



**BIRDLIFE KZN MIDLANDS CLUB E-NEWSLETTER**  
**4th QUARTER – OCTOBER TO DECEMBER, 2018.**

**OUTINGS:**

**Sun. 7 Oct. – Darvill**

A very dull and murky morning greeted the 11 birders who joined Gordon Bennett at Darvill. Two beautiful Lesser Striped Swallows occupied a curl of barbed wire; an image that was repeated later with five White-throated Swallows. A single Barn Swallow was seen at the end of the canals. Also there was an Egyptian Goose with 15 goslings, three larger than the rest.

We were happy to quickly find the pair of Fulvous Whistling Ducks, in a group of White-faced Whistling Ducks and a lone Cape Teal. At their feet, were a few Kittlitz Plovers. A Long-crest Eagle loomed nearby, one of a pair whose calls punctuated the walk. In flight, we saw an African Darter, a Paradise Flycatcher, a single African Palm Swift, and a lovely flight of six or seven Red-billed teals.



Some birders were distracted by mulberries

The ponds are not very productive at present, perhaps due to all of the construction disturbance. We did see the ‘usual suspects’, as well as a pair of Cape Shovelers and some Wood Sandpipers.  
Report by Viv O’Neill and photo by Roger O’Neill

**Sun. 21 Oct. – Owl and Elephant Lodge**

A new venue to bird certainly interested me this October outing. Situated just past the town of Weenen, on the R74 to Muden, The Owl and Elephant Lodge is a small property of 10 hectares on which the lodge is situated.

([https://web.facebook.com/TheWeenenOwl/?ref=br\\_rs](https://web.facebook.com/TheWeenenOwl/?ref=br_rs)).

We arrived at 07:00 on a sunny, but cold morning. The air was icy! Darlene Wagner had muffins hot out the oven and warm beverages to fight off the cold air! What a pleasure! The birding started immediately with White-fronted Bee-eaters hawking on the lawn, plus Rock Martins flying around the thatch roofs. Red-faced Mousebirds made an appearance before their speckled cousins. While in the dining room enjoying coffee, there was a fly-past of Arrow-marked Babblers, Cape Glossy Starlings, and a few energetic White-bellied Sunbirds feeding in the thorn trees.



The Owl and Elephant Lodge (Ann Gray)

The sounds of Bokmakieries in the garden were a delight.

Darlene had arranged for a local farmer and his wife, Alan and Tracy Webster, to take the group for a stroll along the irrigation canal on their farm. We were greeted by White-fronted Bee-eaters



**The canal at Bushman's River**

hawking from the irrigation sprinklers in the dairy pastures – pleasant! A very gentle walk starting off with lots of birds in the ‘forest’ leading up to the canal, these being: Cape Robin-chat, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Black Cuckoo-shrike (calling), Streaky-headed Seedeater, and Green-backed Camaroptera.

Once on the bank of the canal we saw Acacia (Vachellia?) Pied Barbet, African Paradise Flycatcher, Southern Black Tit, African Pygmy Kingfisher, and Black-headed Oriole. A little further along and a tad drier we saw White-browed Scrub-robin, Crowned Hornbill, Chinspot Batis, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, and White-throated Swallows feeding up and down the irrigation canal. A very small storage dam off the canal connected us with a Malachite Kingfisher. On the way back to the vehicles we saw or heard the following species: Lanner Falcon, Red-chested Cuckoo, Long-billed Crombec, Klaas's Cuckoo, Familiar Chat, and a newly arrived Common (Steppe) Buzzard. Part of the group returned to the lodge and rested, while the remainder carried on to another part of the canal and walked to the start of the Bushman's River canal.

This next stroll started off with Common Waxbill and Cape Batis. Other birds along the way were Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, a pair of Namaqua Dove, Common Scimitarbill, Little Bee-eater, Olive Woodpecker, Golden-breasted Bunting, White-throated Robin-chat, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, and on the way back we got Black Cuckoo, and a female Bearded Woodpecker. Finally it was back to the lodge for lunch and refreshments. A lovely and productive morning's birding – 95 species in total were seen and/or heard.

