The Birdlife Polokwane Magazine 38, November/December 2021

THE LARK

Lapwing Rescue

Panama-nia
Neotropical birding

Club Ranch '21

Birdlife South Africa
25 years of conservation success

African Skimmer resighting · Growth and development of Arrow-marked Babbler nestlings · Yellow-breasted Longclaw (Pipit): SA's diminutive longclaw · Verreaux's Eagles nesting in trees in the Eastern Cape · Striking gold: A flavistic Green-winged Pytilia in the Soutpansberg · Opportunistic nectar-ivory of Sausage Tree flowers · Bird names in Tsonga (Xitsonga): A list of names

Birdlife Polokwane

Affiliated to Birdlife South Africa

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings

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

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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 2021

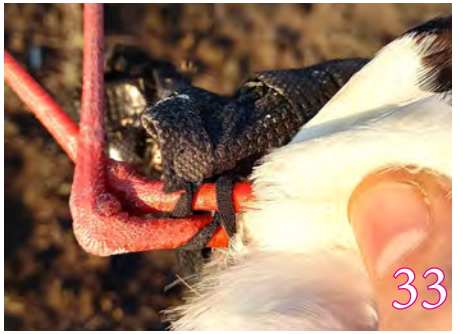
This newsletter is best read in a 'two page view' format.

Cover Crowned Lapwing and face mask
© Derek Engelbrecht

CONTENT

The Lark 38 November/December 2021

Featured



For a lark ...

Choir practice © Sandrie De Wet

P.O. Box 699
Fauna Park 0787
Tel: 015 263 6473
www.birdlifepolokwane.co.za
www.facebook.com/birdlifepolokwane

Editors' chirps

Summer is here and has brought with it some welcome rain and, of course, our visiting migrants. Most of the migrants have arrived now, and judging by reports from further north in Africa, species that arrive towards the middle and end of November are on their way. The mornings are abuzz with activity as birds build nests, carry food, or sing to their heart's content. The singing starts as early as 3:15 when Karoo Thrushes want to have their moment before the rest join the dawn chorus. This issue takes us to places far and wide with birding trip reports from Central America and the Limpopo Valley. There is also a lesson in responsible disposal of face masks. As usual, our Bird Briefs section is packed with anecdotes of strange nesting places, odd plumages, new Sausage Tree nectarivory records, another resighting of a marked African Skimmer and an account of Arrow-marked nestling development. Hugh Chittenden calls for the long-overdue recognition of Yellow-breasted Pipit as a longclaw and a call for recognition of the earliest risers in Polokwane. This issue also presents the final of Johan Meyer's series of bird names in African languages. We wish to extend our gratitude to Johan for selecting The Lark as an outlet to publish this very valuable resource. And finally, a hearty congratulations to Birdlife South Africa. Our organization has turned 25 years this year. We are all proud of the incredible work they do to conserve and raise awareness of birds. On behalf of The Lark and Birdlife Polokwane, a huge thank you for all your efforts and congratulations to the entire Birdlife South Africa family. Our membership is vitally important to help them protect our biodiversity. You can read more about the celebrations on page 37 or by visiting the Birdlife South Africa website.
Raelene and Daniel

Panama - nia

Birding mayhem in a biodiversity hotspot

Text and photos Daniel Engelbrecht

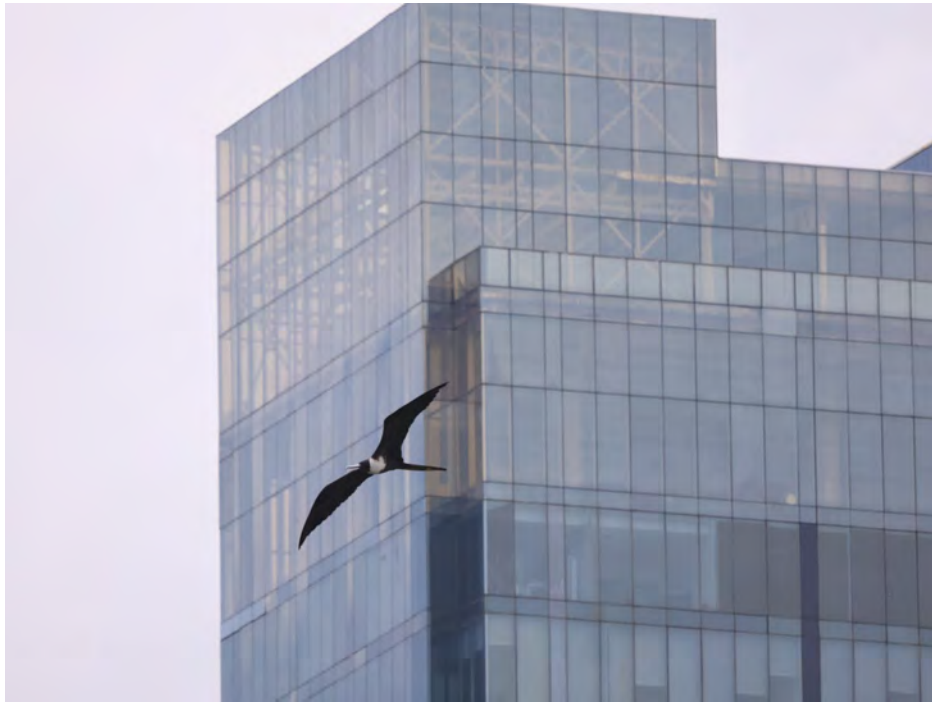
As I scanned both slopes of the forested valley, it became alarmingly clear that there was plenty of suitable habitat. "They are here, it requires patience - and a little luck" – Gabriel said whilst scrutinizing every wild avocado tree through his binoculars. I pushed on up the slippery trail, craning my neck in search of our elusive target. Doubts were starting to set in. Were the birds even here this time of the year? Then I heard Gabriel calling from around a bend in the trail: "As quickly and quietly as you can" he exclaimed, "I've got it!"

Panama is one of those countries that appears as no more than a speck on your world map. Before my departure, I was either met with blank stares or questions like "Is it overseas?" or "So you're going

to Asia?" when I mentioned that I was on my way to Panama. So, to clear up the confusion, Panama is a small tropical country nestled between the Americas. In fact, the country is spread almost equally over the North and South American continents. Those who perhaps know a little more about Panama usually think of either the Panama Canal or the famous Panama hats. What many don't know is that Panama is one of the most biodiverse places on the planet: 220 mammal species, 226 reptiles, 164 amphibians, 10 000 varieties of plants and most importantly for me, over 1000 bird species. To put this staggering number into perspective, there are more bird species in Panama than in the United States and Canada combined - in an area 262 times smaller! To frame this biodiversity hotspot in a local context, Panama is about the size of Mpumalanga. For this reason, I boarded my flight to Panama City with great anticipation for an incredible three weeks of Central American birding.

The downside of travelling internationally during a global pandemic was that upon arrival I was immediately escorted to a quarantine hotel for three days. Thankfully, the room to which I was assigned had a massive window allowing me to pass many of the next 72 hours scanning for fly-by birds. I kicked off the trip list with a special bird indeed, the aptly named Magnificent Frigatebird. The frigatebirds turned out to be trash birds and were regular sightings anywhere along the coastline and even within the city. The birds slowly rolled in with Turkey, Lesser Yellow-headed and Black Vulture, Yellow-crowned Amazon, Great-tailed Grackle, Short-tailed Swift, Crested and Yellow-headed Caracara and Southern Lapwing, to name but a few. After three days in quarantine, a negative COVID-19 test gave me the green light to start exploring the city.

Below Seeing Magnificent Frigatebirds flying amongst the skyscrapers in Panama City seemed strangely out of place.



Above It takes a while to get your head around vultures being garden birds. These Black Vultures were planning their day on the neighbour's roof in Balboa.

Panama City truly is spectacular; despite its relatively small population (1.5 million residents), the city skyline matches that of any of the biggest cities in the world. With over 60 skyscrapers, the city is dubbed the 'skyscraper capital of Latin America', owing much of its economic success to its canal. It was between these towering buildings that my taxi driver navigated his way en route to my accommodation in the leafy suburb of Balboa. Upon arrival in Balboa, I dumped my bags in the room, grabbed my binoculars and camera and headed out birding in the suburbs. After spending three days cooped up in a hotel room with the AC at a chilly 18°C, the Panamanian humidity hit

Below She's free!!!

LEFT A thousand up! Crimson-backed Tanager in Balboa.

BELOW About the size of a Cape Penduline Tit, this Common Tody-Flycatcher was a real joy in the garden as it had a nest and was busily feeding its young.

me like a train, but this didn't hold me back; there were birds to find.

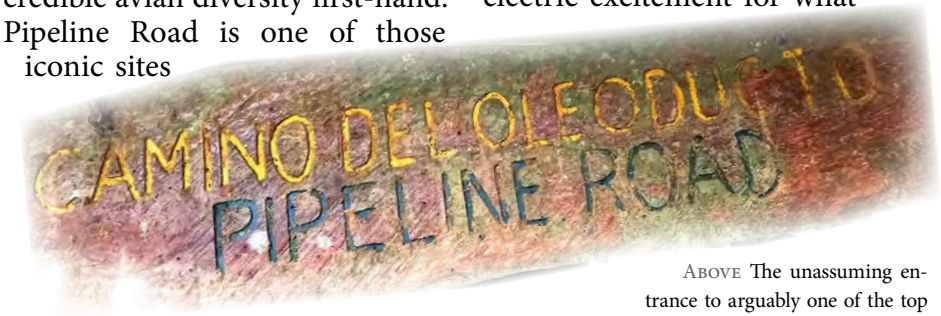
The suburban birding offered sightings of Orange-chinned and Finsch's Parakeets, Red-lored and Yellow-crowned Amazon, Grey-headed Chachalaca (my first member of the family Cracidae), Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Wing-barred Seedeater, Ruddy Ground Dove and Blue-grey Tanager to name but a few. I even managed a small birding milestone with my 1000th species in the form of a Crimson-backed Tanager - a regular resident in many a Panamanian garden but a stunning bird nonetheless. The tyrant-flycatchers were also well represented in Balboa with Social, Rusty-margined, Broad-billed and Streaked Flycatcher showing well along with Great Kiskadee and the diminutive Common Tody-Flycatcher.

For much of the next few days I spent time exploring around my accommodation in Balboa and managed to find some excellent birding spots within Panama City. Cerro Ancón, a large hill within the urban sprawl of Panama City offered some mind-blowing birding with sightings of my first toucan for the trip - Keel-billed Toucan in

ABOVE Cerro Ancón viewed from our quarantine hotel in Panama City. This urban park boasts an impressive tally of 218 bird species. My accomodation in Balboa was on the lower slopes on the right of this photo. .

addition to Isthmian Wren, Yellow-green Vireo, Squirrel Cuckoo, Short-tailed Hawk, Hook-billed Kite, Yellow-crowned Tyrannulet and Plain-colored Tanager. With the trip list gaining momentum, I decided to indulge myself in one of my favourite types of birding - wader-watching, and it did not disappoint. Panama serves as a corridor for birds migrating from their breeding grounds in North America to their wintering grounds in South America. At certain times of the year, birds congregate in countless numbers as they pass through the country. August would not be ideal, but as I started scanning the mudflats at Casco Viejo, it was clear that the waders were already arriving in large numbers on their way south. I quickly found myself onto sightings of Least, Spotted, Semipalmated and Western Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Hudsonian Whimbrel (regarded by some authorities as the *hudsonicus* race of Eurasian Whimbrel), Grey Plover and Black-necked Stilt. The birding didn't stop at waders. Several coastal species such as Gull-billed Tern, Laughing Gull and Brown Pelican also showed well alongside an array of heron species, including Little Blue Heron, Tricolored Heron, Cocoi Heron, Yellow-crowned Night Heron and Snowy Egret.

With my options to add species slowly running out within the confines of Panama City, it was time to head out into the lowland forests to experience Panama's incredible avian diversity first-hand. Pipeline Road is one of those iconic sites



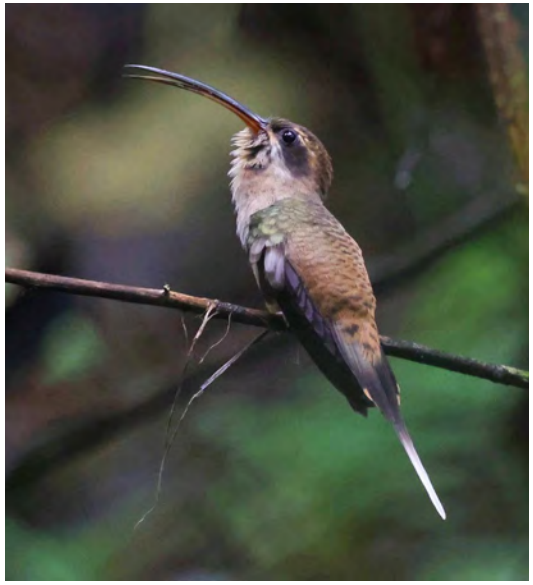
Above The unassuming entrance to arguably one of the top birding destinations in the world.

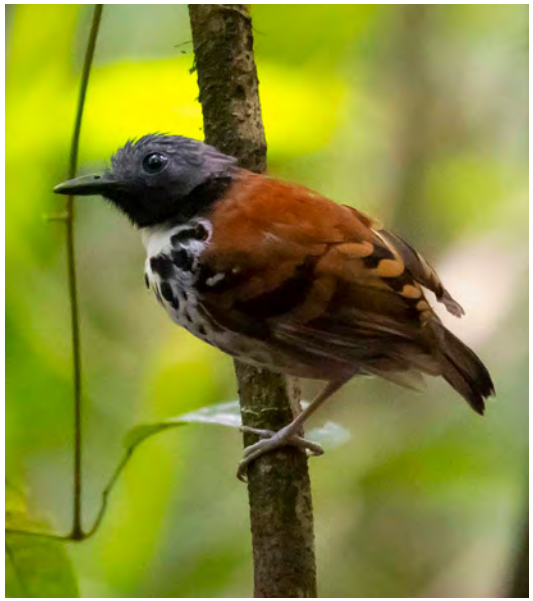
held in legendary regard amongst global birders for its astonishing number of species and is often referred to as: 'the Mecca of neotropical birding'. For many years, Pipeline Road held the record for most species recorded within a 24-hour period - a mind-blowing 357 species! I needed no encouragement, and I arrived before dawn with an electric excitement for what lay ahead. As I stepped out of the taxi, I stepped into an almost suffocating humidity. The road ahead was surrounded by dense lowland forest on both sides, and the canopy was a hive of activity. Some early sightings included: Thick-billed Euphonia, Black-bellied Wren, Rufous Motmot, Yellow-throated Toucan and Purple-throated Fruitcrow (my first representative of the family Cotingidae and second family lifer for the trip). The birding was challenging in that finding a calling species required patience, but it was extremely rewarding. I added Black-faced Antthrush (another family lifer - Formicariidae), Dot-winged Antwren, Blue Dacnis, Olivaceous Flatbill, Masked Tityra (family lifer number 4 - Tityridae) and Plain Xenops showing off in quick succession. The Rainforest Discovery Centre along Pipeline Road was simply spectacular, with several birding attractions, including a canopy view platform and several hummingbird feeders. First up was the canopy view, which offered excellent views over the pristine lowland forests. A few noteworthy additions included Blue-crowned

Left A Squirrel Cuckoo showed well at the Hummingbird Hide on Pipeline Road.

