



Route Reports

WU04, WU06, FS106, WK04, KU02

Science Reports

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KZN Midlands, Overberg,
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Interview with
David Allan

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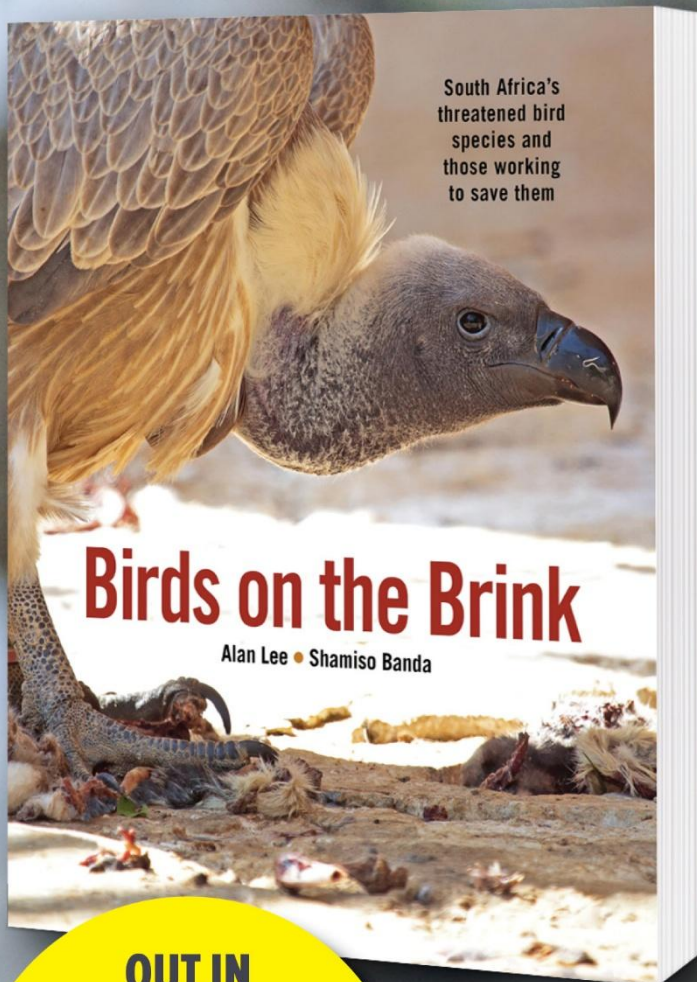
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Contributors	3
Route Reports	4
WU04 & WU06 – Western Cape – Pat Nurse	4
FS106 – Free State – Dawie de Swardt	6
KU03 – KwaZulu-Natal – Cassie Carstens	9
WK04 – Western Cape – Laurel Bloch	11
Precinct Reports	12
Uniondale Precinct Winter Report – Alan Lee	12
KZN Midlands Precinct Winter Report – Peter Divall	14
Overberg Precinct Winter Report – Christie Craig	15
Humansdorp Precinct Winter Report – Truus Hedding	17
Gauteng Precinct Winter Report – Craig Whittington-Jones	19
Pictures	20
Scientific Reports	21
Declines along MT07 in the Standerton Precinct of Mpumalanga – Tobie Pretorius	21
Interviews	24
David Allan – A founder and stalwart of citizen science – Cassie Carstens	24



Figure 1 - Aloe vera next to the road near Uniondale. Photo by Alan Lee.



The Coordinated Avifaunal Road Count (CAR) is a long-running citizen science project in South Africa. Taking place twice per year, this project aims to record the presence, population density, habitat selection, and behaviour of a specific list of bird species.

Summer counts take place over the last weekend in January, and the Winter count over the last weekend in July each year. Surveys consist of participants driving a predetermined route by vehicle and recording all sightings based on distance intervals. Routes are located across the country, and are grouped into precincts, each overseen by a Precinct Organiser.

Data collected during CAR is of critical importance to population and distribution estimates of several Endangered and Critically Endangered bird species in South Africa and forms an important part of Red Data assessments. This also advises conservation actions based on habitat and behaviour of those birds monitored.

This citizen science project is coordinated by the CAR Working Group, consisting of

representatives from various avian conservation and research institutions and organisations, as well as volunteer participants.

The following individuals are members of the working group:

- **Dr Alan Lee** (BirdLife South Africa) – Working Group Coordinator
- **Mrs Tania Anderson** (FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology) - Communications
- **Mrs Donella Young** (Volunteer) - Advisor
- **Dr Christie Craig** (Endangered Wildlife Trust) – Crane Specialist
- **Mr Bradley Gibbons** (Endangered Wildlife Trust) – Grassland Specialist
- **Mr Michael Brooks** (FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology) – Online platform and database
- **Mr Brian Colahan** (Volunteer) – Advisor & Precinct Organiser
- **Dr David Ehlers-Smith** (BirdLife South Africa) – Data analyst
- **Mr Cassie Carstens** (BirdLife South Africa) – Newsletter editor & Precinct Organiser



Online – <https://car.birdmap.africa/>



Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/103532956456685>

Learn more about CAR – Contact Tania Anderson at sabap2@birdlife.org.za.

How to participate – Participation is open to any member of the public with a basic knowledge of bird identification. Access to a vehicle and a pair of binoculars are key, with the ability to follow a set methodology and data entry procedure also required. Contact your local bird club to determine if there are CAR surveys or contact a precinct coordinator to see if opportunities exist.

This publication is produced on behalf of the CAR Working Group and is published bi-annually.

Instructions for newsletter contributions - Articles and pictures are welcomed from all participants. Preference will be given to route and/or precinct reports, as well as more scientific analyses of CAR data. Articles should be no more than 3,000 words. Images of landscapes, birds, and participants should be no more than 2 MB in size. All queries, articles, and images can be sent to the editor at cassie.carstens@birdlife.org.za. The deadline for submissions is 30 calendar days after each CAR survey.

Cover photo - Photograph taken by Cassie Carstens along route KU02 near Underberg in KwaZulu-Natal. The body of water is located on the Waterford Farm and was taken in a westerly direction towards Garden Castle in the southern Drakensberg.



Contributors

- **Peter Divall** – Long-time resident of Howick and chair of the BirdLife Midlands bird club. He has been the precinct coordinator for routes in the KZN Midlands since 2015.



- **Dawie de Swardt** – Curator of Birds at the National Museum in Bloemfontein and coordinator for the Central Free State precinct.



- **Dr Alan Lee** – Long-distance cyclist, bird expert, data guru, and bravest man in the Baviaanskloof, Alan manages the Science and Innovation Project at BirdLife South Africa.



- **Craig Whittington-Jones** – Ecologist at the Gauteng Department of Environment and precinct organiser for the Gauteng Province.

- **Pat Nurse** – A long-time resident of Wilderness and chairperson of Lakes bird club, Pat is a legendary octogenarian who keeps chasing birds and contributing to science.



- **Dr Chistrie Craig** – An alum of the FitzPatrick Institute, Christie works as a Conservation Scientist within the African Crane Conservation project of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT).



- **Laurel Bloch** – The precinct coordinator for the picturesque Klein Karoo in the Western Cape Province.
- **Tobie Pretorius** – Precinct coordinator and keen citizen scientist from Standerton in Mpumalanga.
- **Truus Hedding** – Precinct coordinator from Humansdorp in the Eastern Cape.

The Summer 2026 CAR Survey will take place on

23-25 January 2025.

Contact your local precinct coordinator or bird club to participate or for more information.

CAR Counts in Uniondale along WU04 and WU06

- Pat Nurse

I have been counting in the Uniondale precinct since July 2006. I was approached by Nathalie Baker of Cape Nature, as Chair of the Lakes Bird Club (LBC), to ask if some members could help Cape Nature officers who were based in Uniondale to do a variety of CAR routes in that area. We got together three teams and started out travelling with them initially. After a couple of years, Cape Nature gave up its involvement, and the LBC members took over. I have been doing Route WU02 with various helpers for at least 16 years. I could not do July 2024, as I was on a trip to Brazil and January 2025, as I was on the Flock to Marion Again. I got two other couples from the Club to do it, but unfortunately, they declined to carry on with it, as they found it very unrewarding. I also decided I needed a change of scenery, so Alan Lee said he would do it, as he lives on a small farm near Hartebeest River. I looked at the map of the other CAR routes and saw that WU04 and WU06 were shorter and not as far to drive, so Claire and I decided to try them.

