

KZN BIRDS

NO 62
AUGUST 2020



Oh, go on! Just wear the mask!

There are problems in wearing a mask, as we all have discovered over the past few months. One difficulty is recognising people behind their face coverings. Face masks are nothing unusual amongst our feathered friends, though, as seen in this selection of birds from the KZN Midlands

Photos: Crystelle Wilson

KZN BIRDS is a newsletter for bird clubs in KwaZulu-Natal affiliated to BirdLife South Africa.

Any member of the public, whether a member of a club or not, is invited to submit articles for publication. Views expressed in KZN BIRDS are not necessarily those of the editor, the clubs or BLSA. All national rarities are subject to acceptance by the National Rarities Committee. Submissions are used at the discretion of the editor and may be held back for future editions. Contributions can be sent to the Editor, Crystelle Wilson, at crystelle.wilson@gmail.com or posted to Crystelle at Unit 18, Amber Lee, Private Bag X11, Howick 3290.

Good quality, high resolution digital photographs are also welcome.

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Deadline for the next edition is 15 October 2020

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The spring KwaZulu-Natal Bird Forum, which was due to be held in September, has been cancelled. Speakers who were due to participate in the forum have been asked to produce written contributions which will be published in the November issue of KZN Birds.

CONSERVATION AND PROJECTS

Two new nature reserves declared in KwaZulu-Natal

TWO new mistbelt grassland nature reserves have been declared in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. Conservation Outcomes (www.conservation-outcomes.org) and BirdLife South Africa (www.birdlife.org.za) have partnered to facilitate the declaration of Trewirgie Nature Reserve (470 ha) and Tillietudlem Nature Reserve (1487 ha). These two reserves contribute significantly to the conservation of KwaZulu-Natal's natural heritage and particularly to endangered mistbelt grassland and the conservation of the Critically Endangered Blue Swallow. There are fewer than 30 pairs of Blue Swallow left in South Africa while only 2% of the Grassland Biome is included in formal protected areas.



ABOVE: KZN mistbelt grassland and forest

Image: supplied

The mistbelt grasslands and forests in southern KZN have been systematically destroyed and fragmented over the last hundred years, and it is therefore essential that the remaining fragments are protected and managed to ensure the survival of the threatened Blue Swallow, Cape Parrot and other endangered species. These sites are also extremely important water catchment areas.

Trewirgie Nature Reserve contains some of the most pristine mistbelt grassland and Eastern mistbelt forest in KZN and, along with the Blue Swallow, is home to several threatened species, such as Cape Parrot, Southern Ground Hornbill, Samango Monkey and oribi. The reserve has populations of at least six endangered and 16 endemic (i.e. found nowhere else in the world) plant species.

Tillietudlem Nature Reserve forms part of the catchment of the Elands River which is a major tributary of the

Umkomaas River. The reserve has a high diversity of important endemic and endangered grassland associated animals, such as the Grey Crowned Crane, Blue Crane, Southern Ground Hornbill, oribi and Midlands dwarf chameleon to name a few.

The nature reserves are also original pilot sites for South Africa's first effective biodiversity tax incentive, Section 37D, which allows the value of a nature reserve to be deducted from taxable income. This globally unique incentive is providing much needed financial sustainability to South Africa's protected areas and rewards the dedication of private and communal landowners. The landowners are congratulated for making this significant commitment to conservation. The work was funded by the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, N3 Toll Concession, Mr Price Group, Grindrod Bank, and Woolworths (Bags 4 Good).

The Conservation Outcomes-BirdLife South Africa partnership in KZN was set up to work towards securing further mistbelt grassland and forest areas and thereby supporting Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife in its endeavours to meet their conservation targets. The partnership is also providing landowner support for conservation on private and communal land and access to dedicated tax deductions in collaboration with Wilderness Foundation Africa's Innovative Finance team. This dynamic conservation NGO duo has combined skills and resources to maximise "bang for your conservation buck".

Conservation Outcomes is a registered non-profit organisation created to provide support to land that is being developed and managed for conservation outside of traditional state protected areas. The focus of the organisation is on securing remnant biodiversity, ecological integrity and resilience whilst contributing to poverty alleviation and meaningful socio-economic development in rural southern Africa through the development of the conservation and wildlife sector.

Steve McKean

Conservation Outcomes, Steve@conservationoutcomes.org

Daniel Marnewick

BirdLife South Africa, daniel.marnewick@birdlife.org.za

High winds: a blow to ground hornbills

THE past few months have been terrible for Southern Ground Hornbills. We lost one female to ingestion of a tiny scrap of wire and, despite Dr Katja Koepfel and her team at Onderstepoort managing to get her through two surgeries, the damage had already been done and she succumbed.

We then got reports of two separate mortalities in KwaZulu-Natal, one near Bulwer and one near Bergville, within days of each other. Both were adult females, presumably the alpha breeder in their respective groups, and neither appeared to show any signs of illness. One was found enmeshed in a taut barbed wire fence, the other lying in a fenced field with her wing completely torn from her body and blood splattered all around (*picture right*). We are incredibly grateful to Branden White and Michael du Plessis, who each took the care and effort to report, collect and freeze the carcasses, and to Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, as between us we were able to get the carcasses moved to Onderstepoort for full forensic post-mortems.

