



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 13 - JULY 2013

The Annual General Meeting

The AGM was held on Saturday 13 July 2013 at De Oude Stasie.

The Chairman, Brian Guerin, reported on a very successful year resulting from a substantial sum received as donations, and a membership increase to 48 paid members and 3 Honorary Life Members. Fees will remain unchanged at R100 for the 2013/2014 financial year.

Future plans include:

1. Re-painting of the Iain Drummond Hide, the sum of R1000 has been provided for this,
2. We are planning to help clear reeds from the front of that hide as well as the Crane Hide,
3. We are hoping to clear a stretch of vegetation opposite the WOW Hide, some 4* 25metres in extent as a "Loafing Area" as it is called, to open it up for all birds to rest but hopefully encourage waders as well, and
4. Continuing with regular meetings and outings, our flagship Newsletter, the facebook page and with newspaper and other publicity (handled so well by Norman Dennett) and pursuing any other avenues that may open up to the Club.

The present Committee was available for re-election and the chairman thanked them for their great efforts in 2013.



Hannelie, Geoff, Brian, John Barrow and Len

The AGM was followed by a super lunch, (thanks Len and Hannelie) and a fascinating talk by Geoff Lockwood on "Owls and Owling in Southern Africa".

The committee was re-elected unopposed and will be assigned to various positions at the next committee meeting

Talk on Wattled Cranes by Tanya Smith

Wattled Cranes: A Fascinating Evening!

The WBC was indeed privileged to hear and see presentations by Tanya Smith and Cobus Theron of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's African Crane Conservation Programme on Wednesday 10th July.

The Wattled Crane, at over 6 feet, stands considerably taller than "Tiny Tanya", as Glenn Ramke referred to Tanya during her introduction.

There are only some 260 Wattled Cranes with 80 breeding pairs left in the wild in South Africa, but a captive rearing programme together with other conservation projects, are keeping the overall numbers stable. Nevertheless their dependence for breeding and foraging on South Africa's most threatened habitat, large permanent wetlands, places the Wattled Crane in a very precarious position. The nests are difficult to find from the ground and Tanya detailed the methods and results of the very effective aerial surveys made every year from a low flying aircraft. Finding the nests not only allows accurate breeding data to be collected it also enables the collection of the second egg, which some pairs lay, for incubation and captive rearing.



Glenn Ramke, Tanya Smith, Brian Guerin & Cobus Theron

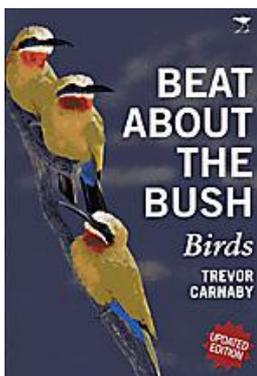
Cobus Theron presented a very exciting development with the use of a motion sensing camera that documents the activity at the nest, both day and night, for up to a week. We were shown some 800 photographs, in rapid sequence, of the behaviour complete with the time, date and temperature. This is a brand new development and it was a great privilege to be the first organization to be shown the results.

This was a very special evening where these young researchers so enthusiastically shared their knowledge, skill and commitment with us.

P.S. The welcoming glass of sherry was a nice touch too! - Norman Dennett.

Book Review by Norman Dennett. - Beat About The Bush *BIRDS*.

By Trevor Carnaby. ISBN 978-1-77009-241-9 and published by Jacana Media www.jacana.co.za



We all have our favourite "Bird Book", Roberts, SASOL, Ken Newman; even Mackworth-Praed and Grant for the really obsessed. Unfortunately, although these books are ideal for assisting with the identification of birds, they seldom answer all of the many questions that will arise as we become more inquisitive about the subject.

Beat About The Bush *BIRDS*, with its more than 900 full colour illustrations and 764 pages of interesting and descriptive text, is written in a user friendly Question and Answer format. Although identification details are given for all of the bird groups found in Southern Africa the book is more of a behavioural guide to the fascinating lives of "our" birds. Breeding and feeding behaviour, survival strategies, migration, and vocalization are among the many topics that are covered in depth.

Author Trevor Carnaby, a professional Trail Guide and photographer, has been an avid bird watcher since childhood. He has been working in the Southern African bush for 15 years and his depth of knowledge and enthusiasm is very evident in this comprehensive reference work that answers many of our everyday questions about birds.

It will appeal to novice and twitcher alike. Priced at R295 the book is not cheap, but it is good value for money.

It can be ordered direct from the author at www.beataboutthebush.co.za

Footnote: The WBC recommends this book to members as a service and has no connection with the Author or the Publisher.

Bird of the Month

Secretarybird.

Scientific Name: *Sagittarius serpentarius*, *Sagittarius*=a bowman, archer. *Serpentarius*= interested in snakes. It is unlikely that the name is derived from the quill-like feathers that adorn their heads.



In the Serengeti

General: The Secretarybird is essentially a large, long-legged ground eagle. Only one species worldwide, endemic to Africa south of the Sahara, less numerous in a rough band from Western Ethiopia to Senegal. Usually in pairs, sometimes solitary. Secretarybirds are often active at midday when their preferred prey is also active. Usually silent, sometimes gives a croaking call when nesting and in courtship. Nomadic. Dust-bathes regularly.

Description: A distinctive species which is unmistakable except at very long range when it could be mistaken for Blue Crane. No colour differences between the sexes and both have a distinctive erectile crest. Both have facial skins. Stands 1.3m tall.

