



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa

Principal supporter of the Wakkerstroom Junior Bird Clubs

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 74 – March 2020

Hello fellow Birders,

Wakkerstroom has just celebrated Water Weekend, as the 29th of February was Water Day ... on Thursday afternoon, we were treated to a 45-minute play by a trio called Galela who performed mainly for the village children as well as a few interested adults. Brian Guerin reports on Saturday's activities:

Water, water everywhere – and it's all fit to drink!

To mark Water Day on Saturday 29 February the WNHA organised, via Professors Bob and Mary Scholes and Wits University, a day of testing our drinking water. In excess of 60 samples were handed in by residents for testing (at a fraction of the usual commercial cost) with some coming from boreholes and others being municipal water. The results announced at the conclusion were very, very good and heartening to those present: ALL results were in line with the standards of the Department of Water Affairs except for one taken from a farm borehole and that one was still considered quite drinkable. E-Coli tests will still take a few days to complete but initial readings all indicate that there will be no problem there either. We are certainly lucky to be in a position of being able to drink our tap water – how many other regions worldwide cannot even brush their teeth, wash fruit and vegetables, or make ice cubes from their tap water? No need to buy expensive water in plastic bottles here! Cheers!

Many thanks to all for this great initiative and to the Scholes' and their wonderful team of students from Wits University.

- INTRODUCING BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA'S BIRD OF THE YEAR 2020 -

SOUTHERN GROUND-HORNBILL

CONSERVATION STATUS:
Worldwide they are listed as **VULNERABLE**
In South Africa they are **ENDANGERED**

ONE BIG BIRD
Southern ground-hornbills are the **largest** of the 54 hornbill species. They have black plumage and characteristic red facial skin. They can live between **50 and 60 years**.

100 cm
3.8 kg

AN AFRICAN LIFE
They are found in African countries, including: Kenya, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.

70% As much as their FORMER RANGE HAS DECREASED In South Africa

LIFE IN THE NEST
Ground-hornbills nest in **tree cavities** or sometimes earth banks and holes in cliff faces. They only breed on average every **2.6 years** but the fledgling rate is less at **1 chick per 5 years**.

SEXY IN RED
In mature birds the males have fully red facial skin, while the female has a patch of violet blue below the bill.

References:
BirdLife International 2016. *Bucconus leadbeateri*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016. eT2268238A92955067. https://doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.LI-2016-3.LI1572268238A92955067.en.
Carstern, K.F., Kasanjee, R., Little, B.M., Ryan P.G. and Hockey, P.A. 2016. Breeding success and population growth of Southern Ground Hornbills, *Bucconus leadbeateri* in an area supplemented with nest boxes. *Bird Conservation International* pp.17.
Malmanga, A. 2004. Breeding biology of Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucconus leadbeateri* in Zimbabwe: impacts of human activities. *Bird Conservation International*. 14(2), pp.63-68.

Designed by Caitlin Judge

Invasive Plant Species in Our Area

This month we'd like to introduce you to a new series of short articles. Some plant species in the Wakkerstroom area are very common, and we have become so used to seeing them around that many of us think they're indigenous. However, invaders can cause quite a bit of havoc in nature, as they are often able to thrive at the expense of local species – not just in the plant world but also with introduced mammals, birds, reptiles, fish etc. So it is important to recognize them, and in a protected area aim to get rid of them.

This month we start with ***Verbascum spp.*** (also known as Mullein) which is the flower with the long yellow inflorescence you see commonly around here. The picture below shows our assistant Eric cutting the inflorescences prior to painting herbicide on the stalks. During the exercise we became aware that non-flowering plants outnumbered those we had cut down by an estimated 4:1. This brings in the need to spray as well to eradicate this plant at least from the Wetland area.

This is a popular (and attractive) plant in many gardens in town, but it is an invasive menace in the wetland and will hopefully be eradicated there.



Wikipedia has this to say: “***Verbascum***, common name **mullein**, is a genus of about 360 species of flowering plants in the figwort family Scrophulariaceae. They are native to Europe and Asia, with the highest species diversity in the Mediterranean.”

SAPIA (South African Plant Invaders Atlas) in 2010, Issue 16 reads as follows: “A species of *Verbascum*, possibly a cultivar of *V. thapsus*, great mullein or Aaron’s rod, has been recorded as an escapee from cultivation in the Eastern Cape and in the Bronberg Conservancy to the east of Pretoria. Great mullein is an erect biennial herb 0.5— 2.0 m high. It is native to Eurasia and is in the snapdragon family Scrophulariaceae. The large woolly white to grey leaves

up to 500 mm long occur mainly in basal rosettes. The flowering stem is unbranched, usually leafy at the base, and carries many yellow flowers 12—20 mm across.

