

THE LARK

Local Birding
Eshowe

Travel
Madagascar

Bat Hawk SOS

A history of BBD

Don't be a chicknapper

African Penguin in trouble

African Skimmer resighting • Black-chested Snake Eagle nesting notes • Angry Birds - Red-winged Starlings • Wing formulas • Weird Palm-nut Vulture behaviour.

The Lark is the newsletter of Birdlife Polokwane and is published bimonthly. It publishes reports of club activities, trip reports, photographic contributions and any natural history notes of birds or events involving birds. Contributions are accepted in English or Afrikaans and are accepted at the discretion of the editors. Non-members are also welcome to contribute, especially if it is of relevance to birds or birding in the Limpopo Province. When submitting images, please submit high resolution images without any borders, frames or signatures.

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

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE:

15 DECEMBER 2024

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

Cover page theme 2024: female birds

COVER Greater Painted-snipe (female)
© Derek Engelbrecht.

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African Penguin in trouble 49

For a lark ...



"Is it a worm? Is it a sna... HA-DA-DA!!!!!!"

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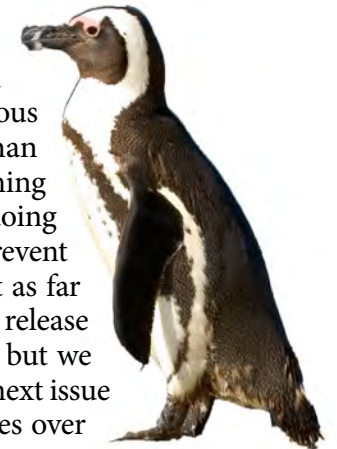
Editors' chirps

Here we are, the last issue of 2024! November will see the last of the migrants arriving, and given that this year's BBD is on the 7th of December, we may get those will-it-be-here-or-won't-it species on the day. Speaking of BBD, we hope everyone's preparation for the BIG day is going well. Please make sure to register on the Birdlife SA website - there are several links in this issue.

To get you in the swing of things, Derek wrote a note about the history of BBD. It makes for some interesting reading, and we hope you will enjoy it. We also continued our theme by including at least one article about travelling beyond the Limpopo Province. In this issue, Daniel Engelbrecht is sharing the first of three articles about his experiences on a birding trip to Madagascar.

We also give feedback about Operation Bat Hawk - the club's efforts to replace a nesting platform for these iconic raptors. On behalf of Birdlife Polokwane, we want to express our sincere gratitude to Limpopo Scaffolding who came to the party - and the Bat Hawks' rescue!

And then there is the African Penguin - please read the article on page 49. This beloved icon is in serious trouble, and we may lose the species in less than 4,000 days. We have no choice but to do everything we can and support the organizations that are doing everything in their power to halt the decline and prevent the extinction of this species. Please distribute it as far and wide as possible. The African Penguin press release was received while we were finalising this issue, but we thought it was too important to let it wait for the next issue and decided to hold some of the Bird Briefs notes over for the first issue of 2025.



Be sure to check out the latest [official bird list](#) for the Limpopo Province.

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

Raelene and Derek

Corrigendum

In *The Lark* 55 (page 75), the photo on page 75 was the wrong photo. A corrected version of *The Lark* 55 can be downloaded [here](#).



Mystical MADAGASCAR

Part 1

TEXT AND PHOTOS Daniel Engelbrecht



Birding Africa

Scaly Ground Roller.

I had the privilege of visiting Madagascar in November last year (2023) on behalf of [Birding Africa](#) – an incredible opportunity with a company with years of tour-leading experience in Madagascar. Part 1 of a three-part series covers my time spent in the Eastern Rainforests in the Andasibe area.

I looked out of the aeroplane window below me, as far as the eye could see, stretched the turquoise-coloured waters of the Indian Ocean. I peered as best I could forward, and on the horizon, a dark landmass gradually came into focus. I had seen this coastline on a few occasions before whilst flying to Mauritius; however, I would set foot on it this time.

Madagascar exudes weirdness; it has been in the same position relative to Africa for between 120-130 million years (dinosaurs went extinct around 65 million years ago) and separated from the Indian subcontinent 84 million years ago. It is the fourth largest island: 90% of its species are endemic, and we don't even know when people arrived on the island, with estimates ranging from 2,000 to 10,000 years ago.

Day 1, 19th November 2023 Arrival in Tana and transfer to Andasibe (Vakona Forest Lodge)

As my flight began its descent towards the capital city,

Antananarivo (or "Tana," as it is somewhat affectionately known), rice paddies and eroded valleys enveloped the undulating landscape. Tana is an exciting place with a distinctly African feel about it. Motorcycles weave between the traffic, zebu (cattle) wade through muddy rice paddies, tall brick houses with steeply angled roof stand in close proximity to one another, and bustling markets spill over onto the streets. After meeting Toky, my driver for my transfer to Andasibe, we set off on the slow five-hour drive to the east.

This is an appropriate time to discuss the important topic of Madagascar's geography. There are many ways of varying complexity and detail to divide the country into biographically distinct areas. However, broadly speaking, there are four main areas. The arid spiny thickets of the southwest, the dry deciduous forests (mainly in the northwest), the central plateau and the evergreen forests of the east. Visiting birders should aim to spend time in all of these distinct areas,



ABOVE Google Earth map of Madagascar showing the regions covered in this three-part series of my birding trip to Madagascar.

and we were now on our way to the most diverse of the lot, the eastern evergreen forests.

As we slogged our way east, I picked up a few widespread species, including the likes of Malagasy Kestrel, Red Fody, Madagascar Wagtail, Malagasy Bulbul, and Souimanga Sunbird. The rice paddies proved popular with waterbirds and quickly delivered Dimorphic, Little, Great, and Western Cattle Egrets, Squacco Heron, Hamerkop and

Red-billed Teal. Progress was slow, and we arrived at the spectacular Vakona Forest Lodge an hour after sunset. Over dinner, I met up with my travel companions for the next few days: Gimme, a South African-born and Brisbane-based avid



ABOVE Typical scenery in rural Madagascar - rice paddies are everywhere.



LEFT One of my first lifers of the trip - the abundant Malagasy Bulbul.

world birder and Reja, one of the most experienced birding guides in Madagascar and an absolute gem of a person. After a busy travel day, I hit the sack with the prospect of thrilling birding to follow.

Day 2, 20th November 2023 Mantadia National Park

I set my alarm for before dawn as I simply could not bear wasting a second of daylight. As I closed the door to my delightful cottage, a flock of raucous Greater Vasa Parrots flew past in the misty

conditions. The lodge grounds were alive with birds, and I added the diminutive Green Jery (a member of the *Cisticola* family), the gorgeous black-and-white morph of Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Malagasy Coucal, Malagasy White-eye, Madagascar Cuckoo, and large numbers of Mascarene Martins. The forest would randomly irrupt with the haunting calls of vocalising Indri (the largest extant lemur species), and I got my eyes on Diademed Sifaka – the first lemur of the trip.

Today, we were going to tackle the magical Mantadia National Park, 155 km² of pristine evergreen forest. We drove along a bumpy gravel track for just under an hour before our excellent local guide, Christopher, ordered the driver to stop. As we stepped out of the car, the forest was reverberating with life. A bird party contained the likes of Common *Newtonia* (a genus of rather dull-looking vangas), Crested Drongo, Common and Stripe-throated Jery, Madagascar Magpie-Robin, Forest Fody, and the colourful *Nelicourvi* Weaver. Whilst we enjoyed the party, Christopher started making a "*bwuupp*" sound, hoping to elicit a response from one of the island's most iconic birds.



OPPOSITE ABOVE A gorgeous Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher in the lodge grounds at Vakona.

OPPOSITE BELOW Dense forests can make birding tricky at times.

BELOW Simply iconic! The first ground roller of the trip: Pitta-like Ground Roller.

We waited a while and then heard a distant response, only a single note at a time, followed by a long pause. We played this cat-and-mouse game, and the sound gradually grew closer. We scanned through the dense forest and Christopher calmly said, "Pitta-like Ground Roller," there, less than five meters from us, sat a pair of these gorgeous jewels of the forest. The ground rollers are one of five endemic bird families to Madagascar and the surrounding islands, the others being the mesites, Cuckoo-roller, Malagasy warblers, and the asities. I was over the moon.





ABOVE Our only Short-legged Ground Roller for the trip, what a bird!

We continued driving along and stopping regularly whenever we found activity. This produced sightings of Malagasy Kingfisher, Madagascar Cuckooshrike, the jet-black male Velvet Asity, the other-worldly Cuckoo-Roller, and a soaring Frances's Sparrowhawk. We parked at the start of the "Circuit Eulophia" trail and set off on foot into the forest. The first bird we saw was an immediate contender for bird of the day: a Madagascar Ibis walked briskly on the forest floor and disappeared as quickly as it came into view. The birding was spectacular, and mixed species flocks contained the likes of Tylas, Red-tailed, White-

headed, Madagascar Blue and Nuthatch Vangas (what a bird!), Ward's Flycatcher (a monarch flycatcher-like vanga), members of the Malagasy warbler family, Bernieridae, including, Wedge-tailed Jery, Rand's Warbler, and Spectacled Tetraka, in addition to many of the abovementioned species.

The true stand-out species for me, however, were the ground rollers, and we enjoyed superb views of Scaly Ground Roller feeding a fledgeling (see opening



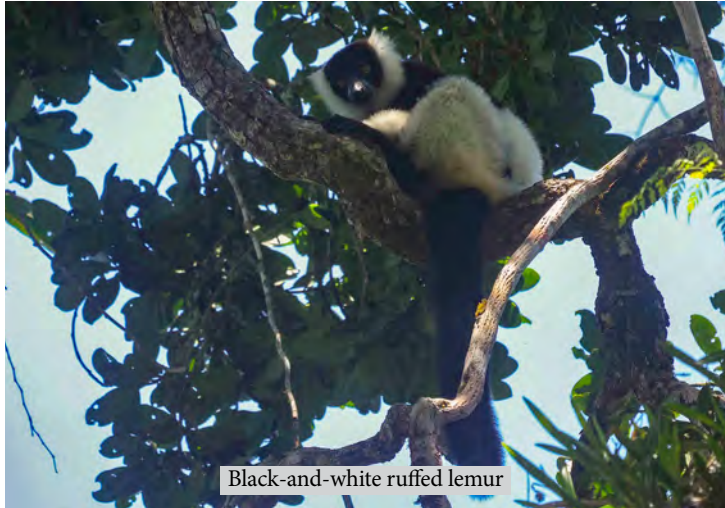
ABOVE Henst's Goshawk is an impressive bird.

spread of this article, page 5) and what turned out to be our only Short-legged Ground Roller for the trip! Crossley's Vanga is a bizarre, babbler-looking bird, and we had frame-filling views almost at arm's reach, whilst Madagascar Blue Pigeons were more reclusive, only perching high up in the canopy.

A brief stop at a pond in a forest clearing delivered Madagascar Swamp Warbler, Olive Bee-eater, Broad-billed Roller, Madagascar Stonechat, and a pair of Madagascar Spinetails. Mammals were also well represented over the course of the morning, and we saw the large Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur,

Red-bellied Lemur, Diademed Sifaka, and the iconic Indri, as well as the weird-looking Lowland Streaked Tenrec. After lunch in the field, we clambered through the forest up a steep hillside to see the impressive Henst's Goshawk at its nest – a breathtaking experience – literally and figuratively!

OVERLEAF A collage of some of the other weird and wonderful Malagasy wildlife we encountered.