On Alan's suggestion, we did WU06 first. The turn off was not well sign-posted, but we soon found it was a productive route. In the first two kilometres, we logged two Cape Crows, 30 Helmeted Guineafowl, one Black-headed Heron, three Spur-winged Geese, and two Blue Cranes. Claire and I are atlassers, but she did the atlassing that day as I was



Figure 2 - Pat looking at the Denham's Bustard. Photo by Claire Clarke.

driving. We saw plenty to enter and were very pleased to be on such a great route. At the 2km stop, we suddenly saw a Denham's Bustard in a veld area off to the right, but quite distant towards some low hills. We both looked more carefully and realised there were a lot more. I got out my telescope, and we finally got 13 birds, all feeding but spread out over the area. About five were smaller than the others, and we initially thought they could be juveniles, but then realised



Figure 3 - A Cape Spurrow. Photo by Claire Clarke.

that the females are quite a bit smaller than the males. We drove on slowly and carefully, checking everything, and at 2.4 km, we found another four bustards. By 2 hours in this pentad, we had covered only 4 km, so it was coffee time! We carried on along the route, which returned to the N9 and then crossed over and went a short distance to the base of the Potjiesberg Pass. On the whole route, there was mixed agriculture and some undisturbed veld. We picked up a Black-winged

Kite, a Common Buzzard, more Spur-wings, Guineafowl, and Pied and Cape Crows. By the time we had driven the 14 km of the route, we had spent three and a half hours there, as we saw 85 of the target CAR species and many birds for the pentads we were atlassing.

We had to drive up the Pass and down the Uniondale side to the turn-off marked Kammanassie to start WU04. As Alan had warned us, this would not be as productive for the target birds, but it certainly was for atlassing. Scenically, it was also beautiful as we travelled next to the Kammanassie River with the beautiful Kammanassie range of mountains over to our right (Figure 4). At 15kms, we stopped for our lunch break and suddenly heard the distinctive call of the Jackal Buzzard. Then, a pair appeared and circled over the hillside on the other side of the river, calling to each other. Soon after, we saw three Red-necked Spurfowl scratching around looking for food on the riverbank. Apart from this, we regularly saw single Cape Crows, another Jackal Buzzard and just before we hit the N9 again, my favourite raptor, a Pale Chanting Goshawk. On the 34 km of this route, we only ticked 16 of the target species. Even the number of birds in the atlas decreased as the afternoon wore on. Clouds were building up in the west with the forecast cold front approaching, and when we saw the back of the Outeniqua Mountains, there was a tablecloth coming over.

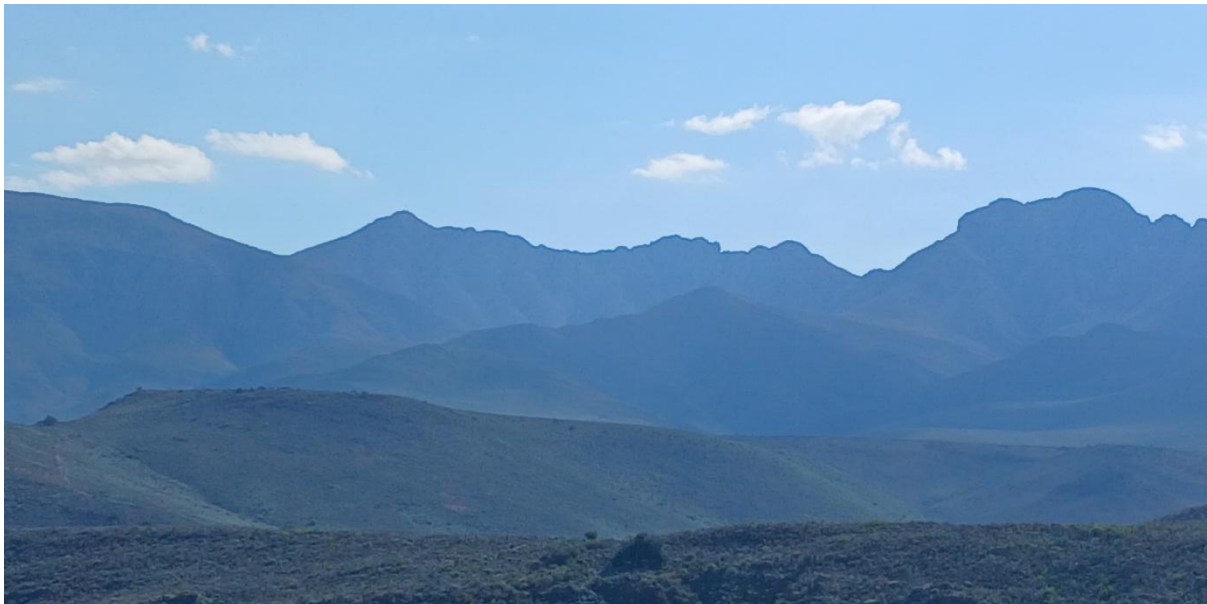


Figure 4 - The Kammanassie Mountains. Photo by Pat Nurse.

Claire and I thoroughly enjoyed our long day, as we only finished WU04 at 4 p.m.! It certainly re-ignited my enthusiasm for the CAR count, and we look forward to seeing how many birds we will see in January.

Route Reports

CAR Surveys on route FS106 west of Bloemfontein, Free State

- Dawie de Swardt

For nearly 20 years (unable to do specific counts and during the 2020 COVID year), I (with assistance with most of the counts by Hennie Bester, Johan Peyper and Zingisile Mbo) surveyed CAR route FS106 of the south-western Free State precinct (Figure 5). The route starts at the railway line at the De Brug silos near the Petrusburg road, goes

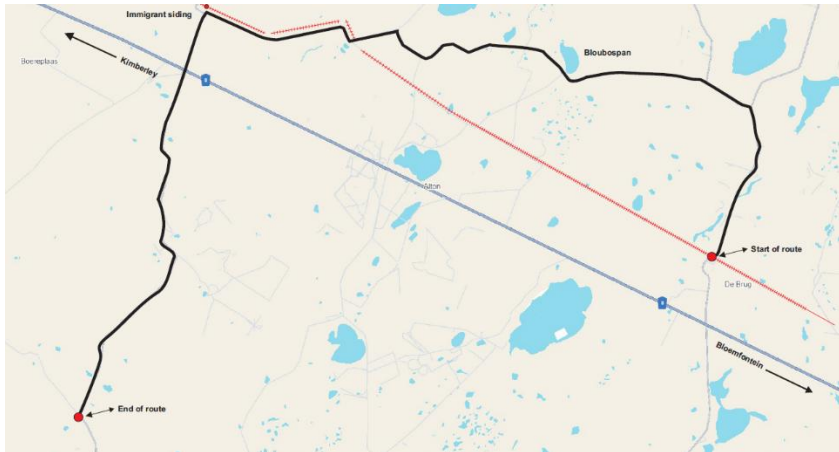


Figure 5 - Route FS106.

through mixed natural and agricultural fields towards the Immigrant station, then over the Bloemfontein-Petrusburg Road towards the Houthaalberg area, where it ends, and meets with Rick Nuttall's route (FS91) near Tafelkop. Our route crosses the Bloemfontein – Kimberley railway track near Immigrant and with some counts, we are lucky to see a passing train! (Figure 6). The route is about 51 km long. The last ten kilometres of the route have more natural veld where korhaans, bustards and cranes are likely to be observed. The De Brug – Immigrant area is dominated by agricultural fields such as sunflower and mealie fields and stubble during winter, attracting Black-headed Herons, Spur-winged and Egyptian Geese. The route passes a large pan, Bloubospan, where flamingos and other water birds have been observed over the years (Figure 7).