All mulleins are poisonous to livestock.

“Legislation: None”

Which leads us nicely into a request from our chairman Brian Guerin

Assistance with Spraying of Exotics

We are currently behind our schedule with spraying exotic plants on the vlei. The best of the summer season has come and gone and we have not used up all the herbicide we have in stock.

We are asking for assistance, we need a car with tow hitch and a driver (usually me), someone to start the pump and walk along ensuring the rubber pipe doesn't snag on roadside barriers etc. The third person needs to be able to climb up and down the embankments alongside the road to spray as far as possible into the reeds.

If anyone feels they would be able to assist with this type of work please contact me on 083 415 6701 or bguerin@nelweb.co.za

ZAAIHOEK DAM LEVELS 28 FEBRUARY 2020

	THIS WEEKS %	LAST WEEKS %	LAST YEAR'S %	FULL STORAGE CAPACITY*
ZAAIHOEK DAM, KZN	**71,4	71,4	78,0	184,3
TOTAL ALL KZN DAMS	60,3	58,7	57,6	4784,0



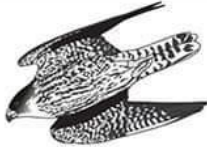


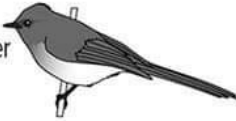




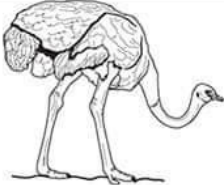
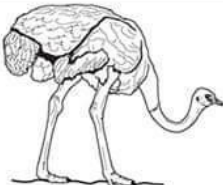






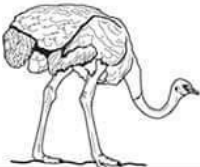

* FULL STORAGE CAPACITY IN MILLIONS OF CUBIC METRES

** LATEST AVAILABLE FIGURES FROM THEIR WEBSITE

Considering we are only weeks from the end of the summer rainy season, these stats are a real worry (Ed)

Fast facts to astound your friends with

Birds South Africa

<p>Deepest Diver King Penguin (±300m)</p> 	<p>Fastest Swimmer African Penguin (±20km/h)</p> 
<p>Fastest Flying Peregrine Falcon (±200km/h)</p> 	<p>Biggest Nest Sociable Weaver (±1.5 tons)</p> 
<p>Lightest Bird Fairy Flycatcher (±6g)</p> 	<p>Smallest Nest White-tailed Crested Flycatcher (±3cm)</p> 
<p>Shortest Wingspan Penduline Tit (±12cm)</p> 	<p>Smallest Egg Grey-penduline Tit (±0.7g)</p> 
<p>Longest Wingspan Albatross (±3.6m)</p> 	<p>Longest Fledging Period Albatross (±1 year)</p> 
<p>Fastest on Land Ostrich (±50km/h)</p> 	<p>Largest Egg Ostrich (±1.5kg)</p> 
<p>Shortest Fledging Period Black-eared Sparrowlark (±7 days)</p> 	<p>Shortest Incubation Black-eared Sparrowlark (±8 days)</p> 
<p>Heaviest Eagle Martial Eagle (±6.2kg)</p> 	<p>Furthest Migrant Arctic Tern (±35400km) round trip</p> 
<p>Highest Flier Vulture (Rüppell's Vulture more than 11000m)</p> 	<p>Longest Incubation Vulture (±58 days)</p> 
<p>Heaviest Bird Ostrich (±128kg)</p> 	<p>Heaviest Flying Kori Bustard (±18kg)</p> 

Wakkerstroom Bird Club Annual General Meeting

Saturday 22 February was the occasion of our AGM at the BirdLife Centre which was attended by 28 people and followed by a bring 'n braai – yes we do like to eat AND watch birds!

Earlier, guest speaker Ulrich Oberprieler gave us a splendid talk on Raptor Identification, interspersed with his unique sense of humour. His approach was to show how, in his opinion, many birders tend to approach raptor ID in the same manner as they do Kingfishers, i.e. by colour first. As Kingfishers are bright and colourful and raptors shades of grey, brown, black and white (and sometimes all of these) he taught us to use features such as leg feathering, eye and cere colouring, size of the bird, tail and wing length, and colour pretty much last (see Jennifer Russell's input further down the page)

A brilliant talk and very well received! We hope to have him back for one of his talks on larks and/or pipits.



