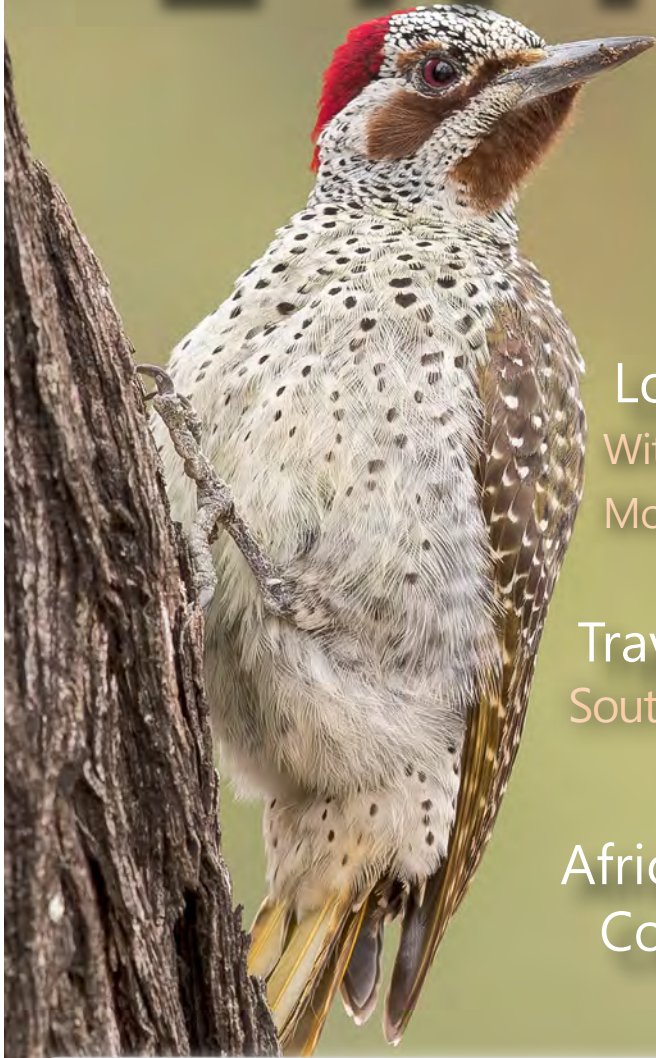


THE LARK

The Birdlife Polokwane Magazine 54, July/August 2024



Local Birding
Witvinger
Mockford's Farm

Travel
Southern Mozambique

African Penguin
Conservation

Breeding records from Zimbabwe • East Coast Akalat plumage, biometrics, moult and vocalisations • Long-billed Crombec roosting strategy • Interesting ringing resightings and recoveries • White-throated Robin-Chat range expansion along the Vaal River in the Free State

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 2024

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

Cover page theme 2024: female birds

COVER Bennett's Woodpecker (female)
© Jody De Bruyn.

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A spur-of-the-moment decision to go birding in Mozambique yielded dividends for **Daniel Engelbrecht**.



African Penguin Conservation donation 17

Birdlife Polokwane donated R2500-00 towards the conservation of the African Penguin.



Mashashane and Witvinger 19

Our annual early-winter club outing to the Mashashane and Witvinger region always springs a few surprises, and 2024 was no different, as **Richter Van Tonder** attests.



Mockford Vulture Restaurant 27

Helga Watson reports on what the Mockford's Vulture Restaurant had to offer this year.



For a lark ...



Me having lunch with friends but then hear someone planning a birding trip

© Derek Engelbrecht

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Editors' chirps

The winter solstice has come and gone, so roll on summer!! This is such a great time of the year because, within the next couple of weeks, we will welcome the first of the intra-African migrants back. Which will be the first species back in the Polokwane 100K? It's usually some of the swallows, either Lesser or Greater Striped or Red-breasted Swallow, but also check out the shores for waders - this is usually our time to see an out-of-range wader. By the time the next issue of The Lark goes live, many more migrants will have returned, so please send us your records of returning migrants.

As usual, we try to include a variety of topics about birds and birding. By all accounts, our club's magazine is very popular with members and non-members, and it has been to all continents - yes, including Antarctica! But we need your help to keep it alive and interesting. If you've been on a trip, please share it with all of us. It makes for nice reading and can help others plan a similar trip. Even trip reports from non-members are welcome, provided they are about birding in the Limpopo Province. You may also have seen some unusual behaviour or perhaps did a bit of a study of birds in your garden - share it with us. Maybe your observations can make their way into Roberts 8, which is currently under revision. How cool is that? You do not need to be a member to contribute to our Bird Briefs section either. Hugh Chittenden from KZN and, more locally, Warwick Tarboton are regular contributors. We have also published notes from as far afield as Malawi! Anything that can add to our knowledge of birds is welcome - we are waiting for your contribution.

The Odendaals are recovering from the awful life-changing accident they were involved in in March, which claimed Riana's life. Gideon is still in hospital where he is making slow but steady progress. Cornie is continuing her recovery at home. On behalf of the editorial team and Birdlife Polokwane, we wish them a full recovery, and our thoughts are always with them.

In this issue, we have the usual feedback of club outings, and we continue our aim to have at least one international birding trip report per issue for 2024 - this time around, we go to Mozambique. Have you ever heard about a Greater Honeyguide drowning? You can read about this and other interesting observations in our Bird Briefs section.

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

Raelene and Derek

S M O Z A M B I Q U E

birding blitz

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Daniel Engelbrecht



Of the countries in the southern African subregion, Mozambique is arguably the most challenging to bird and is often treated with a hint of apprehension. Its history of civil war, political unrest, poor infrastructure, and corrupt officials has given the country a reputation as the type of place you don't really want to mess around in—I mean, the flag even features an AK-47.

The southern and central provinces (all those in the subregion) are reasonably safe and have been for quite some time now – allowing adventurous birders the opportunity to self-drive this under-birded part of southern Africa. In July 2023, I was on holiday in the Limpopo Province, and I started toying with the idea of a raid of the specials of southern Mozambique. Birds like Eurasian Bittern, Olive-headed Weaver, East Coast Akalat, and Green Tinkerbird were occupying my thoughts,

and a week later, I found myself with a stamped passport in the border town of Ressano Garcia in Mozambique.

I didn't have much time, so the trip would last only six days, and since I had a car with two non-birders, the birding half of the family had to indulge in beach requests, too. The first day saw us covering 453 km from Ressano Garcia to the town of Inharrime. The route passed through the capital city, Maputo, where finding an ATM that accepted Mastercard proved to be nearly impossible; thankfully, however, the SimCard was a breeze – once we had cash, of course. Anyway, it was a long day in the car, passing through endless villages with next to no birding. We also had our first run-in with the feds; a plump man who wanted 1000 meticaís for some undetermined offense; after a lengthy back-and-forth, we wore him down without paying a bribe, and we were on our way. We arrived at our accommodation in Inharrime after dark and promptly checked in. We were surprised to see Etienne Marais, a South African birding guide who seems to spend more time finding megas in Mozambique than he does anywhere else, at our accommodation. He was leading a tour, and coincidentally, we had the



same plan for the following day, and it was decided that we would join forces for our pre-dawn mission.

After what barely felt like sleep, we were off on a bumpy dirt track, following Etienne's red brake lights through the dark. When we came to a halt, the first light was upon us, and the dawn chorus was underway. A thick morning fog blanketed the large wetland in front of us. The calls of Shelley's Francolins and Red-necked Spurfowls dominated the soundtrack while Purple-banded Sunbird, Striped Kingfisher, Yellow-throated Longclaws, and

Rufous-naped Larks chimed in. There was no time for distractions; we had come here for one bird. Then we heard it, a loud, deep, and unmistakable call – a booming bittern. We started traipsing through the shallow waters of the wetland, forming a flush line. Being the youngest, I was assigned to the deep end of our flush line, which meant I was soon beyond waist-deep in the water.

ABOVE Getting to see one of the main trip targets meant wading deep into the wetland © Derek Engelbrecht.



ABOVE Eurasian Bittern! One of the main targets of the trip bagged before sunrise on our first birding day © Daniel Engelbrecht.

A large bird flushed, dammit, a Purple Heron. Then another one, and another, and then a much stockier bird – a Eurasian Bittern! I shot off a few lousy shots in the still-dark conditions. We continued for another 20 minutes and flushed another four individuals! This bird used to be a resident in South Africa but was driven to local extinction. These wetlands in Mozambique are the only reliable site in the subregion for this iconic bird, and it was a major target on this trip. The birding here was phenomenal with Lesser Jacanas, African Openbills, and many other tropical wetland species, but I couldn't stay long; another big target was waiting – one

of the most range-restricted species in the subregion.

We bid farewell to Etienne and his group and continued along the dirt road to the village of Panda. Once through Panda (probably 30 seconds after entering it), the vegetation changed from palm savanna to exquisite miombo woodland. For those who know a thing or two about southern African birding, you'll know that this is the only site in the subregion for the



ABOVE The miombo woodlands at Panda, home of the Olive-headed Weaver © Derek Engelbrecht.

globally rare Olive-headed Weaver. I had looked at this species in field guides for years, always illustrated alongside the *Usnea* lichens (old man's beard) with which they are so closely associated. While doing my brief pre-trip planning, I heard that this was a potentially problematic species and recalled stories of birders spending hours in these woodlands without laying eyes on them.

I alighted from the vehicle in a stunning patch of miombo woodland and prepared myself for a long day. A bird party happened to be making its way past the car as I was getting

geared up and contained some cracking birds like White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Grey Penduline Tit, Southern Hyliota, Red-faced Crombec, and my second lifer for the trip, Pale Batis. "PZEEEE pzeee pzeee pzeee," I swung around and cupped my ears—the same call again, about 20 meters off the track. My dad and I darted in, following the call. A small bird was hopping around high in the canopy, partially concealed by the



mean there are few ways to make a living out here.

We passed through the coastal town of Maxixe before continuing north to the idyllic Morrungulo campgrounds. Palm trees line the idyllic beaches here, and the

LEFT Finding Olive-headed Weaver within minutes was a huge relief and I was super excited to see this highly specialised and localised regional special © Daniel Engelbrecht.

LEFT White-breasted Cuckooshrike vied for attention with the Olive-headed Weavers at the Panda woodlands © Daniel Engelbrecht.



Usnea lichens – I already knew what it was before lifting my binoculars – an Olive-headed Weaver! Not one, but a pair.

I spent the next half an hour following these birds as they foraged with the mixed species flock, even seeing an interaction between two pairs. My views were unbelievable, and I even managed to get the first audio recordings of the species on eBird. I was in disbelief; we had spent only a few minutes and had

barely left the car before seeing this globally localised species. The future of Olive-headed Weavers in the subregion is uncertain; rampant clearing of their very specialised habitat for charcoal is an imminent threat to the perseverance of this population. We left the Panda woodlands and noticed the amount of habitat that had already been cleared. I don't claim to have any solutions here, but poverty and lack of opportunities in Mozambique



only just starting to rise as we walked down a small trail into the sand forest. It was a hive of activity with Gorgeous Bushshrike, Eastern Nicator, Green Malkoha, Livingstone's Flycatcher, Purple-banded Sunbird, Rudd's Apalis, and wailing Trumpeter Hornbills all making their

LEFT Now this is camping!
© Daniel Engelbrecht.

BELOW Red-throated Twinspot
© Daniel Engelbrecht.

campgrounds were quiet, allowing me to set up my tent on the beach. What a place. The reason for staying here was twofold: it would keep the non-birders happy, and it was located close to Unguana Forest – the location where Green Tinkerbird was rediscovered in the southern African subregion.

Another pre-dawn start, another dirt track at night. The sun was



way onto the list as early additions. We walked these forest tracks for hours, getting good views of Red-throated Twinspots and Grey Waxbills while Böhm's and Mottled Spinetails foraged overhead. There was, however, a problem: no Green Tinkerbird. I had heard that this species was tough at this time of the year, and after eight hours, I decided to call it quits. There was a big surprise in store for us when an East Coast Akalat announced its presence while we were trying to get

views of a noisy group of Lowland Tiny Greenbul. Both species hadn't been seen this far south in many years and the East Coast Akalat was nearly 400 km south of the nearest record on eBird. It was a welcome consolation prize and an unexpected lifer.

BELOW We were surprised and delighted in equal measures to get East Coast Akalat at Unguana, a species that has not been seen this far south in many years © Daniel Engelbrecht.





ABOVE Ferrari has the prancing horse, Jaguar the Jumping Jaguar, and this Hino has ... the SHEEP! Mozambique is filled with surprises © Daniel Engelbrecht.

LEFT Böhm's Spinetail - a perennial special © Daniel Engelbrecht.



We decided to give it a go again the next day and returned pre-dawn to Unguana. We tried for most of the day but to no avail. Green Tinkerbird had given us the slip; oh well, the game is the game, I guess. However, there was another consolation prize



ABOVE It was great seeing the diminutive Livingstone's Flycatcher again © Daniel Engelbrecht.

this time: another East Coast Akalat at a different site and Lowland Tiny Greenbul, again! The forests here were amazing to bird, and we also enjoyed Livingstone's Turacos, Dark-backed Weavers, Red-necked Spurfowl, and Ovambo Sparrowhawk, along with many of the species listed earlier.

