

GURNEY'S SUGARBIRD ALBERT FRONEMAN

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

December 2015

highlights

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings

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LUCKY DRAW WINNERS

A lucky draw was done for all BirdLife South Africa members who renewed their membership in October 2015, and we congratulate the five members who will receive a copy of *Robins of Africa* coffee-table book:

Peter Hohne
Elodie Janovsky
John Magner
Victor Styger
Morrie Jacobs

We are sure you will enjoy the wonderful illustrations by Graeme Arnott and interesting accounts by Terry Oatley.

Thank you to all who renewed their membership with BirdLife South Africa.

Dear friends of BirdLife South Africa

We have now reached the end of 2015, a very busy and successful year for BirdLife South Africa. Our organisation continues to make significant contributions to the conservation of our country's 845 bird species and their habitats. As the only organisation in South Africa dedicated to the conservation of birds, we have an immensely important responsibility. South Africa's birds will have a brighter future if BirdLife South Africa is well equipped, through funding, trained staff and a network of volunteers, to undertake its species and site/habitat conservation work.

There have been many successes in 2015 and it seems unfair to mention only a few, although moving to our new head office, Isdell House, has certainly been an important highlight. The publication, in the latter half of 2015, of the revised IBA Directory, our first IBA Status Report and the revised Red Data Book, also marked important milestones. There's a growing interest in our magazine, *African Birdlife*, and the numbers of subscriptions and retail sales are increasing. We now have a new constitution and very competent people on our Executive Board.



The headquarters, publications and governance structures, however, contribute only in a relatively small way to our ultimate goal, the conservation of South Africa's birds. It is our regional conservation managers, Albatross Task Force members, environmental educators and other field staff who are really implementing conservation action. They are aided by citizen scientists, bird club members, other volunteers, members of IBA site support groups and many other people who love birds. All those mentioned are the many pieces of the jigsaw puzzle – and the final picture will be a beautiful landscape, with birds and people living in harmony in South Africa.

We benefit enormously from the contributions made by our volunteers, members, donors, supporters and collaborators. Our bird conservation work is a massive team effort and we thank each and every person who helped us to 'give conservation wings' in 2015.

Mark D. Anderson, Chief Executive Officer, *ceo@birdlife.org.za*

Attention BirdLife South Africa members
Please use your membership number as a payment reference when paying your membership fees.



Flock in Kruger 2016

ALBERT FRONEMAN

The final programmes for both the Layman's LAB and the Science LAB are currently being finalised and will be available in January 2016. For those not attending the LABs, various walks and outings will be arranged by the SANParks West Rand Honorary Rangers.

The bird identification course and both game drives are fully booked. There are a few spaces available for the photography workshop. Bookings for accommodation close on Friday, 22 January 2016. However, bookings for the LABs and the AGM will only close on Friday, 5 February 2016.

All the Flock and LAB in Kruger 2016 information and documentation is available on the BirdLife South Africa website at *http://birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-in-kruger-2016*

Please note that the BirdLife South Africa offices will close on Tuesday 15 December 2015 and re-open on Monday 4 January 2016.

Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing Manager, *events@birdlife.org.za*

FLOCK AT SEA AGAIN! 2017



With more than 740 cabins having been sold to date, our next target is to sell the remaining 250 cabins. This will mean we will have more than 2000 birders onboard and the MSC *Sinfonia* will set sail on an exclusive BirdLife South Africa cruise on 24 April 2017. If we achieve this, all the standard onboard entertainment will still be available if we choose, but the programme will be ours to decide. The special programme for birders will include guiding stations positioned around the ship and lectures by leading seabird experts such as Peter Harrison.

If you are interested in joining the cruise but are still thinking about it, BirdLife South Africa would like to encourage you to book your berth as soon as possible. To book, contact MSC Cruises; tel. 011 798 3600.

The challenge is on to fill the MSC *Sinfonia* with birders!

For more information, please visit our website *http://birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-at-sea-again-2017*

Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing Manager, *events@birdlife.org.za*

a new chapter
for the IBA Programme

The publication of the revised IBA Directory and first IBA Status Report for South Africa was certainly the highlight of 2015 for the IBA Programme. It was also a milestone achievement, the culmination of all the hard work over the past five years to assess this network of sites.



