



## TRIP REPORT

**BA2417 Cape to Kruger Tour**

**Tour participants: Sally Fellows, Terry Marron, Marikay Waldvogel,  
Jerry Ledbetter, Jerry Quance.**

**24 October to 8 November 2024**

**Bird highlights: Giant Kingfisher, Blue Crane, Knysna Turaco, Kori Bustard,  
Southern Ground Hornbill, African Skimmer, White-backed Vulture.**

**Bird species Total: 358**



## Day 2: Kirstenbosch and Strandfontein Sewage Works

After having met over a lovely meal the previous night in Pinelands, our tour officially kicked off when I picked the group up early on Friday morning. Around the garden at the guest house, the first birds we encountered included **Cape Canary, Ring-necked (Cape Turtle) Dove, Red-eyed Dove, Cape Sparrow, Laughing Dove** and **Amethyst Sunbird**.

We made our way to the internationally acclaimed Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens, where one of the first birds we saw was a **Spotted Eagle Owl** sitting on a beam overlooking the flowerpot where its mate was nesting. It was a lovely sunny day, the birds in the gardens were quite active and included the likes of **Sombre Greenbul, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Cape White-eye, African Dusky Flycatcher, Cape Robin-Chat, Forest Canary, Cape Spurfowl** and **African Paradise Flycatcher** along the Boomslang walkway. Just after lunch, we spotted a **Lemon Dove** crouching in the streamside vegetation, and then as we were on our way out, we spotted a 'mystery' buzzard, or hybrid **Common Buzzard** as well as an **African Harrier Hawk**.



Afterwards, we headed across to the Strandfontein Water Works - a Ramsar site - where along the evaporation ponds, we saw **Western Cattle Egret**, **Grey Heron** and **Black-headed Heron**. The ducks were represented by **Cape Teal**, **Cape Shoveler**, **Red-billed Teal**, **Southern Pochard**, **Mallard**, **Egyptian Goose**, **Spur-winged Goose** and **Yellow-billed Duck** and everyone got the chance to compare the three different gulls – **Kelp-**, **Hartlaub's-** and **Grey-headed Gull** while **Whiskered Terns** were flying in a daintier manner as they were picking insects from the water's surface.

### Day 3: West Coast National Park

It was a mostly sunny, if windy day as we headed up northwards from Cape Town to the West Coast National Park.

Along the roadside on our way up to the park, we found the likes of **Pied Crow**, **Black-winged Kite**, **Common Buzzard**, **Jackal Buzzard**, **Pied Starling** and **Great White Pelican**.

Our first stop inside the park was at the only large freshwater body, called Abrahamskraal, where we saw **Sacred Ibis**, **Cape Shoveler**, **Little Grebe** and **Red-knobbed Coot**, while both a young **African Marsh Harrier** and a **Black Harrier** put in an appearance, quartering low above the Strandveld vegetation. The reeds and surrounding vegetation here produced, amongst others, **Cape Longclaw**, **Yellow Canary**, **Yellow Bishop** and **Cape Bunting**. Along the gravel road on our way out, we found one of the other stars of the day, namely a **Southern Black Korhaan**, doing its utmost to remain invisible in the low vegetation.



We then made our way up to Seeberg, where along the walkway down to the hide we saw **Southern Double-collared Sunbird** and **Karoo Scrub-Robin** and in addition heard **Southern Grey Tit** and **Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler (Warbler)**, both of which were hiding from the wind and refused to show themselves. From the hide we could see **Grey Plover**, **White-fronted Plover**, **African Oystercatcher**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Sanderling**, **Little Stint**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Lesser Flamingo** and hundreds of **Common Terns** with a few **Little Terns** in between. Along the shoreline of a bit of water behind the hide, we could see a few **Kittlitz's Plovers** and **Common Ringed Plovers**.

Along the drive to the Geelbek Manor, we encountered a few more bush birds, including **Cape Robin-Chat**, **White-backed Mousebird** and **Bokmakierie**, while on the saltmarsh we encountered a few more shorebirds, including some of the species seen earlier on as well as **Black-winged Stilt**, **Common Greenshank**, **South African Shelduck** and **Grey Heron**.

