



Village Weaver battle
Photo by Chris Theron



BIRDLIFE KZN MIDLANDS CLUB E-NEWSLETTER
1st QUARTER – JANUARY TO MARCH, 2019.

OUTINGS:

Sun. 6 Jan. – Darvill

Ten birders joined leader Luiz Mateus for the first outing of the year. The day was quite cool and comfortable. Two Hamerkops flew through the eucalypts as we waited to set off. A Common Sandpiper and a Blacksmith Lapwing ‘decorated’ the edge of one of the settling tanks. The sky was alive with Swallows, mostly Barns, with a few Lesser Striped and White-throated. African Palm Swift and Brown-throated Martins were also seen, but no Wire-tailed Swallows this time. As is common in summer, Red-faced Cisticolas called at various locations. The first canal yielded the ‘usual suspects’ of Red-billed Teals, Black-winged Stilts, Three-banded Plovers, and Wood Sandpipers. There was also a small



flock of White-faced Whistling Ducks, and we were happy to locate a lone Fulvous Whistling Duck amongst them. Little Rush Warblers called all over, and Lesser Swamp Warblers were also heard.

Walking up to the ponds, we found the roads have been re-arranged. About a dozen Kittlitz Plovers occupied the newly-disturbed road. A Goliath Heron stood majestically on Pond 4, and an African Swamphen was seen at the far end, the first for many months. Another first for some time was that no hunters or dogs were seen.

Walking round to the top end of Pond 1, we found a pair of South African Shelduck. BUT, we were unable to move along the berm between Ponds 1 and 2 as a Grey Crowned Crane strode purposefully towards us, honking, and jumping up and down, with wings outstretched! It followed us a short way as

we retreated to take the longer route back across the lawns, where we did see several Spotted Thick-knees.

Report and photos by Viv O’Neill

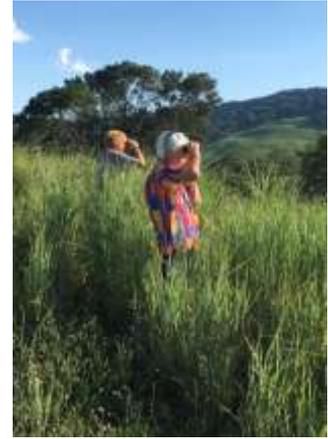
Sun. 20 Jan. – Highover Sanctuary

Please see report below

Sat. 26 Jan. – CAR



Blue Cranes by Chris Theron This was marked for Saturday but the weather reports were giving us bad news for the day and we all debated which would be the next best opportunity. Finally our group decided on Tuesday and what a good decision that was, dawning clear and bright. This time of year is not easy for seeing birds as the mealies are high and we noticed that a lot of the farms had not ploughed their lands but left them fallow, growing waist high with weeds. Was this for some political reason, or a farming technique for resting the land? What was very satisfying is that we saw all three crane species, but no Secretarybirds. Lots of White Storks and they were probably the majority of our count.



Long Grass by Viv O'Neill

Report by Rosemary Forrester and photos by Chris Theron and Viv O'Neill

SUMMARY OF CO-ORDINATED AVIFAUNAL ROADCOUNT (CAR) – JANUARY 2019

Our January (Summer) count was a little disrupted as the weather on Saturday 26th January started with light rain and mist in many areas resulting in some of the leaders postponing their counts until the following day or later in the week. All 8 routes were surveyed and resulted in a total of 1582 birds being counted in the survey.

Just a few comments:

Crane numbers (for all three species) were generally down from 2018.

White Storks which numbered 890 in 2018 now came in at 610.

Other species counted resulted in similar counts.

My thanks, again, to all who assisted with the counts and for giving of your time and fuel!

Peter Divall

Precinct Officer – KZN Midlands

Wed. 30 Jan. – Hihover Sanctuary

We all gathered at the Greendale Spar meeting point at 06:00hrs and set off for Richmond and beyond, finally travelling through spectacular countryside down to Hihover on the Umkomaas River. Stopping on the bridge we admired the swift flowing water and were impressed when Chester and Mary, who used to live nearby, told us that in 1987 there was a huge flood and the river rose up to the high bridge and washed the railings away. Continuing on to the lodge we were welcomed by the present manager and his wife, who said it would be best if we went to look for the Blue Swallows while it was still relatively cool. Once again we climbed into our cars and followed our guide up the Hella Hella pass which is considered to be one of the most difficult in South Africa. You wonder why it is called Hella Hella and maybe because it is a helluva pass to negotiate, especially if it has been raining.



Bridge over Umkomasi River



Now where are those Blue Swallows?

