The Birdlife Polokwane Magazine 52, March-April 2024

THE LARK

Bird of the Year
Bateleur

Birding
Wolkberg
Nylsvley

Travel
Prince Edward Island

Prinia hybrids in the Bethlehem area, Free State · Dickinson's Kestrel diet · Vocalisations of the Green Tinkerbird · Untimely death of a Southern Pied Babbler · An undescribed call of the African Crake · Who's visiting The House of Wax?

Birdlife Polokwane

Affiliated to Birdlife South Africa

BirdLife South Africa
Giving Conservation Wings

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 April 2024

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

Cover page theme 2024: female birds

Cover Southern Ground Hornbill (female) © Derek Engelbrecht.

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Na 'n goeie reënseisoen het Nylsvley altyd 'n verassing of twee. Wat was die jaar s'n? **Richter Van Tonder** *het die uitstappie gelei en vertel meer.*

Bird of the Year: Bateleur 33

... and what a bird!

For a lark ...

Okavango Kleenex © Joe Grosel

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Editors' chirps

The Festive Season was extended a few weeks into the New Year as birders were feasting their eyes on some local rarities early in the New Year - see the Interesting Sightings section. Let's cross our fingers for some more goodies in 2024. Our first club outings for the year were also well attended, and new birders were able to draw upon the collective experience of some of the more experienced birders. Thanks to everyone who attended.

The Club's AGM was held in February, and the new committee was elected and started with their duties. We have some exciting projects planned for the year, so keep your eyes and ears open for announcements. Congratulations to the new committee, and welcome to the new members.

As editors of *The Lark*, a popular regional birding magazine, we urge our readers to consider submitting material to *The Lark*. Currently, most of the contributions come from a few people. Surely you have seen something interesting that you want to share. Perhaps you went on an exciting trip and want to share your great sightings and wonderful birding experiences with us. We are particularly delighted that we receive notes from countries beyond our borders. For example, you can read Liana Tyrrell's note on Dickinson's Kestrel from Malawi. In the last issue, we published important breeding records from a poorly known region in Central Mozambique. Also, in this issue, a former club member, Makhudu Masotla, shares his once-in-a-lifetime experience about his recent visit to Prince Edward Island. Thank you, Makhudu, we are so grateful you chose *The Lark* to share this experience - and the stunning photos! Closer to home, we also feature some interesting notes about hybrid prinias in the Free State. So, as you can see, we try to include notes from different places and on various topics, but the continued success of *The Lark* will depend on contributions from our readers. Please support our magazine.

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

Raelene and Derek

Erratum

The **Lark 51** *page 76, image 9: The birds are not Burchell's Sandgrouse but Double-banded Sandgrouse. Please accept our apologies for this error. Thanks to Ingrid Weiersbye for alerting us to the mistake.*

Prince Edward Island

A hidden gem in the subantarctic wilderness

Makhudu Masotla and Azwianewi Makhado
PHOTOS Makhudo Masotla

In the crisp winds of November 2023, we embarked on a long-awaited journey to the subantarctic Prince Edward Island (PEI), a destination shrouded in mystery and virtually untouched by human presence. Our voyage to PEI was not a casual adventure; it was a meticulously planned expedition years in the making.

PEI, a pristine haven in the Southern Ocean, holds a special allure for explorers and conservationists alike. Its remote location and delicate ecosystem demand careful stewardship and respect. With stringent regulations in place and to ensure minimal human impact on its fragile environment, PEI can only be visited once every five years.

Prince Edward Island as seen from the sea (BELOW) and looking towards the southeast over Cave Bay (RIGHT).

Above Setting up camp.

Right An inquisitive Macaroni Penguin.

Left Despite stringent measures to prevent the accidental introduction of critters, we still made doubly sure and sprayed all our equipment before unpacking.

Our preparations for the expedition were rigorous and exhaustive. Every detail was meticulously planned to uphold the island's pristine nature, from sourcing specialized equipment to implementing stringent mitigations. As we set sail for PEI, anticipation mingled with excitement, knowing we were about to embark on an extraordinary journey into the heart of the subantarctic wilderness.

Opposite A mixed colony of Indian Yellow-nosed and Grey-headed Albatrosses (top), a breeding colony of King Penguins with their chicks (middle), and a large breeding colony of Macaroni Penguins (bottom).

Below A Grey-headed Albatross on its mud nest.

Above A Black-faced Sheathbill surveying its environment.

Above A Southern Elephant Seal giving me a hairy eyeball.

Left A Southern (Eastern) Rockhopper Penguin carrying nesting material.

Right With year-round strong and relentless winds battering PEI, it's best to lie low, like this flightless moth.

Arriving at PEI, we were greeted by a landscape long untouched by human hands (the last time humans set foot on the island was in 2011!), a witness to nature's resilience and grandeur. The island, devoid of infrastructure and human presence, exuded a sense of rugged beauty and untamed wilderness.

Our ten days on PEI were nothing short of an adventure in remote and extreme camping. Each night, battling constant rain, bone-chilling temperatures, and relentless gusts of wind brought forth new challenges. Yet, amidst the elements, we found solace in the unspoiled

Left A Blue Petrel at the entrance to its burrow.

Above A Northern Giant Petrel at its nest.

Below A Kerguelen Cabbage, one of many weird and wonderful plants on Prince Edward Island.

wilderness surrounding us and the privilege of being one of a handful of people that have had the privilege of visiting this island

PEI proved to be a sanctuary teeming with life. From the smallest crawling insects to the majestic albatrosses soaring overhead, the island pulsated with vitality. The sight of Kerguelen Cabbage in full bloom and the curious Gentoo Penguins, unafraid of human presence, left an indelible mark on our memories (when considering how skittish the Gentoos on Marion are!)

Exploring the Albatross Valley, we were met with a breathtaking spectacle of endless nests, a testament to the island's rich biodiversity. It was a rare privilege to witness such

Above A Killer Whale on patrol in the shallows.

Left (top) Nesting Crozet Shags.

Left (bottom) A Brown Skua dragged a Common Diving Petrel from its burrow, killed and ate it within metres from where I was sitting.

abundance in a place so remote and untouched by human hands.

Short-duration visits to PEI are a rarity, with opportunities arising only at intervals of five years or longer. The last visit to PEI was in 2012! With its strict regulations, the Prince Edward Islands Management Plan ensures that the island remains a pristine sanctuary for generations to come.

Our expedition to PEI was not merely a journey but a testament to the enduring spirit of exploration and conservation. As we bid farewell to this remote paradise, we carried with us not only the data and all our litter, but memories of awe-inspiring landscapes, vibrant wildlife, and the profound sense of humility that comes from witnessing nature's grandeur in its purest form.

Until we meet again, Prince Edward Island, may your pristine shores remain untouched, and your wilderness endure for eternity.

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The 2024 Tree Pipit Quest

TEXT Richter Van Tonder

Another excellent outing to the Wolkberg area! Early in the week preceding the club outing to the Wolkberg, heavy rain was predicted across the Limpopo Province for that weekend. Hence, most members thought it would be a wet and muddy situation and opted to skip this year's pilgrimage to see Tree Pipit. But as the weekend approached, the weather forecast improved, and it turned out to be an excellent day.

As usual, we tried to leave early, and after a slight delay, we got going. We were, again, a nice large group of people with our convoy of seven cars going up into the Wolkberg mountains. Unfortunately, Mark's car had brake problems and they decided to play it safe and turned around.

Our first stop was on the 'ridge' before we descended into the Mispah Valley, the summer quarters of the local Tree Pipit population. We all enjoyed a cup of coffee and saw birds like Cape Grassbird (Grasvoël) and Malachite Sunbird (Jangroentjie) among the flowering proteas and Wailing Cisticola (Huiltinktinkie) calling loudly in the grassy patches. As we started our descent, we saw Lazy Cisticola (Luitinktinkie) and a beautiful male Gurney's Sugarbird (Rooiborssuikervoël) feeding on a protea. At the same spot, we also had excellent views of a few Mountain Reedbuck (Rooiribbok).

The Mispah Valley © Derek Engelbrecht.

Above A small group of the shy Mountain Reedbuck showed themselves briefly © Derek Engelbrecht.

Left A Wailing Cisticola giving us the stare © Derek Engelbrecht.

Now it became time to search for the elusive Tree Pipit (Boomkoester). Since 2015, when I first discovered it here, we haven't missed it once. But the habitat is changing: wood harvesting, overgrazing and too frequent burning have changed the vegetation structure and composition to such an extent that the parkland structure favoured by Tree Pipit is slowly disappearing and is now a fraction of what it used to be. So, we searched for it at the usual spot for quite some time, but without any luck. Fortunately, there are some localities in reserve further down the valley and we decided to try our luck over there. Here, the habitat looked better. After some searching, one bird showed itself briefly to three club members before it flew off, not to be seen again.

We continued birding the area and saw the following noteworthy birds: Red-chested Cuckoo (Piet-my-vrou), a lot of them!, Common Scimitarbill (Swartbekkakelaar), Half-collard Kingfisher (Blouvisvanger), Common Buzzard (Bruinjakkalsvoël),

Below Another successful quest! This was the ninth consecutive year that we recorded Tree Pipit in the Wolkberg © Derek Engelbrecht.

Above Red-chested Cuckoos were everywhere! © Richter Van Tonder.

Above As usual, Bushveld Pipits were present in good numbers © Derek Engelbrecht.

Right A small tributary of the Tongwane River where a Half-collared Kingfisher showed itself briefly © Derek Engelbrecht.

Bushveld Pipit (Bosveldkoester) that got everyone excited for a brief moment, lots of Cinnamon-breasted buntings (Klipstreepkoppies) and beautiful fly-bys of Black Saw-wings (Swartsaagvlerkswael).

After some time, we decided to return to the spot where the Tree Pipit were seen. Derek, Justin Nicolau who joined us for the outing and I got out, split up and walked the area. I heard Justin call out as it flew over my head, but I got zero views. And that was it. We decided to wait about an hour to see if it would return, but it didn't. So, in the end, four people got to see the Tree Pipit this year. Perhaps this was just one of those years when fewer than normal pipits spent the summer in the Mispah Valley or are the habitat changes we observe painting a bleak future for Tree Pipits in this valley? Hopefully, the former. Some years, we had up to five individuals there. At least they are still showing up, and it arguably remains the best spot in South Africa for Tree Pipit.

Most of the group decided to call it a day

Above left A small group of Buff-streaked Chats made an appearance at a stop on our way back © Richter Van Tonder.

Above right A local rarity, Cape Bunting, was a big surprise and this individual was surprisingly confiding, alllowing for some excellent views © Richter Van Tonder.

Left A Horus Swift flying past its nest. Seeing such a large colony of this interesting swift was a memorable experience © Derek Engelbrecht.

at around lunchtime. We were glad to have some new people joining us on this outing, and by all accounts, it sounded like they enjoyed it a lot and will be joining us on some more outings.

Derek, Justin and I stopped at a ridge on the way back to try and pick some special species for the area we missed earlier in the day. We got what we came for: Buff-streaked Chat (Bergklipwagter), Nicholson's Pipit (Nicholson Koester), and excellent views of a somewhat rare bird for our area, Cape Bunting (Rooivlerkstreepkoppie).

It was now mid-afternoon, and we decided to call it a day, but on our way back, we decided to stop at a local spot for possible Horus Swifts (Horuswindswael). What a spectacular display! As we approached the huge wall in the riverbank, we feasted our eyes on well over a hundred Horus Swifts flying about. They're usually found in small groups of between 2 and 6 birds at a time, occasionally 30 birds, so seeing this many was a really memorable experience. They were constantly calling and flying in circles above our heads. Some were entering and exiting their nests in the wall, all in typical swift fashion – at breakneck speed! It was a real privilege to end the day in this way.

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Die immergewilde Nylsvley vloedvlakte

TEKS EN FOTOS Richter Van Tonder

Ons het vroeg uit die blokke gespring en was reed 4:30 oppad na die Nylsvley Natuurreservaat toe. Hierdie uitstappie het nou 'n gereelde jaarlikse instelling begin word. Die mikpunt was om so vroeg as moontlik by Vogelfontein te wees. Vogelfontein is die vloedvlakte gedeelte wat aan die noordekant van Nylsvley geleë is. As daar genoeg water is, is jy amper gewaarborg

Bo Witrugeende (White-backed Ducks) by Vogelfontein..

