



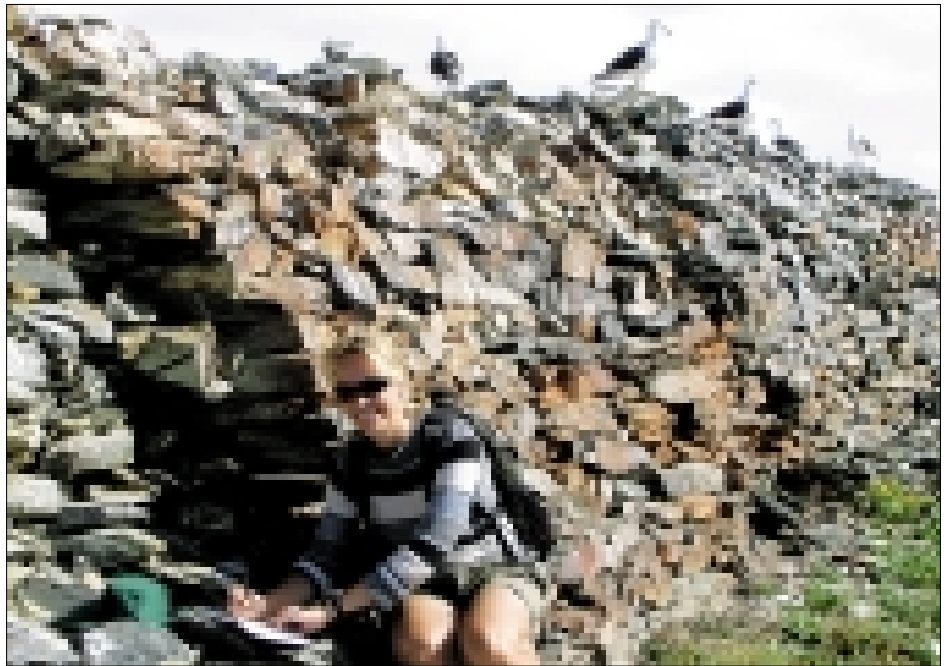
# AVIAN DEMOGRAPHY UNIT

The Avian Demography Unit undertakes bird research in partnership with BirdLife South Africa

The group of postgraduate students based at the Avian Demography Unit has grown to 20 and it is clear that the ADU has become a major centre for bird research. Here we describe the projects of three students.



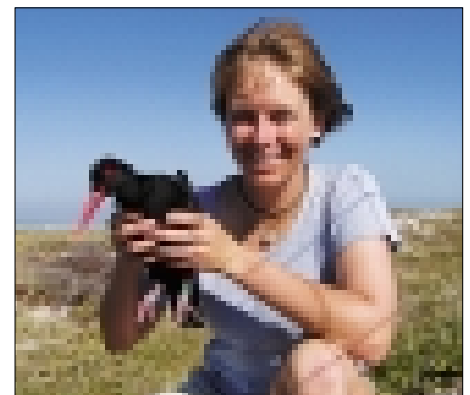
**Dr Francesca Little** graduated in December 2003. She utilised the data from the Southern African Bird Atlas Project and made use of sophisticated statistical modelling to produce a brilliant new set of bird distribution maps which have become the basis for the maps in the upcoming edition of *Roberts'*. She also devised innovative ways of measuring the species richness of an area, which take account of the relative frequency with which species occur. Her results are interesting to a range of users of bird distribution information, from birders who want range maps in their field guides to biogeographers and macro-ecologists who use the maps to develop ecological theories about distribution patterns. Her PhD thesis is called 'The smooth is better than the rough: an exploitation of reporting rate information in southern African bird atlas data'. Readers who were involved in the collection of the bird atlas data will be intrigued to know that the data set to which they contributed has become famous as the best of its kind in the world, and is being used by postgraduate students at many universities for their research.



**Trineke Bakker** is a biology student from the University of Groningen in The Netherlands. She is doing research on Kelp Gulls for one of the two large projects she needs for her masters degree. Her field work is done on Robben Island, where she is studying the growth and energetics of chicks in the colony of Kelp Gulls that breed on the island. The colony is small

enough that, with determination and hard work, the progress of every nest – from egg-laying to chick fledging – can be followed and monitored. The ADU will host three University of Groningen students in 2003/04 while they undertake their masters projects. Trineke's Dutch supervisor is Dr Henk Visser, who also co-supervises the PhD projects of two ADU students.

**Nola Parsons** is doing a careful assessment of the African Black Oystercatchers at the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station for an MSc. Nuclear power is not generally associated with doing anything positive for the environment, let alone birds. However, the Koeberg complex has produced some of the best possible breeding habitat for oystercatchers: sheltered rocky shores. In the 2002/03 breeding season, Nola had 46 pairs of oystercatchers in her study area, of which 37 pairs bred and laid 129 eggs. Only 24 of these eggs hatched, and of these only 10 produced fledglings. It's a sad story, but the heavy losses are due to predation, with the yellow mongoose being the chief suspect, not human disturbance. We are grateful to Gert Greeff, who leads the conservation department at the nuclear



power station, for all his help with this project. Nola is also the vet at SANCCOB: when she is not at Koeberg researching oystercatchers, she is treating oiled and injured penguins and other seabirds.

Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, 7701 Rondebosch. Tel. (021) 650 2423; fax (021) 650 3434; e-mail [adu@adu.uct.ac.za](mailto:adu@adu.uct.ac.za) web [www.aviandemographyunit.org](http://www.aviandemographyunit.org)