

## Recent Sightings

### Kruger National Park – 2007

#### August 2007

The Allen's Gallinule is not the only hot tick recently recorded at Lake Panic. Andre Botha from EWT's Bird of Prey Working Group recently found one roosting in the large jackalberry tree easily viewable from the hide. Now why can't we all have such luck on visiting this superb location? Mind you one is never disappointed by what one does see - cue both night-herons, white-crowned lapwing, leopard etc.

Another posting to the SA Bird Network relating to birding in SANParks:

Hi All Netters

A rather pleasant surprise on a quick hours birding this afternoon delivered an adult Allen's Gallinule at Lake Panic close to Skukuza, the bird was spotted close by to the dam wall but with a bit of luck it can possibly make a appearance within the vicinity of the nearby hide.

Kind Regards

**J.P Le Roux**

Although a rare bird in Kruger, Allen's (Lesser) Gallinule is regularly seen at Lake Panic and several other locations in the park, but most records are for the period December to April, so an August record is most unusual, as this species is an intra Africa migrant.

**Chris Patton**

Trish from Birdlife Sisonke sent through the following report

Hi Everyone,

**Malcolm Gemmell** is in KNP at the moment and asked me to put the following on the net:

19 Grey-headed parrots seen outside Punda Maria on 6th and 7th August and  
1 Dickinsons Kestrel seen on Mahonie loop 7th August.

Please contact Malcolm directly on 082 789 5000 for any more info.

Trish  
BIRDLIFE SISONKE  
E-Mail [birdlifesisonke@futurenet.co.za](mailto:birdlifesisonke@futurenet.co.za)

Allon Traub posted the following to the SA Bird Network and received the accompanying replies:

Hi all

I have just returned from 3 night stay in the central region of the Park. An interesting bird seen along the Timbavati road near Roodewal Camp was a Redheaded Finch at the waterhole. I was wondering if there were any other records for this bird in the Park.

Larklike Buntings and Greybacked Finchlark were still present in large numbers.

**Allon Traub**

Adrian Haagner and I were in the Kruger Park on 7 July and we saw Redheaded Finch feeding in a party with Cut throat Finches and Greybacked Finchlarks. We were on the main road between Skukuza and Sitara (closer to Sitara) and they were feeding on the side of the road.

Regards

**Amanda Haggett**

Red-headed Finch does appear on the Kruger National Park Bird list. Have a look at the link for bird-lists for the various SANParks (<http://www.sanparks.org/groups/birders/checklists.php>)

**Francois Dreyer**

Saw a group in company with Chesnut-backed and Grey-backed Sparrowlarks, African Quailfinch and Larklike Bunting at the Malopenya waterhole north of Letaba on 13 June this year. Presumably all to do with migration out of the drought-stricken Northern Cape/NorthWest/Nothern Limpopo.

**Neil Gray**

Hi Allon,

As the others have indicated Red-headed Finch is a nomadic visitor to Kruger. It was not listed in the old Kruger Bird book by Ken Newman, but when I came across a flock at Babalala Picnic site in the far north of the park I enquired with some of my birding colleagues living permanently in the park and they tell me that there are occasional local eruptions in drier years much like with the grey-backed sparrowlarks (also not in the old Newman's) and larklike buntings. We thus added it to the park checklist list posted on the SANParks website as Francois pointed out.

Regards

**Chris Patton**

**Johan Slabbert** made the following post to the SA Bird Network:

Greetings from Kruger Park:

Tremendous session at Sweni bird hide (again) today.

Seen from the Sweni river causeway, from ~14h00 to ~14h30 today Sat 11 Aug '07:

Water Thicknee  
Three Banded Plover  
Malachite Kingfisher  
Pied Kingfisher  
Brown Hooded kingfisher  
Burchell's Coucal  
Blacksmith Lapwing  
Pied Wagtail  
Cape Wagtail (chased by the Pied in an aerial dogfight with spectacular aerobatics - very entertaining)  
African Jacana

Black Crake  
Hamerkop  
Golden Breasted Bunting  
Forktailed Drongo  
Grey Go Away Bird  
and..... (piece de resistance)....(drumroll).....  
Greater Painted Snipe!

In my book, the very, very bestest bird hide in the RSA. It just never disappoints.

Cheers,

**Johan Slabbert**

**Chris Roche** of Wilderness Safaris writes to the SA Bird Network:

Hi all

Spoke to Simon Stobbs, head guide at Pafuri Camp, yesterday.

They have recorded Wahlberg's eagle, yellow-billed/black kite and barn swallow along the Luvuvhu River recently.

-chris-

PLEASE CONSIDER THE ENVIRONMENT BEFORE PRINTING THIS EMAIL

**Chris Roche** [chriss@wilderness.co.za](mailto:chriss@wilderness.co.za)

Also on the drive along Kanniedood I came across a foraging bird party the one morning. Most of the usual suspects were present, but what was of interest was the ground squad. It comprised of several Terrestrial Brownbuls and Arrow-marked Babblers, a lone Crested Barbet and one White-browed (Heuglin's Robin) and two Red-capped Robin-chats (Natal Robin). For the most part the 2 species were nonchalant to each other's presence, but at one point when one of the red-caps came close to it, the Heuglin's displayed some aggressive behaviour. This didn't last and they then continued to forage side by side. This close interaction is not something I recall seeing before between the 2 species.

