



BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division
Self Drive Itinerary

Birding Route Name: Zululand Birding Route

Self Drive Itinerary Name: 5 Day Zululand Specials Trip

Habitats: Evergreen, Coastal, Riverine, Dune, Sand and Mangrove Forests, Grasslands, Lakes and Wetlands, Estuary, Savanna and Flood plains.

Duration: 5 nights

Itinerary :

Night 1: St Lucia Village

Night 2: Bonamanzi Game Reserve

Night 3: Mkuze Game Reserve

Night 4: Mkuze Game Reserve

Night 5: Eshowe

Distance covered: 900 km

Costs: Fuel	- R700
Reserve Costs (per person)	- R220
Guide Costs	- R500
Accommodation	- Variable

Itinerary updated: August 2010

Specials

Green Barbet, Swamp Nightjar, Mangrove Kingfisher (winter), Pel's Fishing Owl, Neergaard's Sunbird, Lemon-breasted canary, Pink-throated Twinspot, Woodward's Batis, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Southern-banded Snake-Eagle, Spotted Ground-Thrush, Pink-throated Longclaw, Green Twinspot, Palmnut Vulture, Rudd's Apalis, African Finfoot, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Lesser Crested Tern, Greater Sand Plover, Buff-spotted Flufftail, Green Malkoha, African Cuckoo-Hawk, Lesser Jacana,

Day 1

Arrive in Durban and head north to the small town of St Lucia, stopping off on the way for a few Zululand specials, depending on time. Depending on what birds you are after (and time), you can stop off at Amatikulu Nature Reserve for Swamp Nightjar, Umlalazi Nature Reserve for Mangrove Kingfisher (winter only) or at Ngoye Forest for Green Barbet and Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon.

Amatikulu Nature Reserve located approximately 115 km north of Durban, is well signposted from the N2 and easy to find. The main attraction at Amatikulu is Swamp Nightjar, which can be found in the Mlala Palm savanna, such as along the start of the 4x4 track. Try using the local guides (Junior Gabela, +27 (0)82 667 3704 or Jotham Maduna, +27 (0)71 225 2704) as they often know the whereabouts of nesting or roosting birds. If you do not have a guide, then just try walking the area and hopefully one will flush the nightjar. If you do not have a 4x4, just park the car at the start of the track and walk the area for the nightjar. One can also try the forest areas (just below the campsite) along the river for a few forest birds such as; Narina Trogon, Grey Waxbill, Green Twinspot and Black-throated Wattle-eye. Try using tape call back for the wattle-eye as they respond very well to it. Allow 2 hours for finding the Nightjar.

Next destination is Umlalazi Nature Reserve located at the town of Mtunzini. Take the turn off to Mtunzini (at the toll plaza) and head into Mtunzini. Take a right turn to the reserve (well signposted) just past the shops in Mtunzini town and after a couple km you will reach the gate (28°57'14.49" S, 31°45'59.29" E). Once in the reserve take the first left turn down to the lagoon. Park right at the end of the picnic area (a couple km down the road) and walk the road going out of the campsite for the Mangrove Kingfisher (not the road you just came in on). The kingfisher can be seen anywhere along this road in the mangrove forests, the best area is the first 300 metres of the walk (28°56'46.93" S, 31°46'40.06" E). Try playing its call in this area, as it responds really well. A number of forest species can be seen from the forest trail (starts just above the beach car park) such as Green Twinspot, Spotted Ground-Thrush (winter), White-eared Barbet, Grey and Olive Sunbirds, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and other common forest species. Note Umlalazi Nature Reserve is probably only worthwhile in winter when Mangrove Kingfisher is present, as all the other birds here can be picked up elsewhere on the trip.

