

FRIENDS OF NYLSVLEY AND NYL FLOODPLAIN

News from Nylsvley

Newsletter # 109
October 2022

Dear Friends,

Greetings! Writing during a very hot spell I hope you are coping.... it was even hotter at Nylsvley.

The Marabou Storks made a great display recently it is so special to see so many birds of the same species together on our floodplain! Marabou Storks are quite large birds and can weigh up to 7kg and they only start breeding when 6-7 years old that is quite old for a bird. They are obviously successful judging by the numbers; about 300 were counted by Dr Warwick Tarboton at the end of September. They are scavengers but will eat almost any animal matter; there must have been an awful lot of dying fish available for such a huge flock to be together.

Despite the heat there is still lots of water around, hopefully it will last until the rains come.

A friend, **Peter Lor** from the Cape visited early in October and stayed at Dinonyane Lodge. He reported seeing 123 species over three days including Golden-tailed and Bearded Woodpecker, Red-billed Oxpecker, White-throated Robin, Grey Tit-flycatcher, and Purple Roller. He was surprised to see a fairly confiding female Mocking Cliff-chat sitting on the power line at the entrance. There was a lot of open water and they enjoyed spending time in the hides. In addition to the usual Black Crakes, Greater Jacanas, Little, Intermediate and Great Egrets, Black Heron, large numbers of Squacco's and Black-crowned Night Herons, White-faced Duck, etc., there were two huge Marabou Storks towering over the Yellow-billed Storks, African Spoonbill, Herons and Egrets. The little bridge where the Nyl River enters the Reserve is a good spot to watch the large flocks of water birds flying to their roosts, most of them up-river. There he twice saw a solitary Dwarf Bittern. He also saw White-backed Duck. At one stage he spotted what may have been a Lesser Jacana, but could not be sure. *Thanks Peter for your report come and visit again soon.*

The **Ostrich's at Nylsvley** are quite a feature. Friends of Rietvlei carried a story about them in a recent newsletter that I reproduce it here with permission from the chairman James Drowley. The story goes that Nylsvley's ostriches are unique because they pure bred. Apparently many ostrich flocks are impacted by species that have been bred either for feather or meat production. 10 years ago about 40 adult ostriches were on the reserve, in February this year there were 77 they are counted as part of the annual large mammal aerial survey! *Thanks to Dr Warwick Tarboton for the pic:*



“This enormous bird is the largest feathered creature on the planet. The ostrich belongs to the ratite family, along with its similarly flightless cousins such as Emus and Kiwis.

The word ratite: the group of flightless birds to which the ostrich belongs - comes from the Latin ratis, for 'raft'. It refers to the flat sternum of these birds, which lacks the strong keel present in flying birds for the attachment of wing muscles. Thus, even if an ostrich had wings large enough for flight, it would not be able to generate enough power to flap them. Their wings reach a span of about 2 metres and are used in mating displays, to shade chicks, to cover the naked skin of the upper legs and flanks to conserve heat, and as "rudders" to help them change direction while running. The ostrich might not be able to fly, but boy can it run! With its long powerful legs, it can reach a speed of up to 70kmh. This is not only the fastest land speed of any bird, and the fastest of any two-legged creature, but also faster than most birds can fly. When running at full tilt, it takes strides of up to 5m. They have two toes on each foot (most birds have four), with the large nail on the larger, inner toe resembling a hoof. Their powerful, long legs can be formidable weapons, capable of killing a human or a potential predator like a lion with a forward kick. Lacking teeth, ostriches swallow pebbles to grind their food. An adult ostrich carries about 1kg of stones at any one time. The ostrich has the largest eye of any land animal, measuring almost 5 cm across, allowing predators such as lions to be seen at long distances. *Thank you James and Friends of Rietvlei*."

