



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



Affiliated to BirdLife South Africa

Principal supporter of the Wakkerstroom Junior Bird Clubs

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 81 – NOVEMBER 2020

Hello fellow Birders,

Did you miss us during October? Checked your inbox every 2 minutes, but that WBC newsletter never came? Apologies, Folks, all sorts of things were happening and I just never managed to get down to doing it. Now after a discussion with the Chairman and committee, it has been decided to do a newsletter every two months, in order to collect enough interesting and worthwhile material. If you find something to report you think will interest readers, please send it to me at cvoets@absamail.co.za, or WhatsApp 073 877 4386. Particularly Wakkerstroom news is of interest of course, and not always easy to find – so if you've seen something unusual at the vlei or on a drive around the area, let me know! Got a pelican in the garden? A penguin in the shower? A shoebill in the shoe? Tell us about it! Even if, after closer inspection, it was just a curious starling

Graham Spencer and Claudine Tavlet had not one but TWO top sightings this past weekend, a pair of White-bellied Bustards and a pair of Capped Wheatear! Brilliant! Judy-Lynn Wheeler reported 17 male and no less than 80 female Long-tailed Widowbirds on her front lawn at Weavers Estate, the males being in different stages of breeding plumage. And John and Penny Burchmore have repeatedly seen Paradise Flycatcher in their garden, while Rita Wiesemann saw a single Black Stork at the Vlei near the turnoff to Forellenhof and Oude Stasie. But probably the biggest excitement was caused in early September by the appearance of flamingos at the Vlei! First there were six Lesser with one Greater Flamingo spotted, then gradually those got less (no pun intended) with three of the Lessers staying for a good few days before disappearing. Then in mid-October there was another (single) Lesser Flamingo for a day, with several African Spoonbills for company. Wonderful to see them here resting up for a short time before moving on to better feeding areas. The photo below is sadly not a local one, but shows the difference between the Greater (on the left) and the Lesser Flamingo well.



House Sparrow Patient Story by Claudine Tavlet

Our local vet Dr. Gin treats a variety of animals, including wildlife on occasion. Recently Chris had posted a note on Whatsapp asking if anyone wanted to volunteer to take care of any birds that had been treated and needed care whilst healing. I volunteered.

On the 16 October Chris gave me a buzz, asking if I would care for a small bird that had been found near the local petrol station. I said I would and collected the little house sparrow from the practice in the afternoon. I discovered it was a few weeks old, a fledgling and had an injured leg. It was hopping at the bottom of the cage and flying about a bit. As I hadn't been very successful with such cases in the past, I was determined to give the little mite a fighting chance.



It wasn't very afraid and would stay in my hand when I tried to pick it up. However I didn't want to become too familiar with a "wild" bird. I could tell from the beak it was still quite young. I made a mixture of tinned dog food, hardboiled egg yolk and a bit of cooked chicken liver (no seasoning) with a bit of water to thin it out. I fed the bird with the end of a straw I had fashioned into a tiny spoon. She latched on and devoured the bits I fed her. That was a good sign! I topped up the water bottle with fresh water and a tiny pinch of sugar. I fed her again as the sun was setting, and was hopeful she'd make the night. I was delighted when she was alive the next day! I continued to feed her, and added some finely crushed wild bird seed to the concoction of food. I fed her a few times and decide to place a teeny tiny bowl of the stuff in the bottom of the cage. She hopped about and chomped the food herself. A few days later I started adding crushed bird seed in a separate container. Graham added a slightly bigger perch, and higher up. Tweety started hopping, and taking short flights between the perches. She grew and I'd let her out in a small room to fly about a bit, to strengthen her wings. I gave her bits of wild rice and soft potato in her food too. I'm very glad to say, that two weeks later, she's a much stronger bird and almost ready to leave. If the weather is better tomorrow, (it was pretty cold and drizzled and rained intermittently today), on the 2nd November, I'll take her up to Weavers' nest and set her free!

Well done, Claudine, these cases are so often difficult and don't end well. Fly free, little sparrow!

Birding Big Day

This from Ernst Retief of BirdLife South Africa

Difficult to believe, but Birding Big Day 2020 is less than a month away! I am pleasantly surprised with the number of registrations received so far! Especially encouraging is the number of new BBD teams who have registered, it seems many people learnt how to use BirdLasser during the lockdown and am now registering for the first time. Can we break the record for the number of teams, just over 300, who registered in 2019? Yes we can, if you submit your registration! Would that not be a fantastic achievement in an otherwise crazy and frustrating year? So PLEASE consider participating this year, as you know it is great fun.

