

# **The Travelling Naturalist**

**South Africa – Cape & Garden Route**

**1 – 16 September 2007**

**Trip Report**

## THE TRAVELLING NATURALIST

South Africa flowers and birds trip, September 1 – 16<sup>th</sup> 2007

Led by Bob Gibbons, Geoff Crane and Mike Raymakers.

### **Day 1. Sept 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

The group arrived on time at Cape Town airport, and by late morning we had transferred to our beautiful guesthouse on the peninsula south of Cape Town. Although it's on the edge of a small settlement, the guesthouse stands in lovely grounds, and is almost surrounded by National Park.

After re-organising, we set off northwards to Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens, stopping first on the top of the Silvermine ridge for a picnic and a first look at the Cape *fynbos*, that characteristic western cape vegetation that is so reminiscent of mediterranean *garrigue*. A pair of white-necked ravens watched us eat, while Southern Rock Agama lizards and Cape Girdled Lizards basked on rocks in the sun. Several plants were in flower, including a lovely dwarf gladiolus *Gladiolus debilis*, the pretty pink China Flower *Adenandra villosa* and some tiny magenta-pink sand crocuses *Romulea rosea*.

After lunch we drove on a short way to the gardens, which were bustling with visitors thanks to it being both sunny and a Sunday, but somehow we soon escaped the crowds and started getting great views of lesser double-collared sunbirds, the endemic orange-breasted sunbird, and the fabulous malachite sunbird, all visiting *Protea*s or just resting in the sun. In addition, we saw about 20 other species of birds. The weather in Cape Town has been so wet and cold this year, that any sun brings a flurry of activity.

The flowers in the garden were fabulous of course, just approaching their spring best, with many bulbs, annuals, succulents and members of the *Protea* family all coming into flower. Highlights included the giant *Protea*, the extraordinary snake-stemmed *protea* (with the amazing scientific name of *Leucospermum hypophyllocarpodendron*) – pollinated by the three-striped mouse, which we also saw; masses of bird-of-paradise flower, and an avenue of lovely ancient camphor trees.

An excellent first day was rounded off by a view of a rufous-chested sparrowhawk back at the guesthouse, and sacred ibis seen from the vehicle.

### **September 3<sup>rd</sup>. Down onto the Cape.**

Fortunately for our day exploring the Cape Peninsula, the day dawned clear and sunny despite the front that was known to be present just offshore.

Our first stop was at the Boulders Penguin Reserve just south of Simonstown on the east coast of the peninsula, though just before we reached it we stopped to admire a group of southern right whales quite close inshore. This is a relatively recent colony of African penguins (formerly known as Jackass penguins) that became established here and has since flourished to become the largest colony of this rare bird. Viewing facilities are excellent, both from a good boardwalk, and also from a beach at the southern end of the colony which we visited later. Besides views of hundreds of penguins from a few feet away, we also had good views of rock hyraxes, Cape dwarf chameleon, greater cormorants, swift terns, rock martins and many other species. There were even a few Cape fur seals just offshore, preventing masses of penguins from entering the water.

From here, we proceeded southwards into the main block of the old Cape Peninsula National Park, where *fynbos* reigns supreme. The main purpose was to see some of the special plants and animals of this fabulous area of unspoilt *fynbos*, and learn a little of its fire-influenced ecology. A series of short stops and longer walks produced orchids, a selection of bulbs (or

geophytes) including the beautiful little blue or pinkish *Babiana ambigua*, several species of heather, sundews, many members of the protea family and several iris relatives amongst the flowers, while Cape sugarbirds performed magnificently for us, displaying and feeding over the Protea bushes.

Finally, we drove on southwards to the Cape, where we walked or rode up to the lighthouse for wonderful views of Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope, with the vast colonies of cliff-nesting Cape Cormorants, and lovely almost aerial views of a pair of southern Right Whales far below us. The day was rounded off nicely by very close views of a large group of immature ostriches, quite unconcerned by our presence.

#### **September 4<sup>th</sup>. Up Table Mountain, then on to Rondevlei Bird Reserve.**

The threatened cold front had arrived, but luckily quite patchily, characterised by showers and sunny periods, so we decided to go up Table Mountain and take our chances. While waiting for the cable car, we saw a circling black (Verreaux's) eagle along the cliffs, and a fleeting view of a rock kestrel. The cable car ride is spectacular in every way, with wonderful views of both Cape Town and the cliffs from the revolving platform, though by the time we arrived at the top, the mist was closing in and it was cool and damp.

We went for a walk round the plateau anyway, but views were only fleeting, and birds were thin on the ground. The rock formations, lichens and mountain fynbos still looked superb, though, and it was fascinating to hear more of the geology of this extraordinary range. A few plants were in flower, notably lovely bushes of *Euryops pectinatus* glowing with orange-yellow daisy flowers, and some strange everlasting flowers with conical red buds, called *Edmondia sesamoides*. Even the rock hyraxes were staying under cover, so we visited the café to warm up, and took the cable cars back down.

From the mountain, we drove south and east through Cape Town suburbs to a beautiful well-protected bird reserve, Rondevlei. Before we'd started our picnic at the gate, we'd watched sacred ibises flying over, weaver birds, red-winged starlings, and seen an emerging dragonfly in the pond. The reserve itself is an excellent combination of open water, marsh, reedbed and a little of the original vegetation of the Cape Flats area. There are 5 hides and two towers, giving fine views of a range of wetland birds including 3 species of ibis, 6 species of heron (including the two egrets), pelicans, and many others, though the hoped-for malachite kingfisher didn't appear. A few showers passed quickly through, and the rain on table mountain was always visible, but generally we escaped lightly. A pleasant and rewarding visit was rounded off with a visit to the small information centre and reptillary. Overall we had seen almost 60 species of birds here, as a group, though not everyone saw all of them.

