



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa

Principal supporter of the Wakkerstroom Junior Bird Clubs

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 72 – DECEMBER 2019

Hello fellow Birders,

A couple of months have passed since we've last done a newsletter, did you miss us?? Hopefully in the meanwhile your area has had some rain and is looking a lot happier. Wakkerstroom had a week of rain contributions during November that totalled about 120mm, and now it's rained again almost non-stop the past week – that gorgeous gentle soft rain everyone craves, and fortunately none of the flooding other regions experienced. You can certainly hear the wetland breathing when the waters trickle in from upstream; frogs and insects have been in full cry, and even more frantic breeding and nesting activity are keeping the birds busy.

Interesting Local Sightings

These go back a little way, but are still noteworthy

18 September – At the canal under the Amersfoort road bridge: OTTERS - Mother and child having a major rough and tumble in and out of the vegetation lining the bank (Oude Stasie side). Eventually they swam down the canal in to the main pan. I can only assume it was the same pair that came gambolling down the cleared break between the bridge and road, once again on the Oude Stasie side. They swam about rather playfully until the larger individual caught a large frog and began teasing the youngster, running up and down alongside the water's edge and all the while followed by the screaming youngster. The youngster didn't seem to find the situation at all funny! They finally disappeared from sight about 30 minutes after my original sighting – and then silence.



Spotted-necked Otter by Richard McKibbin, Wakkerstroom BioBash 2017

24 September – Mike Maxted photographed a suspected juvenile Brown Snake Eagle at John Burchmore's house in town. Much local discussion followed and then by referring the picture to Warwick Tarboton and Lorna Stanton. This resulted in its ID changing to Black-chested Snake Eagle. A very interesting sighting for our area.

29 September – a regular wetland watcher saw a group of three Curlew Sandpipers – a very nice record.



Curlew Sandpiper with its tell-tale curved bill.

12 November – A Caspian tern spent a few days around Martin's Dam and the wetland. Photos below by Mike Maxted.



Southern Bald Ibis Monitoring Project by John Burchmore

The Southern Bald Ibis population is in decline. A national project for the species, researching the population trends throughout their range, is currently underway (2015 ESKOM Red Data Book of Birds).

Penny, Glenn (Ramke) and I made a start this month (September) to visit two of the seven nesting sites of the Southern Bald Ibis that we have been monitoring since we arrived in Wakkerstroom fifteen years ago. The northern most nesting colony is near Amersfoort and the furthest near Luneburg. All the sites are situated on a cliff face where there are suitable ledges for the birds to build their nest and close to water. We do have one site with the most number of birds on a cliff face with no water in the vicinity.

We visited two colonies, the largest with approximately 130 adults near Luneburg, and the other near Zaaihoek Dam with a population of approximately 30 adults. Birds were present at both sites; however there were no signs of cleaning nesting sites or carrying nesting material.

We spent a few hours at the large colony counting adults as they returned from foraging in the area. There were low numbers of birds when we arrived but when we left, approximately 120 were on the cliff face.

While at the site two White-necked Ravens flew past the colony upsetting the ibis on the cliff ledges, but the birds didn't fly off. Later, a pair of Lanner Falcons also buzzed the cliff resulting in lots of noise and Ibis flying off the cliff. They returned once the Lanner Falcons had left. An African Harrier Hawk also flew past without disturbing the birds.

In 2017 the Lanner Falcons raised three chicks in a cavity on the cliff face in the middle of the breeding Bald Ibis. The Ibis chicks were within 15 metres of the falcons nest.

