



Wakkerstroom Bird Club



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(Affiliated to BLSA)

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER 48, DECEMBER, 2016.

Hi All,

Well, 2016 has nearly gone, but where to? The Club has had a busy year, too – our 50th Vlei Walk, the Citizen Scientist Weekend, regular outings and meetings, the Year-end function, 2 CAR Counts, the pentad Survey now well into its 4th year, our first attempt at Birding Big Day and continuing spraying and maintenance activities in and around the wetland. Has anyone seen the 5 owl posts we recently erected?

Another project on the go involves fixed point photography, being done by Norman Dennett:

A major objective of the WBC is to maintain and improve birding facilities and opportunities within the Wakkerstroom area. In particular we are concentrating on the removal of alien vegetation in the Vlei area both by physical methods and by spraying with Herbicide where there is easy access and good viewing for birders. The emphasis is on the encouragement of more open water and muddy areas. This project has placed considerable financial strain on our small club and we are grateful for the assistance given by the Wakkerstroom Natural Heritage Association.

The monitoring and evaluation of our progress is essential and we are, therefore, photographing 14 fixed points on a regular 6 monthly basis so that a direct comparison can be made over the coming years. We have just completed the third round of photos and, notwithstanding the prolonged drought, which has obviously affected the normal growth patterns of particularly the *Phragmites australis*, we can already see the progress made. Norman Dennett.

Some comments on the Vlei:

There have been comments recently on the apparently reduced number of birds showing on the vlei. “Apparently” because last week one of our members recorded 91 species in Week 48 for the Pentad Survey and 88 species the week before! The most likely reason for fewer birds being seen on the open water seems to be that the water is too deep and some species cannot feed at that depth. Birds that were numerous, e.g. Red-knobbed Coot, Common Moorhen and even Yellow-billed Duck have hopefully just moved off to other waters to feed, temporarily we hope!

The “green algae” is actually floating vegetation caused by an external source. It is difficult to control and we are hoping to be able to better monitor and control the water inflow. Efforts are also underway to improve the through flow in that stream so that the weed also clears by runoff.

3rd Sandy Twomey Photographic Competition:

It's time to get out there and get clicking your entries for the above, Christmas should provide some interesting subject matter for you! Winners will be announced at the club AGM on March 4. Send your entries to John Barrow at wackersbirdclub@gmail.com together with details of the make/model of camera used. Excellent prizes are on offer for the successful entrants.

January 2017 Diary:

Saturday January 7 – first Vlei Walk of the year – don't let the comments about reduced numbers put you off – think of the 88 and 91 species rather! Anytime from 07h00, on the bridge. Something relaxing after the holidays.

Friday and Saturday January 13 and 14 – a frogging weekend on the vlei arranged by Kristi Garland. Several frog experts will guide us through frog identification, calls *and* have a great time. Bring along headlamps, gumboots, torches and cameras. This event, including a talk, will replace our usual outing and meeting for January. There will be a fee of R50 per night, please contact Kristi for further details, flyers have been posted around town.

Saturday January 28 – the Summer CAR Count – we've done a number of these Counts now and the old hands know the ropes but we would like to get in some new recruits into the system, even if you start your CAR career by acting as recorder of sightings. Most of us did! Come and join us, it's instructive and a day out, perhaps to areas you haven't seen before. A briefing will be held at 17h00 on the night before (Friday 27th) at The Country Inn, when full instructions will be given.

Some good news to end with:

ATTENTION: LANDOWNER/STAKEHOLDER

AFRO ENERGY - APPLICATION FOR AN EXPLORATION RIGHT FOR PETROLEUM ON VARIOUS FARMS IN A PORTION OF THE KWAZULU-NATAL AND MPUMALANGA PROVINCES (12/3/321 ER): WITHDRAWAL OF APPLICATION

As you are aware, Afro Energy (Pty) Ltd lodged an application for an Exploration Right (ER) to explore for "Petroleum and Gas" with the Petroleum Agency South Africa (PASA) in terms of Section 79 of the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act, 2002 (No. 28 of 2002) (MPRDA). Afro Energy had also made an application to PASA for environmental authorization of the exploration work programme as required in terms of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (107 of 1998) (NEMA).

In this regard Afro Energy had appointed SLR Consulting (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd (SLR SA) as Environmental Assessment Practitioner to manage the scoping and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process in terms of the EIA Regulations (GN.R982 of 2014). SLR had initiated a public participation process and a draft Scoping Report is currently available to interested and affected parties for a 30-day review, which period commenced on 15 November 2016.

Afro Energy has subsequently withdrawn this application for an Exploration Right. PASA confirmed receipt of the notice of withdrawal for the 321 ER application on 23 November 2016. The application for environmental authorisation of the exploration work programme is therefore no longer required.

As an interested and affected party you are hereby informed of the withdrawal of the application by Afro Energy and are advised that this scoping and EIA process has been terminated. There is no need to comment on the Scoping Report.

Afro Energy and SLR SA would like to extend our thanks for your involvement in the EIA process.

Theo Wicks

For: **SLR CONSULTING (SOUTH AFRICA)**

ALL THAT remains is to wish you and your loved ones a Blessed and Peaceful Christmas and a lifer-filled New Year!

On behalf of the Committee,

Brian Guerin.

