



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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Elephant, 46 vultures and 4 lions killed for muti

Early reports showed that the elephant had probably been shot after which chunks of meat were removed from both the rump and spine and Temik spread on the exposed areas.



A shocking sight: the dead vultures found on the scene.

SKUKUZA – It took the Kruger National Park (KNP) four weeks to release information about a serious poisoning incident where an elephant, four lions and 46 birds were killed. It seems as if the motive for the killing was muti or to provide the animals for TRADE to the Far East.

The incident took place in the Vlakteplaas area in northern KNP at the end of September when rangers were alerted to the carcass of an elephant and subsequently dead animals were scattered in a radius of 300 metres from it. Early

reports showed that the elephant had probably been shot after which chunks of meat were removed from both the rump and spine and Temik spread on the exposed areas. The trunk was cut off and left on the scene while the tusks were removed and taken.



Various scavengers descended on the carcass and were poisoned as a result of it. The face, feet and back skin of one lion had been removed which led to the opinion that the killing might have been mutilated. Birds that were killed included 46 African white-backed vultures (17 breeding adults, 10 sub-adults and 19 immatures) as well as one sub-adult Bateleur.

KNP remained mum on the incident until Lowvelder sent an enquiry to spokesman for the park, Mr William Mabasa last Tuesday. Mabasa only acknowledged it on Thursday after many attempts to get hold of him and by Monday morning the

newspaper was still patiently waiting for a response on the matter. Only late on Monday did the KNP reply.

Mabasa confirmed that it was not the first incident of poisoning in the park and those other cases had been reported on the boundaries of the Kruger. "This is most probably one of the worst methods used with devastating effects. If not detected quickly, mortalities can escalate to hundreds of animals. A single incident in the Caprivi in 2013 led to the death of between 400 and 600 vultures due to late detection," Mabasa said.



The maimed lion.

Manager of the Birds of Prey Programme (BoPP) at the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), Mr André Botha told Lowvelder the incident had far-reaching effects. "For some people the loss of 45 white-backed vultures in the Kruger may seem insignificant with its estimated population of between 1 200 and 1 500 birds. But you have to look at the dynamics of those that were killed. The 17 breeding adults most probably had chicks in nests that are about two months away from fledgling and starting their life as juveniles. They will now have to rely on one adult to complete the

cycle which poses a threat to their survival as it is near impossible for a single adult to raise a chick to fledgling.

The future of the breeding pairs is also at stake as these birds are believed to mate for life thus impacting on future breeding. They will have to find a new mate and can only attempt to breed again at the start of the season next year," he explained.

The same rule applied to the sub-adult Bateleur which was ready to start breeding. "We must also take into ACCOUNT that there has recently been three major poisoning incidents in a small radius, bringing the loss of birds in the Lowveld to 120 since May. Should this trend continue it will have a substantial negative impact on the populations of these endangered birds."

Botha further explained that vultures' activity can be an INDICATION of poacher activity in an area for rangers, which increases the risk of detection for the perpetrators, especially where the poaching of elephant is involved. "Poachers want to eliminate them for this reason. The value of vulture parts has also increased and the probability of it being sold to various markets can't be denied."



For Botha and KNP staff that had to deal with the incident, it was a hideous experience. Mabasa said, "Something that must not be overseen is the emotional effect of the staff WORKING with more than 50 dead animals at once and the continuous exposure to these poisoned animals. It took five days to clean-up the site and successfully sweep the area and burn all the carcasses. Something that is imprinted in your mind forever."

The northern parts of the KNP have been vulnerable to this type of practice for many years as neighbouring communities

traditionally use poisoning as a method of hunting. Meanwhile in Zimbabwe The Guardian has reported that 22 elephants had been poisoned in the Hwange National Park, bringing the total number of mortalities in the country to 62 for October.

An announcement about the status changes for six species of African vulture will be made tomorrow. They are the following African endemics:

- White-headed vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*: uplist from vulnerable to critically endangered
- Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*: uplist from endangered to critically endangered
- White-backed vulture *Gyps africanus*: uplist from endangered to critically endangered
- Cape vulture *Gyps coprotheres*: uplist from vulnerable to endangered
- Rüppell's vulture *Gyps rueppellii*: uplist from endangered to critically endangered

Africa and Middle East Endemic:

- Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*: uplist from vulnerable to endangered

THIS is the disturbing front page of The Lowvelder/Die Laevelder of October 30, too late for inclusion in our last newsletter. Apart from the mindless cruelty inflicted this one event cost the lives of 3-4% of the estimated population of White-backed Vultures in Kruger. Perhaps more sinister is the intent to poison vultures to disguise the poachers activities with the added bonus of selling the body parts for muti. Win-win for the poachers. The number of individuals and species of other victims is not shown in the report but no doubt a number of other scavengers perished.

