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Tour Report

South Africa – Spring Flowers from the Cape to the Kalahari

5 - 17 August 2023

Springbok



Greater kestrel



Swallow-tailed bee-eater



West Coast National Park



Images by Geoff Crane. Compiled by Geoff Crane & Darrin Baxter.

Day 1: Airport transfer and Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens**Saturday 5 August 2023***Weather: Sunny with no wind*

The group arrived in Cape Town after a pleasant flight. We went straight to Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens, where we had lunch in the Tea Room. After lunch we spent the afternoon walking around the gardens birdwatching and photographing birds and flowers. The beautiful protea flowers were in full bloom and the spring flowers were just beginning to show. Our first birds were the colourful southern double-collared sunbirds and Cape sugarbirds feeding on the protea flowers; Cape bulbul, red-winged starling, forest canaries, spotted eagle owl, Cape francolin, spotted prinia, Cape robin-chat, helmeted guineafowl, African olive pigeon, red-eyed dove, Cape turtle dove, speckled mousebird, pied crow, olive thrush, sombre greenbul, familiar chat and southern boubou were seen in the landscaped gardens; and the Cape batis, Cape white-eye and African dusky flycatcher were seen from the tree canopy walkway.

On the grassy common outside the Hout Bay Manor we saw sacred ibis, hadeda ibis and Egyptian goose. We had an excellent early dinner at the Hout Bay Manor.

Day 2: Rondevlei NR, Penguin colony, Cape Peninsula and the Cape of Good Hope Sunday 6 August 2023*Weather: Sunny with no wind*

We had a leisurely start to the day with a lovely breakfast. Speckled pigeon, red-eyed dove, Cape white-eye, sweet waxbill, red-winged starling, amethyst sunbird and brown-backed honey bird were seen from the hotel terrace as we gathered to leave. Our first destination was Rondevlei Nature Reserve, which was looking stunning in the morning sun. We spent three hours going from one hide to the next, birdwatching and photographing the many bird species on the wetland (an angulate tortoise was also well photographed!). Some of the birds seen were little grebe, Cape shoveller, yellow-billed duck, lesser swamp warbler, purple and grey heron, Levaillant's cisticola, common moorhen, red-knobbed coot, water thick-knee, African darter, sacred ibis, white pelican, kelp gull and Hartlaub's gull. We also saw many species in the scrub between the hides. Cape wagtail, rock dove, Klaas's cuckoo, red-faced mousebird, common fiscal shrike, house sparrow, Cape sparrow, Cape white-eye, pin-tailed whydah, Cape robin-chat, Cape bulbul, rock martin, brown-throated martin, spotted prinia, southern double-collared sunbird, little rush warbler and Cape weaver ... to name but a few! We had our picnic lunch at Rondevlei and then headed off to Simon's Town and the African penguin colony.

There were many African penguins on the beach as well as white-breasted cormorants, Cape cormorants and a few rock hyraxes (dassies). We didn't spend too long here as the crowds from the coach tours were here in their droves.

We saw our first African ostrich as we drove to Cape Point. We had a quick look at Cape Point and also the Cape of Good Hope before heading off to a quieter area of the reserve. At Olifantsbos, we watched little egret, sacred ibis, hadeda ibis, Egyptian goose, yellow-billed duck, Cape francolin, African black-oystercatcher, blacksmith lapwing, grey-headed gull, swift tern, sandwich tern, plain-backed pipit, European starling and a large herd of the endemic bontebok antelope. Cape fur seals, chacma baboons, red hartebeest and a lone eland were also seen. Our route back to Cape Town followed the Atlantic seaboard past Scarborough, Noordhoek and the famous Chapman's Peak Drive. For dinner we went out to a local fish restaurant.

