

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

May 2015



GURNEY'S SUGARBIRD ALBERT FRONEMAN



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LUCKY DRAW WINNERS

A lucky draw was done for all BirdLife South Africa members who renewed their membership in March 2015, and we congratulate the five members who will receive a copy of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa* coffee-table book:

Hilary Gerber
Allan Youell
Cleo Artemides
Margaret Edwards
Carol Yeoman

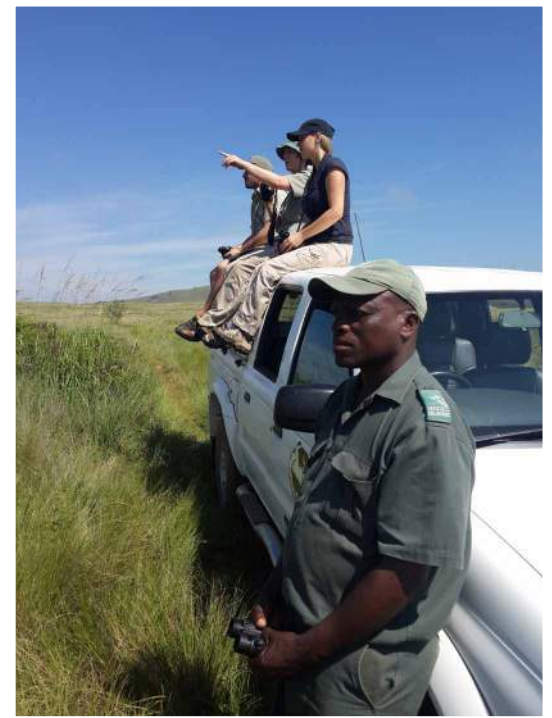
We are sure you will enjoy the wonderful illustrations by Graeme Arnott and interesting accounts by Terry Oatley.

Thank you to all who renewed their membership with BirdLife South Africa.

combining forces TO CONSERVE VANISHING HABITATS

One of the aims of BirdLife South Africa's Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) programme is to secure key sites and habitats crucial for the continued existence of our birds. According to the latest red data listing, 15 per cent of South Africa's 846 bird species are listed as threatened, with 40 species listed as Endangered and, alarmingly, 10 species listed as Critically Endangered. One of the main reasons for these declines is habitat loss. In conserving vital habitats, we can ensure that birds and other species continue to have a place to call home.

The IBA programme consists of a dedicated and diverse team of individuals who are using every tool at their disposal to save our species by conserving vanishing habitats. One of the main tools the IBA team is using is the Biodiversity Stewardship model. This national initiative engages private landowners to formally protect biodiversity by declaring Nature Reserves or Protected Environments or signing Biodiversity Management Agreements. The IBA team is undertaking Stewardship in various IBAs across the country, including a newly launched Stewardship project in the KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grasslands IBA. >>>>



DANIEL MARNEWICK

BirdLife South Africa IBA programme staff watch Blue Swallows enter nest sites as part of a concerted monitoring effort.



Blue Swallow

WARWICK TARBOTON

The KwaZulu-Natal Mistbelt Grasslands IBA provides essential habitat for a number of threatened species, such as the Endangered Southern Bald Ibis and the Critically Endangered Blue Swallow. The enigmatic Blue Swallow is on the brink of extinction in our country with less than 40 known breeding pairs. To make matters worse, the habitat where they breed is classified as Endangered with less than 10 per cent intact Midlands Mistbelt grassland remaining in South Africa. Birdlife South Africa's IBA team has identified that urgent action is needed in this regard and is, therefore, focusing on securing as much of this habitat as possible in collaboration with important partners like Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and WWF-SA.

The efforts around securing habitat for Blue Swallows combine a number of forces under the newly launched Blue Swallow Stewardship Project headed up by Rina Theron, a Blue Swallow researcher, and the expertise of the IBA Programme's KZN Regional Conservation Manager, Nick Theron. The Blue Swallow Stewardship work is also augmented by BirdLife South Africa's Biodiversity Stewardship Fiscal Benefits Project (the Fiscal Benefits Project) managed by Candice Stevens, a tax specialist, who is testing the use of specific green tax incentives as a means to increase the interest and commitment by landowners to steward their land in order to protect biodiversity. The Fiscal Benefits Project uses a new and unique tool that provides additional force to Stewardship efforts and is showing positive results and strong feedback after being launched at Blue Swallow Stewardship sites.

