

# The Kite

Tygerberg Bird Club  
Tygerberg Voëlklub



Daryl de Beer

Number 139 (August - October 2023)

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## Chirp from the Chair

It is spring and the birds and bees are busy everywhere!

But what's happening with some – Nerina Trogon in Constantia, Palm-nut Vulture in Swellendam, American Purple Gallinule in Claremont, Black Heron in Marina da Gama?! Why are we seeing these birds here – what makes them move down the coast? Remember Pel's Fishing Owl at Newlands Forest a while ago? Is this global warming and is Western Cape becoming more tropical? Mmmmm food for thought.

Not like the Ludwig's Bustards which have become a regular visitor to the Velddrif area with their annual movement from the Karoo.

Antarctic Terns are still at Mauritz Bay, and still the best place in the world to see them. Some have already started to put on their breeding colours in time for their long trek south to the Antarctic circle. The ones that breed closer at St Helena are still in casual clothes or should that be feathers, in relaxed mode.

Cape Weavers have already been in breeding colour mode since July, and suddenly Klaas's Cuckoo has been calling and causing grief for the weavers. Also, Red Bishops have the full bishop's regalia on....SPRING IS HERE!

With the exceptional rains that we have had this year, the flowers are spectacular from Darling all the way up the coast to even the Richtersveld! So, get out there and do some birding and flowering whilst it lasts.

Some more good news is that birdwatching at the Abrahamskraal bird hide in WCNP is now a whole lot easier. A large area of reeds that were previously obscuring views of the birds have been removed. A lot of manual work has gone into this – so enjoy!

Happy spring birding!

Brian Vanderwalt

# Bot River Estuary - 30 Years of 'Counting Water Birds'



What is CWAC'ing all about? It is not just the sound ducks make but an extremely important Citizen Science Project which has been on-going for the last 30 years conducted by dedicated members of the Tygerberg Bird Club and stalwart assistance from the Overberg and Helderberg Bird Club members. We salute you!

John Philogene, the late Mariana Delport, who later co-ordinated these CWAC's (Co-ordinated Water Bird Counts) right up to the time of her early illness in 2018 when she retired to her hometown, the late Margaret McCall, who dragged me kicking and screaming to my first CWAC in 2001, injecting me with a birding bug for which there is no antidote and is addictive. You keep having to get a fix, so out you go and find more birds, commune with nature and then the fever passes for a short while until the hunt for new birds starts again.

Earlier, I alluded to the sound ducks make, a sound that has sadly diminished over the years at the Bot River Estuary. Ducks like many other species of water birds have been disappearing in numbers from this water body.

How do we know this? The data collected by Citizen Scientists of course. Far too many to name here individually but who gladly give up their time, family obligations and weekends, taking part in the (CWAC's), which initially was twice a year, then monthly after the mouth was breached artificially to determine the effects of this and currently now four times annually.

These are people who are committed to this project, providing a data base like no other, our own Rodney Gray and his best half, who not only leads a team at the counts but also meticulously collates all the data from the other teams, and spends hours checking and submitting the data to the ADU (Avifaunal Demography Unit) who then store and provide the collective data for Scientist and graduates writing up scientific papers and theses for their own projects. These Scientists are the people whom we pin our hopes on to solve the ecological problems of the Estuary and hopefully one day we will see water birds in huge numbers return to this wonderful water body as it was in the early days of the late 1990's and early 2000's. Mouth breaching was circa 2004 and we surmise was the root cause of many of our bird species abandoning their traditional breeding and feeding ground.

But, then again, CWAC'ing is not just an information gathering exercise, it is the antidote to the birding bug virus, getting your fix, seeing and counting birds and communing with nature and most of all enjoying the great outdoors.

You should consider joining us for this worthwhile cause.

Kevin Drummond-Hay



# How Birds and Their Songs Can Improve your Mental Health

If you're searching for a natural, accessible method to enhance your mental health, you might want to pay more attention to birds.

This advice might come as a surprise, but the chorus of feathered friends surrounding us has been scientifically linked to improved mental well-being.

A symbiosis exists between humans and nature, with research increasingly indicating that our interactions with the natural world contribute to our physical and mental health. Often overlooked or taken for granted, birds serve as a potent link to nature, offering therapeutic benefits, even in the most urban environments. Their ubiquitous presence and delightful songs can uplift our spirits and help combat negative emotions.

