



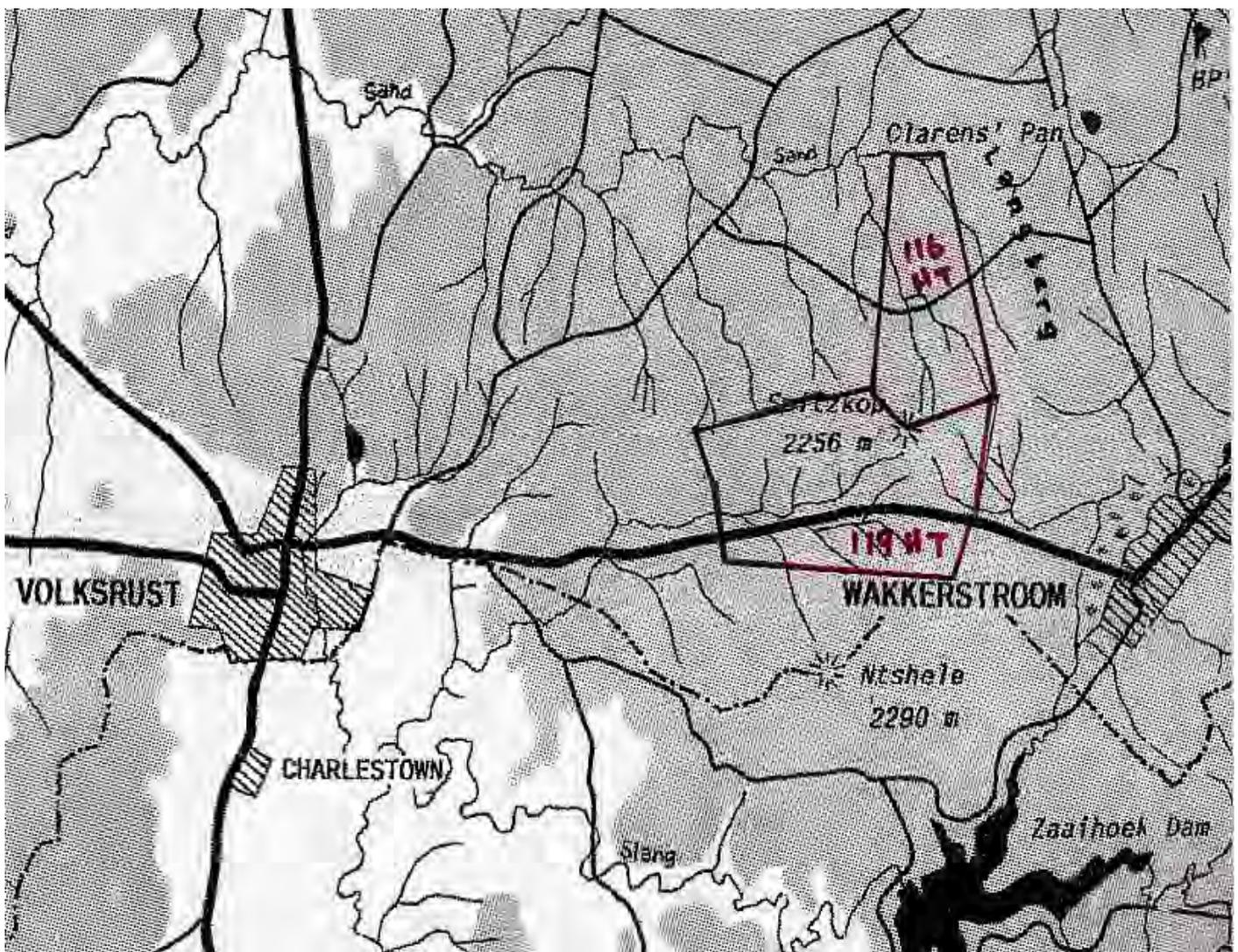
Wakkerstroom Bird Club

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 34– MAY 2015

Wakkerstroom Bird Club is involved with monitoring all forms of mining activity in the area, particularly this latest possibility. Please, we would like EVERYBODY, not just our members, to register and thus present a united front to the latest threat to our beautiful environment. - **Editor.**

Have you registered as an “Interested and Affected Party”? You would not be looking at this if you were not interested. The Map show the approximate position of the two farms where the application for a coal prospecting license has been submitted. To register send an email to Vincent Baloyi tinyikovin@yahoo.co.uk Ref: Application for a Prospecting License Spitskop and Twyfelfontein Farms and ask that you be Registered as an Interested and Affected Party.



