

# South Africa



## Western Cape



9<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2007





Tuesday, 9th	Cape Town to Oudtshoorn Heidelberg Oudtshoorn	9:30 - 16:15 12:30 - 13:00 16:30+
Wednesday, 10th	The Yot Club Cango Wildlife Ranch Buffelsdrift Game Reserve	6:00 - 8:00 9:30 - 12:15 13:00 - 17:30
Thursday, 11th	Meerkats Buffalo Hills	6:20 - 9:30 15:00 - 17:30
Friday, 12th	Buffalo Hills	6:00 - 8:00
Sunday, 15th	Brenton-on-Sea, Knysna Hermanus	6:15 - 7:30 14:00 - 15:00
Wednesday, 17th	Boulders Beach to Cape Point	Full day
Thursday, 18th	Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens	10:00 - 12:15 17:00 - 18:15

# THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

8<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2007

## Introduction

The primary and unashamed reason for our trip to South Africa was to see Meerkats in the wild. This had been an ambition for some years, and we had thought that we would have to visit Namibia or Botswana to do this. Well known distribution in South Africa is in the North-west of the country, but we had wanted to plan a holiday in South Africa to cover the Garden Route, which is to the East of Cape Town. This was then found to be possible when I came across the Meerkat Magic project ([www.meerkatmagic.com](http://www.meerkatmagic.com)).

Grant McIlrath had suspected that Meerkats could be found in the Klein Karoo of South Africa, which is within throwing distance of the coastal route. He duly found a few gangs of them near Oudtshoorn, and now runs small group tours to see them, as a secondary objective to the research.



Working around this, following two booked visits with Grant at the beginning of the 11 nights holiday, we spent a further 3 nights in the Garden Route area, before returning to Cape Town for 5 nights at the end of the vacation. Casual birding was possible around the many and varied activities which we did, such as game drives, a beach walk, table mountain, Robben Island (good for the seabirds on the boat trip out), and the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. In addition, the accommodations which we stayed at along the Garden Route were surrounded by good birding (and scenic) locations, leading to a few early morning walks before breakfast.

In addition to the birds which were seen, there was also some potential for mammals. Unlike the central African countries of big game reserves and free flowing herds, much of South Africa is fenced and owned, with many of the indigenous species being either hunted or moved from original habitat. The answer for many is the setting up of fenced game reserves, quite often covering a large area. Originally indigenous species are then reintroduced and left to fend for themselves (on all but the more purely commercial and poorly run operations). Thus, mammals can be seen, and these will include some truly wild animals, usually of the smaller and more mobile varieties. Sorting out these truly wild animals can quite often be tricky, but it also does not detract from the enjoyment that can be had from seeing reintroduced wildlife in the correct game reserve settings.

The timing of our trip meant that we were in the country during mid-Spring. Considering that the northern counterpart of our latitude was Morocco, the temperatures should have regularly been in the 30's, as experienced towards the end of our stay. However, we landed in unseasonably cold and wet conditions which were not too different from the British Autumn we had just left behind.

## Getting around

For drivers from the UK accustomed to having a steering wheel on the right hand side, South Africa is a dream come true, since they also drive on the left hand side of the road.

The road system in the country is excellent, with very good roads, clear sign posting, and generally a safe standard of driving. Even the city of Cape Town is relatively straight forward, with one or two main arterial highways cutting through the city bowl. Safety in the Western Cape is much better than in the larger cities, such as Durban and Johannesburg. However, this is still something of a problem in certain quarters, and it is best to keep the car doors locked at all times, and be careful of quieter areas after dark (and even some parts during the day). The Garden Route is reportedly a much safer area to be, although it has to be said that we didn't come across any problems during our trip on any day.

Our flights from the UK were via Amsterdam (using KLM), leaving our home and landing at Cape Town on the same day, with no time difference between Europe and our destination. Since the arrival time was at about 10pm, we stayed in the airport Road Lodge overnight, picking up the hire car from Europcar after breakfast the next morning. The airport is situated next to the main N2 motorway, which links Cape Town and the coastal Garden Route, making initial navigation very easy. With the Pound sterling strong against the Rand, petrol was much cheaper than at home (about half the price).

### **Meerkat Magic ( [www.meerkatmagic.com](http://www.meerkatmagic.com) )**

For those wanting to see Meerkats in the wild, this is an excellent experience. The major distribution areas of Meerkats are within Namibia and Botswana, but even then they tend to spot humans from some distance and so are hard to see. Grant McIlrath has been researching three gangs of Meerkats near Oudtshoorn in the Klein Karoo for 7 years, and it has taken a fair portion of this time to gain their confidence and so be able to see them at very close quarters. It has to be stressed that these are truly wild, with no human contact whatsoever. To aid the financial side of the research, Grant leads small groups to a sleeping burrow, where they tend to emerge at very close quarters once the sun has risen. He then follows the foragers for some time. It is advisable to book ahead via the website, and it has to be noted that the Meerkats don't emerge if it is cold and wet (particularly the latter) as we found out when the first of our two mornings was cancelled just as we were leaving for the rendezvous at 5:40am. However, the next morning was stunning, with the whole gang performing until just before 10am. In addition, a Southern Black Korhaan was calling behind our stakeout in the rising sun just behind us, with Karoo and the less common Spike-heeled Larks often encountered.

### **Accommodation**

Our experience of hotels in South Africa is very limited, but we opted for B&B's since they seem to be cheaper yet of an excellent standard, with notably good breakfasts in every case. An additional benefit of the places we stayed (apart from Cape Town) was that they were surrounded by open habitat, and so spare time for a walk out from them was good for an interesting range of bird species.

### **The Yot Club, Oudtshoorn ( [www.gardenroute-yotclub.com](http://www.gardenroute-yotclub.com) )**

The meeting point for Meerkat Magic is on the outskirts of Oudtshoorn, with the viewing not far from town. Grant has a list of favoured accommodations within the area on the Meerkat Magic website, based on the level of support to the cause, and so we plumped for the Yot Club, which was a superb choice. It is very easy to find, with a scenic and birdy location on the river flowing through town. If staying here, the room to go for is the Luxury Double, not a great deal more expensive than the other internal rooms, but it overlooks the river and the garden, giving entertaining views of your own personal Common Fiscals as well as a good selection of species within the property boundaries.





