

KRUGER, GARDEN ROUTE AND KAROO TRIP REPORT

4 - 13 SEPTEMBER 2016

By Dylan Vasapolli



The spectacular **Knysna Turaco** was one of the many highlights.



Overview

This was a customized tour for a couple designed to take in 'The Best of South Africa' in a relatively short 10-day period. A combination of birding, general wildlife viewing, and some of the true splendor of scenic South Africa allowed us to achieve just that.

The tour began in the metropolis of Johannesburg, from where we transferred over the Drakensberg escarpment towards the Lowveld, harboring the famous Kruger National Park. We traveled through the southern reaches of the park before flying onwards to the incredibly scenic Garden Route, where we based ourselves for a few days, undertaking day trips through the region. Following our time on the Garden Route we headed inland into the mighty Great Karoo for a few nights before continuing onwards to Cape Town, where the tour ended.

Despite this not being a 'strict' birding tour, rather more of a 'general' tour taking in birding, wildlife viewing, scenery, and the general beauty of South Africa, we did successfully manage to get a number of highly sought-after species of birds (and mammals) and ended with a very respectable 286 birds seen, with an additional six species being heard, along with 41 mammal species.

Itinerary

| Date | Location | Overnight |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 4 September 2016 | Dullstroom, Kruger National Park | Satara, Kruger National Park |
| 5 September 2016 | Kruger National Park | Satara, Kruger National Park |
| 6 September 2016 | Kruger National Park | Skukuza, Kruger National Park |
| 7 September 2016 | Kruger National Park | Skukuza, Kruger National Park |
| 8 September 2016 | Kruger National Park | Wilderness |
| 9 September 2016 | Knysna, Wilderness | Wilderness |
| 10 September 2016 | Victoria Bay, Wilderness | Wilderness |
| 11 September 2016 | Wilderness, Prince Albert | Karoo National Park |
| 12 September 2016 | Karoo National Park | Karoo National Park |
| 13 September 2016 | Beaufort West | - |

Day 1, September 4. Johannesburg to Kruger

After breakfast I met with Mike and Gabi, fresh from their long-haul journey to South Africa, and we loaded the car and set off towards our ultimate destination for the day, the Kruger National Park – however, via some birding in the Dullstroom region first. We arrived there in good time despite the few avian distractions we had en route, namely **Greater Flamingo**, **Long-crested Eagle**, **Black Sparrowhawk**, and **Squacco Heron**, and immediately headed onto the De Berg Road. Bird activity had slowed down quite a bit already, but we managed to add a number of species throughout the length of the road. The vast grasslands and adjacent bushy areas produced sightings of **Cape Canary**, **Wing-snapping Cisticola**, **Cape Longclaw**, **Long-tailed Widowbird**, **Pied Starling**, **Southern Masked Weaver**, **Drakensberg Prinia**, and **African Stonechat**, among others. The rocky areas held **Long-billed Pipit**, **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, **Mountain Wheatear**, and **Rock Kestrel**, while some eyes to the sky produced a small group of **Cape Vultures**, and the dams and surrounds held **Brown-throated Martin**, **Yellow-billed Duck**, **Spur-winged Goose**, **Little Grebe**, **Reed Cormorant**, **African Wattled** and **Blacksmith Lapwings**, **Common Moorhen**, **Levaillant's Cisticola**, and an **African Snipe** that disappeared into the long grass shortly



where we stopped for lunch.

after we found it. Numbers of the grass-loving blesbok were seen on the mammalian side. Before long our time here had run out and we had to make our way onward to Lydenburg,

Following a good lunch we had to make our way to Kruger and arrived with just enough time for us to make it to the Satara Rest Camp before closing, while still able to enjoy a number of sightings on the way. On the birding side we enjoyed some of the larger species, such as Brown Snake and Tawny Eagles, along with some of the more charismatic bushveld species, such as Grey Go-away-bird, Burchell's Starling, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Magpie Shrike, Fork-tailed Drongo, Purple Roller, both Southern Red-billed and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, and Crested Francolin. The mammals were also excellent, and we enjoyed a great introduction into the mammals of the bushveld region of southern Africa. Not long after getting into the park proper we were blocked by a large heard of African buffalos slowly crossing the road. We enjoyed some good looks at them (along with their accompanying Red-billed Oxpeckers) until they moved off. Greater kudu also proved popular with their very elegant structure, beautiful stripes, and extravagant horns. Our first giraffe afforded good views as it crossed the road and disappeared into the surrounding thick brush. Numbers of impala, blue wildebeest, and plains zebra were also present, and we came across a few of the dainty steenbok and some of the strange common warthog. After checking in we settled down for a hearty dinner, ready for an early start the next day.



