

Birding weekend at Nylsvley, 4-5 February 2022

Sadly, the planned annual census of woodland birds at Nylsvley did not take place this year, partly because we had insufficient skilled birders participating (Covid fall-out much to blame for this) and partly because most of the *Acacia* area and the routes we use to census there were flooded and inaccessible. Instead, we used the opportunity to see how many species could be found in the reserve in a 24 hour period, and over the weekend, given that the inundation of the floodplain this summer is the highest that it has been in more than a decade and this could bring into the area some of the more rarely recorded bird species.

The 24-hour count ran from 17h00 on Friday to 17h00 on Saturday and the species tally for this period was 216, with eight more added for the weekend as a whole. To maximise coverage of the reserve, teams went out on 12 of the 18 traditionally-used routes on Saturday morning which gave us good coverage of woodland species. Thereafter, birders combed the area ad hoc, especially along the floodplain where waterbirds contributed a further 53 species to the total. These included 12 species of heron (unfortunately not the Eurasian Bittern!), 11 species of ducks and 9 rallids. The list for the weekend is attached.

No species new to Nylsvley were recorded although a possible Spectacled Weaver, a new one if we'd been able to confirm it, was reported. A number of species regarded as Nylsvley vagrants were picked up, in both the woodland (White-fronted Bee-eater, Garden Warbler) and on the floodplain (Baillon's and Striped Crake, Goliath Heron, African Black Duck and a couple of others) and on the day after the weekend a pair of African Pygmy Geese, another vagrant, were spotted at Vogelfontein. All the flooded areas were teeming with Lesser Moorhen, and judging by their chattering call that could be heard everywhere across the floodplain, there must have been hundreds and perhaps thousands of these birds present. Despite their prevalence though, they only gave fleeting glimpses of themselves. The presence of a pair of Goliath Heron is of special interest as, until now, it has only been the occasional single bird present, and given the current conditions it will be interesting to see if they breed at Nylsvley - this would be a first for the area. The last species to be recorded on the weekend was the rare Striped Crake which Christo Venter and Wian van Biljon heard calling at Vogelfontein after dark - a seldom-seen species that mostly gives its presence away by its very distinctive clicking call.

As is always the case, a number of common species slipped through our net, and this year we missed Groundscraper Thrush, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Grey Tit-Flycatcher and a couple of others. Once again Nylsvley has shown what an extraordinarily diverse area it is for birds with the various woodland types, the grassland areas and the floodplain each contributing to the exceptional number of species recorded - there are surely few other areas in the country where so many species occur in just 4000 hectares .

NYLSVLEY NATURE RESERVE, 4-5 February 2022
Species recorded in 24 hours (216) and over the weekend (224)