



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 5

OCTOBER 2012

Welcome to our fifth newsletter

Membership

By a unanimous decision, your Committee elected John and Elize McAllister honorary life members of the Club for their past and continuing contributions to the Club and the promotion of birding in the area. John was the past chairperson of the club, a position he held for many years.

Brian Guerin in his capacity of chairperson presented John and Elize with a Certificate of Honorary Membership at a special meeting of the committee held recently. You may have seen the picture below in the Volksrust Recorder.



Joint meeting with the Ama Clic Clic Club

The Ama Clic Clic Club is a locally based camera club which meets in The Mucky Duck on the first Tuesday of each month. Attendees pay a monthly fee of R15.00 and Pat Scott provides a small meal for those who want it at a very reasonable price. Booking for the meal is essential. Pat can be reached on 0832965163

Each month there is a different theme of photography that is shown. For example this month's theme was "Transportation" and members were asked to exhibit about 5 or 6 pictures each.

The theme for November is "Indigenous Birds" and we have been asked to provide a Bird Quiz for attendees to take part in after the pics have been exhibited. The meeting starts at 18h30 and those who have booked food should arrive at 18h00

Trip to the Vlei – 6 October 2012

As advised in the previous newsletter, each month we undertake a trip to the Vlei to check on the status of the water birds usually resident there and to see if there are any unusual species visiting us.

On this trip, we saw about 39 species including a Village Weaver and a Levaillant's Cisticola. It seems that the Swallows are back in town; a Barn Swallow and a White - throated Swallow were seen Also seen was a Brown-throated Martin. We also saw two African Marsh Harriers carrying nesting materials to the same spot.

There weren't a lot of us there this time. Maybe the Dana Bazaar held on the same day had something to do with this.

The next organised visit will be made on Saturday, 3 November. We meet from 07h00 and stay as long as we'd like. Please mark this off on your calendar. You won't regret it.

Talk by Silvea Francis on the Amur Falcon

On Saturday, 13 October, Silvea Francis gave a talk on the Amur Falcon. She brought her husband and the "ill-mannered Korhaan" with her. The Korhaan turned out to be very well-behaved indeed and is very tame. 35 people made up the audience which is very gratifying.

Interestingly, the Amur Falcon steals other birds' nests and doesn't build its own. When it breeds in Upper Mongolia, there are between 3 and 4 chicks being raised and when the chicks are old enough, the entire population migrates down to South Africa. Between 21000 and 26000 birds roost in an avenue of trees close to Newcastle. They only roost in Bluegum and Pine trees although, according to a member of the audience, some have been seen roosting in an Oak near to Midas in Volksrust.

Due to the fact that the bird roosts very high off the ground, it was exceedingly difficult to catch any for ringing purposes. Eventually, a net was strung between two trees about 30 metres off the ground and about 10 were caught, ringed and a minute tracking device attached to their backs. This was in order to track their migrating journey. These tracking devices were very expensive and unfortunately, only one is still operational.

Silvea's talk was most interesting and we doubt whether any member of the audience regretted having attended it.

Turning to the White-bellied Korhaan, she mentioned that whilst its main food consisted of worms, she feeds it on cat food, egg mixture and insects. She also rehabilitates birds but the Korhaan is now imprinted and can't be released.



Silvea and the Korhaan

Remember

This is your newsletter and we would welcome any comments, criticisms and articles for inclusion in it. Articles should preferably be no more than half a page in length and photographs should be limited to 72 ppi (pixels per inch) The size should be 150mm x 100mm. Initial contact be Norman Dennett (0835379092) or Brian Guerin (0834156701)

Bird Feeder in front of the Bakery

Thanks to Graham Mellor who donated a bag of seed for the feeder. Any donation, whether crushed mielies, seed or cash is most welcome and can be given to John at his shop next to the Bakery.

Interesting local sightings

On Monday the 24th September, on arrival at the Kaalkrans Bald Ibis breeding colony, we came upon an African Harrier Hawk flying away from the nest sites. I don't know if it was successful in raiding a nest, but will keep an eye on it next time we go there. - Penny Fox

Black Storks (3) seen near Oude Stasie by Penny and I, on 25th September 2012. – John Burchmore

Lucky and I spotted the following on the BLSA property today □ Glossy Ibis x 25 and Common Greenshank x 1 – Andre Steenkamp

A Black-bellied Bustard has been seen on our communal drive way - Judy-Lynn Wheeler

Mystery Bird

The mystery bird is a mystery no more! Silvea Francis said it is a sub-adult Gabar Goshawk. We hope you enjoyed the puzzle!

