



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

P O Box 93, Wakkerstroom 2480 Cell Number 0822556778 E-Mail: wackersbirdclub@gmail.com

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 28– NOVEMBER 2014

Yet Another ...–Glenn Ramke

Although it was such a sad article in the last newsletter re the dead Grey Crowned Cranes, it was gratifying to hear how concerned so many people were about the event.

Unfortunately we found one more carcass and I got it into a deep freeze – thanks to Theuns and Ans again – hoping it would be fresher and able to reveal something to go on. I took it to the state vet at Ermelo only two days later but it was also a bit too old although the heart, liver and larynx were sent to Pretoria for further investigation but I have not heard since if anything was found. The vet told me the carcass needs to be with them within 24 hours at least!

It's all happening so late ...

The Bald Ibis colonies the monitoring teams have been keeping tabs on for the past 10 years only got going some weeks after what we would normally expect but now things are in full swing and hopefully there will be a bumper crop of babies sent off into the great, wide world to keep their species on the map.

The Blue Cranes



Newly hatched Blue Crane

Over the 20 years I have been monitoring the cranes in this area, it is interesting to see that certain pairs do the same thing year after year – for instance some of them will start nesting in early October, even late September, while others start in late October to early/mid November. However, at this time, there are only two pairs “down” around here and, unbelievably, one pair en route to Luneburg has chicks! Normally by now one is not seeing flocks of Blue Cranes but I am

still seeing that this year – a flock of between 25 – 60 have been on a farm where in the past I have never seen flocks – and they have been there for weeks now! SO – who knows what is going on and all those assumptions as to what kick-starts the breeding cycle, are looking a little ... well frail!

And the Crownies

These delightful birds, so well-known to Wakkerstroom as we have such a good number that nest on our wetland, usually start nesting some 3 – 4 weeks later than their “cousins” so I have not expected to see them nesting yet although I have an idea that one pair not right here, could be nesting. There are pairs to be seen in their “historic” areas and this seems to be how they make sure of “their” territory again – by visiting it on a regular basis – so now you see them, now you don't!

It is always an exciting time of the year and I never fail to delight to the sight of the beautiful, elegant Blue Cranes showing up so strikingly against the short but now greening grasslands where they nest - and to hear the unmistakable call of the Grey Crowned Cranes as they fly over and around this wetland.



Blue Crane nest

Old Photographs etc. (Second Request) –Brian Guerin

In order to gain an overview of the changes to the Wakkerstroom Vlei area as it was we would appreciate seeing any old photographs that you may have in your possession. Aerial photographs would be of particular interest and terrestrial photographs will also tell a story. Printed articles giving historical details will also be of much use.

We need photographic material to plot the spread of alien species like *Phragmites* and also to try and establish the effects of this growth on flow channels through the vlei system. This sort of information seems to be in short supply and any assistance will be appreciated. All material will be returned to the owner. Please contact Brian Guerin, 017 730 0570 or 083 415 6701 for collection, returns will be done as soon as possible.

Black-winged Lapwing - From Wikipedia, the free Encyclopaedia



Black-winged Lapwing with earthworm in Midmar Nature reserve – Photo by AlanD Manson

The Black-winged Lapwing or Greater Black-winged Lapwing (*Vanellus melanopterus*) is an East African species that is found from the Ethiopian highlands in the north to central Kenya, and again at middle to coastal elevations in eastern South Africa. It is a habitat specialist of short grass in well-watered temperate grasslands. They may move about locally to find ideal situations, often at night. In their tightly grouped flying flocks they resemble plovers. (Strange! The Editor thought that the previous name for this graceful bird was the “Plover”!)

A black breast band separates this Lapwing's grey head and neck from the

white underside. The wing coverts are brown. It has a variable but prominent white forehead patch similar to its near relative, the Senegal Lapwing (*Vanellus lugubris*), but in contrast shows a prominent white wing bar in flight, bordered by black remiges. The two species are also separated by their respective habitat preferences, the Senegal Lapwing preferring lower, mostly drier locations. The Black-winged Lapwing behaves somewhat like the similar-sized but more generally occurring crowned Lapwing and the two species sometimes occur in mixed flocks. The leg colour brightens during the spring breeding season, when the birds sometimes move to higher elevations. Males show mutual aggression at this time and establish territories by calling and display flights which may include exaggerated wing beats. A receptive female will follow the male in flight and copulation may follow soon after. The top of a slope in burnt grassland is a favourite location for nesting. The eggs are fairly large and dark in colour. Incubation starts when the clutch of usually 3 is complete. The adults relay one another in shifts of about 90 minutes. Insulating nest lining is added periodically to the well-lined nest until the eggs are half buried. The young hatch in just under a month and require about another month to become self-sufficient.