Both birds were in good condition prior to death, toxicology came back clean and the only cause of death that could be assigned to them was trauma. We went back and worked through the weather data for both localities and found that, on the likely days they died, wind gusts were in excess of 36 km/hr. Ground hornbills have very wide, low-load-bearing wings and a long wide tail, which enable quick vertical takeoff and changes in direction, but are difficult to control in strong winds. So, although usually they are very adept fliers, and very visually aware, it appears that in these high winds they simply lost control and were blown against the wire fences that caused their deaths.



Picture: Michael du Plessis



ABOVE: A vet removes porcupine quills from the throat pouch of a Southern Ground-Hornbill

Image: supplied

Although it is a massive blow to those groups, their custodians will continue to monitor the groups to see if any young dispersing females take up the vacant breeding positions or, if not, with consultation, we could look at the feasibility of reintroducing females into those groups. This is sadly not a threat we can do much about, besides making fences more obvious in danger zones, but others may also have been reported and this risk may need to be considered for other fence hoppers, such as Secretarybirds and large bustards.

At the same time, there was some good news for the month. We had to rush a reintroduction female to Onderstepoort for treatment as she was found in extremely poor condition (at “death’s door” according to our vet team), with three porcupine quills protruding from her throat pouch. The team at Onderstepoort, led by Dr Katja Koepfel, a ground

hornbill specialist vet, managed, over the course of three weeks, to recover her sufficiently to return her into her group in the wild. We are monitoring her closely and, despite her voice sounding a little odd, she is doing very well, and hopefully now has a healthy appreciation for any other porcupines she may encounter.

Dr Lucy Kemp

Chair: South African Southern Ground-Hornbill Working Group

083 289 8610 www.ground-hornbill.org.za Support us: <http://groundhornbillproject.givengain.org>

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BLSA relief fund supports bird guides

THE global Covid-19 pandemic has been the biggest health crisis to face humankind for generations. Nobody is immune to the virus or the resulting restrictions that have been necessitated to reduce our exposure, save lives and protect our health systems. The health crisis has precipitated a concomitant economic crisis that has devastated global markets. Tourism, in particular, has been brought to a grinding halt, with no travel allowed at the time of writing. BirdLife South Africa’s community bird guides, a collection of previously disadvantaged individuals trained by BLSA to be



ABOVE: Community bird guides trained by BirdLife South Africa express their thanks for the support they are receiving during the Covid-19 lockdown

Image: supplied

professional bird and nature guides, have been stranded without any prospect of income for months to come.

BLSA recognised this need and proactively launched the Community Bird Guide Relief Fund, appealing to our members and supporters to pitch in and help support our guides. The response to this appeal has been nothing short of phenomenal, raising over R650,000 by July. It is a testament to the high regard that birders hold our guides in and the fond recollections they have of being out birding with them. BirdLife South Africa and the

guides cannot emphasise our gratitude enough!

Our guides have flooded us with messages of gratitude, photographs of grocery-filled trolleys, and happy children and spouses as evidence of the massive impact this has made on their lives. Many of our guides are sole breadwinners for many dependants, so the impact of this campaign should not be underestimated. The response to the fund has been sufficient that we can commit to providing sustenance funding for 40 guides with the funds available. The situation is dire for the vulnerable members in our society, but the relief fund has given our guides a fighting chance that they would not otherwise have had.

We are still short around R120,000 to keep our guides going until December. For those who would like to contribute further to the relief fund, please see our webpage www.birdlife.org.za/birdlife-guide-relief-fund/.

Details are: Account Name: BirdLife South Africa; Bank: First National Bank, Randburg; Branch Code: 254005; Account Number: 62067506281; reference on your payment “BG_initials_surname”.

KwaZulu-Natal is the stronghold of our community bird guides, with 20 guides active in the area. We are grateful for the support of the KZN bird clubs so far, and are hopeful that they will continue to support the fund. We are asking our KZN birders to support the guides by using their services when you do venture out, of course observing all legal and health-related regulations while doing so. We also ask that birders do not only book the familiar guides exclusively. It will be a refreshing experience to try a new guide and spread your support for their excellent work.

All the guides and their details can be found at www.birdlife.org.za/go-birding/community-bird-guides/.

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Atlasing under lockdown: five olives, the corona-bird and other raptors

HILTON in KwaZulu-Natal will be remembered as the start-line of the Coronavirus outbreak in South Africa. More redeeming is its diversity of habitats for birds – urban, grassland, mistbelt forest, thornveld and wetland. This is my patch, from which I’ve sent so many pentad submissions to SABAP2. But could this work in the lockdown?

Maybe, as I do have the good fortune of living in a complex overlooking Town Bush valley and abutting a “forest” of gums, bugweed and some indigenous *Halleria lucida*. And, on the way to buy essential goods, the road to the Rotunda stall passes a patch of Cedara grassland, while the Quarry Centre with its supermarket has its own lake in the stone quarry that helped build Pietermaritzburg. So without breaking the law, just stopping briefly at the roadside and peeking at the lake, I got to the birds.