Status: Roberts 7 classifies these birds as Near-threatened in South Africa which appears to be their stronghold. The new Red Data Book, due this year, may provide new information.

Food: 87% invertebrates. Smaller prey may be killed with the hooked bill or by the short toes equipped with strong claws. Larger prey items, like snakes, are killed by kicking or stamping with their strong legs. They will also stamp in long grass to disturb prey. Eats a wide range of other food including Striped Polecat, Slender Mongoose, Grey-winged Francolin, Puffadder and various cobra spp. Regurgitates pellets mixed with grass, and stomachs contain small stones.

Habitat: Open grassland (<0.5m) with scattered trees, absent from dense woodlands and rocky hills.

Breeding: Because of their size, large wingspan and long legs they nest on the tops of trees rather than within them and prefer an open grassy area around the tree. Usually two eggs, sometimes three, rarely four. Cannibalism, as such, does not occur with Secretarybirds but should a third or fourth egg hatch then the youngest usually starves, pushed aside by its siblings. An interesting article appears on page 50 of African Birdlife July/August 2013 edition about an unusual man-made nest site resembling an elevated rubbish bag holder.

Conservation: Not threatened but populations are believed to have decreased in South Africa.

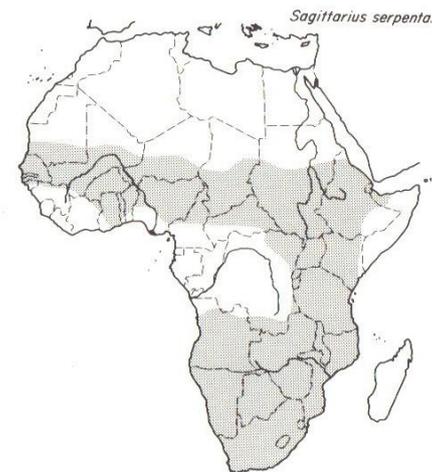
Interesting Websites.

Mark Holder, of the Dullstroom Bird of Prey and Rehabilitation Centre writing in BirdLife Lowveld's "The Hornbill" mentions 2 websites that our members might find interesting. The first one is particularly relevant because it concerns the Amur Falcon. www.Conservationindia.org/campaigns/amur-massacre or Google: Amur Falcon Massacre. This is very informative site for those who were horrified by the recent slaughter of these small raptors in India. It is well illustrated and appears authoritative, well worth a look.

The second website is

<http://talentsearch.ted.com/video/Munir-Varani-Why-I-love-vultures>:TED@Nairobi or Google: TED@Nairobi/Munir Varani/Why I love Vultures. This is an excellent video of an illustrated talk given by Munir Varani. Although sometimes visually disturbing (particularly the windfarm scenes) it gives an excellent overview of the current status of these birds.

Brian Guerin.



Repairs to the Crane Hide



Recently the Club removed the old wooden walkway to the Crane Hide and installed a new and extended 6metre walkway, with railings, to make the Hide wheelchair friendly. We also extended the panelling inside to block the light entering from the door. This aspect still needs attention and a door may have to be fitted at some stage.

Time pressure to complete the job before the arrival of the "Vrou soek 'n Boer" film crew (who were expected to film in the Hide)gave little time to shop around and thus the cost of the repairs were higher than we has envisioned.

Work on clearing the reeds in front of the Hide will start when weather and water conditions permit.

Shown in the photograph is "the Construction Team" of John Burchmore, volunteer Steven Fox and Sihle Buthelezi, aka Vincent and the walkway before the railings were installed.

Future Events

On Saturday, 3rd August, we'll be once again visiting the Vlei for the monthly check of species on show. As it is still winter, we will meet near the bridge on the Amersfoort road with our binoculars etc. from 07h30. A spot of tea or coffee will be provided

Then as a real treat, we've organised a return trip on August the 13th to the Kempenveldt Vulture Restaurant near Dundee. We first visited it in March of this year and were so impressed, we're going again. Hopefully, we will see more activity by the "guests" due to breeding having taken place. We'll meet at the Wakkerstroom Library at 05h30 and wend our way from there. Bring warm clothing and something to eat and drink. There is a fee of R50.00 per person.

We'll be showing another DVD from the EarthLink series on Wednesday, 21 August 2013. The first one was great, so this one will be too! We'll advise the title of the DVD at a later date. The venue will, once again, be at Birdlife SA, Wakkerstroom.

The Next Article on Larks

Unfortunately, the author, John McAllister, of the articles on different species of larks was away on holiday so we don't have an article for you this month. They will resume next month.

Wakkerstroom Annual Pentad Survey

The Wakkerstroom Bird Club is conducting a year-long survey of the birds occurring in our Pentad Number 2720/3005. Participating members are asked to provide the coordinator with their sightings by submitting a weekly list. Information gathering started during last Saturday's A.M. Vlei Walk so please join us there for full details of the method to be used or contact Brian Guerin on 0177300570." Anyone who would like a copy of the list can contact him to receive one.

Car Count

It's time again for the winter Car Count which will take place on Saturday, 27 July 2013. The organiser is Judy-Lynn Wheeler and she is looking for volunteers. She can be contacted on 0836093513 or you could just turn up at the briefing session on Friday, 26 July at the De Oude Stasie. It will start at 17h30. (Note the change of venue).

Yours in Birding

JOHN BARROW - EDITOR