Please submit your registration as soon as possible (if you have not done so already) and do not leave it too late, it will help me with administering the event.

Two important links below:

- General information: <https://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/events/birding-big-day-2020/>
- Registration Page: <https://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/events/birding-big-day-2020/entry-form/>

If you have any questions, you are more than welcome to contact me at bbd@birdlife.org.za.

Ghost Fishing

From BirdLife South Africa's CEO, Mark Anderson, comes this link to a rather alarming article:

There's no respite for our embattled planet. "Ghost gear — fishing equipment lost in the sea — can continue killing marine life for decades or even centuries after it first enters the ocean, making it the most deadly form of marine plastic debris". A thought-provoking article in the Mail & Guardian by Sheree Bega, one of BirdLife South Africa's friends.

<https://mg.co.za/top-six/2020-10-24-ghost-fishing-gear-an-immortal-menace-in-oceans/>

Flock to the Wilderness Event

And something else from Mark to put in your 2021 diaries:

Flock to the Wilderness will take place in Wilderness, Western Cape, from 27-30 May 2021. The Learn about Birds (LAB) conference, which we host in collaboration with the Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, will take place on Thursday 27 and Friday 28 May. BirdLife South Africa's AGM will take place at 10h00 on Saturday 29 May. The LAB and AGM will be held at the Wilderness Hotel. In collaboration with BirdLife Plettenberg Bay, Lakes Bird Club and the Nature's Valley Trust, there will be a series of interesting bird outings during the four days.

For further information about Flock to Wilderness, please send an email to Isabel at FLOCK2021@birdlife.org.za. For more information about LAB, please email LAB2021@birdlife.org.za.

Information about Flock to the Wilderness will be available at <https://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/events/flock-2021/>

Birding Opportunity in the Exclusive Makuleke Concession

.... while Andrew de Blocq, BLSA's Avitourism Project Manager has this very attractive birding offer: ☺

BirdLife South Africa has partnered with EcoTraining to provide an exciting opportunity for birding weekends at their camp within the Makuleke Concession in northern Kruger National Park. This is one of the best birding hotspots in the country with an incredible list of specials that include sought-after species such as Pel's Fishing Owl, Racket-tailed Roller, Dickinson's Kestrel, and two species of spinetails. Usually, access to the concession is only through expensive high-end lodges that price out the regular local birder. However, we have negotiated very affordable rates

in order to open up this area for locals to enjoy. As a bonus, BirdLife South Africa is receiving a commission from bookings, so your visit contributes to the conservation of birds and the development of avitourism.

Our first such weekend is over Birding Big Day from 26 to 29 November. There is space for a total of 20 guests (10 couples sharing) in safari tent style accommodation. The fee of R5400 per person sharing is all-inclusive, except for transport to and from the concession as well as drinks. Every day will have guided activities, including drives and walks, with an especial effort to enjoy Birding Big Day on the Saturday.

All of the details are included on the flyer attached. Any questions can be directed to me, but bookings are being handled directly by EcoTraining whose contact is on the flyer as well.

Please communicate this to your club members ASAP. If we are able to book out these dates, we may be able to make more dates in February 2021 available. If the spaces are not filled in the coming few days then we will have to open this opportunity up to the general public, however we would much prefer this to be an opportunity that we provide to our members and affiliated bird clubs. If your club is interested in booking an exclusive visit for 20 of your members, please get in touch with me and we can arrange this. I think it would be a fantastic club event, and all the board and lodging logistics is taken care of by EcoTraining.

These rates are never-seen-before and unlikely to ever be matched, making this an exclusive opportunity. Please make sure your members are informed as such.

A Close Shave for A Scarce Bird Of Prey

And another interesting article from BLSA, dated 18 September 2020:

Eagle-eyed conservationists are helping protect our country's natural resources in the face of a rapidly changing energy landscape, including protecting one of southern Africa's scarcest endemic raptors, the Black Harrier *Circus maurus*. Considered by many to be a breath of fresh air, electricity generated by wind turbines is a clean and renewable alternative to fossil fuels. There are, however, some environmental challenges associated with wind energy. One of these is that birds and bats may be killed if they collide with wind turbine blades.

