



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



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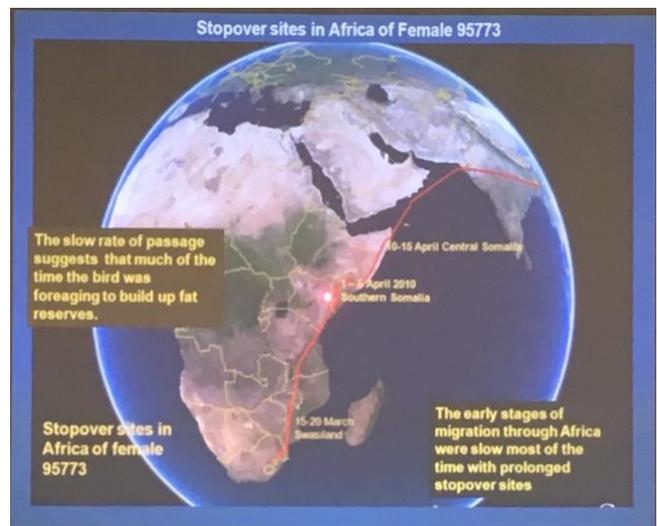
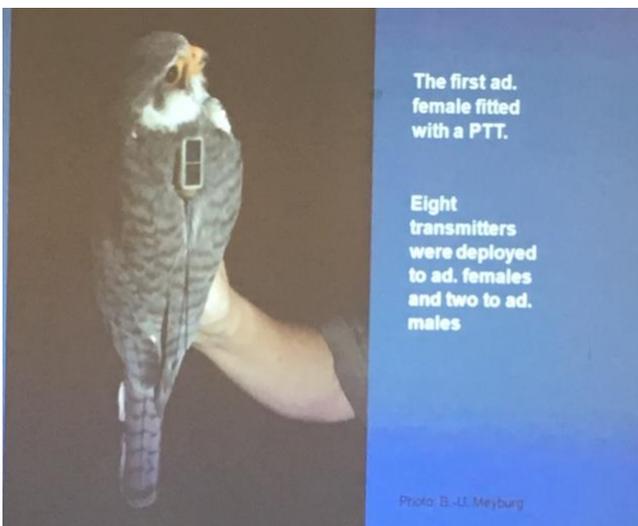
NEWSLETTER NUMBER 70 – AUGUST 2019

Hello fellow Birders,

I hope our 70th newsletter reaches you all in good health and cheer, and with blankets and heaters keeping you warm and cosy! And if you're here in Wakkerstroom, hopefully all the windy days haven't ruffled the feathers too much!

Talk on Amur Falcons by Rina Pretorius

Our speaker in July, Rina Pretorius, gave us a wonderful talk on the Amur Falcon projects she has been involved with for a number of years. It was particularly fascinating to see the routes that these birds cover every year as they migrate – with the little “backpack” transmitters the researchers are attaching to them now, so much new information is coming to light. Long may it continue! – Of course Rina also discussed the thousands of Amurs that were affected by two devastating hail storms in KZN in March this year. Many died or had to be euthanized due to injuries, but many more were saved thanks to the dedication of birding teams, researchers, and other interested parties, thank you to you all!!



The talk was followed by a bring 'n braai, which was enjoyed by all despite the strong winds blowing us about and restricting to us to one instead of two braais. Being amicable birders, no blood was spilt between the braaiers ☺ although we all managed to smell like barbeques ourselves!

Read on about our upcoming talk by Dr Garth Batchelor

Stargazing Event

This proved a very successful venture, and was enjoyed by over 100 attendees, and we are certainly planning for a repeat of this event. Unfortunately the weather decided to keep us on our toes as a strong wind was blowing and made the second part of the event rather cold ... but that's Wakkerstroom, several seasons in a day!