Palmnut Vulture and Woolly-necked Stork can be seen throughout the reserve and town; however the Raphia Palm Monument is probably your best bet for Palmnut Vulture. Allow 1.5 hours for finding the Kingfisher. Other wildlife throughout the reserve include; Red and Blue Duiker, Bushpig, Bushbuck and a number of frog species most notably the vulnerable Pickersgill's Reed Frog, found in the reed bed (as you enter the reserve)

Ngoye Forest, home to the Green Barbet, was previously restricted to 4x4 vehicles but can now be reached by 4x2 vehicles with decent ground clearance. From Mtunzini, head inland and take the R102 north towards Empangeni, after approximately 4.2 km take the turn off to your left, at an old petrol station (28°53'12.89" S, 31°48'57.34" E). Once on this heavily potholed road continue for 4.5 km and take a turn to your right onto the D1554. Once on the D1554 continue 4.4 km and just after the Manzamnyama school take a small track to the right (28°52'47.93" S, 31°44'40.29" E). After approximately 100m you will pass through a small stream and then head up a steep hill after approximately 1.3 km you will reach the main forest. Before reaching the forest you will pass through a small patch of forest (28°51'23.23" S, 31°44'14.47" E) which often holds Green Barbet, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher and Mountain Wagtail (in the stream) and approximately 300 m further up the hill you will drive through the small wetland (28°51'06.01 S, 31°22'22.85" E) and then some good grassland.

The Green Barbet is relatively easy to find in the forest and a couple hours in the forest should produce sightings of this species. Listen out for its chop-chop call and try using call back to lure it in. The other bird worth looking out for at Ngoye is the Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, try climbing to the top of granite koppies or hills (such as the one above the birders camp) and scanning the forest for the pigeons flying over the forest. Other birds to look out for include Yellow-streaked and Yellow-bellied Greenbul (both common), Spotted Ground-Thrush, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Green Malkoha, Lemon Dove, Chorister Robin-Chat, Olive Woodpecker, African Crowned Eagle, Narina Trogon, Brown Scrub-Robin, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Mountain Wagtail (streams) and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher. The surrounding grasslands can produce Southern Ground-

Hornbill, Striped and Plain-backed Pipit and the occasional Broad-tailed Warbler in the damper areas with longer grass. Try the small wetlands (such as the one you drive through before the turn-off to the wardens house) for Red-chested Flufftail, although extremely difficult to find. Allow 3 hours for the drive to and from the forest and finding the Barbet.

Other wildlife to be seen include the endemic subspecies of Red Squirrel, the Ngoye Red Squirrel as well as Bushpig, Syke's (Samango) Monkey and frog species such as Bush Squeaker and Natal Tree Frog.

From Ngoye head north (along the R102) to Empangeni, from here you can get back onto the N2 and drive north to St Lucia to spend the first night. A variety of B & Bs and lodges are found in St Lucia town ranging from budget to luxury accommodation. There are also a number of campsites in the area, which often hold a good variety of bird species. It will be worthwhile trying for African Wood-Owl at the Iphiva campsite (next to entrance to Isimangaliso Wetland Park) or the start of Igwalagwala trail at night. However do not walk the trail at night due to the presence of Hippo.

Distances (approximate)

King Shaka International Airport-Amatikulu Nature Reserve: 115km

Amatikulu- Umlalazi Nature Reserve: 25km

Umlalazi Nature Reserve-Ngoye Forest: 22 km

Ngoye-St Lucia: 100km

Costs (approximate)

Amatikulu Nature Reserve: R10 p/p

Umlalazi Nature Reserve: R10 p/p

Guide Costs: R250

Day 2

An early walk along the Igwalagwala trail, starting at the end of McKenzie Street (the main street in St Lucia town), is normally very productive and here one can find a number of specials. This trail is one of the better places to find the elusive Buff-spotted Flufftail. Listen out for it scratching in the leaf litter, or even seen walking quietly along the paths, first thing in the morning. Also try playing its call while sitting quietly in the undergrowth and waiting for it to walk in. Igwalagwala is a great place to find Woodward's Batis, Brown Scrub-Robin, Rudd's Apalis Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Olive Bush-Shrike, Black-bellied Starling, Narina Trogon, Green Malkoha, Livingstone's Turaco, Red-backed Mannikin, Grey Waxbill and Green Twinspot. Allow 3 hours for walking the Igwalagwala trail.