Black-and-white ruffed lemur



Brown leaf chameleon



Indri



Central bright-eyed frog



Crossley's dwarf lemur



Goodman's mouse-lemur



Lowland streaked Tenrec



Parson's chameleon (adult)

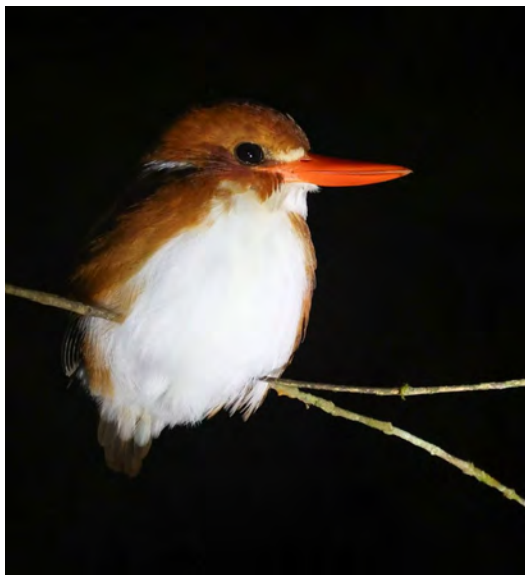


Parson's chameleon (juvenile)

On our way out, we stopped at a wetland that yielded Madagascar Mannikin, Malagasy Green Sunbird, and the main target, Madagascar Rail, which we saw unbelievably well. After having a short break back at the lodge, we made our way towards the V.O.I.M.M.A Community Reserve for a night walk.

We saw good numbers of frogs and chameleons, and the diminutive Goodman's Mouse Lemurs kept us entertained. The calls of Rainforest Scops Owls were ever present, and we had terrific views of White-throated Rail and Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher at night. We

arrived back at Vakona in time for dinner after an incredible first full day out!



ABOVE Our best views of the adorable Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher came on a night walk through the forest.

LEFT We were lucky to get great views of Madagascar Rail.

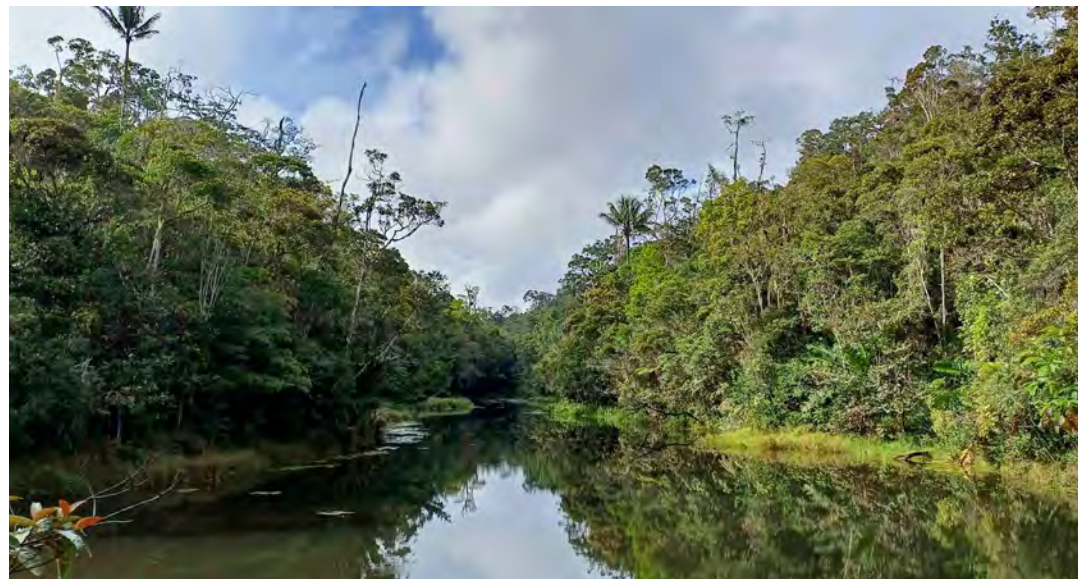


Day 3, 21st November 2023 Analamazoatra Reserve

We were up again before dawn, this time heading back along the main access road through the rural town of Perinet to Analamazoatra Reserve. This large protected forest is one of the more accessible sites in the area and is seemingly popular with tourists hoping to see Indri - and we had several encounters Indri here.

Bulbul, Crested Drongo, and the first Madagascar Starling (one of only two sightings on the entire trip). The forest surrounding the lake delivered the spectacular Blue Coua, and we heard both Madagascar Flufftail and Henst's Goshawk in this area.

Christopher led us to one of his stakeouts for Rufous-headed Ground Roller, and after an extensive game of cat-and-mouse, the bird finally gave itself up for brief yet



ABOVE Analamazoatra Reserve is a delightful place.

The park boasts an impressive trail network and appears to be under good management. We started on the main trail into the forest and soon found ourselves working through the first mixed species flock, which contained the likes of Chabert and Red-tailed Vanga, Malagasy

satisfactory views. I can only equate that individual's behaviour to that of a flufftail – a real skulker. Shortly afterwards, we had improved views



ABOVE Collared Nightjar brooding a chick, a poorly known species with no recorded vocalisations.

of a pair of Pitta-like Ground Rollers, which poured themselves out for us, and we bagged White-throated Oxylabes, a bird with almost arcane skulking abilities. The activity was constant yet manageable throughout the morning, and we added another two excellent birds, Madagascar Forest Rail and Collared Nightjar, the latter of which was on a day roost. The nightjar is exceptionally poorly known; in fact, there are no recorded vocalisations for the species!

Some of the more common species recorded included the

ever-present Souimanga Sunbird, Green and Stripe-throated Jery, Rand's Warbler, Malagasy White-eye, Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher, Malagasy Brush Warbler and Madagascar Magpie-Robin. Cuckoo-rollers were vocal but proved challenging to see as they performed their aerial displays above

the canopy. In the mammal department, we had great views again of Indri and our first Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur. However, our main target here, Red-breasted Coua, had eluded us. We returned to Vakona for lunch, making a quick stop along the way to see a roosting Rainforest Scops Owl, and we had a flyover of Madagascar Buzzard, too.

After lunch and a siesta, we headed back to Analamazoatra Reserve. The activity had died down considerably, and the only noteworthy sighting was another obliging Crossley's Vanga. We made a final stop on the way back at a stand of pine trees, a known stakeout for Madagascar Owl, and thankfully, the birds played along nicely. We had an early night as we would be leaving well before dawn the following day to visit one of the lesser-known forests in the area.

RIGHT Yes, it's there! Look carefully to see this leaf-toed gecko.





LEFT Nelicourvi Weavers were common during our time in the Andasibe area.

BELOW A Madagascar Owl at its roost.



Day 4, 22nd November 2023 Iaroka Forest

ABOVE Iaroka Forest .

Our morning started at 4:00 am as an arduous two-hour drive on poor dirt roads lay ahead of us. We would be spending the day hiking in Iaroka Forest, an area that is seldom visited on birding tours to the country and that occasionally delivers scarce species like Helmet and Bernier's Vanga. As the sun began to rise, a Madagascar Nightjar flushed from the road. We wound up the muddy track and stopped at the summit near the start of the trail. The view was awe-inspiring; the pristine forest stretched as far as the eye could see, and clouds drifted by, seemingly through the canopy. "Cryptic Warbler", Christopher

said in his typical calm tone. High in the canopy sat a tiny warbler-like tetraka, a species only discovered as recently as 1992!

The hike was far more intense than anticipated; the trails were poorly maintained, slippery, and steep. Mixed species flocks yielded our first Dark Newtonia, Forest Rock Thrush, the attractive Common Sunbird-Asity, and many of the species we had seen over the past few days. We finally managed to get visuals of a showy male Madagascar Flufftail, enjoyed several Blue Couas and had our only Madagascar Sparrowhawk for the trip, shortly followed by a Madagascar Harrier-



ABOVE A Forest Rock Thrush sitting motionless in the canopy.



LEFT The Newtonias are comparatively dull-looking vangas, this is the Dark Newtonia.

Hawk. Unfortunately, we failed to see either of the significant vanga targets here; however, both are easier on the Masoala Peninsula in the country's far northeast. Our final addition for the day was

a skulking Red-fronted Coua that refused to show for more than a split second at a time. We returned to Vakona at sunset and after walking an intense 21 km.

Day 5, 23rd November 2023 Analamazoatra Reserve

Today was to be our last full day birding the Andasibe area. We were out early again with one target in mind: the elusive Red-breasted Coua. We rolled into Analamazoatra Reserve, and Christopher led the way at a blistering pace through the

forest. The strategy for this bird was simply to 'trawl' by playing the call and walking through the forest in the hopes of enticing a response. Two hours had passed, and although we had seen some good birds, I could feel the dip sinking in. We had another view of Henst's Goshawk shortly, followed by our second Nuthatch Vanga for the trip, along with Rand's Warbler, Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher and Nelicourvi Weaver.

BELOW A showy Crossley's Vanga.





That's about as good as it got with the secretive Red-breasted Coua.



ABOVE Despite the cracking wildlife on offer, deforestation is evident in many parts and is a stark reminder of how precarious the survival of Madagascar's wildlife is.

After three hours, Christopher and Reja were both looking despondent, and just then, we heard it, the loud "teeee oooooo" call of the coua! Christopher almost threw himself down the muddy forested hillside, and we all followed him.

At one point, we were crawling on all fours to make our way up a steep embankment as we pursued the call. We stopped, and Christopher played the call again. Suddenly, there it was, a Red-breasted Coua, standing concealed in the dense forest floor vegetation. We were ecstatic; our hard work had paid off. As this was our last realistic target for the area, we returned to Vakona for lunch and spent a relaxed afternoon strolling through the lodge grounds, where we had great views of Malagasy Coucal, Cuckoo Roller and

hundreds of Mascarene Martins. At night, we returned to V.O.I.M.M.A Community Reserve for a night walk, which once again yielded an assortment of frogs, a leaf-tailed gecko and two lemurs, Goodman's Mouse Lemur and a night lemur. The only birds encountered included a calling Rainforest Scops Owl and another White-throated Rail.

Join me in Part 2 as I travel to the spiny forests of the southwest and the search for one of Madagascar's most range-restricted birds.

Author e-mail: danielengelbrecht101@gmail.com

Bat Hawk SOS



TEXT AND PHOTOS Derek Engelbrecht

Many birdwatchers from across the world have come to see the Bat Hawks at Agatha near Tzaneen in the Limpopo Province. There are only a few places in Africa where this rare bird of prey can reliably be seen, and Agatha is one of those. The Bat Hawk is an iconic species that is nowhere common throughout its range. They can be tough to find if you don't know where they roost as individuals typically roost high up amongst the dense leafy parts of tall trees during the day. At dusk, however, they do their common name justice as they exchange their slumberous daytime appearance and transform into a highly agile aerial pursuer of bats and, if the opportunity presents itself, small birds. It has a relatively small window of opportunity for foraging during the twilight hours of dusk and dawn, but its huge gape allows it to hastily swallow its prey in flight before homing onto its next target.

Given their highly specialised hunting behaviour, these birds occur naturally at very low densities and have a highly localised distribution, even in suitable habitats. Although Bat Hawks are masters of acrobatic flight, they have a reputation for being notoriously

poor nest builders. They typically nest in tall gum trees where they place their flimsy nests high up (15–25 m) in a horizontal fork on a smooth branch of a gum tree (or other similar smooth-barked tree). Unfortunately, their nests are inherently unstable on the smooth branches and are easily dislodged during high winds or storms, resulting in breeding failure. To help improve their breeding success, generations of passionate birders have, since the 1960s, provided artificial nest platforms to provide some stability for their nests.

The last artificial nest platform at Agatha was installed in 2010, and this pair used it successfully since then. Unfortunately, the branch on which the nest platform was secured came crashing down early in 2024. Local bird guide David Letsoalo alerted the local birding community to this. Birdlife Polokwane initiated a fundraising campaign to install a new nest platform. Fortunately, Heinrich and Abrie Muller of [Limpopo Scaffolding](#) came to the party. They offered their expertise and a 25 m cherry picker to enable us to reach the necessary heights to secure a new artificial nest platform. The nesting platform was donated by Anton Hough of [NTY Steel Works](#) in Polokwane.



The race was on to have the platform installed before they started nesting, usually in September. On the 3rd of September 2024, the team set off

OPPOSITE This is how things were done in the late 1960s. The first nest platform at Agatha was installed in 1968, by the late well-known local Tzaneen birder, Archie van Reenen, David Steyn, and Peter Williams. Archie's 10-year-old son, Frank, was hoisted up a tree in a mealie bag to install the nest platform!

