SOUTH AFRICA

Western Cape Tour

Trip Report

October 3 - 14, 2011

Disclaimer: This report is as accurate as possible using limited notes taken in the field. Species have been reported on the proper day(s) but, with multiple sites visited on the same day, it is possible that some species are listed as being seen at the wrong location. Any such errors are unintentional.

Knysna Turaco

Species seen by group: 247

(Cape Tour only)

Note: **491** species were seen during the combined Cape and Subtropical Tours. The trip report for the 16-day Subtropical Tour will be available soon.)

Additional species heard: 6

Birding guide: Brian Vanderwalt

Tour leaders: Cindy and Jim Beckman

(CHEEPERS! Birding on a Budget owners)

Group: 5 + 2 tour leaders and guide

Highlights: Verreaux's Eagle, Knysna Turaco, Secretarybird, Red-chested Cuckoo, 7 species of Larks, African Penguin, Denham's Bustard, Spotted Eagle-Owl, Malachite Kingfisher, European Bee-Eater, African Hoopoe, Ground Woodpecker, Grey Cuckoo-Shrike, 6 species of Chats, African Paradise Flycatcher, 5 species of Sunbirds, Protea Seedeater, Hamerkop, Greater Flamingo, Knysna Woodpecker, Tambourine Dove, 22 Pelagic species, Grey-winged Francolin, Ostrich, Black Crake, Southern Black and Karoo Korhaans, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Little Stint, Pied Avocet, Chestnut-banded Plover,

This trip report was written by co-leader Cindy Beckman.

Day 1, Monday, Oct. 3

We departed on Oct. 1, connecting in Washington DC for a South African flight to Johannesburg. Bernie and Jude had flown in from Texas, and we met them at the gate at Dulles. Much to our dismay, South African Airways gave us seats in the very last row of the plane instead of the two aisle seats across from each other in row 53 that we had reserved. We had confirmed the seats twice in the previous two weeks (once on the day of the flight), so my frustration level was quite high when I was told that the central computer system had not passed that information along to the gate agents who had given our seats to someone who had requested seats closer to the front. This made the long flight even less pleasant than we had expected, sitting at the entrance to the restrooms where people stood with their posteriors in our faces with a wall behind us so reclining was limited. It also made us the last people to leave the plane, which allowed us the very minimum amount of time to transfer to our next flight when we arrived in Johannesburg. Even after coming in at the very end of a very long line, we had to wait over 30 minutes for our luggage to show up on the carousel, so we barely made it to the gate in time for our flight to Cape Town, and probably wouldn't have if someone hadn't called people who were on the Cape Town flight out of line and expedited the luggage transfer. Once we arrived huffing and puffing from rushing around, the announcement came that our flight had been delayed. After a second delay, we finally arrived in Cape Town at approximately 11:00 PM on October 2, where we met Jean and Andre who had been waiting with our driver for about an hour. It was after midnight when we arrived at the Bed & Breakfast in Simonstown and almost 1:00 AM on October 3 by the time we were able to go to bed.

When Jim and I awoke at Avian Leisure, we heard some strange calls from outside, and after much searching and deliberation found the source of the sound: an ibis! Andre joined us and said it must be a **Hadeda Ibis**. Ha – *day* –da was our pronunciation until Brian explained that it was named after its call (Ha dee dah pronounced like lah dee dah). Other feeder birds included two different sunbirds, **Laughing Dove, Cape White-eye,** and **Common Waxbill**. We were also able to identify a **Cape Robin-Chat.**

Feeder birds at Avian Leisure Bed & Breakfast

Cape White-Eye *Cape Sugarbirds*

We had learned a few days before our departure from the US that the weather forecast for October 4, the day for our scheduled pelagic trip, was not good, nor was our back-up day of Oct. 5 likely to be suitable for the boat to go to sea. October 3, the day we were supposed to be taking it easy and allowing time to adjust to the time change and recover from the long travel days, was likely to be the only day possible for our pelagic excursion. We had to decide to either agree to go on our very first day there or risk not being able to go at all. Everyone agreed that we should go on the first day, so we were up at 6:00 AM for a 7:00 AM breakfast with departure schedule for 7:30. It took just ten minutes to arrive at the dock to report for our 8:00 departure for what is reported to be one of the best pelagic experiences in the world. I was apprehensive about going out to sea after a horrible experience with motion sickness several years ago, but my doctor had prescribed a patch to deter seasickness and I was hopeful that the seas would be kind to me this time.

We gathered the others from Port of Call B&B a few houses down the road and proceeded to the boat dock. I was concerned when I saw that the boat was very small, even smaller than the one I had been on when I got so sick a few years ago. There were some seats on top, a few seats inside and some on the bow. I immediately went to the bow because I know fresh air is essential to avoid motion sickness, but when we were given our safety orientation, we were asked not to sit out front when the boat was moving. We were also told that going inside would make most people sick, even old salts who are not prone to seasickness, so that left the back of the boat (where there were no seats) or the top as our only two choices for the 2.5-hour ride to the continental shelf. The top of the boat had plenty of fresh air, but also offered exaggerated motion, so I went to the back and found a place on the railing to lean on and hold onto for the ride. Two ropes were tied to provide people with something to hang onto as the boat made its way to the continental shelf. We weren't even out of the bay when the first Southern Right Whale was spotted, so the boat was stopped for a better look. As the small boat bobbed around on the fairly sooth water, it was obvious that this was a mistake; I really should have known better than to try this again. As visions of 7 - 8 hours of misery flashed through my head, the captain pointed out our B&B on the hillside we were passing. I really didn't want to ask to be taken back to the dock because the others in the group would lose birding time, but I jokingly commented that if they could just let me off on the rocks I could walk back to Avian Leisure. Jim asked if I was serious, and once I convinced him that I really wanted off that boat, he went inside and asked the captain if it was possible for someone to disembark without going all the way back to the dock. I couldn't believe it when he said that we were within five minutes of the last boat ramp in the bay before open sea, and I could get off at a place called Miller's Landing. The Captain called Brian, our birding guide for the Cape tour, whose phone immediately went to answering machine, then called the B&B to see if someone could pick me up. As I climbed off the boat, he told me he thought I was making a mistake, but I thanked him kindly and stuck with my decision. I birded a bit around the dock until Brian picked me up about 20 minutes later. **Cape Wagtail** and **Cape Bulbuls** were the only birds I was able to identify and photograph.

Brian and I returned to Avian Leisure B&B and I enjoyed photographing birds at their feeders until about 10:00 AM. The view from the balcony here was amazing – the ocean view was stunning, but the hillside below was the real attraction.

Covered with proteas of all colors and other native fynbos plants, it attracted a wide variety of birds, including Sugarbirds, Sunbirds, and Mousebirds. **Cape Sugarbirds** were all over the proteas, about ten in all. Males with their long streamer tails sat as if posing for my camera while **Speckled Mousebirds**, **Malachite Sunbirds, Southern Double-collared Sunbirds, Common Waxbills, Cape White-eyes,** and **Laughing Doves** all appeared at the feeders, allowing some attempts to photograph them as they staged to land on the feeders.

At 10:00 AM, I accompanied Brian while he ran some errands, including a stop at Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens in Cape Town. **African Dusky Flycatcher** was the first species seen at the Botanical Gardens, immediately after we entered. Following quickly were **Somber Greenbul** and **Black Sawwing**, a type of swallow, but Brian seemed to be moving quickly through the gardens as if he had a place to go rather than leisurely birding. When he pointed out a **Spotted Eagle Owl** in a tree overhead, I understood why he had been in such a rush. As I was moving to a better position to see the owls, he motioned for me to move in the opposite direction. Thinking he might know of the perfect vantage point for photographing the owl, I hurried over. There, at eye level right behind him, were two fuzzy owlets, tucked under a bush on top of a rock. Brian explained that this pair of owls had been nesting in the Botanical Gardens for several years, and that they normally nest on the ground, so this ground-level site was not unusual. After clicking off far too many shots, we proceeded to bird the gardens quickly. The weather was perfect and I was thrilled by the excellent opportunities to photograph **Orange-breasted Sunbirds, Southern Double-collared Sunbirds, Egyptian Geese, Helmeted Guineafowl, Cape Spurfowl,** and some other common birds. We observed several species that the rest of the group didn't see on the first day, including **Forest Canary, Cape Canary, Red-eyed Dove, White-necked Raven, Olive Thrush,** and **Amethyst Sunbird,** as well as most of the aforementioned photographed species. Fortunately, all were seen by the entire group by the time we finished the Western Cape Tour.

