

# South Africa

## Eastern V

***22<sup>nd</sup> September to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023 (15 days)***

## Cape Extension V

***6<sup>th</sup> October to 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023 (6 days)***

# Trip Report



Wattle Crane

**All photographs & Trip report compiled by Tour Leader: Quinton Paul Josop**

## Tour Summary

*The South African Eastern birding adventure and the Cape extension is an amazing tour with great diversity! It encompasses the sub-tropical Eastern territory, from Durban to the chilly Midlands, up the Drakensberg mountains and ventures into Lesotho! The Eastern coastal plain of Zululand is explored extensively, from the coastal scarp forests to the gems of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. Wakkerstroom highlights the specials of the high-altitude grasslands, and World-renowned Kruger National Park showcases extraordinarily large mammals, magnificent lowveld avian species, and encapsulates vast open landscapes with interesting habitats! Johannesburg and its surrounding areas take us into a transition zone, from the greener East to the drier thornveld country. Cape Town boasts superb panoramic sights around its Atlantic peninsula and is custodian of the unique Cape Floral Kingdom! The tour discovers some of the local birding hotspots, including the West Coast National Park and then ends off in the heart of the Karoo in search of more endemic birds and plant species of the region.*

*Continue reading to find out more about all the incredible birds and mammals we encountered on this tour...*

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## Tour in Detail

After our party arrived at the guesthouse in Durban, we met our esteemed driver Sura, packed our luggage into the bus and made headway for our adventure! En route to the Midlands we made quick stops at Pigeon Valley and Jubilee Park to warm up our 'blinkers' for the tour! Red-capped Robin-Chat, Olive Thrush, Thick-billed Weaver, Collared Sunbird, Bar-throated Apalis, Spectacled Weaver, Purple-crested Turaco, Crowned Eagle and Green Woodhoopoe were all great starters to our list.

Late afternoon and early morning visits to Cedara Agricultural College produced the likes of Blue Crane, African Marsh Harrier, Jackal Buzzard, Black Sparrowhawk, African Yellow Warbler, Lesser Swamp Warbler, Little Rush Warbler, Cape, and Fan-tailed Grassbird, Levallant's and Lazy Cisticola, Orange-breasted Waxbill, Cape Longclaw, South African Shelduck, Fan-tailed and Long-tailed Widowbirds.

Making our way to Benvie Gardens from Hilton, brilliant roadside birding ensued! A flock of ten Wattle Cranes flew over us and landed on a nearby field where we then had scope views of the birds feeding in the ploughed lands! Benvie Gardens was lively with bird activity. Red-chested Cuckoo, Chorister Robin-Chat, Grey Cuckooshrike, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Black-headed Oriole and our biggest target, the Orange Ground Thrush performed beautifully as it called from one of the large exotic trees!



African Yellow Warbler

Our next stop was the Underberg. The grounds at Cedar Gardens B&B were active with Cape Robin Chat, Southern Boubou and



**Orange Ground Thrush**

their bird feeder was humming with Cape Weaver Amethyst, Greater Double-collared and Malachite Sunbirds! Although the Drakensberg Mountains were misted over and it looked ominous for our day's excursion up the exhilarating Sani Pass and into neighbouring Lesotho, the weather soon lifted, and we had a splendid day! Notable highlights included Grey-crowned Crane, Red-throated Wryneck, Olive Woodpecker, Half-collared Kingfisher, Bokmakierie, Barratt's Warbler, Buff-streaked Chat, Gurney's Sugarbird, Wailing Cisticola, Yellow Bishop, Cape Bunting, Drakensberg Siskin, Cape and Sentinel Rock Thrush, Karoo and Drakensberg Prinia, Large-billed Lark, Grey Tit, Ground Woodpecker, two families of Drakensberg Rockjumpers, White-necked Raven, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Cape Vulture, Southern Bald Ibis, and Bearded Vulture!

