

# PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

## SOUTH AFRICA

16 November – 8 December 2007

### TOUR REPORT

**LEADERS:** CHRIS DOUGHTY and PETER LAWSON

Our tour to South Africa was an outstanding success; we recorded a staggering 421 species of birds, which included most of the hoped for southern African endemics and regional specialities. As with everything in life; it is quality, not quantity, that counts, and we certainly enjoyed many quality birds, which included Little Bittern, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Little Sparrowhawk, Forest Buzzard, Lesser Kestrel, Common Quail, Black-rumped Buttonquail, Karoo Korhaan, Senegal Lapwing, Collared Pratincole, Cape Parrot, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Desert Cisticola, Red-headed Weaver and Red-headed Quelea, to name but a few. We also saw an impressive 41 species of mammals and enjoyed the best roads, restaurants and accommodation in Africa; all set against some of the most stunning scenery in the world.

The tour began in Johannesburg, where we enjoyed a delightful breakfast at our hotel. Following breakfast, we loaded up our small trailer with our bags and while doing so, we saw our first birds of the tour, which included Cape Turtledove, Laughing Dove, the very smart Grey Go-away Bird, Speckled Mousebird, Dark-capped Bulbul, Barn and White-throated Swallows, Karoo Thrush, Cape Robin-Chat, Cape Wagtail, Common Myna, Red-winged Starling, Cape White-eye and House, Cape and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows. Most of the day was taken up by the long drive to Dullstroom, in the highveld, to the northeast of Johannesburg. The long drive was punctuated by frequent roadside birding stops, where we saw a large and varied selection of birds. By far the longest and most productive birding stops were at three fairly large lakes, all situated on the outskirts of Johannesburg. With great excitement, we began observing a host of wetland birds, which included Great Crested and Little Grebes, White-breasted and Reed Cormorants, Grey, Black-headed and Purple Herons, Little and Cattle Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Sacred, Glossy and Hadada Ibis, African Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, White-faced Whistling-Duck, a few very uncommon Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, White-backed and Yellow-billed Ducks, Egyptian and Spur-winged Geese, Cape Teal, a small group of uncommon Hottentot Teal, Cape Shoveler, Southern Pochard, Black-shouldered Kite, Booted Eagle, Eurasian and Jackal Buzzards, Helmeted Guineafowl, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, Three-banded Plover, Crowned and Blacksmith Lapwings, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ruff, Black-winged Stilt, Spotted Thick-knee and our only sightings of Grey-headed Gull. Other species included Whiskered Tern, Feral and Speckled Pigeons, White-rumped and Little Swifts, Greater Striped Swallow, South African Cliff-Swallow, Rock and Banded Martins, Pied Crow, Olive Thrush, Mountain Wheatear, Ant-eating Chat, African Stonechat, African Reed-Warbler, Levillant's Cisticola, our only Black-chested Prinia of the tour, African Pipit, Cape Longclaw,

Common Fiscal, Pied Starling, Cape and Southern Masked Weavers, Red-billed Quelea, Southern Red and Yellow-crowned Bishops, Fan-tailed, White-winged and Long-tailed Widowbirds, Orange-breasted Waxbill, Pin-tailed Whydah and Cape Canary.

A roadside stop near to the town of Belfast, produced the uncommon Maccoa Duck and good views of Black-throated Canary. Just outside Dullstroom, we saw a few Mallards, which unfortunately have been introduced here by a local lodge owner. In the town itself we added African Olive Pigeon and Red-eyed Dove, to a very good first days list. Mammals for the day included Blesbok, Eland, Slender Mongoose, Common Reedbuck, Springbok and Burchell's Zebra.

We then spent a very productive day birding along the dirt roads above Dullstroom, on the highveld. As usual, the mornings birding was by far the better, that is, once the mist had lifted, enabling us to see more than just a few meters ahead of us. As the morning sun burnt off the early morning mist, one of the first birds to come into view was a solitary Red-winged Francolin, which, fortunately for us, stood stationary for a little while, allowing us the opportunity to study this uncommon species of francolin. Several Drakensberg Prinias perched on the barbed wire fence and small numbers of Red-collared Widowbirds flew above the grassland. Peter then heard an Eastern Long-billed Lark calling, and after a great deal of searching, we were able to enjoy good looks at this localised species. While searching for the lark we also saw Long-billed Pipit, Yellow Bishop, Malachite Sunbird and African Wattled Lapwing. A walk around some rocky outcrops produced a splendid male Buff-streaked Chat and best of all, super scope views of a pair of uncommon Sentinel Rock-Thrushes. In a nearby small area of wetland, a pair of African Snipe was displaying and we could clearly hear their tail feathers winnowing, as they flew by, at close quarters. We then enjoyed good close looks at a pair of Denham's Bustards, a small flock of African Black Swifts and a singing Wailing Cisticola. Heading back to Dullstroom for lunch, we enjoyed great close looks at several Cape Vultures, in flight. An attractive Rock Kestrel put in an appearance, along with a pair of Yellow-fronted Canaries, a few Streaky-headed Seed-Eaters and a small flock of Common Waxbills. We also added two new species of mammals, which we saw very well, they were Oribi and Grey Rhebok, two small species of antelope.

As we were assembling for the afternoon drive, small numbers of Alpine Swifts were flying overhead. On the drive, there was a brief sighting of an adult male Pallid Harrier, which unfortunately, disappeared behind a hillside. Shortly afterwards we did much better with a Dark-capped Yellow-Warbler, which showed very well, as did a few Village Weavers. Small numbers of European Bee-eaters perched conspicuously on overhead power lines and we enjoyed good close looks at a Gurney's Sugarbird, which perched prominently on the top of a flowering shrub. A walk through short grassland produced both Zitting and Wing-snapping Cisticolas, followed by our first sighting of a pair of Cape Crows. We also enjoyed our first sighting of a somewhat distant Suricate. Returning to Dullstroom, we did a little birding around town which produced great looks at a splendid Crested Barbet.

The following day we set off early for Mount Sheba Nature Reserve, where we would have breakfast. During the drive there we observed a Black-chested Snake-Eagle in flight and a perched Long-crested Eagle. Following breakfast, African Firefinch and both Blue and Sweet Waxbills were observed feeding on the lawn and Chris was lucky enough to see a Variable Indigobird fly past him, just a few meters away. We then walked through dense rainforest searching for anything that moved. Fortunately, some things did move; a diminutive Kurrichane Buttonquail took off rapidly from the side of the track, at least two pairs of Narina Trogons allowed good looks, as did a foraging pair of Olive Woodpeckers. High overhead several Yellow-streaked Greenbuls were searching for food and a pair of Southern Double-collared Sunbirds gleaned nectar from a flowering shrub. The sweet song of the splendid Chorister Robin-Chat alerted us to its presence and after a little searching we all enjoyed great looks at this very attractive species. Other birds of interest included a few Yellow-throated Woodland-Warblers and a pair of Cape Batis. We then headed north towards the world famous Kruger National Park. On the way we stopped near the J.G. Strijdom Tunnel, part of the very impressive Blyde River Canyon, where the only pair of Taita Falcons is known to nest in the whole of South Africa. We enjoyed our time here, watching a pair of these diminutive falcons, which had two young birds in the nest. Although small, they are a very aggressive falcon and we enjoyed watching them flying along the vertical cliff face, where they were nesting. While watching the falcons, we also enjoyed our first sighting of Yellow-billed Kite.

We enjoyed a splendid lunch at Hoedspruit. Before and after lunch we did some birding in the grounds of the lunch stop and enjoyed a good variety of new birds, which included Wahlberg's Eagle, Diderick Cuckoo, Red-faced Mousebird, White-browed Scrub-Robin, Spotted Flycatcher, African Paradise Flycatcher, White-bellied Sunbird and Golden-breasted Bunting. We made a short detour to Lydenberg, in order to find White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, which duly obliged, as did Lanner Falcon, African Palm Swift and a large feeding flock of Thick-billed Weavers.

We then entered the world famous Kruger National Park, through the Orpen Gate and headed for Satara Lodge, for a two nights stay. Kruger is one of Africa's oldest and largest national parks. It was established in 1898, to protect the wildlife of the lowveld and is home to an incredible diversity of both animal and birdlife. An afternoon drive in the park yielded a great many new birds, which included Hamerkop, Marabou Stork, great views of a perched and very impressive Martial Eagle, African harrier-Hawk, Crested and Natal Francolins, Swainson's Spurfowl, a delightful Red-crested Korhaan, the very uncommon Senegal Lapwing, Water Thick-knee, super close looks at a couple of pairs of Double-banded Sandgrouse, Emerald-Spotted Wood-Dove, Lilac-breasted and Purple Rollers, Southern Red-billed and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, lots of Sabota Larks, Fork-tailed Drongo, Arrow-marked Babbler, Long-billed Crombec, the localised Marico Flycatcher, Chinspot Batis, stunning Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, both winter visitors from Russia and a resident species of shrike, the very large and impressive Magpie Shrike. Other new birds included very attractive Violet-backed Starlings, Burchell's and Cape Glossy Starlings and Red-billed Oxpecker. We also enjoyed a good selection of mammals, which included Chacma Baboon, Giraffe, Hippopotamus, Impala, Blue Wildebeest, Greater Kudu, Vervet Monkey, Smith's Bush-Squirrel and Warthog.

We spent the next day driving around the many roads that dissect the park. Once again we saw a huge number of new birds; which included Goliath Heron, Saddle-billed Stork, White-backed Vulture, Tawny Eagle, Brown Snake-Eagle, Bateleur, Black-bellied Bustard, Temminck's Courser, Brown-headed Parrot, Great Spotted Cuckoo, African Scops-Owl, at its daytime roost, Desert Cisticola and Green-winged Pytilia. Other, more common birds, that were new for the trip list today, included Black Crake, African Jacana, African Mourning and Namaqua Doves, Burchell's Coucal, Pied, Woodland and Brown-hooded Kingfishers, Little Bee-eater, the gorgeous African Hoopoe, Green Woodhoopoe, African Grey Hornbill, Black-collared Barbet, Cardinal Woodpecker, Rufous-naped Lark, Wire-tailed, Red-breasted and Mosque Swallows, Rattling Cisticola, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Black-crowned Tchagra, Grey-headed Bush-Shrike, Wattled and Greater Blue-eared Starlings, Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver, Lesser Masked Weaver and Red-billed Firefinch. We also saw some new mammals today, which included African Buffalo, African Savanna Elephant, Scrub Hare, Steenbok, Common Waterbuck and best of all a large pride of Lions. As we watched the pride of Lions, there numbers gradually grew and grew. A few lionesses were lying in the shade and more and more females came out of the bush and joined them, greeting all in turn as they did so. In the end we saw up to 14 lionesses and one, very lucky, young male!

Today we tried something a little different, which actually worked out very well. We started the day off with a pre-breakfast walk in the grounds of our lodge, which proved very rewarding. We enjoyed super close looks at the seldom seen Little Sparrowhawk, which was eating prey in a nearby tree. Unusually large numbers of Klaas's Cuckoos were also observed, as was the uncommon Lesser Honeyguide, together with equally good looks at two uncommon species of woodpeckers, Bennett's and Golden-tailed. Other birds of note included Black-headed Oriole, Southern Black Tit, Kurrichane and Groundscraper Thrushes, Black-backed Puffback, Brubru and Marico Sunbird. Following breakfast we enjoyed a morning game drive; new birds for the tour included unusually obliging Levillant's and Jacobin Cuckoos, Lesser Striped Swallow, Brown-throated Martin, Burnt-necked Eromomela, Red-faced Cisticola, Southern Black Flycatcher, Spectacled Weaver and Jameson's Firefinch. During the drive we also saw our first Bushbuck of the tour.

