



BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division
Self Drive Itinerary

Birding Route Name: Greater Limpopo Birding Route

Self Drive Itinerary Name: 5 Night Limpopo birding trip en route to Kruger National Park

Habitats: Afromontane and Riverine Forests, Grasslands, Lakes and Wetlands, Acacia Thornveld and Broad-leaved Woodland

Duration: 4 nights

Distance covered: 1150 km

Costs: Fuel	- R800
Reserve Costs (per person)	- R100
Guide Costs	- Negotiable
Accommodation	- Variable

Itinerary updated: August 2010

Specials:

Taita Falcon, African Finfoot, Buff-spotted Flufftail, African Cuckoo Hawk, Pel's Fishing Owl, Green Twinspot, African Broadbill, Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike, Bat Hawk, African Pygmy Goose, Allen's Gallinule, African Grass-Owl, Tinkling Cisticola, Dwarf Bittern, Barred Wren-Warbler, Black-faced Waxbill, Cape Parrot, Knysna Turaco, Orange Ground-Thrush, Barratt's Warbler, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, White-starred Robin, White-backed Night-Heron, Kalahari Scrub-Robin, Southern Pied Babbler, Southern Bald Ibis, Cape Vulture, Half-collared Kingfisher

Day 1

From Oliver Tambo International Airport, take the N1 north to Nylsvley Nature Reserve. En route, it is definitely worth spending some time along the Zaagkuil Road which follows the Pienaars River. Approximately 70 km north of Pretoria along the N1 turn off to the left at Pienaarsrivier/Rust de Winter, the road then meets a T-junction with the R101, turn right here, drive approximately 1 km then turn left onto the Zaagkuil Road.

Good birding is along the first 20 km which follows the Pienarsrivier; look out for waterbirds on the floodplain as well as thornveld species. Some of the species to look out for along the road include; **Black** and **Squacco Heron**, **African Spoonbill**, **Comb Duck**, **Greater Painted-Snipe**, **Yellow-crowned Bishop** and **Orange-breasted Waxbill** along the wetter areas. While in the Acacia thornveld look for **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Purple Indigobird** (try the turnoff to Wolfhuiskraal), **White-browed Sparrow-Weaver**, **Northern Black Korhaan**, **Desert Cisticola**, **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Burchell's Starling**, **Carmine Bee-eater** (late summer), **Southern Pied Babbler**, **Black Cuckoo**, **Kalahari Scrub-Robin**, **Marico Flycatcher**, **Southern White-crowned**, **Lesser Grey**, **Red-backed** and **Magpie Shrike**, **Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler** and a host of migratory warblers in summer such as **Icterine** and **Olive-tree Warbler**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Thrush Nightingale** and occasionally **River Warbler** (late summer is best for migrant warblers). Seedeaters to be seen include **Violet-eared Waxbill**, **Black-faced Waxbill**, **Great Sparrow**, **African Firefinch**, **Shaft-tailed Whydah**, **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah** and **Scaly-feathered Finch**.

Where the area becomes more open look out for **Chestnut-backed Finchlark**, **Red-headed** and **Cut-throat Finch**, **Capped Wheatear** and **Red-capped Lark**.

Head back onto the N1 and drive north approximately another 60 km, turn off the toll road at Kranskop onto the R33, the old road between Modimolle (Nylstroom) and Mookgophong (Naboomspruit). Travelling north along this road take a right turn to Boekenhout Station, cross the railway line and head straight to the reserve, or turn left (after the railway) and then sharp right to get to the flood plain and hides at Vogelfontein. The reserve offers camping, while a range of self-catering accommodation is available nearby. The main attraction at Nylsvley is the waterbirds and in wet summers a wide range of migrant waterbirds arrive, apart from the waterbirds there are number of good thornveld and woodland species to be found.