Cisticolas, euleptids and swallows in the grass; cormorants and darter, Little Grebe, Goliath Heron and martins at the quarry. At home, among the gums and bugweed, the five olives (pigeon, woodpecker, thrush, sunbird and bushshrike). And eagles from the patio – Long-crested, African Fish and, of course, typing “corona” into BirdLasser, Crowned Eagle.

In the five weeks of level 5 lockdown, my mean species count for six lists was a respectable 48. Now, in May, with the less brutal



ABOVE: “Boer maak ‘n plan”:
Peregrine Falcon photographed with a
cellphone camera through a scope

Photo: Eckhart Buchmann

level 4 lockdown, outdoor morning exercise is permitted. My choice – walking in Queen Elizabeth Park in the valley – turned out productive, with the two pentad lists for May bringing 67 and 70 species.

It's been a privilege to do this SABAP2 work and, on a personal level, it offsets some of the anxiety during this difficult time for so many of us. For those with the location, the time and a creative plan, productive atlasing is possible. My best moment? With a count of 69 species and sunset approaching on the fifth and last day for the pentad, the bird on a distant dead gum tree proved, through my scope, to be a Peregrine Falcon, number 70. And I even got an acceptable photo, my phone placed over the scope's eyepiece.

Eckhart Buchmann

Hilton

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BIRD NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Autumn breeding record of Greater Striped Swallows in KwaZulu-Natal Midlands

EVER since moving to my new home in a residential estate at Howick four years ago, I have been envious of neighbours who had swallows breeding at their houses. The most interest my house received were a few tentative pellets of muds stuck on the aluminium frames of the patio doors.

At the beginning of March this year I noticed a few pellets again. I have been concerned that the slippery surface of the frames might have been the reason why previous attempts to build a nest were abandoned, so I stuck a few strips of masking tape on the metal in an area away from the main door to minimise possible disturbance. (For some reasons swallows seem to prefer building nests right over doorways.)

Whether it was that strategy that did it or not, I was delighted when the pair of Greater Striped Swallows began constructing their nest in earnest. Late summer rain provided ample material and they kept flying in with their gapes full of mud. They worked in tandem, both arriving together. One waited on the fence while the other deposited its load and then both flew off again.

BELOW: 14 March, the nest is beginning to take shape



ABOVE: 9 March 2020, an adult Greater Striped Swallow perched on the fence, waiting for its turn to deposit mud pellets

BELOW: 18 March, one of the pair working on the cup of the nest



ABOVE: **27 March**, the cup completed, the pair now work on the entrance tunnel

By the time the country was ordered into lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, I had a perfectly legitimate reason to spend as much time as I wanted to watch the comings and goings of the swallows. With construction nearing completion, they also began lining the cup with feathers. One morning, while exercising in the limited confines of the garden as the per-then regulations, I saw a feather drifting down from a Black-headed Heron which was preening itself on a pole opposite the house. I collected it and put it on the lawn near the nest where the swallows were bound to see it. It was very gratifying when they accepted the offer and the feather found its way into the nest. So too, did they make use of fur left purposefully on the grass after the dogs were brushed, although there was competition from Cape Sparrows for this sought-after commodity.



ABOVE: **28 March**, the swallows and sparrows are collecting material to feather their nests



Guineafowl feathers were definitely trending in swallow interior decorating, or was it just because they were easy to come by? From looking at the remains of a broken swallow's nest at a friend's house, I noticed that both the cup of the nest and the entrance tunnel were lined with feathers. Presumably the tunnel was where the parents would be sleeping at night once their brood had hatched and space becomes limited as the chicks increase in size.

By the end of March the frenetic pace of building appeared to be tapering off, with the swallows spending more time on the fence preening or singing. They were quite vocal, constantly keeping in touch with a *chir-sick* contact call while flying, or when perched, throwing the head back and puffing out the chest feathers with a rolling, chuckling call.

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ABOVE: 29-31 March, time for a song and making sure their feathers are kept in good condition

Because it was so late in the season, I was still uncertain whether the pair intended breeding or were just getting the nest ready for when they return in spring after the winter migration. During most of March, Barn Swallows were collecting in strings on the wires and some Greater Striped Swallows were beginning to join them.

But then, early on 1 April I saw “my” pair briefly copulating.



ABOVE: 31 March, the last pockets of migrating Barn Swallows are joined by Greater Striped Swallows preparing to leave on their own journey north



LEFT: 1 April, exercising their conjugal rights

According to the literature, laying dates for the swallows in KwaZulu-Natal are between October and March, with a clutch of 2-4 eggs. The incubation period is 16-20 days.

During the next two weeks, it appeared like life as usual for the pair. I wasn't really aware that the female might have been sitting on eggs during the day. They spent time preening and sometimes I saw one of them arriving at the nest with another feather.

In the late afternoons they were flying high together, catching the last rays of the sun. On some occasions, I was convinced one of them was playing with a feather, repeatedly dropping it in flight and then scooping it up in the air.

