

Issue 73 | DECEMBER 2023

KZN BIRDS

BirdLife KZN Forum

Where in the World is Bob?

The secret lives of Secretarybirds



Sugar Feeders and Sunbirds

KZN Citizen Science Projects



News from the
KZN Bird Clubs

KZN Birds is the magazine of the regional BirdLife KZN Forum and acts as the communication tool of the KZN Bird Clubs



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Cover Photo | **Greater Painted-Snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis* giving an idea of the striking plumage that gives them their painted moniker. **Photo by Hugh Chittenden**

KZN Birds is the quarterly digital magazine of the regional **BirdLife KZN Forum** and also acts as the communication tool of the KZN bird clubs.

If you would like to contribute to future issues of KZN Birds please send photos, short articles or feature articles to the editor@birdlifekznforum.org following the guidelines and timelines below.

Deadline for article and photo submission during 2024

Issue #74: 15 February 2024
 Issue #75: 15 May 2024
 Issue #76: 15 August 2024
 Issue #77: 15 November 2024

Submission guidelines

Photos:

- Images must be submitted **with captions** via email to editor@birdlifekznforum.org
- Width: 1920 pixels max
- Height: 1080 pixels max
- File Size: not exceed 2MB
- No borders or watermarks can be used - photograph credits will be included with the caption

Articles: if you would like to submit short or feature articles please send a title and three line paragraph indicating the contents and the editor will respond.





ATC/STC ADVENTURE AWAITS

SEE *THE* UNSEEN



From the Editor

As we bid farewell to the last hours of 2023, we have managed to produce four issues of KZN Birds. What a journey it has been! The passion people have for birds, and the warmth of our readers' response has been hugely motivating.

One reader's request to print our issues for overseas visitors to their lodge was a testament to the impact of our shared stories. It's heartening to know that our words have wings that can carry them across borders, introducing the beauty of KwaZulu-Natal's birdlife to a global audience.

Throughout the year, we've explored diverse stories, from personal birding adventures to the monitoring of restoration projects. The pages of KZN Birds have also profiled the noteworthy research of BirdLife South Africa, shedding light on

critical projects that attempt to tackle the challenges facing birds. Hugh Chittenden's detailed species observations have been a highlight, painting vivid portraits of various species.

As the mouthpiece of BirdLife KZN Forum the activities and happenings through the year have been profiled in our publication, ensuring our readers are informed of the regional activities.

As we turn the page into 2024, we do so with optimism and a commitment to reaching new levels. The sky's not the limit; it's just the view. One of the most important things our readers can do is to consider joining a bird club. It's not merely about finding time in your busy schedules but about becoming a part of something greater. By being a member, you lend your wings to regional and national organizations striving to make a difference in the lives of birds



and their habitats. The holiday season is upon us, and as we gather with loved ones, let's take a moment to appreciate the birds that share our world. May your holidays be filled with birdsong, and may the New Year bring new discoveries and joys.

To our readers, contributors, and all the bird enthusiasts out there, we wish you a wonderful holiday season and a fantastic New Year.

Ticky Forbes
Editor-in-Chief | KZN Birds



From the Chair: BirdLife KZN Forum A Year of Achievements for KZN

As we wrap up a busy yet productive year for KwaZulu-Natal birding, it's heartening to reflect on the milestones that have feathered our collective caps.

With two successful BirdLife KZN Forum meets, we've explored the beauty of the Ladysmith area and Zululand, thanks to the gracious hosts Ladysmith Birders and BirdLife eThekweni KZN, respectively.

A noteworthy transformation unfolded as BirdLife Sani spread its wings with a new name and

logo—a commendable evolution that we trust will propel this club in the Drakensberg foothills to greater heights. The regional birding community is richer for it. In synchrony with the changes and growth of this club we spotlight the magnificent Sani Pass in this issue, designated as our KZN Birding Hotspot this quarter. Do explore this to uncover the secrets of this special area and discover the localised species that call it home.

As 2023 bids us adieu, we look ahead with anticipation to 2024, where BirdLife eThekweni KZN will mark a significant milestone—its 75th Anniversary. Join us in celebrating this legacy, as detailed in the short article on page xx of this issue.

Here's to a year of flourishing KZN birding endeavours and to the continued growth of our vibrant community. May the wings of

discovery carry us into an even more exciting future.

Nicolette Forbes
Chair | BirdLife KZN Forum
Sub-editor | KZN Birds
Design & Layout | KZN Birds



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WHERE IN THE WORLD IS BOB?

Secretarybird Secrets



Who is Bob?

I've never met Bob. I've never even seen him, but I must confess that I have been stalking Bob on the internet for almost a year now. Every day I check to see where he is and what he's doing. I monitor where Bob is sleeping every night. I investigate the places he goes for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I figure out which villages he prefers and where he goes for a drink.

I've been able to learn quite a bit about Bob over the 10 months that I've been snooping on him. I know that he is interested in late 19th century history of the KwaZulu-Natal province, especially the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879. I know that he hasn't got a girlfriend yet, due to being a little young. I know he doesn't like to travel far, having never gone more than 117 km away from the place that he was born. But the travel bug did bite a bit during August 2023, when he walked more than 1,100 km. And I know that he prefers to spend his time in fallow fields on Ingonyama Trust land. I am however unsure whether he knows the new Zulu king.

Luckily, I won't be getting into trouble for stalking Bob, and I doubt that he would be worried about it even if he knew. You see, I'm not some creepy online stalker. I'm an ornithologist. And Bob isn't a human, he's a Secretarybird!

Bob's History

On 22 December 2021, Bob, and his brother Fawkes, were ringed and fitted with small GPS-tracking devices on Babanango Game Reserve by my colleagues Drs Melissa Whitecross and Christiaan Brink. They (Bob and Fawkes) were respectively the 22nd and 23rd birds that were selected to be part of a tracking study conducted by BirdLife South Africa's Secretarybird Conservation Project. Ever since then, almost 700 days later, Bob has diligently carried the 38g tracker mounted as a backpack across the open savanna and grasslands of KZN.

Secretary Bird Conservation Project

The project, which was started in 2011 by Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson and Mr Ernst Retief, had

a few audacious aims: monitor the movement and dispersal dynamics of juvenile Secretarybirds; determine the habitat and land use preferences of these endangered birds; assess the risk associated with interactions the birds had with long linear infrastructure such as powerlines and fences; and investigate the presence, nature, and use of foraging islands across a swiftly changing landscape.

The methods were straightforward: find an active Secretarybird nest, monitor it and when the nestling was roughly eight weeks old, go and fit it with a tracking device. These devices, about the size of a small computer mouse, is fitted to the bird like a backpack with Teflon straps slipped underneath the wings and over the back. Fitted snugly across the body they don't impede flight or walking: these iconic birds' preferred mode of transportation. Each tracker has a small solar panel that provides enough power to record a GPS location every few minutes. In Bob's case, this occurs at 30 minutes intervals.

