



AFRICAN HARRIER-HAWK ALBERT FRONEMAN

# BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA e-newsletter

August 2016



## TALKING ABOUT vulture conservation

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### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL COMPETITION

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

- Denise Paton
- Ann Beater
- Dave Green
- Peter & Sue Cole
- Thomas Smith

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

In early August 2016 Bill Bowerman and Reggie Harrell, two professors from the University of Maryland, Washington DC, USA, visited Isdell House and had discussions with Mark Anderson, Hanneline Smit-Robinson and Simon Gear about vulture research and conservation. Colleagues from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (Dr Sonja Krueger and Brent Coverdale), the Endangered Wildlife Trust (Andre Botha) and Dr Pat Benson also took part in the talks, which focused on a large, multi-faceted and multi-organisational project proposal to be submitted later this year for South African vulture conservation.

Professor Bowerman, who has been working on bald eagles for more than 20 years, utilises bird species at the top of the food chain to monitor the concentrations and effects of bio-accumulative compounds of concern. Professor Harrell's research focuses mainly on environmental and bio-ethical aspects of natural resources management, stress physiology in vertebrates and breeding genetics in plants and animals.

Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Manager: Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme, conservation@birdlife.org.za



Left to right: (front) Jennifer Reiss, Pat Benson, Bill Bowerman and Reggie Harrell; (back) Hanneline Smit-Robinson, Mitul Patel, Chevaughn Nagiah, Linda van den Heever and Mark Anderson.

TANIA ANDERSON

# jumbla mountain

IMPORTANT FOR BIRDS AND A KEY WATER SOURCE

**J**umbla Mountain rises above the town of Matatiele in the Eastern Cape. It starts as part of Matatiele Nature Reserve, which is listed as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) but is perhaps better known as a critical catchment providing water to the townspeople and communities below. The Jumbla Plateau extends further south into the old Transkei and at the southern point there is a Bearded Vulture nest. The IBA Programme's regional conservation manager in KwaZulu-Natal, Nick Theron, monitors the nest each season in collaboration with the Eastern Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and other volunteers. This is part of annual efforts to monitor the Critically Endangered Bearded Vulture, an icon of the Drakensberg.

It is usually challenging to get to the nest as the farm roads can be treacherous and the nest can only be accessed on foot. The plateau is also battered by snow and icy winds, the winter norm. This season there was no activity at the nest, but our monitoring over the years highlights the importance of the Jumbla range as a refuge for a host of species such as Cape Eagle-Owl, Drakensberg Rockjumper, Black Harrier, Verreaux's Eagle and Blue Crane. A significant population of the highly localised Yellow-breasted Pipit also occurs and we hold out hope that the elusive Rudd's Lark may still be lurking in the vicinity.



above *Hiking through the snow to get to the nest.*

top *Monitoring the Bearded Vulture nest.*

This is an area where the surroundings are largely transformed due to agriculture and peri-urban sprawl. The monitoring took place while the country was experiencing a severe drought. The Matatiele area has been hard hit and desperate efforts are currently under way to pipe water off the mountain to the town below. We need to look after these water source areas in South Africa that not only are important for birds, but are priceless in the ecosystem services they provide for people.

**Nicholas Theron, Regional Conservation Manager:**  
KwaZulu-Natal, [nick.theron@birdlife.org.za](mailto:nick.theron@birdlife.org.za)

# longevity record

## FOR A SECRETARYBIRD



Ian Haggerty recorded the third re-sighting of Secretarybird NM09 on 7 June 2016 near Kinross in Mpumalanga.

On 7 June 2016 Ian Haggerty observed and photographed a patagial-tagged Secretarybird on his farm Rolspruit near Kinross in Mpumalanga and reported the sighting to BirdLife

South Africa. This particular Secretarybird was tagged with number NM09 on 23 July 2011 in a nest containing two nestlings on the farm Klein Rust Plaats south of Bloemfontein in the Free State. It was first re-sighted by William Killian on 12 March 2013 near the western entrance gate to the Willem Pretorius Game Reserve near Senekal, a distance of 170 kilometres from where it had originally been tagged. It was then observed in the Delmas area, Mpumalanga, in the winter of 2014. Ian's sighting is the third of this Secretarybird over a period of four years and 11 months and it occurred 440 kilometres direct distance from the ringing location. This re-sighting represents the oldest longevity record for a ringed Secretarybird (the previous oldest was three years and four months).

