slightly THE CUCKOO BIRD CLUB

Newsletter 183 October-December 2023

FORTHCOMING CLUB MEETINGS

Every third Tuesday of the month

Next Meeting: 16 January 2024

18h30 for 19h00

Wanderer's Club

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

CONTENTS

SPEAKERS

Organiser: Debbie Jennings

deb.jiq@gmail.com

Please watch Debbie's newsflashes for more info because speakers and dates may change.

DAY OUTINGS

Organiser: Dennis Townsend

dennis.townsend4@gmail.com

MID-MONTH OUTINGS

Organiser: Lester Niss

lestern256@gmail.com

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

TRIPS AWAY

Organiser: Marion Melville

marion@rbs.co.za

FROM THE CHAIR

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for a good and most enjoyable 2023.

All outings, meetings and trips were well attended; this is very rewarding for me personally.

Thanks to all the committee members for their time and efforts put in to ensure the club's success.

Have a good holiday season and all the best for 2024.

Stay safe.

Dennis Townsend

EDITOR'S CHIRP

Thanks to Alex and Roy and their elves, our End-of-Year get-together was a great success. There was an excellent turn-out; good to see some old and some new friends, and, of course, those we see quite often. We're looking forward to seeing you next year. Thanks, Lee, for the super photos (page 5).

A big thanks, too, to our contributors this month – Dennis, Jean-Claude, Leonie, and Heather. Without your support, the newsletter would be very much the poorer.

We're having a very odd summer, as I'm sure you've noticed. Let's hope the rain comes back and more regularly. Meantime don't forget the birdbaths!

I recently had a very ancient pair of Pentax bins serviced and repaired for a very reasonable price by Bill Bunn in Strydom Park. He was recommended by a couple of people in the club. His contact number is 0842054395.

You'll be receiving Debbie's newsflashes, Bev's WhatsApp and Facebook info and details of Lester's and month end walks from early next year. There will be details of upcoming trips and meetings and general birding info. Let us know at info@thecuckoobirdclub.org.za if you have a problem logging on.

I wish you a wonderful holiday season, with lots of good things. If you plan to travel – be careful out there! And may the force be with you. (Not the SAPS, though. We might need something more visible.)

END-OF-YEAR PARTY

Our Hosts,
Roy and Alex

Leonie Smith

PREVIOUS OUTINGS

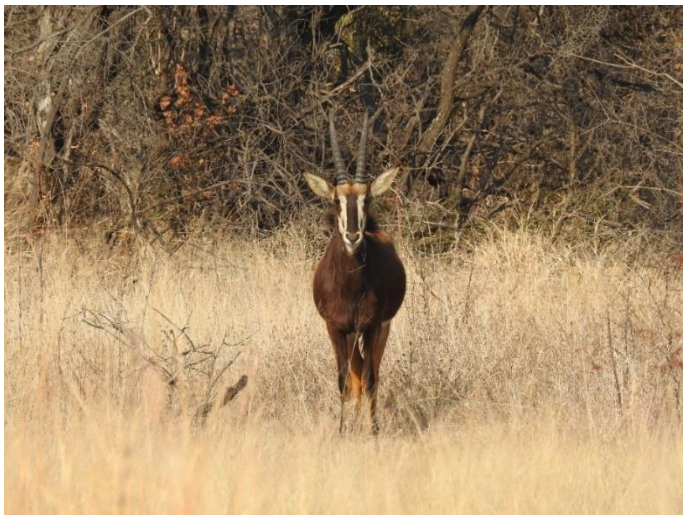
Sediba

September 2023

The photographer at work!

Dennis Townsend

Jameson's Firefinch



Ground-scraper Thrush

Magpie Shrike

Red-headed Weaver

Reed Cormorant

Common House Martin

Red-billed Firefinch

Pearl-spotted Owl

Malachite Kingfisher

Blue Waxbills

Willow Wilderness Park

October 2023

This was one of Lester's early morning outings. A fairly small park, easy to get to, with a lake (waterbirds) and, as you can see from Jean-Claude's list and Heather's photos, not a bad range of birds.