Two recent studies published in *Scientific Reports* shed new light on the psychological benefits derived from birds. According to Emil Stobbe, an environmental neuroscience graduate student at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, birdsongs can serve as crucial links to nature for individuals residing in heavily urbanized environments, effectively alleviating feelings of isolation from nature. Furthermore, research suggests that merely listening to recordings of birdsongs can help mitigate negative emotions.

An innovative study utilized a smartphone app, *Urban Mind*, to assess real-time mental well-being among its participants. Interestingly, the research found a significant positive correlation between seeing or hearing birds and improved mental health, which remained robust even when other variables were considered.

Encounters with birds improved participants' immediate mood and had a positive impact lasting several hours beyond the encounter. This benefit was found to be significant among both healthy individuals and those diagnosed with depression. A second study examined the potential healing effects of birdsong by having participants listen to short audio clips.

This study revealed that listening to a diverse range of birdsongs featuring eight different species decreased feelings of anxiety, depression, and paranoia among participants. Even less diverse birdsongs, featuring just two species, significantly diminished feelings of anxiety and paranoia.

So, why do birds and their songs contribute to our mental health? One hypothesis, the attention restoration theory, posits that natural stimuli, like birdsongs, help improve concentration, decrease mental fatigue, and induce a state of "soft fascination," replenishing our attention.

Furthermore, birdsongs help reduce stress by lowering blood pressure and cortisol levels. Being around birds also encourages physical activity, which inherently offers its own set of mental health benefits.

Engaging with birds can be as simple as stepping outside and tuning into the soundscapes. Paying more attention to the birds' songs and their origins can help maximize their beneficial effects. Smartphone applications like *Merlin Bird ID* and *BirdNet* can assist in identifying the different sounds.

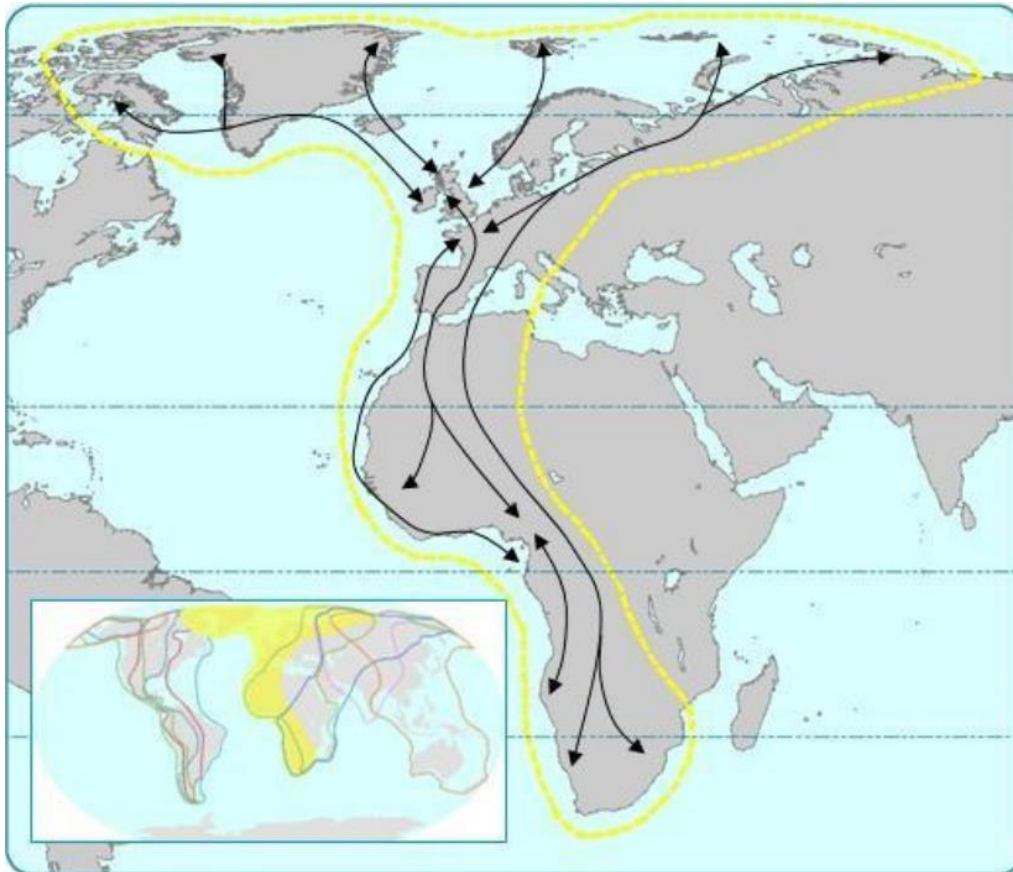
Finally, participation in local birdwatching groups can enhance the experience, offering opportunities to meet like-minded individuals and enjoy birds' presence as a community.

