

The Kite

Tygerberg Bird Club
Tygerberg Voëlklub

Number 131 (August 2021 – October 2021)



Photo: Robert Brink

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Chirp from the Chair

We want to say a BIG thank you to the wonderful speakers we have had, giving talks to the TBC via ZOOM so far this year. Michael Mason (Cape to Kruger); Kevin Drummond-Hay (Karoo Shy Five); Christie Craig (Status of Blue Cranes in the WC); Melissa Whitecross (BLSA's Secretarybird Conservation Project); Mike Buckham (Romancing Uganda); Gerald Wingate (Beautiful AND Beneficial Birds) and Magda Blignaut (Holiday in Namibia). We trust our Members have enjoyed these meetings on ZOOM or on TBC Facebook – on the day of the meeting.

The outings have been well attended. It is nice to meet up with old friends and meet the new Members as well.

The TBC have been doing CWAC waterbird counts at the Bot River Lagoon (near Kleinmond) for the past 28 Years!! Thank you to all who give up their time for these quarterly counts. At each count, there are 5 teams of counters. The longevity of this project makes it of value to various scientific studies taking part at lagoons and estuaries across our country.

We urge our Members to think of 'Bird watching' in the bigger picture. By planting some indigenous, nectar or fruit-bearing plants, or even just by having a bird bath or small shallow container of water available for the birds to drink from. Water being especially important during the dry months of the year. It is enjoyable seeing the variety of birds coming to bath or drink at my bird baths every day.

We are glad that Lesley Teare will once more put a TBC calendar together for 2022. Thanks to funds raised by sales of these calendars, or from the donations made by sponsorships – the TBC is able to support various Conservation projects. This year we have sponsored 'tracking devices' on two black harriers. Important behavioural data will be collected in this way. We look forward to feedback from Rob Simmons about this project at a later date.

We encourage you to follow Birdlife South Africa's Conservation conversations on Tuesday evenings. Or you can find the previous interesting talks on – www.birdlife.org.za/blsa-conversations

Please keep sharing your Birding news and birding photos on the TBC Facebook group. We look forward to hearing from you.

Happy Bird Watching!

Brigid Crewe



Photo: Nick Pattinson

This project received a research grant of £1,532 from the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) in 2017 and was published online in the BOU journal, *Ibis*, in 2021.

Bourne, A.R., Cunningham, S.J., Nupen, L.J., McKechnie, A.E. & Ridley, A.R. (2021a). No sex-specific differences in the influence of high air temperatures during early development on nestling mass and fledgling survival in the Southern Pied Babbler (*Turdoides bicolor*). *Ibis*, in press.

Getting hot in here!

Hot weather suppresses growth and survival in Southern Pied Babbler nestlings

I first visited the southern Kalahari in 2016, at the start of my PhD with the Hot Birds Research Project. I was studying the effects of high temperatures and drought on breeding, behaviour and survival in Southern Pied Babblers (hereafter pied babblers). Pied babblers are medium-sized (60-90g) cooperatively breeding passerines endemic to the Kalahari. They are highly social, living in territorial groups ranging in size from 3 to 15 adults. Each group consists of a single breeding pair with subordinate helpers that are usually, but not always, the offspring of the breeding pair. Dominant pairs monopolise almost all breeding activity, and subordinates rarely breed even when unrelated potential breeding partners are present in the group. Pied babblers breed in open-cup grass nests in spring and summer, when it is hottest, and are monomorphic, which means that males and females look the same.

In order to understand how pied babblers respond to high temperatures and drought in the wild it is important to be able to

monitor individuals in a group. For this I benefitted from the existence of a population of pied babblers that is comfortable with the presence of researchers. Each bird had a unique combination of colour rings on their legs and I knew them by name (Como, Bimbo, Winter, Misty). These birds were used to having people observe them from just a couple of meters away and would hop onto a scale to be weighed in exchange for a bit of crumbled egg yolk or a mealworm. I was also able to follow the birds as they went about their business, observing their behaviour in their natural environment as they responded to naturally occurring extreme weather conditions in real time.

In our most recent publication, we present the results of a study using data I collected during my PhD and long-term nestling life-history data from the same population of pied babblers to see if there were any sex-specific differences in size, mass and survival of pied babbler nestlings that were exposed to high temperatures during early development.

