



BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division  
Self Drive Itinerary

**Birding Route Name:** Zululand Birding Route

**Self Drive Itinerary Name:** 15 Day Zululand Specials Trip

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

**Duration:** 15 nights

**Itinerary:** Night 1: Amatikulu Nature Reserve  
Night 2: Ongoye Forest  
Night 3: St Lucia Village  
Night 4: Ndumo Game Reserve  
Night 5: Ndumo Game Reserve  
Night 6: Ndumo Game Reserve  
Night 7: Mkuze Game Reserve  
Night 8: Mkuze Game Reserve  
Night 9: Pongola Nature Reserve  
Night 10: Ithala Game Reserve  
Night 11: Ithala Game Reserve  
Night 12: Chelmsford Nature Reserve  
Night 13: Chelmsford Nature Reserve  
Night 14: Eshowe  
Night 15: Eshowe

**Distance covered:** 1800 km

<b>Costs (approximate):</b> Fuel	- R1450
Reserve Costs (per person)	- R425 (including vehicle)
Guide Costs	- R500
Accommodation	- Variable

**Itinerary updated:** November 2010

**Number of Species expected:** 375+

**Other Wildlife:** Lion, Leopard, White and Black Rhinoceros, Elephant, Buffalo, Cheetah, African Wild Dog, Spotted Hyena, Serval, Hippopotamus, Eland, Black Wildebeest, Oribi, Nyala, Suni, Klipspringer, Blue and Red Duiker, White-tailed Mongoose, Bushbuck, Bushpig, Large-spotted Genet, Thick-tailed and Lesser Bushbaby, as well as a host of frog and reptile species including Nile Crocodile.

### 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 and Orange Ground-Thrush, Rosy-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, Sooty Falcon, Senegal Lapwing, Southern Brown-throated Weaver, Retz's Helmetshrike, Broad-billed Roller, Plain-backed Sunbird, Allen's Gallinule, Crab Plover (rare), Collared Pratincole, Black Coucal, Olive-tree Warbler, Livingstone's Turaco, African Broadbill, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Eastern Nicator, Short-tailed Pipit (winter), African Barred and Pearl-spotted Owlet, Southern Bald Ibis, Barrow's Korhaan, Southern Ground-Hornbill, Denham's Bustard, Black-winged Lapwing, African Grass-Owl, Blue Crane, Bush Blackcap, Broad-tailed Warbler, Pink-billed Lark, Ground Woodpecker.

### **Day 1**

Arrive in Durban and head north to the small coastal nature reserve of Amatikulu which is located 115 km north of Durban and is well signposted from the N2 and relatively easy to find. The main attraction at Amatikulu is Swamp Nightjar, and is probably the best site for this species in South Africa. The main habitats throughout the reserve include coastal grassland, Mlala Palm savanna, coastal forest, riverine vegetation and estuary. Accommodation in Amatikulu Nature Reserve consists of permanent safari tents.

The best area to search for Swamp Nightjar is 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.

The grasslands offer a different selection of species and are well worth a walk/drive in them. Good grassland areas can be found along the 4x4 track and just as you enter the reserve. In the grasslands

it is possible to pick up Pale-crowned, Zitting and Croaking Cisticola, Neddicky, Black-rumped (uncommon) and Kurrichane Buttonquail, Plain-backed Pipit, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Stanley's Bustard (rare), Shelley's Francolin (uncommon), White-fronted (often on telephone lines) and Little Bee-eater.

A few kilometres along the 4x4 track there is a seasonal pan which after good rains often holds a number of interesting species; such as Squacco Heron, Little Bittern, Greater Painted-Snipe (rare), Cuckoofinch (rare) and occasionally Black Coucal.

A good option for a couple hours in the later afternoon is to take a trip down either of the two rivers. You are able to hire two-man canoes for the day, which is the best way to find many of the birds along the river; the Amatikulu River is excellent for African Finfoot (check low overhanging vegetation) and Half-collared Kingfisher as well as Giant Kingfisher, Goliath Heron, Woolly-necked Stork, African Fish-Eagle, Little Egret and Rufous-winged Cisticola in the tall grass growing alongside the river.