By combining the expertise and commitment of different members of the IBA team, from tax and species expertise to landscape conservation management, the level and success of securing the future of a myriad irreplaceable species, such as the Blue Swallow, carries a far greater impact.

Rina and Candice's work would not be possible without the important funding received from BirdLife Sisonke and the WWF Nedbank Green Trust respectively.

Candice Stevens, Biodiversity Stewardship Fiscal Benefits Project Manager, candice.stevens@birdlife.org.za

NEWS FROM THE DLINZA FOREST AERIAL BOARDWALK

The Dlinza Forest Aerial Boardwalk has resumed its Schools Conservation Programme, where rural schools are bussed to Dlinza Forest to learn about nature conservation from the ground up, using the unique Aerial Boardwalk as their classroom. Learners are given educational talks and activities by experienced guides, followed by lunch, then visit museums for education in conservation of their heritage. Businesses interested in sponsoring a school to participate can e-mail eshoweboardwalk@telkomsa.net or phone Jane Chennells on 083 265 9629. Jane Chennells, thechase@netactive.co.za



gardening

FOR BIRDS

My garden is ablaze with orange *Leonotis leonurus* flowers and, although I don't like winter, I do love the Wild Dagga – and so do the sunbirds. If you have a loupe or magnifying glass (or even use your upside-down binoculars), do have a closer look at the individual florets of this *Leonotis*. I was enchanted by the soft, silky orange hairs, especially at the top of the floret where the anthers sit. Now I know why the genus name refers to a lion's ear (Greek *leon*, a lion, and *otis*, ear). Although I have never been that close to a lion's ear (or a lion for that matter), I am sure it would have the same gorgeous fluffy look. The species name, *leonurus*, refers to a lion's tail (Greek *-urus*, a tail) and this may well refer to the way in which the flowers occur in clusters up the stem – the end of a lion's tail certainly has a 'cluster' of soft hairs. While you are peering at the floret, give the lower part a gentle squeeze and you will see a drop of liquid oozing up – taste it, this is the sweet nectar treat the birds are offered in payment for their pollination duties.

Another sunbird treat flowering in profusion at the moment is *Syncolostemon densiflorus*, Pink Plume. This is a gentle shrub for a sunny position and has a particularly long flowering season. Red is always given as the colour birds go for, but they seem to accept that pink is just as good in this case. Come to think of it, the white form of *L. leonurus* (this is quite natural and occurs in about five per cent of naturally occurring plants) seems to get as many visits as the common orange one so maybe birds are more astute than we give them credit for.

Calling someone a 'Bird Brain' is a derogatory statement but is it a fair comment? Pollination of the *Strelitzia regina* flowers is a case in point. The flower has developed a landing platform for nectar seekers, and when they land on it, it splits slightly and in leaning forward to sip



Syncolostemon densiflorus

the nectar, the birds' breast feathers come into contact and pick up the sticky pollen. Evolution is still quietly going on and in this instance the adult birds have 'learned' to cheat and take the nectar by clinging to the side of the flower, thus avoiding the sticky pollen. Not what the flower wants at all and I wonder what its next move will be? At present the pollination is done by the juvenile birds that have yet to learn the avoidance trick. If you have one of these plants in your garden, make a point of watching carefully – it's such fun!

A tree that seems to be happy growing almost anywhere is *Apodytes dimidiata*, the White Pear. The terminal clusters of white, scented flowers attract insects as well as the insectivores that follow them all through spring and summer. Then follows the small, black berries enjoyed by all the small fruit-eating birds. In some areas the appendage holding the berry is red and in others it is black. The White Pear copes well with the frosty winters here in Howick and it flourished in much warmer Pietermaritzburg, so it gets lots of points from me!

