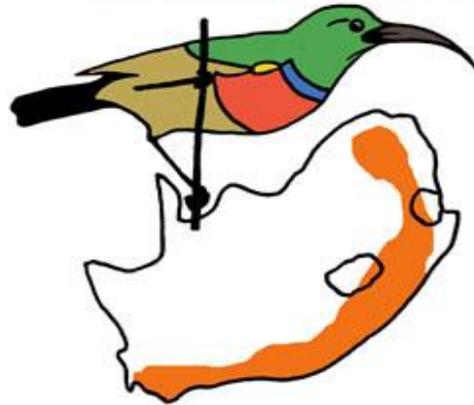


SABAP2



**Lockdown Birding on the Pondarosa Ranch just
outside Nelspruit.**

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LOCKDOWN BIRDING ON THE PONDEROSA RANCH JUST OUTSIDE NELSPRUIT

During these crazy times of the nationwide lockdown my partner Rene Rossouw and I have been privileged to spend our lockdown time on a Ponderosa Ranch just outside of Nelspruit. The farm falls within the 2530_3055 pentad. It's been great to be able to move around the farm and not be confined to just a suburban garden. As a bird guide, and Rene a horse-riding instructor, we have both been placed on forced time off due to the lockdown so we have made the most of our time and decided to join the Birdlasser Lockdown challenge. We both were excited at the thought of trying to identify as many birds as we can on the farm and at the same time atlas therefore contributing to citizen science.

The farm is very large, and we have been able to go across to the neighbours in our quest to find as many species as possible. The habitats are quite varied from open grassland, dams, natural vegetated drainage lines, farmland (macadamia and bananas), Lowveld bush and scrub, rocky habitats with natural vegetation, reedbeds and marshes. The bird diversity in my opinion has been incredible with us seeing just on 160 species of birds, we can on a good day see and/or hear 70 species on a hour walk. When we began the lockdown, we still had some migrants and intra-African migrants present. It was truly an experience one afternoon to marvel the European Bee-eaters gathering to leave. We had well over 100 birds in a flock that perched on the telephone lines!



It was to be expected that when the migrants leave the species number shall drop too, some of the migrants we managed to record included: Barn Swallow, Violet-backed Starling (still present and could possibly over-winter), Wahlberg's Eagle (a pair), African Paradise Flycatcher (also still present and could over-winter), Common Buzzard and Willow Warbler. What was most interesting for us is that during the entire lockdown we could not see or hear any of the Cuckoo species.

In terms of atlasing, we've had some very special sightings, even managing to add new species to the pentad species list! One such species was a Lemon Dove sighting on a cold Lowveld morning. A new bird for the pentad! Some of the other great bird sightings we have had included: Jackal Buzzard (4th sighting for the pentad), Greater Striped Swallow (5th sighting for the pentad), Red-chested Flufftail- a nice garden bird for Rene, Purple Heron, Crested Francolin (4th sighting for the pentad), Brown Snake Eagle (8th sighting for the pentad), Acacia Pied Barbet (5th sighting for the pentad), Grey-rumped Swallow, Black Saw-wing, Common Scimitarbill, Spotted Thick-knee, Water Thick-knee (3rd sighting for the pentad),



Brimstone Canary, Spotted Eagle-Owl, Barn Owl, Fan-tailed Grassbird- used to be a Broad-tailed Warbler.



Like with all birding we have enjoyed some incredible sightings and events take place in-front of us. Having a Jackal Buzzard fly over you while looking at Red-chested Flufftail is some pretty good birding. We also had a great sighting of a Long-crested Eagle fly over us and with us while on a morning run. Watching the Widowbirds change plumage and lose their wonderful colours and long tails has been interesting. It's also been astonishing to see how habitat specific certain species are and how we seem to see certain species repeatedly in the same area - it's been great getting to know a patch so well in terms of its bird population and where certain birds are found.





Marc Cronje ©



The way in which some birds imitate each other has also been interesting and we watched a Fork-tailed Drongo imitate a White-browed Scrub Robin perfectly. Having a Little Sparrowhawk hunting while on a walk was also a highlight.

The lockdown has certainly provided us with some great birding and given me some down time to appreciate the local birds and I am sure hope you all have also been able to spend some time in your gardens or patches and taken in some of the amazing birdlife the Lowveld has to offer. I am sure we are all ready to get back to our “normal” and hopefully we will take the time to appreciate the small things in our lives.

Note: In the text I refer to a pentad, this is used when conducting bird atlassing/monitoring for the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2, and each PenTAD is 5 minute X5 minute area (about 9 km north-south and 7 km east-west in South Africa). My pentad area I covered is located 10 km out of Nelspruit towards Barberton. GPS: -25.546, 30.929. <http://sabap2.birdmap.africa/>