On the way home, Mike's bus stopped for a quick look at some lovely orange orchids growing along the roadside, *Satyrium coriifolium*.

#### **September 5<sup>th</sup>. From Cape Town to Langebaan.**

The long-threatened front eventually arrived with a vengeance, producing heavy rain and strong winds in the night, and a wet squally day to follow. Despite the swell, we all decided to take the boat trip to Duiker Island, which proved to be a good decision as the swell was not too bad, and the fur seal colonies looked wonderful with waves constantly breaking over the rocks. The rain stopped for a while, but soon returned in the form of heavy showers as we drove northwards towards the small town of Darling.

We stopped for a while on the minor road across to Darling, and though the wind and patchy rain limited us, we still saw a good range of birds in the roadside fields, including larks, bishops, wheatears, jackal buzzards and a black-shouldered kite.

We took lunch at Waylands nature reserve, just east of Darling. Darling claims to be the 'bulb capital of the world' and a great town for flowers, thanks to its position amongst the bulb-rich renosterveld, and the presence of a series of small reserves around it. Waylands is one of these, and it turned out to be excellent for flowers despite the limited sun – some lovely *Babianas*, sundews with large pink flowers, large red sand crocuses, several species of iris-like *Moraea* species, and many more were enjoyed by all, and there were a few birds, too.

We then drove a few miles to the famous Tienie Versfeld reserve which, though not at its best due to the cool rainy conditions and the flooded soil, still produced some more lovely flowers: masses of an attractive blue sand crocus *Romulea tabularis*, more *Babianas*, a new orchid, and many other flowers. We also saw spur-winged geese, heard karoo larks, and other birds, though after a relatively short visit the cool conditions drove us back to the van.

From here, it was just a short drive to the welcoming warmth and luxury of the Farmhouse at Langebaan.

#### **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> September. The West Coast National Park.**

At last the low pressure seems to have cleared away, and the day dawned clear. An early morning bird walk around the hotel produced a good number of birds, including many new species or good views of others seen only from the bus. Geoff's identification skills were in evidence for a whole range of small birds from large-billed larks to cisticolas.

After breakfast, we set off to spend the whole day in the West Coast National Park – and what a fabulous day it turned out to be. Some early cloud steadily cleared, and the wind was light, giving perfect conditions for viewing the flowers, birds, mammals and landscapes of this beautiful area. As soon as we entered the Park, we started seeing steinbok close to the road, then a roadside stop for some orchids produced lots of other lovely flowers.

Another roadside stop to see the curious but beautiful *Ferraria crispa* (a close relative of irises, but quite unlike them in appearance) also produced other flowers, a deserted ostrich nest found by Margaret (we were certain it was deserted as the eggs had lichen growing on them!), and a group of kudu were spotted not far away.

Just before entering the restricted Postberg section, we walked down to the sea for some of the best seascapes any of us had seen, with wonderful breakers pounding through granite rocks onto lovely white sands. The dunes were covered with mainly yellow and orange flowers, including the striking dune salad thistle *Didelta carnososa*, and to round it off we saw a couple of southern right whales just offshore.

After entering Postberg, we had lunch at another wonderful cove, with tame Hartlaub's gulls and some more superb displays of flowers on a nearby hill. Just before reaching the cove, we had stopped to admire distant ostriches and eland grazing on an intensely-flowery hillside, then realised that there were about half a dozen bat-eared foxes dashing about on the hillside too. On the way back, we drove to the top of a fine granite tor, where a brief walk is permitted, for some lovely views, lots more flowers including *Gladiolus speciosus*, and the endemic West Coast Girdled Lizard in a large colony.

Our way back to the exit lay through some huge flowery pastures, where zebra, kudu, wildebeest and springbok were grazing, and there were many more bat-eared foxes. We realised that the hectic activity of the foxes, guineafowl, cattle egrets, and huge numbers of kelp gulls was due to the mass emergence of winged termites thanks to the warm settled weather; quite an experience.

Finally on the way home we stopped at a hide overlooking the lagoon and had views of flamingoes, several waders and other birds, found an occupied penduline tit's nest, and had good views of a skink. An exceptional day.

#### **Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September. From Langebaan to Cederberg via Lambert's Bay.**

We set off early for the relatively long drive up the west coast to Lambert's bay, then high into the wild Cederberg Mountains. The weather was superb, clear and sunny, and we soon stopped for some excellent views of a pair of blue cranes, with the male desperately displaying in an attempt to distract an apparently-uninterested female from feeding. At least this gave the photographers plenty of opportunity for some good action pictures.

The northward drive gave us a clear impression of how vast and unspoilt the west coast is, with endless sandy beaches backed by dunes, followed inland by enormous stretches of sandveldt. At one stop, we saw swathes of scarlet *Babiana ringens*, one of the sunbird-pollinated iris relatives, then later we stopped at a small reserve – Rocherpan - with lakes amongst the sandveldt vegetation. There were masses of red bishops in the reeds, and our first

views of the stifftail Macoa ducks, while amongst the bushes we found a few flowering plants of the pretty *Gladiolus orchidiflorus*.