Depending how much time you have available on the first day it is recommended to bird the grasslands first (find the Nightjar) and then possibly do a trip down the river. If the nightjar is still needed it is worthwhile having a walk around the Mlala Palm savanna at the start of the 4x4 trail at sunset and just afterwards, listening out for its distinctive chow-chow-chow call.

### **Distances (approximate)**

King Shaka International Airport-Amatikulu Nature Reserve: 115km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Amatikulu Nature Reserve: R10 p/p

Guide Costs: R200

Canoe Costs: R60

### **Day 2**

There is some great forest birding to be had around the reserve such as below the campsite and along the various trails: first thing in the morning is the best time to bird the forest patches. Birds to look out for include; Lemon Dove, Gorgeous (more open areas) and Olive Bush-Shrike, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Black-throated Wattle-eye (responds well to tape), Green Malkoha, Crested Guineafowl, Narina Trogon, African Emerald Cuckoo, Olive Woodpecker, Spotted Ground-Thrush (winter), Buff-spotted Flufftail (difficult to see), Red-capped and Chorister Robin-Chats while it is possible to find Green Twinspot, Red-backed Mannikin and Grey Waxbill feeding along the paths. Other common birds include; Trumpeter Hornbill, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, African Firefinch, White-

eared Barbet, Purple-crested Turaco, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Terrestrial Brownbul, Olive, Grey and Purple-banded Sunbirds and Back-bellied Starlings.

The next destination is Ongoye Forest however on en-route it is worth stopping in at Umlalazi Nature Reserve located at the town of Mtunzini. Take the turn off to Mtunzini (at the toll plaza) and head into Mtunzini town, 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 picnic area 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. Look out for Purple-banded Sunbird in this area and further along this road especially in the Acacia thornveld.

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), Brown Scrub-Robin (winter), Ashy Flycatcher, Dark-backed Weaver, Gorgeous Bush Shrike, White-eared Barbet, Grey and Olive Sunbirds, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and other common forest species.

Palmnut Vulture and Woolly-necked Stork can be seen throughout the reserve and town; however the Raphia Palm Monument (follow signs from town) is probably your best bet for Palmnut Vulture. Black-throated Wattle-eye can also be seen. Allow 2.5 hours for finding the Kingfisher and birding the reserve.

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). Although only approximately 30 km from Mtunzini, give yourself 1.5 hours to get to Ongoye forest camp.

Ongoye Forest, home to the Green Barbet, will be the next stop. The forest was previously restricted to 4x4 vehicles but can now be reached by most 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 Ongoye Forest Camp is found just as you enter the main forest on your left and consists of a fairly basic (but pleasant) prefab house.

Spend the rest of the afternoon looking for Green Barbet and other forest species. 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 Ongoye 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, Grey Cuckooshrike, African Emerald Cuckoo, White-eared Barbet, Cape Batis, Cinnamon Dove, Grey and Olive Sunbirds, Green Twinspot, Green Malkoha, Lemon Dove, Brown Scrub-Robin, Ashy Flycatcher, Chorister Robin-Chat, White-starred Robin (winter is best), 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, Croaking Cisticola, 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.

At night listen out for African Wood-Owl, while other wildlife may be more obvious at night, however beware Leopard do roam the area but are hardly ever seen.

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

It is worthwhile (but not essential) to hire a guide to show you around the forest, as they will often know the whereabouts of fruiting fig trees (where the barbets feed) and other forest species. Sbo Mthembu + 27 (0)76 811 2996, Sfundo Gumbi +27 (0)72 112 8782 or Junior Gabela +27 (0)82 667 3704.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Amatikulu- Umlalazi Nature Reserve: 25km

Umlalazi Nature Reserve-Ongoye Forest: 25 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Umlalazi Nature Reserve: R10 p/p

Guide Costs: R150

### **Day 3**

Try for the Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon first thing in the morning (flying over the canopy) and once the Green Barbet and other forest species have been found 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. Just before you enter town (before the bridge) check the extensive reedbeds on either side of the road for Rufous-winged Cisticola and Southern Brown-throated Weaver.