Brenda enjoying lunch with Anna and Ulrich Oberprieler



Cosy inside the BirdLife Centre on a rainy day



Graham working hard ... others not so much ☺

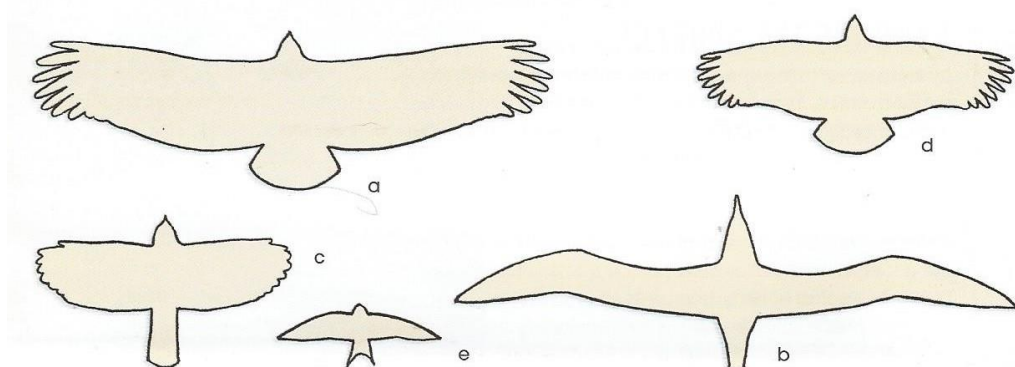
Highlights of the Financial Year from the A.G.M.

- We had a successful year financially, bank balances rose from R11703 to R27833
- Sales of books at the Total Garage reached R26334 or nearly 2.3 times subscription income of R11100
- Our website is up and running at www.wakkerstroombirdclub.org.za
- The Junior Bird Clubs, run by Kristi Garland, have had a good year with Lucky Ngwenya scheduled to take over Smiley's Club so language will no longer be a barrier to that group
- Our Facebook page still commands a strong following
- Extensive effort and money were spent on spraying/cutting alien vegetation in the wetland
- Rupert Lawlor gave a short talk on the situation with THE pipeline and a brief introduction to Water Day, 29th February
- We very unfortunately lost committee members Kristi Garland, Judy-Lynn Wheeler, Claudine Spencer and Chris Voets (who will still compile the newsletter for us). The Chairman thanked them for their wonderful help
- New committee members are Elize McAllister and Jennifer Russell and they were welcomed
- The Chairman thanked everybody who had so generously donated their time, money and books over the course of the year.

The ABC of Bird Identification by Jennifer Russell

I can't imagine anybody found Ulrich's talk at the bird club AGM boring. His ABC of bird identification was very instructive, even if experienced birders follow this method of identification intuitively. An extract from an intriguing little book by Rael and Helene Loon builds on and re-enforces Ulrich's ABC method, when the authors discuss bird design, particularly in relation to flight. By being familiar with body, wing and tail shape, one can tell much about the bird's behaviour.

There are five basic wing shapes and the shape varies according to function. For example, while the African Goshawk and the Peregrine Falcon are similar in size and both prey on small birds, their wing shape indicates their different hunting methods. The goshawk is shaped for manoeuvrability. The broad, 'fingered' wings with the broad, long tail enable the goshawk to pursue its prey in densely wooded areas. By contrast, the falcon's wings are long and pointed and it has a narrow tail. The falcon hunts in open terrain, stooping down from a height at great speed upon its prey, sometimes over 300 km an hour.



The shape of a bird's wing gives an indication of its flight style: (a) Large raptors have broad, 'fingered' wings ideal for soaring; (b) Many seabirds such as albatrosses, petrels and gannets have long, narrow wings for gliding; (c) The wings of most passerines are designed primarily for flapping flight; (d) Francolins and guinea fowl have broad, stout wings for short, rapid bouts of flight; (e) Swallows and swifts have narrow, pointed wings for fast flight.

Diagram taken from Loon R and Loon H (2005)

The tail of a bird helps it to steer, manoeuvre and brake. It also helps reduce turbulence and to provide stability. The shape and length of the tail are also significant. Many aerial feeders, such as swallows, swifts, drongos and bee-eaters, have forked tails which, by spreading and closing like fans, provide greater control as the birds pursue their prey on the wing. However, as if to prove the exception to the rule, amongst the most agile of birds are species that have short square tails, such as spinetails and the Bateleur. The short tail makes these birds extremely unstable in flight, but it is this instability that increases their manoeuvrability in the air, enabling them to deflect from their flight path at the last moment.

