



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

P O Box 93, Wakkerstroom 2480 Cell Number 0822556778 E-Mail: wackersbirdclub@gmail.com

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 33 APRIL 2015

At Last! Our latest edition! Sorry for the delay, but it's been a dreadful month, what with the Editor's laptop crashing, his assistance taking a well-earned break etc. We are back on track. (Famous last words!)

A BIG change...

On the 4th May, begins a new chapter in my life and who would have thought, at this stage in my years I would have been fortunate enough to get such an opportunity! I will be departing for Bredasdorp in the Cape for the rest of this year to get a project underway which will give us an idea of how and if the Blue Cranes of that area move much, i.e. local migration, where their roost sites are and what their preferences are from a crop point of view, to feed on, it is also to "build bridges" with the farmers who have always been positive about having the cranes around – and remember, they have huge flocks on their lands – due mainly to the great work done years ago through the EWT field officer we had there for a number of years, Vicki Hudson. And finally I will be monitoring breeding pairs as in about September Tanya together with people from ADU and Cape Nature will catch adults to attach trackers to 20 cranes which of course will then give much needed and exciting information. This will be the first time trackers have been attached to cranes in this country.

So it is exciting and I think a burst of new people and places in my life will give me a much needed injection of enthusiasm. If anyone is visiting that area, perhaps going to the spring flower delight or elsewhere, you are welcome to give me a call and perhaps overnight en route.

I will keep in touch through this newsletter about what is going on in the Overberg area and let you know if my Blue Crane conversational skills are improving!



Of course, that *poor* province does not enjoy the thrill of seeing a massive, majestic Wattle Crane striding across the veld or the fun of watching the comical and ever active Grey Crowned Cranes prancing and dancing, jumping and

communicating with their “so Africa” calls! Oh well, so be it, will just have to keep in mind what our grasslands present for us and know on my return next year, I will once again enjoy all of that!

Keep well everyone and enjoy the winter!!!! Mine will be wet but probably not as cold! And.....

A final Crane reportSo the 2014/15 season ended with 6 Grey Crowned Crane juveniles fledged from this wetland and six from the Groenvlei wetland. Not a bad return I guess. Take 50% of them surviving to breeding age and it does not look quite so rosy but hopefully more than that will make it.

Ann and I had a lovely Saturday morning some weeks ago. I was determined to get to Groenvlei once more as on the last visit we had seen 3 pairs with 5 young between them and I was sure at least some of them would be flying. And guess what, we saw the three pairs – **each with two chicks** and all of them had fledged! It was wonderful!

The Blue Cranes are beginning to gather in flocks which seem very early but as everything appears mixed up, I don't get too surprised anymore! There was a flock of around 42 that had five juveniles with them as well as two of their enormous Wattled Crane cousins – always a delight to see. And I have seen a flock of over 40 Crownies on a few occasions – so yes, this seems to say, winter is approaching.

It was not the best Blue Crane breeding season I have ever recorded – somewhat disappointing as a farewell blast for me to leave on! But I guess there are always seasons that do not live up to expectations and as long as it is say, weather related, that could be totally different again next season – if is environmentally related, that would be more serious – so hoping for a bumper crop next season.

Until Anon,
Glenn.

African Harrier Hawk



African Harrier Hawk raiding a Weaver's nest

Keep your eyes open for the African Harrier Hawk (*Gymnogene*) as this magnificent hunter sweeps through the NG Kerk grounds in search of prey.

On Saturday, during the Easter Market, an adult bird swept behind the tents just above ground level with an entourage of Red-winged Starlings in hot pursuit. The birds somersaulted and disappeared through the church grounds towards the bus terminal and all went quite, for a while.

Then suddenly, out of cover, the Harrier Hawk glided in and the chase was on but the big raptor was not to be deterred from its mission. Food! Red-winged Starlings were joined by other excited birds and they mobbed as best they could. Undeterred, the Harrier Hawk proceeded to demolish the suspended weaver's nests.

Today is Thursday 9th April and I have been watching this splendid raptor hunting in a deceptively graceful manner. The alarm went out and the Starling troops, in increased number, rallied in defence.

Have a cup of coffee on the veranda at the Wakkerstroom Country Inn between 10.00am and noon and bring your binoculars!

Judy-Lynn Wheeler.

What are feathers made from? Feathers are made from a horny substance called keratin: a light, strong and very flexible form of protein. Keratin is also found in a bird's beak and claws – and indeed in human hair and fingernails. Feathers have several component parts: the central shaft, which is hollow at the base and attaches to the bird's skin; the barbs, or sidebranches, which are attached to the shaft; and tiny barbules, which branch off the barbs and mesh with each other, giving the feather its unique combination of strength and lightness. Different types of feathers have different uses: such as the large wing feathers which enable a bird to fly; the 'contour' feathers which cover and streamline its body; and the soft downy ones which keep it warm.

