

Avian Demography Unit

Department of Statistical Sciences
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7701 South Africa
Tel. (021) 650-4698
Fax. (021) 650-3434
E-mail: marius.wheeler@uct.ac.za
Web: www.aviandemographyunit.org



BIRDS IN RESERVES PROJECT (BIRP)

NEWSLETTER 9

NOVEMBER 2007

Dear BIRP participants

It has indeed been some time since the last formal correspondence. For that I am sorry but unfortunately the reality is that BIRP does not receive all the attention it needs simply because there is not enough money and time.

None the less, the BIRP project has been ticking over slowly and surely for the last 15 years. During the last two years we have expanded the BIRP website in partnership with the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). This has certainly become a very useful tool for many people. Some of the functions available on the website include site summaries, species summaries as well as observer summaries.

When drawing a site summary, one is presented with a breakdown of the number of cards collected for that particular site. This is presented as the number of cards per month which gives a good indication of where the data gaps for the particular site is. Furthermore the site summary gives a list of species reported for the site, as well as the reporting rate for each species per month. Lastly, the site summary also list's breeding occurrence for each species.

If you are interested to know how many BIRP cards you have submitted in the past, follow the observer summary link and provide the system with your ADU code. You will be presented with a breakdown of all the sites for which you have previously submitted data including the amount of

cards for each of those sites. Please keep in mind that there is an inherent lag effect with the processing of BIRP data and as a result your submissions will not show up on the system straight away. We strive to update the data from time to time and as such ask participants to be patient. Your data will eventually be incorporated into the system.

If you are interested to obtain South African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP1) data, follow the appropriate link and type in the quarter degree grid cell for which you need the information.

The main aim of this website is to serve as a data portal for BIRP data. Any person now has the opportunity to access BIRP summary data for any protected area (PA) in the country. Provided there are data available, many researchers, planners, conservationists, etc. now have the opportunity to get hold of the information they need in order to help them make better decisions. In partnership with SANBI, we are glad to serve this purpose! On the contrary, the website also gives us a glimpse of how much data we still need to collect. I urge participants to have a look at the website – find out where the data gaps are, and try and fill them as best possible!

**To access the BIRP website,
point your browser to:
<http://www.birds.sanbi.org>**

New BIRP Checklists

If you have been following the evolution of the BIRP checklist, you will know by now that it has changed quite a bit, and indeed a few times in the last few years!

Yes you guessed right – it is changing again!

Currently, the BIRP project is receiving checklist in all sort of formats and colours. Traditionally, BIRP checklists were colour coded to make it easier to batch groups together. Later versions did not require this to be the case anymore. Then as Roberts 7 was finalised some species were split and various name changes came about. This resulted in the “later versions” changing from time to time to accommodate these new developments. As with most changes, some people were happy, and others not.

We have now reached a stage where we will be working towards a single species numbering system within the Avian Demography Unit (ADU). This is crucial for project integration within the ADU. Currently the South African Ringing Scheme (SAFRING) as well as the latest Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2) is aligned with this numbering system. Other projects that will have to come on board include BIRP, the Coordinated Waterbird Counts Project (CWAC) as well as the Nest Record Card Scheme (NERCS).

As a result, the codes associated with the BIRP species have to change. This also means that we will have to set a deadline for receiving BIRP data in any of the older formats. We have decided that as of 1 February 2008, we will only be accepting “new” BIRP checklists. Unfortunately we have to move this way, and the sooner we do it the better.

So how does a new BIRP form look? Firstly, the BIRP forms are still divided in six regions and these are still the same as was with the older forms. Secondly, the new forms resembles the latest SABAP2 field sheets to some degree thus, species names are written in full and confusing species are

indicated in bold. The species are arranged numerically and as a result very much resembles the previous BIRP forms. Two key factors that can be used to determine whether you are using a new form or not include:

The date of implementation for the new forms are 25 October 2007 – thus if you have any form preceding this date – it is old.

