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Drakensberg Mountains and Zululand
26 January – 10 February 2017

Holiday participants

John and Jan Croft
Malcolm and Helen Crowder
Peter and Monica Douch
Barbara Wheeler
Helen Young
David and Barbara Lovell
John Coish
Jean Dunn
Chris Durdin and John Durdin

Leaders: Geoff Crane and Bruce Terlien

www.naturalhistorytours.co.za

Holiday report by Chris Durdin.

All the photos in this report were taken during the holiday by group members.

Cover: top row – red bishop and elephant parade at Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Park (JCr).

Middle row – Common diadem ♂ (JCr); vervet monkey and butterfly lobelia (BL).

Bottom row – Black-bellied starling and male impalas (JCr).

More photos from the holiday are via

www.honeyguide.co.uk/wildlife-holidays/drakenbergandzululand.html

We stayed at

Drakensbergs: Mont Aux Sources hotel www.montauxsources.co.za

Bonamanzi Game Reserve www.bonamanzi.co.uk

Wakkerstroom: Wetlands Guest House www.wetlandscountryhouse.co.za

and De Kotzenhof Guest House www.dekotzenhof.co.uk



The group in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Park, with elephants in the background.
Peter and Monica were elsewhere when the photo was taken by Geoff, so he is also missing.

This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contributions this year of £40 per person were supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust giving a total of £630, a little over 10,250 rands, sent to the second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2), an intensive monitoring programme undertaken in South Africa and adjacent countries.

As at 9 March 2017, the total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 was £113,179.

DIARY

Thursday 26 / Friday 27 January – London to Johannesburg and on to the Royal Natal National Park

The gathering and departure from Heathrow was smooth and straightforward, as was the overnight flight, though it arrived 30 minute late for unexplained reasons. That was a minor delay compared with the long wait to get through customs, a good 90 minutes. Eventually we collected luggage and found leaders Geoff and Bruce, along with Peter and Monica who had flown out to meet up with friends a few days earlier. Heading east from the airport, Bruce found the right turn to head south but Geoff didn't, which gave those of us with Geoff an interesting deviation via the mining town of Springs. Eventually we were reunited at Junction 59 just south of Heidelberg for a late picnic. And an excellent picnic spot it was, overlooking a small wetland with feeding white-winged black terns, a couple of black-headed herons and a flyover purple heron. There was a bright male red bishop with a larger group of females in and out of the grass; on pool-side trees there were southern masked weavers around some hanging nests, and a white-throated swallow settled on the near fence. A nice patch of creamy-white orchids, like a robust European butterfly orchid, led to photos, from which later study can be named as *Habenaria epipactidae*, a species pollinated by hawkmoths. Three butterfly species were identified too: rayed blue, brown-veined white and broad-bordered grass yellow.

It was time to move on, though there was first a loo stop at a garage down the road from which Jean emerged with a katydid to show us. Then it was the long drive south, often through fairly heavy rain. There were birds to see along the way, such as black-shouldered kites and helmeted guineafowl, though perhaps the most striking thing was the number of Amur falcons (previously known as Eastern red-footed falcons but now recognised as a separate species) on roadside wires, several scores in total. The main road took us to Harrismith then minor roads towards firstly Phuthadijhaba then in the direction of Bergville. Approaching the Mont Aux Sources hotel we stopped to overlook a cliff on which there was a single southern bald ibis alongside patches of guano. It was about six o'clock as we reached the hotel, and we were soon settled into comfortable rooms overlooking the lawns with the hadeda ibises. There was a further natural history event as we gathered for a drink before dinner: dozens of long-winged termites drawn to the light inside the hotel. After hearty meal from the buffet we retired to catch up on sleep after the long journey.

Saturday 28 January – Royal Natal National Park



Drakensbergs view from Mont Aux Sources hotel (JCr).

It was fine and dry with visibility restored, and drawing back the curtains you could immediately appreciate the backdrop of the Drakensberg mountains. On the hotel's terrace a red-winged starling was picking up termite bodies and a man was sweeping away a pile of their wings. Around the hotel there was a mass of swallows and swifts, with three species of each, and some early risers saw red-throated wryneck.