Source: Van Reenen, A. (2004). For the love of birds. Loretto Farm Publications, Tzaneen.



ABOVE The team of Limpopo Scaffolding sending Raymond Lefuka up to install a nest platform.

from Polokwane to Agatha to install the new nesting platform. We were greeted by the resident pair performing a courtship display in flight, so we knew we had to get the job done on the day as breeding seemed to be imminent. After scouting the available trees for a suitable branch, Heinrich and Abrie got their gear in position. Shortly after that, Raymond Lefuka, also



ABOVE The pair seemed unperturbed by the activity below them, occasionally giving the impression they are doing quality control.



ABOVE Mission accomplished. Raymond gives us the thumbs up that the new nest platform is installed.



ABOVE To encourage the Bat Hawks to accept the nest platform, we left a nuptial gift of sticks and green leaves to set them off.

from Limpopo Scaffolding, got into the basket and ascended to the chosen branch. The resident pair of Bat Hawks was unperturbed by the activity and remained perched in the same tree, warily watching the installation of the new nest platform. To entice the pair to use the nest platform, Raymond left a “nuptial gift” of twigs and leaves to attract the pair to the nest. No sooner was the nest platform

installed than one of the individuals flew by. As it passed the nest, I could see it turning its head to look at the new nest. All we can do now is cross our fingers and hope the birds will accept their new platform.

Birdlife Polokwane would like to thank everyone who donated money towards this very worthy project. Also, a special thanks goes to David Letsoalo and his numerous contacts for their contributions.

Finally, this conservation project would not have been possible without the assistance of Limpopo Scaffolding, who kindly donated their equipment to enable us to install the new nest platform.

Author e-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

BELOW Thank you Heinrich and Abrie Muller and Raymond Lefuka.



Eshowe

klub naweek

Leonie Kellerman



Swartberglyster (Boulder Chat) © Richter van Tonder.

In begin Oktober het 'n groepie van ons die aaklige pad getrotseer om die Swartberglyster (Boulder Chat) op die plaas Eshowe naby Platjan te gaan soek. Op die plaas is 'n klompie granietskoppies met los klippe en genoeg plantegroei wat die perfekte habitat is vir die voëls.

Ons het in A raam huisies gebly onder reuse koeldebome met 'n gesamentlike lapa wat teen een van die koppies is. Ons het net uitgepak en kameras en verkykers uitgehaal toe sien ons die Swartberglyster sommer in die kamp. Ewe tuis! Ek kon hom afmerk as n "lifer" vir my. Ons het toe nog twee raakgehoop by van die ander koppies. Vrydagaand het almal saamgebraai en Saterdagoggend vroeg het elkeen sy eie koers gegaan en voëls afgetik. So teen 9 uur het ons almal padgevat na die walle van die Limpopo Rivier waar ons wors gebraai het vir worsbroodjies. Olifante in Botswana het wei-wei verby geloop. Die olifante hier het ongelooflike skade aan die oewerbos veroorsaak want kos is maar skaars weg van die rivier hierdie tyd van die jaar.

Saterdagmiddag het ons gery na 'n nabygeleë buurplaas waar verskeie groot damme watervoëls trek. Saterdagdaand is ons bederf met potjiekos en van die groep het



Rooibeklyster © Jody de Bruyn.



Vaalstreepkoppie © Jody de Bruyn.



Witpenswindswael © Jody de Bruyn.



Kardinaalspeg © Sandrie de Wet.



Swartbekkelaar © Jody de Bruyn.



Witkeeljanfrederik © Sandrie de Wet.

nagvoëls gaan soek. Sondagoggend was almal vroeg uit die vere en het vir oulaas in en om die kamp geloop om nog so laaste paar voëltjies te soek.

Vir die mense wat nie kon saam gaan nie ... julle het baie gemis. Eshowe is 'n juweeltjie in die dorre Bosveld, en die Swartberglyster wat rusting in die kamp rondbeweeg op soek na kos en wat min gepla is met mense in die kamp is die kersie op die koek.

Outeur se e-pos: jakkalsdraf@yahoo.com

A Brief History of BBD

1985

1986 • 1987

1988 • 1989

1990 • 1991 • 1992

1993 • 1994 • 1995

1996 • 1997 • 1998 • 1999

2000 • 2001 • 2002 • 2003

2004 • 2005 • 2006 • 2007

2008 • 2009 • 2010 • 2011 • 2012

2013 • 2014 • 2015 • 2016 • 2017

2018 • 2019 • 2020 • 2021 • 2022

2023

Derek Engelbrecht

With the 2024 edition of BBD fast approaching, I thought it would be a good idea to share some of the history of the highlight on the annual birding calendar with our readers. To the newer birders, I'll take you to when this all started, to the old-timers (not necessarily in age!) where we've been, and to all of you, where we are now. I hope that by reading this note, you'll be inspired to write your own story in the history of BBD – the mud, sweat, and tears beers of the day, your fortune or misfortune, or how you enjoyed the day with like-minded friends. BBD has it all!

I did my best to glean as much as possible from birding magazines and bird club newsletters, but I couldn't trace any details of the winners for 1995. I hope that some of the readers can fill in these gaps.

The Early Days

The first official Birding Big Day (BBD) was held in 1985. Back then, BBD was held on the second Saturday of November, almost a month earlier than now. The first event saw 24 teams participate (12 from the then Transvaal, six from KwaZulu-Natal, three from the Free State, two from Eswatini, and one from the Eastern Cape). In

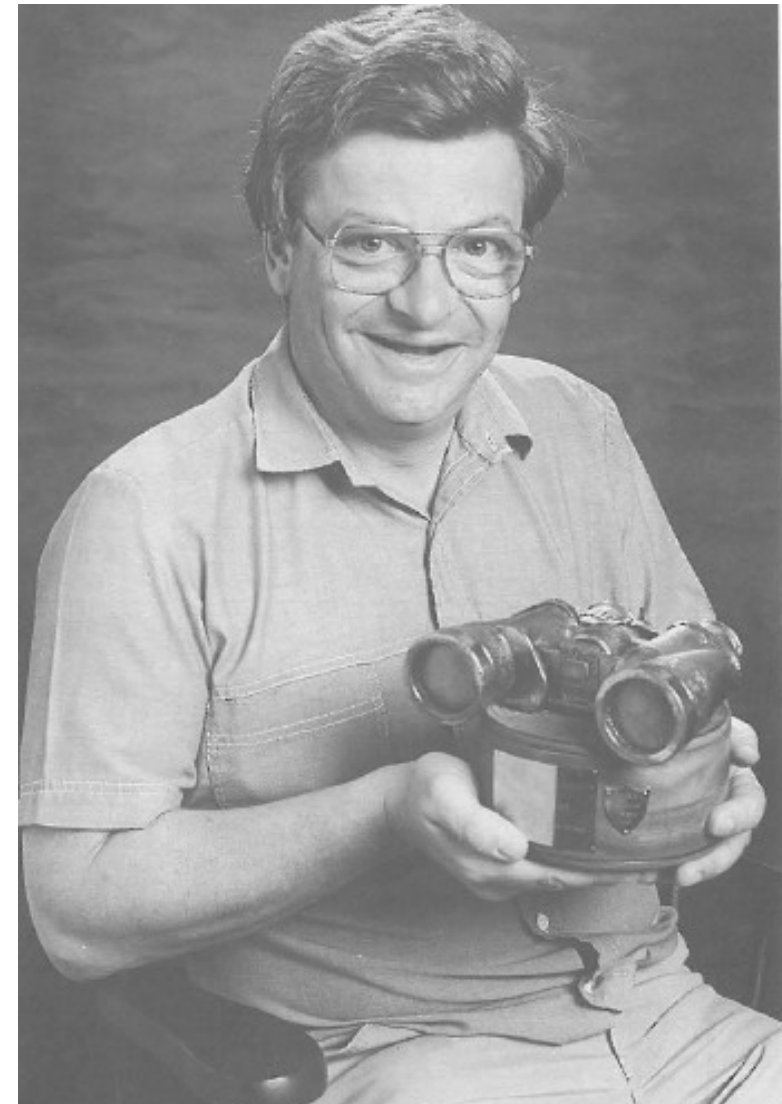
the editorial of *Bokmakierie* 38(1), where feedback was given about the first BBD, the editor wrote: "The winners (naturally) came from Natal ...", which I thought was a bit cheeky as later years would reveal the "truth". As they say in Afrikaans: "Hulle het nie geweet wat ons weet nie". The winning total of the day was 232 species, set by Digby Cyrus, Geoff Nichols, and Nigel Robson, using Empangeni as their base. Only two teams broke the 200 species milestone on the day.

This winning total may seem paltry compared to scores reached nowadays, but let's give these BBD pioneers the credit they deserve. Regional field guides were few and far between and of inferior quality to the rich choices and high-quality field guides and apps we have now. Most birders used their trusted Roberts Birds of Southern Africa as a field guide! Your choices were also limited for sound recordings, and they were all on cassette tapes. Those who remember the cassette recorders and tapes and how you had to fast forward and rewind until you got to your bird would appreciate the frustrations. No cell phones, no online databases to do your planning, no "send me a pin". No digital camera to take a quick

photo to verify a sighting or some plumage features – you took a picture, hoped your exposure was correct, and then took it to a photo studio for development, which could take a few days. The success of these guys was in their collective field experience of observing birds closely to understand their behaviour, habitat requirements, activity patterns, etc. Those guys were good!

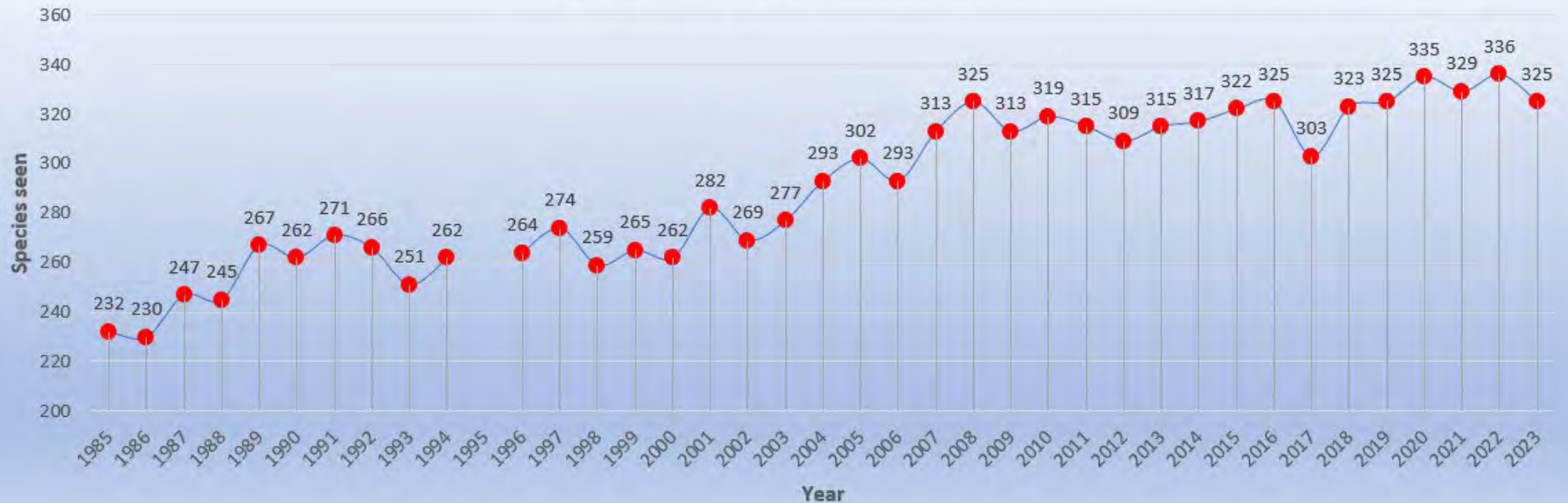
Let's not forget that BBD is a fundraising event, and the first BBD raised R3,500, i.e., about R 56,000 in today's terms, and the money was used for the Yellow-billed Oxpecker conservation project.