Accommodation in Wakkerstroom.

For information, BLSA Wakkerstroom is offering discounted accommodation for the months of June, July and August – stay for three nights and only pay for two, a discount of one third. Applies Monday to Friday in any of their accommodation facilities. Contact Daphne Pyott on 071 718 1566.

The Kittlitz's Plover (taken from Wikipedia)

As we are now going into winter I thought it would be good to do an article on a regular migrant in winter to our dorp. Unfortunately, I couldn't find one in "A Birder's Guide to Wakkerstroom" so I hit on a bird that is not a regular sighting here. – **John Barrow**

The Kittlitz's Plover (*Charadrius pecuarius*) is a small plover found in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, Madagascar, and the Nile delta. Some birds, especially in coastal areas, are resident; other populations are migratory or nomadic. It is an erratic visitor to Wakkerstroom.

The adult Kittlitz's plover is 14–16 cm long. In breeding plumage it has a grey-brown back, crown, and wings, an orange breast shading to white on the lower belly, and long dark grey legs. The forehead and throat are white, with black lores and a black frontal bar, the latter extending as a stripe down the sides of the neck and around the hind neck.

In winter, the adults lose the distinctive face pattern and resemble Kentish plovers, but they are smaller, longer-legged and longer-billed. They have less uniform upperparts than Kentish, and always show a pink or orange breast colouration. Juvenile Kittlitz's plovers are similar to winter adults, but the underpart colour is often restricted to just a narrow gorget. In flight, the primary flight feathers are dark with a short white wing bar.

The Kittlitz's plover forages for food on open dry mud and short grass, usually close to water. The specific name, *pecuarius*, means "grazer", referring to the grassland habitat. It hunts usually by sight for invertebrates including insects, earthworms, crustaceans, and molluscs.

The call is a plaintive *tee peep* and may give a hard *trip* when alarmed. This species is named for Baron Heinrich von Kittlitz. It is one of the species to which the *Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds* (AEWA) applies.

Breeding: Its breeding habitat is open ground on beaches or dry mudflats, near water, and with little or no plant growth. The nest is a simple scrape, and both parents incubate the usually two eggs. If a potential predator approaches the nest, the adult will walk away from the scrape, calling to attract the intruder and feigning a broken wing. Of course, once the intruder is far enough from the nest, the plover flies off. If the adult has enough warning, she will stand above the eggs and shuffle sand and debris over them before moving away from the nest.

The Kittlitz's plover is gregarious outside the breeding season, feeding and roosting in mostly small groups, but in flocks of up to 250 on migration.

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Interesting Local Sightings:

Note, these items don't necessarily have to be from the immediate vicinity of town – we suggest any thing seen on, for instance, on a day outing should be submitted.



Verreaux's Eagle – Photo by Arturo de Frias Marques

4 May – Peregrine Falcon perched in a skeletal conifer behind the Municipal offices. Ann Cleal.

10 May - Greater Striped Swallow – A pair has nested on our front stoep for a number of years, generally raising two broods per season. This year's breeding appeared to commence later than usual and once the second clutch had fledged the adults appeared to depart soon afterwards. I have no way of knowing whether the same pair was involved but the roost was suddenly re-occupied and yesterday (10 May) two chicks fledged at a time when I'm not seeing any other swallow species.

Of particular note was the fact that our resident Common Fiscal took great interest in events and basically spent his day monitoring the fledglings as they negotiated between their tunnel entrance and the burglar bars, no doubt awaiting a miscalculation on their part. Ann Cleal.



Kittlitz's Plover photographed in I Simangaliso Wetlands Park by CJ Sharp (Wikipedia)

17 May – Verreux's Eagle – single bird seen on the Newcastle sand road near Wakkerstroom Farm Lodge, Fred Kolbe's farm. Also African Fish Eagle on Zaaihoek. Mike Maxted-Smith.

An excellent record for our pentad, please report any other sightings to the Club. - Editor.