For the rest of the afternoon 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 3½-4 hours from St Lucia into the park, around Cape Vidal 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 few 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 1.5 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. Crab Plover is also seen fairly regularly here and one should keep a look out for it during summer. Allow 2 hours for the Umfolozi River mouth and estuary mouth.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Ongoye-St Lucia: 100km

St Lucia-Cape Vidal-St Lucia: 80 km

St Lucia- Estuary Mouth: 5 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

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

### **Day 4**

An early morning 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, African Emerald and Klaas's Cuckoo, Terrestrial Brownbul, Red-capped Robin-Chat, White-starred Robin (winter), Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Green Malkoha, Livingstone's Turaco, Red-backed Mannikin, Grey Waxbill and Green Twinspot. Allow 3 hours for walking the Igwalagwala trail.

After leaving St Lucia you will head up the N2 and after 77 km take a right turn to Hluhluwe town. Take the road heading north towards Sodwana Bay and follow this road for 122 km, then at the T-junction turn left towards Tembe and Ndumo Game Reserve's, then after approximately 32 km a take dirt road to your right (well signposted) for the final 15 km before entering Ndumo Game Reserve where the next three nights will be spent. Despite its relatively small size, Ndumo has a list of over 400 bird species and is considered by many to be one of the most productive birding areas in the country. Habitats throughout the reserve include woodlands, sand forest, riverine forest and many seasonal and permanent pans. Ndumo is where many of the Zululand specials can be picked up. There are a number of guided walks which can be done around the reserve (with knowledgeable bird guides) and this is the best way to see birds around the reserve. Accommodation in the reserve includes 2-bedroom cottages, camping and luxury safari lodges.

En route to Ndumo from St Lucia there are a couple of stops that can be made along the way to pick up some additional species. One is able to stop over briefly at Muzi Pan (approximately 55 km north of Hluhluwe town along Sodwana Bay road, take left turn just after Mkuze River bridge) found at 27°39'16.89" S, 32°24'09.76" E). Here one can find a number of waterbirds such as Black Egret (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, ensure to book a few days in advance, as well as to find out whether Pel's Fishing Owl is about.

Rosy-throated Longclaw is found nearby at Nibela Peninsular but again the services of a local guide will be required as it is quite difficult to find your way to the Peninsular where the Longclaws occur. Other good birds to be found at Nibela Peninsular include Short-tailed Pipit (winter), Collared Pratincole, Cape Longclaw, Southern Brown-throated Weaver, Red-headed Quelea (scarce) and a host of waterbirds and waders. Allow 1 and a half hours for Pel's Fishing Owl, two hours for Rosy-throated Longclaw and half an hour for Muzi Pan.

The remainder of the afternoon can be spent birding the woodland (from your vehicle) around the reserve as well as spending some time at the two bird hides at Nyamithi Pan. Birding in woodland throughout the reserve is likely to produce the following; Lilac-breasted Roller, Jameson's Firefinch, Eastern Nicator, Gorgeous Bush-Shrike, African Grey (rare) and Crowned Hornbill, Flappet Lark, Grey Go-Away-Bird, Green-winged Pytilia, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Pink-throated Twinspot, Rudd's Apalis, Bearded Scrub-Robin, Grey Penduline-Tit, Neergaard's, Marico and Purple-banded Sunbirds (check flowering trees, especially Aloes) as well as a number of other common woodland species. Ndumo tends to turn up a number of exciting rarities and one should always be on the lookout for these, such as Thick-billed and Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo and Grey-hooded Kingfisher.

