

## **SOUTH AFRICA - 27th Sep to 17th Oct 2007**

John & Anne Wilson, Dave Bush & Alan Rosney

All travel arrangements booked online. Flights *in theory* with KLM from Cardiff via Amsterdam thence Cape Town. Putting us off KLM for life, a journey that should have seen us leave Cardiff at 06:30 and arrive at Cape Town 19:00 approx, the same day, saw us arrive at 13:00 approx the following day after 31 hrs travel!! Due to an alleged puncture on the Cardiff departure we were taxied to LHR, then BA to Frankfurt then SAA to Cape Town. SAA flight was overbooked! After much negotiation we did Frankfurt to Jo'berg later that night, then Jo'berg to Cape Town the following day. Not best pleased but we did all receive a redeemable cash voucher from SAA which considering it was not all entirely their fault we thought was quite good - and we did get the cash.

Accommodation - all booked online:

Cape Town - Goose Green Lodge, Noordhoek - on the Cape Peninsula and about 15 mins from Simons Town. This is run by an old tennis club friend of ours from Kent days, found purely by accident whilst searching the web. I can recommend it [B&B and s/c]. [[coombes@iafrica.com](mailto:coombes@iafrica.com)]

Hermanus - Avalon-on-sea B&B - right by the whale watching cliff path [[info@avalononsea.co.za](mailto:info@avalononsea.co.za)]

Buchu Bush Camp - adjacent De Hoop Nature Reserve - comfortable rustic timber cabins and a central building with restaurant. - [www.buchu-bushcamp.com](http://www.buchu-bushcamp.com); [info@buchu-bushcamp.com](mailto:info@buchu-bushcamp.com)

Plettenberg - Maesescha Country Retreat - approx 5 miles W of Plett - recommended by a friend of ours whose neighbour moved out there to buy & run this s/c establishment -

[www.masescha.co.za/index.asp](http://www.masescha.co.za/index.asp) ; [mwmasescha@mweb.co.za](mailto:mwmasescha@mweb.co.za)

Grootvadersbosch Forest - Honeywood Guest Farm - delightful s/c or B&B just outside the forest reserve entrance [N of Swellendam]; <http://www.honeywoodfarm.co.za/> ;

[john@honeywoodfarm.co.za](mailto:john@honeywoodfarm.co.za)

The latter is recommended by birdingafrica.com, with whom we also booked a 2 day guided trip into the Tanqua Karoo desert area, N of Cape Town, and also a pelagic out of Simons Town.

Books - SASOL Field Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa - ISBN 1 86872 721 1 Publ by Struik

SASOL Southern African Bird Finder - ISBN 1 86872 725 4 publ by Stuiik

### **27th Sep**

Having arrived at 13:00, completely knackered, we just had an afternoon stroll down the road from Goose Green Lodge, to an area of damp fields and marsh. For a local afternoon stroll it produced an impressive list of 29 spp including Black-shouldered Kite and African Marsh-harrier, Yellow-billed Duck, Red-billed Teal, Egyptian Goose, Red-knobbed Coot and Little Grebe on a couple of small pools, and Hadeda Ibis, African Sacred Ibis, Black-headed Heron, Common Fiscal [Shrike], Speckled Pigeon, Laughing Dove and Red-eyed Dove, Cape White-eye, Red-winged Starling, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, and many more. We retired early eve for some zzzz's and then went for an excellent evening meal at the Red Herring in Noordhoek village - highly recommended.

### **28th Sep**

Started OK with sun & cloud, but got v windy later and then some rain. We started off just up the hill from our pals B&B in Silvermine Nature Reserve, which has a small reservoir and large tracts of typical fynbos [pronounced 'faynbos'] habitat [ericas, proteas and other low woody shrubs]. It was pretty windy here but we had brief views of a Southern Boubou, then Orange-breasted Sunbird feeding young, a stunning Malachite Sunbird [larger than the other species and shiny bottle green in colour], a pair of magnificent Verreauxs Eagles [aka Black Eagle], a Jackal Buzzard, Cape Francolin, Cape Robin-chat, and Karoo [aka Spotted] Prinia.

We then dropped down to the coast, to a small settlement called Kommetjie [pronounced Kommeckie]. This is a recommended site for the scarce Bank Cormorant, of which we saw a good number, together with the White-breasted -, Crowned- and Cape- varieties too. There were also large numbers of Swift Tern and Sandwich Tern, with a few Antarctic Tern dotted amongst them. Our first African Black Oystercatcher revealed itself - this is a species limited to a relatively few

sites along the SA coast. Alongside the Terns were many Hartlaubs Gulls and a few Cape Gulls too - these appear to be a split from Kelp Gull [*Larus dominicanus*]. We also added Blacksmith Plover, Pied Kingfisher, Cape Canary and White-rumped Swift to our rapidly growing list. By now it was blowing a gale onshore and we moved to a nearby location in Kommetjie to have our picnic lunch. Looking out to sea near a small lighthouse we were pleased to see a good number of Shy Albatross passing and also large numbers of dark shearwater-types which were either Sooty Shearwaters or White-chinned Petrels - the conditions [spray and a very strong wind] did not facilitate certain ID, even looking for the crucial features. It was during this stop that I called the pelagic contact on my mobile, to check on weather forecast. Alas the news was bad - huge seas had got up and the marine forecast was very bad for the next two days, the very days we had the pelagic booked for. The trip for tomorrow at least would not run and Sunday looked unlikely too. We would 'phone again tomorrow. Also at this location we had good views of a Cape Grassbird, Cape Wagtail, and Speckled Mousebird, and a couple of White-necked Ravens flew over.

