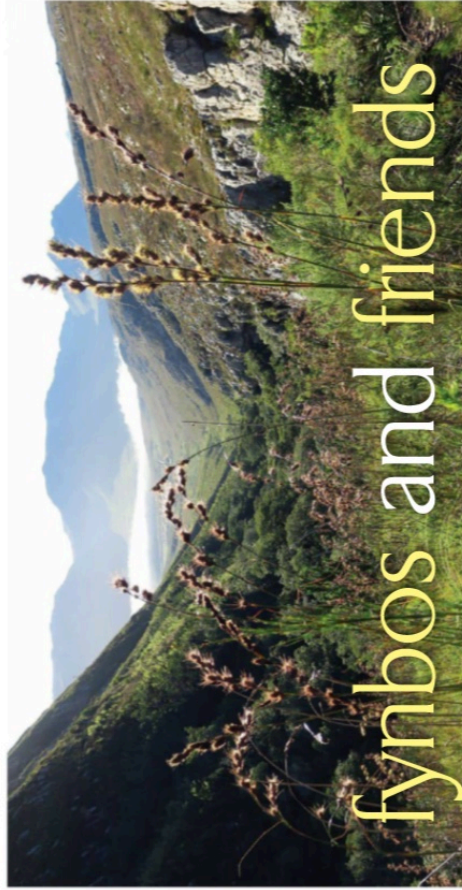


BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA news



PIETER BRAN

BIRD OF THE YEAR 2021: CAPE ROCKJUMPER

One of the best parts of searching for Cape Rockjumpers is the amount of time you spend in their stunning habitat. Although the Cape Floral Kingdom, in which the

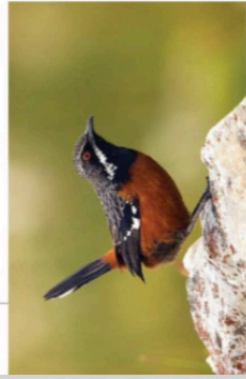
fynbos vegetation type favoured by the rockjumpers grows, covers only about 90,000 square kilometres, thanks to its incredible plant diversity it is one of the world's six floral kingdoms. To give an idea of this diversity, more plant species grow on Table Mountain alone than in the entire British Isles.

Fynbos is a Mediterranean-type biome that, like others of this type, is well known for wine production and coastal development and faces threats from urban and agricultural expansion. In addition to these hazards, the spread of alien species such as *Pinus* and *Hakea* into fynbos poses a major threat to the natural vegetation, while fire – either too much or too little – is also damaging. Although fynbos is a fire-driven system, with fires occurring ideally every 10–25 years, this system is disrupted when fires near human settlements are suppressed,

whereas in remote sites they occur more frequently.

Its position at the southern tip of the African continent makes fynbos especially vulnerable to climate change. Drier and warmer conditions are already being experienced in this part of the world, as are more frequent and more serious wild fires. Who can forget the great fire that swept through the Garden Route in 2017? More-frequent fires threaten plant species that require longer intervals between the burns in order to flower and set seed. But for the Cape Rockjumper frequent fires may be a bonus, as it does well in the resulting more open landscape. It also benefits from most of its habitat being conserved either privately or in Cape Nature reserves designed to protect water catchment areas.

The Cape Floral Kingdom is home to eight endemic bird species: seven



WARWICK PARBITION

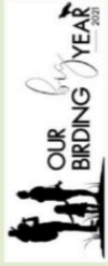
above and top A species that prefers higher rocky mountain slopes, the Cape Rockjumper is one of the eight bird species endemic to the Cape Floral Kingdom.

songbirds and a buttonquail. Cape Rockjumpers are restricted to mountain fynbos, a habitat where it is possible to get good views of Victoria's Warblers, Cape Siskins and Orange-breasted Sunbirds. These three species, however, can also be found almost anywhere in fynbos.

Where the vegetation is young, you may even be lucky enough to flush a Fynbos Buttonquail. A trip to the Renosterveld-dominated Overberg and Agulhas Plain is required to see the Agulhas Long-billed Lark, which appears to be doing well despite the severe transformation of its habitat. Cape Sugarbirds are best found on the flowers of their favourite protea species, even in urban gardens. The nomadic Protea Seedeater are more elusive, but can be abundant in recently

burnt mature fynbos where large quantities of protea seeds have been released. When it is hot and dry they, like Orange-breasted Sunbirds and Cape Siskins, may be observed at streams, drinking and bathing.

In 2011 a comparison of SABAP2 data for species endemic and non-endemic to fynbos revealed that the endemics were not faring too well. As a result, SANBI, the FitzPatrick Institute and BirdLife South Africa sponsored a comprehensive survey (by bicycle!) of fynbos bird species. The results showed that populations of the Cape Rockjumper and Protea Seedeater are in trouble. Follow-up research indicated that declines in reporting rates were associated with warmer parts of their habitat, while ongoing studies suggest that



toolkit and will assist them enormously. Jacana Media also made an unsolicited donation of 16 copies of various titles to be distributed among the guides. They include *Roberts' Nests & Eggs*, *Shorebirds of South Africa*, *Terrestrial Gamebirds and Snipes of Africa and Featherings: True stories in search of birds*. These books will both educate the guides and inspire them to new heights.

If you would like to make use of the services of the guides, you can find their details at www.birdlife.org.za/go-birding/ community-bird-guides. If you would also like to support BirdLife South Africa's Community Bird Guide Project in any way, please contact me at andrew.debloco@birdlife.org.za

ANDREW DE BLOCO,
AVITOURISM PROJECT
MANAGER



MORE SUPPORT FOR GUIDES IN 2021

The community bird guides trained by BirdLife South Africa have received tremendous support over the past 12 months. In the face of the global Covid-19 pandemic, a crowd-funding effort in 2020 raised more than R700 000 to help out 40 guides via our relief fund. And over the summer many birders made a special effort to support the guides by using their services, 2021 looks promising too, with at least one creative effort in the pipeline that will add to funding for the guides.

In a rather extraordinary Birding Big Year, the Widdows family (below) – Craig, Christine, four-year-old Wren and Big Year 2021. The links for donations to their fundraising effort can be found there too. We salute Craig and Christine for their support and encourage you to spread the word about their extraordinary endeavour.

Two local publishers have also offered very generous support. Struik Nature donated 40 copies of the new Sasol eBirds app for the community bird guides. The app was launched last year in conjunction with the fifth edition of *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa*. It is a welcome addition to the guides'

