



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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Congratulations, Kristi Garland.



The Wakkerstroom Bird Club is very proud to congratulate Kristi Garland on being recognised as one of The Mail & Guardian's 200 Young South Africans of 2015. Flagship of the M & G stable this annual list has become the country's most celebrated hallmark of the up and coming generation, a who's who of young people at the top of their field in 10 categories. Kristi is nominated in the Environment Group for her achievements in Environmental Education.

In 1999 Kristi enrolled at the S A Technikon to study for a Diploma in Nature Conservation, a 4 year commitment. She worked as a volunteer with Wildlife and Environment Society of Southern Africa and was appointed a member of the permanent staff the following year at WESSA's Treasure Beach Environmental Education Centre on the Bluff in

Durban. Originally the old Radar Station, Treasure Beach became one of the foremost Environmental Education Centres in Southern Africa and was highly regarded within the conservation field. Kristi was the Senior Environmental Education Officer and served until December 2008 when she was appointed Centre Manager of BirdLife SA's Wakkerstroom Centre and Senior Education Officer of the Grasslands Environmental Education Project. Kristi is convinced that, "with enough education young people will stop seeing birding as "an old man's pastime" and will become enthusiastic about conservation and habitat protection. She says, "Once people understand the "nuts and bolts" of the environment they develop a drive to conserve it". To this end Kristi has very successfully developed and delivered education programmes such as the Avianator, an avian heritage programme. Working with teachers in many schools, this year alone, this programme has increased 18000 learners' understanding of birds, their habits and their habitats.

Congratulations, Kristi, on the well-earned recognition of your contribution, your achievements and the sheer hard work you put into everything you do.

Wakkerstroom Bird Club.

Migration:

Isn't migrating riskier than staying put? Although undertaking such a long journey may seem a risky strategy, the dangers of staying put for the winter, in a cold climate with little or no insect food, outweigh the dangers encountered on migration. Migration gives birds the best of both worlds. In fact, perhaps we should turn the previous question on its head and ask 'why don't all birds migrate?'

Taken from "Everything You Wanted to Know about Birds . . . but were afraid to ask" by Stephen Moss

CAR Count Winter July 2015

As you are all aware CAR count this season provided us with a few challenges, the most difficult one being a shortage of teams/vehicles due to many people being on vacation. The second challenge was the weather. Wakkerstroom does periodically experience hostile weather conditions and the winter count was simply not possible on the day.

We did however manage to get out there on 8th August 2015 and count four of the main routes with a fifth being counted shortly thereafter. This fifth route is in a different location so there is little or no chance of overlap.

Our team leaders had their work cut out for them this count as we had new volunteers on the routes. We were thrilled to have Miles Dell, his wife Belinda and their young son Tristan joining a team. Shirley Blackwell joined us this season and we hope to see all these new volunteers on many more CAR counts.

Always, my sincere thanks go to the Team Leaders, who give up their time and vehicles to take part in this programme.

I believe the drivers of the vehicles have the hardest job of all. Not only do they strive to keep their passengers safe but they have to understand the intricacies of CAR language. Interesting words like stop; backup; forward; stick bird; another BiSKIT (BSKT or Black-shouldered Kite); look for a well screened donga. (And here our drivers are doing their utmost to miss the potholes)!!

To all our drivers – you are much appreciated.

Despite the challenges we did well this season. The birds are still here! Some 12 species were counted totalling 773 birds altogether. A few Blue Crane, Southern Grey Crowned Crane and Blue Korhaan were seen but the following species showed interesting numbers. Spur-winged Goose (23), Cape Crow (40), Helmeted Guineafowl (589), Black-headed Heron (32), Jackal Buzzard (9), Black-shouldered Kite (23), Secretary Bird (10) and Southern Bald Ibis (23).

We encourage all new birders to participate in CAR (Coordinated Avifaunal Roadcount). Not only does this get you out there searching for these spectacular species but it gives you the opportunity of seeing incredible landscapes – especially if you are in Wakkerstroom District.

Watch the Wakkerstroom Bird Club Newsletters and facebook for information on the summer 2016 CAR Count.



Red-winged Francolin taken during the CAR Count

Migration:

How high do migrating birds fly? Different groups migrate at different altitudes: raptors at around 600–1,000 metres (2,000–3,300 feet); most songbirds at below 1,500 metres (5,000 feet); while waders and geese often travel at 1,500–3,000 metres. **Taken from “Everything You Wanted to Know about Birds . . . but were afraid to ask”**

On Vultures and Raptors:

The following was lifted from Mark Anderson's facebook posting by Norman Dennett and makes for depressing reading indeed. Vultures, in particular, are in dire straits throughout their ranges and ours are no exception!

