

Birdlife Overberg Newsletter 24- October 2026



Chairmans Chirp..

Well, the migrants keep on coming this month, sightings of Common Buzzard, Black (Yellow-billed Kite), Red-Chested Cuckoo, different swallows and swifts have all been reported, so summer is really on its way now.

Now we can start to look forward to the arrival of the waders and terns very soon and the birding in our region will step up a gear or two. As always De Mond NR will be well worth a visit from November onwards.

Speaking of things special now is the time to think about our yearly outings to Nuwejaars SMA outside Bredasdorp. These trips are always special and this year we have outings on 21st and 28th November.

So, as there will be limited places per outing remember when Johan posts the trips on the WhatsApp group be sure to get in quick to avoid disappointment.

Steve

Diary Dates

12th October – Monthly Meeting speaker will be Dean Boshoff on the Appeal of Waders

31st October – Outing to Jessie Waltons farm

23rd-25th October – Birding and Social weekend to Vrolijkheid NR near Robertson

7th November (Saturday) – Monthly Meeting will be our yearly Braai and Photo session

21st & 28th November – outings to Nuwejaars SMA

As always more details will be posted on the members WhatsApp group nearer the time.

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Birdlife Overberg outing to Stanford, Flower Valley & Platbos: 22 August 2026.

Thirteen birders in four vehicles left the Eastcliff SPAR at 07:00, destination the beautiful Platbos Forest Reserve. A quick stop at the Bird Hide at “Willem Appel se Dam” to join up with another birder, allowed for some special sightings, amongst others African Swamphen, White-backed Duck, Black Crake & Pearl-breasted Swallows. There were also Black Sparrowhawk and Rock Kestrel flyovers.



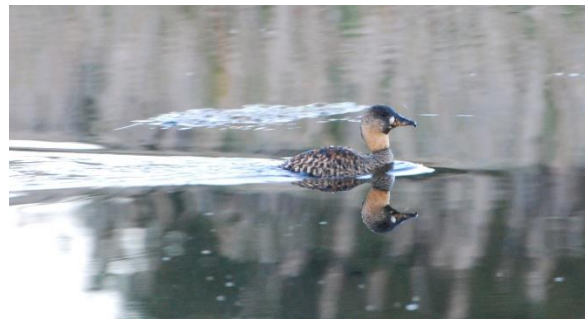
Common Moorhen & Red-knobbed Coot – Cathy Bruce



Yellow-billed Ducks – Johan Olivier



Water Thick-knee – Johan vd Westhuizen



White-backed Duck – Tim Davis

We left Stanford with 25 Bird species already logged on the outing list. Another five birds were added before we arrived at our next destination. The Forest at Witkrans / Flower Valley turned out to be very productive, with around twenty species logged. Another birder joined here. Specials including Knysna Woodpecker, Cardinal Woodpecker & Amethyst Sunbird. Bokmakierie & Southern Boubou were heard but not seen. Some of the members, mostly ladies, got distracted by the beautiful surroundings and ample plant life and had to be reminded that we were on a Birding outing.



Witkrans-Paulette vd Borsh



Amethyst Sunbird & Cape White-eye – Iain Geldart

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After a quick cup of coffee and with muffins supplied by one of the members, we left for our ultimate destination, the enchanting Platbos Forest Reserve. While still sorting out the administrative requirements, a report was received of a Tambourine Dove seen by two birders on the way to the toilet. What a sighting! The forest, as always, was green and lush and we opted to follow the roads as this at least allows glimpses of the birds as they fly over.



Birders at Platbos Forest – Cathy Bruce

Birds could constantly be heard, but very few were seen. Two African Olive Pigeons were seen high up in the canopy, but photography was challenging to say the least. Only five bird species were added to the list during the visit to the Platbos Forest Reserve.



African Olive Pigeon – Cathy Bruce : White-throated Swallow – Tim Davis : Cape Batis Johan vd Westhuizen

Lunch was enjoyed in the forest near the car park, before venturing deeper into the forest again to visit the “Old Tree”. The 1000-year-old Milkwood was indeed a sight to behold. The nearby Maze entertained a few of the members for a while before everyone returned to the vehicles. After saying their goodbyes, the group disbanded, each vehicle returning home in its own time.

