



## **SOUTH AFRICA: 2-DAY AGULHAS PLAINS BIRDING TOUR REPORT**

**By Dominic Rollinson**



*Knysna Woodpecker can be seen with some effort in De Hoop Nature Reserve.*

### Overview

This short two-day birding trip into the Agulhas Plains (Overberg region) was put together to target a number of specials which are best found in this region, a few of which are endemics or near-endemics to South Africa. Some of these species occur here at their most westerly extent and thus this is the closest they can be seen to Cape Town. This trip was highly successful, with some of the highlights including **Horus Swift**, **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, **Blue Crane**, **Denham's Bustard**, **Karoo Korhaan**, **Cape Gannet**, **African Penguin**, **Cape, Crowned and Bank Cormorants**, **Secretarybird**, **Cape Vulture**, **Knysna Woodpecker**, **Southern Tchagra**, **Cape Rockjumper**, **Agulhas Long-billed**, **Cape Clapper** and **Large-billed Larks**, **Victorin's Warbler**, **Cape Sugarbird**, **Orange-breasted Sunbird** and **Sweet Waxbill**.



*The Agulhas Plains host large numbers of the majestic **Blue Crane**.*

### Detailed Report

#### **Day 1. Cape Town to De Hoop Nature Reserve**

We left Cape Town early and headed east, with our first birding stop being near Sir Lowry's Pass where we hoped to catch up with a certain skulking warbler. Soon after getting out the car, we heard our quarry calling nearby and after much effort we eventually got views of a **Victorin's Warbler**. We had a few other nice birds in the area including a small group of **Cape Siskins** and a number of **Orange-breasted Sunbirds**. Our next birding site was a small, quiet farm road near



Swellendam. The birding here was excellent and we soon notched up many of our target birds for the area. Standout birds included **Blue Crane**, **Denham's Bustard**, **Karoo Korhaan**, **Agulhas Long-billed** and **Cape Clapper Larks**, **Capped Wheatear**, **Pearl-breasted Swallow** and a small group of **Quailfinches**, although these were only heard as they flew high overhead. A few widespread raptors were also seen in the area, such as **Black-winged Kite**, **Common** and **Jackal Buzzards** and **Rock Kestrel**.

After cleaning up on most of our open-country targets, we carried onto De Hoop Nature Reserve where we would spend the rest of the afternoon. On the outskirts of the nature reserve, we found a few distant **Cape Vultures** which breed at the nearby Potberg colony. After checking into our accommodation, we immediately headed out and made our way to Koppie Alleen, a large dune which overlooks the Indian Ocean. In early summer this is one of the best places around to look for Southern Right Whales however unfortunately they are not around in late summer. A quick scan out to sea did however produce a few **Cape Gannets** and many **Greater Crested Terns**. The drive to and from Koppie Alleen gave us some nice birds such as **Long-billed Crombec**, **Yellow** and **White-throated Canaries**, **Cape Bunting**, **Kittlitz's** and **White-fronted Plovers**, **Crowned Lapwing**, **Bokmakierie** and many **Common Ostriches**. There were of course large numbers of animals around including the likes of the Cape subspecies of **Blesbok**, known as Bontebok, (Cape) **Mountain Zebra**, **Common Eland**, **Grey Rhebok**, **Steenbok** and large troops of **Chacma Baboons**.

We finished off the day with a walk around the campsite, which was relatively quiet although we did find **Cape Spurfowl**, calling **Grey-winged Francolins**, **African Hoopoe**, **Fiscal Flycatcher**, **Great Crested Grebes** in the nearby wetland, and great visuals of **Fiery-necked Nightjar** as it got dark. We enjoyed a tasty South African braai (barbecue) with the nightjars calling in the background, before heading to bed for the night.



