

**stiffnecks**  
www.sanparks.org/forum/birdclub

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**Stiffnecks**  
SANParks forum Birdclub

This club is for members of the SANParks forum who have an interest in bird life. Although field excursions will be organised, the club will focus on including a wider spectrum of people through the online forum and newsletters.

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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to this, our very first newsletter! Firstly, we would like to thank everyone for their enthusiastic response to the idea of the forum birdclub aka the *Stiffnecks*. May we have many years of birding ahead of us, and together, grow to be avid, expert twitchers.

As you may have gathered from the invite sent out, we have a few objectives (other than generally having great fun). One which is fairly close to our hearts would be raising funds so as to donate birding books and binocs to guides within the national parks. This has a two-fold objective, as not only does it equip them with reference books, but will perhaps create a whole new generation of twitchers!

We will, of course, also arrange birding days and even weekends in the various national parks and perhaps a few other "favourite" spots.



Goliath

Heron

Although, ultimately, we would like to be Birdlife registered, this club will be more about having fun, social get togethers in the name of birding. We would like to inspire interest in birds without scaring you away with big names and LBJ's will most likely remain just that for most of us. After all, a little mystery adds spice to life!

Happy Birding ☺  
Jay

## NEWS

The bird of the year for 2007 is the African Penguin. Although this bird is fairly widespread, especially on offshore islands, of Southern Africa, its numbers are declining. The reason for this is much the same as for any other species facing declining numbers, and that is loss of habitat and decreasing food supplies. These penguins feed predominantly on fish, especially anchovies and sardines, which are unfortunately also targeted by large fishing companies.

For anyone visiting Cape Town, these wonderful, amusing birds can be seen at close quarters on Boulders Beach, Simonstown (part of the Table Mountain National Park.)

Some penguin facts: they moult for about 20 days, losing all their feathers in the process.

The noise they make resembles that of a donkey braying hence the original name, the Jackass penguin.



African Penguin

Penguins move through the water like little torpedoes, occasionally breaching out of the water. Their movement on land is far less graceful and the penguin waddle has been made famous in some recent animated movies.

Oil spills are a major hazard to penguins and many lose their lives annually as they die of hypothermia when covered in crude oil.

### RARE AND INTERESTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

On the 14 February 2007, Hanno Langenhoven discovered a Red Phalarope at the Ruigtehoek Dam in the Pilansberg.



### Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

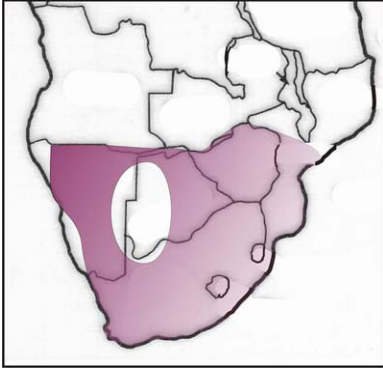


**Description:** This is a large (almost 1m tall), glossy black bird with white belly and undertail, and distinctive red bill and legs. The black plumage has a greenish sheen in sunlight. Juvenile birds have yellowish-green colour legs and bill and dullish black colouring. Females resemble males.

They are usually silent although may emit bill clapping sounds on rare occasions. Also known to make “rasping” sound.

**Habitat:** Feeds in lagoons, ponds and streams, dams as well as shallow river sections and estuaries. They breed in warmer areas of Europe as well as parts of S African including the Kruger National Park. Nesting occurs on cliffs.

**Status:** Uncommon to rare species. (Not classified as threatened.)



**Distribution:** most of Southern Africa, except coastal areas of Namibia, Mozambique and central Botswana. It is found as far a field as W Europe and NE China.

**Feeding Habits:** It feeds mainly on fish, but will also consume reptiles, frogs and even baby birds.



### **Yellowbilled Stork**

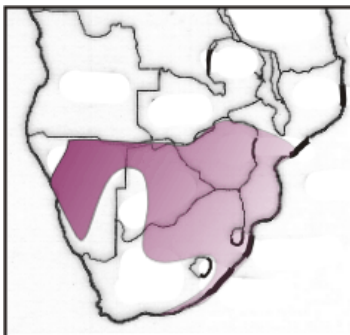
#### **Mycteria ibis** Description:

This bird reaches 97cm in height. They have long, thick, bright yellow bills which are slightly curved at the tip. Plumage is mostly white with black tail and wing tips. The white areas are slightly tinged with pink.

Juvenile birds have “dull” orange facial skin and a greenish-yellow bill with brown coloured plumage.

**Habitat:** As they are wading birds they will be found in shallows of rivers, dams, ponds, streams and marshes. They are somewhat in active birds. They nest high up in trees to avoid predation.

**Status:** Common resident in the northern part of Southern Africa but a rare visitor to the south.



**Distribution:** These birds are found through most of central and Southern Africa.

**Feeding habits:** They eat fish, frogs, worms and insects. Quite often use a foot to “kick up” the mud, and then submerge their heads to feed on flushed out prey.

## CREATING A BIRD FRIENDLY GARDEN

Some of you may have taken the first steps toward making your garden a bird friendly environment. For those who have access to balconies only, do not despair, given the right incentives, birds will grace your space too. An important part of creating a bird friendly garden is the planting of indigenous plants. Not only will you be providing your birds with food, nesting and roosting areas, but you will be helping fight the battle against the ever decreasing habitats for our feathered friends. For South African birders do not forget that Skukuza has a superb nursery filled to the brim with not only indigenous, but ridiculously cheap plants! For the “overseas birders”, firstly our condolences, secondly your local nurseries should be able to help you select suitable indigenous plants for your garden.

There are a few things that will increase the frequency of avian visitors to your garden;

**Water:** a bird bath is more than sufficient, but don't make the mistake of placing it out in the open, your birds will feel too vulnerable. Also many birds prefer not to stand in water deeper than their “knees”, so place a rock in your birdbath if it is too deep.

**Food:** find out what the birds you want to attract eat. Then choose a suitable feeder for the food. Tray feeders are fine for seeds and halved oranges, pears and apples. If you place seed out make sure it contains sunflower seeds, an excellent source of nutrition for birds. Suet is also an important food for birds. (The recipe for which I will include in a later newsletter.)

**Shelter:** if possible plant a few shrubs or trees if you have the space for your birds to find shelter in.

And finally avoid using pesticides. It is probably not even necessary to describe how painfully birds die from secondary poisoning. If your garden has a diversity of plants and a variety of bird species visiting, your pest problem will be minor. Remember that many so called pests are actually bird food.



Sub-adult

Bokmakierie

Happy landscaping for birds, may they bring you many hours of enjoyment!

## TIPS ON PHOTOGRAPHING BIRDS

Starting from this newsletter on, we will be giving guidelines on bird photography. It will begin with simple tips for those of us who are not experts (yet), and then gradually progress to more technical advice. So, learn along with us!



**Tip1:** Although close-up shots of certain birds, such as a Saddlebilled Stork, are striking, for the most part birds show off far better when a little of their *environment is included in your pic.*

**Tip 2:** Big birds will *take off into the wind.* So when you want that action shot of a Fish Eagle, make sure you are upwind of it!

**Tip 3:** This little tip will work wonders for your photos. For those of you who have a *bracketing* setting on your cameras, set it to **+0.3 and -0.3** of a stop. Your camera will now fire off 3 consecutive shots, one a little under exposed, one “normal” and one slightly over exposed. You accomplish two things in one go here: you get to choose which shot has the best colour and when your bird moves, as they are so wont to do, you will quite likely have at least one shot in focus!

Great White Pelican