



Newsletter 181 April – June 2023

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## **FORTHCOMING CLUB MEETINGS**

**Every third Tuesday of the month**

**Next Meeting: 16 August 2022**

**18h30 for 19h00**

**Wanderer's Club**

**Come early (17h30ish) and join us for supper in the restaurant. Good food, great company!**



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## **SPEAKERS**

**Organiser: Debbie Jennings**

[deb.jiq@gmail.com](mailto:deb.jiq@gmail.com)



Please watch Debbie's newsflashes for more info because speakers and dates may change. Next month's speaker will be Rolf Weisler on My Evolution as a Birder and Sara Orchardson is scheduled to speak about the Owl Box Project in August.

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## **DAY OUTINGS**

**Organiser: Dennis Townsend**

[dennis.townsend4@gmail.com](mailto:dennis.townsend4@gmail.com)



Upcoming Sunday outings include CWAC on July 30 – see the article later in the newsletter.

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## **MID-MONTH OUTINGS**

**Organiser: Lester Niss**

[lestern256@gmail.com](mailto:lestern256@gmail.com)



Keep an eye out for the News Flash on the next mid-month morning walks.

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## **TRIPS AWAY**

**Organiser: Marion Melville**

[marion@rbs.co.za](mailto:marion@rbs.co.za)

**Northern Cape: 16 – 25 September 2023**

Sadly, this trip has proved to be too expensive, so Marion is working on an alternative. Watch the News Flashes for further info.

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## PREVIOUS OUTINGS FEEDBACK

### Modderfontein 30 April 2023

We met in the picnic parking area, a total of two visitors and seven members.

We did a nice slow walk along the river – about three kilometers.

A total of 36 species was seen with a special sighting of a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, also known as an African Yellow Warbler.

The Warbler was pointed out and identified by Jean-Michel, a game ranger from Zimbabwe who joined us.



**Giant Kingfisher**



**Dark-capped Yellow Warbler**

**Dennis Townsend**



## Roodeplaat Nature Reserve 28 May 2023

Twelve members and one visitor joined us on this outing.

Four new members came along as well:

Lynda Stephenson, Eric Sewell and Petra and Robin Joslin. A hearty (slightly) Cuckoo welcome to you all!

It was a beautiful day with a bit of a winter chill in the air, but most of the morning was spent driving, so we didn't notice the temperature. We stopped off occasionally to visit the game and birding hides.

Fifty-three species were spotted, including some specials: Long-crested Eagle, Coqui Francolin, Black-backed Puffback, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Acacia Pied Barbet, Black-headed Oriole, and African Jacana.



Photo of Crested Eagle  
taken by Petra Joslin



Ten Cuckoos stayed on for a picnic



**Coqui Francolin**

**Crimson-Breasted Shrike**



**Wattled Starling**

**Dennis Townsend**



## Aloe Farm 25 June 2023

A chilly start to the morning, but 23 people came to the farm, including five visitors.

We took a slow stroll through the nursery towards the sand mounds where White-fronted Bee-eaters nest. As we approached the Bee-eaters started coming out of their burrows. We watched them flying out and returning, presenting us with some nice close-up sightings and photo opportunities.

As we moved further up into the bush, there were many more sightings of the Bee-eaters and other interesting birds, including Black-headed Oriole, White-bellied Sunbirds, Marico Sunbirds, Amethyst Sunbirds, Mousebirds, Boubou, Cape Weaver, Barbets, Fairy flycatcher. Vultures circled in the distance over the mountain. The Sunbirds and Bee-eaters were the highlights.

Then we walked through the bush garden which was alive with Sunbirds, Bee-eaters, Waxbills and Weavers.



Fairy Flycatcher



**Bee-eaters**

Whilst walking through the bush garden, the owner of Aloe Farm came through, welcomed us and answered a few questions regarding the agapanthus. He gave us a quick brief on the one called Black Jack that recently won “The plant of the year” at the recent Chelsea Flower show.

**Dennis Townsend**







A chilly start to the day, but the sun soon warmed everyone, and we were ready to bird. Among the highlights were the Bee-Eaters, whether sitting on a wire or on a tree, or in their nesting sites.



A reminder of summer to come.



A photo of you, taking a photo of us... or something. A great turnout for this very special outing.

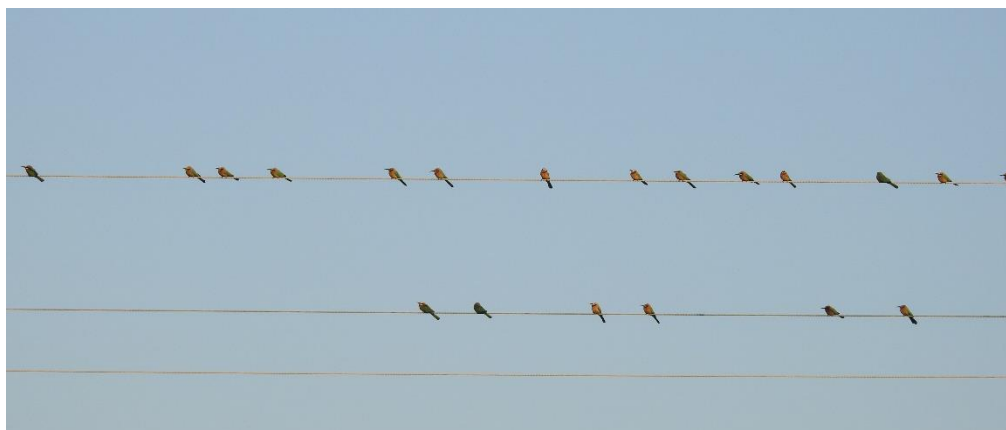


Black-headed Oriole; a beautiful yellow front



Red-faced Mousebird

Birds on a wire, with apologies to Leonard Cohen.



Such diverse colours, just doing their own thing.

