



EASTERN SOUTH AFRICA AND CAPE TOWN PRIVATE TRIP REPORT

14-25 SEPTEMBER 2023



Southern Ground Hornbills are spectacular birds, and we enjoyed this individual in the southern Kruger National Park.

Detailed Report

Day 1, 14th September 2023. Johannesburg and transfer to Dullstroom

We started our 12-day birding and wildlife tour with some brief birding around the gardens of The Safari Club in Johannesburg, where Barbara and Kevin Strobino (mother and son) and their Birding Ecotours guide, had stayed overnight. This turned up several **Karoo Thrushes**, a flock of **Red-headed Finches** around the bird feeder, **Thick-billed Weaver**, **Cape Robin-Chat**, **Southern Masked Weaver**, and **Red-eyed** and **Laughing Doves**, which made for a good start.

We then departed for Bullfrog Pan nearby, and along the way, we encountered **Crested Barbet**, **Cape Sparrow**, **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, and a few others. Upon arriving at the pan, we were met by five **Maccoa Ducks**, a few **Blue-billed Teals**, numerous **Cape Shovelers**, **African Swamphen**, and many more waders. A hawking **Southern Fiscal** happened to become Barbara's 1,000th bird species in the world – a great achievement on our first morning! We then added **Goliath Heron**, with **African Spoonbills**, **Glossy Ibises**, and **Grey-headed Gulls** flying overhead.



Barbara and her son, Kevin, at Bullfrog Pan, our first stop on tour.

Our next destination was calling, and so we headed eastwards towards Dullstroom and our accommodation near Verloren Vallei Nature Reserve. En route, we encountered **Jackal Buzzard**, **Black-headed Heron**, and two surprise **Oribi** antelope in the grasslands approaching the town.

Upon arriving at Dullstroom, we were greeted by **Red-throated Wryneck**, a flock of **Yellow Bishops**, a larger flock of **Long-tailed Widowbirds**, the marvelous calling of both an **African Fish Eagle** adult and juvenile flying overhead, as well as **Speckled Mousebird**, **African Stonechat**, **Bokmakierie**, and **Bar-throated Apalis**. After settling in, we headed to the

Dullstroom town dam in the hope of finding Cape Eagle-Owls. We waited patiently, hoping for at least a glimpse in the fading light, but unfortunately, they did not reveal themselves. So, we had to settle for **Yellow-billed Ducks**, a pair of **Mallards**, some **Reed Cormorants**, and a few others.

After a delicious dinner in town, we made our way back to our accommodation and encountered **Southern Reedbuck**, **Plain's Zebra**, and **Common Duiker** in our spotlight.

Day 2, 15th September 2023. Dullstroom to Pilgrim's Rest

We awoke the next morning to glorious sunrise scenes and **White-throated Swallows** and **Brown-throated Martins** skimming the dam. We then left for Verloren Vallei, and as we stepped out the front door, we found a surprise **Hewitt's Red Rock Hare** hopping about the lawn and rocks as well as a herd of **Gemsbok**.



*The seldom-seen **Hewitt's Red Rock Hare** outside our chalet.*

Our drive through the reserve presented numerous great endemics and other treats, including **Buff-streaked Chat**, **Eastern Long-billed Lark**, **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, and **Cape Longclaw**, as well as **Capped** and **Mountain Wheatears**, **Wing-snapping Cisticola**, **Cape Crow**, two overhead **Cape Vultures** and a **Rock Kestrel**, amongst others. On the mammal side, we found **Grey Rhebok** and herds of **Blesbok** bounding through the mountain grasslands.



*A confiding **Wing-snapping Cisticola** searched the rocky bank alongside our vehicle.*



*A pair of **Eastern Long-billed Larks** feeding amongst the short, recently burnt grass in Verloren Vallei.*

We then departed after breakfast for the glorious mountain and forest habitats of Mount Sheba. On our way, we picked up a single **Southern Bald Ibis**. When we stopped for lunch in Lydenburg, we added **Brown-hooded Kingfisher**, **Southern Black Flycatcher**, **White-browed Sparrow-Weaver**, and **Yellow-fronted Canary** in the garden.

Upon arriving at Mount Sheba, we enjoyed a large flock of over 40 **Swee Waxbills** on the lawn, as well as **Speckled Pigeons**, **Red-winged Starlings**, and **Familiar Chats** on the roofs and fence posts around the resort. A late afternoon walk along the resort roads, and some forest trails before nightfall presented a busy flock of vocalizing **Knysna Turacos**, a pair of **Grey Cuckooshrikes**, **Chorister Robin-Chat**, **Cape Batis**, and **Sombre Greenbul**. Other birds busy calling and flying about in the trees were **Greater Double-collared**, **White-bellied** and **Amethyst Sunbirds**, while a **Natal Spurfowl** hopped out of the bushes onto the road. We also found a family troop of entertaining **Blue (Samango) Monkeys** moving around some chalets.

