

Piffy and Zenzi

GO BIRDING



Written by Kirsty Kyle
Illustrated by Karlien Muller

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www.birdlife.org.za

BirdLife South Africa strives to conserve birds, their habitats and biodiversity through scientifically based programmes by supporting the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources and by encouraging people to enjoy and value nature.

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Dr Kyle J. Lloyd produced and edited the book as an awareness project for the White-winged Flufftail and its wetland habitat.

Karlien Muller designed and compiled the book as the project's graphic designer.

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REFERENCES

Chittenden, H., Davies, G. & Weiersbye, I. 2016. Roberts Bird Guide, second edition. The John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, ABC Press: Cape Town.

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Piffy and Zenzi were lying in their favourite patch of afternoon sunshine in the garden. Their owner had told them they would be going birding the next day and the girls were speculating what “birding” might mean.



“Chickens are birds,” said Zenzi, images of chicken-flavoured dog food flitting through her mind.

“Good point,” said Piffy, “but, somehow, I don’t think that is what she is talking about.”

Zenzi sighed.

“What about chasing hadedas?” said Piffy as she nibbled an itch on her foreleg. Chasing hadedas was one of the girls’ favourite games. Every day a pair would hunt worms on the lawn and the poodles would rush out barking to chase them away. The birds would fly a short distance, much to the girls’ satisfaction, but then return as soon as the poodles had turned their backs. Chasing hadedas would be a fun option. But the girls decided that this was probably not what their owner meant either, as she never joined in the game.

The only other birds Piffy and Zenzi knew were the parakeets that lived in the lounge. Zenzi suggested that maybe they were going to clean the cage or something like

Identification:

A large, brown bird with a long, curved bill and a green sheen on their wings.

Habitat:

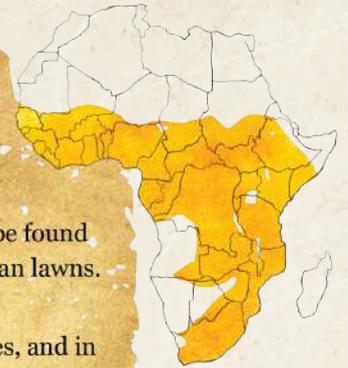
Although they are forest specialists, they can also be found around wetlands and, now especially, on moist, urban lawns.

Food:

Mostly earthworms, crickets and other invertebrates, and in suburbia they forage opportunistically in litter bags and pet bowls.

Call:

The name is onomatopoeic, meaning that they are named after the call they make, “Haaa-dee-daaaah.”



HADEDA

IBIS

Bostrychia hagedash

that. Piffy disagreed because that often happened without any prior announcement.

Piffy flopped over in the sunshine and closed her eyes. “I think we will just have to wait and see.”

Zenzi nodded and continued pondering until the warm light of the setting sun caused her eyes to grow heavy and close as well.



The next morning, bright and early, the poodles were woken by their owner’s alarm clock. Zenzi was a morning poodle. She loved the freshness and excitement of a new day. Piffy, however, was not a morning poodle. She crawled from the covers with her ears twisted, grumbling about needing her beauty sleep.

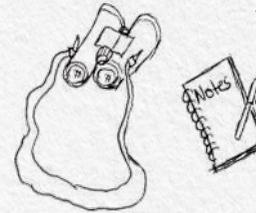


Zenzi agreed that, by her appearance, she should have had more beauty sleep. “But,” she added, “the time for sleep is over: we are going birding!”

This cheered Piffy and the poodles perched together on the edge of the bed, wagging their tails while watching their owner ready herself. She picked some sensible clothes: a long-sleeved shirt (to avoid sunburn), shorts (because it

was going to be hot), boots (so that she could walk far if needed) and a wide-brimmed hat (to shade her face). The poodles smiled at each other; all they had to wear were their collars (purple for Piffy and blue for Zenzi).

Next, their owner packed a day bag with a notebook and pen, binoculars, and a book with pretty birds on the cover. This book was a guide to help identify birds. Then she headed into the kitchen and filled two bottles with water before making herself some sandwiches and throwing in an apple or two. For the



poodles, she packed some doggy biscuits and their water bowls. Finally, just as the sun was lighting the eastern sky, she called the poodles and they were out the door, into the car, and heading off on a grand adventure.



Their first stop was a few houses away where their owner’s friend, Sam, joined them. The girls wagged their pompom tails delightedly as Sam allowed them to sit on her lap in the front seat. Sitting in the front meant the poodles had a good view. The humans chatted about all the birds they hoped to see. From the sounds of it, they were going to see many new species.



The first bird Zenzi spotted was a small, bright-red one perched in a tussock of grass. She pointed it out to Piffy.



The poodles also noticed a group of little, brown birds fluttering around in the grass.

“Southern Red Bishops,” said Sam. Sam explained that the striking red one was a male, while the brown ones were females.

“I’ve heard of that,” said Piffy, her nose in the air. “It’s called sexual dimorphism. This means you can tell the difference between males and females by their colouration or appearance.”

“Why do you think that is the case?” asked Zenzi, impressed by her sister’s knowledge on the subject.

“I suppose,” said Piffy, “it is because the female is the one who sits on the eggs and looks after the young. So, it is important that predators cannot easily see her. The male, though, is the one who must be bright and colourful to attract the females.”

Zenzi spotted another male Southern Red Bishop. This one was perched on the tip of a grass stalk and was puffed up like a dandelion. All his feathers were erect and he was making a funny, fizzing noise.

“That might be a display to warn other males to stay away from his territory,” said Zenzi. Piffy nodded. Just then the bird whizzed after another male who had come too close to his perch. This confirmed Piffy and Zenzi’s thoughts.



SOUTHERN RED BISHOP

Euplectes orix

Identification:

The male in breeding plumage has vibrant red feathers over his back and vent (below the tail), with a striking black facial mask and chest. In non-breeding plumage, the male looks like the female: a stripy, brown, non-descript bird.

Habitat:

Grasslands, agricultural fields, and wetlands comprising sedges. Their neatly woven oval nests are built in reeds and bulrushes, usually over or near water.

Food:

Grass seeds with the odd insects.

Call:

Males give a hissing, sizzling call whilst puffing its feathers to display to females.



“Fascinating,” murmured Zenzi as she looked around for more birds.

As they drove along, their owner mentioned that they should look out for the Long-crested Eagle. These birds liked to perch on the power lines where they scanned for prey, especially rats. Not five minutes after she had said this, Sam pointed out one of these raptors. Sure enough, it was perched on the power line with the wind fluttering his elegant crest feathers.

