

ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT
SOUTH AFRICA
2012

Weather

As expected, the weather was fine throughout with no rain encountered, and comfortable temperatures of around 20C for the majority of the tour. In the Tanqua, it reached 30C and this was our hottest day. Wind was ever present, firstly from a southerly direction and then more westerly, increasing in strength on the final day which meant we were unable to go up Table Mountain since the Cableway was closed.

General

The trip was a great success, with some fabulous accommodation bases and largely excellent food. In terms of the birding, we did extremely well recording around 250 species, and connecting with all of the target Cape endemics and a great number of South African endemics too. Highlights were many, and included the pelagic trip from Simon's Town, visits to botanical gardens at Harold Porter and Kirstenbosch, and the fabulous setting of Honeywood Farm in the Grootvadersbosch forest. Our guide Brian Vanderwalt worked tirelessly for us throughout and we are already looking forward to the next opportunity to work with Brian again – hopefully in the Kalahari next time!

Monday 12th November

The group met at Heathrow Terminal Three for our overnight direct flight to Cape Town with Virgin Atlantic. We were about an hour leaving, due to someone being removed from the plane through illness, but we otherwise made good time on the flight down and managed to get at least some rest.

Tuesday 13th November – 22C, breezy

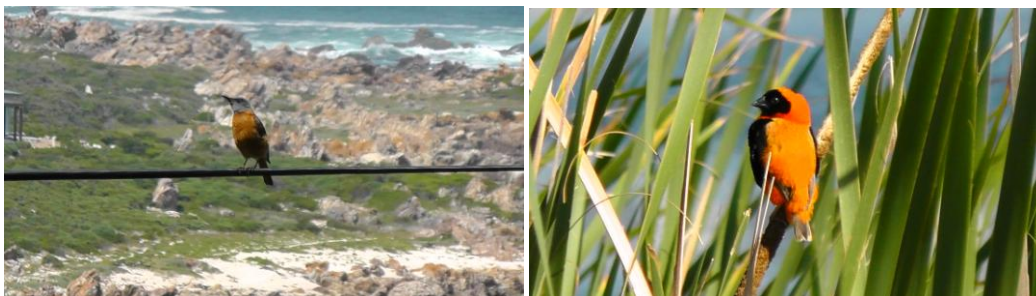
On arrival in Cape Town around noon, we breezed through passport and baggage reclaim and were soon united with Brian who met us in the terminal building. After a quick briefing, and a chance to get changed, we decided the best way to start would be with a spot of lunch since none of us had particularly enjoyed the plane food. This was a good move, and soon we were loading up the minibus feeling suitably refreshed and ready to go birding! After negotiating our way out of the airport and the built up suburbs of the city, we soon found ourselves at one of the regions premier birding spots – the Strandfontein Sewage Works [or Water Treatment Plant, as some preferred to call it!]. Our journey there added the first common species such as Sacred and Hadedra Ibis, Cape Wagtail, Speckled Pigeon, Pied Crow, Cattle Egret, Red-winged Starling and Egyptian Goose – the group of species that would become most ubiquitous during our time here. At the sewage works, we drove around the network of tracks to view the extensive lagoons and reedy margins. Cape Teal, Cape Shoveler, Greater Flamingo, Yellow-billed Duck, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, Hartlaub's and Kelp Gulls, Grey Heron, Blacksmith's Plover, Pied Avocet and Black-winged Stilt were all very common, while a couple of small flocks of breeding-plumaged Black-necked Grebes and our first Levillant's Cisticolas were also noted. Red-billed Teal were less common with about twenty picked out, and other counts included 10 Southern Pochard, 10 Glossy Ibis, 5 White Pelicans, 1 Yellow-billed Kite [which landed at the edge of one of the pools for a drink giving stunning views], 1 African Marsh Harrier, 1 Lesser Swamp Warbler, several Karoo Prinia, 2 Southern Masked Weaver, 1 Cape Weaver, 3 Night Herons, 3 Reed Cormorants, 50+ White-breasted Cormorant, 2 Three-banded Plovers, 1 Bar-tailed Godwit, 2 Common Greenshanks, 1 Eurasian Curlew, 4 African Black Oystercatcher, 50+ Swift Terns, 3 Caspian Terns, 10+ Sandwich Terns, 20+ Brown-throated Martins, 10+ White-throated Swallows, 1 Cape White-eye, 1 Cape Robin-chat, 10+ Zitting Cisticola, 2 Maccoa Ducks, 5 South African Shelducks, 1 Black-headed Heron and 10+ Purple Swamp-Hen. A pair of Cape Longclaw feeding in the margins of the track in front of the vehicle were a nice bonus, and we had some decent but brief views of a Black Crake creeping along the edge of one of the ponds. The highlight though was possibly the excellent views we had of the rare Hottentot Teal, with three individuals seen. From here, we transferred to Simon's Town and checked in at our luxurious accommodation at Avian Leisure and Port of Call Guest Houses. An excellent meal of local fish was enjoyed in a local restaurant, rounding off a great first day.