From here it is best to head into the Isimangaliso Wetland Park towards Cape Vidal, along the drive to Cape Vidal (once in the park) you will pass some great coastal grassland which seasonally get flooded, look out for Lesser Jacana, African Pygmy-Goose, as well as Fulvous and White-backed Duck. You could also come across Grey-rumped Swallow, and occasionally Rosy-breasted Longclaw which is easier to find closer to Cape Vidal. Along the way also keep a lookout for Southern-banded Snake-Eagle at forest patches and on telephone poles, this area is one of the better places in southern Africa for the Snake-Eagle.

The Cape Vidal campsite is one of the better places to find Woodward's Batis, Brown Scrub-Robin and Green Twinspot (try around the cabins). For the Batis and Scrub-Robin try doing the walk up to the whale-watching tower. Other birds to be found in the campsite include; Livingstone's Turaco, Green Malkoha, Buff-spotted Flufftail, Eastern Nicator, Narina Trogon, Rudd's Apalis (Acacia thickets), Red-backed Mannikin and Grey Sunbird. Allow 3½ hours from St Lucia into the park and back into St Lucia. In the park Hippopotamus, White

Rhino, Kudu, Common Reedbuck, Common Duiker, Impala, Nyala and the elusive Leopard can be seen, as well as many huge Nile Crocodiles.

To pick up a waders and terns the Umfolozi River mouth and St Lucia estuary mouth is worth a visit, particularly in summer. To reach this area, take a left at the first T-junction in town, then immediately take a right, at the next T-junction take a right which will lead you to the beach parking. Check the estuary mouth (now cut off from the sea) right in front of you, the other good place is the Umfolozi River mouth. To get to the river mouth walk south along the beach, for approximately 1 km.

At both these areas a good variety of waders can be found including Sanderling, Greater Sand Plover, Common Ringed Plover, White-fronted Plover, Grey Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Terek Sandpiper and Bar-tailed Godwit. There are often large numbers of roosting terns including Little, Lesser Crested, Sandwich, Common, Swift and Caspian. Black Oystercatcher is becoming increasingly common while European Oystercatcher is found here most years, along with the odd Chestnut-banded Plover. Other rarities include Sooty Tern, Brown Noddy and Greater Frigatebird. Other birds to be seen include; Pink-backed and Eastern White Pelican and Cape Gannet can be seen offshore. Allow 2 hours for the Umfolozi River mouth and estuary mouth.

The next night is at Bonamanzi Nature Reserve which is a great place to pick up many of the Zululand sandveld and bushveld specials. From St Lucia head back to the N2, travel north approximately 30 km north until the Bushlands turnoff, take this turnoff to the right, at the T-junction turn left and travel 4 km to the park entrance. Bonamanzi has a range of accommodation; from self-catering tree-houses to fully catered lodges, as well as good camping facilities.

Distances (approximate)

St Lucia-Cape Vidal-St Lucia: 80 km

St Lucia- Estuary Mouth: 5 km

St Lucia-Bonamanzi: 60 km

Costs (approximate)

Cape Vidal: R30 p/p+ R35 (vehicle)

Bonamanzi: R 35 p/p

Guided tour to Hluhluwe Floodplain: enquire at Bonamanzi

Day 3

Bonamanzi has an appeal to birders as it allows you to walk in the reserve unescorted in certain parts of the reserve. Birding in the sandveld forest around much of the reserve should produce sightings of African Broadbill (early morning), Rudd's Apalis, Pink-throated Twinspot, African Cuckoo Hawk, African Goshawk, Little Sparrowhawk, Crested Guinea fowl, Fan-tailed Flycatcher, Gorgeous Bush-Shrike, Green Malkoha, Bearded Scrub-Robin, Square-tailed Drongo, Eastern Nicator, Grey Waxbill, as well as Purple-banded and Neergaard's Sunbird (scarce). Bonamanzi is a great place to find Lemon-breasted Canary especially around Lalapanzi Camp, also try the road between Bonamanzi entrance and Hluhluwe village. Check any open grassed areas throughout the reserve for Senegal Lapwing while other grassland species include; Black-bellied Korhaan, Secretarybird and Quailfinch. At night it is possible to find Swamp nightjar especially around the entrance to the reserve. Every now and again Black Coucal can be found in rank vegetation along drainage lines and the edges of pans.