### **Buffalo Hills Game Lodge ( [www.buffalohills.co.za](http://www.buffalohills.co.za) )**

While visiting the Garden Route, we wanted to see some of the larger mammals living in the wild, and this lodge was not far from our other chosen spots. For a reasonable price, we had a very comfortable en-suite lodge overlooking the meadow, with an electric fence surrounding us to keep out unwanted visitors. The site was originally a dairy farm, and the rather picturesque hill enclosed grazing meadow has been restocked with indigenous and subsequently free roaming wildlife. It is a very relaxing spot, and the stay included a game drive on the evening, with a game walk (dependent on the current location of the Rhino and Buffalo) the next morning. Walking is very limited due to the obvious dangers of the larger animals on the reserve, but the small lodge enclosure was good before breakfast (served in the open).



Other game reserves along the Garden Route which may be of interest are:

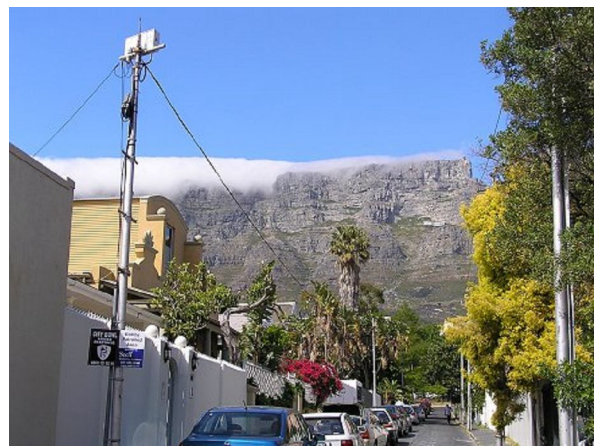
- Plettenberg Bay Game Reserve ( [www.plettenbergbaygamereserve.co.za](http://www.plettenbergbaygamereserve.co.za) )
- Botlierskop Private Game Reserve ( [www.botlierskop.co.za](http://www.botlierskop.co.za) )
- Garden Route Game Reserve ( [www.grgame lodge.co.za](http://www.grgame lodge.co.za) )

### **J&C's Beach House, Brenton, near Knysna ( [www.jcbeachhouse.com](http://www.jcbeachhouse.com) )**

Knysna was chosen for 2 nights due to its beach side location, with ample walking in the forests close by. Rather than stay in Knysna itself, we opted for Brenton-on-Sea, a more upmarket and quiet hamlet on the western side of the lagoon inlet. It is also at the eastern extremity of a 4½ mile long crescent of a beach, which held African Oystercatchers but very few people. The beach house overlooks this, and again offers spacious and well appointed accommodation at a very good price. In addition, it had its own pair of Spotted Eagle-owls roosting in the grounds, and a small fynbos reserve only metres to the rear which held an interesting selection of birds.



*J&C's Beach House*



*Dunkley House from the street*

### **Dunkley House, Cape Town ( [www.dunkleyhouse.com](http://www.dunkleyhouse.com) )**

We ignored the temptations of the Mount Nelson hotel just across the road for this comfortable and spacious B&B, set in the suburbs of the Gardens are of the Cape Town Bowl. Costs within the Western Cape's capital town are predictably more than along the Garden Route, but staying here was well worth the reasonable rates charged. Armed

guards patrol the surrounding streets 24 hours a day, and the drive to the V&A waterfront was only about 10 minutes in good traffic.

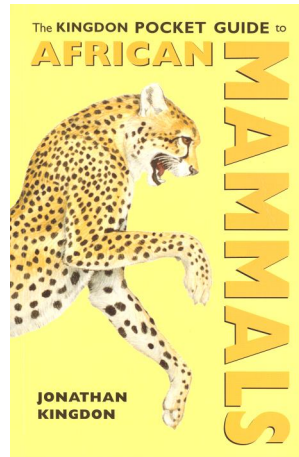
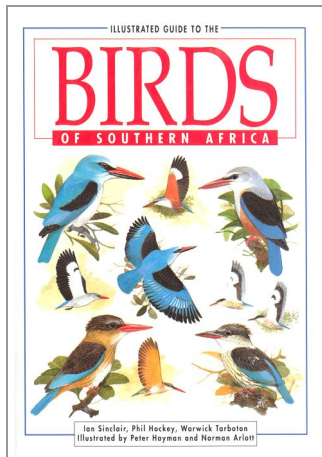
## References

“The Illustrated Guide to the Birds of Southern Africa” by Ian Sinclair et al (New Holland)

“The Kingdon Pocket Guide to African Mammals” by Jonathan Kingdon (A&CB)

“The Rough Guide Map to South Africa” (1:1700000; Rough Guides)

“Insight Fleximap of Cape Town” (1:17000; Insight Guides)



## SITES VISITED

### Oudtshoorn

#### The Yot Club

One of the main objectives of the trip was to see Meerkats in the wild. We were therefore heartened when Grant from Meerkat Magic sent a message the evening before the first of our two planned outings confirming that he had located the overnight sleeping burrow. The weather throughout the day had been variable – cool with intermittent showers – which is not the best for Meerkats. We arose at 5:20 the next morning and were just about to leave the B&B when a message was received saying that it was too cold and wet, thus the trip had to be cancelled. Not much could be done about this, although it was a



*Reed bed below The Yot Club*

massive blow, so a couple of hours were spent wandering around the grounds of the Yot Club to assuage the disappointment. The setting was very attractive and good for birds, with the quite extensive extended property being adjacent to a reed margined river. The gardens are quite well manicured, but did have a few larger trees for perching posts. Some of the more common birds were both regular and noisy, such as the family of carnivorous Common Fiscals in residence below our balcony. The reeds held a mixed



breeding colony of Cape & Southern Masked Weavers, as well as Southern Red Bishops, which were caught by the rising morning sun. African Reed Warblers were slightly less obvious, with the liquid song and larger frame of Lesser Swamp Warbler further down towards the ford crossing. It was in the main elusive, showing occasionally as it actively fed at the base of the reed stems. A Brown-headed Kingfisher perched for some time on the wires above this crossing, unperturbed by my gently swaying frame on the adjacent swinging footbridge.

