

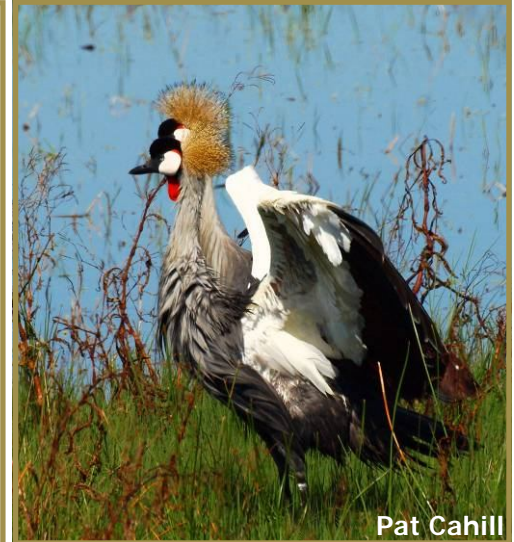
Karkloof Sightings



June 2011

Sightings from the Bird Hides

- 04/06** - 32 Crowned Cranes flying over the Conservation Centre
- 09/06** - ±30 Crowned Cranes on the Morphews' Farm
- 2 African Marsh Harriers
- 1 Jackal Buzzard
- 1 Long-crested eagle
- Pied and Malachite Kingfishers } Gartmore
- 13/06** - 13 Crowned Cranes
- 1 African Marsh Harrier } Gartmore
- ±20 Crowned Cranes
- 14/06** - 21 Crowned Cranes on Loskop Pan (Wattled Crane Hide)
- 17/06** - 2 Crowned Cranes on Loskop Pan
- 20/06** - 42 Crowned Cranes on Gartmore
- 2 African Shelducks at Loskop Pan—this was a “lifer” for one of our guests
- Wattled Lapwings at the Crowned Crane Hide on Gartmore
- 3 Wattled Cranes on Loskop Pan
- 21/06** - 2 Lanner Falcons feeding at the entrance of the KC Centre
- 28/06** - 2 Common Reedbuck wandering around Gartmore farm



Pat Cahill



The Karkloof Conservation Centre



We have a few resident Natal green snakes at the Conservation Centre, but one in particular lives right under our doorstep. I have measured it at about 85cm. It is very relaxed and often pops its head out of the step before venturing off into the garden. I also had a little one keep me company in the office one day as you can see in the above photo.

There have been numerous sightings of Crowned Cranes in June which was exciting for many bird watchers. On the 20 June, I heard the Crownies with their distinctive “ma-Hem” call and I walked outside to have a look. There were 30 crownies flying over in a perfect row (which was a great help while counting) and they landed on Gartmore in the field next to the pan. A few minutes later, I heard some more calling from the sky and another 10 landed with the other 30 and another 2 joined after that. It was very rewarding seeing so many together.



Postman Pat's Sigh-things

The Hamerkop is not uncommon in KZN, but I haven't seen as many in the Karkloof as I have in Merrivale Heights – there is a family who have built two of their huge nests in trees on the other side of my street. Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa says the nest "may weigh up to 50kg" and the "roof withstands the weight of a full grown man". A WESSA staff member at Umgeni Valley told me there is a Zulu myth that if you kill one, lightning will strike you! He considered this to have originated with the tribal elders who didn't like frogs defecating in their drinking water and wanted to protect the uThekwane from predatory picannins with catapults so that it could nosh the frogs!



When the Conservation Centre opened about 4 years ago, I used to see large flocks of Wattled Cranes – on one occasion 35, which is a fair percentage of the estimated 260 birds in South Africa. About two years ago, they virtually disappeared, with occasional birds putting in an appearance. Lately, however they seem to be making a comeback and these two flew into the Loskop pan on the 4th of June with two others. There have subsequently been more sightings and the Grey Crowned Cranes are visiting more regularly, with a flock of 32 having been seen recently.

The African Rail is a "shy skulker in dense reeds" according to Roberts and "rarely comes out into open shallow water to feed". The ones which appear on the Gartmore Dam have obviously read the book as they tend to dash across the open bit of waters edge as if they were being chased by the Devil. This one was seen on the same day as the Wattled Cranes.



Many visitors have reported seeing Marsh Harriers from the Karkloof Hides and I have been trying to get a good shot of one for years, but they are usually too far away. On the 28th June, this one came close enough to the Loskop hide for me to catch it.

The Robinsons of Benvie

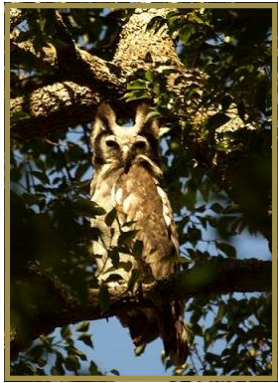
John Robinson informed me of the recent sightings on their Farm. Orange Ground Thrush and Knysna Turaco are in good numbers in Benvie Garden as well as 2 separate sightings of White Starred Robin over the weekend which indicates they are resident with us during winter.

A visitor to the garden saw 9 different Orange Ground Thrush on the Sunday morning in ± 3 hours and general birding was excellent.

The MacGillivrays of Gartmore

Charlie and Robyn phoned me the one day and showed me a Giant Eagle Owl which was hidden quite well in the foliage of the trees. Robyn had spotted it when she was watching the two African Harrier Hawks (*Gymnogenes*) flying above their garden.

Charlie informed Postman Pat about the owl and he jumped at the opportunity to photograph it. He managed to get some nice photographs of the owl.



Pat read a book "West Coast Cederberg to sea" by Karena du Plessis and Vanessa Cowling – a fascinating well illustrated travelogue of the West Coast. They write about the area and its residents and they tell of a local wheat farmer near Velddrif who had a problem with rats and used to spend up to R40 000 a year on rat poison. He decided to be more environmentally friendly and put up owl nesting boxes all over his farm. When the book was published in 2006, he hadn't spent any money on poisons in the year to date, and his rodent problem had virtually disappeared! A family of two adults and six youngsters can destroy about a thousand rodents during a typical three month nesting period.

Well done Charlie and Robbie on your owl sighting!

The Stubbs of Bartersfield and Denleigh

Britt Stubbs mentioned that they are seeing small groups of Oribi regularly on the ryegrass pastures on Bartersfield (total up to 12). They also see the Waterbuck herd emerging from the indigenous bush up there in the evenings.

They have had a juvenile crowned eagle in their garden - making a lot of noise and attracting a gymnogene which has been hanging around for a while.

The Gobles of Triandra

On the 8 June, there were 2 Wattled Cranes that flew over Triandra farm which was seen on the way to the farm school.

On the 24 June, 2 Oribi were seen on the Loskop mountain in the red grass hayfield.

On the 26 June there were 2 Crownies and a juvenile on the farm. That same night, there was a jackal attack, this was due to the fact that the donkeys were not there to protect the close to calving cows.

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE THAT MADE A CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE JUNE SIGHTINGS!!