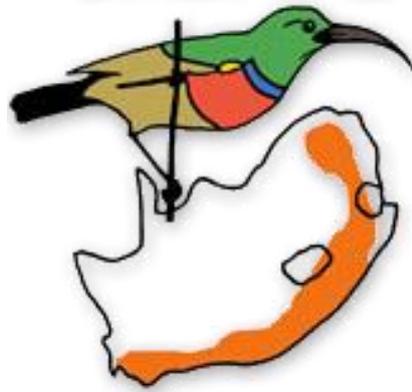


SABAP2



**Turning the Amathole Mountains Green
Stutterheim Atlas Bash**

13-14 February 2021

Cassie Carstens, Cape Parrot Project



Southern African Bird Atlas Project

SABAP2 Reports Series 16

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1. Overview

The Amatola-Katberg Mountain Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) is the largest IBA in the Eastern Cape province in South Africa, and covers an area of more than 300,000 hectares. It stretches from Stutterheim and Qonce (King William's Town) in the east to Fort Beaufort and the Katberg Mountains in the west. It encompasses a range of critical bird habitats, including high altitude grasslands, fynbos heath, and mist-belt forest. A number of globally threatened bird species occur in the IBA, such as Blue Crane *Grus paradisea*, Grey Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum*, Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius*, Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus*, and Bush Blackcap *Lioptilus nigricapillus* (Marnewick, Retief, Threon, Wright, & Anderson 2015). Some species are regionally threatened and include the Cape Parrot *Poicephalus robustus*, Denham's Bustard *Neotis denhami*, African Marsh Harrier *Circus ranivorus*, Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*, and Orange Ground Thrush *Zoothera gurneyi* (Marnewick et al. 2015). Although not mentioned in the referenced document, the Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri* also occurs in the IBA.

The IBA is covered by 69 quarter degree-square pentads which form the basis for the South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP, <http://sabap2.birdmap.africa/>), a citizen science project started in 2007 with the aim of understanding and mapping bird species distribution in southern Africa. Citizen scientists contribute their bird sightings to SABAP according to a set protocol (Underhill 2016). As more bird lists or cards are submitted for each pentad, its colour changes according to the total number of cards submitted. When four cards have been submitted, the pentad is coloured green. Four cards are thought to provide a 'foundational coverage' for analyses (Underhill 2016).



Figure 1 - Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*). Photo: Cassie Carstens.

In 2018, I started the Amatola-Katberg Mountain Subproject named 'Turning the Amathole Mountains Green', with the aim of recording at least four cards in each of the 69 pentads. As research manager

for the Cape Parrot Project, a project of the Wild Bird Trust based in Hogsback, I have spent long hours monitoring the various forests across the IBA, but soon realised that I needed some additional help to find where South Africa's only endemic parrot occurs in the Amathole Mountains. The idea very quickly expanded to cover the entire IBA, and not just the forests and to include all bird species. At the start of this initiative, almost 90 cards were needed in 39 pentads, but this number quickly started falling with local birders visiting the area, until the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown put a stop to any progress. In 2021, I was frustrated enough with staying at home, and with only 45 cards needed in 22 pentads (Figure 2) I was motivated to finish the project before the end of the year!

2. Stutterheim Atlas Bash

The first atlas bash was organised for 13-14 February 2021, and focused on the eight pentads surrounding the town of Stutterheim, in the north-eastern corner of the IBA. The pentads covered a large area of grasslands and thicket, with some forests, timber plantations, rivers, dotted with dams. A total of 20 full protocol cards were needed to turn all the pentads 'green'.

