



**SUBTROPICAL SOUTH AFRICA BIRDING TOUR:
COMPREHENSIVE EASTERN SOUTH AFRICA SET DEPARTURE
TOUR REPORT**

14 – 31 OCTOBER 2023

By Dylan Vasapolli



*A quintessential sight in the African bushveld – this **Leopard** lazing about in the final hours of the day, was one of the standout group sightings on this eastern South Africa tour.*

Overview

South Africa has for a long while been arguably the best and most accessible African country to visit – due to its superb infrastructure, high diversity, and incredible value-for-money. This subtropical South Africa set departure tour is focused on an 18-day route taking in almost all of eastern South Africa's premier birding (and wildlife) reserves and sites.

Starting in the coastal town of Durban, we headed to the fabulous Drakensberg Mountains and took a trip up the birdy Sani Pass into the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, before venturing through the myriad of coastal forests and Zululand bushveld nature reserves and sites. Meccas we stopped at included the world-famous Isimangaliso Wetland Park, and Mkhuze Game Reserve, amongst others. We then headed inland, and made a trip to the highlands of Wakkerstroom, where we focused on the many grassland endemics of South Africa, before calling in at the excellent Kruger National Park, where we enjoyed some of Africa's megafauna, along with its supreme birding. The tour then ended in the diverse mixed acacia thornveld north of Pretoria and Johannesburg.



*This tour yielded a high number of birds, including many localized specials, and many endemics and near-endemics. This localized **Rudd's Apalis** showed well during our time in Zululand.*

We had challenging weather during our 2023 set departure tour, with rain and other adverse weather conditions affecting most days of this trip. Remarkably, despite all the inclement weather, this tour was still supremely successful, with a high count of species (more than 450 recorded, and just under this total being seen), and virtually all of the possible specials and endemics being seen (and generally seen very well)! There were too many highlights to list them all, but our day up a cold, windy, rainy and snowy Sani Pass was superb as, despite everything the weather gods threw down on us, the birds carried on obliging. A somewhat similar day at Mkhuze Game Reserve was

equally superb due to the excellent birds we found, despite the atrocious conditions. Our Kruger drives were well enjoyed, with some superb birds intermingled with far too many **Leopards** (amongst other great wildlife, like **African Wild Dog**), while our trend continued with a cold, wet and generally miserable day on the Zaagkuilsdrift Road being wonderfully productive, netting us virtually every special possible at this time of the year.

A detailed daily account can be read below, and the full bird and mammal lists are located at the end of the report.

Detailed Report

Day 1, 14th October 2023. Arrival in Durban, local birding and transfer to Pennington

Our eastern South Africa subtropical tour began in a comfortable Durban guesthouse with several of the group having arrived early the previous day. With more guests arriving only later in the day, we spent the morning birding a few local sites in the wider Durban north area, including the KwaDukuza Wetlands near Stanger. Water birds formed the center stage during the morning birding, and we acquainted ourselves with the more widespread species like **Egyptian Goose**, **Little Grebe**, **African Swamphen**, **Black Crake**, **Three-banded Plover**, **Blacksmith Lapwing**, **African Jacana**, **African Darter**, **Reed Cormorant**, **Grey Heron**, **Malachite** and **Pied Kingfishers**, **Lesser Swamp Warbler** and a plethora of weavers including **Thick-billed**, **Village** and **Eastern Golden (Yellow) Weavers** and **Southern Red Bishops**. Our hoped for Red-headed Queleas were nowhere to be seen, but we did well to find a pair of **Grey Crowned Cranes** along with shy **Black** and **Purple Herons**. Our acquaintances continued with the likes of **Lesser Striped Swallow**, **Black Saw-wing**, **Red-winged Starling**, **Pin-tailed Whydah**, **African Pied Wagtail** and **Yellow-fronted Canary**.

We headed to the airport, where we met up with a few more guests who had just arrived from our Best of Cape Town & Beyond Tour, before settling in for lunch and transferring down the south coast to the sleepy village of Pennington. Here we met our final guests (who had been staying for a few days prior to the tour beginning) and checked into our comfortable and luxurious seaside accommodations. The wind had picked up to an extraordinarily high level and our afternoon walk around the fabulous Umdoni Park was extremely quiet, with little moving about in the gale-force winds. A fruiting tree proved our saving grace and here we enjoyed the likes of **African Green Pigeon**, **White-eared Barbet** and **Violet-backed** and **Black-bellied Starlings**, all cavorting around the tree. Nearby we enjoyed a small group of **Little Bee-eaters**, dainty **Southern Black Flycatchers** and we eked out an **Olive Sunbirds** in the forest. We settled in for the evening and enjoyed a lovely meal together.

Day 2, 15th October 2023. Birding Umdoni Park, and transfer to Underberg, via Weza Forest

Our early morning coffee and rusks kickstarted our day, and we headed off into the neighboring Umdoni Park where we would spend the morning birding the various forest trails running through it. With the wind having died down substantially, the birds were out and about and we had a superb morning. A pair of confiding **Cape Batis**' gave us good looks, before being replaced by a **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird**, then a **Black-backed Puffback** and lastly a **Square-tailed Drongo**. A

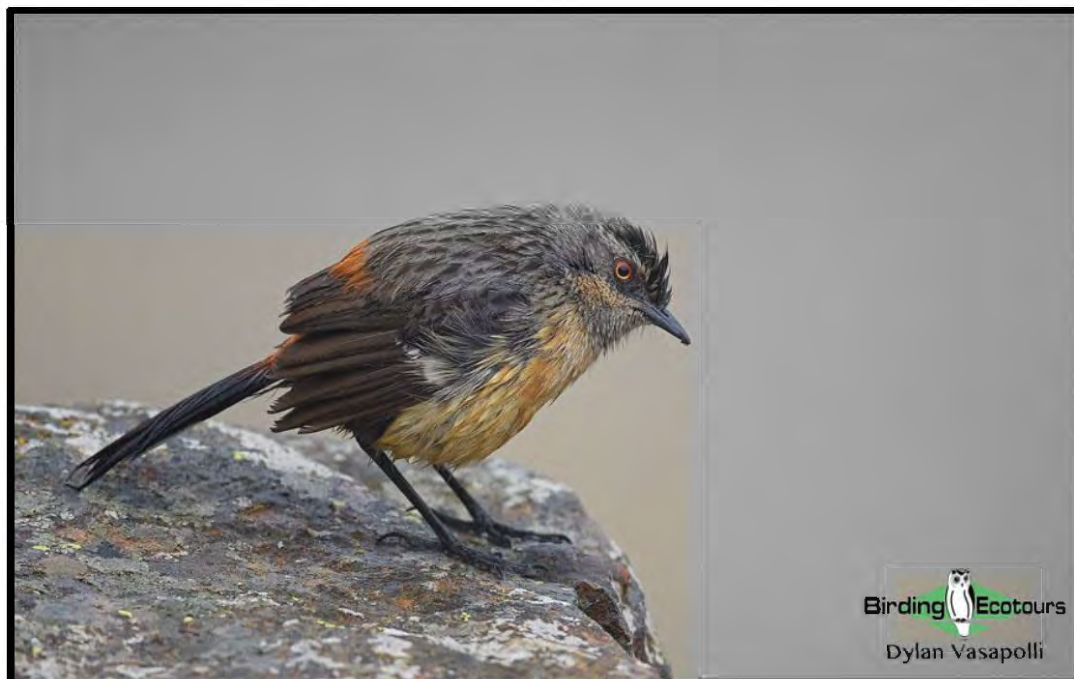
calling **Narina Trogon** gave us only the briefest of glimpses, while a bright **Tambourine Dove** gave us better views. We also did well to find a foraging **Brown Scrub Robin**, one of the main specials for the area (well spotted, Ohad!). We then struck gold and found a party of **Knysna Turacos** which came out into an open tree and put on a fine show for us! After having had our fill, we continued onwards and were drawn to a vocal **Gorgeous Bushshrike**. Rather unlike this usually extremely elusive bird, we had excellent views almost immediately, and enjoyed this brightly colored species calling from the top of a tree at length. Displaying **African Goshawks** were seen, along with **Golden-tailed Woodpecker**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Southern Boubou**, nesting **Southern Black Tits**, **Green-backed Camaroptera**, **Ashy Flycatcher** and **Grey Sunbird**. We headed back for breakfast after a few hours out walking, finding a **Purple-crested Turaco** en route. We kept getting repeatedly distracted during breakfast with the beautiful gardens bringing in excellent birds, like the scarce **Southern Tchagra**, **Brown-hooded Kingfisher**, **Crested Barbet**, **Spectacled Weaver** and **Red-backed Mannikin**.

After eventually getting through breakfast, we gathered up our things and hit the road. We were ultimately bound for Underberg, but would take the bulk of the day getting there with various planned stops along the way. Our first stop at Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve was good, albeit brief. Here we tried hard in a known Knysna Woodpecker territory, but came up empty handed. A vocal **Black Cuckoo** gave us a few good flyby views, and we also added an excellent **Olive Woodpecker** and dainty **Bar-throated Apalis**. **Narina Trogon** finally relented and we found a showy male that refused to budge, giving us all excellent views (thanks again, Ohad!). With inclement and colder weather brewing, our lunch stop at Ingeli was much welcomed, and allowed us to have some coffee and tea to warm up, along with a fine Sunday roast.



*We had sublime views of a male **Narina Trogon** whilst at Oribi Gorge.*

The gardens here held the likes of **Amethyst** and **Greater Double-collared Sunbirds**, **Cape Weaver**, **Cape Robin-Chat** and **Greater Striped Swallow**. After having suitably warmed up again, we ventured off birding to the nearby Weza Forest. A **Red-chested Cuckoo** showed well on the forest edge, and almost as soon as we stepped out the car, we found a **Bush Blackcap** – one of the targets here. The bird kept slightly distant, but showed well. **Olive Woodpecker** and **Cape Batis** kept us entertained before we found a lively **Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler**. Our first try for the shy **White-starred Robin** produced the goods, and we then refocused on finding **Orange Ground Thrush**. We heard several birds calling as we went along, but try as we might, we simply couldn't see any of them, despite the birds being extremely close at times. An **Olive Bushshrike** put in an appearance right at the end, before we headed down to a vlei. Here, we enjoyed excellent looks at several confiding **Barratt's Warblers** that were working the rank vegetation along the edges, along with a vocal **African Yellow Warbler**. A fine **Long-crested Eagle** was seen on our way out. We spent the remaining part of the now rainy afternoon driving to Underberg, where we checked into our stunning lodge in the early evening.



Drakensberg Rockjumper is one the main specials of the Sani Pass – here a young bird.