Participation grew, and winning totals increased steadily over the first few years. The year



ABOVE Nigel Robson holding the winners' trophy - a pair of mounted binoculars - as overall winners of the first BBD held in 1985. Nigel's team mates were Digby Cyrus and Geoff Nichols (Source: *Bokmakierie* 38(1) (1986)).

BBD winning totals: 1985-2023



1988 saw eight teams surpass the 200 species mark, but between 1989 and 2000, the winning totals plateaued around the 260 species mark.

Between 1985 and 2000, teams from KwaZulu-Natal dominated BBD – 11 of the first 15 events (I don't have data for 1995) were won by KZN teams, one was won by a Mpumalanga-based team (1988), and there was one tie between KZN and Mpumalanga (in 1993). The tie was an interesting affair as both teams finished their campaign on 251 species. Still, the team

from Mpumalanga were declared the overall winner based on a handicap system, i.e., the number of species seen versus the number of species possible in that radius. This meant Mpumalanga's Pistas Coots (53.3%) beat the Zululand Road Runners (51.4%).

But the end of the 20th Century also saw a change in guard – the northern provinces had awakened, and with that, the reign of KZN as the BBD kings had ended. The signs were there in 1997 when the late Joe Grosel's Limpopo-based team, the Utopian Snipers (239 species),

sprung a surprise joint second place with the Chobe Chalkers, both teams some distance behind the winners, Adam Riley's No Tern Unstoned (274 species) from KZN.

The “watershed moment”

The year 1998 marked the last year that a KZN-based team was the outright BBD victors (they did share it with the Mpumalanga-based team, the Honeyguides [Gus and Michael Mills, and Paul Funston] in 2002. Gauteng won their first of two BBD titles in 1999, Etienne Marais' Raiders of

the Lost Lark (265 species). In my opinion, BBD 1999 was a seismic event in the history of South Africa's BBD. KZN was always seen as the Holy Grail for big birding totals, but a Gauteng-based team showed them a clean pair of heels. The hounds were released, and over the next few years, between 1999 and 2005, Limpopo (two victories and a tie), Gauteng (two victories), Mpumalanga (one victory and two ties), and KZN (one tie) battled it out for overall winners. This period was chaotic, given the domination of KZN teams in the first 15 years.

Still, the competition sparked an increasingly more “professional” approach, resulting in a leap in the winning total numbers. In 1999, a total in the 260s would see you as the overall winner, but six years later, you’d find it hard to get a place on the podium.

Another momentous occasion happened in 2005 – Etienne’s Raiders of the Lost Lark became the first BBD team to break the 300 species milestone, winning with 302 species, while Joe’s team, which had now morphed into the Rubber Ducks, ended second with a respectable, but oh so frustrating, 299 species! But the cat was amongst the pigeons, and suddenly, teams realised 300 species was the new benchmark. In 2008, two teams

surpassed the 300 species mark; in 2009, three teams did it.

Total domination

After the tumultuous years of 1999 – 2005, there followed a period of relative stability with Limpopo-based teams dominating the next decade or so until 2016 (9 of 11 BBD titles), only interrupted by two consecutive victories by Mpumalanga-based teams in 2012 and 2013. It is also worth noting that 2006 was the last time the overall winners scored a sub-300 total on BBD.

Credit must go to Joe Grosel, whose various teams (Familiar Chaps and Zonke iNyoni) led the charge up in the Limpopo Province between 2006 and 2016. He took BBD

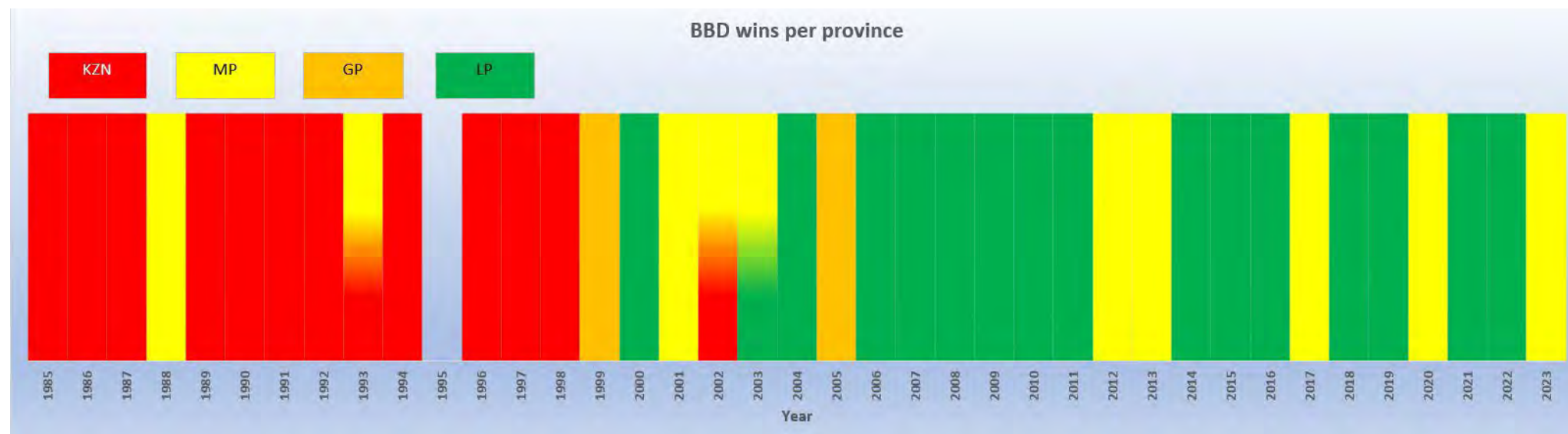
planning to another level, and the results showed that. He meticulously planned the legendary Polokwane Plateau-Woodbush-Lowveld route, which is still used by many teams to this day. It is probably the route that yielded the most BBD winners to date. Joe’s team, Zonke iNyoni, became the team that took BBD to unprecedented levels, regularly breaking the 320 species mark. Their accolades are too many to mention, but they set and broke their own BBD records multiple times and inspired a generation of birders. Legends!

A new (dis)order

Since 2017, there’s been a tough tussle between Limpopo- and Mpumalanga-based teams, and

in the last seven editions of BBD, Limpopo won four titles and Mpumalanga three. Also, the previous seven editions saw six different teams winning! It also saw two new BBD records. In 2020, the Raven Dikkops, a Mpumalanga-based team, smashed the previous record of 325 by an incredible 10 species, setting the new bar at 335 species! What’s more, the team that finished second, Joe’s Zonke iNyoni, also broke the previous record and set a new provincial record for the Limpopo Province at 329 species. An incredible seven teams surpassed the 300-species mark on the day!

The following year, the crown princes for many years, Polokwane team Wat-Kyk-Jy (Jody de Bruyn,



Marcia, Richter, and Rowan van Tonder), showed 2020 wasn't a once-off event, ending up as victors with 329 species. It is worth noting that six teams joined Club 300 on BBD 2021.

BBD 2022 saw yet another BBD total species record! Limpopo-based e-Birders (Daniel and Derek Engelbrecht and Selwyn Rautenbach) clipped the 2020 BBD record by one species after initially having resigned themselves to a draw with the record of 335 species set by the Raven Dikkops but then having a chance encounter with an African Grass Owl on their way home. Once again, six teams cracked the 300 species milestone.

In 2023, team Hamerkop (Ehren and Johan Eksteen, Lourens Grobler and Duncan McKenzie) from Mpumalanga, the 2017 winners with 303 species, returned once again to the top step with 325 species, but Limpopo-based teams occupied the second and third places.

To summarise, the Limpopo Province leads the way with 15 titles, KZN with 11, Mpumalanga with 7, Gauteng with 2, and there

were 3 ties. Mpumalanga has the distinction of having been involved in all three.

This brief overview of the history of BBD shows how far we have come as a birding community. This year, 2024, will see the 40th running of the BBD event. What started as a small event with 24 teams in the first BBD in 1985 has grown to an incredible 349 teams participating in 2023. Also, since the first winning total of 232 species in 1985, the BBD record has grown by more than 100 species! Nowadays, a score of 320 is considered par if you want to be in the reckoning for the title of overall winner.

Whether you're in it for the numbers or records or simply enjoying the day out watching birds for what they are with some friends, BBD is a special event, and if you haven't done it yet, go for it and add your story to the rich history of South Africa's BBD. It is a heap of fun, and you'll make memories that will last you a lifetime. Good luck, everyone – we might see some of you on the road on the 7th of December.

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Birding Big Day 2024 - 7 December 2024

BirdLife South Africa's 40th Birding Big Day (BBD) will take place on Saturday 7 December 2024. Click on the logo to find more information on how you can participate.





Lonely Penguin © Andries Janse Van Rensburg

African Penguin newly classified as ‘critically endangered’ as breeding pairs fall below 10,000

The [International Union for Conservation of Nature \[IUCN\]](#) has uplisted the African Penguin from Endangered to Critically Endangered, underscoring the species' extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

The bird has already lost 97% of its population and could be extinct in less than 4,000 days if nothing changes.

Among other threats, commercial purse-seine fishing is competing with penguins for sardines and anchovies, their main source of food, leaving them hungry and making it harder to breed.

Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds [[SANCCOB](#)] and [BirdLife South Africa](#) have initiated landmark litigation against the South African government to enforce greater protection of this species.

The public can advocate for the African Penguin by signing an OnlyOne petition [here](#), and watch a campaign video narrated by ocean conservationist, Zandi Ndhlovu [here](#).

The African Penguin, with its distinctive black-and-white tuxedo and playful nature, is a cherished symbol in South Africa and around the world. Yet despite its popularity, the species has been uplisted to Critically Endangered by the IUCN, revealing it is one step away from becoming extinct in the wild. The bird is the first penguin species (of the 18 species globally) to meet the criteria for this classification.

SANCCOB and BirdLife South Africa, with the support of ocean conservation charity [Blue Marine](#), are urging the South African government and the international community to take immediate action to save the African Penguin.

Faced with numerous threats, a primary cause of the African Penguin's decline is a lack of available food due to climate change, made worse by competition from commercial fishing around its breeding colonies, which impacts the species' survival and breeding success. While there are existing no-take zones where commercial fishing is prohibited to help the penguins better access the fish they feed on, primarily sardines and anchovies, [research](#) by seabird scientists has demonstrated that these zones are currently inadequate for penguin conservation.

The Red List rings the alarm louder for urgent action

The IUCN Red List is the international “Gold Standard” tool for measuring species extinction risk; to date, 163,040 species have been assessed, of which 45,321 are threatened with extinction.

SANCCOB, BirdLife South Africa, and Blue Marine have long been raising the alarm for better protection of the African Penguin. However, the reclassification to Critically Endangered marks a crucial juncture in the species' future. While the Red List indicates the detrimental status of global biodiversity, it also points towards an urgent need for solutions, and the prioritisation of collaborative, cross-sector action before it's too late.

The current commercial fishery no-take zones in South Africa surround six African Penguin colonies that represent 76% of the global African Penguin population. Yet research finds that these zones fail to sufficiently protect important feeding areas for the penguins, forcing them to compete with commercial fisheries for food.

Scientists such as BirdLife South Africa's Dr Alistair McInnes and the University of Exeter's Dr Richard Sherley recommend expanded and achievable no-take zones that provide more substantial benefits to penguins

without causing disproportionately high costs to the purse-seine fishing industry.

International support is needed

SANCCOB and BirdLife South Africa have united to take legal action to enforce greater protection of the species. Launched by the [Biodiversity Law Centre](#) earlier this year, the two non-profit organisations have instituted a case against the office of the South African Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, to challenge the Minister’s “biologically meaningless” island closures to purse-seine fishing around key African Penguin colonies.

The legal action seeks to substitute the existing commercial fishery no-take zones with alternative zones designed using an internationally-recognised process that will better align them to the African Penguins’ important feeding areas, while minimising the impacts on the purse-seine fishing industry.

Meanwhile, the international community can help push governments to enact the changes needed to safeguard the species by [signing the OnlyOne petition](#) created by SANCCOB, BirdLife South Africa and Blue Marine.

The African Penguin also contributes to ecotourism and the local economy. A new [socio-economic report](#) found the total value of Boulders penguin colony and all other penguin colonies was estimated to be in the considerable range of R613–2,702 million per year.