A quick stop at “Die Vette Mossel” next to Kleinrivier Lagoon produced a few more birds, such as Water Thick-knee, Cormorants, Gulls & Terns.

What a way to end an otherwise challenging day!

Report by: Johan van der Westhuizen.

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A different approach to identifying birds in the field – Adam Cruickshank

One thing many people don't know about me is that I love crime investigation shows. Whether it's *CSI*, *NCIS*, or another detective series, I enjoy watching investigators carefully piece together a case. They don't walk onto a crime scene, look at the first clue they find, and decide they've solved it. They gather evidence. They rule out possibilities. They challenge their own assumptions. Only then do they arrive at a conclusion.

The more I watch these shows, the more I realise that birding should work in exactly the same way.

How often have we caught a glimpse of a bird and immediately decided what it is? Our brains are brilliant at filling in the gaps, but they can also lead us in the wrong direction. Great birders don't simply identify birds. They build a case, one piece of evidence at a time.

The next time you're looking at a bird, try asking yourself these five questions.

1. What group of birds am I looking at?

Before trying to identify the species, step back and identify the broader group.

Is it a pipit? A lark? A cisticola? A prinia? A weaver? A thrush? A raptor?

Getting the family or group right immediately narrows your options and gives you a much stronger starting point. Think of it as identifying the group of suspects before trying to find the individual.

2. Why is it not one of the similar species?

This is where the real birding begins.

Don't ask yourself why it is one particular species. Instead, ask yourself why it isn't the others.

What features rule out the similar looking species? What evidence allows you to eliminate them?

The best birders spend just as much time ruling species out as they do confirming the one they believe they're looking at.

3. What evidence positively identifies this bird?

Now it's time to build your case.

Look carefully at the bill, plumage, wing pattern, tail shape, eye colour, size, structure, call, or any other field marks that stand out.

The more evidence you gather, the stronger your identification becomes.

4. Does the habitat and behaviour support my identification?

A bird doesn't exist in isolation.

Where are you? Are you in grassland, forest, fynbos, wetlands, or coastal forest? How is the bird behaving? Is it feeding on the ground, moving through the canopy, clinging to a tree trunk, or constantly flicking its tail?

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Habitat and behaviour won't identify a bird on their own, but they often provide valuable supporting evidence.

5. What evidence would change my mind?

This is probably the most important question of all.

Good detectives don't become so attached to one theory that they ignore evidence pointing somewhere else.

Neither should we.

Ask yourself whether another species still fits the evidence. Have you heard the call? Have you seen enough of the bird? Is there anything that doesn't quite add up?

Changing your mind isn't a sign that you're a poor birder. In many cases, it's a sign that you're becoming a better one.

One of the biggest lessons birding has taught me is to slow down. We don't always need to identify a bird in the first few seconds. Sometimes the greatest enjoyment comes from watching, observing, asking questions, and allowing the evidence to lead us to the answer.

The next time you lift your binoculars, don't think like someone trying to guess the right answer.

Think like a detective.

You might be surprised by how much your birding improves.

BLSA Updates

POLICY & ADVOCACY PROGRAMME

The Policy and Advocacy team liaised with Odette Curtis of the Overberg Renosterveld Trust, landowners and their lawyers regarding risks associated with a Wind Energy Facility.

HEAD OF CONSERVATION

Hanneline Smit-Robinson and Linda van den Heever met with Odette Curtis to discuss aspects of the Black Harrier Conservation Action Plan. Hanneline also delivered a presentation on the Black Harrier, Bird of the Year in 2026 at the South African Bird Fair.

SEABIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Christina Hagen visited the De Hoop Nature Reserve African Penguin colony to undertake repairs and modifications to the electric fence.

SEABIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Kyle Maurer completed post-survey data management from the first Stony Point hydroacoustic fish survey. He prepared for the second phase of the survey around Dyer Island. These surveys will contribute to the monitoring of fishing closures around African Penguin colonies.

