The itinerary included some intensive birding from the moment the ship left Cape Town harbour on 1 March. All the following day, spent heading north to Walvis Bay, and during all of 4 March, we had a rotation system for guides stationed at six decks to help find and identify birds. With so many eyes on the lookout and with hand-held radios being used by guides to communicate between decks, it’s likely that every single bird that passed within half a kilometre of the ship was seen by someone. At the guides’ wrap-up session after one full day at sea, we had recorded 34 seabird species – a shade less than 10 per cent of the world’s seabird species! A highlight came late in the evening when a fishing boat passed in front of us, heading for Lüderitz. Trailing in its wake was a mixed flock, including terns, shearwaters, petrels and albatrosses, affording excellent views of many birds that before then had only been seen distantly and giving many Flockers a sense of why a pelagic day-trip out of Cape Town is considered one of the greatest birding spectacles on the planet.

During the cruise there were courses in seabird identification and digital photography, and half a dozen lectures from invited local and international experts. The varied programme ensured that, alongside the regular entertainment provided by the MSC team, there was never a dull moment.

As the ship docked in Walvis Bay, the excitement became palpable. Between MSC and various tour operators in Namibia, there was a great diversity of birding and other tours on offer. Despite a disappointing disembarkation procedure, everyone who had booked a tour got to see and do what they had wanted. And the birding list for the day, from all quarters combined, was nothing short of sensational. For the birders who had mobile phones and vehicles, rapid communication ensured that many bagged some exciting rarities. Although these have not yet been verified through the rarities committee, highlights included Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Redshank, and American and Pacific golden plovers. Special birds for the Walvis Bay area were also seen on several of the birding tours, including Gray’s and Dune larks and Damara Tern. Those who chose to amble around the productive Walvis lagoon were not disappointed, with flamingos, pelicans, masses of waders and huge flocks of terns giving everyone a taste of the amazing birding to be enjoyed.

The AGM was a chance to showcase the high points of another successful year for BirdLife South Africa, announce the 2014 BirdLife South Africa’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) is always a festive occasion, being used as a legitimate excuse to travel to a new location and go birding for a weekend and, while you’re at it, attend the AGM. It is a gathering of birders, also known as Flock. The 2013 Flock was a little different as it was held on board the gigantic cruise liner MSC Opera, which took 1 116 birders from Cape Town to Walvis Bay and back. For many it was their first Flock, their first cruise experience and their first look at real birds (that is, those that eat sea-food for a living).

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Many people contributed hugely to the success of Flock and are too numerous to list exhaustively. That said, three people in particular deserve recognition. First are Adam Riley of Rockjumper Birding Tours, and our outgoing President, Peter Robinson, who was giving to the BirdLife staff, guides and top seabird guides, artists, philanthropists and authors. Peter exceeded all expectations, entertaining all who stood near him on deck with stories and facts about the birds encountered. His two lectures were among the best anyone had ever attended. Every man and woman to whom I spoke who had been at Peter’s opening lecture on albatrosses was moved to tears by his extraordinary narrative. After his second lecture, on penguins, he gave a personal message in support of BirdLife South Africa, and in particular our Albatross Task Force and African Penguin programmes. The amazing duo of Nikki McCartney, BirdLife South Africa’s Events Manager, and Gisela Ottner, one of our star aquarium volunteers, ensured that everything that was within our power to manage went smoothly. Although a team of BirdLife staff and volunteers had helped plan and manage logistics, it was these two exceptional women who brought the trip together so professionally. By the end of the trip, apart from the thanks that everyone was giving to the BirdLife staff, guides and speakers, the question on everyone’s lips was along the lines of what will BirdLife South Africa be putting together for the next Flock? Watch this space... ROSS WANSLEY

above BirdLife South Africa staff members were all hands on deck... from left to right: Sikhana Raushlon, Sam Ralston, Hanneline Smut-Robinson, Nikki McCartney, David Maphisa and Bronwyn Mante.

top: Birdlers came out in force to enjoy the cruise and show their support for BirdLife South Africa.

left: Peter Harrison, whose lectures kept audiences enthralled.