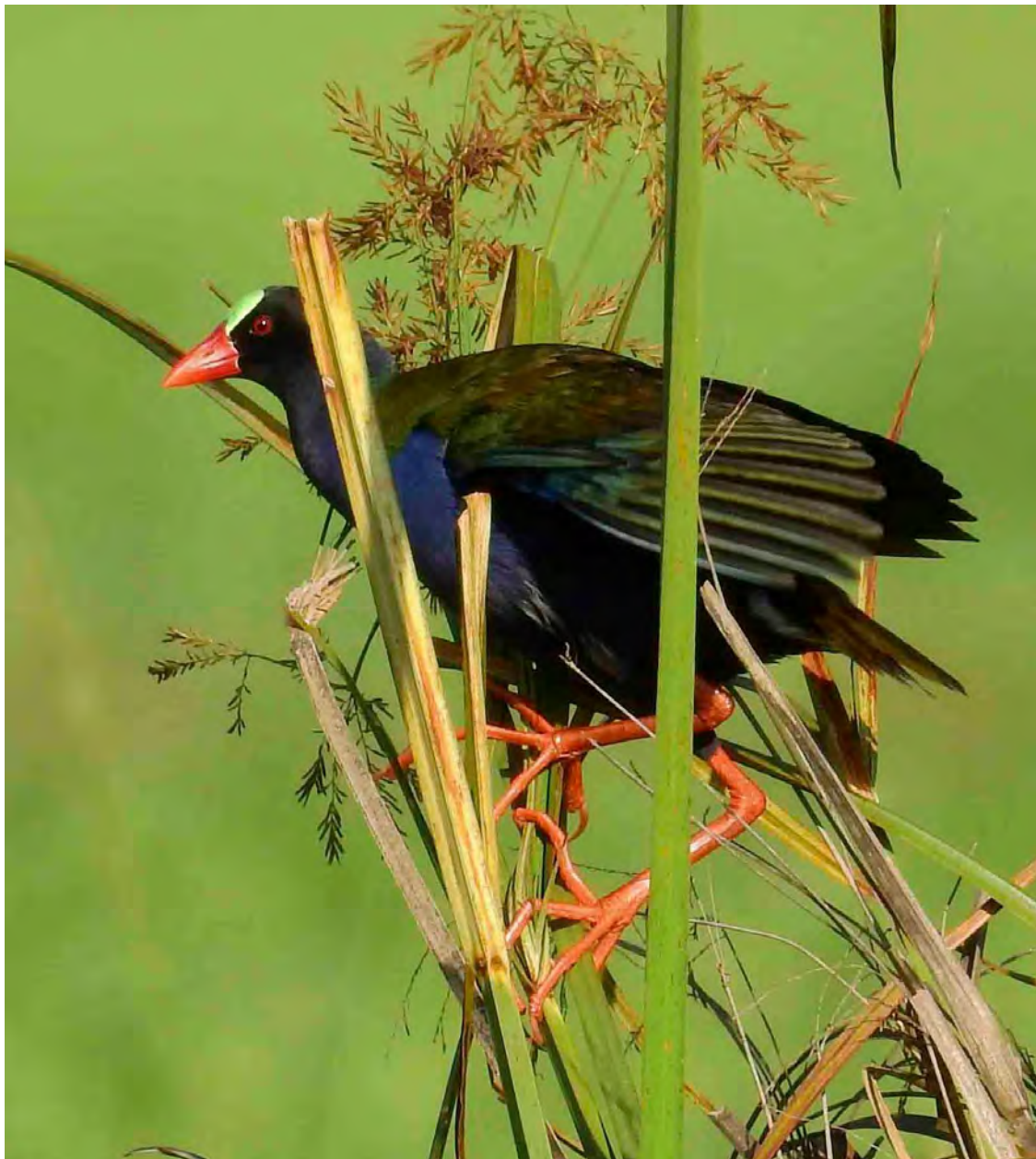
Bo So al voëlkykende het ons ons pad van een skuiling na die volgende gemaak.

om iets spesiaal te sien. En daar was water!

Ons was bietjie bekommerd oor die toestand van die grondpad na Vogelfontein. Dit het lelik verspoel met verlede jaar se baie reën, maar toe ons by ontvangs inteken het die dame daar gesê dat die pad herstel was, maar dat dit nou basies 'n enkel baan (twee spoor) pad is. Ons aankomstyd by Vogelfontein was 6:35. Die weer was ons goedgesind en die baie voëllewe was dadelik sigbaar en hoorbaar. Ons het toe gou koffie en ontbyt geniet. Soos ons daar rondstaan en ons koffie klaar drink gewaar ek 'n groterige roofvoël wat stadig oor die vloedvlakte verby vlieg. Ons was vinnig met ons verkykers op hom en kon dit toe positief identifiseer as 'n volwasse Afrikaanse Vleivalk (African Marsh Harrier). Persoonlik het ek nog nooit 'n Afrikaanse Vleivalk in die Limpopo Provinsie gesien nie. Hulle is maar skaars hier by ons en die enigste plek waar jy 'n redelike goeie kans staan om een te sien is by Vogelfontein. Jippieeee!

Dit was vir my 'n goeie teken vir die dag. Hiervandaan het ons stadig beweeg na die eerste skuiling, Crake skuiling. Ons het

Onder 'n Kleinkoningriethaan (Allen's Gallinule) bespied die vloedvlakte.



besonderse spesies gekry, onder andere Kleinkoningriethaan (Allen's Gallinule), Witrugeend (White-backed Duck) en Kleinrietreier (Little Bittern). Daar was baie Goudgeelvinke (Yellow-crowned Bishop) die hele vloedvlakte deur. Ek het ook 'n Afrikaanse Riethaan (African Crake) hoor roep oppad skuiling toe. By Crake skuiling het ons Grootrietsanger (Great Reed Warbler) gesien. Hier het ons ook na 'n ruk Rooiborsvleikuiken (Red-chested Flufftail) begin hoor roep en so ook Grootriethaan (African Rail), maar nie een van hulle was bereid om hulself te wys nie. Na 'n goeie rukkie se sit in die skuiling het ons aan beweeg na die volgende skuiling, Dabchick skuiling.

Weereens was daar 'n Grootriethaan (African Rail) hier, slegs 5 m van ons af, maar ons kon dit nie te siene kry nie! Ons kon ook heelwat Grootlangtone (African Jacana) en Oostelike Rooipootvalkies (Amur Falcons) van hier af besigtig.

Die besluit is toe gemaak om weer terug te beweeg na die karre toe. Dit het al begin warm word en ons het gou weer iets gegeëet en gedrink. Die plan was om stadig terug te beweeg na die suidekant van die reservaat. Dis toe ons vir Brian Frank by die hek na Sandfields and Forests Private Wildlife Reserve ontmoet. Wat 'n vriendelike en gawe ou. Hy laat ons toe ingaan om vir ons te wys hoe dit daar lyk en toe besluit ons om die res van die uitstappie daar te voltooi. Dié reservaat is net so groot soos Nylsvley en het 'n groter vloedvlakte as Nylsvley. Wat 'n mooi plek en omgewing. Ons kon toe heerlik rondry en het by die vloedvlakte Swartvlerksprinkaanvoëls (Black-winged Pratincole) gesien.

Onder 'n groot boom waar ons middagete geniet het kon ons van naby af die Grysrugkwêkwêvoël (Grey-backed Cameroptera) besigtig. Die plek het mooi en goed versorgde verblyf. Gaan maak gerus 'n draai op hulle webwerf. Dis toe ook hier waar ons die uitstappie afsluit. Ons lys vir die dag het geëindig op 102 spesies.

Dankie aan die lede wat daar was en ook weereens aan Brian vir sy gasvryheid. Daar is tans baie water by Vogelfontein en dis beslis die moeite werd om soontoe te gaan. Ons maak weer so in die nuwe jaar AS dit goed gereën het.

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Oorkant 'n Oostelike Rooipootvalk (Amur Falcon) by Vogelfontein.


BIRD of the YEAR
2024
BATELEUR
Terathopius ecaudatus

BirdLife South Africa is thrilled to announce that the Bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*) is Bird of the Year 2024!

Also known as the Berghaan (Afrikaans), ingqungqulu (isiZulu), and ingqanga (isiXhosa), this magnificent raptor is famous for its striking appearance and remarkable aerial behaviour. Surely a Bateleur soaring high above the African bushveld, with its rocking, gliding motion, is one of the most iconic sights of our country and indeed our continent?

The Bateleur is a truly charismatic and eye-catching bird of prey, with its distinctive plumage – a combination of black, white, and vibrant red-orange on the face and legs. Its common English name, Bateleur, was coined by famed French explorer, writer and ornithologist François Levaillant, and is said to be French for a 'tumbler' or 'tightrope walker', which aptly describes this bird's graceful, aerial acrobatics. Its isiZulu name, ingqungqulu, is onomatopoeic, referring to the sounds of battle drums due to the species relation to war in the Zulu culture. Also very fittingly, its scientific name, Terathopius ecaudatus, is a celebration of its marvellous face, and its short tail.

This species is equally at home in the bushveld of the Kruger National Park, or the arid Kalahari. It is sexually dimorphic, meaning males and females can be differentiated based on their plumage or appearance. This is most easily done when they are in flight by looking at their underwing pattern. Males have all-black secondary and inner primary feathers, while females have broad white bases to these feathers (referring to the header image at the top of this page, the male is above the female).

As bold, majestic and strong an image as these birds portray, unfortunately they are classified as regionally Endangered, with an estimated population reduction of over 50% over the past three generations (40 years), leaving a regional population size of less than 1,000 mature individuals.

It is suspected that this is due to habitat transformation, which has led to a decrease in the available prey base for Bateleurs, especially outside protected areas. Its tendency to scavenge also puts this species at particular risk from indiscriminate poisoning, especially by small-stock farmers. Illegal harvesting of this species for use in the muthi trade is another recent trend, which needs to be further investigated.

Join us in celebrating the Bateleur and supporting the conservation of these incredible birds and their habitats. Together, we can ensure that future generations can marvel at the beauty of the Bateleur in the wild.

Stay tuned to https://www.birdlife.org.za/bird-of-the-year-2024/, as BirdLife South Africa will create awareness about the Bateleur through the production of educational materials, such as posters, infographics, and learning resources for schools that will be free to download on this web page; articles in African Birdlife magazine; social media posts; and presentations to interested groups. Bateleur merchandise, such as t-shirts, pin badges, socks, and fluffy toys, will also be on sale through BirdLife South Africa's **Shop for the Birds!** from January 2024.

We would like to share our gratitude with our Bird of the Year sponsor, the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, for once again making this initiative possible through the funds they generously donate towards BirdLife South Africa and the conservation of birds and biodiversity.

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
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HANS HOHEISEN charitable trust
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PROJECT NEWS

Derek Engelbrecht
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Detail

The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, once said: "Men who wish to know about the world must learn about it in its particular details." This is also our view during the revision of Roberts 8. For many species in southern Africa, or Africa for that matter, descriptions of the species' diet and foraging are limited to broad categories, e.g., seeds, insects, small birds, or snakes. However, some species accounts in Roberts 7 give more detail. Such a broad description is understandable since the previous editions of Roberts Birds of Southern Africa were printed, and there were constraints on the length of species accounts. With Roberts 8 being online, at least initially, we have the luxury of "going deep" and giving more detail.

I will use Liana Tyrrell's record of Dickinson's Kestrel eating a Zambezi giant blind snake (see page 70 of this edition). Knowing the snake species adds much more value to our understanding of the natural world. We now know Dickinson's Kestrel feeds on blind snakes rather than just snakes, and it can catch relatively large snakes. Do Dickinson's Kestrels specifically select blind snakes because they are pretty harmless? Perhaps not, but we won't know until more dietary records give such details. Only once we have more detailed records will a better picture of the species' diet begin to emerge.

So, go out and snap away when you see a bird foraging. Note the date and locality and write a few sentences giving some details. Alternatively, scan through your old photos and see if there is an interesting dietary record. I'm sure there is!

Roberts 8 on Learn the Birds

On the 12th of October 2023, Derek Engelbrecht, editor-in-chief of Roberts 8, and Laura Kammermeier, communications manager with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, presented a webinar on how the 8th edition of Roberts Birds of Southern Africa (Roberts 8) has evolved, the Roberts 8/Birds of the World partnership, and where you can find the newly revised Roberts 8 content. You can watch the webinar on the Learn the Birds YouTube channel at https://youtube.com/@learnthebirds. Please reach out to either of us if you have any questions about Birds of the World or would like to contribute data, observations, photos, or sound recordings (even from Xeno-Canto) to the Cornell Lab.

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Laura Kammermeier, email: lmk25@cornell.edu

Species currently under revision

Do you have any unpublished data, observations, images or sound recordings of any of the species below you'd like to share with the world? Please email me at roberts8revision@gmail.com.

Coursers
- Bronze-winged Courser
- Burchell's Courser
- Double-banded Courser
- Temminck's Courser
- Three-banded Courser

Falcons
- Pygmy Falcon

Parrots
- Cape Parrot

Secretarybird

Storks
- Abdim's Stork

Tinkerbirds
- Green Tinkerbird
- Red-fronted Tinkerbird
- Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird
- Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird

Babblers
- Southern Pied Babbler

Larks
- Pink-billed Lark

Weavers
- Chestnut Weaver
- Spectacled Weaver

Pipits
- Rock Pipit

Swallows
- Blue Swallow
- Wire-tailed Swallow

Cisticolas
- Cloud Cisticola
- Croaking Cisticola
- Grey-backed Cisticola
- Levaillant's Cisticola

Starlings
- Red-winged Starling

Grassbird-like warblers
- Barratt's Warbler

Thrushes
- Spotted Ground Thrush

Soon-to-be-released species accounts

Yellow-billed Stork
Cape Weaver
Southern Brown-throated Weaver
Monteiro's Hornbill

Recently published

African Finfoot
Gurney's Sugarbird

Regulars

Birds in Art

Southern Pied Babbler

Text and Artwork

Willem Van der Merwe

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:

DEVIANT ART

Southern Pied Babbler

This issue's feature bird is a Southern Pied Babbler, *Turdoides bicolor*. The scientific name means 'Two-coloured Thrush-like Thing'. Like many other species, the Southern Pied Babbler has gone through a recent reclassification process. Still called a babbler, it used to belong to the Babbler Family, the Timaliidae. Now, this family has been broken up; today, when you speak of a 'babbler' you can no longer assign it to a specific family. Our babbler of the day has landed in the Leiotrichidae, the Laughing-Thrush family. As hinted by the common name and this species' genus name, these are rather thrush-like birds in size and shape, many of whom have distinctive loud, mocking calls. Several Asian species are quite brightly coloured and boldly patterned, while the African ones are somewhat drabber. Our babblers are called 'katlagters' in Afrikaans – that means 'cat-laughers'. My garden babblers, indeed, appear to enjoy calling mockingly at my cat!

