



BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division
Self Drive Itinerary

Birding Route Name: Southern KwaZulu Natal Birding Route

Self Drive Itinerary Name: Southern KZN Overnight Option

Habitats: Coastal grassland, coastal forest, scarp forest, bushveld
Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve, Umdoni Park, Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve

Duration: 6 hours - Drive (30 mins) – Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve (2/3 hrs) – drive (20 mins) -
Umdoni (4/5 hrs) – drive (45 mins) – Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve (afternoon)

Distance covered: ±300kms

Costs:
N2 toll fees – R15.00
Fuel – R300
Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve – R10 pp.
Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve – R10 pp.
Umtamvuna Nature Reserve – R15pp.
Accommodation

Itinerary updated: January 2010

Itinerary

Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve

Exit the airport and take a left at the traffic lights onto the N2 towards Port Shepstone. After approx. 40 km's take the R612/ Park Rynie/Umzinto off-ramp (GPS: [30°18'44.95''S, 30°43'33.71''E](#)) and follow it inland for about 12,5km, passing through Umzinto. The signposted turnoff to Vernon Crookes Nature Reserve is on the right (GPS: [30°18'49.21''S, 30°37'22.33''E](#)). Follow the gravel road, taking note of the signboards, the main entrance is about 6 km off the tar road. Gate opening time is 6:00am year-round. Leave Durban early enough to reach Vernon Crookes at 6:00am as the gates open. This site conserves some of southern KZN's last remaining coastal grassland, as well as patches of coastal forest. Of particular interest in this reserve are therefore the grassland species, and the **Short-tailed pipit** is the star of a visit. However, this species is very selective about habitat, preferring short, ankle-height grassland on hillsides. Look for areas in the reserve where the grass is short (after a winter burn), and on a hilly or gently undulating hillside as they avoid flat areas. If the grass is long the bird will not be present, so you may need to drive around the reserve to find suitable habitat. The best time to see the pipit is at dawn during springtime (Oct – Nov) when the males display and call, and it is often the call that alerts you to the birds' presence. Otherwise it is difficult to find, and you will need to walk the slopes in the hope of flushing one. Also on these slopes

look for **Cape longclaw** (southern Africa endemic), and in the tall grass, **Broad-tailed warbler**. Carry on along the road taking the right fork, thereafter keeping left at any further road choices. This takes you up onto a grassland plateau (GPS: 30°16'03.57''S, 30°37'21.92''E) where **Pale-crowned, Wing-snapping, Croaking** and **Zitting cisticolas** are easily found. Raptors regularly recorded in the reserve include **Jackal buzzard** (southern Africa endemic), **Lanner falcon, Martial eagle** and **Long-crested eagle**.

Umdoni Park

Head back towards the highway, heading south towards Port Shepstone. Travel for approx. 30 km's along the N2 and take the R102 Esperenza/ Sezela off-ramp (GPS: 30°23'13.04''S, 30°39'20.07''E). Turn left onto the R102 at the top of the off-ramp and continue approx. 7 km along R102 towards Pennington. Turn right into Pennington Drive (GPS: 30°22'46.36''S, 30°41'21.78''E) and after approximately 800 m turn right into Minerva Rd (look out for Umdoni Golf and Birdlife SA signs - GPS: 30°23'02.37''S, 30°41'31.36''E). Continue straight on to a gravel road and through Security Control. Shortly after passing through the gates of the estate (GPS: 30°23'32.06''S, 30°41'20.49''E), there is fork in the road. The road to the left follows the coast along the edge of the golf greens to the golf course clubhouse. The road to the right is signposted to the Wildlife and Environment Society's parking area. Follow this road through extensive areas of forest, and stop along the way for forest birding. In the general area of the parking spot several roads and paths branch off into the forest.