Next stop was Simons Town in the rain where the next new species, a pair of Crowned Lapwing, copulated in the car park! We then moved on to Boulders Beach for a brief stop in increasingly heavy rain, to 'tick' the African Penguins. We would return here later in better weather.

### **29th Sep**

After the pelagic disappointment, it was decided that the first destination today was the famous botanical garden at Kirstenbosch, in warm sunshine. Just outside we saw 2 Yellow-billed Kites flying over. A couple of hours walk around the extensive grounds produced more new species in the shape of Cape Sugarbird, a fantastic bird with long curved bill and even longer tail that loves feeding on the nectar rich proteas, African Dusky Flycatcher, several Sombre Greenbul and a few Olive Thrushes. Anne & Alan saw a Cape Batis. The other sunbirds were also common here [Southern Double-collared-, Orange-breasted- and Malachite]. We were lucky to spot an immature Klaas's Cuckoo sitting in a low bush, a brief fly-over Black Saw-wing [a swallow] and a Rock Kestrel [appears to be an African race of Common Kestrel]. A Cape Francolin paraded around with chicks in tow and there were plenty of Helmeted Guineafowl. We then moved on down to the coast on the SW side of Cape Town, to the Strandfontein Water Treatment Works, which lies just inland of coastal sand dunes. It was now afternoon and a very strong onshore wind had sprung up - this is quite common! Nevertheless, driving around the perimeter of the many lagoons produced a good list of water-borne species, of which 500+ Black-necked Grebes were very impressive, together with a lone Great Crested Grebe. We saw our first Maccoa Ducks here, 10 of them, and other waterfowl comprised Cape Teal, Cape Shoveler, Southern Pochard, Red-billed Teal, Red-knobbed Coot and Spur-winged Goose. Greater Flamingo numbered 500+ and there were 20 Glossy Ibis, African Purple Swamphen, a common Moorhen and 8 African Darters. On the wader front, there was a single Turnstone, 4 Black-winged Stilt, 100+ Avocet, 4 Ringed Plover, Blacksmith Plover. Another wader had us studying it at some length and distance in the strong wind. The size and stature of a Greenshank, this bird had quite definitely, yellow legs and a straight bill which was slightly thicker, esp at the tip, than the elegant slightly uptilted and sharp ended bill of Greenshank. We were 99% sure it was a Greater Yellowlegs - BUT the field guide indicated there had only been one previous record! We mentioned it later, to our birdingafrica.com guide, Callan Cohen, who put it on their Cape Birdnet web site, but checking it later I don't think anyone went to check it out. A further 'phone call confirmed that the alternative pelagic trip tomorrow was also off.

### **30th Sep**

Just after breakfast at Noordhoek, a Greater Striped Swallow flew around the garden. Instead of the pelagic we decided to head up the west coast. We turned off about 50 miles N of Cape Town on to the 'Darling Wildflower Loop', a dirt road that loops off the main highway through the small town of Darling, passing through agricultural land and grassland rich in wild flowers. This took us quite some time with frequent stops for roadside birding. Star bird to start with was a Black Harrier drifting across the fields. We soon started adding new birds, with Southern Masked Weaver, Cape Weaver, Pied Crow, Rock Martin, Namaqua Dove, Capped Wheatear, Blue

Crane, South African Shelduck, Cloud Cisticola, Pied Starling, Red Bishop, Yellow Bishop, African [Grassveld] Pipit, African Hoopoe, and Pin-tailed Wydah. We also found 10+ European Bee-eater, more Yellow-billed Kite and an imm Black-shouldered Kite and many other 'repeats'. A short diversion through a small wild flower reserve was well worth the effort.