The trees hosted calling African Hoopoe, Red-eyed & Mourning Doves throughout the morning. A small posse of Speckled Mousebirds preceded the ridiculous sight of 10 or so perched and calling Helmeted Guineafowl on the bare branches above me at a height of around 10 metres from the ground. Cape Wagtails were a fairly constant feature here, but there was no sign of the Black-crowned Night Herons which had been active the previous evening in the reed. Regular parties of hirundines and swifts circled overhead, the most obvious being Little Swift and Greater Striped Swallow. Occasional White-rumped Swifts were reasonably obvious, but Horus Swifts needed more diligent checking. The much larger Alpine Swifts mingled in singles, and it has to be noted that many of the hirundines and swifts passing over remained unidentified. Long-tailed Cormorants and Egyptian Geese flew past sporadically.

### **Cango Wildlife Ranch and Buffelsdrift Game Reserve**

As if to further soften the disappointment of missing out on the mornings Meerkat visit, we headed for the Cango Wildlife Ranch, which was a small zoo by any other name, but having a core breeding programme of indigenous species as its primary aim. Part of the therapy was unexpected, coming in the guise of 5 Meerkats in one of the first enclosures, and although unnatural and against many personal principles, we just had to sit and watch them for some time. Among the pens within the park were numerous Cape Wagtails, with a regular Cape Robin-chat appearing at various points within the premises. Just as we were about to leave the car park, a female African Paradise-flycatcher passed by in the trees in front of us.



*Lake in front of reception*



*Further into the reserve*

A short drive further out of Oudtshoorn, passing the numerous Ostrich farms which are a feature of the area, we reached the Buffelsdrift Game Reserve ([www.buffelsdrift.com](http://www.buffelsdrift.com)), which in itself is only about 8km from town. As with many of the South African reserves, this is a large fenced in area, which contains replenished stocks of only originally indigenous species to the locale. The property is actually a game lodge and reserve, and so accommodation packages can be arranged, which would make it an alternative place to stay (yet a lot more expensive) than B&B's within Oudtshoorn, with the addition of included wildlife packages. The purist naturalists limitations of this are obvious when looked at from the perspective of the wildness of the animals encountered, but as we approached the reception the lure of a safari drive encountering now free roaming wildlife was far too tempting. We spent a highly enjoyable 2½ hours in an open back 4x4, with only 2 others for company, watching an interesting and healthy

population of animals and a small selection of birds. One of the pair of resident rhinos even approached the side of the vehicle to give us a cursory checking out. Stocks here included the Red variety of Hartebeeste, good numbers of Beisa Oryx, Springbok, a pair of Giraffe with a calf, Black Wildebeeste, etc.

We initiated the visit with a sit on the reception / dining room veranda overlooking the lake, taking in the site of 7 Hippos on the opposite shore. 2-3 White-throated Swallows were not only flying around here, but also landing on the fencing of the decking. A pair of Familiar Chats were almost as obliging just around the corner, again on the fencing. A Giant Kingfisher was spotted flying over the lake twice, the second directly in front of us. The small garden area beneath the walkway to the reception held a nesting pair of Karoo Scrub-robins, a small collection of Karoo Prinias, and a flying male Orange-breasted Sunbird. The nearby car park was host to a singing trio of Red-headed Cisticolas, conducting vertical song flights. The first Pied Starlings here proved to be quite numerous throughout the whole of the reserve, with the largest flock also including Wattled Starlings. The most obvious birds throughout were Mousebirds, most of which were specifically unidentified, but the rump of White-backed and a trio of Red-faced Mousebirds were picked up. A pair of Pale Chanting-goshawks were circling over our second encounter with the White Rhinos. Only the olive back and distinctive yellow tipped tail of Bokmakerie was seen.

### Meerkats



Waking up at 5:20 morning, we were greeted with a lot more optimism than yesterday, since the weather during the previous day was a lot more settled and hot with no rain, with the additional benefit of no messages from Grant cancelling the morning. Things looked even better when we met Grant at 6am, with only 4 others to share the experience with – tours can hold up to 16 guests.

We arrived only about 10 minutes later in an open area of karoo, which had previously been farmed with livestock. This was where Grant had located the Meerkats last evening, and so we approached a small mound looked upon by a small pile of black plastic chairs. We sat patiently for almost 45 minutes, listening to Grants interesting diatribe, for the first of the much vaunted gang to appear. During this time, a Southern Black Korhaan



was calling from another mound to our rear. Larks, prinias, and cisticolas were constantly calling, but were difficult to identify from our seated position. However, the subsequently common Karoo Lark was pinned down, and a Bush Karoo Rat with young was the first mammal to rise in a bush near to us. The somewhat tardy appearance of the Meerkats was fantastic, with an initial lone climate checker standing on the mound, followed by the rest of the gang 10 minutes later, standing on hindlegs as a unit only metres from where we were sat.

This would have been reward enough for our endeavours, but we then followed the foraging group through the scrub for the next hour or two, seeing in real life many of the idiosyncratic behaviours we had become accustomed to from numerous television programmes. One or two birds were seen while following the gang, with at least one positively identified Spike-heeled Lark, a few Pearl-breasted Swallows flying through, a pair of Crowned Lapwings in the distance, numerous Cape Sparrows, and at least one pair of Karoo Scrub-robins. The delights eventually came to an end at around 9:30, when the Meerkats crossed the boundary fence to an adjoining property, where we were unable to follow them.

