



Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 16 – OCTOBER 2013

Birding Tourism in South Africa.

The Wakkerstroom Bird Club has recently received a report published by the Department of Trade and Industry that highlights the importance and value of the Avitourism Industry in South Africa. The report concludes that this is an attractive select market with significant growth potential. The economic value of international and domestic avitourism in South Africa is estimated to be R927-million to R1.725-billion per year. Using a conservative multiplier effect of 1.3 avitourism's potential contribution to South Africa's annual GDP is in the order of R1, 205-billion to R2.243-billion. Birding is therefore of significant importance to the country's economy.

The department has subsequently completed a strategic development plan for birding tourism that will see its greater involvement in the sector as well as more cohesion between BirdLife South Africa, South Africa Tourism and the Department of Tourism.

Although the birding tourism sector in South Africa is strong, considerable work still needs to be done in convincing local residents of the importance and value of Birding Tourism. This is particularly true here in Volksrust and Wakkerstroom where the number of people employed, the extent and value of the development of tourism accommodation and services and the opportunities that exist, are not understood and appreciated.

The Wakkerstroom Bird Club will certainly play its role of helping to develop and maintain the birding facilities in the area and to encourage visitors and residents alike to enjoy the opportunities that exist. This will be, perhaps most important of all, for the benefit of our birds and their habitats.

“Designing and Building Universally Accessible Bird Hides”

This interesting new e-book was recently published by BirdLife South Africa. This can best be introduced by their promotional letter.

Dear all,

In order to promote bird watching, BirdLife South Africa realises that facilities such as hides and boardwalks are needed to allow people to get close to birds, thus allowing the viewing of secretive species and providing bird photography opportunities.

It is important to BirdLife South Africa for bird hides to be carefully designed, properly constructed and well maintained. Unfortunately, this is not always the case and some hides have been poorly planned and built, and despite original good intentions often fall into disrepair. Sadly, many hides are also not accessible to everyone, such as to people who are visually impaired, in wheelchairs, or the elderly who have difficulty walking.

In order to assist people with the building of bird hides BirdLife South Africa drafted a guideline document to provide information about the design of universally accessible bird hides. It is our hope that this document will provide a valuable resource to people and organisations that are planning to construct a bird hide or a walkway. With quality birding



On the Look-out from the Crane Hide.

facilities that are accessible to all people, including those who are mobility impaired, all South Africans will be able to enjoy our country's wonderful birds.

The FirstRand Foundation and the Rand Merchant Bank Fund are thanked for their financial contributions to this project and also for making BirdLife South Africa aware of the important issue of accessibility.

The document (high and low resolution versions) can be downloaded from the Bird South Africa Website:
<http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/iba/657>

Ernst Retief.

This is a well written and illustrated book that we recommend. It is particularly relevant to the Birding community here as we are intent on upgrading the facilities and access to the four Hides here in Wakkerstroom.

More on Secretarybirds from Birdlife SA

October 2013

Eleen Strydom to study Secretarybirds at Wakkerstroom

We are very excited to report that Eleen Strydom, a B-Tech Nature Conservation student at the Tshwane University of Technology, will begin a study with the title "Nesting productivity and diet of Secretarybirds in the greater Wakkerstroom area, Mpumalanga Province". The study will largely be funded by BirdLife South Africa and Eleen will be based at the BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Centre. She will do some initial nest monitoring from the beginning of November and her formal studies will begin in January 2014.

Regular website updates

Please remember that you can obtain more information about this project on the BirdLife South Africa website (<http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species/secretarybird>) as well as the dedicated Facebook Page for the project (<https://www.facebook.com/secretarybirdconservation>).

In the meantime, Birdlife SA has been spending a lot of time applying for provincial permits to fit tracking devices, answer queries from the public, download tracking data, and present talks to the public. We hope to fit many tracking devices in the coming months, monitor birds and learn a lot more about the behaviour of these extraordinary birds. We will keep you updated.



