



BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

February 2015

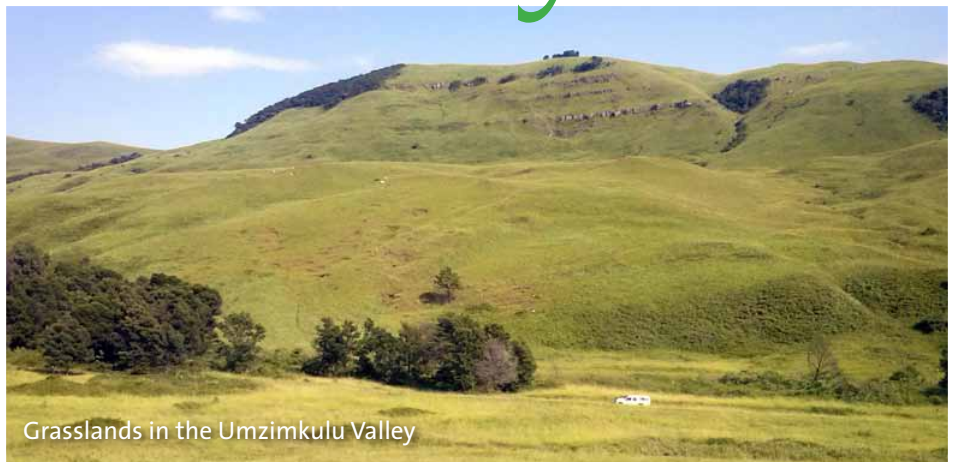
GURNEY'S SUGARBIRD ALBERT FRONEMAN



BLUE SWALLOW survey 2014

CONTENTS

- 1 Blue Swallow survey
- 2 Spring Alive Programme winners
- 3 Champions of the flyway
- 3 Bird of the year 2015: Blue Crane
- 4 Gardening for birds
- 5 SABAP2 Challenge
- 6 Vote for SA's favourite bird
- 6 Notice of AGM
- 6 Not in it alone
- 7 What's on?



Grasslands in the Umzimkulu Valley

One of the most important goals of the Blue Swallow Working Group (BSWG) is to increase our knowledge on the distribution of Blue Swallows *Hirundo atrocaerulea* in KwaZulu-Natal. With only 30–40 pairs remaining in South Africa it is crucial that we identify the sites where this Critically Endangered species occurs and ultimately ensure that these sites are monitored and conserved.

In 2013, a habitat niche model was developed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. The model uses a number of parameters based on data for known nest sites to model the location of potential sites with the same habitat and environmental characteristics where the species is likely to occur. A number of potential sites were identified and a team, with the help of a number of volunteers, set out to explore some of these areas during the week of 27–31 October 2014. Three areas were targeted, centred on Harding, Umzimkulu and Donnybrook in southern KZN. We started in the Harding area, which has a known population of approximately four pairs. During the week we managed to confirm that the birds still occur at one and possibly a second historical site, which would increase the current known population to six pairs. Subsequent visits during the breeding season confirmed breeding at one of the sites but the second site needs further investigation. We were less successful in the Ixopo area, which supports the core of the Blue Swallow population in South Africa. This population is intensively >>>

LUCKY DRAW WINNERS

A lucky draw was done for all BirdLife South Africa members who renewed their membership in December 2014, and we congratulate the five members who will receive a copy of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa* coffee-table book:

Jeanette le Roux
Veronica Spriggs
Chris Hills
Mike Heritage
Dianne King

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.

monitored by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife but there is a possibility that a few pairs are still overlooked. The last area we surveyed was the valleys and hillsides surrounding Umzimkulu, which used to be the border town between KZN and the former Eastern Cape homeland of the Transkei. This site is a relatively 'new' site for Blue Swallows and was discovered by chance when a young herd boy reported the species after being given a talk at his school. Since then this pair has been monitored annually but the surrounding grasslands which occur along a series of hillsides and valleys have never been thoroughly explored. During the survey we split up into four groups and we were all amazed to pick up Blue Swallows at different ends of the valley, representing an additional two to three pairs. A number of valleys still remain to be explored and we are hopeful that a previously overlooked population may still survive in the area.

