



FROM THE WALLOW

2008 is "International Year of the Frog".



Whew – hasn't 2008 just flown by? We have already reached and passed Arbour Week and congratulations to Ingrihid Povey for her initiative to plant trees on 6 September. She is hoping to make this an annual event and the big winner here is the farm – thanks too to all those who participated.

Twinkle, the pale zebra foal, seems to be thriving. Joy Adamson makes reference to a pale-coloured zebra in her book "The Spotted Sphinx". This was an adult running with a herd in Samburu National Park, Kenya in the 1960's. So let's hope our special zebra continues to flourish and grows up big and strong. Has anyone managed to figure out what sex it is yet? Alex did tell me that he thinks it is a female.

I have been away from the farm a lot this year, so I don't have a huge contribution this time. Please send me your stories – everyone has one!

Hope everyone has got fire beaters ready outside their houses in case of fire. Letamo was incredibly lucky to avoid the big fires in the Cradle recently. Many animals died during the fires which actually started in Hekpoort and blew all the way to the Lion and Rhino Park over a period of two days. Our last big fire on the farm was in October 2006, so we still have some way to go before we can relax a bit as can be evidenced by the strong gusting winds we are still experiencing.

I include here a story about a baby scrub hare that was found on the farm. If you do find one, as long as it is not in danger – please leave it where it is – its mother will come back to feed it. Scrub hares don't live in burrows like rabbits – they make a "form" in the grass. This form is merely a flattened area in the long grass where the babies are left while the mother is out foraging. The one that was brought to me clearly did need to be rescued – but they are very difficult to rear, so if you are really concerned – rather phone me so that I can come and assess the situation before moving the animal. The same applies to fledged baby birds – the mother will usually come back to feed them.

Jill



What kind of baby am I?

BIRDING ABOUT LETAMO AND SURROUNDS:

Well, the birders are out of the closet again. I attach an updated bird list from Ian Grant. Two new species have been added, Dusky Lark and Grassbird. Ian photographed the lark – apparently far out of its normal range - on the farm. Ian is surprised that the grassbirds have eluded him so long – they were discovered by Maria McCrae at Steenbok Dam on Easter Monday after chasing the Goliath Heron round Hippo Dam trying to get a photo for me. Ian has been birding here for over ten years, so it is very exciting that we keep notching up new species.

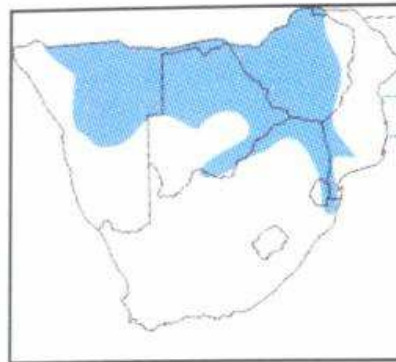


Photo & distribution map – Ian Grant.

Some Dusky Lark Facts

It is an uncommon non breeding intra-African migrant (this bird migrates to tropical Africa and Northern Angola to breed) that visits South Africa from October to May – rarely June. Its habitat is short grass in savanna and open woodland and is also seen on lawns and in parks, but not in our area.

These larks are usually seen in small flocks whilst migrating – our lark must have got a bit lost and separated from its flock. Very occasionally they are seen in flocks numbering in the hundreds.

Dusky Larks feed on insects

Ian’s ID of a Dusky Lark is a big deal because, according to the latest distribution maps, it is quite far out of its normal range - we are about where a vertical line from Lesotho and a horizontal line from Swaziland would meet – see distribution map above.

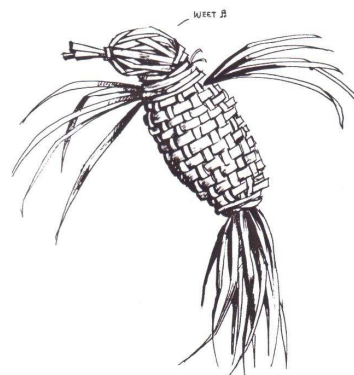


Marie McCrae’s sighting of grassbirds was interesting because she saw two parent birds feeding a youngster. These birds usually lay three eggs, so maybe there’s five grassbirds down by the Steenbok Dam. Grassbirds are usually solitary and found in rank grassland near streams. Rather than fly away when disturbed, they will sneak into matted vegetation to hide. If you want to see them, my Roberts bird book tells me that they perch conspicuously on top of grass stems or bushes to sun themselves or to sing in the early morning.