Since the first tracker was fitted in 2012, more than 380,000 data

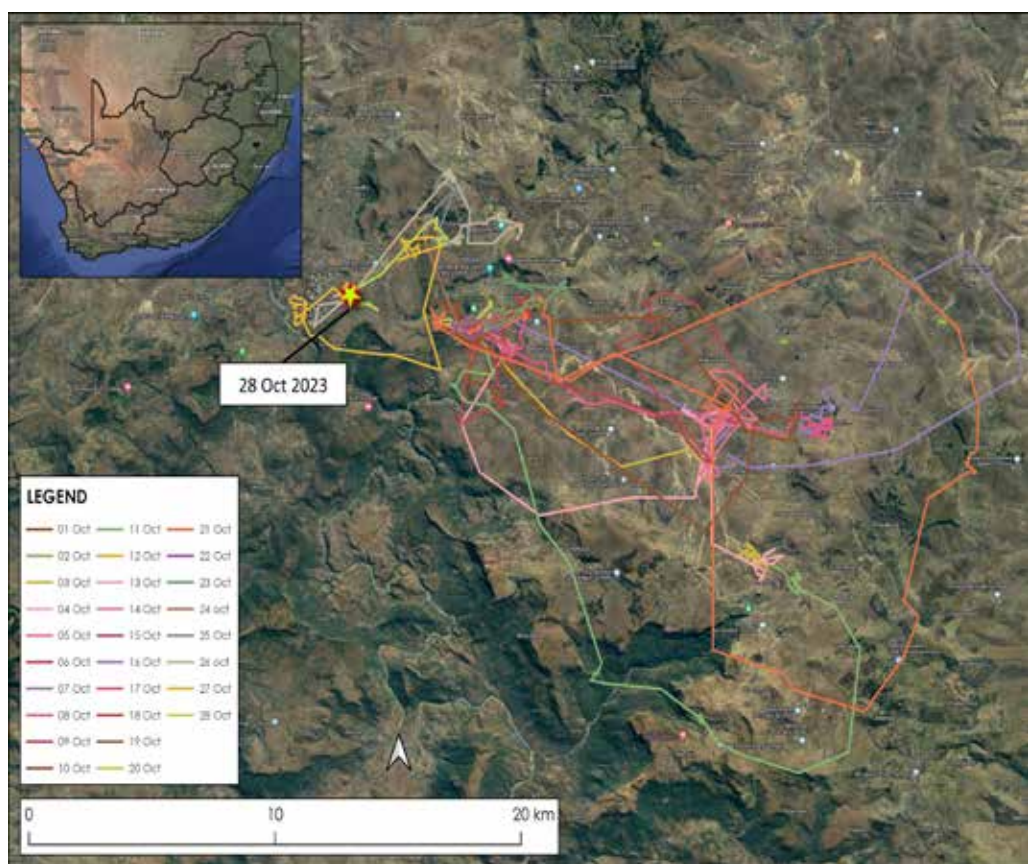
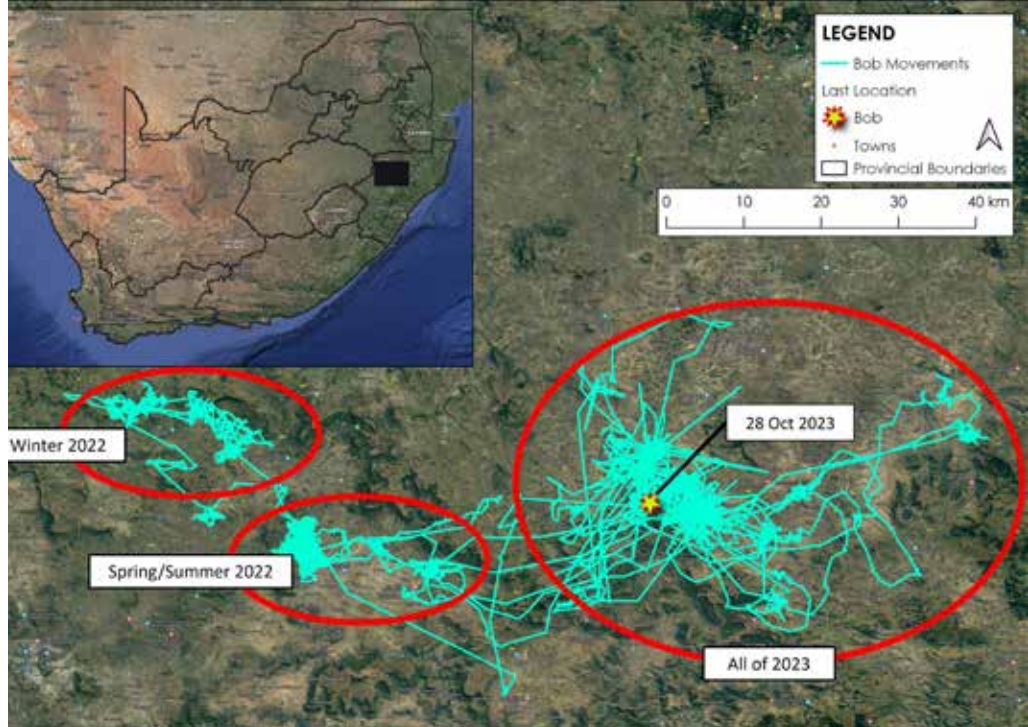


points have been collected in this study, and we have learned amazing things about the behaviour of these birds. Most valuable thus far has been knowledge on the movement of young birds after fledging. They spend the first few months moving around their natal nest, with each day's journey being a little bit further away (Whitecross et al. 2019). These data has helped BLSA to advise the wind energy industry regarding buffer zones around Secretarybird nests when they are found at a proposed development area. After about six months of exploring their immediate neighbourhoods, they disperse and can travel vast distances in the weeks that follow.

Back to Bob

Bob, however, chose to remain close to home. We've received more than 75,000 points from his tracker, and he has travelled more than 8,200 km since that warm summer day in 2021. After fledging, he travelled west and eventually stopped near Dundee, where he spent the winter months of 2022 in the grasslands and open savanna south of Fort Mistake. He slowly moved back east after that, spending the spring and summer of that year near Kameelkop Nature Reserve. In 2023, he settled in the area around Rorke's Drift and the Isandlwana Battlefield, travelling back and forth across the Buffalo River between the two historic sites. He sometimes moves close to small villages and homesteads, walking among the cattle that graze on the communal tribal lands. He seems to prefer the old fields, once planted with crops but now fallow, for finding prey items. He sometimes even flies over a village, but as with most large birds, he keeps a safe distance from humans.

For a large part of October 2023, he chose to roost in a large thorn tree on the edge of the grass covered slopes where the soldiers of the British Empire's 24th Regiment of Foot were defeated by the Impis of King Cetshwayo. Secretarybird males start breeding from about 3 years of age, so Bob is still a few months



short, but the tree does appear to have a clear circular indentation that has all the hallmarks of platform nest. I can see all of this from the satellite imagery at my disposal. I've learned to not get too excited when I find something like this, but trust me, I will keep on stalking Bob for as long as his tracking device keeps telling me where he is.

If I'm lucky, I'll start seeing repeated journeys to this tree. I'll find him spending most nights roosting in it

and spending long periods during the day stationary incubating a small clutch of eggs. And when he does move, it will be for short trips to nearby preferred hunting spots before a swift return trip to deliver prey items to begging mouths agape with hunger.



/continued overleaf



Wherefore and Why¹?

I won't see any of this in reality of course. All I'll see is large Excel spreadsheet with rows and rows of dates and times and coordinates. I'll only follow the points and tracks visible on my computer screen every day after the latest batch had been uploaded to the cloud of information.

But I will know what he is up to. And with that knowledge, I'll hopefully be able to help protect him and his iconic species and ensure their continued presence across our continent.

*Photos and text | Cassie Carstens
BirdLife South Africa Secretarybird
Conservation Officer*

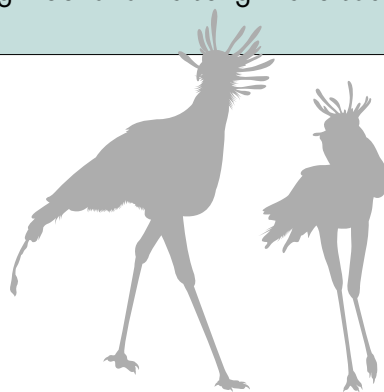
REFERENCE

Whitecross, M.A., Retief, E.F., and Smit-Robinson, H.A. 2019. Dispersal dynamics of juvenile Secretarybirds *Sagittarius serpentarius* in southern Africa. *Ostrich*, 90(2): 97-110.

¹Wherefore and Why a song by Gordon Lightfoot (1971)

Come on sunshine, what can you show me
Where can you take me to make me understand?
Then all at once it came to me
I saw the **wherefore**
And you can see it if you try
It's in the sun above
It's in the [bird] you love
You'll never know the reason **why**...

[Sub-editors note - I was moved by the sentiments in Cassie's final paragraph and used my editorial licence to invoke some appropriate lyrics of a song by Gordon Lightfoot and the song title to sub-title the final paragraph.]