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SEABIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Philip Faure and Kyle Maurer deployed seven Axy-Trek GPS loggers and two GPS cameras on African Penguins at Stony Point, with all nine devices successfully retrieved. They also completed hydroacoustic surveys of small pelagic fish within the Stony Point and Dyer Island fishing closures.

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NPO 317-803

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- Keep areas clean and tidy.



NATURAL ALTERNATIVES

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- Try peppermint oil, chilli or cloves.
- Encourage natural predators.



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- Report sick or dead wildlife.



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A good clean never hurt anyone or anything!

Possibly one of the biggest sins many of us make as birders is how we look after our binoculars.



I know this might be controversial for some people, especially the photographers among us, but I would argue that your binoculars are probably the most important piece of equipment you own as a birder. We spend a lot of money on good optics because we want that clear, bright view of a bird. We want to see the subtle colours, the feather detail and those small features that can sometimes make all the difference when identifying a bird.

And then we look through lenses covered in dust, fingerprints and, quite possibly, the remains of the pie we ate at the last garage stop.

I have been guilty of this more times than I would like to admit. You are out in the field, notice that your binoculars are a little dirty, lift the bottom of your shirt or grab whatever piece of clothing is closest and give the lenses a quick wipe. Somewhere, an optics expert has just felt a sudden unexplained pain.

But apart from not giving us the best possible view through our binoculars, cleaning them incorrectly can actually damage them. Tiny particles of dust, sand and other bits of dirt can scratch the lens surfaces and coatings when we simply rub a cloth across them.

I was reminded of this while reading an article by Bill Thompson III in *Good Birders Don't Wear White: 50 Tips From North America's Top Birders*. His advice is remarkably simple: if we are prepared to invest in good binoculars, we should also invest in looking after them properly.

And that doesn't require anything particularly fancy.

A decent optics cleaning kit should have three basic things. First, a soft hair bristle brush that you can use to gently remove dust, sand, crumbs and whatever else has found its way onto your lenses. This is important because you want to remove those potentially abrasive particles before you start wiping the glass. Second, you need a soft cleaning cloth designed specifically for coated lenses. Lens tissues can also work. Finally, you need a small bottle of proper lens cleaning fluid that is safe to use on coated optics.

You can buy complete optics cleaning kits, but you can also put one together yourself. Your optician is a good place to look for cleaning fluid and cloths, while a small, very soft makeup or artist's brush can work for removing loose particles.

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The actual cleaning process is pretty simple.

Start by holding your binoculars so that anything you loosen can fall away from the lens. Using the soft brush, gently remove all the dust and other particles. Have a good look at the lenses and repeat this until you are confident that the loose dirt is gone. This is especially important if you have been birding somewhere dusty or sandy.

And make sure the pie crumbs are gone. Pies and binoculars are unfortunately not best friends.

Once the loose material has been removed, put a small amount of lens cleaning fluid onto your cleaning cloth and gently clean the lens using a light circular motion. If the lenses are particularly dirty, they may need a little more attention. The important thing is to use a cleaning product that is designed for coated optics rather than reaching for whatever household cleaner happens to be nearby.

Once you have finished, check your work. Tilt the binoculars towards the light so that it reflects off the surface of the lenses. Any fingerprints, smudges or streaks that remain should become fairly obvious. It sounds like such a small thing but clean your binoculars properly and then take them outside and look at a bird. You might be surprised by just how much of a difference it makes.

We spend thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands, on binoculars designed to give us incredible views of birds. Surely it makes sense to spend a little bit of time looking after the pieces of glass through which we actually see them.

So perhaps this is a challenge for today.

Get out your binoculars. Have a proper look at those lenses. If they are anything like mine have been at times, confess your sins, get out the cleaning kit and give them the attention they deserve.

Then go and find some birds.... You might just see them in a whole new light.

News on the Secretary Bird Project

As you know we have been involved with this project for over 3 yrs now and the results are very encouraging. It seems we have more of these birds that we first thought, and I'm delighted to say that the Overberg is one of the strongholds for the species. Although still a special and scarce sighting we still need to keep reporting these sightings in our region so the conservationists can continue gathering important data.

