

Kwazulu-Natal Trip Report:

31st August to 13th September 2018

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Introduction

After an exceptional trip to Costa Rica trip in 2017 we had no hesitation in booking again with the Bristol based bespoke travel company Travel Local <https://www.travellocal.com/>. They used local agents Tailor Made Safaris based in St Lucia. <https://www.tailormadesafaris.co.za/> to produce a fly-drive package that included accommodation, some game drives as well as enabling us some free days to organise our own itinerary.

All our pre-holiday communications were fantastic and Rachael at Tailor Made answered all our questions and provided excellent information for our trip. A couple of weeks prior to departure we were sent a road map, Sat Nav and a mobile phone with a South African SIM card so we could be in contact with Tailor Made in case of emergencies. We also were sent a personalised hardback book detailing all the practicalities of our trip and what we may experience at each location we would visit, this also served as a great souvenir of our travels.

Our flights were on Virgin Atlantic and Comair and booked independently via Trailfinders. <http://www.trailfinders.com/>

Daily Sightings:

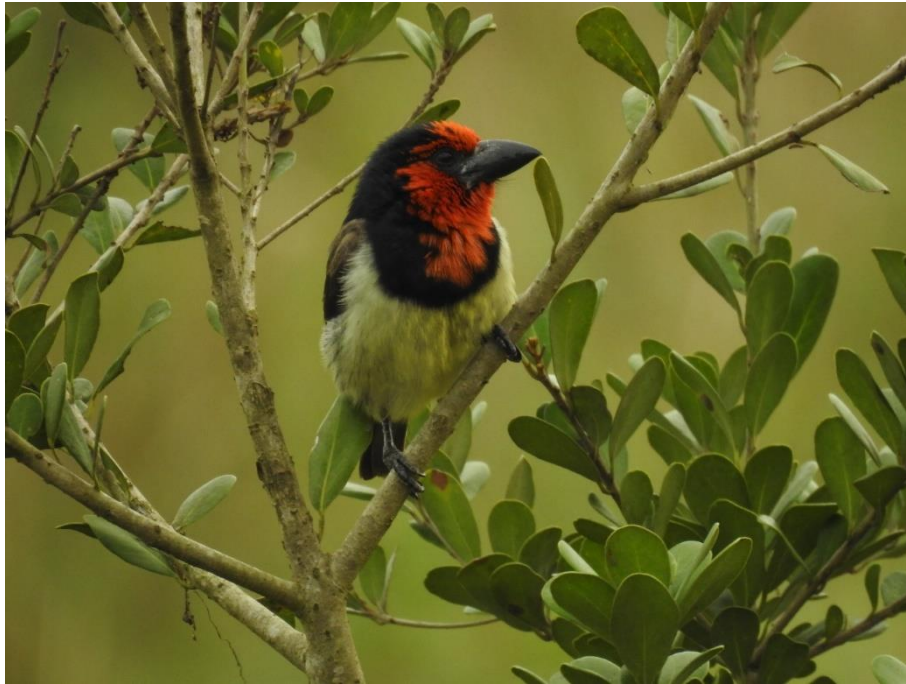
1st September: Arrival Johannesburg airport/Durban Airport/Ballito

After an overnight flight we arrived a little jaded at Johannesburg airport where a porter kindly escorted us through to the domestic terminal and our connecting flight to Durban. I was not feeling great with stomach cramps during the long-haul flight, so some subdued birding from the airport windows was about all I could manage. The first birds of the trip were **Cape Wagtail**, **African Black Swift**, **Common Myna** and **Grey Heron** on the runway taxiway.

We connected with our flight to Durban which was on time and baggage reclaim was very straightforward as was collection of our hire car from Avis (part of our package) and we were quickly on our way to our first stop at Ballito for a lazy afternoon to recover from the flights.

Arriving at the B+B we found that we couldn't check in until 2pm (B+B was closed between 12-2pm). We found the local Salt Rock Hotel to have a light lunch and a drink whilst overlooking the majestic Indian Ocean. This was my first real African birding, so everything was new and exciting. **Hadada Ibis** around the leafy streets of Ballito, **Village Weavers** nesting in hotel ground trees, **Bronze Mannikins** and a possible **Mangrove Kingfisher** were a blur to the senses.

After lunch we finally checked-in to the wonderfully idiosyncratic Petit Provence B+B <http://www.petiteprovence.co.za/> into a large room with a balcony overlooking some habitat (great for birding). The room was decorated with rustic French inspired furniture. The comfy bed was great for an afternoon rest after a very long day travelling. Some birds seen from balcony included **Black-collared Barbet**, **Speckled Mousebird** and **Southern Black Flycatcher**.



We had our evening dinner at the nearby Mo-Zam-Bik restaurant which was superb.....mmm prawns!

2nd September: Ballito/Drive to Mkuze.

We awoke reasonably early and I did some morning birding from our balcony which yielded **Cape White-eye**, **Red-eyed Dove** and **Yellow-fronted Canary**. We had a short walk around the gardens of the B+B and a couple of nearby streets before breakfast finding more of the same birds that we were now becoming familiar with. A male **Thick-billed Weaver** appeared in the trees near us as we had our al fresco breakfast, very considerate as it was the only one that we got good views of all trip. After checking out we embarked on our first major drive of the trip as we headed north to the small town of Mkuze for two nights at Ghost Mountain Inn <https://www.ghostmountaininn.co.za/>. It was a relatively easy drive up the N2, and we soon get the hang of passing vehicles and straddling the yellow line when cars wished to overtake. We saw a few **Yellow-billed Kites**, **Pied Crows** and **Black-headed Herons** along the way.

We arrived late morning and are shown our room in wonderful grounds of the hotel, passing under weaver bird nests in the car park. We had enough time for a light sandwich lunch before our first game drive of the trip- excitement was high.

We met Patrick who was to be our guide/driver as we found we were the only guests to be booked on the excursion. We drive through some Zulu villages passing children collecting water and a host of livestock in the road. Patrick told us some of the local history and cultural relevance of the two mountains Gaza and Tshaneni and their significance to the Ndwandwe tribe as a burial ground and of a battle between two feuding sections of the Zulu nation that left thousands of warriors dead.



After 25 minutes we arrived at the Mkuze gate, alas there were no Rhino in the park as the drought had hit the vegetation hard and they had been moved to other areas. We headed into the park on a very warm afternoon, it takes a while, but the first big mammal encounter is a fine male **Nyala** that leapt into the road but did a quick retreat. We quickly found a mixed group of **Burchall's Zebra and Blue Wildebeest**. The latter being the first of the Ugly Five that includes Warthog, Hyena, Maribou Stork and Vultures. Birds seen included **Cape Glossy Starling, Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove** and **Fork-tailed Drongo**.

At the Ranger centre/camp we encountered more **Nyala** and a troop of **Chacma Baboons** as well as our first of many herds of **Impala** as we made our way to the KuMasinga Hide. At the hide we also saw a family party of **baboons** drinking, **Nyala, Impala** and a lone **Wildebeest**. The water here was a major attractant for many birds and we soon added several species to our trip list with **Three-banded Plover, Grey and Blue Waxbills** plus **Purple-banded Sunbird** which all gave good views close to the hide. We stayed at the hide for about an hour and although no Big Five game turn up, we found more and more birds with **Southern Grey-headed Sparrows, Yellow throated Petronias** and **Crowned hornbill** all being seen. We then drove back to the reserve gate retracing the same route we headed into the park. Our day became even better when we are stopped in our tracks by five **Giraffes** browsing on roadside trees which then wandered across the road right in front of the vehicle allowing great photo opportunities.



On the drive back in the dark a **Spotted-Thick-knee** was flushed off the road. We returned in time for a quick freshen up before an al fresco dinner that gave us time to reflect on a great first full day. The wildlife was not over as on our return to our room we count an impressive 32 **House Geckos** on the walls of the hotel as well as a 6-inch-long millipede.

3rd September: Ghost Mountain Lodge/ Lake Jozini/ Mkuze Fig Forest

We were up early as we had a another busy day ahead planned. The wildlife started before we had left the room with several **Vervet Monkeys** wandering the hotel grounds. After our breakfast buffet, we headed off for a boat trip on Lake Jozini and on the drive to Fish Eagle Camp on the north shore we saw **Impalas** and **Nyala** on the way to the lake. Again, we were the only passengers. **African Pied Wagtails** and **Wire-tailed Swallows** perched on a nearby buoy at the dock. Once on the shallow lake we encountered a mass of water birds with **White-faced Whistling Ducks**, **Egyptian** and **Spur-winged Goose** in flocks on the lake shore. Amongst these there were a few **Red-billed Teal** and a lone **Cape Shoveler**. **Great** and **Cattle Egrets** are also seen as well as **Blacksmith Lapwing** and **African Jacana**. There was almost too much to see... but we could not complain at all. I noticed two distant dark shapes on the far shore..... my first ever **Ostriches**!