Nicky Stander, Head of Conservation, SANCCOB said “*Seeing a 97% loss in African Penguin populations is devastating and knowing they are now officially ‘Critically Endangered’ is a sobering thought. In just over a decade, they could no longer exist, which not only has an impact on our marine ecosystem, but also on South Africa’s economy and ecotourism. These animals are a key indicator of the wider ecological health of our ocean and are beloved worldwide. We cannot wait any longer for change.*”

Dr Richard Sherley, Senior Lecturer, Ecology and Conservation, University of Exeter states “*The African Penguin’s uplisting to Critically Endangered highlights a much bigger problem with the health of our environment. Despite being well-known and studied, these penguins are still facing extinction, showing just how severe the damage to our ecosystems has become. If a species as iconic as the African Penguin is struggling to survive, it raises the question of how many other species are disappearing without us even noticing. We need to act now—not just for penguins, but to protect the broader biodiversity that is crucial for the planet’s future.*”

Alistair McInnes, Seabird Conservation Programme Manager, BirdLife South Africa points out that “*The availability of sardine and anchovy is the key driver of the African Penguin population and the sustainable management of purse-seine fishing, such as the implementation of effective no-take zones around the last remaining large colonies, is a critical intervention to help conserve this species. If we don’t act timeously we could lose Africa’s only penguin species within our lifetime.*”

Jo Coumbe, Communications Director, Blue Marine said “*The plight of the African Penguin, now critically endangered, is heartbreaking. Losing the bird isn’t just about losing a species, it’s a stark warning of the tragic impacts on biodiversity and the health of our ocean.*”



I found a baby bird ... now what?

Move or shepherd it to a safe location.

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

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

Yes

No

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

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

Is the bird bleeding or visibly injured?
Laboured breathing; weeziness when breathing; appearing sleepy/drowsy; puffed-up feathers; flopping

No

Yes

What does it look like?

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

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

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



Can you see the nest?

Yes

No

Is it in immediate danger?

Yes

No

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

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

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

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

ROBERTS 8

IS ONLINE
AND FREE
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA



Photo: Holger Teichmann/Macaulay Library

ROBERTS 8 WISH LIST

Derek Engelbrecht
roberts8revision@gmail.com

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.

Amur Falcon

- photos showing diet
- large numbers at a roost

Red-winged Starling

- typical habitat.

Spotted Ground Thrush

Photos of

- nests and/or nestlings
- spread wing, tail and head profile (ringers)
- typical habitat.

Cape Sugarbird

- spread wing, tail and head profile (ringers)
- typical habitat.

Abdim's Stork

- nests and nestlings
- behaviour
- typical habitat

Recently published species accounts

[African Rock Pipit](#)

[African Finch](#)

[Gurney's Sugarbird](#)

[East Coast Akalat](#)

[Monteiro's Hornbill](#)

[Levaillant's Cisticola](#)

Regulars

Birds in Art

Double-banded Courser

Text and Artwork

Willem Van der Merwe

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:



Double-banded Courser

In this issue, I showcase a little bird I've only seen in the Orange Free State Province on a few occasions. This is a Double-banded Courser, but depending on the taxonomic system you use, its scientific name is either *Smutsornis africanus* (Clements taxonomy) or *Rhinoptilus africanus* (International Ornithological Congress). The generic name *Smutsornis* means "Smuts' Bird from Africa", and it is named for the famed South African statesman Jan Smuts, a writer, philosopher, and South African Prime Minister from 1919–1924 and 1939–1948. The generic

name *Rhinoptilus* means feathered nostrils and refers to the frontal feathers reaching as far forward as the posterior part of the nostrils.

Courser are classified in the Glareolidae, the family that includes the coursers and pratincoles. The two-fold division of the family between coursers and pratincoles is rather unusual. Coursers are long-legged running birds of grasslands, dry woodlands and

BELOW All coursers have a pectinated middle claw © Derek Engelbrecht.



ABOVE Double-banded Coursers are often encountered in groups of three individuals - the parents and a young bird from an earlier brood © Derek Engelbrecht.

deserts, very similar to plovers and lapwings, while pratincoles are short-legged, long-winged birds, somewhat like gulls and terns, that hunt on the wing over open areas. The name 'pratincole' means 'grass-dweller'. One species, the Australian Pratincole, has somewhat longer legs than the others but is still a typical pratincole. Despite their dissimilarity, pratincoles and coursers are closer relatives of each other than gulls and terns on the one

hand or lapwings and plovers on the other. But they are all members of the shorebird and wader order, the Charadriiformes.

The Glareolidae today are characteristic of warmer regions

of the Old World, from southern Europe to Africa, Asia, and Australia. Fossils of them have been found in eastern and western Europe, and there's a possible species even known from the Miocene of North America, though it's not so clear that it actually was a glareolid. Today, the greatest diversity of the family is in Africa, where several courser and pratincole species can be found. One Asian species, Jerdon's Courser, is critically endangered, once feared extinct.

The Double-banded Courser, at least, is still quite common and widespread. It occurs in two widely separated regions, the one in the dry sub-deserts and grasslands of southern Africa, the other in the dry savannah bushlands of north-east Africa, mainly in Kenya, but also in parts of Tanzania, Somalia and Ethiopia. If seen well, it is easy to identify, with the two neat black bands across its breast. The rest of its plumage is streaked and scalloped in black, brown and buff, giving it excellent camouflage in its scrubby, stony habitat. It is slightly smaller than the familiar Crowned Lapwing. While related coursers are mainly nocturnal, the Double-banded Courser can be active by day or by night. They do tend to rest in the shade during very hot days. They can occur singly or in groups of up

to four birds, often composed of a couple and their offspring from the most recent two broods. They use their keen eyesight to spot insects and their running speed to catch them. They're particularly partial to the abundant harvester termites. These termites differ from others in that they are pigmented, allowing them to be active outside during the day and eat mainly grass rather than wood.

In southern Africa, Double-banded Coursers are mostly residents where they occur but may move around in response to the weather. When it is too dry, their insect prey may become too scarce, but when it is too wet, the grass may grow too tall, and they will have difficulty spotting their food. They may also move into areas heavily grazed by large mammals, which keeps the grass short and exposes the soil. They may breed at any time of the year but, in this case, tend to choose the drier periods, often just before the rains start. They form tightly bonded couples, and the male does a little dance for the female at the start of the breeding season. They typically lay just a single egg out on open, stony ground – the eggs resemble pebbles. The parents brood it often to keep it cool rather than warm,



as the sun in these desert regions can be extremely intense by day and may cook an exposed egg in short order. Consequently, parents will be extremely reluctant to abandon their eggs on very hot days. But in milder weather, they may leave the egg for long periods, during which they trust its camouflage to keep it safe. The little chick hatches in about 25 days and leaves the nest within 24 hours. Like other shorebirds, it is downy, open-eyed and able to run from the outset. But the chicks remain close to the nest for a few days, then accompany their parents,

ABOVE A male performing what is known as a "plover's bow" display, but the use of the name "plover" is incorrect
© Derek Engelbrecht.

who show them what to eat and how. They will offer it insects at first, but it can provide for itself in about 5 to 6 weeks. In good years, parents may raise more than one brood.

Double-banded coursers are sparsely but widely distributed and is in no danger of extinction at present.

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Reflections

Reflections

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

A little Shingwedzi Sugar

Chris Patton

In this edition of *Reflections*, I will write about my birding memories from Shingwedzi Rest Camp and its surrounds. I suspect many readers will be well familiar with the Camp, its location and its charm, but for those who are not, it is the most remote of all Kruger Main Rest Camps, being located 73 km from Punda Maria Gate and 143 km from Phalaborwa Gate along the meandering Shingwedzi River after which it is named. When the long-awaited new Shangoni Gate is finally open and operational and the access road completed, hopefully sometime in the next year or two, there will be a shorter,

more direct road to this legendary camp.

I have a strange sense of loss and detachment about Shingwedzi after the more than a quarter of a century I've spent working for SANParks, purely because, as a family travelling to Kruger in the 1980s and 1990s, Shingwedzi was always an absolute favourite and the camp delivered many of my formative Kruger birding memories. Since working for SANParks, my visits there have ironically become greatly reduced, and they are usually just drivebys or, at best, a night here and there. Since moving down to the southern Cape I haven't stayed there in about



a decade, and have maybe visited the camp once in that time.

Thinking back, the camp was the location for many a birding first and will always have a strong sense of identity in my foetal days of discovering birds. Off the top of my head, I can reel off the likes of African Scops Owl, Bennett's Woodpecker, and Red-headed Weaver as three species most Krugerholics will take for granted that I saw for the first time in Shingwedzi, and all are synonymous with a visit to this wonderful camp.

But let's start at the beginning ... the gateway to any visit to the Camp begins with the first sight

ABOVE The entrance to Shingwedzi cannot fail to leave you with a warm welcome feeling and a buzz of anticipation

© Chris Patton.

of the Shingwedzi River itself. If you are driving south from Punda Maria, your first view of the river is at the high-level bridge on the main arterial tar road that runs through the spine of the Park. And if you are travelling from further south, you will have had views of the river already on your left as the road and the river run side by side for 13 km after the turn off to Red Rocks and Bateleur Bushveld Camp, and before one makes the turn off the H1 onto the short 2 km tarred



be an ongoing serenade, with the *poo-poo-poo* of Orange-breasted Bushshrike being the main tempo conductor, and Chinspot Batis, Southern Black Tit, Black-backed Puffback, and Black-collared Barbet

LEFT The Shingwedzi River high-level bridge on the H1 tar arterial that runs through the Park offers iconic views of pure Africa © Chris Patton.

BELOW The delightful leg, foot, beak, and eye colours of the African Green Pigeon are often overlooked as they explode out of the foliage © Derek Engelbrecht.

entrance road into camp the river will still be there on your left with numerous viewing points.

Wildlife can appear sparse in the stretches of mopane woodland or mopane shrubveld that dominate the northern region of Kruger National Park, but the alluvial plains in the immediate vicinity of the Shingwedzi River tend to be very rewarding for game viewing and bird watching alike. Any of the numerous vistas will likely turn up a plethora of water birds, including African Fish Eagles and numerous stork, heron and egret species.

But the riverine forests that line the banks of the

Shingwedzi perhaps hold the most interest for birders. Dominant tree species of the riverine forests include Natal mahogany (*Trichilia emetica*), sycamore fig (*Ficus sycomorus*), leadwood (*Combretum imberbe*), jackal-berry (*Diospyros mespiliiformis*), apple-leaf (*Philenoptera violacea*) and nyala (*Xanthocercis zambesiaca*). All are veritable bird magnets, but special mention should be made of the sycamore fig trees that are particularly popular with Brown-headed Parrots, Grey Go-Away-birds, Violet-backed Starlings and, of course, the African Green Pigeons. And there always seems to



being leading instruments. Between November and March, the trill of the Woodland Kingfisher will join the chorus and fight for centre stage.

This access road should never be rushed, especially as dusk approaches. There are families of Verreaux's Eagle-Owl that make their home in the riverine trees,

and Bat Hawk should be looked for.

Now, for those who know Shingwedzi, I know it will already be a favourite place, from riverine panoramas at the camp's restaurant or day visitors area, lined with fever trees (*Vachellia xanthophloea*) to the colourful intrusions of impala lilies, or the luxurious green



ABOVE Impala Lilies are synonymous with Shingwedzi © Chris Patton.

and it is common to encounter adult singletons or pairs, and at times even fledglings on the gentle curving boughs of particularly the sycamore figs. And from the bridge to the camp, all along the access road, as bats start to emerge in the approaching twilight both Eurasian Hobby (summer only)

of the lala palm groves, to the hum of cicadas, it is just obvious that the camp is in a subtropical wonderland.

I have so many random birding memories from the camp linked to specific parts of the camp I hope readers will allow me to be a little self-indulgent.



ABOVE The boardwalk into the Shingwedzi Day Visitors area © Chris Patton.

A great place to bird early in the mornings is the camp's day visitor area before the day visitors have come to claim possession of the place. The site is accessed across a boardwalk across a gully that always fills me with a thrill of anticipation.

