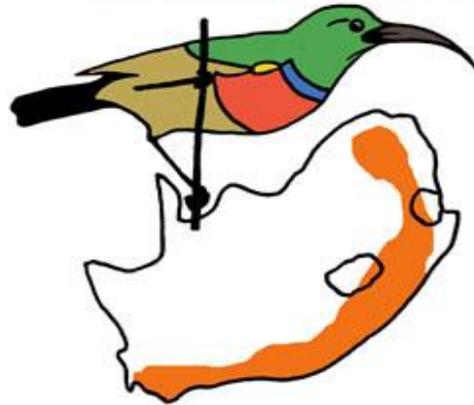


# SABAP2



## Heuningvlei / Morokweng Atlas Bash

**Text: Andre Marx**

**Photos: Elouise Kalmer**

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## HEUNINGVLEI/MOROKWENG BASH

This is a report back on the recent atlas bash to the far west of the North West Province close to the Northern Cape boundary. For too long this hole in the atlas coverage has been staring at us! A group of 10 birders from Joburg and Pretoria from the BirdLife Northern Gauteng bird club travelled the 600-odd km to the area in the week of the 20-24 February 2020. We split into 5 teams to maximise our impact. Atlas participants were André Marx, Elouise Kalmer, Andy Featherstone, Antony Cooper, Christo Venter, Elmien Adendorff, Felicity Kanichowsky, Ida Nel, Pieter Heslinga and Tana Coetzer.

The region had in recent weeks experienced good rains, the first decent rains after 6 years of drought according to local farmers, who were rejoicing at their change in fortune. The veld and the birds had rebounded, and we arrived to find grassland and bushed areas that were filled with displaying birds in full song.