Seventeen "countable" species have been recorded, of which raptors and guineafowls have been counted from July 2013 onwards (Figure 8). The most abundant species counted on the route are Helmeted Guineafowl (707 counted; 203 in July 2023), Northern Black Korhaan (619 counted), Spur-winged Goose (345 counted), White Stork (111 counted) and Pied Crow (142 counted) (see Figure 8). Northern Black Korhaan numbers varied over the seasons, with the highest numbers counted during summer counts in January 2005 (42 birds) and January 2006 (47 birds) (Figure 9). During higher rainfall seasons, when the grass is longer, the visibility of observing korhaans was a challenge, resulting in lower numbers being counted. Secretarybirds are always a valuable addition to the list, mainly as I studied several breeding attempts in the Hagesdam area and areas on the Jagersfontein road. Secretarybirds were observed on 16 different count periods; the highest number was five individuals in January 2008 and January 2021. A first possible nest site on the route was recorded where a pair were observed ca. 800m from the road on top of a *Ziziphus*



Figure 6 - Mid-way towards the Immigrant area we cross again the Bloemfontein – Kimberley railway where we stop for a coffee break. This time we were in time to see the train passing us towards Bloemfontein.

mucronata bush during the 2025 winter count. Other raptors include Common Buzzard (summer), Pale Chanting Goshawk, Black-winged Kite and large numbers of Pied Crows (Figure 8).



Figure 7 - Bloubospan near Immigrant station where flamingos and other water birds observed over the years, especially after high rainfall periods.

The average birds/km varied over the years, with higher densities since 2021 when Helmeted Guineafowls were included in counts, resulting in higher birds/km recorded during winter (Figure 8). The overall summer density was 0.84 birds/km, and the winter density was 0.96 birds/km. During the counts on the route, bird species were also recorded for the SABAP2 bird atlas project and usually one or two full protocol cards and several ad hoc cards were completed. Of the “rarer” CAR species, include sightings of Ludwig’s Bustard, Abdim’s Stork and at times large numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingoes at Bloubospan near the De Brug silos.

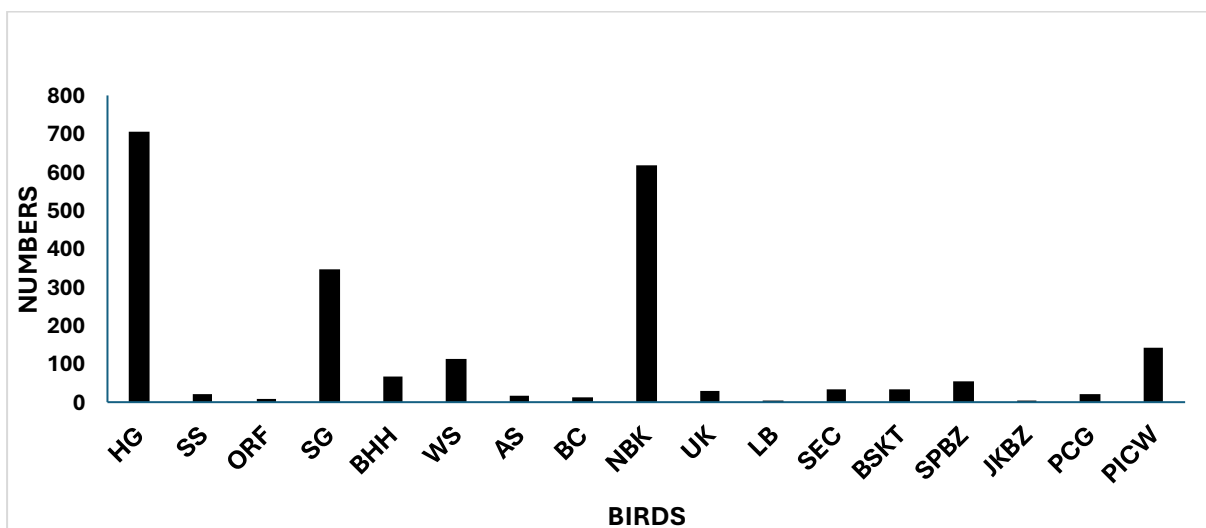


Figure 8 - CAR species recorded on route FS106.

Abbreviations: HG – Helmeted Guineafowl, SS – Swainson’s Spurfowl, ORF – Orange River Francolin, SG – Spur-winged Goose, BHH – Black-headed Heron, WS – White Stork, AS – Abdim’s Stork, BC – Blue Crane, NBK – Northern Black Korhaan, UK – Blue Korhaan, LB – Ludwig’s Bustard, SEC – Secretarybird, BSKT – Black-winged Kite, SPBZ – Common Buzzard, JKBZ – Jackal Buzzard, PCG – Pale Chanting Goshawk, PICW – Pied Crow.

Before raptors were added to the list, we also had sightings of Black-chested Snake-eagles on the route and Common Buzzards, Black-winged Kites and Pale Chanting Goshawks were regularly observed perching on roadside telegraph poles (Figure 10). Challenges in wet road conditions were experienced during surveys, with muddy and slippery conditions, especially near the Immigrant station area. There was an old vacant station building at the site, and I would always have a quick stop to record the roosting Barn Owls. Fond memories of doing the route were when my kids joined us when they were small (and had to!). During the first ten years, my son even acted as the designated driver for the CAR route (while learning to drive) on the extra few kilometres to the Jagersfontein tarred road. Route FS106 will still be surveyed for the following years, and by this valuable count data will be collected (especially now that Steenbok is also added to the count list).

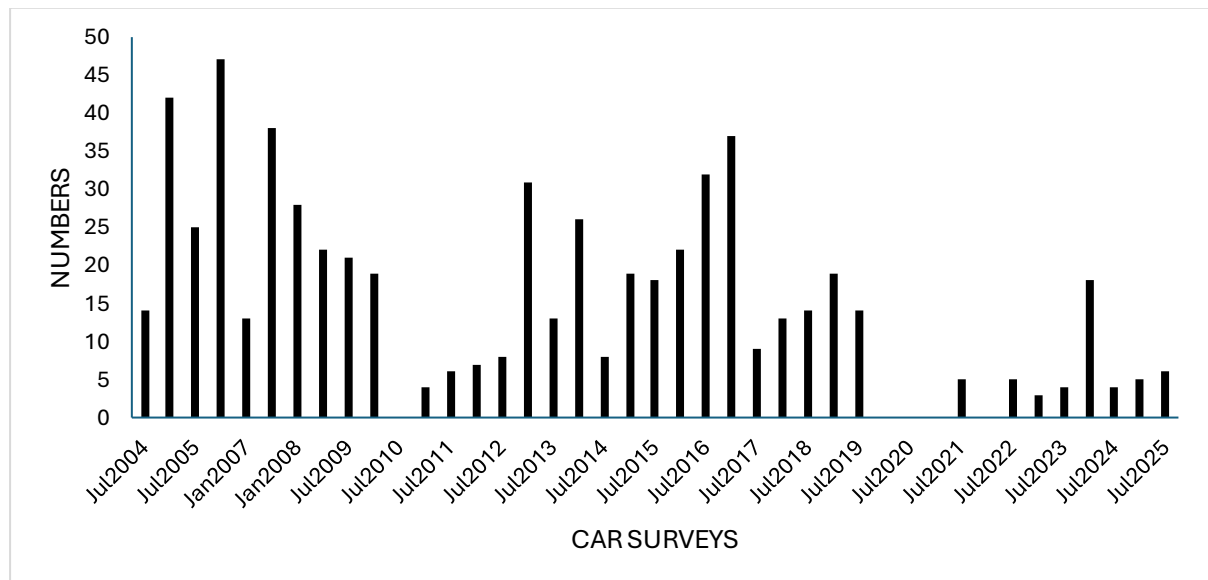


Figure 9 - Northern Black Korhaan numbers during winter and summer counts of route FS106.



Figure 10 - A Pale Chanting Goshawk along FS104. Photo by Dawie de Swardt.

Route KU03 near Underberg in KwaZulu-Natal

- **Cassie Carstens**

The route starts about two kilometres outside Underberg as you drive eastward back to Bulwer: a random dirt district road leads off to the right with a single directional board pointing to Coleford Nature Reserve. Immediately, there's a small open piece of grassy pasture on the right and a dam on the left. Since we are not CWACing, the dam is duly ignored, and our binoculars are aimed at the open grassland.



Figure 11 - Blue Crane foraging on a dry pasture along KU03 near Underberg. Photo by Cassie Carstens.

My CAR companion, local legend Rosanne Clark, and I rarely find anything on it. Maybe the odd Cape Crow or Swainson's Spurfowl, but we aren't worried, since our data entry only truly starts several miles down the road. After passing through a dense section of Black Wattle crowding out the road verge, we cross the Umzimkulu River. The bridge is always worth a stop. Not for our target species, but Giant Kingfishers and African Black Ducks sometimes ply their avian trade on and across the bubbling waters.