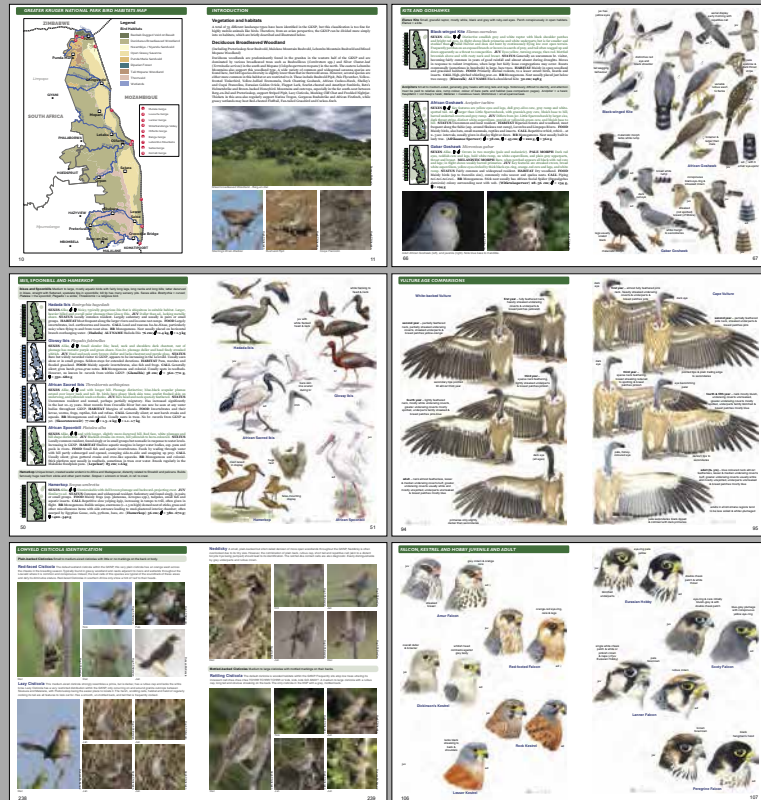
SECOND EDITION

ROBERTS BIRD GUIDE

GREATER KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Duncan McKenzie - Hugh Chittenden - Ian Whyte

Expected in good book stores
before the end of December.



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Mistaken Identity?



Letters to the editors



Rufous-winged
or Levallant's
Cisticola? from
KZN Birds #72
pg 8.

Hi Editors, I appreciated receiving the excellent magazine upon our return from holiday, and am going to endeavour to submit an article for the next issue.

On another matter, the photo labelled as Rufous-winged Cisticola in the article by Steve Davis on van Riebeeck Park bothers me – in my view it's a Levallant's Cisticola,

I know them so well from hereabouts. The bird photo published in Issue 72 has pale lores, extensive warm rufous crown and nape, and I can make out faint flank streaking, which to my mind points to it being Levallant's.

Regards
Ingrid Weiersbye

[Editors Note - Firstly we are delighted to see that people around KZN are reading this magazine so thoroughly and paying such careful attention. We believe Ingrid has raised a good point and the author Steve Davis provided the clarification below.]

Steve Davis replies

Hi Nicky. I had the same debate with Dave Rimmer at the time. I expected Rufous-winged Cisticola in this habitat, not Levallant's, and being winter, it did not call. Subsequently, I have seen Levallant's several times and not Rufous-winged, so I am wondering about the original ID myself.

What do you think?



AN UNEXPECTED OUTCOME OF SUGAR BINGING

An Amethyst Sunbird Lesson

We were alerted to the presence of an Amethyst Sunbird fledgling in our Pigeonwood tree, by the incessant soliciting as it followed the female parent from branch to branch, quivering wings lowered, tail cocked, and never satisfied with whatever insect prey she had delivered. In their company was an older juvenile, most likely offspring from a previous brood some months earlier, which had lost its juvenile gape and was feeding independently. A male adult Amethyst occasionally visited the nectar bottle hanging in the lower branches but it did not seem to be related, and it was never seen provisioning insects. The insatiable fledgling was seen to beg from the older juvenile as well, which ignored it. [Photo 1]



Photo 1 | The animated fledgling constantly begs

The female parent occasionally popped down to the nectar-feeder when the chick was satisfied and still, however before too long we noted with delight the female swoop down to snack, followed instantaneously by the chick who perched alongside her relentlessly soliciting. This happened several times and in every case she ignored the chicks begging and continued to drink....however each time the chick was watching and learning, and within 15 minutes it was successful in emulating the adult habit of sipping at the bottle.....and in so doing sealed its fate. [Photo 2 & 3]



Photos 2 | The chick begs female at the feeder

It is noted in literature just how remarkably fast newly fledged sunbird chicks in particular learn from their parents as they follow them around, learning vital skills in locating food led by both parents. The gleaning lessons for protein-rich





Recent research findings dispel the notion it is harmful....providing that the sugar-water is pure, correct ratios, and with no additives – adult sunbirds are able to regulate their intake. However in this sad instance the circumstances were such that the alternative feeding negated the provision of protein to a still dependant chick.

Text and Photos | Ingrid Weiersbye

Photos 3 | The chick learns fast

prey such as insects and spiders, essential for the chicks robust development, are harder to master and appear to take longer, hence this young sunbird unfortunately learnt about the supply of sugar-water prematurely before it had mastered the skill to find protein. Soon it was staying in the vicinity and gorging itself, no longer venturing up higher in the tree and noisily soliciting. With its appetite repeatedly assuaged with sugar-water – there was no need to beg, and its soliciting ceased. This was calamitous, as the urgent begging is the trigger that keeps the parent/s returning with insect prey, and during the day we noticed the female return less and less...too late we realized the urge to feed her chick had been extinguished. (Photo 4)

It is debatable how long the chick would have survived on sugar-water alone, because the following morning the 'toppies' had finished it and we didn't refill it. We assumed the chick had followed the parent, and were concerned at midday to see the chick fly to the empty bottle, feebly fail to grip the perch, falling backwards then managing to fly weakly to an adjacent tree. With no sign of the adults, and none of the



Photo 4 | the chick replete, and abandoned

usual incessant tseep tseep tseep, we realized it was abandoned, and the sugar-binging had played an indirect role in its demise, aided by our ignorance.

In the soon to be published Roberts Guide to the Sunbirds of southern Africa (JVBBF Trust), researcher and author Mark Brown discusses the debate surrounding artificial feeding and goes a long way to quelling any doubts as to harm inflicted by supplementary sugar-water feeding.



Events and News BirdLife South Africa

2023 by the numbers

THE YEAR BY NUMBERS 2023

2 800 000

Amount donated by BirdLife South Africa's 28 generous Golden Bird Patrons



6

Issues of African BirdLife magazine published

100 000+

Data points have been collected from 6 Secretary-birds that are monitored with GPS-tracking devices



4

Pairs of African Penguins bred at the De Hoop Nature Reserve colony, raising 6 chicks between them.

3000+

Images entered into our first ever Photography Competition



29

Middelport Nature Reserve became the 29th Ramsar Site in South Africa

44

BirdLife South Africa staff members work tirelessly to conserve our country's birds

1000

Tickets sold in the annual Raffle

42 621

22 landowners owning 42 621 ha were approached to expand protected areas in the grasslands of the Eastern Free State to secure critical habitat for our grassland endemic birds and other threatened species

204

Conservation League Donors

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

R30,593,706

Successfully fundraised for The Mouse-Free Marion Project

1600

400 Teams, representing 1600 people, took part in Birding Big Day 2022; nearly 50 000 sightings were recorded

2

Responsible Tourism Awards presented to BirdLife South Africa during the World Travel Market Africa expo

4

Issues of Ostrich - Journal of African Ornithology produced

270

More than 270 people attended the African Bird Fair

11

New staff recruited



14

BirdLife South Africa ended with a financial surplus for the 14th consecutive year!

14

Solar panels installed on Isdell House, BirdLife South Africa's head office

1,22 million

Records were added to SABAP2 this year.

34

Newly-fledged White-backed Vultures were fitted with GPS-tracking devices to understand the impact of lead toxicity on their movement behaviour

60

Juvenile African Penguins were released at the De Hoop Nature Reserve colony

20 000

Unique users of the GoBirding website

GoBirding

58

Conservationists representing government, NGOs, academia and students were trained on the Key Biodiversity Areas Standard in 2023

5

Pelagic trips undertaken to complete Hookpod trials

20

Cape Gannets are being tracked for the first time during the non-breeding season and are being monitored by 20 loggers across 2 sites



49

We have the responsibility of conserving 49 endemic and near-endemic bird species (bird which occur nowhere else in the world)

4061

The 'BioSoundSCapes' Project completed surveys at 482 locations across the Western Cape, with associated Point Counts records totalling 4061 encounters of 196 species

50

Active birding guides trained by BirdLife South Africa



257

Main Road, the address of our office in Claremont, Cape Town

93 000



Members of BirdLife South Africa's Facebook Group (the BirdLife South Africa Facebook Page has more than 32 000 followers)

19

Learners from Bangizwe Primary School and the Boys and Girls Club of South Africa embarked on an excursion to Magoebaskloof centred around the Bird of the Year, the Cape Parrot

60

Participants from diverse sectors attended the Birds and Renewable Energy Forum and shared ideas to promote a bird-friendly renewable energy sector

28

Seabird species breed on Marion Island



25

Per cent of the world's population of Wandering Albatrosses breed on Marion Island

2,8 million

People reached through our Facebook post on World Rhino Day

It's simple.
The longer we wait,
the more we lose.