We gathered for a nine o'clock departure with a short drive into the National Park. Just beyond the gate Geoff stopped to rescue a Drakensberg dwarf chameleon from the road, which was enjoyed by all, as was a red-winged grasshopper (nothing like the European species of the same name) which nibbled my hand. We resisted the suggestion that the first find should have the opportunity to make a meal of the second. A grey-backed cisticola perched on an overhead wire and a neddicky crept along an earth bank seen through some roadside vegetation.



Drakensberg dwarf chameleon (JCr)
and by the shady stream, a goldtail damselfly, its white wing spots
as striking as the gold tail-tip (BL).

We drove on for a short distance, pausing by a lake and failing to identify some damselflies and a blue dragonfly, but more of them later. A female bushbuck, African stonechats and Cape glossy starling led to more pauses before we reached a car park for the hiking trails, where we continued on foot. Just yards into the route we crossed a tiny stream, over which a gem of a damselfly flitted: a goldtail, with a distinctive orange spot at the end of the abdomen and broad, white pterostigma on the wing tips contrasting with darker wings, causing it to flash as it flew in the mottled shade.

Carrying on, it was a hot though often shady walk upwards through open woodland, with several families passing us as we paused for wildlife or breath. The walk then moved into the open, with spectacular mountain views and protea scrub, one silver sugarbush flower *Protea roupelliae* containing an emerald fruit chafer *Rhabdotis aulica*. A jackal buzzard was the only bird of prey, but those who made it this far were lucky enough to see two ground woodpeckers on a rock, plus Cape rock thrush and a buff-streaked chat.

We returned to the small lake where there were picnic tables in the shade spaced out somewhat along one shoreline. Dragonflies were much in evidence: blue emperors, broad scarlet and red-veined darter. The showy small blue dragonfly was eventually pinned down as jaunty dropwing, one of which was perched alongside a highland spreadwing, a large damselfly species. Alongside the dragonflies were swallowtails and an African monarch. A red-collared widowbird was in the scrub at one end of the lake and a black saw-wing flew over. As we gathered near the minibuses a paradise flycatcher showed fairly well and Cape weavers even better, lured to the ground by our sandwich crumbs.

After the longish and warm walk a quiet afternoon was a popular choice so we headed back towards the hotel. A short drive around a field by a lake on route revealed two wattled lapwings, a black-headed heron and two startlingly bright male red bishops, plus, for the occupants of the second bus, a yellow-billed duck with a brood of ducklings on the lake.

After a break back at base we went for a walk around the hotel grounds. A fiscal shrike perched on a pole and two Indian mynas bathed in the water feature. Butterflies showed well as we strolled: citrus and green-banded swallowtails, garden acraea and gaudy commodore, the last ID tracked down later. Good views of an amethyst sunbird made a fine end to the afternoon. There was time to relax before gathering for a beer and checklists followed by another tasty buffet meal.

Sunday 29 January – Golden Gate Highlands National Park

An earlier 8:30 start, with quite a long trip to the Golden Gate Highlands National Park in prospect, but with many stops on route. The first of these was just down the road where there were two southern bald ibises on their low nesting cliff. Pauses for rufous-naped lark and close, brightly-coloured cattle egrets, were soon followed by another for four wattled plovers, several fan-tailed widow birds and the by now usual red bishops.

The drive, and indeed the whole day, was dominated by the impressive landscape of sandstone mountains, on closer outcrops marked with black streaks of lichen. Part of the way as we drove was more like savannah with Natal flat-crowned acacias giving a more East African feel.

Another roadside stop by a small dam was for more southern bald ibises; here and everywhere on wires there were Amur falcons. A much larger raptor encouraged a U-turn, in this case for an African harrier-hawk on a pole. Views of our first Drakensberg mammals soon followed, namely rather distant Burchell's zebra, blesbok and black wildebeest – tasters for the afternoon.



Throughout the holiday there
were long-tailed widow birds,
males with the encumbrance of
hugely long tail feathers
sustaining flight for as long as
possible to impress the females!
(BL)



Striped skink and a view from Protea Corner (JD).

At Protea Corner viewpoint a striped skink ambled slowly up some step-like rocks before tucking out of sight under a bush. David was alert to a bright green bird a little way down the cliff: a Klaas's cuckoo, seen well through the telescope for those nearby. A second African harrier-hawk came into view, this time flying past, and beyond that there was a distant Verreaux's eagle that soon became more distant still. Underfoot there were morning glory (*Ipomoea pellita*, golden-haired morning glory) and mesembryanthemum-type flowers¹, both in magenta.