It has been a year since I produced a 'proper' newsletter, in which I traditionally include the names of all the members who have paid their subs. Having been so long some names are now repeated! Sorry about that, in future I am planning to include the names in the newsflashes as we go along

Renewees with very grateful thanks: Syd & Felicite Catton, Cornelia Siebitz, Eric & Donet Smith, Ian & Pikkie Pringle, Reinier Meyjes, Lance & Hanneline Robinson, James McLuskie, Laetitia Steynberg, Amelia Viana, Brian & Dee Watson, Johna Turner, Marj Crouch, Hennie Kriek, Sue Goodman, Dawn Needham, Tim Wood, Anthea & John Sparrow, Sue Inglesby, Grace Thompson, Theo Sphambo, Jacus Pienaar, Sue Keartland, Lyn Bunce, Val Odendaal, Jan Boshoff, Renske Hofmeyr, Mary Stuart, Robbie Meijer, Margaret Rudolph, Bernard Shaw, Maryke Henton, Theo Boshoff, Jan Boshoff, Carla Hudson, Bosveld Voëlklub, Merryl and Michael Pierce, Carol Taylor, Sue Inglesby, Robbie Meijer, Alan Bedford-Shaw, Marlene and Stoffel Fourie, Louise Donkin, Lee & Andrew Douglas, Dr David Fleming, Martie Knoetze, Margaret Lancaster, John & Liz Livesey, Pete & Di Le Roux, Nyl Retreat, Linda Birkholtz, Ray Dumbleton, Barbi Forsyth, Chris & Grace Fismer, Gillian Pilkington, Dawn Schrock, Louella & John Wilson, Sarel & Rhoda Venter, Otto & Ann Winter, Dave & Val Gemmell, Dave Randell, Trevor Wagner, Richard Wadley, Riaan and Corné Prinsloo, Jenny & Paul Smulders, Eric Salberg, Eric Salberg, Miemie & Gerhard Snyman, Daantjie & Nadia Snyman, Marika vd Walt, Gerhard & Cheryl Venter, Bruce Goetsch, Johann & Anneke Doms, Beth Hackland, Nicky Wood, Pierre Reinecke, Johan Slabbert, Antony Cooper, Daphne & Ed Lee, Ian & Jill Middleton, Des and Ruth Boyes, Pieter Heslinga, Grace Thompson, Chanel & Howard Brinkworth, L Sly, Dr O.A. Leistner, Henk and Erika van Schaalkwyk, Michael and Merryl Pierce, Cornelia Siebitz, Jansen family, Sue Inglesby, Lance Robinson and family, Moira van Heerden, Sue Goodman, Laurene Ferreira.

My apologies if I have missed anyone out.

Huge welcome to new members: Rick Sher, Mark Chiang, Martinus & Marie Heystek, Anna & Izaak Löt, Ann & James Campbell, Alta van Os, Angela Roche, Brian Airey, Sarie Coetzee, Margo & Stefan de Jager, Ben Breedlove, Shirley & Philip Roach, we hope you will enjoy helping to look after such a special place. We received a generous donation from Marnus & Sarah Lottering towards new ablution block; they were the couple that got married in the Crake hide!

The annual cull was very disturbing this year; several visitors including some children were witnesses. Thankfully it is over now but they were working at night and over weekends which impacted on visitor enjoyment of the reserve. I just wish there is a way to remove surplus animals without impinging on visitor experience. I wonder how other reserves cope with this challenge?

Because no-one booked for the Beginner's Bird course 11-13 November with Lance Robinson we are negotiating the possibility of running a work party that weekend instead. We need at least 15 people to attend to cover the cost of the hire of the group camp and the weekend is self-catering. A problem could be the heat if this hot weather continues! Please let me know ASAP if you would like to attend. George Whitehouse is also offering self-catering accommodation to share in the group camp the following weekend (Nov 18-20) when he will be there but needs a few more people to help pay the costs of the hire of the facility. Please contact George directly if you would like to go (082 784 1056). George grew up on Nylsvley his father and grandmother sold the farm to the then TPA in 1974. George has lots of tales to tell about life on Nylsvley.

The **Beginners Bird Course** will be rescheduled for next year and we have a treat in store in the Geoff Lockwood has promised to lead a **Raptors course for us 24-26 February 2023**

It was with great sadness that we heard of the **sudden passing of Dr Salomon Joubert on 14 September.**

I only have happy memories of the great man that was Dr Sollie.