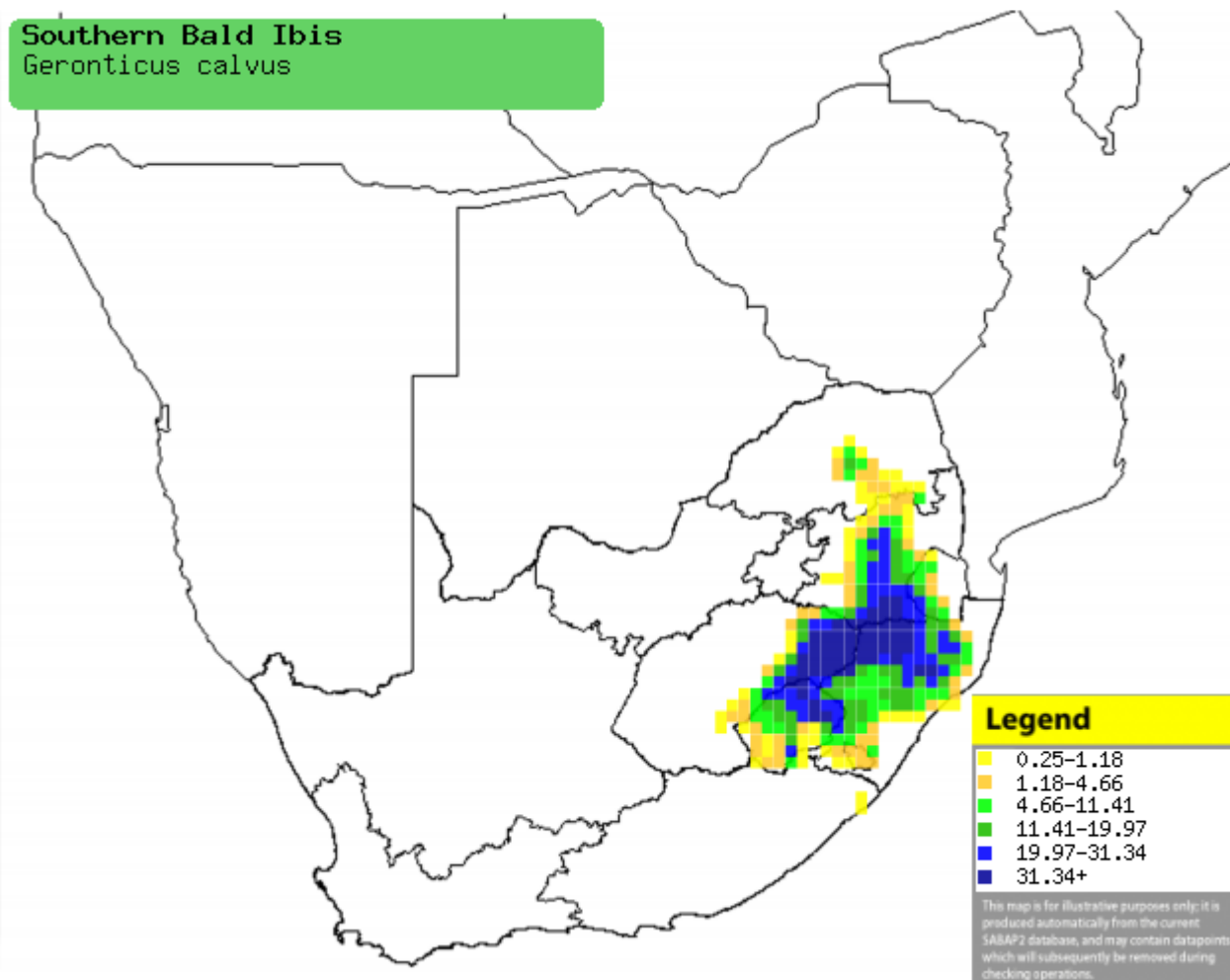
Thanks to ROCKJUMPER BIRDING ADVENTURES for financial assistance, enabling us to carry out the Southern Bald Ibis monitoring programme in the Wakkerstroom area.



Southern Bald Ibis, photograph by Warwick Tarboton

Distribution and habitat, Southern Bald Ibis (*Geronticus calvus*)

Endemic to the Great Escarpment, from the Limpopo Province through Swaziland and Mpumalanga to eastern Free State, Lesotho and KwaZulu-Natal. It generally prefers high-altitude treeless grassland and recently burnt, ploughed or heavily grazed fields.



Distribution of Southern bald ibis in southern Africa, based on statistical smoothing of the records from first SA Bird Atlas Project (© [Animal Demography unit](#), University of Cape Town; smoothing by Birgit Erni and Francesca Little). Colours range from dark blue (most common) through to yellow (least common).