Our last stop in the park was the wild, windswept beach at Tsaarsbank, where **Kelp Gull**, **Crowned Cormorant**, **Hartlaub's Gull** and **African Oystercatcher** all were seen amongst the rocks, while just inland we saw another **Black Harrier** and a **Jackal Buzzard**.

## Day 4: Cape Peninsula

Unfortunately, our pelagic that was scheduled for this weekend had to be cancelled as a result of bad weather. Instead, we decided to drive around the Cape Peninsula, where our first port of call was the **African Penguin** colony at Boulders Beach, Simonstown. This colony, established in the 1980's and home to approximately 1000 pairs of penguins is one of the few land-based colonies of these endangered seabirds. Other birds seen here included **Cape Cormorant**, **White-breasted Cormorant**, **Blacksmith Lapwing**, **Spotted Thick-knee** and **Cape Wagtail**.



We then made our way to the Cape of Good Hope section of the Table Mountain National Park, where we first walked straight up to the old lighthouse at Cape Point, from which we could see **Red-winged Starling**, **Fiscal Flycatcher**, **Karoo Prinia**, **Cape Cormorant**, **White-necked Raven** and **Alpine Swift**. We also stopped off at the Olifantsbos beach, which was spectacular and covered with **Hartlaub's Gull**, **Kelp Gull**, **Greater Crested Tern**, **Sandwich Tern**, **African Oystercatcher**, **Blacksmith Lapwing** and **Sacred Ibis**. It was, however, becoming quite windy and rainy, so we headed back towards Pinelands, where in the garden of the guesthouse, we spotted and spent some time with a young **Klaas's Cuckoo** busy being fed by its **Southern Double-collared Sunbird** foster parent.

## Day 5: De Hoop

For this leg of the trip, we typically stop off at a reasonably accessible spot to look for rockjumpers, but on the morning of our de Hoop trip it rained so hard and we all got wet, so we decided to work in a stop at the southernmost tip of Africa, namely Cape Agulhas. Along the way to and from the continental extremity, the roadside was dotted with several ponds and puddles hosting a number of different birds ranging from **Red-knobbed Coot** and **Eurasian Moorhen** to **Yellow-billed Duck**, **Cape Teal**, **Red-billed Teal**, **Hadedda Ibis**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Blacksmith Lapwing**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Grey Heron**, **Little Egret** and a surprising regional rarity in the form of **Black Heron**.



Once we got onto the agricultural Overberg plains, we saw our first **Capped Wheatear**, **Red-capped Lark**, **Pied Starling**, **White-throated Canary**, **Cape Crow** and **Karoo Korhaan** along the wheat fields.

Driving down towards the accommodation at De Hoop, we came across **Fiscal Flycatcher, Common Ostrich, Greater Striped Swallow, Crowned Lapwing, Cape Wagtail** and **Spotted Thick-knee** amongst the **Bontebok, Eland, Cape Mountain Zebra** and **Grey Rhebok**.

Day 6: De Hoop

During our pre-breakfast walk along the De Hoop Vlei (Wetland), we saw several aerial feeders, including **Little Swift, White-rumped Swift, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Greater Striped Swallow** and **Rock Martin**. On the water were a few **Red-knobbed Coot, Cape Teal** and **Great Crested Grebes**, while **Bar-throated Apalis, Southern Fiscal, Speckled Mousebird, Southern Boubou, Southern Tchagra** and **Bokmakierie** worked the scrub. An **African Hoopoe** was probing the lawns, a **Pin-tailed Whydah** kept chasing every other bird in the vicinity from any available perches, a series of high-pitched whistles in the trees beyond the dining room turned out to be a **Lesser Honeyguide**, and another brood parasite, **Klaas's Cuckoo**, put in a brief appearance.

After breakfast, we popped out for a drive along the farm roads in the area. Birds along the way included **Spur-winged Geese, Yellow Canary Large-billed Lark, Southern Masked Weaver, Agulhas Long-billed Lark, African Black Swift, Yellow Bishop, Red Bishop, Denham's Bustard** and **African Pipit**.



We headed back to the De Hoop manor for a quick lunch, after which we took a drive to the beach at Koppie Alleen. Along the trip down we had **Grey-backed Cisticola**, **Cape Bulbul**, **Cape Bunting** and **Karoo Scrub-Robin**, while **Common Quail** kept calling from the roadside, but didn't allow us any views.





