

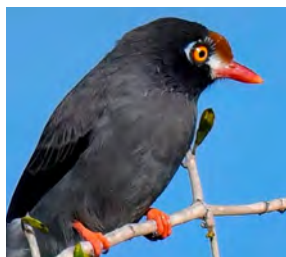
SABAP NEWS

December 2022 - Issue 2



Also ...

- Sparrowhawk diet and behaviour
- Various atlasing destinations
- My atlas journey
- Wide or deep - why not repeat?
- Cape Parrots in the Limpopo Province
- Atlasing news



Magical Mozambique



Atlasing in Eswatini

<https://sabap2.birdmap.africa/>

SABAP2



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EDITORIAL

A successful 2022 for SABAP2!

Our 15th year of the atlas project is drawing to a close. It has been another productive year for SABAP2. Numerous highlights were celebrated: many new atlasers joined our community, lots of incredible milestones were reached, and we launched our SABAP News and ran a successful online survey. The online survey confirmed that atlasers are passionate conservationists, who contribute their data to support the conservation of birds.

In November, we celebrated the publication of our official BirdMap protocol paper. This collaborative project involved all the African Bird Atlas Projects and delves deeper into how data is vetted, gathered and accessed. Details on where to access this paper are provided in this newsletter.

Several successful atlas bashes took place during the year's second half, with an incredible number of new and under-atlased pentads surveyed. The Kimberley bash in particular, will hopefully continue to be an annual event. We hope you enjoy reading about these bashes in this newsletter!

Another exciting development is that SABAP2 data has been used as the main building block for distribution maps submitted to SANBI and the web-based Site Screening Tool, managed by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. These spatial layers will inform conservation planning in South Africa. This means that your data now contributes directly to the conservation of birds in South Africa. During the recently held Pan African Ornithological Congress in Zimbabwe, many talks referenced the SABAP2 dataset, another example of how your data contribute to our growing knowledge about birds.

For many of us, 2022 was a year in which we fully came to terms with our 'new normal' following the COVID-19 pandemic. In many instances, this means less travel capacity to atlas new pentads. We have some articles in this newsletter about why atlasing 'deeper' rather than 'wider' can be just as rewarding, perhaps even more so!

Funding for SABAP2 remains a challenge, but we want to thank the many organisations and individuals who funded and donated to the project this year. We also receive many in-kind contributions. The most important is the contribution from BirdLasser, most of the data submitted to this project is now submitted through this app. We want to thank Henk Nel and his team for their support.

Thank you for your continued data contributions to SABAP2! May you have a peaceful festive season, and we look forward to an even more productive 2023!

Ernst Retief, Sanjo Rose and Michael Brooks
Atlas Management Team

Cover: Secretarybird © Albert Froneman.



Atlasing the southern Cape and Graaff-Reinet regions

TEXT AND PHOTOS **Allan Collett**

The incredible plains of Camdeboo.

When SABAP2 started, I was living at Langvlei Dunes near Wilderness in the Southern Cape. I had easy access to pentads 3355_2240 and

3355_2235 (my home pentad). Pentad 3355_2240 includes Langvlei and Rondevlei and farmland, forest and fynbos. This variety of habitats ensure that I recorded over 100 species multiple times.

Birders are generally besotted with numbers: life-list numbers, the number of atlas cards submitted, etc. Atlasing is only about which species are recorded. Of course, one can argue that the more spe-

cies that are recorded, the more meaningful the data, but the emphasis is not on the performance (in terms of totals) of the individ-

ual atlaser but rather on putting together an accurate species list for the area.

When I atlased the Southern Cape, the price of fuel was still reasonable, and I could atlas further afield because it is always nice to visit different areas. My favourite spots were Bergplaas Forestry station, the Seven Passes Road, the Kammanassie dam and river, the Zebra station area between George and Oudtshoorn, between Calitzdorp and the Swartberg Pass, the farmland west of George, Groot Brak and Voëlvlei adjacent to the Gourits River.

At the end of 2012, I moved to Graaff-Reinet and to very different birding. It is prime Karoo birding (except for the dam and klowe) with very different habitats and species. The species diversity and density are also lower compared to the Southern Cape. An appealing aspect of atlasing the Graaff-Reinet area is the number of easily accessible roads and routes. There are 10 roads in all directions where I can be atlasing within 15 minutes of leaving town - plains of Camdeboo, the Camdeboo Conservancy, Camdeboo National Park, Richmond, Murraysburg and Nieu Bethesda roads, Erasmuskloof, Bloemhof

and Glen Harry loops and the Sundays River on Roode Bloem farm (Figures 1-5).

One of the aspects of atlasing that is always appealing is interacting with farmers. It is incredible how friendly and cooperative farmers are. I can honestly say that in all my contacts with farmers, I have only ever been questioned by two farmers, and one of those was my fault because I broke my own rule of always going to see the farmer first.

I love twitching, but it is not always possible to do the long, expensive ones. While I have been atlasing I have recorded a number of rare birds, so you could say I am combining these two aspects. If I do an official twitch, I always atlas the pentad so that the rare bird is sure to be recorded on a full protocol card. Twitches, of course, mean Out of Range, Regional Rarity or National Rarity forms. I know atlasers find ORFs tedious, but I fill them out religiously – these out-of-range and edge-of-range species are what the project is all about.

OPPOSITE Karoo views of ...
Compassberg (top)
the Middelburg Road (middle), and
Nardau (bottom)



CAPE GANNET

Morus capensis



Toorberg, at the top of the Camdeboo Conservancy .

Atlasing has been an all-absorbing activity for me since inception (my mother was a SABAP1 participant, and I joined her on trips). I never tire of atlasing even in pentads that I have done over 100 times. There is nothing special about the way I atlas. I don't set out to atlas a certain number of hours except 2, obviously. A lot of my cards are 2 hours, but there are plenty that are longer. Birdlasser has totally revolutionized atlasing. It changed atlasing from a rather hit-and-miss affair to highly ac-

curate data collection and, at the same time, made it much easier to execute, and I am in awe of the people who developed it.

Atlasing has been a way of life for me since July 2007, and it has enriched my life beyond measure. There are many aspects to my birding life- twitching, sound recording, photography, and listing but I am mostly an atlaser.



Cape Gannets are spectacular seabirds. With their exquisitely painted faces, featuring striking cobalt blue eye-rings and sharp black accents, these birds are as unmistakable as they are beautiful. Cape Gannets are highly specialised plunge-divers, feeding primarily on schooling pelagic fish such as sardine and anchovy.



Little Sparrowhawk © Derek Engelbrecht

**Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter minullus*
preying on a Golden-breasted Bunting
Emberiza flaviventris at Punda Maria,
Kruger National Park**

Andy Branfield

The Little Sparrowhawk *Accipiter minullus* is a fairly common, easily overlooked accipiter that is sedentary and solitary. It is widely distributed throughout the Kruger National Park (Chittenden and Whyte 2007, Tarboton and Ryan 2016), and it is almost certainly under-reported. From an atlasing

perspective in the Punda Maria pentad (2240_3100), it has been recorded 55 times at a frequency of 8.7% of full protocol cards submitted as of October 2022. It is the second commonest small accipiter recorded in the pentad, the commonest being the African Goshawk *Accipiter tachiro* which has been recorded 73 times at a

frequency of 11.5% of full protocol cards submitted.

Little Sparrowhawk usually still-hunts from a perch in dense cover from where it launches swift short attacks on prey (Allan 2005). This behaviour makes this little raptor difficult to see, and even harder to witness predation. It is small but feisty and may catch birds the same size as itself. The perch chosen is often near a waterhole where it catches birds coming down to drink (Oberprieler 2012). It is very agile, twisting and turning while pursuing prey through the foliage and will, if necessary, continue the pursuit into the foliage (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001, Oberprieler 2012). It occasionally catches prey on the ground (Oberprieler 2012). Little Sparrowhawk regularly attacks birds caught in mist nets and takes prey ahead of wildfires (Allan 2005). The late Leslie Brown described its hunting strategy as 'making short flights to catch birds or insects, twirling and jinking almost like a flycatcher' (Brown et al. 1982). For its size, it is a bold and aggressive raptor.

Its diet comprises mostly of small birds (98%, n = 54 prey remains at nest and witnessed killing of prey), including buttonquails, doves, mousebirds, swallows, bulbuls,

thrushes, prinias, flycatchers, bou-bous, sunbirds, sparrows, weavers, bishops and mannikins (Allan 2005). Juveniles are attracted to Red-billed Quelea colonies. They will also eat small rodents, bats, lizards, and insects, including termite alates (Allan 2005).

I will now document in more detail a successful strike that I witnessed by an adult Little Sparrowhawk on a bird species previously unrecorded as a prey item, namely a male Golden-breasted Bunting *Emberiza flaviventris*. This event was witnessed in the Punda Maria pentad [2240_3055] in the Kruger National Park in 2014.

On the 14th of November 2014, while sitting with a group of fellow Punda Maria birders in the Punda Maria bird hide (built and maintained by the SANParks West Rand Honorary Rangers <http://www.thekruger.com/pundamariabird-gamehide.htm>), I noticed an adult Little Sparrowhawk sitting on a branch about ten metres above the ground in an exposed position. Below the branch, there was considerable green foliage making the accipiter invisible from below. It was 14:30, and it was a hot, dry day. The waterhole was experiencing high volumes of avian traffic, including small groups of Golden-breasted

Bunting and Yellow-fronted Canary *Crithagra mozambica*. As a male bunting landed below the tree where the Little Sparrowhawk was perched, the accipiter dove downwards in a spiralling fashion through the foliage and caught the bunting just above the ground as it attempted to take off. The sparrowhawk caught its prey with outstretched legs and talons, forcing it to the ground. It immediately took off and flew to the previously described branch, where it started to dismember its prey facing away from us. It paid no attention to us at all and continued to enjoy its meal.

Although small birds have previously been described as prey, buntings have not been previously documented. A male Golden-breasted Bunting weighs about 19 g. As typical Little Sparrowhawk prey are small birds in the range of 10–40 g and occasionally up to 80 g this falls within the typical range (Brown et al. 1982). Until recently, the Little Sparrowhawk has been described as specializing in catching birds or insects from cover on height in a short sharp burst of flight. However, I have now described a method of stealth hunting from an exposed branch that is hidden from below that involves diving through the fo-

liage to successfully attack prey on the ground. It is normally an ambush hunter using flight to catch birds exposed in the open. The Little Sparrowhawk is an accomplished predator with a prey list that continues to grow. Being so secretive and such a stealthy predator, much of the biology of Little Sparrowhawk remains a mystery, so hopefully articles like this one will help to shed some light on this secretive but confiding species.

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A Black Sparrowhawk attempting to retrieve avian prey from the water

Andy Branfield

On the 24th of August 2020, while atlasing in pentad 2605_2755, I was on the grounds of the Randpark Golf Course (Windsor side). I was walking west along the banks of a small dam, attracted by the stringent alarm calls of the Grey Go Away birds. I saw an adult Black Sparrowhawk in level flight pursuit at a low altitude of an unidentified dove species. In evasive action, the dove turned at a very low altitude directly in front of my position, and the Black Sparrowhawk struck the back of the dove with its outstretched talons, causing the dove to fall into the water. This occurred in front of some very low reeds. The water was shallow, and the dove was close to the shore (Fig. 1). The hawk immediately flew away and showed no further interest in the dove. It was immediately replaced by a sub-adult Black Sparrowhawk, which landed in the reeds,

perching in a very precarious position balancing on the top of the reeds. It attracted the attention of numerous birds, including swallows, ducks and a coot. The hawk entered the water, talons first and immediately seized a heavy object. I assume this was the dove, but as it remained hidden by the water at all times, I am uncertain. It proceeded to row its way to the side of the dam, using its wings to propel itself and its heavy load forwards, reminiscent of an Osprey with a large fish. It moved through the reeds towards the shore, but the coot was now in aggressive pursuit. As the coot approached within striking range, the hawk abandoned its load and flew with waterlogged wings a few wing beats to the shore. It then sat and dried out its drenched feathers until it could fly in a laboured fashion to a safer branch to dry out properly. Here it sat for about twenty



Figure 1. Scene of the crime!



Example of an immature Black Sparrowhawk taken at Bryanston Gauteng © Niall Perrins.

minutes in the early morning sun before flying off.

The Black Sparrowhawk is the most common accipiter in this pentad. It has a pentad reporting rate of 12.3% out of 2605 Full Protocol Cards submitted (as of the 28th of August 2020). It is the second most frequently recorded raptor after the Black-winged Kite (reporting rate = 29.2%), although it is far more secretive

and much less visible. It often remains in dense cover, so it may be under-reported. In the past, the Ovambo Sparrowhawk was the most common accipiter but now has a reporting rate of 11%. The Black Sparrowhawk has adapted

well to an urban environment. The SABAP2 indicates a range extension of this species in Gauteng compared with SABAP1. One of the main reasons for this increase in urban numbers is the prevalence of its main prey. It is an avian specialist favouring pigeons and doves (between 98 and 99.5% of prey) (Allan et al. 2005). Malan and Robinson (1999) concluded that in Gauteng, they prey mainly on Speckled Pigeon, Laughing and Rock Dove.

Sparrowhawks are generally considered ambush predators but will pursue prey (as in this case) in the open for up to 1.5 km (Allan et al. 2005). It often hunts near its nest, as with a young bird still in the area. It often hunts near water, and it may take water birds like cormorants, egrets, ibises and ducks (Brooks 1997). Prey as large as Egyptian Goose has been reported (Vahatalo 2001). However, I couldn't find any records of attempting to retrieve downed prey into the water as described in this note. The weight of the average prey of 100–300 g (Allan et al. 2005) though will likely become considerably heavier when waterlogged, as described here. The opportunistic nature of the predator is well demonstrat-

ed by the sub-adult bird in this case, although the experienced adult flew off immediately after the dove hit the water. Although I have no evidence that this was a deliberate attempt by the Black Sparrowhawk to drown the dove, this strategy has been reported for Eurasian Sparrowhawks in Finland (Vahatalo 2001). In my case, I believe that the initial strike by the adult Black Sparrowhawk that forced the dove into the water, probably killed the bird, as I observed no struggle by the prey item in the water at any stage.

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Birding at Kaapsehoop



TEXT AND PHOTOS **Johan Gouws**

Red-throated Wryneck

Kaapsehoop is a small village on top of a mountain, often surrounded by mist. It is located about 35 km from Nelspruit (Mbombela) and 14 km from Ngodwana, and approximately three and a half hours drive from Gauteng. Kaapsehoop is better known for its free-roaming horses and the Blue Swallows that used to occur here. Unfortunately, their nesting sites are no longer suitable, and they were last seen here in 2007. Nevertheless, the reserve still boasts a good variety of birds though access to the reserve is only permitted with a guide.