We returned to Morrungulo and enjoyed the next two days exploring other sites in the area that delivered many of the typical coastal species but no more lifers. We then drove the lengthy journey back to the border, which took the entire day, and arrived in South Africa

after dark. This was an exciting trip that, apart from Green Tinkerbird, produced all of the expected targets and five lifers for me. Mozambique is an underbirded part of the subregion; our finding of the East Coast Akalat and Lowland Tiny Greenbul is a testament to this fact. Anyway, I guess I have to go back to the coconut-lined beaches again to try for that tinkerbird. It's a tough life, but someone's got to live it.

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Birdlife Polokwane donated R2 500-00 towards the conservation of African Penguins.



Thank You

for donating towards the conservation of African Penguins.

Now, more than ever, your support is crucial in ensuring
the survival of this iconic and Endangered species.

Thank you for supporting our efforts to conserve our country's natural heritage.

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MASHASHANE AND WITWINGER

Richter Van Tonder

We previously visited this area in June 2023. It was very cold then, and it took us a while to

warm up our fingers. It wasn't as cold this time, and we kicked off with some good birds around the famous rock at Mashashane Dam,

roughly 40 km from Polokwane. We saw birds like Gabar Goshawk (Witkruissperwer), Lanner Falcon (Edelvalk), and Mocking Cliff Chat (Dassievoël).

It was and could still be one of the spots where our endangered

Southern Bald Ibis (Kalkoenibis) made its nest in the available potholes in the rock. Unfortunately, no ibis was spotted here this time around. The area is on the drier side, which makes for a comfortable walk. The microhabitat created



ABOVE A pair of Rock Martins on the rockface at Mashashane © Jody De Bruyn.

around the rock draws species you wouldn't normally associate with this area, like Bar-throated Apalis (Bandkeelkleinjantjie) and Southern Boubou (Suidelike Waterfiskaal). This is also one of the spots where you can get close to Rock Martins (Kransswael) sitting on the side of the big rocks, offering some of us the opportunity to get good photos.

The dam right next to it also gave us interesting species such as Malachite Kingfisher

(Kuifkopvisvanger), Hamerkop, Pied Kingfisher (Bontvisvanger), and Little Grebe (Kleindobbertjie). We found two out-of-range species: Great Egret (Grootwitreier) and Goliath Heron (Reusereier). We also got Levaillant's Cisticola (Vleitinkinkie) in the reeds. Another nice record was a raucous Northern

Black Korhaan (Witvlerkkorhaan) in the grassland beyond the dam.

As usual we took a break for some coffee and rusks. Everyone was chatting away and sharing some stories of recent excursions. Soon after, we decided to move on to the Witvinger area. On our way there, we saw Fiscal Flycatcher (Fiskaalvlieëvanger), Temminck's Courser (Trekdrawwertjie), and Ant-eating Chat (Swartpiek).

The area from Witvinger to Percy Fyfe is a lot hillier, with patches of broad-leafed habitat and open grassy clearings. We were hoping to see some of the specials here, such as Verreaux's Eagle (Witkruisarend), Striped Pipit (Gestreepte Koester), and Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow

BELOW A Hamerkop performing a flyby at Mashashane Dam © Jody De Bruyn.





Geelvlekmossie), but no cigar. As always, it didn't stop us from searching for other specials, and

we managed to get other good ones. One such special was a pair of Secretarybirds (Sekretarisvoël)

roaming in the distance in a patch of grassland. What a good sighting! They are getting more and more

ABOVE Sentinel duties or sunning? This Familiar Chat looks lost in its own thoughts © Jody De Bruyn.



ABOVE Temminck's Courser
© Jody De Bruyn.

endangered, and they came up as out of range for the pentad on SABAP2.

Most of the dirt roads here are quiet and peaceful, making for an enjoyable drive. As we chugged along one of these roads, we saw and heard a Lizard Buzzard (Akkedisvalk) and an energetic Bearded Woodpecker (Baardspeg) crawling along one of the wooden electricity poles.

We were approaching midday now and decided to slowly make our way back towards Polokwane. We had just left the area close to Percy Fyfe Nature Reserve's main gate when we saw two birds flying in to sit next to the road on a dry acacia bush. It was

a bit against the sun and required one member to take a photo for better inspection. To our surprise, they were two Lark-like Buntings (Vaalstreepkoppie)! These birds only come this far east of their range in the dryer years. What a special sighting.

With our day ending on a high, we headed back home. Our list for the day ended with 104 species. Thanks to all who made the effort to attend the outing. I would like to encourage more members to join our outings.

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Bateleur

Terathopius ecaudatus

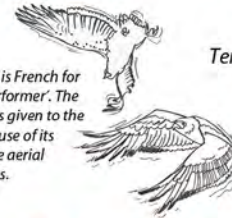
Teras - marvelous; ops - face; e - without; caudatus - tail.

Afrikaans: Stompstertarend or Berghaan.
Zulu: iNgqungqulu. Xhosa: iNgqanga.



François Levaillant, a French naturalist and explorer, gave the Bateleur its common name.

'Bateleur' is French for 'street performer'. The name was given to the bird because of its distinctive aerial acrobatics.



The Bateleur is a medium-sized eagle and is considered a relative of the snake eagles.

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Family: Accipitridae
Subfamily: Circaetinae
Genus: Terathopius



The Bateleur occupies a large range through sub-Saharan Africa. The southern distribution stretches down into the north and north-east corners of South Africa. They are rarely found outside protected areas and are considered 'Endangered' in the IUCN Red Data Book.

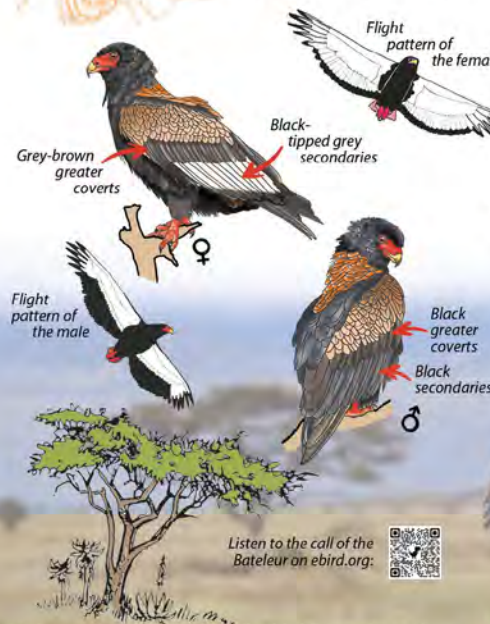


The head of the juvenile Bateleur is paler and tawnier than elsewhere on its body, with dull rufous to creamy edging on some areas. The eyes are brown, the cere is a unique greenish-blue and the feet are whitish in colour. The young Bateleur takes 8 years to develop its adult plumage.

The Bateleur has a thick neck and a very large, cowled head with a proportionately short yellow bill and a very red cere.

The bare parts of adult Bateleurs are bright red. They can fade to pink or yellowish when they are perching in the shade or bathing. When excited the skin flushes very red.

Total length: 55 - 70 cm
Wingspan: 168 - 190 cm
Weight: 1,8 - 3 kg



Listen to the call of the Bateleur on ebird.org:



Bateleurs prefer savanna and woodland habitats, such as arid Acacia Savanna and Miombo Woodland (*Brachystegia*) and Mopane Woodland (*Colospermum mopane*), especially where there is long grass. They are never associated with forest habitats.

Design and illustrations by DI Martin.
Photographs used as reference for the illustrations from Frank Wouters, Helen Davies and taken from Wikipedia and Ecophoto.

They have short legs and the shortest tail of all birds of prey. Juvenile Bateleurs have a longer tail than the adults.



What's cooking at the

Mockford

Vulture Restaurant?

Helga Watson

On a crisp, chilly, morning on the 8th of June, 12 very excited birders met at the entrance to the Mockford's Farm, our main purpose was to see what the Mockford's Vulture Restaurant has on offer. Before proceeding through the security gate, we each had to put the soles of our shoes into disinfectant before each vehicle drove through more disinfectant. This is essential to prevent the spread of disease on the pig farm.

We saw a Grey Heron in a field a few kilometres into the farm. We headed to a patch with lots of gum trees. During our coffee break here, we spotted a Pearl-spotted Owllet in one of the gum trees. Keeping it company was a Black-headed Oriole. We also heard the call of a Green Wood Hoopoe.



En route to the vulture restaurant, we stopped off at several dams where we saw, amongst others, a Pied Avocet with its upturned bill, and a Black-winged Stilt with its straight black bill and long red legs. Others seen at or near the dams included Blacksmith Lapwings, a local rarity in the Cape Teal, Red-billed Teal, and Cape Longclaw with its striking orange throat.

Throughout the trip, we saw some Pearl-breasted Swallows, and some were posing nicely on a fence. Of note, several African Snipes hid in the grasses near the water.

Finally, we arrived at the entrance to the vulture restaurant. What an amazing sight when we silently entered the hide. The sight we saw most certainly took our breath away! Wow! So many vultures were

LEFT Pearl-spotted Owlet eyeing us wearily © Richter Van Tonder.



ABOVE Pearl-breasted Swallows were in constant attendance. © Jody De Bruyn.

RIGHT Inside the hide at the vulture restaurant © Richter Van Tonder.

feasting in one spot, including Lappet-faced, Cape, White-backed, and Hooded Vultures. A few





ABOVE Cape Longclaw is a striking LBJ © Jody De Bruyn.

jackals tried to get to the carcasses but were quickly chased away. However, a few Marabou storks were allowed to join the party at this restaurant. We saw some great interaction between the different species of vultures. Noticeably, the Lappet-faced Vultures were dominant here, and what a sight it was when two of them were going head-to-head. Some Pied Crows were also in attendance, and one

was irritating some of the Hooded Vultures by biting and pulling on their tail feathers. We got out some camping chairs and made ourselves comfortable inside the hide. We enjoyed coffee and something to eat while enjoying the feast on the other side of the glass window

After a good 45 min to an hour enjoying the vultures, we packed up. As we left the hide, we came across at least three Bushveld

Pipits calling on the side of the road. Some of us managed to get some good photos of these small, interesting LBJs. We also got a lone Intermediate Egret on one of the dams. We stopped to look at a soaring raptor as we headed towards the exit. It was identified as a Brown Snake Eagle. As we looked at it, a pair of African Grey Hornbills flew past and disappeared in the distance.

The list of species seen and heard was over 110.

Thank you to Richter for organising this amazing outing and to Willie, who is always willing to teach those of us in the 'pre-school stage' of birding!

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ROBERTS 8

IS ONLINE
AND FREE
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA



The Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Birds of the World



PROJECT NEWS

Derek Engelbrecht

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WHY MOULT MATTERS

Moult, which is the replacement of old, worn feathers with new feathers, is one of the major events in the annual cycle of birds. Feathers are essential for heat regulation, signalling age or sex in some instances, flight performance, and many other aspects of a bird's life. This explains why they spend much time looking after them by preening, taking water or dust baths, etc. But why is moult important to scientists?

Knowing the moulting patterns and strategy of birds allows us to age a bird, at least up to that point when they attain their full adult plumage, determine the onset and end of the breeding season for many species, understand migration strategies, and it may also serve as a gauge of the overall health of a population.

For this reason, bird ringers record moult data, which is then

analysed to determine, amongst other things, the onset and duration of moult. Knowing the moult strategy of a species and when, where and why they moult at a particular point in time can give a fascinating insight into the ecology of a species. Thus, moult matters as much to a bird as an ornithologist unravelling a species' life history.



Cape White-eye primary moult © Derek Engelbrecht.



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.

Derek Engelbrecht, email: roberts8revision@gmail.com

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.

