



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT SOUTH AFRICA

31ST OCTOBER – 11TH NOVEMBER 2016

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TUESDAY 1ST NOVEMBER – *Brisk southerly winds and sunny spells, 20C*

We arrived on time on our overnight flight into Cape Town and after a prolonged passport control, we soon met with our guide Brian Vanderwalt and took a bit of time out for lunch and coffee, and the chance to sort out our birding kit ready for the afternoon. We didn't plan to travel too far, and just twenty minutes from the airport found us at the fantastic Strandfontein water treatment works, where a series of excellent lakes and marshy areas are served by a series of good tracks which allow close approach to a great many waterbirds, using our vehicle as a hide. Birds which would become extremely common, such as Sacred and Hadedra Ibises, White-throated Swallow and Speckled Pigeon, were seen along the way and as we reached the first pan, we could see large flocks of Greater Flamingo feeding in the water. **Cape Teal**, **Yellow-billed Duck** and **Cape Shoveler** were very numerous in the shallow water at the edge of the pools, where many were also sitting out on the embankments allowing fantastic close approach – the light was superb! **Blacksmith's Plovers** were equally obliging right by the side of the track, and we saw our first Black-winged Stilts stalking the muddy channels around the edge of the pools. Roosting gulls and terns, actually sitting on the bund we were driving along, would have flushed high and away back home but here they were completely unbothered by our vehicle and we were able to park right beside them! **Hartlaub's Gulls** were most numerous, but we picked a Grey-headed Gull out too and enjoyed close views of Swift and Sandwich Terns admixed. Over the open water, many **Whiskered Terns** were dancing around, bizarrely just arriving here to breed, and presumably a totally different population to the Northern Hemisphere breeders of south-east Europe. A smart **Black-necked Grebe** in summer plumage was also close at hand, and the first of many **Red-knobbed Coots** was also noted.



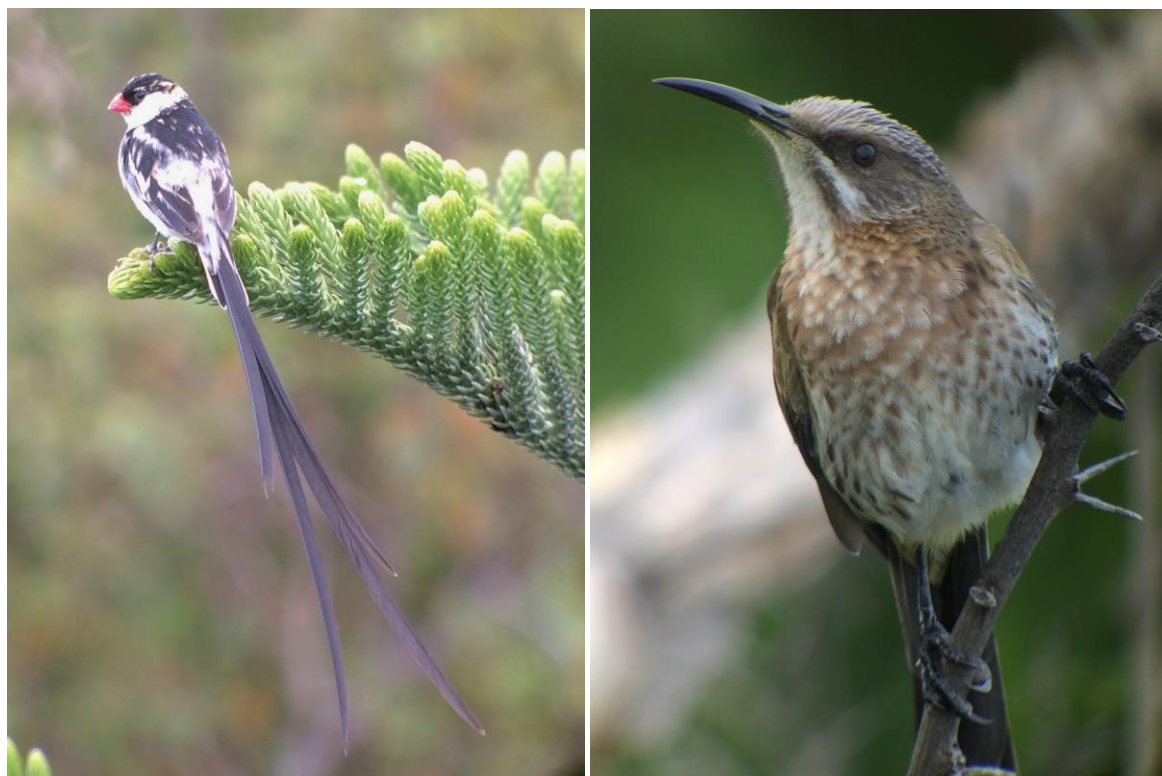
Hottentot Teal and Kittlitz's Plover, 1st November

We continued on around the pans, checking each one carefully for new species. Brian pulled up alongside a pair of **Spotted Thick-knees** – they were ridiculously close right outside the vehicle and never even flinched! The photographers in the group had a field day, especially when we also realised there were two **Water Thick-knees** hiding behind a picnic table in the same field of view, with a half grown downy chick!! **Cape Wagtail** and **African Pipit** hardly managed a second look, but we did pause to appreciate the beautiful **Levaillant's Cisticola**, a very common small bird of these habitats seen here in excellent light. **Southern Masked Weaver**, **Yellow-billed Kite** and **Pied Crow** were next

on the list, before we reached the best area of the works!! Here two marshy pools either side of the track were just busting with birds – **Caspian Terns**, resting among Swift, Sandwich and Common, and large groups of Little Stint, Common Ringed Plover and Curlew Sandpiper. **Glossy Ibis** fed in groups among the wet grassland and careful scanning here picked out three beautiful **Hottentot Teals**, a speciality of the site. **Red-billed Teal**, **Spur-winged Goose**, **Ethiopian Snipe**, **White-faced Whistling Duck**, **White Pelican** and Common Greenshank were also seen. A couple of real highlights were the fantastic close views of **Kittlitz's Plovers**, again best achieved using the vehicle as a hide, and the flock of Whiskered Terns which settled on one of the islands. **African Black Oystercatchers** also wowed us with their simple but wonderful colour scheme, and three **Lesser Flamingoes** were a good pick out, among the many Greater Flamingo present. After spending some more time watching the waders and photographing the stunning **Hottentot Teal**, we began to retrace our route back to the entrance. An **African Purple Swamp-hen** stopped us in our tracks, and also led to fantastic sightings of four **Marsh Sandpipers** feeding close by. Two **Pied Kingfishers**, three **Cape Francolin** [or Spur-fowl] and ridiculous views of three **Water Thick-knee** right outside the van were the final highlights, as we made our way back out of the complex and out towards Baden Powell Drive. Our route to Simon's Town took us along the dunes here, passing a big **Cape Gull** colony, and through the town of Fish Hoek before we reached our lovely accommodation above Simon's Town itself. A breathless first afternoon!

