

Female European Honey Buzzard – it's Trek Over Africa and Europe:



We have member Fred Kolbe to thank for sending the following article on to us. Although these birds are extremely rare in our neck of the woods the migration story is interesting for its directness from start to finish.

The article continues:

“A female European Honey Buzzard was fitted with a satellite tracking system recently and was of particular interest to locals because it spent most of the austral summer around the town of Reitz in the Orange Free State. She left Reitz to start heading north on April 20 and, on 2 June she finally reached Finland where she will probably spend the boreal summer before probably returning again next summer to visit us in South Africa.

Below is an image showing the data received from the tracker which plots out the route the bird took to head north. So, in just 42 days, she covered over 10,000 km at an average of more than 230km every single day. Amazing!

What I find amazing is how she took a straight line north except for when she had to fly over water (or Sudan).”

Fred Kolbe comments – “Apparently she turned right at the source of the Nile and followed it. I’m still fascinated by the fact that after that deviation she returned to the same longitudinal line she started on and continued until she reached her destination!”

So Sorry to drone (!) on about bees.....but



“You can thank a pollinator for one out of three bites of food you eat” Honey bees pollinate about 40-70% of indigenous flowering plants and are the most useful pollinator for most commercial pollination-dependent crops. About 50 crops in South Africa are insect pollinated, and this pollination is worth approximately R10 billion per annum!

The picture shows a purebred African bee, not an “African” hybridized bee. Here it is extracting nectar from a flower whilst pollen grains stick to its body.

The African honey bee (*Apis mellifera scutellata*) is a subspecies of the Western honey bee. It is native

to central and southern Africa, though at the southern extreme it is replaced by the Cape honey bee (*Apis mellifera capensis*).

Apis is Latin for “bee” and “*mellifera*” means honey bearing.

SUMMER? Glenn Ramke

On a number of occasions since being here, I have heard that summer *really* only comes in about December – except for some very hot days here and there. The rainy season is coming to an end now and although everything is lovely and green, the bright yellow of the canola fields is now more creamy as the flowers/seeds are almost ready for stripping. Here and there, the vast wheat fields have turned a light brown and now some of the later planted lupin fields are beginning to flower which is really pretty but they do not cover big areas around here.

The Swartland which is west of the Overberg, is an exceptionally hot and dry part of the Western Cape and it is also home to large flocks of Blue Cranes. This is a fairly marginal farming area and many fields are planted to lupins to help the soil. Unfortunately the Cranes have taken a liking to lupin flowers and of course this is not too acceptable to farmers already fighting many odds.

The Swartland is also on our project agenda as a wind farm company proposed sponsoring 5 trackers to go onto cranes there to show movement patterns – this obviously would benefit the company in siting the turbines in the least invasive areas.

One of the objectives of this project was to talk with landowners about their feelings about cranes – we had heard that their attitudes had changed to something less positive than some years ago! Prof Peter Ryan of UCT, suggested that one of his students, Julia Von Velden, work with me to draw up a questionnaire and the results will be part of her masters. Julia has spent a lot of time in the Swartland region over the past few weeks talking with farmers. We thought that area would reveal some very irate farmers. However, we are delighted with the responses from farmers – even in that desert-like Swartland, a really apt name! Of course there is irritation, sometimes extending to some anger, when cranes descend on fields in large numbers and on sheep feeding troughs – together with Spurwing and Egyptian geese, in growing numbers! We feel for the farmers and are trying to engage them in ideas to combat the problem. It is interesting to see how, after chatting for a while and letting them know we want to help, they begin to relax and end up showing a wry smile and making some remark that actually shows they are proud to have cranes on their farm! I had hoped to find some farmers who were really upset and gave good ideas of something to do but so far, although we have both enjoyed interesting and informative chats with farmers, most of them shrug and say “we have to live with it”.

I feel that the farmers of the Western Cape deserve recognition for – even if by default – feeding and thereby conserving our National Bird!!!