### Buffalo Hills

This property is set in a relatively small grazing meadow surrounded by hills, which was originally a dairy farm, and has unashamedly restocked with original indigenous wildlife. It does offer a reasonably priced game encounter in a very relaxed setting, holding some well nourished free roaming species. It also holds some interesting birds. Our accommodation was overlooking the open plain, and was contained within an electric fence. This enclosed a well mown lawn, and one or two trees, backing on to the forest, holding mainly Cape Weaver, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, and a single male Black Cuckoo-shrike, showing both yellow shoulder and gape. Around the reserve, apart from the usual ubiquitous Helmeted Guineafowl, we also picked out Jackal Buzzard circling overhead, African Hoopoe on the ground, and at least 3-4 Fork-tailed Drongos feeding from low perches.



*Grazing area from accommodation*

### Friday morning

We were due to go on a game walk through the forest at 8am, so I awoke early and looked for the birds contained within the electrified fence area of the accommodation beforehand. This is only a very small part of the reserve, and looks out over the grazing plain, but did play host to a small but interesting assortment of birds. Cape Weavers were again the most noisy and obvious, with a small colony of nests in one of the nearby trees.

As expected, Common Fiscals were dotted around the premises. Doves were of three varieties – Laughing, Ring-necked, and Red-eyed, but the Black Cuckoo-shrike of the previous evening couldn't be refound. A pair of Fiscal Flycatchers hunted insects to the calls of Greater Double-collared Sunbirds. A loud bubbling call within the edge of the forest was traced, and eventually an elusive Southern Boubou emerged on to a branch above me. Helmeted Guineafowl were a constant sight, along with a single Sacred Ibis feeding on the open grass. After a delicious breakfast taken on the lawn, the walk was both informative and enjoyable, and had held the potential of Narina Trogon, which was possibly heard, but certainly not seen. Only birds seen during the forest walk were Cape Robin-chats and Sombre Greenbul.

## Brenton-on-Sea



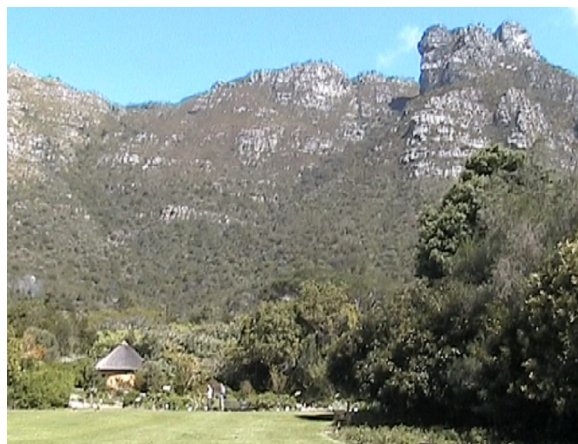
*Fynbos reserve*

Leaving the room at first light, one of the first birds to be seen was a Spotted Eagle-owl which had been seen for the first time the previous evening, perched in its supposed roosting spot almost within touching distance of the back door. The road in front of the Beach House overlooks part of Brenton and the Indian Ocean, and had shown promise on a quick sortie the previous evening, but initially only offered Laughing Dove and Cape Robin-chat, both of which were calling from the telegraph wires. However, the small fynbos nature reserve just down from the accommodation was quickly located, and it was here that the fun began. The entire reserve seems to cover a length of no more

than 100m, with a width of half that, but this was obviously ideal for the Bushbuck staring at me from its centre. The Greater Double-collared Sunbirds found around the Beach House were replaced here by Southern Double-collareds, and also a pair of Amethyst Sunbirds on the wires. Streaky-headed Seedeaters were either building nests or in the throes of courtship, with occasional Yellow Bishops not so obliging. A Spotted Thick-knee appeared from the bush on to the road in ahead of me, gradually making its way further away until it disappeared again in the gardens. Coucals were heard but not seen, but much better luck was had with a Didrik Cuckoo, calling from the top of a small bear bush. The briefly seen Bar-throated Apalis of yesterday was seen again, within the same stand of bushes, but for a lot longer this time. Mouse birds here were White-backed and possible Red-faced, but they kept to the interior of the vegetation and didn't show particularly well. Another surprise was a lone Cape Sugarbird, which turned out to be the only one seen on the entire trip.

## Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens

Two visits were made here, one late morning, returning again for just over an hour in the evening. The gardens are located on the south-eastern base of Table Mountain, and are very ornamental and picturesque. They cover quite a large area, and form varied habitat for a range of birds. The lawned areas give way to hikes through the more natural slopes on the mountain. The most common bird initially was Cape Canary, feeding on flower heads just outside of the reception tea rooms. Progression through the gardens found even more regular Cape White-eyes and Southern Double-collared Sunbirds,



interspersed by singing Olive Thrushes and Cape Robin-chats. One of the main target birds was Cape Sugarbird, but none could be found, even in the likely setting of the Protea Garden, suggesting that their presence could be seasonal. Also absent were Orange-breasted Sunbirds, seen in good numbers higher up on the plateau of Table Mountain, in this case possibly pointing to altitudinal migration for breeding. However, they were replaced by a stunning Malachite Sunbird feeding on the proteas, with a much more dowdy female close by. The protea garden was the most active area for birds, since this was the only location for other species such as African Olive Pigeon, Cape Spurfowl, Karoo Prinias, and a single Forest Canary. The afternoon visit was during the progression of the shadow of Table Mountain as the sun set on the opposite slopes, and bird activity noticeably decreased as the evening wore on.