Chatting with some of my older Kruger colleagues who've lived and birded in the park for many years they tell me that in the 2 or 3 decades ago, red-capped was the commonest of the robin-chats in the park, but over the last couple of decades there has been a changing of the guard and it is now the white-browed that is the most easily found robin-chat species along the major rivers and in other suitable habitat.

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July '07

We have just returned from a fairly long and very interesting trip to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. The whole area is very dry, which made for some truly strange bird sightings. On the first of June a huge front pushed over the park resulting in a spectacular lightning storm over the Nossob river while the bulk of the rain fell in the dunes and the two river beds received only light showers. Next morning slap bang in the middle of the dunes we rounded a corner nearly running over a forlorn Hamerkop standing in a rain puddle in the middle of the road. Things got really strange once we reached the extremely dry and dusty Auob river.

We saw a Spurwinged Goose at Rooibrak, two Sacred Ibis pecking away in the arid riverbed and at Dertiende boorgat the strangest of all - a lone and very bewildered Quail Finch meters from our vehicle on the edge of the drinking trough oblivious to the hunting Gabars and Lanners that zoomed overhead. We took many photos and after more than an hour we moved on.

Owing to the dry conditions in the park large numbers of both Eland and Wildebeest have started moving to the permanent water of the Nossob from the Botswana side, both lion kills we saw were adult eland bulls. One other interesting mammal sighting was four cheetah being robbed of their freshly killed steenbok by a spotted hyena. He ran down into the river bed from the dune crest and proceeded to devour the whole animal in under twenty minutes with three or four jackals in close attendance.

**Mike Taylor**, Nelspruit

**Martin Benadie:**

Northern Kruger National Park - Pafuri, Punda Maria, Mopani and Shingwedzi

The area is being hit by several winter fires at moment. Just beyond Punda Maria gate another birding spectacle unfolds. Many bird species were perching in and around the raging fire trying to catch a fleeing morsel. Drongos, Hornbills, Starlings and Rollers were everywhere. While watching a fleeing Black-crowned Tchagra, a Shikra stooped down to catch it right in front of us!

The flowering aloes at Punda Camp had many feeding sunbirds - Collared, Scarlet-chested and White-bellied. The thickets had White-throated Robin-Chat, Bearded Scrub-Robin, Terrestrial Brownbul and Eastern Nicator.

Also of interest was a single Mottled Spinetail observed with its distinctive erratic low-flying flight over the camp itself, but be careful for the more common Little Swifts resident here.

In the early morning hang out in the area just beyond the main gate to camp. We observed a flock of 8 Grey-headed Parrots on three occasions perched early morning in this area (around 7am). Just listen for their raucous calls, much louder than the more common Brown-headed Parrot. Two Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, typically a more westerly distribution, were found on Mahonie loop which was very dry.

In the Pafuri area along the Luvuvhu, we found two Bohms Spinetails and Mosque Swallow around the Baobabs just beyond the picnic site and Grey-rumped Swallow nesting in underground burrows at the T-junction leading to Crooks Corner.

Due to the dry winter conditions in the park, there is a massive influx of Larklike Bunting and Grey-backed Sparrowlark at moment. They were seen everywhere together with Cut-throat Finch, few Red-headed Finch and African Quail Finch. The drinking troughs just north of Mopani and Shingwedzi camps are worth sitting at for a bit. At Shingwedzi the Collared Palm-Thrush is still around as is Red-capped Robin-Chat.

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### ***Martin Benadie***

#### **Northern Kruger – June/July 2007**

I visited the northern part of Kruger from 28 June to 2 July 2007. The following was seen:

DICKINSON'S KESTREL - On the Northern Plain 4x4 trail just south of the Roan boma. There were also recent reports of this species at Klopperfontein dam.

ARNOT'S CHAT - a group of 7 seen along the S60 road.

RETZ'S HELMET-SHRIKE - a group was seen along the S60 and a group of 11 was found roosting in a tree along the flycatcher trail in Punda Maria Camp.

GREY-BACKED SPARROWLARK - seen on several localities along the Northern Plains 4x4 track as well as at the Klopperfontein dam - no Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks seen.

AFRICAN PARADISE-FLYCATCHER, BLACK-THROATED WATTLE-EYE, NARINA TROGON (female), TROPICAL BOUBOU, WHITE-CROWNED LAPWING, AFRICAN YELLOW WHITE-EYE - Papuri Picnic spot.

CROWNED HORNBILL - Punda Maria camp.

SHELLEY'S FRANCOLIN - At the start of the Northern Plains 4x4 trail.

ASHY FLYCATCHER - Pafuri and Punda Maria camp (common)

TERRESTRIAL BROWNBUL - Punda Maria camp

YELLOW-BELLIED GREENBUL - Common and very tame.

MOCKING CLIFF-CHAT - at rocky outcrops next to main road between Punda Maria and Pafuri.

SOUTHERN GROUND-HORNBILL - On the Northern Plain 4x4 trail just south of the Roan boma.

BEARDED SCRUB-ROBIN - Punda Maria Camp – common

WHITE-THROATED ROBIN-CHAT - Punda Maria Camp – common

LITTLE SWIFT - Punda Maria

LESSER STRIPED SWALLOW - Punda Maria.