Probably the best place to try early in the morning is Vogelfontein (make sure to fetch the key from the reserve entrance) where most waterbirds can be seen along with a good selection of Rallids (particularly wet summers). Some of the better waterbirds to be seen here include; **Rufous-bellied**, **Squacco** and **Black Heron**, **Dwarf** and **Little Bittern**, **White-faced**, **Yellow-billed** and **White-backed Duck**, **African Pygmy Goose** (uncommon), and a host of Rallid species such as **African**, **Baillon's** and occasionally **Striped** and **Spotted Crake**, **Allen's Gallinule**, **African Rail** (also try Jacana Hide in the reserve) and **Lesser Moorhen**. Keep a look out for **Black Coucal** (long rank grass), **Lesser Jacana** and **Greater Painted-Snipe** while **African Marsh-Harrier** may be seen flying low over the wetland. Warblers to be looked out for in the reed beds include **Great Reed**, **Little Rush**, **Lesser Swamp**, **African Reed** and **European Sedge Warbler**. Rare migrants which do pitch up with some regularity include **Slaty Egret**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Streaky-breasted Flufftail** and **Eurasian Bittern**.

Further away from the wetland in grasslands in the reserve **Kurrichane Buttonquail** and **Corncrake** may be flushed; very often a large distance will need to be covered before having any success with flushing Corncrake.

The Jacana Hide can produce some of the following; **African Rail**, **Allen's Gallinule**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Little Bittern**, **Southern Masked Weaver** and occasionally in the early evening try walking the area for **African Grass-Owl** which may be flushed or even seen hunting.

Distances (approximate)

Airport- Zaagkuil Road: 115 km

Along Zaagkuil Road: 30 km

Zaagkuil Road- Nylsvley Nature Reserve: 60 km

Costs (approximate)

Nylsvley Nature Reserve: R20 p/p

Overnight Nylsvley Nature Reserve (1 night)

Contact:

Tel: +27(0)15 293 3616

Cell: +27(0)76 680 4277

Day 2

After an early morning visit to Vogelfontein, it is also worth birding around the areas away from the floodplain. These areas produce a number of good thornveld birds. Try the road to Vogelfontein where it turns away from the railway line. Some of the birds to be seen include **Black-faced Waxbill**, **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Scaly-feathered Finch**, **Ashy Tit**, **Southern Pied Babbler**, **Kalahari Scrub-Robin**, **Cape Penduline-Tit**, while migrant warblers such as **Common Whitethroat** and **Olive-tree Warbler** may be seen as well.

Broad-leaved woodland, such as those areas found along the south-eastern fence, can produce; **European Golden Oriole**, **Pale Flycatcher**, **Green-capped Eremomela** and one of the specials for the area, **Tinkling Cisticola**. You could come across raptors such **African Hawk-Eagle** and **Wahlberg's Eagle**.

The next destination is the Magoebaskloof where the next 2 nights will be spent, picking up a number of Afromontane species. However for those wanting to pick up **Taita Falcon** a fairly significant detour will need to be made via the Abel Erasmus Pass. To get to Magoebaskloof from Nylsvley, it is a case of following the N1 north and turning right onto the R71 at Polokwane. It is however worth stopping in at Polokwane Nature Reserve to pick up Short-clawed Lark. Magoebaskloof is approximately another 90 km along this road. If going via Abel Erasmus Pass, make your way round along the R519 to Roedtan, then onto the R518, next onto the R37 and finally R36, to the Abel Erasmus Pass which carries onto Magoebaskloof via Tzaneen.

The tiny **Taita Falcon** can be seen along the Abel Erasmus Pass just before the J.G. Strijdom Tunnel. Heading north along the Abel Erasmus Pass (R36), park at the curio stall on the right side of the road approximately 1.3 km before the J.G. Strijdom Tunnel. Michael Kumako (+27 (0)79 261 1559) who should be at the curio stall (24°27'35.6" S, 30°36'37.5 E) will know the whereabouts of roosting birds. If Michael is not here, try scanning the cliffs for the birds. A good place to try is to walk across the road (about 30m towards the bridge) and scan the cliff face back across the road. Other birds to be seen in the area include; **Striped Pipit**, **Mocking Cliff-Chat**, **Cape Rock-Thrush**, **Rock Martin** and **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting**.