Senegal Lapwing –Photo taken by Greg Miles - Australia

Black-winged Lapwings hunt termites on the ground, which constitutes a large part of their diet. They also take beetles and ants, and in captivity, prefer earthworms and mealworms. Feeding territories of smaller than one hectare are defended by small groups of these birds. Newly found territories are most aggressively defended through vocal and visual threat displays or aerial mobbing. Large groups however form non-territorial flocks when ample habitat is found. Human activities impact both positively and negatively on this species. The Black-winged Lapwing is one of the species to which the *Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds* (AEWA) applies and is classed as Near-Threatened in the South African Red Data Book.

Christmas is a' Coming!

Have you thought of giving a Christmas Gift of a year's Membership to someone you know? For a modest R100 they will get a monthly reminder of your gift, and, who knows – may take a greater interest in the birds and our beautiful environment? Please contact any Committee member to obtain a membership application form.

Another suggestion! Don't forget that we have a small supply of our unique Wakkerstroom Bird Club mugs available at R45.00 each.

Diary for Balance of 2014:

Wednesday 19 November – Evening Meeting– Wendy Watson will give us a slideshow on her Tanzania/Zanzibar trips.

Saturday 06 December - Monthly Vlei Walk, 07h00 on the bridge.

Also on that day, Saturday 06, – our Annual Function, again at Forellenhof by popular request. See below for details.

Saturday 13 December – Christmas Market. Please come along and support our great book stall. **AND** it's the day our Trailer Competition closes, so come along and make a special effort to boost donations. Later in the day we will draw the winning ticket and we'll see who wins the Wakkerstroom Weekend. Don't forget, if you win it and can't use it, it would make a great Christmas gift!

This is also the day that the winners of the Sandy Twomey Photographic Competition will be announced, a big day not to be missed!

Our **Annual function** for this year will take place as follows:

Venue/Function: A Bring and Braai at the delightful property of Forellenhof, courtesy of owners Ronelle and Johan van Eeden.

Date: Saturday 06 December

Time: 15h00, when fires will be lit

Bring: Your own meat, favourite tippie, glasses and utensils

Our hosts will provide pap, Sheba, fires and some chairs.

The Club will provide a green salad, bread rolls and dessert

Directions: From the De Oude Stasie gravel road turnoff on your left, travel up the road for 2.2 km and there will be a turnoff to the right (signposted Forellenhof), travel 1km along that road to their gate on the right. Total distance is then 3.2 kilometres from the De Oude Stasie turnoff.

We would like to have an idea of numbers, if you could please phone John Barrow on 0822556778 or 0177300169 with details, thanks.

Come along and let us say thanks for your support during the year!

Why do Longclaws Have a Long Claw?

Their hind claws (called hallux claws) are the ones in question, being longer than the other three toes. It is an adaptation to the grassland habitat that these birds favour. It is used to pull or bend long grass stems so that the bird can then walk over the curve, gaining height in order to gain a better view of prey and predators. Living, nesting and roosting close to the ground puts them at risk to many threats. Longclaws share this adaptation of the claws with Coucals. The long claw is clearly visible in the picture to the right.

The Cape Longclaw is the only endemic of the three Longclaws occurring in South Africa and all share the Greek Genus name of *Macronyx*, meaning "large claw"



Membership

It is with great pleasure that we welcome Mr Peter Ruinard to our Club. He hails from Ithala Game Reserve in KZN. We hope that he will visit this area again soon so we can meet him

Robert Alun Blackwell

We also, sadly, have to report that Bob passed away on Thursday, 13 November. He had been ill for some time. We extend our deepest sympathy to Shirley and the Family

Bird of The Month: African Harrier-hawk (Afrikaans: Kaalwangvalk) Previously “Gymnogene”

The scientific name of the African Harrier-hawk is *Polyboroides typus*, *Polyborus* (Latin) is a genus of the Caracara, a New World hawk and means having a wide diet. The suffix *-oides* means like. *typus* means the type, or originally described species. This is not true as the Madagascar Harrier-hawk was described and named much earlier.



African Harrier-hawk taken by Jenny Varley in the Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania

One of only two species in the world the African Harrier-hawk’s distribution covers most of Africa and ends near the Sahara desert. Throughout southern Africa, but largely absent from the arid west and southern Namibia, central Kalahari, and Karoo. They are also absent from eastern highlands of Zimbabwe and adjacent Mozambique.

