**TBC Outing to Spier during April 2022**

It was a lovely calm, sunny Autumn day. Parking the cars at the entrance, we began birding at the adjacent dam. A Black-crowned Night Heron skulked in a Willow tree whilst Yellow-billed Duck and Red-knobbed Coot paddled around. A young Reed Cormorant was perched in a tree. To our great surprise a Purple Heron was “sky-pointing” out in the open, as they often do when standing in a reed bed. A few Blacksmith Lapwing were making themselves heard.

Whilst walking between the buildings, Common Starling, Olive Thrush, Cape Wagtail and Cape White-eye were seen. Just on the other side of the stream we came across a small flock of Swee Waxbill. In the garden alongside the stream Cape Robin-Chat, Malachite Sunbird and Cape Bulbul were flitting about. Two Ring-necked Doves were calling in the tree tops.

On the road to the farm dam we did not find any larks but a Jackal Buzzard was preening on a pole and a Caspian Tern flew overhead. The dam yielded several species including Common Moorhen, Little Grebe and Cape Shoveler. Returning through the farmland, we were given a fly-past by a Black Sparrowhawk whilst Greater Striped Swallow and Brown-throated Martin flew overhead.

After birding on the farm, most members visited Eagle Encounters, the wildlife rehabilitation, conservation and education centre at Spier Wine Farm. All of the raptors there were rescued following injury or poisoning or after nest trees were felled or blown down in storms. Chicks raised at the Centre are human-imprinted and can never be released; they are used for educational purposes. Birds that were so badly injured that they cannot be released are used in a captive breeding program.

We all thoroughly enjoyed the visit. It was an opportunity to see raptors close-up, as opposed to the often fleeting glimpses through binoculars at long range. Highlights of the visit were the morning and afternoon raptor flying sessions. Species flown include Southern White-faced Owl, Lanner, African Harrier Hawk, Rock Kestrel and Cape Vulture. During these sessions Common, African Black and Alpine swifts, and Black Saw-wing, gave a display of their own above Eagle Encounters.

The outing, ably lead by Brigid, was attended by 23 members and we saw a total of 55 species.

Rodney Gray