Courasers

- Bronze-winged Couraser
- Burchell's Couraser
- Double-banded Couraser
- Temminck's Couraser
- Three-banded Couraser

Falcons

- Pygmy Falcon

Parrots

- Cape Parrot

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

Swallows

- Blue Swallow
- Wire-tailed Swallow

Cisticolas

- Cloud Cisticola
- Levillant's Cisticola

Starlings

- Red-winged Starling

Grassbird-like warblers

- Barratt's Warbler

Thrushes

- Spotted Ground Thrush

Soon-to-be-released species accounts

Secretarybird

Cape Weaver

Southern Brown-throated Weaver

Monteiro's Hornbill

East Coast Akalat

Lowland Tiny Greenbul

Recently published

[African Finfoot](#)

[African Rock Pipit](#)

[Gurney's Sugarbird](#)

Regulars

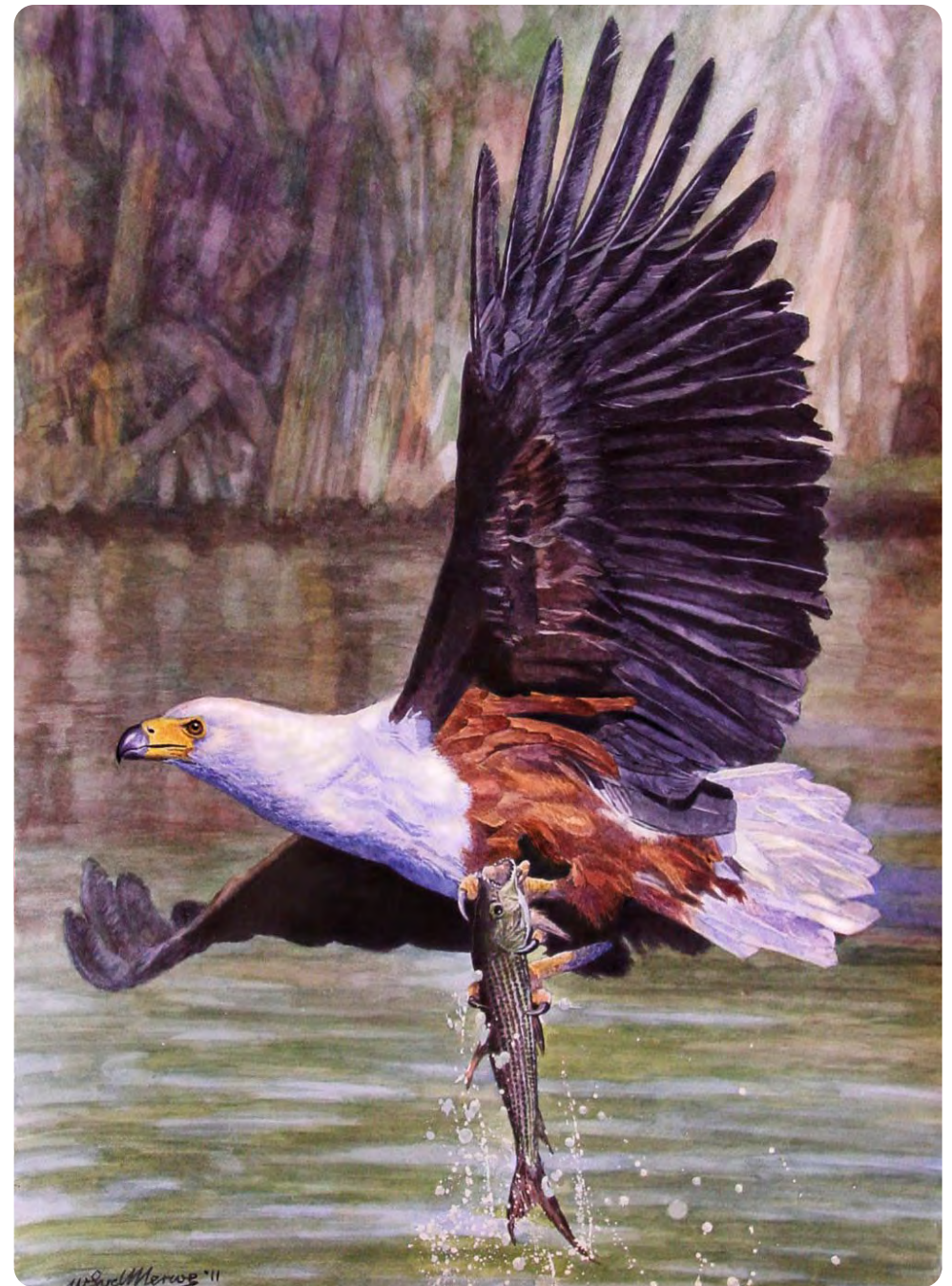
Birds in Art

African Fish Eagle

Text and Artwork

Willem Van der Merwe

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:



African Fish Eagle

Here, I present to you an almost too stereotypical scene of Africa – a Fish Eagle catching a Tigerfish. It's not something I would usually paint, but someone asked me to, so I did!

Like so many birds and other living things, our poor fish eagle seems to have suffered some recent reclassification and renaming. Once it was included in the genus *Haliaeetus* ("Salt Eagle"), along with some other large to huge fish-eating eagles, including the Bald Eagle of North America, and Steller's Sea Eagle, a contender for the largest

and heaviest present-day eagle species. But now, that genus has been restricted to the four largest species, and 'our' fish eagle is put into the genus *Ichthyophaga* ("Fish Eater"), along with five other smaller fish-eating species. Many of these eagles, both the larger and the smaller, are currently seriously threatened, among which is the critically endangered Madagascar

BELOW Head profile of an African Fish Eagle © Warwick Tarboton.



Fish Eagle, the closest relative of our fish eagle.

This is an ancient group; sea eagle-like fossils have been found from 33 million years ago, and fossils certainly belonging to the present genus *Haliaeetus* have been found to be 12 to 16 million years old. These eagles appear to be more closely related to kites (small to medium-sized hawks) and buzzards ('buzzard' in the strict sense, as in medium-sized eagle-like birds, not the new world vultures, often called 'buzzards' in America) than to the 'classical' large eagles of the genus *Aquila*. That genus includes the Golden Eagle, the Australian Wedge-tailed Eagle, and the Verreaux's Eagle (Witkruisarend) of Africa.

The African Fish Eagle's scientific name is *Ichthyophaga vocifer* (meaning "loud/vociferous fish-eater"). It is a rather large eagle, the female (the larger sex) having a wingspan of about 2.4 m and weighing 3.2–3.6 kg, and the male having a wingspan of about 2 m and weighing 2–2.5 kg. However, the sexes look the same and count among the most boldly coloured and distinctive raptors. Not easily seen, but also unique and important, is that they have rough scales on the undersides of

their toes to ensure a tight grip on slippery fish.

Fortunately, the African Fish Eagle is currently not in danger. It occurs everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa, where there are rivers, lakes or ponds, and has even benefited from lakes and dams made by humans. Unlike other fish and sea eagles, it prefers hunting in fresh water. Tigerfish and other large fish like catfish and tilapia are popular prey, but this large eagle will occasionally grab water birds like ducks or flamingos. It will even catch baby crocodiles or water monitor lizards. Many photos and videos have been made of it catching a fish like in my painting. Often, a kind of 'ploy' is involved, a dead fish made to float on top of the water while the camera/video person watches from a hide until the eagle goes for the lure.

My second painting shows the eagle in a much more typical pose, resting in a tree. In the wild, they don't spend all their time fishing. All a single eagle needs is one fish of about 150 grams per day. These eagles can catch fish weighing up to 3.5 kg, giving them enough food to last a while. An African Fish Eagle cannot fly off with such a large catch – it will drag it over



the water surface to the bank - sometimes even paddling in the water using its wings! But they can carry fish weighing up to 1.8 kg in flight. African Fish Eagles typically hunt from perches - they favour large dead trees at the waterside, from where they watch intently for suitable prey to come within reach. They don't always succeed... on average, the African Fish Eagle catches its fish only once every 15 attempts. It's been determined in a study in East Africa that an African Fish Eagle only spends about eight minutes each day fishing. The rest of the time, it's just sitting on its perch, sometimes preening its feathers. Sometimes, they can be seen soaring high in the sky - breeding pairs often flying together.

One of the most iconic aspects of the African Fish Eagle is its call. I don't need to describe this to most readers, but anyone who is not yet in the know can easily find its cry on the internet. This sound in any movie is enough to establish the scene in Africa. The African Fish Eagle utters this call either perched or on the wing and throws its head right back as it does so for that 'yodelling' effect.

The breeding season for fish eagles in South Africa is May to

February, which coincides with the dry season when water levels are low. Males and females mate for life. Mating rituals include singing and flying together. The nest is a bulky, stick structure built in a tree. Nests can be used for many years, but couples may have 2 to 5 different nests in their territories and switch between them from year to year. The female lays 1 to 4 eggs, which she mostly incubates alone, but the male will help in short spurts to allow the female some fishing time. Like other large eagles, the chicks are aggressive to each other, the eldest and strongest, often killing the other(s), but sometimes the parents raise more than one chick per brood. The chicks leave the nest after about 70 to 75 days but are cared for by their parents for another two months while they learn to fish and hunt. Juvenile African Fish Eagles are scruffy-looking with plumage streaked black, brown and white and progressively attain their neat, adult colouration over 4 to 5 years.

This is the national bird of Zimbabwe and Zambia and is featured on the coats of arms of Malawi, Namibia, and South Sudan.

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Reflections

REFLECTIONS

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

Shush! If you're quiet, there's plenty to see around Mopani

Chris Patton

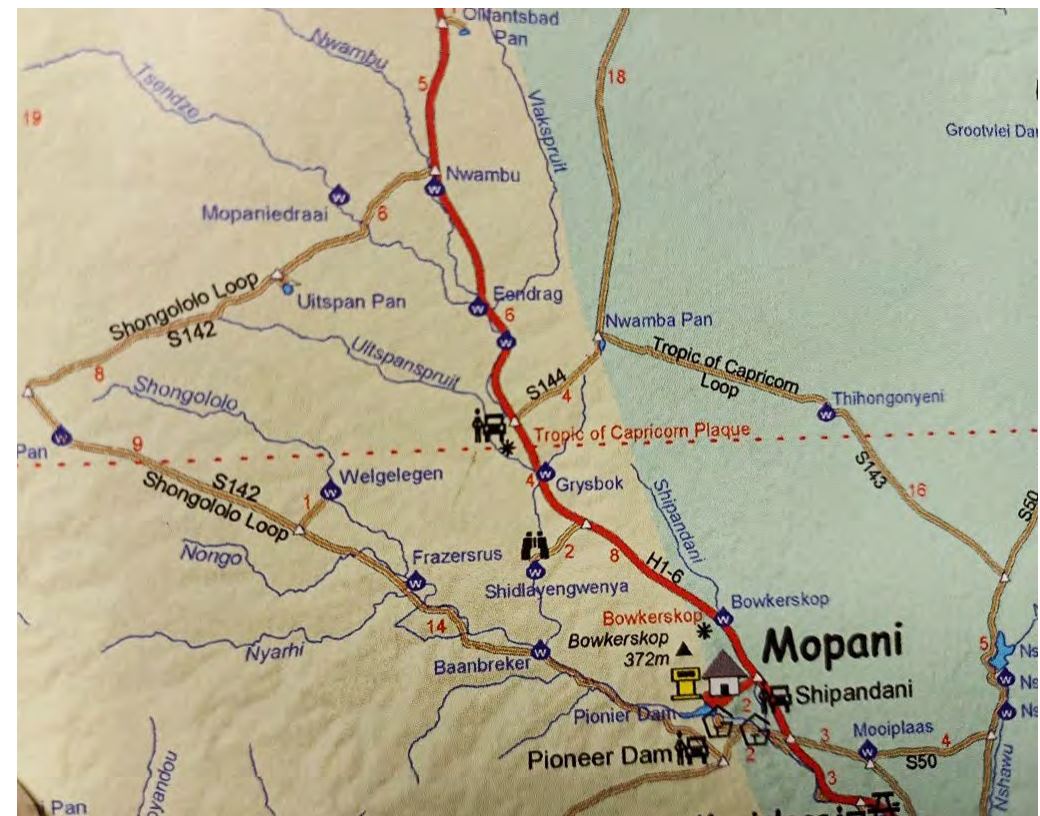
In recent editions of *Reflections*, we have been concentrating on the area around Mopani Rest Camp, and so I've been able to share my memories of birding in the camp itself, or on the routes on the eastern side of Kruger's H1-6 main tarred road. In this edition, we will look to the south and west...

And we find a lot of places or routes beginning with Sh... Shipandani and Shidlayengwenya, while the name for the S142 that sort of mirrors to the west of camp, the Tropic of Capricorn Loop to the east is called the Shongololo Loop. Two

of the park's bird hides are along this road, and the golden rule of all hides is to shush and be quiet and not disturb the wildlife.

The S142 is called the Shongololo Loop, named after the tributary of the Tsendze River, the Shongololo River, named for the rolling meanders in its course, but there are plenty of giant millipedes to be seen along the route, too.

Once the tar road access road from Mopani Camp joins the main Kruger arterial tar road, the turnoff to the Shongololo Loop is about 2 km to the south. Many readers will know Shongololo as the colloquial



ABOVE Map of Mopani Camp's location and surrounds (see https://www.krugerpark.co.za/Kruger_Park_Game_Viewing_Routes-travel/mopani-camp-game-viewing-routes.html)

name for a millipede, but it is also used in some local languages for the spiralled horns of male kudus. The name apparently originates from the word "ukushonga", meaning 'to roll up'. It can apply to the way millipedes roll into a coil, how a kudu bull's horns curl, and to a river that meanders with many twists and turns.

On turning right onto the gravel road route, one soon passes a left turn onto the start of a series of river loops along the Tsendze River. These are always good value for all sorts of wildlife, but I probably most

associate it with a place to reliably search for roosting Verreaux's Eagle-Owls.

