

The Kite

Tygerberg Bird Club
Tygerberg Voëlklub



Number 134 (April 2022 – July 2022)

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Chirp from the Chair

A BIG welcome to the new Members who have joined the TBC this year. We hope that you will come and enjoy the lovely outings with us, as well as the ZOOM meetings held every month. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions of numbers up at the Tygerberg Nature Reserve, we have not been able to go back and host meetings in the hall. Please watch the website, as information may change.

Thank you to the Speakers these past few months. The TBC have enjoyed travel talks of bird trips to Tembe and KZN, Namibia and Kruger Park. Armchair travel at its best!! It was also great to get feedback from Odette Curtis-Scott, of the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust of the wonderful work accomplished there over the past 10 years. With funds donated by the TBC, four Black Harriers had trackers placed on them and important information has been gained on where these birds travel to, after breeding in the Overberg. The first mortality of a black harrier at a wind turbine spells more trouble for these highly threatened birds.

Outings have been well attended, some really wonderful birds have been seen, and a good mix of habitats visited. Thank you to all who have led these outings. A successful camp was held in March to Velddrif. A boat trip up the Berg River being a highlight. This really is a good birding destination, and really worthwhile to visit. See website for details.

The TBC Ringing unit has been doing valuable work for the past 30 years. Well done to all involved, and thank you for all the hours of hard work and dedication by you all. A big shout out must also go to the five teams, who take part in the quarterly CWAC counts at Bot River Lagoon. This is a BIG team effort, and adds to the wonderful data that has been collected for the past 28 years. Thank you to all.

Happy Bird Watching!

Brigid Crewe

Blue Cranes – why are they still listed as a vulnerable species?



The Overberg region of the Western Cape is one of the best areas to go to spot our national bird, the blue crane.

In fact, the sprawling agricultural fields of the region now support the largest population of blue cranes in the country. This means that the Overberg is home to the “population stronghold” of the species.

This was not always the case. Historically, it was the grasslands of Gauteng that hosted the most cranes, as the expansive open plains provided the ideal breeding habitat for these ground-nesting birds. By contrast, the Overberg region was historically characterized by dense renosterveld vegetation, and only supported a small blue crane population.

As these habitats were transformed by humans, the population dynamics of blue cranes shifted. Gauteng grasslands were transformed and degraded, and the number of blue cranes the region could support drastically declined. In the Overberg region, renosterveld was cleared for the cultivation of cereal crops and the creation of livestock grazing pastures.

The loss of renosterveld was devastating to many species in the region, with remaining individuals confined to small, fragmented patches of natural vegetation. Interestingly however, the Overberg population of blue cranes began to grow as the landscape was transformed.

Grazing pastures provide the cranes with their ideal nesting habitat: short, sparse vegetation cover with a wide field of view for spotting approaching threats. Following harvest, which coincidentally overlaps with the crane’s breeding season, cereal crop fields also provide ideal breeding habitats.

And so, we have a rare case of agriculture benefitting a protected species. This is demonstrated by the sheer number of blue cranes you can spot driving through the region. But despite the success of this population, the species is still listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN.

It isn’t hard to understand why. The population stronghold is now effectively reliant on human practices in the region, a tenuous position for any species to be in. Current agricultural practices seem to benefit the Overberg blue cranes, but how sustainable is this relationship in the long term?

This idea has been investigated before, from various angles. Of particular interest to us was the approach of a conservation biology master's student at UCT: Mark Bidwell. In 2004, Bidwell investigated the relationship between nest site selection and hatching success across 63 nest sites. He found that pasture-nesters had the greatest hatching success, and that breeding cranes largely avoided non-cereal crop fields. This highlighted the importance of the mosaic of pastures and cereal crops that characterized the region at the time. It also indicated that any large shifts away from cereal crop cultivation could reduce the breeding success of the Overberg blue crane population.

Seventeen years later, we decided to follow up on Bidwell's study. The idea was to investigate how the agricultural landscape and consequent nesting site choices of the cranes might have changed in the interim. Hatching success in relation to these variables could give us an idea of what the future holds for this population.