At Nyamithi Pan you can pick up a number of commoner waterbird species along with less common birds such as Great White and Pink-backed Pelican, Woolly-necked, Saddle-billed, African Openbill and Yellow-billed Stork, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Lesser Jacana, Black Heron, Fulvous Duck and Pygmy Goose. In wetter years, marshy areas occasionally produce Dwarf Bittern, Rufous-bellied Heron, African and Baillon's Crake, Allen's Gallinule, Lesser Moorhen and Greater Painted-snipe. While in summer it is always worth scanning the many fever trees around the pan for Sooty Falcon, while other commoner summer migrants include Collared Pratincole and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. A great place to find White-backed Night-Heron is at the low level bridge just beyond the (furthest east) Nyamithi Pan hide, on a night drive. The bushveld around Nyamithi can produce a number of

good bushveld species. Keep a look out for Senegal lapwing at the Vulture restaurant on the way to Nyamithi Pan, as well as vulture species (White-headed, Lappet-faced, White-backed and occasionally Palmnut) as well as Steppe and Lesser Spotted Eagles in summer.

Although Ndumo Game Reserve do not offer night drives it is possible to organise to take your own vehicle out at night with a guide, where Square-tailed, European and Fiery-necked Nightjars can be seen. Keep a look out around the campsite at night for Barn, Spotted Eagle- and African Wood-Owl, while if you are very lucky you may find White-faced Owl.

### **Distances (approximate)**

St Lucia- Ndumo Game Reserve: 250 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Ndumo Game Reserve: R35 p/p+ R35 (vehicle)

Guide Costs: R250

### **Day 5**

An early morning guided walk along the Pongola River (remember to book the previous day) is an excellent way to see many of the riverine forest specials, with the number one bird being Pel's Fishing Owl, which is seen with some regularity along these walks. Other species to look out for include; African Broadbill, African Finfoot, Narina Trogon, African Wood-Owl, White-browed Robin-Chat (very vocal), Yellow White-eye, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Gabar Goshawk, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, White-eared Barbet, Woodland Kingfisher, Black-throated Wattle-eye, White-starred Robin (winter), Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Red-backed Mannikin, Broad-billed Roller, Southern Banded Snake-Eagle and Eastern Nicator. In the wetter areas with longer grass keep a look out for Black Coucal (summer) and African Firefinch. These walks normally return back to camp late morning, and so the rest of the day can be spent birding around the camp and taking a drive along the network of good roads around the reserve. The drive to Red Cliffs picnic site is usually productive and takes you through the thick Mahemane bush, where some of the following can be found; Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Terrestrial Brownbul, Crested Guineafowl, Pink-throated Twinspot, Gorgeous Bush-Shrike, African Broadbill, Eastern Nicator, Rudd's Apalis, Narina Trogon, Square-tailed Drongo and Neergaard's Sunbird. At Red Cliffs picnic site look out for Broad-billed Roller and White-fronted Bee-eater, which can be seen hawking insects from the tall trees along the river.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Driving around Ndumo: 30 Km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Guided Walk

### **Day 6**

If you are after Plain-backed Sunbird then an early morning trip to the nearby Tembe Elephant Park will be worthwhile. A 4x4 vehicle or at least a vehicle with good ground clearance is required to enter Tembe. Tembe is the only reliable location for Plain-backed Sunbird within South Africa. Tembe is only 35 km from Ndumo and so by leaving Ndumo early it is possible to arrive at Tembe early when most birds are still active and vocal. The best area to try for Plain-backed Sunbird is the very tall woodland a few hundred metres west of the observation tower, as well as the northern end of the Gowanini Loop. Listen out for its call and even use call playback to try lure them in, however please use sparingly.

Other areas to bird include the many small, seasonal wetlands (of which Muzi Pan is the largest) in the eastern section of the reserve which may hold Rufous-bellied Heron, Little Bittern, Saddle-billed, Woolly-necked and Yellow-billed Stork, African and European Marsh Harriers (rare), Osprey, African Crake, Lesser Jacana, African Pygmy-Goose, Southern Brown-throated Weaver and Red-headed Quelea.

The bushveld throughout the reserve hold good numbers of Retz's Helmetshrike, Pink-throated Twinspot, Crested Guineafowl, Neergaard's and Purple-banded Sunbird, Rudd's Apalis, Woodward's Batis (try the sandveld around the observation tower), Gorgeous Bush Shrike, Eastern Nicator and other common sandveld species.

Small numbers of lion have been introduced to the reserve, other wildlife include many species of antelope such the rare and elusive Suni.