Taken from “Everything you always wanted to know about birds... but were afraid to ask!” by Stephen Moss



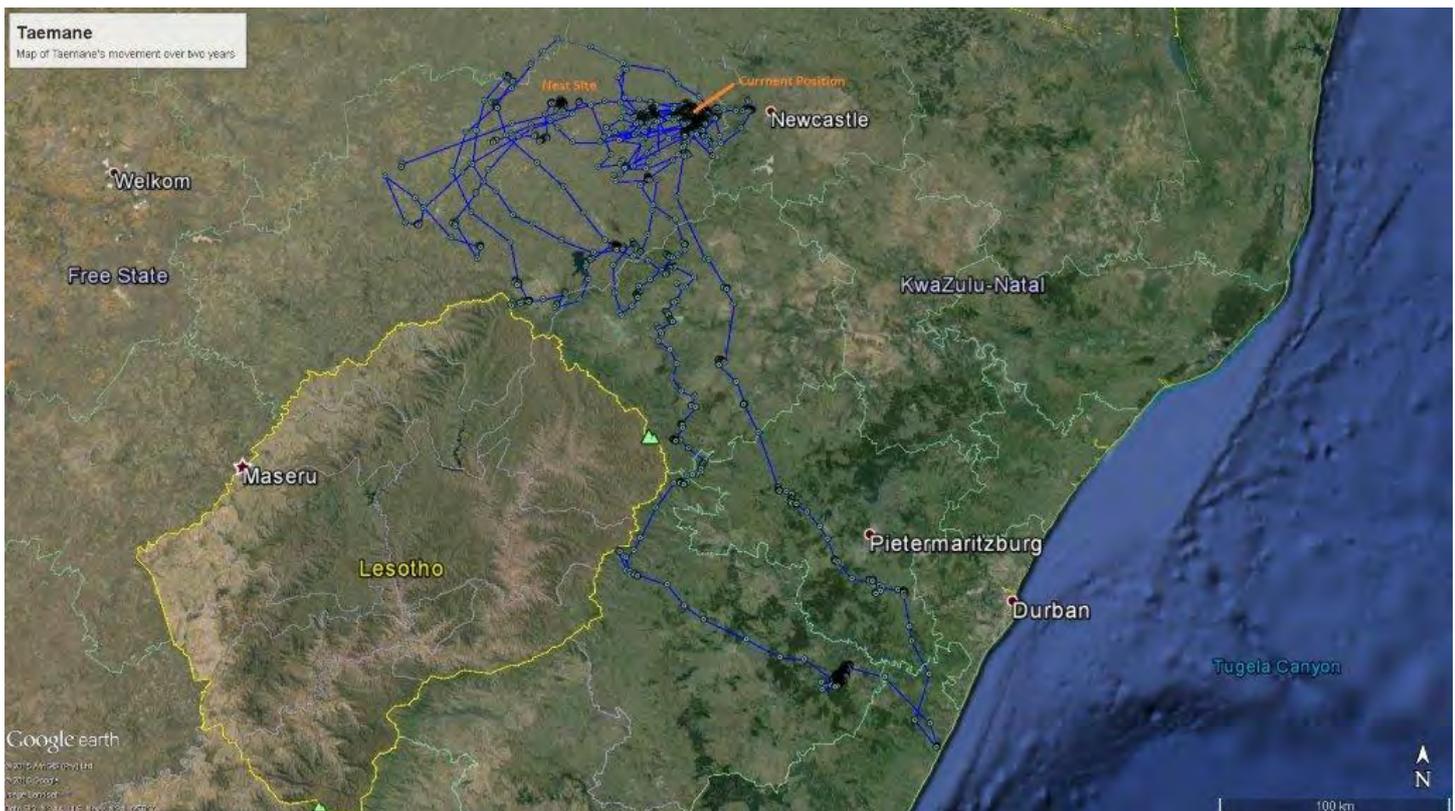
Giving Conservation Wings

Movements of a Secretarybird Tracked for More Than Two Years!

Johannesburg, 16 April 2015: Taemane, a Secretarybird tracked with a sophisticated satellite tracking device, became the first Secretarybird ever to be tracked for more than two years. The information obtained from this bird will be of immense value to conservationists in their work to conserve the globally *Vulnerable* Secretarybird.