And where were, for example, the howls of outrage from the NGO's, a full statement on the matter from Sanparks, what is being gained from donations, why not a call to use the army, the use of drones for patrolling, etc? What proportions do corruption, incompetence, apathy play? The splendid work of a dedicated few is being eroded by an apparent unwillingness to "pull out all the stops." Meanwhile - **the killings continue.....**

Brian Guerin.

Interesting Local Sightings:

October 4 – **Red-chested Flufftail**, male and (spot the) chick. This photograph taken by Stephen Davis during his recent visit with Roy Cowgill. The chick wasn't noticed during the first screening but it is there. These Flufftails have been seen frequently during October/November – not a common event over the years?



November 6 – Bobby Barnardo reports that he had “lots” of **European Bee-eaters** feeding on bees which are exceedingly busy around his Eucalypts – which are now flowering profusely.



November 6 - **Orange-breasted Waxbills** – a small flock seen on several occasions in the vicinity of the Ian Drummond Hide and by various birders subsequently. A most uncommon sight in our area.

November 8 – **Peregrine Falcon** feeding on prey, seen on dead conifer at site of old tennis court behind Municipal offices, being observed closely by a lone Green Wood-hoopoe perched less than 2 metres away.

Grey-headed Gulls – four seen above the vlei +/- 07h00, same day



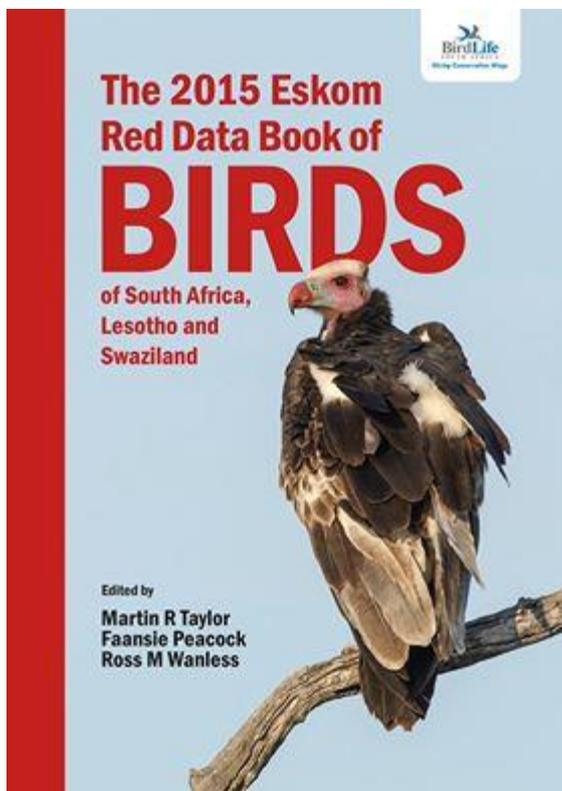
November 13 – Adult **Pygmy Kingfisher** in Rosmarie Weber’s garden, the bird stayed in sight for more than an hour.

November 2- single **Bush Blackcap** seen in the garden at Wakkerstroom Farm Lodge by Fred Kolbe.

November 11 – single **White Stork** on the vlei, opposite Oude Stasie.

November 27 – further sightings of **Baillon’s Crake** at the vlei.

At Last!



BirdLife South Africa

is proud to announce the publication of the 2015 Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of Lesotho and Swaziland, an updated and peer-reviewed conservation status assessment of the 854 bird species occurring in South Africa including the Prince Edward Islands, Lesotho and Swaziland, undertaken in collaboration between BirdLife South Africa, the Animal Demography Unit of the University of Cape Town, and the South African National Biodiversity Institute. Of the 854 bird species assessed, 132 threatened species were considered threatened of which 47 are Near Threatened with the remaining 85 being classified as regionally Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered. Significantly the number of Critically Endangered species increased from five to 13. The Red List produces a relative estimate of the likelihood of extinction of a taxon and is the stepping stone towards prioritising conservation efforts to save our region’s bird species. The publication is available from the BirdLife South Africa Head Office at a cost of R 325 incl VAT (Please contact membership@birdlife.org.za). For any enquiries please contact Martin Taylor. (martin.taylor@birdlife.org.za). We hope a few copies of this important book will be available from Kristi Garland so that we can avoid the cost and vagaries of the “snail Mail”

This is **NOT** A Tuluver!