# The East Atlantic Flyway Initiative

Each year many millions of shorebirds and land birds migrate from their northern breeding grounds in Eurasia to wintering areas in western and southern Africa. Many of these birds travel thousands of kilometres along the flyway and rely on a series of high quality coastal and inland sites as stop over points to feed and rest. The East Atlantic Flyway (EAF) is the network of steppingstone sites used each year by these migrating birds. Many of these coastal and inland terrestrial stop over sites are also important for humans, providing resources, livelihoods and economic development. Unfortunately, due to numerous threats, many of the bird populations

in this flyway are in decline.

The BirdLife partnership has established the East Atlantic Flyway Initiative (EAFI) to facilitate the monitoring of birds and sites, identify conservation priorities and increase capacity for conservation along the Flyway. Collaboration with country partners and organizations working along the flyway is key to the implementation of successful conservation initiatives to address the key threats facing biodiversity and landscapes. BirdLife South Africa, with funding from the Royal Society for the



Protection of Birds (RSPB), has appointed Bronwyn Maree, as the EAFI Project Manager. She will assist in the southern African region (Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe) with the identification of threats to priority bird species and sites along the flyway, the delineation of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), safeguarding of these important sites and fundraising for priority projects along the Flyway.

## How can you help?

As a birder, one of the most valuable contributions you can make is to ensure that the information you collect whilst birding is recorded and put to good use. Your time and inputs could have an extremely valuable outcome for the conservation of birds and their habitats. Whether it is the collection of data on migrant bird species, or common bird species - this information can provide valuable insights such as the trends of a particular species over time, arrival and departure dates for migrants and changes in the ranges of a particular species.

So why not 'bird with a purpose' and combine your birding passion with valuable data collection? Below are some of the projects or initiatives which you could become involved in:

## 1. Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC)

The Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) was launched in 1992. The objective of CWAC is to monitor South Africa's waterbird populations and the conditions of the wetlands which are important for waterbirds. This is being done by means of a programme of regular mid-summer (January) and mid-winter (July) censuses at many South African wetlands and estuaries. CWAC currently monitors approximately 350 wetlands around the country and curates waterbird data for over 600 sites.

## 2. South African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2)

The Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 aims to map the distribution and relative abundance of birds in southern Africa. In addition, it aims to show change in distribution over time, an important aim, as this data can for example help us to understand the impact of climate change on birds. SABAP2 was launched in 2007 and is one of the longest running bird monitoring projects in the world. It is also possible to compare SABAP2 data with SABAP1 data (collected in the 1980/90), which makes these datasets extremely valuable.

Data is collected through the “citizen scientists” in the field, generally on a bird watching outing where the species seen or heard are recorded according to a specific protocol that is meaningful to the final output of the project. Usually, the area that the data is collected in, and the time spent in the area is recorded. In the case of SABAP2, the area for data collection is named a “Pentad”, which is an area of 5 minutes of longitude by 5 minutes of latitude. The minimum time period that should be spent collecting data for a full protocol atlas card is 2 hours. The data is then submitted to SABAP2 using a mobile app or a website. The information is used for research and analysis by several different agencies, including the South African National Biodiversity Institute, BirdLife South Africa, as well as academics and students at various universities.

## 3. Use Birding Apps

Birding applications are a convenient and paperless way to record your sightings, especially while out in the field. Many applications are also linked to or provide the opportunity to share the data with monitoring programmes (such as SABAP2 mentioned above). One such birding app is BirdLasser (<https://www.birdlasser.com/>). BirdLasser supports SABAP2 and BirdMAP (atlas projects within other regions of Africa). Keep an eye out on BirdLasser for ‘Causes’ (which may focus on a particular species) or ‘Play’ (which may include a challenge for a particular period, such as Big Birding Day or World Migratory Bird Day).