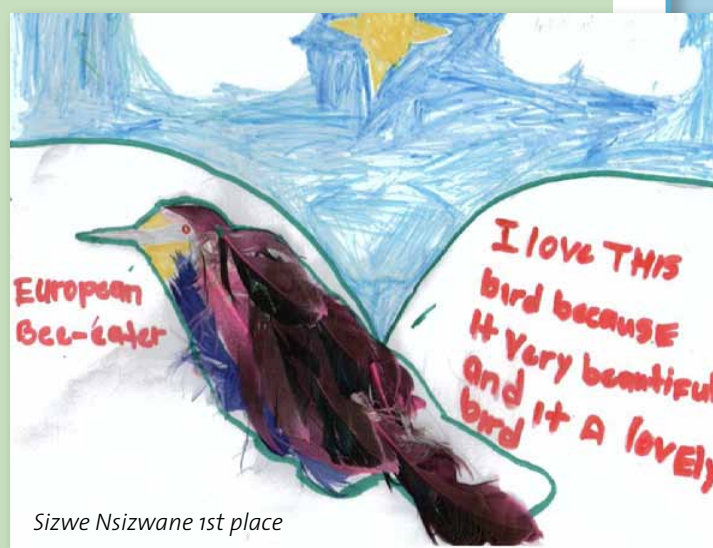
The surveys were a great success and provide some good news for a species in desperate trouble. We have expanded our knowledge of sites where the species occurs and an additional four pairs will increase the known population by almost 10 per cent. Furthermore, the surveys have shown the value of the niche model and we need to continue ground truthing other areas highlighted by the model. For Blue Swallows, knowing the location of every pair is critically important. The surveys were undertaken by BirdLife South Africa, the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, volunteers from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, BirdLife KZN Midlands and local farmers. We are especially grateful to the volunteers who helped and to Malcolm and Gail Gemmel for providing accommodation at Smithsfield Guesthouse in Creighton.

Nicholas Theron, Regional Conservation Manager:
KwaZulu-Natal, nicholas.theron@birdlife.org.za

South Africa competes in the **SPRING ALIVE PROGRAMME**

The Spring Alive Programme encourages children and adults to take action for African–Eurasian migratory birds. Partners and participants in Africa and Europe have been involved in protecting nesting sites, installing and repairing nest boxes, monitoring nesting locations, fitting tracking transmitters, wetland clean-ups and much more.

During the 2014 season, about 67 000 children across Europe and Africa learned about avian conservation across flyways as they engaged in Spring Alive migration-themed activities. The African Art Competition theme was 'Why I like the Spring Alive birds'. South Africa entered approximately 50 artworks and took First Place in the 10–12 age group (Sizwe Nsizwane from Nakekela Nature



Sizwe Nsizwane 1st place

Heroes Group in Van Reenen, KwaZulu-Natal) and Third Place in the 13–16 age group (Sboniso Dlamini from Laerskool Chrissie in Chrissiesmeer, Mpumalanga). Congratulations to Sizwe and Sboniso!

Though the 2014 season is officially closed, visit the Spring Alive website for more news, films and photos at www.springalive.net. For more information, please contact Kristi Garland on 083 227 0128 or kristi.garland@birdlife.org.za.



Sboniso Dlamini 3rd place

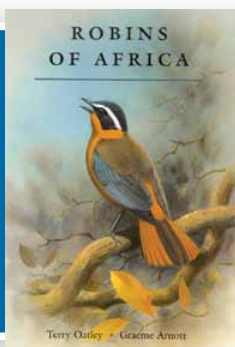
champions OF THE flyway

The Champions of the Flyway competition will take place in Israel on 25 March 2015. It is a 24-hour bird race with teams from all over the world racing around to see as many species as possible in the area. But, more importantly, it is being used as a vehicle to raise awareness for various conservation issues and also much-needed funds for these issues. Read more at www.champions-of-the-flyway.com/the-race/

Currently, there are 13 teams taking part in the competition, 12 of them from the Northern Hemisphere. And then there is Chris Lotz, Jason Boyce and Trevor Hardaker, who have been

selected to represent South Africa, the only Southern Hemisphere team that is taking part. Read more about the team at www.champions-of-the-flyway.com/birding-ecotours-2/

The team would like to show the rest of the world that South Africa is a force to be reckoned with. They will do their part to study up on the birds and do well in the competition, but they would also like to try and raise a lot of money for the conservation effort. Please consider donating to the cause through the website at www.justgiving.com/COTF-birding-ecotours/
Trevor Hardaker, hardaker@mweb.co.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

BIRD OF THE YEAR 2015 **BLUE CRANE**



WARWICK TARBOTON

The Bird of the Year 2015 initiative is proudly sponsored by Waltons. For more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za/events/bird-of-the-year

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gardening

FOR BIRDS

There's a group of birds that is really difficult to 'garden' for and that is the hole-nesters – the woodpeckers and barbets and all their followers such as Black Tits, Grey-headed Sparrows and Wrynecks.

I spent last weekend at a beach cottage in Southbroom and had the pleasure of walking in their conservancy area – thick dune forest. It reminded me that I lived in a rather tree-less area, which in turn is rather woodpecker and barbet-less! Oh yes, lots of folk on our estate plant trees, but these trees will not be barbet and woodpecker-friendly for years and years to come. Hole-nesting birds need mature trees where branches have broken off or died, leaving places where they can chip out tailor-made nest holes to raise their young. The following season one of the secondary hole-nesters will rush in and take over. Eventually the spot becomes too crumbly and is abandoned. One of my favourite tropical migrants, the Woodland Kingfisher, needs an old woodpecker or barbet nest in which to breed, although it is happy to use a natural cavity... if it can find one. If there were such a thing as Bird Estate Agents they would really have their work cut out finding suitable sites for the hole-nesters!