An encouraging snippet was published this month from BLSA that Nico, a male Secretarybird fitted with a GPS tracker in October 2021, has now been tracked for an incredible 1,761 days, making him the longest tracked bird in the history of this project. Even better Nico has bred, and his tracker is still sending information back to researchers.

So please keep reporting all sightings, even if you think it's a repeat sighting of any and all birds you see in the Overberg region to me via WhatsApp 081 817 3223 and be especially on the look out for nesting or breeding birds.

Thank you Steve

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Beaware of getting to close to Cape Fur Seals



Rabid seals bits at least 176 people as fatal disease spreads, threatening other species.

At least 176 people have been bitten by Cape Fur Seals during the marine rabies outbreak along the western and southern coast of South Africa.

Scientists warn that the disease is now endemic to this species and fear it could spill over to infect more vulnerable seals and marine animals as far south as Antarctica and crucial breeding grounds such as Marion Island.

So be very aware of any seals you may encounter along our beaches and estuaries while out walking or birding. So, stay well clear of all seals and other animals you may encounter.

To call or not to call?



The use of bird callback is one of those topics that divides the birding community. There are those who are dead set against the use of any callback at all. Their justification for this is the wellbeing of the birds. You get others who will use callback sparingly. They use it but are still concerned about the impact it may have on the birds. Then there are those who seem to have very few concerns about

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how much callback they use. Their priority seems to be less about the wellbeing of the bird and more about getting the experience they want.

Many clubs and organisations prohibit the use of callback altogether during their activities. I understand why they would do this. Callback is incredibly easy to abuse and allowing it could become an excuse for people to push the boundaries.

But here is the problem.

We live in a technological age. People have smartphones, and almost every birder has access to bird calls on their phone. Furthermore, I would argue that a VERY large percentage of birders do, in fact, use callback when they are out birding.

The problem is that not everyone knows how to use it ethically.

Some birders may have watched an experienced birder or hotshot guide using callback recklessly, and that is the behaviour that has been modelled to them. They see someone they respect doing it and assume that must be how it is done. At the same time, they may feel that they cannot ask other experienced birders about the ethical use of callback because admitting that they use it in the first place could lead to them being judged.

And then there is one of birding's slightly uncomfortable secrets. Some of the same people who speak very strongly against callback will occasionally use it themselves when there is a particular bird they really want to see. That certainly isn't true of everyone. I know birders who are completely opposed to callback and genuinely practise what they preach. But I think most of us who have been around birding for long enough have seen the contradiction at some point.

So maybe we need another approach.

Perhaps blanket prohibition should not be our only tool for addressing callback.

What I would like to see is more emphasis on modelling the ethical use of callback. I understand the difficulty with this. If you allow callback, some people will push the boundaries. A prohibition is much easier to understand and enforce. There may also be particular species, places and circumstances where no callback should be used at all.

But the reality remains that birders are using callback. Perhaps, then, we also need to think about how we create a culture of intelligent, restrained and ethical use.

So what could that look like?

1. **Callback should never be the first option.** Search, listen and wait first. Give the bird an opportunity to show itself without any interference from you.
2. **Know the bird.** Threatened and sensitive species require much greater caution, and in some cases no callback at all. Just because you have the call on your phone doesn't mean you should use it.
3. **Consider the season.** A territorial breeding bird is not responding to your phone for your benefit. It may believe another bird has entered its territory. That should influence the decision you make.

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4. **Keep it short and quiet.** You do not need to blast a recording across the forest. Someone once taught me that the volume should be no louder than the bird would naturally call itself. That advice has always stuck with me.
5. **Play once and wait.** This is a big one. Have patience after playback. Don't immediately play it again because nothing happened within ten seconds. The bird may have heard you perfectly well.
6. **Watch the bird.** Pay attention to how it responds. If its behaviour suggests that you are causing unnecessary disturbance, stop.
7. **Think about cumulative pressure.** Your ten seconds might seem insignificant, but at a popular birding site yours may be the twentieth phone that bird has heard that week. We cannot make our decisions as though we are the only birder who ever visits that bird.
8. **Accept that sometimes you don't get the bird.** This is probably the most important principle of all. Seeing the bird can never be more important than the bird itself.