"We were naturally concerned when we received reports of Black Harrier fatalities at wind farms in South Africa. This species is Endangered and has a small, declining population" said Samantha Ralston-Paton, BirdLife South Africa's Birds and Renewable Energy Project Manager. Wind farms in South Africa are required to monitor and report on their impacts on birds and bats. *"This monitoring allows us to test assumptions and serves as an early warning system – potentially significant impacts can be identified and addressed before it is too late"*, she said.

Black Harrier expert and BirdLife Species Guardian, Dr Rob Simmons, was well placed to investigate why Black Harrier is at greater risk of turbine collisions than initially expected. Black Harrier is the scarcest endemic raptor in southern Africa – it only occurs in South Africa, Lesotho and Namibia and has a tiny global population of approximately 1000 mature individuals. Black Harrier normally hunts close to the ground, below the reach of turbine blades, but it appears that the risk of collisions increases during the breeding season when flight heights increase during breeding displays and nest provisioning. A recent analysis of the population by Dr Francisco Cervantes Peralta suggested that if just three adult Black Harriers are killed per year by wind turbines the population is likely to collapse in about 100 years. For five adults that collapse could come about in our lifetimes.

Dr Simmons teamed up with BirdLife South Africa's Samantha Ralston-Paton and Robin Colyn, and Dr Marie-Sophie Garcia-Hera (another harrier expert and past student) and together they have drafted the best available research,

supplemented with expert opinion, in a simple guideline to support the appropriate location and management of wind energy facilities to avoid further impacts on this embattled species.

One of the key recommendations is that turbines are not placed near Black Harrier breeding sites and BirdLife South Africa has developed fine-scale spatial models that indicate just where these areas are likely to be. These maps can be used in the earliest stages of development and should help developers avoid investing in unsuitable sites. The Guidelines also propose a number of other potential mitigation measures, including increasing the visibility of turbine blades, by painting one of the blades black or red – a novel approach that has reported recent success with other species at one site in Norway. The effectiveness of this and other mitigation measures still needs to be tested for Black Harrier.



Image Black Harrier flies at blade-swept height past an operational turbine in the Eastern Cape.
© Julia Simmons

“We understand that despite the environmental challenges associated with wind energy, there are also a lot of benefits. Our approach is to help bridge the gap between science and implementation and ensure that decisions are based on the best available information, so that no one is left in the dark” said Samantha.

“If these guidelines, in concert with BirdLife South Africa’s guidelines on Cape Vulture and Verreaux’s Eagle, help reduce the impact of renewable energies on our scarce birds of prey, then we can have a win-win – clean energy and a sky full of raptors” concludes Dr Simmons.

The guidelines can be downloaded, free, from <https://www.birdlife.org.za/what-we-do/landscape-conservation/what-we-do/birds-renewable-energy/>

BirdLife South Africa’s Birds and Renewable Energy Project is sponsored by Investec Corporate and Institutional Banking.

For more information contact BirdLife South Africa’s Birds and Renewable Energy Project Manager, Samantha Ralston-Paton at energy@birdlife.org.za, 083 6733948, or visit our website <https://www.birdlife.org.za/what-we-do/landscape-conservation/what-we-do/birds-renewable-energy/>