Day 3: Table Mountain, Two Oceans Aquarium and Rietvlei Nature Reserve**Monday 7 August 2023***Weather: Misty in the morning and then cloudy with no wind in the afternoon*

We had to re-write our day's itinerary as Cape Town was experiencing some 'taxi' issues. The roads out of Cape Town had been blocked by taxis. We had a low-lying thick sea mist hanging over the peninsula, so we

first went up above the mist to the slopes of Signal Hill and Table Mountain where we watched Cape sugarbirds, orange-breasted sunbirds, Cape robin-chats, white-necked ravens, Cape white-eyes and a Southern boubou. The proteas were in full bloom and looked amazing. The mist persisted, so we spent a couple of hours at the Two Oceans Aquarium before having a café-style lunch at the Waterfront.

After lunch, we spent the afternoon at the Rietvlei Nature Reserve just north of Cape Town. Great-crested grebe, black-necked grebe, reed cormorant, greater flamingo, Cape teal, red-billed teal, southern pochard, maccoa duck, black-shouldered kite, African marsh harrier, rock kestrel, black-winged stilt, Caspian tern, laughing dove, southern red bishop, common waxbill and Cape canary were the new birds added to our trip list. Dinner this evening was at the hotel restaurant.

Day 4: Duiker Island boat trip, West Coast NP & Postberg Spring Flower Reserve Tuesday 8 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

We loaded up the vehicle with our luggage and checked out from the Hout Bay Manor. First we went on a short 45-minute boat trip to Duiker Island to see the Cape fur seal colony. The seals were in abundance, we also saw Bank's cormorant, white-breasted cormorant, Cape cormorant, crowned cormorant, African black oystercatcher and kelp gulls. Once we were through Cape Town suburbia, the spring flowers started showing. We took a short detour to find a southern black korhaan - with success! We also saw pied starling, capped wheatear, black-headed heron and jackal buzzard. We had a picnic lunch overlooking the blue water of the Langebaan Lagoon and then slowly drove around the Postberg Reserve. The spring flowers were amazing, with fields of orange, white, blue and yellow flowers. We saw springbok, steenbok, Cape mountain zebra, kudu, bontebok and a few Cape mongooses. We were very much distracted by the fields of colourful flowers but we still managed to see a few new birds; yellow canary, masked weaver, malachite sunbird, Karoo scrub-robin, white-backed mousebird, crowned lapwing, black harrier, Steppe buzzard and cattle egret.

At 4:00 pm, the spring flowers promptly closed for the day, so we went to the birdhide that overlooks a small pool. Cape shoveler, Cape bulbul, lesser swamp warbler, African ostrich, black harrier, southern black korhaan, Cape weaver, red-knobbed coot and Cape turtle dove were seen from the hide. We drove through the park to Langebaan and our accommodation for the night. A few of the group walked to the beach for the sunset and we had a lovely dinner at our hotel.

Day 5: West coast to Lambert's Bay and the Cederberg Wednesday 9 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

We had a good breakfast and a relaxed departure to give the roadside spring flowers a chance to open up. Our first new bird of the day was a pair of blue cranes, followed by thick-billed lark and African pipit. At Velddrif we did some birdwatching over the salt pans and river estuary. We had greater and lesser flamingos, black-winged stilt, pied kingfisher, spur-winged goose, little egret and a Klaase's cuckoo. By the time we left Velddrif, the roadside flowers were opening up and looked good. We took the railway service road up past several wetlands, adding Kitlitz's and white-fronted plover, pied avocet and whimbrel to our checklist. We saw a number of steenboks on the edge of fields and a small group of Cape fur seals at Baboon Point. By the time we arrived at Lambert's Bay for our fish and chip lunch stop, the spring high tide meant that the causeway out to the Cape gannet colony was closed. The waves were crashing over the walkway, so we watched the Cape gannets from the café and then again from the beach area. We then drove through to Clanwilliam and checked into our accommodation. Some of the group did some bird photography in the guest house gardens, while others had a cup of tea. We had dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 6: Cederberg Mountains, San rock art walk and Ramskop Nature Reserve Thursday 10 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

We drove over the Pakhuis Pass to the start of our San rock art walk. The walk took us to nine different rock art sites. The spring flowers and local birds between the sites kept the pace slow. Fairy flycatcher, black stork, Cape bunting, Cape canary, rock kestrel, red-eyed bulbul, white-backed mousebird, spotted prinia, familiar chat, Karoo scrub-robin, bokmakierie, spotted eagle owl and fiscal flycatcher were seen. At the end of the trail we decided to cross a small stream which would allow us to walk back to the café at a quicker pace! We spent late afternoon at the Ramskop Nature Reserve above Clanwilliam. Fantastic spring flowers were everywhere and red-billed quelea, fiscal flycatcher, acacia pied barbet, malachite sunbird, Cape turtle dove and southern red bishop were seen.