And this is where I think modelling becomes so important.

Ultimately, you want the person on your club outing to behave responsibly when nobody from the club is standing beside them. You won't always be there to police their behaviour. The guide won't always be there. The club chairman won't always be there. The rules won't always be there.

But their understanding will be.

If we can teach birders why callback needs to be used with restraint, show them what responsible use actually looks like, and perhaps most importantly show them when NOT to use it, we give them a framework for making that decision for themselves.

The goal shouldn't simply be to create birders who don't use callback because somebody has told them they aren't allowed to.

Surely the better goal is to create birders who have the call sitting right there on their phone, who really want to see the bird, but who understand the bird and the situation well enough to decide:

Not this bird. Not here. Not today.

That, I believe, is where education becomes more powerful than prohibition.

Article by Adam Cruickshank



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Finally some great news that the bridge over the estuary at De Mond NR has been fixed and is open to the public.



A great weekends birding...

The weekend of the 19-20th September saw two birding events organised by The Agulhas Plains Project take place. Firstly, a survey was conducted at a site near Nachtwacht (De Mond) looking for both Grass and Marsh Owls, and both were found and recorded. Secondly a Buttonquail bash was conducted at Sandberg Fynbos NR (Elim) looking for the Fynbos Buttonquail, again two sightings were made thus making it a very successful weekend for all the birders that attended for these much sort after birds.



Birders looking for the Buttonquail & the only photo of the bird that day, well they are fast and it was a very foggy morning!

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Not all South African birds, but makes interesting reading never-the-less.

BIRDS → AVERAGE LIFESPAN

1. House Sparrow → 3–5 years	21. Canary → 10–15 years
2. Pigeon → 6 years	22. Cockatiel → 15–20 years
3. American Robin → 2 years	23. Macaw → 40–60 years
4. American Crow → 14–15 years	24. Budgerigar → 5–10 years
5. Peacock → 18–20 years	25. Lovebird → 10–15 years
6. Bald Eagle → 20–30 years	26. Finch → 5–10 years
7. Golden Eagle → 20–30 years	27. Peahen → 15–20 years
8. Snowy Owl → 9–10 years	28. Vulture → 20–30 years
9. Barred Owl → 18–20 years	29. Albatross → 30–50 years
10. Penguin → 10–20 years	30. Seagull → 10–20 years
11. Flamingo → 20–30 years	31. Woodpecker → 5–10 years
12. Pelican → 15–25 years	32. Kingfisher → 5–10 years
13. Parrot → 20–60 years	33. Heron → 10–15 years
14. Swan → 10–20 years	34. Stork → 20–30 years
15. Goose → 10–20 years	35. Crane → 20–30 years
16. Duck → 5–10 years	36. Toucan → 15–20 years
17. Chicken → 5–10 years	37. Cuckoo → 5–10 years
18. Turkey → 3–5 years	38. Raven → 10–20 years
19. Ostrich → 30–40 years	39. Quail → 2–5 years
20. Hummingbird → 3–5 years	40. Cormorant → 10–20 years

Learn to recognize the call of birds – Adam Cruickshank

So here are five easy and super practical things you can do to improve your retention of bird call.

1. Use mnemonics to remember what you hear

This is easier than you may think. Almost everyone knows the Red-chested Cuckoo more commonly as the “Piet-my-vrou”. This Afrikaans name perfectly describes how the bird’s call sounds, making it easy to remember.

There are some other ones, like the bird who is rather vain about its looks. Not that we blame it, because it is quite a looker! The African Emerald Cuckoo proudly calls, “Pretty Georgie.”

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But you don't need to use somebody else's mnemonic. In fact, Tristan made a great point in our conversation: *come up with something that makes sense to you.*

And it can go further than words. Think about what the sound reminds you of. For example, a Buff-spotted Flufftail sounds to me like a ship sailing through thick fog and sounding its foghorn. Or there is the playful and energetic Green-backed Camaroptera, whose call sounds like it is playing with marbles in the bush.