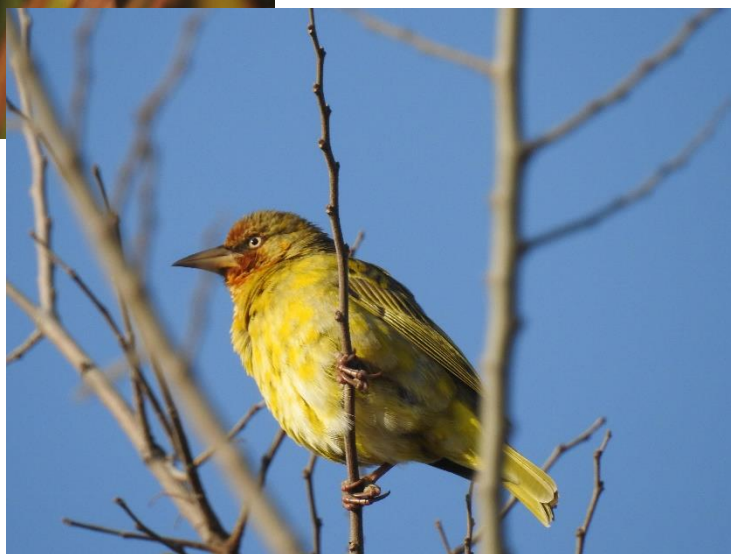




Aloe Farm – a beautiful view of the garden.



Sun's up!





Not only aloes, but a huge variety of plants and bulbs, make the Farm a great place for a day out.

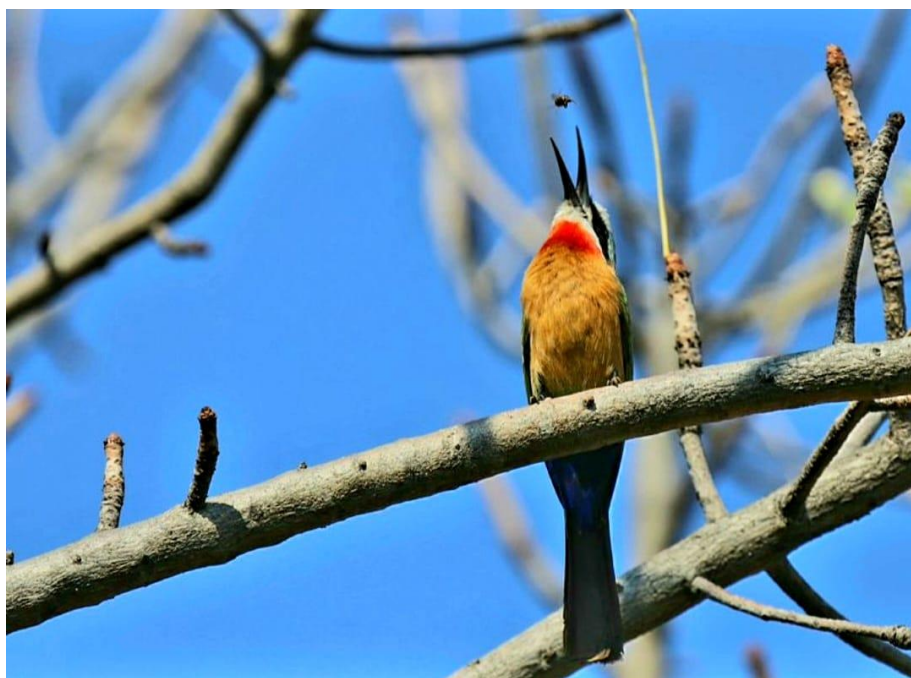


**Heather Darby**





An extraordinary photo! Note the bee about to say, 'Goodbye World!'









**Gavin Clunnie**



## SLIGHTLY CUCKOO AGM

Many thanks to Alex and Roy for the loan of their house and beautiful garden for the AGM earlier this year. A grand time was had by all – a chance to meet up with old friends and make new ones.



Heather Darby





## FROM THE CHAIR

### 1. Summary of the survey results April/May 2023

Thanks to all who completed and submitted the surveys. Your feedback was much appreciated – this is the best, if not the only, way to make sure we do our best for the club. We're discussing the results to look at what we can implement and improve.

Approximately 50% of membership was represented in the surveys we received.

- 1) **Best type of birder that describes you:** With the exception of two members that are expert, all others describe themselves as inter-mediate, or novice birders.
- 2) **Club activities interested in:** All items listed were rated high with the exception of 4 members interested in Saturday activities.
- 3) **Activities regularly participated in:** Weekday outings, had the least number of participants.
- 4) **Type of activities/outings members would like organized:** Saturday outings, birding trips around South Africa, Southern Africa. Combination of Wildlife, nature, stargazing and bird identification
- 5) **Suggestions on where to go birding:** Memel, Kgalagadi, Ndumo, Karroo National Park, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Southern Cape, Northern Cape, Coastal Regions, Game parks, KZN, Estuaries, Nylsvlei, Wakkerstroom, Zaagkuil, Golden Gate, Waterberg, Rietvlei, Eastern Cape, Parys, Vaal Marina, Walter Sisulu, Magaliesburg, Outer Gauteng, Cruises.
- 6) **Specific birds like to see:** Pelagic, Shoebill, Finfoot
- 7) **Estimated budget for 3 nights, accommodation, fuel, and guide. Ex food & drinks:** Average R4200.00 per person.
- 8) **Suggestions on how club can improve on outings:** More frequent, further afield, include nature experts, 2 or more to assist with organising trips, socialise after walk/drive.
- 9) **Being part of WhatsApp group:** With exception of one member, all want to be part of the group.
- 10) **Anything club can improve on;** More marketing, implement bird courses.
- 11) **If you have children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews etc., how can we involve them:** no real feedback.
- 12) **Willing to help committee:** Most participants/members happy to assist.



## 2. CWAC



The Cuckoo Bird Club has been participating in the CWACs at Marievale for around 24 years: we need to continue this important task to contribute towards waterbird conservation.

The morning is about counting the various birds seen and recording on a record sheet, which is then submitted to the main coordinator.

