



# Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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## NEWSLETTER NUMBER 39, OCTOBER 2015

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### Tracing a Ring Back to the Beginning:

A few weeks back, Judy Wheeler came into the BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre with a rather large ring and a request to find more information about it. One of her workers had found it on their back camp – no carcass or any tell-tell signs of what it could have been. Never shying away from such a task I took it and hoped I would be able to go back to her rather quickly with the answers to the questions that quite quickly stated to arise.

I went onto the SAFRING website and logged the ring. Within minutes I had a reply – please could I double check I had entered the data correctly. Mmmm, had typos crept in???? I checked and rechecked all the data (codes and description of the ring). Definitely entered correctly, so I re-submitted. An email came flying back with the response of ‘this ring is not South African and more details would not be available through SAFRING.’

On further inspection of the ring, with a magnifying glass, I found the address of a German website. Not fluent in German, I had a difficulty maneuvering through the site. Finally finding an email address, I sent all the details of the ring, location etc. through to Maik Jurke of the Hiddensee Bird Ringing Centre. A few days later, I received an email back saying that this ring was only used to White Stork in East Germany and more details were required. After a few e-mails back and forth between Maik, Judy and I we finally received details regarding the ring.



Ring DEH HC 914 belonged to a White Stork! This nestling was first ringed on the 25<sup>th</sup> June in Parey, Brandenburg. Two months later the bird had moved to Wildenhain, Sachsen and hung around for two weeks before moving off through Großraschütz and Bärwalde.

The last time the bird was seen was the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2010. There is more to the story... Two years ago a flock of White Stork had been seen feeding in Judy's back camp.

What happened to the bird, we can only speculate it being preyed upon by Cerval or the like. So 1905 days, 9069km later SSE from the place of ringing, the ring was found in Wakkerstroom.

But wait, there's more! At the Flight and Migration weekend – presented by Roy Cowgill and Steve Davis, we learnt more about the migration of these magnificent species. Both the males and female leave Europe around the end of summer, making their way to central Africa. It's only the female birds who take the plunge and fly further south to South Africa in search of food and possibly rest from the males before returning to Europe for breeding at the change of the season. So, we have filled in the gaps. Ringo could quite possibly be a female and has been wandering between Africa and Europe for the last five years after reaching maturity and being able to cope with the pressures migration places on the individual. Since then, this bird has been dubbed Ringo – where did the ring go....

Thanks must be given to Judy, Maik, Roy and Steve for filling in the story line of Ringo. I will be writing up a story soon about Ringo and her travels to be used as part of the Spring Alive Project. Watch this space for more ☺

Kristi Garland. Grasslands Environmental Education Project Manager,

BirdLife South Africa - Wakkerstroom

## Birding Weekend January Wakkerstroom 2016

Those who were lucky enough to attend last year's event will want to diarise January 14-17, 2016 to attend some or all of the events during the Second SANPARKS Honorary Rangers KZN Region birding weekend, again to be held in Wakkerstroom at BLSA South Africa Centre. Full details will be in our next newsletter

All proceeds from this event will again be used to support the sniffer dog project within South African National Parks, [www.sanparksvolunteers.org](http://www.sanparksvolunteers.org) Over 550 poachers have been arrested since the introduction of sniffer dogs three and a half years ago.

# KICK 2016 OFF WITH ANOTHER BIRDING EVENT OF THE YEAR

## 15 TO 17 JANUARY 2016

HOSTED BY:

SANPARKS HONORARY RANGERS

KWA-ZULU NATAL REGION

WING YOUR WAY TO  
WAKKERSTROOM – ONE  
OF THE BEST PLACES  
TO SEE THE GRASSLAND  
BIOME SPECIES

- EXCURSIONS
- GUIDES
- GIVE-AWAYS AND PRIZES
- EVENING MEALS AND ENTERTAINMENT

R 850.00\*

PER PERSON



MONSANTO



FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO BOOK

Martie Strydom

[martiestrydom@telkomsa.net](mailto:martiestrydom@telkomsa.net)

