



# Wakkerstroom Bird Club



*Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa*

*Principal supporter of the Wakkerstroom Junior Bird Clubs*

## NEWSLETTER NUMBER 87 – DECEMBER 2021

Dear Wakkerstroom Bird Club members and friends,

Can you believe we are already in December... This year has definitely flown by. On behalf of the Club committee, we would like to thank you for your continued support this year, attending our monthly Saturday vlei walks, presentations and talks as well as our outings, both close to home and a little further afield.

At our last committee meeting, we started to put together our plan of activities for the first quarter of the new year. Please do mark these in your diaries and remember to bring a friend along to one of the events.

### January

8<sup>th</sup> Vlei Walk

19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> Peter Greeves on traveling through the Galapagos and Ecuador

17h30/18h00 @ BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre

### February

5<sup>th</sup> Vlei Walk

8<sup>th</sup> Outing to Memel

26<sup>th</sup> AGM – details to be released soon

### March

5<sup>th</sup> Vlei Walk

8<sup>th</sup> Outing

### April

2<sup>nd</sup> Vlei Walk

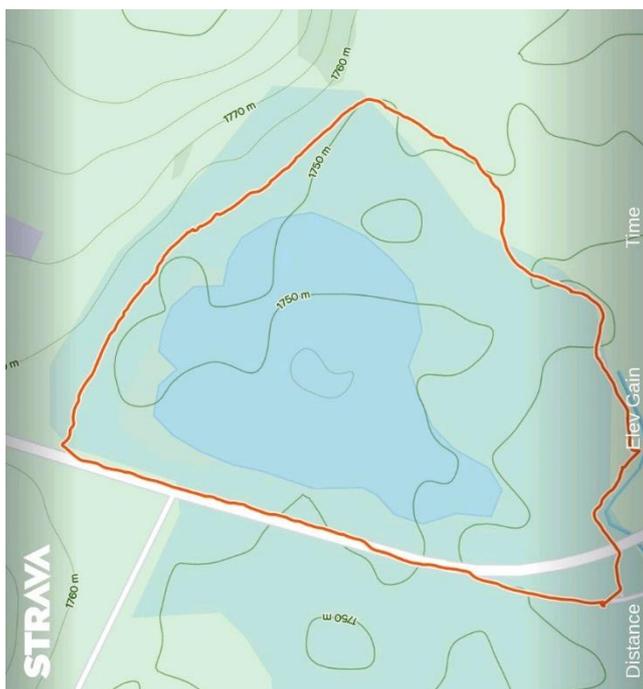
12<sup>th</sup> Outing

20<sup>th</sup> Evening meeting/talk

## ***Wetland Trail update***

This year saw the club start to raise funds to develop a low-impact trail around the eastern section of the wetland. Our current funds sit at approximately R7 000. We are immensely grateful for your support of our various raffles and do hope that we can count on you in the new year to assist in raising a bit more to make sure we develop something really exciting, adding to the birding experience in Wakkerstroom. The map shown, outlines the route we are planning, incorporating the Clive Beck Hide with the installation of benches at specific points to rest and bird watch from as well as 'steps' leading one down from the road to the wetland edge and back to the picnic spot. The trail will also include interpretive signage, filled with useful and interesting information about the wetland and related biodiversity.

If you would like to make a donation specifically to this initiative, please feel free to contact Kristi on [kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za](mailto:kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za) or [info@wakkerstroombirdclub.org.za](mailto:info@wakkerstroombirdclub.org.za).



## **Wakkerstroom Bird Club's Second-Hand Bookstore**

Do visit the store if you haven't been to the Total Garage yet! You are sure to find something interesting, and at phenomenally low prices. Our permanent book sale is open Monday to Saturday for your convenience, and with low, low prices. Hundreds of titles available and not only novels. We have a wide range of genres to choose from including politics, faith, war, gardening, handcrafts and many more! Our thanks to the many people who donate books, buy, and read books from us and then donate them back and buy more, very much appreciated!!!! All proceeds go to preserving our avian heritage and removal of alien vegetation in the wetland area.