Above The 35 m tall canopy tower on Pipeline Road offers you the opportunity to get eye-level views of the canopy dwellers - and a bird's eye view of the forests.

Right A female Black-throated Trogon, one of three trogon species seen at Pipeline Road.





Some of Pipeline Road's pickings, CLOCKWISE FROM TO LEFT Thick-billed Euphonia, Long-billed Hermit, Spotted Antbird, Broad-billed Motmot.

and Golden-collared Manakin, Blue Cotinga, Scarlet-rumped Cacique, Golden-hooded Tanager, Crimson-crested Woodpecker and the only Snail Kite of the trip.

ABOVE The Hummingbird Viewing Deck at the Rainforest Discovery Centre along Pipeline Road is a must. Here you have the opportunity to watch these birds at arms length.

Next up were the hummingbird feeders. This viewing deck provided close-up views of five humming bird species: Blue-chested and Violet-bellied Hummingbird, Long-billed Hermit, Purple-crowned Fairy and White-necked Jacobin. The puffbirds (Bucconidae) were also well represented, with White-whiskered and Black-breasted Puffbird close to one another. Others here included Broad-billed Motmot, Northern Mealy Amazon and three trogon species, namely Black-tailed, Black-throated and Gartered Trogon. Perhaps the day's highlight was connecting with a single Spotted Antbird, which showed itself in the midst of a massive multi-species bird party containing a couple of trip birds such as Shining Honeycreeper, Greater Ani, Checker-throated Stipplethroat, Wedge-billed, Black-striped and Cocoa Woodcreeper. Feeling mentally and physically exhausted after seven hours of intense lowland birding, I caught a taxi back to Panama City for a mere $2 and fell asleep upon arrival in Balboa.

After a good night's rest, it was time to hire a car, pack the bags and hit the Pan-American Highway en-route to Boquete on the Costa Rican border. Boquete is a stark contrast to the hot and bustling

The Talamanca Mountains in Western Panama offers excellent cloud forest birding. Some highlights here included Torrent Tyrannulet (Above), Prong-billed Barbet (Middle) and White-throated Mountain-gem (Bottom) .

Panama City. Situated at just over 1 100 meters above sea level in the Talamanca Mountains, the Boquete area is characterized by cool weather, near-constant rainfall, forest cloaked mountainsides and many endemic birds. With over seven hours on the road and an overnight stop-over in the picturesque town of El Valle de Antón, it was with great anticipation that the car came to a halt in what could have been a scene taken from a Swiss postcard. The previous day had provided some excellent roadside birding with Blue-headed Parrot, Buff-throated Saltator, Black-chested Jay, Bay Wren, White-lined Tanager and the aptly named Roadside Hawk making their way onto the trip list. A quick stroll through the neatly manicured gardens in Boquete revealed that I was no longer birding the lowlands. Everything here was new, and I added Scarlet-rumped Tanager, Rufous-collared Sparrow (a familiar species I had encountered in Argentina before), Yellow-billed Cacique, Red-legged Honeycreeper, Bronzed Cowbird and Lesser Violetear in rapid succession. The sun dipped behind Volcán Barú (the highest point in Panama at 3 474 m above sea level), and a Tropical Screech Owl announced its presence from the forested foothills. I just had the feeling that the next morning was going to be simply spectacular.

My alarm went off at 5 am, but I was already awake, packed and ready for action. The low clearance sedan navigated up winding roads between coffee estates and over turbulent streams. I started scanning the Caldera River and picked up my first special, the minute Torrent Tyrannulet. As the name suggests, this tiny flycatcher is found exclusively along fast-flowing streams and was one of the species I was keen to see in the highlands. The quiet roads offered fantastic roadside birding with Flame-colored and Silver-throated Tanager, Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush, Sulphur-winged Parakeet (a Talamanca Mountains endemic) and Black Phoebe showing well. With the altitude increasing, the coffee plantations gradually gave way to mountain cloud forest. Eventually, the paved road ended, and only a single track trail pushed on into the forest. I parked the car and started exploring; one by one, the endemics began rolling in. I soaked up great views of Ochraceous Wren, Yellow-thighed Brushfinch, Ruddy

Treerunner, Black-cheeked Warbler, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, Collared Whitestart, Scintillant Hummingbird, White-throated Mountaingem, Golden-browed Chlorophonia and Black-and-yellow Phainoptila (family lifer - Ptiliogonatidae) - all of which are restricted to the mountainous regions of Panama and Costa Rica. Other mention-worthy species included

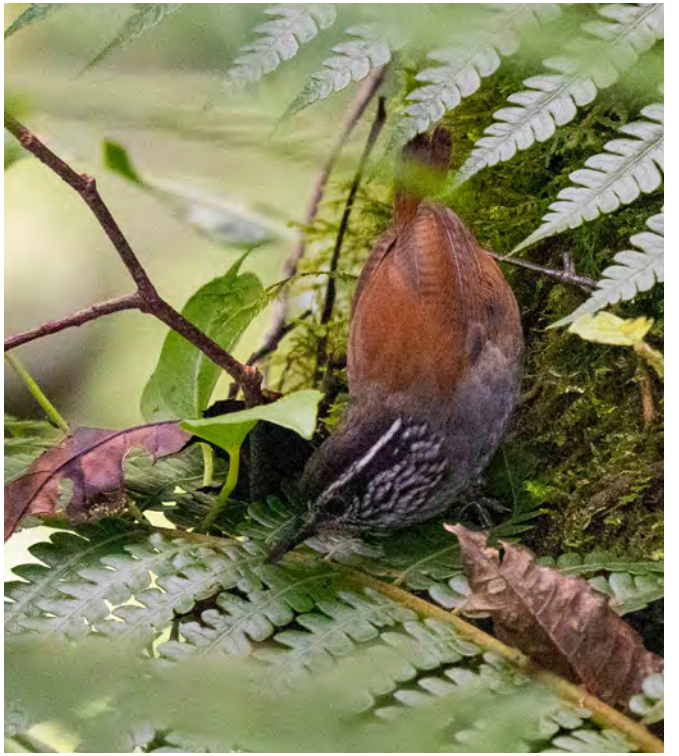
Right Cloud forests of the Talamanca Mountains near Bouqete.

Opposite A Grey-breasted Wood Wren.

Below Silver-throated Tanager.

Hairy and Acorn Woodpecker, Prong-billed Barbet (my first member of the family Seminornithidae), Yellow-bellied Siskin, Slate-throated Whitestart, Band-tailed Pigeon, Barred Becard and Buffy Tuftedcheek. I passed several hours of cloud forest birding in what felt like a few minutes; however, the rain settled in for the afternoon, and I was forced to retreat to my accommodation with a lifer-loaded list - and hundreds of photos to evaluate.

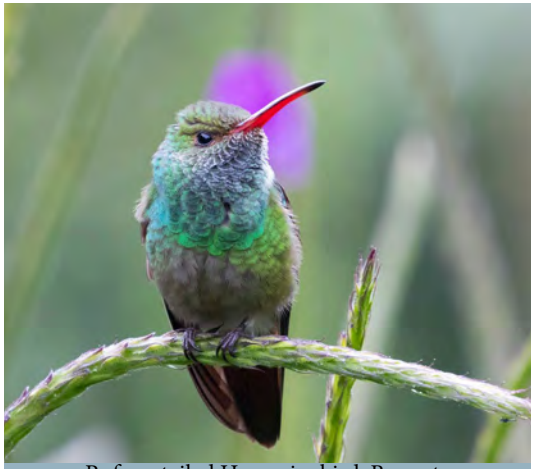
Day two of birding in Boquete brought with it the prospect of seeing one of the most iconic birds in the world. By some fortune, I met up with a group of birders at the start of Pipeline Trail (not to be confused with Pipeline Road). After scrutinizing E-bird maps and recent sightings of my target, Pipeline Trail had repeatedly turned up as an excellent site to search for it. We started the trail and within a few minutes added Elegant Euphonia, White-throated Thrush, Spotted Wood Quail, Brown-capped Vireo, Rufous-capped Warbler and White-tailed Emerald to the list. As we pushed on up the slippery trail, I chatted to Gabriel Ortiz, who works as a birding guide across Panama, about our prospects of finding the bird, "They are here, it's just patience - and a little luck", he replied. I was beginning to feel that painful yet familiar feeling that all birders have experienced – the feeling that I was about to 'dip' (fail to find a target species). Wild avocado trees are the name of the game when searching for the species, and after a few hours of investigating every possible wild avocado, I was almost ready to call it a day. Then, to make matters worse, the weather changed from what



American Dipper, Bouqete

Green Kingfisher, Boca Chica

Eastern Meadowlark, Bouqete



Rufous-tailed Hummingbird, Bouqete

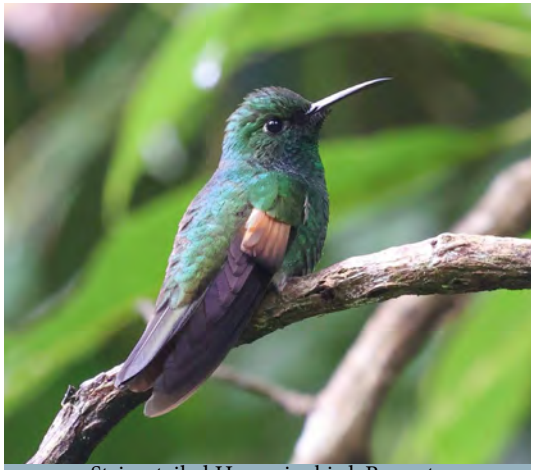
Brown Booby, Panama City

Black-cheeked Warbler, Bouqete

Bat Falcon, San Juan

Bare-throated Tiger Heron, Boca Chica

Golden-collared Manakin, Pipeline Road



Stripe-tailed Hummingbird, Bouqete

Palm Tanager, Panama City

Western Sandpiper, Panama City

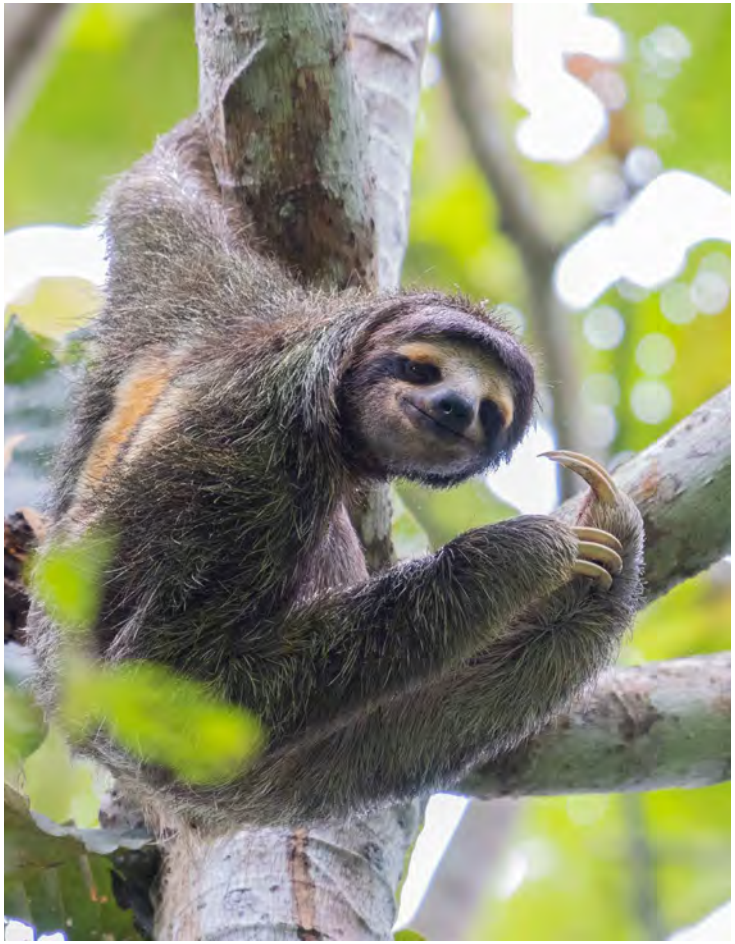
Above The rather odd Grey-headed Chachalaca, a common garden bird in much of Panama.

started as a cloudless morning to a torrential downpour. That's when I heard Gabriel calling from around a bend in the trail: "As quickly and quietly as you can", he exclaimed, "I've got it!". I ran, almost slipped, fixed my binoculars on the area that Gabriel was pointing at and immediately saw it through my somewhat misty binoculars. I had a male Resplendent Quetzal. The quetzal was the sacred bird of the ancient Mayas and Aztecs, and even today, the bird is held in regal regard across its range from southern Mexico into western Panama. It also happens to be the national bird of Guatemala, and the country's currency - the Guatemalan Quetzal – owes its name to this spectacular bird. Several fist-bumps and hundreds of photos later, we began our retreat down the valley in the unrelenting rain until … we found another three quetzals feeding together in a wild avocado tree! Two males and a single female! A couple of hundred photos more, and the Talamanca Mountains still had a couple of surprises in store for us with White-naped and Chestnut-capped Brushfinch, Yellowish

Left An iconic global bird - Resplendent Quetzal. I was delighted to see four birds after hours of searching!

Flycatcher and American Dipper (you guessed it, family lifer - Cinclidae) showing uncharacteristically well.

I packed my bags and left Boquete and the province of Chiriqui with an even greater love for Panama - not only for the fantastic birds but also for the Panamanian people that had on so many occasions saved the day with their limitless kindness and willingness to help. Not everything had gone according to plan; a broken wheel rim could have left us stranded for hours were it not for Eleon, who came out in the rain to help with the repairs, and a minor car accident could have been a disaster if the other driver hadn't been so relaxed about it. As this epic trip concluded, a last session of wader watching in Panama City and a stop-over in Boca Chica took the trip list up to 205 species. We tend to believe that international birding is fraught with difficulty, prohibitively expensive, dangerous without a guide and that cultures are vastly different from ours. In reality, our preconceptions are often incorrect, and I am continually surprised at how easy international birding can be. The flight departed from Panama City as the sun was setting behind the forested hills to the west, but already I was itching to get back.



Author e-mail: daniel.engelbrecht101@gmail.com

Left Panama is not just about birds - it has many interesting mammals too. This Three-toed Sloth was an unexpected bonus on Pipeline Road in Gamboa.

Club Ranch '21

Text Amri Van Aarde

A Limpopo River special - White-crowned Lapwing. Note the carpal spurs
© Jody De Bruyn.

Pel's Fishing Owl(s) - yes more than one! On Saturday, 25 September 2021, we met for our birding outing to Club Ranch Safaris on the Limpopo River near Platjan. I was especially excited by the opportunity to see Pel's Fishing Owl for the first time. Although we had an outside chance of seeing these majestic birds, but I was optimistic.

The long road ahead flew past us as we all caught up and shared what life had been casting our way lately. We discussed past trips and sightings in the car. Maria Botha told us about a Eurasian Blackcap that she saw in her garden that was quite interesting and Willie van der Merwe shared information about some *Hoodia* plants he wanted to take pictures of when we arrived at our destination. Minkie Prinsloo drove like a real pro as there were more potholes on the road than actual tarmac

Above An African Hawk-Eagle is always a welcome addition to a trip list © Jody De Bruyn.

Left Meyer's Parrot is one of the western Limpopo River Valley specials © Jody De Bruyn.