We thus did not arrive at the southern, Geelbeck, end of the West Coast National Park until mid afternoon. We decided to visit the hide overlooking the huge tidal lagoon and fortunately the tide was in our favour. There were plenty of waders feeding, the most impressive being 500+ Curlew Sandpiper! Also present were 12 Marsh Sandpiper, Little Stint, Grey Plover, Sanderling, 2 Whimbrel, 6+ Greenshank, 1 Turnstone, 6 Ruff, and Black-winged Stilt. A tiny hide buried in a sandbank, which we were directed to by a student party that were staying in the field centre, gave us excellent views of 2 new waders - 10 White-fronted Plover and 2 Chestnut-banded Plover. One of the students had apparently seen a Lesser Sand-plover [aka Mongolian Plover] the previous day, and we were pleased to find this bird from the 'sandbank' hide too. Not a lifer but worth adding to the list. Walking back to the car park a good number of Cape [Orange-throated] Longclaw were seen, plus an imm Black Harrier and 4 Ostrich. Back at the car park a Fiscal Flycatcher female showed, and then yours truly spotted a dark bird on the ground. This had all the features of a White-winged Widowbird - superficially like the Yellow Bishop [aka Yellow-rumped Widowbird], it lacks the yellow rump and has white edges to the major coverts and tertials. All these were seen and videoed. This bird was well out of its normal range which is way over to the north-east. Whether it was a vagrant is open to conjecture. Just as we were leaving a Caspian Tern flew over.

### **1st Oct**

This was the first day of our 2 day guided trip into the Tanqua Karoo desert. We met up with the leader, Callan Cohen at BirdingAfrica's offices in Pinelands, a suburb of Cape Town. Callan is one of the authors of the SASOL Southern African Bird Finder. Apart from us 4 there were 2 other participants, a Brit who although very twitchy, became very useful on our return journey to Cape Town, and a SA lady who lived nearby. First significant birds of the day were quite unexpected - a pair of Spotted Dikkop which were nesting on the grass in a small roundabout in the cul-de-sac where the lady lived. We battled our way out of Cape Town in the rush hour, and eventually came to the first stop at Paarl, the Paarl Water Treatment Works - the most picturesque Sewage Works I've ever been to. We toured slowly round here in the provided minibus. Many birds were present but the new species added were Grey-headed Gull, Water Dikkop [nesting just outside one of the hides], Three-banded Plover, Kelp Gull, Reed Cormorant, Great White Pelican, 2 Black Sparrowhawk [ad and imm - a very large and impressive accipiter], African Spoonbill, Lesser Flamingo, together with Greater Flamingo, Little Rush Warbler, African Reed Warbler, and Lesser Swamp Warbler, White-throated Swallow, Malachite Kingfisher, Little Swift, Pearl-breasted Swallow, and the most spectacular, a Gymnogone very close to the bus [this is also known as African Harrier-hawk]. It is a large grey, round winged raptor with an odd adaptation of being able to bend its ankle joint in opposite directions, which enables it to winkle prey out of holes in trees.

We then set off in earnest for the desert - a long drive. We stopped off at the Bainskloof Pass where after much patient waiting in a tangle of prickly bushes and some judicious 'tape' luring [actually iPod luring] we all got views of bits of the very very skulking Victorinus Warbler, and a pair of rather easier fly-over Verreauxs Eagles. We lunched in the town of Ceres and then roadside stops between there and the edge of the Tanqua Karoo gave us Grey-backed Cisticola, and 2 Large-billed Lark. We finally entered the Tanqua Karoo desert proper, on dirt roads for mile upon mile. More roadside stops produced Pale Chanting Goshawk, a beautifully graceful bird, 2 Karoo Chat, Yellow Canary, 2 Karoo Korhaan, 2 Spike-heeled Lark, 4 Ludwigs Bustard, Red-capped Lark, and 2 Tractrac Chat. We finally arrived at the Tanqua Guesthouse just before dusk.

This guesthouse is something else - the owners farmed the area for many years [livestock mainly] - and bear in mind this is 50km from the nearest neighbour and 200km from the nearest town. They retired from farming and started up a guesthouse business, which has been used in the main by birding groups and wilderness walkers. They have now retired for good and we were the last birding group to stay [indeed they had already moved out but agreed to come back one more

time for us, so we were very lucky]. She is a fabulous cook! The Karoo National Park authority have agreed to take over the house so hopefully accommodation will still be possible, otherwise it is necessary to stay in Ceres which is 200 km away out of the park.

### **2nd Oct**

For our whole day in the Tanqua we birded around the farm and its small water course, and further out into the dry parts of the desert. New birds around the house included Familiar Chat and Common Waxbill. A flock of Namaqua Sandgrouse also flew over and landed in a small paddock, allowing close views. Around the small watercourse, where there was some cover we had White-backed Mousebird, Pririt Batis, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Grey-backed Sparrowlark, Fairy Flycatcher, Black-headed Canary, White-throated Canary, Dusky Sunbird, Namaqua Dove and Acacia Pied Barbet. Drier areas produced a little collection of specialities - Namaqua Warbler, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Layards Tit-babbler, Rufous-eared Warbler and Karoo Eremomela. In addition we found Lark-like Bunting, Karoo Lark, Bokmakierie, Red-capped Lark, Karoo Long-billed Lark, Pale-winged Starling and Cape Bunting. A sudden shout from Callan as we drove further on, and we were soon watching the 'butterfly' display flight of a Black-eared Sparrowlark, a species we were lucky to find as it is nomadic and can turn up almost anywhere. We headed up to another pass, where we saw Mountain Wheatear, a Lanner Falcon, and after another 'patient watching' stop and some more iPOD luring, good views of a couple of Cinnamon-breasted Warblers. These inquisitive skulkers will creep up the opposite side of a boulder near where you are standing and grab a look at you over the top before dropping back out of sight almost immediately. We also made a comfort stop at the park headquarters, where a Lesser Honeyguide sang in a tree and a Fiscal Shrike fed young.