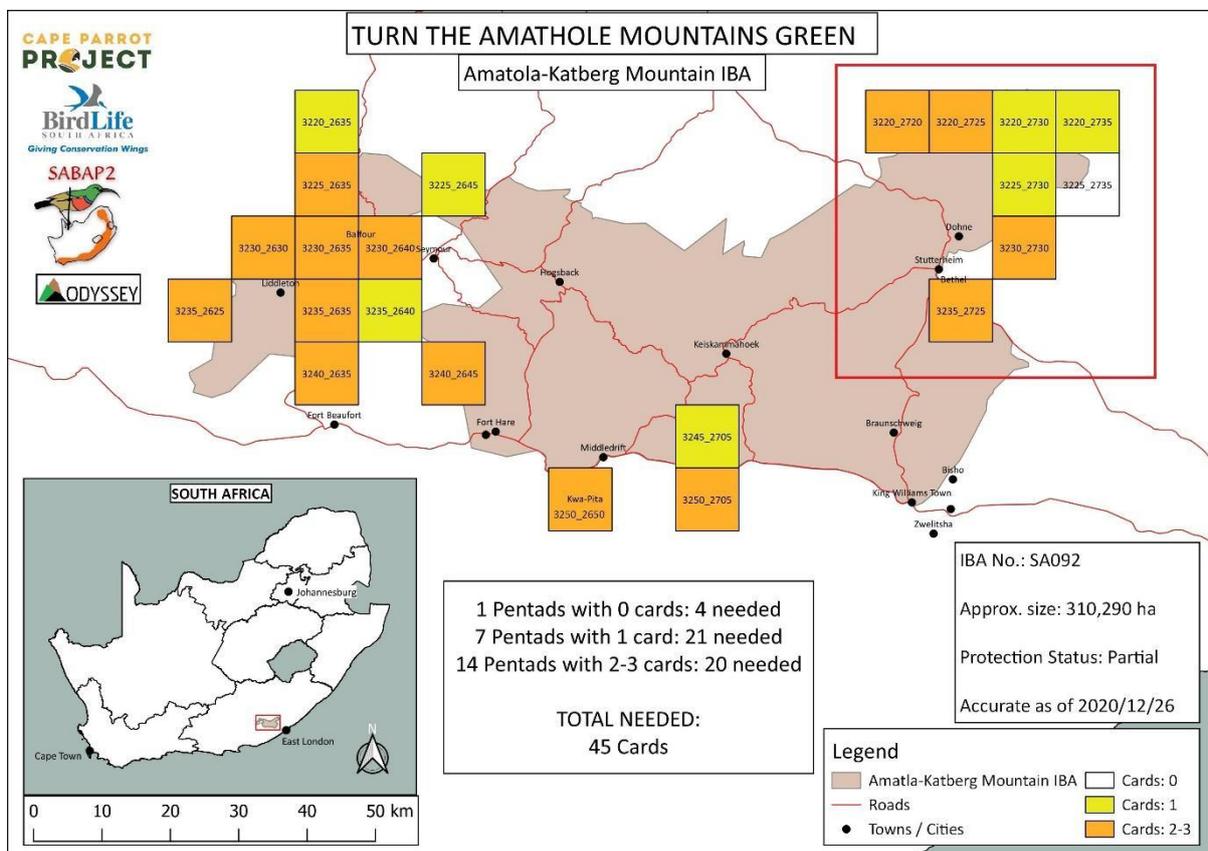


Figure 2 - Remaining pentads in the Amatola-Katberg IBA. Focus area for atlas bash in red square. Pentad data can be found at: <http://sabap2.birdmap.africa/coverage/group/AmatKatMtnIBA>

3. Participants

A total of 16 SABAP2 citizen science volunteers took part in this first atlas bash in the Amathole-Katberg Mountain IBA in the following teams:

- Dora Nell (East London)
- Barbara Monfoort (East London)

- Ian Field (East London)
- Neil Smith (East London)
- Hendrick, Lize, Nadia, and Cobus Smit (East London)
- Tino Herselman (Middelburg)
- Kobus Elstadt
- Jenny and Roddy Furlong (Port Elizabeth)
- Garth, Jean, and Phillip Shaw (King William's Town)
- Cassie Carstens (Hogsback)



Figure 3 - Atlas Bash observers. Photos clockwise from top left: Dora Nell and Barbara Monfoort, Jean and Phillip Shaw, Neil Smith and Ian Field, Tino Herselman, Cassie Carstens, Jenny and Roddy Furlong, Hendrick, Lize, Nadia, and Cobus Smit.