## **News from BirdLife South Africa**

**Migrant birds:** It has come to our attention that there have been a number of reports of deaths of migrant birds, particularly European Rollers. There have also been observations of Honey Buzzards and Falcon deaths. The reason behind these deaths is unknown at this stage. As part of the investigation, we are looking into any other reports within the region of unusual deaths of migrant birds. If you have observed any deaths or are aware of any such events, please contact me directly with the relevant information. My email address is [bronwyn.maree@birdlife.org.za](mailto:bronwyn.maree@birdlife.org.za)



**SHOP** For the **BIRDS!**  
SOUTH AFRICA

We're closing from  
**15 Dec '21 to 3 Jan '22**

Any online orders received after  
**Wednesday 15 Dec '21**  
will be delivered in January 2022

HAPPY  
*holidays*



**BIRD OF THE YEAR 2022**  
Cape Gannet (*Morus capensis*)

Read more at:  
[www.birdlife.org.za/bird-of-the-year-2022/](http://www.birdlife.org.za/bird-of-the-year-2022/)

**BirdLife**  
SOUTH AFRICA  
Giving Conservation Wings

## **Birding Big Day 2021 – The biggest ever!**

BirdLife South Africa's 37<sup>th</sup> Birding Big Day took place on Saturday, 26 November. This event sees teams of birders from around the country attempting to log as many species as possible within a 24-hour period. For the first time, more than 400 teams registered, representing more than 1600 birders. In addition, many bird clubs, school, and scout groups participated, bringing the estimated total participation to over 1700 people. The day saw very challenging birding conditions, especially in the Western Cape, with high winds and rain, yet 659 species were recorded by all the teams.

Mpumalanga province recorded the most species – 522 across all the teams, followed by Limpopo with 499. Nationally, all the teams recorded just over 46 000 sightings on BirdLasser, and more than 800 records were received for species conservation concerns. There were full and ad-hoc protocol cards submitted, covering nearly 600 pentads contributing valuable data for the Southern African Bird Atlas Project. (Taken from the Birding Big Day report by Ernst Retief, Birding Big Day Organiser)



## Report of Global Big Day from Club members – 9 October 2021

Saturday October 9 was Cornell University's October Big Day, which is an annual event open to everybody, worldwide. The object is to count as many species as possible on that day, no limitations of pentads, restricted routes, certain species etc. It's a fun day, wide open, no limitations. The University issues remarkably interesting stats when all the reports are in from observers. These can be viewed on [www.octoberbigday2021](http://www.octoberbigday2021) and are worth a look!

Wakkerstroom Bird Club had three teams out, travelling wherever they wished and for as long as they felt like it, restricted only to the 24-hour period, that's not an issue to any of us! The full list of species recorded by WBC totaled 115, which I think is one of, if not, our club's highest total for this event, great stuff!

The object of this article is to encourage more members, learners, or better birders, to take part, either as scribes (species recorders) or observers contributing to the team totals. I have asked a member of each team to contribute an article on their impressions and what they gained on the day, here goes ours:

Our group, Elize McAllister, John Barrow and I left town around 07h30 (after some garden birding) for what turned out to be a long day, with superb weather though, ending about 17h00. We had elected to do the wetland, Martin's Dam and then along the Newcastle dirt road and veering left to go around Groenvlei, over the hill and back to town. Our only deviation from that plan was due to there being large piles of rocks and soil on the side of the road as we left Groenvlei, obviously due to looming roadworks. We decided to turn right on the D765, shown on Warwick Tarboton's map but without the identifying number. It brings you to the area where the Cloud End development was to be. This is where you turn left, along the Wetland Game Reserve fence and back to town. This proved to be a good decision as on John Burgers lands, we saw the probable highlight of our trip, a mixed flock of some 39 Blue Cranes and 34 Grey Crowned Cranes feeding together in a stubble field. Quite something! Earlier we also recorded our first 2 White Storks for the circling over the Slang River Bridge as we left town. In total we recorded 779 species and as mentioned earlier the Wakkerstroom Bird Club team recorded 115 species. We three are regulars for CAR Counts, Birding Big Day, and this event. We enjoyed the weather, a day birding not ruled by pentads, pre-set routes etc. as well as some beautiful scenery, just birding for the pleasure of it! *(Brian Guerin)*

**Rina Nel-Tomes reports** - Global Big Day was n baie aangename eerste evaring vir my. Behalwe dat voëls kyk een van die lekkerste stokperdjies is was ek die dag saam met Penny en John Burchmore. Almal wat hulle ken weet dat hulle kennis van voëls en hulle geluide uitsonderlik is. Hulle entoegasie oor alles in die natuur tot die groot molslang wat ons gesien het is aansteeklik. Ons het die dag begin deur eers die voëls in ons onmiddellike omgewing aan te teken. Ek het n draai by die vlei gemaak en gelukkig twee Mahems gesien asook n Blouvalk, n paar Bosveld fisante en n Rooikophoutkapper.

