



# Wakkerstroom Bird Club



*Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa*

*Principal supporter of the Wakkerstroom Junior Bird Clubs*

## NEWSLETTER NUMBER 85 – JULY 2021

Dear Wakkerstroom Bird Club members,

We've passed the winter solstice, so the good news is that we're on our way to Spring (although the warmer weather seems a very long way off), and the days are slowly starting to get longer. Not the worst winter so far although we have had some cold days and nights ... but nothing near last year's -18C! Hopefully this newsletter will warm you up a bit. For those of you keen to do something for the gorgeous wild birds in your garden, there's a special section on bird-friendly gardening.



*"Hello?? No, sadly we can't visit your garden in Wakkerstroom ....." African Penguins in Betty's Bay, WC*

### First release of African Penguins at De Hoop Nature Reserve

The attempt to re-establish an African Penguin colony on the south coast of South Africa took a big step forward this week with the release of 30 juvenile penguins at the De Hoop Nature Reserve. BirdLife South Africa, Cape Nature and SANCCOB have partnered together in this ambitious attempt to help save the Endangered African Penguin.

- For further information and photographs, please contact: Jeanette Smith - Communications Manager, BirdLife South Africa. Email: [Jeanette.smith@birdlife.org.za](mailto:Jeanette.smith@birdlife.org.za).
- For further information about BirdLife South Africa, please go to: <https://www.birdlife.org.za>

*I have added the rather long media release as an attachment, for those who want to get all the details.*

## Helping Vultures in Africa

*You may remember that BirdLife International raised funds last year to protect vultures. They have put those funds to great use so far already, and will continue to do so. Here is a report on some of the projects:*

### **Rapid response to vulture poisoning**

With vulture appeal support, BirdLife International, working with the Organization for the Defence and Development of Wetlands (ODZH), coordinated urgent response measures across Guinea-Bissau, following the mass poisonings last year. We were able to provide emergency funding for local actions, including investigating, engaging relevant authorities, and raising awareness against further killings. In the Gambia, surveys were carried out with the West African Bird Study Association, to understand the root cause of the killing, and we worked with vulture and poisoning expert André Botha, from the Endangered Wildlife Trust, to organise virtual training for participants from the Gambia, Ghana and Ethiopia.

In southern Africa there has been increased momentum around developing response protocols to poisoning and introducing rapid response mechanisms across key protected areas in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana. We hope to see these implemented in 2021/2022 leading to a decline in vulture and other wildlife mortality.

In Kenya, we continued our community engagement to find ways for humans and wildlife to coexist, and so to reduce human-wildlife conflict: this has often been a driver of poisoning that has unintentionally killed many vultures.



*Group of volunteers from local communities undergoing training on vulture conservation. © Ednah Kulola*

## BirdLife South Africa names its library after Saul Sithole

One of the unsung heroes of ornithology in southern Africa was recognized this past weekend when BirdLife South Africa commemorated Saul Sithole for his significant contributions to ornithology.

Shining a light on this unsung hero of South Africa's ornithology history, BirdLife South Africa named the organisation's library after Mr Sithole. Described as the "forgotten scientist", Saul Sithole (1908-1997) made a massive contribution to the field of anthropology and ornithology for more than 60 years. This included work he did for South Africa's renowned ornithologist Austin Roberts.

Saul's long-standing contributions have gone largely unacknowledged until Lorato Trok, author of *The Forgotten Scientist: The Story of Saul Sithole*, brought Saul's story to the forefront. It was only befitting that Lorato read the citation during BirdLife South Africa's recent AGM.



Little known facts about Saul's work include a six-week collection trip he made into the wilds of Zululand in 1932, as well as being with Dr Robert Broom at the Sterkfontein Caves in August 1936 when "Mrs Ples", the *Australopithecus africanus* skull, was discovered.

Saul was born in Standerton and grew up in Mamelodi in Pretoria. He started his career as a cleaner at the museum in Pretoria in 1928. Sithole's professional life became specialised around birds when he joined the Vernay-Lang Kalahari Expedition of 1930, a cooperative effort between the American Museum of Natural History in New York and the then Transvaal Museum. His last expedition was to the Blouberg region of what is now Limpopo with ornithologist O.P.M. Prozesky.

His proudest moment, which he will later relate to entomologist Charles Koch during their trip to Angola in 1956, was when he showed Austin Roberts how to collect black and white striped beetles in the dunes of Namibia. Roberts acknowledged Sithole's rare find in *Ostrich*, BirdLife South Africa's ornithological journal.