Red-billed Oxpecker

Day 2, September 5. Kruger National Park

We were up nice and early as Mike and Gabi headed off on a morning walk. The morning walks from Satara are normally quite productive, and, although I didn't join them, they came back with smiles on their faces – usually a good sign. They enjoyed a good walk, with a lion sighting being one of the main highlights. Encountering these regal cats while on foot is always a thrill! Birding is not the main focus on these walks and is usually fairly slow; however, highlights for them were **Giant Kingfisher**, **Little Bee-eater**, **Cardinal Woodpecker**, **Amethyst Sunbird**, and a brief view of **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl**. After 'refueling' at camp we set off on a midday game drive, trying to maximize our time in the park before we returned to camp in time for a sunset drive. Despite it being rather warm, we



enjoyed a good drive with a number of exciting finds. In Kruger the larger raptors seldom disappoint, and we were treated to good views of **Hooded** and **White-backed Vultures** at a hippo carcass, while we also enjoyed aerial views of **Lappet-faced Vulture**, **Bateleur**, and **Wahlberg's Eagle**. A stop at the Sweni Hide was highly rewarding – sporting some of the only water in the otherwise very parched landscape – and we spent some time here, observing the wealth of life and activity. **Yellow-billed Stork**, **Grey Heron**, and **Great** and **Little Egrets**, together with **Water Thick-knee**, lined the water's edge, while a pair of **Black Crakes** was busily feeding a tiny chick on the edge of some vegetation. Noisy **Three-banded Plovers** worked the muddy verges, and **Wire-tailed Swallows** flicked rapidly back and forth over the water.

The surrounding vegetation also produced a few good birds, and highlights were Brownheaded Parrot, Orange-breasted Bushshrike, Black-headed Oriole, Arrow-marked Babbler, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Brubru, and Emerald-spotted Wood Dove. Mammals were also well represented with numbers of African elephants frequenting the water. These intelligent mammals are always a joy to watch, and we spent some time observing their interactions and enjoying some playfulness between individuals. A number of hippos were also present in the water; however, our views were limited to their heads and backs when they resurfaced to breathe. A number of Nile crocodiles were present both in the water and lining the edges. After leaving behind the wealth of activity at the hide we transferred back to camp, arriving in time for the sunset drive. On the way back we were stopped by brilliant sightings of the stunning Lilac-breasted Roller, along with Doublebanded Sandgrouse, African Grey Hornbill, and the neat Red-breasted Swallow. A pair of **Pearl-spotted Owlets** greeted us beautifully when we checked back into the camp. After Mike and Gabi returned from the sunset drive they regaled me with their sightings during the rather successful drive, including a number of lions and a leopard with a kill (!) – although the sighting was somewhat obscured – as well as spotted hyena, African civet, black-backed jackal, and honey badger.

Day 3, September 6. Kruger National Park

We were up early and headed off on a morning drive as soon as the gates opened. We had a few hours until we had to be back to check out and make our way onward to Skukuza Camp. The morning was rather successful, and we enjoyed a number of species, including an incredible bout of activity at one point. We stopped alongside a dam and the nearby trees were alive with species such as **Southern Black Tit**, **Long-billed Crombec**, **Kurrichane Thrush**, **White-browed Scrub Robin**, **Burnt-necked Eremomela**, **Yellow-breasted Apalis**, **Chinspot Batis**, the rather snazzy **Crested Barbet**, and good looks at both **Marico** and **White-bellied Sunbirds**. The dam also gave us the unique **Hamerkop**, and while we were enjoying this, a low-flying **Martial Eagle** graced us with an excellent show. A quick pre-breakfast stop also gave us a pair of roosting **African Scops Owls**. On the return journey a few African buffalos close to the road presented us with a few **Yellow-billed Oxpeckers**, but they sadly didn't hang around long. A large herd of African elephants gave us great views crossing the road near to us, and we also enjoyed a few 'different' mammals to the normal array – waterbuck, bushbuck, Smith's bush squirrel, and slender mongoose.

After breakfast back at Satara we started the drive to Skukuza. The land throughout the journey was incredibly dry and the birding a little slow, but we were able to enjoy the rather beautiful White-headed Vulture along with Little Bee-eater, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Greater Blue-eared Starling, African Fish Eagle, and Brown-headed Parrot. Mammals were also a little on the slow side, but we came across a few lions along with a number of common dwarf mongooses and a sable antelope that disappeared quite rapidly into the woodland. We had a quick break after checking into Skukuza and then headed out on a short



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drive before the gates closed. The Sabie River was kind and gave us **Woolly-necked Stork**, Goliath Heron, African Jacana, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Pied Kingfisher, and African Pied Wagtail, among others. We were also able to enjoy a few new mammals, including nyala and some great views of a massive troop of chacma baboons. We settled down and enjoyed our first traditional 'braai' for the evening. After dinner we set out to find the resident thick-tailed greater galagos around camp and were able to get some great views.



Arguably the most attractive vulture within southern Africa, White-headed Vulture

Day 4, September 7. Kruger National Park

We set off on a morning drive down to Lower Sabie, where we had a late breakfast before returning back to Skukuza for a bit of down time, after which Mike and Gabi would join the sunset drive for the evening. The river throughout the morning was kind to us, and we enjoyed a wealth of species. A small group of White-faced Whistling Ducks stood out from the numerous Egyptian Geese, while the open water held Yellow-billed, Woolly-necked, and the sought-after Saddle-billed Storks, along with Hamerkop, African Spoonbill, Great Egret, African Jacana, White-crowned Lapwing, and Black-winged Stilt. The vegetation surrounding the river contributed equally, if not a bit more, with sightings of White-throated Robin-Chat, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, **Yellow-fronted** Canary, **Green-backed** Camaroptera, Purple-crested Turaco, Mosque Swallows, Sombre Greenbul, Blackbacked Puffback, Black-collared Barbet, Bearded Woodpecker, and Burchell's Coucal. We enjoyed another good morning for raptors and managed to add Dark Chanting Goshawk and Yellow-billed Kite to the 'normal' array of vultures and eagles. Just before arriving at Lower Sabie we ran into a family group of Southern Ground Hornbills. Mammals were also good along the river, and we enjoyed a group of young male lions, along with a great sighting of two spotted hyenas, and the usual array of impala, blue wildebeest,



waterbuck, common duiker, African buffalo, nyala, bushbuck, greater kudu, giraffe, common warthog, chacma baboon, vervet monkey, and African elephant.

