



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



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

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 62 – NOVEMBER 2018

Hello fellow birders,

So we *assume* it's spring or even summer here in Wakkerstroom as we've had temperatures up to 31C already ... but we're not *entirely* sure after last week when we once again had a couple of frosty nights! No doubt the birds are coping better than our lovingly-grown tomatoes and veggie patches, but they do appreciate a bit of spoiling at bird feeders, as well as taking advantage of fresh water offered. We've had three or four good rainfall days since mid-September, and having just returned from Johannesburg, it was very noticeable how dry it is everywhere else whereas our area is relatively green.

This photo by Brian Guerin of a Wood Sandpiper at the wetland this week "proves" that the migrant birds certainly go with the calendar, not the sometimes-unseasonal temperature:



The waders have taken advantage of all the mudflats that have been created by the efforts of the WBC to spray the vegetation in certain areas of the wetland, and Wood Sandpipers are one of the species that has been quite prolific compared to previous years. The spraying does no harm to anything other than the target plants, and the benefitting results are clear to bird watchers and photographers.

Speaking of summer ... it's that time of year when many of us need ideas for Christmas gifts, so here are a few suggestions:

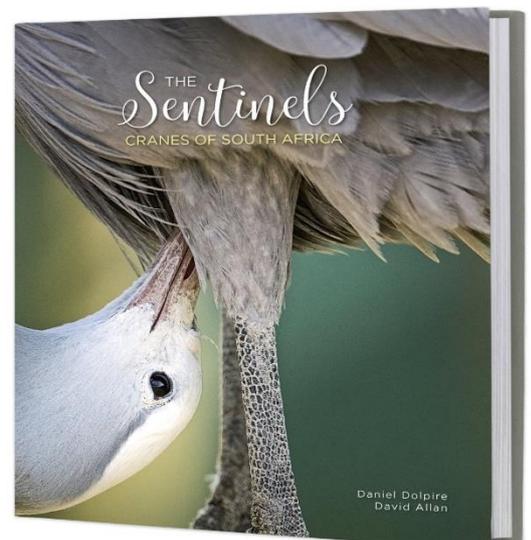
- Kristi has 6 copies of the beautiful BirdLife South Africa 2019 calendar available, at R145 each. Please contact her if you'd like to purchase one at Kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za or on 081 726 5282



- At the upcoming Open Gardens and Rose Show (10 & 11 November), the bird club will have a stand at Runnymede Iris Farm ... find a few little gifts for fellow-birders (or yourself) such as mugs, magnets, as well as bird "snacks".

New Publication

- A new book has just been published which is sure to be of interest to us here in "crane country". Entitled *The Sentinels – Cranes of South Africa*, it has more than 180 spectacular photographs by Daniel Dolpire who set off in 2013 on an odyssey that would consume the next five years of his life in order to tell his story. It's a photographic festival celebrating the beauty and uniqueness of these birds.



- Ornithologist David Allen contributed the text of the 168-page book.
Have a look on the HPH Publishing website for details and photographs of this book at [www.hphpublishing.co.za/pages/daniel-](http://www.hphpublishing.co.za/pages/daniel-dolpires-sentinels)

[dolpires-sentinels](#), where you can also order the book. It would fit a rather large Christmas stocking! (Photograph copyright HPHPublishing)

Birding talks by Steve Davis

On 13 October we were once again fortunate to welcome Steve Davis to the BirdLife South Africa Centre. Steve gave two fascinating talks, and I'm sure everyone who attended learnt a few new things. The first talk was on "Coming and Going: Mysteries of Migration" which fitted in with the day's World Migration Day for the Southern Hemisphere – did you know for example that the Bar-tailed Godwit covers 11,600km in just six DAYS on its migration from Siberia to New Zealand? Or that the popular Amur Falcons traverse vast amounts of the Indian Ocean on their way to Africa from India, having already come from their breeding grounds in Siberia and northern China? Most birds choose to fly over

land rather than water, but these little falcons follow millions of dragonflies that are similarly migrating to Africa – a handy in-flight snack.