Crossing the river, our focus settles on the rolling pastures stretching to the nearby hills. This is where our work begins, and the notations on the datasheet increase in volume.

'Blue Crane, small flock, one, two....seven of them, left hand side, foraging in dry pasture with a nearby water trough.'

The details are duly recorded (Figure 11).

We keep driving, and the farmland seems to be endless. Fortunately, it mainly consists of open grassland pastures where Jersey Cows work hard at producing your morning latté, but there are also large tracts of maize fields. These had all been harvested recently, and Spur-winged Geese rest passively on them near every small irrigation dam. The wintry, brown grass has a beauty that is only appreciated with the knowledge that it'll all be green again soon.

Corvids of each type and the odd Jackal Buzzard are regularly perched on telephone poles and lone snags beside the road. This year, we recorded considerably more crows than in the past!

‘Black-headed Heron, one individual, right-hand side, foraging in a wetland next to that dam.’

Eventually we reach the highest point of the day where we always pause for a few moments to look back at the majestic southern Drakensberg, with white patches still covering large parts of the peaks (Figure 12). We turn left and head down the hill through the Eucalyptus plantations to my favourite part of the day: Coleford!



Figure 12 - The snow-capped peaks of the southern Drakensberg. Photo by Cassie Carstens.

Coleford is a small reserve with rolling grassland, high hills, and several dams (Figure 13). The highlights always entail non-target species: the Buff-streaked Chats and Ground Woodpeckers on the rocky slopes, and Blesbok and Black Wildebeest that stare at you as you drive past. It's a peaceful little break in between the more serious birding. Soon after exiting the reserve, you cross the Ndawana River and pass through the small settlement sharing that name. My awareness always picks up on the far side of houses: we've seen Secretarybirds in this area every time I've done this route. And this year provided the most amazing encounter! I saw the flashes of large wings on a distant hillside, and my new pair of Vortex 12x50 Diamondback bins delivered the clearest possible views of the resident pair in a territorial tussle with an interloper. Furious chasing and kicking made it seem more like a UFC encounter than a dispute over whose breeding areas this was. This was the first time I had seen this behaviour and watched with awe as the transgressor was driven to flight and chased for several hundred meters. The pair turned back at what I assumed was the edge of their home range and continued hunting for prey as if nothing had just occurred!



Figure 13 - The entrance board to the Reserve. Photo by Cassie Carstens.

The last few kilometres pass through more maize fields and pastures, before turning back along the R617 towards Underberg for a second drive through the rest of the reserve. Sightings this year were much lower than previously, with only 18 entries on our datasheet. But the Secretarybird-induced smiles on our faces more than made up for the low numbers!

Route WK04 in the Klein Karoo near Montagu in the Western Cape

- **Laurel Bloch**

The route starts at the turn off from the N1 to Montagu on the R318 and continues in a southerly direction until the Nougaspoot turn off. CAR participants travel from Montagu and beyond Laingsburg.

For the first few kilometres, the road bisects the Bijstein private nature reserve, which has preserved the renosterveld vegetation. We heard Southern Black Korhaan calling, no doubt from under their feather duvets. At that stage, the temperature was 1°C, and an icy wind meant that despite the sunny conditions, it didn't rise above 9°C during the count.

This area, and an area further south is under threat of the proposed Hugo and Khoe wind farm development. An EIA has evidently been completed for the Hugo WEF, but we have been unable to establish whether approval has been granted. We hear anecdotal evidence that the Khoe WEF has been paused. This would be welcome indeed as the whole of the R 318 has been identified as a scenic route with significant eco-tourism potential, but more importantly, it is an area where we count the most Blue Cranes and less commonly Black Harriers.

At 26 kilometers the route follows an easterly direction on a gravel road, through extensive grain lands and Karoo veld. The lands have been ploughed and very few Blue Cranes were in evidence. Rainfall has been low, and many small dams and pans were dry. However, this meant that the gravel road was in unusually good condition. There are private nature reserves and guest farms along this part of the route and much of the natural vegetation has been preserved. We counted 5 Jackal Buzzards and 6 Pale Chanting goshawks.

Grey Rhebok numbers have been increasing in recent years and 14 were counted. Although rather disappointing in terms of bird numbers it was as always, an interesting day.



Figure 12 - Laurel's CAR companions scanning the plains of the Klein Karoo.

Uniondale Precinct in the Western Cape Winter 2025 Report

- Alan Lee

“Because of you, the other day on the drive to George, I was looking for birds all the way”.

The words made me smile and filled me with joy. Claire Jorgenson was out to visit her mother, Judy, who has been co-opted as CAR route scribe several times since efforts began to get the Uniondale precinct going again (Figure 15). Claire now lives in Ho Chi Minh City, population 11 million, and leads a very different urban life. Judy had suggested she come along, and I'd agreed — on condition she looked for birds, only half-joking that if she didn't spot any, I'd leave her at the end of the route.

Claire diligently scanned the hills of the Klein Karoo, racking up many contributions to the WU01 tally, and more than earning her ride back to the sleepy town of Uniondale. My highlight was my first-ever Uniondale Secretarybirds: I'd heard rumours of the existence of a pair but never seen them in a decade of birding the area. Even more exciting was the use of a potential nesting tree!



Figure 15 - The lonely roads through the precinct. Photo by Alan Lee.

The company is always nice on a CAR route. Pat Nurse, who, together with the Lakes Bird Club, has been doing WU02 (a route towards the western edge of the Baviaanskloof) for years, recently requested a change to routes closer to George. This winter, she and Claire Clarke (a different Claire) set off for WU04 and WU06.

WU06 is a very short route at about 12 km, but running through mixed agricultural land, it has always been a good stretch on the couple of times I have done it. True to form, it turned out to be a gem — so much so that it took them two hours to cover just 4 km, as Claire was also atlassing and every bird demanded attention. The highlight was a spectacular group of 13 Denham's Bustards grazing far from the road near the start of the hills, joined by two Blue Cranes in the same area.

They finally wrapped up WU06 at 11:30 a.m., having started just before 8 a.m., and moved on to WU04. This route follows the Kammanassie River valley and is rocky and hilly if not cultivated

with orchards, so it's never great for target birds despite the spectacular scenery. While not as productive from a count perspective, it was as beautiful as ever. A pair of Jackal Buzzards circled and called overhead, and the route finished on a high with a sighting of Pat's favourite: a Pale Chanting Goshawk.



*Figure 16 - Claire and Judy Jorgenson taking a break from scanning for birds.
Photo by Alan Lee.*

By the time they rolled back into George at 6 p.m., it had been a full day in the field, starting at 5:30 a.m. Pat said the outing had “revived my enthusiasm for CAR”, though Claire was less enthused about the online data entry process, declaring it too fiddly for younger birders used to quick-fire apps like BirdLasser. Perhaps, Pat mused, it's time to consider whether CAR could have its own streamlined mobile app to make participation easier.

If you agree and can help contribute to the ±R100k the developer will charge, please get in touch!

WU02 is on my doorstep, and with the cold weather keeping the only other potential participants in bed on the day, I set out alone. The highlight was reconnecting with some of the area's landowners and managers I had not seen for a long time. Just as well, the birds seemed to have stayed in bed. I commented to Pat on the lack of Blue Cranes, to which she replied that they disappeared once agricultural practices turned more to orchards and away from the winter planting of oats that drew them here in earlier years. The large flocks are certainly a memory for me from yesteryear, and I'd not really noticed them silently disappear — a reminder of the value of repeating these surveys year after year.

A shout-out to Brian Taggert, still a mystery man to me, but who completed yet again WU05 (the most consistently monitored route in the Uniondale precinct over the years).

Lastly, thanks to Hanneline Smit-Robinson for allowing me to pursue my CAR interests and to my sponsors at BirdLife South Africa, Mapula Trust and FirstRand Foundation, who support the Science and Innovation Programme Manager position.

CAR Winter 2025 Report for the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands

- **Peter Divall**



Figure 17 - Jackal Buzzard. Photo by Crystelle Wilson).

Our counts all took place on Saturday, 26 July, except for KM04, which was counted on a very windy Sunday, 27 July. It was definitely a wintry morning, but, fortunately, it became sunny and windless and turned out to be an ideal day for venturing into the beautiful countryside.

