

Birdlife Overberg Newsletter 18- October 2025



Chairman's Chirp...

Unfortunately, I have to start this newsletter with the sad news of the passing of Charles Naude.

Charles was a club member of long standing, a respected journalist, photographer, and kind-hearted gentleman.

He will be fondly remembered by club members for his ability to take beautiful photographs and for softly telling the stories behind them.

He inspired us all with his enthusiasm, passion and knowledge around the birding world, and would always help and advice others, expecting nothing in return.

He will be greatly missed at club meetings and outings.

RIP Charles



Diary Dates

Monday 13th October Monthly Meeting – African Penguin & Seabird Sanctuary, Mollergren Hall 6.30pm

Saturday 25th October Monthly Outing – Zoetendal Winery Elim: African Marsh Harrier Trail

Saturday 15th November – BLO Fundraiser Evening, Mollergren Hall 6.30pm

Saturday 22nd November – Monthly Outing – Lady Stanford River cruise

Full details of all events will be posted nearer the time on the Members WhatsApp group

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Trip report: A morning out near Jongensklip – Graeme Hatley

There is an extensive network of gravel roads north-east of Stanford, in the area between Caledon, Riviersonderend, and Napier. A junction of these roads is in the Jongensklip region. The route I took starts on the R316, heading north towards Jongensklip and then east towards the Rietpol silos. This is not a section I've explored before.

The first section is fairly hilly, with sections of Renosterveld broken up by wheat and canola fields and grazing for sheep. The birds were typical of this sort of habitat — lots of LBJs! Large-billed Larks were calling throughout the area. Agulhas Long-billed Larks were coming into breeding season and showing off with their vertical display flights. The cryptically coloured Red-capped Larks were abundant but kept a low-profile in the more gravelled and heavily grazed areas.

Capped Wheatear, Cape Longclaw and African Pipit were not shy and often presented themselves for a photo opportunity. Less keen to be photographed were the canaries. Yellow Canaries were abundant, with an occasional White-throated Canary making an appearance.

Raptors were not present in large numbers. I recall seeing only one Jackal Buzzard and one Black-winged Kite. Just outside Jongensklip, a Spotted Eagle-Owl sat on the railway line catching the early morning sun.

This is a road well worth exploring and I see it becoming a regular outing for me.



All images by Graeme



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The Search for Lost Birds – Adam Cruikshank

If I mentioned a “lost bird,” what would come to mind? For most people, it might be something like a missing pet parrot. But for an ornithologist or devoted birder, it means something far deeper. As we all know, humans have been overexploiting Earth’s resources at an alarming rate, often bulldozing pristine habitats in the process. One of the tragic consequences? Extinction.

According to BirdLife International, at least 187 bird species have been confirmed or are suspected to have gone extinct since the year 1500, many of them island endemics. Extinction means lost forever, a heartbreaking reality. Imagine our Narina Trogon, the jewel of our forests, gone. Imagine scouring the last fragments of forest, only to come up empty-handed. While we’re far from that scenario here, it is already the reality in many parts of the world.

But what if some of these “extinct” birds aren’t truly gone? What if they’re still out there, hidden in the shadows of remote forests? That’s where the Search for Lost Birds comes in. This initiative is a global partnership between the American Bird Conservancy, Re:wild, and BirdLife International. Its goal is to raise awareness about these lost species and support efforts to find them again.

They define a “lost bird” as one that hasn’t been documented through photographs or audio recordings in the wild for at least 10 years, and that has no known captive population. Since its founding in 2021, the initiative has identified 152 such species, from those classified as Least Concern to those presumed extinct or listed as Data Deficient, meaning we simply don’t know enough to assess their conservation status.

This project has captured my imagination ever since I stumbled upon it. Maybe it appeals to the explorer in me, or maybe it’s rooted in my passion for conservation. Rediscovering one of these species is an achievement of critical importance. It could inform vital conservation strategies and make the species and its habitat a top priority for protection. As an aspiring ecologist, being part of such a rediscovery would be a dream come true.

And here’s the exciting part, several of these “lost” birds have already been found! Some have even been photographed for the first time ever. One of the most incredible stories is that of the Black-naped Pheasant-pigeon, which hadn’t been recorded since 1896 on Fergusson Island in Papua New Guinea. Then, in 2022, after a month-long expedition, researchers captured a clear photo of the bird strolling past one of their camera traps deep in the forest. If you’ve seen the video of the team’s reaction in the field, you’ll understand why that moment gave me goosebumps.

If you're curious to see what other species are still missing, visit the Search for Lost Birds website, you can even subscribe to updates. Some species may be lost forever, while others are likely hiding out in remote or politically unstable regions, still waiting to be rediscovered.

Fortunately, no species from Southern Africa are currently on the list, at least, not yet. Perhaps Botha’s Lark, which has occasionally pulled the disappearing act for months at a time, might be a contender in the future? Thanks to the tireless efforts of BirdLife South Africa, I’m hopeful that won’t be the case.