A little further north, the Eland's Bay area gave us great views of a Verreaux' eagle being mobbed by pied crows, and good views of 5 species of terns roosting and feeding from a seaside rock. The highlight of the day for many was the superb Cape Gannet colony at Lambert's Bay. This is a huge colony of over 17,000 birds very close to the harbour, accessible on foot in a well-managed protected area. There are good views of the whole colony and the nearby fur seals from a raised hide, or you can just enjoy the birds flying over your head outside. Many birds were starting to display, and the noise and general excitement was wonderful.

Finally, we drove inland across the plains to the spectacular Cederberg mountains, rising like a rampart to almost 2000m. Our hotel lay deep in the heart of the mountains, miles from anywhere, and a few stops along the way started our introduction to the fynbos of the sandstone areas and the more spectacular flowers of the shales. The hotel is extraordinary, with chalets scattered along a wild valley, perfect for walking, botanising, birdwatching, or just enjoying the solitude and amazing stars here.

### **Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September. Around Mount Cedar.**

An early morning walk around the habitats near the hotel produced relatively little of interest, though it was a beautiful morning and the views were spectacular.

After a leisurely breakfast on the terrace overlooking the valley, we drove just a mile or so to the boundaries of the olive groves to walk up a small valley noted for its ancient bushman paintings. The flowers were spectacular, and one of the great botanical finds of the day was a clump of the gorgeous little winged gladiolus *Gladiolus alatus* in intense shades of orange, though we soon discovered dozens more scattered through the bushes. Soon afterwards a Cape eagle owl flew up from nearby, giving wonderful views as it flew cross the valley to roost on the cliff, followed shortly by another. These are quite rare owls, preferring wild rocky country in contrast to the more suburban spotted eagle owl. Other good flowers soon followed including the spectacular magenta pelargonium, another species of gladiolus, and one of the strange *Massonia* species with two large leaves flat on the ground, and a cluster of stalkless flowers between them.

The bushman paintings were superb, and Mike and Geoff explained much of the background to the history of the bushmen's life in this area, and their subsequent demise. On the walk back, one Cape siskin was seen, and a few mountain wheatears, though birds were generally thin on the ground.

After a pleasantly long lunch break at the hotel, we drove back up to a nearby pass on our route into the valley, for a walk on to the higher parts of the spectacularly tilted sandstone and shale ridge, though a few people took the opportunity to rest at the hotel. Birds were again thin on the ground, though the plants, views and general environment were a delight. There were more winged irises, plus a lovely new mountain speciality *Gladiolus inflatus*. Great clumps of orange-red *Aloe melanacantha* dotted the hillside, here at the far south of its range, and there were both yellow and white *Bulbinella* species on the hillsides, like foxtail lilies. As we walked down the last bit, and on the drive back to the hotel, the 2 species of evening-flowering *Hesperantha* began to open their beautiful white and red flowers for the night. Finally, as we went back to the rooms, we realised that masses of pale blue iris-like *Moraea fugax* had just come into flower.

After supper, the stars were again quite exceptional, with the milky way as clearly-visible as it can ever be.

### **Sunday September 9<sup>th</sup>. Mount Cedar to Matjiesfontein.**

Another clear day dawned, and some enjoyed a pleasant walk down to breakfast from their chalet.

After breakfast, we set off through the rest of the Cederberg mountains to the fruit-growing areas around Ceres, and the nearby wine-growing regions. A few birds were seen from the vehicles, such as black eagle and jackal buzzard, but not many.

In the mountains after Ceres, we stopped for a coffee and/or a short walk in the hills. Black eagles were seen again, together with white-necked ravens, and a few new flowers such as an attractive pink-flowered bush in the pea family, *Podalyria sp* and a small bluish-white flowered shrub *Oftia africana*. This area falls between the areas covered by the flower books, and it's hard to identify anything with certainty here unless it's a widespread species.

By lunchtime, we reached Worcester for a picnic lunch at the Karoo National Botanic Gardens, followed by a walk around the gardens. The wet winter had turned the gardens into a spectacular show of orange *Gazania* and other daisies, which were very pretty, but rather obscured some of the special plants there. There were a few new birds including the bar-throated apalis, a streaky-headed seed-eater, and a steppe buzzard; a couple of leopard tortoises (one of which was labelled 'Ben'!) and a new species of chameleon, the Karoo dwarf chameleon. The little Quiver tree forest was one of the botanical highlights, and the diversity of forms of *Euphorbia* was fascinating, with many of them looking like cacti.

We stopped briefly on our journey up the N1 to admire the massed clumps of the daisy *Dimorphotheca cuneata*, before arriving at the fascinating little desert village of Matjiesfontein and our period-piece hotel, the Lord Milner, originally built by the British as a base for senior staff during the Boer war.

### **Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September. From Matjiesfontein to the garden route.**

This was essentially a transfer day, with a long drive across more of the Great Karoo, through the spectacular Swartberg Mountains, across the Little Karoo, then eastwards along the coast from George.

As we drove across the increasingly-dry Great Karoo, Mike explained that the rainfall in this area had been steadily decreasing over 10 years or so, and this was visible in the poor state of the shrubs and lack of any flowers. Even the recent wet winter weather experienced by the western Cape had failed to penetrate here. We had a few brief stops to watch a Martial Eagle, a Pale Chanting Goshawk, and see two different species of Aloe, before arriving at the attractive town of Prince Albert with its many old (by South African standards!) buildings. From here, the road climbed steadily through spectacular scenery into the Swartberg mountains. In the lower areas, there were masses of the almost tree-like orange-flowered *Aloe ferox*, often with *Protaea* canaries (or seed-eaters) feeding on them. Higher up, except in the areas ravaged by recent fires, there was more genuine *fynbos* with several species of *Protaea* visible.

