

EASTERN SOUTH AFRICA AND CAPE TOWN REGIONS GUIDED TOUR

14 to 25 September 2023
12 Days, 11 Nights

TRIP REPORT



This spectacular male **African Finfoot (*Podica senegalensis*)** – the bird find of the tour!

Summary

Tour Leader:	Michael Wright
Tour Participants:	Barbara Strobino and Kevin Strobino (mother and son)
Total Distance Travelled:	2,435 kms
Temperature Range:	7-30°C
Total Mammals:	57 species
Total Birds:	298 species
Top Mammals:	2 Honey Badgers, Cheetah female and 3 cubs, Hewitt's Red Rock Hare, adult "White" Lion male with 3 brothers, 3 White Rhinos, 2 Leopards, African Wild Cat.
Top 10 Birds:	African Finfoot, 4 Cape Rockjumpers, 6 Antarctic Terns, 4 Bar-tailed Godwits, Red-faced Cisticolas and a Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk.
Top Reptile:	Boomslang female mobbed by a Black-backed Puffback.

Note: All images included in the report are from this particular trip.

Trip Breakdown and Report:

Our tremendously successful **12-day tour**, guided on behalf of Birding Ecotours, once again produced a multitude of special mammal and birding highlights. The number of rare and special mammal species we encountered was very impressive, and even though most of the bird migrants had yet to return, we tallied a substantial bird species list, despite the occasional inclement weather. This tour route once again delivered in bucket loads, and our guest departed very impressed and grateful for the unexpected bounty nature blessed us with.

Final species totals:

- **Mammals = 57**
- **Birds = 298**

Considering the time available, the significant tally of species seen was largely a result of the different territories, varied habitats, altitudes, great spotting and good fortune. These were enjoyed on the many day and night open safari vehicle game drives, regular game drives and day nature walks we undertook.

Below is a day-by-day account of the highlights of our journey:

Day 1, 14th September 2023 – Johannesburg to Dullstroom

We commenced our **12-day** birding and wildlife tour with brief birding around the gardens of **The Safari Club** in Johannesburg, where Barbara and Kevin Strobino (mother and son) and their guide, Michael Wright, had stayed overnight. This turned up several **Olive Thrushes**, a flock of **Red-headed Finches** around the bird feeder, a **Grosbeak (Thick-billed) Weaver**, **Cape Robin-Chat**, **Southern Masked Weavers**, 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 Sparrows**, **Rose-ringed Parakeets**, and a few others. Upon arriving at the pan we were met by 5 **Maccoa Ducks**, a few **Blue-billed Teals**, numerous **Cape Shovellers** and **African Swamphen**, and many more waders. A hawking Southern Fiscal happened to become Barbara's 1000th bird species in the world – a great achievement on our first morning! We then added **Goliath Heron** with **African Spoonbill**, **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 Linger Longer accommodation near Verloren Vallei Nature Reserve. En route we encountered **Jackal Buzzard**, **Black-headed Heron**, and 2 surprise **Oribi** in the grasslands approaching the town.

Upon arriving at Linger Longer we were greeted by **Red-throated Wryneck**, a flock of **Yellow Bishops**, a bigger flock of **Long-tailed Widowbirds**, the marvellous calling of both an **African Fish-Eagle** adult and juvenile flying overhead, as well as **Speckled Mousebirds**, **African Stonechats**, **Bokmakerie** 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 **Mallard**, some **Reed Cormorants** and a few other.

After a delicious dinner in town we made our way back to our accommodation and encountered **Southern Redbuck**, **Plain's Zebra**, **Grey (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, and a herd of **Oryx**.



The seldom-seen **Hewitt's Red Rock Hare** (*Pronolagus saundersiae*) 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 Crows**, 2 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** (*Cisticola ayresii*) searched the rocky bank alongside our vehicle



A pair of **Eastern Long-billed Larks (*Certhilauda semitorquata*)** 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** and when we stopped for lunch in Lydenburg we added **Brown-hooded Kingfisher**, **Southern Black Flycatcher**, **White-browed Sparrow Weaver** and **Yellow-fronted Canaries** in the garden.