After a truly scrumptious dinner by the fireside, we went outside to hear and then locate a pair of **African Wood Owls** near our rooms – a great end to a productive day.



*One of the pair of **African Wood Owls** that visited us outside the lodge at Mount Sheba.*

Day 3, 16th September 2023. Pilgrim's Rest to Kruger National Park (Satara)

This morning, we headed onto a forest trail for a short walk and soon located a vocalizing **Narina Trogon**. Next, we heard **Trumpeter Hornbills** flying overhead, found two **African Dusky Flycatchers** hawking, and saw many of the same birds as the previous evening. We returned to our rooms to pack and found another large group of **Swee Waxbills** feeding happily on the lawn right outside our rooms. We then departed for the central Kruger and picked up a **White-necked Raven** and a pair of **Drakensberg Prinias** on our way out.



Gorgeous Sweet Waxbills were feeding en masse outside our chalets at Mount Sheba.

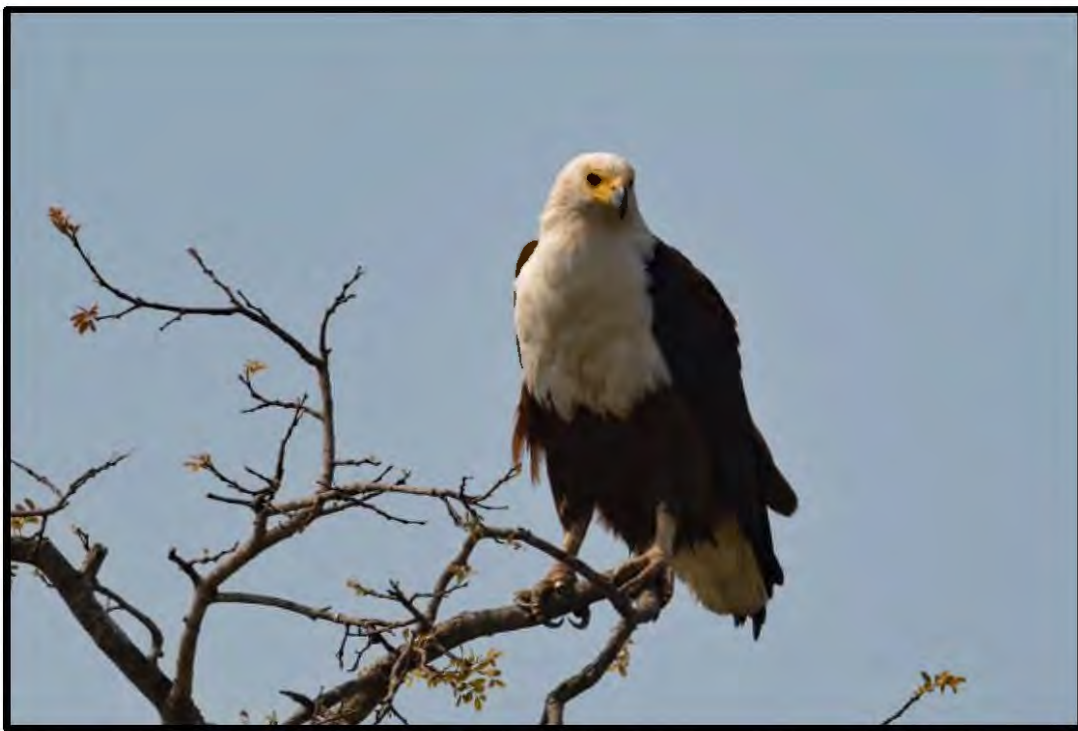
We entered Kruger through Phabeni Gate around lunchtime and soon found a **Striated Heron** and an **African Grey Hornbill**. A stop at Nyamundwa Dam produced an **African Darter** and several **African Openbills** on the water's edge with a grunting pod of **Hippopotamus** in the water. Around the viewing area, we also found **Southern Black Tit**, **Golden-breasted Bunting**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver**, and **Blue Waxbill**. We made our way gradually towards Satara, and along the way, we encountered **Southern Red-billed Hornbill**, **Black-headed Oriole**, and **White-crested Helmetshrike**. Then we started adding some raptors, which included a pair of **African Hawk-Eagles**, **Bateleur**, and **Wahlberg's Eagle**. Other species that we enjoyed when passing the Skukuza area included **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, some **Magpie Shrikes**, and **Grey Go-away-bird**. On the mammal side, we started finding numerous **African Savanna Elephants** as well as **African Buffalo**, **Greater Kudu**, **Giraffe**, **Waterbuck**, **Plain's Zebra**, and **Common Wildebeest**.

Upon reaching Tshokwane, we paused for an ice cream, stretched our legs, and managed to add several **Vervet Monkeys** and a **Smith's Bush Squirrel** around the picnic site. We pushed on towards Satara, and at Kumana Dam, we were pleased to find our first **Saddle-billed Storks** for the trip. These were accompanied by **Woolly-necked Stork**, **Yellow-billed Stork**, **Burchell's Coucal**, **Striated Heron**, and **Wood Sandpiper**.

