



# Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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## NEWSLETTER NUMBER 10, APRIL 2013

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### EDITORIAL - BRIAN GUERIN - CHAIRPERSON

Hi everybody,

You will see from the banner above that this is the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of our Newsletter, a milestone which the Committee was a little sceptical about achieving when we sent out Issue Number One in June last year! With that issue of just over 2 pages (with a B&W picture of the new Committee) and a handful of members, a process of growth began that is extremely pleasing. We now have 47 Family Members representing about 70 people and we are proud to have 3 Honorary Life Members as well.

We also send our magazine out to all Bird Clubs in South Africa as well as to Bird Clubs and individuals in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mauritius, United States, Japan, United Kingdom and Zimbabwe. Our Facebook page is, if anything, even more widely read. Many of these are "Freebies" that cost us nothing to send, thanks to email etc. We are only too pleased to include these "Friends of the Wakkerstroom Bird Club" in our mailing list. If you know of anyone who would appreciate a copy of our Newsletter or would like to join us on Facebook please let a Committee member know. We will be happy to welcome them to our extended family.

The Committee and I would like to thank you for the support we are given, it makes the job a pleasure!

### OUTING TO FICKLAND'S PAN ON 9 APRIL

The weather couldn't have been better on Tuesday morning for the Fickland's Pan outing, a beautiful autumn morning. 13 members enjoyed our first club outing to that part of the Pan that has been closed to us for a very long time. Some 43 species were recorded, probably 90% of them on or next to the water, Specials included Great Crested



Grebe, Maccoa Duck, Grey Crowned Crane, South African Shelduck and almost a "full house" of Martins. A super outing and the venue is not too far from town.

## HOUSE SPARROWS

There was an interesting note posted on SABirdnet recently by Stan Madden. He has noticed that there are no House Sparrows in his garden in Dunnottar near Springs and none in the nearby Marievale Reserve, a previously common bird. There are lots of Cape Sparrows and a few Grey - headed Sparrows. A quick look in my garden has the same result. Has anybody seen House Sparrows recently?.....Norman.

## VLEI OUTING ON 6 APRIL 2013

After temperatures of -2 at BLSA Centre during the week, we approached our monthly Vlei Walk with great trepidation. Any way the day dawned crisp and clear, a beautiful Autumn morning. Birding was quiet despite this and a total of 28 species were recorded, we were definitely missing a few extra pairs of "eyes"!

One highlight was a group of approximately 34 White-throated Swallows still roosting in the reeds, warming up no doubt. African Snipe, African Spoonbill and a lone African Rail calling added some spice.

## MEETINGS AND OUTINGS FOR MAY

**4<sup>TH</sup> May '13. Saturday. Our Monthly Vlei Walk.** Meet on the Amersfoort Rd Bridge at 7am with your Binoculars etc.

**14<sup>TH</sup> May '13 Tuesday. Outing to Pringle's Farm.** Meet Wakkerstroom Library 7am.

**15<sup>TH</sup> May '13. Wakkerstroom Birds of the Vlei - Quiz/Teach-in** led by Norman Dennett at BLSA, Wakkerstroom. Meet at 17h30 to start at 18h00 sharp.

## UP FROM THE EGG:

## THE CONFESSIONS OF A NUTHATCH AVOIDER



Flamingos

Bird watchers top my honors list  
I aimed to be one, but I missed.  
Since I'm both myopic and astigmatic,  
My aim turned out to be erratic,  
And I, bespectacled and binocular  
Exposed myself to comment jocular.  
We don't need too much birdlore, do we,  
To tell a flamingo from a towhee;  
Yet I cannot, and never will,  
Unless the silly birds stand still.  
And there's no enlightenment so obscure  
As ornithological literature.



Towhee



Chickadee

Is yon strange creature a common chickadee,  
Or a migrant *alouette* from Picardy?  
You rush to consult your Nature Guide  
And inspect the gallery inside,  
But a bird in the open never looks  
Like its picture in the birdie books –  
Or if it once did, it has changed its plumage  
And plunges you back into ignorant gloomage.  
That is why I sit here growing old by inches,  
Watching the clock instead of finches.  
But I sometimes visualize in my gin  
The Audubon that I audubin



Alouette (Lark)

**Ogden Nash**

## **BACK PAGE**

On the back page of this Newsletter we have placed the WBC Information pamphlet which was originally produced to be included in the "Flip File" that each B & B owner etc. is encouraged to have in their premises. The File contains lots of information about Wakkerstroom and the intention of our pamphlet is to tell visitors about our Club and how we can be contacted etc.

If you would like a copy please feel free to use this one or we will be very happy to supply you with additional copies if required. We can also supply them laminated if needed.

## **OUTREACHING**

Your committee has been making overtures to bird clubs around us with the view of promoting interest in birding in Wakkerstroom. We're also interested in clubs who are making visits to us now and in the future. If you have any contacts of clubs, please let us know.

One such club is Birdlife Zululand who is here from 19 April up to 21 April. We hope we'll get together with them, even it is a joint trip to the Vlei. Should you wish to welcome them, they can be found at Birdlife SA's premises outside the village.