I have birded in this reserve for the past 15 years and have personally reported 262 bird species in and around the Kaapsehoop pentad (2535_3045). The species counts during the winter months are, on average, around 50 and in summer, around 80 plus. Some of the specials in the reserve include Black-rumped Buttonquail, Red-winged Francolin, Black-winged Lapwing, Blue Crane, Wing-snapping and Levillant's Cisticola, African Stonechat, Peregrine Falcon, Alpine-, Horus and White-rumped Swift, Cape Long-claw, Red-throated Wryneck, Cape Rock Thrush, Rock Martin, African and Plain-backed Pipit, Rock Kestrel, Jackal Buzzard and African Crowned Eagle. In summer, a pair of Blue



White-starred Robin



Red-chested Cuckoo

Crane have nested in the reserve for the past 15 years. The occasional Secretarybird also puts in an appearance for a week or two.

There are areas of natural forest around Kaapsehoop which boast

White-starred Robin, Barrett's Warbler, Olive Bushshrike, Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler, Bush Blackcap, Cape Batis and various cuckoo species in summer. Birding is easy, and birding in the village

can be very rewarding. There is a wide range of accommodation to suit everyone's needs. Options for birding range from walking in the streets, to visiting the rocky outcrops and the patches of indigenous forests. Dur-

ing the months of May to mid-July, the aloes are in flower, and it attracts a lot of sunbirds as well as Gurney's Sugarbird. Amongst the rocky outcrops, you can hope to find Familiar and Buff-streaked Chat, Cape



CAPE GANNET

COMPETITION WITH FISHERIES

Sardine
Sardinops sagax



The highly productive Benguela current system, along the west coast of southern Africa, supports a wealth of animal life. It is here that the preferred prey of gannets, anchovies and sardines, were once plentiful. Unfortunately, the overfishing of these fish species by commercial purse-seine vessels led to the collapse of the sardine fishery in Namibia in the 1960s and 70s.

The shortage of these highly nutritious fish species has led to adult gannets scavenging for fish scraps and offal discarded from fishing trawlers. These trawl fisheries mostly target hake (*Merluccius* spp.), a far less nutritious fish than the energy rich pelagic species they prefer. The poorer diet has resulted in a deterioration in the health of breeding adults, who must travel longer distances in search of food. The less frequent feeding of hungry chicks has resulted in higher death rates of chicks from starvation.

Bycatch mortality is when foraging birds are tangled up and snared in the nets and heavy warp cables of the trawl fishing equipment as they scavenge for a meal, and many drown as a result.

GLOBAL WARMING EFFECTS

Anchovy
Engraulis encrasicolus



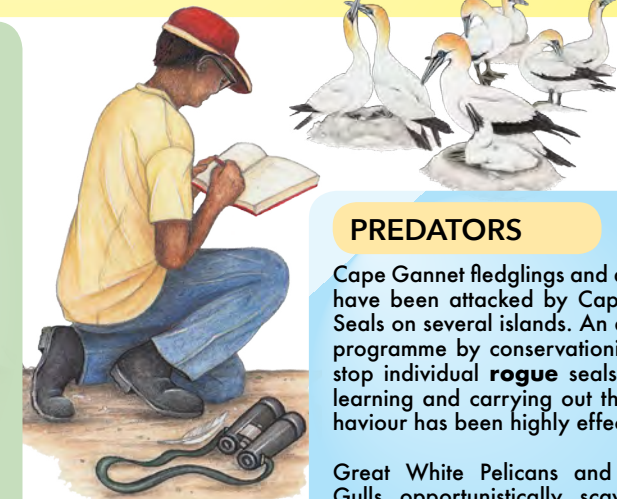
Due to increasing sea surface temperatures, anchovies and sardines have moved away from the west coast of southern Africa. The gannet colonies in this region have declined in size due to the reduced availability of these fish. The birds have followed the movement of the pelagic fish, shifting to the southern and eastern coasts of South Africa. The colony at Bird Island (Algoa Bay), on the east coast, has grown in size as a result. It is now the largest gannet colony in the world, supporting **70%** of the total population. This puts the survival of the entire species at risk should there be an outbreak of an **avian disease**, or if a devastating storm or oil spill occurs in the area.

Global warming is causing sea levels to rise and is predicted to lead to an increased frequency of extreme weather events. Large waves may cause nests to be swept away and heavy rainfall could lead to colonies being flooded and the chicks drowning. Increasing summer temperatures predicted may also lead to adult gannets overheating and eventually abandoning their nests.

OIL POLLUTION

Gannets have fallen victim to disastrous oil pollution at sea. In 1983, the damaged ship, the *MT Castillo de Bellver*, was the cause of a large oil spill off Saldanha Bay on the west coast of South Africa. Sadly, about 5000 gannets from a nearby colony were oiled by the slick. There are constant smaller spills from vessels that illegally clean their oil tanks at sea. Fish factories are also guilty of discharging fish oil into the sea, affecting smaller numbers of birds.

Luckily, gannets have been successfully cleaned and **rehabilitated** in South Africa following such spills, but there are always many birds that die because of oil pollution.



Continued scientific research is needed to monitor the health of gannet populations.

PREDATORS

Cape Gannet fledglings and adults have been attacked by Cape Fur Seals on several islands. An active programme by conservationists to stop individual **rogue** seals from learning and carrying out this behaviour has been highly effective.

Great White Pelicans and Kelp Gulls opportunistically scavenge gannet eggs and small chicks on the edges of colonies.



Bush Blackcap

Rock Thrush and a variety of other birds. Check the bird list on the SABAP2 site for more details (https://sabap2.birdmap.africa/coverage/pentad/2535_3045).

Access to the reserve is by permit only (the current rate is R30 per person), but you need to be accompanied by a guide. You are welcome to get in touch with me for more detailed information (Johan Gouws 0832943370). Kaapsehoop village, the reserve and surrounding areas are really productive, and I would suggest that it is best to spend at least 2 days birding here as there is a lot to see and visit. This special place needs to be conserved, and we need atlas data to do it!



Familiar Chat



Eswatini

bird atlasing adventure

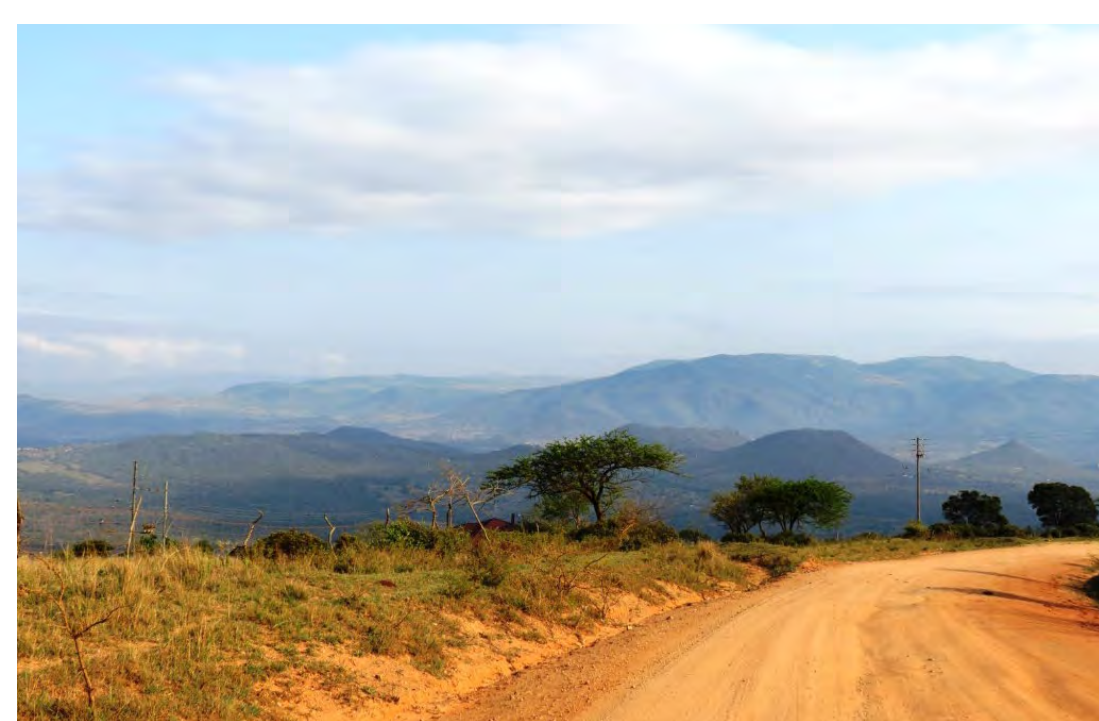
TEXT AND PHOTOS **Hunt Holley**

Our mission on 29 September 2022 was to cover two pentads in the southern part of Eswatini: pentad

2705_3125 and pentad 2705_3120. These pentads are accessed by taking the road from the Lavumisa (Golela) border post town to

Hluti along the MR 11. This road runs along the southern border of Eswatini north of Pongola in KwaZulu-Natal. At Hluti there is a dirt road that descends into the Ngwavuma River valley. The Ngwavuma River's source is within Eswatini and starts around about

Hlatikulu. The river cuts through the Ubombo Mountains at Nsoko and joins the Usutu and Pongola Rivers on the Ndumo flood plains. Pentad 2705_3125 had not been atlased as yet in the SABAP2 project and it was our mission to atlas it for the first time.



As we descended into the valley, we encountered fairly abundant birdlife but no wildlife. The western edge of the pentad was gener-

ally shrubby with grazing herds. This area produced a decent list of 55 bird species in 3.5 hours. We ended up logging a total of 72 species in the pentad of which the Long-tailed Paradise Whydah, in half breeding plumage, and the Jackal Buzzard were of particular interest.

Next on our list was pentad 2705_3120 which had only been atlased once before. The road climbed up the Ngwavuma River valley, which eventually cuts through the gorge. We took a small dirt road which led us to the top of the mountain overlooking the gorge. This road turned incredibly bad, and we



had to engage low range to get to the top. In wet weather this road would have been impassable. The birdlife on the mountain was disappointing, no doubt partly due to the planted eucalyptus and black wattle trees which have also encroached the steep valley gully's. However, upon our descent, we were treated to an awesome scene when a gathering of birds was alarm calling an unseen predator. There was a cacophony of sound and to our surprise we

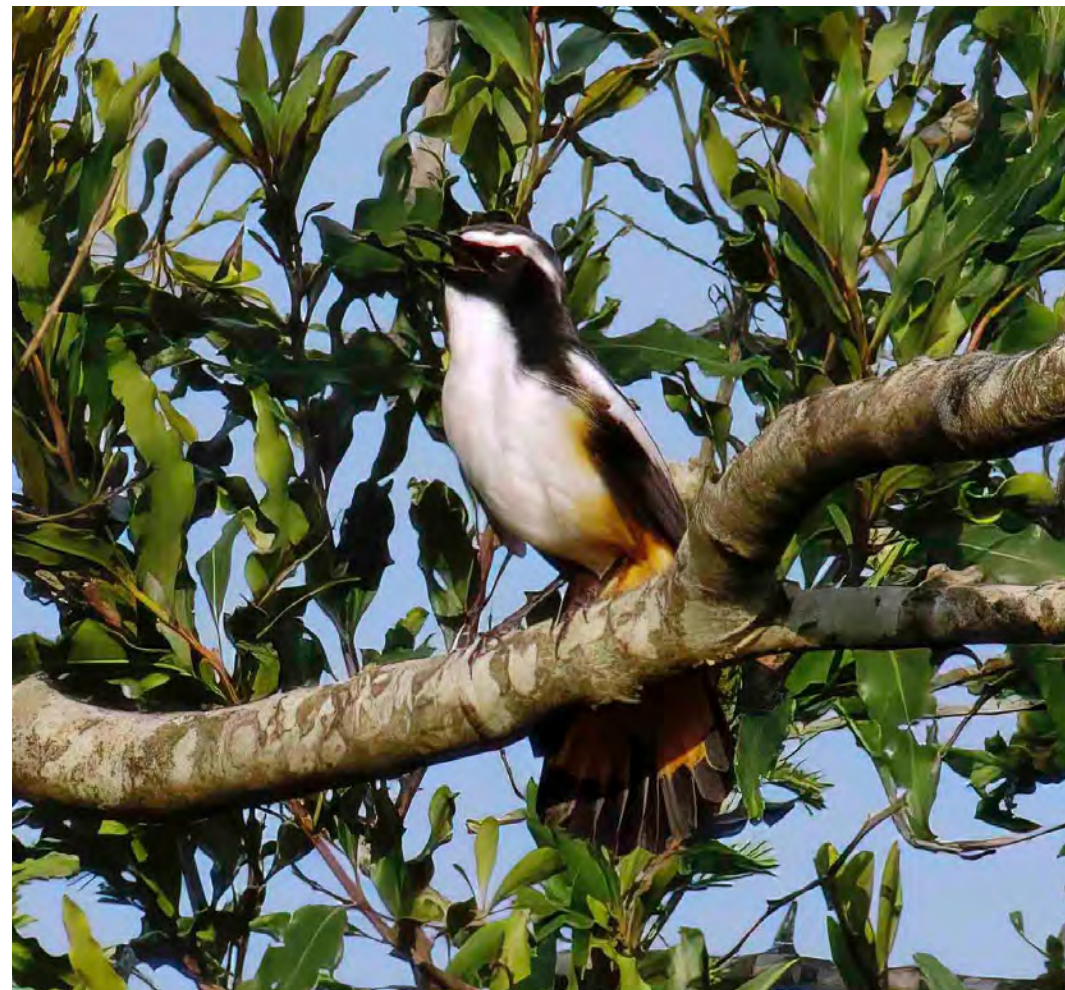




The western edge of pentad 2705_3125 was mainly characterised by rural farmland.



The gorge at the Ngwavuma River valley.



White-throated Robin-Chat.

heard two birds that were Out of Range in this pentad, namely Dark-backed Weaver and Yellow-rumped Tinker. These two birds were subsequently verified by the regional atlas committee.

We only managed to record 57 species in this pentad and this was likely due to the fact that we only entered the pentad at mid-day to mid-afternoon and it was a fairly hot day. The day ended

with a total of 95 species for the two pentads, a total of 139 observations, and some spectacular views!

Should anyone be interested in birding those areas I would be glad to give information or even lead a party to this beautiful part of Eswatini.

BIRDING IN

TEXT AND PHOTOS **Judith Crawford**

If I were to describe birding in Eswatini in one word, I would have to say - Magic! There are few places where one can get 80 birds in a morning and up to 150 on a really good day, yet that's all possible here in the lowveld of Eswatini, a real birders' paradise. Being a relatively small country with the added benefit of having three different climate zones, Eswatini packs an abundant number of bird species into a small place. Indeed, you can get through these three climate zones in one day, as we do when the Birding Spectacular is on the go. All teams race across the country, lowveld to highveld, within 24 hours and clock up the most amazing bird list. It's not often you get the Malachite and Collared Sunbird on the same list, or the Southern Bald Ibis and the Tawny Eagle. It makes for some interesting birding!