The presence of an owl along the Tsendze is pretty appropriate because many readers probably know the Tsendze Rustic Campsite a bit further south. Its legendary camp attendant, Roger Hobyane, who for those who follow him on

FaceBook will know is “the owl whisperer” and will famously show guests staying at his camp the several resident roosting owl species in the camp, which include Pearl-spotted and African Barred Owlets, African Scops Owl, Western Barn Owl and even bizarrely African Wood Owl. I’ve never actually overnighted in the camp and have only had the pleasure of meeting Roger once, so I don’t have any memories to share. Still, his reputation and social media posts

are a testament that this is a place worth staying at.

But I got side-tracked... past the Tsendze turn-off, the road descends to the Tsendze Weir, which is one of the best in the Park and, without fail, will have a plethora of waterbirds lurking in the shallows

BELOW A roosting Verreaux’s Eagle-Owl on one of the Tsendze Loops © Chris Patton.



ABOVE The descent down to Tsendze Weir from the east © Dries De Wet.

RIGHT Goliath Heron at Tsendze Weir © Chris Patton.

and affording excellent photography opportunities. Crakes, herons, egrets, wagtails, geese, and Hamerkops can make even photography Philistines like me look good.

But perhaps the best thing about Tsendze Weir is that looking upstream, one first gets a glimpse of Shipandani Sleepover Hide. Spelt Shipandani on most of the maps, it is alternatively spelt Shipandane. The





ABOVE An elephant bull the marketing blurb eulogises about, with Shipandani Hide in the background © Dries de Wet.

marketing blurb on the SANParks' website reads thus: "A bird-hide by day, it transforms into a primitive overnight dwelling by night, where a select few can experience the Kruger National Park nightlife first hand. Large buffalo herds and many elephant bulls frequent the area meters from where you are sleeping. This is your chance to experience Africa in its truest form."

The write-up sounds enticing but does not mention the birding delights the hide offers. More of the same birds one can see at the nearby Weir. And I turn to my friend and ex-colleague Dries de Wet for some wonderful photos that better capture my memories.

Throw in African Fish Eagle, kingfishers patrolling the open water, and warblers, Common Waxbills and various weavers in the reeds in front of the hide, while in the surrounding sycamore fig trees, African Green Pigeons, Brown-headed Parrots, and Purple-crested Turacos and a cornucopia of other fruit feeding birds. But in terms of my memories from the hide, two birds stand out... It was the first place in the Park where I found a Great Reed Warbler, with its characteristic



ABOVE Black Crake at Shipandani Hide © Dries de Wet.

RIGHT A mystical White-backed Night Heron at dusk © Chris Patton

grating call... but the one mystical bird that the hide is renowned for amongst the birding community is one of the Park's most reliable places in Kruger to see White-backed Night Herons. You have to be lucky to see them during the hours of the day when the hide is open to the general public, so



the best way to maximise your chances is to book a night at the hide's sleepover facility. As night falls, keep scanning the river, and they are sometimes quite obliging in showing themselves to onlookers.

Leaving the Hide and returning to the Shongololo Loop, the next landmark is the S146 turnoff to Stapelkop Dam, which I confess is not somewhere I've ever explored. I guess I was always put off by the fact I have only ever had a sedan vehicle and that ignoring the turnoff to Boulders Bush Lodge after a few hundred metres, the S146 is a cul-de-sac route that ends at Stapelkop Dam after 18 km of driving southwest into the mopane belt hinterland, along a reputedly rough narrow track that is not much traversed, so I haven't

been keen to risk it. Still, I believe it is a wonderful end destination with rich avian rewards and an excellent place to see Collared Pratincoles and African Openbill.

But back to my own experiences, continuing along the S142 only a couple of kilometres from the hide you've just left or driven past is another hide... the Pioneer Dam Hide, which is near where the Tsendze River that fills the dam's basin, enters the dam. Less vaunted than its sister hide, Shipandani, it did get some acclaim around 2010, when an African Skimmer became

BELOW An African Skimmer turned up at Pioneer Dam © Chris Patton.



ABOVE Glossy Ibis and Black Heron are some other Kruger rarities that have been seen at Pioneer Dam © Chris Patton.

a temporary resident on one of the islands in front of the hide. But it's not the only rare bird to look out for from the hide, and I once found Glossy Ibis and Black Heron there alongside each other, both rare or, at best, uncommon in Kruger.

The Shongololo Loop is quite a long one, and one will encounter a range of good woodland birds. It's a remarkably different profile of birds to the Capricorn Loop on the other side of the tar road. There are some delightful waterholes to stake out along the route, and they have charming names like Baanbreker, Frazersrus, Welgelegen, Ntomeni,

and Uitspan Pans. Some of my favourite reminiscences include finding vulture wakes at kills, majestic Martial Eagles, displaying African Hawk-Eagles and local explosions of Dusky Larks. In the summertime, after good rain, several steams cause temporary drifts along the route and can always turn up something unusual. I recall with envy learning that one of the trucks on a Mopani SANParks Honorary Rangers'



Now, I have driven this stretch many times, and usually, I intend to either get back to Mopani or even further south if that is my destination or if heading north to get up to Shingwedzi or Punda Maria. Alternatively, I may have been eagerly targeting the wonders of the Tropic of Capricorn Loop, which I celebrated in a previous article. And so it is that countless

LEFT Some years see explosions of Dusky Larks on the Shongololo Loop © Derek Engelbrecht.

BELOW Little Egret in portrait © Chris Patton.

Birding Weekend in the late 2000s found an African Rail along one of these stream crossings, always a rare bird anywhere in the Park.

The S142 rejoins the H1-6 main tar road back in the Tropics, and it is a good 21 km south along the tar to get back to the Mopani Camp turnoff. There is a sprinkling of roadside pans to entertain – Grysbok and Bowker's Kop pans on the east side of the road and Eendrag on the west side. The Tropic of Capricorn Monument and

the Bowker's Kop hill (alternatively known as Bowkerkop), also on the west side, are two significant landmarks, the latter being a hill with some impressive baobabs on its slopes. The hill is named after a hunting party from the Reef in the 1880s, and one of their party, Miles Robert Bowker, carved his name into one of the baobabs. An interesting aside is that two of the party were the brothers Fred and Harry Barber, after whom the town of Barberton is named.



times, I have driven past a small gravel road turnoff to a road with no route number. I can't even remember what the roadside cairn indicates. Still, consulting the numerous park maps I have in my office, I see that the road runs for about a kilometre to a waterhole in a tributary of the Shongololo River going by the name of Shidlayengwenya. But, some of the maps do not even show the road, and the name Shidlayengwenya is not in the Dictionary of Kruger National Park Place Names, so I cannot share any information about its history or the origin of the name. However, I sense it is linked to the Nguni

language name for a crocodile. But one December day in 2017 (the last time I stayed at Mopani Camp), I was driving back from completing the Shongololo Loop, and I took a notion... And I'm so glad I did.

I had the road all to myself, and despite it being in the middle of the day, I found an obliging pair of Double-banded Sandgrouse under a bush at the side of the road. Soon after, I located a typically aggressive

BELOW An obliging pair of
Double-banded Sandgrouse
© Derek Engelbrecht.

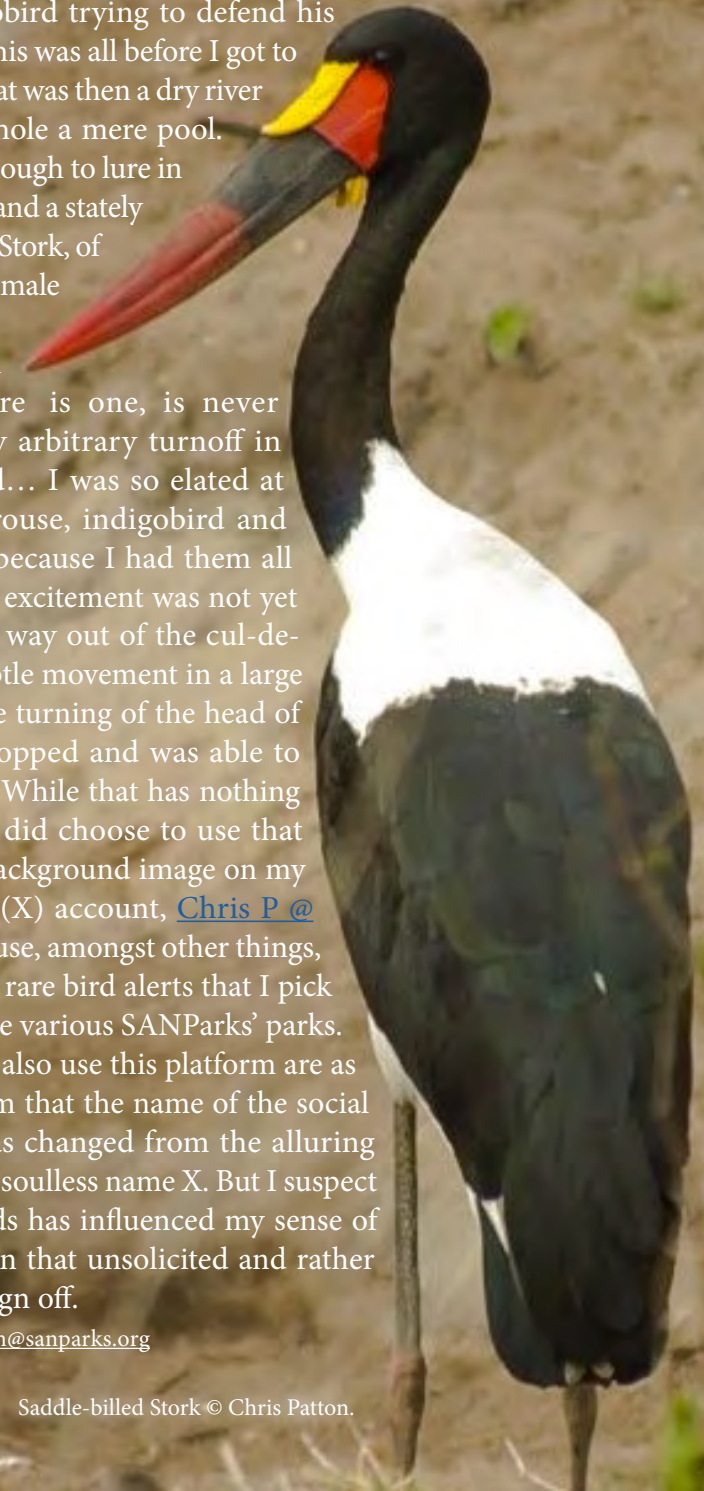


male Dusky Indigobird trying to defend his harem of females. This was all before I got to the waterhole, in what was then a dry river bed, and the waterhole a mere pool. But that pool was enough to lure in a few elephant bulls and a stately pair of Saddle-billed Stork, of which a photo of the male is also shared here.

The moral of the story, if there is one, is never taking a seemingly arbitrary turnoff in Kruger for granted... I was so elated at finding the sandgrouse, indigobird and storks, but mostly because I had them all to myself... but the excitement was not yet at an end... On my way out of the cul-de-sac, I detected a subtle movement in a large leafy tree. It was the turning of the head of a leopard, and I stopped and was able to fire off a few shots. While that has nothing to do with birds, I did choose to use that very photo as my background image on my SANParks Twitter (X) account, [Chris P @ SANParks](#), which I use, amongst other things, to post many of the rare bird alerts that I pick up as reported in the various SANParks' parks. I hope readers who also use this platform are as unimpressed as I am that the name of the social media platform was changed from the alluring name Twitter to the soulless name X. But I suspect that my love of birds has influenced my sense of indignation! And on that unsolicited and rather pointless rant, I'll sign off.

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Saddle-billed Stork © Chris Patton.



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Breeding records from Zimbabwe

Duncan Parkes†* and Derek Engelbrecht

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**Duncan sadly lost his life on the 3rd of April 2024 while this note was in preparation. I did my best to draw together everything discussed in our correspondence. I have Duncan's original dataset, so should there be any questions about any aspect of this paper, I can be contacted at the email address provided. I will try my best to assist where possible.*

This is the final of Duncan's notes on the breeding of birds, this note focusing on records from Zimbabwe. Duncan's notes significantly contributed to our knowledge of the breeding season and other aspects of their breeding biology in Central Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Our hearts go out to Duncan's wife, Isla, and his family and friends. Thank you, Duncan.

This note follows on the first two notes on the breeding biology and ecology of the birds of Sofala Province in Central Mozambique (Parkes 2024, Parkes and Engelbrecht 2024). In this note, we present the breeding records collected by Duncan Parkes in Zimbabwe between 2004 and 2023. The records report only on breeding seasonality and clutch sizes.

References

Parkes, D. (2024). Miscellaneous breeding records from Central Mozambique. *The Lark* 51:77–92.

Parkes, D., and D. Engelbrecht (2024). Breeding records from Sofala Province, Central Mozambique. *The Lark* 53:71–85.