So now while waiting for the cranes to start breeding – also something we were told happened a month earlier than on the Highveld – not right either, I am enjoying visiting farms, popping in and chatting with owners, their wife or son and I have met such delightful and informed people, shared many laughs and listened to some interesting tales. One farm I was on today is now in the hands of the 7th generation – and the young man, like his parent, is dedicated to conserving and increasing the bird



and mammal populations on the farm. His mother who knows as much about it all as do her men, said that after aerial spraying stopped 10 – 15 years ago and crop spraying was done by machines on the ground, the wildlife and bird populations have increased enormously – so there are some good things happening!

NOTE: On our recent trip to the West Coast we were as surprised as she was to bump into Glenn at a lookout point along the road from Montague to Bonnievale. Always polite she had tapped on Brenda’s car window to enquire “Are you also from Mpumalanga?” and was amazed to find Brenda looking back at her! We had arranged to drop some parcels to her at Bredasdorp but hadn’t expected to meet her where we did. Glenn is well and happy in the area and, as the Cranes are late nesting this year, may be there for another month or two. Brian Guerin.

New Report Shows One-Third of South African IBAs Are In Imminent Danger!

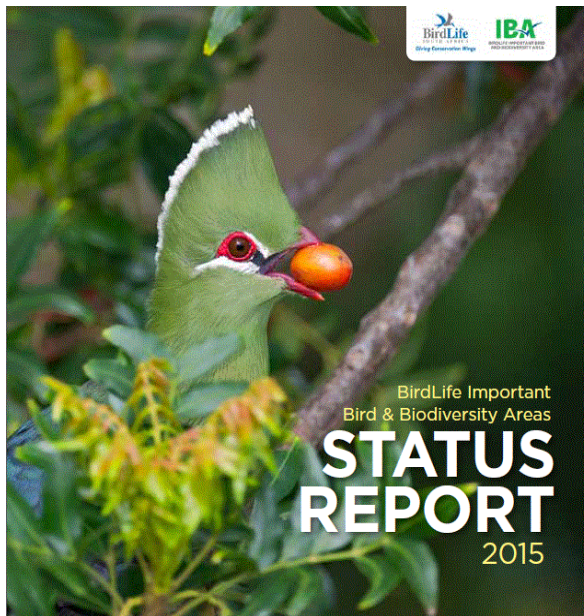


West Coast National Park and Saldanha Islands IBA ©Jackie During

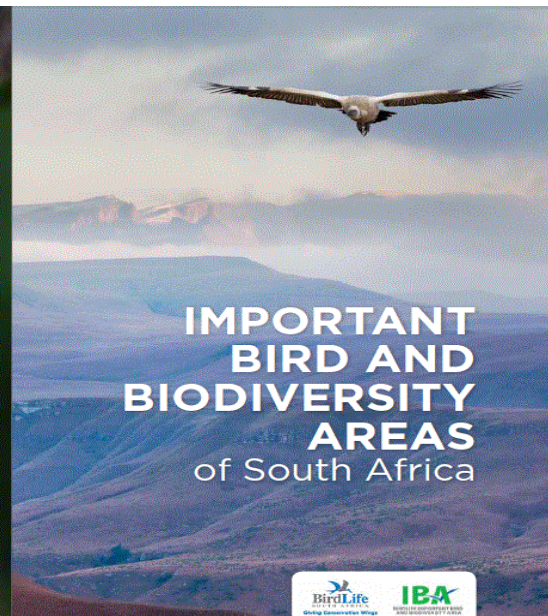
By BirdLife South Africa, Sat, 12/09/2015 - 09:00

One-third of the 112 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) of South Africa are facing imminent danger of irreversible damage, according to a new report published by BirdLife South Africa. The most prevalent threats are invasive alien plant species which push out indigenous species, the modification of habitats through incorrect burning practices, agricultural expansion and mismanagement. Habitats in unprotected IBAs in particular are deteriorating at a concerning rate, most especially in grasslands, wetlands and fynbos but protected IBAs are also facing a diverse set of threats. The 42 IBAs with the highest threats will be included in BirdLife International's list of IBAs in Danger, the global list of priority sites identified for urgent action.

Front cover of the IBA Status Report



Front cover of the IBA Directory



This South African IBA Status Report is accompanied by a revised IBA Directory, building on and updating the first such inventory published in 1998. It provides updated information of the most important aspect of each of these 112 IBAs, including the geography and climate of the area, the list of the bird species found at the IBA, the biggest threats to the site, and what conservation action is taking place to secure the IBA. This publication can be used by conservation practitioners and planners to prioritise their

work, by developers who need to understand the sensitivity of an area, and can even be used by bird enthusiasts to plan a birding trip.