Sally Johnson, sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com

Attention BirdLife South Africa members:

Please use your membership number as a payment reference when paying your membership fees.

on the road

with ROSS



In 2013, I stopped off in Beijing, China, en route to a meeting in South Korea. That was the sum total of my experience of the world's most populous country. My colleague, Karen Baird from New Zealand, has done exceptional work in getting a workshop with China, on seabird bycatch issues, to finally happen. Using the GEF project resources, five experts (including me) went to Shanghai in mid-April 2015 to repeat what has become a very successful model – deliver a workshop in-country, and develop a working relationship to help the country transition its fleet to be compliant with international regulations. China's approach to seabird bycatch was a great unknown before this workshop – their reporting to the various fishery commissions is so minimal that we had little confidence that what they reported was actually happening. This workshop has changed all of that – in large measure because China has recently made a strong commitment towards becoming sustainable. Part of this includes capping its distant waters longline fleet, which currently is at around 350 vessels. It was very encouraging to hear this news and see the way in which China is moving towards responsible and sustainable fishing practices. Time will tell how far these initiatives (China's approach and our engagements with them on seabirds) are taken, but all the experts who participated came away encouraged and optimistic.

Our workshop, while technically in the big city, was actually in a very newly constructed part of the city. And it was extremely empty, with no significant industry, housing or related infra-

Modern China – Ross takes in Shanghai's iconic skyline from The Bund.

structure aside from the two universities (the Shanghai Ocean University, right next door to the Shanghai Maritime University – both with 12 000 students each). And so, unusually for me, the little spare time I had (one day) was not spent birdwatching.

My colleagues really wanted to see Shanghai proper – a city of 22 million inhabitants – so birding was relegated to a bit part as we visited a museum and some iconic sites. China's strides to match its massive economic growth with modern standards for urban systems and infrastructure is seriously impressive. The transport systems are inexpensive, clean and very efficient. And although the city centre was a thronging mass of humanity, it was always orderly and enjoyable to experience.

The Bund is a famous part of Shanghai, where a skyline composed of ridiculously modern skyscrapers faces across a river to a much older façade. The views are sensational! We made the mistake of trying to find lunch and a beer on the 'modern' side. The first place we tried offered very little by way of choice, the stand-out item being a steak for more than R1 000. We departed quickly and found a somewhat less pretentious spot to eat and to take the edge off our thirst, without requiring a bank loan for the pleasure. Karen and her husband did go birding, in the Yellow Mountains. If I ever go back, I'll be sure to do likewise.

Dr Ross Wanless, Seabird Programme Manager,
ross.wanless@birdlife.org.za

champions OF THE FLYWAY 2015

Following the piece in the February 2015 newsletter, the Champions of the Flyway competition took place in Israel on 25 March. Chris Lotz, Jason Boyce and Trevor Hardaker represented South Africa, the only southern hemisphere team taking part. So, how did it go? Here is what Trevor Hardaker had to say:

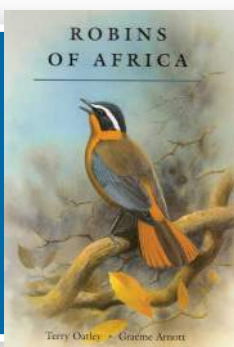
'Well, we had a lot of fun... We didn't win, unfortunately, but we learned a lot. Fifteen international teams took part and we ended up coming sixth with a total of 150 species for the day. Perhaps not as high as we would have liked, but considering that most other teams had taken part before and knew the area better than us, we believe that we did quite well. It wasn't so much about knowing the birds (as we have had experience with most of the species before), but rather about knowing the area intimately and knowing where to go to get the various species. We only had three days to get to know the "playing field", which is a very large area stretching from Eilat in the south to an area some 250 kilometres north of it. We tried to cover as much of it as possible during the scouting days we had available, but just didn't have enough time to find all the good sites. In discussions with some of the other teams after the event, we realised that we had missed out on a couple of key sites (that we were not aware of at the time), which could have added a good number of species to our list. If we are fortunate enough to be invited to take part again next year, we believe that we can fine-tune our route quite a bit and have a better chance at being a challenger for the title. Nevertheless, it was a great event and we really enjoyed it.



The South African team (L-R): Chris Lotz, Jason Boyce and Trevor Hardaker.

'The South African team also came extremely close to being crowned "Guardians of the Flyway", the title given to the group that raises the most money for the conservation cause. We were literally pipped at the post by a British team who got a late, but large, donation at the eleventh hour to put them just a little ahead of us. Nevertheless, we got a special mention at the awards ceremony for our fund-raising efforts, especially since it was the first time we were attending the event. Given that the main aim of the event is to raise money for conservation, the "Guardians of the Flyway" title is almost more coveted than a win in the actual race! Through a number of generous supporters, the South African team was able to raise around R80 000 to go towards the conservation cause, so all the South African supporters can feel very satisfied with that achievement. Thanks again to everyone for their support!'