There are no rules to this. Describe it how you hear it, not how other people tell you that you should hear it.

2. Don't neglect habitat

Where are you hearing the call?

This can immediately help you eliminate some species and work out what you are hearing much quicker.

On many birding apps, you can set your location, which will help give you a list of species that are possible where you are. Pair this with a basic understanding of the habitat you are in and suddenly that massive list of possible species becomes a lot smaller.

Tristan mentioned this in our conversation too. Before trying to identify an unfamiliar sound, think about where you are and what birds should actually occur in that habitat.

3. Use as many tools as possible

There are a wide range of great apps available for the local market. My personal favourite for learning calls is the Firefinch app, particularly because of the interactive sonograms, but almost all of the major birding apps provide good quality calls that will help you learn.

There are also some fantastic free online resources, such as eBird and Xeno-canto.

Use these tools. Listen to different recordings of the same species. Look at the sonograms. Compare what you are hearing.

Deeply immerse yourself in the learning experience.

4. Spend time in the field

This is key.

As good as all these resources are, nothing beats time in the field.

Take time while you are birding to actually listen. Don't only listen for something unusual. Listen to the common birds as well.

And, if possible, record some of the calls you hear. This was something Tristan and I spent quite a bit of time talking about. Recording a bird forces you to listen differently. You start noticing things like pace, pitch and the different sounds that even one species can make. Tristan spoke about how recording has helped improve his own knowledge of bird calls.

You don't need expensive recording equipment either. Your phone is enough to get started.

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5. Repetition is key

There really isn't a shortcut around this one.

Take the time to listen carefully to the calls you hear, and when you are out again, listen to those same calls again.

In a previous episode of the podcast, we spoke about “active listening”. Don't just hear a bird calling in the background. Listen carefully to what you are actually hearing.

Pay attention to the pitch, tone, structure, melody and pace.

Then hear it again. And again.

Over time, something that once sounded completely unfamiliar starts becoming instantly recognisable.

These five simple tips will help you improve your retention of bird calls. And the result is not simply being able to put a name to more sounds.

You will start noticing more of what is happening around you.

There are birds calling everywhere that we walk straight past because we simply haven't learnt to listen for them yet. The better you become at birding by ear, the more birds you will find, the more you will understand what is happening around you, and I genuinely believe the more you will enjoy your birding.

Striped Flufftail *Sarothrura affinis* by Carin Malan

Recently, I became aware of Striped Flufftails calling in and around Kleinmond. Of course, most birders know that flufftails are among South Africa's most secretive and elusive birds. Many of us have never actually seen a flufftail, even though some species can be surprisingly common.

Yes, we heard them — several times at several different spots but trying to lure them out into the open was another story altogether and, unfortunately, completely unsuccessful!

At a meeting, I casually mentioned the Striped Flufftail activity and immediately received an interesting response from Justin, a local resident. He told me that, following the 2019 Kleinmond fire, he had seen a **Southern Fiscal (*Lanius collaris*) dragging a Striped Flufftail around his garden**, close to the mountain. Even better, he had photographs! The fire obviously pushed the bird out of the mountain that was under fire. He immediately had my attention, and he kindly promised to send me the photos.

At first, the size of the prey didn't make sense to me. How could a Southern Fiscal possibly manage to carry a flufftail?

That prompted me to do a little research — and I quickly realised just **how small the Striped Flufftail actually is.**

Striped Flufftail (male)

15cm and 28g

Southern Fiscal (male)

22cm and 40g

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To put the size of the Striped Flufftail into perspective a Cape Sparrow is 15cm and 26g

This species occupies a range of habitats and altitudes, being found at sea level in South Africa, mostly at lower altitudes particularly in fynbos habitat. Breeding takes place during the local rainy season. Pairs hold territories year-round, with a smaller breeding territory and a larger home range. The nest is a bowl of dry grass set in a grass tuft.