Below An adult Southern Pied Babbler © Warwick Tarboton.

Above Southern Pied Babblers are highly social and live in groups © Warwick Tarboton.

Then there's the reason why this is called the Southern Pied Babbler. There has to be a northern one, too, right? Indeed, the Northern Pied Babbler, *Turdoides hypoleuca* ('Thrush-like Thing that's White Below'), occurs over a small range in Tanzania and Kenya and looks somewhat different, being dark brown above and white below. As you can see, the southern species is mainly white with black wings and tails, and the sexes look the same. It is perhaps the most striking of the African babblers. It occurs in dry regions in Southern Africa, from northern South Africa to Namibia, Botswana and southern Zimbabwe. Apart from these two, seventeen other babbler species in the same genus occur all across Africa and parts of Asia. The common Arrow-marked Babbler, *Turdoides jardineii,* is a close relative. Several Asian species that used to belong to the genus have been removed and put in their own genus, *Argyra*.

Southern Pied Babblers are similar in behaviour to Arrow-marked Babblers. They are very cooperative. They typically live in noisy groups of two to (rarely) 16 birds foraging through open, dry, thorny woodland. They are particularly associated with Camelthorn trees *Vachellia erioloba*. Each group defends its territory. Their calls are a harsh, high-pitched, husky jeering, typically uttered by several birds in unison. They forage mainly on the

ground, often thrashing dry leaves aside to uncover their prey or even digging into the soil for it with their strong, curved bills. They feed primarily on invertebrates and small reptiles. They can target intimidating critters such as scorpions, centipedes and solifuges (also called sun or camel spiders, though they're not true spiders).

There's an interesting relationship between Southern Pied Babblers and Fork-tailed Drongos *Dicrurus adsimilis*. The drongos, bold and aggressive birds, often associate with flocks of babblers. The drongos are very alert and will give warning calls that the babblers heed if they spot any danger. They serve as sentinels, allowing the babblers to be more at ease while feeding. However, every now and then, the drongos will sound false alarms! Upon hearing this, the babblers will scatter for safety and shelter, abandoning the prey that they were targeting - which the drongos will then swoop at and take for themselves! But this doesn't always work since, in larger groups, there will be enough babblers to perform sentinel duties themselves, in which case they chase away the drongos. The drongos are tolerated more in small babbler groups. They tend to steal food more from inexperienced immature babblers than from adults.

A more benign interaction is with Common Scimitarbills, *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas*. These hang around close to babbler flocks, listening out for the babblers' sentinels giving alarm calls, enabling the scimitarbills to avoid predators.

It's mainly in their breeding activity that the babblers cooperate most interestingly. Each group will have a dominant couple, who will do basically all of the breeding for the flock. The other flock members will assist the dominant couple in raising the chicks. They will help incubate the eggs, bring food to the nestlings, and protect them from cold, hot or rainy weather by sheltering them with their bodies.

The nestlings are 'taught' by older birds to know when there's food for them. This is done by the older birds uttering a purring call on approaching the nest. The nestlings soon learn that this means food, and they'll reach out of the nest to receive their meal. But the adult babblers now use the purring call ingeniously to manipulate the youngsters. When it is time for the nestlings to fledge, the adults will utter the purring call

Above A Southern Pied Babbler nest with three eggs © Warwick Tarboton.

a distance away from the nest; still associating the call with food, the nestlings will be tempted to leave the nest. They may even be forced to leave the nest by aggressive behaviour from their parents (who, at this point, may want to start a new clutch), such as jumping on them! From here, the helpers will be the ones raising them. Then, they can continue to be taught, the adults using the purring call to coax the young birds to safety or to feeding sites with lots of food. So, the young birds learn to forage for themselves. They tend to be rather slow learners, and adults may continue feeding them for up to four months after they leave the nest. The birds that receive the most attention and food for the longest time from the adult helpers turn out to be the biggest, strongest and healthiest. The young birds are taught along the way how to become helpers themselves, for when it becomes their turn to assist with raising a new brood. Some birds may leave their birth flocks and disperse to join others. Dispersal helps to avoid inbreeding, enabling couples to form from birds that

Above A recently fledged Southern Pied Babbler chick © Warwick Tarboton.

aren't direct relatives. This helps against inbreeding, which can cause genetic deterioration.

Because of their cooperative breeding efforts, pied babblers are quite successful breeders. They can raise three clutches per season, that is, over the spring and summer, the rainy season. The wetter the season, the more successful the breeding attempt is likely to be. Each clutch, on average, has three eggs. But remember that in each group, it is typically only the dominant couple that breeds. But because of their helpers, they 'waste' fewer eggs per breeding attempt, and the parents can start a new brood before the previous chicks have become independent. Levaillant's Cuckoos *Clamator levaillanti* sometimes parasitise them; strangely, some babblers seem to be savvy to the cuckoo chicks and reject them, while others blithely accept them.

This help, care and attention make for strong babbler 'societies'. Each flock tends to stay close together, birds rarely straying more than 20 m from their cohorts. They all perform sentinel duty, mob predators, and, in general, defend their territories. Birds are very involved with each other. They preen each other, engage in play-fighting (mostly the youngsters, but adults too), roost and huddle together, warming each other in the cold nights. The play-fighting usually takes the form of birds 'wrestling' with each other on the ground, chasing, jumping, or hanging upside-down. Their calls help keep their groups together, proclaim their territories, and inform each other of aspects like food, danger, or individual birds in distress. When they meet neighbouring groups, the birds become agitated and display to each other by calling loudly while spreading their tails and drooping their wings. Relationships within the group are dynamic. Dominants may be usurped; parents may 'divorce', and young birds may be kidnapped or even killed. Overall, though, groups tend to remain stable. In the wild, pied babblers can live for 15 years.

Much of the information I present here comes from the amazing (ongoing) research by Dr. Amanda Ridley. She and her collaborators are studying several groups of pied babblers in the southern Kalahari Desert region. They've habituated these birds to themselves - the birds come to them now without fear. They even jump onto scales of their own accord to be weighed! The birds are individually identified by personalised coloured rings on their legs. Her research mainly revolves around the cooperative breeding behaviour of these fascinating birds.

Though not common, pied babblers are widespread and not of any conservation concern at present. They are, though, vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In their already very hot, dry haunts, they can be deleteriously affected if global warming raises the temperature even higher. It has been shown that youngsters learn more slowly the hotter it gets!

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Reflections

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

The Tropic of Capricorn Loop
Part 2
Nshawu Vlei and Mooiplaas Windmill

Chris Patton

So, in the last edition, I took readers onto the Tropic of Capricorn Loop starting from the North but only shared my birding memories up to where the S143 joins the S50. Turning south along the S50 and the rest of the Tropic of Capricorn Loop, the road now runs adjacent to the Nshawu Creek/Vlei, perhaps best described as a 'dambo,' i.e., a shallow, seasonal wetland.

Nshawu, which means 'pleasant-tasting meat' in Tsonga, is perhaps most renowned as the former home of the elephant bull Shawu, one of the Magnificent Seven big tuskers, and the elephant with the longest recorded tusks in Kruger's history. Incidentally, the tusks can be seen at the Letaba Elephant Hall, some 40 kilometres

Opposite top Map of the Tropic of Capricorn Loop and surrounds of Mopani Camp (see https://www.krugerpark.co.za/Kruger_Park_Game_Viewing_Routes-travel/mopani-camp-game-viewing-routes.html)

Opposite bottom The Nshawu Wetland in all its glory © Joep Stevens.

Left The longest tusks in Kruger's recorded history, belonged to the elephant named after the Nshawu Wetland of which I write.

to the south, if readers are looking for a non-birding distraction…

It is important to share with the readers that things have changed in the Nshawu Wetland over the last three-quarters of a century. In approximately 1950, no fewer than five boreholes were sunk along the course of the wetland, named Nshawu 1 to 5. These boreholes and the cul-de-sac roads down to them are still on park maps and as location indicators along the route, except Nshawu 4… because an earthen dam was built along the Creek in 1967 and named Nshawu/Shawu Dam. Its waters covered where the fourth borehole was located.

The Park's changed water provision policy is based on sound ecological principles and supported by science, aiming to ensure resilient and sustainable wildlife populations and habitat conditions. It includes an integrated management of both natural water resources and artificial water points. The water resources for Kruger National Park are carefully evaluated and monitored. The maintenance and use of natural water resources are applied as the first preference. Consequently, the former Nshawu boreholes have been closed for several years now, while the Nshawu Dam, I believe, was first breached naturally by flooding in the early 2010s and then more formally removed by

Above A long-distance shot of a pair of Pied Avocets in Nshawu Dam © Chris Patton.

Right A close-up of one of these beautiful birds © Chris Patton.

the park's technical services.

When I first started working for SANParks, the Nshawu Dam was still in place. I'm not 100% sure when it was first breached, but when I reminisce and consult my photo records, the most bizarre birds I've recorded at the site were a very out-of-place pair of Pied Avocets in February 2010. Avocets are rare vagrants to Kruger. The long-distance photo of the birds shows significant water at the site of the dam, so I assume the dam wall was still present then, unless it was already breached, and the water in

the photo is just the dambo's natural depression that still retains such a significant amount of water in the wet season?

Over the years, I saw a few unusual vagrant non-typical Kruger species on the Nshawu Dam… Red-knobbed Coot, Red-billed Teal, and Southern Pochard, to name three that spring to mind, and now that the dam is no longer, perhaps these waterbirds will find somewhere else to rest when they stray into the Park.

When one drives through the Nshawu wetland system, the abundance of game is obvious, and elephant, waterbuck, wildebeest and zebra will all be common. In contrast, rarer Kruger mammals like common reedbuck, tsessebe and Sharpe's grysbok are regularly encountered. But perhaps the most imposing mammal in the wetland are some sizeable herds of African buffalo, and their presence has avian implications, too. Buffalo are the favoured host of oxpeckers, and the once absent Yellow-billed Oxpecker (this species became locally extinct in South Africa in the 1890s because of the rinderpest epidemic and only recolonised Kruger from Zimbabwe some 90 years later) is now once again regularly seen on these giant bovines.

Below A common reedbuck ram photographed at Nshawu 5 © Daniel Engelbrecht.

And while the oxpecker/buffalo symbiotic relationship is one of mutualism where both receive obvious benefits, other bird species in the Nshawu Wetland (and park as a whole) have a more commensal relationship with the wild oxen, as several species, both large and small will forage near to grazing buffalo and then seize any insects, reptiles

Above Black-headed Herons are efficient hunters in open grasslands around vleis like Nshawu © Joep Stevens.

Top Large herds of buffalo in the Nshawu Wetland make for some dramatic photographic scenes, like the backdrop for this strutting Kori Bustard © Joep Stevens.

or rodents disturbed from the grasses as the big beasts lumber through the veld. Various bee-eaters, Wattled Starlings, Fork-tailed Drongos, Western Cattle Egret, Black-headed Herons, and Kori Bustards are some of the regular exploiters of buffalo as a meal assister, without any obvious benefit to the buffalo themselves.

But for me, there is one mystical bird that I have always associated with Nshawu, particularly the vlei habitat around Nshawu 3 and the dam. I heard it before I saw one and immediately knew it was a call I had not heard before. I would describe the sound as a pulsing and repeating double-beat *doo-doo*, and I was intrigued as to what it could be when I first heard it. The call was permeating through the woodland and did not sound like it was coming specifically from the wetland, and as that first encounter, the source was not revealing itself visually, and I was left stumped.

It was only when leading a bird group on a SANParks Honorary Rangers Birding Weekend, a year or two later, in January 2008, that I was able to see the source perched out in the open, and by then, I had figured out what it was. It is a bird only found in the park in wet years when wetlands like the Nshawu system are right up its alley. If you haven't guessed what it is just yet, I'm writing about the Black Coucal, and one of the participants on one of the birding weekends I've stayed in touch with over the years secured this fantastic photo of one.

Another species I look forward to having an excellent chance to find in the Nshawu area is the Black-bellied Bustard. When one of these birds is seen at the side of the road, as they frequently are in the area, if time and inclination allow, turn the engine off and watch, and the chances are as the bird settles itself, it will start to make

Left The mystical Black Coucal is only found in Kruger in suitable habitat in wet years © Tommy Liversage.

Left A Black-bellied Bustard about to pop some Champagne © Derek Engelbrecht.

its characteristic Champagne-cork popping noise.

Most of the Nshawu wetland along the S50 is on the eastern side of the road, but there is one small ephemeral pan on the western side that is not marked on most maps. It is regularly used as a buffalo wallow, but it also is a strategic spot to park next to and watch a stream of passerine birds come down to drink… things like Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks, Wattled Starlings and more will all provide some excellent photo opportunities.

As the Capricorn Loop continues southwards along the S50, and just past the cul-de-sac turn-off down to the old Nshawu number 3, the road will fork. Remaining straight and continuing south, the S50 continues along the Nshawu Creek and past the former boreholes Nshawu 2 and 1 before reaching the H1-6 tar road from Letaba. But to complete the Tropic of Capricorn Loop, one must actually take the right-hand fork westwards in a 4 km link road that will then join the S49, and after another 3km, also join the H1-6 tar road.

It is along this portion of the route that the last spot of significance on the Capricorn Loop is found before travellers return to Mopani Camp, and that is the Mooiplaas Waterhole. Mooiplaas (which means 'beautiful place' in Afrikaans) lends its name to a tributary of the Tsendze River and the nearby picnic site back on the H1 tar road through the spine of the park… but it is the open plains and vlei around the Mooiplaas Waterhole that are the subject of our attention for birding. It is only 7.2 km from Mopani Rest Camp, close enough so visitors can have a sundowner viewing experience there and still make it back to camp before gate closing time or make it one of their first stops if they make it out of the camp gate at dawn.