We then started the long journey back to Cape Town. A sudden stop, still in the desert, had us eyeballing a large Puff Adder which Callan had spotted. Walking along the dirt road to get some pix at a respectable distance from this very poisonous snake, Alan Rosney was suddenly alarmed by a slight movement just off the road - another, albeit smaller, Puff Adder was coiled up under a small bush. Further on there was a huge 'bang' - we had a blow-out in a rear tyre! These dirt roads are not to be taken lightly as they are more stone than dirt, and the stones are very sharp. We were 150k from Ceres! Fortunately the twitchy brit birder was a service manager at a garage and leaped out of the minibus and soon had it jacked up and the tyre changed, in about 20 mins. Approaching Ceres, Callan mentioned that the stretch of road was often good for Eagle Owl. Almost immediately one was spotted on a telegraph pole, and with a spotlight, ID'd as a Spotted Eagle Owl. A late supper at a café in Ceres, and a couple of hours later we were back in Cape Town, tired but happy.

### **3rd Oct**

Today we left Noordhoek for our trip up the Garden Route, first overnight stop Hermanus, the well known location for watching Southern Right Whales, which calve offshore at this time of year. En route up the coast from Cape Town we stopped at a small coastal town called Rooi Els, a recommended site for seeing Cape Rockjumper. After finding the right track, between a high rocky crag and the sea, we eventually found a pair of Rockjumper doing as their name suggests amongst the rock strewn slopes below the crag. Three Cape Rock Thrush hopped around the gardens of the holiday homes, and a new bird in the shape of a Levallants Cisticola showed well, as did 4 Cape Bunting, another Verreauxs Eagle, Cape Grassbird and a few other by now familiar species. Near to Rooi Els is the Harold Porter Botanical Garden. We stopped here to have our picnic lunch and soon added the amazing African Paradise Flycatcher to our list. The male has a black head, rusty back and wings and a tail that is about 2 ½ times the length of the bird. It also has a blue bill and eye-ring. Stunning. We also added Cape Bulbul and Swee Waxbill and yet another, or perhaps the same, Verreauxs Eagle. We arrived at Hermanus late afternoon, in time for some shopping to stock up on provisions.

### **4th Oct**

First task of the day was to walk the clifftop path just across the road from the B&B, but no whales were showing. A crowd of people seen thro' the 'scopes on the other side of town indicated that the whales were there. We birded the path and the adjacent fynbos and scrub and soon added

Bar-throated Apalis to the list - a small Dartford Warbler like bird in that it had a frequently cocked long tail on a small compact body - otherwise totally different! We made our way to where the crowd was and soon had amazing views of a good number of Southern Right Whales just offshore, including a number of young animals. In the afternoon we visited Fernkloof Nature Reserve, at the eastern end of the town. This is a small reserve with an area of fynbos leading in to a deep gorge or kloof. We had excellent views of 20+ Cape Sugarbirds here, and picked up Cape Turtle Dove and Olive Pigeon. Alan found us a Neddicky [a cisticola] and we had 3 Fork-tailed Drongos and 4 Cape Batis and a few other species.

### **5th Oct**

Today we pressed on to get to Buchu Bush Camp, just outside De Hoop nature reserve, a very isolated location in the so-called Overberg region, which is a huge area of agricultural land, with only dirt roads. We made a roadside stop at the Uilenkraals Estuary which looked quite good. Here we saw 3 White-fronted Plover, 30+ Whimbrel, a Marsh Sandpiper, a Blue Crane, Pied Kingfisher, Cape Wagtail, and whilst skulking off for a pee behind a bush, I found 2 Red-faced Mousebirds. Sadly they flew off and did not return for the others to see. We then travelled entirely on dirt roads, from Die Dam to Bredasdorp, a small town in the middle of the Overberg. Along the way we were signed on to a diversion after which we had no idea where we were on the map. We made stops, including roadside pools, and found some good species. Agulhas Long-billed Lark were soon located, and Red-capped Lark were very common. Raptors seen were Black Harrier, African Marsh-harrier, Yellow-billed Kite, Black Sparrowhawk, and 1 African Fish Eagle, our first of the trip. Blue Crane and Ostrich became commonplace [this is the main area for Blue Cranes]. We heard Common Quail. At one roadside pool we found Curlew Sandpiper, African Shelduck, African Spoonbill, Ringed Plover, 4 Glossy Ibis and Brown-throated Martin. In addition we found 2 Temmincks Stints - a rare vagrant. We arrived at Buchu Bush Camp in the late afternoon, and once settled I had quick scan and found Karoo Scrub-robin outside our chalet.