Up on the high grasslands we walked along the track above the trees lining the small stream, straining our eyes for the sight of a swallow. And there were plenty of swallows to look at – Barn and Black Saw-wing and Lesser and Greater Striped just to confuse the issue. Then suddenly a shout of delight and with a flash of metallic deep blue, the object of our concentration flew rapidly past us as we all twisted and turned with our binoculars glued to our eyes, nearly losing our balance on the rough path.

What happiness to see these beautiful and rare birds, migrants who travel between South Africa and Lake Victoria, the males with their fine streamers adorning their tails. Some of us peered into old aardvark burrows in the hopes of seeing a little mud nest glued to the roof of the hole.

Report by Rosemary Forrester. Photos by Chris Theron

Tues. 15 Jan. to Fri. 15 Feb. – CWAC

Mid-January to mid-February is the time for the BLSA counts of water fowl at the various water bodies, which in the Midlands area are Karkloof Conservancy, Midmar (Thurlow), Albert Falls, Hlatikulu and Darvill. The Karkloof count was carried out on 15th January, a rather misty day which threatened rain but didn't really deliver.



African Snipe

We went to the Loskop hide first to discover to our dismay that there was no water in the pan – a sad reflection on the “green drought” which at this stage (January) is affecting much of KZN. No cranes or waders, just a few distant Sacred Ibis and Hadeda Ibis.

The Gartmore hide was much more rewarding. We still neither saw nor heard cranes, but there was a very exciting display by the African Marsh Harrier, which flew over the reeds on the far side of the dam. His plumage was quite dark, so perhaps he was not yet adult. There was a pair of Spoonbills, the usual Blacksmith Lapwings, three Red-billed Teal, and a Grey Heron which stood directly behind a Reed Cormorant, giving the impression of some sort of composite bird with long grey neck and black wings.



Fulvous Duck

We suddenly saw a bird flying in fast, making a curious whistling sound. It did a fly-past, and then came back and landed on the water, and there was one lonely Fulvous Duck! No sign of its mate, but the duck later disappeared, so either it flew off unnoticed, or sneaked into the reeds to join its mate.

As we were about to leave an African Snipe wandered into view on the little patch in front of the hide, exploring the mud with his long beak, and showing off his beautiful gold and brown markings. Report by Sally Cumming. Photos by Eve Hughes

Sun. 3 Feb. – Darvill



A dull humid morning saw 14 birders join leader David Crampton at Darvill. On the way in, we had seen two White Storks and two Yellow-billed Kites in a single gum tree and many more White Storks graced the turf fields. Along the road, the settling tanks held none of the usual swallows or wagtails. Red-faced Cisticolas called insistently, and several Willow Warblers were active in the roadside trees. The grasses held Common Waxbills and Bronze Mannikins, and a single White-winged Widowbird. A stately Goliath Heron flew over the canals.

The canals held Common and Wood Sandpipers, and some Black-winged Stilts, but we commented that relatively few swallows were overhead. There was a brief glimpse of a Jacobin Cuckoo just below Pond 4. Round ‘the bend’, two African Black Ducks flew along the river, and a Pied Wagtail called insistently near the top of the spillway.

Up by the ponds, the skies were full of Brown-throated Martins, as well as a White-rumped Swift. Two African Snipe camouflaged themselves so expertly that it was difficult to point out their position to those who hadn’t seen them settle. Pond 1 was half-dry, with some sandpipers and Three-banded Plovers. A pair of South African Shelduck were in the far end, but there was no sign of last month’s Grey Crowned Cranes. Perhaps the January dump fire drove them off.



African Pied Wagtail

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

Mon. 4 – 8 Feb. – Pongola Game Reserve



Is a wonderful trip such as this only about the birding or does it include the all-encompassing holistic experience?

Thirteen keen birders set out to experience a week of fun, great company, catering “to die for” as only part of the tranquillity and comfort offered at the Mhlozi Bush Camp within the Pongola Game Reserve. Mhlozi is the name of the small stream bordering the camp which is situated in the low-lying bushveld of the reserve. This 16



bed self-catering camp consists of rondavels and chalets all with en-suite bathrooms, communal lounge and view deck with a very well stocked kitchen. These facilities surround the paved circular social area shaded by a magnificent specimen of fig tree (*Ficus sycomorus*) with its huge buttressed trunk and spreading crown, allowing evening bush camp fires and braais while yarns, true or false, were shared around sundowners and incredible meals pre-planned and prepared by “teams” of the ladies co-ordinated by Eve Hughes before the trip. **Arrow-marked Babbler**

Naturally, the menfolk took charge of the braais – supervised by the ladies, of course!