Upon arriving at Mount Sheba we enjoyed a huge 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**. Others busy calling and flying about in the trees were **Greater Double-collared Sunbirds**, White-bellied and **Amethyst Sunbirds**, and a **Natal Spurfowl** hopped out the bushes onto the road as well. We also found a family troop of entertaining **Samango Monkeys** moving about 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 (*Strix woodfordii*)** that visited us outside the lodge

Day 3, 16th September 2023 – Pilgrim’s Rest to Kruger (Satara)

The following 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 2 **African Dusky Flycatchers** hawking, and saw many of the same birds as the previous evening. We returned to our rooms to pack and found the healthy population of over 40 **Sweet Waxbills** feeding happily on the lawn right outside our doors. We then departed for the central Kruger, and on our way out picked up a **White-necked Raven** and a pair of **Drakensberg Prinias**.



Gorgeous **Swee Waxbills (*Coccygia melanotis*)** feeding en mass

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 Hippos in the water. Around the viewing area we also found **Southern Black Tit**, **Golden-breasted Buntings**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weavers** and **Southern Cordonbleu (Blue Waxbill)**. We made our way gradually towards Satara, and along the way we encounter **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**. Others we enjoyed when passing the Skukuza area included **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, some **Magpie Shrikes** and the **Grey Go-away-bird**. On the mammal side we started finding numerous **African Elephants**, some **Cape Buffalo**, **Greater Kudu**, **Giraffe**, **Waterbuck**, **Plain's Zebra** and **Blue Wildebeest**.

Upon reaching Tshokwane we paused for an ice cream and 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 several **Woolly-necked Stork**, a **Yellow-billed Stork**, **Burchell's Coucal**, **Striated Heron** and **Wood Sandpipers**.

Further along we encountered a **Spotted Hyena** den on the roadside and 3 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**, and then lying across and alongside the road 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 – Satara area

This wonderful morning we awoke to the **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 Bush Shrike** also revealed itself from its haunting call. We left the camp soon after gate opening 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** and several **African Openbills** on the dam edge, and many regulars. On the mammal side we had a pod of **Hippo's** grunting, and several **Waterbuck** lingering around. We then pushed on a bit and located a very active bird party, involving **Green Woodhoopoes** making a racket, **Red-billed Buffalo Weavers**, a **Bennett's Woodpecker**, **Southern Grey-headed Sparrows**, **Chin-spot Batis**, **Blue Waxbills (Southern Cordonbleu)**, **Red-billed Firefinch** 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 (*Haliaeetus vocifer*) scanning the activity around the dam

We left to find a substantial herd of **African Buffalo**, with many **Yellow-billed Oxpeckers** (encouraging to see) and several and **Red-billed Oxpeckers** grooming them, and 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 (*Buphagus africanus*) hooking onto the hide of a **Cape Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer caffer*)**

For the afternoon adventures we proceeded eastwards to Nwanetsi Dam, and en route the new discoveries were many **White-winged Widowbirds** still in non-breeding plumage, a flock of White-crested Helmetshrikes, an **African Green Pigeon**. We arrived at the picnic and made our way to the viewpoint, and encountered **Long-billed Crombecs** 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 its throat up and trying to find relief from the perpetual harassment.

It was starting to get late and we needed to head back for 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**, 2 **Lappet-faced Vultures** and a welcome **White-headed Vulture** atop some trees and peering at an animal carcass that was just out of sight. The fact that they were not descending to 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 **Elephant** herd coming down to drink, and then shortly after, we chanced upon a large **Lioness** striding for the river with 4 **Spotted Hyenas** harassing her from behind. With her being alone and large-bellied, we were left wondering if she was going to seek a 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.



