



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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Claudia Holgate's Talk 15 June:



A pleasing group of over 40 people turned up for Claudia Holgate's talk, on Monday afternoon at the BirdLife Centre. They were entertained on the subject "Galapagos - the Enchanted Islands" with some excellent photographs. Her knowledge of the Galapagos Islands is extensive resulting from many visits. The description of the development of the bills of 13 species of Galapagos Finches, other life forms (e.g. Marine Iguanas) and how the volcanic Islands were formed by pressure bursting through the earth's crust always fascinate!

A little known fact is that Charles Darwin spent only 5 weeks on the islands and, on his return to England, couldn't accurately recall which island he had gathered many of his specimens! He was helped in this task by the master of the Beagle, Captain Fitzroy, himself a keen "citizen scientist" as we might call him today. The story of Fitzroy, Darwin and the infighting of scientists and Clergymen of the day regarding the evolution debate makes for fascinating reading.

Picture shows Claudia's constant companion, Duncan, no doubt the most widely travel Wild Dog in the world!

The talk was preceded by a bring 'n braai which was well received. We would like to move these winter meetings from evenings to afternoons to avoid the cold that might put people off attending – please give us your comments.

Brian Guerin.

Who painted the first bird? Well, we don't know the actual artist, but cave paintings in southern Europe that dates back at least 18,000 years depict recognisable images of owls and long-legged water birds (probably cranes, herons or storks).



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NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN of the Club's Annual General Meeting to be held at De Oude Stasie, Wakkerstroom at 11h30 on Saturday July 18.

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Apologies
2. Minutes of 2014 Annual General Meeting

Proposed:

Seconded:

3. Chairman's Report
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Election of New Committee
6. General

By Order of the Committee,

John Barrow,
Secretary.

Note: A meal with 2 optional dishes will be available at a cost of R50 and a cash bar will be available. For catering arrangement please book direct with Hannelie on 078 416 3712.



Some Interesting Websites/facebook Pages:

OO (Ornithological Observations). This is a semi-scientific electronic publication from BLSA and the ADU (Avian Demography Unit) at the University of Cape Town. It has an excellent Archive link to previous issues – don't be put off by this preamble – it's well worth a browse!

Bird Club Resources (facebook page). This is a fairly general site, hosted in part by Peter Greaves who addressed an evening meeting (Peru) of ours last year. Usually worth a look but could be updated more frequently.....

biodiversityexplorer.org – a website dedicated to "The Web of Life in South Africa" – the site has many themes, like Wild Biodiversity, Home, Food and Drink etc. The illustrated section is very attractive and the aim of the Bird Highlights section is to contain information and pictures of every species in S.A. Excellent illustrations.

Norman Dennett shared Rina Pretorius' post to Wakkerstroom Group.

The Amur Falcon is the little Raptor we see in the hundreds in our area from December to April. Just look at how far they come to spend with summer with us! This is one of the reasons that Wakkerstroom is such an important place for birds and why we must care for our precious environment.

Thanks, Norman – some good conservation news for a change! Editor.





Rina Pretorius, BirdLife Northern Natal:

Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*) Migration! Male (red line) finally 'home' now he can begin with his 'homework', 67 days since he left his overwinter roost! He will spend the next 5 months at the breeding grounds. Female (yellow line) did +- 460km east and now in eastern Burma. Thanks to Péter Palatitz and team for sharing the data.

Patrick Benson: Last week I met with Dr. Suresh Kumar of the Wildlife Institute of India, who has been conducting research on this species in Nagaland in eastern India, where there was massive killing of Amurs a few years ago for food. Subsequently, this situation has been reversed and the local villages have become protectors of these birds and host to large numbers of ecotourists from around the world. This is a good news story, in a staging area for hundreds of thousands, if not millions of these little travelers. Congratulations Suresh

Request from Eleen Strydom



Most of our members and other residents of Wakkerstroom will remember our own “Secretary Bird Lady”, Eleen Strydom. She has a favour to ask of us!” Dawie de Swart from the Bloemfontein Museum is doing a study on African Rock Pipits. He is however struggling to get sightings. Will it be possible to put word out to the Wakkerstroom Birders to report sightings with GPS coordinates please? They can send the sightings with coordinates to either her (StrydomME@tut.ac.za) or to Brian (bguerin@nelweb.co.za) who will forward them to me.” She also says that it looks like she will be back for another season, but not on a permanent basis and will let us know when and, then can give a talk on the findings of the project as well as future plans for the study.