Contrary to general belief these birds are not “double jointed” but do have specially modified ankle joints which allow almost unhindered backwards and

forwards movement of the leg. They use this ability to great benefit as they are able to use their long feathered legs to remove prey from holes, crevices and nests. Their legs are heavily scaled, presumably to protect them from dangerous prey and abrasions.

A fairly distinctive raptor in adult plumage, their boldly marked tail with a prominent white stripe, the bare, unfeathered face which flushes from yellow to pink according to the birds state of excitement and it’s almost unique method of foraging should aid identification. Their smoky grey plumage and barred bellies are ID aids. They are usually solitary birds, occasionally in small family groups. Should anybody see two together around Wakkerstroom it would be of interest to the Pentad Survey. Males and females are alike, reaching some 63cm in length with females not being noticeably larger. Juveniles are shades of brown on top, with more white on the head and breast feathers. The tail is dark brown with brown/black stripes.

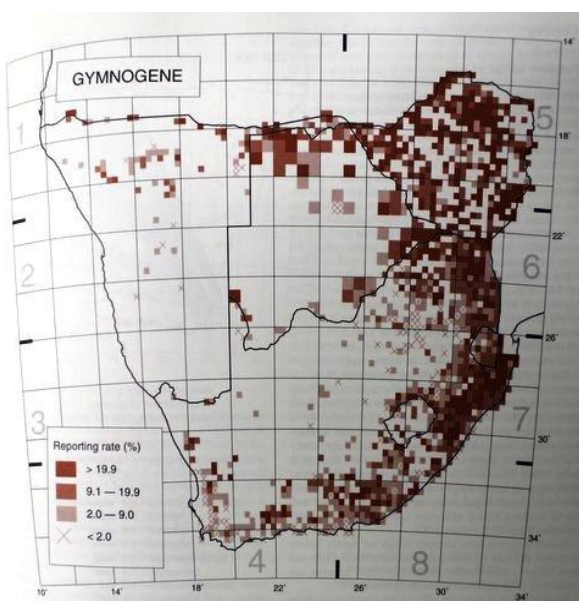


Hunting at a Weaver’s Nest in the Etosha National Park. – Photo taken by Yathin S Krishnappa

The African Harrier-hawk is considered “Not-threatened” and is well represented in protected areas.

Foraging/feeding methods have been mentioned and the scientific portion of their name meaning having a wide diet is particularly apt! Whilst small mammals form the bulk of its prey, birds’ eggs and nestlings come a close second. Weavers are its speciality but stomach contents have included one “crammed with frogs”. Carrion, stranded fish and heronries provide a great source of food.

The habitats they favour are closed and open savannas e.g. Acacia (African Harrier-hawks still call them Acacias) and miombo but fortunately for us, also plantations and tall trees in



gardens.

They are monogamous and solitary breeders and highly territorial, laying a clutch of two strikingly blotched red-brown eggs. The second egg is laid a few days after the first and that hatchling usually dies, sometimes by sibling aggression. The nest is a large platform of about 75cm in diameter and with use over several years can increase in size. The nest construction, by both sexes, can take up to thirty days.

BIRD NAMES

The below was taken from the book “Everything you always wanted to know about birds. . . but were afraid to ask”, the RSPB publication by Stephen Moss.

How did birds get their English names? History doesn't record which imaginative individual first coined the word 'Blackbird'. Like most common names, it simply arose from the everyday observations of ordinary people. Thus



English Blackbird - photo by Charles J Sharp (Wikipedia)

some birds are named for physical characteristics such as colour (Greenfinch), size (Great Tit) or markings (Whitethroat); some for their voice (Chiffchaff); some for what they do (Trecreeper); and others for where they live (**Barn Owl**). Ornithologists later developed new techniques for naming less common species. These included borrowing foreign names (such as hobby, which comes from an Old French word meaning 'to jump'), adapting scientific names (such as phalarope, which derives from the Latin Phalaropus, meaning 'coot-footed'), commemorating the place where the bird was first found

(Dartford Warbler), or commemorating a colleague (Montagu's Harrier).

How did birds get their scientific names? This was a lot more systematic. The pioneer who developed the process of giving each bird (and indeed every other organism) a scientific name was Carl Linnaeus, an eighteenth century Swedish botanist. Linnaeus invented the system known as 'binomial nomenclature' (see Chapter 2), which gave each species a unique combination of two names, the first indicating its genus and the second its species. For instance, while Brits and Americans may argue the merits of Great Northern Diver and Common Loon, to scientists this bird will always be *Gavia immer*.