Glossy Ibis

Wednesday 14th November – 25C, fresh South-west breeze

An excellent breakfast this morning was supplemented by our first group sightings of Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird and Cape Canary on the Protea-clad slopes surrounding our accommodation. The spectacular views down across the bay also allowed us to see large flocks of the endemic Cape Cormorant commuting from their roosts at Boulder's Beach. Heading East towards the Hottentots Holland Mountains, we paused at Somerset West service station to use the toilet and this gave us the chance to check a small area of reeds for nesting bishops and weavers. Our first Southern Red and Yellow Bishops were breathtaking, supplemented by more good views of Cape and Southern Masked Weaver, Rock Kestrel and a close fly-by from a Black-headed Heron. Nearby as we continued East, large numbers of Alpine Swifts were feeding low by the roadside giving good views. Rooi Els was our destination for the morning, and here we spent about an hour and a half wandering along the track to view the lower mountain slopes for a range of Fynbos endemics. Unfortunately this did not include the hoped-for Cape Rockjumper, despite our best efforts, though this would wait until later in the tour! Karoo Prinia, Yellow Bishop, Cape Bunting and Grey-backed Cisticola were all common here, and we had superb views of 5+ Orange-breasted Sunbirds, 5+ Cape Sugarbird, male Malachite Sunbird [a wow bird continuously for the rest of the trip!], a very obliging male Cape Rock Thrush, 2 Familiar Chats, 2 White-necked Raven, Neddicky, 3 Cape Grassbird, 2 Cape Siskin, African Black Swift and Rock Martin. Two Black Eagles appeared over the adjacent crags and gave stunning views as they drifted across the face of the mountain, and a Klipspringer was negotiating the rocky peak in goat-like fashion. Moving on around the coastal road our next stop was the idyllic location of Harold Porter Botanical Garden. An excellent lunch here gave us chance to catch up with the common species, Cape Bulbul, Southern Double-Collared Sunbird and Sombre Greenbul. The walk through the gardens after lunch produced many birds coming to drink from a small stream, including 10+ Cape Canary, Cape Sugarbird, 2 Brimstone Canary and Karoo Prinia. 10+ Cape Robin-chats, Cape White-eyes [mobbing a Boomslang Snake!], 2 Familiar Chats, 2 Black Saw-wing Swallows, 4 Speckled Mousebirds, 5 Cape Francolins, 1 Sweet Waxbill, Fiscal Flycatcher and Olive Thrush were among the other species noted. Up in the 'kloof' or valley behind the garden, we spent some time looking for the very elusive endemic Victorin's Warbler. After some time we located a singing bird, eventually seeing three extremely well with one bird singing in the open from a dead tree for about ten minutes! Having such good views of this ultra-skulking bird was certainly the afternoons highlight. Finally we checked some small sewage ponds nearby noting two Water Thick-knee, Fiscal Flycatcher and Three-banded Plover before motoring back to Simon's Town. We returned to the same restaurant for dinner enjoying another selection of local fish.



Cape Rock Thrush and Southern Red Bishop

Thursday 15th November – cloudy with light SW winds clearing to 18C and sunshine

Today was our pelagic day and we boarded the boat and met our guide Alvin at 0700 in Simon's Town Harbour. It took about an hour to steam down to Cape Point, a route which added many Cape Cormorant, and also our first Bank Cormorant as well as Cape Gannet. Once clear of the point the Cape of Good Hope came into view and from here we steamed to 26 miles South-west of the peninsula. It wasn't long before we began to see our first White-chinned Petrels which would be incredibly numerous throughout the voyage, as well as Sooty Shearwaters and a Pomarine Skua. Large flocks of Common Terns numbered thousands, and once land had become a distant shadow, our first Shy Albatrosses began to appear. Over the next few hours we had awesome views of four species of Albatross flying right alongside the boat – Shy, Black-browed, Atlantic and Indian Yellow-nosed. Large groups of them were also seen sat on the water, allowing for some great close ups and photo opportunities. Rafts of Sooty Shearwaters and White-chinned Petrels on the water were scanned and we saw a few checker-board Pintado Petrels, two Manx Shearwaters, about fifty Great Shearwaters and both Southern and Northern Giant Petrels. With all the terns about, it was no surprise that we saw in excess of thirty Arctic Skuas, and a couple of the larger Subantarctic Skua. A flock of Sabine's Gulls numbered about ten birds, and they looked stunning as they took up from the water and flew away showing their diagnostic upperwing pattern. We spent some time chasing a group of Humpback Whales, eventually getting some decent views as two or three were surfacing and blowing near the boat before one demonstrated the classic tail fluke manoeuvre. Shoals of Yellow-finned Tuna leaping clear of the water were also impressive, and a single Blue Shark was also noted. On the way back into Simon's Town, we had better views of nesting Bank Cormorants, and got our first views of the African Penguins at Boulder's Beach. We were met at the quay by Brian and we all decided a coffee would be a good idea, before we made the hours journey to central Cape Town where we checked into our superb luxury B&B at Braeside, Greenpoint. An excellent dinner at Ocean Basket restaurant nearby completed another fine day.