On the shoreline at the southern end of the lake we found several family groups of **Warthog**, which quickly became one of our favourite mammals of the trip, always busy and with such personality. As we continued around the lake, we found more geese, a solitary **Glossy Ibis** and a couple of **Nile Crocodiles**; Eventually we located a couple of family groups of **Hippopotamus**. We ventured on further with a few more groups of hippos and a small group of **African Spoonbills**. Large shapes in the distant heat haze turned out to be a group of c20 **Ostriches**! As we headed back to the dock, we find a dead tree covered with **Reed Cormorants** and more **Hippos** wading in the shallows.



A massive **Maribou Stork** obligingly overflowed the vehicle on our return trip back to the Lodge. We had to have a very quick lunch before we met up with Patrick again as he would guide us on a walk through the Fig Forest in Mkuze. We speed through the park to meet the armed ranger (another Patrick) who would lead the walk through the forest. We found a **Lilac-breasted Roller** and more **Baboons** on the way. At the park office we find **Green-winged Pyillia** and **Bearded Scrub-Robin**.

We were met by another small group booked on the Fig Forest walk and briefed by Patrick that he was there for our protection and was armed in case we had any encounters with big game, namely Buffalo or Elephants.

The Forest was reached by a short walk with a couple of suspension bridges over any water. Here we saw a pair of the omnipresent **Egyptian Geese** and soon had a **Green Malkoa** fly over our heads, it disappeared into the canopy of a tree above us and didn't allow any further views other than very fleeting and obscured ones. A Pel's Fishing Owl was seen in morning in this area but alas was not relocated. In hindsight it would probably have been better doing this walk in the morning, as we would have seen more bird activity.

Whilst in the forest we find a few birds with a pair of **White-backed Vultures** near a nest. **Trumpeter Hornbills** called from the tallest trees whilst a **Brown-hooded Kingfisher** frequented the river. Notable sightings for me also included a pair of **African Paradise Flycatchers** and a female **Black-Cuckoo Shrike**. The walk was a bit of a route march and we didn't really find that we had time to sit and wait for birds to appear. Our walk back to the vehicles yielded a singing **Rudd's Apalis**, **White-eared Barbets** and **Green-backed Camaroptera**.

After the slightly disappointing Fig Forest walk, we explored more of the Mkuze park including the large Nsumo Pan wetland. Here we discovered **African Spoonbill**, **White-faced Whistling Ducks**, **Black-winged Stilts** and several distant **Whiskered Terns**.



We headed back to the kuMasinga Hide which was much quieter than the previous day. We did record our third species of **sunbird** with a female **Scarlet-chested**. We then needed to drive back at speed to exit the park before the gates closed.

During the day the wind picked up and by the evening, this meant that we had to have our meal indoors. Ghost Mountain Lodge staff had set us at a private table covered in flowers which was a lovely gesture. The food was excellent and washed down with the best craft beer of the trip (Impala) which made for a wonderful evening. During dinner we were informed that we could have a free neck, back and shoulder massage as part of our accommodation package the following morning.

4th September: Mkuze to Tembe Elephant Park.

We had a quick pre-breakfast walk around the boardwalk area in the grounds of Ghost Mountain Lodge and the reedbed and lake added a few new species including **Purple Heron**, **Black Crake** and **Little Grebe**. A pair of preening **Trumpeter Hornbills** were found in the grounds, giving superb views as well as a **Brown-hooded Kingfisher**.



After breakfast we both made good use of the neck, back and shoulder massage and this did wonders for my neck which after forty years of birding and binocular usage can make some fine crunching noises.

Once packed and our bill settled, we continued our travels further north to Tembe Elephant Park <http://tembe.co.za/> near the Mozambique border. The park was set up by the local Tembe people who jointly own and fully manage the park along with the local KZN wildlife concern. This was one of the main reasons we wanted to visit this reserve.

The route took us past Lake Jozini and the Pongolapoort Dam and via the bustling town of Jozini. Road conditions were good, the speed bumps mountainous and there were plenty of things going on you had to be aware of whilst driving with livestock, monkeys, cyclists and slow vehicles all potential hazards.

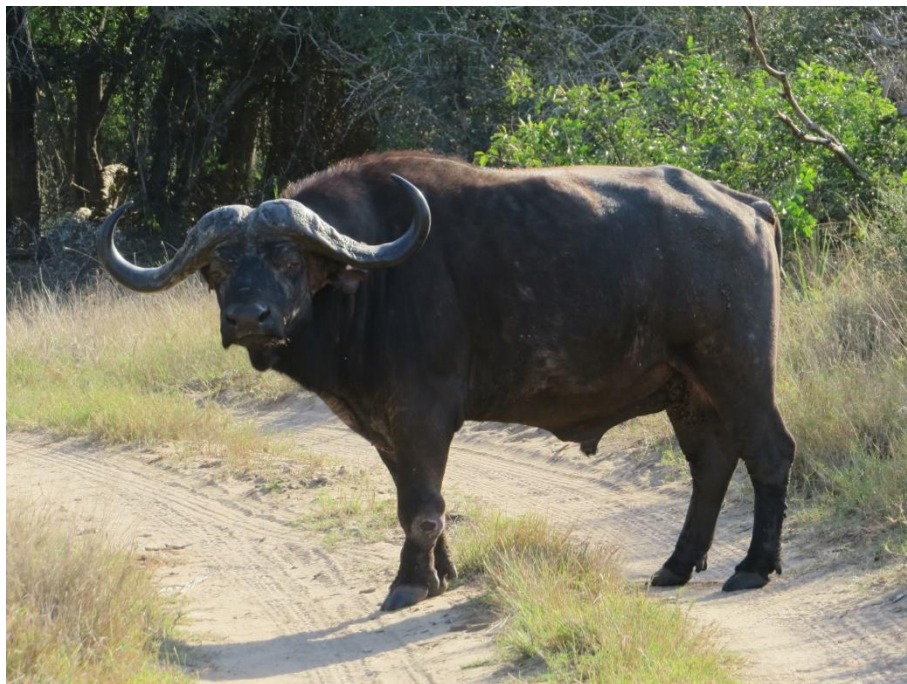


We arrived at Tembe and visited the park office, paid the park entrance fees and awaited transport to the Lodge. **Blue Waxbills** and **Cape Glossy Starlings** drank at an outdoor tap at the office. Our hire car was parked up, as only four-wheel drive vehicles operate in Tembe as all the tracks in the park are sand based. We watched groups of **Nyala** as both us and our luggage were driven to the camp. As we arrived the staff greeted us with a traditional welcome song and a cool drink. We were then introduced the Lodge and then shown to our safari tent. The accommodation was impressive with a massive bed, and an outside shower. The bird bath out front would prove to be excellent for attracting some birds.



We had some time to settle in before lunch and our first afternoon game drive, understandably we were very eager and were at the vehicle a little early. We met Hector who would be our guide for our stay at Tembe. Whilst waiting for others we had our first **Little Bee-eater** sighting of the trip. We were lucky and secured front seats in the safari vehicle and we headed off to see if I could see my first of the Big Five.

It was a very warm day, so animals appeared to be sheltering and avoiding the watering holes in the heat of early afternoon. Suddenly however we found two massive male **Cape Buffalo** in a clearing just metres from the road - my first of the BIG FIVE... it only took a few moments to find the second as a huge male tusker **Elephant** appeared just a few metres behind the Buffalo - quite an entrance for my first wild elephant.



We encountered a few more lone Elephants as well as the usual **Zebra**, **Nyala** and **Impala** in the grassland areas around the reserve. **Black-shouldered Kites** and a pair of very tame **Black-bellied Bustards** were on the track only a couple of metres from the safari vehicle as well as numerous **Speckled** and **Red-faced Mousebirds**, **Fork-tailed Drongos** and **Rufous-naped Larks**.

Later we found more young male Elephants and they occasionally had playfights close to our vehicle. A quite breath-taking sighting. All this happened while a massive herd of around 100 Buffalo grazed a couple of hundred metres away.



We drove on a short way and enjoyed sundowners with the buffalo and elephants a safe distance away. A gin and tonic at sunset with these great animals in the distance was a truly magic moment. On our return journey Hector manages to find an adult **White Rhino** in the gloom, the fully horned animal was the first seen in the park for a few weeks and Hector informed us about the horrific rate of poaching the Rhinos in the park had suffered in the previous few months. Three of the Big Five on one afternoon drive will be something we will never forget. It was dark by the time we returned to the Lodge and we flushed a few **Fiery-necked Nightjars** and a small group of **Spotted Thick-knees** off the sandy tracks.

Our return coincided with dinner. Before the three courses were served, there was a brief introduction by the chef detailing the nights menu. Our soup starter was followed by roast Impala and a dessert. We headed for an early bed as is another early start, we drifted off to sleep to the sounds of an **African Wood Owl** calling.

