



South Africa Photo

November 3 - 15, 2023

Leader Dorian Anderson



Summary

South Africa boasts a stunning array of birds and animals, and we experienced a wonderful sample of both during two amazing weeks in the country. Beginning in Cape Town, we spent three days exploring West Coast National Park, the Cape Peninsula (penguins, yay!), and other hot spots. Trading those urban digs for the secluded confines of Zimanga Game Reserve after flying to Durban, we enjoyed three days of game drives and blind sessions on the private property. The service and experience were first class, and our close encounters with cheetahs, lions, elephants, and rhinos were unforgettable. It was difficult to leave it all behind, but the world famous Kruger National Park welcomed us with open arms. Scouring the southern reaches of the massive reserve across the next five days, we found Lilac-breasted Roller, Southern Ground Hornbill, Giraffes, Zebras, and a host of other birds and beasts. And we even had views of the elusive Honey Badger! What else could we ask for? Kabooms! I mean balloons. Wait, no. Baboons! Yes, baboons! Anyway, you get the idea. We saw loads of stuff. Please keep reading for a day-by-day account of our amazing adventure!

Cheetah by guide Dorian Anderson



p.1

***Before diving into this lengthy recap, some will be relieved to know that I have created an electronic, eBird trip report (<https://ebird.org/tripreport/173277>) for this tour. It concisely and quantitatively summarizes the 288 bird species we encountered (albeit without Dorian's trademark wit and charm).

Day 1 - Friday, November 3rd - West Coast National Park

Since all clients were time-adjusted after arriving three days early, we decided to make an early start out of Cape Town and head north, towards West Coast National Park. A wrong turn unexpectedly delivered us to agricultural swath, but that proved a boon as we scored great views of three **Blue Cranes** in a roadside field. Dorian didn't expect to find that bird, so it was an awesome bonus (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S153661972>).

Arriving at the park, we made our first stop at the Abrahamskaal hide, where we found **Yellow-billed Duck**, **Little Grebe** and **Little** and **Western Cattle Egrets**. A **White-throated Swallow** let us approached to within ten feet, an **African Marsh Harrier** cruised overhead, and a group of **Common Ostriches** thrilled everyone as they ran across the road right in front of us.

Moving to the Geelbak Pan and Hide, we found our first shorebirds: **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Little Stint**, **Common Ringed Plover**, and **Common Greenshank**. We also enjoyed nice views of **Black** and **Black-winged Kites**, the first offering perched views and the second soaring above us. **Levaillant's Cisticola** and **Yellow Bishop** were noted in the reeds. Walking the gardens, we found **Blacksmith** and **Crowned Lapwings**, **Cape Spurfowl**, and **Rock Kestrel**.

Souther Double-collared Sunbird by client Johanne Charbonneau



Spotted Eagle-owl by client Mike Todd



Eland herd by client Michel Métayer



Continuing north, Dorian spotted a large snake lounging on the side of the road. Compact, fat, and lethargic, it was a **Puff Adder**, a particularly deadly beast! Dorian had a bit of fun when he hissed at Chantal, and the snake slithered off after allowing close (but careful!) inspection. Though we found a variety of shorebirds at the Seeberg Hide — **Black-bellied** and **White-fronted Plover**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **African Black Oystercatcher**, **Whimbrel**, **Sanderling** — only **Kittlitz's Plover** presented close enough for photos. Landbirding proved challenging in the wind, but we persevered and eventually had good looks at fynbos residents like **Karoo Scrub-Robin**, **Southern Double-collared Sunbird**, **Brimstone Canary**, and **Red-headed Cisticola**. **Bar-throated Apalis** and **Southern Penduline-Tit** proved particularly challenging; we had only brief views of each as they navigated thick vegetation. Exiting the park near midday, we slalomed **Angulate Tortoises** as they crossed the road.

We enjoyed a leisurely lunch at Thoban Chefs in Langebaan and retraced our tracks through the park as we returned south. Though we added **Pearl-breasted Swallow**, **Eurasian Curlew**, and **Cape Crombec** at Seeberg, the highlight was a very large **Mole Snake**! We also had nice views of a **Black Bustard**, but those were exceeded by another individual down the road, the gorgeous male offering point-blank views as it walked along ten feet from us. And who knew that we weren't done with snakes!?!? Though we had only brief views of a large, golden serpent as it slithered across the road on our park exit, the encounter suggested **Cape Cobra**, our second deadly snake of the day! Dorian hadn't seen a single snake on his three previous visits to South Africa, so it was a miracle to score a snake hat trick species on this first day. Coupled with 74 birds species (73 at West Coast NP plus Blue Crane on the outgoing drive), we were off the a strong start! Full list of birds from West Coast NP is here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153661302>.