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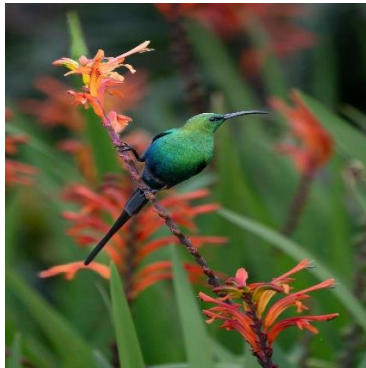


Botha's Lark – Carin Malan

BIRDLIFE OVERBERG OUTING TO THE VAN DER STEL PASS - By: Johan van der Westhuizen.

DATE: 23rd OF AUGUST 2025.

Despite the unfavorable weather conditions, 10 birders in 3 vehicles left the Onrus OK parking area at 7:30 am in high spirits, destination the “van der Stel pass”. At the Karwyderskraal turnoff from the R43, 6 more birders in 3 vehicles joined the group. The convoy then drove along the Karwyderskraal road and as can be expected the more common birds such as Guinea fowl, Hadedda Ibis, Egyptian geese and spur-winged Geese were soon ticked off. A Rock Kestrel glided past, followed by a Yellow-billed Kite, which was a “first” for the season for most of the group. Brimstone Canaries were spotted feeding next to the road. In the field opposite the “dump”, 2 Denham's Bustards were spotted, which resulted in brakes being slammed on and everyone disembarking, with the photographers trying their best to take photographs of the distant birds in the early morning light. Two more Bustards flew in but unfortunately landed on the other side of the hill.



Cape Weaver & Malachite Sunbird – Chris van Schalkwyk

Doulbe-collared Sunbird – Annelien Dalton

At the first official stop at the Steel Bridge, the birders mingled and welcomed the 2 new members. Levaillant's Cisticola, Common Waxbill, White-throated Swallows, Blue Cranes, Yellow-billed Ducks and Cape Robin Chat amongst others were soon added to the growing bird list. Reports also came in of Capped Wheatear, Large-billed and Red-capped Lark being spotted on the way. The convoy then made its way along the Swartvriër road. The Canola fields were in full bloom and with the green wheat fields, made for some spectacular scenery. Landscape photography was embraced, and the birds played second fiddle for a change. Numerous birds were active in the fields and along the road. African Pipits, Southern Red Bishops and Cape Canaries amongst others, were reported by those not distracted by the scenery.

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After driving along the N2 and the Villiersdorp road, the Hawston View gravel road was a welcome relief as birding could be done at a more leisurely pace. The convoy stopped at the grove of Blue gum trees for a much-needed coffee break. A Greater Honeyguide was calling but the movement of the trees in the strong wind made it impossible to spot. Birds seen were Malachite Sunbirds, Cape White-eye, Karoo Scrub Robin and Cape Batis.

The next stop at the dilapidated building next to the road on the “van der Stel pass” were unsuccessful as the Western Barn Owl usually found there, was nowhere to be seen. The convoy slowly made its way up the pass, but only Cape Bunting were added to the list. At the turn-around point the group spent some time scanning the nearby cliffs for the Verreaux’s Eagles often found there. Two people reported spotting an Eagle briefly, and this motivated everyone to search the cliffs in earnest. A nest was spotted and resulted in some hilarious direction giving. Suddenly a pair of Verreaux’s Eagles took to the skies, to the delight of all watching. A male Southern Double-collared Sunbird joined in the excitement and perched close-by, affording plenty of photo opportunities.



Yellow-billed Kite & Denham's Bustard – Gerbus Vermaak

Little Egret – Johan vd Westhuizen

On the way back to Botrivier, the convoy stopped at a well-known birding spot to try and attract a Greater Honeyguide sometimes found there. The only birds responding however were a competitor, a Male Klaas's Cuckoo and a flock of Cape Canaries. An African Dusky Flycatcher was spotted perching on a fence post from where it launched numerous attacks on a variety of insects.

At the Goedvertrouw Estate the group stopped for lunch. Streaky-headed Seedeaters were abundant, feasting on the ripe Wild Figs and Amethyst Sunbirds were spotted feeding on the flowers of a Coral Tree. Sweet Waxbills, Olive Thrushes, Cape Bulbuls and Cape Weavers further entertained the appreciative birders. The group then disbanded, each completing the rest of the journey in their own time.



Yellow Canary – Ruth Vary

White-throated Swallow- Johan Herselman

Pied Kingfisher – Johan Olivier

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The final bird species count of 82 was encouraging given the unfavorable birding conditions. This added to the enjoyment of birding in these amazing and beautiful locations. Those who have not birded the Swartrivier road and “van der Stel pass” before, were duly impressed by its beauty and tranquility.

Steel Bridge – Ruth Vary



I drank from your lawn, ate a worm,
and now my wings won't work. Your
chemicals are harming the bugs I
rely on and poisoning me
internally.