For those that are concerned about the actual ID of birds, don't be concerned, as we have a few members who have done this count many times and are familiar and able to ID. It's a great way of learning about the various birds on the day.

As per the club motto: 20% birding and 80% fun.

There is a wide variety of birds to be seen and counted: Cape Teal, Blue-billed Teal, African Rail, Red-chested Flufftail, African Marsh Harrier, Little Bittern, Curlew Sandpiper, Pied Avocet, Sedge Warbler, Orange-breasted Waxbill, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Red-throated Wryneck to name a few.

The Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) project started in 1992 as part of South Africa's commitment to international waterbird conservation. CWAC is managed by the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology. Regular mid-summer and mid-winter counts take place at many South African wetlands. Regular six-monthly counts are regarded as a minimum standard. All the counts are conducted by volunteers – people and organisations with a passion for waterbird conservation. It is one of the largest and most successful citizen science programmes in Africa, providing much-needed data for waterbird conservation around the world. Currently the project



regularly monitors over 400 wetlands around the country, and furthermore curates waterbird data for over 600 sites.

There are many reasons for collecting waterbird data from around the country. A comparison of counts from different wetlands gives indications of seasonal movements and the relative importance of sites for the conservation of different species. Long-term monitoring of population numbers on a site basis allows for the development of annual population indices to trace the fluctuations of populations.

We are proud of the achievements the CWAC project has made since 1991. We are thankful to all the people that contribute their time and money towards this worthwhile cause. This project is a success because of you! If you are not participating yet, please consider lending your support. Your participation will make a real contribution towards waterbird conservation, not only in South Africa, but truly on a global scale.

### **3. Improved security at Wanderer's: please note!**

Upgrading our security via a new access control system has been done for the safety and benefit of all our members and visitors using our facilities. Crime is an ever-present element in our daily lives and the latest statistics paint a bleak picture. Recently a visitor to our neighbouring townhouse complex was held up at gunpoint just outside our premises. We want to minimise any risks associated with unfortunate crime-related events.

Our primary focus in implementing this new security system is safeguarding you, protecting your belongings, and mitigating risks like car theft. Over the past two months, we have been actively engaging with our members, keeping them informed about the security system's installation, testing, and current operation.

**From the end of this month, visitors must sign in with their driver's license and will receive an exit access code to leave the premises.**

Our primary focus in implementing this new security system is safeguarding you, protecting your belongings, and mitigating risks like car theft. Over the past two months, we have been actively engaging with our members, keeping them informed about the security system's installation, testing, and current operation.



From the end of this month (June), visitors must sign in with their driver's license and they will receive an exit access code to leave the premises.

**Dennis Townsend**

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## **BIRDING VS BIRD WATCHING (WITH SIMPLE COMPARISON TABLE!)**

I remember once when I was out with my binoculars and couple of friends who loved to look at the birds in my area. Then I casually asked some other people who were standing around with their big cameras: “You guys here to bird watch?” They simply gave me a look and said, “No, we’re here to bird.” I mean, that left me absolutely confused as I was just beginning to get into knowing more about birding/bird watching. So, I did a little research online on the difference between the two terms “Birding” and “Bird Watching”. Here’s what I found and can share with you:



What’s the Difference Between “Birding” and “Bird Watching”? It’s a matter of their different levels of commitment. Birders are more dedicated and intense in their pursuit of birds throughout their lifetimes, while bird watchers tend to be more casual. Birders are more commonly seen with more enhanced gear as compared to the more budget-friendly casual bird watcher. More often than not, birders will get slightly offended when they are accidentally referred to as bird watchers.

Well, now that we all know what the difference is between Birding and Bird Watching, what specifically do birders and bird watchers do that make them so different?

### **Birders Versus Bird Watchers**

While birders and bird watchers have their differences, some may be quick to say



that birders are just more passionate hobbyists than bird watchers. I have gone a little deeper in my research on the web to find out more on what really makes them different.

	<b>Birders</b>	<b>Bird Watchers</b>
<b>Time Commitment</b>	High	Low
<b>Competitiveness</b>	High	Low
<b>Type of Pursuit</b>	Active	Passive
<b>Financial Costs</b>	High	Low

Summary of Differences Between Birders and Bird Watchers

**Time Commitment:**

Oftentimes, birders are known to chase down birds over miles to follow a sighting that they may have heard of from in their community. They are often willing to simply hop into their car and head off to their destination 2 hours away, just to see a vagrant bird! While this may seem silly to casuals such as the public and bird watcher, many birders take pride in their pursuit of rare bird sightings.

In fact, birders are known to spend their entire lifetimes growing their list of sighting birds in their region, country and for some, around the entire globe. That’s right, some even travel to foreign countries just to tick off more bird sightings off their lifetime list! This is often termed as a birding life list.

On the other hand, bird watchers really take it down a notch. They are casual onlookers and observers of birds. Most bird watchers are actually most people: people who happen to appreciate the beauty of the birds around our neighborhood. Therefore, these bird watchers do not spend time chasing and “hunting” down birds



just to extend a birding life list.

The approximate maximum amount of time a bird watcher will spend on observing birds will be about only 5 minutes. Only 5 minutes to observe the bird that landed outside their window. Or some may even stop to think about the bird that started to sing a beautiful song, then wonder to themselves: "I wonder what kind of bird is singing such a beautiful song?", followed by proceeding to take a look at the bird just outside their porch.

### **Competitiveness:**

Birders and Bird Watchers take on two very different notches of competitiveness. While it may not be very noticeable for the public eye, it is in fact quite distinguishable. Let me dish out the details:

Birders tend to be highly competitive in their pursuit of extension of their Birding Life List. For some, the act of birding and extending their list of the avian species is no longer just a hobby rather that of an elite sport. Many from all over the globe flock to competitions organized such as the cross-country "Big year", or the highly competitive 24-hour New Jersey-based "World Series of Birding". In addition to all these, there are those who choose to participate in smaller local events and birdathons too. In birdathons, birders compete to locate and identify bird species, whereby the funds raised will be channeled to bird conservation efforts both local and worldwide.