Ernst Retief, one of BirdLife South Africa's Regional Conservation Managers, reported that the bird, a male, was fitted with a tracking device on 5 April 2013 on a farm near Warden in the Free State. The bird was estimated to be about 49 days old at the time. He left his nest on 7 April and remained in the area of the nest until 30 July when he was about 114 days old. Taemane then visited various parts of the Free State before moving south to the KwaZulu-Natal south coast, before moving inland and settled for a few months on a farm near Ixopo. From there he moved back to the Free State where he then continued to spend time in the grasslands south of Memel. Since the tracking device was fitted to Taemane, more than 9 000 location points, each accurate to within 10 meters, have been obtained. Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Terrestrial Bird Conservation Manager at BirdLife South Africa, stated that the data, together with the data received from tracking devices fitted to ten other Secretarybirds, will allow researchers to better understand the movement patterns and habitats used by this species. Even though the project is still in the data collection phase, valuable discoveries have already been made. The data show that most of the immature birds moved long distances from their nest site and then returned to their natal areas a few months later. Ernst Retief commented that BirdLife South Africa hope to receive tracking data from these birds for many years to come. The information will contribute to the conservation of the Secretarybird.

BirdLife South Africa is grateful to E. Oppenheimer and Son for the sponsoring Taemane's tracking device. Taemane means diamond in Setswana and Sesotho. Dr Duncan MacFadyen, Manager: Research and Conservation at E. Oppenheimer and Son, said that the research is providing information about the habitats used by Secretarybirds,



dispersal patterns of juvenile birds, and also helping to identify threats to these birds.

In addition to this research on Secretarybirds, BirdLife South Africa has also initiated a project to determine the impact of fences on birds. This was done after a number of records were received of Secretarybirds that had died after colliding or after becoming entangled in fences. Information for this project can be submitted to: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/fence-mitigation-project>

Why do birds have feathers? Feathers do two main jobs for birds: they allow them to fly and they keep them warm. Fossil evidence suggests that feathers probably evolved from reptilian scales to keep birds' ancestors warm in cold climates. Flight would thus have been an evolutionary afterthought.

Taken from "Everything you always wanted to know about birds... but were afraid to ask!" by Stephen Moss

Another bird in our series of species that occur in the wider area but not regularly in our Pentad:

The **Cape Teal** (*Anas capensis*) is a 44–46 cm long dabbling duck of open wetlands in sub-Saharan Africa.



This species is essentially non-migratory, although it moves opportunistically with the rains. Like many southern ducks, the sexes are similar. It is very pale and mainly grey, with a browner back and pink on the bill (young birds lack the pink). The Cape teal cannot be confused with any other duck in its range.

It is a thinly distributed but widespread duck, rarely seen in large groups except the moulting flocks, which may number up to 2000.

Cape Teals feed on aquatic plants and small creatures (invertebrates, crustaceans and amphibians) obtained

by dabbling. The nest is on the ground under vegetation and near water. This is a generally quiet species, except during mating displays. The breeding male has a clear whistle, whereas the female emits a feeble quack. This attractive bird is regularly seen at Newcastle Ponds.

As a matter of interest, this specie's numbers increased ca 50-fold at Strandfontein Sewage Works following reed removal. After the removal of reeds around our Vlei, this may encourage them to visit our Vlei – Editor.

De-mystifying Birding Terminology: Bird-bathing



Pied Starling bathing.

“What’s so mystifying about bathing?” you may ask – “do it every day myself” Well, so do birds – but they don’t have just the bath/shower option, they are much more inventive!

Their versions include: Plunge-bathing – in which the birds drop vertically into the water, usually from a perch, mainly because while on the perch it can scan around for predators etc. If the bird plunge-dives from the air (no prior perching) the bird is pre-occupied to the point of not looking for danger and can be vulnerable.

Foliage-bathing – usually preferred by small birds which are vulnerable out in the open. They push against whatever parts of the plant contain the water drops and dampen their plumage. Also known as leaf-bathing. This behaviour is also followed by large birds if the leaves are dense enough and hold sufficient water to do the job.

Surface-bathing – usually involves the bird swimming along the surface, dipping the head and body in the water. This is followed by fluttering the wings rapidly to spread water over the body.

Shore-bathing – probably the most common means of bathing and is used by many birds, from the smallest to the largest, even vultures. Birds land in or near the water's edge and scan for danger before waddling in. Much splashing follows before they go back to the edge to preen,

Most forms of bathing take place during the hottest part of the day – predators are less active then and their plumage dries more quickly.

Brian Guerin.