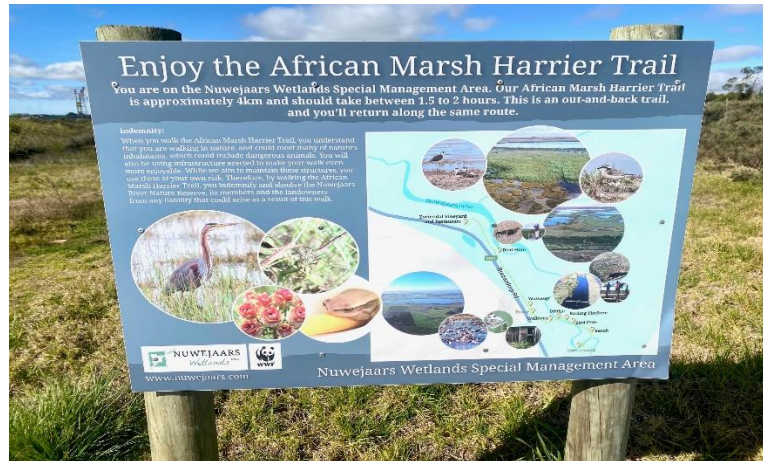


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African Marsh Harrier Trail near Elim – Steve Peck

Tucked away in the wetlands between Elim and the Black Oystercatcher restaurant is a delightful winery called Zoetendal. Not only do they have a beautiful stoep overlooking the vines, but the food is delicious, and the wine is award winning - reason enough to visit I would say!

They also have a purpose-built hiking trail called the African Marsh Harrier Trail, that meanders from the winery alongside the river and pans. It is an out-and-back trail with the turn around point approximately 2km from the start. It also boasts two dedicated bird hides and a purpose-built viewing platform that looks over the river.



Lee and I walked the trail mid-August with a view to check out the type and numbers of birds that could be found there. We were not disappointed as we had close-up encounters with African Swamphen, Spoonbills, Sacred Ibis, Cape Teal, various ducks and geese and, best of all, a great sighting of a Purple Heron.

We were serenaded the whole way by Little Rush Warblers, that seemed to be in every reedbed. Red and Yellow Bishops made an appearance, and we encountered some unknown calls from the reedbeds that despite looking hard we couldn't find the culprit. Brown-throated Martins and White-throated Swallows hawked the beds looking for insects and on two occasions we spooked African Snipe from the low water lined grasses.

Nearer the winery we spotted Cape Canary, Fiscal Flycatcher, African Stonechat, Little Egret and Malachite Sunbirds.



All in all, we hiked for about 2hrs and recorded over 40 species, so we were really happy and finished on the winery stoep for a light lunch. Oh, and a glass or two!

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Using satellite tracking to help birds colliding with wind turbines – another step in the right direction.

Mpumalanga, South Africa – In a pioneering move for avian conservation and renewable energy, the [Endangered Wildlife Trust](#) (EWT) has launched South Africa's first **state-sponsored** bird-tracking initiative focused on informing safer wind energy development in the ecologically sensitive province of Mpumalanga.

Dubbed the **Mpumalanga Bird Flyways Research Project**, the initiative emerges as a reconciliation of conservation science and renewable infrastructure planning. The project equips conservationists with GPS tracking tools and strategic monitoring across key flyways, enabling data-driven decision-making that could dramatically reduce bird collision risks at wind energy facilities.

Some mitigation strategies are already being explored, such as Shutdown-on-Demand (SDOD) systems that temporarily stop turbines when birds are detected nearby. However, these systems have limitations. For example, many Flamingos fly mainly at night, and most existing SDOD systems are not capable of identifying nocturnal flights.



EWT officials emphasise that this data is invaluable—especially as Mpumalanga's lower wind speeds require taller turbines, amplifying potential risks to avian life. The new research aims to address knowledge gaps around seasonal bird movement patterns, flyway locations, and collision hotspots—insights essential for aligning the renewable energy expansion imperative with ecological stewardship.

Beyond immediate mitigation, the flyway monitoring initiative is poised to inform future environmental planning tools and policies. Contributions from the project may enhance the EWT's broader planning, currently terrestrial-focused, with potential expansion to incorporate marine environments and offshore wind considerations.

As the demand for clean energy surges in South Africa, the project's outcomes may serve as both beacon and blueprint—showing how commitment to biodiversity and sustainability can be woven into energy infrastructure from the outset. The initiative underscores that renewable development need not come at the cost of wildlife but can proceed hand-in-hand with conservation.

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After many years absence (mainly due to Covid) the club organized a Weekend Away birding outing this September. This was asked for by many members and through the hard work of Cathy finally came to light.

There were many photos taken over the weekend, far too many unfortunately to post here. Everyone that attended had a great time, and had nothing but praise for the venue, the hosts and Cathy's organization.

I have attached some of the magnificent scenery shots to give those who couldn't attend a taste of what it was all about with a few of the more special birds seen, over 100 species were recorded over the weekend.

The club hopes to continue with these weekend away trips and hope many more members will come and join us next time.



Impressions of Kuifkop BLO Birding Weekend 12 to 15 September 2025

By Catherine Bruce

Thanks to Nick Martin for his article. I've added some comments of my own.

We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves on the Birdlife Overberg Weekend Excursion to Kuifkopvisvanger Farm; I heard no complaints and received many good comments. We identified 106 birds in total, which left us with a head full of bird song, a kaleidoscope of bird colours, and the peace of the golden to azure Berg River. It was good for birders, but you don't have to be a birder to really enjoy this environment.