Crossing this bridge, I remember finding a Red-capped Robin-Chat in the gully below as a child. It was still called Natal Robin then, and while it was a bird I'd seen on family holidays to the KZN coast, it

BELOW A palm grove at Shingwedzi © Chris Patton.



would have been a park lifer for me at the time. Broad-billed Roller and Village Indigobird (then known as Steelblue Widowfinch) are two of my other childhood birding memories from this place.

I mentioned that Shingwedzi has some impressive groves of lala palms. As the image shows, some are stunted and shrub-sized, but some grow to impressive heights. If you are looking to tick off African Palm Swift in the Park, Shingwedzi is as good a place as any, but I was delighted to find a Collared Palm Thrush in the camp by the palm grove just near the camp's petrol station during my

early years in Kruger in May 2000. I wasn't even birding at the time. I was having petrol put in my car and could not believe my eyes. I knew Collared Palm Thrush had been seen in the Camp, but at the time, I wasn't aware of any recent records, and I don't think many people would be able to claim such a wonderful tick while filling a car.

Another of my quirkier camp records comes from the Shingwedzi swimming pool. Brubru is a bird

BELOW The Shingwedzi Swimming Pool – a scene © Chris Patton.



ABOVE AND RIGHT Don't be fooled by the barren-looking foliage in the camp in winter and the blanket of bare earth. Squadrons of starlings, hornbills, doves, and other species maraud these open circles in search of titbits from visiting humans © Chris Patton.

I've found there, but as a university student doing some research there in the mid-1990s, a group of Cut-throat Finches in the enclosure around the pool. I happened to mention this to a birding colleague who lived in the area, and she flatly told me I must be mistaken because

she hadn't seen one in Shingwedzi Camp in all the years she had been living there. So, it was with smug delight that I was able to track them down again. I didn't know her well enough to drag her to the pool, show them and gloat, and in her defence, as staff living there,



she probably didn't go to the pool much, which is for camp visitors.

One of the features of staying at Shingwedzi is the marauding squadron of birds that move from bungalow to bungalow in search of food scraps. This is common at most Kruger camps and picnic sites, but the Shingwedzi ones are particularly busy. In my memory, Greater Blue-eared Starlings and Southern twins of Red-billed and Yellow-billed Hornbills are the dominant species, verging on aggressive, with a supporting cast of weavers (including Red-headed), sparrows, and doves. The Mourning Collared Dove is an entrancing feature of the camp birdlife, and it is always strange to me how this species is so established at camps like Shingwedzi,

LEFT Mourning Collared Dove
– one of the diagnostic sights
and sounds of Shingwedzi
© Derek Engelbrecht.



ABOVE Bennett's Woodpecker behave most un-woodpecker-like at Shingwedzi by hopping around the bare earth of the camp foraging for morsels. Here, a male is feeding on ants in the wall of one of the huts © Derek Engelbrecht.

Letaba, Satara and Lower Sabie, yet very difficult to locate elsewhere in the Park. But their call is such a welcoming sound.

One other aggressive species I first encountered in Shingwedzi as a child has a call that instantly fills me with excitement and a sense of being somewhere exotic: the excited jabbering of Bennett's Woodpecker. They behave most un-woodpecker-like in the camp by joining the bird parties and begging for food, or foraging on the ground, suggesting a bit of learned behaviour from other common species.

Now the image I share of a Southern Red-billed Hornbill may seem completely unremarkable and is not even a great photo, but

the very bird in the portrait is a convicted felon and once famously disrupted a family game of Risk by swooping onto our table and making off with one of the coloured army tokens into a nearby tree. I hope you can all picture the chaos it caused, and for those of us taking a beating at the time, grateful merriment and a way out of defeat...



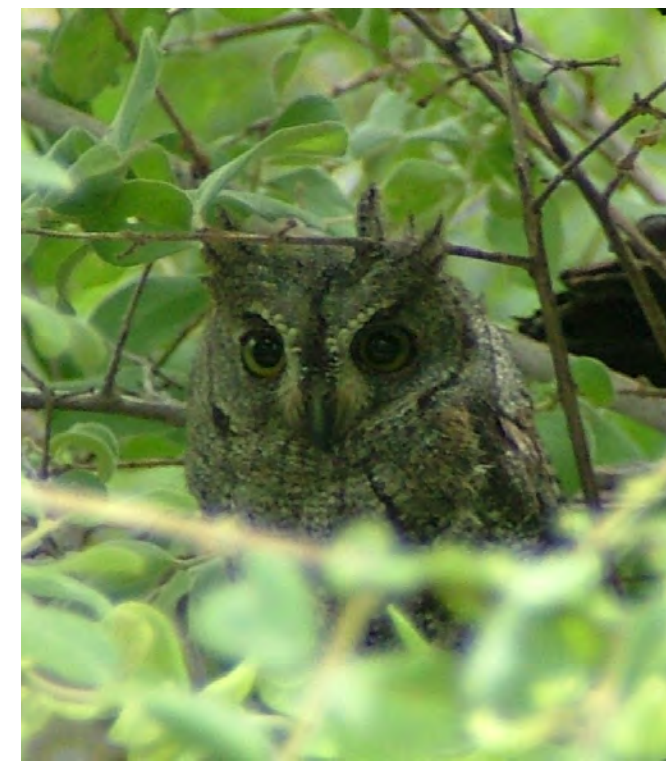
ABOVE This Southern Red-billed Hornbill disrupted a game of Risk by stealing some of the coloured army widgets © Chris Patton.

Birders of similar age to me will remember what an audio cassette was, and if already into their birds, would have had either Len Gillard or Guy Gibbon's Bird Calls of South Africa or Kruger National Park. I remember sitting with my brother in the Shingwedzi Campsite at night, playing the sharp *chirrrppppppp* of the African Scops Owl and shining the beam of our torches on the beautiful little balls of camouflaged feathers with their throats inflating as the tape soon elicited a response and they responded to the 'intruder'. And when we found one (and they were usually very prompt

responders), we had to alert the rest of the family, and then other camp residents would have to come have a look... As children, you wouldn't think about the stress we were causing in the Shingwedzi Scops Owl social life. Hopefully, we didn't cause too much disruption, especially as I'm sure this use of callback to disrupt the harmony of Shingwedzi Scops Owls is still

going on today, although generally frowned upon. I would love to try and find their daytime roosts too. Below is an image of one from the foliage in the Swimming Pool enclosure, suggesting these delightful little owls are more tolerant of passing traffic than we think.

Other Shingwedzi memories have to include a punt of the low level drift over the river out the Camp's back entrance gate. It takes travellers right down to water level and is an excellent place to secure some nice photographs.



TOP African Scops Owl are a certainty to hear in Shingwedzi at night, but with a little searching can also be found roosting amongst the Camp's foliage © Chris Patton.

BOTTOM A Yellow-billed Stork, moving into breeding plumage with a wash of pink feathers, standing in the shallows at the low level bridge © Chris Patton.



A drive southeast from camp along the S50 along the Shingwedzi River will always be incredibly rewarding for animals and birds alike. Special memories include sightings of pelicans and lost flamingos. I've seen juvenile flamingos and heard of others seeing them here, too. The theory is that they breed in the Makgadikgadi Pans in Botswana and then make their way into the Shashe River and then the Limpopo River system, heading to the Mozambican Coast. Still, instead of making it along the Limpopo River to the coast, some young birds take a wrong turn and head up tributary rivers like

the Shingwedzi and get spotted temporarily in the Park.

One other must-visit spot near Shingwedzi is the Confluence of the Shingwedzi and Mphongolo Rivers, which is reached along a short loop road opposite the tarred turn-off point to the camp. My memories from down this road are of nesting White-backed Vultures, which, given their current **CRITICALLY ENDANGERED** status, if the nests

BELOW There are a handful of White-backed Vulture nests in the vicinity of the Shingwedzi/Mphongolo Confluence
© Chris Patton.



are still there, makes this a site of global conservation importance. The road passes some large umbrella thorn trees, and this is a great place to find Burnt-necked Eremomelas. Then, as the road becomes a loop like a needle head, it moves into dense riverine forest. Invariably, there will be a Grey-headed Bushshrike calling with its haunting whistle that leads to its colourful Afrikaans name of Spookvoël. The confluence will often have elephant, buffalo, Woolly-necked, and Saddle-billed Storks, while it

ABOVE The majestic African Openbill is regularly seen along the Shingwedzi River © Chris Patton.

is one of the more reliable places in the park to see African rock pythons. But for me, it is forever associated with African Openbill, and I'm particularly fond of this image taken along the Shingwedzi showing their iridescent plumage and prehistoric shape.

Author email: chris.patton@sanparks.org

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African Skimmer resighting

Derek Engelbrecht

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The recolonisation of South Africa's northern provinces by African Skimmers as breeding migrants since 2016, following a hiatus of 73 years, is nothing short of remarkable. The Limpopo Province has seen several breeding attempts, and between 2017 and 2022, several pairs bred here

annually. High water levels since 2022 have flooded their traditional breeding ground on a small "peninsula" on one of the irrigation dams, and as a result, there has

BELOW African Skimmer chick 5H35167 hiding away in a shallow depression.



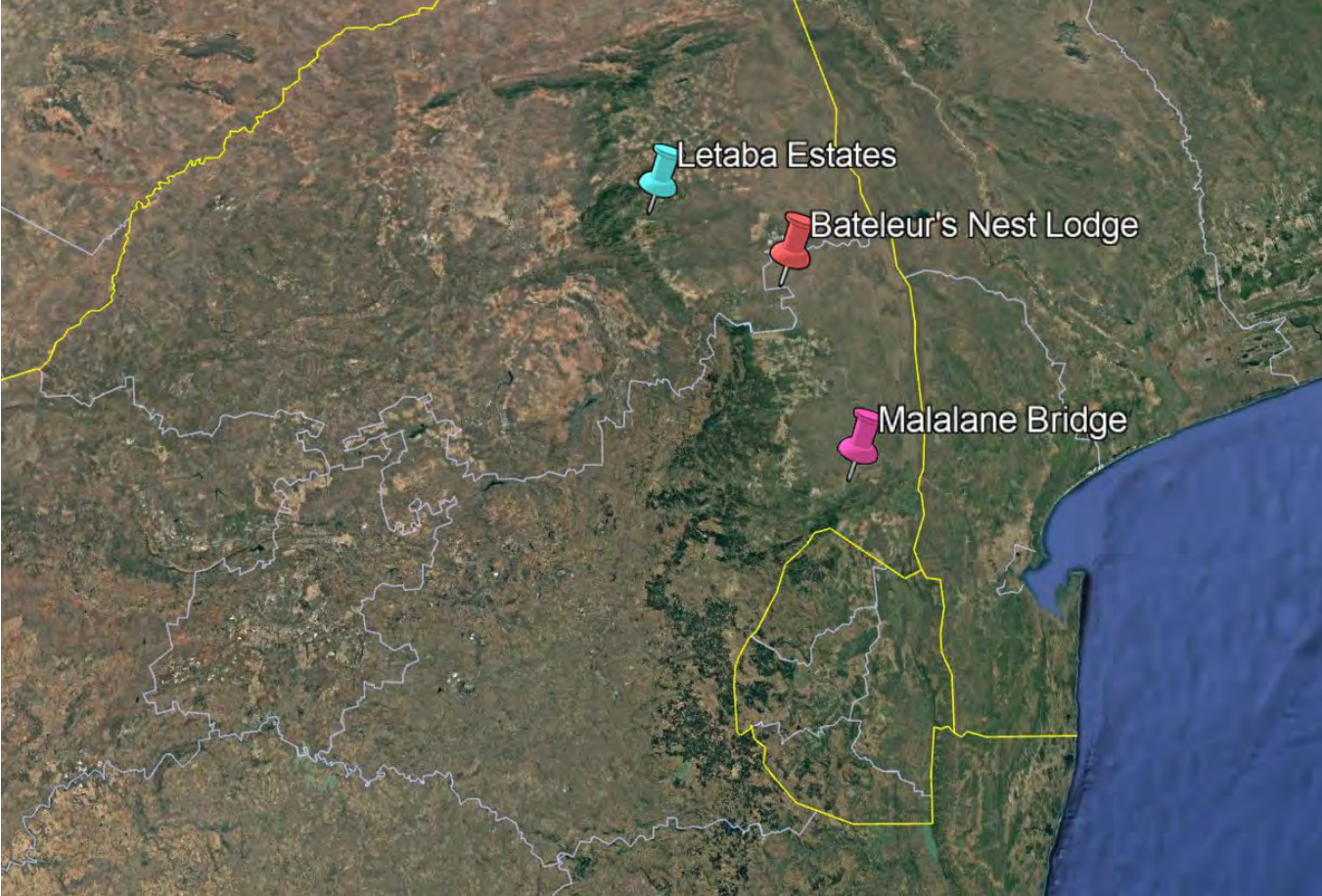
ABOVE African Skimmer chick 5H35167 just after it was ringed.

been no breeding at Letaba Estates in 2023 and 2024.