Observations: 25
Species: 25
Species (heard only): 0
Sent via BirdLasser

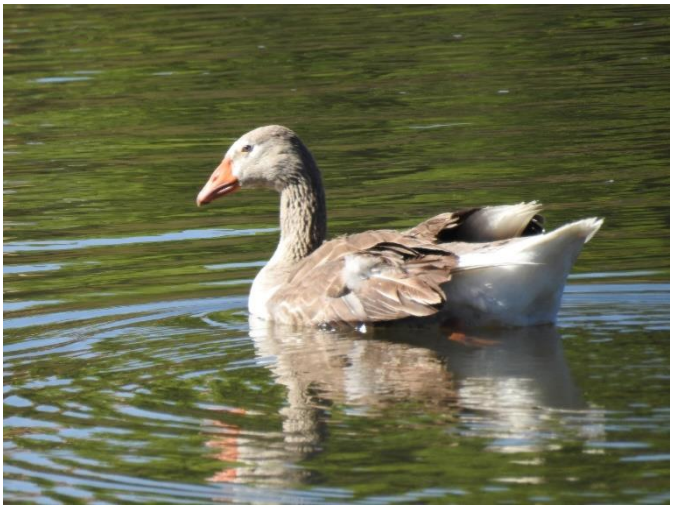
1. Hadada Ibis
2. Southern Masked Weaver
3. Common Myna
4. Crowned Lapwing
5. Black-collared Barbet
6. Egyptian Goose
7. African Hoopoe
8. Green Wood Hoopoe
9. Speckled Mousebird
10. Rose-ringed Parakeet
11. Southern Red Bishop
12. Crested Barbet
13. Fiscal Flycatcher
14. Cape Wagtail
15. African Sacred Ibis
16. Red-knobbed Coot
17. African Black Duck
18. Mallard
19. African Palm Swift
20. Dark-capped Bulbul
21. Grey Heron
22. Blacksmith Lapwing
23. Tawny-flanked Prinia
24. Black-chested Prinia
25. White-throated Swallow

Jean-Claude Biart

Stunning Morning

Birders birding

Mallard



Spur-winged Goose

Red-knobbed Coot

Grey Heron

Heather Darby

Woodmead

November 2023

Heather Darby

Angel's Valley

December 2023

Angel's Valley was a great location for the Birding Big Day, despite very hot weather.

We had fun and the birding was good, as our motto says – 20% Birding and 80% Fun.

Ten Slightly Cuckoo members participated, and two teams were entered: Jacobins 1 and Jacobins.

The Jacobins managed to record 62 species and the Jacobins 1 recorded 74 species. Final positions were Jacobins 1 at 281 and Jacobins at 292. In all, 330 teams recorded sighting with the winning team recording 325 species in the allotted 24 hour period.

Some of the special sightings were African Finfoot, Verreaux's Eagle, Grey-headed Bushshrike, Klaas's Cuckoo, Mocking Cliff Chat, Black Crake, Greater Kestrel, Diederik Cuckoo, Orange-breasted Bushshrike, Black Cuckoo, Red-chested Cuckoo, Southern Black Tit, Black-headed Oriole, and Violet-backed Starling.

Violet-backed Starling

Dennis Townsend

NESTING PENGUINS TAKE MORE THAN 10,000 MINI NAPS EVERY DAY

Jack Tamisiea

Chinstrap Penguins take more than 10,000 seconds-long naps during the day to remain vigilant while incubating their eggs.

Chinstrap penguin sleeping in the snow, Yankee Harbor, South Shetland Islands, Antarctica.

Credit: Marica van der Meer/Arterra Picture Library/Alamy Stock Photo

For soon-to-be Chinstrap Penguin parents, getting enough sleep is tough. Not only do the seabirds nest in crowded, noisy colonies, but they are also often on full-time egg duty when their partners head out to sea to forage for days. To keep their developing chicks safe from predators, the penguin parent who is left behind must remain vigilant around the clock.

Now scientists have figured out how they accomplish such a feat without becoming sleep-deprived: the feathery mamas and papas take more than 10,000 micronaps a day. The findings, published today in *Science*, reveal that these seconds-long naps add up to more than 11 hours of sleep per day, helping the seabirds snooze as they safeguard their nests.

According to co-lead author Paul-Antoine Libourel, a researcher at the Lyon Neuroscience Research Center in France who studies sleep across the animal world, the findings highlight how little we know about sleep in nonmammals, especially birds.

Named after their thin “chinstrap” of black feathers, Chinstrap Penguins (*Pygoscelis*

antarcticus) nest on rocky slopes along the Antarctic Peninsula and nearby islands. While the two-foot-tall adult penguins are safe from terrestrial predators, their eggs and hatchlings are tasty snacks for Brown Skuas (*Stercorarius antarcticus*), large gull-like predators with voracious appetites. Fellow Chinstrap Penguins can also destroy or dislodge one another's eggs as the new parents jostle for space on the overcrowded nesting ground.

To determine how the penguins keep their nests safe with seemingly little shut-eye, Libourel and his colleagues headed to a large chinstrap breeding colony on King George Island just north of the Antarctic Peninsula.

When penguin parents were swapping nesting and foraging duties, as they do throughout the roughly 37-day egg-incubation phase, the researchers captured one member of the pair and equipped it with sensors to measure the electrical activity of its brain. Tracking this activity indicates when a penguin's brain is in sleep mode. Before returning the penguin to its nest, the team also attached sensors to the bird's neck muscles to track head movements and a GPS monitor to its back to track activity at sea. They also stationed video cameras at several nests to directly observe the penguins' behavior.