Of course, it is impossible to predict the future success of a population without considering the influence of climate change. The Overberg, like many areas, has been getting hotter and drier, and this trend is predicted to continue. Extreme high temperatures would be especially bad news for the local cranes. This is because they nest out in the open, which means no escape from the sun. What's more, they like to nest on bare ground, which radiates a lot of heat as it is warmed by the sun. Should heat levels become unbearable, incubating cranes might abandon their eggs in search of shade or water. This would leave the eggs exposed, and effectively fry the developing embryos.

Taking all of this into consideration, we decided on two aims for our study. Firstly, we wanted to understand how the landscape influences where the cranes choose to nest and how this choice affects hatching success. Secondly, we wanted to investigate how incubating adults are behaving in the heat, and how any behavioural changes might affect hatching success.

To understand these links, the principal investigator of the team, Michelle Bouwer (Conservation Biology MSc student, UCT) set out in search of breeding cranes from September 2021 to December 2021. Once an incubating crane was spotted, the nest location was pinpointed, and the measurements began. We measured the weight, length, and width of each egg. We also set up camera traps at each nest site to allow us to monitor incubating behaviour of the adults.

Additionally, we placed temperature loggers (known as "ibuttons") at some of the nest sites. One logger was placed in the nest, under the egg, and one was placed immediately next to the nest. This allowed us to estimate how much an incubating crane shelters the eggs from the heat.

Once the eggs had hatched, we could start the habitat measurements without disrupting incubation. We measured the land type and the slope of the land as well as the vegetation height and plant species diversity surrounding the nest. We also measured how far the nest was from a water source, a natural renosterveld patch and various human construction like roads, buildings, powerlines and fences.

There were some snags during the data collection period, as is so often the case with fieldwork. Unfortunately, our old, donated camera traps didn't consistently trigger, so not all incubating behaviours were caught. Fortunately, we were able to source new camera traps towards the end of the field season, so we have a complete camera trap dataset for the last several nests.

Additionally, there was the issue of the weather. Climate change was definitely influencing the local climate, but not as we predicted. The Overberg was unseasonably cool and wet. This delayed the harvest until late November-early December and meant the cranes usually nesting in the harvested cereal fields had a delayed start to their reproductive season. Transportation and accommodation constraints and the need for Michelle to start her coursework in January meant we missed the tail end of the delayed breeding season. This means that our data is

skewed to pasture nests and we lack complete information on the fate of nests in wheatfields. A second field season at the end of 2022 is therefore imperative for a comprehensive dataset.

Despite these limitations, preliminary results highlight some interesting and concerning trends. Firstly, only 17 nests were located during the 2021 breeding season. We were searching for nests on the same farms as Bidwell back in 2004, across the same time window. This is an approximate 73% reduction in the number of nests across the same area and stretch of time.

There could be various explanations for this trend. It is possible that crop type changes on the farms in question have led to fewer suitable nesting sites. Indeed, driving around the area you will see a lot more orchards than you would have in the past. It is also possible that Bidwell had more widespread access to the farms than we did, due to increased security concerns among the farmers. Indeed, we were mostly active along the periphery of the farms, with most nest spotting occurring from open-access, public roads. And of course, we might have discovered more nests in harvested wheatfields had harvest not been delayed by the unusual weather.

The other, more concerning possibility is that the breeding density of blue cranes in the region is declining. If this is the case, it is important that we continue to work to determine the cause of this decline.

Of the 17 nests we studied, all contained two eggs. Nine successfully hatched both eggs (~53% clutch success). Two hatched only one of the two eggs ("clutch reduction" ~12%). Finally, six nests failed to produce any hatchlings (~35% clutch failure).

Of the six clutch failures, three were due to egg predation by pied crows. While the other failures were also likely due to some sort of predator, our camera traps unfortunately missed the predation events. Pied crows have proliferated across South Africa, largely due to an interaction between climate change and human disturbances. The influence of a thriving pied crow population on blue crane reproductive success in the Overberg is therefore important to study further, and we will be monitoring this carefully in our next field season.

Our sincere thanks:

A massive thanks to the Tygerberg Bird Club for sponsoring project costs. We are working on further analysing our camera trap and ibutton data and look forward to sharing more results with you in the future!