....and lots, lots more...

### ***Rihann F. Geyser***

#### **Pafuri Area – June '07**

I received nice pics of Bat Hawk (500m from camp) and a female Narina Trogon (in camp) taken at Pafuri Camp in northern Kruger by Simon Stobbs.

Grey-backed sparrowlarks (finchlarks) and larklike buntings also around up there. Racket-tailed rollers being seen well in post breeding family groups of 5 and Pel's fishing owl chick recently discovered.

### ***Chris Roche***

#### **Southern and Central Kruger – June '07**

Just returned from a trip in Kruger.

Saw a few birds that I don't normally associate with Kruger and in the light of other recent odd birds in Kruger are worth mentioning

- Cape Canary-Flock near Malelane
- Fiscal Flycatcher-Berg&Dal
- Lark-like Bunting-common around Satara&Orpen
- Cape Wagtail

### ***Charles Vermeulen***

Lark-like Bunting are prone to occasional eruptions in the park, particularly during dry periods. The 2007 autumn and winter has seen them widespread in many areas in the park, particularly around Satara and in the north.

### ***Ed.***

#### **Orpen, Shimuwini, Mopani, Punda Maria and Pafuri – June '07**

Was also fortunate to be able to spend a few days in Kruger, and although with non-birders, was still able to record some pretty decent sightings with a Kruger bird list of 165 species in 7 days: Grey Rumped Swallow (at Shimuwini Bush Camp, and later at Crook's Corner), a pair of Painted Snipe next to a pair of African Black Duck (in the river one or two kilometres before Shimuwini camp) and great views of a bathing Gabar Goshawk in the same area, Marico Flycatcher (800 metres from Orpen Camp), large numbers of Larklike Buntings as far south as the Satara-Orpen Road (and again near Mopani), at least 3 Yellow-Billed Oxpeckers on a large herd of buffalo 3-4 kilometres south of Mopani (and another one on a buffalo on the Mahonie Loop near Punda Maria), 3 Grey Headed Parrots on the Mahonie Loop. Finally, Pafuri picnic site produced (with Frank's assistance!) knockout views of a pair of Black-Throated Wattle-Eye, Tropical Boubou and a few km's up the tar road Grey-Backed Camaroptera.

### ***Mark Harrington***

#### **Olifants River – June 2007**

Two teams of observers conducted a survey along the Olifants river in the Kruger Park from the 24th-27th of July 2007 and some of the interesting sightings were as follows:

- \* Pel's Fishing Owl
- \* Low numbers of fish-eating species such as the white egrets, e.g. a

single Little Egret and no Great White Egrets recorded by the team covering the western half of the river. Goliath- and Grey Herons well-represented however.

\* Several pairs of White-backed Night Heron

\* At least 8-10 individual Paradise Flycatchers seen and heard in riparian vegetation. They obviously don't read the standard fieldguides!

\* Good numbers of Giant Eagle Owls.

\* Several African White-backed- and Hooded Vulture nests along the river.

\* 3 Saddle-billed Storks and 1 Black Stork only was counted.

\* Several sightings of Grey-backed Sparrow-lark along the river as well as in the Gudzane-area. Interestingly, no Chestnut-backed's recorded.

\* Good numbers of Alpine and Black Swift in the pre- and post-frontal conditions were seen from Tuesday to Thursday.

\* White-backed Duck at Engelhard Dam which is acquiring a good covering of water-lilies in some areas and should be worth scouring for Lesser Jacana and Pygmy Goose in the coming months.

### ***Andre Botha (Manager Birds of Prey Working Group - EWT)***

#### **Pafuri Area – 3 to 6 June 2007**

I recently spent 4 days (3 to 6 June 2007) in the Makuleke concession based from the Wilderness Safaris 'Pafuri Camp'. This concession comprises 24000 hectares of pristine wilderness and is sandwiched between the Luvuvhu and Limpopo rivers in the extreme north of Kruger National Park. Although not strictly a birding trip, I still had some great opportunities and we managed to find many of the specials for the area. Summer migrants were obviously absent, but the climate at this time of year is certainly more pleasant and one can basically spend whole day birding.

Some notable bird species observed during visit were:

- Pel's Fishing-Owl. An adult and large downy chick was found roosting along the Luvuvhu east, whilst another adult was found on a night drive along Luvuvhu west.
- Three-banded Courser. Almost guaranteed in certain areas just after dark.
- Lark-like Bunting. Influx of this species at moment due to dry conditions.
- Stierling's Wren-Warbler. Excellent views obtained within a mixed feeding flock of birds.
- Racket-tailed Roller. Certainly a highlight for me! Observed group of 5 birds actively feeding, interacting and calling around a grassy clearing in a Fever tree forest patch. Perhaps these birds move out of their usual mopane breeding haunts in summer to the more insect-rich fever tree areas here in winter? Other comments on this would be welcome!
- Retz's Helmet-Shrikes.
- Raptors galore!
  - African Goshawk
  - Little Sparrowhawk
  - Gabar Goshawk
  - Tawny Eagle
  - Gymnogone
  - African Hawk-Eagle
  - Verreaux's Eagle
  - Cuckoo Hawk
  - Greater Kestrel was observed outside park on Tshipise road, hunting over more open fields in the Popallin turnoff area.
- Eastern Nicator. Interesting to note that in winter their vocalization is just a soft 'clucking' call.
- Grey-headed Parrot.
- Mosque Swallow. These birds were observed every day. Certainly a stunning hirundine!

