

The Summer 2014 CAR count went by very smoothly thanks to an amazing effort by the Precinct Organisers and participants! I was very happy to see the CAR Roadcount forms flooding in soon after the count, and I'm pleased to report that most have been captured. Great job everyone!

Results for the Summer 2014 Count

The Bronkhorstspruit area in Gauteng seemed to have an overall poor count. Awie Coetzee and his team saw 39 birds, 32 of which were Helmeted Guineafowl. Craig Whittington-Jones experienced poor conditions on GB02; there was a bad haze that created harsh light conditions, they were unable to cross the Wilge River and at the end of the day they could only complete 22km of the route – only seeing 8 Northern Black Korhaan. Peter Huggins and his team (GB03) also had a very hot count! At the OS River they found a large colony of South African Cliff Swallows nesting under the bridge. In the Carleton precinct tall grass and crops limited visibility; and John Randall and his wife (GC02) only managed to see 14 birds.

On KD01, in KwaZulu-Natal in the Dundee precinct, a new settlement has popped up between 46 and 61km, and according to Henery and his wife Elizabeth, it is a very poor birding spot. Paul Garner noted that the number of crows on KD02 has diminished since the vulture restaurant had closed. Even though the weather on KD05 was pleasant, the dams were drier than usual and Chris de Lange and Warren Boggs only saw 7 birds. Heino Wellman (KD07) farms on this route and regularly sees a lot of CAR birds; and even though weather and field conditions were good, he didn't see any birds. A lot of new informal houses and settlements have appeared on the government owned land on KE01; Ingrid Oates noted that the grass is also becoming more heavily grazed. Jane McCarthy and her team saw the most species in the East Griqualand precinct (11!) and saw an impressive 169 birds on KG05. Even though the most of the Midlands precinct was misty and cool, it didn't seem to impact the count too greatly. Even with low mist and tall grass, Shirley Bennett and her team (KM01) made 51 observations, 13 species totalling in 177 birds – the second most in the precinct. The heavy mist on KM06 didn't get Karin Nelson, Pam Nicol and Andile Vilakazi down – they saw an amazing 257 birds! Luckily for Peter Divall and his team, the weather improved as the day went on. They observed a heronry on the Fryslan farm on a site where food for feedlots is prepared; the heronry seems to be new as they never noticed it before. The tall grass and large maize fields in parts of the Newcastle precinct made counting difficult for the participants of routes KN04 and KN05. Klaus Heyer and his team (KN06) had a very good count – seeing 318 birds, 198 of these were White Storks! Tall crops and grass hindered observations, but at the end of the day Aldo and Sharon Berruti saw 334 birds on KU01! Crops on route KU02 were not as high as usual for summer, probably because rain and planting had been delayed, but crops seemed more widespread. Graham Kletz and his team of participants saw 454 birds on this route – 183 White Storks, 166 Cape Crows, 57 White-necked Ravens and 17 Grey Crowned Cranes!!

Thank you to Inés and Duncan Cooke for the report on the Overberg precinct:

The summary table of the day's count is presented below along with earlier data for your interest. Additionally, we have constructed a summary table for the newly included Raptors and Corvids, for last year and this year. As usual, our Route Leaders

did a wonderful job of getting the data to us quickly by fax, e-mail and, despite Post Office strike problems, by post!

YEAR	BLUE CRANES Adult/Juveniles/.Chicks			DB	SBK	KK	SEC	SG	BHH	WS	BS
2014	2016	218	42	59	2	9	9	889	421	3932	1
2013	2006	170	94	27	2	14	5	1466	245	1861	3
2012	2165	113	91	33	3	9	9	473	128	1013	2
2011	2943	210	90	57	2	16	6	359	267	2669	1
2010	3290	174	103	69	10	27	20	750	292	1669	8
2009	3164	216	104	69	2	18	18	802	420	5793	5

YEAR	SPBZ	JKBZ	PCG	BSKT	WNR	PICW	CPCW	HAR
2014	595	191	6	40	83	51	769	13
2013	763	148	7	35	138	34	739	9

The region suffered unusually heavy rains, accompanied by flooding and severe road damage late last year and again in January this year. Some teams had great difficulty in completing their counts because of having to negotiate road damage or avoid flooded areas as near de Hoop Vlei, or do huge backtracks as in the case near Botriver where a donga had developed across the road causing it to be closed and despite generally quick road repairs in the region it had not yet been repaired. Thank you to the Overberg Team for your steadfast approach to the situation that meant we had a good count.