The specials to look out for in the forest are **Scaly-throated honeyguide, Narina Trogon, Green malkoha** (listen out for its call as this species is notoriously difficult to find otherwise), **Grey waxbill** and **Brown scrub-robin**. **Green twinspace** may be found at the picnic site birdbath at the Environmental centre. Another sought after southern African endemic that occasionally occurs at Umdoni Park is the **Southern tchagra**. Winter specials include **Spotted ground-thrush, White-starred robin** and **Yellow-throated woodland warbler**. Birds that have been recorded regularly throughout the year and are fairly common in the coastal forest here are **Crowned eagle, Narina trogon, Square-tailed drongo, Yellow-rumped tinkerbird, Golden-tailed** and **Cardinal woodpeckers, Gorgeous bush-shrike, Tambourine dove, Southern black** and **Ashy flycatchers, Crowned** and **Trumpeter hornbills, Knysna turaco** (South African endemic), **Purple-crested turaco, Yellow-bellied greenbul, Brown scrub robin, Red-capped robin-chat, Cape batis** (southern Africa endemic), **Black-bellied starling, Grey waxbill** (forest edges), **Dark-backed weaver, Eastern olive** and **Grey sunbirds**. Outside the forest, in the grassland and riverine areas, look for flocks of **Red-backed** and **Bronze mannikins**, keeping an eye out for the rare **Magpie mannikin**. Other common species include **Yellow-throated longclaw, Hamerkop, Natal francolin** and **Black saw-wing**. Less common birds that occur here are **Black** and **Grey cuckooshrikes, Little sparrowhawk** and **African goshawk**. The Umdoni Park clubhouse is open to visitors for drinks and meals from 7:30am, but only if there are golfers on the course. Contact Umdoni Park on +27 (0)39 975 1615 to check if the clubhouse is open.

Magpie mannikin

If you missed seeing this elusive bird at Umdoni Park there are a few more areas along the south coast where sightings are possible. In particular, Magpie mannikins have been recorded at Pumula, Southport, Umtentweni and Port Shepstone. From the N2 heading south, take the R102/ Hibberdene off-ramp (GPS: 30°33'12.31''S, 30°35'10.46''E) and head south. The R102 takes you through the small villages mentioned, so keep an eye open for the birds along forest edges, clearings in dense bush and well-wooded gardens.

* Southport – as you enter the village, take the 3rd right into Kloof Rd (GPS: 30°40'35.58''S, 30°30'14.40''E). The birds have been seen in gardens along this road.

* Umtentweni – at the R102 and Rethman Drive intersection, turn right and immediately left into Link Rd (GPS: 30°42'40.09''S, 30°28'24.58''E). Search for the birds in suitable habitat along this road. Residents in Umtentweni feed the birds, so the beach-side of the main road should also be searched.

Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve

Take the N2 highway inland from Port Shepstone to Kokstad, signed Marburgh/Harding/Kokstad. The turnoff to Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve from the N2 is 21km from Port Shepstone and is well signposted (ignore the first turnoff marked Oribi Gorge about 10km from Port Shepstone). The road winding through Oribi Gorge is spectacularly scenic allowing easy access to a large area of scarp forest and greatly facilitating birding. In addition, there are several walking trails that traverse all the major habitats and a comprehensive bird list is available from the main EKZNW office. It is suggested to overnight at Oribi Gorge so as to be able to do some early morning birding (always the most productive time of day) before returning to Durban. However, if time does not allow, it is an easy 2 hr drive back to Durban.

