



SOUTH AFRICA: 1-DAY ZAAGKUILSDRIFT BIRDING TOUR REPORT

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Lesser Moorhen is a special that moves into the area following good rains, and showed well to us on this day tour.

Overview

This Johannesburg/Pretoria, South Africa, birding day tour visits one of the premier South African birding sites, in arguably the best season for this site. While the many dry-land specials can be sought throughout the year, such as **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Southern Pied Babbler** and **Cape Penduline Tit**, it is the subtropical and palearctic migrants that visit this area in the summer months that make this area truly exciting. Indeed, these birds would take up most of our focus during this day trip. This site is characterized by acacia woodlands and thickets, along with a vast seasonally inundated floodplain. This season has been a particular wet one, and meant the floodplain was totally inundated, bringing with it a vast number of birds.

This trip was carried out for a large group of seven clients.



*The bright **Crimson-breasted Shrike** can be found throughout the year.*

Detailed Report

We departed Johannesburg early in the morning, and found ourselves on the Zaagkuilsdrift Road at sunrise, where we immediately set out birding. The many palearctic warblers would be our primary focal point, before turning our attention to some of the floodplain specials, and then the resident thornveld species. Our first stop saw us birding the edge of a flooded dam, with a stream of various waterbirds flying overhead. **Red-billed Teal**, **African Darter**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Striated Heron**, **Hamerkop** and **Pied Kingfisher** were all evident. A calling **Marsh Warbler** refused to show, before we turned our attention to **Great Reed Warbler**, which gave us brief views. We also managed to get some brief views of a **Marsh Warbler**, while a calling **Common Whitethroat** remained unseen. A bout of acacia birding followed, and yielded

lively groups of **Cape Penduline Tits** and **Burnt-necked Eremomelas**, with more common species such as **Marico Flycatcher**, **Magpie Shrike**, **White-browed Sparrow-Weaver**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver** and **Blue Waxbill** all seen well.

An extended search for the ever-difficult **River Warbler** ensued shortly after this. This species is one of the most sought-after specials occurring here, with birds in varying numbers present almost annually. As we set about birding and exploring, we heard no less than four birds calling at various places. However, try as we might, we simply couldn't obtain any views of these master skulkers, despite the birds calling from almost arms-length away at times. Our time here however added other birds such as **Levaillant's Cuckoo**, **Chin-spot Batis**, **Willow Warbler**, **Grey-backed Camaroptera**, **White-throated Robin-Chat**, **Brown-crowned Tchagra**, **Violet-eared Waxbill**, **Village Indigobird** and **Shaft-tailed Whydah**. A jaunt down 'crake road' was surprisingly quiet, though we did add **Southern Pied Babbler**, **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Southern White-crowned Shrike** and **Red-billed Oxpecker**, before we heard another **River Warbler** calling. We tried once more to pry this bird out from its thickets, but were unrewarded with our efforts.



Black-winged Pratincoles were active around the Kgomo Kgomo floodplains.

With the temperature warming up as we approached midday, and bird activity tailing off we stopped for our lunch break in the shade of some trees on the edge of the Kgomo Kgomo floodplain. Groups of **Black-winged Pratincoles** flying by overhead kept us company during our interlude. We resumed our birding, with our attention turning to the floodplains and surrounding areas. We were finally able to pry a **Common Whitethroat** out in the open for some good views, before the water birding took over. A group of extremely confiding **Lesser Moorhens** gave us wonderful views at length, while some of the group latched onto the rare **Striped Crake**. Try as we might, we weren't able to relocate this bird however. The floodplain proper also gave up a brief

Allen's Gallinule sitting atop the vegetation as arguably the most exciting find, but also produced the regionally scarce **Marabou Stork**, the secretive **Sedge Warbler** and a shy **Little Bittern**. More widespread species such as **Fulvous** and **White-faced Whistling Ducks**, **African Swamphen**, **Black Crane**, **African Jacana**, **Yellow-billed Stork**, **African Spoonbill**, **Purple** and **Black Herons** and **Malachite Kingfisher**, amongst others. The dry plains on the edge of the water added **Kittlitz's Plover**, **Red-capped Lark**, **African Pipit** and **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah**. Venturing into the acacia woodland we also finally notched up the sought-after **Olive-tree Warbler** before trying once more to see a **River Warbler**. Sadly, it just wasn't to be, as we had to be content with hearing the birds only, before calling it a day and making our way back to Johannesburg in the late afternoon.



*After a concerted effort, we finally located an **Olive-tree Warbler**.*

Despite not seeing any River Warblers, we enjoyed an otherwise successful day out, that produced nearly 150 species of birds – a true testament to the immense birding potential of this area! A full list of the species recorded can be seen below:

Bird List - Following IOC (11.2)

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen.