Accipitriformes Accipitridae

African Cuckoo-Hawk

Phenology

Laying Dates

December (n = 2).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 2).

Brown Snake Eagle

Phenology

Laying Dates

January (n = 2), February (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

1 egg (n = 3).

Charadriiformes Glareolidae

Three-banded Courser

Phenology

Laying Dates

September/October (n = 2).

Eggs

Clutch Size

1–2 eggs (n = 2).



Nest with the partially buried eggs of a Three-banded Courser
© Warwick Tarboton.

Passeriformes Cisticolidae

Pale-crowned Cisticola (see Cuckoo-finch)

Croaking Cisticola

Phenology

Laying Dates

January (n = 1), February (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

1–2 eggs (n = 2). Each nest also contained one Cuckoo-finch egg.



Croaking Cisticola eggs © Derek Engelbrecht.

Wing-snapping Cisticola

Phenology

Laying Dates

December (n = 4), January (n = 2), February (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

3.6 ± 0.53 eggs (range 3–4, n = 7).

Estrildidae

Red-headed Finch

Phenology

Laying Dates

January (n = 2).

Nest Site

Site Characteristics

In Great Sparrow nests (n = 2).

Eggs

Clutch Size

3 eggs (n = 1).



Red-headed Finch nestlings © Derek Engelbrecht.

Brown Firefinch

Phenology

Laying Dates

April (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

3 eggs (n = 1).

Locustellidae

Fan-tailed Grassbird

Phenology

Laying Dates

February (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 1).

Malaconotidae

Black-fronted Bushshrike

Phenology

Laying Dates

November (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 1).

Motacillidae

Rosy-throated Longclaw

Phenology

Laying Dates

December (11),
January (n = 12),
February (n = 5),
March (n = 1).

Nest Site

Site Characteristics
At the edge of vleis.

Eggs

Clutch Size

2.8 ± 0.66 eggs
(range 2–4, n = 29).



Rosy-throated Longclaw © Jody De Bruyn.

Muscicapidae

Collared Palm Thrush

Phenology

Laying Dates

January (n = 2).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 2).

Miombo Rock Thrush

Phenology

Laying Dates

November (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

3 eggs (n = 1).

Collared Sunbird

Phenology

Laying Dates

January (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 1).

Bronzy Sunbird

Phenology

Laying Dates

November (n = 1).

Copper Sunbird

Phenology

Laying Dates

January (n = 3), February (n = 4), March (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

1.8 ± 0.46 eggs (range 1–2, n = 8).

Eastern Miombo Sunbird

Phenology

Laying Dates

September (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 1).

Nectariniidae

Purple-banded Sunbird

Phenology

Laying Dates

October (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 1).

Cinnamon-breasted Tit

Phenology

Laying Dates

August/September (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

5 eggs (n = 1).

Phylloscopidae

Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler

Phenology

Laying Dates

November (n = 1).

Ploceidae

Yellow-mantled Widowbird

Phenology

Laying Dates

January (n = 3),

February (n = 3),

March (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2.1 ± 0.69 eggs (n = 7).

Paridae



Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler © Derek Engelbrecht.

Pycnonotidae

Yellow-streaked Greenbul

Phenology

Laying Dates

November (n = 2).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 2).

Stenostridae

White-tailed Crested Flycatcher

Phenology

Laying Dates

November (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 1).



Yellow-streaked Greenbul at nest © Derek Engelbrecht.

Turdidae

Olive Thrush

Phenology

Laying Dates

September (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2 eggs (n = 1).

Viduidae

Cuckoo-finch

Phenology

Laying Dates

December (n = 1), January (n = 1), February (n = 1).

Nest Site

Site Characteristics

At the edge of a vlel (Marlborough vlel, Harare).

Eggs

Clutch Size

1–2 eggs (n = 4) (in a Pale-crowned Cisticola nest, also Croaking Cisticola host).

Piciformes Lybiidae

Whyte's Barbet

Phenology

Laying Dates

September (n = 3).

Eggs

Clutch Size

6–7 eggs (n = 2).

White-eared Barbet

Phenology

Laying Dates

September (n = 1), November (n = 2).

Eggs

Clutch Size

6 eggs (n = 2).

Strigiformes Tytonidae

African Grass Owl

Phenology

Laying Dates

March (n = 1).

Eggs

Clutch Size

4 eggs (n = 1).

Strigidae

African Barred Owlet

Phenology

Laying Dates

September/October (n = 3).

Eggs

Clutch Size

2.3 eggs (range 2–3 eggs, n = 3).

East Coast Akalat plumage, biometrics, moult and vocalisations

Derek Engelbrecht

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The East Coast Akalat (ECA) *Sheppardia gunningi* inhabits the understorey of evergreen montane and submontane forests and dense coastal thickets in tropical East Africa. This furtive species can be difficult to find if it is not singing, which explains the species' patchy distribution, and why new populations are discovered relatively regularly. Fortunately, it sings often, especially during the breeding season, when it can be heard throughout the day. Once considered rare, this is not the case, and they can reach very high densities in some areas, e.g., 4 birds/ha in Malawi (Dowsett-Lemaire and Dowsett 2006). Still, its secretive habits and the difficulty in following individuals in the undergrowth explain why the first nest of the species was only found in the early 1990s. Its preferred habitat is the understorey of forests and thickets, specifically areas with a relatively clear understorey and a sub-canopy

about 2–3 meters high, a thick bed of leaf litter, and lots of moss-covered logs and other dead wood. ECAs use moss for lining and building their nests on the ground, which is well-concealed by leaf litter and dead wood on the forest floor.

Four subspecies are recognised (Collar 2024). The nominate subspecies, *S. g. gunningi* (hereafter *gunningi*), is found in central and southern Mozambique's coastal thickets and lowland forests. The Malawian subspecies, *S. g. bensoni* (hereafter *bensoni*), is found in lowland through to montane forests on the western shores of northern Lake Malawi in the Nkhata Bay region, and, presumably, it is the same subspecies that is found on 'sky islands' such as Mt Mabu, Mt Socone, and Mt Inago in Mozambique. The smallest subspecies, *S. g. sokokensis* (hereafter *sokokensis*), is found in coastal Kenya, Tanzania (including Zanzibar), and, presumably, the extreme north of Mozambique. The subspecies *S. g. alticola* (hereafter

alticola), only described in 2000, is restricted to the Nguu Mountains in northeast Tanzania.

The purpose of this note is to describe, in detail, the plumage of a sub-adult (Formative Plumage), to summarise SAFRING data for the species, and to describe its vocal array using my recordings and ones that are available in online databases.

Plumage

Although Keith (1992) describes the plumage of juveniles (First Basic Plumage) and adults (Definitive Basic Plumage), there is no description of the plumage of a sub-adult ('immature') in the literature. A sub-adult is an individual that has completed a partial post-juvenile moult (Preformative Moult) of the spotted or mottled contour feathers, but this typically does not involve the remiges and rectrices or the wing coverts.

On 18 April 2023, I caught an immature bird in a mist net in the dry, deciduous forest at the Khodzue Caves (-18.565104, 34.870902) on the Cheringoma Plateau. The description of the bird follows:

The crown, nape and back are bronze-brown with an olive tinge, like the adult's (Fig. 1a). The rump and uppertail coverts are more rusty orange (Fig. 1b). The rectrices

(tail feathers) are greyish-brown with a bronzy tinge, r1–r3 having broad russet edges (Fig. 1c). In this individual, the outermost rectrices (r6) were freshly moulted, and these two feathers were greyish and more rounded (like adult rectrices), whereas r1–r5 had pointed tips typical of juvenile rectrices. The lores and supercilium are dark grey, but directly above the eye, the supercilium is paler bluish-grey; the featherlets of the lower eyelid are greyish-white, and those of the upper eyelid a darker bluish-grey (Fig. 1d). The ear coverts are mostly olive-brown but with a whitish to bluish-grey posterior margin (Fig. 1d). The chin is white, grading to pale orange-yellow on the throat and a richer rufous-orange on the chest and flanks (Figs. 1d and e); the belly is white, and the undertail coverts are pale buff (Fig. 1f). The primaries, secondaries, and tertials are dusky brown, and the outer webs of the primaries are pale rufous; the tertials also have pale rufous tips; pp5–8 are emarginated, but the emargination on p5 is slight; the secondaries also have broad, rufous margins on the distal webs (Fig. 1g). The upperwing coverts of the primaries are bluish-grey with pale rufous outer margins, those of the secondaries also bluish-grey,



a



b



c



d



e



f



g



h

Figure 1. Plumage features of an immature East Coast Akalat ringed on the 18th of April 2023 at Khodzue, Mozambique. See text for detail.

the distal webs rufous, inner webs slaty-grey but with some russet edging at the tips; some median coverts also have rufous tips; the underwing coverts are pale buff to greyish-white. The rectal bristles are black and well-developed (Fig. 1h).

The bill is blackish-brown, and the base of the mandible is yellowish-brown (Fig. 1d). Inspection of online images of ECA from across its range suggests subtle regional variation in the colour of the bill: the nominate subspecies has a blackish upper bill and a yellowish-brown mandible. In contrast, the other subspecies seem to have wholly black bills. The eye is dark brown; the legs and feet are greyish-pink, and the soles are primrose yellow, like the adult (Fig. 1f).

Measurements

ECA is sexually monomorphic for plumage colouration but exhibits sexual dimorphism for wing and, to a lesser extent, tail length (Irwin 1963, Clancey 1969, Keith 1992). All the records in the literature show males have wing lengths ranging between 72 mm and 76 mm, and females range from 65–69 mm. Using these ranges, I grouped the unsexed biometric data of adults of the nominate subspecies, *gunningi*, in the SAFRING database into males

(n = 6) and females (n = 2). Below is a summary of the biometric data of adult ECAs in the SAFRING database as extracted on 30 May 2024 (South African Bird Ringing Unit 2024).

Mass

S. g. gunningi

Adult male 17.4 mm ± 1.5 SD (range 14.5–18.9, n = 6); adult female 15.5 mm (range 15.4–15.5, n = 2).

S. g. bensoni

Adult male 18.2 mm (n = 1); adult female 16.2 (n = 1).

Wing

S. g. gunningi

Adult male 74.0 mm ± 2.1 SD (range 71.0–76.0, n = 6); adult female 67.5 mm (range 67.0–68.0, n = 2).

Tail

S. g. gunningi

Adult male 57.0 mm (range 55.0–59.0, n = 2).

Culmen

S. g. gunningi

Adult male 12.9 mm (range 12.6–13.3, n = 2).

Tarsus

S. g. gunningi

Adult male 26.1 mm (range 25.8–26.3, n = 2).

Moult

An adult male ringed on the 12th of December in the Mt Mabu region of Mozambique had a primary moult score of 5 (p1³, p2², p3–10⁰) (South African Bird Ringing Unit 2024). The immature bird (post-juvenile plumage) I ringed at the Khodzue Caves (Cheringoma Plateau) on the 18th of April had two fresh outer rectrices (adult/Definitive Basic) (Fig. 1c), the rest being retained juvenile rectrices and the primaries were worn (p1–10⁰).

Vocalisations

To describe the vocal array of ECA, I analysed recordings available in two online databases, [Xeno-Canto](#) and the [Macaulay Library](#). Only three subspecies are represented in the available recordings, namely *gunningi*, *bensoni*, and *sokokensis*. Unfortunately, there are no online recordings of the subspecies *alticola* in the two online repositories accessed in this study. The quality of the recordings varies, so it was not always possible to record all parameters for every recording. Some recordings were excluded because the recordist noted that the vocalisation was in response to playback, and it was evident that the individual's vocalisations deviated from the norm, e.g., much longer

song phrases, sometimes lasting more than 30 seconds, but up to 1 minute has been reported in the literature.

A brief definition of the terms used in this note follows (see also Fig. 2):

- 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 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. In this note, ≥ 2 phrases following in quick succession, usually ~0.5 s.
- 4) Strophe. Several phrases delivered in sequence without a significant pause (> 1 s in this note) constitute a strophe.
- 5) Tempo. The rate of delivery per unit of time, whether notes or phrases.