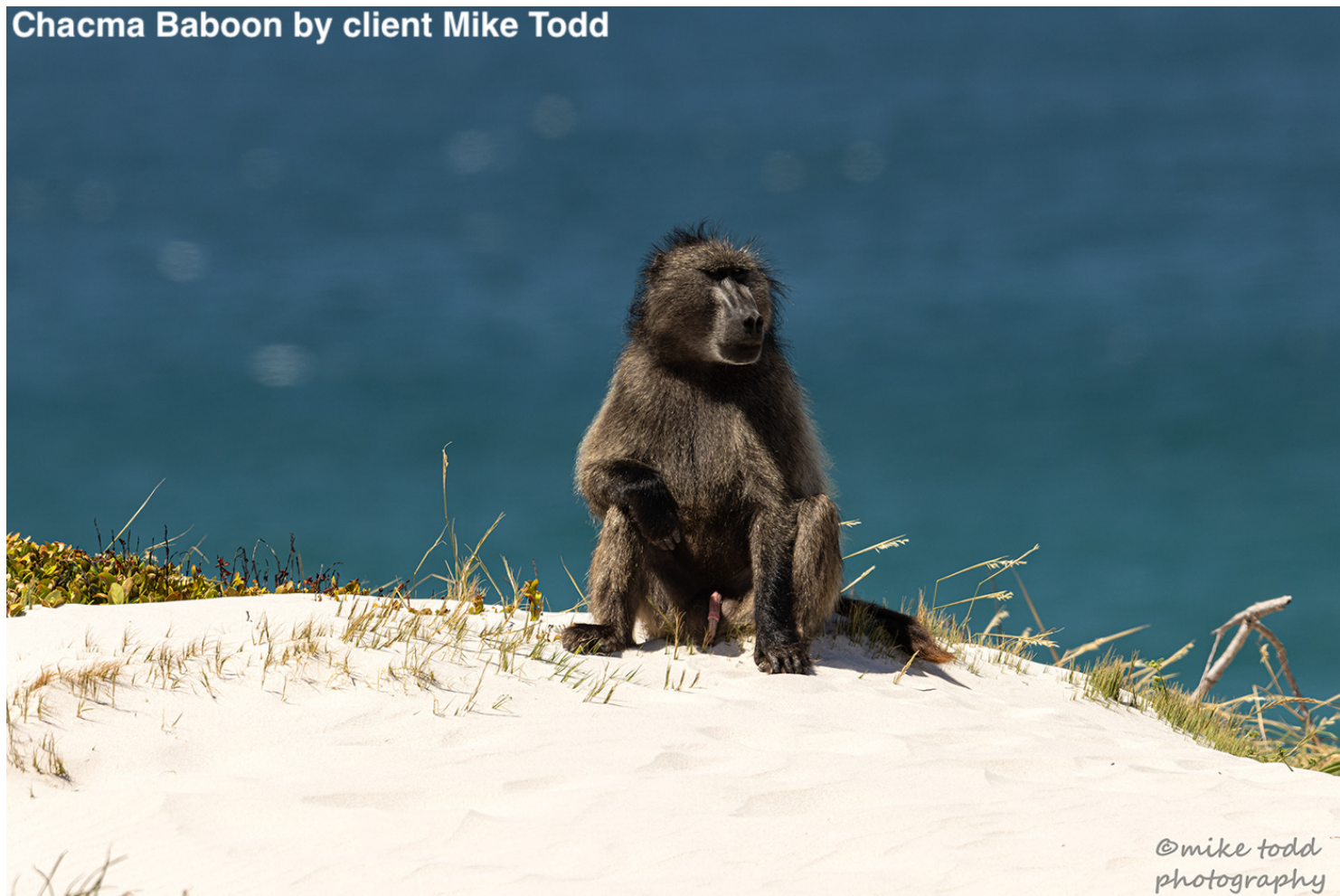


Cape Batis by client Michel Métayer

p. 4

Day 2 - Saturday, November 4th - Cape Town and surrounds, Day 1

Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens didn't open until 8am (very late by birding standards), so we enjoyed a leisurely breakfast before heading in that direction. Bird activity was surprisingly low at the outset, glimpses of **Cape White-Eye** all we could claim through twenty minutes, but the tide turned when we connected with a cooperative **Cape Batis**. The black-white-and-orange bird demanded lens time as it flitted about the shrubs! Next up? A striking **Cape Canary**! Feeding on low flowers, the gray-and-yellow bird was super confiding. That subject sated and departed, we moved into the aloe garden, where we found **Karoo Prinia**, **Olive Thrush**, **Forest Canary**, **Cape Robin-Chat**, **Cape Bulbul**, and **Common and Swee Waxbills**. **Somber Greenbul** and **Fork-tailed Drongo** presented as we pushed through the wooded dell, and **Southern Double-collared** (common) and **Amethyst** (female, unusual) **Sunbirds** offered excellent views as we emerged from the trees. With views to the sky, we added **Booted Eagle** and **White-necked Raven**. A few minutes later, Dorian noticed an odd blob in a tree. When his binoculars revealed a **Spotted Eagle-Owl**, clients were stoked! We spent the next ten minutes clicking pics before initiating our slow and downhill exit from the garden. Lunch at the on-site restaurant was excellent. A complete checklist from our outing is here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153698406>.