Judging on the results logged by our leaders and observers, our counts for the three species of Crane were all less than in Summer 2025 – Blue Crane (S - 95/W – 46), Grey Crowned Crane (S - 179 /W – 127), and Wattled Crane (S - 37 /W – 15). Black-headed Herons increased markedly from 60 to 103, with over 40 counted at a heronry – all nest-building and squabbling over nesting places! It was great to have eight Secretarybirds sighted, along with four Denham's Bustard – often not seen at all. Now that Cape Vultures have been added to the list, it seems they need to make their presence felt with 36 being counted on the summer count in January and 75 on this Winter count.



Figure 18 - Snow on the southern Drakensberg. Photo by Alan Turner.

There is evidence, especially on KM 01, of an increased change of land usage (especially maize) where grasslands and even old plantations are being converted into cultivated areas. There has also been a marked increase in the number of cattle on some farms closer to the berg.



Figure 19 - A Black-headed Heron on a nest. Photo by Peter Divall.

Winter 2025 Report for the Overberg, Western Cape

- **Christie Craig**

On the 26th of July 2025, thirty teams braved the cold and mud to complete their route in the Overberg. The Overberg is the longest-running precinct in the country with the most complete dataset- a testament to the determination of the Overberg counters! Overall, the count was a success. Many counters commented on how much canola was planted this year. An observation that rings true, according to the latest crop estimates for the season, is that canola harvests are expected to be up 9% of the 5-year average. Canola makes for beautiful photographs, but we suspect that canola is not as 'usable' for bird species that use this landscape, being a tall, impenetrable crop with very hard stubble.

In total seventeen bird species were counted (Table 1), with an impressive 7531 birds counted on the day! Blue Cranes came out top in terms of number- 3966 were counted, with 1209 of these counted on OV08- between Witsand and Heidelberg. It seems that the biggest Blue Crane flocks congregate in the east of the Overberg during the winter- this is a trend we have also observed during aerial surveys. The reasons behind this are unclear- let us know what you think the reasons are! Compared to 2024 the Blue Crane count was higher, but overall numbers are down since 2010 (Figure 1), which has led to their uplisting on the Red Data Book, from Near-Threatened to [Vulnerable](#). Winter counts tend to be quite variable year on year- as it very much depends on where the flocks are each year and whether a CAR route 'captures' the key flocking areas. This is why we tend to look at the summer numbers when looking at Blue Crane trends.

Table 1: A tally of all the species counted across the Overberg precinct

Species	Total Count
Black Harrier	9
Black-headed Heron	131
Black-winged Kite	36
Blue Crane	3966
Cape Crow	501
Cape Vulture	100
Denham's Bustard	91
Grey-winged Francolin	38
Jackal Buzzard	94
Karoo Korhaan	28
Pale Chanting Goshawk	4
Pied Crow	63
Secretarybird	3
Southern Black Korhaan	12
Spur-winged Goose	2167
Steppe Buzzard	1
White-necked Raven	107
Grand Total	7351

The second most counted species was the Spur-winged Goose (2167)- a species which has done well in the agricultural landscape and can cause significant crop damage, especially on canola at the start of the growing season. Corvids were also abundant- interestingly far more Cape Crows were counted (501), compared to relatively few Pied Crows (63). These opportunistic species, particularly the Pied Crow, have proliferated in the agricultural landscape, taking advantage of powerlines to nest on and abundant roadkill and grains to feed on.

In terms of our threatened species of concern- 9 Black Harrier ([Endangered](#)), 100 Cape Vultures ([Vulnerable](#)), 91 Denham's Bustard ([Vulnerable](#)), 3 Secretarybirds ([Vulnerable](#)), and 12 Southern Black Korhaans ([Vulnerable](#)) were counted. There were also 28 Karoo Korhaan counted ([Near Threatened](#)). The CAR data was instrumental in informing many of these Red Data assessments- which we hope is encouraging to many of our counters- your data is contributing in a real way to conservation!

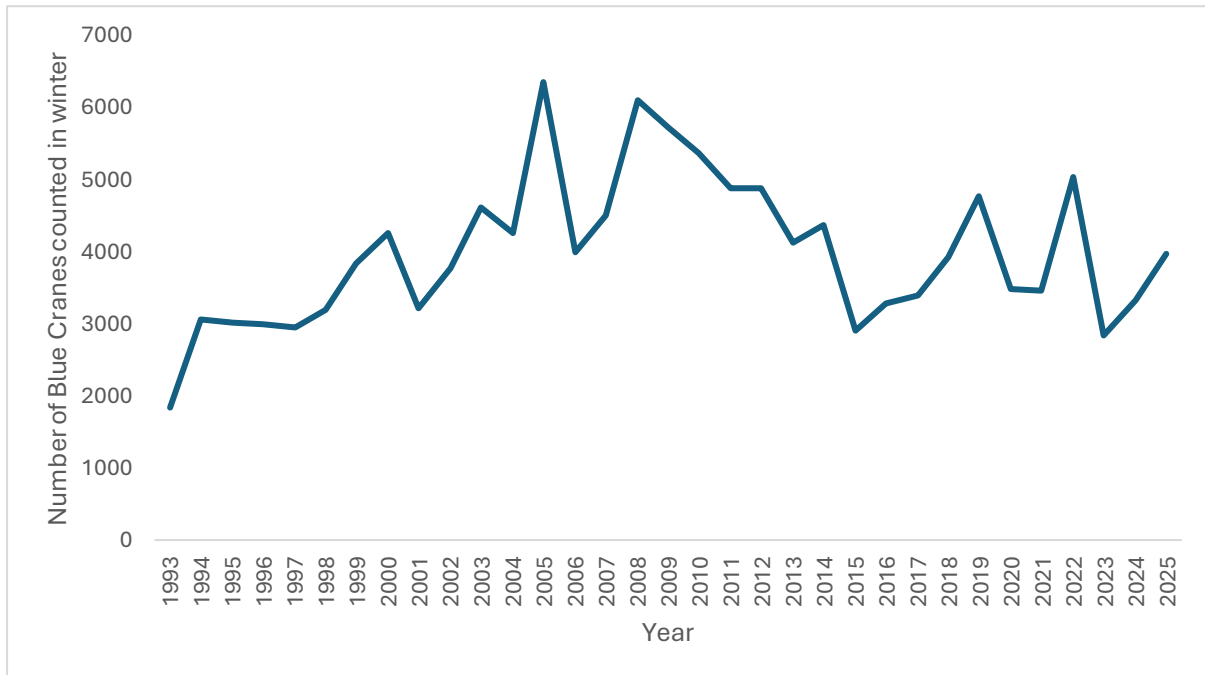


Figure 20 - Total Blue Cranes per annum during winter since 1993.

One route (OV17) needed to be shortened due to roadworks and high traffic volumes on the R43. When a route is changed by more than 10% we rename it to make sure that we compare 'apples with apples' going forward, OV17 is now OV39. A reminder to let your route organiser know if your route needs to be changed because of impassable roads or unsafe counting conditions. In a perfect world we would want all the routes to stay stable over time so that OV01 counted in 1993 is the same area as OV01 in 2025, and therefore can be directly compared, like for like. However, the reality is that the Western Cape is a rapidly developing province and we want everyone to enjoy their routes and feel safe doing them.



Figure 23 - Sarel Snyman and team. Photo by Sarel Snyman.

A big thank you to all the CAR counters for counting your routes, entering your data and being so dedicated to this project. This dataset has immense value to the conservation and monitoring of several Overberg species. I'm also grateful for your patience as I find my feet as CAR coordinator. A big thank you to Sally, Pam and Donella for their hard work in coordinating their respective routes. The Overberg precinct has many routes and many hands make light work!

Winter 2025 Report for Humansdorp, Eastern Cape

- **Truus Hedding**

Every July and January, the St Francis Bay Bird Club members are extra busy, as a group of us takes to counting birds for the Coordinated Avifaunal Road Counts. As a club, we are involved in the CAR counts, CWAC counts, and our regular windfarm bird counts, which happen every six weeks. Each group takes on its bi-annual commitments, and as “old counters” leave, newer birders are invited to learn the ropes.

