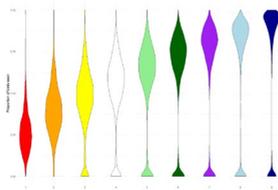


SABAP NEWS

July 2022 - Issue 1



Atlassing pentad
2540_1845



Is 2 hours enough?

Also ...

- The joys of atlassing
- Finding an open pentad
- Bashes are fun
- Turning Kruger Green
- Cape Parrot on Birdlasser
- Making history
- Atlassing news

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

SABAP2



EDITORIAL

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Thank you for supporting the Southern African Bird Atlas Project!

The Second Southern African Bird Atlas project is now 15 years old. Who will forget the submission of the first full protocol card back in 2007. What a special moment! Over the past 15 years, SABAP has faced numerous challenges: staff changes, funding shortages, load shedding, and recently, a global pandemic and historic fuel price increases. However, despite these challenges, SABAP continues. How is this possible? Several reasons come to mind. First, by the strength of the project partners, BirdLife South Africa, SANBI and the FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, who are committed to provide long-term support. The second reason is the incredible support team that we have in our Regional Atlas Co-ordinators. As volunteers, they provide the crucial task of vetting SABAP data, at times a tough and unthankful task. And of course, where would SABAP be today without the BirdLasser team? Henk Nel and his team developed BirdLasser largely via their own funding and time. Are you aware that the SABAP2 management team never asked them to develop this app, an app that made atlassing so much easier? It was their initiative because they are passionate about SABAP2, birds and conservation!

But without a doubt, the most important reason, is the resilience of our citizen science community. You! Thousands of birders have spent countless hours in the rain and shine collecting data. As citizen scientists, this data is collected at your own cost, with your time and money. Many of you have put incredible effort into reaching tough pentads to ensure good atlas coverage. Some pentads are 'easy' yielding many species, but others are much harder work, requiring real dedication to persevere for the two hours needed to submit a full protocol atlas card.

This bi-annual newsletter is long overdue, and we hope the articles and stories will inspire and motivate you. Though 15 years is a long time, and the species distribution and coverage maps may look complete, we must keep building on this long-term dataset. The value of SABAP stems largely from the fact that it is a long-term project, yielding long-term datasets. Such long-term projects are rare and incredibly valuable; we are making history! Enjoy the newsletter, your atlassing, and here's to a rewarding second half of 2022!

Ernst Retief, Sanjo Rose and Michael Brooks
Atlas Management Team

Cover: Yellow-billed Oxpecker © Daniel Engelbrecht.



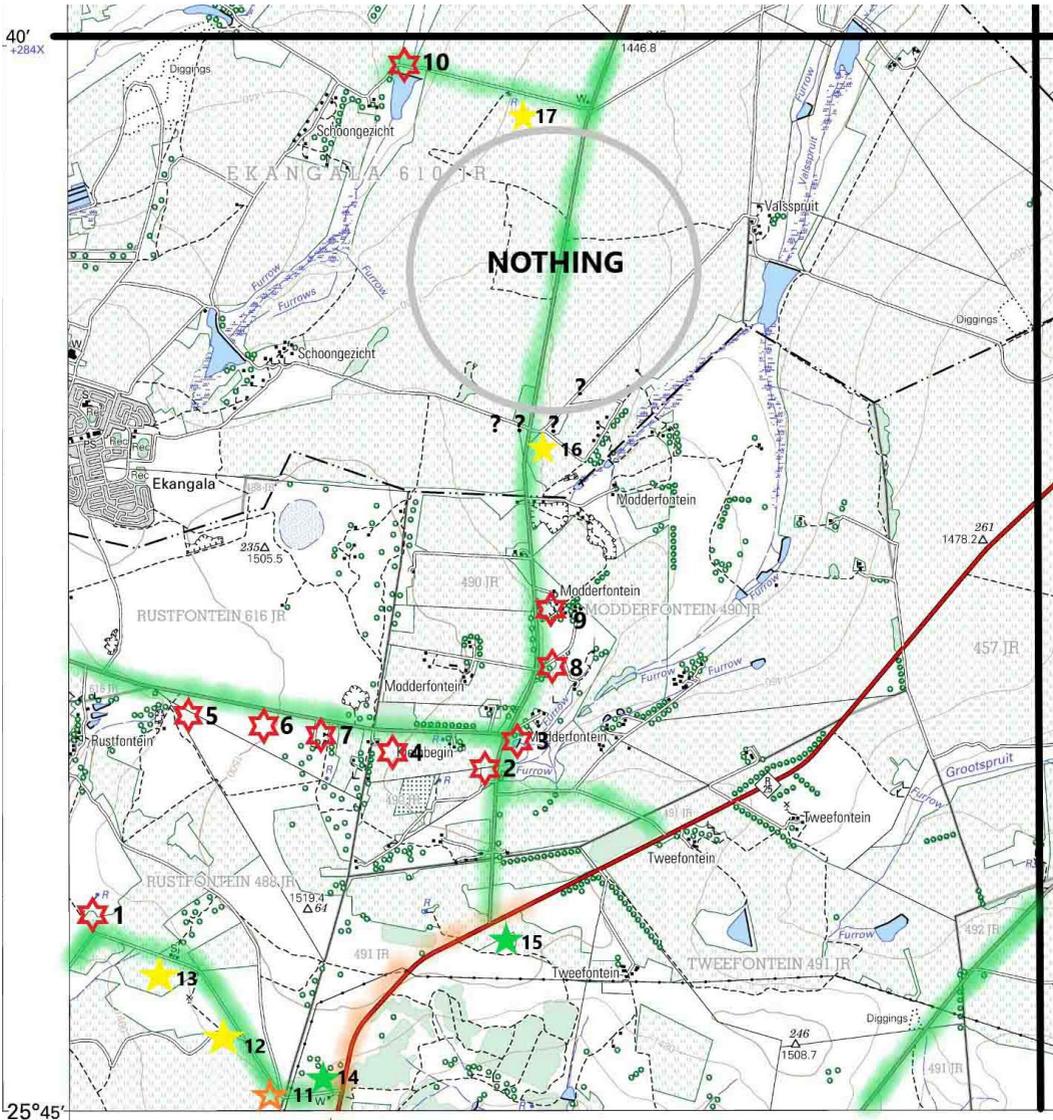


Atlassing

pentad 2540_2845

TEXT AND PHOTOS **Stefan Terblanche**

Why would one go **birding** in a bleak patch of modified landscape north of Bronkhorstspruit in May? For an atlasser, the answer is quite simple: because the pentad has not yet been done in 2022. Still, with some trepidation, I turned my car's wheels in that direction. Just a few weeks earlier, the Bronkhorstspruit area was dull and almost birdless, and I had struggled to get to 30 species in two hours. In addition, I was only able to arrive there at 09:50.



