



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 23 – JUNE 2014

Notice of Annual General Meeting.

The Annual General Meeting of the Wakkerstroom Bird Club will be held at 11h00 on Saturday 19 July 2014 at De Oude Stasie, Wakkerstroom.

AGENDA:

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Chairman's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Election of Office Bearers (Nominations will be accepted from the floor)

To be followed by: 11h30, A talk, "Eagles of Africa", by special guest, **JOHANN KNOBEL** and then 13h30 Lunch: Set Menu at R40.00 per person.

Please Note that we would like to have a handle on the number of people who would like to stay on for lunch at this special event. In order to do this we ask that you book as early as possible with Hannelie on 078 416 3712. Many thanks.

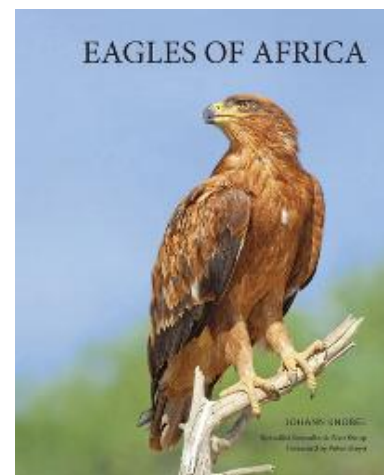
Our guest speaker at the AGM on Saturday July 19, De Oude Stasie

Johann Knobel has been interested in eagles since childhood, and has spent more than twenty years collecting photographic material for his book *Eagles of Africa*. Johann also embarked on a study of the utilisation of environmental legislation in the conservation of birds of



Tawny Eagle Juvenile – Johann Knobel

prey, with special emphasis on eagles. He is married to Ina and they have two sons, Johann and André. His recent book, "*Eagles of Africa*" showcases the 26 eagle species that occur on the African mainland in words and images. The publication of *Eagles of Africa* was the fulfillment of a dream that Johann had for many years. He conceived



the idea to produce an eagle book in 1991, and it was finally published by Game Parks Publishing and Sunbird Publishers late in 2012 and was available for distribution in early 2013. Alan Kemp acted as Specialist Advisor and there is a Foreword by Peter Steyn, acknowledged experts in the raptor field.

Bird of the Month: Crested Barbet

Scientific Name /Meaning: *Trachyphonus vaillanti* – Greek *trachy* – rough; *phonus* - voice, *vaillanti* – named after Francois Le Vaillant, who is believed to be the first real ornithologist to visit the Cape. More about him below!

General: These colourful birds are probably more often heard than seen, their characteristic staccato, old-fashioned typewriter call carrying for some distance. They are terrestrial whereas other barbets stay in the trees. Both sexes sing, sometimes duetting. They are resident and largely sedentary.

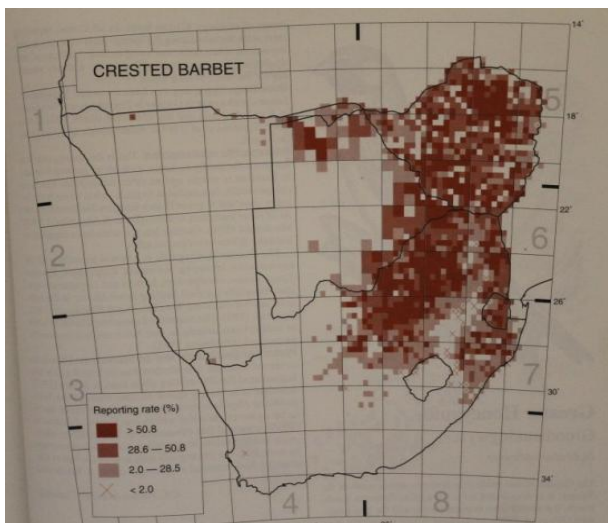


Crested Barbet

Note: Le Vaillant was given to embellishing details of his travels and was not always accurate in his descriptions. He even made “new” birds from parts and feathers of others! Le Vaillant did not agree with the Linnaen system and gave all his birds’ French names, of which Bateleur remains in use today.

Description: This colourful bird, the largest Barbet in the sub-region and the only one showing sexual differences, is unmistakable with his gaudy colour scheme! The sexes are very similar while the female is generally duller and having less red around the face. There are 2 sub-species recognized in southern Africa.

