



BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division  
Self Drive Itinerary

**Birding Route Name:** Western Cape Birding Route

**Self Drive Itinerary Name:** Langebaan and surrounds - Day Trip Option A

**Habitats:** Seashore, tidal mudflats, saltmarsh, strandveld, cultivated fields and Renosterveld.

This day trip covers a range of habitats from fynbos-like vegetation to the spectacular wetlands of Langebaan lagoon, and a wine-tasting if you're in the mood!

**Duration:** Drive to West Coast National Park (45 mins) – West Coast National Park (4/5 hrs)  
– drive (20 mins) – Darling detour (2/3 hrs) – drive to Cape Town (25 mins)

**Distance covered:** ± 250 km's

**Costs:** Fuel – R225

WCNP (Oct – July) - R26 pp (SA residents & citizens)  
R36 pp (SADC nationals)  
R40 pp (other nationals)

WCNP (Aug / Sept) – R38 pp (SA residents & citizens)  
flower season R52pp (SADC nationals)  
R72 pp (other nationals)

Tienie Versveld NR - free

Oudepos Wild Flower NR – donations appreciated (open Aug - Oct)

Waylands Wild Flower NR - donations appreciated (open Aug - Oct)

**Itinerary updated:** January 2010

## Itinerary

From Cape Town head north on the R27 to Langebaan/Velddrif. After the R315 Yzerfontein/Darling intersection continue on the R27 for a further 10.9 km's before turning left into the well signed West Coast National Park. Keep an eye open for hunting **Black harriers** along this stretch, as well as throughout the reserve. An entry fee is payable at the Park entrance, which includes a map of the reserve. Strandveld vegetation (a transitional vegetation type between fynbos and karooveld) dominates WCNP, and harbours species such as **White-backed mousebird, Grey tit, Cape penduline-tit, Chestnut-vented tit-babbler, Karoo scrub-robin, Karoo prinia, Cape bulbul, Karoo lark, Southern double-collared sunbird, Cape grassbird, Bokmakierie, Long-billed crombec, Bar-throated apalis** and **Grey-backed cisticola**, so look out for these birds throughout the reserve. Also watch out for Angulate tortoises which are regularly encountered along the road! The area around Geelbek Manor House is great for seeing the bolder birds of the strandveld, and **Karoo scrub-robin, Karoo prinia, Cape weaver, African hoopoe** and **Cape spurfowl** are regularly found on the lawns. The avenue of *Eucalyptus* in the approach to Geelbek Manor House is good for roosting **Black-headed & Grey herons, Spotted flycatcher** (summer), **Rock kestrel, Acacia pied barbet** and **Chestnut-vented tit-babbler**. **Common ostrich, Southern black korhaan** and **Grey-wing francolin** are also fairly common throughout the Park. Once at the manor house you have the option of 4 hides; 2 located on the shore of Langebaan lagoon, and 2 in the saltmarsh inland of the lagoon. The 1<sup>st</sup> hide, and arguably the best wader-watching spot in South Africa, is accessed from the far end of the *Eucalyptus* avenue. A wooden boardwalk takes you across a colourful patch of saltmarsh where **Kittlitz's plover, Black-winged stilt, Blacksmith lapwing** and **Cape wagtail** may be seen. **African rail** inhabit the reedbeds, but you need to be here early in the morning for a chance of seeing this secretive bird. Although summer can be particularly rewarding at Langebaan, as a number of vagrant waders are regularly recorded, there are numerous birds that are present year-round: **Chestnut-banded plover, Grey plover, Three-banded plover, Kittlitz's plover, White-fronted plover, Ruddy turnstone, Pied avocet, Black-winged stilt, Greater & Lesser flamingos, African spoonbill** and **Great white pelican**. Also look overhead for passing **African marsh harrier** and **Osprey**. Common summer migrants that boost wader diversity include **Sanderling, Little stint, Curlew sandpiper, Red knot, Terek sandpiper, Common greenshank, Marsh sandpiper, Common whimbrel, Common ringed plover** and **Bar-tailed godwit**. Some of the rarer summer migrants that you may be lucky enough to see are **Hudsonian godwit, Common redshank, Broad-billed sandpiper** and **Lesser sand plover**.