The map shows routes that I took or have taken in the past in green. The red stars show spots where birds were encountered, which have been found in less than 25% of atlas cards, according to current atlas data. Spots where more common species were found are indicated by orange (25-50%), yellow (50-75%), and green stars (above 75%). The numbers next to the coloured stars serve as an index to the bird list below, always with an emphasis on the rarer birds – the more common birds found are only indicated by their own star if a rarer bird was not found at the same spot; otherwise, they are subsumed into the rarer spots.

Access to the pentad is along the R25, the main provincial road between Bronkhorstspuit and Groblersdal. The pentad is accessed from the south, exactly 8 km from the turn-off from the N4. I immediately turned left onto a dirt road in the southwestern corner of the pentad. The accompanying map shows the route. Birding was slow to begin with. Eventually, however, it started improving, especially when I started picking up birds that are not common in this area. Indeed, although 35 previous field cards have been submitted since 2007, I still added three species (Black Sparrowhawk, African Grey Hornbill and Rock Martin) to the species list, which now stands at 191.

The map shows that many rare birds were found between stars 2 to 9, which took almost 50 minutes to complete. The spot indicated by star 8 was particularly productive, despite not looking that way at all – just a moist patch with some sedges and tall grass on one side and a stand of wattles on the other. This was followed by a large area virtually devoid of any birds.

In the far north of the pentad, a small track leads to the west, with more productive grassland, and then reaches a nice wetland with a dam on the left of the track. This area was very productive and added nine species in almost as many minutes.

I missed a few common birds, most notably Speckled Pigeon (which has not been observed since 2020), Laughing Dove, Cape Longclaw and Pied Starling. Most of these species were seen when I entered the adjacent pentad!

There are spots on the map that might increase the species tally, such as Ekangala and the dam and pan to its east and the dams in the Valsspruit. Access points to these spots are not obvious from the public roads. Tracks lead into what might be communal land, which I am a little hesitant to enter without prior permission, or privately-owned farms that are not well signposted.

Still, this experience indicates that good atlasing is not limited to good birding months, first light, or visiting well-known birding spots. □

Birds observed (Numbers refer to the star number on the map)

Recorded on < 25% of field sheets

1. Fiscal Flycatcher
2. Rock Martin
3. Pied Kingfisher
4. African Grey Hornbill
5. Little Bee-eater
6. Black Sparrowhawk
7. Crimson-breasted Shrike
8. Red-throated Wryneck, Black-headed Oriole, Orange-breasted Waxbill
9. Village Weaver
10. Fan-tailed Widowbird

Recorded on 25–50% of field sheets

1. Quailfinch
7. Amethyst Sunbird
10. Little Rush Warbler, Cape Wagtail
11. Greater Kestrel

Recorded on > 50–75% of field sheets

1. African Stonechat, Brown-throated Martin, Cape Sparrow
4. Dark-capped Bulbul
8. White-winged Widowbird
9. Neddicky, Cape Glossy Starling
10. Little Grebe, Reed Cormorant, Yellow-billed Duck, Common Moorhen; Red-knobbed Coot
11. Red-billed Quelea, Southern Red Bishop
12. Northern Black Korhaan
13. Black-chested Prinia, Egyptian Goose
16. Pied Crow
17. African Pipit

Recorded on > 75% of field sheets

2. Southern Fiscal
5. Hadada Ibis
9. Western Cattle Egret, Common Myna; Southern Masked Weaver
11. Southern Red Bishop
13. Red-eyed Dove, Long-tailed Widowbird
14. Ring-necked Dove
15. Crowned Lapwing

Bokmakierie from 2555_2735, Maropeng © Anthony Paton.



Dwarf Bittern from 2750_2635 © Janet Du Plooy.



02:00:00

IS 2 HOURS ENOUGH?

Alan Lee

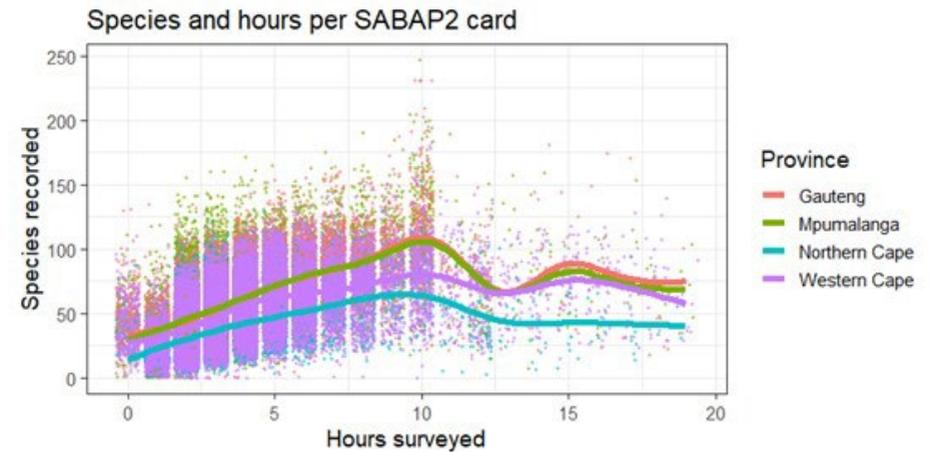
Given that as birders we are pretty confident that the longer we spend looking for birds, the more we will see. This may lead to the question: are 2 hours enough to sample all birds in a pentad using the SABAP2 BirdMap protocol?

Let us first explore the effects of atlassing longer. In our data sets, we can look at the number of birds recorded in relation to the total number of hours reported recording.

Unsurprisingly, we see the expected increase in the number of species with increasing time. But only up to a point, and patterns differ in the types of slopes we see when breaking our data sets

by province. You'll plateau more quickly in the Northern Cape than in Mpumalanga. Across the SABAP2 data set, on average, species lists are two and a half times higher for cards with 10 hours of atlassing compared to those with two hours. Clearly, from that perspective, 2 hours is not enough. But then, how much is enough? Well, given that we are still adding species to our South African bird list, potentially even years are not enough.