Steve's second presentation was on "Getting others to raise your chicks" which gave insight on how and why brood parasites such as cuckoos, whydahs, indigobirds, honeyguides and others manage to convince other birds to look after and successfully raise chicks other than their own (usually to the detriment of their own brood). Where some birds aren't too fussy about what's in their nest, others are not so easily fooled, and the parasitizing bird has to mimic not only the size and colouring of the eggs it lays, but some go as far as needing to copy the exact colour and pattern of the new mum's chicks' mouth cavity! No match and Mama won't feed that hungry mouth. Clearly thousands of years of evolution and adaptation have gone into this, and we were all captivated by Steve's tales.

During lunch numerous discussions ensued on the two subjects. Claudine Spencer had provided a wonderfully-warming chicken curry – a rapid re-think after the original plan of cold chicken and salad didn't seem to fit the weather! We had also planned to go out after lunch to see whether we could find some of our own visiting migrants. However the ever-changing Wakkerstroom weather had other ideas and blessed us with a rather fresh 8C maximum temperature for the day, and wonderfully soft and soaking rain (which nobody minded, actually).

Many thanks for the day, Steve; I think it goes without saying that we all really enjoyed it!

Friends of Wakkerstroom Wetland – an Appeal - written by our Chairman, Brian Guerin

Hi Everybody,

As you will be well aware the Wakkerstroom Wetland belongs to all of us and is a significant contributor to the welfare of Wakkerstroom. Its contribution from birding, tourism and providing employment is acknowledged by all.

Over recent years the Wakkerstroom Bird Club has invested a lot of time, effort and money in efforts to return the Wetland to a more nearly pristine state by opening up and extending mudflats to encourage more wading species, control of exotic vegetation, maintaining Bird Hides, trails etc. and improving photographic opportunities.

It occurred to me recently that a number of Wakkerstroopers, when we appealed, gave willingly of their time, effort, and in many cases, equipment to help us with projects that we undertook from time to time. Most notably recently was the support given in the first attempt to remove the willows in the river that will eventually cause a blockage. And, the free provision of a drone to take aerial photographs of the wetland to facilitate planning future clearing activities saved the Club a lot of money, and this from a non-member!

Other similar bird-rich areas such as Nylsvlei have support groups of volunteers (Friends of Nylsvlei) and Marievale Bird Sanctuary, near Springs, has Friends of Marievale, groups of people who may not all be birders but have the community spirit and willing hands to assist with necessary work on their wetlands. Sometimes we may need the use of a trailer, help with supervision of clean-ups/alien vegetation removal on the wetland, the list is really very varied. And don't underestimate the value of any contacts you may have!

The present Committee needs help in this work and we are appealing for volunteers to assist it in its aim of continually improving conditions in the wetland.

Just to "test the water" (no pun intended) Graham Spencer has set up a whatsapp group called Friends of WackersWetland on which we intend to give details of jobs we may need a hand with so that you are able to assess where you can help. Please contact him (082 576 2108) to get enrolled on Friends of WackersWetland and help to make a difference.

Proposed pipeline Martin's Dam to Volksrust

We reported separately yesterday on a distressing plan that has only recently been discovered by vigilant Wakkerstroopers, and that we felt must be made available to as many residents, visitors, and other interested parties as possible. The report which details what is currently known, was written by Rupert Lawlor, Chairman of the Wakkerstroom Natural Heritage Association (WNHA) and the Wakkerstroom Interest Group (WIG).

We will keep you updated on any further information or action. You will agree that if this project should go forward, it would have a devastating impact on our water supply, the wetland, and its many natural inhabitants.

COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE UNVEILED AT BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA CENTRE WAKKERSTROOM

While Steve Davis was here to present his talks, he was also part of the unveiling of a commemorative plaque in the honour of his good friend Roy Cowgill who passed away early in 2017.

Roy Cowgill was a teacher for many years at Durban High School and inspired generations of young learners. He was not only a well-qualified biologist, but someone with an encyclopaedic knowledge of birds, trees, plants and all kinds of fauna. He was the Honorary President of BirdLife Port Natal, having joined the club at the age of 16, and through the years, he served in every role on the committee of the club except that of Treasurer. He worked closely with Steve to present courses on identification and calls of birds and bird behaviour. In his name, Steve also made very generous donations for renovations and the upgrade of the BirdLife Centre.



Some good news for birds for a change!!! (Well, mostly ...)

