



AFRICAN HARRIER-HAWK ALBERT FRONEMAN

# BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

April 2016



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## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL COMPETITION

The lucky draw has been done for BirdLife South Africa members who renewed their membership in February 2016. We congratulate the five members who will each receive a copy of the beautifully illustrated *Robins of Africa* coffee-table book:

David Green  
Juliet Rogers  
Renata Reiff  
Christine Mossop  
Bruce Tucker

Thank you to everyone who renewed their membership.  
*Shireen Gould, Membership Manager, membership@birdlife.org.za*

## help wanted

### Moutonshoek Protected Environment Public Participation Process

The intention to declare the Moutonshoek Protected Environment in terms of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 was recently published in the Western Cape Provincial Gazette. BirdLife South Africa would like to encourage its members to supply letters of support for this declaration, which has been made possible through funding from the WWF-SA Nedbank Green Trust.

Travelling along the R366 from Piketberg to Elandsbaai, one passes what looks like just another dirt road turn-off. This is the track into the valley of Moutonshoek, which is the start of the Krom Antonies River and houses many floral and faunal gems. A new species, *Diascia caitliniae*, was discovered in the valley a few years ago. It is classified as Endangered and occurs nowhere but in this valley. Moutonshoek is also an important place for bird conservation as the Endangered Blue Crane and African Marsh Harrier and the Vulnerable Lesser Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon and Martial Eagle have all been recorded in the area.

The Krom Antonies River flows through the valley and is the main source for the Verlorenvlei estuary, which is recognised internationally as a Ramsar wetland and an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. This secretive river is home to three threatened fish species: the Endangered Verlorenvlei redbfin, and the Cape galaxias and Cape kurper, both of which are classified as Near Threatened. Declaration of the Moutonshoek Protected Environment will afford a level of formal protection to the immediate area, in turn sustaining the important Verlorenvlei estuary, and will contribute significantly to securing this biodiversity.

A letter of support can be completed at [www.123contactform.com/form-1841038/Moutonshoek-Protected-Environment-Letter-Of-Support](http://www.123contactform.com/form-1841038/Moutonshoek-Protected-Environment-Letter-Of-Support) or downloaded from the BirdLife South Africa webpage

[www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/iba-projects/verlorenvlei-protected-area](http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/important-bird-areas/iba-projects/verlorenvlei-protected-area). Please return the completed form to [samantha.schroder@birdlife.org.za](mailto:samantha.schroder@birdlife.org.za)

**Dale Wright, Regional Conservation Manager: Western Cape,**  
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# LAB 2016 in kruger



ALBERT FRONEMAN



DYLAN VASAPOLLI

The biennial LAB, co-hosted by BirdLife South Africa and the Percy FitzPatrick Institute for African Ornithology, was held at Skukuza in the Kruger National Park in March and offered a full programme. Presentations covered various scientific and conservation-related topics, including summaries of research and report-backs on ongoing studies.

Proceedings began on Wednesday 9 March with two workshops, one on advanced bird identification by Faansie Peacock and the other on bird photography by Albert Froneman. The official jam-packed programme got going the next day and attendees were soon engrossed in the various discussion topics of both the Science and the Layman's LAB parallel programmes. A further highlight was the keynote addresses by Kruger stalwarts Dr Ian Whyte and Dr Alan Kemp. Joe Grosel's raptor and lark identification workshops proved very popular and both were oversubscribed.

Apart from the full days in the various lecture rooms, there was naturally time for some great Kruger birding. Thanks go to Henk Nel and Ernst Retief for setting up the BirdLife South Africa – Flock in Kruger 2016 BirdLasser challenge. Over the five days, 10 213 sightings were logged for 299 species and 101 full protocol atlas cards were

above *Sooty Falcon*

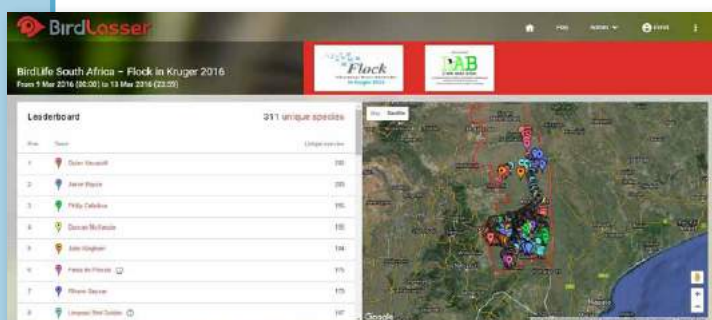
above, left *Attended by nearly 300 delegates, LAB 2016 was a perfect opportunity for both the scientific and the birding communities to talk about what we have in common: a passion for birds.*

submitted. These added significantly to the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2) dataset for Kruger. Two participants (Dylan Vasapolli and Jason Boyce, both from Birding Ecotours) managed to see more than 200 species each. A special mention must be made of the 43 teams and individuals who also participated in the challenge.

