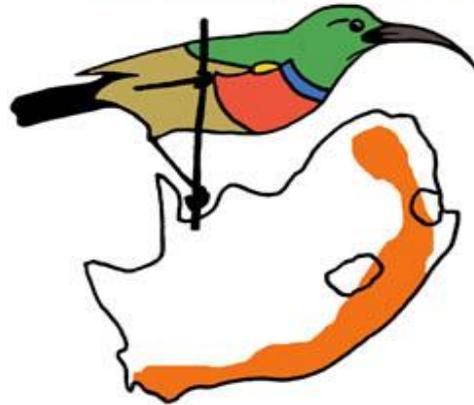


SABAP2



Further Fuss around Vosburg

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Further Fuss around Vosburg

I really like Vosburg. For a Karoo town, it holds its own as being neat and well managed, small, but welcoming. Pulling into the town October 2021, the lady who guards the key to the simple municipal campsite

said: "The birdwatcher! Weren't there two of you last time?"

Well, that was impressive because 'last time' was 2018 when I was surveying across the Karoo with Eric Herrmann: <https://bluehillescape.blogspot.com/2018/10/whats-up-with-vosburg.html>

I like to think I must have made an impression, but if I was told I was the first visitor since my last visit, I wouldn't be surprised either. There are few reasons to stop at this out-of-the-way town when the bustling 'Karoo polis' (my new word for a Karoo version of a large town) of Carnarvon is just another hour down the road.

My mission this time was slightly different compared to 2018. There was one of those gaps in the atlas coverage map that had been bothering me for a long time. Earlier in the year Stefan Theron had organized an atlas bash to the east, beyond Britstown. Britstown is one of those more typical Karoo towns, with a more typical *dorp* personality associated with the unwashed and unwanted. I'll never forget the hotel unable to serve us a coffee, for which there must surely be a rampant market for the endless stream of traffic traversing the N12 towards Kimberley, still 3 hours' drive beyond. That mission was to see if Karoo Lark indeed did venture this far east as the atlas project suggested. We found no Karoo Lark.

We'd also hoped for a range extension of Sclater's Lark. A year previously we'd also recorded Sclater's Lark in the vicinity of Britstown. Now, with fields of '*kalk*' and associated shrubbery and waterholes, I was optimistic I'd pick one up. Alas, the species would not occur on any of the 6 full protocol cards spent in the area (split with a trip to Kimberley for Kamfer's Dam and donor related business, a tale for another day perhaps). The Vosburg pentad is an oasis in a desert of dusty brown, with the local sewage works a party place for plovers and other waterbirds. I had the fifty before I was curled up in my tent, with bike assembled for the mission the next day.



The morning mission was two virgin pentads to the west. I'd set off in the dark, steering the bicycle with one hand and wielding a spotlight with the other, just so I could tick the 'include nights' option for these cards. A polecat, Cape fox and scrub hare were the only entertainment, with the decaying Telkom poles sadly bereft of owls, and the road free of nightjars. Dawn brought with it an Out of Range record (ORF) generating pair of Kalahari Scrub Robins and a hungry jackal facing off a dapper dorper defending a lamb. A farmstead generated all the usual birds, and venturing beyond, a pair of Secretarybird keeping the company of cows. A mid-morning wait by a waterhole generated second prize for Black-eared Sparrowlark, and accompanying nomadic granivorous friends. The 25 km back to Vosburg was long and hard, into a warm and dusty breeze that transformed blue skies to grey.



A few days later, Kimberley behind me (and the highlight of that not >1000 Lesser Flamingo, but meeting my fellow BirdLife South Africa colleagues face-to-face for the first time since starting my new position), I returned to finish off the pentads. My arrival coincided with howling winds which brought down the powerlines from Prieska, plunging the town into darkness, and scattered leaves and branches far and wide. It was a nervous night in my tent, with trees creaking around. Awakened by a Barn Owl screech, thankfully, the final day was calm, allowing me to productively retrace my route towards Victoria West. Northern Black Korhaan were in every pentad, and everyone produced an ORF, as did White-necked Raven and multiple other species. Such is the burden of virgin pentad atlassing! Final card tallies were between 40 and 50, not bad given the conditions. It was hard to decide what the species of the day was: a Verreaux's Eagle in a stand of trees at an abandoned farm, or unexpected African Snipe at a wetland seep. I probably was overly excited by a Karoo Lark: but this species is causing me no end of consternation with its range maps these days. More on that another day. I wrapped up my day and my week wanting to return to these rough roads and dusty plains to further attempt pry the birding secrets held so tightly in these vast and dusty lands.

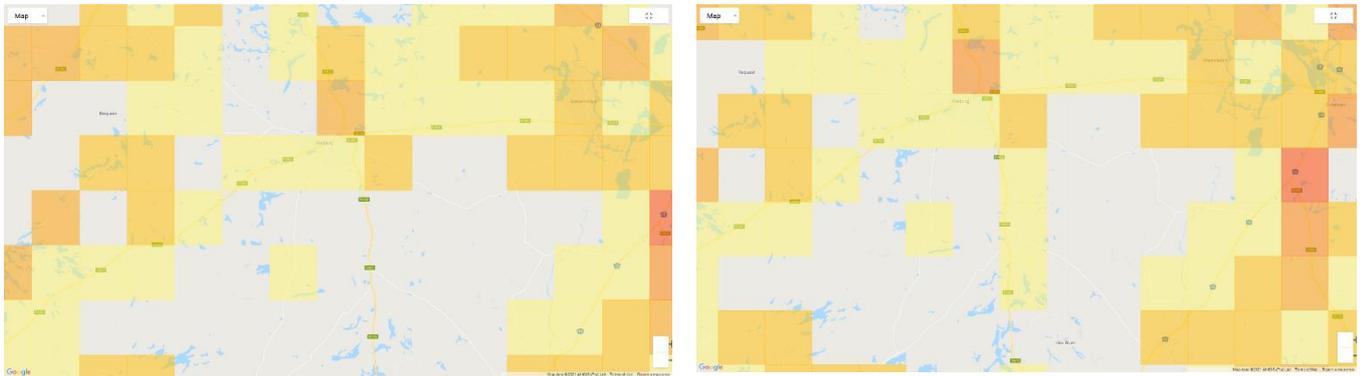


Figure 1 SABAP2 coverage before (left) and after (right).