The Pongola Game Reserve, in its original expanse, was named by Paul Kruger, President of the then Transvaal Republic in 1894. The original reserve has been re-proclaimed in part to what it is today. As a business, it is owned and run by the Landman family whose ancestors arrived in the Cape in 1744. The perennial broad Pongola River meanders through the centre of the reserve before entering the 13,276 hectare man-made lake, all providing an environment unique for a South African bushveld destination. A three hour Pontoon cruise was arranged, to the enjoyment of all, upon the tranquillity of these waters with sightings of so many water bird species, rhino, elephant, hippos and crocodiles. Perhaps a “lifer” for most was the stunning female Greater Painted Snipe.



Glossy Ibis

With the Mhlozi camp being open to all elements, a number of heart-stopping encounters were experienced close to camp on sunset walks, coming face to face (within 15 – 20 meters) with white rhino and a herd of buffalo. It took some doing to “extract” an over-zealous photographer within the group (she shall remain unnamed) who needed to attempt really close-up feature photos of the hairs within the nostrils of these animals.

Of further concern were two ladies who were hell bent to try to consume every ripened fallen Marula fruit at the base of one particular tree. The concern naturally was a possible repeat of the Jamie Uys film “The Gods must be Crazy”.

Trained medical experience in the bushveld is hard to come by but “necessity is the mother of invention”.



So! Is a wonderful trip such as this only about the birding or does it include the all-encompassing holistic experience? I have no doubt it includes for all – a “let us go back and do it again” emotional experience.

Report by Norman Freeman and photos by Eve Hughes and Norman Freeman

The reserve is home to many typical game species including four of the big five (lions excluded) with all of which we had encounters. It is also a birding “hot-spot” boasting \pm 350 species. Our trip recorded 139 bird species including many specials such as Grey-Tit Flycatcher, Lesser Grey and Magpie Shrike, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, White-crested Helmet-Shrike, Wattled Starling and Wattled Lapwing, Black Cuckoo, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Barn-Owl, Lesser Honey-guide, Marabou Stork, Wahlberg’s Eagle, Fish Eagle, Brown Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Willow Warbler, Long-billed Crombec and many more.



Greater Painted Snipe

Sean Glynn had a tumble twisting the fingers of his left hand beyond all recorded mathematical and geometrical shapes. This resulted in excessive swelling with accompanied pain. So it was that “Doctor” Derek Hughes came to the rescue with toolkit from the 4 x 4 comprising pliers, spanners and screwdrivers but most importantly a small hacksaw and the ring was finally sawn through and extracted from the wounded hand.

So! Is a wonderful trip such as this only about the birding or does it include the all-encompassing holistic

Sat. 23 Feb. – BLKZNM 30th AGM

An early morning bird walk was enjoyed by about 20 enthusiasts who met Deryck Day at 0700 outside the Auditorium, returning for hot coffee and tea, scones and sandwiches, before the BirdLife KZN Midlands 30th AGM held in the Ambers Auditorium in Howick.



We were most fortunate to have Mark Anderson, the CEO of BirdLife South Africa, come and speak to us about giving conservation wings. Birds are nomadic and there is a big international partnership that is obligated to implement strategy for their preservation for future generations, and BLSA is working to ensure that birds stay around for a long time to come.

Bird-watching is a fast growing pastime and now matches golf and gardening in popularity in the USA. R.8 billion is spent a year on bird-watching and whereas it was once the domain of elderly white folk, lots of young birders are now out there which is encouraging, particularly in Gauteng, and the reason is IT - twitching and Instagram – it's no longer uncool to be a bird-watcher. The demographics of birders are now changing with more people of colour joining bird clubs and outings.

Cats have been eradicated in Marion island; originally brought in to control mice, the 2500 cats were killing 400,000 Burrowing Petrels a year and it took a couple of decades to eliminate them. But of course, the mice will play when the cat's away, and the mouse population has gone through the roof and they are now eating seabird chicks. On Gough Island, south west of Cape Town, 2 million seabird chicks were being killed a year by mice, but now they have been eradicated.

BLSA is trying to create a mouse-free Marion island, dropping mouse-specific poison bait but it is hard to cope with 29,000 hectares and the plan is to get the public to sponsor a hectare per person.

In 2006 an artificial island was sponsored and built by a mining company in the Kamfers dam, 200m from the shore for the Lesser Flamingo as there was a good algae proliferation for them to eat from the treated sewage water of the nearby town. It cost R.1 million to construct and initially the birds didn't use it. However in 2008 nine thousand birds were counted, then more started arriving and the project was considered a success with 24,000 chicks being hatched over the following years. For the first time Lesser Flamingos were breeding in South Africa and there are only four breeding localities in Africa.