Chacma Baboon by client Mike Todd

We returned to home base, rested for ninety minutes, and headed towards the Strandfontein wastewater treatment plant at 2:30pm. Our first notable find was a mixed flock of **Greater** and **Lesser Flamingos**; fifty feet from the road, they gave clients a nice taste of what was to come. Navigating the

various dikes across the next two hours we found many of the species which congregate in the adjacent settling ponds: **Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Southern Pochard, Maccoa Duck, Little and Eared Grebes, African Swamphen, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Whiskered Tern, Gray Heron, Hadada Ibis** and other common residents. A smaller and more-frenetic **Levaillant's Cisticola** gave us fits as it bounced from shrub to shrub; it was like it was waiting for clients to raise their camera before flitting to its next perch! With the sun dropping to the west, we made a final lap of the facility and connected with a group of flamingos as they lifted off from dike's edge. Everyone was ready when that happened, and we scored crushing frames of the gangly birds as they took to the air! It was the perfect end to our visit! Complete checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153728240>.

Our night was complicated by a large and very loud house party adjacent to our lodging; the mass of twenty-somethings were presumably unwinding after the workweek while coincidentally celebrating the Springbok's victory in the Rugby World Cup. Ahh....to be young again!

Day 3 - Sunday, November 5th - Cape Town and surrounds, Day 2

Despite some sleep lost to the raucous house party, we made it to Boulders Beach at 8am as planned. There we stormed the boardwalk and took in views of hundreds of **African Penguins**. Most of the birds were inactive/lounging — interestingly, many of them were in heavy molt — but a few were frolicking in the surf. A few pairs were engaged in allopreening, and we enjoyed watching a particular (presumed) male bring his (presumed) female mate bits of seaweed which he collected from around the beach. He was super funny as he waddled hither and tither. There was also a squabble of some sort, one bird chasing the other through the colony, but things were otherwise civil. It was super fun to watch the penguins, well, be penguins. Otherwise, we scored two **Water Thick-Knees** among a host of more common birds (**Kelp** and **Hartlaub's Gulls, Red-winged Starling**, etc). Full checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153806626>.

We left Boulders and headed south, towards Cape Point. Featuring rolling fynbos hills and white sand beaches hemmed by rocky cliffs, it is a truly spectacular place! For better or worse, that beauty attracts lots of tourists, and gathering crowds complicated our morning beyond what strong wind already did. Most small birds stayed hidden, but we did score a trio of **Common Ostriches** foraging on the dunes. Seeing them against the ocean was quite the sight! **Cape Grassbird** and **Fiscal Flycatcher** were present at that same site. We also had a controlled encounter with a large troop of **Chacma Baboons** (aka 'Kabooms'); given Dorian's story about the baboon climbing into his rental car on a previous trip, we were thankful to avoid a repeat episode! We lunched at the park restaurant and explored some additional areas as we made our exit. Those stops yielded **Common, Sandwich, and Great Crested Terns** and **Cape, Great, and Crowned Cormorants**.

The remainder of the afternoon was more frustration than fruitful. Between Sunday afternoon traffic and crowds, there wasn't much room to operate. We folded our return visit to the penguin colony when we saw how chaotic/packed the parking lot was, and we failed to find many shore/beach birds at any of our subsequent stops because people (and particularly fisherman) were everywhere. Knowing we'd already had the best of Cape Point, we returned to the hotel ahead of schedule. Tomorrow was a travel day, and we figured we'd get a jump on packing ahead of the departure.

Day 4 - Monday, November 6th - Moving Day!

Today was uneventful, exactly what we wanted on a travel day! Dorian returned the rental car in perfect shape, our flight from Cape Town to Durban arrived early, and the drive to Mkuze was sunny and smooth. Reaching Zimanga at 4:30pm, we juggled our hide/activity schedule to account for forecasted heavy rain; if rain materialized tomorrow afternoon and night, it would render our overnight hide session



Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill by guide Dorian Anderson



p.7 **White Rhinos by guide Dorian Anderson**

Cheetah by client Mike Todd



©mike todd
photography

Yellow-billed Stork by guide Dorian Anderson



no fun. To avoid that fate, we decided to put four clients into the overnight hide immediately. That process consumed most of the early evening, and the remaining three of us enjoyed a nice dinner while fearless foursome waited for animals to visit the overnight hide.