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LEFT AND BELOW: 6-7 April, playing with a feather and enjoying the late afternoon sun



The first inkling I had that chicks might actually have hatched, was when I saw a swallow one late afternoon sitting with what looked like some insects in its bill. When I looked at pictures I took a few days earlier, I realised that what I thought of them as bringing in mud to “repair” their nest, might actually have been the first “baby food” they were feeding to chicks. According to the field guide, eggs hatch 16-20 days after being laid, so the timing appeared right, counting from the time of the pair mating.



ABOVE: 15 and 17 April, could this be mashed up “baby food” for the chicks?

Another photograph (right) showed what looked like the remains of a brood patch on the belly of the female.

The four weeks that followed were taken up by the parents feeding the chicks in the nest, once again working in tandem. One bird flew straight into the nest, while the other waited on the fence with its delivery. Food items appeared to be mostly flies that they caught while flying.



RIGHT: 23 April, is that a brood patch showing?



ABOVE: 5 May BELOW: 12 May



ABOVE: 30 April, left, 2 May, right



ABOVE: 5 May, left, 11 May, right



BELOW: 15 May, left and right, 17 May





ABOVE and BELOW: 19 May, the adults spending time on the fence

I had found it difficult to understand how the birds manage to catch and carry a number of live, crawling insects with their small bills. This puzzle was solved by a picture (left) taken while they were preening, which showed that the swallows have large gapes which, presumably, they use like sieves or nets to collect flying insects on the wing. This is similar to the way nightjars hunt and collect prey.

By the middle of May cold fronts were passing over the country. The adults spent early mornings on the fence, preening and waiting for the sun to arrive. They also called often, possibly encouraging their young to think about leaving the nest and learning to feed themselves.



The first chick left the nest on 17 May and the second two days later. The next few days they remained in the vicinity of the nest. Much of the time they were sitting on the fence, waiting for the parents to arrive with bulging gapes to feed them. As soon as the chicks spotted the adults, they would twitter and flutter their wings, opening their mouths wide to attract the delivery of food.



ABOVE: 19 May, the month-old siblings were now being fed outside the nest

By 21 May, the youngsters “graduated” to sitting on the high overhead electricity wires nearby, as well as practising flying and strengthening their wings. Once again, the family appeared to keep in touch by frequent contact calls. I was aware of another pair of Greater Striped Swallows nesting at another home in the vicinity and who were raising three chicks. The two families sometimes spent time together on the wires.

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ABOVE and BELOW: 21 May, the chicks are sitting exposed on overhead wires, waiting for meals. Their tail and wing feathers are not yet fully developed.



BELOW: 27 May (left) and 1 June (right) the family was still sleeping in the nest during the cold nights



Towards the end of May the adults and their young left the nest soon after sunrise and were gone for the day. I imagined the immature birds were by now in training for flying long distances. They returned home at dusk and after briefly settling on the fence, flew into the nest where all four sheltered against the increasingly cold weather. On the morning of 3 June I saw a last, brief silhouette of them against the dawn sky when they flew straight out of the nest and disappeared north before sunrise.

Fly safe, babies. I am looking forward to your return soon, the nest is waiting.

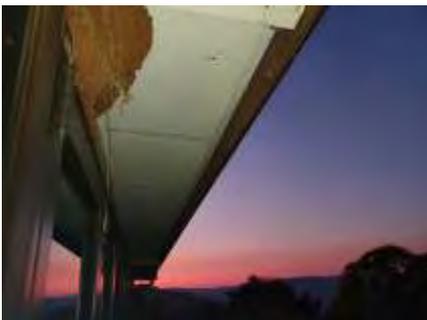
Crystelle Wilson

Howick

All photos: Crystelle Wilson

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BELOW: 3 June 2020, the family leaving the nest for the last time.



Mystery buzzard picked up in Botswana

SEPARATION of Forest and Common (Steppe) Buzzards can be a daunting task, as a number of us discovered when preparing the coverage for these two species for a recent field guide. With much head-scratching we analysed hundreds of buzzard photos in our vast photo library. FreeMe Wildlife must be commended for seizing the opportunity to compare the two buzzard species whilst both were in their care (*KZN Birds Issue 61*, picture right). As they rightly point out, a particular problem is the considerable variation within the Common Buzzard and, possibly, also in the Forest Buzzard.

The barring on the lower flanks and underparts seems to be a consistent feature of the many colour forms of Common, particularly adults (bar some totally plain-coloured brown individuals). A general feature of the juveniles is the long tear-drop shaped markings down the breast, as shown in the two individuals (photo 1).

The FreeMe article prompted me to re-examine a road-kill buzzard that we found south of Kasane in Botswana, in December 2017 whilst travelling with Karin and Craig Nelson. I wish now I had photographed it more rigorously, right down to the nostril shape as described! We stopped to examine it because it was so strikingly pale (photo 2). The lack of a tail terminal band and the pale eye (such as revealed in the small gap), in addition to the teardrop-shaped upper breast markings, pointed to it being an immature buzzard and my first thought was that here was the whitest Common Buzzard I had ever seen. The throat, lower underparts, and undertail coverts were pure white and unmarked. Looking at the underside now one could be forgiven for thinking it was a Forest Buzzard. However, upon turning it over and viewing the back and spread wings (photo 3), one sees the typical varied-colour mottling of a Common Buzzard, and the back is therefore not consistent with the plainer back of the FreeMe Forest Buzzard.

