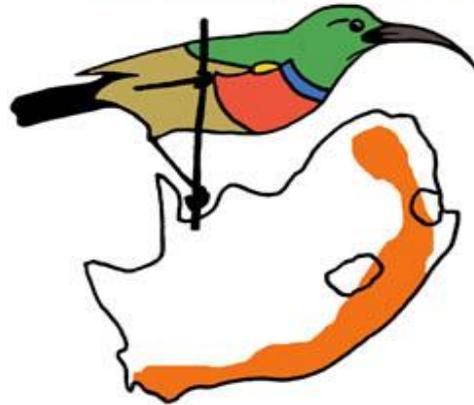


SABAP2



Atlasing the Leeuberg Pentads South of Bloemfontein

Dawid H de Swardt

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ATLASING THE LEEUBERG PENTADS SOUTH OF BLOEMFONTEIN

Any SABAP2 participant travelling south on the N1 past Bloemfontein will notice the big mountain just after the Windmill Casino and Total petrol garage on the Jagersfontein / Currie Avenue turn-off. This mountain is known as Leeu-berg, surrounded by grassland, cultivated fields and the Ferreira small holdings (Figure 1). Since September 2008 I have monitored the



Figure 1: The Leeu-berg mountain south of Bloemfontein next to the N1 highway to Colesberg.

two Leeu-berg pentads south of Bloemfontein (2910_2605 and 2910_2610). To date, 95 cards have been submitted for pentad 2910_2610, and 38 for pentad 2910_2605 (most of these cards are mine). A total of 214 species have been recorded in these two pentads.

The Leeu-berg mountain is dominated by *Olea* and *Buddleja* tree species, and is surrounded mainly by grassland habitats and small holdings with various exotic tree species. There are few dams in both pentads, attracting a variety of water bird species. The most

important of these are Rooidam which is situated adjacent the Loerierpark suburban area and the new developed sewage work near the Church Street (now Oliver Tambo road) and the "kring pad" intersection to Reddersburg. The sewage spills cause the area to flood, producing a marshland which several water bird species make use of.

In the rest of the article I will highlight interesting species which I have encountered while atlas-ing at Rooidam, the "kring pad" dams, Leeu-berg and the surroundings further south to Reddersburg and along the Jagersfontein road during the past 11 years.

Rooidam is unfortunately currently infested with Water Hyacinth *Eichhornia crassipes* but still attracts classic waterbirds such as Red-knobbed Coots, Yellow-billed Duck, White-faced Whistling Duck, Common Moorhen, Egyptian Goose, Red-billed Teal and Black-winged Stilts. The little island in the middle of the dam is populated with acacia trees and a few *Salix* trees line the shores of the dam.

This island hosts one of the few heronries in and around Bloemfontein. White-breasted and Reed Cormorants, Grey- and Black-headed Herons, Western Cattle Egrets and African Sacred Ibis have been recorded breeding in



Figure 2: Cattle Egrets, Little Egret and White-faced Ducks sitting on the shore of the Rooidam outside Bloemfontein.



the trees. The egrets also roost in the trees and more than 300 have been counted at the roost site or sitting on the Water Hyacinth (Figure 2). Special visitors include the two African Jacanas who visited Roodam in late 2015 to January 2016 (de Swardt 2015). They were observed foraging on the Water Hyacinth for insects. Other notable visitors were Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron and Glossy Ibis. Grey-headed Gulls also visit the dam from time to time as well as the dams at the "kring pad" area (also probably visit the nearby land fill areas). Raptors include both Gabar Goshawk and Black Sparrowhawk which have been observed catching doves and raiding Cattle Egret nests.

As the habitat changes when travelling towards the Oliver Tambo road intersection on the "kring pad", a new suite of species start to appear. Pied Starlings are usually present at the N1 bridge while in the grassland and flooded areas, Long-tailed Widowbirds, African Stonechats, African Snipes, Cape Longclaws and Levaillant's Cisticolas start to make their appearance. After high rainfall years, Yellow-crowned Bishops are also present in the marshy areas. In August 2018 a Marsh Owl was observed perching on a fence pole surrounded by grassland areas.