083 458 7513

REGISTRATION CLOSES 30 NOVEMBER 2015

All proceeds from this event will be used to support the sniffer dog project within

South African National Parks

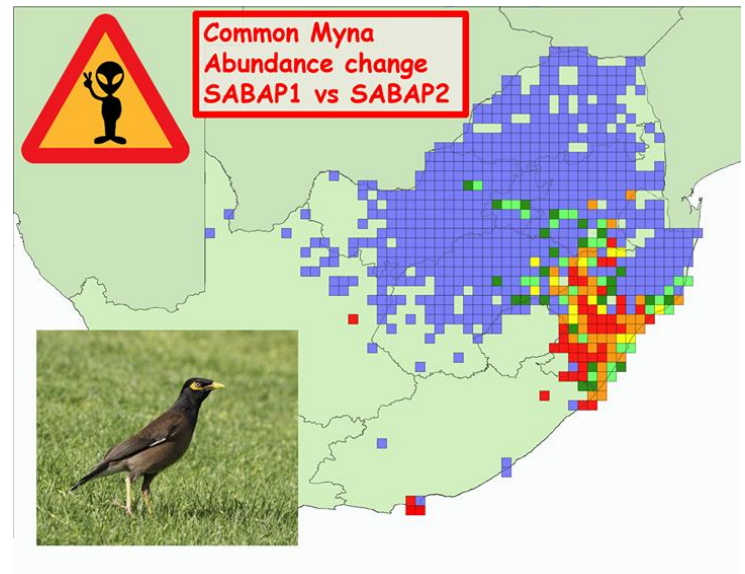
[www.sanparksvolunteers.org](http://www.sanparksvolunteers.org)



South African  
NATIONAL PARKS  
Honorary Rangers™

**From the Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town:**

**“It’s National Invasive Species Week.** The ADU is doing its bit to highlight these issues, focussing on the Common Myna. This introduced alien continues its march across the southern African landscape. The Common Myna has displayed more range expansion than any other species during the gap between the SABAP1 and SABAP2 projects. That is in South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland alone. The recent bird atlas project in Zimbabwe reveals a scary range expansion to that country too. In all the quarter degree grid cells, the increase in abundance has been enormous. There have been smaller increases in the dark green and light green cells. What is unexpected red in its former heartland of KwaZulu-Natal; in these cells the Common Myna appears to have decreased sharply, and we can only speculate why. There is an article about the Common Myna in our e-journal Ornithological Observations. It is called: “SABAP2 shows that the Common Myna



Acridotheres tristis is using the towns and villages as stepping stones to spread across South Africa.”

The best account of the early history of the Common Myna in South Africa is probably in the first bird atlas book, in Adrian Craig's species text. He considered that although it was first introduced to South Africa in Durban in 1888, it was a release by bird dealers in 1900 which was the first to be "successful."

Common Mynas have not only been introduced to South Africa. They have also been introduced to parts of South East Asia, New Zealand, eastern Australia and Madagascar. They are also present in many islands in the Atlantic Ocean (including the Canary Islands, St Helena and Ascension Island), Indian Ocean (including Réunion, Mauritius, Rodriguez north to Lacadive and Maldive Islands and east to Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and Pacific Ocean (including Fiji, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Cook Islands, Society Islands and some other French Polynesian islands). There are also more recent accounts of an introduction in France.