One of the world's most birds, the African Woodhoopoe, breeds in South Africa as a breeding species. The wider ranging population of one species that we lost within the last decade is a loss to our bird life and to our future. As habitats continue to disappear, so will our birds. Help us not lose.

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A KZN MIDLANDS BIRDING EDEN

Highlight Farm



Finding Eden

Highlight farm, is the sister farm to the larger Ivanhoe Farming Company in the Dargle area, and is nestled under the Inhlezela mountain ridge along the R209 in the southern Kamberg region just outside Fort Nottingham.

History

I moved onto Highlight Farm in late September 2017 after returning from a twelve-year stint fly-fishing in Scandinavia. I knew there would be an abundance of birds, but over the last seven years I can honestly say I have been blown away that this smallish farm would hold such a diverse array of birds.

Habitat Diversity

Highlight farm boasts such a wide variety of different habitats for birds to not only congregate in to feed, but also breed in during the abundant summer months as well. It boasts two largish expanses of dammed water which are separated by two vleis (Wetland) areas. Fourteen separate fields are alternated between annually for growing potatoes, which once harvested, are then left fallow for Angus cattle to graze on. The North western boundary of the farm backs up against the southern part of the Inhlezela mountain ridge which also holds one of only three remaining north facing indigenous forests left in the Kamberg region. Three separate homesteads are located throughout the farm each with their own garden.

Listing

Every person that has passion and an understanding of nature and the outdoors regardless of their expertise starts a bird list when settling into a new homestead. My list started rapidly, with what I call the 'usual suspects'. The everyday bread and



Above | Layout and main features of Highlight Farm



butter birds which included doves, pigeons, ibises, raptors, sparrows, weavers and the easily recognisable waterfowl at the dam added up quickly. By the end of that first week the list was at 85 species. The end of that first summer saw major additions and by the time we were leading into the autumn of 2018 I'd notched up over 140 birds. I was rather chuffed with this total considering I had not put a lot of effort into it. Some noticeable sightings were Wattled Crane, Black Sparrowhawk, Bar-throated Apalis, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Secretarybird, African Firefinch, Malachite Sunbird, Crowned Hornbill, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, and two owls, Marsh and Wood.

When winter set in, my winter list was started, and this has been a great way for me to document the farms list of resident species which fluctuates between 64 and 83 per annum depending on the weather.

Seasonal and Land-use Changes

What has been really interesting over these last seven years, has been the seasonal ebb and flow of birds on a working farm. By seasonal, I don't just mean the birdlife that builds from spring to summer, and dissipates in autumn and winter. Rather this refers more to the changes on the farm and how land use during the seasons attracts different birds at different times.

Directly after the potato fields are harvested, the ground is turned, flattened and new grass is planted turning the field back into grazing pastures again. With minimal irrigation, the grass starts to grow but stays short through the winter. This brings in large flocks of Bald Ibis as well as Yellow-throated Longclaw, African Rock and Buffy Pipits and Crowned Lapwing. However, once this grass starts to thicken, these four species move off this land. By mid to



Above | Jackal Buzzard

late August, this grass is burned in preparation for the potato planting. Before the fields are turned by the ploughs for replanting, the pipits, Bald Ibis and Yellow-throated Longclaw return, only for them to move off again. Cape Longclaw are however here throughout the year. I can only surmise that Yellow-throated Longclaw are seasonal visitors attracted to the fire breaks during these months.

Following last year's summer potato harvest, management re-turned the land on one of the fields and replanted Japanese Radish for the heifers to graze on. These radish grew rapidly and flowered for the first time since being here. I noticed a massive increase in Zitting, Wing-snapping, Lazy and Levallant Cisticola as well as Drakensberg Prinia in and around this field. I have always had trouble distinguishing between these LBJ's but after two weeks of constant visits to this field I was able to differentiate which was which through their calls and flight patterns.

The farm managers recently built a cattle feed area directly behind my house under an open barn for the younger bulls. With thousands of mealie-seeded cowpats now fertilising the ground, an explosion of flies and insects attracted, happily for



Above | Yellow-throated Longclaw

me, a number of flycatcher species including Spotted, Dusky, Southern Black and African Paradise as well as Fork-tailed Drongo. While these had all been spotted elsewhere on the farm, I've never had all these together in my garden in such abundance.





Top Left | *Spotted Flycatcher*



Middle Left | *African Paradise Flycatcher*



Bottom Left | *African Dusky Flycatcher*

Fork-tailed Drongo will utilise many branches throughout the day to hunt from and are constantly darting from tree to tree. African Paradise Flycatchers use the same hunting strategy. African Dusky and Spotted Flycatcher however, launch themselves off the same favourite branch darting out only to head back to the same perch, hour after hour. With such an abundance of insect life around I am hoping some of them find partners and nest within the garden.

Two years, 2019 and 2023, have been stand-out dry years since moving here and many of the newly planted potato fields around the farm have been constantly irrigated. This is achieved using water from the two dams throughout the winter and spring months. This constant irrigation lowers the water levels on both stretches of still waters, but with that brings a multitude of waterfowl and wading birds to the farm.

Greenshank, Three-banded Plover, Crowned Lapwings, African Snipe, Black-winged Stilts, Ruff, Common and Wood Sandpipers and Squacco Heron are a regular sight. The lower water levels produce more open muddy areas around the shores and make Black Crake, African Rail and African Swampphen more visible as they have to venture out from the relative safety of thick reedbeds to forage. The latter three are my favourite birds to spot here as they are usually elusive. I cannot tell you how many hours I have dedicated to

tracking these three birds in the lower end of the vlel. I have suggested to management that they should consider erecting a bird hide at the big dam in the near future.

Our sister farm, Ivanhoe, up in the Dargle has just built a bird hide at their new vulture restaurant which overlooks a large vlel area that holds 30 to 40 pairs of Wattled Crane. Speckled Pigeons, Red-eyed, Ring-necked and Laughing Dove are by far the most common species to be found here. On any given day throughout the year there could be well over two to three thousand perched on branches or flying around the farm. All are skittish, and the clapping of wings as large flocks dart away often alerts me to the presence of a Lanner or Peregrine Falcon high above. I have recorded up 20 different raptor species on the farm so far, the most memorable being a Black Harrier flying over the dam while I was out fly fishing on my pontoon; a Verreaux's Giant Eagle-owl (probably an offspring from a breeding pair that was nesting at Clifton Prep a few years back); a lone Cape Vulture sitting atop of my garden oak tree during a miserable cold front; a Brown Snake-eagle carrying a massive puff-adder in its talons caught in the vlel and Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk hunting Cape Weaver and Dark-capped Bulbul along the Vlei edges. African Harrier-hawk, African Fish Eagle, African Goshawk, Long crested Eagle as well as Forest, Common (Steppe) and Jackal Buzzard are seen daily throughout the summer months. A pair of Martial Eagle and their juvenile offspring as well as juvenile Osprey have been spotted between the months of April May and June for the last four years and we have two breeding pairs of Western Barn Owl here also which are heard most evening along with Spotted Eagle-owl and African Wood owl.



Directly below the smaller dam wall at the top end of the vlei, an old dead pine plantation of around 30 or so trees still stands and is home to Golden tailed, Olive and Cardinal Woodpeckers. On calm, windless winter mornings and evenings one can hear the constant knocking of their beaks above all else from over 800 m away.

The Inhlezela mountain ridge towards the north west boundary of the farm is strewn with small undercut gullies that hold Cape and Chinspot Batis, Bar-throated Apalis, Drakensberg Prinia, African Firefinch, Glossy and Pied Starling, Sweet, Blue & Common Waxbill. These gullies as they drop down split up and become tree lined scrub edges for the fields and are perfect habitat for Natal and Red necked Spurfowl, Red winged Francolin, Helmeted Guineafowl and Common Quail. All of the above use these corridors that I call "birding highways" and in my eyes are probably the most important habitats on the farm as they hold such a diverse spectrum of species throughout the year.

Lastly a saddening aspect - I have noticed since moving here a steady decline in White Stork on the farm during the summer months. The first summer of 2017 - 2018 I counted no less than 130 on any given day. As each year has passed the numbers have dwindled dramatically. I probably only saw 20 - 25 last summer here on the farm. It is possible they are finding better feeding grounds elsewhere on other farms. I am hoping that with the addition of a lot more cows this winter, there will be higher numbers visible.