"The results of this paper (Buij et al. 2015 Oryx) saddened me. How are we going to save Africa's vultures?! "Abstract." Diurnal raptors have declined significantly in western Africa since the 1960s. To evaluate the impact of traditional medicine and bushmeat trade on raptors, we examined carcasses offered at markets at 67 sites (1–80 stands per site) in 12 countries in western Africa during 1990–2013. Black kite *Milvus migrans* and hooded vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* together accounted for 41% of 2,646 carcasses comprising 52 species. Twenty-seven percent of carcasses were of species categorized as Near Threatened, Vulnerable or Endangered on the IUCN Red List. Common species were traded more frequently than rarer species, as were species with frequent scavenging behaviour (vs non-scavenging), generalist or savannah habitat use (vs forest), and an Afrotropical (vs Palearctic)

breeding range. Large Afrotropical vultures were recorded in the highest absolute and relative numbers in Nigeria, whereas carcasses were dominated by Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis* in Central Africa. Estimates based on data extrapolation indicated that within West Africa 73% of carcasses were traded in Nigeria, 21% in Benin and 5% elsewhere. Off take per annum in West Africa was estimated to be 975–1,462 Hooded Vultures, 356–534 Palm-nut Vultures, 188–282 Rüppell's Griffons *Gyps rueppellii*, 154–231



African White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus*, 143–214 Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos*, and 40–60 Crowned Eagles *Stephanoaetus coronatus*. This represents a sizeable proportion of regional populations, suggesting that trade is likely to be contributing significantly to declines. Stronger commitment is needed, especially by governments in Nigeria and Benin, to halt the trade in threatened raptors and prevent their extirpation." (Buij et al. 2015 Oryx). **Mark Anderson.**

The picture is of an adult Rüppell's Griffon in Nairobi National Park. It is a rare vagrant to southern Africa, 3 birds were recorded in 1994 at Blouberg. It is heavily speckled with a pale bill and is larger than the White-backed Vulture. Editor.

News From the Drummond Hide

The Drummond Hide wheel-chair friendly walkway is nearly complete. With a great deal of willing assistance from Graham Spencer it has finally taken shape. The cement work linking the ramp and ground is in place after staining and all that remains to be done is the fitting of runners along the sides of the ramp to prevent toppling off. This material is on order, to be followed by another coat of Waksol. Thanks are due also to Malcolm Drummond for his donation toward the cost.



Yet Again – From the Overberg:

Last time I mentioned that the first capture of Blue Cranes to fit trackers was to take place and now that is past and four birds are happily moving around with their flocks not knowing that they are being “spied on” every day and every move! Almost, anyway.

The farms I chose for this exercise fitted the bill to perfection. Flocks of cranes were around the sheep feeding troughs daily for many weeks – which happens every year, and the owner, MG Lotter, is very interested and supportive of anything to do with the environment and its inhabitants.

A high powered team of experts and experienced people gathered on Monday 3rd August for the week staying in accommodation at Bot Rivier which was convenient to the capture site – sounds so dramatic! There were quite a few choices for setting up the nooses and two were given the nod initially with a further one being adopted on the second day.

Tuesday dawned cold with a gale force wind howling across and through everything but as lines had been laid out the day before we headed out to start the operation. Kevin Shaw from CapeNature, Tanya and I were a bit tense about it all but although they had not caught cranes before, all the other members of the team had used this method to catch other birds for the purpose of ringing and or fitting trackers and were very calm. We walked along the lines closing the nooses then drove off in the 2 vehicles to about 100m away to be ready for quick action when a bird got caught. Patience is the name of the game at this point and Ben Dilley who had worked on the Ludwig’s Bustards said they spent days and days just watching, waiting and hoping. However within an hour and a half our



first crane fell prey and was caught. Obviously we could see the potential of this happening so within a second the vehicles were off and people out and getting the noose off its leg, hooding it and calming it down with soothing purrs! Everyone had their part to play and within a few minutes the bird was sporting beautiful colour rings on its legs, a spot of blood had been taken for sexing purposes and the main part of the exercise was under way. The harness to hold the tracker cannot be fixed on before being put on the bird as each bird is different in size and the harness must be adjusted to go under the wings and back up to the tracker sitting on the back of the bird. This must be firm but not tight, it must not move or chafe the bird and the solar panel must be above the feathers or it won’t charge. Ben Hoffman who designs and makes the trackers is an expert

and has done it many times before and is methodical and calm. And there it was, the first Blue Crane with its tracker, ready to be released and from the moment it was caught to the moment of release was 26 minutes! Fantastic and so exciting – and at last Tanya and I could breathe and smile again. Two hours later we had the second one done and the following day the next two so in three days the operation was complete and all the birds were being followed on Ben and Tansy’s computers.