Thank you to the birders whom attended, and a massive thank you to Darlene for hosting us and arranging Alan and Tracy, excellent guides. A really great morning!

“One Life – Bird It”

Report and photo by Ian G. Gordon

PS – a tasty snippet! The two Ian's, Ian Matthews and myself, connected with a small flock of Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks on the way home!

And an additional comment from Becky Manning:

We went up a steep path through trees to a contour on the hill and, incredibly, there was a canal, 10 feet wide, with three-foot deep water, set into steep terrain and running fast. In the 1910s, this 8+ kms of canal had been blasted and dug, and has been maintained for the last hundred years because of farms around the hill taking irrigation water. The canal comes from the Bushman's River and each May is closed off for repairs and dredging. It has locks, weirs, run-offs, three small dams, and is overhung with wild geraniums and flattish stone aloes on the cliff side in the shady parts.

We had the most beautiful walk along the ‘towpath’. Old jacarandas dot the way. Sometimes, where the hillside has collapsed with erosion, they have put the canal underground. It immediately makes you think: what fun in a canoe! Alan said the biggest rock pythons are found fishing along

its length and there is a lower canal too, both coming off the Bushman's River (which ends up in the Tugela).

Thanks to Ian Gordon, all the bird club folk, the Owl and Elephant and Alan and family – and bless the weather for clearing to become a beautiful day. Such lush farms, such big views – great birding – great hospitality. Wish you could see it. Who knew?

### **Wed. 31 Oct. – Owl and Elephant Lodge**

We were promised a cold and drizzly day by the weather forecasters for the drive to Weenen, so nine of us dressed up warmly and nothing daunted, set off from our meeting point at 06.30am. Arriving at The Owl and Elephant we were pleasantly surprised - no rain, cloudy and cool. As Ian describes in the previous article, we were also made most welcome at The Lodge with hot coffee and muffins, before we set off birding, first around the lodge and then down into the pecan plantation. Drummond recorded 56 species including Barn Swallow and Wahlberg's Eagle.



**The Pecan Plantation at the Owl and Elephant**

Report by Rosemary Forrester and photo by Drummond Densham

### **Sun. 4 Nov. – Darvill**

Just six birders visited Darvill on a hot and windy early November morning. Despite some recent rain, the ground was mostly quite dry. The first part of the circuit yielded the usual African Pied Wagtail, Brimstone Canary, and a pair of Brown-hooded Kingfishers, with a Slender Mongoose slinking quietly by beneath them. The canals held White-faced Whistling Ducks, Wood Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilts and Ruffs. Above, the sky was alive with Brown-throated Martins, as well as Barn, and some White-throated, Swallows.



Towards the river, we heard Tambourine Dove and Klaas's Cuckoo, while a Diderick Cuckoo flew and called. We were distressed to see the now-usual group of poachers and dogs, but when we mentioned this to the Umgeni Water employee driving past, the response was "Oh, Gogo, they're just hunting meat".

Pond 4 was smelly and the eastern end held no water birds at all, though there were some Blacksmith Lapwing and some warblers called. Two Grey Crowned Cranes were on the far bank. At the far end, there were a few Hottentot Teal, but no Red-billed Teals, Little Grebes or Yellow-billed Ducks were seen on the walk at all. We did see a single African Fish Eagle, as well as three Lanner Falcons (two adults and an immature) and several YBKs.

Report and photos by Roger and Viv O'Neill.