## Day 7: Tankwa Karoo

An early morning drive not only gave us a last opportunity to spend time with birds and mammals already seen at this wonderful reserve but delivered several displaying **Cape Clapper Larks**. One last special of the Agulhas plains was Cape Vulture. Although we spotted a distant bird near the Potberg section of de Hoop the previous morning, we had reasonably close views of a group of five vultures sitting in a fallow field. After a brief lunch stop near Ceres, we headed northwards out of town. There are a few dams located along this section, and a few quick stops here delivered, amongst others, **South African Shelduck**, **Maccoa Duck** and **White-faced Whistling Duck**.

In the afternoon, we took a mountain pass along a gravel road towards our accommodation. We stopped briefly for a pair of **Klipspringer**, and then we had a mixed group of seed-eating birds, including **Streaky-headed Seedeater**, **Cape Canary**, **White-throated Canary**, **Yellow Canary**, **Black-headed Canary** and **Lark-like Bunting**. This section of road also gave us **Karoo Prinia**, **Familiar Chat** and **Mountain Chat (Wheatear)**.

Along the entrance road to our accommodation, we encountered a couple more regional specialities in the form of **Karoo Chat** and a small flock of **Karoo Eremomela**.

## Day 8: Return to Cape Town

On our pre-breakfast walk we found a **Karoo Lark** and what is arguably THE Tankwa special, namely **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler** along a few more common birds including **Lark-like Bunting**, **Cape Bunting**, **Cape Sparrow**, **Mountain Chat** and **Rock Martin**.

After breakfast, we visited a nearby picnic spot, the Peerboomkloof, also locally known as Skitterykloof, where we found **Southern Masked Weaver**, **Bokmakierie**,

**Red-faced Mousebird, Dusky Sunbird, Fairy Flycatcher and Pririt Batis**, while a drive along another gravel road nearby produced **Tractrac Chat** and **Black-eared Sparrow-Lark**. The road back to Cape Town was relatively quiet, although a stop at a roadside spot gave us two more birds in the form of **Namaqua Warbler** and **Common Reed Warbler**.



#### Day 9: Cape Town to Dullstroom

On Friday morning, we were off early to the Cape Town International Airport, from we flew to OR Tambo Airport, just outside of Johannesburg. After we picked up our vehicle, it was driving along main routes for a good part of the day with only a brief lunch stop, and birding was mostly done from the car, however, we also saw a few new birds, including brief views of **South African Cliff Swallow** and **Common Mynah**.

Once we had dropped our baggage off at our overnight accommodation, we went exploring the grasslands along a gravel road to the north of town. Despite the fact that it was quite windy and the farmers were burning their fields, we still got a few

great new birds, including **Natal Spurfowl**, **Long-tailed Widowbird**, **African Olive Pigeon**, **African Wattled Lapwing**, **Eastern Long-billed Lark** and **Buff-streaked Chat**.



Day 10: Skukuza

Just before breakfast, a bit of birding around the garden produced **Karoo Thrush**, **Cape Robin-Chat**, **Dark-capped Bulbul**, **Speckled Mousebird** and **Southern Boubou**. Heading out of town, we again saw a few of the species we connected with on the previous afternoon, including **Jackal Buzzard**, **Common Buzzard**, **Pied Starling** and **Cape Crow**. We didn't make a lot of stops on our way to the main gate of our destination, save to stop for a **White-fronted Bee-eater** and a distant **Broad-billed Roller**.

The weather had changed drastically – once we were in the Lowveld, it got very hot, but then once we got into the Kruger National Park, we suddenly started seeing so much that we almost forgot about the heat. We came across a small herd of **Impala** with a grooming squad of **Red-billed Oxpeckers** in attendance. Then came the starlings – **Greater Blue-eared Starling** and **Burchell's Starling**. We encountered **Southern Red-billed Hornbill** and **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, **Common Scimitarbill**, **Magpie Shrike** and **Bateleur**. Looking onto the Sabie Rivier from our lunch spot in the camp, we saw a few **African Buffalo**, and then on the water, quite close by, a pair of **African Black Duck**.