## SPECIES SEEN

### Ostrich

*Struthio camelus*

The massed flocks enclosed in the Ostrich farms along the Garden Route, with a peak in numbers within properties around Oudtshoorn ("the Ostrich capital of the world") give the impression of an abundant bird within the region. However, only one or two birds along the journey look to have even a remotely wild credential, and it is possible that the nearest to truly wild birds were those seen at Cape of Good Hope Reserve. Here, one pair had two fairly well grown young, and a male was seen at Cape Point

### Helmeted Guineafowl

*Numida meleagris*

This is probably one of the most common and widespread species seen, occurring in almost every type of habitat



### Cape Spurfowl

*Pternistis capensis*

Surprisingly, only a few of these were seen: Signal Hill (2); Robben Island (1); Kirstenbosch (3)

### Egyptian Goose

*Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Very common. Seen on every day, although less commonly seen when spending time in Cape Town



### South African Shelduck

*Tadorna cana*

Only one seen, on the estuary just East of Plettenberg Bay when leaving Buffalo Hills

### Red-billed Teal

*Anas erythrorhyncha*

The only bird seen was on a small pond next to the airport

### African Penguin

*Spheniscus demersus*

For the last 20 years or so, this species has decided to forego its island status to some degree, and 3 colonies have been established on the mainland of South Africa. Boulders Beach is the best known and most commercialised, with the colony undergoing practical work to fence it in from the nearby human dwellings (not a total success), yet leaving it in its wild state. The penguins are truly up close and personal here, with ~3000 birds present. We arrived during the moulting season, leaving most of them swimless, although small numbers were also seen swimming from both the Robben Island and Whale Watch boat trips



### Hadada Ibis

*Bostrychia hagedash*

These birds are both common and noisy, being more or less ever present in small numbers while out of the city: Oudtshoorn (6, 2); Buffelsdrift (2); Buffalo Hills (1); Brenton (1); Knysna to Cape Town (8); Kirstenbosch (1)

**Sacred Ibis***Threskiornis aethiopicus*

Common along the Garden Route: journey from Cape Town to Oudtshoorn (~50); Buffalo Hills (~40); Brenton-on-Sea (22); journey from Knysna to Cape Town (1); Robben Island

**Black-crowned Night-Heron***Nycticorax nycticorax*

A pair of active birds were present at the reedbed in front of The Yot Club on both evenings

**Cattle Egret***Bubulcus ibis*

Journey from Cape Town to Oudtshoorn (~100); Cango Wildlife Ranch (3); Robben Island (~30)

**Grey Heron***Ardea cinerea*

The only birds seen were 2 on the journey from Cape Town to Oudtshoorn

**Black-headed Heron***Ardea melanocephala*

Much more common than Grey Heron, these were seen regularly in the first week: Cape Town to Oudtshoorn (2); Buffalo Hills (1)

**Little Egret***Egretta garzetta*

Oudtshoorn (1); journey from Knysna to Cape Town (1)

**Cape Gannet***Morus capensis*

A total of ~6 birds were passing the boats on the Robben Island and Whale Watch boat journeys

**Reed Cormorant***Microcarbo africanus*

As is the case for this bird, all sightings were inland, with all the birds I saw along the Garden Route, with up to 6 around Oudtshoorn, and another over Buffalo Hills

**Crowned Cormorant***Microcarbo coronatus*

At least 2 birds were in the harbour of Robben Island, with one on the dock as we were leaving, and 3+ in the harbour of the V&A Waterfront, Cape Town

**Bank Cormorant***Phalacrocorax neglectus*

The best site for these is the harbour of Robben Island, where a large colony greets those on the island tour

**Great Cormorant***Phalacrocorax carbo*

This is probably one of the least common of the cormorants seen on the trip, with the largest number being at Storms River (8) and Brenton-on-Sea (20). A single bird stood out amongst the Cape Cormorants at Boulders Beach

**Cape Cormorant***Leucocarbo capensis*

Common in colonies along the coast, with a small group of ~12 on the rocks at Hermanus, and much more populous colonies at Boulders Beach and Cape Point (again on rocks just offshore)



**Black-winged Kite** *Elanus caeruleus*

A single bird was on telegraph wires on the outskirts of Oudtshoorn

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

Only 2 seen, both while travelling between the Garden Route and Cape Town

**African Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus vocifer*

A single bird was seen briefly over the inland part of the lagoon at Knysna

**Pale Chanting-Goshawk** *Melierax canorus*

5 were on wires from Cape Town to Oudtshoorn; 2 at Buffelsdrift; 1 at Oudtshoorn

**Eurasian Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

Another raptor seen exclusively while travelling: ~8 from Cape Town to Oudtshoorn; 1 from Storms River to Knysna; 2 around Knysna lagoon; 4 from Knysna to Cape Town

**Jackal Buzzard** *Buteo rufofuscus*

What was probably the same bird seen twice was circling Buffalo Hills

**Rock Kestrel** *Falco rupicolus*

A single male was seen while travelling from Oudtshoorn to Buffalo Hills

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*

The bird seen at Signal Hill was playfully (?) stooping on a toy kite

**Southern Black Korhaan** *Afrotis afra*

A male was calling for some time from a sandbank while waiting for the Meerkats to appear early morning near Oudtshoorn

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

2 at the pool adjacent to the airport, and 1 at Oudtshoorn

**Red-knobbed Coot** *Fulica cristata*

1 on the lake at Buffelsdrift, and 25+ on the lagoon at Knysna

**Blue Crane** *Anthropoides paradiseus*

This is almost a South African endemic, and listed as being threatened with a declining population. I was therefore surprised to see so many on the journey between Cape Town and the Garden Route, with ~25 on the outward journey, and 11 on the return. They usually occurred in open fields, quite often by the roadside, and were usually in pairs or small groups

**Spotted Thick-knee** *Burhinus capensis*

Two birds were seen – 1 was next to the exit track when leaving Buffelsdrift Game Reserve, the other appeared on the road from the fynbos nature reserve at Brenton-on-Sea

**African Oystercatcher** *Haematopus moquini*

This is a near threatened species which occurs along the Namibian and Western Cape coasts. Numbers were low, but it was found at three separate sites: Storms River (2); beach at Brenton (4); Boulders Beach (4)

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*

2 were in the estuary just East of Plettenberg Bay

**Blacksmith Lapwing** *Vanellus armatus*

Pool next to airport (4); Buffelsdrift (~40); Robben Island (5)