BirdLife Northern Natal Newcastle (BLNN):

“Please join BirdLife Northern Natal facebook page and share your birding photos and sightings with us” is the message from Rina Pretorius of that club. The page is excellent and well worth a browse, especially for updates on the progress of migrants.

This is an excellent page, full of interesting factual articles and a good way to keep in touch with the progress of migrants.

Well done, Rina.

Donation of Books for Sale:

We must mention that Ian and Gill Alexander of Big Tree Cottage for a most generous donation of books – these will provide some fresh stock for our table at the Christmas Market on December 12. Thanks, Ian and Gill!

Nearing the end.....

As December rapidly approaches, so does the culmination of the crane project I came down to undertake. Seven months had seemed like a good, long time to be away but now it feels as though it was just a short while ago that I was packing up and wondering what the immediate future held.

Sadly, on one hand, the project has not been the success we had hoped for. The trackers that we fitted and which started off so well, all failed and within a month no readings were being recorded. This was very upsetting, especially to the man who makes them as he had never had such a failure in his many years of making and fitting trackers of many sizes to numerous bird species. Testing the trackers in KZN to establish the problem, they showed nothing wrong when left outside day and night and in all conditions and he was at a loss but then had the idea to put them into a 'fridge then into the sun, back into the 'fridge and so on and sure enough after a while the resin cracked – he had used a “new and better” resin on the little solar panels!. So the next phase of the project was obviously put on hold and a lot of thought and discussion into the way forward took place and will now only take place once the trackers are 100% reliable and could possibly be changed to only catching birds in flocks in different parts of the Overberg rather than known breeding birds. Unfortunately I won't be around for that but hopefully the data I have gathered on where flocks are and in getting to know the farmers, will help the planning next time around.

One of the things that had been of concern before the project started was the perception that farmers were not too charmed by the numbers of cranes anymore. Many years ago we had Vicki Hudson in the area and she had done a wonderful job in getting to know the farmers, especially around Caledon where the majority of cranes are, and when through lack of funding, she had to leave, two other people were here at various times for short spells but otherwise there has been no active crane presence. However, through chatting and a questionnaire devised by UCT, we have been delighted to hear that on the whole, the farmers are from tolerant to really enjoying cranes on their farms. They claim that the damage and loss due to cranes is minimal, even to their feeding on the pellets put into troughs for the sheep and the big no-no are the geese – Spurwing in particular but also Egyptian, the numbers of which are enormous. They are rather shocked that there has been any negative perception about the feeling for cranes. Wow, what a relief as over 60% of the Blue Crane population resides in the Overberg! So a lot of good has come out of the months spent here and hopefully in time, funding will be found to have someone more permanently in the area again.

Wonderful experience

I will be sorry to leave as the farmers are getting to know me and I am receiving a number of calls telling me of pairs nesting. My BIG thrill last week was being taken, again by Errol who I mentioned last month, to yet another nest only to find one of the two eggs pipping. I could hardly breathe – and as I video'd it, I was



“purring” as the adults do – to it and it was answering me with chirps and cheeps. I went back the following day to see two tiny chicks only to find one chick and the other egg now pipping so after another encouraging ‘conversation’ with it, I left so the adults could get back to the chick out in the hot sun and be with the new one as it hatched. What an experience!

There are many nests and it is incredible for me to see on the sand bank of a large dam – two pairs nesting about 150m apart and across the dam, a pair with two tiny chicks! A friend stayed over for a few days and she was out with me and it took us three hours to travel about 30k with all the stopping to record yet another pair sitting, or with chicks or small flocks! Amazing.

So from the cranes of the Western Cape, for almost the last time, take care. Glenn.

New Member:

The club welcomes new members Hans and Ulrika Wieschhausen to the fold – we hope they have a long and happy association with us!