(all worth it in the end.)

Upon arrival, we had a quick coffee-and-rusks break, as is tradition for our birding club by now, and this also satisfied the caffeine junkies among us. We set

Above Birding along the dry riverbed on our way to the Pel's island © Richter Van Tonder.

off through the gate to the island where the Pel's owls were said to be found.

As soon as I told Minkie that I felt we would find them soon, the first owl made its appearance. These birds are so much bigger than I imagined. Yes, I have read up on them, but seeing them for myself was mesmerizing.

What's more, we found a younger owl with paler plumage and another adult – that's three of these enigmatic birds! Now it was the photographers' among us who showed off their skill and talent by trying to find a clear shot of these timid birds of prey. Jody, Richter and Marcia took some beautiful photos.

In my heart, I hoped to see just this species, so to see a family of these rare owls made my day. I couldn't ask for a better start to a fabulous biding day.

The owls aside, the species below are some of my lifers that were among the 82 species we saw:

- White-backed Night Heron,
- Brown-backed Honeybird,

Pel's Fishing Owl © Jody De Bruyn.

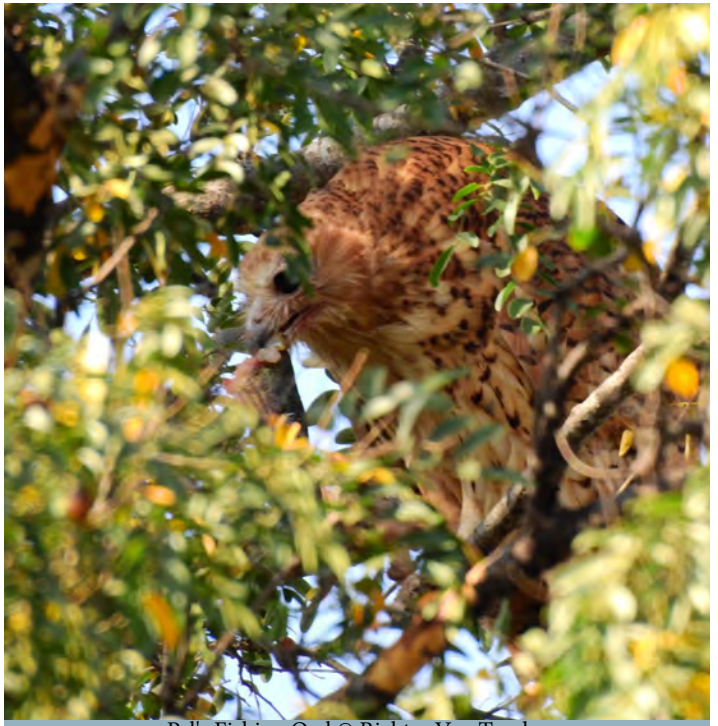
- Terrestrial Brownbul
- Tropical Boubou
- Shikra
- Meyer's Parrot
- White-crowned Lapwing
- Meves's Starling

We had a lovely braai, as is appropriate for Heritage Day. Money really can't buy the joyful and unforgettable day we had together once again.

Walking on the banks of the Limpopo River -
Priceless,
Having a braai in nature -
Priceless,
Seeing a family of Pel's Fishing Owls -
Totally unbelievable!

Author e-mail: a.vanaarde@mitchellhouse.co.za

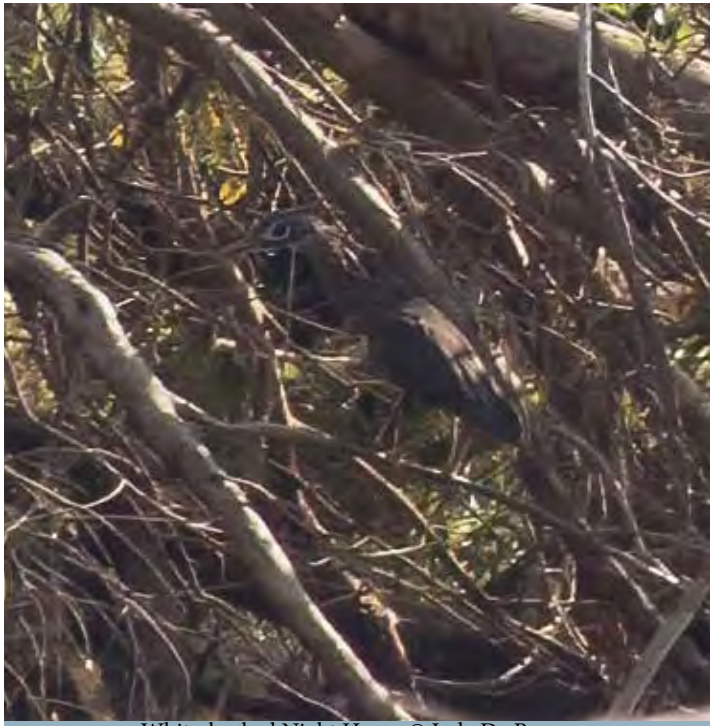
Brown-throated Martin © Jody De Bruyn



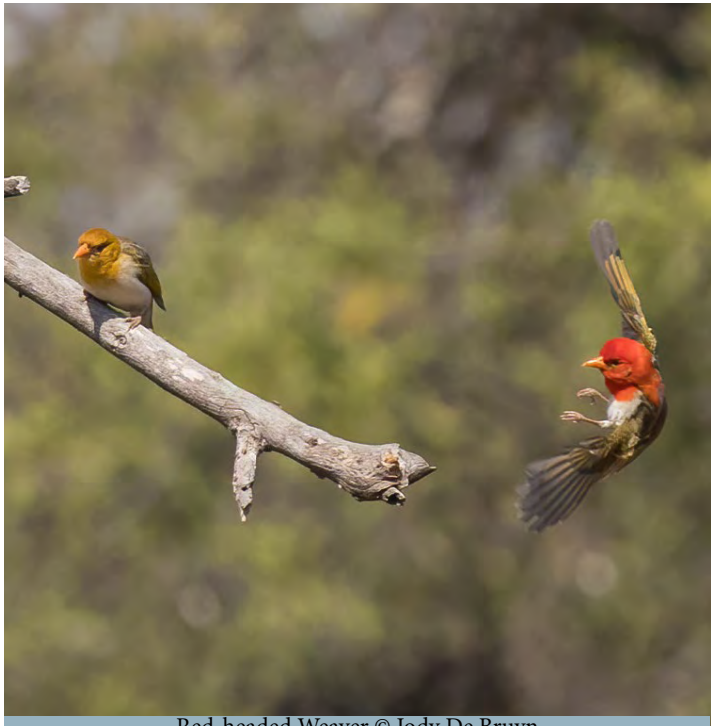
Pel's Fishing Owl © Richter Van Tonder

Pearl-spotted Owlet © Richter Van Tonder

White-throated Robin-Chat © Richter Van Tonder



White-backed Night Heron © Jody De Bruyn



Red-headed Weaver © Jody De Bruyn

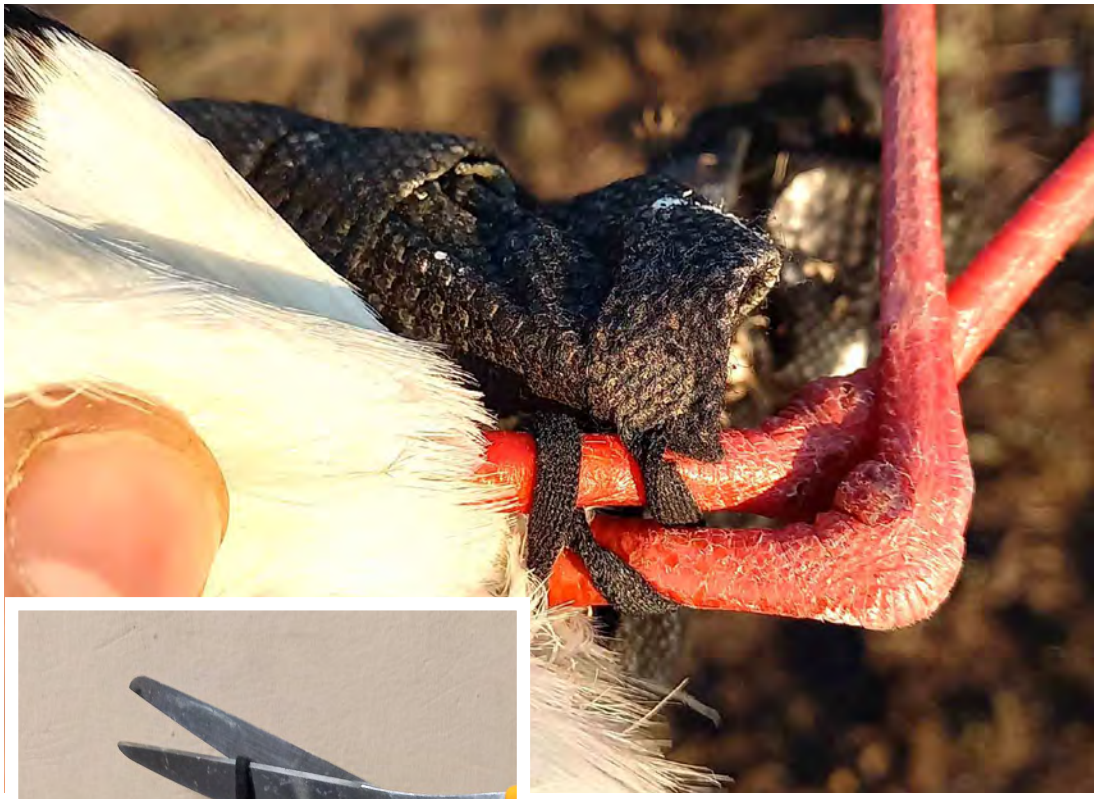
SNAP THE STRAP!

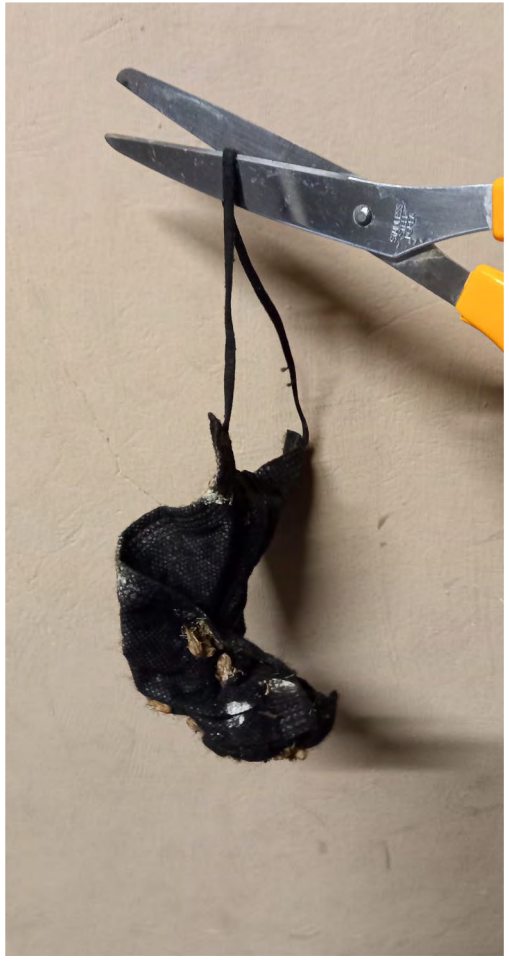
Derek Engelbrecht

Crowned Lapwing trapped in a discarded face mask
© Derek Engelbrecht

I suppose it was bound to happen, but it is still a shock when you see it. I was driving home on the 5th October 2021 when I saw what appeared to be a badly injured Crowned Lapwing hobbling along in a nearby open space. I stopped to have a closer look to see if I could help it. That was when I noticed it somehow got one strap of a face mask over its head. What's more, it must have got the other strap wrapped around its legs as it tried to get rid of the face mask and got badly entangled trying to do so. Both legs were essentially tied together, and it was unable to fly. As soon as it got airborne and wanted to extend its neck and legs, the elastic straps pulled tight and caused

BELOW The straps of the face mask got entwined around both legs.





Above A closer view of the straps entwined around the plover's legs.

Left It gave me extra satisfaction to snip the straps of this particular face mask before disposal.

the bird to thump back down to the ground. Aside from this debilitating position the bird found itself in, it appeared to be doing OK and was still foraging. I realized a rescue was on the cards.

I quickly went home to fetch some gear to capture the bird and was back in no time. After some nifty manoeuvres, I had the bird in hand and could free it from its death trap. I ringed it and released it, and I'm happy to say that I saw the bird on 25th October again.

Face mask pollution is becoming a growing threat to wildlife. Sadly, we will miss many animals facing similar dire circumstances trapped in a face mask that someone disposed of irresponsibly. In my youth, we had the very successful Zap it in the Zibi campaign to reduce litter. Perhaps we should promote a Snap the Strap campaign - and revive the Zap it in the Zibi bin campaign too!

We should all be aware of the dangers these masks pose after disposal. It should become a habit to snap (it's easy enough) or cut the straps before disposal in a bin. It doesn't mean that if you dispose of it in a bin, it cannot still cause harm to wildlife.

Author e-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

Right RRRR - Rescued, Ringed, Released and Resighted. All is well that ends well.

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Thank you for helping us "give conservation wings".

