



Newsletter 4 – Sept 2008

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## **1. Greetings!**

It seems like Easter was last week and I'm already starting to try and tie up loose ends before the year is over! A lot has happened over the past few months. The Avitourism Division has just returned from a highly successful trip to the British and Dutch Bird Fairs. This year I took a promising community bird guide from the South Coast with me. Innocent used the opportunity to learn as much as possible and to make as many connections as he could. You can read more about our trip under community bird guide news below. I am also busy assisting with the organization of the N3TC Karkloof Adventure Quest, a Southern KZN Birding Route fundraiser



which is due to taking place at the end of this month. As part of this exercise we have been liaising with the media. I had to send a few photos to one of the newspapers but I really struggled to find fresh material. As luck would have it our resident Long Crested Eagle came and perched just outside my office window and posed patiently while I took some nice pics! On a more personal note Sarah accepted my marriage proposal while we were on holiday in Zambia in July. Like I say a lot has happened!

## 2. Community Bird Guide News

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 2008 the dream of a life time came true for Impendulo Innocent Mzindle, when he boarded his flight to England to attend the British Bird Fair. This is one of the world's biggest and most popular bird fairs and offered Innocent valuable insights into the scale and nature of the birding market worldwide.



Innocent attended the fair as a representative of Birdlife South Africa and the Southern KZN Birding Route. BirdLife South Africa's Avitourism Division first attended the British Bird Fair 6 years ago and found it to be an invaluable marketing opportunity. The Manager of the Avitourism Division, Duncan Pritchard, believes that it is vital for the Birdlife South Africa trained community bird guides to experience international bird fairs not only to gain exposure to the international market but also to gain first-hand experience of what an inbound birding tourist would go through when travelling to South Africa.

The British Bird Watching Fair took place from 15 – 17 August 2008 and attracted in excess of 20 000 birding enthusiasts from all over the world. The high standard of the Fair was highlighted by the quality of guest speakers such as Sir David Attenborough. Innocent was one of 5 BirdLife South Africa representatives attending the fair and his aim was to make as many contacts as possible and learn about the workings of this rapidly growing tourism sector. He came into contact with many potential clients and had the opportunity to build lasting friendships and business relationships.



Once the British Fair was over it was off to the Netherlands and the city of Amsterdam where the BirdLife South Africa team and Innocent attended the Vogels Festival or Dutch Bird Fair. This fair is held near the town of Lelystad which is about a 30 min train ride from the vibrant city. This is another big birding fair, attracting in the region of 9000 visitors. Although it is not the magnitude of the British Bird Fair it is still a very valuable marketing and networking opportunity, since it attracts a more independent and socially conscious type of birder who would naturally be more interested in the self-drive birding routes that BirdLife South Africa is currently developing across our country.

Besides being trained as a bird guide Innocent has also attended several other newly developed BirdLife South Africa programmes. As a result of funding received from the N3 Toll Concession (Pty) Ltd. , Innocent was able to attend an introductory course on environmental education and the exciting pilot of the entrepreneurial course which was held in conjunction with Junior Achievement. BirdLife South Africa's Guide Training manager is developing these courses to meet the needs of guides who would like to further their education and careers in Avitourism and for anyone else who may be interested in attending. Prior to attending the entrepreneurial course Innocent had already demonstrated a large amount of entrepreneurial flair and it is hoped that his experience abroad will ignite a burning desire to become a successful business owner in the near future.

### 3. Birding Site News:

#### Marutswa Forest – Site 6.1



The exciting news is that the Marutswa Forest Boardwalk has been completed! Even more exciting is the flock of 70 – 85 Cape Parrot that seem to be hanging about there. John Brown who manages the site says that the Parrots have been providing immense amounts of entertainment including chasing unwanted Long Crested Eagles



out of the forest. Another exciting piece of Marutswa news pertains to a world record. According to Malcolm Gemmel, 2 birders travelling the world to try and break the world record of 3628 species in a calendar year were taken by Keith Barnes to Marutswa Forest and were blessed with 20 new species in 20 minutes. Not bad going at all! Malcolm also played his role in this record breaking attempt by getting them another 3 species. By the time they left the Gemmell's, the pair had seen 3082 species but unfortunately they hit a bit of a snag as their budget had been devastated by the recent worldwide fuel prices hikes. Other species that you may see while visiting Marutswa are the Bush Blackcap, Orange Ground-Thrush and Southern Ground Hornbill. Keith Barnes and other well know birders have been raving about the site, so if I were you I would go and see what they are raving about! In the coming weeks I will be posting a fair amount of new information about Marutswa on [www.kznbirding.co.za](http://www.kznbirding.co.za) and [www.birdingroutes.co.za](http://www.birdingroutes.co.za)

Should you wish to see the Parrots contact the local community bird guide Simphiwe on 072-356-5700.