Since 2017, I have studied aspects of their breeding ecology and behaviour at Letaba Estates, including arrival and departure dates, chick growth and development, parental care strategies, and breeding success. Chicks were fitted with a unique combination of colour rings when they were 7–10 days old to study

chick survival, movements, and post-juvenile dispersal.

The colour-ringing project has been a great success, and there have been several resightings of the colour-ringed birds at Letaba Estates and further afield (Engelbrecht 2020, Engelbrecht



ABOVE Google Earth map showing the initial ringing site at Letaba Estates and subsequent resighting localities of African Skimmer pale blue/orange (5H35167).



ABOVE African Skimmer pale blue/orange (5H35167) photographed on the 25th of October 2024 at the Malalane Bridge © Lauren Joubert.

2023). One of the colour-ringed birds, SAFRING #5H35167, continues giving us valuable information about its movements.

This individual hatched on the 28th of September 2022 at Letaba Estates. It was the only survivor of a clutch of three - one egg failed to hatch, and one chick was predated. I ringed this chick on the 9th of October 2022 with the standard SAFRING metal ring on

the right leg and two colour rings (pale blue/orange) on the left leg.

This individual was resighted by Gijs Rinsma at Bateleur's Nest Lodge in the Klaserie Private Nature Reserve, Limpopo Province, on the 28th of October 2023, about 98 km from Letaba Estates (Engelbrecht 2023). But there's more ...

On the 25th of October 2024, Lauren Joubert took a picture of a pair of African Skimmers at the

Malalane Bridge, and one of the birds had pale blue/orange colour rings. The days elapsed between ringing and this resighting was 2 yr 17 d, and the straight-line distance between Letaba Estates and the resighting at Malalane Bridge was 216.5 km.

Acknowledgements Thanks to Duncan McKenzie for notifying me of this record and Lauren Joubert for allowing me to use the photo.

References

- Engelbrecht, D. (2020). Remarkable resightings of African Skimmers in the Limpopo Province. *The Lark* 32:53–58.
- Engelbrecht, D. (2023). Resighting of a ringed African Skimmer. *The Lark* 50:81–82.

Black-chested Snake Eagle nesting notes

TEXT AND PHOTOS Riëtte Griesel

email: riettegriesel32@gmail.com

It is the 15th of July 2023. I am standing on my veranda, looking over the dry Karoo winter veld. My eyes catch sight of a beautiful eagle flying along a nearby ridge carrying a large branch in its feet, heading towards a large *Cotoneaster* bush and so begins a story of my amazing experience and unforgettable privilege of following the daily activities of this beautiful pair of Black-chested Snake Eagles at their nest.

I kept a diary of their activities and soon realized that they loved routine. For

the first two weeks, they only visited the nest site in the late afternoon, usually around 17:00. The male, very noticeably smaller than the female, would bring most of the nesting material to the site. Sometimes she'd be waiting for him on the nest, but at least once during the afternoon, she'd fly towards him as he approached with a branch and they'd "dance" in the air. Then, soon after 18:00,

BELOW The male delivering nesting material carried in his beak.



ABOVE The pair mating on the 10th of August 2023.

they would leave the nesting site and fly off to roost out of sight somewhere behind the ridge.

On the 8th August, their routine changed - they started making morning visits to the nest. They'd arrive at about 07:45, work on the nest for perhaps an hour and a half and then leave at about 9:15. Come the afternoon, they'd return, usually just after 16:45, and work on the nest until about 17:30, before leaving. Neither of them is yet spending the night at the nest.

The 10th of August was the BIG day! The pair were working on the nest

as usual, and then ... the first mating! It was so special to see and to know what was to come.

Seven days later, on the 17th of August at about 17:15, after spending time together at the nest, the male flew off while the female stayed put, and I knew that she'd laid. So, from the first branch brought to start the nest until the egg was laid took 33 days.



From the 22nd of August onwards, a new routine was established. The female incubated during the day, and at about 17:15, the pair changed over, the male settling on the egg for the night while she flew off over the ridge behind the nest for the night. Then, each morning, she arrived back at the nest at about 08:15 and took over nest duty. He would then visit her for short visits, at least twice a day, usually at about 11:00, bringing a small fresh branch with him, and then again at about 14:00, sometimes bringing an unidentified item (prey?) that he carried in his talons. It was disturbing during this time to see Pied Crows harassing the eagles, sometimes several times a day.

ABOVE The female is on the nest, her head just visible.

The chick hatched on the 11th of October, 53 days after the date I'd assumed the egg to have been laid, and the female then remained on the nest, attending to it. At almost hourly intervals, she was visited by the male who brought food to the nest, sometimes with a spray of fresh green leaves.

On the 19th of November, after a stormy night with terrible winds, I became aware of something strange - both parents leaving the nest unattended. I ran down and found the chick on the ground, crouched in the dense shrubbery below the nest.



ABOVE The pair on the nest on top of a *Cotoneaster* bush.

We caught it, my son Abrie brought a ladder, and we returned it to the nest. I then sat for 5 hours in the vicinity of the nest to keep the crows away until finally, at about 14:00, the female returned. What joy! She settled, and the pair fed the chick the rest of the afternoon. The female remained overnight on the nest.

From the 1st of December, the female began leaving the nest unattended for short periods, but she always remained nearby. The crows were now flying more frequently over the nest, and the eagles had difficulty fending them off.

The 4th of December 2023. A sombre day. The female sat there on the nest the whole day and was not visited by the male. Again, on the 5th, she just sat there on the edge of the nest, not flying off. I asked my son to bring the ladder, and we found the eaglet, now about 7 weeks old, without eyes and part of the head missing. My heart was broken ... the mother eagle's eyes were sad. Finally, she flew off and away, far over the ridge. I just hate crows!

Angry Birds - Red-winged Starlings

Derek Engelbrecht

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In the previous issue of *The Lark*, I wrote about the bomb squad - a pair of Red-winged Starlings that singled me out amongst hundreds of people and relentlessly dive-bombed me whenever I walked past their nest. Why, you may ask? I monitored their nest, which meant climbing a ladder to inspect the contents every few days. Being the aggressive nest defenders they are, they took exception to this disturbance.

The same pair is currently nesting at the same spot again, and although I've yet to be dive-bombed by them, whenever they see me, they follow me closely until I've passed their nesting area. This shows they can hold a grudge for at least a year.

A colleague, Ben Smit, has not been so fortunate to be gently escorted beyond the nesting area. Having inspected a nest of a pair in his backyard in 2023, the same pair has since earmarked him as public enemy #1. On the 21st of October 2024, they got their moment, and a grudge held

for over a year found an outlet - the back of Ben's head.

So, the moral of the story is, don't mess with nesting Red-winged Starlings.

Reference

Engelbrecht, D. (2024). Red-winged Starling breeding observations Part 2: The bomb squad. *The Lark* 55:82-83.

BELOW Ben's badge of honour after being attacked by an angry Red-winged Starling.



MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

PLUMAGE

Wing formulas

Below follows a description of the wing structure (primaries only) of selected bird species. The wing formula is based on the length of a primary relative to the length of the other primaries in the folded wing. Abbreviations: wp = wingpoint; E = heavy but not abrupt narrowing (emargination) of the vane, usually on the outer web, occasionally on the inner web; e = gradual (weak/indistinct) narrowing of the vane, usually on the outer web, occasionally on the inner web; N = heavily notched, i.e., an abrupt change in the slope on the inner (trailing) web; n = weakly notched on the inner web; v = vestigial. Species are placed in alphabetical order according to family.

Bucerotidae: Monteiro's Hornbill

$(p_6)wp > p_7 \geq p_5 \geq p_4 > p_3 = p_8 > p_2 > p_1 > p_9 > p_{10}$
 $(p_7 = p_6 \geq p_5)wp > p_4 > p_3 = p_8 > p_2 > p_1 > p_9 > p_{10}$

Cisticolidae: Levaillant's Cisticola

$(p_7 = p_6)wp > p_8 > p_5 > p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1 \geq p_9 > p_{10}$
 $p_{10} \geq 50\%$ the length of p_9 .

Cisticolidae: Grey-backed Cisticola

$(p_7 \geq p_8 \geq p_6)wp > p_5 > p_9 \geq p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1 > p_{10}$
 $(p_7 = p_6 = p_5)wp > p_8 \geq p_9 \geq p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1 > p_{10}$
 $p_{10} \geq 50\%$ the length of p_9 .

Falconidae: Amur Falcon

$(p_9)wp > p_{10}^N > p_8 > p_7 > p_6 > p_5 > p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1$
 $(p_9)wp > p_8 > p_{10}^N > p_7 > p_6 > p_5 > p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1$

Falconidae: Pygmy Falcon

$(p_9^n)wp > p_{10}^N > p_8 > p_7 > p_6 > p_5 > p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1$
 $(p_{10}^N)wp > p_8^n > p_9^N > p_7 > p_6 > p_5 > p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1$
 $(p_9^n)wp > p_{10}^N \geq p_8^n > p_7 > p_6 > p_5 > p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1$
 $(p_{10}^N = p_9^n)wp > p_8^n > p_7 > p_6 > p_5 > p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1$

Glareolidae: Burchell's Courser

$(p_{10} \geq p_9)wp > p_8 > p_7 > p_6 > p_5 > p_4 > p_3 > p_2 > p_1$

Glareolidae: Temminck's Courser

(p10≥p9)wp>p8>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

Glareolidae: Double-banded Courser

(p9)wp>p10≥p8>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

(p10≥p9)wp>p8>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

Glareolidae: Bronze-winged Courser

(p8=p9)wp>p10>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

Glareolidae: Three-banded Courser

(p10≥p9≥p8)wp>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

Hirundinidae: Blue Swallow

p9>p8>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

Hirundinidae: Wire-tailed Swallow

p9>p8>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

Leiothrichidae: Southern Pied Babbler

(p7_E=p6_E=p5_E)wp>p4_E>p3≥p8_E>p2>p1>p9>p10

p10 is >50% the length of p9.

Locustellidae: Barratt's Warbler

(p7_E=p6_E)wp≥p5>p4≥p9>p3>p2>p1>p9>p10

p10 is >50% the length of p9.

Lybiidae: Green Tinkerbird

(p8=p7_E=p6_E)wp>p5_E>p4>p9>p3>p2>p1>p10v

Lybiidae: Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird

(p7_E=p6_E≥p5_E≥p8)wp>p4>p3>p2>p1>p9>p10v

Lybiidae: Red-fronted Tinkerbird

(p7_E=p6_E≥p5_E≥p8)wp>p4>p3>p2>p1>p9>p10v

Lybiidae: Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird

(p8=p7≥p6_E)wp>p5_E>p4>p9>p3>p2>p1>p10v

(p8=p7_E=p6_E)wp>p5_E>p9 ≥p4>p3>p2>p1>p10v

Muscicapidae: East Coast Akalat

(p7_E)wp≥p6_E≥p5_E≥p8_E>p4_E>p3>p2>p1>p10

Nectariniidae: Greater Double-collared Sunbird

(p8_E=p7_E=p6_E)wp>p5_E>p9>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p8_E=p7_E)wp≥p6_E>p5_E>p4>p9>p3>p2>p1>p10

p10 is ~40% of the length of p9.