Wakkerstroom
Bird Club

presents the

Sandy Twomey Memorial Photographic Competition



Would
you like
to
enter?

1st prize

DeKotzenhof dinner for two,
including a bottle of wine

Framing of winning photo by
the Little Frame Yard

One year's membership of
WBC

Categories

- * Indigenous Fauna & Flora of the Wakkerstroom area
- * Seasons
- * Architecture
- * People
- * Scenery

Select 3 of your favourite photographs taken in and around Wakkerstroom. Email your photograph to wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com with your name, category entered and your camera make and model.

Entries must be received before the 6th January 2016.
Entry is free and professional entries will not be permitted.

Winners will be announced on the 15th January 2016 in Wakkerstroom at the SANParks Birding Weekend.

2nd prize

Meal voucher from Grasslands

Hamper from Ye Refill shop

Robins of Africa book

3rd prize

Breakfast at Wetlands Country House and Sheds

Fold out guide of The birds of Wakkerstroom

Two bottles of wine from Wakkerstroom Country Inn

A reminder: You should be out there already, clicking away – trying to win any one of the excellent prizes! Remember there are super prizes, too, for “Special Mentions.” Winners to be announced at the Sanparks weekend.

Nice Things:

Everybody likes a compliment and Wakkerstroom Bird Club is no exception! As the comments below show, they reflect on all of us and the club and we thought you might like to share them.

RE: BIRDLIFE LOWVELD OUTING TO WAKKERSTROOM

“Thank you for a most enjoyable weekend, Averil and I will look forward to the next excursion.

Regards,

Averil & Mike Heritage.

Thanks for all the efforts to you and the Wakkerstroom team for making this a truly memorable weekend. It may have been an “out of area experience” for most Lowveld birders, but we enjoyed the variety of activities and discovering new places in spite of the many visits we have now made. A slightly longer drive but an absolutely stunning setting. We have booked again for April next year.

The elusive and secretive flufftail remains so for us but I was heartened at least to hear one resident of 18 years who still has not seen this bird! My list is en route.

Kind regards

Peter & Sue Doble

Greetings Wakkerstroom participants,

Thank you to all of you (32 in all) for joining BirdLife Lowveld’s annual outing to Wakkerstroom.

From all accounts everyone enjoyed the experience and a number of folks achieved sightings of lifers for them. The major benefit was the opportunity to spend time around wetlands and water and come to know birds that frequent this type of habitat. Our party thoroughly enjoyed both the birding and the time we spent at our lodgings, where we added a number of garden birds to the wetland birds seen earlier.

I did chat to a few of you and asked you to email to me a list of all the birds you identified. I will then prepare a combined list for circulation to all. I attach a copy of the W/Stroom bird list for you to use as a template. Thanks also to Brian & Brenda Guerin and the Wakkerstroom Bird Club for their welcome at both the braais and at the rather windy outing to the VLEI on Saturday morning.

Thanks also to Kristi Garland and Daphne Pyott for the use of BLSA centre facilities. The process of having each party book their own accommodation worked well and will be used again.

Regards

Frank Webb Treasurer, BLL.”

AND ON THE NEWSLETTER:

“Well done Brian and team.

John Broli

Morning Brian,

Thank you for sharing your interesting Newsletter with us – we always thoroughly enjoying reading it and wish we lived in Wakkerstroom so we could participate in all the exciting trips you arrange. Compliments to Jackie During on her beautiful photo of the spring flowers in the West Coast National Park.

Kind regards

Helen and Roy Biram.

Once again an extremely interesting newsletter.....it makes Wakkerstroom such an interesting birding area.

I enjoy every bit of it!

Regards

Eddie Edmonds, Nelspruit.

I also had positive remarks about the WTA website.