Wakkerstroom Bird Club's Second-Hand Bookstore

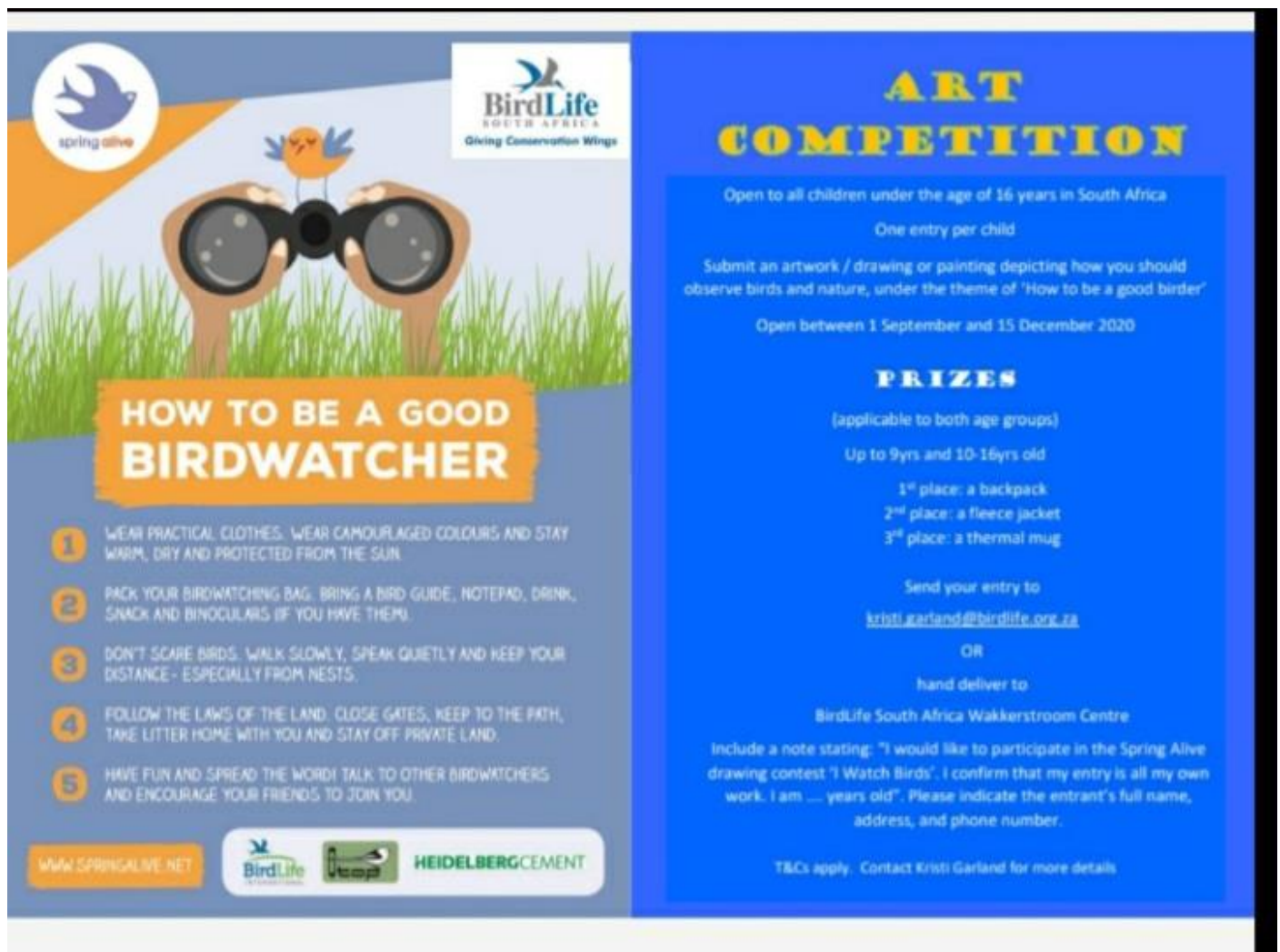
We hope you haven't forgotten about this during lockdown? Come visit if you haven't been there yet! You are sure to find something interesting, and at phenomenal prices. We're at the Total Garage.

Our permanent book sale is open Monday to Saturday for your convenience, and with low, low prices. 100's of titles available and not only novels. We have a wide range of genres to choose from including politics, faith, war, gardening, handcrafts and many more!

Our thanks to the many people who donate books, buy and read books from us and then donate them back and buy more, very much appreciated!!!!

All proceeds go to preserving our avian heritage and removal of alien vegetation in the wetland area.

Art Competition for the Kiddies



The poster is divided into two main sections. The left section features a blue background with a white circle containing a blue bird logo and the text 'spring alive'. Below this is an illustration of a pair of hands holding binoculars, with a small blue bird perched on top. The title 'HOW TO BE A GOOD BIRDWATCHER' is written in white on an orange banner. Below the banner are five numbered tips in orange circles. The right section has a blue background with the title 'ART COMPETITION' in yellow. It lists the competition's eligibility, entry rules, dates, prizes, and submission details. Logos for BirdLife South Africa and Heidelberg Cement are at the bottom.

spring alive

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings

ART COMPETITION

Open to all children under the age of 16 years in South Africa
One entry per child

Submit an artwork / drawing or painting depicting how you should observe birds and nature, under the theme of 'How to be a good birder'

Open between 1 September and 15 December 2020

PRIZES

(applicable to both age groups)

Up to 9yrs and 10-16yrs old

1st place: a backpack
2nd place: a fleece jacket
3rd place: a thermal mug

Send your entry to
kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za

OR

hand deliver to
BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre

Include a note stating: "I would like to participate in the Spring Alive drawing contest 'I Watch Birds'. I confirm that my entry is all my own work. I am ... years old". Please indicate the entrant's full name, address, and phone number.