\* A note about the tides: the best time for wader viewing is just as the water begins to recede from its highest point, as the mud flats begin to be exposed, and the birds are forced into the narrow margin of land close to the hide. As the tide drops, the birds have a greater area over which to forage and move further out following the receding water. Although it is difficult to predict precisely, the best viewing is roughly 4½ hrs after high tide in Cape Town/Table Bay.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> hide on Langebaan lagoon is accessed from the front of Geelbek manor house – walk through the gardens toward the lagoon and turn left along the shoreline, the hide is only a few hundred metres further. This hide is located along a short boardwalk, though there are no surrounding reedbeds here. The 2 lagoon hides offer similar bird-watching opportunities, though the 1<sup>st</sup> hide is generally preferred.

The remaining 2 hides are on a pan at the edge of a saltmarsh. These hides, the 1<sup>st</sup> one in particular, are an option if you're waiting for the tide to start receding as waders occasionally roost here during high tide – depending on water levels in the pan. The 1<sup>st</sup> of the 'pan' hides is a 20-minute walk from the manor house, starting in the

parking area. Follow the signs and walk down a rough track before turning off to the right into a short, scrubby area. The path meanders through fairly open ground which is a good place to look for **Large-billed lark, Cape sparrow, Grey-backed & Levillant's cisticola, Yellow canary, Cape spurfowl, Cape longclaw** and **Common ostrich**. The pan often holds **Curlew sandpiper, White-fronted plover, Cape wagtail, African pipit** and an assorted mix of waders. From here, continuing along the path, the next hide is a 15-minute walk. Although not as productive for waders as the previous hides, on occasion **Chestnut-banded plover** has been seen here.

An alternative to the Geelbek hides for wader viewing is Seeberg hide, situated at the northern end of Langebaan Lagoon. This is perhaps a better option than the 'pan' hides for waiting out the tides if shorebirds are what you are here for, as numerous waders are present at Seeberg regardless of the tides. On the drive from Geelbek to Seeberg, take a left turn up a steep gravel road to Seeberg lookout. The large granite boulders provide an excellent spot from which to scan for **Black harrier, Peregrine falcon** and **Rock kestrel**, and are home to a family of Rock hyrax. The relatively open area around the car park is a good place to look for **Southern black korhaan** and **Grey-winged francolin**. Continue along the road towards Langebaan village, and after a short distance you'll see a turn-off to the left for Seeberg hide. The short road to the parking area, and the walk to the hide itself, provide for some excellent strandveld birding and hopefully you can catch up with any species that you've missed so far! In particular, **Cape penduline tit, Grey tit, Malachite sunbird** and **Chestnut-vented tit-babbler** are regularly seen here. The hide is positioned on the edge of Langebaan Lagoon so you are not as close to the birds as you are at the Geelbek hides. However, Seeberg is a good spot for **Bar-tailed godwits**, as well as a selection of terns - **Little, Common, Sandwich, Swift & Caspian terns**.

The Abrahamskraal waterhole is one of the few regular sources of freshwater in the reserve, and as such, is visited by numerous birds. The seedeaters are numerous here, so look for **Namaqua dove, White-throated, Brimstone & Yellow canary, Cape bunting** and **Common waxbill**, as well as flocks of **Common, Wattled & Pied starlings, Little, African black, White-rumped & Alpine swifts** together with **White-throated, Barn & Pearl-breasted swallows** may be seen overhead. The water and associated reeds host **South African shelduck, Little grebe, Cape shoveler, Black crane, Lesser swamp warbler, Little rush warbler** and the skulking **African rail**.

The Postberg section of the reserve, only open to the public during the flower season (Aug – Oct), is well worth a visit for the spectacular floral displays as well as for the numerous mammal species that occur in WCNP – **Gemsbok, Eland, Red hartebeest, Bontebok, Plains zebra, Springbok, Common duiker** and **Steenbok**. The vegetation in this section is also strandveld, so offers similar birding to the rest of the reserve.

