



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa
Principal supporter of the Wakkerstroom Junior Bird Clubs

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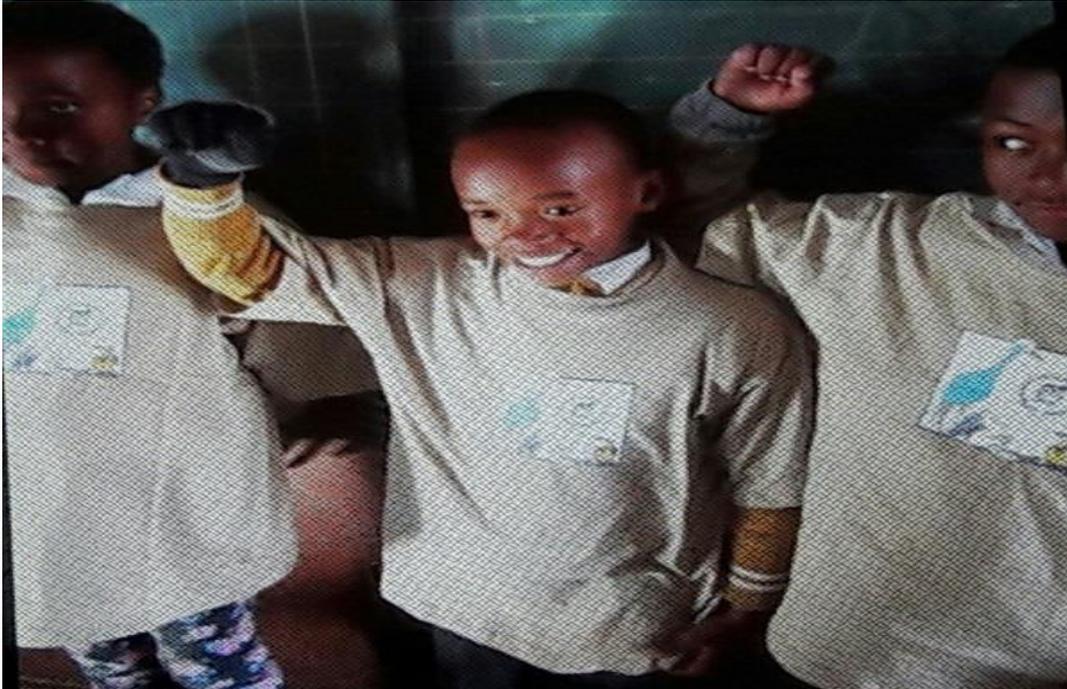
Hello Everybody,

With overnight temperatures of -4C and -6C this week here in “Wakkers”, you would think we would all be hibernating by now! But since the days have been full of glorious sunshine and clear skies, it’s been more fun being outdoors than indoors, and many have been doing their BriskMorningWalk and PutAnotherLogOnTheFire exercises ☺

A couple of weeks ago, members enjoyed the **talk on the National Lotteries’ Biodiversity Stewardship Project** by Kristi at the BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre (David was unfortunately called away on a family matter), which was a real eye-opener on what wonderful work she and David do with the region’s schools – believe it or not, they cover 40 schools across southern Mpumalanga and northern KZN, reaching about 400 teachers and 11,589 school children!! They combine “new” information with what the teachers already have in their lesson plans, and – very importantly – get those kids out of the classroom and into the environment, which they of course really enjoy. - The bring ‘n braai which followed the talk was a great time for everyone to discuss this valuable programme. WELL DONE, Kristi and David – what a fantastic contribution you are making in the lives of those children (and teachers!) in schools that are often pretty much forgotten even by the Department of Education. THANK YOU BOTH!!



Another exciting venture David and Kristi, as well as Lucky, work on every week is the **Junior Bird Club**. This involves about 190 kids from Country College in Volksrust, as well as Smiley's and ClayEdu in eSizamaleni, where they learn all about the local birds and are given weekly "tasks" to find ten species, also learning both the English and Zulu names. This programme also combines with Carol Preston's anti-littering campaign. This week some of the children at ClayEdu received their special Junior Bird Club t-shirts yesterday, and are wearing them proudly. Apologies for the quality of the photo, we've had some technical issues I'll post better quality ones on the Facebook page.



Water Sampling to Monitor Pollution in Wakkerstroom

John Burchmore, Prenita Sanderson (an Honours student at Wits), Marta Magnuszewska (a visiting Polish student) and Mary Scholes (a Professor at Wits) took water samples at three locations on the 18th of May, namely 1) Martins Dam; 2) Close to the sewage overflow from Esizamaleni and 3) the uThaka river as it flows into Zaaihoek Dam. The purpose of the sampling is twofold:

- 1) To monitor the levels of nitrate, ammonia and phosphorus
- 2) To monitor the levels of *E coli* from sewage contamination

Sampling for the nutrients has taken place for months and the results to date show that the water in Martins Dam has extremely low levels of nutrients, the sewage overflow contains high levels of all the nutrients, especially phosphorus and the water entering Zaaihoek has low levels of all the nutrients. This shows that the vleis is performing a cleansing service, an ecosystem service to the residents of Wakkerstroom and the environment. The samples taken from May – September 2018 will also be tested for *E coli* contamination. "Preliminary data show no (or extremely low) *E coli* at Martins Dam, but high levels at the sewage overflow and high levels at the uThaka river. No *E coli* in the tap in our house," reports Professor Scholes. This is a wonderful service that Mary and Bob

Scholes and John Burchmore are providing which will also help when necessary in dealing with local authorities, thanks to you all!

Below is a photo of Mary, Prenita and Marta doing some of their research.