However the island became flooded and washed away, so the flamingos moved to the shoreline and started breeding there. They bred this summer but the pan almost dried up again as most of the sewage water was draining into the veld and not into the dam, temperatures were very high and no rain fell. In February a crisis developed and the burning question was – to rescue or not to rescue. The SPCA in Kimberly rescued 2000 chicks and distributed them around the country to be cared for - half of them died but the rest survived and will be released back in Kamfers Dam in April (Note: A week after this talk it rained at Kamfers dam and the remaining chicks were saved.)

To end his talk Mark introduced the new Bird of the Year for 2019 – Strider the Secretarybird, and gave us a quotation from Richard Hass to contemplate.

“The birds are silent in the woods. Just wait, soon enough you will be too.”

Report by Rosemary Forrester. Photo downloaded from BLSA.

Wed.27 Feb. – Boschoek Golf Estate

It is always such a pleasure to visit this beautifully groomed 9 hole golf course and the club is most hospitable, offering us tea and coffee, scones and sandwiches, when we return from our walk by the dam and the forest.



A lone watcher and a lone Hadeda

Fortunately it was a cool day and for some of us who did not want to go on the walk into the woods, it was comfortable to sit on a jetty by the water's edge and enjoy the birding. Many species were seen and heard including a Red-chested Flufftail, Terrestrial Brownbul, Forest Weaver, Natal Spurfowl, African Olive Pigeon, Green-backed Cameroptera and a juvenile Common Buzzard, to name a few. Report by Rosemary Forrester and photos by Chris Theron and Eve Hughes.

Sun. 3 March – Darvill

Only four hardy birders joined the Darvill walk on this cool wet day, with intermittent rain/drizzle. Hamerkops bracketed the walk, being seen overhead both at the beginning and end of the walk. Some Common Sandpipers were identified on the settling tanks, while a Malachite Kingfisher gave a quick flypast. Some small flocks of Yellow-fronted Canaries shone in the gloom. The water in the strip ponds seemed uncommonly nasty, and relatively few species were seen along them. We



watched two Burchell's Coucals calling to each other – it was interesting seeing the tucked-down head while calling.

We did see one African Jacana at the far end of Pond 4, but the berms were too overgrown (and wet!) to traverse. Walking round the top of Pond 1, a few White Storks could be seen in the far distance, as well as three Woolly-necked Storks and a single Grey Crowned Crane. A walk down the road to the end of Pond 4 yielded a Red-faced

Cisticola calling insistently from the top of a bush, as well as a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler. An African Reed Warbler worked busily along the row of alien vegetation. On the way out, a Long-crested Eagle brought our raptor species count to two(!), with several Yellow-billed Kites having also been seen.

Report and photo by Viv o'Neill

Sun. 9 March - Birdlife KZN Forum

Another interesting programme was arranged for the day with 11 presentations on a variety of topics. Tea was provided during the morning and afternoon breaks and most participants had a picnic lunch under the trees near the centre. This allowed for some stimulating discussions. About 50 people attended the day.

Peter Divall: Introduction

Peter gave a short talk on BirdLife South Africa. He is the KZN representative on the Executive Board and Mark Anderson has been CEO for the past ten years. In the past Board Meetings have been held each month except December via Skype and it has been decided that from 2019 the meetings will only take place every alternate month.

At the KZN Chairs' meeting in September 2018 it was decided that KZN Birds would in future be published electronically every four months. The first electronic edition was published during the past month.

Ernst Retief: Key Biodiversity Areas. The Standards and Importance of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas.

IBAs are a flagship project of Birdlife SA. A book on The South African Important Bird Areas (IBA) was published, but is also available on line in pdf format.

Birdlife has 125 partners worldwide and over 13,000 IBAs are identified. In 2016 The IUCN decided that all Important Biodiversity Areas should be combined i.e. not only for birds but also for butterflies, plants, etc.

The following global Standards have been identified for Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA):

- A. Threatened Biodiversity;
- B. Geographically Restricted Biodiversity Sites;
- C. Ecological Integrity i.e. a country like Canada;
- D. Biological Processes i.e. sites for migratory species;
- E. Irreplaceability.

There are a range of global NGOs working on the KBAs internationally and in South Africa SANBI is the National Co-ordinator. Other partners are BLSA, EWT, Dept. of Environmental Affairs, etc. KBAs have a positive benefit for a country as it puts pressure on governments to do something for conservation and the environment.

There is concern that in future some IBAs may no longer be recognized. There is thus a need to review the IBA network. The emphasis of KBAs is on smaller areas, and regional KBAs may require a lower standard.

Nicolette Forbes: Clawing back the IBA status for the uMvoti Estuary.

Three hundred estuaries are recognized in South Africa of which 75 are in KZN. The functional area of wetlands is the wetland margin which worldwide is being replaced by urban areas.