BirdLife South Africa is grateful to Themba Zitha, Saul Sithole's great-grandson, and other members of the family for permission to commemorate this unsung ornithologist in this way.

## **BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA AWARDS GILL MEMORIAL MEDAL TO DAVID ALLAN**

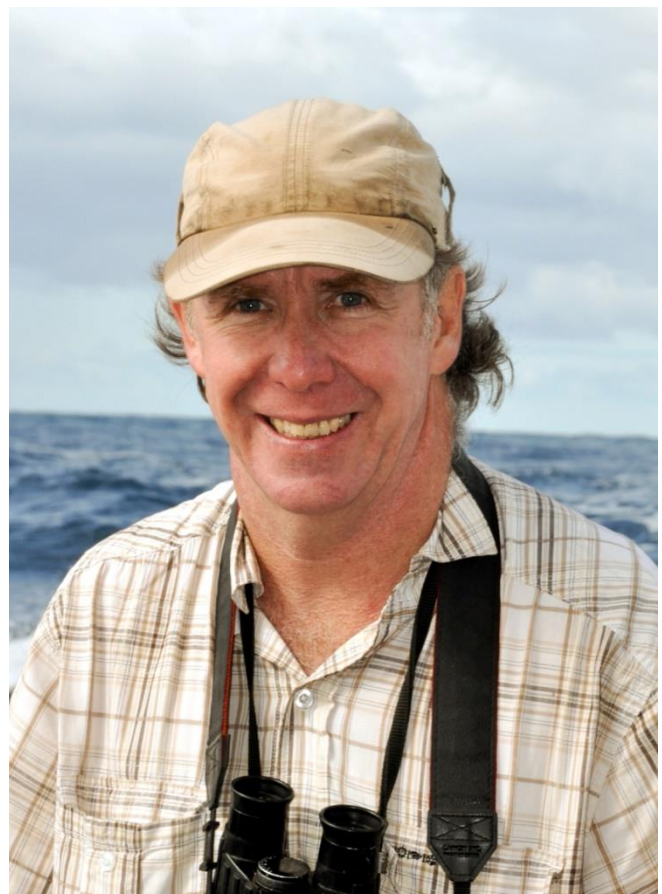
*BirdLife South Africa's most prestigious award was presented to David Allan during the organisation's Annual General Meeting held on Saturday, 29 May 2021.*

The Gill Memorial Medal is awarded for outstanding lifetime contributions to ornithology in southern Africa and the list of recipients includes a very renowned group of southern Africa's distinguished ornithologists.

David Allan, ornithologist at the Durban Natural Science Museum, is the most recent recipient, with BirdLife South Africa recognising his contributions over four decades.

David Allan is an accomplished academic ornithologist and an avid and enormously experienced birdwatcher. David has always favoured application over theory and active and effective conservation over the simple generation and analysis of data. During his career, David has brought his unique blend of pragmatism, sincerity, and deep knowledge to bear in furthering our understanding of the region's birds, and in highlighting and mitigating the threats they face.

"It is a deep honour to receive this award from an organization of the stature of BirdLife South Africa. I am delighted to have been able to contribute to the cause so close to BirdLife South Africa's mission: the understanding and conservation of South Africa's rich and unique avifauna," David remarked.





On 8 May, four teams from the Wakkerstroom Bird Club headed out into the district, to log all species seen, counting toward the total birds logged worldwide. Here are some of the statistics for Southern Africa:

618 species observed & 530 complete checklists submitted across 6 sub regions.

John Burchmore's team is listed 64<sup>th</sup> in the top 100 birders, with 64 species, Brian Guerin's team is 88<sup>th</sup> with 52 species and Kristi Garland's team is 91<sup>st</sup> with 50 species recorded. South Africa is listed first in the sub region, with 511 species recorded over the 24-hour period, Zimbabwe second with 376 species, Botswana third with 204 species, Namibia fourth with 87 species and Lesotho and Eswatini in fifth and sixth position with zero species logged.

Across the four teams, 100 species were recorded for the Wakkerstroom district. The most common species, or rather those species seen by all four teams are:

Long-tailed Widowbird, Ring-necked Dove, Cape Longclaw, Dark-capped Bulbul, Cape Sparrow, Cape Wagtail, Southern Fiscal, Buff-streaked Chat, Spur-winged Goose, African Sacred Ibis, Laughing Dove, Cape Crow, Ant-eating Chat, Southern Bald Ibis, Pied Starling and Helmeted Guineafowl.

We do wish to encourage more of our members to participate in the upcoming southern hemisphere count in October. Watch this space for more news in the coming months.

