SCIENCE AND INNOVATION: A NEW MANAGER

With the departure of Robin Colyn to Canada, Alan Lee has taken over the role of Ekapa Science and Innovation Manager at BirdLife South Africa. Together with Ernst Retief – and with collaboration from Robin and guidance from Hanneline Smit-Robinson – he will continue to work on spatial products and research that informs the conservation of South Africa's birds.

Having conducted surveys in fynbos, the Karoo and the Amazon rainforest, Alan brings a wealth of experience to the post, as well as a research portfolio that strongly features fynbos birds and collaborations with SANBI and the EWT. He believes that anything can be achieved; dream big and be satisfied with what you accomplish along the way. Among his accomplishments he counts surveys of Fynbos Buttonquail and perhaps also his work as editor-in-chief of *Ostrich: Journal of African Ornithology*, which attained its highest rating ever in 2020.

Alan is a big fan of citizen science in all its forms and he contributes to iNaturalist as well as SABAP2 and SAFRING. He also hosts Biosphere Expeditions (*www.biosphere-expeditions.org*) research at his home on the Blue Hill Nature Reserve. As a proficient R coder, he is adept at using these databases. For example, in 2020 he collaborated with SAFRING to summarise bird biometric data and with Chevonne Reynolds at Wits University to examine the species richness and functional diversity of Africa's urban birds using African Bird Atlas Project data. He urges readers to contribute to SABAP2 and other bird atlasing projects; by downloading BirdLasser you can give more meaning to your birding, he says.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Austin Roberts Memorial Award

BirdLife South Africa's Austin Roberts Memorial Award has been established to honour people who have made a significant contribution to bird conservation in South Africa. The inaugural award was presented to John Ledger in 2014, and then to David Chamberlain in 2015 and Bruce Dyer in 2019.

Nominations can only be made by members of BirdLife South Africa and should include a detailed motivation and the candidate's CV.

Gill Memorial Medal Award

BirdLife South Africa's most prestigious award is the Gill Memorial Medal, which is presented to deserving recipients for their outstanding lifetime contributions to ornithology in southern Africa. The inaugural award was presented to Jack Winterbottom in 1960 and the most recent recipient was David Allan in 2021. The list of recipients includes some of southern Africa's most distinguished ornithologists, such as Claire Spottiswoode, Phillip Clancey, Roy Siegfried, Richard Brooke, Warwick Tarboton, Richard Dean, John Cooper and Adrian Craig.

Nominations can only be made by members of BirdLife South Africa and should include a detailed motivation, a short CV of the candidate and a list of the candidate's relevant achievements (especially his/her publication list).

Both awards will be presented at BirdLife South Africa's Annual General Meeting in 2022.

Please visit *www.birdlife.org.za* for procedures and criteria information. Nominations should be sent to *isabel.human@birdlife.org.za* by Friday, 25 February 2022.

THE **93rd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** (AGM) OF BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA

To be held at xxxxx, Saturday, xxxxx, at xxxxxxx

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Confirmation of the minutes of the 92nd AGM
3. Matters arising from the minutes of the 92nd AGM
4. Chairman's 2021 report
5. President's address
6. Consideration and adoption of the annual report of the Chief Executive Officer
7. Consideration and adoption of the report of the Treasurer and the audited 2021 annual financial statements
8. Appointment of external auditors
9. Nomination and election of office bearers in accordance with the BirdLife South Africa constitution
10. BirdLife South Africa initiatives & publications
11. Resolutions
12. Presentation of the Gill Memorial Medal and Austin Roberts Memorial awards
13. Any other business

BIRD OF THE YEAR 2021: CAPE ROCKJUMPER

WHERE DO ROCKJUMPERS FIT IN?

ADAM RILEY

It's a messy family tree, but we are making progress… Genetic technology over the past few decades has given scientists an increasingly accurate picture of avian taxonomy. With more knowledge, however, comes more rearranging. New techniques uncover new relationships, resulting in species shifting from one genus – or even family – to another, to the extent that it seems unlikely we'll be able to say that we've 'solved' bird relationships within our lifetime. In the past we depended mostly on the morphology of birds to figure out who was related to whom, which meant that a singular species like the Cape Rockjumper was constantly put in the wrong group.

The first attempt to put the rockjumper into a taxonomic box was made in 1867, when it was labelled a thrush (family Turdidae) in Edgar Layard's *The Birds of South Africa*. This made some sense; it has the requisite dark back and red or orange breast. But the red eye and longish bill must have seemed out of place and in the 1980s Michael Irwin argued that it should rather be placed with the babblers (Timaliidae), where red eyes and pointed bills, as well as living in small territorial groups, are commonplace. The next decade saw early genetic work placing it in its own family, Chaetopidae. Of course, until the 1990s there was only one species, *Chaetops frenatus*, with a subspecies, *C. f. aurantius*, in the Drakensberg – which explains why some museum specimens collected before the 1990s are labelled *frenatus* when they are clearly *aurantius*.

The Chaetopidae are grouped with the picathartes, or rockfowl (Picathartidae), of West and central Africa and, more distantly, with the monotypic Rail-babbler (Eupetidae) of South-East Asia. However, the finer details of these relationships are still up for debate.

But many of us have no more than a passing interest in systematics, so why should we care? One reason may be that numerous studies suggest that many traits – be they behavioural, physiological or other – have a lot to do with how closely species are related to one another. For example, when we took phylogeny into account, some of the 'weird' physiological traits found in the Cape Rockjumper suddenly made more sense. When rockjumper data were compared to other so-called 'young' passerine species they stood out, but when they were compared to 'old' passerines – ones belonging to a group that split off 30–40 million years ago – they did not. So perhaps these data represent traits that all the 'old' passerines still have.

We have always known that the Cape Rockjumper is special. Anyone who spends time with these charismatic birds will acknowledge this. But the better genetic understanding we have recently acquired tells us that its uniqueness stems from more than being an intrinsic part of a special floristic kingdom and restricted to a small, specialised habitat where you have to put in some serious legwork and exercise great patience if you want to see it. Now we also know that it is unique because of its genetic placement as a single genus within an ancient passerine lineage. So maybe rockjumpers don't want to fit in at all; maybe they've just been waiting for someone to show us how well they stand out.

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KRISTA OSWALD