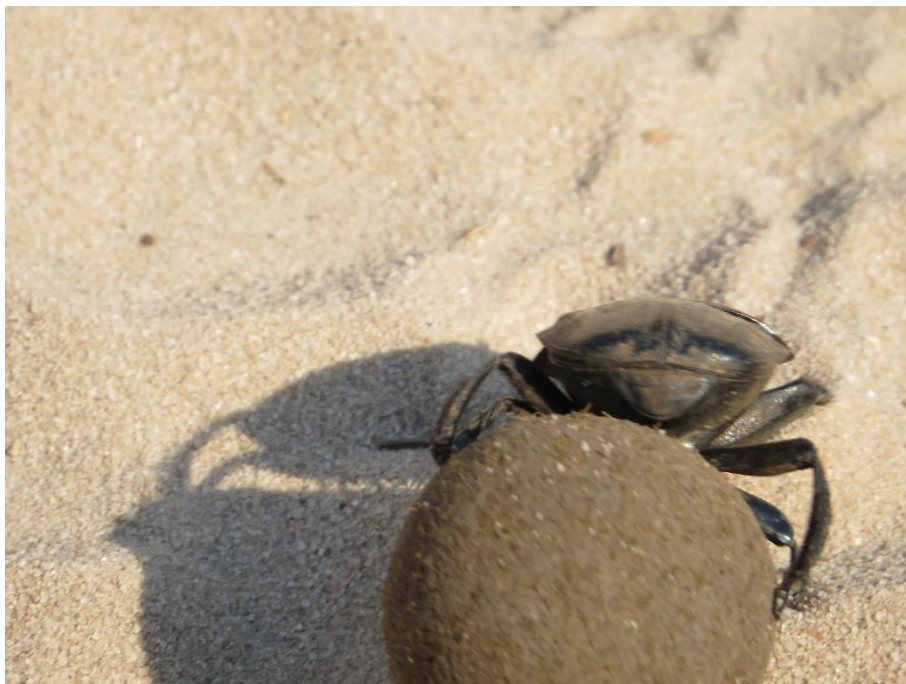
5th September: Tembe Elephant Park

It was an early 5.30am alarm call and we had a light breakfast before our 6am game drive. Just after we had set off there was a call on radio that Lions had been seen at a nearby water hole. We arrived in time to see three young **Lions** - four of the Big Five In less than 24 hours.... Now where's a Leopard when you need one....



Lots of **Emerald-spotted Wood-Doves** were flushed off the tracks as we drove through the reserve, calls of **Sombre Greenbul** were everywhere and we found ourselves in the middle of a territorial dispute by **Brown-Hooded Kingfishers** at our coffee stop.

We drove back to the Lodge via an area with much more open vegetation here several **Common Fiscals** were seen and we stopped for a **Dung Beetle** busy rolling its ball of dung along the sandy track, as the sign says at the entrance of Tembe “dung beetles have right of way” and we allow the beetle to pass but not until several of us had taken photos and video. This was one of those wildlife documentary scenes that I thought I’d never see in person.



We returned for our cooked breakfast and as the temperature were in the high 30's we decided to seek the shade of the tent for a nap/downtime. As soon as we had arrived we had filled up the bird bath out the front of the tent. This proved to be an inspired move. As the heat increased birds were attracted to the birdbath and a nearby tap. First to appear were a pair of **Purple-crested Turacos** that are simply stunning. I was dozing away and noticed that a large shape dropped down to the birdbath and stated that there is a "pigeon or something" in the bird bath. I had a massive shock when I looked through my binoculars to find that there was an **African Goshawk** bathing there. The bird was oblivious to us in the tent and we had some great views and photos albeit through the fly-screen windows of the tent. Either side of lunch and before our game drive we attracted **Crowned Guineafowl**, **Yellow-bellied Greenbul**, a pair of **Ashy Flycatcher** and a superb male **African Paradise Flycatcher** to the bird bath.... We wondered what may have turned up when went out on our game drive.

Our afternoon game drive in the heat started with **Elephants** seen at a several of the pans and waterholes around the reserve as they needed cooling as much as we did. These wetland pans also attracted plenty of birds with **Wooly-necked Storks**, **Hadada Ibis** and a pair of **African Wattled Lapwing** seen. Other game seen included our regulars with herds of **Impala**, **Nyala** and **Zebra**, the latter seemed to be the favoured host for foraging **Red-billed Oxpeckers**. We find a breeding herd of **Elephants** with over 20 individuals including some youngsters, an amazing sight. Our evening was rounded off with another tasty dinner this time of Nyala and we contemplated how amazing our time at Tembe had been and that we had just one more game drive to enjoy here.

6th September: Tembe to St Lucia

We had a final morning game drive at Tembe and were surprised to find we were the only guests in Hectors' truck. We soon found the highlight of the drive with the same three **Lions** seen previously as they walked towards the vehicle, they were wary but continued past us just metres away. Simply stunning.



We saw a couple of **Martial Eagles** perched some distance away. This was the complete opposite to a pair of **Lilac-breasted Rollers** that sat only centimetres away in a trackside thorn bush. Mammals seen include a lone **Buffalo** and lots of **Nyala**. After a late post drive breakfast, we are driven back to collect our hire car, we still have time to find a new mammal as a fine **Kudu** is amongst the Impalas just outside the camp grounds.



We returned by the same route as we had arrived on our drive to St Lucia. We witnessed the aftermath a bad traffic accident towards Jozini thankfully the local Police were in attendance. This again highlighted that there are quite a few dangers driving on the rural roads with cattle, monkeys, goats as well as cyclists all on the road, not necessarily on the right side. Traffic in Jozini was as chaotic as we first arrived but we were soon back on the N2 and sped our way southwards. The journey yielded the usual **Pied Crows** and **Yellow-billed Kites**, a lone **African Harrier Hawk** flew over the road south of Mkuze.

The habitat changed markedly as we approached St. Lucia, once what was scrub and bush had been converted into farmland as well as huge monocultures of Eucalyptus. Upon arrival in St Lucia, after the wilds of Tembe we were a bit taken aback by the electric fences and massive security gates of the guesthouses here. The area around Avalone Guesthouse <http://www.avaloneguesthouse.co.za/> where we stayed appeared to be a newer part of town comprising of a grid of streets that appeared to be solely guesthouses, which gave the place a strange Stepford-type feel. The weather had also changed from bright blue skies to become very overcast with the threat of rain. Indeed, the weather played an important part in our stay in St Lucia over the next few days.

We arrived just after lunchtime and only had 45mins to settle in, meet Rachel from Tailor Made Safaris and visit the local supermarket for some lunch before we were collected for our hippo and crocodile watching boat trip. This was the one part of our itinerary where we felt that too much was crammed into a single day and that if there had only been a minor travel delay, we would have arrived too late for the boat trip.

We were one of several couples and groups collected from accommodations around the town in an old Angolan army vehicle and were driven to the small dock where the Hippo boat was moored. After a safety briefing, we were quickly on our way with the guide pointing out the mass of **Yellow Weavers** building nests in the nearby reeds. In the trees above a majestic **African Fish Eagle** was perched giving the best views of the trip. The boat headed out onto river and we located several groups of **Hippos**, that were making some great noises. Hot drinks and rusks were provided when we were moored near a big group of hippos and a **Nile Crocodile**.



We spotted a **Common Sandpiper** that was precariously using the head of one of the hippos as a perch, probably not too wise a move. Birds were surprisingly thin on the ground with only the expected **Cattle Egrets** and **Egyptian Geese**. We did get to see the first gulls of the trip with a few fly-over **Grey-headed Gulls** (sorry Viv). We docked back at the jetty after finding some roosting **Yellow-billed Kites** on route. Around the jetty itself the air was alive with **Little, White-rumped** and **African Black Swifts** as well as a large roost of **African Pied Wagtails**. After a long day and a quick evening meal in town we have an early night as another early start was planned for the following day.

7th September: St Lucia/Eastern Shores.

This was one of the best days of our trip. We spent a wonderful day being guided by Nick (Director of Tailormade Safaris) on the eastern shores of the iSimangaliso wetland reserve. We met at 6am at our B+B and headed off to the east shores gate. On the way Nick asked whether there any things we would like to see, and any birds are of special interest that we wanted to try to find. We replied with our usual "we really don't mind, we're happy just to see what we find".

Within a few minutes of entering the park we came across a party of **White-crested Helmet-shrikes** a good start to the proceedings. In a recently burnt area, groups of **Wildebeest** and **Zebra** were accompanied by several **Woolly-necked Storks**. In the distance we observed a group of **Kudu** with a territorial battle raging between two young males, we encountered more of these majestic antelopes throughout the morning with some animals only a few feet of the vehicle.



We had some excellent views of a small party of **Red-breasted Swallows** as well as an elegant **Tambourine Dove**. Nick stopped the vehicle as he heard his first **Klass's Cuckoo** of the spring, the bird called a couple of times, but did not show itself.



Our drive continued further north into the reserve, and we headed to the Mission Rocks area. As we approached the parking area for the beach we came upon a small slightly bedraggled bird on the verge, this turned out to be an out of range **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting**. From the behaviour of the bird it was likely to have been blown in on the gale force winds, we took some record shots to confirm the ID as this was a rare bird for iSimangaliso. We walked down the short path to the beach and find a lone **Cape Cormorant**.



From the Kwasheleni Tower lookout I picked up an in-flight **Saddle-billed Stork** way off in the distance that landed at a wetland pan that was only just close enough to determine a positive identification.

Our next point of interest was the lookout over ocean, it was here that Nelson Mandela said *"iSimangaliso must be the only place on the globe where the oldest land mammal (the rhinoceros) and the world's biggest terrestrial mammal (the elephant) share an ecosystem with the world's oldest fish (the coelacanth) and the world's biggest marine mammal (the whale)."* The view was stunning with the sea flat calm, a quick scan yielded multiple **Humpback Whales** with some fin slapping and occasional partial breaches. We estimated there was at least 20 whales close to shore.

