



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



The new addition to our
letterheads!

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Our “NEW” Newsletter, No.43.

This new format is designed to allow cheaper printing costs and therefore more scope for distribution to non-members as advertising material. Let us know if you like it (or not!).

Hot news is that our club is now affiliated with BirdLife South Africa with a brand new Constitution. This change will have little effect on members, mostly just the Committee’s running of the Club. We will not need an Annual General Meeting until the 1st quarter next year. We will produce a summary report on 2015 operations and results for the information of members shortly.

Wakkerstroom Music Festival

One of the highlights of the Wakkerstroom year is the annual Music Festival. As usual it was a great success with benefits for all, many thanks to the organizers!

Norman Dennett reports on a couple of unexpected guests:

A Spotted Eagle Owl regularly roosts in the willow tree at the rear of St. Joseph’s Church. The bird was there as usual for the first day and, much to the surprise of concert-goers, a second owl came along for the second day! We trust they enjoyed the music and will hopefully be along to next years performances!

A general request:

The Bird Club has recently installed notices at the Drummond, WOW and Beck hides asking visitors to ensure that they lower the flaps (if fitted) and close the door when leaving the hides.

This is essential to assist with reducing the number of birds that regularly roost there and to help keep the hides clean. Thanks.

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Bird of the Year 2016

Although not too relevant to us here in “Larkland”, BirdLife South Africa’s chosen Bird of the Year is the Sociable Weaver. These charming little birds are endemic to the Kalahari and Nama-Karoo regions, far to the west of us.

They are small birds with big personalities, and have a complex social life, living in colonies that can be hundreds strong. Colonies are like villages, made up of nuclear families organised into close-knit societies with strict social hierarchies.

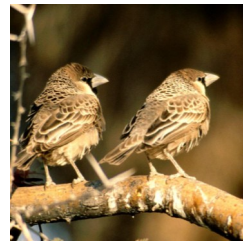
Sociable Weavers don’t weave their nests as typical weavers do but instead push the grass stalks into place until they have made a tight-knit and robust structure. Some nests are over 4m across and can weigh a ton. These large nests can be very effective in countering the extremes of Kalahari weather.

BirdLife South Africa has developed learning resources on weavers in general and these can be downloaded at: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/>

[events/bird-of-the-year](#)

The Bird of the Year 2016 poster was sent out with the March/April 2016 issue of *African Birdlife* and is available free of charge from BirdLife South Africa’s Head Office, Isdell House, in Johannesburg.

CDs containing the learning resources are also available from Isdell House. Please contact Kathleen April Okoye on 011 789 1122 / info@birdlife.org.za.



Special points of interest:

Environmental days coming up in April:

- 4th—International Day for Mine Awareness
- 7th—World Health Day
- 20th-26th - World Days of Action
- 22nd International Mother Earth Day

Women who have made the world better for birds and people

When we hear the word “naturalist,” we often think of Charles Darwin and his theories, John Muir, the “Father of National Parks,” and of course, John James Audubon. But let’s not forget the women who rallied to preserve the natural realm. From creating the first avian field guide, to ending the feather trade, to dying in pursuit of birds, these femmes prove that the history of incredible women transcends any single month.

1. Genevieve Estelle Jones (1847-1879)

Ohio native Genevieve Estelle Jones was a self-taught scientific illustrator christened the “other Audubon.” After seeing some of Audubon’s paintings at an exhibition, Jones decided to draw the nests and eggs of the 130 bird species nesting in Ohio at the time. But before she could finish, she died from typhoid fever at age 32. Her family spent the next seven years completing the hand-coloured plates, of which 90 copies were made. Only 26 still exist.

2. Harriet Lawrence Hemenway and Minna Hall (1858-1960 and 1864-1944)

This two-woman dream team was responsible for taking down the

19th-century plume trade and establishing the National Audubon Society. Appalled by the number of birds being killed in the name of fashion, Hemenway, an impassioned amateur naturalist, and her cousin Hall, persuaded their socialite friends to boycott the trade and protect the wildlife behind it. Ultimately, they recruited 900 women to join the fight, and gave rise to an establishment that, a century later, has grown to 1 million members and supporters strong.