Then all along the Levuvhu

- Black Stork
- White-fronted Plover
- Senegal Coucal
- White-crowned Lapwing.
- Mocking Cliff-Chat
- Bearded Scrub-Robin
- Grey Tit-Flycatcher
- Striped Pipit
- Plenty Meve's Starling and Tropical Boubou all over the place!
- Yellow-billed Oxpecker. Observed daily around buffalo herds and other large mammals. Their vocalization is very different to the more common Red-billed.
- African Quail Finch.

A mammal 'lifer' for me was the Yellow-spotted Rock Hyrax which is commonly encountered on the rocky outcrops of the area. The concession was crawling with 'big and hairies' and we enjoyed great sightings of Buffalo, Elephant, Hippos, Banded and Dwarf Mongoose, African Civet, Black-backed Jackal, Lion, Chacma Baboons, Thick-tailed Bushbaby, and many antelope species. While all the vehicles were out on a gamedrive one afternoon the staff enjoyed their own leopard sighting right in camp!

Certainly one of the most untouched, remote areas in entire park. The Wilderness Camp is an ideal and tranquil base to bird this area. The landscapes, scenery and habitats were awe-inspiring! Massive Baobabs, impressive fever tree forests, exciting riparian woodland, vast floodplains, ancient gorges and 'koppies', Mopane and other broad-leafed woodland certainly sets the stage for non-stop birding...For more info check out [www.pafuri.com](http://www.pafuri.com)

### ***Martin Benadie***

I can certainly back up Martin's comments. I was also recently on a trip in the Makuleke concession and the birding really is spectacular, with a very good chance of Pel's Fishing-Owl. If you can afford to stay at the Pafuri Wilderness Camp, the level of service offered is excellent and the guides have an excellent knowledge of the special birds ([www.pafuri.com](http://www.pafuri.com)).

Larklike Buntings were here in good numbers

### ***Callan Cohen***

#### **Unusual Winter Birds in Southern Kruger – June '07**

I have just come back from spending 2 nights on safari in the Kruger, and was happy to add 3 new species to my Kruger list. The first was a Fairy Flycatcher, seen on the Fayi Loop just south of Pretoriuskop Camp, and the other two were Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher and Cape Batis, seen on the perimeter of the camp.

I had always wondered if I would ever see a Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher in the park. I also noticed that Fairy Flycatcher and Cape Batis were not on the official Bird List of the park.

I just wish I had some more time to spend in the area. There has got to be a few other unusual species that have crept in from higher altitudes.

### ***Robert Wienand***

Not sure what list Robert was using, but on the website we keep on this website, both Cape Batis and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher are listed as rare seasonal altitudinal visitors to the park.

Most sightings are from the Skukuza area, where it is thought they move along the Sabie River to escape the cold in their summer breeding grounds in the forests of the Mpumalanga Mountains. The fairy flycatcher wasn't on the list on this website (it is now), although I see it is in Ken Newman's Birds of the Kruger National Park as a rare vagrant from April to August – of the few sightings mentioned 2 were from the nShawu area between Mopani and Shingwedzi.

*Ed.*

### **Olifants and Orpen Areas – June '07**

The dry conditions seem to have brought an influx of out-of-range species to the park. We have seen flocks of Grey-backed Sparrowlarks around Shingwedzi and Satara; several Marico Flycatchers near Olifants and Orpen; and Lark-like Buntings on the Olifants trail, and near Satara.

We also found a confiding African Rail on the low water bridge between Olifants and Balule, seen on two different occasions, which has learned to pose for photos.

*Allan Ridley*

### **Striped Pipit – Shabeni Hill – 30 May '07**

Striped Pipit is an unheralded little bird associated with rocky, wooded slopes and outcrops. It is seen quite regularly in suitable habitat in Marakele, but is not a bird one would automatically associate with Kruger. It is an uncommon visitor to the park to suitable habitat (mainly in the southwest) and was thought to be a predominantly summer visitor, although many records are from August.

I was delighted to see one last week (30<sup>th</sup> May) on the slopes of Shabeni Hill near Pretoriuskop. As pipits go it is one of the most striking - with heavily streaked underparts and diagnostic yellow edges to the flight feathers. It was rather confiding as well. Something to look out for for people travelling to Pretoriuskop.

*Chris Patton*

### **Punda Maria and Pafuri – May '07**

I returned from my 1st ever trip to Kruger 2 weeks ago. Had a great trip and also missed all the cold weather that is now around! Stayed at Punda Maria (3nights) and Crooks Corner (2nights at TEBA) and both sites impressed me.

At Pafuri picnic spot we found Cuckoo Hawk, Saddle-billed Stork, male Paradise Flycatcher still with long tail, Grey-headed Bushshrike taking a Flapnecked Chameleon in front of us. Could tick the Chameleon whilst it was alive! Took some great pics of this action. Frank says the Paradise Flycatchers were always there, I always assumed that they migrated further north. Anyone know if they stay there? Wattle-eyed Flycatcher, Terrestrial Bulbul, Puffback, Olive-bush Shrike were amongst the bird party and made great viewing.

