



Newsletter 5 – November 2008

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1. Greetings!

Hello! I hope you are all enjoying spring and the fantastic birding that comes with it. Since my last letter in September we have had so many exciting things happen that I'm not sure what to include in this edition. I know what you are saying! You love reading my writing and therefore I should just include everything! Unfortunately I'm not the fastest writer and time is short but I have included the highlights of the past few weeks. However since so much has taken place at Marutswa Forest and the Sisonke Birding Route, a large amount of the content relates to these places.



2. Community Bird Guide News

Our guides continue to impress me and other birders who have had the pleasure of birding with them. Since one of the biggest highlights of the past few weeks was the launch of the Marutswa Forest Boardwalk, I would like to focus on the BirdLife Community Bird guide at the site, Simphiwe Damakude.

Over the past few months Simphiwe has been working extremely hard on his birding skills. He has been assisted by volunteer mentors, including Trish Strachan who is Chairwoman of BirdLife Sisonke. By working closely with Simphiwe Trish has really helped him when it comes to the immensely challenging art of forest birding. Mary Lynne Atkin and the Reichau Mission also assisted in Simphiwe's development by donating a very nice PDA that included Roberts Multi-Media software. Almost every time I go to Marutswa I see Simphiwe using his PDA to identify bird calls.

Over the past few weeks I have had the pleasure of birding with him at Marutswa and I can tell you that he knows where to find most of the specials including, Orange Ground-Thrush, Bush Blackcap, White-starred Robin, Cape Parrot, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler and many others. Besides for being a good guide Simphiwe is a very friendly man and he is hungry to learn. This is evident by his current endeavours to learn the forest trees and their medicinal uses.

If you would like to spend some time with Simphiwe you can contact him to make an appointment by calling 073 543 8545 or contact his manager John Brown on 072 372 1500 . If you would like to assist in his development as a guide please contact me on 082 325 3514 or drop me an email. Any assistance would be appreciated.



3. The N3TC Karkloof Adventure Quest

The N3TC Karkloof Adventure Quest took place on Saturday 27 September. The event was a blend of trail hiking/running, mountain biking, canopy zip-lining and a series of birding games and riddles which the contestants had to complete. All contestants had to try their hand at two birding games in order to score a time deduction. The first game was a mix and match game whereby they had to match the first part of a bird name to the second part. We used names of birds found in the area but that would pose a challenge to most novice birders. The second game was a bird call identification game whereby birders had to correctly match 5 bird calls (played to them using my Roberts PDA software) to eight possible birds.

The event was extremely successful and achieved the objectives of sparking an interest in birding amongst eco-tourists who would traditionally be more focussed on mountain biking and other adventure sports, it received a lot of media coverage and it raised valuable funds for the Southern KZN Birding Route. As naming sponsors the N3 Toll Concession were fantastic. They contributed far more than just financial support and were definitely one of the main reasons for the events success.

A special thanks must go to all the sponsors including the naming Sponsor, The N3 Toll Concession, Karkloof Canopy Tours for allowing us to use their facilities, Sappi for the bird books they donated, New Balance for the fantastic prize hampers they donated, USN for sponsoring sports drinks and prize hampers and last but not least to SA Birding for donating a copy of Roberts Multi-media as a prize.

N3TC
KARKLOOF ADVENTURE QUEST
 Adventure racing with a treasure hunt quest!

SATURDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 2008
 Tackling the natural beauty and splendour of Karkloof Nature Reserve, participants can expect some of the most challenging and fun trail runs, hikes and biking circuits on the coast to challenge a regular runner.

Karkloof
ROCKWOOD

Distance: 40-50km / 5-7 hrs
Disciplines: trail running / hiking, mountain biking, canopy ziplining, water activity, problem solving and other obstacle activities.
 Basic navigation skills required.
Team Format: Pairs, Mixed & Same Sex Categories, Open and U19 category.
Where: Karkloof Nature Reserve (KZN ARKland)
Start / Finish Venue: Bushwillow Park (20mins from house) along the Karkloof (Riverside) Road.