Further along, we encountered a **Spotted Hyena** den on the roadside, and three adorable-looking pups came out to greet us and smell the vehicle, just before an adult female returned to them. On our final stretch to Satara, we located our first **White-backed Vultures** and a **Burchell's Coucal**. Shortly afterwards, we came upon a sleeping and restful pride of 14 **Lions** – just the type of sighting one needs when the camp gates are soon to close! We made it to Satara Rest Camp just in time, and after another delicious dinner, we managed to locate an awesome **African Scops Owl** in camp.

Day 4, 17th September 2023. Birding around Satara

This wonderful morning, we awoke to **African Scops Owl** still calling at first light. In addition, **Lesser Striped Swallows** were flying about, **Burchell's Starlings** were making a noise, and a **Grey-headed Bushshrike** also revealed itself by its haunting call. We left the camp soon after the gate opened and first headed west and then northwards to Timbavati Picnic Site. At Nsemani Dam, we located an abundance of birds, including a magnificent **African Fish Eagle** alongside the road, a **Marabou Stork**, a **Yellow-billed Stork**, several **African Openbills** on the dam edge, and many other regulars. On the mammal side, we had a pod of **Hippopotamus** grunting and several **Waterbuck** lingering around. We then pushed on a bit and located a very active bird party involving **Green Wood Hoopoes** making a racket, **Red-billed Buffalo Weavers**, a **Bennett's Woodpecker**, **Southern Grey-headed Sparrows**, **Chinspot Batises**, **Blue Waxbills**, **Red-billed Firefinches**, and **Green-winged Pytilias**. A pause at a water trough nearby for a breakfast snack revealed a **Hamerkop**, some **Crested Francolins**, and a surprise melanistic **Gabar Goshawk** flyby (our first of two on the Kruger leg of the trip). We progressed to Timbavati Picnic Site, finding **Bateleurs** and **Tawny Eagles** flying overhead, and at the picnic site, we were entertained by begging **Greater Blue-eared Starlings** and **Crested Barbets**.



African Fish Eagle scanning for activity around the Nsemani Dam in Kruger.

We left to find a substantial herd of **African Buffalo**, with many **Yellow-billed Oxpeckers** (encouraging to see) and several **Red-billed Oxpeckers** grooming them. We also heard a **Black-crowned Tchagra** calling nearby. As the day was warming up and things were slowing down, we made our way back to camp for a rest, late brunch, and a refreshing swim before the afternoon activities.



Yellow-billed Oxpecker hooking onto the hide of an African Buffalo.

For the afternoon adventures, we proceeded eastwards to Nwanetsi Dam, and en route, the new discoveries included many **White-winged Widowbirds**, still in non-breeding plumage, a flock of **White-crested Helmetshrikes**, and an **African Green Pigeon**. We arrived at the picnic site and made our way to the viewpoint, where we encountered **Long-billed Crombees** and **Marico Sunbirds**. A ruckus was being made in a nearby tree canopy by a **Black-backed Puffback**, and this revealed a surprising and very large female **Boomslang**, puffing her throat up and trying to find relief from the perpetual harassment.

It was starting to get late, and we needed to head back to camp, so we departed and soon found a gorgeous **Malachite Kingfisher** on the edge of the Sonop stream, with a magnificent bull **Giraffe** feeding in the stream, which made for a great scene. A bit further on, we saw some vultures descending and soon found a gang of **White-backed Vultures**, two **Lappet-faced Vultures**, and a welcome **White-headed Vulture** atop some trees - all peering at an animal carcass that was just out of sight. The fact that they were not descending to the ground left us wondering what predators were still in attendance, holding them at bay.

Further down the gravel track, while returning along the N'wanetsi River road, we came upon another large **African Savanna Elephant** herd coming down to drink, and then shortly after, we chanced upon a large **Lioness** striding along the river with four **Spotted Hyenas** harassing her from behind. With her being alone and large-bellied, we were left wondering if she was going to seek refuge near the river to den and potentially give birth. The light had now all but faded, and so we got back to camp just in time and headed straight to a delectable restaurant dinner.