It is for this reason that I urge you lucky folk who have mature trees in your gardens not to be 'tidy' and cut out large, dead branches. If they are going to fall onto your house, of course they must go, but if it is simply a matter of aesthetics, think of the birds. Chicks reared in a hole are in the nest for much longer than those in a



African Hoopoe

DON COWIE

'normal' open nest. This is because they cannot stand on the edge of the nest and do little wing-stretching exercises like their cousins; their first look at the world outside is the day they leave and they must be strong enough to fly at their first attempt. And there is always the chance that you might attract a

Honeyguide – one of the lazy brigade who want a hole nest for their chick without the trouble of having to actually live in it!

The White Pear *Apodytes dimidiata* is a great 'all-rounder' that almost anyone can grow. Found naturally in both coastal and mist-belt forests, this evergreen tree can cope with heat and a moderate amount of frost – giving up only if it is too dry and the frost is severe. At the moment, the trees in my area are covered with masses of small, white flowers with a delightful scent. Insects find it irresistible and so, in turn, do all the small insectivores. Then, as autumn approaches, bunches of fruit will appear to the delight of the frugivores. Trees in other areas are already groaning under their load of black fruits held in a little kidney-shaped cup, red in most areas but black in coastal Zululand. Flowering and fruiting times definitely vary considerably country-wide, depending on rainfall and temperature. Although the White Pear can reach great heights in some natural habitats, in a garden situation it forms a delightful medium-sized shade tree – 10 metres is the tallest I have seen in 'captivity'.

Sally Johnson, sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com

Attention BirdLife South Africa members:

Please use your membership number as a payment reference when paying your membership fees.

THE GREATER KRUGER NATIONAL PARK SABAP2 challenge



Congratulations to all who played a part in the Kruger National Park 2014 challenge. The targets set by the Animal Demography Unit (ADU) were both met, one in early November and the other in early December.

The 2015 challenge is now open to all atlasers and we start again from scratch. Every single pentad in the entire area is a target and we need to cover as many as possible at least once during the year to meet our new challenge of 400 pentads.

The 'Turning Kruger Green' challenge will remain open until the end of 2016 and so far good progress has been made. All pentads within the project area must be atlased a minimum of four

times to turn green on the website map and any assistance is most welcome.

There is yet another extremely important side to this project and that relates to funding and donations, whether monetary or in kind. To find out how to make a donation, please contact Peter Lawson at peter@lawsons-africa.co.za

Thanks to Les Underhill of the ADU at the University of Cape Town for his guidance and encouragement and Sharon Thompson of SANParks Scientific Services, who was instrumental in convincing the ADU that it would be beneficial to all for this SABAP2 project to be registered as a scientific project.

Peter Lawson, Project Leader, peter@lawsons-africa.co.za



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www.birdlife.org.za/vote

Nearly 8 000 votes have been cast to date! Remember, voting closes on 28 February 2015.

Vote now at www.birdlife.org.za/vote

NOTICE OF THE 86TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA

The AGM will be held at 16h00 on Saturday 21 March 2015 at the Benvenuto Hotel and Conference Centre, 1 Pitsani Road, Kelland, Johannesburg, Gauteng. The registration form is available on the BirdLife South Africa website www.birdlife.org.za/events/flock. For more information, please call Nikki McCartney on 083 636 1060 or e-mail events@birdlife.org.za

not in it alone

To truly to be able to conserve biodiversity – habitats, species or ecosystems – one cannot solely rely on conservation NGOs to do all the work. After all, we all enjoy and benefit from what nature has to offer. Conservation requires support from members of the public, government, corporates, bird clubs and Trusts.

BirdLife South Africa is in an extremely fortunate position where we have support from all the avenues mentioned above. However, often we do not give enough recognition to those who give of their time, expertise or money.

One such person is Niall Perrins, who runs pelagic birding trips out of KwaZulu-Natal. These trips are all run to benefit the Albatross Task Force and our feathered pelagic friends. David Allan also kindly gives up his time to join these trips and impart his expertise to the guests.

Another amazing team is Trevor Hardaker and John Graham of Zest for Birds, great supporters of BirdLife South Africa and the Seabird Conservation Programme. They are well-known South African birders, but they never forget about the greater cause of conservation! For the past two years, they have organised a raffle to raise money for the annual Celebrate our Seas Festival (previously Save our Seabirds Festival). In 2013, they raised R26 000 and in 2014 they managed to more than double this and donated R71 000 to our seabird conservation work! This donation will go towards our African Penguin programme to support a contract for an intern with a marine law background to assist us with legal and permitting aspects of establishing a new African Penguin colony on the south coast.

Thanks John, Trevor, Niall and David, as well as the prize sponsors, for your continued support. We would not be able to achieve nearly as much without you guys!

Bronwyn Maree and Christina Hagen, Seabird Programme,
bronwyn.maree@birdlife.org.za



Left to right: John Graham and Trevor Hardaker from Zest for Birds presenting Ross Wanless (Seabird Conservation Programme Manager) with the donation of R71 000.

what's on?

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