The Common Myna features on the IUCN list of the 100 worst invasive species (The four key impacts of Common Mynas are a consequence of them being communal, often in huge flocks, and being commensal, living in close association with people. They are a public nuisance. They are raucously noisy. Their droppings foul buildings and streets. (2) They are a human health hazard. "Their droppings can spread Psittacosis, Ornithosis, Salmonellosis and arboviruses." "Mynas fearlessly steal food off plates" which is a hygiene risk. They also carry mites associated with human diseases. (3) They damage fruit crops, and especially "grapes, apricots, apples, pears, strawberries, figs and gooseberries." (4) They are known to have significant impacts on threatened bird species in Australia, New Zealand, Saint Helena, French Polynesia, Cook Islands and the Comoro Islands”

In the illustration above the brightly coloured squares represent the distribution of the Common Myna as revealed by data gathered in SABAP 1, ( the South African Bird Atlas Project One). The blue squares represent its current spread from the information submitted to date in SABAP 2. This is an alarming rate of progress and confirms the statement above i.e. that this pest is indeed using the towns and villages as stepping stones to spread across South Africa.

In Nelspruit it was found that the bird’s first toehold was in the hangars of the old airfield just out of town and which was largely inactive for a period. The rest is history and very likely irreversible.

Can anyone tell us some of this invaders history in Wakkerstroom?

### Interesting Local Sightings:

Less than usual to report this month but here goes!

- Great Crested Grebe - hung around the vlei for (it seems) only part of one day and was not seen again.
- Baillon's Crake - A group of American tourists with South African guides reported Baillon's Crake at the vlei (or marsh) as they called it. A very nice record, the bird has been seen on the vlei before though not for a number of years. Please watch out for it and report it to any Committee member! Their breeding habitat is sedge beds in Europe, mainly in the east, and across Asia. They used to breed in Great Britain up to the mid-19th century, but the western European population declined through drainage. There has been a recovery in north-western Europe in recent years, with the recolonisation of Germany and the Netherlands, and breeding suspected in Britain; an Irish record in 2012 was the first there since the 1850s.<sup>[2]</sup> They nest in a dry location in wet sedge bogs, laying 4–8 eggs. This species is migratory, wintering in east Africa and south Asia.

It is also a resident breeder in Africa and Australasia.



**Baillon's Crake.**



**Grey-headed Gull.**

Red-chested Flufftail – a male and a chick were seen and photographed by Steve Davis during their recent visit, a female has also been seen since.

- Leguaan or Water Monitor spotted sunning itself on the stream bank behind the Clive Beck Hide.
- S.A. Cliff Swallows collecting remnants of "fluff" from the phragmites on the vlei, some whilst in flight. Others perched momentarily but in each case only returning to the bridge once they had a beakful of material.
- 3 Grey-headed Gulls circling over the vlei.

### NEWSFLASH – Vultures:

Vultures: What do we know about these birds? If you've had the opportunity of seeing a gathering of vulture species at a carcass it's easy to believe the old tales of these birds being dirty slobbering scavengers. Well scavengers they are but dirty slobbering birds they are not.

Here are some facts for you to digest and after feasting on this information you will no doubt see these birds in a far more positive light.

Vultures occur on all continents except Australia and Antarctica yet globally they are threatened.

Vultures are placed within the large family Accipitridae which contains all the eagles, buzzards, harriers and hawks. Birds of prey have hooked beaks and use claws (talons) to catch and kill their food. They tear the food with strong hooked bills and swallow the pieces.

Vultures have immensely strong bills and large strong flat feet as they spend considerable time on the ground. They do not kill their food. Vultures feed on carcasses. A carcass is an animal/bird that has already died. Vultures bathe regularly to keep feathers in good condition. They bathe after every feeding. Once wet the birds have to sit around for their feathers to dry with considerable care being given to preening/rezipping of feathers. The large vultures consume up to 1.5kgs meat in one feed but may go without food for a period of up to 14 days. Vultures can travel

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vast distances in search of food. Records show some birds moving between 600 – 1200kms a day. They can reach heights of 8000m. Vultures have an acidic stomach (pH 1-2) which kills bacteria. The whitewash droppings are indicative of the high acidic content.

In this Newsflash we will target 4 species:



Lappet-faced Vulture.