At present, my list stands at 195 species. I am sure if I was able to distinguish more easily pipits, warblers, swallows, martins and swifts I might break the 200 barrier mark but to be honest I don't care

whether it takes me another 7 years for that to transpire. I feel blessed and grateful to be able to have spotted the species I have, in what I call my Birding Eden in the midlands.

Text | Simon Graham

Bird photos provided by Nicolette Forbes

Top Right | African Fish Eagle



Nicolette Forbes

Right | Spotted Eagle-owl



Nicolette Forbes

Bottom right | Cape Weaver



Nicolette Forbes



KZN BIRDING HOTSPOTS

Sani Pass

Bird Specials

Drakensberg
Rockjumper
Mountain Pipit
Gurney's Sugarbird
Ground Woodpecker
Malachite Sunbird
Bush Blackcap
Bearded Vulture
Drakensberg Prinia
Denham's Bustard
Barrat's Warbler



Why visit?

The Sani Pass is one of the must visit places for an all round fantastic experience. Stunning scenery, beautiful wildflowers and access to most of the birds endemic to the Drakensberg Mountain Escarpment. It is a breathtaking mountainous route that connects KwaZulu-Natal with the mountain kingdom of Lesotho. As you ascend the winding, hairpin turns of Sani Pass, you'll be greeted by a variety of special bird species. The high-altitude grasslands and rocky cliffs provide an ideal habitat for some really special species. Look to the skies, and you may spot the majestic Bearded Vulture, soaring effortlessly with its impressive wingspan while other residents that may be ticked include Cape Eagle Owl, Drakensberg Rockjumper, and vibrant Malachite Sunbird, adding splashes of colour to the mountainous landscape.

Underberg provides a good base to stay and you will need a 4x4 to travel

up the pass. The grasslands below the pass may yield Denham's Bustard, Ant-eating Chat, Grey Crowned Crane, and Secretarybird. Wooded and scrub areas may produce Bush Blackcap, Drakensberg Prinia, Chorister Robin-Chat, and Sweet Waxbill, but as you reach higher altitudes and the *Protea* habitat begins Gurney's Sugarbird and Malachite Sunbird occur alongside Ground Woodpecker, Red-throated Wryneck, Cape Rock-Thrush, and Buff-streaked Chat. Above the tree-line Drakensberg Siskin and Drakensberg Rockjumper start to appear, as well as Bearded (Lammergeier) and Cape Vultures. In the Kingdom of Lesotho the habitat consists of vast open plains with small scrubby bushes which hold Large-billed Lark, Fairy Flycatcher, Grey Tit, Layard's Warbler (Tit-babbler), Sickle-winged Chat, Yellow Canary, Sentinel Rock Thrush, and Southern Bald Ibis. In summer the grassy areas of the plateau host the range-restricted Mountain Pipit.





Members Murmurings

Nature at its best

Golden-tailed Woodpeckers move in

We erected a sisal nesting box in our coral tree in March this year at Mount Edgecombe Estate, four metres above the ground and facing south. All was quiet until the end of June when a pair of Golden-tailed Woodpeckers came to investigate the nesting box. The woodpeckers spent quite some time deciding where to make the opening. They would peck all over and then disappear for extended periods and then reappear. This also drew the attention of a pair of black collared barbets who did something similar.

Eventually decisive action was taken and the golden tailed woodpeckers burrowed an entrance to the nesting box in about the middle of October. They completed a neat hole in the widest point of the sisal nesting box (not actually near the top where an imprint was artificially made) and then within three days they excavated a neat and deep hole inside. Within a few days the female had moved in and a face appeared at the entrance in the late afternoons. Then all was quiet...



Nicolette Forbes

An adult female Golden-tailed Woodpecker

Success - the family grows!

Happiness! About three weeks later we noticed three hungry beaks squawking at the entrance, mother and father feeding them. This was followed by the adult entering the nest and immediately leaving with a large white faecal sac in its mouth to keep the nest clean.

Over a period of three weeks the feeding became more frequent, the chattering more intense until the young called out in the familiar squawk of the adult sound, soft at first and then more intense. The feeding times became more ferocious and eventually the young adults had one foot out of the entrance waiting to be fed. Then suddenly one morning the nest was empty.

/continued overleaf



Above | Two young Golden-tailed Woodpeckers stare out at the world from their new sisal log home.



Right | Mother arrives to provide the much anticipated food.





Left | Male and female adult birds at the nest



Right | Mother feeding the eager soon-to-be fledglings

As it should be.

We heard the calling of the woodpeckers in a nearby fever tree for that one day only. Then all was quiet. They were gone – free and wild.

Text | Nigel and Val Cotterell &
Photos | Trish and Eric Beaumont



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2024



April 2024

13 months each and 14 wonderful bird photos plus
monthly planner blocks marked with holidays,
and special bird/environmental days highlighted

**BirdLife eThekwni KZN's
2024 Calendar
is going to be a significant one**

This year's theme
Come Dine with Me
profiles birds, their food and feeding behaviour

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Birds in Focus

Send your interesting sightings, rare bird photos or just great pics of birds seen while you are out and about birding. Send in any contributions following the guidelines and deadline dates on page 2. Note that the design and layout editor may crop, or change the editing of the photos if necessary to improve the publication quality.



A Striped Pipit (left) and a Scaly-throated Honeyguide (right) seen at Vergara Farm, situated within my home Ballito pentad in the Dolphin Coast Pentad challenge | Mike O'Donoghue



Yellow-throated Longclaw at Tembe Elephant Park | Trish Beaumont





*Broad-billed Roller couple
nesting in Tembe Elephant Park
in early November 2023 | Trish
Beaumont*



Greater Sand Plover (left) and Collared Pratincole (right) at the uMvoti Estuary. The estuary produced some great wading birds early this summer, before the water levels rose and covered the sandbanks. Besides the above, we also saw Bar-tailed Godwits, Avocets, Black-winged Stilts, Greenshanks, Curlew Sandpipers and Whimbrels, all along with the more common waders as well as a range of Terns. | Mike O'Donoghue





A pair of Red Knot on the uMvoti Estuary. An uncommon KZN species. | Mike O'Donoghue

So you just bought your first camera...

3 key lessons for every new photographer

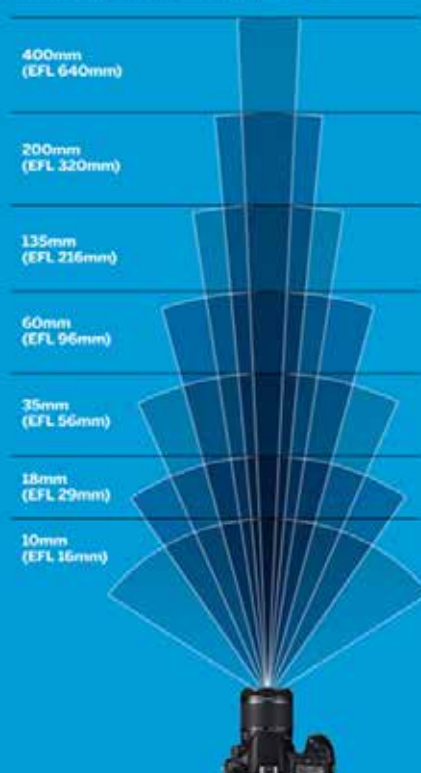
Shutter speed explained

Just like aperture settings and ISOs, shutter speeds go in a fixed sequence, with each full 'stop' being double (or half) the speed of its neighbour, though intermediate values are used too.



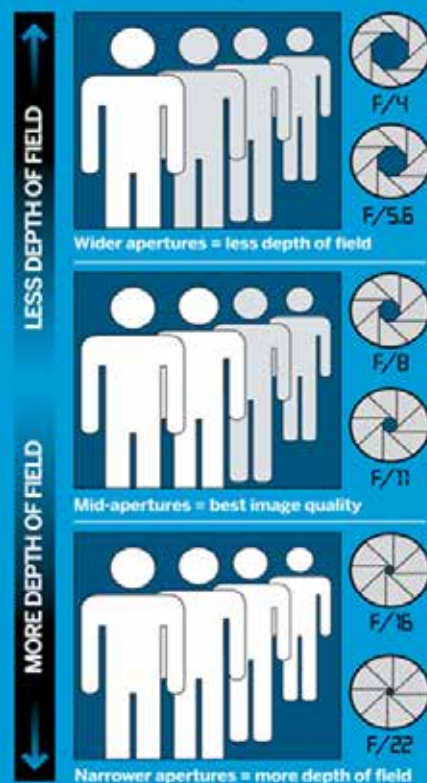
Focal length explained

The focal length of a lens and its angle of view go hand in hand. Wide-angle lenses have shorter focal lengths, while telephoto lenses have longer focal lengths. The smaller sensors on APS-C-format D-SLRs have a 1.6x magnifying effect, known as the effective focal length, or EFL.