After retracing our steps, we headed to the northern most point of our tour; Cape Vidal. This is a lovely spot with mass expanse of sandy beach. Nick sent us off for a wander along the beach while he set up a table for lunch. Along the beach we found a flock of c40 **Swift Terns** as well as the usual **Grey-headed Gulls**.



One of the terns was wearing a coloured ringed, we tried in vain to try and take a photo or read the code, but the bird would not stay still long enough before the terns were flushed by other beach users. (As a bird ringer I always try to collect any colour ring data when out birding as I'm grateful to anyone who reports finding any bird, I have ringed). Before returning for our lunch we also encountered a single **White-fronted Plover** wandering the tideline.

Nick had set up a safari picnic table and chairs and the three of us enjoyed a very tasty pasta salad overlooking the Indian Ocean. Lunch eaten we packed up and whilst we are about to embark on our post lunch tour a "troop" of about 50 **Banded Mongooses** scampered through the car park, darting under cars and between where people were standing, and within a couple of minutes they were gone. As we exited the Cape Vidal recreation area, we had some close views of a family of **Vervet Monkeys**, and at the turning for the grassland loop track some less confiding **Sykes's Monkeys**.



Our return journey was via the inland “grassland loop” which first passed by the south end of Lake Bhangazi where we spotted a distant **Hippo** foraging on land, in a nearby wetland pan an **African Spoonbill** was frantically feeding. We ventured around the grassland area with its red sand dunes. **Buffalo** were seen distantly as a pair of stately **Denham’s Bustards** were expertly spotted by Viv as they strolled in the low vegetation. A closer herd of **Buffalo** were also located and are in the company of a small group of **Little Bee-eaters**.



We had seen park staff vehicles and a helicopter flying low over part of the reserve earlier in the day, we had heard there was a poaching incident being investigated. This was made starkly evident to us in the afternoon when we found what was by far the saddest and most distressing sighting of the trip, a white rhino carcass lying a few hundred metres away. A stark reminder that these amazing animals are under such threat.



It needed something special for our spirits to be lifted after the awful sight of the dead rhino and late in the day this came in the form of all three species of **snake-eagle** with **Black-chested**, **Brown** and **Southern Banded** all being seen in flight and subsequently found perched up.

56 bird species and 13 mammal species were seen on a superbly productive day. We thoroughly impressed with our time with Nick who was an outstanding and friendly guide who provided us with lots of great information and local knowledge. We could not have had a better guide.

As we were leaving the park a massive thunderstorm hit, this knocked out the power in St. Lucia. This seemed to be a common occurrence as our guesthouse and the restaurants in town all have back up generators and life carried on as usual.

8th September: St Lucia: Whale watch

This was planned as a day where we would entertain ourselves and explore the local area without any guides. However, our whale watching trip pre-booked with Adventure Tours and Charters online before we left the UK was moved forward to this morning as poor weather was forecast for next few days. All thoughts of a lie-in were scuppered as we had to sign-in at the office at 5.30am to be transported to the beach.

We were allocated one of two boats, ours turned out to be the smaller boat which normally we'd have chosen if given the choice. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case for this trip. Firstly, there was a scrum for lifejackets and waterproofs, without making sure there were the correct size for the individual.

The weather had also deteriorated, and the wind was creating some serious whitecaps further out to sea. In fact, sea conditions were too rough to take any meaningful photos or observe the **Humpback Whales** we did see. There was lots of spray and the beach launch was very bumpy (though quite exhilarating). The conditions seemed too dangerous to undertake this kind of launch as there was only a handle to hold that was located down by your ankles. With a lifejacket and waterproof it felt as if you were going to be pitched forward over the side of the boat. Not ideal.

The skipper was very knowledgeable about the whales and other wildlife and did call time on the trip when he deemed that the weather had deteriorated too much. From our experience on many whale watching trips around the world we thought it was a borderline call on whether the boat should have been launched at all. Bird wise a few **Cape Gannets** out at sea and a group of **Sanderlings** on the beach were the only sightings of note.

We returned to the Avalone Guesthouse for breakfast and a nap after three early starts in a row, Viv had a quiet afternoon and I headed out to do some birding as the rain had relented. Driving through St Lucia I almost run over a smaller troop of **Banded Mongoose** crossing the road. I decided to investigate the river area leading to the St Lucia Estuary making a few stops along the way I managed to find a large flock of **Pied Avocet** with a few **Black-winged Stilts**. I stopped for a drink at the St Lucia Ski Boat Club as the garden here has views over the estuary. Here there was a mass of waders in the distance including **Little Stint** and **Curlew Sandpiper** as well as very distant **African Oystercatchers**. There was some construction work in the area, and it appeared that there was no further access to the estuary so decided that this would end my afternoon out. This proved to be a wise call as the rain returned shortly afterwards to end a slightly frustrating day.

9th September: St Lucia: West Shores.

The forecast gales arrived but the rain had passed through by breakfast time. We had a more relaxed start to the day with breakfast at the guesthouse before we went off to explore the western shores of the iSimangaliso park. The self-drive day started with a few **Hippos** seen as we crossed over the St Lucia bridge heading towards the Dukuduku gate. Despite bright and sunny conditions, it was seriously windy, and we wondered how this might affect us finding any game or birds.

We were not long through the gate and into the park before we encountered a mixed herd and located a lone **Tsessebe** amongst the **Wildebeest** and **Waterbuck**. Birds were a bit thin on the ground due to the strong wind, however we did find a flock of **Black Saw-wings** hawking insects around a group of trees. One of the highlights of the day was the large numbers of Giraffe sightings, with around 20 individuals. We also spent half an hour watching a stunning **Malachite Kingfisher** as it fished in small wetland pan. As we headed northwards, we found numerous **Collared Pratincoles** in the middle of the road and the verges that were seemingly oblivious to the car.



We had a couple of stops at various places where it was possible to get out the car including the uMthoma aerial boardwalk where we found **Cardinal Woodpecker** and a singing **Yellow-bellied Greenbul**. At one of the waterholes an **African Cuckoo-Hawk** fed on prey in the grass, here we also had **Lizard Buzzard** as well as the ever-present **Egyptian Goose** around anywhere which held water.

We travelled up as far as the Charters Creek where the lakeside held a massive and aptly named **Goliath Heron** as well as **Great Egret**, **Woolly-necked Stork** and **Greenshank**. More **Hippos** were found out wallowing in the lake.



We decided that we would head back to St Lucia and retraced our route.

A private tour safari vehicle approached us and kindly informed us that there were two **White Rhino** seen foraging a short way ahead of us just a few minutes ago. We drove on scanning the grassland and eventually located one of the Rhinos feeding in a slight dip about 100m from the road. The second animal was on the opposite side of the road to the first and slightly closer, both animals, like all Rhinos here, were de-horned, but this sadly still does not prevent poaching. We were the only vehicle at the sighting which was such a privilege.



We headed for a late Lunch in the Ski Boat club which also gave the opportunity to scan over the estuary. The tide was in and any waders, gulls and terns were more distant than the previous day. We did find **Yellow-Billed Duck, African Swamp-hen and a Caspian Tern**. A rainstorm prevented further investigation as we fled indoors to eat our lunch, the storm produced on one the brightest rainbows we have ever seen. This spelled an end to our St Lucia adventure, we had some amazing wildlife sightings despite the weather making it difficult for most of our stay.

10th September: St Lucia to Mavela Game Lodge, Manyoni.

On a very windy drizzly morning, we tried to have a quick look at the waders on the estuary to get better views than those from the St Lucia Ski Boat Club. However, the beach was whipped up in to a sand storm. We decided to head off and drive to our next destination Mavela Game Lodge <https://mavela.co.za/> in Manyoni Private game reserve, known as the "Place of Birds" with high hopes that this would live up to its reputation. We would not be disappointed.

To reach the reserve we retraced our steps back up the N2 to the Mkuze crossroads and took a left turn at the junction instead of the right turn into Mkuze. Shortly along the unpaved road we reached the entrance to the Manyoni Private Game Reserve. We were met at the gate and our booking was confirmed by telephone and we continued along the bumpy track through the reserve.



An **Ostrich** ran alongside the car in the bush for a few metres and **Giraffes** were seen on the ridges above the road. After about half an hour and after some discussion on whether we were going in the right direction we found a sign to Mavela Lodge. We parked up and unloaded our luggage and found that we were the only guests with another couple due to arrive later in the day. We were shown our superb safari tent; one of just five that overlook a vast African savannah and bush panorama. The tent had a huge bed, on suite bathroom with shower and a sundeck overlooking a bird bath, a great place to do some relaxed birding.

A light lunch was served at 1430hrs prior to our afternoon game drive an hour later. Over lunch we had a **Lanner** overfly the Lodge buildings. Waiting for our guide we met our fellow campmates Laura and Alessandro from Italy who would share our game drives for the next couple of days. They were birders too which made for great game drives as we were all happy to stop for any bird sightings as well as mammals.