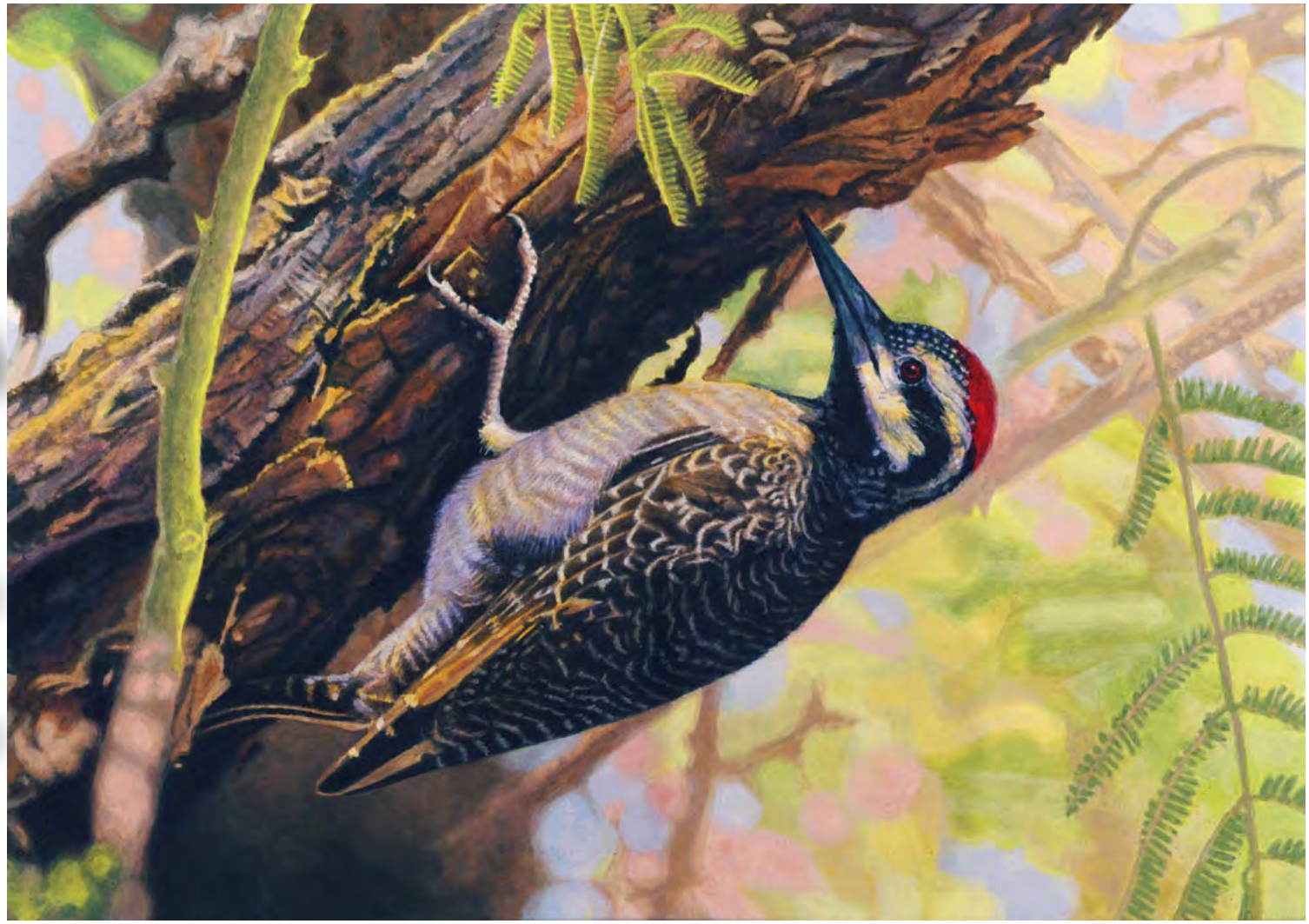
Regulars

Birds in Art

Bearded Woodpecker

Text and Artwork

Willem Van der Merwe



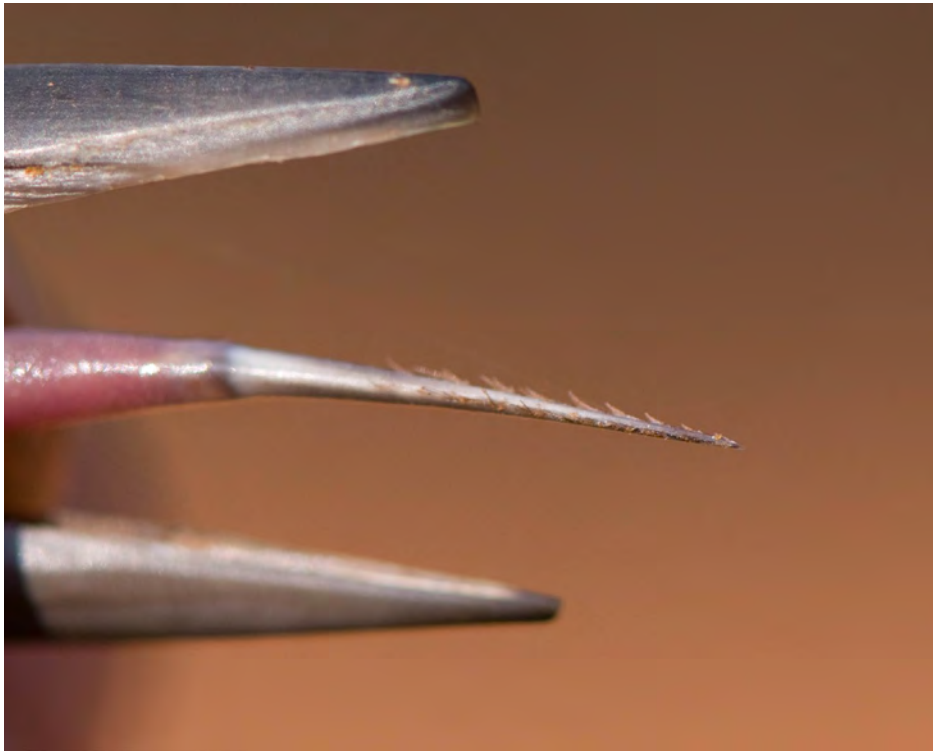
Here is a Bearded Woodpecker, *Dendropicos namaquus*. The scientific name means 'Namaqua Tree-woodpecker'. It is a bit inappropriate since the species doesn't occur in Namaqualand! Furthermore, 'tree-woodpecker' doesn't tell you much since just about all woodpeckers occur in trees. The common name is a bit better since this woodpecker has black patches on its throat that look like a beard. It is closely related to the Cardinal Woodpecker and sometimes classified into a different genus, *Thripias*. It's not as common around Polokwane as the Cardinal and Golden-tailed Woodpeckers are, but some are around.

The woodpecker family is large, diverse and fascinating for many reasons. Almost every part of their anatomy is specialized for their lifestyle of creeping up and down trees, pecking into the wood and extracting grubs and other insects to eat. In this respect, the Bearded Woodpecker is very typical: it has a long, powerful, ice-pick-like beak for hammering and chiselling; it has a long tongue for winkling critters out of the wood; it has stiff tail feathers to prop itself up against the bark; on each foot, it has two toes forward and two toes backwards, for a firm grip in going both up and down tree limbs. Its mainly black-and-white colour pattern is also nothing unusual, nor is the bright red patch

on its crown (possessed only by the male). Almost all woodpeckers of the world have at least some red on their heads somewhere.

But the Bearded Woodpecker does have one claim to fame. It is South Africa's – and indeed the whole continent of Africa's – biggest 'proper' woodpecker. The Ground Woodpecker is indeed quite a bit larger, but it is a weirdo among the woodpeckers for avoiding trees. Instead, Ground Woodpeckers hop and seek its food on the ground and between boulders in rather barren environs. Being a conventional woodpecker, the bearded holds the niche in Africa for a large-ish and powerful wood-pecking bird in regions with fairly big trees. It is actually not at all big, at a maximum overall length of 25 cm. Many woodpeckers of Europe, Asia and the Americas are quite a bit bigger. Because we humans are horrible, we have driven to extinction the world's two largest woodpecker species, the Ivory-billed and the Imperial, both of which lived in North America and grew to 55-60 cm in length.

Below The barbed, harpoon-like tip of a Bearded Woodpecker's tongue © Derek Engelbrecht



It is quite a puzzle why Africa doesn't have similarly large woodpeckers. We have expansive forests here, especially in the equatorial belt, and these hold some enormous trees. But for one reason or another, these have not 'stimulated' woodpeckers into growing big and diversifying and making use of all the food and lifestyle opportunities these forests offer. It might be that the many kinds of monkeys we have here made life hard for birds. But South America, which also has a huge diversity of monkey species, has a fantastic wealth of birds in its forests, including woodpeckers. And Asia is just a tad below Africa in monkey diversity and again has a magnificent variety of woodpeckers and other forest birds. In Africa, we don't have as many spectacular forest birds as in either of these continents. Most rainforest birds here are small and drab and hard to tell apart. Sure, even these are pretty fascinating once you get to know them! And we do also have our share of very striking birds. But many, if not most, of these, are inhabitants of the savannahs that characterize so much of the continent.

But still, it is strange that we don't have more, and bigger, and brighter, woodpeckers in Africa. Our rainforests hold only a few species of these, and they're quite small. But that is not the only puzzle about the woodpeckers. At least we have some. Woodpeckers do not at all occur in Madagascar or in Australia and its associated islands. Once again, there would seem plentiful niches for them there, and it ought not to have been so difficult for flying birds to reach and colonize these regions. But in Madagascar, lemurs have taken to the woodpecker niche. Today only one species remains, the Aye-Aye, with its chiselling teeth and absurdly elongated grub-winkling fingers. In New Guinea, some phalanger species seem to have done the same. And there's also a couple of small Australian birds that have taken to the tree-creeping lifestyle, though they're not as powerful peckers.

But let's get to our bird of the moment, the Bearded Woodpecker. This bird inhabits, rather than rainforests, a variety of drier, more open woodland types from South Africa northward to Ethiopia. In West Africa, it is replaced by the similar, though slightly smaller, Fire-bellied Woodpecker. While avoiding dense forests, Bearded Woodpeckers nevertheless seek out areas with substantially-sized trees, especially dead ones. People often fail to realize that dead trees are extremely important to the ecology. Dead trees are rapidly infested by fungi and lots of small invertebrates that start feasting on the deadwood. They also tend

Above The zygodactylous toe configuration of a woodpecker © Derek Engelbrecht.

to rot from the inside out, and their wood is soft and easy to excavate, making them ideal for foraging and nesting for woodpeckers and other wood-diggers and hole-nesters. For these reasons, anybody who values wildlife and is in charge of an extensive portion of wildland should leave trees that die naturally standing as they are to decay and be utilized.

Although they never occur in large groups or flocks, bearded woodpeckers are not hard to spot. They give away their presence with their loud, rapid 'wick-wick-wick' calls, and you can often hear their tapping as they explore the trees. They also have a louder and farther-carrying drumming. For this, they will select a very favourable 'instrument', such as a piece of thick, dry bark backed by a cavity, or a hollow with thin wooden walls, on a dead tree. This forms a natural drum! The woodpecker now pecks onto this drum, creating a loud drumming sound proclaiming its dominance and territory. It is also a way for a couple to keep in touch with each other as they separately forage throughout their territory. The drumming can be heard a kilometre away, under optimal conditions, so that a mate can be reassured upon hearing it that its 'better half' is still out there and doing fine. So, this loud drumming has nothing to do with seeking food. There have been videos circulated online showing woodpeckers pecking on metal boxes, and some people thought the woodpeckers to be stupid for trying to peck into metal! In fact, those woodpeckers were smart, since metal rings even more loudly than wood does, making metal surfaces much better for drumming for communication purposes.

While forming close bonds between mated pairs, bearded woodpeckers are otherwise very asocial. As I said, even mated pairs often forage far from each other. Having the longest beak of any African woodpecker, they can drill deep into the soft, rotten wood for the beetle grubs and other creepy crawlies within. But they will also pick up critters from the surface of the wood and bark, such as spiders or aphids. These birds hardly ever join the mixed bird parties that methodically forage through the African savannahs and woodlands, instead keeping to themselves. When couples do meet each other, they communicate by softer clucking sounds. Both sexes excavate their nest holes together. The female lays two to four eggs, which both sexes incubate. The chicks hatch after about two weeks, and both parents brood and feed them. They fledge at the age of about 26 days.

Bearded Woodpeckers have a very large range in Africa, and while never abundant at any particular place, are numerous enough overall that they can't at present be considered endangered.

Acknowledgements I thank my friend Minkie Prinsloo for permission to use her photo as a reference for this painting.

Author e-mail: willemsvandermerwe@gmail.com

View my gallery by clicking on the logo below:

Reflections

Birding in SANParks Limpopo parks

The magic of Matlakusa

Text and photos Chris Patton

Matlakusa Pan is on the edge of the N'wambiya Sandveld (the Nyandu Thicket) in Kruger National Park. To reach it, one has to turn off on an obscure track just off the SISAL Road that runs parallel to the Park's eastern boundary road (a few hundred metres at most to its west). The name Matlakusa means 'to raise or lift up' in Tsonga, and the locality is guaranteed to lift the spirits of any birder because, without fail, it always turns up some juicy sightings. If you are on a birding weekend like the SANParks' Honorary Rangers Punda Extreme Birding Weekends (the best ticket to get there for birding), a visit is always most welcome, particularly as it is likely to be in the heat of the day, when the mania of spending dawn in the Pafuri region, has worn off and additional species have ground to a trickle.

Although the Pan is a chance to add some exciting water birds in this arid sandveld part of the Park, some of the main attractions are not birds ostensibly associated with water. The only time I have managed to get (an admittedly poor quality) photo of a Stierling's Wren-Warbler out in the open was on the access track into the Pan, as the dense thicket of the Nyandu Bush thins a little.

In the previous edition of 'Reflections' in *The Lark*, I described birding in the N'wambiya Sandveld, aka the Nyandu Forest in far north-eastern Kruger. Matlakusa is flanked to the east by the sand camwood thickets of the Nyandu, and to the west is mixed

Right Stierling's Wren-Warbler, an often heard but seldom seen cryptic bird of thickets, along the access track into Matlakusa.

Below Matlakusa Pan may look innocuous, but always attracts a few exceptional birds.

mopane woodland, but the area immediately around the Pan is open and grassy, punctuated by a handful of trees…

And it is the tree just to the right of centre in the above photo of the Pan that is home to another sandveld special, difficult to find in Kruger, the dainty yet aggressive Shaft-

Left The dainty, yet aggresive Shaft-tailed Whydah in breeding plumage © Derek Engelbrecht.

tailed Whydah. I have been to the Pan somewhere between 15 and 20 occasions, always in late January or early February, and I don't think I have ever failed to record this species on that very tree. Apart from this location, I have only found this species (more associated with the country's arid west) on four or five other occasions in my decades of birding in the Park. The whydah is of course a parasite, and its host species the exquisite Violet-eared Waxbill can also be found in the area, but because it is less demonstrative than the whydah, is more a chance encounter than a reliable tick.

That same tree and the other taller trees on the south side of the Pan are also perches usually frequented by another quality target species associated with the Pan, the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. If you're visiting the Pan as a participant on the Punda Extreme Birding Weekend, there is a chance you might have already ticked this species at Crook's Corner, another of the Park's reliable haunts for this bee-eater, but while it is somewhat hit and miss at the Levuvhu/Limpopo Confluence, it is pretty much guaranteed at Matlakusa in late January and early February.

Being one of the few waterholes away from the Limpopo Basin in the far north of Kruger, water birds are what one wants to get from a visit to Matlakusa. There will invariably be something, even in dry years, when the Pan is a puddle. Species like African Openbill, African Jacana or one of the Park's ducks, such as Knob-billed or White-faced Whistling Duck, or one of the teal species, rare in the Park. But if it is a wet year, the Pan's basin will be a mass of saturated grassland vegetation, and then Matlakusa attracts some of the Park's rarities.

Above Blue-cheeked Bee-eater is reliably found in only a handful of places in Kruger… Matlakusa Pan is one of those…

It always amazes me how water birds know that the conditions of a location are favourable, but somehow they do. Even weak fliers

Above The rank waterlogged grassland in the wider depression of Matlakusa Pan in a wet year.

Left A juvenile Allen's Gallinule… how do such obvious weak fliers like most of the rallids know to descend in numbers in wetlands like Matlakusa when conditions are right?

like crakes, jacanas and gallinules somehow find their way to this little oasis in the arid sandveld. Lesser Moorhen, Allen's Gallinule, Intermediate Egret and African Pygmy Goose are some of the specials I've been lucky enough to find in this magical little spot. I'm pretty sure that some of the rarer migrant crakes will also find their way to Matlakusa, because they've been recorded at many other ephemeral pans in this tropical far-northern section of the Park.

From my first visit to this incredible Pan, I've always had such a strong sense of excitement and anticipation when I know I'm going to visit there. One year the Pan was bone dry, with no water birds, but the whydah and bee-eaters were still around. What's more, there was also a pair of mating lions right where the main pool of water usually lies! In another year, we saw an enormous African rock python gliding through the water and into the refuge of the waterside grass. Spiritual and uplifting indeed, this is a spot worth going the extra mile to visit.

Author e-mail: chris.patton@sanparks.org

Below An African Pygmy Goose, one of the treats that will appear at Matlakusa from time to time.