WEDNESDAY 2ND NOVEMBER – *Light winds and high cloud, 22C*

Our pelagic birding day today meant an early start for breakfast and down to Simon's Town harbour for 0700 to meet Alvin, our seabirding guide for the day. It was a stunning morning, and some of the group had already seen endemic **Orange-breasted Sunbird**, **Familiar Chat** and **Red-winged Starling** during and after breakfast!



Pin-tailed Whydah and Cape Sugarbird, 2nd November

We set sail under blue skies and in light winds, noting our first **African Penguin** in the harbour, and scores of **Cape Cormorants** moving to and from their colonies along the rocky shore. As we passed the famous Boulders Beach, more **African Penguins** could be seen, and huge numbers of **Swift Terns** were also resting on the offshore skerries. The next hour and a half was taken up by steaming down the

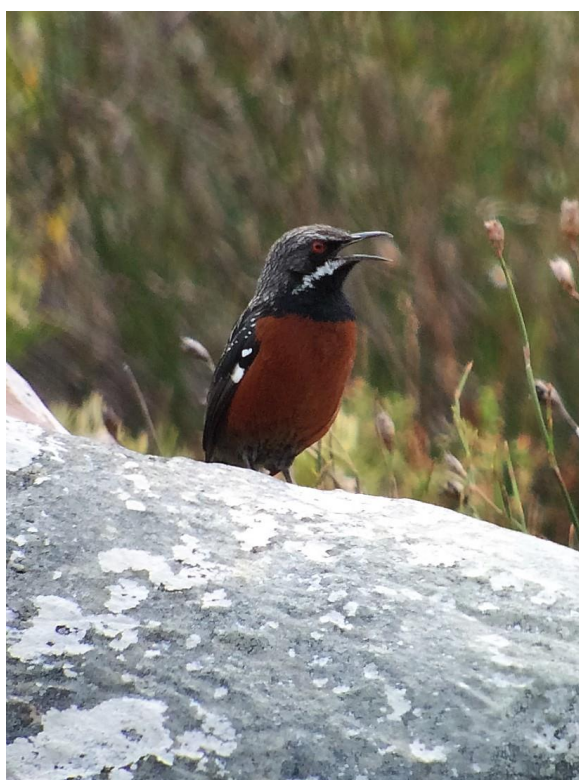
peninsula and out into the open sea off Cape Point, where the sea began to get a little bit more choppy! There was a good swell running, and it was a bit lumpy where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet! The first hour of steaming out to sea was exceptionally quiet, and we struggled to see much at all, but soon we had our first **White-chinned Petrels**, perhaps the commonest seabird of these waters, and then a lovely **Sooty Shearwater** right alongside the boat – things were looking up. The further we steamed out the more birds we began to see – huge flocks of **Common Terns**, then several **Great Shearwaters** including several sat on the water with a large group of **Sooties**. Our skipper was using radar and scanning the horizon, to try and find us a fishing boat, and this he duly did – we set off in hot pursuit! It wasn't long before the first shout of 'albatross' went up as a young **Black-browed Albatross** cruised past, and soon this was followed by the huge **Shy Albatross** too. As we got closer to the fishing boat, we could see huge numbers of birds behind it – this was going to be good! Over the next hour we ran up and down the slick picking out as much as we could – point blank views of **Black-browed** and **Shy Albatross** on the water squabbling in small groups over discarded fish, were surrounded by scores of **White-chinned Petrels**, **Sooty** and **Great Shearwaters**. Some of the views were just amazing, almost touching distance, and we had some fabulous 'wow' moments when an albatross would take off and fly over the stern of our boat! **Subantarctic Skua**, **Sabine's Gull** and both **European** and **Wilson's Storm Petrels** all gave excellent views, but pride of place went to a single **Black-bellied Storm-petrel** which performed beautifully and was a lifer for everyone. Both **Southern** and **Northern Giant Petrels** could be picked out by close examination of their bill tip colour, and a dapper **Pintado Petrel** was picking tiny morsels off the surface in phalarope fashion, away from the main hordes. We were able to drift right up to this beautifully marked seabird, and enjoy amazing close views. We continued to work up and down the slick, making sure everyone had great views of all the birds and working on identification of the immature albatrosses, which was not always easy. An absolutely stunning adult **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross** flew right past us and we went on to see two or three more, plus an adult of the **Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross** sat on the water, told by its much whiter head.

We began to make the long trip back into shore, picking up more great albatross views on the way, and some more congregations of **Sooty** and **Great Shearwaters**. A single **Manx Shearwater** was also noted, and the odd **Cape Fur Seal** was also seen. Once we got back around Cape Point, we sailed up to a large mixed cormorant colony on the rocks – endemic **Cape** and **Bank Cormorants** were here together, allowing a nice comparison. Back on dry land, it was time for a much needed coffee stop, with some even going as far as having cake to go with it! Then it was along to **Boulders Beach**, for closer views of the **African Penguins**. These charismatic birds were great to see up close, but we also found **Crowned Cormorant**, **African Black Oystercatcher** and close up **Karoo Prinia** along the shore too. Back at the car park, a short wander around the adjacent suburban gardens added two **Cape Robin-chats**, mobbing another **Little Grey Mongoose**. A couple of **Cape White-eye** also joined in, and then Brian heard a **Cape Grassbird** singing close by. We looked for the bird, but couldn't find it, so wandered a bit further along the road noting **Common Fiscal Shrike**, and better views of the **Cape White-eye**. Back at the van, as we were about to leave, the **Cape Grassbird** appeared and goodness what views! It was ridiculously close, singing its heart out on a bare branch! Back at the guest house, some of us couldn't resist birding a bit longer from the balcony – **Cape Sugarbird**, **Orange-breasted Sunbird**, **Speckled Mousebird**, **Pin-tailed Whydah**, **Brimstone Canary** and a surprise **Klaas's Cuckoo** being the highlights! Another great day!

THURSDAY 3RD NOVEMBER – *Strong N winds and sunny spells, 22C*

We had a slightly more leisurely breakfast this morning, and an excellent one it was too! Some folk noted **Red-faced Mousebird** in the gardens, **Southern Boubou** and of course **Cape Sugarbirds**, which were common here. Then after breakfast, we motored eastwards around False Bay, stopping briefly at a service station near Somerset West where a small reedbed held both **Southern Red** and **Yellow Bishops**, looking dazzling in the morning sunshine. A **Rock Kestrel** was also seen carrying prey, and roadside birds included **Black-shouldered Kite**, **White-breasted Cormorant**, **Glossy** and **Sacred Ibis**, **Black-winged Stilt** and **Greater Flamingo**. A pair of **Crowned Lapwing** were perhaps the highlight though before we reached our main birding site for the morning – the coastal mountains at

Rooiels. This stunning and dramatic rocky coastline was rather windswept today in the strong northerlies, which were whipping up some white horses on the ocean and making birding a little tricky. Nevertheless, we had great views of **Malachite Sunbird**, **Speckled Mousebird** and **Fiscal Flycatcher** along the approach track, before setting off on foot along the stony path to look for the speciality birds of the area. These included **Cape Bunting**, **Grey-backed Cisticola**, **Familiar Chat**, **Cape Grassbird**, **Orange-breasted Sunbird** and **Cape Siskin**, some of which were seen better than others. A pair of **Cape Rockjumpers**, the main target for the morning, gave stunning views for about half an hour, and were quite probably the bird of the day. With excellent light and close range views, we really couldn't have seen them any better. **Cape Rock Thrush** was also seen fleetingly, perched on the top of a boulder with a bill full of food, before it dashed off and we didn't catch up with it again. A **Jackal Buzzard** was more obliging, perching long enough on the crags above for everyone to get a scope view. **Greater Striped Swallow** and **Rock Martin** were also seen along the trail, making for a pretty productive session despite the now gale force wind!