Female **Boomslang** (*Dispholidus typus*) that was being mobbed by a Black-backed Puffback at N'wanetsi Picnic Site

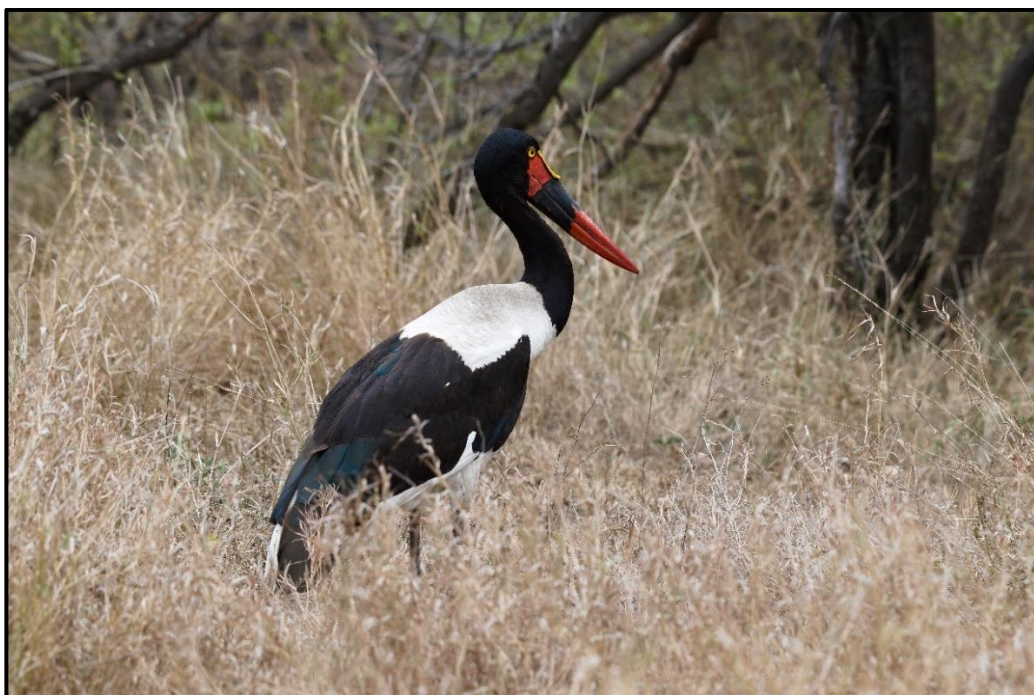
Day 5, 18th September 2023 – Satara to Skukuza

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 2 **Lionesses** lazing in the grass, seemingly satiated from a good nighttime meal. A bit further along we came across 2 **Spotted Hyenas** relaxing by a drinking trough, and shortly thereafter, were delighted to discover a **White (albino) Lion** male, fondly named 'Casper', and his 3 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 layby's 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 proceed 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 3 **Double-banded Sandgrouse**, which flew off, and we pushed on to Gudzani Dam, which was pleasantly full and overflowing. 2 **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 dryer riverbed with a few pools, we discovered a gorgeous **Saddle-billed Stork** resting 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, 2 **Hamerkops** and a **Tawny Eagle** rushed in, and the Tawny attempted to pilfer the fish. We carried on and soon came upon 2 **Kori Bustards** striding through the open savannah within a few kilometres of each other. We then headed back to camp for another late breakfast, before packing and departing southwards for Skukuza.



One of 2 **Kori Bustards** (*Ardeotis kori*) seen searching for prey within close proximity of each other



This **Saddle-billed Stork** (*Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*) relaxed on its forelegs for a significant period

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 **Elephant** herds on the way, and near Kumana Dam we found some more **Saddle-billed Storks**, a **Little Bee-eater** and 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 and 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, an **African Mourning Dove** was feeding near the restaurant.



African Mourning Dove (*Streptopelia decipiens*) searching the leaf litter at Tshokwane Picnic Site

A flock of **Arrow-marked Babblers** also entertained. We carried on toward Skukuza and paused to watch an old **Elephant** bull bathe at Leeupan, while a **White-browed Scrub-Robin** sung nearby. Next, we came upon the Krugertabletkop and enjoyed a statuesque **Klipspringer** and shortly thereafter an **African Wild Cat** surprised us on the roadside. A few kilometres further along we found a family of 6 **Southern Ground Hornbills** scrounging about in the recently burnt veld, and one was hammering through the shell of Hinged Tortoise, which caught the attention of 3 of the youngsters. Next, we found a **Brown Snake-Eagle** and shortly afterwards a juvenile **Bateleur** both sitting 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.