### **Sat. 17 Nov. – Ingula Pump Station.**

The weather forecast predicted a searing hot 38 degrees Celsius up by Ingula so we all arrived at our Spar Greendale meeting point at 05.30am armed with sun block, hats and bottles of water, besides our usual picnic baskets of coffee/tea, rusks and sandwiches. Two hours later we arrived at the 8,000 hectare Ingula Nature Reserve which was declared in March of this year and surrounds Eskom's Ingula Pumped Storage Scheme. Carina Coetzer, the Ingula Project Manager, together



**Bald Ibis**



**Cape Vultures**

with Sakhile and Bonginkosi met us at the entrance gate and took us to a nearby office facility where we could freshen up, grab a hot drink and a rusk before we set off to explore this amazing reserve. There were altogether 18 of us in five cars and Sakhile and Bonginkosi joined us as guides, taking us along rough tracks to spectacular view points and fascinating petrified trees.

Luckily for us a cooling breeze was blowing when we arrived and so it was not too hot, but by the time we got to the high view point the wind must have been tearing across the mountain-top at a good 50kms and the guides advised us not to walk too close to the rocky edge in case we got blown away like thistles. As there was a fenced off telecommunications tower at the site some of us clung to the wire netting in order to preserve our dignity and not get tumbled to the ground.



The vast and magnificent expanse of this natural grassland framed by high distant peaks is quite breath-taking and, even though we did not see that many birds, we still had a good count of at least 35, including the three cranes, Wattled, Blue and Grey Crowned; Secretarybird; Bald Ibis and the most unusual sight of a Denham Bustard being pursued by a jackal. The bustard was hobbling along the ground dragging a wing as if to lure the jackal away from a chick or a nest. The jackal



**The Rock Bidet**

stopped when it saw the cars and the bustard pulled himself together and ran off in a hurry. Some of the other birds seen were a group of Cape Vultures eating a dead cow by a boundary fence with the reserve; African Pipit; Ant-eating Chat; Red-chested Sparrowhawk; Steppe (Common) Buzzard; Eastern Long-billed Lark; Rufous-naped Lark; Red-capped Lark; South African Cliff-Swallow; Barn Swallow; Banded Martin; African Black Swift.

Our guides took us to see pieces of a fossilised tree lying on a grassy slope and this walk also revealed a number of

the most beautiful wild flowers nestled amongst the vegetation. There were some unusual rock formations to admire as well, and a natural rock bidet provided a lot of entertainment as we debated who would take it home – and how? Later we stopped to enjoy our picnic lunch at the new visitors centre, a large and imposing building with an auditorium, kitchen and eating area with table and chairs. Later Carina showed us a video of how the Ingula Pumped



**Fossilised Tree**



**The wild flowers of Ingula**



**Our guides Sakhile and Bonginkosi**

Storage Scheme was constructed between the Bramhoek and Bedford dams and the work that BirdLife is doing in co-operation with Middelpunt Wetland Trust and Eskom. Report by Rosemary Forrester and photos by Eve Hughes.

**Sun. 2 Dec. – Darvill**

After some scorching days in late November, the December Darvill outing was mercifully cool. Nine birders gathered under the leadership of Roger O’Neill. Having rained the previous evening, Darvill was buzzing with activity. A Grey Crowned Crane perched atop a vachellia, and Goliath Herons flew past several times. Other herons included Grey and several Black-headed. The ‘reds’ were back – Red-faced Cisticola called everywhere and later we had good views, while Red-backed Shrikes joined the various birds hawking for insects along the road. Wood and Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt and Little Grebe were seen along the canals. We also had our first Willow Warbler of the season. We heard Tambourine Dove and Klaas’s Cuckoo, while several Diderick Cuckoos joined the ‘hawkers’.



**Watchful Grey-crowned Crane**

Overhead, we saw Little, Palm and White-rumped Swifts, Barn, White-throated, Greater and Lesser Striped Swallows, and a few Brown-throated Martins. The river held a single Black Duck, and a perched ‘Common Buzzard’ led to considerable discussion about Forest and Common Buzzards.