T&Cs apply. Contact Kristi Garland for more details

www.springalive.net

BirdLife **Heidelberg CEMENT**

“Thunderbird” News

From Mabula comes this newsletter, just click on the link:

It is with great pleasure that we publish our latest news: <http://stories.ground-hornbill.org.za/the-thunderbird-Jul-Sept2020/index.html>



Ostrich Scientific Journal Turns 90

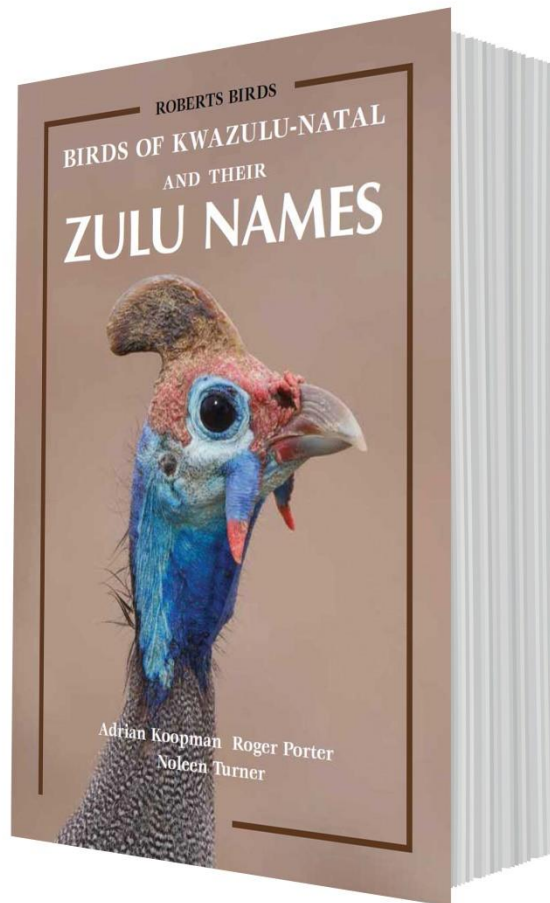
BirdLife South Africa’s scientific journal, Ostrich, is 90 years old! To celebrate the anniversary, Dr Alan Lee, the current Scientific Editor, had written an excellent review of the history of our journal. It can be downloaded for free at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.2989/00306525.2020.1818045>

First Project To Use Local Language To Save SA’s Bird Species Published

The John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, publishers of the Roberts bird books, is proud to announce the publication of the Birds of KwaZulu-Natal and their Zulu Names.

Accompanied by superb photographs, this ground-breaking book is the first practical field guide to record the Zulu names of bird species commonly found in KwaZulu-Natal. Where one name was previously used to describe a number of birds belonging to the same genus (i.e. ukhozi for most eagles), the need existed to give species specific names.

The authors hope this book will be used to inspire a greater interest, awareness and protection of the avifaunal heritage of KwaZulu-Natal. It is vital for the heritage of all South Africans that these names are recorded and made widely available. Noleen Turner, a passionate birder and honorary research professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in collaboration with Prof Adrian Koopman and Roger Porter, led this seven-year project, together with 18 expert Zulu bird guides from various parts of KwaZulu-Natal.



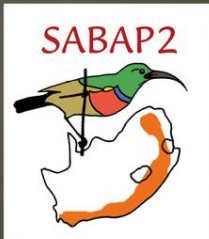
The recording, derivation and crafting of these names has been a lengthy but fascinating process. Turner notes that the project has included not only the consideration of biodiversity management, but also the pursuit of social ecology, the long neglected but crucial 'people's' aspect of conservation. She said when it came to Zulu names for birds, they had to fill in the gaps, and of the 550 species analysed, some were confirmation of well-known names, such as *inkazwi* for the fish eagle; some were selected from the most commonly known names such as *inkankane* for the hadeda ibis. Some names were redirected: for example, the name for the Brown-headed Kingfisher *indwazela* became the generic name for all kingfishers (*ndwaza* referring to the motionless position while waiting for prey).