*This female **Boomslang** was mobbed by a **Black-backed Puffback** at N'wanetsi Picnic Site.*

Day 5, 18th September 2023. Birding southern Kruger, Satara to Skukuza

We arose this wonderful morning to lions roaring in the distance, and we soon departed camp, once again aiming to drive the N'wanetsi River road. Not too far into the drive, we located two **Lionesses** lazing in the grass, seemingly satiated from a good nighttime meal. A bit further along, we came across two **Spotted Hyenas** relaxing by a drinking trough, and shortly thereafter, we were delighted to discover a white (albino) **Lion** male, fondly named 'Casper', and his three formidable adult brothers also resting up. What a force these four adult males are, ruling a vast territory! A stop at some of the river laybys revealed a **Cardinal Woodpecker**, a pair of **Common Scimitarbills**, a **Golden-tailed Woodpecker**, and a **Giant Kingfisher** darting back and forth along the river. We proceeded further and, to great excitement, spotted a **Honey Badger** running next to the road, but it unfortunately soon disappeared in some dense valley brush. Next, we flushed three **Double-banded Sandgrouse**, which flew off, and we pushed on to Gudzani Dam, which was pleasantly full and overflowing. Two **Black Crakes** were prancing about the overflow at the wall, and on the far side of the dam, a **Knob-billed Duck** and **African Openbill** caught our attention.

A bit further down the track, just before entering a drier riverbed with a few pools, we discovered a gorgeous **Saddle-billed Stork** resting on the roadside. After many photos, we proceeded onto the bridge and noticed a **Bateleur** descend onto the edge of a pond and proceed to catch a sizeable fish and make quick work of it. Within seconds of it being swallowed, two **Hamerkops** and a **Tawny Eagle** rushed in, and the Tawny Eagle attempted to pilfer the fish. We carried on and soon came upon two **Kori Bustards** striding through the open savannah within a few kilometers of each other. We then headed back to camp for another late breakfast, before packing and departing southwards for Skukuza.



*One of two **Kori Bustards** seen searching for prey within close proximity of each other.*



*This **Saddle-billed Stork** relaxed on its forelegs for a significant period, offering great views.*

With the day having warmed up, we made steady progress and found a gorgeous male **Common Ostrich** very near the road, displaying its pink skin forelegs. We came across a few **African Savanna Elephant** herds on the way, and near Kumana Dam, we found some more **Saddle-billed Storks**, a **Little Bee-eater**, a **Giraffe**, several male **Greater Kudus**, a male

Nyala, and a **Chacma Baboon** troop - all feeding on Sausage Tree pods and flowers. We carried on southwards, paused for a break at Tshokwane Picnic Site, and found a **Spotted Hyena** lurking about nearby and a large family of **Banded Mongooses** scampering about. In addition, a **Mourning Collared Dove** was feeding near the restaurant.



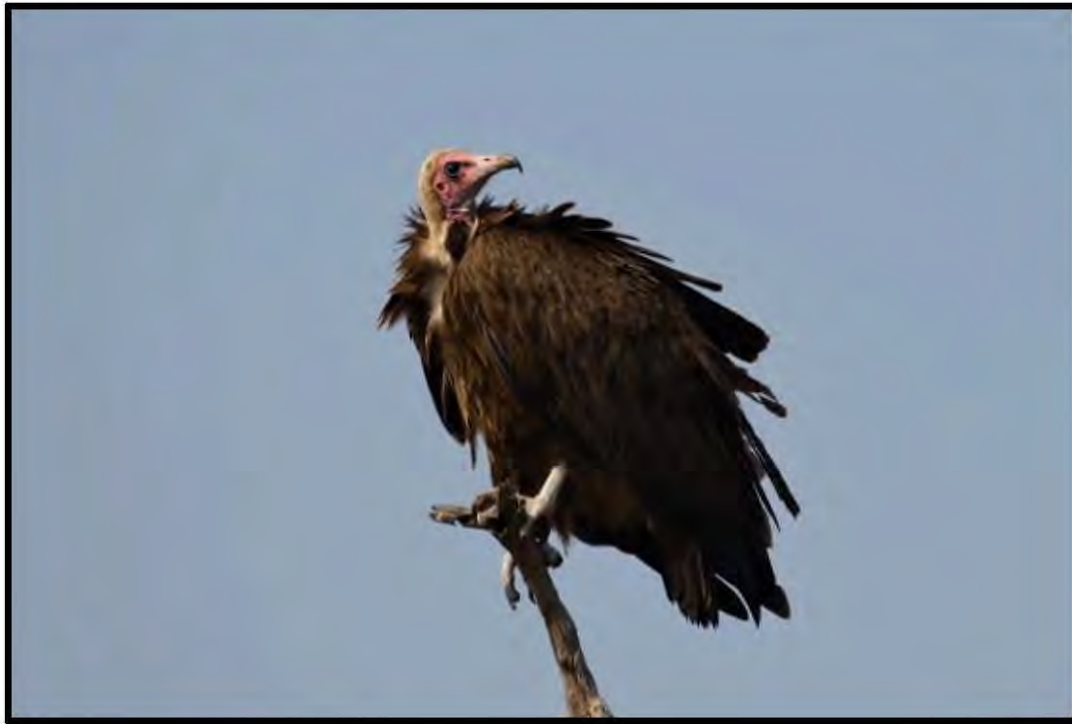
A Mourning Collared Dove searching the leaf litter at Tshokwane Picnic Site.