We travelled to the Pafuri gate and found 2 Dark Chanting Goshawks and 4 Bronze-winged Coursers next to the road. We spent some time with these new birds for me.

The stay at TEBA can only be recommended as you can get to Crooks Corner early. We were 8 in the party and were very comfortable in the house. The 2nd house sleeps 4 as far as I am aware. Lovely to sit and braai and look over to Mozambique and Zimbabwe with Thick-tailed Bush babies in the trees. I definitely will stay there again maybe for 3 not 2 nights. Very impressed with the forest along the river, Yellow-breasted Canaries, Green Spotted Doves, Natal Francolin, Lizard Buzzard and Pels Fishing Owl were seen and photographed there.

We found the park and the surrounding area clean and the people very friendly and helpful.

One thing I found strange, different from Kalahari is that that you were not checked out on your drive. In Kalahari you cannot go out, even if you are going to another camp or just a game drive without your 'pass-out' as such and the park knowing which route you were taking. This I think should be looked at. Any Parks Board birders on the net who can comment?

Had 2 lovely Leopard sightings in the Park, but no other cats. Elephants were not abundant at all and in the 5 days saw only about 10!

Arnots Chat and Ground Hornbill eluded me but maybe next time we will see them. 10 new birds from Kruger and 3 more outside the Park.

All in all a trip enjoyed by all and looking forward to the next one there!

***Brian van der Walt***

### **Skukuza to Phalaborwa – mid April '07**

Just back from a working trip to the Kruger Park that started last Wednesday. A couple of noteworthy sightings include:

\* Pel's Fishing Owl from the bird hide at Lake Panic near Skukuza on Thursday morning at about 06:10. The bird was flushed and chased twice by a pair of African Harrier Hawk that were not happy with having it around. Once it reached sufficient cover, it continued giving the typical hoarse scream until the AHH's lost interest and moved off. Also heard at least two Gorgeous Bush Shrike calling from the same hide.

\* A flock of 38 Pink-backed Pelican at the eastern end of the Bangu Gorge on the Olifants river on Saturday morning (21st). This is the largest number of this rather uncommon species I have ever recorded in Kruger.

\* Some intra-African migrants have also departed already and not a single Carmine Bee-eater, Woodland Kingfisher or Wahlberg's Eagle was either heard or seen at the places that I visited. This is in sharp contrast to last year when both species were still present in the first week of May.

\* Of the intra-African migrants that were still around and recorded include plenty of Paradise Flycatcher and a few Jacobin Cuckoo.

\* The only Palearctic migrant was a lone Spotted Flycatcher in a garden at Phalaborwa.

***Andre Botha (EWT)***

Further to Andre Botha's email we had a wonderful surprise at Shingwedzi Camp last week when we met up with Phanny Risimati an unofficial bird guide that works in the supermarket. Anyone travelling there for the forthcoming long weekend who wants to see the Collared Palm-Thrush, Verreaux's Eagle Owls or Red-Capped Robin Chat pop in to chat or phone him 072 942 9868. He has an outstanding knowledge of the birds, can imitate their calls and is more than willing to assist.

***Helen Biram***

### **Sable Dam – 2 April '07**

Although I was visiting for non-birding reasons, I was able to spend a few hours at Sable Dam in the KNP on the Monday morning. I saw flocks of Amurs heading north (approximately 30 - 40), as well as plenty of Red-backed Shrikes.

At Sable Dam there was also a lone Curlew Sandpiper in full breeding plumage.

### ***Mark Harrington***

#### **Pafuri – 12 March '07**

Very exciting potential sighting of a red-throated twinspace at Pafuri yesterday!

The bird was seen in the Punda Maria Sandveld north of the Luvuvhu River but was not photographed. It was seen by Johnson Mlambo who spent many years guiding at Ndumo and is very familiar with the pink-throated twinspace.

Of course the sandveld in Kruger is understood to harbour pink-throated and it is very possible and even likely that the bird reported here is this species. I know there is at least one post-1997 record of red-throated from Venda (Gundani) however; if anyone on the net was present at that or any other red-throated sighting in SA could they contact me directly. Also if anyone has any comment on changed (deepening perhaps) pink colouration of the pink-throated north of Maputaland, I'd also be grateful to hear from you.

In the mean time the guides have been trying to obtain another sighting of the bird and get a photograph and I'll keep the net posted if we ever get to the bottom of this one.

### ***Chris Roche***

I have been told the colour of Pink-throated Twinspots in the Kruger sandveld is almost red. I have been un- able to see them though.

Maybe look for crown colour, brown, not grey and spot colour, pinkish. Pinks have little red on tail itself. Their females differ from Reds in being grey chested. Only birds without spots are juveniles. Check for blackish feet.

### ***Mostert Kriek***

#### **Skukuza Area – March '07**

Managed to sneak away for a weekend in the KNP.

Two main sightings which were of interest to me were:

- Crested Guineafowl outside Skukuza (on the Pretoriuskop Road) It appeared to be a single bird and it was foraging amongst a troop of baboons (which based on photos I've seen of baboons and Egyptian geese did not seem the safest thing to do, but it was pecking berries off the same bush off which the baboons were feeding). I was under the impression that these birds only really occurred up north in the Pafuri region and have certainly never seen them south of there in all my visits to the park.
- Dark form Jacobin Cuckoo - how common are these?