The most Blue Cranes were recorded on the routes in the Heidelberg, Witsand and Swellendam area, with Keith and Michelle Moodie counting 396 BCs. Other tallies in that area were 230 and 221. To the west of Greyton, Wicus counted 174, while near Caledon 114, and near Napier 157 were counted. On some routes near Swellendam, Stormsvlei and Riviersonderend it was noted that the Crane numbers had decreased compared to the usual sightings. John Jones was surprised by the low count considering the good feed situation locally after the good rains. The query was raised as to the very low count of chicks, wondering whether many had been drowned in the heavy rains in January. Happily, near Greyton and in the Jongensklip area many breeding pairs were noted, so perhaps some balance may be restored.

We were very fortunate to find a ringed Crane close enough to photograph, and having sent the picture with the GPS Coordinates to SAFRING, we had the interesting reply that the bird had been ringed at Rooiwal, south of Bredasdorp, on 19th March 2008, some 45kms from our sighting position. Its sibling was also ringed and thus far this has been the only recorded sighting of either bird. The importance of recording the detail of rings as well as position of any sighting was highlighted again and if any counters are as lucky as we were, please send the observations to SAFRING; it will help to plot migration and distribution patterns, all a big help in our quest to know more about our feathered friends, and to help them survive the ravages of human encroachment in their habitats.

We have included, below, a photograph of the ringed bird as a point of interest. The bird had in fact lost an Orange ring from the right leg but the ringer could still identify the bird because of the remaining rings.



Wicus sent us a beautiful image of a pair of BCs enjoying being together and singing away!



Thanks Wicus for permission to include this gem in the Overberg Summary for summer 2014.01.25

On to other species

Denham's Bustards

The count for Denham's Bustards was higher than for the previous 2 years; they were mainly seen around the Napier, Bredasdorp, Arniston and Elim areas. However, 10 were also recorded in the Albertinia/Mosselbay area.

Southern Black Korhaans

The number for SBK was only 2, a clear indication that the species remains in a critical state.

Karoo Korhaan

Fewer were noted than previously, a cause for concern?

Secretary Birds

Here we can report some good news!! There were more recorded sightings of the endangered Secretary Bird, Frans de Graaff saw 5 birds near Mossel Bay; 1 pair with a juvenile and 1 pair displaying. Ernst Retief is doing a study on these birds and should anyone find a nest, please record the details, including the location of the nest and send them on to Ernst at: ernst.retief@birdlife.org.za

Spur-winged Geese

These birds are plentiful and widespread over the precinct, with the Moodies recording 140 and Anne Price some 219 in the Jongensklip area.

Black-headed Heron

A virtual explosion in the area with 421 seen, well distributed throughout the precinct; the Moodies having recorded some 42.

White Storks

We had the highest count since 2009 with John Carter and his team recording 810 on the Stormsvlei Route. The Storks were mainly around the Swellendam area with counts of 475 (John Coates), 260 near Heidelberg (Pierre van den Berg), 311 near Swellendam (Christine Wallace), 322 in the Heidelberg/Swellendam area (Mareloise Groenewald). There were also high counts near Napier of 412 by Ken Price and 358 by Marion Naude.

Black Stork

Just one sighting of 1 bird by John Carter's team near Stormsvlei.

The Raptors and Corvids were well distributed throughout the area and remained more or less the same except for fewer SPBZ and a greater number of JKBZ, the shift might just be due to identification problems between the two species. It was great to see more Black Harriers on our lists. As far as WNR is concerned, changes to recorded numbers can be surprising:- last year one route saw 75, whereas this year the same route recorded only one!

Thank you for the other interesting reports such as the Lesser Grey Shrike seen by John Carter's team near Stormsvlei, very much out of its normal Northern Range. Other birds reported were Spotted Eagle Owls, many Yellow-billed Kites, Cape Vultures, Peregrine and Lanner Falcons, Amur Falcons and an African Fish Eagle. Great stuff!!

