



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



NEWSLETTER NUMBER 7 - DECEMBER 2012

Saturday Morning Vlei Walk.

Saturday morning December 1st started out a bit murky but cleared up a little as the outing progressed and even the breeze was not too unpleasant. Eleven hardy souls attended and the total of 54 species sighted is our best yet, made more pleasing as high water levels seem to be affecting breeding success rates. For this reason we haven't seen too many youngsters for comparison with their adult plumages.

Most of the "usual suspects" were recorded including Cape Rail, Little Bittern, Squacco Heron and Black-crowned Night Heron. We also saw a Cape Wagtail nest, evacuated by the chicks just the day before. This was pointed out to us by Vaughan Meyrick, a visiting birder and a founder member of BirdLife Trogons, South Coast. The Glossy Ibis which has been common this summer was not sighted.

Don't forget the next Saturday Vlei Walk is on January 5th – see you there!

Don McGillivray enjoys his birding in Wakkerstroom.

We are very pleased to quote a posting on sabirdnet@yahoo.com by Don MacGillivray who obviously had a very enjoyable visit to Wakkerstroom a few weeks ago. He writes:

"I recently made my third birding trip to Wakkerstroom. The first trip, some years back, was in the middle of winter and against the advice of John McAllister. Nonetheless, John guided me around the area having advised me that my chances of seeing any of the famous Wakkerstroom specials were almost zero. Another trip thereafter, in the summer, was successful in seeing Rudd's and Botha's Lark, albeit with Norman Mncube's help. My most recent trip was a couple of weeks ago when I was guided by Lucky – a most exceptional bird guide and a fantastic host. My thanks to Kirsti Garland at Birdlife for helping me in this regard.

For those of you who don't know it, Wakkerstroom really is one of the jewels in the crown of South African birding. It is not spectacular like Sani Pass, not exciting like Mkuze and not as colourful (birding-wise) as the Western Cape. But if you like larks and crisp clean air, this is a good spot. I am fairly indifferent about the town itself (so was my Garmin – no matches were found for it) but the birding makes up for it. I stayed at the Wakkerstroom Country Inn which was clean, comfortable and served good food. The weather in this area is notoriously changeable with all four seasons possible within a few hours.

Lucky met me at the hotel at 6am and we headed out on the Utrecht road. Before long, we had seen an Eastern Long-billed and Red-capped Lark and a pair of Yellow-breasted Pipits. We also saw Plain-

backed and African Pipits. We drove onwards to Dirkiesdorp which was the highlight of my trip. We saw Bush Blackcap, Malachite Sunbird and four Barrow's Korhaan. One of these was at a distance while the other three were really close. On our return to Wakkerstroom we saw a Denham's Bustard and a couple of White-winged Terns. Rudd's Lark was easily found near Fickland's pan. A large field nearer to Amersfoort was good for larks - Spike-heeled, Botha's. We didn't see Pink-billed lark though they occur here. It was also good to see all four of the SA ibises in one day. We only saw a single Blue Korhaan all day, perhaps as we only started looking for them once we had seen all the other specials and by which time it was getting hot. Another birding group also staying at the hotel had seen lots of them. I spent some time in the late afternoon birding around and about the wetland and saw SA Cliff Swallows, lots of weavers and widows, a Marsh Harrier and a Little Bittern. On my previous trips to Wakkerstroom I had seen African Rock Pipit and Ground Woodpecker but I didn't go searching for them this time.

In summary, if you haven't been to Wakkerstroom before, it is time to make the trip. The birding is excellent, providing the weather is good. Also, hire a local bird guide; you won't regret it"

Interesting Local Sightings

Wattled Cranes –2 birds reported by a number of people on the field opposite the first turnoff to Volksrust, Warwick Tarboton ref C1, a nice sighting so close to Wakkerstroom." – Brian Guerin



This will be the Bird of The Month in Newsletter Number 8, learn more about this special bird written from Bigmac's guiding experiences.

We've asked before, but a reminder doesn't hurt! If you've seen any unusual or interesting birds, we'd love to hear from you. We'd need the name, date, time and place of sighting and the real McCoy would be a photo of the bird.

Please e-mail John Barrow at dajohn.barrow@gmail.com

Hides

As we all remember, the Flufftail Hide was completely burned down during the August Vlei fire. The Hide was insured, and the appropriate Claim was submitted which was unfortunately repudiated, due to a technicality. A separate claim has now been submitted to Eskom as the fire had occurred due to a flashover on the main supply line to Wakkerstroom. Let's hope that Eskom is more sympathetic.