“Oh, look at his lovely white legs,” said Sam.

“That means it is a male. The female has dull, brown-coloured leg feathers.”

“More sexual dimorphism,” said Zenzi, her head held high again.

Before long they reached their first stop. It was a small bird hide on a dam surrounded by reeds and bulrushes. The wooden building was set on the edge of the water and was designed to give uninterrupted views of the dam without frightening animals away. Inside the hide the humans sat on benches and looked through the long, narrow, slit windows. The dogs were lifted onto the benches. Piffy and Zenzi wagged their tails when they realised that if they stood on their hind legs, they too could peek out the windows.



Identification:

Dark brown with a long, floppy crest that is usually visible. They can be identified in flight by the white panels in the outer wings.

Habitat:

Tall trees in grasslands, forest edges, plantations and power lines. They favour areas near water.

Food:

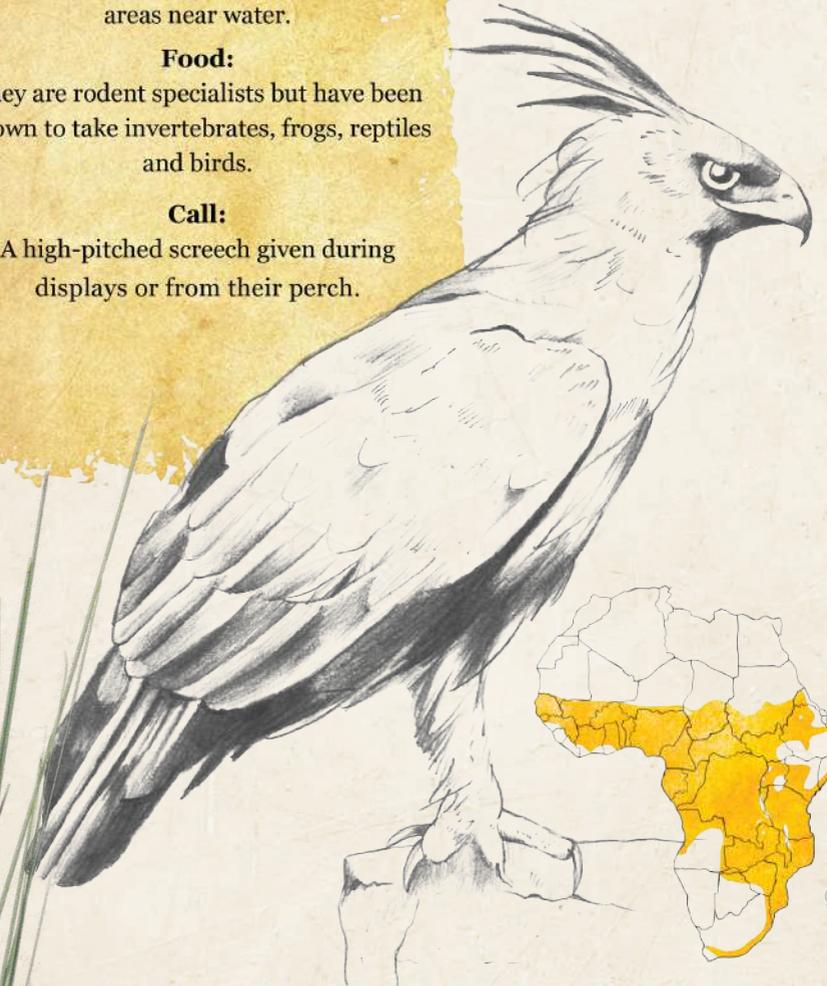
They are rodent specialists but have been known to take invertebrates, frogs, reptiles and birds.

Call:

A high-pitched screech given during displays or from their perch.

LONG-CRESTED
EAGLE

Lophaetus occipitalis



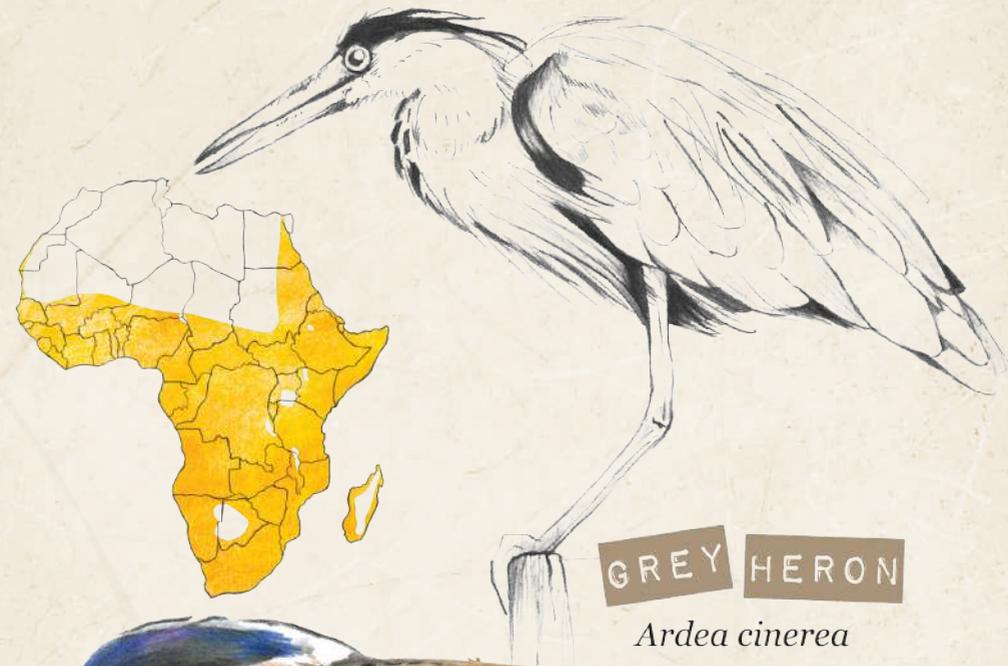
The first animal they spotted was a tall, regal, powder-grey bird with a yellow bill. It perched in a tree close to the window and was identified as a Grey Heron. The humans and dogs noticed its long, pointy bill that was specialised



for stabbing fish and frogs in the shallow water, and mice in long grass. On the same branch was a black bird with a beady, red eye. It was a Reed Cormorant, they decided, after noting its short, light-coloured bill with a sharp curve at the tip. Piffy shivered when she saw the bill. It was

shaped that way so that the cormorant could catch fish and tadpoles underwater. It was interesting to see that the different bird species had specific body and bill shapes suitable for their preferred habitat and feeding style.

