



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



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Giving Conservation Wings

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 46, AUGUST, 2016.

Hi All,

As I write the weather has turned milder but don't put the woollies away yet! Reports have already been received of returning migrant Yellow-billed Kite near Piet Retief and White-throated Swallow, South African Cliff Swallow at the vlei and Amethyst Sunbird in town. The (remaining) willows are beginning to flush as well but these trees are being cut daily and are now in a sad state. Our vlei walk on Saturday 6th yielded 54 species, excellent for the time of year.

- 1. Car Count, 30 July.** Another splendid autumn day for the Count, although with only five teams to cover the seven precincts, but we managed. Our preliminary result shows that 883 individuals of 18 species were counted. Interestingly the highest count was of Southern Bald Ibis, followed by Helmeted Guineafowl. Three teams did not see this species. Highlight of the day for two teams was recording Black Harrier, a mega sighting these days. A full report from the ADU will follow shortly, we are having some difficulty in accessing the system they use. Thanks to all participants!
- 2. Another Black Harrier Story.** Saturday 23 July 2016 – the Vlei: beautiful morning, no wind to speak of, reasonable birding augmented by an otter lying spread-eagled less than 10m away, determined to expose every square centimetre of its belly to the sun. All told, couldn't have been much better given the time of year ... until a Black Harrier literally floated into view! In perfect viewing conditions for the better part of 10 minutes, this bird provided my best ever sighting of the species; close-up, almost slow motion glides, an occasional half stoop followed by languid turns displaying all aspects of its plumage. Despite constantly looking for movement in the vegetation, it certainly didn't appear to be hunting in earnest, simply enjoying the sun and life on the wing. Endemic to South Africa and Namibia and listed as endangered, the Black Harrier population has been pegged at approximately 1000 birds, (African Bird Life, June/July 2016 issue).
- 3. We Can't Say we Weren't Warned.** In the January 2006 of the newsletter "Klipbek" Roy Cowgill wrote: "May I add a few comments about the Common Myna. What a great idea to reduce the exotic Common Myna numbers before they take over. It is illegal to discharge a firearm in town but this is not the only way to reduce numbers. Make their habitat unfriendly by the prevention of them breeding. Block up nest holes, remove nests and destroy eggs. Take some sound advice, you do not wish to be menaced like the Durbanites are by this unwelcomed bird."



5. And on Guineafowl. "Another great concern is the number of domestic or exotic Helmeted Guineafowl that are unpenned and walking the streets of town. These birds are easily recognised by the presence of some white feathers in their plumage and pink of the scales of the feet or legs, see picture, the reduction of white dots in the feathers or the incomplete white rectangle around the white dots. Should they hybridize with the local wild species numerous problems are introduced which will steadily lead to the reduction and loss of the indigenous species. It is recommended that the domesticated variety be then kept securely in captivity, or even better, eaten."

- 5. The 3rd Sandy Twomey Photographic Competition.** The competition is now underway and posters detailing the categories prizes on offer will appear in town shortly. A nice selection of slides from

previous years, as part of a display advertising Wakkerstroom and its attractions, is being shown in Jane Harley's shop, Wakkerstroom Central. Get clicking!

6. **Citizen Scientist Day** – weekend of 17/18 September. This should be one of the highlights of our year and bookings are beginning to climb. BLSA capacity is 40 people and we would hate members to be disappointed so please book soon with Norman Dennett dennett@mtnloaded.co.za This is a golden opportunity to listen to speakers who are leaders in their field and talk to them face to face. And don't forget the ringing demonstrations.
7. **Painting of Gates at wetland.** Norman Dennett, capably assisted by painter Shorty, have done a splendid job of painting the three gates at the Drummond Hide, two at the WOW/Beck hide entrance and the two benches under the poplars, together with the surrounding poles. Thanks guys!
8. **Other Diary Items.** We have a busy rest of year:
 - Saturday 3 September**, Vlei Walk. With the migrants beginning to return this could produce a nice list of sightings, 07h30 on the Bridge. Coffee will be available.
 - Tuesday 13th September**, outing to the Myburgh's farm, previously Birdsong, on the outskirts of town, along the Oude Stasie tar road. We will leave from the Wakkerstroom Library at 08h00.
 - Saturday 16/17 September**, Citizen Scientist weekend, see above.
 - Wednesday 21st September**, one of Kristi's fun and games evenings in celebration of the Spring Alive Campaign which we would like to support.
 - Saturday 1st October**, Vlei Walk, it should be light (and warm) enough to meet a little earlier, say 07h00 or earlier if you wish, and we contribute to the SABAP2 project. Coffee as usual.
 - Tuesday 11 October**, outing to the berry farm near Charlestown. We believe it is a very big area, largely untouched grasslands and three dams. Breeding Blue Crane and Secretarybird occur there. We will try to do a recce of the area beforehand.
 - Wednesday 19th October**, speaker/DVD, details to be finalized.
 - Saturday 3rd September**, Vlei Walk, join us from 07h00 or earlier.
 - Saturday 3rd December**, tentative date for our year-end function, possibly at Dana – we'll keep you posted!
9. **Speed Humps.** You may or may not like the speed humps on the main road but they do seem to be calming the traffic, although many drivers have taken to using the back streets for their nonsense! We heard of a fatal hit and run incident near the bridge at the beginning of the bridge a couple of weeks ago. As a result we are looking into the Council placing three humps at certain positions along the bridge to try and avoid a similar event befalling anybody else. Unfortunately it is a case of softly, softly catchee monkey so even if we are successful in the application, it will take time.
10. **Breakaway.** One of the unexpected revelations of Robin Colyn's excellent talk on the plight Southern Bald Ibises was to hear that Eskom finished construction work on the site at Ingula and there is now accommodation available there. We will be looking into this in the near future with the idea of arranging an outing there for a couple of days. Ingula has more than two hundred and fifty species of birds, including all three crane species, Southern Bald Ibis, Rudd's Lark, Secretarybird and a host of others. They have also recorded White-winged Flufftail and Eurasian Bittern, in summer.

That's all for now, thanks for your support and above all – enjoy your birding!

Brian.

19th August, 2016