### **WBC's Weekly WhatsApp Quizzes**

Sadly the cold weather has meant that we had to cancel our June vlei walk followed by breakfast buns, and Covid meant that we postponed Bradley Gibbons' presentation too. Keep an eye out though – Bradley will definitely come to town at some stage to do his talk, and during July and August the club will be hosting a weekly bird quiz on WhatsApp! Looking forward to seeing you all there – either "virtually" or in person, Covid-permitting!

## **Mark 27<sup>th</sup> November in your calendars ..... It's Birding Big Day!**

*Here is a heads-up by BirdLife South Africa's Spatial Planning and Data Project Manager, Ernst Retief:*

BirdLife South Africa's 37th Birding Big Day (BBD) will take place on Saturday 27 November 2021. For more information, please see <https://bit.ly/2QTzzAF>. Registrations are now open; the registration form is at <https://bit.ly/3hZ1jij>.

Note that we did away with the Community and Open Categories. There are now two new categories - the first is the 50km radius category, which is similar to the previous Open Category. Teams in this category can have one or more members, but only the species lists of teams with 2-4 members will qualify for national and provincial records. The second is a 5km radius category. Many birders asked for a category covering a smaller area, so we decided to include it. For all the rule changes, please refer to the pages at the above links. If you have any questions, please email me at [bbd@birdlife.org.za](mailto:bbd@birdlife.org.za).

## **Virtual African Bird Fair 30 & 31 July – mark this in your calendars too!**

**The biggest event in African birding will soon be with us and preparations are well underway for the Virtual African Bird Fair on 30 and 31 July 2021.**

As you know, a physical Bird Fair was traditionally held in Johannesburg each year. However, following the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020 the need to re-imagine our physical and popular African Bird Fair came about and so the virtual platform was created.

As the 2020 event proved to be hugely successful we are taking this exciting programme to even greater heights. We've learnt, we've listened, we're better informed with virtual technology and now we can't wait for you to join us in about five weeks' time. You can expect all the attributes of a physical fair, including talks, workshops, exhibitor stalls, an auction and social networking, with the added benefit of being able to enjoy the fair from the comfort of your own home.

This year's event will take place from late Friday afternoon with an opening ceremony and a comedic look at what makes birders tick, followed by a jam packed Saturday, with parallel sessions and workshops to choose from.

As always, our commitment is to the birds, with all proceeds from this event going straight back into supporting BirdLife South Africa's important and renowned conservation work.

To register, please go to: [www.eventmobi.com/birdfair](http://www.eventmobi.com/birdfair)

## **SPECIAL SECTION – GARDENING FOR BIRDS**

*I recently found an attractive local website all about gardening called "Life in a Garden" (<https://www.lifeisagarden.co.za>) when I was looking for some birdfeeder information. If you would like to provide a happy birding and wildlife garden, here are some of their suggestions.....*

### **Bird-friendly Plants**

The best feeding programme for birds is to plant shrubs and trees which offer nature's menu. Aloes, watsonias, wild dagga a.k.a. lion's ear (*Leonotis* spp.), red-hot poker (spp.) and wachendorfias will attract

nectar feeding birds such as the sunbird. Seed eating birds are attracted to the seed heads of grasses and grains. Plant patches of mixed bird seed and you'll be fascinated to see the response from local birds. Seed eaters also thrive the seeds of ordinary daisies (such as the euryops daisy). Leave the dried out dead heads of daisies for as long as you can to give the birds time to take most of the seed at the end of summer. To attract fruit eating birds, plant fruit producing plants. Try the tree fuchsia (*Halleria lucida*), dune crow-berry (*Rhus crenata*) or white stinkwood (*Celtis africana*). Did you know that the local weavers, sparrows, sunbirds and even crested barbets will flock to your garden if you discover how to plant up bird-friendly plants or install a nesting box, bird feeder or bird bath in your garden? This is a basic guide on how to attract birds to your garden:



*Male Malachite Sunbird on Wild Dagga plant (Leonotis leonurus)*

### Roosting Sites

Established trees will naturally provide a source of shelter and roosting spots for many birds and a garden which is well planted with indigenous trees will attract numerous birds throughout the year. Good roosting sites are provided by the Henkel's yellowwood (*Podocarpus henkelii*), fever tree (*Vachellia xanthophloea*), karee (*Searsia lancea*), sweet thorn (*Vachellia karroo*) or buffalo thorn (*Ziziphus mucronata*). Creepers such as the black-eyed Susan (*Thunbergia elata*) can be draped around the branches of trees to provide a secluded nesting site for robins or flycatchers. Grasses, including reeds and bulrushes are valuable suppliers of nesting material to weavers who suspend their nests from trees. (Remember not all these plants are suitable for Wakkerstroom's climate – Ed.)