The next bird along the water's edge was one they all knew well. It was a dear old, brown duck, with a bright- yellow bill: the Yellow-billed Duck. She had a big, flat, paddle-shaped bill for dabbling in the water and ripping seeds from water plants. The humans and poodles held their breaths in delight as five ducklings emerged from the reeds behind the mother duck, paddling in a straight line. The ducklings paused in front of the hide and four of them proceeded to preen themselves. They trod water with their little feet and groomed their downy wings. The mother



GREY HERON

Ardea cinerea

Identification:

A large, grey and white heron with a distinguishing black eye stripe that ends in a plume. They have a striking yellow beak and brownish-yellow legs.

Habitat:

They are commonly found near rivers and wetlands, in both fresh- and salt-water systems. They breed in colonies in reeds and trees.

Food

They target fish but are opportunistic and will feed on what is available according to the season and habitat.

Call:

A harsh croaking sound given in flight.



REED CORMORANT

Microcarbo africanus

Identification:

A shiny black bird with a striking red eye and yellowy-cream bill.

Habitat:

Freshwater systems as well as estuaries.

Food

Mostly fish, but have been recorded eating frogs, insects, and even some plant matter.

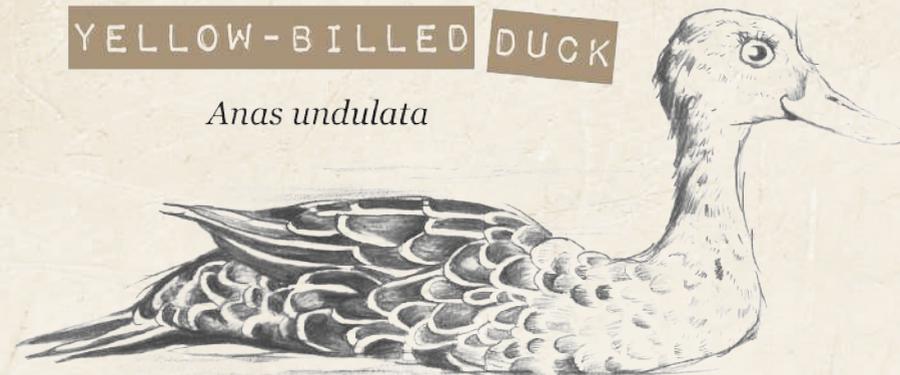
Call:

Silent away from colonies, males make loud calls and females softer, croaking calls near the nest.



YELLOW-BILLED DUCK

Anas undulata



Identification:

Brown feathers edged in white over the body and a distinctive bright-yellow bill with a black saddle.

Habitat:

One of the most common ducks, they are found in most freshwater bodies, including estuaries and lagoons.

Food:

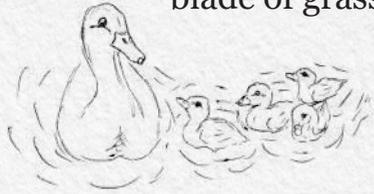
Seeds, leaves and stems of water plants, supplemented with insects, molluscs and crustaceans.

Call:

A typical quack-like call. Males hiss when aggressive.



duck continually glanced around to check for dangers. Piffy saw another adult duck standing close by on the bank. It was the father duck, also keeping an eye out for any threats. The fifth duckling spotted a dragonfly on a nearby blade of grass and began sneaking towards it.



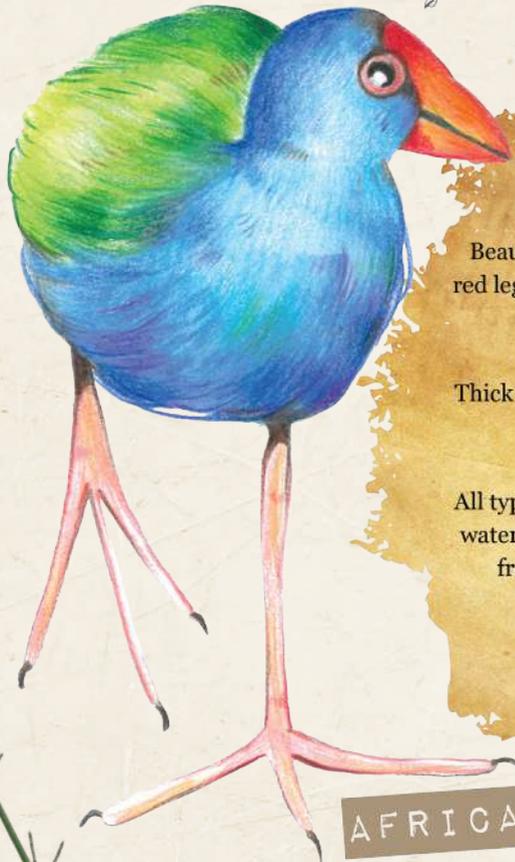
Instinctively, the duckling knew to hold its head low to the water so that the dragonfly would not notice it. The duckling glided within striking range and shot out its neck, quick as lightning, to catch the delicious snack. And just like that it had some food. The dragonfly fluttered briefly, and the other ducklings heard the rustling of its parchment-textured wings. They stopped preening and hurried to see what their sibling had caught. But by the time they got there, the dragonfly had been swallowed whole.

Absorbed in the unfolding duck drama, everyone took a while to notice a magnificent green and blue bird emerge from the reeds nearby. The bird had a strong, bright-red bill and long, red legs with spiky toes. Piffy and Zenzi's owner whispered that it was an African Swamphen. While they watched, it stretched a leg into the bulrushes and grabbed hold of one of the stems. It pulled the bulrush closer and then cut it into small bits with its bill to eat.

"I wouldn't like to be bitten by that," whispered Piffy.

QUACK! The peaceful scene was shattered by a warning call from the father duck. The ducklings scattered into the undergrowth and the swamphen disappeared like a ghost. There was silence as a shadow passed over the open water. It was an African Marsh Harrier! While the humans gazed in wonder, the smaller animals in the wetland took cover. The harrier had broad, powerful wings for soaring over the ground with hardly a flap. Its bright, yellow eyes scanned every centimetre of the wetland for the movement of potential prey. Its sharp, curved bill was designed for ripping off bits of meat and its long, yellow legs and strong toes tipped with sharp talons were perfect for grabbing prey. But not this time. The shadow passed and peace returned to the wetland. The mother duck reappeared followed by the ducklings, one at a time. The swamphen was not seen again. But Piffy and Zenzi panted happily at having seen this elusive bird.