According to the SABAP2 species list, Eswatini has 482 different species, and the Birdclasser species list stands at 624, although this list possibly needs to be revised. As our home is in the lowveld of Eswatini, this is where most of our birding takes place, and after 33 years, we know it like the back of our hand. My husband Gordon, or as I like to call him, my wingman, as we do birding together. There are so many advantages in knowing your home pentads really well and knowing the best places to seek out certain species. We have the added bonus of living along the Usutu River, a spectacular river which always produces something new every day. We have recorded 153 bird species from our garden since January 2021, adding the Square-tailed Nightjar to our list in October 2022.

ESWATINI

Though we love our home area, it's still a good idea to venture further afield at times and appreciate other species that you don't get to see that often. For us, that meant a recent trip (August 2022) to the highveld. Our target areas were pentad 2605_3105, which includes a large part of Malolotja Nature Reserve and 2610_3100, which covers an area near the Ngwenya Border Post. We did these two pentads last year (2021), got some lifers and wanted to connect with them again, hoping for better photo opportunities. We arrived mid-afternoon and were grateful for the cooler weather. I'm not sure how other birders



atlas, but as we see our target area approaching on the Birdclasser app, it's game on, and for the next few hours or so, we're laser-focused on bird activity. The Birdclasser app takes birding to another level, and it certainly played a major part in my decision to take up atlasing.

The predominant landscape in this pentad is grassland with small streams meandering through. It is a favourite place for the locals to graze their cattle and wash their cars, so there is a fair amount of

Panoramic view from the top of one of the trails



Southern Bald Ibis



Buff-streaked Chat



Drakensberg Prinia



A pair of Black-winged Lapwing sheltering from the morning wind

human interaction, and the bird life appears to have adapted well to this. My favourite species here are the Southern Bald Ibis, Cape Long-claw, Blacksmith and Crowned Lapwings, and in the cooler months, the Black-winged Lapwing, which we saw for the first time last year and were excited to see here again this year. The Bokmakierie is a good sighting in this area, and Lanner Falcon and Black-winged Kite can be spotted on fence posts watching for their next meal. This grassland area is right next to the main highway leading to the Ngwenya Border Post, and last year we saw a bird on the highway eating seed that had fallen from the numerous trucks that go up and down the road. As we got closer to it, we saw it was a Red-capped Lark and were intrigued to see that this was how he sourced his food. We were amazed to see him again this year, in the exact same spot, still eating seed from the highway, incredible how birds adapt to make the most of any opportunity.

This time around, we saw so many Red-capped Lark, they were everywhere, and they certainly outnumbered the African Pipit this time. Other highlights included Grey Heron, Three-banded Plover, Hadada Ibis, Natal Spurfowl and Western Cattle Egret. After a successful day of birding, we headed to Hwane Lodge, our home away from home in this area. If you are ever in the area and need a place to stay, I really recommend this Lodge, the staff are friendly, the food is great, and the rooms are comfortable,



One of many interesting rock features at Malolotja.

and affordable. The birding is good, too, as they have a resident pair of Bokmakierie, various sunbirds and shrikes. We left early the next morning to head out to Malolotja Nature Reserve, our second pentad, and I was hoping to see Gurney's Sugarbird, which has been seen in the area on a few occasions and would be a lifer for me.

Leaving the Lodge, we passed through a chicken farm and feedlot, and there we saw a small group of Pied Starling, the only place in Eswatini to see them as far as I am aware. There was quite a bit of activity around the farm, lots of Village Weaver, Cape Canary and Cape Robin-Chat. On entering

Malolotja, it's like opening the door to another world. The landscape is breathtaking, with wide open panoramic views of hills and valleys, dotted with large monolithic boulders where scrub-brush and trees cling and grow out of. Misty mornings add to the otherworldly feel, and as the day unfolds, the sun breaks through and pushes the mist back. Near the entrance to the reserve, we saw a group of Southern Bald Ibis silently walking through the field. We headed to the main camp area, where the birds are used to human activity and just carry on

with what they're doing. This makes for some great photo opportunities. We saw a pair of Black-winged Lapwing sheltering behind a rock, which made for a good photo. There were plenty of Cape Longclaw and Nicholson's Pipit scurrying around and photo-bombing the lapwings. Red-winged Starling were feasting on the last of the aloes, whilst the Cape Rock Thrush were looking on at all the activity. Moving on and further into the reserve, the Buff-streaked Chat seemed to dominate today by sheer numbers. In fact, this is what we noticed on this trip, the sheer number of birds. The species list might not have been as high as usual, but the number of birds around made for an excellent



A Cape Longclaw stands alert



birding experience. Everywhere we looked, there were birds flying from one rock to another or from one shrub to another. Plain-backed Pipit, Mountain Wheatear, and Wing-snapping Cisticola were all over the reserve, and we were delighted to see the Drakensberg Prinia a few times. There were also a number of large groups of Yellow Bishop just moulting into their yellow jackets, which helps for iden-

A pair of Red-throated Wryneck and Cape Robin Chat sharing a moment

tification. Though we saw lots of African Stonechat, Red-throated Wryneck, Familiar Chats and Amethyst Sunbird, we sadly didn't see Malachite Sunbird or the Gurney's Sugarbird. We spent three hours in this pentad just soaking up all this bird

activity and getting familiar with these birds that we don't get to see that often. We only saw one raptor (Lanner Falcon), which is unusual as normally there are quite a few species of raptor in this area. We phoned ahead to Hwane Lodge to order breakfast which was waiting for us on our return, and the staff are always interested to hear how our birding went. I think they are puzzled as to why we travel so far to come and spend the weekend looking at birds, as most people go there to ride horses in the mountains. There's something for everyone. We truly had a lovely birding weekend and were now ready to

head home. For me, birding is like a tonic that has to be taken at regular intervals in order to keep body and soul sane and connected to the Creator. Birding can be done on your own, but it is more enjoyable when you're sharing those special moments with other like-minded people. There are not many who can get excited and travel long distances to see 'just a bird'! Yes, we are a rare breed, but we enjoy life. I Hope Eswatini will be on your list. Happy birding.

Hills and valleys make for some serious hiking trails.





Magical Mozambique

Estelle Smalberger

On Sunday, 10 July 2022, we departed from Komatipoort on an unforgettable journey of atlasing and birding through Southern Mozambique. We were in the very capable hands of birding expert, Etienne Marais. Our first destination was



the Jolly Roger in Inharrime, where we stayed for two nights. On the first day of birding, we headed to Chakane Wetlands with the aim of finding our first target species: Eurasian Bittern. We got to see two individuals!

We spent just over 3½ hours at-lasing this pentad (2420_3455) and ended with a list of 45 species, including African Snipe, Rufous-bellied Heron, Black-bellied Bustard, and in the mist, we also heard Quailfinch, Yellow-throated Longclaw, African Rail and Shelley's Francolin. From there, we left

for Panda Woodlands, hoping to find the Olive-headed Weaver in good time. After walking about 17 km, we managed to log the weaver at 16:18 in the afternoon! Species number 53 on that card.

We spent over 8 hours logging another 45 species, including African Barred Owlet, Grey Penduline Tit, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Red-faced Crombec, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Pale Batis, Southern Hyliota, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and we heard Coqui Francolin, African Scops Owl and Greater Honeyguide to name just a few.



ABOVE Great Bittern – yeah!!
© Estelle Smalberger.

TOP INSERT Besides early morning coffee and rusks, Etienne did a great job providing excellent breakfasts and lunches every day
© Estelle Smalberger.

RIGHT Persistence pays, a great view of the Olive-headed Weaver © Estelle Smalberger.





Olive Bee-eater in Inhasoro regurgitating a pellet
© Estelle Smalberger.

The following morning, we did another quick check at Chakane Wetlands, but it was too misty for birding. So, we refuelled in Inhambane and departed for Morrungulo. After a relaxed stay at the beautiful Morrungulo Beach Lodge, we departed for birding in the Unguana Woodlands. We managed to do two cards of almost 3 hours each reflecting good numbers of species, including Livingstone's Flycatch-

er, Mottled and Böhm's Spinetail, which were lifters for most of us. A 5-hour drive would take us to San Sebastian to Jacana House, our destination for the following 3 nights. On the way there, Etienne and I composed a song called "*The Short-tailed Pipit is in the Bag*" after

he amazingly heard it calling while driving along a sand road. Hennie managed an in-flight shot of this lifer for all of us. We would get good views of it again later.

With the moon still shining, we left on a boat the next morning, we had a day planned to visit locations such as Rattray Point, Bird Island and Dead Man Island, where we planned to look for Lesser and Greater Sand Plover, Crab Plover and Saunders Tern. However, the day took an unexpected turn when we got stuck on dry sand and had to wait for about 8 or 9 hours for the tide to 'come and fetch us'. We were rewarded for our patience by

numerous flocks of Crab Plovers we saw during our wait! For the rest of the day and the one following, we added several species to our card, including a good number of Saunders Terns and a single Common Redshank: Mozambique's 4th record only, but the first with photographic evidence!

We made sure to do some birding at San Sebastian Sanctuary, adding a few new species to their list. Exploring the area around Lake

Team "Sand Sabastiaan" and Mi Laidi – stuck on the sand
© Hennie Storm.





Green Tinkerbird © Estelle Smalberger



Livingstone's Flycatcher © Estelle Smalberger



Chestnut-fronted Helmetshrike © Estelle Smalberger

Muangwane, we racked up a total of 47 species, including Flappet and Rufous-naped Lark, Grey-rumped Swallow, another Short-tailed Pipit, African Pygmy Geese, Rufous-bellied Heron, White-backed Duck, Little Bee-eater and a single Black-chested Eagle to name a few. In Inhassoro, we found the Olive Bee-eater, a lifer to all of us. Our destination was Beira, where we stayed in Vimar House for two days. There were trees full of House Crows everywhere.

In the Save Woodlands, we connected with a Green Tinkerbird!

We were over the moon. This species completed our Southern Moz Slam targets of Great Bittern, Olive-headed Weaver, Crab Plover, Saunders Tern and Green Tinkerbird. Etienne did an excellent Haka for us. Our two-hour card here included Livingstone's Flycatcher, Eastern Nicator, Racket-tailed Roller, Brown-headed Parrot, Chestnut-fronted Helmet-Shrike (also a lifer for everybody), Collared Sunbird and Southern Banded Snake Eagle. Later the same day, en route to Beira, I managed to finally add Dickinson's Kestrel to my life list as



Western Banded Snake Eagle © Estelle Smalberger

part of the 336 ad hoc cards I submitted on behalf of the group. We also had good views of a few Southern Banded Snake Eagles and a single, Red-necked Falcon.

We planned to do a full day's birding around Rio Savane, but pouring rain saw two of three vehicles stuck in the mud. We managed to flush a single Black-rumped Buttonquail but missed Locust Finch, our target for the day. Other species recorded were Collared Pratincole, Senegal Lapwing, Palm-nut Vulture, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Black-bel-

lied Bustard, African Goshawk, Temminck's Courser and a single Blacksmith Lapwing, for which I received an Out of Range Form.

We left for Dondo, along 'The Hell Road to Mpingwe', passing beautiful Mount Gorongosa, which at the time was still sadly closed to tourists, which meant we had to remove Green-headed Oriole from our list. And then, bang, we spotted a Western-banded Snake Eagle! What a bird!

Our next destination was Mphingwe Lodge, Catapu, where we

spent four full days of birding in the Zambezi Basin area. We recorded over 200 species. Birding in the Coutadas was great, but it presented challenging photographic conditions. The habitats are a mosaic of woodlands, forests and floodplains along the Zambezi River. We saw a total of 16 lifers here, with four mega highlights; East Coast Akalat, White-chested Alethe, Spotted Creeper, and Tiny (Slender) Greenbul (species number 750 for my life list!). We also made the trip up to Sena, to see the resident Böhm's Bee-eater.

Next, we had some long distances to cover. A quick stop on a bridge on the way to Casa Msika, bagged two more lifers (for most of us): Collared Palm Thrush and Black-winged Red Bishop. We also managed much better views of the Moustached Grass Warbler. The most common species seen continued to be Lizard Buzzard and Lilac-breasted Roller. On our way to Ndzou Camp near Morrribane we did some excellent birding around Mount Tsetserra – one of the highest points in Mozambique. This place stole our hearts. We saw so many new birds and the highlights included Spotted Creeper, Eastern Miombo Sunbird, Chirinda Apalis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher,



Böhm's Bee-eater © Estelle Smalberger



Spotted Creeper © Estelle Smalberger



Roberts's Warbler © Estelle Smalberger

Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Roberts's Warbler, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Eastern Saw-wing and Bronzy Sunbird.

On our way from Buffalo Camp to Zona Braza in Xai-Xai where we stayed for our last night, we ticked lifers like Miombo Rock Thrush, Green-backed Honeybird, Cinnamon-breasted Tit,

Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Miombo Tit and Black-eared Seed-cracker. We had an emotion-filled final dinner together – our heats filled with a huge appreciation. What a privilege to be able to do what we love most: birding!

After 17 days of traveling on the most horrendous roads, birding in a variety of habitats (swamps, scrub-thickets, shores, sand banks, most beautiful forests, Miombo woodlands, floodplains, mountains, lakes), walking approximately 122 km and driving 5 500 km we are heading home (Figures 18 and 19). This was an unbelievable experience and initially lifers were high on the list, but as the tour progressed, the overall experience and company become much more paramount than the lifers. Etienne is a master, and we can highly recommend a birding tour with him. He has extraordinary



My Birdclasser Map for our team
© Johan Schoeman.



The legend himself, Etienne Marais © Estelle Smalberger.

