

The Fledgling

The Monthly Newsletter of Youth Africa Birding

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Chairman's Chatter

Today I sit down to write this soon after the extremely successful Faansie Peacock Warbler Weekend which was held in Rust de Winter on the outskirts of Gauteng and is the second annual birding event for the youth which YAB has created. The event was named after Faansie Peacock, well known author and southern African bird expert, and the reason we did so was simple: the role which Faansie has played in furthering the development of birding in southern Africa is remarkable and unrivalled by a mere few birding legends such as Austin Roberts and Phil Hockey and thus has found himself, without a doubt, heading toward the figurative birding hall of fame. It is thus understandable that with the younger generation of birders starting to make an appearance, when they hear of Faansie Peacock and see his work and how he is continually making an impact on the birding scene that they themselves look up to him as an inspiration and a role model. It was with this in mind that we decided to dedicate the Warbler Weekend in his name, LBJ's being a speciality and personal favourite of Faansie's.

The idea behind the weekend was to expose those who either struggle with LBJ's, and warblers in particular, and/or new to the hobby of birding to the expertise of Faansie himself with the assistance of some of YAB's more 'senior' members. The birding was to be centred in and around Rust de Winter and the famous Zaagkuil drift road and Kgomo-Kgomo Floodplain, all of which fall within the wider Gauteng 'warbler paradise' radius during the summer months, where we would target species along the likes of Common Whitethroat, Icterine, Willow, Olive-tree, Marsh and River Warblers as well as try our luck for Thrush Nightingale. We managed a solid haul of just over 180 species for the day and half's worth of birding, had a fantastic time wading through flood plains, sitting around the fire each evening and chatting all things birds, slipping and sliding on the mud-clogged roads, admiring Faansie's plates for his up-and-coming book on Waders and of course learnt a whole lot from one another whilst out birding; whether it was birding techniques, ID skills or general birding knowledge. What really stood out for me however was the level of skill of which some of the younger members showed and this truly warmed my heart for before our eyes we couldn't help but notice the eager stares and sharp ears of the future generations of Faansie Peacock's, Austin Roberts and Phill Hockey's right before our eyes.

Yours in Birding,
John Kinghorn

Each year millions upon millions of birds are slaughtered, captured and eaten as they traverse ancient flight paths known as 'flyways',



CHAMPIONS OF THE FLYWAY

routes which have been travelled for thousands of years by birds making their way to and from their breeding and non-breeding grounds in the southern and northern hemisphere respectively. Each year, along with these migrating birds, is a conservation centred event held in Israel which is aimed at raising funds for Birdlife international and their affiliated organizations to help aid them in their quest to prevent the destruction of our migrating birds in various eastern Mediterranean countries. The event is called the *Champions of the Flyway* and is one of the world's most prestigious international bird races.

Teams from all over the world arrive in Eilat, Israel, a good few days before the event day is scheduled where they will then use the time to get back up to standard with regards to the local species as well as to scout out various spots within the race day 'playing field' (the area marked out by the race organizers and in which the competitors need to stay within). Once final preparation is done, areas scouted and calls and ID's are up to scratch, teams then prepare mentally for race day where they go all out against the other teams in a 24 hour race to see how many species of birds they can see within that 24 hour period, the team who records the most then walking away with the coveted title of Champions of the Flyway. Among all the race preparations teams are also encouraged to raise as much funds as possible toward the dedicated conservation cause for that specific race year, with this year's cause being the prevention of the illegal killing of birds in mainland Greece and its islands.

The past two years has seen Birding Ecotours send over a team with this year's team, the Birding Ecotours Bandits, having two YAB members among their ranks in the form of Dylan Vasapolli and Jason Boyce and so it was only natural that YAB members rallied and



#BackedTheBandits in their quest to bring home the title of not only Champions of the Flyway but

also Guardians of the Flyway (team to raise the most amount of money). We are glad to report back that the Bandits came second in the race for fund raising, having raised over R150 000.00, as well as placing 4th in the International Teams and 6th out of the 41 teams which listed during race day. They managed a massive 163 species and missed out on a podium finish by a mere 1 bird! A massive congratulations gents and as the only South African team who competed; you did your country proud!

