



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



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Austrian Birders

The weekend before last, due to the BLSA bird guides being fully booked, Judy Wheeler arranged for bird club members to take a group of 10 Birdlife Austria members around the Wakkerstroom area to work on their “must have” trip list.

The day dawned (and remained) grey and gloomy, but rain free. We picked them up at Forellenhof near town at 07h00 and delivered them back at dusk. Thanks to Forellenhof and De Oude Stasie for the superb catering arrangements.

We located a total of 11 species from their tough “wanted list” including Rudd’s and Pink-billed Lark, Long-billed Pipit, Buff-streaked Chat, Mountain Wheatear and Blue Korhaan, but dipped out on flagship species like Ground Woodpecker and Bald Isis – much to our embarrassment!

This type of specific bird hunting was new to me but we all enjoyed the day and the group made a substantial donation to the club’s coffers.

This outing was a steep learning curve and we gained some good tips in the event of a future opportunity of this nature

-Brian Guerin



November monthly Talk



Bradley Gibbons of the Endangered Wildlife Trust will spend the next 3 years in the Wakkerstroom High Altitude Grassland area promoting the Stewardship Scheme.

On Wednesday, 20 November 2013, he gave a talk on “Stewardship” with the emphasis on habitats of endangered species such as the Golden Mole, Sun Gazer Lizard and the Oriibi which occur in this area. It was a most interesting, witty, informative talk with many facts about the difference between the Golden Mole and the Mole Rat. He also expounded on the Sun Gazer Lizard and the Oriibi.

Bradley talked about the Stewardship scheme, the benefits to the farmers and landowners who participate and most importantly, an opportunity to reverse the decline in numbers of these indicator species. Welcome to Wakkerstroom, Bradley. We’re sure your stay here will be fruitful and will do our best to assist you in your endeavours

BUSH BLACKCAP – A FIRST FOR WAKKERSTROOM VILLAGE?

While working in our garden on the afternoon of Tuesday 19th November, Penny spotted a brown bird creeping through the shrubs 4m in front of her. That’s different she thought, it has a bright orange bill and it is not a thrush. She dropped everything and ran to

call me. I was on my way back to the house from the workshop and was stopped by the words “come quickly there is something different, fetch your bins, I think it is a Bush Blackcap”

The bird was still in the *Buddleja salviifolia* when I returned and sure enough it was a Bush Blackcap. The black cap and orange/pink bill and legs were clearly visible. The bird was moving slowly through the foliage gleaning insects off the leaves and twigs. It then moved into a peach tree nearby also gleaning insects but then returned back to the buddleja. We watched the bird for about 45 minutes before it moved out of sight.

According to Roberts VII, the Bush Blackcap eats mostly fruit, but also gleans insects from foliage.

Warwick Tarboton, in his publication of The Birds of the Wakkerstroom District of South Africa, 2001, records the species as being locally common, being found mainly in larger, (more than 10 hectares) patches of indigenous forest. There is no mention of the bird being seen in Wakkerstroom.

We were wondering why a species that inhabits montane evergreen forests would come into the village? Could it perhaps be the increase in trees and shrubs in our gardens?

-John Burchmore

The Bush Blackcap is a Near-Threatened endemic in southern Africa - Editor.

Interesting Sightings from the Amersfoort Bridge

An African Harrier Hawk was seen raiding swift and swallow nests under the bridge. It was feeding on an unidentified prey item on Saturday 9th @ 12h30 and an adult White-rumped Swift the next day @ 05h30. This is a productive seasonal haunt for this species and, on occasion, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk.

Some further interesting sightings occurred on Sunday 17th:

A beautiful sighting of 22 Whiskered Terns checking out the waterways,

A rapacious Grey Heron caught and consumed four Common Platanna within a short space of time, none actually “speared” but captured entangled within varying quantities of grass and weed. Without ever releasing this mixed bundle, on each occasion the bird somehow managed to extricate an extremely slippery and agile prey item, then rinse and consume it.

An over-flying Steppe Buzzard was harassed and actively chased by a pair of African Marsh Harriers as it passed over their nest site.

In addition a number of European Bee-eaters were observed in and around the village this week.

We also saw a Lesser Grey Shrike when we went out with the Austrian birders. This is a rarely recorded bird in our area.