It is one of the most reliable places in the park to find the uncommon migrant harriers Pallid and Montagu's, which will ghost past the waterhole with their diagnostic seemingly laboured quartering flight. The males of the two species are easy to distinguish, but the females and sub-adults are hard to distinguish. The open and usually short grassland around the

Below The open plains around Mooiplaas Windmill will consistently produce quality birds © Joep Stevens.

Above The Rufous-winged Cisticola © Tommy Liversage.

waterhole is also a reliable spot for the rare summer migrant Caspian Plovers, sometimes in non-breeding plumage and other times in their breeding finery.

And where there is longer vlei-type vegetation, this spot is good for the localised habitat-restricted Rufous-winged Cisticola (and to be fair, along the Nshawu Wetland is suitable for this species too, but there the road doesn't penetrate as close to the vlei as at Mooiplaas). I don't have any decent images of my own, but SANParks Honorary Rangers Birding Weekend participants again come to the rescue with this effort by Tommy Liversage.

It's not just the harassment of harriers; the open plains around Mooiplaas are a raptor haven. In late summer, look out for Amur Falcons and Lesser Kestrels, while Bateleur will be seen both overhead, and frequently swooping down to land on the ground near the water's edge for either a dust or water bath as part of their feather maintenance.

As I wrote above, the Mooiplaas Waterhole is close enough to get to or from at dawn or dusk to take advantage of beautiful light to get some spectacular silhouettes, and this evocative scene of Amur Falcons at dawn seems an excellent way to end this reflection.

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Amur Falcon © Chris Patton.

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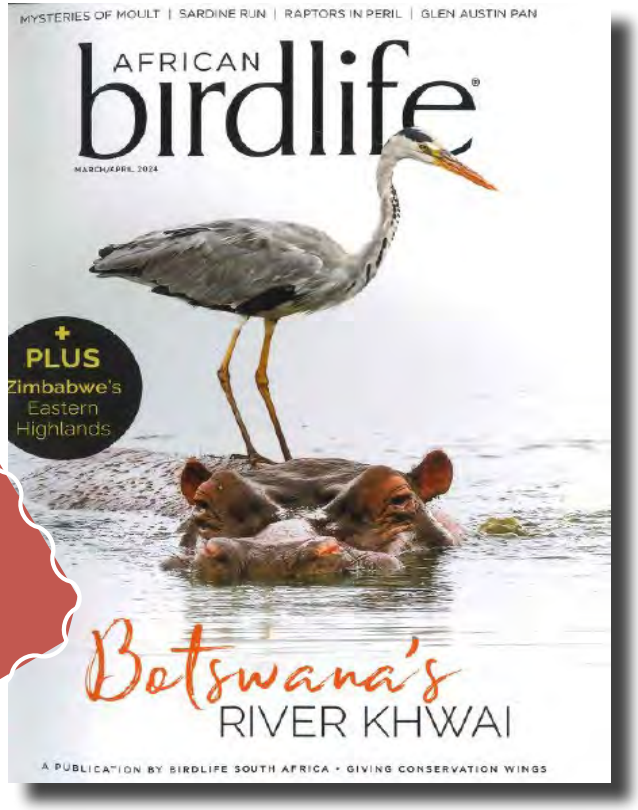

Possible Karoo Prinia x Black-chested Prinia hybrids at Holhoek, Paul Roux, and other records in the Bethlehem area, Free State

Dawie de Swardt, Martin Potgieter and Zingisile Mbo

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The existence of atypical prinias in the eastern and southeastern Free State that does not fit the 'field guide' description of Karoo *Prinia maculosa*, Black-chested *P. flavicans*, or Drakensberg *P. hypoxantha* prinias is now well known (De Swardt et al. 1998, De Swardt 2023, Terblanche 2023, MP, unpublished observations). It has been suggested that these unusual prinias are hybrids involving the three species mentioned above.

While on a research field excursion to collect data on Rufous-eared Warblers *Malcorus pectoralis* on the farm Holhoek, Paul Roux district from 13 to 16 November 2023, one day was spent in *Leucosidea sericea* bush to ring "other" birds (De Swardt, 2023). The streaking of Karoo Prinias at this site is known to be different to conspecifics from elsewhere in the Free State and adjacent areas (De Swardt et al., 1998), so DDS was attentive to be on the lookout for "unusual" prinias. Also, MP (SABAP2 observer and SAFRING registered bird ringer) observed possible hybrid prinias in the Bethlehem area of the eastern Free State, approximately 30 km east of the farm Holhoek, so he was also familiar with the "unusual-looking" prinias from this region.

Two prinias were caught in mist nets before weather conditions forced us to close the nets at around 10:00. Upon processing the two prinias for ringing, we immediately suspected these two birds were possible Karoo Prinia x Black-chested Prinia hybrids. Both prinias captured showed streaked necks and partial streaking down the flanks and had somewhat "broken" breast bands, suggesting these birds may have been hybrids. In April 2023, Karoo Prinias were also ringed in the same area, but no potential hybrids were recorded. The birds were measured, weighed, ringed, and photos were uploaded to Birdpix and the Macaulay Library (Ring numbers AS28479: ML612974554 and ML612974551; AS28480: ML612974552 and ML612974553) (see Figs. 1a and b, and 2). The birds weighed 5.7 g and 9.5 g, and although sexing was not possible, they were possibly males based on tail length measurements (De Swardt et al., 2018). Prinia AS28479 responded to the playback of a Karoo Prinia call and was subsequently captured in the mist net. Photographs of the two birds were sent to ornithologist Rick Nuttall, who agreed that these two birds were likely Karoo x Black-chested Prinia hybrids. Furthermore, the photos were uploaded to the Fitzpatrick Institute's Birdpix

Figure 1 a and b. Possible Karoo Prinia x Black-chested Prinia hybrid ringed at Holhoek, Paul Roux on 16 November 2023. Ring number AS28479 (ML612974554 and ML612974551) © Dawie De Swardt.

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Figure 2. Possible Karoo Prinia / Black-chested Prinia hybrid ringed at Holhoek, Paul Roux on 16 November 2023. Ring number AS28480 (ML612974552 and ML612974553) © Dawie De Swardt.

platform (https://vmus.adu.org.za/vm), where their identification was also confirmed as Karoo x Black-chested Prinia hybrids (Birdpix nr 268119 and 268120)

Subsequent to the observations of hybrid prinias on two separate occasions at Holhoek in 2023 (De Swardt 2023), more attention was given to the possibility of hybrid prinias in the Eastern Free State. MP (and Melanie Potgieter) captured and ringed a Karoo Prinia (ring no AM48548) in Pretoriuskloof, Bethlehem, on 5 November 2023 (Fig. 3a and b). This bird displayed many characteristics of the Holhoek hybrids reported above. The bird had a clean white throat without any apparent markings, a broken breast band, and fine partial streaking extending down the flanks. On the 26th of November 2023, MP again encountered prinias in the Loch Athlone Bird Sanctuary. Using playback of Karoo Prinia calls, two birds immediately responded aggressively, one undoubtedly being a Black-chested Prinia, but the other looked very much like the bird in Fig. 3; i.e., it had some streaks on the breast, forming a broken breast band, with some fine streaking extending down its sides, a clean white throat, etc.

MP (and Melanie Potgieter) were atlasing in the Kransfontein area, east of Bethlehem, on Sunday, the 31st of December 2023. They found two prinias foraging together in a stand of black wattles *Acacia mearnsii*. The one bird was a "normal" Black-chested Prinia, but the other bird's chest had fine streaks extending down to the lower chest (Fig. 4), and the bird's throat was yellowish and unstreaked. Whether this bird was a Black-chested x Karoo Prinia hybrid or a Black-chested Prinia in pre-breeding moult is unknown.

Figure 3. Karoo Prinia captured and ringed (ring no AM48548) in Pretoriuskloof, Bethlehem on 5 November 2023. The bird shows similar prinia hybrid characteristics as observed in the Holhoek, Paul Roux birds © Martin Potgieter.

These possible hybrids are not the first records for the Free State. Terblanche (2023) reported on possible Black-chested Prinia x Karoo Prinia hybrids in the Clocolan region of the southeastern Free State. DDS reported on an eastward range extension of Karoo Prinia into the range of Drakensberg Prinia at Mount Everest Nature Reserve, Harrismith, in November 2021 (De Swardt 2022). These records and the ones reported in this note show that hybridization is possible between Karoo, Drakensberg, Black-chested, and possibly even Tawny-flanked Prinias *P. subflava* in areas where

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these species co-exist. Observers should take careful note of prinias in regions of overlap and photograph, where possible, "pure" and "suspected" hybrids to improve our knowledge of the phenotypic variation exhibited by prinias, not only in the eastern and southeastern Free State, but also beyond.

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Figure 4. A possible Black-chested Prinia hybrid (with Drakensberg Prinia?) was observed alongside a "normal" Black-chested Prinia in the Kransfontein area, east of Bethlehem, on 31 December 2023. The possible hybrid prinia's chest was mostly streaked with fine streaks extending down to the lower chest, with an unstreaked throat © Martin Potgieter.

Dickinson's Kestrel diet

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Dickinson's Kestrel's diet is varied and includes, amongst others, invertebrate prey such as insects and solifuges and small vertebrate prey such as frogs, birds, lizards, chameleons, snakes, rodents, and bats (Ferguson-Rees and Christie 2001), but more often than not the dietary records lack detail, e.g., which species of prey. On the 7th of April 2022, I observed a Dickinson's Kestrel in the Liwonde National Park, Malawi, that had caught a ~40 cm long Zambezi giant blind snake *Afrotyphlops dinga*.

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Below The Dickinson's Kestrel with the Zambezi Blind Snake © Liana Tyrrell.

Vocalisations of the Green Tinkerbird

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The Green Tinkerbird has a rather patchy distribution in East Africa, from Kenya in the north to the Inhambane Province, Mozambique in the south. It is closely related to two other diminutive tinkerbirds: the Moustached Tinkerbird and Western Tinkerbird. The Moustached Tinkerbird is found along the East African Rift and is a bird of mountain forests, usually above 900 m. For most of their ranges, Green and Moustached Tinkerbirds are allopatric, except in the West Usambaras in Tanzania, where they are sympatric. Here, the Moustached Tinkerbird sometimes descends to 450 m, and both species have been recorded in the 450–900 m above sea level range (Short and Horne 2020a). The two species' calls are distinctive, so separating them based on calls is easy. The Western Tinkerbird has, as the name implies, a more westerly distribution, but the eastern subspecies *hildamariae* of Western Tinkerbird and the nominate subspecies of Moustached Tinkerbird both occur in Uganda, albeit in different regions (Short and Horne 2020b).

The Green Tinkerbird has an aura of mystery surrounding it. It has a very patchy distribution in East Africa, occurring in various habitats, from hot, lowland thickets to cool montane forests and from sea level to ~1,800 m above sea level. Nowhere common in its range, its occurrence in southern Africa took ornithological mysteries to another level after seemingly vanishing from the southern African subregion for 55 years until Greg Davies and Hugh Chittenden rediscovered it at the original locality in 2013 (see the review of events by Davies 2013).

Most aspects of the natural history of the Green Tinkerbird are either unknown or poorly known. For example, only two nests of the species have been recorded to date. Short and Horne (1988) provided a brief description of the vocalisations of Green Tinkerbird. According to these authors, the species has two main calls: a piping trill at 2.8–3.0 kHz and a pip (pop) trill. Other calls include a grating call during interactions, a begging-soliciting call, and a *prit* or *prit-it* call (Short and Horne 1988). The context in which these calls are delivered remains mostly unknown. This note aims to describe in more detail the vocalisations of Green Tinkerbird, using data obtained from recordings uploaded to online repositories such as Xeno-canto and the Macaulay Library, and to compare it to some congenerics found within its range.

Above Green Tinkerbird, Save Woodlands, Mozambique © Mike Buchan.

A brief definition of the terms used in this note follows (see also Fig. 1 below):

1) ***Note***. This is a single tone of definite pitch, the smallest sound unit. The term often describes a single continuous trace on a sound spectrogram. In some

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literature sources, this is known as an element.

2) ***Phrase***. A sequence of similar notes, also known as a strophe in some literature.

3) ***Syllable***. A repeated unit in a song – see chittering calls below.

4) ***Strophe***. Several phrases delivered in sequence without a significant pause (>1 second in this note) constitute a strophe.

5) ***Bout***. All the strophes combined in a sequence without a significant pause (usually several minutes) in calling, such as foraging, self-maintenance, etc., is known as a call bout.

6) ***Tempo***. The rate of delivery per unit of time, whether notes or phrases.

7) ***Frequency***. The pitch of a sound, measured in Hertz (Hz).

Green Tinkerbird vocalisations

The calls of Green Tinkerbird can broadly be grouped into four categories:

1) The pop trill,
2) The chittering trill,
3) Pip calls, and
4) A harsh, grating, aggressive call.

Each has slight variations, which will be discussed under each type.

The pop trill

This is the typical call and is almost certainly a territorial call. Pop trills are delivered in strophes comprising one and usually fewer than 25 phrases, but exceptionally long strophes of 65, 75, 79, and 87 phrases have been recorded. With at least two of these long strophes, the recordists noted that the calling was in response to playback, suggesting the Green Tinkerbird may be sensitive to playback. If playback is used to "lure" Green Tinkerbird, it should be used judiciously, if at all. These long strophes appear to deviate from the usual pattern, and as such they were excluded from the analyses, unless otherwise indicated. If the long strophes are excluded, the mean number of phrases per strophe is 4.94 ± 4.02 phrases (range 1–22, n = 71 strophes), and if long strophes are included, the mean is 10.11 ± 16.11 phrases, the median = 5 phrases (range 1–87, n = 89 strophes).