A flock of **Arrow-marked Babblers** also entertained us. We carried on toward Skukuza and paused to watch an old **African Savanna Elephant** bull bathe at Leeupan, while a **White-browed Scrub Robin** sang nearby. Next, we came upon the Krugertabletkop and enjoyed a statuesque **Klipspringer**, and shortly thereafter, an **Afro-Asiatic Wildcat** surprised us on the roadside. A few kilometers further along, we found a family of six **Southern Ground Hornbills** scrounging about in the recently burnt veld, and one was hammering through the shell of a **KwaZulu-Natal Hinged-back Tortoise**, which caught the attention of three of the youngsters. Next, we found a **Brown Snake Eagle** and, shortly afterward, a juvenile **Bateleur** both sitting on the roadside in the late afternoon light, which made for tremendous photos. As we made our final stretch for Skukuza Rest Camp, a large family of **Chacma Baboons** were sprawled all over the road. We headed over the Sabie River bridge and found an egret roost, which included **Great, Intermediate, and Little Egrets**, all alongside one another. We then crawled into camp just in time.

Day 6, 19th September 2023. Birding around Skukuza

Today started off with a trip along the Sabie River, and we soon added a feeding **Brubru** and a few perched vultures, including a lovely **Hooded Vulture** very nearby. After finding many more of the same bird and mammal suspects as in previous days, we proceeded onto the Sabie River bridge, and things began to hot up! We watched a **Yellow-billed Kite** picking up scraps on the bridge, and shortly thereafter, another **Honey Badger** appeared and strode across the sandy floodplain in search of fresh water – what a special moment! We then made our way along the river and first encountered a breeding **African Savanna Elephant** herd and then a

massive **African Buffalo** herd several hundred strong. We returned across the same river bridge and found a **Woolly-necked Stork** and then a **Goliath Heron** feeding on a quiet stream near the riverbank. We next headed toward Nkuhlu for breakfast, and traffic began piling up. We had arrived at a gorgeous male **Leopard** resting in the shade, and then, remarkably, no more than 200 meters further on, a female **Leopard** had also crossed the road and headed for a drink from the river. We rolled into a busy Nkuhlu and headed for a great cup of coffee and delicious breakfast.



A Hooded Vulture in the morning sun, waiting for thermals to develop.

We then headed further south and paused at a small dam to watch some entertaining **Hippopotamus**, and an amazing flock of **Yellow-billed Storks** was a big surprise. We continued westwards along the N'watimhiri Road and located a **Klipspringer** pair at Rhenosterkoppies, before returning to Skukuza for a late lunch and rest.

Our afternoon drive found us heading southwards in the hope of finding a few new birds and possibly some African Wild Dogs and White Rhinos. We first visited Transport Dam, where we picked up **African Pied Wagtail** and **Water Thick-knee** before winding our way along the Biyamithi River all the way to the Biyamithi Weir. Along the way, we found a lovely **Red-crested Korhaan** on the roadside and, shortly thereafter, an adorable **Common Dwarf Mongoose** family on the gravel road. Despite some determined searching, we were unable to add anything else new, but we did encounter a very large **African Buffalo** herd in the road, as well as a **Spotted Hyena**. We cruised back into camp to a lovely sunset.



*This **Honey Badger** strode onto the Sabie River bed and headed straight to the river for a drink.*