We arrived at Lower Sabie a little later than originally planned and settled in for more of a brunch/early lunch, which we enjoyed with a few close-feeding hippos. A major traffic jam on the way back to Skukuza revealed a leopard lying close to the road, sadly, horribly obscured by bushes with only a small gap with a clear view. We waited a while trying to work our way into a better position but didn't seem to accomplish too much and left the elegant cat be. Taking a back road to Skukuza during the heat of the day didn't produce too much, but we did enjoyed a great sighting of **Red-crested Korhaan**, along with another group of **Southern Ground Hornbills**, **African Hoopoe**, and some views of **African Green Pigeon** and **Red-faced Mousebird** that left a bit to be desired. We took a short time off until the late afternoon, when Mike and Gabi got on their sunset drive. They were brimming with a wide smile after they returned – and they had indeed seen our only missing member of the 'Big 5', white rhino. They enjoyed a number of them on the drive, which was somewhat of a relief as we had inexplicably somehow not seen one throughout the trip so far. Other mammals seen were white-tailed mongoose, African civet, and klipspringer. On the birding side **Fiery-necked Nightjar** was the main highlight.



Southern Ground Hornbill

Day 5, September 8. Kruger National Park to Wilderness

We began our last morning in the park excitedly looking for any species we'd not seen up until now and managed to find a group of the tiny **Grey Penduline Tits** early on. These small birds, together with the closely related Cape Penduline Tit, are the smallest species in South Africa, weighing in at around 8 – 10 grams. A pair of **Coqui Francolins** provided excellent views as they slowly crossed the road right in front of us. Other highlights were **Marabou Stork**, **Southern Black Flycatcher**, **Brubru**, **Speckled** and **Red-faced Mousebirds**, some rather distant **White-fronted Bee-eaters**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Brown-headed Parrot**, and **Marico Sunbird**. Turning down a new road we quickly spotted a male lion striding down the road some way ahead of us. As we caught up we noticed there were two males, one resplendent in blood all over his face and legs – evidence of a recent kill. We enjoyed well over ten minutes with these incredible cats as they walked along the edge of the road, luckily



with very few cars at the sighting. Eventually a third male appeared out of the trees, and we finally left the cats be while they were still walking down the road. We couldn't have asked for a better sighting to round up our time in the park. After a good breakfast back in Skukuza we packed our things and made our way onwards to the Kruger Mpumalanga Airport, from where we flew to George via Johannesburg. Just before leaving camp we found a lovely **Bearded Scrub Robin**, and as we exited the park we saw a stunning **African Harrier-Hawk**. Before long we arrived at the airport and awaited our flights. Both flights were uneventful, although a massive queue getting into the departure lounge at Johannesburg caused a few grey hairs, and when we arrived at George it was with some relief that we stepped off the rather 'compact' flight. We arrived at the glorious Kingfisher Country House in Wilderness just before it got dark and enjoyed a good dinner in this seaside village.



The stunning African Harrier-Hawk

Day 6, September 9. The Garden Route

We began the morning by birding around the lodge grounds until breakfast. This proved excellent, and we were well rewarded with many of the specials of this area. Red-necked **Spurfowl** frequented the more open, grassy parts of this otherwise forested area and gave us good views before they scuttled back into cover, while these open areas were also frequented by Swee Waxbill, Forest Canary, Streaky-headed Seedeater, both Southern and Greater Double-collared Sunbirds, Cardinal Woodpecker, Klaas's Cuckoo, African Dusky Flycatcher, and a number of the exquisite Knysna Turacos feeding on an open lawn. We had gotten off to a splendid start this morning, and it only continued when a Knysna Woodpecker suddenly released a single note. In no time at all we were looking at a stunning specimen just above our heads. The forest proper was just as good, and we were rewarded early on with Chorister Robin-Chat, White-starred Robin, Olive Thrush, Bar-throated Apalis, Terrestrial Brownbul, and Cape Batis. Just when we thought it couldn't get better, we heard the loud call of Knysna Warbler. This skulker can sometimes present a serious challenge to lay one's eyes on while it happily calls from an unseen location. Fortunately we didn't have this problem, and we were enjoying great views of this rather drab special within a minute. After we had soaked up our views an Olive Bushshrike started calling, we quickly aligned ourselves in a good position, and a brief burst of playback put us eye to eye with the



bird. Just before having to head back for breakfast we heard the eerie hooting of **Buff-spotted** Flufftail coming from a dense section of the forested area. Although we had a brilliant morning, it was just impossible to get anywhere near this bird to try for it. We headed through to the much-anticipated breakfast, as Kingfisher Country House is famous for its bird feeders directly adjacent to the breakfast table, where one can enjoy the views of many of the local forest species in their full splendor feeding an arm's length away. It sure didn't disappoint, and we were reveling in the many **Knysna Turacos** bouncing around the feeders, chasing each other, while the dainty Swee and Common Waxbills battled with Forest Canaries for the small seeds. Southern Boubou, Terrestrial Brownbul, Chorister Robin-Chat, Cape Bulbul, Fork-tailed Drongo, Cape Weaver, Yellow Bishop, Olive Thrush, and the sought-after Lemon Dove all made passes through the feeders during the course of breakfast, while the nectar feeder brought in Amethyst, Southern Double-collared, Greater Double-collared, and Grey Sunbirds as well.