On our afternoon drive, we encountered **Southern Fork-tailed Drongo**, **Southern Black Flycatcher**, **Brown Snake Eagle**, a **Wahlberg's Eagle** on a nest and a **White-backed Vulture** pecking at an Impala carcass dragged up into a tree by a leopard. Mammal-wise we also had fantastic sightings, including **Giraffe**, **Greater Kudu**, **Southern White Rhino**, **African Buffalo**, **African Savanna Elephant**, **Lion**, and then on our return, less than 50 metres from the camp gate, we saw a **Leopard** cross the road. Just before we got back to our accommodations, we saw the final new bird of the day, namely **Crowned Hornbill** eating some seeds in one of the campsite trees.



## Day 11: Skukuza

The next morning, we got onto an open safari vehicle with Andrew, our guide in the Kruger Park. Our route took us along the Sabie River, one of the larger rivers in the park, and fringed with typical riverine vegetation, including some big fig trees.



We saw **Crested Francolin** and **Natal Spurfowl** crossing the road, while the roadside shrubs has **Blue Waxbill**, **Green-winged Pytilia**, **Jameson's Firefinch**, **Black-crowned Tchagra**, **White-throated Robin-Chat** and **White-browed Scrub Robin**. Scanning the islands, and reeded fringes on the river was also productive with the likes of **Collared Pratincole**, **Great Egret**, **Goliath Heron**, **White-crowned Lapwing** and **African Wattled Lapwing** all present along with non-avian attractions such as **Nile Crocodile**, **African Savanna Elephant**, **Chacma Baboon**, **Vervet Monkey** and **Hippopotamus**.

We stopped off at Lower Sabie Camp for a brunch, where at a little fountain in the shade we encountered **Lesser Masked Weaver** and **White-browed Robin-Chat**.

From the restaurant, we had great views onto the river, from where we could see a single **Marabou Stork** and a slightly more distant **African Openbill**. Besides the colourful **Greater Blue-eared Starlings** and **Cape Starlings**, two species of barbet, namely **Crested Barbet** and **Black-collared Barbet** were also present at the restaurant, all trying to get in a few crumbs whenever a group of diners got up from their tables.



The same route back to Skukuza for the most part delivered a similar suite of birds, in addition to **Woolly-necked Stork**, **Saddle-billed Stork**, **Yellow-billed Stork**, **White-headed Vulture**, **African Fish Eagle** and **Hamerkop**.

Once it started colling down a little, we took a drive to the golf course located quite close to Skukuza. A group of golfers tried to chase off a **Warthog** that was digging up one of the greens, and a few **Hippopotamuses** were occupying a dam just a few metres away. We could hear (and some of us got brief views) **Little Rush Warbler** in the reeds and also saw **Black Crake**, **Common Moorhen**, a **Squacco Heron** flew past and two **Broad-billed Rollers** were perched in a distant fever tree on the other side of the dam.

Day 12: Satara

On the day that we moved camp, the tour participants joined Andrew on the game drive vehicle, while I followed behind closely. We encountered a little bird party in the parking lot even before we left our camp which included the likes of **Green-backed Camaroptera**, **Black-backed Puffback**, **Southern Black Tit**, **White-bellied Sunbird** and **Yellow-fronted Canary**.

Along the way up to Satara we came across several new birds, including **Hooded Vulture**, **Orange-breasted Bush Shrike**, **African Grey Hornbill**, **Brown-hooded Kingfisher**, **Bennett's Woodpecker**, **Pearl-spotted Owlet** and **Southern Ground Hornbill**. We stopped midway for brunch at the Tshokwane picnic spot, where we added **African Mourning Dove**, **Cardinal Woodpecker** and **Red-faced Cisticola**.



That even after supper, we embarked on a night drive on one of the official park vehicles. Being in the bush at night offers a different perspective and is a wonderful way of seeing nocturnal animals. Although we didn't see any new birds during the night drive, we had a few good night-active mammals, including **Scrub Hare**, **Small-**

**spotted Genet, Black-backed Jackal, African Wild Cat** and a few members of the local **Lion** pack.

Day 13: Satara

After meeting early for coffee and rusks at the tailgate of the safari vehicle, we headed north through the open savanna that dominates this area. We found a few mixed-species seedeater flocks consisting of, amongst others, **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah, Red-billed Quelea, Village Indigobird** and **Dusky Indigobird**. The LBJs (little brown jobs) were well represented by **Sabota Lark, Rattling Cisticola, Desert Cisticola** and **Zitting Cisticola**, while **Common Ostrich, Kori Bustard, Red-crested Korhaan, Black-bellied Korhaan** and **Swainson's Spurfowl** represented the ground-dwelling species.