Status/Conservation: Crested Barbets are considered common and not endangered, recent expansions of its range suggest a thriving population.



Food and Feeding Methods: Omnivorous, feeds mostly on insects when fruit is scarce and bashes snails on the ground to gain access. They also feed on nectar and occasionally rob nests of eggs and chicks.

Habitat: They prefer moist or dry open woodland, grassland with scattered alien trees, has adapted well to suburban gardens and feed trays.

Breeding: Crested Barbets are monogamous, solitary nesters and quite territorial with nests normally spaced widely apart. They usually nest in a cavity, dug by both sexes, in a tree trunk. The tunnel ranges from 300-400mm in length and is set at a right-angle

short entrance tunnel. Will occasionally use swallow nests or a Sisal log tied to a tree. They are preyed upon by both Greater and Lesser Honeyguides. 2-5 eggs are laid and adults are regularly double-brooded and can rear 4 broods in a year. Nestlings are evicted and killed by Common Mynas.

Monthly Pentad Report - to June 15

The total species count at June 15 stands at 205. The only addition since our last report, Greater Honeyguide, was from Judy-Lynn Wheeler’s garden.

The first phase (July 2013 to June 2014) is almost finished and it would be appreciated if members would hand in their final checklists ASAP after that. A process of double checking will be done and the final product printed out for those who would like to see it. The second year of what is proposed as a 3 year project will then commence immediately. As always the request is for more members to submit lists to

increase our coverage. The system is simple and ALL sightings, including from your own garden, are valuable.

Our trip to the Hlatikulu Crane and Wetlands Sanctuary by Wade Sexton

On the way to the Crane Sanctuary we found a dead serval on the road along with sightings of the Blue and Grey Crowned cranes. On our arrival at the Sanctuary there are a few of the cranes there that are allowed to walk around freely such as Boston the Grey Crowned Crane. Boston is the naughtiest Crane as he was constantly biting my hand and always following me around. He once even jumped up onto the car and we couldn't leave because he just wouldn't move. I was just about to meet Trinity (the baby Wattled Crane). I had been waiting for this opportunity my whole life and I was really excited. The other Crane chick's name is Blake and I never got to see Blake because of him not being allowed to be around human contact as he will be released into the wild and his parents are raising him until that point. Trinity will probably be used for rehabilitation or he will be sent to Joburg Zoo. It was finally time to see Trinity and they gave me a hand mitt that was meant to look like an adult Wattled Crane. His food was porridge mixed with egg pieces. They told me to walk around and take him for a walk and feed him between breaks. As we walked I communicated to him by making a "brrrrrr" sound as it helps him know where you are. The Sanctuary is set near a fantastic vlei which has great bird life. I was on an afternoon walk when an African Rail flew past and disappeared into the reeds. The little Crane was constantly falling over as we walked. The next day we took a different route through the habitat and we came across a little dam where we found Cape Shoveler with 8 baby chicks. We had Blacksmith Lapwings constantly flying above our heads screeching which we thought that there were eggs or a nest somewhere. As we walked around I taught the little bird how to forage for insects and we found some snails in the mud that he could eat. I was continuing with my walk with Trinity when I spotted the Blacksmith Lapwing eggs, it was amazing, we didn't stay too long as we didn't want to disturb the birds any longer. Trinity had an afternoon nap where my friend, Tristan and I went birding around the vlei. We had amazing sightings of African Rail, African Marsh Harrier and we were lucky enough to hear the Red-chested Flufftail. On my way back there was a Wattled Crane called Walta and I decided to use my "brrrrr" chant to it and it went berserk. It flew around the cage and bobbed its head up and down and had its mouth wide open. It was almost as if it tried using a mating ritual on me or something. Anyway that's it! We left the next morning and I will never forget that little bird as it was a life changing experience.

Note by the Editor: Wade (age 14) is my Great – Nephew, residing in Kloof KZN. He is an exceptionally keen birder



Wade with the puppet & Trinity

Vanishing of the Bees - Little Bee - Big Mystery. By Norman Dennett

This interesting, frightening, but nevertheless entertaining film, tackles an important problem. The sudden disappearance of honey bees in vast numbers has been labeled Colony Collapse Disorder and has been observed in many parts of the world. This has very serious implications because 1/3rd of our food is reliant on Honey Bees for pollination.