Ernst Retief

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Report on Pentad Survey – to Week 40

We have recorded 144 species in the pentad to the end of week 40 i.e. 6 October. Interesting species added to the list during this month include Great Crested Grebe on the vlei, White Stork feeding near the Iain Drummond Hide and African Palm Swift near the Paul Kruger Bridge. We have now recorded 100 species for one week in three separate weeks, all in spring; one of those was the Vlei Walk on October 5. The moral? Don't miss the Vlei Walks!

We would still like some volunteers in order to widen the geographic spread to all corners of the pentad

Bird of the Month

Malachite Sunbird

Scientific Name/Meaning: *Nectarinia famosa* (Latin), *Nectarinia*, pertaining to nectar, *famosa*, famous or excellent.

General: Breeding males, in their iridescent green (malachite) plumage are unmistakable and this is the largest of our sunbird species and is the only one with long central tail feathers. They can slow their metabolism down at night and body temperature can drop to as low as 26deg. Usually seen singly or in pairs. Males are approximately 25cm long, females 15cm. Approximate weights are males 20g, females 15g. An altitudinal migrant with some post-fire dispersal in Mpumalanga.

Description: Males unmistakable in breeding plumage, eclipse (non-breeding) males are drab and similar to females, although there may be several green patches on the body. The long tail central feathers are absent. Bright yellow (or orange) pectoral patches aren't always visible in males.

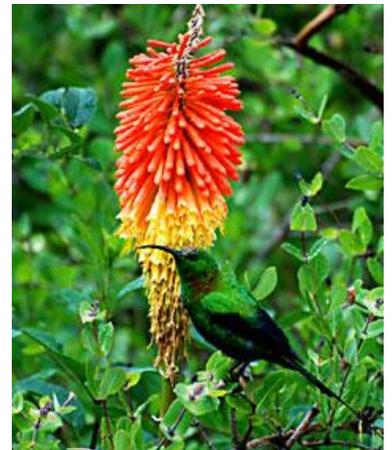
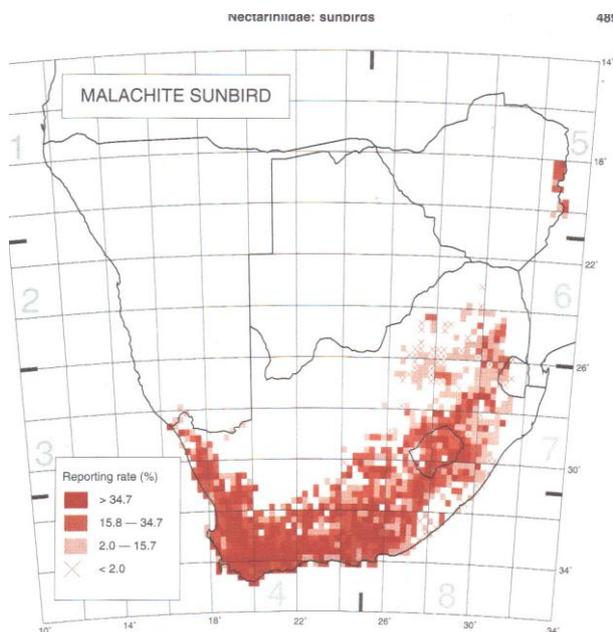
Status/Conservation: Considered not threatened but habitat loss is a factor. Commercial plantations of Protea and Aloe species attract these birds but their destructive eating habits may result in control measures being taken. Parasitised mainly by Klaas's Cuckoo, also by Red-chested Cuckoo and possibly by Diderick Cuckoo.

Food: Mostly nectar but also arthropods. Readily takes sugar-water from garden feeders.

Habitat: Varied, montane and lowland fynbos, riverine woodland, parks, gardens and alien plantations.

Breeding: Mostly October to January. Solitary nester with nests widely spaced. Nests are dome-shaped with a top-side entry hole and are built by females only in 10-16 days. Usually 2 eggs are laid and are incubated by the female only for 13-15 days; she also provides most of the food. Sometimes they are triple-brooded in a season.

Distribution area: Southern Africa



Events and Dates for your Diary.