**Crowned Lapwing** *Vanellus coronatus*

A pair were on the open Karoo while following the Meerkats, and a single bird was at Buffalo Bay (along the beach from Brenton-on-Sea)

**White-fronted Plover** *Charadrius marginatus*

2 were on the beach at Brenton-on-Sea

**Hartlaub's Gull**

*Chroicocephalus hartlaubii*

Very common around Cape Town and the False Bay area



**Kelp Gull**

*Larus dominicanus*

Quite common, with small numbers seen on most days when near or at the coast

**Swift Tern**

*Thalasseus bergii*

Storms River (~200); Buffalo Bay (near Brenton-on-Sea 10); Cape Point (~50)

**Sandwich Tern**

*Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Cape Town harbour (~10)

**Speckled Pigeon**

*Columba guinea*

A common bird throughout, even being seen feeding from scraps in the harbours



**African Olive Pigeon**

*Columba arquatrix*

~20 just outside of Brenton-on-Sea; 4 at Kirstenbosch

**Red-eyed Dove**

*Streptopelia semitorquata*

Common



**Ring-necked Dove**

*Streptopelia capicola*

Common

**Laughing Dove**

*Streptopelia senegalensis*

Common. A pair had made its nest and was incubating in one of the trees next to our entrance door at J&C's Beach House in Brenton-on-Sea



**Dideric Cuckoo**

*Chrysococcyx caprius*

Apparently, the owner at J&C's Beach House had been looking for this bird for the last three months at the fynbos reserve at Brenton-on-Sea, so I was pleased to find it calling from an open bush on the last morning there



**Spotted Eagle-Owl***Bubo africanus*

Another surprise at Brenton – a pair were using two of the trees which were next to our entrance door as their roost site, and were calling to each other from above our room on the second evening. We also came across one of the birds setting off on an evening hunt just after dusk as we were driving to find our own restaurant!

**Alpine Swift***Tachymarptis melba*

6 over Table Mountain; small numbers at Cape Point

**African Black Swift***Apus barbatus*

2 over Signal Hill

**Little Swift***Apus affinis*

These were common around Oudtshoorn

**Horus Swift***Apus hours*

~6 were picked out amongst the Little Swifts at Oudtshoorn, and small numbers were over Buffalo Bay, Knysna

**White-rumped Swift***Apus caffer*

Up to 10 were with the Little Swifts at Oudtshoorn, and small numbers were with the Horus Swifts at Buffalo Bay, Knysna

**Speckled Mousebird***Colius striatus*

Mousebirds were very common around Oudtshoorn, and this was the most common species identified amongst them. In addition, 5 were at Boulders Beach, and 3 at Cape Point

**White-backed Mousebird***Colius colius*

4 were identified at Oudtshoorn, with another at Buffalo Hills, and 1 at Brenton-on-Sea

**Red-faced Mousebird***Urocolius indicus*

4 were at Buffelsdrift, and another 3 at Brenton-on-Sea

**Brown-hooded Kingfisher***Halcyon albiventris*

2 were seen – 1 perched on the wire over the river ford at Oudtshoorn, just outside of the Yot Club, and another next to the road leading into Brenton-on-Sea

**Giant Kingfisher***Megaceryle maximus*

One bird was seen twice flying over the lake at Buffelsdrift; 1 flew along the rocks at Storms River; 1 perched over the lagoon at Knysna

**Eurasian Hoopoe***Upupa epops*

1 singing in front of the Yot Club at Oudtshoorn; 1 flying at Buffelsdrift; 1 at Buffalo Hills

**Pied Kingfisher***Ceryle rudis*

1 on journey from Cape Town to Oudtshoorn; 1 on the estuary East of Plettenberg Bay

**Bokmakierie***Telophorus zeylonus*

It was disappointing that the only view of this stunner was the olive back and yellow tail tips which flew past our jeep and into the scrub during the game drive at Buffelsdrift

**Southern Boubou***Laniarius ferrugineus*

The rich song of this bird is quite often the only sign of its presence, since it is very much a skulker. It was heard at one or two localities, including from the balcony of J&C's Beach House, but a pair were seen well at the lodge area of Buffalo Hills

**Black Cuckooshrike***Campephaga flava*

Only one seen very briefly, in one of the few large trees just outside of the perimeter electric fence of the lodge at Buffalo Hills. It showed both yellow wing patch and gape

**Common Fiscal***Lanius collaris*

Very common throughout

**Fork-tailed Drongo***Dicrurus adsimilis*

Buffelsdrift (4, 4); Brenton-on-Sea (3)

**African Paradise-Flycatcher***Terpsiphone viridis*

One briefly in the car park as we were about to leave Cango Wildlife Ranch

**Cape Crow***Corvus capensis*

Seen in small numbers sporadically, they were reasonably common while journeying between the Garden Route and Cape Town, with an additional 4 at Buffelsdrift, and a few at Buffalo Hills

**Pied Crow***Corvus albus*

4 were seen while travelling, with an additional 6 at Brenton-on-sea, and 4 at Cape of Good Hope Reserve

**White-necked Raven***Corvus albicollis*

1 each was seen on both journeys to and from the Garden Route to Cape Town, with 1 over Kirstenbosch

**Karoo Lark***Calendulauda albescens*

Good numbers of larks were seen but not identified on the Klein Karoo while watching the Meerkats, but of those seen well, this was the predominant species (~8)

**Spike-heeled Lark***Chersomanes albofasciata*

There were hints of the presence of these with the distinctive shape of occasional larks seen briefly, but only one was seen well enough to identify

**Cape Bulbul***Pycnonotus capensis*

Brenton-on-Sea (quite common); Boulders Beach (1); Cape Point (2); Cape Town (2)

**Sombre Greenbul***Andropadus importunus*

The rich song of this bird belies its plain looks, and it is often the song that is first noticed: Brenton-on-Sea (2, 2); Kirstenbosch (1)