Common name	Scientific name
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>
Guineafowl (Numididae)	
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
Pheasants & Allies (Phasianidae)	
Crested Francolin	<i>Ortygornis sephaena</i>
Natal Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis natalensis</i>
Swainson's Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis swainsonii</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Turacos (Musophagidae)	
Grey Go-away-bird	<i>Crinifer concolor</i>
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	
Burchell's Coucal	<i>Centropus burchellii</i>
Levaillant's Cuckoo	<i>Clamator levaillantii</i>
Jacobin Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba guinea</i>
Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)	
Lesser Moorhen	<i>Paragallinula angulata</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Allen's Gallinule	<i>Porphyrio alleni</i>
African Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio madagascariensis</i>
Black Crake	<i>Zapornia flavirostra</i>
Striped Crake	<i>Aenigmatolimnas marginalis</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>
Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>
Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>
Jacanas (Jacanidae)	
African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Courasers, Pratincoles (Glareolidae)	
Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>
Storks (Ciconiidae)	
Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumenifer</i>
Anhingas, Darters (Anhingidae)	
African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
Cormorants, Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)	
Reed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>
White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>
Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	
African Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Herons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Hamerkop (Scopidae)	
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Black-chested Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>
Gabar Goshawk	<i>Micronisus gabar</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Pearl-spotted Owlet (H)	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>
Mousebirds (Coliidae)	
Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>
Red-faced Mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>
Hornbills (Bucerotidae)	
Southern Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus rufirostris</i>
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>
Rollers (Coraciidae)	
Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudatus</i>
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>
Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Bee-eaters (Meropidae)	
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
African Barbets (Lybiidae)	
Acacia Pied Barbet (H)	<i>Tricholaema leucomelas</i>
Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Golden-tailed Woodpecker (H)	<i>Campethera abingoni</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>
Wattle-eyes, Batises (Platysteiridae)	
Chinspot Batis	<i>Batis molitor</i>
Bushshrikes (Malaconotidae)	
Orange-breasted Bushshrike (H)	<i>Chlorophoneus sulfureopectus</i>
Brown-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra australis</i>
Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>
Southern Boubou	<i>Laniarius ferrugineus</i>
Crimson-breasted Shrike	<i>Laniarius atrococcineus</i>
Shrikes (Laniidae)	
Magpie Shrike	<i>Urolestes melanoleucus</i>
Southern White-crowned Shrike	<i>Eurocephalus anguitimens</i>
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>
Drongos (Dicruridae)	
Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Penduline Tits (Remizidae)	
Cape Penduline Tit	<i>Anthoscopus minutus</i>
Larks (Alaudidae)	
Sabota Lark	<i>Calendulauda sabota</i>
Red-capped Lark	<i>Calandrella cinerea</i>
Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)	
Yellow-bellied Greenbul (H)	<i>Chlorocichla flaviventris</i>
Terrestrial Brownbul (H)	<i>Phyllastrephus terrestris</i>
Dark-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus tricolor</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
White-throated Swallow	<i>Hirundo albigularis</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Crombecs, African Warblers (Macrosphenidae)	
Long-billed Crombec	<i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>
Leaf Warblers & Allies (Phylloscopidae)	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Reed Warblers & Allies (Acrocephalidae)	
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
African Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus baeticatus</i>
Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>
Olive-tree Warbler	<i>Hippolais olivetorum</i>
Grassbirds & Allies (Locustellidae)	
River Warbler (H)	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>
Little Rush Warbler	<i>Bradypterus baboecala</i>
Cisticolas & Allies (Cisticolidae)	
Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>
Levaillant's Cisticola	<i>Cisticola tinniens</i>
Neddicky	<i>Cisticola fulvicapilla</i>
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Black-chested Prinia	<i>Prinia flavicans</i>
Grey-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brevicaudata</i>
Burnt-necked Eremomela	<i>Eremomela usticollis</i>
Sylviid Babblers (Sylviidae)	
Chestnut-vented Warbler	<i>Curruca subcoerulea</i>
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>
Laughingthrushes & Allies (Leiothrichidae)	
Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>
Southern Pied Babbler	<i>Turdoides bicolor</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)	
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Cape Starling	<i>Lamprotornis nitens</i>
Burchell's Starling	<i>Lamprotornis australis</i>
Oxpeckers (Buphagidae)	
Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorynchus</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
White-browed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas leucophrys</i>
Marico Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis mariquensis</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)	
Amethyst Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra amethystina</i>
Marico Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris mariquensis</i>
White-bellied Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris talatala</i>
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)	
Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer diffusus</i>
Weavers, Widowbirds (Ploceidae)	
Red-billed Buffalo Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>
White-browed Sparrow-Weaver	<i>Plocepasser mahali</i>
Scaly-feathered Weaver	<i>Sporopipes squamifrons</i>
Southern Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>
Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Yellow-crowned Bishop	<i>Euplectes afer</i>
Southern Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes orix</i>
White-winged Widowbird	<i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>
Waxbills, Munias & Allies (Estrildidae)	
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>
Orange-breasted Waxbill	<i>Amandava subflava</i>
Violet-eared Waxbill	<i>Granatina granatina</i>
Blue Waxbill	<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>
Green-winged Pytilia	<i>Pytilia melba</i>
Red-billed Firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>
Jameson's Firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta rhodopareia</i>
Indigobirds, Whydahs (Viduidae)	
Village Indigobird	<i>Vidua chalybeata</i>
Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>
Shaft-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua regia</i>
Long-tailed Paradise Whydah	<i>Vidua paradisaea</i>
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Cape Wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>
African Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>
Species seen:	140
Species heard:	7
Total recorded:	147