Just as the humans decided it was time to go, there was a sharp whistle nearby and a flutter of black and white. A Pied Kingfisher hovered into view in front of the hide. Hovering, the birds learnt, was a special way of flapping really quickly to remain in the same place in the air. This allowed the bird to search for prey in the water directly below it. Piffy and Zenzi watched as the kingfisher stopped hovering, folded its wings and dived like an arrow into the water, barely making a splash. It emerged with a small fish



Identification:

Beautiful blue-green bird with bright-red legs and bill and a conspicuous white flash under its tail.

Habitat:

Thick reed and bulrush beds in wetlands and flooded grasslands.

Food:

All types of aquatic vegetation, including water lilies. They also eat invertebrates, frogs, snakes, birds and rodents.

Call:

Screeches, booms and wails.

AFRICAN SWAMPHEN

Porphyrio madagascariensis



Identification:

Streaky brown with barred underwing feathers and tail.

Habitat:

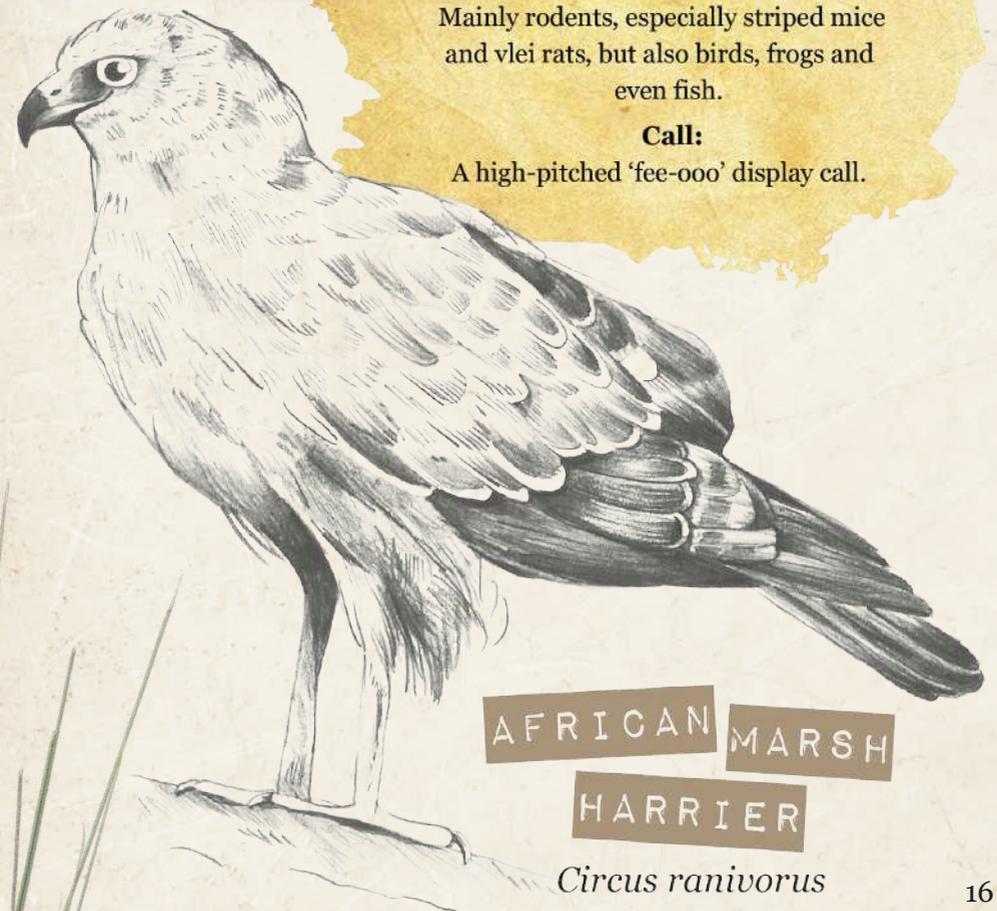
In or near permanent wetlands.

Food:

Mainly rodents, especially striped mice and vlei rats, but also birds, frogs and even fish.

Call:

A high-pitched 'fee-ooo' display call.



AFRICAN MARSH HARRIER

Circus ranivorus

in its bill. It landed on the branch next to the cormorant where it beat the fish against the perch. This killed the fish and broke its sharp spines. While the cormorant inched closer, eyeing the scrumptious prey, the kingfisher swallowed the meal in one gulp.

As the scene played out before the onlookers, their owner noticed a flash of vivid blue among the grasses at the water's edge. It was a Malachite Kingfisher, belonging to the same family as the Pied Kingfisher. Interestingly, the Malachite Kingfisher fulfilled a similar role to the Pied Kingfisher in the ecosystem, but was much smaller in body size. This meant that it was the same shape, fed on the same type of prey, and even nested in a similar way. But everything about it was smaller: smaller bill, smaller prey, smaller nest-hole. The girls gazed at the two birds. While the Pied Kingfisher looked as though he was about to attend a formal dinner in black and white, the Malachite Kingfisher looked as though he was ready for a raucous party. His bright-red legs and bill, electric-blue back, sharply contrasting orange chest, and glorious blue crest feathers made for a crash of colour. The poodles also noticed that while the Pied Kingfisher had been hunting in deeper waters and had perched in a tree, the Malachite Kingfisher was sitting on a reed near shallower water.

“So similar, and yet so different,” said Zenzi.

PIED KINGFISHER

Ceryle rudis

Identification:

Striking black and white plumage.

Habitat:

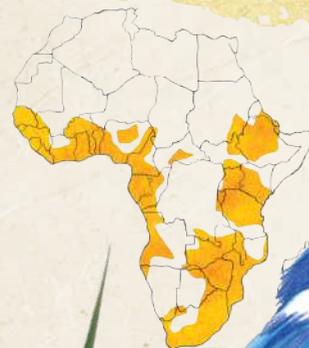
All water bodies that contain fish, including marine margins.

Food:

Predominantly fish but also prawns, crabs and insects.

Call:

High-pitched “kweek”, sometimes given in series.



Identification:

Bright turquoise with an orange chest, bright-red bill and legs, and a barred crest which it uses for displaying.

Habitat:

Closely associated with margins around vegetated waterbodies.