A trip report of the Skukuza area during Flock 2016, prepared by Jason Boyce of Birding Ecotours, can be downloaded from [www.birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-in-kruger-2016](http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-in-kruger-2016). Certainly the bird that got everyone dashing off was the Sooty Falcon seen near Lake Panic. Other Kruger specials seen included Martial, Tawny and Wahlberg's eagles, Saddle-billed Stork, African Openbill, White-crowned and Senegal lapwings, Crowned Hornbill and Retz's Helmet-shrike.

Thanks go to all the bird guides and experts for sharing their exceptional skills and knowledge. Thanks are also due to the SANParks staff, Cattle Baron restaurant, SANParks Honorary Rangers: West Rand Region, Birding Ecotours, Tembele Birding Safaris, keynote speakers, presenters, BirdLife South Africa staff and all the volunteers, especially Gisela Ortner, for their supreme efforts and for giving us so much of their valuable time. Lastly, thanks to all the delegates for their support of the conference and for making LAB 2016 an undoubted success!

Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Manager: Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme/Oppenheimer Fellow of Conservation, [conservation@birdlife.org.za](mailto:conservation@birdlife.org.za)



# gardening

## FOR BIRDS

Last month I extolled the virtues of pink plume *Syncolostemon densiflorus* and it is still gorgeous and filled with sunbirds. Not too big and easily controlled, this is an absolute must for a bird garden. A clump of *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora* standing tall next to it makes an artistic addition with its silvery-grey leaves tinged with pinkish-red edges. The tiny yellow flowers, appearing in a packed, grey, tubular inflorescence, offer delicious nectar – maybe a second course after the pink plume? The *Kalanchoe's* common names, white bird's brandy or voël-brandewyn, say it all!

Flowering in profusion at present is the crane flower *Strelitzia reginae*. It's a stately plant, with stiff green leaves and orange flowers with bright blue, arrow-like centres spearing the space between the upright orange petals. The blue platform is the obvious place for a bird to land on in order to sip the nectar, but the weight of the bird causes the 'arrow' to sag slightly and expose the sticky pollen. When the bird bends forward to enjoy the sweet treat, its breast feathers pick up some of the sticky pollen and then transfer it to the next flower when repeating the process. It's fun to notice that many of the older and wiser birds have learnt to bypass the blue arrow and sneak in from the side, thus avoiding getting their breast feathers soiled with pesky pollen. Maybe evolution in progress? For now, the plant can rely on juvenile birds for pollination, but what if they also learn to avoid getting sticky?

That reliable-under-any-conditions tree *Ziziphus mucronata*, commonly called the buffalo thorn, is now producing its generous crop of red-brown berries. These will remain edible for many months, providing a great supply of winter food for bulbuls and turacos, among others. Insectivores such as robins, warblers and shrikes are attracted by the many insects that consider this tree to be the perfect home. Not even I could call it a tree of great beauty,



but it is a fantastic survivor, coping with frost and drought, and it performs an excellent bird-attracting duty. It's not for the small garden, but makes an excellent addition to any large garden and it could be used as a deterrent to unwanted visitors with its thorns in pairs, one straight and one curved backwards. The Afrikaans name, *blinkblaar-wag-'n-bietjie*, is most descriptive.

Much to the horror of many of my friends, I have allowed a couple of clumps of the tall grass *Paspalum urvillei*, the giant paspalum, to pop up in my flower beds. The tall flowering stems (yes, grass is a flowering plant!) wave gracefully in the breeze and little seed-eaters such as bishops and sparrows make their way gingerly along the curved stem until they can feast on the seeding head. This is not an indigenous grass – it came originally from South America but is now naturalised here – but every now and then I go against my own principles and allow 'exotics' to creep into my garden. Obviously I am careful to ensure that it does not take over, weeding out all the youngsters, and when the time comes it is very easy to dig the clump out. I don't have room for a proper grassland patch, with different seeding grasses, but these tall plumes stand high above the smaller plants below and to me, and the little seed-eaters, they are very pleasing!