Day 3, 16th October 2023. Endemic birding on Sani Pass, and into Lesotho

We awoke to the same continuous rain as had been ongoing from the previous day, and braced for a cool day as we transited up the famous Sani Pass, and into Lesotho. We made use of several 4x4 vehicles to traverse the rugged road up the mighty Drakensberg Mountains. After meeting our drivers and ace local guide, Stuart, we climbed into the cars and set off. Early stops still in our lodge grounds produced a fine male **Buff-streaked Chat**, along with **Wailing Cisticola** and **Nicholson's Pipit**. A calling **Red-winged Francolin** took some careful watching to locate, but we enjoyed good scope views of this secretive species. The large dam on the lodge grounds also held

nesting **Hamerkop**, distant **Grey Crowned Cranes**, flyby **Black-crowned Night Herons** and a **Giant Kingfisher** for a lucky few. The lower reaches of the pass were extremely wet and pretty miserable, but we somehow managed to better our views of **Bush Blackcap**, enjoyed several showy **Drakensberg Prinias** and found numerous **Malachite Sunbirds** and a single **Gurney's Sugarbird** on some of the flowering plants. While having breakfast in a short gap in the weather, we also eked out a few new birds like **Bokmakierie**, **African Dusky Flycatcher** and **Cape Canary**, while **Half-collared Kingfisher** frustratingly only showed itself to a lucky few. Once we were past the South African border post, we managed to get our first **Ground Woodpeckers**, along with **Cape Buntings** and **Cape Rock Thrushes**, while the surprise of the day went to a **Levaillant's Cuckoo** – a rare bird in the province. The higher reaches of the pass were blanketed in thick mist, and a quick stop at the Sani Top area, once we crossed into Lesotho, gave us a confiding **Drakensberg Rockjumper** and numerous **Drakensberg Siskins**.



Mountain Pipit is a highly localized breeding endemic, only really possible within the high Drakensberg Mountains in Lesotho.

The mist cleared and rain stopped as we went deeper into Lesotho, but it miraculously started snowing and was bitterly cold (unusual for this time of year). Despite conditions, the birding was excellent and we roped in all of our targets. One of the first **Mountain Pipits** of the season showed well to us, while we also netted **Grey Tit**, **Fairy Flycatcher**, **Karoo Prinia**, **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, **Sickle-winged Chat** and both **Large-billed** and **Red-capped Larks**. Comical parties of **Ground Woodpeckers** were seen at several places and we also did well to find a covey of **Grey-winged Francolins** feeding in the open. We eventually arrived at our **Bearded Vulture** nest site, and enjoyed good views of the adults on the nest and changing, along with seeing the now large chick on the nest, albeit distantly. We enjoyed much more satisfactory views of them flying overhead. Numerous **Cape Vultures** were also present, along with a few **Southern Bald Ibis**, and

a **Black Stork** was a lucky sighting. Birding some of the surrounding areas here gave us our few missing Karoo species like **Layard's Warbler** and **Karoo Scrub Robin**, while we also added a large party of **Yellow Canaries**. **African Rock Pipit** took a herculean effort to find, after spending much of our time in Lesotho listening to various birds calling, and we did well to add a **Mountain Wheatear**. We enjoyed repeat views of **Drakensberg Rockjumpers** here, along with some of the other Karoo species seen earlier in the day, like **Fairy Flycatcher** and **Grey Tit**.

Content and satisfied, and with all our target birds under our belt despite the most inclement of weather conditions, we made our way down the pass and into the Underberg farmlands. Here, heavy rain resumed and we made the most of our search for cranes. A large flock of **Grey Crowned Cranes** were seen in the farmlands, while a pair of **Blue Cranes** were sighted close to the road, and eventually we arrived at an active **Wattled Crane** nest. Here, the adults were seen on and around the nest respectively, and we counted ourselves lucky to see this locally rare and Critically Endangered (in South Africa) species. Opportunistic stops in the farmlands also gave us **Cape Crow**, **South African Cliff Swallows**, **Pied Starlings**, **Long-tailed Widowbirds** and our first **Cape Longclaws**. We retired for the remainder of the day, and warmed ourselves up in front of our fires.

Day 4, 17th October 2023. Blue Swallows and transfer to Mtunzini

We had an early start, as we checked out of our lodge and began the long journey to the coastal village of Mtunzini, where we would spend the night. As most of our travel days go, we would make several birding stops along the route, the first of which was at the Marutswa Forest in Bulwer. This is a usually reliable stakeout for Cape Parrot, but the weather gods were still angry with us, as we had much rain and inclement weather to deal with. As we waited it out, the likes of **Black-headed Oriole**, **Southern Boubou**, **White-necked Raven**, **Drakenberg Prinia**, **African Dusky Flycatcher**, **Southern Double-collared Sunbird** and **Red-collared Widowbird** kept us company. Some hard work paid off and we enjoyed a fine **Orange Ground Thrush** that remained perched, for all to admire, on the forest edge, while **Narina Trogon** offered some brief views and a vocal **White-starred Robin** offered no views. The rhythmic booming of **Southern Ground Hornbills** was heard out over the valley and **Black-winged Lapwings** were seen in flight above the forest. The parrots were unfortunately a no show, and we eventually had to throw in the towel and move on.

Our next stop was the Roselands Farm near Richmond, where we had a date with the sought-after **Blue Swallow**. Our journey took us through some farmlands, where some opportunistic birding stops in between bouts of rain produced some fine birds, such as **Jackal Buzzard**, **Cape Grassbird**, **Levaillant's Cisticola**, **African Yellow Warbler**, **Fan-tailed Widowbird**, **Common Waxbill** and **Brimstone Canary**. We also had to navigate our way down and up the Hela Hela Pass, and more opportunistic birding here gave us **Southern Tchagra**, **Black Cuckooshrike**, **Lazy Cisticola** and **Greater Double-collared Sunbird**. We also picked up **Cape Vultures** overhead, along with a mixed flock of **Alpine** and **African Black Swifts**. Lower down the pass, we added **Emerald-spotted Wood Dove** and **Natal Spurfowl** before rain intervened once more and forced us onwards. We had done well and were nearly up the pass when a nasty churned up piece of mud ground us to a halt. Here we reassessed, thankful for a brief interlude from the rain and actioned a plan that got us through the mud patch with minimal hassle (though we must thank the local villagers for helping us carry bags up the hill through the mud).

We were on the road soon enough and found ourselves at Roselands Farm in no time. Here we met up with local guide, Craig, and he took us off to a nearby patch of remnant grasslands for our date with this rare bird. We almost immediately got our first, distant, views of the pair of **Blue Swallows** that come to this patch annually to nest, but it took a short wait before we were treated to our second views, which were much better and closer! We reveled in our amazing sighting of these rare birds, as they flitted about us and even perched for a short while. **Forest Canaries** were also obvious in the area. Thankfully the rain abated for the duration of our time with the swallows. After having had our fill, and with the skies darkening and looking ever more ominous, we retreated to the main farm where we settled in for a cup of coffee and our lunch, after a successful outing. The rest of our afternoon was mostly filled with driving, as we made our way back to Durban and up the north coast to Mtunzini. We briefly called in at the Umdloti area to try for **Buff-spotted Flufftail** at a local stakeout outside my parents' house. Despite the continuous drizzle and inclement weather, a lovely male **Buff-spotted Flufftail** came in to view repeatedly, sadly, the dark and gloomy understory it frequented meant that not everyone in the group was able to see the bird. We also bid farewell to Ohad, who had only joined for the first few days of the trip and was departing from the Durban airport, before resuming our journey up to Mtunzini. Here, we would spend the next two nights, and we settled in for a lovely evening meal following a good and exciting day in the field.



*A male **Blue Swallow** drifts over its mistbelt grasslands – now a rare species in South Africa, with a tiny, fragmented population.*

Day 5, 18th October 2023. Birding Ongoye and Dlinza Forests

After having our religious early coffee and rusks to kick start our first sunny day, we met up with local guide Sakhamuzi and immediately set off on our morning birding. We started our day off in

the Ongoye Forest, where the highly localized endemic population of **Green Barbet** occurs, and this would be our main target. The barbets were fairly vocal and we heard several birds calling regularly throughout the morning, but they proved difficult to find and we were frustrated for some time. While we went about our search, we picked up a slew of other birds, including the likes of **Striped Pipit** and **Yellow-throated Longclaw** on the grassy edges to the forest, and the likes of **Trumpeter Hornbill**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Southern Boubou**, **Yellow-streaked Greenbul**, **Ashy Flycatcher**, **Collared Sunbird**, **Dark-backed Weaver** and **Red-backed Mannikin** in the forest interior. At our last scanning point, after a hike through the steep forest, atop a grassy hill looking over the forest, we finally found a fruiting tree and right on cue, picked up a feeding **Green Barbet**. We enjoyed some excellent scope views before the bird melted back into the forest. We enjoyed our breakfast after our efforts, and were aptly rewarded with a stunning male **African Emerald Cuckoo** that showed well.



A close-up Grey Cuckooshrike watching over us in Ongoye Forest.

We then transferred to the Dlinza Forest, in Eshowe, where we would spend a few hours seeking out other species. We made our way up to the canopy tower, but as it was late morning now, bird activity was a bit slow and Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeons were conspicuous only by their absence. We got wind of a **Spotted Ground Thrush** nest, and duly headed off towards this, finding a lovely **Chorister Robin-Chat** en route. We soon found the nest, and as if right on cue, an adult flew in and sat on the nest. It took a while for everyone in the group to see the bird, and we had to be content with partially-obstructed views as the bird sat hunkered down on its nest. A calling **Scaly-throated Honeyguide** showed well, and we also picked up our first **African Woolly-necked Stork**, amongst other more common species of birds seen. We picked up a few pizzas in Mtunzini and headed off to the Umlalazi Nature Reserve to eat them for lunch, and try for a few more birds. A lovely **Green Malkoha** showed right on cue, and gave us all incredible views – unusual for this

normally ultra-shy bird. We also enjoyed a plethora of kingfishers here, with **Malachite**, **Giant** and **African Pygmy Kingfishers** all showing well. A late-staying **Mangrove Kingfisher** also played hide and seek, needing a few attempts to find, but we all finally got onto the bird and enjoyed good looks at this scarce species. The resident **Palm-nut Vultures** also found their way onto our list. Following lunch, and our quick-fire birding here, we retreated to our lodge, where we had an afternoon break. A late evening walk around the grounds of the lodge rewarded us with **Purple-banded Sunbird** along with showy **White-eared Barbets** and **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds**.