“Vanishing of the Bees” certainly found an appreciative audience at our recent DVD evening. Some 20+ members braved a cold evening to watch the film. The clear explanation of the life cycle of the bee was well demonstrated and it was very evident that the alarming message which was the film's main theme struck home.

The size and scope of the commercial beekeeping industry in America, the huge numbers of hives and the vast distances they are transported as they follow the pollination seasons, was surprising. Some of the

practices used within the industry are cause for concern with long term implications that are not fully understood.

Although there is, as yet, no definitive proof, the consensus within the knowledgeable bee keeping community, both beekeepers themselves and research scientists working on the problem, is that the increase in the use of systemic insecticides has long term genetic effects upon the bees.

The steady increase, all over the world of the planting of monocultures, (the planting of huge areas to single crops), is deemed necessary to provide the ever increasing demand for food. The methods needed to sustain this are thought to be the root cause of many problems. The film concludes with an appeal, more of a hope, for the return to mixed farming practices and the suggestion that instead of a bee farmer with 60,000 bee hives, we should encourage 60,000 people to each have a bee hive in their garden.

IFAH (I Found a Hedgehog) Project

What? You say, Hedgehogs in this area? Rubbish! A few weeks ago I would have agreed with these sentiments but after visiting the facebook page "IFAH-I FOUND A HEDGEHOG, *Atelerix frontalis*" and an exchange of e-mails with one of the people heavily involved in the project I'm curious to find out more.

This project is being run by an MSC Zoology Student Jessica Light (nee Artingstall) whose parents are shareholders in Big Tree Cottage here. Although Wakkerstroom appears to fall outside the Hedgehog's known range several sightings from Newcastle, Volksrust, Amersfoort and Standerton may indicate that the map needs revising. Some new records even extend towards Swaziland.

Although we don't expect a plethora of records we would like to try and help with this project – wouldn't it be exciting to come up with some sightings from our area?

To this end the organisers need:

1. Notification of all and any sightings with fairly accurate details of where the animal was seen, GPS co-ordinates if possible,
2. Photographs of the sighting would be of value,
3. Historical records are also wanted, in fact any records, even dating back as far as 100 years are of value for comparison purposes. Families with historical roots in the area may be able to help in this regard. Old records, dated even to the nearest decade, will be useful!

The Club has offered to gather information and it would be very much appreciated if you have any recollections, photographs or sightings in the area if you could contact Jessica at

ifoundahedgehog@gmail.com AND also copy us in at wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com so we can share your experiences. We recommend you visit their facebook page as mentioned above for more information and some superb pictures of these very photogenic animals.

Interesting Local Sightings

We have nothing to report this month. It seems like winter is really biting?



A South African hedgehog or in Afrikaans - 'n Suid-Afrikaanse krimpvarkie

Special Offer

Keith Davidson is offering club members a number of water bottle bird feeders at a special price of R70 each. The set consists of a sturdily made metal holder, a glass bottle and a metal top/dispenser.

They are very good value at this price and Keith will deliver to purchasers and are in time for winter supplementary feeding! Please order directly from either Brian on 017 730 570 or 083 415 6701 or John Barrow on 082 255 6778. The club will receive a donation from each sale.



Membership

We are pleased to welcome Bilkis Moola and Sue Dandridge to our Club and are also glad to mention that 55 members have renewed their memberships in this financial year. For information, renewal memberships are due on the anniversary date of the member's joining the club.

If anyone is unclear about their membership periods, please contact me on 0822556778 or e-mail the club on wackersbirdclub@gmail.com. Or, just wait for our invoice!

Tongue - tied:- from Stephen Moss' book "Everything you wanted to know about birds ... but were afraid to ask"

The bird with the longest tongue relative to body size is the Wryneck, whose tongue may measure more than eight cm (over three inches) – about half its body length.

The Club's outing in June

Another Enjoyable and Informative Visit to John and Tienie Burgers' Farm at Groenvlei, near Wakkerstroom.