Sadly, we have had to say goodbye to Abel Bezuidenhout, who used to lead on route EH05, but his team members, Maggie Langlands and Jean Cook, took over the reins, and the team is now strengthened by Sandy and Andrew Sieborger together with Roy Allen. They had a reasonably quiet count, but the exciting part was that they saw 39 Blue Cranes and no less than 14 White-bellied bustards spread out over a stretch of 8 km of their route. The route had to be cut short by about 3 km as the last bit runs on a farm that was still closed because of our region's Foot and Mouth restrictions for the past year. Some farmers were severely affected and are still reluctant to allow visitors onto their farms, although the situation is improving. They spotted a Long-crested Eagle and one Black Harrier. Black Harriers like the (as yet) unspoiled parcels of Renosterveld in our region need to be protected urgently. Three Denham's Bustards were also added to the list.

Jill Tudhope, who led on EH04 for many years, has moved to Australia to be with her family. Colleen Smith, the club's chairperson, is now taking care of this route, and she set forth with Joachim Mennen and Fiona Hodson, who were introduced to “CAR Counting”. They found the experience interesting and will hopefully help in future. The group also encountered a Black Harrier and a Black-winged Kite. No Denham's bustards were seen as many of the fields in their usual area were recently ploughed over, and there was little natural grass and scrub left.

Birds on EH06, traditionally Yvonne Bosman's route, were counted by Truus Hedding and Inez Rossouw, assisted by new birder Laura Dyson. They had an outstanding count with two Secretarybirds, 43 Blue Cranes, two White-bellied bustards and 29 Denham's bustards as highlights. What a lovely morning.

Route EH03 was counted by the team of Chris and Valda Barratt, assisted, as usual, by Frank and Anita Dabrowski. They saw seven species, including 11 Denham's bustards and 256 Helmeted Guineafowl. No raptors were spotted.

The use of the land on these routes changes every year. As reported before, the farming community has turned to dairy farming, which has resulted in hectares of land being converted to pasture. Every time we count, there is less indigenous bush. We therefore reiterate the need to preserve what is left of the original vegetation, particularly the remaining patches of Renosterveld.

Wind farm development is still taking place at a rapid rate and is transforming the landscape. We (as a bird club) call for mitigating measures to be enforced to avoid bird collisions with the many wind turbines in our area. On a positive note, one windfarm (Jeffrey's Bay) has installed computer-driven recognition and shut-down equipment, after experimenting with Observer-Led-Shut-Downs and has also facilitated the painting of a blade on two of the turbines. Research has shown that this contributes to the avoidance of bird fatalities. We commend them on their progressive approach and wish for all other wind farms to follow suit.



Figure 22 – Two close to a windfarm. Photo by Truus Hedding.

Winter 2025 Report for the Gauteng Province

- **Craig Whittington-Jones**

The first of Gauteng CAR routes was established in 2004 following a promotional visit to Gauteng by the project champion, Donella Young. Over the years further routes were added to the network and at its peak (2009-2018) 26 routes covering about 1250km were counted each summer and winter. About 300 conservation professionals and volunteers have contributed to the project so far. Most routes run through the rural periphery of the province, and several extend into neighbouring provinces for better coverage of priority areas such as the Devon Grasslands Important Bird and Biodiversity Area.

Poor economic conditions, the pandemic, natural attrition (emigration, semigration, ill health, death and loss of interest), increased traffic, deteriorating roads and uncertainty over the future of the project decimated the volunteer force and counting on many routes stopped or became erratic after 2018. The Devon and Heidelberg precincts have survived largely intact thanks to the willingness of some volunteers to take on a second or even a third route. 2025 has seen a resurgence of interest in the project that to the efforts of BirdLife South Africa and the new CAR Working Group. The Inkwazi and Rand Barbet Bird Clubs have both adopted routes in the southern precincts.

Various non-affiliated birders counted two long dormant routes in the north and there appears to be capacity to revive additional routes in this area in collaboration with BirdLife Northern Gauteng.

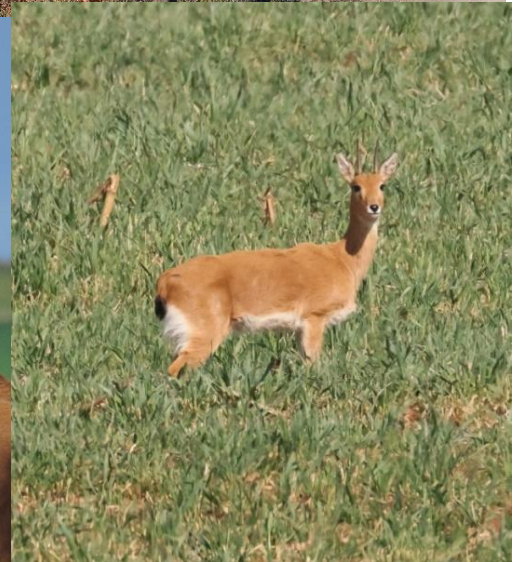
CAR is at a turning point and maintaining the interest and energy of both long-term and new volunteers is key. Regular feedback is critical and Brian Colahan's



Figure 23 - A chance meeting with Hennie and Natalie de Beer and Penny Abbott and her Inkwazi volunteers outside Devon. Photo by Craig Whittington-Jones.

CAR reports for the Free State precincts provide an excellent example of how this can be done. In future I hope to produce something similar for Gauteng. Some highlights from the winter count include 249 Blue Cranes on GD01, a pair of Natal Spurfowl on GC04, nine Orange River Francolin on GD02, two Northern Black Korhaan on GD03, the first since 2006. A Goliath Heron on GH01, the first for this route. Two Secretarybirds on GH05 and a Cape Vulture and a White-bellied Korhaan on GW02. In contrast, Black-winged Kites which appear common on the highways around Johannesburg were thin on the ground. Only 63 were counted, the lowest winter tally since this species was introduced to the project in 2013.

Pictures



Clockwise from top left: Decals (Alan Lee); Slow down! (Alan Lee); Oribi (Peter Divall); Secretarybird (Cassie Carstens); Blue Crane and cattle (Dave Whitelaw).



Declines along MT07 in the Standerton Precinct in Mpumalanga

- **Tobie Pretorius**

I have been doing my seasonal Coordinated Avifaunal Road Counts (CAR) without fail for the past fourteen years. To me, it gives a good indication of the “state of the birds” in my local area. For most of this period, the sightings and numbers were remarkably stable, given the habitat destruction that was taking place. However, as more grasslands are being converted into croplands annually, some significant changes have materialised in the past three years, mostly negative but positive.

Most distressing is the decline in sightings and the number of individuals of the Blue Korhaan (UK). On route MT07, the Blue Korhaan is a regular feature, both in summer and winter counts, but especially during the winter counts, with an average of 19.2 birds per count and numbers as high as 32 individuals being recorded as recently as 2022. However, the three winter counts after that yielded only 2.3 birds on average. Summer counts are generally lower, averaging 7.8 individuals per count; however, in the last two summer counts, no birds were recorded at all (Figure 29).

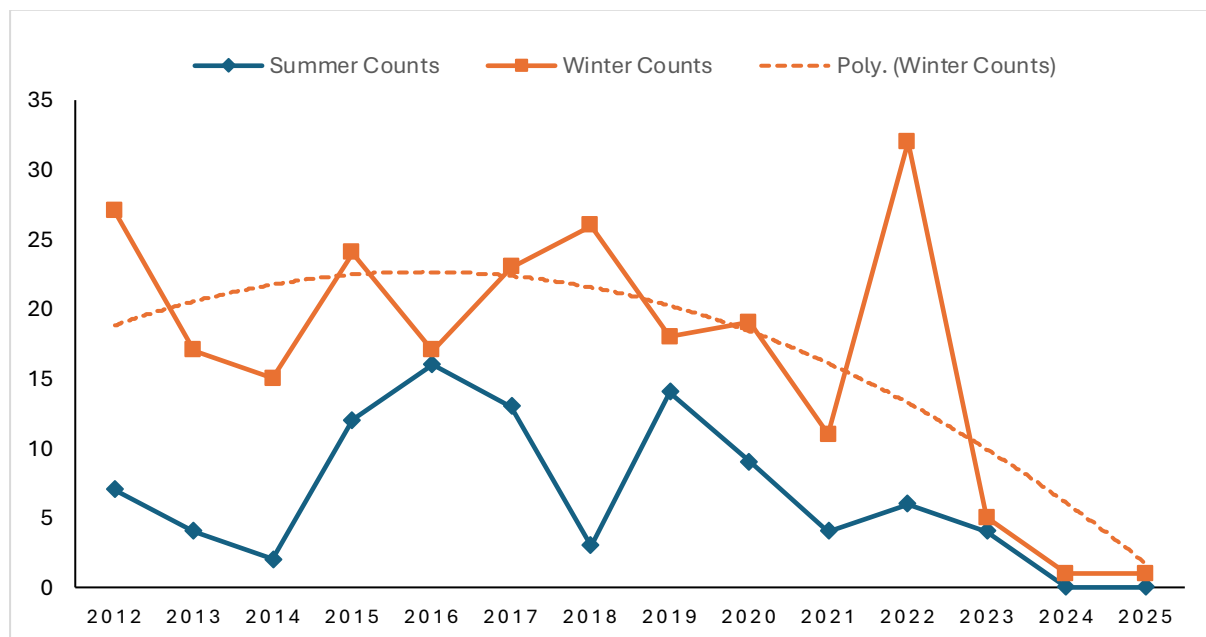


Figure 29 - The concerning decline of Blue Korhaan along MT07.