3. Florence Merriam Bailey (1863-1948)

Florence Merriam Bailey, maker of the first known bird guide, in New Mexico, 1901. American nature writer and ornithologist Florence Merriam Bailey was a jane of all trades. Not only did she work with the National Audubon Society during its early years, she is also credited for writing the first known bird guide, *Birds Through an Opera Glass*, published in 1889. A true pioneer in the field, Merriam protested the mistreatment, killing, and trade of feathered animals.

Her legacy still remains in the form of a subspecies of the California Mountain Chickadee, *Parus gam-*

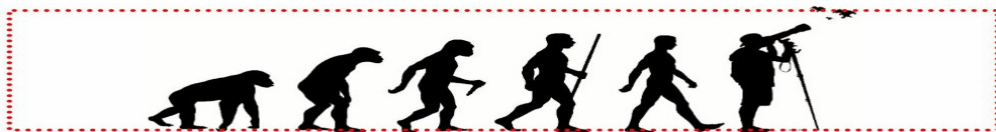
beli baileyae, that was named in her honour.

4. Rachel Carson (1907-1964)

Rachel Carson is most famous for her book *Silent Spring*, in which she bared the sins of the pesticide industry. In her later writings, the author and activist continued to examine the relationship between people and nature, questioning whether human beings are truly the dominant authority. Needless to say, she was an outspoken advocate for the environment and one of the greatest social revolutionaries of her time.

5. Frances Hamerstrom (1907-1998)

This female ornithologist dedicated the majority of her life to just one kind of bird: The Greater Prairie-Chicken. Frances Hamerstrom headed a research team that ultimately saved the eccentric species from extinction in Wisconsin. She helped identify the ideal habitat for prairie-chickens, and was also one of the first to put coloured leg bands on wild birds—a technique that has helped reveal important information on bird behaviour through the decades.



Recent Club Activities on the Vlei

In the hope that by clearing the waterway of willow growth impeding the flow we could flush the floating green weed downstream. After a couple of days it became obvious that our ploy would not work as the stream flow remained sluggish. A final nail was that the last tree, and the worst culprit, contained a very active bees nest. Nevertheless we are convinced that the overhanging willows need to be stopped from growing into the streams.

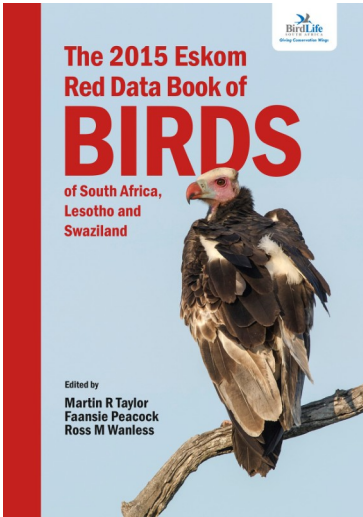
A further project was to cut the grass growing along the Amersfoort bridge. Kristi Garland, organized a team of 18 Working on Fire people so that we could “blitz” it in a day. Some follow-up cutting remains and, in order to hopefully discourage the rampant growth, an application of herbicide will be sprayed very shortly.

This exercise has improved visibility greatly, even when seated in a vehicle.



Picture shows the laborious nature of the work.

2015 Eskom Red Data Book of Birds



This splendid publication is at last available from BirdLife South Africa at a cost of R325/copy.

Edited by Martin Taylor, Faansie Peacock and Ross Wanless and illustrated throughout by Faansie Peacock it is highly recommended. Spanning some 464 pages it covers not only threatened species but finishes with a detailed index of "Special Interest Species" which

also require monitoring lest they one day fall into the main body of the work! Large and detailed maps of known distributions are a valuable tool in accessing the book. Each species account ends with a box headed "Research Priorities and Questions" which highlight gaps in our knowledge which interested members/Citizen Scientists could perhaps try to fill!

Highly recommended.

Interesting Local Sightings

Interesting local sightings have been a bit slow recently, the African Jacana seen by several members no doubt the most interesting. I can only find records for the same period in 2008. Warwick Tarboton's records appear to be all from Heyshope Dam, no years specified.