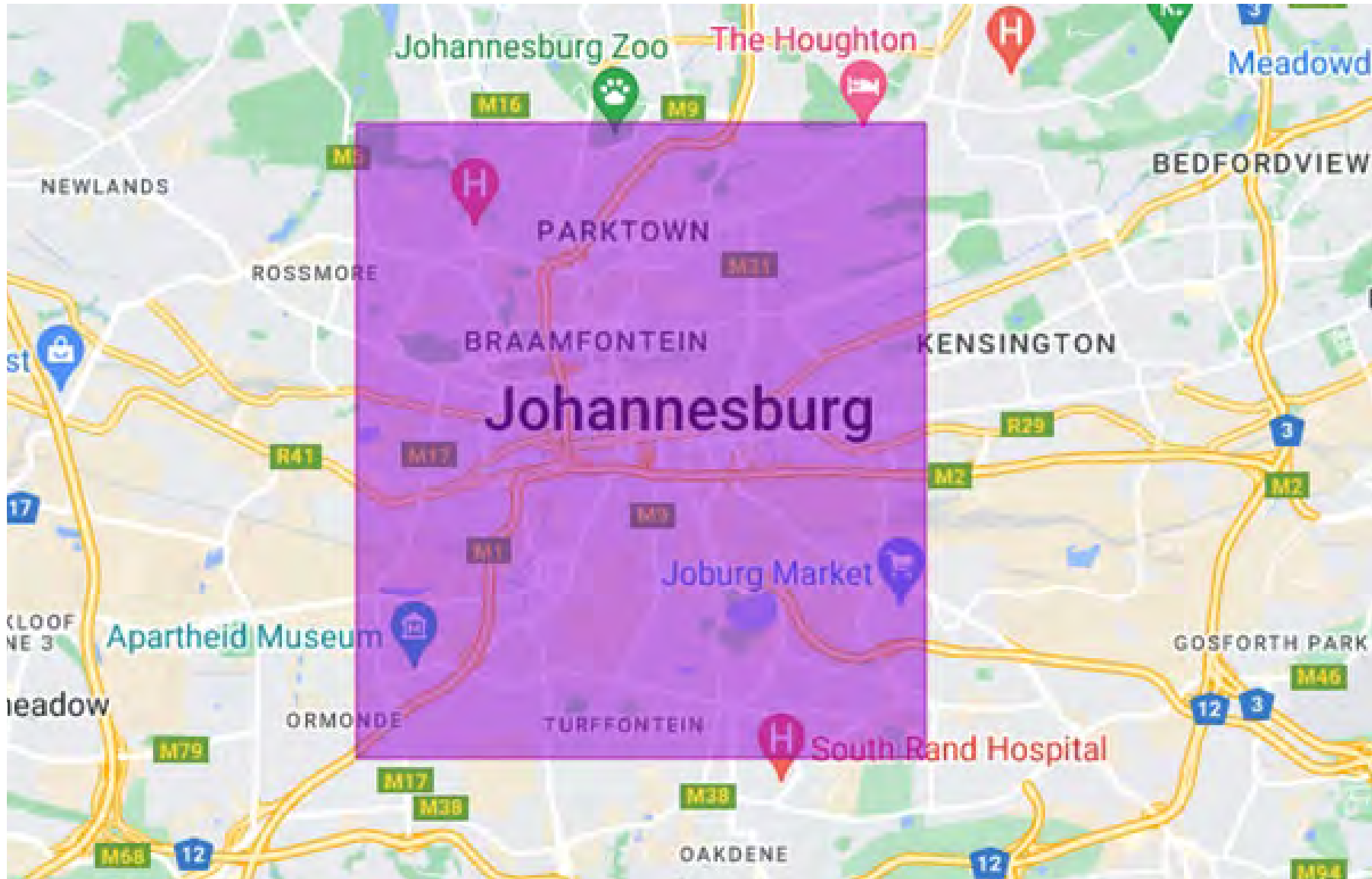
visual and hearing senses, knows the birds, locals and Mozambique very well, is a very safe driver and his planned accommodation and meals blew everyone's mind. We saw a total of 345 species for the 18 days, completed 21 full protocol cards and 336 ad hoc cards. I received over 200 Out of Range forms that was fun to complete. It was such a privilege to feel that I was leaving my mark with these

vetted records! A big thank you to the MZ RAC team for vetting these. Many thanks to Hennie Storm for posting our daily trip report on Facebook – it helped me to write this article.

This is my favourite photo of the trip. We had fun!
© Estelle Smalberger.

AN 'URBAN' PENTAD REPORT 2610_2800

TEXT AND PHOTOS Anthony Paton



DATE OF SUMMARY REPORT

4 September 2022

GIVEN NAME OF PENTAD

Johannesburg Central/Melville Koppies

DESCRIPTION OF PENTAD LOCATION

The pentad is located in central Johannesburg, with its north-western corner in the Johannesburg Botanical Gardens and incorporating most of Melville Koppies Central. The pentad contains Parktown, Braamfontein and Johannesburg CBD, extending to Ormonde in the south-west, Turffontein in the south, and South Hills in the south-east. Jeppe Boys High School and Athlone Boys High School are both within but close to the eastern edge of the pentad. The north-eastern corner is close to Sacred Heart College. The south-eastern quadrant incorporates Wemmer Pan. It is thus the quintessential urban pentad.

KEY SITES

1. **Melville Koppies** - a nature reserve which was donated by Louw Geldenhuys to the City of Johannesburg. This historical site has produced evidence of hunter-gatherers as well as pre-colonial (Batswana) metal workers. It is located on a ridge comprising of fairly pristine, well-preserved and managed land, which consists of grassland as well as treed habitat with proteas, acacias and an extensive variety of indigenous plants. It is fenced and has well-maintained walking trails. This reserve is managed by a cooperative agreement between the Johannesburg municipality and a committee of volunteers. For more than the past two decades, this has been made possible by the kind support of David and Wendy Carstens, backed by generous private donations. I have enjoyed privileged access to this site as a result of having assessed some of the guides, including the legendary Richard Hall (who was operating a weed-eater there well into his 80s, but is now deceased) and the late Brian Wicken. This site has a legacy of excellent birders. John Frere saw his first Dusky Lark on the site, whilst John Bunning maintained a list that began in the 1950s and led this veteran ringer to a personal site list

of 185 species. Gail Schaum was a bird ringer on the site for years and trained the incredible Jake Mulvaney (who is also a SABAP2 atlaser). Arjen van Zwieten has done a fair amount of SABAP2 atlasing (as well as ringing) at the site.

2. **Blue Dam** - this small dam in Mayfair is located between a residential and an industrial area, but nevertheless, it has a couple of islands used for nesting and sometimes attracts some interesting and unique waterbirds.
3. **Wemmer Pan** - this is a medium-sized pan that is popular with rowers, as well as gulls and other interesting and unique waterbirds. There is also a nearby dump which attracts White Stork and Yellow-billed Kite in summer.
4. **Other sites** - Wits University and the Johannesburg CBD.

NUMBER OF CARDS ON THE DAY OF THE REPORT

590

TOP ATLASERS BY CARDS

1. Andy Branfield - 241
2. Anthony Paton - 128

TOP ATLASERS BY SPECIES

1. Anthony Paton - 163
2. Andy Branfield - 131

OTHER ATLASERS

56 atlasers have submitted full protocol cards for this pentad

ANTHONY PATON COMPLETED CARDS

128

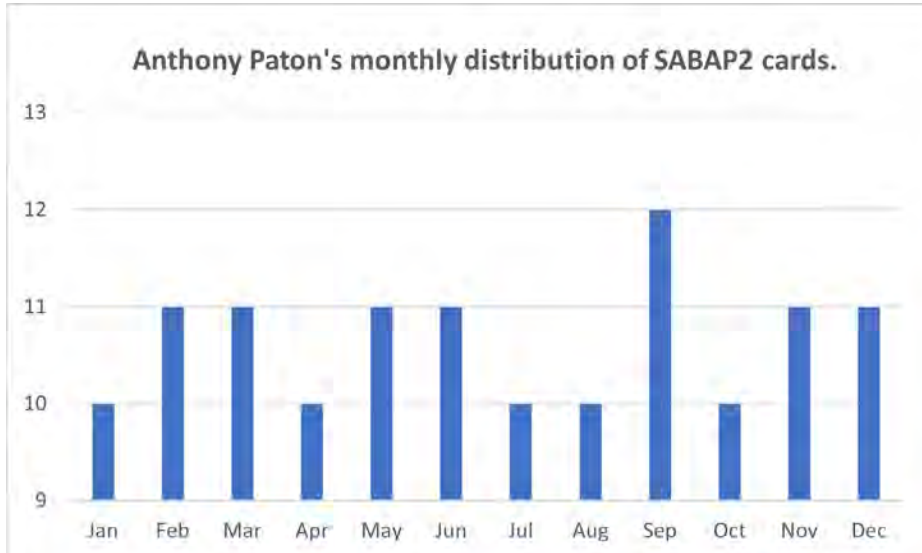
ANTHONY PATON QUARTERLY DISTRIBUTION

A total of 32 cards in each quarter.

ANTHONY PATON PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD FOR PENTAD

106 species from 569 photographs

ANTHONY PATON MONTHLY DISTRIBUTION



COMMENTS ON ATLASING

The importance of access is demonstrated when comparing the top two atlasers. In just over half the number of cards, I have 32 more species than Andy Branfield, who is (if anything) a more experienced and thorough birder than I am, as demonstrated in numerous other pentads. As a former guide and guide trainer at Melville Koppies, I have had a key to the site, which has allowed me to report a fairly extensive list of unique species which have not been reported and probably occur very rarely, if at all, anywhere else in the pentad.

SIGNIFICANT RECORDS

Determining significance is subjective, but the following species have an unexpectedly high reporting rate: Black Sparrowhawk (19.8%), Ovambo Sparrowhawk (7.2%) and Swainson's Spurfowl (17.7%). This is probably due to residency in or near to the pentad, or frequent visits to the pentad by an individual or several individuals of the species. Other species occasionally seen but are worth a mention given the urban environment in which Melville Koppies is situated include European Honey Buzzard (0.7%), Swallow-tailed Bee-eater (0.8%) and Fairly Flycatcher (3.4%, winter visitor).



Western Barn Owl



Common Whitethroat



Swallow-tailed Bee-eater



Klaas's Cuckoo

The following species are uncommon for the pentad and were observed at Blue Dam in Mayfair, an under-rated, but threatened site: Southern Pochard, Yellow-billed Duck, Squacco and Purple Heron.

Common Whitethroat has a low reporting rate of 0.3% and was recorded at The Origins Centre, University of the Witwatersrand originally by Melissa Whitecross.

Peregrine Falcon has a reporting rate of 1%, and was recorded at the Carlton Centre, Johannesburg CBD.

CONCLUSION

I would contest that this is probably the most urban pentad you can find anywhere in southern Africa. By atlasing this pentad patiently and continuously, I have been able to record some unique and spectacular bird that you would really not expect in close proximity to the Johannesburg CBD.

Whilst guiding at Melville Koppies, I had the good fortune to show a European Honey Buzzard to a group on the 24th of November 2019 whilst another MK group shared my unusual daytime sighting of a Western Barn Owl on the 30th of May 2021. The Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters that I located on the 20th of July 2015 waited around for long enough that I could share them with other birders, including other SABAP2 atlasers, but were gone again a few days after this. The best sighting on my own at Melville Koppies was probably being able to photograph a Fiery-necked Nightjar on the 8th of June 2015.

Seeing a Peregrine Falcon in the Johannesburg CBD is always a rare thrill, but the sighting of this species opposite my office on the 20th of December 2019 was made particularly special by the fact that I succeeded in sharing this view with my colleagues, Mags Pillay and Hein Pienaar, and also by the fact that I got photos (albeit fairly grainy ones) of this visit.

The best sighting elsewhere in the pentad has got to be the Common Whitethroat at the Origins Centre, which was located after Melissa Whitecross kindly alerted the birding community.

I think the above evidence is proof that there is no such thing as a bad pentad, but there are pentads in which good sightings are the reward for very consistent and persistent birding.



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CITIZEN
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CAPE PARROT SIGHTINGS

HELP US RECORD CAPE PARROTS IN SOUTH AFRICA. REGISTER FOR THE CAUSE ON BIRDLASSER AND SUBMIT INFORMATION IN NUMBERS AND LOCATION

My atlas journey

TEXT AND PHOTO **Peter Ginn**



Red-billed Quelea

I started bird listing and then subsequently atlasing way back when in the 1980s, during the first atlas period, I organised the Mashonaland East Bird Atlas members. We started with about 30 members and ended the atlasing with about 20+ of them still sending in weekly cards by the end of SABAP1 in the 1990s! Although keen, they all had to be taught how to identify birds as they were non-birders, but by the end, they could identify most of the commoner birds on their farms!

Then I moved to George in 2004 and I started teaching bird identification courses at schools. Based on my early book, *Birds Afield*, published in the Bundu Series in Zimbabwe in the 1970s, I taught courses to many school groups. Some of the attendees are still avid birders! Christiaan Viljoen, now a qualified bird guide, as well as Sanjo Rose were among the school kids who completed the courses.

At that stage, I did comparatively little atlasing as most of my birding was done with the Lakes Bird Club. SABAP2 was launched in 2007, and Pat Nurse or Robert Smith usually atlased the birds seen on outings. I started using

Birdlasser when it was launched but admit I used it more as a tool for recording birds and on Birding Big Days. In the meantime, I was getting older, and my life became focused on writing and editing our new book *The Ultimate Companion for Birding in Southern Africa*. However, this changed early in 2022 when John Drowley invited me to join him on his weekly atlasing trips. Incredibly, I taught him Geography at Peterhouse in Zimbabwe in 1968, which was the last time we saw each other! He usually tries to do two pentads each week, so I decided it would be useful to learn how to use Birdlasser properly. It also meant learning what to choose to insert for a bird's name to find it quickly on Birdlasser. Both sound easy, but if you are over 80, these are far from easy to master. I am improving, but..!

I still do bird ID courses and hope to encourage those new birders to learn to atlas too. Recently a father and son team did the bird ID course together and have registered to start atlasing. So, while I use Birdlasser, I am not an expert yet but know I shall get better with practice! I encourage all birders to add atlasing to their bird watching.

W I D E

OR

DEEP

WHY NOT REPEAT?

Roelof van der Breggen

Since the day that I started with my first SABAP card in 2007, a lot has changed in terms of terminology. However, two terms have been consistently relevant – to atlas

deep or wide. Which should take preference have been central to many discussions and atlas stories. I personally think that in the early days, many of us atlasted deep rather than wide. At-

lasing wide was hard! This was mainly because pentad boundaries and numbers had to be deduced from paper topographical maps, rather than having pentad lines preprogrammed in Birdlasser. As it was a lot more difficult to know when you moved over a pentad border, one tended to focus on far fewer pentads and spend much more time in a few pentads and thus going deep.

With the shift over to applications such as Birdlasser that automatically kept a record of movements over pentad lines, it has become far easier to atlas wide. Certainly, if I look at my own cards over the years, this is what has happened to a large degree to my atlas. Where we used to pay careful attention to stay within pentad borders and thus end up spending longer time in a pentad, I find that I now spend more time ensuring that I meet the minimum 2 hours and then easily moving off to the next pentad.

There is no right or wrong to this, as I believe that we do need both wide and deep atlas to make an impact. However, it does seem that many people atlas wide rather than deep, which I think is a shame. I would like to illustrate why it can be so rewarding to repeatedly atlas your own set of pentads or your home pentad. While many people might feel this will be extremely boring: birding the same pen-

tad, along the same roads, visiting the same spots, week after week, month after month and year after year...how dull! I can assure you that repeat atlas-ing is quite the contrary!

Atlasing the same pentad over time allows you to track how weather affects your lists, the number of species and the abundance of species, while over time, you can start tracking seasonal changes. For example, in my part of the world, there was a massive difference in species numbers and abundance between an extremely wet 2010 and an extremely dry 2015 in the eastern Free State. To me, the lure of repeat atlasing is the thrill of finding new species in a pentad after years of birding the area. The exhilaration of this is often just as great as finding a new lifer. I will discuss two pentads that I have repeated for several years. One was visited infrequently but atlased deep, and the other is atlased shallow, but almost weekly. Both have already yielded interesting results.