Oceans of Life photographic competition

Birdlife South Africa advises that the annual competition opened on 3 June, and entries are open until 15 August. The winning photographer will receive a berth in a share-cabin on board the 12-day ‘Spirit of Antarctica’ expedition sponsored by Aurora Expeditions! Submit your photos using this link: <http://www.oceansoflife.co.za/conditions> (if it doesn’t work, try leaving off the https://www)

Kruger National Park's Big 5 of Alien Invasive Plants.

You may recall in previous newsletters that we have mentioned an invasive plant, *Parthenium spp*, which was identified on the vlei by our member from Ithala, Peter Ruinard. Despite searching we have not yet been able to locate it although we accept Peter's knowledgeable opinion and hope to locate it when flowering. If you see it, please bring it to our attention. The June 2015 issue of Sanparks Times listed this alien as number 2 on the list and described it as "potentially the worst invasive plant we have faced in a long time" and was first recorded in Kruger in 1991 and was not considered a threat, however today this South American species is spreading rapidly. The other 4 "charmings" are Prickly Pear, Triffid Weed, Lantana and Common Thorn Apple. We will keep you posted.



Fairy Flycatcher:

The Fairy Flycatcher or Fairy warbler (*Stenostira scita*) is a small passerine bird, and is an endemic resident breeder in South Africa but occurs also in Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia, and is a vagrant to Zimbabwe and Swaziland.



A Fairy Flycatcher photographed in South Africa, 2013, by Francesco Veronesi of Italy

Stenostira scita is a common seasonal migrant, breeding in karoo scrub and fynbos in the southern highlands, and migrating north in to spend the southern winter in thorn scrub at lower altitude

Description

The Fairy Flycatcher is 11–12 cm in length. The adult is pale grey above with a black mask through the eye and a white supercilium. The wings are black with a long white stripe, and the long black tail has white sides. The throat is white, the breast is pale grey, and the belly is white with a pinkish-grey wash to its centre. The sexes are alike, but the juvenile is browner than the adult. The eye is brown and the bill and legs are black.

Behaviour

The Fairy Flycatcher is monogamous unless its mate dies, when it will seek a new partner. It builds an open cup nest from thin stems and other plant material and lined with plant down. It is placed in the branches of a tree or shrub but well concealed. The female lays two or three green eggs. This bird is usually seen alone, in pairs, or small flocks. It feeds on small insects and other invertebrates, foraging in the foliage like a warbler.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

How do Birds Keep Warm in winter?

When the cold hits us we simply added layers of clothing, hats and gloves or snuggle under a feather duvet. Birds have many physical and behavioural adaptations to keep warm, no matter what the low temperatures of their surroundings.

Physical Adaptations

Feathers: Birds' feathers provide remarkable insulation against the cold. The oil that coats birds' feathers also provides insulation as well as waterproofing.

Legs and Feet: Birds' legs and feet are covered with specialized scales that minimize heat loss. Birds can also control the temperature of their legs and feet separately from their bodies by constricting blood flow to their extremities, thereby reducing heat loss even further.

Fat Reserves: Even small birds can build up fat reserves to serve as insulation and extra energy for generating body heat.

Behavioural Adaptations

Fluffing: Birds will fluff out their feathers to create air pockets for additional insulation in cold temperatures.

Tucking: It is not unusual to see a bird standing on one leg or crouched to cover both legs with its feathers to shield them from the cold. Birds can also tuck their bills into their shoulder feathers for protection.

Sunning: On sunny winter days, many birds will take advantage of solar heat by turning their backs to the sun (therefore exposing the largest surface of their bodies to the heat) and raising their feathers slightly. This allows the sun to heat the skin and feathers more efficiently. Wings may also be drooped or spread while sunning, and the tail may be spread as well.

Shivering: Birds will shiver to raise their metabolic rate and generate more body heat as a short term solution to extreme cold. While shivering does require more calories, it is an effective way to stay warm.

Roosting: Many small birds will gather in flocks at night and crowd together in a small, tight space to share body heat. They can roost in shrubbery or trees, under eaves or in outdoor sheds. Even individual birds choose roost spots that may have residual heat from the day's sunlight, such as close to the trunk of a tree or near any dark surface.

Plagiarised from The Far South Coast Birdwatchers Newsletter, Volume 20, Number 3, June 2015.

From the Overberg, Cape.

Hi Wakkerstroomers –it is hard to believe that it is six weeks since I left Wakkers for the great, new adventure. It took a while but now I am feeling as though this is “home” and I am loving it. Have done a bit of getting to know this very vast area but still a long way to go – and now discovered where South is so that's a help - a step forward! Two weeks ago the first rain fell – 130+mm in 2.5 days and what a difference that made to the landscape which changed within a short time from endless rolling grey/white hills and dales to refreshing green as the shoots popped through that unlikely looking ground!