On the way there, I savored spring wildflowers in Wayland's Wildflower Reserve near Darling, where the King Kalkoentjie (*Gladiolus alatus*) was flowering in abundance within the 300 Sandplain and Renosterveld plant species protected there. The crisp sea air at Paternoster accompanied a delicious lunch on the way back.

Kuifkopvisvanger is a wonderful venue for birding. We spotted most of our list within sight of the cottages, which were our accommodation. I discovered great birdwatching spots from fishing roads further up the river, but still on the farm. The highlight for me was a flock of Pelicans fishing together in sync, along with Lesser Flamingoes, Kittlitz Plovers, and White Breasted Cormorants; all in one spot.

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The most common birds we saw were African Darters, Black Winged Stilts, Glossy Ibis, Red Knobbed Coots, and many more. There were also several smaller birds in the reeds, most of which were Levaillant's Cisticolas. However, a few surprises were identified later from photographs. Birds were abundant next to the cottages. Watching from the stoep, we were entertained by courting weavers singing and weaving nests with gay abandon.

The highlights of the tour of Kliphoek Salt Pans with Jan Kotze were the Red-necked Phalarope, a rare, endangered bird, the Chestnut Banded Plovers, and Kittlitz Plovers' eggs in a nest. These are working salt pans from which the public is prohibited, so the birds are well protected within the area. A research team from the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, UCT, and the Milner Centre of Evolution, University of Bath, was conducting ongoing surveys of plovers at the Salt Pans and at Kuifkopvisvanger, drawing blood samples for genetic scrutiny and recording their details. I photographed a Kittlitz Plover with 4 of these researchers' rings on its legs. Prof Tamas Szelekely of the Milner Centre explained that they were a global collaborative group of researchers, which included three of his doctoral students. I hope they can visit us in the Overberg in the future. It was good to see BL South Africa has also been active here, when I spotted their sign on a habitat restoration area.

The boat tour on the Berg River Estuary with Natie and Wendy, the owners of the Cracklin' Rosie, and bird guides Mike and Beverly, was incredible for bird watching. We passed a tree full of Black-crowned Night Herons and saw Black-headed Herons and Grey Herons. We looked for Purple Herons with no luck, but a sighting of two African Fish Eagles made up for it.



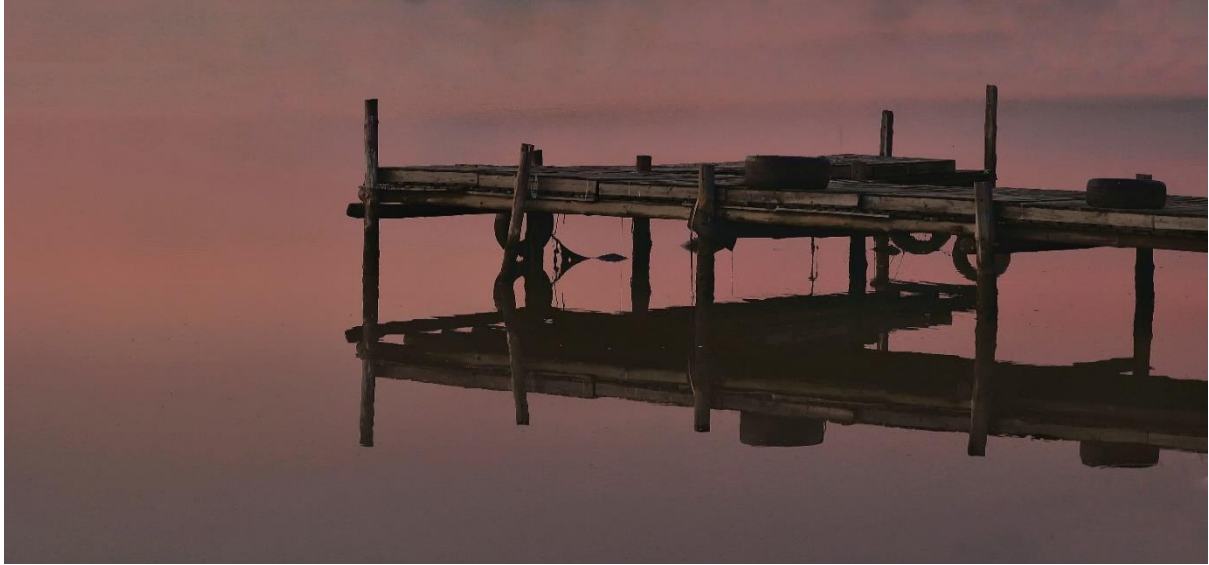
The tour began in the whiteout morning mist, common along the west coast. Typically, it cleared by 10:30 to reveal sunny skies. I enjoyed the trip without the burden of my long lens camera, which I unintentionally left at the cottage. I took a few photos with my cell phone, capturing the riverbanks looming through the mist, the calm river, and distant specs of birds.