The ECA has a range of vocalisations. Keith (1992) describes three types of vocalisations: a song (including a subsong [Dowsett-Lemaire 1989]), an alarm call, and an “aggressive” call. The song is described as fast, simple, high-

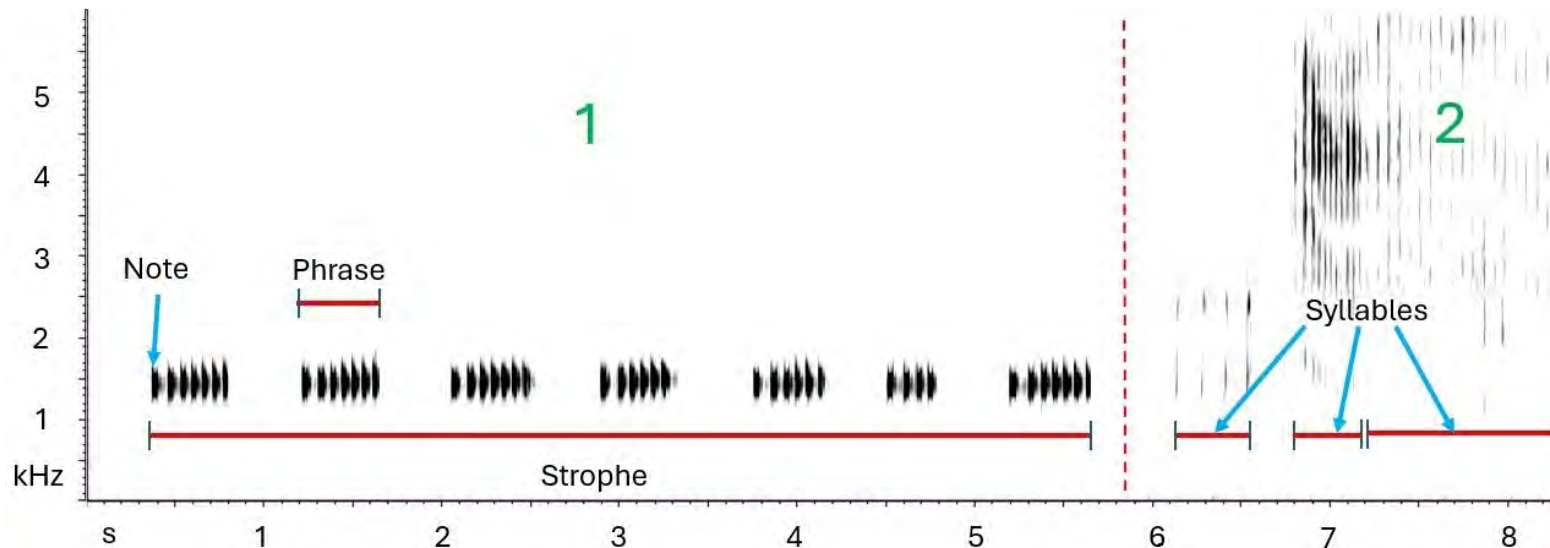


Figure 2. Spectrogram illustrating some of the terminology used in this note.

pitched phrases comprising 4–5 notes, each lasting ~2 s. The alarm call is described as a piping ‘seeep’ call, interspersed with guttural clicks and ratchets. The “aggressive” call, delivered in response to playback, was a 3-syllabled descending call like a high-pitched Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* call. I was unable to find any calls resembling an alarm call in the recordings I analysed.

Based on the recordings I analysed, the following categories of vocalisations were identified:

- 1) song,
- 2) clicks, croaks, rattles, and trills (seemingly associated with aggressive interactions or agitated individuals),

- 3) contact calls, and
- 4) *seeep* calls (possible begging and parental contact calls).

Song

At the individual level, the song is delivered within a relatively narrow frequency range and appears somewhat stereotyped at first glance. However, it is surprisingly complex and comprises a varying number of notes and phrases delivered in a near-constant stream in strophes. The notes and phrases show tremendous variation in structure, frequency, and duration (Fig. 3). In all subspecies, several notes are grouped in phrases, with short (~0.5 s) pauses between phrases, which, in turn, are grouped to form a strophe.

as if it were their own (Dowsett-Lemaire 1989).

The song features of each subspecies will be discussed separately in the following section. It should be noted that these findings are tentative, as the sample sizes are small. More recordings from across the species’ range are needed to confirm or refute the existence of these regional differences.

Subspecies *gunningi*

As far as the songs of the three subspecies analysed here go, the song of *gunningi* is the simplest. Individual phrases are short (~1.7 s) and typically comprise ~10 notes/phrase with long intervals (mean = $2.87 \text{ s} \pm 1.28 \text{ SD}$, range 1.58–8.96, $n = 70$ intervals) between successive phrases. The frequency range of *gunningi* notes is the broadest of the three subspecies, averaging 1,445.74 Hz.

Subspecies *bensoni*

Although the song of *bensoni* is recognisably similar to *gunningi*, there are differences between the two subspecies. While the song of *gunningi* is characterised by the delivery of individual phrases separated by long intervals (~3 s), the *bensoni* song is characterised by fewer notes per phrase (~5 notes/phrase

A summary of the song parameters analysed in this study is presented in Table 1.

There appear to be regional differences between some song parameters of *gunningi*, *bensoni*, and *sokokensis*. Dowsett-Lemaire (1989, 2010) also noted these regional dialects. Individuals on Mt Mabu in Mozambique, which resemble *bensoni* from Malawi rather than the nominate subspecies *gunningi*, responded to the playback of other *bensoni* birds but not to the playback of *sokokensis* and vice versa (Dowsett-Lemaire 2010). Also, *bensoni* individuals responded to playback of a *gunningi* song recording from the Dondo region in Mozambique

Table 1. Summary statistics of the song parameters of East Coast Akalat. The results are presented as all subspecies combined, but because there is evidence of regional dialects, the results are also given for the three subspecies for which online recordings are available. The data is presented as mean \pm SD.

Parameter	All (n = 220)	<i>gunningi</i> (n = 77)	<i>bensoni</i> (n = 76)	<i>sokokensis</i> (n = 67)
Notes/phrase	8.77 \pm 5.96 (range 2–41)	9.91 \pm 2.28 (range 4–16)	4.86 \pm 2.15 (range 2–13)	13.0 \pm 8.3 (range 3–41)
n Syllables	2.41 \pm 1.02 (range 1–5)	No obvious syllables were noted.	2.2 \pm 0.97 (range 1–5)	2.64 \pm 1.05 (range 1–4)
Phrase duration (s)	2.02 \pm 1.57 (range 0.59–20.16)	1.66 \pm 0.33 (range 0.62–2.46)	1.90 \pm 0.67 (range 0.67–5.29)	2.57 \pm 2.67 (range 0.59–20.16)
F _{Low} (Hz)	1780.31 \pm 211.91 (range 1287.2–2238.6)	1713.4 \pm 86.38 (range 543.3–1958.9)	2019.73 \pm 97.93 (range 1690.4–2238.6)	1585.6 \pm 140.68 (range 1287.2–1842.6)
F _{High} (Hz)	3092.21 \pm 253.69 (range 2504.4–3601.1)	3159.14 \pm 110.45 (range 2869.0–3462.6)	3295.22 \pm 169.72 (range 2923.9–3601.1)	2785.01 \pm 135.24 (range 2504.4–3121.8)
F _A (Hz)	1311.9 \pm 207.45 (range 746.19–1899.5)	1445.74 \pm 145.24 (range 1127.83–1899.5)	1275.48 \pm 238.88 (range 746.19–1781.73)	1199.41 \pm 135.62 (range 796.84–1581.0)

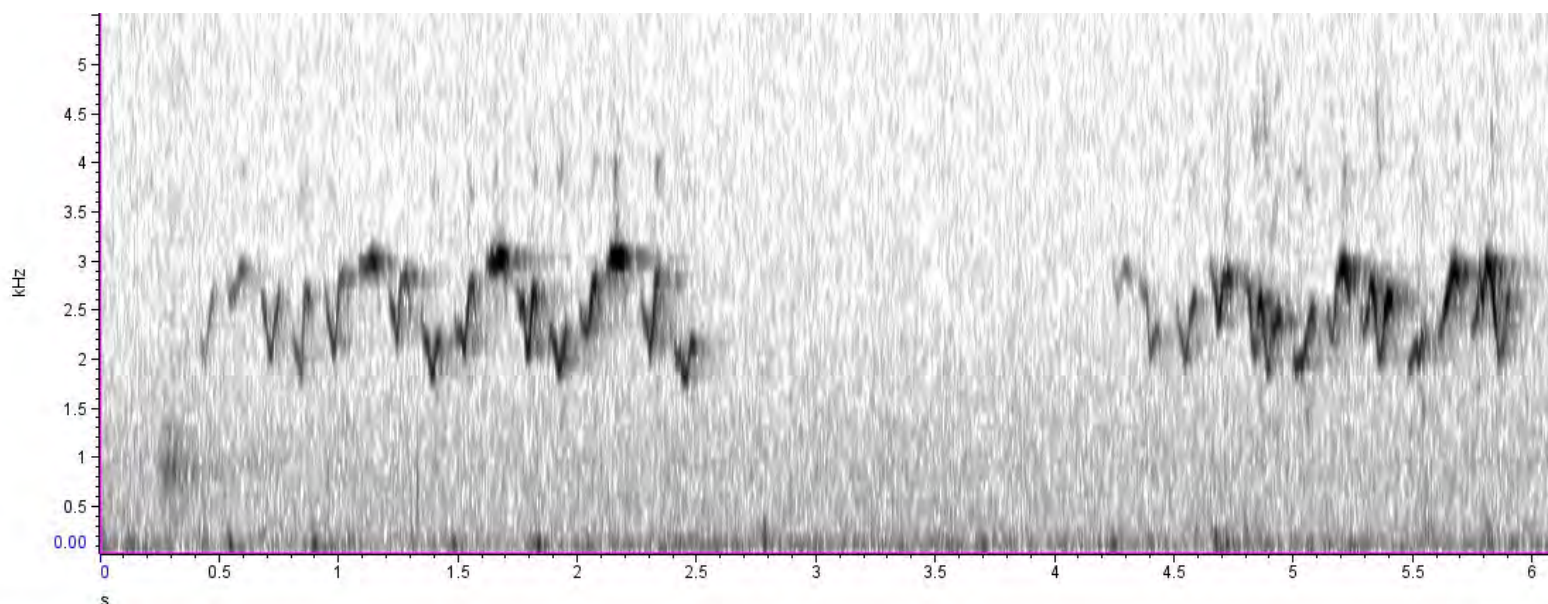


Figure 3. An example of two consecutive song phrases of East Coast Akalat from Central Mozambique. The first phrase comprises 16 notes and the second 11 notes. Note the variation in structure, duration, and frequency of the notes.

vs \sim 10 notes/phrase in *gunningi*). Still, phrases are usually delivered in clusters, typically 2 phrases at a time, occasionally 1 but sometimes up to 5 phrases clumped together to form a strophe. It also has the shortest

mean interval between successive strophes (mean = 1.83 s \pm 0.82 SD, range 0.99–5.02, n = 63 intervals). This subspecies also has the highest mean lowest (F_{Low}) and highest (F_{High}) frequency of the three subspecies.

Subspecies *sokokensis*

Like *bensoni*, this subspecies also tends to deliver phrases in clusters (mean = 2.64 phrases in a cluster). However, *sokokensis* typically have many more notes/phrase (mean

= 13) and, consequently, the phrases are longer (mean = 2.57 s), the intervals between successive strophes are also much longer (mean = 2.47 \pm 1.00 SD, range 1.05–6.03, n = 61), and the song frequency (Hz) is the lowest of the three subspecies (Table 1).

According to Dowsett-Lemaire (1989), the species also performs a subsong in winter, but there was no indication of this in any of the online recordings analysed.

Clicks, croaks, rattles, and trills

In common with many other akalats and robin-chats, ECA also produces sounds associated with alarm, aggression, and agitation. These include clicks, croaks, rattles, and trills across a broad frequency range (\sim 1,000–9,000 Hz), often interspersed with song phrases during counter-singing or in response to playback (e.g., [ML58665](#)

@ 6:30–6:39 mins). At Khodzue (Mozambique), an individual was heard calling the click call in the pre-dawn before it commenced with singing. It is therefore possible that this call may also serve a contact call function. The clicks are either single notes or, more usually, two notes following in rapid succession (interval of 0.02–0.03 s between notes) (Fig. 4). Depending on the individual's state of agitation, the clicks can increase to as many as six clicks, at which point it resembles a frog-like croak (Fig. 4). The croaks sometimes grade into a rattle (Fig. 4). An even faster repetition of notes creating a trill with intervals

of ~0.01 s between notes has also been recorded ([ML58665](#) at 7:42 min). It is unknown if these different sounds communicate different states of agitation or if they reflect individual or regional differences. The difficulty of observing behaviours in the dense, gloomy undergrowth favoured by ECAs makes it difficult to place some of the sounds in context.

Contact calls

These stereotyped calls show little variation and are delivered at a constant frequency, often for long periods. The individual notes are uttered rapidly and show minimal

structural variation, if any. I will briefly describe three examples of these calls:

[ML619518717](#) (*gunningi*, Cheringoma Plateau, Mozambique)

These notes are short (mean = 0.14 s ± 0.02 SD, range 0.10–0.19, n = 26 notes) and delivered at a rapid tempo (one note every 0.3 s) in a relatively narrow frequency band of 2,691.0–3,482.4 Hz.

When I first encountered this individual, it was singing. I sat watching it, and eventually, it started foraging for about 2 minutes before perching on a fallen tree stump and started with this

monotonous call. This sequence went on intermittently for at least 10 minutes.