Yellow Bishop and Cape Rockjumper, 3rd November

Heading further east along the coastal road, we called next at the excellent Harold Porter Botanical Garden which would be our destination for the rest of the day. An **African Dusky Flycatcher** was our first new bird, gathering food off the path at our feet and feeding a fledgling nearby. A **Familiar Chat** was doing the same, tending to a speckled youngster by the restaurant, but other birds around the gardens were more difficult to find in the strong winds. In fact our first circuit of the garden and up the 'kloof' or pass, was disappointing. Other than **Cape Canaries**, **Cape White-eye**, **Cape Robin Chat**, **Olive Thrush**, **Cape Sugarbird**, **Cape Turtle Dove**, **Cape Bulbul** and a good view of a **Neddicky**, it was very quiet. So we decided to go back to the restaurant for lunch, to give the birds a chance to wake up after their own siesta! This was a good move, and our second circuit was far more productive. Along the river, we eventually had good views of the rather tricky **Cape Siskin**, as well as **Brimstone Canary**, **African Paradise Flycatcher**, **Black Saw-wing Swallow** and the stunning **Sweet Waxbill**. **Cape Sugarbird** was wonderfully photogenic and a pair of **Alpine Swifts** were swooping overhead, loving the winds deflecting off the spectacular mountainside above us. Further up along the wooded stretch of stream, we had more superb views of the **African Paradise Flycatcher**, a **Cape Francolin** on the path with a youngster, two **Common Waxbills** and a **Giant Kingfisher** which called loudly and flashed by briefly. The **Victorin's Warbler** we could hear, remained sadly hidden on

the other side of the river. A decent haul given the weather, and now it was time to make the 1.5hr trip back to Cape Town, noting **Indian House Crow**, **Rock Kestrel**, Sacred and Glossy Ibises, hundreds of Black-winged Stilts, Cattle Egret and **African Marsh Harrier** along the way. After checking in at our townhouse B&B near Greenpoint, we enjoyed an excellent meal of seafood in a local restaurant and crashed for the night.



Cape Sugarbird, 3rd November

FRIDAY 4TH NOVEMBER – *Sunshine and a moderate breeze, 23C*

We started off the day with two new birds, the dapper Cape Sparrow and a Laughing Dove, from the verandah of our townhouse B&B overlooking the Greenpoint Stadium in Cape Town. Our first birding destination for the day would be the wonderful botanical gardens at Kirstenbosch, on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain – a superb place for getting close views of the many of the fynbos endemics. Starting here just after 8am was great, it wasn't yet busy, and the birds were active. Cape White-eye and **Southern Double-collared Sunbird** were common, and the latter included several stunning males, the first we had seen. Cape Robin-chat, Cape Sugarbird, Cape Canary, Red-eyed Dove and Cape Francolin were also easily observed, and our first overhead raptor was a pale phase **Booted Eagle** which spiralled us almost inquisitively, giving excellent views. **Sweet Waxbills** were present in good numbers, feeding on seeding grasses in the flower borders, and while photographing these two **Southern Boubou** popped out from under the bushes – many of the birds here are so tame, it is ridiculous! The same could be said for the usual nesting pair of **Spotted Eagle Owls** – the female was perched out in a big pear tree, and her two chicks were sat in one of the flower beds, peeking out from behind a rock! Amazing to see such impressive predators at close quarters. We carried on up the slopes around the protea garden, and here a party of **Forest Canary** were seen extremely well and an **African Goshawk** gave us the slip amongst the dense canopy of the woodland behind. We spent quite a bit of time wandering around enjoying more close ups of the same species, and taking some pictures – the scenery was pretty breathtaking here too! An **African Harrier-hawk** cruised by in excellent light, and then the male **Spotted Eagle Owl** was picked up – not hiding in the canopy of a big tree, but sat on a stump in full view about twenty feet away! Its eyes lit up and its head span

round when a Striped Field Mouse dashed across between borders, but it decided it wasn't worth interrupting its slumber for. After a coffee back at the visitor centre, we headed back to the car and negotiated our way out of Cape Town, to the north side, on the road to Milnerton.



Southern Double-collared Sunbird and Spotted Eagle Owl, 4th November

Once clear of the city, we followed the river mouth along to the north and began to pick up many waterbirds – Caspian Tern, Little Egret, Common Greenshank, Greater Flamingo, African Darter and African Spoonbill all being roadside birds. Crossing the bridge over the Deip River, we stopped to scope the lagoon which held a superb Purple Heron, Great Crested Grebe, Yellow-billed Duck, Cape Shoveler, and a brief White-backed Duck. Over the adjacent rough ground, many Brown-throated Martins were feeding with White-throated Swallows, and by the bridge we were able to compare White-rumped and Little Swifts in flight. A Black-shouldered Kite, perched on the top of a bush, was also seen – there were birds everywhere! Continuing a bit further up to the Reitvlei wetland area, we scanned two more very birdy roadside pools fringed with reeds. A Black-crowned Night-Heron flew up as we got out, but thankfully perched on the far shore in view. We also noted our first Reed Cormorants, completing our endemic set, and there were at least half a dozen more Purple Herons here giving some superb views. A sudden ripple in the water alerted us to perhaps the biggest surprise of the day – a family of Cape Clawless Otters, a mother and four cubs, which swam towards us before climbing out of the water and then disappearing into the reeds. The lagoon on the northern side held even more birds, including a Wood Sandpiper, a pair of displaying Great Crested Grebes and excellent views of our target bird, the odd looking White-backed Duck. A quick check around the far side of the same pool failed to produce the hoped for Squacco Heron which had been reported recently, but we did see a Water Thick-knee and a nice pair of Red-billed Teal.

Now it was lunchtime, and so we headed for our favoured café stop at Malkbos, just a short drive further on. Suitably refreshed, our plan for the first part of the afternoon was to bird the Strandveld, a narrow coastal strip of scrub covered dunes, to look for some of its speciality birds. The views back towards Table Mountain and out to Robben Island, were spectacular, and the birding wasn't far behind. Red and Yellow Bishops were common, and in fact there were small birds everywhere in the scrub – Speckled Mousebird, Karoo Prinia, Cape Robin-chat and also Yellow and White-throated Canaries, two new ones for our list. The Yellow Canaries showed really well, and we had

one dazzling male scoped up at close range. Brian spotted the dowdy looking **Karoo Scrub Robin**, and in fact there was a pair feeding young. Close observation reveals a very beautiful bird in fact, especially when it perched up on a dead stick and fanned its white tipped tail. More spectacular looking was the pair of **Bokmakierie** which popped up right in front of us, dazzling us for a few moments in the open before disappearing back into cover. Back by the van, a **Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler** popped out with some perserverance and gave point blank views – it certainly lived up to its rather entertaining name! A little further up the coast, we called at a beautiful beach with rocky shoreline, and there were several **Crowned Cormorants** here, a species we had not had brilliant views of before. A pair of **White-fronted Plovers** was our main target though, and we actually discovered their nest with three beautiful eggs, as well as getting great views of the adults. We had to make it a quick look before retreating though, as we had inadvertently flushed the sitting bird. A quick toilet and fuel stop nearby, and then onto another new habitat to end the day!