Bird watchers, on the other hand, take bird observation with much more of a slower pace. Bird watchers take their time to take in the beauty of the animal, while enjoying a little chase here and there. While bird watchers may have a little list of bird sightings that they keep as "medals" in their notebook, they not nearly as passionate as the birders, who passionately seek ways to extend and compete with other birders on the length of their list!

### **Type of Pursuit:**

Birders and bird watchers alike both enjoy the pursuit of birds. Some sociologists may attribute this incredible drive to 'hunt down' as many birds as they can as being



related to our Neanderthal ancestors.

Birders would often engage in active pursuit, where some may even book a plane ticket to fly overseas to attend a birdathon or to witness a rare bird species. In general, birders **engage actively** with the sport of birding. Birders will go to the bird's location to find them and identify them.

Conversely, bird watchers take on a more passive stance in their pursuit of birds. Most bird watchers will only take few short moments to attempt to identify the species that commonly lands on their neighbor's bird feeder in their lull time, but their interest in the hobby/sport will never extend beyond that. They are simply okay with just having a slight interest in the topic of birds, but they never take it to the next level to develop a deep interest.

### **Financial Costs:**

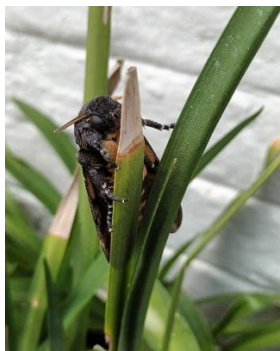
Birders are often seen decked out in camouflage outdoor gear, boots, binoculars, a field guide, notebook, and with cameras that often look too bulky for a hobbyist. All these items are extremely essential to a birder, but they are costly. The total cost of these can amount to **\$15,800 – \$23,900!** Now that may seem to some like a huge financial investment for just looking at birds, but to birders, it's often money well spent.

Bird watchers are much more different in the way they spend their money for their hobby. Some don't even bother to spend on it at all. Some may proceed to purchase a **single good starter pair that usually costs between \$75 and \$100** on average, in order to peer further into foliage and observe more shy birds.

Written by Justin in Bird Facts, Birding, Birding Guides

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**GUESS WHAT? (ANSWER ON NEXT PAGE. NO PRIZES!)**





## OWL NEWS

Apologies for the quality of the item. Mo Bellis kindly sent us this. The school is a credit to the Owl Box Project.

(Note that we have a speaker in August from the Owl Box Project.)



The Owlproject.org taking the release programme to St Andrew's School for Girls.

# Rescued owl finds new home at St Andrew's

Owlproject.org visited St Andrew's School for Girls on May 18, as part of their owl release programme.

This time it was a sweet ending to a bitter beginning for a Spotted Eagle owl (*Bubo africanus*).

The Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Clinic treated the female owl for trichomoniasis.

Owlproject.org places owls in the release programme for 21 days.

They install release pens at schools to engage with and educate children about owls.

According to the organisation, schools are ideal release sites because there are large grounds and proper food sources. It is also quiet at night.

Jordan-Michael Hardey from the Owlproject.org said the programme also helps owls adapt to their new environment.

"The learners at St Andrew's School for Girls have the opportunity to feed and monitor the owl.

"We had senior and junior learners join an educational talk about the importance of owls in our environment.

"They received valuable input on how to formulate a sustainable future.



A Spotted Eagle owl.

"Owls are extremely important in our environment," he said.

The school thanked the organisation for entrusting them with her and for its efforts in educating communities about the importance of owls in the environment.

"Owls are the best solution in combating rodent problems, and as an EcoSchool, we urge our community to not use rodenticides.

"Not only are the poisons causing painful deaths to rodents,

but the owls are affected by secondary poisoning when they eat the poisoned rodents," said the school's marketer Brandon Townsend.

Hardey added that rat poison is just poison.

He said contacting non-toxic rodent control organisations such as EcoSolutions is the best alternative to assist with a rodent problem.

"Spotted Eagle owl breeding season is around the corner. During this time, juvenile owls spend a few days on the ground in gardens and common areas while they hone their hunting skills.

"It is best practice not to pick up or rescue them if they don't need to be.

"If there is a cause for concern for these young owls, contact your local SPCA.

"SPCAs have a list of accredited wildlife facilities that can help," said Hardey.

St Andrews thanked their sponsors for making the event possible.

They are International Owl Centre, SPCA, Sage Foundation, Woodoc, Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital, and Hatch.

Answer to Guess What? This is a Death's Head Hawkmoth, photographed by Heather Darby in her Bryanston garden.





## BIRD COURSE WITH GEOFF LOCKWOOD



### RAND *Barbet Bird Club*

**"IN MY BACKYARD", A BIRD COURSE WITH THE DOYEN OF DELTA**

#### **GEOFF LOCKWOOD**

DATE: Sunday 30 July  
TIME: 9:00 to 13:30  
VENUE: Delta Park Eco-centre Auditorium  
COST: R450

The talks will be interspersed with walks. It will be a fun morning of learning with leading ornithologist Geoff Lockwood – scientist, artist, wildlife guide, raconteur, and inspirational teacher.

#### **ALL BIRDERS WELCOME**

- Beginners will learn basic bird ID in the field.
- Intermediate birders will come to know which birds come and go at Delta and at what time of the year.
- Advanced birders will learn about the changes in species prevalence over the last 40 years in Johannesburg, and in Delta Park particularly, and what the trends have shown and mean for the future.

Cost includes only tea, coffee and biscuits. BYO snacks and a picnic lunch to enjoy together afterwards. Don't forget your binoculars.

BOOK: By sending proof of payment by e-mail to [randbarbets@gmail.com](mailto:randbarbets@gmail.com) or WhatsApp to 083-267-7070.  
PAY: Standard Bank, acc no: 2050-722  
Acc name: Rand Barbet Bird Club.  
Ref: Your Surname

DRESS CODE: POLAR. Blankets will not be frowned upon. Ignore this warning at your peril. Frigid venue.