[XC859014](#) (*bensoni*, Nkhata Bay, Malawi)

Similar in structure to *gunningi* above, but with slightly more variation in the structure of notes and the tempo of delivery. The notes are slightly shorter (mean = 0.08 s ± 0.02 SD, range 0.06–0.11, n = 20 notes) than *gunningi* notes, delivered at a slighter faster tempo (one note every 0.2 s), and the frequency band is at a slightly higher frequency (range 2,832.5–3,959.4 Hz). As with the *bensoni* song, these calls were delivered as single notes or in clusters of 2–6 notes. This call was interspersed with clicks, croaks, and song in this recording.

[ML58665](#) (*sokokensis*, Tana River, Kenya)

As with the song, *sokokensis* has the lowest frequency range of the three subspecies for this call (mean range = 408.5 Hz ± 90.58 SD, range 1,762.9–2,532.4). Like *bensoni*, these notes are also delivered in clusters, but the number of notes/cluster is considerably more than in *bensoni*, up to 26 notes. Like *bensoni*, there is some structural

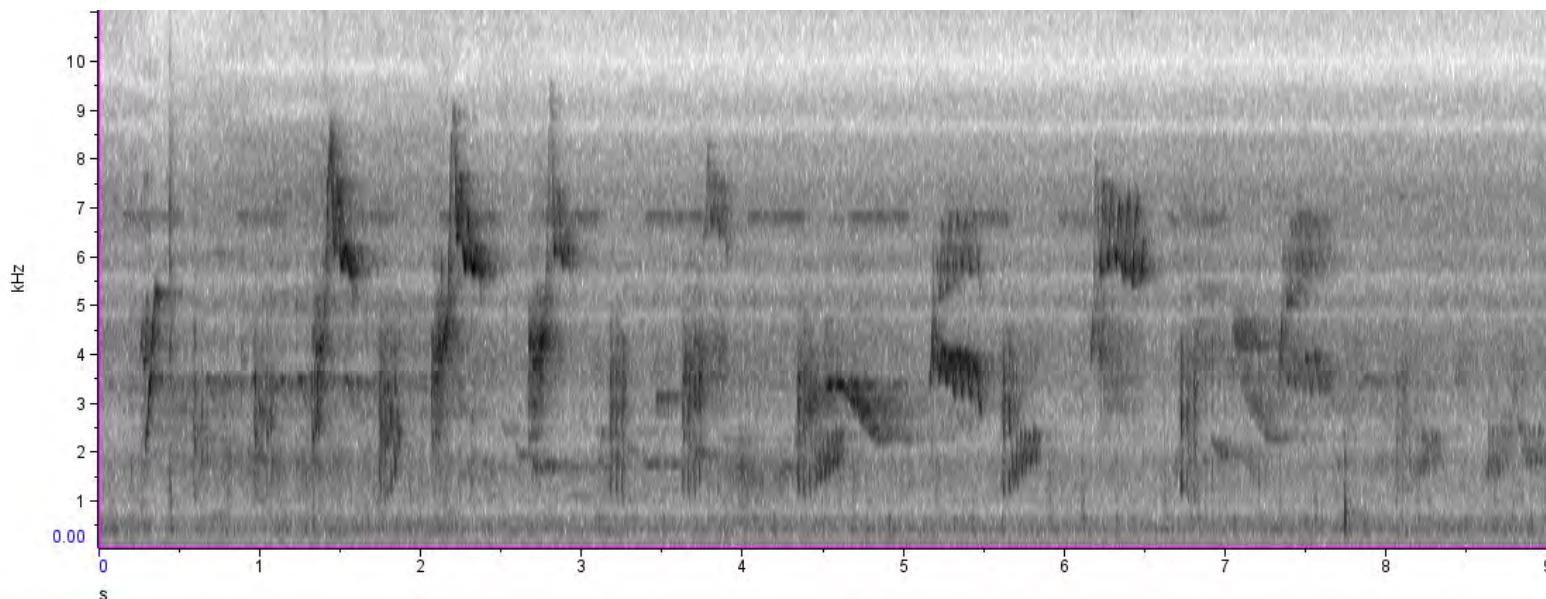


Figure 3. A spectrogram of a series of clicks, croaks and rattles delivered by an East Coast Akalat.

variation in the notes. Although the notes are the same duration as *bensoni* (mean = 0.08 s ± 0.01 SD, range 0.06–0.10, n = 25 notes), it is delivered at a faster tempo (one note every 0.17 s), the fastest of the three subspecies. In this recording, the contact notes were interspersed with a few song phrases.

Seep calls

Based on my experience with robin-chats, the high-pitched calls in [XC633855](#) and [XC633857](#) (*sokokensis*, Zanzibar) are all either fledgling begging calls or a mixture of begging calls and parental contact calls. The calls that can be heard between 12 and 17 s in [XC633857](#) are typical of the excited calls of a fledgling either seeing its parents or being fed.

These notes are short (mean = 0.23 s ± 0.08 SD, range 0.14–0.48, n = 38 notes) and of the highest frequency in the ECA's vocal repertoire (frequency range 5,208.1–8,101.5 Hz).

Conclusion

Although the description of the song differs substantially from that of Keith (1992), that author did not distinguish between the three subspecies known at the time. This study showed there

appear to be regional dialects in ECA, but sample sizes are small, so the findings are tentative. Sound recordists are encouraged to record ECA vocalisations from across the species range and, where possible, to place the vocalisations in context. But that is easier said than done when scrambling for views in the undergrowth.

Acknowledgements I wish to acknowledge and thank Kim Hunt of the South African Bird Ringing Unit for extracting the moult and biometric data for me.

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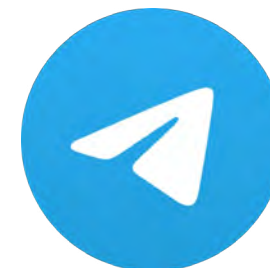
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LIMPOPO RARITIES

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

Long-billed Crombec - an interesting roosting strategy

TEXT AND PHOTOS Hugh Chittenden

email: hugh@rarebirds.co.za

This note illustrates one of the roosting strategies of Long-billed Crombec, the most common and widespread of the three crombec species in southern Africa.

BELOW An adult Long-billed Crombec. "The bird without a tail", as it is sometimes referred to!



ABOVE The start of a nest that will end up as a deep, suspended cup.



ABOVE Typical crombec nests that are well camouflaged and slung over a slim twig or branch.

The following photographs illustrate one of the interesting roosting strategies of Long-billed Crombec during the winter months in Botswana.

As with all bird species, finding a safe and secure place to roost at night, out of sight from predators,

is important. Whilst camping on the edge of Lake Ngami, we noticed Long-billed Crombecs flying at dusk into stands of dry *Datura* plants. Using a torch, we found that these birds seemed to be using the seed pods as camouflage, roosting alongside them at night.



LEFT *Datura stramonium*, commonly known as *Datura*, Thorn Apple, or Olieboom, is a highly invasive common weed that probably originated from Central America. This herbaceous plant grows to about 1.5 m tall and is an aggressive, highly toxic weed (especially the seeds). Surprisingly, the flowers that open at night have a pleasant fragrance and are fed on by nocturnal moths! All parts of the plant contain tropane alkaloids that are toxic, especially to children. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhoea, seizures, difficulty in breathing and even death © Geoff Nichols.



ABOVE Guy Upfold shining a torch, looking for roosting crombecs in dry *Datura* plants on the edge of Lake Ngami in Botswana.

BELOW A Long-billed Crombec roosting below a spiky *Datura* pod.





ABOVE Head under the wing, the crombec settles in for the night!

BELOW A crombec, happy to roost some distance from the *Datura* pods.



ABOVE A crombec neatly positioned between two seed pods.

Because of their toxicity, most livestock and potential predators tend to avoid stands of these plants. More importantly, though, the seed pods are more or less the same size as the crombecs, making them difficult to detect at night. The important question is: would potential nocturnal predators see these spiky, dry, poisonous *Datura* plants as dangerous? Do

the crombecs roost next to the seed pods to benefit from the camouflage or for protection against nocturnal predators not wanting to have contact with plants they know as being toxic?

Acknowledgements: I thank Guy Upfold for helping to search for roosting crombecs in the *Datura* plants and Geoff Nichols for supplying the *Datura* plant photographs.

Interesting ringing resightings and recoveries

Derek Engelbrecht

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Details of a few interesting resightings or recoveries of ringed birds follow.

Ring K42075: Lanner Falcon

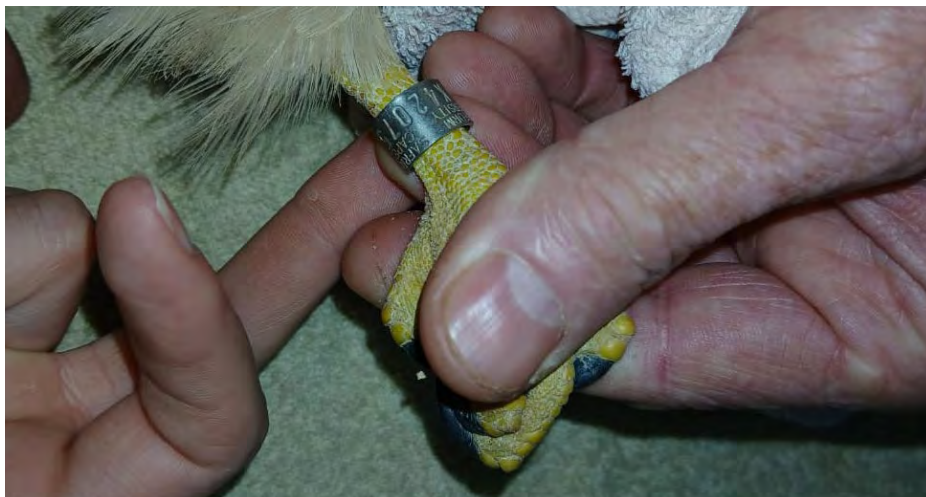
An injured adult bird was found on the Bylsteel road, north of Polokwane. The bird either collided with a fence or was struck by a car and unfortunately had to be euthanised. The bird was ringed by Malcolm Wilson as an adult female on 11 December 2023 on the farm Waterval, about 10 km west of Matoks. It was euthanised on 2 May 2025.

The straight-line distance between the ringing locality and where the injured bird was found was 12.5 km and the days elapsed were 144 days (0y, 4m, 22d). Reported by Minkie Prinsloo.

CA30631: Greater Honeyguide

The bird was ringed as a juvenile on 30 October 2023 in my garden in Welgelegen, Polokwane. It was then resighted several times in my garden over the next six months (4 January

BELOW The foot of the injured Lanner Falcon © Minkie Prinsloo.



2024, 10 March 2024, 23 March 2024, 4 April 2024, 27 April 2024, and 13 May 2024) before it was found dead by Nico Claase at his house on Plot 55, Leeuwkuil smallholdings, west of Polokwane on 27 May 2024. The cause of death was drowning - in a watering can! There was some water in the watering can and, according to Nico, bees were seen drinking from it. The honeyguide either attempted to drink water, lost its footing and fell in the water, or it saw bees entering the watering can and followed them to see if there was any comb inside the watering can. Honeyguides' primary food source is beeswax. The straight-line distance between the ringing and recovery localities was 9.5 km, and the days elapsed between the initial ringing and the recovery were 211 days (0y, 7m, 1d). Reported by Nico Claase.



Greater Honeyguide CA30631 2023-10-30



Greater Honeyguide CA30631 2024-05-13

Ring AR97501: Fiscal Flycatcher

I ringed this individual as an adult female on 21 August 2018 on the campus of the University of Limpopo. The bird has been seen at the initial ringing site several times since then, the most recent resighting being on 9 January 2024. The straight-line distance between the ringing and resighting locality was 0 km, and the days elapsed were 1968 days (5y, 4m, 20d). Reported by Derek Engelbrecht.



Fiscal Flycatcher AR97501 2024-01-09

Possible White-throated Robin-Chat *Cossypha humeralis* range expansion along the Vaal River in the Free State

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The White-throated Robin-Chat *Cossypha humeralis* is a southern African endemic and occurs mainly in thickets and riverine scrub in woodland and savanna and dense vegetation along watercourses (Oatley 2005). In central South Africa, its range includes the North West and Gauteng Provinces extending as far south as the Vaal River on the border with the Free State Province (Oatley 1997). Colahan (1989) first reported the presence of this species in the Vredefort area of the Free State (Wittekoppies farm), and his observation was included in the species' SABAP1 map (see Oatley 1997).

The current SABAP2 distribution map (see <https://sabap2.birdmap.africa/species/582>) shows the species has now been recorded as far west as Kimberley (September 2008) and Mokala National Park

(May 2015) in the Northern Cape Province. In the Free State, the species has now also been recorded at Sandveld Nature Reserve (July 2010 and September 2023) in the northwest.