SA Birdlife



The European Roller is vulnerable to an array of threats throughout its annual cycle and is a flagship species for monitoring. The movements, population trends and habitat use of this and other birds is crucial for understanding population declines and developing targeted conservation strategies.

Photo: Chris van Rooyen

## International News

### Albania: New breeding beds for Dalmatian Pelican

January is an eventful month for Karavasta Lagoon in Albania. It's the time of the year when the Dalmatian Pelican starts its breeding season. This is the beginning of a several-month-long process of incubation, hatching and rearing of chicks. Being the only breeding colony of this species in Albania, the success of the breeding season is of utmost importance not only to NGOs and the Park administration but also to the people of Divjaka, who find a sense of pride in this flagship species.



In December 2022, a “Pelican Island Warden” team was appointed to organize the rehabilitation of the Pelican Island, specifically the three breeding beds of the Pelican colony. This annual activity is carried out before the start of the breeding season to elevate the nests from the water level, thus avoiding flooding which would spell disaster for the pelican colony. The breeding beds were repaired by increasing their size and height with tree branches.

To ensure the success of the breeding season, the Albanian Ornithology Society will periodically monitor the colony and, most importantly, the wardens will take on guarding duties during the nighttime hours for the strategic breeding months. It is hoped that this strategy will ensure that the Dalmatian Pelican colony doesn't face any disturbance during its most vulnerable time of the year and that they will have a productive year.

Albanian Ornithology Society

### Artificial nest boxes used for Lesser Kestrel in Europe

Lesser Kestrel is one of the smallest falcons found in Europe. In Europe, their decline equivalent 46% in each decade since 1950 and in the wintering grounds in South Africa, there have been 25% declines in each decade since 1971. In the breeding range, factors include demolition of older buildings where the birds nested, loss of habitat through afforestation, intensification of agricultural, and urbanization, pesticide poisoning, human persecution, and interspecific competition. The most serious problem today is the critically low number of



populations and isolation, which do not allow the species to recover naturally. Due to the drastic reduction of natural habitats, the placement of artificial nest boxes provides reliable nesting sites with a low risk of predation.

The use of artificial nest boxes for Lesser Kestrel has become common in Europe. Countries like Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal use them successfully. The nest boxes are constructed with a variety of material to make them strong, reliable and to protect birds, eggs and young chicks. Some of them are classical wall nest boxes, cavity wall nest boxes and under-roof nest boxes. All studies show that Lesser Kestrel adapts extremely successfully to the artificial

nest boxes, and this is a successful way of conserving the species as well as increase its numbers.

Researchgate.net

# Club Outings and Activities

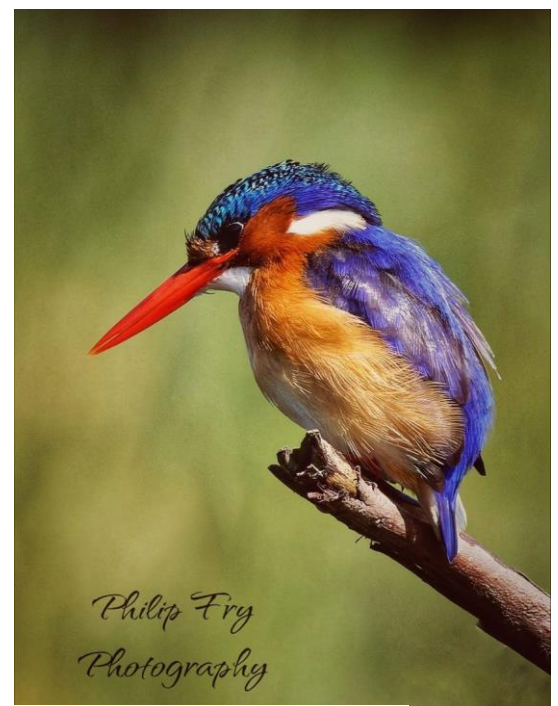
## Outing to Intaka Island, Century City - 20 May



A lovely group, with some new and young faces, enjoyed a great walk-a-bout at Intaka Island under a dull sky. Several of the regular bush birds were seen from the bridge at the entrance plus we had a good view of 3 Lesser Swamp Warblers feeding on the canal edge. On the viewing platform next to the office, the African Swamphen was in full view as was a mother Red-knobbed Coot plus her little ones. The walk around the dry pans was uneventful until 2 Water Thick-knees were spotted followed a little further on by at least 8 Spotted Thick-knees. The Spotted Thick-knees posed beautifully for the cameras.