The first pentad I call Bornmansdift (2855_2725), the name of a former family farm, situated in the eastern Free State around 20 km west of Clocolan near Excelsior. The habitats range from typical Free State grassland, cultivated lands, numerous farm dams, marshy grasslands (in wet years), exotic woodland, and rocky slopes which are either wooded or

bare. Large parts of this pentad are easily accessible via several provincial gravel roads and minor farm roads. With landowner permission, I could access other parts of the pentad too. As things stand in October 2022, this pentad has only been atlased by two observers and has a species list of 168, of which I have added 165.

My first list contained 36 species over 4 hours, which is fair for the area in May. I was careful to access all the available habitats and stick to the atlas protocol. However, each of my visits increased the species list exponentially as I went back in different seasons. My first three visits alone more than doubled the number of species from 36 to 78! My visits to the farm were mostly over holidays, and thus the cards are infrequent (an average of 3 cards per year), but I repeated these visits for another 10 years, and the increase in species numbers is quite astounding. At the end of the 10 years, 132 more species had been added from that first card. Figure 1 shows two significant bumps in species numbers in 2010 and 2015, both exceptional years: 2010 was one of the wettest years that we had experienced in the area. The abundance of water attracted numerous species, such as Maccoa Duck, White-breasted Cormorant, South African Shelduck, Mountain

Chat, Cape Bunting and also, sadly, Common Starling. In contrast, 2015 brought severe drought, with grazing reduced to sand. Even common species were severely affected and reduced in numbers, but exciting new species entered the area, such as Pririt Batis, Wing-snapping Cisticola, Familiar chat and Red-backed Shrike. Between 2012 and 2017, on average, I added about 3 species per year, except for 2015, where I added 11 species; 146 in 2014 to 157 in 2015.

By frequently atlasing this pentad, and thus acquiring an intimate knowledge of that area, I could not only build a better species list that likely really illustrates the species occurring here but also gain an appreciation of the impact of these annual climate changes.

The next pentad is much closer to home and on the outskirts of Johannesburg. This is pentad 2555_2750, the famous Dog Haven/Gnu Valley Slaty Egret pentad. Ironically, I had gone to see the Slaty on the 11th of September 2017, dipped on it, and had never gone back to add it to my pentad species list. This is a pentad that I atlas almost every weekend and have, over the past 8 years, contributed over 100 cards, totalling 184 species. This is a well atlased pentad with 96 atlasers having submitted 377 cards, totalling 310 species.

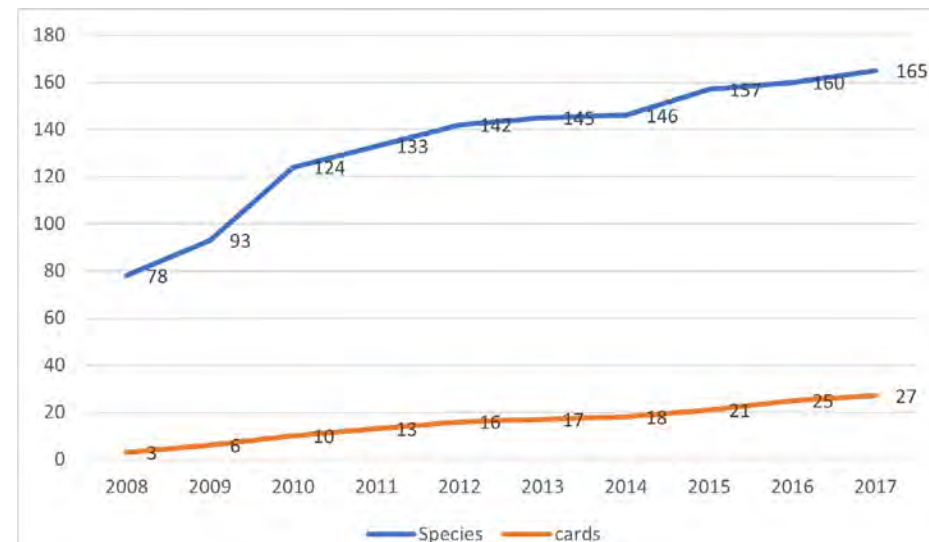


Figure 1. Accumulation curve for species and cards for pentad 2855_2725 submitted over a period of 10 years by the author. Though the card accumulation is low, repeatedly atlasing the same pentad has ensured a near doubling of species observed from the initial three cards, showing the importance of continually adding new lists, especially in pentads with a low number of observers.

There is, however, still value in repeat atlasing a pentad like this by a single observer. The average number of cards per observer for this pentad is around four. My first card in the pentad, in October 2015, produced a low 25 species and the next two cards were even lower, with 15 and 19 species recorded. By the end of 2015, I had done five cards, and had recorded 59 species in the pentad. Though I atlas this pentad fairly frequently, I do not atlas for many hours, generally 2–3 hours, split over two days, when my daughter is doing her horse

riding lessons. As a result, the cards do not have smashingly high totals, but over time my average species per list has increased to 50s in winter and 60s in summer. The more significant number for me, however, is that if I had just done the average number of cards that people do for this pentad (four), my species number would have been 59, however, because I've returned to this pentad numerous times, I've almost tripled this to 184 species! This illustrates how even in a very well atlased pentad, repeat atlasing by one atlaser can add so much to

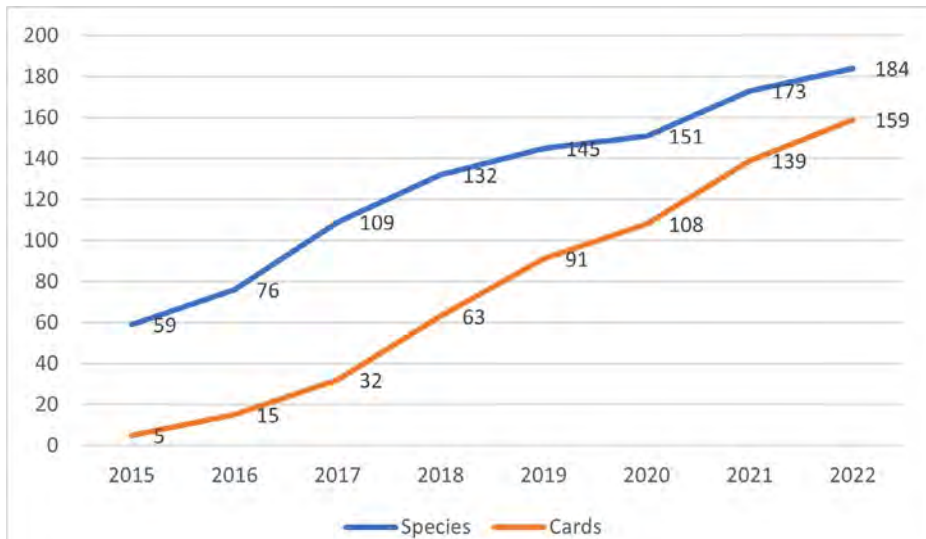


Figure 2 Accumulation curve for species and cards pentad 2555_2750, by the author where cards are added more at a much higher frequency, showing that species are still accumulated even though the pentad is not atlasted deep. In a highly atlasted pentad, one individual adds less in terms of new species to the pentad but adds important data on the reporting rate of species.

the overall species diversity recorded for the pentad (see Fig. 2).

The value of repeat atlasing is that the observer gets intimately acquainted with the pentad, and the prevailing conditions within the pentad, to know where to potentially dig out both resident and new species. You learn that when August winds blow, the birds don't disappear but move to a poplar stand as it provides shelter. You know which temporary pans hold water after rains and have a higher potential for something to turn up, and you know where many of the territories are for the resident birds. You also

realise when you find something out of the ordinary.

If 98 observers have added 310 species to an almost suburban highveld pentad, can you just imagine what could be added if more atlasers repeated pentads?

Take a look at pentad 2605_2755, affectionately known by its residents as the Boss Pentad, with a massive average card submission of 22 cards per observer and a species count of 326 for a suburban pentad. Andy Branfield contributed his 1001st card in September 2022, done over the past 16 years. That is repeat atlasing at a legendary level!

Do wide, do deep AND REPEAT.

BIRD OF THE YEAR 2022

CAPE GANNET

COLONIAL LIVING

A CROWDED HOUSE

Cape Gannets breed in densely crowded colonies on flat or gently sloping open ground on 6 islands offshore of Namibia and South Africa. The shortage of suitable habitats that are free from land predators and close enough to their preferred foraging areas results in densely packed island colonies with tens of thousands of gannets on nests. You can get up close to a gannet colony at **Lambert's Bay** on the West Coast of South Africa.

'karok-karok-karok'

FUN FACT

When returning to its nest, a gannet makes a special 'landing call', which is recognized by its **mate**. In all the pandemonium and noise of thousands of gannets, it can recognise its mate's distinctive reply. This helps it pinpoint its own nest. It then lands, helicopter-like, directly at its own nest, which prevents unnecessary squabbling with the pair's difficult neighbours.

MAINTAINING THE SPARK

To strengthen the bond between a breeding pair of gannets, they often perform elaborate **courtship** rituals. One such ritual is called '**fencing**' and involves pointing their beaks skywards, while crossing their slender necks, rubbing their long bills against one another as if sharpening swords.

MATES FOR LIFE

Cape Gannets are monogamous, breeding with only one **mate** during their lifetime. They return each year to the same island colony and reunite to breed with that same mate.

Their mud and **guano** nests are built on the ground, and have a cup-shaped hollow into which only one egg (rarely two) is laid. The single, bluish-white egg is **incubated** under the large, webbed feet of the parents. This helps to maintain it at a constant temperature and keep it safe from predators.

Both adults look after the chick, taking turns to forage for food at sea. When they return to the nest, they **regurgitate** their nutritious fishy meal to feed their ravenous chick.

The fully feathered, mottled chocolate-brown and white **juvenile** finally **fledges** after about 3 months, leaving the safety of the crowded colony. The **fledgling** goes to sea to forage for prey, spending between two to three years at sea before returning to the colony to breed.

what's that SMELL?

You will smell a colony of gannets before you see one. Colonies are noisy, smelly and crowded neighbourhoods, thanks to white **guano**-splattered rocks, muddy puddles, and regurgitated fish.

38 cm - 58 cm pecking distance between nests

KEEPING THE PEACE

Gannets are fiercely **territorial**, defending their nest site from intruders by a variety of gestures such as bowing, beak pointing, head shaking and even vicious pecking using their surprisingly sharp and powerful beaks. To maintain order and harmony in the tightly packed colony, each nest is cleverly spaced just beyond the **pecking range** of the feisty neighbours.

Because of their long wings, gannets need a long runway or elevated rock from which to take off. In the crowded colony they must run the gauntlet of sharp beaks to get to the desired launching area. They perform a '**sky-pointing**' gesture, stretching their necks upwards and pointing their beaks in the air to keep the peace with their neighbours as they pass quickly through the colony. The dramatic black gular stripe, running down the front of the throat, accentuates this recognised gesture of non-aggression in a potentially volatile gannet colony.

Expanding the known distribution range of

Cape Parrots

in the Limpopo Province

Cassie Carstens and Mike Henshall

Flying over the plantation-covered, historically grassy hills and hiding in the forested valleys of the Magoebaskloof and Wolkberg Wilderness in the Limpopo Province (Fig. 1), you will find South Africa's only endemic parrot: the Cape Parrot.

This small population of Cape Parrots (*Poicephalus robustus*) are the true nomads of the north. The steep valleys, protecting the mist-belt forest, make getting around on foot quite an undertaking, but the parrots fly back and forth across the range on a daily basis in search of food. It is estimated that there are approximately 100 birds in this

population (Carstens et al. 2022), and the most recent annual census in May 2022 put the number of Cape Parrots in the Limpopo Province at only 52, with unfavourable weather during the census probably causing this underestimate (Downs 2022). It is a geographically isolated population, with more than 600 kilometres between them and

the next confirmed population in KwaZulu-Natal, which moves as far north as the Karkloof Forest. They are also placed into geographically correlated genetic clusters (Coetzer et al. 2020), with vocalisations also having a distinct dialect (Young et al. in prep).

However, very little is known about this population in the north

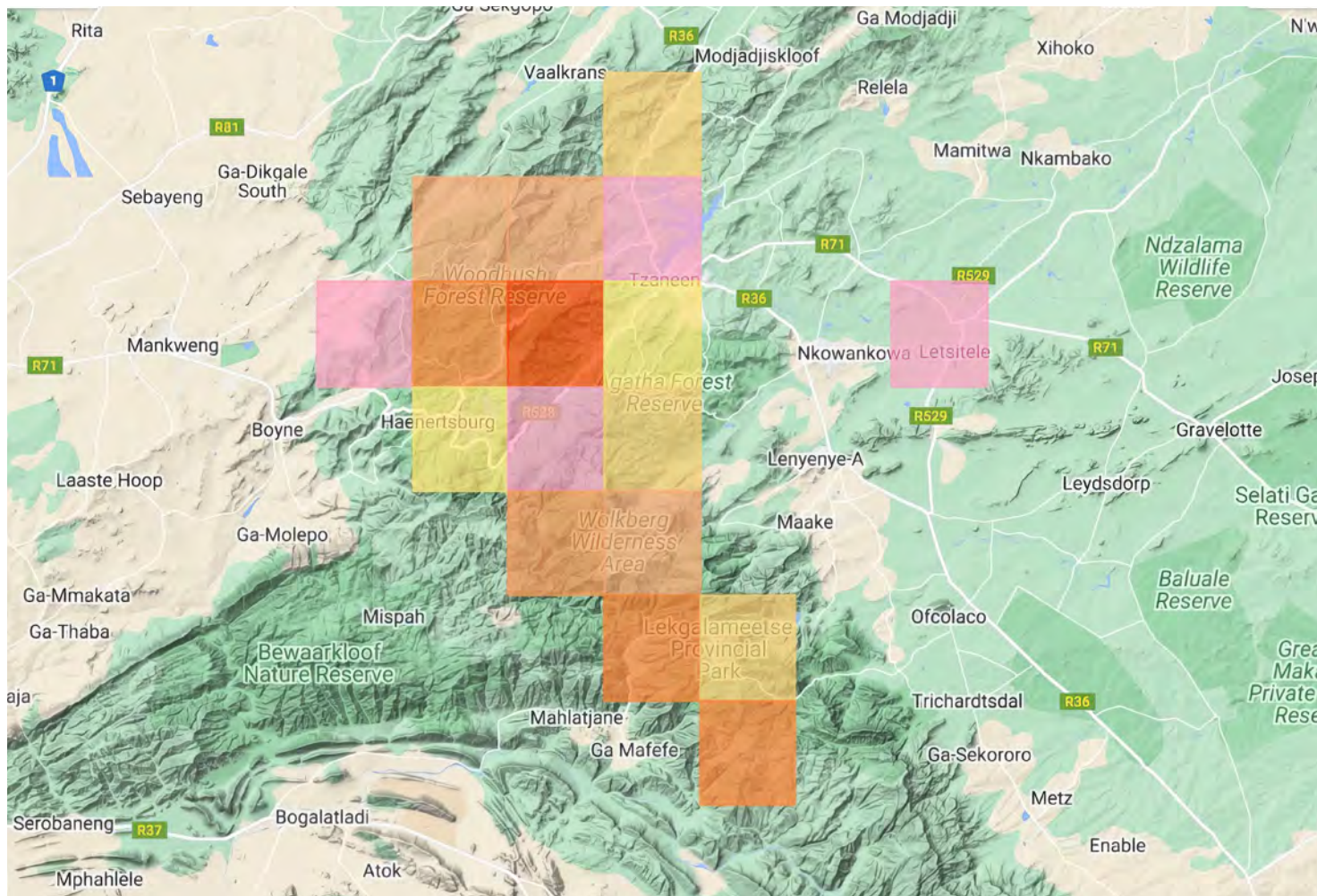
of South Africa, besides the total population numbers estimated through annual censuses conducted since 2003. In 2013–2015 and again in 2020–2021, more intensive research was conducted to obtain information on the variation of local abundance (Martin 2017, Carstens et al. 2022). The Cape Parrot Project (CPP) has been keeping track of the comings and goings of these birds through information supplied by some of the excellent bird guides in the area, most notably Mr David Letsoalo. Our most regular information, however, arrives each month through the free BirdLasser mobile app. Each time a Cape Parrot sighting is recorded on the app, the record is logged, extracted, and then mapped by our team in Hogsback. Since the start of our interest in the region, we have built up but a fraction of the true scope of movements that the birds undertake.