At the top of the pass, there was a useful notice which read "die top", in Afrikaans presumably, though it gave no indication of altitude. From here we walked down the far side along the road, hoping, particularly, to see rock jumpers. One group were pretty certain they saw one, and we also had excellent views of klipspringers, and a family party of ground woodpeckers amongst other things.

After lunch, we drove steadily onwards, passing through vast flocks of farmed ostriches around Oudtshoorn – the ostrich world capital – before finally reaching the lush forests and scrub of the coast, and our lovely base beyond Knysna.

### **Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September. Exploring the garden coast.**

Tuesday dawned fine and warm, and after an excellent breakfast enjoyed outside our cottages, we set off for the 'Garden of Eden', one of the remnants of ancient forest still protected in this area. There is an excellent boardwalk around the forest, with many labelled trees and shrubs, though the experience is slightly marred by the very noisy nearby N1. Dominant trees included the 2 species of yellowwood, both species of *Podocarpus*. This is an unusual genus of conifers that bear plum-like fruit, occurring only in the southern hemisphere continents that once formed Gondwanaland. There were also tree ferns and other plants of interest, and we had our first views of wood hoopoes, olive woodpeckers, and other forest birds.

From here, we drove to one of the headlands that form the mouth of the Knysna lagoon, for fabulous views of the coast plus a peregrine. Along the way, we passed some attractive saltmarsh pools and grassland with avocets, black-winged stilts, plovers and other waders.

Lunch was taken in the grounds of the Old Nick pub, greatly enhanced by the presence of a large colony of Cape weaver birds just above our heads, and many other birds. Some had excellent views and photographs of Knysna Turaco. After a tasty lunch, we boarded a boat on the nearby river for a gentle trip up the river into the forest, and a short walk. Our boatman was full of interesting local and general information (though it may not all have been accurate as he believed that Britain only had 7 species of trees!).

The scenery became steadily wilder, and we had good views of black-crowned night heron, cormorants, darters, and eventually wonderful views of a giant kingfisher which settled several times in front of us. A troop of vervet monkeys moved through the forest, so we immediately started scanning the skies for crested eagles, their main predators, though without success. Several plants were visible from the boat, including the yellow spikes of *Bulbine latifolia*, several Aloes, lovely pink bushes of *Polygala myrtifolia* (often grown in gardens in warmer areas) and others we were less sure about. After a brief shopping expedition on the way home, we had an excellent barbeque prepared by Geoff and Mike in the gardens, giving the evening something of a party atmosphere!

### **Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> September. To the Tsitsikamma National Park**

After the warm winds of yesterday, there was rain in the night and the promise of more to come. We had already planned an early start and a picnic breakfast in Nature's Valley on the coast, so we stuck to the plan, and luckily there was no rain while we breakfasted and birdwatched on the river mouth. This was a wonderful place, with a lovely unspoilt atmosphere and great views of birds where the forest and river met: half-collared kingfisher, Knysna turaco, grey cuckoo-shrikes, black-headed orioles, wood hoopoes and many others showed themselves beautifully as they perched or worked their way through the trees. After breakfast, we walked through the forest and along the river estuary; one group saw several new birds including very close views of a Chorister robin, while another group walked on, and on, in search of a mythical viewpoint over the bay and estuary.

From here, we drove on eastwards to the coastal part of the Tsitsikamma National Park. We stopped on the way to admire a lovely view northwards over the unspoilt area of hilly forest, and a male Crowned Eagle flew overhead, displaying and calling beautifully.

The coast was atmospherically spectacular when we arrived, with huge swells breaking on the rocks and cliffs, mist over the hills, and rain in the air. The main walk was closed due to landslides, but we were able to sample the unspoilt coastal forests with a shorter walk, and admire the stunning coastal scenery. Sunbirds showed themselves beautifully, and we found a few new birds such as the terrestrial bulbul, or groundbul. There were also some nice new flowers including the iris-like *Dietes iridioides* and an attractive scrambling purple-flowered pea, *Dipogon lignosus*.

Finally, we moved on to a roadside protected area to walk to a huge yellow-wood tree *Podocarpus falcatus* though we spent rather less time here than we might have, due to the increasing rain and the noisy nearby roadworks.

### **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September. Transfer from Coral Tree to Hermanus**

We ordered an early breakfast as there was a long day of travelling ahead of us. There had been rain in the night, and it was noticeably colder and windier. We soon set off westwards along the coast, stopping for little, though there were glimpses of blue cranes and other things. As we turned southwards to head for the southernmost point of Africa, Cape Agulhas, we began to see more: more cranes, a few Denham's bustards, clapper larks, and the attractive orange spikes of a bulb *Watsonia aletroides*. Some heavy showers passed through, pushed along by the strong south-westerly wind, but by the time we reached the cape, it was clearer and sunny, though still windy.

Although not as spectacular as Cape Point, Agulhas is a lovely stretch of coast, protected by National Park status, and with some attractive masses of flowers. Over a picnic we soon

found a familiar *Ferraria*, a wild *Freesia*, and some striking white and pink everlastings *Helichrysum retortum* amongst other things. The nearby beach had masses of yellow daisies *Arctotis acaulis* and coastal ragwort, with clumps of the lovely dune salad thistle nearby. Birds were mostly sheltering from the wind, though there were a few larks and some Cape spur-fowl.