But the project's strength is that in many places, we have many observers and thus many lists. So, although two hours is not enough for a single list to tell us about the potential species richness of a pentad, if we have more than four lists,



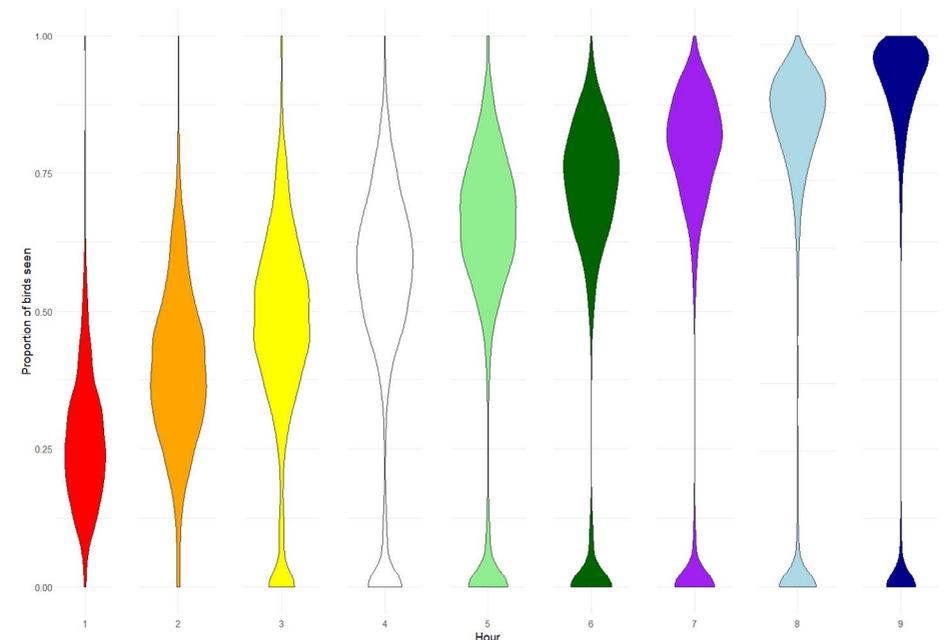
we can see that we will have a closer approximation of potential species richness.

One of the strongest points of the project is that for many locations, we do have many lists and with this comes valuable data. For instance,

Most of the data in the SABAP2 database are for cards of 10 hours or less.

Here, we show for those cards with ten lists, what was the proportion of birds recorded in the previous hour.

This is a violin plot: the wider the violin, the more data in that region.



if every list we received contained every single species, then our index of abundance would be 100% for all species, which tells us very little about which are rare or hard to detect and which are common. Reporting rates, our fundamental index of abundance, rely on some species being missed some of the time.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the number of species you

will record in relation to time spent birding should be born in mind when you are creating a card for a virgin pentad or in a region where there are few lists, as you are presented with the unique opportunity to record the species richness for that site. In such cases, clearly, five days is better.

There are times to go deep, there are times to go wide, but every list has a value to the atlas projects. □

It pays to look! Good advice from Pam Kleiman as she recounts one of her atasing adventures in the Berg, “Not a single protea plant was flowering and only this one small *Halleria lucida* was in flower so I decided to stop and check it out only to find this beautiful Gurney’s Sugarbird © Pam Kleiman.



CAPE GANNET

Morus capensis



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.

The Joys of Atlassing #1

Finding an Open Pentad

TEXT AND PHOTOS Ian-Malcolm Rijdsdijk



Pririt Batis

On Google maps, the Touwsberg looks like a fossilised trilobite. It erupts out of the flat brown plains northwest of the R62 between Barrydale and Ladismith in anticipation of the looming Swartberg mountains further north. Against the southern slopes, beneath imposing buttresses and deep winding kloofs lies Touwsberg Private Game and Nature Reserve. The undulating hills, covered in Boerboon (Tree Fuschia), Gwarrieboom and a dazzling array of succulents (including the rare *Hoodia pilifera*) tumble down towards the Warmwaterberg, and thick stands of sweet acacia populate the streams. The most well-known landmark is Plathuis, a tiny whistle-stop town whose pretty schoolhouse still remains.

In 2019, I had the good fortune to stay with friends in their hand-built stone cottage in the north-western corner of the reserve. As an avid atlasser, I was keen to see how frequently the area had been atlassed and what possible Karoo specials I could find. Between 2011 and 2013, one person had covered the pentad 3335_2055 pretty intensively, but between 2013 and 2019, only two atlas cards were submitted. The Plathuis road bisects the

pentad, and I did not manage to atlas the cultivated areas to the south of the reserve (a future project).

I eked out 45 species in 2019. The spruit below the cottage held busy Fairy Flycatcher, Cape Batis and Chestnut-vented Warbler. The nasal hoot of Acacia Pied Barbet echoed down the valley, a Cardinal Woodpecker tapped away constantly, and a pair of Cape Bunting hopped around the shaded veranda. The cottage owner was bugged by a particular call that he had not been able to identify, a sequence of monotonous, descending piping notes. Pririt Batis, I thought, but it took a while to find one I could photograph so that he could put a visual to the call. A small dam boosted my total with some standard waterbirds and waders: Common Moorhen, South African Shelduck and Three-banded Plover.

In 2020, my family had the privilege of returning to *kuier*, as our friends say. Knowing the area a little better, I decided to extend the range of my walks; Karoo Er-emomela and some desert chats would be nice, while the crags behind the cottage looked like suitable habitat for Verreaux's Eagle.

On the second morning, I decided to try the dry riverbed up



Malachite Sunbird

behind the house. The blooming acacias produced a heady scent in the morning coolness, attracting giraffes and good numbers of birds. Suddenly, a large bird burst out of a crevice no more than fifty metres away: a beautiful adult Verreaux's Eagle. It circled effortlessly twice before settling on a rocky outcrop in an iconic pose. I activated Birdlasser on my phone and realised I had crossed into a new pentad. Excited, I decided to complete my first hour, though the impregnable cliffs above halted my progress up the kloof. Picking along the lower slopes, I managed thirteen species, including Familiar Chat, Pririt Batis and Karoo Scrub Robin.

One of the joys of staying at the stone cottage in Touwsberg is that there is no cellphone reception. Sometimes, if you leave your phone on the edge of the kitchen counter, it mysteriously receives messages but never when you look. And if you walk to the top of the koppie next to the house and wave your arms around, you get acceptable reception sometimes. That evening while watching the sunset and listening to our friend's Tibetan singing bowl ring out over the valley, I quietly accessed SABAP2. I realised that the northern pentad (3330_2055) I had ventured into was completely open. There was not a single record, not even an incidental sighting since the project

began in 2007. Though there were still several open pentads in the Western Cape – including a juicy patch northeast of Laingsburg and a strip north of Towerkop Nature Reserve – it was a nerdy thrill to stumble upon one after more than ten years of atlassing. I would not be able to get to the area north of the Touwsberg, but I would give the southern slopes a good bash in my remaining two days.