Mice on Marion Island – an appeal by

BirdLife South Africa. Marion, Island is the jewel in South Africa's island crown – it is huge and beautiful, hosts an astonishing array of endemic species and charismatic marine megafauna, and is pristine. Or nearly pristine... After cats were eradicated from Marion Island in the early 1990s, mice were left as the only introduced mammal there. At the time, no thought was given to tackling mice, even though their impacts on invertebrates such as the flightless moths and weevils, plant communities, nutrient cycles, etc., were gigantic. Little did we know that mice could become such a significant threat to seabirds. Work done at Gough Island demonstrated that mice can wreak devastation on seabird colonies, and there is now good evidence that mouse impacts at Marion Island are increasing. BirdLife South Africa is leading a collaborative effort to



Photo by Angela Angel & Ross Wanless

review the feasibility of eradicating mice from Marion Island. The good news is that the techniques to do this type of conservation work exist and have proven to be effective. Marion remains the largest island ever cleared of cats. Australia's Macquarie Island is now free of rabbits, rats and mice, the largest island to have a three-species complex eradicated simultaneously, and one of very few where rats and mice have been tackled successfully. South Georgia is currently being cleared of rats and mice, which will make it the largest island on which these invasive rodents have ever been eradicated. There are also plans afoot to clear Gough, the celebrity island for mouse impacts on seabirds. So initiating work to consider options at Marion Island isn't really pushing the envelope in any meaningful way. But it is a massive island and will require very significant resources if an eradication is to be tackled. We therefore need to get every aspect considered, studied in depth and squared away comprehensively. That's the good news. The bad news is that these are extremely expensive, risky operations that require extensive studies, meticulous planning and a lot of time. And time, as everyone knows, is money. A bit of luck doesn't hurt, but almost nothing is left to chance in operations of this scale. The first step is to have an expert (in this instance, Dr John Parkes from New Zealand), inspect the island and highlight where there are significant risks to other species, logistical constraints and areas that require more research. This might result in a professional view along the lines of „forget it, there are too many risks that cannot be contained“, but we won't know until we've commissioned an assessment. We need your help to take this first step in what might be a very long road. BirdLife South Africa is trying to raise R200,000 to cover the expenses of getting John to Marion Island so that he can undertake a feasibility study and risk assessment. Please support this appeal! Those who donate more than R1,000 will be mentioned by name on our website and in the final report, they will receive a copy of the expert's report and be acknowledged in BirdLife South Africa's 2015 Annual Report. Please donate now by visiting www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/donate. Fill in the details on the donation form and tick „Marion Island“ under the options.

You can make a Real Difference!

Andrea Angel & Ross Wanless, BirdLife South Africa News

Support the Marion Island funding appeal

Do all migratory birds follow the same route? As you might expect, different species follow very different routes. Raptors such as eagles and buzzards find it hard to fly over large expanses of water because of the lack of thermal air currents to give them lift. So most European birds of prey take routes south which involve the shortest possible sea crossing. They cross at the Straits of Gibraltar, over the Bosphorus at Istanbul, and over the Red Sea from Eilat in Israel, and can be seen in huge concentrations at these locations every spring and autumn.

How well do birds see? Like a hawk! Birds' eyes, like those of other vertebrates, are complex organs: able to process visual information, and send signals to the brain that allow their owner to interpret the world around it. Without sight, birds would find it almost impossible to fly around without bumping into things, let alone find food or dodge predators. It is generally assumed that birds see better than we do, and it is true that groups such as diurnal birds of

prey have much better eyesight than humans. „Better“ means that they have a greater ability to discern distant objects; probably somewhere between two and five times the power of human eyes.

From “Everything you always wanted to know about birds ...but were afraid to ask!” By Stephen Moss

The Lesser Grey Shrike

The Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*) is a member of the shrike family *Laniidae*. It breeds in South and Central Europe and western Asia in the summer and migrates to winter quarters in southern Africa in the early autumn, returning in spring. It is a scarce vagrant to western Europe, including Great Britain, usually as a spring or autumn erratic.

This medium-sized passerine eats large insects, specially beetles, butterflies, moths and grasshoppers. Like other shrikes it hunts from prominent perches and sometimes impales corpses on thorns or barbed wire as a "larder".

Taxonomy: The Lesser Grey Shrike was first described by Johann Friedrich Gmelin in 1788. There are two subspecies, *Lanius minor minor* and *Lanius minor turanicus*.