Golden Gate Highlands National Park IBA ©Dominic Henry

The 112 IBAs in South Africa are the last stand for bird conservation on a landscape level. Protecting these sites has benefits not only for South Africa's birds, but also for other animals, plants and the vital ecological services these sites provide to people. These services include providing us with fresh water, managing floods and disease, and providing grazing lands for livestock farming. Conserving IBAs is also important for attaining our government's environmental commitments like the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Target 11 that calls for the expansion of terrestrial Protected Areas by at least 17%, and the Convention on Migratory Species. Therefore, their deteriorating status is a very high concern which requires immediate attention from government agencies and other stakeholders.

While both these publications are milestones for bird conservation, they need to be seen as the spearhead which will now be used to lobby, plan and implement effective conservation for birds, their habitats and other biodiversity.

Both the revised IBA Directory and IBA Status Report can be bought in hard copy from BirdLife South Africa's IBA Programme (011 789 1122, daniel.marnewick@birdlife.org.za), or the electronic versions can be downloaded for free.

Editor's Note: Both of these publications are available direct from BirdLife (via the website) at R215 for both plus R80 postage, Hopefully some copies will be available from BirdLife locally in order to avoid the cost and risk of the snail mail

Membership

We are happy to welcome John and Janet Proudfoot, Jane Harley and Miles Dell to the Club. We hope that our association with them will be long and fruitful.

Interesting Local Sightings:

September 2015:

Malachite and Amethyst Sunbirds are back in our gardens, unfortunately there is only meagre foraging available at this stage.

Lanner Falcons have resumed their targeting of local roof-top Speckled Pigeons. The falcon's technique honed to a fine art - one flushes whilst the other grabs!

African Harrier-Hawk nuptial display flight witnessed. Immediately over the village, their exaggerated wing beats, stoops and even momentary grappling were quite beautiful to watch.

At the vlei, Blacksmith Lapwings exhibited extreme persistence (and courage) in mobbing a pair of African Marsh Harrier, redefining 'close encounter' to a contact sport.

White-throated Swallows, which have been seen at the vlei for over a month, now joined by South African Cliff Swallow, Greater Striped Swallow (see below) and White-rumped Swift.

Whiskered Terns once again visible over the vlei and during the holiday weekend, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler kept an American birding group well entertained.

Talking entertainment: "our otters" enthralled fortunate visitors over the holiday weekend, on occasion providing ideal photographic opportunities rather than clear, but shadowy glimpses. One well-travelled, nature-loving couple declared the experience had made their visit truly memorable.

Friday 2 October 2015:

A string of goodies was on show. Some were in full view almost begging to be admired whilst a couple of others only allowed brief glimpses. Close-up, but most elusive of all, a Red-chested Flufftail kept peering from ground level vegetation before crossing a miniscule patch of mud and disappearing again.

For all that they were so "in your face" a few months back, Little Bitterns seem to be keeping to themselves again. Volubly protesting, one was flushed from cover by a couple of Red-knobbed Coots.

Other sightings included a pair of Olive Woodpeckers (in full cry), Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Black Sparrowhawk, Common House Martin, Rock Martin, Common Waxbill and Great Egret.

Ann Cleal.

Hint for our Newer Birders:



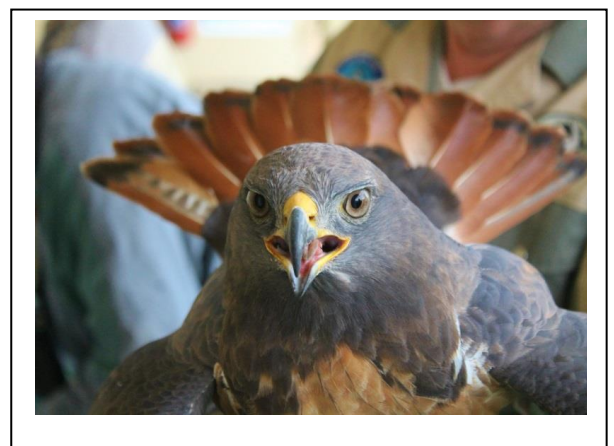
Comparison shots of (L) Greater Striped Swallow and (R) South African Cliff Swallow, for comparison. Both have rufous rumps, the cliff swallows is paler and there is no striping on the chest and stomach. They are easily separated if perched but in flight it can be a different matter