The following morning I decided to head up the kloof again towards a series of caves. Our friends had once bundu-bashed up to the caves but dissuaded me from venturing up solo as there are several dangerous ledges and areas with very loose shale. I scrambled up one side of the valley but quickly found myself on a series of ledges, so I backtracked gingerly. A small family of Klipspringer on the far ridge had no problems, however, snorting at my impudence as I attempted to extricate myself from trouble. It was hot, scratchy work relieved slightly by finally seeing the pair of Hadadas who retired noisily up the kloof every evening. It is comfortably the most work I have ever put into logging a Hadada!

On our final morning, both families set out to hike up to a waterfall in the central portion of the

reserve. After a day of drizzle and overcast weather, the temperature nudged into the high 30s, so an early start was imperative. It was not to be. Wrangling four children under 13 into a bakkie properly attired with hats and slathered in sunscreen proved challenging.

The walk was mercifully short, though the waterfall itself was completely dry (recent rains have apparently revived it dramatically). My exertions again added slim rewards: Booted Eagle, Rock Kestrel and Rock Martin.

My final total for pentad 3330_2055 was only 25 species, but there are some lengthy river courses on the northern slopes of the mountain that might produce some good birds. Cape Bird Club stalwarts Simon Fogarty and Mel Tripp atlassed the neighbouring pentad north (3325_2055) in 2013 and 2014 and recorded Martial Eagle, Hamerkop and Dusky Sunbird, so there is undoubtedly a much-expanded list of birds to be found in the area.

Checking again in May 2022, my card is still the only full protocol for this pentad. I look forward to my next adventure in the Touwsberg, exploring its many riches and expanding the species list for this pentad. □

Bashes are fun

TEXT AND PHOTOS Tino Herselman

In March this year, Tino Herselman and others organised an atlas bash to the tiny towns of Hofmeyr and Tarkastad in the Eastern Cape. It was fun and resulted in excellent data! Here is an edited account from their atlas story available on our website.

The second Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 is valuable for many reasons: mapping birds through space and time and bringing birders together with a unique and singular passion – those who wish to contribute to this citizen science project (atlassers). With two long years of pandemic-induced lockdown, opportunities for ‘atlas bashes’ have been few and far between. We decided it was time to tackle the poorly atlassed region around Tarkastad in the Eastern Cape, an area that has been on the wish list for a long time!

The target area for the bash was the under-atlassed area covering the eastern half of the Hofmeyr district and the north-western part of the Tarkastad district in the Eastern Cape (Figure 1).



Klaas's Cuckoo

The vegetation and topography in the area vary considerably from the west to the east, resulting in quite diverse habitats. The western parts consist mainly of open plains with a mixture of Karoo shrub and grass. The grasslands are un-



Figure 1. The target area of the Hofmeyr/Tarkastad birding bash held from 18–21 March 2022.

characteristically overgrown because of the exceptionally good rainy season. The eastern half of the target area is a mountainous area covering the Bamboes Mountains, known for peaks above 2 000 meters above sea level and kloofs, valleys and plains covered with grass, shrubs and acacia trees. Most rivers and streams had free-flowing water, while most farm dams were full or partially full.

The area consists of 64 pentads in a square (8 x 8), as shown in Figure 2. Of these pentads, eight were virgin pentads, 28 had 1

card, 14 had two cards, 6 had three cards, and eight were surveyed four or more times. The following eight birders participated in the bash. They formed six teams: Tino Herselman, Stefan Theron, Chris Cheetham, Felicity Ellmore, Henk Nel, Rudi Minnie, Salome Willemse, and Alan Lee (plus his two children). The teams stayed in an old farmhouse on the farm Houw Kuilen in the Hofmeyr district on the foot of the Bamboes Mountain. The spacious house included five bedrooms, two bathrooms, a lounge, kitchen, pantry with plenty of



Figure 2. The 'before' and 'after' images of the 64 pentads of the target area of the Hofmeyr/Tarkastad birding bash.



Common Scimitarbill

fridge and freezer space, and a large stoep with a lekker braai.

The first full day of atlassing (Saturday, 29 March 2022) started with great weather for birding, but a heavy thunderstorm late afternoon threatened our efforts over a large part of the target area. The challenge was less the rain than the sticky, muddy conditions that resulted. However, true to nature, the adventurous atlassers were not too phased by this – some excellent records made it onto various cards during and just after the storm. These encounters and tales from

the day in the field were shared during the evening's socialising, with highlights like Common Whitethroat, Icterine Warbler, Drakensberg Rockjumper, and Buff-streaked Chat, to name a few, making us wish we could stay longer and get those specials on our lists too! The Common Whitethroat especially revealed that there is a twitcher in every atlasser! Sunday's weather was great with no more rain experienced on the day, neither on Monday when we returned home.

A total of 53 Full Protocol cards were completed, covering 43 of the pentads in the target area and one other pentad just outside the target area. The outcome of the bash on the SABAP2 coverage is shown in Figure 2.

A total of 211 species were recorded during the bash, 18 of which

generated ORFs. The species with the highest reporting rates were Greater Striped Swallow, Red-billed Quelea, Acacia Pied Barbet, Pied Crow and Neddicky, which were recorded on more than 90% of the cards.

We want to acknowledge Alan Collett for the inspiration to visit this area. He was missed on this expedition! The participants would also like to thank Tino for the fantastic organisation of this bash: he printed out the battle maps and booklets of pentad information (including contact details), shepherded in the lost and the late and prepared some delicious meals. We also thank all the landowners between Hofmeyr and Tarkastad that allowed us access to their farms and their special birds. □

Links to the story:

Tino Herselman and participants atlas story:

<https://sabap2.birdmap.africa/media/stories#pgcontent>

Alan Lee's account of the bash from his family perspective:

<https://bluehillescape.blogspot.com/>



Red-billed Quelea

Turning Kruger Green

Peter Lawson

In 2013, a bird census was launched by the University of Cape Town and SANParks Scientific Services in the Kruger National Park (KNP) with the goal of creating a comprehensive database for scientific research. I was chosen to lead the fieldwork, and this turned out to be the best time of my life in my retirement years.