Karoo Scrub Robin and young Spotted Eagle Owl, 4th November

Heading just inland towards Durbanville, we soon entered the vast prairie like wheatlands and a whole new set of birds. Top target was the national bird of South Africa, the **Blue Crane**, and we soon found two in the roadside fields, viewed distantly through a telescope. In the same area, two **Jackal Buzzard** were overhead, and we saw **Capped Wheatear**, **White-rumped Swift** and our first **European Bee-eaters**. Three **Cape Weavers** on the fenceline were also surprisingly new birds for the trip, and a little further on we had fantastic roadside views of a lovely rufous **Steppe Buzzard**. A few more **Bee-eaters** were seen, plus better views of **Capped Wheatear**, and our first **Red-capped Larks** of the trip by the roadside. **Helmeted Guineafowl** and some suspect **Common Ostrich** rounded off the day before we motored back to Cape Town in time for a bit of a break before dinner at The Waterfront.

SATURDAY 5TH NOVEMBER – *Sunny with a moderate breeze, 19C*

We left Cape Town behind this morning to begin our clockwise circuit of the western cape habitats which would occupy us for the next five days. We took the same route north as yesterday morning, passing the Diep River again and seeing **African Darter**, **Caspian Tern** and others from the vehicle. We basically planned to continue straight through these areas though, and stop in the Strandveld to the north near Silverstroomstrand. It was quite breezy here as we drove slowly down a track towards

the sea, and we had barely seen a bird until we drive back up and Brian spotted two **Grey-winged Francolins** crouched by the side of the track, our main target species here! The birds showed well, much smaller than the Cape Francolin and with 'chain mail' markings on the breast. Up the main road a bit further, and we turned inland this time to explore a bit more of the grassland habitats touched on yesterday afternoon. We soon saw two **Blue Crane** with two large chicks, an improvement on yesterdays views, before we stopped at a roadside nature reserve under the care of Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden. This was a great site, and by wandering slowly along the paths through the grassland, low scrub and rather out of place saltmarsh flora, we began to pick up all the typical birds. These included **Cloud Cisticola**, which proved common and was seen very well indeed, and both **African Pipit** and **Large-billed Lark**. Star bird though was the **Cape Longclaw**, with its impossibly vivid orange throat patch, which entertained us at point blank range. Several **Banded Martins**, and our best views yet of **Pearl-breasted Swallow**, rounded things off nicely.



Cape Longclaw and Cloud Cisticola, 5th November

We decided to motor north now to the West Coast National Park and Langebaan Lagoon, arriving there late morning and winding our way in through this vast area of Strandveld towards the bird hides at the south end of the lake. Two excellent scrub specialities were picked up along the way, the tail-less **Long-billed Crombec** and the **Cape Penduline Tit**, both of which gave us good views with some perseverance. At the hide, we were able to spend some time watching more familiar fare with the aid of a telescope – a variety of shorebirds which breed in the Arctic and pass through Britain on their way south to the cape. Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Grey and Common Ringed Plovers, Common Greenshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel and Sanderling were all here, along with several delicate **Marsh Sandpipers**, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet and two beautiful **South African Shelducks**. We had particularly good views of **Lesser Flamingo**, feeding close to the hide and often in direct company of **Greater Flamingo** for comparison. A nice session, and some good photographic opportunities too. Back at the van, we moved down to the restaurant complex and had a wander around, getting some great perched views of **Pearl-breasted Swallow**, our first **Pied Starlings** and an **Osprey** flying over. An **African Hoopoe**, after initially giving us the runaround, gave itself up in the end and perched nicely. **Malachite Sunbird** was also obliging, with a dazzling male perching on a dead snag by the roadside and allowing us all to get some nice shots – a superb way to

round off another exciting morning! Langebaan village next, for a welcome late lunch in one of the small restaurants there.



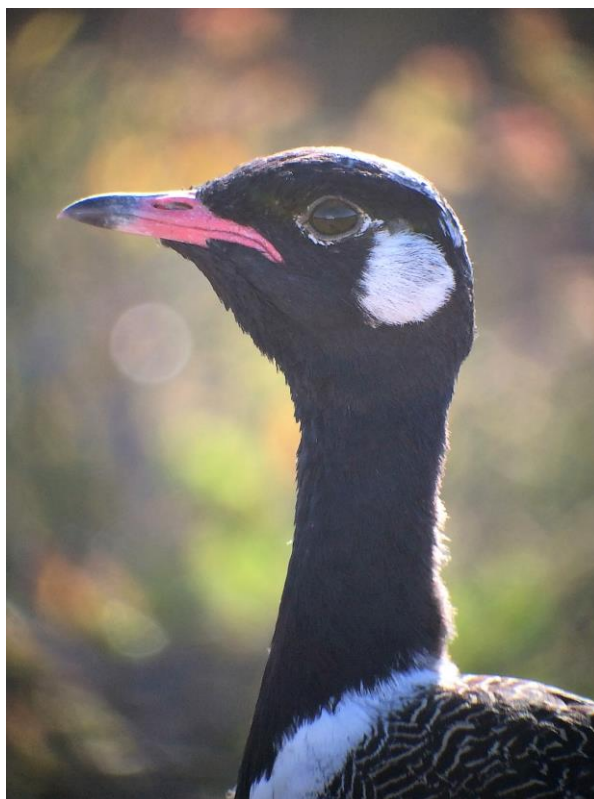
Grey Plover and Malachite Sunbird, 5th November

The afternoon was leisurely, as we re-entered the park to try again for some of the regional specialities which we missed in the morning. This included the stunning Southern Black Korhaan, an endemic small bustard, which we found rather typically sitting by the side of the road. Back down at the eastern side of the lagoon, we parked up to walk down to another hide. A pair of Cape Penduline Tits were tending to a beautifully constructed nest, and both Cape Bunting and Bokmakierie called from the tops of bushes.