In total, they kept tabs on 14 Chinstrap Penguins as they incubated eggs around the colony. From the videos, they observed rapid-eye movements and drooping heads when the penguins were standing or lying down.

These sleepy behaviors were backed up by the penguins' brain signals. The researchers pinpointed sleeplike activity in both hemispheres of the penguin's brain throughout the day. These bouts of sleep averaged only four seconds each. But the penguins performed these "microsleeps" more than 10,000 times per day.

According to Libourel, many other species have drowsy states straddling wakefulness and sleep. In humans the behavior is often called nodding off. But very few species, if any, utilize this sleep strategy full time. "While other animals do have some drowsy state, we were not expecting that the penguins could sustain such extreme sleep fragmentation continuously," Libourel says.

The brevity of Chinstrap Penguins' bouts of sleep is unprecedented, according to Jennifer Arnold, a biologist who studies the evolutionary ecology of seabirds at Pennsylvania State University and was not involved in the new study. "The findings extend what we know about avian sleep as the sheer extent to which these birds are using microsleep is remarkable,"

she says. In her own research, her team has observed terns utilizing short spells of eye closure, which may serve a similar function to the microsleep behavior of the penguins. She thinks these brief naps make perfect “evolutionary sense” because vigilance is vital for colonial nesting seabirds.

Chinstrap Penguins’ piecemeal sleep schedule also challenges the long-held belief that fragmented rest negatively impacts sleep quality. Instead, even the briefest snoozes may incrementally add up to high-quality slumber for Chinstrap Penguins, allowing them to essentially sleep on the job. “We all know that if we sleep one hour versus two or three or four, there is a cumulative effect of more sleep,” Libourel says. “And we suspect here that this is the same for the penguins.”

And now for:

THE PERFECT GIFT!

The following article was sent to us from SANCCOB:

Every year we challenge ourselves to find the perfect gift! Something meaningful and quite unique for the ones we love, to keep. This year, look no further for your loved ones – or even yourself – because you can adopt and name an African penguin and get a newly launched festive-theme certificate.

When you adopt a penguin, you will be playing a 'literal' lifesaving role. Your contribution will help us provide sufficient food, veterinary care, and rehabilitation for our patients. There are plenty of penguin personalities to choose from, which ensures that the selection process promises to be just as rewarding as the reaction of your loved one, upon receipt of this incredible gift! The process of a symbolic adoption is an easy one. Simply visit our **online penguin gallery** of birds in care and name your penguin. Once your contribution is complete, a beautiful, personalised gift certificate is delivered straight to your inbox!

We love hearing from our penguin parents so please stay connected.

By adopting this festive season, you enable our intervention to make the recovery and release journey of this incredible species possible.

Adopt A Penguin

‘Adopt’ and name a wild penguin – or choose one of our home pen birds which live permanently at SANCCOB because they cannot survive in the wild …

Makes A Great Gift for an Environmentally Conscious Friend – or for Yourself!

Help save this highly endangered species by adopting* a wild African penguin or penguin egg that will be rehabilitated and released back into the wild by our dedicated staff … or one of our ‘Home Pen’ birds that live permanently at our Table View and Gqeberha seabird centres because for various reasons, they cannot be released back into the wild.

Terms and Conditions

If you have any technical issues with your adoption process, please email: ninag@sanccob.co.za.

Choose Your Penguin

You can make a choice to adopt a resident bird or one undergoing rehabilitation.

Adopt one of the resident birds at SANCCOB for R1,000

You will receive a certificate of adoption, which includes a visual and details of your chosen penguin, as well as a special letter of thanks from ‘your’ bird.

Adoptions are valid for one year.

Choose Your Penguin

Adopt and name any penguin of your choice for R600

You will receive a certificate of adoption valid for one year, which includes a visual and details of 'your' penguin, as well as a special letter of thanks from 'your' bird.

Choose Your Penguin

Adopt a penguin egg for R300

Adopt an African penguin egg that will be hatched, hand-reared and cared for until it is ready to be released into the wild.

You will receive an official certificate of adoption.

Adopt a Penguin Egg

***Multiple adoptions of individual birds enable us to cover the full costs of caring for all the seabirds at SANCCOB; your contribution will form part of a collective pool of funds to provide food and veterinary treatment for all.**

Check out the gallery – penguins are such appealing birds!

Click on this: SANCCOB - SANCCOB for more info on the work of this wonderful institution.