Orange-breasted Sunbird

The pelagic tour was scheduled to finish at around 3:00 PM, so we couldn't linger for long at Kirstenbosch. Brian ran a few errands after we left the botanical gardens and then we drove to the dock, arriving at 2:40. We settled back to wait

in the van, but Jim knocked on the window within a few minutes. The group was inside a restaurant across from our parking place, having coffee or soft drinks.

We joined them and learned that the conditions had been pretty rough once the boat left the shelter of the bay, and both Jean and Jim had been sick. Unfortunately, both of them had fed the fish, something Bernie managed to avoid, although he did not feel well on boat. With the seas so rough, everyone agreed that I had made a wise decision to return to land. The birding had been pretty good on the tour, with 22 pelagic species seen: **Shy Albatross, Black-browed Albatross, Southern Giant-Petrel, Northern Giant-Petrel, Pintado Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Great Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Black-bellied Storm-Petrel, Cape Gannet, Crowned Cormorant, White-breasted Cormorant, Bank Cormorant, Cape Cormorant, Subantarctic Skua, Kelp Gull, Hartlaub's Gull, Swift Tern, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern,** and **Arctic Tern**.

After a late arrival the night before (actually early that morning) and a full day of birding under their belts, I thought the group would want to go to their rooms to rest, perhaps do some balcony birding until dinner, but they opted to go to a nearby wastewater treatment facility when Brian offered it as an option. Before we left the parking lot someone told Brian about a Great White Shark that had been in the bay since about 10:00 AM, so we stopped to see it. A man had been attacked by a Great White in this bay the week before, and everyone wondered if it was the same animal. At over three meters in length, it was an impressive sight from our vantage point on the hill overlooking the beach. We also stopped for good looks at some **Southern Right Whales** in False Bay before driving on to the sewage ponds.

Blacksmith Lapwing

Along the drive to Strandfontein Wastewater Treatment Facility, we saw many **Pied Crows**. A **Black-headed Heron** stood near the entrance road as we drove toward the ponds. We quickly added **Black Sawwings** and **Pearl-breasted Swallows** as we rounded a curve where we stopped to see **Zitting Cisticola.** We also picked up **Yellow-billed Duck** and

White-throated Swallows at this stop, but only part of the group got looks at **Greater Striped Swallows**, and no one got really good looks of the colorful swallows as they flew with other aerialists, which included **African Black Swifts** and **Brown-throated Martins**. At the ponds, Brian called out one ID after another: **Glossy Ibis, Hadeda Ibis, Sacred Ibis, Cape Teal, Little Grebe (Dabchick), Spur-winged Goose, Red-billed Teal, Little Rush Warbler, Blacksmith Lapwing (Plover), Red-knobbed Coot, Southern Pochard, Macoa Duck** (which looks very much like a Ruddy Duck), **Black-necked Grebe, Yellow-billed Duck, Cape Shoveler, White-breasted** and **Reed Cormorants, Black-crowned night-Heron, African Purple Swamphen, White-rumped Swift, Little Swift** (which also has a white rump, but with a stubby tail). There were hundreds of **Hartlaub's Gulls** on the road in front of us. As we were leaving we saw a single **Red Bishop** female and just a few hundred feet down the road a bright male **Yellow Bishop**. The last bird we saw as we were leaving was a **Fork-tailed Drongo**, which Brian said was not supposed to occur in this area.

Yellow Bishop

We returned to Simonstown and went straight to a restaurant for dinner rather than going back to the B&B to clean up. None of us had a full night's sleep the night before, and none but David had had any "real" sleep (upright in an airplane seat doesn't count as "real" sleep) in the last 60 hours, so a quick meal and early to bed sounded like a good plan. We went to a restaurant where we might see African (aka Jackass Penguins) nearby but learned that the eatery was closed on Mondays, so we would have to wait a day to see penguins. We drove a short distance back into the center of town to a different restaurant where we learned on the first night that there is no such thing as a quick meal in South Africa. It took nearly three hours for us to order, be served, and eat. Even without dessert, it was 9:30 by the time we got back to our rooms.

It turned out the Drongo wasn't the last bird of the day, after all, and we wouldn't have to wait any longer for one of our target species. As we returned to our B&Bs after dinner, we spotted an **African Penguin** in the darkness as it waddled up the hill into the neighborhood where our lodging was located. We could hardly wait to see more the following day!

Other species seen today included **Cattle Egret, Common Moorhen, African Black Oystercatcher, Rock Dove, Speckled Pigeon, Cape Turtle-Dove, Levaillant's Cisticola, Karoo Prinia, Red-winged** and **Common Starlings, House Sparrow,** and **Brimstone Canary**. We finished the day with 90 species, 12 of which were seen only by me and 16 that were seen only on the pelagic trip. (I did manage to see some cormorants, gulls, and terns that had been part of the count of 22 for the pelagic.)

Karoo Prinia

<u>Day 2, Tuesday, October 4</u>

Of our group, three people were staying at a nearby B&B called Port of Call, and we met there for breakfast at 7:00 AM, planning to depart at 7:30 so we could be at the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens when they opened at 8:00. I had tested my travel alarm the night before to make sure that the atomic clock inside wouldn't reset itself to EST in the middle of the night. There is a button you can push to request a signal, and it did nothing when I pressed it, so I assumed that we were too far from Colorado for the clock to work. Never mind the satellites used to send the signals, I was sure the clock would remain set to the appropriate time. Much to my surprise, the clock reverted to EST during the night, and we slept beyond the 5:30 I had set. Jim woke up at 6:15, and we managed to hurry and make it to Port of Call on time.

Unlike our continental breakfast the previous morning, today's breakfast was a veritable feast: fresh fruit salad, yogurt, eggs prepared to order, warm croissants, bacon, sausage, grilled tomatoes and mushrooms, toast and assorted jams,

fresh fruit juice, coffee and tea. Wow! We learned that Bernie and Jude and David had the same breakfast the day before while we had our bananas and muffins at Avian Leisure. With a breakfast this good, time is needed. We weren't able to leave until after 8:30 AM, and arrived at Kirstenbosch at around 9:00. The sky was cloudy and it looked as if it might rain, but not many of us took our rain gear since Brian assured us that it would clear off.

Once again, our first bird at the Botanical Gardens was an **African Dusky Flycatcher**, but this time we got it in the parking lot, before we even entered the gardens. **Red-eyed Dove** was also seen in the parking lot, and in spite of the dreary skies we knew this was going to be an excellent day. **African Goshawk** was seen soaring above us as we stood on the inside of the entry gate waiting for people to come out of the restrooms. As we wandered about the beautiful gardens, we spotted many common birds: **Karoo Prinia, Spur-winged Goose, Cape Bulbul, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Cape White-eye, Cape Spurfowl (Francolin)** with chicks**, Black Sawwings, African Olive (Rameron) Pigeon, Cape Batis, Somber Greenbul,** and **Forest Canary** were all seen and most were photographed. Brian explained to us that the Afrikaans name for **Familiar Chats** is "Spekvreters" ("Fat Eaters"). This name was given to them because they used to take animal fat that was used to grease wagon wheels many years ago. Accustomed to seeing the birds around their homes, the name "Familiar" was adopted when the practice of using animal fat as axle grease was no longer the norm. Raptors seen included **Forest Buzzard, Jackal Buzzard,** and **Yellow-billed Kite.** A **Little Gray Mongoose** scampered away too quickly for everyone to see it, but we would see more later. About this time, it began to sprinkle a little and we were all regretting our decision to leave our rain gear behind. But Brian really had known what we was talking about when he said it wouldn't rain, and after just a few minutes of very light rain the sky cleared and the rest of the day was beautiful.

Red-eyed Dove

We ran into another tour operator, Christian, who tried to tell us about the owls, but Brian interrupted him before he could "steal his thunder". We walked on to the spot where the owls were nesting and Brian took me aside to tell me the

plan he had hatched (pun intended). We positioned the group in front of the owlets, facing the other way, for a group photograph. After we snapped the photos, Brian told them to turn around. It took several seconds for them to realize what was right in front of them at eye level, and then everyone oohed and aahed as the photographers among us went into rapid fire mode, sounding for all the world like the paparazzi had just located Branjelina.

