

TAKE
FLIGHT WITH
SASOL IV
A brand new edition of the
best bird book in the region



In fine feather

Revised field guide has more aids to identification

ANNETTE BAYNE

THE brand new *Sasol Birds Of Southern Africa* fourth edition has arrived just in time to find itself on every bird watcher, bush fundi and wildlife enthusiast's Christmas list.

With nine years between the third and the fourth editions, authors Ian Sinclair, Phil Hockey, Warwick Tarboton and Peter Ryan have looked at every aspect of the text and rewritten it with new information.

Award-winning illustrator and bird artist Norman Arlott has gone back to the plates and revised many of the illustrations, often just making them bigger, adding new details or generally improving on the quality of his artwork, all in the name of making identification a little easier.

"The fact is, new things *do* appear – an identification feature that wasn't thought of or we hadn't noticed before," says Arlott.

"But also, I hope my artwork improves and continues doing so. When I look at the first edition, I don't like some of the stuff I did, but it was the best that I can do then."

Always an artist and a birdwatcher, Arlott "slipped into" illustrating bird guides 35 years ago on a trip to East Africa and has been lucky enough to be doing it ever since.

It was also on that trip that his passion for African birds developed and you only have to look at the delightful cover image of the Swallowtail Bee-eater to get a sense of it.

But illustrating an identification guide and painting the intricacies of a bird's behaviour in the wild are two very different artistic experiences.

"It is all very false," laughs Arlott. "If you take some birds, it really is artistic license gone mad. If I was painting the Amethyst Sunbird, for instance, and the light was coming from one direction, the purple chest wouldn't show up.

"Or if it was upside down, as they usually are, the green on the forehead wouldn't show. But if I painted it all black as it appears, but everyone says it's *not* all black, because it has a purple chest. So in the end, I paint all the colours and the text says 'it may appear all black', so you have it covered," he says.

"It is a bit of a fiddle, because you basically show the birds with the light coming from all around it, which is a physical impossibility, and which can make the birds look very wooden, because there is no roundness, which you have to add," says Arlott.

"We exaggerate the bits that aid the identification, so we may even boost the colours up a bit. "Of course it would be great to do the all the birds from different angles, but you would need a book three times the size."

Arlott can claim he has seen 90% of the birds in the book, but while it has made him more aware of the finer details of identifying the bird, he still delights in the behaviour of common of garden species often missed.