Head back into Ndumo and the rest of the afternoon can be spent birding around the reserve or at the various hides overlooking the pans.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Ndumo-Tembe-Ndumo: 70 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Tembe Elephant Park: R30 p/p

## **Day 7**

For the final morning it is worth taking a guided walk through the fig forest surrounding Shokwe Pan. Specials that can be seen here include Broad-billed Roller, Narina Trogon, Woodland Kingfisher, African Cuckoo Hawk, Southern Banded Snake-Eagle, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Retz's Helmetshrike, and Green Malkoha while if you are lucky you may come across African Barred-Owlet or Verreaux's Eagle-Owl. The pan itself is a good place to find Allen's Gallinule in summer as well as Lesser Moorhen, Pygmy Goose and Lesser Jacana.

The next destination, for two nights, will be Mkuze Game Reserve. From Ndumo head back onto the N2 and head south for approximately 20 km where the turnoff to the reserve will be well signposted. Mkuze Game Reserve is considered by many to be one of the best birding spots in the country, in summer lists of over 150 species in a day are quite possible, it 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. There is a variety of self catering accommodation at Mantuma Camp; there are also two bush lodges in the reserve and a good camping site. Mkuze will be last place to pick up any sandveld species that have been missed along the trip.

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.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Ndumo- Mkuze Game Reserve: 115 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Guided Walk

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

## **Day 8**

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 Gabar 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 Penduline-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, Suni, 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 9**

Head back onto the N2 head and drive north for approximately 35km, take the right hand turnoff to the border town of Golela. Approximately 10 km along this road is Golela. As you enter the town, turn right onto the road which follows the railway line, the reserve is a further 700 m along this road. Pongola Nature Reserve only offers camping facilities along the edge of the dam, however a number of private lodges and game farms offer upmarket accommodation nearby and will offer a similar selection of bird species.

Pongola Nature Reserve is situated on the western edge of Jozini Dam and consists mostly of thornveld and dry bushveld. Due to the drier conditions and hence drier habitat, it means Pongola Nature Reserve attracts a number of different species to those found typically in Zululand.

Fairly common birds to be seen around the reserve include Arrow-marked Babbler, Marabou Stork, Red-crested Korhaan, Swainson's and Crested Francolin, Namaqua Dove, Striped Kingfisher, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Acacia Pied Barbet, Bearded Woodpecker, Groundscraper Thrush, Marico Sunbird, Flappet Lark and Grey Penduline Tit, Yellow-bellied and Burnt-necked Eremomela, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, White Helmetshrike, White-throated and White-browed Robin-Chats, Bearded Scrub-Robin, Bushveld Pipit (common), Rudd's Apalis, Grey Go-Away-Bird, Grey, Scarlet-chested and Neergaard's Sunbirds (rare), and Gorgeous Bush-Shrike. A number of seedeaters are found throughout the bushveld areas such as; Pink-throated Twinspot, Long-tailed Paradise Whydah, Red-billed and Jameson's Firefinch, Green-winged Pytilia and Red-billed Quelea. Bronze-winged Courser is commonly seen along the road that follows the fenceline, while Square-tailed Nightjar is often flushed from this area as well.

'Specials' of the reserve which are difficult elsewhere in KwaZulu-Natal include Olive-tree Warbler (listen out for its harsh grating call), Bennett's Woodpecker, Burchell's Starling, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Magpie Shrike, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Red-headed Weaver, Brown-headed Parrot, Grey and Red-billed Hornbills, Levailant's Cuckoo and Purple Roller (difficult).

In summer a number of additional migrant species can be seen such as African, Jacobin, Levailant's, Red-chested and Diderick Cuckoos, European Bee-Eater, European Roller, Red-breasted Swallow, Olive-tree (surprisingly common) and Icterine Warblers, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes, Plum-coloured Starling as well as Wattled Starling which forms large flocks in summer.

A number of waterbirds and waders can be seen along edge of Jozini Dam and in the grassland on the floodplain look out for Montagu's and Pallid harrier (both in summer, with Montagu's being commoner), Kurrichane Buttonquail, Temminck's Courser, Black-bellied Bustard, African Wattled Lapwing while in the damper areas with longer grass look for Yellow-crowned Bishop, White-winged Widowbird, Quailfinch and it is also possible to flush Marsh Owl.