Day 6, 19th October 2023. Transfer to St Lucia, and estuarine birding

An unfortunate windy, drizzly and generally gloomy morning greeted us, as we set off to spend the morning in the Umlalazi Nature Reserve. Predictably, things were slow and we had to work hard to eke out new birds. Multiple feeding **Purple-crested Turacos** were an early highlight, as was a large flock of **White-faced Whistling Ducks** flying along the river. Here, we also added a hulking **Goliath Heron**, along with **Purple Heron**, **African Spoonbill**, **Little Egret** and several **African Woolly-necked Storks**. A pair of **Rufous-winged Cisticolas** were found flitting about in a reedbed, as were **Lesser Swamp** and **Common Reed Warblers**. Wooded patches held **Cardinal Woodpecker**, **Southern Black Flycatcher** and a bright **Yellow-bellied Greenbul**. We also tried our luck with **Red-chested Flufftail** and, while we got close with a bird calling from only a few feet away, we had to be content with only hearing this species. **Natal Red Duikers** were numerous.



A male Southern Brown-throated Weaver busily constructing its intricate nest.

We had a short drive up the coast further to St Lucia, where we would spend another two nights. We paused at the iMfolozi River bridge, where we fortuitously had a short break in the rain. We

easily picked up the resident **Southern Brown-throated Weavers** here, and enjoyed the antics of the displaying males, along with the bustling colony of **Eastern Golden (Yellow) Weavers**. With the rain coming down again, we retreated to our comfortable guesthouse for lunch and a short break. The stars aligned for our planned afternoon walk on the beach, down to the river estuary for some coastal birds, with the weather clearing up. We had a good birding walk, with high numbers of waders and terns present. Comical **White-fronted Plovers** ran around on the beach, while the estuarine area held the likes of **Grey Plover**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Common Greenshank**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Sanderling**. Some careful scanning also revealed a few of the sought-after **Terek Sandpipers**, and a small flock of **African Oystercatchers** flew in as well. A small tern roost was also present here, and consisted of large numbers of **Common** and **Greater Crested Terns**, with smaller numbers of **Caspian** and **Little Terns**. A vagrant Saunders's Tern had been seen on and off recently, and we scanned carefully in the hope of picking it up, but alas, it was not present in the roost during our time here. Remarkably, we also found a flock of **Yellow-billed Storks** congregated on the beach, and it was a strange sight, seeing this normally freshwater species standing in the surf! Returning back to our guesthouse, we picked up a fine male **Klaas's Cuckoo**, **Little Bee-eaters** and a few **Southern Crested Guinea-fowls** around the town. We headed out to try for some nightjars and owls around the town, but things were remarkably quiet and only several calling **Buff-spotted Flufftails** and the resident **Hippopotamuses** were about.

Day 7, 20th October 2023. Birding the Eastern Shores of the Isimangaliso Wetland Park

Armed with packed breakfasts and lunches, we set off into the Eastern Shores section of the Isimangaliso Wetland Park World Heritage Site. We would spend the bulk of the day birding and exploring the park, going as far up as Cape Vidal. A spot of birding at the gate gave us a few new birds like **Golden-tailed Woodpecker**, **Red-capped Robin-Chat** and a gorgeous **Scarlet-chested Sunbird**, along with favorites like **Purple-crested Turaco**, **Trumpeter Hornbill** and **African Green Pigeon**. We started off at some wetlands, which were absolutely packed with birds. A small flock of **White-backed Ducks** showed well early on, followed by two pairs of **African Pygmy Goose**, before we struck gold and found several of the rare **Rufous-bellied Herons**. The continuing high water in the park had resulted in several of these (normally rare South African birds) to come down from Mozambique, where they are more numerous. We did incredibly well, finding five separate individuals, and enjoyed superb looks at several birds. **African Jacanas** were commonly seen and we picked up on a long-staying **Lesser Moorhen** in addition. A range of more widespread ducks, herons and waterbirds were seen as well. Some of the open grassy regions gave us the likes of **Brown Snake-Eagle**, **Collared Pratincole**, **Little Bee-eater**, **Rufous-naped Lark**, **Grey-rumped** and **Red-breasted Swallows**, **African Pipit** and **Yellow-throated Longclaw**. Here, we also picked up the first large mammals in the park, with several **White Rhinos** and **African Buffalos** slowly striding through the coastal grasslands, with **Red-billed Oxpeckers** in tow. We called in at the Mission Rocks picnic site, where we had our well-deserved breakfast. The picnic site is situated in a spot of excellent coastal dune forest, and we did well to find several of the specials of the park here, with **Livingstone's Turaco** and **Rudd's Apalis** both showing well. **Woodward's Batis** showed to only some in the group, while many other birds were out and about and included **African Harrier-Hawk**, **Striped Kingfisher**, **Broad-billed Roller**, **Yellow-breasted Apalis**, **Terrestrial Brownbul**, **Grey** and **Purple-banded Sunbirds** and **Spectacled** and **Dark-backed Weavers**.



Rufous-bellied Heron is a rare bird in South Africa – to find five in one area was almost unbelievable!



*The Critically Endangered (in South Africa) **Southern Banded Snake Eagle** perched in the open next to the road and gave us all excellent views!*

We gradually made our way up to Cape Vidal, where we took a walk around the expansive grounds looking for two special birds – **Green Twinspot** and **Grey Waxbill**. We found both fairly quickly, but our views of **Grey Waxbill** left us wanting more. It took lots of effort and patience, but we were well rewarded with excellent views of the prized **Green Twinspot**. **Brown Scrub Robins** were evident as well. With the wind having picked up dramatically, we opted to make our way back out the park, calling in at Mission Rocks picnic site again for lunch. A fine **Southern Banded Snake Eagle** that we found quietly perched next to the road was much welcomed, while we had some back and forth with a boisterous male **African Elephant**. Eventually, we found our way through, and enjoyed an afternoon break. Some of the other mammals we found in the park included **Plains Zebra**, **Common Warthog**, **Hippopotamus**, **Waterbuck**, **Southern Reedbuck**, **Greater Kudu** and **Blue (Samango) Monkey**.

Day 8, 21st October 2023. Birding St Lucia and the Nibela floodplains

Our morning began by exploring the excellent iGwalagwala Trail running through the coastal forest around the town. With the heavy winds continuing from the previous day, the birding was difficult, but we had a remarkable morning nonetheless. Comical **Southern Crested Guinea-fowls** greeted us at the trail head, and we also enjoyed excellent views of **Rudd's Apalis** once more. A productive alley gave us fidgety **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher**, along with a cooperative pair of **Woodward's Batis** that showed well to all. **Buff-spotted Flufftails** were heard in several places, and eventually we were rewarded with brief views as a male popped into the open right in front of us. We had repeat views of other specials like **Livingstone's Turaco**, while also adding the scarce **Black-throated Wattle-eye** and **Crowned Hornbill** to our growing list. After a good breakfast, we gathered our things and made the short transfer to our next lodge in the Hluhluwe district.

We arrived in good time, had our lunch and a short midday break, before resuming in the afternoon. The wind had begun to die down, and despite the high temperatures, the birds were out and about and we struggled to even get into the car. Firstly, a pair of bright **Southern Yellow White-eyes** entertained us, before delightful **Grey Waxbills** joined the party and gave us all excellent views! Things weren't done yet, when a **Red-fronted Tinkerbird** popped into view and showed itself off. We were eventually able to tear ourselves away and get going, bound for the vast Nibela floodplains region. We tried to access the first pan, but the high water levels effectively thwarted our access to get further into good habitat for the likes of Rosy-throated Longclaw. We made do with birding the edges, which were dripping with birds themselves. Vast flocks of both **Fulvous** and **White-faced Whistling Ducks** lined the shallows, numbering into the thousands, and we also picked up both **Blue-billed** and **Red-billed Teals** as well. Many other waterbirds were present, and we enjoyed numbers of **Yellow-billed Storks**, along with multiple **Squacco Herons** and other herons, egrets and ibises. Various shorebirds, consisting mainly of **Wood Sandpipers** and **Little Stints**, were present, and there were also several **Collared Pratincoles**. **Whiskered Terns** and **Pied Kingfishers** were seen dancing about above the water. The wooded edges produced a fine pair of **Crested Francolins**, along with more excellent views of **Red-breasted Swallows** and **Violet-backed Starlings**. Mpempe Pan followed, and here we spent a while working the dry grasslands on the edges for waders and were aptly rewarded with two of the rare **Caspian Plovers**. We enjoyed some superb views of this scarce species, along with the similar **Kittlitz's Plovers**, but some of the other usual suspects like Black-winged and Senegal Lapwings were completely absent. The pan itself held another family of **African Pygmy Goose**, along with **Goliath** and **Black**

Herons and **Knob-billed Duck**, amongst many others. We spent a long while searching for **Lemon-breasted Canary** in the palm-dotted edges, and while we had several birds fly over us at break-neck speed, we couldn't find any individuals perched nicely and had to make do without them.



The delightful African Pygmy Goose was always a highlight when we saw it.

Day 9, 22nd October 2023. Birding Muzi Pan and Mkhuze Game Reserve

This is always hotly anticipated as one of the best days of the trip, with not only a high species list possible, but lots of quality species possible as well. Unfortunately, the gloomy weather from earlier on the trip had rejoined us again, and we had to contend with inclement (and cold) weather throughout the day. We started off at the large Muzi Pan, just outside Mkhuze, and spent a while birding the wetland edges and the surrounding fever tree forest. It was amazingly productive and we quickly raced up to 80 species in the space of 30 minutes. A wide range of waterbirds were present here, though only the likes of **Common Ringed Plover** and **Great Egret** were new to our list, but many other ducks, herons, egrets and shorebirds were evident. The forested edges gave us a wonderfully cooperative **Grey Penduline Tit**, along with a showy **Diderick Cuckoo**, **Burchell's Coucal**, **Lesser Honeyguide**, **Golden-tailed Woodpecker**, **Yellow-breasted Apalis**, **Kurrichane Thrush**, **Pale Flycatcher**, **Lesser Masked Weaver** and a pair of bright **White-browed Robin-Chats**. We eventually tore ourselves away and pressed on into Mkhuze Game Reserve proper, where we headed straight for Kumasinga Hide.

The inclement weather finally had its say (as we had done remarkably well on the tour, despite the adverse weather on many previous days), and we battled for birds here. Rain was on and off, and bird activity generally low. **Pink-throated Twinspot** took a herculean effort, but we were finally rewarded with a stunning male that showed beautifully to all. Several **Acacia Pied Barbets** were

picked up and we also found the likes of **Common Scimitarbill**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Black Cuckooshrike**, **Chinspot Batis**, **Southern Black Tit**, **White-browed Scrub Robin**, **White-bellied Sunbird** and **Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow**, amongst others. Brief interludes in the rain also gave us some raptors such as **White-backed Vulture**, **Bateleur**, **Martial** and **Wahlberg's Eagles** and the regionally rare **Dark Chanting Goshawk**. We explored the reserve a bit, adding birds here and there slowly, with the likes of **African Openbill**, **European Bee-eater**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **White-crested Helmetshrike** and **White-throated Robin-Chat**. Eventually though, the cold and rain had worn through and we called it a day in the early afternoon, and headed back to our comfortable (and warm) lodge, where we had the rest of the afternoon at leisure. Despite the inclement weather on the day, we still managed to record over 130 species!