Depth of field explained

The aperture is the main factor in dictating how much of the scene appears pin-sharp. The narrower the aperture (larger f/number) the more of the image will be in focus: the wider the aperture, the less of the image will be in focus.





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KZN BIRDING AND CITIZEN SCIENCE

December 2023

Citizen Science Birding Hub

Welcome to the one-stop information hub for all things birding and citizen science taking place in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa.

This report will cover the three main birding projects that are currently being managed by BirdLife South Africa and the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology:

- Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP),
- Coordinated Avifaunal Roadcounts (CAR), and
- Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC).

CAR and CWAC surveys take place twice per year, in January/February (Summer) and in June/July (Winter), and SABAP is an ongoing project that has been running since 2007.

SABAP2 – KZN 2023 (Q1 to Q3)

Whether due to rising fuel costs, safety concerns, or too much sport on the weekends, atlasing in KZN during the first three quarters of 2023 has been considerably lower than previous years. This has been an unfortunate trend for the last two years (Figure 1). By the end of October, only 1,799 cards were submitted in 322 pentads.

The total numbers for previous years (Table 1) are however still within reach and hopefully new and experienced atlasers will rise to the challenge to get areas covered, but more than 500 full protocol cards in a three-month period might be a bit much to ask.

Of the 1,285 pentads that cover the province, only 371 still need some attention to reach the threshold of four full protocol cards. This number is the minimum requirement for detailed analysis of species presence/occurrence and probability in each pentad. A full protocol card is achieved when more than two hours are spent recording birds in a pentad which covers an area of roughly eight by nine kilometers, or a ninth of a quarter degree grid cell.

Depending on the number of cards submitted, each pentad will change in colour. The aim is to reach green (4-6 cards), with yellow (1 card) and orange (2-3 cards) denoting those areas where more work is needed. As can be seen in Figure 2, there are three main areas that still require considerable attention: the southern parts of the province on the border with the Eastern Cape, the far northern parts of Zululand, and the large north-western corner stretching from Ulundi to Newcastle and Ladysmith.

Of the 371 pentads mentioned above, 86 only have one card, 185 has two, and 99 have three full protocol cards.

SABAP2 – KZN 2023 Q3 Rarities

The two biggest rarity highlights for the third quarter of 2023 were the small covey of Namaqua Sandgrouse near Bergville and Thrush Nightingale in Amanzimtoti.

Table 1

Year	Pentads Covered	Total FP Cards
2023	322	1,799
2022	372	2,307
2021	387	2,786
2020	381	2,545
2019	410	2,855
2018	405	2,879
2017	435	2,944
2016	442	2,882
2015	508	2,992
2014	700	2,565
2013	675	2,385
2012	692	2,324
2011	762	2,754
2010	698	3,080
2009	724	3,134
2008	418	1,383
2007	153	304

CAR – KZN 2023 Winter Survey

The CAR winter survey took place on the last weekend of June with only 11 of the 63 routes in the province being surveyed, and these were in the Underberg and Midlands areas. Thank you very much to the following birders (and companions not shown) for taking the time to do a survey or two:

- Rosanne Clark
- Pamela Kleiman
- Timothy Hedges
- Sean Glynn

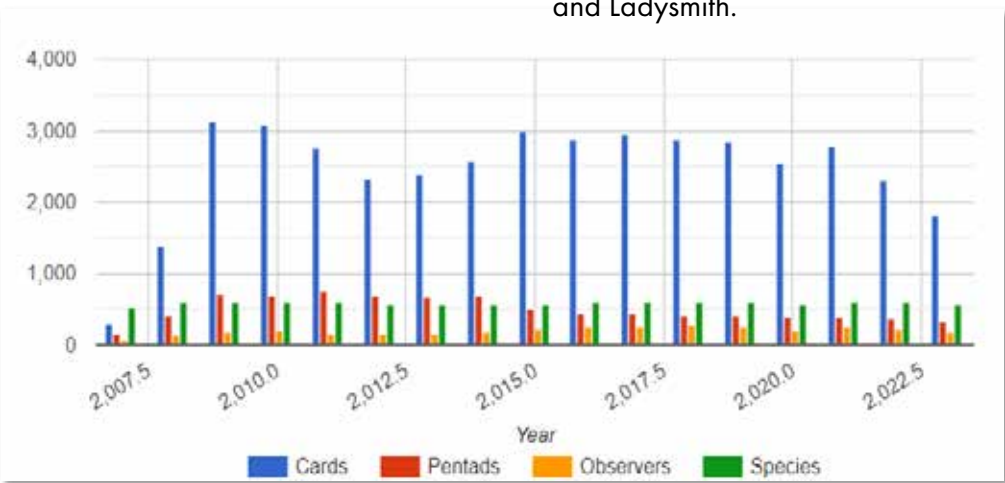


Figure 1



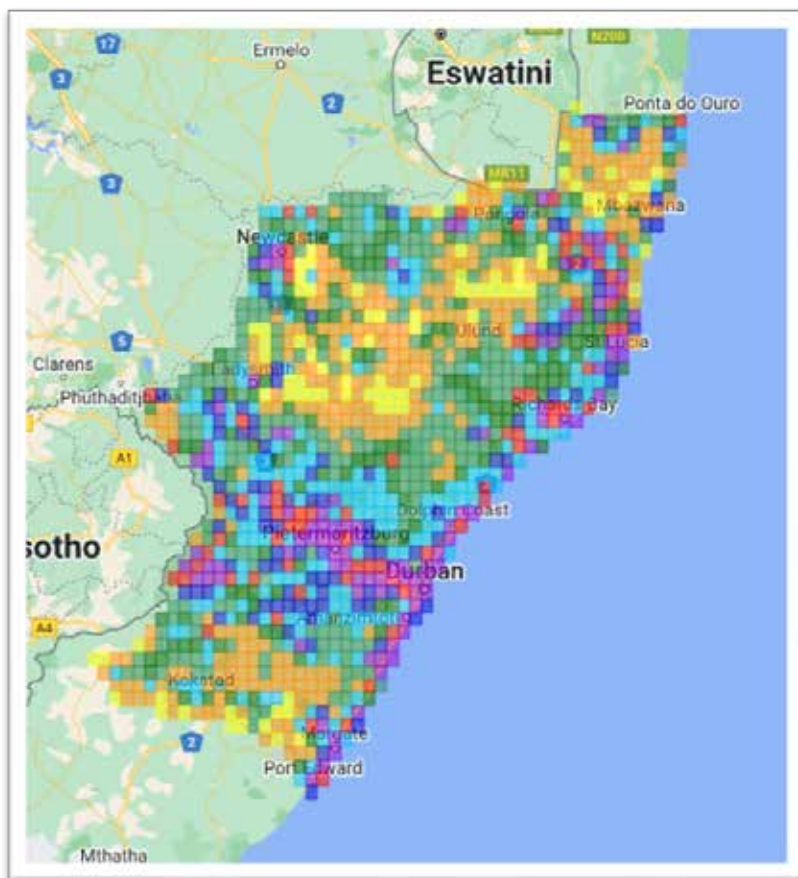


Figure 2

- Hugh Bulcock
- Colin Summersgill
- Sally Cummings
- Anita and Peter Divall
- Evelyn Hughes

CAR is a valuable tool that assists with data collection on presence and density of large bird species, such as cranes and bustards. In KZN the routes are in the following areas:

Region/Main Town	Routes
Creighton (KC)	1
Dundee (KD)	12
Escourt (KE)	4
East Griqualand (KG)	11
Ladysmith (KL)	9
Midlands (KM)	8
Newcastle (KN)	8
Melmoth (KO)	1
Paulpietersburg (KP)	2
Underberg (KU)	3
Vryheid (KV)	4

CAR entails driving along a set route and recording a specific suite of large birds, how many there are, and in what type of habitat or land use they are active.

Routes are normally between 70-100 kilometers in length and take between 4-6 hours to complete.