But a lot lies beyond the publication of these two important documents. To paraphrase a fallen hero, 'It's not just about the books.' These two publications are intended for a number of conservation outputs: to highlight the importance of these sites; to keep unsustainable developments out or manage them carefully; to draw attention to key threats to IBAs and across habitats; and to inform conservation planning undertaken by government and other NGOs. We even invite birders to use the IBA Directory to plan their next birding trip.

The directory is testament to the importance of these IBAs for protecting birds, and BirdLife South Africa staff and supporters will use it (directory-bashing if you please) to lobby for the conservation of our avifauna.

It is equally important to note that the IBA Team did not wait for these documents to be published before starting to conserve what we instinctively knew were our priority IBAs. In 2015 we launched two important conservation projects. Firstly, we began Biodiversity Stewardship work at two important estuary systems in the Western Cape (the Berg River and the Klein River and Bot–Kleinmond River estuaries), which aims to formally protect these sites. Secondly, we launched the Biodiversity Stewardship Fiscal Benefits Project, which is a pilot study to assess the viability of tax benefits for landowners engaging in Biodiversity Stewardship. In addition, we are very close to securing funding for and launching a landscape-scale project that focuses on the conservation of patches of land that make up the KZN Mistbelt Grasslands IBA. We are also working with large industry to achieve the protection and improved management of this highly threatened habitat type.

While we focus on large results, like formally protecting vulnerable IBAs (as we did with Chrissies Pans IBA in 2014), we are also working on a number of smaller projects. These include developing best-practice guidelines for fynbos management; the rehabilitation of farm dams to entice breeding waterbirds; and surveying areas for threatened or little-known species, such as Rudd's Lark in the Eastern Cape and Hottentot Buttonquail in the Western Cape. We also continue to survey for Blue Swallow in summer months. All this is done with the extensive network of partners the IBA Team has built up over the past four years.

We will soon finalise a scientifically based prioritisation model that will tell BirdLife South Africa in which IBAs we need to focus our efforts in future, based on a number of criteria.

I am immensely proud of the IBA Directory and IBA Status Report and I encourage everyone to buy a copy for their bookshelf. But I am even more proud of the conservation work the IBA team has initiated in priority IBAs over the past few years. BirdLife South Africa is now not only recognised for identifying and proclaiming IBAs, but also for playing an active, and often leading, role in conserving these important sites for birds, other biodiversity and habitats.

Daniel Marnewick, Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas and Regional Conservation Programme Manager,
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New guidelines for sustainable solar energy

make a contribution!



above Prof. Peter Ryan (not a short man) is dwarfed by a heliostat at Khi Solar One power tower facility near Upington. These reflective mirrors concentrate the sun's energy onto a central receiving tower.

South Africa is blessed with abundant sunshine, so it is somewhat surprising that it has taken us so long to begin seeing solar power in our energy mix. Things are changing, though. Seven concentrated solar power plants (with a total capacity of 600 megawatts) and 45 photovoltaic power projects (with a total capacity of 2297 megawatts) are in the pipeline or have already been built. Hundreds of other solar energy projects have already received environmental approval.

Solar energy is a welcome alternative to environmentally destructive power sources such as coal, but it is not without environmental impacts. It can cause large-scale habitat loss and fragmentation, and birds may be killed if they collide with the reflective panels or heliostats. Birds may also be burned if they fly through an area of intense solar energy at concentrated solar power tower facilities.

It is important that proper planning goes into the development of solar energy. The impacts must be rigorously assessed and we need to be sure we are making the best decisions possible with regard to the type of technology used and its location. Unfortunately we don't have all the answers. There has been little research or monitoring at solar facilities worldwide. Monitoring at solar plants in California has yielded some results that are cause for concern, but it is not clear if we can expect similar effects in South Africa. It is therefore important that solar facilities that might pose a risk to birds are monitored so that we can learn and improve their sustainability into the future.



Concentrated solar power troughs, an alternative to power towers, are also enormous.