**The Lappet-faced Vulture** (*Torgos tracheliotus*) has a wide distribution in the Afrotropical zone. It is a large bird and its massive bill may be used as a killing weapon when defending itself. Usually solitary. On a carcass this vulture will tear through skin and tough muscle with ease, swallowing large chunks within a very short space of time. This species will also predate on small mammals, flamingos, mongoose, catfish, terrapins and eggs. Food is brought to the nest but is also regurgitated to feed the chick. The chick then regurgitates pellets/castings of hair as it grows which end up lining the nest. This is called carpeting. A Lappet-faced Vulture builds its nest on the tops of trees.



Cape Vulture.

**The Cape Vulture** or Cape Griffon (*Gyps coprotheres*) is endemic to southern Africa. A gregarious bird mostly and is a critically threatened species. Poisoning, power line electrocution, reservoir drownings, bush encroachment and lack of clean food are the major threats to this bird. Muthi collectors are another threat. Insensitive tourism/human disturbance is another major problem to this sensitive species. These vultures do not feed on skin as it is too tough. They pluck at the soft anal/groin areas to gain access to the red meat, organs and viscera. Meat is extremely salty and this bird secretes large volumes of nasal fluid to rid them of the high salt load. (Thus the slobbering effect). Very little salt is excreted in urine. The Cape vulture nests in colonies on cliff ledges. All nest material is carried in the bill.

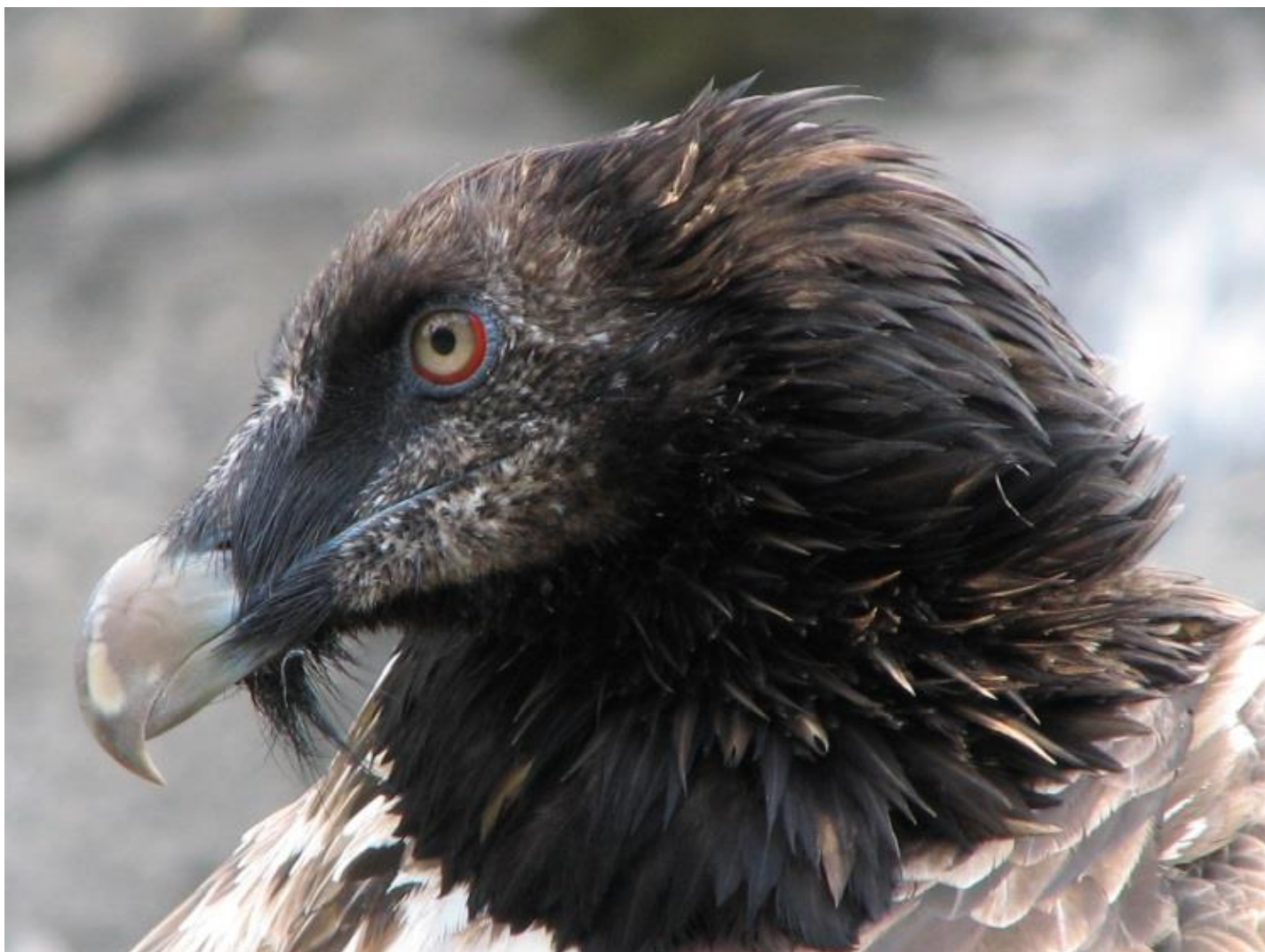
**The White-backed Vulture** (*Gyps africanus*) is found throughout sub-Saharan Africa, barring desert and forest areas. A gregarious bird.