Listen out for the following around the campsite at night; Southern White-faced, Pearl-spotted, Spotted Eagle-, and Barn Owl, Fiery-necked and Square-tailed Nightjar along with Spotted Thick-knee.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Mkuze Game Reserve - Pongola Nature Reserve: 65 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Pongola Nature Reserve: R35 p/p + R35 (vehicle)

### **Day 10**

After the mornings birding spent around Pongola Nature Reserve the next destination will be Ithala Game Reserve, which should only take an hour or two to get to from Pongola Nature Reserve. Get back onto the N2 and head north for approximately 25 km then turn left onto the R60, then after approximately 22 km take a right turn onto the R69. Follow this road for approximately 60 km where the entrance will be sign posted to your right.

Ithala offers different habitat to that experienced on the trip comprising of rocky ridges, gorges and mid-altitude grasslands, which then means it will offer a different selection of bird species.

A great place to start your birding is at the Ntshondwe Camp which is situated amongst many rocky boulders at the base of Ntshonwe Mountain, birds to look out for here and along the trails include Mocking Cliff-Chat, Striped Pipit, Cape Rock-Thrush, Buff-streaked Chat, Jackal Buzzard, Grassbird, Verraux's Eagle, Alpine and Black Swifts, along with others found in the vegetation such as Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Cape Weaver, African Green-Pigeon, Olive Bush-Shrike, Cape Batis, White-throated Robin-Chat and Brown-backed Honeybird. Listen out for Freckled Nightjar at night. Rock Dassie can be seen around the camp as well.

Nghubu Drive is worth trying for Wailing and Lazy Cisticola, Ground Woodpecker, Long-billed Pipit, Mountain Wheatear, Cape Rock-Thrush, Verraux's Eagle, Jackal Buzzard, Lanner Falcon and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting

### **Distances (approximate)**

Pongola Game Reserve- Ithala Game Reserve: 120 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Ithala Game Reserve: R40 p/p + R30 (vehicle)

## Day 11

The day can be spent birding the various drives and different habitats throughout the reserve. Birds which can be seen in the grasslands, such as along the Onverwacht Loop, include Barrow's Korhaan (easiest in winter when grass is burnt), Southern Ground-Hornbill, Ostrich, Southern Bald Ibis, Denham's Bustard, Black-winged Lapwing, Secretarybird, along with a few smaller species such as Red-breasted Swallow, Quailfinch, Plain-backed and Buffy Pipits, Croaking, Zitting, Cloud and Wing-snapping Cisticolas and very occasionally Cuckoo Finch.

Other birds to look out for around the reserve include Shelley's Francolin, Jameson's Firefinch, Bearded Woodpecker, Flappet and Sabota Larks as well as raptors such as Rock Kestrel, Lappet-faced Vulture and African Hawk-Eagle.

At Mbizo Bush Camp and picnic site keep a lookout along the river for African Black Duck and Half-collared Kingfisher. Keep a look out along the river for Mountain Wagtail and African Finfoot, while Red-headed Weaver (rare in KwaZulu-Natal) and Brown-headed Parrot can be seen in the adjacent vegetation.

A number of species of game can be found throughout the reserve such as Black and White Rhino, Elephant, Buffalo, Leopard (rare), Eland, Mountain and Common Reedbuck, Red Hartebeest, Tsessebe, Oribi, Klipspringer (rocky outcrops), as well as other uncommon species such as Serval, Aardwolf and Large-spotted Genet.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Driving around Ithala Game Reserve: 25 km

## Day 12

Although the drive to the next destination, Chelmsford Nature Reserve, is only 170 km and will only take a couple hours, there are a few worthwhile stops to be made along the way. It is thus advisable to leave the Ithala fairly early so time can be spent at the various stops along the way.