In order to promote the sustainable development of renewable energy, BirdLife South Africa is encouraging appropriate impact assessment and monitoring. Our Guidelines for Birds and Solar Energy are being updated and we invite your input. Please e-mail Sam Ralston-Paton at *energy@birdlife.org.za* if you would like to receive a copy of the draft guidelines. Deadline for comment is 10 January 2016.

Sam Ralston-Paton, Renewable Energy Manager,
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on the road with ROSS

Ross birding in Portugal with his Zeiss-donated binoculars.

My last entry for the blog, back in June, was about a trip I did in May. Three trips followed in July (Nairobi, Johannesburg and Rome), none of which were really worth writing about. Then came a trip to Olhão, Portugal, where an Indian Ocean Tuna Commission meeting was hosted. I won't bore readers with the details of the meeting; suffice to say that it was useful and that BirdLife's agenda for reducing seabird by-catch and improving how countries report on their fishing made good progress. The major highlight for birding was a two-day trip into Castro Verde in the Algarve heartland, trying out my new binoculars kindly donated by Zeiss. My mate Nuno Barros (whom I met on the Tinhosas expedition in São Tomé and Príncipe in 2013) set me up with two local guides, Thys Valkenberg and João Tavarez, who are two of the most insanely gifted birders I've ever met. With them, and with Nuno on the second day, I clocked 131 species, including iconic birds such as Spanish Imperial Eagle and both Little and Great bustards, as well as no fewer than 27 lifers.

But Portugal was eclipsed by my participation in the BirdLife Africa Partnership meeting in Ghana. I was amazed by the level of interest and desire from our coastal BirdLife partners to engage in marine work and came away inspired (as I am at all these meetings) to help build capacity and create a strong seabird programme across Africa. But as this was my first visit to true West African Upper Guinea Rainforest, I was in for a slew of new species! A massive highlight was birding around the Royal Senchi Hotel precinct and its set-aside natural habitats. I probably ticked 40 lifers just in the area, including the ultimate Ghanaian bird: the White-necked Picathartes! Personal highlights included species that have a near-mythical status for me in



Martin Taylor and Ross after having seen a White-necked Picathartes in Ghana.

southern Africa: the Vanga Flycatcher and Mottled Spinetail. Then with Ademola Ajagbe, head of Conservation Action & Policy at the Africa Secretariat, and two BLI colleagues from Cambridge we set off for two nights at the legendary Kakum National Park with its canopy walkway. Ashanti Tours provided a superb guide for the day and our pre-dawn birding kicked off with a Fraser's Eagle-Owl before we really got going on the canopy species. Luck was definitely with us and we had views of many of the specials that ranged from great to crippling, including both dwarf hornbills and the crazy White-crested Hornbill, Chestnut-bellied Helmet-shrike, a fistful of bulbuls/greenbuls, eight sunbirds and, to top it off, another southern African special: the Bat Hawk. The outstanding sighting for the trip, however, was not a bird; that honour goes to the long-tailed pangolin!

But the reason it's taken me so long to write up this blog is that among all this travel Cape Town hosted the World Seabird Conference, with meetings for me either side of the five-day conference. That was followed immediately by more travel, to Europe, where I didn't even try to go birding and so still have no personal bird list for either Switzerland or Germany. It's been a pretty crazy, busy second semester; hopefully 2016 will slow down a tiny bit!

Dr Ross Wanless, Seabird Programme Manager,
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gardening FOR BIRDS

December is upon us and the grand Christmas theme is decorating the shops and even some streets. What about my garden, I thought – and there was the answer in the form of *Erythrina humeana*. All ablaze with gorgeous red spikes offering sips of sweetness to visiting sunbirds. Wouldn't a flowering dwarf coral tree decorated with male Malachite and Amethyst sunbirds make the most beautiful Christmas tree? Add a couple of male Red Bishops and that would be utter perfection! *Erythrina humeana* is a great addition to any bird garden, even though it is, sadly, not very frosty. At a modest height of 2–3 metres, this is a tree that can fit happily into the smallest garden. The red-and-black seeds in their cylindrical pods are an added attraction. The scientific name *Erythrina* derives from the Greek word *erythros*, meaning red, while the Latin *-inus* indicates possession. In this case, both the flowers and the seeds are red.