Speak to reception about organising a guided trip to the Hluhluwe River floodplains to see special species. Rosy-throated Longclaw, it is possible to see all three southern African Longclaw species alongside each other here. Other birds to be seen here include Pink-backed Pelican, Quailfinch, Collared Pratincole, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Grey-rumped and Red-breasted Swallow while Short-tailed Pipit has been found in winter. In the reed beds look out for Rufous-winged Cisticola, Southern Brown-throated weaver and Red-headed Quelea.

A night drive around the reserve at night could produce African wood-Owl, Spotted Eagle-Owl, Fiery-necked, Swamp (uncommon) and Square-tailed Nightjar, Spotted Thick-knee and Bronze-winged Courser. Other wildlife to be seen at night includes; Thick-tailed Bushbaby, Springhare, Large-spotted Genet, Four-toed Elephant Shrew or even a Leopard.

Mkuze Game Reserve will be the next stop for two nights where the remaining sandforest and bushveld specials should be picked up. There is a variety of self catering accommodation at Mantuma Camp, there are also two bush lodges in the reserve and a camping site. The turnoff to Mkuze Game Reserve is approximately 45 km north of the Bonamanzi turnoff along the N2. From the N2 the reserve is another 20 km of decent dirt road (however can be slippery when wet).

Distances (approximate)

Bonamanzi-Mkuze Game Reserve: 75 km

Costs (approximate)

Mkuze Game Reserve; R35 p/p + R35 (vehicle)

Day 4

Mkuze Game Reserve is considered by many to be one of the best birding spots in the country and is also a great place to find many special endemic species. A day and half can easily be spent at the various hides and pans as well as driving around exploring the different sections of the reserve.

Some of the best places to bird are in the sandforests especially around Kubube and Kumasinga hides. A few hours in the morning can produce the following; Rudd's Apalis, African Broadbill, Bearded Scrub-Robin, Greater Honeyguide, Sombre and Yellow-bellied Greenbuls, Grey, Olive, Marico and Neergaard's Sunbird, Crested Guineafowl, Narina Trogon, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Tambourine Dove, Eastern Nicator (common) and Pink-throated Twinspot, particularly around Kumasinga car park. If you are lucky you may come across Retz's Helmetshrike or African Barred Owlet which are occasionally seen in the sandforest. In wetter years Kumasinga hide occasionally holds Lesser Moorhen, Allen's Gallinule and Dwarf Bittern.

A guided early morning walk in the Fig Forest is definitely worthwhile and can produce the following; White-eared Barbet, Black-bellied Starling, Trumpeter Hornbill, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Yellow White-eye, Brown-headed Parrot, Green Malkoha and Broad-billed Roller. Some of the scarcer birds which can be seen along the Fig Forest walk include; Southern-banded Snake-Eagle, African Cuckoo Hawk and Pel's Fishing Owl (rare).

Nsumo Pan, formerly an oxbow lake, holds large numbers of waterbirds and, depending on the water levels, can produce a wide variety of species. Two hides are built along the edge of the pan to enhance viewing potential. Common birds to be seen include; Yellow-billed Stork, African Openbill, Pink-backed and Eastern White Pelicans, White-breasted Cormorant, Goliath Heron, African Fish Eagle, Water Thick-knee, African Fish Eagle, Spur-winged Goose and Whiskered and White-winged Goose. A number of rarities have been found at the pan over the years including Long-toed Lapwing, Pectoral Sandpiper and Black-tailed Godwit. Keep a look out for Collared Pratincole and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater in summer.

The Loop Road in the south west of the park is drier than the rest of the park and produces a different mix of species. Some of the birds to be seen here include; Bushveld Pipit, Yellow-bellied and Burnt-necked Eremomela, Flappet and Sabota Larks, Bearded Woodpecker, Lizard Buzzard and raptors such as Gabor Goshawk, Shikra (very rare), White-headed, Lappet-faced and African White-backed Vultures.

Throughout the park the following can be found; White-throated Robin-Chat, Little Bee-eater, Grey Pendulune-Tit, Grey-headed Bush Shrike, White-browed Robin-Chat (Riverine vegetation) and Martial Eagle.

