



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa

Principal supporter of the Wakkerstroom Junior Bird Clubs

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 73 – February 2020

Hello fellow Birders,

Did you manage to survive all 572 days of January?? I hope it meant you had lots of chance to do some birding, as there is some exciting stuff out there now that most of the country has had a good amount of rainfall. Let know if you have seen anything interesting or unusual! Here is a typical "right place, right time" birding tale

KITTLITZ PLOVER SIGHTING by Graham Spencer

On 26th December which most of us older folk still call Boxing Day, we took an afternoon drive to Zaaihoek Dam. A pleasant slow drive stopping regularly for various birds.

Some highlights were a pair of Wattled Lapwings with two juveniles and further along were three Blue Cranes. But the most exciting was a Kittlitz Plover taking short and low flights from roughly the same spot just inside the fence by the road. Then, while we were watching it on the ground with binoculars, we were fortunate to see a very young chick appear through the grass and waddle about half a metre, then disappear under the parent's body. Very fluffy and very cute. One of those "right place, right time" moments.

We finished with a nice sunset at the dam wall.



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CAR COUNT – SUMMER 2020

As always, the last weekend of January saw the Summer 2020 CAR (Coordinated Avifaunal Roadcount) in South Africa ... where we count not cars or roads, but mostly large birds and indicator species along specific routes. Up to now this has been done twice annually, a summer count in January and a winter count in June. At the briefing a few days before the count, Kristi Garland from the BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre gave a talk on how counts have changed over the years and possible reasons for falling or rising numbers of species and numbers. It was found that seasonal rainfall, changing land usage, as well as human error can have wide-ranging effects on the counts, and there is also missing data due to incorrect logging, computer error, or incomplete routes. Kristi also suggested that it might be more sensible to do four counts annually instead of two. Therefore, 2020 will be the first year where we will do not just the summer and winter counts, but also an autumn and a spring count. There must be at least 2, if possible up to 4, team members in each car – the more eyes out there, the better. All the better if one of the team members can do atlasing as well, thereby noting all the species seen and not just the CAR ones.

The other main change will be that teams will each cover the same route every time instead of rotating routes. This will enable teams to keep an eye on changing agriculture and other factors that might influence the count. Over time, a solid database will emerge and reveal positive as well as negative data giving a clearer picture of the state of the larger birds along routes.

For the summer count, there were seven routes covered by six teams. All but two routes reported less numbers and species of birds than in the previous summer count (the other two routes had a sharp increase as the routes were not completed last summer). While this is alarming, there are many factors involved in this, such as the fact that we have had six seasons of drought conditions, the increase in agriculture along routes, varying weather conditions on the days the counts take place, and so on – therefore much of this is out of our hands. So until we have more seasons and counts to look back on, one or two counts in themselves do not show the story. But it will all be interesting to collate over the years and look at trends.

We can always use more team members on the routes, so please let us know if you would like to help in this citizen science project. The autumn 2020 CAR Count will take place on Saturday 18 April. Please contact Kristi if you are interested in helping with these Kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za

Here are a few photos from the day ... as always you will note an important trend essential to bird watching – the refuelling stops!!



Miles, Kristi, Len and Belinda enjoying life!



John Burchmore staring wistfully into the distance ☺



Graham and Marilyn, one actually birding ☺



Size doesn't always matter, Len – inedible mushrooms



Judy-Lynn with the essential hot coffee!



Elize and Brian looking very organised

WBC February Diary

Tuesday February 11 – Monthly outing, this month a return visit to The Restory, a good summer birding spot. To leave the Wakkerstroom library at 07h00. Bring the usual accoutrements, chairs, goodies to eat and drink at the lovely Angus family farm.

Saturday February 22 – our Annual General Meeting, 11H00 AT Birdlife South Africa Education Centre. Followed by a talk on raptors by Ulrich Oberprieler, well known for his superb courses on nature related topics and an enthusiastic wildlife photographer. His book “Raptor Identification Guide” is still a classic. This should be a good one so please come along! His talk will be followed by a bring ‘n braai. Bring drinks. The club will provide salads.

Please Note: everybody is welcome to attend the AGM and braai but only club members may vote at the AGM should a vote be necessary.

GENUS PROFILE PAGE – PHOENICOPTERUS (FLAMINGOS)

This was sent by Rita Wiesemann, one of several in the series – thanks Rita!

The Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland used flamingos as croquet mallets, presumably because of their long necks – longer than any other bird relative to body size – and their upside-down mallet-shaped heads with large bills. There are three genera of flamingos: three species of *Phoenicopterus* (red-feathered), one species of *Phoeniconauas* (red naiad) and two species of *Phoenicoparrus* (red water bird). The word flamingo derives from the Spanish *flamenco*, meaning flame-coloured.

The flamingo's bill allows it to feed like baleen whales; in both animals the inner part of the jaw is covered with numerous lamellae and the tongue, moving over these lamellae like a piston, filters out microorganisms from the water. These microorganisms, animal and plant plankton, contain carotenoids, protein pigments that give the birds their colours. Because the concentrations of these pigments in their food sources vary, the colour flamingo populations and individuals varies from whitish to red.

The six species of flamingo are found primarily in the southern hemisphere, but also in Spain, the Caribbean and coasts from Arabia east to India. They are very social birds, often found in flocks numbering thousands of birds. The warm alkaline lake provide the birds abundant algae, which itself is dependent on the droppings of the birds for nutrients.

The names of the birds are pretty straightforward. *P.roseus* (Latin: rose-coloured) is the Greater Flamingo; *P.ruber* (Latin: red) is the American Flamingo; *P.chilensis* is the Chilean Flamingo; *P.minor* is the Lesser Flamingo and *P.andinus* is the Andean Flamingo. *P.jamesi*, James's Flamingo, was named after British tycoon Harry Berkley James, who sponsored an expedition that discovered the bird in Bolivia in 1886.