Another small tree or large shrub that, with its red tubular flowers, is perfect for Christmas is wild pomegranate *Burchellia bubalina*, a firm favourite with all nectar-feeding birds. The fruits that follow the flowers are really nothing to write home about, but to barbets, bulbuls and starlings they are delicious! The generic name honours William John Burchell, who travelled widely in southern Africa in the 1800s, collecting plants. Nearly 9000 of his specimens are now housed at Kew. The only reference to the specific name *bubalina* that I could find is the Latin word *bubalinus*, which is described as pertaining to the African gazelle! I am none the wiser on that one.

My bee–sunbird problem has reared its ugly head once again. After quite a long period of not putting out my nectar feeder, I decided to try again as nectar-producing flowers are thin on the ground in my garden. All was good on the first day – the Malachite and Amethyst sunbirds were delighted and so was I. But on day two the bees discovered the bottle and, although they can no longer get into it and drown, they pack into the tiny aperture so tightly that the birds have given up the battle. I even tried a saucer of sugar water, as suggested by a friend, to draw the bees' attention away from the bottle. The bees loved it, but they weren't distracted from the bottle. I know bees are in danger and incredibly important in the pollination game, but still... A friend has suggested that I get one of those hummingbird feeders that have tiny holes with painted yellow petals around them. The bees, it seems, just cannot cope with that. We bought a feeder like that in the USA, but it has since broken. I can only hope that someone is importing them into South Africa. I will keep you posted.


Erythrina humeana

Here's wishing you all a wonderful, happy festive season – keep your birdbaths full, take a break from gardening chores and sit back and enjoy the birds.

Sally Johnson, *sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com*



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ZEISS



BirdLife South Africa's new nest

Isdell House, BirdLife South Africa's new head office in Dunkeld West, Johannesburg, was officially opened at a very special function on 13 November 2015. The event was attended by about 340 people, including many of BirdLife South Africa's donors and supporters. The guests received a gift when they left: an umbrella with beautiful Leigh Voigt sketches of a Burchell's Coucal and the message 'Love the Rainbird'. The function was sponsored by Pamela and Neville Isdell, with additional donations provided by Edward Snell, Gaynor Rupert, Julio Moreira, Land Rover Centurion, Leigh Voigt, Lesley van der Spuy, Lindy van Hasselt, Nikon, Philipp Exter, Rod Mcleod (Community Protection Services), Roger McFall (Selbys) and SABMiller. Utopia, BirdLife South Africa's ad agency, created superb invitations for the function. The event was organised by Siyenza and we are very grateful to Margaret Agocs, Louise Mokonyane and Liz Hart for their assistance.

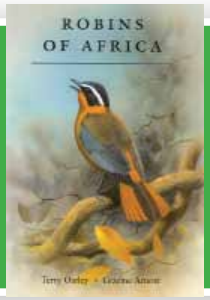
Mark D. Anderson, Chief Executive Officer, *ceo@birdlife.org.za*

BIRDING BIG DAY

The 31st BirdLife South Africa Birding Big Day (BBD) took place on 28 November 2015. Thank you to all the individuals and teams who participated. The entries are rolling in and the information will be collated and the results will be available towards the end of January 2016.

Thanks must also go to Henk Nel and the team at BirdLasser. Many teams registered with the mobile app and sightings were automatically synced with the BirdLasser database, enabling us to monitor the total number of species seen by the BBD teams during the event. The final tally of the collective sightings – how many of South Africa's 846 bird species were seen in a single day by birders across the country – will be announced in January 2016.

Nikki McCartney, Events & Marketing Manager, *events@birdlife.org.za*



RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP AND STAND A CHANCE TO WIN!

Renew your membership in the month that it is due and stand a chance to win one of five copies of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa*, a celebration of the African robin and its world in all its variety. Please remember to use your membership number as the reference when making your payment.

Shireen Gould, Membership Manager, *membership@birdlife.org.za*

seabirders flock to Cape Town

Seabirds make up only about 3.5 per cent of all bird species but are among the most endangered groups, with a conservation status deteriorating faster than just about any equivalent group. Reasons for this are impacts of invasive predators and humans on breeding colonies, by-catch in fisheries, food shortages as a result of unsustainable fishing practices and climate change. It is therefore no surprise that the 2nd World Seabird Conference (WSC2) was deemed to be necessary following the successes of the initial World Seabird Conference (WSC) in 2010.

