

# South Africa, November/December 2011

*Report by Sjef Öllers*

## Introduction

Our second holiday in South Africa was mainly set up to see five mammals: aardwolf, armadillo, black-footed cat, caracal and brown hyena. We managed to see the first three and dipped on the last two. Nevertheless, I was very glad to see armadillo and black-footed cat, which I thought would be the most difficult ones. In addition we had very good sightings of African wildcat, cheetah and leopard. Completely unexpected was the bizarre Cape dune mole-rat in West Coast national park.

I also wanted to see a decent cross-section of the South-African endemic and near-endemic bird species in the western half of the country. I had about fifty target species and saw most of these. Some highlights were good numbers of Ludwig's bustard and black harrier, a small flock of rosy-faced lovebirds in Augrabies, white-starred robin, narina trogon and both cuckoo-shrikes in the Wilderness area, Cape rock-jumper at Rooiels, and Knysna woodpecker and Cape griffon vulture in De Hoop. In total we identified more than 50 mammals and about 300 bird species.



*Bontebok (de Hoop)*

## Travel Information

A car was hired through [www.drivesouthafrica.co.za](http://www.drivesouthafrica.co.za), which was easy and efficient. The car was provided by Europcar. I had asked for a 4WD Daihatsu Terios. When we left Cape Town, we had noticed that it had the differential lock button to switch on the 4WD and nothing was said when the car was delivered, so we assumed it was fine. When we arrived at Springbok at the end of our first day, we noticed there was a sticker saying that the 4WD had been disabled. So we called their head office and they told us to go to the Upington office to have it fixed. These guys were very helpful and instead of fixing the Daihatsu they gave us a monstrously big Mitsubishi Triton, a very comfortable car that should get you through most terrain in South Africa. We used the 4WD a few times in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and once in Mokala National Park, but high clearance for better wildlife viewing and easier spotlighting was more useful than the 4WD.

The national park accommodations were booked about 6 months in advance, which was just in time for Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (KTP). Most camps in KTP were already fully booked for most days in December. For the other parks it was still easy to get a reservation in June. Several of the other accommodations were booked in advance as well, because two South-African colleagues at work told me that December can be busy. If you want to stay at a particular place on a certain date, making a reservation is indeed a good idea in December, but I had the impression it was no problem to get decent accommodation anywhere. Notes on the places we stayed in are included in the day-to-day account below. Getting money and buying food is trivial, even in the far north. Only thing to keep an eye on is gas stations in the remoter parts in the north and the Karoo.



*Crimson-breasted Gonolek (Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park)*



## Itinerary

November 25	Flight to Cape Town
November 26	Arrival Cape Town – Drive to Springbok
November 27	Morning Goegap – Koa Dunes – afternoon Augrabies
November 28	Morning Augrabies – afternoon Twee Rivieren in KTP
November 29	Twee Rivieren to Nossob
November 30	Nossob
December 1	Nossob to Mata Mata/Kalahari Tented Camp
December 2	Morning Mata Mata to Twee Rivieren – evening Upington
December 3	Drive to Kimberley – afternoon Benfontein
December 4	Mokala national park
December 5	Drive to Mount Zebra National Park
December 6	Mount Zebra National Park
December 7	Mount Zebra National Park/Samara Private Reserve
December 8	Samara Private Reserve
December 9	Morning Samara Private Reserve – drive to Wilderness
December 10	Wilderness
December 11	Morning Wilderness - Drive to De Hoop Nature Reserve
December 12	De Hoop Nature Reserve
December 13	Drive to West Coast National Park
December 14	West Coast National Park
December 15	Drive to Pringle Bay - Afternoon Rooiels
December 16	Betty's Bay - Harold Porter Botanical Gardens - Rooiels
December 17	Rooisand Wetland – Harold Porter – evening flight out
December 18	Arrival Europe



*View from the Klipspringer Trail in De Hoop*

## **Day-to-Day Account**

### **November 26: Arrival Cape Town – Drive to Springbok**

Our plane arrived around 6am in Cape Town. After getting money and some food, we tried to rent a phone, which turned out to be less trivial. In the end, we just rented a SIM card, thoroughly unimpressed by the service of both phone companies at the airport. We then picked up our car and headed for the N7 by 9am. It takes about 6-7 hours from Cape Town to Springbok if you more or less stick to the speed limits. Be careful when you see signs for camera traps, radar control, etc. or if you have to slow down around towns on the main highways. We were really surprised how often the police was checking at such places with “speed guns”. We decided to head straight to Springbok and skip any birding detours en route, but we made a few picnic stops and one lunch stop in Clanwilliam, which allowed some casual birding, but nothing of note was seen. Late afternoon we arrived at the Desert Rose guesthouse in Springbok ([www.desertroses.co.za](http://www.desertroses.co.za)), where our friendly hosts were waiting for us. I did some birding in the garden, but we were both too tired to do much else because we hadn’t slept properly the last three nights. As luck would have it, Springbok was celebrating World Cancer Day that night, so there was loud music until about 5 am in the morning but we did manage to sleep several hours.



*Goegap Nature Reserve*

### **November 27: Morning Goegap – Koa Dunes – afternoon Augrabies**

After a late breakfast we headed to Goegap around 8am (only a 10-minute drive). On the entry road past the airport things started off nicely with an adult jackal buzzard and Eurasian bee-eater. Goegap is a great little reserve and it must be stunning to visit in the flower season. We only had three hours here, which was way too short. It would be well worth to do one of the hikes that start at the visitor’s centre in the morning and do the 13 km self-drive “Tourist Route” in the afternoon. We only had time to drive the Tourist Route and make a short walk around the visitor centre. For a small fee, you can drive on several 4x4 roads that go deeper into the reserve. The Tourist Route road has good scenery, excellent birding and some mammals too. We only saw common mammals (see below), but for example aardwolf, armadillo, Hartmann’s mountain zebra, round-eared

elephant shrew and Smith's rock rabbit are present too. An overnight stay (camping only as far as I know) might be interesting.

After entering the reserve we almost immediately saw gemsbok and springbok. Birds were all over the place and included spike-heeled lark, black-headed canary, fiscal shrike, Karoo scrub-robin, Karoo prinia, ostrich, white-throated canary, white-backed mousebird, Cape sparrow, red-eyed bulbul, Cape bunting, dusky sunbird and ant-eating chat. We didn't stop at the visitor's centre but drove straight onto the Tourist Route, nice scenery and more springbok and gemsbok. We saw a troupe of very dark baboons with the adult male being almost black. A nice score was Brant's whistling-rat. The Birdfinder book indicates that kilometres 5-6 and 8-9 are particularly good for birds and they were: we saw Ludwig's bustard, Karoo eremomela, another jackal buzzard and a host of common species here. In the same area we saw more gemsbok now with calves and a very dark common duiker (almost chocolate brown). A bit further on I was lucky to find a Karoo chat, which is uncommon here.

Around 10.30 we had finished the loop and made a short stop at the visitor centre. It was quite hot and birding had slowed down. Only sighting of note was a tame young klipspringer that lived around the visitor's centre. Around 11 we unfortunately had to leave, because we wanted to move on to Augrabies and stop at Koa Dunes en route. We picked up our bags at the guesthouse, said goodbye to our hosts and headed east on the N14. A beautiful drive along endless and lonely landscapes. Around 2pm we stopped at Koa, where it was hot and very windy. Still, there were birds around in the area, including scaly-feathered finch, greater kestrel and pygmy falcon, but not the hoped for red lark. On our way back to the N14 we saw a mongoose that looked like a slender mongoose to me. We then continued to Augrabies without any stops en route.

After a short break and shower we went for an early dinner to be on time for our afternoon drive. We had an excellent guide (I think his name was Mario) who seemed to know every mammal personally in this section of the park. Even the faintest eye-shine 400 meters from the road was identified correctly, usually without bins. About 30 minutes before sunset we drove off and in the beginning we saw little more than a common sandpiper and some rock hyraxes. At dusk we saw a few giraffes (one in rather poor condition). When it got dark we quickly picked up scrub hare, rufous-cheeked nightjar, a few klipspringers, gemsbok, Smith's rock-rabbit and then rather surprisingly four Hartmann's mountain zebra and a group of about 55-60 eland with calves. The guide considered the zebras and eland good sightings as they wander large distances though the park and are not seen regularly. But things got even better, close to camp we saw an African Wildcat, which allowed us good views, and at the picnic spot for day visitors we saw a small-spotted genet. All in all, a good start.

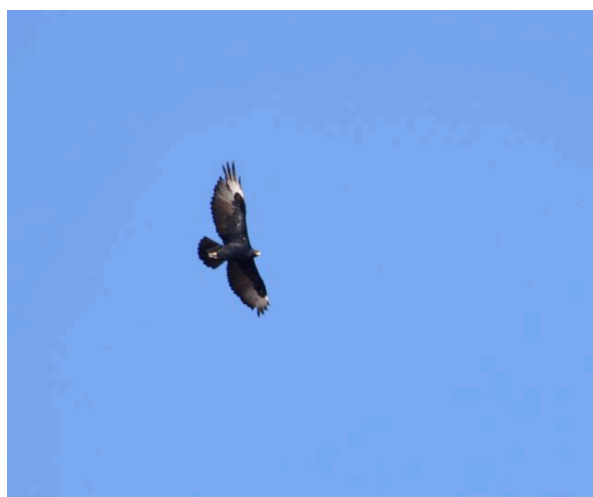
### **November 28: Morning Augrabies – afternoon Twee Rivieren in KTP**

We got up just before dawn, had a quick breakfast and then started walking the Dassie Trail. On our way to the start of the trail we birded around the campsite but I couldn't find the short-toed rock-thrush I was hoping for. The Dassie Trail is a great walk and well worth doing just for the scenery. Birding was good. Around Augrabies canyon there were good numbers of swallow and swift species. African cliff swallow was a lifer. Pale-winged starling, familiar chat, dusky sunbird and white-backed mousebird proved to be very common. At Moon Rock we saw two adult black eagles trying to rise on the thermals, very nice. The area around Moon Rock is very scenic but doesn't hold many birds, but to compensate there are a lot of the beautiful Broadley's flat lizards here. Another nice sighting in this area was a klipspringer perched on a rock. Rock hyraxes are everywhere along the trail. As we walked back towards the camp and the woodland

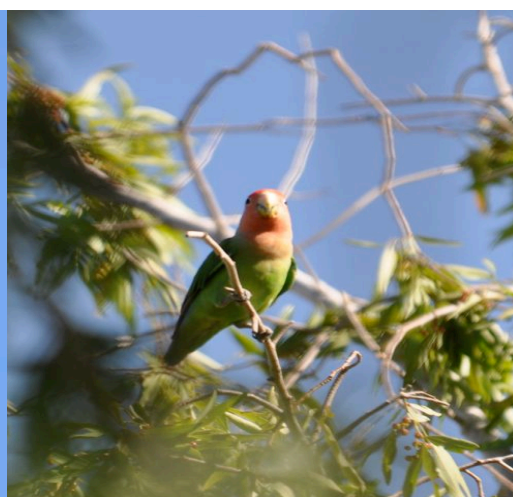
surrounding the camp, bird numbers quickly picked up again. Best sightings here were a bokmakierie and Namaqua warbler. We also saw our first vervet monkeys of the tour and more baboons. The guide had told us yesterday evening that a pair of caracals lives in the Dassie Trail area but they are rarely seen.

After we returned from the walk we had a quick look at the falls and then Anja started packing, but I decided to have another last look at the campsite area, where I saw the first Cape robin-chat of the tour, a few red-billed fire-finches, the omnipresent Orange River white-eye, but suddenly I heard a characteristic shriek: the lovebirds!! They were in the top of a tree with very dense foliage. I had to walk around the tree twice before I found a small window in which one bird was calling out in the open. As always, much more beautiful than any guidebook suggests. They were nervous and wary, and after about a minute a group of six flew off.

Augrabies national park seems to be a bit underrated as a lot of people seem to skip it completely. We stayed only one night, which again was really too short. You need two nights to do the park justice if you want to look for both birds and mammals. It would be well worth it to spend one morning birding the falls and the woodland around the rest camp and another full morning to walk the Dassie Trail more slowly than we did. A combined afternoon/evening game drive should be enough to see the most common diurnal mammals and the occasional interesting night-active mammal.



*Verreaux's Eagle*



*Rosy-faced Lovebird*

Around 10 we left Augrabies and first stopped in Upington to do some shopping, fill up the tank and get the new car at Europcar's office at the airport. We then moved on to Kgalagadi national park with a few short stops en route. Late afternoon we arrived in Twee Rivieren. Although several guidebooks claim that Molopo Lodge (60 km from the park entrance) will deflate/inflate your tires when you go to/come from the park, this is no longer true. You have to do this at the petrol station in Twee Rivieren. Twee Rivieren has nice chalets but the whole place somehow lacks character. The layout is a bit weird as well. The chalets are built on top of a dune but from the front-row chalets you look onto the campsite, the petrol station and the rather hideous park office with its big slab of concrete around it. On the opposite dune they were building even more chalets, so not exactly pristine Kalahari landscapes to enjoy from your terrace.

Having been in a car non-stop for most of the last three days I decided to spend the afternoon birding on foot around the camp. The camp mostly held common birds such as yellow canary, white-backed mousebird, Cape sparrow, white-browed sparrow-



weaver, Cape glossy starling, fork-tailed drongo, crimson-breasted gonolek, crowned lapwing, black-chested prinia, social weaver, scaly-feathered finch, etc. Best sighting was a pearl-spotted owl perched on a dead tree, but unfortunately it was chased away by two hyperactive yellow-billed hornbills. Around dusk a thunderstorm was building up so we decided to take it easy and go to bed early.

### **November 29: Twee Rivieren to Nossob**

We left Twee Rivieren around 5.45 and slowly made our way up to Nossob. We had to take the detour via the First Dune Road because the main road was closed after Rooiputs. The dunes between Samevloeïng and Houmoed yielded ant-eating chat, northern black korhaan, a black harrier and a lone gemsbok. There was a lot of bird activity on the stretch between Houmoed and Auchterlonie, which included a pygmy falcon, another black harrier, tawny eagle, common scimitarbill, swallow-tailed bee-eater and the only purple roller of the trip.

The First Dune Road was quiet with only a few gemsbok and steenbok. Birding was pretty bad because of the strong wind, but we did see chat flycatcher, familiar chat, fawn-coloured lark, and a few more northern black korhaan. We then made a lunch stop at Melkville. Best sighting here was a group of red-headed finches, including two males in full breeding plumage.



*Purple Roller*

*Northern Black Korhaan*

Mammals were rather scarce on our way up through Nossob valley. Only small groups of blue wildebeest and springbok (rarely more than ten together) were seen. Occasionally a steenbok or black-backed jackal was seen. Gemsbok were usually alone and no red hartebeest were seen. Best sightings en route were a single bat-eared fox, a yellow mongoose and three kudus. Birding was quite good with Namaqua sandgrouse, Kalahari scrub-robin, lanner falcon, black-breasted snake-eagle, spotted thick-knee, bateleur, many kori bustards, gymnogene, eastern clapper lark and many social weavers and scaly-feathered finches.

When we arrived in Nossob, it was very hot (high 40s), even the staff was complaining. The camp itself is compact and somehow has a much nicer vibe than Twee Rivieren. Birding in Nossob camp resulted in some nice species such as violet-eared waxbill, groundscraper thrush, crimson-breasted gonolek and shaft-tailed whydah. I also had a quick look at the waterhole from the hide and saw a male cinnamon-breasted bunting

coming to drink (a rarity in KTP). Entertaining was the fight for the waterhole between three secretary birds and about ten springbok.

In the afternoon we made a slow drive on the Marie Se Draai loop. Up in the sky two black-breasted snake eagles, a martial eagle and a lanner falcon were seen. Birds and mammals were coming slow but eventually we got onto acacia pied barbet, another violet-eared waxbill, striped mouse, two gemsbok and a handful of springbok and wildebeest. About halfway on the loop a couple of cars had stopped and rather quickly we found out why. A cheetah mother and her two medium-sized cubs were resting in the shade of a tree near the top of a dune. We both got good looks at the cats with our scope. Luckily the cats decided to get up after some twenty minutes. The cheetah mum took a little sprint and then sat down on top of the dune to overlook the dry river valley below. The cubs eventually followed here and once the cubs had caught up with her, the mother lay down again just behind the dune top out of sight. We waited a while but nothing happened, so we slowly drove back but saw nothing of note.

When I heard that about 18 people had signed up for the evening drive, we decided against joining that. So, from dusk until about 9 pm I spent in the hide. There were constantly animals coming in to drink, but most of them were black-backed jackals (at least nine different individuals). Most interesting was a Cape fox but he got chased off rather quickly by three jackals. Three spotted thick-knees were looking for food around the hide and a barn owl appeared for a few moments over the waterhole. I also did some spotlighting for mammals along the park gate and tried to call in white-faced scops-owl, but no luck with both.

### **November 30: Nossob**

This morning we were at the office at 5.15 to pick up our permit and by 5.30 (when the gate opens) at least 20 people were waiting to get their permits, but no ranger. He finally showed up at 5.50, which was a little annoying. We decided to drive in the direction of Union's End and just see how far we would get. Mammalwise this morning was very poor, we saw more striped mouse, a steenbok, ground-squirrels, and some wildebeest and springbok. Not even a gemsbok was seen. Birding was moderately interesting. Two greater kestrels and a flock of Namaqua sandgrouse were great, but otherwise not much of note was seen. Raptors were rather plentiful though with pale chanting goshawk, bateleur, secretarybird, black-breasted snake-eagle, tawny eagle, black-shouldered kite, lanner falcon and rock kestrel. We saw two snakes, but they moved off too quickly to be able to identify them. Late morning we reached the turn-off for Polentswa and decided to turn around.

Around lunchtime I birded in the camp and saw among others ashy tit and chestnut-vented tit-babbler and got good views of the last shaft-tailed whydah male in full breeding plumage, but again no great sparrow. Between 4 and 5pm I went to the hide, but not much was happening. Lions were heard in the back, but at the waterhole only a couple of black-backed jackals and a Cape hare were seen. Late afternoon we drove to Cubitje Quap and Kwang, but saw almost nothing. Best were a group of double-banded coursers near Cubitje Quap and our first lilac-breasted roller.

Due to a stupid misunderstanding we ended up on the late-evening drive instead of the drive that departs around sunset. When the guys from the sunset drive returned, they had seen cheetah, spotted hyena and our target mammal for Kgalagadi, brown hyena. Aaargh. Nevertheless, we set off on our night drive but only got about forty springhares, a barn owl and black-breasted snake-eagle. Not even the guaranteed spotted eagle-owl



showed up. Even our guide was puzzled: this quiet was unusual. Altogether a rather disappointing day.