A friend of long standing who lives in Somerset West, spent a few days with me last week and she, like Ann Cleal, LOVES every bird and doing this sort of monitoring and observing – it was great to have Ally with me and I know she will spend a lot more time helping. The first evening she was here, we went to a roost site called Soutpan where hundreds of cranes roost. Close by en route, is another pan and there were already a few cranes and around 200 Flamingos there and although we went to the other one I had a gut feeling about the first one so we went back and as the sun set over the mountains we managed to count 160 Blue Cranes although we felt there were more but it got too dark to count. We also saw some flying in the direction of the other pan - a lovely way to spend a few hours. People ask about this project so here is a brief outline to put you in the picture:

The Blue Crane, *Anthropoides paradiseus*, is well-known as South Africa's national bird. Found only in southern Africa, this iconic species faces an uncertain future. The population's stability is undermined by threats including development (wind farms, power lines and urbanisation), habitat loss due to climate change and human alteration of the landscape (e.g. through mining) and destructive human activities (poisoning and illegal trade). Historically Blue Crane numbers and distribution patterns have changed with time. Recently the agricultural activities and the resultant landscape mosaic of agricultural patches in the Overberg Region of the Western Cape have benefited Blue Cranes and the area has become a stronghold for the species. Looking forward, changes to the socio-economic environment and climate in the area could alter farming practices to the detriment of the cranes. In addition, fatal collisions with power lines in the area currently kill 12 % of the Blue Crane population annually. The Overberg Region is a hotspot for wind farm developments and, together with the associated increase in power line instalment; these most likely will impact the Blue Crane population and exacerbate the negative effect of unnatural Blue Crane fatalities in the area. In response to these threats the Endangered Wildlife Trust's objective is to identify the habitats these birds require for foraging, roosting and breeding and to ensure the continued existence of these birds. We aim to identify and describe important Blue Crane sites and their flight patterns in the Overberg region in order to gain information crucial for advising developers prior to construction. Importantly the project will allow us to address threats to Blue Cranes and develop relationships with local farming communities in the Western Cape thereby increasing awareness of biodiversity and Blue Crane conservation. (In a nutshell)

My Garden “neighbours” Although around my house there is exotic *stuff*, some HUGE Blue Gums and other, there are other nice trees and shrubs and a lovely water section and in the short time we were at home between outings, Ally saw from the verandah – All Cape – Batis, Bulbul, Canary, Crow, Wagtail, Weaver and White-eye also, Bokmakierie. Levillant’s Cisticola, Reed Cormorant, Red-eyed dove, Fork-tailed Drongo, Common Fiscal, Guinea Fowl, Lesser Honeyguide, Speckled Mousebird, Streaky-headed seedeater; Common Starling; Malachite Sunbird;



Southern Double-collared Sunbird;, Hadeda – by the hundred and I hear the Eagle Owl quite often. There is a lot of cheerful noise and action around – lovely, and when out counting cranes, I am amazed at the large number of Denham’s I see.

The Sea and MeAlthough I have never regarded myself as a great fan of the ocean, I am SO enjoying nipping down to the lovely, quiet beaches and popping in for a wonderful bit of freshly caught and cooked "fis n tjips"! This weekend I ate this treat at the southernmost point of our continent –Agulhus with a little White Fronted Plover close by, waves rolling into a little bay, and rugged rocks that must have a million tales to tell – such as the ship-wreck close by.



Until another time – keep warm and well. Glenn and “da boyz”

Club Membership

We haven’t attracted new members for quite some time! We’re still sitting on 68 members; 3 of whom are Honorary Life Members. (You may recall we published a short article with picture of Yvonne Clulow who, at 90, is our oldest HLM.) We do considerably better on our facebook page with 193 “likes”! Would that these could translate into members! If anyone knows of someone who would be keen to become a member, please contact the editor on wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com. At present, the annual membership fee is R100.00 which is lower than the cost of a packet of cigarettes and much better for you!

Diary of Events:

We have decided to move our evening meetings to daylight hours; our experiments so far have been successful.

Saturday July 4 – Vlei Walk – meet at the bridge from 07h00, our recent walks have been successful and the weather kind. Last month's total of 44 species was excellent.

Tuesday 14 July – details are to be advised – we are considering attempting a CWAC Count on the vlei but some practical details have to be worked out. CWAC stands for Co-ordinated Water Bird Count, one of the acronyms that the (here we go again!) ADU, the Animal Demography Unit in Capetown loves. If this doesn't come to pass an alternative outing will be organized.

