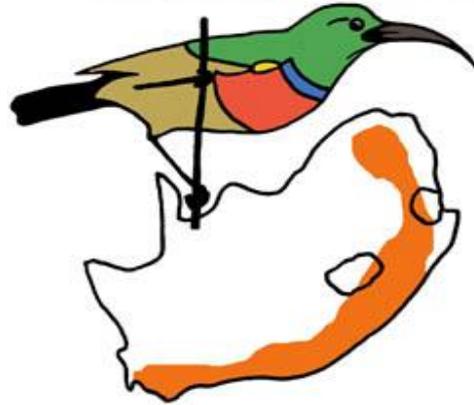


SABAP2



Atlasing with sounds

Tony Archer

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ATLASING WITH SOUNDS

Over the years, my atlasing style has altered quite a bit; initially, I went about it frantically, with the only one goal: the accumulation of the total number of pentads I could successfully atlas. Then after the Prieska Bash some years ago, I realised that slowing down and spending more time in each pentad would let me find a greater variety of birds within the pentad.

Then I came across Xeno-canto; an online platform where bird call recordings are uploaded, and a community of people help ID each others calls and learn from one another. And now I spent much more time looking for sounds, making recordings and uploading these to Xeno-canto. And at the same time, I am finding many new unexpected birds.

My atlas adventure on the 20th of October 2019 is a case in point. At this time of year, it's already terribly hot by as early as 8am, so I start each pentad in the dark. Thus, finding many more night birds than before. On this particular morning for example, my first bird was a Rufous-cheeked Nightjar – only the second sighting in 49 cards near Dominionville.

By 7am I make sure I reach the water source in the pentad to increase my species tally. As I approached the water, I could hear a high, repetitive bird call (recording: 4aWBSR, file: <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/docs/4aWBSR.mp3>), the high, repetitive one) It sounded like a small, almost waxbill type bird. I had no clue what species though so thought I would post the recording on Xeno-canto and ask for help once back home. But just as I was driving off, I thought I would playback the call and see if the bird showed itself. It did not – but it did move away and then made this recording: 4bWBSR, file: <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/docs/4bWBSR.mp3>. It made another repetitive call but moved off some distance.

I decided to try the playback again, but with the new call. Sure enough! The bird came back with this call recording: 4cWBSR, file: <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/docs/4cWBSR.mp3>. Still had no clue about ID though. But I still had to go about 500 meters back down the road to where I could hear the bird. And WOW, far away on the top of a tree was movement! Out comes the binoculars and I see an upright, trembling tail. Kalahari Scrub-robin? But I have never heard them making a call like this, not even while mimicking. Could, *could* it be a White-browed Scrub-robin? That would surely be a new bird for the pentad, maybe even an Out of Range record!

But to make sure of that I would need my new scope – which was 500 meters back down the road! And why would the bird patiently stay there? I leave my recorder on repeat and ran (actually a 73-year-old wobble!) back to the bakkie. Reversed back and the bird is still there! Stop the recorder and use some choice language as I try assembling the tripod before the bird flies away. Whenever I try to assemble a scope in a hurry it seems to grow new extensions and knobs everywhere. And this time was no exception.

But eventually it is up, and the bird is still there and I'm able to establish that it has stripes on the chest! In the bag: a White-browed Scrub-robin. It even comes closer and I get a final good recording: 4dWBSR, file: <http://sabap2.adu.org.za/docs/4dWBSR.mp3>.



Later I discover that although it was not a new record it is only the second sighting in 49 cards.

So, with the help of sound recordings, a whole new world has opened to me while atlasing, allowing me to find many unexpected birds!

