

RESISTANCE TO MINING AT MABOLA

South Africa is endowed with a wealth of non-renewable resources, the exploitation of which has contributed to the nation's economic growth. It is also, however, globally renowned as a mega-diverse country. This rich biodiversity and the supporting ecological infrastructure underpin South Africa's social and economic development in numerous ways, yet are put at risk when poorly considered and unsustainable projects are allowed to go ahead.

At BirdLife South Africa we recognise the need for economic development, but do not support projects that would have a significant negative impact on biodiversity and the ecosystem services needed to support current and future generations. For this reason, in 2015 we joined a coalition of eight civil society organisations – the Mabola Coalition – to oppose the development of an underground coal mine in the Mabola Protected Environment.

That this area near Wakkerstroom in Mpumalanga is ecologically important has been recognised in a suite of policy

documents. It also falls within a Strategic Water Source Area. South Africa has 22 of these areas but they span only 10 per cent of the country – and provide roughly half its water supply. They are thus extremely important for water security and it is crucial that they be protected from destructive activities.

Under the Protected Areas Act, commercial mining may only occur in a protected environment with the consent of the ministers responsible for the environment and mineral resources. In 2018 the Pretoria High Court set aside the ministerial permissions for mining in the Mabola Protected Environment. In an apparent attempt to sidestep this judgment and the provisions of the Act, Mpumalanga's provincial government recently excluded the proposed mining properties from the protected environment. In April 2021 the Mabola Coalition therefore launched a court challenge asking that this exclusion be reviewed and set aside. We have been able to secure an interdict that prevents mining activity from starting until this and five other related court challenges have been finalised.

Although BirdLife South Africa is not currently involved in any other litigation, we regularly submit comments on prospecting, exploration and mining applications with a view to ensuring that environmental impacts are properly assessed and ecologically sensitive areas avoided.

Unfortunately, we are seeing a worrying trend in southern Africa in that laws intended to protect sensitive areas from the impacts of resource extraction are being weakened, poorly applied or inadequately enforced. To keep apprised of such developments and provide policy and advocacy support where appropriate, BirdLife South Africa regularly engages with BirdLife partners and other NGOs in southern Africa. Examples of matters on which we are currently collaborating are the threat of an opencast copper mine in the Lower Zambezi National Park (Zambia) and oil and gas exploration in the Kavango Basin (Namibia and Botswana).

DR MELISSA LEWIS, POLICY & ADVOCACY PROGRAMME MANAGER

AGM 2021

Held on 29 May 2021 via Zoom, BirdLife South Africa's 92nd AGM was attended by more than 150 people, including representatives from BirdLife International and the RSPB. The organisation's chairperson, Philip Calinikos, praised its staff for weathering the Covid-19 storm, while its honorary treasurer, Manuela Krog, reported a financial surplus made in 2020, despite South Africa's economic difficulties. Honorary President Anusuya Chinsamy-Turan presented her address before reading the citation for the Gill Memorial Award, which was bestowed on David Allan. Several BirdLife South Africa staff members then delivered the 2020 annual report in short presentations. Finally, the library at BirdLife South Africa's head office was named the Saul Sithole Memorial Library.

Copies of the 2020 annual report can be downloaded from www.birdlife.org.za or obtained, in either electronic or hard-copy format, from Kathleen April at info@birdlife.org.za



finding CAPE ROCKJUMPERS

BIRD OF THE YEAR 2021

A tour of potential Cape Rock-jumper sites will take you to the best that the Cape Fold Mountains have to offer, from spectacular passes to crazy rock crags, all with stunning views. Perhaps the best-known and most photographed examples of BirdLife South Africa's 2021 Bird of the Year are those at Rooiels, a standard destination in any fynbos endemics tour from Cape Town, but there are many other places to look for them. And while Rooiels may offer the unique opportunity for amazing sightings of the rock-jumpers just around the corner from a breeding colony of African Penguins, our personal favourite spots are more remote, often require more effort to get to and in many cases are CapeNature reserves.

Not too far from Rooiels are the Kogelberg Mountains and a hike into them from any of the coastal towns is sure to reward you with Cape Rockjumpers, as well as colourful floral distractions. Fernkloof Nature Reserve deserves special mention and is easily accessible, as would Salmonsdam Nature Reserve be if it ever re-opens. The latter has the potential to be the only site where all the fynbos endemics, including the Agulhas Long-billed Lark, could be found. However, the best sites for habituated rockjumpers are the Wolfberg Arch and Cracks in the Cederberg. Some hiking is required, but will be rewarded with excellent opportunities to photograph these friendly birds.

So where are the closest Cape Rockjumpers to Gauteng? As the crow flies, in the Groot Winterhoek Mountains north-east of the Baviaanskloof. As described in *African Birdlife* July/August 2021, the Baviaanskloof itself offers diverse habitats, from Karoo and thicket to forest and fynbos – and the chance to tick a Cape Rockjumper in the Eastern Cape.



ALAN LEE

Or you could head down the N1 and then N9 to the Swartberg and Kouga mountains, where the birds may be more difficult to see but the peace and quiet are memorable. In this part of the world, the top of the Swartberg Pass is the only drive-to rockjumper location accessible to the public; you're sure to find these dapper little birds around the picnic table. Blue Hill Nature Reserve in the Kouga Mountains boasts all fynbos endemics except for the lark. It's just a short hike to the rockjumpers, although you do need to approach stealthily as they are not habituated, even though Alan has been observing them here for years (he can take you to the best sites).

For true wilderness, the standout nature reserves are Kammanassie and Anysberg, both run by CapeNature. Only Anysberg is accessible to tourists and it boasts lovely accommodation at the base of this Karoo mountain. It's always fun to visit a location where you can tick Karoo Eremomela and Cape Rockjumper on the same day! The 4x4 route

'Come and see me in the Cederberg!' Surrounded by stunning scenery, a male Cape Rockjumper stands guard at the Wolfberg Cracks.

to the top of the Anysberg is an adventure in itself and you can camp overnight. But beware: there are no facilities and the weather is unpredictable (Krista has experienced snow and ice there in October and thick fog in March). All in all, there may be more accessible spots where you'll find Cape Rockjumpers, but if you get an opportunity to stay overnight in the mountains, there is nothing like being woken before dawn to the rockjumpers' piercing calls echoing above the valleys.

KRISTA OSWALD AND ALAN LEE

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