

AFRICAN BIRD ATLAS PROJECT

The BirdMap protocol, initiated and developed through SABAP2, is being implemented throughout Africa under the umbrella of the African Bird Atlas Project (ABAP). A Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) grant has been awarded to help fund the project. It is targeted at technical skills transfer, with the aim of publishing more than 20 million records to GBIF and really putting the data to use. The grant was awarded to a three-way partnership, consisting of the Nigerian Bird Atlas, Kenya Bird Map and the Namibia Chamber of the Environment (representing SABAP2 in southern Africa). The FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town is providing technical support and training to the project partners. The funding will enable the ABAP to grow in other countries, help support existing regional projects and facilitate the appointment of technical staff in Kenya and Nigeria, which will help to advance atlasing in these regions.

Established projects such as SABAP2, Kenya Bird Map and the Nigerian Bird Atlas will serve as technical nodes to support the roll-out of the BirdMap system throughout the continent. Twelve countries were represented at the first meeting of parties held remotely in May 2021 and the process of creating regional structures to take the project forward has begun. At the first meeting of parties, Ulf Ottosson was elected as the ABAP coordinator and a project steering committee was formed, consisting of Bruktawit Abdu (Ethiopia), Michael Brooks (South Africa), Clara Cassell-Jud (Liberia), Sam Ivande (Nigeria), Colin Jackson (Kenya), Ulf Ottosson (Nigeria), Sydney Shema (Kenya) and Les Underhill (South Africa).

Numerous workshops are planned to improve the technical skills of the projects across the continent, with SABAP2 personnel leading the training. Since the end of May 2021, several vetting



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workshops have been held to bring the new partners up to speed on using the project's systems. By using a common atlasing method, we will gain many novel insights into bird distributions and movements in Africa.

And in news from closer to home...

Following the decrease in atlas submissions in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 lockdowns, this year SABAP2 has once again taken flight, with a massive upsurge in contributions. Between January and June 2021, SABAP2 observers spent more than 42 600 hours atlasing, eclipsing the previous record for the same period set in 2018. In addition, a large number of Out-of-Range records have been processed, thanks to a huge effort led by Sanjo Rose and the Regional Atlas Committees. This has resulted in thousands of expert-scrutinised records being added to the verified dataset, further enhancing its value.

The SABAP2 species list has had a much-needed update to align it with the latest IOC list (v11.1; visit www.worldbirdnames.org to access the full world list). In addition, the National Rarities list has been brought up to date and provincial rarity lists are currently under review.

The first record of African Grass Owl for the Wilderness area was reported in June 2021.

Interesting atlas records:

- Pam Ellenberger Kleiman recorded the first Black Stork from pentad 2945_2925, near Underberg in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, after more than 250 surveys of that pentad.
- Dawie Kleynhans sighted the first Red-winged Starling for pentad 2645_2750, near Sasolburg, after completing 294 of the pentad's 347 surveys since 2008.
- In June 2021 the first record of African Grass Owl from the Wilderness/Sedgefield area was reported in pentad 3355_2240, after 569 surveys of the pentad.

These records show that atlasing is always rewarding. There are never 'enough' data for a pentad and there are always new species for atlasers to find.

