

Karkloof Sightings

August 2012



Natal Green Snake

Karkloof Conservation Centre



1

We hope you had a look at the blue moon (1) on the 31 August. It's amazing to experience two full moons in one month!

The **Reedbuck** have been seen regularly again. A ram with 2 females were at the Gartmore pan with another ram frequenting the Loskop pan.

There were sightings of a **Cardinal Woodpecker** in the Plane trees at the office. This bird fascinates many scientists, engineers and doctors due to its ability to withstand brain damage considering that it drums away at a rate of 18-22 times per second, with a "deceleration" force of 1200 g. Humans, on the other hand, will lose consciousness under 4 to 6 g's and a sudden deceleration of 100 g will cause a concussion. Through the studies done on woodpeckers, designs have been created to replicate the woodpeckers which have been used in shock absorbers for aeroplane flight recorders and helmets.



Again, all 3 crane species were seen this month. A pair of **Blue Cranes** were foraging amongst Stuart MacKenzie's cattle, a pair of **Wattled Cranes** were regular visitors on Loskop Pan, and about 30 **Grey-crowned Cranes** were on Gartmore and Colbourne farms.

The **African Sacred Ibis** have increased with sightings of about 30 - seems like they too are upset with the Municipal landfill site where they usually occur. **Reed Cormorants** and **African Darters** were seen sunning themselves. A **Grey Heron**, as well as a pair of **African Shelducks** have taken up residence on the Loskop pan.

The **Village Weavers** (2) have started building their nests above the office again. The males were using the vegetation around the garden as well as Charlie's cover crop for their nesting materials. It is amazing to witness such craftsmanship by these birds. I can't even get close to building the same nest with my 10 fingers, yet they are able to build this intricate design using their bills.

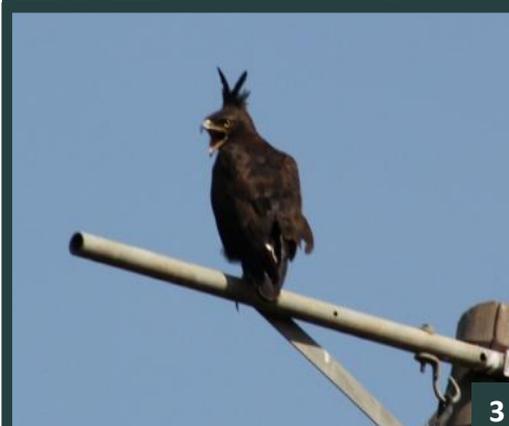
An interesting sighting that was noted this month was a **Common Greenshank**. The **African Olive-Pigeon** (formerly known as a Rameron Pigeon) which is the largest Pigeon in the region has also been sighted.

African Fish Eagles, **African Marsh-Harriers** and **Black-shouldered Kites** have been seen at the pans. **Long-crested Eagles** (3) and **Jackal Buzzards** are seen along the Karkloof Road on telephone poles with **Yellow-billed Kites** soaring in the air.

Others great sightings: **Yellow-billed Ducks**, **White-faced Ducks**, **Egyptian Geese**, **Spur-winged Geese**, **Red-billed Teal**, **Black Crake**, **African Rails**, **Three-banded Plovers**, **Blacksmith Lapwings**, **Black-winged Lapwings**, **African Wattled Lapwings**, **Pied Kingfishers**, **African Stonechats**, **Common Fiscal**, **Cape Wagtails**, **Levaillant's Cisticolas**, **Fork-tailed Drongos**, **Yellow-fronted Canaries**, **Dark-capped Bulbuls**, **White-throated Swallows**, **Hadedda Ibis** and **Black-headed Herons**.



2



3

Mbona - Richard and Glenda Booth

We apologise for the exclusion of the following sightings by Glenda and Richard Booth during July:

On Tuesday morning 10th July, the McDonalds and I saw a single **Secretary Bird** walking through the grassland on the eastern half of Mbona hill.

Then on Sunday morning 15th July Richard and I saw a pair of **Greater Painted Snipe** feeding in a swampy area above Lake Crystal, they flew up as we came closer. Great sightings of not so common birds!

Shawswood - Bundy and Wendy Shaw

Samango Monkeys (4) were seen in the forest and have developed the art of hiding from the camera. A **Bushbuck (5)** was seen on the path from Mount Gilboa to Shawswood. We found a **monkey skull (6)** in the field with a crack in the upper part of the skull.



Postman Pat - Volunteer at the Karkloof Conservation Centre

I apologise! For many years, I have derisively referred to some friends and colleagues as “*bird brains*” when they have done something worthy of entry into the Darwin Awards. I now consider this epithet insulting to birds!