Rather worryingly, SABAP2 data confirms the decline in reporting rates for the Blue Korhaan is also occurring at a provincial level. Comparing the reporting rates (RR) of species between SABAP1 and SABAP2 is a very useful exercise when investigating range change and abundance change. But instead of comparing the reporting rates between SABAP1 and SABAP2, I opted to compare the reporting rates from the first half of SABAP2 with the second half of SABAP2 (Figure 30). The average RR between 2009–2016 is 3.54 compared to 3.26 during 2017–2024, confirming a decline of 0.28 in RR during SABAP2 for the Blue Korhaan in Mpumalanga.

The other korhaan that is regularly found on the MT07 route is the Northern Black Korhaan (NBK) and unfortunately it is suffering the same fate. The NBK is also recorded on both summer and winter counts with the summer counts averaging the highest with 7.1 birds recorded per count and in the winter with an average of 4.2 birds per count. This was up until 2022, however during

the summer and winter counts of 2023 and 2024 no birds were recorded at all. The summer count of 2025 yielded 3 birds and during the recent winter count, again not a single NBK was recorded.

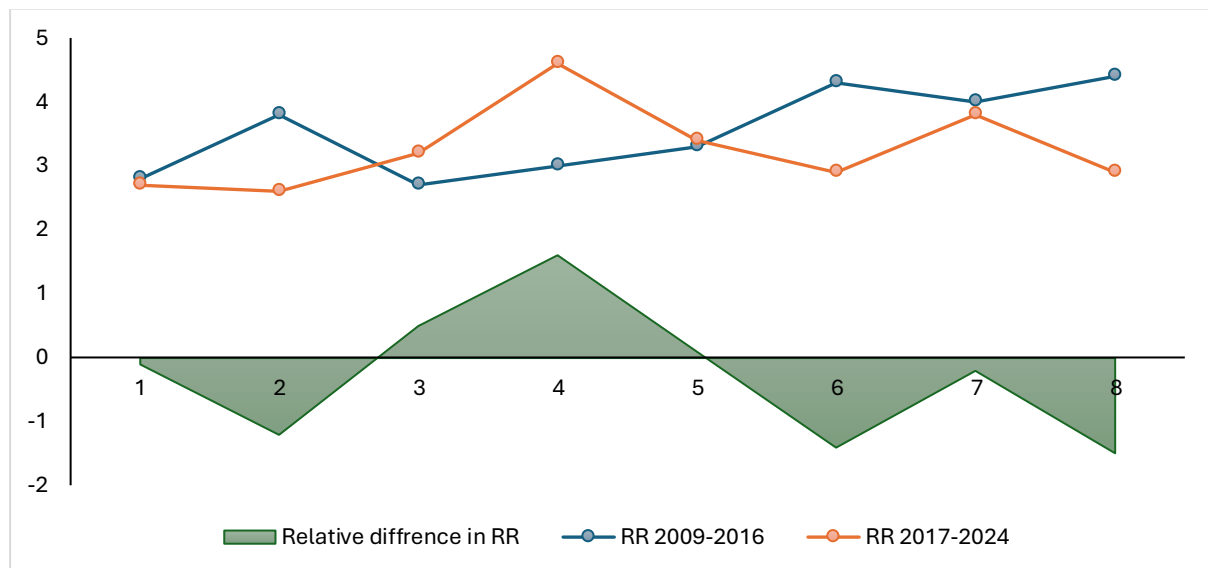


Figure 30 - Difference in reporting rate for Blue Korhaan in Mpumalanga using SABAP2 data.

In the newly published Red Data Book of birds 2025, the Blue Crane has been uplisted to vulnerable, mainly because of a 44% decline in the Overberg population, sadly this trend seems to reflect in the Eastern grasslands as well. Winter counts on the MT07 shows a steady decline during the past 14 years (Figure 31).

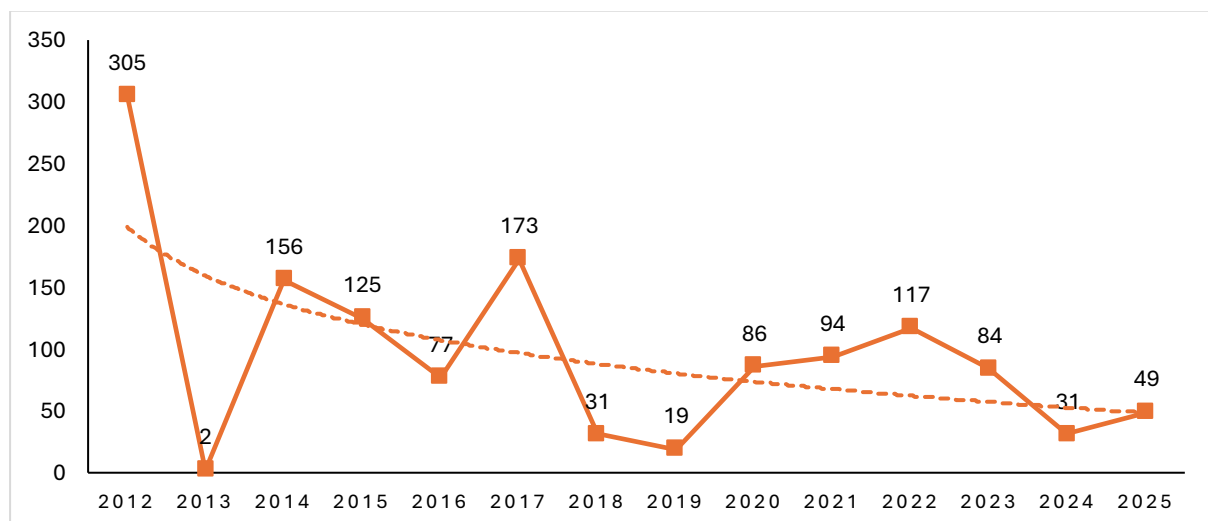


Figure 31 - Winter counts for Blue Crane along MT07.

Fortunately, it is not all doom and gloom, since 2020 the number of individual birds recorded during the winter counts for Southern Bald Ibis has increased significantly. Pre 2020 the average number of individuals recorded were 36.8 birds per count, however since then the average number has increased to 147.8 birds recorded per count (Figure 32)! This is a testament to Birdlife South Africa's hard work and dedication in protecting this endemic species, leading to them being downlisted from vulnerable to near threatened. Unfortunately, during the most recent winter count only 8 birds were recorded but that can most likely be attributed to bad luck on the day, after all birds have wings! Another species that has undergone a rapid change is the Spur-winged

Goose. Before 2022 a mere 7.8 birds were recorded on average, since then their numbers have mushroomed to an average of 192.8 birds, during the winter counts. Both species seem to favour stubble and ploughed croplands of which there is plenty and thus leading to the increase in numbers, especially during the winter counts.