Michelle Boucher: Conservation Biology MSc student, Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology





Another successful season of Pelican Watch* on Jutten and Malgas Islands

“Problem pelicans”

Predation by the Great White Pelican on the Cape Gannet and Cape Cormorant chicks in the breeding colonies of the Cape Gannet (Malgas Island) and the Cape Cormorant (Jutten Island) increased dramatically after 2005. This type of predation isn't natural for pelicans (who eat mostly fish), but rather a “learnt behaviour”. The increase in predation happened at the same time when local farming practices of dumping their offal and dead day-old chicks in the open ceased, and pelicans lost this easy source of food. Pelicans learnt that feeding on chicks of seabirds on Malgas and Jutten islands is another easy source of food.

This predation led to the dramatic decrease in breeding numbers of not only the vulnerable Cape Gannet and Cape Cormorant, but also other seabirds like the endangered Bank Cormorant and the near threatened Crowned Cormorant and the Greater Crested Tern on Malgas and Jutten islands. If left unchecked, the long-term effect of this unnatural predation will be that birds on these islands could become decimated. The breeding colony on Malgas Island is of utmost importance – being the second biggest breeding colony of Cape Gannet, with only six breeding sites in the world.

A novel solution

The SANParks Honorary Rangers: West Coast Region (WCSHR's) are passionate about making a difference in their area and they weren't going to stand by watching a calamity happen on their home turf. In 2005, they organised the Pelican Watch' programme to assist the SANParks Marine Rangers of the WCNP with guarding the islands of Malgas and Jutten during the summer breeding months. The programme has now been ongoing for 17 years, with teams of volunteers manning the islands – 13 shifts for seven days at a time each year. These volunteers “chase” not only pelicans but also other predatory birds such as Kelp Gull, Sacred Ibis and Pied Crow as well as keeping the rogue seals away from the breeding bird colonies. This year, Pelican Watch has had participation and support from SANParks Honorary Rangers nationally and a total of 81 volunteers took up the call for help. SANParks is currently facing a serious shortage of manpower nationally and the volunteers have become the hands for executing this successful management strategy. The increased breeding numbers of birds on the islands, is a clear indication that this solution is paying off.

It's not a holiday!

To start off, the boat trip from Langebaan to the islands is not for the faint hearted. The boat is small and easily affected by rough seas. Volunteers must take everything they need - clothing, bedding and enough food (plus extra) for the seven days. Volunteers work long hours, in seven-day shifts, changing on Monday mornings. If the sea conditions are rough or a storm warning is looming, the boat can't make the trip and volunteers may have to spend another day or two on the islands.

Whilst on the islands, daily data records must be kept (covering the 13-week season). Records are kept of any bird carcasses found, egg and chick predation noticed - with seal predation specifically recorded and information of any bird rings sighted recorded. Detailed data on pelican behaviour is recorded. Apart from this busy daily schedule, volunteers also keep record of weather and sea conditions as well as keeping a watchful eye out and report activity of any suspicious boats around the islands to the relevant authorities.

Challenges in the 2022 season

Pelican Watch had a shaky start with the outbreak of avian flu amongst the Cape Cormorant on Jutten Island at the beginning of the season. After consultation and a visit to the islands by Dr Alison Kok (Cape Research Centre: SANParks) and Pierre Nel (Senior Section Ranger: WCNP), it was decided to continue with this season's Pelican Watch. Strict guidelines and protocol measures were set up before volunteers went to the islands. Luckily, Malgas Island was not affected by any serious outbreaks of avian flu. The volunteers on the first three shifts to Jutten were faced with the unenviable task of burning the carcasses of the dead Cape Cormorants. Although Jutten island was not as badly affected as Dyer Island, an estimated 1200 birds died from avian flu on the island. The concerted efforts of burning these carcasses (under advice of the Marine Rangers: WCNP), not only put an end to the outbreak of avian flu but also gave the Cape Cormorants a second chance of breeding. The cormorants returned to the island after 3 – 4 weeks into the Pelican Watch season and the watch on Jutten Island was therefore extended by another two weeks until the middle of February, to allow the Cape Cormorant chicks time to fledge.

The Cape Gannets on Malgas Island were faced with an additional predation challenge this year. Due to the "boom and bust" (starvation) of the Cape Fur Seal population along the West Coast, single rogue seals would come onto the island from any angle and attack the gannet colony. This resulted in the Pelican Watch volunteers having to man continuous 24-hour shifts to keep seals from attacking the gannet colony. Although dramatic and stressful for the volunteers, luckily there were only three serious seal attacks recorded. However, the concern is that this will become a learnt behaviour among seals and repeated in the future.