### **December 1: Nossob to Mata Mata/Kalahari Tented Camp**

Today things immediately started off nicely with an adult gabar goshawk at the Rooikop waterhole. On the Marie Se Draai loop we saw a Ludwig's bustard in the riverbed and at least three different lanner falcons. We slowly headed south and stopped at all the waterholes for longer periods. In particular, Kaspersdraai and Cheleka were good fun with lots of gemsbok and wildebeest present and mock fighting for water. We also saw Namaqua sandgrouse at both waterholes. Finally, the first red hartebeest started appearing in the Kaspersdraai and Cheleka area. Next, we spent some time with three bat-eared foxes. South of Cheleka I stopped for a moment for a red hartebeest and when we were about to move on, I noticed that something was moving through the grass. Luckily there was a break in the grassy vegetation and it turned out to be an African wildcat. This was a very large and powerful looking animal. We could follow it walking along the riverbed for about a kilometre, when it suddenly started an incredible sprint. It didn't look like we caused him to sprint like that, but it was great to see the cat sprint at full speed. Eventually the cat disappeared in a dense tangle of dead wood.

We made a short stop at the picnic site Dikbaardskolk and then headed onto the Second Dune Road. On the first few kilometres there is still some open woodland or better a loose sprinkling of trees and the road goes up and down through the undulating dune landscape. Because of the rains of the last few days, there were quite a lot of roadside pools. A nice sighting was a leopard tortoise drinking from one of these pools, but this only proved to be the starter. A couple of kilometres on we saw the real thing drinking from a roadside pool. A leopard sat down for at least five minutes to drink. We stopped the car about hundred meters from the cat and waited.



A black-backed jackal was howling only some ten meters away from the leopard. Once the leopard had finished, he initially seemed to walk away from us, then changed his mind and started walking right towards the car. The jackal followed the leopard for the first fifty meters but then disappeared. I couldn't believe my eyes when the leopard just kept heading straight towards us and passed my side of the car only four meters away. Every now and then he slowed down and looked up when the camera clicked. He stopped for a while at the back of our car allowing the only other car with a group of American guys to have superb views as well. Not our first leopard, but by far the best sighting. We were still on an adrenaline high from the leopard when only five minutes later we ran into a group of lions dozing in the shade of a tree. It looked like they weren't going to do anything for a long time so after ten minutes we moved on. Good numbers of gemsbok including calves and a pair of steenbok were seen as well.

Birding was good as well with northern black and red-crested korhaan, double-banded courser, and best of all four Burchell's sandgrouse feeding along the edge of the road. In all the excitement I had completely forgotten about the pink-billed lark, which can be seen along the two dune roads. Only on the last bit of the dune road I tried to call them in several times but no luck.



*Lion with porcupine quills*



*Burchell's sandgrouse*

After a short stop at Kamqua we continued towards Mata Mata. It was clear that this area already had had good rains, because the riverbed here was much greener and there were much larger herds of wildebeest and springbok. Red hartebeest also seemed to have been attracted to the good rains here as we saw them a bit more often in the Aoub valley. A large male lion with lots of porcupine quills in his mouth and throat was seen at Dalkeith waterhole and another group of lions (a male, two females and two cubs) were seen at the Sitsas waterhole. Birding highlights on this stretch were four Ludwig's bustards, our first white-backed vultures and several large flocks of red-billed queleas at the waterholes with lanner falcons hunting after them overhead.

We stopped in Mata Mata to register and buy some drinks and then drove the few kilometres back to Kalahari Tented Camp. Great camp with very nice safari tents, beautiful location, but no gates around the camp so you are not allowed to walk around the camp after dark. From the terrace next to our tent we saw seven giraffes walk down the dry riverbed. Occasionally wildebeest, springbok and black-backed jackals came down to drink at the waterhole in front of the camp. Two days before we came the

ranger had seen three brown hyenas roaming through the camp, but we didn't see or hear any large predators when we were there.

In the afternoon Anja decided to take it easy and enjoy the views and the wildlife around the camp. So I went out on my own. The group of lions and the lone male with the porcupine quills were still in the same place. Near Sitsas I found two spotted eagle owls roosting. A few kilometres east of Sitsas I stopped because a tawny eagle, a black-backed jackal and several pale chanting goshawks were fighting over some leftovers. When I scanned the dune on the far side of the river valley I noticed some movement and then saw that five male cheetahs were heading up to the dune top. I was a few minutes too late because three of them had already reached the dune top and were just settling down when I got my bins on them. I then saw the last two move up the dune to join the other three. I stayed with the cheetahs for about 40 minutes, but not much was happening and it seemed like they had settled in for the night. Nevertheless, it was a good ending to a great day.

## **December 2: Morning Mata Mata to Twee Rivieren – evening Upington**

Next morning we headed back to the place where I had seen the cheetahs, but they had already gone. In the same area an African wildcat walked onto the road out of nowhere and passed a few meters in front of the car. Unfortunately she immediately walked into high grass and I could only take a few pictures through the front window. We also had three different sightings of bat-eared foxes and numerous ground squirrels. Between Kalahari Tented Camp and Kamqua we saw eleven Ludwig's bustards (no double counts), acacia pied barbet and a red-necked falcon that had just caught a social weaver.

The rains clearly had been very local because east of Kamqua the riverbed vegetation was much sparser or absent. Animals were much scarcer but we still saw small numbers of red hartebeest, blue wildebeest, gemsbok and springbok. At Batulama waterhole we saw a young male lion and at another waterhole (I think it was Munro) we found two spotted hyenas cooling themselves in the water.

Before leaving the park we decided to drive to Rooiputs (to the point where the road was closed) and then turn back and leave the park. We found another lion, a female, at Samevloeing. Lots of springbok with calves on this stretch but little else. Most interesting were eleven secretarybirds together at the Rooiputs waterhole.

Unfortunately, it was time to leave Kgalagadi. All in all a fabulous park, I can't wait to go back here. Our four nights was too short to our tastes, six nights would have been better. Tourist numbers are still moderate, so it is not too crowded and north of Nossob you still can have a waterhole to yourself for more than an hour or so if you are lucky. Even then, I have rarely seen more than 3-4 cars at one spot, which was great. The only minor annoyance is speeding tourists and park staff, in particular in the Auob valley (one idiot overtook us at a ridiculously high speed and almost managed to turn a bat-eared fox into a road pizza). On our way back to Upington we stopped for lunch at Molopo lodge, which has a pleasant garden with pretty good birding and decent food. In the afternoon we just relaxed at Libby's lodge and did very little. Libby's Lodge is in a quiet neighbourhood in the eastern part of Upington (<http://www.sa-venues.com/visit/libbyslodge/>).

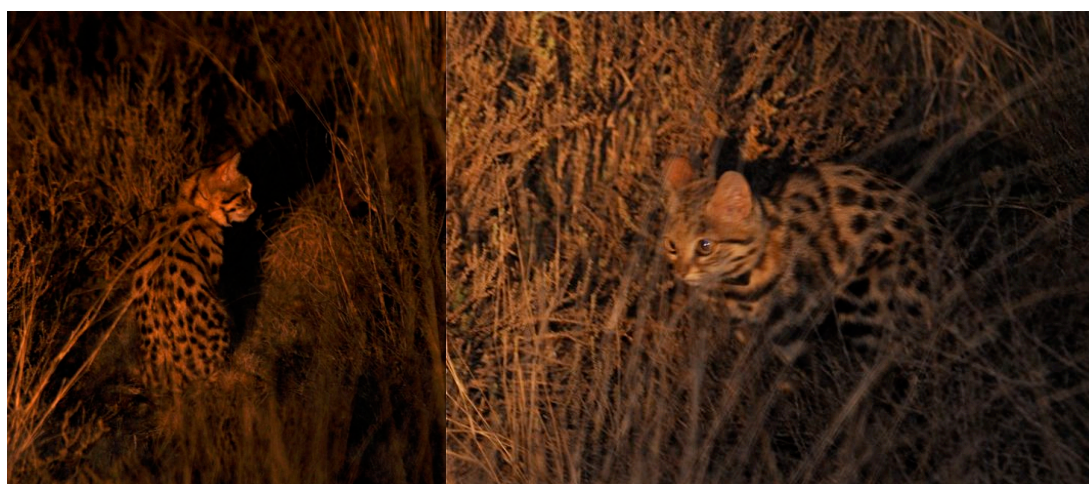
## **December 3: Kimberley/Benfontein**

In the morning I birded in the small garden of the lodge. Mostly common species but red-faced mousebird was a trip tick. There is a bird feeder in the garden that attracts red bishop, Orange River white-eye and pin-tailed whydah among others. Our initial plan to



take the N14 and then take one of the smaller roads down to Kimberley was cut short because a serious accident had just happened on the outskirts of Upington, so we took the N10/N8, which is probably much faster anyway. Apart from a slender mongoose and a kori bustard not much of note was seen. We stayed in Carrington Lodge ([www.carringtonlodge.co.za](http://www.carringtonlodge.co.za)) in Upington, a nice place with a very friendly and helpful owner and conveniently located in a quiet neighbourhood that is close to the city centre and a large shopping mall but also gives quick access to Benfontein, the place we had to be this evening. In the afternoon we went out for lunch and relaxed a bit.

Around 5.30 we went to Benfontein. We were early so we birded around the research station. The birding was actually pretty good. On the pond behind the station there were various ducks and waders. Around the station the most interesting species were yellow-bellied eremomela, common scimitarbill and Swainson's spurfowl. Some ten minutes after our arrival two of Beryl Wilson's family members arrived to do the game drive to look for black-footed cat. After the equipment had been installed on the vehicle, we were ready to go. When it was still light we saw several of the commoner lark and pipit species and a few northern black korhaan. On the grasslands we found a group of white storks that had just landed and overhead a small group of blue cranes flew over to roost somewhere nearby. Benfontein is a hunting farm, so mammals are a little wary and keep vehicles at a distance. There were good numbers of black wildebeest and springbok and a few red hartebeest were seen as well. Around dusk we saw a mongoose dart across the track, probably a Cape grey mongoose. We first went to look for the male black-footed cat. He is shy and usually doesn't show very well. The last few attempts to see him had failed, but amazingly we found the male rather quickly. He mostly kept in high grass so it was difficult to see him for more than a few seconds at a time. Taking pictures was near impossible and he was always moving away from the car. Nevertheless, it was fantastic to see him in action. He was clearly hunting and caught something at least once while we were following him. After staying with the male for a while, we decided to go looking for the female, who usually is in more open terrain and easy to photograph (when found). After we had driven to the territory of the female we soon picked up her signal as well but this evening she had decided to hunt in high grass as well. I was already surprised to see how small the male was, but this female was just tiny.



*Black-footed Cat (Benfontein)*

Luckily the female had to cross some areas with low grass cover so we got some very good views every now and then. Getting pictures, however, was a challenge as she kept moving all the time. After following her for a while we suddenly noticed that there was movement in two places and unbelievably the female had led us to her kittens (we had been told that she had kittens, but that the chance to see them was about nil). After

taking some pictures of her and the kittens we decided to leave them alone as black-footed cats are very susceptible to stress. Despite not getting really good pictures, this had been much better than what we had hoped for. Definitely one of the highlights of the trip. On our way back we tried to find aardwolf, but we only encountered springhare, black wildebeest and springbok.

#### **December 4: Mokala national park**

The next morning we decided to skip a visit to the hole in Kimberley and Kamfersdam north of town and headed straight to Mokala national park. This was a good decision as there was a lot to see and we really needed the time to see both the northern and southern sector of the park.

Mokala national park is still relatively young, it was opened to the public in 2007. The area is a transition zone with elements of both the Kalahari and Karoo biome. The rest camps are great, the scenery is good, the birding is excellent and mammals are all over the place, but the area used to be owned by hunting farms and the park is still surrounded by hunting farms, which has pros and cons. Many of the animals are very skittish and in particular some of the antelopes unsurprisingly react rather hysterically when they hear the click of a camera mirror. So getting good photos can be a challenge. It was amazing to see though how smart some animals have gotten in dealing with/avoiding humans and vehicles. White rhinos, some zebras and most elands and giraffes on the other hand were quite relaxed and seemed to have come from non-hunting areas. On the plus side, the hunting farms provide some buffer against rhino poachers, which recently have become a huge problem again (not only here though, rhinos are currently being killed at about 1.3-1.5 rhino a day in South Africa, the days of mass slaughter are unfortunately back again and the government seems slow to pick up on this). The park is basically a hoofed mammal breeding station for other national parks and nature reserves (disease-free buffalo, etc.), which also discourages the introduction of big predators. Currently there are almost no large predators, there may be some very shy leopards, but they are never seen. Caracal is the most common "big" cat, but even these are not seen very often. It almost seems that they therefore had to create an artificial attraction to get people to visit. Their pride and joy seems to be a project to "breed back" the extinct quagga. Probably interesting for scientists interested in genetics and breeding biology but why money is spent on bringing back an animal that looks close to an extinct sub-species is beyond me when there are so many pressing conservation issues in South Africa. The park staff could in my opinion not really present any convincing arguments to justify the project. Finally, and I hope we had a non-representative experience, the afternoon/evening drive we had was the worst guided game drive we have ever been on. Nevertheless, it is a fun park, because you will see many mammals and birds in a short time in pleasant scenery. We stayed in Mosu Lodge, which has great chalets, and the food in the restaurant was good. One (or maybe two) night(s) should be enough to see the park.

We entered the park in the north and first drove to the reception at Lilydale Rest Camp to book our accommodation at Mosu Lodge. We had a quick look around Lilydale Rest Camp. The chalets overlook the Riet River and surrounding grasslands and savannah. Great location and friendly and helpful staff.

In the northern sector around Lilydale there is mainly rather flat and open grassland habitat and riverine forest along the river. Mammal densities are fairly low but black wildebeest prefer these grassy plains. Kudu and steenbok were quite common in this area and a few gemsbok and red hartebeest were seen as well. Eastern clapper lark, fawn-coloured lark, plain-backed pipit, chat flycatcher, lark-like bunting, secretarybird

and northern black korhaan were some of the birds seen. The riverine forest along the Riet River is probably very good for birds but we didn't have enough time to check out this habitat.

The southern sector is a mixture of typical open acacia woodland, grassy clearings, and some rocky "highland" areas. Animal densities are high: in particular, warthog, kudu, tsessebe, red hartebeest, and plains zebra are very common. Both sectors are connected by road, but separated by a gate.

On the link road between both sectors we didn't see much of interest. In the southern sector we first drove the Doornlaagte Loop (good numbers of various antelopes and some buffalo). The Stofdam hide was very nice and looks like it should be good for both mammals and birds that come to drink or forage. An early morning or late evening visit could be good, but it is unfortunately a 30-minute drive from the closest lodge (Mosu). From the hide we saw among others green-winged pyillia, red-billed firefinch, black-faced waxbill, warthog and vervet monkeys. Near the hide we also saw brown-crowned tchagra and Kalahari scrub-robin. We slowly moved on to Mosu Lodge ticking off blesbok and impala en route. We arrived just in time at Mosu lodge to have a late lunch, which was delicious.

During the heat of the day we relaxed a bit in front of our chalet with views over a little waterhole. The waterhole attracted red hartebeest, warthog and yellow mongoose. Birds seen included black-throated canary, familiar chat, fiscal shrike, yellow canary and several swift species.

For the afternoon we had signed up for the afternoon gamedrive. It was just us and two German businessmen on their first game drive ever, so these guys were very eager to see things. Both the park ranger/driver and the young guide were friendly guys, but for some reason mainly interested in chatting with each other. Five minutes into the drive they managed to overlook a group of giraffes. Ouch. Next they stopped at random spots for random things (but ignored buffaloes, kudus, etc.). One of the Germans several times looked in despair our way for help with identification. If the driver stopped the vehicle for whatever reason, it was consistently in the worst possible spot to take photos. Next we found ourselves in Mokala's wildlife-for-children program: "this hartebeest is the Harley-Davidson of the bush", "the warthog is the Ferrari of the bush", etc. On we went and the guide and ranger were still waffling so they managed to miss a group of white rhinos in fairly open woodland. I now asked them to stop much to the relief of the Germans who were about to lose it. When I scanned the area beyond the rhinos, I found a single roan antelope in a loose mixed group of gemsbok, buffalo, kudu and plains zebra. I got out my scope to have a better look at the roan because it was a few hundred meters from the road. A few minutes after I had pulled out the scope they just drove off, because they seemed to have decided it was *now* time for the sundowner. Just bizarre. To balance things out a bit Anja gave them a good grilling about the quagga project during the sundowner. Shortly after we had finished our sundowner we found a predator hiding in high grass/reed vegetation. Without his bins the guide decided it was a bat-eared fox. I was immediately sceptical and I couldn't help but saying "are you sure". We could only see the ears and a bit of the crown and face. The ears were quite large, but did not have a hint of black lining and seemed too small in comparison to the head to be a bat-eared fox. The colour of the ears and what we could see of the head was all sandy/gold-coloured and there were no markings at all in or around the ear, the bit of the head I could see looked more like an aardwolf (or a Cape fox) to me, but after I had asked the guide whether he was sure this was a bat-eared fox, he got so uneasy that I gave up and unfortunately they moved on straight away. We didn't see anything of note when it was dark.



## **December 5: Mokala National Park/Mount Zebra National Park**

In the morning we had a quick breakfast outside and saw two Cape grey mongooses frolicking at the waterhole. We decided to drive all the game drive loops in the southern sector this morning. We first went to the area of Stofdam hide and the Doornlaagte and Kameeldoorn loops. En route we had some very relaxed eland next to the road. At the hide we saw most of the birds we saw yesterday again (new was a red-backed shrike). A nervous group of kudu came out to drink and two warthogs were chewing on bones from an eland carcass. A bit further on a black rhino suddenly appeared out of nowhere, the animal was shy and cautious but we both had good views before it ran off again.



*Eland (Mokala)*

On the Matopi loop we saw the white rhinos again, but the roan had gone. On the Tsessebe Loop we saw a group of giraffes in a semi-circle around a dead giraffe. Weird, not sure whether they “mourn” in a similar way elephants seem to do. By mid-morning it was time to leave. On the unpaved road from the southern park entrance back to the N12 we found an aardwolf carcass. On the N12 a freshly killed striped polecat and numerous dead springhares and ground squirrels were seen. Quite a carnage!

En route at a roadside wetland we saw a large group of blue cranes but also the only grey crowned crane of the trip. Some fifty kilometres before we reached Cradock we stopped at a mountain pass to enjoy the views. When I got out the car I startled two rheboks on the hillside. The views from the pass were impressive but the dark clouds building up around Cradock and Mount Zebra national park even more so. About thirty kilometres from Cradock we got the full force of the thunderstorm. It was quite incredible. From one moment to another we drove into a wall of water and even with windshield wipers at maximum speed we could literally see nothing because there was just a big curtain of water in front of us. We slowed down to 30-40 km/h, which helped a bit, but the next ten minutes were just scary because we could barely see where we

were going. Luckily it changed to just insane torrential rain, but at least we could see 10 meters ahead of us. By the time we reached the national park entrance, it had levelled off to normal rain, but it didn't stop until late night. Finally time to update the checklist. In the evening we went to the restaurant (simple, but well-prepared and tasty food).

