DEAR BIRDERS:

This edition of the Oystercatcher will take us to mid-year and for all of those hoping to slow down the passage of time a little, take heart because you have all made it through at least half of the year! Thus far the birding has been good and the club has drawn benefit from our new committee members – here’s hoping that the rest of 2012 will be good to both ourselves and the flying feathered treasures we all so enjoy.

Welcome to new members Pat van Schoor, Michael & Sally Wynne, Paul & Carien Pretorius, Tony & Rozanne O’Hagan. May you have a long and active association with Hermanus Bird Club.

Mariana Delport's 'Gardening for Birds' course was very inspiring and after the lovely rains I'm sure you felt like working in your gardens, planting a pantry full of plants for the birds.

Coming soon is Mike Ford’s course on the 'little brown jobs' of our area. If you would like to enrol, please contact me as soon as possible. The date is 23rd May.

Our morning outing for June will be on the 7th when we’ll drive along the Swart Rivier Road to practice our newly acquired identification skills on the local LBJs.

We are very excited to announce that we've set up a BLOG for Hermanus Bird Club!! What is that all about, some of you may ask? Well, the easiest way to find out is to go to http://www.hermanusbirdclub.wordpress.com/ and see for yourself. We would love to hear what you think about your club being on the world wide web, where you and anybody else interested in birding in the Overberg
can get information about our club and its activities, print a species check-list and enjoy stunning photos of the birds of the area, all at the click of a button. The idea is that you as members can 'follow' the blog and so receive updates and chirps about our activities, as well as read The Oystercatcher on-line. All you have to do is go to 'Follow Blog via Email', (this is the last 'block' on the right hand side of the web page) fill in your email address and click 'Follow'. Viola! Every time a committee member posts a message or observation on the Blog, you will receive an email informing you that there's new post. You in turn can comment on any of the posts, so helping us to understand the needs of our members. Many thanks to Ronnie Hazell for his help with this endeavour.
Till next time.....Barbara

SOME RECENT CLUB NEWS

WILDLIFE IN A VERMONT GARDEN – Observations by John Bowman

We experienced an interesting observation recently. Sheelagh was hanging up washing in the back garden when she became aware of intense, noisy birding activity near the top of our large Milkwood. Having found a Boomslang in our garage the previous week (and that’s another story!) we assumed the birds were having a go at a snake. We looked hard for a while without finding the ‘culprit’. However in the space of about 10 minutes ticked off the following 14 species all participating in the ‘fun’ in an area of about 2 metres:
Speckled Mousebird, Olive Thrush, Cape Robin, Cape Bulbul, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Malachite Sunbird, Brimstone Canary, Cape Weaver, Karoo Prinia, Laughing Dove, Cape White-eye, Fiscal Flycatcher, Cape Wagtail, and Southern Tchagra. Quite an exhibition!

Furry ‘Bird’
Eventually we saw a furry tail moving, and through binoculars were able to ID a Large-Spotted Genet as the perpetrator of all this excitement. After a while, it jumped down but cornered itself in a corner of the garden long enough to enable me to take a couple of photos. Eventually it scampered off.
So wildlife is alive and well and living in Vermont!

Thanks John

OUTING TO DUINEPOS – 13–16th March

This popular venue was once again a great attraction to those lucky members who made their way up to the West Coast National Park. Our new outings organizer, Craig Holmes, pulled out all the stops to make the visit a pleasure for all and the flexible catering arrangements were easy to fit in with. The activities were well organized and we tallied 122 species during the visit. Good sightings of the Black Crake and the African Rail were seen at the Abrahamskraal hide and once again we were privileged to have really good sightings of the Black Harrier. With the tides being well read, there were good marine sightings to be had at the Geelbek hide. Our trip to Velddrif included the estuary and the salt works and was most enjoyable.

Pelicans at Velddrif

BIRDS OF THE ELGIN VALLEY – 21st March

The presentation made by Andre was well attended by Bird Club members. The presentation consisted mainly of photographs all taken by him. The quality was excellent and the birds in and around the Elgin/Grabouw were the highlights of the evening. Andre also produced some excellent photos taken of animals in Kruger and Kgalagadi National Parks. A thoroughly enjoyable evening was had by all.
RAPTORS – Fernkloof Hall  18th April

The bird of the year is the Fish Eagle, so appropriately, Gerhard Vosloo treated us to a wonderful presentation of pictures of Birds of Prey including a stunning sequence showing a Fish Eagle touching down to secure its prey. The monthly meeting took the format of photographs by Gerard Vosloo with a commentary by Mike Ford. Gerard has been holidaying in the Hermanus area since 1957 and it came as no surprise when he decided to settle here after retirement.