**Black Saw-wing**

*Psalidoprocne pristopectera*

1 over Brenton-on-Sea, and ~6 over Cape Point

**Brown-throated Martin**

*Riparia paludicola*

1 over Cape Point

**Banded Martin**

*Riparia cincta*

Strangely, these were only seen over the harbour at Knysna, where they were easily the most common hirundine

**White-throated Swallow**

*Hirundo albigularis*

An initial individual was seen perched on a fence during a coffee break just outside of Heidelberg, with 4 regularly landing on the dining area at Buffelsdrift, and 2 in front of the Yot Club at Oudtshoorn



**Pearl-breasted Swallow**

*Hirundo dimidiata*

Only seen passing over the Klein Karoo while sitting waiting for the Meerkats to appear, with at least 4 birds

**Greater Striped Swallow**

*Cecropis cucullata*

Regularly seen in mixed hirundine and swift flocks: Oudtshoorn (4, 10, 2 over Yot Club); Buffalo Hills (1); Brenton-on-Sea (1)

**Lesser Swamp Warbler**

*Acrocephalus gracilirostris*

Noticeably larger and with a much cleaner appearance than the African Reed Warbler, the much more melodic song of this skulking bird was picked out of the reeds at the Yot Club in Oudtshoorn, with good views eventually obtained



**African Reed Warbler**

*Acrocephalus baeticatus*

Up to 10 birds were in the reeds, with some singing, in front of the Yot Club

**Red-headed Cisticola**

*Cisticola subruficapilla*

3 were showing off song flights in the rough scrub just outside of the reception building of Buffelsdrift Wildlife Reserve

**Karoo Prinia**

*Prinia maculosa*

An understated bird with a powerful call: Buffelsdrift (3 just outside the reception building); Brenton-on-Sea (~8); Boulders Beach (2); Signal Hill (1); Kirstenbosch (3)



**Bar-throated Apalis**

*Apalis thoracica*

What was probably the same bird was seen in the same general area next to the road on both visits to the fynbos reserve at Brenton-on-Sea



**Cape White-eye**

*Zosterops capensis*

Quite common at the fynbos reserve at Brenton-on-Sea; ~20 in Kirstenbosch Gardens



**Cape Sugarbird**

*Promerops cafer*

I was surprised that these birds were absent from the Protea Gardens at Kirstenbosch, where they are likely to be seasonal, so had to make do with the single female which landed in the fynbos reserve at Brenton-on-Sea

**Wattled Starling**

*Creatophora cinerea*

Only birds were ~15 in a flock of Pied Starlings at Buffelsdrift

**Cape Starling**

*Lamprotornis nitens*

1 at Buffalo Hills

**Pied Starling**

*Lamprotornis bicolor*

Apart from up to 6 seen on each journey between Cape Town and the Garden Route, and also between Buffalo Hills and Knysna, the only others were 30+ around Buffelsdrift, including a mixed flock with Wattled Starlings

**Red-winged Starling**

*Onychognathus morio*

This species seems to be fulfilling a similar role to the Eurasian Starlings of other continents, since it is common within human habitation, such as the dining areas of Table Mountain, Cape Point, and the V&A Waterfront of Cape Town



**Olive Thrush**

*Turdus olivaceus*

Oudtshoorn (3, 1); Cango Wildlife Ranch (1); Buffalo Hills (2); Storms River (1); Kirstenbosch (~8)



**Cape Robin-Chat**

*Cossypha caffra*

Fairly common, seen on most days: Oudtshoorn (1); Cango Wildlife Ranch (2); Buffalo Hills (2); Knysna (1); Brenton-on-Sea (4, 3); Signal Hill (1); Cape Point (1); Kirstenbosch (4)



**Karoo Scrub Robin**

*Erythropygia coryphaeus*

A pair were building a nest in the manicured area in front of the reception building at Buffelsdrift, and another were seen on the Klein Karoo at the end of the Meerkat outing

**African Stonechat**

*Saxicola torquatus*

A single bird landed in the reeds for a short time at the Yot Club





**Familiar Chat**

*Cercomela familiaris*

2 birds at Buffelsdrift, with one preening and showing off for some time on the fence surrounding the dining area

**Fiscal Flycatcher**

*Sigelus silens*

A pair were within the enclosed lodge area of Buffalo Hills, with at last 4 even more approachable birds in the fynbos reserve at Brenton-on-Sea



**Orange-breasted Sunbird**

*Anthobaphes violacea*

After one was seen at Buffelsdrift, the only other location where they were seen was on the top of Table Mountain, with at least 5 males were singing, and a female was on the ground next to one of the popular tracks

**Amethyst Sunbird**

*Chalcomitra amethystine*

A stunning male was lit in the evening light opposite J&C's Beach House at Brenton-on-Sea on the second evening, with a pair on wires at the fynbos reserve the next morning

**Malachite Sunbird**

*Nectarinia famosa*

Another of those species which I have been looking forward to since childhood, they didn't disappoint. After a non-breeding male was seen briefly on successive days next to the flowerbeds of the Yot Club, a pair was seen on both visits to the Protea Garden of Kirstenbosch



**Southern Double-collared Sunbird**

*Cinnyris chalybeus*

The only site where both this species and its Greater cousin were seen together was at Brenton-on-Sea, where sightings included a nest in the conifer adjoining our room (1, 3). Further single males were at Cape Point and Kirstenbosch



**Greater Double-collared Sunbird**

*Cinnyris afer*

This species seems to have a more easterly distribution in the Western Cape than Southern Double-collared Sunbird: Buffalo Hills (a pair inside the lodge area, and a separate extra male outside); Brenton-on-Sea (~6, 2)

**House Sparrow**

*Passer domesticus*

Small numbers at Oudtshoorn, Cango Wildlife Ranch, and Robben Island

**Cape Sparrow**

*Passer melanurus*

Thankfully, this more native sparrow seems to outnumber the House Sparrow, where it is quite common in the Oudtshoorn area, and also on Robben Island