Basic Bird ID Course

Andre Steenkamp has offered to hold a course on basic bird identification on the afternoon of Friday 9 November 2012 at Birdlife SA and a field trip on the morning of Saturday 10th November. Fees are R50.00 for members of our club and R75.00 for non-members. Contact Andre on 084 396 6853 or John Barrow on 082 255 6778. Andre has limited attendance on this course to 15 people, so book your place as soon as possible.

Display material for the Bird Hides - (Norman Dennett)

We are fortunate, here in Wakkerstroom, to have five Bird Hides (well we will have when the fifth one is rebuilt shortly). They are well constructed, comfortable as hides go; they look out over varied habitats, reed beds, open water, trees, grassland etc. and give an opportunity to see a wide variety of birds.

Where I think they could be improved is in the interpretative material that is displayed in the hides. Some have no informative display at all. Most of the illustrative materials, posters, pamphlets etc. that are readily available, are not place specific and often contain much irrelevant information. The overall result is very confusing especially for young people visiting a bird hide for the first time. To be confronted with a Poster with 158 species of Raptor when you are trying to identify a Marsh Harrier that you have never seen before must be a daunting task for anyone!

This was discussed at a recent Committee Meeting and it was agreed that we would try and address the problem. So, the intention is to produce interpretative material that will enable a visitor to a particular Bird Hide to identify a few of the birds that they will be certain to see. The material will take the form of an A4 mini-poster. One bird – one poster, well maybe two occasionally, two species of Egrets, two Lapwings, two Weavers - but generally each individual bird mini poster will contain an illustration of the bird, the Names, and information on Identification, Status, Migration, Habits, Breeding etc. Each hide will have 10 – 12 posters, some 40 species over the five hides.

We have approached Random House Struik (Pty) Ltd for permission to use the illustrations from Sasol **Birds of Southern Africa** for the posters. They have, most generously, agreed to our using their artwork provided we acknowledge their copyright, include their website address and make sure that the illustrative material is not abused.

We also hope to add a QR code to each poster. They are the little square boxes with apparent random lines that you see next to the Website address in many adverts. If you hold one of the modern phones up to this sign the phone will automatically download the website for more information and possibly even the bird calls, photographs etc. Don't ask me how it does it but my daughter tells me that if we wish to encourage young people to take an interest this is one of the most effective tools we could use.

To date we have drawn up the list of the birds to be shown at each bird hide, completed the pre - production planning and produced about half of the material required.

On a personal note I have thoroughly enjoyed researching and getting the information together, and I've learned a lot. For instance, an Egyptian Goose is not a goose, it's a duck,

When a Coot lands on the water it lands on its belly whereas a duck lands on its feet and when the eggs of the Little Grebe hatch the little ones climb onto their parents back and stay there even when they dive under the water!

We have donations for approximately 50% of the cost and we are confident that the balance will be forthcoming. A commercial company has generously agreed to sponsor the two hides controlled by the WNHA, thank you Sean.

My apologies for the mix-up at the meeting on Saturday 13th October regarding the collection taken. The funds collected will be used for the Mini-Posters in the Bird Hides; a separate donation was made to the Rehabilitation Centre in Newcastle.

Bird of the Month

The White Stork



The **White Stork** (*Ciconia ciconia*) is a large bird in the stork family Ciconiidae. Its plumage is mainly white, with black on its wings. Adults have long red legs and long pointed red beaks, and measure on average 100–115 cm (39–45 in) from beak tip to end of tail, with a 155–215 cm (61–85 in) wingspan. Males have slightly thicker bills. When migrating between Europe and Africa, it avoids crossing the Mediterranean Sea and detours via the Levant in the east or the Strait of Gibraltar in the west, because the air thermals on which it depends do not form over water.

A carnivore, the White Stork eats a wide range of animal prey, including insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals and small birds. It takes most of its food from the ground, among low vegetation, and from shallow water.

This conspicuous species has given rise to many legends across its range, of which the best-known is the story of babies being brought by storks.