This species practices Polyandry, which means a female will mate with a number of males who then undertake all or most of the parental care.



Weed Alert!!

It has come to the attention of various organisations in Wakkerstroom, of the weeds growing on the water surface beneath the Kruger Bridge. To perhaps clear the air as to what it is and what's on the cards for this 'weed', here is a little more information on the plant.

Lemna gibba - commonly known as duck weed or damslily. It is an indigenous weed, mainly found in

Norman Dennett photographed the very long Leguaan on the bridge last week. We think it is over 2m in length and are trying to establish its approximate length by comparing it with other items in the photographs.



Another sighting is of a Grey-headed Gull on the vlei, regular records exist for it on Heyshope Dam, occasional records for Amersfoort Dam, Alzu Dam and Clarens Pan.



Our Wakkerstroom Pentad Survey

Our 3-year survey of the birds occurring in just our pentad (2720-3005) draws to a close in June of this year.

Suggested as a project at the Committee meeting in early June 2013 there was little time to prepare a detailed methodology for starting on 1 July but it seems to have fallen into place and has produced some amazing information.

The small team of keen participants has identified an amazing total of some 220 species so far in this approximately 9km by 7km area.

This total includes 38 migrant species. This is a very impressive total for us and a credit to those who put in all the "hard yards", thanks a lot and keep it up for just a few more months!

pools, dams and river backwaters throughout South Africa. This plant favours nutrient-rich water and can quickly cover a wide expanse of water. Although registrations exist elsewhere, in South Africa there are no chemicals registered for the control of this plant.

To reduce the risk of invasion, it is important to prevent the inflow of nutrients. We will be looking into various steps to both remove and prevent further spread of this aquatic plant.

Wakkerstroom Bird Club

Box 93, Wakkerstroom, 2480
facebook: Wakkerstroom Bird
Club



Mission:

The Wakkerstroom Bird Club's aims are to encourage and promote birding, to develop and maintain facilities for birding, to help conserve the natural habitat the birds depend on and to enjoy the birding in and around Wakkerstroom.

Regular Activities include:

First Saturday of the month – A.M. Vlei Walk – meet on Amersfoort Road Bridge @ 07h00 until +/- 09h00,

Second Tuesday of the month – outings to recognized birding sites in the area –we usually meet at Wakkerstroom Library at a seasonable time, summer 07h00, winter 08h00.

Third Wednesday of the month – speaker or quality DVD show. This day may vary according to the speaker's commitments. Held at the BirdLife Centre, 17h30 for 18h00. Sometimes preceded by a bring 'n braai.

ALSO:

- SABAP 2 Atlassing
- CAR (Co-ordinated Avifaunal Roadcounts)
- BIRP (Birds in Reserve Project) counts,
- The Wakkerstroom Pentad (2720_3005) Survey, ending June 30, 2016

Diary of Events:

Saturday, April 2 Vlei Outing—our popular “walk and talk” outing—usual spot from 07h00, refreshments available.

Monday April 11— important evening meeting in Newcastle run by the BirdLasser team, led by Henk Nel. BirdLasser has established itself as the standard programme for atlassing and has many unique features. including the “Causes” facility whereby your records of certain species will be automatically sent to people studying those birds. If you want to learn about it or brush-up this is for you. Joint travel arrangements can be made to the Newcastle Club for 18h00.

Tuesday April 12—a new venue!! The Restory, off the Newcastle



gravel road. Full directions will be made available in time, leave the Library at 07h00 SHARP. Contact Rita Wiesemann on 082 958 4641

Wednesday April 20 - Return visit by Bronwyn Howard from Eco-Life, Utrecht.. Bronwyn will talk on “Birds as Environmental Indicators” A popular speaker on a very current topic.

Saturday April 23 - second session of the basic bird ID course, presented by Kristi Garland and Judy Wheeler. This will be followed with a field outing, led by Lucky Ngwenya.

New Members:

The club welcomes the following new members:

Ros Gerber,
Ruth and John Boyce, and
Arun Govender

We wish them a long and satisfying time with the Club.