



## **SOUTH AFRICA: 3-DAY TANKWA KAROO BIRDING TOUR REPORT**

**19 - 21 MARCH 2022**

**By Dominic Rollinson**



*Namaqua Sandgrouse can often be tricky to find in the Tankwa Karoo*

## Overview

This three-day Tankwa Karoo birding tour was put together for Richard who was in Cape Town for the first time and had a few free days to spare to try and find some South African endemics and near-endemics. As it was Richard's first time in South Africa it was not only endemics and near-endemics which were on the target list, as we tried to track down a number of other more widespread species. We also spent some time around Cape Town on the final afternoon as we birded a wetland area, just north of the city. Some of the better birds we found on this trip included **Grey-winged Francolin, Freckled Nightjar, Namaqua Sandgrouse, Verreaux's Eagle, Acacia Pied Barbet, Pririt Batis, Fairy Flycatcher, Spike-heeled, Karoo Long-billed, Karoo and Large-billed Larks, Namaqua, Cinnamon-breasted, Rufous-eared and Layard's Warblers, Karoo Eremomela, Karoo and Tractrac Chats and Protea Canary.**



*Large-billed Larks were surprisingly numerous in the Tankwa Karoo.*

## Detailed Report

### **Day 1, 19<sup>th</sup> March. Cape Town to Tankwa Karoo**

I picked up Richard well before dawn and we decided to give **African Wood Owl** a go around Cape Town which worked well with an extremely obliging pair, as well as a displaying **African Goshawk**, once some daylight started to appear. After this fairly brief stop we headed out of the city and made a stop on the Dutoitskloof Pass to try for a few mountain fynbos specials. Unfortunately, we could not see the vocal **Victorin's Warbler** however we did manage to find **Cape Siskin, Cape Batis, Southern Boubou, Cape Bulbul, Neddicky, Karoo Prinia, Cape**



**Sugarbird** and **Orange-breasted Sunbird**. We briefly heard **Protea Canary** however unfortunately it would not show for us (for now!).

After we'd enjoyed some breakfast in the mountain fynbos we decided to head further west into the Tankwa Karoo plains which offered us a very different set of birds and scenery. On our way to the Tankwa Karoo we saw a **Hamerkop** which is not an easy bird in the southwestern Cape. Our first birding stop was at a small farmhouse which had good birds such as **Cardinal Woodpecker**, **Red-faced** and **White-backed Mousebirds**, **Acacia Pied Barbet**, **Pied Starling**, **Fiscal Flycatcher**, **Karoo Scrub Robin**, **Mountain Wheatear** and **Cape Weaver**. After this it was into the plains proper where we found further Karoo specials such as **Yellow Canary**, **Karoo Lark**, **Karoo** and **Tractrac Chats**, **Rufous-eared Warbler** and calling **Karoo Korhaans**, which unfortunately would not show for us. A pair of **Namaqua Sandgrouse** then wandered across the road and showed really well.



*Karoo Chat is one of the most widespread species encountered in the Tankwa Karoo.*

For our lunch break we stopped at a small patch of acacia trees which proved really productive, with **Pririt Batis**, **Namaqua Warbler**, **Chestnut-vented Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied Eremomela** and **Karoo Scrub Robin** all showing well. After lunch we headed to Skitterykloof Gorge where **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler** was our major target. The warbler did not show this afternoon although we did hear at least two birds singing. We did however manage to see **Cape Spurfowl**, **African Reed Warbler**, **Grey-backed Cisticola**, **Mountain Wheatear** and a pair of **Pale-winged Starlings** which are at the southern limit of their range here. After a long and productive day of birding we headed to our comfortable accommodation and prepared for another day in the Tankwa Karoo.

**Day 2, 20<sup>th</sup> March. Tankwa Karoo birding**

We left our accommodation before sunrise and made our way back into the semi-desert plains where we would spend most of the day. En route to the plains we found a covey of **Grey-winged Francolins** which can be a tricky species to see out here. Soon after arriving in the plains, we found **Spike-heeled** and **Large-billed Larks**, **Karoo** and **Tractrac Chats**, **Bokmakierie** and a small group of foraging **Karoo Eremomelas** which are always a delight to see.

