



# Wakkerstroom Bird Club

## NEWSLETTER NUMBER 4 SEPTEMBER 2012

Hi all.

Welcome to our fourth newsletter. We hope you find it as enjoyable and full of news as the last three.

### **Saturday Morning Walks.**

Your Committee has decided to offer a series of informal "Summer Walks" to the vlei. The proposal is to meet once per month, during the summer months, on a Saturday morning from 07h00 onwards for an hour or two's summer birding.

The aims are multiple:

- To observe the birds arrivals (migrants) and later in the season, their departure,
- To observe the breeding habits of the birds,
- To watch the development, including plumage changes in the young birds as they grow, and above all,
- TO MEET FELLOW BIRDERS, ENJOY OUR HOBBY AND SHARE OUR KNOWLEDGE!

Posters were placed in various places around town giving details of the September "Summer Walk", and we hope those attending enjoyed it. A brief report on the outing follows .Further Walks will be held as follows:

October 6<sup>th</sup> 2012  
November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2012  
December 8<sup>th</sup> 2012  
January 5<sup>th</sup> 2013  
February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013  
March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013  
April - to be confirmed.

These Saturday walks will be in addition to our normal monthly outings (where we go a little further afield) and are intended to be casual get-togethers with a view to pass around some knowledge and obviously the beginners will be given every assistance !

### **Outing to the Vlei – 15 September 2012**

Considering the inclement weather, we had a good turn out to the first of the monthly trips to the Vlei.

36 species were sighted, amongst them: Spotted Eagle Owl, Common Squacco Heron, Black Crake, Grey Crowned Crane, Little Bittern, African Rail and Malachite Kingfisher.

People attending had a good time and it was worth braving the weather.

### **Next outing.**

Our next outing will be to Jamie and Trish Oglesby's farm at Ngogo on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2012. This venue provides good birding and the owners are as delightful as they are knowledgeable. Lots of space to walk around safely and a enjoy variety of habitats. This venue requires 4x4 or hi-rise vehicles. Should you and your friends wish to join us then please contact Judy-Lynn Wheeler on 083.609.3513 several days prior to the outing for directions, and to give her your names/contact numbers.

People in **Wakkerstroom** will meet at the Library at 07h00 – please gear yourselves for a day outing i.e. Hat/chair/comfortable walking shoes/binoc's/bird book/jacket/refreshments/etc.

### **Talk by Silvea Francis on the Amur Falcon**

Ms Francis will give a lecture on the Amur Falcon at BLSA on 13 October 2012 from 15h00 onwards. She has asked that as she will have live birds with her, including an ill-mannered Korhaan, that no children are permitted to attend. She will also touch on her bird rehabilitation activities at her sanctuary in Newcastle. This is one not to be missed !

### **Bird Feeder in front of the Bakery**

We are looking for donations of seed for the bird feeder. John Burchmore has been providing the seed up until now and is finding it somewhat expensive. As the feeder also attracts various species to it, it is worthwhile to carry on with the exercise. Any donation, whether crushed mielies, seed or cash can be given to John at his shop next to the Bakery.

### **Interesting local sightings**

A group of 11 Grey Crowned Cranes was seen on the way back from Volksrust just before the Zaaihoek Dam turn-off on 7 September and two more were seen later from De Oude Stasie. – Brian Guerin

### **Seen on BLSA land on 8 September**

2 Grey Crowned Cranes

1 Black Stork

3 Southern Bald Ibis

4 Wood Sandpipers

10 Orange Breasted Waxbills – Andre Steenkamp.

Sighting of a lone Avocet by Ann Cleal

Following the recent flood a lone Avocet could be seen feeding at the vlei. Nomadic visitors, rarely seen at our local wetland (the birds preferring brackish water or that with a higher saline content) occasional sightings are more likely at other pans in the area. A supremely elegant and unmistakable wader with black and white plumage, a dark delicately recurved bill and long blue-grey legs.

They are filter feeders, locating food primarily by touch as the bird scythes its bill from side to side whilst wading, swimming or even up-ending. However it is also able to feed by sight and will take insects from dry land or even plants. Food items comprise mainly minute molluscs, crustaceans, insect larvae and invertebrates.

At high ambient temperatures, "egg wetting" has been observed: breeding birds may belly soak in order to take water to their nest and thereby reduce the temperature of the eggs. As with many ground nesting birds, hatching is asynchronous and chicks are precocial. From an early age they have an upward curve to the bill. In common with some other long billed birds, the chicks are "asymmetrical" hatches; rotating very little in the shell and simply push hard against the chipped hole in the egg, enlarging it to an irregular shape. ""

Seen on an inspection of the Iain Drummond Hide on 11 September

2 Southern Grey Crowned Cranes displaying

Black Stork – Committee members.

**Bird of the Month**

Because of Ms Francis' talk on this particular bird, our "Bird of the Month" is the Amur Falcon.

**The Amur Falcon (formerly the Eastern Red-footed FALCON)**



Male Amur Falcon.



Female Amur Falcon.

The **Amur Falcon** (*Falco amurensis*), formerly **Eastern Red-footed Falcon**, is a small raptor of the falcon family. It breeds in south-eastern Siberia and Northern China, wintering in Southern Africa. Its diet consists mainly of insects, such as termites

## Description

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Males are characteristically predominantly uniform blue-grey, and may offer confusion with melanistic Gabar Goshawk, but the chestnut should prevent confusion here. Also there may be some superficial resemblance to Sooty Falcon and Grey Kestrel, but those two species both have yellow feet and cere. Separating male Amur and Red-footed Falcons is best done by the white underwing coverts on Amur Falcon, whereas the underwing of male Red-footed Falcons is uniformly grey.

Females may offer a bit more confusion with a wider range of falcons as they have a typical falcon head pattern. The grey on the top of the head should quickly rule out confusion with Red-footed Falcons. The female has barring on the lower belly. Red cere and feet rule out all other falcons.

For juveniles, red feet should restrict ID to the Amur and Red-footed group, and the darker crown and lack of buff all the way up the belly rules out Western Red-footed Falcon. Females and juveniles lack the buff underwing coverts of Red-footed Falcon.

## Taxonomy

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It was long considered a subspecies or morph of the Red-footed Falcon, but it is nowadays considered distinct. Nonetheless, it is the Red-footed Falcon's closest relative; their relationship to other falcons is more enigmatic. They appear morphologically somewhat intermediate between kestrels and hobbies and DNA sequence data has been unable to further resolve this question, mainly due to lack of comprehensive sampling. They might be closer to the Merlin than to most other living falcons, or more generally related to this species and American falcons such as the American Kestrel and the Aplomado Falcon.

According to a post on the Web, the largest Amur Falcon roost in the world was seen at Newcastle, KZN on 19 February 2012.

***THE COMMITTEE***