We encountered welcoming hosts, a superb garden, and good birding on a 14 000 hectare Farm.

Some 40 species ranging from Waxbill's and White-eyes to Black-shouldered Kites and Secretarybirds were sighted. A beautiful, crisp, sunny day with a deep blue sky so typical of the High Altitude Grassland in winter.

Thank you John and Tienie, we look forward to our next visit to your beautiful farm.

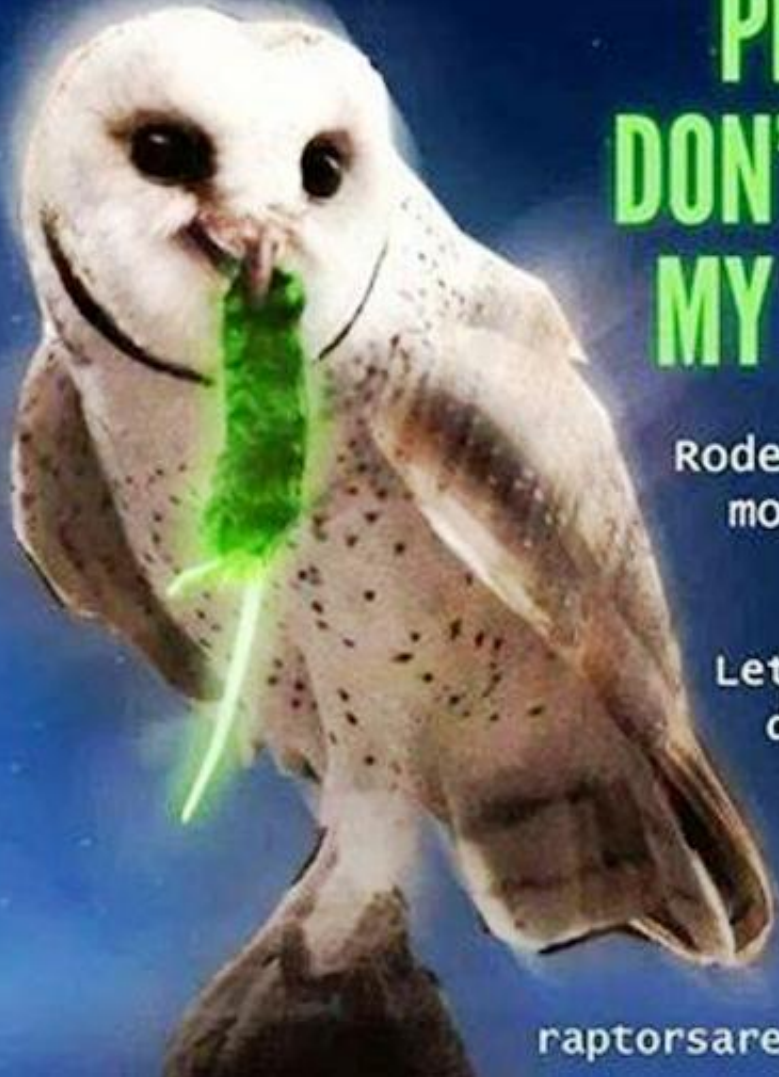
This Secretarybird is one of a pair sighted just after we left the farm. The magnificent creature struts its stuff as only a Secretary Bird can !

A Couple of Interesting Websites. –Brian Guerin.

1. When Claudia Holgate gave her excellent talk on Antarctica she mentioned her blog site to me. The address is holgate.co.za and is packed full of information and photographs about her work and travels. The site is headed "Following Clouds, Let the Adventure Begin." Fairly apt as she is currently exploring Japan, the Russian Far East and Alaska on the Silver Discoverer! Recommended site.

2. For those interested in Butterflies, moths and activities surrounding them, the Lepidopterist Society has issued its first e-magazine "Babbel Blues" and it is most attractive. They are also asking for articles, pictures etc. for inclusion in future issues. The contact address is babbelblues@lepsoc.org.za

**IN ONE YEAR I WILL
EAT 1,000 RODENTS.**



**PLEASE,
DON'T POISON
MY DINNER.**

Rodenticides kill
more than just
rodents.

Let birds of prey
do their job.



raptorsarethesolution.org

THE EDITOR,
JOHN BARROW