Karoo Lark, 5th November

Down near the hide we had good views of **Grey-backed Cisticola**, and **White-throated Swallow** which was actually nesting inside the hide, unperturbed by people! Two **Little Terns** were viewable from here, with a large flock of **Common Terns**, and we had some lovely views of **White-fronted Plovers** among the sand dunes in front of the hide. The walk back up the trail produced the **Cape Bunting** at ridiculous range, and a couple of **Karoo Scrub Robins** which were bouncing around in the scrub. Yet another crazy close up was had from the vehicle just along the track here, as a **Karoo Lark** flew in and landed on a bush beside the track, allowing us to cut the engine and roll up alongside it as it sang just feet away! It was already 4pm by now, and we only really had one more target in mind for the day. This was to drive slowly through the scrubland and keep an eye out for the endemic **Black Harrier**, a real speciality of the park. After many false alarms, mainly from **Yellow-billed** and **Black-shouldered Kites** and **Pied Crows**, we picked the harrier up flying up ahead. After initially losing it, we drove further on and turned, getting distracted then by a staggering roadside **Southern Black Korhaan** which just gave itself up, again feet from the vehicle and even calling its head off as we snapped away from inside the van! The **Black Harrier** wasn't to be outdone though, and we picked it up again as we drove on towards Langebaan, and had several fantastic minutes with the bird flying alongside our van – what a day! Three **White-backed Mousebirds**, another of our target birds, was also picked up by the park entrance, meaning we had nailed virtually all the top birds of the area today, a great result indeed.



Kittlitz's Plover and Southern Black Korhaan, 5th November

SUNDAY 6TH NOVEMBER – *Sunny in a moderate wind, 18C*

Our first port of call this morning was a small quarry near Langebaan village, where a pair of **Black Eagles** has a nest. We saw them here four years ago and sure enough they were still here, both adult birds clearly visible perched in a small bush mid way up the quarry face. Spectacular birds to start the day! There were a lot of small birds around in the scrub, and we had better views of **White-backed Mousebird** and **White-throated Canary** here, as well as several **Karoo Scrub Robins** and five **Grey-winged Francolins** which scuttled nervously away from the edge of the track. Our next target bird for the morning was the endemic **Cape Long-billed Lark**, and for this we travelled a short distance to the Iron ore processing plant near Saldahna. A roadside stop here was productive, with two **Jackal**

Buzzard, male Cape Weaver, a family of Capped Wheatears and a Large-billed Lark all showing nicely. Another new endemic for our list was the distinctive Southern Grey Tit, and while watching this bird hopping along a fence, we realised the brown blob in the stony ground just behind it was the Cape Long-billed Lark! We had excellent views of this quirky bird with its improbably long decurved bill – a great morning so far! Cape Penduline Tit and a family of Karoo Scrub Robins were also seen nearby, and a feeding party of Pied Starlings also hosted three Wattled Starlings – two young being fed by an adult. Next we moved a bit further north up the coast and drove a couple of side tracks. More Capped Wheatears, and a couple of beautiful Red-capped Larks, were some of the highlights, plus five Blue Cranes which posed right beside the road and our first Sickle-winged Chats were seen. With that we had seen most of our dry country targets, and so popped in to the rather attractive coastal village for a coffee stop before checking out the beach White-fronted Plover, Cape and Crowned Cormorants were seen, plus a pair of Crowned Lapwing seeing off a marauding Pied Crow. Two Little Grey Mongoose and an assortment of alarm calling small birds, alerted us to a Boomslang snake curled up in the top of a bush, and two Spotted Thick-knees stood proud among the low shrubs by the side of the road. We couldn't find any resting tern flocks here though, so from here we carried on north to Velddrif.



Pied Starling and Spotted Thick-knee, 6th November

The large salt works complex at Velddrif on the banks of the Berg River, are a good site to find the localised Chestnut-banded Plover. It was very windy by the main works entrance, and we couldn't see much other than extremely good views of Greater and Lesser Flamingo side by side. So after a quick loo stop at a local garage, we headed for another spot where Brian had access to a private salt farm. A flock of thirty Black-necked Grebes was a great sight, especially as many were in breeding plumage, and a stonking African Fish Eagle over the track as we headed into the works was a bonus too. Once among the salt pans, we began to see plenty of Little Stints, Common Ringed Plover, Black-winged Stilt and the odd Curlew Sandpiper. A single Common Sandpiper was new for the trip and once we reached the appropriate spot, our main target was easy to find – at least five beautiful Chestnut-banded Plovers showed brilliantly at close range. We enjoyed an excellent packed lunch here overlooking the pans, before making our way back out to the farm – superb close ups of African

Hoopoe and Namaqua Dove from the vehicle were our final birds here before we set off on our longest journey so far, of about 2.5hrs duration, to our next base at Ceres.



Chestnut-banded Plover and African Hoopoe, 6th November

The journey east through the vast wheatlands was punctuated by a couple of very short stops, the first for a pair of **Anteating Chats** by the side of the road, the other for a quick stretch of the legs by some ponds. Many **Yellow-billed Kites** and several **Black-shouldered Kites** were noted along the journey, and we finally reached Ceres around 1700 and headed straight down to the river. Here we wanted to check for **African Black Duck**, a riparian species which favours the shady parts of the river. We found a pair, just downstream of the small bridge, and had some nice scope views of them before they swam out of view. Our final action of the day would be Brian's 'drinking pool', at a lay-by on the mountain road above Ceres. We hoped to see the two drab canaries here – the **Protea** and **Streaky-headed Seed-eaters**, which often come in for water at a small pool in the late afternoon. The **Protea Seed-eater** was there as we arrived, and adult with two young, and we had some excellent views of this rather dowdy canary, our only chance to see it on the trip. Likewise the **Streaky-headed**, which came to drink and then began feeding on seeding grasses at the edge of the gully. In the half hour we were here, thirteen species came to drink, including **Cape Sugarbird**, **Malachite** and **Southern Double-collared Sunbirds**, **Cape Bunting**, **Cape Canary**, **Cape Robin-chat**, **Cape White-eye**, **Cape Turtle Dove**, **White-backed Mousebird** and **Cape Grassbird**. A super end to a tiring day, we were soon checked in and enjoying another good meal at our guest house in Ceres.

MONDAY 7TH NOVEMBER – *Sunny day in light winds, 30C*

Our longest day of the trip as we rose early and took a packed breakfast to tackle the vastness of the Tanqua Karoo, a semi desert landscape hosting many special birds, as well as the highest diversity of succulent plants of any habitat on earth. Crossing the mountain ridge and dropping down into the vast Tanqua plain, we took a side road and began looking and listening for our first endemic of the day, the **Cape Clapper Lark**. Disembarking, we could listen for its whistled call in the very still morning air, and soon we had one, clapping its wings as it rose into the sky in display, then whistling as it dropped back down. A fantastic display flight! We also saw **African Stonechat**, lots of **Yellow**

Canary, Karoo Scrub Robin, Large-billed Lark and a brief male **Black-headed Canary** here, the latter refusing to perch and really only giving flight views. Further on, we found another **Cape Clapper Lark**, this time displaying from a roadside fence post, and a small group of Blue Crane flew across the valley calling. We then began to make our way north into the Karoo, and at our next roadside stop, we realised it was not going to be cool today! For the first time all trip the wind had dropped and at 0730 in the morning it was already warm! Brian spotted a **Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk** perched up on a bush on the hillside, and two **European Bee-eaters** were on the wires. A large, dark chat turned out to be **Mountain Chat**, and we saw an adult female and a youngster here. Cape Bunting was common, and in the dried river bed, patches of reed and scrub held singing **African Reed Warbler** and the elusive **Namaqua Warbler**, which we eventually had some excellent views of with a bit of patience. Nearby, a **Layard's Titbabbler** popped up nicely in roadside bushes, at the exact spot where Brian thought it would be!