Having caught Blue Crane chicks in the past by having to run after them which was very stressful for all of us, this method which has been used in some countries for centuries, obviously to catch food or for falconry in the past, is so much more efficient and effective. Firstly, one can catch adults which gives a much better chance of good information as it is reckoned that around 60% of juveniles do not make it to their second year and the way it is done in some places where bait soaked in a drug to make them sleep is used, is a much longer process where recovery areas must be set up, weather conditions must be not too hot or cold and consequences are not predictable. Obviously birds can succumb to stress in any of these situations but this does seem to have an edge on the others providing you have a good team who are quick off the mark and well prepared.

The nooses are of fishing line attached to thin rope which is staked in lines and the nooses when ready, stand up and are fairly visible. We caught Guinea Fowl and sheep too! The sheep were amazing as after the initial shock, they would carry on feeding and as soon as there is no pull on the noose, it opens and the animal can walk away. One of the things we found interesting was that cranes would be some distance off feeding and taking their time about reaching the troughs but suddenly Guinea Fowl would arrive in their numbers and dash in or sheep would arrive and that seemed to give the cranes confidence even if Guineafowl were caught and squawking and flapping around. It was also interesting to see at times they would walk up to the lines, look at them, some would walk away, others walk around to a spot where there were no lines then one couldn't wait and – zap! Once the exercise was over, it was wonderful to see how, the minute they were freed, they took off and flew strongly to join the flock. We have one video showing the bird landing with the others and walking around a bit then, preening and feeding and other birds walking past it as though it was just a late comer! Blue Cranes are fighters and can cause some nasty injuries but with experienced handlers they were soon held properly with feet on the ground and legs in a normal walking position, as, if left on folded legs for long they can suffer serious problems. Only the last caught bird really fought hard but that was probably because it was one of a pair and both birds were caught at the same time. As we only had rings for four birds, one was released.



Setting the nooses.

Reports from the trackers can be scheduled, and to start with the first one is daily at 06:00 then 08:00, 12:00, 15:00 and finally 18:00 but this will change and probably be fewer and at different times as the days lengthen. After two weeks, three of the birds are in and around the Caledon area where they were fitted and one has moved some 100 kilometres north. Tanya and I saw two of the birds with trackers in a flock of around 160 on the same farm where they were caught and they looked strong and absolutely fine.

There will be further such events in a few months time when we hope to fit trackers to breeding birds whose young are almost fledged. That I think, could be quite a challenge – time will tell.

Glenn Ramke

Message from the Editor:

Due to gremlins within the Editor's memory, our usual article on Interesting Local Sightings did not appear in July's edition. As they were indeed most interesting, we didn't want to let them fall by the wayside so we are including them in this month's article. Apologies to those kind folk who contributed their sightings.

Interesting Local Sightings:

On Friday Morning, 21 August, I was driving to work at sunrise when I saw a large bird on the telephone post at Camp 49, I am used to seeing the Jackal Buzzard family there (they successfully raise 2 chicks last year) and assumed it was them, as I was driving past I noticed the "kuiif", turned the car around and confirmed that it was not the buzzard but a Long-crested Eagle, On Saturday I returned with Jenni, the eagle was on the same post but when we stopped it flew to the trees near the river bed. We spoke to John and Penny Burchmore and they asked us to atlas the bird, we decided to complete a full protocol on Sunday starting at Camp 49, sure enough we found the bird again this time in the blue gum trees on the other side of the road. We atlased around the vlei for 2 hours and amassed 61 species, what a great day! But the Eagle was undoubtedly the highlight.

Mike and Jenni Maxted-Smith.