### **December 6: Mount Zebra National Park**

I was pleasantly surprised that next morning was cloudless, warm and sunny. We had signed up for cheetah tracking this morning, but departure was only around 7.30 am, so we had enough time to walk the longer walking trail (3 km) that starts at the swimming pool. It is a very nice walk with fantastic views. Birding was enjoyable with golden-breasted and cinnamon-breasted bunting, both tit-babblers!, streaky-headed seedeater, southern boubou, bokmakierie, the ever-elegant male red-backed shrike and a host of common species. Unfortunately, no ground woodpecker.



*Mountain Zebra National Park – View from the walking trail in the rest camp*

Our guide for the cheetah tracking was Mike, one of the senior guides in the park and so far the best guide we have had in South Africa. What a joy! After a short discussion on the status of South Africa's vultures (not very good), we set off and headed to the area between the Umngeni and Ubejane loop. We quickly picked up a signal, parked the vehicle and continued on foot. Soon we found fresh cheetah tracks. The cheetah seemed to be heading up the hill in front of us. So we slowly walked up and scanned the flanks of the hills. Once we were almost at the top of the hill the signal started bouncing around like crazy. We scanned the far sides of the hills around us thinking the signal was maybe bouncing back from the hillsides, when Mike suddenly said: "oh, there she is". We looked behind us and there was the cheetah only a few meters away. We had stopped exactly at the point where the cheetah was lying under a bush, but we hadn't seen her because we had approached the bush from the other side (i.e., she was at our backs). We walked up



the hill a bit further to give her a bit more personal space and sat down to watch her. After a while she started scanning her surroundings and was looking at some gemsbok and hartebeest on the other side of the valley. A few minutes later she got up and we followed her a couple of hundred meters before she lay down again to scan her surroundings from a better vantage point. We decided to leave her and walked back to the vehicle. Maybe not as great as finding your own non-habituated cheetah, but I thought it was well worth it, although a good guide does make all the difference. And we always like to take any opportunity we can to walk in the bush, because you are likely to bump into something interesting anyway.



*Cheetah Tracking in Mountain Zebra National Park*

Since it was still early, Mike took us up the Umngeni 4x4 trail. Here we had booted eagle, jackal buzzard and rock pipit. On the Rooiplaat loop Mike helped me boost my lark list significantly. Within ten minutes we had superb views of eastern clapper lark, large-billed lark, spike-heeled lark and eastern long-billed lark plus sickle-winged chat and cloud cisticola. We descended back to the camp via the northern end of the Kranskop loop, where we saw several of the exquisite blue rock agamas and heard another rock pipit. We got to chat with Mike about the mammals in the park. Caracals are common, in particular in the area around the camp, but they only show up for tourists that are not interested in seeing them (Mike had four one evening earlier that month and no one was interested). Mike also showed us an aardwolf den and told us that the animal often can be seen basking in the sun around 5 pm. There are only three brown hyenas in the park and they are almost never seen. Aardvark is seen about once every two months and he had seen four! on a single night drive two days ago, so after hearing that I put my bets on Samara for that one.

In the afternoon Anja and I first went up the Kranskoploop. At the most southern point of the loop we found a family of rhebok drinking at the Wilgeboomrivier. From there it



goes up into the highlands and the scenery here is just brilliant, absolutely worth it for the drive alone. On the way up we saw among others stonechat, bokmakierie, blue crane and sickle-winged chat. Once we reached the top of the plateau, a thunderstorm was coming in, so we headed down again. Luckily the thunderstorm passed by quickly.

Mike had told us that we should be at the aardwolf den around 5 pm, so around 4.45 pm we slowly approached the den and indeed there she was! The aardwolf was dozing and every now and then opened her eyes to see what we were doing. I was sure she would get up at some point, so we just waited. After some ten minutes we had the incredible luck that two cars approaching from opposite sides met exactly at the point where we were looking at the aardwolf. The driver of one of the cars was unhappy that he might have to wait a second and signalled that we should move. The noisy melee of cars unfortunately scared the aardwolf and within a second she was in the den. The impatient people turned out to be park staff. Well great! Anja wanted to go back so I dropped her off at our chalet. I drove back to the aardwolf den in the hope that she might come out again, but it proved fruitless as there was too much traffic on the main road around 5.30 pm.



*Aardwolf*

I drove back to the chalet and we then walked down to the reception to pay for the evening gamedrive. Mike was luckily going to be the guide again. It was just us and a family (parents and two kids) from Port Elizabeth, all four hobby naturalists. The boy had seen a bush pig at their chalet that afternoon. A good sighting here. The weather was absolutely perfect, warm but not hot, no wind, and almost no clouds. Mike was driving and spotlighting and a student wildlife management joined him to operate the other spotlight. This guy was as enthusiastic as a dead kudu. Anyway, off we went, first we saw a fairly large group of buffaloes and a group of fourteen kudus (the latter quite unusual in MZNP). Soon we also found the red-billed oxpeckers that have been reintroduced in the park. Next were a largish group of eland, several black-backed jackals and very nice and close views of a bat-eared fox. We turned back onto the main

road, which has good habitat for just about every night-active mammal you would want to see. However, nothing apart from a springhare had come up until we got very close to camp when Mike said the magic word “aardvark”. It was the animal everybody was hoping to see and there it was. Unbelievable! The animal first walked away from us and then it stayed parallel to the road for several tens of meters. At some point its natural shyness got the better of him and the aardvark started sprinting at full speed, made a sharp turn and then galloped in front of the car across the road where it disappeared in a den within two seconds. Amazing. The sound of the hooves galloping on the paved road was brilliant. We were all ecstatic and I think I even saw a faint smile on the student’s face. Stumbling over a cheetah in the morning and seeing aardvark and aardwolf within three hours in the evening, things could have been worse today.



Aardvark

*Intermezzo: how to find the aardwolf den? From the rest camp gate, turn right onto the main road (so towards the main entrance gate). Drive on for about 1.5 km (there are some speed bumps along this stretch). The road then makes an obvious right turn and descends to an (often dry) riverbed, which you cross over a concrete riverbed (don’t know the proper civil engineering term for this thing, but it should be obvious as it is the only one). Directly after the concrete riverbed the road turns left. After the turn there is rather dense woodland on both sides for the first 100 meters, but after that there are gaps with lower bushes and grass. Start looking on the left side. After no more than about 200-300 meters there is a very obvious sandy area (i.e., the den) on the left but the viewing window is fairly small and the den is partly obscured by bushes. Drive slowly because the den is easy to miss if you drive too fast. If the landscape gets significantly more open on both sides of the road or if you pass the first little wooden pole (after the concrete riverbed) that indicates the speed limit (40), you have gone too far. If you keep looking carefully between 100 and 500 meters after the concrete riverbed, you should find it at some point, it is quite obvious.*

## **December 7: Mount Zebra National Park/Samara Private Reserve**

We left the rest camp immediately after the gate had opened. We first had a look at the aardwolf den. We again cautiously approached the site but no aardwolf. So forty meters on we turned the car; we had just turned the car around when I saw the aardwolf on the other side of the road. She wanted to sprint across the road, but clumsily stumbled onto the tarmac. Quite funny. This allowed us to have at least a look at her for a few seconds, but after she got up she instantly raced into the den. It all happened too quickly to take a picture, which was a shame, because the morning light was fantastic. Next we drove the lower section of the Kranskoploop in the hope to catch up with a late caracal, but no luck. At the second picnic site I found three ground woodpeckers, but otherwise it was rather quiet on this stretch. We turned around at the second picnic site, checked the aardwolf den again (nothing) and turned onto the Ubejane loop (yellow mongoose), then went up the plateau via the link road and drove the complete Rooiplaat loop and then left the park via the main road again. At the start of the link road we saw a fairly large yellowish/ochre snake (at least 1.5 meters), but no idea which species. Higher up on the link road we saw another snake, which I think was a yellow cobra. On the link road we also encountered a black harrier on the ground, which could be approached quite closely and seconds later we found another one patrolling on the other side of the road. Other birds seen here were blue crane, white-necked raven and jackal buzzard. On the Rooiplaat loop we saw two orange-throated longclaw couples, cloud cisticola and most of the lark species we saw yesterday. The plateau is the best place in the park to see black wildebeest and we also saw plains and mountain zebra, springbok, and a black-backed jackal harassing two black wildebeest half-heartedly. On our way out of the park I found two dusky indigobird males perched on the electricity wires.

We first tried to drive to Samara Private Reserve via the road (R337) that starts west of Cradock and which should go to Pearston. The road that we did find west of Cradock only had a very old signpost that said Somerset East, but judging from the map it had to be the R337. The first few kilometres went through a pleasant landscape with good birding, but after a few kilometres there was a barrier and a note that you had to register because the road was in bad condition. Mmmm, this didn't sound reassuring. Shame because the scenery was probably very good all the way. So we made the detour via the R61 and N9 passing Graaff-Reinet and then onto the R63. This is actually also a very nice route with good scenery. The mountains of Cambedoo national park near Graaff-Reinet looked spectacular. Probably well worth a visit. En route we saw our only mountain reedbucks and a booted eagle south-east of Graaff-Reinet.

Samara Private Reserve is well sign-posted on the R63 and the unpaved entrance road. The unpaved road may turn up common stuff such as vervet monkey, chacma baboon, and some of the commoner antelopes. Along the entrance road I finally also managed to see rufous-eared warbler.

Because a film crew was visiting, we had been upgraded to stay in the Manor Lodge (we had booked a stay in the cheaper Karoo Lodge). Fantastic rooms with much more luxury than I need (including towel heaters, perverse), but the views on the surrounding mountains are nice, there is a cosy lounge area and best of all you can walk around the lodge garden to do some birding (although keep an eye open for buffalo). Apart from us there was a young English couple staying at the lodge on the first night and a journalist and his wife the second night.

After we had installed ourselves and indulged a bit in the luxury, there was afternoon tee at 4 pm, which basically turned out to be a proper lunch. Nice, since we had skipped ours. And our first proper cappuccino of the trip, pure bliss. The first disappointment



came when it turned out that our afternoon drive had been cancelled and been limited to a post-dinner game drive. The weather was excellent and I still don't know why we could not do a short drive around dusk and a proper one after dinner.

Dinner was an elaborate affair and the food was excellent. Around 9 pm we finally set off and it was surprisingly chilly. We first headed into rather thick bush, where we saw fiery-necked nightjar, common duiker, scrub hare, a few jackals, steenbok and the ever-present gemsbok and kudu. A waterbuck was a bit of a surprise, but turned out to be an escapee from a neighbouring hunting farm. We then headed into more open territory and after some thirty minutes we did indeed see an aardvark, but the animal was aardvarkian shy. It immediately ran away from us and disappeared into cover but after a few seconds we found it again as it ran even harder for cover. I had good bin views for about 3-4 seconds and then the aardvark was gone. We then went into habitat that looked even better for aardvark, but we didn't find another one. Still brilliant to see two aardvarks in two days.

We had decided to go to Samara Private Reserve ([www.samara.co.za](http://www.samara.co.za)) because they claim on their website that aardvark is virtually guaranteed (of course realizing that chances probably weren't much higher than 10-20%, but that would still be pretty good for aardvark). They also claim to offer "aardvark safaris", but got no response on that when I wanted to book one of those, so that is just marketing waffle (as is the cheetah tracking they advertise on the website, if you want to do cheetah tracking, go to Mountain Zebra National Park). Nevertheless, after having been there I have to say that your chances of seeing an aardvark are probably quite good if the weather plays along and you go in the right season (ideally not summer, too much vegetation). The situation is currently great for them. Their spoor and other signs of their presence were everywhere around the lodge. That is the good news, but the management will release lions very soon. The reserve's biggest predator currently is cheetah (not many), but the aardvarks here haven't seen a proper lion in ages so one of the resident guides reckoned that numbers will almost certainly go down rapidly when the lions arrive.

### **December 8: Samara Private Reserve**

When we got up it was raining and very cold outside. The mountains were covered in thick mist that was slowly descending from the mountains towards the lodge. Strangely nobody had bothered to give us the wake up call and when we showed up at the agreed time for the game drive nobody was there. After a while the guide showed up but no real explanation what had happened. The plan that we discussed upon arrival for this morning was to do some cheetah tracking first and then drive up the mountain from where there are spectacular views, but clearly this had to be shelved. Anyway, we set off for a drive around the Karoo Lodge area but the weather remained miserable (very cold wind and constant drizzle). Unsurprisingly, activity was very poor. At the end of the drive we had a nice close encounter with a group of vervet monkeys, but otherwise not much of interest happened.

The breakfast was excellent and very welcome after the chilly game drive. After breakfast we both hang around in the lounge a bit but after a while it was driving me crazy, so I walked a bit on the tracks around the lodge. Throughout the day there were short dry spells but most of the day drizzle and proper rain reigned. Birding was actually ok considering the weather. I saw among others lanner falcon, steppe buzzard, yellow-fronted canary, alpine swift, chestnut-vented tit-babbler, hoopoe, spotted flycatcher, wattled and red-winged starling, Cape robin-chat, Karoo prinia, neddicky, pearl-breasted swallow, red-eyed dove, streaky-headed seedeater, red bishop, southern masked weaver and yellow-throated petronia.

Around lunchtime we were told that they had seen on the weather forecast yesterday that the weather was likely not to be very good today. This really annoyed me. If I had known that yesterday, I would have insisted on doing a game drive before dinner yesterday when the weather was perfect. But we were told that the journalist definitely wanted to do a night drive tonight, so we would definitely go out after dinner in case it was dry.

Our guide was not very keen to go out again in the afternoon, but we were fed up having been inside most of the day, so the compromise was to walk a couple of hours in the area around the lodge. We did not see much, but it was good to be outside for a while. Entertaining was a group of red hartebeest and their young calves that were trying to prance just like the adults. Because we hadn't heard anything on the night drive we assumed it was still on since it was dry outside in the evening. When we showed up for dinner in our "safari gear" we noticed that the journalist and his wife were all dressed up in attire that was more appropriate for a cocktail party. What had we missed? After dinner we asked what the situation was with the night drive. "oh, didn't we tell you that the other couple doesn't want to do the night drive". Sigh. We were by now fed up and didn't want to push the issue and just went to bed after dinner. Tomorrow the weather was supposed to be better so we arranged a wake-up call and agreed to get up at dawn and do a long morning game drive.

### **December 9: Morning Samara Private Reserve – drive to Wilderness**

Of course no wake-up call in the morning, but we had set our own clock. The weather was indeed much better, but the bitter cold wind was back again. Our guide thought that the road up the mountain would be too slippery and dangerous so we made a drive along the foothills. The drive proved to be quite nice with some good scenery along the way. We found a large herd of eland (at least fifty animals), plains zebra, kudu, red hartebeest and a male nyala, another escapee from the hunting farm. We saw three bustard species (Kori, Ludwig's and Southern Black Korhaan), but these were all extremely shy, so I suspect they have been hunted in the past.

At a large water reservoir we made a stop and we were happy to see that our guide had taken hot coffee and tee. It was sunny, but still unbelievably cold for the time of year. On and around the water reservoir we saw among others yellow-billed duck, black-winged stilt, blacksmith plover, little grebe, grey heron, blue crane, white-faced whistling duck, red-knobbed coot and greenshank. In the acacia woodland best birds were a male chinspot batis, bokmakierie and three acacia pied barbets.

After a last breakfast it was time to say goodbye and around 10 we left. We left Samara with mixed feelings. It is likely that we would have been more positive about the place if we had been able to go up to the plateau in good weather, because the pictures of the plateau on their website look fantastic. The weather is of course beyond anyone's control, but how you communicate with your clients, offer alternative activities in case of less than optimal weather, etc. also defines your level of professionalism. There were several little unnecessary annoyances throughout our stay. They market themselves as a five-star game reserve (with prices too match), but they seem to think that just providing luxury takes care of things. Everything seemed centred around relaxing, enjoying the luxury, lounging, eating, etc., and wildlife activities are squeezed in around those things. I got the impression that they don't get a lot of hobby/amateur naturalists, mainly honeymooners, families, people that need luxury on their holiday, etc. I think they were also a bit too focused on not having the big five in the reserve (they will get elephants and lions soon), but they would better spend some effort on providing a

tailor-made approach for what individual clients actually want. Everything for an excellent wildlife experience is already there. All in all, a bit of a shame as the scenery is outstanding, the lodge and the food are both excellent and the owners seem to be genuinely dedicated to conservation.



*Samara Private Reserve*

We continued our way south along the N9 through the desolate but beautiful Karoo. Near Aberdeen I saw two Karoo korhaan. Further south we had mountain chat, gymnogene, the first malachite sunbird, the only pied wagtail of the tour and several flocks of blue cranes near Unionsdale.

After two weeks of fantastic panoramas and solitude in the Karoo, Kalahari and Bushmanland, we were a little shocked when we arrived in George, a busy but uninspiring town. We actually had to pay attention to traffic again as the holiday season on the coast was clearly in full swing.

We stayed in the Moontide B&B (<http://www.moontide.co.za>) in Wilderness, located directly next to the N2 but at the end of a very quiet private road. From there it is just 3-4 minutes to the San Parks Ebb & Flow Rest Camp and about a 15-20 minute drive to the Big Tree Trail in Woodville. At Moontide we stayed in their secluded Treetops room. Recommended. Common birds in the garden (Cape bulbul, Cape weaver, Cape white-eye, bar-throated apalis, speckled pigeon, etc.). It was already quite late when we arrived in Wilderness, so we did our shopping for the next days and went to have dinner at the Salinas restaurant (which was okay) across the road next to the N2.

## December 10: Wilderness

We got up quite early and first visited the Big Tree Trail in Woodville. The forest was extremely quiet in the beginning and the few birds we saw were all high up in the canopy. After about half an hour we finally heard and saw some activity of birds in the lower and mid-stratum. Cape batis and terrestrial brownbul were the first species seen. Then another long period with nothing seen. Several times we stopped and waited to see if birds would pass through or react if their calls were played, but this was hugely unsuccessful. We flushed a mammal that may have been a bushbuck, but I only saw some ghostly movements for a few seconds and then it was quiet again. We had almost completed the trail when we finally hit a good flock. As always, there are just too many birds to look at, but we got good views of Cape batis, African paradise flycatcher, yellow-throated woodland warbler, black-backed puffback, narina trogon, red-billed wood-hoopoe, olive woodpecker and southern double-collared sunbird. We also heard emerald cuckoo and black cuckoo calling nearby. The black cuckoo responded to my recording and eventually I got to see them in the Big Tree. The emerald cuckoo unfortunately did not seem to move and we couldn't find him. A good start but I had missed my two main target birds here, white-starred robin and chorister robin-chat, but it was time to go back and have breakfast. After breakfast we parked at Ebb and Flow Rest Camp and got ourselves a permit to walk the trails. Around the rest camp I had good views of sombre greenbul and amethyst sunbird. We first took the steep high-level side-trail on the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail. Virtually birdless, but we did see a lemon dove and an olive thrush. However, there are two nice viewpoints and from there we saw a peregrine falcon at close range and higher up in the sky African fish eagle. On the main trail along the river birding strangely got better later in the morning. Here, we encountered green-backed camaroptera, bar-throated apalis, terrestrial brownbul, sombre greenbul, paradise flycatcher, Cape batis and Knysna turaco, but none of the specials. It is a very nice walk with good scenery along the way. Despite the fact that Ebb and Flow Rest Camp seemed close to fully booked, there weren't that many people on the trail. The birds also seemed a bit tamer and more approachable here than on the Big Tree Trail, but the overall variety seemed better at the Big Tree Trail. We didn't have time to visit the Brown-hooded Kingfisher Trail (see below), which looked interesting as well and passes through similar forest habitat.