Black-browed Albatrosses

Friday 16th November – Cooler, 17C and breezy

We headed North from Cape Town this morning, following the course of the Diep River and spending some time looking for wetland birds. At the river mouth, we had our first classic view south to Table Mountain, and also saw our first Kittlitz's and White-fronted Plovers on the beach here. Pied Kingfisher, 5 Common Greenshanks, Caspian Tern and 2 Little Egrets were also present while the adjacent gardens added Common Fiscal, Pin-tailed Whydah and Laughing Dove. Moving on towards the Sunset Beach development, we paused to view a roadside swift colony underneath a bridge. We had stunning close up views of both Little and White-rumped Swifts, and also saw our first Purple Heron and African Darter. Pin-tailed Whydah was seen again in reeds surrounding a roadside pool where Cape Shoveler and Red-knobbed Coot were also seen. At Reitvlei, a large wetland area just to the north, we paused at a toilet block by the dunes so we could use the facilities. Greater-striped Swallow, Brown-throated Martin and White-throated Swallow were all seen well here, and it was at this point that Brian received a call that the American Black Skimmer had been sighted again after a long absence. We decided to look for the bird, stopping first by two more roadside ponds where we had good views of White-backed Duck and a statue-like Purple Heron. On the main wetland, good views followed of African Darter, Glossy Ibis, 2 Whiskered Terns, White Pelican, Banded Martin, African Spoonbill and another male Pin-tailed Whydah. There was no sign of the skimmer, but a distant African Fish Eagle circling was some compensation. Retracing as far as the bridge over the Diep River to check the tern roosts there, we still couldn't find the bird but we did add a Grey-headed Gull and Common Sandpiper and had good views of Pied Kingfisher, Water Thick-knee and Caspian Tern. From here we headed North up the coast, following the narrow strip of coastal Strandveld –

basically a dune scrub habitat that holds more endemic species new for our list. Yellow Canary proved numerous, and we also had good views of two White-throated Canary, Cape Bulbul, both Levillant's and Grey-backed Cisticola, Bokamkierie and both Speckled and White-backed Mousebirds. Two European Bee-eater flew over calling giving some nice but brief views. Malkbos was our next stop, and another small roadside pool here held a smart African Spoonbill as well as the usual assortment of ducks and Red Bishops. The farm shop style cafe at the road junction here made for an excellent lunch stop, and an opportunity to purchase souvenirs and gifts as well as add our first Pied Starlings. We now continued inland, and a different habitat opened up for us again as we crossed the vast wheatlands of the Philadelphia region. South Africa's national bird, the Blue Crane, was not difficult to find though most of the views were fairly distant. Steppe Buzzard, Red-capped and Large-billed Larks, Yellow-billed Kite, Spur-winged Goose and Capped Wheatear were all typical birds of this landscape, though we also added singles of Long-billed Pipit, Cloud Cisticola and African Stonechat. Heading back to Cape Town via Durbanville, we passed through extensive areas of wine production and in the town itself, added two more new birds – Spotted Thick-knee in the garden of the old peoples home, and Crowned Lapwing on a roadside wasteland. Back in Cape Town we visited a restaurant on the Waterfront for another enjoyable meal.