Lasser Year List Challenge 2016- Updates

This month has been a fantastic one for YAB members who seemed to have really made the best of the final few weeks of summer as we now move into autumn. There has been some serious shifting in the top rankings and this month see's **David Snow** hold onto his 1st position with a total of 507 species whilst **Caroline Howes** has snuck into 2nd place with 491 species having bumped **Melissa Whitecross** down to 3rd on 482 species. Meanwhile **Dylan Vasapolli** has made his way into the top five rankings and is now sitting in 4th on 439 species whilst **John Kinghorn** finds himself slipping away from the pack on 426 species.

The rest of the top ten positions have likewise experienced some shifting among the ranks with **Werner van der Walt** and **Jason Boyce** now tie in 6th position on 395 species, **Ian Luyt** is on 387 and **Nicholas Fordyce** on 357.

Pos.	Team	Unique species
1	 David Snow	507
2	 Caroline Howes	491
3	 Melissa Whitecross	482
4	 Dylan Vasapolli	439
5	 John Kinghorn	426
6	 Jason Boyce	395

Combined YAB has managed to see 724 species within the Southern African sub-region, which is a steady increase from last month's total. The aim of reaching 800 species between YAB members on the combined list is looking alive and well and we are safely on course! As we now move into autumn, birding is going to get substantially harder as we start to lose our migrants whilst they tackle the journey northward, having said this however birding is still great and there is a chance to clean up on some of the endemics we as a group have yet to record as well as some fantastic altitudinal migrants which will move around the country as the weather conditions change.

All the best for the month of April and happy, safe birding to you all!

The Faansie Peacock Warbler Weekend

Faansie Peacock (photos Megan Loftie-Eaton)

Standing on the bridge at Kgomo-Kgomo, staring out over a vast sheet of open water on the floodplain, one would not think that this has been one of the most severe and prolonged droughts the region has experienced in decades. Nevertheless, warbler numbers were considerably lower than in summers of better rainfall and we had to work hard to find our targets. Personally I really enjoyed the excellent views of multiple Whitethroats gorging themselves on berries in an attempt to fatten up for their pending northward migration. And the near-sacred opportunity to watch a Crowned Lapwing hatch from its egg, and see the world for the first time, was a first for me.



It was a great honour for me to have been invited to join John Kinghorn and the rest of the Youth Africa birding squad in the field. I was thrilled and impressed with the level of enthusiasm and skill exhibited by the team, and it is extremely gratifying to see so many knowledgeable and active young birders. Demographic research has shown that the average birder is typically male, 50+ years old, well-educated and rich. But I would

venture that this group of guys and girls, many of whom are still in high school, birding on a student's wages, will easily out-bird the statistical average and veteran birding *ooms*. I also greatly enjoyed hanging out with a whole bunch of new birding colleagues - reminiscing about treasured birding memories, sharing new hypotheses and laughing about memorable incidents. And all to a background of chirping African Scops Owls and grunting Verreaux's Eagle-Owls.

I am still not 100% sure why the event was named after me, but what I am sure about, is that it is a deep and lasting honour - and certainly means infinitely more to me than some academic book review, magazine interview or journal article. I also want to

wholeheartedly thank everyone for their encouraging comments regarding the draft plates of my upcoming waders book. Your kind words will motivate me through the many, many weeks that will remain to finish the project. Perhaps we can have a Youth Africa Wader Bash next year on the West Coast!

Thanks again for organizing such a fun and educational weekend! I can't wait to witness the great things that

Youth Africa Birding will achieve in the future, and I am elated that there has already been such a positive response from so many young birders. Can't wait to go birding with you all again!



Oom Albatross- 40 Year Old Albatross Seen on Cape Pelagic

Andrew de Blocq

I led a pelagic off Cape Point for Cape Town Pelagics on the 24th of February. We had a wonderful trip, seeing all of the regular species present at this time of year. We also managed to find 3 individual Spectacled Petrels, which were the birds of the trip due to their rarity and the photographic opportunities they obliged us with.