Accommodation: Self-catering cottages + grassy camping sites with hot shower. All units available at **Bushwillow Park** (R60/pp) contact by Steve on 072 2376247 or the luxury self-contained units of **Rockwood Forest Lodge**: www.rockwood.co.za - contact Cindy on 031 363 5162 for reservations. Visit our event website for other accommodation listings.

Catering: Saturday lunch and dinner available. Dinner tickets can be bought with online entries.

Start times: Race Briefing: 6h30am. Race Start: 9am. Prize Giving: early evening.

Entry Fee: R200/pp - Includes Canopy Slides & Sponsors "Goodie bag" + Incentive Prize for first 20 Online Entries.

Entries are limited to 50 teams so pre-empt now! Proceeds from the event will go to the Southern KZN Birding Route and Karkloof Conservation Centre.

For more info visit the event website:
www.active-escapes.co.za/events/n3tc/
 Enter Online at www.entrytime.co.za
 Event Queries:
 Sarah Colvin 084 240 7277

Sponsors: Sappi, TreeRoutes, USN, Rockwood, and others.



4. The N3TC Southern KZN Birding Tour

Despite poor weather conditions The N3TC Southern KZN Birding Tour held from 22 – 26



October 2008 was a huge success, filled with some great sightings and real adventure!

The aim of the event was to showcase the best that the Southern KZN Birding Route had to offer, to provide birders with an idea of how the birding route concept works and to raise funds for the route.

The tour started at Beacon Vlei Farm on the Midlands component of the Southern KZN Birding Route and then went on to the newly developed Marutswa Forest

Boardwalk, Creighton, Sani Pass, the African Bird of Prey Sanctuary and finally to Shongweni Resources Reserve. The highlights of the tour were the amazing morning spent at Marutswa Forest where the group saw Cape Parrot, Bush Blackcap, Orange Ground-Thrush, White-starred Robin, Grey Cuckooshrike, Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler and many other species. Simphiwe Damakude, the community bird guide at the site was excellent and knew exactly where to locate all the specials and identify them by call. Charles Moore (one of the group) was extremely keen to see a Bush Blackcap and with the assistance of Margret Graham, who is not a rabid twitcher but is a very good spotter the bird was seen as the group was nearing the end of their time in this magical forest.

The other highlight of the trip was the Sani Pass. The pass never ceases to entertain birders and those with a taste for adventure. The group saw most of the targeted species including Drakensberg Rock-jumper, Ground Woodpecker, Drakensberg Prinia, Bearded and Cape Vulture, Gurneys Sugarbird, Mountain Pipit and Drakensberg Siskin. Besides for the fantastic birding the group also had an unexpected surprise when they encountered a truck stuck in the mud on their way down the pass. As the tour guide, Malcolm Gemmell said, “ This tour was plagued by bad weather and nearly came unstuck on the most difficult day of all the descent of Sani Pass. With deadlines everywhere, we did not need to find the Pass closed entirely by a fully laden 8 ton truck, which had spent the night in one spot having rendered what little bit of road was available into an un-holy mess. Enter Client Mr. Charles Moore in his Prado (which he insisted on taking because the Guide’s Condor was too small and uncomfortable) and self, to



save the day. We commandeered chains, snatch-straps, shackles, etc, from the 4x4s waiting in line behind the truck, turned around so that we were facing back up the Pass, made up a series of tow-ropes so that the Prado was standing on rocks, did the same to the Condor which we attached to the front of the Prado, loaded our clients in these vehicles to get maximum weight for traction, got them to lie down in the vehicles in case a shackle broke and took somebody's head off as it flew forward like a bullet, elected a co-ordinator from the spectators to stand well clear, but in sight of both drivers, and one client with binoculars to stand well ahead, but where she could observe the hook under the front of the Prado (Charles was worried this might rip open—so observer Margaret Graham was to scream to the co-ordinator if she could see the hook opening—in which case we were to abort), and then hauled the entire assembly out of the mess to much cheering and hand-clapping.”

We were lucky to have been accompanied by Jon Minister of GO Magazine and you can read his story in the February 2009 edition of GO.