In the southern part of the Luangwa Valley, outside of the National Park in the Game Management Area, is this phenomenal sight – about 400 Southern Grey Crowned Cranes in one area. They obviously roost in this large green clearing which is surrounded by kilometre of thick woodland, mostly Mopane, where we also saw Arnot’s Chat and Racquet-tailed Roller. We were first taken to this clearing in 2004 and were fortunate to go back there in June this year, to be able to see the same sight. It was impossible to get all the birds in one frame. **Bronwen and Keith Davidson.**

Not a local sighting but very interesting, I also saw them in large numbers some years ago in Uganda where they are the National bird. **Brian Guerin.**

28 June – Capped Wheatear- On a firebreak on the Willkie’s farm, fairly close to the farm entrance. A distinctive bird I have seen before. Feeding in freshly burnt grass together with Red-capped Lark, bishops and Ant-eating Chat. **Ann Cleal.**

This attractive small bird is rarely seen in our area and, in fact, has not been recorded in the two years of the Pentad Survey. Roberts lists its distribution as extreme sw Namibia, w and s N Cape, W Cape, Free State, Gauteng highveld, Lesotho lowlands, and w Swaziland. An interesting sighting and a very nice addition to our Wakkerstroom list!

This bird mimics calls of other species, including African Wattled Lapwing, Crowned Lapwing, Temminck’s Courser, Little Bee-eater, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Groundscraper Thrush and Fork-tailed Drongo; it also mimics mammal sounds, including a dog’s bark and a goat bleating.



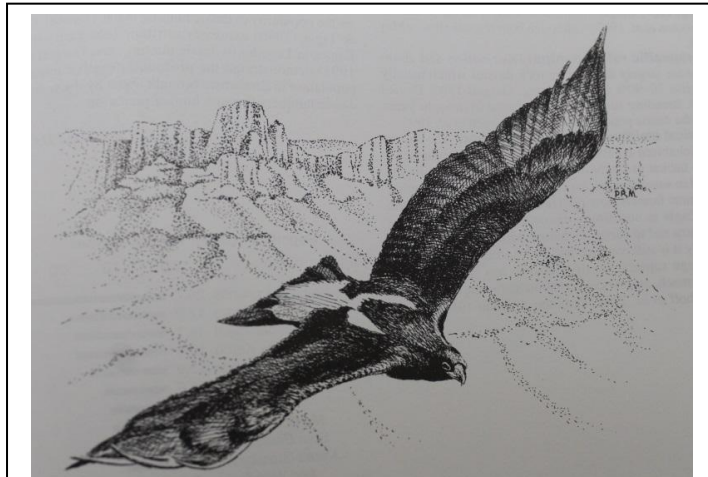
12 July – A pair of Lanner Falcons hunting over the vlei. On the way home later I could see both birds dive-bombing on the flat area opposite Miltec and near the overflow from the sewage discharge. Naturally I turned left instead of right which would have taken me straight home! Both birds were targeting the same spot, either “bombing” or extremely low flights until a small bird broke cover and was immediately struck and carried off to a large electricity pole next to the road. The victim was clearly identifiable as an African Rail. As the second bird landed next to the captor, this appeared to start a dispute over possession and the birds flew off, landing in some trees near the airport hill from where they could settle their ‘domestic’ away from prying eyes. Most unusual

habitat for the Rail – truly was a wandering soul that paid the price.

Ann Cleal.

21 June – seven to maybe nine otters killed and ate a Yellow-billed Duck after a successful ambush. Otters showed very well during the month, and both African Fish Eagles were recorded on several occasions in July. **Ann Cleal.**

July – **Judy Ryder** reports seeing a Verreaux's Eagle sitting on top of a pine tree in her garden, being mobbed by



Verreaux's Eagle in Typical Habitat.

Black-shouldered Kites. **Jenni Maxted-Smith** also reports a sighting of two of these birds flying near Ossewakop. These sightings are way out of the normal mountainous habitat of this large bird and are therefore worth monitoring and reporting immediately. The picture shows the characteristic cross on its back, hence the Afrikaans name, Witkruis Arend.

They are usually in pairs, and pair members remain close together for 75-95% of day and they are territorial year-round. They are active mostly at first light and dusk roosting or preening in shade during midday heat. Roosts on cliffs, often near nest site.

Soars with wings in deep dihedral; glides with wings level or in shallow dihedral. The dihedral, for those like me who didn't know, is the extent to which the bird's wings move up and down in flight relative to its body. ie it soars with wings up and glides with its wings level. Editor.

August 2 - 4 otters sprawled on a bank, giving the impression they had dozed off whilst enjoying the mid-morning sun. All were clearly visible, their coats quite dry and there was no sign of white on the chest or stomach of a couple which were lying belly-up. One of the others, largest of the four, did appear to have a 'grizzled' coat – possibly an old matriarch?

Some +/- 25 minutes after the initial sighting, two roused themselves sufficiently to playfully chase some African Rail and Black Crake feeding in the vicinity. This disturbed the remainder who promptly joined in a general rough & tumble, displaying amazing bursts of speed and dexterity on dry land whilst chasing each other between trees and through the under-storey before taking to water.

