



BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division
 Self Drive Itinerary

Birding Route Name: Gauteng Birding Route

Self Drive Itinerary Name: Johannesburg/Pretoria surrounds, day trip 4
 Botanical gardens

Botanical gardens are great places for seeing birds. They are natural gems in the midst of cities, often easily accessible and offer a relatively 'wild' place for both birds and birders alike.

** Please note that Northern Farms are only open on weekends & public holidays.

Habitats: wetland, dams, agricultural fields, cultivated gardens, cliffs, woodland

Reserves visited: Northern Farms (Diepsloot Nature Reserve), Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens

Key species: Half-collared kingfisher, Orange-breasted waxbill, Verreaux's eagle, Ovambo sparrowhawk, Striped pipit

Northern Farms - species count: ± 300; daily species list: 80 (summer), 55 (winter); endemics: 18

Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden - species count: ± 240; daily species list: 70 (summer), 50 (winter); endemics: 18

Driving times*: Drive from Johannesburg (45 mins) to Northern Farms (bird for 3–4 hrs). Drive to Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens (30 mins) and bird for 2-3 hrs. Return to Johannesburg (1 – 1½ hrs)

*Driving times are estimated to/from OR Tambo International Airport (Johannesburg).

GPS Co-ordinates: Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens
 27°50'40.7"E 26°05'13.8"S
 Long 27.84463 Lat -26.08716

Distance covered: 190 km

Costs: Fuel – R160

Northern Farms – R30 per person (only open weekends & public holidays)

Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden – R25 per person

Pack a picnic breakfast and lunch, or stop at the Eagle's Fare restaurant in the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens

Itinerary updated: October 2010

From OR Tambo International Airport, take the R24 west towards Edenvale which joins the N12. At the Gillooly's interchange take the N3 (N1) north towards Pretoria. Continue on the N3 for 15 km and then take the N1 south towards Roodepoort. Take the William Nicol off-ramp, keeping to the right and turn right at the top of the off-ramp into William Nicol Drive. Follow William Nicol Drive and just before the bridge keep left and take the Witkoppen Road glide-off. At the first set of traffic lights on Witkoppen Road turn right into Cedar Avenue. Travel about 11 km along Cedar Avenue until you reach a T-junction, turn right and continue along the R114. Turn left onto a tar road at the "Riverfield Lodge Hospital" sign (100m after Heron Bridge College) and at the end of the tar road follow the gravel road left, and then right under the N14 highway. Continue along this road for 400 m until you see the "Northern farm Access Cards" sign, and turn left onto the property and park where indicated. This is the ticket office, so aim to be here as they open at 06h00 (Sept – April) or 06h30 (May – Aug).

After buying tickets return to the R114, turn left onto the R114 and continue for 2.7 km. Turn left into Northern Farms. Follow the gravel road through the farm, under the highway and turn right, then keep left until some dams are on your left hand side. **Yellow-billed duck, Cape shoveller, White-faced duck, Southern pochard** and **Great crested grebe** are all common on the open water of the dams, while in the vegetation alongside look for **African reed**, **Lesser swamp** & **Little rush-warbler**. The fringing reed beds should be checked carefully for **Little bittern, African snipe** and **African rail**, with **Black crane** and **African purple swamphen** occurring regularly. From the dams take the right fork and head down to a small vlei to look for rallids and warblers. During summer months when birds are in full breeding plumage expect large numbers of gloriously coloured **Southern red bishop, Long-tailed, Red-collared & White-winged widowbirds**, as well as a smattering of **Yellow-crowned bishops**. Return to the dam and turn right which takes you along the dam wall then skirts an agricultural field. Scan these for hawking **South African cliff swallow, Lesser striped & White-throated swallow** and **White-rumped swift**. It is worth a quick stop at the first track off to the right, which crosses a canal, to look for **Half-collared kingfisher**. The rank grasses and vegetation found over much of the farm are great for **Black-chested prinia, Neddicky, Orange-breasted waxbill** and **Cape grassbird**. Continue over the canal and follow the track as it bends left and finally brings you back to the main gravel road, turn right and park. Walk down to the hide to scan for waterfowl, kingfishers, herons and **African fish eagle**.