The stunning Swee Waxbills showed well at the bird feeders.

Following this excellent start to the morning we transferred to Knysna and spent some time enjoying the splendor of the Knysna Heads. A quick sea watch from here produced Shy Albatross, White-chinned Petrel, and Cape Gannet, along with many Cape and Whitebreasted Cormorants, Kelp Gulls, and an African Oystercatcher scampering around on the rocks on the edge of the coast. A quick search of the Woodbourne Pan gave us a few freshwater species, including Cape Teal, Cape Shoveler, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, and Common Greenshank. Following a good lunch at the waterfront we transferred slowly back to Wilderness, visiting a few of the lakes on the way. Highlights of the lakes were numbers of Southern Pochards, along with Great Crested Grebe, African Swamphen, Greater Flamingo, African Marsh Harrier, Jackal Buzzard, Caspian Tern, Malachite and Pied Kingfishers, Brown-throated Martin, Cape Wagtail, and a vocal Little Rush Warbler that just refused to show. A late afternoon walk on the Half-collared Kingfisher trail, in the Wilderness section of the Garden Route National Park, was rather on the slow side. We enjoyed a vocal family of Peregrine Falcons on the cliff face above the river, while the scarce Collared Sunbird showed rather poorly, sadly - this species is right on the western edge of its range here and has only just recently moved into this area. The trail,



fortunately, delivered its namesake, and we enjoyed good looks at the highly prized **Half-collared Kingfisher**. This difficult species is nowhere easy or guaranteed and must surely rank as the, or one of the, most difficult kingfishers to get within southern Africa, and it is always a joy to come across – not to even mention its exquisite beauty! Its larger cousin, the **Giant Kingfisher**, was also present on the river, calling noisily at regular intervals. A good end to an excellent day, with a total of just shy of 100 species!

Day 7, September 10. The Garden Route

We began the morning with a pre-breakfast walk along the Half-collared Kingfisher trail where we ended off yesterday, hunting some of our remaining forest specials. Our walk was highly successful, and although we ran out of time too quickly, sadly, we enjoyed a number of our targets. We managed to get some much better views of presumably the same Collared Sunbirds as the previous day, as they were in the same area, until a small bird popped up, revealing a Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler. We enjoyed repeat views of both Halfcollared and Giant Kingfishers along the river, and then a Narina Trogon started calling – one of our main targets. Within no time we had located the bird and enjoyed great views of a stunning male trogon as it called and moved within the immediate area. After we had soaked up the trogon we enjoyed good looks at a Grev Cuckooshrike. As we continued on the trail we had a flyby of Knysna Woodpecker, before a Scaly-throated Honeyguide started up. We quickly backtracked and tried a bit of playback to bring this species in, as the surrounding mountain and forest gave us no room to see the bird at all. A very inquisitive Scaly-throated Honeyguide flew in to check us out almost immediately and presented us with excellent views, as it peered at us cautiously on a branch just above our heads. An African Olive Pigeon followed soon after, and we unsuccessfully managed to get onto at least two different vocalizing Blue-mantled Crested Flycatchers; sadly, we had only poor views of them flitting very quickly through some thickets. A Black-headed Oriole popped up right in front of us and gave us truly brilliant views before we returned to the car and headed back for breakfast. We also marveled at the number of Knysna Warblers heard along the length of the trail throughout the morning.

The breakfast spectacle was just as excellent as on the previous day, and shortly after breakfast we headed to nearby Victoria Bay. Here we bumped into an active surfing competition and spent a bit of time watching and enjoying the action along with trying to figure out how the sport/competition actually worked. It was a good break, and we managed to pick up a Cape Rock Thrush as a welcome addition. We then transferred back to Wilderness and had a walk on the beach there, along with trying our luck at another sea watch - which sadly didn't produce anything. We soon headed out onto the boardwalk flanking the lagoon/river that runs through Wilderness and watched as the weather progressively got worse with a storm brewing. The walk didn't produce much, but we did enjoy views of Lesser Swamp Warbler. Following a good lunch in Wilderness we transferred inland to the Woodville Forest, where we'd visit the 'Big Tree', and hopefully enjoy a few forest species as an aside. The afternoon was on the quiet side again, with the weather keeping bird activity to a minimum. We persisted along the forest trail, though, and enjoyed the likes of Grey Cuckooshrike, Green Wood Hoopoe, Knysna Turaco, Yellowthroated Woodland Warbler, Chorister Robin-Chat, and a few extremely skittish Whitestarred Robins, while a flock of noisy African Black Swifts wheeled about high overhead. We also tracked down another Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher and enjoyed some better views than this morning, but the views still left a bit to be desired. A late evening walk back at the lodge produced Purple Heron, some good views of Little Rush Warbler, and an excellent Jackal Buzzard sighting.





