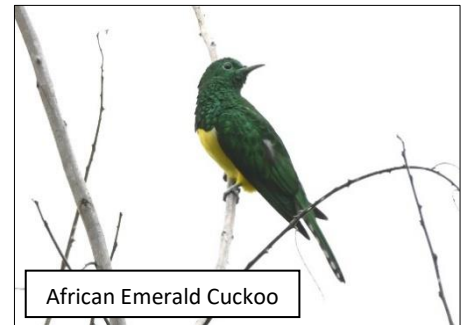


## TRIP REPORT SOUTH AFRICA TOUR – 6<sup>TH</sup> – 24<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2022

Despite flight delays and the South African border control trying an extremely slow new entry process, Mike, Sally and myself eventually managed to head off to the Devon grasslands just before mid-morning on day 1. Once we had left the environs of Johannesburg behind, we soon started to find some of the highveld grassland birds with *Long-tailed Widowbirds* displaying at the side of the road. Once off the main road stops at various small pans produced *White-faced Whistling*, *Yellow-billed* and *Maccoa Ducks*, *Red-billed* and *Cape Teal*, *Southern Pochard* and *Cape Shovelers*. Larger birds included *Greater Flamingo*, *African Spoonbill* and *Black-headed Heron*. Driving the dirt roads through the grasslands we came across a *Black-chested Snake Eagle* and several *Black-winged Kites*. Smaller birds encountered included *Rufous-naped* and *Red-capped Larks*, *Cape Longclaw*, *Capped Wheatear*, *Ant-eating Chat* and *African Stonechat*. Hearing a *Common Quail* close to the road we managed to flush it for a brief view as it flew away. A pair of *Blue Cranes* completed a successful afternoon's birding. Two mammal species were encountered, *Yellow Mongoose* and *South African Ground Squirrel*.

Day 2 started early with a lengthy drive north to Levubu in the north-east corner of South Africa but once there we met with our local guide Samson to start exploring this bird rich area. The next couple of days were spent visiting the local hotspots producing specials such as *Bat Hawk*, *African Finfoot*, *Crested Guineafowl*, *Purple-crested* and *Knysna Turacos*, *African Emerald Cuckoo*, *Tambourine Dove*, *African Pygmy Goose*, *Black Sparrowhawk*, *Striped* and *Giant Kingfishers*, *Olive Woodpecker*, *Brown-necked Parrot*, *Grey Cuckooshrike*, *Orange Ground Thrush*, *African Wood Owl*, *Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler*, *Collared* and *Scarlet-chested Sunbirds* and a displaying *African Broadbill*. Mammals encountered included *Vervet Monkey* and *Chacma Baboons*.