We drove to the hide at Langevlei where we had lunch. Birding was a bit less spectacular than I had hoped and expected, but we did see among others southern pochard, reed cormorant, yellow-billed and black duck, lesser swamp warbler and malachite kingfisher.

Next stop was Rondevlei Hide. At the parking and along the railway there was a real bird frenzy going on. Most were common species, but nice sightings were common waxbill, pin-tailed whydah, chorister robin-chat, olive bush-shrike and best of all a yellow-shouldered black cuckoo-shrike. At the Rondevlei bird hide there was a lot of waterfowl but most of the birds were at the far end of the lake. In front of the lodge we saw glossy ibis, several common duck and wader species, pied kingfisher, little grebe and great crested grebe, and above the lake two African fish eagles. Back at the parking we decided to walk the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail (and not the Brown-Hooded Kingfisher Trail). The Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail (actually two trails but you can combine them) did not show up in any trip reports I read, but I found this trail very enjoyable. The terrain is open and a mixture of sandy dunes, fynbos, marshes, bushes and also skirts along some farmland. The trail map you get from the park office is basically correct, but some picnic spots are shown in the wrong place, and the trail's colour-coding and signs are a bit confusing. However, it is unlikely you get lost in this open landscape. The trail starts on the other side of the railway track at the parking that gives access to the bird hide at



Rondevlei. We walked the trails from about 3.30 to 6.30pm, but there was bird activity almost constantly (sky was overcast). We did not see anything special but it was good a trip list booster. Species seen in addition to the ones mentioned above included southern boubou, streaky-headed seedeater, Burchell's coucal (heard only), sombre greenbul, Dideric's cuckoo, red-necked spurfowl, both double-collared sunbirds, Levallant's and grey-backed cisticola, stonechat, and red and yellow bishop. Just like the Big Tree Trail in Woodville we did not encounter anyone on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail.

When we had returned from the walk and wanted to eat some fruit at the parking, I saw some drunk and rowdy youngsters approach on the railway track, so I told Anja to get in and leave. Probably nothing would have happened, but it was the only time during the trip that I thought it was smarter not to wait and find out. That said, when confronted with the same situation in Europe I would do exactly the same thing. I read in the trip report of a German birding crew that they were being checked out and followed by two guys in the Brown-hooded Kingfisher Trail/Langevlei area. Again nothing happened and they easily shook them off and then left. Absolutely no reason to get paranoid or not to visit these areas, but the area between Langevlei and Rondevlei is much quieter than the area around the Ebb and Flow Rest Camp and hence more attractive for opportunistic crime. Don't leave your valuables in the car here.

It had been a long day and we slowly drove back to Moontide. At the river near the entrance for the Brown-hooded Kingfisher Trail we saw a malachite kingfisher. When we passed the Ebb and Flow Rest Camp there were people everywhere barbequing and partying and the whole area was covered in thick smoke from tens of braais. You probably won't get much sleep here during the main summer holiday period.

### **December 11: Morning Wilderness - Drive to De Hoop Nature Reserve**

Anja decided to sleep in, so I went back to the Big Tree Trail in Woodville on my own. At the parking I saw a brown-hooded kingfisher and finally I got really good views of a chorister robin-chat. This time I walked the trail counterclockwise, but just like yesterday the first hour after sunrise was very quiet. My main target was white-starred robin. I played its call several times but no response. When I was almost back at the Big Tree itself, I played the call again and finally I got a response. It came in silently and moved inconspicuously through the undergrowth and then luckily stayed for a minute at the edge of the trail. A very pretty little bird. The recording on Guy Gibbons' CD was quite different from this bird's song. Same melody but with a different pitch and slower. In the same area I finally found a flock. First bird of the flock seen was again a Cape batis. I don't know whether two of them were "naive" juveniles but with silent pishing I had one of them come in at less than one meter, too close for the camera to focus. Then within a few minutes I had Knysna turaco, olive woodpecker, spotted and dusky flycatcher, sombre greenbul, red-billed woodhoopoe (heard only), and excellent views of two grey cuckoo-shrikes. There were much more birds but I couldn't get on to them. And all too soon it was over and the forest was silent again. On the way out I saw a small drab warbler that was probably a Knysna warbler, but not 100% sure as the bird wasn't singing, but it seemed to react after I played its song.

I headed back to Moontide, where we had breakfast, packed and then headed west along the N2. Busy road and for the first time boring landscapes most of the way. East of Stellendam I saw what looked like a Eurasian honey-buzzard (grey pigeon-like head, bold shoulder marks and broad terminal band on the tail), but it disappeared too quickly to allow good views. About 13-14 km west of Stellendam we took the unpaved road south towards De Hoop. Only a few hundred meters after the turn-off we encountered a

small group of rhebok. A bit further we saw a yellow mongoose and a steenbok. Birding was good and among others we saw a variety of larks, streaky-headed seedeater, stonechat, a lot of blue cranes and two Cape griffon vultures. Around lunchtime we arrived in De Hoop. We dropped our bags and then went back to the restaurant for lunch. The restaurant is a bit overpriced, but the food is ok and they are friendly.

The accommodation we stayed in (a Spartan cabin with shared bathroom facilities) was outrageously priced at 600 ZAR. We initially asked for one of their cottages with en-suite facilities but the price for those was ridiculous, something like 220 euro a night. On the plus side, our cabin was nicely located at the edge of the campsite. From the cabin you overlook one arm of the De Hoop vlei, which has excellent wetland birding, and the area immediately around the cabins is very good for birding as well. Bontebok and rock hyrax were often only 50-200 meters away. If you want to cook yourself you have to walk several hundred meters to the kitchen of the campsite. Not a very inviting and practical place, but it will get the job done. We went to the restaurant on both days.

After lunch we walked the Vlei Trail. The strong wind along the trail was downright annoying, but at least it was sunny. Birding was good with large flocks of waterbirds. Highlights were greater flamingo, great white pelican, glossy ibis, Hottentot teal and Caspian tern.

Late afternoon we drove to Koppie Alleen seeing Denham's bustard, a black harrier and lots of bontebok, but little else. Spotlighting back on the Koppie Alleen road and main road was disappointing. Only a few scrub hares and a fiery-necked nightjar were seen.

## **December 12: De Hoop Nature Reserve**

I got up very early to do a pre-dawn drive, but it was cold and drizzling. I saw absolutely nothing. After an hour I went back to bed and when we got up around 7.30 it was still grey, cold and raining. During a relaxed breakfast the weather slowly started to improve. Birding was surprisingly easy from the breakfast table: southern boubou, pied starling and even a couple of southern tchagras were foraging under the trees next to our cabin.

After breakfast I birded a bit around the campground. I had excellent views of a Knysna woodpecker in literally the first tree next to the cabins and managed to get a decent record shot. A bit further I had malachite sunbird, capped wheatear, Cape sugarbird, both spurfowl/francolins and another couple of tchagras. The sky was suddenly cleared very quickly but the Potberg was still covered in thick cloud and rain. So we first headed to Tierhoek, a nice and quiet spot with beautiful views over the vlei. From the viewpoint we saw among others hamerkop, African fish eagle, giant kingfisher, glossy ibis, three African spoonbills, pied avocet, black-winged stilt, and Cape mountain zebra and eland.

From Tierhoek we could see the weather was quickly improving at the Potberg, so we headed there mid-morning. Once we got there the cloud had almost completely lifted. The Klipspringer Trail was without doubt the highlight of our visit to De Hoop. First you pass a plantation of eucalyptus and other exotic trees. This was surprisingly good for birds: paradise flycatcher, orange-breasted sunbird, Cape canary, Klaas' cuckoo, Cape batis were some of the species seen. The trail then skirts up through fynbos vegetation and you pass a rocky bluff. Here we saw rock hyrax, Cape sugarbird, eland in the valley below, and best of all Cape griffon vultures started sailing past right above our heads. Some of them perched on top of the bluff above us. We climbed up further and reached a ridge from where there are fantastic views. Here the Cape vultures rushed over our heads (often only 10 meters away). At some point we had birds flying over our heads from all directions. I counted at least 34 birds together at some point. Brilliant. Even if

you don't want to walk the complete trail, do consider walking up the first kilometre up to the ridge. The views are great and the chance of having Cape vultures fly past almost at touching distance is an opportunity not to be missed. The birds started going up the thermals between 9 and 10 when we were there, but maybe they are out earlier when the weather is sunny from sunrise. After climbing the ridge, the trail levels off and undulates along the contours of the mountain for a few kilometres. Birding here was slow (best birds yellow bishop and Cape grassbird), but the number of unusual flowers here was quite spectacular (this wasn't even peak season for flowers, because many had already flowered). And there is good scenery and views along the whole trail. The trail back down to the parking looks like it should be good for birds as well, but by the time we got there it had become really hot and bird activity had slowed down considerably. Only a few common species were seen.



*Cape Vulture*

We went back for a late lunch at the restaurant and then sat a bit outside in front of our cabin. Again the birds came to us, the birds here are habituated and I had pied starling, tropical boubou, cape robin-chat and red-winged starling feed at my feet on the papaya that I had spilled. I was sitting on the doorstep when I noticed a bird sneak through the trees in front of the cabin. It was the Knysna woodpecker, probably the same female I saw this morning. It then sat down for 45 minutes (well concealed) only 5 meters from where I was sitting. Brilliant to see how their plumage blends in with the trees.

One problem with De Hoop is that the options for "gamedriving" are limited. A lot of the sandy trails in the park are closed for vehicles and are only open to bicycles (not a bad thing of course). One night would probably have been enough here.

Anja was more in the mood for relaxing, so she stayed at the cabin. Late afternoon I drove to Tierhoek and sat there for a couple of hours enjoying the serenity of the place. For a change it was relatively warm and there was no wind. Large squadrons of pelicans and flamingos flew past at sunset. A massive eland bull was feeding on the grassy flat below. A bit later a group of six Cape mountain zebra came down to the flats as well. The great kingfishers were still there, but no sign of any otters that I was hoping to see here at dusk. When it was getting dark, I got back in the car and very slowly drove the triangular loop east of Tierhoek. Ignore the signs that you need a 4WD for that loop. Only in extreme weather things might be a bit slippery with a regular sedan, but even

then with careful and slow driving it should be no problem at all. I saw a few bats fly past the car but no idea what species. Next there were a couple of scrub hares and a fiery-necked nightjar on the road. When I was almost back at the campsite my perseverance finally paid off, a porcupine on the road. I could follow him about 200 meters and got some decent record shots. Brilliant. When I got cheeky and got out of the car, he checked me out for a minute but then slowly moved off into the fynbos vegetation. I tried for caracal once more on the main road and part of the Koppie Alleen road but apart from the many bonteboks I saw absolutely nothing.

### **December 13: Drive to West Coast National Park**

Around 4 am I had a quick look outside, but there was heavy cloud cover and it was raining again, so I went back to bed. We got up at 6.30am. Since the park gate only opens at 8, I birded a bit around the campground and cabins, but I saw nothing new. After leaving the park we first drove to Bredasdorp where we stopped at Julian's art gallery to buy some presents. There is a restaurant as well and the food is supposedly very good, but we were there far too early for lunch. The drive to Cape Town wasn't very exciting. Only sighting of note was an adult black harrier near Napier. Cape Town was very busy and there was a bit of a traffic jam before we could get onto N7. At Melkbosstrand we switched to the R27 and drove straight to West Coast National Park. We both didn't like the park. First thing you need to know is that the signs showing a speed limit of 50 km/h is not the maximum but the minimum speed at which you are supposed to drive. Locals and park staff are clearly more experienced at this than regular tourists. Three times we almost had a car ram into our back, because we were doing what nobody else seems to do: watching wildlife. You can't really blame people though, because the roads in the park just beg for speeding. Luckily almost nobody is on the road early in the morning and late afternoon. Your options for activities in the park are rather limited: ten months of the year there is just one proper walking trail, which is a shame and it is a short return walk to the top of Seeberg hill (only in the flower season in spring a larger number of trails is open). There are several interesting looking unpaved roads through the park, but they are closed to tourists. The weather didn't help either when we were there. The weather literally changed every 30 minutes and bright sunny weather could turn into miserable rainy and windy weather in no time and usually lasted twice as long. It was also much colder than what is usual for the time of year. Probably because of the weather mammal watching (especially at night) was exceptionally poor. The post-sunset and pre-dawn drives I did were stunningly eventless. Apart from a few daytime-active striped mice I saw zero rodent species, which surprised me as bush Karoo rats and even porcupines normally seem almost guaranteed here. Anyway, we stayed at Duinepos Chalets, which is ok if a bit Spartan and soulless. We ate at the Geelbek restaurant on the afternoon we arrived, but weren't impressed by the food and slow service so we cooked ourselves the day after.

After our lunch at Geelbek restaurant the weather had become progressively worse and by the time we wanted to go out, dark clouds were closing in from all sides. Nevertheless, we wanted to do a little recon trip through the park and drove to Tsaarbank. On our way up there we only saw cars coming back. Once we reached the beach at Tsaarbank, the sky was pitch black and it had started raining. Between the rocks along the beach we saw two mongooses, of which I am still not sure what they were (see trip list for notes). At the furthest point that you can drive to at Tsaarbank it was interesting to see groups of Cape gannets being pushed to the coast by the stormy weather. Further at sea I saw more seabirds, but it was difficult to tell which species because the wind was so strong that the rain hit my bins horizontally. They were soaked within a minute. Nevertheless, at Tsaarbank we saw turnstone, sanderling, black oystercatcher, Cape cormorant and kelp gull.



After a while we drove back to the hide at Abrahamskraal where we saw South African shelduck, black crake, marsh harrier, Cape shoveller, yellow-billed duck, red-knobbed coot and little and great crested grebe. When we returned to the car around dusk I noticed a small antelope at the far side of the water at Abrahamskraal. The animal was soaked from the rain making him look a bit strange and it was partly obscured by vegetation, but I am pretty sure it was a Cape grysbok. The weather was just too miserable so I put my cards on a pre-dawn drive.

#### **December 14: West Coast National Park**

I got up at 3.45 am. It was mostly dry with the occasional drizzle and a stiff breeze; the car electronics said that the outside temperature was 10 degrees Celsius, but my spotlighting hand thought it was closer to 2-3 degrees Celsius. From Duinepos to Posberg I saw absolutely nothing. At Posberg I saw Cape mountain zebra, kudu and springbok. At sunrise I saw two spotted eagle-owls together at the turn-off for Kraalbaai. At Tsaarbank I saw the same bird species as yesterday. On the way back I saw several steenbok but nothing else. I was back at 6.45. After breakfast we went to the Seeberg hide and then walked to the top of the Seeberg hill. It is an enjoyable walk with good birding and luckily it wasn't raining for a couple of hours. Highlights were Cape penduline tit, Levalliant's cisticola, red-capped lark, spotted thick-knee, black harrier and Cape longclaw. Only mammals seen were striped mouse and eland. From the bird hide we saw among others both Eurasian! and black oystercatcher, Caspian tern, both curlews, sanderling and several plover species. We then stopped at the Geelbek hide (getting completely soaked by a freak shower on the way in), which had a good selection of waders, but nothing unusual. Around 1 pm we went back to our chalet for lunch. After lunch we went to the high-tide hides at Geelbek (the trail starts at the far side of the parking at Geelbek and after 100-200 meters turns right onto a narrow trail that almost looks like an animal trail, there is a signpost). The marshland vegetation here is beautiful and luckily it had stopped raining as well. Birding was not bad and included hundreds of curlew sandpipers and small numbers of various Charadrius plovers. An osprey was hunting over the marshland. Next we drove to Tsaarbank. Only thing of note was a group of white-chinned petrels at sea but close to shore.

Late afternoon we went back to Abrahamskraal, by far the most pleasant, quiet and interesting area in the park. The weather had finally calmed down and it was sunny, but not very warm. Interesting species here were a group of spoonbills and a single Eurasian bee-eater. From the car park I scanned the surroundings and found a male southern black korhaan. Half an hour before sunset I drove Anja back to the chalet and I went back out for a night drive. I was more optimistic this time, because it was dry and cloudless. I drove to Posberg/Tsaarbank, but again none of the night-active mammals showed themselves. I saw kudu, Cape mountain zebra, eland, an unidentified beautiful snake (gone before I could get out of the car) and two spotted eagle-owls (probably the same I saw this morning). I also tried the main road but saw absolutely nothing there.

#### **December 15: Drive to Pringle Bay - Afternoon Rooiels**

I peeked out of the window around 4 am for a last assault, but it was windy, cloudy and raining. I cursed the caracals, Cape foxes and porcupines in this place and went back to bed. When I got up around 7 and looked outside I saw a Cape grey mongoose sniffing around our door. After a relaxed breakfast we packed and checked out and then headed to Langebaan, because we badly needed some petrol. About halfway between Duinepos and the Langebaan entrance gate I yelled "stop, stop". Anja only just managed to evade

the bizarre animal that suddenly walked onto the road. It turned out to be a Cape dune mole-rat!! What a weird beast, but an excellent find.



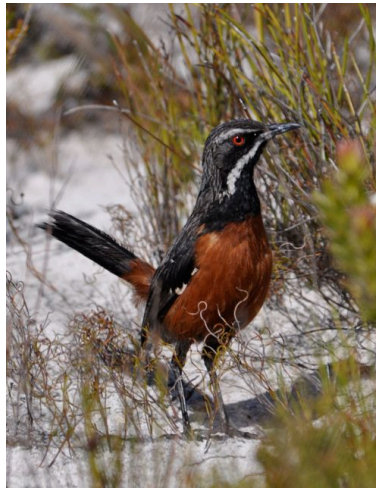
*Cape Dune Mole-Rat*

We drove back to the R27 through the park, but saw nothing on our last drive in the park. On our way south we stopped at Yzerfontein, which was indeed good for bank and crowned cormorant and Cape fur seal. I saw some dolphins far out at sea but it was so windy that I could not get my pocket scope and flimsy tripod stable enough for a conclusive view. We also tried the gypsum mine road described in the Birdfinder book, but the gate was closed after one kilometre and the office was closed (national holiday). Good views of Cape grassbird though on the first stretch of road.