Invitation issued by RBBC, [randbarbets@gmail.com](mailto:randbarbets@gmail.com) or Judy 083-267-7070.





## BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA NEWS



### Get ready for Birding Big Day!

BirdLife South Africa's 39th Birding Big Day (BBD) will get under way on Saturday, 2 December and you are invited to join hundreds of birders around the country who will be looking to record as many species as possible within a chosen time, be it the entire day or a few hours in the garden or a local park.

Two categories are offered: the 50-kilometre, where you choose a central point and can look for birds within a 50-kilometre radius of it; and the six-kilometre, which is designed for birders who prefer to atlas a pentad, enjoy birding while walking or cycling, or have limited time available. In both categories you can upload your sightings using the BirdLasser app, and a dedicated online map will be provided for the six-kilometre one.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a tally of 880 bird species on the checklist of birds in South Africa. During BBD our collective efforts usually result in recording approximately 650 of these species in just one day! For many avid birders, BBD is an opportunity to spend quality time with friends and family outdoors, revelling in the wonders of our diverse avian population.

More than 400 teams – that's over 1000 birders – took part in each of the last two BBD events and this year, we hope you will join us and help to make the 39th BBD the biggest ever! It promises to be an absolute blast. All you need to do is assemble your team of at least four birders, plan your route and then register for the event. You can log your sightings on the BirdLasser app or simply write them down on a piece of paper. For more information, go to <https://www.birdlife.org.za/support-us/events/birding-big-day-2023/>. Alternatively, feel free to contact me at [ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za](mailto:ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za). To register, please go to <https://www.birdlife.org.za/birding-big-day-2023-entry-form/>  
ERNST RETIEF, BIRDING BIG DAY ORGANISER



Please note that there will be an increase in BLSA membership fees from 1st July. Click on the link below to sign up and pay.

[Join BirdLife South Africa - BirdLife South Africa](#)

## KRUGER PARK BIRDING WEEKENDS

### KRUGER NATIONAL PARK BIRDING WEEKENDS, 2024

Camp	Description	Accommodation	Guests' stay		Nights	Rate INCL VAT	Single suppleme
			Arrive	Depart			
Pafuri 1	Border Camp	Doctor's House/Mockford House	18-Jan-24	21-Jan-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Pafuri 2 (mid-week)	Border Camp	Doctor's House/Mockford House	22-Jan-24	25-Jan-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Letaba 2	Main Camp	Bungalows	26-Jan-24	28-Jan-24	2	R4 700,00	25%
Talamati 3	Bush camp	Cottages	01-Feb-24	04-Feb-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Punda Maria 3 - Extreme	Main Camp	Bungalows	01-Feb-24	03-Feb-24	2	R4 700,00	25%
Pretoriuskop 3	Main Camp	Bungalows	02-Feb-24	04-Feb-24	2	R4 700,00	25%
Shimuwini 4	Bush Lodge	Cottages	08-Feb-24	11-Feb-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Punda Maria 4 - Extreme	Main Camp	Bungalows	09-Feb-24	11-Feb-24	2	R4 700,00	25%
Crocodile Bridge 4	Main Camp	Bungalows	09-Feb-24	11-Feb-24	2	R5 920,00	25%
Shingwedzi 4	Main Camp	Bungalows	09-Feb-24	11-Feb-24	2	R4 700,00	25%
Pafuri 5a (mid-week)	Border Camp	Doctor's House/Mockford House	11-Feb-24	14-Feb-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Biyamiti 5 (mid-week)	Bush Camp	Cottages	12-Feb-24	15-Feb-24	3	R6 100,00	25%
Pafuri 5b	Border Camp	Doctor's House/Mockford House	15-Feb-24	18-Feb-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Bateleur 5	Bush Camp	Cottages	15-Feb-24	18-Feb-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Olifants 5	Main Camp	Bungalows	16-Feb-24	18-Feb-24	2	R4 700,00	25%
Sirheni 6	Bush Camp	Cottages	22-Feb-24	25-Feb-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Punda Maria 6 Normal	Main Camp	Bungalows	23-Feb-24	25-Feb-24	2	R4 700,00	25%
Pafuri 7	Border Camp	Doctor's House/Mockford House	01-Mar-24	04-Mar-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Pafuri 8a	Border Camp	Doctor's House/Mockford House	10-Mar-24	13-Mar-24	3	R5 800,00	25%
Pafuri 8b	Border Camp	Doctor's House/Mockford House	14-Mar-24	17-Mar-24	3	R5 800,00	25%

Camping option: Cost of bungalow option less R550.00

## THE WAY WE FEED BIRDS IN OUR GARDEN HAS BEEN CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR DECLINE.

### SIX BIRD-FEEDING MISTAKES YOU'RE PROBABLY MAKING, ACCORDING TO EXPERTS

There are many ways we can attract wildlife to our outside spaces, from not mowing our lawns as much, to growing butterfly-friendly plants. But when it comes to our feathered friends, sometimes our best intentions can accidentally lead to bird-feeding mistakes – from using the wrong food to not cleaning their feeders.

We've spoken to experts to reveal the common bird-feeding mistakes you're probably making. But there's good news: there are simple ways you can make your garden a safer place for birds. We'll tell you how.

Feeding garden birds properly is vital to some populations' survival.

#### 1. Not keeping feeders clean

Dirty feeders cause disease to spread.



Credit: Shutterstock /

A sign of trichomonosis in chaffinches is matted plumage and uneaten food around their beak

Findings from the 2023 RSPB Big Garden

Birdwatch reveal that a parasitic disease called trichomonosis is decimating our bird population. Bird food, feeders and drinking water in our gardens are contaminated with this disease. Birds badly affected by it, such as greenfinches and chaffinches, are in decline as a result. But there are things we can do to combat it.