#### 4. Introducing John Brown – By Linda Bourbon Povall



Popping in to the Marustwa Forest Boardwalk on one of our regular afternoon visits we spotted John Brown, Manager of the Forest Boardwalk, emerging jauntily from his daily rounds of the forest, and stayed to chat for a while in the balmy sunshine of the midwinter afternoon.

Born in rural Harding KZN, as a small child John developed a deep love and understanding of nature and the beauty of indigenous wildlife and plants. Growing up he formed a close affinity with the tribal workers on his parents' farm, and in particular a fascination for their traditional bead work, weaving and pottery, as well as developing an enviable fluency in the IsiZulu language.



John has been appointed to fuse the varying elements of the project as practically as possible by working hand in hand with the other custodians of Marutswa and our local Inkosi Dlamini, as well as project sponsors and supporters such as SAPPIWWF TreeRoutes Partnership, SKZN Birding Route and the Bulwer Biosphere. It certainly takes a rare kind of character to successfully manage and balance the many facets of a new project like this in a small rural area. Inspired in his role as manager of this project which allows him the joy of being outdoors surrounded by natural beauty; interaction with birding and nature loving tourists from all over the world and South Africa; as well as the continuous contact with local community members. Every day is filled with a surprising variety of challenges and events, fueling John with an infectious enthusiasm and calm but intense determination to succeed.

An accomplished crafter in his own right, John learnt to weave reed mats and make brooms at an early age from hours of watching a friend's Gogo at work on her own projects, and developed his own craft patterns and style alongside the other young children on the farm. John has been creating and sourcing craftwork for over 20 years now, and has travelled and bought and sold crafts in London's famous Camden Lock Market, Swaziland, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique as well as throughout his home province of KwaZulu-Natal and has encountered many skilled and original crafters on his travels. Some of the finest of our local artisans are being show cased in the small but beautiful shop at the Marutswa Forest Boardwalk reception. John tells us that he has carefully selected crafts that are often unique, always exquisitely made and also useful, so that the shop is not only a wonderful place for quality unusual souvenirs and gifts , but also services the local rural community in its sale of keenly priced clay pots, mats, traditional ceremonial beadwork, beer strainers, snuff spoons and basketry.

These practical items also produce extra valuable revenue for the Forest Boardwalk and it's crafters as they are in demand by traditional medicine shops and wholesalers in Ixopo, as well as being sold at market days in the smaller townships in the surrounding municipality.

John and the other custodians are working hard to eradicate alien vegetation, and maintain the pristine biosphere of the ancient forest thus preserving the habitat of the many varieties of rare and interesting birds, indigenous wildlife, trees and plants which are found there. In order to achieve this John and the custodians are constantly working and talking with the rural community through Inkosi Dlamini and Ezemvelo Wildlife to stamp out hunting with dogs in the



forest, chopping down of Sneezewood trees for fence poles and the random gathering of bark from protected trees for medicinal use. They have also organised firewood allocation to the community from the eradicated wattle trees. One of the solutions John and his team have come up with in relation to medicinal spoilage of the forest plants and trees, is to work more closely with the local healers and through carefully managed plant and bark collection in the wild, this allows the local community to use the forest resource without spoiling it. The team is also commencing work on their indigenous nursery that will provide the local community with affordable healing plants and tree saplings for home usage as well as indigenous plants and trees for decorative gardening too.

Environmental Education is of course a great passion for all who are involved in this project. John and Simphiwe, the project's bird and plant guide, are planning organised visits from the local schools in the area to encourage the children to become involved and enchanted with this very special forest and to learn more about the eco-heritage of the land and what they can do to conserve this for themselves and for their children. With increasing numbers of visitors and the hard work and initiatives of the custodians, the hope is that more trained and accredited bird and plant guides and other key staff members from the local community will find employment and fulfillment at the Marutswa Forest Boardwalk. John and each of the project custodians and sponsors believe in the sustainability of the Marutswa Forest Boardwalk and its potential for success as a highly valuable resource in eco-preservation and education.

## **5. Birder Friendly Establishment News**

I would like to welcome our newest Birder Friendly Establishment. For those of you that don't already know Oribi Gorge Hotel is a 3 Star establishment located on the edge of the beautiful Oribi Gorge. Besides for offering their guests the "wild five" the hotel owners Paul and Galia are also keen to promote the birding in Oribi Gorge and their own garden areas where they have been planting indigenous trees and shrubs to attract birds.



## 6. Sightings

### August

- Richard Hurt – Male Wood Duck at Old Bird Sanctuary across the road from the Midlands Mall in PMB
- Andrew Pickles – (Site 12.1 Southern KZN Birding Route) – [www.kznbirding.co.za/scr\\_Empisini.htm](http://www.kznbirding.co.za/scr_Empisini.htm) numerous Lesser Striped Swallows flying around. 2 Spotted Ground Thrush were also seen along with displaying Crowned Eagle, a pair of Black Sparrowhawk, Trogons calling as well as Scalythroated Honeyguide amongst the usual array of forest birds.