BIRDING WITH A PURPOSE

BIRD TAKES ON TYPHOON FOR AN INSANE 700-MILE SKY-HIGH RIDE OF HIS LIFE

Bronwyn Thompson October 25, 2023

The research was published in the journal *Ecology*. Source: Ecological Society of America

High flyer: Streaked shearwaters generally stick to a maximum height of 100 m (328 ft)
(lin-sun-fong/iNaturalist/ (CC By SA 4.0)

In 2019, a bold male seabird threw caution to the wind, flying above Typhoon Faxai as the storm pummeled southeastern Japan. It was the start of an 11-hour, 1,146-km (712-mile) crazy journey, that took the bird 15,000 feet higher than normal, at three times its usual speed, on a ride that his species are quite good at avoiding. Happily, the bird survived and eventually returned to his feathered friends with quite the story to tell.

Thanks to GPS bio-loggers that had been attached to 14 adult streaked shearwater (*Calonectris leucomelas*) seabirds in August that year by Tohoku University biologist Kozue Shiomi to track nesting behaviors, scientists were lucky enough to have a record of this nutty nature-defying act, spotting a huge flight pattern anomaly that coincided with the storm.

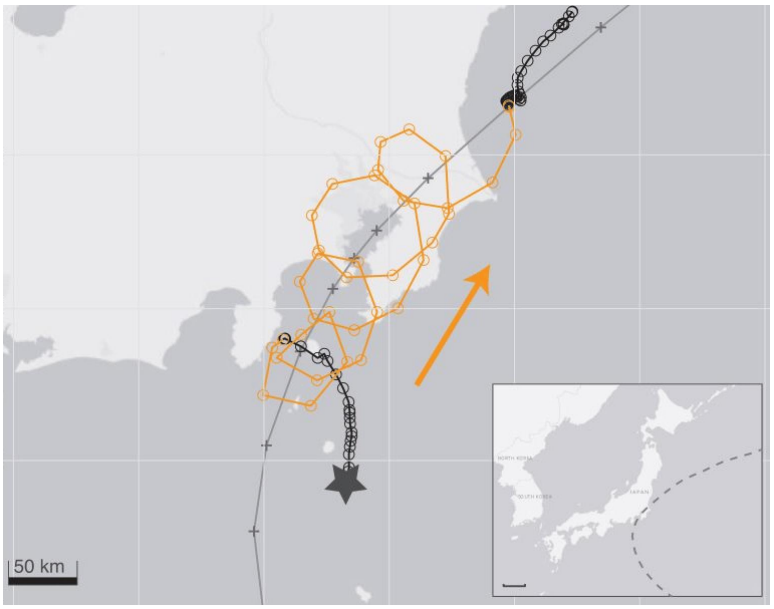
While it didn’t affect the other birds, one male managed to get caught up in the atmospheric drama, though researchers can’t say if he had a daredevil streak or was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. But one thing is for certain: the 585-g (1.3-lb) bird didn't have much choice but to 'go with the flow.'

Throughout the 11-hour epic flight, the bird completed five full loops in circles ranging from 50-80 km (31-50 miles) in diameter, which tracked with the typhoon’s rotation and movement. While the shearwaters usually fly below 100 m (328 ft), this brazen bird found himself in entirely new territory, soaring at an altitude of 4,700 m (15,420 ft).
For context, small aircraft fly between 600 and 3,000 m (2,000 and 10,000 feet).

All the while, the bird was zipping along at 90-170 km/h (56-106 mph). Given that these birds generally cruise at 10-60 km/h (6-37 mph), at his top speed, our aerial adventurer was probably flying on a wing and a prayer.

The bird took a less-than-scenic route over mainland Japan before being carried back out above the Pacific Ocean as the typhoon swung out to sea. At this point, with the storm’s power subsiding, the bird resumed normal transmission and no doubt had some explaining to do when he returned to his flock over the water near the nesting island.

The GPS timeline shows how the bird was, for a while, in the eye of the storm, but then ended up flying in larger loops outside of it. It also had a delayed departure time, which scientists note is unusual for the species.



Not as the crow flies: Scientists were able to track the loopy 11-hour journey of the GPS-tagged 'rider on the storm' **ESA.**

“The early evening departure of the bird from the breeding area was also unusual for this species, which usually departs for foraging during several hours before sunrise,” the researchers noted. “This might indicate that the bird attempted to circumnavigate the harsh conditions in advance but failed.”

They note that it’s impossible to know how much of this journey was planned, but it's just as likely the bird could have opted out of the trip but chose to ‘ride’ the storm instead.

Regardless, looking at this wild ride highlights the increasing risks that seabird populations could face as climate change drives more extreme weather events.

Pelagic birds have many different ways to avoid run-ins with severe weather systems, yet increasingly larger and more frequent storms will likely challenge their skill and resilience (Depositphotos)

Pelagic birds, like this streaked shearwater, spend most of their lives over the open ocean, flying to land only to breed. They have a wide range of inclement weather avoidance mechanisms and behaviors, varying from staying in the eye of a storm to ascending to high altitudes above the disturbance.

However, more frequent, larger hurricanes are making it an increasingly difficult task for many species of birds to combat.