Stiptelik 7 uur was ons oppad. Voëls kyk is nie vir laatslapers nie. Na n vinnige draai rondom die vlei het ons die Groenvlei roete aangepak. Penny het die opskryf werk gedoen en saam het ons elke bewegende objek wat enigsins soos n voël lyk van nader bestudeer. Gelukkig het dit in die omgewing gereën so alles het saam gewerk behalwe die wind. Dit het ons nie afgesit nie en die aantal voëls wat ons kon aanteken het vinnig vermeerder.

Een van die hoogtepunte was die Oostelike Langbek lewerik. Ons was ook gelukkig om n paar Blou kraanvoëls te sien asook n Langkuif arend. Die Paulpietersburg pad was uitsonderlik mooi. Die pragtige beeste was beslis die moeite werd om te sien. Natuurlik was n heerlike tee en koffie met padkos deel van die dag. Ons het by n lekker koelte boom stil gehou. Dit is juis waar die molslang sy verskyning gemaak het.

Ons was so 2 uur terug in Wakkerstroom met n spesie lys van n paar in die 70s. Wakkerstroom omgewing leen hom regtig vir aangename voël kyk geleenthede en wat dit meer besonders maak is as jy saam met Penny en John kan gaan.

# South African Bird Atlassing Project 2

SABAP2 is a citizen science project that is driven by the energy of several hundred volunteers who are mapping the distribution of birds across several southern African countries. SABAP2 is the follow-up project to the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP1), which took place from 1987-1991. The second bird atlas project started on 1 July 2007 and is still growing. The project aims to map the distribution and relative abundance of birds in southern Africa and includes South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, eSwatini, Zimbabwe, Zambia. To gather data, volunteers select a geographical 'pentad' on a map and record all the bird species seen within a set period, in order of species seen. This information is uploaded to the SABAP2 database and is used for research and analysis by several different agencies, including the South African National Biodiversity Institute, BirdLife South Africa, as well as academics and students at various universities.

Since 2007, more than 17 million records have been collected with about 2 million more being added each year. This valuable dataset is key to determining the conservation status of bird species, correctly assigning red-list status, and establishing Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas, as well as forming the basis for

informing environmental impact assessments. To gather valuable and useful data atlas coverage needs to be as thorough as possible. Ideally, each pentad should have a baseline of at least four comprehensive checklists ('cards'), over several years and seasons. On the coverage maps this will mean a pentad turns 'green.' Coverage intensity is scaled from yellow to dark purple, making it easy to identify which regions need more checklists.

Atlasing is fun and gives your birding a purpose! If you are keen to get involved, click on the 'How to Participate' tab or get in touch via our Facebook Group or Page and we'll help you get started!

SABAP2 is based at the University of Cape Town and is funded by the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology and the South African National Biodiversity Institute. The project is actively supported by BirdLife South Africa and BirdLasser.



## Junior Bird Club Newsletters

This year brought much change in the manner in which we support our three Junior Bird Clubs. As COVID had so drastically impacted on the learning time teachers had with the learners so did it affect our time with the learners. The best and most practical way through which to keep our contact with the club members was through producing the Amaphiko – giving juniors wings newsletter. We produced six issues during 2021, with the last few focussing on the Spring Alive Project. Each issue was warmly welcomed by the clubs, filled with information, activities, and competitions.

Issue 1 June 2021

**Amaphiko**  
Giving juniors wings

The official Wakerstrom Junior Bird Club Newsletter

**Bird of the month - Egyptian Goose**

**Wakerstrom Bird Club**

**Content**

- Bird of the month: 1
- Important environmental days in June: 1
- How to make an eco-brick: 2

**Important environmental days in June**

World Environment Day: 5th June  
World Water Day: 22nd June  
World Oceans Day: 8th June  
World Environment Day: 5th June

**How to make an eco-brick**

1. Wash and dry plastic bottles.  
2. Cut the bottles into halves.  
3. Fill the bottles with clean, dry waste (e.g. paper, cardboard, fabric).  
4. Press the waste down and seal the bottles.  
5. Use the eco-bricks for building or as planters.

Issue 2 July 2021

**Amaphiko**  
Giving juniors wings

The official Wakerstrom Junior Bird Club Newsletter

**Bird of the month - Little Grebe**

**Wakerstrom Bird Club**

**Content**

- Bird of the month: 1
- Important environmental days in July: 1
- How to make an eco-brick: 2

**Important environmental days in July**

World Environment Day: 5th July  
World Water Day: 22nd July  
World Oceans Day: 8th July

**How to make an eco-brick**

1. Wash and dry plastic bottles.  
2. Cut the bottles into halves.  
3. Fill the bottles with clean, dry waste (e.g. paper, cardboard, fabric).  
4. Press the waste down and seal the bottles.  
5. Use the eco-bricks for building or as planters.