We then drove straight to Moonstruck Lodge in Pringle Bay. Professionally run and a nice place to unwind at the end of a trip ([www.moonstruck.co.za](http://www.moonstruck.co.za)). The rooms all have beautiful views on the Rooiels birding area. We had a late lunch at a place called "Simply Coffee" (a nice place with good salads, coffee and cake and only a two-minute walk from Moonstruck) and then relaxed a bit at the lodge (Cape sugarbird and Cape rock-thrush from the balcony).

In the afternoon we went out for what should have been a short beach walk, but turned into a proper walk to Rooiels, where we saw among others orange-bellied sunbird, more Cape sugarbirds and Cape bunting. Just when we were turning around to go back I noticed a black-looking bird on a rock. Cape rock-jumper! Eventually we saw both the female and male very well, and in particular the male allowed very close views.

In the evening we went to the @365 restaurant in Pringle Bay. Pleasant atmosphere, friendly staff, but I had expected more of the food. Well prepared but a bit bland.



*Cape Rock-jumper*



*Cape Sugarbird*

### **December 16: Betty's Bay - Harold Porter Botanical Gardens - Rooiels**

In the morning we went to Betty's Bay, where we saw a good selection of terns and cormorants and of course the penguins. From 10am to about 4.30pm we visited the Harold Porter botanical gardens. It was a hot and cloudless day and bird activity was rather poor. On the Disa Trail we saw paradise, dusky and spotted flycatcher, Cape batis and olive woodpecker but little else of note. On the Zig Zag Trail we saw four birds, a rock martin, a male orange-breasted sunbird and two peregrine falcons hunting overhead. This area has been burnt and a lot of the vegetation has not recovered. On the other hand, the walk up to Leopard Kloof is great and well worth doing just for the walk. Birdwise it was rather quiet (between 2 and 3.30 pm), but we did see several of the beautiful Disa orchids and a largish black snake. The gardens themselves were very quiet as well, only common stuff was seen such as olive thrush, Karoo prinia, Cape wagtail, Cape white-eye, red-winged starling, Cape canary, etc.

I spent the late afternoon/early evening at Rooiels. Again lots of Cape sugarbirds were around. In addition, neddicky, grey-backed cisticola, Karoo prinia, white-necked raven, Cape grassbird, yellow bishop, orange-breasted and southern double-collared sunbird and Cape bunting were seen. Best sighting was a ground woodpecker. I did not see or hear the rock-jumper this time.

This evening we went to the Hook, Line and Sinker restaurant, probably the most famous place in town. We were told in advance that the owners were a bit crazy and we shouldn't get too upset by them and god knows what, but I thought they were very friendly and great hosts. Maybe quite direct in their approach, but that is nothing Dutch aren't used too. Anyway, the food was excellent, they had a good selection of wines and just generally there was a pleasant and homely atmosphere. Recommended. Getting a reservation here can be tricky and is maybe easier when done through your accommodation.

### **December 17: Harold Porter Botanical Gardens – evening flight out**

After breakfast we went to the Rooisand wetland. This wetland can be accessed a few kilometres beyond Kleinmond but is only signposted when you come from the other side, i.e., from the Botrivier side, but the turn-off is shortly after a farm named Larmloch Protea Farm if you come from the Kleinmond direction. The farm is on the left side but the turn-off to Rooisand is on the right (it is a dirt road with a eucalyptus plantation on the



left). There are two short trails with several viewpoints and a nice bird hide for a couple of hours of pleasant wetland birding. We saw four tern species, several waders, Hartlaub's and kelp gulls, Cape and white-breasted cormorant, three egret species, grey heron, a few duck species, a blue crane, pied kingfisher and about ten great white pelicans.

After some shopping in Kleinmond and lunch in Pringle Bay we went back to the Harold Porter botanical garden to see if the birding was less disappointing this time. Amazingly it was better (despite being there between 3 and 5 pm). At the Disa Trail we saw an African goshawk and malachite kingfisher plus the same species seen yesterday. We also scanned the darkest and moistest corners of the gorge and now also found Disa orchids here. In the botanical garden section we saw common waxbill, Cape grassbird, Cape sugarbird and Cape siskin, which we had all missed yesterday. No sign of Victorin's warbler though.

We drove back to Cape Town, delivered the car at Europcar's office, and then decided to take it easy and eat something first. We were a bit puzzled that our flight was not yet displayed on the board, but didn't think much of it until we sat down in the restaurant and Anja decided to look at the ticket once more at 8.05 pm. The ticket said: departure at 8.40 pm, gate closes at 8.05 pm. Oops, and we hadn't checked in our luggage yet. For some reason I was sure I had read 11.40 pm instead of 8.40 pm when I had checked the ticket in the morning. We raced to the BA counter. There was just one last counter open and we managed to get the last two seats on the flight. Thankfully an official waved us through the long queue at the passport control and we managed to board the plane just in time. Comments, feedback, corrections on identifications, etc. are most welcome: olpa [at] onsneteindhoven.nl



*Blue Cranes (Overberg)*

## Trip Lists: Notes, Index and Literature

I only took the two Sasol books to South Africa for bird finding and identification: *Sasol's Southern African Birdfinder* by C. Cohen, C. Spottiswoode and J. Rossouw is essential and still up to date for all the places I visited. One of the best bird finding guides I have seen so far. *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa* by I. Sinclair, P. Hockey, W. Tarboton and P. Ryan is probably the best field guide for Southern Africa. The drawings and range maps are mostly good to excellent, but there is still room for improvement in the drawings of certain species. Other minor things that would be nice to be included: several nightjars are not shown on the ground, and canaries and larks are not all shown in flight (they are often seen flushed). At home I also used *Birds of Africa (South of the Sahara)* by I. Sinclair and P. Ryan and a Newman's guide from 1983 (interesting to see how much has changed in thirty years). Sounds recordings of the birds were compiled from the 6-CD set *Birds of Southern Africa* by Guy Gibbons and recordings on Xenocanto.

For mammals I took *Field Guide to African Mammals* by J. Kingdon, which is not that great for rodent identification in Southern Africa. It is better to have one of the guides for the Southern African region (even if they are far from comprehensive). I took some copies of the rodent pages from Chris and Tilde Stuart's books. I also took a 20-year old copy of *Southern Africa's mammals: A field guide* - Robin Frandsen, which is nice to leaf through, but completely ignores "micromammals" (i.e., anything smaller than a rabbit). At home I also used *Carnivores of the World* by Luke Hunter. The book provides a compact overview and good drawings of all the terrestrial carnivores, but I don't think I would take in on trips as a field guide. It is more suitable to double-check things at home. The book itself doesn't contain range maps. However, the range maps can be downloaded here: <http://www.panthera.org/carnivoreguide-maps> to allow for updates when new data or insights become available. An interesting and innovative approach.



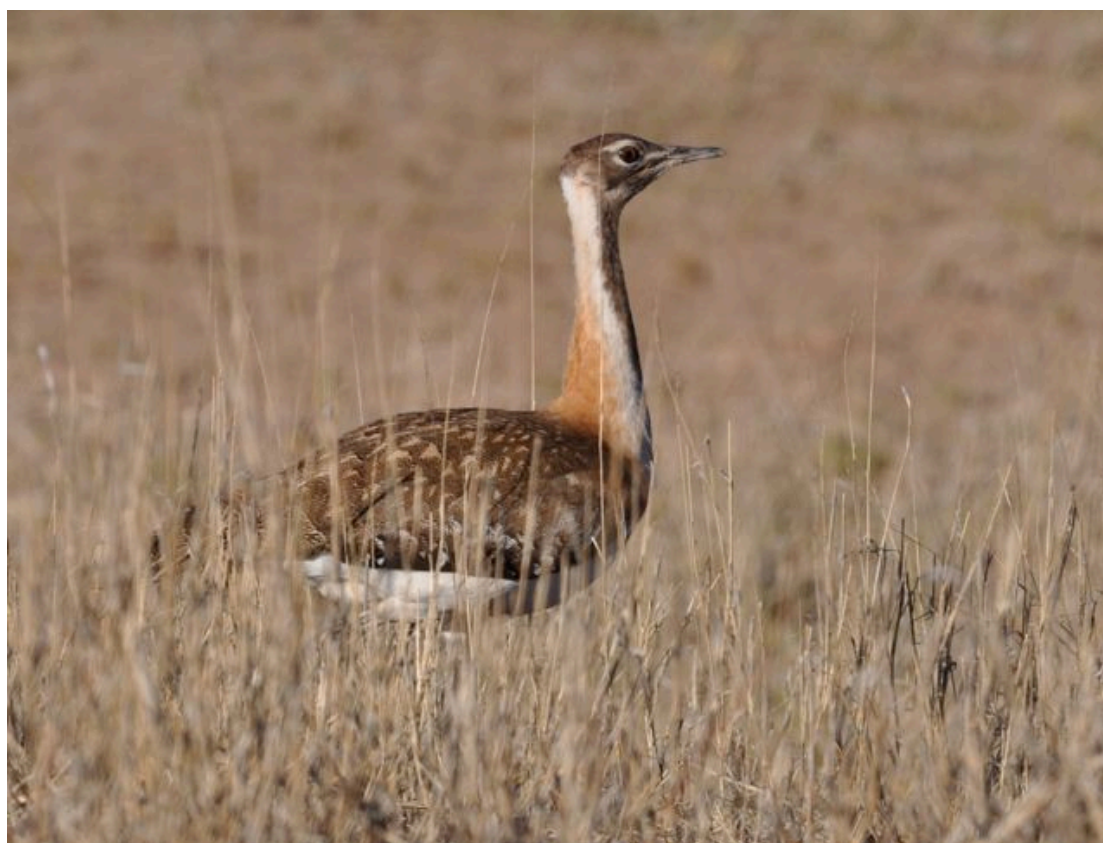
*Bat-eared Fox (Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park)*

For general travel information and preparation, I mainly used trip reports. I found the following birding reports useful: G. Delforge (2008), J. Hughes (2010), O. Campbell (2008), H. & K. Gustavsson (2002/2003), V. de Boer (2008), J. Wouters (2003/2006), W. Heylen (2002), and D. Mason (2010). Keith Taylor's *Finding South Africa's Endemics* is still worth a read, but most of the information in that report can be found in the Birdfinder book. For mammals, I read all the reports on [www.mammalwatching.com](http://www.mammalwatching.com) and I found the following very useful: J. Hall (2007/2009), R. Webb (2004/2010), S. Lithner (2010), A. Guillemont (2010) and M. Steer (2010). The San Parks discussion forums for the national parks are nice to have a look at just before you leave to see what's going on.

Useful books during the preparation of the trip were: *Watching Wildlife: Southern Africa (Lonely Planet)* by Luke Hunter and Susan Rhind, *Reiseführer Natur, Südliches Afrika* [in German] by August Sycholt and *Exploring the Natural Wonders of South Africa* by Willie and Sandra Olivier. The latter also includes less well-known nature reserves in South Africa. Quite old, but still reasonably up to date and useful for trip planning.

Index to the mammal and bird lists below:

GG = Goegap Nature Reserve	AU = Augrabies National Park
MZNP = Mount Zebra National Park	SAM = Samara Private Reserve
DHO = De Hoop Nature Reserve	WCNP = West Coast National Park
HPBG = Harold Porter Botanical Gardens	MOK = Mokala National Park
MOS = Moonstruck Lodge and immediate surroundings in Pringle Bay	
KTP = Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park	
2R = Twee Rivieren area in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park	
KTC = Kalahari Tented Camp in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park	



*Ludwig's Bustard (Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park)*



## MAMMAL LIST

Chacma Baboon, *Papio ursinus* - a group of about twenty very dark (almost black) individuals in GG, 10+ in AU, two small groups en route from MOK to MZNP, a few groups in SAM, a few in Pringle Bay village

Vervet Monkey, *Cercopithecus aethiops* - three in AU, several small groups in MZNP, several larger groups (10-25) in SAM

(Four-)Striped (Grass) Mouse, *Rhabdomys pumilio* - common in KTP, several in DHO, two on the Seeberg viewpoint in WCNP

Brant's Whistling Rat, *Parotomys brantsii* - a few seen in GG

[Vlei Rat species, *Otomys* sp - a dead rodent on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail was possibly this genus]

Bush Karoo Rat, *Otomys unisulcatus* - two groups seen well in MZNP

Cape Hare, *Lepus capensis* - one from the hide in Nossob, several at Benfontein

Scrub Hare, *Lepus saxatilis* - at least five on the night drive in AU, three on the night drive in SAM, three on the first and two on the second night drive in DHO (I am not 100% sure that all of these were Scrub or Cape Hare, but Scrub Hare seems more likely)



Steenbok (KTP)



Scrub Hare (Augrabies)

Smith's Red Rock Rabbit, *Pronolagus rupestris* - one on the night drive in AU, rather shy  
Springhare, *Pedetes capensis* - at least 5 on the night drive in AU, abundant (>40) on the night drive in Nossob, many on the night drive in Benfontein, about 2-5 on the night drives in MOK, MZNP and SAM.

Ground Squirrel, *Xerus inauris* - common in KTP and MZNP, also seen in MOK and en route to MZNP

Cape Dune Mole-Rat, *Bathyergus suillus* - one in WCNP

Porcupine, *Hystrix africaeaustralis* - one on the second night drive in DHO



Porcupine (de Hoop)



African Wildcat (Augrabies)



Cape Fox, *Vulpes chama* – only one at the waterhole in Nossob camp (after dark)

Bat-eared Fox, *Otocyon megalotis* – several sightings in KTP: one on Nov. 29, two on Nov. 30, three on December 1 and a total of six animals (three sightings) on Dec. 2. One in MZNP on Dec. 6.

Blackbacked Jackal, *Canis mesomelas* – common in KTP (between 5 and 15 daily), two in MOK on Dec. 4, one on the Rooiplaat loop in MZNP on Dec. 7 and three on the night drive in SAM on the same day

[Striped Polecat, *Ictonyx striatus* – only seen as a roadkill in the north]

Cape Grey Mongoose, *Galerella pulverulenta* – one in MOK on Dec. 4, one on the road from DHO to Bredasdorp, one looking for food around our chalet (Duinepos) in WCNP at dawn on Dec. 15, one at Rooiels on Dec. 15

[Marsh Mongoose, *Atilax paludinosus* – late afternoon on Dec. 13 we went to Tsaarbank. When we arrived there, a storm was building up, the sky threateningly black and it was raining. The area was completely deserted. When we stopped the car at the first point where you can see the ocean at Tsaarbank we saw two mongooses scurry along some rocks only some 10-15 meters away. One was about 30% larger than the other, and the bigger one was much larger than any Cape Grey Mongoose or Yellow Mongoose I had seen in the preceding days. The larger animal appeared uniformly dark chocolate brown with rather messy long fur and I could not see any obvious grizzled pattern on the coat (so Marsh Mongoose came immediately to my mind). However, confusingly the smaller animal was more similar to a Cape Grey Mongoose in colouration and size, but maybe more brown/blackish (not greyish), but with some clear grizzling on the coat. Both animals were very shy. I could look at them for about ten seconds and then they disappeared behind or under some rocks. A few minutes after they went for cover I got out of the car trying to flush them in a last desperate attempt to see them again, but they had disappeared completely and I had not managed to take a picture. Given the size and colouration of the bigger animal I think it was probably a Marsh Mongoose or maybe even a very oddly coloured Egyptian Mongoose (which would explain the colour of the smaller/younger animal better). However, the divergent appearance of both animals keeps bugging me. Any comments are welcome at: olpa [at] onsneteindhoven.nl]

Slender Mongoose, *Galerella sanguinea* – probably one at Koa Dunes (to me it looked more like a slender mongoose than Cape grey mongoose, short view though, but the IUCN range map suggests that it does not occur in the Koa Dunes area although it is close to the distribution limit shown in the IUCN map), one in AU on the Dassie Trail was definitely this species, one south of Upington on the way to Kimberley also seemed to be this species (warm light brown/caramel colour and clear black tail tip).

Yellow Mongoose, *Cynictis penicillata* – single animals twice on Dec. 29 in KTP, a tame animal in Nossob rest camp, one in MOK on Dec. 4, one en route to MZNP and one in MZNP on Dec. 5, one on an unpaved road between Swellendam to De Hoop on Dec. 11, one on the road from DHO to Bredasdorp,

[Suricate, *Suricata suricatta* – not seen, despite actively looking for them in AU, KTP, MZNP, MOK and SAM]

Small-spotted Genet, *Genetta genetta (felina)* – one on the night drive in AU

Spotted Hyena, *Crocuta crocuta* – two cooling down in one of the waterholes between Auchterlonie and Houmoed in KTP on Dec. 2

Aardwolf, *Proteles cristatus* – one animal was seen in the afternoon on Dec. 6 sleeping in front of his den. We saw the same animal again racing back to its den early in the morning on Dec. 7. A dead animal was seen near the southern entrance of MOK.

African Wild Cat, *Felis lybica* – one on the night drive in AU, one walked and sprinted in the Nossob riverbed near Kaspersdraai parallel along the road for at least ten minutes, and one crossed the road some 7-8 meters in front of our car near Craig Lockhart in KTP.

Black-footed (or Small Spotted) Cat, *Felis nigripes* – one male and a female with two kittens on the night drive in Benfontein.

Cheetah, *Acinonyx jubatus* – in KTP a female with two medium-sized cubs was seen on the Marie se Draai loop on Nov. 29 and a group of five males in the Sitsas/Craig Lockhart area on July 1. A female was seen during cheetah tracking on foot in MZNP.

Lion, *Panthera leo* – all sightings in KTP: three sightings on Dec. 1: a group of five (young male and adult females) was seen near the Eland waterhole on the Second Dune Road only a few minutes after we had seen the leopard, a group of five lions (male, females and cubs) was seen at Sitsas waterhole and a large male with lots of porcupine quills in his mouth and throat at Dalkeith waterhole. Two sightings on Dec. 2: a subadult male at Batulama waterhole and a female at Samevloeing

Leopard, *Panthera pardus* – one on the Second Dune Road was seen for at least 20 minutes, the cat was drinking from a pool on the road and then walked straight towards our car and passed us at only 4-5 meters and then slowly walked up one of the dunes

Aardvark, *Orycteropus afer* – two sightings!!!, one seen very well in MZNP on Dec. 6, one seen briefly in SAM on Dec. 7.

