

Birding Ecotours



SOUTH AFRICA: 1-DAY WEST COAST BIRDING TOUR REPORT

By Dominic Rollinson



Cape Long-billed Lark was one of the many South African endemics seen along the west coast.

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Overview

Marc was on holiday for a few days around Cape Town and had a number of Cape targets which he was keen to track down. So, after reviewing Marc's list of target birds, we decided a west coast day trip would work out best. Unfortunately, we happened to choose one of April's windiest days, however we still had a fun, bird-filled day out and managed to find most of Marc's target birds.

Detailed Report

Marc and I left Cape Town before dawn to ensure we could arrive in some good strandveld (beach scrub) habitat at around sunrise. As we left Cape Town, we could still see the red glow of Table Mountain as the mountain was experiencing one of its worst wildfires in a long time, with firefighters battling to contend with the gale force winds!

We arrived at our Cape Clapper Lark spot, however the combination of strong winds and the lateness of the season meant they were quiet and would not show for us. In late winter/spring these birds are normally very easy to find as they give their obvious wing-clapping display. While

birding in the area we came across our first **Cape Sparrow**, **Bokmakierie**, and **Karoo Scrub Robin** of the day.



*Cute **Karoo Scrub Robins** were a constant feature of the day.*

We headed further up the coast and stopped in at the Darling Hills area where we had good numbers of **Pied Starling**, with a few **Wattled Starling** in amongst these flocks. We also came across **Cape Weaver**, **Red-capped Lark**, **Karoo Prinia**, **Cape White-eye**, **Cape Bulbul**, and our best bird of the morning so far, a brief view of a male **Southern Black Korhaan**. Before we carried on with our way to West Coast National Park, we stopped in briefly at Tienie Versveld Wildflower

Reserve where it did not take long to find the Cape subspecies of **Cloud Cisticola** as well as a few **Blue Cranes**.



*One can never tire of seeing South Africa's national bird, the **Blue Crane**.*

Our next stop was West Coast National Park. Once in the park we headed to a nearby waterhole (with a hide/blind overlooking it) and enjoyed a late breakfast while we watched waterbirds going about their business and a number of terrestrial species coming down to drink. Waterbirds here included **South African Shelduck**, **Cape Shoveler**, **Cape Teal**, **Yellow-billed Duck**, **Lesser Swamp Warbler**, and a very showy **African Rail**. The nearby scrub yielded good views of **Karoo Lark**, **Cape Spurfowl**, **Karoo Scrub Robin**, **Chestnut-vented Warbler**, **Grey-backed Cisticola**, and **Yellow Canary**. In the distance we could see a number of **Common Ostriches**, a common species throughout the park.

We had timed our day so that we could arrive at Geelbek Hide with a dropping tide which ensured we could experience the huge numbers of waders (shorebirds) which makes this park famous amongst birders. At this time of the year many of the species are in almost complete breeding plumage (before they depart for the Northern Hemisphere to breed) which is quite different from how we mostly experience migrant waders in South Africa. While scanning through the large numbers of waders, hoping for a rarity (unfortunately not this time), we managed to find **Black-winged Stilt**, **Pied Avocet**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Common Greenshank**, **Grey**, **Common Ringed**, and **Chestnut-banded Plovers**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Curlew**, **Terek**, and **Marsh Sandpipers**, **Sanderling**, and **Little Stint**. The hordes of **Greater** and **Lesser Flamingos** however did not take as much effort to pick out as they went about feeding in the shallows. In the nearby strandveld we found the beautiful **Black Harrier** as well as **Martial Eagle** (rare in the park), **Jackal Buzzard**, **Grey-winged Francolin**, and **Malachite Sunbird**.



Grey-winged Francolins were seen well near Geelbek Hide.

Before we left the park, we made a quick stop at Seeberg Hide where we added the likes of **Kittlitz's**, **Three-banded**, and **White-fronted Plovers**, **African Oystercatcher**, and **White-backed Mousebird** to our rapidly growing list.

Once out the park we made our way through the town of Langebaan and into the farmlands around Vredenburg on the Columbine Peninsula. The wheatfields in this area often hold a number of special birds, and today was no different. Highlights from our time here included **Cape Long-billed** and **Large-billed Larks**, **Cape Bunting**, **White-throated Canary**, **Sickle-winged Chat**, **Capped Wheatear**, **Namaqua Dove**, **Blue Crane**, and after much searching a couple of obliging **Grey Tits**. Before turning back south towards Cape Town we took a scan over the bay from near St Helena Bay and found **Bank**, **Crowned**, **Cape**, and **White-breasted Cormorants**.

We ended a long but really enjoyable day out with 108 species on the list and managed to find many of Marc's target birds.