Spotted Eagle-Owls, Adult and Owlet

Kirstenbosch is a gorgeous garden, but it has nothing on the natural landscape that surrounds it. We found birds at nearly every turn, and when we weren't admiring a bird, we were checking out the plants and insects. We spent more time there than Brian had intended and finished the morning with lunch at the cafe there. As we were waiting for our food to arrive, someone spotted a raptor overhead that Brian identified as a **Black Sparrowhawk.**

Our next destination was Cape Point, where we planned to visit Table Mountain National Park. As we were driving along, Brian suddenly made a u-turn (which is always a good sign when you're birding). In a vacant lot there stood two **Spotted Thick-Knees**, huge golden eyes staring at us. Brian got out of the car so the birds would move, and we were able to photograph them from the van.

Spotted Thick-Knee

Next Brian took us to Commetjie (Little Bay), one of his regular stops for shorebirds, gulls, herons, etc. There we saw **Swift Terns** and **Common Terns** resting on a sandbar and **Little Egret** (which looks very much like our Snowy Egret)

foraging along the water's edge. We got close-up looks at **Sacred Ibis** and enjoyed better looks at Hadeda Ibis, which we heard and saw on every day for the remainder of the trip.

As we drove on toward the national park, Brian spotted some **Bontebok** in a field. Also seen on the way were **Rock Kestrel, Common Fiscal,** and **Chacma Baboons.** The Baboons were alongside the road just as we entered the national park, a family group that included everything from tiny babies to huge males. We watched them for a few minutes before driving into the park.

Once inside Table Mountain National Park, it wasn't long before we saw **Mountain Zebras** grazing near the roadside. Brian pointed out the difference between this zebra and the ones we would see farther east, most noticeably the dew flap on the Mountain Zebra is absent on Burchell's Zebra. We drove to the visitor's center, where we found **Cape Bunting**. After looking around for a short while, we drove on a road that paralleled the shore and were able to find **Gray-backed Cisticola** in the short plants that are characteristic of fynbos. Brian kindly pointed out a distant **Cape Gannet** for me, giving me one of the birds I had missed by ditching the pelagic trip. Prone to motion sickness himself, Brian was very empathetic in this regard. A bit farther down the road we saw a pair of **Ostriches** on the beach and quickly noticed that they had chicks with them.

We all marveled at these wonders of the bird world, observing their behavior and clicking off photo after photo. It seemed strange to us that they would be so near the ocean's edge, but we really didn't know anything about the species so just about any behavior would be a surprise. As we were standing at the road's edge, focused on the ostriches through our long lenses, the male and the chicks made their way closer to us. Thrilled at the photographic opportunity, we just kept clicking away. Standing a short way down the road from us, Andre was nearly bowled over by two females who came from behind to join the birds we were watching on the other side of the road. He was so focused on his

photography, he might not have noticed the birds at all without the warning from another birder. As David and I continued to shoot the chicks, we were unaware of just how close the huge male had come. I looked away from my camera to see that the chicks had placed themselves between the dad and us. I looked up to see that the male ostrich had stopped browsing and was now standing very erect with his attention on the two of us. I thought he was posturing, giving us a warning of sorts and I told David I thought we should back off. Still looking through his long lens, he seemed a bit surprised to see just how close we were to this huge and very strong animal, and he agreed that we should retreat. What a thrill!

Ostrich Dad with Chick

As we drove away, we saw **Eland** grazing on the hillside. We drove back to Simonstown with just a bit of birding along the way. Once again, we went straight to a restaurant, this time to the one where penguins are seen near the parking area. We took some time with the penguins before going in and then enjoyed a lovely meal overlooking the bay. Once again, it took hours to make it through the process of ordering, waiting, and eating. And once again, our last bird of the day was the neighborhood penguin seen waddling up the hill in the dark. We met in the living room of our B&B to go over the day's list, with 65 species seen and an additional 2 heard. Our trip total stood at 105, so we only added 15 new birds, which was understandable since I had had a "preview" of Kirstenbosch Gardens the day before. Once again, we didn't finish until 9:30, much later than I'm accustomed to on birding trips where the norm is falling in bed right after dinner so you can be up between 4:30 and 5:00 to make your way to the best birding site as early as possible. Brian wasn't asking us to start in the wee hours of the morning, so it was possible for us to get a full eight hours of sleep if we didn't waste too much time.

By the end of day 2, every man in the group had clobbered himself on the head getting into the van. The van door had lower than normal clearance, and with hats blocking peripheral vision as they stepped up, the tallest among us were bound to get some bumps on the head. Getting in and out frequently to bird along the way, the recurring exclamations of "OW!" were at first met with sympathy. As the collisions with the low-clearance entry continued and the exclamations became more colorful, everyone started to joke about it. Now, each time we re-entered the van, the men would say "God Save the Queen" to remind each other to bow down as they climbed into the vehicle.

<u>Day 3, Wednesday, October 5</u>

Even though our breakfast wasn't scheduled until 7:00 AM, I got up at 5:30 so I would have some time to photograph some of the birds on the hillside and at the feeders before breakfast. This morning was very windy and there wasn't

much in the way of photograph-able activity. We had planned to leave at 7:30, but it was 8:00 before everyone had finished their huge morning meal. Quite late by birding standards, but the heavy winds were keeping the birds down this morning, anyway, and we hoped the winds would die down as the morning went on. We had a drive of about an hour and a half to the opposite side of the bay where we would look for Cape Rockjumper. We did see many birds from the van on the way, but nothing that was new for the trip. When we arrived at the destination, a gravel road near a town call Rooi-els where Brian knew the Rockjumpers could be found, the wind was howling fiercely. It was difficult to use binoculars, let alone the spotting scopes, so when we finally located the **Cape Rockjumpers** high on the hillside, the views were unsatisfactory to say the least. Birding along the road was also disappointing in general because the heavy winds were keeping the birds down. In a spot where the birding is normally very good, we saw just a few species, including **Cape Grassbird, Rock Martin,** and **Cape Rockthrush.**

We next drove to Betty's Bay to view a colony of penguins. When we arrived, we started down a boardwalk that took us along the edge of the rocky shore where penguins literally covered every available spot. The wind at the shore was even stronger than it had been at Rooi-els, and it was quite frigid, but what fun it was to watch the African Penguins at such a close range. A short distance offshore was a rocky island that hosted Cormorants and Gulls, and Brian managed to find for me a single **Subantarctic Skua** as it flew over the water, giving me one more of the species that had been seen by the others on the pelagic trip. Although I had only distant views of the bird, I was very grateful to Brian for making the effort to find some of the pelagic species for me whenever he could.

African Penguin Colony

African (aka "Jackass") Penguin

African Penguin with chick

When we left the penguin colony, we drove a short distance to Harold Porter Botanical Gardens where the first order of business was lunch. As we enjoyed a delicious meal from a veranda overlooking the gardens, our attention was divided between conversation and watching the behavior of some common birds. As we finished our meal and stepped away from the restaurant, Brian said he heard one of the target species. We followed him to a path less than 100 feet from where we had been sitting, and within minutes we were looking at our first **Paradise Flycatcher**. Although both male and female were in the area, I saw only the female - what a beauty! As we walked around the gardens, we heard a lot of commotion from a group of small birds and found a **Southern Boubou** in a **Cape White-eye** nest. The White-eyes were clearly upset, and other birds came to help deter the intruder, including **Fiscal Flycatcher, Somber Greenbul,** and **Southern Lesser Double-collared Sunbird** (Seriously, this name is bigger than the bird!).

Southern Lesser Double-collared Sunbird

As we were heading toward the exit, I was in the back of the line as the group walked past an intersection on the path. I looked down trail to the right as I came by and saw small birds with red rumps in the grass. I knew they were waxbills of some kind, and they did not look like the Common Waxbills we had seen at the B&B, so I called the others back. Brian identified the birds as **Swee Waxbills.**

Our last stop was back to Strandfontein Waste Water Treatment Facility for one last look. We quickly identified many of the same species we had seen there earlier, and this time some of the group was able to call out id's of birds that were becoming familiar. Because we arrived shortly before 6:00 PM, we were not permitted access to the back part of the facility where flamingoes come in to roost, so we would need to come back one more time. The quick visit to the Wastewater Treatment Facility upped the daily count, but we had only two new birds there, **Gray-headed Gull** and **Great Crested Grebe.** Our count for the day was 73 plus 3 birds that were only heard, with 12 of them new for the trip, bringing the total for the trip to 117. Even though the men were announcing "God Bless the Queen" each time someone got in to remind them to bow down, they were still suffering some head injuries from climbing into the van.