Following lunch, we went for a second drive, this time we concentrated on checking out a number of waterholes, which also proved very rewarding, producing new birds such as Squacco Heron, Woolly-necked Stork, Red-billed Teal, Comb Duck, the stately Secretary-bird, African Fish-Eagle, Kittlitz's Plover, Common and Marsh Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, super looks at a few Collared Pratincoles, which are very uncommon winter visitor to this part of Africa, Giant Kingfisher, Little Rush and Willow Warblers and African Pied Wagtail. We spent the night at Skukuza Lodge, in the southern part of Kruger National Park.

Following our success of yesterday, we once again decided on an early morning walk in the grounds of Skukuza Lodge. This was a very pleasant and fruitful walk; new birds for the trip observed during the walk included Great Egret, Striated Heron, African Green-Pigeon, Purple-crested Turaco, Terrestrial Brownbul, Sombre Greenbul, White-browed

Robin-Chat, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Collared Sunbird and Bronze and Red-backed Mannikins. This was indeed a very productive walk; we also added two species of mammals during the walk, a large group of roosting Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bats and a mischievous group of Banded Mongooses, who had been raiding the rubbish bins. Following breakfast, we made our way out of the park, while also making a determined effort to find the very attractive White-crowned Lapwing, which is at the extreme southern edge of its range here. We searched along the edge of the Sabie River, which runs through the park in this area. After a great deal of searching, we managed to find a couple of birds, which we saw very well. We also saw a small flock of attractive White-fronted Bee-eaters and in riverine woodland we enjoyed watching a pair of Black Cuckoo-shrikes. Just prior to leaving the park, we came across four Sable, one of the most attractive and uncommon species of antelope, in Africa.

We then drove to Nelspruit and during the afternoon we went for a walk in the botanical gardens. We enjoyed super looks at a pair of uncommon African Black Ducks, perched on a rock in the middle of the river, before they flew right past us. We also found an obliging Ashy Flycatcher and saw three Tambourine Doves, but unfortunately, all three sightings, were only quick flight views.

The following morning we were up early and headed for Kaapschehoop, in the Misty Mountains; were our main target bird was to be the endangered Blue Swallow. It was very cold and not surprisingly, a little misty, as we picked up our local guide and set out for a walk across the moorland. As we walked along a Forest Buzzard, a very uncommon and localised species of raptor flew past us and we watched it in flight for sometime. Shortly afterwards, we enjoyed great flight views of a close pair of Blue Swallows and another member of the swallow family, the Black Sawing. Other birds of note in this area, were Bush Blackcap, Cape Rock-Thrush and Amethyst Sunbird. Back at Kaapschehoop, we watched a nesting pair of Red-throated Wrynecks. We also added two species of mammals this morning; Wild Horse and a superb Serval, a small species of cat.

We then paid a visit to a forestry plantation, not far from Nelspruit; our main target bird here was a nesting pair of African Crowned Eagles. While searching for the nest we enjoyed good looks at a few African Dusky Flycatchers and a superb African Pygmy Kingfisher. Shortly afterwards, we spotted an African Crowned Eagle, flying along a rocky escarpment, before landing in a large tree on the escarpment. A little later we tracked down the nest itself, where an adult was present. To add icing to the cake, Peter taped in a Red-chested Cuckoo, which had been calling incessantly from deep in cover.

In the afternoon, as huge storm clouds were gathering overhead we paid a visit to the Nelspruit Nature Reserve and managed to find four new species of birds for our ever growing list. The first new bird was a delightful little Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, followed closely by a superb Red-headed Weaver, in full breeding plumage. We then found a few nesting Golden Weavers and last, but not least, a pair of Bar-throated Apalis. As the sky around us was blackened by storm clouds, we made a quick dash for our bus

and just made it in time before the heavens opened. A huge thunderstorm followed, with torrential rain, very loud thunder and numerous lightening strikes. As we were stationary at a set of traffic lights, a bolt of lightening struck the signal box, just to our right and all the traffic lights started to flash amber. Back at our guest house, we were glad to be indoors as the storm gradually worsened. Then the power went out and we enjoyed a delightful, candle lit dinner.

Most of the following day was taken up by the drive to Wakkerstroom situated on the high windswept plains in the far south of the Transvaal. During the drive we added Yellow-billed Egret at a small wetland and a solitary Southern Bald Ibis, along the roadside. In the afternoon we went birding in the montane grasslands that surround Wakkerstroom; where we found a family party of Ground Woodpeckers, several Red-capped Larks, a small group of Cape Buntings, but unfortunately, no Yellow-breasted Pipit, the main bird we were looking for. We also enjoyed our first look at Yellow Mongoose. In the late afternoon we did some birding at Wakkerstroom Wetland Reserve, where birds of note included African Marsh-Harrier, African Purple Swamphen and Sedge and Lesser Swamp Warblers and best of all good scope views of stunning Grey-crowned Cranes.

An early morning start found us once again at the Wakkerstroom Wetland Reserve; where we were extremely fortunate to find a male Little Bittern, perched in the top of the reeds, for all to see. It was a migrant bird from the northern Palearctic, which is a very uncommon and seldom seen bird, in this part of Africa. The rest of the day was spent birding around gravel roads and marching through native grasslands in our continued search for the very rare and illusive Yellow-breasted Pipit. We saw some very uncommon species today, the much sought after Blue Korhaan, the endangered Rudd's Lark and at last, superb looks at the Yellow-breasted Pipit. There was also a supporting cast of new birds which included White and Black Storks, Common Quail, Blue Crane,



Photo by Dorothy

Spike-heeled Lark, Pale-crowned Cisticola, Common Starling and African Quailfinch.

The following day, was very much a travel day, as we drove from Wakkerstroom to Sani Pass, in the Drakensberg Mountains, the southernmost extension of the Great Rift Valley. Before setting off on the long drive, we had a quick look at the Wakkerstroom Wetland

Reserve, where we observed an African Darter, which proved to be the only new species of bird for the day. During the drive we also enjoyed our first looks at a family party of Cape Rock Hyrax.

Following breakfast at the Sani Pass Hotel, we boarded our 4 wheel drive vehicles and headed up into the clouds, to the independent African kingdom of Lesotho, with two local birding guides. A few stops en route to the border crossing proved very rewarding, with good looks at the very dapper Bokmakierie, a singing Cape Grassbird, the very uncommon Brown-backed Honeybird and great spotting by Dorothy enabled the group to enjoy magical scope views of a perched Verreaux's Eagle. On crossing the border into Lesotho, we could barely see through the cloud but as we headed further into the kingdom the weather improved, along with the visibility and we were soon enjoying great looks at specialities such as Horus Swift, Large-billed Lark, the very attractive White-necked Raven, Grey Tit and Sickle-winged Chat. A quick stop at the 'highest pub in Africa' produced good looks at the extremely localised Drakensberg Siskin. As we drove deeper into the kingdom, we were soon enjoying brilliant looks at the delightful Drakensberg Rock-jumper. We continued through to our furthest point, where we enjoyed a very fine picnic lunch and an impromptu dance performance by three local shepherd boys and we had to restrain Doris from joining in.



Photo by Ruth

During lunch we added Layard's Tit-Babbler, Fairy Flycatcher the very uncommon Mountain Pipit and the splendid Yellow Canary. New mammals today included a Common Duiker and a few very wet and bedraggled Sloggett's Rats. I was very saddened recently, as I am sure you will be, to learn that Robin Guy one of our local guides at Sani Pass was in Johannesburg visiting family over Christmas and New Year and he was shot and killed in an attempted robbery at his son's home.



Photo by Ruth

A pre-breakfast walk in the grounds of our hotel at Sani Pass produced only one new bird for the tour, the delightful Greater Double-collared Sunbird. The rest of the morning was taken up with the drive to Creighton, in Kwazulu-Natal Province, where we would spend the night. It was this area; where the Boers, British and Zulus clashed in bloody conflict and in doing so, shaped the future of South Africa. Birding in the grounds of our guesthouse produced a family party of Southern Boubous and a very obliging Four-striped Grass Mouse. Following lunch we were taken out by our local birding guide Malcolm, who we quickly nicknamed Sergeant Malcolm, as he barked out orders to us as he marched us up and down empty paddocks in search of the illusive Black-rumped Buttonquail. Unfortunately, we failed to find any but we did enjoy good looks at a Croaking Cisticola. Later in the day, while birding in nearby farmland Sergeant Malcolm produced a small flock of very uncommon Red-headed Quelia's, much to everyone's delight. A second try for the Black-rumped Buttonquail turned up trumps; as they exploded at our feet, giving pretty good looks, which rounded the day off perfectly.

In the early morning we drove out to Xumeni Forest, where we enjoyed super looks at the endangered and seldom seen Cape Parrot, both perched and in flight. Other new birds seen in this area included a wintering European Honey-Buzzard, Knysna Tauraco the highly localised Orange Ground-Thrush, glimpsed the very difficult to see Barratt's Warbler and enjoyed very good looks at both Forest and Brimstone Canaries. We then drove to Durban airport, where we flew to Cape Town. On the drive from Cape Town airport to our very comfortable guesthouse, we added Cape and Harlaub's Gulls and the introduced House Crow.

We spent the next day and a half birding in and around the beautiful city of Cape Town and its world famous landmark, Table Mountain. The mountain is three kilometres wide, 1,086 metres high and 600 million years old. When the Cape Doctor blows, in the summer months; this sandstone edifice is covered with a thick blanket of white cloud, known locally, as the table cloth. Our first port of call today was Boulders Beach, nestled in a sheltered cove between Simon's Town and Cape Point. It has become world famous for its thriving colony of approximately 3,000 African Penguins; which began from just two breeding pairs, in 1982. Here we were able to get up close and personal with dozens

of African Penguins, plus neighbors such as Cape Gannet, Cape and Bank Cormorants, African Black Oystercatcher, Swift Tern, wintering Sandwich and Common Terns, Cape Bulbul and Karoo Prinia. We also enjoyed good looks at the Afro Australian Fur Seal. From here, we visited nearby Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve; situated at the meeting point of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Here we found stately Common Ostriches, a wintering flock of Common Swifts, a confiding Familiar Chat, the highly localised Cape Sugarbird and the stunning Orange-breasted Sunbird, as well as an offshore Parasitic Jaeger. Next we drove to a sheltered beach at Kommetjie, where we added Crowned Cormorant, White-fronted Plover and a few wintering Whimbrels. Following lunch at a pub that served typical British food, we visited Heron Park Sewage Works, where we saw our first South African Shelducks for the tour. On to Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens which is nestled on the eastern slope of Table Mountain. Here we enjoyed a relaxed walk in the sunshine and added Cape Francolin and a pair of Spotted Eagle-Owls, with a full grown young bird. We then tried for the very skulking Knysna Warbler and although we had it calling just a few metres away from us, not one of us managed to even glimpse the bird.

Today we did some pre breakfast birding at nearby Black Mountain, where we were hoping to find the highly localised Cape Siskin. Without too much trouble we managed to find a small flock, which showed particularly well. Here we also added Neddicky, a species of cisticola. Following a very enjoyable breakfast we made a visit to Strandfontein Sewage Works, where we enjoyed good looks at Black-necked Grebe, Great White Pelican, Pied Avocet and a wintering Grey Plover. We also had a good close look at a solitary Small Grey Mongoose. Our next birding stop was at Rooiels, in False Bay, where our main target bird was the beautiful Cape Rockjumper. Despite strong winds, there were one or two sheltered areas and in one of these we found a very obliging pair of Cape Rockjumpers, who performed well for us. Heading eastward we stopped in at Betty's Bay, where we had lunch. While enjoying lunch, most of the group managed to observe a perched African Goshawk, which made a brief appearance. On our drive to Swellendam, where we would spend the next two nights, we had a few good looks at another new bird, the attractive Capped Wheatear.