(Ref. http://www.biodiversityexplorer.info/birds/threskiornithidae/geronticus_calvus.htm)

BIRDLASSER CHALLENGE STANDINGS AT 10 DECEMBER 2019

<u>NEWCASTLE CHALLENGE</u>						
<u>PLACING</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>THE 5 MOST LOGGED SPECIES</u>			<u>NUMBER OF RECORDS</u>
2	MIKE/JENNI	325	SOUTHERN FISCAL			640
6	BURCHMORES	225	AFRICAN STONECHAT			588
17	BRIAN GUERIN	178	HADEDA IBIS			534
24	CHRIS VOETS	116	CAPE TURTLE DOVE			499
25	KRISTI GARLAND	99	LONG-TAILED WIDOW			492
<u>IBA CHALLENGE</u>						
<u>PLACING</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>THE 5 MOST LOGGED SPECIES</u>			<u>NUMBER OF RECORDS</u>
40	BURCHMORES	329	CAPE TURTLE DOVE			2015
56	MIKE/JENNI	280	FORK-TAILED DRONGO			1893
86	BRIAN GUERIN	141	EGYPTIAN GOOSE			1706
93	KRISTI GARLAND	99	HADEDA IBIS			1523
<u>SOUTH AFRICAN BIRDING BIG YEAR CHALLENGE</u>						
<u>PLACING</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>THE 5 MOST LOGGED SPECIES</u>			<u>NUMBER OF RECORDS</u>
242	CHRIS VOETS	116	HADEDA IBIS			9372
			LAUGHING DOVE			8820
			DARK-CAPPED BULBUL			8542
			CAPE TURTLE DOVE			8374
			EGYPTIAN GOOSE			8246
<u>SOUTHERN AFRICAN BIRDING BIG YEAR CHALLENGE</u>						
<u>PLACING</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>THE 5 MOST LOGGED SPECIES</u>			<u>NUMBER OF RECORDS</u>

PLACING	NAME	SPECIES	THE 5 MOST LOGGED SPECIES			RECORDS
205	KRISTI GARLAND	97	CAPE TURTLE			7959
			HADEDA IBIS			7570
			LAUGHING DOVE			7464
			EGYPTIAN GOOSE			7146
			RED-EYED DOVE			6685

2019 SABAP cards for Wakkerstroom to date:

- 592 cards completed; 209 Full Protocol
- 57 Pentads covered.
- Mike and Jenny: 76 full protocol cards in 25 Pentads
- Brian: 30 f.p. in 1 Pentad
- Graham: 6 f.p. in 6 Pentads
- John B: 8 f.p. in 8 Pentads
- Jenny Russell: 1 f.p. in 1 Pentad.

If all that sounds like a foreign language to you, get in touch with John Burchmore or Mike Maxted who will explain what it's all about! It's not nearly as complicated as it all sounds 😊

Zaaihoek Dam and KZN Dams – current levels (9 Dec)

	<u>ZAAIHOEK DAM LEVELS</u>			
	<u>THIS</u>	<u>LAST</u>	<u>LAST</u>	<u>FULL</u>
	<u>WEEKS</u>	<u>WEEKS</u>	<u>YEAR'S</u>	<u>STORAGE</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>CAPACITY*</u>
<u>ZAAIHOEK DAM, KZN</u>	<u>66,3</u>	<u>67,1</u>	<u>82,5</u>	<u>184,3</u>
<u>TOTAL ALL KZN DAMS</u>	<u>53,3</u>	<u>53,6</u>	<u>55,8</u>	<u>4784,0</u>
<u>* FULL STORAGE CAPACITY IN MILLIONS OF CUBIC METRES</u>				

Kristi Garland Talk on Morocco

Our monthly talk in November was by Kristi about her trip to Morocco, where she represented South Africa in the Spring Alive Steering Committee in mid-October. All in all, nine countries from around the globe were represented. Kristi gave a wonderful talk and slide presentation on everything from the Moroccan scenery, customs, other participants from around the world, food, and (yes!) the 22 Lifers she managed to add to her list of birds.