Grey-headed Gull

Day 4, Thursday, October 6

I asked Brian if we might have breakfast a bit earlier since it was taking so long and delaying our departure. He couldn't ask for earlier than 7:00, but suggested that we plan to arrive at Port of Call at 6:45 so everyone could tell Carol how they wanted their eggs so we might actually be able to start eating at 7:00. He didn't tell Carol about this slight change in plans, and it really threw her for a loop when we all arrived 15 minutes ahead of schedule. She rushed around trying to get fruit and juices and cereals out for everyone and I felt really bad about causing her the frustration of doing this with all of us standing there watching her as if we were starved. It certainly didn't speed anything up by coming early, and we departed shortly before 8:30 to begin the drive north into the Karoo.

We left some of our things to be stored at the B&Bs since we would be back in a few days. Although we had been traveling for only three days, Jim and I left some laundry to be done since it seemed like such a good opportunity. Having laundry done proved to be a challenge in the coming days, so we were glad we left it even though we had plenty of clean clothing.

As we drove through Capetown, we stopped at a little wetland located right along the highway called Sunset Beach Pan. There we saw **Pied Kingfisher, Masked Weaver, Greater Flamingo, African White Pelican, Caspian Tern, Lesser Swamp Warbler,** and **Common Moorhen** with chicks. We next stopped at a small park along the highway for a requested restroom break. While there, we picked up **Kittlitz's Plover.** Brian then took us to a nice little beach where we were able to take some group photos with Table Mountain in the background. We included Wildbird Magazines in some of the shots, then moved on to Inie Versveld, a wildflower reserve maintained by Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. On the way to the reserve, we noted **Booted Eagle, Black Harrier, Southern Black Korhaan, Pied Starling, and Capped Wheatear** but the Korhaan was not seen by everyone and not seen well by anyone.

A vast open field covered in tiny wildflowers of all colors and types, Tinie Versveld harbored more species than expected. As soon as we got out of the van we saw a pair of **Bokmakieries.** We watched as they foraged for insects and then dropped into a dense thicket along the fence where we assumed they had a nest, although we could not see it. As

we walked along a narrow path through the wildflowers, we were bombarded by tiny gnat-like insects that felt like our US Black Flies as they landed on our heads, especially along the hairline for people not wearing hats (which I think was only me). But who cares about annoying insects and extreme heat when you have birds like **African Marsh Harrier, Yellow-billed Kites and Blue Cranes** in view? We found the first of many larks for the trip – first **Red-capped,** then **Large-billed Lark,** and got great views of **Cape Longclaw**. As we exited the field of flowers, an **African Stonechat** was sitting on the wires above the fence where the Bokmakieries continued to forage.

Blue Crane

We stopped for lunch at the West Coast Farm Store where we enjoyed home-made meat pies and where the grounds produced close-up views of **Speckled Pigeon, Cape Weavers,** and **Red Bishops**. There were a lot more birds on the grounds that I would have liked to have spent some time photographing, but they were all common species and we needed to move on to West Coast National Park.

At the Park, we got excellent views of **Southern Black Korhaan** as it walked through tall grasses near the side of the road. We added **White-backed Mousebird** to the list, but we had to work a bit so that everyone got a good enough view to distinguish it from the more common Speckled Mousbird. We got our only **Red Hartebeest** of the trip while at West Coast and added **Karoo Lark, Black-shouldered Kite,** and **Karoo Scrub-Robin** to the bird list. We spent a short time in a bird blind at Abraham's Kraal where we picked up **Yellow Canary, African Spoonbill, Black Crake, Red-knobbed Coots with chicks, Cape Bulbul,** and **Little Grebe** which was formerly called Dabchick. Moving on to a second blind that overlooked a marsh near the Geelbeek Manor House, we saw the first shorebirds of the trip: **Curlew Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Gray Plover** (aka Black-bellied Plover), **Sanderling, Common Whimbrel, Ruff, Ruddy Turnstone, Ringed Plover,** and **Little Stint.** By this time we were all pretty tired from a long day of birding, plus the effects of the travel days and time change were really being felt, and I think Brian was surprised by our lack of enthusiasm for the shorebirds. We left the seawater blind and went to the visitors' center for a loo break, and there we found a **Cardinal Woodpecker** peeking out of a nest cavity. Our waning energy was boosted when an **African Hoopoe** was spotted. As we drove out of the park, we saw **Steenbok** near the road and noticed a large **Ungulate Tortoise** lumbering along. Brian had told us to watch for the uncommon **Gray-winged Francolin**, and Jean called out when she saw one of the well-camouflaged birds in the low plants at the road's edge. Other new birds seen today included **Long-**

billed Crombec, Rufous-vented Tit-babbler, Great White Pelican, African Darter, Gray Heron, White-backed Duck, Mallard, Banded Martin, Black-winged Stilt, Caspian Tern, Cape Sparrow, and **Southern Masked Weaver.**

We finished the day with a whopping 107 species, of which 47 were new to the trip, bringing our trip total to 164. Not only a great day of birding, but the queen seemed to be saving the day and no new head injuries were suffered during the van entries today. We arrived tired but not battered at Seeberg Lookout Point B&B in Langebaan and went to have dinner at Pearly's Restaurant. The food was excellent, but once again the amount of time spent on the evening meal was extreme. We completed the bird list while waiting for our food orders to arrive and went straight to our rooms when we returned to the B&B.

Day 5, Friday, October 7

After a 6:45 AM breakfast (that's more like it!), we drove to Mykonus Quarry where Brian knew of an eagle's nest. Walking to the back of the property, we saw **Southern Gray Tit**, but it was again very windy and there weren't a lot of small birds up and about in the shrubbery as we walked through the old quarry. As we approached a steep cliff, we could see two **Verreaux's (Black) Eagles**, one adult and one fledgling, sitting together at the top. Below them was a nest where a second adult eagle sat nearby. We watched as the adult that had been with the fledgling took flight and landed a short distance away, displacing a **Rock Kestrel** from its lofty perch. I snapped some photos of the kestrel as it flew, and was surprised to see one of the resulting photos showed the kestrel as it crossed in front of the eagle sitting on the lower perch. The large bird in the background of the photo is out of focus, but there's no question that it is a Verreaux's Eagle.

Verreaux's Eagle

After watching the eagles and kestrel for a short while, we made our way back to the car. We found **Acacia Pied Barbet** on the way and walked among the low shrubs to get better looks. As we walked along, occasionally I would step down on what appeared to be firm ground, but what was actually a thin layer of sand covering a tunnel or hole made by some burrowing animal. It seemed like I was falling through about every third or fourth step, and my shoes were filled with sand when we got back to the van. As we drove away we saw **Cape Penduline Tit** and **Capped Wheatear** along the road.

We drove on to some gravel and dirt roads to look for larks and other species associated with the Karoo. It was very hot and dusty along these roads and we did most of the birding from the van. More often than not, when we did venture out of the car, we ended up getting a good dust bath from a passing car, but we enjoyed shedding the restrictive confines of the van and got out every chance we could. We stopped at one point to look at a **Pied Crow** and were rewarded with good looks of **Cape Long-billed Lark, Black Korhaan,** and **Crowned Lapwings.** We enjoyed watching a **Long-billed Lark** displaying – going straight up into the air and then dropping down to the ground as if dropped by some invisible support that had kept it airborne. We stopped by a pond and saw **Kittlitz's Plover, Little Stint, Black-winged Stilt, Shelduck,** and **Blacksmith Plover.** A **Steppe Buzzard** flew overhead as we were looking at a **Sickle-winged Chat** that was just a bit too far for satisfying views.

Our next stop was at a Cerebos Salt Works, where the target species was Chestnut-banded Plover. As the group followed Brian around the salty terrain, Jean went back to the van to get her hat. Before she and Andre rejoined the group, the **Chestnut-banded Plovers** were spotted and quickly departed. At the salt works we also saw a group of **Pied Avocets** on a salty sandbar, and a couple of **Greater Flamingoes**.