Buchu Bush Camp is a delightful camp with rustic wooden cabins which can sleep 4 altho' 2 is better, and there is a central building where breakfast and an evening meal, if required, is served.

### **6th Oct**

Sunny with some cloud, quite windy p.m. [this latter seems to be a feature]. Just before breakfast I had another brief view bird - a Southern Tchagra - which refused to show for the others. Brimstone [Bully] Canary was a new bird for the trip as was African Black Swift. After breakfast we drove in to De Hoop Nature Reserve, a huge reserve with fynbos, a large lagoon and a large section of sands dunes known as Koppie Aleen. The lagoon had many by now familiar waterfowl, but 4 Kittlitz's Plover were good to find. A couple of Karoo Scrub-robin showed well for the others. We made our way over to the Koppie Aleen dunes by the sea, and there we found at least 17 Southern Right Whales, some of which gave a good display of breaching. We had a picnic near the reserve centre, and were entertained by many Cape Weavers coming down from an adjacent tree for our crumbs. Soon a fluty call in the tree alerted us to the presence of 3 Southern Boubou, which also came for food. A movement nearby turned in to a Water Dikkop. It walked up and down in true Stone-curlew like fashion and eventually plucked up courage to come within a couple of feet of the table to pick up sausage roll crumbs - an amazing sight. Cape Sparrows also kept us company. In the air around the reserve centre, we were pleased to see about 20 Horus Swift [this is a good place for them] and many Little Swift too. In an arm of the lagoon nearby we saw our only Hammerkop of the trip, and 4 Caspian Terns flew in to feed. We then drove a circular route within the reserve, and found a troupe of Chacma Baboons, some Bontebok and Cape Zebra, and also Eland. A large Bustard which flew in was probably a Denhams but was not seen well enough.

### **7th Oct**

Today we drove a large circular route around the Overberg in fairly poor weather. First stop after leaving Buchu, was the junction of the exit road from De Hoop with the 'main' dirt road. Here we had good views of a pair of Denhams Bustard in a field, 6 Blue Cranes, and then Dave Bush

picked up a new bird in the shape of a Diederick Cuckoo. Two Bokmakieries gave good views together with what by now were a number of familiar birds.

Next was the Potberg NR section of De Hoop, a location where the endangered Cape Vulture breeds [this is related to the European Griffon Vulture, which it closely resembles]. First birds on arrival were 3 African Hoopoe, and in the wood adjacent to the car park, a pair of Cardinal Woodpeckers. Scanning the ridge adjacent the reserve we were soon watching 10+ Cape Vultures drifting along. We took a track through the wood to an open area behind, and found several Cape Batis, 2 Southern Boubou, African Paradise-flycatcher, Olive Thrush, Cape Robin-chat, Fiscal Flycatcher, and excellent views of a Southern Tchagra. A pair of Amethyst Sunbird was also a good find.

We moved on to a settlement called Malagas, where there is an ancient hand pulled pont ferry across the river. Whilst waiting for the ferry to come across and collect us we found an adult Klaas's Cuckoo and 6+ Red Bishops nest building in the reeds. We pressed on stopping on and off to scan the large fields and roadside pools. We saw at least 4 more Denhams Bustard including a male displaying, 30+ Blue Cranes, 2 Karoo Bustard, 2 Little Stints by a roadside pool and came across a Yellow-billed Kite feeding on a road kill, which turned out to be a Spotted Eagle Owl. Mammals were represented by a Grysbok, 6 Grey Rhebok and 12+ Springbok.

We returned to Buchu for a last meal in the excellent restaurant.

### **8th Oct**

Drove from Buchu further east along the Garden Route, to Plettenberg. We stopped on the way at Wilderness, a natural area with three lakes and a river. Richard Smith had recommended a spot in the Ebbw & Flow camp site for Knysna Lourie [Turaco]. This [i.e the spot] was easily found although the specific tree that Richard had mentioned wasn't productive - probably 'cos it wasn't in fruit. First bird was a stunning Chorister Robin feeding on the ground. Whilst I disappeared to use the facilities the others saw a Lourie in flight. Fortunately another showed not long after I returned. Batises, Boubous and African Dusky Flycatcher showed well and then another two new birds - a male Black-backed Puffback [a small shrike] and a Greater Double-collared Sunbird and also another Amethyst Sunbird. We had now seen all 6 expected Sunbird species.

We arrived at Masescha Retreat near Plettenberg [known locally as Plett], mid afternoon and after settling in explored the large grounds, which had 3 small pools and a forest at the bottom. Two Forest Buzzards were new for the list and a Black-headed Oriole flew over as we were chatting to our hosts. An African Fish Eagle flew from a tree in the grounds - apparently a regular visitor and many of the common species were present including Cape Whiteeye, -Weaver and -Sparrow.