Neergaard's Sunbird is a Zululand special, occurring only marginally in the Hluhluwe/Mkuze areas we get to on this tour – it took some searching, but we eventually enjoyed some good views.

Day 10, 23rd October 2023. Birding Hluhluwe and transfer to Wakkerstroom

We had the morning available for birding the small private reserve our lodge was based on, searching for some of our outstanding species. A pair of delightful **Bearded Scrub Robins** showed well early on, and we enjoyed repeat views of the localized **Rudd's Apalis**. A **Broad-billed Roller** showed well, perched atop some dead trees, and we added a few more birds like **Brown-crowned Tchagra**, **Orange-breasted Bushshrike**, **Willow Warbler**, **Grey Tit-flycatcher** and **Bronze Mannikin**. **Pink-throated Twinspot** and **Gorgeous Bushshrikes** were ultra secretive today, and both remained as heard only. It also took a few attempts, but we finally managed to get some good and prolonged views of an **Eastern Nicator**, and just as we were enjoying this species, we heard the tell-tale call of **Neergaard's Sunbird**. In but a few moments we had the bird in view, and spent

the next little while soaking up our views of this scarce and localized species. It was a fine male, and put on a wonderful show for us.

Following our good walk, we made our way back for breakfast, before gathering our things and beginning the drive to our next destination, the birding mecca of Wakkerstroom. It is a fair drive to get to Wakkerstroom, so we settled in for the scenic drive, before taking a backroad into the charming village, allowing us to do some afternoon birding before we arrived. Our first target was **White-bellied Bustard**, and we did well to find an extremely showy pair of these birds without much hassle. The surrounds also gave us a close-up flock of **Southern Bald Ibis**, along with others like **White-fronted Bee-eater**, **Lanner Falcon**, **Ant-eating Chat** and **Long-tailed Widowbird**. Wakkerstroom is famed for its grassland and LBJ (little brown job) birding, and we started off well by getting **Spike-heeled Lark** (amongst other species we had seen already), and the crowd favorite **Cape Longclaw**. Numerous **Banded Martins** and **South African Cliff Swallows** were also evident over the grasslands. We checked into our comfortable guesthouse in the late afternoon, before settling in for the evening.



*We enjoyed watching this pair of **White-bellied Bustards** go about their business.*

Day 11, 24th October 2023. Endemic birding around Wakkerstroom

We had a full day at our disposal for birding around Wakkerstroom, and were to make use of local guide, David, for the day. We started off the morning looking for **Blue Korhaan** near Wakkerstroom, and got off to a great start, finding a pair of **Blue Korhaans** feeding in the open. We enjoyed them for a time, also getting onto some **Quailfinches** in the surrounding area. We then moved on to the Groenvlei district where we would be trying for two big specials of the area, **Rudd's Lark** and **Yellow-breasted Pipit**. We paused along the way when we picked up an **Eastern Long-billed Lark** right next to the road, and then marveled as we found it had a nest right

on the road edge. A **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk** gave us a flyby as well, before we carried on. We eventually arrived at the **Rudd's Lark** site, and set off on our walk up the hill. A small bird that flushed up out of the grass was our target, **Rudd's Lark**, and soon we were enjoying good scope views of this prized endemic. We watched it for a while as it went about feeding in the grass, constantly moving about, before leaving the bird in peace. Yellow-breasted Pipit proved much more difficult to find, and eluded us at this first stop. We did well, though, to get excellent looks at both **Wing-snapping** and **Pale-crowned Cisticolas**. We arrived at our second site for the **Yellow-breasted Pipit**, and while it took some searching to find, we eventually hit the jackpot and found a lovely male **Yellow-breasted Pipit** which showed off very well to everyone. Content with the good progress from the morning, we broke for breakfast at our guesthouse, before resuming in the late morning.



*Watching an **Eastern Long-billed Lark** next to the road was superb, but watching as it walked over to its nest nearby was an even better surprise!*

Unfortunately, the wind had been picking up throughout the day and it was now at high levels, which would make the rest of the day challenging. Botha's Lark is the other major grassland endemic that is traditionally looked for in the Wakkerstroom district. This species, however, had largely disappeared from the area and there had been no sightings during the preceding 18 months, incredibly worrying to say the least. We still headed out to the 'former' sites where this species occurred and tried our hand at finding them – requiring much walking through short grassland. While no Botha's Larks were found, we did pick up a small flock of the similar-looking **Pink-billed Larks**, which showed well in the gale-force winds. Nearby, we got extremely lucky when we flushed up a **Black-rumped Buttonquail** out of the field in front of us. **Black-winged Lapwing** required a dedicated trip to a specific site, and we made this trip without any hassles, this side trip also rewarded us with a close-up **Secretarybird**. Remarkably, we found **Cloud**

Cisticola despite the intense winds, and enjoyed other birds like **Swainson's Spurfowl**, a huge flock of **Blue Cranes**, **African Snipe**, **African Marsh Harrier**, **Jackal Buzzard**, **Cape Crow**, **Mountain Wheatear**, **Red-billed Quelea**, delightful parties of **Orange-breasted Waxbills** and **Black-throated Canary**, amongst others. By early afternoon, we called it a day and sought refuge from the winds, and settled in for a more relaxed afternoon, in preparation for a busy few days to come once we got up to the Kruger National Park.



*Wakkerstroom is LBJ (little brown job) heaven – herewith a confiding **Pale-crowned Cisticola**.*

Day 12, 25th October 2023. Birding Wakkerstroom wetland, and transfer to the Kruger National Park

A cold morning greeted us as we had a quick walk around the guesthouse. Here we picked up several **Malachite Sunbirds**, along with the hoped-for **Red-throated Wryneck** and **African Paradise Flycatchers**. We then made our way down to the Wakkerstroom wetland, where we spent a few hours birding. Things were slow to begin with, and we focused on the ducks, where we added the likes of **South African Shelduck**, **Cape Shoveler** and **Southern Pochard**, amongst the many other species present which we were already familiar with. Numbers of **Red-knobbed Coots**, **African Swampheens** and **Common Moorhens** were present, and we spent a while focusing on some of the other rallids. **Black Crakes** showed nicely without much effort, while **Red-chested Flufftail** took a considerable amount of effort to track down. We eventually found just the right bird, and were aptly rewarded with excellent views as a male wandered out into the open. **African Rail** proved even more elusive with scattered and extremely rapid views – until we arrived back at the car ready to call it, when we found a bird walking around in the open and could study it at length! **African Snipes** put on a good show, while **Little Bittern** left us wanting a bit more. **Black-crowned Night Heron** and **Squacco Heron** showed remarkably well, as did **Purple**

Heron, while numerous **African Spoonbills** were also present patrolling the edges. A bright **Malachite Kingfisher** frequented the reedy edges, as did a vocal **African Yellow Warbler**. A few **Spotted-necked Otters** were also seen swimming about (well spotted, Mark!). We made a quick trip into a nearby patch of grassland where we enjoyed the multiple **Long-tailed Widowbirds**, along with other crowd favorites like **Cape Longclaw**, **Pin-tailed Whydah** and a very showy **Pale-crowned Cisticola**.



*Elation as we finally lay eyes on the elusive **Red-chested Flufftail**.*

We returned in time for breakfast, following which we loaded up all our things and settled in for the long drive to Kruger, where we would be arriving in the late afternoon. Our wonderful lunch stop in a scenic valley gave us an excellent **Greater Double-collared Sunbird**, amongst other species, and was a good break from the car. Another stop saw us visiting a known **Bat Hawk** nest, where one of the adults was present and perched nicely in the open for all of us to enjoy! Here we also opportunistically found a **Groundscraper Thrush**, and enjoyed our familiar **Purple-crested Turaco** once more. We eventually arrived at the gate into the world-renowned Kruger National Park, where we checked in, and headed to our camp, Skukuza, where we would be based for our entire three-night stay in the park. We picked up a few new birds on the drive to camp, but things were mostly on the quiet side. A noisy **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill** showed well, and we also added a **Purple Roller** and several **Burchell's Starlings**. We also had repeat views of **Crested Francolin** and **Natal Spurfowl**, along with others like **Klaas's** and **Levaillant's Cuckoos** and **Striped Kingfisher**. A **Spotted Hyena** crossing the road right next to us was our first real moment of excitement and was followed soon after by another sighting of several young **Spotted Hyenas** outside their den next to the road. After having had our fill, we pressed on, though didn't make it too far before we picked up a **Leopard** lying down next to the road. Even though it was in

incredibly dense bush, we had a good view as it walked through, and melted back into the undergrowth. We checked into our accommodations in the camp, and settled in for the evening.



*We enjoyed a pair of **Bat Hawks** along the route.*

Days 13 – 14, 26th – 27th October 2023. Birding the famed Kruger National Park

Our two full days in the magical Kruger National Park blurred together with a similar suite of birds seen throughout each of the days. Both of the days are discussed below as one. We made use of an open safari vehicle for the duration of our full days within Kruger, as this enhances the views and experience of the park, because we are not allowed out of our vehicles except in designated areas (like camps and picnic sites).