After lunch and further exploration, we drove back the way we had come, then turned westwards towards Hermanus. Along the way, we stopped for grey rhebok, a large flock of blue cranes (at least 25 birds), some bontybok and zebras in a game farm, and various other points of interest. We arrived at Hermanus in time to see several southern right whales playing in the surf outside the superbly-placed hotel – a promise of more to come tomorrow, especially as the weather forecast is better.

### Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September. Around Hermanus.

Our first few hours were spent enjoying the delights of Hermanus, walking the cliff path and looking at the town, which is beautifully situated and quite elegant. There is a path all along the low cliffs, with superb views of the bay and mountains, and – of course – the whales. Whales are clearly quite common in the bay, though they were not coming particularly close inshore today, and we didn't get the best possible views. There were a few orchids *Satyrium odorum* on the cliffs, and several people had good views of Neddicky in the bushes.

At mid-morning, we gathered to drive to the nearby hills, for panoramic views of the bay and the whales, and a first look at the local *fynbos*. This had been burnt recently, so it was not attractive, though there were some nice flowers including a gladiolus, the Painted Lady *Gladiolus debilis*, a pretty pink *Ixia*, a yellow gentian-relative *Sebaea exacoides* and various others, plus a few sugar birds. On seeing a whale close to a headland, we quickly drove back down to the coast, and had some quite close views, though it soon moved away.

Hermanus is very close to some fine protected areas, of which the best is the Fernkloof reserve, our destination for a picnic and the afternoon. As it happened, the reserve was having its flower show and open day, which had the disadvantage of making it more busy and expensive, but the great advantage of a lovely display of many of the local native plants picked and labelled in an exhibition hall. There was also a book-stall and other shops, and several people took the opportunity to buy a new book on the flowers of the *fynbos*.

After enjoying the show and some lunch, we walked up into the main reserve, where there were excellent close views of sugarbirds, sunbirds and others, and some lovely flowers. This is probably the best example of *fynbos* we have seen, in a particularly species-rich area, and there were many plants in flower: Proteas in all forms, more gladioli, a nice *Geissorhiza ovata*, a lovely blue-flowered bush in the pea family *Psoralea pinnata*, lots of Ericas, and many others. There were some pleasantly tame birds in the lower gardens, including fiscal flycatcher and waxbills, and a last chance to check the names of some of the plants we had seen in the exhibition.

### Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September. Last day. Hermanus to Cape Town.

The day dawned fine and soon became warm for our last morning here, and whales were close inshore during breakfast, easily visible from the hotel dining room. By mid-morning, we were packed and ready to head for the Harold Porter Botanic Garden, though unfortunately it had become steadily cooler and wetter, with rain in the air. The garden is an attractive small site, featuring *fynbos* plants, and backing onto a large area of protected mountain *fynbos*. We explored the area until lunchtime in various ways, and everyone had good views of a troupe of baboons, with a young one riding on its mother's back. The light rain stopped and we had a pleasant picnic here, before heading on westwards towards Cape Town.

Geoff knew of a good rockjumper site *en route*, and a short walk through coastal *fynbos* proved highly successful, with excellent views for everyone of at least one family of these attractive birds. There were also some good new flowers here.

Finally, we climbed back into the vans for the last leg of the journey to the airport, and home, with some great memories, lots of photographs, and wealth of information about South Africa and its wildlife and people. The whole tour was enriched hugely by the knowledge,

enthusiasm and hard work of our two local guides, Geoff and Mikle. They drove, identified, explained, discussed, made picnics, booked restaurants and did endless other little things that go to make up a great tour, always with good humour.

Bob Gibbons

**South Africa trip: Summarised Flower list. September 1<sup>st</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>.**  
**The Travelling Naturalist.**

**September 2<sup>nd</sup>. Visit to Kirstenbosch**

Lunch at silvermine hills

Little gladiolus *Gadiolus debilis*  
China flower (pink bush) *Adenandra villosa*  
*Chrysanthemum monilifera* – yellow ‘daisy bush’  
Hottentot fig *Carpobrotus edulis*  
Little pink sand-crocus *Romulea rosea*

Plants in garden not listed

**September 3<sup>rd</sup> Down onto the Cape Peninsula**

*Salvia africana-lutea*: the brownish-yellow sage  
Tree mallow *Lavatera arborea* - introduced

First roadside stop: Orchids *Pterygodium cafferum*  
Gladiolus-like *Melasphaerula ramosa*  
Several *Agathosmas* (white and pink)

*Erica tristis*  
*E. paniculata*  
*E. mammosa*  
*Leucadendron salignum*  
*Drosera trinervia* – little red rosettes of sticky leaves  
*Serruria glomerata* (a small protea)  
The red parasite *Hyobanche sanguinea* (cat’s claw)  
The orange *Oxalis obtusa*  
Dodder *Cuscuta nitida*

After lunch walk

The curious protea-like legume *Liparia parva*, in bud  
*Nemesia versicolor*  
Orange lichens *Teloschistes* sp.  
*Aspalathus capensis* (relative of Rooibos)  
The yellow iris *Moraea neglecta*  
Yellowish star at end: *Bobartia indica*  
Big yellow stars seen from vehicles – Probably the yellow form of *Spiloxene capensis*  
*Mimetes fimbriifolius* – an unusual Protea

Sprawling shrubs with yellow daisy-like flowers at cape and elsewhere were probably *Oedera* sp.