The case of the uMvoti Estuary is a sad one: The uMvoti Estuary was the first IBA to be declared in SA in 1998. Today the estuary is recognized as being largely modified. Plantations and sugar cane have encroached on the estuary and the water quality has deteriorated because of the industries around Stanger discharging into the river. The number of birds, as well as the species diversity, has decreased especially since 2012. Collared Pratincoles bred in the estuary in the 1980/90 and the last pair did so in 2001.

Despite the deterioration of the estuary over the years there is still potential for restoring it. The proposed urban development of 2000Ha south of the estuary may, in fact, favour it as a nature reserve is on the plans.

Carina Coetzer: Update on Ingula.

Ingula Nature Reserve was officially proclaimed in 2018 and the reserve covers an area of approximately 8,000 hectares stretching over the escarpment between KZN and the Free State and includes afro-montane forest, high altitude grassveld and a wetland of 1,300 hectares. Three hundred and thirty seven species are recorded for the reserve. A brochure has been compiled for visitors which shows where certain key species may be found, also the self-drive routes open to visitors. A bird guide is also available to take visitors around.

Carina Coetzer: Update on Bald Ibis Project.

The Southern Bald Ibis is not a resident species at Ingula but has started breeding in an artificial breeding site that was created for them. In 2018 four pairs bred and 15 to 27 birds have used the site for roosting during the breeding season, but the species is absent when not breeding. The relationship between raptors and Bald Ibis deserves more study and it has been found that Lanner Falcons are almost always present where Bald Ibis are breeding.

The project aims at monitoring all breeding sites within the species range to determine which colonies are active and which are not. Carina appealed for assistance from birders to monitor known breeding sites. There are between 3,290 and 4,010 Bald Ibis in South Africa.

A comment from the floor suggested that there could be confusion between Bald Ibis and Ground Hornbill resulting in Bald Ibis being killed for the muthi trade.

Nikisha Singh: Habitat use, Population estimate and factors affecting the Urban Exploiter – The Tree Agama.

It is generally considered that urbanization has a negative effect on biodiversity. The effect of urbanization on reptiles is little understood and Nikisha is studying the Tree Agama in an urban environment. She has two study sites, one in a retirement village in Pietermaritzburg and the other on a golf course. In the retirement village the agamas use the brick walls to bask on, moving to shaded areas to cool off. It is insectivorous, feeding mostly on bees and wasps but in the retirement village will eat cheese and cake! There is a lower concentration of agamas on the golf course. Agamas are sexually dimorphic and Nikisha has found that there is a colour change when breeding compared to non-breeding.

The Agamas motto could be: “Keep calm and enjoy the sunshine”.

Steve McKean: BirdLife and Conservation Outcomes partnership – Priorities for KZN.

Land transformation is occurring rapidly and grasslands are declining by about 6% per annum. The cost of the loss of grasslands is estimated at between R 4.7 billion and R 12.8 billion per annum. Conservation Outcomes is working in partnership with Birdlife SA to preserve valuable grasslands for conservation. The Blue Swallow is one of the key species, and in 1987 there were 22 breeding pairs in South Africa; 2003 – 40 breeding pairs but in 2018 only 15 breeding pairs. The species is now extinct in Mpumalanga.

The partnership hopes to have four areas totalling over 2300Ha declared under the Stewardship Declaration Programme during this year. Declaring an area a nature reserve has tax incentives for the land owner.

Clive Vivier: Zululand IBA

A group in Zululand hopes to create a massive IBA between Mkhuze and Pongola. During the past three years 200,000Ha has been declared and it is hoped to extend this to 500,000Ha. Many of the IBAs are in community areas. The IBAs may need to be converted to the global concept of KBAs in the future.

Clive spoke at length about “global warming” with lots of slides showing facts and figures.

He also spoke about the declining numbers of vultures and bees and the increasing numbers of elephant, especially in the Kruger National Park.

Prof. Ticky Forbes: These Fabulous Flying Machines

Prof. Forbes asked the question “What makes Birds so Special?” The answer, of course, is flight and flight can be divided into Flying or Gliding. Only birds and bats can truly fly. Fish, frogs, lizards, squirrels, colugos and sugar gliders all glide.

He gave an interesting presentation on the history of birds evolving from reptiles in archaeological time through to the present time and discussed what enables birds to fly and how morphologically birds have achieved flight. Prof. Forbes finished by comparing the difference between the flight of a vulture and that of an albatross.

David Allan: Durban Bay Counts. What have we learnt and what are the key threats?

David started counts of birds in Durban Bay nearly 20 years ago in July 1999 and two hundred and thirty seven counts have been done at the spring low tide. Very little change has occurred to the habitat during this period except that the harbour mouth has been widened. Also during this period he has been doing monthly pelagic trips.