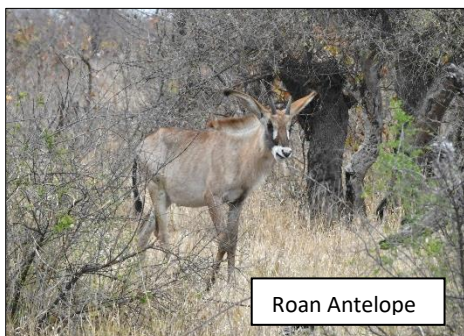


African Emerald Cuckoo

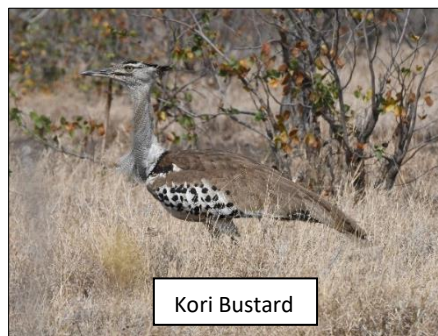


African Grey Hornbill

On the afternoon of day 4 we packed up and headed east into the jewel of South Africa's game reserves, Kruger Park. The first two nights were spent at the most northern camp, Punda Maria, where we soon started to encounter the typical birds and animals of the bush. *African Elephant*, *Giraffe*, *African Buffalo*, *Lion* and *Hippopotamus* were soon added to the mammal list and on the birding front *Meves's* and *Greater Blue-eared Starlings*, *African Jacana*, *African Green Pigeon*, *Hooded*, *Lappet-faced*, *White backed* and *White-headed vultures*, *Southern Yellow*, *Southern Red* and *African Grey Hornbills* and *Red-headed Weaver*. Raptors included *Bateleur* and *Little Sparrowhawk*. Whilst smaller species such as *Blue Waxbill*, *Fork-tailed Drongo*, *Yellow-bellied Greenbul*, *Long-billed Crombec*, both *Yellow-billed* and *Red-billed Oxpeckers*, *Green-winged Pytilia* and *Golden-breasted Bunting* were encountered. A night drive added *Verreaux's Eagle Owl* and *Fiery-necked* and *Square-tailed Nightjars* to the bird list and the kangaroo-like *Springhare* to the mammal list.



Roan Antelope



Kori Bustard



Double-banded Sandgrouse

From Punda Maria we started to move down the park to our next stop, Mopani, pausing briefly to admire a male *Arnot's Chat* in the mopani forest. Enroute many species of antelope were encountered including *Impala*, *Greater Kudu*, *Steenbok*, *Nyala*, *Tsessebe* and a herd of beautiful *Roan Antelope*. Mopani has a large lake with two bird hides and consequently a wealth of water birds, *Black Crane*, *Water Thick-knee*, *Black-winged Stilt*, *Three-banded Plover*,

*Collared Pratincole, Yellow-billed and Saddle-billed Storks, Squacco, Goliath and Striated Herons and Great and Little Egrets* were soon added. After a delay to swop over a temperamental vehicle we drove around the nearby open floodplains where *Common Ostrich, Kori Bustard, Red-crested Korhaan, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Kittlitz's Plover, Arrow-marked Babbler, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark and Sabota Lark* were all encountered. Within the camp *Grey-headed and Orange-breasted Bushshrikes, White-crested Helmetshrike, Black-headed Oriole and Southern Black Tit* all made an appearance.



Brown-headed Parrot

From Mopani we again headed south to our next destination Satara. Plentiful *Lilac-breasted Rollers, Cape and Burchell's Starlings, Swainson's Spurfowl, Rattling Cisticolas, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Magpie Shrike and White-browed Scrub Robin* lined the route and *Tawny, Brown Snake, Wahlberg's, African Hawk and African Fish Eagles* either appeared overhead or perched in trees to add to the raptor list. A night drive added *Leopard and Caracal* to the mammal list and a marauding pair of *Honey Badgers* caused consternation by approaching a little too close for comfort within the camp itself. An *African Scops Owl* perched above our unit as we enjoyed a nightcap. Around the camp

*Natal Spurfowl, Burchell's Coucal, Mourning Collared Dove, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Brown-headed Parrot and Chinspot Batis* made their presence known.



Southern Ground Hornbill



Retz's Helmetshrike

Day 8 and down to our final Kruger stop, Berg-en-daal with *Woolly-necked and Marabou Storks* encountered on the riverbanks enroute. Walks around the camp and drives around the surrounding roads produced *White-fronted, European and Little Bee-eaters, Bearded and Cardinal Woodpeckers, Retz's Helmetshrike, Green-backed Camaroptera, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Southern Ground and Trumpeter Hornbills, White-throated Robin-Chat, Yellow-fronted Canary and White-bellied Sunbird*. Mammals included further sightings of *Lion*, a pack of *Wild Dogs, Blue Wildebeest, Waterbuck and White Rhinoceros* to complete the Big Five.



White-throated Robin-Chat



Water Thick-knee



Wild Dog



Hooded Vultures

Exiting Kruger Park on day 10 we crossed the Crocodile River, pausing briefly to view the many water birds, *Hippopotamus* and huge *Nile Crocodiles* before heading off to the grasslands of

Wakkerstroom. After a long drive through beautiful countryside, we arrived at our destination. Exploring the open grasslands and misty hills with Sifiso, our local guide, we managed to find our target birds of *Denham's and White-bellied Bustard, Blue Crane, Southern Bald Ibis, Secretarybird, Spike-heeled, Eastern Long-billed and Eastern Clapper Larks, South African Cliff Swallow, Pied Starling, Sentinel and Cape Rock Thrushes, Buff-streaked Chat, Mountain Wheatear, African Pipit, Cape Canary* and the mountain dwelling *Yellow-breasted Pipit*.