A while later, one returned to the original spot and immediately resumed snooze mode. A passing African Rail did a double-take on spotting the otter, cautiously inspected the sharp-end and began what appeared to be an extended detour before simply taking a short cut, walking right over the sleeping animal - which never stirred! ...do I trust my wings or what?

Ann Cleal.

Diary of Events:

Saturday September 5 – Monthly Vlei Walk - meet on the Amersfoort Bridge at 07h30. Maybe some of the newly returned migrants will entertain us! And coffee, too – how can you refuse?

Tuesday September 8 – our monthly outing, this time to Fickland Pan. Leave the Wakkerstroom Public Library at 07h30, we are hoping to add to the list of returning migrants! Bring the usual food/drink requirements and enjoy one of the better waterbird sites in our area. Contact Claudine (083 347 2270) for details.

Saturday September 12 – Bronwyn Howard from Utrecht will be giving us a talk along the following lines:

“Human beings are having an unprecedented impact on the planet - to the point where our demands are jeopardising the future security of numerous species, including ourselves. Natural resources are dwindling apace, plants, animals and birds are dying out in what scientists believe is the sixth greatest extinction on Earth and natural systems are hard-put to mitigate a myriad of human impacts. But all is not lost. Although the future looks bleak, by dint of changing our lifestyles, our economic models and the way we live on the planet, providing habitat for birds and animals as natural areas become ever more impacted, humans may yet save the Earth, many living creatures and ourselves. **Urban Eco Life** is an e-magazine focusing on solutions to the fix humanity currently finds itself in and we will be exploring some of these ideas and themes, as well as providing a blueprint as to how you can secure

your future and that of birds and wildlife in a rapidly changing world” Join us in a bring ‘n braai from 12h30 before Bronwyn’s presentation.

Saturday September 26 –Beginners ID Course - An Introduction to Birds and Birding presented by Kristi Garland and Judy Wheeler at Birdlife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre. Theory and practical in the form of videos and talks on matters such as correct use and settings of binoculars, how to correctly use a field guide and some electronic wizardry. Members R40, Visitors R60 to cover cost of printed material/notes. There will be an optional lunch by Claudine Tavlet. Contact Kristi (0832270128) or Judy (0789887502) to book early. We have plans to upgrade the skills of our learner birders!

We have a very full programme for the rest of 2015 and the Sanparks Weekend in mid-January so watch this space as they say! It includes for October a Spring Alive Weekend on Flight and Migration at BLSA, the Atlas Bash (October), Birding Big Day on November 28 (during the visit of Wits Bird Club) and the Second Sandy Twomey Photographic Competition which is ongoing. Don’t forget the Categories are: People and Portraiture, Landscapes, Buildings and Architecture, Seasons, and, all forms of Fauna and Flora. Don’t forget pictures must have a Wakkerstroom theme/connection. Handsome prizes are available so get out there and start clicking!

A very new possibility is a weekend away to another vulture colony!

Early Notice: The Club’s Annual Function will take the form of a Lamb on the Spit Braai at the Boeresaal, Oude Stasie on November 21. Tickets will cost R100 pp. Further details will be available shortly – this early notice is given because there will be a Fancy Hat (bird theme) Competition (NO Peacocks, Mynas etc.) – so put the thinking caps into gear and join in the fun. PLEASE we would like you to book early with Claudine on 0177300316 or 0833472770.

=== STOP PRESS ===



Tremendous start to our CAR Count!

The sighting of a Black Harrier, and what a co-operative bird! Initially seen in the distance, despite a horrendous amount of heavy traffic, it obligingly changed direction to fly alongside the section of road on which we were parked. It then tilting slightly as though to make sure its white rump was clearly seen!

Ann Cleal.

Description plagiarised from SANBI. With thanks, Editor.

The Black Harrier is a beautiful, eye-catching bird that has black feathers, an obvious white rump, a striking black-and-white striped tail and silver wing panels. Sexes are similar with yellow legs, eyes and cere, but the male has greyer primaries and a more coal-black plumage than the female. Females are generally 15-20% heavier than males. The Black Harrier has a body length of 45-50 cm, weighs between 400-600 g and has a wing span of 1 m. Juveniles have dark brown upperparts with tan feather edges, sand-coloured

under parts and blackish streaks on the breast and flanks. This will be a valuable record for the ADU. Editor.

JOHN BARROW – EDITOR.