David presented some interesting graphs showing trends of some species compiled after 14 years of counts. Generally the graphs show a downward trend but there are interesting anomalies which show an increasing trend. In the 1960's the Curlew Sandpiper numbered in tens of thousands, but today are decreasing. A similar trend is being observed at Langebaan on the west coast. The Curlew however are increasing in number.

The dredging of the bay seems to have favoured the piscivorous species which are generally tending to increase. This may be because the habitat of the fish is improving whilst the intertidal zone where the waders feed is decreasing. Lesser Crested Terns which feed in the bay are increasing in number. Swift Terns numbers, however, fluctuate but overall remain constant. These terns only use the bay to roost.

David then discussed the proposed extension of the harbour's container berths and the effects this may have on the birds. This project is on hold pending an investigation. The major threats to the birds in the bay are:

1. Litter;
2. Bait Collecting;
3. Neglect of the Bayhead National Heritage Site;
4. Water Contamination.

Ian Gordon: SABAP and BirdLasser.

Ian gave a short presentation on the state of Atlassing in KZN. The Avian Demographic Unit has ceased functioning so SABAP is now administered by the Percy FitzPatrick Institute. A new website was recently being launched which is much simpler to follow and use. It is however still under development.

Ian showed graphics of atlassing in KZN over the past 10 years. He pointed out that there had been an apparent drop off since 2015 which probably correlates with the dramatic fuel price increases. The best atlassed areas in KZN are along the coast, along the N3 and Zululand. Four hundred of the 1293 pentads in KZN require attention to show seasonal changes. These are mostly in northern and southern KZN. There are 747 active observers.

A Regional Atlas Committee has been established to co-ordinate atlassing in the province. A permanent e-mail address for the SABAP2 Co-ordinator had been established:

sabap2kzncoord@gmail.com

It was hoped to start co-ordinated atlassing in remote rural areas in the province.

Ian is planning to hold a combined technology workshop for Birdlasser SABAP2 protocols.

Thus ended a very interesting and informative day. The next Forum will be in September or early October 2019. The date will be confirmed as soon as a final decision has been reached.

Thanks to the organizers and all participants.

Report by Deryck H. Day

Sun. 17 March - Sevenoaks/uMvoti Vlei

Please see report below

Wed. 27 March – Sevenoaks/uMvoti Vlei



Marsh Owl by Peter Divall

What a wonderful place to visit, a great wide wetland with hardly a house in sight, well kept farm lands and peaceful cattle grazing in the distance. It was just as well we had Ian Gordon to show us the way once we were on the farm as there were only tracks and concertina gates to take us to the best vantage points.

Some of us had brought gum boots and were very pleased to have them as we sloshed through wet and marshy areas to get

down to the dam

One of our party ventured into an interesting looking patch of reeds and to our surprise startled a reed buck that bounded away.

But that was not the only surprise because the buck in turn disturbed a pair of Marsh Owls that circled above us looking down with their dark owl faces glaring in indignation. Who would have suspected 14 enthusiastic birders to come stumbling into their domain? They thought they were safe in the swamp.



Wattled Cranes by Chris Theron

There wasn't really anywhere to stop for our morning tea/coffee and snack but fortunately it was a cloudy overcast day, almost bordering on chilly. There was no comfort station for the ladies and it was a question of heading into the mealies or ducking behind the cars.

We saw many species including Grey Crowned and Wattled Crane, Wahlberg's Eagle, Denham's Bustard, Western and African Marsh Harrier, African Spoonbill, Fish Eagle, White Stork, African Snipe, Red-billed Teal, Cape Shoveler, Yellow-billed Duck, Little Grebe, Spurwing and Egyptian Goose amongst many others.

Report by Rosemary Forrester and photos by Peter Divall and Chris Theron

EVENING TALKS:

Wed. 16 Jan. - Adam Riley

"Ngorogoro Crater and the Serengeti - amongst the birds and the beasts" – was the title of Adam Riley's excellent talk on this amazing part of the world. He dazzled us with photo after photo of beautiful well-known birds and not so well-known, some very similar to our KZN birds, but not quite.

The Ngorogoro Crater and Serengeti Plains cover an area of 14,763 square kilometres and the crater is one of the largest intact calderas in the world, which collapsed on itself some 2 to 3 million years ago. The crater is 610 metres deep and covers an area of 260 square kilometres of mainly grasslands and lakes, and it is said that before it erupted it would have been higher than Mt. Kilimanjaro. The first European to see the crater was a German called Oscar Baumann in 1892 and later German farmers settled in the crater until the outbreak of World War 1. Early settlers eradicated wild dog in the reserve as they were considered vermin and became extinct, and only recently have been re-introduced. The wholesale shooting of lions and other animals only stopped in 1922. In 1979 the area became a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the park is a multi-use conservation area. The Maasai have been living around the crater since the 1700s and are a pastoral people and cattle owners, their staple diet being milk and blood. They do not hunt the game for meat and only kill lions as part of their tradition.