Today we decided we would spend the morning birding in the De Hoop Nature Reserve. In order to get there, we had to drive across part of the Agulhas Plain, which is home to two highly localised and endemic species of lark. On reaching the plain, we checked every single lark that we could find; and in no time at all, we were enjoying good looks at both Agulhas Clapper Lark and Agulhas Long-billed Lark. This area also held other new birds for us and we saw a small flock of wintering Lesser Kestrels, a splendid Grey-winged Francolin and best of all, a pair of Karoo Korhans. The male was busy performing a spectacular courtship display for the benefit of the female. True to form; the female was playing hard to get and did not take one scrap of notice. No surprises there then! Other new birds included Karoo Scrub-Robin and both Cloud and Grey-backed Cisticolas. Not far from the nature reserve there was a large river, which we had to cross by a small ferry boat, in order to get to the reserve. Unfortunately, on reaching the ferry, we found that it was in a state of disrepair and was no longer in good working order! We would now have to undertake a long, circuitous drive to reach the reserve. So

we decided to eat our packed breakfast by the riverside; and as we were doing so we added two more new species of birds, to our ever growing list. While eating our sandwiches, we watched a family party of Acacia Pied Barbets and a couple of Pearl-breasted Swallows.

De Hoop Nature Reserve was well worth the effort we had made to reach it. New birds here included Caspian Tern, Fiscal Flycatcher and the much prized and very stunning Black Harrier. While having lunch, we also found the extremely localised and uncommon Knysna Woodpecker, which showed very well. In the late afternoon we had a quick look at Bontebok National Park. New mammals for the day included Bontebok, Red Hartebeest, Black Wildebeest and Cape Mountain Zebra.

The following morning, in driving rain, we had an early start, as we headed for Grootvadersbosh Nature Reserve, a small patch of coastal highland rainforest. As we birded the rainforest, the showers came and went and we were pleased to have a good look at the Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher. Then Peter heard the call of the dreaded Knysna Warbler, so we decided we would have a game of hide and seek with it, hoping that it would be kinder to us than the last one we had tried for! Our hearts sank, when we realized it was across the other side of a ravine, singing its heart out. Undaunted, Peter decided to play some tape at it. To our astonishment, the bird flew across the ravine and continued to sing just a few metres away from us. Even more astonishing, from one particular angle, we could see the whole bird and we very much enjoyed watching this, usually most skulking of birds.

We then drove to the small town of Robertson, where we enjoyed a particularly good lunch. Continuing northwards, our vehicle came to a screeching halt and we enjoyed good scope views of a very grand Pale Chanting Goshawk. At Worcester, we went birding in the Karoo Botanical Gardens and were rewarded with good looks at a few new birds which included White-backed Mousebird, Greater Honeyguide, Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler and White-throated Canary. We then drove to Ceres where we were to spend the night. Following a brief siesta, we drove to nearby Gydo Pass, to search for the little-known Protea Seedeater. We checked and double checked every seedeater, canary, finch and waxbill that we stumbled across, but to no avail. Chris then noticed that a good number of birds were flying to a nearby hillside. Careful examination of the site revealed a small trickle of a stream, complete with a tiny waterhole. This is what the birds were attracted to. We enjoyed watching a number of species of birds coming down to drink; when suddenly Peter shouted, "There it is." An adult Protea Seedeater slowly made its way through the undergrowth and we were able to watch this very rare bird drinking, just a few metres in front of us.

Leaving Ceres behind, we continued north into the heart of the great Tanqua Karoo. At first we drove through, citrus groves, wheat fields and roadside dams; it was in stark contrast to the endless, barren, stony plains of the Tanqua Karoo, which reminded us very much of the deserts of inland Australia.



Photo by Ruth

However, the birds were very different; at our first birding stop we found Pirit Batis, Black-headed Canary and Lark-like Bunting. Driving deeper into the desert, we decided to search an area of tall scrub, which looked ideal for the Karoo Eremomela, one of the most sought after, of the Karoo specialities. Within no time at all we were watching a small party of these energetic birds moving through the scrub, they were accompanied by Cape Penduline Tits and a pair of Rufous-eared Warblers. As we drove along we stopped to look at Ludwig's Bustard, Namaqua Sandgrouse, a huge flock of Grey-backed Sparrowlarks and both Tractrac and Karoo Chats. As well as a very cute Brandt's Whistling Rat, which sat at the entrance to its burrow.

The following day, we spent the whole day birding in the Tanqua Karoo, in the arid plains of South Africa's heartland, surrounded by endless expanses of desert. Our first new bird of the day was a splendid Kori Bustard, which walked sedately across the sparsely vegetated landscape. Suddenly, we came across a small patch of surface water, this was a great surprise, there must have been some very localised rainfall and it was possibly the only water for many kilometres. There was a steady stream of larks and pipits coming in to drink and bathe. Then we hit the jackpot, a large flock of uncommon and very nomadic Black-eared Sparrowlarks seemed delighted to find the water and we watched them for quite some time.

Much of our time was spent birding close to the small town of Brandvlei, where diligent searching produced Karoo Long-billed Lark, Chat Flycatcher and the surprise find of a Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, which was a good 500 kilometres south of its normal range! A quick stop at the patch of surface water, on the way back to Calvinia, paid dividends, with splendid looks at the very uncommon Stark's Lark.

Leaving the Karoo behind us, we headed south for Lambert's Bay. On our way to the coast we stopped to admire one or two Greater Kestrels. At Lambert's Bay we headed straight for Bird Island; it was a spectacular site, with thousands of Cape Gannets wheeling around and squabbling right in front of us. It was a seething mass of gannets, cormorants, gulls and terns. Careful examination of the flocks revealed one or two wintering Common Ringed Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones. A nearby saltpan produced

the last two new birds for the trip; we saw small numbers of the extremely localised Chestnut-banded Plover and a solitary, wintering Curlew Sandpiper. We then drove to Cape Town where the tour ended.

At the conclusion of the tour, we went our separate ways, we had traveled many kilometres together, got to know each other really well, had seen many terrific birds, Peter had done a wonderful job for us and we shall all have fond memories of our time together in South Africa.



Photo by Ruth

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

### STRUTHIONIDAE

**Common Ostrich** *Struthio camelus* We observed small numbers of wild birds in the Cape of Good Hope and De Hoop Nature Reserves.

### SPHENISCIDAE

**African Penguin** *Spheniscus demersus* We very much enjoyed our visit to a colony of these birds at Boulders Beach, at Cape Town. This bird is listed as Vulnerable in `Threatened Birds of the World. The world population is estimated at 180,000 individuals and is decreasing. It breeds on 24 islands and three mainland sites. Population declines are largely attributed to food shortages, resulting from large catches of fish by commercial fisherman and environmental fluctuations. Human disturbance and egg-collecting appear to have been additional factors. Mortality from oil spills is serious and may increase if proposed development of harbours close to colonies proceeds.

### PODICIPEDIDAE

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Small numbers present in most wetland areas.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* Small numbers of this species were observed in a few wetland areas.

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis* Good numbers present at the Strandfontein Sewage Works at Cape Town, with smaller numbers present at a large lake, a little to the south of Lambert's Bay.

### PELECANIDAE

**Great White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* Super looks of this species were obtained at Strandfontein Sewage Works, in Cape Town.

### SULIDAE

**Cape Gannet** *Morus capensis* First observed flying inshore at Boulders Beach, in Cape Town; followed by thousands at the very impressive colony at Lambert's Bay; amazingly, this colony had been deserted throughout 2005 due to rogue Afro Australian Fur Seals preying on the colony! Listed as Vulnerable in `Threatened Birds of the World; the world population is estimated to be approximately 346,000 individuals and decreasing. Food shortage, following the collapse of the Namibian sardine fishery has been the main cause of the decline. Oil spills are also a serious threat, 5,000 birds were oiled during an incident in 1993 and seal predation is also a threat.

### PHALACROCORACIDAE

**White-breasted Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax lucidus* A common bird in all wetland habitats.

**Cape Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax capensis* A common resident of coastal waters, throughout the whole of South Africa.

**Bank Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax neglectus* A couple on the rocks at Kommetjie Point, at Cape Town, where the only ones seen. This bird is listed as Endangered in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. The world population is estimated at around 7,400 individuals and decreasing. They breed at 45 locations in Namibia and South Africa, in recent years seven of these breeding colonies in South Africa, have been deserted. In the past 30 years the population has declined by 50%; the main reasons for this are the collapse of the Namibian sardine fishery and the spectacular recovery of the Afro Australian Fur Seal, which competes with this species for nesting grounds and food. There is simply not enough food to go around.

**Reed Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax africanus* This freshwater inhabiting species proved to be fairly common in most wetland habitats.

**Crowned Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax coronatus* Seen well at Kommetjie Point, at Cape Town and again at Lambert's Bay.

#### ANHINGIDAE

**African Darter** *Anhinga rufa* Small numbers present in a number of wetland areas.

#### ARDEIDAE

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* Commonly observed in all wetland habitats.

**Black-headed Heron** *Ardea melanocephala* Widespread in small numbers, more often seen in dry habitats, than other species of heron.

**Goliath Heron** *Ardea goliath* We enjoyed very close looks at a single individual of this uncommon species, at a small waterhole in Kruger National Park.

**Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* Only seen on two occasions; the first sighting of a solitary bird, was literally at our first birding stop, at a small wetland just outside Johannesburg and the second sighting was also of a single bird, this time at the Wakkerstroom Wetland Reserve.

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba* Small numbers observed in Kruger National Park and in wetlands at Creighton.

**Yellow-billed Egret** *Egretta intermedia* Odd individuals, scattered throughout the tour.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* Small numbers seen in a variety of wetland habitats.

**Squacco Heron** *Ardeola ralloides* In South Africa this species only occurs in the northeast. Denis pointed one out, at a waterhole in Kruger National Park.

**Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* We saw this species frequently and often in large numbers.

**Striated Heron** *Butorides striatus* One bird observed along the edge of the Sabie River, in Kruger National Park.

**Black-crowned Night-Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax* A few scattered sightings, throughout the tour.

**Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus* Super looks at this attractive and uncommon bird, perched in the top of a reedbed in the Wakkerstroom Wetland Reserve. This bird was of the race *minutus*, which is a migrant to South Africa from eastern Europe and western Asia.

#### SCOPIDAE

**Hamerkop** *Scopus umbretta* Small numbers present throughout the tour.

## CICONIIDAE

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* An uncommon bird in South Africa, we observed one in a roadside field, close to Wakkerstroom.

**Woolly-necked Stork** *Ciconia episcopus* One individual seen well, at a waterhole in Kruger National Park.

**White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia* Migrant White Storks, from the northern Palearctic, had just arrived on their wintering grounds in South Africa, upon our arrival. We enjoyed several good sightings.

**Saddle-billed Stork** *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* A couple of birds were observed very well in Kruger National Park.

**Marabou Stork** *Leptoptilos crumeniferus* We enjoyed several good sightings in Kruger National Park.

## THRESKIORNITHIDAE

**Sacred Ibis** *Threskiornis aethiopicus* A common bird of wetlands throughout South Africa.

**Bald Ibis** *Geronticus calvus* A few good close sightings throughout the tour; listed as Vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World', the total population is estimated to be 4,000 individuals and decreasing, mainly due to habitat loss.

**Hadada Ibis** *Bostrychia hagedash* One of the characteristic sounds of Africa, and seen and heard pretty well everywhere.

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Small numbers present throughout the tour.

**African Spoonbill** *Platalea alba* Several good looks in wetland areas, throughout the tour.

## PHOENICOPTERIDAE

**Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus roseus* We encountered a few nice flocks.

## ANATIDAE

**Fulvous Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna bicolor* This is a very uncommon bird in South Africa; we were very fortunate to observe a pair of birds, at our first birding spot on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

**White-faced Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna viduata* A few good sightings in wetlands, throughout the tour.

**White-backed Duck** *Thalassornis leuconotus* Seen well while doing some roadside birding at a wetland, just outside Johannesburg, with a second sighting at Wakkerstroom Wetland Reserve.

**Egyptian Goose** *Alopochen aegyptiacus* Common throughout all wetland areas.

**South African Shelduck** *Tadorna cana* Small numbers of this breeding endemic were present in a few wetland areas throughout the Cape.