“Remember to clean your feeding stations regularly, as this is something that is often overlooked,” says Dani Hawkins from CJ Wildlife. “Many parasites thrive on filthy





feeders, including trichomonosis. So, feeders need to be cleaned to ensure that bacteria doesn't mount up and make our birds sick."

### **Clean bird feeders once a week**

Helen Moffat of the RSPB advises people to clean bird feeders once a week. "Use a mild anti-bacterial cleaner, such as washing-up liquid, and nothing as harsh as bleach-based products," she adds. "There are some purpose-made cleaners out there too. Save cleaning equipment to use just for this job and do it outside where possible – anything you can do to make the process as hygienic as possible."

The RSPB also advises that if you see sick birds where you are feeding, temporarily stop feeding for at least two weeks and leave bird baths dry.

### **How to spot poorly birds in your garden**

Not sure what a bird sick with trichomonosis looks like? The RSPB says that signs may include fluffed-up plumage, laboured breathing and lethargy (the bird might not fly away if you approach, for example). Birds with trichomonosis might also regurgitate food and have difficulty swallowing. They may have a swollen throat or stretch their necks in discomfort.

The RSPB says finches may have matted, wet plumage around the face and beak, and uneaten food in and around the beak. Visit the [RSPB website](#) for further information if you're concerned.

## **2. Leaving too much food out**

If your bird feeders are very busy, then you can fill them up more.

Another way to reduce the risk of bird disease spreading is eliminating the build-up of food waste.

"It's better to put food out little and often," says Helen Moffat from the RSPB. "The issue around overfilling is that food can go off, particularly in hot or wet weather. You don't want to put out vast amounts unless you know your garden birds are going to eat it all fairly quickly."

"When birds need lots of energy for nest-building and then to feed broods, you might

find that your feeders are emptying almost as quickly as you can fill them, in which case, fill them right up.”

She adds that if you are just starting to put food out, birds can take a while to find new sources, so put out smaller amounts until you find the right level that works.

It’s also wise not to leave food out overnight, as this can also attract rodents to your garden.

### **Think about birds’ food shortages**

“While people often put out seed mixtures for birds in winter, food shortages can occur anytime of the year,” Rob Stoneman, director of landscape recovery for The Wildlife Trusts, tells us. “Extreme weather, which caused drought and wildfires last summer, affects food sources for lots of animals – including birds.”

Keeping an eye on local and regional weather conditions with this in mind will help you decide if you need to put additional sources of food out for the birds.

### **3. Feeding bread to birds**

Bread can lead to malnutrition



Credit: CJ Wildlife

Specially formulated peanut butter is a much better source of nutrition for birds.

We’ve probably all been there. Rather than throwing stale bread away, we’ve broken it up and thrown it out for the birds. But regularly feeding bread to birds can lead to problems for them.



“Bread is high in carbohydrates, and therefore does not provide the right balance of nutrients that birds need to thrive,” says Dani Hawkins of CJ Wildlife.

“Garden birds require a protein-rich and high-calorie diet. Ideally, they should be eating a combination of insects such as mealworms, seeds such as sunflower hearts, peanuts and fat.”

### **“Garden birds require a protein-rich and high-calorie diet”**

Hawkins adds that while bread isn’t directly poisonous, too much of it can act as an “empty filler”. This means that over time it will leave birds suffering from conditions associated with malnutrition. “Unfortunately, once malnutrition has set in, it can be incredibly difficult to reverse the effects.”

Bread also contains considerably fewer calories than birds need to survive. Hawkins says that they may not have enough energy to stay warm during winter, sustain young chicks or evade predators.

“A chick with a stomach full of bread can freeze to death overnight.”

Don’t panic, though, as much of the damage done by bread can be reversed if you change your bird-feeding habits.

You should avoid putting out fat and whole peanuts during the warmer months when birds have chicks in the nest, as these items can pose a choking threat, the RSPB tells us.

### **What should birds be eating?**

The best food for birds is specially formulated with our feathered friends in mind, says Hawkins.

The Wildlife Trusts’ Rob Stoneman recommends seed mixtures high in protein, with foods like black sunflower seeds and dried fruits, which will help adults feed young birds preparing to leave the nest.

High-calorie options, such as CJ Wildlife’s peanut square cake, fat balls or peanut butter for birds are all easy and affordable ways to make sure your garden visitors are getting plenty of calories. A high-energy seed mix, such as CJ Wildlife’s High-



Energy No Mess Bird Seed, is an all-round favourite of many bird species, while dried mealworms are loved by robins in particular.

#### 4. Forgetting to provide water

A bird bath is important for their feathers



Credit: Chris Gomersall RSPB Images

Don't forget to replenish bird baths with fresh water.

Watching birds splash about in a bird bath will bring joy to just about anyone.

Bathing regularly helps birds to keep their feathers clean so they can keep flying properly. But providing fresh water is more important than you might think.

Helen Moffat from the RSPB says a big bird-feeding mistake people often make is forgetting to put out fresh water for the birds.

“Birds need to drink and bathe daily – especially in hot weather,” she says. “So fresh water can literally be a lifesaver in the summer.”

It's important to also keep this water clean – change it every day and make sure you don't site it too near your feeders, as it could become contaminated with food. It's a good idea to give the bath itself a good scrub regularly too, especially if it receives lots of visitors.

## 5. Putting feeders in the wrong place

Birds need protection and cover



Credit: CJ Wildlife

Place bird feeders near to shrubs, trees and bushes where they can seek cover.

If space allows on your property, it's useful for

birds to have a safe place to feed from (and bathe!) comfortably.

“Birds like cover,” says Helen Moffat at the RSPB. “So put your feeders near to areas where birds can quickly flit back and forth.”

If your garden is also visited by lots of neighbourhood cats, then consider how close they can get to the birds, too.

“It's important to put bird feeders in places where birds feel safe from predators, so make sure they aren't too low,” says Rob Stoneman of The Wildlife Trusts.

### Your lawn can help to feed birds

One major grass-cutting mistake people make is mowing their lawns too short. The Wildlife Trusts encourages people to let their grass grow long in spring, which will help provide habitat for insects – a vital food source for birds.