**September 4<sup>th</sup>. Up Table Mountain then on to Rondvlei bird reserve.**

Table Mountain

Yellow daisy bushes widespread at top were: *Euryops pectinatus*  
The curious everlasting with red conical buds was: *Edmondia sesamoides*  
Various *Ericas*  
Lovely lichens on the rocks incl. *Sticta*, *Xanthoria* etc.

Reserve

Not many species in flower, but a few *Nemesias* (quite similar to toadflax), some small annual scrophulariaceae called *Zaluzianskya*, and bushes of the nightshade *Solanum americanum*, with blue flowers; also lots of bushes of 'wild rosemary', actually a composite with small white flowers and fluffy white seeds – *Eriocephalus africanus*; and the famous Cape Daisy, widely grown in gardens – *Dimorphotheca nudicaulis*.

The orchid on the way home was *Satyrium coriifolium*. (orange spikes)

### Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> September. Trip to Duiker Island, then off northwards to Langebaan Bay.

No flowers on island trip.

#### First stop on the minor road across to Darling:

The large red bushy pea was *Sutherlandia frutescens* sometimes known as cancer bush. Also masses of Purple bugloss *Echium plantagineum*, a European species, very rare in UK.

#### Waylands reserve and lunch. Renosterveldt habitat.

Lots of white arum *Zantedeschia aethiopica*

*Babiana rubrocyanea*, the blue and red 'wine cups'

*B. ambigua*, low iris-like flowers

*Homeria bituminosa*

*H. miniata* – can be peachy pink or yellow

NB Some newer books now include *Homeria* in *Moraea*.

The sundew *Drosera cistiflora*, with big pink fls

*Lobostemon fruticosus* – bushes with blue-pink fls

*Lachenalia pallida* – hyacinth-like spikes

*Spiloxene capensis* – white stars with violet centre

*Wachendorfia paniculata* – large orange-brown butterfly iris

*W. parviflora* – smaller but more attractive version

2 species of the blue crucifers (cress family) *Heliophila cornopifolia* was smaller but more intense blue;

*H. refracta* was bigger, paler and more erect.

*Lapeyrousia jacquinii* – little striped iris relative, right by cars

*Tulbhagia capensis* – like a garlic

*Tripteris clandestina* – small orange daisy

*Hermannia alnifolia* – low-growing bush with folded orange bell-flowers

The iris-like *Moraea tricolor* was orange-pink

And *M. tripetala* was pale blue

*Romulea hirsuta* – the large satiny-red sand crocus on low stalks

*Albuca flaccida* – tall greenish white bulb with hanging flowers

#### Teenie Versfeld reserve: wet flat renosterveld with boardwalk

Masses of blue starry sand crocus *Romulea tabularis*

Little orchid *Disperis villosa*

Ragwort *Senecio littoreus*

*Wachendorfia paniculata* – as in Waymans

Pinky spikes, low-growing = *Cyphia bulbosa*, with flowers a bit like *Lobelia*

*Oxalis versicolor*

*Spiloxene canaliculata* – big yellowish stars with red below petals

*Babiana angustifolia* – like a dwarf iris with stiff leaves

*Ornithogalum thyrsoides* – a creamy-white spiked star of Bethlehem just coming out

### Thursday 6<sup>th</sup>. Into West Coast NP

First stop by roadside for the orchids *Corycium orobanchioides*, but also quickly found purplish

*Diascia capensis*

Drumsticks *Zaluzianskya villosa* – usually white

*Gazania pectinata* – big orange daisy

*Ornithoglossum viride* – small bulb with greenish flowers

*Babiana tubulosa*

*Nemesia versicolor* – bit like an annual toadflax with yellow and blue, or white, flowers

–

Cape Rosemary *Eriocephalus africana* (no relation to real rosemary)

Hottentot fig *Carpobrotus acinaciformis* : big pink mesemb with sprawling triangular-section leaves; showy.

—  
*Ferraria crispa* on sandy roadside

Walk to sea, and lunchtime bay

*Hemimeris sabulosa* – little yellow annual

*Senecio littorea*

*Cotula* sp. (rayless mayweeds)

Bermuda buttercup *Oxalis pes-capraea*, and *O. obtusa*

Dune salad *Didelta carnosa* – clumps of big yellow daisies on the dunes

*Lampranthus aurantiacus* – lovely deep orange mesemb.

*Dorotheanthus bellidiformis* – pretty starry low-growing annual mesembs in pink, white etc.

*Ruschia* sp – shrubby pink mesembs

—  
*Geissorhiza aspera*

*Satyrium odorum* (orchid)

Walk at viewpoint with granite boulders

*Gladiolus speciosus*

*Moraea fugax* – pale, iris-like

*Pelargonium fulgidum* – almost scarlet.

**Friday 7<sup>th</sup>. Up west coast and on to Cederberg Mountains**

Dune stop

Masses of the red *Babiana ringens* (= *B. thunbergii*)

Also *Ferraria crispa* and a pretty creamy *Nemesia* with purplish stripes *Nemesia bicornis*. The common purplish annual ragwort is probably *Senecio elegans*, the Veld Cineraria.

The whitish campion here was probably *Silene bellidioides*, closely related to our red and white champions.

Rocherpan bird reserve

*Gladiolus orchidiflorus*

The usual shrubby yellow daisy bush *Chrysanthemoides monilifera*

A scrambling pinkish-white flower plant with badder like fruit *Cysticapnos vesicaria*, related to *corydalis*.