Range expansion

Our first inkling that the range of the Limpopo population might be slightly larger than previously thought came in September 2019. Prior to that date, most, if not all, of the sightings reported on the BirdLasser app were from the Magoesbaskloof area, focused on the Woodbush Forest

Figure 1. Known range of Cape Parrots in the Limpopo Province. Extracted from the SABAP2 website on 26 October 2022.

PREVIOUS SPREAD Cape Parrots drinking from puddles in Magoesbaskloof, Limpopo Province © Mike Henshall.





Reserve, and a few from the Serala and Wolkberg Forest Complexes. On the 14th of September in 2019, a contact was recorded along the Orrie Baragwanath Pass on the northern edge of the Lekgalameetse Nature Reserve. We were intrigued, but no pictures or supporting evidence could be provided about the sighting, and as a result, it was not considered seriously. We follow a similar approach to the vetting

conducted by SABAP adjudication committees, where extra information or supporting evidence is requested if a sighting is outside of the known range. Nine months later, that evidence was provided.

A survey of the reserve by a small team from the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) found a small flock right in the middle of the reserve in one of the heavily forested valleys. The team leader, Dr John

Davies, managed to take a number of photographs which confirmed the southernmost contact for the species in this region. Since then, more sightings of singletons and small flocks of Cape Parrots have been recorded in that area, with the most recent being made in September 2022.

Thankfully, a number of these sightings were submitted to SABAP2 as part of full protocol cards,

Close-up image showing a healthy-looking adult female searching for pecans in an orchard
© Mike Henshall.

which has meant that the known range of the species is now more than 20 kilometres further south-east than previously known (Fig. 1). Hopefully, more sightings and cards will be submitted in the fu-

ture, and we might just learn that they are moving even further south!

CPP Expansion

It's not just the range of the Cape Parrots that are expanding in the Limpopo Province, but also the research activities of the CPP. Since 2009, CPP has been working out of the most southern part of the Cape Parrot's distribution, in the town of Hogsback in the Eastern Cape Province. The time to set up another conservation node in another area of the Cape Parrot distribution, in Limpopo, came in August 2022, when Field Manager, Mike Henshall and a research assistant, Tara Naeser, both who come from a strong conservation background, started with the CPP.

Together the Limpopo team, along with the continued help of many parrot-loving locals, will work to fill the knowledge gaps that are present in the Limpopo Cape Parrot population. Finding and monitoring nesting as well as roosting sites are the main priority, for now, to attempt to get a better understanding of the regional primary threats facing this species. Feeding and movement data is also being recorded as well as close-up and flock photography when it is possible. This helps us to

monitor the presence or absence of diseases and get estimates of sex and age ratios within the Limpopo population.

How can you help

To help the CPP get to know this mysterious population, please consider becoming an active citizen scientist and record sightings of Cape Parrots on the free BirdLasser mobile app. If possible, please add in the number of birds seen and the closest approximation of the location where the birds were encountered. Please join the Cape Parrot cause on the app, which will ensure that your sightings are received by our research team. Also, please consider submitting all sightings as part of either Full Protocol or Ad Hoc cards to SABAP2 to ensure that the scientifically recognised range of these endangered birds continues to be recorded. If you have any further information on the movements of Cape Parrots in this region, please get in touch with Mike at 063 6010793 or mike@wildbirdtrust.com.

Please follow and support the CPP on social media. We are active on Facebook and Instagram and can be found @capeparrot-project.



BIRD of the YEAR
2023
CAPE PARROT
Poicephalus robustus

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Atlasing in Bushmanland

Part 1 - Atlasing under SABAP1 in the 1990s

Peter and Wally Silbernagl

This is the first instalment of a three-part series of articles detailing our atlasing adventures in Bushmanland, South Africa¹

Although my brothers, Wally and Miggie, and I had been casual birders and atlasers for some years (my wife Suzette and I having joined the Cape Bird Club in 1977 - I think), we had never undertaken an organised venture to make a concerted contribution to the knowledge on birds. Until one day in 1990. Our interest in atlasing was first piqued when, in early 1987, we found a note under the door of our holiday house at Infanta, inviting one to participate in the then atlas for the area of the Cape Bird Club. This initiative was soon expanded significantly into

the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 1.

We started to submit atlas records in April 1987. We enjoyed it and felt the warm feeling of contributing to something bigger. Then the SABAP

newsletters started to provide feedback on the coverage extent in various parts of the country. It gave, for each quarter degree square (QDGS²), the number of 'cards' submitted, and the total number of

¹There is also a Bushmanland on the eastern border of Namibia, north of Gobabis.

²Under SABAP1, atlasing was done in Quarter Degree Squares (QDGS); each QDGS being a quarter degree (15 minutes) latitude by a quarter degree (15 minutes) longitude. Today, under SABAP2, the 'squares' or pentads are 5 minutes by 5 minutes. Therefore 9 pentads per QDGS. Thus, SABAP2 records are at a density of 9 times greater than SABAP1. One pentad is about 8.5 km x 8.5 km, varying with the latitude.

species observed. From the maps, it was clear that there were VAST tracts of land within the Western Cape³ where NO atlasing had been done, and NO records were available.

In the large area between Loeriesfontein and Pofadder, and from Gammoep to the east of Brandvlei, there had practically been no atlasing. This was just the sort of challenge that we needed. So, the three brothers packed the VW Kombi, kissed our spouses goodbye and off we went.

What was it like to atlas in Bushmanland in the 1990s? It was remote! There were no cell phones, LEDs, solar-powered lights or gear, internet (wifi, email etc), Birdlasser or GPS (yes, you read correctly – no GPS!!). Like today, farmhouses were very few and far between. Most farms

were unoccupied and only had farmers or staff visiting their farms once a week or so. In Bushmanland, farmers talk about the number of hectare per sheep (not the number of sheep per hectare) due to the low carrying capacity of the land. So, if you got stuck somewhere, Bushmanland can suddenly become a very lonely place.

You found your way by using 1: 50 000 topographical maps (only hard copies - obtained from the then Surveyor-General in Mowbray, Cape Town) and then by noting the key landmarks with which to orientate yourself (windmills, farm boundaries, etc). Without these maps, finding the start and end of QDGs would have been guesswork. There was an extensive network of minor roads and 'divisional' roads, in addition to the main roads⁴. These were

³Going back in time to 1990's, towns such as Springbok, Loeriesfontein and Pofadder were still part of the former Cape Province which then included the Western, Eastern and Northern Cape Provinces. Indeed, the Cape Province also included towns and cities such as Kimberley, Port Elizabeth, etc.

⁴The road hierarchy in South Africa has, from the biggest to the smallest, National roads, Trunk roads, Main roads (often gravel roads), Divisional roads (almost always gravel) and Minor roads (nearly always gravel, servicing one or a few farms on route). Since 1996, the Minor roads (and some of the Divisional roads) in the Northern Cape Province have sadly fallen into disrepair, as these are no longer maintained by the authorities. In several instances, what used to be very adequate graded gravel roads have now deteriorated into "twee-spoor paadjies". As a result, the country has lost a significant economic asset. The loss of Minor roads has greatly reduced the accessibility of some of the remote areas. Areas which were accessible to birders (and the general public) in the 1990s are now no longer accessible, due to the loss of publicly maintained Minor roads, some of which farmers now maintain themselves, but often then install lockable gates on these roads. One can't really blame these farmers; especially those with livestock.



well-maintained (graded every few months) by the respective Divisional Councils and generally kept in good order. In Bushmanland, the traffic volumes have been (and are still) very low on most roads. One could easily have a day go by without seeing any people or coming across any vehicles on some of the roads. Even on a subsequent trip in 2017, we spent 2 ½ days on one strip of the road without any vehicles coming past us - this was

The three brothers (Peter, Wally and Miggie) camping on the side of the road near Langpan, between Kliprand and Pofadder.

PREVIOUS SPREAD Inspecting a nest in Bushmanland – a very flat and seemingly barren countryside

on a well-maintained public road. There were no guesthouses, BnBs or such anywhere within the whole of the greater Bushmanland, except for towns such

as Pofadder and Loeriesfontein. But these towns are 230 km apart by gravel road; with nothing in between. So, one camped next to the side of the road. It is only once one settles down for the evening that you realise how unbelievably quiet Bushmanland is - and how noisy even relatively remote areas in the Boland are. Somewhere, in the Boland or even in Namaqualand, there is always a dog barking or a car or something to remind one of 'civilisation'. In Bushmanland, it gets really, really quiet. Even the Kalahari is noisier, with all its geckos and other wildlife. Yes, it takes about an hour or two of no motor car engine or such to get your hearing sensitised, but after a while, one is able to hear the larks walkabout on the sand, without having to see them...

Sleeping next to the side of the road, while living out of a Kombi, has its disadvantages. On one trip, we ended up in Pofadder after five days in the veld, atlasing from before sunrise till after dark every day. So, on day five, we checked in at the Pofadder Hotel for lunch. I still have the till slip which says: *3 x Bar Lunches: R36 + 3 x Showers: R30*. I was told that the barman had insisted that we shower first before the bar lunch would be served.

There being no garages for refuelling between the few towns, careful planning of the routes for extended trips was essential. Likewise, a second spare tyre and a reserve supply of 25 litres of potable water are essential. You don't want to get stuck at 45°C without adequate potable water, not knowing where the nearest occupied farmhouse is. Fortunately, SABAP was better funded then, and one's

direct fuel costs for such trips were recoverable from the project. For the trip in May 1990, a distance of 1506 km was covered, and the fuel cost was R219.19 for 184.06 litres (or R1.19/litre!!). Over the peri-

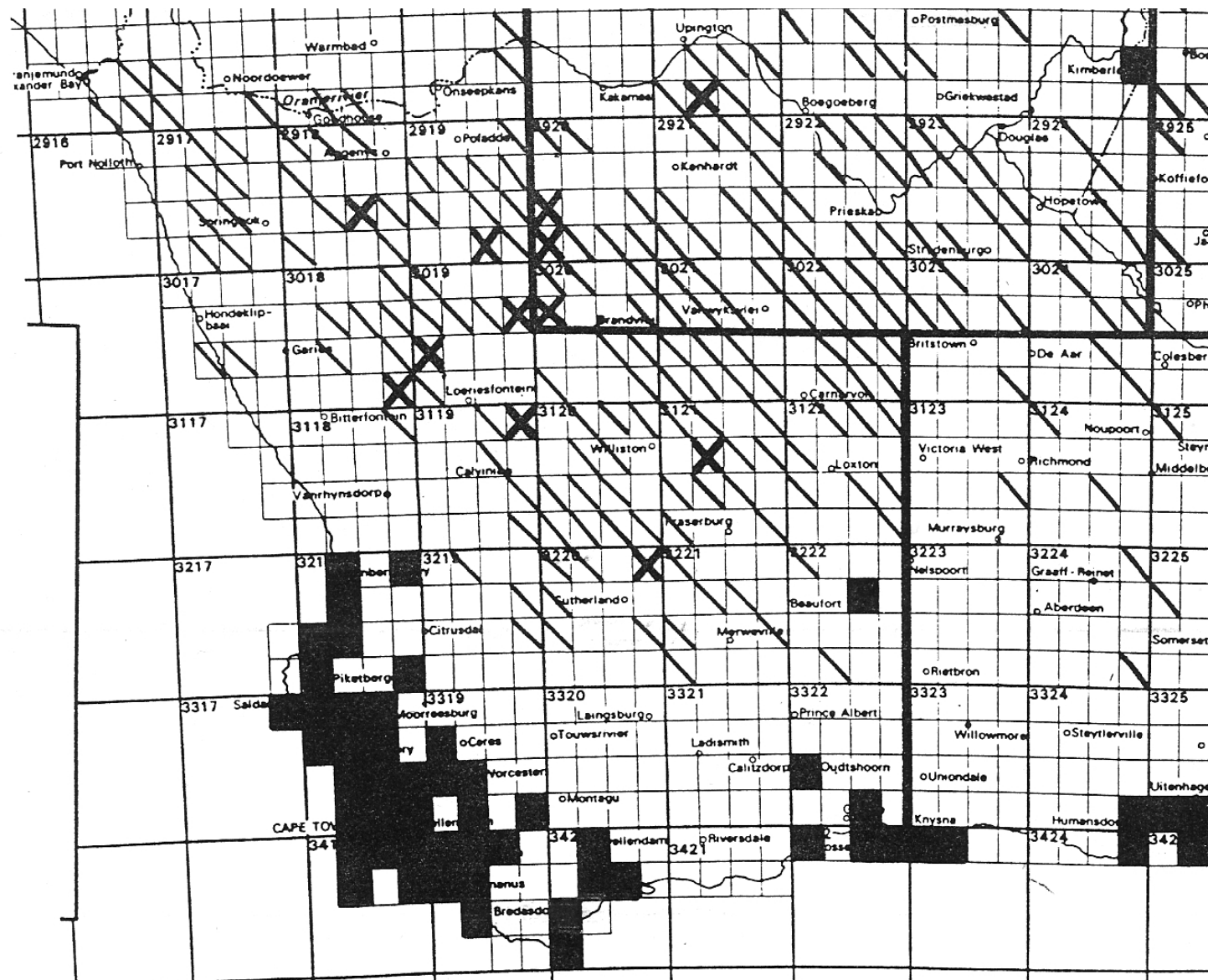


Figure 1. Map indicating, in a non-quantitative way, which were then still considered as Highest Priority QDGS (marked X) and those which were Very High Priority (/). Note that under SABAP1, some QDGS were considered 'Closed', as it was deemed that enough information had been received for these QDGSs; the blacked-out QDGSs on the map.

od from May 1990 to December 1991, we undertook seven special atlasing trips to Bushmanland (on one of these Suzette accompanied me, but the venture into Bushmanland was largely contained to its fringes), completed a total of 70 QDGS that required just under 10 000 km in a Kombi. Thankfully, SABAP refunded me for the cost of fuel - the princely sum of R1 695 for the seven trips. Today, I can't fill my SUV for that amount.