The incredible Narina Trogon

Day 8, September 11. Wilderness to the Karoo

We began our last morning on the Garden Route looking for our only outstanding target – Olive Woodpecker. We had rather inexplicably somehow managed to miss this normally common species down here. We got off to a good start with us hearing a bird call briefly early on, but we battled to get views. We had it rapidly fly in to a large tree very close to us, but try as we might we just couldn't get views, aside from it flying. Eventually we moved along, and this soon paid off with us managing to get a pair of birds perched beautifully in the sun on an exposed branch above the canopy. A small group of Black Saw-wings flitted over the surrounding forest as well. Otherwise we enjoyed a very similar suite of species to the previous days and also managed to get a better view of a Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher before having to call it quits and head back for breakfast.

After our last breakfast with all of the local birds happily feeding away right next to us we set off for our ultimate destination, the Karoo National Park, via the incredibly scenic Swartberg Pass. A Forest Buzzard perched along the roadside was the only bird of interest seen until we arrived on the outskirts of the Swartberg Pass, where we started picking up a few different species. Before we got onto the pass proper we enjoyed the likes of Cape Sparrow and Karoo Scrub Robin, along with a stunning Martial Eagle. Birding was quite good as we worked our way up the Pass, despite a large fire having moved through the area. The denser stands of fynbos produced Cape Grassbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, and Cape Sugarbird, along with Streaky-headed Seedeater and the sought-after Protea Canary – the latter gave us good, close views! The rockier areas near the top of the pass produced the exquisite Cape Rockjumper along with Cape Bunting and Verreaux's Eagle. Just when we had given up on it, a Victorin's Warbler started up, and we headed toward it, to find it completely in the open, moving between a few very open shrubs directly on the road edge. We spent probably about ten minutes with it before eventually leaving the bird where it was – we couldn't have asked for better or more prolonged views of this skulker, which normally



presents only the briefest of views. Working our way down the other side of the pass we enjoyed the incredible contortions of the rocks, with the birding being on the slow side. We enjoyed repeat views of **Cape Rockjumper** as we stopped at a viewpoint and found a stunning male hopping on the adjacent ground, while, on the mammalian side, a few rock hyraxes glared at us from the rocks on the road verge,.

Following lunch in Prince Albert we headed over to enjoy the splendor of Meiringspoort before covering the last stretch to the Karoo National Park. We enjoyed a few sightings on the way, including better views of Verreaux's Eagle along with Black Stork, Alpine Swift, Chestnut-vented Warbler, Pied Starling, and a large group of Ludwig's Bustards that flushed from the roadside, giving us good in-flight views. We arrived at the park in the late afternoon and headed to the main camp to check in, from where we'd take it easy for the last bit of the afternoon. The short drive to the camp gave us our first wild Common Ostriches along with further views of Verreaux's Eagles, White-backed Mousebird, Pririt Batis, Karoo Long-billed Lark, Grey-backed Cisticola, and White-throated Canary on the birding side, while we were treated with grey rhebok, greater kudu, and Cape mountain zebra on the mammalian side.



The exceptional view of Victorin's Warbler

Day 9, September 12. Karoo National Park.

Mike and I met for an early morning walk around the camp before the gates opened. Although it was barely light when we started, along with it being extremely cold, we had a good walk and enjoyed great views of Fairy Flycatcher, South African Shelduck, Karoo Thrush, Mountain Wheatear, Red-winged Starling, Rock Martin, White-backed Mousebird, Bokmakierie, Pririt Batis, and Chestnut-vented Warbler. We headed for the Lammertjiesleegte Loop just as the gates opened and worked the plains for a few hours before returning for breakfast. Although the birding was a bit slow, we had great looks at many Karoo Long-billed Larks along with the dainty Rufous-eared Warbler, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Ant-eating and Karoo Chats, Pale-winged Starling, Booted Eagle, and Pale Chanting Goshawk. The picnic site located along the loop was good, and we enjoyed excellent views of Acacia Pied Barbet, Namaqua Warbler, Malachite Sunbird, and further looks at Fairy Flycatcher. We also had a number of mammals, and in addition to



the species seen yesterday evening we enjoyed our first gemsbok along with red hartebeest. After breakfast we stocked up on a few supplies for lunch and headed out to explore the rest of the reserve, breaking for lunch at one of the rest stops.

The day was pretty slow going for the most part, but by the time we got back to camp in the afternoon we had racked up a number of the main specials for the park. African Rock Pipit tormented us early on, with the bird just being heard, and, while we heard this species a number of times throughout the day, we just couldn't get any visuals on them. We did, however, enjoy looks at Lark-like Bunting, Dusky Sunbird, Sickle-winged and Familiar Chats, Layard's Warbler, Red-faced Mousebird, Grey Tit, Bokmakierie, Pririt Batis, and Cardinal Woodpecker, among others. We also had a Secretarybird fly over the plains and disappear into the big sky, while at the last point, just as we had practically given up on them, a pair of Karoo Korhaans strode across the road and gave us rather incredible views. Mammals were also on the slow side, but we added klipspringer and had to be content with a very brief view of a bat-eared fox before it moved out of sight, along with our first springboks and the usual array of Cape mountain zebra, gemsbok, greater kudu, and red hartebeest. We took a little walk around the camp in the late afternoon and were rewarded with Southern Tchagra, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, and African Red-eyed Bulbul as new species for our list. We rounded off the day, the last dinner, and the trip overall with another traditional South African braai while listening to black-backed jackal and Spotted **Thick-knee** calling into the night.