Try the grasslands in the area known as the California Tribal area (approximately 5km before the tunnel) for **Southern Bald Ibis**, as well as **Cape Vulture**. From the tunnel carry on to Magoebaskloof for some great afromontane birding.

There are a number of places to stay in the Magoebaskloof area, such as Magoebaskloof Hotel and Kurisa Moya Lodge. Kurisa Moya lodge is situated in a patch of forest in the Magoebaskloof, where a good selection of species can be picked up. There is a guide, David Letsoalo, who is based at the lodge who knows the birds of the area really well, and should be able to help find you most of the specials of the area.

Distances (approximate)

Nylsvley Nature Reserve- Magoebaskloof: 210 km

Nylsvley Nature Reserve- Magoebaskloof (via Abel Erasmus pass): 430 km

Guide Costs: Negotiable

Overnight Kurisa Moya Nature Lodge (2 nights)

Contact:

Tel: +27 (0)15 276 1131

Cell: +27 (0)82 200 4596

Email: info@krm.co.za

Website: www.krm.co.za

Day 3

Probably the best birding to be had is along Woodbush Forest Drive. To reach Woodbush Forest Drive from Polokwane way; carry along the R71 past Haenertsberg, 2km after passing the Magoebaskloof Hotel turn left onto a gravel road to Houtbosdorp/Wodbush. 2.5 km further along keep to the right fork and then 2.1 km further fork right again. This track offers good birding for the next 13 km. To find **Cape Parrot** try the lookout point, to reach the lookout point, instead of taking the last right fork, keep left and try approximately a kilometre down this track. The best time is early morning when the parrots fly above the forest.

Birds to be seen along Woodbush Forest Drive include **Black-fronted** and **Olive Bush-Shrike**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler**, **Cape Batis**, **Square-tailed Drongo**, **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher**, **African Emerald Cuckoo**, **Scaly-throated Honeyguide**, **Yellow-streaked Greenbul**, **Olive Woodpecker**, **Knysna Turaco**, **African Cuckoo Hawk**, **Forest Buzzard** (winter), **African Goshawk** and **African Crowned Eagle**. Look out for skulking species such **White-starred Robin**, **Chorister Robin-Chat**, **Brown Scrub-Robin**, **Orange Ground-Thrush** and **Olive Thrush** as well as **Barratt's Warbler** (easy to hear calling but difficult to find). The exotic plantations often produce **Long-crested Eagle** and **Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk**. **Bat Hawk** nests in the area and the guides will know the whereabouts of the nest.

Another forest route to take is the one that passes Dap Naude Dam, which takes you through some forest then into grassland and eventually some Protea stands. Birds to see here include **Black**, **Levaillant's** and **African Emerald Cuckoo**, **Knysna Turaco**, **Little Sparrowhawk**, **Narina Trogon**, **Olive Woodpecker**, **Barratt's Warbler**, **Black-fronted Bush-Shrike** and if you are lucky **Gurney's Sugarbird** (Protea stands).

Try the Debengeni Falls area for **African Dusky Flycatcher**, **Red-backed Mannikin**, **Green Twinspot**, along with **Mountain Wagtail** and from time to time a **Grey Wagtail** pitches up and stays for a while.

For those who still need **Short-clawed Lark** it is worthwhile driving the 70 km (approximate) to Polokwane Game Reserve, where you stand a very good chance of finding the lark which can be found all over the reserve in broad-leaved woodland.

Other birds to be seen in the reserve include **Brown-backed Honeybird, Black-faced Waxbill, Ashy Tit, Violet-eared Waxbill, Kalarari Scrub-Robin, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Marico Flycatcher** and **Bushveld Pipit**. Most **Gabar Goshawk** found in the reserve are of the melanistic variety, while other raptors include **Booted Eagle, Greater Kestrel, Secretarybird**, as well as **African White-backed, Cape** and **Lappet-faced Vulture**. In the open plains look out for **Northern Black Korhaan, Double-banded Courser** (uncommon) and **Ant-eating Chat**. Then head back to Magoebaskloof for the night.