Setting off in the cool of the early morning, activity was generally high on our drives and we enjoyed a wider range of sought after birds and mammals. We focused a fair bit of our time on the Sabie River and surrounds, and naturally waterbirds were a primary feature. Carefully scanning the river banks we picked up the localized **White-crowned Lapwing** and a pair of vagrant **African Skimmers** (well spotted, Maria!) as two notable standout species. Various smaller dams adjoining the main river were always bustling with birds, and here vast numbers of waterbirds entertained. While flocks of **Yellow-billed Storks** and **African Spoonbills** sunbathed on the edges, **Hamerkops** rode on the backs of **Hippopotamuses** and **Wire-tailed Swallows** flitted about over the water. Numbers of **African Woolly-necked Storks** were also present, and we eked out a few **African Openbills** and **Marabou Storks**, and eventually the prized **Saddle-billed Stork**. **Black Crakes** were commonly seen, as were **African Jacanas** and shorebirds like **Common** and **Wood Sandpipers**, while the inland race of **White-fronted Plover** was a good record. **Red-faced Cisticolas** were a common sight in the reeds along the river, and some of the quieter pools held the likes of **Striated Heron** and, on a night drive, the rare **White-backed Night Heron** – the latter

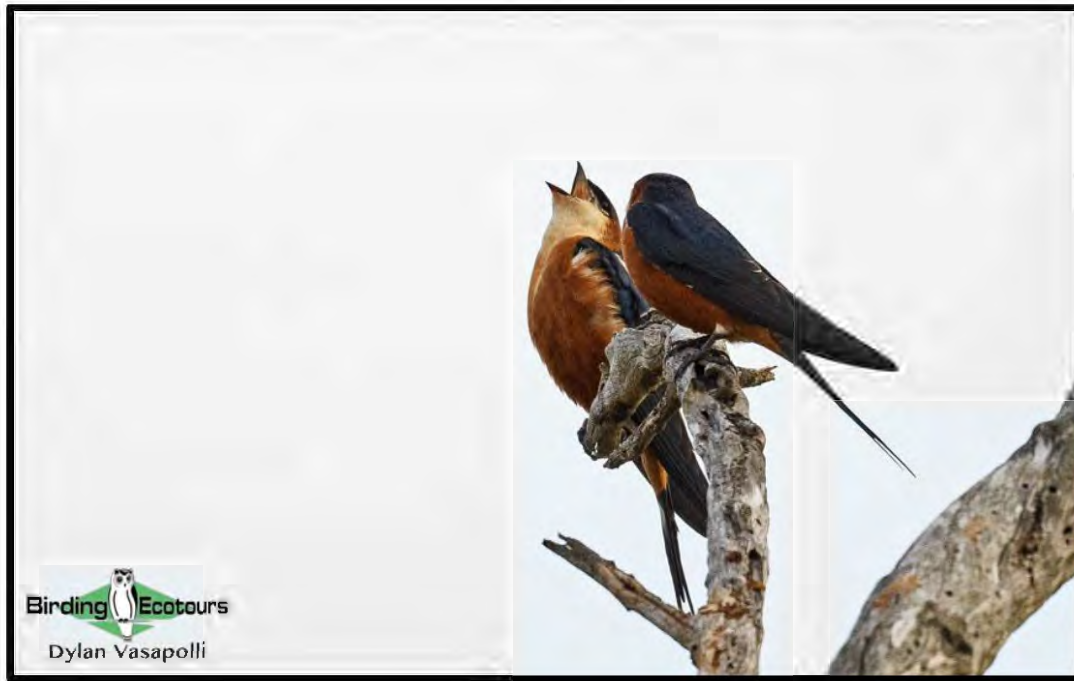
of which sadly didn't hang around for very long. A number of mammals were also seen, with the best sighting going to a large pack of **African Wild Dogs** found loafing about in the sand. We spent a while watching these special animals as they went about their business, as typical dogs do. Numerous herds of **African Elephants** were seen, as were the likes of **African Buffalo** and some antelope like **Waterbuck**, **Impala**, **Bushbuck** and **Nyala**.



*We spent some time watching a pack of **African Wild Dogs** lazing about in the dry river.*

The immediate river surrounds were also highly productive; noisy **Purple-crested Turacos** jumped and jostled about in fruiting trees, while cuckoos were well represented with **Jacobin**, **Levaillant's**, **Diderick** and **Red-chested Cuckoos** all being seen regularly. **Burchell's Coucals** showed well in the rank growth, and were often joined by various other species which included **Black-crowned Tchagra**, **Long-billed Crombec**, **Yellow-breasted Apalis**, **Sombre Greenbul**, **Arrow-marked Babbler**, **White-browed Scrub Robin**, **White-browed Robin-Chat**, **White-throated Robin-Chat**, **Lesser Masked Weaver** and the delightful **Blue Waxbill**. **White-fronted Bee-eaters** were found nesting opportunistically on some of the exposed sand banks, with **Broad-billed Rollers** watching over their patches of water from the treetops. A pair of **Bearded Woodpeckers** drummed from a bare tree and **Golden-breasted Buntings** called from the treetops. A particularly large herd of **African Buffalo** was scrutinized carefully and revealed a few of the scarce (this far south in the Kruger) **Yellow-billed Oxpeckers**, amongst the more numerous **Red-billed Oxpeckers**. We also did well to find several **Mosque Swallows**, another scarce species this far south in the Kruger. Bright **Greater Blue-eared Starlings** entertained at the picnic sites while flowering plants brought in numbers of **Scarlet-chested Sunbirds**. As the days began warming up, raptors also became particularly obvious, and **White-backed Vultures** were frequently encountered, as were **Tawny Eagles** and **Bateleurs**. We picked up several pairs of **African Hawk Eagles**, always quietly perched in the trees, and found **Walhberg's Eagles** on several occasions.

African Fish Eagles were conspicuous around any bits of water, but we struggled to find any large flocks of vultures. After careful scanning, we finally picked up a **White-headed Vulture**, and also added a lone **Brown Snake Eagle** and several **Black-winged Kites** and **Yellow-billed Kites**, but generally raptor numbers were down massively from their 'usual' numbers.



A Mosque Swallow calling – a scarce species in southern Kruger.

The wide range of mixed woodland and mixed savannah habitats in the Kruger was also explored, and added yet more species to our tally. Here we did well to pick up shy **Red-crested Korhaans** in the more open sections of grass, with these areas also patrolled by the likes of **Southern Red-billed** and **African Grey Hornbills**, **Magpie Shrikes** and **Lilac-breasted Rollers**. Roving bird parties were usually led by noisy **Southern Black Tits**, but we also added other species like **Green Wood Hoopoe**, **Brubru**, **Orange-breasted Bushshrike**, a bright male **Red-headed Weaver** and **Village Indigobird**, amongst others. We also took a trip farther north, which delivered a **Spotted Eagle Owl** on its nest next to the road, along with the localized **Mourning Collared Dove**, while drier areas gave up **Namaqua Dove**, **Sabota Lark**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver** and the locally rare **White-browed Sparrow Weaver**, amongst others. Some night birding around the camp gave us a fine **African Wood Owl**, along with several vocal **Fiery-necked Nightjars** that frustratingly remained as heard only.

These bushveld regions also rewarded us with many more excellent mammal sightings. We encountered numerous prides of **Lions**, and enjoyed some up close and personal views of these big cats. **Leopards** were also extremely kind to us on this tour, and we had **Leopard** sightings on every day, with several cats found up in the trees and a glorious male **Leopard** on our night drive, that we were also privileged enough to have roaring in front of us! Our night drive also gave us a few nocturnal mammals, like **Southern Lesser Galago** and **White-tailed Mongoose**, along with

a **Spotted Bush Snake** and several **Flap-necked Chameleons**. All the expected plains game was seen, with the bizarre **Giraffes** also being a favorite.



*An enormous male **Lion** kept an eye on us during one of our Kruger safaris.*

Day 15, 28th October 2023. Birding Skukuza and transfer to Dullstroom, birding en route

Our final morning in Kruger saw us undertaking a birding walk around the Skukuza camp – normally a very birdy affair. This morning was no different, and progress was slow with birds coming in thick and fast. We spent a while enjoying various fruiting trees, which held numerous **Purple-crested Turacos**, **African Green Pigeons**, **Red-faced Mousebirds**, **Black-collared Barbets** and a plethora of **Wattled**, **Greater Blue-eared** and **Violet-backed Starlings**. Some of the thickets in the camp gave us **Bearded Scrub Robin** and **Terrestrial Brownbul**, while the many larger trees yielded the likes of **Golden-tailed** and **Cardinal Woodpeckers**, **Klaas's** and **Red-chested Cuckoos** and, after much back and forth, **Brown-headed Parrots**. The parrots had proved elusive, with only brief flyby views repeatedly throughout the morning, before we finally tracked down where they had settled down. The cut lawns gave us a good opportunity to connect with the likes of dainty **Bronze Mannikins**, **Blue Waxbills**, **Red-billed Firefinches** and **Yellow-fronted Canaries**. The first **Spotted Flycatcher** of the season also cropped up on our walk, while some flowering bushes held a plethora of sunbirds, with **Collared**, **Scarlet-chested**, **Marico**, **White-bellied** and **Purple-banded Sunbirds** all showing well. A small party of **African Black Ducks** frolicked in the river in front of camp as we drew our walk to an end and settled down for breakfast.

We eventually had to bid this incredible wilderness area farewell, and we slowly made our way out the park, enjoying some of the regularly occurring suspects, including various hornbills, bee-eaters, rollers, shrikes and starlings. Our most exciting moments, however, came with two separate

Leopard sightings on our way out, leaving all of us stunned and ecstatic with how many sightings of these elusive cats we'd seen. Once out the park, we made our way to Dullstroom, where we would be spending the night, but first via Mount Sheba. We broke at Mount Sheba for lunch and a spot of forest birding, but with the sun beating down, activity was virtually nonexistent. We eked out the likes of **Familiar Chat** and some species we were acquainted with, like **Southern Boubou** and **Cape Robin-Chat**, before we finally found a few **Swee Waxbills**, though the views left us wanting a bit more. A party of **Western (Common) House Martins** were seen flitting by, and we also did well to find a **Black Stork** riding the thermals, before calling it and moving to Dullstroom.

We arrived at our comfortable guesthouse, scenically set out in the hills, before heading to the local Dullstroom Nature Reserve where we would spend the evening. Our primary goal here was to stakeout **Cape Eagle-Owl**. While we waited, we enjoyed the antics of **Banded Martins** flitting above the grasses, along with numerous **Long-tailed Widowbirds**. The likes of **Yellow Bishop** and **Streaky-headed Seedeater** found their way onto our lists, before we finally picked up on the owl calling, just as it started to get dark. Rather frustratingly, light ran out before we could find the bird, and we had to be content with listening to the deep hoots of this species ringing out over the valley. We retired to dinner in town, and being a weekend combined with the Rugby World Cup Final match taking place later in the evening (in which South Africa was playing against New Zealand), dinner was a busy (and animated) affair in the town. Whilst making our way back to our accommodation, the most incredible thunderstorm rolled in and put paid to our attempts to try for a few nocturnal birds in the area.

Day 16, 29th October 2023. Birding Dullstroom, and transfer to Dinokeng, birding along the route.

Thick mist and ice-cold conditions greeted us in the morning, and we soldiered on and gave some morning birding in the normally excellent Verloren Vallei Nature Reserve a shot. We had a momentary break in the mist, which gave us some hope for the morning but alas when the thick mist rolled in a few minutes later, we admitted defeat with only a handful of birds seen and barely able to see but a meter or two in front of us, and headed for breakfast in town, and greener pastures (and no mist) elsewhere.