Day 5 - Tuesday, November 7th - Zimanga full day #1

As the group was split in half for many of the activities at Zimanga, the recaps of these three days will necessarily be incomplete/confusing because Dorian couldn't be in two places at the same time. The important thing to know is that the property is unlike any other in Southern Africa. Beyond the series of custom built blinds which offer unparalleled activity to a wide variety of wildlife and birds, the facility is stunning and the service is top flight. We had several folks with very specific dietary needs, and the Zimanga kitchen staff went above and beyond preparing their individual meals. More so than any other property that I've stayed at on any other tour, the Zimanga experience is completely unique. Ok, let's continue with the recap!

The group that stayed in the overnight hide — Johanne, Michel, Chantal, Mike — was visited by several **Cape Buffalo** and a massive **Giraffe**. While they liked those mammalian encounters, they were more impressed with the birds; there was apparently a nice variety which visited the pond and hide, particularly in the morning hours when the light was best. Sadly, there isn't a formalized eBird list from that session because Dorian wasn't there with them. While the overnight foursome finished out their session, Dorian, Mary Ellen, and Frédéric visited the scavenger hide. It was quiet for the first 20 minutes, but the action was non-stop after that. It was awesome to watch the **Black-backed Jackal** chase the **White-backed Vultures** around the arena! The point-blank views were incredible! Otherwise, p.9

Bateleur by client Frédéric Flament



© F. Flament - Bateleur - Zimanga GD, Kwazulu-Natal, 2023



p.10 Cape Buffalo by client Johanne Charbonneau

it was fun to watch the **Yellow-throated Bush Sparrows** and **Lesser Striped Swallows** flit around. A checklist from the scavenger hide is here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153934432>.

After returning to camp and eating an amazing breakfast, we birded the area around the rooms/lodge and found **Levaillant's Cuckoo**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, **Tawny-flanker Prinia**, **Red-backed Scrub-Robin**, **Mocking Cliff-Chat**, **Scarlet-chested Sunbird**, and others. Complete checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153937155>. Unfortunately, steady rain set-in after lunch and rendered the entire afternoon a washout.



White-backed Vultures by client Johanne Charbonneau

Day 6 - Wednesday, November 8, Zimanga full day #2

The rain abated overnight, so we were able to proceed with scheduled activities on this morning. Johanne, Michel, Chantal, and Mike ducked into the scavenger hide and had an experience comparable to what Dorian, Frédéric, and Mary Ellen had yesterday. Those last three went on a game drive and racked-up a nice mix of birds including **White-browed Coucal**, **Bateleur**, **Black-chested Snake-Eagle**, **African Fish-Eagle**, **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Brown-hooded** and **Striped Kingfishers**, **White-fronted Bee-eater**, and **Yellow-throated Longclaw**. A full checklist from that outing is here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153994681>. I am sure we saw the usual/expected complement of mammals, but I (Dorian) cannot remember which and under what specific circumstances. The days kinda blur together when you stay at the same place for several days!

Like yesterday, we spend the after breakfast hours (~9:30am to 11:30am) exploring the areas around the rooms/lodge. Clients had been salivating for good opportunities to photograph **Violet-**

backed Starling and **Scarlet-chested Sunbird**, so everyone was stoked when those kinetic species presented at close range. And if those weren't colorful enough, we backed them up with **Dideric Cuckoo**, **Southern Masked Weaver**, **Southern Cordonbleu**, and **Black-collared Barbet**. Post-breakfast checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S153997318>.

We enjoyed a wonderful lunch on the roof of the lodge and returned to the field mid-afternoon. Johanne, Chantal, and Mike were keen on doing a second overnight hide session, so they joined Frédéric to do that. Meanwhile, Dorian, Michel, and Mary Ellen visited the lagoon hide. It was such a cool place! We had to walk through a subterranean pipe to get inside! Once we were situated, we were at water level with birds like **Great Egret** and **African Pied Wagtail**. The sun came and went throughout our session, but we were afforded some incredible light towards day's end, when **Yellow-billed Stork** and **Water Thick-Knee** appeared. And if that wasn't enough, we were shocked when a **Black Heron** showed itself. There wasn't much light after sunset, but it was super cool to watch the bird use its trademark fishing technique! Otherwise, we had nice looks at **Blacksmith Lapwing**, **Three-banded Plover**, and **Common Sandpiper**. Full checklist from the lagoon hide: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154016982>.