5. The Launch of the Marutswa Forest Boardwalk

What was once an old logging site used in the 1800s, has recently been transformed into the Marutswa Forest Boardwalk, giving locals and tourists the opportunity to experience and discover the natural wonder of the Marutswa Forest. The project was made possible through a grant of more than R1,4 million from the Sappi WWF TreeRoutes Partnership.

Situated in the village of Bulwer, in the southern part of the Kwazulu-Natal region, the Marutswa Forest is home to a variety of rare and endangered plant, animal, tree and bird species which can be spotted while walking through this enchanting piece of nature.

The boardwalk was officially launched on 28 October 2008 by the custodians of Marutswa,



including Inkosi Dlamini, and the project's sponsors and supporters: Sappi Limited and WWF-SA through their Sappi WWF TreeRoutes Partnership, Birdlife South Africa's Southern KZN Birding Route, the Wildlands Conservation Trust and the Bulwer Biosphere.

Guests experienced an early morning birding tour to get a sneak preview of what the forest has to offer birders, and boy did they see some exciting birds. The Cape Parrot were doing their thing and some of the media



were even treated to sights of the Orange Ground-Thrush and African Crowned Eagle. Everyone was then treated to a brunch prepared by the local community. The official launch of the boardwalk followed thereafter.

The Marutswa Forest Boardwalk Project is aimed at profiling and promoting the conservation of Bulwer's unique biodiversity by supporting eco-tourism initiatives that will lead to the conservation of the threatened forest.

The project has also allowed for the construction of a visitors centre where visitors can view the local arts and crafts on sale, enjoy a cup of tea, or just come and relax in this serene area.



The 800m boardwalk takes visitors through the forest where they can see an array of diversity, and enjoy a picnic under the shady trees. Along the boardwalk, visitors can use the viewing decks, observation jetties and an observation tower as vantage points to get a better view of the forest and its biodiversity.

Establishing the boardwalk and its infrastructure created 5 jobs for the local community. The site is also utilized by Simphiwe Damakude who is a BirdLife

South Africa trained community bird guide. It is hoped that more bird guides will be trained at the site as it becomes more popular with birders and eco-tourists.

Should you wish to visit the boardwalk please contact John Brown on 072 372 1500.

6. Sightings

October

- A pair of Baillon's Crake at the Karkloof Conservation Centre – Ray and Helen Biram
- Bronzed Naped Pigeon in Westville Durban – Derek Spencer
- African Openbill at Umdoni Park – Andy Ruffle



- White-throated Bee-eater at Winston Park, Hillcrest – Steve Huges
- Magpie Mannikin, Buffspotted Flufftail and Bush Blackcap at Mpiti Nature Reserve in Hillcrest Durban – Martin Taylor

7. Projects

Sisonke Birding Route Gijima Funded Project

The Sisonke Birding Route project has now been completed and we now have several highly exciting business plans available. The plans include a mobile Vulture Hide at Ntsikeni Nature Reserve and the Umgano Mbandla Tribal area, a Dawn Chorus Centre at Gqumeni Forest and a bird hide at Umgano.