Shiomi noted that more research into how pelagic birds are dealing with more extreme weather events is vital, to see if and how these species are responding to the rapid changes.

Like so many of you, I am a dedicated Birdler. These two newsletters from The Birdle Club will bring you up-to-date with this very interesting and informative app. If you aren't a Birdler yet, have a look – it's good fun! These two newsletters will tell you all about it.

BIRDLE #1

HELLO, BIRDLERS,

It's Lily here (half of the development team for Birdle) and I wanted to share with you the story of how Birdle first came to be!

It was the year 2022 and my family and I were absolutely loving Wordle. We were playing every day with what seemed like the rest of the world.

The changes in the world were leading to many changes in my life. I finally had time to go bird watching!

I had always been a bird lover but during this period I could spend the whole weekend in nature and truly immerse in the tranquility. But even in these peaceful moments as I listened to the delicate bird songs, one thing would niggle at me: what was that bird called again?

At the same time, my boyfriend Alberto (the other half of the Birdle duo) was wanting to create a game which was both inspiring and educational. He just didn't know what topic to choose! We sat down to brainstorm some ideas...

The stars had aligned for Birdle to be born.

We knew about the amazing work done at Birdlife South Africa, so we reached out to Andy Wassung, their (fantastic) Communications Manager, to see if they wanted to work together on Birdle. By a stroke of luck, Andy had a very similar idea: wouldn't it be great to make a Wordle for birds?

Slowly, over a year, we started designing and developing Birdle in our free time. We got our whole family involved to test out different versions! The wonderful team at Birdlife South Africa gave us crucial feedback on the game, as well as providing all the scientific knowledge for the birds and reaching out to the amazing photographers who allow us to use their beautiful photos.

It took us longer than we expected but we are so proud of the game today, and we are still working to improve it even further.

BIRDLE #2

HELLO BIRDLERS 🦜

We have a really exciting update to tell you about!

After being asked by many Birdlers, Alberto and I have been working super hard to finally bring to you the **Birdle Mobile App**!!! It will be available for free on both iOS and Android, so nobody gets left out 😃

The plan is to release it to the different stores by **mid-late December**, and **you can already pre-register**!

We are still working on several brand-new features for the app, including Birdle badges and daily reminders to never miss a new Birdle!

Birdle PRO

At the same time, we will also be releasing **Birdle PRO**: it will be available for a small monthly subscription (within the app) - we are hoping this will help with keeping Birdle going and cover its running costs, as well as with supporting all the great work done by **BirdLife South Africa** to conserve birds, their habitats and biodiversity.

And of course, becoming a **Birdle PRO** comes packed with other benefits for you:

- **History**: Play the **last 14 days** of Birdle - never miss another bird!
- **Difficulty:** HARD mode (are you tough enough?)
- **Highlight:** Select / Ignore bird names to ease your guessing process
- *and more to come!*

These features are on top of other new features that we will be making available to everyone (we couldn't leave the web players with nothing!) - I'll give more details about those in an upcoming newsletter.

We are so excited for all these updates and are looking forward to hearing from you all. What do you think? What new features would you love to see on Birdle?

PS: You will still be able to play Birdle via the web on www.birdle.co.za if you would prefer.

In the meantime, happy birdling!

Lily

Pre-register for our app by going to your app store!

Google Play Store: https://android.birdle.co.za

Apple Store: https://ios.birdle.co.za

CORNELL BIRDS OF THE WORLD

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Birds of the World

As you may have heard, thanks to a unique publishing partnership with the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund (JVBBF), the entire "Roberts 8" revision project will be published online at *Birds of the World*. This not only brings this authoritative Roberts 8 content into *Birds of the World,* but it opens **unlimited access to the resource** for anyone accessing from southern Africa.

Known as the world's leading ornithology research platform, *Birds of the World* contains **detailed life histories for every bird species and bird family in the world,** with data, maps, photos, videos, and sound recordings compiled by a global network of scientists and media contributors. Read more here.

FREE access to *Birds of the World*

This online resource is typically available by subscription, but the Roberts 8/Cornell Lab partnership means **anyone accessing from southern Africa is now eligible for FREE access to** *BIRDS OF THE WORLD***!** See access details below.

How to access Birds of the World

Create an Account/Sign In

To access Birds of the World, you will need a Cornell Lab ID. Just click the button above and click "Sign In" to create an account or use your existing eBird or Merlin username. Your local IP address will be detected and if in one of the partner countries it will qualify you for free access; do not go through the subscription process!

Questions and Answers

Which countries have free access?

Due to existing partnerships, *Birds of the World* is available at no cost to anyone accessing from the following countries, including: Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, the Caribbean, India, **Eswatini, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique,**

Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. More (including several in West Africa) coming soon!