Buff-streaked Chat



Bush Blackcap



Sentinel Rock Thrush



Gurney's Sugarbird



Drakensberg Rockjumper



Sloggett's Vlei Rat



Ground Woodpecker

*African Rock* and *Mountain Pipits*. Mammals added included *Rock Dassie*, *Grey Rhebok*, *Mountain Reedbuck* and the rather cute, despite the name, *Sloggett's Vlei Rat*.



Cape Rockjumper



Cape Siskin

Returning to Johannesburg on day 14 we said goodbye to Mike and Sally and myself then boarded a flight to Cape Town. Arriving to a Cape South-Easter gale forecast we decided to change the itinerary around and drove to Rooi Els early the following morning whilst it was still calm. It proved to be the correct decision as we were able to locate Sally's two target birds of *Cape Rockjumper* and *Cape Siskin* with a cameo appearance of them both sitting together on the same rock! A *Booted Eagle* cruised past as we were returning to our car, so it was fingers crossed that he was not dining on Rockjumper or Siskin for breakfast after we left. From there we drove to the Stoney Point reserve to admire the colony of *African Penguins*. The reserve also has a breeding colony of

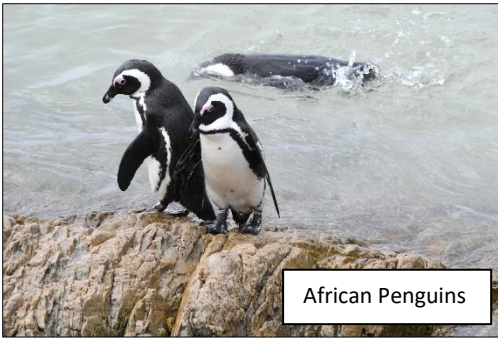
Day 12 and it was off to the last destination on the main tour with a lengthy drive to Himeville at the base of the legendary Sani Pass, the road up to Africa's Switzerland, Lesotho. Meeting up with Stuart our local guide we spent an afternoon visiting a local indigenous forest and a

marshland area. At the marshland we encountered *Grey-crowned* and *Wattled Cranes*, *South African Shelduck*, *Cape Crow*, *Brown-throated Martin*, *White-throated Swallow*, *African Yellow* and *African Reed Warblers*, *Pale-crowned*, *Levaillant's* and *Wing-snapping Cisticolas*, *Fan-tailed* and *Red-collared Widowbirds* and *Yellow-crowned* and

*Southern Red Bishops*. The forest produced *Cape Parrot*, *Black Saw-wing*, *Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher* and *Olive Thrush*. A visit to a local farm with sunbird feeders added spectacular views of *Gurney's Sugarbird*, *Amethyst*, *Malachite* and *Greater Double-collared Sunbirds*.

The following day it was an early start and a long slow climb up the Sani Pass stopping along the way to view *Black* and *Red-chested Cuckoos*, *Hamerkop*, *Jackal Buzzard*, *Spotted Eagle-Owl*, *Red-throated Wryneck*, *Bokmakerie*, *African Paradise* and *African Dusky Flycatchers*, *Rock Martin*, *Cape Grassbird*, *Barratt's Warbler*, *Karoo Prinia*, *Streaky-headed Seedeater* and *Bush Blackcap*. At the top of the pass approaching the Lesotho border and once into Lesotho we added *Cape* and *Bearded Vultures*, *Large-billed Lark*, *Ground Woodpecker*, *Rock Kestrel*, *White-necked Raven*, *Drakensberg Rockjumper*, *Fairy Flycatcher*, *Grey Tit*, *Wailing Cisticola*, *Drakensberg Prinia*, *Layard's Warbler*, *Sickle-winged Chat*, *Drakensberg Siskin*, *Cape Bunting* and

*Drakensberg Prinia*, *Layard's Warbler*, *Sickle-winged Chat*, *Drakensberg Siskin*, *Cape Bunting* and



African Penguins



African Oystercatchers



Southern Right Whale



Greater Crested Terns



Cape Fur Seals

three different species of *Cormorant*, *Cape*, *Crowned* and *Bank* all of which were visible. In amongst the rocks a pair of *African Oystercatchers* were raising a family of young, these were subsequently immortalised in the Wild Earth tv programme. *Rock Dassies* and *Cape Girdled Lizards* sunned themselves on the rocks. Leaving Stoney Point we continued our drive across country to the small port of Gansbaai where we stayed the night.