To make matters even worse this year, SANParks were also faced with serious operational budget cuts that impacted the operation of the boats needed to take volunteers to the islands. These budget constraints led the WCSHR's having to source funding at short notice to cover the fuel costs needed for the Pelican Watch season. The Pelican Watch Team and the WCSHR's extend a huge thank you to the Western Cape Birding Forum who came forward with a generous donation towards the fuel costs.

Thanks to the support of the volunteers and the donations towards the cost of fuel, Pelican Watch has once again managed to provide the support that has led to a successful breeding season on both islands.

Information provided by Beverly Moll - the SANParks Honorary Rangers: WCSHR's

** The Pelican Watch programme is an ongoing SANParks management strategy in the West Coast National Park (WCNP) aimed at controlling the predation by the Great White Pelican of the Cape Gannet and Cape Cormorant chicks in the breeding colonies of the Cape Gannet (Malgas Island) and the Cape Cormorant (Jutten Island).*

Mapping Cape Parrots at pecan orchards

The Cape Parrot population is distributed across large parts of three provinces in SA, with the largest populations being found in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. With less than 2000 birds remaining in the wild, a small geographically isolated population is also present in the Magoebaskloof region of the Limpopo Province. Sickness, historic persecution, and poaching for the illegal pet trade has had negative impacts, in addition to the degradation and fragmentation of indigenous forests which has led to limited nest sites and food for the parrots.

The Cape Parrot Project (CPP) actively works to conserve these amazing birds through research, reforestation, and community engagement and education. Based in the town of Hogsback in the Amathole Mountains of the Eastern Cape, the small but growing team spend their days clearing exotic vegetation from forest edges, planting indigenous trees, linking up with local communities to engage with them about the importance of these birds, and of course, monitoring the general behaviour of the species on a long-term basis.

Since the 1970's, these noisy birds have developed a taste for pecans, possibly preferring these exotic nuts over indigenous species due to the high amount of fat and protein content – very valuable prior to the cold winter months. Pecan orchards and even small pecan tree groves in residential areas are very useful to monitor Cape parrot populations, as the birds congregate in large numbers and are relatively easy to count and see compared to



when they forage in indigenous forests. During autumn and the early winter months, they undertake a daily commute - leaving the roosting sites in the forests in the early morning, and flying to orchards up to 40 km away, returning to the forests at dusk. The CPP use this seasonal activity to track parrot numbers closely each year and determine age and sex ratios to estimate breeding activity of the surrounding population. They can also monitor the parrots' health using photographs of flocks and looking at individuals in the photographs and how many look healthy or sick from Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (loss of feathers for example). Given the wealth of knowledge that can be gained about the parrots by monitoring pecan orchards, the CPP are now looking at expanding their research into other parts of the species' range, with assistance from South African Pecan nut producers.

By Cassie Carstens – published in: "Suid-Afrikaanse Pekanneutprodusente Assosiasie NPC Tydskrif"

Club Activities



A weekend at Velddrif in March

Helene, Monty and I left Cape Town at 13h30 – to get ahead of the Friday traffic leaving the city. Upon arriving at Velddrif, we went for a recce at Bokkomlaan, and to assess the tides – which were very high. Next, we visited Jan Kotze at Kuifkopvisvanger Farm, to plan the next day's visit. On to our lovely accommodation at Kliphoek River Resort. This farm has many waterside cottages, and our group unpacked and

enjoyed a wonderful sunset at the river's edge. We were a group of ten members. Some of the ladies were spoilt to a 'harder (mullet) braai' by Pierre van Zyl. The fish were caught in the river that afternoon.

Saturday morning Jan Kotze waited for us at the turnoff to the Kliphoek Salt Pans. It had rained 5mm the previous evening, and he warned us that the salt cakes onto the tyres and driving there could be dangerous. Following him – our tyres were already slipping! With his help we could only go on a few of the roads. Nobody felt like landing in the salt pans!! Jan helped us locate the Red-necked Phalarope. What a joy to watch this bird's feeding frenzy! Chestnut-banded plovers were everywhere and seen well.