Issue 4 October 2021

**Amaphiko**  
Giving juniors wings

The official Wakerstrom Junior Bird Club Newsletter

**Spring Alive Mascots**

**European Bee-eater**

**Content**

- Spring Alive Project: 1
- Spring Alive Mascots: 2
- Spring Alive Project: 3
- Spring Alive Mascots: 4

**Important environmental days in October**

World Environment Day: 5th October  
World Water Day: 22nd October  
World Oceans Day: 8th October

**How to make an eco-brick**

1. Wash and dry plastic bottles.  
2. Cut the bottles into halves.  
3. Fill the bottles with clean, dry waste (e.g. paper, cardboard, fabric).  
4. Press the waste down and seal the bottles.  
5. Use the eco-bricks for building or as planters.

## Local guide sightings



David Nkosi

7 Nov – Caspian Tern on the Amersfoort Road

11 Nov – Cardinal Woodpecker in the village

14 Nov – first White Stork of the season in Dirkiesdorp

Lucky Ngwenya

November – Black Swift, Alpine Swift and Common Swift at the wetland, Black Cuckoo and Fiscal Flycatcher on the Jankieshoek Road, Pallid Harrier on the Sandfontein Road, Eastern Long-billed Lark, Rock Kestrel and Banded Martin on the Paulpietersburg Road, Red-billed Teal on the Kaalport Road.

## Fantastic Journeys: Shorebirds are next level athletes

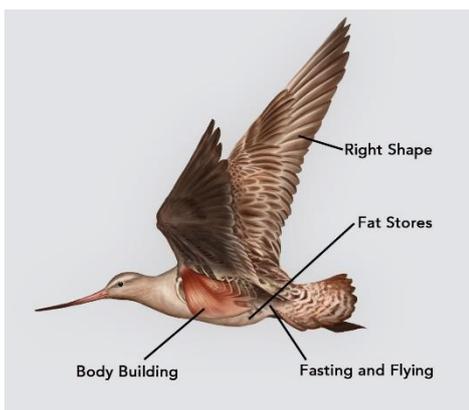
Shorebirds are the undisputed marathon champions among migratory birds. About 20 species of shorebirds have been recorded making nonstop flights longer than 5,000 kilometres, or 3,100 miles—about the distance from Boston to San Francisco. No other species of migratory bird has been recorded completing a nonstop flight longer than 4,000 km.

The longest known shorebird flights—about 12,000 kilometres and nine days in length—belong to the Bar-tailed Godwit during its migration from Alaska to New Zealand. But even small shorebird species make epic flights. The Semipalmated Sandpiper, which at about 22 grams weighs less than an apple, makes nonstop flights of 5,300 kilometres from Canada to South America—that's the aerial equivalent of completing 126 consecutive marathons.

To accomplish these incredible migratory feats, shorebirds are legendary gorgers. Red Knots stopped over in the Delaware Bay on migration feast on horseshoe crab eggs and more than double their body mass in just three weeks. Not all of that food goes toward fuel. Research on Whimbrels stopped over in Chesapeake Bay showed that the protein from a feast of crab eggs went directly into producing eggs when the Whimbrels arrived on their breeding grounds in Churchill, Manitoba, just days later.

In this way, shorebirds rely on habitat across hemispheres, which means shorebird conservation requires international efforts. Protecting important habitat for a single shorebird species could unite a native Inuit community in Alaska, a California rice farmer in the Central Valley, and a Mexican fishing village in a shared goal. Shorebirds are a unique opportunity for conservation diplomacy—a chance to bring the peoples of the Americas together for birds.

How Do They Manage Such Extreme Endurance? Flight is one of the most energetically costly forms of locomotion, with long-distance flight being especially expensive and requiring a suite of incredible physiological adjustments. Scientists are still just beginning to understand the incredible athletic feats of shorebirds, only recently discovering that some shorebirds migrate at the altitudes of jet-liners, while others fly their entire migrations at speeds approaching 100 kilometres per hour (or more than 60 mph). Future research will continue to elucidate what makes it possible for shorebirds to push the boundaries of what humans' think is possible. At present, here's what we know about how they do it:



Bar-tailed Godwits hold the record for longest nonstop flight of any bird: 7,250 miles in 8 days. Read more in our story [Flight of the Kuaka](#). *Illustration by Jillian Ditner.*

### *They Have The Right Shape*

Long pointed wings allow shorebirds to efficiently carry heavy loads, while a long, sleekly shaped body helps them minimize drag while in the air. This aerodynamic design allows shorebirds to fly at high speeds while migrating, enabling them to travel long distances while maintaining their heading in the face of crosswinds that threaten to blow them off course. Shorebirds' body shapes may also enable them to climb to high altitudes more easily, where they can avoid high air temperatures and find favourable tailwinds.