This new report shows an upward trend for migratory waterbirds:

Bonn, 11 October 2018 - Bucking a major general trend, the overall status of waterbird populations listed on the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) has slightly improved over the last ten years, says a new report.

The findings are being released ahead of World Migratory Bird Day, an annual, UN-backed global awareness-raising and environmental education campaign focused on migratory birds and the need for international cooperation to conserve them.

The 7th Edition of the AEWA Conservation Status Review of Migratory Waterbirds in the Agreement Area (CSR7) provides a long-term view of the changing status of migratory waterbird populations listed under AEWA.

The upward trend assessed in the report is due to concerted conservation actions along the birds' migration routes, the so-called flyways. These range from targeted species action planning for the most threatened species to ensuring that hunting of widespread waterbirds species is sustainable.

AEWA protects nearly half a billion waterbirds and seabirds across the African-Eurasian Flyway. More than 220 species covered by AEWA have been assessed in the report.

AEWA Executive Secretary Jacques Trouvilliez said: “AEWA is an example of an environmental treaty which can record a clear conservation success. The report shows that the overall status of migratory waterbirds in Africa and Eurasia is actually improving instead of getting worse. Flyways are the pertinent scale to implement coordinated actions between breeding and wintering areas. I would like to thank the Parties to AEWA which collaborate through specific action plans or thematic issues.”

Currently more than 60 per cent of populations of the species covered by AEWA are stable or increasing. Pelicans, cormorants, avocets and stilts, flamingos and storks are the waterbird families with the highest proportion of increasing populations. However, crane and auk numbers are in strong decline. And the highest proportion of populations on the Endangered IUCN Red List are in Eastern and Southern Africa. Although AEWA is successful with recovery of threatened species, it is challenging for the treaty to stop the decline amongst the more common waterbirds as they are facing habitat degradation or reduction in at least some parts of their ranges. Climate change will affect hydrological regime of many wetlands which are also under human demographic pressure. Combating climate change and involving local communities are two key measures for stopping the decline of common species.

Species are becoming globally threatened much faster than they can recover. It is a race against time. The situation is most dramatic for the birds that depend on farmed habitats – meadows and fields - and on the marine environment.

Both farmland birds and seabirds would benefit from conservation measures beyond protected areas. Conserving their habitats both at sites and in the wider landscape is necessary to keep common birds common. In addition, hunting must not threaten populations and other factors leading to unnecessary mortality must be reduced. The report recommends integrating bird conservation into a wide range of other land use policies. In the EU, action plans to preserve species and their habitats in agriculture and fisheries policies are efforts in this direction.

The new Strategic Plan of AEWA includes measures to step up habitat conservation efforts. It will be presented for adoption at the AEWA Meeting of the Parties to be held 4 – 8 December in Durban, where AEWA countries will also agree on a response to the findings of the CSR report.

The Strategic Plan will contribute not only to achieving AEWA's conservation targets but also to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Biodiversity Aichi Targets.

Sustainable fisheries and agriculture are amongst the key prerequisite for species conservation. They are also enshrined in the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

About the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)

The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) is an intergovernmental treaty dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds that migrate along the African-Eurasian Flyway. The Agreement covers 254 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle. The treaty covers 119 Range States from Europe, parts of Asia and Canada, the Middle East and Africa. Currently 76 countries and the European Union (EU) have become a Contracting Party to AEWA (as of 1 November 2017).

www.unep-awa.org @UNEP_AEWA

Can you help our Junior Bird Club members?

Contact Kristi on 081 726 5282 or Kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za should you wish to donate any binoculars or field guides (preferably SASOL) to our local junior bird clubs. THANK YOU IN ADVANCE!!

A young boy is looking through binoculars. In the foreground, there is a book titled 'BIRDS OF SOUTH AFRICA'. The text 'We need more of these...' is at the top, and '...and these.' is below the book. Below that, it says 'We can make good use of any of your unused binoculars and field guides for our community outreach projects across the country.'

We need more of these...

...and these.

We can make good use of any of your unused binoculars and field guides for our community outreach projects across the country.