Saturday July 18 – our Annual General Meeting – Malcolm Drummond, who has a long term relationship with us here in Wakkerstroom via White-winged Flufftails and sponsorship of the Drummond Hide will be our guest speaker. Please remember to book with Hannelie on 078 416 3712 for catering purposes.

Saturday August 1 – the winter CAR (Co-ordinated Avifaunal Roadcount!) will take place. Judy-Lynn Wheeler will give details in the near future.

BLSA'S Fence Mitigation Project: (Pictures show Cape Longclaw fatality, taken near Wakkeestroom.)



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During the Secretarybird Project the team received a number of reports of Secretarybirds that had died after becoming entangled in fences, a hazard faced by many bird species. To determine which species these are, BirdLife South Africa has launched the Fence Mitigation Project. During its first phase, members of the public are requested to submit details of incidences they come across.

Since the project's launch, 44 records of 22 species have been reported: African Grass Owl (4), African Rail (1), African Wood Owl (1), Blacksmith Lapwing (1), Blue Crane (3), Cape Eagle Owl (1), Common Buzzard (1), Crowned Lapwing (2), Eastern Clapper Lark (1), Greater Flamingo (1), Grey-winged Francolin (1), Harlequin Quail (1), Helmeted Guineafowl (1), Laughing Dove (2), Little Bittern (1), Marsh Owl (5), Secretarybird (3), Southern Ground-Hornbill (1), Southern Red Bishop (1), Spotted Eagle-Owl (6), Black Stork (1) and Western Barn Owl (5).

Please submit sightings to: ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za with details such as date, species, type of fence and if possible with precise locations photographs.

Whilst we recognize fences as a fact of life we would also ask interested members to take part in this information gathering exercise, who knows what might be revealed? Editor.

Sony-World – photography Awards 2016 open competition.

Kristi Garland came across this competition. She thinks that it could be quite nice if through the Sandy Twomey Photographic Competition that will be started at the AGM in July, we could enter some really good photos in that competition. The only thing is the closing date for the Sony comp is the 5th Jan 2016. We think this is a good idea, but entrants will probably have to enter their photos themselves.

The link is <https://www.worldphoto.org/competitions/sony-world-photography-awards-2016-open-competition/>. (If it won't open, try leaving off the <https://www>)

Levaillant's Cisticola or **Tinkling Cisticola**, *Cisticola tinniens*, is a small passerine bird

Description: The Levaillant's Cisticola is a small, 12–15cm long, dull-coloured bird with a longish tail and a rufous cap. The upperparts of the breeding adult are grey, heavily streaked with black, and with a rufous panel in the folded wing. The supercilium, face and underparts are buffy white and the tail is russet brown. The short straight bill is blackish-brown with a pinkish base, and the feet and legs pinkish-brown. The eye is light brown. Non-breeding adults are browner-backed, and juvenile birds have yellower underparts. The calls include a musical *chrip-trrrup-trreee*, a wailing *tee tee tee* and harsh alarm notes.

Distribution and habitat: The Cisticola is a resident breeder in eastern Africa from Kenya to eastern South Africa. It is common in reed beds, sedges, rank grass, and similar wet habitats usually near rivers or dams.

Behaviour: Levaillant's Cisticola is seen in pairs, singly, or in small family parties. Flitting through the grass as it forages for small insects. It is vocal and conspicuous, perching on the top of tall grass stems and reeds and making its alarm call.

Breeding: The Cisticola builds a ball-shaped nest with a side entrance from dry grass, cobwebs and felted plant down. It is usually placed in a tuft of grass or weeds, which are standing in, or hanging over water. Nesting occurs from August to October.

Conservation status: This common species has a large range, with an estimated extent of 1,400,000 km². The population size is believed to be large, and the species is not believed to approach the thresholds for the population decline criterion of the IUCN Red List (i.e. declining more than 30% in ten years or three generations). For these reasons, the species is evaluated as least concern.



Levaillant's Cisticola taken by Derek Keats in the Marievale Nature Reserve. RSA

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A Fishy Story:



We are really hoping that at least one of the two immature African Fish Eagles stays permanently in our area. This is Norman Dennett's grab shot of one of "our" African Fish Eagles doing its thing with its fish prey. Member Ann-anonymous reports seeing one of them carrying a Yellow-billed Dusk off for a meal. The eagle caught the duck in the air but it is not certain whether the duck maybe flew up in panic after the eagle's sortie and collided with another bird. This might have made the catch a little easier.

Two very encouraging sightings! Brian Guerin.

N.B. Unless otherwise stated, all tidbits in this newsletter are taken from "Everything you always wanted to know about birdsbut were afraid to ask" by Stephen Moss

THE EDITOR

JOHN BARROW
