

# BIG BIRDING DAY

2018

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## Verlorenkloof



“Frans bracht me vervolgens naar een ander mooi gebied, Verloren Kloof, waar de familie Ahlers later neer gestreken is. Nu wordt het beheerd door Heidi en Erik Johnson, een vriendelijk echtpaar dat respect heeft voor de natuur- en de historische waarden van het gebied.” *Hans Kroon.*

The mountains do not change much in 16 years but the people have changed a little bit.

During November 2003 a small group called the Verlorenkloof team started to do birding with me on Verlorenkloof Estate to assist with the National Sasol BBD surveys, on Verlorenkloof it is a birding, big day. I must admit that I did not even own my own binoculars at that time but the newly acquired green Verlorenkloof t-shirt and cap made me

part of the team. 16 Years later our team is still doing it. We have grown under the leadership of Jane Smart, Geoff Lockwood and the “Cannon” team into a formidable group of almost 40 participants this year. To find 134 birds and most of them rare forest dwellers such as the Narina Trogon, White- starred Robin and Blue- mantled Crested Flycatcher is exciting. I have noticed that there were some over eagerness with certain people who started to warm up almost a week before the big day. With some screening and a little interrogation along the way we made sure that the recordings were legit. Jane Smart has undoubfully got an advantage above the rest in that she carries very strong lenses, and if that is focused on any LBJ nobody is in doubt of what it is. She was also the fortunate photographer of the first African Grass-Owl found on Verloren Kloof in 2013. (See photo below).



**African Grass owl**



**Cape Batis**

**The Verlorenkloof Falcons wow!** Are we African Goshawks, Afrikaanse Sperwers or Peregrine Falcons?(Swervvalke) Both species are regarded as “Standvoels” meaning that they breed in Southern Africa, the latter could also be a summer visitor.

The late Kenneth Newman described the Goshawks , and Sparrowhawks as “ ware valke met slank liggaamsbou,(uurglas) kort geronde vlerke,(sagte handjies) lang sterte,( ronde boudjies ?) klein, skerp snaels en lang, kaal bene en tone (kaalvoet)”. Net soos die meeste meisies vandag. The Falcons and Kestrels were described as “ware valke, kleiner roofvoels wat aan hul spits vlerke en, in die meeste gevalle, aan hul opvallende ‘bakkebaarde” (Jo Black”) uitgeken word. Die wyfie is groter as die mannetjie (hen pecked ?) I like the Amur Falcon’s, *Falco amurensis* their males and females are clearly distinct. Unfortunately it has become a delicatessen in the land of the Gupta brothers and has sadly become a rare summer visitor in our world. Millions of these falcons were caught in nets and eaten. Hopefully the insect’s plagues will now sort out the perpetrators in India and Mongolia. We know how detrimental chemical grasshopper control was on many of our insectivorous birds such as the Blue Crane .



Part of the 2018 Verlorenkloof Falcon team. The others were doing bundu bashing along the watercourse as usual.

It was close to this exact spot where we found a Red-chested Flufftail in 2015. Red-chested Flufftails are heard early in the mornings and sometimes around the edges of seepage wetlands.



Hi Wally, remember this one? One must be able to draw and shoot from the hip. If you are able to catch the “vleikuiken” and hold it in your hand you can take your time and even have a look at its flufftail.

There is an Afrikaans saying, “As jy wakkerskrik is jou koffie koud”. Something about the English names, why do they call a Draaihals, a Red-throated Wryneck, instead of just calling it a Rooineck? I know it is difficult for the Poms to say Rrrooi, but Wryneck is misleading. I think the Common Names Committee of the International Ornithological Congress who has recommended the use of a standard list of English common names across the world must go back to the drawing board. Did you also notice that they have got an issue with red? Every second bird is either, red-headed, red billed, red-collared, red throated or red-titted whatever. These “lighoofdigde” ornithologists should learn to wear a broad brimmed hat.

With trout fishing the English use a technique which they call, catch and release . With regards to the Red-chested Flufftail the technique is called catch, wring and release. Sometimes when the little thing doesn't make it , it is called catching and recycling.



**Red-chested Flufftail.**

Verlorenkloof's claim to fame is the number of special forest species recorded mostly on foot expeditions during the 24h00 period. Geoff has this remarkable ear and a magic tool that enables him to talk to them. He is obviously not very fond of a Chorister Robin-Chat.

The Estates list of bird species has increased remarkably and birds such as the Short-tailed Pipet, Drakensberg Prinia, Red-chested Flufftail, Blue Crane ,Crowned Eagle and the African

Jacana can be added to this list. Something really special that was spotted for the first time in 2017 was the Red-necked Spurfowl. We have heard it but not seen it before.

Another advantage of our birding area is that we can also enjoy the many rare orchid species found on the farm.



Spurs of the *Mystacidium capense* filled with nectar. It would be interested to find out how many of the orchid species are pollinated by birds such as the various species off sunbirds.



**A rehabilitated Crowned Eagle**

You don't want to be caught behind the head with those claws. I have found a leg of a young bushbuck under a nest of a Crowned Eagle. Verlorenkloof does not only provide habitat for a healthy population of Vervet Monkeys but there are also Chackma Baboons and various small antelope species in the patches of dense forests.

Verlorenkloof lie in two distinct ecotones. The high altitude subalpine grasslands (Steenkampsberg Montane Grassland) gives way to deep forests ( Lydenburg Kloof Forest) from where it steps down the escarpment into numerous waterfalls and seeps which gives rise to streams that converges into the Crocodile River . The flatter low lying areas outside of the forests could almost be regarded as Savanna.( Lydenburg Thornveld). During this birding leisurely walk one has a good opportunity to spot a remarkable grassland bird a bird that had been recorded again for almost every year for the last 5 years. The Broad-tailed Warbler, or "Roof tile bird". It seems to have lead in its tail, because it has a very peculiar way of flying and landing. Certainly one of Geoff Lockwood's favorite species. During this survey another species the Croaking Cisticola was prominent. The reason why it imitates a frog is uncertain.



Broad –tailed Warbler. (Wally Davy, 2017)



Malachite and Half-collared Kingfishers are re found regularly along the river. We love to walk with and talk to the birds and crocs along the Crocodile River!



More baldheaded Ibises, with grey moustaches.



It is then that a man with a golden phone and a man with a legendary gun and a very pretty wife, steps forward, almost as towards the end of a rugby game, when the commentator says, " here comes the cavalry! Kerrrrr , click click, click.

We spotted a Lessor Honeyguide. The heavy equipment is pulling him down, by the time he finds the spot the bird has flown away. ☺



If you are able to identify what birds's eggs these are, you might qualify to become a Life Long member of the VKF. With this we came to a halt after a long day . A day well spend with feathers ,family and friends , friends who still have time for each other.

Frans Krige