Other new names were coined based on appearance, calls, behaviour and distribution such as *isankawu* (the bird whose call sounds like a vervet monkey) for the Southern Pochard, or *umacutha* derived from the Zulu word *cutha* (meaning to draw the body tense) as the generic name for herons, which perfectly describes the bird's behaviour before it lunges at its prey.

Birds of KwaZulu-Natal and their Zulu Names will be available online and on shelves in all good book stores from late September. The book is priced at R250.

Media queries: carol@jacana.co.za

Orders: orders@jacana.co.za



LET'S NOT LOSE IT

One of South Africa's most important biodiversity monitoring programmes needs your help!

The Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP) collects almost 2 million bird distribution records each year, providing the best real-time measure of the impact of global change on regional biodiversity. Citizen scientists carry the costs of data collection, but funding is needed to maintain the information technology backbone, which also supports atlas projects throughout Africa, as well as other bird monitoring projects like CWAC and CAR.

The South African National Biodiversity Institute has funded most of these IT costs, but the COVID-19 pandemic has seen their budget cut, and the funding promised for 2020, 2021 and 2022 has been lost, putting the future of the project at risk.



We are appealing for help to ensure the future of SABAP2! Are you able to assist?

Donations large or small, monthly or once-off contributions would be appreciated. We would also value any suggestions of corporate or other sources of funding we could investigate. Send your suggestions to Hilary Buchanan at fitz@uct.ac.za. All donations will be eligible for a 18A tax certificate.

For more information and banking details, visit <http://sabap2.birdmap.africa/funding>



Ensuring the protection of avifauna near wind farm facilities through world-first partnership

In a global first for any energy utility in the world, Eskom and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) have developed a proactive mitigation strategy to make powerlines and related structures more bird-friendly. This approach is not only good news for a variety of threatened birds in South Africa but also goes a long way to reducing wildlife-related power outages on the national grid. Initiating this strategy signals an exciting start, but much more work remains to be done, and BioTherm Energy has offered assistance to take this historical conservation initiative one step forward.

The EWT and Eskom have produced a map indicating which powerlines across the country are most likely to cause catastrophic impacts for birds and in particular, the most threatened species. Produced in 2016, this map has directed the activities and resources of both parties towards mitigating these lines against wildlife collisions. Despite this, however, and even narrowing the focus to prioritised areas, it remains a mammoth task to mitigate many thousands of kilometres of powerlines.



BioTherm Energy heard of this initiative and contacted the EWT in February 2020 to propose a collaboration to accelerate the mitigation of powerlines surrounding two of their wind farms: Excelsior Wind Energy Facility in the Western Cape, and Golden Valley Wind Energy Facility in the Eastern Cape. This collaboration comprises the donation of 4,200 bird flight diverters to the EWT for installation on additional sections of powerline in the 2020/2021 financial year. BioTherm Energy's assistance will ensure that the powerlines near these two wind energy facilities (WEF's) are visible to birds in flight and that the risk of collision is reduced.

The Overberg region, where the Excelsior Wind Energy Facility is situated, is home to our National Bird the Blue Crane. Although these birds seldom collide with wind turbines, their susceptibility to powerline collisions has been well documented by the EWT, and poses a significant threat to the species. In the Eastern Cape, the EWT's Birds of Prey Programme has established a 'Vulture Safe Zone' project focussed on understanding and addressing a multitude of threats to these majestic birds, with powerline collisions featuring high on the priority list. BioTherm Energy's contribution will enable the EWT to align the mitigation of priority powerlines in the region with the Vulture Safe Zone project, contributing significantly towards the project targets.

Years of historical mortality data, priority species home ranges and various other environmental factors were used to produce detailed sensitivity maps for every province. This was the starting point for Eskom to identify and prioritise

areas along the 300,000 km of Distribution network in need of mitigation. Eskom has nine operating units in its Distribution division, each with its own challenges relating to this ambitious task. In KwaZulu-Natal, for example, the Distribution Operating Unit had to physically inspect 6,134 km of powerline, guided by the EWT's sensitivity map, and as a result, they identified 36,121 structures requiring mitigation. During the 2019/2020 financial year alone, Eskom Distribution marked 255 spans and mitigated (insulated or replaced) 2,375 structures as part of the strategy. No other power utility in the world has attempted a proactive mitigation project of this magnitude.