The biggest hurdle to taking part in CAR, besides the cost of fuel (!), is the difficulty entering the data. The CAR website is slightly on the ancient side, and data entry is a very tedious task. But here's a deal: if you are keen to take part in CAR and start contributing to critical research on endangered and vulnerable species, please contact Cassie for more information. He is willing to enter the data into the website for you! All you need to do is go watch some birds, fill in a datasheet while doing so, send that sheet to him, and he'll do the rest! The next survey will take place from 27-28 January 2024.

CWAC – KZN 2023 Winter Survey

The CWAC winter survey for 2023 took place during July and, disconcertingly, of the 106 sites in KZN only 12 were surveyed. The website for this project, as with CAR, is incredibly difficult to navigate.

Even just finding where the sites are located is a struggle! Fortunately, I took the time to map them all and will be supplying a slightly better information document to clubs before the end of the year. This will hopefully encourage birders to visit some nearby sites and do some CWAC surveys. Some of the sites have become unsafe over the years, but others are still accessible. For instance, the Durban Botanical Gardens hasn't been surveyed since 2016!

If you are keen to take part in CWAC and start contributing to critical research on endangered and vulnerable waterbirds, please contact Cassie for more information.

UPCOMING BIRDING EVENTS FOR Q1 & Q2 OF 2024

- January 2024 – CWAC Summer Surveys (Various dates, check BeKZN outings)
- 27-28 January 2024 – CAR Summer Survey
- February 2024 – CWAC Summer Surveys (Various dates, check BeKZN outings)
- 2 February 2024 – World Wetlands Day
- 26 February 2024 – SABAP2 Workshop (Contact Tania Anderson at sabap2@birdlife.org.za)
- 3 March 2024 – World Wildlife Day
- 4-5 May 2024 – Cape Parrot Big Birding Day
- 9 May 2024 – World Migratory Bird Day
- 11 May 2024 – eBird Global Big Day
- June/July 2024 – CWAC Winter Surveys (Various dates, check BeKZN outings)
- 29-30 June 2024 – CAR Winter Survey

*Text and images | Cassie Carstens
SABAP2 RAC KZN - Coordination & marketing*



BirdLife eThekwin KZN celebrates!

It's our 75th Anniversary
- designated as our
Albatross Jubilee

In 2024, BirdLife eThekwin KZN, also known as BeKZN, proudly celebrates its 75th Anniversary, a significant milestone for a club with members who are dedicated to birds. Established in 1949, the club is one of the oldest bird clubs in South Africa, along with the Cape Bird Club and Wits Bird Club. With three-quarters of a century behind it, the club is still standing as a testament to a long and passionate journey in birdwatching, conservation, and awareness raising.

One of the standout features of BeKZN's legacy has been its unwavering commitment to bird conservation and the preservation of natural habitats. Over the years, the club has been at the forefront of various initiatives aimed at protecting South Africa's diverse birdlife. From monitoring endangered species, funding conservation initiatives and organisations, to raising awareness about the importance of preserving bird habitats, the club has made significant contributions to the welfare of birds particularly in KZN.

As the club enters its 75th year, it is filled with pride, not only for its remarkable history but also for its ongoing dedication to the well-being of birds and their ecosystems. This anniversary is not just a celebration of the past; it's a reaffirmation of commitment to a brighter, more bird-friendly future. Over the course of its illustrious 75-year history, the club has been fortunate to count among its ranks a remarkable cadre of luminaries, each contributing their unique talents and unwavering dedication to the club and the bird world. Names like Dr Hamish Campbell, Roy Cowgill, Ian Sinclair, Dennis McCullough, Tim Wood, Prof Steve Piper, Prof Gordon McLean, Terry Oatley, and Dr Phillip Clancy have shone brightly in the annals of the club's legacy. These individuals and many others (we don't have enough space here to mention them all) have left an indelible mark, working tirelessly in diverse capacities to advance the club's mission and champion the cause of birds. Their collective efforts have not only enriched the club's history but have also had a profound impact on the broader conservation landscape, leaving a lasting legacy of devotion to our feathered friends.

This anniversary year promises to be filled with exciting events and activities for club members. We welcome visitors and any interested birders to join us.

A special logo has been produced in line with our theme.



Why have we chosen an Albatross Jubilee?

The club has already celebrated a Diamond Jubilee as its 60th Anniversary in 2008. A 75th Anniversary is also sometimes referred to as a Diamond Anniversary. To avoid repeating this moniker we have therefore decided to mark this our *Albatross Jubilee*. The reasons for this are good ones. The logo of the club is an albatross, we are a club situated on a coastline that hosts many seabirds, including a number of albatross species and, the major Mouse Free Marion project is in full swing aiming to ensure these birds remain on our shores. We therefore thought it appropriate to use this iconic group of birds as part of our celebration. A pelagic trip or two off Durban will also be part of the celebrations.



Come celebrate with us.

While the official anniversary month is May, the celebration will kick off with the start of a Big Year Challenge for members on the 1st January 2024. This extended jubilee will provide ample opportunities for members to come together, celebrate their shared passion for birds, and reflect on the club's rich history.

The club plans to kick off the year with a **Big Year** for members and any visitors who would like to join in (with a donation for our conservation fund of course). A bird book club, The Feathered Tales Book Club, will be run profiling books that cover birds and birding in interesting ways, some offshore pelagics, our 75th AGM, and other special events to be announced as they roll around.

So, we look forward to celebrating 2024 with all of you and hope we see many of you at the exciting events which are planned. May the club's passion for birds and the tireless efforts of many members continue to inspire both current and future generations. Here's to 75 years of remarkable achievements, and to many more years ahead with the beauty and wonder of South Africa's birds.



Feathered Tales Book Club



The rare and elusive White-backed Night Heron



Above | An adult White-backed Night Heron, photographed at night on the Mtunzini mudflats in April 2012.

Without hesitation you would all agree that the two most uncommon breeding heron in southern Africa are White-backed, and Rufous-bellied. Of the two nocturnal Night Heron species, White-backed is more elusive and uncommon than Black-crowned. And yet, White-backed

Night Heron aren't really rare, they are just uncommon and tremendously secretive and shy, seldom venturing out into the open, and importantly, strictly nocturnal.

I have been fortunate to have been able to photograph at two White-backed Night Heron nests. The first

was north of Eshowe on the edge of Goedetrouw Dam in the Nkweleni valley, KZN.

The following 3 photographs were taken in the late 1980's using slide film!

Right | An adult arriving to feed three nestlings.





Above | The nestlings being fed small fish and shrimps.



Nestlings at two different ages. To obtain the these photographs, a boat was required to get to the site, a hide was erected just before nightfall near the nest, then a small tent was set-up in thick undergrowth 40 m away so that I could get some sleep after midnight! Presumably a fairly safe locality - except for a leopard heard grunting in the distance!



Left | In 2007 a friend showed me a nest near Gingindlovu, KZN. Nests may not necessarily be placed over water but preferred sites are usually within 5 m of still, slow-moving water bodies.





Age comparisons. Left, a sub-adult that has white spotting to its wings, and, Right, an adult. Sub-adults are browner backed than adults.



Above | The young bird on the hunt, with small fish scattering ahead. Below | Success shortly after nightfall.





Above | A large mud crab, *Scylla serrata* (left) moves onto the mudbank. The wary Night Heron is alarmed and moves away!



Reflections of a beautiful still evening where the silence is disturbed only by the occasional plunge of the night heron, the sound of distant frogs and crickets, and the continuous buzzing of mosquitoes!

Acknowledgments: I thank Guy Upfold and Ashton Musgrave for their help.

Photos and Text | Hugh Chittenden



Chair's Chirps

BirdLife eThekweni KZN



BirdLife eThekweni KZN | October to December 2023

In the final quarter of 2023, the BirdLife eThekweni KZN bird club soared through a series of engaging activities, showcasing the diverse avian wonders of our region. Despite the challenges faced by our dedicated members, the club continued to thrive, maintaining its rich tradition of birding excursions and insightful guest speakers.

Activities and Guest Speakers

Our BeKZN Birding diary was brimming with exciting activities, featuring captivating speakers and explorations of both familiar local bird haunts and more distant territories. The enthusiasm and passion for avian encounters were palpable, creating memorable experiences for all participants.

The BeKZN Calendar has sold really well

The sale of BeKZN calendars took center stage this quarter, as we endeavored to fill the coffers of our Bird Conservation Fund. These funds play a crucial role in supporting our ambitious conservation goals and initiatives.

