

Birdlife Overberg Newsletter 22- June 2026



Chairman's Chirp...

I am pleased to say that the club held a successful AGM (13th April) and several important matters were voted on enabling the club to move forward in 2026/7.

Firstly, members voted unanimously to donate R25K to the purchase of a satellite tag to be placed on the BLSA bird of the year, the Black Harrier, by the Black Harrier Trust. This tag will transmit valuable data of the bird's habits, whereabouts and movement ensuring the Trust can target the right conservation needs to keep this bird from extinction. We have only approximately 1200 birds left in the wild and they are declining yearly so this is very important work. The tag will be invaluable in this ongoing project.

We also have the privilege of naming the bird, so we are asking members to send their suggestions to Steve via WhatsApp 081 817 3223. We need a male and a female name as we don't know the sex of the bird yet, so please have a think and send in your suggestions.

Yet another unanimous vote saw the current committee members voted back into office for the coming yearly term.

Lastly, all the online courses written and designed by Anton have now been made available for purchase on the club's website (birdlifeoverberg.org.za) and can be viewed there. Elaine Odendal will be overseeing the administering of these courses, and I urge everyone to take a look at them and consider them in light of your further birding adventures.

Cheers

Steve

Diary Dates

- 8th June : Monthly Meeting Mollergren Hall 6.30pm : Gentle Giants of the Southern Oceans
- 27th June : Monthly Outing to Greyton NR
- 11th July : Club Fundraising Evening Mollergren Hall 6.30pm
- 25th July : Monthly Outing to Napier Gravel RDs

As always, full details will appear on the Members WhatsApp group nearer the respective times.

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BIRDLIFE OVERBERG OUTING TO ROOIELS, HAROLD PORTER & STONY POINT.

DATE: 25 APRIL 2026 : Johan van der Westhuizen

13 Birders left the Onrus OK parking area just before 7 am, in perfect weather conditions, with only a light breeze blowing, destination Rooiels. By the time we reached Betty's Bay, the wind had picked up significantly. At Rooiels we met 4 more birders. There were also numerous enthusiastic participants in the Worldwide Bioblitz on the route, photographing every living thing they could find. One of the locals we met on the route predicted that the strong wind would keep the birds grounded and hidden from sight. True to his words, very few birds were seen. Orange-breasted Sunbirds, Familiar Chats, Red-winged Starlings and Cape Bunting showed themselves now and again and the familiar songs of Cape Grassbirds could be heard all around. This at least kept the interest going.



Cape Grassbird: Orange- breasted Sunbird : Familiar Chat – Gerbus Vermaak

Two Verreaux's Eagles and a Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk used the wind to glide past. These unexpected sightings are what makes birders come back for more, despite the conditions. A Female Cape Rock Thrush was also seen and photographed by one of the members. We spent three hours in total at the Rooiels site but disappointingly the Rockjumpers and Ground Woodpeckers were not seen or heard by anyone in our group. Coffee and breakfast were on the menu as we arrived back at the vehicles.



Cape Rock Thrush : Gerbus Vermaak, RooiEls : Cathy Bruce, Cape Bunting : Johan vd Westhuizen

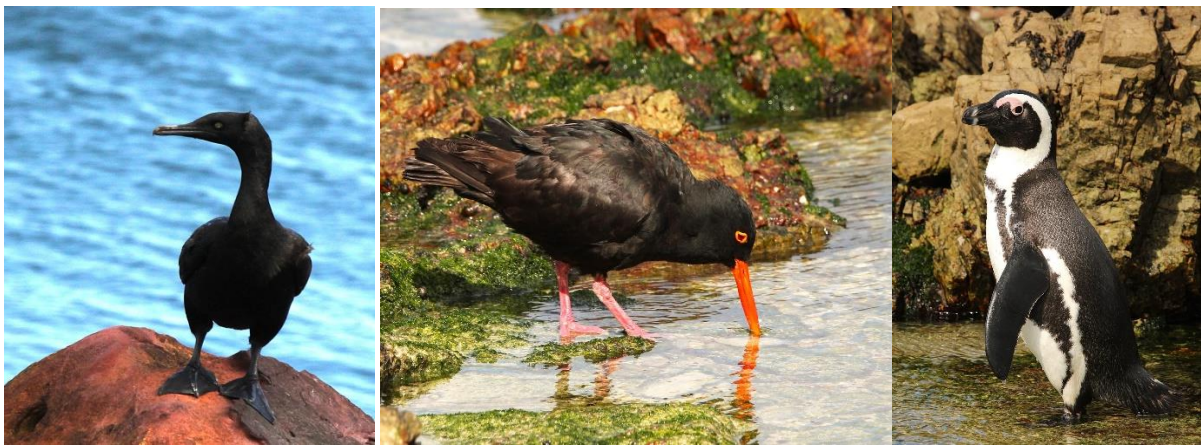
The situation was much the same at Harold Porter Botanical Gardens. The group strolled up the path to the waterfall, but very few birds could be seen. Sombre Greenbul were heard, Amethyst Sunbirds, Southern Double-collared Sunbirds and Cape Batis amongst others were added to the sightings list. There were more people than birds in the Gardens and everyone was enjoying the beautiful scenery and just being out in Nature.