His passion is photographing animals and birds but he admits to not being a birding fundi. Nevertheless, his amazing raptor photographs were collected on various visits to Botswana, Kruger, Kgalagadi and the Overberg. All the details about habitats, identifying features and species characteristics were supplied by Mike in his easy and interesting way. Thus the evening had a wonderful mix of both entertainment and edification.

The photographs displayed not only technical accomplishment but also demonstrated an amazing patience in waiting for the ‘right moment’ and good fortune in being in the ‘right place at the right time’. We witnessed territorial scraps between a Crow and Tawny Eagle and between a Fish Eagle and a Tawny Eagle as well as a Secretary Bird looking most bedraggled after emerging from a pool of water. We also witnessed birds attacking and dismembering their prey.

With all the snakes in our area one would imagine that the Snake Eagles would be able to dine in style on most days. Some members present thought that they had identified a snake eagle in the Bot River area and Mike confirmed that an occasional visit by a Black-chested Snake Eagle would be all we could hope for in this area.

As usual, the meeting was very well attended and enjoyed by all.

Thanks Lynn

(Please visit the HBC website to see examples of Gerhard’s work.)
Once in Ruaha National Park, we paid the steep entrance and camping fees (contact me for details, if interested) and pitched tents at ‘Public Campsite No.1’ with the temperature still in the mid 40’s. Fortunately we found a big acacia, on the banks of the mainly dry Ruaha River, to pitch under. There were reasonable ablutions with cold showers, and the tracks in the Park were well signposted. Very soon we were into the birds of Ruaha. New lifers around the campsite included the striking Superb and Ashy Starlings. On our first drives we met the handsome White-headed Buffalo-Weaver, Von der Decken’s Hornbill, Yellow-collared Lovebirds, and the three Cordon Bleus: The Southern, the Blue-capped, and Red-cheeked. All striking new birds, which we were frequently to encounter. And many more! One of the sensible rules at all Tanzanian Parks is that you can walk within 20 metres of your vehicle, as long as there are no animals close—so birding is great! As with Mana Pools, the veld was generally brown and dry, but the Baobabs were starting to come into leaf and flower. Striking! And Ruaha was teeming with game. Although the river below our campsite only held a few pools of water, there was a constant procession of elephants, different antelope, giraffes and zebra for us to observe. Further North on our drives we discovered the Mwagusi River hosting a huge herd of buffaloes. And the big cats! We started seeing lions on our second day, at a kudu kill, and thereafter saw different prides every day. There was a wonderful picnic site at the bridge over the Ruaha, from where one had great views of different Storks, and various water-birds, as well as smaller birds like Firefinches and Green-winged Pytilia’s. Animal wise, the best came last when a family of two lions plus three cubs came down the bank of the river across from our campsite, at sundowner time to drink and chill out. So we did the same from our camp chairs with beers in hand, and watched them! The perfect end to a wonderful five days at Ruaha.
Next, the Udzungwa Mountains National Park for a night. The Turners enjoyed a lovely walk here, while we washed our vehicle after foolishly parking under a tree where it turned out the baboons roosted. Enough said! Then a night in the Mikumi National Park—a lovely little Reserve. Followed by a couple of nights in the West Udzungwas, where we walked, and enjoyed an interesting trip on the Kilombero River in an 8 person mokora dug out canoe, surrounded by waterbirds—and surviving an angry hippo charge!