**Confiding Yellow-throated Longclaw**

In contrast to last month, Pond 4 had coots and moorhens, black Crakes and some African Jacanas. An African Snipe was also spotted. The mud edges held Ruffs and more ‘Woodies’. We also saw all three teal species but still no Yellow-billed Ducks. African Rails called repeatedly. A surprise was a Yellow-crowned Bishop buzzing around with the Southern Reds, while a (frustrating) glimpse was all we had of an Orange-breasted Waxbill. The Yellow-throated Longclaws were also busy. At the cars, we heard an African Fish Eagle.

Overall, this was a much more productive walk than in November, with close to 50 species on the list.

Report by Viv O'Neill and photos by Roger O'Neill

### **Sun. 9 Dec. – Year end braai at Hilton College**

Unfortunately this had to be cancelled due to rain making the road impassable.

### **EVENING TALKS:**

#### **Tues. 9 Oct. - Matthew Bekker “Watching over Wattled Cranes**



At a very well-supported meeting at Woodgrove, Janine Rennie gave a most interesting talk on monitoring Wattled Crane conservation and the aerial crane surveys in the KZN Midlands. KZN is home to the majority of the Wattled Cranes in South Africa. This emphasises the importance of the surveys, which monitor the population and check the breeding status of Wattled Crane pairs. It also monitors trends in the populations of Blue and Grey Crowned Cranes. Janine spoke about how the aerial surveys allow for coverage

**Wattled Crane (pic. Warwick Tarboton)**

of a wide area, and she acknowledged the high level of skill shown by the pilot. A great deal of detail can be gleaned from these surveys by an experienced observer. Janine commented that ‘managing one’s stomach’ was sometimes a challenge during these flights!

Report by Viv O'Neill

#### **Wed. 17 Oct. – David Johnson “Peacocks and Tree-pies”**



**Brown Fish Owl**

David’s journey through India was partly cultural and partly birding and it was interesting to note how many birds are similar to our African species, such as the Oriental White-eye; Spot-winged Grosbeak; Himalayan Bulbul; Brown Fish Owl; Crested Kingfisher; Black-necked Stork; Golden-backed Woodpecker; Black Drongo - the comparisons went on and on.

It was a cold and drizzly evening as Pam Nicol and I sat hopefully at our table by the entrance to the auditorium to see which brave souls would come out to listen to David Johnson, forsaking their warm homes. And they did! It was well worth their while as David gave an excellent and entertaining talk on his recent visit to India. The title itself was intriguing – what could a Tree-pie be; perhaps some Indian culinary delight balancing on a branch, to be harvested and eaten?



**Black-necked Stork**

The Crested Kingfisher is like the Pied Kingfisher, but where the Pied Kingfisher hovers over open water, the Crested Kingfisher prefers to fish by a flowing stream. In 8 days of his travels through India David saw 190 bird species.

An amusing photo showed a feral pig lying on its side surrounded by House Crows and initially one presumed it was dead – but no – the crows were doing a cleaning service, picking off ticks and parasites and the pig was loving it.

Feral Pigeons were in abundance and originate from Rock Pigeon stock, filling a niche in cities where they are fed by the local stall keepers. India has a wild life ethic of live and let live and everyone is very laid back.

The Chia Pheasant is a rare and difficult bird to find, inhabiting steep slopes at around 6000/8000 feet, and taking a professional guide is well worthwhile, as they know where these birds can be found. David found that it meant standing on a cliff-edge gazing down 300 feet to spot the pheasants picking up fallen seeds amongst the vegetation - a nerve-wracking experience!



**A pair of Sarus Cranes**

He warned us not to mention the Raj if we should travel to India; however a very famous author, Jim Corbett (Man-Eaters of Kumaon), is a hero in the north because of tracking man-eating tigers. He was born there and had a job on the railway line providing firewood for the engines and a nature reserve is named after him, which is considered a great honour in that part of the world. The reserve has 200 tigers and David was extremely fortunate to see one walking down a dry river bed. Tigers are solitary animals and their stripes are unique to each animal, rather like a fingerprint.