Day 7: Clanwilliam to Springbok via the Namaqua National Park

Friday 11 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

We enjoyed a good breakfast before heading north to the Namaqua National Park. The spring flowers on the side of the road were getting better and better! We stopped on the side of the road in an area where there were some interesting succulent plants, 'babies bums' (*argyroderma delaetii*) as well as another dozen examples of desert adapted plants. The first serious splash of colour we saw as we arrived at the Namaqualand National Park was the best flower display I had seen in twenty years! A huge field of yellows, oranges, blues and whites with a dash of red here and there (photographs just didn't do it justice!). We had our picnic lunch in the flowers and spent the afternoon either walking some of the trails or simply enjoying the view. Between the swathes of colour we found many special individual flowers (a few listed in the checklist below). We left the flowers as they began to close for the day and drove to our guesthouse in Springbok.

Day 8: Springbok to Augrabies Falls National Park

Saturday 12 August 2023

Weather: Sea fog around Springbok, sunny with no wind for the rest of the day

We awoke to a thick sea fog that had come in overnight. Our first destination was the Gogap Nature Reserve just outside of Springbok. We took a circular route through the park but the wet fog was keeping the flowers closed and the birds and mammals were definitely not stirring. We did manage to see Cape crow, pied crow, white-necked raven, jackal buzzard, pale-winged starling, mountain wheatear, dusky sunbird, capped wheatear and malachite sunbird. We didn't spend too much time here before setting off inland to Augrabies. The sea fog dissipated after 10 km and we were back to blue sky and spring flowers. Greater kestrel, pale chanting goshawk and the first sociable weaver nests were seen on the telegraph poles as we were driving along. We had a quick lunch in the little dorp of Pufadder before continuing to the Augrabie's Falls National Park. We checked in and went for a walk to look at the falls. Alpine swifts and rock martins were flying in the gorge. Dinner was at the camp restaurant.

Day 9: Augrabies Falls National Park

Sunday 13 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

As we had breakfast in the restaurant, some of the group went on a birdwatching walk. Our route took us around the camp and to the birdhide by the camp site. We saw ashy tit, golden-tailed woodpecker, red-eyed bulbul, dusky sunbird, orange river white-eye, crested barbet, collared barbet, acacia pied barbet, black-chested prinia, Karoo scrub-robin, Karoo thrush, long-billed crombec, fiscal flycatcher, common waxbill, white-throated canary, Cape bunting, black stork, red-billed quelea, Cape glossy starling, bokmakierie, alpine swift, palm swift, pale-winged starling, Cape sparrow, southern grey-headed sparrow and a small mixed flock of newly arrived pearl-breasted and white-throated swallows.

After breakfast we went on a game drive through the park where we saw giraffe, klipspringer, chacma baboons and lots of rock hyraxes (dassies). The new birds that we saw were swallow-tailed bee-eater, black-chested snake eagle, pale chanting goshawk, chestnut-vented tit-babbler, three-banded plover, Burchell's coucal, spotted eagle owl, Karoo long-billed lark and palm swifts. We drove to the various viewpoints that looked over the park or river gorge and then back to our camp for a picnic lunch. We had some time to relax after lunch. Some of the group went to the birdhide, whilst others went back to the lookout decks over the falls and others just relaxed. Later in the afternoon we went for another birdwatching walk around the camp.