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

## THE AFRICAN BIRD FAIR

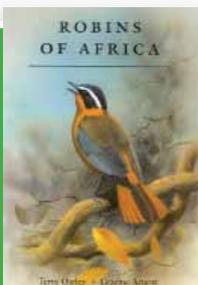
Be sure not to miss the African Bird Fair over the weekend of 3–4 September at the beautiful Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden. An exciting variety of exhibitors will be showcasing all things birding, such as binoculars and spotting scopes, bird books, birding apps, bird feeders, wildlife art, birding holiday destinations and tour operators.

Throughout the weekend there will be lots of things happening, including guided bird and botanical walks, photography workshops by well-known wildlife photographer Kyle

de Nobrega (bookings essential) and fascinating

presentations by experts such as Professor Braam van Wyk and Faansie Peacock, as well as lots of fun activities for the kids. The fair will be open from 08h00 until 17h00 on both days.

For more information, please visit the BirdLife South Africa website at [www.birdlife.org.za/events/bird-fair](http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/bird-fair) or contact Emma Askes at [emma.askses@birdlife.org.za](mailto:emma.askses@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)

# gardening

## FOR BIRDS



The very welcome sight of a Yellow-billed Kite circling over our house heralded the advent of spring, although the frosty winter weather seems reluctant to leave. This past month has seen the harshest frosts since we moved here to Howick more than three years ago and I have had



DAVID JOHNSON

to learn the hard way which plants survive and which don't. I know you lucky folk who live in the warmer parts of the country don't have to worry about things like frost, but please bear with me while I talk about frost-hardiness.

Let's start with the small things. Cotyledons come in various shapes and colours – round leaves, grey leaves, narrow leaves, for starters – and they are really tough. Sadly, in one very low-lying area of my garden the flowering stalks with their lovely nectar-offering tubes got zapped, although the leaves survived. In this area, even recently planted *Aloe arborescens* was reduced to mush, which really surprised me. However, *Crassula capitella* was a winner, making a lovely splash of colour with its winter red and yellow leaves, even though its flowers are too tiny to be of any use to birds.

*Melianthus* species are a great asset in a cold garden and I have planted *M. comosus* in my very frosty area, where it is thriving. With its interesting compound leaves and orange-red flowers producing copious nectar, it makes an excellent addition to a bird garden. In the wild it is mostly found growing near water (this particular species is from the Free State), but a clump of two or three plants make a delightful feature, growing to a maximum of about 1.5 metres. My clumps are still flowering and looking good, in spite of the harsh frost and the fact that the books seem to think they only flower in summer!

The genus *Searsia* (that's what many of us knew as *Rhus*) contains a number of excellent shrubs and small trees that tick the bird-attracting and frost-resistant boxes, but their one drawback is the single sex thing. Only the female plants bear fruit, so only they are good for a bird garden.

You really need a very large

garden where you can plant two or three of one species and hope that at least one of them will be female. Sadly, the only way to distinguish the sex is if the plant was flowering in the nursery. I knew someone who assured me she could tell the sex by dangling a ring over the plant and if it circled one way it was female, the other way it was male – obviously a 50 per cent chance of success!

Now for the best trees for frosty areas. Probably my favourite look-good-all-year-round is *Rhamnus prinoides*, the dogwood. This is an evergreen with glossy, dark green leaves, little white stars for flowers and small fruits that mature into little black berries loved by all the frugivores. Shrubby if left alone, and hence great as a screen, it can be trimmed to form a proper tree if that is your thing; either way, it is a great asset to any bird garden. Although it is happy in the coldest of areas, it also thrives in warm gardens, as long as there is good rainfall.

