



# Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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## **NEWSLETTER NUMBER 42, JANUARY 2016**

**WELCOME**, everybody, to the first Newsletter of 2016! The Committee believes that this year will be a good one for the Club with some exciting new developments and a further extension of our activities to improve birdwatching in the area. The major new development for 2016 will be our amalgamation with BirdLife South Africa. This will bring us into the fold with all of the other clubs and will result in a stronger image in fund-raising due to the inclusion of the BLSA logo on our letterheads. We expect a wider cross-pollination of ideas through closer ties with all sections of the organization.

### **Indian Government Signs Raptor Conservation Agreement**



Raptors such as Amur Falcon could benefit from the new agreement (Image: Ramki Sreenivasan)

By Ed Parnell, Thu, 21/01/2016 - 11:28

India has become the 54th country to sign the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU), an important international agreement to protect migratory birds of prey.

Established in 1883, BNHS (Bombay Natural History Society, now BirdLife India) is among the oldest conservation organisations in the world, and over the course of its long history has carried out pioneering research and conservation on many birds of prey including South Asia's critically endangered vultures, and other migratory raptors such as Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*.

Although the migratory status of Asia's vultures is in most cases ambiguous, they are in the process of being included in the Raptors MOU, which will be an important instrument in the fight to save them.

Although legally non-binding this is, hopefully, a big step towards putting an end to the distressing images we saw a year or two back on human predation on these birds. There is also some hope for the vultures of the area if they do get included in this MOU.

## Final Cape Report:

A month has passed since I joined the ranks of retirees and a week is left before I head back to Wakkerstroom, at the end of January, the Cape chapter of my life having been completed and I now await for the next chapter to unfold.

The crane project was partially successful – actually, I feel it was pretty good as we were under the impression that farmers were becoming irritated with the number of cranes around but I am still waiting to hear from one that he detests the cranes and would do something drastic – some do say they wish the cranes would spend more time on their neighbor's farm! So that is a great relief and wonderful news and so many farmers have given the assurance that they are willing to help and in fact would love to again have a full time crane field worker in the area – they also would love to have an annual crane count again.

The tracker 'phase one' was not a success but the trackers are on track again!!! And phase two will take place around June when more birds will be caught from flocks in different places that I have identified and a total of at least 15 will be fitted. Much the same team will be involved so with the experience of last year it should go even more smoothly.

So that's my story from the Cape in summer – it is dry and glary and I have to admit that I prefer the winter Months of green, pretty countryside. We have been fortunate that other than a few days here and there, the weather has been very pleasant, not too hot or windy – although I have to admit that I think my accommodation is in a sheltered place as others talk of a lot of wind. This particular farm is very water-rich and is a bit like an oasis and that will be sorely missed – there is a fountain where I collect water (and friends



come with multiple

bottles to fill) with a liquid that puts bottled water to shame! Even I drink water these days. I hope the year has started well for you all and will continue so.

Ramke.

Glenn

Thanks for the series of articles on "our" birds in the Cape and we hope to see you soon! Editor.

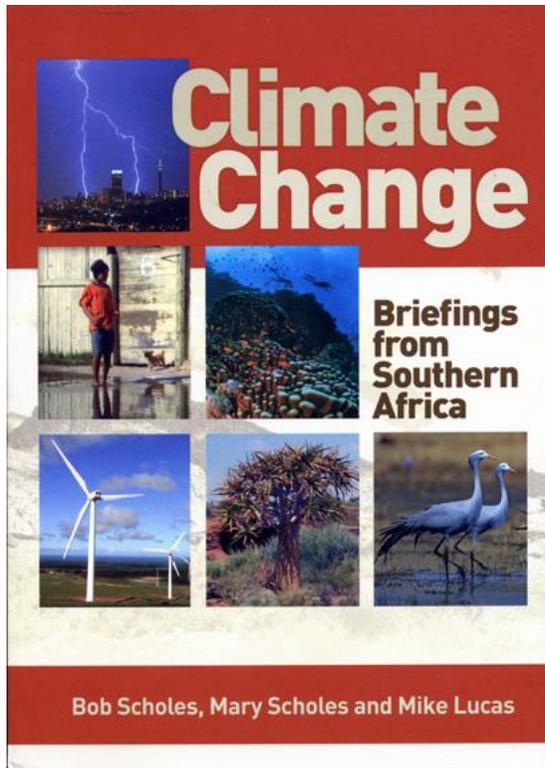
## Local Snippet.