The list of birds is too numerous to mention here but the Painted Snipe is interesting. Even though it is called a snipe, it is related to the jacana family and the female is the colourful partner, mating with several males, laying her eggs in various nests and leaving the males to hatch and rear the chicks. A familiar bird to us, the Yellow-billed Kite, is a menace in the park, swooping boldly down to steal sandwiches out of the hand, and it is only safe to enjoy one's picnic in the confines of the safari vehicle.

Adam mentioned the paleoanthropological site of the Olduvai Gorge made famous by Louis and Mary Leakey in the 1960s where hominin remains were found. Homo habilis occupied the gorge around 1.9 million years ago and Homo erectus arrived on the scene about 1.2 million years ago. Finally our species, Homo sapiens, emerged around 300,000 years ago and inhabited the gorge some 17,000 years ago.

Report by Rosemary Forrester

Tues. 12 Feb. – Craig Nelson



Shoebill

A very well-attended meeting at Woodgrove heard a fascinating account by Craig Nelson of their visits in 2017 and 2018 to Zambia to see the fruit bats – a Batsolutely AmaZambia trip! Along the way, some excellent bird species were seen, including Collared Palm-Thrush, Chaplin's Barbet, and a leucistic Dark-capped Bulbul. Travel in Zambia is slow due to the many heavy trucks heading to and from the DRC. The Kasanka National Park is a small reserve best known for the annual spring migration of some 10 million straw-coloured fruit bats. These are very large bats, weighing 250 gm and having a

wingspan of 85 cm. Some people's worst nightmare! The reserve organises guided walks into the fruit forest, which is primarily wild loquats.

On the way south, the group also visited the Bangweulu wetlands, seeing large numbers of Black Lechwe. Bird species included Sooty Chat, Rosy-throated Longclaw – and the elusive Shoebill (In November 2018, sadly only a juvenile that was rescued from poachers and which would be released when the rains started and the swamp fills was seen)! Mutinondo yielded further special species, including Trilling Cisticola and Bar-winged Weaver.

Report by Viv O'Neill and photo by Karin Nelson.

Wed. 20 March – Ekhart Buchmann and Adrian Koopman

This evening we had a double treat – two excellent speakers to give us food for thought.

Eckhart Buchmann's title of his talk was “Oh shucks, they have changed the name again” and so many people feel just that. For years and years a Rock Pigeon was a Rock Pigeon and so why did it have to become a Speckled Pigeon. Eckhart said it was just too annoying because if he said Rock Pigeon then he would have to apologise and feel stupid at using the old name. But then he felt totally irritated that he was being forced to use the new name and it didn't seem right. In 2006 a decision was made to globalize and standardize the list and each species should only have one name.

For example here in South Africa we have a Black-shouldered Kite, but so does Australia, therefore our bird has to be renamed the Black-winged Kite so that when Australians come birding in our country they don't get confused - and we can't have confused birders.

An example of the taxonomic changes is the Yellow-spotted Shrike, now known as the Eastern Nicator, the new name derived from the Latin *Nicator gularis*.

Here's another one – the Fiscal Shrike became the Common Fiscal which has now turned into the Southern Fiscal if you want to get it quite correct.

What about the Natal Robin who now goes by the name of Red-capped Robin-Chat. Eckhart showed us an amusing slide of the red-caps he identifies with – Donald Trump and our very own Juju Malema.

The older bird books listed the Hadeda as Hadeda Ibis, then Hadada Ibis and even Hadida. One book said it was a rather scarce bird and good eating – who would have known? Right now the list has settled for Hadeda Ibis.

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“Zulu bird names old and new. The Zulu bird name project 2013 -2018” was the subject of Adrian Koopman's fascinating talk on inventing Zulu names for at least 221 birds that only had Latin, English and Afrikaans names, but needed identification in isiZulu. Only familiar birds had colloquial names, and they also had local names, the names varying from region to region. It was thought that most bird species had no African names at all but this was not true, there were no *recorded* African names, but they were certainly out there.

The first workshop was held in 2013 with Zulu speaking bird guides who were very familiar with their subject and by 2018 a total of 671 bird names old and new had been recorded. The Zulu culture has a herding tradition, learning about nature as they care for their cattle, so the names were chosen with traditional meanings in their culture, which might not mean very much to our Western way of thinking. But look at this name for the Yellow Bishop – Umambathilanga – the one that wears the sun as a blanket across the shoulders and back. How lovely is that?

What about the Rose-ringed Parakeet. Here is a much shorter name – Unocu – and it is the bead necklace given by a young Zulu maiden to a young man she fancies.