Grassbird – Photo – Marie McCrae
Grassbird – drawing by Dr Jack

Marie's sightings don't end at grassbirds. A short while after seeing and photographing them she got home and heard a big commotion in her garden – a mixed flock of birds were mobbing a large puff adder. Marie moved the snake into cover in the long grass and settled down to watch the birds at her feeding



Grassbird *Sphenocacus ajer*

table on her veranda. Marie puts out a veritable smorgasbord for the birds – fruit, seed and bone meal being favourites and attracting a wide variety of bird species.

The afternoon in question some doves had alighted and were snacking on bird seed when suddenly a raptor of some sort – possibly a kestrel – dived down and grabbed a dove for supper! Talk about extreme bird feeding! Attract the bait – and you may even witness a kill from your stoep! Despite her best efforts, Marie was unable to photograph her rather unusual visitor to her bird table. Marie – save the doves and put out a few chicken wings for the raptors!

THE BABY BISHOPS GET THEIR BLING!

Well, this turned out to be a saga. I got the red bishop babies on the 26th of January and the last one left "home" on the 6th of March. The interesting thing was that I released them from their aviary about three weeks before they left home properly – but they realised that I could not fly after them to feed them, so they came back to me for their four meals a day. While they were free to fly, they joined up with two wild red bishop females and formed a flock. So, sometimes there would be six bishop birds perched on my little acacia tree waiting for a feed. The adult birds always got scared and flew away when I approached – conveniently teaching my babies not to trust humans.

With Ian Grant's help I managed to get them ringed by a very nice chap from SAFRING. Michael was amazed because he had only ever ringed wild birds, so nearly fell over when I just plucked each bird from the feeding tree – without the use of nets! He was also amazed to see that they had no poverty line visible on the under-wing – which is a pale line on the feathers which shows when the parent birds had not been able to feed the babies – mine never missed a feed! Four rescued – four released – just what the doctor ordered!

Anyway, they are now living free and if you see a bishop bird with a little silver ring (BLING) on its right leg – you will know that it is probably one that I raised! Please let me know – especially this breeding season – when some might turn red and be identifiable as males.

By: Mother Superior



A Hare Raising Tale



Levi the leveret at four days old
Photos: Anna-Maria Cosgrove



Levi at four weeks old

In March some children on the farm brought me a tiny little “bunny” that was on their lawn in danger of being chomped by their dogs.

Fully furred and eyes wide open – the “bunny” was in fact a tiny two-day-old leveret – or baby scrub hare. Not a baby rabbit at all – baby rabbits are called kittens and are born without fur, eyes and ears closed and very helpless. Scrub hares, by contrast, are born being able to walk, with eyes open and have all their fur right from day one.

Anyway, the leveret arrived on a Saturday afternoon and I spent all night trying to get him to suckle as he was quite dehydrated. On the Sunday morning I called Freeme and I took him to a volunteer called Anna-Maria Cosgrove in Fourways for her to attempt to raise the little leveret.

The baby was christened Levi - and Anna-Maria told me that he was the youngest one she had ever been given to raise. I had managed to get the dehydration under control so we made him up a feed of special milk and he suckled up this with gusto – always a good sign.

After about a week, Levi started to fade – but with some ideas from other rehabilitation specialists, the milk formula was changed and from four hourly feeds at the beginning, Levi was soon running about in an aviary, eating grass and getting only two bottles a day. The little hare was finally released back into the wild, but not on Letamo. Note the little white spot on his head – apparently all leverets have a white spot which disappears as they get older. (And I thought ours was special!)

A huge thank you to Anna-Maria and Freeme – let’s hope that Levi goes from strength to strength and has leverets of his own.

If you see a baby scrub hare lying in the veld, please don’t move it as it will be rescued by its mother. In this case, it was essential that the leveret was rescued as it was in danger of being killed by dogs – such a young creature has no fear of animals or humans. Thank you to Levi’s rescuers.



Have you guessed yet?



Arbour Day on Letamo

Not a lot of people pitched up on Saturday 6 September – left to right standing – Lance, Jill, Otto, Ingrihid, Enoch, Frank. Sitting – Ilse and Jacques. Those who did were full of enthusiasm and had lots of fun – and this is set to become an annual event.

Quite a few people could not make it to the Arbour Day, but donated many trees which are in the process of being planted. Trees like *Acacia karoo*, *Rhus* species and *Kigelia africana* (wild peach) were planted. Theo (in the wellies) gets the prize for the smallest tree – but he did hand-rear it from seed – and the Hattings donated the large wild peach. Well done all and especially to Ingrihid Povey for initiating the idea!

Here is a list of trees suitable for planting on Letamo. There are many indigenous nurseries in the area so do give some of these species a go in your garden. Transvaal Bluebush makes loads of edible berries that attract birds, but it is slow growing so try and get a big one.