4 Otters were seen playing with a floating log in the canal where they cross under the road – then actively hunting at which stage they disturbed a shoal of tiddlers and became extremely busy. NO table manners whatsoever but in the ensuing melee a Malachite Kingfisher was able to catch a fish and settled close to the water to enjoy it. Estimated size of the tiddler was +/- 6cm (larger than the distance from the tip of the bird's bill to the back of its neck) with a head size almost as large as that of the bird! It was sometime before the bird finished beating the fish and appeared to be fairly tired after the exercise and breathing heavily. Whilst tossing it around to "swallowing" position there was a moment when the fish was nearly dropped but somehow the Kingfisher retrieved it and began the even more laborious task of consuming it. This took ages and was painful to watch but was eventually completed after some ten minutes.

## BOOK REVIEW:

### “Climate Change Briefings from Southern Africa”

**WRITTEN BY** Bob Scholes, Professor of Systems Ecology, University of the Witwatersrand, Mary Scholes, Professor, School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences, and Mike Lucas, Assoc. Professor Department of Biological Sciences, Cape Town.



Climate change is a confusing business. Is it real, or just a natural cycle? Will it affect us all? The Authors of this book, who have worked on the issue for more than two decades are considered to be World Authorities' on the subject. They have produced a superb book which will certainly help you to understand this complex topic.

The book is in four main sections. 1. Earth system Science. The processes that underlie climate change. 2. Consequences of a changing climate for the Southern African environment. 3. Consequences of a changing environment for society. 4. What we can do to avoid and adapt to climate change.

Each section poses about a dozen “frequently asked questions”, which it then answers with a straight forward, short factual answer. This is followed by a two or three page comprehensive, extremely well illustrated answer with a detailed explanation of the science and evidence involved.

The book concludes with a Codicil: Is there a dangerous level of climate change?

The alarming answer: **It is widely agreed that an average global warming of more than 3deg C would be extremely dangerous worldwide. Even lesser degrees of global average warming (for example 2deg C) could be locally dangerous in South Africa, which**

**warms faster than the global mean.**

ISBN 978-1-86814-918 6 Published by Wits University Press Recommended price R350. [witspress.co.za/catalogue/climate-change-2](http://witspress.co.za/catalogue/climate-change-2) also available as an e-book and PDF. P.S. Bob and Mary Scholes are Weekend Wakkerstroemers.

**Norman Dennett.**

#### More Snippets:

Our **Whatsapp** system of rapid advice of interesting sightings is working extremely well since Graham Spencer initiated it around 13 December! Messages should be to the point with sufficient detail to pinpoint the bird's position should someone want to go after it! Warwick Tarboton's map reference numbers could be used also e.g. E3-E4 instead of Amersfoort Road, to position the sighting more closely. Also, as previously mentioned replies such as “Stunning”, “Wow” etc. shouldn't be sent as everybody receives them, for no real benefit! Explanatory notes, comments are welcome. The system is refining itself as we gain experience of using it, well done!

**The 3-year Pentad Survey** is in its last six months and this mountain of work should provide an up to date view of the birds one can expect to see around the study area of one 5deg\*5deg portion. A large amount of reviewing of the results will no doubt raise a great many questions about one-off sightings, vagrants, maybe we will learn more about altitudinal migration in our birds, migration, etc. will no doubt be raised. Hopefully we won't raise too many more questions than answers!