Cape Clapper Lark and Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk, 7th November

The final settlement of houses along the road before 35km of open terrain, produced a few interesting birds. A large colony of **Southern Masked Weaver** were here, and we found both **Red-faced** and **White-backed Mousebirds**, **Olive Thrush** and a smart female **Black-headed Canary**. We continued in this vein, moving and stopping and checking in particular the thicker areas of cover with acacia trees. This tactic produced two more of our main target birds in the next area of habitat once into the Karoo proper – a beautiful pair of **Pirit Batis**, roving quietly among the thorny acacias, and the dainty **Fairy Flycatcher**, which was less obliging. Greater Striped Swallows and Rock Martins could be found around the rocky gulleys, and a stunning pair of **Black Eagle** drifted over a ridge behind us in perfect light – stunning birds! **Fairy Flycatcher** is certainly one of the key birds of the area and we were pleased to find an adult feeding a fledged youngster, allowing us to get excellent views. A pair of **Namaqua Doves** included a female perched up right next to us, and another two **Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks** included a cracking view of one perched on a post right beside the road. The desert chats are a tricky bunch to get to grips with, but the larger **Karoo Chat** with its dusky grey plumage and white outer tail, was easy to find once into more open terrain. Like the similar sized **Mountain Chat**, it lacks that species white rump and shoulder patches and prefers to be in more exposed, open semi-desert with scattered small shrubs. This same habitat is also favoured by the superb **Rufous-eared Warbler**, and at our ‘usual’ spot for it we had views down to a couple of

feet of up to three birds, though due to its continuous movement and reluctance to stay in the open between shrubs, not easy to photograph! It was now lunchtime, and despite being on the longest road between two settlements in the Western Cape, with 170km of dirt road ahead to the next one, the amazing Tankwa Padstal 'shop and café' is like something out of a wild west movie! It served us an excellent lunch and welcome drinks, and we made a protracted stay here in the shade, making the most of the free wifi too! It really was hot after lunch, and so we did not linger much longer in the Karoo before starting our journey south-east towards Swellendam. We did drive a couple more tracks though and first found our final remaining desert chat, the **Tractrac Chat**, and rounded off our visit here with excellent views of two **Spike-heeled Larks** foraging by the side of the road. The drive then in the late afternoon took 3.5hrs, with perhaps the highlight coming as we made our way through the mountain pass just beyond Barisdale – **Rock Hyrax**, a troop of **Chacma Baboons** and a tree full of **Rameron Pigeons** were seen here. We arrived, exhausted, at Honeywood Farm around 1830 and our hosts John and Miranda provided us with a fantastic meal and local wines – the South African Malay speciality, **Bobotie**, was a particular favourite!



Spike-heeled Lark and Rufous-eared Warbler, 7th November

TUESDAY 8TH NOVEMBER – *Cloudy day in light winds, 18C*

We rose early this morning to bird around the gardens of Honeywood Farm before breakfast, and soon we were watching another new endemic, the stunning **Greater Double-collared Sunbird**. Other common birds around about included Cape Weaver, Fiscal Flycatcher, Cape Robin-chat, **Rameron Pigeon** and **Cape Crow**, while a **Streaky-headed Canary** was also seen. Exploring a little deeper into the Eucalyptus forest, we added a nice **Olive Woodpecker**, our first of the trip, and also **Cape Batis** which we had missed earlier in the trip around Cape Town. A pair of **Amethyst Sunbirds** included a superb male, looking all black in overcast light but coming alive when his iridescent head markings caught the sun. After breakfast, we took the van down one of the farm tracks to the edge of the Grootvadersbosch Forest, and spent some time exploring the forest fringe and interior via a narrow path. The bush and open grassland was alive with birds – Yellow, Cape and Brimstone Canaries, **African Hoopoe**, **Common Waxbill**, **Speckled Mousebird**, **Neddicky** and **Black Saw-wing** all being seen. Once we reached the start of the forest trail, we found **Olive Bush Shrike**, a timid

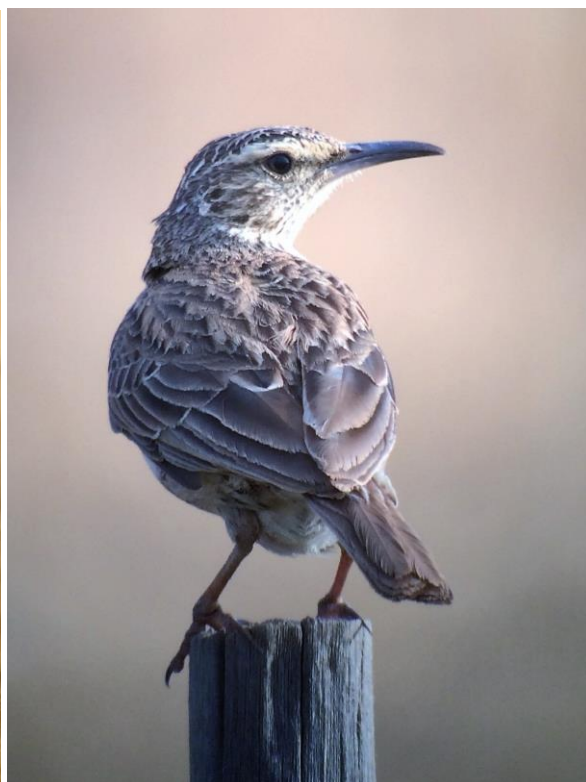
canopy species which, like all the African bush shrikes, was a real dazzler when seen clearly. **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher** was one of our main targets in the forest, so we were really pleased to find a pair quickly and get good views. Dusky and **African Paradise Flycatchers** were also seen, and a pair of **Olive Woodpeckers** were visiting a nest hole. The forest interior produced many more sightings of the same species, including more excellent views of **Cape Batis**, but not the hoped-for **Narina Trogon**. Retracing our steps back to the forest edge and taking a steep track up behind to overlook the area, we had close views of **Bar-throated Apalis**, several more **Rameron Pigeon** and a superb but brief **Lesser Honeyguide** which landed in a dead tree close at hand.