The Sarus Crane is a large non-migratory bird, the tallest of the flying birds, standing at up to 1.8m, and lives in open wetlands and agricultural fields in close proximity to humans, eating roots, tubers, insects and crustaceans. They form long-lasting pair bonds and in India they are traditionally revered, considered symbols of marital fidelity, and maybe for this reason there were lots of Indian tourists with cameras and binoculars appreciating them.

Another interesting bird is the Bar-headed Goose, the highest flyer of the migratory birds, breeding in Central Asia and crossing the Himalayas at 25,000 feet on their long journey. Flying northwards from India they breed on the Tibetan Plateau in the summer months, taking their route in stages, with the flight across the Himalayas being done non-stop in as little as 7 hours. The Bar-headed Goose feeds on grasses, roots, stems, seeds and berries.

Now what is a Tree-pie? Finally we saw a photo - and guess what it is? A magpie! and it likes to hang around picnic sites.

David also showed us lovely photos of the Taj Mahal in Agra, a monument built to Shah Jahan's favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal, who died in childbirth with her 14<sup>th</sup> child. Other photos were of the pink city of Jaipur with the world's biggest sundial, built in 1740, and the Barathpoo station surrounded by water and full of water birds. What a wonderful journey through this ancient land with its rich history and natural beauty.

Report by Rosemary Forrester and photos by David Johnson.

### **Wed. 21 Nov. Rick Nuttall “Feathers in the Life of Birds”**

A cool and misty evening did not deter the enthusiastic crowd of bird club members who came to listen to Rick Nuttall’s fascinating talk on bird feathers. He started with a slide of the Bird of the Year – the very handsome African Black Oystercatcher whose domain is on the rocky beaches of the South African and Namibian coastlines. The bird breeds in protected dunes and banning of 4x4s driving in these areas has done a lot to protect the Oystercatcher.

Feathers enable birds to fly and the next photo was of a flock of Namaqua Sandgrouse arriving at a waterhole. They live and breed in extremely dry surroundings and need water daily, flying up to 40kms to water sources. The males belly-soak their bodies and 10% of the water is retained on their long journey home where the chicks drink the droplets from their wet feathers. The uncoiling



mechanism of the feathers and the expansion of the polypeptide chains of keratin accommodate additional water bonding to side chains at a molecular level.

Many owl species have particular adaptations to the flight feathers enabling them to fly silently, and the only owl who doesn’t need this stealth is the Pel’s Fishing Owl. The silent flight is due to filamentous extensions of the anterior barbules on feathers. Electron micrographs show the aerodynamics of feathers and how they keep together by anchoring between hook barbules and bow barbules, acting like a zipper.

Not all birds fly, but they all have feathers which act as insulation against heat and cold. For example, penguins have adapted to the cold in the Antarctic with specialised feathers to protect them in the long journeys they undertake to feed their young.

Watch how the Brown-headed Kingfisher and the Pygmy Falcon sit in the early morning sunshine fluffing out their feathers so the trapped air warms them up. It is physical thermo regulation and you will see bee-eaters holding up their feathers, and the Spike-heeled Lark of the arid countryside, raising up their body plumage in the cold. A comparison slide showed the Double-banded Courser suffering heat stress with sleeked-down plumage, open beak and gular fluttering, and then fluffed up in the cold. Birds will perch in hot weather on a high bush all facing the same way, offering the least possible body surface exposed to the sun.

Nest construction is another use of feathers, with Orange-breasted Waxbills using feathers and grasses in courtship displays and feathers in the lining of the nest to keep the naked little chicks warm.

Iridescence in bird feathers has two different processes – one is pigmentation and the other is structural modification. The barbules of different layers of where and how the light is reflected determines the colour, like a Hadedda Ibis or a sunbird.

Another aspect to feathers is the mechanical sound of the Eastern Clapper Lark as the tip of the primaries of its wings touch below the body as it is flying. And what about the drumming display of a male Ruffed Grouse which he creates rotating his wings back and forth?