*Cape Spurfowl were very common and quite cheeky at times.*

## Day 2. De Hoop Nature Reserve to Cape Town

We awoke just before sunrise and spent the next few hours wandering around the campsite which was incredibly productive. It didn't take long to locate one of our major targets **Southern Tchagra**, and they actually proved quite numerous in the campsite over the morning. Our next target **Knysna Woodpecker** took a lot more effort but eventually we were rewarded with point-blank views of a bird as it went about feeding, completely oblivious to our presence. Other good birds here included the likes of **Horus**, **Alpine**, **White-rumped** and **African Black Swifts**, **Willow Warbler**, **Spotted Eagle-Owl**, **Speckled** and **Red-faced Mousebirds**, **Bar-throated Apalis**, **Southern Double-collared Sunbird**, **Pied Starling** and **Water Thick-knees** along the shoreline. A small flock of **Namaqua Sandgrouse** were seen as we departed the campsite.



*Southern Tchagra* was an important target which was rather numerous in De Hoop Nature Reserve.

After having spent most of the morning in the nature reserve we started to make our way back to Cape Town with a number of important birding stops planned en route. Just outside the reserve we had nice views of a circling **Secretarybird** and a couple of distant **Cape Vultures**. After a decent drive through the Agulhas Plains, our next stop was near Betty's Bay where we had some very obliging **Cape Rockjumpers**. We then enjoyed a late lunch in Harold Porter Botanical Garden which gave us nice views of **Brimstone Canary**, **Sweet Waxbill** and **Cape Sugarbird**. Next was a brief stop at Stony Point for **African Penguin** and **Bank, Cape, Crowned** and **White-breasted Cormorants** before we pressed onto our final stop at Rooi Els which delivered a cooperative **Cape Rock Thrush**. From here we headed back to Cape Town and finished the day in the late afternoon after what had been a very pleasant and productive couple days of birding.

**Bird List - Following IOC (12.1)**

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

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable.

| Common Name                                 | Scientific Name                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| <b>Ostriches (Struthionidae)</b>            |                                  |
| Common Ostrich                              | <i>Struthio camelus</i>          |
|   |                                  |
| <b>Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)</b>       |                                  |
| Spur-winged Goose                           | <i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>   |
| Egyptian Goose                              | <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>      |
| Cape Shoveler                               | <i>Spatula smithii</i>           |
| Yellow-billed Duck                          | <i>Anas undulata</i>             |
| Cape Teal                                   | <i>Anas capensis</i>             |
|   |                                  |
| <b>Guineafowl (Numididae)</b>               |                                  |
| Helmeted Guineafowl                         | <i>Numida meleagris</i>          |
|   |                                  |
| <b>Pheasants &amp; Allies (Phasianidae)</b> |                                  |
| Grey-winged Francolin (H)                   | <i>Scleroptila afra</i>          |
| Cape Spurfowl                               | <i>Pternistis capensis</i>       |
|   |                                  |
| <b>Swifts (Apodidae)</b>                    |                                  |
| Alpine Swift                                | <i>Tachymarptis melba</i>        |
| African Black Swift                         | <i>Apus barbatus</i>             |
| Little Swift                                | <i>Apus affinis</i>              |
| Horus Swift                                 | <i>Apus horus</i>                |
| White-rumped Swift                          | <i>Apus caffer</i>               |
|   |                                  |
| <b>Bustards (Otididae)</b>                  |                                  |
| Denham's Bustard                            | <i>Neotis denhami</i>            |
| Karoo Korhaan                               | <i>Eupodotis vigorsii</i>        |
|   |                                  |
| <b>Sandgrouse (Pteroclididae)</b>           |                                  |
| Namaqua Sandgrouse                          | <i>Pterocles namaqua</i>         |
|   |                                  |
| <b>Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)</b>          |                                  |
| Rock Dove                                   | <i>Columba livia</i>             |
| Speckled Pigeon                             | <i>Columba guinea</i>            |
| Red-eyed Dove                               | <i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i> |
| Ring-necked Dove                            | <i>Streptopelia capicola</i>     |