Before the game drive we found **Crested Barbet**, **Bearded Woodpecker** and **White-browed Scrub Robin** around the main lodge building. Not long after we had begun the game drive, we located herds of **Impala**, and **Buffalo** and one of the great collective nouns an implausibility of **Wildebeest**.



Bird wise the highlights included **Lappet-faced Vulture** soaring over the reserve, a pair of **Crowned Lapwing** and **Striped Kingfisher**. The drive included time for a sundowner and continued well after sunset and in the dark, this enabled Nico our guide to spotlight mammals and birds. A huge **Verreaux's Eagle-owl** was found atop a dead snag and the haunting call of **Fiery-necked Nightjars** accompanied our journey. A female and juvenile **White Rhino** lurked in the gloom before disappearing off into the bush after we fixed them in the spotlight.

Nico somehow managed to catch glimpse of some movement in the vegetation, to start with all we could see were a pair of feline ears, within seconds a **Serval** appears in the spotlight before disappearing quickly into the gloom, an awesome find. The sightings were still not at an end as we encounter a **Marsh Owl** perched on the road as we head back to the Lodge for an excellent three course dinner to round off a superb day. We were escorted back to our tent as there are no fences around the camp and no risks are taken regards encountering large mammals after dark. We were thankful of the blankets in the tent as the night was surprisingly chilly.

11th September: Manyoni.

After the freezing cold night, we were well wrapped up when we were collected at our tent at 5.30am for a light breakfast prior to our morning game drive at 6am. Just out of the lodge grounds we found coveys of both **Crested** and **Helmeted Guinea fowl**. Around a large tree a pair of **Yellow-billed Kites** were very agitated, and it soon became clear the source of their attention when an **African Harrier Hawk** swooped out of the vegetation being chased off by the Kites. The great raptor sightings continued with a pair of **Whalberg's Eagles** that were sat near a nest site.

Our day was about to get even better with possibly the defining sighting of the whole trip. Nico had a call on the radio that a pack of Wild Dogs had been seen on a kill some distance away did we want to risk an attempt to see them and not stop for any other sightings on route. We all decided that this was a no brainer and so began our "Ferrari Safari".

We arrived at the very edge of the Manyoni Reserve and we were greeted by a lone **Wild Dog** staring at us down the track, it's soon joined by three others and for half an hour we watch them play amongst themselves, disappear off into vegetation to feed on the carcass of what seemed to be a **Nyala** we could hear the cracking of bones from our vantage point as well as get the pungent aroma of the kill.

We were joined by the local scientists' vehicle who were equally amazed at we are at the sighting. We were told that there was only one pack in the park. These can be tracked by the scientists, but the Game Lodges have no access to this information. We considered ourselves so privileged to get to witness these amazing and endangered animals. We arrived back for breakfast in the highest spirits after the superb sightings of the morning. After a nap, I spent some time birding from the decking of the tent and get good views of **Long-billed Crombec**, **Acacia Pied Barbet** as well as **Golden-breasted Bunting**.



Over lunch we discussed how could our afternoon game drive compare to the morning. We stared well with both **Southern Red-billed** and **Yellow-billed Hornbills** and a **Lilac-breasted Roller** close to our vehicle. We quickly find a **Lioness** purposely moving through the undergrowth and continue to track her for the next half hour. There was some initial concern that she was heading towards a group of workers from the local community who were clearing vegetation. Thankfully the Lion decided to give them a wide berth. Our drive yielded some more sightings of **Giraffe**, **Wildebeest** and **Zebra** and birds seen included a pair of **Gabar Goshawk** one a dark morph the other a pale morph, **Southern Black-tit** and three **Ostrich**.



We met a safari vehicle from another Lodge in the park who had found off road a Giraffe that had been killed by an unusual pride of three male **Lions**, it was late in the day and with darkness falling our chances of finding them were reduced. We drove to the area where Nico had been told where the kill was, but we would be unable to go off-road as the other vehicle had. We traversed a dam and by now it was almost total darkness, so much so we had **Fiery necked nightjar** and a **Lone Square-tailed Nightjar** calling. We knew the kill was near as we could smell the blood and viscera - a pungent aroma that is hard to describe. We were about to continue our way when out of the darkness came a mighty "Roarr" not too far away. We returned to the dam area and found that another vehicle had a massive male **Lion** fixed in its red spotlight (no white light is used in the park after dark) drinking from where we had driven past a few minutes before.

We watched as the amazing beast climbed the bank and walked within a few metres from the other vehicle and only c50m from ours, after a massive yawn it then promptly lay down for a nap, blocking our return track. We heard some movement to our left and out of the darkness a second male **Lion** appeared. This had the same idea as the first, that with a stomach full of Giraffe that a drink followed by a lie down and a nap were the order of the day. Both lions were a few metres apart and were not for moving.

We had to take a longer route back to the Lodge for dinner, this proved very productive as we had a **Porcupine** wander in front of the vehicle, several **Scrub Hares** (I wanted to make a case of starting a Small 5 list to rival the Big 5) and two **Spotted Eagle-owls** that marked the end of an amazing day of wildlife watching. At the Lodge we had a communal dinner including very tasty Impala/Nyala Pie with our guide and Lodge staff. We toasted our good fortune before being guided back to our tent tired and elated. Thankfully the night was much warmer, and the fine red wine probably helped too.

12th September: Manyoni to Mtunzini.

We were up early again for our final morning game drive of our trip. As we started the drive and heard that there had been a group of Hyenas near one of the main tracks through the reserve. Alas our luck had run out and we don't get to encounter these ferocious predators. Our drive took us through some of the most scenic parts of Manyoni.



Mammals were highlighted with plentiful **Giraffes** and **Zebras**. Bird wise we managed to get superb views of a spectacular **Gorgeous Bush-shrike** as it sang in full view from a thorn-bush.



We also added **Grey Penduline Tit** and **Pale Flycatcher** to our list and a couple of pairs of **Southern Black Tit**. A **Steppe Eagle** majestically soared overhead at our coffee stop (Amarula and hot chocolate was a winning combination too). Our drive ended with a flock of vultures over the Lodge that contained at least one **Cape Vulture** amongst the **White-backed Vultures**.

We had a final Manyoni breakfast and were saddened that our time here was at an end. We had a spectacular stay here and could have easily stayed for much longer. Our trip now took us further south as we headed back towards Durban and our return to the UK later the next day.

Our last night in South Africa was spent in the small town of Mtunzini at the One-on-Hely Guesthouse <https://oneonhely.wixsite.com/oneonhely> as this was a convenient place to break up the journey back to Durban. This was also so we could visit both the Raffia Palm Monument and Umlalazi Nature Reserve. Once checked-in we had an evening stroll along the beach in the Umlalazi reserve. There were some seriously impressive waves on the Indian Ocean and the surf was too inviting not to have paddled in. Birds were at a premium with just lone **White-fronted Plover** and **Greenshank** on the shore. A pizza in town ended another long day.

13th September: Umlalazi/ Return to Durban Airport and the UK.

Our last day in South Africa, we needed to be at Durban airport for 2pm before the two flights that would take us back to Heathrow. We had breakfast at a sensible time, and I managed to find a few new species in the garden of our accommodation namely **Scaly-throated Honeyguide**, **Laughing Dove** and **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird**.

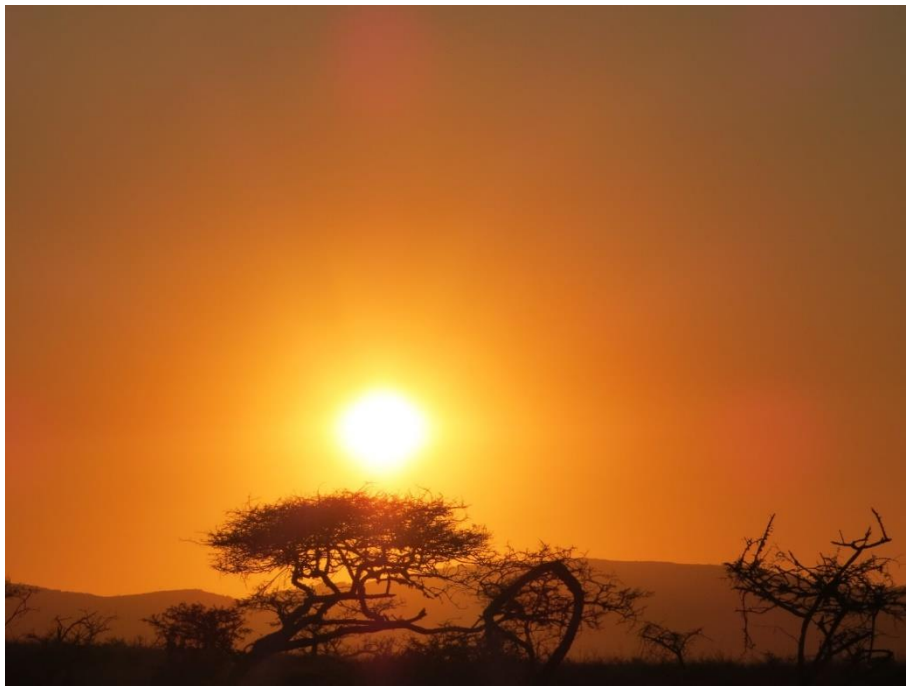
We decided that we'd have a quick explore of the Raffia Palm Monument and then the Umlalazi Reserve. The Raffia forest was quite quiet, and it took a while to find any birds until a party of **White Eared Barbet** appeared. Our main target the **Palm Nut Vulture** gave three flyover views, but alas no perched birds were found. **Purple Crested Turaco** and an **Olive Sunbird** were the only other birds of note.