The endemic Karoo Korhaan

Day 10, September 13. Karoo National Park

We woke on the last day of the trip and started with another walk around the camp until the camps gates opened, where we'd head out and explore the open plains. The walk produced much the same as yesterday, including the likes of **Southern Red Bishop**, **Fiscal Flycatcher**, **Lesser Swamp Warbler**, and **Common Moorhen**. The drive after the walk was on the slow



side; however, we managed to enjoy the normal array of Karoo birds such as **Rufous-eared** and **Namaqua Warblers**, **Karoo Long-billed Lark**, **Fairy Flycatcher**, **Karoo Scrub Robin**, **Dusky Sunbird**, **Acacia Pied Barbet**, and **Karoo Chat**, while we picked up **Pale Chanting Goshawk** in virtually the same perch as the previous day and managed to add **Ground Woodpecker** to the list. Upon arrival back at the camp a **Namaqua Sandgrouse** flew overhead calling, but we just couldn't get onto it. After checking out we made a beeline for a mountainous spot just outside Beaufort West, a short drive away, where we'd try for some of the outstanding Karoo specials.

Although it was late morning, the bird activity was still pretty good, and we started off well, finally managing to lay our eyes on one of the pesky **African Rock Pipits**. We enjoyed good looks at **Booted Eagle** and **Rock Kestrel** flying overhead, and it wasn't long before we picked up on the sharp notes of **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler**. We soon had our eyes on it and enjoyed the bird as it moved along a rocky ridge and even perched atop some bushes not far from us. This is another species that can be incredibly difficult to pin down and is always a good one to catch up with. Just before calling it here we picked up **Short-toed Rock Thrush**, which presented us with good scope views.

We had a long drive back to Cape Town and detoured via Touws River and Ceres to enjoy some of the spectacular mountain passes of the Cederberg Range before arriving at Cape Town Airport. Birding was a little slow on the drive, although we did add **Blue Crane** to the list despite the rather poor flyby we had while on the highway. We arrived at the airport in the early evening, said goodbye to Mike and Gabi, and wished them well for the rest of their trip here – they would continue around the Western Cape for the next few days.



The sought-after Cinnamon-breasted Warbler

I would just like to thank Mike and Gabi for the good times shared and the good fun and brilliant sightings we had! Despite the short nature of the trip we covered a wide variety of habitats, as is evident by the high number of both bird and mammal species seen. On top of the high diversity we also successfully managed to get many of the region's most prized specials and enjoyed excellent looks at virtually all of them. One of the highlights that will stick with all of us was the incredible and prolonged views of the lions we had on our last morning in Kruger.



KRUGER, GARDEN ROUTE AND KAROO BIRD LIST SEPTEMBER 2016

Bold = country endemic

Status: NT = Near-threatened, VU = Vulnerable, EN = Endangered, CR = Critically Endangered

| Common Name (IOC 6.4) | Scientific Name (IOC 6.4) | Trip |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|------|
| | STRUTHIONIFORNES | |
| Ostriches | Struthionidae | |
| Common Ostrich | Struthio camelus | 1 |
| | ANSERIFORMES | |
| Ducks, Geese and Swans | <u>Anatidae</u> | |
| White-faced Whistling Duck | Dendrocygna viduata | 1 |
| Spur-winged Goose | Plectropterus gambensis | 1 |
| Egyptian Goose | Alopochen aegyptiaca | 1 |
| South African Shelduck | Tadorna cana | 1 |
| Cape Teal | Anas capensis | 1 |
| Yellow-billed Duck | Anas undulata | 1 |
| Cape Shoveler | Anas smithii | 1 |
| Southern Pochard | Netta erythrophthalma | 1 |
| | GALLIFORMES | |
| <u>Guineafowl</u> | <u>Numididae</u> | |
| Helmeted Guineafowl | Numida meleagris | 1 |
| Pheasants and allies | Phasianidae | |
| Coqui Francolin | Peliperdix coqui | 1 |
| Crested Francolin | Dendroperdix sephaena | 1 |
| Natal Spurfowl | Pternistis natalensis | 1 |
| Red-necked Spurfowl | Pternistis afer | 1 |
| Swainson's Spurfowl | Pternistis swainsonii | 1 |
| | PROCELLARIIFORMES | |
| Albatrosses | <u>Diomedeidae</u> | |
| Shy Albatross | Thalassarche cauta | 1 |
| Petrels, Shearwaters | <u>Procellariidae</u> | |
| White-chinned Petrel - VU | Procellaria aequinoctialis | 1 |
| | PODICIPEDIFORMES | |
| Grebes | <u>Podicipedidae</u> | |
| Little Grebe | Tachybaptus ruficollis | 1 |
| Great Crested Grebe | Podiceps cristatus | 1 |
| | PHOENICOPTERIFORMES | |
| <u>Flamingos</u> | Phoenicopteridae | |
| Greater Flamingo | Phoenicopterus roseus | 1 |
| 3 | CICONIIFORMES | |
| <u>Storks</u> | <u>Ciconiidae</u> | |