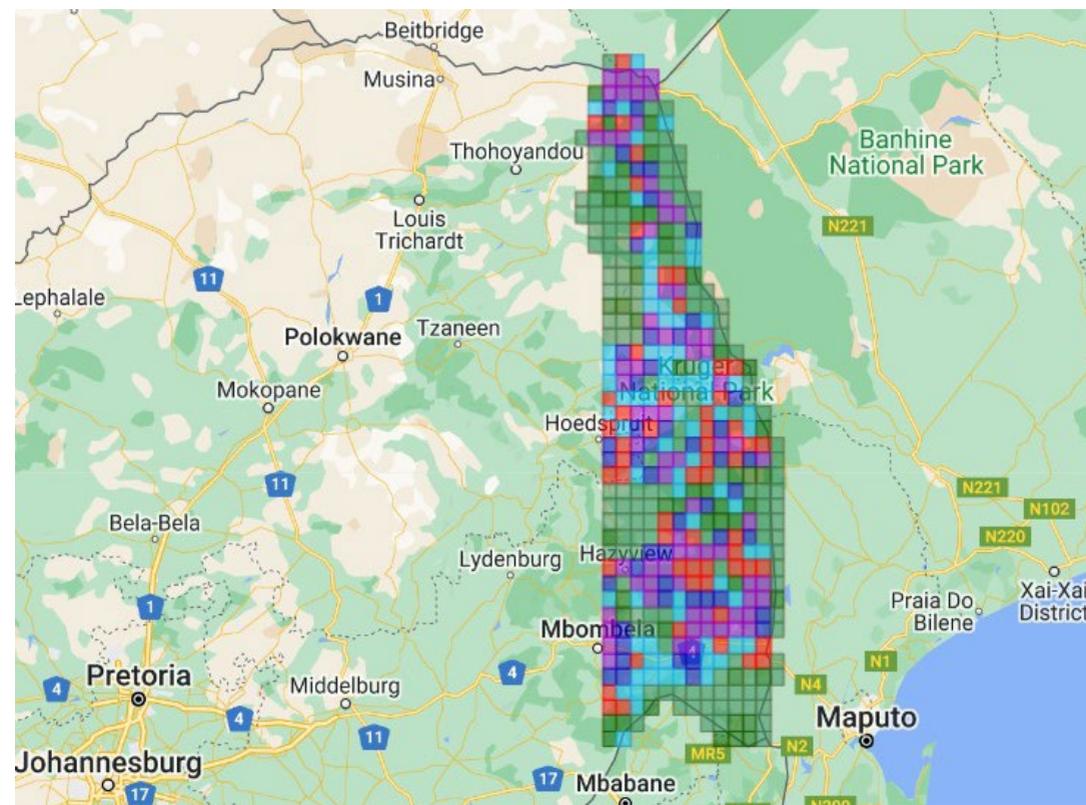
The project was to be a subsidiary of SABAP2. It was registered to take place over a period of three years, expiring on 31 December 2016. It started in January 2014 and was completed ahead of schedule in late November 2016. BirdLife Lowveld in Mbombela took it under their wing and were instrumental in negotiating finance, as a project of this nature is expensive to operate.

A considerable area adjoining KNP and private reserves outside the western and southern boundaries was included in the study area; the reason being to ascertain bird populations in a large protected

area, as against heavily populated and stressed areas including human sprawl, rural settlements, towns and farmland. This turned out to be an important decision as it produced many surprising and unexpected results.

The entire study area was divided into 446 pentads that needed to be covered and turned green on the SABAP2 coverage map (i.e., minimum four full protocol lists per pentad), with brighter colours when covered more than the minimum. Due to this, BirdLife Lowveld appropriately gave the project the name “Turning Kruger Green” (TKG).

Completion of the project in three years would seem like an impossible task when 446 pentads require 1784 bird lists to be made in a minimum of 3568 hours, but not so. With just one month left for completion, the project was brought to finality. My responsibility as Project Leader, motivated by my ambition, was to see this project through.



Turning Kruger Green coverage as on 19 July 2022. Courtesy of SABAP2.

Not all pentads are off the beaten track and many are on tourist routes or outside Kruger National Park. All atlassers registered with SABAP2 could contribute data to the ‘Turning Kruger Green’ project, simply by virtue of atlasing the pentads in question when visiting the KNP area. Without these ‘Citizen Scientists’, turning Kruger green would not have been possible in a 3-year period and I am exceedingly grateful to the many people who helped to make my dream come true.

I must say, though, that many bird atlassers were reluctant to cover pentads in the rural areas and the many pentads in these areas were covered by myself and the few birders brave enough to do so. To cover all areas properly it was often necessary to work in some really rough places, but no serious problems were encountered. This sounds surprising given that we drove very slowly, with the windows wide open to hear birds and make frequent stops with the engine cut, usually leaving the doors unlocked so that

we could exit rapidly for the best sightings.

Findings show some interesting and, in some cases, startling results. For instance, probably due to the over-population of elephants, there has been drastic habitat change in many areas. Bush encroachment in once pristine open grassland has resulted in serious declines of some of our large birds which are icons. To add to this, many large trees used for nesting purposes have been felled or ring barked. Comparison between this study and one done 20 years previous indicate that the Secretary-bird had a median reporting rate of 20.2% during the previous bird atlas



Secretarybird © Derek Engelbrecht

project and was down to 0.4% in this study. Southern Ground Hornbill had decreased from 31.4% to 9.3% and for Kori Bustard the figures were 24.6% down to 2.4%. On the other hand, bush encroachment favoured certain species such as Long-billed Crombec, Sombre Greenbul, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Green-backed Camaroptera and the migrant Marsh Warbler, to name just a few.

The comparison of bird species inside the protected areas and settled areas to the west and south shows some alarming results. One would expect most birds that frequent the protected areas to be absent or far less common on the outside, but that is not always the case. For instance, in the case of Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Cape White-eye, the populations were almost double on the outside. A possible reason for this trend could be that the one is a nectar feeder and the other feeds mainly on fruit, both of which are profuse in rural gardens and scarce inside the protected areas. The same applies to some grassland species such as Yellow-throated Longclaw, Rufous-naped Lark and African Pipit to name but a few. Suitable habitat inside Kruger has been considerably reduced due to bush encroachment, whereas on the outside in rural areas trees are felled for firewood and

large areas are over-grazed by cattle and goats, to form artificial, but suitable habitats for such species.

Then the reverse to birds such as European Roller, which likes to perch on dead branches waiting for beetles and the like to appear on the ground below to feed on. Perches of this nature are plentiful in protected areas but virtually absent in the rural areas due to firewood collection. Most vultures, eagles and storks are scarce on the outside as well due to large nesting and perching trees being felled in human habituated areas, as well as disturbance by people and numerous dogs when feeding.