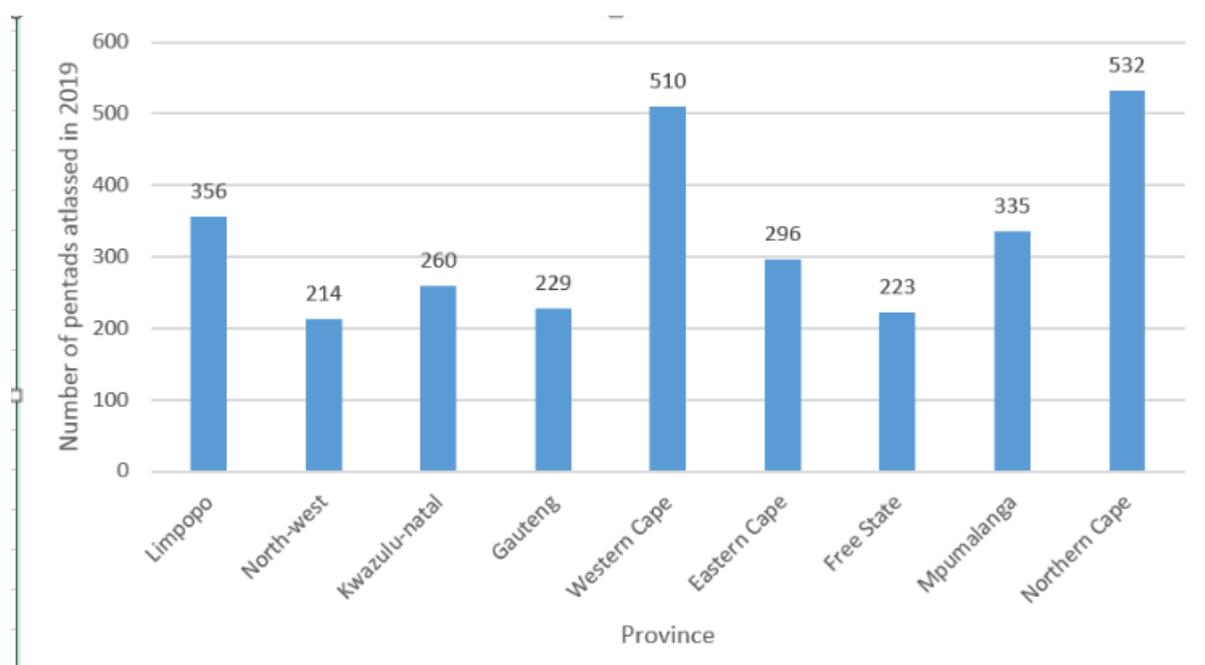
In the afternoon there was a presentation by Head of UNISA's Astronomy department, Professor Derck Smits which certainly lived up to its title "A quick tour through the universe". Then the team set up their 5 telescopes and trained them onto heavenly bodies such as the new moon, Saturn with its spectacular rings, and Jupiter with four of its moons clearly visible. Just to make things really exciting, there was a great meteor burst which looked like fireworks while attendees were waiting for their turns at the telescopes!

We also drew the name of the winner of the telescope raffle. The lucky person was Gordon Billing – many congratulations, Gordon! We are very grateful to John and Judy Ryder for sponsoring the huge 'scope; funds raised in raffles such as these contribute to the maintenance and upkeep of the bird hides, wetland litter campaigns, water quality research, herbicide spraying operations, and other tasks the WBC handles.

Short SABAP2 Update by Sanjo Rose

- 2019 target: we are doing extremely well with reaching the 2019 target of atlassing 5 300 pentads. In total 2 955 pentads have been covered so far. This is super! A big thank you to you all. 😊

Below is an image showing the break-down per province of the number of pentads atlassed. Please do continue to look for new 2019 pentads when planning your outings 😊



- Webinars: We've received lots of positive feedback with regards to the webinars. We're glad that you are finding these useful and hope that many of you will be able to join the one in August. All webinars are recorded and uploaded to our website here: <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/media/youtube#pgcontent>

Under the same 'resources' tab there are lots of articles and some useful documents for downloading.

- Buddies: we'd also like to remind you that we have several people who are willing and available to assist new atlasers in the field. If you would like to be put in touch with someone, or would like to volunteer to be a buddy, please do let us know.

Please do feel free to get in touch with any queries or suggestions.

Kind regards,

Sanjo Rose - Southern African Bird Atlas Project

FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, UCT

sanjojenkins@gmail.com> Phone: 021 650 2421 Web: <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/>

Attention Birders/ Mountain Bikers!

Take a Ride on the Wild Side, with Phil Liggett

BirdLife South Africa, ZEISS and Phil Liggett invite you to take part in our annual mountain bike adventure fundraiser. This year we will be cycling through the spectacular Pafuri in the Kruger National Park accompanied by the voice of cycling, Phil Liggett.