The social highlights, including the two braais and two tours, were great fun and good opportunities to chat and get to know each other. In the end, the company comprised three couples and three solo travellers, including two visitors, and Kody the poodle. I'm sorry I didn't include lunch or coffee together in Velddrif before most people left on Sunday, and that more BLO members were not there to enjoy this phenomenal outing.

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I'm grateful to everyone for their good company, participation, enthusiasm, bird spotting, food preparation, chatting, braaiing (thank you, Johan van der Westhuizen), photos, and articles (thank you, Nick Martin). I'm glad that everyone returned home safely.

I will enthusiastically return to Kuifkopvisvanger, tour again on the Cracklin' Rosie, and look for birds with Jan on the Salt Pans. We enjoyed the special treatment they all gave us. I can highly recommend their hospitality. It was great to socialize and go birding in a secure environment, with such knowledgeable guides.



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BirdLife South Africa has a new logo – The Blue Crane

The Blue Crane, South Africa's national bird, now represents our organisation and symbolises our mission: to stand for and conserve all our region's birdlife.

Our purpose has always been clear: to protect South Africa's birds, their habitats, and the balance between people and nature. But as threats to biodiversity intensify, so too does our commitment.

As we grow in size and impact, we embrace a bold new emblem: the Blue Crane. When the Southern African Ornithological Society, founded in 1930, partnered with BirdLife International in 1996 and evolved into BirdLife South Africa, we adopted their Arctic Tern as our logo, a global traveller whose epic migration captured BirdLife International's mission of uniting conservation worldwide.

Today, we root ourselves more deeply in home soil. The Blue Crane (Bloukraanvoël in Afrikaans, indwe in isiZulu and isiXhosa, mogolodi in Sepedi, and mxololo in isiNdebele), a regionally Vulnerable species with 99% of its global population in South Africa, now takes flight as BirdLife South Africa's emblem. This bird reflects aspects of our conservation priorities (protecting the grassland and wetland habitats that are central to healthy ecosystems), and, as our national bird, also serves as a symbol for all of South Africa's birdlife.

We remain aligned with BirdLife International, keeping their colours and typeface, and celebrate nearly a century of bird conservation, as the Southern African Ornithological Society also bore the Blue Crane as its emblem. As our national bird, it represents all our region's birdlife, which we are dedicated to protecting.

The Blue Crane's silhouette is familiar to many, appearing on the five-cent coin, and its cultural significance runs deep. It symbolises strength and bravery, with its feathers once adorning warriors and leaders. Our new logo is more than a change of image. It marks a new chapter: one that honours our legacy, strengthens our South African voice, and renews our promise to stand boldly for birds and biodiversity. It is a symbol of purpose, and a declaration of who we are and what we protect.



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News from BLSA affecting our area

SEABIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Christina Hagen and Philip Faure, together with colleagues from the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB) and CapeNature, released a group of 30 hand-reared, fledgling African Penguins at the De Hoop Nature Reserve penguin colony. This is part of the ongoing project to re-establish the colony there. The fledglings went to sea as they would naturally at this age but will hopefully return when they are old enough to breed.

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Giselle Murison participated in the Fynbos Forum conference, where she presented a poster on BirdLife South Africa's (BLSA's) work at the Klein River estuary, Stanford, and she facilitated presentations on the Cape Floristic Region Partnership, including those of its working groups: the Integrated Fire and Invasive Alien Plant Management, and Research and Practice Gap Working Groups.

SEABIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Christina Hagen found a new nest containing two African Penguin chicks at De Hoop Nature Reserve, making it the second breeding pair at the new colony this year.

Protecting our Beach-breeding Birds

**AFRICAN OYSTERCATCHER
&
WHITE-FRONTED PLOVERS**

A HUGE THANK YOU to all BLO Members!



Thanks to your generous contributions, we now have **160 new nest warning signs** printed, distributed and ready for use! This important project was first initiated by **Dr Anton Odendal in 2020**. As the original boards became worn over time, it was decided and approved at the last AGM to print a fresh round to continue protecting our beach-breeding birds.

The campaign is built on research and development work initially undertaken by the **Nature's Valley Trust (NVT)**. A special thank you also goes to the **Environmental Management Division of the Overstrand Municipality** for their support and approval of the project.

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The new signs have been distributed from **Rooi-Els to Pearly Beach**, where dedicated volunteers are running the project in their respective areas. Some of these volunteers have been collecting valuable monitoring data for more than **seven years**.

By the **end of October 2025**, we will launch a social and print media campaign to raise awareness among beachgoers and walkers as the breeding season of the **African Black Oystercatcher** and **White-fronted Plovers** starts.

Many people enjoy our beaches without realising the risk they pose to these vulnerable breeding birds. With your help, these signs and campaigns will play a vital role in ensuring the survival of future generations of Oystercatchers and Plovers along our coastline.