Continues next page ...

Getting hot in here continues ...

We learned that 11-day-old pied babbler nestlings were negatively affected by high temperatures, being both lighter (by body mass in grams) and smaller (by tarsus length in mm) when they had experienced a larger number of hot days as a developing nestling.

Although pied babbler chicks leave the nest between two and three weeks after hatching, fledglings are dependent on the adult groups members for food until they are about three months old. After this time, they are nutritionally independent although they typically continue to live with their natal group for at least their first year. We also found that pied babbler fledglings were also much less likely to survive to nutritional independence when they experienced a larger number of hot days as a dependent fledgling. There was no difference between male and female pied babbler young in terms of the impacts of high temperatures on body mass, tarsus length and survival.

High temperatures limit nestling growth and survival in arid-adapted pied babblers. As climate change advances, extreme heat events will become more frequent and the duration, return rate and intensity of heatwaves will continue to increase. Under these conditions, pied babblers may struggle to reproduce successfully and this could compromise long-term population persistence, contributing to local extinctions. Climate change is a serious threat to the endemic, range-restricted species of the rapidly warming Kalahari. Rapid decarbonization is needed to secure the future of these noisy black-and-white charmers.

Amanda Bourne: FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology



As part of the fieldwork for this research we ringed, measured, and blood sampled nestlings when they were 11 days old.

Photo: Todd Erickson.

A family of Southern Pied Babblers take some time out to preen each other.

Photo: Marc Freeman.



Zambia's Vulture Safe Zones provide hope for African vultures

Poisoning – both accidental and deliberate – has driven Africa's vultures to the brink of extinction. But hope is at hand: a new series of poison-free safe spaces are protecting vultures, raising awareness and advancing research in Zambia.

Over the last 30 years, vulture populations in Zambia have declined catastrophically. This situation is replicated across Africa, where vulture populations have declined by up to 97%. Zambia is home to seven vulture species, four of which are Critically Endangered and two Endangered. Like the rest of Africa, Zambia's vulture populations have suffered a human-induced population decline of up to 98% in some species, such as the White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis* and White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*. The main culprit is poisoning: either accidentally, through ingesting livestock carcasses that had been treated with painkillers that are toxic to vultures, or deliberately. To save the country's dwindling vulture populations, BirdWatch Zambia is creating a poison-free environment through establishment of Vulture Safe Zones – a system that has previously proven successful across Asia.

The Vulture Safe Zones are being set up in partnership with farm owners, and with support from the National Geographic Society. These areas provide safe feeding and roosting sites for vultures, with no risk of poisoning. Since the start of the initiative in 2017, BirdWatch Zambia has expanded it to cover three farms in Chisamba. Today, the Vulture Safe Zones cover over a thousand square kilometres of land, including farms and a game reserve.

A vital aspect of conservation is the involvement of local communities. To this end, BirdWatch Zambia engages nearby residents, raising awareness on the ecological importance of vultures and the need to save them. Farm owners, managers and workers who operate within the Vulture Safe Zones are educated on the importance of protecting natural habitats from man-made threats. An education and awareness campaign around the area has also targeted school children and their parents who own, manage or work on these farms. This dialogue seeks to change local perceptions about vultures and influence farm management practices. This can lay the groundwork for future expansions: working with partners, BirdWatch Zambia is seeking to increase the area of Vulture Safe Zones in the country to at least 2,500 square kilometres by 2025.

Vultures may not be the most beautiful-looking birds, but their presence is now starting to be appreciated within the Vulture Safe Zones. At Fringilla farm, where BirdWatch Zambia commemorated International Vulture Awareness Day in previous years, the local community is beginning to acknowledge and appreciate the importance of these Critically Endangered birds that they share their surroundings with.

Find out more about BirdWatch Zambia's vulture conservation work at www.birdwatchzambia.org/vulture-safe-zones/



Mary Malasa, BirdWatch Zambia ecologist, handling a Hooded Vulture
© BirdWatch Zambia

The secret to bird navigation during migration



We may finally know the secret to how migrating birds can sense Earth's magnetic fields: a molecule in their eyes called cryptochrome 4 that is sensitive to magnetism, potentially giving the animals an internal compass.