While reviewing the photographs from the trip that night, I spotted a yellow band on the leg of an Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross. The bird was flying away from the camera, and I would have deleted it were it

not for this lucky find. I emailed the photo and the text on the band, which read A50, to Prof Peter Ryan, the director of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute, a seabird expert, and as it happens also my Masters supervisor! Peter replied quickly indicating that this bird was a male,



ringed as an adult way back in 1982 on Gough Island when the study on these species started, and must now be well in excess of 40 years old! This individual had returned 25 times to the colony, attempting to breed 18 times but only succeeding in raising 9 chicks. He was undeniably a pathetic parent, but the interesting part of this re-sighting was that this bird is one of the oldest Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses ever recorded. The latest Roberts Birds of Southern Africa (Hockey, Dean and Ryan 2005) states that these birds live to at least 37 years old, indicating this was the oldest recorded to that date. A few adults from that original banding in '82 are still alive, so it is impossible to say if this is the oldest of the lot, but it is still a valuable record of the surprising longevity of these amazing birds!

As an interesting aside, the oldest wild bird ever recorded is a Laysan Albatross, 'Wisdom', who made world headlines in 2014 when she returned to the Midway Atoll to lay an egg, at the ripe old age of 63!

BioMAPping and the Animal Demography Unit's Virtual Museums

Megan Loftie-Eaton

What is the Virtual Museum? When people hear the word museum they often think of a building filled with dusty display cases and stuffed animals. But, the Animal Demography Unit's Virtual Museum (VM) is not gathering dust. Our "specimens", photographic records of Africa's biodiversity, are being used to make a difference for conservation in Africa. The VM provides the platform for citizen scientists (members of the public), or BioMAPpers, to contribute to biodiversity mapping projects. We cannot conserve Africa's wonderful biodiversity if we don't know where species occur. Up to date distribution maps are key for species conservation. The realm of biodiversity conservation is no longer only the responsibility of professional scientists and game rangers; everybody has their part to play in conservation! It is up to all of us to make a difference, the future of Africa's wildlife and natural ecosystems are in our hands. So what can you do? You can snap it and map it!

I encourage all of you to submit your photographs of the awesome critters that you find out there while you are out birding to the various projects in the VM (e.g.

LepiMAP, which is the Atlas of African Butterflies and Moths), along with the locality information and the date. You can try and identify the critter that you photographed, but this is not essential, because the species identifications are made and confirmed by a panel of experts for each



project. Within each VM project there are distribution maps and species lists freely available online, and these also serve as conservation and education tools. These maps and species lists include VM records (that citizen scientists have submitted via the VM website at <http://vmus.adu.org.za/>) as well as other distributional records which are contained within the Animal Demography Unit's databases (e.g. historical records, museum collections, bulk data uploads, records from private collections, expert confirmed sightings records). The data from the VM has been used in the Red Listing and Atlas of butterflies, reptiles, and frogs of southern Africa. This is data that is making a difference.

VM records help expand the distribution databases and information for these various taxa (mammals, reptiles, butterflies/moths, dragonflies, mushrooms, lacewings, spiders, scorpions etc etc); they not only confirm the presence of a species at a particular point in time, but they also provide new distribution records for species and sometimes lead to extensions of the known range of a species. By uploading your photos to the Animal Demography Unit's VM you CAN make a difference for biodiversity conservation. Instead of having your photos sit on your computer gathering digital dust they can form part of a valuable database of biodiversity. Let's take responsibility for biodiversity conservation, let's snap it and map it! If you have any questions about how to submit your photos to the VM please don't hesitate to contact me.

Book the Date!

❖ Flock at Sea AGAIN! 24-28 April 2017

It is often said that pelagic birding is birding on a whole new level and often one is treated to sightings of incredible species whether it be on day trips out of Durban or Cape Town but heading out to the continental shelf of southern Africa is a new level above a new level and is thought to be some of the best pelagic birding in the world and that's exactly where the MSC Opera will be heading on next year's Flock at Sea so make sure that you book your spot on what is undoubtedly going to be one of southern Africa's birding event highlights and your only chance in the near future to connect with some of our waters most sought after pelagic species! For more details visit the webpage on Birdlife South Africa's website: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/flock/flock-at-sea-again-2017>



Advertisement Corner





YAB has its own group on Whatsapp for organizing twitches among youth, “YAB Twitchers”, for further information drop John Kinghorn a message on Facebook!