Please contact us if you need support with the protection of these birds, we have volunteers from Rooi-Els to Pearly Beach (**see below**). For more information on BirdLife Overberg's campaign, pls contact Carin Malan on 073 172 2660 or visit www.birdlifeoverberg.org.za/conservation-overview

Pearly Beach Conservancy	Steve Peck	081 817 3223
		073 647 2173
Franskraal	Karin & Mark Vonk	066 273 5790
Kleinbaai/Gansbaai/Danger Point	Chester (Cape Nature Ranger)	078 044 5020
Hermanus	Hermanus Birdclub, Ed Meyer Chair	082 880 7604
Onrus/Sandbaai	Elaine Odendal	082 455 8402
Meer-en-See	Adele Sterrenberg	072 470 8574
Kleinmond	Carl Swart	082 908 9825
Palmiet River Mouth	Joan / Maaïke	076 787 0267
Bettiesbaai	Leonore Watermeyer	072 345 7357
	Myrna Cook	073 154 3688
	Wendy Lucas	083 383 3534
Pringle Baai (Coastal Rewilding)	Norah Clarke	083 654 4228
	Linda	082 553 1854
RooiEls Conservancy		083 302 6970
	Ralf Pina Gavin Lundie	082 900 3173

Cape Whale Coast Stranding Network at 072 598 7117

Ethical birding. – The Birding Life

Two words that divide many in the birding community. For some they have become a badge of honour. For others, these words have been used to bring shame. People speak of themselves and their approach to birding as some moral high-water mark that other still need to reach.

If we are honest, these words many like to define as black and white, but more often than not they are grey. The answer is often found in the midst of the two extremes.

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We have become so good at times birders – when the dark side of our human nature seeps through – to use these words as weapons to expose and hurt people. We often don't use the words to celebrate and show when someone gets it right.

Today's email is a celebration. It shows what ethical birding looks like. Yes, it involves some scrawny lions, but it shows what should be the standard for all of us in nature.

At the end of a hot morning in Manyoni Game Reserve, we slowly made our way out of the reserve in the comfort of the air-conditioned 'birding bus'. As we neared the gate, we saw that just a few hundred metres in front of the vehicle a pride of lions was walking down the road. What made this exciting is that it was the second group that we had seen on that day.

We parked the car next to the road, got our cameras and cell phones out to get photos and videos as they passed. They walked within a few metres the car – it was a truly epic sighting! What we did notice, was that for some reason this pride of lions were quite scrawny. We nevertheless loved getting to see these majestic beasts only a few meters away.

As we watched them pass the vehicle, we noticed about 50 meters behind us, there was giraffe and some buck. The lions started to walk into the grass and started to hunch down, looking like they were about to go on a hunt. The action was unfolding in front of our eyes – it felt like we had been teleported into an episode of Wild Earth! A few of us, including myself, wanted to slowly reverse back to get a better view of what was happening. This would be a great opportunity to get to see something that we don't see often.

Dave Rimmer after a few seconds said that the words that show just what an ethical approach to nature looks like. He said that lions were scrawny and needed to food that would come from a kill, lets rather not go back to try get a better view and possible impact their chances of getting a meal. He was in the same car and would also miss the opportunity. Yet he decided to put nature first. Not our enjoyment. Not getting an award-winning shot of video. Nature first.

This is maybe the easiest way to approach ethical birding. We should also look to out the birds that we encounter first. We should prioritize their well-being and do everything we can to ensure that we put them first. Before we look for award winning bird photos or amazing sightings – we need ask if we are putting nature first and doing everything we can to not have a negative impact on the bird and its surroundings.

This can be a challenge with bird calls available on our phones and social media that screams out for that next 'epic photo'. But if we simply look to put nature first, all the other decisions we need to make will quickly fall into place.

When in nature, simply, **be like Dave**, It's the right thing to do.

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Trip report: Platbos Saturday 27 September - Jill Wheeler

A Canopy of sound

Can you spot the bird?in the top right-hand corner of the photo?



Where's the bird? That became the phrase of the morning.

"There! Look - in the canopy to the left ... "

A quick dash across the forest floor would follow, rewarded by a flurry of wings, some clicking of shutters and a few contented sighs from patient bird watchers. Today's outing was all about listening – tuning into the call – identifying and then searching for the performer.

A heartfelt thank you to Johan ,who skilfully guided us on this trip with patience and enthusiasm, as always.

Platbos is an ancient, endangered indigenous forest, described as Africa's southernmost forest. Existing for potentially millions of years, its endurance is due in part to its remarkable trees, some over a thousand years old, and it is now protected under a contract nature reserve status. After the 2006 fires, a reforestation project continues to work to restore and connect Platbos to other reserves through the planting of trees and creation of fire breaks. Species of tree such as White Stinkwood and Milkwood, give the forest it's unique character and the existence of the forest is something of a botanical mystery.

A visit to Platbos is a magical experience, listening to unique bird calls and walking through age-old trees draped with old man's beard. The ancient, gnarled trunks and branches are alive with a myriad different mosses and ferns, and it truly feels like a timeless, enchanted forest.

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Images by Jill Wheeler

The canopy is alive with birds, and we were privileged to hear ... and see... a Tambourine Dove, an African Dusky Flycatcher, an African Paradise Flycatcher and a Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher. Hearing the characteristic call of the Sombre Greenbul was very exciting and we managed three separate sightings of this elusive bird: a first for many in the group.