| Common Name                                    | Scientific Name                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Laughing Dove                                  | <i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>       |
| <b>Rails, Crakes &amp; Coots (Rallidae)</b>    |                                      |
| Common Moorhen                                 | <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>           |
| Red-knobbed Coot                               | <i>Fulica cristata</i>               |
| <b>Cranes (Gruidae)</b>                        |                                      |
| Blue Crane - VU                                | <i>Grus paradisea</i>                |
| <b>Grebes (Podicipedidae)</b>                  |                                      |
| Little Grebe                                   | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>        |
| Great Crested Grebe                            | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>            |
| <b>Stone-curlews, Thick-knees (Burhinidae)</b> |                                      |
| Water Thick-knee                               | <i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>         |
| Spotted Thick-knee                             | <i>Burhinus capensis</i>             |
| <b>Oystercatchers (Haematopodidae)</b>         |                                      |
| African Oystercatcher                          | <i>Haematopus moquini</i>            |
| <b>Stilts, Avocets (Recurvirostridae)</b>      |                                      |
| Black-winged Stilt                             | <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>         |
| <b>Plovers (Charadriidae)</b>                  |                                      |
| Blacksmith Lapwing                             | <i>Vanellus armatus</i>              |
| Crowned Lapwing                                | <i>Vanellus coronatus</i>            |
| Common Ringed Plover                           | <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>          |
| Kittlitz's Plover                              | <i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>          |
| White-fronted Plover                           | <i>Charadrius marginatus</i>         |
| <b>Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)</b>       |                                      |
| Little Stint                                   | <i>Calidris minuta</i>               |
| <b>Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae)</b>        |                                      |
| Grey-headed Gull                               | <i>Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus</i> |
| Hartlaub's Gull                                | <i>Chroicocephalus hartlaubii</i>    |
| Kelp Gull                                      | <i>Larus dominicanus</i>             |
| Greater Crested Tern                           | <i>Thalasseus bergii</i>             |
| <b>Penguins (Spheniscidae)</b>                 |                                      |
| African Penguin - EN                           | <i>Spheniscus demersus</i>           |
| <b>Gannets, Boobies (Sulidae)</b>              |                                      |
| Cape Gannet - EN                               | <i>Morus capensis</i>                |



| Common Name                                   | Scientific Name                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| <b>Anhingas, Darters (Anhingidae)</b>         |                                 |
| African Darter                                | <i>Anhinga rufa</i>             |
| <b>Cormorants, Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)</b>  |                                 |
| Reed Cormorant                                | <i>Microcarbo africanus</i>     |
| Crowned Cormorant                             | <i>Microcarbo coronatus</i>     |
| Bank Cormorant - EN                           | <i>Phalacrocorax neglectus</i>  |
| Cape Cormorant - EN                           | <i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>   |
| White-breasted Cormorant                      | <i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>    |
| <b>Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)</b> |                                 |
| African Sacred Ibis                           | <i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i> |
| Hadada Ibis                                   | <i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>      |
| Glossy Ibis                                   | <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>     |
| <b>Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)</b>            |                                 |
| Black-crowned Night Heron (H)                 | <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>    |
| Western Cattle Egret                          | <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>            |
| Grey Heron                                    | <i>Ardea cinerea</i>            |
| Black-headed Heron                            | <i>Ardea melanocephala</i>      |
| <b>Secretarybird (Sagittariidae)</b>          |                                 |
| Secretarybird - EN                            | <i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i> |
| <b>Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)</b>    |                                 |
| Black-winged Kite                             | <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>         |
| Cape Vulture - EN                             | <i>Gyps coprotheres</i>         |
| Pale Chanting Goshawk                         | <i>Melierax canorus</i>         |
| African Fish Eagle                            | <i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>       |
| Common Buzzard                                | <i>Buteo buteo</i>              |
| Jackal Buzzard                                | <i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>         |
| <b>Owls (Strigidae)</b>                       |                                 |
| Spotted Eagle-Owl                             | <i>Bubo africanus</i>           |
| <b>Mousebirds (Coliidae)</b>                  |                                 |
| Speckled Mousebird                            | <i>Colius striatus</i>          |
| Red-faced Mousebird                           | <i>Urocolius indicus</i>        |
| <b>Hoopoes (Upupidae)</b>                     |                                 |
| African Hoopoe                                | <i>Upupa africana</i>           |
| <b>African Barbets (Lybiidae)</b>             |                                 |
| Acacia Pied Barbet (H)                        | <i>Tricholaema leucomelas</i>   |