“Building a pond is also a brilliant way of helping wildlife at home and even the smallest water feature can be transformational for birds, bugs and small mammals,” adds Stoneman.

The Wildlife Trusts and RHS are running a campaign called ‘Bring your lawn to life’ to encourage gardeners to reimagine their lawns and help wildlife. For more information, visit [wildaboutgardens.org.uk](http://wildaboutgardens.org.uk)

## 6. Not using the correct feeder Different species have different needs



Credit: Chris Gomersall RSPB Images

Robins prefer table feeders and eating lower to the ground.

Not all birds feed in the same way, so your best efforts at nurturing your feathered friends might not be as successful as you'd hoped.

“Ensure that you use the correct type of feeder for the birds in your garden, or that you want to attract to your garden,” says Dani Hawkins from CJ Wildlife.

“Blackbirds and robins are ground feeders, and prefer tables or lower surfaces, whereas tits and sparrows prefer to feed from hanging stations. Setting up an array of feeders will help you care for a wide range of birds.”

### Did you know?

There's a quick window safety tip that could save millions of British birds from crashing into our houses each year. Read our article on how window stickers can deter birds from flying into our windows, and how to apply them properly for the best results.

Written by Rosanna Spence (she/her)

Published: 28 April 2023



## THUNDERBIRD NEWS

Thunderbird news takes a different form this month.

### Hornbill Fights with Eagle in Tree

by [Mohammed Kathrada](#) April 12, 2023, 4:00 pm **21.4k**Views

A grumpy tawny eagle takes out its frustration on a group of ground hornbills; angered by this, the hornbills seek out the eagle and take revenge.

[Andi Dill](#), a guide at Royal Malewane, recently was witness to this incredible sighting and shared it with LatestSightings.com.

“As an avid photographer, I always have my camera

ready to capture special moments. On an early morning drive. We were busy tracking a leopard in the central and northern parts of the reserve. We then came



across a bull elephant. Brendan Davis, an apprentice guide, then spotted a ground hornbill family”. Ground hornbills are fascinating creatures and are classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). With their deep, booming calls that can be heard from far away, they are known as the largest species of hornbill. Ground hornbills are also monogamous and have a unique social structure where they live in family groups consisting of a breeding pair and their offspring.

“As we were observing the hornbill family, a Tawny Eagle suddenly swooped down and attacked them. It was surprising to see the eagle take on a family of ground



hornbills, who are known for their aggressive nature. The hornbills were not going to let the eagle get away with its attack and started to confront it.”

Tawny eagles, with their striking plumage and piercing eyes, are frequently seen in the African bush. They are opportunistic hunters and will prey on a variety of animals, including birds, lizards, and small mammals.



“This gave us an incredible photographic opportunity to witness these two species going at it. After a prolonged tussle, the Tawny Eagle finally flew off, defeated.”



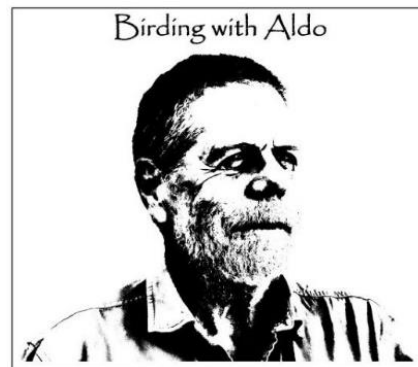
“This sighting was incredibly rare, and I don’t think I’ll ever witness anything like it again. If you’re planning a safari, my advice is to have patience and enjoy the bush at your own pace. You never know what you might come across. And if you do get lucky

enough to witness a special sighting like this, treasure it and appreciate the natural world around you.”

## BIRDING WITH ALDO ONLINE BIRDING COURSES

*Some of us attended Aldo's recent course on waterbirds. In case you missed the article in the last newsletter, here is a repeat of the details.*

**Birding with Aldo** is now three years old, dating from early Covid days, and I now offer an incredible 13 courses. I cater for beginners and more advanced birders. My online Zoom courses comprise 1-3 sessions, are small, interactive, engaging with annotation, polls, comparisons, videos, vocalisations and chat room. Each session is person-centred, focussing on how to become a birder rather than trying to rote-learn endless characters for each species. I have devised unique protocols which will change your birding. You can review any session afterwards through a time-limited link to recorded sessions and you receive a permanent pdf copy.



My courses are **SUPERB** value for money, with discounts for pensioners.

To book a course, go to my website [www.birdingwithaldo.com](http://www.birdingwithaldo.com) or if you have queries please contact me directly on [birdingwithaldo@gmail.com](mailto:birdingwithaldo@gmail.com)

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## ANIMAL CONSCIOUSNESS: WHY IT'S TIME TO RETHINK OUR HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH

by Patricia MacCormack, The Conversation



Credit: Aleksey Mnogosmyslov/Shutterstock

While we may enjoy the company of companion animals or a fleeting encounter with wildlife, many people believe humans have a superior

consciousness of the world we live in.

Every now and then, though, new study findings about the surprising intelligence of other animals reignite this debate. Recently, two German philosophers, Professor





Leonard Dung and Ph.D. candidate Albert Newen, published a paper questioning whether we are coming at the issue from the right angle, or even asking the right question at all.

In their article, the authors say we should stop approaching animal consciousness as a "do they/don't they?" question. Rather, they suggest we should measure nonhuman consciousness on a spectrum alongside human consciousness.

In my research, I have explored whether we should stop trying to compare other animals with humans to gauge which ones are "worthy" of better treatment. My work doesn't oppose the study of animal consciousness, it simply asks people to reflect on the reasons we are asking these questions.

There may be other forms of consciousness we cannot understand. Nonhuman animals' precise relationship to human consciousness doesn't make them less important.

## **A different take**

We still do not know what makes the difference between being alive and having consciousness.