Our next destination was the Dinokeng and Rust de Winter region, lying in the rich bushveld north of Pretoria, and we took the adventurous route getting there, via Verena. We started off on some quiet backroads, which access superb tracts of grassland and rocky broad-leaved woodland. One of our major targets here, **Melodious Lark**, was easily seen with many birds all in full display singing from fence posts and from up in the air. We soaked up our views of this scarce near-endemic, before some careful scanning gave us a fine male **Denham's Bustard** in full display. Though the bird was a bit distant, we enjoyed some good scope views. While here, we also picked up on the distinct whistles of an **Eastern Clapper Lark** – a species we had missed earlier around Wakkerstroom. We had good looks at several birds that were actively displaying in the grasslands, before we turned our attention to the numerous **Desert** and **Cloud Cisticolas** that were also present – both of which showed superbly to us! A pair of **Capped Wheatears** sat on some termite mounds in a burnt patch of grasslands, while a pair of **White-bellied Bustards** flew by calling away. We soon moved into a tract of broad-leaved woodland, and very soon had a covey of the scarce **Shelley's Francolin** calling from a patch of dense grass. Unfortunately, all our efforts to see these birds went by unrewarded, as I was the only one to see them scuttling by and we had to make do

with them being heard only. During our time trying to see the francolins, a lovely **Flappet Lark** gave us superb views, and we also picked up on **Brown-backed Honeybird** feeding in the surrounding vegetation, and a flyby **Black-chested Snake Eagle** entertained. Immensely dark clouds rolled in, thunder and lightning began and, with some trepidation, we headed over to the nearby Mabusa Nature Reserve. Unfortunately, we were only given a few minutes of birding here before the storm hit us and forced an early retreat. We only added a pair of charming **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds** during our short time here. We completed the journey to our comfortable lodge, arriving in the afternoon, with the rain not relenting the entire afternoon.



*We enjoyed a **Melodious Lark** in full song in the Verena area.*

Day 17, 30th October 2023. Birding the Zaagkuilsdrift Road and Kgomo-Kgomo

Another of the more famous birding routes in South Africa is the superb Zaagkuilsdrift and the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplains. This public gravel road traverses mixed thornveld and offers a host of sought-after specials, and while the floodplains around Kgomo-Kgomo are dry at this time of year, the dry thornveld here is always worthwhile for several species. We started the day in frigid conditions with rain about, but the rain fortunately abated, leaving us with productive overcast weather, though the temperature remained cold. Our biggest challenge was getting through the numerous (and deep) mud pools that had formed after the heavy rain the previous day and night, and we fortunately managed to get through without hassles.

Birding was extremely slow to start off with, almost certainly due to the cold temperatures, and our first sessions hardly produced any birds except vocal **Rattling Cisticolas** and chattering **Chestnut-vented Warblers**. A flash of color ground us to a halt, and we all piled out the car to enjoy a pair of **Crimson-breasted Shrikes**. The birds were shy, but gave us all good looks in the end. A noisy and confiding group of **Southern Pied Babblers** were also evident here, and we got

our first looks at the fidgety **Burnt-necked Eremomelas** as well. Things were finally beginning to come out, and we also enjoyed a good flyby view of a **Great Spotted Cuckoo**. As we carried on, we enjoyed old friends like **Magpie Shrike**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, **Burchell's Starling** and **White-browed Sparrow-Weavers**. We spent a while with a mixed feeding flock of small seedeaters which were mostly made up of **Blue Waxbills** and **Red-billed Firefinches**. Careful scrutiny of the flock also gave us several **Jameson's Firefinches**, along with several pairs of **Green-winged Pytilias**, while a **Grey-backed Camaroptera** also came to investigate the feeding birds.



A confiding group of Southern Pied Babblers put on a fine display.

We pressed on to the drier Kgomo-Kgomo floodplains, and the new birds came rolling in. A fine party of **Cape Penduline Tits** kicked things off with a bang, and we quickly found the likes of **Black-chested Prinia** and **Marico Flycatcher** as other dry acacia specials. Small groups of the comical **Scaly-feathered Weavers** roved about, while dainty **Kalahari Scrub Robins** ran about between thickets. We found a female **Great Sparrow** huddled up in a tree, and some patience allowed us to track down the male, and their nest, which they appeared to be freshening up in preparation for the upcoming breeding season. Large numbers of **Red-billed Queleas** were feeding on the dry ground of the floodplains, and were interspersed with the likes of **White-winged Widowbird**. We also did well to find both **Violet-eared Waxbill** and **Shaft-tailed Whydah** feeding on the ground nearby, while our views of **Black-faced Waxbill** left us wanting a bit more. The flats also had several **Kittlitz's Plovers** walking around them, while the remaining pools of water from the past rainy season had only a few common and widespread waterbirds in attendance. The wind began to pick up, and made it bitingly cold outside the vehicle, and we sought some shelter in the trees. We did well to pick up on a **Barred Wren-Warbler** and enjoyed superb views of this shy bird at point-blank range. Further along in denser areas, we finally managed to locate a

Pearl-spotted Owlet, which showed well to all, while a **Lesser Honeyguide** also made an appearance. With the rain starting up again, we called it a day and made our way back to our lodge. Here we settled in for the afternoon, enjoyed some downtime and got our things sorted in preparation for our departure the following day. Following dinner, we opportunistically decided to make the most of the short break in the rain, and headed out for a night drive. Things were slow and quiet throughout, with the inclement weather hanging around no doubt affecting things, but just as the drizzle started up, we found a superb **Southern White-faced Owl** that gave us all excellent and prolonged views.



*A lovely **Southern White-faced Owl** in the drizzle rounded off a superb day of birding.*

Day 18, 31st October 2023. Birding urban Gauteng, and departure from Johannesburg

The final day of the tour had come much too quickly, and our hopes of a morning walk around the lodge were put to paid as the rain continued. Following breakfast, we gathered our things one last time, and departed this area, bound for some urban Pretoria and Johannesburg sites, where we would spend the remainder of the day, before departing in segments from the Johannesburg airport.

Our first stop near Pretoria was unfortunately a washout, and the heavy rains meant the access gate was not functioning. We reverted to the nearby Rietvlei Nature Reserve, where we could stay in our car and negate some of the rainy weather. This proved a good move, and we enjoyed a drive around the grassland-dominated reserve adding a few new species, and finding several photogenic birds not wishing to move from the road edge. **Common Ostriches** seemed unhappy with life, and despite the rain bucketing down, we somehow pulled out a vocal **Northern Black Korhaan** and a pair of **Spotted Thick-knees** out in the open. We took a coffee break at the restaurant and picnic site, and wandered around in the drizzle, adding the likes of **Fiscal Flycatcher**, and enjoyed our last **Fork-tailed Drongos**, **Green Wood Hoopoes** and **African Hoopoes**. We also finally enjoyed

some top **Long-tailed Widowbird** views, and also found the **Cape Longclaws** to be quite obliging, walking next to the road.

Our time had come to leave the reserve, and head to the airport for our first round of departures, where we bid farewell to some in the group. Those that were remaining only departed later in the day, and we headed off to some nearby pans where we would spend the remainder of our time birding. We had a bit of a gap in the rain here, and enjoyed the likes of **Maccoa Ducks** and **Blue-billed Teals** at Bullfrog Pan, and **African Olive Pigeons** and **Karoo Thrushes** in the surrounding suburbia. Korsmans Bird Sanctuary held a large flock of **Lesser Flamingos**, and some careful scanning revealed a few **Greater Flamingos** scattered in between them. We also found a lone **Pied Avocet** wandering the shoreline with a few **Common Ringed Plovers**, while a monstrous **Goliath Heron** attempted to eat a large fish further along the shoreline. A few **Rose-ringed Parakeets** seeking shelter from the now falling rain was our last sighting, before heading back to the airport, and dropping off the remaining guests in time for their departures.



*A content group and happy guide, after our **Blue Swallow** success!*

I would like to thank the group for always keeping their heads up, despite the challenging weather and conditions we had on this tour. It was this, and the fantastic group camaraderie, that made the tour the success it was. Despite the inclement weather on many days, there were not many species missed and we did remarkably well to still find virtually all of the major targets on this route. We ended the tour off having recorded just over 450 species of birds, with marginally under that total being seen.

Bird List - Following IOC 13.2

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 the IUCN Red List:

CR = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable.