Next, we went birding at the harbour at Laaipek. We watched a Trawler rolling up its net and were amazed to see the incredible length of this net – just more and more kept on being loaded onto a truck. It shocks one to know that this is just one of the huge nets used by each of the trawlers fishing out at sea. No wonder fish stocks are getting scarce!!

Then we went onto Kuifkop farm to bird. What a joy!! Western Barn Owl was seen well in a palm tree and here our birding list for the weekend really grew. Saturday evening a nice braai was held back at Kliphoek, with everyone sharing the best sightings of the day.



The weather was not great on the Sunday, but we dressed warmly and went on the Cracklin' Rosy boat for a river cruise. This really is a lovely way to see many birds on little islands in the river and at their roosts. We were happy to find a Bar-tailed Godwit amongst the waders on a small island. We were all amazed at the large number of Pied Kingfishers seen on this trip. They flourish along the Berg River. Pelicans entertained us, and water birds were enjoyed by all. This was a lovely way to end the weekend. The total bird species seen for the weekend was 94 species. A good and relaxing time was had by all.

Brigid Crewe

Know your birds

Autumn, the time for watching tern roosts for Antarctic Terns ...

coming up from Antarctica where they breed, before spending the winter on our west coast.

Living in Langebaan now, we find that the coastal tern roosts are close and accessible for a quick check to see who has arrived

We went to Jacobs and Mauritz Bay (on the coast near Vredenburg), at end of April to do some birding and also to see if any Antarctic terns have arrived. Unfortunately, the tide was not yet full to bring terns into the roost, so no Antarctic terns were seen - however a week later a few had arrived.

We checked the tides – to make sure that we would arrive when the high tide was coming in.....terns at sea normally feed on low tide so you want to be there when they are finished feeding and coming in to roost and tend to feathers, etc.



Mauritz Bay is very sheltered and has many small round boulders where the birds roost, creating a spectacle *en mass*, as the incoming tide pushes them closer to the shore. This is of course an ideal situation to sit and wait and watch and scan...

The beauty of these terns is that they arrive in almost full breeding plumage.... red bills, red feet, black head, and a darker grey upper body. The other interesting observation is that the first ones to arrive (around May), are probably from the furthest breeding point in Antarctica. For the next few months there will be a mixture of new arrivals in various stages of plumage from breeding sites closer to the continent - with the St Helena birds probably only arriving much later as they don't have far to fly. Over the course of three months, you can observe how the initial arrivals are changing, with their red bills and feet turning to black and their heads becoming a grizzled grey. Here are some pics taken at different times over the years, showing that for three months, the birds are in various stages of plumage.... rather fun to watch! The other fun thing is to look out for ringed birds - I saw 4 but could unfortunately not read the information on the rings!!!!

Observed in May – a bird in partial breeding plumage ...



and a bird in non-brooding plumage ...



Observed in August – a bird in full breeding plumage. Did it just arrive from St Helena breeding site or is it getting ready to return to Antarctica? Who knows!

A number of papers have been written about the movements and breeding sites of Antarctic terns, however more research needs to be done to prove which subspecies arrives here and when - or do they all mix and just like to come to the CAPE WEST COAST!!!!

Brian Vanderwalt



Brain teasers

CROSS WORD PUZZLE NO. 12

1		2		3		4		5		6
				7						
8						9				
10			11			12	13			
14		15		16		17		18		19
20						21				
				22						
23						24				

Compiler: Gerald Wingate

Clues Across

1. A babbler is marked with this sign
4. Bird of wetland
7. Abr. for Important Bird Area
8. The colour of a tiny tinker
9. Tall vegetation
10. Someone's vagrant turaco
12. A cuckoo's counterparts
14. Covies
17. A snake
20. Rallids
21. A tiny bittern
23. Hard layer of an egg
24. Afrikaans for gull

Clues Down

1. A buzzard or prophesy
2. Vegetation at wetlands
3. Appendages for flight
4. To emerge from an egg
5. Roosts for seabirds
6. Structures for eggs
11. A female pig
13. Opposite of even
14. Flesh around nostrils
15. A woodpecker or thrush
16. A type of log for barbet nest
17. A stork named after him
18. A male duck
19. Male of reeve

General Club information

Subscribe to the TBC Birdnet

Make sure you get all the communication from the club. Send an e-mail to:

tygerbergbc+subscribe@groups.io

In case your e-mail address changes, unsubscribe your old address and send a subscribe request from your new e-mail address.