Aggressive and noisy at a carcass this bird will gorge itself within minutes. "Sneezing" after feeding is caused by the dribbling or copious secretions from the nasal gland to rid the bird of high salt load ingested in the meat. These vultures also bathe after every feed. The White-backed vulture nests on the tops of high trees. Nesting material is carried in the bill.

They are monogamous and believed to pair for life. Almost invariably a single egg is laid, rarely two.

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### **Bearded Vulture:**

The gape of the Bearded Vulture is the largest of any vulture and the largest of any bird of prey and If a bone is too large to swallow, this species will clutch it in its feet and fly to great heights, only to drop the bone on a rocky outcrop in order to splinter the bone and both bone and marrow are consumed. The Bearded Vulture will eat dead meat.

This bird drinks daily yet bathes infrequently as there is no gore from feeding. The Bearded Vulture carries large sticks in its feet for building of nests and nests are lined with wool, hair, skin and sacking. This bird nests on cliff ledges. Nest sites are not marked by the birds' droppings or whitewash. Bearded vultures are fiercely territorial and will defend their nest sites against Verreaux's Eagle. The Bearded Vulture population has been reduced to critical levels of 350 birds in southern Africa.

A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug called Diclofenac used on livestock is fatal to Gyps species when ingested at livestock carcasses. There have been numerous reports and articles recently on this subject. This product has been banned in several countries and the Indian government is under pressure to also ban this product for such purposes. Judy-Lynn Wheeler.

In fact India as well as Iran, Pakistan and Nepal have all banned this product for veterinary use – Editor.

**More on Vultures:** There is an old adage about vultures being found on all continents of the world except Australia – they got flies! Unfortunately the current situation is that Australia has more flies and the other continents have fewer vultures! The following article was picked up from a BirdLife International e-mail and makes encouraging reading about the area which appear to be the main offenders with the product.

“The Iranian Department of Environment has officially banned the export, import, production and veterinary use of diclofenac in the country. “Iran’s decision to ban diclofenac is a major step to protect vultures in the African-Eurasian region. It is a clear demonstration of the country’s concern for and leadership on the conservation of migratory birds of prey. Other countries should follow Iran’s lead and that of the other countries such as India, Pakistan and Nepal that have also banned diclofenac”, said Lyle Glowka, Executive Coordinator, CMS Office - Abu Dhabi.

## Our Monthly Update from the Cape:

Just a couple more news briefs from me in the Cape and then my time here will be over and I will be –at the moment, not sure. Seven months had seemed a good longish time but wow, it's gone so fast I would love to wish back at least 3 or those months.