The road ends at Tsaarsbank, with fantastic views across the Atlantic Ocean, a good place for whale watching. Birds occurring along the coast include **African black oystercatcher, Cape, White-breasted & Crowned cormorants**, and **Arctic terns** in winter.

The detour to Darling either before or after a visit to West Coast National Park is optional. The route takes you inland and through renosterveld, a fynbos-like vegetation that harbours a number of endemic plant and animal species. From Cape Town, look for a gravel road off to the right signed Darling Hills Road, opposite the Grotto Bay turn-off.. Take a slow drive along this ± 12 km section of gravel road, checking the surrounding fields for **Blue crane, Capped wheatear, Spurwing goose, Familiar chat, Pied starling, African pipit, Cape sparrow, Red-capped & Large-billed lark**. In summer look for hawking **European bee-eaters**. A number of pans or small streams are visible from the road, and the surrounding reeds or trees may support **Southern masked weaver, Cape weaver, Southern red bishop** and **Yellow bishop**. In the summer months listen for **Diderik cuckoo**,

as this cuckoo parasitizes both weavers and bishops. Coveys of **Grey-winged francolin** should be looked for all along this detour. Approximately 6km's down the road you will cross a river. From the bridge watch out for **White-throated swallow**, and in the riverine bush you may spot **Fiscal flycatcher** and **Acacia pied barbet**. Once you reach the tarred road (R307) turn left towards Darling and scan the fence posts or powerlines for perched **Jackal buzzard**. **Cape clapper lark** inhabits renosterveld, or more densely vegetated fynbos, so look for this bird in any of the flower reserves along this route. Continue through Darling along the R315 towards Yzerfontein, and look for the Tienie Versfeld Nature Reserve on the left. Park on the roadside, climb over the stile and wander freely in the reserve – there are no facilities here. This little flower reserve is best known for its Western Cape subspecies of **Cloud cisticola**, but you're also likely to find **Cape longclaw**, **Spur-winged goose**, **African pipit**, **African stonechat**, **Bokmakierie** and **Common quail** – though you'll probably hear rather than see this one! Once you've finished here, carry on the R315 to the intersection with the R27, turn right and carry on towards West Coast National Park.

\* If coming from WCNP turn left onto the R315 to Darling. Drive through the town, and after about 10 km's look for a gravel road off to the right. All the reserves are signed.

Yzerfontein is a small coastal village situated at the end of the R315, but it is the associated gypsum mine that makes it of interest to birders. Cross the R27/R315 intersection and travel for 4 km's towards Yzerfontein, then turn right towards the 'Gypsum Mine' and continue for a further 1.8 km's. Look for **Cape clapper & Cape long-billed lark** along the road, as well as in the vicinity of the saltpan. At the mine office ask for permission to bird the edges of the saltpan. This site is reliable for **Chestnut-banded plover**.

Geelbek' restaurant is conveniently situated close to Geelbek hide, is open from 9am – 5pm all week, & offers excellent dining. Alternatively, combine a wine tasting with lunch at Groote Post vineyard (lunch available Wed – Sat; +27 (0)22 492 3430) on the Darling detour.

\* A spotting scope is recommended for wader watching, though by no means a necessity.

\* Birding at Langebaan is tidal dependent, so you may have to alter the itinerary to fit in with the tides. The most rewarding birding occurs as the tide begins to drop, so time your visit to be at Geelbek hide about 4½ hrs after high tide in Cape Town/Table Bay (see [www.satides.co.za](http://www.satides.co.za) for info on tides).

\*Costs are accurate at the time of collation of copy

\*Fuel costs are based on the AA rate for a standard petrol 1.6L sedan, fuel price of R8.60/litre, and calculate out at R0.90/km.

\*Accommodation rates are on a per person sharing basis. Single supplements are usually more expensive.

\*GPS co-ordinates are in DDMSS format. To convert to an alternative format try [www.earthpoint.us/Convert.aspx](http://www.earthpoint.us/Convert.aspx)