Feathers do not last forever and need to be renewed, black feathers wearing better than white feathers. Birds moult on an annual basis and especially the feathers of migrants need to be in top condition for their long distance journeys. The South African Shelduck loses all its wing feathers at the same time and as they cannot fly, they all stay huddled together in the middle of dams and bodies of water. There is definitely safety in numbers.

Report and photo by Rosemary Forrester.

### **AROUND AND ABOUT**

#### **Ringling a Crowned Eagle chick.**

At 5h00 on Tuesday morning Sarah Millar and I set off to Midlands Forest Lodge to watch Shane McPherson and his partner Petra ring a 70 day old Crowned Eagle chick.



It took some time to secure the ropes on a huge Yellowwood tree so Shane could prusik up to the nest, carrying with him a bag to put the chick in so he could lower it safely to the ground. While this was happening we had to watch out for the female Crowned Eagle because Shane did not want to be attacked by her.

over its head. Shane examined the young bird and declared that it was a female and in good condition. He did find two monkey legs in the nest that the mother

must have brought in that morning. Petra then started to measure all the important parts of the chick and put a metal ring on the right leg. Shane assisted by placing first a yellow ring and then a blue one with the number B3, on the left leg. After measuring and examining the feathers, the chick was placed back in the bag and Petra took her back up to the nest.



It did not take long for the female Crowned Eagle to fly over the nest to check on her chick. It was only out of the nest for one hour and the mother could be seen in a tree nearby keeping watch.



Any birders who later see a Crowned Eagle with the number B3 on its left leg, should contact Shane so he can record the sighting which helps him with his studies.

Report and photos by Eve Hughes.

### A circular tour round SA

In the middle of October, Roger and I set off on a circular tour, heading for a mix of places we had visited previously, and some new ones. We started with three nights in a BnB (Seldré) in Nigel, visiting lovely Marievale three times over that period. Highlights were a Western Yellow Wagtail, many African Snipe, and watching a Goliath Heron spend nearly half an hour manoeuvring the humungous fish it had caught down its gullet!



**Goliath Heron**



**African Snipe**

Although we didn't see anything mega, it is such a wonderful place to visit. My only 'complaint' was the bank of photographers occupying Hadedda hide on Sunday morning. On Saturday morning we headed off to Suikerbosrand, a new venue for us. We were very sad to see a dead Western Barn Owl on the R550, our second this year.



**Black-backed jackal**

Suikerbosrand only opens at 07h00 on a Saturday; when we turned into the access road, we were dismayed to see a **long** queue at the entrance gate. It took us nearly 30 minutes to get through. The 'crowds' were mostly cyclists and trail runners. The reserve has a 60-km one-way round loop; after some time birding round the car park and picnic sites (Yellow Canary; Acacia Pied Barbet), we duly set off. It's a wonderful drive with very varied topography. We upset some cyclists by stopping in the middle of the road to spot something! Birds of the day for me were Orange-breasted and Black-faced Waxbills. We had lunch at a large, well-equipped, virtually empty picnic site.

Sunday morning saw us heading to the North-West for four nights at Pilanesberg. Happy to be back in our Skipper camper, we chose a lovely site on the perimeter of Manyane camp. We had kudu and impala sleeping close by each night, along with Crested Francolin and Helmeted Guineafowl. Set-up highlights were a Burnt-necked Eremomela and Bearded Woodpecker. Somewhat less happy were the five or six domestic cats in camp! One does not expect to be woken by cat fights in a reserve. Unbeknownst to us, Pilanesberg had been devastated by a massive fire in early September.



**Bushveld Pipit**

A massive area was burned (between 5,000 and 8,000 hectares), and Mankwe hide was completely destroyed. The veld was recovering but the over-riding impression was rocky, sooty and very dry. The geology was fascinating.