Sally Johnson, [sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com](mailto:sarahjarvis.johnson@gmail.com)

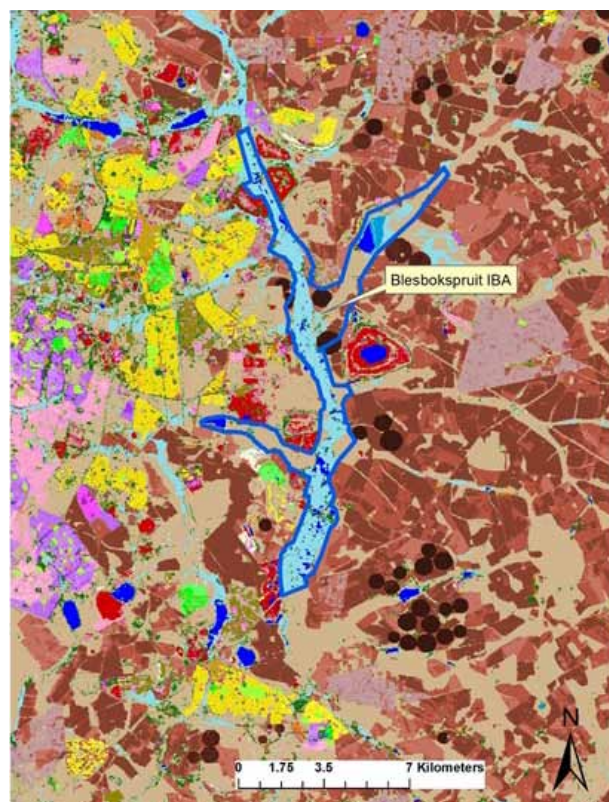


# MONITORING IBAs BY satellite

**T**he current Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) network consists of 112 IBAs that cover more than 14 million hectares. These IBAs are located throughout South Africa and contain various habitat types, including grassland and forest. Human activities such as agriculture and urban expansion have an impact on them by destroying habitats that may be important for birds.

The IBA Team is responsible for monitoring the quality of habitats and the impact of human activities in IBAs, but it is not practical for a small team to cover 14 million hectares – and the very large team needed brings high cost implications. However, recent years have seen the development of new technology that makes this task much easier. Since 1972, satellites have been orbiting the earth and taking millions of images every day. On 11 February 2013 Landsat 8 was launched and it takes an image of the entire earth every 16 days! This enables us to compare images and note changes in land cover (habitats) and land use (for example, the expansion of a city) without leaving our offices. In addition, these images are distributed for free, which considerably reduces the cost of monitoring the IBA network.

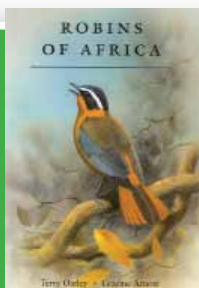
Downloading and analysing this massive dataset needs special expertise. A company with such skills, GeoTerraImage ([www.geoterraimage.com](http://www.geoterraimage.com)), recently published two datasets (basically maps) for 1990 and 2014 that show detailed land use and land cover for the whole of South Africa. They enable us to compare changes in land use and land cover within the IBA network over this period of time and give us valuable insight into what is happening. GeoTerraImage has greatly assisted the IBA Team in this task by making the 1990 dataset for the IBA network available at no cost.



*This image of land cover and land use shows the Blesbokspruit IBA and surrounding areas. Yellow indicates built-up areas, red is for mines and brown denotes agricultural lands. The blue area shows the wetlands in the IBA and light brown is grassland patches. The map clearly indicates the pressures on the IBA linked to urban sprawl, mining and agriculture.*

The analysis of the data is ongoing and a report will be published later in 2016. BirdLife South Africa and the IBA Team would like to thank GeoTerraImage, and especially Stuart Martin, for their support of the IBA Programme by providing data and continuing to assist us with our GIS-related queries, all at no cost.

**Ernst Retief, Regional Conservation Manager: Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Free State**, [ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za](mailto:ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za)



## RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP AND STAND A CHANCE TO WIN!

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

Shireen Gould, Membership Manager, [membership@birdlife.org.za](mailto:membership@birdlife.org.za)

# FUND-RAISING FOR secretarybirds



SECRETARYBIRD ALBERT FRONEMAN

To provide much-needed support for our national parks, the SANParks Honorary Rangers: West Rand Region have initiated various birding events in the Kruger National Park. They have also been supporting BirdLife South Africa through a fundraiser linked to their popular annual summer birding weekends, which take place in January and February. Significant funds have been raised over these weekends for the conservation of our terrestrial birds, including threatened vulture species in 2014 and 2015. Five vulture species regularly found in South Africa have recently been uplisted to the Red List categories of Critically Endangered (White-headed, White-backed and Hooded vultures) and Endangered (Cape and Lappet-faced vultures).