Nectariniidae: Southern Double-collared Sunbird

(p8=p7_E)wp>p6_E>p5_E>p4≥p9>p3>p2>p1>p10



ABOVE Spread wing of a Barratt's Warbler © Derek Engelbrecht.

(p8=p7_E=p6_E)wp>p5_E>p4≥p9>p3>p2>p1>p10

p10 is ~33% of the length of p9.

Promeropidae: Cape Sugarbird

(p7_E≥p6_E)wp>p8_E>p5_E>p9>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p6_E)wp>p7_E>p5_E≥p8_E>p9>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

p10 is ~60% the length of p9.

Psittacidae: Cape Parrot

(p9_E≥p8_E)wp>p7_E>p10>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

(p8_E)wp>p9_E>p7_E>p10>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

Psittaculidae: Rosy-faced Lovebird

(p10≥p9)wp>p8>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

(p9)wp>p10>p8>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

(p10>p9≥p8)wp>p7>p6>p5>p4>p3>p2>p1

Indistinct emarginations on p8 and p9, but not worth noting.

Sturnidae: Pale-winged Starling

(p8_E≥p7_E)wp>p9>p6_E>p5_E>p9>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

p10 is ~25% the length of p9.

Sturnidae: Red-winged Starling

(p7_E≥p8_E)wp>p6_E>p9>p5_E>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p7_E=p6_E)wp≥p8_E>p9>p5_E>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p7_E)wp>p8_E=p6_E>p9=p5_E>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p8_E)wp≥p7_E>p6_E≥p9>p5_E>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

p10 is ~25–33% the length of p9.

Turdidae: Spotted Ground Thrush

(p7_E≥p8_E)wp>p6_E>p5_E>p9>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p7_E=p8_E=p6_E)wp>p5_E>p9>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p7_E=p6_E)wp>p8_E>p5_E>p9>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p7_E)wp>p8_E=p6_E>p5_E>p9>p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p7_E=p6_E)wp>p8_E>p5_E>p9≥p4>p3>p2>p1>p10

p10 is ~25–30% the length of p9.

Turdidae: Orange Ground Thrush

(p6_E=p7_E)wp>p8_E=p5_E>p4>p9>p3>p2>p1>p10

(p6_E≥p7_E)wp>p8_E=p5_E>p4≥p9>p3>p2>p1>p10

p10 is ~40% the length of p9.

Derek Engelbrecht • faunagalore@gmail.com (received 15 October 2024).



ABOVE Spread wing of an Orange Ground Thrush © Derek Engelbrecht.

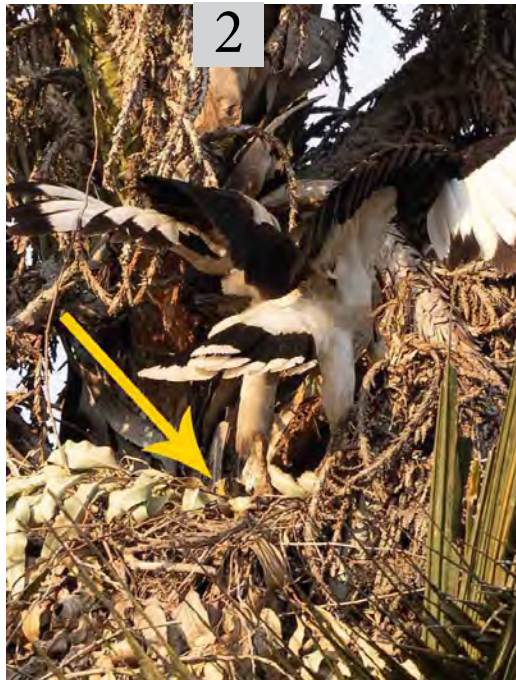
BREEDING: Parental Behaviour

Weird Palm-nut Vulture behaviour

1. An adult flies in from the top of an adjacent Raffia Palm and onto the nest carrying an empty egg shell that had probably been removed earlier from the nest.
 2. The head of a chick is arrowed.
 3. The empty egg is placed next to the chick!
 4. The bird waits for a minute...
 5. It then lifts the empty egg with the chick looking upwards.
 6. The adult flies off with the egg, dropping it to the ground 50 m away.
- Weird!!!! The chick is at least a couple of weeks old.

Place: Mtunzini south.

Hugh Chittenden • hugh@rarebirds.co.za (received 11 October 2024).





Interesting sightings
16 August 2024 - 15 October 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 Goshawk - 5 September 2024. One seen on the campus of the University of Limpopo - a new record for the campus (Derek Engelbrecht).
African Rail - 1 September 2024. Heard calling at the inflow of the Hout River Dam (Richter van Tonder); 14 September 2024. Two at Makotopong (Richter van Tonder).
African Grey Hornbill - 24 August 2024. An individual seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Derek Engelbrecht).



African Goshawk © Derek Engelbrecht

Black Sparrowhawk - 24 August 2024. One in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Derek Engelbrecht).

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater - 13 October 2024. Seen at Hout River Dam (Richter van Tonder).

Burchell's Sandgrouse - 16 September 2024. Six were seen near Makotopong (Richter van Tonder).

European Bee-eater - 22 September 2024. Seen at Soetdorings (Minkie Prinsloo); 6 October 2024. Seen and heard in Bendor (Susan Dippenaar).

Jackal Buzzard - 12 October 2024. One seen in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

Jacobin Cuckoo - 29 September 2024. Two individuals calling in Dorp suburb (Mark Friskin).

Olive Bee-eater - 24 September 2024. Five seen in the Makuleke Concession and on the Mahonie Loop in the Kruger National Park. This is a new species for the Kruger National Park and the Limpopo Province (Zach Savage).

Ruddy Turnstone - 9 October 2024. Returning migrant. Two seen at Spies Dam near the Soutpansberg (Johan Botha).

Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill - 28 August 2024. A male seen on the campus of the University of Limpopo (Derek Engelbrecht).



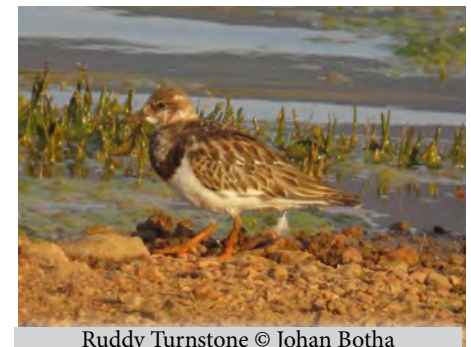
Burchell's Sandgrouse © Richter van Tonder



Jackal Buzzard © Derek Engelbrecht



Olive-Bee-eater © Richter van Tonder



Ruddy Turnstone © Johan Botha

Wahlberg's Eagle - 24 August 2024. Returning migrant. One of the resident pair was seen refurbishing the nest (Derek Engelbrecht).

Whiskered Tern - 30 October 2024. Eight seen at Hout River Dam (Richter van Tonder).

Woodland Kingfisher - 13 October 2024. Returning migrant. A very early arrival. Seen in Welgelegen. See *Miscellaneous Notes*.

Yellow-billed Kite - 24 August 2024. One flying over Cycad Estate (Derek Engelbrecht).

Yellow-billed Stork - 24 August 2024. Seven birds at the Flora Park Dam (Derek Engelbrecht).



Wahlberg's Eagle © Derek Engelbrecht



Yellow-billed Stork © Derek Engelbrecht

PASSERINES

African Paradise Flycatcher - 7 October 2024. Seen at Soetdorings (Leonie Kellerman); 13 October 2024. Returning migrant. One in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).

African Red-eyed Bulbul - 28 August 2024. One seen on farm Zandriverspoort near Duiwekop on the N1 (Leonie Kellerman).

Barn Swallow - 21 October 2024. Returning migrant. Seen in Mokopane (Bruce Goetsch).

Willow Warbler - 6 October 2024. Returning migrant. Seen in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).



African Red-eyed Bulbul © Leonie Kellerman



Willow Warbler © Derek Engelbrecht

BEST OF THE REST LIMPOPO PROVINCE

NON-PASSERINES

African Skimmer - 7 September 2024. Three birds seen at the Olifants River Weir in the Kruger National Park (Hugh Retief).

Grey-headed Kingfisher - 29 October 2024. Returning migrant. A pair seen at Ratho on the Limpopo River (Leonie Kellerman).

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater - 11 September 2024. Four birds seen in the Makuleke Concession (Toby Esplin).



African Skimmer © Hugh Retief



Swallow-tailed Bee-eater © Toby Esplin

PASSERINES

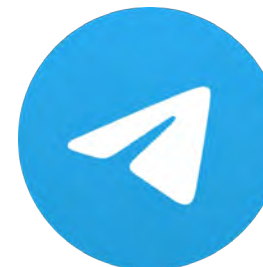
Fairy Flycatcher - 22 August 2024. One seen at Mabalingwe Nature Reserve (Allan Ridley). It is a winter visitor to the Limpopo Province.

Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark - 17 August 2024. Several seen at Boyela Waterhole in the north of the Kruger National Park (Wian van Biljon).



Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark © Wian van Biljon

VERSION 1.2. RELEASED 28 OCTOBER 2024



LIMPOPO RARITIES

Check out the latest official bird list for the Limpopo Province on the Limpopo Rarities group on Telegram or view it [here](#). Thanks to Daniel Engelbrecht, Jody De Bruyn, Derek Engelbrecht and Richter Van Tonder.

Mouse Free Marion

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

SPONSOR A HECTARE NOW



HELP SAVE OUR SEABIRDS

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

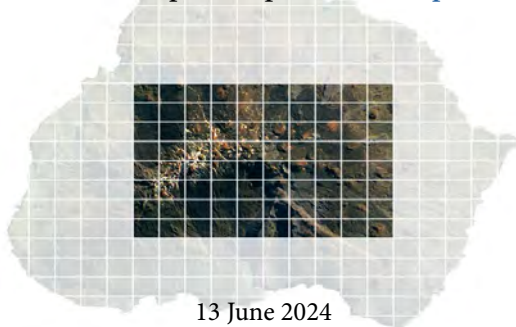
The bait required to cover the island alone will cost upwards of R30 million. To help raise the necessary funds, please would you consider sponsoring one or more hectares of land on Marion Island.

At R1000 (US\$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.

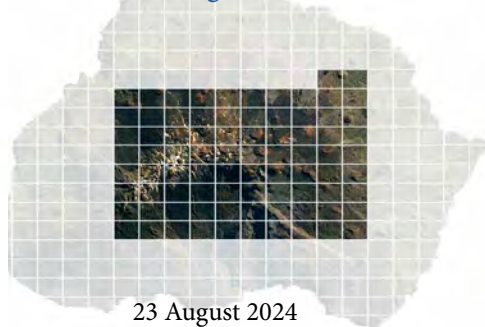
Be a part of history, and sponsor one (or more) hectares of this beautiful oceanic gem.

For more information about this very worthwhile project and how to become a sponsor, please visit <https://mousefreemarion.org/>



13 June 2024

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



23 August 2024

Percent of target reached: 36.0%
Sponsored Hectares: 8257 ha
Sponsors: 1758

Saving Marion Island's Seabirds™
The Mouse-Free Marion Project



ALBATROSSES ON MARION ISLAND

1. Grey-headed *Thalassarche chrysostoma*
2. Wandering *Diomedea exulans*
3. Sooty *Phoebastria fusca*
4. Light-mantled *Phoebastria palpebrata*

mousefreemarion.org

UPCOMING EVENTS



Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting
Date: 20 November 2024
Time: 17:30
Venue: Polokwane Ring Tennis Club

Club outing

Where? Mahela - Nagude Farm
Date: 9 November 2024
Contact: Richter van Tonder
Cell: 082 213 8276



Shopping list: Hooded, White-backed and Cape Vultures, Tawny Eagle, Shikra, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Arnot's Chat, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Orange-winged Pytilia, Bushveld Pipit, Green-capped Eremomela, Grey Penduline Tit, and many more.



Birding Big Day 2024 - 7 December 2024
[Register here](#)

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.



Shaft-tailed Whydah © Jody de Bruyn