Take a bow, all of you! **EDITOR**

Yellow-breasted Pipit Research – Request for Help:

Dear Bird Club members and LBJ fundi’s, In order to understand the conservation status and genetic diversity of Yellow-breasted Pipits we are desperately looking for as many genetic samples for this species as we can get. We only have this summer season (October 2015 to April 2016) to collect these samples and we would appreciate any



and all the help that you can offer. What we are specifically asking is that you alert us if you know the location of any active Yellow-breasted Pipit nests. We will need to be alerted immediately as the nests are predated and the time from egg laying to chicks fledging is not much more than two weeks. We will be taking a tiny blood sample from the chicks that do not harm the birds at all. We do have the necessary ethics and conservation permits. If you can help us with up-to-date information please contact Ian Little on 084 240 7341 or ianl@ewt.org.za

Thank you for your continued support, with kind regards, **Dr**

Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Manager: Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme/Oppenheimer Fellow of Conservation

And Another Request for Help:

Dear Bird Club chairs and members

We are writing to you in connection with a long-term programme that we are establishing to monitor European Rollers on their southern African non-breeding grounds, and would like to invite your members to participate in this programme. This programme is endorsed by BirdLife South Africa and we will sign up as BirdLife Species Guardians under the Preventing Extinctions Programme.



As you may know, European Rollers are currently classified as globally Near Threatened, and their numbers have declined by as much as 20-30% over the last decade. Although there is a very active network of research and conservation organisations monitoring rollers across their breeding range in Europe, very little is known about their migratory routes and non-breeding grounds in southern Africa. We would therefore like to set up a network of people who would be willing to work with us in trying to fill this knowledge gap, and piece together a fuller story of these remarkable birds in southern Africa. This information would then be shared with the international European Roller conservation network, and hopefully contribute towards the more effective long-term conservation of the species.

We are aware that in many areas within their range in South Africa it certainly doesn't seem as though European Rollers are even close to Near Threatened, as they are frequently seen adorning trees and telephone poles in relative abundance! However, their numbers are dropping dramatically in Europe and changes in their numbers in southern Africa are unknown.

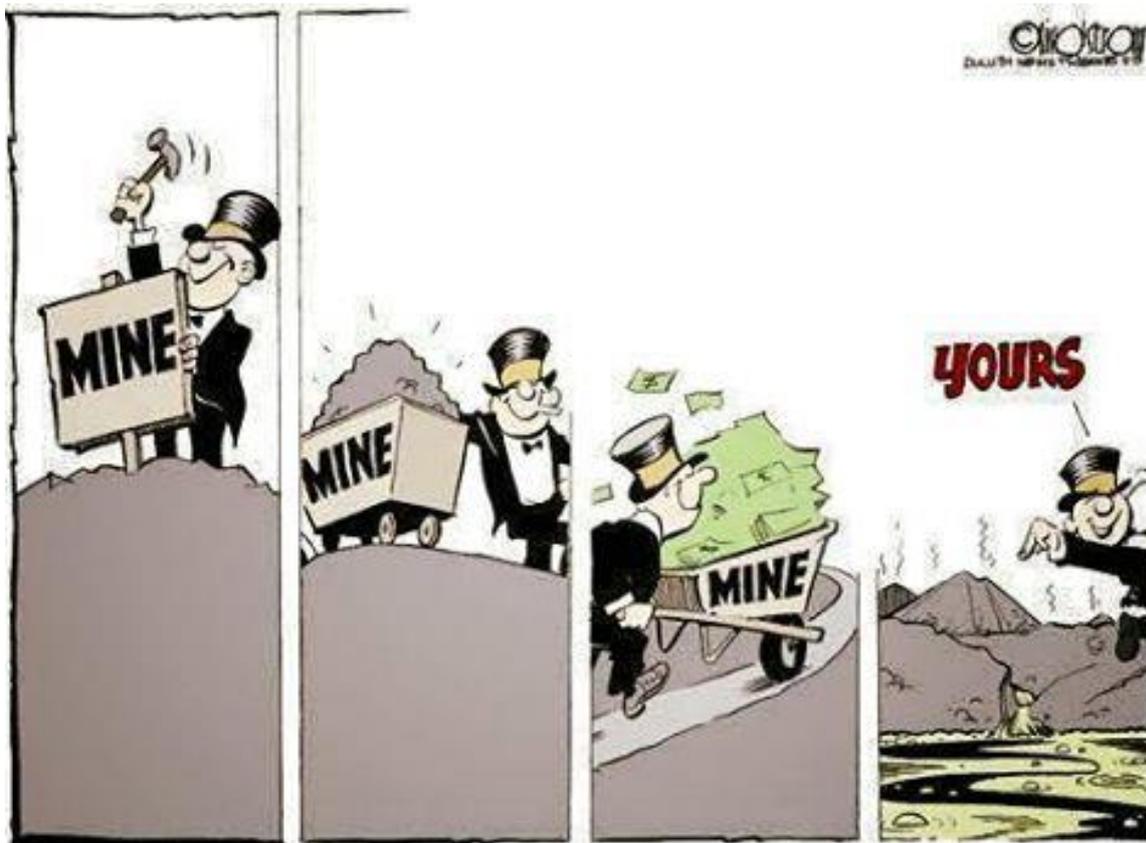
Such changes, as well as changes in arrival and departure dates of birds, can only really be assessed if they are monitored. We are hoping to appeal to Birdlife members to help us build up some of this vital baseline data that will allow us to monitor these changes over time. We have attached a more detailed outline of the activities that we will be setting up, and would like to encourage members who have the time and enthusiasm, to get involved if they can.