Trevor Hardaker, hardaker@mweb.co.za



RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP AND STAND A CHANCE TO WIN!

Renew your membership in the month that it is due and stand a chance to win one of five copies of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa*, a celebration of the African robin and its world in all its variety.

Please remember to use your membership number as the reference when making your payment.

Shireen Gould, Membership Manager, membership@birdlife.org.za

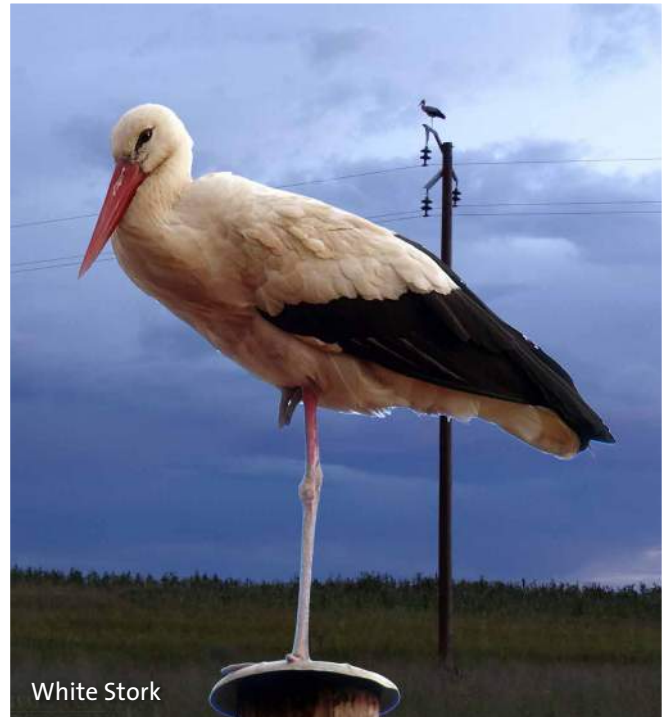
atlasing

LESOTHO

Johan van Niekerk continues his BirdLife South Africa-sponsored effort to atlas some of the lesser known pentads in the eastern Free State and Lesotho. His second trip took place over 17 days in February 2015.

The first couple of days delivered a Spotted Eagle-Owl near Maseru, some White Storks roosting at the airport, a rare Greater Painted-snipe at Mokema Wetlands, a single Fulvous Duck at the Thetsane West water treatment works (the first record since 1980), and an African Crake at the Agricultural Research Station, only the second record for Lesotho since the first sighting in 1909!

From Maseru, Johan travelled to Bokong Nature Reserve and from there on to Tshelanyane Nature Reserve, where he encountered a Bush Blackcap. The only Lesotho records of this species both came from the Masitise area in the south of the country.



White Stork

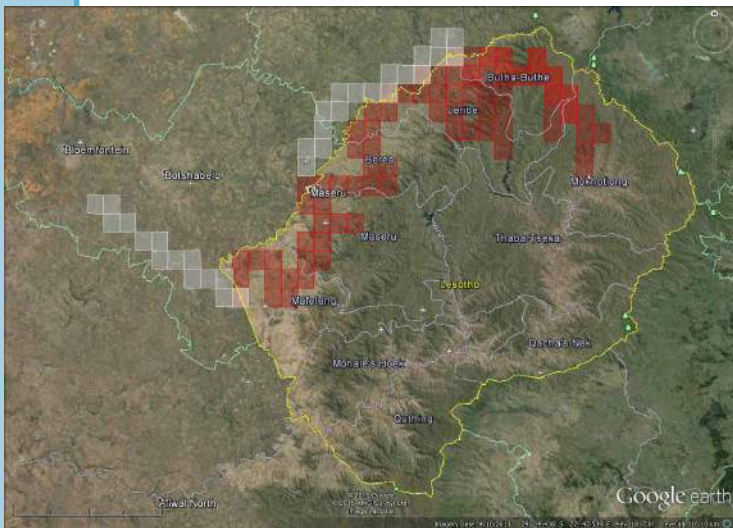
JOHAN VAN NIEKERK

A number of surveys of the Tlokoeng Valley produced a total of 106 bird species over a four-day period. Of particular interest was the first Lesotho record of a European Honey-Buzzard. From here, Johan moved on to the upper catchment areas of the Matsoku and Motete rivers, where most of the sponge wetlands were dry, raising concerns about the effects of overgrazing and soil erosion on the resilience of these wetlands to drought.