Report on Pentad Survey – to Week 47.

We have recorded 160 species in the pentad to the end of week 47 i.e. 24 November. Interesting species added to the list during this period were Bush Blackcap, European Bee-eater, Greater Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, African Black Swift, Spike-heeled Lark and Diderick Cuckoo.

We would still like some volunteers in order to widen the geographic spread to all corners of the pentad.



Bird of the Month

African Hoopoe

Scientific Name/Meaning: *Upupa Africana* (Latin) *Upupa* – onomatopoeic rendition of the birds call, as is Hoopoe,

General: Usually solitary or in pairs, forages on the ground with its head nodding, mostly feeds by probing. The African Hoopoe has a distinctive flight pattern and its colouration makes it easy to identify, even in flight.

Description: This attractive bird (25-27cm in length) is a favourite of most people, even non-birders. Adults are unmistakable, females are very slightly duller and juveniles more so with some greying in the rufous areas.

Distribution: Throughout s Africa, scarcer in the dry western half.

Conservation: Widespread in s Africa and considered not threatened. Parasitised elsewhere mainly by Greater Honeyguide (and possibly Lesser Honeyguide). Both these species are however shown as “No evidence of breeding in the district has yet been obtained” (W Tarboton.)

Food: Mostly insects, their larvae and pupae. Flicks cow pats over with its bill. Unlike their close relatives the wood-hoopoes and scimitar-bills they do not probe bark.

Habitat: Open woodland with short grass including parks, gardens and plantations. Interestingly it avoids the interior of indigenous forests.

Breeding: August-February, peaking in September-November. There are usually 2-6 eggs, rarely 7 and they may rear more than one brood per season. A wide variety of nest sites may be used including old woodpecker or barbet holes, stone wall or ground holes, drainage pipes etc. Nest becomes foul-smelling after young hatch, probably from their developing preen glands, the ejections from these glands may be used as a form of defence.



End of the Year Function



On Saturday, 23 November, 23 people attended our “Bring and Braai” at the magnificent property, Forellenhof, only some 7km outside town. Hosts, Ronelle and Johan van Eeden generously provided a large wood fire with pap and sheba as well. One of our three Life Members, Yvonne Clulow, was a welcome visitor whilst the other two (John and Elize McAllister) are overseas. Punch, sherry and salads, aplenty, rounded off an enjoyable afternoon; the weather played ball and a good time was had by all.

On Otters:

Otter sightings have been unusually common for some months now and nobody seems to know why. One of our members was privileged to see, close up, a group of 5 otters feeding amongst a shoal of small (+/- 15cm) fish. There was great excitement amongst the otters, calling and diving and obviously enjoying the feast!

We have for some weeks now been calling for all otter sightings to be recorded on the reverse of the Pentad Survey form.

Our little village has a soft spot for "our" otters so the rest of this story is very poignant. During a visit by several members of BirdLife Austria we headed towards the WOW Hide for lunch. At the hide end of the new walkway we spotted a small otter lying on the bank, obviously in great distress and presumably after a fight or attack. He moved only clumsily and his eyes were glazed.

Graham Wheeler and Pat Benson were alerted and they found it also had a broken back. The only course was obviously euthanasia after which the animal spent the night in Pat's deep freezer and was taken to a University the next day for study/display purposes. Some sort of "happy ending"?

Secretarybird Research in Wakkerstroom

I am doing a study on Secretarybirds in the Greater Wakkerstroom area with BirdLife South Africa. This bird has been Red-Data listed as Vulnerable in 2011 and their numbers are declining at an alarming rate. I am looking for nests as I want to determine nesting success, diet and eventually distribution. I would greatly appreciate it if any sightings or nests can be reported to me. I would also like to involve the community as much as possible in this project as your contribution and involvement is crucial to these birds' survival.

This photo is from a nest on a farm just outside Wakkerstroom. We fitted a camera on the nest about four weeks ago and the data



we can gather on the nest activity through these photographs are very useful. I am staying at the BirdLife Centre just outside Wakkerstroom and I will be living here for the next 17 months. I look forward to your feedback and working with you!

