



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 14 – AUGUST 2013

Report on Annual Pentad Survey:

The first six weeks of the Pentad Survey have passed and we thought a brief report on progress would be of interest. From the lists received, we have so far recorded 103 species, a creditable number for mid-winter. Vlei species obviously predominate but some assiduous searching in the far corners of the pentad has been rewarding. Some species recorded may come as a surprise, Red-winged Francolin (Vlei area), Ground Woodpecker and Mountain Wheatear (angling club road), Southern Boubou and Secretarybird (Hillview Farm) and a number of others. Of course the absence of a species tells a story, too. Yellow-billed and Great Egret have not been recorded yet – are they altitudinal migrants as well, like the Cattle Egret?

It's a little early to read too much into the results and we will watch with interest. A survey of this nature requires full coverage of the area concerned and we would appreciate your assistance, even if you only report unusual sightings.

Car Count July 2013

Greetings Everyone,

Sincere thanks to all Team Leaders, Observers and Volunteers for making this count a truly successful one.

Pieter de Beer, his first time out with CAR, was introduced to the Luneberg route. Not only were we subjected to swirling dust storms as passing motorists sped their way to the Luneberg Festival, the winds were very unkind, but this route yielded 8 species with 168 birds in total. We take this opportunity of welcoming Pieter.

Despite the dust, the bitterly cold, strong wind conditions, the birds were there.

This count showed an increase of 166 in total number of birds counted (against Winter 2012), of which the Raptor and Corvid species totaled 104.

Secretary Birds showed an increase in number at 14 over 6 of the 7 routes, Helmeted Guinea Fowl numbered 366, Bald Ibis =144, Southern Grey Crowned Crane =22, Blue Crane =13. Cape Crow = 74 over 7 routes, Black-headed Heron=40 over 7 routes, Black-shouldered Kite =20 over 6 routes and Jackal Buzzard = 6

Interestingly, the Pied Crow = 4 but only on the Volksrust route.

The success of this count is due to all those who participated. You are commended for your dedication to this project and I trust we will see you all in January 2014 for our Summer Count.

- Judy-Lynn Wheeler, Precinct Co-ordinator, Wakkerstroom District

A non-happening!

We had organised a return trip to the Kempenveldt Vulture Restaurant for Tuesday, 13 August 2013 as the birds had bred and there would be increased aerial activity. The desire to go on the trip was so intense amongst us members that we eventually had to close the list! Regrettably we were informed that the farmer concerned was unable to obtain any

carcasses and it was therefore not worth the trip. Also, we were notified too late to find another venue, so for the first time in 15 months there is no outing for August. We feel very upset about it and are sure that you are disappointed as well.

The only good news is that, although the farm has been sold, the new owners will keep the “restaurant” going and we’ll be able to organise another trip at a later date.

Progress Report on the Ringed Amur Falcon

The ringed Amur Falcon is safe and sound in her breeding grounds in Mongolia. She’ll evidently start her way home in about October. She has completed 7 trips in her lifetime; approximately 105,000 km. Wonderful, isn’t it?

Rina Pretorius of Birdlife Northern Natal says there will be an excerpt on Amur Falcons in the SABC 2’s 50/50 program on either 19 or 26 August.

Announcement!

Some homeowners have reported an increase in calls by the Spotted Eagle Owls who are about to breed! Three nesting boxes have been installed in Wakkerstroom and we are waiting impatiently to see if they will be occupied. We’ll keep you updated.

One back on the Common Myna!

There is an interesting article in Laniarius No 124, the newsletter of BirdLife Northern Gauteng, written by one of their members. It describes her observation of a nest of a Common Myna with 4 eggs, three normal and the other about 30% larger. The larger egg was also light blue but with fine brown speckles. Over the observation period one egg disappeared (fate unknown) and one failed to hatch. As the two chicks grew the disparity in size became obvious and the larger chick was identified as a Great Spotted Cuckoo and was ringed before departing the nest. Roberts 7 lists only the Great Spotted Cuckoo as a brood parasite on the Common Myna.



It seems that even the normally very cunning Myna can be fooled!



Buy a Wakkerstroom Bird Club Mug.

Contact Brian Guerin, 0834156701, or way lay him at the next Bird Club Event. R45 per Mug with the proceeds adding to our Fund Raising efforts.

Diary for September

Saturday, 7th September –
Tuesday, 10th September

The Vlei Walk
Outing to Wetlands Country House We’ll meet at the gates by 07h30. Our hosts are Rita & Philip Schoeman.

Wednesday 18th September

Evening meeting. Proceedings will begin sharp at `18h00. Details to be advised later

Bird of the Month.