*A large flock of **Yellow-billed Storks** is not a common scene!*

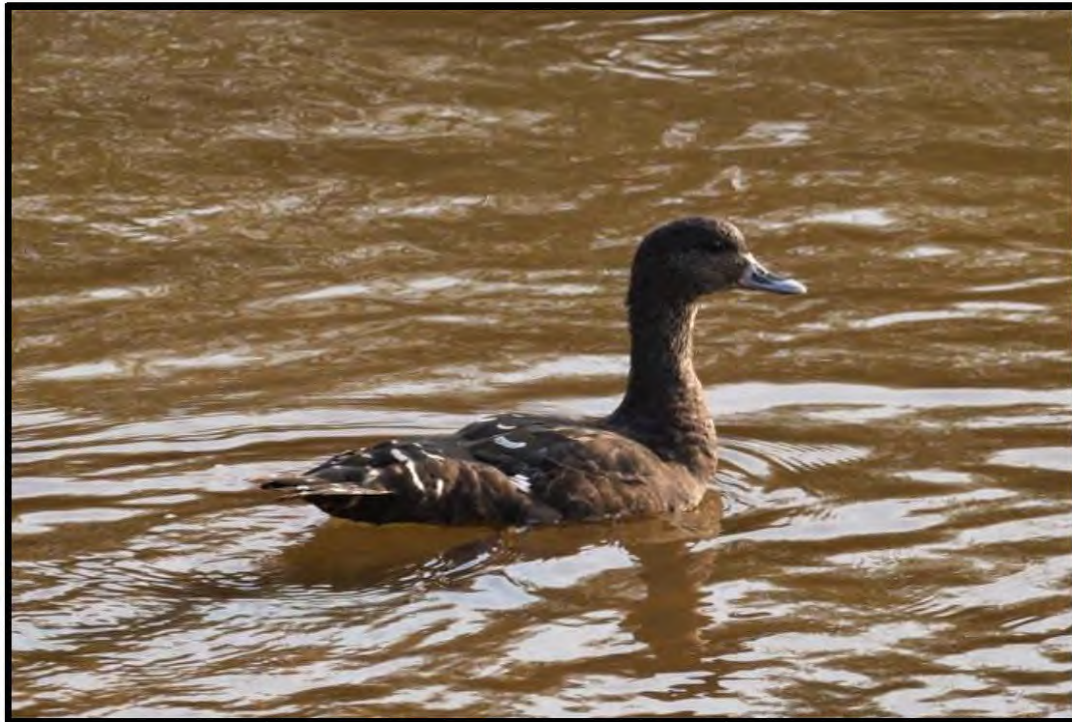


*A lone male **Red-crested Korhaan** in the afternoon glow.*

Day 7, 20th September 2023. Skukuza to Dinokeng

Our last morning in Kruger saw us first taking a bird walk around the camp for two hours during the most perfect time of the morning, and a great decision it proved to be. We quickly added a gorgeous **Purple-crested Turaco** and a pair of **White-browed Robin-Chats**, which both gave themselves away by calling. Next were a pair of **Black-collared Barbets** and a **Black-headed Oriole**. A saunter along the river walk produced **White-fronted Bee-eaters**, **Black Crakes**, a **Striated Heron**, a few **Tawny-flanked Prinias**, and a vocal pair of **Red-faced Cisticolas**. While watching a large **Nile Crocodile** make its way onto a sandbank, an **African Black Duck** flew in and landed directly in front of us before catching the drift down river. Some cackling and performing **Green Wood Hoopoes** provided some laughter and good entertainment while **Yellow-fronted Canaries** hopped about the trees overhead.

After a great coffee and light breakfast, we loaded up and headed for Lake Panic Hide. Along the route, we found a **Klaas's Cuckoo**, and just before entering the hide, a **Southern Boubou** flew across the road. Some relaxed **Nyala** welcomed us in the parking area, and we entered the hide to find **Black Crakes** feeding and vocalizing very nearby, and a pair of **Malachite Kingfishers** provided great entertainment and challenged our photography skills as they caught many tadpoles directly in front of us. An **African Fish Eagle** perched nearby and then gave us a fantastic flyby in an attempt to catch a fish barely 10 meters from us. Some **Water Thick-knees** then went crazy close by as they tried to defend their nest from a marauding **Water Monitor** hungry for their eggs. The **Village Weavers** were actively nest building, and a **Waterbuck** herd then approached the water, with three large **Nile Crocodiles** only a few meters away from them on the bank. They were very uneasy for several minutes, trying to find the courage to drink, but chose to depart without even having a drink!



*An unusually confident **African Black Duck** – a species that normally shies away from the watchful eye.*

After two hours of great entertainment and hundreds of photographs, we left to search for a few new birds at the Skukuza Golf Course and then enjoyed some brunch. It was already getting hot, so a brief visit to the dam in front of the clubhouse produced **African Jacana**, **Lesser Swamp Warbler**, and several swimming **Hippopotamus** in close attendance. After another great meal, we chose to head for the exit gate, as we still had a great distance to cover to reach our next destination, just north of Pretoria.

We headed for Paul Kruger Gate, and a few kilometres from the exit, we found a beautiful male **Leopard** lying across a large Marula tree branch in an iconic pose. What a great way to bid farewell to this amazing park!

We then climbed up the Drakensberg escarpment onto the highveld plateau, adding a **Long-crested Eagle** along the way. We made our way through Pretoria, to arrive at the 'Big 5' Dinokeng Private Game Reserve at dusk. On the drive through to the lodge, new birds included **Marico Flycatchers**, **Spotted Thick-knees**, and a few others.

Day 8, 21st September 2023. Birding Dinokeng and Zaagkuilsdrift

This morning, we arose early once more and set off at first light but paused to enjoy a pair of **Groundscraper Thrushes** before exiting the lodge property. We wound our way through the reserve to the northern gate and first encountered a lovely **Common Ostrich** family, comprising a dad, mom, and six chicks. Next up were a **Brubru** and **African Grey Hornbill**. We then heard a **Northern Black Korhaan** and **Barred Wren-Warbler**, both calling just out of view. Shortly after exiting the reserve, we added **Violet-eared Waxbills** feeding with **Green-winged Pytilias** and **Blue Waxbills**, a pair of **Red-breasted Swallows**, a

Secretarybird, a perched **Black-chested Snake Eagle** and **Wahlberg's Eagle**, another melanistic **Gabar Goshawk**, and a delightful **Pearl-spotted Owlet**.