An adult **Southern Ground Hornbill** (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*) scratching an itch while foraging in recently burn grassland

Day 6, 19th September 2023 – Skukuza area

This day 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 previous days for a while, 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 some fresh water – what a special moment! We then made our way along the river and first encountered a breeding elephant herd and then a massive **African Buffalo** herd numbering in the several hundreds. 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 200m 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.



Hooded Vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) in the morning sun, waiting for thermals to develop



This **Honey Badger (*Mellivora capensis*)** strode onto the Sabie River bed and headed straight to the river for a drink

We then headed further south, and paused at a small dam to watch some entertaining **Hippos**, and an amazing flock of 14 **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.



14 **Yellow-billed Storks** (*Mycteria ibis*) grouped together is not a common scene

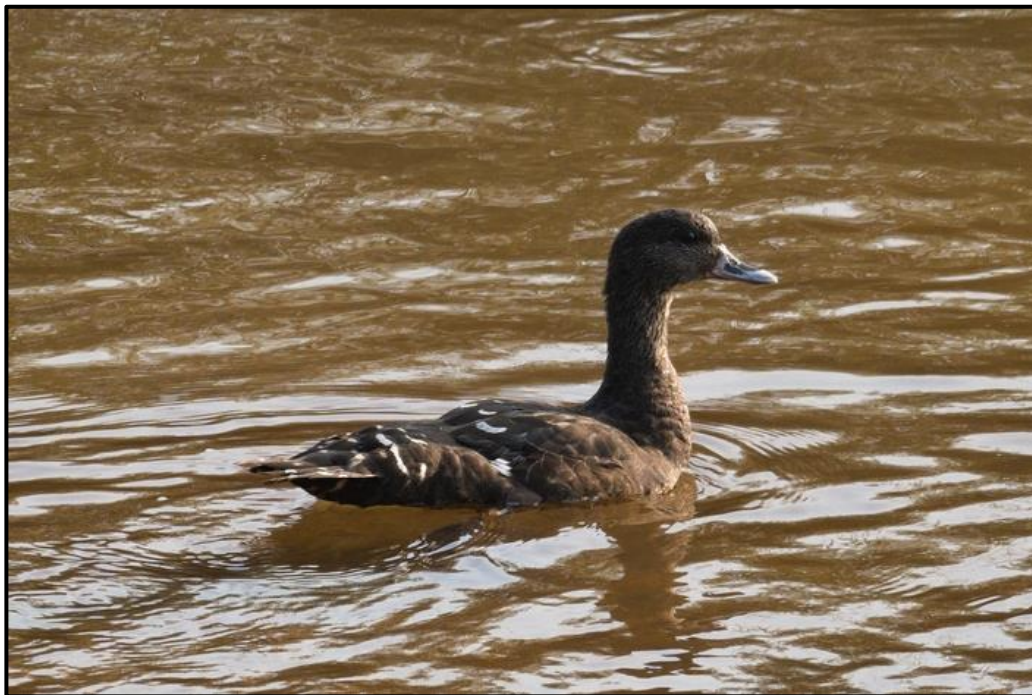
Our afternoon drive found us heading southwards in the hope finding a few new birds and possibly some **African Wild Dogs** and **White Rhinos**. We first visited Transport Dam, where we picked up **African Pied Wagtail** and **Water Thickknee**, before winding our way along the Biyamithi River all the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



A lone male **Red-crested Korhaan** (*Lophotis ruficrista*) 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 2 hours during the 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 call. 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 Woodhoopoes** provided some laughter and good entertainment while **Yellow-fronted Canaries** hopped about the trees overhead.