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Bird Briefs

African Skimmer resighting

Derek Engelbrecht
E-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

African Skimmers returned as breeding migrants to South Africa in 2016 following a 73-year hiatus. Since their return, I've been keeping a close watch on their arrival and departure dates and logged all known sightings and nesting attempts and, where possible, the nesting outcome. The stronghold for the South African breeding population is at Letaba Estates about 15 km east of Tzaneen in the Lowveld, where one to four pairs have been nesting every year since 2017.

As part of a study of the ecology and behaviour of this iconic species, I have been recording chick growth and development, parental care strategies and breeding success at Letaba Estates. To facilitate individual identification of chicks, and monitor their pre- and post-fledging movements and survival, chicks are ringed when they are 7–10 days old and fitted with a unique combination of two plastic colour rings. Colour ringing has already paid dividends as one of the chicks that fledged at Letaba Estates near Tzaneen, was resighted at a dam in Venda, about 90 km to the north (Engelbrecht 2020). In 2020, another component was added to the study; the roles of the sexes during nesting. To this end, two adults were captured and fitted with colour rings to aid in individual identification.

On 3 September 2021, while performing routine monitoring of the small breeding population of African Skimmers at Letaba Estates east of Tzaneen, a colour-ringed adult was photographed in flight. It turned out to be one of the adults ringed at Letaba Estates on 14 August 2020. The days elapsed between ringing and resighting was 386 days. This resighting again demonstrates that African Skimmers show a reasonable degree of site fidelity (see Engelbrecht 2020). In addition to the juvenile resighted in Venda (Engelbrecht 2020), there is another speculative record of site fidelity exhibited by African Skimmer. One of the female African Skimmers (sexing based on morphological and behavioural features) at Letaba Estates is easily recognisable due to her peculiar gait, the result of an old foot or leg injury. This bird was first observed at Letaba Estates in 2019 and she successfully fledged four chicks that year. On 2 September 2021, she was observed incubating a clutch of two eggs at Letaba Estates (Johan Botma, pers. com.).

To conclude, this study keeps delivering surprises and continues to improve our knowledge of chick survival, the roles of the sexes during nesting, movements and dispersal. A kind request to photographers: please check your images of African Skimmers, particularly of birds in the Limpopo Province, for rings (metal on the right leg, colour rings on the left leg). Should you see a ringed bird, please notify me and include a photo (for ageing purposes), GPS for the site (or as close as possible) and the date.

Above A pair of African Skimmers at Letaba Estates. The bird on the right is the female. The yellow ellipse is shown enlarged in the inset, and the colour combination of White/Green on the left leg is clearly visible © Daniel Engelbrecht.

Acknowledgements *My sincere appreciation goes to Johan Botma, my eyes and ears on the ground at Letaba Estates.*

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Growth and development of Arrow-marked Babbler nestlings

Derek Engelbrecht
E-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

The harsh nasal chatter of Arrow-marked Babblers is as distinct as it is a familiar sound in the mesic woodlands of southern, central and eastern Africa. They are highly social cooperative breeders living in groups ranging from 3 to 13 individuals, defending their territory throughout the year. Although aspects of their breeding biology are known, there seems to be limited information about the growth and development of nestlings. This note describes the growth and development of a clutch of two Arrow-marked Babblers. The use of plumage and growth parameters is of value for studies where nestling age estimates are required for daily survival estimates.

On 19 October 2010, I found an Arrow-marked Babbler nest containing two eggs in the Polokwane Game Reserve. The nest was placed in a medium-sized *Vachellia tortilis*, about 1.7 m off the ground and close to the tree's main stem.

BELOW The Arrow-marked Babbler nest containing the two eggs
© Derek Engelbrecht

The two eggs measured 24.1 mm x 18.4 mm (4.24 g) and 24.8 mm x 19.1 mm (4.59 g), respectively. The nest was visited on alternate days to determine the hatching date. At 13:10 on 27 October 2010, the nest contained a recently hatched nestling and an unpipped egg. The next day, the other egg hatched, suggesting incubation at this nest commenced after laying the first egg, resulting in an asynchronous hatching pattern.

The growth and development of nestlings were recorded mostly on alternate days during the nestling period. All measurements were recorded within 90 minutes after sunrise. To distinguish individual nestlings, they were marked on the thigh with a non-toxic marker pen and fitted with a metal ring when they were eight days old. Nestling development was described with regard to:

- plumage development,
- increase in mass (g) measured with a portable digital electronic scale,
- increase in tarsus length (mm), and
- length of the wing chord (mm) as described by de Beer et al. (2001).

Nestling development

Growth patterns of the two nestlings for selected parameters are presented below. It is interesting to note that

A newly hatched Arrow-marked Babbler nestling.

upon fledging, the tarsi of the two nestlings were almost fully grown but the wings were not nearly fully grown yet. This is a strategy employed by many open, cup-nesting species to invest heavily in the growth of the legs to enable the nestlings to fledge early and be mobile, to reduce the risk of a predator locating the nest and depredating the entire brood.

Hatching (Day 0)

The newly hatched nestling was naked and blind. The skin was a pale flesh colour. On hatching day, the two nestlings weighed 5.6 g and 4.6 g, respectively. The bill was yellowish, and the gape flanges a slightly paler, yellow colour. The inside of the mouth and the tongue was a brighter yellow colour. Although there were no tongue spots or spots at the bill tips, the posterior central part of the tongue showed a slightly darker discolouration. The claws were pale horn-coloured.

Day 1

Eyes still closed. The individual pterylae are visible below the skin.

Day 2

The eyes are open slits. Some primaries and secondaries erupted through the skin. Tail neosoptiles are visible. The bill starts to darken but the gape flanges remain the same colour.

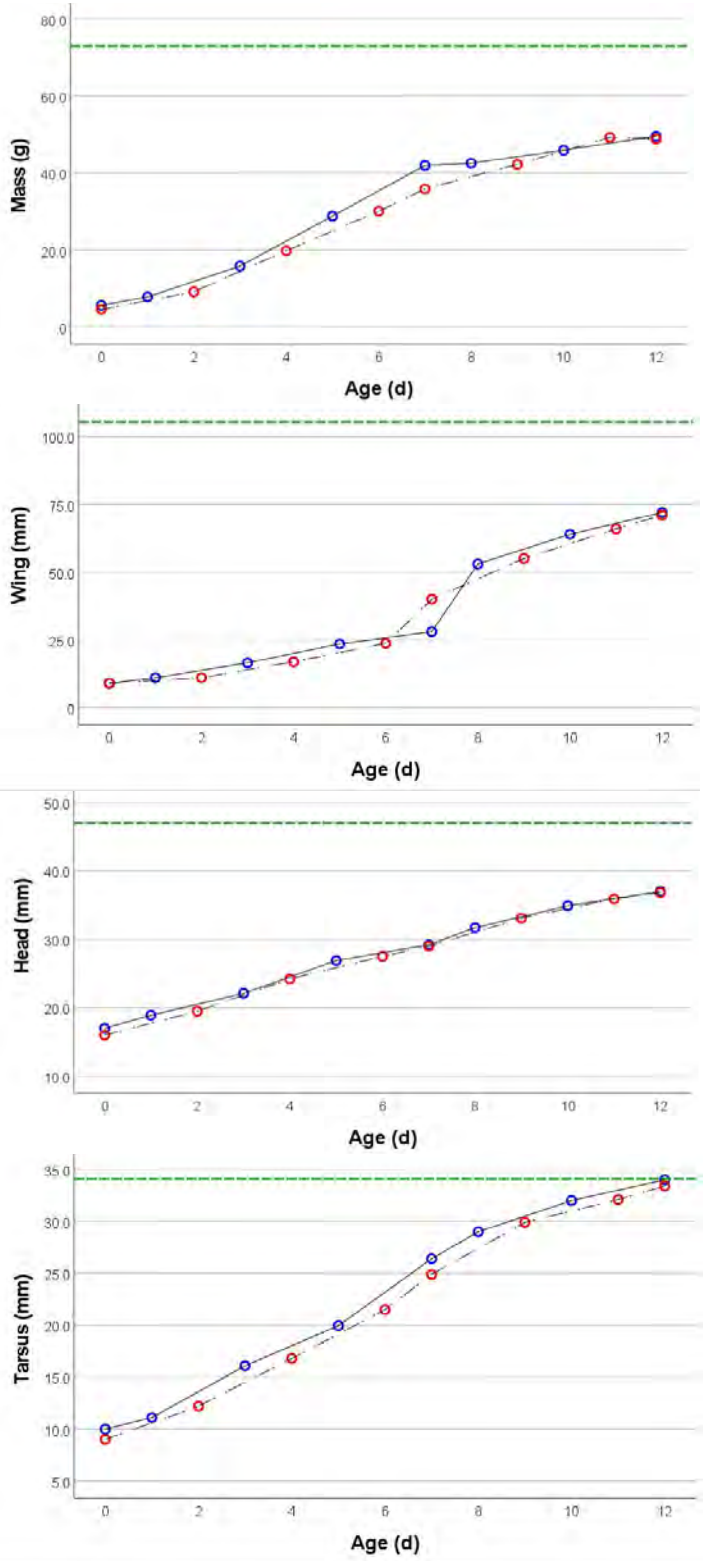
Day 3

The eyes are still open as slits but more so than on day 2. All the feather tracks have erupted except the capital and crural pterylae.

Day 4

All the feather tracts in pin, including some on the capital and crural tracts, but only just though. The eyes

A 6-day old Arrow-marked Babbler nestling.



Increase in mass and selected morphological parameters of two Arrow-marked Babbler nestlings. The green dotted line represents the mean value of that parameter for adult birds.

Two Arrow-marked Babbler nestlings, 9 (left) and 10 (right) days old.

are almost fully open, but the nestlings prefer to keep it open like slits.

Day 5

The eyes are fully open, and all tracks are in pin.

Day 6

The first feathers on the capital, crural, femoral, dorsal and ventral pterylae in brush. Nestlings are very vocal, calling a babbler-like call.

Day 7

Most feathers on the capital (except crown), crural, femoral, dorsal and ventral pterylae in brush. Most secondaries and one or two primaries in brush, but only just.

Day 8

All pterylae in brush. All primaries and secondaries in brush.

Day 9

All tracts have most feathers in brush, but crown only starting to go in brush. Most secondary greater coverts and the first primary greater coverts in brush.

Day 10

All feathers in brush. Primaries are between 25% and 50% in brush.

Day 12

All in brush, primaries approximately 66% in brush.

The nestlings fledged asynchronously when they were 13 days old. This is considerably shorter than the 18 to 21 days reported by Monadjem et al. (1995). According to Monadjem et al. (1995), nestlings of larger groups tend to fledge at a younger age (9 group members, 18 day nestling period) than smaller groups (3 group members, 21 days). The short nestling period in this study, therefore, seems unusually short. Despite the early fledging observed in this study, at least one of the fledglings survived as adults were seen carrying food 25 m from the nest three days after the younger of the two nestlings fledged. It would be interesting to investigate the proximal causes of variation in the nestling period of Arrow-marked Babblers. I acknowledge that, despite my well-designed field protocol to minimize disturbance at the nest during data collection, my activity may have contributed to earlier than usual fledging. An alternative explanation may involve partial predation of the oldest chick followed by premature fledging of the younger chick a day later. Whether the unusually short nestling period recorded here was natural or induced, it highlights the need for a more detailed study of these fascinating birds.

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Monadjem A, Owen-Smith N, Kemp AC. 1994. Position of nest, incubation period and nestling period of the Arrowmarked Babbler. Ostrich 65: 341.

A 12-day old Arrow-marked Babbler nestling.

Yellow-breasted Longclaw (Pipit): SA's diminutive longclaw

Hugh Chittenden
E-mail: hugh@rarebirds.co.za

This short note has been compiled to support the recent genetic findings that show that Yellow-breasted 'Pipit' *Anthus chloris* is, in fact a longclaw, and that it should be now placed in the genus *Macronyx* with the other longclaws.

The latest genetic work by Pietersen et al. (2018), showing that this bird should rightfully be placed with the longclaws (*Macronyx*) and not with the *Anthus* pipits, is overdue and welcomed. I have always thought that this species is misplaced as an *Anthus* pipit; it just doesn't have the right 'pipit' feel, so the delay in accepting the Yellow-breasted Pipit as one of the *Macronyx* longclaws in the latest checklist updates comes as a surprise.

It appears that those involved with compiling world bird lists have decided that findings of the Pietersen et al. (2018) study should be kept on ice and that the current conservative generic classification be maintained 'until future studies are performed'. Regarding Yellow-breasted 'Pipit' (the species under discussion here), which was just one of the 56 species looked at in the study, I totally disagree! Its DNA has been shown to be aligned with the *Macronyx* longclaws, and any observer with good field experience with this species would

Below A male (left) and female (right) Yellow-breasted 'Pipit' © Hugh Chittenden.

Above A Yellow-breasted Pipit (left, © Hugh Chittenden)) and Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei* (right, © Adam Riley).

Below Head views of Yellow-breasted 'Pipit', male (left), and female (right). The bluish lower mandibles are more pronounced during breeding. Golden Gate NP, January.

Far left A male Yellow-breasted 'Pipit' showing typical longclaw back feathering © Hugh Chittenden.

Left Dorsal plumage of museum study skins showing how the dorsal plumage of Yellow-breasted 'Pipit' contrasts with those of pipits.

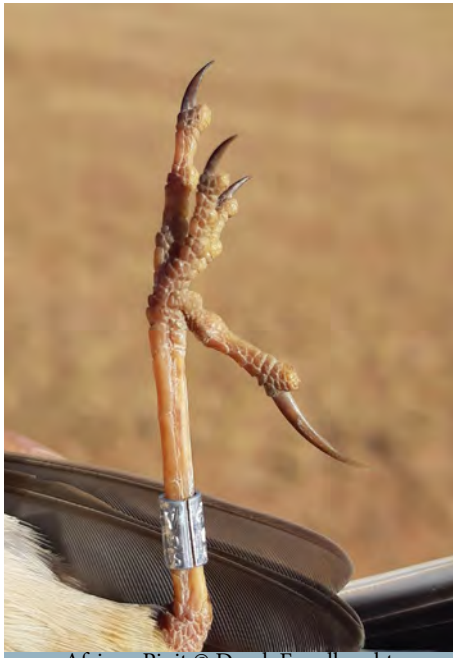
know that its current status quo in the pipit family is simply incorrect!

Sharpe's Longclaw *Macronyx sharpei* is the East African equivalent of our endemic Yellow-breasted 'Pipit'. Classification of the latter however, has meant that it has, till now, been regarded as a pipit, whereas Sharpe's has always been correctly positioned in the longclaw genus. Both are morphologically and ecologically similar. Both have bluish bases to their lower mandibles, and both have dark brown/blackish blotching to their backs, with feathers broadly margined yellowish white. They are not only surprisingly similar in appearance but also behaviour and habitat choice. Both are high altitude, short grass specialists, occurring in Afromontane grassland, preferring fairly short-cropped grassy areas. Both are uncommon species, and both are about the same size (16–17 cm). Sharpe's Longclaw is endemic to

Far left A Cape Longclaw showing typical black blotching to its back feathers © Hugh Chittenden.