And while all of this is fascinating, the real challenge remains the same: **hearing a Striped Flufftail is one thing — actually seeing one is quite another!**

Interesting article in African BirdLife : [South African flufftails \(and their ridiculously cute chicks\) - African BirdLife](#)



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Promoting the area as atop birding destination in the local newspaper.

Overberg birding takes flight

TWEET GAINSBOROUGH-WARING

As more local and international birders discover the region's exceptional birdlife and natural beauty, the vision of making the Overberg a leading birding destination - once a dream - is now a reality.

BirdLife Overberg chairman Steve Peck says this was the vision of the late Anton Odendal, a legend in the Overberg birding community.

Peck, who has guided international birders around the region, is mindful of the growing number of birders and is committed to carrying this vision forward.

With an impressive 454 bird species on record, including 41 pelagic and 413 terrestrial species - which include one critically endangered, eight endangered, 15 near-threatened, and eight vulnerable species, as well as endemic and near-endemic species - the Overberg is a hotspot for conservation.

It has sixty-one migrant species, including the Red-chested Cuckoo, African Paradise Flycatcher, Black Saw-wing and Black Cuckoo.

Based on BirdLife Overberg's monthly bird counts over the past seven years,



Denham's Bustard. PHOTO: Steve Peck



Birding at Kleinriver Lagoon. PHOTO: Tweet Gainsborough-Waring

the number of species recorded represents 42% of all the birds on the official South African bird list.

"We firmly believe no other region in South Africa can come close to this percentage," says Peck. Birding enthusiasts are drawn by iconic birds such as the Blue Crane, Denham's Bustard, Cape (Aguilas) Long-billed

Lark, Cape Rockjumper and other fynbos endemics.

Avitourism is becoming increasingly popular - and a valuable additional income for tourism in the area. Recent research has highlighted the benefits of developing it as a conservation and economic opportunity in South Africa.

A study of 11 community-based projects revealed that birding, when linked to conservation objectives, creates income, skills and empowerment opportunities for local communities.

The Overberg's diversity of habitats and nature reserves - such as De Hoop, home to Cape Vultures; Stony

Point, with its African Penguins; and Rooiels, where Cape Rockjumpers and Verreaux's Eagles can be seen - offers birding enthusiasts a range of options.

Visit the club's website, birdlife-overberg.org.za and follow the link Birding Routes Archives to explore available routes in the Overberg. ■

BIRDLIFE OVERBERG OUTING TO THE "VAN DER STEL" PASS.

DATE: 26th OF SEPTEMBER 2026. - Johan van der Westhuizen.

Weather Forecast: 70% chance of rain with a strong Southeaster. Enough to let any man, or woman stay home & cuddle up.

15 Birders in 6 vehicles set off on the Karwyderskraal road, destination the "van der Stel" pass, each vehicle equipped with a two-way radio. A big thank you to the BLO committee for acquiring the 4 new radios to add to the existing 4. It certainly makes it more enjoyable if everyone can share in the sightings. The predicted rain stayed away, although it was cloudy and quite dark, which made photography a bit challenging. The Birds were out in force, and the more common birds were quickly "ticked off", Ibises, Doves, Sunbirds, Stonechats, Sparrows & Yellow-billed Kites to name but a few. Greater-striped and White-throated Swallows could be seen swooping under the bridges or perching on fences. As we made our way down the road, Black-headed Herons flew overhead, and Bokmakieries could be heard in the thickets next to the road. A Burchell's Coucal could be heard calling from the reedbeds along the Botrivier.

Common Quail were very vocal in the wheat fields next to the Swartrivier road while Capped Wheatears, Red-capped and Large-billed Larks preferred to perch on the fence posts.

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Greater-striped Swallow- Johan Olivier : Scenery – Stoney Steenkamp : Greater-striped Swallow – Ruth Vary

50+ Blue Cranes made the convoy stop and everyone embarked to view these magnificent creatures' parade and perform their unique courting displays.