*Nemesia versicolor*

The bushy pinkish-white flowered mesembs were *Ruschia* sp.

Also yellow-flowered *Zygophyllum* bushes, blue-flowered annuals in the cress family *Heliophila*, and a distinctive pink-flowered large sea-lavender which was probably *Limonium purpuratum*.

Tern stop at Eland Bay

There were 2 species of a low-growing plant with yellow cup-like flowers here: *Grielum grandiflorum* (larger) and *G. humifusum*.

Also a nice largish orange daisy *Arctotis hirsuta*, and a few saw the blue sand-crocus again *Romulea tabularis*.

2 stops in the Cederbergs

**a)** A very unusual *Protea* with pink spikes *Paranomus bracteolaris*, a nice whitish daisy *Ursinia chrysanthemoides*; the pink narrow spikes of a milkwort-relative *Muraltia heisteria*. From round about here, we started seeing lots of bushes with fine leaves and large yellow daisy flowers – *Euryops speciosus*.

**b)** Some low-growing *Proteas*, *Protea acaulos*, and the attractive grey leaf sugarbush *Protea laurifolia*. Also more sundew rosettes, and pretty yellow starry *Spiloxene*, probably *Spiloxene serrata*.

Along the road we saw more *Sutherlandia frutescens* and the nice silvery-grey-leaved, yellow-flowered waboom *Protea nitida*.

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup>. In the Cederberg Mountains.**

Morning, up beyond olive groves to the valley of the rock art.

Gladiolus alatus – the lovely little orange one, and the less distinguished green and blue *G. venustus*.  
 Botterboom trees (the little trees with scaly bark) *Tylecodon paniculatus*  
 Button daisies *Cotula* sp  
 Selago glutinosa  
 A small orange-yellow annual daisy *Tripteris clandestina*  
 The little hyacinth-relative *Lachenalia unifolia*  
*Homeria* (*Moraea*) *minata* – peachy-pink bulb  
*Moraea tripetala* – bluish iris  
*Felicia* sp – daisy family, blue ray petals and yellow centres  
*Pelargonium magenteum*  
 Bulbine torte – little yellow spikes, lily family, with twisty leaves  
*Diascia capensis*  
 Drumsticks *Zaluzianskya villosa* (pretty white annual)  
 Orange daisy *Ursinea* sp  
*Babiana* sp  
 A sorrel *Rumex lativalvis*  
*Massonia depressa* ( or similar) – the plant with two big flat leaves and a cluster of stemless flowers by the rock art.  
 Yellow snow or gold cloth *Rhynchopsidium pumilum* – low growing annual yellow daisy that fills in all the gaps  
*Nylandtia spinosa* – pink-flowered shrub in milkwort family  
*Hermannia trifurca* – pink flowers, small bush  
*Euphorba mauretanicum* – the large bushy spurge, common in drier areas  
 Beetle daisy *Gorteria diffusa* – orange with black dots in centre

Afternoon, walk up from pass

Gladiolus alatus, *G. venustus*, and the new blue-flowered *G. inflatus*  
 A dwarf stonecrop, probably alpine stonecrop *Crassula alpestris*  
 Shubby borage relative with blue flowers *Lobostemon* sp  
 Yellow daisy bush *Euryops thunbergii*  
 White spikes like a foxtail lily = cat's tail *Bulbinella cauda-felis* (and we saw another yellow *Bulbinella* on the other side of the valley, from the bus)  
*Zygophyllum fulvum*  
*Wormbia elongata* – curious low-growing geophyte  
*Erica* spp  
 The big orange aloe near the parking: *Aloe melanacantha*  
 Three bulb flowers only came out in the evening: *Hesperanthus bachmanii* with almost white fls; *H. cucullatus* with red outer petals; and the iris-like pale blue *Moraea fugax*.

10 spot ground beetle  
 Spotted sand lizard  
 Bibron's gecko in huts

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> september. Karoo National Botanical Garden, and Matjiesfontein**

In the garden, most things were labelled, though perhaps the most obvious plant was the deep orange daisies *Gazania rigida* that were everywhere!

We stopped by the roadside for impressive clumps of the white daisy *Dimorphotheca cuneata*.

The railway walk from the toll-house café had large pink-flowered legume shrubs *Podalyria* sp, and the pale blue flowered shrub *Ofia africana*.

**Monday 10<sup>th</sup>. From Matjiesfontein to Plettenberg Bay area.**

Stop 1 in the Karoo for *Aloe variegata*

Stop 2 in the Karoo for Aloe claviflora, plus yellow daisy bush *Osteospermum scariosum*; and bushes of Karoo Gold *Rhigozonum obovatum* with yellow flowers seen *en route*.

Stop 3 in gorge after Prince Albert: Aloe ferox and another, Aloe comptonii; Pelargonium capitatum (very like garden 'geraniums')  
Nemesia ?fruticans in white form  
+ Zygophyllum, Euryops etc

Protaeas on the way, especially P. punctata with silvery-grey leaves and red to white flowers.

Just before the pass, pink *Oxalis commutatum* and Aster sp.

Walk down from the pass produced the attractive gentian-blue geophyte *Nivenia binata*.

Chinese lanterns *Nymania capensis* along roads, and Mike mentioned Portulacaria bushes, eaten by elephants.

### **Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> September. Close to Plettenberg Bay.**

#### Garden of Eden

Wild fuchsia *Halleria lucida* and wild pomegranite *Burchellia bubalina*.