Greater Double-collared Sunbird and Brown-hooded Kingfisher, 8th November

After collecting our luggage and checking out of Honeywood Farm, we took the track down to the main forest park entrance. The area is currently close for maintenance so we couldn't enter, but we did see a brief **Red-necked Francolin** by the main gate, another very good view of **Bar-throated Apalis** and a typically elusive pair of **Olive Bush Shrikes**. Now we began making our way south, out of the park and towards Swellendam and the national highway. A few km before the end of the dirt road, we stopped to view an **African Crowned Eagle's** nest, just about managing to see most of one of the adult birds from a couple of different vantage points – what a beast! Both **Red-chested** and **Klaas's Cuckoos** called but remained hidden, though we did see a super **Brown-hooded Kingfisher**, sharing a fenceline with a **Fork-tailed Drongo**. Hitting the main road we stopped at a service area and had lunch, before continuing south on dirt roads towards the Brede River. This whole area produced superb roadside birding, and we had countless excellent views of **Red-capped** and **Large-billed Larks**, **Capped Wheatear**, **Blue Crane**, **Spur-winged Goose**, **Common Ostrich**, **Southern Red and Yellow Bishop**, **Crowned Lapwing** and **Yellow Mongoose**. Both **Steppe** and **Jackal Buzzards** were frequent roadside pole birds, and a **Southern Black Korhaan** posed typically close by the side of the track. **Blue Cranes** became progressively more common in fact, and we had some super views including a bird 'dancing' right beside the road. A **Diderick Cuckoo** tantalised us at a thickly vegetated river bed crossing, and we did see it in flight a couple of times, but our target bustard remained elusive despite much scanning and many false alarms with either **Egyptian Geese** or **Helmeted Guinea Fowl**! Eventually we reached the Brede River, crossing by a manned pontoon, and then we climbed back up into the cultivated land and continued south. Finally a distant blob was not an **Egyptian Goose** but a stunning male **Denham's Bustard** strutting his stuff across a stubble field. He became particularly

animated when a second male flew in and a female also appeared. The same field also hosted our other main target, the smaller **Karoo Korhaan** – a good result! Just as we were getting close to our accommodation for the night, we found our final target for today – the **Agulhas Long-billed Lark** – another endemic and more great roadside views to boot! An **African Spoonbill**, sharing a small pond with seven Little Stints, was a real surprise, and a cracking **Bokmakierie** greeted us as we pulled into the farmyard at The Cottage, our base for tonight. Another superb meal of traditional cuisine washed down with local wines, rounded off a very successful day in the field again. A **Spotted Eagle Owl** was seen near the farm, hunting from a roadside pylon, for those of us staying at the neighbouring property.



Blue Crane and Agulhas Long-billed Lark, 8th November

WEDNESDAY 9TH NOVEMBER – *Sunny day in moderate winds, 20C*

We made a fairly leisurely start this morning though as we were split between three neighbouring farms, and all eating at the main house for breakfast, for some of us this meant another view of the **Spotted Eagle Owl** on the way into breakfast! We enjoyed a delicious meal on the patio, with **Bokmakierie** calling and our first **Cape Vulture** floating overhead. In fact **Bokmakierie** were common here, with two pairs just around the garden, and we also saw a **Diderick Cuckoo** which was flying around calling, and a pair of **Spotted Thick-knee**. Packing up and moving out after breakfast, we enjoyed close views of **Red-capped** and **Large-billed Larks**, **African Pipit** and **Agulhas Long-billed Lark** just along the entrance road, and a marshy flood in one of the nearby fields held **Greater** and **Lesser Flamingo**, **Pied Avocet**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Little Stint** and **Three-banded Plover**! We headed straight down to De Hoop nature reserve, just a fifteen minute drive from the accommodation, with a specific target of seeing the endemic **Cape Vultures** which breed on the mountain there. We had good views of at least thirty birds soaring together above the 'kloof', and were able to scope them from the parking area. A short walk around the Eucalyptus woodland and adjacent scrub produced **Grey-headed Sparrow**, **Bar-throated Apalis**, **Malachite Sunbird** and **African Hoopoe**, but with a long trip ahead, we didn't plan to stay long. As we headed back out along the entrance road, we had a couple of impromptu and rather gruesome stops! The first was for an adult **Peregrine**, plucking its prey on top of a telegraph pole. It was calling away, and we soon realised this was because the male was sat on the next pole, also with prey! A bit further up the road, we screeched to a halt as Brian

spotted a **Secretarybird** stalking along in a roadside stubble field. We watched the bird for a while, and were then amazed to see it suddenly stamp on and eat what looked like a **Common Quail**! It was like a sequence from an Attenborough film! It was an hours drive from here to De Mond reserve, near Cape Agulhas, and we resisted the temptation to stop for every **Jackal Buzzard** and **Blue Crane** we saw along the way – two excellent views of **Denham's Bustard** and some beautiful **Bontebok**, were worth making an exception though.



Bokmakierie and Peregrine, 9th November

At De Mond we hoped to connect with the very rare and localised Damara Tern, which breeds here in the sand dunes by the Indian Ocean. It is a stunning location, with miles of white sands and crystal blue waters. A female **Spotted Eagle Owl** incubating her chicks right by the entrance hut, on the ground at the bottom of a tree, looked completely ridiculous – but her camouflage worked. We would have walked straight past it had Brian not known it was there! The estuary was full of waders – **White-fronted**, Grey and **Kittlitz's Plovers**, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Ruddy Turnstone and **African Black Oystercatcher**. The terns were our main quarry though, and we could see Swift, Common Sandwich and **Caspian Terns** all roosting in large numbers. About twenty small terns though, after much close scrutiny, all appeared to be **Little Terns**, and we couldn't find a definite Damara among them – tricky though! From De Mond we made the short journey into Bredasdorp for lunch, before making the final 2.5hr trip back to Cape Town. We had our final meal of the trip on the waterfront – the time had gone so quickly!

THURSDAY 10TH NOVEMBER – *A sunny day in very strong winds, 17C*

The wind had been with us throughout the trip, and it finally picked up pace today ahead of a forecast ten days of strong winds in the cape. It meant that our planned trip on the Table Mountain cableway had to be cancelled as the cable cars were not running. We drove up to the bottom station car park anyway to enjoy the spectacular views down across the city and out to Robben Island, and to look, unsuccessfully, for Ground Woodpecker which had eluded us so far. We then took a drive around via Camps Bay and Hout Bay as we had not yet been along that part of the peninsula – the views were indeed spectacular. With all the luggage in the van and with our proximity to the city, we had to choose carefully where we could go birding. Rondevlei was an excellent choice, as we were able to park inside the reserve compound. This wetland area backs on to the Strandfontein water

treatment plant visited on the first day, and as well as hosting some similar species, has more reed and sedge beds attractive to one or two different birds. This included **Little Bittern**, with a fine male making a nice long flight above the reeds. We also heard Lesser Swamp Warbler, but didn't manage a sighting. **Malachite Kingfisher** was new for the trip, and in amongst throngs of **Yellow-billed Duck**, **Red-billed Teal** and **Cape Shoveler**, we picked out two smart **Southern Pochard** which had eluded us on the first day at Strandfontein. Great Crested and Little Grebes, three lovely **African Darters**, many **Reed Cormorants** and three fantastic **Cape Dwarf Chameleon** rounded off a successful visit, despite the wind absolutely howling and threatening to lift the roof off the well-placed hides!