Dancing Blue Cranes - Iain Geldart

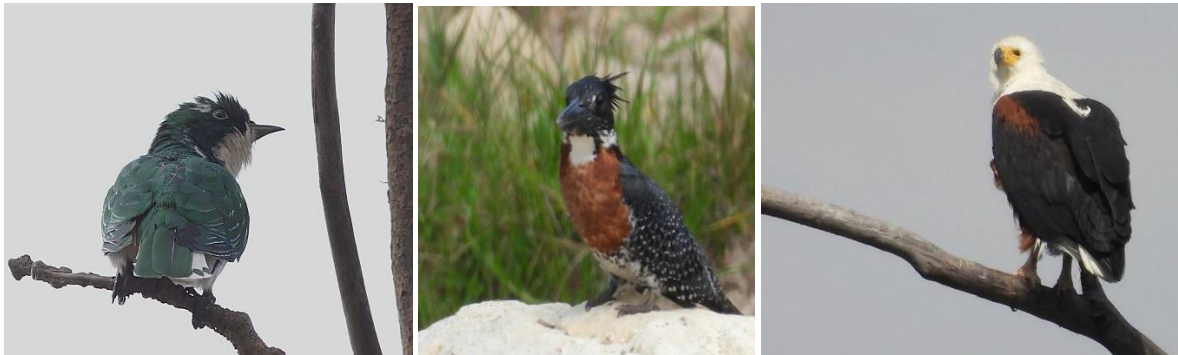
A flock of Pied Starlings were seen at their usual spot on the Villiersdorp road. Once on the Hawston View road, the convoy could slow down to better observe the abundance of birds and also enjoy the incredible scenery. The much-anticipated coffee break was taken under the towering Eucalyptus trees lining the road further down. People were chatting away, catching up on lost time and meeting the new members. Cape Weavers and Southern-masked Weavers were busy constructing nests high up in the trees and letting the world know of it. A Cape Bunting was seen on the old telephone wires next to the road.



Cape Weaver – Ian Swemmer : Cape Bunting – Johan vd Westhuizen

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The Barn Owl usually found in the derelict old building next to the road on the “van der Stel” pass, was nowhere to be seen, but numerous other bird species, including White-rumped Swifts and House Sparrows were seen. The next stop a few hundred meters down the road proved very successful. There were numerous African Paradise Flycatchers chasing each other around, a Greater Honeyguide could be heard, and a Klaas’s Cuckoo made a brief appearance. We made our way up to the top of the pass where a Verreaux’s Eagle chick was spotted on a nest a few weeks ago. No luck. The nest was empty. We also “dipped” on the White-fronted Bee-eaters that are often seen in the vicinity. As we made our way back down the pass, a Giant Kingfisher was seen perched on a large rock in the riverbed. A Brown-hooded Kingfisher could be heard calling further up the stream. Further down the road an African Fish Eagle was perched in its usual spot. Lunch was enjoyed at the pond near the Goedvertrouw Homestead, some members electing to make a picnic of it, reclining in the shade on a grass bank near the pond. Red-winged Starlings were feasting on berries in the trees, Streaky-headed Seedeaters were scurrying in the grass, and a lone White-faced Whistling Duck was sitting on another of the pond’s banks. In a little forest a bit further down the road, a Black Sparrowhawk was briefly seen flying low down amongst the trees. An Olive Woodpecker was seen by one member exiting a nest hole.



Klaas’s Cuckoo – Johan vd Westhuzien : Giant Kingfisher & African Fish Eagle – Johan Olivier



White- faced Whistling Duck – Ian Swemmer : Kittlitz Plover & Large-billed Lark – Johan vd Westhuzien

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Black-winged Kite & Cape Sugarbird – Johan vd Westhuzien : African Pipit – Ruth Vary



Birders Birding & White-necked Raven (+sheep) - Ian Swemmer

All too soon, we reached Botrivier, where goodbyes were said and the group dispersed. What an enjoyable outing! So glad that the outing wasn't called off. 87 Bird Species were logged during the outing.

The next Birdlife Overberg outing is on the 31st of October 2026 to Jessie Walton's farm, Keurbos, in the Elgin Valley.



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

Steve