The process may result in the animals seeing darker or lighter areas in their vision when they look in the direction of magnetic field lines, says Henrik Mouritsen at the University of Oldenburg in Germany. "You may be able to see where north is as kind of a shading on whatever else you would be seeing."

Previous work has shown that certain species of birds, such as the European robin, use Earth's magnetic fields when they migrate, as well as using visual and other cues. Some European robins migrate south every northern hemisphere winter, for instance from Scandinavia to the UK, and return in spring.

At least part of this ability is thought to lie in their eyes, because their magnetism sensing is disturbed in the absence of light. Mouritsen has previously shown that when birds are using their internal compass, the information is processed in the same parts of the brain that process vision.

Suspicion had fallen on the cryptochrome 4 molecule because it is present in the eye's light-detecting cells and has a structure that suggests it can be affected by magnetic fields. Now Mouritsen and his colleagues have shown how the molecule reacts to magnetic fields in the lab.

The team found that in the presence of light, electrons can jump between different parts of the molecule, and between it and another molecule called flavin adenine dinucleotide (FAD), ultimately leading to the production of a compound called CRY4-FADH*. The process is suppressed by weak magnetic fields.

Changes in the level of CRY4-FADH* potentially give a way that light-sensitive cells in the eye could alter their output – making the view lighter or darker – depending on the direction and strength of the magnetic field in the bird's field of vision, says Mouritsen.

The team also looked at cryptochrome 4 from chickens and pigeons, which don't migrate. Each species has a slightly different version of the molecule, and the team found that these two are less affected by magnetism, suggesting that the version of the molecule in migratory birds has been fine-tuned to amplify its sensitivity.

But the group hasn't yet demonstrated that cryptochrome 4 is being used for magnetic sensing in real life. "We only looked at this molecule in isolation, we didn't look at it inside a bird, which is extremely difficult," says Mouritsen.

Roswitha Wiltschko at the Goethe University Frankfurt in Germany says the case isn't yet closed because there are other cryptochrome molecules in the eye that could also be responsible for magnetic sensing. "Most cryptochromes would in principle be able to do this," she says.

And while pigeons don't migrate, they have been found to be able to navigate using magnetism, suggesting that other cryptochrome molecules may play a role, she says.

Read more: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2281998-we-may-finally-know-how-migrating-birds-sense-earths-magnetic-field/#ixzz71FrzJYTK>

The first Spoon-billed Sandpiper for the African-Eurasian Shorebird Survey

The critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been added to the surveyed shorebird species list for the first time during the February survey weekend. A young supporter of the African-Eurasian Shorebird Survey from Thailand spotted a wintering, unflagged, Spoon-billed Sandpiper on the salt pans of the famous Pak Thale Nature Reserve.

Only about 348 (average population size) Spoon-billed Sandpipers are believed to be

surviving in the wild and conservationists fear the worst that this unique shorebird species will be gone forever in the next decade or so.

While Muangpai Suetrong and Vatcharavee Sriprasertsil's 'Spooie' observation represents only 0.3% of the global population, the record is significant and encourages them to promote this shorebird monitoring program more intensively. To read more about the African-Eurasian Shorebird Survey visit their website:

<https://www.shorebirdconservation.org/shorebird-survey>



Photo: Spoon-billed Sandpiper – Shaun Ferguson

Thank you to the following members for their donations:

Jenny Brink, Anton and Wiesa Maree, Wilna Meanley, Piet Dorfling, Petrus Vermeulen, Christine McIntosh, Jenny Wentzel, Jurie Kemp, Jonathan and Marje Hemp, Annette Versluis, Benita and Wiekie Bartlett, Hannes and Wendy Visagie, Marianne Toros, Elizabeth De Villiers, Stefanie van den Heever, Frances and Angus Hemp, Anila van der Merwe and Riaan van Wyk, Joye Newby, John Fincham and Jo Hobbs, Anneke and Andre Gouws, Barry Street, Vic and Carol Els, Keith and Nicki Roxburgh, Thenesia Ackerman.