Blue Cranes and Cape Bunting

Saturday 17th November 22C and breezy

We left Braeside this morning and began heading north to our next base at Langebaan, birding en route. A quick check of the Diep River mouth again produced Caspian Tern, Water Thick-knee, 20+ Common Greenshanks and Pied Kingfisher, though in the back of our minds we were still hoping for the skimmer! The coastal Strandveld route north towards our first stop at Silwerstroomstrand added two roadside Black-shouldered Kites and fabulous close views of a pair of Blue Crane with chicks, improving on yesterdays distant views. Silwerstroomstrand itself produced our first Jackal Buzzard which circled right overhead, two more Black-shouldered Kites, Bokmakierie, Grey-backed Cisticola, Malachite Sunbird, Grey-winged Francolin and non-avian interest provided by a Mole Snake, Angulate Tortoise and a very large bright red grasshopper! The main road north from here provided one of the days highlights [possibly trip highlights?] as a male Black Harrier quartered alongside the van for about 3km, giving stunning views and photo opportunities. A hatch of winged Termites also encouraged a big flock of Pied Starlings, several Yellow-billed Kites and Alpine Swifts to feed low over the road too. As we reached the West Coast National Park, another unplanned roadside stop afforded good views of a soaring Martial Eagle, and then two distant Secretary Birds were spotted flying down into a stubble field – unfortunately their position did not permit closer approach. 4+ Karoo Robin-chats, Larklike Bunting, Capped Wheatear and Jackal Buzzard were all seen well again in this area. The park itself was closed for a cycle race until 1300, so we had to push on and rearrange our day a bit. Near Saldahna, Brians 'lark road' came up with the goods as we found Karoo Lark as well as two soaring Booted Eagles, another Black Harrier and two showy Bokmakierie. 3 Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers and 2 Southern Grey Tits were also high quality list additions here. After lunch we returned to the park, and could now enter and drive in through the vast Strandveld landscape. Another Black Harrier came close to the van and we saw our first groups of tickable Common Ostrich here. The hide overlooking Langebaan lagoon would be our main destination, as thousands of waders were being pushed up by the tide. The saline pools alongside the boardwalk gave us good close ups of Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Marsh Sandpiper and Kittlitz's Plover [doing a broken wing display!] and once in the hide, we could sort through the flocks and add many species to our list. Familiar to us were hundreds of Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints but also Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Ringed and Grey Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Whimbrel, Common Greenshank and Red Knot. The Marsh Sandpipers were the highlight though, with at least 8 present and right outside the hide too. Finally around the visitor centre we looked successfully for the dark Karoo Thrush, and then just as we were

about to leave Brian brilliantly spotted a Klaas's Cuckoo in the bushes. We had good views, but as we headed back down the tree-lined drive we stopped again as an African Hoopoe flew up and perched in the trees. This encouraged to get out again, at which point we had even better views of the cuckoo [and the hoopoe!], as well as a stunning male Malachite Sunbird. Southern Black Korhaan was our final new bird of the day, giving decent roadside views as it stalked through the low scrub. We checked into the Glenfinnan B&B in Langebaan and had an excellent if a little noisy meal in a beachfront restaurant.



Black Harrier

Sunday 18th November – Warm and breezy, 25C

Leaving Langebaan this morning, a male Black Sparrowhawk floated across the road and two White-throated Canaries were in a bush in someone's garden. Heading out towards Saldanha, we spent some time birding in the shadow of the huge Iron Ore mine though the slightly reddish tinged landscape didn't seem to bother the birds! A roadside Booted Eagle gave remarkable views down to a few feet, and we had similarly good views of Karoo Lark, Large-billed Lark, Yellow Canary, Larklike Bunting, Karoo Robin-chat and Cape Long-billed Lark which gave good perched views and also demonstrated its distinctive song. Steppe Buzzards, wintering here all the way from their Russian breeding grounds, were more numerous than in previous days and we added another new species in the form of two Anteater Chats again at the roadside. A mixed feeding group of larks gave us even better views of Cape Long-billed, though really it was the beautiful Red-capped Larks that were the best looking! In fact this whole area was full of larks, particularly where we found bare areas in cultivated fields. African Pipit and Blue Crane also favoured this type of terrain and a small roadside pool held a Kittlitz's Plover, with a fine White-throated Swallow perched on a fence. Mauritz Bay would provide a very pleasant coffee stop but not before we had checked out a tern roost in a rocky bay. Large numbers of Sandwich and Swift Terns held a few Common and Caspian Terns, while waders were represented by Curlew Sandpiper, Whimbrel, White-fronted Plover and African Black Oystercatcher. Around the houses where we had parked, Southern Grey Tit showed well and a male Malachite Sunbird, always a crowd pleaser, was feeding on flowers in one of the gardens. Karoo Prinias and Grey-backed Cisticolas seemed everywhere around the van and a Cape Bunting sang from one of the rooftops. Moving on to Veldruff, we spent some time birding around the extensive saltworks after Brian had negotiated our entry! Sadly we did not connect with Chestnut-banded Plover but fortunately saw a wealth of other birds including large flocks of both Greater and Lesser Flamingoes, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Common Sandpiper, White-fronted Plover, Pied Kingfisher [at least 5], 10+ Black-necked Grebes, 5+ Banded Martins and a Grey-headed Gull. Back on the main road and beginning our journey eastwards, two more Blue Crane were seen with chicks by the roadside and then we made a planned stop to view a drinking pool [created by a leaking pipe at a windmill pump]. This proved a superb spot, with up to 3 Namaqua Doves giving great views, Larklike Buntings mixing with bishops and weavers, two Common Waxbills perching on the fence and perhaps best of all, great views of the rather unpredictable Grey-backed Sparrowlark. The two hour drive to Ceres didn't offer much more birding, though on a couple of lagoons we did see Spur-winged Goose, 3 Purple Herons, 2 Whiskered Terns, Red-billed Teal and our first Hammerkops of the tour. Once at Ceres, we headed straight into the mountains to visit Brian's drinking pool for canaries. Cape Canary, Cape White-eye, Cape Robin-chat, Streaky-headed Canary and Cape Sugarbird all paid a visit to the tiny pool, and eventually a Protea Canary appeared and gave good views. Back in the town, our day was rounded off with a roost of over one hundred Lesser Kestrels on the electricity pylons – what a sight! Overnight at the Village Guest House where we enjoyed another excellent meal and local wines.