It was noted that on some routes there has been much habitat destruction, much more land devoted to Orchards and maize and many more sheep instead of wheat-fields. A report from an agricultural organisation referred to us by Wicus notes that pasture is steadily giving way to more grain and cash-crops

In closing, we would like to say a big thank-you to all our precinct members for the wonderful dedication displayed and the quick sending of the Forms, that makes

such a difference to John Carter and us when trying to check everything and get it all onto the ADU Data-base; not to be forgotten, thanks too for the mammal counts, there will be a build-up of data there as well, so go for it!!

It was a hot day in the Swartland precinct, but the heat didn't get in the way of the CAR participants having a good count. Fiona Hellmann and Loni Drager saw 148 birds – 24 of these were Steppe Buzzards! Reg le Roux and his team saw a Black Harrier for the first time on SW06, since the route was started. They saw 224 birds in total (the most in the Swartland precinct).

Stefan Theron noted that rain on WB03, near Beaufort West, had been less than surrounding areas and that possibly resulted in the bustards migrating.

The Little Karoo precinct received some good rain and Margaret Powell and her team noticed an unusual amount of cattle along WK03.

Thank you to Yvonne Bosman for her report on the Humansdorp precinct:

There were no problems this count although we had heavy cloud all around us and thought that it was going to rain us out. The wind came up and was quite cold in the end but the count was finished comfortably.

Chris Barratt's team on EH03 was fortunate enough to find a Long Crested Eagle sitting up in a tree on that route and they also came across 43 Cape Crow in one spot. Their 584 White Storks was the highest count for some years and it was pleasing to see them back.

Jill Tudhope on Route EH04 commented that it was great to have the raptors and corvids to count as numbers of large terrestrial birds had been few and far between on their route which was becoming overgrown. They decided to do a detour to find the Crab Plover that was very close to their route and this made the day more exciting. They also saw a European Roller at their 2km stop and had several sightings of Amur Falcons.

Abel Bezuidenhout on EH05 found a Black-shouldered Kite mobbing and attacking a Jackal Buzzard. He also commented that it was great to have raptors and corvids on the list. He is most concerned that the windfarm planned for their route will have a detrimental effect on the Bustards and Black Harriers on their route. Secretary birds breed along that same site and for the first time for some while none of these were seen.

Route EH06 progressed well and saw many antelope on their route as well as over 200 Amur Falcons and two European Rollers, both these added to the enjoyment of the route. An adult and a juvenile Martial Eagle flying also added interest.

The three routes EH03, 05 and 06 reported a dearth of numbers in Denham's Bustards. In EH03 and 06 it could be the disturbance caused by the construction of wind farms. This area is a stronghold for Denham's and this is of grave concern.

Both Phil Whittington and his team counting EE05 and Michael Stanyon and his team counting EE06 reported poor counting conditions due to mist. Route EE19 had some excellent late summer rain; Sandy and Hope Stretton saw an impressive 346 birds!

Due to the sand carting activities and heavy traffic on routes MT03 and MT04, near Standerton in Mpumalanga, these routes have been discontinued. Judy-Lynn Wheeler

and her team unfortunately had to abandon their count after 7.8km due to deep mud and the road being impassable.

In the Free State FS52 was counted for the first time since Winter 2010 by Toby Esplin. It might have been a hot day, but Beryl Wilson and her team saw 830 Abdim's Storks on FS41- an incredible total! Even though the veld condition around FS70 was very good, most of the dams in the area had low water levels or were empty. Abrie and Helene Bam also noted that there has been a big increase in cattle and sheep on this route. FW46 was last counted in Winter 2009, thank you Robert and Magda Lotze for counting this route again!

In the Eastern Karoo precinct Chris van Rooyen made a very interesting observation on Route NK331; he observed Grey Crowned Cranes on the neighbouring farm during the count. According to the neighbours, the cranes have been staying there for two months. Unfortunately Chris wasn't able to get any photos!

Thank you again to all the participants for going out and doing the counts and thank you to everyone counting the routes which haven't been done in a while! To the Precinct Organisers – you are an incredible team of people! Thank you for your hard work and for all the extra effort.