The funds raised for BirdLife South Africa's Secretarybird initiative in 2016 will be used for two projects: one that focuses on finding out about the species' foraging range, habitat preferences and post-natal dispersal, and the other related to fence collisions.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of the guests participating in these birding weekends.



*Lucky draw for the fundraiser. Left to right: Simon Ridge (chairperson SANParks Honorary Rangers: West Rand Region), Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson and Grant Hine (EcoTraining academic manager).*

A total of R18 450 was raised from the events in 2016. The lucky draw for the three prize winners was done on Tuesday 5 April at Isdell House, BirdLife South Africa's head office. Our congratulations go to the winners.

**FIRST PRIZE:** EcoTraining 'Birding In the Bush' or 'EcoQuest' course for one guest valued at R7000 (valid until 30 April 2017). Winner: Willem Bosman

**SECOND PRIZE:** 2017 KNP birding weekend for two guests. Winner: Marlou van den Berg

**THIRD PRIZE:** A weekend of grassland birding for two guests at Wakkerstroom with a BirdLife South Africa-accredited guide. Winner: GJ Swart

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



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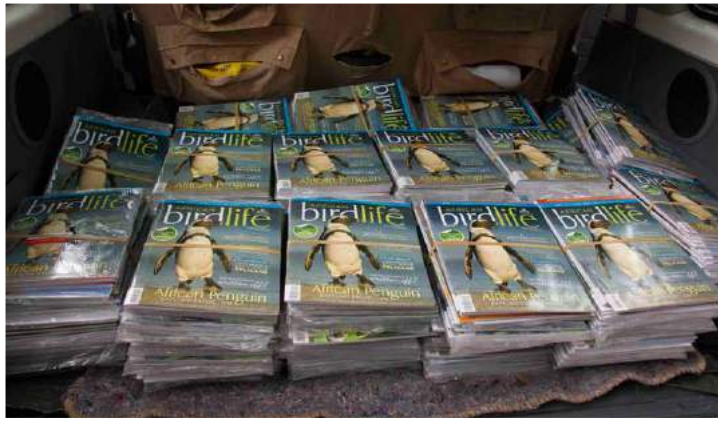


## Attention BirdLife South Africa members

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



# spreading the word



Every two months, BirdLife South Africa receives the copies of the previous issue of *African Birdlife* that were unsold in retail stores. David Chamberlain, chairman of the magazine's management committee, has undertaken that, instead of dumping and pulping these return copies as many publishers do, he would send batches of the magazines to Gauteng schools to display in their libraries. There has been a gratifying response to this initiative and we hope in the future to increase the network of schools receiving complimentary copies.



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We truly appreciate your kindness and support.

Sincerely

MRS AC BOTHA  
PRINCIPAL

## BIRD OF THE YEAR 2016 SOCIABLE WEAVER

This year's Bird of the Year is the Sociable Weaver, a species of the arid parts of South Africa. The Bird of the Year 2016 poster (free of charge), CDs containing the learning resources (free of charge) and pin badges (R25 per pin badge, excluding postage) are available on request from BirdLife South Africa's head office, Isdell House, in Johannesburg. Please call 011 789 1122 or e-mail [info@birdlife.org.za](mailto:info@birdlife.org.za). The learning resources can also be downloaded from the BirdLife South Africa website at [www.birdlife.org.za/events/bird-of-the-year](http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/bird-of-the-year)

The Bird of the Year 2016 initiative is proudly sponsored by Builders Warehouse.

Nikki McCartney, [marketing@birdlife.org.za](mailto:marketing@birdlife.org.za)



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# snippets

## BIRD PAINTINGS TO BENEFIT BIRDS

Nicole Sanderson is an artist living and working in Zimbabwe and for the past couple of years she has been painting mainly birds. To view the paintings, please visit [www.nicolesanderson.co.zw/art/recent-paintings](http://www.nicolesanderson.co.zw/art/recent-paintings). Reproductions of the paintings are available on canvas and 20% of the proceeds of the sales will be made to BirdLife South Africa.

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