The Iain Drummond Hide is in the last phase of repairs and should be open to the birding public shortly

Our Christmas Social

On Monday, 10 December 2012 we held a successful Sherry and Snacks Christmas function at Birdlife SA premises About 25 people attended despite the inclement weather and Brian Guerin gave a short address reviewing the year's progress and highlighted some proposed plans for the future.

Future Activities to Diarise.

Saturday 5th January – Monthly Vlei Walk. Meet on Amersfoort Road bridge from 07h00. Our regular meeting is always held on the 1st Saturday of each month.

Wednesday 9th January - Talk by DR Charmaine Uys from BLSA. “The Future Plans for the Conservation of Wakkerstroom Grasslands” 17h30 for 18h00 at BirdLife Center, Wakkerstroom. This is an important and interesting talk. Not to be missed.

Saturday January 26th – CAR Count – Details will be provided separately by Judy Wheeler in due course. CAR = Co-ordinated Avifaunal Roadcount, a National Project organized by the Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town.

Tuesday January 29th – Amur Falcon roost, Volksrust, meet at Wakkerstroom Library at 17h30.

Saturday 2nd February – Monthly Vlei Walk Meet on Amersfoort Road bridge from 07h00.

Tuesday February 12th – Visit to Klaus Devenish’s farm for birds and flowers, meet at Wakkerstroom Library at 07h00, bring refreshments.

Wednesday 20th February – Talk by Andre Steenkamp. “Snakes” At BirdLife Centre 17h30 for 18h00. A good opportunity to learn more about our indigenous snakes!

Wakkerstroom Bird Club facebook page

Our facebook page is proving popular. If you are on facebook and haven’t as yet “liked” it, then please do so and encourage your friends to do so as well. In this modern day and age, more and more communications are being made by social media sites and millions of people are now using them. The Wakkerstroom Natural Heritage Association has a facebook page and the Wakkerstroom Tourism Association has a website (www.wakkerstroom.co.za). Our material is available on both.

Mini Poster Progress Report

In our last Newsletter we announced the plan to design and produce Mini A4 Interpretative Posters to be placed in each of Wakkerstroom’s Bird Hides. We are pleased to report that the posters for the Crane Hide and the Iain Drummond Hide have been completed and it is our intention that the Beck and WOW Hide posters will be finished and installed early in the New Year.



Brian Guerin, WBC Chairman shows Beverly Thorne one of the posters. He commented, “I’m sure the posters will make a visit to the Hides much more enjoyable and informative, our hope is that visitors will come away having been able to identify the birds they will have seen”.

Bird of the Month

Rudd's Lark



Photograph by kind courtesy of Warwick Tarboton.

Status: Endemic **Red Data Book status:** Critically Endangered

Scientific Name: *Heteromiraфра ruddi*

Named after Charles Dannel Rudd (1844-1916).

Born in England he came to the Cape in 1865. In 1870 he went to Kimberley where he became a successful diamond dealer and associate of Cecil John Rhodes with whom he founded the De Beers Mining Company. In 1886 Rudd went to the Witwatersrand where he and Rhodes later started Gold Fields of South Africa Limited. He applied himself to business while Rhodes was involved in politics and it was Rudd that secured from Lobengula sole concessions for the British South Africa Company to prospect in Matabeleland. In the early part of the 1900's he financed collecting trips in southern Africa by Captain C.H.B. Grant (1878-1958) (of the "Mackworth-Praed and Grant" series of bird books) on behalf of the British Museum. - Taken from "South African Bird Names Explained" by the late Charles Clinning, illustrated by Duncan Butchart.

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Rudd's Lark is featured as Bird of the Month because it is the club's logo bird and because of its conservation status of : **Critically Endangered** - meaning that it is a species that is either facing an extremely high risk of extinction or have numbers which have decreased, or will decrease, by 80% within the next three generations. It is the highest risk category assigned by the IUCN Red List for wild species.

Threats: Habitat destruction due to unfavourable land use, e.g. forestry/agriculture. Small population of <5000 birds.

Habitat: High altitude grassland (1700-2200masl), mostly centred around Wakkerstroom.

Opportunity: The establishment of a Grassland Biosphere Reserve in our area would cover and protect a large proportion of the population. **Dr Charmaine Uys will be telling us more about this at our meeting at BLSA on January 9.**

**The Committee wishes you and your family a Blessed Christmas
and a safe, prosperous and lifer-filled 2013 - at our outings!**