We were frequently asked when returning from field trips, “what good birds did you find?” My reply was usually, “all birds are good birds when atlassing as every species, even the common ones, are important for data collection”. One of these is Buffy Pipit, which was uncommon in Kruger and seldom seen on tourist routes, and yet we encountered them on many occasions off the beaten track, usually in the foothills of the Lebombo Mountains or in the hilly Stolsnek section. The first breeding records of Racket-tailed Rollers were obtained in the Makuleke concession in the far north. Also, in the far north-east, the Nwamibiya Sandveld was one of the most delightful

areas to visit, holding species not found elsewhere in Kruger such as Pink-throated Twinspot and Rudd’s Apalis. One of my favourite Kruger rarities we sometimes encountered in dry areas is the gorgeous little Violet-eared Waxbill.

In spite of some serious habitat changes in parts of Kruger and spreading human settlements on the outside, the Lowveld still offers some of the best birding in South Africa. Leading this project was one of the best things I have done and led me to places I would never have been to otherwise. For a full account of this project, do read: *The impact of political history on birds: A case study in north-eastern Mpumalanga, South Africa*, available at <http://bo.adu.org.za/content.php?id=261>. In addition much of this data was used by Warwick Tarboton and Peter Ryan in their book ‘Guide to Birds of the Kruger National Park’.

In conclusion, I must sincerely thank all who were involved, including SANParks Scientific Services, section rangers, citizen scientists, team members, ADU university staff and the BirdLife Lowveld committee, and of course the numerous individuals and organisations who contributed to funding one of the best projects ever to have taken place in Kruger National Park. □

JOIN THE CAPE PARROT CAUSE

ON BIRDLASSER

TEXT AND PHOTOS Cassie Carstens

Imagine the eastern half of South Africa. Moving inland from the coast, you first encounter some relatively flat terrain that eventually rises into the tall mountain ranges of the great escarpment. The entire escarpment stretches over a vast area that stretches from the Amathole Mountains in the Eastern Cape, through KwaZulu-Natal, to the northern Drakensberg and Wolkberg in Limpopo. It's quite a large area, right? Massive actually! Sections of this escarpment are covered by indigenous Mistbelt forests, and it is here that you can find South Africa's only endemic

parrot, the Cape Parrot (*Poicephalus robustus*).

Finding these parrots can be easy on some days. They are generally quite loud when gathering together in flocks and fly conspicuously between forest patches. Finding them inside the forest where they roost and nest can be a bit more difficult, but if you wake up early enough you might just be able to hear them call while they fly from the tall yellowwoods that tower above the canopy.



Monitoring Cape Parrots is no easy task. The forests that Cape Parrots call home are very fragmented and difficult to access.

Travelling by car between them can be difficult and sometimes very time consuming. Since 2016, the

research team at the Wild Bird Trust's Cape Parrot Project, have been intensively monitoring the local population in the Amathole Mountains. The Cape Parrot Project is based in Hogsback. Demographic counts, phenology surveys of trees, and nest monitoring are but a few of the routine field research activities that we conduct.

While in the field, we not only collect data for our project, but for citizen science projects too, such as SABAP2. We capture this data on BirdLasser which allows us not only to record the presence of Cape Parrots, but also, the presence of all the bird species in our study area.

Each month, we are fortunate enough to receive all the Cape Parrot sightings reported on the BirdLasser app that were submitted by citizen scientists and birders around the country. We get this data because birders have activated the 'Cape Parrot Cause' on their BirdLasser app. These data have contributed to our understanding of the Cape Parrot's current distribution and seasonal movements. This in turn has helped us to determine the best monitoring sites and



species, we encourage new and existing users to record sightings in BirdLasser and to submit Ad Hoc or Full Protocol cards to SABAP if you encounter Cape Parrots during your birding trips and expeditions. Each card helps! □

A Cape Parrot inspecting a tree snag while keeping a sharp eye on the photographer!

identify important forest patches for conservation. However, we also need you to please submit Cape Parrot sighting to South African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2) as part of either a Full Protocol or Ad Hoc list. These submissions help identify the current distribution of the species.

There are many gaps in the distribution where we know Cape Parrots occur but where no SABAP records yet exist and we ask you please to especially help us here! For instance, the large forests close

Species distribution map data for Cape Parrot. Image courtesy of SABAP2.

to Mthatha and the scattered forest patches in the northern parts of the Eastern Cape province have not been surveyed. Each new submission within this area ensures that research and conservation activities can be targeted at the most critical habitats in which Cape Parrots can be found.

To ensure your sightings reach us, and to help do your part for the



A scenic landscape featuring a river or lake in the middle ground, surrounded by a dense forest of green trees. In the foreground, there is a stone structure, possibly a dam or a bridge, with water flowing over it. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

Making history

at Tala Manzi Game Farm

Part 1

Janelle Verster

I want to tell you a story of five people, ten animals and a hundred birds. (Okay, some of these numbers are to give it a nice ‘ring’. As Foster M. Russell said, “Every story has three sides. Yours, mine and the facts”.

Anyway, let me very briefly introduce you to the five people. Five bird-atlassers/adventurers/good-friends: Viandre and Bianca Delpport, Eduard Teichert, and Pieter and Janelle Verster. The five of us are involved (yes, the project is still continuing, and I hope there will be a Part Two in this story as well) in compiling a bird list for the Tala Manzi Game Farm. The Tala Manzi Game Farm is situated in the Groot Marico, breeding ground for stories of the famous South African author, Herman Charles Bosman.

The Groot Marico is not only a part of Bosman’s history. When I was a high school pupil, I went to a wonderful school camp in the area. Tala Manzi manager Erika told me that the Martha Glatthaar camp was on a portion of what is now the Tala Manzi Game Farm. Fond memories of obstacle courses and other adventures are part of my personal history and may be of some other atlassers too (I have already heard of two other people who also went to this spot back in the day).

What a privilege to now revisit the area years later. This time to help compile a bird list. Compiling a bird list often gels very well with atlassing, as the existing data of the area that is available on the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2) website can potentially provide background for planning, preparation and setting one’s expectations on what one is likely to find, whereas atlassing whilst compiling the bird list may also contribute valuable information about the area to the citizen science project. For instance, if certain birds are reported in the general area, it may pose the question, have I covered all habitats that are present, or is there perhaps something I am missing in my bird list?

We compiled our bird list for the game farm in mid-May 2022, aware of the time of year and the potential effect seasonal variation in bird species, migration, water levels and other factors may have on what we find. For this reason, we would like to go back in summer, do another card in the pentad, and add data to the bird list.