By June 1991, the amount of effort began to show results, and in the newsletter of June 1991, the number of 'empty' QDGS had reduced considerably (Fig. 1). Coverage was non-quantitative, however (no number of submissions provided), and this lack of quantification bothered me, and I set about building a model in Quattro Pro (remember that? – the forerunner to Excel – all done using keystrokes, before the mouse appeared on desks!!). I asked the SABAP coordinator at the time whether he could provide me with some data on numbers of species and cards, but he wanted to sell this data to me at exorbitant prices

and under onerous conditions. Needless to say, I declined, but was able to obtain later some adequate data for the Western Cape from the late James McFarlane, Western Cape Regional Atlas Co-ordinator. Thank you again, James. Good as the data was, it was difficult to make out where the greatest need for further atlasing was.

The model simulated the network of QDGS in the Western Cape and assigned either the number of species or the number of cards submitted for each QDGS. The model also included a smoothing function so that for each QDGS a modified value, to measure the relative atlasing effort, could be determined (Figure 2). The smoothing function takes into account the results from the surrounding eight QDGS on a weighted basis to determine an adjusted or weighted value for each QDGS. From this model, we could see that the least atlas efforts were in the Central Karoo and in Bushmanland. This was further reinforced by a model with a smoothed number of species for each QDGS (Figure 3).

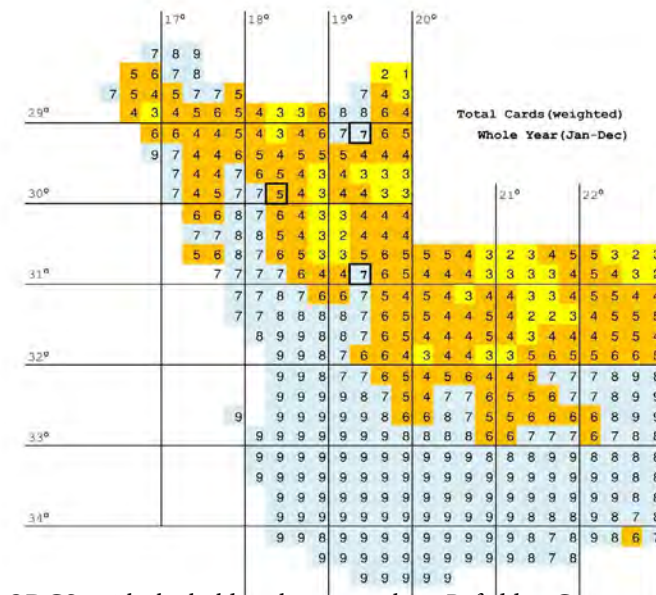


Figure 2. The QDGSs with the bold outlines are where Pofadder, Gamoeep and Loeriesfontein lie. From the map in Fig. 3 showing the 'smoothed' distribution of cards submitted, it appears that the least efforts have been in the Central Karoo and in Bushmanland. Atlas data up to early 1992.

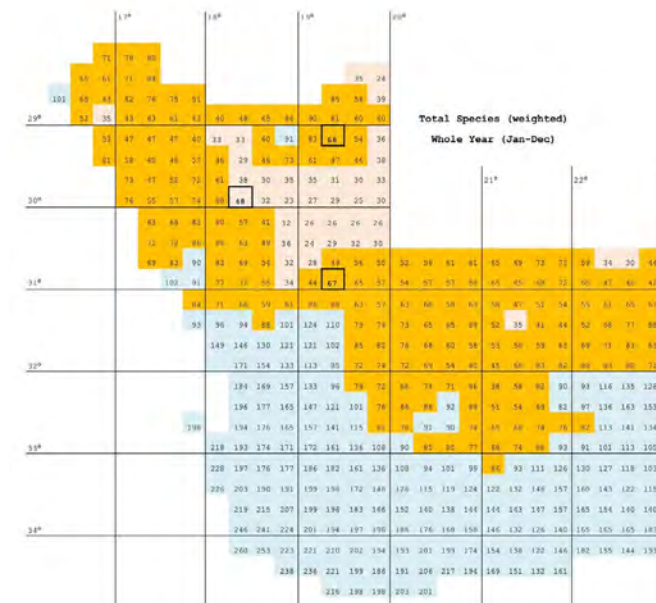


Figure 3. Atlas efforts up to early 1992, showing the smoothed number of species for each QDGS, it becomes apparent that the area between Pofadder, Gamoeep and Loeriesfontein could do with some more atlasing.

Our efforts did not go unnoticed, and we received a number of letters from Geoff Kieswetter, Chairman of the Regional Atlasing Committee (RAC). The last one, of 6 July 1992, reads:

*Dear Peter,
... I'm most grateful for all the priority squares which you and your party have so diligently and efficiently covered over the past five years...
The next issue of SABAP News is due soon ... and I'm sure that you'll take much interest in the progress over the past few months, thanks mainly to the amazing efforts of Richard Brooke and Atlassers like yourself.
Please also pass on my thanks and best wishes to your brothers, who have assisted you in making so significant a contribution to the atlas project.
Yours sincerely,
Geoff Kieswetter
(RAC Chairman)*

Apart from the special trips into Bushmanland, we also undertook several atlasing trips into the Central Karoo, the Hantam area, Namaqualand and one memorable trip to the southeastern parts of Namibia. Suzette and I have particularly fond memories of exploring new areas while atlasing, with the spring flowers erupting in their full glory all around us. Overall, good fun was had by all, with not a single incident that evoked a negative connotation.

Would we do it again? Yes, of course - but it took some 24 years before we could mobilise ourselves to undertake our first atlasing trip into Bushmanland under SABAP2 and the new protocol.

More about that in the next article!

Wally Silbernagl and the late Richard Brooke approximately 110 km south-east of Pofadder on 18 December 1991, with a thunderstorm brewing behind them.





PROJECT NEWS

Atlas bashes feedback: Queenstown and Kimberley

Three atlas bashes took place during the second half of 2022. A brief overview of two of these bashes are provided here.

The Queenstown atlas bash in September 2022 was a weekend to remember, with over 100 species seen, 32 virgin pentads covered, and valuable data added to the SABAP2 database. What a win for citizen science!

In October, a small, but dedicated, group of atlasers descended on Kimberley for the annual Kimberley atlas bash. Valuable data were collected for atlas blocks and pentads that had only a few cards prior to the atlas bash. Several interesting species records were added, with threatened and previously uncommon species recorded on several cards.

Eastern Cape Atlasing Extravaganza

Alan Lee¹ and Shamiso Banda²

¹Science and Innovation Programme Manager,

²Red Data Book and Seabird Liaison Officer

Although the weather report said “unsettled,” lightning storms, hail and rivers flowing down main roads were not what we were expecting. We thought our

atlas bash was going to be washed out, and although it delayed surveying on the Friday, it really just served to wake up the birds for counting for the rest of the weekend.



On Friday at 07:30 am, Uniondale disappeared into the background as Alan, and travelling companion Dahlallio, drove towards Gqeberha/PE to rendezvous with eagerly awaiting first time atlasers - Shamiso and Mbulelo. Next stop was Fort Beaufort for Sandiswa Kula. The rainstorms hit shortly after. It was both Friday and end of the month, so the small towns were heaving. Load shedding caused extra chaos in Komani (Queenstown), so delays at our accommodation just

south of town were slightly behind schedule, with no atlas cards completed. Well, it can't all be plain sailing.

That evening we had the meet-and-greet braai. The other main participants were Ian and Peter from East London, Wesley and

All smiles after a successful day of contributing to SABAP2 coverage and awarding ourselves gold stars for being good citizen scientists.



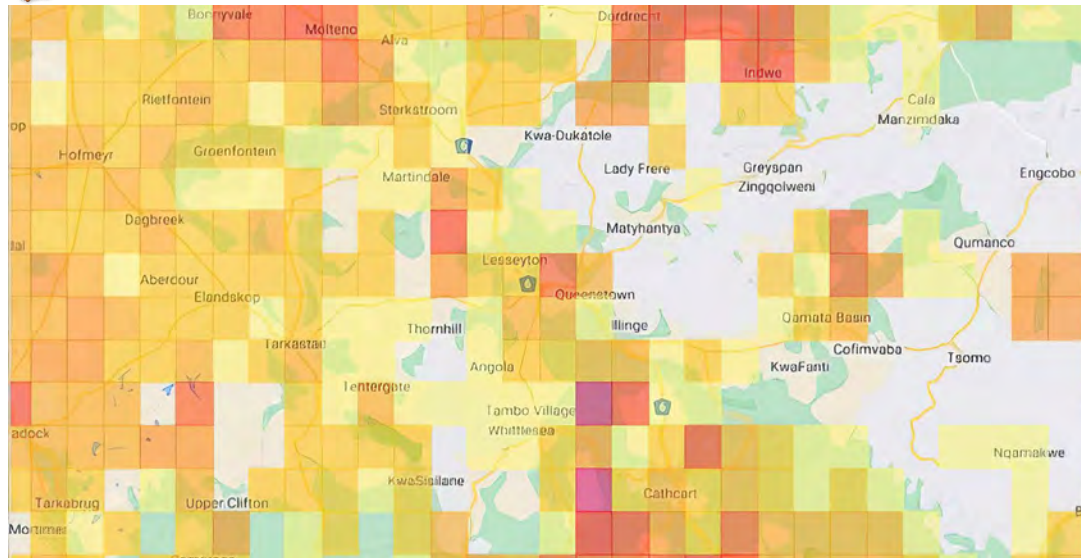


Figure 1. All time coverage prior to the bash.

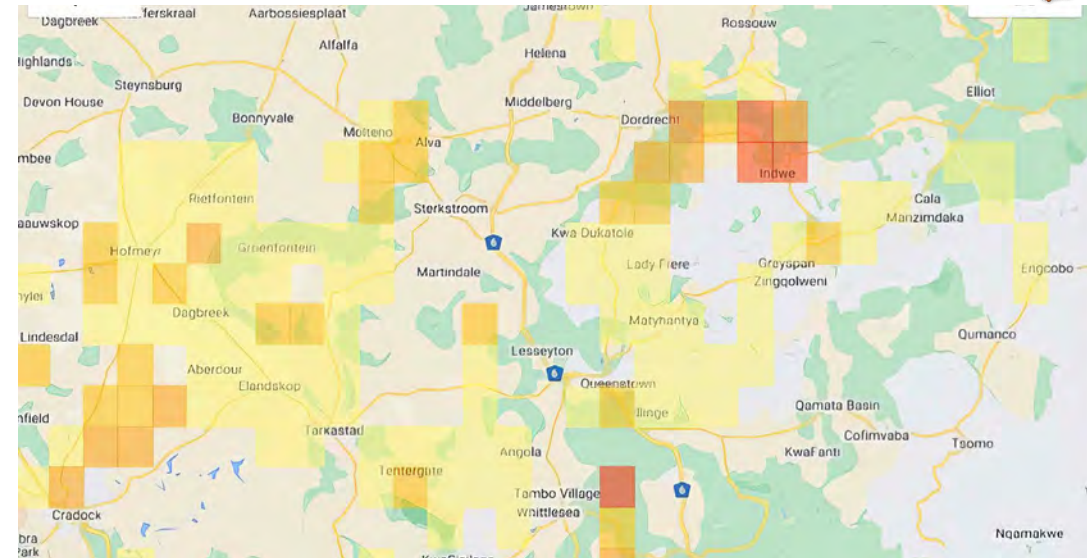


Figure 3. The 2022 only coverage. The region covered earlier in the year by the Hofmeyr bash stands out.

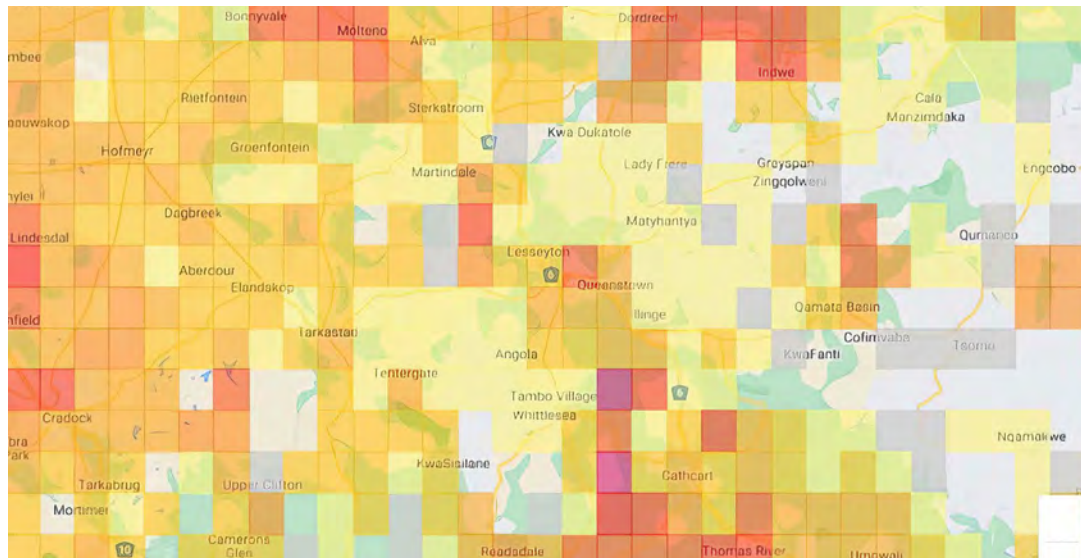


Figure 2. All time coverage after the bash.

Bryce from Makhanda, Leonie from Graaff-Reinet, Crystelle from Howick, and Renier and Louis from George. Renier Balt had printed the battle maps designed by Ernst Rietief, and teams were drawn up and pentads selected. Each experienced team were allocated a team member new to atlasing, which meant we had 6 teams. Most were in bed before 9pm in preparation for the day ahead.

Saturday saw perfect birding weather: overcast and cool. By 05:30 am each team was on the road, and the adventure of atlasing virgin pentads had begun. We each drove through our respective sections of the region spotting, identifying, and logging every bird seen and/or heard. The hours flew by, and were punctuated by thrilling sightings, warming weather, stunning views and the satisfaction of our growing species lists (compare our impact in Figs. 1 and 2).