Steppe Buzzard

Monday 19th November – Hot, 30C

An early start saw us pack up and leave the guest house by 0600, and we started close by at the river to look for African Black Duck, a secretive bird that favours shady waterways. After initially flushing two from near the bridge, we eventually managed to relocate them and get really good views before they swam out of sight once more. Kicking on from this early success we drove towards the Tanqua, heading over the first ridge of mountains and dropping down towards this semi-arid plain. The last of the cultivated areas was our next stop, and here we had the memorable experience of watching a male Cape Clapper Lark displaying from a roadside fence – what an amazing bird! Further on in a reed-filled dry gully we added several new birds. Two Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks were seen in the distance and in the reeds, Namaqua Warbler was eventually seen well. African Reed Warbler, Namaqua Dove, Bar-throated Apalis, White-backed Mousebird, Malachite Sunbird and Karoo Robin-chat were also present and a dead tree hosted a Long-billed Crombec. Cape Penduline Tit also put in a brief appearance which represented our only sighting of the trip. Passing a shady clump of Eucalyptus by some buildings a little further on, a Willow Warbler was seen and a Hammerkop circled overhead – its huge nest spotted high on an adjacent cliff ledge. We paused again by the last clump of Acacias before the landscape really opened out into the Tanqua itself, and even here we still added a new species in the form of Layard's Tit-babbler. The Karoo is famous for its chats and we were soon watching the first of several species – Sickie-winged Chat. The same short roadside stop also produced two Yellow-bellied Eremomela, two Rufous-eared Warblers bouncing around on the ground waving their tails, and two Karoo Chats. A dried out river bed hosted a few stunted Acacias and here the 'bicycle pump' song of the Pirit Batis could be heard, with a good sighting eventually obtained. Two more Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks were also seen here, initially flushed off a road kill before perching nicely on a pylon. Further on at the 'twin peaks' site, it was getting hot but amazingly our target bird here – Karoo Eremomela – took about thirty seconds to find as a group of about 6 individuals moved through the low shrubs. An immature Black Harrier quartering along the ridge behind us was a bit of a surprise given the arid landscape, but Brian said he suspects them of breeding nearby. An artificial pond proved a magnet to South African Shelduck, while several more Karoo Eremomela and Yellow Canary were working their way along the fenceline. A Greater Kestrel gave a lovely roadside comparison with the more familiar Rock Kestrel and a Tractrac Chat was also obliging on a nearby fence. A brilliant stop at a roadside 'shop' that looked like something from a spaghetti western proved a big hit, especially as it was now 30C outside and the bar served cold beer! We spent a bit longer here than planned, chatting to the owners of this remarkable establishment which provides a refreshment stop and provisions on the longest dirt road in South Africa – 200km between towns! On a nearby track, Spike-heeled Lark showed well and was a real bonus bird, being a lifer for Ashley! We managed to squeeze one more bird out of the Tanqua despite the now oppressive heat, as we managed good views of a Fairy Flycatcher in a nearby rocky ravine before switching on the air con and settling down for our four hour drive to Swellendam. Some decent roadside birds along the way [in between naps!] were Cape Crow, Grey-headed Sparrow [in a service area], Hammerkop, Booted Eagle, Yellow Canary, Grey-backed Sparrowlark and Southern Black Korhaan. A planned stop in the town of Montagu allowed us to view the incredibly heronry in the middle of the town, home to a bustling colony of Cattle and Little Egrets, Sacred Ibis, Reed Cormorant, Grey and Black-headed Herons. We finally arrived at our accommodation for the night at the delightful Honeywood Farm where our welcoming hosts John and Miranda prepared us a fantastic meal before we turned in ahead of another early start tomorrow!