Pentad 2900_2850, targeted for full protocol treatment, delivered Black Harrier and Verreaux's Eagle, as well as Layard's Tit-Babbler, Sickle-winged Chat and Large-billed Lark. Johan also observed a pair of Red-billed Teal, the only full out-of-range record in the pentad.

In summary, Johan traversed 102 pentads – 32 in the Free State and 74 in Lesotho – recording 193 bird species in total. Analyses showed that between one and 49 species were added to 85 of the 102 pentads.

Linda van den Heever, Administrator: Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme, linda.vdheever@birdlife.org.za



Pentads atlased in Lesotho during February 2015.



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COMPETITION!

YOUNG HOTSPOTTERS



Find and photograph this bird species and **YOU COULD WIN!**

First prize: Nikon Coolpix S2800, valued at R1 000.

Runners-up will each win a Woolworths voucher to the value of R500.

PLUS if you enter N3TC's Young Hotspotters challenge in *African Birdlife*, you will automatically be entered into the scholar category of the 2015 N3TC Photographic Competition – and stand a chance to win a very generous cash prize for yourself and your school. For more information about N3TC's 2015 Photographic Competition, visit www.n3tc.co.za



MARIETJIE FRONEMAN

The Pied Kingfisher is very common throughout southern Africa – and it is one of the three most numerous kingfishers in the world. You can find it at most water bodies that support fish, but this bird with its striking black and white plumage also feeds on crabs, prawns and insects. It frequently hovers ('hangs' in the air while in flight) over water and then plunge dives and catches its prey underwater. This method of foraging also enables the Pied Kingfisher to hunt far from shore as it doesn't need perches from which to launch its attack. You can easily distinguish between the male and the female birds as the male has a double black breast band, whereas the female has only a single band.

THIS IS HOW IT WORKS

If you can spot the bird shown above, take a photograph of it. Enter your photograph(s) via the N3TC website – www.n3tc.co.za – and click on the Photo Competitions icon on the home page. Follow the icons and entry process via the *African Birdlife* Young Hotspotters icon. Your entries should reach us by **26 June 2015** and remember that you must be 18 years or younger to be eligible to enter. The winners' names will be published in the September/October 2015 issue of *African Birdlife*.



congratulations!

Congratulations to the winner of the competition to photograph the Hadeda Ibis (January/February 2015 issue). **Anton Schultz**, who goes to Northcliff High School in Johannesburg, took this photograph of the bird in Berario, Johannesburg. He wins a Nikon Coolpix S2800.

The runners-up, who will each receive a R500 Woolworths voucher, are **Sarah Barber**, who attends Wembley College in Greytown, KwaZulu-Natal, and **Daniel Engelbrecht**, who goes to Curro Heuwelkruin in Polokwane, Limpopo.

N3 Toll Concession is committed to touching lives meaningfully and sustainably through an integrated Corporate Social Investment programme that focuses on many key areas, including the conservation and preservation of our natural heritage. In addition, we aim to keep the N3 Toll Route between Cedara in KwaZulu-Natal and Heidelberg South in Gauteng free of litter and in pristine condition for the benefit of our neighbours and the surrounding environment.



what's on?



SASOL
Bird Fair
2015

SAVE THE DATES!

5 & 6 September 2015

Sasol Bird Fair at the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden, Johannesburg

For more information, please contact Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing Manager, events@birdlife.org.za

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From the desert coast to the dizzying heights of the planet's second highest mountain range, what's not to love about the birding in Peru? And although Ecuador is more compact than Peru or Colombia, it means that birds of all the habitats mentioned can be found in a smaller area.

From our Peru office, which is run by our ever-popular guide Eduardo and his well-organised team, we are able to run tours to these three countries. For more information, dates and costs contact Birding Ecotours on info@birdingecotours.co.za

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Everyone who subscribes to the print edition of *African Birdlife* between 1 May and 31 October 2015 will be entered into the lucky draw to win this fantastic holiday for two to Wilderness Safaris' Davison's Camp in Hwange National Park. For more information, or to subscribe to the magazine, visit www.birdlife.org.za