We drove the short distance to Umlalazi, when paying the entrance fee, we were informed by the ranger we were a bit late in the day for the best birding. We continued alongside the lagoon and followed the mangrove trail to the river. Three **White-breasted Cormorant** were fishing in the lagoon. The open areas allowed great views of a troop of **Vervet Monkeys**. There were several pools close to the track through the mangroves these held very confiding **Common** and **Wood Sandpipers**, **Blacksmith Lapwing** and several **Greenshank**. By the time we arrived at the river it is time for us to turn back as we needed to head to airport, not before an **African Fish Eagle** gave a fly past. On the return journey we were treated with only the second **Goliath Heron** of the trip along with a distant **Pied Kingfisher** and a **Little Egret**.

The drive to the airport was uneventful and we saw a few **Yellow-billed Kites**, **Common Mynas** and **Cattle Egrets** as well as a **Long-crested Eagle** atop a telegraph pole. Our hire car was returned to Durban airport and we were soon awaiting our first flight on our long journey back to the UK.

We had an amazing trip and it was a great introduction to Africa for me. We saw some stunning wildlife that I for one thought that I would never have the opportunity to see. We met some great people especially all our guides and the staff at all the Lodges. Four of the Big Five was a good result and four of the ugly five too. It certainly gives us a great reason to return to Africa again one day.



Bird Sightings

Ostrich: Two birds followed by a larger group of c20 seen on Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September) and one seen on entry road in Manyoni on (10th September) and 3 after dark on game drive (11th September).

Little Grebe: Several birds seen on lake from the boardwalk at Ghost Mountain Lodge (4th September).

White-faced Whistling Duck: Large flock on shores of Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September), also seen on Nsumo Pan, Mkuze on the same day.

Egyptian Goose: Pairs or small groups around most freshwater habitats, large numbers around Lake Jozini (3rd September).

Spur-winged Goose: Several birds seen on the Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September).

Yellow-billed Duck: Small group seen on St Lucia Estuary (9th September).

Red-billed Teal: Several birds in the flocks of wildfowl on the Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September).

Cape Shoveler: Single bird amongst other wildfowl on Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September).

Helmeted Guinea Fowl: Seen on all game drives at Manyoni.

Crested Guinea Fowl: Common in all game reserves visited, often very confiding especially around the camp at Tembe.

Crested Francolin: Small coveys seen on almost all game drives in Tembe and Manyoni.

Maribou Stork: Single over road on way back from Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September)

Wooly-necked Stork: Seen around waterholes and pans at Tembe and iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September).

Saddle-billed Stork: A very distant individual from high point of iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September).

Cape Gannet: Small numbers out at sea from St Lucia whale watching trip (8th September).

Reed Cormorant Commonly seen on Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September).

White-breasted Cormorant: Three seen fishing at Umlalazi (13th September).

Cape Cormorant: A single bird was found at Mission Rocks iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September).

Grey Heron: First seen on airfield at Johannesburg airport also seen at iSimangaliso western shores. Several birds seen on shores of Lake Jozini on boat trip (3rd September).

Black-headed Heron: Widespread but not common most notable at iSimangaliso western and eastern shores (7th and 9th September).



Goliath Heron: Singles seen at Charters Creek, iSimangaliso western shores (9th September) and Umlalazi (13th September).

Great Egret: Several birds seen on shores of Lake Jozini on boat trip (3rd September). A single was also at Umlalazi on (13th September).

Purple Heron: Single bird flushed from reedbed along boardwalk at Ghost Mountain Inn (4th September).

Little Egret: Single birds seen on St Lucia estuary (8th September), iSimangaliso western shores (9th September) and Umlalazi (13th September).

Cattle Egret: Found almost anywhere where there were livestock even along the busy N2 motorway.

Glossy Ibis: Single seen from our Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September)

African Spoonbill: Small group feeding in shallows on Lake Jozini (3rd September), also found at iSimangaliso eastern shores and Nsumo Pan, Mkuze.

Hadada Ibis: Common and widespread seen in most habitats. The loud “ha-da-da” fight call one of the bird calls that defined the trip.



Black-shouldered Kite: First seen on the Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September), several also seen on game drives at Tembe and Manyoni.

African Fish Eagle: Singles from the St Lucia Hippo boat (6th September) and over the river at Umlalazi (13th September)

African Harrier Hawk: Drinking bird at watering hole in Tembe (5th September), Singles at Manyoni (11th September) and over the N2 motorway (6th September).

Palm-nut Vulture Three sightings of birds overflying the raffia palm forest, Umlalazi (13th September).

Lappet Faced Vulture Single bird in flight over Manyoni (10th September).



Cape Vulture: At least one bird in small flock of soaring vultures over Mavela Game Lodge, Manyoni (12th September).

White-backed Vulture: A pair at a nest were found on out Fig forest walk, Mkuze. Also seen at Manyoni and Tembe.

Bateleur: Distant flying birds seen from Lake Jozini boat (3rd September) also at Tembe, iSimangaliso Western shores and Manyoni. All sightings were of flying birds.

Black-chested Snake Eagle: Pair were found at iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September) one of which perched up nicely.

Southern Banded Snake Eagle: Single bird late in day at iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September).

Brown Snake Eagle: Single perched bird on post towards exit of iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September).

Long Crested Eagle: A soaring bird was over iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September) and perched bird on roadside between Mtunzini and Durban airport (13th September).

African Cuckoo-hawk: A lone bird seen near a wetland pan on west shores of iSimangaliso (9th September).

Martial Eagle: Two birds seen at Tembe on (6th September), an adult overflew Mavela Game Lodge at Manyoni (11th September).

Verreaux Eagle: A possible adult was on a telegraph pole between Ghost Mountain Lodge and Mkuze.

Whalberg's Eagle: Pair near nest gave superb views on morning game drive at Manyoni (11th September).



Steppe Eagle: Single bird flew over when we had our coffee stop on our game drive on final morning at Manyoni (12th September).

Gabar Goshawk: A pair one a light morph and the other a dark morph together at Manyoni (11th September).

Lizard Buzzard: Widespread in game reserves especially Tembe and Manyoni.



African Goshawk: The only sighting was a bird drinking from the bath at our tent in Tembe (5th September).

Lanner: Single bird seen over Mavela Game Lodge, Manyoni (10th September).

Yellow-billed Kite: Common and widespread in all habitats.



Black-bellied Bustard: A pair including a very confiding bird close to the vehicle on our first game drive in Tembe (4th September).



Denham's Bustard Pair seen on the eastern shore side of iSimangaliso (7th September).

Spotted Thick-knee: One flushed from road between Mkuze town and game reserve. Three were seen on return to Tembe camp on our first game drive (4th September).

Black-winged Stilt: Small numbers seen at Lake Jozini, Nsumo Pan, Mkuze and St. Lucia estuary, Umlalazi.

Pied Avocet: A large flock was seen on St. Lucia estuary/river on (13th September).

African Oystercatcher: Several seen from distance on St. Lucia estuary.

African Wattled Lapwing: A pair were seen at one of the wetland pans in Tembe (5th September).

Blacksmith Lapwing: Commonly seen on the shores of Lake Jozini on our boat trip (3rd September) a pair were in the mangroves at Umlalazi (13th September).



Crowned Lapwing: Pair seen on afternoon game drive Manyoni (10th September).

Collared Pratincole: Three birds seen on eastern shores of iSimangaliso reserve (7th September). Large numbers on roads through western shores side (7th September).,

Common Sandpiper: Singles seen from St Lucia hippo boat (6th September) and the mangrove trail at Umalazi (13th September).

Wood Sandpiper A pair were on the mangrove trail at Umlalazi (13th September).



Three banded Plover: Singles seen at kuMasinga hide, Mkuze and at Manyoni.

White-fronted Plover: Singles seen on the beaches at Cape Vidal (7th September), St. Lucia (9th September) and Umlalazi (12th September).

Sanderling: Small groups seen on the shoreline of St Lucia beach (8th September).

Little Stint: Several seen from distance on St. Lucia estuary.

Curlew Sandpiper: Several seen from distance on St. Lucia estuary.

Greenshank: Singles seen on beach at Umlalazi (12th September) and Charter's Creek (iSimangaliso western shores) (7th September). Several on mudflats in mangroves at Umlalazi (13th September)

Moorhen: Several on lake seen from the Ghost Mountain Inn boardwalk (4th September).

African Gallinule: One flushed from reeds at Ghost Mountain Inn boardwalk (4th September), two others on St Lucia Estuary (9th September).

Black Crake: Single bird walked out of the reeds briefly from the Ghost Mountain Inn boardwalk (4th September).

African Jacana: Several birds seen on the shores of Lake Jozini on our boat trip (3rd September) also seen at wetland pans at Tembe and iSimangaliso.