And so on to ‘secret’ Selous Game Reserve—the second largest wildlife sanctuary in Africa. We arrived via the ‘back’ or Western entrance. Not the usual way in, but we drove from Morogoro on a very rough road through wonderful rural and village vistas. It took about 6 hours to do the approx 150kms. At the entrance gate we paid the even higher entry and camping fees and arranged to camp at Lake Tagalala Public Campsite, 2 hours drive away. We had bought a basic map at the entrance. But with virtually no signs on the tracks, and the park not comprehensively mapped on the GPS, it was not easy finding the way! That’s why we called it ‘secret Selous’. But Selous was green, wild and wonderful. And plenty of game. Apparently only about 5000 tourists visit Selous each year. We imagined it was how much of Africa must have looked long, long ago. We passed lions along the way, and found Lake Tagalala, teeming with hippos, but after 2 hours searching, no sign of the campsite. As it was getting dark we chose a clearing off the hippo’s paths and set up camp. A wonderful wild night in Africa, disturbed by many animal sounds, including a herd of buffalo passing quite close. Next morning we broke camp early, and headed for the nearby delightful hot springs where we had our morning’ bath’. Then birded around the Lake where we enjoyed great views of many water birds, including close ups of African Skimmers. Then a slow drive east exiting through the Main entrance, passing much game and birds along the way. We decided to stay outside the Park at the adjacent and delightful Hippo Camp for 3 nights, as it was more affordable, and paid for a day pass for another visit to Selous. We went for a morning boat ride on the Rufiji River, skirting the camp, and had wonderful close up views of many species, including African Pygmy-Kingfishers, White-Fronted Bee-eaters and Brown-Throated Weavers. On our day pass into Selous next day the game and bird sightings continued. Great mammal views included the striking Black-and-White Colobus (a monkey species).
Black & White Colobus monkey

And among the birds, lifers included Black Coucals, Long-Tailed Fiscals, Black-Throated Barbets, Northern Wheatears, and more! Also fascinating close up views of Lappet-Faced and White-Backed Vultures at a zebra kill. And a wonderland of different green trees and bushes all around—a welcome change after the very brown Mana and Ruaha.

Next Instalment: Frustrating Mkomazi, bustling Arusha, tremendous Tarangire, and fascinating Manyara.
**Damara Tern – Sterna balaenarum**

This smart little tern is one of only four pelagic tern species that breed on our shores, the others being the Caspian, Swift and Roseate. It is one of our smallest terns, with a length of only 23cm and a wingspan of 51cm – considerably smaller than the Common or Roseate, which are about 35cm long and with 76cm wingspan. Here in the Cape we usually see this species in its full breeding plumage, the main features of which are the full black cap reaching below the eyes and down the full reach of the nape, and the black bill. With a total population of only about 2000 pairs, this is certainly one of our most threatened tern species, and the only tern totally confined to the southern and western African coasts.

They breed on deserted beaches, dunes or coastal pans, mainly in Namibia but with a few sites in the Western Cape as far east as Mossel Bay. Laying takes place between November and February, and they depart for their West African non-breeding grounds once their chick is fledged and capable of fending for itself – around March or April. As they lay their single egg in a simple scrape in the sand, their breeding success rate is quite low, not only due to disturbance by man, but through predation by gulls, mongoose and rats. The good news is that the population figures seem to be stable at present, and as most of their preferred breeding sites are situated on deserted and rather inaccessible stretches of coastline, there is hope that this charming little seabird will survive in our crowded world.

**Thanks Mike**
MADALA WINE a vote of thanks:

At our evening and other events, the club often presents a small gift to the speaker, normally in the form of a bottle of wine. Dr Theo and Marie Vorster have generously donated a number of bottles of Madala Shiraz for this purpose. The Madala Shiraz is an internationally acclaimed prize winning wine which is exported to Germany and distributed in Europe. Theo & Marie are willing to supply limited quantities to club members and can be contacted by phone or e-mail.

DIARY NOTE
The following Club activities are in the pipeline from now until the end of June:

- Thurs 3rd May: Walk at Fernkloof. Meet at Fernkloof 08:00
- 9 – 11th May: Outing to Pat Busch. Fully subscribed
- Wed 16th May: ‘Botswana’ by Ronnie Hazell – Fernkloof 19:00
- Wed 23rd May: ID course on ‘LBJ’s of this area’ by Mike Ford – Fernkloof
- Thurs 7th June: Morning drive to Swart River Rd – Larks & Pipits – meet at OTP at 08:00
- Wed 20th June: Members’ Experiences (presentations by John Bowman, Carl Pohl & Mike MacNaught) – Fernkloof 19:00
- Thurs 21st June: Morning drive to Caledon – meet at H&A Village at 08:00
I WISH MY WIFE WOULDN’T BE SO FUSSY!

HBC Committee

Barbara Palmer (Chairperson) 028-314-1167
Keith Brooke-Sumner (Treasurer) 028-313-1633
Lee Burman (Environment) 028-312-3011
Craig Holmes (Outings) 028-313-2458
Cherry Mills (Catering & PR) 028-316-4333
Jamie Hart (Projects) 028-314-1593
Hugh Frangs (Secretary & Oystercatcher) 028-316-2007

Address: Hermanus Bird Club, 69 Berg en See
Pvt Bag X06, Hermanus, 7200