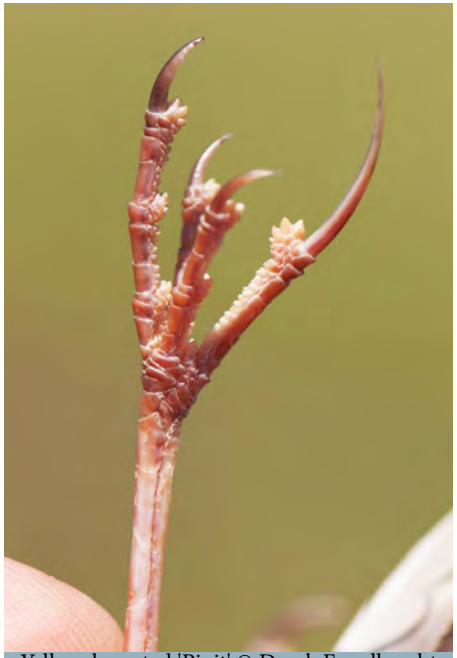
Left Dorsal plumages of longclaws (including Yellow-breasted 'Pipit') showing the dark blotching to their dorsal plumages.

HIND CLAW COMPARISONS OF PIPITS AND LONGCLAWS



African Pipit © Derek Engelbrecht

Nicholson's Pipit © Derek Engelbrecht



Yellow-breasted 'Pipit' © Derek Engelbrecht

Cape Longclaw © Derek Engelbrecht

Kenya, and Yellow-breasted 'Pipit' is endemic to South Africa.

Time in the field with Yellow-breasted 'Pipit' will show two morphological characters that are unlike grassland inhabiting pipits. Firstly, the blue base to their bills, and secondly, their dorsal plumage that is unlike all *Anthus* pipits. Pipits don't have a bluish base to their bills, and, an infield view from the rear will reveal that the dorsal plumage blotching is more akin to longclaws than pipits.

Ninety-nine years ago, Austin Roberts in his landmark 1922 publication, wrote that this species "reminds one of the Yellow Wagtails. It has little in common with the other plainer coloured Pipits and would seem to be allied to *Tmetothylacus* (Golden Pipit) ..... and is the link between the pipits and the longclaws (*Macronyx*)". The Pietersen et al. (2018) findings show that both the Yellow-breasted Pipit and Golden Pipit are indeed nested within the longclaw group, and that they

Below A female carrying nesting material. Golden Gate NP, January © Hugh Chittenden.

should both thus be transferred to *Macronyx*.

Setting aside taxonomic issues, the following photos are included to give insight into their everyday lives and the typical upland grassland habitat they favour.

Finally, when the change to this bird's classification occurs, having two yellow longclaws in the region with similar names (Yellow-throated and Yellow-breasted Longclaws) might lead to confusion. If so, perhaps Montane Longclaw, instead of Yellow-breasted Longclaw, might be a better option.

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A male scratching for invertebrates in Black Wildebeest dung © Hugh Chittenden.

A female perched in a patch of pale, grey-coloured *Helichrysum odoratissimum*, a strongly aromatic perennial herb © Hugh Chittenden.

Three nestlings near Wakkerstroom, January 2014 © Derek Engelbrecht.

A bird drinking at a shallow hillside pond © Hugh Chittenden.

Bird names in Tsonga (Xitsonga): A list of names

Johan Meyer
E-mail: meyer.ij@gmail.com

Tsonga (Xitsonga) is a Bantu language spoken in South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Eswatini. It is also known as Shangaan. It is one of the official languages of South Africa, where it is spoken by 4,5% of the population as a home language. It is a recognised language in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Officially six Tsonga dialects are recognised, and there is a slight difference in the spelling used in South Africa and Mozambique. These differences can be seen in the name of the Double-banded Sandgrouse *Pterocles bicinctus*: xighwaraghwara (South Africa) vs xiguaraguara (Mozambique).

This study aimed to make a database of bird names in Tsonga found in literature and two fieldwork sessions and then analyse this database.

Method

A database was constructed using the same method as previously with Venda (Meyer 2021a). The database had two types of sources: a literature survey and fieldwork.

Various dictionaries and other publications were consulted from 2017 to 2020. A full list of the sources used can be found at the end of the article.

Fieldwork was done in 2016 in the Lowveld and Kruger National Park. The contributors were Alex Van den Heever, Renias Mhlongo, Norman Chauke and Bernard Stiglingh. In 2021, Edith Baloyi, a BirdLife South Africa bird guide, also did fieldwork. The bird names obtained in 2016 and 2021 field seasons were added to the database.

Briefly, a database was created from the information found in both the literature research and the fieldwork. All the names found were entered into the database. With each entry, the following was recorded:

1. The name in the specific language,
2. The name in the language found in the source (mainly English or Afrikaans),
3. The source name,
4. The family of birds to which the name belongs,
5. The scientific name if it is found in the source.

The total number of entries means the actual number of names in the database. A name can be repeated several times in the database from different sources, and each time it will be counted as an individual entry. The number of names, therefore, does not equal the number of bird species.

The names in the database were then analysed, sorting them into four categories, namely:

1. A name used for only one species (species-specific name),
2. A general name used for more than one species of the same family,
3. A general name used for more than one species in different, sometimes unrelated, families.
4. Name of an unknown bird species.

This final database was then analysed to determine the number of entries, the number of unique entries and the percentage of the unique names of the total number of entries.

Results and Discussion

There are 1592 data entries in the database, of which only 594 or 37% are unique entries. The total number of unique data entries was higher than both Ndebele and Venda, but lower than Northern Sotho. (Meyer 2021a, Meyer 2021b and Meyer 2021c). There were 27 names where the species could not be identified.

The percentage of species-specific names (52.5%) were almost the same as for Venda, higher than Northern Sotho and a lot higher than Ndebele. A list of the species-specific names found, together with the bird's scientific name and name in English, can be found in the appendix after the bibliography.

Conclusion

More fieldwork should be done, especially looking for names for birds that currently do not have a recorded name. After this, descriptive parts, like adjectives, need to be added to the known names to make them species-specific. Once this is done, it will help promote birdwatching and bird conservation among Tsonga-speakers in Southern Africa.

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Xiganki -Crested Guineafowl © Daniel Engelbrecht

Makoti -Lappet-faced Vulture © Derek Engelbrecht

Ncilongi - Magpie Shrike © Derek Engelbrecht

Nghututu - Southern Ground Hornbill © Derek Engelbrecht

Urimakutata - Sabota Lark © Derek Engelbrecht

Mandlakeni - Arnot's Chat © Daniel Engelbrechtt

Appendix. Bird names in Tsonga

Family	Scientific Name	Tsonga	English
Struthionidae	*Struthio camelus*	Bulume, nyimbu, yimbhu, yinca	Common Ostrich
Numididae	*Guttera pucherani*	Mangoko, xiganki, xinganki	Crested Guineafowl
Phasianidae	*Dendroperdix sephaena*	Cecere, nghwari	Crested Francolin
	Coturnix delegorguei	Dzurhini, n'hwarixigwaqa	Harlequin Quail
	Peliperdix coqui	mantantana , mantsentse, n'hwarimantantana, ntantana	Coqui Francolin
	Coturnix coturnix	Mavolwane, xighwaqua	Common Quail
	Scleroptila levaillantoides	ncecerhekungwa	Orange River Francolin
	Pternistis natalensis	nghwari ma ntshengwhayi, n'whari ma ntshengwhayi	Natal Spurfowl
	Pternistis swainsonii	nghwari ya xidhaka, n'whari mankoko, n'whari ya xidhaka	Swainson's Spurfowl
	Scleroptila shelleyi	njenjele	Shelley's Francolin
	Pternistis afer	n'warimakokwe	Red-necked Spurfowl
	Scleroptila levaillantii	xicecerekungwa, xicendzerekungwa	Red-winged Francolin
	Coturnix adansonii	xindogo	Blue Quail
Turnicidae	*Turdus libonyanus*	xigwahla	Kurrichane Buttonquail
Anatidae	*Alopochen aegyptiaca*	hanzi, sekwa mhala, sekwa ra Xigipita	Egyptian Goose
	Dendrocygna viduata	xintwintwintwi, xiyahkokeni	White-faced Whistling Duck
	Netta erythrophthalma	xinyankakeni	Southern Pochard
	Nettapus auritus	xisekwana	African Pygmy Goose
	Plectropterus gambensis	sekwagongwana, sekwanyarhi	Spur-winged Goose
	Sarkidiornis melanotos	patu ra nhova, xikuvikuvi	Knob-billed Duck
Podicepididae	*Podiceps cristatus*	ripetani	Great Crested Grebe
Phoenicopteridae	*Phoenicopterus ruber*	ximinta ntsengele	Greater Flamingo
Ciconiidae	*Anastomus lamelligerus*	mukyindlopfu	African Openbill
	Ciconia ciconia	xaxari	White Stork
	Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis	hukumhlanga, kokwasabi, ngwamhlanga	Saddle-billed Stork

Family	Scientific Name	Tsonga	English
	Leptoptilos crumeniferus	qandlopfu, tsevane	Marabou Stork
	Mycteria ibis	ghumba leri kulu	Yellow-billed Stork
Threskiornithidae	*Bostrychia hagedash*	ing'angane, man'an'ani, mangangani, n'an'ana, xikohla-hi-dyambu	Hadada Ibis
Scopidae	*Scopus umbretta*	makhondjana, mandonzwana, manghondzwana, nghondzo, n'wa ncakeni	Hamerkop
Ardeidae	*Ardea goliath*	ntsaviya	Goliath Heron
	Ardea purpurea	rikolwa	Purple Heron
	Bubulcus ibis	masemgahomu, mthejwana, munyangana, muthecana, ntexani, nyonimahlopi	Cattle Egret
Phalacrocoracidae	*Phalacrocorax lucidus*	ngulukwani	White-breasted Cormorant
Anhingidae	*Anhinga rufa*	gororo	African Darter
Sagittariidae	*Sagittarius serpentarius*	mampfana, mhampfana	Secretarybird
Accipitridae	*Circaetus pectoralis*	xithaklongwa	Black-chested Snake Eagle
	Elanus caeruleus	nwarikapanyana, n'watavangani, xikhavakhwani	Black-shouldered Kite
	Gypaetus barbatus	mpfumo	Bearded Vulture
	Gypohierax angolensis	gungwa, ngungwamawala	Palm-nut Vulture
	Haliaeetus vocifer	nghunghwa, nghwati, nhwati, xikwembu xa mathi	African Fish Eagle
	Lophaetus occipitalis	masworhimasworhi	Long-crested Eagle
	Milvus parasitus	mangatlwana	Yellow-billed Kite
	Polemaetus bellicosus	gama rhandsele matlavela, mandlobye, manole, xatobola	Martial Eagle
	Polyboroides typus	kwezu, n'watimhakweni	African Harrier-Hawk
	Terathopius ecaudatus	ximhungwe	Bateleur
	Torgos tracheliotus	khoti mfumo, lwanga, makoti	Lappet-faced Vulture
	Trigonoceps occipitalis	khoti mpenyani, nkotimpenyana, ridya mangwa	White-headed Vulture
Falconidae	*Polihierax semitorquata*	n'watsweku	African Pygmy Falcon
Otididae	*Ardeotis kori*	manthensi, mithisi, ntshesi	Kori Bustard

Family	Scientific Name	Tsonga	English
	Lissotis melanogaster	xicololwana lexi kulu	Black-bellied Bustard
	Lophotis ruficrista	ntsukwani, xicololwana lexi tsongo	Red-crested Korhaan
Sarothruridae	*Sarothrura rufa*	nhwari	Red-chested Flufftail
Rallidae	*Amaurornis flavirostra*	hukunambyeni	Black Crake
	Rallus caerulescens	nwa tsekutseku, nwatsekutseku	African Rail
Gruidae	*Balearica regulorum*	sekwarhandzana	Grey Crowned Crane
Burhinidae	*Burhinus capensis*	mpyempye	Spotted Thick-knee
	Burhinus vermiculatus	xigidavusiku	Water Thick-knee
Charadriidae	*Charadrius tricollaris*	n'wantshekutsheku, n'watshekulana	Three-banded plover
	Vanellus lugubris	covela khwatsi	Senegal Lapwing
Glareolidae	*Rhinoptilus chalcopterus*	tshembyana	Bronze-winged Courser
Pteroclididae	*Pterocles bicinctus*	xighwaraghwara	Double-banded Sandgrouse
Columbidae	*Columba arquatrix*	ngalakana	African Olive Pigeon
	Oena capensis	xivhambalana xa ncila	Namaqua Dove
	Spilopelia senegalensis	guu-guu nkata mkhacani, serhu	Laughing Dove
	Streptopelia capicola	xilandakhopola	Ring-necked Dove
	Streptopelia semitorquata	khopola, kopo, nyakopo	Red-eyed Dove
	Treron calvus	nguamba, ngwambani, mbambawunye, nghwamba, ngwamba	African Green Pigeon
	Turtur chalcospilos	wariba	Emerald-spotted Wood Dove
Musophagidae	*Corythaixoides concolor*	kwenyana, ntluwa	Grey Go-away-bird
	Tauraco corythaix	ntlume, tlulutlulu	Knysna Turaco
	Tauraco porphyreolophus	ghwalaghwala	Purple-crested Turaco
Cuculidae	*Chrysococcyx caprius*	mandzamandza	Diederik Cuckoo
	Cuculus solitarius	ngwafalantala, tsheketani, xiholowanye	Red-chested Cuckoo
	Oxylophus jacobinus	hunyi, mahleveni, nkata mangovo, tatamagova	Jacobin Cuckoo
Tytonidae	*Tyto alba*	madzukuya, nsoo, nsoona, swnono, tsoo	Western Barn Owl
	Tyto capensis	musoho	African Grass Owl

Family	Scientific Name	Tsonga	English
Strigidae	*Bubo africanus*	xiyinha	Spotted Eagle-Owl
	Bubo lacteus	nkhunsi, nkuhunsi, xidjonga, xinunu	Verreaux's Eagle-Owl
	Glaucidium capense	xikhodlane	Barred Owl
	Otus senegalensis	xikotlwa	African Scops Owl
	Ptilopsis granti	kurkurtavoni, tshukut-shukurhulu	Southern White-faced Owl
Caprimulgidae	*Caprimulgus rufigena*	kumbyata	Rufous Nightjar
Coliidae	*Colius striatus*	nhlazi	Speckled Mousebird
	Urocolius indicus	xivovo	Red-faced Mousebird
Coraciidae	*Coracias naevius*	vhevhe nkomo	Purple Roller
Alcedinidae	*Alcedo cristata*	thungununu, xicelele lontsongo	Malachite Kingfisher
	Alcedo semitorquata	xicelele wa le handle, xitserere	Half-collared Kingfisher
	Ceryle rudis	n'warikwenyana, xicelele wa le matini	Pied Kingfisher
	Halcyon albiventris	ikula-nhenje	Brown-hooded Kingfisher
	Halcyon senegalensis	ncocololo	Woodland Kingfisher
	Halcyon senegaloides	xitselele	Mangrove kingfisher
	Megaceryle maxima	n'wancakini	Giant Kingfisher
Meropidae	*Merops nubicoides*	nkhonyana, nkonyana leyi kulu	Southern Carmine Bee-eater
Upupidae	*Upupa africana*	marimahlanga, phuph-uphu	African Hoopoe
Phoeniculidae	*Phoeniculus purpureus*	hlekavayeni, kokoko, lokoloko, munyani, ndokotwana, yokoyoko	Green Wood Hoopoe
Bucerotidae	*Bucanistes bucinator*	hakamila, nkorho xind-lopfu, nkorhondlopfu	Trumpeter Hornbill
	Lophoceros nasutus	manteveni, nkorhoxangu	African Grey Hornbill
	Tockus alboterminatus	nkorhonyarhi	Crowned Hornbill
	Tockus rufirostris	manon'wana	Southern Red-billed Hornbill
Bucorvidae	*Bucorvus leadbeateri*	nghututu, rhandala	Southern Ground Hornbill
Lybiidae	*Lybius torquatus*	sivakona	Black-collared Barbet
	Trachyphonus vaillantii	xingoquane, xitsemah-angoni	Crested Barbet
Indicatoridae	*Indicator variegatus*	nhlampfu	Scaly-throated Honeyguide