Barn Owl – photo by Peter Trimming (Wikipedia)

Do scientific names always reflect common names? No. In fact, some make nonsense of each other. Take a look at gulls, for example. The Black-headed Gull has the scientific name *ridibundus*, which means 'laughing' – the English name of a North American gull. Meanwhile the Mediterranean Gull has the scientific name *melanocephalus*, which means 'black-headed'. Incidentally, although the Mediterranean Gull does have a black head, the Black-headed Gull only has a brown hood. And outside the breeding season neither has either!

Trailer Competition

In our last newsletter, we talked about our terrific Trailer Competition. To recap, WNHA very kindly bought a Sprayer to be used for ridding the vlei of these unsightly reeds. Now, we need to assist by purchasing a trailer in order to transport it to the various sites.

There are super prizes on offer to the lucky winner! The main prize is a weekend for 4 people kindly donated by Johan and Ronel van Eeden in one of their self-catering cottages on their Forellenhof farm, Then there's a voucher for R500 to pay for a meal at “Le Bistro” or Metamorphis donated by Lizzie Lack and her partner, Paul Grobler. There's also a Birding Morning with Lucky Ngwenya, renowned Birding Guide and a copy of “Robins of Africa” by Terry Oatley, illustrated by Graeme Arnott, both donated by BirdLife SA Wakkerstroom Education and Tourism Centre; totalling R3750.00. Tickets at R20.00 each are available from The Crow's Nest and De Oude Stasie. Or, contact me personally. It is intended that the draw will take place during the Country Fair in December



2 of the cottages on Forellenhof



SANParks Honorary Rangers

Kwa-Zulu Natal Region

"Volunteers in support of SANParks"

www.sanparkshr.org

Established 1964

Non-profit Organisation No. 086 703 2100 | Public Benefit Organisation No. 930010091

Wing your way to Wakkerstroom
for the birding event of the year!

16 – 18 January 2015



Birding Weekend in Wakkerstroom – 16/18 January 2015

The Kwa-Zulu Natal Region of SANParks Honorary Rangers is holding a Birding Weekend in Wakkerstroom on the above dates. Their aim for this weekend is to raise funds to buy and train tracker dogs with their handlers for use in anti-poaching activities in various SANParks. The Honorary Rangers have committed to supply fourteen new dogs to Kruger National Park and replace two dogs during phase one of the project. Other parks which would benefit from the use of dogs include Addo, Karoo and Mountain Zebra.

This is obviously a major national project for the Honorary Rangers organisation and to give some financial scale to its magnitude, the eventual costs can reach:

Buying and training a new dog, basic equipment and training of the handler – R80 000.

Supply a replacement dog (handler training already done per above) - R50 000

GPS Tracking Collar to ensure valuable dogs don't get lost Est. R18 000

Dog Kennels, predator proof and holding a number of dogs Est. R100 000

Registration Fee for the weekend is R650pp and includes:

- Two birding outings with qualified local guides
- Dinner on Friday and Saturday nights (cash bar will be available)
- Goodie bag and prizes
- T-shirt

People who would like to attend either dinner (without Registration) may do so at a cost of R130 per head.

Space does not permit giving full details of the excellent programme here, it will be put on the Whiteboard outside The Crow's Nest. A Vlei Market will be held at De Oude Stasie on Saturday 16th so please come along and support it.

Wakkerstroom Bird Club Involvement in the Birding Weekend:

1. At least 4-5 people will be required to be in attendance on the Amersfoort Bridge and for the hides. Presumably the visitors will have a reasonable knowledge of birds so only a little guidance from us might be necessary.
2. They have booked three BLSA guides for the Saturday morning and suggest that we supply two more guides from our members so that five groups of ten or more can go off in different directions. The emphasis would be on the endemic larks/pipits.

Your support in any form will be of great value so PLEASE consider volunteering in some capacity for at least some part of the weekend. Contact Brian on 0834156701 or any Committee member.

It is recognised that this should be a major event for Wakkerstroom and, if successful, may turn into an annual item on our calendar with benefits to businesses, accommodation establishments etc. to everybody's benefit.

Pentad Survey- November 2014:

The total for the first 18 weeks of the second year stands at 142 species, an increase of 11 species since last month's report reflecting again the return of migrants. Submission of lists has been a little slow this last couple of weeks, not always the best of weather though.

Only one species was recorded this month and not last year – Violet-backed Starling, which with Lesser Flamingo, Black-bellied Bustard, Cape Rock-thrush and Thick-billed Weaver make a total of five new species this year.