Spike-heeled Lark

Tuesday 20th November – Hot and sunny, 25C turning cooler and cloudier later

Honeywood Farm is a fabulous base for exploring the Grootvadersbosch State Forest, and just around the gardens before breakfast we picked up our first Fork-tailed Drongo, Greater Double-collared Sunbird and Greater Honeyguide as well as Pearl-breasted Swallow, African Hoopoe, White-rumped Swift, Brimstone Canary, Fiscal Flycatcher, Neddicky and African Harrier-Hawk. Heading down into the forest park, we saw Brimstone and White-throated Canaries, Sombre Greenbul and Fork-tailed Drongo around the visitor centre, and although the trail through the forest was perhaps quieter than hoped for, we still added a few new birds. A Forest Buzzard was perched on a dead tree and two Forest Canary gave great views as they fed quietly on the woodland floor. Cape Batis and Bar-throated Apalis were both sighted frequently, but it took us a good while before everyone had seen them well. Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler was perhaps the highlight, with great views of this little gem that looks similar to our own Wood Warbler. Narina Trogon would have occupied top spot, but despite hearing them calling views were tantalising and didn't amount to much more than moving foliage – though Peter was lucky and saw the bird perched in the open. Black Sunbird, Olive Bush-shrike, African Paradise Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher and Sweet Waxbill were also seen, though many also left us feeling we could have done with better views – both Olive and Knysna Woodpeckers were also in this category being basically heard only. We headed back for breakfast, knowing that we would have a second bite at the cherry once we had devoured Miranda's delicious offerings! So after packing up and saying farewell, we headed back into the woods again determined to improve on some of the views we had. Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Dusky Flycatcher, Cape Batis, Bar-throated Apalis and above all Olive Bush-shrike were all seen well at the second attempt, but with the temperature rising and things quietening down we decided to begin our journey south towards Cape Agulhas. However, the entrance road provided three more star birds as a Brown-hooded Kingfisher perched on a pylon and an African Crowned Eagle was observed at the nest – all played out to the constant song of an unseen Knysna Warbler. A male Denham's Bustard was displaying on a nearby ridge, seen as we stopped the car to pick up a pair of wings from a Fiery-necked Nightjar that had been hit by a car! From here we drove to our next overnight stop, at The Cottage near Bredasdorp on the Agulhas Plains. The drive was punctuated by roadside stops though, with many Blue Crane, Spur-winged Goose, Red-capped Larks, Steppe and Jackal Buzzards seen. Another displaying Denham's Bustard and another endemic in the form of the Agulhas Long-billed Lark were soon added as well as roadside African Stonechat, Namaqua Dove and Bokmakierie [our best views so far]. Once on the actual plains, at least five more Denham's Bustards included two females in flight, and yet more Blue Crane and Agulhas Long-billed Larks. Our final bird of the day was Karoo Korhaan, with Brian spotting two by the side of the road which we watched for ages, and another three were seen just before we dropped down to cross the Brede River on South Africa's only working manual pontoon. A very enjoyable meal and wine at The Cottage rounded off yet another successful day, leaving us to carefully plan our final route back to Cape Town around any missed species.



Booted Eagle

Wednesday 21st November – 18C, sunny spells and breezy

Around The Cottage before breakfast, Common Quail were calling in the fields and collectively we noted Malachite Sunbird, Bokmakierie, Fiscal Flycatcher, Red-capped, Large-billed and Agulhas Long-billed Larks, Blue Crane, Steppe and Jackal Buzzards, Southern Masked and Cape Weavers, White-throated and Yellow Canaries, White-rumped Swift and Greater-striped Swallow, while Celia and Carolyn were lucky enough to add the Agulhas Clapper Lark which the rest of us missed. After a delicious breakfast, we made the short journey to De Hoop nature reserve where we hoped to connect with the endemic Cape Vulture. This wasn't difficult, with several birds soaring over the parking area – along with Martial and Black Eagles! An Olive Woodpecker was admiring itself in a nearby window the whole time we were here and an African Hoopoe fed on the lawns by the dormitory buildings where a Familiar Chat was also seen. Bar-throated Apalis, Cape Batis, Pearl-breasted Swallow and Denham's Bustard were also seen along with a fabulous Bontebok right beside the road. The journey from here back towards Cape Town was relatively uneventful until we diverted along the coastal road towards Betty's Bay and Harold Porter. The idea of this was to visit the African Penguin colony at Stoney Point, a great idea as there were far more birds here in this stunning setting, and fewer people, than the popular Boulder's Beach. Cape Cormorants were also nesting in numbers, Black Oystercatchers fed on the rocks and a White-fronted Plover was by the car park. From here we drove straight back to Cape Town and checked back into Braeside about 1800. After a couple of bottles of wine over the checklist to celebrate our last evening, we headed down to The Waterfront for a meal.