*One of the **Groundscraper Thrushes** hopping about the lodge chalets.*



*A **Common Ostrich** family on their morning walk and dust bath.*

We then headed for the Zaagkuilsdrift road, and the temperature was rising fast. Despite this, we located a flock of **Scaly-feathered Weavers**, a **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Southern Pied**

Babblers, and several **Black-faced Waxbills**. When we reached the bridge across the main stream, we paused to check the banks and caught sight of movement below us beneath some overhanging branches, and to our great delight, a magnificent male **African Finfoot** appeared, no more than 15 meters from us – definitely the bird of the trip to that point! We watched it for a decent amount of time, but it sensed it was vulnerable and quickly went under the bridge and around the high-reeded bend in the river to disappear. As the heat really set in, things slowed down, and all we managed to add on the dry Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain was a **Common Sandpiper** aside the river. So, we returned to our lodge for some much-needed rest.



*This spectacular male **African Finfoot** was directly beneath us at the Zaagkuilsdrift River bridge – the bird of the tour!*

That afternoon, we got going again at 16h00 and decided to tour the reserve. We soon found a **Chestnut-vented Warbler**, and shortly thereafter, a family of three **White Rhinos** (father, mother, and an older calf) surprised us in the middle of the road and provided the most fantastic viewing experience in the golden light. The adult bull and cow definitely had some romantic feelings towards one another and were behaving very amorously, signaling that they would soon likely mate. A bit further on, we found a **Black-backed Jackal** running through the open woodland, which became the first of quite a few. The light was fading fast, so we headed back to camp to arrive just in time.



*These female and male **White Rhinos** were becoming very amorous as the sun began to set.*

Day 9, 22nd September 2023. Johannesburg to Cape Town

This morning, we again took a drive around Dinokeng, and once again, before exiting the camp, we found both a **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird** and **Amethyst Sunbird**. A short drive around the reserve added **Grey Penduline Tit**, **Black-chested Prinia**, and a pair of **Rufous-naped Larks** to the bird list. We then needed to head back to pack, as today we were heading back to the airport to catch our domestic flight to Cape Town. However, shortly after departing the lodge, we spotted a female adult **Cheetah** sitting in the shade of a tree alongside the road – what an awesome surprise! She then stood up and began walking a bit deeper into the bush, and to our great delight, four young cubs hopped up to follow her! This really filled our guests with great joy and appreciation.

In the early afternoon, we touched down in glorious Cape Town – an entirely different environment to what we had experienced the previous eight days! We headed straight to our accommodation near Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens for the final three nights, and then, with the last couple hours remaining, we spent the rest of the day's light searching the gardens for as much as we could find. We quickly located several regular birds, such as **Olive Thrush**, **Cape White-eye**, and **Red-winged Starling**. Then an endemics feast began – we first found many **Southern Double-collared Sunbirds**, then **Cape Bulbuls**, then **Cape Spurfowls** and **Forest Canaries**. A walk up to the protea section proved most rewarding, and we came upon several **Cape Sugarbirds** and **Orange-breasted Sunbirds**, which offered amazing views and photo opportunities, and a few fast-flying **Malachite Sunbirds**. We then went searching for the resident **Spotted Eagle-Owl** pair and quickly found it in one of its regular trees and were delighted to see the female sitting on her well-hidden nest. The sun was fast setting behind glorious Table Mountain National Park, and so we headed for home, well pleased with our day's adventures.



*This spectacular **Cheetah** mother and her three cubs gave us the most welcome surprise as we left Dinokeng.*



A memorable touring team photo in Kirstenbosch to celebrate our arrival in Cape Town – still smiling broadly near the end of the tour.

Day 10, 23rd September 2023. Birding around wider Cape Town

The weather forecast suggested that this day would grant us the only decent weather with our days remaining, and so we tried to take full advantage. We first set off for the east coast of

False Bay and popped in at Paardevlei wetlands, which turned up many good birds. As we arrived in the car park, a juvenile **African Harrier-Hawk** flew into the roof eaves straight behind us to raid some **Little Swift** nests. Several **Lesser Swamp Warblers** showed themselves, and when we reached the reeded section, a **Little Bittern** soon erupted and flew off, affording us all good views. A **Black-crowned Night Heron** provided a flyby, and many **Southern Red Bishops** and some **Cape Weavers** busily built their nests while a large assortment of waterfowl made up good numbers.

The clouds were moving in, so we set off for Rooi-Els, but before arriving, we spotted some cormorants on the rocks at Gordon's Bay main beach, and so we stopped for a look and were delighted to discover they were three **Crowned Cormorants**. We then continued and arrived at Rooi-Els to find a **Chacma Baboon** troop lounging on the road, as well as a **Cape Grey Mongoose** running along the road ahead. We then began the walk along the renowned gravel track, and the wind quickly picked up, followed by some steady rain, but we soldiered on. Soon, we found some **Cape Buntings**, a few **Orange-breasted Sunbirds**, a **Rock Kestrel** battling the winds, a **Neddicky**, and a **Yellow Bishop**. We kept going with the hopes of locating the targeted **Cape Rockjumpers**, and soon found a group of four (two males and two females) where we expected. They provided amazing views right along the roadside, and we shot off plenty of photos, before returning to the dry warmth of the vehicle.