Sixty eight species were seen last year and not yet this year – but we have 34 weeks left this year!

The Sandy Twomey Memorial Photographic Competition



Sandy Twomey sadly passed away recently. She was so well known and respected for her love of birds and her skill as a photographer that the Wakkerstroom Bird Club has initiated an annual photographic competition in her honour. This event has the backing and support of Mr. Kevin Twomey and the family. Want to enter? Select 3 of your favourite photographs taken in and around Wakkerstroom. These could be nature, scenery, architecture or portraits. Please save your photographs as your name bird/scenery etc on a labelled USB stick and drop off at the Crow's Nest. Every Wednesday afternoon, the photographs will be loaded onto a laptop. Otherwise, if you are happy to load your own photograph onto the system, please do so. The laptop is available at the Crow's Nest. Entry is free and professional entries will not be permitted. A presentation of all the photographs will run on the PC until the closing date of 10th December 2014 at the Crow's Nest at 12h00. Winners will be announced at the Christmas Market on the 13th December.

First Prize

Sunday lunch for 2 @ Oude Stasie
Winning photo – printed and framed
A year's membership to the Wakkerstroom Bird
Club
A Crow's Nest hamper

Second Prize

Breakfast for 2 @ Wetlands Country House and Sheds
Ye Refill Shoppe Hamper
4 Block pictures of your choice from "Just Because"
A Crow's Nest hamper

Third Prize

2 Bottles of wine from the Wakkerstroom Country Inn
A copy of "Robins of Africa from BirdLife South Africa"

Interesting Local Sightings:

– Thick-billed Weaver – This bird (single?) bird has been seen in town by several people now.

Week 43 – Approximately 40 Whiskered Terns seen resting at a dam, Moolman's Farm near the tennis courts. One bird seen on the November Vlei Walk. Also Red-chested Cuckoo heard near Luneburg. Ann Cleal.

Week 43 – Southern Bald Ibis chicks recorded at one of the colonies being monitored.

Tierboskat (Serval) on the Vlei Walk Saturday 1 November, we are hopeful of receiving a photograph – just shows you shouldn't miss Vlei Walks! Incidentally this week's Africageographic.com website has an article and pictures of a melanistic (black) Serval, strange looking critter!

White-backed Vulture – as reported in the Recorder of November 14 – a ringed bird was found stunned on a farm in the Wakkerstroom district by Heini Eksteen. One of the interesting things about this bird is that it was ringed by Andre Botha at Otjiwarongo in Namibia on 4 October, 2008. It also hasn't been recorded that this species would move such a great distance.

The Migrants are Coming!

August Sightings:

21 August – Common Greenshank – seen from Utaga River Bridge, poor photographs taken. Brian Guerin.

South African Cliff Swallows have been seen at the vlei.

Wood and Common Sandpipers have also been recorded.

Please keep us apprised of your first sightings of all migrants – in OR around our area!

21 August - Yellow-billed Kite, near Dirkiesdorp. Ann Cleal.

Additional Sightings this Month (to 07 Oct):

21 September – Greater Swiped Swallow. Ann Cleal.

24 September – Barn Swallow. Ann Cleal.

25 September – White-rumped Swift. Ann Cleal.

28 September – Ruff. Ann Cleal.

7 October – Paradise Flycatcher. John Burchmore.

Additions this Month (to 07 Nov):

Week 43 - White-rumped Swift – Brian Guerin.

Week 43 – South African Cliff Swallow. Ann Cleal.

20 October – Steppe Buzzard – John Burchmore,

02 November –Dideric Cuckoo – Ann Cleal.

02 November – Great Spotted Cuckoo – reported by Judy Ryder from her garden. This is a mega-tick for our area and any further sightings should be advised to a Committee member immediately!

European Bee-eater and Violet-backed Starling were also reported (John Burchmore) but we don't know dates.

Work-in-Progress at Drummond Hide Entrance Gate:



The Club has done some work recently filling in portion two dongas that blocked easy access to the vehicle path down to the Hide. Some 14 loads of rubble (kindly donated by Johan van Eeden of Forellenhof) were transported in Norman Dennett's trailer from Loop Street to site. Picture shows workers Syabonga and Vusi putting the final load for the day in place. After a week or so to allow for settling we will check and, if necessary, add more material. We also attempted another spraying session on the reeds but a shift in the wind put paid to that for the day. As it has on a number of occasions lately!

THE EDITOR

JOHN BARRROW