**Spur-winged Goose** *Plectropterus gambensis* Widespread, in small numbers.

**Comb Duck** *Sarkidiornis melanotos* Small numbers seen very well in Kruger National Park.

**African Black Duck** *Anas sparsa* Great looks at a pair of birds in Nelspruit Botanical Gardens, followed by a second sighting, close to Wakkerstroom.

**Cape Teal** *Anas capensis* A few good sightings throughout the tour.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* Feral populations of this species have recently become established in the Dullstroom area, where we saw a few.

**Yellow-billed Duck** *Anas undulata* Common in wetlands throughout the tour.

**Red-billed Teal** *Anas erythrorhyncha* Scattered sightings throughout the tour.

**Hottentot Teal** *Anas hottentota* Only observed on the first day of the tour; where we enjoyed good scope views of a couple of birds, at a wetland, just outside Johannesburg.

**Cape Shoveler** *Anas smithii* This breeding endemic also proved to be common and widespread throughout most wetland areas.

**Southern Pochard** *Netta erythrophthalma* An uncommon bird in South Africa; we enjoyed a few sightings throughout the tour.

**Maccoa Duck** *Oxyura maccoa* One or two birds present at a small wetland, close to Belfast, on our way to Dullstroom; as well as a few at Strandfontein Sewage Works, at Cape Town.

#### ACCIPITRIDAE

**European Honey-buzzard** *Pernis apivorus* One seen very well in flight, near to Creighton, this bird is a very scarce winter visitor to this part of Africa; from breeding grounds in the western Palearctic.

**Black-shouldered Kite** *Elanus caeruleus* Common and widespread throughout the whole of the tour.

**Yellow-billed Kite** *Milvus aegyptius* Fairly common and widespread. All birds seen well, were of this race, which is now split from the migratory Black Kite.

**African Fish-Eagle** *Haliaeetus vocifer* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this very impressive species of raptor.

**White-backed Vulture** *Gyps africanus* Small numbers present in Kruger National Park.

**Cape Vulture** *Gyps coprotheres* First seen close to Dullstroom, where we saw them exceptionally well. We then saw large numbers at their breeding cliffs, close to Lydenberg, followed by a few birds at Sani Pass, in the Drakensberg Mountains. Listed as Vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. The world population is estimated to be around 8,000 individuals and unfortunately, rapidly declining. Major conservation efforts are now underway to preserve and protect the birds cliff-nesting site and there is a more determined effort to eradicate the illegal shooting of birds.

**Black-chested Snake-Eagle** *Circaetus pectoralis* Good views of a bird in flight, close to Dullstroom.

**Brown Snake-Eagle** *Circaetus cinereus* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this uncommon species, during our time in Kruger National Park.

**Bateleur** *Terathopius ecaudatus* Once again, we enjoyed many good sightings of Doris' favorite bird but only in Kruger National Park.

**African Marsh-Harrier** *Circus ranivorus* A few good views throughout the tour.

- Black Harrier** *Circus maurus* This very attractive species of harrier, was seen well on two separate occasions, both times the bird was spotted by Michael, so well done Michael. The first sighting was in De Hoop Nature Reserve, followed by a second sighting in the Tanqua Karoo. The world population of this graceful harrier is estimated to be less than 1,000 individuals. Not surprisingly, it is listed as Vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. The small population and its heavy reliance on private farmland, makes this species highly susceptible to changing land-use.
- Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus* An adult male, of this superbly plumaged species of harrier, was glimpsed by Chris, as we drove along a dirt road, close to Dullstroom. Unfortunately, the bird flew over a hill and disappeared into the valley below and although we tried very hard we were unable to relocate it. It is an uncommon winter visitor from the northern Palearctic.
- African Harrier-Hawk** *Polyboroides typus* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this unique bird of prey.
- Pale Chanting-Goshawk** *Melierax canorus* This species was common in the northern Cape; were they frequently perched on top of telegraph poles.
- African Goshawk** *Accipiter tachiro* We were fortunate to find one of these birds perched on top of a telegraph pole, while having lunch at a small café, at Betty's Bay, not far from Cape Town.
- Little Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter minullus* We were extremely fortunate to watch one of these birds plucking prey in a tree, in Kruger National Park. It is a scarce and secretive species, which is seldom observed.
- African Crowned Eagle** *Harpyhaliaetus coronatus* Great views of a bird at the nest and its partner in flight, at a forestry plantation, near Nelspruit. This is one of the largest birds of prey in the world and feeds exclusively on monkeys.
- Eurasian Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* A very common winter visitor, which we saw well on numerous occasions throughout the tour.
- Forest Buzzard** *Buteo trizonatus* We enjoyed two sightings, both of birds in flight. The first, at Kaapschehoop, in the Misty Mountains, followed by a second sighting, close to Creighton.
- Jackal Buzzard** *Buteo rufofuscus* Common, especially in the Wakkeestroom area and in the Drakensberg Mountains.
- Tawny Eagle** *Aquila rapax* Two or three, including a perched bird, seen very well in Kruger National Park,
- Wahlberg's Eagle** *Aquila wahlbergi* Good numbers in and around Kruger National Park.
- Verreaux's Eagle** *Aquila verreauxi* Brilliant spotting by Dorothy, allowed us to enjoy good scope views of this uncommon bird, perched on a rocky hillside at Sani Pass, in the Drakensberg Mountains.
- Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennatus* This uncommon resident, was seen well in flight, on a few occasions.
- Martial Eagle** *Polemaetus bellicosus* We enjoyed super looks at two separate, perched birds in Kruger National Park.
- Long-crested Eagle** *Lophaetus occipitalis* Several good sightings of this handsome and very distinctive raptor.

## SAGITTARIIDAE

**Secretary-bird** *Sagittarius serpentarius* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this very unique bird-of-prey, which feeds exclusively on snakes.

## FALCONIDAE

**Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* South Africa is the main wintering ground of the Lesser Kestrel, which breed throughout the northern Palearctic. We saw a small flock in flight on the Agulhas Plain, in Cape Province. It is listed as Vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. The world population is estimated to be around 50,000-60,000 individuals and unfortunately, declining rapidly. The main cause of its decline is habitat loss and degradation of its western Palearctic breeding grounds, primarily a result of agricultural intensification, but also afforestation and urbanization. On its wintering grounds in South Africa, key grassland areas have been lost to agricultural intensification, afforestation and intensive pasture management.

**Rock Kestrel** *Falco rupicolus* Commonly encountered throughout the whole tour.

**Greater Kestrel** *Falco rupicoloides* A few seen well around Vanrhynsdorp, in Western Cape Province.

**Lanner Falcon** *Falco biarmicus* Observed on a few occasions, with particularly good views of one, close to Creighton.

**Taita Falcon** *Falco fasciinucha* Stunning views of a pair with young, nesting on a steep cliff at the J.G. Strijdom tunnel, part of the very grand Blyde River Canyon. It is the rarest bird in South Africa, only this one breeding pair is known. Hopefully there are more; there are areas of suitable steep rock-face habitat in inaccessible areas of the Blyde River Canyon. It is listed as Near Threatened in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. This has always been a rare bird throughout its entire range; this may be due to competition for suitable nesting sites, with the larger and more dominant Lanner and Peregrine Falcons.

## PHASIANIDAE

**Crested Francolin** *Francolinus sephaena* Several good sightings in Kruger National Park.

**Red-winged Francolin** *Francolinus levaillantii* An uncommon bird, we were very fortunate to enjoy super close looks at a single very obliging roadside bird, close to Dullstroom.

**Grey-winged Francolin** *Francolinus africanus* Good looks at a small group on the Agulhas Plain in Cape Province.

**Cape Francolin** *Francolinus capensis* Seen well on several occasions in the Cape area, especially in Kirstenbosh Botanical Gardens.

**Natal Francolin** *Francolinus natalensis* Proved to be fairly common in Kruger National Park.

**Swainson's Spurfowl** *Francolinus swainsoni* Common in Kruger National Park and in the Wakkeestroom area.

**Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* We had good views of flushed birds, on two separate occasions. The first was flushed near Wakkeestroom, while searching for Yellow-breasted Pipit. The second bird was flushed at Creighton, while searching for Black-rumped Buttonquail.

#### NUMIDIDAE

**Helmeted Guineafowl** *Numida meleagris* A common bird throughout the whole of South Africa.

#### TURNICIDAE

**Kurrichane Buttonquail** *Turnix sylvatica* A single bird flushed from our feet, along the edge of a dirt road in the Mount Sheba Nature Reserve. This species is very rarely observed.

**Black-rumped Buttonquail** *Turnix nanus* Once Sergeant Malcolm had knocked us into shape, marching us up and down empty paddocks. He then took us to the real site, where, due to our previous training, we flushed them easily, we even managed to watch one bird running along the ground in front of us.

#### GRUIDAE

**Grey Crowned-Crane** *Balearica regulorum* We enjoyed some very good looks at this Particularly attractive species of crane.

**Blue Crane** *Grus paradisea* We also enjoyed many good looks at this very beautiful bird, which is the national bird of South Africa. So perhaps it was very fitting that it was voted bird of the trip, by tour participants. It is listed as Vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. It has an estimated world population of 25,000 birds and unfortunately, is decreasing. It has declined rapidly in the last 30 years, largely due to direct poisoning and afforestation of its grassland breeding grounds. Now conservation measures have been implemented to protect its breeding grounds. We saw many signs on farmer's property indicating that their farming practices were beneficial for the cranes.



Photo by Ruth

## RALLIDAE

**Black Crake** *Amaurornis flavirostris* We enjoyed some good sightings in Kruger National Park.

**African Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio madagascariensis* Small numbers present in a number of wetland areas.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* Small numbers scattered throughout most wetland areas.

**Red-knobbed Coot** *Fulica cristata* This is a common species throughout South Africa; we saw large numbers at several sites.

## OTIDIDAE

**Kori Bustard** *Ardeotis kori* A solitary bird was observed very well in the Tanqua Karoo, it is a very large and impressive species of bustard.

**Ludwig's Bustard** *Neotis ludwigii* Another striking species of bustard; once again, we only observed this species in the Tanqua Karoo, which is perfect habitat for this species.

**Denham's Bustard** *Neotis denhami* We enjoyed a number of sightings of this uncommon species of bustard, which unfortunately, is declining rapidly.

**Blue Korhaan** *Eupodotis caerulescens* Yet another rapidly declining species of bustard; we saw it well at Wakkeestroom and again in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains.

**Karoo Korhaan** *Eupodotis vigorsii* We saw a few of this species particularly well, in their grassland habitat on the Agulhas Plain, in Cape Province.

**Red-crested Korhaan** *Eupodotis ruficrista* We enjoyed a few very good sightings of this particular species, in Kruger National Park.

**Black-bellied Bustard** *Lissotis melanogaster* Super looks at this very beautiful species of bustard in Kruger National Park and again close to Wakkeestroom. I am sure none of us will ever forget the males `advertising call`, a short wheezy rising whistle, followed by a three to five second pause, then a hiccupping or cork-popping `mpok`.

## JACANIDAE

**African Jacana** *Actophilornis africanus* Small numbers present in Kruger National Park.

## HAEMATOPODIDAE

**African Black Oystercatcher** *Haematopus moquini* Small numbers present at Boulders Beach and at Lambert's Bay, in Cape Province. This species is listed as Near Threatened in `Threatened Birds of the World`.

## RECURVIROSTRIDAE

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* Good numbers present throughout the tour.

**Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* First seen at Strandfontein Sewage Works in Cape Town and there was a large flock present around a lake close to Calvinia, in the Tanqua Karoo.

## BURHINIDAE

**Water Thick-knee** *Burhinus vermiculatus* Seen well on a number of occasions.

**Spotted Thick-knee** *Burhinus capensis* This less common species of thick-knee, was also seen well on a few occasions.