Birding Activities

Accidental birding in KZN

Family responsibilities took Dalene and I to Scottburgh on the south coast of KZN from February to end June this year.



We knew that it would be a long stint and so we cart our birding equipment and PC along on the plane. The situation there was emotional and stressful but we were able to get away for short stints of birding in between and saved our sanity.

My priority was to see the Green Barbet and Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon which I needed for my SA list and for Dalene of course also as her list is still growing. This meant an overnight stay at Eshowe so that we can be at Dlinza Forest early in the morning to hopefully catch the pigeon and then move on to Ongoye Forest for the illusive barbet.

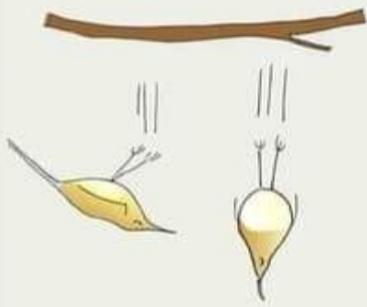
We arranged a Birdlife guide, Junior Gabela, to guide us and he was at the arranged collection spot on time. The forest was quiet as we proceeded to the steel tower which gives a 360degree view above the canopy. We quickly spotted the pigeon sitting in the sun.... really?? - it was about 500m away and of course through binos you could id it but the main features were not clear. I wasn't happy – “Better View Desired”. Junior led us down through the forest on an elevated walkway to a tree that he knows the pigeon favours. Suddenly he heard one close by and wow - this was the view desired! Even some pics with my bridge camera came out fine. On our way out of the forest, a Spotted Ground-Thrush was heard calling next to the pathway and we had some good views of it - another lifer for Dalene. Our patience in the bird hide was rewarded with good views of the Red-backed Mannikin and Green Twinspot.

Then we moved on to Ongoye Forest for the Green Barbet and we did not have to wait long after parking the car at the site office gate and walking to the tar road. Three barbets sat in the tree across the road and called and preened - another lifer for us both..... not a bad day so far as my list total was now over 800 again!

With it still being early in the day, we set off to Mtinzini to try and pick up more birds for Dalene, main target being the Palmnut Vulture. Junior's local knowledge took us on a suburban road behind housing and overlooking a long row of Palmnut Palms and there was a big white bird in the open – easy to spot Palmnut Vulture. Driving through the Umlalazi Nature Reserve, we quickly added Woolly-necked Stork, Scarlet-breasted Sunbird, Scaly-throated Honeyguide to the list. A great birding spot, of course this reserve will have to be visited later again to try and get the Mangrove Kingfishers which overwinters here.

Brian Vanderwalt

Know your birds



Why don't **birds** fall off branches when they sleep?

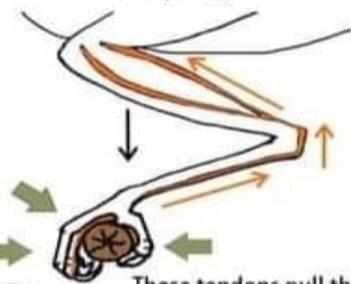
1



The bird lands on the perch with a straightened leg

2

As it settles on the perch, special tendons in the leg act like pulleys



3

These tendons pull the toes around the perch as the bird bends the leg

4



The toes are 'locked' in place with no effort, as long as the leg is bent



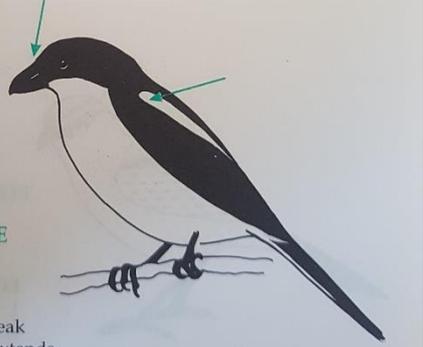
Know the difference with help from Ken Newman's book called "Look-alike Birds"



FISCAL FLYCATCHER
(Newman's Birds p. 364)

LOOK FOR:

1. Slender beak
2. White bar on lower wing only



FISCAL SHRIKE
(Newman's Birds p. 372)

LOOK FOR:

1. Heavy, hooked beak
2. White wing-bar extends to shoulder

Brain teasers

CROSS WORD PUZZLE NO. 09

1		2		3		4			5			6		7
											8			
9									10					
11					12								13	
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31												32		