WBC November activities

Saturday, 3 November: Time for our **monthly Wetland Walk**. Meet on the bridge on the Amersfoort road at 7am, hopefully even more migrants will have come in by now. The October walk also produced a good sighting of some of “our” otters! White-backed Duck, Whiskered Tern and Black-winged Stilt have all been seen this week. Coffee and tea will be available.

Tuesday, 13 November: Our **outing** will be to Ben and Hanlie Uys's farm, (formerly Klaas Devenish's property). Let's meet at the Library at 07:00 to get across to the farm, which is just over 10 kilometres out of town, while it's still relatively cool.

Please bring along hats, binoculars, cameras and snacks. If we have rain in the next two weeks, the wild flowers will also be a real treat at this time of the year. Any queries, contact Claudine 083 347 2770

Wednesday, November 21: **meeting** at BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre, 17h30 for 18h00.

A quality DVD – Episode 4 of “Hebrides, Islands on the Edge”. Narrated by Ewan McGregor this episode combines compelling story-telling with stunning HD wildlife footage and ends with a message of what can be achieved by a small community where the will exists. Not to be missed.

Saturday, 24 November: **BIRDING BIG DAY 2018 IS FINALLY HERE!!**

One of the highlights on the local birding calendar is BirdLife South Africa’s Birding Big Day (BBD). By doing their best to record as many species as possible within 24 hours, birders in South Africa celebrate the wonderful bird diversity we enjoy. This year we are again partnering with the mobile app BirdLasser so that we can show the progress of teams live on an interactive map that can be viewed by participants and their supporters at any time during the day.

There are two categories in which birders can participate: either the Open Category, where a team – maximum four members – birds within an area of 50km radius; or the Community Category, which is less

formal and aimed at large groups, such as bird clubs or schools. For more information, visit the BirdLife South Africa website.

Teams are invited to log their sightings on the mobile app BirdLasser and share them to the dedicated BirdLasser BBD event page. In order to do so, one member of the team must enter the data on BirdLasser while birding. Excitement levels will increase over the course of the day, as the challenge page updates automatically when teams record their sightings. For more information about BirdLasser, visit www.birdlasser.com or e-mail support@birdlasser.com

If you plan to participate in BBD, please register before the event by completing the online form. There is no entry fee, but a minimum donation of R300 is required to qualify for a BirdLife South Africa Birding Big Day 2018 cloth badge.

ERNST RETIEF, REGIONAL CONSERVATION MANAGER: FREE STATE, GAUTENG AND MPUMALANGA

The link to the BirdLasser online map: <https://www.birdlasser.com/events/bbd2018> BirdLife South Africa will post regular updates on the Facebook events page: <https://web.facebook.com/events/212406386013322/>

Carina Coetzer talk on the Southern Bald Ibis project

Not only did we have Steve Davis's talks to enjoy in October, but Carina Coetzer from BirdLife South Africa popped in as well. She is the Project Coordinator at Ingula Nature Reserve and has recently taken over from Kate Henderson. Here is an extract (and photograph) from the latest BirdLife South Africa newsletter by Hanneline Smit-Robinson, the Conservation Manager:

“The national project will build on work done previously by Kate Henderson and Robin Colyn and aims to assess the current status of Southern Bald Ibis breeding colonies across South Africa and Lesotho; identify potential unknown or under-surveyed breeding sites; monitor changes in colony size and breeding success over time; determine what proportion of breeding colonies and available habitat fall under formal protection and within Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs); and examine the spatial movement of fledged individuals over their range through tracking.

The project's current focus is to obtain data on breeding success from a representative number of colonies. Bird clubs in the Southern Bald Ibis's core distribution area have been identified and Nest monitoring started at the end of August – the peak egg-laying season is in August and September – and the feedback already received from the volunteer monitors is mostly positive. Six known nests in the vicinity of Van Reenen and Ingula Nature Reserve have also been monitored, with confirmed breeding at all sites.

Anyone willing to assist with this monitoring initiative is asked to contact Carina Coetzer at carina.coetzer@birdlife.org.za”



NEW WAKKERSTROOM BIRD CLUB WEBSITE

We're getting close to going ONLINE with our brand new WEBSITE! Thank you in advance to Jane Harley for all the extra work you have put into this, as well as to Graham Spencer for working with Jane to make this informative, entertaining, and accessible!

That's it from me for this month. Enjoy your birding!

Chris

