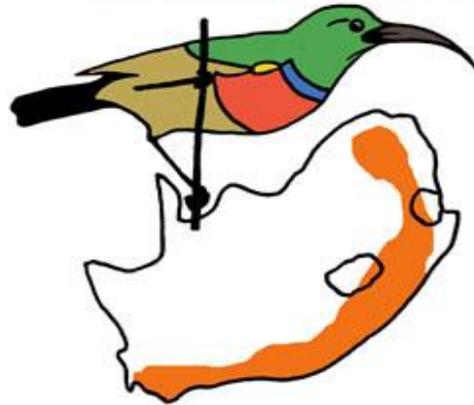


SABAP2



Chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat.

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CHAT, CHAT, CHAT, CHAT, CHAT, CHAT, CHAT

How many species of chat occur in the Western Cape? Go and look it up in your field guide if you are uncertain...

During May 2019 Simon Fogarty and I were atlasing in the Moordenaars Karoo, an under-atlased area South-East of Sutherland and North-West of Laingsburg, bordering the Northern and Western Cape. Fortunately, no murderers hang out there these days! That is, apart from Martial Eagles killing Scrub Hares from time to time and other murderous acts of the natural world.

On one of the days we experienced an entire day of rain and high winds. Good for the painfully parched karoo but not for atlasing! We were house bound for almost the whole day. Temperatures also dropped, with ice and frost appearing in the morning of our last 2 days.

By now you should have checked your field guide; 7 species of chat in the Western Cape if your tally is the same as mine? I, of course, include Mountain Chat (in line with my Campaign to Re-establish Old Names). Many of the new digital birders and those with the latest field guides will know this as Mountain Wheatear (the new name). It really is a chat, if not, then why is the similar Arnot's Chat not now called Arnot's Wheatear? However, generally the 7 species of chats in the Western Cape are spread over wide and varied habitats, several occur in the more arid areas. In summary:

Karoo Chat is ubiquitous it was almost the first bird in every pentad.

Sickle-winged Chat prefers Karoo scrub with taller vegetation.

Tractrac Chat inhabits desert gravel plains.



Figure 1 Fortunately, no murderers hang out there these days!



Figure 2 Simon breaks for cover in an unusual wet and windy Karoo



Mountain Chat, well as the name suggests, is found in mountainous rocky terrain.

Stonechat of course in a wide variety of habitats.

Anteating Chat in open sandy areas.

Familiar Chat is found in rocky areas and common around farms. This is the most widespread, but surprisingly we only ticked this towards the end of our last hour.

But in pentad 3245_2040 WE HAD ALL 7 SPECIES OF CHATS!

(A Pentad is 5 minutes of latitude x 5 minutes of longitude, approximately 8 x 9kms)

I began to wonder whether this is this some kind of record? Neither Simon nor I have ever experienced this before in all our atlasing days. When one visits the Karoo, the impression is generally one of a monotone habitat, often miles of scraggy *drie-doring* shrubs, distant koppies, rocky outcrops, some dry river courses. Pentad 3245_2040 had this, but clearly just a bit more to get all 7 Western Cape chat species! It just goes to show that one never does know what your atlasing will reveal!



Figure 3 The scraggy habitats of the Moordenaars Karoo.