You may share information / important sightings with other club members by sending an e-mail to:

tygerbergbc@groups.io

NB: note new information

Join our Facebook page

Members are welcome to share information regarding their travels and interesting sightings on this page.

www.facebook.com/groups/tygerbergbirdclub/

Change of contact details

Please notify the TBC Membership Secretary, Judy Kotze, should your e-mail address or other contact details change. Gert.k@absamail.co.za

TBC contact details

Website: www.tygerbergbirdclub.org

PO Box 1321, Durbanville, 7551

Chairperson's e-mail: B.crewe@wo.co.za

Vice Chairperson's e-mail: dalene@brians-birding.co.za

Contributions to The Kite

Please mail any contributions to the newsletter (include pictures where possible) to:

dalene@brians-birding.co.za

TBC Steering committee 2021

Honorary President	Brian Vanderwalt	Cell: 082 999 9333
Chairperson	Brigid Crewe	Cell: 082 570 0808
Vice Chairperson	Dalene Vanderwalt	Cell: 084 702 4201
Treasurer	Lionel Crewe	
Secretary	Margaret Oosthuizen	Cell: 073 210 9397
Membership Secretary	Judy Kotze	Cell: 083 254 0919
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TBC Ringing Unit	Lee Silks	Cell: 083 208 8766
Conservation Officer	Kevin Drummond-Hay	Cell: 074 587 3792



Tygerberg Bird Club's Mission / Missie van die Tygerberg Voëlklub

To enhance our knowledge of all birds, their behaviour, and their habitats and to introduce the public to the conservation and science of our avian heritage through enjoyable participation by club members.

Om as klub ons kennis van alle voëls, hul gedrag en hul habitat te verbeter en deur genotvolle deelname van klublede, die publiek bewus te maak van die bewaring en wetenskap van ons plaaslike voel erfenis.

Celebrating 35 years of bringing birders together



Club meetings and outings

May 2022

WEDNESDAY – 11 May 2022 @ 09:00

Midweek Outing: Intaka, Century City
Contact: Brigid (082 5700 808)

THURSDAY – 19 May 2022 @ 19:30 ZOOM Meeting.

Speaker: Michael Mason

Topic: “Seabirds: An overview of Ocean-loving Avian families”

Michael went on the recent Flock to Marion Island – where he took wonderful photographs of the Albatross and Pelagic offshore birds. He also enjoys the pelagic trips off Cape Town. Come and enjoy the journey with Michael. His photography is excellent.

SATURDAY – 21 May 2022 @ 08:30

Outing: Taal Monument to Paarl Mountain Nature Reserve

Contact: Brigid (082 5700 808)

Taking the N1 to Paarl, take the R45 off-ramp from the N1 onto Main Road (Paarl). Follow the Brown signs. Turn into Flambeau Street (Courtrai) and follow the signs. *Taal Monument – 33 45' 58.64”S and 18 56'35.36”E. We meet along the road, below the Monument. Wear good walking shoes, as the trail in the Nature Reserve can be slippery. Remember to pack your coffee and picnic goodies.

June 2022 –

(Diarise the following dates – watch Facebook and TBC website for details)

Wednesday 8 June 2022 – Midweek Outing

Thursday 23 June 2022 – Monthly Meeting (Later date than usual)

Saturday 25 June 2022 – Monthly Outing



Tracked route of female Honey Buzzard ...

fitted with a satellite tracker in Finland recently. Of particular interest to locals is the fact that she spent the most recent austral summer around the town of Reitz in the Free State, SA. She left Reitz, heading north on 20 April and on 2nd June, she finally reached Finland where she will probably spend the boreal summer before probably returning again next season for a visit in SA. So, in just 42 days, she covered over 10 000 km at an average of more than 230 km every single day! What is amazing is how she took a straight line north except for when she had to fly over water (or Sudan). Apparently, she turned right at the source of the Nile and followed it. After that deviation, she returned to the same longitudinal line she started on and continued until she reached her destination. Mother nature at its most fascinating best!