We had brought a box lunch with us, and we stopped at some roadside picnic tables at the edge of a marsh to eat. From a small blind there, we picked up **Gray Heron, Little Egret, Reed Cormorant, Greenshank, African Spoonbill,** and **Sacred Ibis.** Brian drove us along a channel where there were racks of dried fish hanging out in the open and in storage buildings. Fortunately, the fish were at the stage where they were dry enough for the smell to be negligent, and we drove slowly along the water's edge to view a pair of **Pied Kingfishers** as they hovered over the water and then perched on the seats of a boat as if they were going to drive away in it. Driving through an agricultural area near Piketberg, we found **Jackal Buzzard** and **Ant-eating Chat**. Red **Bishops** seemed to be everywhere and Bernie was able to get great photos of his favorite bird. As we drove over a small stream, we saw our first **Hammerkop**. Another stop at a small pond yielded **White-backed Duck** and **Cape Shoveler.**

Pied Kingfisher

We arrived at the Village Guest House in Ceres just before the sun went down, and we checked into our rooms before meeting near the pool to go over the day's list. Another stunning day of birding with the highest count so far for the trip – 109 species seen, plus 1 heard, bringing our trip total to 182 + 3 heard only. We enjoyed a gourmet meal at the Village House B&B restaurant and retired to our lovely rooms by 9:30 PM.

Day 6, Saturday, October 8

We left the Village Guest House at 6:00 AM with both breakfast and lunch to go. We birded the Droehoek area where we saw **Cape Clapper Lark** in display, **Gray-back Cisticola**, and heard Common Quail. In a wetland we found **African Shelduck. Grey Rhebok** was seen before we stopped in a rocky area with short vegetation. There we found **White-throated Canary** and high on a rocky outcrop, **Ground Woodpecker**. Brian put the woodpecker in the scope, but only a few got to see it well before it flew away, so most people needed a better view of this bird to count it as a life bird even though it had been positively identified. **African Reed (aka Marsh) Warbler** popped in and out of the brush and we were able to get scope views of both **Mountain Wheatear** (once called Mountain Chat) and **Lark-like Bunting**. We stopped at a small stand of trees to look for birds but the area was very still and quiet with no apparent bird activity. Just as we were about to leave, a **Hammerkop** soared overhead, something that surprised all of us since we didn't know this was part of a Hammerkop's hunting strategy. As we drove on, we added **Streaky-headed Seedeater (Canary), Red-faced Mousebird, Layard's Tit-babbler,** and **Alpine Swift.** Some **European Bee-eaters** flew by, leaving us wanting better views. We stopped by a historic property at Karoopoort where we found **Fairy Flycatcher** among many of the more common species. Driving on into the Karoo, we saw **Karoo Scrub-Robin, Malachite Sunbird, Karoo Chat** and **Tractrac Chat**. Brian had shown us a chart that showed how to tell chats apart from the pattern on their tails as they flew away, but honestly, we just had to take his word on most of the chats. He parked the van on the side of a hill that was covered in flowers of all colors but looked like a sea of magenta because of the preponderance of one flower of that color that was in peak bloom. We walked along this hillside following the sound of a **Karoo Eremomela** that Brian could hear. After a bit of effort, the elusive bird was found hopping from one low shrub to another, grabbing large insects as it moved about.

Karoo Eremomela

Tiny and quick, this bird wasn't the easiest specimen to get on, but we all finished with excellent views. Once everyone was satisfied with their Eremomela experience, we walked back to the van to have our box lunch. No stale coldcut sandwich from the guys at Village Guest House – our box lunch was an assortment of appetizers and meats, a poo poo platter of sorts that had everyone expressing approval. Until, that is, Bernie opened his container to see that he had been given a low-fat lunch. One of the biggest eaters in the group, he was appalled and confused by this special meal. I had to remind Jude that she had indicated low-fat as a dietary restriction for Bernie, and it was immediately decided that low-fat wasn't necessary on a vacation. Although Bernie is slim and trim, he has high cholesterol and normally watches what he eats. But not today and not on this trip! Jude shared her lunch with him and we made sure this didn't happen again.

From here we continued on through the karoo, and people were getting tired. We saw some **Spike-heeled Larks** that looked like the heat was about to do them in, and we knew how they felt. We passed a farm store that stood, literally, in the middle of nowhere, and I asked Brian if they might have some cold drinks there. He had already planned to stop there, and admonished me a bit (good-naturedly) for spoiling his surprise. When we entered the store it was as if we had been transposed to another time. One room held merchandise – everything from cabbages to candy bars, tools to toilet paper. The second room housed a bar with stools that had been made from galvanized wash tubs cut in half. Old farm implements adorned the wall along with some trophies of assorted antelopes . The proprietor sported a long shaggy beard and spoke with a thick Africaans accent. He told us that, although his farm store was situated far from any town or village, he actually did quite a bit of business with locals. His Tankwa Padstal had become a bit of a gathering spot for the ranchers who lived far apart from each other and they often came there to meet and catch up on news. We enjoyed a cold drink and some interesting conversation with the owner and another group of birders and then moved on to Skitterykloof (seriously, don't you just love these names?).

Tankwa Padstal

Along the way we spotted **Namaqua Tent Tortoise**, and stopped at a dry river bed to make a quick search for any birds that might be in the trees and shrubbery there. A Batis of some kind was spotted, and as the group pursued that bird, I was distracted by three **Fairy Flycatchers** that were flitting about between a couple of short trees, seemingly playing hide-and-seek with me. They were low and close, but they never remained still long enough for me get a single shot fired from my camera. Because of my preoccupation with the flycatchers, I missed the Batis, which turned out not to be a Batis after all and was never positively identified. When we arrived at Skitterykloof we immediately began to search for the target species of that area, the **Black-headed Canary.** We finally located a group of the birds on a hillside, but it proved difficult to get a good look at them as they flushed from one spot to fly quickly to another and then flush again. I got on a couple of females only, but some in our group were able to get their binoculars on some of the males. Most of

the birds that were seen on the way back to our B&B in Ceres were species we had already seen, but we did add a few significant species, **Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk** (wow!) and **Rufous-eared Warbler.**

Our total for the day was 83 plus 5 heard and one species seen by the guide only, bringing our trip total to 201.

Day 7, Sunday October 9

We met at 6:30 to take a walk through the neighborhood near the Village Guest House in Ceres. As we entered a small city park we crossed a small stream where we found **African Black Duck**. Other than the duck, we found nothing else new. At the far side, we observed a male **Paradise Flycatcher** and a few minutes later found the male and female together near a nest. The light was too dim for photography, but I upped the iso and fired off a few shots anyway. I got one marginally acceptable shot of the male sitting on the nest with his long tail flowing behind him.

We were scheduled to have breakfast at 8:00, but we returned early and were ready to leave by 8:30. We packed all the luggage into the trailer and then drove up to Gydo Pass, where we had tried unsuccessfully for Protea Seedeaters (canaries) a few days before. There was a small leaking pipe that created a little pool of water that attracted birds, but the activity was low when we had stopped there, probably due to the high winds. On the short drive there, we saw two **Black-shouldered Kites** and some **Helmeted Guineafowl** running so fast that it made us all laugh. I saw a bird that I was pretty sure was a Protea Seedeater low by the water, but couldn't relocate it to show to anyone else. We all searched for quite awhile and were ready to give up and leave when Brian spotted a **Protea Seedeater** in a conifer near the road as we were getting in the van to leave. We all climbed back out quickly and everyone got good looks, but the bird was not positioned well for photos. Other birds seen at the pass were not new for the trip: **Karoo Robin-Chats, female Malachite Sunbirds, Cape White-eyes,** and **Orange-breasted Sunbird**. As we drove down the hill, a **Booted Eagle** flew into view at eye level.

Booted Eagle

We continued to Paarl Nature Reserve, through Prince Albert's Hamlet, where the people seated on the right side of the van spotted a **Peregrine Falcon** on a cell tower as we entered town. Some pesky **Pied Crows** chased it away before the other side of the van could move enough to see the falcon. Paarl is another waste water treatment facility, and it did not disappoint. The first new bird of the day was a **Common Sandpiper**, quickly followed by **Hottentot Teal.** We found lots of species we had already seen and tested our memory as we added birds to the day's list. Some new fencing had been installed since Brian's last visit here, so our first attempt to venture beyond the front pond took us to a locked gate. We thought we might not be able to bird the rest of the Reserve but Brian drove around to find an opening to get to more remote parts of the area.

Our first stop was a bird blind where we encountered two guards who asked that we wait a few minutes before we entered. They were accompanied by two huge Rotweiler mixed guard dogs, and as they walked by us, one of the dogs lunged at Jude. Luckily the guard who had this dog's leash had it under control, but it was a very scary moment for Jude. From the blind we had **Red Bishop, Fishing Eagle**, and **Pin-tailed Whydah**, but there really wasn't much going on so we piled in the van and moved on. We made note of some birds we had already seen as we drove along - **Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Dabchick, African Darter, Black Duck, African White Pelican** – but by now we were all ready to stop for lunch.