Leaving the mountains, we travelled Northeast up the coast to Zululand! Dlinza Aerial Boardwalk and Ongoye Forest played difficult trying to find Spotted Ground Thrush and Green Barbet, but the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (St. Lucia, Eastern Shores, and Mkuze Game Reserve) warranted species that made up for it! Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Trumpeter and Crowned Hornbill, Rudd's Apalis, Square-tailed Drongo, Woodward's Batis, Livingstone's Turaco, Southern Crested Guineafowl, Crowned Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Black-crowned Night Heron, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Green Malkoha, African Emerald and Klaas's Cuckoo, Rufous-bellied Heron, Black-throated Wattle-eye, White-eared Barbet, African Pygmy Goose, Southern Yellow White-eye, Narina Trogon, Gorgeous Bushshrike, Southern Brown-throated Weaver, African Oystercatcher, Grey-hooded Gull, and Cape Gannet were all the splendid species we spotted. At Cape Vidal, we had cracking views of Humpback Whales breaching, White-fronted Plovers feeding along the water's edge and Greater Crested and



**Yellow-breasted Pipit**



Caspian Terns cruising up and down the beach!



**Southern Bald Ibis**

Hluhluwe floodplain didn't disappoint and offered an array of shoreline birds! Collared Pratincole, Black-winged Lapwing, Kittlitz's Plover, Yellow-billed Egret, Great White Pelican, African Swamphen, Black Heron Little Stint, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Blue-billed Teal, Cape Shoveler and Lesser Jacana all congregated at this remarkable setting!

Exploring Mkuze Game Reserve and its surrounding wetlands, our top birds included: African Goshawk, Diederik Cuckoo, Giant and Malachite Kingfisher, White-browed Robin Chat, Wahlberg's Eagle, Black-bellied Bustard, Pink-backed Pelican, Rufous-naped Lark, Neergaard's Sunbird, Lemon-breasted Canary, Pink-throated Twinspot, Eastern Nicator, Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow and Green-winged Pytilia. We were also surprised and extremely lucky to see a big White Rhinoceros bull drinking and then resting in the waterhole at KuMasinga Hide!

Departing from the Eastern coastal plains we made our way to Wakkerstroom. We spent two days in the acclaimed birding grassland habitat and were joined by local guide Lucky, who showed us most of the sought-after birds for the area! Yellow-breasted Pipit, Eastern Long-billed Lark, Mountain Wheatear, Ant-eating Chat, Denham's Bustard, African Snipe, Black-throated Canary, Greater-striped Swallow, Whiskered Tern, Secretarybird, Southern Pochard, Maccoa Duck, Red-winged Francolin, Spike-heeled Lark, Wing-snapping Cisticola, South African Cliff Swallow, Blue and White-bellied Bustard, Red-chested Flufftail, African



**Meerkats**





**Black Herons**

Rail, Little Bittern and Common Reed Warbler were all spectacular. Black-backed Jackal, Meerkat and Yellow Mongoose were new and great additions to our mammal list!

Kruger National Park was our next destination and lived up to our expectation! The drive from Numbi Gate to Skukuza Rest Camp was miraculous! We were welcomed by a pride of lions lazily strutting off the road, Elephants, Giraffe, and lots of smaller general game species also close to the road! Birds en-route included: Green-capped Eremomela, Natal Spurfowl, African Green Pigeon, Senegal Lapwing, Tawny Eagle, Southern Red-billed Hornbill and Greater Blue-eared and Burchell's Starling.

The three days spent in the Lowveld allowed us to enjoy some of the Kruger best locations for large game species and we added more birds to our ever-growing list. Significant highlights were: Massive Nile Crocodiles

along the prominent rivers, Nile Monitor Lizards, Leopard, African Buffalo, Hippopotamus, Spotted Hyena, troops of Chacma Baboons, Southern Ground Hornbill, White-crowned Lapwing, Marico Sunbird, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Bateleur, African Skimmer, Saddle-billed Stork, African Openbill, African Harrier Hawk, Purple Roller, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Red-headed Weaver, Brown-headed Parrot, Arrow-marked Babbler, Swainson's Spurfowl, African Mourning Dove, Red-crested Korhaan, Greater Painted Snipe, Martial Eagle, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Bearded Woodpecker, Retz's Helmetshrike,



**African Finfoot**





**Chestnut-banded Plover**

Flappet Lark, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Wattled Starling, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, African Firefinch, African Finfoot and Stierling's Wren Warbler.