It would be very easy to dismiss this Botswana bird as an immature, very pale form of Common Buzzard. However, it is well known that inexperienced juvenile raptors “get lost” as they disperse and can be picked up in the most unlikely of places. Once again I’m left wondering which buzzard is my mystery buzzard? Forest-like underparts, Common-like upperparts. A bird seemingly with features of both species!

Ingrid Weiersbye

Hilton

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ABOVE: Common Buzzard, left, and Forest Buzzard

Photo: FreeMe



PICTURE 1: Immature Common Buzzards



PICTURE 2 (above) the underside of the Kasane bird and
PICTURE 3 (below) the upper wing and back

Photos: Ingrid Weiersbye



HONORARY RECORDER'S REPORT JULY 2020



ABOVE: Ruppell's Vulture, Pongola Nature Reserve, May 2020

Photo: Ferdi Myburgh

HELLO birders! Since the last report, at least we have been able to get out and do some birding again and this is reflected in more rarities being seen, although it is still winter. Most interesting sightings seem to have been an influx of Abdim's Storks to KZN, some of which have been seen by many; some vultures straying far from their usual haunts; and a Denham's Bustard and a Pied Starling that decided they wanted a seaside holiday. Also to note is that Ayres's Hawk-Eagles are being seen far more frequently around Durban, so always double-check large mottled raptors flying over.

RARITIES

SWALLOW-TAILED BEE-EATER

Merops hirundineus

KZN Rarity

One, Pongola Game Reserve, 17 May 2020, Chris Kelly.

VERREAUX'S EAGLE-OWL *Bubo lacteus*

KZN Rarity

One, Howick, 16 May and 9 June 2020, Paul Hodkin.
One, Pietermaritzburg, 13 June 2020, Ole Karl Wang.

ALLEN'S GALLINULE *Porphyrio alleni*

KZN Rarity

One immature, Port Edward, 22 April to 10 June 2020, Stan Culley.
One juvenile, Zimbali Lakes, north coast, 29 to 30 June 2020, David Taylor.

SOOTY TERN *Onychoprion fuscatus*

National Rarity

Two, St Lucia estuary, 4 to 5 July 2020, Ian Ferreira.

RUPPELL'S VULTURE *Gyps rueppelli*

National Rarity

One immature, Pongola Nature Reserve, 30-31 May 2020, Ferdi Myburgh and Ivan Pretorius.

OVAMBO SPARROWHAWK

Accipiter ovampensis

KZN Rarity

One, Manyoni Private Game Reserve, Zululand, 22 April 2020, Michaela Crous.

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ABOVE: Abdim's Stork, Bluff, Durban June 2020

Photo: Anneli Mynhardt

OUT-OF-RANGE SIGHTINGS

Denham's Bustard

One, Scottburgh Golf Course,
25 June to 4 July 2020,
Liam O'Connor, Bailey Musgrave
and many others.

Cape Vulture

One immature, Umhlanga Rocks,
13 May 2020, Jono Greenaway.

Lappet-faced Vulture

One, Mtunzini, 10 July 2020,
Terry Stallard.

Secretarybird

One, La Lucia, Durban North,
9 July 2020
(SA Rare Bird News report).

AYRES'S HAWK-EAGLE *Hieraaetus ayresii*

KZN Rarity

One, Xaxaza, Mtunzini, 8 May 2020,
Lorna Rautenbach.

One, Zini River Estate, Mtunzini, 31 May 2020,
Neil Perry.

One adult and one immature, Bluff, Durban,
27 to 29 June 2020, Rowan Bartlett and
Warren Dick.

One juvenile, Westville, Durban, 7 July 2020,
Jonathan Wimberley.

ABDIM'S STORK *Ciconia abdimii*

KZN Rarity

One, Selborne Estate, Pennington,
27-29 May 2020, Byron Swart,

One, Bluff Golf Course, Durban, 5 June to
18 July 2020, Rowan Bartlett and many others.

One, near Mtunzini, 7 July 2020, Amy Mathew.

CAPPED WHEATEAR *Oenanthe pileata*

KZN Rarity

One, near Underberg, 6 July 2020,
David Hoddinott.

MOUNTAIN PIPIT *Anthus hoeschii*

KZN Rarity

One, Midmar Game Park, 6 October 2019,
Ingrid Weiersbye (KZN Rarity submitted).

African Openbill

One, Mount Edgecombe Country Club Estate,
29 June 2020, Elton-John Bartlett
and Zach Simpson.

Marabou Stork

One, Swartberg, 23 May 2020, Ivy van Dyk.

One, Himeville, 29 May to 7 July 2020,
Pam Kleiman and Stuart McLean.

Two, Bergville, 3 July 2020

(SA Rare Bird News report).