A brickweave path took us to a 'vulture restaurant' – a feeding station in front of a brick hide. Comments in the visitors' book reflected our experience today of a lack of birds on a very old carcass. There were crowds of fast-flying white butterflies here and many orchid spikes, mostly well over, but a few with lingering flowers that were *Disa cooperi* and *Disa versicolor*. A male blesbok ran full-tilt at a group of six wildebeest for no apparent reason. Jean found a fine *Eucomis autumnalis* or pineapple lily.

Next stop was under a spreading oak tree opposite a fine cliff, also looking down on a large pond with red-knobbed coot on a nest and yellow-billed duck. From a ledge on the cliff a male peregrine took off and flew over us, while the female stayed put and could be seen through scopes.

Lunch was in Clarens, which was popular this Sunday lunchtime in the cafés and galleries around the central green. But there was still room for us at The Artists' Café where salads were a popular choice for the group this warm day. Rock shandy to drink was new for me: lemonade, tonic water and a dash of angostura bitters. Following lunch, we paused at the edge of Clarens by a lake that had caught Helen C's eye as we came into town: she was right, there were more bald ibises here, this rare bird feeding within earshot of a boombox in the built-up area.



Southern bald ibises; pineapple lily *Eucomis autumnalis* (CD).

The afternoon was a driving tour mainly looking at mammals in the green mountain pastures. These were generally botanically poor, though there were two species of orchids in one area: pink candle orchid *Satyrium neglectum* and *Habenaria falcicornis*.

There was just the one family group of three zebras, but rather more black wildebeests with their straw-coloured tails. They may have harsh times here, especially when it's dry, but they have no big cats or other top predators to cope with. While watching a group of 20 or so wildebeests an elegant grey rhebok pranced and strutted.

¹ *Delosperma cooperi* seems to be the best fit.

The buses were a little separated when Geoff called Bruce on the radio to alert the trailing contingent to a black-backed jackal near the road, and we dropped down the hill for a closer view. The jackal seemed aware of us but happy to ease gently away, searching for food as it went. All this was taking place against a stunning backdrop of mountain scenery.



Black wildebeest, with its distinctive straw-coloured tail (CD) and black-backed jackal (JCo).

The final new mammal was a group of springboks, seen from the road as we drove back, including a proper 'prong' from one as the group moved along. The glorious mountain scenery was with us all the way back to base, then in the gentle evening light, and it was just past six o'clock when we reached Mont Aux Sources.

Monday 30 January – Drakensberg Park (now officially uKhahlamba NP)

Another longish drive, via Bergville and Winterton to Drakensberg Park, with Geoff's minibus taking a detour into Bergville to find a doctor and pharmacy. There were stops along the way as ever, including one not far from the hotel by the Tower of Pizza sign, for three species of widows and whydahs plus weavers and bishops. Much farther on there was a wide verge overlooking lakes where there were several South African shelducks with the usual Egyptian geese, plus blacksmith lapwing, African darter and a distant night heron. The best sighting here was of yellow-billed kites that gathered in an acacia: I counted 21 when they flew off.

We met up at Monk's Cowl in the National Park. A little bridge took the path to the shop and refreshments area over a stream and here there were goldtail damselflies again, their tail ends bright in 'cadmium yellow' as Monica described it from a painter's perspective. There were also Julia skimmers including a pair 'in cop'.

From here we walked, through an open wood, past some ponies and then a circuit in the open mountain grassland by a mountain known as Champagne Castle. Later there was some debate as to whether the two kilometre distance quoted equated to the same UK distance or took into account ups and downs! The numbers of garden acraea butterflies was astonishing, here still and close enough for photos. Coming into the open we had excellent views of African olive-pigeons on dead tree tops.



Sterkspruit Falls (HC). The cascade of *hesperantha* is just to the right of the waterfall.

On the first stretch of the circuit was a superb, vegetation-covered mountain tarn that was alive with damselflies including a new species, smoky spreadwing, and after some persistence I was able to confirm two-striped skimmer landing on rocks along the path.

The far point of the circuit offered a view over Sterkspruit Falls, with a cascade of pink flowers to the right of the waterfall, namely Drakensberg cliff *hesperantha* *Hesperantha scopulosa*. Near the viewpoint John Croft got a picture of a predatory wasp (photo on p20), and Jean and Helen C found a new butterfly, marsh commodore. Dozens of garden acraeas were joined by a black-and-white syntomid moth. In isolated trees on the return leg two white-necked ravens croaked ominously and their heavy heads and beaks were a clear feature.