A LUCKY ENCOUNTER:



Recently I called at the BLSA Centre on Bird Club business and was also treated to a very special encounter. Some visiting birders from the Reef area had been ringing in the field opposite and had captured a Jackal Buzzard in a Bal Chatri trap. This is a trap containing some tempting morsels, in this case 2 white mice, and covered by a number of small “toe nooses” made of fishing line.

The ringers were, as is required by Safring regulations, very quick and professional in their measuring of the bird and placing a ring on its leg. No measurement escaped the ringer’s attention and moult details were also noted.



Seeing the bird close-up like this reveals unexpected details, note the eye colour and the dark spots at the ends of each of the tail feathers, things that are not readily seen in the field.

Brian Guerin.

DIARY OF EVENTS:

October:

Tuesday 13th – our monthly outing, this time to a new venue, we will be visiting the farm “Bergen” which is 8km from town along the Amersfoort road, turn off to the right at the sign reading “Bergen’s”. We will leave the Library at 07h00.

Wednesday 21st – an illustrated talk by John McAllister on his recent trip to England and the Faroe Islands. This is a destination most of us can only dream of seeing in real life! 18h00 at BirdLife.

November:

Friday 6th – 8th – BirdLife Lowveld will be visiting Wakkerstroom for the weekend. We will keep you posted of any involvement for our Club, apart from their attending our Vlei Walk with us.

Saturday 7th – regular monthly Vlei Walk, meet from 07h00 on the bridge. Earlier if you prefer!
We found 71 species at the October outing!

Tuesday 10th – another outing to a new venue! This time we are going to Sarge Brits farm to look for the Sungazer or Giant Girdled Lizard (*Cordylus giganteus*). We anticipate that Bradley Gibbon will lead the group. Once again we will leave the Library at 07h00 sharp as the farm is beyond Volksrust. Directions to follow.

Saturday 21st – the BIG one – our Annual Function at Oude Stasie. **PLEASE NOTE** – there will not be a charge for this function! A sheep on the spit, pap & sous, salads, breads and dessert will be provided. This year we plan to have a load of fun so the theme will be a hat/head dress depicting your favourite South African bird. We will have a guest judge, Malcolm Drummond. Start will be at 4.00pm to allow sufficient time for judging. Supper will be ready at 6.00pm.

Saturday 28th – Birding Big Day – we want to take part this year by forming at least one team. We are awaiting details from BirdLife SA regarding terms of entry, areas we can cover e.g. home garden/farm, pentad, 50km radius etc. Details will be given when we receive them.

What is JIZZ?

Jizz is a term originally used to describe the overall impression or appearance of a bird garnered from such features as shape, posture, flying style or other habitual movements, size and colouration combined with voice, habitat and location. The concept is so useful, however, that it has since been adopted increasingly widely by field biologists in referring to the impression of the general characteristics of other animals. It similarly appears in such fields of observational biology as microscopy. Ecologists and botanists may speak of ‘habitat jizz’ or the jizz of a plant.

Sean Dooley described jizz as "the indefinable quality of a particular species, the 'vibe' it gives off" and notes that although it is "dismissed by many as some kind of birding alchemy, there is some physical basis to the idea of jizz." Experienced birders can often make reliable identifications in the field at a glance by utilising jizz. Often jizz is useful for identifying to the family or genus level, rather than the species level. For example, "It definitely had the jizz of a thrush, but I couldn't see what kind."

The origin of the word is a mystery. There is a theory that it comes from the World War II acronym GISS for "General Impression of Size and Shape (of an aircraft)", but the birding term was first recorded earlier than that in 1920. More likely, jizz is a corruption of gestalt, a German word that roughly means form or shape, or more specifically from the word *gist* which has the same meaning. *Sourced from Wikipedia.*



JOHN BARROW – EDITOR.