**Violet-eared Waxbill**

Elephant, hippo, black-backed jackals and white rhino seemed quite plentiful, with special animal sightings including a black rhino, a brown hyena, a tired leopard with her warthog kill, and three very dozy lionesses. We listed 129 species in our four days in Pilanesberg, with highlights being Violet-eared Waxbills, Scaly-feathered Weavers, Crimson-breasted and Magpie Shrikes, Pearl-breasted Swallows (feeding juveniles), Bushveld Pipit and Black-chested Prinias (i.e. the species we don't commonly see at home!). Raptors were very scarce, which we speculated was due to the fire.



**Brown hyena**

Returning to KZN, we travelled south down the N11 from Middelburg. Just north of Hendrina, we saw a pan which seemed to have white scum all around it. As we approached, we were amazed to see the ‘scum’ comprised many, many flamingos. Roadworks meant we were unable to stop, but we saw another similar pan, also with flamingos, a little further on. An overnight stop at eMkhondo (Piet Retief) gave us a bad night, with campsite peacocks making their eerie wailing through the night. The next day’s drive to Ndumo was through interesting countryside skirting the southern border of Swaziland.



We were at Ndumo for a SANParks Honorary Rangers weekend. It turned out to be a competitive weekend, as participants were divided into four teams. Our team of four came stone last but we were happy with the ‘booby’ prize of two bottles of wine. Each team did a different morning and afternoon outing on the two days of the event. Our best outing was on our first morning, when we went to an area of sand forest with experienced and



**Western Barn Owl**

knowledgeable guide Bongani. That walk yielded my only lifer of the trip, African Broadbill. We had reasonable looks at Woodward’s Batis, Eastern Nicator, a Western Barn Owl and a number of Narina Trogons (not often one can say that!). In the fig forest, the ever-curious giraffes were dwarfed by the trees! In camp, the Spotted Eagle-Owl nesting near the chalets had a very young chick – just a barely visible ball of white fluff. On a last morning trip to the hide, we had really good views of Gorgeous Bushshrike.



**Southern Brown-throated Weaver**

On the Monday morning, sad to leave Ndumo, we wended our way to St Lucia, where we camped at Sugarloaf. Unfortunately, the weather did not play ball as our first day there was bedevilled by a hot wind, and the second by a cold one! We began the first day at the reedbeds near the bridge into town, seeing Yellow, Lesser Masked and Brown-throated Weavers. But the wind on the bridge was scary, and we didn’t tarry.

We diligently carried the scope onto the beach to look at the waders and terns, but even Junior Gabela, whom we bumped into there, decided it was too windy to endure. That afternoon, we drove up to Cape Vidal, seeing few birds but lots of buffalo. On the second day, we packed up early to get ahead of the predicted showers, then 'hit the beach' again, freezing in the cold wind. We did see Little Tern, but no sign of the Gull-billed Tern (and the Lesser Frigatebird had chosen that week to decamp to Richards Bay!). Getting the sand out of the scope was another story!

Report by Viv O'Neill and photos by Roger and Viv O'Neill



### Nesting Woolly-necked Storks

Woolly-necked Storks were first seen nesting in Howick on the Sakabula Estate in 2007. They chose a grove of large Pine trees surrounded by indigenous trees and bushes. They were observed there for three years before they moved off due to Herons taking over the Pine trees for their heronry. A pair of WN Storks were seen nesting in a Pine tree in Fraser street in Howick. They used that nest site for a couple of years.



By that time many WN Storks were seen in Amber Valley, sometimes up to sixteen congregating on an island in a dam. They are frequent visitors to Elizabeth Gardens and The Ambers where kind people can't resist giving them treats.

The pair with their two juveniles, illustrated in the photos, are residents at the Howick High School. They have been nesting there for many years. The main nesting site is in a Pine tree. Last year they did try to nest in an Acer but were not successful. The juveniles fledged and left their nest on Tuesday 13 November 2018.

The public **must not** feed them polony or processed meats.

Report and photos by Eve Hughes

BirdLife KZN Midlands wishes all their members a peaceful and blessed Christmas and good health and good birding in 2019.

Rosemary Forrester – Editor.