Pop trills are delivered in a frequency range of 926.1–1722.9 Hz (mean frequency bandwidth = 453.42 Hz ± 80.04), with the mean F_{min} in a phrase at 1152.36 Hz and the mean F_{max} at 1606.15 Hz. The mean F_{peak} is 1365.23 Hz (n = 335 phrases).

Each strophe starts with an introductory phrase, which itself is characterised by an introductory note, followed by a short pause, and then a series of notes following in quick succession (Fig. 2). The pauses between the 1st and 2nd, 2nd and 3rd, and 3rd and 4th notes of an introductory phrase get progressively shorter, but in the second half of the phrase, the notes are spaced more or less equidistant (Fig. 3). The mean duration of the pause between the introductory note and the second note of an introductory phrase is 0.19 s ± 0.06 (range 0.09–0.28), between the 2nd and the 3rd note it is 0.12 s ± 0.04 (range 0.06–0.19), and the duration of the pause preceding the penultimate note in a phrase is 0.05 s ± 0.01 (range 0.03–0.07).

Phrases that follow the introductory phrase sometimes display a slightly longer pause between the first and subsequent notes (Fig. 3), but this is never as marked as in the first and second notes of an

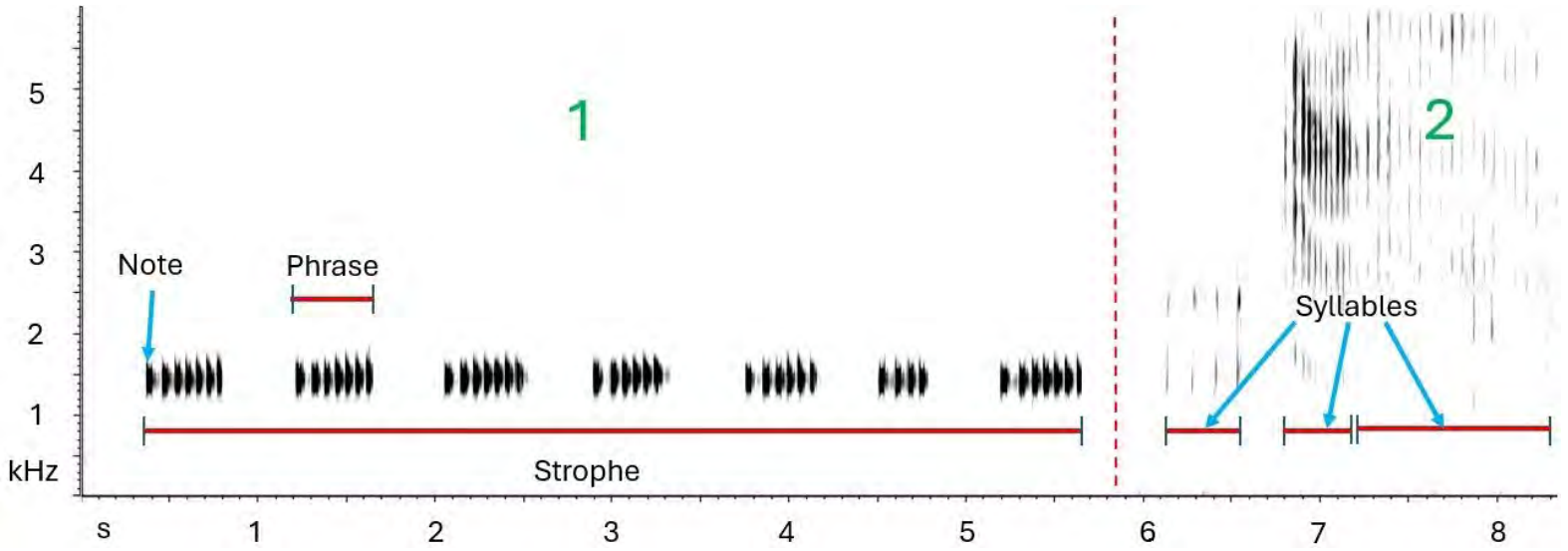

Figure 1. Spectrogram of two calls of Green Tinkerbird to illustrate some of the terminology used in this note.

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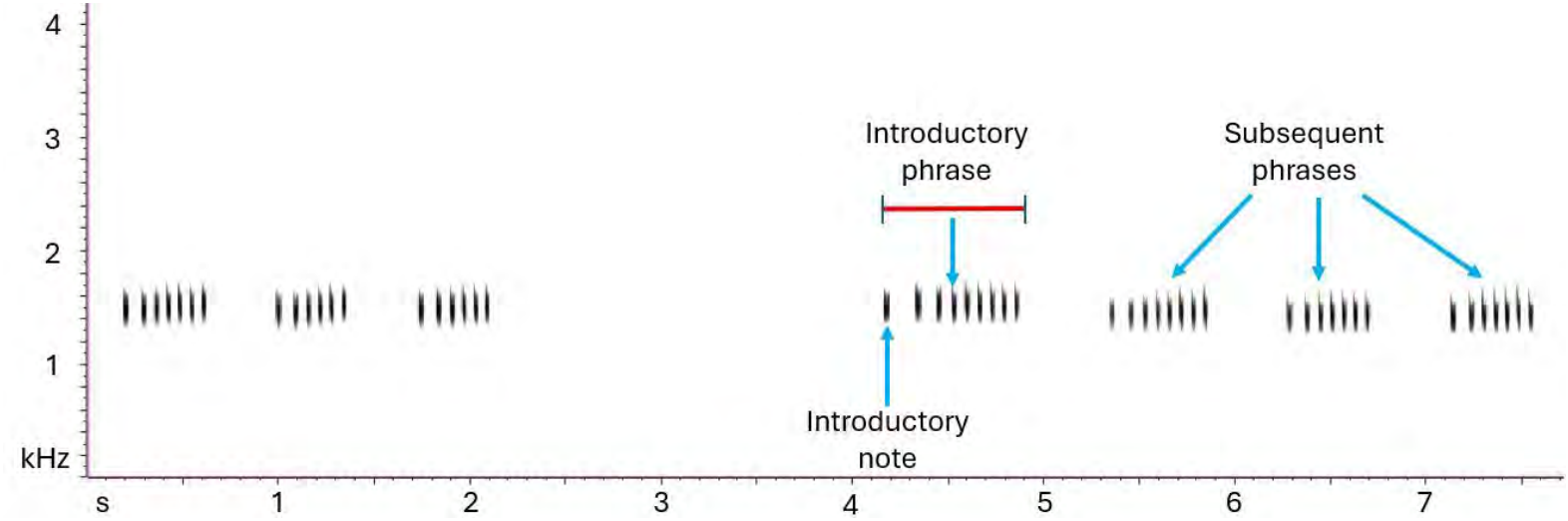

Figure 2. A sequence of pop trills of a Green Tinkerbird. The last three phrases of a strophe is followed by an approximate 2 s break before the next strophe starts (the first four phrases are shown here). Note the larger gap between the introductory note of an introductory phrase of a new strophe (here starting at 4.1 s).

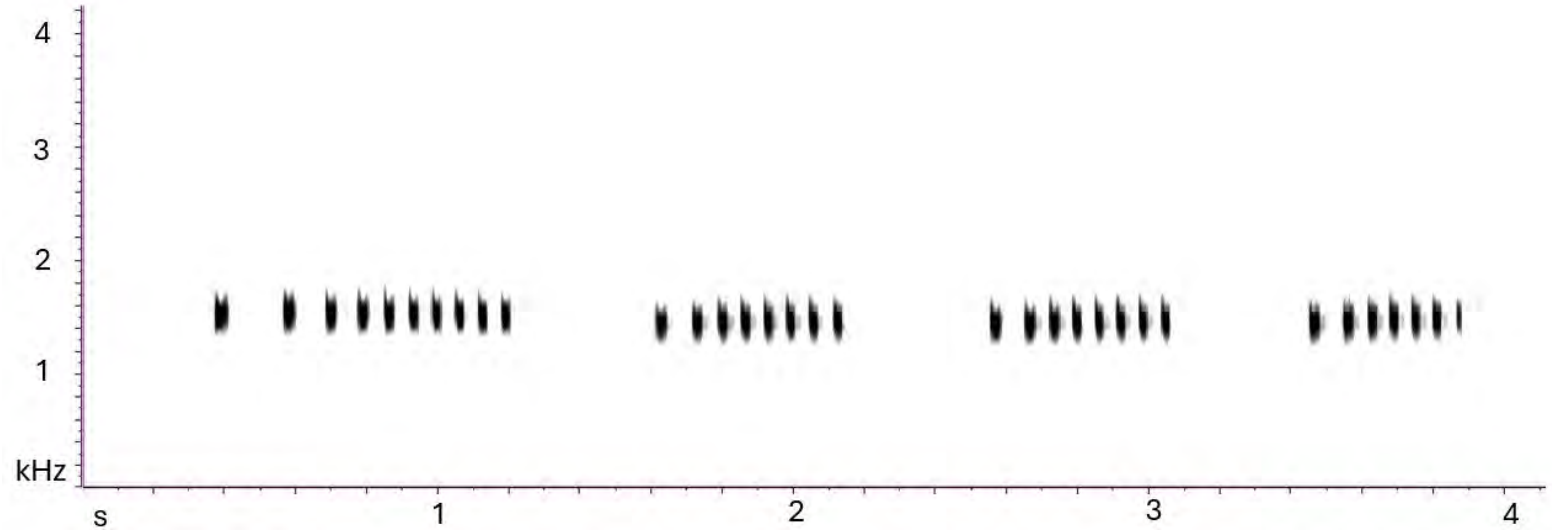

Figure 3. An introductory phrase and three subsequent phrases. Note the large gap between the introductory note and the subsequent ones in the introductory phrase, Also, note how the gaps get shorter but then remain more or less constant in the second half of the phrase. In subsequent phrases, there may or may not be a slightly larger gap between the first note and the ones following, but it is never as distinct as in an introductory phrase.

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introductory phrase, and the notes are generally spaced more or less equidistantly in such phrases (e.g., last phrase in Fig 3). The gaps separating successive phrases average 0.39 s (n = 20 pauses).

The mean number of notes for all phrases (introductory and subsequent phrases) is 8.01 ± 2.60 notes (n = 335 phrases), but introductory phrases have significantly more notes compared to subsequent phrases (mean for introductory phrases = 9.79 ± 4.29 notes, n = 70; mean for subsequent phrases = 7.54 ± 1.64 notes, n = 265; Mann-Whitney U-test, $P < 0.01$, n = 335 phrases). Individual notes are delivered at an average rate of 1 note every 0.06 s (n = 20 phrases).

It appears if both sexes perform this call. When two birds (a pair?) are calling pop trills together, the frequency of one bird (female?) is slightly higher than the other bird (Fig. 4).

Generally, there is minimal variation in the phrases delivered by an individual, with the number of notes per phrase contributing to the most variation.

The chittering trill

This category corresponds with the piping trill described by Short and Horne (1988). It is usually delivered during interactions between two individuals (a pair?). It is characterised

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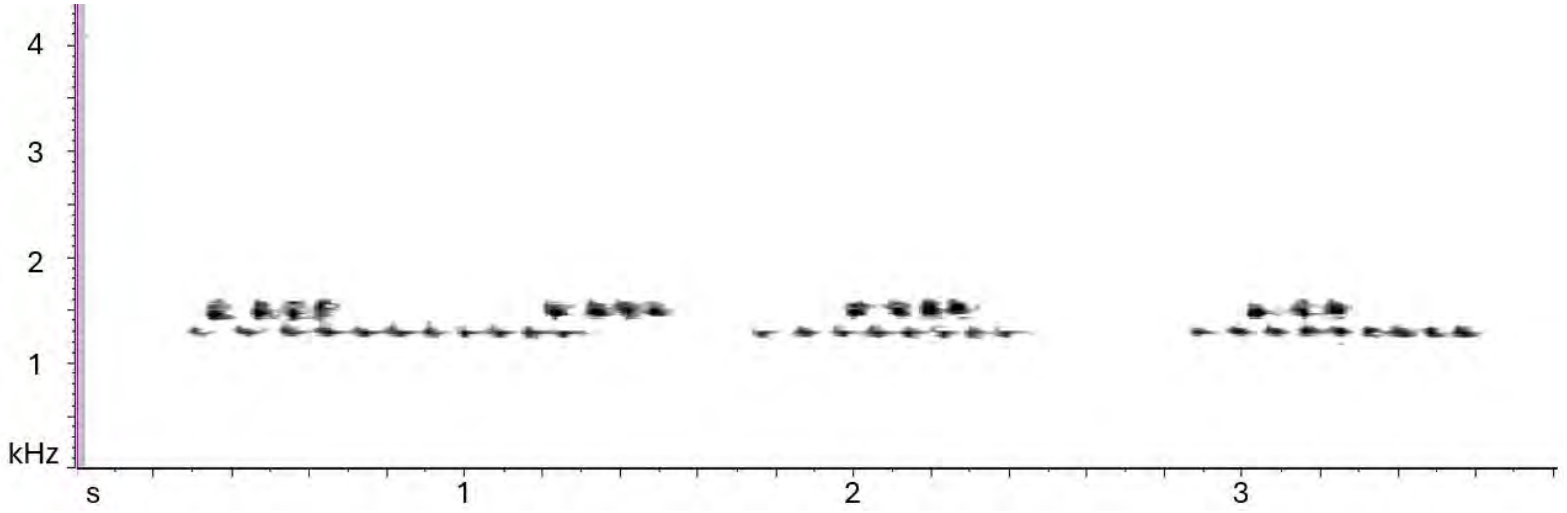

Figure 4. Two birds calling different versions of pop trills. When two birds are calling together, there are slight frequency differences between the two birds. Does this suggest sexual differences in the calls of Green Tinkerbird?