## GLAREOLIDAE

**Temminck's Courser** *Cursorius temminckii* This smart looking bird, was seen very well on one occasion, in Kruger National Park.

**Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola* An uncommon migrant to southern Africa, we were very fortunate to observe a few birds, at close quarters, alongside waterholes in Kruger National Park.

## CHARADRIIDAE

**Blacksmith Lapwing** *Vanellus armatus* Widespread and common.

**White-crowned Lapwing** *Vanellus albiceps* This very beautiful species of lapwing, is at the extreme southern edge of its range in Kruger National Park. Therefore we were very fortunate to enjoy good looks at a couple of birds along the Sabie River.

**Senegal Lapwing** *Vanellus lugubris* Kruger National Park is the extreme southern end of this uncommon birds range; so we were indeed fortunate to enjoy very good looks at a solitary bird, shortly after entering Kruger National Park.

**Crowned Lapwing** *Vanellus coronatus* Many good sightings throughout the tour.

**African Wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus senegallus* We enjoyed several good sightings in the eastern part of the country.

**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* Only seen on one occasion; a solitary bird was observed in flight at Strandfontein Sewage Works, in Cape Town. This species is a winter visitor from breeding grounds in the northern Palearctic.

**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* Another winter visitor from the northern Palearctic; a solitary bird was present amongst the huge flocks of birds at Lamberts Bay.

**Kittlitz's Plover** *Charadrius pecuarius* We enjoyed several good sightings throughout the tour.

**Three-banded Plover** *Charadrius tricollaris* A number of good sightings at freshwater sites.

**White-fronted Plover** *Charadrius marginatus* Small numbers present at Kommetjie Point, in Cape Town, plus a few more at Lambert's Bay.

**Chestnut-banded Plover** *Charadrius pallidus* Great looks at a few of these very handsome and extremely localised plovers, at a saltpan, near Lamberts Bay.

## SCOLOPACIDAE

**African Snipe** *Gallinago nigripennis* Fantastic looks at a pair displaying in the Dullstroom area, followed by a second sighting of a bird feeding in the Wakkeestroom Wetland Reserve.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* A small number of this winter visitor were present at Kommetjie Point, in Cape Town.

**Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis* Small numbers of this winter visitor were seen well at a couple of waterholes in Kruger National Park.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* Small numbers of this winter visitor were scattered throughout the tour.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* Small numbers of this winter visitor from a few wetland areas.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Small numbers of this winter visitor were seen on a few occasions.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* This winter visitor was only seen on one occasion, a solitary bird was picked out amongst the flocks of birds at Lamberts Bay.

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* Small numbers of this winter visitor were encountered at a few wetland areas.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea* Another winter visitor; a solitary bird was observed very well at a saltpan, near Lamberts Bay.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* Small numbers of this winter visitor at a few wetland sites during the tour.

#### STERCORARIIDAE

**Parasitic Jaeger** *Stercorarius parasiticus* Another winter visitor, a single bird was observed flying offshore at the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve.

#### LARIDAE

**Cape Gull** *Larus vetula* Common in the Western Cape.

**Grey-headed Gull** *Larus cirrocephalus* Only observed at our first birding stop, on the first day of the tour; a small number were present at a small wetland, on the outskirts of Johannesburg.

**Hartlaub's Gull** *Larus hartlaubi* A common endemic of the southwest coast.

#### STERNIDAE

**Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia* A single bird observed flying above a river in De Hoop Nature Reserve, in Cape Province.

**Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis* Stunning views of this winter visitor at Boulders Beach and again at Lambert's Bay.

**Swift Tern** *Sterna bergii* Also good numbers of this endemic tern at Boulders Beach and Lambert's Bay.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* Once again, we enjoyed very close looks at this winter visitor at Boulders Beach and Lambert's Bay.

**Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybridus* Small flocks observed at a number of wetland sites.

#### PTEROCLIDAE

**Namaqua Sandgrouse** *Pterocles Namaqua* Small numbers observed in the Tanqua Karoo, including some nearby birds, feeding on the ground.

**Double-banded Sandgrouse** *Pterocles bicinctus* We enjoyed good close looks at a couple of pairs in Kruger National Park.

## COLUMBIDAE

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia* Small numbers of this introduced bird, scattered here and there.

**Speckled Pigeon** *Columba guinea* Widespread and common.

**African Olive Pigeon** *Columba arquatrix* We enjoyed regular sightings throughout the tour.

**African Mourning Dove** *Streptopelia decipiens* In South Africa, this species only occurs in Kruger National Park, where it was common.

**Red-eyed Dove** *Streptopelia semitorquata* A common bird, which we saw on most days of the tour.

**Cape Turtledove** *Streptopelia capicola* Seen almost daily, throughout the tour.

**Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis* A very common bird, seen throughout the whole tour.

**Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove** *Turtur chalcospilos* A few scattered sightings throughout the tour.

**Tambourine Dove** *Turtur tympanistria* This uncommon species was seen in flight on three separate occasions, in Nelspruit Botanical Gardens.

**Namaqua Dove** *Oena capensis* Commonly encountered in arid areas; such as Kruger National Park and the Tanqua Karoo.

**African Green-Pigeon** *Treron calva* A large flock was encountered early one morning at Skukuza Lodge, in Kruger National Park.

## PSITTACIDAE

**Cape Parrot** *Poicephalus robustus* A recent split from Grey-headed Parrot, so it is not recognized as a separate species in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. If it was, it would be listed as Critically Endangered. We enjoyed birds perched and in flight in Xumeni Forest near Creighton.

**Brown-headed Parrot** *Poicephalus cryptoxanthus* In South Africa, this uncommon species of parrot only occurs in Kruger National Park. We observed a pair of birds at very close quarters, feeding in a tree, in the grounds of Satara Lodge.

## MUSOPHAGIDAE

**Knysna Turaco** *Tauraco corythaix* A single bird was seen very well in Xumeni Forest near Creighton.

**Purple-crested Turaco** *Tauraco porphyreolophus* We enjoyed great looks at this attractive and colourful turaco in Kruger National Park and Nelspruit Nature Reserve.

**Grey Go-away-bird** *Corythaixoides concolor* Many good sightings throughout the tour.

## CUCULIDAE

**Jacobin Cuckoo** *Clamator jacobinus* We only saw this uncommon species on one occasion in Kruger National Park, however, we did see it very well.

**Levaillant's Cuckoo** *Clamator levaillantii* Another uncommon species, which we saw well on a couple of occasions in Kruger National Park.

**Great Spotted Cuckoo** *Clamator glandarius* Yet another uncommon species of cuckoo and once again we saw it well on two separate occasions in Kruger National Park.

**Red-chested Cuckoo** *Cuculus solitarius* Heard on a number of occasions, but only seen twice; at a forestry plantation, close to Nelspruit and in Xumeni Forest near Creighton.

**Black Cuckoo** *Cuculus ciamosus* Seen in flight by Michael and Dennis, in Xumeni Forest, near Creighton.

**Klaas' Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx klaas* Seen well in Kruger National Park and again in the De Hoop Nature Reserve.

**Dideric Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx caprius* Seen well on many occasions.

**Burchell's Coucal** *Centropus burchelli* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this very large species of cuckoo.

#### STRIGIDAE

**African Scops-Owl** *Otus senegalensis* In South Africa, this species only occurs in the northeast. It was fortunate that Chris found one at its daytime roost, in Kruger National Park.

**Spotted Eagle-Owl** *Bubo africanus* Fantastic views of a pair of birds, with a fully fledged young bird in Kirstenbosh Botanical Gardens, followed by a second pair roosting in a tree, outside our hotel at Swellendam.

#### APODIDAE

**African Palm-Swift** *Cypsiurus parvus* A few small flocks observed.

**Alpine Swift** *Tachymarptis melba* Seen on several occasions, the large flock above Dullstroom, was very impressive.

**Common Swift** *Apus apus* Small flocks of this winter visitor were encountered on a few occasions.

**African Black Swift** *Apus barbatus* Small flocks observed very well on a few occasions.

**Little Swift** *Apus affinis* Very common throughout the tour, with many nesting underneath road bridges.

**Horus Swift** *Apus horus* A very uncommon species of swift; we saw it well on one occasion while enjoying our picnic lunch, close to Sani Pass, in Lesotho.

**White-rumped Swift** *Apus caffer* We enjoyed many good sightings of this common species of swift.

#### COLIIDAE

**Speckled Mousebird** *Colius striatus* We enjoyed many good sightings throughout the tour.

**White-backed Mousebird** *Colius colius* Scattered sightings throughout the Tanqua Karoo.

**Red-faced Mousebird** *Urocolius indicus* Many good sightings in the first half of the tour.

#### TROGONIDAE

**Narina Trogon** *Apaloderma narina* Very good looks at two pairs of this stunning species, during our walk in the Mount Sheba Nature Reserve.

#### ALCEDINIDAE

**African Pygmy-Kingfisher** *Ispidina picta* We enjoyed super close looks at this attractive and uncommon species of kingfisher, in a forestry plantation, close to Nelspruit.

**Woodland Kingfisher** *Halcyon senegalensis* In South Africa, only occurs in the northeast, it proved to be common in Kruger National Park.

**Brown-hooded Kingfisher** *Halcyon albiventris* Seen well on a number of occasions.

**Giant Kingfisher** *Megaceryle maxima* We saw this impressive species of kingfisher, on a few occasions.

**Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis* Small numbers scattered throughout the tour.

#### MEROPIDAE

**White-fronted Bee-eater** *Merops bullockoides* Small flocks of this uncommon species were observed in Kruger National Park and in a forestry plantation, close to Nelspruit.

**Little Bee-eater** *Merops pusillus* Small numbers observed on a couple of occasions in Kruger National Park.

**Swallow-tailed Bee-eater** *Merops hirundineus* A solitary bird was observed very well a little to the north of Brandvlei, in the Tanqua Karoo. This bird was a good 500 kilometres south of its normal range, so was quite a surprise.

**European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* We enjoyed many good sightings of this very attractive winter visitor. In the last few years birds have been observed nesting in South Africa, which seems rather strange.

#### CORACIIDAE

**Lilac-breasted Roller** *Coracias caudata* Once again, in South Africa this common but delightful species only occurs in the northeast, we saw it well on numerous occasions in Kruger National Park.

**Purple Roller** *Coracias naevia* This less common and less attractive species of roller, only occurs in the northeast of South Africa, where we enjoyed many good sightings in Kruger National Park.

#### UPUPIDAE

**African Hoopoe** *Upupa africana* A gem amongst birds, which we saw very well on several occasions.

#### PHOENICULIDAE

**Green Woodhoopoe** *Phoeniculus purpureus* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this attractive species.

#### BUCEROTIDAE

**Southern Red-billed Hornbill** *Tockus rufirostris* In South Africa, this species only occurs in the northeast; we enjoyed several good sightings in Kruger National Park.

**Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill** *Tockus leucomelas* We enjoyed many good sightings of this attractive species, in Kruger National Park.

**African Grey Hornbill** *Tockus nasutus* Only occurs in the northeast corner of South Africa, we enjoyed a few good sightings in Kruger National Park.

#### CAPITONIDAE

**Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird** *Pogoniulus chrysoconus* Super close looks at this diminutive species of barbet, in the Nelspruit Nature Reserve, just before the thunderstorm.

**Acacia Pied Barbet** *Tricholaema leucomelas* First seen at the ferry crossing, close to De Hoot Nature Reserve, followed by a second sighting of a small flock in the Karoo Botanical Gardens at Worcester.

**Black-collared Barbet** *Lybius torquatus* Many good sightings throughout the tour.

**Crested Barbet** *Trachyphonus vaillantii* We enjoyed a few very good views of this most unusual looking species of barbet.

#### INDICATORIDAE

**Greater Honeyguide** *Indicator indicator* A pair of birds were seen fairly well in the Karoo Botanical Gardens, at Worcester. This brood parasite lays its eggs in the nests of kingfishers, bee-eaters, woodhoopoes and even some species of swallows.