We also saw a number of small raptors, which is always great.

### ***John McPherson***

I spoke to my father (Ian) recently about another report of Crested Guineafowl around Skukuza. He said that although not common, there have been fairly regular reports dripping in about these birds, specifically near the bridges crossing the Sabi River. Where they come from is a bit of a mystery.....

### ***Neil Whyte***

#### **Olifants and Sweni Wilderness Trails**

Comments on Olifants and Sweni trails 7-14 February 2007. A Pretoria based birding group joined me for the ninth consecutive year for some quality birding in the Kruger Park. Whilst resting up for a while in a rugged spruit that feeds into the Olifants river, we were put on high alert by the ever wary and reactive Grey Louries. The outcome most of the time is African Hawk Eagle, however on this morning we were treated to a Peregrine diving straight towards us, only turning around to settle in another Leadwood tree. This is the type of magic one can experience when birding on foot in the bush. Prior to this pit stop we walked along the river for a while turning up passed the old picnic site and circled back to camp. The area has received generous rain and the condition of this rugged veld is superb. Queleas were numerous and evening roosts were impressive. I hope this will lead to nesting. Harlequin Quail was heard. Further highlights were Monotonous Lark and Olivetree Warbler. I cannot recall hearing this Warbler so frequently in the past and so widespread. This would continue into the Sweni area later on.

The second morning activity produced a pair of Fishing Owls much to my delight, this being my first sighting of them on the Olifants river. All in all a wonderful 3 days, with Dwarf Bittern being seen at Bangu windmill on our way out.

The Sweni area has had later rains and the veld seems to be playing catch up when compared to the Bangu area where the Olifants trail occurs. The trail camp looks down onto the Sweni river and across onto an open sodic plain. Good timing and thanks to the slow speed at which the bird flies, the whole team watched a male Pallid Harrier do a slow motion flyby across our field of view. It was pursued by relentless mobbing parties. These open patches are great new habitats when the number of new birds has almost reached a standing point. Temminks Courser and Redcapped Larks were no surprise. Whitethroat was however, a lifer for most of the party, found in Acacia Welwitschia thickets adjacent the open areas. This area has always been good to us, with Caspian Plover and Breeding Marico Flycatcher in 2003.

On previous Swenis in wet years Orange breasted Waxbills bred in the Sweni reedbeds(bishop nests), however no luck this time round due to the absence of seed. Weaver activity too was surprisingly quiet, with many nesting sites unoccupied. We ended up with a list of 223 birds on trail plus Osprey and Black Egret at Engelhard dam near Letaba and Whiskered Tern at Mazithi near Tshokwane. A very meaningful week indeed, where one can forget about worrying about the crime in our beloved country for a while.

### ***Nic Squires***

#### **Afsaal Area February '07**

Had an interesting late afternoon birding experience yesterday (Thurs 8 Feb). Was in southern Kruger near Afsaal (Road H2-2) co-ords S25.19.819 E031.35.021 elev 344m at 16:52 when we spotted a Violet-eared Waxbill. I always thought this was found further north (saw my first one on road to Shimuwini Bushveld Camp some years ago). Also spotted what we think were two Thickbilled Cuckoos but do not have enough info to confirm - BUT - we also saw a group of more than 6 Reitz's Helmet Shrikes shortly thereafter. Two very satisfied birders exited Malelane Gate just before closing time!

### ***Sally King and Paul Bartho***

#### **Northern Kruger – February '07**

That is what we all enjoy most. And what my husband and I did for 9 days weeks in Kruger Park during Feb. In spite of the fact that it takes us 3 days to get there; that we knew it would be extremely hot and that the mozzies would be very active, we took the gap and packed the vehicle. Homework was done and the target list highlighted.

As it took us three full days of driving to reach Letaba camp through Phalaborwa gate, we decided to, for the first time in all our Kruger years, spend the day in the camp. And what a lovely day we had. In three hours we ticked off quite a number of species including great views of 2 Jacobin Cuckoo. However, we dipped on the nightjar which was supposed to roost in the palm trees at the restaurant. Had stiff necks the next day from standing there for long periods looking up and scrutinizing every branch. And to think that it was the main reason for booking Letaba camp!

From Letaba we went up to Punda where the main targets were. Birding in the camp was a bit disappointing. Previous visits were in winter and definitely more rewarding. Highlight was the Yellowbilled Oxpecker on a buffalo taking a mud bath right in front of the bird hide. Next morning early we were off to Pafuri, admittedly keeping our eyes wide open, but exceeding the speed limit (just). Michael was unfortunately on leave and we were left on our own. While my husband was trying to see the Bearded Scrub-robin in a thicket, I checked the air for swallows/swifts (not including the Böhms or Mottled Spinetail – for we were going to look for them from the bridge). And there it was – all on its own and giving us excellent views – our very own Böhms. We celebrated with breakfast and chose a table nearest to the thickets where we expected to find the Blackthroated Wattle-eye. We have spent quite a lot of time trying to find it and by now have given up. Then, while packing up, it flew in and sat right next to us!. Unfortunately only for a short while and then took off. Nevertheless, we had good views and were much exited. On the river edge we saw Whitecrowned Lapwing & Greenshank. Together with all the other ticks, this was indeed a fruitful morning, even if we dipped on Mottled which we hoped to see.