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Fiscal Flycatcher : Ruth Vary, Malachite Sunbird : Gerbus Vermaak, Southern DC Sunbird: Iain Geldhart

A quick visit to Stony Point by a few of the birders produced the ever present African Penguins with Cape-, White-breasted-, Crowned- and Bank Cormorants thrown into the mix.



Bank Cormorant : African Black Oystercatcher: African Penguin – Johan vd Westhuizen

The final bird count was very disappointing, with only 48 species logged. This, however, did not detract from the enjoyment of birding in these amazing and beautiful locations.



Birders having a rest! – Iain Geldart

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BLSA News

SEABIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Philip Faure, Eleanor Weideman, Kyle Maurer and Alistair McInnes moved the Automated Penguin Monitoring System at Stony Point to a new location where there are more African Penguins commuting to and from the sea. It is hoped that the new location will increase the sample of penguins that are weighed in order to improve estimates of penguin condition. This information will inform the evaluation of the new purse-seine fishery no-take zone adjacent to this colony.

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Our support of the Coordinated Waterbird Census (CWAC) summer 2026 count is drawing to a close.

As part of this effort, Sanjo Rose and Keenan Meissenheimer have been working hard to track down and upload missing data. They have been able to fill historic data gaps in CWAC counts for four important long term monitoring sites, the Onrus River estuary, Vermont Salt Pan, the Palmiet River estuary and the Uilenkraalsmond estuary.

Stranded Turtles

Many birders bird along our coastline so it's important that you have the below telephone number in your contacts list in case you come across a stranded turtle.

Remember **NEVER** put a stranded turtle back in the ocean, please call turtle hotline on **083 300 1663** if you find one.

POLICY & ADVOCACY PROGRAMME

Kirsten Day attended the public consultation meeting for the Scoping process for the proposed Nuclear 2 power station, focusing on the Bantamsklip and Thyspunt site alternatives along the "southern" Cape coast. Policy & Advocacy will be submitting comments on behalf of BLSA.

Memorial Bench to Anton Odendal

I pleased to say that the club's memorial bench to Anton has been ordered and should be ready for placement at Fernkloof NR by the end of the month.

We will be announcing details of its placement nearer the time on the members WhatsApp group and would love to see as many members and friends at its unveiling as possible.



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20 bird species can understand each other's anti-cuckoo call - By [Chris Simms](#)

Several species of birds from different continents use and understand similar alarm calls when they see an invader that might lay an egg in their nest – this shared call hints at the origin of language



A superb fairy-wren (left) tries to fend off a cuckoo : David Ongley

More than 20 species of bird around the world use a similar “whining” alarm call to warn birds like cuckoos are around. The call seems to be understood across species, and its specific use hints at [how language may have originated](#).

[Cuckoos](#) are one of a range of some [100 species known as brood parasites](#) that lay their eggs in the nests of other [birds](#), attempting to con the hosts into incubating and caring for the hatchlings as if they were the hosts’ own offspring.

[Will Feeney](#) at the Doñana Biological Station in Spain and his colleagues have now found 21 bird species, which last shared a common ancestor about 53 million years ago, all use structurally similar “whining” vocalisations when they spot a brood parasite.

The species include [superb fairy-wrens](#) (*Malurus cyaneus*) in Australasia, tawny-flanked prinia (*Prinia subflava*) in Africa, Hume’s leaf warblers (*Phylloscopus humei*) in Asia and greenish warblers (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*) in Europe.

“All of these different birds from all around the world seem to have converged on using this same vocalisation to denote their respective brood parasites,” says Feeney.

The researchers found the species that produce this alarm call often inhabit areas where there are lots of brood parasites that make use of many different host species, and when the potential hosts hear the whining call, they attempt to scare away the invader with aggressive physical mobbing.

“Brood parasites represent this very unique kind of threat. They are an enormous threat to your offspring but not at all a threat to you,” says Feeney. “Our data suggests that [the call] is to bring in birds as quickly as possible, potentially to assist.”

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“For the superb fairy-wrens, because they’re cooperative breeders, it’s quite possible that the mobbing call is intended to draw in other individuals to participate in the mobbing,” says [Rose Thorogood](#) at the University of Helsinki in Finland.