Day 10: Augrabies Falls National Park to Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Monday 14 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

We enjoyed a short birdwatching walk en route to breakfast and a last look at the falls before we set off for Upington. Just outside the park gate we stopped on a bridge over a muddy stream to watch a South African shelduck, little swift, little egret and a black crane. When we arrived in Upington I did some food shopping for the next three days whilst the group enjoyed a coffee at the local café. We broke the long drive to the Kgalagadi Park with a picnic lunch. White-browed sparrow-weavers, fork-tailed drongo, Cape glossy starling and yellow-billed hornbill entertained us while we ate our picnic. It was time to leave when the white-backed vultures started circling above us! We checked into our cottages and went into the park for a late afternoon game drive to as far as the Rooiputs Waterhole. Springbok, gemsbok, blue wildebeest, yellow mongoose and a couple of relaxing lions on top of the red dunes were seen. We arrived back at the camp just as the gates were closing. Dinner was at the camp restaurant.

Day 11: Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Tuesday 15 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

We left camp as the gates opened at sunrise for a morning game drive. We saw many birds and mammals on the Nossob River road, and we had our breakfast at the Melkvei picnic spot just after the Kij Kij Waterhole. During the course of the morning, we saw kori bustard, crowned lapwing, northern black korhaan, African ostrich, tawny eagle, pale chanting goshawk, lanner falcon, African hoopoe, African gray hornbill, groundscraper thrush, southern yellow-billed hornbill, marico and chat flycatcher, common fiscal shrike, crimson-breasted boubou, scaly-feathered finch, white-browed sparrow-weaver, southern grey-headed sparrow and sociable weavers tending to their nest.

The short Dune Road took us over the dunes to the Aoub River and the Auchterlonie Museum picnic area. By now the temperature was in the low 30's, so we drove back to the camp for a late lunch on our stoep. After some rest, one vehicle went out for a game drive with half the group and the other half of the group went for a birdwatching walk around the camp and to the hide on top of the dune. It was still rather warm so not much was seen on the walk. We did get good views of chestnut-vented tit-babbler, familiar chat, white-browed sparrow-weaver, marico flycatcher and Cape glossy starling.

Day 12: Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Wednesday 16 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

Our first mammal as we entered the park at sunrise was a cheetah. The cheetah stood proud on top of a ridge surveying the horizons. A little further down the road we came across a honey badger on the hunt. Springbok, gemsbok, steenbok, blue wildebeest, suricates, yellow mongoose, ground squirrel and black-backed jackal were also seen before breakfast. We turned around at the Kamfersboom Waterhole as we were having breakfast back at the camp this morning.

After a good breakfast we set off up the Nossob River road. Another honey badger was on the hunt, this time accompanied by a pale chanting goshawk. Lots of bird and mammal photography was happening. We

stopped for our picnic lunch at the Melkvlei picnic area. Cape glossy starling, Cape sparrow, white-browed sparrow-weaver and southern grey-headed sparrow joined us at the picnic table!

At 5:00 pm we met up in the birdhide, followed by a birdwatching walk around the camp.

Day 13: Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to Upington Airport

Thursday 17 August 2023

Weather: Sunny with no wind

A gemsbok and some birds were seen at the floodlite waterhole and hide before sunrise. Unfortunately the restaurant didn't open early enough for breakfast so we had coffee, tea, juice, bacon, eggs, toast, jam and fruit for our early breakfast on the stoep at sunrise. We then packed the vehicles and set off on the three-hour drive to Upington Airport for a local flight to Johannesburg.

Checklist for Spring Flowers from the Cape to the Kalahari



	Common Name
	BIRDS
1	Common Ostrich
2	Cape Gannet
3	Spur-winged Goose
4	Egyptian Goose
5	South African Shelduck
6	Cape Shoveler
7	Yellow-billed Duck
8	Cape Teal
9	Red-billed Teal
10	Southern Pochard
11	Helmeted Guineafowl
12	Purple Heron
13	Cape Spurfowl
14	Black-necked Grebe
15	African Penguin
16	Little Grebe
17	Great Crested Grebe
18	Greater Flamingo
19	Lesser Flamingo
20	African Sacred Ibis
21	Hadada Ibis
22	Glossy Ibis
23	Great White Pelican
24	Western Cattle Egret
25	Grey Heron
26	Maccoa Duck
27	Black-headed Heron
28	Little Egret
29	Cape Cormorant
30	Bank Cormorant
31	White-breasted Cormorant
32	Crowned Cormorant
33	Reed Cormorant
34	African Darter
35	Rock Kestrel
36	Lanner Falcon
37	Black Stork
38	Black-shouldered Kite
39	Black-chested Eagle
40	Pale Chanting Goshawk
41	Black Sparrowhawk