## **BIRD OF THE MONTH**

### **African (previously Ethiopian) Snipe.**

#### **General**

The African Snipe belongs to the large family of Scolopacid waders which includes Turnstones, Sandpipers, Knots, Greenshanks, Ruffs and several others. Of the 35 species in the family occurring in southern Africa, only the African Snipe breeds here. Their bills may be short or long, usually slender, straight, decurved or slightly recurved.



**Description:** Size medium, bill more than twice the length of the head, an excellent guide to field identification. The back is boldly streaked buff on a much darker brown, sides of belly and chest striped. Face prominently striped, sometimes with a pale buffy wash. Usually secretive but fairly common on the wetland. The call has been likened to the sound made on pulling ones foot out of mud! (See Breeding.)

**Status:** Locally common resident, nomadic at temporary waters.

**Scientific Name:** Gallinago – Latin – a Woodcock, nigripennis, also Latin – black wing.

**Habitat:** Vleis, marshlands, sewage ponds, all altitudes in South Africa but absent from the dry west.

**Food:** Insects, worms, molluscs, crustaceans.

**Breeding:** Usually mid-winter in southern Africa, nest is a well concealed pad of dry grass, usually near or in the edge of a marsh. Usually 2 olive green to greenish brown eggs are laid. This iconic bird's trademark is the male's territorial/courtship flight display, a deep stoop of some 30-40 metres in which he spreads his tail feathers in a broad "fan", causing the stiff feathers to protrude almost at right angles to the body. The resulting noise from his speed and airflow over these stiffened feathers is called winnowing, or more commonly, drumming. It can be performed in the mornings, late afternoons or on moonlight nights.

**Conservation:** Considered "Not Threatened". A popular bird with hunters until the 1940's but there is no record of ringed birds being shot by hunters since 1972.

## MIGRATION OF THE AMUR FALCON

Birdlife Northern Natal tells us that the female falcon which has been fitted with a transmitter is now flying over Somalia on her epic journey to Upper Mongolia. We're all hoping that she survives her seventh trip.

Go well, little falcon!

## A FUN LOOK AT FAMOUS BIRDING SURNAMES ASSOCIATED WITH WAKKERSTROOM (SOMETIMES SOMEWHAT TENUOUSLY) by JOHN McALLISTER

Undoubtedly the most famous birding name associated with Wakkerstroom is that of **J Austin Roberts** (1883-1948). For those of you who still do not recognise the name he is the "Roberts" of *Roberts' Birds of southern Africa*. His father was the Anglican Vicar at St Marks' Church here in the village in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and he collected many of his bird specimens in the area including Rudd's and Botha's Larks. He also collected birds and mammals on the farm Tafelkop where the club has often birded and where the near mythical butterfly, *Dingana alaoides*, is to be found.

Other famous people, not birders, who worked on Tafelkop include FitzSimmons, who wrote the first comprehensive book on southern African snakes that I know of and the Hemming brothers who authored the *South African Red Data Book – Butterflies*. Acocks, who wrote *Veld Types of South Africa* also worked here and included photographs of the farm in his book. Birds named after Roberts include Roberts's Warbler (also known as Roberts' Prinia or Briar Warbler) which is endemic to the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe, a subspecies of Fawn-coloured Lark which is found in eastern Botswana, south-western Zimbabwe and north-eastern South Africa, a subspecies of Grey Penduline Tit which occurs from south-eastern Kenya to north-eastern Zambia, Malawi and northern Mozambique and allegedly a subspecies of Mountain Parakeet found in northern Peru. I must say that I find the last one a bit hard to accept as I can find no connection between Roberts and Peru, but maybe someone has access to better info than me.

Another famous South African who has a connection to Wakkerstroom and has given his name to one of our very special birds is **General Louis Botha** (1862-1919) whose farm was just north of Perdekop on the road from Volksrust to Standerton. His house is still lived in today so visits to the house are unfortunately not possible. Roberts named Botha's Lark after him.

Many of you have visited the Pringle's farm at Tafelkop and marvelled at the many Yellow-breasted Pipits and the wonderful wildflowers to be found on the farm. Well apart from this and all the past research that has been conducted here John Pringle may be related to **Colonel Sir John Wallace Pringle** (1863-1938) who was the Chief Inspector of Railways in Uganda from 1891 to 1892. Just what his connection to birds in East Africa was is uncertain, but Pringle's Puffback of north-eastern Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia and east-central Somalia was named after him by Sir Federick John Jackson who collected birds in the area.

Some of you may remember David and Wendy Whitehead who used to live at Rudd's Hill just outside Wakkerstroom on the Piet Retief road. David was the grandson or perhaps great nephew of **John Whitehead** (1860-1899), an intrepid British explorer who collected birds in Borneo, the Philippines and the island of Hainan in the South China Sea. He also wrote *Explorations of Mount Kina Balu, North Borneo*. He may have been the first European to reach the summit of this Bornean Mountain which now features on the itineraries of all the birding tour companies visiting the area. Whitehead has no fewer than eight bird species and another eight subspecies of birds named after him. Not surprisingly these are, in the main, from Borneo and the Philippines.

