



The Oystercatcher

NEWSLETTER OF THE HERMANUS BIRD CLUB
JULY / AUGUST 2010

WINTER GREETINGS BIRDERS

Maybe we are getting older, but the winter weather is really catching up with us and I am fast finding common cause with the swallows who wisely move away to warmer weather each year. Be that as it may, the Overberg plays host to some of the most beautiful country on earth and constantly renders up interesting birding visitors - to wit the recent Eurasian Oystercatcher and some Openbills (more of them later). Enjoy the newsletter and please feel free to send in any comments and/or suggestions you may have.



by Barbara Palmer

When you receive this edition of *The Oystercatcher*, the Soccer World Cup will be half-way through and some teams will have gone home, while others will still be battling it out for top position. However, this is a bird club newsletter and I don't normally talk sport but have a bad dose of 'Soccer Fever' and can't help voicing my pride in our country for hosting the biggest sporting event in the world so successfully. We can certainly hold our heads high and be Proudly South African.

Since our AGM in February the following members have joined our Club: Megan Carr, Emmie Gouws, Anthony van Hoogstraten, Judith & Alan Calder, Peter & Alison Eustace, Noel Bishop, Peter & Rona Rousseau, Helen Knutzen, Ed & Sally Meyer, Dalene Worrall, Ian Johnston & Patti Smith. Welcome to all of you and we hope your association with Hermanus Bird

Club will be long and happy and that you will add to your birding knowledge and in turn share it with us.

The recent cold spell took its toll on the penguin colony at Bird Island, Algoa Bay when 500 chicks succumbed to the cold and wet weather and although it is apparently common for a third of penguin chicks to die in such weather, it is bad news for the African Penguin as it was placed on the Red Data list in May, when its status changed from vulnerable to endangered. With the Stony Point breeding colony on our doorstep we should be very aware of the Penguin's plight and support organizations like BLSA's Seabird Division where and when we can.

You will read all about our past & future activities in this newsletter. There are however two events that I would like to urge you to participate in, namely our annual Mini-Mini-Birding-Big-Day on Sunday 18th July and our Quiz/Soup & Sherry Evening on July 21st.

If you are new to the area or new to birding, MMBBD is the time to learn about our birding spots & how to identify birds. Please contact me for more details for these events.

Till next time, stay warm.

Barbara

RECENT ACTIVITIES

LISA MANSFIELD - SEABIRDS (21st April)

Terry Demmer reporting

On Wed 21 April at our monthly get together we were entertained by a talk by Lisa Mansfield from the Albatross Task Force (SA).

ATF was initiated by BirdLife International in 2006. There are teams operating in seven countries in the southern hemisphere. Lisa and her two team members are at sea twice a month on fishing trawlers, monitoring and implementing means of scaring the birds away from the long lines and nets.

The statistics are frightening. During 2006 approximately 300 000 (no, the nought's are correct!) albatrosses and petrels were killed during fishing operations around the globe. 18 out of 22 Albatross species across the globe are threatened with extinction, mainly from fishing.

The albatross is a slow breeder, laying one egg in two years, and they mate for life.

South African waters are rich foraging areas for 15 of the above species. Over the last three years, since the team started working, seabird mortalities have been reduced in both trawler and longline fisheries by between 60 - 90%.

The work they do involves organising workshops with the industry and building relationships with local fisheries. Observers are trained, and compliance officers play a key role in providing reliable data about fishing operations as well as enforcing fishing regulations.

Regular harbour visits are undertaken to talk to fisherman and deliver the Bird Scaring Lines which are utilized on the boats.

As far as Lisa is concerned 'S O S' has taken on a complete new meaning. Save Our Seabirds !

Very interesting and suggested reading can be obtained at www.savethealbatross.net. In particular Lisa's article (with pictures) of the Rory line, a simple device thought up by Roy the skipper and enthusiastic crew. This can be found under 'Read the Task Force blog'.

Also info at www.birdlife.org.za

LEEUVENBOSCHFONTEIN OUTING (11th - 13th May)

Cherry Mills reporting

Swinging off the tarred road, pens poised to commence ticking, we were welcomed to the Little Karoo by a flock of Blue Cranes. Eyes got set into birding mode and 16 members were off to a non-working farm, Leeuwenboschfontein, to do what we all enjoy doing best. On arrival we were greeted by the managers, Bets & Wessel, intent on making us as comfortable as possible. We settled into cozy accommodation - fireplaces in some bedrooms, double beds with electric blankets & 'hotties' for the less fortunate. All necessary as the temperature fell to 8 degrees. No one queried the chill factor when the wind came up!

No excuse not to begin surveying the immediate vicinity & then discover the farm dam. A herd of springbok were 'pronking' around but did not distract us from sighting a Cape Penduline Tit - an agreed highlight.

The next morning, promptly at 8:00, we embarked on the Blou Toring Loop, only returning at 17:30 - sufficient evidence of a most productive day's birding. Regular sightings of the Pale Chanting Goshawk & Jackal Buzzard

held our attention but sightings of juveniles of both at close range was a special treat. Another highlight was 2 Verreaux's Eagles soaring in a cloudless sky. John Bowman was rather sulky when his mission of seeing a Rufous-eared Warbler was denied him, but he perked up when we could tick both Southern Black & Karoo Korhaan - 6 of the latter! Of course we always enjoy a double-deal when Graham Palmer joins us. When the birding is slack we are treated to the odd lecture on the geology of the area for free. Thanks Graham!