It was getting hot and we were off to the camp via Klopperfontein road to find Arnots Chat, on which we also dipped. Next morning we left for Shingwedzi via the Mahonie Loop. This is a great road with lovely scenes. Here Eastern Nicator & Lemonbreasted Canary was ticked. Not in our dreams did we expect to see the canary.

Next on the list was the Bat Hawk & Collared Palm Thrush at Shingwedzi. Again I needed a therapist for my neck after standing there for 90” at dusk without luck. Fortunately, two persons made notes in the Visitor’s Book regarding the Palm Thrush and the next morning we picked it up very easily at the exact spot - Exit Gate for Staff. It was singing its heart out in the early morning sunrays. We made a quick turn on the high water bridge and guess who flew by? You got it – Bat Hawk. It is such a thrilling experience to find a bird after you have given up and not expecting to see it anymore.

I wonder if we as birders always appreciate the privilege of having our national parks, our eyes to see with and our limbs to carry us there. There is a quote that says : Friends are those that nourish the sole. I see myself as extremely blessed to have feathered friends, for they nourish my sole. You Guaties who live nearer to the park should go there more often than you can.

***Estelle Coetzee***

### **Shingwedzi and Pafuri – February ‘07**

I have just returned from Kruger on an extended birding honeymoon. Apart from the usual good stuff, there were three really good sightings.

1 Collared Palm Thrush in the staff gardens next to the secondary entrance to the Shingwedzi Camp on the 12th Feb (it had been seen 2 days previously as well).

1 Pectoral Sandpiper on the sandbank below the Pafuri picnic spot on the 14th (no White-crowned Lapwings, they were at Crooks Corner).  
2 Rudd's Apalis in the scrub on the eastern side of the camp site on the same day.

### **Vince Ward**

#### **Editor's note**

Collared Palm Thrushes appear to be more or less resident at Shingwedzi in groves of Hyphae Palms. The sandpiper and the Apalis are not on the Kruger Birdlist. While the former is the type of vagrant to South Africa that could turn up anywhere, the Apalis is very range restricted and its appearance at Shingwedzi would be a real coup. Both records require more verification.

#### **Pafuri area – February '07**

Cuckoo hawk, 2 Pel's and greater painted snipe seen on a walk from Pafuri camp in northern Kruger this morning by head guide Simon Stobbs.

Notably absent birds compared to this time last year (when both were abundant) are black cuckoo and Senegal lapwing.

### **Chris Roche**

#### **Punda Maria area – 2/02/2007**

We (myself and two clients from the US) saw a pair of Arnot's Chats (White-capped Black Chats) feeding apparently non-flying young between Punda and the Klopperfontein Dam road on 2nd February, 2007. This would appear to be quite a late indication of breeding by this species. Also there do not appear to be any breeding records in South Africa as all the references I have found refer to breeding in Zimbabwe or Botswana.

### **John McAllister**

The Kruger Park staff informed me of breeding in mopane right beside the tar road east of Punda Maria, ca 1994.

During a 1993 project it was clear that the Arnot's Chats along the Klopperfontein road were in distinct territories, spaced at regular intervals and defended these. A juvenile and possible nest site was also found on 20/1/93.

### **Mostert Kriek**

Thanks Mostert. That's very interesting.

Obviously I did not do a very exhaustive search of the literature available to me, but I am apparently not alone in this. Surprisingly this South African breeding info does not seem to have been picked up in any of the "Roberts". Laying Dates in Roberts VII are given as Botswana Aug, Oct, Zimbabwe Aug-Dec (28 of 40 records Oct-Nov. This compares with "August to December (mainly October-November) in Zimbabwe according to Roberts V.

SABAP 1, on the other hand records breeding between and September and April with at least some of this being in South Africa.

### **John McAllister**

#### **Limpopo River – January '07**

The Greater Limpopo Birding Route had its first event of the year. Sarah Venter of the Soutpansberg-Limpopo Birding Route organized and led this hugely enjoyable and successful event. The other participants in the count were Sven Carlsson-Smith, Lyn Carlsson-Smith, Anne Ayre, Linda Lutz, Charles Marais, Walter Naser and Ben de Boer.

[See other park for details of birds seen in the Mapungubwe National Park](#)

After the count, we drove to Pafuri. Arriving at 4pm, we spent the night in the wonderful Wilderness Safari's Pafuri River Camp. This camp is on the banks of the Luvubu River and is entirely built on wooden decks with huge safari tents under thatch. The outdoor shower under the Nyalaberry of tent 12 was my favourite feature of many in the elegant tents. All the tents are linked by wooden walkways to a bar and dining area under an enormous Jackelberry tree. After some well needed tea and snacks, we were taken on an evening drive to look at the Racket-tailed Roller nest. Unfortunately none were about, but we did see Broadbilled Rollers and heard Barred Owlets calling while we had sundowners. On the way back to camp we had various sightings of nightjars and were kept busy trying to identify these cryptic birds, we eventually settled on Square tailed, Freckled and Fiery-necked. We were then treated to a wonderful sighting of a Pels Fishing-owl sitting on a fallen tree over a deep pool in the Levubu River - a long searched-for lifer for various members of the group. The night drive was finished up with an amazing sighting of two White-tailed Mongoose. Back at camp we were treated to a meal fit for kings and we took full advantage of it knowing the long walk we had ahead the next day.

