen at Nylsvley (Derek Engelbrecht).

Burchell's Sandgrouse © Leonie Kellerman

Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark © Daniel Engelbrecht

Lark-like Bunting © Jody De Bruyn

Slaty Egret © Derek Engelbrecht

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater - 7 June 2023. Several birds seen near Kranskop and the Nyl River floodplain (Christo Venter).

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater © Christo Venter

Passerines

Barn Swallow - 5 May 2023. A straggler seen at Nylsvley Nature Reserve (Derek Engelbrecht).

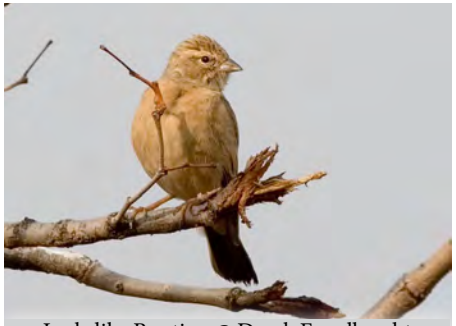
Barn Swallow © Derek Engelbrecht

Chestnut-vented Warbler - 30 April 2023. One south of Hoedspruit (Otto Scribante).

Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark - 20 May 2023. Four birds seen on the S143 Capricorn Loop, Kruger National Park (Stu Hoets). Large flocks were subsequently reported from the same locality by Hannes Swanepoel (see SA Rare Bird News Reports). 5 June 2023. A small group on the Limpopo River floodplain in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Duncan McKenzie).

Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark © Duncan McKenzie

Lark-like Bunting - April/May 2023. Reports of birds from various localities in the Limpopo Province, e.g. Zaagkuildrift, Sondela, Springbok Flats, Kruger National Park and Steelpoort (SA Rare Bird News Reports).



Lark-like Bunting @ Derek Engelbrecht

CAPE PARROT

The Cape Parrot is a flagship species for South African biodiversity. It is the only parrot species endemic to the country.

TAXONOMY

KINGDOM:	Animalia
PHYLUM:	Chordata
CLASS:	Aves
ORDER:	Psittaciformes
FAMILY:	Psittacidae
GENUS:	*Poicephalus*
SPECIES:	*P. robustus*

COMMON NAMES

Cape Parrot	(English)
isikhwenene	(isiXhosa)
isiKwenene	(isiZulu)
Hokwe	(Setswana)
Dikgwapa	(Sepedi)
Woudpapegaai	(Afrikaans)

DISTRIBUTION

The Cape Parrot is only found in South Africa. It inhabits a mosaic of patches of **Afromontane mistbelt forests**, stretching from the Amathole mountains in the Eastern Cape, through Kwa-Zulu-Natal along the escarpment, and into the Limpopo Province in the north of South Africa. These **high altitude** forests are between 1000 to 1400 metres above sea level. Cape Parrots are heavily dependent on the yellowwood trees within these forests for their entire **life cycle**.

ORIGIN OF SCIENTIFIC NAME

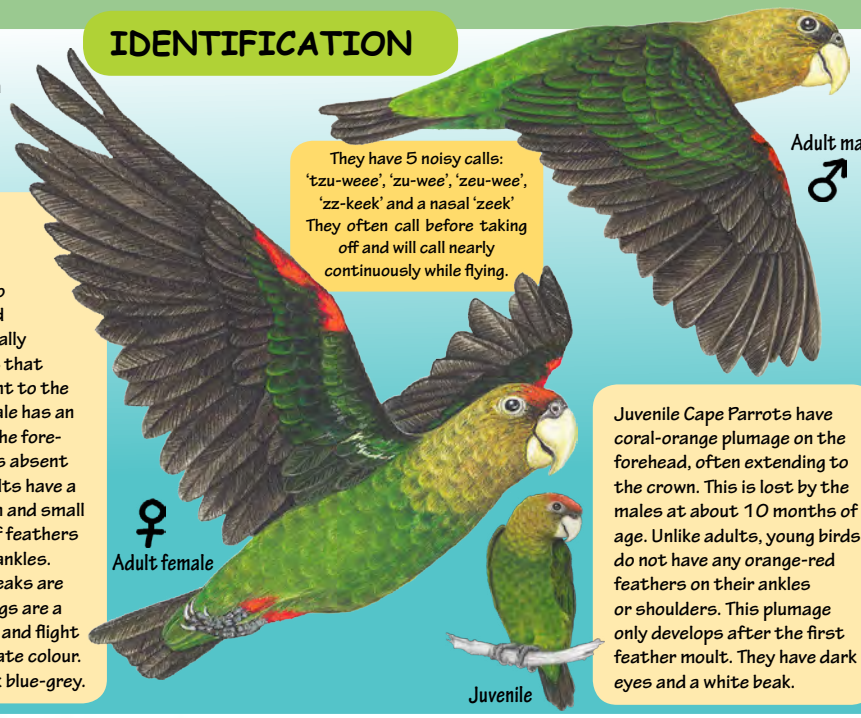
The genus, *Poicephalus*, means 'different head'. All the species in this genus have heads that are a different colour to the rest of their bodies. The species name, *robustus*, is Latin for 'robust', probably referring to its hefty beak, which allows the Cape Parrot to crack open all sorts of hard nuts and fruits, especially those of its preferred food, the **kernels** of the fruits of yellowwood trees (Podocarpaceae).