4. Day 01

Most teams started early on the Saturday morning, motivated by my promise of a prize for the team with the most birds in a single pentad. Roddy and Jenny had arrived a few days early from Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) and had done two of the pentads in the north on the Friday. Dora, Barbara, Jenny, Roddy and I held a quick planning meeting in Stutterheim to discuss access roads to the southern pentads where they would be focusing their attention on the day. Soon the WhatsApp chat group was buzzing with pictures and requests for assistance to identify difficult species. Those teams covering the grassland areas in the north were encouraged by the calls of Zitting *Cisticola juncidis* and Wing-snapping *Cisticola ayresii* flitting over the rolling hills. Neil Smith and Ian Field pointed out the flight calls of the small flocks of Quailfinches *Ortygospiza atricollis*, a species that I had not yet encountered in the region.

Garth and his sons were the first to report a Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*, which they saw perching dangerously on a power pylon. Hendrick and his family were the first to find a young Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* during the course of the morning, the only one for the weekend. Sightings and pictures kept rolling in despite the terrific heat.

One of the species that stood out on day one were Cape Longclaws *Macronyx capensis* perched on fence posts and farm gates (Figure 4). They were recorded in all pentads and by almost all of the teams. Cape Parrots were only encountered by Dora and Barbara in pentad 3235_2725 south of Stutterheim. A few of the species recorded during the bash will most likely result in queries from the SABAP vetting team, since they may be rare or not previously reported in the area. These will most likely include the European Rollers *Coracias garrulus* seen in the northern-most pentads, the Black-chested Snake Eagle *Circaetus pectoralis* seen by Tino, and the Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumani* that I encountered. Hopefully the details and photographic evidence we provide will settle the Out of Range queries.



Figure 4 - A young Cape Longclaw (*Macronyx capensis*). Photo: Cassie Carstens.

5. Day 02

The second day dawned with morale and excitement still high from the previous day! The Shaw family, who had spent the night camping next to a farm dam, had accumulated a very impressive list of water birds seen by few of the other teams. African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus*, Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, and African Snipe *Gallinago nigripennis* were some of their highlights seen skulking in the reed beds. I encountered numerous Blue and Grey Crowned Cranes in the wetter areas, while marching across the grasslands were Denham's Bustard and the odd pair of Secretarybirds. The highlight for me was seeing an impressive Long-tailed Widowbird *Euplectes progne* showing off by puffing up his feathers and slowly bowing with opened wings (Figure 5).

Barbara and Dora encountered quite a few raptors during their second day covering the southern pentads, with a Crowned Eagle and many Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo* (Figure 6) spotted perching

on telephone poles. As with the previous day, all teams commented on the large number of Cape Longclaw juveniles that were observed throughout the areas covered.