Interesting Local Sightings:



Black-backed Puffback (Wikipedia)

28 March – Black-backed Puffback at Wetlands, also Black Stork flying over, Cape White-eye, Amethyst Sunbird and Hamerkop. Later we saw 99 southern Bald Ibis roosting in the gums at Martin's Dam. Ann Cleal, Beverley Thorne.

28 March – Marsh Owl sighted quartering the field on the road to Forellenhof. Ann Cleal.

03 April – Rufous-chested Sparrow-hawk – flying over the garden carrying a mouse prey then mobbed by a second one. They both disappeared from view before the dispute was resolved – more's the pity! Ann Cleal.

18 April – Otters – initially two seen near the large stump on the left hand side of the main pan, circling purposefully and on occasion, very quickly and making a distinct “bow wave”, all clearly seen despite the distance. These continued as they moved to the open water and were joined by another three individuals. It seems they had encircled a shoal of small fish, gulping one down with barely a pause before resuming the hunt. Sheets of water sprayed out during tight turns (mini-regatta style), an almost unbelievable sight! Ann Cleal.

19 April – African Fish Eagle – “White” bird seen eating a very large fish with great gulps – the “Brown” bird watched with great interest from the large stump nearby, eventually flying over to the feeding bird and soliciting food but without success, it was simply ignored but there was no aggression was displayed by either bird at any time.

For those who have been following the saga of the “Mystery Raptor” it is pleasing to report that it is an African Fish Eagle. Even more pleasing to report that there are two of them, as Ann reported after her first sighting. Does anybody have any thoughts as to how long these two birds will stay together? Are they siblings? The story isn't finished yet! Ann has described them in her item above as “White” and “Brown” EDITOR.

23 April – Cape Grassbird – spotted in my garden by Ann Cleal, this is the first record of this endemic species since week 9 (end February) of 2013, nearly a two year gap. Ann Cleal, Brian Guerin.



Cape Grassbird

26 April – Another African Fish Eagle – one adult and one sub-adult, this time on the shore of Zaaioek Dam, just inside the limit of our pentad. The adult appeared to be trying to reject the other bird. Brian Guerin.

An Appeal:



Brian persuading Jessie Dennett to buy a book

We have just completed another successful book sale, this time at the Wakkerstroom Fibre Fair. Since we started doing these Vleimark, Easter Market and Christmas Market sales in 2013 the sum of R7399 has been raised. This has allowed the Club to keep annual subs at a very modest R100 per year. In order that this happy state of affairs can continue we are asking for donations of any books that you are prepared to part with. Novels, autobiographies/biographies and other non-fiction works are all needed. There is also normally a shortage of Afrikaans titles which we would like to rectify. We will arrange collection/delivery, please just phone Brian on 083 415 6701 or 017 730 0570.

Sorry this article is late but it was embargoed by BLSA until midnight on April 24: We know that the World Penguin Day has passed, but we feel that it is of interest to all serious birders.

Celebrate the Tuxedoed Birds on World Penguin Day on 25 April 2015.



Cape Town, 24 April 2015 – Who doesn't love penguins? With their fancy-dress feathers, whimsical walk and humorous habits, penguins have captivated the minds, hearts and imaginations of both young and old. Every year on 25 April the international community comes together to celebrate World Penguin Day.

The 25th of April marks the annual northwards migration of Adélie Penguins after spending the summer months on their breeding grounds in Antarctica. Like clockwork, the majority of the colony dives into the frigid waters and heads north to packed sea ice where they will overwinter in warmer conditions and fatten up for the breeding season in spring. This behaviour was first noticed by scientists working at the McMurdo Station in Antarctica, and the colony's departure on this day every year ignited the notion of celebrating these flightless birds.

Penguins are not only adorable and comical; they are also extraordinary animals, evolved to survive in extreme habitats. All penguins breed in the Southern Hemisphere, and inhabit

a range of habitats – from the Emperor Penguin on the ice sheets of Antarctica to the African Penguin on the sunny beaches and offshore islands of South Africa and Namibia. “They are one of our most popular birds, and it is alarming to see that the populations of all species are dwindling,” states Christina Hagen, BirdLife South Africa's Coastal Seabird Conservation Manager. Of the 18 species of penguins, four are listed as Near Threatened, six as Vulnerable and five as Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. It is therefore crucial that action is taken to raise awareness and conserve these iconic birds.

BirdLife South Africa is actively involved in the conservation of the endangered African Penguin, the only penguin on the African continent. The current African Penguin population is at about 14% of its 1950s level, due to historical egg harvesting, guano collection and overfishing which leads to lack of food availability for the penguins. “BirdLife South Africa is currently involved in various projects, with the outcome aimed at incorporating penguin conservation into fisheries management,” Christina explains. “This includes an island closures project, satellite tracking, establishing a new colony, micro-chipping penguins and addressing issues at policy level.