Rock Dassie/Hyrax, *Procavia capensis* – at least thirty on the Dassie Trail and a few in the Rest Camp in AU, three on the longer walking trail in MZNP, many around the buildings behind the restaurant towards the vlei in DHO, two on the Klipspringer Trail in DHO



*Rock Hyrax (De Hoop)*

Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, *Equus zebra hartmannae* – four rather shy animals on the night drive in AU

Cape Mountain Zebra, *Equus zebra zebra* – one in MOK on Dec. 4, quite common in MZNP, six in the morning and four in the evening on the Tierhoek loop in DHO, between two and ten in the mornings and evenings in the Posberg area in WCNP

Burchell's Zebra, *Equus burchellii* – common in MOK, small numbers in SAM and MZNP

Black Rhino, *Diceros bicornis* – one on Dec. 5 in MOK

White Rhino, *Ceratotherium simum* – six on the evening of Dec. 4 and four the next morning in MOK

Warthog, *Phacochoerus aethiopicus* – common in MOK

Giraffe, *Giraffa camelopardalis* – three in AU on the afternoon/night drive, seven around KTC on December 1, at least seven on Dec. 4 and about ten on Dec. 5 in MOK

Buffalo, *Syncerus caffer* – at least ten on Dec. 4 and more than twenty on Dec. 5 in MOK, a herd of several tens along the main road in MZNP on the evening drive on Dec. 6

Eland, *Taurotragus oryx* – a group of forty adults and fifteen calves in AU on the night drive, a group of at least ten in MOK on Dec. 5, a group of at least fifty in SAM on Dec. 9, a small group and a lone male at Tierhoek in DHO, a group of twenty seen from the Klipspringer Trail in DHO, two sightings of small groups (<5) after dark in WCNP

Nyala, *Tragelaphus angasii* – one male in SAM (an animal that had escaped from a nearby hunting farm)

Kudu, *Tragelaphus strepsiceros* – three north of Dikbaardskolk (KTP) on Dec. 29 and one male north of Cheleka on Dec. 1, common in MOK but mostly very skittish, regular sightings in MZNP and SAM, four sightings of small groups of 3-6 animals in WCNP, of which only one sighting was in daytime

Roan, *Hippotragus equinus* – one scoped in MOK on the Matopi loop

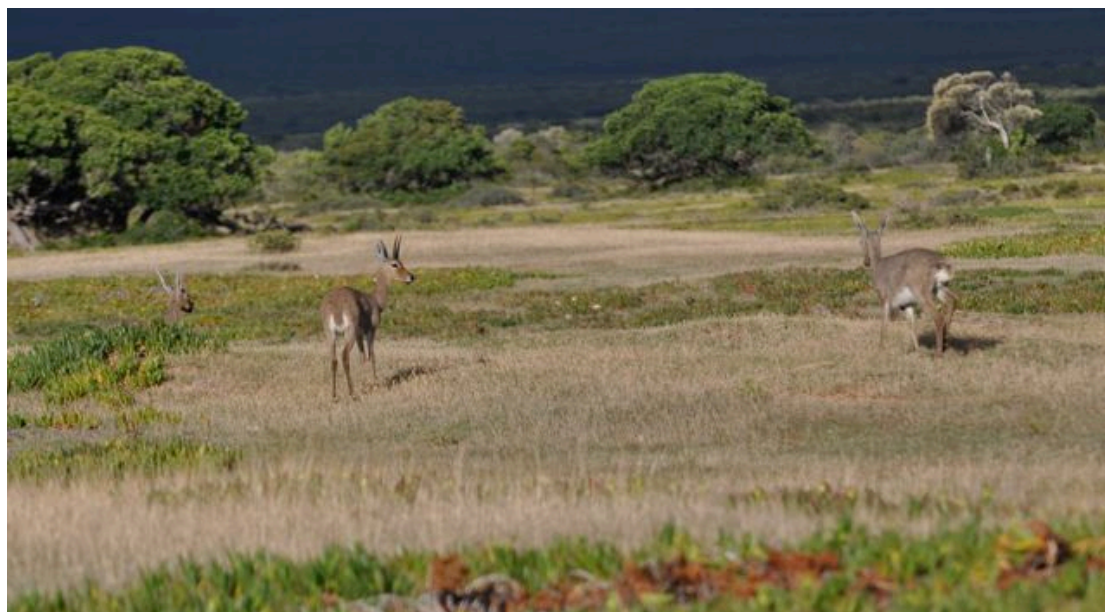
Sable, *Hippotragus niger* – singles and small groups of animals in hunting reserves around MOK.

Gemsbok, *Oryx gazelle* – one on the night drive in AU, between 5 and 50 daily in KTP, about 20-30 in MOK, fairly low daily numbers (5-15) in MZNP and SAM

Waterbuck, *Kobus ellipsiprymnus* – one male in SAM (this animal escaped from a nearby hunting farm together with the nyala)

Mountain Reedbuck, *Redunca arundinum* – two males on a mountain pass on the R61, not sure whether they were on a hunting farm, but very likely

Grey Rhebok, *Pelea capreolus* – two on a mountain pass on the N10 about 50 km northwest of Cradock, a group of four on the Kranskoploop in MZNP, a group of four on an unpaved road between Swellendam to De Hoop, daily a group of 4-6 animals was seen near the accommodation in DHO



*Rhebok in De Hoop*

Black Wildebeest, *Connochaetes gnou* – small numbers in the northern sector of MOK, several dozens in MZNP (mainly on the Rooiplaat loop).

Blue Wildebeest, *Connochaetes taurinus* – in KTP only small groups (<15) or single animals were seen in the Nossob area, in the Auob valley especially towards Mata Mata the groups were much larger and more frequent (typically 20-60 animals), a group of about 20 en route to Kimberley in a hunting farm, common in MOK and MZNP, small numbers in SAM.

Red Hartebeest, *Alcelaphus buselaphus* – in KTP first seen on Dec. 1: a single animal and a group of four were seen between Cheleka and Dikbaardskolk, they were slightly more frequent between Kamqua and Mata Mata, a total of 5 sightings of 10 animals on Dec. 1 and 2, common (several tens) in MOK, about 25 in total in MZNP on Dec. 6, several sightings at SAM including a nice one of a group of about 15 with more than half of them calves on Dec. 8, a group of four was seen daily along the Abrahamskraal road in WCNP.

Bontebok, *Damaliscus dorcas* – common (50-100) daily in DHO, occasionally seen on hunting farms en route

Blesbok, *Damaliscus phillipsi* – only a few sightings of small groups or singles in MOK, several tens in MZNP, occasionally seen on hunting farms en route

Tsessebe, *Damaliscus lunatus* – common in MOK

Impala, *Aepyceros melampus* – fairly common in MOK

Springbok, *Antidorcas marsupialis* – common in KTP, but only small herds around Nossob, much larger groups (up to 50-100) in the Mata Mata area, also common north of Twee Rivieren towards Rooiputs. Small groups in AU, Benfontein, MZNP and MOK, and a few in WCNP at Posberg

Klipspringer, *Oreotragus oreotragus* – three on the night drive in AU, one on the Dassie Trail in AU, and a tame animal in GG



*Klipspringer – classic pose in Augrabies*

Steenbok, *Raphicerus campestris* – quite common: one near Molopo Lodge, 1-3 daily en route in KTP plus one from the hide at the waterhole in Nossob and one on the night drive on Nov. 30, several in MOK, one in MZNP, two on Dec. 7 and one at Dec. 8 at SAM, two on the road from DHO to Bredasdorp, three at Abrahamskraal in WCNP on Dec. 15.

Common Duiker, *Sylvicapra grimmia* – two in MOK on Dec. 5, two on the night drive in MZNP on Dec. 6, and two in SAM on the night drive on Dec. 7



[Cape Grysbok, *Raphicerus melanotis* – a possible one at Abrahamskraal on Dec. 13 around dusk, the animal was foraging at the far end of the water edge. It was raining and the air was damp so visibility was not optimal. Even with the scope I could not really get good views. I could not see its legs in the high grass and his belly and back were obscured by vegetation. The pelage was grizzled, but not as much as you would expect for a grysbok (coat was soaking wet though).]

[Heaviside's Dolphin, *Cephalorhynchus heavisidii* – non-tickable sighting of some dolphins far out at sea at Yzerfontein, but they were probably this species]

Cape Fur Seal, *Arctocephalus pusillus* – about 6-7 at Yzerfontein



*Springbok and Secretarybird at the waterhole in Nossob Camp*

## BIRD LIST

Common Ostrich, *Struthio camelus* – wild animals were common in almost all national parks and nature reserves

African Penguin, *Spheniscus demersus* – several tens seen at the colony in Betty's Bay

White-chinned Petrel, *Procellaria aequinoctialis* – a small group seen offshore at Tsaarbank in WCNP

Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – one on a small pool of water in MZNP, a few (2-3) at the water reservoir in SAM, common on Langvlei and Rondevlei, common on the vlei in DHO, a few were always present at Abrahamskraal in DHO

Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus* – common on Langvlei and Rondevlei, common on the vlei in DHO, a handful at Abrahamskraal in DHO

Cape Gannet, *Morus capensis* – several tens pushed to the shore by a storm in WCNP in the afternoon of Dec. 13.

Reed Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax africanus* – a few near Clanwilliam, common on the lakes in the Wilderness area

Crowned Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax coronatus* – one at Yzerfontein, decent numbers at the penguin colony in Betty's Bay and a few scattered sightings along the coast

Bank Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax neglectus* – good numbers at Yzerfontein and decent numbers at the penguin colony in Betty's Bay, also seen in WCNP

White-breasted Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax lucidus* – common along the coast in the Western Cape

Cape Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax capensis* – common along the coast in the Western Cape

African Darter, *Anhinga rufa* – one flying over the road near Somerset West

Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax* – about 5-10 daily in DHO

Western Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis* – common in the southwest, but seen on most days when traveling

Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea* – regular sightings throughout the tour, mainly in the south

Black-headed Heron, *Ardea melanocephala* – common (in particular in the Western Cape), seen on most days and even as far up north as Vaalpan waterhole in KTP

Purple Heron, *Ardea purpurea* – only one near the Ebb & Flow Rest Camp in Wilderness

Western Great Egret, *Ardea alba* – seen at Rondevlei, Langvlei, DHO, Rooisand Wetland and WCNP, and occasionally en route

Yellow-billed Egret, *Egretta intermedia* – seen at Rondevlei, Langvlei, DHO, Rooisand Wetland and WCNP

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta* – seen at Rondevlei, Langvlei, DHO, Rooisand Wetland and WCNP, and occasionally en route

Hamerkop, *Scopus umbretta* – two on the Kranskoploop in MZNP, two on the vlei section in front of our cabin and possibly the same two birds were the ones seen at Tierhoek in DHO.

Great White Pelican, *Pelecanus onocrotalus* – between 40 and 80 roosting on the island in the vlei that can be seen from the walking trail in DHO, about 10 at Rooisand

Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus* – about 100 roosting on the island in the vlei in DHO

White Stork, *Ciconia ciconia* – eight at Benfontein, one en route from SAM to Wilderness

African Sacred Ibis, *Threskiornis aethiopicus* – a few along the N7 to Springbok, about ten around Graaff-Reinet, common around Cape Town, also seen in DHO, WCNP and Rooisand, most remarkable was a congregation of at least 200 birds on farmland on the road from DHO to Bredasdorp.

Hadedda Ibis, *Bostrychia hagedash* – common, 1-5 almost daily, but scarce in KTP

Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus* – about 8-9 at Rondevlei, about 7-8 feeding in the vlei in DHO (seen both from our cabin and from the Tierhoek viewpoint, but probably the same birds)

African Spoonbill, *Platalea alba* – one from the walking trail in DHO and three at Tierhoek in DHO, about 14-15 roosting at Abrahamskraal WCNP

White-faced Whistling Duck, *Dendrocygna viduata* – two at Benfontein, about 4-5 at a water reservoir in SAM, about 4-5 at Rondevlei

Spur-winged Goose, *Plectropterus gambensis* – seen at Benfontein, SAM, DHO, WCNP and Rooisand Wetland

Egyptian Goose, *Alopochen aegyptiaca* – common

South African Shelduck, *Tadorna cana* – a pair at the vlei in DHO, a pair with about 8-9 young at the hide in Abrahamskraal in WCNP

Cape Teal, *Anas capensis* – a few at Benfontein, a small group (4-5) at the vlei in DHO

African Black Duck, *Anas sparsa* – about twenty at the dam near Clanwilliam, about 15 at Benfontein, common at DHO, one male at the dam on the Disa Trail in HPBG, several tens at Langvlei, several times seen en route

Yellow-billed Duck, *Anas undulate* – about ten at a water reservoir in SAM, common on the vleis (lakes) around Wilderness and in WCNP and DHO, also seen at the Rooisand wetland.

Cape Shoveler, *Anas smithii* – common around Wilderness (Langvlei, Rondevlei), WCNP, DHO, Rooisand wetland

Red-billed Teal, *Anas erythrorhynchos* – a few at Benfontein, about ten at the vlei in DHO, four at the Rooisand wetland near Betty's Bay

Hottentot Teal, *Anas hottentota* – two on the vlei in DHO on Dec. 11

Southern Pochard, *Netta erythrophthalma* – three on Rondevlei on Dec. 10 (possibly more there but they were too far away to be sure)

Secretarybird, *Sagittarius serpentarius* – very common in KTP (up to 10-15 a day), most amazing was a congregation of eleven birds at Rooiputs on Dec. 2. At least two in the northern sector of MOK on Dec. 4 and one in SAM on Dec. 9

Western Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus* – one hunting over the high-tide hides at Geelbek

Yellow-billed Kite, *Milvus parasitus* – common around Cape Town, in WCNP and on the unpaved roads in de Overberg area, occasional sightings along the N7, but rarely seen elsewhere

Black-winged Kite, *Elanus caeruleus* – common throughout, 1-5 seen on most days

African Fish Eagle, *Haliaeetus vocifer* – a juvenile in the morning and an adult in the evening at Tierhoek at DHO, two adults above the gorge of the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail, two adults flying above Rondevlei

White-backed Vulture, *Gyps africanus* – three at the turn-off for the Witsand Nature Reserve, low numbers (1-4) between Mata Mata and Kamqua, three perched a few hundred meters away from Molopo Lodge.

Cape (Griffon) Vulture, *Gyps coprotheres* – two from the unpaved road between Stellendam and DHO, spectacular views of at least thirty trying to find thermals in DHO on the Klipspringer Trail.

Lappet-faced Vulture, *Torgos tracheliotus* - two at the turn-off for the Witsand Nature Reserve, not seen in KTP.

Black-chested Snake Eagle, *Circaetus pectoralis* – 2-3 daily in KTP, most were adults, but one (what I think was a) 2<sup>nd</sup> year bird was photographed near KTC.

Bateleur, *Terathopius ecaudatus* – one on Nov. 29, four on Nov. 30 and two on Dec. 2 in KTP

African Marsh Harrier, *Circus ranivorus* – a few daily in WCNP, usually at Abrahamskraal and sometimes around Seeberg

Black Harrier, *Circus maurus* – one in the red dunes between Samevloeing and Houmoed and another one north of Houmoed in KTP, two in MZNP on Dec. 6, one on the road to Koppie Alleen in DHO on Dec. 11, one close to the main entrance in DHO on Dec. 12, one near Napier on Dec. 13, at least 3 different birds on Dec. 14 in WCNP



*Black Harrier (KTP)*

African Harrier-Hawk (*Gymnogene*), *Polyboroides typus* – one in KTP on Nov.29, one near Unionsdale along the N9, one on the Tierhoek loop in DHO

Pale Chanting Goshawk, *Melierax canorus* – only a few along the N7 and the N14 up to Pofadder, but becoming common between Pofadder and Upington, very common to abundant in KTP and along the N63, common (1-5 daily) in MOK, MZNP and SAM.

Gabar Goshawk, *Micronisus gabar* – one adult seen well at the Rooikop waterhole in KTP

African Goshawk, *Accipiter tachiro* – one adult on the Disa Trail in HPBG

Common Buzzard, *Buteo buteo* – several along the N7 to Springbok, about 4-5 in SAM, common in the south, in particular in the Overberg area

Forest Buzzard, *Buteo trizonatus* – only one identified with certainty above the forest at Woodville (Big Tree Trail)

Jackal Buzzard, *Buteo rufofuscus* – a few juveniles on the N7 to Springbok, two adults at GG, an adult on Dec. 6 in MZNP, an immature bird on Dec. 7 in MZNP, one in Overberg en route to DHO, three different adult birds on the entrance road to DHO on Dec. 12, one on the walk to the Seeberg viewpoint

Tawny Eagle, *Aquila rapax* – 1-3 daily in KTP

Verreaux's Eagle, *Aquila verreauxii* – two adults trying to find thermals low over Moon Rock while walking the Dassie Trail in AU

Booted Eagle, *Aquila pennatus* – one dark-phased bird on the Umngeni 4x4 trail in MZNP, one near Graaff-Reinet, one near George

Martial Eagle, *Polemaetus bellicosus* – one adult en route between 2R and Nossob, one adult on Nov. 29 just south of Nossob Rest Camp and one adult on Dec. 1.

Pygmy Falcon, *Polihierax semitorquatus* – surprisingly scarce, one along the entrance road to Koa Dunes, one between Pofadder and Kakamas, and two along the R360 to KTP, one somewhere near Kamfersboom in KTP on Dec. 29.

Rock Kestrel, *Falco rupicolus* – quite common throughout the tour, 1-5 seen on most days

Greater Kestrel, *Falco rupicoloides* – one near Koa Dunes and two in KTP

Red-necked Falcon, *Falco chicquera* – one eating what looked like a Social Weaver between Craig Lockhart and Dalkeith

Lanner Falcon, *Falco biarmicus* - 1-4 seen daily in KTP, one in SAM on Dec. 8.

Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus* – two adults hunting over the gorge at the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail in Wilderness, two birds (adult and juvenile) on the Zig-Zag trail in HPBG

Black Crake, *Amaurornis flavirostra* – two from the hide at Abrahamskraal

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus* – surprisingly only one in the Wilderness area

Red-knobbed Coot, *Fulica cristata* – about 15 at Benfontein, very common in the Wilderness area, WCNP, and DHO

Grey Crowned Crane, *Balearica regulorum* – one in a wetland together with blue cranes en route from MOK to MZNP

Blue Crane, *Anthropoides paradiseus* – one along the N7 to Springbok, about ten at Benfontein, a few tens en route from MOK to MZNP, two seen in a valley on the Kranskoploop on Dec. 6 and about 3-4 on the Rooiplaat loop and Link Road in MZNP on Dec. 7, about eight in SAM on Dec. 9, very common in the Overberg region and small numbers were also seen in DHO (mostly early in the morning), regular sightings along the N2 between Swellendam and Somerset West, one at the Rooisand wetland

Kori Bustard, *Ardeotis kori* – common in KTP (between 5 and 15 daily), one along the road in a nature reserve near Kimberley, one in MOK on Dec. 4

Ludwig's Bustard, *Neotis ludwigii* – four in GG, a total of eight on Dec. 1. Eleven! birds on the stretch from KTC to Kamqua on Dec. 2, two in SAM.