Family	Scientific Name	Tsonga	English
Psittacidae	*Poicephalus cryptoxanthus*	yhokwe	Brown-headed Parrot
Platysteiridae	*Batis molitor*	xigurumangwana, ximangwa mangwana, ximgenngwamangwami	Chinspot Batis
Prionopidae	*Prionops retzii*	vuhoyohoyo	Retz's Helmetshrike
Malaconotidae	*Chlorophoneus sulfureo-pectus*	maphimbikunyini	Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike
	Dryoscopus cubla	mchavhoti, mcoveni, phavomu	Black-backed Puffback
	Laniarius ferrugineus	hwilo, samjukwa, xighigwa	Southern Boubou
	Malaconotus blanchoti	malumpfanini, n'wamalompfana	Grey-headed Bush-Shrike
	Tchagra australis	mghubani lowu tsongo, mghubhana lowu tsongo, mughubana leyi tsongo	Brown-crowned Tchagra
	Tchagra senegalus	mghubhana lowu kulu, mghubhana lowu kulu, mughubana	Black-crowned Tchagra
Laniidae	*Corvinella melanoleuca*	ncilongi	Magpie Shrike
	Eurocephalus anguitimens	ghengele	Southern White-crowned Shrike
	Lanius collurio	manguaiane, mghubhana lokhulu	Red-backed Shrike
Oriolidae	*Oriolus auratus*	khilidyone, nkondzo ya homu	African Golden Oriole
	Oriolus larvatus	khitsha homu, phaman-yarhi	Black-headed Oriole
Dicruridae	*Dicrurus adsimilis*	mantengu	Fork-tailed Drongo
Monarchidae	*Terpsiphone viridis*	chiliboyi, dlaya jesu, dz-wedzwe, dzwindzwo, ngl-hazi, ridantswe, xiavava	African Paradise Flycatcher
Corvidae	*Corvus albicollis*	thungwana	White-necked Raven
	Corvus albus	qigwana, tlotlowane	Pied crow
	Corvus capensis	xikhunguba	Cape Crow
Paridae	*Parus cinerascens*	xizavazava	Ashy Tit
	Parus niger	vayi-vayi, xidzhavadzhava	Southern Black Tit
Alaudidae	*Calendulauda sabota*	urimakutata, vhumaku-tata	Sabota Lark
	Mirafra rufocinnamomea	mamhengele, mamheng-wana, matharhatharha, phapharharha	Flappet Lark

Family	Scientific Name	Tsonga	English
	Pinarocorys nigricans	xihelagadzi	Dusky Lark
Pycnonotidae	*Pycnonotus barbatus*	mabyitana	Dark-capped Bulbul
Hirundinidae	*Hirundo semirufa*	nyengha leyi kulu	Red-breasted Swallow
Macrosphenidae	*Sylvietta rufescens*	dungalissuko, madingara, madlumbaxipesu, ngunhu, nqcunu, n'wadungaxisuka, xipyherhe	Long-billed Crombec
Locustellidae	*Schoenicola brevirostris*	qovo	Broad-tailed Warbler
Cisticolidae	*Calamonastes stierlingi*	xingede	Stierling's Wren Warbler
	Camaroptera brachyura	nhlarhu, xime-memee	Green-backed Camaroptera
	Cisticola lais	ngonhavarimi	Wailing Cisticola
	Prinia subflava	matsinyani	Tawny-flanked Prinia
Leiothrichidae	*Turdoides jardineii*	hlekedwana, mayokoyiwani, ngayakaya	Arrow-marked Babbler
Zosteropidae	*Zosterops senegalensis*	nhamaguati	Yellow White-eye
Sturnidae	*Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*	xinwavulombe	Violet-backed Starling
	Creatophora cinerea	kwezu elimhlope	Wattled Starling
	Lamprotornis australis	khwezu ley khulu, kwezu leri kulu	Burchell's Starling
Buphagidae	*Buphagus erythrorhynchus*	ndzandza, vafana va tihomu, yandhana	Red-billed Oxpecker
Turdidae	*Psophocichla litsitsirupa*	xihandza matala	Groundscraper Thrush
	Turdus libonyanus	mbyhiyoni, nbyireni	Kurrichane Thrush
Muscicapidae	*Cercotrichas leucophrys*	macharatana, mtsherhitani	White-browed Scrub-Robin
	Cossypha natalensis	nyarhututu	Red-capped Robin-Chat
	Myrmecocichla arnoti	mandlakeni	Arnot's Chat
Nectariniidae	*Cinnyris afer*	rithweethwee	Greater Double-collared Sunbird
	Cinnyris talatala	xitetengwana	White-bellied Sunbird
Passeridae	*Passer diffusus*	dwadwa	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow
	Gymnoris superciliaris	mpyikidan lowukulu	Yellow-throated Petronia
Ploceidae	*Anaplectes melanotis*	ndzeyana ya nhloko ya ku tsuka, ndzheyana ya nhloko ya ka phsuku	Red-headed Weaver
	Bubalornis niger	mawilu, xighonyombha	Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver
	Euplectes afer	matunje	Yellow-Crowned Bishop
	Euplectes orix	ndzeyani	Southern Red Bishop
	Euplectes progne	cilori, ncilakulondza	Long-tailed Widowbird

Family	Scientific Name	Tsonga	English
	Ploceus velatus	majojo	Southern Masked Weaver
	Quelea quelea	ndzeyana leyi tsongo	Red-billed Quelea
Estrildidae	*Lagonosticta rubricata*	xintsingiri	African Firefinch
	Pytilia melba	xindzinghiri mbandi	Green-winged Pytilia
Viduidae	*Vidua macroura*	n'waminungu	Pin-tailed Whydah
	Vidua paradisaea	maningele, mitikahincila, nengele, nkapa	Long-tailed Paradise Whydah
Motacillidae	*Anthus cinnamomeus*	mdlodlomu, mjonjo	African Pipit
	Anthus leucophrys	xihitagadzi	Plain-backed Pipit
	Motacilla aguimp	n'watsekulane	African Pied Wagtail
	Motacilla capensis	matsherhani	Cape Wagtail
Fringillidae	*Crithagra atrogularis*	ngodzi	Black-throated Canary
	Serinus citrinipectus	txeluane	Lemon-breasted Canary
Emberizidae	*Emberiza flaviventris*	mrontiho, rhakweni, rhanciyoni, ronti	Golden-breasted Bunting
	Emberiza tahapis	vontiyo	Cinnamon-breasted Bunting

Click on the links below to view my work and participate in the discussion ...

Verreaux's Eagles nesting in trees in the Eastern Cape

Alan Collett
E-mail: arc060752@gmail.com

Of the 14 Verreaux's Eagles nests that I visit during the breeding season in the Graaff-Reinet and Cradock districts, nine (64%) are in trees. Verreaux's Eagle nests are almost invariably placed on cliffs, but they are known to use trees or man-made structures on rare occasions, and there is even a record of a pair nesting on the ground in the Northern Cape (Anderson and Laubscher 2003; Simmons 2005). In her study of the species in the Matobo Hills, Valerie Gargett recorded only one nest in a tree during the 20 years of her study (Gargett 1990), but as you may know, the Matobo Hills has a plethora of suitable cliff sites. The available evidence suggests that cliffs are the sites of choice for nesting Verreaux's Eagles. Clearly, the high incidence of tree-nesting in the Graaff-Reinet region is at odds with what is known about this species preferred nesting habitat. This behaviour would indicate a shortage of suitable cliffs or that all territories with suitable cliffs for nesting are already occupied by other Verreaux's Eagles, forcing some pairs to use alternative nesting sites.

Below A Verreaux's Eagle attending a nest in an exotic tree © Alan Collett.

Above A Verreaux's Eagle nestling on its nest on a cliff. This nest is easily accesible from above © Alan Collett.

I should note that all the tree nests are in exotic trees, usually near a homestead. It is possible that these tall exotic trees in the Karoo provide the next best alternative (in terms of height) to a nest on a cliff. Nesting in trees raises the question of security. All the nests in trees are easily accessible to a range of potential predators such as primates and leopards. However, some nests on cliffs also have security issues as one of the cliff nests I'm monitoring can be accessed by a person approaching the nest from above. I'm unaware of a study comparing breeding

Above A nest at Welgemoed near Graaff-Reinet © Alan Collett.

success of tree and cliff-nesting Verreaux's Eagles, but tree nests and cliff nests alike have produced fledged young and breeding success is high in both scenarios. I regularly observe that even with small chicks, the parents are nowhere to be seen. As I have said, this is not a scientific study, and it could be that one or both adults are sitting out of view, but I can vouch that more often than not there is no adult near the nest. It almost appears if predators know if they move towards the nest, they will be in big trouble.

Verreaux's Eagles' status in southern Africa is of least concern. Many landowners want them on their farms, and I like to think that this, combined with the fact that they don't take a lot of domestic stock, is why they remain such a successful species.

Above A nestlings on its nest in an exotic tree © Alan Collett.

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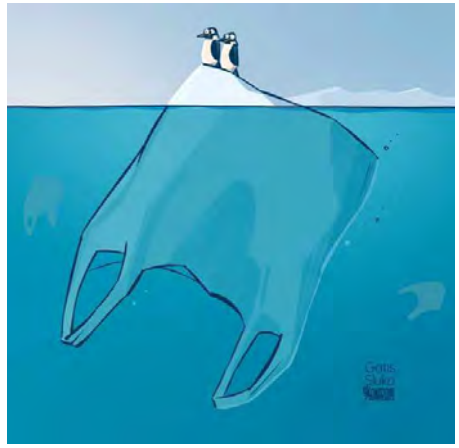

Striking gold: A flavistic Green-winged Pytilia in the Soutpansberg

Derek Engelbrecht
E-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

Colour aberrations in birds are rare and always attract the attention of birders. Although several kinds of colour abnormalities result from altered amounts of pigments, erythrism and flavism are considerably rarer than melanism and leucism. Flavism (or xantochroism) results from a genetic mutation affecting carotenoid pigment production, resulting in a yellow expression instead of red. Its rarity equates to 'striking gold'; excuse the pun. In our local context, flavism has been recorded in Black-collared Barbet, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Green-winged Pytilia and Southern Red Bishop (see Benadie 2007; Davies and Symes 2012; Little 2014; Engelbrecht 2019).

On 12 September 2021, Wilma Moreby reported a flavistic Green-winged Pytilia male seen at a birdbath at Bergfontein, 8 km east of Vivo on the southern slopes of the western Soutpansberg. It was seen in the company of other Green-winged Pytilias. Flavistic Green-winged Pytilias are known from a few localities in Africa, e.g. Djibouti (Welch and Welch 1988) and a few locations in South Africa, mainly from the arid Northern Cape province. These localities include Kathu (Brickell 1999), Tswalu Kalahari Reserve near Hotazel (De Swardt 2013) and Kimberley (Boyes 2017). The Djibouti birds seem quite interesting as the number of yellow morph birds suggests a relatively high incidence of flavism in this region (Welch and Welch 1999). It was suggested this population may represent a distinct race - '*flavicauda*' or even a distinct species (Fry 2004). The Northern Cape birds appear phenotypically identical to the Djibouti birds, and genetic analysis of a flavistic individual from the Gamagara Valley near Kathu, Northern Cape, showed it was identical to the 'standard' red-faced morph and probably represents a genetic mutation (Fry 2004). Interestingly, a flavistic Crimson-breasted Shrike is/was also present at Kathu for many years! According to Welch and Welch (1988) and Brickell (1999), yellow morph birds did not associate with red morph birds, lending support to the notion that these birds may represent a different species. The Soutpansberg record of a yellow and red morph Green-winged Pytilia in the same photo frame therefore doesn't fit the usual pattern.

My opinion is that the yellow morph birds simply represent a genetic mutation affecting carotenoid pigment production. This mutation may have a higher incidence in some populations; in this instance, the Djibouti birds in north-eastern Africa and the Kathu region in south-western Africa. Therefore, the Soutpansberg bird represents a considerable 'range extension' of the rare yellow morph in South Africa.

Above A flavistic Green-winged Pytilia (left) seen in the company of a standard red morph (right) in the western Soutpansberg © Wilma Moreby.

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Opportunistic nectarivory of Sausage Tree *Kigelia africana* flowers

Derek Engelbrecht
E-mail: faunagalore@gmail.com

Nectarivory is a common phenomenon in southern African birds. No fewer than 158 southern African bird species (including obligate nectarivores such as sunbirds and sugarbirds) have been recorded feeding on nectar of a variety of plants (Grosel and Engelbrecht 2021). Although a great variety of plant species are utilized by obligate nectarivores, relatively few species stand out as being popular amongst opportunistic avian nectarivores. Some of the popular ornitophilous plants include flowers of various aloe species, Weeping Boerbean *Schotia brachypetala* and Coral Tree *Erythrina lysistemon*. Mountain Aloe *Aloe marlothii* is the leading favourite plant amongst opportunistic nectarivores with no fewer than 106 species recorded probing its flowers for nectar (Engelbrecht et al. 2014, Grosel and Engelbrecht 2021). Despite its attractive flowers and pleasant tasting nectar (from a human perspective - I tasted it!), the Sausage Tree *Kigelia africana* has received comparatively little attention from naturalists interested in opportunistic avian nectarivory.

Below Black-headed Orioles were numerically dominant at flowering Sausage Trees
© Derek Engelbrecht.

Above A Sausage Tree flower
© Derek Engelbrecht.

The Sausage Tree is an iconic tree of the Lowveld. It's dense shade provides welcome reprieve from the baking sun, but beware ... its 8 to 10 kg pendulous fruit can knock you unconscious, or worse, into the afterlife, should it fall on you. In spring, its deep maroon flowers attract a variety of animals that feed on its flowers, and its scent attracts bats at night. It is believed the flowers are mainly chiropterophilous (Baker 1961), but recent research by Namah et al. (2019) showed that, at least in the Kruger National Park, facultative nectarivorous bird species are the main pollinators of this tree.

Compared to popular ornitophilous trees such as Mountain Aloe, Coral Tree and Weeping Boerbean, relatively few birds species have been recorded probing the flowers of Sausage Trees for nectar (Table 1). Until as recently as 2019, the only birds known to probe Sausage Tree flowers were six sunbirds, and no records of any opportunistic nectarivores. The study by Namah et al. (2019) revealed 10 species

Table 1. Avian nectarivores of Sausage Tree *Kigelia africa* flowers.