### *They Build Up Fat Stores*

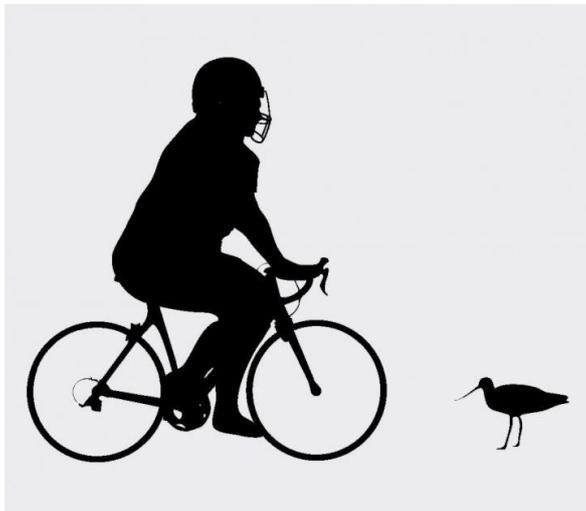
Unlike humans, birds rely predominantly on fat to power their endurance exercise. Fat holds significantly more energy per unit than carbohydrates. Before departing on their migration from Alaska to New Zealand, Bar-tailed Godwits more than double their body weight. Most of that added weight comes in the form of fat, which comprises up to 55 percent of a departing godwit's mass.

### *They Can Fly While They Fast*

Bar-tailed Godwits burn about a calorie over every 3 km of flight, but they don't add back any calories over their 12,000-km flights—fasting for the entire two weeks of their fall migration. Upon arrival in New Zealand, the Bar-tailed Godwits weigh about half of what they did when they departed Alaska, as they have burned through nearly all of their fat.

### *They're Incredible Body-Builders*

Because they grow so heavy for their migrations, shorebirds also need to bulk up their flight and respiratory muscles to help carry all that weight and pump blood to supply all of the extra tissue. Bar-tailed Godwits nearly double the size of their pectoralis (breast) muscles, as well as the size of their heart and lungs. To accommodate their musclebound migratory physique, shorebirds shrink the organs they don't need, reducing the size of their stomach and gizzard prior to departure.



If cyclists prepped for the Tour de France the way godwits do for migration, they would need to double their body weight in fat before getting into the saddle and attempting to ride. Imagine an NFL lineman on a racing bike! *Illustration: Jillian Ditner.*

### *What Would It Take For A Human To Measure Up?*

Cyclists competing in the Tour de France burn more than 8,000 calories per day in order to maintain metabolic rates five times higher than their base metabolic rates. Bar-tailed Godwits migrating from Alaska to New Zealand must be able to maintain metabolic rates more than nine times higher than their basal rates for over nine days. In order to duplicate the feats of these migratory shorebirds, cyclists would have to nearly double that energetic output—and do so without food or water. The average

professional cyclist weighs 160 lbs and maintains 2 to 3 percent body fat. Were they to prepare for a Bar-tailed Godwit's migration, they would need to put on more than 160 additional lbs, of which at least 126 lbs would need to be fat. Can you imagine a 320-pound cyclist (the size of former NFL defensive lineman William "The Refrigerator" Perry) pedalling through the French Alps?

(Lifted from [www.allaboutbirds.org/news/fantastic-journeys-shorebirds-are-next-level-athletes/](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/fantastic-journeys-shorebirds-are-next-level-athletes/))

## **Unusual sightings**

Two pictures of the same bird, a beautiful male Violet-Backed Starling, showing how the sun angle "alters" his magnificent colour. This is the first time that I have spotted this bird in Wakkerstroom, but a pair was sighted subsequently to this. An intra-African migrant that breeds here October to January. (*Brian Guerin*)



## **End of year function**

The club recently held the end of year function at Wetlands Game Lodge. We had a great turn out from the members, with a couple of new faces too. A bird list was drawn up for the venue which ended with approximately 50 species. Thank you to Wetlands Game Lodge for hosting us and to you, for joining.



Till next time, keep safe and keep on birding! We would love to hear more from you – please feel free to drop me an email with your unusual sightings, a report on a recent trip or even a suggestion of what you would like to see in your newsletter. From ours to yours – all the best over the festive season.

Kind regards

Kristi

Vice-chair WBC

[info@wakerstroombirdclub.org.za](mailto:info@wakerstroombirdclub.org.za)