Kelp Gull: Dark winged gull Seen from distance at St Lucia Estuary was most likely this species.

Grey-headed Gull: The common gull species of the region found in all coastal locations.



Caspian Tern: Singles seen at St Lucia Bridge and over St Lucia Ski/Boat club (9th September).

Lesser Crested Tern One flew over the St Lucia whale watching boat (8th September).

Swift Tern: c 40 birds on beach at Cape Vidal on east shores of iSimangaliso (7th September).

Whiskered Tern: Several birds seen flying over Nsumo Pan Mkuze.

Cape Turtle Dove: Common in dry bush habitat, it's "drink lager" call was one of the sounds of an African Safari.

Red-Eyed Dove: First seen and heard at Ballito (1st September). Widespread and more often heard than seen.

Emerald-Spotted Wood-dove: Very common along tracks in game reserves where they would be flushed by the vehicle.

African Green Pigeon: One bird singing close to the Wild Dog kill in Manyoni, close-by but not seen.

Laughing Dove: A pair were seen in the garden of One-on-Hely Guesthouse, Mtunzini (13th September).

Tambourine Dove: Two birds seen in wooded area of iSimangaliso east shores (7th September).

Purple-crested Turaco: Two close birds came to drink near our tent at Tembe (5th September). Also found at Manyoni (11th September) and Raffia Palm Monument, Umlalazi (13th September).



Grey go-away Bird: Birds heard but not seen at Manyoni.

Klaas's Cuckoo: Early returning bird singing on east shores of iSimangaliso (7th September).

Green Malkoa: Single bird seen flying into Mkuze Fig forest then poor views as it skulked in the tops of trees (3rd September).

Burchalls Coucal: Widespread and often very confiding in bushes and occasionally on the ground along game drive tracks, seen at Tembe, iSimangaliso, and Manyoni.



African Scops-owl: Birds heard calling after dark on both afternoon game drives at Manyoni.

Spotted Eagle owl: Two birds giving amazing views on second Manyoni game drive (11th September).

Verraux's Eagle-owl: One bird on tree on first Manyoni game drive (10th September) and second on a nest the following day (11th September).

Marsh Owl: One seen on track on first Manyoni game drive (10th September).

Barn Owl: One in flight on Manyoni game drive (11th September).

African Wood Owl: Heard calling outside out tent at night and early morning at Tembe (4th and 5th September).

African Black Swift: One of the first birds seen on the trip with several flying around Johannesburg airport. Also seen at iSimangaliso.

Little Swift: Commonly seen near bridges over watercourses and a large flock was at the boat dock at St Lucia.

White-rumped Swift: Like Little Swift often seen near bridges over watercourses.

African Palm Swift: c20 birds flying around palm trees around a settlement in Manyoni on last morning game drive (11th September).

Fiery-necked Nightjar: Often encountered at dusk on game drives, usually heard more than seen, birds were flushed from the vehicle tracks in Tembe and Manyoni.

Square-tailed Nightjar Single bird heard churring when we were looking for lions on dark in Manyoni (10th September).

Speckled Mousebird: One of the first birds seen at Ballito 1st September, groups seen in all game reserves.

Red-faced Mousebird: Less commonly found than Speckled. Seen in small flocks in both Tembe and Manyoni.

African Hoopoe: Common and widespread with birds being seen in all game reserves.

Common Scimitarbill: First bird seen near the KuMasinga hide, Mkuze (2rd September). Foraging birds were seen on most game drives in Manyoni.

Crowned Hornbill: The most widespread and encountered Hornbill. First found in Mkuze (3rd September) with regular sightings in both Tembe and Manyoni.

Trumpeter Hornbill: Widespread but not as often encountered as Crowned Hornbill. First seen and heard in Fig Forest, Mkuze (3rd September). A pair of preening birds in the grounds of Ghost Mountain Lodge (4th September) made for some great video.



Red-billed Hornbill: Found on game drives at Manyoni (11-12th September).

Yellow-billed Hornbill: Found on afternoon game drive at Manyoni (11th September).

Pied Kingfisher: Two distant birds seen fishing first on the Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September), the second at Umlalazi (13th September).

Malachite Kingfisher: Single bird watched for 20 minutes fishing in small roadside pool iSimangaliso Western shores (9th September).



Brown-hooded Kingfisher: The most common and widespread Kingfisher seen. A pair were found on the Fig forest walk. Several subsequent sightings in Tembe, iSimangaliso, Manyoni.

Striped Kingfisher: Several sightings of birds at Manyoni (11-12th September).

Little Bee-eater: Small numbers seen in most game parks. Often perched up nicely for photographs.



Lilac-breasted Roller: First seen on afternoon game drive in Mkuze (2rd September), two very close birds in bush next to vehicle at Tembe (6th September), other sightings at Manyoni.

Black cuckoo-shrike: A female seen high in the canopy on our Fig Forest Walk, Mkuze (3rd September).

Crested Barbet: Seen and heard daily on game drives in Manyoni also around the main building at Mavela Game Lodge.



Acacia Pied Barbet: Two birds seen one from the decking outside our tent at Mavela game Lodge the other on a game drive at Manyoni (10th and 12th September).

White-eared Barbet: Small groups seen in many places including the Fig Forest, Mkuze iSimangaliso, and Umlalazi (13th September).

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird: One seen in the garden of One-on-Hely B+B, Mtunzini (13th September).

Black-collared Barbet: First seen at Ballito, seen in most habitats and game reserves and often heard calling.

Scaly-throated Honeyguide: Single birds first in Garden of One-on-Hely, Mtunzini and at Raffia palm forest, Umlalazi (13th September).

Bearded Woodpecker: A very confiding bird foraging in trees near Mavela Game Lodge, Manyoni (10th September).



Golden-tailed Woodpecker: Fleeting glimpses seen on game drives in Manyoni (10-11th September).

Cardinal Woodpecker: Good views of a foraging bird iSimangaliso western shores, (9th September).

Chinspot Batis: A lone bird seen on game drive in Tembe (4th September).

Brubru: Found on our Fig Forest Walk, Mkuze (3rd September).

Black-backed Puffback: Widespread and found at iSimangaliso eastern shores as well as sightings at Manyoni, Mkuze and Mtunzini.

White-crested Helmet-shrike: Small groups seen at iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September) and Manyoni on (11-12th September).

Southern Boubou: Recorded daily at Manyoni (10-12th September).

Black-crowned Tchagra: Seen on all game drives in Manyoni.

Gorgeous Bush-shrike: Superb views of a stunning singing male bird on final game drive in Manyoni, others heard singing but not seen (12th September).

Grey headed Bush-shrike: Lone singing male seen from distance on final game drive in Manyoni (12th September).

Southern Fiscal: Regularly encountered on game drives at Tembe and Manyoni.

Black-headed Oriole: Two birds seen well on game drives in Manyoni, others heard singing.

Square-tailed Drongo: First seen on drive through iSimangaliso eastern shores Manyoni (7th September), also seen at Manyoni.

Fork-tailed Drongo: Very common in all game reserves visited.

Southern Black Flycatcher: Pairs seen from balcony of The Petit Provence B+B in Ballito (1st-2nd September). Also seen on game drives in Manyoni.

Ashy Flycatcher: A pair visited the bird bath near our tent at Tembe (5th September).

Pale Flycatcher: Single bird on our final game drive in Manyoni (12th September).

African Paradise Flycatcher: A pair were found on our Fig Forest walk, Mkuze (3rd September). A male bird visited the bird bath near our tent at Tembe, giving amazing views (5th September).



Cape Crow: Couple of birds seen on outskirts Durban airport (1st September).

Pied Crow: Widespread almost always seen in pairs. Seen daily.

Sabota Lark: Close views on evening game drives at Manyoni (10-11th September).

Rufous-naped Lark: Several seen on drive through iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September). Also found in Manyoni.

Grey-rumped Swallow: A few birds seen in flight over Ballito (1st September).

Black Saw-wing: A flock was seen hawking around trees at iSimangaliso western shores (9th September).

Red-breasted Swallow: Several birds seen perched at iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September).

Greater Striped Swallow: A lone bird was with Black Saw-wings at iSimangaliso western shores (9th September).

Wire-tailed Swallow: Common around Mkuze especially near the KuMasinga Hide, Ghost Mountain and Lake Jozini.

Lesser-striped Swallow: First seen at Tembe (4th September), Confiding birds were seen at both iSimangaliso eastern and western shores (7 and 9th September).

Southern Black-Tit: Seen in pairs at Tembe, and at several locations in Manyoni.

Grey Penduline tit: A pair were found on our final game drive in Manyoni (12th September).



Sombre Greenbul: Very common, often heard with its “willet” call being one of the sounds of our game drives. Seldom seen.

Yellow-bellied Greenbul: A bird visited the bath near our tent at Tembe (5th September). A singing bird gave close views at iSimangaliso western shores (9th September).

Dark-eyed Bulbul: First seen at Ballito on 1st September. One of the most widespread birds of the trip. Common in almost all habitats.



Long billed Crombec: Single birds seen near our tent at Mavela Game Lodge, Manyoni (10th-11th September).

Rudd's Apalis: Singing bird, finally gave reasonable views on path back from Fig Forest, Mkuze (3rd September).