Secretarybird Greetings,

Eleen Strydom (AKA "The Secretarybird Girl")

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Some News of the Amur Falcon

There are lots of posts on the Web regarding the latest news of the Satellite tracking of Amur Falcons on their way to spend the summer with us here in South Africa. Recently two were fitted with "Tags" in Nagaland, a province of India where many thousands of falcons rest and feed for the month of October.

Wide spread "harvesting" of birds for food was reported from Nagaland last year. It has been reported that the authorities are discouraging that practice and are cooperating with various Conservation organizations with such projects as Satellite Tagging.

Reports of the latest activities can be downloaded by "Googling" Amur Falcon Tracking.

On Thursday 14th November, we were advised by Birdlife Northern Natal that the bird which has been fitted with the PTT in India was getting ready for her 8th Indian Ocean flight of approximately 62 hours duration. Wonderful isn't it? We'll keep you posted.

Cloud Formations

This is a picture of an interesting cloud formation taken over Wakkerstroom recently. It shows a Mammatus (or Mammary) cloud formation. Mammatus is a meteorological term applied to a cellular pattern of pouches hanging under the base of a cloud.

Mammatus are most often associated with the anvil cloud and severe thunderstorms. They often extend from the base of a cumulonimbus cloud but may also be found under other types including volcanic ash clouds.

I wonder if anybody else saw this?



Our outing to Bertus Berger's' Farm on 12 November 2013

What a beautiful farm! Just magnificent.

There was a fairly high wind blowing but a warm and pleasant sunny day. Not fantastic birding but we did see seven Blue Cranes and lots of Pipits, Larks and Plovers etc. The beautiful scenery and flowers certainly made the day. It was most interesting to see the source of the Slang River, just a simple stream running out of a small wetland but it does emphasize just how important these small wetlands are.

Thank you Bertus for welcoming us to your farm. It was a pleasure to see such a productive, well kept, well cared for area. The sheer magnificence of the scenery and the whole sense of place made this a very special outing for all those that attended. We certainly pledge our support in the coming fight to oppose the extraction of Methane and eventual coal mining on your farm and many others in this area. How anybody could think of desecrating such a beautiful area beggars belief. The risk of polluting the source of one of South Africa's major rivers, a river that supplies a huge proportion of our population with water must surely be a risk that our nation cannot afford to contemplate.

Norman Dennett.



Diary of Events

December:

Saturday 6th – A.M Vlei Walk – meet on the bridge from 07h00 for a couple of hours birding, coffee will be supplied.

No further outings are planned for December

Thursday 12th – Return visit by Steve Davis and Roy Cowgill, you will remember their earlier talk. The subject will probably be Shorebirds, along the lines of their recently released book – not to be missed! At BLSA, 17h30 for 18h00.

In addition Stan Madden of Marievale will be visiting us around that time to give us advice on the chemical eradication of weeds. He MAY give a talk or interview on what he has achieved there and what we hope to emulate at the vlei.

January:

Saturday 4th - A.M. Vlei Walk – meet at 07h00 as usual

Tuesday 14th–Fickland Pan, we haven't had an outing there this season and now is the time. Meet at Wakkerstroom Library to leave at 06h30 (note new time) for this popular venue.

Wednesday 15th – Talk at BLSA – 17h30 for 18h00 – Eleen Strydom will talk on the purpose and progress of her Secretarybird studies.

Saturday 29th – Summer Car Count – Judy Wheeler to give a briefing beforehand.

Lucky Ngwenya

Congratulations to Lucky Ngwenya

Lucky, one of the first Bird Guides to be trained in Wakkerstroom, was recently awarded a 10 year service award by Andre Steenkamp, the Manager of the BirdLife SA's Wakkerstroom Centre.

Wendy Watson, of the Wakkerstroom Tourism Association, Brian Guerin of the Wakkerstroom Bird Club and Rupert Lawlor of the Wakkerstroom Natural Heritage Association were present and congratulated Lucky on his award.

Lucky is very popular with visiting birders and has done much to enlighten and encourage local people on the possibilities and opportunities that eco-tourism presents.

Well done, Lucky!



Message from the Chairman

As this will be the last Newsletter for 2013, I would like to wish one and all a blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year, full of birding opportunities and lifers. We have, thanks to the Committee and the members, had a successful year and the hope is that this will continue into 2014 and way beyond. - Brian.

JOHN BARROW - EDITOR