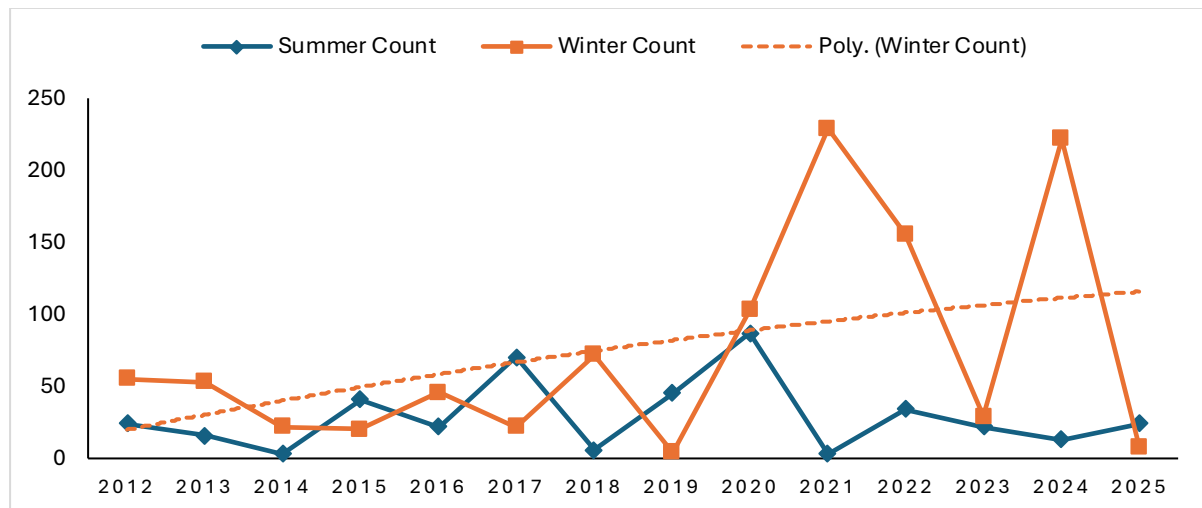


Figure 32 - Southern Bald Ibis numbers during Summer and Winter Counts.

It would appear that we have a double-edged sword, on the one side the increased coverage of crop lands creates ample opportunities for the birds to find food in the winter months when food is scarcer and in the process ensuring higher survival rates. On the flip side there is less natural habitat left for breeding purposes and higher disturbance during the breeding phase, leading to a lower breeding success rate, which is most likely the reason for the recent decline in numbers. But for now, it is still unclear why some species numbers are declining while others are increasing. The obvious reasons are that all of the habitat destruction taking place is simply causing certain species to go extinct. Another thing I have noticed is that since 2022 we have had consecutive years with higher than average rainfall, hopefully leading to some kind of cyclical migration that is linked to the El Niño weather phenomenon, that forces birds like the korhaans, that prefer dryer habitats to temporarily migrate to drier regions, leading to lower counts in recent years and potentially then increasing when we enter the drought cycles. The only thing I do know is that I will be doing my CAR count with bated breath to find out!

Bob Dylan asked the question - how many times can a man turn his head, and pretend that he just doesn't see? Doing road counts for the past fourteen years, has made me see the decline in sightings, habitat loss and degradation. And I cannot pretend any longer that by some miracle or by someone else's doing, that this is going to change in the future. The CAR project has been brought back from the brink of extinction, and we cannot let it fall by the wayside again. We as the birding community of South Africa must collectively stand up and actively do something right now, before our endemic species start going extinct on our watch. I leave you to ponder the following while we wait for the next summer count: Perhaps it is time to upgrade the engine of our CAR and present it on a Birding Big Day format on Birdlasser, with a leader board displaying team names and a live species count for some of our most endangered birds. Perhaps this will spark a renewed interest into one of our most valuable and long running citizen scientist projects.

David Allan – A founder and stalwart of citizen science

- Cassie Carstens

Recipient of BirdLife South Africa's Gill Memorial Medal in 2021, former curator of birds at the Durban National Science Museum, and stalwart in South Africa ornithology, David Allan is a true legend! Involved with the Animal Demography Unit at UCT since the early 1990s, David has been part of the development of both the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2) and the Coordinated Avifaunal Road Count (CAR). We reached out to him to learn more about his fascination with birds.



Figure 33 - David Allan. Supplied.

- *Where were you born, and where do you currently reside?*

I was born in Nakuru, Kenya. My parents immigrated to South Africa when I was quite young, and I was raised in Johannesburg. My early work career saw me based in the towns of Barberton, Amersfoort and Lydenburg in Mpumalanga Province. I then moved to work at the FitzPatrick Institute and the then Animal Demography Unit (ADU), both at the University of Cape Town, for nearly a decade. In 1996, I relocated to Durban. I've been here ever since.

- *What was your occupation (since I know you are retired)?*

Most of my working career has been as an ornithologist. I moved to Durban to take up the position of Curator of Birds at the Durban Natural Science Museum, and I retired in late 2021 after some 25 years in the job.

- *How long have you been a birder?*

From about the age of 19 (so about 47 years!).

- *What are your first memories of birds/birding?*

I first really became aware of birds while cycling after school in the open highveld expanses north of Johannesburg, with birds of prey particularly piquing my interest.

- *How have you been involved in CAR?*

My initial MSc. work at the University of Cape Town was focused on the three large bustard species, and as part of this, I conducted road counts of Denham's Bustards in the Overberg

region. I'd learned the technique of avian road counts from Dr Warwick Tarboton while working as his assistant on a survey of birds of prey in the erstwhile Transvaal Province. During these Overberg Road counts, the huge abundance of Blue Cranes in this area became apparent. This had not yet been appreciated at the time, and the focus of my study shifted to Blue Cranes as a result. After a few years, I involved Cape Bird Club members in these counts, and this was the genesis of what was to expand and become the nationwide CAR initiative.

- *Did you have regular companions accompany you?*

My Western Cape road-count era provides many nostalgic memories of hours spent on the road with close friends sharing like-minded stories and anecdotes of wild and often threatened birds in South Africa's fantastic natural landscapes. Dr Andrew Jenkins and the late Wally Petersen were two such companions.

- *Which birds did you most look forward to seeing on the surveys?*

Cranes, bustards and birds of prey were always the jewels in the crown.

- *How many bird species have you recorded in South Africa?*

I must admit I don't actually know – but most of them, I guess!

- *Do you have any favourite birds in South Africa?*

Always a tough question. Seems to shift a bit, too, depending on which species I've most currently had significant interaction with. A pair of Spotted Eagle Owls are currently nesting in my garden in Pinetown. Concerns that the aggressive Egyptian Geese and some of my noisy neighbours might disturb them is pushing these owls front and centre of my attention right now. Diurnal birds of prey though were my first love and remain as my most familiar old friends. Bustards and cranes rank up there too. But specials like Blue Swallow, Rudd's and Botha's larks and Southern Bald Ibis, among others, have also carved a place in my birding psyche. Not to mention pelagic seabirds and waterbird assemblages generally. Maybe it's like your children – hard to pick a favourite and indeed best not to try!

- *What do you feel is the value of CAR surveys?*

I think the primary value of the CAR surveys is monitoring the population status of threatened large birds over both extensive areas and extended time periods. Only a large-scale citizen-science project like this can achieve such goals. Individual researchers, even working in cooperation, cannot come close to what a mass-participation effort can accomplish.

- *How would you encourage those who have never participated to start doing so?*

Encouraging people to take part in CAR counts really should be easy as the effort just has so much going for it. As already mentioned, the project is of inestimable value to bird conservation. It is also hugely enjoyable and enriching. You get to spend time with large, fascinating and often threatened birds, and you get to do it in the great South African outdoors and accompanied by companions that share your passion. What are you waiting for!



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Anthus crenatus



Agulhas Long-billed Lark
Certhilauda brevirostris

We are proud to launch the revised Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Eswatini 2025 (RDB-online), a comprehensive, freely accessible online resource revealing the conservation status of the region's birds. The announcement was made during our Annual General Meeting in Cape Town on 24 May 2025, marking a pivotal moment for regional bird conservation. Over three years, more than 137 ornithologists, conservationists, and citizen scientists collaborated on 193 detailed reports to quantify the risk of extinction for the region's birds. This extends to an additional 70 endemic and near-endemic species still considered to be at a lower risk of extinction, such as the Cape Sugarbird and Orange-breasted Sunbird. The RDB-online provides insights into the conservation threats faced by the region's birds, as well as the effect of countermeasures put in place to protect them. The findings are alarming, yet hopeful and provide crucial insights into threats and clear pathways for conservation action. Explore the new website for yourself here: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/red-data-book/>