

Spring fever

Just like Spring brings new life to nature, it seems to bring new life to the Visitors Centre. This revival started at the end of Winter already; from July to September the Visitors Centre hosted **3 570** visitors! All of them handled by only two staff members!



The most interesting group were a delegation of Russian engineers. Not able to speak or understand any English, everything had to be done via a translator. They were particularly interested in Eskom's national grid and its operations.

Fluffing out for Spring

The striking Southern Double-collared Sunbird can be seen everywhere at Koeberg, flashing their bright colours in the sun. Their high-pitched twittering is very recognisable.

Their diet consist of nectar, the juice from overripe figs and insects such as spiders, which they catch by hovering in front of the webs and picking them out with the tip of their bills.

A male Southern Double-collared Sunbird sporting his yellow 'shoulder pads' for Spring



What the....

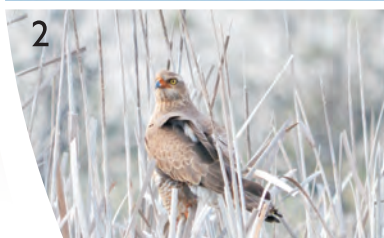
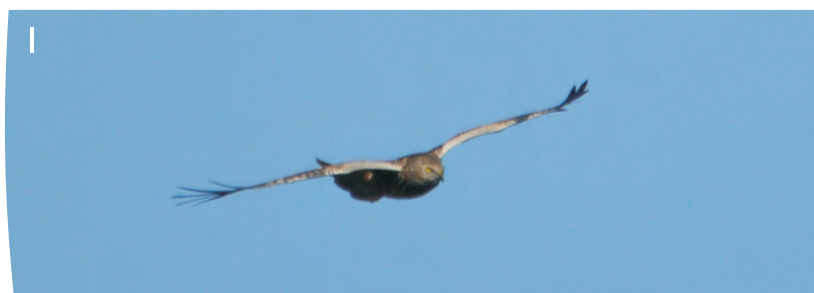
Identifying birds of prey (or raptors) is not easy. Whether you are a beginner or an expert birdwatcher, identification can result in a great deal of head-scratching.

Raptors are often seen from afar or in flight. It also does not help that young birds often look very different from adult birds. Each of these elements increases the difficulty of identification. Buzzards (solid brownish raptors) are known for being tricky to identify.

If one looks at brown Buteo(hawk) buzzards in a bird guide, they vary significantly, making it very difficult to identify. It is best to get help from an experienced birder and to keep practicing.

Identification challenge

Have a look at the photos taken in the reserve recently. See if you can identify the species.



Make use of a bird guide/app and ask the time-tested questions:
 What is the bird's relative size? E.g. is it bigger/smaller than a crow?
 What is the shape and colour of the bill?
 What is the length and colour of the legs?
 What colour and plumage characteristics did you notice?
 Where does it occur, and what is it doing?

Should you need help with identification, send your queries to Louis van Wyk at vwykLo@eskom.co.za

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Spotted!

The Spotted Harlequin snake (*Horomoselaps lacteus*) is a rare sight and a very exciting one for Koeberg Nature Reserve. In Afrikaans it is known as the *Gevlekte Kousbandjie* due to its characteristic coloration.

Spotted Harlequin snakes grow to an average length of 40 cm and prefer fynbos, lowland forests or moist savannah. They typically shelter in abandoned termite mounds or under rocks. If disturbed, they will violently wiggle their bodies to escape.

They have a mild venom which is not harmful to humans but can cause swelling, aching glands and mild haemorrhaging. They feed on blind snakes, small snakes, legless skinks and lizards.

Should you be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of these snakes, be sure to take pictures!



Scarlet Vampire Cup



The fascinating *Cyrtanthus sanguineus*, also known as the *Aardroos* (earth or ground rose) or Scarlet Vampire Cup, is one of many parasitising plants found in the Koeberg Nature Reserve.

The plant is *dioecious*, meaning that there are separate male and female plants. They are mostly parasitic on shrubby *Asteraceae* (daisy family).

They flower from July to December and is found in sandy soils from Namaqualand and the western Karoo to Mossel Bay.

An interesting fact is that they are pollinated by sunbirds, which is quite unexpected given the location of the flowers at ground level (sunbirds generally do not like foraging on the ground). The birds transfer pollen on their beaks while drinking the nectar from the flowers.



Bird ID quiz answers

1. African Marsh Harrier
2. Pale Chanting Goshawk (Juvenile)
3. African Fish Eagle (Juvenile)