Because the system detects 1) if you're logged in and 2) that your IP address is associated with one of these countries if you are on vacation or assignment in a different country the access will not work. You might wish to retain a subscription if that occurs regularly.

I already have a *Birds of the World* subscription. Can I get a refund?

No refunds, but please cancel your subscription so it doesn't renew. Reach out to customer support if you need help.

Who can I thank?

Please thank JVBBF for making this possible and BirdLife South Africa for their support. We select our partners carefully and encourage your support and involvement with their important work.

Why did I get this email?

You are receiving this email because you recently interacted with a Cornell Lab of Ornithology project or website and freely offered your email (and live or lived in the region). We never sell or buy email addresses. If you live outside of the region, please disregard this email.

Other questions?

Contact us at support@birdsoftheworld.org.

MEET THE 2024 BIRD OF THE YEAR

By Sheree Bega

The Bateleur, with its distinctive plumage and graceful flight pattern, is under threat (Photo by: Leonardo Mangia/REDA&CO/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

BirdLife South Africa has announced the majestic Bateleur, a regionally endangered eagle, as its Bird of the Year 2024.

Known as the Berghaan in Afrikaans, Ingqungqulu in Zulu and Ingqanga in Xhosa, the Bateleur is “famous for its striking appearance and remarkable aerial behaviour”, the group said.

“The Bateleur is a truly charismatic and eye-catching bird of prey, with its distinctive plumage — and combination of black, white and vibrant red-orange on the face and legs,” BirdLife said of the species that is equally at home in the bushveld of the Kruger National Park and the arid Kalahari.

The eagle’s English name, Bateleur, was coined by François Le Vaillant, a famed 18th-century French explorer, writer and ornithologist, and is said to be French for a “tumbler” or “tightrope walker”. This “aptly describes this bird’s graceful, aerial acrobatics”, according to BirdLife.

“It’s isiZulu name, ingqungqulu, is onomatopoeic, referring to the sounds of battle drums due to the species’ relation to war in the Zulu culture. Also very fittingly, its scientific name, Terathopius ecaudatus, is a celebration of its marvellous face, and its short tail,” it said.

The Bateleur is sexually dimorphic, meaning that males and females can be differentiated based on their plumage or appearance. This is most easily done when they are in flight by

looking at their underwing pattern.

“Males have all-black secondary and inner primary feathers, while females have broad white bases to these feathers,” BirdLife said.

Bateleurs are, however, in trouble, being classified as regionally endangered with an estimated population reduction of more than 50% over the past 40 years. The regional population size is estimated at fewer than 1 000 mature individuals.

The non-profit bird conservation organisation said it is suspected that habitat transformation has led to a decrease in their available prey base, especially outside protected areas. The tendency of Bateleurs to scavenge, too, puts them at particular risk from indiscriminate poisoning, especially by small stock farmers.

Illegal killing for use in the muti trade is another recent trend which needs further investigation.

The 2023 Bird of the Year is the Cape parrot.
Mail and Guardian
7 November 2023

A MOUSE-FREE MARION ISLAND

Thank you very much for your kind donation to the Mouse-Free Marion project.

Your support is greatly appreciated and helps to progress this important endeavour.

The project will make a real difference to the seabirds and the ecology of Marion Island and leave a lasting conservation legacy.

Please find attached a certificate of appreciation.

We look forward to your continued interest in the project.

Thanks again and kind regards,

Robyn Adams

PALALA

In November Heather went to a private reserve in the greater Waterberg area, next to Lapala.

The reserve is ideal for walking or driving around and no life threatening wildlife, unless you are concerned about snakes. Oh! And there's a resident leopard (not seen).

She sent us the following photos.

Heather Darby

GOLDEN MOLE THAT SWIMS THROUGH SAND IS REDISCOVERED IN SOUTH AFRICA AFTER 86 YEARS

Published: December 5, 2023

The De Winton's golden mole was last seen in 1937 on the north-western coast of South Africa, and later declared officially lost. This iridescent blind mole with hearing superpowers evades contact with humans and "swims" through sand dunes, making it very difficult to locate. But in November 2023, a team of conservationists and geneticists from the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Stellenbosch University and the University of Pretoria found the mole after tracking its environmental DNA through the sand dunes. Molecular biologist Samantha Mynhardt was part of the team that found the mole. We asked her about it.

A tunnel used by the De Winton's golden mole in Port Nolloth, South Africa.

How did this mole species stay 'lost' for so long?

Golden moles are elusive little animals that spend nearly their entire lives underground. They are very seldom seen by humans. Some species will occasionally come to the surface to forage on insects, typically only at night. In most cases, the only sign of golden mole activity is a raised ridge on the surface of the ground, indicating a shallow tunnel

underneath. For the sand-dwelling species, such as De Winton's golden mole (*Cryptochloris wintoni*), even these ridges are hard to find, since the subsurface tunnels collapse in the soft sand.