| Yellow-billed Stork | Mycteria ibis | 1 |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Black Stork | Ciconia nigra | 1 |
| Woolly-necked Stork - VU | Ciconia episcopus | 1 |
| Saddle-billed Stork | Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis | 1 |
| Marabou Stork | Leptoptilos crumenifer | 1 |
| | PELECANIFORMES | |
| Ibises, Spoonbills | <u>Threskiornithidae</u> | |
| African Sacred Ibis | Threskiornis aethiopicus | 1 |
| Hadada Ibis | Bostrychia hagedash | 1 |
| African Spoonbill | Platalea alba | 1 |
| Herons, Bitterns | Ardeidae | |
| Squacco Heron | Ardeola ralloides | 1 |
| Western Cattle Egret | Bubulcus ibis | 1 |
| Grey Heron | Ardea cinerea | 1 |
| Black-headed Heron | Ardea melanocephala | 1 |
| Goliath Heron | Ardea goliath | 1 |
| Purple Heron | Ardea purpurea | 1 |
| Great Egret | Ardea alba | 1 |
| Little Egret | Egretta garzetta | 1 |
| Black Heron | Egretta ardesiaca | 1 |
| Hamerkop | Scopidae | |
| Hamerkop | Scopus umbretta | 1 |
| | SULIFORMES | |
| Gannets, Boobies | <u>Sulidae</u> | |
| Cape Gannet - VU | Morus capensis | 1 |
| Cormorants, Shags | Phalacrocoracidae | |
| Reed Cormorant | Microcarbo africanus | 1 |
| White-breasted Cormorant | Phalacrocorax lucidus | 1 |
| Cape Cormorant - EN | Phalacrocorax capensis | 1 |
| Anhingas, Darters | Anhingidae | |
| African Darter | Anhinga rufa | 1 |
| | ACCIPITRIFORMES | |
| Secretarybird | <u>Sagittariidae</u> | |
| Secretarybird - VU | Sagittarius serpentarius | 1 |
| Kites, Hawks and Eagles | <u>Accipitridae</u> | |
| Black-winged Kite | Elanus caeruleus | 1 |
| African Harrier-Hawk | Polyboroides typus | 1 |
| Hooded Vulture - CR | Necrosyrtes monachus | 1 |
| White-backed Vulture - CR | Gyps africanus | 1 |
| Cape Vulture - EN | Gyps coprotheres | 1 |
| White-headed Vulture - CR | Trigonoceps occipitalis | 1 |
| | Trigonoceps occipitatis | - |









1

1

1

Tockus leucomelas

Lophoceros nasutus

Tricholaema leucomelas

PICIFORMES

Lybiidae

Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill

African Grey Hornbill

African Barbets

Acacia Pied Barbet



Oriolidae

Figbirds, Orioles



| Vallayy throated Woodland Worklan | Phyllogopus wifiognilla | 1 |
|--|--|---|
| Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler Reed Warblers and allies | Phylloscopus ruficapilla Acrocephalidae | 1 |
| Lesser Swamp Warbler | | 1 |
| * | Acrocephalus gracilirostris | 1 |
| Grassbirds and allies | <u>Locustellidae</u> | 1 |
| Little Rush Warbler | Bradypterus baboecala | 1 |
| Knysna Warbler - VU | Bradypterus sylvaticus | 1 |
| Cisticolas and allies | <u>Cisticolidae</u> | 1 |
| Rattling Cisticola | Cisticola chiniana | 1 |
| Grey-backed Cisticola | Cisticola subruficapilla | 1 |
| Levaillant's Cisticola | Cisticola tinniens | 1 |
| Neddicky | Cisticola fulvicapilla | H |
| Wing-snapping Cisticola | Cisticola ayresii | 1 |
| Tawny-flanked Prinia | Prinia subflava | 1 |
| Karoo Prinia | Prinia maculosa | 1 |
| Drakensberg Prinia | Prinia hypoxantha | 1 |
| Namaqua Warbler | Phragmacia substriata | 1 |
| Bar-throated Apalis | Apalis thoracica | 1 |
| Yellow-breasted Apalis | Apalis flavida | 1 |
| Rufous-eared Warbler | Malcorus pectoralis | 1 |
| Green-backed Camaroptera | Camaroptera brachyura | 1 |
| Cinnamon-breasted Warbler | Euryptila subcinnamomea | 1 |
| Yellow-bellied Eremomela | Eremomela icteropygialis | 1 |
| Burnt-necked Eremomela | Eremomela usticollis | 1 |
| Laughingthrushes | <u>Leiothrichidae</u> | |
| Arrow-marked Babbler | Turdoides jardineii | 1 |
| Sylviid Babblers | Sylviidae | |
| Chestnut-vented Warbler | Sylvia subcaerulea | 1 |
| Layard's Warbler | Sylvia layardi | 1 |
| White-eyes | Zosteropidae | |
| Cape White-eye | Zosterops virens | 1 |
| <u>Sugarbirds</u> | <u>Promeropidae</u> | |
| Cape Sugarbird | Promerops cafer | 1 |
| Starlings, Rhabdornis | Sturnidae | |
| Common Myna | Acridotheres tristis | 1 |
| Common Starling | Sturnus vulgaris | 1 |
| Cape Starling | Lamprotornis nitens | 1 |
| Greater Blue-eared Starling | Lamprotornis chalybaeus | 1 |
| Burchell's Starling | Lamprotornis australis | 1 |
| Pied Starling | Lamprotornis bicolor | 1 |
| Red-winged Starling | Onychognathus morio | 1 |
| Pale-winged Starling | Onychognathus nabouroup | 1 |
| Oxpeckers | Buphagidae | |