We look forward to hearing from you, and would be happy to provide any extra information or details that may be needed.

Yours sincerely, Helene Loon, helene_loon@yahoo.com, cell: 084 8114327

Obviously this colourful little bird is not seen often in our area although it has been seen irregularly in the past. We will be sending this old info to Helene and future records, too. Please report any sightings you may have.

A Bit of a Giggle:



Before:

Sorry.....

.....but we have to tell you that inflation, and all its attendant ills, has finally hit Wakkerstroom Bird Club.

We have always tried to raise extra money for running costs by our own efforts e.g. book sales, the sprayer trailer raffle etc. without approaching the members. None of the Committee claims for personal expenses (including petrol) and still the Club is finding it difficult to cope. Labour costs have increased substantially and as most of the Committee members are a bit past it, we have to rely more and more on casual labour. Petrol, Waksol etc. for vlei and hide maintenance have all been contributing factors.

For the first time in three years we find it necessary to ask for a subscription increase- to R130 per annum. As a result, all subs renewals invoiced from 1 January will attract this new charge. We are very sorry to have to take this step but believe that Wakkerstroom Bird Club still represents outstanding value at this figure and hope that members will understand and continue to support us.

Brian Guerin.

Diary of Events - December, January, February:

This year is rushing to its conclusion and the club is tapering its activities for a month or so. We also intend to include BLNN's (BirdLife Northern Natal) activities in our diary in the event that you may like to attend theirs as well. The recent Sungazer outing with them, and the earlier one to Memel were very successful. Their evening meetings are on Monday evenings, commencing 18h30 and followed by an optional meal, after the talk. Their meetings are held at the Newcastle Club, Bird Street off Scott Street.

December:

Saturday 5th – our last Vlei Walk for the year, let's try for a 6:30 start (but later if you prefer) on the bridge – the migrants are here in full swing so we need to count them all! Coffee, as usual.

January: Saturday 9th –Vlei Walk, let's kick off the New Year (albeit a week late) with a good turnout to tick all the birds we can for the Atlas and our pentad survey. 06h30 on the bridge. **NOTE:** This is the second Saturday.

Tuesday 12th – Outing, a local one. We want to twitch the airport road area and surrounds down to Martin’s Dam and maybe take a look at the vlei from a different angle, ie from the end of the runway. Depart Library 07h30.

Monday 18th – (**BirdLife Northern Natal**) - Andre Botha, quoted in our lead article and Manager of the Bird of Prey Programme (BoPP), of EWT, will be giving a talk.

Wednesday 20th – Mauritz (Mo) de Bruyn, Lawyer and Environmental Monitor, will talk on his experiences in working with all the players in this never dull field, including illegal hunting in our area.

Saturday 23rd – A Bird ID Course will be held at BLSA Wakkerstroom, more details will follow, please book with Claudine (083 347 2770) or direct with Kristi (083 227 0128)

February:

Saturday 6th - Vlei Walk, 07h00 or thereabouts on the bridge.

Monday 15th – (**BirdLife Northern Natal**) - Mark Anderson CEO of BirdLife South Africa will be their guest speaker.

Tuesday – 16th – Outing – details to be advised.

Year End Function:

For those of you who missed our “do” on November 21 we offer a selection of photographic memories! What a super, happy evening and our thanks to Judy-Lynn Wheeler and Claudine Tavlet who went the extra mile to cater for every detail, thank you both! First, Wendy and Olive (Hoopoes), second Janet Harries) and third, Judy-Lynn Wheeler.



Brian Guerin. (Guest) Editor.