De Winton's golden mole has been severely affected by diamond and mineral mining activities on the South African west coast and we suspect that the population has declined substantially over the past century. The species was last detected in 1937 at the small harbour town of Port Nolloth on the north-western coast of South Africa. For the next 86 years, it eluded scientists, probably because of difficulties in locating and trapping it and because a similar looking mole, Grant's golden mole (*Eremitalpa* granti), was still present in the area.

How long does a species have to be missing before it's said to be extinct?

Lost species are those that have been lost to science for at least 10 years, and often much longer. Extinct species are different: a species is presumed extinct when it has not been detected for more than a generation of its lifetime, despite exhaustive surveys of its habitat. Although De Winton's golden mole had not been seen in over 80 years and was presumed extinct, no comprehensive searches had taken place and therefore it was still considered "lost".

How did you rediscover the mole?

In 2020 we conducted a pilot study in Lambert's Bay, where De Winton's sister species, the endangered Van Zyl's golden mole (*Cryptochloris zyli*), lives. This study showed that our techniques for detecting golden moles would work.

In July 2021, we began our expedition along the west coast to Port Nolloth, the only site where De Winton's golden mole had ever been found. We surveyed sites along a 300km stretch of coastline, from the Groen River mouth northwards to Alexandra Bay. Our team of five, including border collie Jessie and I, conducted surveys on foot for a week, exploring 18km of dune habitat every day. Jessie had obviously never encountered a De Winton's golden mole before and was not trained to sniff out the species. However, she had been trained on other golden moles and we knew she would indicate to us if she picked up the scent of these more common species. When the team found golden mole tunnels, and

Jessie wasn't interested, we had a good idea that we had found something "new".

How did you collect the mole's environmental DNA?

We collected over 100 soil samples from the insides of their underground tunnels. Animals shed their DNA into their environment, typically in the form of skin cells, hair, excretions, and secretions. This environmental DNA (eDNA) is so tiny it is invisible to the human eye. We later extracted the eDNA from the soil in the lab, and barcode-sequenced it. The DNA sequence matched a De Winton's reference sequence, which had been generated in 2010 from a museum specimen housed at the Ditsong National Museum of Natural History.

What made you go looking for this mole?

I had been looking into alternative non-invasive means of studying golden moles, having faced the immense challenge of trapping them in nature to collect genetic samples. The Endangered Wildlife Trusts's Drylands Conservation Programme received funding from Re: wild, a non-profit organisation founded by a group of renowned conservation scientists together with Leonardo DiCaprio, who had listed De Winton's golden mole as one of the world's Most Wanted Lost Species. So, we teamed up to search for this mole.

Though many people doubted that De Winton's golden mole was still out there, we had good faith that the species had not yet gone extinct. We were convinced it would just take the right detection method, the proper timing, and a team passionate about finding it. We have now tapped into a way of finding other lost or imperilled species through eDNA tracking.

How many De Winton's golden moles still exist, do you think?