Secondly, all new forms have a visible cue that will identify them as such. On all of the new forms the page numbers (1 and 2) in the bottom right corner, will have a yellow block around them. If you print the forms without colour, the page numbers will still have a block around them and they will appear slightly greyed out. Some examples are shown below:

Barn Swallow	04939	.....
White-throated Swallow	04956	.....
Blue Swallow	04972	.....
Pearl-breasted Swallow	04987	.....
Red-breasted Swallow	05014	.....
Greater Striped Swallow	05021	.....

<input type="checkbox"/>	Info	No.hours	Hab	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	48	50	54	

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:			
Additional Species require additional info, i.e. identifying features, habitat, exact locality and numbers, activity. Information helpful to the validation of unexpected records, e.g. unusual weather conditions, should also be mentioned here.			
Attach a sheet of paper if necessary.			
.....(w).....		.....(Cell).....	
			2

African Black Swift	03806	.....
White-rumped Swift	03831	.....
Horus Swift	03847	.....
Little Swift	03853	.....
Alpine Swift	03868	.....
African Palm-Swift	03875	.....
Speckled Mousebird	03909	.....
Red-faced Mousebird	03924	.....

<input type="checkbox"/>	Info	No.hours	Hab	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	48	50	54	

The new checklists are available on the BIRP website for download. We have also updated the BIRP booklet with the latest species list (including the new codes) and this is also available for download. I will also send out new BIRP checklists per email to all the participants that have this facility. For those that do not have email, I will be sending out the new forms per post as well.

As said before; you may still submit any old BIRP checklists during the coming three months but please, as of 1 February 2008, we will only accept the latest forms. You are of course welcome to start using the new checklists right away. Please communicate this message as far and wide as possible, especially if you know of people that may not be aware of this. Your co-operation is appreciated!

Electronic data capture

With the previous website development, a facility for online data entry was developed. Unfortunately this facility had the drawback that one needed to be online in order to submit data. Probably as a result of this, it has not been used widely with only a select few people making use of it. With the current developments surrounding the number system change, this facility has been removed from the website until further notice. I regret this move and urge those few that do make use of it to rather fill in a checklist for the time being.

I do realise that an electronic data capture facility is essential, and to that effect we are working towards implementing a better system.

Currently the SABAP2 project is using a stand alone data capture system. This system has been developed during the last few months and as such has made tremendous progress. This system runs independently on your home computer and negates the need to be online all the time. It is user friendly and also performs as a stage one vetting tool; making sure that the data that is submitted contains less errors. To that effect we are planning to tweak the electronic capture system to cater for the BIRP project, including other ADU projects such as CWAC.

When exactly the electronic capture system will be rolled out is difficult to say, but we are working towards having it in place within the first quarter of 2008. For the time being – paper rules!

BIRP and SABAP2

I have received a few questions from participants regarding how BIRP and SABAP2 fit together. I can confirm that the BIRP project will continue and anybody that want to submit BIRP data are more than welcome to do so!

SABAP2 kicked off earlier this year and from the ADU's side we do encourage people to become actively involved in this project. To that effect it does take precedence over BIRP but by no means do we discourage anybody to submit BIRP data. If at all possible, we would encourage participants to submit data for both projects. In the end, both data sets will be complementary.

SABAP2 and BIRP protocol differ from each other and as a result we would like to keep these projects separate. Furthermore, the spatial resolution that these projects operate at differ tremendously and that causes problems when it comes to submitting data for both projects simultaneously. The key phrase that we want to stress when dealing with these projects is: Keep it simple! In some instances it may be feasible to conduct BIRP and SABAP2 surveys together, while in other situations this may not be the case. Below are some examples to give a better understanding.

Figure 1 shows that in most cases there are extensive overlap between protected areas and pentads. This is mainly as a result of the small spatial scale of pentads (8 x 7.6km). SABAP2 operates on pentad level whereas BIRP operates on a protected area level. As we all know, PA's can dramatically vary in size, and this is where it gets complicated.

When collecting SABAP2 information within a pentad, that either falls completely or partially within a protected area, it would be unwise to assume that the atlas information would be relevant for BIRP purposes; simply because it may well be that the pentad does not represent the PA as a whole. In some instances it may be representative but it is rather difficult to determine when exactly this

would be the case. For this reason we have decided that in cases where pentads fall completely or partially within protected areas, rather stick with either atlasing or BIRP'ing separately; what ever you are most comfortable with.