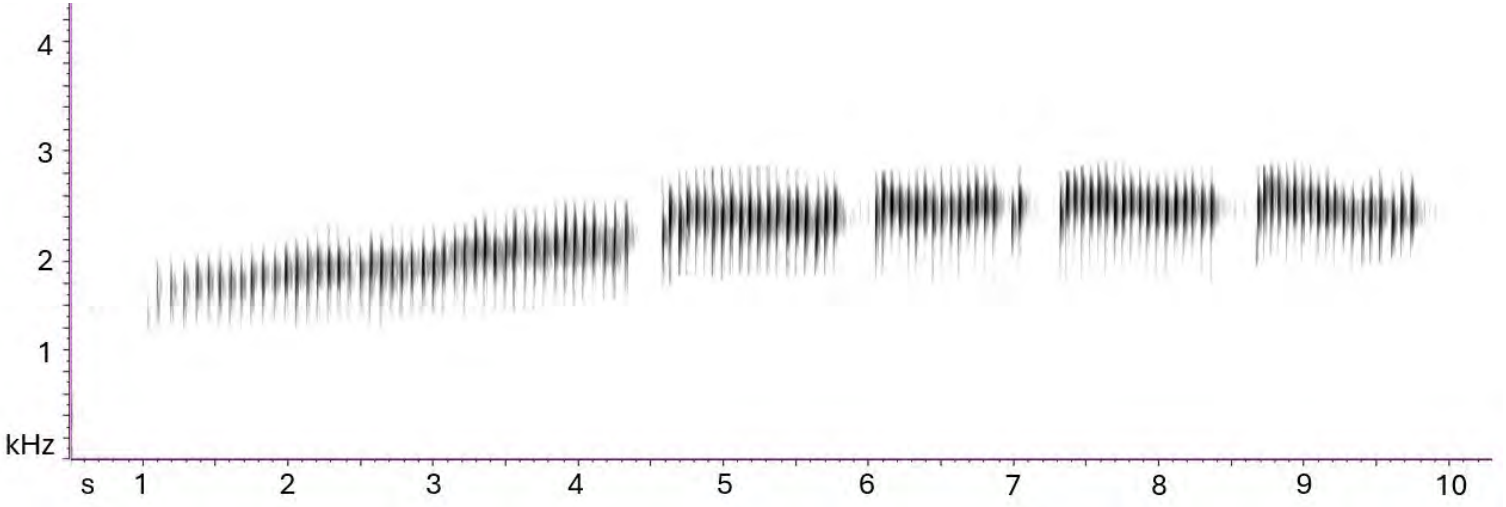

Figure 5. One type of chittering trill is characterised by a rapid repetition of notes in 1–6 phrases with the notes delivered at a constant tempo but showing some frequency variation.

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by tremendous frequency (Hz) variation of these calls, the tempo at which individual notes are delivered, and the tempo at which syllables and phrases are delivered. Due to the extensive variation exhibited by these calls, the chittering trills will only be described in a broad sense in this note.

One type of chittering trill is a rapid trill (one note every 0.05–0.09 s) comprised of several phrases (1–6 phrases) delivered at a more or less constant tempo but showing some frequency variation (Fig 5, also Fig. 6 for an interaction between two individuals, possibly a pair). Phrases with notes towards the lower end of the frequency spectrum bear a remarkable resemblance to the call of the Crested Barbet (e.g., ML79364 at 1:01–1:06 mins). The frequency range of these calls is between 1184.5 Hz and 3249.4 Hz. Sometimes, the frequency of a strophe increases gradually, giving the impression that the trill is becoming more "urgent" (e.g., ML79364 at 11–23 s). The phrases vary in length from short (<10 notes per phrase) to medium (10–25 notes per phrase) and long (>25 notes per phrase). The longest phrase of this type of chittering trill recorded in this study was 46 notes (see ML79364). One of these calls included three phrases that preceded the chasing of

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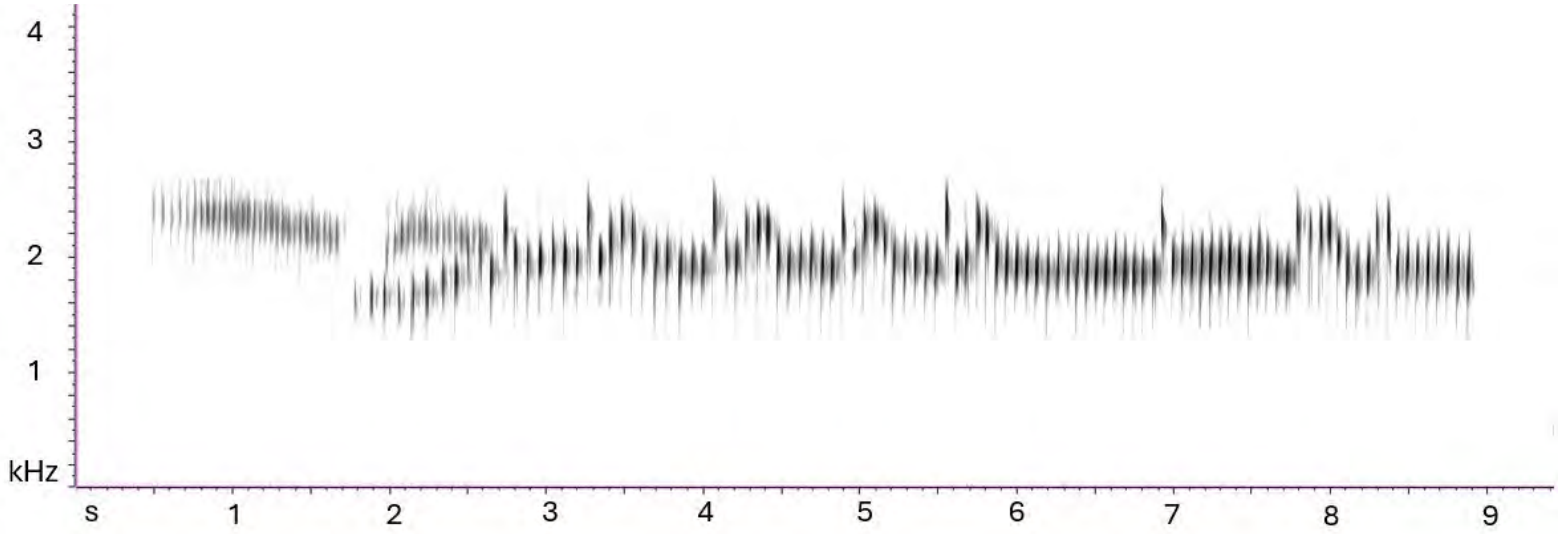

Figure 6. An interaction between Green Tinkerbirds (a pair?), starting with one bird delivering two phrases of high-pitched notes in rapid succession, and the other delivering a long sequence of notes at a somewhat slower tempo and with considerable frequency variation (ML79364 at 50–58 s)

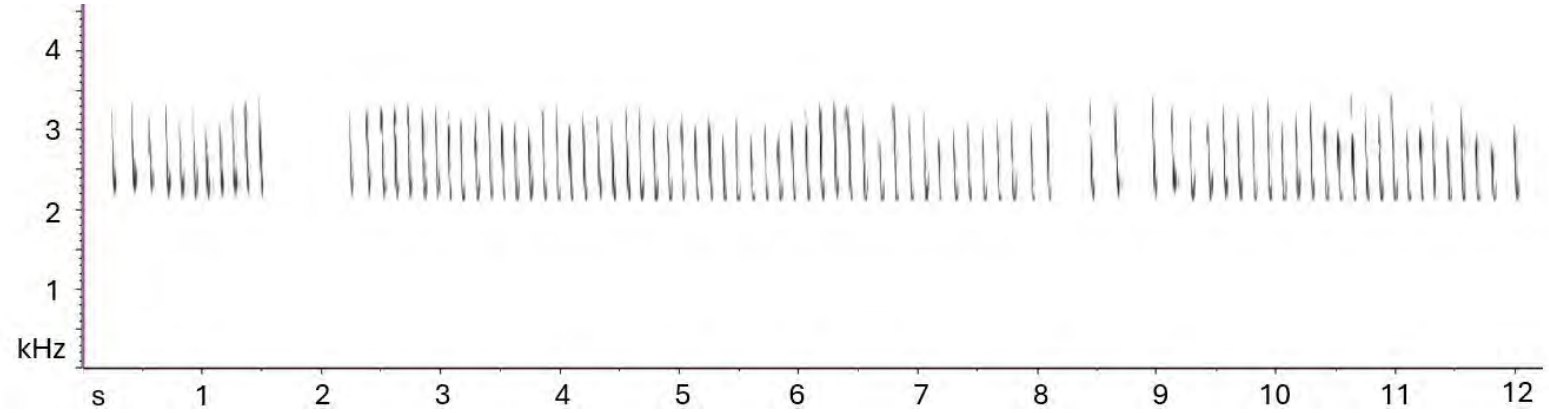

Figure 7. A sunbird-like chittering trill is characterised by notes delivered at a relatively slow but constant tempo and with slight frequency variation.

another Green Tinkerbird (ML79364 at 11:07–11:11 mins).

The second type (e.g., ML58580 at 5–15 s) resembles the call of some sunbirds (Fig. 7). Although it does not qualify as a piping trill per se, I regard it as a variation of the chittering trill. It is delivered in phrases at a relatively slow but constant tempo and shows some minor frequency fluctuation. The frequency range of these calls is between 2101.5 Hz and 3411.2 Hz. The phrases comprise 2–50 notes, delivered at a relatively slow ~0.11 s/note, but with some minor variation in the tempo.

A third, very different type of chittering trill was only recorded once during an interaction between two individuals (Fig. 8, ML79364 at 11:20-11:28 mins). This is an even higher-pitched trill (F_{min} = 1119.9, F_{max} 6180.0 Hz, F_{peak} = 5343.75 Hz) than Type 1 above. The trill was comprised of four phrases, each with a brief introductory syllable lasting 0.3–0.5 s, made up of 10–12 notes repeated in rapid succession (~0.03 s/note), followed by a slightly longer syllable lasting 0.6–1.1 s and comprised of 11–20 notes delivered at a slower tempo (0.05–0.06 s/note). One of the phrases was interrupted by a 4-note *wik-wik-wik-wik* call (ML79364 at 11:20 mins) lasting 0.42 s (frequency range 1249.1–2562.8 Hz, F_{peak} = 1500 Hz).

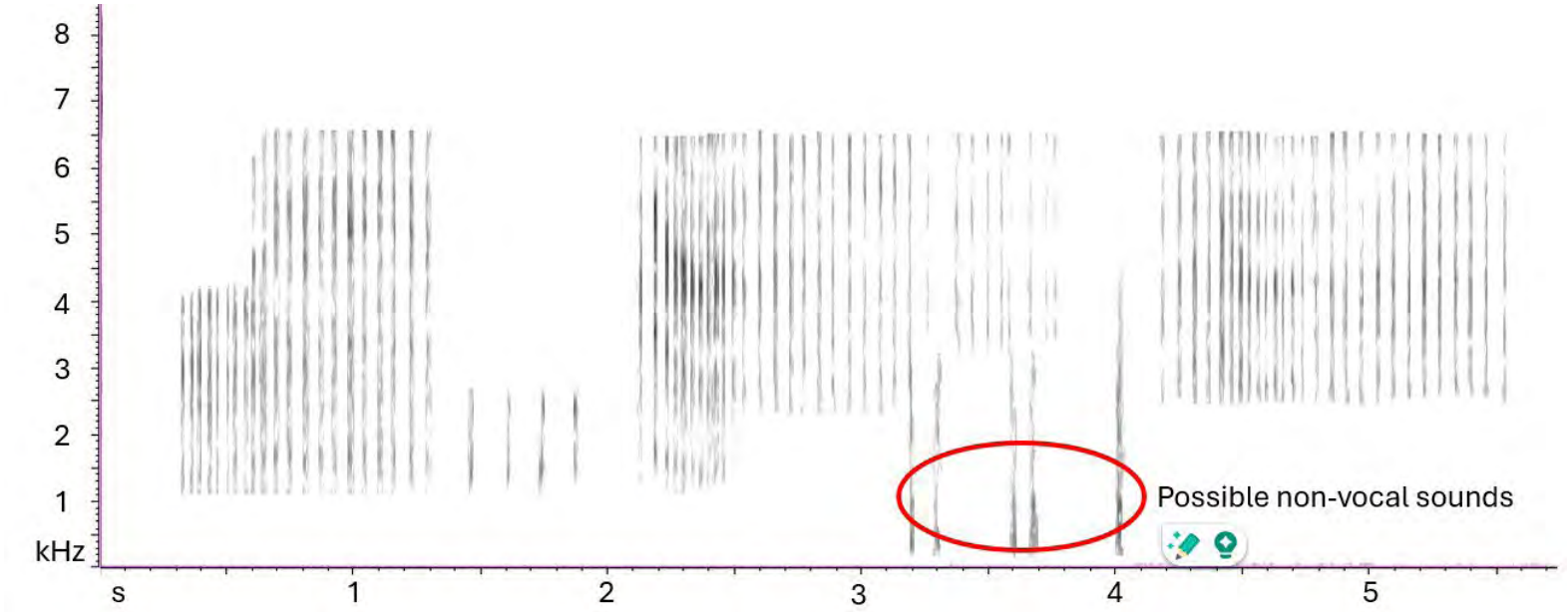

Figure 8. A highly charged and excited chittering trill delivered during an interaction between two individuals. It is not known if both birds produced the sounds or only one. A possible non-vocal sound is circled in red (see **Other** in this note).