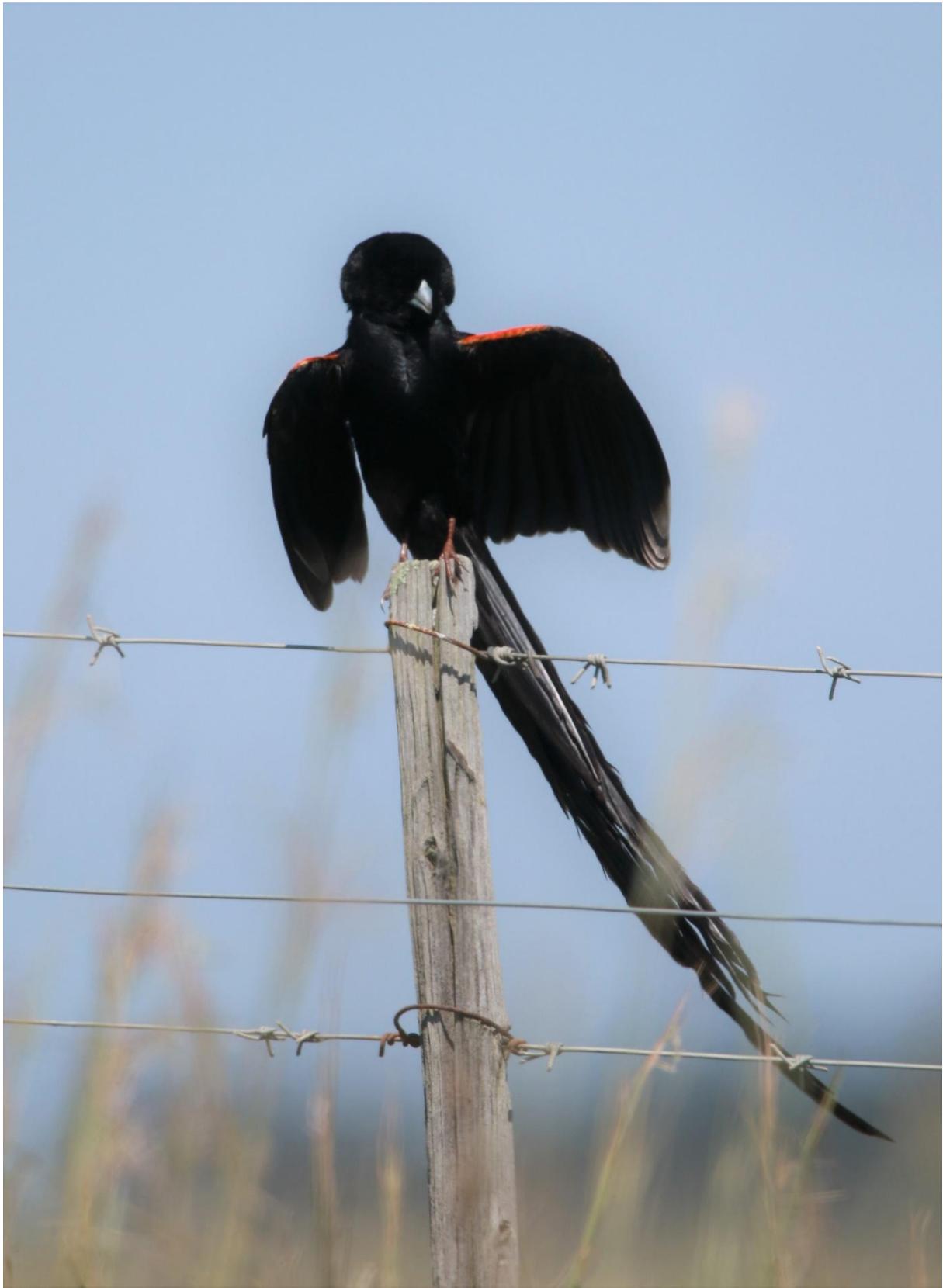


Figure 5 - A Long-tailed Widowbird (*Euplectes progne*) male displaying. Photo: Cassie Carstens.

6. Results

A grand total of 173 bird species was identified by all the teams during the Atlas Bash, with 20 being seen in each of the eight pentads. The full list of species and the pentads in which they were recorded is included in Appendix I.

Over the course of the two days a total of 19 full protocol cards were recorded in the eight pentads, turning all but three of them 'green'. The remaining pentads each need one more full protocol card. They are:

- 3220_2725
- 3220_2730
- 3225_2730

Even though the bash did not result in all the pentads being sufficiently covered, the final outcome is still far beyond my wildest expectations. I will endeavour to survey the last three over the course of the next few months, but hopefully I will be beaten to it by others encouraged by our efforts.

Garth Shaw and his two sons, Jean and Phillip, recorded 100 species in pentad 3235_2725, and they claim the prize for most prolific birding team. Well done The Shaw boys!

I would just like to extend my most sincere thanks, congratulations, compliments, and appreciation to all of the volunteers that put in the time and effort to assist with this subproject. You are all amazing examples of dedicated citizen scientists!



Figure 6 - A Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*). Photo: Cassie Carstens.