Black Harrier

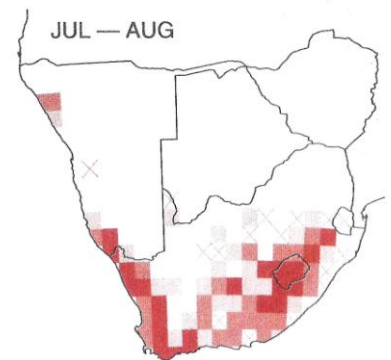
Scientific Name/Meaning: *Circus maurus*, Circus=a circle, habitually flies in circles, maurus, Greek=black

Picture by kind permission of Pete Morris / Bird Quest



General: This stunning bird is a southern African endemic, with five local Harrier species occurring here either as residents or migrants. Their nearest relatives are the goshawks. They have facial cavities on each side of the head, much less pronounced than those in owls, but believed to serve the same purpose of benefitting hearing. Loose feathers on the head form a cowl that also helps in directing sounds to the ears. Hunts by quartering low over the ground.

Description: A medium-sized raptor with females larger than males, males averaging 375g and females 550g. Essentially a black and white bird with a longish barred tail, bright yellow legs and a white rump. The iris is yellow and the bill black. In adult plumage it is considered unmistakable. Seen in good light against a deep blue sky they are also unforgettable!



Status: A rare endemic, Roberts 7 classifies it as Near-threatened in southern Africa. The next Red Data Book, to be published hopefully this year, will provide more information on its plight. A local migrant that usually moves out of the breeding range when not breeding, i.e. January-July. This seems to apply particularly to females.

Food: Small birds up to 350g, nestlings and eggs. Also rodents, frogs, insects and carrion.

Habitat: Grassland, cultivated lands and semi-desert in the west of its range, see distribution map.

Breeding: July to September, usually on a pad of grass or sticks, on the ground, sometimes up to 50cm above ground. 3-4 white eggs are laid which the female alone incubates. The eggs hatch after about 34 days and first flights take place after about another 36 days.

Conservation: With only approximately 1500 individuals and a small distribution in southern Africa it will be uplifted from Near-threatened to Endangered in the 2013 Red Data Book.

Karoo Thrush or Olive Thrush?

The Field Guides are very confusing regarding the identification of these species. Sasol III shows the Karoo Thrush as having orange flanks and a partially black upper mandible or bill and a plain greyish-brown throat. Roberts VII and the Roberts Field Guide show the Karoo Thrush as having an insignificant eye-ring and the Olive Thrush (sometimes Southern Olive Thrush) as having a conspicuous orange-ish eye-ring. All of these would seem to be incorrect.

If one goes onto the internet Etienne Marais' website at Indicator Birding (<http://www.birding.co.za/feature6.htm>) maintains that the key identification features of the Karoo Thrush are:

- grey flanks:
- yellow or orange eye-ring:
- plain yellow bill without dark base to upper mandible; and

- throat usually off-white or dusky, streaks olive-grey or light brown giving the effect of less heavily streaked throat (this is variable)

The key features of the Olive Thrush on the other hand are:

- orange flanks;
- brown (dull) eye-ring;
- yellow bill with dark base to upper mandible; and
- throat usually white with dark streaking making it appear more heavily streaked than the Karoo Thrush.

We have a bird in our garden right now that has all the features of a Karoo Thrush EXCEPT that it has a dark smudge at the base of the bill. The photo below was taken with a Kodak “mik & druk” camera through the glass of our patio door and has been heavily cropped so if it doesn’t meet your high standards I apologise in advance, but I believe that it shows all the relevant ID features.



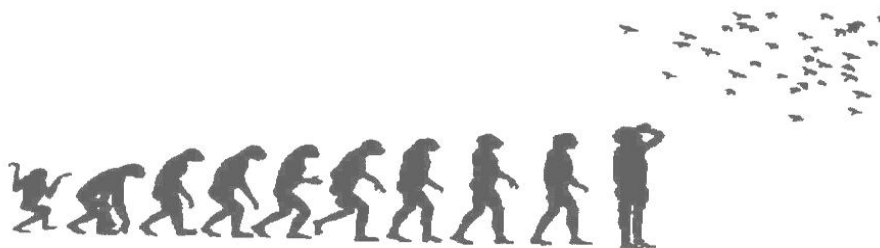
A Karoo Thrush in Wakkerstroom?

The current wisdom maintains that Karoo Thrushes do not occur anywhere near Wakkerstroom. I, on the other hand, believe that we are in an overlap area. I have seen both “classic” Olive Thrushes and similar birds to this one in the area – in fact last Monday (12th August) I saw a very distinct Olive Thrush on the farm *Bon Esperance* west of Amajuba Mountain on the northern slopes of Inkwelo with Pat Benson – and in Wakkerstroom itself.

My thoughts are that even if the pundits maintain that this bird is a hybrid between an Olive and a Karoo Thrush then a Karoo (or another hybrid) must have been around reasonably nearby. If it is a hybrid it would seem that it is an octoroon (only one eighth Olive Thrush) or something like that. It certainly has more Karoo than Olive Thrush features.

The evolution of man

The Evolution of man
(Contributed by Susan Velthuysen)



Yours in Birding

JOHN BARROW - EDITOR