Yellow-breasted Apalis: Seen from the path back from Fig Forest, Mkuze (3rd September).

Green-backed Camaroptera: Widespread and seen in scrubby habitats in most reserves.

Little Rush Warbler: At least one bird from Ghost Mountain Inn boardwalk (4th September).

African Reed Warbler: Seen and heard in reedbeds at Ghost Mountain Inn boardwalk (4th September).

Tawny-flanked Prinia: Single bird seen iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September).

Croaking Cisticola: A few birds heard and one flushed on drive through iSimangaliso Eastern shores (7th September).

Rattling Cisticola: Very common, seen daily in almost all habitats with scrubby vegetation.

Cape White-eye: A couple of birds seen from our balcony at Petit Provence B+B Ballito (2nd September).

Arrow-marked babbler: Small group seen on first game drive at Manyoni (10th September).

Familiar Chat: A Female was seen on rooftops in Ballito (2nd September).

African Stonechat: Several pairs usually seen together at both Tembe, and Manyoni.



White-browed Scrub Robin: At least one bird frequented the area around tents at Mavela game Lodge, Manyoni (10th-12th September).

Red-capped Robin Chat: Two birds seen on pre-breakfast walk around Ballito (2nd September) singles on guided trips in iSimangaliso eastern shores and Manyoni.

Bearded Scrub Robin: One seen around the park offices in Mkuze on (2nd-3rd September).

Kurrichane Thrush: Attracted to water at KuMasinga hide, Mkuze and around tents at Mavela Lodge, Manyoni.

Cape Glossy Starling: Very common in most bush habitats first seen in all game reserves.

Red-winged Starling: Birds around the hotel at Ballito (1st September) and main building at Mavela Lodge, Manyoni.

Black-bellied Starling: A pair were seen at Ballito on morning walk (2nd September).

Red-billed Oxpecker: Common in Mkuze, Tembe and Manyoni game reserves, almost always associated with or perched on large herbivores.

Common Myna: First seen at Johannesburg airport, occasionally seen on roadsides around towns and villages. Common in the grounds of Ghost Mountain Lodge.

Black-throated Wattle-eye: Single bird seen amongst a mixed species flock in Ballito (2nd September).

Cape Wagtail: Seen from departure lounge at Johannesburg airport and a single bird was on lawn of Petit Provence B+B in Ballito (1st September).

African Pied Wagtail: Common in areas with short grassland and water, Largest numbers were seen at a potential roost site near the Hippo boat dock, St. Lucia (6th September).

Scarlet-chested Sunbird: Female found near the kuMasinga hide (2nd September), Mkuze. Others seen at iSimangaliso Eastern shores (7th September) and on game drives in Manyoni.

Purple-banded Sunbird: First seen at kuMasinga hide (2nd September), others found on our Fig Forest Walk and Manyoni.



White-bellied Sunbird: First seen at kuMasinga hide (2nd September), Mkuze others found on our Fig Forest Walk and iSimangaliso western shores (9th September).

Olive Sunbird: One seen in Raffia palm forest, Umlalazi (13th September).

Yellow-throated Longclaw: Regular in areas of low scrub grassland on game drives at Tembe iSimangaliso Eastern shores and Manyoni.

African Pipit: Found in areas of grassland at Tembe and iSimangaliso eastern shores.

Yellow-faced Canary: Common in most habitats, often in small flocks. Attracted to drink at waterholes and bird baths at Manyoni.



House Sparrow: One seen in Ballito on 2nd September.

Southern Grey-headed Sparrow: A pair were seen in Ballito (2nd September) and several seen drinking at kuMasinga hide waterhole.

Yellow throated Petronia: Birds attracted to water at the KuMasinga hide, Mkuze and bird baths near the Safari tents at Mavela Game Lodge, Manyoni.

Yellow Weaver: A large colony was near the boat dock of our St Lucia Hippo boat (6th September). Also seen in riparian vegetation along the Ghost Mountain Lodge boardwalk (4th September).



Village Weaver: The commonest encountered weaver species. Huge nesting colonies in the grounds of Salt Rock Hotel Ballito, and Ghost Mountain Lodge, Mkuze.

Dark backed Weaver: Occasionally found on game drives in Manyoni.

Thick-billed weaver: Female seen with mixed flock at Ballito, male gave great views in trees above breakfast area at Petit Provence B+B (2nd September).

Blue Waxbill: Common in bush habitat and seen on game drives at Mkuze, Tembe, Manyoni. Attracted to and seen readily at drinking sites.

Red Billed Quelea: A small flock were seen in trees from our balcony at Petite Provence B+B Ballito, (2nd September). also seen at Tembe and Manyoni.

Grey Waxbill: Two or three birds were very confiding in waterside vegetation at KuMasinga Hide, Mkuze (2nd-3rd September).



Bronze Mannikin: First seen at Salt Rock Hotel at Ballito (1st September) also seen at Mkuze (3rd September) and iSimangaliso western shores (9th September).



Green-winged Pytilla: Single birds seen near drinking pools near camp office Mkuze (3rd September), visiting bird baths at Mavela Game Lodge and on some game drives in Manyoni.

African Firefinch: Two or three birds seen on final game drive at Manyoni Mkuze (12th September).

Common Waxbill: Occasionally seen on game drives in Manyoni.

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting: Single bird seen Mission Rocks iSimangaliso (7th September)., was a very tired looking bird, possibly blown in with gales that day.

Fan-tailed Widowbird: Eclipse plumage males seen at Ghost Mountain inn and on guided drive iSimangaliso (7th September).

Golden-breasted Bunting: Occasionally seen foraging and drinking around tents at Mavela game lodge and on game drives at Manyoni

Mammal Sightings

Humpback Whale: At least 20 individuals seen offshore from iSimangaliso east shores (7th September) and several on our St. Lucia whale watching trip (8th September).

Scrub Hare: A few animals seen after dark on game drives in both Tembe and Manyoni.

African Elephant: All sightings were on afternoon game drives at Tembe Elephant Park. This included big tuskers and family parties. A group of young males having a “playful” fight near our vehicle was a magical moment.



Zebra: Seen in small herds in all reserves including Mkuze, Tembe, iSimangaliso and Manyoni.



White Rhino: Five individuals seen at three locations. One fully horned individual seen on dusk on a game drive at Tembe (4th September). A dead poached animal was seen on eastern shores of iSimangaliso (7th September). Thankfully two individuals were seen close to the road on the western shores (7th September). A mother and juvenile were seen briefly after dark on our first game drive at Manyoni.

Hippopotamus: Small groups in the water were found on our Lake Jozini boat trip (3rd September) and St Lucia boat trip (6th September).



Warthog: Very common with multiple family groups on the shores of Lake Jozini (3rd September). Seen in all game reserves including areas around the tents at Manyoni. One of the underrated animals that we saw.



Giraffe: Seen on almost all game drives in Mkuze, Tembe and Manyoni and were commonly found at iSimangaliso western shores (9th September).



Blue Wildebeest: Common on game drives especially at Mkuze, iSimangaliso and Manyoni.

Tseesebe: A single animal was seen on our self-drive through iSimangaliso western shores (9th September).

Red Duiker: Regularly seen in scrubby vegetation near our safari tent at Tembe and iSimangaliso eastern shores (7th September).



Common Duiker: Lone individuals occasionally seen in open areas of Tembe.

Impala: The commonest antelope species, numerous in all game reserves especially Tembe, iSimangaliso and Manyoni.

Buffalo: Two huge bulls at Tembe were the first of the Big Five we saw. Large herds were seen at iSimangaliso and Manyoni.

Kudu: One was seen when we were leaving Tembe (6th September). Very commonly encountered on the eastern shores of iSimangaliso (7th September). Others were seen at Manyoni.



Nyala: Seen in all game reserves especially numerous around Tembe and Manyoni.

Bushbuck: Occasionally seen at iSimangaliso eastern and western shores (7th and 9th September).

Southern Reedbuck: Small group was seen on our guided trip through iSimangaliso Eastern shores (7th September).

Common Waterbuck: Small numbers seen from our Lake Jozini boat trip and common at iSimangaliso on both Eastern and Western shores (7th and 9th September).



Lion: Three animals seen on two successive days at Tembe. A female and then later two males seen on afternoon game drive at Manyoni (11th September).

Serval: A lone individual was found after dark on our first game drive at Manyoni (10th September).

Wild Dog/Painted Wolf: A group of four were found on a kill and gave awesome views at Manyoni (11th September), almost certainly our best wildlife encounter of our trip.

Slender Mongoose: Singles seen running across tracks on game drives in Tembe, iSimangaliso and Manyoni.

Banded Mongoose: Two troops were encountered one of c50 at Cape Vidal, iSimangaliso (7th September). The other in St Lucia town (8th September).

Porcupine: One seen after dark on game drive in Manyoni (11th September).

Chacma Baboon: Family groups seen around the park offices at Mkuze (2nd September). Also on shores of lake Jozini (3rd September) and iSimangaliso (7th September).

Samango/Sykes' Monkey: Brief views of a couple of individuals near Cape Vidal, iSimangaliso (7th September).

Vervet Monkey: Widespread with sightings in all reserves and in the wider countryside including roadsides.