Southern Giraffe by client Johanne Charbonneau

Day 7 - Thursday, November 9 - Zimanga full day #3

While the group of four finished their overnight hide session, Dorian and Michel took to Zimanga's dirt roads on another game drive. We'd dipped on big cats to this point in our stay, but that changed on this morning when we connected



with a pair of **Cheetahs** on a freshly killed Impala! They'd mostly gorged by the time we found them, but they gave us some amazing views as they finished eating. Zimanga's cheetahs are unique in being habituated to people; as a result, it's possible to exit the vehicle and join them in the habitat. There's really nothing like being eye-to-eye with such magnificent beasts! And if that wasn't enough, we tracked down a pride of five **Lions** twenty minutes later. They weren't doing much, just snoozing and rolling around as cats often do, but our close views more than made up for the lack of activity. At one point, four of the five stood and stretched, so we had nice full body inspections at that moment. While we had some nice bird sightings — **Martial Eagle, Cardinal Woodpecker** — a nesting **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill** offered the best photo ops as it came and went from the nest. Full checklist from our outing: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154050179>.

Returning to camp for breakfast, we learned the second stay at the overnight hide wasn't as productive as the first. Yes, a big group (maybe 75-80) of **Cape Buffalos** presented, but they scared off two approaching **White Rhinos** and subsequently splashed water all over the glass. Stomping around camp after breakfast, we found **Brubru** and **Pale Flycatcher**, both trip firsts. Full checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154052566>.

Given that the four folks in the overnight missed out on cats in the morning, we prioritized those on this afternoon. Neither the lions nor the cheetahs had moved very far from where we saw them in the morning, so we connected with both without much trouble. We also had excellent looks at a mother and (mostly-grown) calf **White Rhino**. On the bird front, our best afternoon sighting was a **White-eared**

Barbet, a species which had not been eBirded from Zimanga previously. So, another very successful day!

Elephant by client Mike Todd



Day 8 - Friday, November 10 - Zimanga wrap-up and transfer to Kruger NP

Since all clients had already had close looks at **Cheetahs, Lions, Rhinos, Elephants, Giraffes, Impalas, Wildebeests, Kudus, Zebras, and Impalas**, we used our final morning at Zimanga morning to target three specific photo ops: Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, a nesting Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, and a female Cheetah that had escaped us on previous days. The first of those, the **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl**, showed at a known roost fifteen minutes into our game drive. The adult bird was huge and was eventually joined by an immature on the same branch. The low light and canopy made photographing the pair a challenge, but it was still cool to watch them interact. From there we exited the forest and set our sights on another **Cheetah**. Pushing through the brush in our Landcruiser, we found the sought female gorging on an Impala. Our ground-level view of the carnage were incredible! Next up? The **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill!** Hustling to the other side of the reserve, we parked the vehicle near the nest and enjoyed close-views of the male as he visited the nest. Three for three - booyah! We scored 54 species of birds beyond the owl and the hornbill, so it was a very successful morning (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154111075>)! Ending on that high note, we returned to camp, ate a quick breakfast, and met Edward, the guide/driver for our Kruger leg of the tour. The six-hour drive to the south end of the park was very boring because most of it ran through eucalyptus and pine farms. Reaching the Malalane Gate after a late lunch, we transferred to an open-air safari vehicle. We didn't

p.14

have much time to bird en route to Skukuza, but we did pause to enjoy a roadside family of **Spotted Hyenas** — the little ones were so cute! — and a group of **Southern Ground-Hornbills**. But the undisputed highlight was the **pack of Wild Dogs** that paralled our vehicle for a short distance. That species has experienced precipitous declines, so it was wonderful to experience it at such close range!

Checklist from that drive:
<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154152813>.

Southern Cordonbleu by client Frédéric Flament



© F. Flament - Blue Waxbill - Zimanga 2023

Day 9 - Saturday,
November 11 - Skukuza
and surrounds

This day started with a long, leisurely drive from Skukuza to Lower Sabie, where we planned to eat a massive brunch. **Natal** and **Swainson's Spurfowl** sprinted along the roadside, and we connected with **Pied** and **Red-chested Cuckoos** in the adjacent bushes. While mammals were is surprisingly short supply, the birding stayed hot with **Black Stork**, **Green Woodhoopoe**, **Woodland Kingfisher**, **Southern Red-billed Hornbill**, **Giant Kingfisher**, **European Bee-Eater**, **Bearded Woodpecker**, **Burchell's Starling**, and **Red-faced Cisticola**. A cooperative

Goliath Heron posed in a roadside wetland, and **Bateleur**, **Brown Snake-Eagle**, **Martial Eagle**, **Black Kite**, **African Fish-Eagle**, and **White-backed**, **White-headed**, and **Hooded Vultures** soared overhead. The action was non-stop; we scored over 70 species (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154187408>)!

Pausing at Sunset Dam outside of Lower Sabie, we had excellent views of twenty-some **hippos** as they bobbed up and down. A brave **Gray Heron** landed on one of their backs and rode it across the pond! Beyond that comical character, we found **Yellow-billed Stork** (very big!) **White-crowned Lapwing**, **African Jacana**, **Three-banded Plover**, and **African Spoonbill** (distant, sadly). Much closer were **Lesser Masked** and **Red-billed Buffalo Weavers**. Their colonial nests were enormous! Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154187441>.