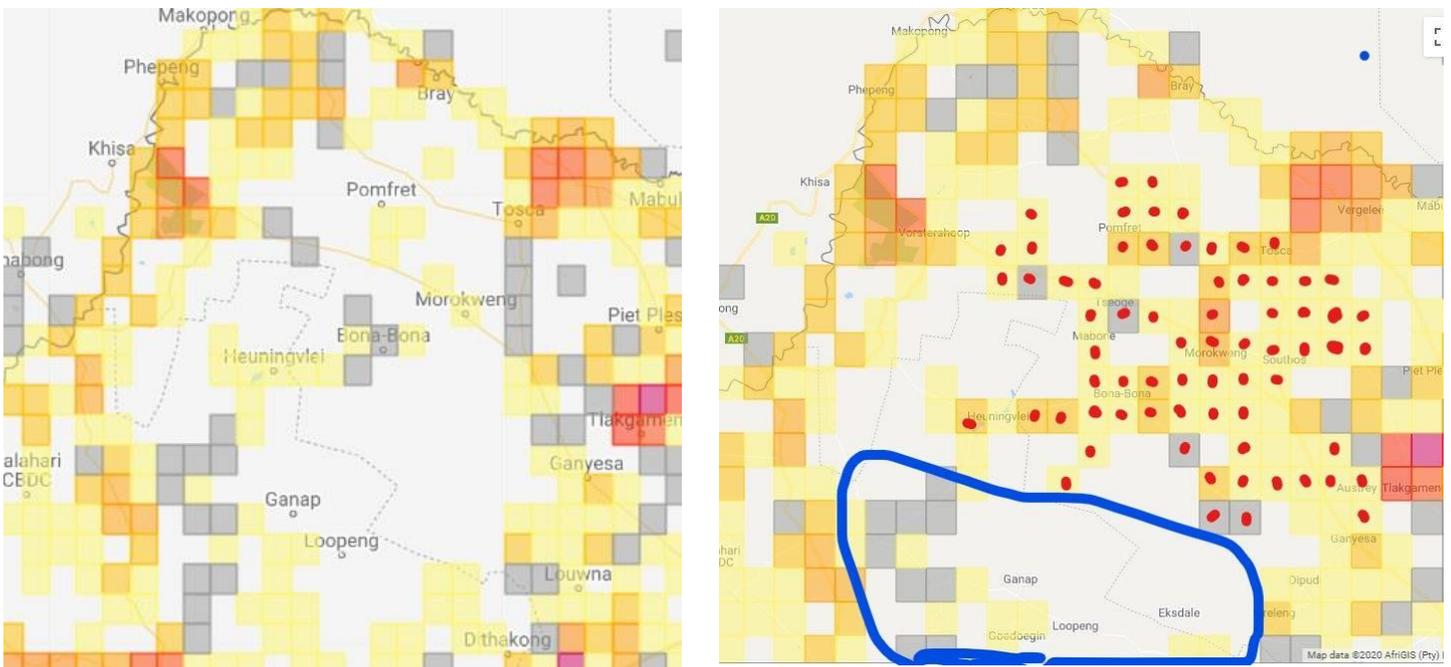


Figure 1 The Southern Africa Bird Atlas Project 2 map before (left hand side) and after (right hand side) the bash. Red dots show the pentads that were visited. A whopping **78 cards, 69 pentads, and most importantly 45 pentads visited for the first time**. The coverage was generally poor and even pentads that gained second and third cards had bird total that were significantly increased. The blue circle shows the area that extends even further south than shown here into the Northern Cape and is an area that is mostly communal land and is difficult to traverse. It will require a special trip and a dedicated bash to be atlased properly.

This is a remote area that is somewhat off the beaten track so there were not many roads to traverse, but from our base just north of Morokweng town (pentad 2600\_2345) we managed to access a number of pentads that have never been atlased. Andy Featherstone designed a 'master map' (Figure 4) to coordinate the atlasing effort. A total of 69 pentads were atlased, with 78 cards in total being submitted. 45 pentads were atlased for the first time and there were 11 ad-hoc cards. A total of 202 species was seen with 6421 records being logged on BirdLasser.



A staggering 292 Out of Range records (ORFs) by my count were generated! Thankfully mainly for common species, and I have now managed to work through these.

As is the case in poorly atlased areas, most ORFs were for common species, with Grey Go-away-bird, Monotonous Lark, Black Cuckoo, Rattling Cisticola, Common Myna, African Palm Swift, Lanner Falcon, Red-billed Oxpecker, Tinkling Cisticola, Lark-like Bunting, Red-eyed Dove, Greater Striped Swallow, Common Buzzard, Green Wood Hoopoe and Jacobin Cuckoo leading the way.



Figure 2 Some stars of the trip! From top left: Cape Penduline Tit at its nest, Northern Black Korhaan in full cry, Black-chested Prinia and a Sabota Lark

Special sightings included fair numbers of Double-banded Courser, Temminck's Courser, Burchell's Sandgrouse, a single Namaqua Sandgrouse, dozens of South African Shelduck at the main Heuningvlei Pan, Olive-tree and Icterine Warbler, and a good selection of raptors that included Pale Chanting Goshawk (many), Martial Eagle, Common Buzzard, Gabar Goshawk (several), Shikra, Lanner Falcon (several), Tawny Eagle, Lesser and Greater Kestrel,



Wahlberg's Eagle. Also, a solitary Black-winged Pratincole, Eurasian Golden Oriole and a somewhat out of range Ludwig's Bustard!

Perhaps the most enduring memory was the stunning display of larks, cisticolas (primarily Desert and Tinkling) and pipits in full song after the good rains. An amazing 10 lark species was identified; namely Rufous-naped, Sabota's, Fawn-coloured, Monotonous (in great numbers), Red-capped, Eastern Clapper, Melodious, Spike-heeled, and Chestnut-backed and Grey-backed Sparrowlark. On one morning 9 larks were found in one two-hour visit to a single pentad!



*Figure 3 Gabar Goshawks were encountered on a number of occasions.*

All told a very worthwhile trip to a forgotten part of the country. At times there were a few challenges with locked gates and torrential rain that produced flooded roads, but the team overcame these odds and persevered! The local people were friendly and helpful at times and there were no problems regarding our presence. But there is still more work to do in follow up visits.