Night drives in the park are productive and can produce some of the following; African Scops, (common around Environmental camp), African Barred (uncommon), Spotted Eagle-, Southern White-faced (uncommon), Pearl-spotted and Africa Wood Owls (common in camping site). Fiery-necked and Square-tailed Nightjars are common, and Bronze-winged Courser can also be seen.

Other wildlife in Mkuze includes; White and Black Rhinoceroses, Elephant, Cheetah, Wild Dog, Spotted Hyena, Leopard, Hippopotamus, Nyala, Sunni, Kudu, Impala, and smaller animals such as White-tailed Mongoose, Four-toed Elephant Shrew, Side-striped and Black-backed Jackal and Large-spotted Genet.

Distances (approximate)

Driving around Mkuze: 25 km

Day 5

After a morning of birding around the park, leave the park out the new gate (just past the airstrip). Turn right and follow the road eastwards until you come to Muzi Pan (20 mins outside park, a couple km before connecting with the Hluhluwe-Sodwana Bay road) found at 27°39'16.89" S, 32°24'09.76" E). Here one can find a number of waterbirds such as Black Heron (uncommon), African Pygmy Goose, Lesser Jacana (uncommon), Senegal and African Wattled Lapwing, Comb and White-backed Ducks, and occasionally Black Coucal, Allen's Gallinule and Lesser Moorhen. Rufous-winged Cisticola, Yellow and Southern Brown-throated Weavers can be found in the vegetation surrounding the pan. In the surrounding woodland it is possible to find Lemon-breasted Canary, Rudd's Apalis and Gorgeous Bush-Shrike. Pel's Fishing Owl can be seen along the Mkuze River, although a local guide (Bheki Mbonambi +27 (0)72 043 4717) is needed to find it, as they have access to the area and should know the whereabouts of the owls if they are around. It is best to book a few days in advance. Allow 2 hours for the Pel's Fishing Owl and half an hour for Muzi Pan.

From here head south to Hluhluwe town, back onto the N2 and head to Eshowe for the night (via Empangeni).

Distances (approximate)

Mkuze Game Reserve- Eshowe: 215 km

Eshowe-Entumeni Forest-Eshowe: 40 km

Costs (approximate)

Guide Costs (Pel's Fishing Owl): R250

Eshowe Boardwalk: R 25 p/p

Day 6

Eshowe is well known for its forest birding and is one of the better places to see species such as Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon and Spotted Ground Thrush. The best birding is to be had at Dlinza forest, which is found in town and Entumeni forest, found about 20 km outside of town. Dlinza offers a 124m long boardwalk which puts you high in the canopy and allows for an easier forest birding experience. There are also bird guides based

permanently at Dlinza. Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon is best seen from the tower where you can look out over the forest canopy and wait for the pigeons to fly over. Other birds to be seen from the boardwalk and various trails around Dlinza include; Spotted Ground Thrush, Grey Cuckooshrike, African Emerald Cuckoo, Grey, Olive and Collared Sunbirds, Narina Trogon, Lemon Dove, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Green Malkoha, Olive Woodpecker, Cape Batis, Chorister Robin-Chat, Trumpeter Hornbill and Green Twinspot (best around Bishops Seat area). Try the entrance to Dlinza forest at night for African Wood Owl.

Entumeni Forest, being higher in altitude than Dlinza, offers a different selection of forest birds. Most of the birds recorded at Dlinza can be seen at Entumeni while some of the different forest birds include; African Broadbill (difficult), Black Cuckoo, Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler, Brown Scrub-Robin, Bar-throated Apalis, African Olive-Pigeon, Crowned Hornbill, African Crowned Eagle, Mountain Wagtail, while Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon can often be heard and occasionally seen flying over the forest. In the surrounding scrub and grasslands it is possible to find Southern Tchagra, Drakensberg Prinia, Plain-backed Pipit, Croaking and Lazy Cisticola and Dusky Indigobird. Entumeni Forest is approximately 15 km from Eshowe on the main road to Nkandla, the turnoff (28°51'22.35" S, 31°22'29.94" E) onto a dirt road is well signposted, and the entrance (28°53'04.66" S, 31°22'51.90" E) to the forest is another 3.5 km on the right of the road. From Eshowe head back to King Shaka International Airport.

Distances (approximate)

Eshowe-King Shaka International Airport: 120 km