



Newsletter 7 – June 2009

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1. Greetings!

Hello from the chilly Midlands in KwaZulu-Natal! Winter is upon us and we had our first frost on 27 May 2008. Since my last newsletter I have successfully secured enough funding to keep the Southern KZN Birding Route afloat and to implement the Ntsikeni Mobile Vulture Hide project at Ntsikeni Nature Reserve. This project is exciting for several reasons which I have elaborated on below. The Karkloof Conservation Centre and Marutswa Forest Trail and boardwalk continue to grow in popularity and we have some exciting events coming up in the next couple of months.

2. Community Bird Guide News

Since the inception of the project I have been identifying and facilitating the training of community bird guides along the Southern KZN Birding Route. The aim is to create avi-tourism employment opportunities for these guides and to create conservationists amongst rural communities. This has probably been one of the most challenging aspects of the project as avi-tourism is taking time to develop in Southern KZN and therefore the demand for bird guides is not always constant or high. However most of the candidates we have trained have remained committed to the cause, despite the desperate need to earn a living, and this shows how truly committed they are to developing a career in conservation and avi-tourism. I have a fairly close relationship with some of the guides and I am encouraged to see them starting to use their initiative to develop opportunities. Richard and Innocent who attended the Entrepreneurial Training course held last year have opened their own Close Corporation and they have obtained drivers licenses in an effort to start their own guiding tour operation. Their company is called Imvuselelo Guiding Tours and they are in the process of having their own website designed. Thanks to South Coast Tourism Association they were given the opportunity to print their own flyers and distributed them at the 2009 Tourism Indaba. South Coast Tourism has also provided them with the resources required to develop their own website and they funded their attendance at Monty Brett's birding course in March. Another guide that has been showing a huge amount of commitment is Lindelani Zuke, who is based at Umgeni River http://www.kznbirding.co.za/ethr_Umgeni_Beachwood.htm . Lindelani recently passed his driver's license and he will be attending the up and coming entrepreneurial training course which has once again been kindly sponsored by the N3 Toll Concession.



3. BirdLife South Africa are appointed to implement the Ntsikeni Mobile Vulture Hide

In April 2009 BirdLife South Africa were awarded the tender to implement the Ntsikeni Mobile Vulture Hide project by the Sisonke District Municipality. In previous newsletters I referred to the business plans developed by Environdev and the Southern KZN Birding Route on behalf of BirdLife SA. The Ntsikeni Mobile Hide is one of these project plans and it will lead to several developments. One of the objectives of the project is to create an employment opportunity for a black entrepreneur. Mr. Dalu Ncobo, a Birdlife trained community bird guide has been identified as the most suitable candidate and he will end up managing the business as part of his responsibilities at Ntsikeni Nature Reserve. One of the other very exciting aspects of this project is the opportunity for collaboration between Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) and BirdLife South Africa on this project. EKZNW have indicated that they would potentially like to use the hide for vulture research purposes. This would be fantastic and may also allow for Mr. Ncobo to develop some basic scientific skills through his involvement on the project. If all goes well the hide should be operational towards the end of 2009.

As project manager I have already begun meeting with the hide designers and the original designs as seen above will change a fair amount. This is as the result of input from various stakeholders including EKZNW, professional photographers and Capilano Industries (Pty) Ltd (the hide manufacturers).



4. South Coast Tourism Association becomes a Friend of the Southern KZN Birding Route

Over the past few years I have been building a healthy relationship with the South Coast Tourism Association and earlier this year they showed their commitment to the development of birding on the South Coast by accepting the Friends of the Southern KZN Birding Route Proposal submitted to them. The monetary value of their contribution is significant and will be used to market the birding route, community bird guides and support the development of two exciting events on the South Coast. South Coast Tourism have become true partners in our quest to make Southern KZN a premier birding destination.



South Coast Tourism have also developed a very informative website for their component of the birding route - <http://www.flydownsouth.co.za/> This is very encouraging as it shows that tourism authorities are also starting to see birding as a growing eco-tourism activity. We hope to continue building our relationship with South Coast Tourism well into the future.

5. Feature Article in SA 4x4 Magazine

It's too late to get a copy of the magazine but for those of you that are interested I am happy to email an electronic copy of the feature article entitled *Southern KZN's Feathered Treasures*, which was published in the April 2009 edition of SA 4x4 Magazine.

6. The 2009 Karkloof Adventure Quest

We have begun working on the 2009 Karkloof Adventure Quest. Last year's event was such a success that we have decided to keep a similar format consisting of a hiking, mountain biking, the Karkloof Canopy Tours and various birding activities at the checkpoints on the route. However this year we have discovered a more adventurous mountain biking trail in the Karkloof. This should make the event even more exciting as it will take route participants along some fantastic single track and past stunning natural features such as the Karkloof Falls and Karkloof Conservation Centre and Hides. Once again the N3 Toll Concession has come onboard as title



sponsors. The event has been scheduled for 22 August 2009. For more information refer to <http://www.active-escapes.co.za/events/n3tc/index.htm>

7. Celebrating six months of the Marutswa Forest Trail and Boardwalk – by Linda Bourbon Pouval

Our first 6 months of operation has given us some very valuable experience and an understanding of how to solve some problems encountered as well as to look at the organism of the forest and how it might be improved.

The custodians of Marutswa and the Bulwer Biosphere would like to share some very exciting new plans to further enhance the forest experience for our many visitors.

WWF Wildlands Conservation Trust gives

The gumboot the boot!

The very inexpensive and ingenious gumboot hire service at reception, of course up to now has proved a godsend on wetter days, and some moments of truly carefree hilarity for our city visitors, one exquisitely turned out urban lady told me that her gum boot mud wade was enormously good for the soul.