IDENTIFICATION

Size: 251 - 349 mm length
Weight: 260 - 329 grams

Cape Parrots are medium to large parrots with a bright green body and olive to golden yellow head and neck. Adults are sexually dimorphic. This means that the male looks different to the female. The adult female has an orange-red patch on the fore-head and crown. This is absent on the male. Both adults have a dark brown fore-crown and small orange-red patches of feathers on the shoulders and ankles. Their ivory-coloured beaks are robust and sharp. Wings are a dark bottle-green. Tail and flight feathers are a dark slate colour. Legs and feet are dark blue-grey.

They have 5 noisy calls: 'tzu-weee', 'zu-wee', 'zeu-wee', 'zz-keek' and a nasal 'zeek' They often call before taking off and will call nearly continuously while flying.



Juvenile Cape Parrots have coral-orange plumage on the forehead, often extending to the crown. This is lost by the males at about 10 months of age. Unlike adults, young birds do not have any orange-red feathers on their ankles or shoulders. This plumage only develops after the first feather moult. They have dark eyes and a white beak.

Created by Leigh Wolfaardt

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.

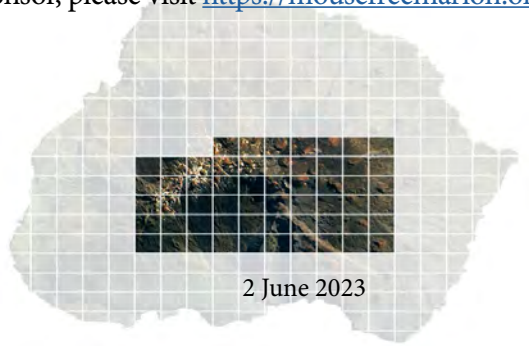
The bait required to cover the island alone will cost upwards of R30 million. To help raise the necessary funds, please would you consider sponsoring one or more hectares of land on Marion Island.

At R1000 (US$56), 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/



2 June 2023

Percent of target reached: 20.0%
Sponsored Hectares: 6026 ha
Sponsors: 1852

UPCOMING EVENTS

Hibernating

No monthly club meetings are scheduled for June and July, but look out for club outings.

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting
Date: 1 August 2023
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting
Date: 5 September 2023
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Shopping list: This is a new venue for a club outing, but we expect to see a variety of waterbirds and arid bushveld species.

Shopping list: This is a new venue for a club outing, but we expect to see a variety of waterbirds and bushveld species. © Richard Greenfield

Shopping list: Pel's Fishing Owl, Meves's Starling, Tropical Boubou, White-crowned Lapwing, Meyer's Parrot, Temminck's Courser, Kori Bustard, White-backed Night Heron, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Southern Ground Hornbill, Water Thick-knee, etc.

Visit https://www.birdlife.org.za/african-bird-fair-2023/ for more info.

All birds are equal

In 2023, the front covers of **The Lark** will be dedicated to species that may never feature on any front cover. This year, our back cover is reserved for the non-LBJs.

African Scops Owl © Jody De Bruyn