Travelling Westwards to Johannesburg and then North to Rust de Winter area gave us an opportunity to bird the highveld and to see species that exist in the drier thornveld country. Karoo Thrush, Red-headed Finch, Spotted Thick-knee, Namaqua Dove, Wattled Lapwing, Gabar Goshawk, African Grey Hornbill, Pied Barbet, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Barred Wren Warbler, Black-chested Prinia, Cloud Cisticola, Chestnut-vented Warbler, White-throated Robin-Chat, Scaly-feathered Finch and Great Rufous Sparrow all offered excellent views and wrapped up the Eastern section of our tour.

Saying farewell to some of our group and our driver, we flew Southwest to continue with a five-day Cape extension tour! An afternoon birding walk in the impressive Fynbos rich Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens was wonderful! We had epic sights of Cape Sugarbird, Cape Spurfowl, Cape Bulbul, African Olive Pigeon, Spotted Eagle Owl, Cape White-eye, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Common Chaffinch, Forest Canary, Cape Siskin, and Cape Canary. Unfortunately, the infamous South- Easter wind, best known as the 'Cape Doctor', was upon us and this resulted in our pelagic birding trip being called off! Making up for this, we had more time to bird around Strandfontein Sewage Works where we saw, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Greater Flamingo, Cape Teal, Great Crested and Black-necked Grebe, Whimbrel, Hartlaub's, and Kelp Gull and many more of the common species! We explored a bit of the wine route, had lunch at Spier Winery, birded around the grounds finding Cape Batis, African Dusky Flycatcher and African Hoopoe.



**Cape Lark**



Protea Canary

The Cape Peninsula, West Coast National Park, Langebaan and Velddrif were all great birding spots where we managed to connect with some more Cape specials and other interesting species. These comprised of African Penguin, Sweet Waxbill, Neddicky, Rock Kestrel, Karoo Scrub Robin, Capped Wheatear, Cape Clapper Lark, Grey-backed Cisticola, Southern Black Korhaan, Verreaux's Eagle, Western Barn Owl, Black Harrier, Lesser Flamingo, Cape Lark, Pied Avocet, Chestnut-banded Plover, and Curlew Sandpiper.

Ceres and the Tankwa Karoo were the last destinations of our tour. Fascinated with the change in landscape, from the Protea hillsides, farmlands, Southern edge of the sandstone rock formations of the Cederberg Mountains, up onto the plateau of Koue Bokkeveld and then down into the vast desolate karoo environment blooming with yellow, orange, and purple flowers at the time! Significant species we got our 'bins' on were Layard's Warbler, Protea, White-throated, Yellow, Black-headed Canary, Lark-like Bunting, Rufous-eared Warbler, Pale-winged Starling, Karoo Chat, Grey-back Sparrow-Lark, Karoo Lark, Karoo Eremomela and Pirit Batis.

With the tour coming to an end, everyone on a high but birded out, we headed back to Cape Town International Airport to catch our return flights back home!

## Annotated List of species recorded

For the bird list and more photos, please see the eBird Trip Report:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/163374>

### Mammals

<b>Rock Hyrax</b>	<i>Procavia capensis</i>
<b>African Savanna Elephant</b>	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>
<b>Lion</b>	<i>Panthera leo</i>
<b>Leopard</b>	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
<b>Common Genet</b>	<i>Genetta genetta</i>
<b>Spotted Hyena</b>	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>
<b>Yellow Mongoose</b>	<i>Cynictis penicillate</i>
<b>Cape Grey Mongoose</b>	<i>Herpestes pulverulentus</i>
<b>Common Slender Mongoose</b>	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>
<b>Banded Mongoose</b>	<i>Mungos mungo</i>
<b>Meerkat</b>	<i>Suricata suricatta</i>
<b>Black-backed Jackal</b>	<i>Lupulella mesomelas</i>



