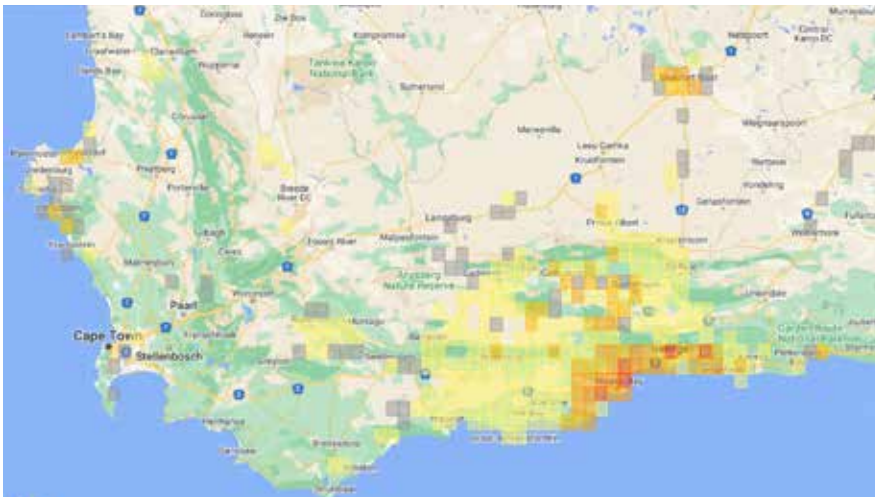


ONE IN A MILLION

Targeting new pentads motivates keen atlasers



Encouraged by fellow birder Rudi Minnie, Elmarie Brits registered as a citizen scientist with the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP) in 2016. Like many atlasers, she was introduced to SABAP2 via the BirdLasser app. It took a few years and encouragement from fellow atlasers, Amanda Walden and Renier Balt in particular, for Elmarie to start atlasing in earnest. But by 2019 the bug had well and truly bitten!

above Elmarie's atlas data in the Western Cape. Her incredible impact is obvious!

top Locating Barlow's Lark in Namibia – the millionth species record in SABAP2.

Once Elmarie was confident in using BirdLasser and the atlas protocol, she switched from submitting ad hoc lists to only completing full protocol lists. This switch provided the motivation to be more strategic about her atlasing and to target areas with poor coverage. She has not submitted any ad hoc lists since 2019. Her mantra is simple: where possible, target new pentads!

By her own admission, Elmarie loves numbers, lists and checking atlas coverage maps. Having grown up in Oudtshoorn, she was drawn to the many blank spots in the Little Karoo and Garden Route maps. With much careful planning and a dedicated driver in the form of her husband Buks, she

has now submitted full protocol lists for 282 pentads in the Western Cape – the third most pentads by one atlaser in the province. It's an impressive result after only three years of atlasing.

Although she's part of an active birding community on WhatsApp, atlasing is an activity Buks and Elmarie do alone. Their trips often involve weekends away and are meticulously planned to maximise birding time. Using the SABAP2 website, they scrutinise all the atlas data for the chosen area and print, study and annotate coverage maps. Taking part in SABAP2 has encouraged her to learn her bird calls. Before a trip she personalises her phone notifications to bird calls she wants to memorise ahead of time.

Of course, tackling pentads in areas with sparse coverage has meant many Out-of-Range forms. However, this only adds to the challenge and she loves that she is adding new and meaningful data.

There have been many highlights for Elmarie over the past few years, but the most memorable was adding the millionth species record to SABAP2 in December 2021. The species, Barlow's Lark, was in itself a special sighting on the Brits's Namibian road trip. They connected with all the Namibian 'specials' without the help of a guide, relying on atlas data and patience.

Her advice to new atlasers? Take the time to understand how BirdLasser functions and the logic behind the atlas protocol. And make sure that you visit all the habitats in each pentad – a surprise could be waiting around the corner. Next up is a trip along the R62, visiting new pentads of course!

SANJO ROSE