Recently, Brian Guerin had this mail from Cornell University with regard to **World Birding Day** last month:

“Hi Brian - On 5 May 2018, you helped set a birding world record. Your eBird lists joined reports from nearly 30,000 fellow eBirders, tallying 6,924 species as a global team: two-thirds of the world's birds in 24 hours. This is a new world record for the number of bird species reported in one day. Thank you. Mark your calendar for 6 October for another Big Day—we'll be in touch with more info before long! Importantly, this impossibly fun event also provides valuable information to help birds. In all, eBirders gathered more than *1.6 million* bird sightings on 5 May, which are now freely available to researchers, conservationists, and birders everywhere.” What phenomenal statistics!

Here are some more facts from Brian:

“Mpumalanga was closely behind as the second province in South Africa, following Limpopo by 210 to 201 species. In the list of Top Birders was Mike Maxted-Smith's team with Graham and Claudine Spencer (7th) and Brenda and I in 15th place. Unfortunately John Burchmore's team's figures were lost somewhere “in the ether” or they would have featured very prominently. Even if birders saw every bird on the Southern African List we would have finished behind Colombia (1546), Peru (1492) and Ecuador (1162). These South African figures represent a fraction of what we could have achieved with more participants. We will have to do better next year, it's also good fun! Check their website, www.ebird.org.”

Another Citizen Science birding project some WBC members participate in is the **2018 Newcastle Challenge on Birdlasser**. Kristi reports that so far Mike & Jenni Maxted are in third place overall with 262 species seen, Kristi & David 12th (199 species), while John & Penny Burchmore have so far spotted 149 species. Keep it up, Folks!

Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency Brochure

Have you seen the new glossy brochure “Scenic Mpumalanga – Gateway to the Kruger National Park”, limited copies of which are in the Info Centre? There is a double page spread (pages 40 and 41) on Wakkerstroom birding compiled by Judy-Lynn Wheeler, Graham Spencer and Brian with photographs by some of our members. The brochure was released at Indaba, the travel industry’s annual flagship event, in Durban in May and is being distributed internationally.

Donations

Rather belatedly (because I forgot to include it in last month’s newsletter, sorry!!) we are pleased to record that Steve Davis, after his recent Workshop here, made a generous donation of R500 to the White-winged Flufftail Monitoring Fund which we have created. The recent first breeding record ever in South Africa of this species was recorded at Middelpunt Wetland, near Belfast, by BirdLife South Africa and the Middelpunt Wetland Trust. If Wakkerstroom is accepted as a site for monitoring (fingers crossed!) much funding for the project will be required by BirdLife South Africa. A figure of 20 tracking cameras at R4000 each is just the beginning!

Your Committee has decided to allocate funds for at least one of these tracking cameras which may, at the conclusion of the Flufftail monitoring period, also be used to monitor other species presence/movement on the wetland. We will keep you posted on this and our other ongoing projects in future newsletters.

Other Projects

If you ever wonder what the Bird Club gets up to when they’re not peering through binoculars at the local feathered population, here is a list of projects (other than the above-mentioned White-winged Flufftail one) that WBC is involved in. Many of these rely on generous donations of time and monetary funds; if you would like to help with either – or if you need more information on any of them - please let us know on wackersbirdclub@gmail.com :

- Wetland Spraying
- Maintaining Drummond Hide
- Junior Bird Club
- CAR Counts Birding Big Day
- Migratory Bird Day
- Spring Alive
- Clearing rubbish from the Wetland
- Atlassing
- Wakkerstroom Pentad Survey
- GEM Project (Funded by SAPPI)
- Greening 94 Pentads
- Water Quality Monitoring
- Southern Bald Ibis Monitoring
- WBC is represented on the WIG and WNHA Committees
- Fundraising is achieved through raffles, Book Sales, etc.

June/ July Diary

There is so much going on around the weekend of 15-17 June with the Arts Ramble activities, the Mountain Challenge etc. that we have decided not to have a talk during June. As you know, in summer these usually take place on a Wednesday evening, but for the colder months they have been moved to a Saturday morning. Let us know if you have any ideas and suggestions for interesting speakers, or have a DVD with interesting birding-related content we would all enjoy seeing. Here's what's coming up:

- We will have our monthly outing on Tuesday 30th June to the Wessels farm again, departing at 7h30 from the Library.
- On Saturday the 16th July, during the Arts Ramble, we will hold the prize giving of both the winner of the Weber Braai raffle (tickets still available at R20 each at the Crow's Nest) as well as the winners of the Sandy Twomey Photographic competition. This will take place at the Town Hall (between the steam train and the municipality building, for those new to town) at 16h30. Entrance free of course ☺ Good luck to all those involved.
- Our usual Wetland Walk will take place on Saturday the 7th July from 8am (it gets a bit warmer by then!). Coffee and tea will be available as always, and we will meet on the bridge on the road to Amersfoort.
- Saturday talk to be confirmed – we will let you know ☺
- The annual winter CAR count (where we count birds not cars!) will take place on Saturday 28th July. We are currently on the prowl for some volunteers for the seven routes in our area. If you are interested in taking part, please contact Kristi (that busy lady again!) on 081 726 5282 or email kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za – even if you are a beginner birder there is still an opportunity to get involved. A briefing session will be held the night before (27th July) at BirdLife South Africa Centre. Watch this space for more details.

That's all from me this month. As always, enjoy your birding!

Chris

“REFUSE -- REDUCE – REUSE – RECYCLE – ROT”

Did you know that an aluminium can takes between 200 and 500 years to decompose?

Plastic bags 200 to 1000 years?

Milk cartons 5 years?

A cigarette butt 10 to 12 years?

(thank you to Carol Preston for these facts)