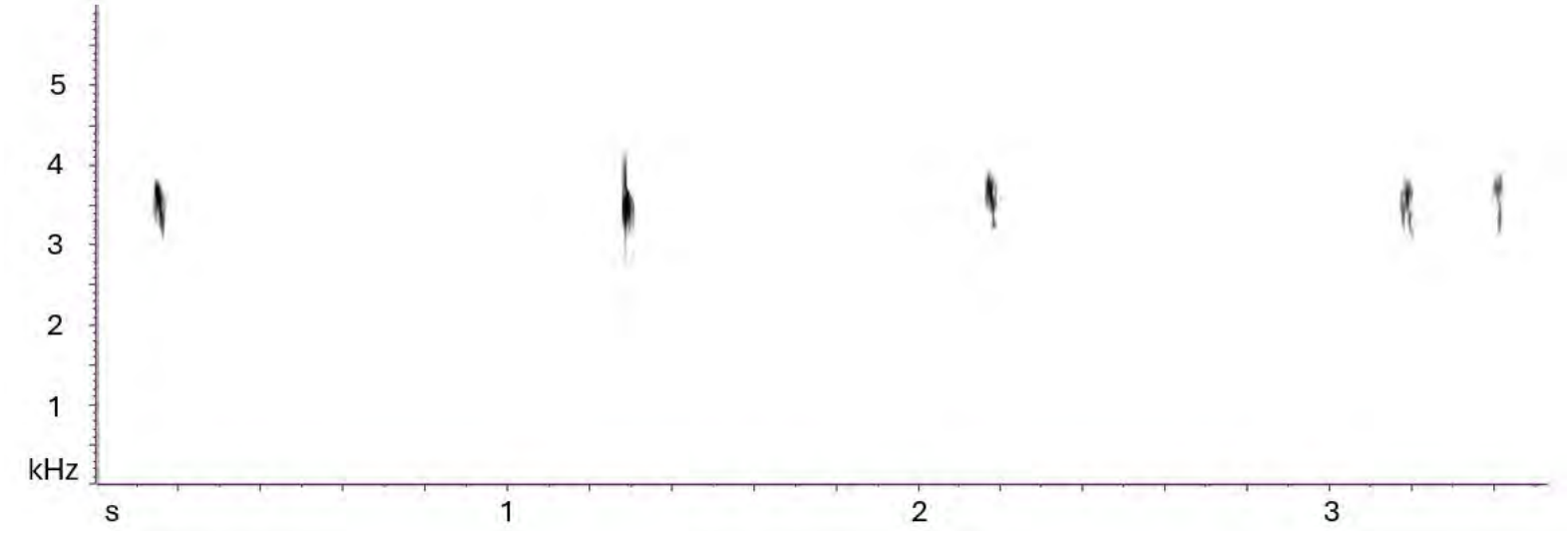

Figure 9. The high-pitched versions of the pip calls of a Green Tinkerbird.

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Pip calls

These calls are very short, ~0.03 s and may be low- (e.g., F_{peak} = 1968.75 Hz, ML79364 at 7:04 mins) or high-pitched (F_{peak} = 3468.75–4218.75 Hz, ML79364 at 8:27 mins and ML58580 at 46 s) (Fig. 9). The context in which these calls are delivered is unknown, but two birds were present in the recordings.

Aggressive call

A harsh, grating hissing-like *tschhhhh-tschhh-tsch-tsch-tsch* call can be heard in ML79364 at 10:54–10:56 mins. The recordist noted it was an interaction between two individuals. These calls fit the phonetic description of Short and Horne (1988), namely a fast grating *gggggg* and *git-i-i-i-i-it*. According to these authors, this type of call is delivered during interactions between a male and female, or it is a soliciting call when a female begs for food from a male. The aforementioned recording certainly gives the impression that the call was associated with chasing or being chased. The recordist also noted that "the second bird had the tail cocked."

Other

A possible non-vocal sound was noticed in ML79364 at 11:23 mins, which formed part of a sequence

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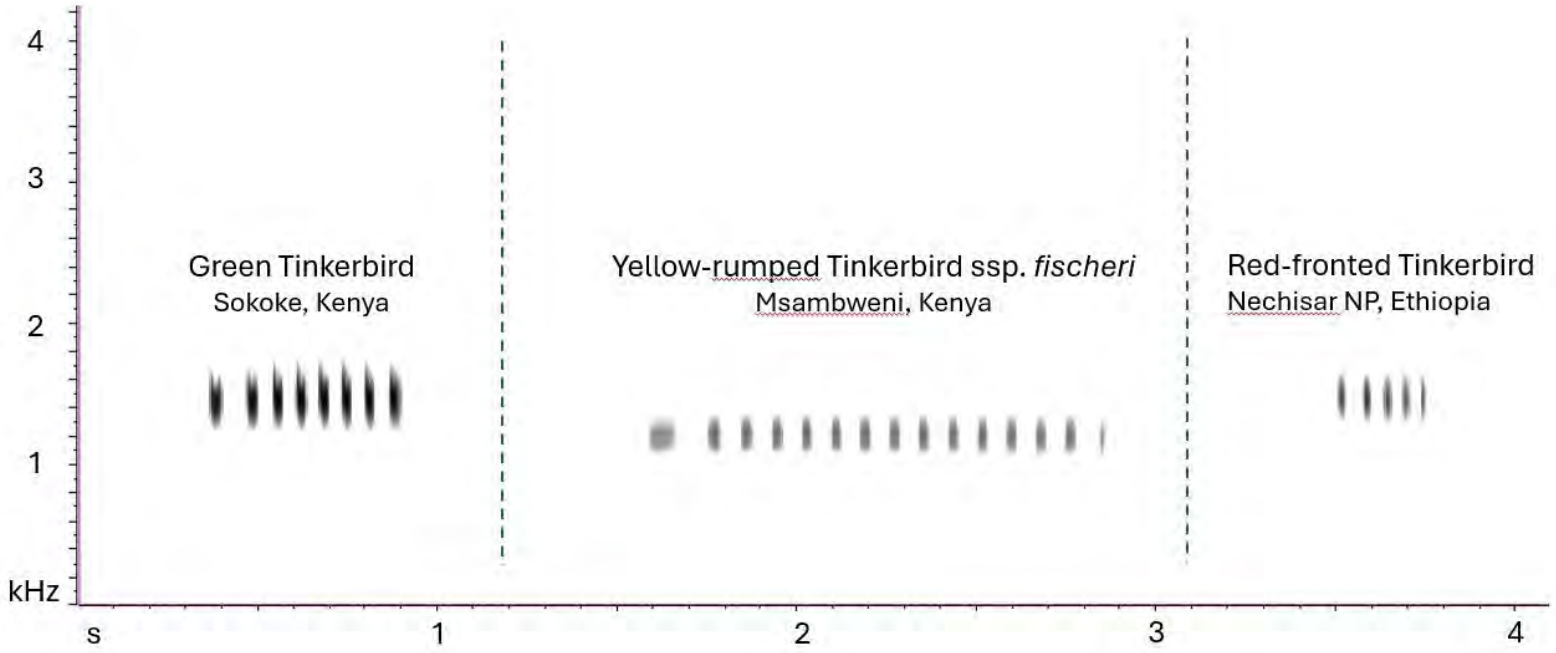

Figure 10. Comparison of the pop trills of Green, Yellow-rumped, and Red-fronted Tinkerbirds. See the accompanying text for an explanation of the differences.

of sounds produced by two birds interacting (see Chittering trill type 3 above; see also Fig. 8). A highly excited bird appeared to have made this sound, but the recordist didn't give any details about this mysterious sound. It may be a muted drumming sound, but it sounds and looks spectrographically remarkably like the rustling flight of a Greater Honeyguide I've heard on several occasions.

Comparison with other species

The calls of the Green Tinkerbird are remarkably similar to the pop trills of the subspecies *fischeri* of Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird in East Africa. However, the notes of Green Tinkerbird are pitched higher (~1600 Hz) compared to the ~1250 Hz of Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird; the introductory note is identical to the subsequent notes in the phrase in Green Tinkerbird, but in Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird the introductory note is usually longer compared to subsequent notes; generally fewer notes/phrase in Green versus Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird (there is some overlap); and the notes are delivered at a faster tempo in Green compared to Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird (Short and Horne 1988) (Fig.10).

The Red-fronted Tinkerbird also delivers a pop trill, but the phrases are generally shorter (2–8 notes), with or without an introductory note, and the peak frequency is also higher, typically between 1500 and 1700 Hz versus ~1300 Hz for Green Tinkerbird (Fig.10).

From the above, it is clear that there is still a lot to learn about the vocalisations of the Green Tinkerbird. With some of the calls discussed above, it is not known if these are indeed distinct types of calls, e.g., the different chittering calls, or if it reflects sexual, individual, or geographic differences. Sound recordists are encouraged to record vocalisations of the species from across its range and upload them to online repositories such as the Macaulay Library or Xeno-canto. In particular, there is a need to obtain recordings of the species from Mozambique and Malawi.

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BIRD BRIEFS

BIRD BRIEFS

Untimely death of a Southern Pied Babbler

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*corresponding author

In March 2019, we found on the farm Hamakari, south of the Namibian Waterberg, a dried Southern Pied Babbler *Turdoides bicolor* that had been caught on a thorn on a tree. The bird was still in the juvenile brown plumage, just a few months old (Dean 2005), with moulting flight feathers (remiges and rectrices) and corresponding coverts.

Above Close-up of the bird showing one leg fixed by a thorn that caused immobility and death (16 March 2019) © Ursula Bryson.

Bird Briefs

Above The *Ziziphus* tree in which the juvenile Southern Pied Babbler got trapped in (16 March 2019) © Ursula Bryson.

While the group had been moving through the vegetation, a long, thin thorn of a buffalo thorn *Ziziphus mucronata* had protruded fully through the skin of the leg (see photo opposite), and the bird was doomed to die slowly at this spot.

Bird Briefs

This record adds to a compilation of observations of birds "entangled, trapped, perished" by plants (Harms 2021) that lists reported incidents caused mainly by burdock (*Arctium* sp.). While most of the records and publications of birds found dead after being caught in plants refer to occurrences in North America and Europe, only two bird families in Africa are listed, the Dicruridae (the drongos) and the Estrildidae (waxbills and finches) (Harms 2021).

In African literature, we found a two-year study of Black-winged Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) by Mendelsohn (1983), who reported the death of six individuals being "hooked and spiked" by *Vachellia* (formerly *Acacia*) thorns, likely *V. tortilis*, and 25 cases of kites seen "struggling to free themselves from thorny thickets" during that study.

A second paper for Africa describes the debilitating effect of clinging seeds. During a nine-month study on Cousin Island, Seychelles, on the dispersal of a tree species (*Pisonia grandis*), Burger (2005) counted 222 individuals with seeds attached to the plumage: "... 64% were either dead or so entangled with seeds that they were unable to fly and were likely to have died." (Burger 2005).

The number of non-reported incidents in Africa and elsewhere presumably is much higher than the numbers known.

Acknowledgements We want to thank Janine Dunlop from the Niven Library at the Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the UCT and Hartmut Kolb and Gudrun Middendorf for identifying the tree species.

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BIRD BRIEFS

BIRD BRIEFS

An undescribed call of the African Crake

Derek Engelbrecht

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The African Crake is more often heard than seen and has a rich vocal repertoire. Known vocalisations include an advertising call (male only), various calls during aggressive encounters, an alarm call, a call delivered when the bird is apprehensive, and calls associated with mating and post-copulatory behaviour (Taylor and Van Perlo 1998).

On the 27th of January 2024, I had the opportunity to ring an African Crake. While handling the bird, it produced a barely audible, low, growling *brrrr* sound, almost like a forceful sigh, with the body gently trembling as the sound was delivered. I tried to get a sound recording of the call, but it was too soft for my cellphone. The sound produced does not match any of the descriptions given by Taylor and Van Perlo (1988), nor can I find any reference to such a sound in the literature I consulted.

Acknowledgements I want to thank Jan and Estie Oldewage, Leonie Kellerman and Les Reynolds for rescuing the bird and bringing it to me to be ringed and released.

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African Crake © Derek Engelbrecht.

Who's visiting The House of Wax?

TEXT AND PHOTOS Derek Engebrecht

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Although many bird species consume waxes incidentally as part of their usual diet, e.g., the waxy cuticles of some fruit and the exoskeletons of insects, relatively few species can digest waxes. True cerophagous species, i.e., those species that consume and can metabolise wax, include the honeyguides (Indicatoridae), some seabirds, e.g., Wilson's Storm Petrel (Obst 1986), Myrtle Warblers and Tree Swallows (Place and Stiles 1992).

Although the consumption of beeswax is well-known in the honeyguides, relatively few other bird species have been recorded eating beeswax. I found consumption records for Common Bulbul (East Africa) and Crowned Hornbill in the literature (Friedmann 1955, Horne and Short 1990, Lloyd-Jones et al. 2022).

BELOW Two Lesser and a Greater Honeyguide squabbling at one of the wax feeders in my garden.

In 2020, I started a honeyguide feeding station in my garden in Polokwane, Limpopo Province (Engelbrecht 2021). Depending on availability, I either place fresh comb honey one can buy at some grocery stores, pure beeswax obtained from a local bee-keeper, or various types of comb obtained from a local bee remover. This comb typically includes a mixture of beeswax, including fresh, white wax, older yellow wax comb, usually containing some bee larvae, and old dark wax.