### **9th Oct**

A dull day with drizzle at first. We set off for Natures Valley, a few km east of Plett. An unproductive search at the top of the steep descent down to Natures Valley beach, for Lazy Cisticola was abandoned and we parked up and decided to take the Grootriviere Trail. The trees in the car park revealed Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, another new bird, and Knysna Louries could be heard uttering their harsh calls in the surrounding woodland. We soon had excellent views of these gaudy green Turacos with their crest and bright vermilion wing flashes when they flew. Along the trail we picked up another 3 Black-backed Puffbacks and then new birds in the shape of 2 Forest Canaries, 3 Black-headed Orioles [better views], 4 splendid Green Wood-hoopoes, 6+ Black-bellied Starlings and thanks to Annes eagle eyes, a Green-backed Camaroptera [also known as Green-backed Bleating Warbler]. We completed the trail and had just got to the small café when the heavens opened and produced the heaviest downpour I have ever seen.

### **10th Oct**

A return trip to Wilderness. Here we walked the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail, but did not see one! However 2 Knysna Warblers were a welcome find as we had dipped on these at a recommended site near Kirstenbosch in Cape Town. Forest Canaries were plentiful here as were many of the other species already seen. However we successfully found Olive Bush-shrike and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, more Knysna Louries, and whilst picnicking in the south campsite, a fly-by Giant Kingfisher.

After lunch we moved on to the Malachite Hide overlooking Langvlei, one of the Wilderness lakes. Just outside was a male Pin-tailed Wydah and 6+ Common Waxbill. The lake held 1000+ Red-knobbed Coot, Great-crested- and Little Grebes and a White-throated Swallow sat on a twig in front of the hide. Alpine Swifts were much in evidence and 2 African Fish Eagles flew over, calling. Also up with them were 3 Jackal Buzzards. Further on we stopped by Rondevlei, a smaller lake. Here 6+ Black-necked Grebes were with the other two common species. Also familiar was a Grey Heron and Little Egret. Two other Fish Eagles [immatures] were seen on the ground. Two Malachite and 2 Pied Kingfishers showed well, and Alan spotted a Tambourine Dove on the road and just after that a Red-necked Francolin [Spur-fowl] wandered along the road as we approached. After a good day we went back to Masescha and in the late afternoon watched 50+ African Black Swift and a Purple Heron fly over, whilst a Black-headed Heron strutted in the grounds. On a short walk up the entrance track Dave and I saw a Little Sparrowhawk.

### **11th Oct**

Today we took a small boat trip up the nearby Keurbooms River in warm sunshine. Quite a few Reed Cormorant gave good views and another for the list. We were dropped off on a small beach where a short trail led off into the forest. We walked the trail which proved quite productive and added Red-chested Cuckoo to the trip list. Also worth seeing was the bizarre display of a Green-backed Camaroptera. This small long-tailed small bodied 'warbler' was observed jumping up and down on the ground in a jerky fashion, flicking its wings. On the way back down the river a pair of Half-collared Kingfishers were found by the boatman and 2 Black Saw-wings flew over the canopy. Best find though, was a female African Black Duck with a brood of several ducklings. Back near the jetty a Common Sandpiper was feeding on the exposed mud. On the recommendation of the boatman we drove a couple of miles west and worked the Bitou River estuary. We finally found Lazy Cisticola here by the roadside. The estuary was very productive with Red-billed Teal, 20 Yellow-billed Duck, 33 South African Shelduck, 20+ Black-winged Stilt, 2 Yellow-billed Egret [another new species], 3 Greenshank, 3 Marsh Sandpiper, an Avocet, African Sacred Ibis, African Spoonbill, a Kittlitz's Plover, 2 Whimbrel, Cape Longclaw, Forest Buzzard, and White-necked Raven.

### **12th Oct**

A transfer day. En route west to Swellendam we made a road stop to watch a 'kettle' of 60+ Blue Cranes circling - an impressive sight. After another dirt road diversion to avoid a landslip we eventually arrived at Honeywood Guest Farm where we were made very welcome and shown into our comfy bungalow. The farm lies just outside the entrance to Grootvadersbosch Nature Reserve. The view from the garden was stunning - huge tract of forest [Grootvadersbosch], mountains and rolling farmland. The front lawn immediately produced a little flock of 13 Sweet Waxbill. Up to 4 Red-chested Cuckoos were calling - the call is very strident and carries a long way - if you are musical it is rendered by 'me, re, doh, ... me, re, doh' non-stop. A couple of Plain-backed Pipits were in an adjacent paddock and over the forest we saw our second Gymnogene, being mobbed by a Forest Buzzard. A couple of Streaky-headed Seed-eaters [canaries] were added to the list and White-rumped Swifts were plentiful, as were many other common species. A pair of Fiscal Flycatcher were feeding young in the garden.

### **13th Oct**

After a wonderful breakfast provided by our hosts, we drove the short distance to the forest reserve entrance [small fee]. It was going to be a very hot day. We decided on a trail and very soon the first new trip birds came in the form of a pair of Olive Woodpeckers. There were many other common birds but the other highlights were 4 African Paradise Flycatchers, Olive Bush-shrike, and several Narina Trogon heard calling from the other side of the forest. We retired after a hot morning and took a picnic lunch back at the house, and then returned for the afternoon to walk a different trail. This produced another new bird which I was lucky enough to more or less accidentally come across whilst scanning the canopy - a Grey Cuckooshrike. Up to 5 Olive Pigeons were seen amongst the common species and Narina Trogon again calling fairly close, but despite my being able to produce a passing imitation of the hooting call, we were not able to call one down into view.