We arrived back at Skitterykloof Gorge around mid-morning and spent a while scanning rocky slopes until we eventually had brief views of **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler** and also found **Layard's Warbler**, **Mountain Wheatear**, **Pale-winged Starling**, **Streaky-headed Seedeater** and **Yellow** and **White-throated Canaries**. **Grey Tit** teased us by calling nearby but would not show for us.



*Grey morph Mountain Wheatears were common in dry rocky areas.*

After a couple hours at Skitterykloof we headed back north through the plains and eventually made it to the Tankwa Karoo National Park. Bird numbers (as always) were low here, but we did find **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, **Karoo Eremomela**, **Pale Chanting Goshawk**, **Red-capped Lark** and displaying **Karoo Long-billed Lark**. An almost entirely white (leucistic) **Common Ostrich** was a strange sight in amongst other more conventionally colored specimens.

As we made our way back south through the plains we were hit with a big thunderstorm and heavy rain which was quite something to experience in the semi-desert of the Tankwa Karoo. After we arrived back at our accommodation, we still had some light left and so took a walk around the area, which had some nice birds such as **Cape** and **Southern Masked Weavers**, **Swee Waxbill**, **Giant Kingfisher**, **Yellow Bishop** and **African Black Duck**. As we came back from dinner in the

evening, we were greeted by two **Freckled Nightjars** and four **Spotted Eagle-Owls**, a great way to end the day!

### Day 3, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022. Mountain fynbos and wetland birding

After having found just about all of our Karoo targets, we decided to spend the day birding in the mountain fynbos around Ceres and also a couple spots around Cape Town which could yield some more targets for Richard. Our first stop was Gydo Pass which was really productive and provided us with some fantastic views over the Ceres Valley. Some of our better birds seen here included **Lark-like Bunting**, **Cape Grassbird**, **Bar-throated Apalis**, **Brimstone Canary**, **Southern Boubou**, **Bokmakierie** and **Fiscal Flycatcher**. Later in the morning we headed to the nearby Michell's Pass where at last our target bird showed up, with a lovely sighting of a pair of **Protea Canaries**.

We then took the drive back towards Cape Town where we enjoyed a couple of hours of wetland birding in the late afternoon at Rietvlei Nature Reserve and some other nearby wetlands. We had many interesting waterbirds and water-associated species here such as **African Swamphen**, **Red-knobbed Coot**, **Cape and Blue-billed Teals**, **Cape Shoveler**, **Great Crested Grebe**, **African Snipe**, **Glossy Ibis**, **African Marsh Harrier** and **Southern Red Bishop**. I dropped off Richard late in the afternoon back in Muizenberg where we called it a day after a fun weekend in the Tankwa Karoo.



*White-throated Canary was numerous at Skitterykloof Gorge in the Tankwa Karoo.*

**Bird List - Following IOC (12.1)**

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen.

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>
<b>Ostriches (Struthionidae)</b>	
Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>
<b>Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)</b>	
Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
South African Shelduck	<i>Tadorna cana</i>
Blue-billed Teal	<i>Spatula hottentota</i>
Cape Shoveler	<i>Spatula smithii</i>
African Black Duck	<i>Anas sparsa</i>
Yellow-billed Duck	<i>Anas undulata</i>
Cape Teal	<i>Anas capensis</i>
<b>Guineafowl (Numididae)</b>	
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
<b>Pheasants &amp; Allies (Phasianidae)</b>	
Grey-winged Francolin	<i>Scleroptila afra</i>
Cape Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis capensis</i>
<b>Nightjars (Caprimulgidae)</b>	
Freckled Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus tristigma</i>
<b>Swifts (Apodidae)</b>	
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
White-rumped Swift	<i>Apus caffer</i>
<b>Bustards (Otididae)</b>	
Karoo Korhaan (H)	<i>Eupodotis vigorsii</i>
<b>Sandgrouse (Pteroclididae)</b>	
Namaqua Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles namaqua</i>
<b>Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)</b>	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba guinea</i>
Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>