Pied Starling

One, Ballito beach, 14 June 2020, Calvin Harris.

Red-headed Finch

One, Bluff, 29 May 2020, Rowan Bartlett.

Caveat: the sightings recorded here have been submitted directly to me or have been posted on the SABirdNet or SA Rare Bird News and have not been vetted by any rarities committee for validation unless otherwise noted. As such, the information presented here should be used with due consideration.

Steve Davis: Honorary Recorder

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KZN Rarities Accepted

The following KZN records have been accepted by the committee
since the February 2020 Honorary Recorder's Report.

Species	Observer	Date	Pentad/Locality
Lesser Spotted Eagle	Colin Summersgill	04-Nov-18	2930_3030
Black-rumped Buttonquail	Dave Rimmer	03-Dec-18	2900_3135
Pallid Harrier	Colin Summersgill	11-Dec-18	2720_3155
Pallid Harrier	Colin Summersgill	15-Dec-18	2800_3050
Hooded Vulture	Japie Claassen	05-Oct-19	2720_3150
Hooded Vulture	Johan Potgieter	06-Nov-19	2745_3200
Green Sandpiper	Johan Potgieter	06-Nov-19	2745_3200
Bennett's Woodpecker	Adam Riley	06-Nov-19	2745_3200
Green Sandpiper	Adam Riley	06-Nov-19	2745_3200
Hooded Vulture	Adam Riley	06-Nov-19	2745_3200
Purple Indigobird	Adam Riley	11-Nov-19	2745_3200
Green Sandpiper	Steve Davis	17-Nov-19	2650_3205
Green Sandpiper	Dave Rimmer	17-Nov-19	2650_3205
Karoo Thrush	Dave Rimmer	29-Nov-19	2840_2915
Black-chested Prinia	Morne Pretorius	30-Nov-19	2735_2950
Hooded Vulture	Kevin Westermann	30-Nov-19	2745_3200
Pearl-breasted Swallow	Malcolm Robinson	30-Nov-19	2935_3025
Karoo Thrush	Dave Rimmer	04-Dec-19	2840_2915
Karoo Thrush	Dave Rimmer	09-Dec-19	2840_2915
Eastern Clapper Lark	Klaus Heyer	19-Dec-19	2735_3005
Green Sandpiper	Sally King	21-Dec-19	2650_3205
Black-rumped Buttonquail	Duncan McKenzie	22-Dec-19	2745_3050
White-backed Night Heron	Richter van Tonder	26-Dec-19	2820_3220
White-backed Night Heron	Rowan van Tonder	26-Dec-19	2820_3220
Pearl-breasted Swallow	Colin Summersgill	27-Dec-19	2740_3215
Short-tailed Pipit	Andrew Hester	28-Dec-19	3050_3015
Short-tailed Pipit	Andrew Hester	29-Dec-19	3045_3015
Knysna Warbler	Andrew Hester	29-Dec-19	3045_3015
Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark	Nick Schaller	03-Jan-20	2735_3210
Greater Kestrel	Noleen Turner	06-Jan-20	2830_2955
Hooded Vulture	Ralph Gilbert	09-Jan-20	2745_3200
Hartlaub's Gull	Tyron Dall	11-Jan-20	3000_3050
White-backed Night Heron	Dave Rimmer	13-Jan-20	2820_3220
African Crake	Dave Rimmer	28-Jan-20	2855_3145
Montagu's Harrier	Nick Schaller	01-Feb-20	2720_3155
Black-rumped Buttonquail	Adam Riley	13-Feb-20	2915_3020
White-backed Night Heron	Brad Arthur	20-Feb-20	2820_3220
Hooded Vulture	Ferdi Myburgh	21-Feb-20	2715_3150
Ayres's Hawk-Eagle	Tyron Dall	29-Feb-20	3005_3045
Hooded Vulture	Ferdi Myburgh	29-Feb-20	2720_3150
Karoo Thrush	Dave Rimmer	29-Feb-20	2840_2915
Hooded Vulture	Ferdi Myburgh	08-Mar-20	2720_3150
Hooded Vulture	Ferdi Myburgh	12-Mar-20	2715_3150
Bennett's Woodpecker	Sally King	13-Mar-20	2740_3210
Grey-headed Kingfisher	Nick Schaller	15-Mar-20	2740_3210
Black-rumped Buttonquail	Stuart McLean	15-Mar-20	Highover NR

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CLUB NEWS AND CHAIRS' CHIRPS

BirdLife ZULULAND



WHEN I looked at my comments in the April issue, I indicated that we were then in the midst of “hard lockdown” due to the Covid-19 coronavirus. As I write now, many of us “more mature” individuals are still in lockdown of some sort, as well as trying to balance life of the “new normal” – whatever that means for each person individually.

What did you learn during those first couple of months when all one could do was stay at home, dash quickly to a close shop and not much else, versus where you are now today? Maybe you are now happily back at work, maybe working from home, maybe not yet returned. What those weeks taught me was to be grateful for the small things around me, in particular the visits by birds, butterflies and the like to my little garden patch. But that being said, more than ever, I longed for the freedom to walk outside my home in nature. I hated (and still hate) the suffocation that comes with wearing a face mask. My hands are, I think, eternally damaged by the amount of sanitiser used on one trip to the mall. By far the hardest for me has been the lack of physical contact. Those who know me, know that I am a hugger and I HATE it that I cannot hug those around me. Ok, bleat over.