We finally returned to the house and were eventually treated to a superb evening meal and a bottle of wine to take back to our bungalow to watch the Rugby!

Whilst at Grootvadersbosch I contacted the pelagic guys again and they eventually called back to say that they had chartered a boat just for us although we would have to pay a bit over the odds as it would not have the minimum quota of passengers for a cost effective trip. We were OK with that. This was scheduled for the Tues after we got back to Cape Town.

#### **14th Oct**

We said our goodbyes and set off for the long journey back to Cape Town via Montagu and Worcester. Montagu was an interesting little town with a rather smelly pond in the middle which was home to a sizeable mixed Heron/Egret colony. Whilst having a brief stop off to witness this we had a pale phase Booted Eagle fly over. Eventually made it back to Cape Town after passing through some heavy rain, spectacularly so over the Sir Lowrys Pass to the east of Cape Town.

#### **15th Oct**

Tourist day - we managed a last minute sneak on to the heavily booked Robben Island trip where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for 17 years. We were taken round by an ex-inmate. The return crossing on the ferry produced a few Cape Gannet and both Arctic and Pomarine Skua. Lunch at the Victoria Dock area and then up Cable Mountain on a wonderfully clear afternoon with no 'tablecloth' to block the view. A phone call to the pelagic folk and unbelievably another disappointment - forecast for the following morning was again horrendous as far as sea conditions were concerned and we were foiled again. I learnt later that they had had to cancel an unprecedented number of trips in Oct 2007 due to persistent strong winds and big seas off the Cape.

#### **16th Oct**

Following the pelagic disappointment we decided to get down to the Cape of Good Hope today and took in Boulders Beach on the way for another look at the penguins. The Cape was as windswept and rugged as expected, and of course busy with tourist buses turning up every few minutes. Nevertheless worth the visit although just producing Cape Gannet and Cormorant, Swift Tern, an Arctic Skua, Red-winged Starling and Familiar Chat, but sadly none of the hoped for blown in pelagic birds which might have sweetened the disappointment somewhat. On the way back up the peninsula we took a side road to Olifantsbos, a nice deserted beach area on the east side where we found Swift- Sandwich- and Antarctic Tern, Hartlaubs- and Cape Gulls, 6 African Black Oystercatcher, 2 White-fronted Plover, 2 Kittlitz's Plover, 14 Ringed Plover and 22 Sacred Ibis.

#### **17th Oct**

Final day - I had read about Intaka Island, a wetland preserve within the vast Cape Town conurbation so we set off there as it was only a short drive to the other side of the city from Noordhoek. Finding the site was another matter! It is in the middle of a vast development site called Century City. The instructions in the Bird Finder were out of date as development is going on all the time, but the reserve itself is inviolate. After driving around in circles for about 30 mins we eventually found a way in and were made very welcome by the duty ranger. I don't think he gets many visitors as he insisted on taking a group photo of us, especially as we were Europeans. One possibility here is Greater Painted Snipe and also Black Crake. Sadly we dipped on both these despite some 'gen' from the ranger as to the best areas. It was a very windy day again but we did pretty well with 38 species including a Little Bittern [new for the trip] and a pair of Purple Heron with a nest.

Flight home was uneventful!

Must return in the future to make up for the 'dip' on the pelagic.

Trip list follows - 246 species.

Ostrich  
African Penguin  
Black-necked Grebe  
Great Crested Grebe  
Little Grebe  
Shy Albatross  
Sooty Shearwater  
Cape Gannet  
African Darter  
Bank Cormorant  
Cape Cormorant  
Crowned Cormorant  
Reed Cormorant  
White-breasted Cormorant  
White Pelican  
Black-crowned Night-heron  
Black-headed Heron  
Cattle Egret  
Grey Heron  
Little Bittern  
Little Egret  
Purple Heron  
Yellow-billed Egret  
Hammerkop  
Greater Flamingo  
Lesser Flamingo  
African Spoonbill  
Glossy Ibis  
Hadedda Ibis  
Sacred Ibis  
Maccoa Duck  
African Black Duck  
Cape Shoveler  
Cape Teal  
Egyptian Goose  
Mallard  
Red-billed Teal  
South African Shelduck  
Southern Pochard  
Spur-winged Goose  
Yellow-billed Duck  
African Fish Eagle  
African Marsh-harrier  
Black Harrier  
Black-shouldered Kite  
Cape Vulture  
Gymnogene  
Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk  
Yellow-billed Kite  
Black Sparrowhawk  
Little Sparrowhawk  
Booted Eagle  
Forest Buzzard  
Jackal Buzzard  
Verreauxs Eagle  
Lanner Falcon  
Rock Kestrel  
Cape Francolin  
Quail