Description: The adult male Lesser Grey Shrike has its nape, cheeks, ear and eye coverts and front part of the crown black. The hind part of the crown and the back is a pale bluish-grey and the rump is a similar but rather paler colour. The underparts are white with the lower breast and belly suffused with pink. The axillaries are greyish-white and the underwing coverts are brownish-black. The two central tail feathers are black with a white tip and base. The other pairs have increasing areas of white and less black. The primaries are black with a buff tip and white base. The secondaries are black with broader, paler tips but no white bases. The wing coverts are black with the lesser coverts being fringed with grey. The female has similar plumage but the head is dark grey rather than black, the ear coverts brownish-black, the upperparts a brownish-grey and the underparts less pink than the male. The juvenile is similar to the adults but is altogether more brown. It lacks the grey back and rump which are instead pale brown and faintly barred, and the underparts are white and cream without any pink. All birds have a brownish-black beak with a paler base to the lower mandible, brown irises and black legs and feet. Adult length is around 20cm (7.9in) with a wing length of 13cm (5.1in) and a tarsus length of 2.5cm (1in).

Distribution and habitat

The Lesser Grey Shrike spends the summer in South and Central Europe and western Asia. It breeds in southern France, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, the former Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and southern Russia. In Asia it breeds in the Middle East, its range extending as far as eastern Turkey and Iran. It is a vagrant to more northerly parts of Europe, usually in spring or autumn. Countries where it has been seen include Sweden, Finland, Denmark, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium and northern France. It is a migratory species and winters in a broad belt across tropical southern Africa.

During the summer the Lesser Grey Shrike inhabits open countryside, the edges of cultivated areas, heathland with scattered bushes and trees, gardens, coppices, woodland and roadside trees. In its winter quarters it is usually found in scrubland and among thorn trees

Diary of Forthcoming Events:

Saturday June 6 – our regular vlei walk which continues to yield useful information for the pentad survey and various other ADU surveys.

Tuesday June 9 – Outing to the Wessels“ Farm. An annual outing, again in search of the Gurney“s Sugarbird – even if we miss it again it“s a good birding venue and we are always made welcome. Details to follow or contact Judy Wheeler on 0789887502.

Monday June 15 – Kristi Garland will entertain us at BLSA with a show such as she has given before at the Mucky Duck, please note the changes to time **and** day. Changes made courtesy of Eishkom and the Public Holiday next day, potentially making it a long weekend. This will be at the new time of 14h00 in the afternoon, see note below.

NOTE regarding winter meetings: To avoid the cold evenings of June, July and August (and also to avoid abandoning winter meetings for those months) we are going to try holding them in the afternoon from 14h00. An optional bring and braai will be on offer from 12h00 for those interested.

As usual, visitors are welcome at all our functions and there are no entrance fees. In future we hope to include information on BLNN, (Newcastle“s Club), outings/meetings.



Picture by Daniel Bastaja taken at Bugyi, Hungary

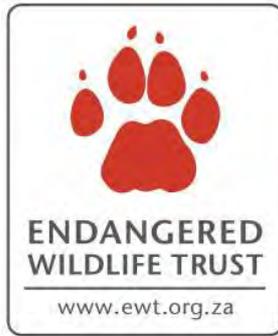
Please pencil in your diaries our Annual General Meeting on July 18 at De Oude Stasie. We have yet to organise a speaker and would appreciate some suggestions.

Our Oldest Life Member has a Birthday!



Norman Dennett's Picture captures the indomitable spirit of this remarkable lady!

On Tuesday 19th May our oldest Life Member, Yvonne Mavis Clulow, reached the wonderful age of 90 years! This milestone was celebrated with a small function after the Book Club meeting that afternoon. My earliest memories of Yvonne date back to the early ,nineties when I was a fairly regular weekend visitor to Wakkerstroom and Big Tree Cottage. Yvonne in those days worked at The Wild Turkey when it was still next to the Green Acres building. Older residents will remember her and her husband, Tony, as the Mayor and Lady Mayoress, and even further back, her as a "biker chick"! She still has her leather jacket and colours stored in her wardrobe – and by all accounts is ready to put it on at a moment's notice for a demo! Congratulations, Yvonne, Wakkerstroom Bird Club Committee and members wish you a healthy, hearty time while you move on to your telegram from the Queen! **Brian Guerin.**



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Norms and standards for raptor ringing, marking and tracking

Johannesburg, May 2015:

South Africa's raptors are important environmental indicators and monitoring of, and research into several species helps to improve our knowledge and inform conservation decision-making. Given the growing interest in raptor ringing, marking and tracking in South Africa, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and BirdLife South Africa are of the opinion that the current approach to these activities should be reviewed. Information obtained through the tracking of birds with satellite and other sophisticated tracking devices can provide answers to important research questions that can ultimately contribute to their conservation. This will provide conservationists and decision-makers with a better understanding of movements of birds which can help inform placement of wind turbines and other infrastructure which can pose a significant risk to some bird species.