Cape Dwarf Chameleon and Southern Pochard, 10th November

With about two hours left before we had to head to the airport, we opted for a bit of shelter and an excellent lunch at Kirstenbosch. While dining, **Cape Francolins** were picking around under the table, and an **African Harrier-hawk** circled overhead. Another large raptor drifting over, with orange-washed underparts, turned out to be an immature **Black Sparrowhawk**. An hour birding around the gardens produced some nice birds and few more photo opportunities – **Cape Batis**, **Southern Double-collared** and **Malachite Sunbirds**, **Sweet Waxbill**, **Dusky Flycatcher** and fantastic views of the **African Harrier-hawk** perched in a tree, being the highlights. Even as we left and headed down the entrance road there was time for one final bit of excitement and bail out of the van as a large raptor drifted into view. Its flat winged shape with full rounded tail and protruding head suggested **European Honey Buzzard**, and this identification was confirmed as it circled right overhead and revealed its diagnostic tail barring pattern. The first of the season for Brian of a migrant which had travelled a long, long way! From here it was straight to Cape Town international, and farewell to Brian, after what had been an excellent trip in his good company.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

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. European Storm-Petrel
18. Wilsons Storm-petrel
19. Black-bellied Storm-petrel
20. White Pelican
21. Cape Gannet
22. White-breasted Cormorant
23. Cape Cormorant
24. Bank Cormorant
25. Reed Cormorant
26. Crowned Cormorant
27. African Darter
28. Grey Heron
29. Black-headed Heron
30. Purple Heron
31. Little Egret
32. Cattle Egret
33. Night Heron
34. Little Bittern
35. Sacred Ibis
36. Glossy Ibis
37. Hadedda Ibis
38. African Spoonbill
39. Greater Flamingo
40. Lesser Flamingo
41. White-faced Whistling Duck
42. Egyptian Goose
43. South African Shelduck
44. Yellow-billed Duck
45. African Black Duck
46. Mallard
47. Cape Teal
48. Hottentot Teal
49. Red-billed Teal
50. Cape Shoveler
51. Southern Pochard
52. Spur-winged Goose
53. White-backed Duck
54. Secretary Bird
55. Cape Vulture
56. Yellow-billed Kite
57. Black-shouldered Kite
58. Verraux's [Black] Eagle
59. Booted Eagle

60. African Crowned Eagle
61. African Fish Eagle
62. Steppe Buzzard
63. Jackal Buzzard
64. European Honey Buzzard
65. Black Sparrowhawk
66. Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk
67. African Goshawk
68. Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk
69. African Marsh Harrier
70. Black Harrier
71. African Harrier-Hawk
72. Osprey
73. Peregrine
74. Rock Kestrel
75. Lesser Kestrel
76. Grey-winged Francolin
77. Cape Francolin
78. Red-necked Francolin
79. Common Quail [H]
80. Helmeted Guineafowl
81. Blue Crane
82. African Purple Swamp-Hen
83. Common Moorhen
84. Red-knobbed Coot
85. Denham's Bustard
86. Karoo Korhaan
87. Southern Black Korhaan
88. African Black Oystercatcher
89. Ringed Plover
90. White-fronted Plover
91. Chestnut-banded Plover
92. Kittlitz's Plover
93. Three-banded Plover
94. Grey Plover
95. Crowned Lapwing
96. Blacksmith Plover
97. Ruddy Turnstone
98. Common Sandpiper
99. Wood Sandpiper
100. Marsh Sandpiper
101. Common Greenshank
102. Curlew Sandpiper
103. Little Stint
104. Sanderling
105. Ruff
106. African Snipe
107. Bar-tailed Godwit
108. Whimbrel
109. Pied Avocet
110. Black-winged Stilt
111. Water Thick-knee
112. Spotted Thick-knee
113. Subantarctic Skua
114. Sabine's Gull
115. Kelp/Cape Gull
116. Hartlaub's Gull
117. Grey-headed Gull
118. Caspian Tern
119. Swift Tern
120. Sandwich Tern

121. Common Tern
122. Little Tern
123. Whiskered Tern
124. Speckled Pigeon
125. African Olive Pigeon
126. Red-eyed Dove
127. Cape Turtle Dove
128. Laughing Dove
129. Namaqua Dove
130. Tambourine Dove
131. Rock Dove
132. Red-chested Cuckoo [H]
133. Klaas's Cuckoo
134. Diderick Cuckoo
135. Spotted Eagle Owl
136. African Black Swift
137. White-rumped Swift
138. Little Swift
139. Alpine Swift
140. Speckled Mousebird
141. White-backed Mousebird
142. Red-faced Mousebird
143. Pied Kingfisher
144. Giant Kingfisher [H]
145. Brown-hooded Kingfisher
146. Malachite Kingfisher
147. European Bee-eater
148. African Hoopoe
149. Lesser Honeyguide
150. Olive Woodpecker
151. Cardinal Woodpecker
152. Cape Clapper Lark
153. Cape Long-billed Lark
154. Agulhas Long-billed Lark
155. Karoo Lark
156. Spike-heeled Lark
157. Red-capped Lark
158. Large-billed Lark
159. Grey-backed Sparrowlark
160. Barn Swallow
161. White-throated Swallow
162. Pearl-breasted Swallow
163. Greater-striped Swallow
164. Rock Martin
165. Brown-throated Martin
166. Banded Martin
167. Black Saw-wing
168. Fork-tailed Drongo
169. Cape Crow
170. Pied Crow
171. House Crow
172. White-necked Raven
173. Southern Grey Tit
174. Cape Penduline tit
175. Cape Bulbul
176. Sombre Greenbul
177. Olive Thrush
178. Cape Rock Thrush
179. Mountain Wheatear
180. Capped Wheatear
181. Familiar Chat

182. Tractrac Chat
183. Sickie-winged Chat
184. Karoo Chat
185. Anteating Chat
186. African Stonechat
187. Cape Robin-chat
188. Karoo Scrub Robin
189. Cape Rockjumper
190. Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler
191. Layard's Tit-babbler
192. Lesser Swamp Warbler [H]
193. Little Rush Warbler [H]
194. African Reed Warbler
195. Knysna Warbler [H]
196. Victorin's Warbler [H]
197. Bar-throated Apalis
198. Long-billed Crombec
199. Cape Grassbird
200. Cloud Cisticola
201. Levaiant's Cisticola
202. Grey-backed Cisticola
203. Neddicky
204. Karoo Prinia
205. Namaqua Warbler
206. Rufous-eared Warbler
207. African Dusky Flycatcher
208. Fiscal Flycatcher
209. Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher
210. African Paradise Flycatcher
211. Cape Batis
212. Pirit Batis
213. Fairy Flycatcher
214. Cape Wagtail
215. African Pipit
216. Cape Longclaw
217. Common Fiscal
218. Southern Bou Bou
219. Bokmakierie
220. Olive Bush-shrike
221. Common Starling
222. Pied Starling
223. Red-winged Starling
224. Wattled Starling
225. Cape Sugarbird
226. Malachite Sunbird
227. Orange-breasted Sunbird
228. Southern Double-collared Sunbird
229. Greater Double-collared Sunbird
230. Amethyst Sunbird
231. Cape White-eye
232. House Sparrow
233. Grey-headed Sparrow
234. Cape Sparrow
235. Cape Weaver
236. Southern Masked Weaver
237. Southern Red Bishop
238. Yellow Bishop
239. Common Waxbill
240. Sweet Waxbill
241. Pin-tailed Whydah
242. Cape Canary

- 243. Forest Canary
- 244. Cape Siskin
- 245. Black-headed Canary
- 246. Streaky-headed Seed-eater
- 247. Brimstone Canary
- 248. Yellow Canary
- 249. White-throated Canary
- 250. Protea Seed-eater
- 251. Cape Bunting

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