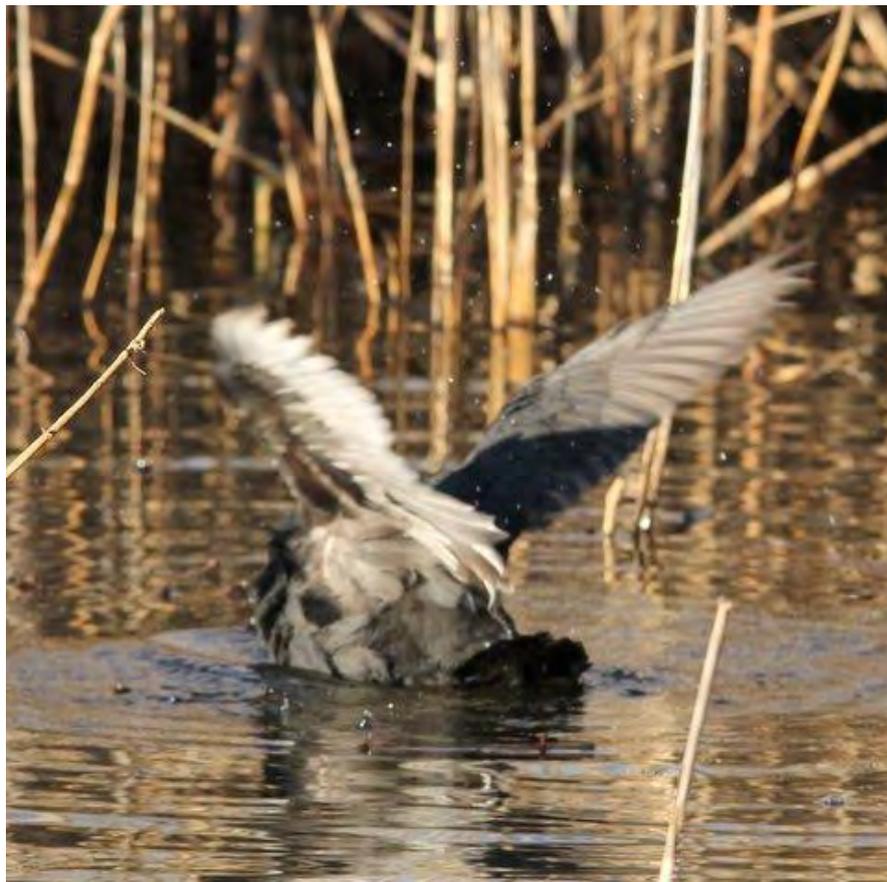
So how can you celebrate World Penguin Day? Support your local penguin conservation initiatives, wear penguin supportive clothing and jewellery, read up about penguins or even just do a little waddle during the day! (The mind boggles at their final suggestion! Editor.)

Pentad Survey:

The Survey continues apace and we have added a second page to try to get a hold on the departure dates of migrants. The names of all migrants i.e. those birds “greyed out” on the first page are repeated on the new page with space to record the date of sighting. This process is obviously coming to an end now as the birds leave – but it will be re-introduced as they begin to arrive again later in the year.

Once again we appeal for more members to take part in the survey – don’t forget you don’t even need to leave your property to contribute – every sighting counts! Contact me for further info, Brian Guerin.

And now for a bit of fun.....a mystery bird to identify! The picture was taken from Drummond Hide a couple of months ago. Clue – a very common bird on the vlei, captured from an unusual angle, showing parts we don’t often register.



Diary of Forthcoming Events:

Tuesday May 12 – our May outing is a return visit to the area we call the Crater, near Luneburg. We will leave the Library at 07h30 for what will be a drive of approximately 1 1/2 hours. Please note that only 4*4s and vehicles with diff locks are essential, we will organise lifts where possible. Bring along your eats, drinks etc. for what should be a good day in the bush! Contact Judy-Lynn Wheeler for details, phone 0789887502

Tuesday May 20 – at last we will show John Mac’s DVD Africa – “Eye to Eye With the Unknown”, NOTE the change of day to (hopefully avoid load-shedding.) There will be a bring and braai beforehand, fires ready at 1615.

Tuesday June 9 – an outing to the Wessels Farm, still looking for the elusive Gurney’s Sugarbird! Seriously though, one of the nice outings we go on.

Wednesday June 17 – evening programme, details to be advised.

**JOHN BARROW –
EDITOR**