However, not everyone is quite as much of a mud fan as the gumboot lady mentioned so thanks to extremely generous funding provided by **WWF Wildlands conservation Trust**, we are now truly pleased to be able to further **extend the boarded walk into the forest**. In addition a very kind donation of a large quantity of wood chips from Creighton's **Weatherboard Sawmill** will allow us **to strengthen and improve the remaining trail**. We are also working out some rerouting, via grids for destructive roaming cattle, which will alleviate some of the boggier moments seen in our first rainy season.

New Trails and Observation jetty coming soon...

In addition to the improved pathways **WWF Wildlands Conservation Trust** has also provided Marutswa with funds for some really wonderful new features within the Forest, this allows us to create a **new trail and picnic site to the top of the Tanglewood section** which will afford the most exquisite views down into the chaotic poetry of the ancient monkey vines and rock formations, and we are also very excited to be able to begin building a **large observation jetty**



on the upper contour level which will allow our visitors a true birds eye view into the forest at maximum canopy height, we also have been gifted with funds to build an additional eco toilet on the upper section.

We are also starting to clear a **new lower trail**, which will afford new sights and sounds for Marutswa's guests to explore.

Simphiwe's Schools projects

As well as infrastructure changes in the forest **we are beginning to expand the educational possibilities** of the forest and are beginning to draw more local rural children to the forest under the mentorship of **Marutswa's BirdLife South Africa trained bird guide Simphiwe**, and through the generous donations so far from the business men and women of Bulwer who make these visits possible.

Simphiwe is a really excellent mentor for our young visitors who spend the day being enthusiastically shown and taught about the many birds plants and trees in the forest and learning more about the conservation work carried out by all the custodians they then carry their knowledge back to school to make projects about their experience. We hope to continue and expand the number of school visits over the coming year to allow as many local children as possible to experience the delights and secrets of the Marutswa world.

Over the last six months since it's official launch, Marutswa has gone from strength to strength and is fast becoming a well known must see destination. The ongoing success of the forest comes through the teamwork and care of its Custodians, John Brown's expert knowledge of craft and culture, and the volunteers of the Bulwer Biosphere all of whom give many hours of their time to this beautiful and much loved forest. We also thank SKZN Birding's Matthew Drew for his constant advice and support, Mike Exelby, project designer, for his continued interest and our friends at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Suffice to say without the support of our many and much loved visitors and supporters and our very generous sponsors SAPPI WWF and Wildlands Conservation Trust, plus numerous local business people, Marutswa would be just another forest on the edge of a rural town, as it is thanks to all of you Marutswa is a magical mysterious place where the spirit of South Africa's indigenous beauty remains shared preserved and protected.

More information about Marutswa forest trail and bird boardwalk is available from bulwerbiosphere@gmail.com



8. News from the Karkloof Conservation Centre

Come and visit the Karkloof in all its autumn glory! Birding in the Karkloof has increased dramatically and the cranes have returned. 23 Wattled cranes were seen recently, as well as grey crowned cranes and 2 blue cranes. We have had sightings of a lesser jacana, a pygmy kingfisher as well as a half collared kingfisher. Please take note of the picture of the bald ibises that were seen coming to take a drink at the Gartmore hide. We have a bird list of 176 birds that have been seen here.

Our two world class bird hides remain popular and we have a bird guide available for those who would like to know more about our wetland birds. Our picnic site has been revamped and a split pole fence erected around it to provide more privacy and protection from the elements. We have also constructed a braai facility for your convenience. Our golf cart is also available for the elderly. We will shortly be offering "Learning through Nature" art courses for smaller groups of school children.



Please phone our office at 033 3302992 to make a booking or for any further information.

We are situated 15kms outside Howick on the Karkloof/Rietvlei Road.

9. Sightings

May 2009

- **Mike Buckham - Oribi Gorge** http://www.kznbirding.co.za/scr_Oribi_Gorge.htm - a pair of Narina Trogons, Square-tailed Drongo, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Dark-backed Weaver, Crowned Hornbill, African Dusky-flycatcher, Blue-mantled Flycatcher, Southern Boubou, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Collared and Olive Sunbird, Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow-bellied and Sombre Greenbul, Trumpeter Hornbill, Knysna Turaco, Ashy Flycatcher, Red-backed Mannikin, all three woodpeckers (Golden-tailed, Olive and Knysna), Tambourine Dove, Sweet Waxbill, Spectacled Weaver and Grey-headed Bush-shrike.



- **Peter Woolcock – Toti** - Palmnut Vulture
- **Trish Strachan – Springbrook Farm** - http://www.kznbirding.co.za/sisr_Springbrook_Farm.htm - Denham's Bustard's and Cape Parrot
- **Lesley Frescura – New Germany NR** - http://www.kznbirding.co.za/ethr_New_Germany_Res.htm - Spotted Ground-Thrush

10. My School, My Village, My Planet



You can support BirdLife South Africa by applying for a My School, My Village, My Planet Card and registering BirdLife SA as your beneficiary. Each time you shop at Woolies or any of the other business that is part of the programme, a percentage of your spending goes to BirdLife SA. To order your card just phone – 0860 100 445. For more info please see http://www.woolworths.co.za/caissa.asp?Page=ITB4_RHContext&Post=CO-Community_MySchool

11. 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 –

[http://www.birdlife.org.za/index.php?p\[Igcms_nodes\]\[Igcms_nodesUID\]=97e804c8da196469ec4653c2c42ac0f9](http://www.birdlife.org.za/index.php?p[Igcms_nodes][Igcms_nodesUID]=97e804c8da196469ec4653c2c42ac0f9)

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



<http://www.kznbirding.co.za/index.htm>