We also saw African Olive Pigeon, Speckled Pigeon, Bar-throated Apalis, Southern Boubou, Cape Batis, along with Black Saw-wing and plenty of smaller forest birds.



Jill Wheeler – Birders!

Johan vd Wrsthuzien – Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher , African Olive Pigeon

Our group of nine birders were all captivated by this outing and there was a tangible sense of peace and awe as we wandered through this unique environment. Reluctantly, after several hours, we left the calm embrace of the forest and continued our birding adventure.

Earlier in the day we had all met at the bird hide in Stanford and never missing the prospect of focused viewing, we quickly dived into the hide to see what bird opportunities awaited us! Ten minutes of viewing produced several water birds, but we were especially excited to see two African Swamphens in the reeds and delighted by the White-throated swallows just posing for photos!

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White-throated Swallow- Jill Wheeler Karoo Prinia & Bar-throated Apalis – Gerbus Vermaak

We left Platbos and headed for the bridge over the Uilenkraals river, excited to scan the estuary for bird life. Two nimble Pied Kingfishers delighted us by their acrobatics on the wire, and we were treated to beautiful views of the estuary with flocks of Kelp and Hartlaub's Gulls, White-breasted and Crowned Cormorants, interspersed with African Oyster Catcher and Eurasian Whimbrel.

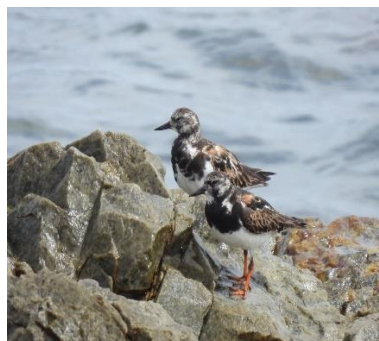


Crowned Cormorant & Little Egret – Gerbus Vermaak

Pied Kingfisher – Cathy Bruce- Wright

Our final stop was Danger Point – a well-earned picnic break – and time to view the birds at our leisure. What a treat to see three Ruddy Turnstones, with White-fronted Plovers scurrying amongst the rocks between them.

A huge flock of Greater Crested Terns were seen in the distance with the ubiquitous, White-breasted Cormorant and Cape Cormorant. A garden over the road provided a super sighting of a tiny baby Blacksmith Lapwing, fiercely guarded by its parents.



Baby Blacksmith Lapwing & Ruddy Turnstone's – Leanie Herselman : White-fronted Plover – Cathy Bruce

A total of 59 bird species were identified and a magical morning of birding had by all. Many thanks to Johan for his outstanding guiding and organisation of the birding outing.

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Birds on the Brink Book Launch Invite

Birds on the Brink is a fascinating and beautifully illustrated book, based on BirdLife South Africa's Regional Red Data Book. It brings to life the story of our most vulnerable coastal, marine, and terrestrial birds in South Africa, Lesotho, and Eswatini - and shows what we can still do to protect them.

Inside you'll find:

- Profiles of the region's most threatened birds
- Stories from the front lines, from scientists, conservationists, and guides (many of whom work for BirdLife South Africa)
- Stunning images of sea, coastal, and terrestrial birds
- Insights into the dedication and science needed to safeguard these species

Come celebrate the launch of this inspiring book with us! Our very own Alan Lee and Shamiso Banda will share behind-the-scenes stories about putting it all together, and you'll get to learn more about the birds we love and the work being done to protect them.

Johannesburg

Date: **Wednesday, 15 October**

Time: **18:00 - 20:00**

Venue: **Exclusive Books, Hyde Park**

Hyde Park Corner, Jan Smuts Ave & Winnie Mandela Dr, Craighall, Johannesburg

RSVP: <https://loom.ly/rEFQXwE>

Cape Town

Date: **Friday, 17 October**

Time: **17:30 for 18:00**

Venue: **Nassau Centre, Groote Schuur High School, 77 Palmyra Rd, Newlands, Cape Town**

RSVP: https://loom.ly/_fmHBtg

Fish Hoek

Date: **Saturday, 18 October**

Time: **10:30 for 11:00 - 12:00**

Venue: **Blown Away by Books: Fish Hoek Library, Central Circle, Fish Hoek**

RSVP: <https://loom.ly/zQnjbSs>

Betty's Bay

Date: **Saturday, 25 October**

Time: **10:30 for 11:00 - 12:00**

Venue: **Harold Porter Botanical Garden**

RSVP: <https://loom.ly/qwRG-uA>

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What's the best app for birding in South Africa? – The Birding Life

This is a question that gets asked on social media pages again and again. And let me be honest, sometimes I get irritated by the answers that are given. People often push certain apps, thinking that the app that suits their needs will suit everyone else. Some may even have a connection to the app or its development, so the answers can be skewed. Another bias comes down to which apps people already have on their phones - they'll recommend what they know and love.

So what qualifies me to write this and give my opinion?

1. I am not sponsored and have no connection to any of the app developers.
2. I have all the local bird identification apps on my phone. Yes, all of them. Sasol eBirds 5th Edition, Roberts Guide 2, Roberts Birds, Newman's Birds, Firefinch, and BirdPro South Africa.