The seabird research and conservation community is not taking the threats to seabirds lying down. Nor is it just going to sit around and lament. The WSC gatherings have a different and proactive approach that sets them apart from just about every other academic conference: the Legacy Programmes. These are big-picture, global initiatives that are designed to bring researchers and conservationists together, build global, free-access databases to enhance everyone's understanding of seabird-related issues, and create an environment that will nurture future conservation leaders. The World Seabird Union is one of the legacy initiatives from the first conference, while the 'Early Career Scientists' initiative was launched at WSC2 and is geared to generating opportunities for postgraduate students transitioning to PhDs, post-docs or, more pertinently, into the work place.

WSC2 took place from 26 to 30 October at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. With the theme of 'Seabirds: Global Ocean Sentinels', the academic gathering was hosted by the World Seabird Union and the African Seabird Group. The topics covered ranged from DNA sequencing of individual seabirds to managing entire breeding colonies and included fishery management for seabirds, creating new colonies, addressing by-catch and even new funding models for improving the efficiency of conservation outcomes.

Members of BirdLife South Africa's Seabird Conservation Programme contributed one poster and five oral presentations. They joined the BirdLife International Marine Programme team to promote BirdLife's work and approaches and to ensure that we participated in the many conversations and initiatives linked to seabird research and conservation. The local team also sponsored many of the prizes for the student awards and even helped drive a Twitter storm that saw the hashtag #WSC2 trending globally on Twitter during the week!

The conservation outcomes of the many sessions and the collaborations that were established during the week will be difficult to quantify, but there's no question that everyone who participated felt that it was a hugely successful and well-organised event. The only question that does remain is: where will WSC3 be held?

Ross Wanless, Seabird Programme Manager, *ross.wanless@birdlife.org.za* and Adri Meyer, BirdLife South Africa Intern, *seabird@birdlife.org.za*



BIRDLIFE PORT NATAL 2016 CALENDAR

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eagles and energy

Work in South Africa on a Californian stage

Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson attended the Raptor Research Foundation Symposium in Sacramento, California, USA, from 4 to 8 November 2015. She presented a talk on BirdLife South Africa's involvement with birds and wind energy at the Raptors and Wind Energy Symposium. In addition to covering the challenges and progress in South Africa, the presentation highlighted the threats that proposed wind farms in Lesotho will pose to Bearded and Cape vultures. It also focused on the current energy crisis in Africa and the need for more renewable energy sources, with the proviso that these should be developed responsibly. Site selection (avoidance) is critical for project screening, while the implementation of mitigation measures is equally important at operational facilities. Mention was made of the work of the BirdLife International Migratory Soaring Birds Project, which focuses on minimising impacts along the soaring raptors' migratory route through Egypt and along the Eastern African Rift Valley. Three Percy FitzPatrick Institute for African Ornithology students (Marie-Sophie Garcia-Heras, Rowen van Eeden and Gareth Tate) also attended the symposium.

Hanneline also visited the Peregrine Fund headquarters in Boise, Idaho, during her trip to the USA, where she discussed and presented BirdLife South Africa's work on raptors, with a focus on the Taita Falcon and Secretarybird projects. A presentation to the staff of the Peregrine Fund focused on the current priorities of the SA Taita Falcon Survey Team and the Species Guardians who contribute to the research and conservation of the two species. Research includes a dedicated post-graduate study on the biology of the species in South Africa and the expansion of monitoring during the breeding season across the species' distribution in eastern and southern Africa.



Marie-Sophie Garcia-Heras, Rowen van Eeden, Rick Watson (Vice President: Peregrine Fund), Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson and Gareth Tate.

Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Manager: Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme/Oppenheimer Fellow of Conservation, *conservation@birdlife.org.za*

NOTICE OF THE 87th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA to be held at 14h00 on Saturday, 12 March 2016 at the Conference Centre, Skukuza Camp, Kruger National Park.

For more information, please visit *www.birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-in-kruger-2016*

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