| Common Name                             | Scientific Name                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| <b>Woodpeckers (Picidae)</b>            |                                  |
| Knysna Woodpecker                       | <i>Campethera notata</i>         |
| Cardinal Woodpecker (H)                 | <i>Dendropicos fuscescens</i>    |
| <b>Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)</b>  |                                  |
| Rock Kestrel                            | <i>Falco rupicolus</i>           |
| <b>Bushshrikes (Malaconotidae)</b>      |                                  |
| Bokmakierie                             | <i>Telophorus zeylonus</i>       |
| Southern Tchagra                        | <i>Tchagra tchagra</i>           |
| Southern Boubou                         | <i>Laniarius ferrugineus</i>     |
| <b>Shrikes (Laniidae)</b>               |                                  |
| Southern Fiscal                         | <i>Lanius collaris</i>           |
| <b>Drongos (Dicruridae)</b>             |                                  |
| Fork-tailed Drongo                      | <i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>        |
| <b>Monarchs (Monarchidae)</b>           |                                  |
| African Paradise Flycatcher (H)         | <i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>       |
| <b>Crows, Jays (Corvidae)</b>           |                                  |
| Cape Crow                               | <i>Corvus capensis</i>           |
| White-necked Raven                      | <i>Corvus albigollis</i>         |
| <b>Rockjumpers (Chaetopidae)</b>        |                                  |
| Cape Rockjumper                         | <i>Chaetops frenatus</i>         |
| <b>Larks (Alaudidae)</b>                |                                  |
| Agulhas Long-billed Lark                | <i>Certhilauda brevirostris</i>  |
| Cape Clapper Lark                       | <i>Mirafrapa apiata</i>          |
| Large-billed Lark                       | <i>Galerida magnirostris</i>     |
| Red-capped Lark                         | <i>Calandrella cinerea</i>       |
| <b>Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)</b>           |                                  |
| Sombre Greenbul                         | <i>Andropadus importunus</i>     |
| Cape Bulbul                             | <i>Pycnonotus capensis</i>       |
| <b>Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)</b> |                                  |
| Black Saw-wing                          | <i>Psalidoprocne pristoptera</i> |
| Brown-throated Martin                   | <i>Riparia paludicola</i>        |
| Rock Martin                             | <i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>     |
| Pearl-breasted Swallow                  | <i>Hirundo dimidiata</i>         |
| White-throated Swallow                  | <i>Hirundo albigularis</i>       |
| Barn Swallow                            | <i>Hirundo rustica</i>           |



| Common Name  | Scientific Name                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Greater Striped Swallow                            | <i>Cecropis cucullata</i>       |
| <b>Crombees, African Warblers (Macrosphenidae)</b> |                                 |
| Long-billed Crombec                                | <i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>      |
| Victorin's Warbler                                 | <i>Cryptillas victorini</i>     |
| <b>Leaf Warblers &amp; Allies (Phylloscopidae)</b> |                                 |
| Willow Warbler                                     | <i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>   |
| <b>Cisticolas &amp; Allies (Cisticolidae)</b>      |                                 |
| Grey-backed Cisticola                              | <i>Cisticola subruficapilla</i> |
| Zitting Cisticola                                  | <i>Cisticola juncidis</i>       |
| Cloud Cisticola (H)                                | <i>Cisticola textrix</i>        |
| Karoo Prinia                                       | <i>Prinia maculosa</i>          |
| Bar-throated Apalis                                | <i>Apalis thoracica</i>         |
| <b>White-eyes (Zosteropidae)</b>                   |                                 |
| Cape White-eye                                     | <i>Zosterops virens</i>         |
| <b>Sugarbirds (Promeropidae)</b>                   |                                 |
| Cape Sugarbird                                     | <i>Promerops cafer</i>          |
| <b>Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)</b>           |                                 |
| Common Starling                                    | <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>         |
| Pied Starling                                      | <i>Lamprotornis bicolor</i>     |
| Red-winged Starling                                | <i>Onychognathus morio</i>      |
| <b>Thrushes (Turdidae)</b>                         |                                 |
| Olive Thrush                                       | <i>Turdus olivaceus</i>         |
| <b>Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)</b> |                                 |
| Karoo Scrub Robin                                  | <i>Cercotrichas coryphoeus</i>  |
| Fiscal Flycatcher                                  | <i>Melaenornis silens</i>       |
| African Dusky Flycatcher (H)                       | <i>Muscicapa adusta</i>         |
| Cape Robin-Chat                                    | <i>Cossypha caffra</i>          |
| Cape Rock Thrush                                   | <i>Monticola rupestris</i>      |
| African Stonechat                                  | <i>Saxicola torquatus</i>       |
| Capped Wheatear                                    | <i>Oenanthe pileata</i>         |
| Familiar Chat                                      | <i>Oenanthe familiaris</i>      |
| <b>Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)</b>                    |                                 |
| Orange-breasted Sunbird                            | <i>Anthobaphes violacea</i>     |
| Malachite Sunbird                                  | <i>Nectarinia famosa</i>        |
| Southern Double-collared Sunbird                   | <i>Cinnyris chalybeus</i>       |