### September

- William Collingwood – Palm-nut Vultures around Beachwood Country Club. Apparently they have been seen by others in this area.
- Matthew Drew- Marutswa Forest (Site 6.1 Southern KZN Birding Route) – 5 Bush Blackcap, 2 Orange Ground-Thrush, 42 Cape Parrot

## 7. Projects

### Sisonke Birding Route Gijima Funded Project

This project is nearing completion and we are busy finishing off business plans for a mobile vulture hide which will move between Ntsikeni Nature Reserve (Site 8.1 Southern KZN Birding Route), a bird hide at Umgano, a bird hide/ accommodation facility/ information centre at Gqumeni Forest (Site 6.3 Southern KZN Birding Route) and a fixed vulture hide at Sani Pass (Site 6.2 Southern KZN Birding Route). The next step will be to submit these business plans to suitable funders for consideration.



## 8. Events

### **N3TC Karkloof Adventure Quest**

The adventure begins on 27 September 2008! Thus far 25 teams entered and the event promises to be excellent. The N3 Toll Concession (Pty) Ltd have been absolutely fantastic sponsors. Not only have they been very helpful in terms of marketing input but they have even gone to the extent of organizing two masseurs to sooth the tired limbs of our brave entrants. Now that's what I call being thoughtful!

If you or anyone you know of are interested in entering this event please refer to the following website – [www.active-escapes.co.za/events/n3tc/](http://www.active-escapes.co.za/events/n3tc/)

### **The N3TC Southern KZN Birding Tour**

***Experience the best that the Southern KZN Birding Route has to offer on this expedition lead by Professor Steven Piper and Malcolm Gemmell!***

**Dates:** 22 October – 26 October 2008

**Birding sites included:** Beacon Vlei Farm, Marutswa Forest Boardwalk, Sani Pass and Shongweni Resources Reserve

This fantastic itinerary includes a variety of habitats such as wetlands, mist-belt grassland, mist-belt forest, the 5 distinct biomes of the Sani Pass and Coastal Scarp Forest. Specials and endemics include African Rail, Bush Blackcap, Barratt's Warbler, Drakensberg Siskin, Drakensberg Rock-jumper, Gurney's Sugarbird, Bearded Vulture, Mountain & African Rock-Pipits, Cape Parrot, Orange Ground-Thrush, Wattled Crane, Blue Crane, African Broadbill, Gorgeous Bush-Shrike, Green-backed Camaroptera, Martial Eagle, African Crowned Eagle, Verreauxs' Eagle, Striped Pipit & Lanner Falcon.

### **COSTS & TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

- The cost of the weekend will be R4500 per person sharing. R5175 per person single surcharge.



- The maximum number of participants will be limited to 10 birders and 2 tour guides.  
**Only 4 spaces left!**
- The deadline for bookings and full payment is **22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2008**

**INCLUDED:**

- *Accommodation*
- *All meals*
- *Guides*
- *Transport (including pick up / drop off from Durban Airport)*

**EXCLUDED:**

- *Drinks*
- *Gratuities*
- *Flights*

**BOOKINGS/CONTACT**

For more info & bookings contact Sue Anderson on:

- Email: [travel@birdlife.org.za](mailto:travel@birdlife.org.za)
- Cell: 082 777 7202

**All proceeds from this tour will go directly back into conservation and community projects that benefit and preserve wild birds and their habitats.**

The Southern KZN Birding Route is a project of BirdLife South Africa and our primary sponsor is the SappiWWF TreeRoutes Partnership

## **9. The Fast & the Featherless**

BirdLife South Africa recently formed it's very own mountain biking team named The Fast & the Featherless. The team will enter some of the country's most challenging endurance mountain bike races, such as the Dirty Harry and Sabie Experience in a quest to promote birding, raise awareness for BirdLife SA and raise funds for our conservation projects. The team is currently looking for sponsors, so why not consider supporting this worthy cause! For more information you can contact me on [skzn@birdlife.org.za](mailto:skzn@birdlife.org.za)



## 10. Birding Routes & KZN Birding Websites

As part of our new marketing strategy the Avitourism Division has been working on a new, highly comprehensive and easy to use birding route website. The site will allow you to access over 850 pages of birding route information including site descriptions, maps, Birder Friendly Accommodation and Community Bird Guides! The website address will remain [www.birdingroutes.co.za](http://www.birdingroutes.co.za).

The Southern KZN Birding Routes website has been steadily experiencing an increase in traffic. Should you wish to view the usage statistics please click on the following link – [www.kznbirding.co.za/webalizer](http://www.kznbirding.co.za/webalizer)

Thanks very much for reading this newsletter letter! Until next time, enjoy your birding!