An unusually confident **African Black Duck (*Anas sparsa*)** floating that normally shies away from the watchful eye

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 vocalising 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 then gave us a fantastic flyby in an attempt to catch a fish barely 10 metre from us. Some **Water Thickknees** 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 very active nest building, and a Waterbuck herd then approached the water with thirst, with 3 large **Nile Crocodiles** only a few metres 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, fearing the risks.

After 2 hours of great entertainment and hundreds of photographs we left to search for a few new birds at the Skukuza Golf Course and then enjoy some brunch. It was already getting fairly hot, so a brief visit to the dam in front of the clubhouse produced **African Jacana**, **Lesser Swamp Warbler** and several swimming **Hippos** in close attendance. After another great meal we chose to depart 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 we picked up included **Marico Flycatchers**, **Spotted Thicknees** and a few others.

Day 8, 21st September 2023 – Dinokeng to 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 6 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 Thrush** (*Turdus litsitsirupa*) pair hopping about the lodge chalets



Common Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*) 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 mainstream, while pausing to check the banks, we 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 metres 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 from view. 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 needed rest.



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

That afternoon we got going again at 16h00, and decide to tour the reserve. We soon found a **Chestnut-vented Warbler**, and shortly thereafter, a family of 3 **White Rhinos** (father, mother and young adult 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 romance going up, and were behaving very amorously with one another, signalling 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 (*Ceratotherium simum*)** were becoming very amorously as the sun began to set

Day 9, 22nd September 2023 – Dinokeng to JHB to CT to Kirstenbosch

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** in the camp. A short drive around the reserve added **Grey Penduline-Tit**, **Black-chested Prinias** and a pair of **Rufous-naped Larks** to the bird list. We need 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, 4 young cubs hopped up to follow her! This really filled our guests with great joy and appreciation.



This spectacular **Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*)** mother and her 3 cubs gave us the most welcome surprise as we were leaving Dinokeng.

In the early afternoon, we touched down in glorious Cape Town – an entirely different environment to what we had experienced the previous 8 days! We headed straight to our accommodation near Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens for the final 3 nights, and then with the 2.5 hours remaining we spent the rest of 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-eyes** and **Red-winged Starlings**, and then an endemics feast began – we first found many **Southern Double-collared Sunbirds**, then **Cape Bulbuls**, then **Cape Spurfowl** 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 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.



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 – Paardevlei, Rooi-Els, Betty's Bay and Strandfontein SW

The weather forecast suggested that this day would grant us the only decent weather with our day's remaining, and so we tried to take full advantage. We first set off for the east coast around False Bay, and first 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 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 3 **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, and then some steady rain began, 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 4 (2 males and 2 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** (*Chaetops frenatus*) and his 3 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 to see what we could find. Despite the tide being high, this visit turned up **Common Ringed Plover**, **Kittlitz's Plover**, several **Glossy Ibis**, 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 2 days, we decided to also head to Strandfontein Wetlands. 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 adults. 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**, and a visit to the outer pans offered 4 **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 – Cecelia, Tokai, Hout Bay, Maiden's Cove, V&A

We awoke to some mist and light wind, which was a pleasant surprise, 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.

So, 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 walking through the forest 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 Swift**, **White-rumped Swift**, **Greater Striped Swallow** and **Rock Martin**.

Next, we headed over Constantia Nek to the west coast and popped into Hout Bay to see some **Cape 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**, with good views.



Antarctic Terns (*Sterna vittata*) at Maiden's Cove between Camps Bay and Clifton

Day 12, 25th September 2023 – Milnerton Lagoon, Shops, Airport

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 Tern** and **Caspian Tern**. We then headed to nearby Rietvlei in hopes of finding a few more, and managed to see numerous

Great Crested Grebes, some **Pied Avocets**, a few **White-winged Terns** and a decent flock of **Greater Flamingos**. We were hoping to also add **White-backed Duck** and **Cape Grassbird**, which are normally not much of a challenge, but these 2 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 really smoothly, and ended up finding **298 bird species** and **57 mammal species**. This fortunately exceeded our guest's expectations, as they had originally hoped for 275 bird species.



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