7. Next Event

A second event is planned for the second quarter of 2021, and will hopefully take place the third or fourth weekend of May. The focus area will be the large cluster of pentads north of Fort Beaufort in the Katberg Mountains. 11 pentads still need to be covered in that area, requiring a total of 20 full protocol cards. The roads and accessibility of the Katberg Mountain area is very difficult, however, and extensive scouting and planning will need to be conducted prior to the event to ensure that observers have sufficient information about the pentads in which they will be moving. Just for interest, a map showing the current status of all the pentads in the IBA is included in Appendix II (Figure 8).

The annual Cape Parrot Birding Big Day is scheduled to take place on 8-9 May 2021, and if some birders are interested in taking part and possibly doing a few pentads prior to the next bash, they can contact me at cassie@wildbirdtruct.com or on +27 82 321 3302.

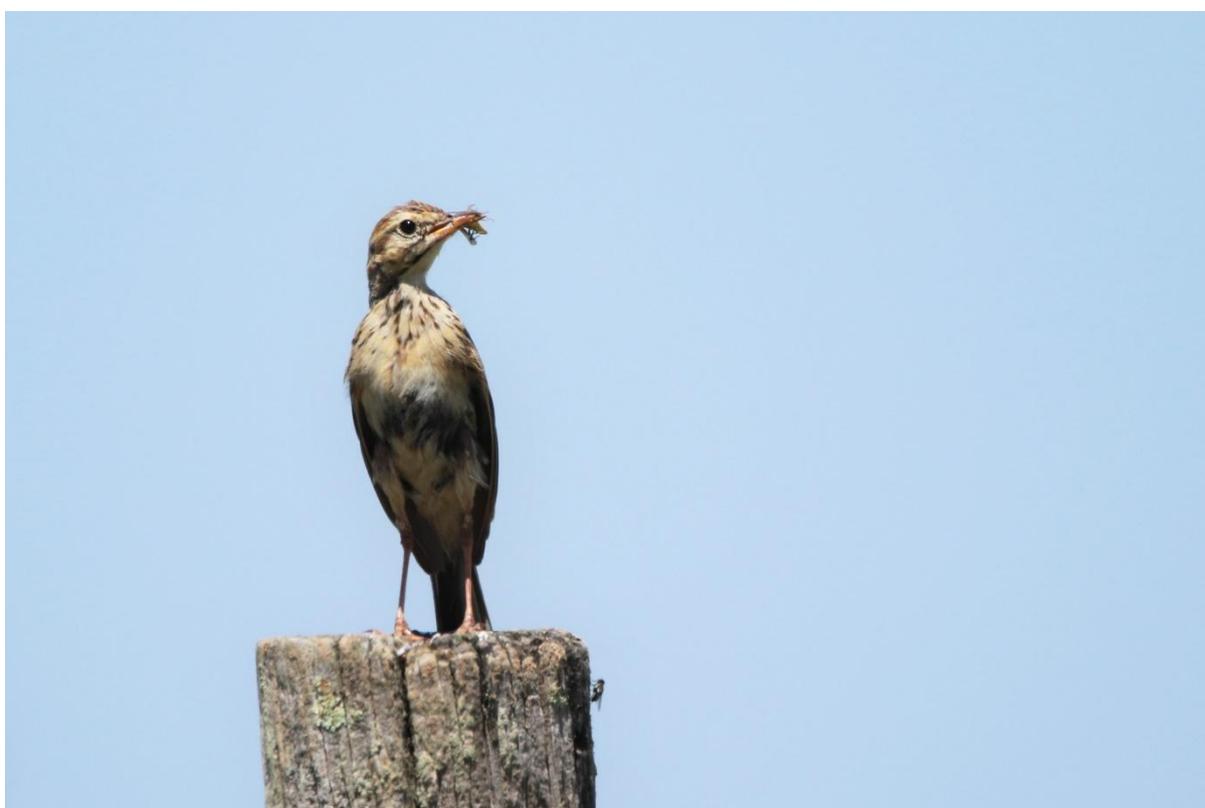


Figure 7 - African Pipit (*Anthus cinnamomeus*). Photo: Cassie Carstens.