The first stop to be made will be at Vryheid Hill Nature Reserve just on the edge of the town Vryheid. Some of the best birding in the reserve is to be had in the grassland on the plateau, here one can expect to see Red-winged Francolin, Drakensberg Prinia, Southern bald Ibis, Buff-streaked Chat, Broad-tailed Warbler, Sentinel (winter) and Cape Rock-Thrush, Black-winged Lapwing, Cape Longclaw, Greater Double-collared and Malachite Sunbird and African Quailfinch, a number of Cisticola (Wailing, Lazy, Wing-snapping, Cloud, Zitting, Pale-crowned, Croaking and Neddicky) and Pipit (Striped, Long-billed, African, Buffy, Plain-backed) may also be seen up here but can take some time to identify.

The forest along the road up to the plateau is worth spending some time in and can produce the following; Bush Blackcap, Cape Batis, African Cuckoo-Hawk, Forest Canary, Fairy Flycatcher, Olive Woodpecker, Black Cuckoo and Olive Bush-Shrike.

In more open patches of woodland throughout the reserve look out for Brown-backed Honeybird, Fiscal Flycatcher, Cocqui and Shelley's Francolin, Bar-throated Apalis, Black Cuckooshrike, Red-throated Wryneck, Marsh Warbler, Sweet Waxbill and Bushveld Pipit.

The next stop is Klipfontein Bird Sanctuary just outside of Vryheid where a number of reed dwelling species may be encountered. The bird sanctuary is located about 3 km south west of Vryheid along the western bypass road. Coming from Melmoth take the left turn before Vryheid (towards Paulpietersburg) and after approximately 3 km take the first left towards Babanango. The sanctuary can be seen on your left approximately 200 m down the road. There is a small elevated hide which allows one to observe the birds more easily.

Birds which can be expected here include skulkers such as African Rail, Baillon's Crake, Black Crake, Moorhen, African Snipe and African Painted-Snipe. If you are really lucky you may come across Red-chested Flufftail (early morning is best). The reedbeds are excellent for warblers and the following may be seen here; Great Reed, European Sedge, Little Rush, Lesser Swamp, Dark-capped Yellow and African Reed. Common and Orange-breasted Waxbills as well as Red Bishop may also be encountered in the reedbeds.

Waterbirds include Hottentot and Red-billed Teal, South African Shelduck, African Purple Swamphen and Glossy Ibis while less commonly seen species include Southern Pochard, Cape Shoveler, African Black Duck, Green-backed Heron and African Marsh Harrier. Grey Crowned Cranes breed in the reedbeds while in summer large numbers of Amur Falcons can be seen on the telephone wires, with the occasional Red-footed Falcon.

Away from the water you may be able to find Wahlberg's Eagle (breed in Eucalyptus trees), Black-throated Canary, Red-throated Wryneck, African Firefinch, Bokmakierie, Shelley's Francolin (uncommon), Cape Grassbird and the occasional Southern Bald Ibis.

If time allows it is worthwhile to stop off at Blood River Vlei along the way to Chelmsford Nature Reserve. The best birding to be had at Blood River Vlei is on private land; however the surrounding grasslands can produce a number of interesting species. Approximately 15 km west of Vryheid along the R33 (to Dundee) take a right turn at the Scheepersnek sign. The next 6 km has good grassland birding, and one should look out for Blue Crane, African Grass-Owl (uncommon), Jackal Buzzard, Anteater Chat, Southern Bald Ibis, Secretarybird, Amur Falcon, Cape Longclaw, Buffy and Plain-backed Pipit, Spike-heeled Lark, Pale-crowned Cisticola, Yellow-crowned Bishop, Long-tailed Widowbird, African Quailfinch, Cape Canary, Common Quail, Small Buttonquail, as well as the occasional Blue or Barrow's Korhaan.