Handling birds and attaching devices to them can, however, pose inherent risks for the individual birds. These risks must be minimised, and must be justified in terms of the expected science and conservation outcomes for the species from the deployment. The *ad hoc* fitment of tracking devices where the research questions are unclear is considered to be unethical.

A workshop to discuss the requirements to undertake these ringing, marking and tracking activities was therefore recently held at Ithala Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, and co-hosted by the EWT's Birds of Prey Programme and BirdLife South Africa's Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme. The outcomes of the discussions will provide guidelines in terms of ensuring a more rigorous approach with regard to the training of researchers and the permitting of projects which involves these activities.

The South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING) keeps a record of all bird ringing undertaken in the country. A "ringing" qualification is also granted through SAFRING following a rigorous training process. All ringing, marking and tracking projects have to comply with the relevant legislation which is ultimately controlled by the provincial nature conservation ordinances.

The meeting was of the opinion that, for all projects involving marking and tracking, the granting of provincial permits should be subject to ethical approval by a relevant ethics committee. The workshop participants also agreed to the establishment of a committee to oversee projects which involve this work, following the example of the British Ornithological Trust, UK. The advisory committee will comprise representatives from relevant organisations, such as SAFRING, South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), BirdLife South Africa and the EWT.

It was further suggested that norms and standards should be developed to provide clear guidance on the sharing of marking and tracking data as well as the storage of such information in a central database. Researchers and specialists are also encouraged to share the lessons they have learnt from their work. This would improve tracking methods and techniques, thus minimising impacts on birds during future studies.

The EWT, BirdLife South Africa and SAFRING acknowledge the importance of bird ringing, tagging and tracking. These technologies are amongst the most important and powerful tools in recent ornithology providing key information which informs conservation decisions.

For more information, or interviews please contact:

Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson: BirdLife South Africa, Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme Manager, conservation@birdlife.org.za; Tel +27 11 789 1122.

André Botha: Endangered Wildlife Trust, Birds of Prey Programme Manager, andreb@ewt.org.za; Tel +27 11 372 3600.

The Latest on the Amur Falcon Fitted with a Transmitter:

According to Birdlife Northern Natal who monitors his progress, our newest intrepid traveler was winging his way across the ocean near South China. By now, it must be across land. Awesome! The editor had heard that the bird that had traversed the earth between breeding ground and Southern Africa eight times had died.

Possible Good News from the Vlei?



On May 20 we had a visit (courtesy MTPA) from Hannes Marais, a wetland flora researcher to examine the weed that has spread over the open water area near the bridge. He has identified it as *Potamogeton thunbergii* Broad-leaved Pondweed. This he describes as an indigenous, opportunistic species that favours shallow, slow-moving water. It also likes low-ish water quality and plenty of nutrients. Sound like our vlei? There are apparently no known effective herbicides; it just disappears when conditions

become unfavourable. We are looking into the possibility of measuring the quality of the water entering the vlei and, if successful, this should provide an early warning of possible problems. Hannes will give us further confirmation as and when it becomes available.

A Thank You!

In our last edition we appealed for donations of books to sell at various spots in Wakkerstroom. We'd like to thank Pat Cochran for his kind donation.

OUR FACEBOOK PAGE

For those members who are on facebook and have not yet looked at our page, we encourage you to do so. It is called, fittingly, "Wakkerstroom Bird Club" and is easily accessible once you are in facebook. Call it up and click on the "like" icon. We already have 186 "likes" and we're looking for more! Some "likes" have come from overseas countries. We try to make the page as interesting as possible and would appreciate suggestions on how to make it even more so. Please ask your friends, both on facebook and in real life to "like" the page

THE EDITOR

JOHN BARROW