[Sunday 28 January 2007](#)

We left camp at 4:45 with two guides, Alweert Hlungwane and Enos Mngomezulu. We were dropped off at the eastern end of the section of the Limpopo River and a vehicle was left 10 km upstream. We then had the rare privilege of walking along the banks of this remote and magnificent river. The banks, with huge stands of Fever trees and stands of Lala palms. We heard Nicators, White-browed Robin-Chat, Tropical Bou-Bou and a flock of at least 30 Trumpeter Hornbills flew past, but we were strong and stayed true to our mission and kept our bins firmly focused on the banks of the massive river. Initially the water course was close to the South African bank, but about half way along it hugged the Zimbabwean bank. It was a very hot and long walk through the sands over the Limpopo but we were kept going by sightings of Blue-cheeked Bee-Eaters, Martial Eagle, Tawny Eagle and a brief glimpse of Crowned Eagle and Cuckoo-Hawk. A cisticola calling from the top of a clump of reeds was identified as a Rufous-winged Cisticola. At 12:30 we were back at Pafuri Camp and were given a delicious lunch, after which everybody made their way home. The birding highlights of the day were Lemon-breasted Canary and Saddle-billed Stork.

A total of 462 water birds were counted (up from 309 last year), this is more than likely as a result of lower water levels and a more comprehensive coverage of the area (last year the group did not walk the whole area in the Kruger). The most numerous bird was the Black-winged Lapwing and a total of 26 different species of water related birds were counted.

Anyone interested can get the full list from me.

Special thanks to Sarah Venter, Mapungubwe National Park, Coleen Mullen (Wilderness Safaris – Pafuri Camp), Chris Roche (Wilderness Safaris)

This event is being planned again for next year and anyone interested in participating, please contact me early, as there are only 8 places available.

***Ben de Boer***

**Punda Maria – January '07**

Thank you all for your kind suggestions on camps in Kruger to visit. In the end, I chose Punda Maria, and saw nearly 150 species. The best moments perhaps being when I saw a Eurasian Hobby mob a Brown Snake Eagle while a Broadbilled Roller looked on, and when at Mopani a loud bird next to me on a rock turned out to be a Thickbilled Cuckoo.

Just to add: at the same spot where we saw the Eurasian Hobby we saw Arnot's Chat, but missed the WB Cuckoo-Shrike. This was further west than the link to the Mahonie gravel loop.

### ***Crispin Hempson***

#### **Klopperfontein Dam – 28/01/2007**

On the way back from Pafuri on Sunday afternoon, I stopped off at Klopperfontein Dam (what a gem of a place) and picked up a green sandpiper on the far bank. Ben, you should have followed me in. There seems to have been a bit of a surge in green sandpiper sightings in KNP recently. Or is this usual?

### ***Charles Marais***

#### **Southern and Central Kruger – January '07**

Common Quail - Sweni Road  
Little Bee-eater - North of Satara  
Common Cuckoo - Timbavati Road  
African Scops-Owl - Satara camp  
Namaqua Dove - East of Satara  
Bronze-winged Courser - S of Satara  
Cape Vulture - W of Satara  
Lappet-faced Vulture - W of Satara  
Brown Snake-Eagle - E of Satara  
Woolly-necked Stork - near Tshokwane picnic area  
Fork-tailed Drongo - several in between Pretoriuskop and Skukuza  
Retz's Helmet-Shrike - between Sabie river and Skukuza  
Village Weaver - Lake Panic  
Bushveld Pipit - E of Satara

### ***Niall Perrins***

#### **Pafuri – January '07**

I got an excited call from Simon Stobbs at the Wilderness Safaris Pafuri Camp in the far north of Kruger last night.

He managed to locate his second racket-tailed roller nest of the season yesterday afternoon. It seems this is only the second confirmed nest record for SA.

Over the past year, and continuing for the remainder of 2007, we have been recording all RTR sightings in the concession with a view to better describing habitat preference in far northern South Africa and estimating densities in the area. The two nest sites - both located by Simon - have been an excellent bonus and will hopefully allow some insight into fledgling periods (both sites were located after laying had commenced so only the roughest estimates of incubation periods are possible).

### ***Chris Roche***

**PS:** Not to plague the net with constant updates, but it seems the racket-tailed roller chicks in the two nests at Pafuri have fledged. They are still being seen in the nest site vicinity, but sightings now take a little more work. Anyone interested in a pic of a fledgling taken by Simon Stobbs this weekend please email me directly.

### **Skukuza – January '07**

Just returned from a 2 week Kruger trip. My first real birding trip in 18+ months as business has been hectic. We found a Green Sandpiper on the S3 near Skukuza on 6 January 2007. Spent at least 30 minutes with it in 35 degrees plus. I attached the photo, so if I got it wrong, please let me know.



***Pieter Du Plessis***

Spot on Pieter – the lack of white shoulder rules out Common.