A lot of work was done on the word Inhlolamvula meaning - what predicts the rain. From this word came Imvuliyeza – the rain is coming – for the Common Swift. And the Alpine Swift was given the name of Ihlolazulu – what predicts the weather.

So how come the Blue Crane has the name of Usuga when a crane in isiZulu is Indwe. Have a look at the five cent coin (Usuga) and what do you see. A Blue Crane! It makes all the sense in the world.

The African Oystercatcher is Inozile – the wearer of mourning clothes.

The Honey Buzzard is Umanyovini because it eats wasps – not honey. The Mangrove Kingfisher is Unonkalankala – the eater of crabs.

And maybe this is the most charming name of all, thought up by one of the guides when he saw the pretty Pink-throated Twinspot and was reminded of a Gumede tribal girl with all her beads. So he named the bird Umagumejana – the one having the characteristics of a young Gumede maiden.

Report by Rosemary Forrester

AROUND AND ABOUT



How about this for an amusing photo taken by Ingrid Weiersbye – loo queue at Midmar dam.

Jane Irvine sent this interesting photo.

A friend and I decided to spend time at the Gartmore hides late November. Plenty of activity - Shelduck, Teals, Yellow-billed and the odd Wood Sandpiper. Herons eating frogs, then we noticed a Black-headed Heron struggling with a huge snake. A water snake according to a snake fundi. It managed to swallow the snake then up it came to be swallowed again this time stayed down. Birding always turn up something interesting.



The Southern African Bird Atlas Project, a tool to monitor changes in bird distribution

Read about this interesting project in KZN Birds Issue No. 56 for February 2019

Amur Falcons



A vicious hailstorm hit the Mooi River Amur Falcon Roost late at night on Saturday, 9th March. The hail was apparently quite small but there was a lot of it so it was deep on the ground. It seems as though there was quite a bit of wind, as well. The SPCA was contacted after the security guard called the manager of Spar to tell him that there were lots of dead and injured birds on the ground. The Mooi River SPCA called FreeMe KZN and they did a quick call around to find volunteers to go up to Mooi River to assist. The people who went up, together with some

The raptor flight tunnel at FreeMe

locals, gathered up the dead birds in shopping trolleys and placed the injured and grounded birds into boxes after which they were brought back to Howick. The staff of FreeMe, Ben Hoffman from the Raptor Rescue Centre, volunteer Vets and many



others then worked almost through the night checking the birds and putting them into the raptor flight tunnel (which was not occupied). Badly injured birds were kept in the clinic for treatment. 1020 birds were placed in the tunnel, where poles had been put across to act as perches although many of the birds were on the ground under shelter, and about 70 were kept in the clinic. Sadly, 760 birds were killed and these were collected by David Allan of the Durban Museum. On Monday, there were four ringers with scribes, Ben Hoffman was catching the birds in the tunnel with a large net, and a team of FreeMeKZN staff and volunteers were doing a final check of the birds before giving them a small injection of Ringer's lactate to hydrate them, as well as eye drops where necessary, before they were released.

Karin Nelson rings the Amur Falcons.

It was really heartening to see how so many folk came together so willingly to offer assistance at the time of this tragedy and how many donations are being made to cover the costs incurred.

A storm in Newcastle two weeks later with hail that was very large, caused major fatalities: 756 birds have been released - 85 were brought to clinics in and around Pietermaritzburg - 2000 were killed - 60 were kept overnight to rest and probable release. One female bird that had been ringed from the Mooi River disaster was released and flew up to Newcastle where she got hit by the second hailstorm – and survived. Has she got a story to tell! Although, sadly there were birds that were ringed at FreeMe that were killed.

The feeling is (and Mark Anderson alluded to this with the flamingo incident) that this is probably just the start of things to come with climate change where hot areas will become hotter, cold areas will become colder, storms will increase in incidence and severity etc. I think that our heavy storms do seem a little later this year.

Report and photos by Anita Divall



Peter Divall presents Pam Nicol with an Honorary Life Membership Certificate from BirdLife KZN Midlands. The wording on the certificate is:

On behalf of the BirdLife KZN Midlands this certificate of appreciation is presented to:

Mrs. Pam Nicol

granting Honorary Life Membership of the club in recognition of her involvement on the committee for many years, both as Chairman and as the Membership secretary. The Chairman and Committee members of BirdLife KZN Midlands.



The CEO of BirdLife South Africa, Mark Anderson, at the end of his talk at the AGM of BirdLife KZN Midlands, presented the club with this valued certificate on our 30 years in the KwaZulu Midlands.

Autumn is upon us and BirdLife KZN Midlands wishes you all good birding in the cooler weather and wonderful colours at this time of year.
Rosemary Forrester – Editor.