Denham's Bustard, *Neotis denhami* – two in DHO on Dec. 11 (in the more open grassy areas near the turn-off for Koppie Alleen), two outside DHO on Dec. 12 at the turn-off towards Potberg



Karoo Korhaan, *Eupodotis vigorsii* – two south of Aberdeen en route from SAM to Wilderness

Red-crested Korhaan, *Lophotis ruficrista* – only seen in KTP on the First (two birds) and Second Dune Road (one bird)

Southern Black Korhaan, *Afrotis afra* – one rather distant male in SAM and another male scoped near the bird hide at Abrahamskraal

Northern Black Korhaan, *Afrotis afraoides* – several males between 2R and Auchterlonie on Dec. 29, about 3-4 on the Second Dune Road on Dec. 1 and one near Kamfersboom on Dec. 2, two at Benfontein, two males in the northern sector of MOK.

Helmeted Guineafowl, *Numida meleagris* – common, seen almost daily throughout the tour

Grey-winged Francolin, *Scleroptila Africana* – common in DHO and WCNP

Cape Spurrow, *Pternistis capensis* – common in DHO and WCNP

Swainson's Spurrow, *Pternistis swainsonii* – 3 at Benfontein

Red-necked Spurrow, *Pternistis afer* – a female with young along the unpaved entrance road to the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 11, about 4-5 on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail

Spotted Thick-knee, *Burhinus capensis* – three around the waterhole at night in Nossob Rest Camp, in daytime I found them roosting in the bushes around the gate that gives access to the road to Union's End, two near Rooibrak in KTP, one on the night drive in MZNP, two on the night drive in SAM, a couple on the walk to the Seeberg viewpoint

African Black Oystercatcher, *Haematopus moquini* – about 10-20 in WCNP and DHO, also seen on the beach in Pringle Bay and Betty's Bay and the Rooisand wetland

Eurasian Oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus* – one at the Seeberg hide in DHO, present on all three visits to the hide. This bird had been here since October. It was interesting to see how much larger African Black Oystercatcher is.

Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus* – about 6-7 at Benfontein, about 8 at the large water reservoir in SAM, common at DHO, WCNP and Rooisand Wetland

Pied Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta* – only two at Tierhoek in DHO

Blacksmith Lapwing, *Vanellus armatus* – quite common, a few en route on the N7 to Springbok, about 3-4 at Benfontein, a pair at the water reservoir in SAM, also seen in WCNP, DHO, Rooisand, and en route in the Western Cape

Crowned Lapwing, *Vanellus coronatus* – common in most places visited

Common Ringed Plover, *Charadrius hiaticula* – at least ten seen from Geelbek hide on Dec. 14 and at least two from the Seeberg Hide on Dec. 14

Kittlitz's Plover, *Charadrius pecuarius* – common in WCNP and Rooisand

Three-banded Plover, *Charadrius tricollaris* – fairly common in WCNP, two in Rooisand from the hide

White-fronted Plover, *Charadrius marginatus* – fairly common in WCNP

[Chestnut-banded Plover, *Charadrius pallidus* – not seen, I tried to go to the gypsum mine at Yzerfontein, but the gate was locked and the office was closed probably because it was a national holiday.]

African Jacana, *Actophilornis africanus* – only once en route in the Western Cape

Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica* – two from the Geelbek hide and about 4-5 from the Seeberg Hide on Dec. 14

Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus* – small numbers (10-20 in total) in WCNP, both at the Geelbek and Seeberg hides

Eurasian Curlew, *Numenius arquata* – about 20-30 in total in WCNP, both at the Geelbek and Seeberg hides

Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatilis* – about ten in total in WCNP

Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia* – common in DHO and WCNP, also seen in Rooisand

Wood Sandpiper, *Tringa glareola* – about 2-3 at Langvlei from the hide, about 5-10 feeding along the vlei on all days in DHO

Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos* – one in AU, a few in DHO

Ruddy Turnstone, *Arenaria interpres* – only about 4-5 seen at Tsaarbank and Seeberg Hide in WCNP

Red Knot, *Calidris canutus* – quite common in WCNP, most numerous at the Geelbek hide, but also seen at the Seeberg hide

Sanderling, *Calidris alba* – quite common in WCNP, seen at Geelbek, Seeberg and Tsaarbank

Little Stint, *Calidris minuta* – small groups foraging along the vlei in DHO, a few groups in WCNP

Curlew Sandpiper, *Calidris ferruginea* – about 300 at the high-tide hides at Geelbek, a few tens at the “regular” Geelbek hide and a few around the Seeberg hide, also seen at Rooisand

[Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax* - a small group that almost immediately flew off in DHO seemed to be this species]

Double-banded Courser, *Rhinoptilus africanus* – about 5-6 in the grassy flats between Cubitje Quap and Kwang, two on the Second Dune Road near the Moravet waterhole



*Double-banded Courser (Cubitje Quap area, KTP)*

Hartlaub's Gull, *Chroicocephalus hartlaubii* – common along the coast

Kelp Gull, *Larus dominicanus* – common along the coast

Caspian Tern, *Hydroprogne caspia* – three roosting on the island in the vlei that can be seen from the walking trail, two at Tsaarbank and three at the Seeberg hide on Dec. 14, about forty in total at Rooisand

Swift Tern, *Thalasseus bergii* – low numbers (3-8) at Seeberg in WCNP and the penguin colony in Betty's Bay, about 10-15 at Rooisand

Sandwich Tern, *Thalasseus sandvicensis* - low numbers (3-8) at Seeberg in WCNP and the penguin colony in Betty's Bay, about 10-15 at Rooisand

Little Tern, *Sternula albifrons* - one from the Seeberg hide in WCNP

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo* – several at Rondevlei, common at DHO, WCNP and Rooisand

Namaqua Sandgrouse, *Pterocles namaqua* – regularly seen in flight and often quite easy to see at waterholes (including Cubitje Quap, Montrose, Kaspersedraai, and Cheleka), wary but not supershy, about six sightings of groups on the ground in KTP, seen throughout the park

Burchell's Sandgrouse, *Pterocles burchelli* – a few times in flight in KTP and superb close-up views of four birds alongside the second dune road in KTP

Rock Dove, *Columba livia* – did not pay much attention to this species, but seen at Yzerfontein and in the Pringle Bay/Rooiels area

Speckled Pigeon, *Columba guinea* – common

Lemon Dove, *Aplopelia larvata* – several flushed that looked like this species, but one seen well on the high section of the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail

Red-eyed Dove, *Streptopelia semitorquata* – one seen well in Springbok, did not look for them after that, but seemed less common than the other common doves

Cape Turtle Dove, *Streptopelia capicola* – common to abundant throughout the tour, seen daily

Laughing Dove, *Stigmatopelia senegalensis* – common, but low daily numbers, seemingly less conspicuous and/or abundant than Cape Turtle Dove

Namaqua Dove, *Oena capensis* – common in the north, uncommon to fairly common in the south, many seen in AU and KTP, lower numbers in MZNP, MOK, Benfontein, DHO and WCNP

Rosy-faced Lovebird, *Agapornis roseicollis* – I was very lucky to find a group of six at the campsite in AU, I only got to see one perched bird well (and got two records shots with the camera). Even after I had recognized their call they proved hard to find in the dense foliage and they seemed shy, constantly giving alarm calls. They only stayed for a few minutes and then flew off.

Knysna Turaco, *Tauraco corythaix* – easy to see on the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail with several birds that were relatively tame. Also common at the Big Tree Trail, but I had to work a bit harder here to see the birds well.

Dideric Cuckoo, *Chrysococcyx caprius* – one on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail

Klaas's Cuckoo, *Chrysococcyx klaas* – one at the start of the Klipspringer Trail in DHO

[African Emerald Cuckoo, *Chrysococcyx cupreus* – unfortunately heard only at the Big Tree Trail]

Black Cuckoo, *Cuculus clamosus* – good views of two birds that I followed on the Big Tree Trail while calling. Eventually I got to see both birds in the canopy of the actual Big Tree

[Red-chested Cuckoo, *Cuculus solitaries* – heard only, did not actively try to see it as I have seen this species several times before, but one sighting of a cuckoo in flight in MOK was most likely this species]

[Burchell's Coucal, *Centropus burchelli* – heard only at AU and in the marshy area on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail, did not make an effort to see it, as I have seen this species several times before]

Western Barn Owl, *Tyto alba* – one hunting over the waterhole in front of the hide in Nossob, one perched on the night drive at Nossob on November 30, one in KTC at dusk

[Southern White-faced Owl, *Ptilopsis granti* – not seen, much to my surprise the bird was not around in Nossob camp, I asked the rangers there and they confirmed they hadn't seen the bird for a while. I also played its call in the other camps in KTP and AU but no luck]

Spotted Eagle-Owl, *Bubo africanus* – two at a roost near Dalkeith on Dec. 1 and 2. Two birds together at sunrise on Dec. 15 near Kraalbaai and two single birds (possibly the same as seen at sunrise) on the road between Abrahamskraal and Posberg on the night drive on Dec. 15.

Pearl-spotted Owlet, *Glaucidium perlatum* – one seen perched on a dead tree in daytime at 2R in KTP, the owl unfortunately got attacked by two yellow-billed hornbills and then disappeared in dense cover

Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, *Caprimulgus rufigena* – one on the night drive in AU, a few on the night drive in Nossob, two on the night drive in MOK

Fiery-necked Nightjar, *Caprimulgus pectoralis* – at least one (seen perched for at least 5 min) on the night drive at SAM, one on the road on the first night drive in DHO

African Palm Swift, *Cypsiurus parvus* – small numbers in AU, KTP, Molopo Lodge and SAM, probably overlooked in other places

Alpine Swift, *Tachymarptis melba* – probably overlooked, but only one seen at SAM and DHO, and a few at Augrabies Falls

Common Swift, *Apus apus* – several near Koa Dunes, a few tens near the falls in AU, also a few sightings in KTP, among the large number of swifts flying above our accommodation in Kimberley (mainly Little Swifts) the large, dark, chunky swifts mostly seemed to be this species (pale throat patch clearly seen on two) and not African Black Swift.

African Black Swift, *Apus barbatus* – I assumed that most of the sightings between DHO and WCNP were this species, and not Common Swift.

[Bradfield's Swift, *Apus bradfieldi* – not seen, we did not have much time or interest to go to the Big Hole in Kimberley, so missed that one. I did see some swifts in AU that may have been this species, but views were not good enough to be conclusive]

Little Swift, *Apus affinis* – common to abundant throughout

White-rumped Swift, *Apus caffer* – fairly common to common, seen in most places visited

Speckled Mousebird, *Colius striatus* – common in the south

White-backed Mousebird, *Colius colius* – common in the arid areas (Bushmanland, Karoo and Kalahari)

Red-faced Mousebird, *Urocolius indicus* – I saw the first one in the garden of Libby's lodge in Upington and stopped looking after that, seemed much less common than the other two mousebirds

Narina Trogon, *Apaloderma narina* – one adult and one subadult seen, but probably three birds present on the Big Tree trail in the Wilderness area on Dec. 10

African Hoopoe, *Upupa Africana* – surprisingly common, 1-5 seen almost daily in protected areas and occasionally en route

Common Scimitarbill, *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas* – one tame bird near the restaurant in AU, one en route to Nossob on Nov. 29 and one heard at Kamqua on Dec. 2, one at the research centre in Benfontein.

Green Wood-hoopoe, *Phoeniculus purpureus* – a group of 4-5 birds seen on both mornings on the Big Tree Trail near Wilderness

Brown-hooded Kingfisher, *Halcyon albiventris* – two in MZNP on Dec. 6, about 4-5 in SAM, one at the parking of the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 11

Malachite Kingfisher, *Alcedo cristata* – two at Langvlei, one at the stream next to the entrance of the Brownhooded Kingfisher Trail on Dec. 10, one in HPBG on Dec. 17

Giant Kingfisher, *Megaceryle maxima* – two at Tierhoek in DHO

Pied Kingfisher, *Ceryle rudis* – two at Rondevlei, one near Wilderness Rest Camp, one at Rooisand

Purple Roller, *Coracias naevius* – only one sighting on November 29 in KTP near Auchterlonie

Lilac-breasted Roller, *Coracias caudatus* – 1-3 daily in KTP

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, *Merops hirundineus* – common in AU and KTP, also a few seen in MOK

European Bee-eater, *Merops apiaster* – a few on the GG entrance road and one hunting over Abrahamskraal in WCNP

Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, *Tockus leucomelas* – two in 2R, a few en route from 2R to Nossob Rest Camp, about 4-5 between Mata Mata and Dertiende Boorgat, two in MOK  
Acacia Pied Barbet, *Tricholaema leucomelas* – one on the Marie Se Draai Loop on Nov. 29, one near Dalkeith on Dec. 2, three together in SAM on Dec. 9

Knysna Woodpecker, *Campethera notata* – a female was seen early in the morning next to our cabins in DHO, probably the same female was roosting and feeding for 45 minutes in the tree opposite our cabin around 3pm (amazing to see how inconspicuous they move around even if feeding four meters away)



Ground Woodpecker, *Geocolaptes olivaceus* – a group of three near the second picnic site on the lower part of the Kranskoploop in MZNP on Dec. 7, one at Rooiels on Dec. 16

Cardinal Woodpecker, *Dendropicos fuscusmalacens* – one at SAM on Dec. 7.

Olive Woodpecker, *Dendropicos griseocephalus* – three on the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 10, one on the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail, one on the Disa Trail in HPBG on Dec. 16

Cape Batis, *Batis capensis* – surprisingly common, at least six on Dec. 10 and more than 10 on Dec. 11 on the Big Tree Trail, several on the Half-Collared Kingfisher Trail, about 3-4 at the start of the Klipspringer Trail in DHO, and 4-5 at HPBG

Chinspot Batis, *Batis molitor* – one male-type bird in SAM (got some record shots but could not turn into a Pririt Batis, which would have been a lifer)

Red-backed Shrike, *Lanius collurio* – a female-type bird in MOK and a beautiful male on the longer walking trail in MZNP

Common Fiscal, *Lanius collaris* – common indeed, seen daily

Bokmakierie, *Telophorus zeylonus* – two at dusk in AU on Dec. 27, two at the trailhead in the MZNP Rest Camp, two on the Kranskoploop in MZNP, about 5-6 in total in SAM on Dec. 9, several family groups in DHO.

Olive Bushshrike, *Chlorophoneus olivaceus* – one at the start of the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail on Dec. 10

Brown-crowned Tchagra, *Tchagra australis* – at least three in MOK on Dec. 4

Southern Tchagra, *Tchagra tchagra* – two birds were foraging on the ground next to our cabin in DHO, I had at least three sightings of couples on the camping ground. They usually feed on the ground and seem quite relaxed but will immediately disappear into the trees if you come to close and it can be difficult to relocate them in the dense foliage

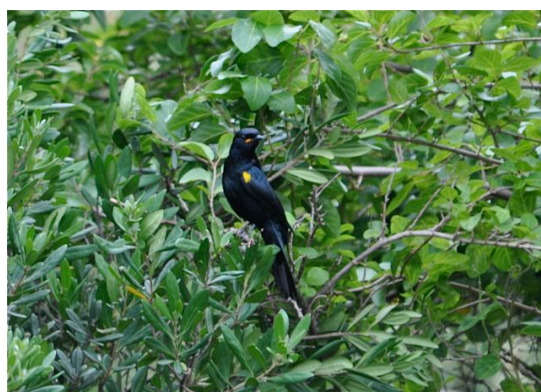
Black-backed Puffback, *Dryoscopus cubla* – two on the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 10

Southern Boubou, *Laniarius ferrugineus* – a couple was usually present around the swimming pool in MZNP, a few around both picnic sites on the Kranskop loop, heard on the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail and about four in total seen on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail, common in the camping area at DHO, including a very tame bird that came looking for food at our feet in front of our cabin

Crimson-breasted Shrike/Gonolek, *Laniarius atrococcineus* – one in the garden of Molopo Lodge, at least two in 2R, at least three in Nossob Rest Camp, two at Dikbaardskolk

Grey Cuckooshrike, *Coracina caesia* – two showed very well in a flock on the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 11

Black Cuckooshrike, *Campephaga flava* - a beautiful male with yellow tufts on the wings was seen hunting for insects on the short trail that leads to the hide at Rondevlei



*Black Cuckooshrike*



*Grey Cuckooshrike*

Fork-tailed Drongo, *Dicrurus adsimilis* – common throughout the tour

Cape Crow, *Corvus capensis* - fairly common even in the north with daily sightings in KTP

Pied Crow, *Corvus albus* – common in most places but seemed scarce in the more arid places

White-necked Raven, *Corvus albicollis* – at least two on the Rooiplaat Plateau, at least ten at SAM, a few near Unionsdale, two seen calling from the hilltops at Rooiels

Cape Rockjumper, *Chaetops frenatus* – one pair seen at close range in Rooiels

Ashy Tit, *Parus cinerascens* – 3-4 birds moving through bushes along the electric fence in Nossob Rest Camp

Cape Penduline Tit, *Anthoscopus minutus* – a probable sighting on the short trail in MZNP, two different groups of four and six birds were seen very well on the walking trail to the Seeberg Hill viewpoint

Agulhas Clapper Lark, *Mirafrja marjoriae* – good numbers on the unpaved roads towards DHO in Overberg, a few on the road to the Potberg section of DHO

Eastern Clapper Lark, *Mirafrja fasciolata* – seen in KTP on Dec. 29., a few at Benfontein, quite common in MOK, several seen very well in MZNP

Fawn-coloured Lark, *Calendulauda africanoides* – common in KTP, MOK and MZNP, also seen in Benfontein

[Red Lark, *Calendulauda burra* – not seen, we arrived at Koa Dunes around 2 pm, it was hot and very windy, probably not the best conditions to see or hear them]

Eastern Long-billed Lark, *Certhilauda semitorquata* – two seen very well on the Rooiplaat plateau MZNP on Dec. 6

Agulhas Long-billed Lark, *Certhilauda brevirostris* – good numbers on the unpaved roads towards DHO in Overberg, one on the road to the Potberg section of DHO,

Spike-heeled Lark, *Chersomanes albofasciata* – common, seen at GG, Benfontein, MZNP

Red-capped Lark, *Calandrella cinerea* – one seen well on the trail to the Seeberg viewpoint, a few on the unpaved road between the N2 and DHO

[Pink-billed Lark, *Spizocorys conirostris* – not seen, I tried on both dune roads in KTP, but no luck, on the first dune road the wind was very strong (no birds calling and playing their call was not very successful) and on the second dune road the big cats distracted us a bit too much although I did try a few times]

Large-billed Lark, *Galerida magnirostris* – one seen and photographed at close range in MZNP on Dec. 6, several on the unpaved road towards DHO in Overberg

African Red-eyed Bulbul, *Pycnonotus nigricans* – common in the Northern and Eastern Cape, many in AU and KTP, also common in MOK, MZNP and SAM.