IN THE red

Many of South Africa’s bird species are classified as Endangered and are listed in the Red Data Book of Birds. On 14 February 2013 Elna Insurance and BirdLife South Africa, in association with Charles Greg Jewellers and the Everard Read Gallery hosted clients, friends and donors at an elegant ‘In the Red’ evening at Villa Arcadia in Johannesburg. The evening was held to celebrate Valentine’s Day and, more importantly, to raise awareness about South Africa’s Red Data birds. Cocktails, appropriately red and kindly supplied by Campari, were served to welcome guests as they made their way down the red carpet to the elegant Villa. Mark Anderson spoke about South Africa’s Red Data birds and the pressing need to protect the wetland and grassland habitats which are vital to the survival of many species, and he concluded by stressing the need for ongoing support of BirdLife South Africa’s important work.

Women were treated to stylish black goody bags, containing chocolates sponsored by Aon and Bobbi Brown mascaras. Beautiful bronze bird sculptures were on display, and 10 per cent of the proceeds from sales went to BirdLife South Africa. Frédérique Constant watches were also a feature of the evening, and the lucky draw for a lady’s watch was won by Barbara Cory. Our thanks go to David and Jenny Moss from Picot & Moss for their generous donations of this prize. NIKKI McCARTNEY

EVENTS MANAGER

GAINING MOMENTUM

In November, BirdLife South Africa staff and supporters in Gauteng will be cycling the Momentum 94.7 Cycle Challenge to raise awareness and funding for our crucial conservation work.

We invite you to join us by:
• Purchasing a BirdLife South Africa cycling shirt and riding in our charity group.
• Urging your social network to support your charity ride by donating to BirdLife South Africa through GivenGain;
• Getting your friends and family to join you in riding for the only dedicated bird conservation NGO in the country.

It is easy to join our charity ride. If you are chasing a best time you can still participate on our behalf by riding in our cycling shirt, and help us raise funds by inspiring your social networks to support you and this worthy cause.

For more details, contact Daniel Mannewick on e-mail: Daniel.mannewick@birdlife.org.za or tel: (011) 789 1122 or 082 772 4432.

above The Campari barman displaying his impressive skills.

top: Nikki McCartney and Tania Anderson were on hand to welcome the guests.

above BirdLife South Africa’s Events Manager, Nikki McCartney and Tania Anderson.

Going the extra mile for South Africa’s cycling patron.

Facebook, Twitter

Like our Facebook page: BirdLife South Africa www.facebook.com/groups/814f76071562476

Join our Facebook group: BirdLife South Africa www.facebook.com/groups/101553023504718

To subscribe to our free monthly e-newsletter, go to www.birdingroutes.co.za/forms/newsletter.html or e-mail membership@birdlife.org.za

May/June 2013

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AFRICAN BIRDLife
Dr Rob Crawford is a very deserving recipient of the Gill Memorial Award. Over the past 40 years he has made a major contribution to our understanding of seabird population dynamics, and in particular the importance of fisheries and other human impacts on their conservation. At a time when many government officials have given up in the face of an increasingly difficult working environment, Rob has stubbornly continued to not only produce excellent research, but also to fight tirelessly for the conservation of southern Africa’s seabirds.

Programme of Events

SATURDAY, 25 MAY 2013
• Photography workshop
• Bird identification course
• Threats facing wetland bird species
• Conserving South Africa’s wetlands and grasslands
• Wetland specialists of the Kruger National Park

SUNDAY, 26 MAY 2013
• Photography workshop
• Bird identification course
• Thieves against wetland bird species
• Conserving South Africa’s wetlands and grasslands
• Wetland specialists of the Kruger National Park

This programme is subject to change.

Sasol aims to foster enthusiasm for the preservation of Southern African birds and has committed itself to sponsoring a number of bird projects. These include the Sasol Bird Fair, the Sasol Birds of Southern Africa field guide, as well as bird hides and birding weekends.

The Sasol Bird Fair will be held at the Johannesburg Zoo, Gauteng, on 25 and 26 May 2013. This year’s theme is Conserving our Wetlands. The Bird of the Year for 2013, the White-winged Flufftail, is a wetland specialist.

Both days of the fair are packed with lectures, workshops, guided walks and activities for children. A wide variety of exhibitors will be displaying their wares on the Centenary Lawn and items such as binoculars, camera equipment, bird books and bird feeders will be for sale.