Little Grebe (Dabchick)

As we drove around to the other side of the reserve, the odor diminished to nothing and we agreed that we could have lunch at a picnic table at the edge of one of the ponds. Just before we stopped for lunch, we saw a **Malachite Kingfisher** fly by, but of course we all wanted better looks. During lunch we spotted a **Willow Warbler** in the trees next to our picnic tables. As we finished eating, some of us made our way back up the road to the spot where we had seen the diminutive kingfisher. It didn't take long for the bird to reappear, and we soon found a second bird. We watched as the

pair hunted and returned to the same perch, trying to get closer for photographs. As Andre, Bernie, David and I continued to try to photograph the Malachite Kingfishers as they flew back a forth across the pond, others went on with Brian to find a **Tambourine Dove** that he had been hearing. Luckily the dove stuck around long enough for all of us to see it, although it was mostly hidden behind leaves.

After lunch, we proceeded to a building that housed restrooms. The guards we had met earlier were sitting there and the ferocious-looking dogs were chained nearby. Brian told them we wanted to use the restrooms, and they had to unchain one of the dogs from the door to the ladie's loo. Jude and I stood a good distance away until we were certain the dogs were securely chained in a new location.

We drove back to Strandfontein before heading to Avian Leisure because we hadn't been to the back where the flamingoes roost – what an awesome sight! Although most of the other birds we saw there were species we'd seen there before, we did find a few new birds for the trip, including **Lesser Swamp Warbler, Yellow-billed Egret,** and **African Jacana.**

When we went over the day's list we checked off 98 species plus 3 heard. Of the 98 seen, only 13 were new for the trip, bringing our trip total to 214.

Day 8, Monday, October 10

I didn't get a lot of sleep last night because I was thinking about the conversation Jim and I had before retiring for the night. Jim shared with me that Jude was not happy with the amount of time people were spending on photography, and I was having a difficult time coming up with a solution that would make everyone happy. If we continued to spend as much time as everyone wanted for photos, Jude would not be happy, and if we limited the time for photos, Andre, Jean, and David would most likely feel a great deal of frustration. I decided to refrain from taking photos all morning to get a better idea of how both sides of this issue feel. By the end of the morning, I was about to jump out of my skin from the sheer frustration of not being able to take photographs as one bird after another positioned itself in perfect light for the cameras. Andre, Jean, David, and Bernie were thrilled with the photographic opportunities, but as I sat in the van with Jim and Jude as they waited for the camera bugs to finish photographing a **Pin-tailed Whydah** as it sat on a fence and allowed close approach, I got a feeling for just how unsettling it was to sit there and wait for photographers for several minutes after having had a long and satisfactory look at a bird. When we stopped for lunch, I told David and Jean about my little experiment and suggested that, while we definitely want everyone to have the opportunity to photograph the birds we see, it would be better for the people who weren't carrying cameras if we would limit the amount of time we spent on each bird to a reasonable level. Both were in full agreement and Jean said she would pass the message on to Andre. After this conversation, I went back to using my camera and the amount of time spent on each bird was noticeably shorter.

The morning's birding produced a lot of birds that we had already seen, including **Malachite Sunbird, Karoo Robin-chat, Paradise Flycatcher, Olive Thrush, Swee Waxbill, Cape Bunting, Greater Striped Swallow, Jackal Buzzard,** and **White-necked Raven.** We turned off to drive some back roads and saw lots of **Blue Cranes** and **Karoo Prinias,** also saw **Cape Canaries** and **Spotted Thick-Knee**. At a landfill we picked up **White-necked Raven, Kelp Gull, Yellow-billed Kite**, all birds we had seen before. What was remarkable about this morning was the number of birds that were sitting right along the side of the road, at a short distance and in perfect light – **African Stonechat,** multiple species of **Larks, Pied Starling, Banded Martin** – one bird after another seemed to line up to have their photographs taken. And not on the side of the road that gave you horrible back lighting – no, these birds were placing themselves in ideal lighting and then sitting there as if posing! This, of course, occurred during the hours that I had resolved to just bird and not photograph, so I guess it's possible that it wasn't as good as I thought, but when that final bird, a **Pin-tailed Whydah** in perfect breeding plumage with the longest tail of any Whydah we saw on the entire trip, just sat there on a fence, sun shining on it from a good angle, allowing the photographers to approach closer and closer, it took every bit of stubbornness I possess to

remain in the van with Jude and Jim. This was the moment that I could not only empathize with the photographers who wanted to spend every second the bird would allow to get the best shot possible, but I could also fully understand that if you're not a photographer but a birder who's anxious to move on to the next life bird, waiting on people to take photos is a lot more than a bit trying – it can be downright deadly sitting in the van waiting.

By the time we stopped at a unique spot called Dassie Fontein for lunch, my self-imposed photography hiatus had put me in a bit of a foul humor. I don't know if it was my frame of mind or if the food was really as bad as I thought it was, but I didn't eat more than a bite of the sandwich that was served. Everyone else seemed to think the food was pretty good, although unique, so I guess it was probably just me (I've been told I'm a picky eater, although I haven't accepted ownership of that label). Even if the food wasn't so great, the place was amazing. Every square inch of the large building was occupied by merchandise of every kind imaginable. Antique stoves lined the front porch, old chandaliers hung from the ceiling, snacks and wine were sold in the back. Even the artwork in the restrooms was for sale! My words can't begin to describe the multitude of items and complete disorganization of this establishment, so I've included a photograph that does a little better, but even the photo can't fully depict the hodgepodge of this place. We thought that most of the stuff must have been hanging there for decades and that it probably took many, many years to accumulate such a conglomeration, but when Jude asked how long the store had been in operation, the answer was less than 10 years!

Dassie Fontein

Our first new bird of the day was one that Brian had been scouring the hillsides and fields for all day. Finally, he spotted a **Denham's Bustard** displaying on a hillside, a pretty good distance away but close enough for us to have decent looks. We added a bird with a limited range, the **Agulhas Long-billed Lark**, which made Brian very happy but the truth was that most of us were starting to get a bit weary of Larks. David was the only one among us who had a true appreciation of

the plain LBJs while the rest of us looked at each new lark as not much more than a tick on the list for the day, which was not the norm for us.

We arrived at the Tip of Africa B&B in small town of L'Agulhas at 6:30PM, walked across the street for dinner at 7:00, and completed our list while we waited on our food to arrive at the table. We had just 83 species today, with only three of them new for the trip, bringing our trip total to 217. Not a stellar day, but not a bad day considering it was mostly a travel day.

Denham's Bustard

Day 9, Tuesday, Oct 11

Our Bed and Breakfast was located within a block of the ocean, and I wasn't much interested in another heavy breakfast, so as others were sitting down to eat, I walked to the shore to see if I might find some birds. Walking through a residential area, I saw some **White-throated Swallows** fussing at a dog that was obviously too close to their nest. Once the dog had been properly banished from the area, the birds landed on a telephone wire, allowing me to see their rufous caps really well for the first time. I snapped off a few photos of the swallows and then took a few shots of the **Speckled Pigeons** that were hanging around and walked on to the water's edge. There wasn't so much as a gull flying around, but I thought the saltwater swimming pools that had been built into the rocky shore were interesting. Apparently, they were situated to be filled each day during high tide and then exposed and usable when the tide went out. What an efficient way to get fresh water in your pool every day! No filters or pumps – just new water every twelve hours. I noticed a few **Greater Striped Swallows** on my way back to the B &B, but not much else.

After breakfast, we packed our luggage into the trailer and headed out. Our first stop was the southernmost tip of Africa where we took some group photos and could touch both the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. Walking down the boardwalk to the tip we saw **Swift Terns, Crowned Lapwings, Gray-backed Cisticolas, Kelp Gulls**. There were lots of lizards running around on the rocks along the boardwalk.

As we started our morning drive, we saw group of Pied Starlings on a fence, and I noticed one of the birds was quite different. I was able to get Brian on the bird and he identified it, but by the time I got other people to focus on the one odd bird, the **Wattled Starling** flew away. It would be several days before we saw another one.