In humans, the definition of consciousness is vague and speculative. For example, the Glasgow coma scale measures the expectation that a patient will regain consciousness, rather than defining its presence or absence. Neurologists can't agree on what part of the brain consciousness is generated in—yet we try to measure it in nonhuman animals.

Even within the animal rights movement, there is conflict between those who defend animals based on their similarity to humans (moral theorists), and those who claim nonhuman animals have a right to exist regardless of our view of them (abolitionists).

The problem is, both perspectives discuss our treatment of animals from a human perspective. In her book *In Neither Man Nor Beast*, abolitionist Carol J. Adams calls this the "arrogant eye" of anthropocentrism—the distortion of our understanding of the world into models suited for humans.



Of course, as humans we can only really look at the world from a human perspective. But anthropocentrism presumes there to be only one "objective" perspective—the human one—and that Earth's other organisms should measure up as close to humans as possible in order to be granted the right to exist. This implies that many nonhuman animals require no ethical consideration at all when it comes to their welfare.

A longstanding paradox is the status of animals used in research. They are similar enough to stand in for humans, yet a lot of people don't want to think about what this means for their consciousness of pain and suffering. It seems an uncomfortable inconsistency.

Equally, many scientists working in AI, stem cell research and other fields are trying to reduce the exploitation of nonhuman animals in medical development—for example, the Dr. Hadwen Trust, whose research does not involve testing on animals.

It's important to understand our motives behind measuring animal consciousness. A lot of people seem to want to want to measure it to alleviate their guilt, by "othering" the animals we harm from those we find appealing or similar to ourselves. Studying animal consciousness can help us empathize with nonhuman animals, but it can also help people avoid grappling with the ethics of animal testing.

## **A whole new world**

I believe we need to stop asking questions about animal consciousness that are based on a hierarchy.

Octopi and other cephalopods have nervous systems throughout all their limbs. Their bodies are not a separate thing controlled by a brain or central nervous system.

So, measuring consciousness using a central nervous system like ours may lead us to believe they do not have pain capacity or even sentience. Yet behavioral studies show they express both, just differently to humans.

Many animals express reproductive behavior in ways completely alien to humans. For example, the female mole has an ovoteste and, outside of mating season, behaves like a male. (Mole ovotestes release eggs like typical ovaries but also have



testicular tissue to one side that releases large amounts of male sex hormones.) Similarly, clown fish change from male to female, and kobudai fish change from female to male.

These species show how rich and diverse the animal kingdom is. Viewing them and other animals as "lesser" versions of ourselves denies the rich and complex diversity of the animal kingdom.

We are in an age which, to an extent, embraces feminism, anti-racism and anti-ableism. Perhaps it is also time to include "speciesism" in our discussions about ethics—since valuing some species over others is a form of prejudice.

Over time, the public has slowly broadened its criticism of animal testing from great apes to baboons, mice and even water fleas. This shows we have placed animals in a hierarchy which makes experimenting on some acceptable and others less so. Philosophers have been raising concerns about the ethics of this since the sixth century BC.

This is also the age of the Anthropocene, the period during which human activities have affected the environment enough to create a distinct geological change. We live in a climate and nature crisis of our own making.

If we are serious about revolutionizing our use of the Earth, it is time to rethink our need to classify all forms of life. We may find this is not about curiosity, but a desire to vindicate our history of dominion over the Earth. How about we exchange hierarchy for care? The future may depend upon it.

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## **EDITOR'S CHIRP**

The AGM was very successful – apart from the serious aspect of business, we had a lot of fun in Roy and Alex' beautiful garden. Thanks to all who contributed to this super occasion.

This newsletter is another 'big issue'. I wonder if it's not too big? There were so many great photos of the Aloe Farm trip, in particular, I didn't want to leave them out.





Please let me have any comments and/or criticisms. Is there too much about specific issues or fields (sorry, but I am deeply devoted to the tardigrades!)? Or too little about birds and birding?

It would be a great help to know what you, the readers, are interested in reading about, and even more of a help if you can write something to be included in the newsletter. It doesn't have to be perfect – a few notes can be turned into a short article and I'm happy to do that. Photos on their own are most welcome, as you can see from the great pics in this issue.

We are now in what seems to be the depth of winter, but the shortest day is behind us and we're heading in the right direction, i.e., towards the spring. I try to convince myself every year that winter is bracing and a good time to do things, but it gets harder by the year!

However, when you see the lovely pics of the Aloe Farm trip, you can see that there are indeed benefits to winter.

Please keep your eyes peeled for Debbie's news flashes and for Bev's WhatsApp and Facebook pages for even more birding news, particularly about upcoming events.

I hope you're all keeping warm and well and we all look forward to seeing you at the club meetings.

Ed.

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## Web Pages

Thanks to Alex for this fascinating story of devotion.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-64833175>

<https://www.msn.com/en-za/news/other/south-african-scientists-track-down-creature-from-250-million-years-ago/ar->



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This might be a bit of a blow to people (and film makers) with vivid imaginations!  
[Sorry, but the T. rex doesn't look anything like you think it does \(newatlas.com\)](https://www.newatlas.com/news/2023/01/17/sorry-but-the-t-rex-doesnt-look-anything-like-you-think-it-does/)

This fun gadget might not be available in SA – yet.  
<https://www.stuff.tv/features/bird-buddy-a-camera-fitted-bird-feeder-and-life-affirming-joy/>

Runners (and walkers!) beware of irritable predators.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-65601462>

Some more interesting news from the world of paleontology  
<https://www.thearchaeologist.org/blog/14-different-types-of-human-species>

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Account number 023 212 934

**CONTACT:**      [info@thecuckoobirdclub.org.za](mailto:info@thecuckoobirdclub.org.za)





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## NOTES

1. This newsletter is for members of the (Slightly) Cuckoo Bird Club only. It is not intended to be passed on to people outside the club.
2. To opt out of receiving mail from the Cuckoo Bird Club, please send an email to [dennis.townsend4@gmail.com](mailto:dennis.townsend4@gmail.com) with the title: **Opt Out/Unsubscribe**