Food:

Predominantly fish, but also tadpoles, frogs and invertebrates.

Call:

Usually silent, they can give a sharp whistle when flushed or in flight.



MALACHITE KINGFISHER

Corythornis cristatus

“Wow,” said Piffy as they trotted back towards the car. “How lucky were we to see those special birds? When you start to look for them, it is amazing how many different birds there are of all shapes and sizes.” Zenzi nodded in agreement and hopped, this time, onto the back seat of the car.

The humans discussed their next wetland destination. It was where a secretive, rare and threatened bird had apparently been recorded: the highly elusive White-winged Flufftail. The poodles looked over Sam’s shoulder at the picture in the book that she and their owner were consulting. The dogs noticed how the male bird had a deep-chestnut-coloured head and chest, a fluffy tail, and a dark body with streaking.

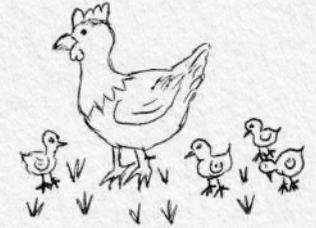
“Imagine if we saw one,” their owner said to Sam.

“It would be unbelievable,” Sam replied. “They’re about the rarest bird in the world!”

“So, we probably won’t see one then,” said their owner, “but we can always hope.”

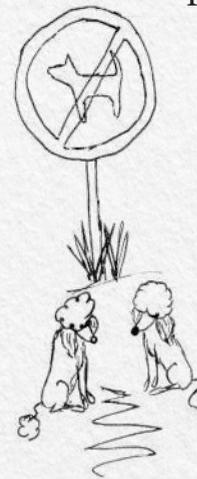
They drove off and some time passed with many twists and turns in the road. They spotted a few birds, but were moving too fast to identify what they were. Except for one incident. Zenzi was looking out of the car window and yelped.

“Look!” she exclaimed. Near a homestead in the passing farmlands was a flock of chickens. “I told you that birding was about chickens.” Piffy laughed and shook her head at her sister as the mother hen and her chicks, scratching in the dirt, vanished from sight.



Finally, the car slowed to a stop. They had climbed high into the hills and were surrounded by rolling grasslands. In the distance the poodles saw the mighty uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Mountains. The wetland they stopped beside had an allocated parking space. Positioned nearby were interesting signboards. One described what birds might occur here. Another asked visitors not to litter and to stay on the paths so as not to disturb wildlife. A third had a

picture of a doggy but with a red line through it. No dogs were allowed on the trails! The poodles stopped wagging their tails after seeing this.



The humans and poodles exited the car and greeted the man who was going to be their guide. He introduced himself as Jimmy and included the dogs in his greeting. This cheered the poodles and they wagged their fluffy pompoms. Zenzi even went so far as to

give him a lick on the hand.

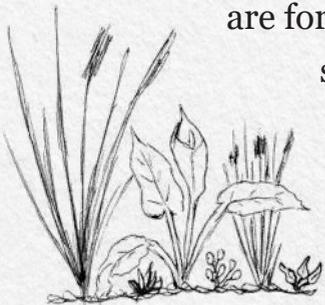
Jimmy suggested that the ladies fill their water bottles from the stream before they headed out. Sam raised her eyebrows and asked if Jimmy thought that was safe.

“Oh yes,” said Jimmy. “The water from this high-elevation sedge wetland is clear and fresh. It flows off the mountains and through the natural filtration system provided by the wetland.”

“Explain to me how that works,” said Sam, eyeing the clear water that flowed past them.

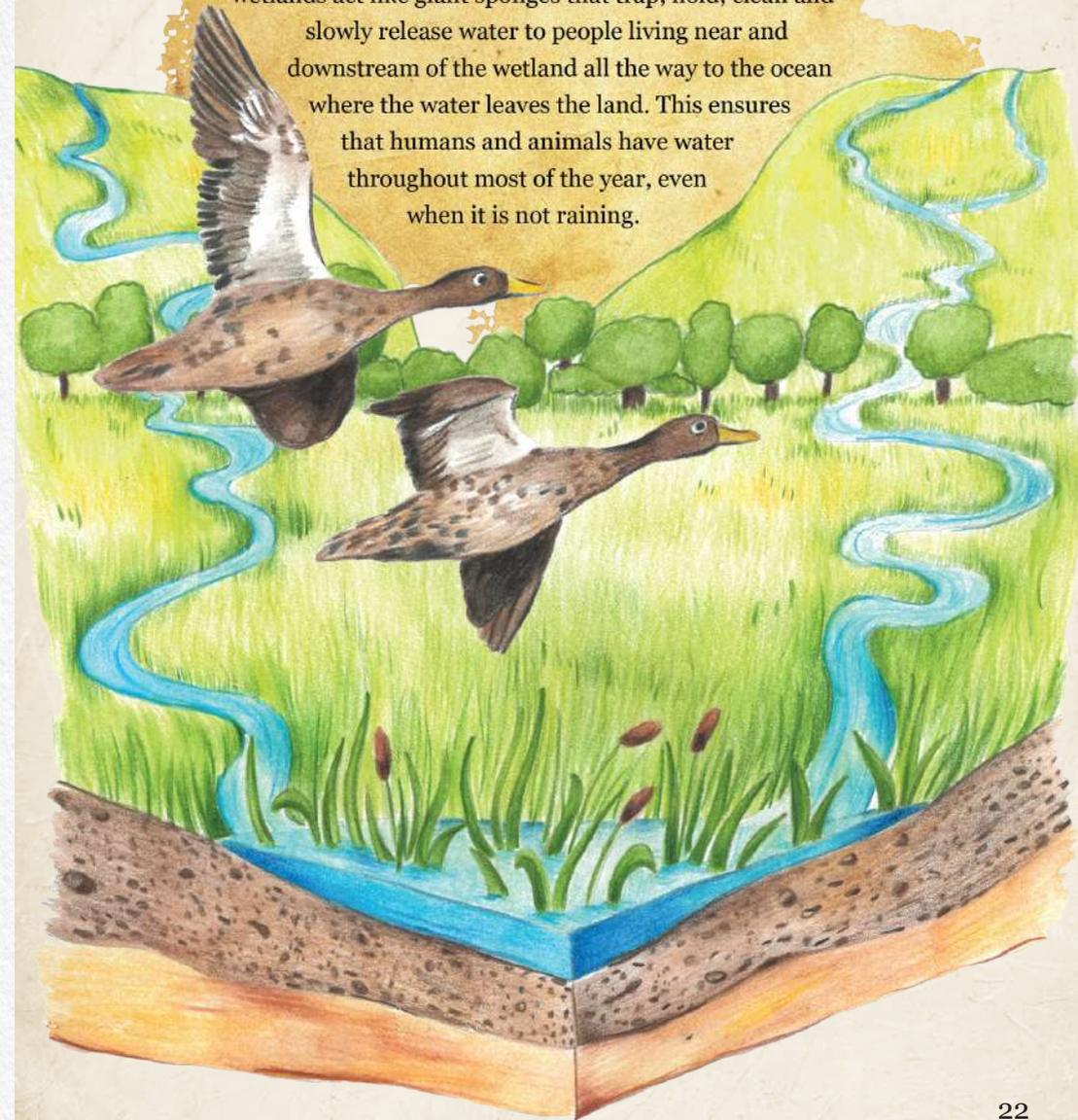
“Well,” began Jimmy, “all the rain, mist and snow that falls in the mountains flows downhill because of gravity. Areas where water is collected are called catchments. In the flatter parts of the catchment the water slows and spreads out over a wide area. Plants that specialise in growing in waterlogged soils take root in these flooded areas. The growing plants help to slow the water even more and trap the soil that it carries. This is how wetlands