Brunch on the Mugg and Bean deck was fantastic (pro tip - the corn fritters and giant chocolate chip cookie are where you want to be!). The **elephants** crossing the river below our vantage were an appropriate bonus.

White-browed Coucal by client Chantal Parent



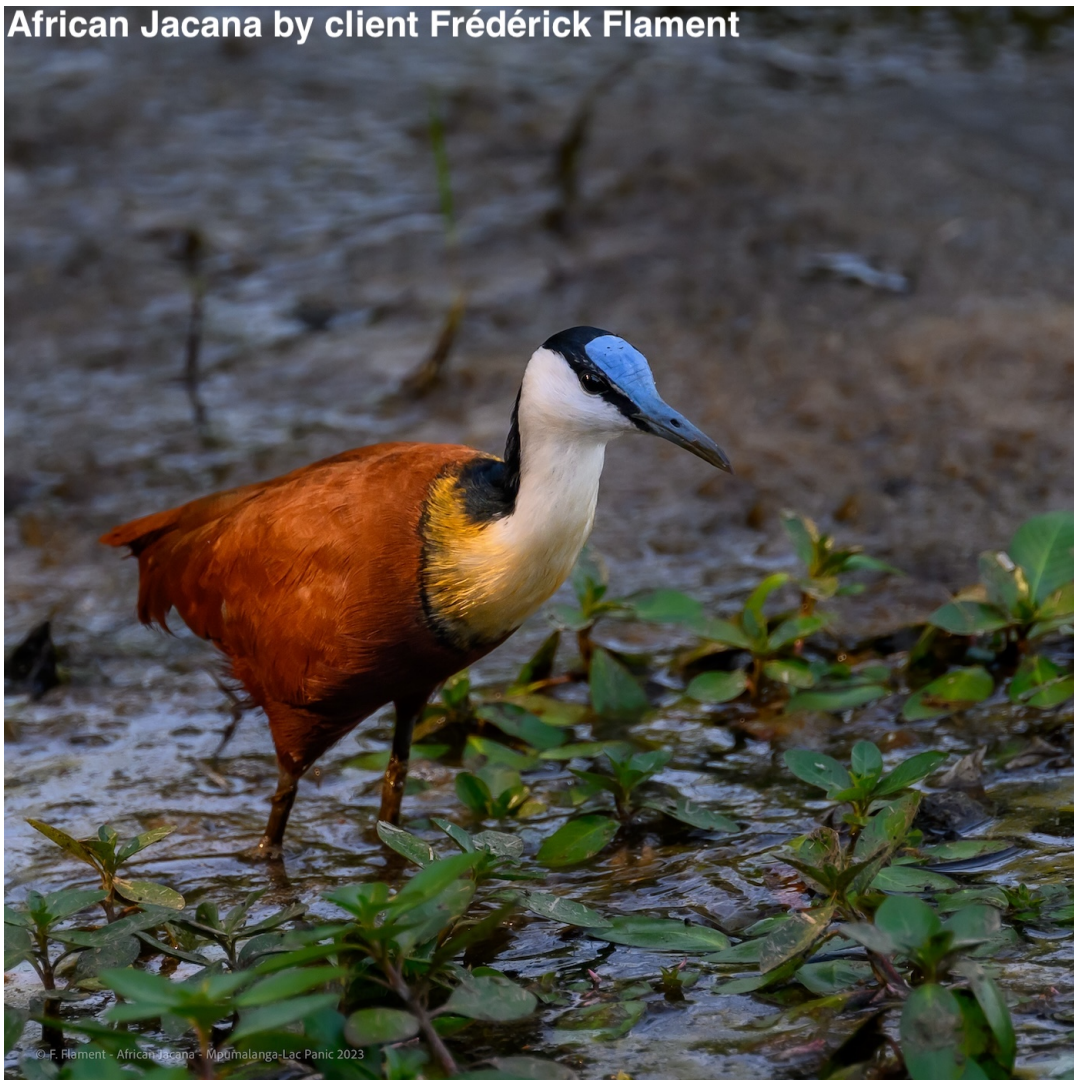
© ChantalParent RSA2023

Hyena puppy by guide Dorian Anderson



The heat suffocated birding through the late-morning, so we returned to Skukuza and enjoyed some midday downtime before initiating another game drive at 3:30. Our first stop was the Lake Panic bird hide. The adjacent pond was very active. **Black Crake** and **Water Thick-Knee** stalked the waterline, and everyone enjoyed watching the **Village** and **Lesser Masked Weavers** constructing their nests and displaying for potential mates. The hide kept us cool, so it was a great way to spend the heat of the day (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154216670>). We returned to the park roads, but they were quiet on the mammalian front. **African Green-Pigeon**, **Red-crested Bustard**, and **Wahlberg's Eagle** were new for the trip list, but the undisputed highlight was a **Lilac-breasted Roller**. Perched low in a roadside bush, the vibrant subject allowed close approach in golden, end-of-day light. It was the perfect capper to a wonderful day!