8. References

Marnewick, M.D., Retief, E.F., Theron, N.T., Wright, D.R., and Anderson, T.A. 2015. *Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas of South Africa*. Johannesburg: BirdLife South Africa.

Underhill LG. 2016. The fundamentals of the SABAP2 protocol. *Biodiversity Observations* 7.42: 1–12.

9. Appendix I – Total Bird List for Atlas Bash

Bird	Species	Pentad								RR%	
		3220_2720	3220_2725	3220_2730	3220_2735	3225_2735	3225_2735	3230_2735	3235_2725		
1	African Black Duck	<i>Anas sparsa</i>						1		1	25
2	African Black Swift	<i>Apus barbatus</i>		1			1	1			37,5
3	African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>								1	12,5
4	African Dusky Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa adusta</i>							1		12,5
5	African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>					1			1	25
6	African Harrier-Hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>	1								12,5
7	African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>		1					1		25
8	African Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus ranivorus</i>			1						12,5
9	African Olive Pigeon	<i>Columba arquatrix</i>	1	1			1				37,5
10	African Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>						1		1	25
11	African Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	87,5
12	African Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus baeticatus</i>								1	12,5
13	African Snipe	<i>Gallinago nigripennis</i>								1	12,5
14	African Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
15	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>		1							12,5
16	Amethyst Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra amethystina</i>		1		1	1	1			50
17	Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	87,5
18	Ant-eating Chat	<i>Myrmecocichla formicivora</i>	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	87,5
19	Banded Martin	<i>Riparia cincta</i>	1				1				25
20	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
21	Bar-throated Apalis	<i>Apalis thoracica</i>		1		1	1	1	1	1	75
22	Black Crake	<i>Amaurornis flavirostra</i>								1	12,5
23	Black Cuckooshrike	<i>Campephaga flava</i>				1					12,5
24	Black Harrier	<i>Circus maurus</i>								1	12,5
25	Black Saw-wing	<i>Psalidoprocne pristoptera</i>		1	1	1	1	1		1	75
26	Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>					1				12,5
27	Black-bellied Starling	<i>Notopholia corrusca</i>				1					12,5
28	Black-chested Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>						1			12,5
29	Black-collared Barbet	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>			1	1		1			37,5
30	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>		1		1	1	1	1	1	75
31	Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	87,5
32	Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
33	Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>						1	1	1	37,5
34	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		1		1	1	1	1	1	75
35	Black-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus melanopterus</i>								1	12,5
36	Blue Crane	<i>Grus paradisea</i>	1	1	1		1	1		1	75
37	Bokmakierie	<i>Telophorus zeylonus</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100