Various trees all labelled, including the Outeniqua yellow-wood *Podocarpus falcatus*

#### Knysna lagoon headland

The slightly old-man's-beard-like plant with creamy flowers: *Knowltonia vesicaria*, in the buttercup family

Erica versicolor, with long pink and white tubular fls

#### Lunch

The lovely blue-flowered bush with long wands of hanging flowers was Sandpaper vine *Petraea volubilis* from Brazil.

#### Up the river by boat

Bulbine latifolia with yellow spikes on cliffs

Pig's ear *Cotyledon orbiculare* with orange fls

*Podalyria* sp (pink bush, pea family)

Polygala myrtifolia

Common reed *Phragmites australis* and giant reed *Arundo donax* .

Aloe ferox, A. arborescens, and the smaller A. pluridens.

### **Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> September. Tsitsikamma National Park.**

#### a) Nature's valley

A few labelled trees, plus wild pomegranite *Burchellia bubalina*.

The grasshoppers/locusts everywhere were probably the milkweed locust *Phymateus mobilus*.

Those who walked to the viewpoint (!) also saw a nice little orange pea family, *Indigofera porrecta*.

**b) en route to the park**, we stopped briefly for a nice pink heather *Erica sparsa*, a blue lobelia *Lobelia coronopifolia*, and a lot of clubmoss *Lycopodium cernuum*.

**c) At the café/seashore** the walk through the woods produced a scrambling reddish pea *Dipogon lignosus*, a pretty pale bluish iris *Dietes iridioides*, the September bush *Polygala myrtifolia*, and Barbara saw stock rose *Sparrmannia africana* (also seen in afternoon). The frogs 'tinking' here were probably clicking stream frogs.

#### **d). Walk to large yellowwoods**

The white-flowered yellow-stamened stock rose by the viewing platform, *Sparrmannia africana*

### **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> September. From Coral tree to Hermanus, via Cape Agulhas.**

#### **a) Roadside stop a bit before Agulhas**

The orange-red spikes of *Watsonia aletroides* (some books spell it alectroides, but I've used the most recent spelling)

Greenish spikes of *Albuca flaccida*

**b) At Agulhas**

A low-growing pinkish-white everlasting *Helichrysum retorta*

*Babiana ambigua*

The yellow with purple *Freesia leichtlinii*, endemic to just this area

*Ferraria crispa* in a dwarfed form

Little red-leaved clumps of *Crassula expansa* ssp. *filicaulis*

A blue and yellow *Felicia* with fleshy leaves

Also blue pimpernel and tree mallow, both introduced euro species

Beach area near lighthouse was dominated by a ragwort *Senecio littoralis* and a yellow daisy *Arctotis acaulis*. Also nice bushes of the yellow-flowered dune salad thistle *Didelta carnosa*.

Geoff's bus saw *Gladiolus liliaceus* on the way to the hotel

**Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September. Around Hermanus.**

First part of morning on cliffs near hotel, with whales but also lots of the greenish orchid *Satyrium odorum*, and various non-native species.

Rotary route up into the hills above Hermanus

Yellow gentian-relative with starry 5-pointed flowers was *Sebaea exacoides*

A striking orange heather was *Erica cerinthioides*

Pinkish-purple spikes of *Ixia micrandra*

The painted lady *Gladiolus debilis*

2 whitish-flowered members of the Daphne family: *Gnidia oppositifolia* and *Struthiola ciliata*

A scrambling plant with white 5-petalled slightly irregular flowers was *Cyphia volubilis*

Small white-pink flowered succulent was *Crassula fascicularis*

Also everlasting in bud *Edmondia sesamoides*

Fernkloof flower reserve and walk

The pink everlasting was *Phaenocoma prolifera*

Shrubby pea-family bush to about 10ft high with blue flowers was *Psoralea pinnata*

Pink flowered pea was *Podalyria calypttrata*

Nice pink bulb *Geissorhiza ovata*

The common 'geranium' there was *Pelargonium cucullatum*

Bush with masses of white pom-poms: *Berzelia lanuginosa* in the Bruniaceae family

*Gladiolus breviflorus*

Sundew *Drosera cistiflorus*

Yellow composite with leaves tight to stem *Oedera capensis*, seen on landslip

Proteaceae seen here included: *Protea longifolium*, *P. compacta* (pink), *Leucospermum gracile* (a small creeping one), *Leucospermum cordifolium*, and the yellow-flowered *Leucadendron xanthoconus*.

Also the greenish-yellow large-flowered heather *Erica sessiliflora*.

A curious legume, orange nodding head *Liparia splendens*

Painted lady butterfly, and grizzled skipper or similar.

This reserve has a website [www.fernkloof.com](http://www.fernkloof.com) with pictures of the local flowers if anyone needs help identifying pictures etc. Worth a look.

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>. Departure day: Hermanus, Harold Porter gardens and nearby reserve; and short coastal walk to see rock jumpers nr. Rooies.**

No notes made at the gardens.

The **rock jumper** walk had some nice flowers, including:

A shrubby yellow-flowered legume *Aspalathus neglecta*, and a smaller yellow legume with rounded fleshy leaves *Rafnia* sp.

A small pinkish-flowered protea *Serruria adscendens*

An unusual protea, looking like little pine trees with spikes of white flowers: *Spatalla curvifolia*  
And an orchid we'd seen before *Corycium orobanchioides*.

With best wishes

Bob Gibbons

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