Common Name	Scientific Name
<b>Rails, Crakes &amp; Coots (Rallidae)</b>	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>
African Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio madagascariensis</i>
<b>Grebes (Podicipedidae)</b>	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
<b>Flamingos (Phoenicopteridae)</b>	
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
<b>Stilts, Avocets (Recurvirostridae)</b>	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
<b>Plovers (Charadriidae)</b>	
Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>
<b>Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)</b>	
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
African Snipe	<i>Gallinago nigripennis</i>
<b>Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Laridae)</b>	
Hartlaub's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus hartlaubii</i>
Kelp Gull	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
<b>Anhingas, Darters (Anhingidae)</b>	
African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
<b>Cormorants, Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)</b>	
Reed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>
White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>
<b>Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)</b>	
African Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
<b>Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)</b>	
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
<b>Hamerkop (Scopidae)</b>	
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
<b>Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)</b>	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
African Harrier-Hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
Verreaux's Eagle	<i>Aquila verreauxii</i>
Pale Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax canorus</i>
African Goshawk	<i>Accipiter tachiro</i>
Black Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter melanoleucus</i>
African Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus ranivorus</i>
Jackal Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>
<b>Owls (Strigidae)</b>	
Spotted Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo africanus</i>
African Wood Owl	<i>Strix woodfordii</i>
<b>Mousebirds (Coliidae)</b>	
Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>
White-backed Mousebird	<i>Colius colius</i>
Red-faced Mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>
<b>Hoopoes (Upupidae)</b>	
African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>
<b>Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)</b>	
Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>
Giant Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>
<b>African Barbets (Lybiidae)</b>	
Acacia Pied Barbet	<i>Tricholaema leucomelas</i>
<b>Woodpeckers (Picidae)</b>	
Cardinal Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicops fuscescens</i>
<b>Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)</b>	
Rock Kestrel	<i>Falco rupicolus</i>
<b>Wattle-eyes, Batises (Platysteiridae)</b>	
Cape Batis	<i>Batis capensis</i>