*This male **Cape Rockjumper** and his three family members put on a great performance for us in Rooi-Els.*



The steady drizzle and wind tested us in Rooi-Els, but we soldiered on to find our targets.

We next ventured to Stony Point, where we enjoyed the multitude of **African Penguins** and a very near **African Oystercatcher**, together with many **Cape** and **Bank Cormorants**, and several **Rock Hyraxes**. The rain returned, and so we headed for a delectable seafood lunch. We attempted to locate a Victorin's Warbler, but with the now strong winds, this proved unsuccessful. So, we returned toward the Cape Peninsula and chose to pop in at Macassar estuary on the way to see what we could find. Despite the tide being high, this visit turned up **Common Ringed** and **Kittlitz's Plovers**, several **Glossy Ibises**, some **White-breasted Cormorants**, **Cape Shovelers**, some **Red-billed** and **Cape Teals**, and a surprise **Red-capped Lark** pair.

With conditions improving and a horrid forecast for the remaining two days, we decided to also head to Strandfontein Waste Water Treatment Plant. This proved a wise call, and when we arrived, we immediately searched a **Black Sparrowhawk** nesting site and were afforded great views of both the male and female. We then made for the wetlands, and soon found a large number of **Greater Flamingos**. We then continued through this large area and located **Southern Pochards**, several **Maccoa Ducks**, huge numbers of **Black-necked Grebes**, many **Lesser Flamingos** and **Fulvous Whistling Ducks**. A visit to the outer pans offered four **Bar-tailed Godwits** and a few **Curlew Sandpipers**. The light began to fade, and still a bit wet, we returned to our hotel.

Day 11, 24th September 2023. Birding around the Cape Peninsula.

We awoke to some mist and light wind, which was a pleasant surprise (having expected much worse conditions), so we quickly set off and first stopped at Cecilia Forest, where we only managed to add a **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk** amongst the tall gum trees. We next headed to the Tokai Forest in the hopes of locating some local specials. We arrived to large numbers of weekend dog walkers, and despite this, we managed to locate several **Common Chaffinches**. We searched the outer scrub and stream vegetation and managed to find some

Karoo Prinias, and some aerial feeders, such as **African Black** and **White-rumped Swifts**, **Greater Striped Swallow**, and **Rock Martin**.

Next, we headed over Constantia Nek to the west coast of the Cape Peninsula and popped into Hout Bay to see some **Afro-Australian Fur Seals** just when the wind began to rage! We hastily hopped back into the vehicle and drove the gorgeous coastline back towards the city. A brief stop at Maiden's Cove in almost gale-force winds afforded us decent views of another target, **Antarctic Tern**, which was in the close company of **Common Terns**, **Kelp Gulls**, and a **Greater Crested Tern**. We then called it a day in near impossible conditions, but fortunately, during our return to the hotel, we finally picked up **Common Buzzard** which afforded us some good views.



Antarctic Terns at Maiden's Cove between Camps Bay and Clifton.

Day 12, 25th September 2023. Birding around Cape Town

On our final morning of the tour, we braved the rain and wind and birded from the car in an effort to locate some new, as yet unseen species for the trip. We did fairly well, considering the inclement conditions. Firstly, we headed for the Milnerton Lagoon, and although it was high tide, we added **Sandwich** and **Caspian Terns**. We then headed to nearby Rietvlei Wetland Reserve in the hopes of finding a few more new birds and managed to see numerous **Great Crested Grebes**, some **Pied Avocets**, a few **White-winged Terns**, and a decent flow of **Greater Flamingos**. We were hoping also to add White-backed Duck and Cape Grassbird, which are normally not much of a challenge, but these two eluded us.

With the steady rain persisting, we headed to the mall for some final gift purchases and a hearty lunch before returning to pack and head to the airport. All in all, it was a wonderful tour that went smoothly, and we ended up finding 298 bird species and 57 mammal species. This fortunately exceeded our guests' expectations, as they had originally hoped for 275 bird species.

Sighting Highlights

- Birds – an **African Finfoot**, four **Cape Rockjumpers**, six **Antarctic Terns**, four **Bar-tailed Godwits**, **Red-faced Cisticolas** and a **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk**.
- Mammals – two **Honey Badgers**, **Cheetah** female and three cubs, **Hewitt's Red Rock Hare**, adult "White" **Lion** male with three brothers, three **White Rhinos**, two **Leopards**, **Afo-Asiatic Wildcat**.
- Reptile – **Boomslang** female mobbed by a **Black-backed Puffback**.