**Lesser Honeyguide** *Indicator minor* Great looks at this uncommon species on one of our pre-breakfast walks in the Kruger National Park. This species mainly parasitizes members of the barbet family

**Brown-backed Honeybird** *Prodotiscus regulus* Very good looks at a single bird at Sani Pass. This species of honeyguide mostly parasitizes Grey-backed Camaroptera and Neddicky.

#### PICIDAE

**Red-throated Wryneck** *Jynx ruficollis* Our first sighting was of a pair of nesting birds at Kaapschehoop, in the Misty Mountains, followed by a second, much better sighting at Sani Pass.

**Bennett's Woodpecker** *Campethera bennettii* This very uncommon species of woodpecker only occurs in the northeast of South Africa. We were very fortunate to observe this bird on one of our pre-breakfast walks in Kruger National Park.

**Golden-tailed Woodpecker** *Campethera abingoni* We also observed this more common species of woodpecker, during our time in Kruger National Park.

**Knysna Woodpecker** *Campethera notata* We were extremely fortunate to observe this uncommon and illusive species, during our lunch stop in De Hoop Nature Reserve. It is listed as Near Threatened in 'Threatened Bird of the World'.

**Ground Woodpecker** *Geocolaptes olivaceus* Great looks at a family party close to Wakkeestroom, followed by a second family party at Sani Pass.

**Cardinal Woodpecker** *Dendropicos fuscescens* We encountered this common species on a number of occasions.

**Olive Woodpecker** *Dendropicos griseocephalus* We enjoyed good sightings at Wakkeestroom, Mount Sheba Nature Reserve and Sani Pass.

## ALAUDIDAE

- Rufous-naped Lark** *Mirafra africana* Many good sightings throughout the tour.
- Agulhas Clapper Lark** *Mirafra marjoriae* Seen well on the Agulhas Plain, to which this species is endemic.
- Sabota Lark** *Mirafra sabota* Many good sightings of this species in Kruger National Park and in the Tanqua Karoo.
- Rudd's Lark** *Heteromirafra ruddi* Excellent views of a bird in grassland, close to Wakkeestroom. Listed as Critically Endangered in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. Its total population is estimated between 2,500-5,000 individuals and declining. The main threat to this species is habitat loss, as a result of afforestation, agricultural intensification and inappropriate pasture management.
- Agulhas Long-billed Lark** *Certhilauda brevirostris* Seen well on the Agulhas Plain, to which this species is endemic. It is listed as Near Threatened in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. The main threat is habitat loss.
- Eastern Long-billed Lark** *Certhilauda semitorquata* Seen well on a number of occasions.
- Karoo Long-billed Lark** *Certhilauda subcoronata* Great looks at a bird a little to the north of Brandvlei, in the Tanqua Karoo.
- Spike-heeled Lark** *Chersomanes albofasciata* This distinctive and attractive species of lark proved to be particularly common around Wakkertroom and in the Tanqua Karoo.
- Black-eared Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix australis* We very much enjoyed our sighting of a flock of approximately 30 or so birds, at a small isolated patch of water, approximately 50 kms south of Brandvlei, in the Tanqua Karoo. This uncommon species is highly nomadic and is difficult to find.
- Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix verticalis* We saw one very large flock, feeding in agricultural land, in the Tanqua Karoo. This also is an extremely nomadic bird and normally, only occurs in large flocks.
- Red-capped Lark** *Calandrella cinerea* A widespread species of lark, which we saw well on many occasions.
- Stark's Lark** *Eremalauda starki* Yet another nomadic species of lark, which follows rains. We enjoyed a prolonged look at a single bird at the isolated patch of water, 50 kilometres south of Brandvlei, in the Tanqua Karoo. This is a difficult species to identify, so we were appreciative of the prolonged look.
- Large-billed Lark** *Galerida magnirostris* Scattered sightings throughout the tour.

## HIRUNDINIDAE

- Brown-throated Martin** *Riparia paludicola* Scattered sightings throughout the tour.
- Banded Martin** *Riparia cincta* We enjoyed many good sightings, particularly around Wakkeestroom.
- Rock Martin** *Hirundo fuligula* Widespread and common, we found nesting birds at Mount Sheba and De Hoop Nature Reserves.
- Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* We saw large flocks of wintering birds throughout the tour but the enormous flocks perched on telegraph wires in the Tanqua Karoo, were particularly memorable.

**White-throated Swallow** *Hirundo albogularis* This attractive species was widespread but only in small numbers.

**Wire-tailed Swallow** *Hirundo smithii* We observed small numbers in a few locations.

**Blue Swallow** *Hirundo atrocaerulea* We very much enjoyed superb views of a pair of this rare and beautiful swallow flying over rolling grasslands at Kaapschehoop, in the Misty Mountains. Listed as Vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. The world population is estimated to be around 4,000 individuals and decreasing. It is one of the most endangered birds in South Africa; in the last decade this bird has disappeared from 21 of the 29 known breeding localities in the country. This migratory species is threatened because of the destruction and derogation of its grassland habitat on both its breeding grounds in South Africa and its wintering grounds in East Africa.

**Pearl-breasted Swallow** *Hirundo dimidiata* This uncommon species of swallow was observed at the ferry crossing, close to De Hoop Nature Reserve and in Bontebok National Park.

**Greater Striped-Swallow** *Hirundo cucullata* The most widespread of the swallows, although never abundant.

**Lesser Striped-Swallow** *Hirundo abyssinica* There were small numbers of this attractive species of swallow in Kruger National Park.

**Red-breasted Swallow** *Hirundo semirufa* Another attractive species and once again we saw small numbers in Kruger National Park.

**Mosque Swallow** *Hirundo senegalensis* In South Africa this uncommon species only occurs in Kruger National Park; where we saw a few pairs.

**South African Cliff-Swallow** *Hirundo spilodera* We watched large flocks of this species at their communal nest sites, underneath road bridges.

**Black Sawwing** *Psalidoprocne holomelas* Scattered sightings of this distinctive species of swallow, occurred throughout the tour.

#### MOTACILLIDAE

**African Pied Wagtail** *Motacilla aguimp* Seen very well on a couple of occasions in Kruger National Park.

**Cape Wagtail** *Motacilla capensis* A common bird throughout South Africa, which we saw on most days of the tour.

**Cape Longclaw** *Macronyx capensis* This attractive species was seen well on a number of occasions.

**Yellow-breasted Pipit** *Anthus chloris* After a great deal of searching, this beautiful species of pipit gave itself up and we enjoyed super looks at an adult bird in grassland close to Wakkeestroom. Listed as Vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World', its world population is estimated to be between 2,500-6,500 individuals and decreasing. The main threat to this species is habitat loss due to overgrazing, burning, rapid afforestation of long term grasslands and agricultural intensification.

**Mountain Pipit** *Anthus hoeschi* Once the fog lifted in Lesotho, a single bird was observed close to the road and we were able to study the subtle plumage characteristics of this very uncommon species, when compared to the very similar and more widespread African Pipit.

**African Pipit** *Anthus cinnamomeus* Many good sightings throughout the tour.

**Long-billed Pipit** *Anthus similis* Seen well but only on a few occasions.

#### CAMPEPHAGIDAE

**Grey Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina caesia* Seen on one occasion, in the pouring rain, in the carpark of Grootvadersbosh Nature Reserve.

**Black Cuckoo-shrike** *Campephaga flava* A pair of birds showed well in riverine forest, along the Sabie River in Kruger National Park.

#### PYCNONOTIDAE

**Dark-capped Bulbul** *Pycnonotus tricolor* A common bird throughout much of the tour.

**Cape Bulbul** *Pycnonotus capensis* Very common around the Cape.

**Sombre Greenbul** *Andropadus importunus* Seen well in Kruger National Park and again in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve.

**Terrestrial Brownbul** *Phyllastrephus terrestris* First seen in Kruger National Park and seen again in Grootvadersbosh Nature Reserve.

**Yellow-streaked Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus* Only seen at the Mount Sheba Nature Reserve, where it proved to be fairly common.

#### TURDIDAE

**Cape Rock-Thrush** *Monticola rupestris* We enjoyed a few good sightings at scattered locations throughout the tour.

**Sentinel Rock-Thrush** *Monticola explorator* Once again several good sightings of this localised and uncommon species.

**Orange Ground-Thrush** *Zoothera gurneyi* We were very fortunate to enjoy a long, close look at this very localised and seldom seen species, while searching for the Cape Parrot in Xumeni Forest, close to Creighton.

**Groundscraper Thrush** *Psophocichla litsipsirupa* We observed small numbers of this species in Kruger National Park.

**Olive Thrush** *Turdus olivaceus* Common in the southern Cape and in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains.

**Karoo Thrush** *Turdus smithi* Seen well in the grounds of our hotel in Johannesburg, and again in the northern Cape.

**Kurrichane Thrush** *Turdus libonyanus* A few pairs seen well in Kruger National Park.

#### CISTICOLIDAE

**Red-faced Cisticola** *Cisticola erythrops* Seen well in Kruger National Park and in Nelspruit Nature Reserve.

**Rattling Cisticola** *Cisticola chiniana* This particular cisticola proved to be common in Kruger National Park.

**Grey-backed Cisticola** *Cisticola subruficapillus* The common cisticola around the Cape and in the Tanqua Karoo.

**Wailing Cisticola** *Cisticola lais* Seen well in the grasslands around Dullstroom and again at Sani Pass.

**Levaillant's Cisticola** *Cisticola tinniens* The common cisticola of wetland areas, we saw this species particularly well around Wakkeestroom.

- Croaking Cisticola** *Cisticola natalensis* A very large, distinctive species of cisticola, which we only saw on one occasion; while searching for Black-rumped Buttonquail, close to Creighton.
- Neddicky** *Cisticola fulvicapillus* Surprisingly, we only saw this common species of cisticola, on one occasion. This was at Black Mountain, at Noordhook, Cape Town, while we were searching for Cape Siskin.
- Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis* This very widespread species of cisticola was seen well at several grassland locations.
- Desert Cisticola** *Cisticola aridulus* A couple seen fairly well during our time in Kruger National Park.
- Cloud Cisticola** *Cisticola textrix* We observed a couple of birds very well, on the Agulhas Plain. As the name would suggest, this species really does fly so high during its song display, that they are very hard to spot.
- Pale-crowned Cisticola** *Cisticola cinnamomeus* We had a few good looks at individuals in the Wakkeestroom area.
- Wing-snapping Cisticola** *Cisticola ayresii* Particularly common around Dullstroom and Wakkeestroom, where we enjoyed some good looks at them.
- Tawny-flanked Prinia** *Prinia subflava* Seen regularly in small numbers in the east of the country.
- Black-chested Prinia** *Prinia flavicans* Seen on only one occasion, while we were doing some roadside birding at a wetland, just outside Johannesburg, on the first day of the tour.
- Karoo Prinia** *Prinia maculosa* Common and conspicuous in the southern Cape.
- Drakensberg Prinia** *Prinia hypoxantha* Seen well on a number of occasions, in the east of the country.
- Rufous-eared Warbler** *Malcorus pectoralis* This very attractive species of warbler, was seen well on a couple of occasions in the desert country of the Tanqua Karoo.
- Bar-throated Apalis** *Apalis thoracica* Seen at a number of sites but our first sighting in the scrub at Nelspruit Nature Reserve, was the most memorable.
- Yellow-breasted Apalis** *Apalis flavida* Seen well on a couple of occasions in Kruger National Park and again in a forestry plantation, close to Nelspruit.

#### SYLVIIDAE

- Little Rush-Warbler** *Bradypterus baboecala* Super views of a bird that responded well to tape playback in Kruger National Park and one seen briefly in a reedbed in the grounds of our hotel at Sani Pass.
- Knysna Warbler** *Bradypterus sylvaticus* We heard this species just a couple of metres away from us in a greenbelt area of Cape Town, but this individual was very shy and refused to show itself. Fortunately, one in Grootvadersbosh Nature Reserve proved far less illusive and responded very well to tape playback and we were able to enjoy super looks, at this most skulking of species. This highly localised species is listed as Vulnerable in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. Its population is estimated to be around 2,500 individuals and decreasing. The main threat to the bird is loss of habitat, this species now has a severely fragmented range and population.