Birding Big Day, 30 November 2019

In spite of the hot weather, some intrepid teams took part in this year's Big Birding Day, and did very well. Here is how they shaped up (as logged on Birdlasser):

"Wakkerstroom Picnickers" (*Mike Maxted, Jenni Maxted-Smith, Karen Kotze and Mark Kotze*) 152 Species
95th overall countrywide

"Bergklipwagters" - a team from Piet Retief that always choose Wakkerstroom for BBD (*Martin Knoetze, Francois Pretorius, Christo Herbst*) 148 Species 107th

"SABAP2 Wakkerstroom" - a team from WITS Bird Club that stayed with Kristi (*Andy Featherstone, Jeanne Thomas, Beth Carstens, Jenny Pappas*) 127 Species 131th

'Vlei Folk" (*John Burchmore, Penny Burchmore and Jenny Russell*) 123 Species 133rd

"The Village Weavers" (*Graham Spencer, Claudine Tavlet, Judy-Lynn Wheeler*) 89 Species 193th

“The Kana Thick-knees” (Brian Guerin, Elize McAllister, John Barrow) 88 Species 196th

“Wakkerstroom Juniors” (led by Kristi Garland) – sadly not many of the Juniors turned up on the day, as they got into the school holidays’ full swing) 12 Species 265th



The Wakkerstroom Picnickers



The Kana Thick-knees

BioBash Weekend December 2019

The fourth annual Wakkerstroom BioBash, hosted by Richard and Candice McKibbin of Lionheart Experience, took place this past weekend, so it’s fabulous that we had just had all this rain to make things interesting. It’s always a very busy weekend spent bird watching, bird ringing, frogging, herping, camera trapping, and all sorts of surprises - great fun for old and young. Every sunrise/ sundowner meeting at the bridge produced sightings of the spotted-necked otters which always delight our visitors. The frogs and toads of course were very cooperative during the nightly “frogging” outings, and during the bird ringing *they even managed to get a Red-chested Flufftail* – what a rare opportunity to see one of these close-up! Join us next year, there was an almost total lack of Wakkerstroom residents which is a shame – you are sure to see some new things and have a fabulous time. Richard always offers a special price for Wakkerstroomers.

I was hoping to post a photo of the Flufftail, but Ronay Delpont who was going to share her stunning picture has had a problem trying to send it to me. As soon as I get it, I will post it on the Facebook page. Instead I’ll share one of mine, of the sun reflecting off the sea of green wetland reeds. A poor substitute, but there it is 😊 And there are flufftails somewhere in there!!



WBC End-of-Year Celebration at Hare's Rest

Bird club members got together on 23 November for our year-end gathering. We enjoyed a wonderfully relaxing and scenic day at Hare's Rest, where we were hosted by owners Billy and Noelene Hare as well as their little group of rescue donkeys (including a two-week-young foal). It was a typically windy Wakkers day, but the anticipated lunchtime storm stayed away. Beside a bring-and-braai, there was also a make-a-bird-mask/ hat competition which was won by Wendy Watson, with second and third prizes going to Claudine Spencer and Jane Harley - well done to all who participated! Many thanks to all who attended the day, and special thanks to Claudine and her merry helpers who organised some wonderful food. Below are a few photos of the day....



Peaceful surroundings at Hare's Rest



Avoiding the hot sun



Christmas Market

The WBC will be at the Wakkerstroom Christmas market, taking place on the 21st of December from 9h30. Come and see us!

SA Bird Of The Year 2020 – The Southern Ground Hornbill

A big favourite with many visitors to our national parks, this will be a popular choice. Sadly not many live outside of the parks, all the more reason to look after them. Here's an update of the Bird of the Year 2019 and 2020 by Ernst Retief:

“Dear Secretarybird Supporter,

This is a short email with two messages. First we want to thank you for your fantastic contribution to the Secretarybird Bird of the Year 2019 BirdLasser Challenge (<https://www.birdlasser.com/events/secretaryb2019>). We have recorded more than 700 sightings of this amazing bird and I know that my colleague Melissa is keen to analyse the data. So, thank you very much.

The second message is that we last week announced that Bird of the Year 2020 will be Southern Ground Hornbill. We created a similar BirdLasser challenge for this species, see <https://www.birdlasser.com/events/sghb2019>. We took the liberty of copying all the participants of the Secretarybird challenge to the Southern Ground Hornbill challenge as we hope that you would also like to contribute your Southern Ground Hornbill sightings . However, if you do not want to be part of this challenge, please let me know and I will remove your name. The Southern Ground Hornbill project is already active (from BBD) and will continue till the end of 2020. Note that the Secretarybird challenge will remain active till the end of 2019.

Thank you for your continued support.”

That just leaves me to wish you all a very happy and safe Festive Season and all the best for the coming year. Wherever you may be going, remember to enjoy your birding!

Chris