A mountain bike wilderness trail is a one-of-a-kind bush experience for the adventurers and nature lovers. Spend 3 days cycling through Big 5 country, accompanied by Phil Liggett, in the beautiful Pafuri Camp in northern Kruger National Park.

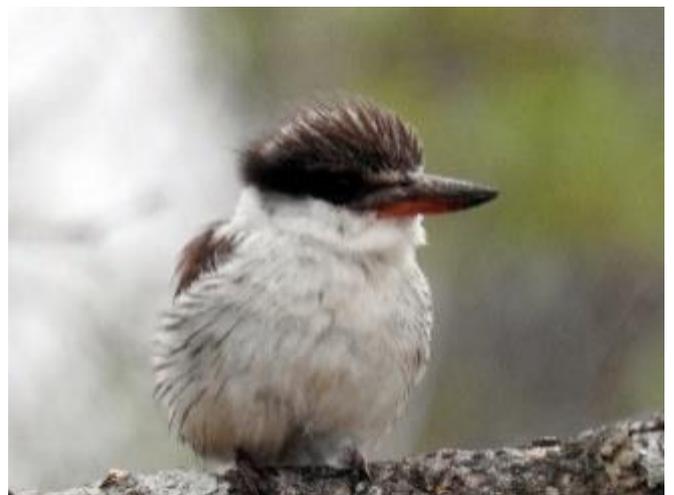
Date: Fri 1st – Mon 4th November 2019 (3nights)

Venue: Pafuri Camp in Northern Kruger National Park

Cost: R16000 per person sharing *includes accommodation, food, drinks & guided activities.

Book by 31 July at the special rate of R15, 750pps

To book contact hiral.naik@birdlife.org.za and reference "Phil Liggett Cycle"



Upcoming Talk on Crowned Eagles of Mpumalanga, by Garth Batchelor, Sat. 17 August



Crowned Eagle population along the Drakensberg escarpment through the location and monitoring of Crowned Eagle nests. Nests are monitored to determine the population fecundity, record prey selection, identify threats and to document Crowned Eagle behaviour.

Being a forest specialist, the Crowned Eagles in Mpumalanga occur where there are fragments of indigenous temperate forest or dense woodland in mountainous granitic areas where they breed in large riparian trees along drainage lines. The spacing between the nests, in suitable habitat, is relatively uniform suggesting that the population could be saturated.

The current study has been undertaken for 12 consecutive years during which time over 50 Crowned Eagle nests have been located. The focus of the study has been on fledgling success as a measure of the population health. The fledgling success is high with few instances of breeding failure. The breeding cycle of Crowned Eagles in Mpumalanga is predominantly every alternative year. Small antelope are the preferred prey. The presentation will cover some of the highlights of the study to date.

Dr Garth Batchelor studied Zoology at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, his Honours at Rhodes and completed an M.Sc. and Ph.D. on fresh water fish and aquaculture from the Rand Afrikaans University. He worked for the former Transvaal Division of Nature Conservation and later was the Director for Environmental Management for Mpumalanga Provincial Government. He has been retired for the past three years and studies Crowned Eagles in his spare time.

Burning Programme

With the help of the Working on Fire group we have started a programme to burn the embankments on each side of the Amersfoort road bridge and part way along the Oude Stasie road. Strong winds have put the WOF group behind time a little and only one side has been done so far. The first picture shows Vusi Sibaya walking ahead at the base of the embankment starting the fire and then the fierceness it reaches in seconds.



August Diary

Saturday 3rd: Our monthly Wetland Walk starts around 8am as it's pretty nippy earlier, but of course you're welcome to arrive before that. Coffee and tea provided. Meet at the bridge over the wetland on the Amersfoort road.

Saturday 17th: 11h30 – Talk on Crowned Eagles by Dr Garth Batchelor at the BirdLife South Africa Centre, followed by a bring 'n braai. The talk will last around an hour, by which time the braai fires will be lit and ready. The Bird Club will provide salads and rolls, as well as plates and cutlery. Please bring your own meat and drinks. **N.B.** please for catering purposes, send Brian Guerin a Whatsapp (083 415 6701) to let us know how many people will be in your party.

That's my two cents for this time. Keep birding – like the little fellow below!

Chris