Only briefly mentioned in the Diary below, Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February is **World Wetlands Day** which rather crept up on us! We are, co-incidentally, planning to work on clearing the willow branches which are impeding the flow of water just

below the Kruger Bridge. The suggestion is that we get the team organised and working and somewhere around 10h-00 we will have set up the banner etc. and take some pictures and maybe get an article in The Recorder – it seems like a good way to publicise the event and the Club. So.....if you want to take part in the fun and get into the Press, come and join us!

### **Diary of Forthcoming Events:**

**Tuesday February 2<sup>nd</sup>** – World Wetlands Day.

**Saturday 6 February** (note, back to the first Saturday) - monthly Vlei Walk, on the bridge from 7h00 or earlier if you prefer – remember the early bird story! Let's keep up with the migrants while we have them. Coffee will be available.

**Saturday February 6** – entries close for the Sandy Twomey Photographic Competition. Entries should be e-mailed to [wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com) as soon as possible. Get clicking for some great prizes!

**Tuesday 9 February**– Monthly Outing - a Message from Claudine Tavlet, Outing Organiser:

“The next Wakkerstroom Bird Club outing is again, quite local, to Wetlands Country House and Sheds, on the 9th February 2016.

Philip will feed the birds at 07:30 and this promises to be worthwhile. We'll meet from 06:45 at the Library, Corner Badenhorst and van Riebeeck Streets. Please bring your binoculars, hat and cameras. We'd like to get there around 07:00/ 07:15 to watch Philip feed the birds.

Rita will provide tea, coffee and light refreshments, from around 08:30 onwards. For catering purposes, kindly RSVP by 7th February, to Claudine on 083 347 2770, or [grasslandscottage@gmail.com](mailto:grasslandscottage@gmail.com)

We look forward to seeing you there.”

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup>** – Meeting at BLNN, Newcastle, a talk by Mark Anderson, CEO of BirdLife South Africa.

**Wednesday/Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>** – not one but two talks. You may remember Peter Greaves who spoke to us on successive nights, on Peru and then on “Coffee and Hats – Costa Rica and Panama”. Peter will again do two nights – topics “The Search for Pithacartes” (the rare and elusive Yellow-headed Pichacartes) through The Gambia, and “Colorado Chicken Run” – searching for Prairie Chickens, Grouse and others. I have more detailed information on these topics if anybody would like to read them.

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup>** – A Bird ID course will be held at the BirdLife South Africa Centre, Wakkerstroom, more details are available from Kristi Garland (083 227 0128) or Claudine Tavelet (083 347 2770) Book soon as the numbers are limited!

### **Snippet: Secretarybird tracked from nestling to breeding: a first for science!**

**Johannesburg, 11 December 2015:** *Taemane, a Secretarybird tracked with a sophisticated satellite tracking device, became the first Secretarybird ever to be tracked from eight weeks of age to first breeding.*

Ernst Retief, one of BirdLife South Africa's Regional Conservation Managers, reported that the bird, a male, was fitted with a tracking device on 5 April 2013 on a farm near Warden in the Free State. The bird was estimated to have hatched during January 2013, so it is now almost three years old. During the last few weeks the location points from Taemane's satellite tracking device were all from the same locality. Taemane was either dead or breeding! As these points overlapping with a tree, BirdLife South Africa's conservationists were hoping that Taemane was breeding. Ernst Retief made contact with the local farmer, who then accompanied him to the site on 6 December. Taemane was found on a nest, the tracking device clearly visible and in place. With him on the nest were two chicks, barely a week old. This breeding event is important for many reasons. It is the first time that a Secretarybird has been tracked from a young age to first breeding, providing valuable information which will assist researchers to understand important aspects of the species' biology. It also provides the first ever information of the age of first breeding of Secretarybirds.

**Brian Guerin (Guest) Editor.**