Cape Bulbul, *Pycnonotus capensis* – first time seen in the garden of Moontide B&B in Wilderness, very common from then on.

Terrestrial Brownbul, *Phyllastrephus terrestris* – two sightings of two and four birds on the Big Tree Trail and two sightings of two birds on the Half-Collared Kingfisher Trail, commonly heard in the Wilderness area.

Sombre Greenbul, *Andropadus importunes* – heard constantly on the Half-Collared Kingfisher Trail, but seen well only a few times, but in the Ebb&Flow Rest Camp there are several tame birds of this species. At least five sightings on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail and seen twice on the Big Tree Trail.

Black Saw-wing, *Psaldoprocne pristoptera* – quite common in the Wilderness area (including the Big Tree Trail, Half-Collared Kingfisher Trail, and Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail) and a few on the Klipspringer Trail in DHO

Brown-throated Martin, *Riparia paludicola* – small groups at AU, a few at Moontide B&B in Wilderness, small groups at DHO and WCNP

Banded Martin, *Riparia cincta* – at least one positively identified, but probably more present at MOK on Dec. 4

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica* – a few en route to Springbok and AU, at least 30-40 in AU, small groups and singles in KTP, at least 200 in Benfontein

White-throated Swallow, *Hirundo albigularis* – regularly seen throughout the tour

Pearl-breasted Swallow, *Hirundo dimidiata* – common in DHO and WCNP, a few seen at close range in SAM

Rock Martin, *Ptyonoprogne fuligula* – several above the garden of the Desert Rose Guesthouse in Springbok, common at AU, MZNP, DHO, Rooiels, HPBG and Wilderness

Greater Striped Swallow, *Cecropis cucullata* – very common, seen almost daily

South African Cliff Swallow, *Petrochelidon spilodera* – only one identified with certainty in AU, but probably more present. I did not really look for them after that.

Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, *Phylloscopus ruficapilla* – (at least) two birds on the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 10

Lesser Swamp Warbler, *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* – heard at AU and WCNP, one seen from the boardwalk to the hide at Langvlei

[Little Rush Warbler, *Bradypterus baboecala* – heard only in WCNP]

[Knysna Warbler, *Bradypterus sylvaticus* – a bird that must have been this species was moving through the undergrowth near the Big Tree in Woodville, it reacted to its song being played but didn't call back, poor views]

Grey-backed Cisticola, *Cisticola subruficapilla* – several seen well in SAM, quite common on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail and in the Seeberg area in WCNP, and several scattered sightings throughout the Western Cape

Levaillant's Cisticola, *Cisticola tinniens* – quite common in the marshy areas on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail, fairly common in the Geelbek and Seeberg area, especially around the parking and the lower parts of the walking trail to the Seeberg viewpoint

Neddicky, *Cisticola fulvicapilla* – common in MOK, MZNP, Wilderness area, DHO, Rooiels, HPBG and WCNP

Cloud Cisticola, *Cisticola textrix* – excellent views of one perched on the Rooiplaat plateau on Dec. 6 and one on the Link Road on Dec. 7 in MZNP

Rufous-eared Warbler, *Malcorus pectoralis* – three on bushes along the entrance road to SAM

Black-chested Prinia, *Prinia flavicans* – common in AU and KTP

Karoo Prinia, *Prinia maculosa* – common to abundant in most sites visited

Namaqua Warbler, *Phragmacia substriata* – seen well only once in AU at the end of the Dassie Trail (near the camp)

Bar-throated Apalis, *Apalis thoracica* – common in MZNP, SAM and the Wilderness area

Green-backed Camaroptera, *Camaroptera brachyura* – several seen well on the Half-Collared Kingfisher Trail

Yellow-bellied Eremomela, *Eremomela icteropygialis* – one at Benfontein

Karoo Eremomela, *Eremomela gregalis* – when we were stopped in our tracks by four Ludwig's bustards in GG, I heard an agitated bird calling in the bushes next to the car. When I looked, it was a Karoo Eremomela sitting completely free on the edge of a bush, brilliant views with the bins of a bird only 3 meters away. Just when I realized this would be a great photo, the bird sneaked back into the safety of the bush. In total there were about 3 of 4 birds moving around.

Long-billed Crombec, *Sylvietta rufescens* – one seen in the garden of Desert Rose Guesthouse in Springbok, didn't look for it after that

[Cinnamon-breasted Warbler, *Euryptila subcinnamomea* – not seen, tried a few places but simply did not have enough time to look for it. I did not hear them calling in GG and AU].

Cape Grassbird, *Sphenoeacus afer* – one flushed on the Klipspringer Trail in DHO, one on the entrance road to the Gypsum mine in Yzerfontein, one at Rooiels on Dec. 16, and one in HPBG on Dec. 17

Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, *Parisoma subcaerulea* – one on Nov. 29 and two on Nov. 30 in Nossob Rest Camp, one in KTC on Dec. 1, (at least) two on the trails in MZNP, a few around the lodge at SAM

Layard's Tit-babbler, *Parisoma layardi* – one on the short walking trail in MZNP

Cape White-eye, *Zosterops capensis* – common in the Western Cape, first seen in SAM, common from there on.

Orange River White-eye, *Zosterops pallidus* – a few in the garden of Desert Rose Guesthouse in Springbok and Libby's Lodge in Upington, common in AU and KTP

Cape Sugarbird, *Promerops cafer* – first birds seen were three distant males on the Klipspringer Trail in DHO and later that day a male near our cabin, but best views at MOS and in particular Rooiels (up to 15-20), also several at HPBG on Dec. 17

Pied Wagtail, *Motacilla aguimp* – one en route from SAM to Wilderness

Cape Wagtail, *Motacilla capensis* – common, seen almost daily

Cape Longclaw, *Macronyx capensis* – four on the Rooiplaat loop in MZNP, one on the walk to the Seeberg viewpoint, two on the walk to the high-tide hides at Geelbek

African Rock Pipit, *Anthus crenatus* – one seen and photographed on the Umngeni 4x4 trail in MZNP, one on the road up to the Rooiplaat plateau, nice and characteristic call.

African (grassveld) Pipit, *Anthus cinnamomeus* – several in Benfontein, MOK and MZNP. A pipit in seen in DHO may have been a long-billed pipit, I first thought it was a grassveld pipit but when it flew up the outer tail feathers appeared buff. Bird wasn't calling, so I was not sure.

Plain-backed Pipit, *Anthus leucophrys* – one at MOK on recently burned grassland, several at Benfontein were probably also this species.

Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris* – seemed most common around Cape Town and in the WCNP area

Wattled Starling, *Creatophora cinerea* – only seen at SAM where seen several times daily

Cape Glossy Starling, *Lamprotornis nitens* – common almost everywhere

Pied Starling, *Lamprotornis bicolor* – common in MZNP and SAM, very common in DHO and Overberg, and also regular in WCNP

Red-winged Starling, *Onychognathus morio* – quite common in SAM and DHO, very easy to see in HPBG (up to 30-40)

Pale-winged Starling, *Onychognathus nabouroup* – common in AU (up to forty) on the Dassie Trail

Red-billed Oxpecker, *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* – about twenty in MZNP, reintroduced

Groundscraper Thrush, *Psophocichla litsitsirupa* – one in Nossob Camp in KTP

Olive Thrush, *Turdus olivaceus* – a few on the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 10 and 11, one at Moontide B&B, a few in HPBG and common around MOS

Karoo Thrush, *Turdus smithii* – one in the garden of Desert Rose Guesthouse in Springbok and Libby's Lodge in Upington, good numbers in AU, a few in KTP, two in the garden of Molopo Lodge, a few in the garden of Carrington Lodge (Kimberley)

White-starred Robin, *Pogonocichla stellate* – one finally came in after playing its call on the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 11

Cape Robin-Chat, *Cossypha caffra* – uncommon to fairly common in the north, seen in AU, KTP, Upington, Kimberley. More common in the south; seen in all Eastern and Western Cape places we visited.

Chorister Robin-Chat, *Cossypha dichroa* – one at the start of Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail in Wilderness on Dec. 10, one at the entrance to the Big Tree Trail on Dec. 11

Kalahari Scrub Robin, *Erythropgyia paeon* – a few daily in KTP, quite common in MOK.

Karoo Scrub Robin, *Erythropgyia coryphaeus* – one in garden of Desert Rose Guesthouse in Springbok, common in GG, AU, and WCNP. Only occasionally seen elsewhere, but did not pay that much attention after ticking them off in the north.

African Stonechat, *Saxicola torquatus* – a male on the Kranskoploop in MZNP, two pairs on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail, one male at Langvlei, one male near Swellendam, a couple on the road to the Potberg section of DHO

Capped Wheatear, *Oenanthe pileata* – a few in GG, a few on most days in KTP, quite regular on the walk around the accommodation and the vlei in DHO, a few on the one on the road from DHO to Bredasdorp.

Mountain Wheatear, *Oenanthe monticola* – quite common in GG, one on our rental car in Upington Airport, one in MZNP, one en route on a mountain pass between SAM and Wilderness.



Sickle-winged Chat, *Cercomela sinuate* – one seen well in GG, two seen very well in MZNP on Dec. 6, and one on the Kranskoploop in MZNP on Dec. 7.

Karoo Chat, *Cercomela schlegelii* – I was lucky to see one well in GG with possibly a second bird present in the back, but did not get good views of that one.

Familiar Chat, *Cercomela familiaris* – common, seen in AU, KTP, MOK, MZNP, SAM, DHO, WCNP, and HPBG.

Ant-eating Chat, *Myrmecocichla formicivora* – (very) common in the north, seen in GG, AU, KTP, MOK, MZNP, only a few in SAM

Cape Rock Thrush, *Monticola rupestris* – a pair was seen from the balcony at MOS, the birds seem to enjoy sitting on the electricity pylons and wires in the village

Chat Flycatcher, *Bradornis infuscatus* – one near Cheleka in KTP on Nov. 29, two on the Second Dune Road on Dec. 1, three in MOK on Dec. 4,

Marico Flycatcher, *Bradornis mariquensis* – abundant in KTP

Fiscal Flycatcher, *Sigelus silens* – common in MOK, MZNP, SAM,

Spotted Flycatcher, *Muscicapa striata* – one in AU, one at Benfontein, two at SAM and two at HPBG

African Dusky Flycatcher, *Muscicapa adusta* – several on the Big Tree Trail both on Dec. 10 and 11, about 4-5 in HPBG

African Paradise Flycatcher, *Terpsiphone viridis* – fairly common in the Wilderness area (2-5 seen on all trails we walked), at least two in the plantation at the parking of the Klipspringer Trail in DHO, also about 4-5 in HPBG

Orange-breasted Sunbird, *Anthobaphes violacea* – two in the plantation at the parking of the Klipspringer Trail in DHO, guaranteed at Rooiels and HPBG, also seen at MOS, gorgeous sunbird in good light.

Amethyst/Black Sunbird, *Chalcomitra amethystine* – A group of 4 including a male in the palms next to the reception in the Ebb & Flow Rest Camp in Wilderness.

Malachite Sunbird, *Nectarinia famosa* – two en route from SAM to Wilderness, quite common in the Wilderness area, always about 3-5 present in the campsite area in DHO, about 3-4 on the walk to the Seeberg viewpoint including a beautiful male in full plumage

Southern Double-collared Sunbird, *Cinnyris chalybeus* – quite common in the Wilderness area, also seen in HPBG, DHO and WCNP

Greater Double-collared Sunbird, *Cinnyris afer* – quite common in the Wilderness area, a lot of birds of this and the above species were in juvenile/subadult/molting plumage, so quite a challenge to identify

Dusky Sunbird, *Cinnyris fuscus* – first seen in the garden of Desert Rose Guesthouse in Springbok, common in AU, not that many in KTP, 2-3 in the garden of Libby's Lodge in Upington,

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus* – regular sightings throughout the tour

Cape Sparrow, *Passer melanurus* – common, seen in GG, AU, KTP, DHO and WCNP (among other places)

Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, *Passer diffuses* – common in AU and KTP

Yellow-throated Petronia, *Gymnoris supercilialis* – two at SAM. This species is at the edge of its distribution in SAM, but was seen at close range. It can be confused with the (in SAM) more common Streaky-headed Seed-eater, but the wingbars were clearly seen and the bird was less bulky, i.e., with a more typical sparrow-like jizz.

White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, *Plocepasser mahali* – common in GG, AU and KTP

Sociable Weaver, *Philetairus socius* – common to abundant in the north, in particular KTP

Scaly-feathered Finch, *Sporopipes squamifrons* – common in AU, abundant in KTP, also common along roads in the north (N14, R360). Still common in MOK, MZNP, Benfontein and SAM but lower numbers overall.

Cape Weaver, *Ploceus capensis* – common, seen at most sites except AU, KTP and the Kimberley area.

Southern Masked Weaver, *Ploceus velatus* – common, seen at most sites on the tour

Red-billed Quelea, *Quelea quelea* – about 15 at Molopo Lodge, at least 20 in 2R, several tens in Nossob Rest Camp, several sightings of large groups (50-250) at waterholes in KTP, several groups in MZNP.

Southern Red Bishop, *Euplectes orix* – a few en route on the N7 to Springbok, one male on the Dassie Trail, about ten at Libby's lodge in Upington, several en route to Kimberley, about 10-15 at SAM and MZNP, a few on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail and on the boardwalk at Langvlei, several on the unpaved road from the N2 to DHO in Overberg

Yellow Bishop, *Euplectes capensis* – more than ten on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail, a total of about 10-15 along the length of the Klipspringer Trail in DHO, a pair on the entrance road to the gypsum mine at Yzerfontein, up to 10-15 at Rooiels, a few at MOS, and 3-4 in HPBG

Green-winged Pytilia, *Pytilia melba* – about five at the Stofdam bird hide in MOK

Red-headed Finch, *Amadina erythrocephala* – a group of eight including two beautiful males in full breeding plumage at Melkvlei (Nov. 29), about 10-15 in a large group of red-billed queleas at Veertiende Boorgat in KTP on Dec. 2.

Red-billed Firefinch, *Lagonosticta senegala* – a small group (4-5) feeding close our cabin in AU, about 10 at the Stofdam bird hide in MOK, a small group (3-4) on the short trail in MZNP

Violet-eared Waxbill, *Granatina granatina* – one in bushes around the entrance gate in Nossob Camp, one on the Marie Se Draai Loop

Common Waxbill, *Estrilda astrild* – about 4-5 at the Rondevlei parking and four on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail, and a group of seven birds at HPBG

Black-faced Waxbill, *Estrilda erythronotos* – about 6-7 at the Stofdam bird hide in MOK

Pin-tailed Whydah, *Vidua macroura* – several males and females in AU on the Dassie Trail, about 3-4 at Libby's Lodge (Upington), two males on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail,

Shaft-tailed Whydah, *Vidua regia* – at least ten on Nov. 29 and at least fifteen on Nov. 30 in Nossob Rest Camp, of which only one male was in full breeding plumage

Dusky Indigobird, *Vidua funerea* – when leaving MZNP on Dec. 7 two all-black birds with red legs and pearly white heavy bill were seen perched on the electricity wires. I photographed them and I am sure they are this species. They are nomadic and there are records for this species in this area (check The Southern African Bird Atlas Project: [http://sabap2.adu.org.za/spp\\_summary.php?Spp=849](http://sabap2.adu.org.za/spp_summary.php?Spp=849)).

Cape Canary, *Serinus canicollis* – a few at the start of the Klipspringer Trail in DHO, at least two on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail on Dec. 10, a few in HPBG on Dec. 16/17

Black-throated Canary, *Crithagra atrogularis* – quite common in GG, a small group feeding in front of our chalet in MOK, quite a lot of them have little or no black on the throat, which confused me in the beginning

Yellow-fronted Canary, *Crithagra mozambica* – one seen well in SAM on Dec. 8

Yellow Canary, *Crithagra flaviventris* – common to abundant in the Northern Cape, also regular in the south, but from a distance it was often difficult to tell the "yellow canaries" apart, double-checking with a scope was often essential

Brimstone/Bully Canary, *Crithagra sulphurata* – one determined with certainty on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail.

White-throated Canary, *Crithagra albogularis* – several sightings in GG, MOK and MZNP

Streaky-headed Seedeater, *Crithagra gularis* – one at the trailhead near the swimming pool in MZNP, several at SAM, 4 on the Cape Dune Mole-Rat Trail, several on the unpaved road from the N2 to DHO, a few near the Seeberg hide in WCNP,

Cape Siskin, *Crithagra totta* – a small group of about 4-5 was seen at HPBG on Dec. 17

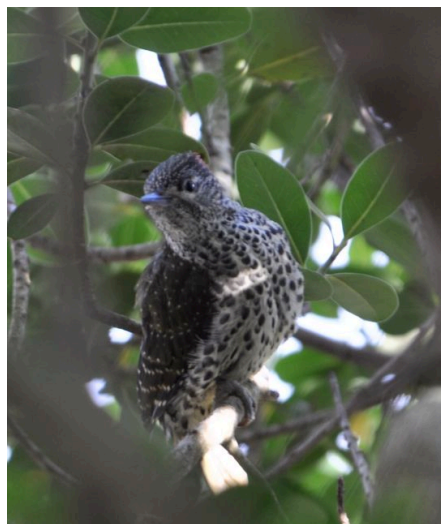
Black-headed Canary, *Serinus alario* – small groups seen in GG and AU, only a few seen in MZNP

Lark-like Bunting, *Emberiza impetuani* – one seen well just outside MOK and one seen ok-ish in GG, a lot of flushed roadside birds in the north seemed to be this species, but they would often hide or fly off when the car was stopped.

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, *Emberiza tahapisi* – surprise sighting of one at the waterhole in Nossob (bird was photographed), three on the longer walking trail in MZNP

Cape Bunting, *Emberiza capensis* – first seen in the garden of Desert Rose Guesthouse in Springbok, quite common from then on, seen well in GG, AU, KTP, DHO, Rooiels and WCNP

Golden-breasted Bunting, *Emberiza flaviventris* – several seen on the walking trails in the rest camp in MZNP



*Knysna Woodpecker*



*Cape Canary*

## OTHER WILDLIFE

We saw numerous lizards and about ten snakes, but most of them disappeared too quickly and could not be identified.

Cape Angulate Tortoise *Chersina angulata* – abundant in WCNP

Leopard Tortoise *Stigmochelys pardalis* – common in KTP, MOK and SAM

Marsh terrapin *Pelomedusa subrufa* – one along the Half-Collared Kingfisher Trail

[Girdled Lizard species – a few sightings, not sure which species]

Mole Snake, *Pseudaspis cana* – one in KTP

Augrabies/Broadley's Flat Lizard *Platysaurus broadleyi* – good numbers in AU

Southern Spiny Agama *Agama hispida* – two in MZNP

Southern Rock Agama *Agama atra* – quite common in MZNP

Ground Agama *Agama aculeate* – good numbers around Nossob, especially near Cubitje Quap