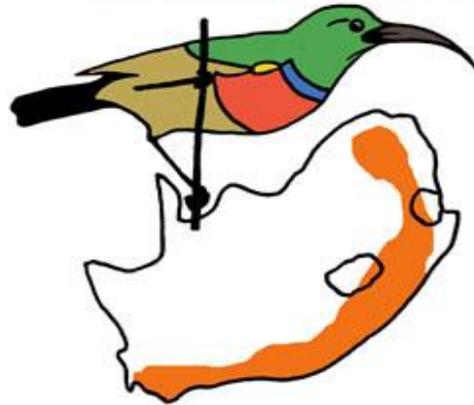


SABAP2



The “Bad” Pentad

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THE “BAD” PENTAD

Last night I promised the Redhead she could sleep in late after I had woken her very early the previous morning.

This morning I woke at 5.15 am (late for me), but quietly took my cell phone and started reading. Then a mumble from below the duvet: "Why don't you go and do your pentad?" Almost, but not quite, a squeal escaped my mouth and feeling rocket propelled, I rushed through the necessary motions - coffee, sandwich for breakfast on the way, then tea for the fabulous Redhead for waking so early, take dogs out to piepie. A rush to get out as the sun rises at 6.07am, but already I could hear the birds in the garden. The wind was also picking up to gale force strength.

I had already labeled the pentad in question as a 'Bad Pentad'. Figure 1 shows the Birdlasser map screenshot: access comes down to only about 1.5 kilometer of road through the top left corner. My only hope was a dam in the middle of the 1.5 km; accessible only if I find the farmer and he grants me permission and opens the locked gate. So, the prospect for a great species list was not good: I said to the Redhead “I am doing this pentad as it will be a new one for 2019, but I doubt if I will hit 30 species”.

Got to the farmhouse which is opposite the dam in question, but all is deathly quiet. Cannot hoot - if I upset the farmer, I will never get to the dam again - ever! Plan B: park amongst the bluegums and listen for a possible owl (or two). A bird glides overhead - a Gabar Goshawk. Fabulous! Species number one is also a new species! Bit by bit I move up and down the road, but no farmer shows up. Soon however I am on 40 species.



Figure 1: The bad pentad with few roads

After an hour and 30 minutes I gave up hope of finding more species, but then I remember that when I flew microlights, we used to land at a farmer's landing strip which was JUST in the lower corner of the pentad. I know a farm road to get there which is not shown on any map. So off I rush on the detour out of the pentad to get there. Calamity. Someone has built a gate across the road about 500 meters along the road. 500 meters for that half an hour? This was not going to work.

Then just ahead of me a farmer turns into his farm. I rush after him and beg permission to enter, which he granted, and provided valuable additional info. His farm runs into the middle of the pentad and there is a road; reach the high-tension Eskom wires and you've reached the end of the farm. So off I rush. But alas, another nuisance presents itself! The road leads directly into the rising sun. I never identify birds against the sun. Never. Rather give me rain, but not the sun and wind. So, I decided to travel till I hit the high-tension wires, turn around and head back with the sun at my back. Being Sunday I know I should not leave the Redhead alone more than necessary. So I pick up the pace; picking up Kalahari Scrub-robin, Sabota Lark, Scaly-feathered Finch (Weaver) and Red-headed Finch.



Then bingo, a raptor! About 110 exposures later I have another new bird for the pentad - Greater Kestrel! Get settled again and look for the Eskom wires. As I reach them, I view the pylons for any further raptors. One has a 'bump' on a support beam. Too far away with the binoculars. Zoom in with the 600mm - could be Hadeda (Hadada) Ibis or Spur-winged Goose. Decision time! It COULD be a raptor. But time is getting very short and I still want to visit two or three leaking water cribs which could have some great birds on the way back.



Figure 2 White-backed Vultures sitting on Eskom pylons

But a possible raptor? Too good to leave. I trudge off with the camera. Six pylons to go. A little prayer - please do not fly away while I am not looking up. Then a bird flies up from the ground...a White-backed Vulture. A great ORF which made everything worthwhile. There were another three birds perched on a pylon further on, they posed for a few photos (Figure 2).

So a new pentad for 2019 and only the fourth card ever, turning this pentad green. This "bad" pentad turned out not to be so bad after all with 54 species logged of which 8 were new. I will have to return as soon as possible.