Knysna woodpecker (South African endemic) is not easy to find (listen for its call), but is a fairly common resident in the gorge and has been seen all along the tar road. Birds occur singly or in family groups, occasionally joining bird parties foraging in the forest, but be careful of the similarity with the **Golden-tailed woodpecker** (uncommon) which also occurs here. Also look out for **Olive woodpecker**. Birds to look, and listen, for on your drive through the reserve are similar to the forest birds found at Umdoni Park, and any that you missed there can hopefully be picked up here. Forest species to look for are **Olive bush-shrike**, **Yellow-throated woodland-warbler**, **Grey cuckooshrike**, **Lemon dove**, **Barratt's Warbler** (southern Africa endemic), **Greater double-collared sunbird** (southern Africa endemic) and **African broadbill** (uncommon). Common in these forests are **Green woodhoopoe**, **Trumpeter** and **Crowned hornbills**, **Black-collared barbet**, **Black-headed oriole**, **Cape batis** and **Collared sunbird**. In summer, **African emerald cuckoo** makes its presence known with its distinctive 'pretty georgie' call, though actually seeing the bird is a little harder. Other seasonal species of interest here are **Forest buzzard** (summer) and **Spotted ground-thrush** (winter). A night drive along the road is likely to reveal **African wood-owl** and listen for **Freckled nightjar** (uncommon). About 1.5 km's down the main road from the entrance, a pair of **African crowned eagle** have a nest in a roadside tree (Fluted milkwood *Chrysophyllum viridifolium*). Directly opposite the tree on the left-hand bend is a stream-line. This area is very good for **Narina trogon** and **African broadbill**. Travelling down the road and past the view site, approx. 700 – 800m, is a grassy area with scattered trees. Check this grassland area and forest edges for **Green twinspot** (uncommon), **Grey** and **Sweet waxbills** and **Red-backed mannikin**. On the lower side of the grassland area, where the forest resumes, is a good place for **Knysna woodpecker** and **Spotted-ground thrush**. Scan the Umzimkulwane River from wherever visible along the road, and the bridge (GPS: 30°42'26.25''S, 30°16'14.84''E), for **African finfoot** (uncommon), **Malachite kingfisher**, **African black duck** and **Mountain wagtail**. The picnic site adjacent to the Umzimkulwane River is very good for various species of flycatchers, robins and **Spotted ground-thrush**. The rare and localised **Knysna warbler** (South African endemic) has been recorded in Oribi Gorge on a few occasions, however a better site for this bird is Mbumbazi Nature Reserve (see below).

If you're hungry or just a little peckish, an absolute must is a stop at the Leopard Rock Coffee Shop. Situated on the edge of the Umzimkulu River gorge, enjoy beautiful views across the valley while sipping a coffee. After driving through the reserve from the main entrance, at the T-junction turn right and then left at the Leopard Rock Coffee Shop sign. Open Wednesday – Sunday between 09h00 and 16h00 (Tel: 039 687 0303).

Mbumbazi Nature Reserve

To access this reserve you need to have made prior arrangements with the Conservation Manager of the area, Mr Alfred Gcabashe on +27 (0)82 705 4324. The entrance fee is R10 pp and is payable at the Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve offices. To get to Mbumbazi NR, travel past OGNR on the N2 towards Harding/Kokstad. As you enter the small town of Paddock take your 1st left (at the police station). Drive along the gravel road until you see the reserve sign and turn right, this takes you to the reserve gate. As you go through the entrance gate there is a road (walking only) on the left into the forest. This is the site to see and hear the **Knysna warbler**. On the right a bit further on (towards the house/office) there is a trail into the forest where the warblers have also been recorded. The best time to see these birds is during the summer breeding season, early or late in the day, as they are inactive during the midday period.

Umtamvuna Nature Reserve

If you have more time to explore the southern KZN coast, Umtamvuna Nature Reserve is well worth a visit. The reserve lies just inland of Port Edward, on the provincial border of Eastern Cape and KZN. To get to the reserve follow the N2, then R61, south from Port Shepstone to Port Edward for about 45 km's. As you begin to enter the town of Port Edward, take a right into Izingolweni Rd (GPS: 31°02'55.44''S, 30°12'44.87''E). Follow this rd for 10 km's, turn left at the signpost for the Beacon Hill entrance to the reserve (GPS: 31°00'27.24''S, 30°10'48.29''E). There are no roads in the reserve and all birding must be done from one of the 7 hiking trails. The suite of birds is similar to that at Oribi Gorge Nature Reserve, though there are a number of species which may be easier to see in this reserve. In particular, there is a colony of breeding **Cape vulture** (southern Africa endemic) on the cliffs in the reserve. **White-necked ravens** are common alongside cliffs and gorges. In the grassland areas look for **Jackal buzzard** (southern Africa endemic), **Secretarybird** and **Southern ground hornbill**. Proteas in the grasslands provide nectar for **Malachite sunbirds** and **Gurney's sugarbirds** (southern Africa endemic), which occur here in the winter months (Mar – Oct).