From the koppie overlooking the cormorant nesting islands, we had a good view of the action on the water. A Black-Crowned Night Heron was spotted busy getting ready for the daily nap and a Black Sparrowhawk did a quick fly-by just above our heads - a great sighting. The "Kingfisher" hide was very quiet while the hide overlooking the cormorant Islands gave us great views of the White-breasted Cormorants sitting on the nests and feeding the young. Three hybrid Yellow-billed Ducks were seen amounts the other normal ones. We ended with tea, eats, a good chat, and some great laughs. In all, 42 species of birds were seen by the group.

Keith Roxburgh



*Philip Fry  
Photography*  
Malachite Kingfisher

## Outing to Table Bay Reserve - 12 July



*Levaillant's Cisticola* by Philip Fry

The walk up the road to the boardwalk gave us many sightings of the Levaillant's Cisticola and a few glances of the Lesser Swamp Warbler. The Cape Longclaws were in full breeding plumage and 4 of them gave us a good aerial display as well as posed for the cameras, a lovely sighting. All along the boardwalk, the Lesser Swamp Warbler could be easily seen in the reeds. The pans were very full, and bird hide 1 was not very productive apart from a distant view of Glossy Ibises and Flamingos.

The next excitement was the flypast by Southern Pochards. Some good photos by Karen Small allowed the species speculation to be settled. It was great to see the underwing patterns of both male and female and a few more sightings of single birds were seen. Hide 2 gave us lovely views of the Great Crested Grebes as well as the diminutive Little Grebe. The Whiskered Terns gave a good flying and diving display as they fished for a snack. A distant viewing of the African Marsh Harrier delighted us and some had a closer view of it on the walk back. The Black-necked Grebes were studied



in detail through the scope on the way back.

A lovely outing in good weather that was enjoyed by 18 birders. In all, 48 species sightings were recorded by the leader plus a few more not seen by him. As always tea and a chat were enjoyed by us all. The highlight of the day was not a single Hadedda Ibis was seen.

Keith Roxburgh

The visit was a day of Fulvous Whistling Ducks, Grebes, and Lesser Swamp Warblers. On arrival at the picnic area, the early group was enchanted by Fulvous Whistling Ducks right against the shore. Many photos were taken, and the ducks gave us a lovely whistling goodbye as they flew off. In the middle of the bay off the picnic site, a large raft of Black-necked Grebes (50 odd) gave all a great view of their non-breeding plumage. The Cape Shovelers were also close to the bank and their lovely yellow eyes could clearly be seen. The walk around the bush area did not produce many birds and the Bar-throated Apalis was calling constantly, and some had a fleeting glance of it.



*Fulvous Whistling Duck* by Gert Kotze



## Outing to Helderberg Nature Reserve - 22 July

15 brave souls ventured out and joined the TBC at the Helderberg Nature Reserve on our monthly Saturday outing. Birding around the information centre and dam was very rewarding with a Spotted Eagle-owl and Southern Boubou stealing the limelight.

The group proceeded to climb towards the top of the reserve which produced wonderful vistas of the Strand and Clarence Drive but virtually no birds were seen or heard other than a Bar-throated Apalis and Cape Batis was seen by some.

All in all, 28 species were recorded for the morning which wasn't too shabby for a cold winter's day.

The reserve has not recovered yet from a devastating fire a year or so ago and will probably only get back to its former glory in 3 or 4 years from now. Some new growth was apparent, but the reserve has a long road ahead.

Still a very nice venue to visit and the usual TBC Tea Party at the end of our outing on the lawns is always a big hit.

I certainly am looking forward to seeing Helderberg blossom again in the near future.

Images and text by Kevin Drummond-Hay - Outing Mis-leader



*Spotted Eagle-owl*



*Southern Boubou*



*Malachite Sunbird*

# Know Your Birds

## Cuckoos and Fork-tailed Drongos

New research from Prof. Claire Spottiswoode and her team working across the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology and Cambridge University suggests that while cuckoos might be the ultimate avian con artists, Fork-tailed Drongos are remarkably good at rumbling the fraud.