Aside from the usual maintenance responsibilities, Eskom staff need to allocate time, vehicles and budget to retrofit structures and attach bird flight diverters (BFD) to sections of high-risk line. These bird flight diverters make powerlines more visible to birds in flight, significantly reducing the chances of collisions.

Lourens Leeuwner, Programme Manager of the EWT's Wildlife and Energy Programme, said "It is extremely encouraging to see an Independent Power Producer actively seeking opportunities to conserve priority bird species in the regions surrounding their facilities. BioTherm Energy is actively engaging with project partners and looking to bolster conservation initiatives around Excelsior and Golden Valley wind energy facilities".

BioTherm Energy's Sustainability Director Libby Hirshon said "At BioTherm Energy we are deeply committed to mitigating the potential impact of our wind farms on birds. We have worked hard to design programmes aimed not only at zero loss to priority species, but that actually result in net gain wherever possible. We, therefore, wanted to explore what we could do to achieve this aim, beyond on-site mitigation measures. We approached the EWT to discuss several initiatives, and the result of this was the rollout of 4,200 bird flight diverters to mitigate high-risk powerlines near our projects. We believe that this initiative will prevent needless collisions by Blue cranes, Cape Vultures, and a host of other raptors. We have no doubt that, through this kind of collaboration, we can create innovative solutions where both conservation and renewable energy can coexist and even enhance each other."

The Eskom/EWT strategic partnership is an example of what can be achieved when industries and conservationists work together towards a common goal and has been addressing electricity infrastructure impacts in South Africa for the last 24 years.

WBC November Diary

Here are the details of November activities, and a little more! Once again we remind you that the Club is alive and well and we need your support and encouragement to bring some feeling of normalcy back into our birding! And our lives, too.

Saturday November 7 – the monthly vlei walk, meet at the picnic spot and NOT on the bridge as previously, this gives everyone the option of walk different routes and to compare notes when we finish. Coffee, tea and rusks will be on offer as usual from about 9h00 back at the picnic spot for time to compile a list and socialise. During this week an African Crake was recorded at the wetland, a very big tick for us.



African Crake



African Rail

Care should be taken with this crane due to a superficial resemblance to the more common African Rail which has a longer bill, darker head and less distinct back markings. The pics above make it look easy, but.....This sighting will likely attract an ORF (Out of Range Form) from the SABAP 2 people so we need photographs! Hint hint.

And we still need to tick a few migrants!

Tuesday November 10 – our monthly outing, which will be our last for this year (where did the year go?) will be a local one. Let's plan to leave the Wakkerstroom Library at 07h30 to visit Bergen, the farm of Ben and Martie Pretorius. Braai facilities are available if you wish with the most hospitable host that we visit in the year. Birding should be good, breeding activity is reaching a peak and I'm sure Ben will be there to regale us with his stories again! Don't forget masks, hats, chairs and, above all, refreshments!

Wednesday November 18 – our meeting at BirdLife Centre *will not take place then* – instead we have a special treat on

Wednesday December 2 – Kyle Lloyd who is working on the White-winged Flufftails will give us a talk on this iconic little bird. Normal time of 17h30 for 18h00. Don't miss it!! Kyle will be here for a few days, setting up his monitoring equipment for the project.

Saturday November 28 –the big one, Birding Big Day. The regular participants should soon finalise their teams, decide on the centre point they will operate from and register with BirdLife South Africa early. There will be a briefing and a feedback meeting, details later.

AND a glimpse into December – our Christmas function will be held on December 5 at Camp 49, in the Lapa near the dam. Starting around 11h30 the function will be a bring and braai, **PLEASE** we need an estimate of numbers (**Brian 083 415 6701 ASAP**) as the club will provide salads, garlic bread and rolls and maybe a pud or two! If anybody would like to volunteer a salad or pudding that would be grand, contact Brian. Bring condiments and your binoculars for a surprise competition.....

That's it from me for now. I'll pop in again before Christmas. Till then, keep birding!

Chris