To get to Chelmsford Nature Reserve, carry on along the R33 to Dundee, then once in Dundee take the road north-west through Dannhauser and then onto the nature reserve (crossing over the N11). Accommodation in Chelmsford Nature Reserve consists of camping and various chalets.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Ithala Game Reserve- Vryheid Hill Nature Reserve: 50 km

Vryheid Hill Nature Reserve- Klipfontein: 5 km

Klipfontein- Blood River Vlei: 18 km

Blood River Vlei- Chelmsford Nature Reserve: 110 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Chelmsford Nature Reserve: R15 p/p

### **Day 13**

The day will be spent birding the dam, grasslands and rocky slopes around Chelmsford Nature Reserve. The grasslands are where the best birding is to be had and this is where one can pick up the special for the reserve; Barrow's Korhaan which is best looked out for in the morning, listening out for its distinctive call. Other birds to look out for in the grasslands include African Grass-Owl (uncommon), Marsh Owl, Blue and Grey Crowned Crane, Denham's Bustard, Southern Bald Ibis, Pink-billed, Cloud, Desert, Zitting and Pale-crowned Cisticola, Eastern Clapper (uncommon) and Spike-heeled Lark and occasionally in summer Montagu's Harrier may be seen hunting low over the grasslands.

Birds to look out for on and around the dam include Great Crested Grebe (uncommon), Comb, Yellow-billed and White-faced Duck, Red-billed teal, Southern Pochard, Pied Avocet, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Caspian, Whiskered and White-winged Tern as well as African Fish Eagle and Osprey in summer.

The rocky slopes below the dam wall can produce Ground Woodpecker, Mountain Wheatear, Speckled Pigeon, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and Rock Martin.

Black Wildebeest and Oribi may be seen in grasslands throughout the reserve.

### **Day 14**

The next destination is Eshowe town for two nights, the drive from Chelmsford Nature Reserve to Eshowe should take about 3 hours and is a distance of 250 km. Head back into Dundee then towards Melmoth and on to Eshowe (through Nkwaleni).

In Eshowe town there are a number of B & Bs as well as camping facilities. 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 (found in Eshowe 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. Blue Duiker can be seen skulking in the undergrowth along with the larger Bushbuck.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Chelmsford Nature Reserve- Eshowe: 250 km

### **Costs (approximate)**

Eshowe Boardwalk: R 25 p/p

### **Day 15**

It is worthwhile to spend the day heading up to Nkandla Forest where some different montane forest species may be seen. A vehicle with good ground clearance will be needed, while during wet conditions a 4x4 vehicle is recommended. Nkandla forest is found approximately 60 km from Eshowe and can be reached by carrying on past Entumeni. Entumeni forest is found en-route and is worth a stop first thing in the morning.

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, Rufous-winged, Levillant's and Lazy Cisticola and Dusky Indigobird. Check the grassy slopes a few kilometres past the Entumeni turnoff (along the road to Nkandla) for Cape Grassbird, listening out for its call as well. 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.

Once past Entumeni one starts to climb into higher grassland, keep a look from here on (and especially the grasslands around Nkandla Forest) for Neddicky, Wailing, Wing-snapping and Lazy Cisticola, Malachite Sunbird, Cape Crow, Jackal Buzzard, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Buff-streaked Chat, Broad-tailed Warbler and Cape Grassbird. Approximately 14 km past the turn-off to Entumeni there is a fork in the road; take the right hand fork to Nkandla. The tar road ends a couple kilometres further and is replaced by gravel. Approximately 14 km after taking the right hand fork (to Nkandla), there is a left hand turn-off to Kranskop, do not take this, proceed straight and the forest reserve should be on your left after a further 17 km.

Once you enter the forest look out for Bush Blackcap, Forest Canary, White-starred Robin, Orange Ground-Thrush, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Chorister Robin-Chat, Lemon Dove, Narina Trogon, Barratt's Warbler, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Knysna Turaco, Grey Cuckooshrike, Cape Batis, Sweet Waxbill, Olive Woodpecker, Olive Bush-Shrike, Bar-throated Apalis and Mountain Wagtail (streams). Keep a look out on the edges of the forest for Southern Tchagra.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Eshowe-Nkandla Forest-Eshowe: 120 km

### **Day 16**

Depending on time the early morning can either be spent at Entumeni or Dlinza Forests picking up on any missed forest species. From Eshowe head back to King Shaka International Airport, allow 2 hours to King Shaka International Airport.

### **Distances (approximate)**

Eshowe-King Shaka International Airport: 120 km