We stopped at a spot that looked likely to harbor small birds and found **Bar-throated Apalis** and **Namaqua Warbler** in some thick bushes at the edge of the road. Both birds were hopping in and out of view, and when they finally flew on, I had missed the warbler (darn!). Our first real birding destination for the day was De Woop Nature Reserve, where one of the first birds seen was a **Knysna Woodpecker**. It was calling a lot, something that Brian said is unusual for this species which normally has a gap of several minutes between their one-note calls, so we thought that it must have had a fledgling in the area. It was very windy at De Hoop which probably contributed to the low number of birds we saw there. We did have a wind-blown **Bokmakierie** out in the open and fairly close, as well as a more cooperative Bar-throated Apalis. **Southern Boubou** was also seen well.

Knysna Woodpecker

After we left DeHoop, we drove for awhile and crossed the Breede River on the last manually-operated ferry in South Africa. On our way to Honeywood Lodge, we saw **Cape Vulture** soaring overhead. Eland and Bushbok were seen, but we weren't having any luck finding a Secretarybird or Karoo Korhaan in the areas where Brian expected them. Finally,

just before the light began to fade, he spotted a lone **Secretarybird** on the left side of the road. We stopped to observe and photograph the bird for the few moments that it allowed. When we started to leave, Brian turned to glance at the other side of the road, and there stood two **Karoo Korhaans** in plain view!

Secretarybird

We arrived at Honeywood Lodge before dark. The owners, Miranda and John Moodie, are wonderful people, open and friendly and very accommodating. The group was divided into two or three different small houses, and Jim and I were put in the same house with Bernie and Jude. We each had our own bathroom, but it was across the hall from our bedrooms. The rooms were small but comfortable, which was acceptable, but the water was brown. Although John said it was perfectly safe to drink, the color was so dark I couldn't even bring myself to shower in it. Luckily, we were staying just one night, so a single day without a shower was tolerable.

We had time before dinner to go over the day's list, so the group met in the living room of the house that Jim and I shared with Jude and Bernie. Our daily count was pretty good: 103 seen, 4 heard, 1 seen by the guide only, and 1 fly-by. But only 7 were new for the trip, bringing our trip count to 224.

Miranda had gone to a lot of trouble for her American guests. She had just returned from a trip to the states, and she made sure she provided a good American meal for us – pumpkin soup, turkey, sweet potatoes, and a salad were served for dinner, and the following morning she prepared pancakes along with the regular African fare that included meats and eggs. I appreciated her thoughtfulness so much, I tried to make it unnoticeable that I didn't enjoy the food.

Pumpkin pie I like, but pumpkin soup isn't my favorite, and this one didn't have much seasoning. I never eat sweet potatoes, so I didn't even taste them. The turkey was good, although a bit dry, and there was no dressing for the salad, which I wasn't too sure was safe to eat, anyway, since it had been washed with that brown water. I had a small slice of turkey and a few bites of lettuce at dinner and enjoyed the last of my Milano cookies when I got back to my room. It was great to have pancakes as an option for breakfast, something other than eggs and meat for a change, but cold and without syrup? Not so wonderful. Fortunately, everyone else raved about how good the meals were, so I guess I really must accept that "Picky Eater" label.

Back in our rooms after dinner, I learned that Jude and Bernie had also opted to skip showers because of the dark water. Just before we went to bed, our roomies came in and showed us the small (dead) scorpion that Jude had stepped on a few minutes earlier in their room. This made all of us a bit uneasy, and I really regretted not getting my flashlight out when, at around 4:00 AM, I needed to get up to go across the hall to the bathroom. Far from civilization, it was pitch black inside the room, and I thought of the scorpion when I swung my legs out from under the covers and started to put my feet on the floor. The image of the scorpion flashed through my head, and I quickly pulled my feet back up. I tried to use the small amount of light from my travel alarm to check the floor, but it was no use. I finally convinced myself that there was nothing to worry about and felt my way through the total darkness to the bathroom. Note to self: flashlight at beside – always!

Day 10, Wednesday, October 12

I was out in the garden by 6:00 and found that some others had come out to bird on their own before our agreed-upon 6:30 meeting time. Once the group was all together, we birded around the farm for a short while, finding **Greater Double-collared Sunbird** in the yard close to the houses and **Neddicky** along a dirt road on the property. We had an **African Goshawk** overhead before we piled into the van to drive to Grootvadersbosch (Grandfather's Forest). On the way, someone spotted a bird (**Swee Waxbill**) from the van. When Brian stopped to take a look, Jim saw a new bird from his position in the back of the van. He didn't know what it was, but he knew he hadn't seen it before. Brian backed the van up and we all got great looks at the **Grey Cuckoo-Shrike** as it foraged on some bare limbs of a tree that was in a ravine, which put the bird at eye level.

Grey Cuckoo-Shrike

When we arrived at Grootvadersbosch, we birded down a steep hill (and back up) before breakfast. A male **Paradise Flycatcher** flew by and **Dusky Flycatchers** were numerous. So numerous, in fact, that it made it difficult to find the single **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher** that Brian could hear and we were all looking for. No one but Brian ever got on

the tiny bird as it flitted about in the thick vegetation, but we could all see the movement. We heard Red-chested Cuckoo repeatedly but never located the bird, but we did see multiple **Yellow-throated Woodland Warblers**.

As we left Grandfather's Forest to go back to the B&B for breakfast at around 9:30, we saw **Amethyst Sunbird** and **Short-billed Honeyguide** near the entrance. Two unrestrained horses were wandering around, and I couldn't resist approaching them. After petting them for just a few minutes, one of them followed me to the van as if he were a puppy following a friendly child home. We joked a bit about, "Mom, can't I keep him?" before driving back to the B&B. After breakfast we returned to the same forest trail, where we birded until about 1:00 although we had planned to leave at around noon. The birding was pretty slow, with only 6 new species, and we dipped on several important birds that Brian had hoped to find there, such as the Narina Trogon and elusive little flycatcher we had heard but not seen on our first walk and the cuckoo that we heard almost incessantly on both walks. One of the six new species, **Greater Honeyguide**, was found from the parking area at Honeywood as we were getting ready to leave. Brian was occupied elsewhere, and most of the group was watching weavers when I saw a bird fly into a nearby tree. I got it in my binoculars and was really surprised to see a new species. I called out that there was a new bird and everyone was able to get on the bird – but no guide to id it for us! I snapped a photo, even though it was much too far away to be a good photo, so we could show it to Brian when he returned to the group. We were able to find the honeyguide in the field guide, and proudly announced to Brian what we had seen before showing him the photo for confirmation.

Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler

By now it was almost 1:30, so we hadn't gone far before everyone was ready to eat the box lunch. We stopped to look for Long Crested Eagles near the nesting site just 15 minutes after leaving Honeywood, and we pulled our lunches out right there. It was a three-hour drive to Wilderness, and we didn't do a lot of stopping for birds along the way. We checked in at Ebb & Flow at around 5:30 PM and settled in our cute little cabins before meeting at 6:30 to go to dinner. At our suggestion, we bought some continental breakfast items at a gas station after dinner so we wouldn't have to waste precious morning birding time in the morning just to eat. By the time we did all of this and got back to Ebb & flow, it was nearly 10:00 PM. Our bird list for the day, tallied at the restaurant while we waited for our food orders to

come, was just 67 species, with 4 heard and one seen only by the guide. Trip total came to just 230, only 6 new species again.

Day 11, Thursday, October 13

We had agreed to meet for breakfast at 6:30 in David's cabin, where we had stored the stuff we bought at the gas station last night . I was ready by 6:00 so I could walk around the cabin area before breakfast. At this hour the lighting was pretty dim. I could see well enough, but the lighting was not yet good enough for photography. There were lots of **Fork-tailed Drongos** scattered around the area and there was a group of **Cape Weavers** working on nests along the boardwalk that ran in front of the cabins. I found a **Black-headed Oriole**, although I didn't know what kind of oriole it was until later. Best of all, I saw two **Knysna Turacos** fly low over the marsh across the water – not great looks, but I could see the crested head, the long tail, and the bright red in the wings as they swooped out of sight.

Black-headed Oriole

Once the group started birding together, the first bird seen was the **Knysna Turaco**. And then another . . . . and then another. . . . . and another! Obviously more common that I expected them to be, the Turacos were easily seen, but it took some effort to see them well. We followed them as they made short flights from one tree to another, usually in pairs but sometimes in larger groups. One bird would fly, then the next would follow, and so on, moving one at a time in very short distances. Their wings were so beautiful when extended, but the red didn't show at all when they were sitting. They didn't seem to stay long in one spot, and the flights were too short flights to focus on them before they landed, so photos of any kind were impossible – so far.