African Penguin

Thursday 22nd November – Windy, 17C, sunny spells

Due to our late night flight, we had a full days birding today though we were disappointed to discover that the Table Mountain cableway would not be running due to the strong winds so we could not scale the mountain. Our back up plan was to motor directly back east for an hour to the Hottentots Holland Mountains to try again for the Cape Rockjumper, probably the biggest, and only real, omission from our lists. Along the coast road between Gordon's Bay and Rooi Els, we took a minor road up the mountain to view the boulder-strewn slopes. In fact we saw virtually all the Cape Mountain Fynbos endemics here, including Malachite and Orange-breasted Sunbirds, Cape Sugarbird, Cape Siskin, Cape Canary, Familiar Chat, Neddicky, Rock Kestrel and Cape Canary. Best of all though was the superb Ground Woodpecker which we watched for ages as it sat sentinel like on a boulder before dropping to the ground to feed. With still no sign of the Rockjumper though, we accepted that we would now have to drive all the way round to Betty's Bay to try another site for it there. Luck would

have it though, that somehow at 70kph Brian spotted a group of Cape Rockjumpers by the side of the road and screeched to a halt! A well-placed lay-by allowed us to scope the birds for a while as they bounced around the hillside – what fantastic birds! With that species well and truly in the bag, we headed back towards Cape Town and called at Rondevlei Wetlands reserve which was a new site for us. The various well-placed hides allowed us to view good numbers of waterbirds with Red-billed Teal, Cape Shoveler, Yellow-billed Duck, Little and Great Crested Grebes, Glossy Ibis, Blacksmith's Plover, and African Spoonbill all present in good numbers. 3+ African Darter, 2 Three-banded Plovers, Water Thick-knee and Pied Kingfisher were also noted, while an African Snipe fed furtively at the edge of some reeds. The big prize though, quite literally, was a superb Goliath Heron which flew over and was then relocated on a small pool allowing us all to get fantastic views. Kirstenbosch next, and after lunch at the restaurant we spent some time wandering around this huge Botanical Garden. Spotted Eagle Owl was the undoubted highlight, with two adults and a chick seen down to about ten feet! It was great to get really close views of the Cape Sugarbirds too, and we also noted Southern Double-Collared Sunbird, Cape Francolin, African Dusky Flycatcher, Common Waxbill, Cape White-eye, Olive Thrush, Karoo Prinia, Cape Canary and White-necked Raven. After a look around the shop though it was time to leave, and after dropping Jan, Kathy and Adrian at their accommodation on The Waterfront the rest of us headed to the airport where we bid farewell to Brian and caught our 2315 flight back to London.

Friday 23rd November

We arrived back at Heathrow slightly ahead of schedule at 0905 and after a seamless transition through baggage reclaim and passport control, we went our separate ways for the onward journey home.

Systematic List

Birds

1. Common Ostrich
2. African Penguin
3. Great Crested Grebe
4. Little Grebe
5. Black-necked Grebe
6. Shy Albatross
7. Black-browed Albatross
8. Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross
9. Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross
10. Southern Giant Petrel
11. Northern Giant Petrel
12. Pintado Petrel
13. White-chinned Petrel
14. Great Shearwater
15. Sooty Shearwater
16. Manx Shearwater
17. White Pelican
18. Cape Gannet
19. White-breasted Cormorant
20. Cape Cormorant
21. Bank Cormorant
22. Reed Cormorant
23. Crowned Cormorant
24. African Darter
25. Grey Heron
26. Black-headed Heron
27. Purple Heron
28. Goliath Heron

29. Little Egret
30. Cattle Egret
31. Night Heron
32. Hammerkop
33. Sacred Ibis
34. Glossy Ibis
35. Hadedda Ibis
36. African Spoonbill
37. Greater Flamingo
38. Lesser Flamingo
39. Egyptian Goose
40. South African Shelduck
41. Yellow-billed Duck
42. African Black Duck
43. Mallard
44. Cape Teal
45. Hottentot Teal
46. Red-billed Teal
47. Cape Shoveler
48. Southern Pochard
49. Spur-winged Goose
50. Maccoa Duck
51. White-backed Duck
52. Secretary Bird
53. Cape Vulture
54. Yellow-billed Kite
55. Black-shouldered Kite
56. Verraux's [Black] Eagle
57. Booted Eagle
58. Martial Eagle
59. African Crowned Eagle
60. African Fish Eagle
61. Steppe Buzzard
62. Forest Buzzard
63. Jackal Buzzard
64. Black Sparrowhawk
65. Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk
66. African Marsh Harrier
67. Black Harrier
68. African Harrier-Hawk
69. Peregrine
70. Rock Kestrel
71. Greater Kestrel
72. Lesser Kestrel
73. Grey-winged Francolin
74. Cape Francolin
75. Common Quail [H]
76. Helmeted Guineafowl
77. Blue Crane
78. Black Crake