### Mulch and compost

Leave fallen leaves and logs in the garden as these will provide micro-habitat for various insects, grubs and worms, which will in turn attract insect feeders such as Cape robin-chats, thrushes as well as African hoopoes. These birds love the dense undergrowth of gardens where they turn over leaves and debris in search of grubs. Dead logs and tree trunks make ideal nesting spots for birds such as barbets and woodpeckers.

### Water for birds

Every garden should have a bird bath in the quieter part of the garden preferably near thick foliage and established trees, so that the birds can perch nearby and not feel exposed. Avoid placing a bird bath directly underneath tree branches, as falling leaves and bird droppings may soil the water. Keep the bird bath topped up over winter, as many birds will frequently visit to drink and bath. Bird baths come in various shapes and sizes, but most importantly, they should be anchored securely so that they don't topple over.



### Feeding the birds

Feeding stations for garden birds come in a range of shapes and sizes. A common variety is the seed-dispersing tube type feeder whereby you place bird seed on top by removing a cap. A feeding plate attaches to the bottom and this will hold the seeds which are gravity fed. As the birds feed, the seeds will filter down and spread over the plate. These are often equipped with small perches, allowing only small birds such as finches and sparrows to feed, but making it difficult for large seed eaters such as doves and pigeons to perch and feed, which would otherwise rapidly finish off the bird seed.



These feeders can be hung from a tree branch. Other bird feeders include platforms where bread, seed, fruit and suet and can placed. They often have spikes where fruit can be anchored for fruit eating birds. These bird feeders can be placed on top of a sturdy pole or hung from a tree branch. For the really dedicated, consider breeding your own mealworm colony, which will provide a delicious treat for grub feeding birds.

### Nesting boxes

Hollowed out logs, available from garden centres, are a favourite with barbets who use them for breeding. Anchor the logs vertically on tree trunks several metres off the ground. Traditional square or rectangular box nests are also available and can be anchored securely around various parts of the garden.



*Nesting log and owl box images by EcoSolutions*

### What to feed and NOT feed wild birds in your garden

The Garden Route Birds Facebook page posted a great list of suitable and unsuitable bird food:

#### Is it for the birds? – Yes!

- **Peanut Butter** – Peanut Butter is really good for birds because it is high in fat, calories and it is great for energy. Note: Check the labels because if it contains xylitol or artificial sweeteners it can be toxic to birds.

*“Other ways to offer it to the birds is to cover a pinecone or empty toilet roll in peanut butter and then cover it in wild bird seed! The birds will LOVE it! “*

- **Cheese** – Cheese is a great source of protein for birds. Note: Hard cheeses like mild cheddar are great but avoid soft or strong cheeses. Also note, you should never use mouldy cheese.

*“Most people know that Drongos LOVE cheese, but loads of other birds will also enjoy it including Robins, Boubous, Shrikes, sometimes Flycatchers and even the Brown-hooded Kingfisher!”*

- **Suet** – Suet is made up of fats, mostly. There is a variety available in stores. It helps the birds maintain temperature and energy levels. **(Suet recipe below this article – Ed.)**
- **Sugar** – Sugar is actually good for birds and plays a big role in their lives. Nectar birds love a water and sugar solution but be sure to keep food colouring out of it.

### **Is it for birds? – No!**

- **Honey** – Honey isn't good for birds, it is a complex sugar and they cannot digest it. It has very little nutritional value for birds.
- **Avocado** – Avo is toxic to birds as well as your pets.
- **Bread** – Bread is very filling and also has no nutritional value. It also contains preservatives and chemicals. It is important to also avoid rolls, crackers, chips, biscuits and doughnuts.
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### **How to make your own suet balls**

From the Grow Wild website <https://growwild.co.za>

Melt 1 cup of lard and 1 cup of peanut butter (*again – ensure your peanut butter contains no xylitol – Ed.*) and then add 1/3 cup of sugar, 2 cups of instant oats, 2 cups corn starch, 1 cup of flour and 1 cup of wild bird seed. Pour into a patty pan tray, or a baking tray and leave to cool and set. Your birds will be grateful!



I hope this has inspired you a little ... have fun and send us some photos of your feeders, nests, plants, and happy birds for the next newsletter! [cvoets@absamail.co.za](mailto:cvoets@absamail.co.za)

Happy birding! Stay safe, stay healthy, stay strong!  
Chris

*Smile a while .....*

Less flamboyant relative of the  
Boom Chacalaca

