

Dear BIRPer

It has been nearly eighteen months since we last sent you a newsletter and we apologise for the long delay in getting this issue to you. Financial and resource constraints have prevented us from producing an earlier issue.

It is good to see so many of you still submitting checklists for BIRP. To date, 18 500 checklists have been received with over half coming from the Eastern Coastal Belt (green forms) and SW Cape/Southern Coastal belt/Little Karoo (blue forms) regions. Of the 1375 sites registered in the BIRP database, 1128 (82%) have at least one checklist submitted with 458 (41%) having 20 checklists or more. Since the beginning of the year, just over 100 new sites were visited for the first time, many of them Natural Heritage Sites (see below).

The number of new participants also seems to be on the increase judging from the number of "BIRP-packs" mailed out during the course of this year. This is encouraging, and indicates that there is still lots of interest in the birding community to get involved with the project. For both our newcomers and regulars we would like to say THANK YOU for your support and commitment – I hope that it will continue in the coming years.

IBAs and NHSs

In our last newsletter (No. 6) we featured two articles by Steven Evans, the IBA project manager at BirdLife South Africa, focussing on using BIRP to monitor birds in Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Natural Heritage Sites (NHSs). For most of the sites falling within these two protected area (PA) categories, little is known about their birdlife, especially in NHSs. Together with the South African Natural Heritage Programme of the Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism and BirdLife SA, a coordinated approach has been designed to ensure seasonal and long-term coverage at these sites. All BLSA-affiliated clubs have been approached to set up regional monitoring programmes at their nearest IBAs and/or NHSs. This does not mean, however, that other individuals cannot BIRP at these sites, but we do ask that they follow the necessary protocol to ensure that proper legal access to areas is adhered to and that methods remain consistent. Please contact Steven (011 – 789 1122, iba@birdlife.org.za) or myself for further details.

There has been a gradual increase in the number of NHSs monitored, but there is still room for growth. As of July 2001, 26 out of the 138 sites registered with the programme have at least one checklist submitted to BIRP, while only 10 sites have more than 10 checklists. To access the list of sites and coverage statistics, please go to www.aviandemographyunit.org and follow the BIRP links from the Research button, or for a hard copy please contact me at the numbers listed above. In the south-western Cape, meetings between the ADU and BIRP coordinators of the Cape, Tygerberg, Somerset West and Hermanus bird clubs are proving valuable in prioritising and coordinating coverage at these sites. It is hoped that bird clubs in other regions will be encouraged to do the same.

PA lists

The last two newsletters saw the production of two separate PA lists which together comprise a comprehensive PA list for all nine provinces. These two lists have now been combined into one list which is available to be viewed or downloaded from the BIRP webpage, or can be requested as a hardcopy direct from the ADU. Some people may only have one of the two previous lists and hopefully the combined list will eliminate any more queries.

There is also a Priority List available, which lists all those PAs that are poorly covered (i.e. <10 checklists). These reserves need urgent attention! Please consult the list and if one or several of these PAs fall within your area, we encourage you to start BIRPing at these sites as soon as possible. Many of these areas remain unknown to birders - here is your chance to go exploring!

Please don't forget that if you visit a private PA that is not on the list, we rely on you, the observer, to send us all the necessary details in order for the site to be registered. The information we require includes: **official name of the PA, centre-point coordinates (to the nearest minute), size (in hectares) and owner contact details (full name, tel/fax/cell/e-mail)**. A map showing the boundaries of the PA is also useful.

Instruction booklets

These booklets have long been out of print but we are hoping that we can raise funds to print some more. Roy Cowgill and Steve Davis, BIRP coordinators in KwaZulu-Natal, are keen to see if the bird clubs in that province can make some contributions in this regard. We will keep you posted, but in the meantime, we will continue to distribute photostat copies of the booklet to new participants. Existing participants who may not have a copy are welcome to contact me and I will gladly forward one to you.

BIRP Spring Competition

This competition was introduced in September 2000 in order to raise the awareness of BIRP and help raise funds for the project. The results of the 2000 competition were published in *Bird Numbers* 9(2). This year, the competition was renamed the BIRP Spring Promotion and took place between 1-16 September. Results will be published in *Bird Numbers* and the next BIRP newsletter which we plan to publish in the first quarter of next year.

BIRP Report

In Newsletter 6 we mentioned that we were planning on publishing a report in 2001 based on the data collected to date. However, due to a lack of funds and resources, we have decided to postpone the report until a later stage, possibly 2003. A major obstacle is to find a sponsor for the publication of the report. Anyone who knows of a potential sponsor should contact me and I will gladly send them a project outline and funding proposal.

BIRPNET

Many of you will be familiar with CWACNET, the news and information forum that I provide to all CWAC participants. Owing to its success, I am planning to do the same for BIRP, since more and more people are acquiring e-mail and Internet access. Like CWACNET, BIRPNET would aim to provide regular feedback to 'on-line' participants about specific newsworthy items or information concerning BIRP. Being a one-to-one link, you the observer also have the opportunity to respond or comment about issues raised or problems you are encountering, etc. We have already acquired many e-mail addresses from our mailing list, and this will form the initial distribution list for BIRPNET. However, if you have only recently acquired an e-mail address and you would like to be added to the BIRPNET list, please send an e-mail to me at doug@maths.uct.ac.za

Regional Organiser update

For those of you living in the Pietersburg/Louis Trichardt region of the Northern Province, a new Regional Organiser (RO) has been appointed. Joe Grosel, from the Pietersburg Bird Club, has agreed to act as RO for BIRP in this region. As RO, Joe will help promote the project and facilitate regular coverage of particular PAs, especially priority sites, in the Pietersburg and surrounding districts. If you would like to assist Joe in his task, please contact him at Tel. (015) 290-2336 or e-mail joe.grosel@pietersburg.org.za

Finally, please remember to complete each form as **completely** and **clearly** as possible. This all helps to streamline the processing of the forms and assists us in keeping our mailing list up-to-date.

Happy BIRPing!

Doug Harebottle
Project Coordinator