Our calendar for 2024 is almost sold out but if you still need to purchase please contact us by email calendars@bekzn.org as we have one box left. Grab your copy and start planning your birding adventures for next year. The theme this year is **Come Dine with Me!** and profiles bird food and feeding behaviour

Conservation Goals

The club set three ambitious goals for the year, demonstrating our commitment to making a positive

impact. Collaborating with BirdLife Sani, we dedicated efforts to raise funds for the Ntsikeni Project, with Mr. Dalu Ngobo as the reserve custodian. This collaboration extended beyond financial support, as we joined hands to provide essential equipment and resources for this vital reserve.

Our second goal involved supporting BirdLife South Africa's Secretarybird project, contributing to the conservation efforts highlighted in the article on page 6. Additionally, the club embraced the challenge of aiding vulture conservation through contributions to the BLSA Vulture project.

Membership Growth and Acknowledgements

Despite personal challenges, the dedication of our members shone through. A significant increase in membership this year is a testament to the collective passion for bird conservation. A special acknowledgment goes to Jane Morris, whose outstanding work as Membership Manager played a pivotal role in this achievement.

A Call to Stay Engaged

To all members, we extend a heartfelt reminder that your participation, no matter the level, is crucial. Your membership is not just a commitment to our club but a vote for the well-being of our birds and their habitats. As we navigate legislative decisions, your support empowers organizations to advocate effectively.

Upcoming Excitement

The club celebrates its 75th Anniversary in 2024. As we ease into the New Year, the excitement is tangible with the anticipation of our 75th Anniversary - the Albatross Jubilee. Special activities, including

the launch of a BeKZN Big Year on January 1, 2024, promise an exhilarating start to the new year. Details of all special events will be sent to all members.

In Memory of Cecil Fenwick

Sadly, December marked the loss of one of our longtime and stalwart members, Cecil Fenwick. His contributions and presence will be deeply missed, and our thoughts are with his loved ones during this difficult time.

Wishing You a Wonderful 2024:

As we bid farewell to 2023, we extend warm wishes for a fantastic 2024. May the coming year be filled with joyous birding adventures, discoveries, and the continued camaraderie of our vibrant birding community.

Here's to the enjoyment of birds and the shared passion that binds us together!

Nicolette Forbes | Chair BirdLife eThekweni KZN & Chair BirdLife KZN Forum



Shy Albatross | Nicolette Forbes





Chair's Chirps



BirdLife KZN Midlands

We have settled down to our usual routine in the KZN Midlands after a fantastic BirdLife KZN Forum and birding at Bonamanzi and environs in September 2023.

One item that came out from the report backs given at Forum was the importance and value of Information obtained from CAR and CWAC as well as Atlasing and Birdlasser. So all those members who do contribute, well done and please continue the good work!

We are gearing up to host the BirdLife KZN Forum in March 2024 and it's a fantastic opportunity to showcase all the birds and habitats that the KZN Midlands has to offer. One thing we don't have at the moment is decent weather, but hopefully it will be fine in March 2024?

We haven't had the mega ticks that have been seen in St Lucia and eThekweni recently but a few interesting birds have been spotted at Darvill and Thurlow lately. We were pleasantly surprised to have a flock of around 50 Cape Parrots visiting Summerfield Guest House near Lions River for a few weeks in October before moving on to we know not where!

BirdLife KZN Midlands club teamed up with the Karkloof Conservation Centre (KCC) and One Planet for an outreach program for three schools in the Karkloof area. Several club members volunteered to support KCC and One Planet on Wednesday 25th and Friday 27th October 2023. A total of 147 children enjoyed a few hours communing with nature

and doing a spot of birding. You will be able to read more about this elsewhere.

We are holding a course on Bird Sounds and Calls, presented by Steve Davis from Birdlife eThekweni KZN on Saturday 25th November 2023 and a lot of interest has been shown, so we expect a good turnout.

We continued with our regular outings and evening talks during the year and the number of people joining in is picking up and is almost back to pre-Covid levels. It is heartening to see that many non-club members do attend the live talks, it shows there is a broad interest in birds, birding and places to see birds.

*Sean Glynn
Chair BirdLife KZN Midlands*



Lilac-breasted Roller | Nicolette Forbes



Chair's Chirps BirdLife Sani



Greetings, Birding enthusiasts!

As we approach the end of the year, I'm delighted to share some fantastic news and express our sincere thanks for the incredible support we've received.

Firstly, a huge shout-out to Nicky Forbes from BirdLife eThekweni KZN for orchestrating a truly fabulous BirdLife KZN Forum | Zululand in September 2023 at Bonamanzi.

Nicky's dedication and attention to detail have set an inspiring standard for future Forums. The event was a resounding success, filled with enriching experiences and valuable insights that will undoubtedly resonate with all our KZN members.

A heartfelt thank you also goes to BirdLife eThekwini KZN for their unwavering financial support

toward the Ntsikeni Project. This support played a crucial role in securing an extension of Mr Dalu Ncgobo's employment contract, ensuring the continued success of our conservation efforts at Ntsikeni. In addition to this, BirdLife Sani proudly contributed R15k to the Ntsikeni project, reaffirming our commitment to the preservation of this vital habitat.

Exciting news on the vulture conservation front! Wildlife Act secured much needed funding for the Safe Vulture feeding site here in Underberg, enabling the construction of a permanent subterranean hide. Furthermore, with Wildlife Act graciously returning our Mobile Hide, we decided to pay it forward. We've donated the Mobile Hide to the Southern Drakensberg Honorary Officers Group, where it will find a new home at Himeville Nature

Reserve. This hide will soon be available for club members and the public to use, providing a unique birding experience.

As we embark on the festive season, I extend warm wishes for a safe and joyous time. May the holidays bring you moments of peace and reflection, surrounded by the beauty of nature. Remember to keep looking up; you never know what feathered wonders might grace the sky above. Thank you all for your continued dedication to BirdLife and birding. Here's to a bright and bird-filled future!

*Tony Coetzer | Chair BirdLife Sani
KZN Birds Editorial Team | Advertising
Treasurer BirdLife KZN Forum*

News from non-affiliated KZN bird clubs St Lucia Bird Club

St Lucia resident Lucy Erasmus mentioned that while on a horse trail she spooked a nightjar that flew off from what appeared to be a nest in the grass. The other riders who frequently rode past this spot mentioned that a nightjar was often visible.

So a small group of John & Marie-Claire Field, Lucy Erasmus and Jan de Winter set off on Monday 6th around 16:00 to find the nightjars. Lucy led us straight to the spot in the veld in the vicinity of the St Lucia Bhangazi horse stables. According to passing riders the parent had not been seen for the last two days, and we can only assume that what we found were actually two fledged offspring. However be that as it may, we have photos of them hiding in the grass and believe they are Swamp



Nightjars. Nearby was the site where they had been incubated in the open as remnants of eggshell could still be seen in the small circular clearing.

The birds were remarkably calm and did not flinch at all as we parted grass with our hands to get a better view.

St John Field | St Lucia Bird Club



BirdLife KZN Forum 2023/2024 Committee

Office Bearers

Chair | Nicolette Forbes (BirdLife eThekweni KZN)
Secretary | Carron Dove (BirdLife eThekweni KZN)
Treasurer | Tony Coetzer (BirdLife Sani)
Editor KZN Birds | Ticky Forbes (BirdLife eThekweni KZN)

BirdLife Affiliated Club Chairs (voting members)

Sean Glynn (BirdLife KZN Midlands)
Peter Nelson (Ladysmith Birders)
Otto Nel (BirdLife Northern KZN)
Tony Coetzer (BirdLife Sani)
Nicolette Forbes (BirdLife eThekweni KZN)

Non-voting representatives invited to attend the BirdLife KZN Forum committee meeting:

Representatives from relevant KZN bird-related organisations invited to attend the committee meeting

KZN Rarities Committee Chair | Digby Cyrus
Natal Ornithological Trust | Steve Davis (BirdLife eThekweni KZN)
SABAP2 KZN representative | Cassie Carstens (BirdLife eThekweni KZN)
John Voelcker Bird Book Trust | Ingrid Weiersbye/Guy Upfold

Bird Club Chairs from non-affiliated clubs always invited to attend the committee meeting

John Field (St Lucia Bird Club)
Chris MacDonald (Dolphin Coast Bird Club)
Harry Voorma (Mount Edgecombe Bird and Environment Club)
Carole Hills (Birdlife Zululand)



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The front cover featured a Greater Painted-Snipe so we thought we would end with an African Snipe



Wishing everyone a very Happy 2024!

