



man^{AT} work

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS **PETER RYAN**



'You might think that as an ornithologist I get plenty of time to photograph birds, but I spend most of my time behind a desk,' says Peter Ryan, Director of the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town. 'And when I do get into the field, I'm usually rushing to complete some sampling. However, I try to structure my field trips to leave the early mornings and evenings free to "play", and I keep my camera handy at other times of the day, just in case...' >



left Researcher Davide Gaglio has spent the past two years trying to understand why the numbers of Swift Terns breeding in the Western Cape are increasing when other seabirds that rely on anchovies and sardines for food are in trouble. This has involved a lot of time photographing the fish brought home by the terns, and monitoring the challenges the birds face delivering fish to their chicks when breeding cheek-by-jowl with Hartlaub's Gulls. We thought it would be fun to contrast this situation with that of Caspian Terns breeding among Kelp Gulls near the Berg River mouth. The gulls usually get short shrift from the terns, but this chase got physical and the tern lost its prey.
Canon 1D Mark IV, 500 mm f4, 1/5312s at f6.3, ISO 400

above Southern mullet are the most common prey of Caspian Terns at the Berg River, but they are often too large for the small tern chicks, and even mid-sized chicks struggle to handle them. This pair worked together to ensure their little offspring managed to swallow a fish not much smaller than the chick itself.
Canon 1D Mark IV, 500 mm f4 with 1.4x converter, 1/3200s at f8, ISO 400

previous spread Apart from seabirds, I very seldom photograph birds at their nests. Local researchers Rob Martin and Jessie Walton are currently studying brood parasitism of Karoo Prinias by Brown-backed Honeybirds. When I was drafted in to help ring the honeybird chicks, I took the opportunity to stake out one of the nests for half an hour or so. After being visited on most days for several weeks, the parents were reasonably confiding, but unfortunately the chick remained stubbornly invisible.
Canon 1D Mark IV, 500 mm f4, 1/1000s at f8, ISO 800

previous spread, right Levaillant's Cisticolas are one of the easiest warblers to photograph in the Cape, often calling from exposed perches obligingly close to the car window. However, this bird, photographed at Rietvlei Nature Reserve, was feeding chicks and had to be stalked on foot to obtain this image of it with an unusually large prey item.
Canon 1D Mark IV, 500 mm f4, 1/2650s at f6.3, ISO 400



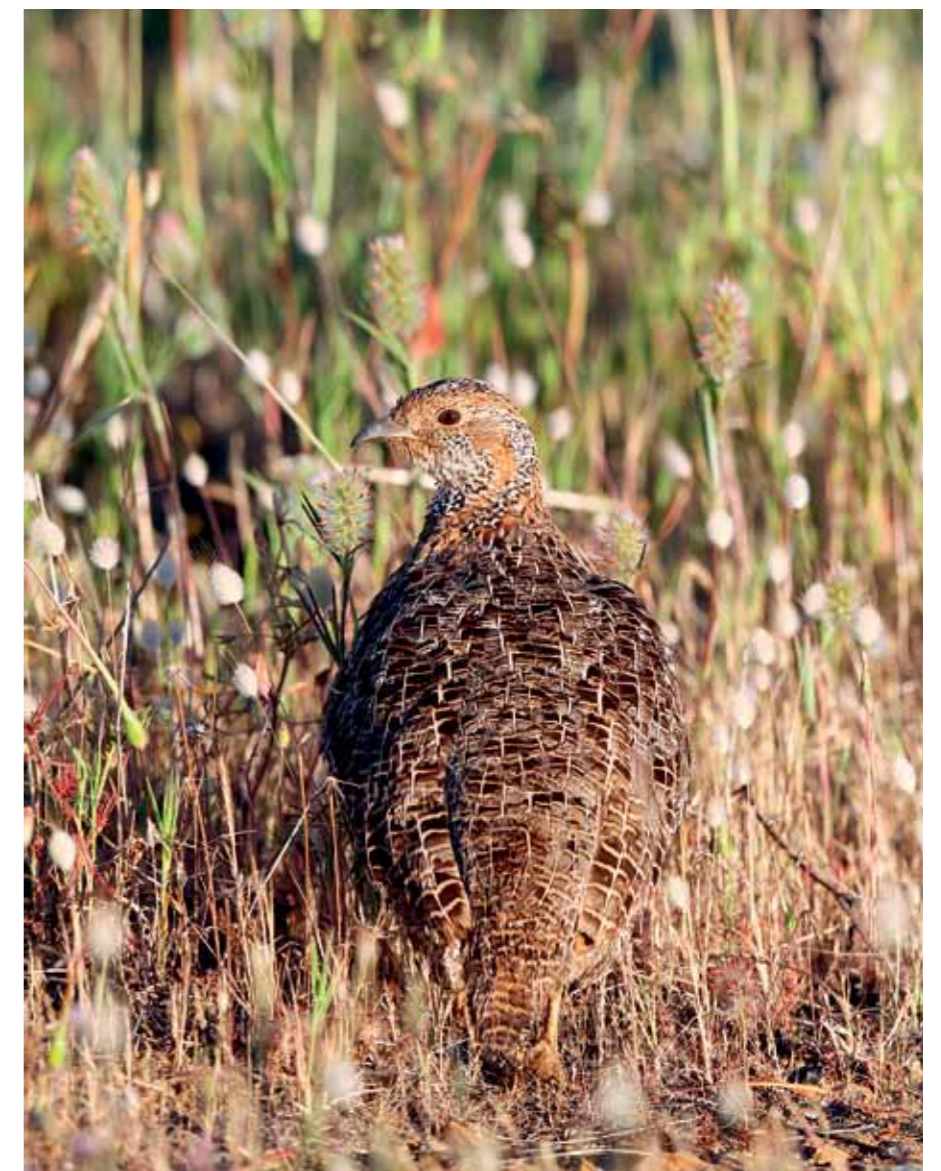
left Despite their widespread appeal, I tend not to spend much time with raptors, but occasionally you get lucky... This Jackal Buzzard was mobbed by an irate Rock Kestrel after flushing from a roadside perch. Fortunately the buzzard continued to soar lazily next to the road, paying little heed to the kestrel, and offered some good photographic opportunities.

Canon 1D Mark IV, 500 mm f4, 1/2000s at f6.3, ISO 400

below Francolins are subtly handsome birds, and their finely patterned plumage shows to best effect in the early morning golden light. Grey-winged Francolins often sit out of the dew on quiet road verges in the morning, and a cautious approach can yield striking portraits.

Canon 1D Mark IV, 500 mm f4, 1/800s at f6.3, ISO 400

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Although a shadow of its former self, Strandfontein Sewage Works is in my neighbourhood, so I spend a fair amount of time there. Greater Flamingos still occur in good numbers, and frequently fly back and forth between the network of pans. Flight shots are easy to come by, but the mirror symmetry of this pair of birds gives the image added appeal.

Canon 1D Mark IV, 500 mm f4, 1/2000s at f8, ISO 400

Paarl Sewage Works is another popular venue for birding – and bird photography – in the Cape. Fulvous Whistling Ducks are regular here, and once again the symmetry of the image lifts it out of the ordinary.
Canon 1D Mark IV, 500 mm f4, 1/1328s at f8, ISO 400 ◆