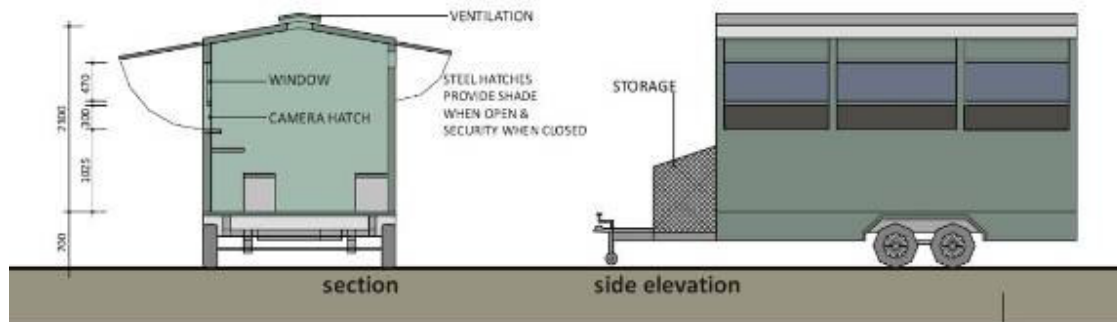


Figure 1: Views of the Mobile Vulture Hide



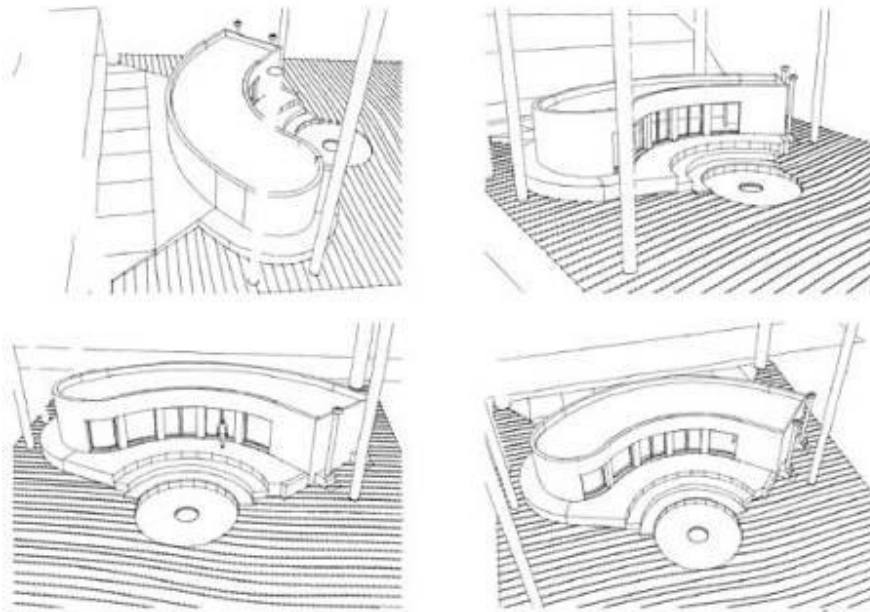


Figure 2: Views of the Dawn Chorus Centre

Currently Gqumeni forest is used by a number of birding tour operators, independent birders, hikers and mountain bikers. One of the key draw cards for birding is the opportunity to experience a dawn chorus in a natural forest setting. A dawn chorus occurs early in the morning when many species of birds are most active and vocal and in a forest setting the effect is that of a chorus of bird song. This is a very unique and pleasing experience for any nature lover.

It is proposed to formally develop a Gqumeni Dawn Chorus Centre that will be able to capitalise on this chorus experience, while simultaneously offering facilities that can accommodate a range of other tourists and tourist activities. The ultimate aim of the centre would be to provide facilities to birders, where there are currently none, in order to encourage more visitors to the Gqumeni forest and so doing, enhance tourism in broader Sisonke area.

There is already a community bird guide operating at Gqumeni. It is envisaged that the guide/s will be responsible on a rotational basis for maintaining the cleanliness of the site. The guide will be one of the points of contact for the hide and will be able to use the infrastructure as an anchor for their guiding business.

All of these projects are located within the Sisonke District and we are currently seeking potential funders. If you know of anyone who may be interested in funding one of these projects please contact me so that we can discuss the matter further. My numbers are 082 325 3514 or 033 234 4367 or you can email me.



8. Volunteers and Support

The Birding Route is always in need of volunteer and financial support. The project is at a very exciting point and is set to develop into something that has significant economic, environmental and social value.

If you would like to contribute towards an aspect of our project either in terms of volunteer time or financially I would be grateful if you would contact me via email so that we can discuss how you would like to support us. For example you may want to assist by funding guide development or one of the Sisonke Birding Route projects such as the Dawn Chorus Centre at Gqumeni.

The potential of this project can grow exponentially if we all chip in and give our support.

9. Birdlife Membership

BirdLife SA is currently on a membership drive and I encourage you to apply for membership on the BirdLife SA website. You can click on the following link which will take you to the BirdLife SA website – www.birdlife.org.za

Thanks very much for reading this newsletter and until next time enjoy your birding! To unsubscribe send the word unsubscribe to skzn@birdlife.org.za

WWW.KZNBIRDING.CO.ZA