Source: Gerald Wingate

Clues Across:

1. Small cousins of honeyguides
6. Could be grey or penduline
9. Penguin named after early seafarer
10. A smallish raptor
11. A helmetshrike
12. This group contains the ultimate LBJs
15. Colour of a Ground Thrush
16. Counterpart of a parasite
18. Sing-song for two
20. A popular exhibitionist
23. Abbreviation for South-West
24. A chat was named after him
27. Of the East
28. An accipiter
29. Abbreviation for African Purple Swamphen
30. A colour on a Roller
31. A swampy tchagra
32. A chat could be eating this

Clues Down:

1. This Afrikaans bird name is used by the English
2. This bird may be freckled or fiery
3. Part of ovum
4. Generic name of vagrant White-throated Robin
5. Cousin of canaries
7. Small ducks
8. Bird in mourning?
13. He had an hawk-eagle named after him
14. A noisy goose
17. A rose-ringed invasive bird
19. Two dots
21. Yellow-and black melodious forest dwellers
22. A descriptor for a swift, bittern and egret
24. Original home of the Cave Chat
25. Structure to contain a clutch
26. A tree for a Pied Barbet

Around House and Home by Brian Vanderwalt

Living without kikuyu and the difference it makes to birdlife

When I first moved in next to the vlei at Meerenbosch in 2018 the major portion of the garden was a kikuyu lawn with a mixture of clover. The lawn was cut regularly but was not watered in summer and went brown as I don't waste water on kikuyu. There were no resident birds all "fly-ins" when I set up water and feeders. After removing the kikuyu, the clayey ground had to be tilled and loosened with compost, before planted with waterwise/succulent plants like aloes, restios, cotyledons, watsonias, some fynbos plants and fever trees.

It took some time, but slowly birds started arriving - Spurfowl (coming into house looking for food if I'm too slow), two types of bishops, two weaver species, Sparrows, Levallant's Cisticola, Burchell's Coucal - in fact 25 to 30 species regularly seen.

The real surprise is a bird that normally builds a bulky open cup nest in low dense shrubs or bushy trees and was collecting building material in our garden and flying to the reedbed!!!! There is no mention in any of my nest and egg books that they use reedbeds to breed in.

This only goes to show that taking out alien kikuyu was a good move and replacing it with shrubs and local plants encourages new visitors!



The surprise was that Karoo Prinia is now a regular feeder outside my office window.... what a treat!



The birds in question were a pair of Bokmakierie. Cannot wait to see how many offspring they manage to raise.



Another unusual nest site was a pair of Cape Sparrows using an old Barbet nest log.



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 change, 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

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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
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Vice Chairperson	Dalene Vanderwalt	Cell: 084 702 4201
Treasurer	Lionel Crewe	
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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

August 2021

Thursday 19 August 2021: Club Zoom meeting @ 19:30

Speaker: Dr Megan Murgatroyd - Conservation Biologist

Topic: Finding solutions to the conflict between Wind energy and Raptors.

Raptors are the bird group which are most frequently killed by wind turbines in South Africa. GPS tracking can be used to understand flight behaviour and habitat use of raptors, and to predict their interactions with wind turbines. Verreaux's Eagles, Cape Vultures and Black Harriers are some of the species which are most sensitive to wind turbine collisions. Megan will present research which is being done to find solutions to these conflicts and promote the sustainable development of wind energy in South Africa.

Saturday 28 August 2021: Planned Club outing: Tinie Versfeld and Darling flower reserves.

Due to the current Covid situation, a decision about having an outing on this day will only be finalised by 25 August. Watch the website for details.

For the foreseeable future, all club meetings and outings are arranged at short notice, depending on the Covid situation. Make sure you stay in touch and join our monthly talks on Zoom or Facebook.

We encourage our TBC Members to continue birding safely. Visit Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, Helderberg; Tygerberg Nature Reserves and West Coast National Park. These are all really lovely this time of the year, when spring flowers start to bloom. Birding alone can also be very rewarding. Stay safe everybody.



Well attended Club outing on 20 June to SWWW.

Photo: Robert Brink