African Jacana by client Frédéric Flament



Day 10 - Sunday, November 12 - Skukuza to Satara

We'd spent a lot of time in vehicles to this point in the trip, so we used this morning for some in-camp, walk-around photography. This proved wise as we connected with a bunch of birds which we would have missed from the vehicle. The first of these was **Spectacled Weaver**. Dorian heard one call outside the camp fence, and a bit of audio brought it and a second into clear view. Two minutes later he worked his magic again, on **Green-backed Camaroptera**, the often-shy bird perching in the open for an extended period. Continuing through camp as the sun warmed the surroundings, we found **African Green-Pigeon**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Chinspot Batis**, **Somber Greenbull**, **White-browed Robin-Chat** and **White-breasted Sunbird**. A raucous group of **Brown-headed Parrots** was particularly entertaining, the talkative birds dangling from branches as they gorged on fruit. **Purple-banded Sunbird** put on a good show, and we had quick glimpses of a striking **Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike** before it vanished into an impenetrable thicket. Looping back towards the Cattle Barron (yum yum!), we had crushing views of a female **African Goshawk**. The perched bird didn't seem to mind us as we

crept closer and closer! It was a really sweet encounter. Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154268520>.

We ate, packed and hooked up the trailer, and headed north. Mammals were in short supply on this morning, so we made good time towards Satara. A stop at a Leeupan Waterhole yielded **Knob-billed Duck** and **African Gray Hornbill** (both trip firsts) (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154277406>), and we found expected waterbirds when we paused at Maziti Dam a few minutes later (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S154277406>). It was encouraging to note **Southern Ground-Hornbills** as multiple points between Skukuza and Satara.

We reached camp, lunched at a different Cattle Baron (with the exact same menu), and rested through the early part of the afternoon. Returning to the park roads at 3:30pm, we made an extended loop to the east of camp that netted us **Common Ostrich**, **Swainson's Spurfowl**, **Gray Go-away-bird**, **Green Woodhoopoe**, and others. Raptors put on a good show with the likes of **Martial Eagle** and **African Hawk-Eagle**, but our best find was a pair of **Saddle-billed Storks**. Their colors were amazing! Heavy cloud subsequently crushed any hope of end of day light, so we returned to camp and called it a day. Checklist from our afternoon loop: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154305157>.

Green-backed Camaroptera by client Chantal Parent



Day 11 - Monday, November 13 - Satara and surrounds

Weather would prove a challenge across this entire day. Braving early-morning chill and wind, we departed camp for an early morning game drive. Birds were few and far between, the occasional **Sabota Lark** serenading us from the roadside, but our luck turned when Edward spotted a **Honey Badger** scampering through the brush! The animal is one of the most sought (and least found) in

p.18

Black-winged Stilt (chick) by client Frédéric Flament



© F. Flament - Black-winged Stilt - Strandfontein WTP 2023

African Fish-Eagle by client Michel Métayer



Kruger, so our encounter, though brief, was nonetheless a massive win! Drizzle set in a few minutes later, and we bounced back to camp in the company of **Zebra, Giraffe, Impala, Crested Francolin, White-browed Coucal, Rufous-crowned Roller**, and a variety of **Hornbills (Southern Red-billed, Southern Yellow-billed, African Gray, and Southern Ground)**. Full checklist from our morning drive: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154356707>.

Lion by guide Dorian Anderson



Given the on-and-off rain, we decided to bird camp so that we could shelter if the precipitation became too much. It didn't, and we managed to connect with **Marabou Stork, Crested Barbet, Bearded Woodpecker, and Gray Tit-Flycatcher**. Most exciting was a pair of **Woodland Kingfishers** coming and going from a nest. They gave great views of their electric blue plumage! We paused for brunch but continued our in-camp wandering afterwards. Activity had increased since earlier, and we enjoyed views of **Mourning Collared-Dove, African Black-headed Oriole, Southern Black-Tit, and Marico Sunbird** (not to be confused with the

Purple-banded from Skukuza yesterday). Checklist from the first bout of in-camp birding: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154357888>. Checklist from the second bout of in-camp birding: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154361628>.

We rested for a few hours and — despite a threatening wall of clouds to the east — took to the roads again. Against that threat, we welcomed **Great Spotted Cuckoo, Lappet-faced Vulture (finally!), Broad-billed Roller, African Penduline-Tit, Rufous-chested Swallow, and Green-winged Pytilia**, all new for the trip. We also had fabulous views of a group of **Kudu** before the skies open up. When the deluge intensified across the next twenty minutes, we called it quits, folded down the truck's protective sides, and returned to camp. It was an abrupt end to the day, but we hardly cared given all the cool stuff we'd saw! Checklist from our afternoon outing: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154381323>.