2nd November '13. Saturday. VLEI WALK. Meet on the Amersfoort Bridge Rd. 7am. Very interesting now that Summer and the Rain are finally arriving.

12th November '13. Tuesday. Farm Visit to Bertus Berger's Farm. Meet at the Wakkerstroom Library 7am. Beautiful farm where we have been conducting a Farm Count for a number of years. This time Bertus will include a trip to the source of the Slang River. **Not to be missed.**

16th November '13. Saturday. Annual Christmas Function. Wakkerstroom BirdLife Centre. 4pm. Bring and Braai. Join us for a couple of hours of chat and good company. Bring your own meat and drinks etc. Salads will be provided.

20th November '13. Wednesday. Talk: "Stewardship". by Bradley Gibbons of EWT. Wakkerstroom Birdlife Centre. 5.30pm for 6.00pm. The emphasis will be on the habitats of endangered species such as the Golden Mole, Sun Gazer Lizard, Oribi etc that occur in this area. We are very pleased to welcome Bradley to Wakkerstroom, his work is very relevant to the conservation of the area.

White-rumped Swifts

(Observed Sunday 13 October '13 07:30 – 07:50 by one of our members)

About 50 White-rumped Swifts erupted en masse from under the Amersfoort Road bridge, forerunners clearing the adjacent reed bed as two tail-enders collided, lost what little height they had and dropped between the stalks. One somehow managed to regain height even whilst striking reeds; the other less fortunate bird was amongst denser reeds, unable to spread its wings sufficiently to fly and disappeared into loose base growth.



When re-sighted several minutes later, it had somehow managed to wriggle almost 1m from the "crash site" and was attempting to clamber up a reed: not something a swift is designed for and promptly slid out of sight again. Several unsuccessful attempts followed but on each occasion the bird was a tad closer to more open vegetation, finally clinging to a reed with slight projections that enabled it to have a brief rest. Now almost 50cm above the tangled growth there was sufficient clearance to spread its wings and somehow fly upwards; striking other reeds en route, faltering and dipping, before finally breaking out and flying free.

Editor's Note.

Just to put this diminutive (24g) little bird's achievement into perspective, several of its physical limitations should be borne in mind:

- Its wings are too long (they extend to just beyond its tail) to permit it to take off in the confines of those thick reeds, or in fact from any horizontal surfaces.
- its feet are too small and insignificant to allow it to grip onto swaying reeds, they are designed to grip onto more nearly vertical surfaces from which the bird drops to resume flight. Their feet are ill-equipped for walking.
- when grounded it shuffles around until it is able to roll onto one side and flaps its "free" wing violently until it creates enough lift to become sufficiently airborne to resume flight.

Some feat I'm sure you will agree! (Ed.)

Club Membership

We welcomed the following new members to the Club since the AGM in July:-Glynn Field, Peter and Lynn Goodrum, Jenni and Mike Maxted, Robin and Linda Michelmore, Annelize Roberts, Azille Schulze, Graham Spencer and Johan van Eeden. Just a note, a member's membership is valid for 12 months from the date of joining or renewal. We now have 62 members, not bad for a small club like ours!

Advertising

The following page shows our very first sponsored advertisement! This advertisement will be included in the Newsletter which goes to all our members, our contacts, both local and overseas and a number of bird club chairpersons and / or secretaries. Rates are available from either Brian Guerin (0834156701) or me (0822556778)

Yours in Birding - JOHN BARROW - EDITOR

BIG TREE COTTAGE

Perfect nest for bird lovers (sleeps 8)

This in-town property with a large garden has two separate “nests” which are rented together. The set-up is ideal for a large family or two smaller families who prefer privacy. The cottages are cosy; each sleeps four. They have everything required for a self-catered stay including a Braai kettle. No TV.

The premises are doggy friendly (please no dogs on beds/furniture). There is a single garage on the property.

Simply dump your cases, pop your food in the fridge and you are ready to go birding. R220pppn, kiddies under 12 half price.

A 15% discount applies for stays of more than three nights (2 to 5 people) and 20% (6 to 8 people)

Contact: Cor 082 335 5005 or corrie4sa@icon.co.za