38	Brown-backed Honeybird	<i>Prodotiscus regulus</i>							1		12,5
39	Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>		1		1					25
40	Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>								1	12,5
41	Cape Batis	<i>Batis capensis</i>		1				1			25
42	Cape Canary	<i>Serinus canicollis</i>	1								12,5
43	Cape Crow	<i>Corvus capensis</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
44	Cape Grassbird	<i>Sphenoecus afer</i>	1	1	1		1	1		1	75
45	Cape Longclaw	<i>Macronyx capensis</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
46	Cape Parrot	<i>Poicephalus rubustus</i>								1	12,5
47	Cape Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha caffra</i>						1		1	37,5
48	Cape Sparrow	<i>Passer melanurus</i>						1	1		25
49	Cape Starling	<i>Lamprolornis nitens</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
50	Cape Vulture	<i>Gyps coprotheres</i>	1	1	1			1	1		62,5
51	Cape Wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
52	Cape Weaver	<i>Ploceus capensis</i>	1	1			1		1	1	62,5
53	Cape White-eye	<i>Zosterops virens</i>	1	1		1	1	1		1	75
54	Cardinal Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicus fuscescens</i>		1		1		1	1	1	62,5
55	Chinspot Batis	<i>Batis molitor</i>	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	87,5
56	Cinnamon-breasted Bunting	<i>Emberiza tahapisi</i>	1								12,5
57	Cloud Cisticola	<i>Cisticola textrix</i>						1	1		25
58	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
59	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>								1	12,5
60	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>								1	12,5
61	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>						1			12,5
62	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		1	1				1	1	50
63	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>						1	1		25
64	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>	1	1		1		1	1	1	75
65	Crowned Eagle	<i>Stephanoaetus coronatus</i>								1	12,5
66	Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>				1				1	25
67	Dark-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus tricolor</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
68	Denham's Bustard	<i>Neotis denhami</i>			1		1			1	37,5
69	Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>			1	1				1	37,5
70	Drakensberg Prinia	<i>Prinia hypoxantha</i>			1		1			1	37,5
71	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
72	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>			1			1			25
73	Familiar Chat	<i>Oenanthe familiaris</i>	1							1	25
74	Fan-tailed Widowbird	<i>Euplectes axillaris</i>			1	1	1	1	1	1	75
75	Fiscal Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis silens</i>	1			1		1			37,5
76	Forest Canary	<i>Crithagra scotops</i>								1	12,5
77	Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
78	Golden-breasted Bunting	<i>Emberiza flaviventris</i>	1	1		1	1			1	62,5
79	Greater Double-collared Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris afer</i>		1	1	1		1			50
80	Greater Honeyguide	<i>Indicator indicator</i>						1			12,5

81	Greater Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis cucullata</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
82	Green Wood Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>		1		1	1	1	1	1	75
83	Green-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>		1	1	1	1			1	62,5
84	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		1				1			25
85	Grey Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra veroxii</i>		1							12,5
86	Grey-crowned Crane	<i>Balearica regulorum</i>			1		1		1		37,5
87	Grey-headed Bushshrike	<i>Malaconotus blanchoti</i>		1						1	25
88	Hadedda Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
89	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>							1		12,5
90	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>			1						12,5
91	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>					1	1		1	37,5
92	Jackal Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	87,5
93	Karoo Prinia	<i>Prinia maculosa</i>							1		12,5
94	Klaas's Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>								1	12,5
95	Knysna Turaco	<i>Tauraco corythaix</i>		1							12,5
96	Knysna Woodpecker	<i>Campethera notata</i>			1			1			25
97	Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>						1	1		25
98	Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>		1				1		1	37,5
99	Lazy Cisticola	<i>Cisticola aberrans</i>			1			1			25
100	Lesser Honeyguide	<i>Indicator minor</i>		1							12,5
101	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				1					12,5
102	Lesser Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis abyssinica</i>				1			1	1	37,5
103	Levaillant's Cisticola	<i>Cisticola tinniens</i>	1	1	1	1		1		1	75
104	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			1			1	1		37,5
105	Little Rush Warbler	<i>Bradypterus baboecala</i>		1						1	25
106	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>							1	1	25
107	Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>							1	1	25
108	Long-tailed Widowbird	<i>Euplectes progne</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
109	Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>								1	12,5
110	Neddicky	<i>Cisticola fulvicapilla</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
111	Olive Bushshrike	<i>Chlorophoneus olivaceus</i>								1	12,5
112	Orange-breasted Bushshrike	<i>Chlorophoneus sulfureopectus</i>				1	1				25
113	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	1				1	1	1	1	62,5
114	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>			1				1	1	37,5
115	Pied Starling	<i>Lamprotornis bicolor</i>						1			12,5
116	Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>	1	1			1	1	1	1	75
117	Plain-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus leucophrys</i>			1	1	1	1			50
118	Quailfinch	<i>Ortygospiza atricollis</i>			1		1	1		1	50
119	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>						1			12,5
120	Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>			1			1			25
121	Red-capped Lark	<i>Calandrella cinerea</i>					1			1	25
122	Red-collared Widowbird	<i>Euplectes ardens</i>			1					1	25
123	Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>		1	1		1	1	1	1	75