Not much to report on birdwise from my side, outside of the little visitors to my garden like the Cape White-eye, Bronze Mannikin and my pairs of Yellow-bellied Greenbuls and Collared Sunbirds. Nothing spectacular, but I did have a low-flying air display by an African Harrier-Hawk showing off its gliding moves. However, these times gave me plenty of opportunity to take pictures in different sunlight during the course of a day. Isn't winter sun just the best! Relaxation of rules which allowed exercising during the day was welcomed. It afforded us the opportunity to “exercise” along some of our bird paths around the area. Some element of freedom!

With level 3 lockdown allowing day trips to certain nature reserves, Umlalazi Nature Reserve in Mtunzini is easily reached from Richards Bay. This small reserve has quite a few gems for those prepared to spend time there. The African Crake is one of them, two or three have been seen. Others specials include the Black Coucal juveniles overwintering, a Half-collared Kingfisher with the winter migrant Mangrove Kingfishers around the mangrove channels and a Fan-tailed Grassbird (Broad-tailed Warbler). Common Buttonquail has also been seen in the same area as the African Crakes. (This bit of information and the picture was provided by Kevin Westermann, who had the opportunity to visit the reserve over the past weekend or so.)

Obviously, we have had no meetings or outings and do not foresee any, maybe not even this year. The infection rate hit Zululand and climbed exponentially in the past few weeks, so everyone is being extra cautious. We were afforded the opportunity for a few members to attend the Zimanga Aloe Homestead, which the Senekals graciously opened to both the St Lucia and Zululand Bird clubs in mid-July under strict Covid protocols and restrictions. The report back was that there were fewer sunbirds than in previous years.

Now, as we approach the end of July, we are looking forward to first sightings of the return of the summer migrants. Some of the swallows are being sighted and we are all in anticipation of the first sighting of our beloved Yellow-billed Kite.

Till next time, stay safe.

Carole Hills



ABOVE: African Crake, Umlalazi Reserve, July 2020

Photo: Kevin Westermann

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STILL sitting in the midst of lockdown as I write this, club activities are heavily curtailed by bans on public gatherings and quarantine by housing estates. As such, traditional club activities have been severely affected and we are in many ways treading water as a club.



ABOVE: *Crowned Eagle, Hella Hella, July 2020*

Photo: Colin Summersgill

The one activity that we have been able to engage in, towards a collective effort, albeit on an individual level, has been submitting data to SABAP2, especially since June with the opening of nature reserves for day visits. The number of cards submitted for KZN for 2020 as at the end of July makes for some interesting reading: starting in January with 268 cards, 220 for February, 150 from March, a low of 72 for April, 137 in May, 143 in June and only 103 for July (so far).

Most of this is expected, although the 72 for April was higher than I expected. With the relaxation of exercise restrictions, a number of birders managed to increase May to 137. I fully expected June to jump far more than it did.

I then looked at the broadest possible definition of the value of the cards submitted, using the number of records per card as the indicator. Interestingly, although April had the poorest number of cards per month for many years in KZN, it had a very nearly all-time high number of records per card of 62.3. If anything, the reduced submissions seem to have been

of a higher quality than normal, if one uses the simplified gauge of cards/record as the guide. None of the other months had any real change other than being slightly higher than normal, i.e. of a higher quality than usual.

I certainly found June a breakout month, but I will happily admit that we targeted our trips not to poorly atlased areas, but rather focussed on some birding hotspots. This perhaps was understandable as we certainly had a feeling of wanting to get out and, of course, one then tends to try to get to where one can see the most.

One of the things that we did manage was to get some good pictures, perhaps with some skills honed in the garden during the harder lockdown. An example is this Crowned Eagle taken on the Hella Hella Pass in early July.

Stay safe and atlas.

Colin Summersgill

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FRONT COVER PICTURES UNMASKED

Top, from left to right: Red-collared Widow, Blacksmith Lapwing, Cape Sparrow.

Middle: Red-billed Quelea, African Stonechat, Bronze Mannikin.

Below: Barn Swallow, Cape Robin-Chat, Southern Red Bishop

BirdLife KZN Midlands provisional activities

SEPTEMBER

Sunday 6 – Morning outing to Darvill.

Wednesday 16 – Presentation at Ambers Auditorium by Ed Schroeder: *Of birds, and other natural phenomena and their association with Nguni cattle*

Sunday 20 – Morning outing to Midlands Forest Lodge

Wednesday 30 – Morning outing to Midlands Forest Lodge

OCTOBER

Sunday 4 – Morning outing to Darvill.

Tuesday 13 – Presentation at Woodgrove by Nicolette Forbes: *Birding the hotspots of Arizona*

Sunday 18 – Morning outing to Benvie

Wednesday 21 – Presentation at Ambers Auditorium by Rob Gous on *Birding in Brazil*

Wednesday 28 – Morning outing to Benvie.