I have recorded nine bird species other than the Greater and Lesser Honeyguides feeding on the beeswax at my garden feeder, but it was not always possible to determine if the individual consumed wax only, larvae only, or a mixture of wax, larvae, and honey. A brief description follows.

1. Coliidae: Speckled Mousebird

A regular visitor to the wax table. Speckled Mousebirds have been seen feeding on all types of wax except the pure wax blocks. It is one of the few species I have seen feeding on the old, dark wax. Speckled Mousebirds appear to eat the wax and honey, not the larvae.

2. Lybiidae: Crested Barbet

An occasional visitor, seen feeding on larvae in yellow comb, possibly also on sweeter comb still containing some honey.

3. Muscicapidae: Cape Robin-Chat

An occasional visitor when there is the yellow comb, undoubtedly after the larvae.

4. Malaconotidae: Grey-headed Bushshrike

Once recorded feeding on the yellow comb, extracting larvae but also swallowing some wax.

5. Malaconotidae: Southern Boubou

A regular visitor to the wax feeder, feeding mainly on yellow comb (extracting larvae), but also seen taking bites from white wax.

6. Ploceidae: Spectacled Weaver

A regular visitor recorded feeding on all types of wax except the dark wax. It feeds mainly on the larvae but was also recorded eating white wax and occasionally yellow wax. Although it won't chisel away at a solid block of pure wax, Spectacled Weaver often pecks at small bits of pure wax on the table. It is not known if they deliberately take this or if it is a case of mistaken identity of the food item.

7. Leiotrichidae: Arrow-marked Babbler

An occasional visitor, feeding mainly on larvae in yellow wax.

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Cape White-eye


Speckled Mousebird


Spectacled Weaver


Southern Boubou


Cape Robin-Chat


Slender Mongoose

BIRD BRIEFS

BIRD BRIEFS

8. Zosteropidae: Cape White-eye

A regular visitor, feeding mainly on fresh honeycomb, white wax, and yellow wax. Eats wax and larvae. I once saw a bird feeding at the entrance of a nest box that bees recently absconded from, seemingly feeding on left-over comb or propolis.

9. Pycnonotidae: Dark-capped Bulbul

An occasional visitor, seen feeding mainly on the fresh honeycomb, white wax, and occasionally yellow wax, extracting larvae.

Other

Lloyd-Jones et al. (2022), using camera traps, recorded six mammal species eating beeswax at their study site in Mozambique: striped bush squirrel, slender mongoose, yellow baboon, honey badger, African civet, and Meller's mongoose. My records include the following two mammals feeding on beeswax.

Slender Mongoose

One was camera trapped entering an absconded beehive in a nest box to feed on wax (Mogalakwena Nature Reserve, Limpopo Province, 16 June 2016).

Lesser Galago

One was camera trapped feeding on fresh honeycomb placed on a tree stump in the Blouberg Nature Reserve, Limpopo Province (6 April 2016).

To conclude, this note shows that the consumption of beeswax may be more common than previously thought. Despite representing only a small group of terrestrial vertebrates able to metabolise waxes, honeyguides certainly do not have it all their way when it comes to exploiting an unusual food source such as beeswax. It's likely that there may be many more opportunistic beeswax consumers than visits to my House of Wax suggests.

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BIRD BRIEFS

POLOKWANE 100 KM

... and a bit beyond

Interesting sightings

16 December 2023 - 15 February 2024

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 Fish Eagle - 2 January 2024. One at Hout River Dam (Derek Engelbrecht).

Dwarf Bittern - 2 January 2024. At Makotopong and UL Experimental Farm's dam (Jody De Bruyn); 4 January 2023. At least two seen at the Tom Naudé Dam (Derek Engelbrecht).

European Honey Buzzard - 30 December 2023. One seen near Chebeng (Derek Engelbrecht).

Dwarf Bittern © Jody De Bruyn

Fulvous Whistling Duck - 2 January 2024. A skein of 22 at UL Experimental Farm dam (Jody De Bruyn); 4 January 2024. One seen at a small roadside dam near Vencor (Mark and Julia Friskin).

Great Egret - 1 January 2024. One seen at Hout River Dam (Jody De Bruyn).

Greater Flamingo - 1 January 2024. One seen at Hout River Dam (Jody De Bruyn).

Greater Painted-snipe - 2 January 2024. Several at Makotopong wetlands (Jody De Bruyn).

Half-collared Kingfisher - 7 January 2024. One seen at Polokwane Golf Club (Jody De Bruyn).

Jackal Buzzard - 7 January 2024. One seen in a garden in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

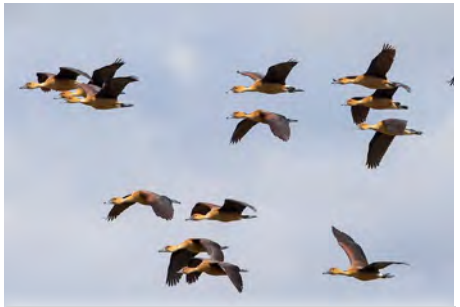
Lesser Moorhen - 4 January 2024. At Hout River Dam (Richter Van Tonder).

Lesser Spotted Eagle - 4 February 2024. One seen near Makotopong (Jody De Bruyn).

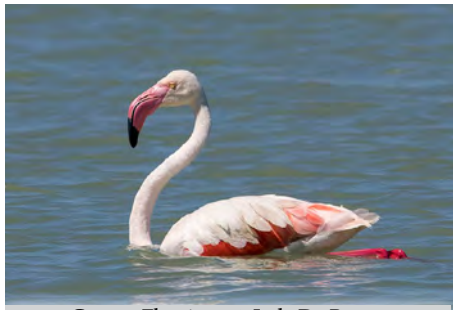
Little Bittern - 4 January 2024. One seen at Tom Naude Dam (Mark and Julia Friskin).

Maccoa Duck - 1 January 2024. A pair seen at the Sterkloop wetlands (Jody De Bruyn).

Southern Bald Ibis - 30 December 2023. Three birds at Mashashane Dam (Leonie Kellerman).



Fulvous Whistling Duck © Jody De Bruyn



Greater Flamingo © Jody De Bruyn

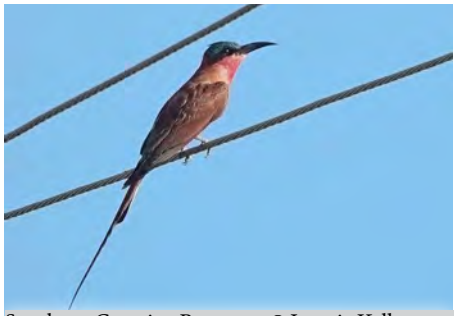
Jackal Buzzard © Derek Engelbrecht

Lesser Spotted Eagle © Jody De Bruyn

Southern Carmine Bee-eater - 5 January 2024. A flock of 24 seen near Flag Boshielo Dam (Leonie Kellerman).
Tawny Eagle - 7 January 2024. One seen near the Sand River bridge on the Soetdorings Road (Minkie Prinsloo).
Temminck's Courser - 2 January 2024. One seen at Chebeng (Derek Engelbrecht).
Thick-billed Cuckoo - 6 January 2024. Seen at Pierre Homan's farm near Tzaneen (Jandré Verster).
Wahlberg's Eagle - 29 December 2023. One seen in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).
Western Osprey - 4 January 2024. One seen at Hout River Dam (Richter Van Tonder).
White-backed Duck - 1 January 2024. Several seen at Sterkloop wetlands (Jody De Bruyn); 4 January 2024. A pair at Tom Naude Dam (Mark and Julia Friskin).

Passerines

Cape Bunting - 13 January 2024. Several seen at La Fleur in the Wolkberg (Justin Rhys-Nicolau).
Lark-like Bunting - 2 January 2024. One seen at Hout River Dam (Derek Engelbrecht).
Red-headed Weaver - 10 January 2024. Several breeding at Oukraal farm near Legkraal (Susan Dippenaar).


Southern Carmine Bee-eater © Leonie Kellerman


White-backed Duck © Derek Engelbrecht


Cape Bunting © Derek Engelbrecht


Lark-like Bunting © Derek Engelbrecht

Thrush Nightingale - 30 December 2023. One seen at De Loskop (Derek Engelbrecht); 6 January 2024. One in Welgelegen (Richter Van Tonder).
Tree Pipit - 13 January 2024. One seen in Mispah Valley (Minkie Prinsloo).
White-breasted Cuckooshrike - 6 January 2024. One seen at Pierre Homan's farm near Tzaneen (Jandré Verster).

Best of the Rest
Limpopo Province

Non-passerines

Allen's Gallinule - 4 January 2024. At Banyini Pan, Makuleke Concession, northern Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).
African Pygmy Goose - 4 January 2024. At Banyini Pan, Makuleke Concession, northern Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).
Black Coucal - 9 February 2024. Seen in vlei east of Magamba Waterhole in the Punda Maria region, Kruger National Park (Richter Van Tonder).
Dwarf Bittern - 4 January 2024. At Banyini Pan, Makuleke Concession, northern Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).
Green Sandpiper - 26 December 2023. One seen at the Tzendze low water bridge on the H14 in the Kruger National Park (Pieter Scholtz).

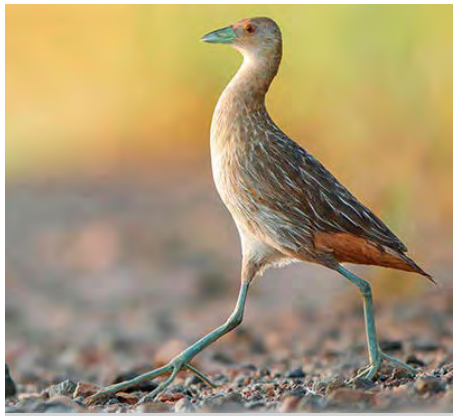

Tree Pipit © Derek Engelbrecht


White-breasted Cuckooshrike © Jandré Verster


Black Coucal © Richter Van Tonder


Green Sandpiper © Pieter Scholtz

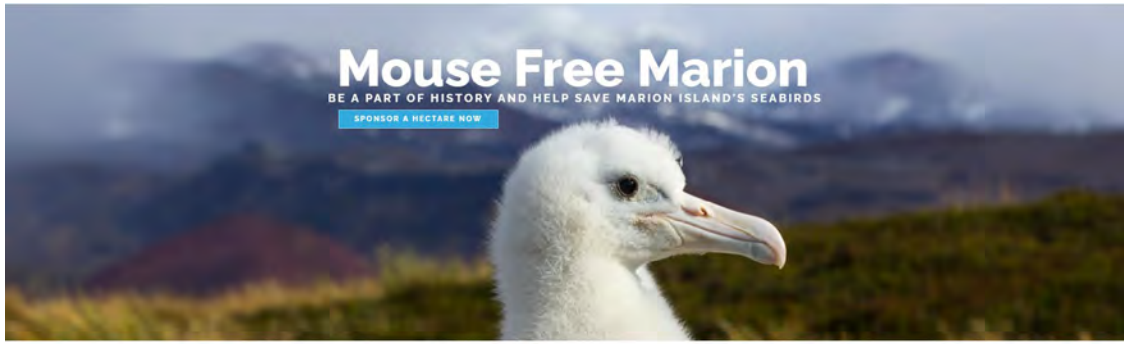
Southern Pochard - 4 January 2024. At Banyini Pan, Makuleke Concession, northern Kruger National Park (Marc Cronje).
Striped Crake - 23 January 2024. One seen at Zaagkuildrift (Jandré Verster).



Striped Crake © Jandré Verster

Check out the latest official bird list for the Limpopo Province on the LimpopoRaritiesgrouponTelegram. Thanks to Daniel Engelbrecht. Jody De Bruyn, Derek Engelbrecht and Richter Van Tonder.

LIMPOPO RARITIES



BirdLife South Africa environmental affairs

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.

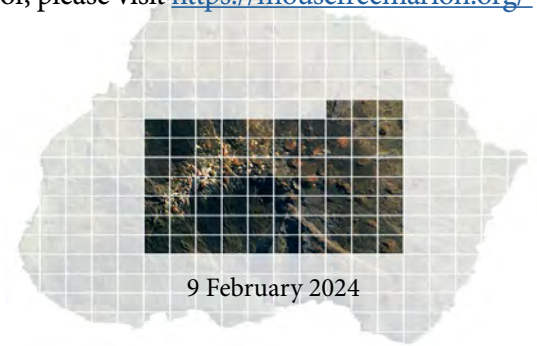
The bait required to cover the island alone will cost upwards of R30 million. To help raise the necessary funds, please would you consider sponsoring one or more hectares of land on Marion Island.

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/



9 February 2024

Percent of target reached: 24.0%
Sponsored Hectares: 7313 ha
Sponsors: 2026

UPCOMING EVENTS

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting
Date: 5 March 2024
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting
Date: 2 April 2024
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting
Date: 7 May 2024
Time: 18:00
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Shopping list: This is a new venue so we don't know quite what to expect. A mixture of habitats on the farm will guarantee a good tally for the outing. Be part of history and join us on this outing.

Shopping list: Anything is possible at Hout River Dam, and this is a good time to pick up waders heading to their summer grounds in the northern hemisphere. Larkville offers 8 lark species, White-bellied Bustard, Cape Crow, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Tinkling Cisticola and more.

All birds are equal

In 2024, the front covers of **The Lark** will be dedicated to the female of the species as they seldom feature on any front cover. All the other bird beauties will be featured on the back cover.

African Palm Swift © Jody De Bruyn