Distances (approximate)

Travelling around the Magoebaskloof: 40 km

Round trip to Polokwane Nature Reserve: 150 km

Costs (approximate)

Debengeni Falls: R10

Polokwane Nature Reserve: R15 p/p

Overnight Kurisa Moya Nature Lodge

Day 4

The next night will be spent in the Soutpansberg where there are a number of birding sites to find specials in the area. Most of the birding spots are found around the Makhado (Louis Trichardt) area, where a range of accommodation can be found in town. Shiluvu Lakeside Lodge is located on the banks of Albasini Dam and offers boatrides on the dam, where some species may be observed more easily and at closer ranges (such as night heron and finfoot). Ben Lavin Nature Reserve can also serve as a useful base for exploring the Soutpansberg, accommodation ranges from lodges to huts as well as camping facilities and a rustic bush camp.

Albasini Dam itself is a great place to find **African Finfoot** and **White-backed Night Heron**. Check the quiet tributaries for both, especially in areas where there is a lot of overhanging vegetation. **Half-collared Kingfisher** can also be seen fishing in the dam, especially in the quiet backwaters. Other birds to look out for in the surrounding vegetation include; **Grey-headed Parrot, African Broadbill, Marico Flycatcher, Gorgeous** and **Olive Bush-Shrike, Bar-throated Apalis** and **White-throated Robin-Chat**. In the grassland areas look out for **Shelley's Francolin** and **Croaking Cisticola**.

Birding around Ben Lavin Nature Reserve could produce bushveld species such as **White-browed** and **Bearded Scrub-Robin**, **Cape Glossy Starling**, **Little** and **African Goshawk**, **Shikra**, **Dusky**, **Village** and **Purple Indigobird**, **Brubru**, **Crested** and **Natal Francolin** as well as **Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove**. At night it is possible to find **Barn**, **Southern White-faced** and **Spotted Eagle-Owl**, **Fiery-necked Nightjar** and **Bronze-winged Courser**

Distances (approximate)

Magoebaskloof- Soutpansberg: 140 km

Driving around the Soutpansberg: 50 km

Costs (approximate)

Boat trip on Albasini Dam: Enquire at Shiluvan Lakeside Lodge

Ben Lavin Nature Reserve: R15 p/p + R10 per vehicle

Overnight Shiluvuvaru Lakeside Lodge (1 night)

Contact:

Tel: +27 (0)15 556 3406

E-mail: info@shiluvuvaru.com

Website: www.shiluvuvaru.com

Day 5

Entabeni Forest is a good place to spend the morning before heading off to Kruger. It should produce a good selection of forest species and is one of the few places in South Africa where **Blue-spotted Wood-Dove** can be found. Try for this bird in areas away from the true forest often on the disturbed slopes of the mountain. Some of the other forest birds to be seen at Entabeni include **Orange Ground-Thrush**, **Black-fronted Bush-Shrike**, **Yellow-streaked Greenbul**, **White-starred Robin**, **Brown Scrub-Robin**, **Red-capped** and **Chorister Robin-Chat**, **Olive Woodpecker**, **Crested Guineafowl**, **Sweet Waxbill**, **Knysna** and **Purple-crested Turaco**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Southern Double-collared Sunbird**, **Lemon Dove**, **African Olive-Pigeon**, **Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler**. Watch overhead for **Forest** and **Jackal Buzzard**, **African Goshawk** and **Long-crested Eagle**.

From Makhado the drive to the Punda Maria Gate of Kruger National Park, along the R524, is approximately 140 km and can easily be done in a couple hours.

Distances (approximate)

Makhado-Punda Maria Gate: 140 km

Costs (approximate)

Entabeni Forest: R10 p/p + R10 per vehicle

Overnight Punda Maria rest camp (1 night)**Contact:**

SANPARKS Central Reservations

Tel: +27 (0)12 428 9111

Email: reservations@sanparks.org

Website: www.sanparks.org

The tour can end here with the return drive to Johannesburg from Punda Maria gate or continue your birding through the Kruger National Park, exiting at a gate of your choice.

Tour Ends