The African false-currant *Allophylus africanus* produces little red berries on hanging clusters that are eagerly sought by all the little fruit-eaters. The trifoliate leaves are shiny green and the small, whitish flowers are sweetly scented, attracting many small insectivores. This is a tree that grows naturally from the coast all the way to the 'Berg and is not afraid of the cold.

Here's hoping for warmer weather and lots of lovely rain! Happy bird gardening.

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

# THE impacts of lead

## ON BIRDS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

**M**itul Patel and Jennifer Reiss, undergraduate students in the USA, recently spent their summer holiday volunteering at BirdLife South Africa. The visiting interns formed part of an exchange programme between two US universities and BirdLife South Africa. Both are senior undergraduates, Mitul at the University of Maryland majoring in ecological technology and design, and Jennifer at the University of Houston, where she is majoring in biology. Mitul and Jennifer completed an advanced draft of BirdLife South Africa's strategy document, summarising the threats of the heavy metal lead to birds and the environment as well as identifying various research gaps and opportunities.



MARK D. ANDERSON  
*Mitul Patel and Jennifer Reiss, undergraduate students from the USA, worked on BirdLife South Africa's lead strategy in July 2016.*

Although there are several environmental and anthropogenic sources of lead, we have identified lead ammunition to be a significant source of poisoning in birds and humans. To better understand the risk of lead contamination, the interns took radiographs of various game meat samples at Professor Vinny Naidoo's lab at Onderstepoort. A continuation of their work will be to conduct tests on the level of lead in the blood of White-backed Vultures. Through the involvement of Jennifer and Mitul, BirdLife South Africa was also

introduced to Professor Angela Matthee of the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Witwatersrand, whose research focuses on the impacts of various metals and toxins on human health.

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

## CALLING FOR NOMINATIONS

**Austin Roberts Memorial Award and Gill Memorial Medal Award**

BirdLife South Africa is inviting nominations for these awards in 2017. To make a nomination, please visit the BirdLife South Africa website for criteria and procedure information:

[www.birdlife.org.za/about-us/our-organisation/gill-memorial-medal-award](http://www.birdlife.org.za/about-us/our-organisation/gill-memorial-medal-award)

[www.birdlife.org.za/about-us/our-organisation/austin-roberts-memorial-award](http://www.birdlife.org.za/about-us/our-organisation/austin-roberts-memorial-award)

Please send your nominations to Estelle Barker at [secretary@birdlife.org.za](mailto:secretary@birdlife.org.za) by Friday 2 September 2016.



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### Attention BirdLife South Africa members

Please use your membership number as a payment reference when paying your membership fees. If you renew your membership in the month it is due, you could win a copy of *Robins of Africa*.

# snippets

## BIRD OF THE YEAR 2016 SOCIABLE WEAVER

Visit 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) to download the Bird of the Year 2016 learning resources and learn more about these fascinating birds. 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 Bird of the Year 2016 initiative is proudly sponsored by Builders Warehouse.

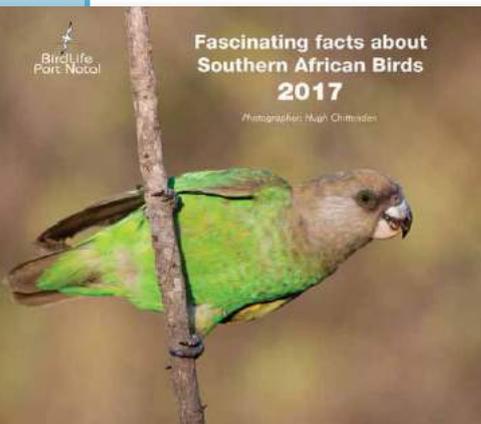


WARWICK TARBOTON

## BIRDLIFE PORT NATAL - 2017 CALENDAR

Fascinating facts about  
Southern African Birds  
2017

Photographer: Hugh Chittenden



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