- Barratt's Warbler** *Bradypterus barratti* We heard this bird's loud song in Xumeni Forest, from just a few metres away. However, seeing it was much more difficult. Some members of the tour party did manage to glimpse the bird.
- Cape Grassbird** *Sphenoeacus afer* Seen well at a number of sites.
- Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* This winter visitor was seen by Chris in a reedbed at the Wakkeestroom Wetland Reserve.
- African Reed-Warbler** *Acrocephalus baeticatus* Seen well at a number of wetland areas.
- Lesser Swamp-Warbler** *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* Another inhabitant of reedbeds, we saw it well at the Wakkeestroom Wetland Reserve and again at Strandfontein Sewage Works.
- Dark-capped Yellow Warbler** *Chloropeta natalensis* Seen particularly well during our first sighting, along the roadside, close to Dullstroom. We also saw it a second time in the Xumeni Forest, close to Creighton.
- Fairy Flycatcher** *Stenostira scita* This attractive species was first seen at Sani Pass, where we saw it very well. We saw it a second time, along the southern edge of the Tanqua Karoo.
- Karoo Eremomela** *Eremomela gregalis* We enjoyed great looks at a family party in the Tanqua Karoo, north of Ceres. This species can often be difficult to find.
- Burnt-neck Eremomela** *Eremomela usticollis* Seen well on one occasion in Kruger National Park.
- Long-billed Crombec** *Sylvietta rufescens* A common species which we saw well on a number of occasions.
- Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler** *Phylloscopus ruficapillus* Seen well on a number of occasions but perhaps none better than our first sighting in the Mount Sheba Nature Reserve.
- Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus* Surprisingly, this common winter visitor was only seen on one occasion, this sighting occurred in Kruger National Park.
- Layard's Tit-babbler** *Parisoma layardi* We enjoyed good looks at Sani Pass, followed by a second sighting, in the Karoo Botanical Gardens, at Worcester.
- Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler** *Parisoma subcaeruleum* Similar to the above species, we enjoyed a couple of sightings in the Tanqua Karoo.

#### MUSCICAPIDAE

- Chat Flycatcher** *Bradornis infuscatus* We enjoyed good sightings of this large species of flycatcher around the town of Brandvlei, in the Tanqua Karoo.
- Marico Flycatcher** *Bradornis mariquernsis* We enjoyed a couple of good sightings of this species in Kruger National Park.
- Southern Black-Flycatcher** *Melaenornis pammelaina* Good sightings in Kruger National Park and Nelspruit Nature Reserve.
- Fiscal Flycatcher** *Sigelus silens* A few good sightings in the Cape Province.
- Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata* Small numbers of this winter visitor, were observed throughout the tour.
- African Dusky Flycatcher** *Muscicapa adusta* Many good sightings scattered throughout the tour.

**Ashy Flycatcher** *Muscicapa caerulescens* We only observed this rather plain species of flycatcher on one occasion; however, we did see it very well, during our walk in Nelspruit Botanical Gardens.

**Grey Tit-Flycatcher** *Myioparus plumbeus* Seen very well on one occasion in Kruger National Park.

**Cape Robin-Chat** *Cossypha caffra* A common and conspicuous bird throughout the whole tour.

**White-browed Robin-Chat** *Cossypha heuglini* We enjoyed some good observations in Kruger National Park, followed by a further sighting, in Nelspruit Nature Reserve.

**Chorister Robin-Chat** *Cossypha dichroa* We only saw this beautiful bird on one occasion, however, we did see it very well and heard its beautiful song. This all took place in the Mount Sheba Nature Reserve.

**White-browed Scrub-Robin** *Cercotrichas leucophrys* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this attractive species.

**Karoo Scrub-Robin** *Cercotrichas coryphaeus* We enjoyed many sightings of this range restricted species during our time in the Tanqua Karoo.

**African Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* Commonly encountered throughout the whole tour.

**Buff-streaked Chat** *Saxicola bifasciata* One of the prettiest of the wheatears, we enjoyed several good sightings.

**Mountain Wheatear** *Oenanthe monticola* We enjoyed a few good sightings of this attractive species.

**Capped Wheatear** *Oenanthe pileata* We enjoyed many good sightings of this beautiful bird during our time at the Cape.

**Sickle-winged Chat** *Cercomela sinuate* Common around Sani Pass, with smaller numbers present in the Tanqua Karoo.

**Karoo Chat** *Cercomela schlegelii* This range restricted species, proved to be common in the Tanqua Karoo.

**Tractrac Chat** *Cercomela tractrac* Prefers the same habitat as the above species; therefore it was also common in the Tanqua Karoo.

**Familiar Chat** *Cercomela familiaris* Scattered sightings throughout the tour, usually in rocky areas. We enjoyed particularly good looks in the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve.

**Ant-eating Chat** *Myrmecocichla formicivora* Common around Wakkeestroom and the northern Cape.

#### PLATYSTEIRIDAE

**Cape Batis** *Batis capensis* Several good sightings throughout the tour.

**Chinspot Batis** *Batis molitor* Also seen well on several occasions.

**Pririt Batis** *Batis pririt* Small numbers present in the Tanqua Karoo.

#### MONARCHIDAE

**Blue-mantled Crested-Flycatcher** *Trochocercus cyanomelas* We saw this delightful species on only one occasion; fortunately, we saw it very well, in between showers in Grootvadersbosh Nature Reserve.

**African Paradise-Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone viridis* We enjoyed many good sightings throughout the tour.

#### TIMALIIDAE

**Cape Rockjumper** *Chaetops frenatus* We enjoyed great views of a pair of these very special birds at Rooiels, in False Bay.

**Drakensberg Rockjumper** *Chaetops aurantius* Without doubt one of the birds of the trip, we watched a dozen or so birds during our time in Lesotho.

**Arrow-marked Babbler** *Turdoides jardineii* We enjoyed sightings of a few flocks, mainly in Kruger National Park.

**Bush Blackcap** *Lioptilus nigricapillus* Our first sighting of this rare species occurred at Kaapschehoop, in the Misty Mountains. This was followed by a second, much better sighting, at Sani Pass. This species is listed as Near Threatened in 'Threatened Birds of the World', with a world population of approximately 5,000 individuals.

#### PARIDAE

**Southern Black-Tit** *Melaniparus niger* Only observed on one occasion, during one of our pre-breakfast walks in Kruger National Park.

**Grey Tit** *Melaniparus afer* Once again, only observed on one occasion; however, we saw it very well during our time spent birding in Lesotho.

#### REMIZIDAE

**Cape Penduline-Tit** *Anthoscopus minutus* We were very fortunate to bump into a small family party in the Tanqua Karoo.

#### NECTARINIIDAE

**Collared Sunbird** *Hedydipna collaris* Just one sighting; thankfully it was a good one, during our time in Kruger National Park.

**Orange-breasted Sunbird** *Anthobaphes violacea* Several good encounters around the Cape.

**Amethyst Sunbird** *Chalcomitra amethystina* Several good sightings of this common species.

**Malachite Sunbird** *Nectarinia famosa* Great looks on many occasions. This species is an altitudinal migrant in South Africa, hence our many sightings in the highveld around Wakkeestroom.

**Southern Double-collared Sunbird** *Cinnyris chalybeus* Mainly observed in the western Cape, where it was widespread and common.

**Greater Double-collared Sunbird** *Cinnyris afer* Scattered sightings throughout the Cape.

**Marico Sunbird** *Cinnyris mariquensis* Small numbers present in Kruger National Park.

**White-bellied Sunbird** *Cinnyris talatala* Many good sightings throughout the northeastern part of South Africa.

## ZOSTEROPIDAE

**Cape White-eye** *Zosterops pallidus* This very variable species is common and widespread throughout South Africa.

## PROMEROPIDAE

**Gurney's Sugarbird** *Promerops gurneyi* Our first sighting was of a bird perched on top of a protea, close to Dullstroom, followed by several sightings along the road up to Sani Pass.

**Cape Sugarbird** *Promerops cafer* A few good sightings scattered throughout the Cape. The two species of sugarbirds make up a complete family, which is endemic to southern Africa.

## ORIOLIDAE

**Black-headed Oriole** *Oriolus larvatus* Seen on a few occasions, but never very well.

## LANIIDAE

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* We enjoyed many sightings of this beautiful species of shrike, which is a winter visitor from the northern Palearctic. Surprisingly, we enjoyed a couple of sightings around the Cape, where it is reported to be a rare vagrant.

**Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* Another very beautiful species of shrike, which is also a winter visitor to South Africa, from breeding grounds in the northern Palearctic. We enjoyed several good sightings in Kruger National Park.

**Common Fiscal** *Lanius collaris* Common and widespread throughout the whole country.

**Magpie Shrike** *Corvinella melanoleuca* We enjoyed many good sightings of this very large species of shrike, during our time in Kruger National Park.

**Brubru** *Nilaus afer* We enjoyed a couple of good sightings, on our pre-breakfast walks in Kruger National Park.

**Black-backed Puffback** *Dryoscopus cubla* Fairly common in the east of the country.

**Black-crowned Tchagra** *Tchagra senegala* Seen very well on a few occasions in Kruger National Park.

**Southern Boubou** *Laniarius ferrugineus* A common bird throughout the eastern half of the country.

**Bokmakierie** *Telophorus zeylonus* This very attractive species of shrike was seen very well on a number of occasions.

**Orange-breasted Bushshrike** *Telophorus sulfureopectus* Another beautiful bird, which we saw well during one of our pre-breakfast walks in Kruger National Park.

**Grey-headed Bushshrike** *Malaconotus blanchoti* A few good sightings throughout the tour.

## DICRURIDAE

**Fork-tailed Drongo** *Dicrurus adsimilis* This is a very common bird throughout most of South Africa.

## CORVIDAE

**House Crow** *Corvus splendens* Only seen at Cape Town airport; this introduced species seems not to have spread very far at all.

**Cape Crow** *Corvus capensis* Several good sightings throughout the tour.

**Pied Crow** *Corvus albus* Common and widespread throughout much of South Africa.

**White-necked Raven** *Corvus albicollis* We enjoyed many good sightings of this attractive species of corvid.

## STURNIDAE

**Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis* This introduced species is now unfortunately, all too common.

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* This introduced species is also all too common in the southern Cape.

**Wattled Starling** *Creatophora cinerea* Several small flocks observed throughout the tour.

**Cape Glossy-Starling** *Lamprotornis nitens* Several good sightings throughout the tour.

**Greater Blue-eared Starling** *Lamprotornis chalybaeus* In South Africa this species only occurs in Kruger National Park, where it is very common.

**Burchell's Starling** *Lamprotornis australis* We only saw this species in Kruger National Park, where it is also very common.

**Violet-backed Starling** *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* In South Africa this very attractive species only occurs in the northeast, where we enjoyed a few small flocks.

**Pied Starling** *Spreo bicolor* This large species of starling was common and conspicuous throughout most of the tour.

**Red-winged Starling** *Onychognathus morio* Seen on almost every day of the tour.

**Red-billed Oxpecker** *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* Small numbers of this aberrant starling were seen on various mammals in Kruger National Park.

## PASSERIDAE

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* This introduced species is unfortunately, widespread and common.

**Southern Grey-headed Sparrow** *Passer diffusus* Small numbers present throughout much of the tour.

**Cape Sparrow** *Passer diffusus* This attractive species of sparrow was particularly common in the more arid areas and patchily distributed throughout the rest of the country.

## PLOCEIDAE

**Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver** *Bubalornis niger* Proved to be fairly common in Kruger National Park.