The intersection of habitat types (Karoo, Thicket, Grassland) coupled with mixed agricultural use saw a remarkable range of species observed. It was interesting in the evening to compare what was 'common' in one area, but not observed at all by another team. Scaly-feathered Weaver was abundant for Leonie and Crystal, but not observed

in the grasslands to the north. The region also lies on the intersection of Dark-capped and Red-eyed Bulbuls, Olive and Karoo Thrush, and three prinia species.

We arrived back at camp around 18:30 pm, each with stories to tell of the lifers we'd seen. Highlight species included Black Stork, Lanner Falcons, Blue Korhaan, Cape Vulture and several Secretarybird sightings. In one day, a small group of dedicated birders had atlased at least 18 virgin pentads. That number was extended to 32 for the

overall weekend, as some members continued atlasing on their way home on Sunday. Deon du Plessis did an amazing 10 virgin pentads during the course of the weekend!

On Sunday, our small team visited Kate Webster to the south of Queenstown to see some of the amazing work she is doing with vulture rehabilitation. She also contributes to SABAP2 and was kind enough to show us her home pentad, which included breeding Secretarybird as well as free flying Cape Vultures.



Kimberley bash

Ernst Retief

Spatial Planning and Data Project Manager

A small, but dedicated, group of atlasers descended on Kimberley from 19–23 October 2022 for the annual Kimberley atlas bash. The aim of an atlas bash is to improve coverage in a certain area, either by adding more full protocol cards or tackling new so-called 'virgin' pentads. This year's Northern Cape bash targeted pentads with less than four cards, or that have not been atlased during 2022. The weather was perfect, and the veld around Kimberley was beautiful after last summer's rains. Species lists

per pentad were between 35 and 70 species, not bad for this area. Highlights recorded included threatened bird species Secretarybird, Martial Eagle, Blue Crane and Kori Bustard.

Unusual species for the area recorded were Blue Waxbill and Grey Go-away Bird. It seems both species are expanding their ranges westwards (Figure 1). These range

One of the Secretarybirds recorded during the atlas bash
© Dawie De Swardt.



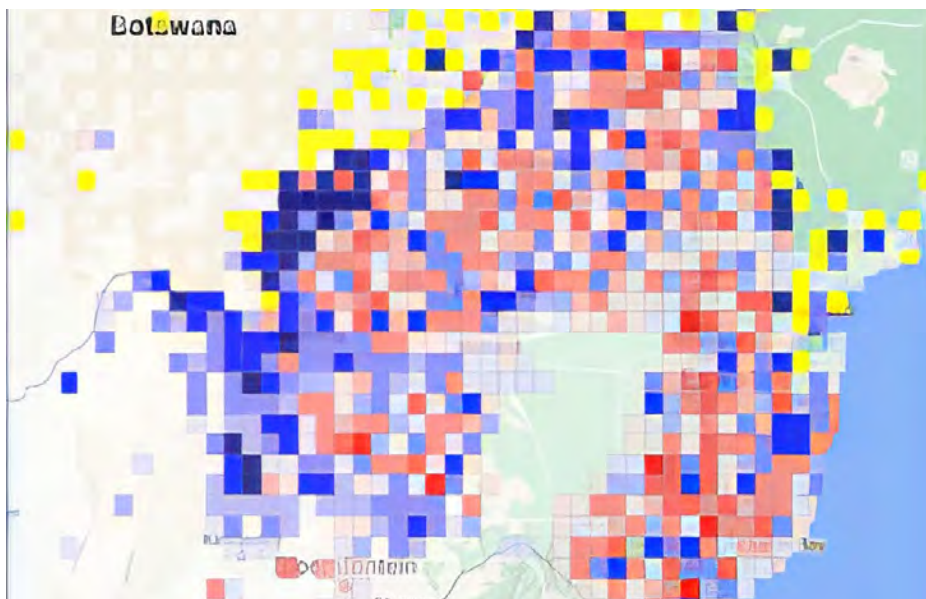
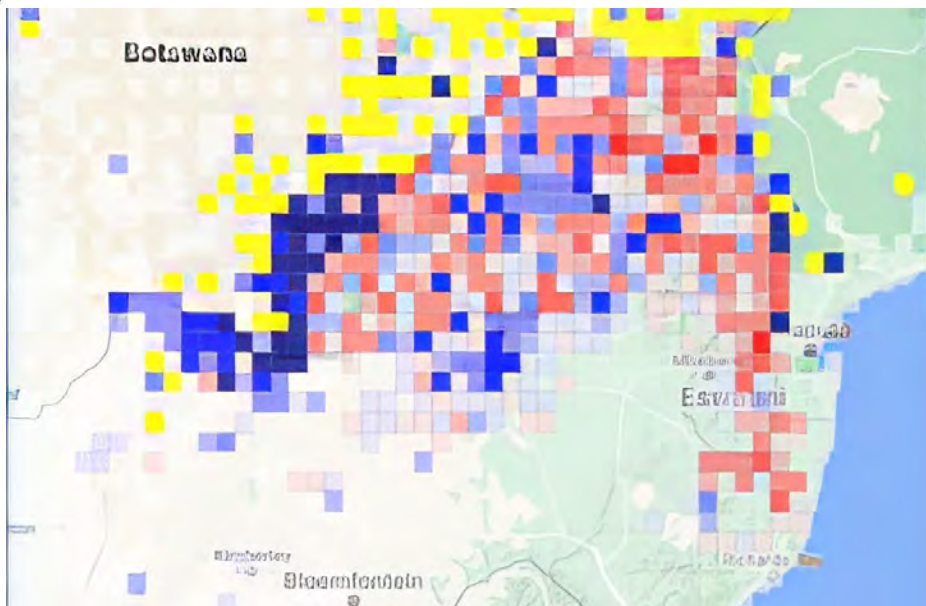


Figure 1. The blue pentads show where Grey Go-away Bird (top) and Blue Waxbill (bottom) were recorded in SABAP2 (2007-2022) but not during SABAP1 (1990). A clear westward expansion in their ranges is seen. A few individuals were recorded during the Kimberley atlas bash.

change maps highlight the value of SABAP2 in detecting these changes.

One of the fun aspects of an atlas bash is the conversation around the campfire after a long day in the field. Although the odd, rare bird sighting would be mentioned, most of the discussion is about relatively common bird species. Why would Blue Waxbill expand its range to the west? Why do we get species X in pentad A but not the neighbouring pentad? A learning experience for all the participants!

Another positive aspect of an atlas bash is the opportunity to connect in conversation with landowners.

We had good discussions about the bird species occurring on their properties and conservation issues, such as uncontrolled fires, that these species are faced with. These are valuable opportunities to remind landowners that they are custodians of many threatened bird species.



The Ford Wildlife Ranger at the end of the atlasing bash.



Karoo atlas bash reflections

Alan Lee

Science and Innovation Programme Manager

In the middle of October, a fortuitous sequence of events led to me being on the road for my 5-hour drive into the heart of the Karoo (I live on the edge of the Karoo) on a Thursday night. My target: the side of the road in a virgin pentad well off the beaten track to the north-west of Three Sisters. Past 10 pm, and I spotted the first South African Kangaroo (Springhare) of the trip. As I rolled across the boundary of the target pentad, a genet bounded away through the low scrub: an unexpected sighting, and a good omen of renewed life in the Karoo

after years of drought.

On the horizon, the red blinking lights of far-off windfarm reminded me of the winds of change blowing across the Karoo, and 'big development'. For the 15 km of dirt track I'd followed since leaving the N12 to Victoria West, I had seen no cars, no farmhouses. Yet there in the distance, probably over 50 km away, were the slow flashing warning lights of the impacts of man: generating energy that, for the most part, would not even use

those around them. In the distance, a Western Barn Owl screeched: my first species for the pentad. Then, an uncomfortable few hours of sleep in the passenger seat of the Suzuki Jimny before sunrise. But even before dawn breaks, Eastern Clapper Larks display beneath the moon and stars. Then the chats call as the red

Climb a Karoo Koppie for beautiful views. There has been a Cinnamon-breasted Warbler on this rock not moments before.





starts to perforate the black on the horizon, and the Karoo Long-billed Lark begins its day. With the dawn, the Lark-like Buntings awake and arise from their hiding places in the shrubs in swarms.

Like much of the country, this part of the Karoo had good rains last summer. I pass brim-full dams, with rows of baby South African Shelducks, and even Greater Flamingos. My morning tally for my first pentad is well over fifty, with a wooded valley with a trickling stream attracting the buntings as well as Namaqua Doves and Red-eyed Bulbuls to drink. Only at the end of this pentad do I shed my winter jacket, as temperatures rise exponentially. By the end of the third pentad, completed just before 1 pm, it is clear there will be no point in doing another simply for the sake of colouring in the coverage map: birds had evaporated into whatever shade they could find. Time to continue north.

Interesting also is how sentiment change is in the air. When I last surveyed south of Victoria West in 2017, the threat of fracking loomed large. My presence as an ally against this threat was well received: birds drink and would be vulnerable to contaminated water resulting from shale gas extraction. But now, the

blinking lights have sparked dollar signs in the farmers' eyes: to secure a wind farm on one's land is a big win cash cow. But wind energy is not the friend of birds, so the doors of at least one family I'd met before didn't open on this expedition. They don't want documentation of raptors and vulnerable birds on their land now.

My ultimate destination was to rendezvous with a dedicated group of atlasers at the El Jo guest farm south of Vosburg (the town now the subject of several personal atlas-ing expeditions over the years). The bash was organised by Stefan Theron, one of the top contributors to SABAP2, and up there for the title of best birder in the Karoo. His interest in this area was also inspired somewhat by the probability of encountering Sclater's Lark, an obsession of ours for the last several years.

The small number of participants comprised several birding veterans: Mel Tripp and Simon Fogarty, Chris Cheetham (participant in almost every Karoo bash organized over the years), and Dean Boshoff. El Jo Guest Farm proved to be excellent accommodation with very welcoming hosts Elsabe and Johan van Rensburg. Johan was particularly useful, making contact with landowners to ensure participants could get off the dusty main roads

and onto farms beyond locked gates. Their guesthouse was in a virgin pentad, as was their adjacent farm.

Chris had arrived early and had already contributed substantially to coverage. Henk Nel (and family) stayed at a separate venue nearby to make it a holiday - the only thing we talk about is birds, so fair enough to the average person! Evening discussions revolved around larks and interesting personal encounters: Simon was quite enamoured with a family of Namaqua Warblers, for instance. Mel and Simon would stay on for a few more days beyond the weekend. Everyone contributed fistfuls of lists of virgin pentads, and we can finally close off the Vosburg gap on the SABAP2 coverage map.

There are many micro-habitats across the Karoo. Koppies with Cinnamon-breasted Warbler and African Rock Pipit are one, while Gannaveld with Sclater's Lark is another. Roads tend to follow the vlakte. But Karoo farmsteads are yet another: these are literally oases in the desert at times, with water and tall stands of trees, plus supplemental feed for livestock. Here you'll find the white-eyes, Karoo Thrush and Gabar Goshawk. And, of course, every birder knows the value of water. To my astonishment, an afternoon pentad on the way home, which I was expect-

ing to be dead, had multiple dams and stunning surprises: Glossy Ibis and African Spoonbills. Of course, getting home doesn't signal the end of the expedition: our Whatsapp group buzzed the rest of the week regarding Out-of-Range Forms.

If you're itching for somewhere off the beaten track, peace and quiet, unsurpassed hospitality, and (at the moment, at any rate) amazing birds, the Karoo is calling you. Vosburg is on the road between Britstown (on the N12 south of Kimberley) and the West Coast. There are still virgin pentads a plenty scattered across the plains, calling you to come and contribute your name to the legacy of the SABAP2 project.

Many thanks to Afrit, Ekapa Minerals, and Italtile and Ceramics Foundation. Thanks also to the sponsors of the SABAP2 project (mediated by Ernst Retief), which covered some accommodation costs for participants during this bash.



Recent publications using SABAP2 data

The African Bird Atlas Project: a description of the project and BirdMap data-collection protocol

Michael Brooks, Sanjo Rose, Res Altwegg, Alan TK Lee, Henk Nel, Ulf Ottosson, Ernst Retief, Chevonne Reynolds, Peter G Ryan, Sidney Shema, Talatu Tende, Les G Underhill and Robert L Thomson

The African Bird Atlas Project (ABAP) is a citizen-science bird-monitoring programme that relies on a robust, repeatable protocol (BirdMap) and allows insights into the distributions of African birds and their conservation. The protocol involves collecting bird lists within spatial sampling units called pentads (5×5 minutes of latitude by longitude), in relation to survey effort. It is based on the Second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2), which is one of Africa's largest citizen science projects, with over 600 thousand checklists, comprising 19 million bird locality records as of December 2021. SABAP2, which focuses on southern Africa, was initiated in 2007 and is ongoing. Both the Kenya Bird Map and the Nigerian Bird Atlas Project, initiated in 2013 and 2015, respectively, use this protocol. These projects have galvanised local bird-watching communities and allow for important comparisons across sub-Saharan African countries. The spatial scope of ABAP covers the entire African continent. Bird species lists are collected by citizen scientists within a pentad, with each list encompassing a minimum of 2 hours of active birding over a maximum of 5 days in the preferred 'full-protocol' format. Lists that do not meet the full protocol requirements are called 'ad-hoc'. Species lists are mostly submitted to the SABAP2 database at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, by the third-party mobile phone application BirdLasser. Incoming data are vetted against existing records, with unusual records verified by Regional Atlas Committees. Data are open access via public websites. Distributional records can be downloaded for each species in the database, or site-specific species lists in various formats can be downloaded for pentads. Here, we introduce technical details of the database to inform researchers on how the data are gathered and curated. Data-access protocols are explained, with examples of data use given from the publication record.

Read the full text here: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2989/00306525.2022.2125097>

New atlassers submitted data in 2022

S Venter	L Foster	J Hendrik Visser
L Sogot	B Gould	M Weber
S Dhlamini	M Lindeque	J Roux
T Hedding	F Labuschagne	A Steyn
C Smith	L Oelofse	M Ferreira
D van der Westhuizen	G Hempson	P Kruger
S van Zyl	S Murray Marr	A Lamb
P Breedveld	M Ferreira	A Jooste
M Gertenbach	J Philogene	D Gysbert van der
D de Wet	R van Aalst	Merwe
R Michael Cooper	J Smit	J Colville
L Tomlinson	C du Plooy	L Pretorius
J Winter	J Burrows	Z Kathoria
J Beukes	G Edward Craig	L Burger
R Roberts	Heath	M De Kock
G Baumgarten	E Beusse	R Schutte
T Liversage	A Manson	M Nel
J Wallace	M du Trevou	L Supply
A Plint	S Nicholls	

**Connect with
the Southern African Bird Atlas Project
and tag us on your atlas adventures!**



sabap2@birdlife.org.za





Southern Red Bishop © Albert Froneman.