Common name	Scientific name
Ostriches (Struthionidae)	
Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
White-backed Duck	<i>Thalassornis leuconotus</i>
Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>
Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
South African Shelduck	<i>Tadorna cana</i>
African Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus auritus</i>
Blue-billed Teal	<i>Spatula hottentota</i>
Cape Shoveler	<i>Spatula smithii</i>
African Black Duck	<i>Anas sparsa</i>
Yellow-billed Duck	<i>Anas undulata</i>
Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>
Southern Pochard	<i>Netta erythrophthalma</i>
Maccoa Duck - EN	<i>Oxyura maccoa</i>
Guineafowl (Numididae)	
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
Southern Crested Guineafowl	<i>Guttera edouardi</i>
Pheasants & Allies (Phasianidae)	
Crested Francolin	<i>Ortygornis sephaena</i>
Red-winged Francolin	<i>Scleroptila levaillantii</i>
Grey-winged Francolin	<i>Scleroptila afra</i>
Shelley's Francolin (H)	<i>Scleroptila shelleyi</i>
Natal Spurrow	<i>Pternistis natalensis</i>
Swainson's Spurrow	<i>Pternistis swainsonii</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Red-necked Spurfowl (H)	<i>Pternistis afer</i>
Nightjars (Caprimulgidae)	
Fiery-necked Nightjar (H)	<i>Caprimulgus pectoralis</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>
African Black Swift	<i>Apus barbatus</i>
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
White-rumped Swift	<i>Apus caffer</i>
Turacos (Musophagidae)	
Grey Go-away-bird	<i>Crinifer concolor</i>
Purple-crested Turaco	<i>Gallirex porphyreolophus</i>
Livingstone's Turaco	<i>Tauraco livingstonii</i>
Knysna Turaco	<i>Tauraco corythaix</i>
Bustards (Otididae)	
Denham's Bustard	<i>Neotis denhami</i>
White-bellied Bustard	<i>Eupodotis senegalensis</i>
Blue Korhaan	<i>Eupodotis caerulescens</i>
Red-crested Korhaan	<i>Lophotis ruficrista</i>
Northern Black Korhaan	<i>Afrotis afraoides</i>
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	
Burchell's Coucal	<i>Centropus burchellii</i>
Green Malkoha	<i>Ceuthmochares australis</i>
Great Spotted Cuckoo	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>
Levaillant's Cuckoo	<i>Clamator levaillantii</i>
Jacobin Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>
Klaas's Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>
African Emerald Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx cupreus</i>
Black Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus clamosus</i>
Red-chested Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus solitarius</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba guinea</i>
African Olive Pigeon	<i>Columba arquatrix</i>
Mourning Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>
Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>
Tambourine Dove	<i>Turtur tympanistria</i>
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>
African Green Pigeon	<i>Treron calvus</i>
Flufftails & Forest Rails (Scolothruridae)	
Buff-spotted Flufftail	<i>Scolothrura elegans</i>
Red-chested Flufftail	<i>Scolothrura rufa</i>
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)	
African Rail	<i>Rallus caerulescens</i>
Lesser Moorhen	<i>Paragallinula angulata</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>
African Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio madagascariensis</i>
Black Crake	<i>Zapornia flavirostra</i>
Cranes (Gruidae)	
Grey Crowned Crane - EN	<i>Balearica regulorum</i>
Wattled Crane - VU	<i>Grus carunculata</i>
Blue Crane - VU	<i>Grus paradisea</i>
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Flamingos (Phoenicopteridae)	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
Lesser Flamingo	<i>Phoeniconaias minor</i>
Buttonquail (Turnicidae)	
Black-rumped Buttonquail	<i>Turnix nanus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Stone-curlews, Thick-knees (Burhinidae)	
Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
Spotted Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus capensis</i>
Oystercatchers (Haematopodidae)	
African Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus moquini</i>
Stilts, Avocets (Recurvirostridae)	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
White-crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>
Black-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus melanopterus</i>
Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>
African Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>
Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>
White-fronted Plover	<i>Charadrius marginatus</i>
Caspian Plover	<i>Charadrius asiaticus</i>
Jacanas (Jacanidae)	
African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
African Snipe	<i>Gallinago nigripennis</i>
Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Coursers, Pratincoles (Glareolidae)	
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae)	
African Skimmer	<i>Rynchops flavirostris</i>
Grey-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus</i>
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
Storks (Ciconiidae)	
African Openbill	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>
Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumenifer</i>
Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
Saddle-billed Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
African Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia microscelis</i>
Gannets, Boobies (Sulidae)	
Cape Gannet - EN	<i>Morus capensis</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>
Southern Bald Ibis - VU	<i>Geronticus calvus</i>
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>
White-backed Night Heron	<i>Gorsachius leuconotus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
Rufous-bellied Heron	<i>Ardeola rufiventris</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Hamerkop (Scopidae)	
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
Secretarybird (Sagittariidae)	
Secretarybird - EN	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
African Harrier-Hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
Palm-nut Vulture	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>
Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>
White-backed Vulture - CR	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
Cape Vulture - VU	<i>Gyps coprotheres</i>
White-headed Vulture - CR	<i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>
Black-chested Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>
Brown Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
Southern Banded Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus fasciolatus</i>
Bateleur - EN	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
Bat Hawk	<i>Macheiramphus alcinus</i>
Martial Eagle - EN	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>
Wahlberg's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus wahlbergi</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Tawny Eagle - VU	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
African Hawk-Eagle	<i>Aquila spilogaster</i>
Dark Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax metabates</i>
African Goshawk	<i>Accipiter tachiro</i>
Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter rufiventris</i>
African Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus ranivorus</i>
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
African Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga vocifer</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Jackal Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Pearl-spotted Owlet	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>
Southern White-faced Owl	<i>Ptilopsis granti</i>
Cape Eagle-Owl (H)	<i>Bubo capensis</i>
Spotted Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo africanus</i>
African Wood Owl	<i>Strix woodfordii</i>
Mousebirds (Coliidae)	
Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>
Red-faced Mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>
Trogons (Trogonidae)	
Narina Trogon	<i>Apaloderma narina</i>
Hoopoes (Upupidae)	
African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>
Wood Hoopoes (Phoeniculidae)	
Green Wood Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>
Common Scimitarbill	<i>Rhinopomastus cyanomelas</i>
Ground Hornbills (Bucorvidae)	
Southern Ground Hornbill - VU (H)	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>
Hornbills (Bucerotidae)	
Southern Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus rufirostris</i>
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>
Crowned Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros alboterminatus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
African Grey Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros nasutus</i>
Trumpeter Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes bucinator</i>
Rollers (Coraciidae)	
Purple Roller	<i>Coracias naevius</i>
Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudatus</i>
Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>
Striped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon chelicuti</i>
Mangrove Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegaloides</i>
African Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ispidina picta</i>
Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>
Half-collared Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo semitorquata</i>
Giant Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Bee-eaters (Meropidae)	
Little Bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>
White-fronted Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
African Barbets (Lybiidae)	
White-eared Barbet	<i>Stactolaema leucotis</i>
Green Barbet	<i>Stactolaema olivacea</i>
Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird - DD	<i>Pogoniulus bilineatus</i>
Red-fronted Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus pusillus</i>
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus chrysoconus</i>
Acacia Pied Barbet	<i>Tricholaema leucomelas</i>
Black-collared Barbet	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>
Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>
Honeyguides (Indicatoridae)	
Brown-backed Honeybird	<i>Prodotiscus regulus</i>
Lesser Honeyguide	<i>Indicator minor</i>
Scaly-throated Honeyguide	<i>Indicator variegatus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Red-throated Wryneck	<i>Jynx ruficollis</i>
Ground Woodpecker	<i>Geocolaptes olivaceus</i>
Golden-tailed Woodpecker	<i>Campethera abingoni</i>
Bearded Woodpecker	<i>Chloropicus namaquus</i>
Cardinal Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos fuscescens</i>
Olive Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos griseocephalus</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
African & New World Parrots (Psittacidae)	
Brown-headed Parrot	<i>Poicephalus cryptoxanthus</i>
Old World Parrots (Psittaculidae)	
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Wattle-eyes, Batises (Platysteiridae)	
Cape Batis	<i>Batis capensis</i>
Woodwards' Batis	<i>Batis fratum</i>
Chinspot Batis	<i>Batis molitor</i>
Black-throated Wattle-eye	<i>Platysteira peltata</i>
Bushshrikes (Malaconotidae)	
Grey-headed Bushshrike (H)	<i>Malaconotus blanchoti</i>
Olive Bushshrike	<i>Chlorophoneus olivaceus</i>
Orange-breasted Bushshrike	<i>Chlorophoneus sulfureopectus</i>
Gorgeous Bushshrike	<i>Telophorus viridis</i>
Bokmakierie	<i>Telophorus zeylonus</i>
Brown-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra australis</i>
Southern Tchagra	<i>Tchagra tchagra</i>
Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>
Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>
Southern Boubou	<i>Laniarius ferrugineus</i>
Crimson-breasted Shrike	<i>Laniarius atrococcineus</i>
Brubru	<i>Nilais afer</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Vangas & Allies (Vangidae)	
White-crested Helmetshrike	<i>Prionops plumatus</i>
Cuckooshrikes (Campephagidae)	
Grey Cuckooshrike	<i>Cebilepyris caesius</i>
Black Cuckooshrike	<i>Campephaga flava</i>
Figbirds, Old World Orioles, Piopios (Oriolidae)	
Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>
Drongos (Dicruridae)	
Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
Square-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus ludwigii</i>
Monarchs (Monarchidae)	
Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher	<i>Trochocercus cyanomelas</i>
African Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
Shrikes (Laniidae)	
Magpie Shrike	<i>Lanius melanoleucus</i>
Southern Fiscal	<i>Lanius collaris</i>
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
Cape Crow	<i>Corvus capensis</i>
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
White-necked Raven	<i>Corvus albicollis</i>
Rockjumpers (Chaetopidae)	
Drakensberg Rockjumper	<i>Chaetops aurantius</i>
Fairy Flycatchers (Stenostiridae)	
Fairy Flycatcher	<i>Stenostira scita</i>
Tits, Chickadees (Paridae)	
Southern Black Tit	<i>Melaniparus niger</i>
Grey Tit	<i>Melaniparus afer</i>
Penduline Tits (Remizidae)	
Grey Penduline Tit	<i>Anthoscopus caroli</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Cape Penduline Tit	<i>Anthoscopus minutus</i>
Nicators (Nicatoridae)	
Eastern Nicator	<i>Nicator gularis</i>
Larks (Alaudidae)	
Spike-heeled Lark	<i>Chersomanes albofasciata</i>
Eastern Long-billed Lark	<i>Certhilauda semitorquata</i>
Sabota Lark	<i>Calendulauda sabota</i>
Rudd's Lark - EN	<i>Heteromiraфра ruddi</i>
Eastern Clapper Lark	<i>Miraфра fasciolata</i>
Rufous-naped Lark	<i>Miraфра africana</i>
Flappet Lark	<i>Miraфра rufocinnamomea</i>
Melodious Lark	<i>Miraфра cheniana</i>
Pink-billed Lark	<i>Spizocorys conirostris</i>
Large-billed Lark	<i>Galerida magnirostris</i>
Red-capped Lark	<i>Calandrella cinerea</i>
Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)	
Sombre Greenbul	<i>Andropadus importunus</i>
Yellow-bellied Greenbul	<i>Chlorocichla flaviventris</i>
Terrestrial Brownbul	<i>Phyllastrephus terrestris</i>
Yellow-streaked Greenbul	<i>Phyllastrephus flavostriatus</i>
Dark-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus tricolor</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
Black Saw-wing	<i>Psalidoprocne pristoptera</i>
Banded Martin	<i>Neophedina cincta</i>
Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
Grey-rumped Swallow	<i>Pseudhirundo griseopyga</i>
Rock Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>
Blue Swallow - VU	<i>Hirundo atrocaerulea</i>
Pearl-breasted Swallow	<i>Hirundo dimidiata</i>
White-throated Swallow	<i>Hirundo albigularis</i>
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Red-breasted Swallow	<i>Cecropis semirufa</i>
Mosque Swallow	<i>Cecropis senegalensis</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Lesser Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis abyssinica</i>
Greater Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis cucullata</i>
South African Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon spilodera</i>
Crombecs, African Warblers (Macrosphenidae)	
Cape Grassbird	<i>Sphenoeacus afer</i>
Long-billed Crombec	<i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>
Leaf Warblers (Phylloscopidae)	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus ruficapilla</i>
Reed Warblers & Allies (Acrocephalidae)	
Lesser Swamp Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus gracilirostris</i>
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
African Yellow Warbler	<i>Iduna natalensis</i>
Grassbirds & Allies (Locustellidae)	
Barratt's Warbler	<i>Bradypterus barratti</i>
Little Rush Warbler	<i>Bradypterus baboecala</i>
Cisticolas & Allies (Cisticolidae)	
Red-faced Cisticola	<i>Cisticola erythrops</i>
Lazy Cisticola	<i>Cisticola aberrans</i>
Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>
Wailing Cisticola	<i>Cisticola lais</i>
Rufous-winged Cisticola	<i>Cisticola galactotes</i>
Levaillant's Cisticola	<i>Cisticola tinniens</i>
Neddicky	<i>Cisticola fulvicapilla</i>
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Desert Cisticola	<i>Cisticola aridulus</i>
Cloud Cisticola	<i>Cisticola textrix</i>
Pale-crowned Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cinnamomeus</i>
Wing-snapping Cisticola	<i>Cisticola ayresii</i>
Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>
Black-chested Prinia	<i>Prinia flavicans</i>
Karoo Prinia	<i>Prinia maculosa</i>
Drakensberg Prinia	<i>Prinia hypoxantha</i>
Bar-throated Apalis	<i>Apalis thoracica</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Rudd's Apalis	<i>Apalis ruddi</i>
Yellow-breasted Apalis	<i>Apalis flavida</i>
Green-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>
Grey-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brevicaudata</i>
Barred Wren-Warbler	<i>Calamonastes fasciolatus</i>
Burnt-necked Eremomela	<i>Eremomela usticollis</i>
Sylviid Babblers (Sylviidae)	
Bush Blackcap - VU	<i>Sylvia nigricapillus</i>
Layard's Warbler	<i>Curruca layardi</i>
Chestnut-vented Warbler	<i>Curruca subcoerulea</i>
White-eyes (Zosteropidae)	
Cape White-eye	<i>Zosterops virens</i>
Southern Yellow White-eye	<i>Zosterops anderssoni</i>
Laughingthrushes & Allies (Leiothrichidae)	
Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>
Southern Pied Babbler	<i>Turdoides bicolor</i>
Sugarbirds (Promeropidae)	
Gurney's Sugarbird	<i>Promerops gurneyi</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornises (Sturnidae)	
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Wattled Starling	<i>Creatophora cinerea</i>
Black-bellied Starling	<i>Notopholia corusca</i>
Cape Starling	<i>Lamprotornis nitens</i>
Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>
Burchell's Starling	<i>Lamprotornis australis</i>
Pied Starling	<i>Lamprotornis bicolor</i>
Violet-backed Starling	<i>Cinnyricinclus leucogaster</i>
Red-winged Starling	<i>Onychognathus morio</i>
Oxpeckers (Buphagidae)	
Yellow-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>
Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Thrushes (Turdidae)	
Spotted Ground Thrush - VU	<i>Geokichla guttata</i>
Orange Ground Thrush	<i>Geokichla gurneyi</i>
Groundscraper Thrush	<i>Turdus litsitsirupa</i>
Olive Thrush	<i>Turdus olivaceus</i>
Kurrichane Thrush	<i>Turdus libonyana</i>
Karoo Thrush	<i>Turdus smithi</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
Karoo Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas coryphoeus</i>
Brown Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas signata</i>
Bearded Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas quadrivirgata</i>
Kalahari Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas paena</i>
White-browed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas leucophrys</i>
Pale Flycatcher	<i>Agricola pallidus</i>
Grey Tit-Flycatcher	<i>Fraseria plumbea</i>
Ashy Flycatcher	<i>Fraseria caeruleascens</i>
Southern Black Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis pammelaina</i>
Fiscal Flycatcher	<i>Sigelus silens</i>
Marico Flycatcher	<i>Bradornis mariquensis</i>
African Dusky Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa adusta</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
White-starred Robin	<i>Pogonocichla stellata</i>
White-browed Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha heuglini</i>
Chorister Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha dichroa</i>
Red-capped Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha natalensis</i>
White-throated Robin-Chat	<i>Dessonornis humeralis</i>
Cape Robin-Chat	<i>Dessonornis caffer</i>
Sentinel Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola explorator</i>
Cape Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola rupestris</i>
African Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
Buff-streaked Chat	<i>Campicoloides bifasciatus</i>
Sickle-winged Chat	<i>Emarginata sinuata</i>
Ant-eating Chat	<i>Myrmecocichla formicivora</i>
Mountain Wheatear	<i>Myrmecocichla monticola</i>
Capped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pileata</i>
Familiar Chat	<i>Oenanthe familiaris</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)	
Collared Sunbird	<i>Hedydipna collaris</i>
Olive Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra olivacea</i>
Grey Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra veroxii</i>
Amethyst Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra amethystina</i>
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra senegalensis</i>
Malachite Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia famosa</i>
Southern Double-collared Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris chalybeus</i>
Neergaard's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris neergaardi</i>
Greater Double-collared Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris afer</i>
Marico Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris mariquensis</i>
Purple-banded Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris bifasciatus</i>
White-bellied Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris talatala</i>
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)	
Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow	<i>Gymnoris superciliaris</i>
Cape Sparrow	<i>Passer melanurus</i>
Great Sparrow	<i>Passer motitensis</i>
Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer diffusus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</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>
Thick-billed Weaver	<i>Amblyospiza albifrons</i>
Spectacled Weaver	<i>Ploceus ocularis</i>
Cape Weaver	<i>Ploceus capensis</i>
Eastern Golden Weaver	<i>Ploceus subaureus</i>
Southern Brown-throated Weaver	<i>Ploceus xanthopterus</i>
Lesser Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus intermedius</i>
Southern Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>
Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>
Dark-backed Weaver	<i>Ploceus bicolor</i>
Red-headed Weaver	<i>Anaplectes rubriceps</i>
Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>
Southern Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes orix</i>
Yellow Bishop	<i>Euplectes capensis</i>
Fan-tailed Widowbird	<i>Euplectes axillaris</i>

