



BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division  
Self Drive Itinerary

**Birding Route Name:** Southern KwaZulu Natal Birding Route

**Self Drive Itinerary Name:** Durban Day Trip – Option B

**Habitats:** Estuary, lagoon, coastal forest, reed beds, pelagics

**Duration:** 7 hours - Umhlanga Lagoon NR (2/3 hrs) – drive (10 mins) – Umhlanga Ponds (1 hr) – drive (15 mins) – Umgeni River Mouth (2/3 hrs) – drive to Dbn (20 mins)

**Distance covered:** ±100kms

**Costs:** Fuel – R80

**Itinerary updated:** January 2010

### Itinerary

This day trip heads north from Durban and heads to the Umhlanga area. Umhlanga Lagoon provides some fantastic forest birding in the suburbs, and the opportunity to perhaps see some marine bird species as well. The Ponds and the Umgeni River mouth provide some freshwater and estuarine birding.

#### **Umhlanga Lagoon Nature Reserve**

To get to Umhlanga Lagoon Nature Reserve from the airport, take a right at the traffic lights onto the N2 to Durban/Pietermaritzburg. Travel for approx. 25km's on the N2 before taking the Umhlanga/Phoenix/Mt Edgecombe off-ramp. At the top of the off-ramp, turn right onto the M41. Continue along the M41, turn left into Umhlanga Rocks Drive and keeping in the left lane, head north onto the M4/ Leo Boyd Highway. From the M4 North take the Portland Drive exit. Turn right at the T-junction and immediately right again. Turn left into Newlands Drive after driving under the highway. Turn left at the stop sign, into Lagoon Drive. The entrance to the reserve is at the end of the road (GPS: 29°42'46.99''S, 31°05'33.16''E).

From the car park follow the single path that crosses a boardwalk, before the path splits left and right, describing a circular route. The right fork crosses a reed bed, look for **Black crane**, before ascending the sand dune for views across the lagoon. From here it is possible to see **Kelp gull**, **White-fronted plover**, and possibly some terns on the sand bar, as well as **Goliath heron** and **Malachite kingfisher** at the edge of the lagoon. The left fork enters the dune forest proper. Specials to look out for are **Crested guineafowl**, **Spotted ground-thrush** (winter), **White-eared barbet**, **Yellow-rumped**

tinkerbird, Square-tailed drongo, Red-capped robin-chat, Brown scrub-robin, Black-throated wattle-eye, Green twin-spot (uncommon) and Grey sunbird. Crossing the reed beds look out for breeding (summer) Southern brown-throated weaver, Yellow weaver and Thick-billed weaver. The path then climbs a steep dune where it meets with the first path, and you can return to the car park along either path.

The nearby Breakers Resort is an option for breakfast (± R40 for a full English breakfast) before heading to the Umhlanga Wastewater Treatment Works. The "Ponds" are worth a quick visit, providing an opportunity to see a range of waterfowl and some reed bed species. Much of what you see here may also be found at Umgeni River mouth, the next stop, but this site allows a closer approach and perhaps better views.

### Umhlanga Ponds

Retrace your steps along Lagoon Drive, take a right onto Newlands Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> right into Egret Lane and 1<sup>st</sup> right into Portland Drive. Follow the road, which bears left up the hill. At the top of the hill, turn right into Herrwood Drive and pass through fields of sugar cane. The road descends into the valley for two kilometres, keep right, and at the bottom of the hill turn right into the parking area (GPS: 29°41'51.52''S, 31°04'50.31''E).

Many waterfowl visit these ponds, and a variety of the more common ducks have been recorded here including White-faced duck, Yellow-billed duck, Red-billed teal, Hottentot teal, Egyptian goose and Spur-winged goose. Black crake, Common moorhen, African purple swamphen and African jacana are regulars, while African crake and Lesser jacana are rare visitors. The thick vegetation surrounding the ponds provides refuge for Village and Yellow weavers, Dark-capped yellow warbler (winter), Little rush warbler, African reed warbler, and Lesser swamp warbler. Red-faced cisticola may also be found nearby. A hedge of hibiscus attracts sunbirds when in flower and Eastern olive, Grey and Purple-banded sunbirds may all be encountered.

### Umgeni River Mouth

Heading back towards Durban for the next stop, Umgeni River Mouth, retrace your steps to Portland Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> left into Egret Lane, 1<sup>st</sup> right into Newlands Drive and get back onto the M4 heading south. Take the M21/Riverside Rd off-ramp. Park at any of the parking areas along the road (GPS: 29°48'23.85''S, 31°02'13.03''E). The 'regulars' at this site include Grey, Goliath and Purple herons, Water thick-knee, Sacred ibis, African spoonbill and Woolly-necked stork. Pink-backed and White pelicans are frequent visitors, while Black oystercatchers make an occasional appearance at the mouth. Summer is the best time for this site as the mud flats provide feeding opportunities for numbers of Palaearctic waders; Terek sandpiper, Grey plover, Curlew sandpiper, Sanderling, Little stint, Common ringed plover, Greater sand plover (rare). This site also provides excellent opportunities for spotting rarities, and over the years these have included Greater frigatebird, Crab plover, Red-necked stint, Broad-billed sandpiper, Common black-headed gull, Bridled and Sooty terns. Waterfowl are also plentiful, with White-faced and Yellow-billed ducks, and Egyptian and Spur-winged geese being the most common. In the reed-beds upstream, look out for Red-faced and Rufous-winged cisticolas (rare), while the waterways hold Malachite, Pied and Giant kingfishers. The car park on the opposite side (south bank) provides a good vantage (a telescope is advantageous) from which to scan the sand spit at the river mouth and the open ocean for pelagics (Subantarctic skua, Cape gannet, White-chinned petrel, Indian yellow-nosed albatross), particularly after a large storm. To get to the south bank take the M21/Riverside Rd and get onto the M4 heading south to Durban, cross the bridge and take the off-ramp signed Athlone Drive/ Blue Lagoon. Take the 1<sup>st</sup> left into Snell Parade and at the T-junction turn right into Lagoon Drive (GPS: 29°48'45.32''S, 31°02'24.29''E).