167	Yellow Weaver	<i>Ploceus subaureus</i>		1				1			25
168	Yellow-billed Duck	<i>Anas undulata</i>					1		1	1	37,5
169	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>							1	1	25
170	Yellow-breasted Apalis	<i>Apalis flavida</i>						1			12,5
171	Yellow-fronted Canary	<i>Crithagra mozambica</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	100
172	Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus ruficapilla</i>		1							12,5
173	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		1	1	1		1	1	1	75
TOTALS			52	79	67	71	79	94	70	103	

10. Appendix II – Current Status of Pentads in IBA

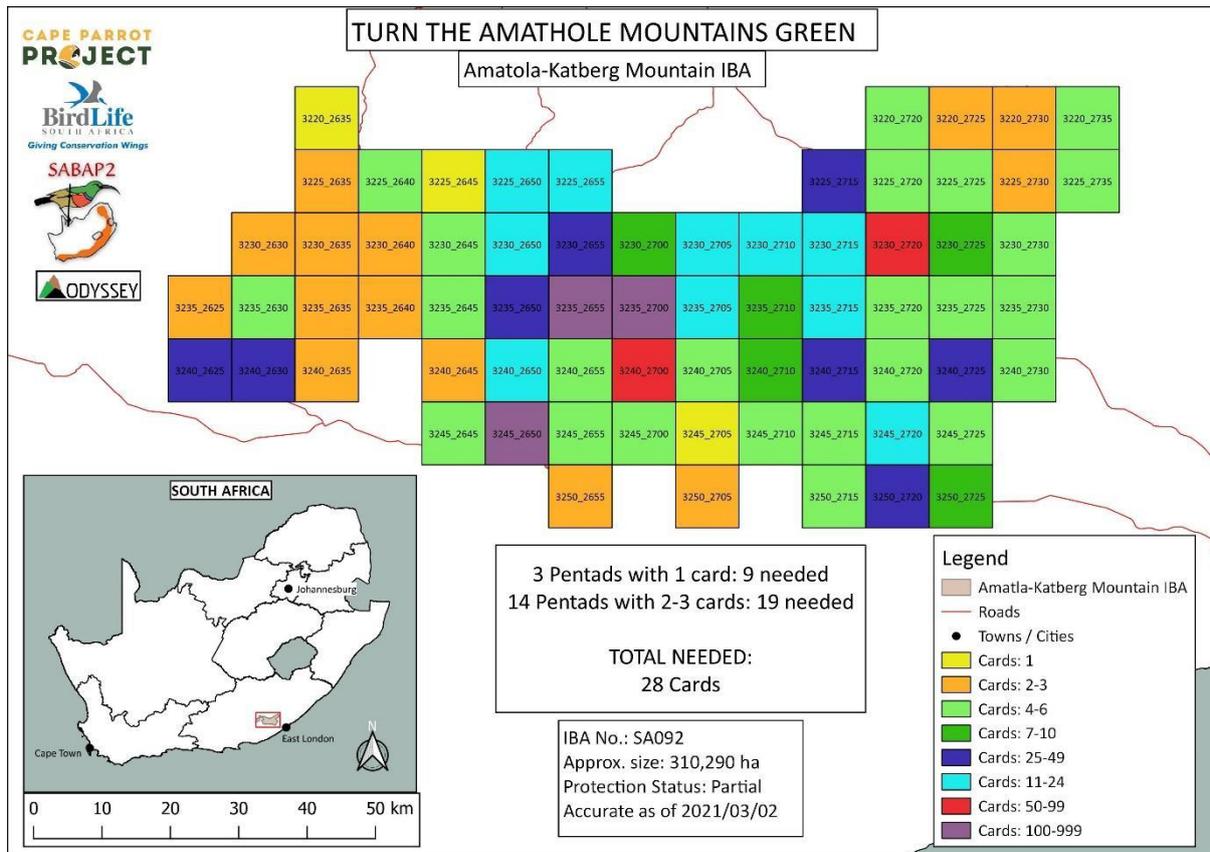


Figure 8 - Current status of all the SABAP2 data for the pentads in the IBA.