Common name	Scientific name
White-winged Widowbird	<i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>
Red-collared Widowbird	<i>Euplectes ardens</i>
Long-tailed Widowbird	<i>Euplectes progne</i>
Waxbills, Munias & Allies (Estrildidae)	
Bronze Mannikin	<i>Spermestes cucullata</i>
Black-and-white Mannikin	<i>Spermestes bicolor</i>
Sweet Waxbill	<i>Coccyzygia melanotos</i>
Green Twinspot	<i>Mandingoa nitidula</i>
Black-faced Waxbill	<i>Brunhilda erythronotos</i>
Grey Waxbill	<i>Glaucostrelda perreini</i>
Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>
Quailfinch	<i>Ortygospiza atricollis</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>
Pink-throated Twinspot	<i>Hypargos margaritatus</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>
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Cape Wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>
African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>
Cape Longclaw	<i>Macronyx capensis</i>
Yellow-throated Longclaw	<i>Macronyx croceus</i>
African Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>
Mountain Pipit	<i>Anthus hoeschi</i>
Nicholson's Pipit	<i>Anthus nicholsoni</i>
Striped Pipit	<i>Anthus lineiventris</i>
African Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus crenatus</i>
Yellow-breasted Pipit - VU	<i>Anthus chloris</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae)	
Forest Canary	<i>Crithagra scotops</i>
Black-throated Canary	<i>Crithagra atrogularis</i>
Lemon-breasted Canary (H)	<i>Crithagra citrinipectus</i>
Yellow-fronted Canary	<i>Crithagra mozambica</i>
Drakensberg Siskin	<i>Crithagra symonsi</i>
Yellow Canary	<i>Crithagra flaviventris</i>
Brimstone Canary	<i>Crithagra sulphurata</i>
Streaky-headed Seed eater	<i>Crithagra gularis</i>
Cape Canary	<i>Serinus canicollis</i>
Buntings (Emberizidae)	
Cape Bunting	<i>Emberiza capensis</i>
Golden-breasted Bunting	<i>Emberiza flaviventris</i>
Species seen:	444
Species heard:	7
Total recorded:	451

Mammal List

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following the IUCN Red List:

EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable.

Common name	Scientific name
Hyraxes (Procaviidae)	
Rock Hyrax	<i>Procavia capensis</i>
Elephants (Elephantidae)	
African Elephant - EN	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>
Rabbits and Hares (Leporidae)	
Scrub Hare	<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>
Squirrels and Relatives (Sciuridae)	
Smith's Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Red Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus palliatus</i>
Old World Mice, Rats and Gerbils (Muridae)	
Sloggett's Vlei Rat	<i>Otomys sloggetti</i>
Bushbabies (Galagidae)	
Southern Lesser Galago	<i>Galago moholi</i>
Old World Monkeys (Cercopithecidae)	
Chacma Baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>
Vervet	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>
Blue Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>
Bats (Chiroptera)	
Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus wahlbergi</i>
Cats (Felidae)	
Lion - VU	<i>Panthera leo</i>
Leopard - VU	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
Hyaenas and Aardwolf (Hyaenidae)	
Spotted Hyaena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>
Mongoose and Fossa (Herpestidae)	
Yellow Mongoose	<i>Cynictis penicillata</i>
White-tailed Mongoose	<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>
Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>
Meerkat	<i>Suricata suricatta</i>
Common Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>
Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>
Canids (Canidae)	
Side-striped Jackal	<i>Lupulella adustus</i>
Black-backed Jackal	<i>Lupulella mesomelas</i>
African Wild Dog - EN	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>
Mustelids (Mustelidae)	
Spotted-necked Otter	<i>Hydrictis maculicollis</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Horses, Asses and Zebras (Equidae)	
Plains Zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>
Rhinoceroses (Rhinocerotidae)	
White Rhinoceros	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>
Hogs and Pigs (Suidae)	
Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>
Hippopotamuses (Hippopotamidae)	
Hippopotamus - VU	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>
Bovids (Bovidae)	
African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>
Nyala	<i>Tragelaphus angasii</i>
Cape Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus sylvaticus</i>
Greater Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>
Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>
Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>
Southern Reedbuck	<i>Redunca arundinum</i>
Mountain Reedbuck - EN	<i>Redunca fulvorufula</i>
Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>
Grey Rhebok	<i>Pelea capreolus</i>
Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>
Blesbok	<i>Damaliscus pygargus</i>
Common Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>
Common Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>
Blue Duiker	<i>Philantomba monticola</i>
Natal Red Duiker	<i>Cephalophus natalensis</i>
Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>
Giraffes and Okapis (Giraffidae)	
Southern Giraffe	<i>Giraffa giraffa</i>
Rorquals (Balaenopteridae)	
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>
Species seen:	47
Total recorded:	47

Reptile List

Common name	Scientific name
Crocodiles (Crocodylidae)	
Nile Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>
Colubrids (Colubridae)	
Spotted Bush Snake	<i>Philothamnus semivariegatus</i>
Chameleons (Chamaeleonidae)	
Flap-necked Chameleon	<i>Chamaeleo dilepis</i>
Skinks (Scincidae)	
Rainbow Mabuya	<i>Trachylepis margaritifera</i>
Tortoises (Testudinidae)	
Leopard Tortoise	<i>Stigmochelys pardalis</i>
African Side-necked Turtles (Pelomedusidae)	
Cape Terrapin	<i>Pelomedusa galeata</i>
Species seen:	6
Total recorded:	6