are formed and maintained. The roots, stems and leaves of wetland plants that die then fall into the water and decompose. Decomposition takes a long time because there is little oxygen under water. Eventually,



A NATURAL FILTRATION SYSTEM

Wetlands supply humans and animals with many provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural ecosystem services. These are benefits that the environment provides for free. The soils and plants of wetlands act like giant sponges that trap, hold, clean and slowly release water to people living near and downstream of the wetland all the way to the ocean where the water leaves the land. This ensures that humans and animals have water throughout most of the year, even when it is not raining.



the accumulating dead plants form something called peat. Because of the web of plant roots and peat, the water flowing through the wetland is cleaned and enriched with healthy minerals and vitamins.”

“Wow, the wetland acts like a giant sponge. It filters dirty water entering the area and then gives us clean water flowing out,” said their owner.

“Precisely!” replied Jimmy. “But, unfortunately, people can damage wetlands so that they no longer slow down and clean the water.”

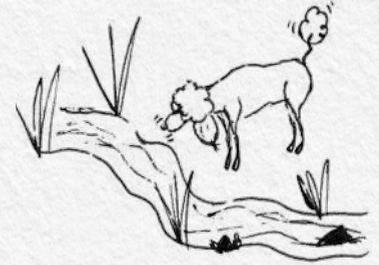
“How do we damage wetlands?”

“Well, for example, some people throw their rubbish into the environment. This rubbish washes into streams and ends up in wetlands. The plastics and chemicals accumulate and pollute the natural filtration system. Other people dig channels that drain the water out of a wetland. This lowers the water table so that the soils dry out and are no longer waterlogged. The wetland plants then disappear and are replaced by those that grow in drier soils. Some people allow livestock to overgraze wetland plants and degrade the sensitive soils. And others burn wetlands and the surrounding catchment at the wrong time of year or too often.”

After listening to all this, Piffy went over to the flowing

water and sniffed at it. It smelled earthy and rich, different to the tap water at home. She stuck out the tip of her pink tongue and lapped once. It was delicious!

“You can taste the difference between tap water and clean wetland water,” Jimmy went on. “In town, water is purified and sterilised with chemicals that kill the bad bugs. But the process also removes all the nutrients.”



“What can we do to better conserve wetlands that are harmed?” asked Sam.

“That is a good question,” Jimmy replied. “Instead of seeing only the damage we have done, we can explore ways of restoring and maintaining healthy wetlands. Recycling our rubbish and reducing the amount of water we use can help. Draining can be carefully corrected by blocking the drainage channels. And we can tell our family and friends how important wetlands are in providing, supporting and regulating water resources. If they know the value of wetlands, they are more likely to protect and care for them.

“They might even go so far as to stop illegal hunting of animals inhabiting wetlands.” As he said this last bit, Jimmy glanced at Piffy and Zenzi. The girls hung their heads, remembering the “no doggies” sign.

“Anyway,” said Jimmy with a smile, “do you hear that noise?” He gestured towards the wetland from which issued a cacophony of whistles, squeaks, quacks, roars and chirps. “That is the sound of a healthy wetland, a home to many frogs and birds preparing for the sunset chorus.



In unhealthy wetlands, only a few species can survive. But in healthy wetlands there is rich biodiversity. Shall we put these

vicious, hunting hounds back in the car and go for our walk?”