| Cape Sparrow | Passer melanurus | 1 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----|
| Southern Grey-headed Sparrow | Passer diffusus | 1 |
| Weavers, Widowbirds | Ploceidae | |
| Red-billed Buffalo Weaver | Bubalornis niger | 1 |
| Cape Weaver | Ploceus capensis | 1 |
| Southern Masked Weaver | Ploceus velatus | 1 |
| Village Weaver | Ploceus cucullatus | 1 |
| Southern Red Bishop | Euplectes orix | 1 |
| Yellow Bishop | Euplectes capensis | 1 |
| Long-tailed Widowbird | Euplectes progne | 1 |
| Waxbills, Munias and allies | Estrildidae | |
| Swee Waxbill | Coccopygia melanotis | 1 |
| Common Waxbill | Estrilda astrild | 1 |
| Indigobirds, Whydahs | Viduidae | |
| Pin-tailed Whydah | Vidua macroura | 1 |
| Wagtails, Pipits | Motacillidae | |
| Cape Wagtail | Motacilla capensis | 1 |
| African Pied Wagtail | Motacilla aguimp | 1 |
| Cape Longclaw | Macronyx capensis | 1 |
| African Pipit | Anthus cinnamomeus | 1 |
| Long-billed Pipit | Anthus similis | 1 |
| African Rock Pipit | Anthus crenatus | 1 |
| Finches | Fringillidae | |
| Forest Canary | Crithagra scotops | 1 |
| Yellow-fronted Canary | Crithagra mozambica | 1 |
| Streaky-headed Seedeater | Crithagra gularis | 1 |
| White-throated Canary | Crithagra albogularis | 1 |
| Protea Canary | Crithagra leucoptera | 1 |
| Cape Canary | Serinus canicollis | 1 |
| Buntings, New World Sparrows | Emberizidae | |
| Lark-like Bunting | Emberiza impetuani | 1 |
| Cinnamon-breasted Bunting | Emberiza tahapisi | 1 |
| Cape Bunting | Emberiza capensis | 1 |
| TOTAL | | 286 |

| KRUGER, GARDEN ROUTE AND KAROO MAMMAL LIST SEPTEMBER 2016 | | |
|--|------------------------|------|
| Common Name (IUCN) | Scientific Name (IUCN) | Trip |
| | RODENTIA | |
| | Muridae | |



| Southern African vlei rat | Otomys irroratus | 1 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Four-striped grass mouse | Rhabdomys pumilio | 1 |
| 1 | Sciuridae | |
| Smith's bush squirrel | Paraxerus cepapi | 1 |
| • | LAGOMORPHA | |
| | Leporidae | |
| Scrub hare | Lepus saxatilis | 1 |
| | HYRACOIDEA | |
| | Procaviidae | |
| Rock hyrax | Procavia capensis | 1 |
| • | PROBOSCIDEA | |
| | Elephantidae | |
| African elephant | Loxodonta africana | 1 |
| • | PERISSODACTYLA | |
| | Equidae | |
| Cape mountain zebra | Equus zebra zebra | 1 |
| Plains zebra | Equus quagga | 1 |
| | Rhinocerotidae | |
| White rhinoceros | Ceratotherium simum | 1 |
| | ARTIODACTYLA | |
| | Hippopotamidae | |
| Hippopotamus | Hippopotamus amphibius | 1 |
| | Suidae | |
| Common warthog | Phacochoerus africanus | 1 |
| | Giraffidae | |
| Giraffe | Giraffa camelopardalis | 1 |
| | Bovidae | |
| Blue wildebeest | Connochaetes taurinus | 1 |
| D. III | taurinus | 4 |
| Red hartebeest | Alcelaphus buselaphus | 1 |
| Blesbok | caama Damaliscus pygargus | 1 |
| Diesook | phillipsi | 1 |
| Common duiker | Sylvicapra grimmia | 1 |
| Springbok | Antidorcas marsupialis | 1 |
| Klipspringer | Oreotragus oreotragus | 1 |
| Steenbok | Raphicerus campestris | 1 |
| Common impala | Aepyceros melampus | 1 |
| - | melampus | |
| Grey rhebok | Pelea capreolus | 1 |
| Sable antelope | Hippotragus niger | 1 |
| Gemsbok | Oryx gazella | 1 |
| African buffalo | Syncerus caffer | 1 |
| Greater kudu | Tragelaphus strepsiceros | 1 |



| Nyala | Tragelaphus angasii | 1 |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----|
| Bushbuck | Tragelaphus scriptus | 1 |
| Common waterbuck | Kobus ellipsiprymnus | 1 |
| | ellipsiprymnus | |
| | CARNIVORA | |
| | Hyaenidae | |
| Spotted hyaena | Crocuta crocuta | 1 |
| | Felidae | |
| Leopard | Panthera pardus | 1 |
| Lion | Panthera leo | 1 |
| | Canidae | |
| Bat-eared fox | Otocyon megalotis | 1 |
| Black-backed jackal | Canis mesomelas | 1 |
| | Mustelidae | |
| Honey badger | Mellivora capensis | 1 |
| | Viverridae | |
| African civet | Civettictis civetta | 1 |
| | Herpestidae | |
| Slender mongoose | Galerella sanguinea | 1 |
| White-tailed mongoose | Ichneumia albicauda | 1 |
| Common dwarf mongoose | Helogale parvula | 1 |
| | PRIMATES | |
| | Galagidae | |
| Thick-tailed greater galago | Otolemur crassicaudatus | 1 |
| | Cercopithecidae | |
| Chacma baboon | Papio ursinus | 1 |
| Vervet monkey | Chlorocebus pygerythrus | 1 |
| TOTAL | • | 41 |