Our illustrious Chair, Brian Guerin, also has a possible relative in **Felix Edouard Guerin-Meneville** (1799-1874). Felix was a French entomologist who is perhaps best known for introducing silkworm breeding to France. He was also responsible for the first scientific description of Rouget's Rail which is found in Ethiopia and Eritrea. He seems to have been something of an all-rounder, with scientific papers on plants, insects and others to his name. There is also a Felix-Edouard Guerin-Meneville Collection of Crustacea at the Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia. A Colombian/Venezuelan hummingbird, Guerin's Helmetcrest, now known as the Bearded Helmetcrest, with the scientific name *Oxygogon guerinii*, was named after him.

The Club's Treasurer does not escape Scot-free either. **Sir John Barrow** (1764-1848) was Secretary to the Admiralty and a founder of the Royal Geographic Society and a great advocate of Arctic exploration. Swainson, of Spurfowl fame, named Barrow's Goldeneye, a sea-duck of sub-arctic North America and Iceland, after him. Our Barrow's Bustard or Southern White-bellied Korhaan (now relegated to a subspecies of the more widespread White-bellied Bustard) was somewhat incongruously named after him by John Edward Gray (of Gray's Lark fame), an ornithologist at the British Museum in London. Many geographical features in the North-west Passage such as Barrow Point in Alaska and Barrow Strait between Somerset and Cornwallis Islands in Arctic Canada are named after him.

The village's resident ornithologist, Patrick Benson, may or may not be related to **Constantine Walter Benson** (1909-1982) who collected in central Africa for over 30 years. Benson's Rock-thrush of Madagascar was named after him. Probably the best known books published by Con Benson as he was known are the *Birds of Zambia* co-authored by Richard Brooke and others, published in 1971 and *Birds of Malawi* co-authored by his wife, Mary Benson. He is also said to have tasted all the specimens he collected – apparently turacos were the best while owls tasted pretty bad!

**MESSAGE FROM BIRDLIFE SA, WAKKERSTROOM**



When you are out birding, it would be appreciated if you could record the following species and their location and complete the sighting template found on the laptop at the Crow's Nest. Any other interesting sightings are also welcome.

All three species of crane, White-bellied and Blue Korhaan,  
Southern Bald Ibis, Secretary Bird  
Ground Woodpecker, Rudd's and Botha's Larks  
Yellow-breasted Pipit, Grass and Marsh Owls  
White Stork and Cape Vulture

Thank you for your time and contribution. All sightings will be registered on a weekly basis with ADU on the My Bird Patch programme. This information is used for EIA's and sensitivity mapping. Your contribution counts!

**Feel free to visit us at the BirdLife South Africa Wakkerstroom Tourism and Education Centre or contact us if you require any information or assistance**

Andre – 084 396 6853 / [andre.steenkamp@birdlife.org.za](mailto:andre.steenkamp@birdlife.org.za) Kristi – 083 227 0128 [kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za](mailto:kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za)

Happy birding and we hope to see you again soon

**WNHA**

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# Wakkerstroom Bird Club

Postal Address: P O Box 93, Wakkerstroom, 2480. Cell: 0822556778



The Wakkerstroom Bird Club's aims are to encourage and promote Birding, to develop and maintain facilities for Birding, to help conserve the natural habitat the birds depend on and to enjoy the birding in and around Wakkerstroom.

**Regular Activities ;**

**First Saturday** of the month – A.M. Vlei Walk – meet on Amersfoort Road Bridge @ 07h00 until +/- 09h00,

**Second Tuesday** of the month – outings to recognized birding sites in the area –we usually meet at Wakkerstroom Library at a seasonable time, summer 07h00, winter 08h00.

**Third Wednesday** of the month – speaker or quality DVD show. This day may vary according to the speaker's commitments.

**Other activities:**

**CAR Count.**

We are also involved in the bi-annual CAR Count (Co-ordinated Avifaunal Road count) on the last Saturday in July and January and we often need extra volunteers. A 4x4 or high clearance vehicle would be an advantage.

**Bird Atlassing.**

Please submit your sightings to SABAP 2 and help keep Wakkerstroom on the (Atlas) map. The A.D.U. cancels the tally of the numbers of pentads covered back to zero on January 1 each year – so let's climb in and get them rolling again!

**CWAC Count.**

We support the CWAC Count (Co-ordinated Water Bird Count) system.

**Other Useful Information.**

Bird lists for the area are available at The Crow's Nest in Badenhorst Street.

Bird Guides may be arranged through the BLSA centre, phone Andre Steenkamp, cell 0843966853

Club Contact people are: John Burchmore at "The Crow's Nest", cell 0822243326

Norman Dennett 017 730 0523

Brian Guerin cell 0834156701

**Visit our facebook page "Wakkerstroom Bird Club"**

**All of our Club activities are free and we particularly welcome visitors to Wakkerstroom.**

## The Committee