Learn more, for free

The Sasol Bird Fair is the ideal event at which to improve your knowledge of birds and learn more about some of the measures being taken to conserve South Africa’s seabirds. On both days, free talks on a variety of topics concerning wetland and grassland bird species will be presented in a marquee on the Centenary Lawn, on a first-come, first-served basis.

You will, however, need to book for the workshops on bird photography and bird identification for beginners. These will be held in the Old Elephant House and the AngloGold Centre, and a small fee will be charged to attend.

Sasol’s commitment to birds

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Outgoing President of BirdLife South Africa Peter Ryan with Gill Memorial Award recipient Rob Crawford.
With a population of between 1 000 and 1 500 birds, the Black Harrier is southern Africa’s rarest endemic raptor. It has a small world distribution, occurring only in parts of South Africa, Lesotho and Namibia. This globally Vulnerable bird of prey will be uplisted in South Africa from Near Threatened to Endangered during 2013.

FIRST PRIZE: A weekend (three nights, from 27–30 September 2013) for four people at Duinepos Chalets self-catering accommodation in the West Coast National Park. The weekend includes a day in the field with harrier specialist and researcher Dr Rob Simmons, and a full day’s guided birding with Birding Africa. Transport costs are for the winner’s account.

SECOND PRIZE: A copy of Harriers of the World, signed by the author, Rob Simmons.

FOCUS ON THE black harrier

Numbering less than 1 500 individuals, the Black Harrier Circus maurus is southern Africa’s rarest endemic raptor. It has a small world distribution, occurring only in parts of South Africa, Lesotho and Namibia. During 2013 this globally Vulnerable raptor will be uplisted in South Africa from Near Threatened to Endangered.

A striking black-and-white bird, the harrier is found in fynbos, renosterveld, Karoo shrubland and dry grassland, where it feeds predominantly on mice and, to a lesser extent, small birds, reptiles, frogs and insects. The Black Harrier has suffered a considerable population decline in the Overberg regions of the Western Cape as a result of the fragmentation and loss of most of the natural renosterveld habitat.

In its core areas (the winter rainfall regions of South Africa’s west coast) it is confined largely to protected areas. Elsewhere it breeds periodically in the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape, and occasionally in KwaZulu-Natal, where it favours coastal areas or mountains. The Black Harrier’s numbers are thought to vary in some areas as a result of food availability, synchronizing with fluctuating rodent populations. In Lesotho, its migration coincides with the breeding of ice rat populations.

A pilot study is under way to determine the dispersal and behaviour of satellite-tagged Black Harriers, and regular updates on the travels of these birds can be viewed at www.blackharriresetpace.blogspot.com. The study by Rob Simmons has shown that female Black Harriers head for the highest points in southern Africa (such as the Lesotho plateau) after breeding, whereas the males tend to stay closer to their breeding grounds. The urgency for studies on these raptors is intensifying because the west coast region of South Africa is the winter range for 17 species of Cape Petrel, which are known to be threatened with extinction.

A satellite-tagged female Black Harrier is released by Rob Simmons.

The Black Harrier Research Team is affiliated to the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town and is the BirdLife Species Guardian for the harrier under the Preventing Extinctions Programme. Your contribution will help BirdLife South Africa in its endeavours to save the Black Harrier. For more information, contact Hanneline Smit-Robinson conservation@birdlife.org.za

DONATE & STAND A CHANCE TO WIN!

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Black Harrier Donation: R200

Your contribution will help BirdLife South Africa

Terms and conditions apply (see www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species/black-harrier).

To order, download the donation form from www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/threatened-species/black-harrier or call +27 (0)83 256 0491.


duinepos chalets

Duinepos Chalets are a retreat for bird- and nature-lovers. The charming chalets are situated within the West Coast National Park on the Cape West Coast, some 15 kilometres from Langebaan Lagoon and 7 kilometres from the centre of the town of Langebaan. The camp offers self-catering chalets, all of which can sleep four to six people. It is secluded and peaceful – the only sounds you will hear on waking are bird calls.

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AVOIDING CLEAR & PRESENT DANGER

The transparency of glass, while the perfect medium through which to view birds from your home or office, can pose a considerable danger to the birds themselves, trips of collision.

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