As our Pelagic trip was sadly cancelled due to the bad weather, we were relieved to find that the Dyer Island Marine Big 5 whale watching cruise was still on as the coast on this side was more sheltered. The voyage produced several *Southern Right Whales* with a mother and calf approaching close to the boat. The boat also circled a small rocky island with a large colony of *Cape Fur Seals* on. *Kelp* and *Hartlaub's Gulls* circled the boat and several *Greater Crested* and *Sandwich Terns* flew past. Returning to port we passed a shark dive boat with a group of wet suited spectators in a cage hung off the side of the boat observing *Bronze Whaler Sharks* approaching close to feed off chum

thrown into the water by the crew.

Returning to Simons Town where we were staying in Cape Town, we enjoyed the sight that evening of two *Cape Porcupines* feeding on vegetables and fruit left out by our hosts. In the morning feeders provided in their fynbos garden attracted *Cape Sugarbirds*, *Orange-breasted*, *Malachite* and *Southern Double-collared Sunbirds*, *Cape Bulbuls* and *Speckled Mousebirds*.



Cape Batis

The following day the South Easter was at full force with gale force winds making conditions extremely difficult for birding. However, we took a chance and drove to the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens which proved to be a good choice as it was sheltered from the wind and produced several good sightings including *Cape Spurfowl*, *Alpine Swift*, a pair of *Spotted Eagle-Owls*, *Cape Batis*, *Southern Boubou*, *Sombre Greenbul*, *Karoo Prinia*, *Familiar Chat*, *Sweet Waxbill* and *Cape Canary*.



Hartlaub's Gull

Despite the windy conditions we drove up the coast to the West Coast National Park where conditions were much calmer. The Park partially surrounds a large lagoon and is renowned for its flocks of shorebirds. Large numbers of *Blacksmith Lapwings*, *Grey*, *Common Ringed* and *White-fronted Plovers*, *Ruddy Turnstone*, *Curlew* and *Wood Sandpipers*, *Little Stint*, *Common Greenshank*, *Eurasian Whimbrel* and a solitary *Eurasian Curlew* thronged the mudflats and large flocks of *Greater* and *Lesser Flamingos* were joined by a small group of *Great White Pelicans*. Driving around the reserve and stopping at picnic spots or viewpoints we came across *African Marsh Harrier*, *Yellow-billed Kite*, *White-backed Mousebird*, *African Hoopoe*, *Grey-backed Cisticola*, *Karoo Scrub Robin*,

*Yellow Bishop* and *Yellow Canary*. *Small Grey Mongoose*, *Bontebok* and *Common Duiker* added to the mammal list and several *Angulate* and *Speke's Hinged Tortoises* wandered across the road.

With a few hours to spare on our final day we decided to try our luck at the Strandfontein Sewerage works settlement ponds. Weather conditions had improved, and the ponds featured large flocks of *Greater* and *Lesser Flamingos*, *Cape Teal*, *Black-necked*, *Little* and *Great-crested Grebes*, *Great White Pelicans*, *Black-winged Stilts*, *Pied Avocets*, *Caspian*, *Greater Crested*, *White-winged* and *Sandwich Terns*, *Spur-winged Geese*, *Glossy Ibis* and a solitary out of range *Fulvous Whistling Duck*. With time running out we returned to Cape Town for our flights back to Johannesburg and Sally's onward flight to the UK.

Despite the delayed start, adverse weather conditions in Cape Town and the change of vehicles in Kruger Park we still managed to amass a total list of well over 350 species of birds and nearly 50 species of mammal.