The rainy season here is supposedly over but we keep on having showers which I think is lovely but for the farmers who are harvesting crops right now, it is not such a gift. The countryside is looking exquisite with even more wonderful blobs of orange, yellow and purple flowers along many roads and if one takes time to stop and get out of the vehicle, there are masses of blue, white, cream, pink and mauve flowers amongst the grasses. And there is water everywhere, which no doubt now that it is getting very hot, will soon disappear but in the meantime, many ducks and Stilts and others have taken advantage of and enjoyed a bumper bonus of bugs/bulbs – and also produced the season's delightful youngsters. (Pictures by Warwick Tarboton, Overberg Oct 2015)



A highlight for me was that my dearest friends Michele and Warwick Tarboton flew down to spend a weekend with me and check out my living quarters and what I am up to! They hired a vehicle and to my chagrin, when they arrived at the house, they informed me of TWO Blue Crane nests along the road I use daily! One of these is just about 25m off a moderately busy tar road and 2 eggs can clearly be seen from the road.

The Tarbes and I found another nest and since then, a farmer told me of a nest in the windrows – something I had always heard of so dashed out to see the nest with its one egg - and then a farm worker on another farm I visit, took me to see a nest with 2 eggs also in a harvested field where the windrows still had to be gathered. This chap, Errol had long ago marked the nest with a pipe so that it would not be minced up in harvesting and as it sounds as though the chicks could hatch soon, I asked about small chicks being ridden over but he assured me the drivers knew to look out for them and anyway “..dese parents are clever and mooff de baby's away ver quickly”. And as this has been happening for yonks, and the population continues to grow, I guess that's correct information.



The landscape has changed again and the lovely creamy, brownish colours of the ripened wheat are quite beautiful and the cranes love them, too.



Another great few days was when Pat and Mel arrived to spend a couple of nights with the boyz and me – it was good to see them and they had a relaxing time recharging batteries before the next leg of their holiday.

Last weekend I had lunch with Willie and Carol Tromp who until 2.5 years ago farmed past Groenvlei and whose daughter and son-in-law farm at Balele. They had been in Wakkers the week previously so I was filled in on what's cooking there.

Hope all readers are fit and well and not melting in the heat up country is having.

Glenn Ramke.

#### Diary of Events, November:

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> – BirdLife Lowveld will be visiting Wakkerstroom for the weekend and attending our Vlei Walk with us, come and meet them and maybe get some new ideas!

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

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> – We're off to see the Lizard (see pic), 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 shortly or contact Claudine on 083 347 2270.



Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> – the BIG one – our Annual Function at BirdLife South Africa. Please note change of venue and no longer restricted to members and partners. **PLEASE NOTE** – there will NOT be a charge for this function and bookings via Claudine on 083 347 2770 **ON OR BEFORE November 11** are essential for catering purposes! **NOW** to be a Bring 'n Braai, the club will provide pap & sous, salads, breads and a dessert will also be provided. This year we plan to have a load of fun so the theme will be a hat/head dress of your own making depicting your favourite South African bird. We will have a guest judge/guest speaker, Malcolm Drummond who will also judge the headwear! Start will be at 4.00pm to allow sufficient time for judging. Supper will be served from 6.00pm.

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> – 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.

#### December:

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> – our last Vlei Walk for the year, let's try for a 6:30 start (but later if you prefer) on the bridge – the migrants will be here in full swing so we need to count them all!

#### Change of Address and Contact Details:

This is a notice to all members to notify John Barrow at [wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:wakkersbirdclub@gmail.com) of changes to e-mail addresses and other contact details early if possible or at least when these changes come into effect.



**A Final Word on Vultures:**



We couldn't resist printing this delightful cartoon of all the world's vulture species!



**Club Car Stickers Now Available:**

These car stickers were designed and financed by Anton Muller of the Recycle Shop. They are for sale there at R10 each with R3 per copy coming to the Club. Thanks, Anton. Stocks are limited.

**Brian Guerin – (Guest) Editor.**