Common name	Reference
Purple-crested Turaco	Namah et al. (2019)
Red-faced Mousebird	Namah et al. (2019)
Green Wood Hoopoe	Namah et al. (2019)
*Black-headed Oriole	Namah et al. (2019)
*Dark-capped Bulbul	Namah et al. (2019)
Cape Starling	Namah et al. (2019)
**Greater Blue-eared Starling	This study
Village Weaver	Namah et al. (2019)
Southern Masked Weaver	Namah et al. (2019)
Yellow-fronted Canary	Namah et al. (2019)
Malachite Sunbird†	Cheke et al. (2008)
Bronzy Sunbird†	Cheke and Mann (2008)
Marico Sunbird	Fry (2000)
*Scarlet-chested Sunbird	Namah et al. (2019)
Plain-backed Sunbird	Cheke et al. (2001)
White-bellied Sunbird	Skead (1967)
Olive Sunbird	Cheke et al. (2001)

* Observed in this study
**New record of Sausage Tree nectarivory
† Probably a garden record as the Sausage Tree does not occur in the habitat of these species

feeding on Sausage Tree nectar in the southern Kruger National Park (see Table 1). Nine of these species were opportunistic nectarivores, with Scarlet-chested Sunbird the only obligate nectarivore recording probing Sausage Tree flowers in that study.

In early October 2021, my attention was drawn to a cacophony of calls created by a pitch of orioles in some Sausage Trees at Mahela near Letsitele. They were criss-crossing between different trees and at one stage I counted as many as nine individuals in one tree at the same time. Black-headed Orioles were numerically dominant nectarivores at this site. Other species recorded probing for nectar in Sausage Trees were Dark-capped Bulbul, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and, a new addition to the list of Sausage Tree nectarivores, Greater Blue-eared Starling. This brings the list of Sausage Tree nectarivores to 17 bird species. Although this total of 17 species is considerably less than the number of species recorded at Mountain Aloe (106 species, Engelbrecht et al. 2014; Grosel and Engelbrecht 2021), Weeping Boerbean (54 species, Symes and Yoganand 2013) and Coral Tree (53 species, Engelbrecht et al. 2019), I am of the opinion that Sausage Tree nectarivory is simply under-reported. I encourage our readers and other birdwatchers across Africa to report sightings of birds probing Sausage Tree flowers for nectar. If possible, please send your photos of wild birds either feeding on or probing flowers for nectar to *The Lark*.

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POLOKWANE 100 KM

... and a bit beyond

Interesting sightings

16 August 2021 - 15 October 2021

Share your interesting sightings seen within a 100 km radius of Polokwane. 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 record; Regional rarity; National Rarity

Compiled by Derek Engelbrecht

Non-passerines

African Skimmer - 3 September 2021. Seven birds at Letaba Estates (Derek Engelbrecht).

African Openbill - 11 September 2021. Two birds at Letaba Estates (Minkie Prinsloo).

Broad-billed Roller - 15 October 2021. Returning migrant: one seen near Lushof, Tzaneen (Derek Engelbrecht).

Common Sandpiper - 21 August 2021. Returning migrant at Makotopong Wetland (Jody De Bruyn).

African Openbill © Minkie Prinsloo

Curlew Sandpiper - 5 September 2021. Returning migrant seen at Hout River Dam (Jody De Bruyn).

European Bee-eater - 22 August 2021. Returning migrant. An unusually early flock seen at Doornbult north of Polokwane (Minkie Prinsloo).

Great Crested Grebe - 21 August 2021. Two adult and four juveniles seen at Hout River Dam. A rare breeding species in the Limpopo Province (Mark Friskin).

Greater Honeyguide - 29 September 2021. An adult male seen in a garden in Welgelegen (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Greater Painted-snipe - 5 September 2021. One seen at the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary (Jody De Bruyn).

Green Sandpiper - 18 September 2021. Returning migrant: an individual in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht); 1 October 2021. One seen at the Aloe Ridge Dam in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Craig and Christine Widdows).

Intermediate Egret - 6 October 2021. One seen at Flora Park Dam (Richter Van Tonder).

Klaas's Cuckoo - 27 August 2021. Returning migrant heard calling in Dorp, Polokwane (Julia Friskin).

Levaillant's Cuckoo - 12 October 2021. One seen in Welgelegen, Polokwane (Daniel Engelbrecht).

Great Crested Grebe © Mark Friskin

Greater Honeyguide© Daniel Engelbrecht

Greater Painted-snipe © Jody De Bruyn

Green Sandpiper © Daniel Engelbrecht

Little Bittern - 6 October 2021. A pair feeding two juveniles at Flora Park Dam (Mark Friskin).
Little Stint - 3 September 2021. Returning migrant seen at Letaba Estates (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Marsh Sandpiper - 5 October 2021. Returning migrant: seen at Letaba Estates (Derek Engelbrecht).
Red-chested Cuckoo - 28 September 2021. Returning migrant: One calling near Tzaneen (Dalena Mostert).
Ruff - 21 August 2021. Returning migrant seen at the Polokwane Bird Sanctuary (Richter Van Tonder).
Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk - 1 October 2021. A single bird in the Rheebokvlei Valley (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Rufous-cheeked Nightjar - 30 September 2021. Returning migrant: Several males calling on the Tweefontein Road (Craig and Christine Widdows).
Southern Red-billed Hornbill - 18 September 2021. A rarity in Polokwane, two seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Temminck's Courser - 14 September 2021. Several individuals at Kgwareng (Derek Engelbrecht).
Wahlberg's Eagle - 22 August 2021. A single bird seen in Welgelegen (Daniel Engelbrecht).
White Stork - 29 August 2021. A single bird in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht).


Marsh Sandpiper © Derek Engelbrecht


Ruff © Jody De Bruyn


Southern Red-billed Hornbill © Daniel Engelbrecht


Wahlberg's Eagle © Daniel Engelbrecht

Passerines

African Paradise Flycatcher - 4 October 2021. Returning migrant: one seen in Welgelegen (Derek Engelbrecht).
Barn Swallow - 1 October 2021. Returning migrant: several birds seen in the Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Bush Blackcap - 3 October 2021. A male showed well near the top end of Forest Drive in Woodbush (Jody De Bruyn).
Capped Wheatear - 21 August 2021. One seen at Chebeng (Mark Friskin); 1 September 2021. A single bird seen at Setotolwane (Derek Engelbrecht); 1 October 2021. Several birds seen in burnt section of Polokwane Game Reserve (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Lesser Striped Swallow - 3 September 2021. Returning migrant at Letaba Estates (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Marsh Warbler - 9 October 2021. Returning migrant: several birds heard and seen at the Madea wetlands (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Red-breasted Swallow - 21 August 2021. Returning migrant at Hout River Dam (Mark Friskin).
Short-toed Rock Thrush - 14 September 2021. At least five birds near Kgwareng (Derek Engelbrecht).


Bush Blackcap © Jody De Bruyn


Capped Wheatear © Derek Engelbrecht


Red-breasted Swallow © Daniel Engelbrecht


Short-toed Rock Thrush © Derek Engelbrecht

Violet-backed Starling - 3 October 2021. Returning migrant at the Polokwane Golf Club (Jody De Bruyn).
Willow Warbler - 2 October 2021. Returning migrant heard in Welgelegen, Polokwane (Daniel Engelbrecht).


Willow Warbler © Daniel Engelbrecht

Best of the Rest
Limpopo Province

Non-passerines

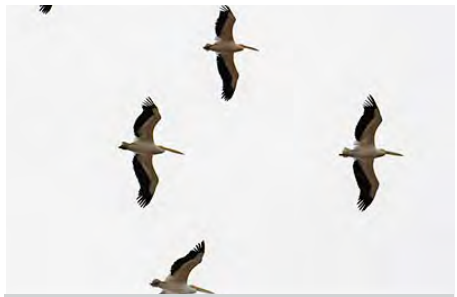
Abdim's Stork - 27 September 2021. Returning migrants: A flock of ~30 birds flying over Selati River Ruins (Daniel Engelbrecht).
African Skimmer - 25 August 2021. Two birds seen on the Lonely Bull Trail along the Letaba River in the Kruger National Park (Dirk Human/John Adamson); 28 August 2021. Two birds at Moholoholo Mountain View (Nicholas Knott-Craig); 9 September 2021. An immature bird at Makwadzi Pan in the Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park (Otto Scribante); 8 October 2021. Three birds seen at Middle Letaba Dam (Keenan Houareau).


African Skimmer © Keenan Houareau

Common Ringed Plover - 8 October 2021. Seen at Middle Letaba Dam (Keenan Houareau).


Common Ringed Plover © Keenan Houareau

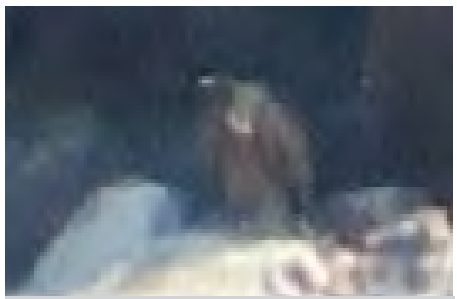
European Bee-eater - 25 September 2021. A flock seen at Boelamien (Derek Engelbrecht).
Great White Pelican - 9 September 2021. A flock of 9 birds seen at Shingwedzi in the Kruger National Park (Estelle Smallberger).


Great White Pelican © Estelle Smallberger

Green Sandpiper - 9 October 2021. One at Lissataba Private Nature Reserve (Karin Nelson).
Palm-nut Vulture - 13 October 2021. Probably the same individual frequenting the Tzaneen-Gravelotte region seen at Pidwa Wilderness Reserve (Katie Rooke).
Red-chested Cuckoo - 25 September 2021. Returning migrant: One calling at night at Boelamien (Derek Engelbrecht).
Rüppell's Vulture - 12 September 2021. After an absence of 5 years, an individual was observed on its nesting ledge in the Blouberg Nature Reserve (Ruan Stander).
Wahlberg's Eagle - 26 August 2021. Returning migrant seen at Phalaborwa (Minkie Prinsloo).
Western Osprey 8 October 2021. One seen at Middle Letaba Dam (Keenan Houareau).
Yellow-billed Kite - 26 August 2021. One seen on R71 between Letsitele and Gravelotte (Minkie Prinsloo).


Green Sandpiper © Karin Nelson


Palm-nut Vulture © Katie Rooke


Rüppell's Vulture © Ruan Stander

Passerines

African Reed Warbler - 28 September 2021. Returning migrant at Mahela (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Barn Swallow - 28 September 2021. Returning migrant: several birds seen at Selati River Ruins (Daniel Engelbrecht).
Willow Warbler - 13 September 2021. Returning migrant at Zebula Golf Estate (Daniel Engelbrecht).


African Reed Warbler © Daniel Engelbrecht

- THREATS AND CONSERVATION FACT SHEET -

CAPE ROCKJUMPER

Declining populations were first noticed in early 2010 and in 2013 were found to be related to a warming environment. These findings were used by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and led to their classification as '**Near Threatened**'.

THREATS

Cape Rockjumpers are endemic to the fynbos environment in the Western and Eastern Cape provinces of South Africa. Their main threats are due to the **changes their environment is facing**.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Weather patterns

- South Africa is facing an increase in temperature and changes in rainfall patterns as a result of climate change.
- The fynbos is a fire dependent environment which may be altered if the frequency of fires changes.

Temperature adaptation

- Cape Rockjumpers have lower reproductive success at higher temperatures.

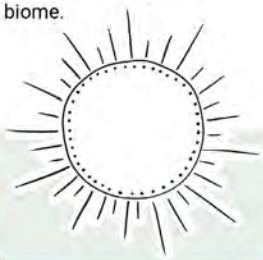
LAND LOSS

Increased agriculture

- Areas of fynbos which lie within their range have been converted into agricultural land.

Invasive vegetation

- Alien plant species out-compete the endemic fynbos species and shift the vegetation patterns of the biome.

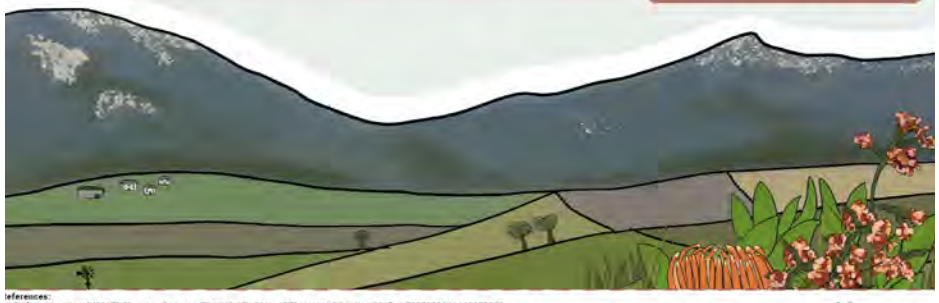


CONSERVATION

The main conservation and research focuses are to:

- ★ Tackle invasive vegetation in the Fynbos Biome.
- ★ Reduce carbon emissions globally.
- ★ Switch to using renewable energy sources.
- ★ Investigate the temperature tolerance limits for the species and predict how they may respond to different climatic changes.

ROCKJUMPER WARNING:
It is important to understand the species-specific mechanisms that may leave certain species more vulnerable to a changing climate.



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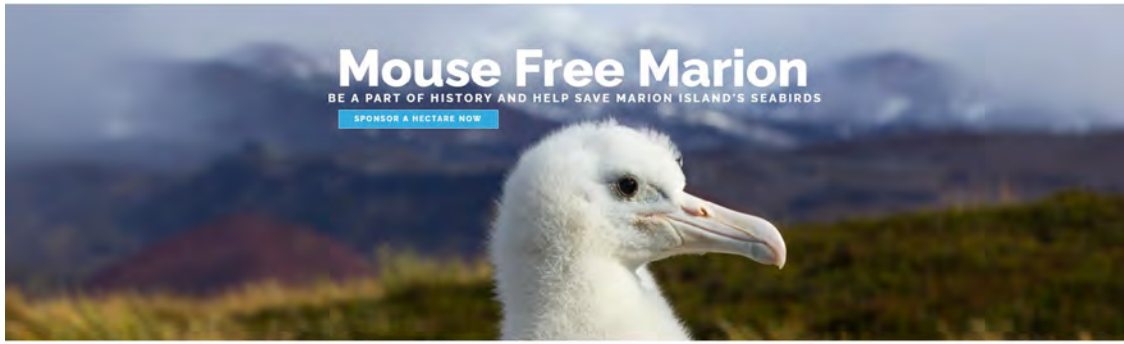
ROCKJUMPER HANS HOHEISEN BirdLife Created by Caitlin Judge



BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA Giving Conservation Wings · environmental affairs Department: Environmental Affairs REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA · FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology

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.

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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/about/

Percent of target reached: 8.4%
Sponsored Hectares: 2521 ha
Sponsors: 966

Marion Island Sponsor Map
29 October 2021

UPCOMING EVENTS

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting
Date: 02 November 2021
Time: 18:30
Venue: Polokwane Golf Club

Birdlife Polokwane year-end function
Date: 24 November 2021
Time: 18:30
Venue: Capricorn Racing Club

Birdlife Polokwane Club Meeting and AGM
Date: 1 February 2022 (to be confirmed)
Time: 18:30
Venue: To be confirmed

37th Birding BIG day

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Giving Conservation Wings

27 November 2021

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More information
If anything is unclear or you need more information, please contact bbd@birdlife.org.za or visit https://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/events/birding-big-day-2021/

Cinderella's page

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

African Stonechat © Jody De Bruyn