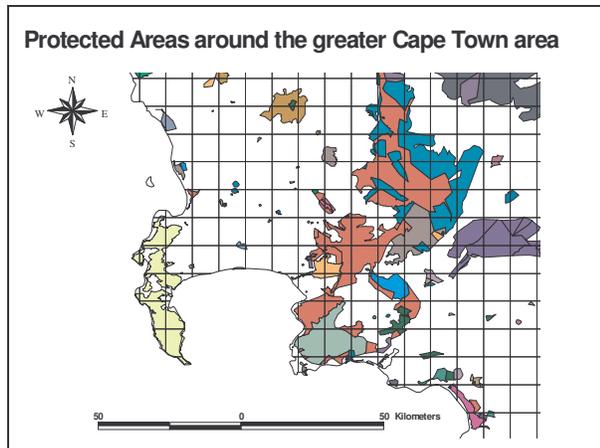


Figure 1: Layout of protected areas and pentads within the greater Cape Town area.

In some instances it may be feasible to combine SABAP2 and BIRP surveys simultaneously. This can usually be achieved fairly easily in the case of **small** protected areas that **fall completely within a pentad**.

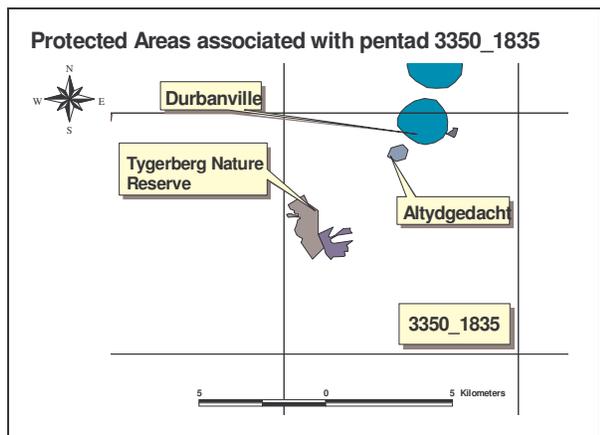


Figure 2: Protected areas associated with pentad 3350_1835.

Tygerberg Nature Reserve and the Natural Heritage Site (NHS) Altydgedacht, fall completely within pentad 3350_1835 (Figure 2). In this case it is highly likely that the SABAP2 observer will visit both Tygerberg Nature Reserve as well as the Altydgedacht NHS while conducting his or her atlas surveys for this particular pentad. In such a

case it would be fairly easy for the observer to indicate which species were recorded inside both PA's separately. These species can then be allocated to two different BIRP forms. Furthermore, a SABAP2 data form can span for a total of 5 days. Thus there is no need to worry that the temporal resolution won't be compatible since a BIRP form can span for a maximum period of up to 7 days. This is a good example of how two additional BIRP data sheets can be generated through a single atlas survey.

As said before, we do intend to keep track of bird species found inside protected areas separately from those found outside PA's. It is only by doing this that we will be able to compare the data against each other.

We do realise that doing BIRP surveys while atlasing would certainly require a bit more planning and effort. For those that feel they can or want to do this, we would encourage you to do so. Your contributions will certainly be appreciated. For those that would rather not combine BIRP surveys with their atlasing work, that is also perfectly acceptable. Lastly, for those that would prefer a casual approach to birding while within a National Park or Nature Reserve, BIRP offers you the opportunity to submit that information in a relatively easy and relaxed way.

In case you require more information or want to become involved in the SABAP2 project, please visit their website at: <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/index.php>

If you need more information related to the BIRP project, please visit the BIRP website at: <http://www.birds.sanbi.org>

Alternatively contact me on 021 650 4698 or email me at marius.wheeler@uct.ac.za

Thank you again to everybody for their continued support towards all the ADU projects! Your efforts certainly contribute towards the protection of our country's avifauna.

Marius Wheeler and Doug Harebottle
BIRP Coordinator / SABAP2 Coordinator