As someone who has used and tested all these apps, the best way I can offer insight is by sharing which ones I actually use the most, and for what reasons.

The app I use most for identifying birds is Firefinch. This is a monthly or yearly subscription app, but it offers loads of value. It's regularly updated, with new articles published often - many by Faansie Peacock. The plates are in Faansie's style, so if you like his art, this app will be a winner. The photos are labelled to highlight key ID features, and the calls are excellent, with notes explaining what to listen for. Recently, detailed text on breeding biology was added, making it useful even for more advanced birders. Firefinch is a great app for both newer and experienced birders.

The app I probably open second most is BirdPro South Africa. Like Firefinch, it's subscription-based. Where it shines is in the photos - it provides a wide range showing different plumages, morphs, and sexes. Under most of the photos, there are ID notes to guide you. The calls are excellent, and the inclusion of text from The Ultimate Companion is a big win. This is an award-winning app that I use regularly in the field, and it appeals to all levels of birders.

Next is Sasol eBirds 5th Edition. This app offers the most "bang for your buck." It's a once-off purchase, not subscription-based, and has good plates, decent text, and easily accessible calls, you can play them right from the main screen, which is quick and handy in the field. The photos are not as strong as Firefinch or BirdPro, but for the price, this is a fantastic all-rounder, especially for newer birders buying their first app.

For detailed information, I use Roberts Guide 2. This remains one of the most popular apps among experienced birders because of the in-depth text and high-quality plates. I also own the newer Roberts Birds app, but honestly, I find it less user-friendly and often go back to the older app. Many birders share this frustration. Roberts is subscription-based, and while it appeals more to experienced birders, most birders will eventually add it to their collection.

The Newman's Birds app I don't use as often, but that's because of my current birding level. For newer birders, though, this is a great app. It uses Kenneth Newman's simple methods to teach ID, has good-quality calls (many supplied by Doug Newman), and is straightforward to use. It's also a once-off payment.

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Finally, the BirdScan app is a companion to Veld Birds of Southern Africa – The Complete Photographic Guide. While it has brilliant photos, I don't think the app adds much value compared to the book, which is excellent.

So here's my summary:

Best all-round app: Firefinch

Best photography app: BirdPro South Africa

Best “bang for your buck” app: Sasol eBirds 5th Edition

Best information app: Roberts

Best beginner app: Newman's Birds

A few people have been having a problem with using the poll system on the Members WhatsApp group to book their meal or attendance to the monthly meetings, so here's a simple guide to explain how it works – by Jill Wheeler

USING POLLS ON WHATSAPP

A **poll** on WhatsApp is generally a short question with a few answer options to choose from. It's an easy way to confirm attendance, get opinions or make decisions in a group.

To complete it:

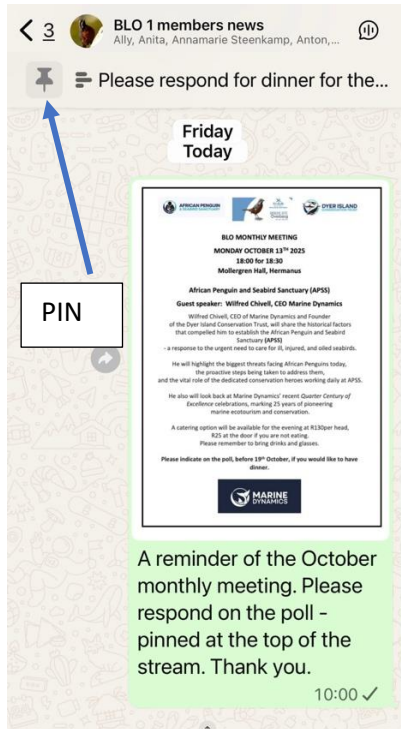
1. Tap on the poll in the chat
2. Choose the option(s) which apply to you
3. Sometimes there may be more than one option but you will be told this before you answer the question – in the context of responding to dinner at the BLO meeting you are limited to choosing one option
4. Your vote will be added, and you can see the responses from other people if you are interested by clicking on “view votes”



This poll was preceded by the notice for the meeting – you are then asked to confirm attendance by selecting an option.

You can also go back and change your option if you want to. You cannot vote in a poll for another person.

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The meeting notice is always sent out a few weeks before the meeting and then the poll ends up amongst a stream of other messages and makes it difficult to find. The admin of the group who posted the message then **“pins”** the message to the top of the stream so that every member can easily find the poll and then vote at their convenience.

Go to the **“pin”** at the top of your screen and select it – this will take you to the poll and you can put in your selection – once you have made your choice you can just scroll down again to the end of the stream, and the poll will stay **pinned** at the top until the administrator *unpins* it.

Any problems, WhatsApp Jill on 083 327 4344

BLO Fundraiser Evening

Finally, don't forget to book early when it's posted on the Members App soon, for the clubs annual Fundraising Evening on **Saturday 15th November**.

We will be offering a delicious three – course meal with complimentary wine, a brilliant guest speaker, an auction and raffle along with spot prizes will complete the evening.

So yet again I'm indebted to everyone for sending me articles, reports, snippets and photos for this newsletter, please keep them coming.

Steve

Editor

