How exciting to participate in writing a bird book for Johannesburg Zoo. One would think with so many bird books on identification available, why would you want to write another one?

One of our aims is to educate our communities about our surroundings and the animals that we live with. Birding is very popular in South Africa, as I am sure it is in the rest of the world. Most bird books focus on indigenous birds, normally covering certain regions or the entire country.

To be involved in such a project is very exciting, especially if you have never been party to writing a book. It is an enormous task—hours of research, finding the correct vocabulary, the correct photo with the correct number of pixels, the latest in scientific and common names of birds, and on and on. This is not a task for the faint hearted.

The book follows the same principle as most, providing a short description of each bird, information about its reproduction and habitat plus a colour photo. Conservation in our urban areas is discussed as part of the introduction. It is important for our community to know how to treat the animals that live in our surroundings.

We added a bookmark. The introduction of most bird books includes a list of characteristics to follow in identifying species. Ours is summarised on the bookmark, overcoming the need of paging back to the beginning of the book time and again. It is handy and easy to use, and keeps your place while you are watching the birds.

A map indicates in which enclosures all the included species may be found within Johannesburg Zoo.

The book is an invaluable resource for schools and a very cost effective product used in conjunction with pupil activity sheets. Learners are invited to a slide show and then accompanied to a bird enclosure to start birding. The sheet is designed in such a way that it includes zoo work as well as activities to do at school or home. It has proved very popular and we are pleased with the results of this programme.

We are proud of this new resource and would like to thank our sponsor, “Sasol Limited” for their generous contribution. Thanks also to the educators involved in the project – it took many hours of sweat to complete!