This area was a 1st for most of us & we will certainly return. The owner of the farm arrived specially to conduct a tour to the honeymoon cottage overlooking the dam & one fair damsel was spotted accepting a ride home on the back of his bakkie! The development of an already extensive camping area was also viewed, with Springbok overseeing the progress. A warm welcome was extended to first-timers Ronnie & Renee Hazell and Dalene Worrall, who must be praised for slotting into this riotous breed of birders. Commonest phrase heard while birding: "It just dropped down" and a choice one, which caused much laughter round the glowing braai was "can I put my thighs next to your chump chops?"

A highly successful sojourn master-minded & designed by our gracious chairlady, Barbara. Thanks Barbs!



LEEUBOSCHFONTEIN

NEW ZEALAND BIRDS (Wed 19th May)

Lee Burman reporting

At our May monthly meeting we were once again treated to an excellent presentation by Gavin Turner, who becomes more professional every time he entertains us, this time even adding beautiful snatches of birdsong to his pictures.

He and Cynthia spent three months exploring New Zealand recently, hiking some of the spectacular trails and birding as they went. On the face of it, New Zealand is not exactly a birders' paradise, with only between 170 and 200 bird species, many of these critically endangered due to predation and habitat loss - 50 have already become extinct. Some exist only on offshore island sanctuaries.

But in spite of this they managed to see, hear and photograph an impressive number of species in a beautiful setting and obviously had a great time doing it!

Highlights were the uncommon endemic *N Z Robin* which was happy to feed right at their feet; the rather scruffy looking *Fiordland crested Penguin*, a rare endemic in the middle of moulting; the *Kea*, the only mountain parrot, a very destructive bird famous for destroying hiking boots and windscreen rubbers. Other uncommon endemics included *N Z Pipit*, *Fantail*, *Brown Kiwi* (highly threatened as stoats kill 15000 chicks a year), *Kaka* and *Bellbird*.

Having travelled from south to north and explored many varied habitats, from "Lord of the Rings" type snowy mountains, to geysers and boiling pots in the north, the Turners highly recommend New Zealand as the place for an outstanding holiday.



OUTING TO MACASSAR & HELDERBERG (20th May)

Barbara Palmer reporting

On 20th May, in thick mist, John Carter from Somerset West Bird Club kindly met us at Macassar settling ponds. Luckily the mist cleared and we spent two hours in perfect weather identifying various water-birds, including some not often seen around Hermanus, e.g. White-faced Whistling Ducks, Pied Avocets, a Yellow-billed Egret and Gannets. Afterwards we went to Helderberg Nature Reserve where we enjoyed our picnic-brunch before doing a short walk through the reserve, ticking off the usual bush-birds, including Southern-double Collared, Malachite, Amethyst and Orange-breasted Sunbirds, bringing our total for the day to 67 species.

We really are lucky to have such super birding spots on our doorstep!

VERMONT PAN HERONRY, CORMORANT ROOST & FLAMINGO VISITORS

After some really accomplished construction efforts and the establishment of the heronry, the local cormorant pressure group decided that this would provide the ideal breeding site. The nett result has been a well established cormorant colony and a relegation of the herons to a few nests in the trees to the west.

A small work group assembled one cold morning in May with the intention of adding some branches to the roost. The ever intrepid Mike Ford braved the water in his waders (water depth above gonad level) and assessed the prevailing conditions on the roost. To the relief of the rest of the work party he decided that adding material to the roost would disturb the breeding birds and damage the nests with eggs and young chicks.



Shots of the beautiful flamingos

AFRICAN OPENBILLED STORK

Leon Marshall, writing for the National Geographic, reports that openbilled storks are appearing in places where they have never been seen before in South Africa.

Openbill storks (*Anastomus lamelligerus*) or African openbills, as they are also known, are usually restricted to the Kruger National Park and a strip along the coast north of Durban, Botswana's Okavango Swamps, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Angola. The birds are dark in colour and their long beaks have a pronounced opening towards the front, through which daylight shines. Snails are a favourite part of their diet and the gaps in the bills are used to get a grip on them and crack their shells rather like a nutcracker.

The birds that we are seeing in the Vermont area are therefore a thousand miles away from their normal range. Various theories have been advanced for this, from weather changes causing marsh habitats to disappear: the use of pesticides that are killing off the molluscs, mussels and snails on which they feed: the invasion of Zambia's Kafue Flats by a thorny shrub (*mimosa pigra*) that flourishes on seasonally inundated land. However, the overall consensus is that deteriorating environmental conditions are driving the birds south.



OPENBILLS IN VERMONT
(pics by John Bowman)

DIARY:

The following Club activities are in the pipeline for the next two months:

- Sun 18th July: Mini-mini Birding day (08:00 - 14:00)
- Wed 21st July: Bird quiz with Mike Ford as quizmaster
- Thur 5th August: Walk at Arabella & Rooisand
- Wed 18th August: Talk "Turkey Revisited" by Mike Ford
- Thur 19th August: Outing to Strandfontein & Rondevlei

P.S. by the editor.....

THE SECRET OF THE HADEDA

Legend has it that the strident call of the widespread Hadedda Ibis comes about as a result of the poor creature being scared of heights! However, little did we know that this fellow has a far greater claim to fame. The World Cup fever that has gripped the country has been accompanied by some fairly well discussed and debated noises. So, on investigation I came across a strange secret which can now be revealed as an urban legend fact: *"The Hadedda in full SA regalia with its loud call is actually the originator of the ubiquitous VUVUZELA!!"*



AYOBA

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