| Common Name   | Scientific Name               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| <b>Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)</b> |                               |
| Cape Sparrow  | <i>Passer melanurus</i>       |
| House Sparrow                                       | <i>Passer domesticus</i>      |
| <b>Weavers, Widowbirds (Ploceidae)</b>              |                               |
| Cape Weaver   | <i>Ploceus capensis</i>       |
| Southern Red Bishop                                 | <i>Euplectes orix</i>         |
| Yellow Bishop                                       | <i>Euplectes capensis</i>     |
| <b>Waxbills, Munias &amp; Allies (Estrildidae)</b>  |                               |
| Swee Waxbill  | <i>Coccygia melanotis</i>     |
| Common Waxbill                                      | <i>Estrilda astrild</i>       |
| Quailfinch (H)                                      | <i>Ortygospiza atricollis</i> |
| <b>Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)</b>              |                               |
| Cape Wagtail  | <i>Motacilla capensis</i>     |
| African Pipit                                       | <i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>     |
| <b>Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae)</b>            |                               |
| Cape Siskin   | <i>Crithagra totta</i>        |
| Yellow Canary                                       | <i>Crithagra flaviventris</i> |
| Brimstone Canary                                    | <i>Crithagra sulphurata</i>   |
| Streaky-headed Seedeater (H)                        | <i>Crithagra gularis</i>      |
| White-throated Canary                               | <i>Crithagra albogularis</i>  |
| Cape Canary   | <i>Serinus canicollis</i>     |
| <b>Buntings (Emberizidae)</b>                       |                               |
| Cape Bunting  | <i>Emberiza capensis</i>      |
| <b>Total seen</b>                                   |                               |
| <b>126</b>  |                               |
| <b>Total heard only</b>                             |                               |
| <b>9</b>  |                               |
| <b>Total recorded</b>                               |                               |
| <b>135</b>  |                               |

**Mammal List**

| Common Name                                | Scientific Name                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
|  |                                     |
| <b>Mongoose (Herpestidae)</b>              |                                     |
| Cape Grey Mongoose                         | <i>Herpestes pulverulentus</i>      |
|  |                                     |
| <b>Horses, Asses and Zebras (Equidae)</b>  |                                     |
| (Cape) Mountain Zebra                      | <i>Equus zebra zebra</i>            |
|  |                                     |
| <b>Bovids (Bovidae)</b>                    |                                     |
| Common Eland                               | <i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>             |
| Blesbok (Bontebok)                         | <i>Damaliscus pygargus pygargus</i> |
| Grey Rhebok                                | <i>Pelea capreolus</i>              |
| Steenbok                                   | <i>Raphicerus campestris</i>        |
|  |                                     |
| <b>Hyraxes (Procaviidae)</b>               |                                     |
| Rock Hyrax                                 | <i>Procavia capensis</i>            |
|  |                                     |
| <b>Old World Monkeys (Cercopithecidae)</b> |                                     |
| Chacma Baboon                              | <i>Papio ursinus</i>                |
|  |                                     |
| <b>Rabbits and Hares (Leporidae)</b>       |                                     |
| Cape Hare                                  | <i>Lepus capensis</i>               |
|  |                                     |
| <b>True Mice (Muridae)</b>                 |                                     |
| Four-striped Grass Mouse                   | <i>Rhabdomys pumilio</i>            |
|  |                                     |
| <b>Total seen</b>                          | <b>10</b>                           |