He came into my life in the mid 1990's when he had recently moved to Naboomspruit. Dr Sollie as we all knew him had retired in 1994 as executive director of the Kruger National Park and still had plenty of enthusiasm and verve.

We met for the first time at Nylsvley and walked together over Maroelakop. At one point my boot got stuck between two rocks, I fell over backwards and nearly fainted, he picked me up and rubbed my bottom which somehow prevented any damage. That was my introduction to this great man!!!

Dr Sollie was born on 30 June 1941 in Pretoria, went to Afrikaanse Hoer Seunskool and University of Pretoria where in 1967 he gained BSc Hons in Wildlife Management going on to study for an MSc and DSc on the social behaviour of Roan antelope and population ecology of Roan respectively. I believe he also gained his PhD on studies of Roan. Dr Sollie had a private pilot's license and was actively involved in all aspects of research and management, including aerial census, culling strategies, translocation, veld burning, bush encroachment, border security and affirmative action. Altogether he worked in the KNP for 30 years. His wife Bets supported him fully in all his endeavours and their two children were born and went to school in Skukuza. Bets and Sollie were camping in the KNP as recently as a couple of months ago; he was a fit strong man who played golf and ran.

Dr Sollie represented Friends of Nylsvley at several local meetings relating to the care of the Nyl floodplain and always made a very good impression. His depth of knowledge of all issues relating to conservation and the care of the earth was immense. He wrote the three volume book 'Kruger National Park a History' a truly monumental task and now a wonderful record of the development/management of the Park.

Dr Sollie was violently opposed to the plan to put a hotel in the Park. He was our guest speaker at the FoN zoomed AGM in July 2021 when he spoke so passionately about the elephant population in KNP.

In his 60 years of being involved with the park (before and after retirement) he saw, once culling ceased due mostly to world pressure, how the elephant population increased to the extent of largely destroying many habitats. He held quite controversial opinions about managing the elephant populations in the KNP. Only time will tell if he was right.

One winter Dr Sollie came with us on a hike up Kranskop Mountain he told all about the geology of how the surrounding countryside had eroded away leaving the lonely hill. Which according to local tradition is a holy place, we certainly had to get permission to go up there. I have climbed it 4 times, there are no formal paths and the type of grass on the steep slopes was treacherous, it is a special slippery grass used nowadays on artificial ski slopes. There were elephant and rhino bones on the top!

On another occasion Friends of Nylsvley held an AGM at Sandfields and Forests, Nylsvley's neighbouring farm owned by Brian Frank. Brian and Sollie got chatting; Brian was looking for advice about putting bulk grazers on his land and was thinking of buying some buffalo? Sollie advised him to rather get Nguni cattle as they would be much easier to care for, and the short grass would be good for roosting birds. This duly happened and Brian was very pleased with the investment and we all enjoy seeing indigenous cattle on the Nyl floodplain.

Dr Sollie spoke to the Friends Nylsvley on several occasions he was always so articulate and with a sense of humour. He understood how people's minds work and was very good at making people see the positive aspect of any situation. We shall miss him terribly his most appreciated thank you gift was a bottle of whisky and 1 litre of UHT milk! The other trick I learnt from him is during very hot weather to drink 2 litres of water first thing in the morning this pretty well ensures that you will not become dehydrated during the day. The Friends are busy negotiating with the family to install a paver for him in our Memory Garden. Susan and Gillian happened to be in the Kruger National Park soon after Sollie died and kindly sent the attached cutting from the local paper.

I have no more news of permission to get on with the campsite ablution block but the building of the new holiday chalets is going ahead quite well. If anyone visits in the next couple of weeks do please send a pic.

Please find attached a cutting from "Go" magazine (Oct/Nov edition) featuring our favourite couple Dr Warwick and Michèle Tarboton. With grateful thanks to member **Mike Nieuwoudt**.

Hoping that the rains come soon as I sign off.

With love Marion x x x