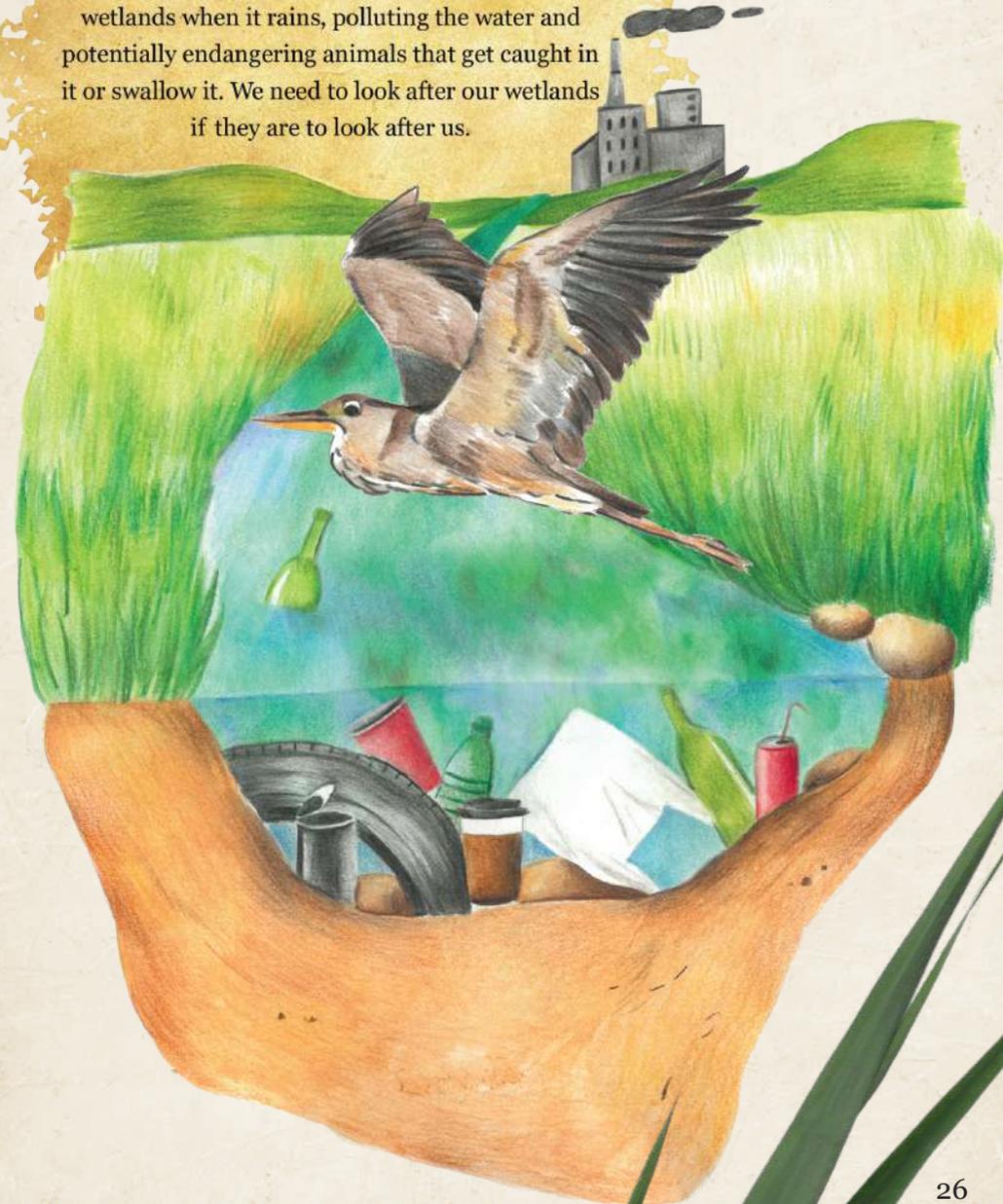
With that the poodles were scooped up and dumped into the car. They gazed out the partially opened window, their ears drooping. Even though they had a bowl of water and some fresh air, Zenzi and Piffy felt sure they were going to miss out on something spectacular.

“It is so unfair,” sulked Piffy, who turned from the window, curled up on the back seat and shut her eyes. Zenzi agreed, but she remained standing up against the door just in case she saw something. She had not given up on spotting birds.

The gravel of the car park ended abruptly at the edge of the wetland. As she looked, Zenzi saw small movements in the plants as the wildlife resumed its routine after the humans had left for their walk. The undisturbed wetland

Wetlands are being destroyed by activities like mining, forestry, agriculture and construction. Invasive alien plants that have been introduced from other countries are also stealing underground water, causing wetlands to become dry. Litter that people throw on the ground can wash into wetlands when it rains, polluting the water and potentially endangering animals that get caught in it or swallow it. We need to look after our wetlands if they are to look after us.

DAMAGE TO WETLANDS



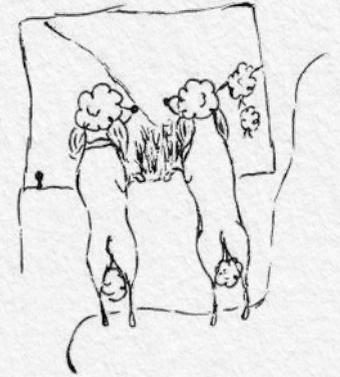
was a restful place with water gurgling and sedges rustling. As she continued to watch, Zenzi spotted two little brown birds in the vegetation near the car. They were stripy with a reddish crown and long pinkish legs. They pecked around the leaves and stalks on which they hung. Zenzi looked at the signboard that showed which birds they could expect to see. Judging by their appearance and behaviour, Zenzi decided that the pair must be Levillant's Cisticolas. A lifer for her!

Next, she saw, and described to Piffy, a Vlei Rat that emerged from the sedges. The hamster-looking rat had used a tunnel. He and his family had created the tunnel by walking the same path every day through the dense wetland vegetation. His tiny paws had trampled the plants and he had nibbled the tasty, new growth that grew along the path. The tunnels through these wetlands were important for all sorts of other animals that used them as well. They helped many small birds and beasts navigate the labyrinth of wetland plants and quickly escape from predators.



By now, Zenzi had also spotted a large crab marching across the gravel. Piffy could not contain her curiosity any longer and joined Zenzi at the window. Just then the girls heard

a strange noise. Piffy pricked her ears, glad she had joined her sister. The noise sounded a bit like a cricket. But it was not the same as the Mole Crickets that screeched in the rose garden at home every night. No, this was chirpier and seemed to be getting closer. The poodles pricked their ears higher and strained their eyes, scanning the edge of the wetland for any sign of movement.



And then, to their tail-wagging delight, a small, dark bird crept from one of the Vlei Rat tunnels and eased onto the pathway. It had long legs, a chocolate-brown head, and a rufous-black body with lots of white streaks. It looked left and right and then stretched, fluttering its beautiful wings. As it did so it revealed the snow-white feathers that gave it its name: the White-winged Flufftail! The girls blinked. This was the bird that the humans had been so eager to see! The poodles held their breaths as they watched the flufftail finish its stretch and then give a soft, twittering call. They could not believe their eyes when the flufftail was joined by three little, black fluffballs. This was a hen with chicks! The chicks pecked at the sedges beside their mother, devouring the delicious seeds at the tips of the stems. Seconds passed before she gave another sideways glance, cocked her head and then vanished into the sedges with her chicks in hot

LEVAILLANT'S CISTICOLA

Cisticola tinniens

Identification:

Small, streaky, dark-backed bird with a rufous crown.

Habitat:

Wetland specialists, usually found in dense sedges and grasses.

Food:

Only insects.

Call:

They have two different calls; the alarm call is a "tse-tse-tse" sound while their general call is a short note followed by a melody, "tsip tsirrirooree".