Further down the road, we stopped on the high bridge across the Olifants River, where we could alight from the vehicle and scan both sides of the river. An **African Pied Wagtail** patrolled the bridge, while Wire-tailed Swallows flew past, and on the sandbanks, we saw **Three-banded Plover, Saddle-billed Stork, Goliath Heron, Common Greenshank** and two very distant, but equally special **African Skimmers**.



Other good birds spotted here were **Giant Kingfisher**, **Pied Kingfisher** and **Yellow-billed Kite**.

We then stopped at Olifants Camp for brunch, after which we enjoyed spectacular views from the cliffside lookout, here we also saw **Marico Sunbird**, **Grey-backed Camaroptera**, **Crested Barbet** and **Mocking Cliff-Chat**. At a river crossing on our way back to camp, we also encountered a **Striated Heron** and **Little Egret**.



Day 14: Kruger to Mount Sheba

The weather had changed again, and our last morning in the Kruger National Park was cold and a light drizzle was falling. Those who were brave enough to join in on an early morning walk after coffee and rusks were, however, rewarded with good views of **Grey-headed Sparrow**, **Common Scimitarbill**, **Green Woodhoopoe**, **Grey Tit-Flycatcher**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver**, **Burnt-necked Eremomela**, **Violet-backed Starling** and **African Green Pigeon**.



When we turned off on the entrance road to Mount Sheba, we saw a group of small birds which turned out to be **Common Waxbills** and **Cape Canaries**. We could hear **Wing-snapping Cisticola** displaying from up high and both **African Stonechat** and **Southern Fiscal** dotted the fence lines. As we were about to descend into the forest down towards the lodge, a pair of **Red-necked Spurfowl** crossed the road. After we checked in, we went on a late afternoon walk, during which we saw a troop of **Samango (Blue) Monkeys**, **Sombre Greenbul** and **Knysna Turaco**.

#### Day 15: Mount Sheba

On this day we had a full day of forest birding around Mount Sheba lodge, and we explored it via pre- and post-breakfast walks around the grounds, the dirt trails through the forest and the paved road up from the entrance gate up through the forest towards the main road and back down again later on that afternoon.



Around the gardens we saw Southern **Grey-headed Sparrow**, **Familiar Chat**, **Cape Wagtail**, **Hadeda Ibis**, **Greater Striped Swallow**, **White-rumped Swift**, **Little Swift**, **Olive Bush Shrike**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Cape White-eye**, **Chorister Robin-Chat**, **Sombre Greenbul**, **Greater Double-collared Sunbird** and **Dark-capped Bulbul**, while on the forest walks we added **Bar-throated Apalis**, **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher**, **Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler**, **White-Starred Robin**, **Red-Chested Cuckoo**, **Yellow-streaked Greenbul**, and **Knysna Turaco**.



## Day 16: Drive back to Johannesburg

It was still cold and misty on our last morning at Mount Sheba, and our pre-breakfast walk around the lodge grounds delivered a similar suite of birds than the previous morning. A pair of **Natal Spurfowl** were patrolling the lawns along with **Hadedda Ibis** and **Cape Wagtail**, while the trees and shrubs around the lodge were alive with **Cape White-eye**, **Olive Bush-Shrike**, **Sombre Greenbul** and **Knysna Turaco**.

On our drive out, we came across a **Wailing Cisticola** and **Drakensberg Prinia** alongside the more common **African Stonechat** and **Southern Fiscal**. A passing **Black-chested Snake Eagle** gave us good, if brief views, and along the way to the closest town we got one final new trip bird in the form of **White-browed Sparrow Weaver**.

A small dam at our lunch stop had **Egyptian Goose** and **Grey-headed Gull**, while the rest of the road back was marked by typical roadside birds including **Black-winged Kite**, **Speckled Pigeon** and **Pied Crow**.

All too soon our tour came to an end when I dropped the tour participants off at their guest house in Johannesburg. In the end, though, it was a wonderful tour, during which we encountered 358 bird species, one or two of which were heard only.



*Trip report and photos by Birding Africa guide, [David Swanepoel](http://www.birdingafrica.com).*