Red-necked Spurfowl  
Helmeted Guineafowl  
Blue Crane  
African Purple Swamphen  
Moorhen  
Red-knobbed Coot  
Denhams Bustard  
Karoo Korhaan  
Ludwigs Bustard  
African Black Oystercatcher  
Avocet  
Black-winged Stilt  
Spotted Dikkop  
Water Dikkop  
Blacksmith Lapwing  
Chestnut-banded Plover  
Crowned Lapwing  
Grey Plover  
Kittlitzs Plover  
Lesser Sand Plover  
Ringed Plover  
Three-banded Plover  
White-fronted Plover  
Common Sandpiper  
Curlew Sandpiper  
Greater Yellowlegs  
Greenshank  
Little Stint  
Marsh Sandpiper  
Ruff  
Sanderling  
Temmincks Stint  
Turnstone  
Whimbrel  
Arctic Skua  
Pomarine Skua  
Cape Gull  
Grey-headed Gull  
Hartlaubs Gull  
Kelp Gull  
Antarctic Tern  
Caspian Tern  
Sandwich Tern  
Swift Tern  
Namaqua Sandgrouse  
African Olive Pigeon  
Cape Turtle Dove  
Laughing Dove  
Red-eyed Dove  
Rock Dove  
Speckled Pigeon  
Namaqua Dove  
Tambourine Dove  
Knysna Lourie  
Diederick Cuckoo  
Klaass Cuckoo  
Red-chested Cuckoo  
Spotted Eagle-owl  
African Black Swift

Alpine Swift  
Horus Swift  
Little Swift  
White-rumped Swift  
Red-faced Mousebird  
Speckled Mousebird  
White-backed Mousebird  
Narina Trogon  
Giant Kingfisher  
Pied Kingfisher  
Half-collared Kingfisher  
Malachite Kingfisher  
Bee-eater  
African Hoopoe  
Green Wood-hoopoe  
Acacia Pied Barbet  
Lesser Honeyguide  
Cardinal Woodpecker  
Olive Woodpecker  
Agulhas Long-billed Lark  
Black-eared Sparrowlark  
Grey-backed Sparrowlark  
Karoo Lark  
Karoo Long-billed Lark  
Large-billed Lark  
Red-capped Lark  
Spike-heeled Lark  
Black Saw-wing  
Brown-throated Martin  
Greater Striped Swallow  
Pearl-breasted Swallow  
Rock Martin  
Swallow  
White-throated Swallow  
African Pipit  
Cape Longclaw  
Cape Wagtail  
Plain-backed Pipit  
Grey Cuckooshrike  
Cape Bulbul  
Sombre Greenbul  
Black-backed Puffback  
Bokmakierie  
Fiscal Shrike  
Olive Bush-shrike  
Southern Boubou  
Southern Tchagra  
Cape Rock-jumper  
Cape Rock-thrush  
Olive Thrush  
African Stonechat  
Cape Robin-chat  
Capped Wheatear  
Chorister Robin-chat  
Familiar Chat  
Karoo Chat  
Karoo Scrub-robin  
Mountain Wheatear  
Tractrac Chat

Bar-throated Apalis  
Cinnamon-breasted Warbler  
Cloud Cisticola  
Fairy Flycatcher  
Green-backed Camaroptera  
Grey-backed Cisticola  
Karoo Prinia  
Lazy Cisticola  
Levaillants Cisticola  
Namaqua Warbler  
Neddicky  
Rufous-eared Warbler  
African Reed-warbler  
Cape Grassbird  
Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler  
Karoo Eremomela  
Knysna Warbler  
Layards Tit-babbler  
Lesser Swamp-warbler  
Little Rush-warbler  
Victorins Warbler  
Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler  
African Dusky Flycatcher  
Fiscal Flycatcher  
Spotted Flycatcher

Cape Batis  
Pirit Batis  
African Paradise-flycatcher  
Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher  
Amethyst Sunbird  
Dusky Sunbird  
Greater Double-collared Sunbird  
Malachite Sunbird  
Orange-breasted Sunbird  
Southern Double-collared Sunbird  
Cape White-eye  
Cape Sugarbird  
Fork-tailed Drongo  
Cape Crow  
House Crow  
Pied Crow  
White-necked Raven  
Black-headed Oriole  
Black-bellied Starling  
Pale-winged Starling  
Pied Starling  
Red-winged Starling  
Starling

Cape Bunting  
Lark-like Bunting  
Black-headed Canary  
Brimstone Canary  
Cape Canary  
Chaffinch  
Forest Canary  
Streaky-headed Seed-eater  
White-throated Canary  
Yellow Canary  
Common Waxbill  
Pin-tailed Wydah  
Swee Waxbill  
Cape Weaver  
Red Bishop  
Southern Masked Weaver  
White-winged Widowbird  
Yellow Bishop  
Cape Sparrow  
House Sparrow  
Southern Grey-headed Sparrow