**Cape Weaver**

*Ploceus capensis*

The most common weaver, with regular numbers at Oudtshoorn (breeding within the Yot Club grounds), Buffalo Hills (again breeding in a colony in the lodge area), and Brenton-on-Sea



**Southern Masked-Weaver**

*Ploceus velatus*

Following a single bird at the coffee stop near Heidelberg, only seen at Oudtshoorn, where a small colony was breeding in the reeds in front of the Yot Club

**Southern Red Bishop**

*Euplectes orix*

3 were the first birds seen at the coffee stop just outside of Heidelberg, but they were much more common and up close with a breeding colony within the reedbed of the Yot Club at Oudtshoorn



**Yellow Bishop**

*Euplectes capensis*

A single bird was in the fynbos reserve at Brenton-on-Sea

**Common Waxbill**

*Estrilda astrild*

Brenton-on-Sea (1)

**Pin-tailed Whydah**

*Vidua macroura*

Single male from the car between Cape Town and Oudtshoorn

**Cape Wagtail**

*Motacilla capensis*

Very common throughout, when it was seen on every day and in almost every habitat. A very young bird with a very short tail was on the weir of the river in front of the Yot Club



**Cape Canary**

*Serinus canicollis*

A male was singing one evening from the wires in front of J&C's Beach House at Brenton-



on-Sea, with a small flock or two feeding amongst the flowerbeds at Kirstenbosch

**Forest Canary** *Crithagra scotops*

A single bird landed briefly in the Protea Garden at Kirstenbosch

**Streaky-headed Seedeater** *Crithagra gularis*

At least 2 pairs in the fynbos reserve at Brenton-on-sea, with one pair gathering nesting material, and the other with a singing male

**Cape Bunting** *Emberiza capensis*

2 at Cape Point dining area, including one singing male



**Total species = 115**

## MAMMALS SEEN

**Chacma Baboon** *Papio ursinus*

The most likely place for these to be seen is on the Cape of Good Hope Reserve, where regular signs warn against the feeding of the baboons. We didn't see any here, but did watch a troop of about 12 individuals on our approach to Oudtshoorn on the first day. They were initially crossing the road in front of us, and found entertainment on the wet roof of a disused building in the rain. Another small troop was feeding on the verges of the main N2 highway East of Plettenberg Bay, with a single individual further on near to Nature's Valley

**Small Grey Mongoose** *Herpestes pulverulenta*

A single individual ran across in front of us and into the vegetation on Signal Hill

**Grey Meerkat** *Suricata suricatta*

The population on the Klein Karoo hadn't been officially discovered until the intervention of Grant McIlrath and his Meerkat Magic project. They represent a subspecies distinctly darker than those in Namibia, North-western South Africa, and Botswana. The study group covers 3 populations, each with territories of around 10km<sup>2</sup>. We saw 11 animals in the study gang, with the female leader heavily pregnant, which subsequently gave birth the day after our visit

**South African Fur Seal** *Arctocephalus pusillus*

We were pleasantly caught unaware to the presence of these within the harbour at Cape Town, where some could be regularly seen very close to while sleeping on gangways. There are apparently 250+ within the harbour, living off scraps, and are reportedly darker (dirtier?) than the ones found in the open ocean. We also saw 4 from the whale watch trip, all looking to follow in the wake of the boat for some distance



**Southern Right Whale***Eubalaena australis*

Of the 3 regular whales found off the South African coast, this is by far the most common, approaching the shores during July to November. There are many spots along the coastline where they can be seen, with those around False Bay being among the best. We stopped off at Hermanus on the journey back from the Garden Route, to find a mini whale watching industry, and 3 whales a little distance offshore. A better experience was of 5 whales, including a very light grey one, in one of the bays South of Boulders Beach on the Cape. These were possibly as close to the shore as they could get, and we watched them from above. 3 more were also seen North of Cape Town from the Whale watch, with a further 3 just outside of the harbour entrance as we returned (apparently they had been within the harbour earlier)

**White Rhinoceros***Ceratotherium simum*

Both Buffelsdrift and Buffalo Hills held a pair of these, the latter having a 2 year old calf

**Common Rock Hyrax (Dassie)***Procavia capensis*

One of the most regular sites for these is around the café on table mountain, but we couldn't find any. However, they were feeding amongst the crowds and the rubbish bins at Hermanus (6), with more next to the boundary fence at Boulders Beach (3)

**Common Hippopotamus***Hippopotamus amphibious*

A group of 7 were on the opposite shore to the reception area of Buffelsdrift

**Giraffe***Giraffa camelopardalis*

3 at Buffelsdrift and 5 at Buffalo Hills (each containing one calf)

**Impala***Aepyceros melampus*

3 at Buffalo Hills

**Hartebeest***Alcelaphus buselaphus*

Small numbers of these, the rather dapper *caama* subspecies indigenous to the Cape and Kalahari, are at Buffelsdrift, where we saw 1

**Black Wildebeest***Connochaetes gnou*

Buffelsdrift (~15)

**Bontebok***Damaliscus pygargus*

A pair of seemingly wild animals were beside a waterhole at Cape Point. Introduced animals were also at Buffalo Hills, where some of the females had days old calves

**Springbok***Antidorcas marsupialis*

~20 at Buffelsdrift

**Steenbok***Raphicerus campestris*

2 were in the Klein Karoo just outside of Oudtshoorn while watching the Meerkats

**Bushbuck***Tragelaphus scriptus*

A single animal of the relatively unmarked Cape variety was in the fynbos reserve at Brenton-on-Sea

**Greater Kudu***Tragelaphus strepsiceros*

5 at Buffelsdrift, and ~3 at Buffalo Hills

**Beisa Oryx***Oryx gazella*

~12 at Buffelsdrift

**Four-striped Grass Mouse***Rhabdomys pumilio*

A single animal was just below the entrance walkway within the flowerbeds at Buffelsdrift

**Bush Karoo Rat***Otomys unisulcatus*

2 preceded the Meerkats in waking up first next to the sleeping burrow

**TOTAL SPECIES = 20**