NOVEMBER

Sunday 1 – Morning outing to Darvill.

Sunday 15 – Morning outing to Cumberland

Wednesday 18 – Presentation at Ambers Auditorium by Adam Riley on *Spectacular birds of the world*

Wednesday 25 – Morning outing to Cumberland

DECEMBER

Sunday 6 – The club end-of-year braai: Bush Willow campsite in the Karkloof.

BLKZNM Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1665147100412251/?ref=bookmarks>
and click on the “Join Group” button at the top right corner of the screen.

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ONE thing we can say from our own perspective is that it is definitely a different world. With so much depressing news as the virus escalates, it is really heartening to see our members enjoying the world around us and, especially, the birds even more.

The BLPN usual club activities of indoor meetings and organised walks continue to be suspended, but in the meantime we have been working hard to develop slightly different activities to keep our members amused and engaged. We are very proud to say we have even had new members signing up to the club during lockdown – long may the interest in birds continue to increase.

A convenient new addition for the club is that new members can now sign up using our online application form, <https://blpn.org/membership/onlineform/>. Please refer people to this portal if they wish to join the club. All categories of membership and the option of BLSA membership and magazine subscription are there.

Some of the activities we have managed to roll out since March include five online quizzes which were part fun and definitely aimed to teach people more about the birds. The five online quizzes are still available for anyone to try <https://blpn.org/blpns-factual-friday-bird-quizzes/> and the sixth quiz will be released shortly. This will be exclusively for current BLPN members, so check on your subs payments. Dave Rimmer was our clear winner of the set of five quizzes in the first series and won a surprise cash prize of R500. Well done Dave!

The Lockdown Bird Count challenge was the other main event which ran from 27 March – 31 May 2020. If you would like to read more about this and see some of the wonderful photos that came from many of the participants, please go to <https://blpn.org/blpns-lockdown-bird-count/> and see the weekly diary during the nine weeks. The Lockdown Bird Count ended on a really high note with seven winners in different categories and they are listed in the table below. The winners each had a choice of winning a year's subscription to African BirdLife or receiving a copy of the new SASOL 5 field guide. Well done to all.

The most amazing part of this challenge (it is hard to pick just one amazing part actually) was that together we all managed a total bird list of 286 species in 66 days, with over 66% of this list being seen in the first week. There is a detailed breakdown in the reports of the common species, the rate of sightings and other interesting bits and pieces, including some identification tips, so please do visit the link to this event. An incredible

consequence of the competition was how people who had never really had contact within the club got to “know” each other through this event despite physical distancing – social distancing it was not. We all got much more social with each other. Thank you to all of you who participated directly or indirectly and to those of you who sent so many heartfelt emails.

Additional contact was achieved through our WhatsApp group for members only. This group has allowed people to share sightings and ask for help with IDs, and is a wonderful mix of new, enthusiastic birders and older, more experienced, but no less enthusiastic individuals. The group is strictly controlled for junk and spam and it is working very well and is again getting people to know each other much better, albeit electronically. It sets a great platform for when we can bird together again. If you would like to join the group and are a member of BLPN, please just send an email to chair@blpn.org with your cell number.

Jane Morris, our activities co-ordinator, has been extremely anxious about when and how we start formal face-to-face activities again, but all the advice and indications are that it is going to be a while before that is allowed. She and I have been planning what we can do in the interim. A poll proposing the establishment of a BLPN Zoom webinar platform received overwhelming support of 98% of members. We are planning to have bird-focussed webinars, debates and discussions, ID sessions, live quizzes and games and nature journaling. For the readers we have also begun rolling out individual member’s trip reports, giving details of their own birding visits on our *News & Trip Reports* page in place of our usual club activity reports. This has been kicked off by with a report by our new vice-chair, Mike du Trevou, on day visits to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. A few more reports from members are being gathered and edited by Jane, please sign up to receive notices of these blogs at the end of the page where it says subscribe. News and trip reports going back to 2007 are catalogued at <https://blpn.org/blog-trip-reports/>

The Spring Bird Photographic Competition launches on 15 August, with categories spanning all levels of photography, from cell phones to the more advanced photographer.

I would like to end with a note about our 2021 calendar which has been launched for online sales. This year’s theme is *Celebrating and Understanding the Zulu names of KZN birds*, a step towards broadening our thinking about birds and the history and culture of our province. Again Hugh Chittenden has kindly provided 14 of his photos for the club’s use to raise funds. Please remember that these calendars allow us to provide support to conservation and other community initiatives which benefit the birds. See BLPN’s new YouTube channel video for more detail <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OafaYDG3P1g&t=4s>. These calendars are a steal at R100 per calendar.

Nicolette Forbes

0824518078

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Hand delivered in the greater Durban area @ R20 per delivery. Postage to all other areas possible & will be quoted separately.

CELEBRATING AND UNDERSTANDING THE ZULU NAMES OF KZN BIRDS

2021 BirdLife Port Natal

December 2021

June 2021

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Looks like everyone is online



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