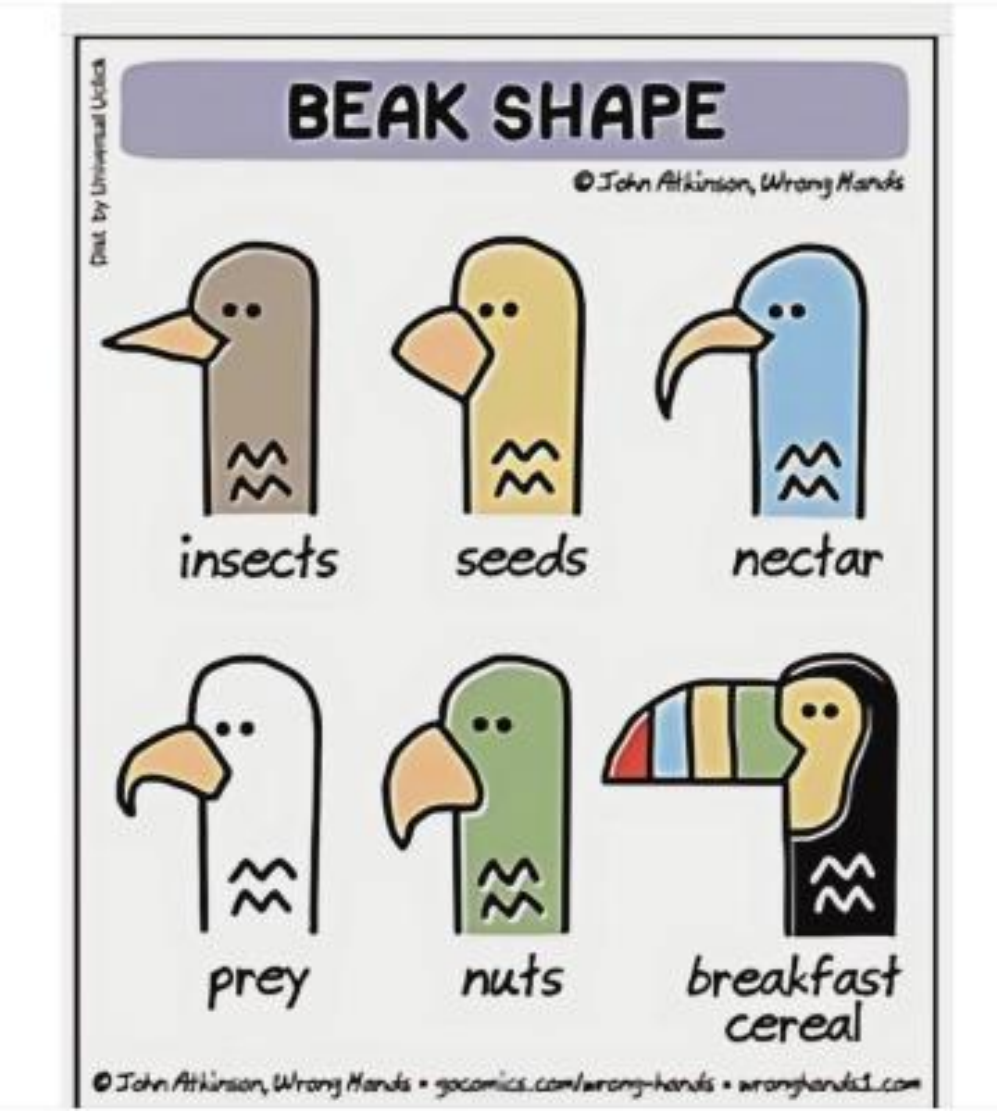
Golden mole activity was particularly abundant on the beach at McDougal's Bay in Port Nolloth, so it is likely there is a healthy population there. We also detected De Winton's golden mole presence at additional sites, indicating that the species may be more widespread. Unfortunately, we are not able to estimate the population size at this stage, but future research should aim to do so.

Although we were hopeful of finding eDNA evidence of De Winton's golden mole, we did not expect to see a live animal. But we did capture one golden mole at Port Nolloth and confirmed that this was a De Winton's golden mole after taking swabs and sequencing the DNA. We've since found a second De Winton's golden mole in the same area.

We are incredibly excited about this discovery. The rediscovery of De Winton's golden mole offers us the chance to learn more about this fascinating and poorly understood small mammal. It also offers an opportunity to reinvigorate conservation efforts for threatened golden moles and gives us hope of finding other species presumed to be extinct.

Daily Maverick

BIRD ID FOR THE 80%



WEB PAGES

General

Have a look at this fantastic short trailer about fungi.
https://vimeo.com/808069406

I knew this!
Short Naps Have Major Benefits for Your Mind | Scientific Americanhttps://youtu.be/e5-3rYnwk7o

Animals of the Safari Are More Afraid of Humans Than Lions - Scientific American

Photography and Photographic Equipment

One for the Christmas stocking – or not!
Take your birding to an exciting new and immersive level (newatlas.com)

Another one for the stocking?
The Best Birdwatching Equipment Kit List (bradtguides.com)

Magnificent award-winning landscape photographs:
https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2023/nov/03/landscape-photographer-of-the-year-2023-in-pictures

Have a look at these beautiful shots of trees.
'Talking to Trees': Photographing the Expressive Nature of Trees | PetaPixel

Birds and Birding

For those who are thinking of travelling further afield, this book is a must.
Birds of east Africa: new book reveals their extraordinary diversity and changing behaviour (theconversation.com)

https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/millions-of-mosquitoes-will-rain-down-on-hawaii-to-save-an-iconic-bird/

https://www.livescience.com/animals/birds/stunning-footage-captures-tiny-birds-fight-for-survival-in-massive-saharan-sandstorm

Parrot communication

https://phys.org/news/2023-10-unique-voice-parrots-birds-flock.html

Here's how they do it!

Finding the genes that help kingfishers dive without hurting their brains (phys.org)

COMMITTEE

Chair	Dennis Townsend
Secretary	Mo Bellis
Treasurer	Alex Jennings
Day Outings	Bev Williams
Weekends Away	Marion Melville
Speakers	Debbie Jennings
Newsletter	Penny Clemson
News Flashes	Debbie Jennings

OFFICE BEARERS

Facebook Page	Bev Williams
WhatsApp	Bev Williams
Equipment	Lester Niss
Mid-month Outings	Lester Niss
Technical Support/Online Host	Mike Hamilton

BANKING DETAILS

Cuckoo Bird Club
Standard Bank Sandton City
Branch code 051 001
Account number 023 212 934

CONTACT: info@thecuckoobirdclub.org.za

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 with the title: **Opt Out/Unsubscribe**