A bird list also tells a story. The British novelist Mrs Humphry Ward was quoted saying, “The first law of story-telling. Every man



Rock pool at Tala Manzi
© Bianca Delpport.

is bound to leave a story better than he found it.” I don’t think I am generally someone who over-thinks things (though that in itself already sounds complicated), but a few philosophical questions have crossed my mind lately. Do all humans inherently want to make

history? Why do some people, for instance, carve out their names in famous places or leave a footprint on a concrete path that has not dried yet?

And then: isn't atlassing a constructive way to make history? To make a story better than the way we found it?

An additional benefit of atlassing is what else you see while recording what birds you see. Ten animals (other than birds) that I really enjoyed seeing (or at least 'experiencing') in the process, were giraffe, blue wildebeest, eland, zebra, warthogs, bats of different sizes, aardvark (although I did not see them, seeing the many burrows was a real treat), hippos and baboons. Butterflies were present in numbers! I particularly liked the guineafowl butterfly, for some reason, it reminds me of a dinosaur.

We managed to record around 130 birds in pentad 2535_2620 in

which the Tala Manzi Game Farm is situated. Some of the birds we saw in the pentad have not been recorded in the pentad before:

1. Swallow-tailed Bee-eater
2. Pale Flycatcher
3. Yellow-bellied Greenbul
4. Water Thick-knee
5. Cape Vulture
6. Red-headed Weaver, and
7. African Harrier-Hawk.

It was also interesting to see that five of the birds we found in the pentad have not been recorded in the general area (25 pentad blocks, including this pentad) during SABAP2. There are lots of what we perceived as excellent broadleaved woodland on the farm, together with a variety of other habitats.



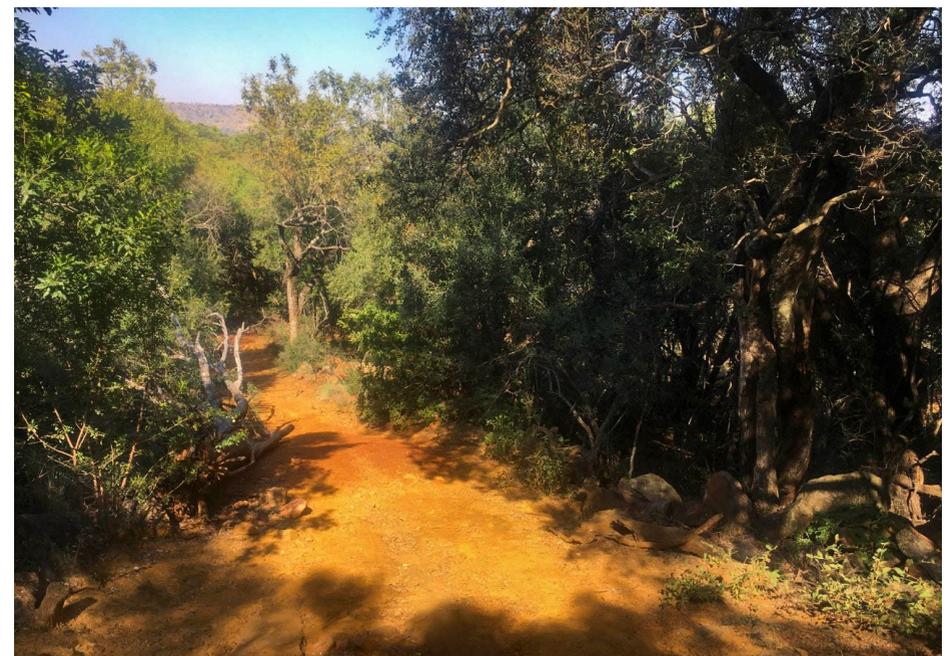
Guineafowl Butterfly © Eduard Teichert

We enjoyed the braais, luxurious accommodation next to a beautiful dam, lots of jokes and old stories retold, and I enjoyed a solo 23 km run and even a swim (in winter!) on the farm. When it comes to the fun and adventure, it is your side of the story and mine. But when it comes to the bird data, let's submit the facts to SABAP2: "If in doubt, leave it out" (see https://sabap2.birdmap.africa/docs/SABAP2_Protocol_2021.pdf). Let's go and make history! Viva atlassing!



A xantochromatic White-fronted Bee-eater © Pieter Verster.

One of the habitat types at Tala Manazi © Janelle Verster.



Anthony (Tony) Archer

One of the giants of SABAP2



Over the course of the Southern African Bird Atlas Project, there have been several incredible contributors, people who went out of their way to atlas both ‘wide’ and ‘deep’. One of these giants is Anthony Archer, who suddenly passed away in April 2022. Known to his birding friends as Tony, he hailed from Klerksdorp in the North West province, and this is also where he made his biggest atlassing contribution. He is one of the few who started atlassing in 2007 and never lost momentum! It is only fitting that we pay tribute to one of South Africa’s most dedicated citizen scientists and SABAP2 contributors. He submitted a mammoth total of 2 645 full protocol cards and 588 ad-hoc cards. He was an active participant, joining many atlas bashes and regularly posting updates on Facebook about his home pentads around Klerksdorp.

Tony’s contribution to citizen science was not limited to SABAP2. Over recent years Tony became an enthusiastic bird sound recordist and submitted an incredible 2 359 sound recordings to Xeno-Canto - an online bird call project. He merged his passion for recordings and atlassing, writing atlas stories about this new twist to his atlassing (“Atlassing with sounds” T Archer).

The extent of Tony’s enthusiasm for atlassing, as seen from his many Facebook posts, cannot be reflected in the numbers alone. He regularly posted reports of a new bird species recorded in a pentad, some interesting bird behaviour or even simply a photo of a beautiful bird. His posts must have motivated many more people to become atlassers, a legacy that will now continue, even when he is not with us anymore.

Birders who knew him and spent time birding with him reflect on a generous, helpful and extremely enthusiastic birder.

We will miss this incredible contributor. Rest in peace, Anthony.

by Etienne Marais and Ernst Retief

PROJECT NEWS

New RAC member for Mozambique



We were thrilled to welcome Dylan Vasapoli to the RAC team for Mozambique at the beginning of the year.

Dylan is a birder through and through, with a deep-filled passion for birds and birding built through his younger years. Dylan works as a professional tour leader for Birding Ecotours, showing clients sought-after birds throughout southern Africa and the rest of

Africa and the world and gaining a deeper understanding of them. Mozambique is a regular destination for Dylan. He has spent a significant amount of time birding and travelling around, both on tour and in his personal time, and is intimately familiar with the birds occurring in the country. When not on tour, Dylan volunteers his time on the South Africa Rarities Committee and contributes to various books and similar birding projects.