**Afro-Australian Fur Seal**  
**African Clawless Otter**  
**Plain's Zebra**  
**White Rhinoceros**  
**Common Warthog**  
**Southern Giraffe**  
**Impala**  
**Springbok**  
**Natal Red Duiker**  
**Black Wildebeest**  
**Blue Wildebeest**  
**Blesbok**  
**Sable Antelope**  
**Waterbuck**  
**Klipspringer**  
**Rhebok**  
**Steenbok**  
**Southern Reedbuck**  
**Bush Duiker**  
**African Buffalo**  
**Nyala**  
**Northern Bushbuck**  
**Greater Kudu**  
**Common Hippopotamus**  
**Humpback Whale**  
**Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat**  
**Egyptian Free-tailed Bat**  
**Thick-tailed Greater Galago**  
**Blue Monkey**  
**Vervet Monkey**  
**Chacma Baboon**  
**Scrub Hare**  
**Smith's Bush Squirrel**  
**Red Bush Squirrel**  
**Eastern Grey Squirrel**  
**Sloggett's Vlei Rat**

*Arctocephalus pusillus*  
*Aonyx capensis*  
*Equus quagga*  
*Ceratotherium simum*  
*Phacochoerus africanus*  
*Giraffa giraffa*  
*Aepyceros melampus*  
*Antidorcas marsupialis*  
*Cephalophus natalensis*  
*Connochaetes gnou*  
*Connochaetes taurinus*  
*Damaliscus pygargus*  
*Hippotragus niger*  
*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*  
*Oreotragus oreotragus*  
*Pelea capreolus*  
*Raphicerus campestris*  
*Redunca arundinum*  
*Sylvicapra grimmia*  
*Syncerus caffer*  
*Tragelaphus angasii*  
*Tragelaphus scriptus*  
*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*  
*Hippopotamus amphibius*  
*Megaptera novaeangliae*  
*Epomophorus wahlbergi*  
*Tadarida aegyptiaca*  
*Otolemur crassicaudatus*  
*Cercopithecus mitis*  
*Chlorocebus pygerythrus*  
*Papio ursinus*  
*Lepus saxatilis*  
*Paraxerus cepapi*  
*Paraxerus palliatus*  
*Sciurus carolinensis*  
*Otomys sloggetti*

### Reptiles & Amphibians

**Angulated Tortoise**  
**Natal Hinge-back Tortoise**  
**Leopard Tortoise**  
**Helmeted Turtle/ Terrapin**  
**Southern Tree Agama**  
**Ground Agama**  
**Flap-neck Chameleon**  
**House Gecko**  
**Cape Girdled Lizard**

*Chersina angulate*  
*Kinixys natalensis*  
*Stigmochelys pardalis*  
*Pelomedusa subrufa*  
*Acanthocercus atricollis*  
*Agama aculeata*  
*Chamaeleo dilepis*  
*Hemidactylus mabouia*  
*Cordylus corylus*





**African Striped Skink**  
**Nile Monitor**  
**Nile Crocodile**

*Trachylepis striata*  
*Varanus niloticus*  
*Crocodylus niloticus*

**Guttural Toad (heard)**  
**Vlei Frog (heard)**  
**Water Lily Frog (heard)**  
**Tinker Reed Frog (heard)**  
**Painted Reed Frog (heard)**  
**Bubbling Kassina (heard)**  
**Whistling Rain Frog (heard)**  
**Sharp-nosed Grass Frog**  
**Cape River Frog**

*Sclerophrys gutturalis*  
*Hylambates maculatus*  
*Hyperolius pusillus*  
*Hyperolius tuberilinguis*  
*Hyperolius marmoratus*  
*Kassina senegalensis*  
*Breviceps sopranus*  
*Ptychadena oxyrhynchus*  
*Amietia fuscigula*

### **Butterflies**

**African Monarch**  
**Common Bush Brown**  
**Friar**  
**Novice**  
**Common Bush Brown**  
**Streaked Sailor**  
**Golden Piper**  
**Yellow Pansy**  
**Blue Pansy**  
**Painted Lady**  
**Common Purple Tip**  
**Citrus Swallowtail**

*Danaus chrysippus*  
*Bicyclus safitza*  
*Amauris niavivus*  
*Amauris ochlea*  
*Bicyclus safitza*  
*Neptis goochii*  
*Eurytela dryope*  
*Junonia hierta*  
*Junonia oenone*  
*Venessa cardui*  
*Colotis ione*  
*Papilio demodocus*

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