79. African Purple Swamp-Hen
80. Common Moorhen
81. Red-knobbed Coot
82. Denham's Bustard
83. Karoo Korhaan
84. Southern Black Korhaan
85. African Black Oystercatcher
86. Ringed Plover
87. White-fronted Plover
88. Kittlitz's Plover
89. Three-banded Plover
90. Grey Plover
91. Crowned Lapwing
92. Blacksmith Plover
93. Ruddy Turnstone
94. Common Sandpiper
95. Marsh Sandpiper
96. Common Greenshank
97. Red Knot
98. Curlew Sandpiper
99. Little Stint
100. Sanderling
101. African Snipe
102. Bar-tailed Godwit
103. Eurasian Curlew
104. Whimbrel
105. Pied Avocet
106. Black-winged Stilt
107. Water Thick-knee
108. Spotted Thick-knee
109. Arctic Skua
110. Subantarctic Skua
111. Pomarine Skua
112. Sabine's Gull
113. Kelp Gull
114. Hartlaub's Gull
115. Grey-headed Gull
116. Caspian Tern
117. Swift Tern
118. Sandwich Tern
119. Common Tern
120. Whiskered Tern
121. Speckled Pigeon
122. African Olive Pigeon
123. Red-eyed Dove
124. Cape Turtle Dove
125. Laughing Dove
126. Namaqua Dove
127. Tambourine Dove [H]
128. Rock Dove

129. Red-chested Cuckoo [H]
130. Klaas's Cuckoo
131. Spotted Eagle Owl
132. African Black Swift
133. White-rumped Swift
134. Little Swift
135. Alpine Swift
136. Speckled Mousebird
137. White-backed Mousebird
138. Narina Trogon
139. Pied Kingfisher
140. Brown-hooded Kingfisher
141. European Bee-eater
142. African Hoopoe
143. Acacia Pied Barbet [H]
144. Greater Honeyguide
145. Lesser Honeyguide [H]
146. Ground Woodpecker
147. Olive Woodpecker
148. Knysna Woodpecker [H]
149. Cape Clapper Lark
150. Agulhas Clapper Lark
151. Cape Long-billed Lark
152. Agulhas Long-billed Lark
153. Karoo Lark
154. Spike-heeled Lark
155. Red-capped Lark
156. Large-billed Lark
157. Grey-backed Sparrowlark
158. Barn Swallow
159. White-throated Swallow
160. Pearl-breasted Swallow
161. Greater-striped Swallow
162. Rock Martin
163. Brown-throated Martin
164. Banded Martin
165. Black Saw-wing
166. Fork-tailed Drongo
167. Cape Crow
168. Pied Crow
169. House Crow
170. White-necked Raven
171. Southern Grey Tit
172. Cape Penduline tit
173. Cape Bulbul
174. Sombre Greenbul
175. Olive Thrush
176. Karoo Thrush
177. Cape Rock Thrush
178. Mountain Wheatear

179. Capped Wheatear
180. Familiar Chat
181. Tractrac Chat
182. Sickie-winged Chat
183. Karoo Chat
184. Anteating Chat
185. African Stonechat
186. Cape Robin-chat
187. Karoo Scrub Robin
188. Cape Rockjumper
189. Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler
190. Layard's Tit-babbler
191. Lesser Swamp Warbler
192. Little Rush Warbler
193. African Reed Warbler
194. Knysna Warbler [H]
195. Victorin's Warbler
196. Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler
197. Bar-throated Apalis
198. Long-billed Crombec
199. Yellow-bellied Eremomela
200. Karoo Eremomela
201. Cape Grassbird
202. Zitting Cisticola
203. Cloud Cisticola
204. Levallant's Cisticola
205. Grey-backed Cisticola
206. Neddicky
207. Karoo Prinia
208. Namaqua Warbler
209. Rufous-eared Warbler
210. African Dusky Flycatcher
211. Fiscal Flycatcher
212. Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher
213. African Paradise Flycatcher
214. Cape Batis
215. Pirit Batis
216. Fairy Flycatcher
217. Cape Wagtail
218. African Pipit
219. Long-billed Pipit
220. Cape Longclaw
221. Common Fiscal
222. Southern Bou Bou [H]
223. Bokmakierie
224. Olive Bush-shrike
225. Common Starling
226. Pied Starling
227. Red-winged Starling
228. Cape Sugarbird

- 229. Malachite Sunbird
- 230. Orange-breasted Sunbird
- 231. Southern Double-collared Sunbird
- 232. Greater Double-collared Sunbird
- 233. Black Sunbird
- 234. Cape White-eye
- 235. House Sparrow
- 236. Grey-headed Sparrow
- 237. Cape Sparrow
- 238. Cape Weaver
- 239. Southern Masked Weaver
- 240. Southern Red Bishop
- 241. Yellow Bishop
- 242. Common Waxbill
- 243. Sweet Waxbill
- 244. Pin-tailed Whydah
- 245. Cape Canary
- 246. Forest Canary
- 247. Streaky-headed Seed-eater
- 248. Brimstone Canary
- 249. Yellow Canary
- 250. White-throated Canary
- 251. Protea Seed-eater
- 252. Cape Siskin
- 253. Cape Bunting
- 254. Larklike Bunting