Figure 3 Greater Flamingoes visiting the new sewage work dam near the "kring pad" intersection to Reddersburg.

At the "kring pad" dams, Pied Kingfishers, African (Purple) Swamphen, Cape - and Hottentot Teals, Southern Pochard and Maccoa Ducks have been observed on irregular occasions. Both Greater and Lesser Flamingoes have been observed at the dams with flocks at times exceeding 300 (mostly juvenile birds) (Figure 3).

On 18 March 2018 a vagrant Red Phalarope was observed at a dam in the 2910_2610 pentad by another SABAP2 observer. The observation coincides with the observation of another (or same bird?) Red Phalarope at the dam near the Dewetsdorp turn-off (pentad 2910_2615) between 26 February - 3 March 2019 (observed by several Birdlife Free State and other SABAP2 observers).

Other sections of the pentads include the Ferreira small holdings and section of the Jagersfontein road which are mainly dominated by grassland and agriculture. Grassland species recorded include Ant-eating Chats (mostly further away on the Reddersburg road) and a whole collection of larks: Melodious (mainly summer months after rains), Pink-billed, Red-capped and Spike-heeled! Rufous-naped Larks are also present in the area, mostly calling from fence song posts in the grassland habitats, while Capped Wheatear and Sickie-winged Chats prefer the shorter grass areas with open patches.

On Leeuberg itself the following species are associated with the rocky northern slopes which are dominated by *Olea* and *Buddleja* trees: African Rock Pipit (occur in both pentads), Long-billed Pipit, Layard's Warbler, Grey-backed Cisticola, Pirit Batis and Fairy Flycatcher. Uncommon birds on these rocky slopes include Short-toed Rock Thrush, Ashy Tit, Three-streaked Tchagra and White-throated Canary. In the adjacent grassland Common (Kurrichane)



Buttonquail and Orange River Francolin have been flushed on numerous occasions and both Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Sickle-winged Chat (winter) have been observed in the low shrub on the foothills.

During the winter months (mostly from June - September), large stands of flowering *Aloe granidentata* (Figure 4) attract White-bellied Sunbird (which are resident), but also visiting Malachite Sunbirds between June to early October. During the past 2 years, mainly during June and July, Dusky Sunbirds were also observed at these Leeueberg aloe stands. The Dusky Sunbirds may be winter migrants to the Bloemfontein area.

Raptor species recorded include Lanner Falcon, Rock Kestrel, Booted Eagle and Jackal Buzzard. Verreaux's Eagle was observed once in December 2018. Historically, Martial Eagles occurred at Leeueberg (confirmed by Colin Steyn of Onze Rust farm) but I have not yet seen them during 11 years of monitoring! Grassland raptor species include Secretarybirds, Black Harrier and Amur Falcons as well as Lesser Kestrels in summer.

By regularly monitoring SABAP2 pentads you will always find new and interesting species. My last few lists for Leeueberg pentad 2910_2610 exceeded 60 species and during summer months more than 80 species can be recorded. You also learn where target species can be observed. These pentads are also near my home, making it easy to reach them on a regular basis and less than 30 km travelling is needed to cover all the areas in the pentad (with some walking at Leeueberg and the various dams). Sometimes both pentads are done on a day or over 5-day period or I rotate visits between months. In addition, I submit photographs to the various Virtual Museums such Birdpix, Lepimap and Lacewing Map.

Further reading:

De Swardt DH (2012) 2925BD Hagesdam - SABAP1 and SABAP2 compared. *Ornithological Observations* 3: 109-122.

De Swardt DH (2014) A comparative analysis of SABAP2 data for the Free State National Botanical Gardens and the Valley of Seven Dams Conservancy, Bloemfontein. *Ornithological Observations* 5: 1 – 8.

De Swardt DH (2015) Observations of African Jacanas at Rooidam, Bloemfontein. *Ornithological Observations* 6: 202 – 204.

De Swardt DH (2017) Birds of the Bloemfontein pentad 2905_2610: a review over a 30 year period. *Biodiversity Observations*, 8.43: 1-1.