Cuckoos lay nearly identical eggs in the nests of other birds to avoid raising their own young, but Fork-tailed Drongos are likely to reject an impostor egg about 94% of the time.

FitzPatrick Institute of African  
Ornithology



*Photo credit: Derek Keats.*



*Photo credit: Francois du Plessis.*

## Wax digestion by the Lesser Honeyguide

Records of the Lesser Honeyguide feeding on beeswax in the wild are common. However, little is known about the ability of these birds to digest wax. We studied the wax preference, digestive efficiency, retention time and gut structure of the Lesser Honeyguide in the laboratory. Wax was found to be eaten daily by the Lesser Honeyguide.

Birds ate significantly more new beeswax and foundation wax than old, black beeswax, but required an additional source of protein to maintain body mass. In the absence of other feed, the digestive efficiency for foundation wax was above 90%, with a long transit time of 256 min. Examination of the digestive tract showed no specialisation and no crop. The presence of digestive

enzymes, including lipase, in the pancreas and small intestine and very few microbes in the digestive tract of the Lesser Honeyguide suggests that wax digestion occurs through a biochemical pathway with endogenous avian enzymes.

Colleen T Downs: University of KwaZulu Natal

# General Club Information

## How do we communicate with members?

Notices on outings, etc. are sent to members via a “groups” e-mail address. **Members only MUST SUBSCRIBE themselves** – we cannot do it. It is quick and easy to do. Send an e-mail to: [tygerbergbc+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:tygerbergbc+subscribe@groups.io) and you will be included.

You may share information / important sightings with other club members by sending an e-mail to: [tygerbergbc@groups.io](mailto:tygerbergbc@groups.io)

## 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](mailto:Gert.k@absamail.co.za)

## TBC contact details

Website: [www.tygerbergbirdclub.org](http://www.tygerbergbirdclub.org)

PO Box 1321, Durbanville, 7551

Chairperson’s e-mail: [B.crewe@wo.co.za](mailto:B.crewe@wo.co.za)

Vice Chairperson’s e-mail: [dalene@brians-birding.co.za](mailto:dalene@brians-birding.co.za)

## Join our Facebook page

Members are welcome to share information regarding their travels and interesting sightings on this page.  
[www.facebook.com/groups/tygerbergbirdclub/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/tygerbergbirdclub/)

## Contributions to The Kite

Please mail any contributions to the newsletter (include pictures where possible) to:  
[dalene@brians-birding.co.za](mailto:dalene@brians-birding.co.za)

## TBC Steering committee 2023

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
Communication & Public Relations Officer	Dalene Vanderwalt	Cell: 084 702 4201
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 37 years of bringing birders together**

# Upcoming Club Outings and Activities



## AUGUST 2023

**TUESDAY – 08 AUGUST 2023 (08:30)**  
**Midweek Outing: Tygerberg Nature Reserve**  
**Contact: Keith Roxburgh (082 901 2611)**

**THURSDAY – 17 AUGUST 2023 (19:30)**  
**Monthly Meeting at Tygerberg Nature Reserve – Welgemoed.**  
**Speaker: Andrea Angel**  
**Topic: The Albatross Task Force – ‘Reducing at-sea threats and conserving SA’s seabirds’**  
 The ATF team works directly with fishermen to understand the realities and challenges at sea. Working with deep-sea hake trawlers and longline fisheries. Come and hear about the wonderful work being done by these Birdlife SA teams.

\*\*Please watch TBC notices and TBC Facebook page - on the meeting day In case of loadshedding, we will have to start later\*\*

**SATURDAY – 19 AUGUST 2023 (08:30)**  
**Outing – Taal Monument to Paarl Mountain Nature Reserve**  
**Contact: Kevin Drummond-Hay (074 587 3792)**

We meet along the road, below the Monument. Wear good walking shoes, as the trails in the Nature Reserve can be slippery. Remember to pack your coffee and picnic goodies. If possible use high clearance cars and share lifts.

## SEPTEMBER 2023

Diarise:

- 13 September 2023 - Midweek Outing
- 21 September 2023 – Monthly Meeting
- 23 September 2023 – Monthly Saturday Outing