VLEI RAT

Otomys irroratus

Identification:

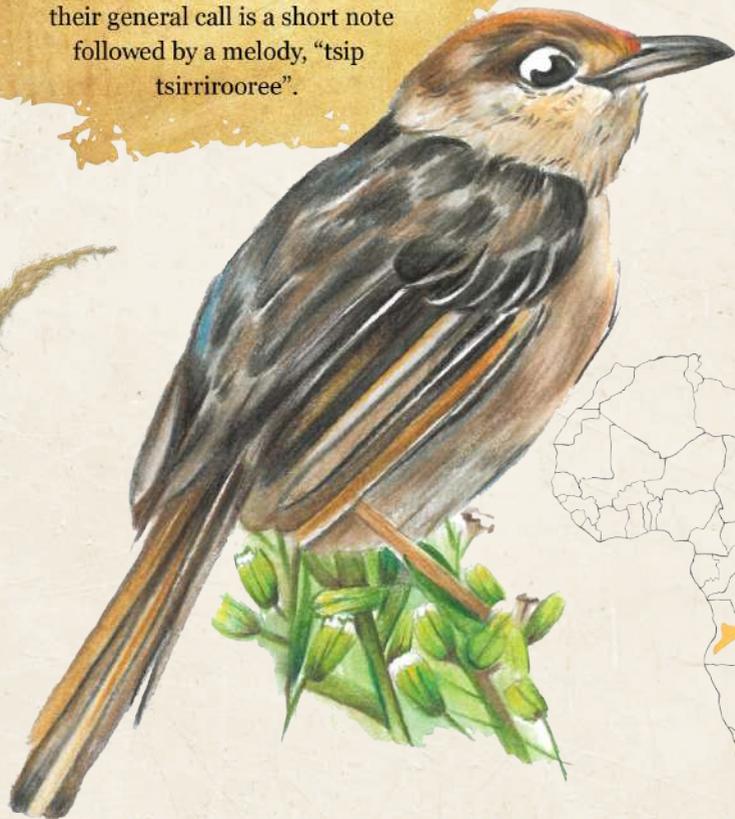
A chunky, brown, hamster-looking rat with a short tail and blunt nose.

Habitat:

Usually associated with wetlands and moist soils, making tunnels through dense grasses and sedges.

Food:

Strictly vegetarian, feeding on grass stems and leaves and herbs.



pursuit. The girls looked at each other, hardly daring to believe what they had just seen.

A moment later they heard the voices of their owner, Sam, and Jimmy returning, discussing the African Rail that they had heard, but not seen.

“There is no need to be so excited; we have not been away long,” their owner exclaimed when the dogs jumped all over her as she stepped into the car.

“If only she knew!” Piffy and Zenzi thought. Try as they might, the girls could not get her to understand what had just happened. Eventually the poodles gave up and settled down together on Sam’s lap once more.

They kept discussing how special the day had been, how much they had learnt and how fun it was to go birding. No one would believe that two little poodles had gone birding and seen one of the rarest birds in Africa.



The End.

WHITE-WINGED FLUFFTAIL

Sarothrura ayresi



Identification:

A small, long-legged bird with black and white feathers and chestnut barred tail. Males have a deep-chestnut-coloured head and chest. In flight the white wing feathers are diagnostic.

Habitat:

Wetlands, particularly mixed sedge meadows with shallow water.

Food:

Invertebrates, with some seeds and vegetation.

Call:

Repetitive, sharp call easily confused with a frog.



GLOSSARY OF WORDS

Adaptation: Species change or develop traits to better suit their changing environment.

Awareness: Have knowledge about something or to be informed.

Bank: The edge of a waterbody, usually higher and steeper than the waterbody.

Binoculars: Telescopic lenses that help to see distant objects nearer and larger.

Biodiversity: “Bio” means life and “diversity” means a range, thus the variety of plants and animals.

Bulrushes: A tall, reed-like, broad-leafed water plant with a brown, velvety flower.

Cacophony: A variety of loud sounds.

Consulted: Seek information from a knowledgeable source such as an expert or book.

Critically Endangered: A category of threat status determined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), meaning that the species is one step away from becoming extinct in the wild.

Dam: A human-made body of water that results from blocking a river by building a wall so that water accumulates and rises behind it, typically used for water storage and supply.

Decompose: Dead material that breaks down through microbe (bacteria and fungi) activity.

Degrade: Damage or deteriorate resulting in the overall condition worsening.

Disturbance: Interrupt, interfere or disrupt the current condition.

Ecosystem: Interacting living (plants and animals) and non-living (water, soil, light, weather) components that shape the environment.

Elusive: Shy, secretive or difficult to find.

Filter: Remove the impurities from a fluid leaving it cleaner after it passes through.

Grassland: A habitat dominated and characterised by grass species with ecological processes (like frost, fire and herbivory) that exclude trees.

Lifer: A phrase bird watchers use to describe when they see a bird species for the first time.

Preen: When birds clean and realign their feathers.

Recycle: Reuse an item for the same or different purpose than originally intended.

Sedge: A group of grass-like plants that grow in wetlands, usually with adaptations to survive saturated or water-logged soils (e.g. air pockets in roots and stems).

Specialised: Designed or adapted to fulfil a very specific purpose.

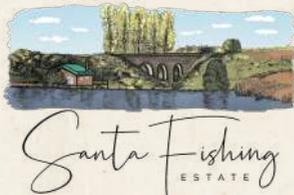
Territory: An area that an animal uses for feeding and breeding and guards against other members of the same species.

Undergrowth: Vegetation that grows beneath the canopy or top layer of plants, usually dense and shaded.

Waterlogged: A medium like soil that is saturated or filled with water so that no more water can be absorbed.

Wetland: Land that changes from dry to wet conditions where water is usually at or near the surface, or temporarily covered with water, and supports plants adapted to saturated soil.

SUPPORTED BY



Kirsty Kyle

Kirsty is passionate about environmental education, science communication, the great outdoors and poodles. With this story she hopes to enchant young readers (and their parents) and spark an interest in the magic of the natural world. An inspired community is more likely to protect and be interested in nature.



Karlien Muller

Karlien, a South African graphic designer, draws inspiration from her upbringing in nature reserves, surrounded by stunning landscapes and wildlife. In her free time, Karlien delights in capturing the essence of various animals through her drawings, intertwining her love for art with her appreciation for the natural world. Through this book she aims to ignite children's curiosity about wetlands and birds, nurturing a passion for nature that mirrors her own.



BIRD SIGHTINGS



Piffy and Zenzi Go Birding

Poodles, Piffy and Zenzi, wonder what going “birding” means. On a birding day out with their human friends, the dogs discover a diversity of birds and other species inhabiting wetlands. They learn about the special adaptations to living in aquatic habitats, and they discover the vital role wetlands play in our everyday lives. Join these two cheeky pups on their birding adventure - a journey that leads to a threatened bird few have ever seen...