I was watching the **White-throated Swallows** from the Gartmore hide and they have some amazing advantages over humans:- they can fly and they have built in GPS systems. The pair which has moved into the nest under the eaves of the hide is probably the pair which built it about three years ago. How many thousand kilometres have they flown in that time and how many insects have they devoured? The homing instinct is perhaps the most remarkable feature of some birds. Even the humble pigeon which was not gifted with an overdose of brain cells is capable of pinpointing its home from hundreds of kilometres away.

When I was running the Blood Bank in Port Shepstone, I had a problem transporting specimens of patient’s blood from the hospital in Bizana to my laboratory. Usually the hospital would send them with the railway bus service, which took several hours and the specimens were often lost or damaged in transit. Whilst trying to solve this problem I was inspired by a few ales and asked some friends for help. There was a very active pigeon fanciers club in Port Shepstone, and I persuaded some of the members to lend me a few birds which we sent up to Bizana where they boarded with a local policeman. When the hospital needed to send me a specimen, instead of waiting for the next bus (which only ran once a day) they would take 2mls of blood into a small tube, clip it to a birds leg, let it go and phone me to tell me it was on its way. It worked perfectly, and prevented several possibly fatal transfusions of incompatible blood. Birdbrains do have some uses!

It has always surprised me how swallows and drongos risk drowning when they drink from the pans by flying just above the surface of the water and dipping their beaks into it. The **drongos** actually go a bit deeper as I have seen them coming back to their perch with sopping wet chests. I know their feathers are fairly hydrophobic, but they’re not like the amphibians which have webbed feet and can swim and get a bit of forward momentum to take off. Did penguins advance from other species which couldn’t take off after falling in the water?!!!!



Colbourne Farm—Lynn Morphew

This photo shows a pair of **Blue Cranes** on the Colbourne Vlei.

They, together with a pair of **Crowned Cranes**, have been around quite a bit.



Charlie & Robyn MacGillivray @ Kruger Park



Charlie and Robyn went on an amazing hike through the Kruger National Park.

They saw a **lioness** with **3 cubs** which was an absolute delight. The right picture shows two of the cubs who seem intrigued by the presence of the *MacGillivray* species.



Spitzkop Farm - Tim Hancock

In the beginning of August I saw **Lazy Cisticola** and a **Brown-crowned Tchagra** (previously known as a **Threestreaked Tchagra**).

Benive Gardens - John & Jenny Robinson

A pair of **Black Sparrowhawks** used a Long-crested Eagle's nest and in August they managed to fledge their offspring. I am seeing them with the parent in the garden being taught to hunt.

Cape Parrots are also preparing a nest in a Blackwood tree so holding thumbs! The **Orange Thrushes** are being seen in good numbers and in pairs. Now getting ready to breed as soon as we get some decent rain. In general lots of **Sweet Waxbills** in the garden and **White-starred Robins** are seen regularly.

Benive Garden opened from 22nd September officially but as the flowers were \pm 2 weeks early we were open from 15th.

Please call in advance if anyone wishes to visit:

033 502 9090 or 082 443 3805



♥♥♥♥♥ A Snake Love Story Continued ♥♥♥♥♥

In May this year, we had witnessed the Natal Green Snake and the Variegated Bush Snake "cuddling" on our Trellidor. Pat McKrill had mentioned that the fat Natal Greeny seen days later may have eaten the Bush Snake.

In August I found this **Variegated Bush Snake** curled up when I opened the Conservation Centre's door. I do hope this is the same one that survived and that love overcame all hunger obstacles. In September I will be looking for the young hybrids which would really put a happy ending to this story.



Mbona - Pierre Olivier and Ronnie Ritchie



The Karkloof was one of the many lucky recipients of a winter wonderland snow fall on the 7 August 2012! The first picture was taken by Pierre and he explained that he could hear the **Zebra's** teeth chattering while he was taking the photo. The second picture is from Ronnie and I would rather not know what sounds she heard! The last picture was also taken by Ronnie. This photo overlooks the Karkloof Valley from Mbona.

Mholweni Farm - Jennie Shaw



Jennie captured a stunning photo of the Grey Mares Tail waterfall with the snow giving the cliff's edge great definition. She also took this adorable photo of Bakkie's first snow experience!

Peter and Gill Train



Gill took this photo of **Bronze Mannikins** on her bird feeder. They look quite satisfied with themselves for finding food and shelter during the snow. I'm sure we all wonder about what happens to the animals during the snow and we hope that their survival instincts kick in.

Tony Matchett - Agricultural Manager of Benson Farming

Tony Matchett gave us good news that both **Wattled Crane chicks** in the valley have survived the snow! Lets hope the 2 pairs of cranes are able to fledge their chicks successfully.



Thank you to everyone who contributed towards this month's sightings. These reports are useful for tracking changes, trends and monitoring biodiversity.

The Karkloof Conservation Centre would like to thank David Clulow of Boston Conservancy for his inspiration in starting this initiative.

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