As with other storks, the wings are long and broad enabling the bird to soar. In flapping flight its wing beats are slow and regular. It flies with its neck stretched forward and with its long legs extended well beyond the end of its short tail. It walks at a slow and steady pace with its neck upstretched. In contrast, it often hunches its head between its shoulders when resting. Moulting has not been extensively studied, but appears to take place throughout the year, with the primary flight feathers replaced over the breeding season.

Upon hatching, the young White Stork is partly covered with short, sparse, whitish down feathers. This early down is replaced about a week later with a denser coat of woolly white down. By three weeks, the young bird acquires black scapulars and flight feathers. On hatching the chick has pinkish legs, which turn to greyish-black as it ages. Its beak is black with a brownish tip. By the time it fledges, the juvenile bird's plumage is similar to that of the adult, though its black feathers are often tinged with brown, and its beak and legs are a duller brownish-red or orange. The beak is typically orange or red with a darker tip. The bills gain the adults' red colour the following summer, although the black tips persist in some individuals. Young storks adopt adult plumage by their second summer

Similar species

Within its range the White Stork is distinctive when seen on the ground but, when seen at a distance in flight, it can be confused with several other species with similar underwing patterns, such as the Yellow-billed Stork, Great White Pelican and Egyptian Vulture. The Yellow-billed Stork is identified by its black tail and a longer, slightly curved, yellow beak. The White Stork also tends to be larger than the Yellow-billed Stork. The Great White Pelican has short legs which do not extend beyond its tail, and it flies with its neck retracted, keeping its head near to its stocky body, giving it a different flight profile. Pelicans also behave differently, soaring in orderly, synchronised flocks rather than in disorganised groups of individuals as the White Stork does.

Routes

To avoid a long sea crossing over the Mediterranean, birds from central Europe either follow an eastern migration route by crossing the Bosphorus to Turkey, traversing the Levant, then bypassing the Sahara Desert by following the Nile valley southwards, or follow a western route over the Strait of Gibraltar. These migration corridors maximise help from the thermals and thus save energy.^{[54][55]} The eastern route is by far the more important with 530,000 White Storks using it annually, making the species the second commonest migrant there (after the European Honey Buzzard). The flocks of migrating raptors, White Storks and Great White Pelicans can stretch for 200 km (125 mi). The eastern route is twice as long as the western, but storks take the same time to reach the wintering grounds by either.

Communication

The adult White Stork's main sound is noisy bill-clattering, which has been likened to distant machine gun fire. The bird makes these sounds by rapidly opening and closing its beak so that a knocking sound is made each time its beak closes. The clattering is amplified by its throat pouch, which acts as a resonator.

Breeding and lifespan

White Storks generally begin breeding when about four years old, although the age of first breeding has been recorded as early as two years and as late as seven years. The oldest known wild White Stork lived for 39 years after being ringed in Switzerland, while captive birds have lived for more than 35 years.

Conservation

The White Stork's decline due to industrialisation and agricultural changes (principally the draining of wetlands and conversion of meadows to crops such as maize) began in the 19th century: the last wild individual in Belgium was seen in 1895, in Sweden in 1955, in Switzerland in 1950 and in Holland in 1991. However, the species has since been reintroduced to many regions

Our previous outing

On September 21st, we had a most rewarding visit to Jamie and Trish Oglesby's farm near Ngogo in KZN. Brian and Brenda Guerin, Bertus and Rita Wiesemann, Bev Thorne, Paul Tubb and John Barrow formed the expedition. Amongst the more unusual species seen there were the Greater Honeyguide, the Black Saw-wing and the Brubru.

Next outing

Our next outing is to Fickland's Pan on Tuesday, 6 November 2012. We'll meet at the Wakkerstroom Library at 07h00 and go on from there. You'll need binoculars and, if possible, telescopes. There'll be a "Bring and Braai" at Birdlife SA afterwards. For further details, please contact Brian Guerin on 083 415 6701 or 017 730 0570.

Future outing

It's hard to believe it, but the Christmas period is nearly on us. Residents of Wakkerstroom and the surrounding areas are aware that *The Whistling Duck* near Luneburg holds an annual Christmas Fair. Birding is great around there too and we're thinking of combining our November or December outing with a visit to the Fair. Again, we'll keep you posted.

The Committee