Zebras by client Chantal Parent



Day 12 - Tuesday, November 14 - Satara to Berg-en-Dal

Though yesterday's crappy weather carried into this morning, a pause in the precipitation at 5am allowed us to enjoy some in-camp, pre-breakfast birding. We walked. We looked. We pished. And we found little. Breakfast seemed a much better idea, so we headed towards the Cattle Baron just as the skies opened up. Our timing could not have been better, and the worst of the rain cleared as we gobbled eggs, bacon, cereal, sausage, and the like. Here's a checklist from our in-camp wanderings: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154421068>.

With the rain continuing and the vehicle's canvas sides closed to keep the water out, we made good time to Tshokwane, where we'd been alerted to not one but **two leopards!** Edward skillfully maneuvered the truck, and we caught glimpses of the pair as they engaged in a round of mating! Unfortunately, they flopped into the long grass — and out of view — after that bout of excitement. Knowing it could be hours before they moved, we decided to keep moving. Birds noted during our leopard vigil: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154448288>.

We continued to Skukuza, lunched, and closed the distance to Berg-en-Dal. After checking-in and unhitching the trailer, we returned the park roads, our hopes for additional leopards high as we

Hamerkop by guide Dorian Anderson



Yellow-breasted Apalis by client Michel Métayer



cruised the Matiulu loop. We didn't find that sought beast, but we did connect with **Pied Cuckoo**, **Crowned Lapwing**, **White-breasted Sunbird**, and **Magpie Shrike**. Those were great, but our best find was a pair of eye-level **Bennett's Woodpeckers** ten feet off the tarmac. The species is scarce in Kruger, so the encounter was a nice way to wrap a long day of travel and birding. Heavy cloud robbed us of the last 40 minutes of light, so we return to camp, enjoyed an early dinner, and bedded down ahead of our final tour day.

Day 13 - Wednesday, November 15 - Berg-en-Dal and departures

With several clients feeling under the weather on this morning, a reduced complement departed camp just after sunrise. Our hopes were pinned on leopard, a beast we'd had only glimpses of to this point in the trip. Cruising back roads, we observed **Hooded Vulture**, **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, and **Pearl-spotted Owlet**. Our look at the last was excellent, the bird giving great views as it hunkered in its cavity overhanging the road. It was at that point when we received word of a leopard, apparently in a tree with prey! Pulling up stakes, we zoomed towards to the referenced area only to find the cat hunkered in long



grass. It was the fifth leopard we'd encountered, but we hadn't secured decent views of any of them because all were concealed by habitat or running directly away from us. It was so frustrating! Returning to camp, we had nice looks at **Brown-hooded Kingfisher** and **Broad-billed Roller**. Complete checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154481050>.

We gathered the remaining folks, ate a massive breakfast, and spent a few hours exploring camp. Beyond bonus views of **Green Woodhoopoe**, **African Black-headed Oriole**, and **Southern Black-Tit**, we secured our first looks at **African Pygmy Kingfisher** (microscopic), **Gray-headed Kingfisher**, **Lesser Honeyguide**, **Golden-tailed Woodpecker** (overdue), and **Gray-headed Bushshrike** (so cool). As great as those were, a cooperative **Eurasian Hoopoe** put clients into a frenzy! We also scored **Red-headed Weaver**. Actually, that's a lie. But we did see one in camp yesterday; I was too lazy to make an eBird list for it, so I threw it onto the list from this outing. <https://ebird.org/checklist/S154484481>.

Our departure looming, we mounted up and took to the park roads one final time. Final looks at **Brown Snake-Eagle**, **Saddle-billed Stork**, **Southern Ground Hornbill**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, and **Red-billed Oxpecker** were enjoyed by all, but

the icing on the cake was a stunning **Leopard** resting on a small rise! The intervening foliage allowed only a small window to the beast, but we managed to get everyone nice looks by moving the truck forward a few inches at a time. The views weren't perfect, but they were much better than what we'd had previously. It only took six leopards to get there, but we did it! It was the perfect note on which to exit the park and head towards the Nelspruit airport. And what trip to South Africa would be complete without a stop at Nando's!?!? When I said the food was spicy, I wasn't joking! From there is was a quick (but blustery) ride to the airport, where our connecting flight left on time and without episode. All clients were scheduled to overnight in Johannesburg and fly out tomorrow, so Dorian wished everyone well before heading off to catch his connecting flight to London.

And just like that - it was over! But never fear - there are plenty of other tours in your future because you can go anywhere with Tropical Birding! Cheers!

And a reminder - the complete bird list of 288 species can be found here:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/173277>

Lilac-breasted Roller by guide Dorian Anderson