Common Name	Scientific Name
Pirit Batis	<i>Batis pririt</i>
<b>Bushshrikes (Malaconotidae)</b>	
Bokmakierie	<i>Telophorus zeylonus</i>
Southern Boubou	<i>Laniarius ferrugineus</i>
<b>Shrikes (Laniidae)</b>	
Southern Fiscal	<i>Lanius collaris</i>
<b>Monarchs (Monarchidae)</b>	
African Paradise Flycatcher (H)	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
<b>Crows, Jays (Corvidae)</b>	
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
White-necked Raven	<i>Corvus albicollis</i>
<b>Fairy Flycatchers (Stenostiridae)</b>	
Fairy Flycatcher	<i>Stenostira scita</i>
<b>Tits, Chickadees (Paridae)</b>	
Grey Tit (H)	<i>Melaniparus afer</i>
<b>Larks (Alaudidae)</b>	
Spike-heeled Lark	<i>Chersomanes albofasciata</i>
Karoo Long-billed Lark	<i>Certhilauda subcoronata</i>
Karoo Lark	<i>Calendulauda albescens</i>
Large-billed Lark	<i>Galerida magnirostris</i>
Red-capped Lark	<i>Calandrella cinerea</i>
<b>Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)</b>	
Cape Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus capensis</i>
<b>Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)</b>	
Rock Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>
White-throated Swallow	<i>Hirundo albigularis</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Greater Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis cucullata</i>
<b>Crombecs, African Warblers (Macrosphenidae)</b>	
Cape Grassbird	<i>Sphenoeacus afer</i>
Victorin's Warbler (H)	<i>Cryptillas victorini</i>
<b>Reed Warblers &amp; Allies (Acrocephalidae)</b>	
Lesser Swamp Warbler (H)	<i>Acrocephalus gracilirostris</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
African Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus baeticatus</i>
<b>Cisticolas &amp; Allies (Cisticolidae)</b>	
Grey-backed Cisticola	<i>Cisticola subruficapilla</i>
Levaillant's Cisticola	<i>Cisticola tinniens</i>
Neddicky	<i>Cisticola fulvicapilla</i>
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Karoo Prinia	<i>Prinia maculosa</i>
Namaqua Warbler	<i>Phragmacia substriata</i>
Bar-throated Apalis	<i>Apalis thoracica</i>
Rufous-eared Warbler	<i>Malcorus pectoralis</i>
Cinnamon-breasted Warbler	<i>Euryptila subcinnamomea</i>
Yellow-bellied Eremomela	<i>Eremomela icteropygialis</i>
Karoo Eremomela	<i>Eremomela gregalis</i>
<b>Sylviid Babblers (Sylviidae)</b>	
Layard's Warbler	<i>Curruca layardi</i>
Chestnut-vented Warbler	<i>Curruca subcoerulea</i>
<b>White-eyes (Zosteropidae)</b>	
Cape White-eye	<i>Zosterops virens</i>
<b>Sugarbirds (Promeropidae)</b>	
Cape Sugarbird	<i>Promerops cafer</i>
<b>Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)</b>	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Pied Starling	<i>Lamprotornis bicolor</i>
Red-winged Starling	<i>Onychognathus morio</i>
Pale-winged Starling	<i>Onychognathus nabouroup</i>
<b>Thrushes (Turdidae)</b>	
Olive Thrush	<i>Turdus olivaceus</i>
<b>Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)</b>	
Karoo Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas coryphoeus</i>
Fiscal Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis silens</i>
African Dusky Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa adusta</i>
Cape Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha caffra</i>
African Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
Karoo Chat	<i>Emarginata schlegelii</i>
Tractrac Chat	<i>Emarginata tractrac</i>
Mountain Wheatear	<i>Myrmecocichla monticola</i>
Familiar Chat	<i>Oenanthe familiaris</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
<b>Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)</b>	
Orange-breasted Sunbird	<i>Anthobaphes violacea</i>
Malachite Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia famosa</i>
Southern Double-collared Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris chalybeus</i>
<b>Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)</b>	
Cape Sparrow	<i>Passer melanurus</i>
Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer diffusus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
<b>Weavers, Widowbirds (Ploceidae)</b>	
Cape Weaver	<i>Ploceus capensis</i>
Southern Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>
Southern Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes orix</i>
Yellow Bishop	<i>Euplectes capensis</i>
<b>Waxbills, Munias &amp; Allies (Estrildidae)</b>	
Sweet Waxbill	<i>Coccyzygia melanotis</i>
Common Waxbill (H)	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>
<b>Indigobirds, Whydahs (Viduidae)</b>	
Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>
<b>Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)</b>	
Cape Wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>
Cape Longclaw	<i>Macronyx capensis</i>
<b>Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae)</b>	
Cape Siskin	<i>Crithagra totta</i>
Yellow Canary	<i>Crithagra flaviventris</i>
Brimstone Canary	<i>Crithagra sulphurata</i>
Streaky-headed Seedeater	<i>Crithagra gularis</i>
White-throated Canary	<i>Crithagra albogularis</i>
Protea Canary	<i>Crithagra leucoptera</i>
Cape Canary	<i>Serinus canicollis</i>
<b>Buntings (Emberizidae)</b>	
Lark-like Bunting	<i>Emberiza impetuani</i>

<b>Total seen</b>	<b>141</b>
Total heard only	6
Total recorded	147

**Mammal List**

<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Scientific Name</b>
<b>Mongoose (Herpestidae)</b>	
Cape Grey Mongoose	<i>Herpestes pulverulentus</i>
<b>Bovids (Bovidae)</b>	
Springbok	<i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>
Gemsbok	<i>Oryx gazella</i>
Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>
Grey Rhebok	<i>Pelea capreolus</i>
<b>Hyraxes (Procaviidae)</b>	
Rock Hyrax	<i>Procavia capensis</i>
<b>Old World Monkeys (Cercopithecidae)</b>	
Chacma Baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>
<b>True Mice (Muridae)</b>	
Four-striped Grass Mouse	<i>Rhabdomys pumilio</i>
Brants' Whistling Rat	<i>Parotomys brantsii</i>
<b>Total seen</b>	<b>9</b>