BECOME A
CITIZEN
SCIENTIST

★ WANTED ★

CAPE PARROT SIGHTINGS

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

Webinar and YouTube channel

We were thrilled that almost 200 people logged in to watch and partake in the SABAP2 webinar on 23 April 2022. The webinar introduced the topics of vetting, data use, the atlas protocol, and various website features. The webinar was recorded, and the link is on our YouTube channel, where it has been viewed a further 200 times!

Click to watch



Connect with

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



sabap2@birdlife.org.za



Recent publications using SABAP2 data

Assessments of range-wide distribution of six African storks and their relationships with protected areas

Gula J, Green MC, Fritts S, Dean WRJ and Sundar KSG

Species range maps provided by the IUCN and BirdLife International are recognised to sometimes mischaracterise distribution and have resulted in inaccurate status assessments. In this study the distribution trends and relationships with protected area extent for six African storks, the African Openbill *Anastomus lamelligerus*, Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*, African Woolly-necked Stork *C. microscelis*, Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*, Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumenifer* and Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis* were investigated. Each of these species is understudied and assumed to be ubiquitous throughout sub-Saharan Africa and therefore considered Least Concern on the IUCN Red List. The authors developed empirically based distribution maps for the six African stork species using a plethora of data sources from >150 years. They found all six species were widespread from East to Southern Africa, but had highly fragmented ranges in West Africa. West African populations have either declined or been extirpated since the 1960s. Countries that require better field coverage include Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Zimbabwe. For each species, there was a positive relationship between occurrence and protected area extent, suggesting either protected habitat is important for storks or unprotected areas are poorly covered in the field. We evaluate species status based on the new collated information and recommend uplisting the global status of the Saddle-billed Stork to Near Threatened and West African populations of the Saddle-billed Stork, Marabou Stork and Yellow-billed Stork to Threatened status. This study shows the value of ongoing large scale data collection projects like the African Bird Atlas Project.

Link to their study: Gula J, Green MC, Fritts S, Dean WRJ, Sundar KSG. 2022. [Assessments of range-wide distribution of six African storks and their relationships with protected areas](#). Ostrich 93(1).

Population viability assessment of an endangered raptor using detection/non-detection data reveals susceptibility to anthropogenic impacts

Cervantes F, Martins M, Simmons RE

As the demand for carbon-neutral energy sources increases, so does the need to understand the impacts that these technologies have on the environment. In this article, the authors assess the potential consequences of additional mortality on an Endangered raptor recently exposed to wind farms for the first time, the Black Harrier *Circus maurus*, one of the world's rarest harriers. They conduct a population viability assessment using a Bayesian model integrating life-history information and annual reporting rates from detection/non-detection surveys from the South African Bird Atlas Project. Their model estimates a global population of approximately 1300 birds currently declining at 2.3% per year, and one that could collapse in under 100 years, if an average of three to five adult birds are killed annually. This level of mortality may soon exist, given the current rate of fatalities and the number of wind farms planned within the species' distribution. Their results highlight the critical need for appropriate placement, and adaptive management of wind farms and other infrastructure causing harrier mortality. They also show how detection/non-detection data (SABAP2 atlas data!) may be used to infer population dynamics and viability, when population counts are unavailable.

Read the paper here: Cervantes F, Martins M, Simmons RE. 2022. [Population viability assessment of an endangered raptor using detection/non-detection data reveals susceptibility to anthropogenic impacts](#). Royal Society Open Science 9(2).

A review of the history and use of data generated by a long-running citizen science project

Lee ATK, Brooks M, Underhill LG

The Second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2), initiated in 2007, is one of the region's longest-running citizen science programmes and collects spatial and temporal data on birds. Data from the project are

publicly available and used extensively by environmental impact assessment practitioners, conservationists, authors, protected area managers, scientists and the general public. The project is the template for other established projects that now operate across the continent, collectively now falling under the 'African Bird Atlas Project' umbrella. The authors show that since the initiation of SABAP2, there has been a three-fold increase in publications, with over 150 papers that can be attributed to SABAP2. The contribution of citizen scientists to the published scientific domain has been enormous.

Read their paper here: Lee ATK, Brooks M, Underhill LG. 2022. [The SABAP2 legacy: A review of the history and use of data generated by a long-running citizen science project](#). South African Journal of Science 118(1).



Photographed in pentad Northcliff 2605_2755, this African Harrier-Hawk does its best to ignore the anxious Rose-ringed Parakeets!
©Anthony Paton

Upcoming atlas bashes

SEPTEMBER

Where? Queenstown (Eastern Cape)
When? 30 September - 2 October 2022
Contact: Alan Lee
 alan.lee@birdlife.org.za

OCTOBER

Where? Vosburg (Northern Cape)
When? 14-16 October 2022
Contact: Stefan Theron
 stefan.theron@westerncape.gov.za

Where? Kimberley (Northern Cape)
When? 21-23 October 2022
Contact: Ernst Retief
 ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za

Where? Hanover (Northern Cape)
When? 21-25 October 2022
Contact: Megan Loftie-Eaton
 megan@thebdi.org

New atlasers submitted data in 2022

A Human	A Kirsten	S Banda
V Manganukira	B Cohen	C Venter
S Venter	A Okunaiya	J Blignaut
A Wiggett	H Symington	A Forsyth
D De Waal	P Cairns	D Rautenbach
J Rossouw	R Allen	R Du Toit
L Hobson	I Rossouw	H Holley
F Hoogendijk	L Findlay	PJ O'Brien
C Kraak	B Viljoen	J Leaver
C Taljaard	S Ramseier	C Bierman
A Okunaiya	J Foster	L Dekeda
F Dumon	B Maritz	S Snyman
R Schoeman	N Pieters	B Roberts
D Fry	T Theron	C Fourie
R Conrad	S Amon	G Van Rensburg
D Kretzinger	M Hemp	W Khoza
M Van Zyl	F Webster	P Jordaan
L Leibach	W Hall	A Bosman
GJ Bredenkamp	I Makwetu	R Nel
B Klinck	T Bruneau	M Elburg
K Fraser	M Caine	S Tucker
W Van Biljon	Askari Conservation	AF De Souza
S Isaacs	P Milligan	D Wood
R Reid	J Crawford	R Du Plessis
J De Wit	CB Green	W Janse van Rensburg



Malachite Sunbird from 2555_2735, Maropeng © Anthony Paton.