Flamingos build a volcano-shaped nest and usually lay one egg on the top. The grey-plumaged chick is born with a straight red bill that develops the adult curve later. Filter feeding by the adults poses a problem for feeding the young, but a special adaptation solves the problem. The crop, an expanded part of the oesophagus, produces a protein-rich secretion that both the male and female feed to the young. It is called flamingo milk and is similar to pigeon milk.



Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)



Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*) © Albert Fronemann

A NESTING TALE by Graham Spencer

“A couple of months ago we had a pair of Greater Striped Swallows begin building a nest under our patio roof and close to the kitchen window.

After several failed attempts they gave up due to the mud not sticking properly resulting in the nest crashing to the floor.

They did attempt more building at the front of the house but unfortunately with similar results.

Not long after, they returned to building on the exposed timbers of our patio roof in a more secure position. We watched the pair daily working very hard, ferrying bits of wet mud and building tirelessly. They would sit on our fairy lights’ wires to rest and twitter (no smartphone!)

Eventually, a superb example of a swallows nest was realised and we were so happy.

We watched on happily as the swallows were lining the nest with soft furnishings (not from Louisa’s Botselos!)



Then came more disaster – a pair of Grey Headed Sparrows began a series of attacks to try to commandeer the nest from the swallows. We became concerned for the swallows after having watched them for so long tirelessly building and we didn’t want them to lose their nest.

We decided to intervene. We tried to shoo the sparrows away and we had limited success for a short time. Then we began to see a pair of White-Rumped Swifts also trying to take over the nest.

The swallows were becoming outnumbered. Sadly for them, the swifts remained in control (even with another vain attempt by the sparrows)

With all the in and out of the nest by different birds, there has been some collateral damage. The entrance hall has fallen down but the main body remains and the swifts are roosting every night, and we hope to see and hear some chicks soon.”

Sadly, a few days ago Graham informed me that the nest had collapsed during the night. The swifts had still been living in it at the time of their housing disaster. It’s tough out there!



On a more cheerful note, **John Burchmore** took these gorgeous photographs this week of the next generation of local guineafowl. No doubt everyone will look at these and say “Awwwww....” Go on, you know you want to!



It’s that time of year again

© J. Burchmore



One out, many indoors

© J. Burchmore



Lots to discuss!

© John Burchmore



Don't shove!!

© J. Burchmore



Fresh air at last!

© J. Burchmore

Superb photos, John, thank you for sharing!

NEW BILLBOARD BY BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA IN SANDTON

BirdLife South Africa is pleased to have two clever animated adverts at the corner of Jan Smuts Avenue and Bompas Road in Dunkeld, Johannesburg (one of the busiest intersections in the city). The billboard is two blocks from Isdell House, our head office in Dunkeld West. The adverts, as part of our "Think Birds" campaign, have the messages "We love free darter" and "Petrel increase: we love it!". *Mark Anderson, CEO BirdLife South Africa*

So be sure to have a look next time you're in that neck of the woods.

WAKKERSTROOM CENTRE ACTIVITIES AND TRAINING

I've nicked this off the BirdLife South Africa 27-31 January news brief

This week, the Wakkerstroom Centre was a hive of activity. Monday saw most of our weekend admin being completed by Daphne Pyott. She also attended to a range of administrative duties, assisted by Kristi Garland. Another influx of bookings was received this week, including a large group for the month of April. Tuesday saw Kristi, assisted by Sharmaine Allen, completing the last CAR route in Wakkerstroom. It was a rather long day in the car but highly worthwhile. Heading straight back to Wakkerstroom in the afternoon, Kristi attended the Wakkerstroom Tourism Association's Events meeting. The meeting focussed on the calendar of events for 2020 in the village. Watch this space for regular updates on these happenings. Wednesday morning saw Kristi and Fanie du Plessis having a Skype meeting regarding the Centre and maintenance tasks set for the coming weeks. Kristi also submitted her and Lucky Ngwenya's draft appraisals for 2020. Lucky reports the following sightings this week: Amur Falcon, Lanner Falcon and Ground Woodpecker on the Piet Retief Road, Blue Korhaan, Blue Crane and Pale-crowned Cisticola on the Amersfoort Road and lastly, African Quailfinch and Black-bellied Bustard near Fickland Pan. Between Dirkiesdorp and the Amersfoort Road, Kristi reports great sightings of Secretarybird, Black-winged Stilt, Denham's Bustard and Yellow-fronted Canary.

Environmental Education Projects

Wednesday afternoon saw Kristi attending the Country College Junior Bird Club meeting. As previously mentioned, once all the school's extra mural activities officially start, the Junior Bird Club seems to rise in popularity. This week saw an increase of 15 learners across the juniors and seniors. They looked at basic bird ID this week – some learners remembered the work we did last year and shone at the various activities. The plan is to put this recall into practice next week with a mini outing around the school – armed with binoculars and field guides. Kristi met with Carol Preston on Thursday to further discuss the way forward with the Clay Edu-Centre's programme for the year. After finalising this, they then met with the head teacher at the Clay to ensure that everyone is on the same path with regards to continuing the Environmental Club. They official start with 50 learners on the 6th February.

Working on Fire

The Fire team has had a rather busy week – having scheduled meetings and activities each day. Monday, Tuesday and Thursday were dedicated to alien plant removal and slashing at the Centre whilst Wednesday was spent at a local school and in the community conducting awareness programmes. The team is booked out for the whole of next week on a local farm.

Yikes Kristi get bored much???? Got your plate full as always!

That's it from me for the month – hoping to see as many of you as possible at the AGM!

Happy birding,

Chris