We found **Olive Woodpecker** in trees near some campers, and a **Malachite Kingfisher** sat on a low branch near the river that ran through the property. Unfortunately, the kingfisher had positioned himself right in front of a camper who was still sleeping when we walked over to get better views. He raised his head to glower at the chatty birders as we hastily

retreated from his turf. Leaving the Ebb & Flow property, we saw **Forest Canary, Dusky Flycatcher, Somber Greenbul,** and **Black Sawwings**. As we entered the Half-collared Kingfisher Trail, we could hear Somber Greenbuls singing from every direction, but we didn't take the time to try to find them. New birds were added to the list fairly quickly: **Terrestrial Brownbul, Emerald Cuckoo, Chorister Robin-Chat, Black-backed Puffback.** Some familiar birds were welcome additions to the day's list as well: **Bar-throated Apalis, Southern Lesser Double-collared Sunbird, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Amethyst Sunbird, Greater Double-collared Sunbird.** We saw a **Marsh Terrrapin** along the river, and then some of us put our binoculars on a few birds that were bathing in the shallow water on the opposite side of the river and saw - **Starred Robin**!! We called out and everyone came to look, but the bird didn't remain long and a few of the group missed it. It was a stunning view of the bird, with the two bright "stars" showing vividly on its forehead, a field mark we were told is not always visible even though the bird is named for it. Much to our delight, we saw more **Paradise Flycatchers**, and as we started back up the trail some people saw a snake that remained unidentified. Just before exiting the trail to go back to the cabins, a **Chorister Robin-Chat** was seen as it sat on a low branch just a few feet from the boardwalk and sang one melody after another. As we were enjoying the performance from the Robin-Chat, a **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher** came in just a short distance away.

Going back across bridge into the Ebb and Flow property, Brian thought he heard a Brown Hooded Kingfisher, but it turned out to be a **Fiscal Flycatcher** – darn! I really want to see that one because I think it looks like a little Kookaburra with a red bill (or " red bull" as Brian would say). We stopped to look at a **Pied Kingfisher**, then another **Bar-throated Apalis**, and by then the **Brown-hooded Kingfisher** could definitely be heard. We followed the sound, climbed through a fence to move in the direction it was coming from, just to hear Jean say she saw it fly away. We walked in the direction Jean indicated the bird had flown and quickly found it in a bare tree in the middle of a field. This kingfisher eats large insects and small lizards rather than fish, so it doesn't perch along streams as most other kingfishers do. It really is like a small Kookaburra!

Brown-hooded Kingfisher

We decided we didn't want to waste a lot of time on lunch, either, since the birding here was so good. We sent Brian to town to buy some meat pies for us, and Jean went along to select something that would allow her to adhere to her gluten-free diet. We ate near the cabins and then headed back out in the van at around 1:00 PM. We were ready to do some more forest birding on foot – the morning had been so good and there had been so many days birding from the van, even the steps on the Kingfisher Trail felt good. So we were all surprised when Brian took us back to the shore, although we assumed he had some target species in mind. First we visited a bird blind at Swaltvlei (Black Marsh) where we saw **African Fish-Eagle, White-throated Swallow,** and **Blacksmith Plovers**. We watched a **Kittlitz's Plover** doing the broken wing act near the Blacksmith Plovers, which was interesting, but we were not finding any new birds. **Pied Kingfisher,** another **Fish Eagle, Common Waxbill, Cape Canary, Streaky-headed Canary (seedeater), Yellow Bishop,** another **Pied Kingfisher, Cattle Egret, White-breasted Cormorant,** yet another **Fish-Eagle, Yellow-billed Ducks, Red-knobbed Coots, Great Crested Grebe**, really big fish jumping, and on it went. Finally, on a side road near Knysna, an **Osprey** – first of the trip! At Buffel's Bay we saw **Cape Gannet**. We stopped at the mouth of Kaaiman's River for finfoots and some other target species, but saw nothing there. We returned to Ebb and Flow thinking we should have spent the afternoon in the woods. When Brian came from his cabin on the other side of the road to pick us up for dinner, he told us he had seen a **Giant Kingfisher** near his cabin. We looked for it as we drove by and tried again the next morning, but Brian remained the only one to have seen it.

Cape Canary

Today's count was 89 species seen, 3 heard, and 2 guide only, with 11 of the seen species new for the trip. Total for the trip stood at 241 seen, 6 heard, 3 guide only, and 1 fly-by. We were 9 short of the 250 we had hoped to see on the Cape tour, and we had just one morning of birding left – could we get 9 species in one morning? Doubtful.

<u>Day 12, Friday, October 14</u>

We again met at David's cabin for breakfast at 6:30 AM, then returned to the Kingfisher Trail for one last morning of birding with Brian. He had spoken to a friend who told him he had seen the trogon there yesterday afternoon (when we

were out in the van!). The forest was pretty quiet this morning, and I turned back at about 7:40 because I wanted one more opportunity to get a good photo of a Knysna Turaco. I told Jim what I was doing, and asked him to let the others know, and he continued on the trail to catch up with the group. I was surprised to see Jim a short while later when he decided to turn back as well. Back at the cabins we picked up a new species, **Black-bellied Starling**, and I got some great photos of the **Knysna Turaco** after chasing them around the grounds for awhile. Standing on the porch eating leftover pizza, I saw a flash of brilliant blue fly low over the water and land in a tree a short distance away. I rushed inside and grabbed my bins - **Brown Hooded Kingfisher**! I got some good shots before it flew away and was even able to leave the porch and go closer for some better shots. The **Fork-tailed Drongos** and **Black-headed Orioles** also allowed close approach for photographs.

Andre and Jean came back about 45 minutes after we did; the rest of the group returned at 9:30, earlier than expected. They got the **Narina Trogon** shortly after Jim and I turned back, and Brian had gone running through the forest to get us because Jim hadn't told the group that we were going back to the cabins. Bernie, Jude, and David saw a **Red-billed Wood Hoopoe** after the Meyers turned back.

Fork-tailed Drongo

We loaded up the trailer and left for airport at 10:00 AM, about a half hour ahead of schedule. We didn't run into any traffic, and only paused for a moment for Brian to show us a **White-faced Duck** along the road just before the airport exit. At the airport, we had plenty of time to lounge around, even had to wait awhile to check in because we were so early. The luggage allowance for the domestic flight was less than that for the international flight, and we had to pay about $80 in fees for the extra kilos. Note to self: don't bring the scope and tripod on future trips, and learn to pack light, for crying out loud!

We looked in some shops and part of the group sat down for some coffee. Jim and I and Bernie and Jude finally decided to go on through security even though it was early, which turned out to be a good decision. Bernie had forgotten that

he had a pocket knife in his pocket and had to go put the knife in his checked luggage when it was discovered at the security checkpoint. He rushed to get it in his luggage and then came back through security - and dinged again! This time it was because of change in his pocket. A little later, when the others came through security, Andre had also forgotten that his pocket knife was in his pants pocket, but by then it was too late to get it in his checked bag, so the knife was tossed.

Our flight to Durban left on time . When we boarded, Jim's carry-on bag was too large and had to be gate checked. This is always a bit of a problem since our carry-ons are filled with delicate items, so Jim had to take our bins and his camera out of the bag before he could gate check it. At least we didn't have to pay for the extra kilos there!

This is where the Cape Tour ends and our new adventure begins. When we went through the day's sightings that evening, we kept the birds seen before we left George separate from those we saw after landing in Durban so we would have an accurate count of species seen on just the 12-day Cape Tour. Our grand total came to 247. A very good count for this itinerary, but why couldn't there have been just 3 more?

Speckled Mousebird

All five of the participants went on to take part in the Subtropical Tour that began on October 14 and ended on October 29. Five more people joined us in Durban when we arrived on the afternoon of the 14th, and the group immediately went out to bird with our two new guides, John Davies and Errol de Beer. We traveled many miles to see the best that South Africa has to offer, including a few days in Kruger, and we even spent a day in Lesotho via Sani Pass. The trip report for the Subtropical Tour will be published soon, hopefully by the end of December, 2011.

Cheepers! Birding on a Budget will offer another bird watching tour to South Africa in 2013. We are currently working on ways to "tweak" this itinerary to make the trip even more interesting and comfortable. Please check our website in early 2012 to see the new and improved itinerary. Until then, you might be interested in one of our 2012 tours. We still have a few openings for Panama in January and have several spots available for our tours to Ecuador and the Galapagos in March, Alaska in June, Brazil in July and Australia in October.