On 24 April 2024, DDS and ZM were doing bird ringing fieldwork in the Sophiasdal section of the Kareeboomvult farm, Hoopstad (-27.880, 25.731), ca. 20 km south of Sandveld Nature Reserve near Bloemhof along the Vaal River, Free State. The nets were placed in mixed *Vachellia erioloba* and *Ziziphus mucronata* veld. One net was set in a dense bush clump, and when nets were closed at ca. 11:00 for a midday break, we found a White-throated Robin-Chat in it. The bird was ringed and measured, and pictures were taken before it was released.

In nearly 36 years of fieldwork in the Free State and areas along the Vaal River (bird collecting and ringing fieldwork), this species has

never been encountered by DDS in the Free State. This individual, and earlier SABAP2 observations, confirm the occurrence of this species in the Free State and appear to show a gradual westward range expansion of the species along the Vaal River. Colahan's (1989) record was the first record of the species in the Free State at the time, and 35 years later, the species has a reporting rates of 4–10% in the Vredefort region (see <https://sabap2.birdmap.africa/species/582>). The Vredefort area was probably the original 'entry' locality of the species in the Free State, from where it expanded its range to other places along the Vaal River.

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RIGHT A White-throated Robin-Chat showing its white wing bar, white-eye brow and black-tipped orange tail, ringed at Sophiasdal farm, Kareeboomvult, Hoopstad on 24 April 2024.



Interesting sightings
16 April 2024 - 15 June 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 Grey Hornbill - 9 May 2024. One seen flying over Cycad Estate (Derek Engelbrecht).

Bat Hawk - 4 May 2024. One seen at the former tea plantations near Tzaneen (Hein Warmenhoven).

Black Sparrowhawk - 19 May 2024. One seen at the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary (Richter Van Tonder).

Double-banded Sandgrouse - 21 April 2024. Several seen near the confluence of the Nkumpi and Olifants Rivers (Richter Van Tonder).



Bat Hawk © Hein Warmenhoven

European Honey Buzzard - 23 April 2024. One seen in Welgelegen (Bossie Bosman).

Fiery-necked Nightjar - 14 May 2024. One roosting in a garden in Welgelegen (Rupert Harris).

Goliath Heron - 11 May 2024. One seen at Mashashane Dam (Richter Van Tonder).

Grey-headed Gull - 26 April 2024. An immature seen at Cramer Dam, Letaba Estates (Johan Botma).

Jackal Buzzard - 29 May 2024. An adult seen in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

Secretarybird - 11 May 2024. A pair seen in grassland at Witvinger Nature Reserve (Richter Van Tonder).

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater - 21 April 2024. Several seen near Khureng (Richter Van Tonder).

Water Thick-knee - 18 May 2024. One seen at the Dendron STP (Jody De Bruyn).

Yellow-billed Stork - 21 April 2024. Seen near Khureng (Richter Van Tonder).

PASSERINES

Lark-like Bunting - 21 April 2024. Two seen near Percy Fyfe Nature Reserve (Richter Van Tonder).



European Honey Buzzard © Bossie Bosman



Fiery-necked Nightjar © Derek Engelbrecht



Grey-headed Gull © Johan Botma



Lark-like Bunting © Richter Van Tonder

Pearl-breasted Swallow - 21 April 2024
2024. Seen near Khureng (Richter Van Tonder).

Short-clawed Lark - 21 April 2024.
Seen at Byldrift (Richter Van Tonder).

Tinkling Cisticola - 4 May 2024. One
seen and heard calling opposite
PEPPS (Derek Engelbrecht).

BEST OF THE REST LIMPOPO PROVINCE

NON-PASSERINES

African Skimmer - 13 April 2024.
One seen at Pioneer Dam at Mopani
Rest Camp, Kruger National Park
(Faiyaz Vally); 6 May 2024. Four at
Nhlanganini Dam near Letaba Rest
Camp, Kruger National Park (John
Adamson).

Common Tern - 16 May 2024. One
seen at Olifants River Safaris. This
is a new species for the Limpopo
Province (Spencer Gallant).

Pink-backed Pelican - 28 April 2024.
Seen at the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain
near Pienaarsrivier (Pieter Verster).

PASSERINES

Fairy Flycatcher - 7 May 2024. One
seen in Modimolle (Christo Venter).

Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher - 2
June 2024. One seen for at least a
week the on Letaba River at Riverside
farm (Group 91). This is a case of
seasonal altitudinal migration (Jan-
Louis Pretorius).



African Skimmer © John Adamson



Common Tern © Spencer Gallant



Fairy Flycatcher © Wian Van Biljon



Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher
© Jan-Louis Pretorius

Bateleur

Terathopus ecaudatus

The Bateleur occurs in a very large range of habitats,
through open savanna and woodland within
sub-Saharan Africa.

The Bateleur is mainly found at altitudes below 3 000 m.
They are not often seen in tropical forests or
mountain areas, and very rarely occur in
deserts. The Bateleur can forage
extensively over treeless
savannas.

During the breeding
season, Bateleur pairs
prefer closed-canopy
savannah-woodland habitats
including *Acacia* savanna,
mopane and miombo woodlands,
as they like to nest in large,
leafy trees.



Mopane woodland is
dominated by
Colophospermum mopane -
a small, deciduous tree.
The wood is often used for
building and fuel.
This type of woodland
is found particularly in
regions with a
dry climate.



Bateleurs rely on water
sources for drinking and
cleanliness.



The Bateleur spends a large amount
of time on the wing. It uses its keen
eyesight to scan the landscape for prey
while conserving energy by gliding at
low altitudes.

Map showing
Bateleur range
across Africa



Threats to the Bateleur

- **Loss of habitat** attributed to climate change, urbanisation and intensive agriculture.
- **Disturbance of the Bateleur pair** while breeding can result in the nest being abandoned, and the single chick not surviving.
- **Collisions with powerline cables, reservoir drownings and road casualties.**
- **Poisoned carcasses.** Bateleurs are sometimes inadvertently killed when they feed on poisoned carcasses.
- **Bateleurs are sometimes shot by poachers.**
- **The use of pesticides** is contributing to the decline of the Bateleur.



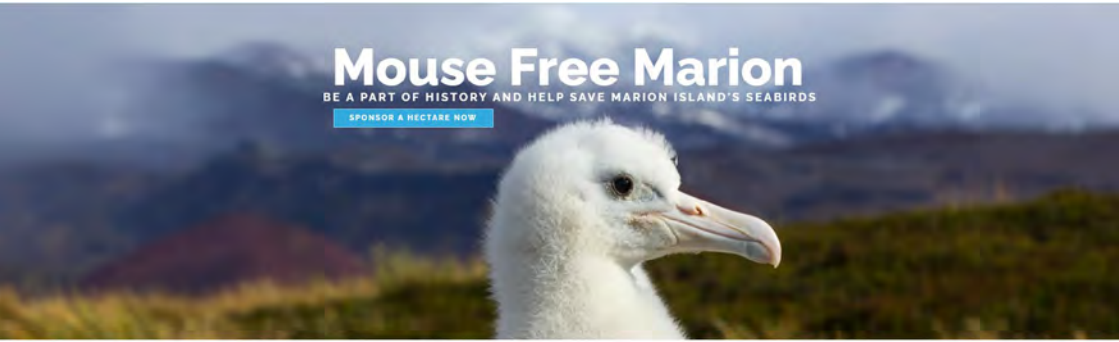
Bateleurs are found in northern and northeastern parts of South Africa, particularly in protected areas like the Kruger National Park.



Mouse Free Marion

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

SPONSOR A HECTARE NOW



environmental affairs
Department
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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.

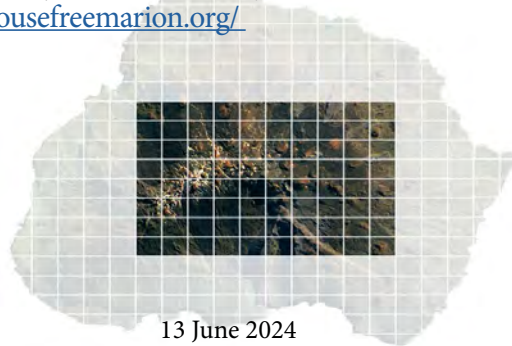
Once completed, Marion Island will be the largest island from which mice have successfully been eradicated.

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/>



Percent of target reached: 25.0%
Sponsored Hectares: 7749 ha
Sponsors: 2052



Percent of target reached: 26.0%
Sponsored Hectares: 8012 ha
Sponsors: 1732

UPCOMING EVENTS



WINTER BREAK

No club meetings for June and July



STAY WARM!



Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 6 August 2024

Time: 18:30

Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting

Date: 3 September 2024

Time: 18:00

Venue: Polokwane Golf Club



Club outing

Where? Moorddrift Dairy
Date: 6 July 2024
Contact: Richter van Tonder
Cell: 082 213 8276

Shopping list: Various waterbirds, including Cape Shoveler, Whiskered Tern, White-backed Duck, and some woodland species such as Bearded Woodpecker, Retz's and White-crested Helmetshrikes, Ant-eating Chat, and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill.



Club outing

Where? Club Ranch - Limpopo River valley
Date: September 2024 (date to be confirmed)
Contact: Richter van Tonder
Cell: 082 213 8276

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.



Club outing

Where? Blouberg Nature Reserve
Date: 3 August 2024
Contact: Richter van Tonder
Cell: 082 213 8276

Shopping list: Various vultures including Hooded, Lappet-faced, Cape, and White-backed, Marabou Stork, Grey Penduline Tit, Retz's Helmetshrike.



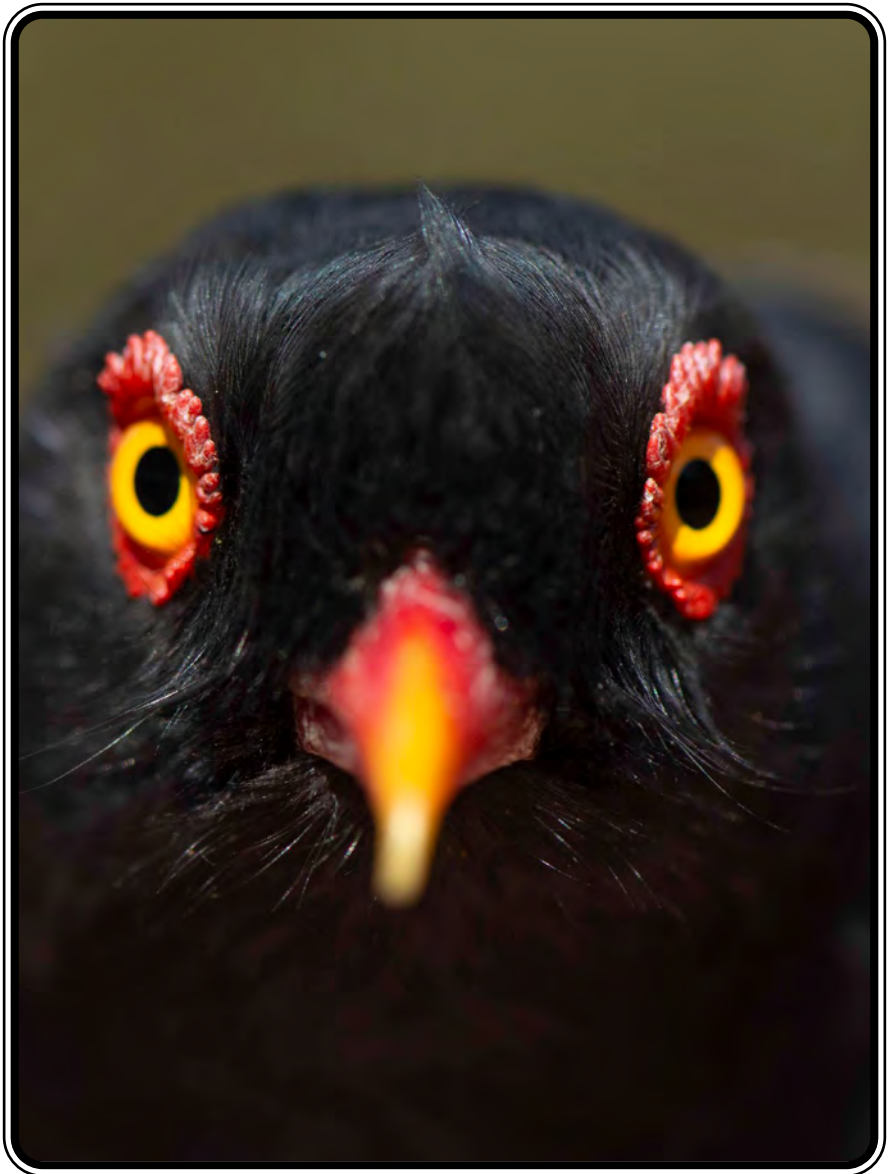
Short-clawed Lark census

Where? Polokwane Game Reserve
Date: 14 September 2024
Contact: Derek Engelbrecht
Cell: 082 200 5277

We will be doing a census of Short-clawed Larks to compare with data collected 20 years ago in 2004. How has habitat changes in the reserve affected the numbers of this species?

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.



Retz's Helmetshrike © Derek Engelbrecht