A walk along the dam wall is a good place to look for the beautiful and uncommon **Half-collared kingfisher**. Getting back into your car return the way you came (i.e. do not cross the dam wall) keeping to the main gravel road and at the first intersection continue straight. Carefully scan the open fields for **Cape longclaw**, **African wattled lapwing**, **Pied starling**, **Glossy ibis**, **African quailfinch** and more uncommonly, **Black-winged pratincole**, **Abdim's stork**, **Yellow wagtail** and **Long-billed & Buffy pipit**. At a 4-way intersection turn left away from the dam. The road takes you around the same field giving open views of the farm, a great place to see if there are any raptors overhead – **Black-shouldered kite**, **Long-crested eagle**, **Black-breasted snake-eagle** or **African marsh harrier**. Three tracks converge to cross another small canal, and after the crossing bear left. This road parallels the canal and offers a more wooded habitat to bird, so in summer listen for the give-away calls of **Diderick & Klaas's cuckoo**. **Fiscal flycatcher**, **Cardinal woodpecker**, **Red-faced mousebird**, **Crested & Black-collared barbet** are all common species, but occasionally you may be lucky and spot a **Fairy flycatcher**. At the T-junction turn left, drive over a dam wall and the road bends sharply left to again skirt a field. Continue straight, past a turn-off to the left, and you will find yourself where you started at the two dams. Go back along the dam wall and follow the main gravel road out the same way you entered, back under the highway to the tar road R114.

Zero the odometer as you hit the R114 and turn right. After 6.1 ks keep straight and continue along the R114, and at 9.3 km turn right onto Malibongwe Drive. Shortly after turning onto Malibongwe Drive keep left and take the on-ramp onto the N14 towards Krugersdorp. After 13 km turn left onto the M47 at a four-way intersection. After about 3.5 km turn right into Handicap Street, drive for 1.5 km and take a right into Malcolm Street. This takes you right up to the entrance of the Gardens. An entry fee is payable at the entrance and the gardens are open from 08h00 – 18h00.

The Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens are almost 300 ha in extent and are most widely known for their pair of breeding **Verreaux's eagle**. The eagles have bred on the cliffs near the top of the Witpoortjie waterfall for over 40 years, and in winter (May-Sept) when they are raising chicks you are virtually guaranteed a sighting of these magnificent birds. As you enter the gardens turn right and head for the Forest Walk which is the first walk off to your left. A stroll through here, occasionally alongside the Crocodile River, may reveal **Half-collared kingfisher** and **African black duck**, as well as **African olive pigeon**, **African paradise flycatcher**, **Bar-throated apalis**, **Fairy flycatcher** (winter) and **Lesser honeyguide**. Keep an eye overhead for raptors, in particular **Ovambo sparrowhawk**. In summer the wooded areas are alive with the calls of **Red-chested**, **Black**, **Diderick's & Klaas's cuckoos!** At Lion's Bridge turn left and take a stroll through the Succulent Rockery where you may pick up **Malachite**, **Greater double-collared**, **White-bellied & Amethyst sunbirds**.

From here make your way down to Witpoortjie waterfall which is the best site to view the **Verreaux's eagle** from. Also scan the cliffs for **Lanner & Peregrine falcon, Rock kestrel, Mocking cliff-chat, Cape & Cinnamon-breasted bunting** and **Cape rock-thrush**. Follow the Mountain View Walk, which probably offers the best chance of **Striped pipit**, and stroll out into the Bushveld area where you can look for **Brubru, Ashy tit, Black cuckooshrike, Black-crowned tchagra** and **Bokmakierie**.

From here you can return to the parking area or continue to explore the gardens. Keep in mind that rush hour traffic in the greater Johannesburg/Pretoria area is from approximately 16h00 – 19h00, so if you wish to miss it, aim to leave the gardens with enough time to spare.

Tour Ends