To investigate further, Feeney and his colleagues played recordings of the calls made by brood-parasite hosts from other continents to potential host birds in Australia and China. They discovered hearing the foreign warning calls elicited just as rapid a mobbing response as hearing the calls produced by their own species.

“This indicates that the function of this vocalisation is to facilitate a communication across species rather than just within,” says Feeney.

Thorogood cautions, “It might not be that they have an ancestral, ancient, shared alarm towards brood parasites, but rather it might actually just be that there is a specific acoustic feature that seems to be quite successful at driving away brood parasites.”

The team also did a similar playback experiment in territories of yellow warblers (*Setophaga petechia*) in North America, which are used as egg incubators by brown-headed cowbirds (*Molothrus ater*), but don’t make the distinctive whining alarm call. When hearing the alarm calls of superb fairy-wrens, the warblers responded with a rapid return to their nests much as they do to other calls indicating distress, rather than by mobbing.

Feeney says this suggests there is an innate component to the alarm calls that many bird species respond to, but birds in areas where brood-parasites are common have tailored the call and response to pass on knowledge of the local risk.

“They’ve taken a distress call vocalisation and repurposed it for use in a novel context, which is a high threat to offspring,” he says. “That would explain why all these birds from all around the world are using a similar sound.”

[Charles Darwin](#) speculated in his 1871 book *The Descent of Man* the origins of spoken language might be traceable to the imitation and modification of instinctive sounds that humans and other animals produce. Examples of these might be a squeak if you are scared or a scream made in response to pain. “The birds adapting these innate calls to another purpose could be the first stepping stone towards language,” says Feeney.

[Rob Magrath](#) at the Australian National University says, “Calls often have specific meanings, and in some cases, they refer to external objects or events, rather than merely communicating about internal states like fear, or attributes like sex or species.”

“This referentiality means that such calls are akin to human words, which often refer to external objects or events,” he adds. “So, animal communication and human language appear to be on a continuum, rather than ‘language’ being a uniquely human feature.”

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Lesser Honeyguide V Acacia Pied Barbet Interaction – Report & Images by Carin Malan

Watching a pair of Acacia Pied Barbet nesting recently revealed one of nature's more dramatic relationships. Each time the barbets changed nests, fierce skirmishes erupted with a nearby Lesser Honeyguide — a species that has expanded into the Western Cape alongside the spread of the barbets into the Australian Acacia-infested areas of the fynbos biome. (*Macdonald 1986b, Hockey et al 1989; Underfill 1992*).



Unlike the better-known Greater Honeyguide, the Lesser Honeyguide does not guide humans to bee hives. Instead, it is an obligate brood parasite, laying its eggs in the nests of cavity-nesting birds such as Acacia Pied Barbets. The honeyguide chick hatches first and instinctively eliminates the barbet chicks, leaving the unsuspecting foster parents to rear the young parasite.

It is a remarkable and often brutal example of co-evolution and adaptation unfolding in our local landscape.

For those interested in the different honeyguide species each specialise in particular host birds:

- The Greater Honeyguide targets hole-nesting species, such as African Hoopoe, Brown-hooded Kingfisher
- The Lesser Honeyguide primarily parasitises Olive Woodpecker and Acacia Pied Barbet nests.
- The Scaly-throated Honeyguide mainly targets Olive Woodpecker, Cardinal Woodpecker and Knysna Woodpecker nests.



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Here is something worth considering



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Wings



KNYSNA TURACOS JO GROBLER



AFRICAN JACANA THINUS VAN STADEN

“
Birding has brought me great joy over the years, from quiet garden moments with a Cape Robin-Chat, to the call of a Fiery-necked Nightjar on a summer night, to the flash of a Crimson-breasted Shrike in the bushveld. Each encounter has deepened my appreciation for South Africa’s birds and wild places.

I want to give back and help ensure that species such as the Botha’s Lark, African Penguin, and Secretarybird continue to inspire future generations. That is why I have chosen to leave a legacy gift to BirdLife South Africa – so that the wonder of birds endures.

Leaving a gift in my will is my way of protecting habitats, supporting research, addressing threats to birds, and ensuring that the joy of birding continues beyond my lifetime.”

Thinking about the future of birds?
After taking care of your loved ones, you might consider leaving a gift in your will to BirdLife South Africa. Even a small portion can help ensure that birds – and the joy of birding – endure for generations to come. For more information, visit birdlife.org.za/support-us/leave-a-legacy/

Spot the odd one out! – Paula Combrink (taken at Fernkloof NR)



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As always I'm indebted to everyone who has sent me reports, photographs and snippets for the newsletter, please keep them coming.

Steve

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