42	African Marsh Harrier
43	Black Harrier
44	Greater Kestrel
45	Red-necked Falcon
46	Steppe Buzzard
47	Jackal Buzzard
48	Southern Black Korhaan
49	White-backed Vulture
50	Tawny Eagle
51	Common Moorhen
52	Red-knobbed Coot
53	Blue Crane
54	Black Crake
55	Kori Bustard
56	Northern Black Kothaan
57	Blacksmiths Lapwing
58	Crowned Lapwing
59	Southern Black Korhaan
60	Water Thick-knee
61	African Oystercatcher
62	Black-winged Stilt
63	Pied Avocet
64	Kittlitz's Plover
65	Three-banded Plover
66	White-fronted Plover
67	Whimbrel
68	Marsh Sandpiper
69	Grey-headed Gull
70	Hartlaub's Gull
71	Kelp Gull
72	Caspian Tern
73	Greater Crested tern
74	Sandwich Tern
75	Common Tern
76	Rock Dove
77	Speckled Pigeon
78	African Olive Pigeon
79	Cape Turtle Dove
80	Red-eyed Dove
81	Laughing Dove
82	Klaas's Cuckoo
83	Burchell's Coucal
84	Spotted Eagle Owl
85	Alpine Swift
86	Little Swift
87	Pine Swift
88	Swallow-tailed Bee-Eater

89	Speckled Mousebird
90	Red-faced Mousebird
91	White-backed Mousebird
92	Pied Kingfisher
93	Yellow-billed Hornbill
94	African Hoopoe
95	Acacia Pied Barbet
96	Golder-tailed Woodpecker
97	Cardinal Woodpecker
98	Large-billed Lark
99	Cape Batis
100	Bokmakierie
101	White-throated Swallow
102	Southern Boubou
103	Southern Fiscal
104	Fork-tailed Drongo
105	Pearl-breasted Swallow
106	Cape Crow
107	Pied Crow
108	White-necked Raven
109	Black-chested Prinia
110	Fairy Flycatcher
111	Ashy Tit
112	Red-eyed Bulbul
113	Karoo Prinia
114	Cape Bulbul
115	Sombre Greenbul
116	Brown-throated Martin
117	Chestnut-vented Warbler
118	Rock Martin
119	Dusky Flycatcher
120	Marico Flycatcher
121	Chat Flycatcher
122	Long-billed Crombec
123	Lesser Swamp Warbler
124	Little Rush Warbler
125	Levaillant's Cisticola
126	Cape Sugarbird
127	Cape White-eye
128	Orange River White-Eye
129	Crimson-breasted Boubou
130	Grey Hornbill
131	Karoo Long-billed Lark
132	Red-capped Lark
133	Common Starling
134	Cape Glossy Starling
135	Pied Starling

136	Red-winged Starling
137	Pale-winged Starling
138	Dusky Sunbird
139	Brown-backed Honey Bird
140	Collard Barbet
	MAMMALS
1	Chacma Baboon
2	Honey Badger
3	Egyptian Tomb Bat
4	Cape Mongoose
5	Bontebok
6	Cheetah
7	Eland
8	Rock Hyrax
9	Gemsbok
10	Red Hartebeest
11	Black-backed Jackal
12	Klipspringer
13	Kudu
14	Springbok
15	Steenbok
16	Cape Fur Seal
17	Lion
18	Slender Mongoose
19	Cape Mongoose
20	Yellow Mongoose
21	Ground Squirrel
22	Suricate
23	Blue Wildebeest
24	Cape Mountain Zebra