Sivest Suggested Planting List – trees and shrubs suitable for Letamo Game Farm

Common Name	Taxonomic Name	Family
Mountain aloe	<i>Aloe marlothi</i>	Asphodelaceae
Transvaal milkplum	<i>Englerophytum magalismontanum</i>	Sapotaceae
Brack Thorn	<i>Acacia robusta</i>	Fabaceae
Common Hook Thorn	<i>Acacia caffra</i>	Fabaceae
Sweet thorn	<i>Acacia karroo</i>	Fabaceae
Mountain Silver Oak	<i>Brachylaena rotundata</i>	Asteraceae
False Olive	<i>Buddleja saligna</i>	Buddlejaceae
Sagewood	<i>Buddleja salvifolia</i>	Buddlejaceae
Velvet Rock Alder	<i>Canthium gilfillanii</i>	Rubiaceae
Rock Alder	<i>Canthium mundianum</i>	Rubiaceae
Num-num	<i>Carissa bispinosa</i>	Apocynaceae
White Stinkwood	<i>Celtis africana</i>	Ulmaceae
River Bushwillow	<i>Combretum erythrophyllum</i>	Combretaceae
Mountain Cabbage Tree	<i>Cussonia paniculata</i>	Araliaceae
Common Cabbage Tree	<i>Cussonia spicata</i>	Araliaceae
Transvaal Bluebush	<i>Diospyrus lycioidis</i>	Ebenaceae

Common Wild Pear	<i>Dombeya rotundifolia</i>	Tiliaceae
Puzzle Bush	<i>Ehretia rigida</i>	Boraginaceae
Blue Guarri	<i>Euclea crispa</i>	Ebenaceae
Tree Fuschia	<i>Halleria lucida</i>	Scrophulariaceae
Common Spike-thorn	<i>Gymnosporia buxifolia</i>	Celastraceae
Cork Bush	<i>Mundulea sericea</i>	Fabaceae
Bushman's Grape	<i>Rhoicissus tridentata</i>	Vitaceae
Karree	<i>Rhus lancea</i>	Anacardiaceae
Mountain Karree	<i>Rhus leptodictya</i>	Anacardiaceae
Common taaibos	<i>Rhus pyroides</i>	Anacardiaceae
Wild Medlar	<i>Vangueria infausta</i>	Rubiaceae
Small Knobwood	<i>Zanthoxylum capense</i>	Rutaceae
Buffalo Thorn	<i>Ziziphus mucronata</i>	Rhamnaceae
Dwarf Buffalo Thorn	<i>Ziziphus zeyheriana</i>	Rhamnaceae
Dog Wood	<i>Rhamnus prinoides</i>	Rhamnaceae

If it is any help to anyone – I can tell you what grows easily in my (VERY COLD and WINDY) garden – Sweet Thorn, Sagewood, River Bushwillow, Transvaal Bluebush, Puzzle Bush, Karree, Common Taaibos, Buffalo Thorn and Dog Wood. Common Pear died from the cold as did Num-Num and Cabbage trees. After all that, my spell check nearly had cardiac arrest!



River Bushwillows

Positioning an Owl Nesting Box

1. The larger side of the box should be attached to a tree, your house, or any other suitable structure on your property.
2. Position box at least four or five metres from ground level. You should be able to access the box in order to relocate young if they fall out of the box.
3. It is best to position the box where there is not too much vehicle or human traffic.
4. Owls favour north-facing entrances.
5. Spotted Eagle Owls like nesting in exposed positions, where they can keep a watchful eye over surroundings. The opening for this box must be like a stable door where the bottom door section is closed and the top section missing. Position it the same as the standard box.



I am a baby giant panda! Ain't I cute?

PICK UP YOUR LITTER - AND ANYONE ELSE'S YOU FIND ON LETAMO

SUNSET BRAAI AREA -

The Sunset Braai Area must be booked. This can be done by contacting the LE office.

NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHED!

The SA Biodiversity Institute has launched a website with information on the status of South African species – including legal status of threatened species as well as IUCN Red List assessments. www.speciesstatus.sanbi.org

****REGISTER ON LETAMO WEBSITE & MAILING LIST****

Go to: <http://flame.co.za/mailman/listinfo/residents> to register.



Owl nesting boxes for sale – attract barn owls, spotted eagle owls to your house. Owls will control your rodent population on your stand. Owl Boxes are made by David Jeppe – R300 each. For more details, contact Marie McCrae on 083 302 6228.

For fabulous catering and party and function co-ordination, contact Tristan at FGF Caterers – 082 363 6063



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