Ref: Loon R and Loon H (2005). *Birds. The inside story*. Struik Publishers (Pty) Ltd. Cape Town. South Africa

Are you a Lister?? Good news for you then ...

With 870 recorded bird species – more than 8% of the entire global tally – South Africa is regarded as one of the top birding destinations in the world. Of these 870, 18 are endemic and another 31 are near-endemic. And yet, until now there has been no consolidated platform on which country listers could publish their totals.

BirdLife South Africa, as the primary NGO dedicated to conserving the country's birds, has responded to this need by founding the South Africa Listers' Club, which is hosted on our website, www.birdlife.org.za All listers, whether based in South Africa or not, who have a South Africa list of more than 300 species are welcome to submit their totals via the official webpage through a simple form. Please note that your lists should conform to the official checklist produced and updated annually by BirdLife South Africa. The eligible listing area comprises all of sovereign South Africa, up to and including the 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone around continental South Africa and the Prince Edward Islands. This sets it apart from the geographical southern Africa list.

BirdLife South Africa hopes that the South Africa Listers' Club will encourage birders to explore this wonderful country, strengthen their appreciation of local bird species and ultimately help us to protect these birds and their habitats. We also ask birders to always bird responsibly and follow the BirdLife South Africa Birding Code of Ethics. Please encourage your family, friends and fellow birders to submit their totals and support this platform so that the proudly South African birding community grows.

For any queries about this list, please e-mail salistersclub@birdlife.org.za

ANDREW DE BLOCQ, COASTAL SEABIRD CONSERVATION PROJECT MANAGER

Note: I have asked the Listers Club for a list of endemic and near-endemic species that supports the figures quoted above.



Bird Safari – to play and to win

Now's your chance to pit your birding skills against those of friends and family, with Bird Safari, a new birding board game that is endorsed by BirdLife South Africa. And you won't be the only winner: for every game sold, R30 goes towards bird conservation.

Bird Safari is an Afrikaans/English board game that can be played by individuals or teams of two, who identify birds by means of photos, calls or descriptions. Just decide which level of skill you want to play, then head towards the finish line – and if you're there first, you get to claim bragging rights! It's a great way to test your knowledge and build your skills, while having fun at the same time!



You can purchase Bird Safari for R550 at **Shop for the Birds!** At the BirdLife South Africa office in Johannesburg – simply call in or e-mail (shopforthebirds@birdlife.org.za).

For more information about the game, go to <https://www.birdsafari.co.za>

JULIE BAYLEY, MARKETING & EVENTS COORDINATOR

Bird Club Diary – March 2020

Saturday March 7th – Monthly outing to the Amersfoort Bridge (before the migrants leave). Meet on the bridge at about 07h00 and stay as long as you like! Tea/coffee provided. We are looking at ways to improve the birding experience on these outings and would really like a good turnout and some suggestions from YOU. See also the simple questionnaire elsewhere in this issue.

Tuesday March 10th – a return visit to Zoetendalvlei (a.k.a. The Lavender Farm). We will leave the Wakkerstroom Library at 07h00 for the journey - bring the normal accoutrements, bins, food, water, hat etc. A lovely picnic spot there!

There will, as last year, be no evening meeting in March due to the Wakkerstroom Music Festival taking place that week.

Donations of binoculars and bird books

BirdLife South Africa was happy to receive a wonderful donation from the Port Natal branch recently. Herewith Mark Anderson's reply: "BirdLife South Africa received a very generous donation of field guides and binoculars from BirdLife Port Natal. These will be put to good use and distributed to people (especially learners at rural schools) who have an interest in birds and nature, but who do not have this essential equipment. Please consider donating the field guides and binoculars you no longer use to this important cause. See <https://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/outreach-donations/> "

Remember that our own Junior Bird Club members are always grateful to receive similar donations, particularly used binoculars and any version of Sasol Birds of Southern Africa field guide. If you can help, please contact Kristi Garland on 081 726 5282.

That's it from me for the month, see you in April 😊

Chris

I FELT HUMILIATED, MOLESTED AND ABUSED AS THIS LECHEROUS MAN SHAMELESSLY EXAMINED EVERY INCH OF MY BODY WITH THOSE BINOCULARS IN FULL PUBLIC VIEW, REPEATEDLY UTTERING LEWD REMARKS LIKE "NOTE THE FINELY STREAKED BREAST."