**White-browed Sparrow-Weaver** *Plocepasser mahali* We made a special detour to the town of Lydenberg, in order to see this species.

**Lesser Masked-Weaver** *Ploceus intermedius* We only saw this species in Kruger National Park, where it was very common.

**Spectacled Weaver** *Ploceus ocularis* A few birds present in Kruger National Park.

- Cape Weaver** *Ploceus capensis* This attractive species was very common throughout much of the tour.
- Golden-Weaver** *Ploceus xanthops* Small numbers were nesting in Nelspruit Nature Reserve and this was the only place we saw it.
- Southern Masked-Weaver** *Ploceus velatus* Common and widespread throughout the whole country.
- Village Weaver** *Ploceus cucullatus* Small numbers scattered throughout the tour.
- Red-headed Weaver** *Anaplectes rubriceps* We only saw one individual of this uncommon species. This sighting occurred in Nelspruit Nature Reserve and fortunately, it was a male in full breeding plumage. It was the last bird we saw before the huge thunderstorm struck, blacking out the whole of Nelspruit.
- Red-headed Quelea** *Quelea erythrops* An uncommon and nomadic intra-African migrant, which occasionally occurs along the coast of Natal, in eastern South Africa. Therefore, we were very fortunate that Sergeant Malcolm knew they were in the area when we were birding with him around Creighton. We saw small numbers scattered amongst much larger flocks of Red-billed Queleas and Southern Red Bishops.
- Red-billed Quelea** *Quelea quelea* A few large flocks, scattered throughout the tour.
- Yellow-crowned Bishop** *Euplectes afer* We saw this species very well at a small lake just outside Johannesburg and on a second occasion, close to Wakkeestroom.
- Southern Red Bishop** *Euplectes orix* We observed countless flocks which all contained stunning males, in full breeding plumage.
- Yellow Bishop** *Euplectes capensis* Many good sightings throughout the tour.
- Fan-tailed Widowbird** *Euplectes axillaris* Good numbers present throughout the tour.
- White-winged Widowbird** *Euplectes albonotatus* First seen at a small lake, just outside Johannesburg and not seen again until Sani Pass.
- Red-collared Widowbird** *Euplectes ardens* Small numbers present throughout, with the exception of arid areas.
- Long-tailed Widowbird** *Euplectes progne* This stunning species was seen on many occasions, the males were in full display, flying above the grasslands.
- Thick-billed Weaver** *Amblyospiza albifrons* Several good sightings throughout the tour, including nesting birds at Nelspruit Nature Reserve.

#### ESTRILDIDAE

- Green-winged Pytilia** *Pytilia melba* We saw this species very well on a couple of occasions in Kruger National Park.
- Red-billed Firefinch** *Lagonosticta senegala* A few birds were present in Kruger National Park.
- African Firefinch** *Lagonosticta rubricata* A small flock was seen along the roadside, just before reaching Mount Sheba Nature Reserve.
- Jameson's Firefinch** *Lagonosticta rhodopareia* A pair of these very pink firefinches, showed well in Kruger National Park.
- Blue Waxbill** *Uraeginthus angolensis* Small numbers feeding on the lawn, along with the next species at Mount Sheba Nature Reserve. It proved to be more common in Kruger National Park.

**Swee Waxbill** *Estrilda melanotis* Small flocks observed on a number of occasions.

**Common Waxbill** *Estrilda astrild* Small flocks observed throughout the tour.

**Orange-breasted Waxbill** *Amandava subflava* At least three sizeable flocks were observed during the tour. This species is often extremely difficult to get good looks at, however, we did manage to see them feeding on the ground on one occasion.

**African Quailfinch** *Ortygospiza atricollis* We were indeed fortunate to find a large flock that allowed us to watch them feeding in grassland. They are usually very difficult to see well.

**Bronze Mannikin** *Lonchura cucullata* Small flocks observed on a few occasions in Kruger National Park.

**Red-backed Mannikin** *Lonchura nigriceps* A few of these uncommon birds were mixed in amongst one of the flocks of Bronze Mannikins, in Kruger National Park.

#### VIDUIDAE

**Variable Indigobird** *Vidua funereal* A male bird flew very close to Chris in the grounds of the Mount Sheba Nature Reserve. This very uncommon species parasitises the African Firefinch. Coincidentally, the only place we saw African Firefinches, was close to the entrance of the reserve.

**Pin-tailed Whydah** *Vidua macroura* Another brood parasite, which is obviously very successful, as we saw good numbers throughout the tour.

#### FRINGILLIDAE

**Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* Introduced to Cape Town; we saw this species in the grounds of our hotel at Noordhook.

**Cape Canary** *Serinus canicollis* A very common and widespread but nonetheless attractive species.

**Forest Canary** *Serinus scotops* A pair showed very well in Xumeni Forest, close to Creighton.

**Black-throated Canary** *Serinus atrogularis* A small flock was observed at a wetland close to Belfast, on our way to Dullstroom. We also saw another small flock in the Tanqua Karoo.

**Yellow-fronted Canary** *Serinus mozambicus* Good numbers present in the east of the country.

**Yellow Canary** *Serinus flaviventris* Widespread in the southern and northern Cape, where we saw them well on a number of occasions.

**Brimstone Canary** *Serinus sulphuratus* We enjoyed a few sightings of this rather chunky species of canary.

**White-throated Canary** *Serinus albogularis* Good numbers present in the Tanqua Karoo.

**Streaky-headed Seedeater** *Serinus gularis* Scattered sightings throughout the tour.

**Protea Seedeater** *Serinus leucopterus* We were very pleased to find an adult bird of this very uncommon species, drinking at a small creek, at Gydo Pass, close to Ceres.

**Cape Siskin** *Serinus totta* This highly localised species was first seen at Black Mountain, in Cape Town; followed by a second sighting at Gydo Pass, close to Ceres.

**Drakensberg Siskin** *Serinus symonsi* Our only sighting was of some very wet and bedraggled birds, at Sani Pass.

**Black-headed Canary** *Serinus alario* We were fortunate to find a few females of this uncommon species, at our first birding stop in the Tanqua Karoo.

#### EMBERIZIDAE

**Lark-like Bunting** *Emberiza impetuani* We saw some nice flocks of this very nondescript species, during our time in the Tanqua Karoo.

**Cape Bunting** *Emberiza capensis* Fairly common and widespread, it is particularly fond of rocky areas.

**Golden-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza flaviventris* A solitary adult male was observed very well at our lunch stop at Hoedspruit, just prior to entering Kruger National Park.

## MAMMALS

- Chacma Baboon** *Papio ursinus* Seen well on many occasions.
- Vervet Monkey** *Cercopithecus aethiops* Fairly common in small numbers, most sightings occurred in the east of the country.
- Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bat** *Epomophorus crypturus* We saw a small colony roosting under a thatched roof, during our time in Kruger National Park.
- Scrub Hare** *Lepus saxatilis* A few sightings, predominantly in arid areas.
- Smith's Bush Squirrel** *Paraxerus cepapi* Proved to be common in Kruger National Park.
- Brant's Whistling Rat** *Parotomys brantsii* We were fortunate to find one of these rodents at the entrance to its burrow, in broad daylight, in the Tanqua Karoo.
- Sloggett's Rat** *Otomys sloggetti* Seen very well in Lesotho; they need all that fur!
- Four-striped Grass Mouse** *Rhabdomys pumilio* This very cute species of rodent was seen on a few occasions but none better than at the bird feeding station, in the grounds of our guest house, at Creighton.
- Slender Mongoose** *Herpestes sanguinea* Up to three solitary animals were observed during the tour.
- Small Grey Mongoose** *Herpestes pulverulenta* One of these was seen particularly well at Strandfontein Sewage Works, in Cape Town.
- Yellow Mongoose** *Cynictis penicillata* Common in the grasslands around Wakkeestroom, where we enjoyed many good sightings.
- Suricate** *Suricata suricate* This charismatic species was seen at a distance at both Dullstroom and Wakkeestroom.
- Banded Mongoose** *Mungos mungo* A large group of this hyperactive, mischievous and social animal, were seen very well at Skukuza Lodge, in Kruger National Park. They had been raiding the rubbish bins and had made a bit of a mess!
- Afro Australian Fur Seal** *Arctocephalus pusillus* Large numbers present at all coastal areas of the Cape, we saw them particularly well at Lambert's Bay.
- Serval** *Felix serval* We were very fortunate to observe this wonderful species of cat at Kaapschehoop, in the Misty Mountains.
- Lion** *Pantera leo* We enjoyed three separate sightings of Lions during our time in Kruger National Park. The third sighting, which included an adult male, with a full mane, was particularly memorable.
- Cape Rock Hyrax** *Procavia capensis* A few family parties encountered throughout the tour.
- African Savanna Elephant** *Loxadonta africana* We enjoyed many encounters with these huge creatures during our time in Kruger National Park. The recently born baby elephants were particularly endearing.
- Wild Horse** *Equus caballus* A feral population of wild horses has been established for some time at Kappschehoop, in the Misty Mountains and have become somewhat of a tourist attraction. We too enjoyed seeing them.
- Burchell's Zebra** *Equus burchelli* Many good sightings throughout the tour. The most memorable ones were those in Kruger National Park.
- Cape Mountain Zebra** *Equus zebra* Super looks at this now very endangered species, during our visit to De Hoop Nature Reserve.

- Hippopotamus** *Hippopotamus amphibius* Good numbers of these impressive beasts were seen at close quarters in Kruger National Park.
- Warthog** *Phacochoerus aethiopicus* Small numbers showed very well in Kruger National Park.
- Giraffe** *Giraffa camelopardalis* Good numbers of these wonderful creatures were seen at incredibly close quarters in Kruger National Park.
- African Buffalo** *Syncerus caffer* We enjoyed many good sightings at this, the most dangerous animal in Africa, during our stay in Kruger National Park.
- Bushbuck** *Tragelaphus scriptus* Small numbers present in Kruger National Park.
- Greater Kudu** *Tragelaphus strepsiceros* Good numbers of these magnificent antelopes were seen in Kruger National Park.
- Eland** *Taurotragus oryx* The largest of all the antelopes; this huge animal was seen on a few occasions throughout the tour.
- Common Duiker** *Sylvicapra grimmia* Two seen, perhaps the best of which was the one seen close to Sani Pass.
- Steenbok** *Raphicerus campestris* We enjoyed many good sightings of this tiny species of antelope.
- Oribi** *Ourebia ourebi* Seen well in grassland at Dullstroom and again at Creighton. This orange antelope is one of the most endangered antelopes in South Africa, due to the afforestation of its native grasslands.
- Grey Rhebok** *Pala capreolus* A few of these small antelope were observed during the tour. They are often hard to find, so we were very lucky. A well known brand of running shoes, takes its name from this animal.
- Common Reedbuck** *Redunca arundinum* Only seen on one occasion, during the drive to Dullstroom.
- Common Waterbuck** *Kobus ellipsiprymnus* This large and attractive species of antelope was seen very well in Kruger National Park.



Common Waterbuck

Photo by Ruth

- Springbok** *Antidorcas marsupialis* Several large groups observed.

**Impala** *Aepyceros melampus* Large numbers present in Kruger National Park.

**Bontebok** *Damaliscus dorcas* Bonteboks were seen well around the Cape and the closely related Blesbok, which is sometimes treated as a separate species was seen very well around Wakkeestroom.

**Red Hartebeest** *Alcelaphus buselaphus* Seen well in Bontebok National Park and again in the Tamqua Karoo.

**Blue Wildebeest** *Connochaetes taurimus* Good numbers present in Kruger National Park.

**Black Wildebeest** *Connochaetes gnou* This far less common species of wildebeest was seen very well in De Hoop Nature Reserve.

**Sable Antelope** *Hippotragues niger* We were very fortunate to see a group of two adults and two immatures in Kruger National Park. Unfortunately, this magnificent animal has now become extremely uncommon.



Sable Antelope

Photo by Dorothy