After our walk in the midday heat the refreshment hatch did good business in cold drinks, and they kindly let us eat our picnics there on the tables in the shade.

The return journey seemed to go much quicker than the outward one and included a stop by the lakes again. Here the telescopes came in useful for distant views on wires of pied kingfisher and white-fronted bee-eater. We were back in good time, enough to allow three of us to watch a mocking cliff-chat on the Mont Aux Sources roof, plus fork-tailed drongo on a dead tree. There were also two large invertebrates at the hotel this evening: Helen C took a rain spider outside which, she was told, had moved inside sensing rain coming (which it didn't), and after dinner Peter discovered a huge dung beetle outside his room.



Marsh commodore (HC) and white-necked raven (JCr).

ORCHIDS IN THE DRAKENSBERGS



Above left: *Habenaria epipactidae*, at the stop on the first day (CD).

Above middle and right, at the vulture hide: *Disa cooperi* (CD) and *Disa versicolor* (JCr).

Below left and middle: pink candle orchid *Satyrium neglectum* and *Habenaria falcicornis*, together in the high grasslands of the Drakensbergs. Below right: *Liparis bowkeri*, in the wood on 28 January (all CD).



Tuesday 31 January – transfer to Bonamanzi

A travel day, though with stops close to Mont Aux Sources to look at foam grasshopper on bristle-fruited silkweed, a secretarybird stomping on a snake, and pied starlings looking rather hot on the Tower of Pizza sign. Then it was on the road via Winterton again and onto the motorway for the long drive south towards Durban and then up the coast to Hluhluwe. The planned lunch stop was at Zinkwazi beach, in humid tropical weather, but we learnt it wasn't to be open until next week. Lucky ones saw two good birds here: white-eared barbets in the trees and a red-capped robin-chat on a post by the parked minibuses.

We drove on up the coastal motorway, stopping at a filling station to re-fuel in both senses. Here there was our first African pied wagtail, my first house sparrow and a huge brown long-horned beetle on a small wall.



At Bonamanzi: Nyala and calf (HC) and a family of warthogs (JCr).
The warthogs were especially fond of relaxing in the confines of our verandas!

The back of the journey had been broken by now and we turned off the motorway and onto a wide dirt track towards Bonamanzi nature reserve and lodge. Once through the gates there were immediately close nyalas and a bachelor group of impalas. We were initially assigned to accommodation a short walk into the wooded area, but we were swiftly – before we'd unpacked – moved. Banded groundling dragonflies scattered and settled on the ground as we walked to where we were supposed to be, in thatched rondavels close to the waterhole. This small lake, with lilies and open water, was overlooked by a large building – a hide doesn't do it justice – and several of us gathered there to enjoy white-faced ducks, water thick-knees, large-billed weavers and a jacana, among others.

During dinner, a family party of warthogs had settled in the veranda of Barbara W's accommodation. Geoff shooed them away and a party of impalas wasn't in the least bit bothered by us walking past with torches under the star-filled night sky.

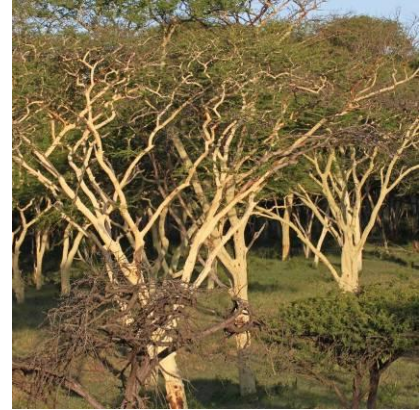
Wednesday 1 February – Bonamanzi

We'll gloss over Jean's early morning tea and gecko story before our six o'clock start for a wildlife drive. This was with two of Bonamanzi's enthusiastic local guides, Mishak and Steve, driving open-sided safari vehicles: mostly the two vehicles split up. Giraffes, to start with a bachelor group, were walking around the open scrub. These, Burchell's zebras and the buffalo seen later were all brought into the private nature reserve: nyala, impala, warthog, red duiker and other mammals were here naturally.



Young male giraffe (JCr) and Cape buffaloes (JD).

Crowned hornbill, emerald-spotted wood-dove and female violet-backed starling were tastes of Africa. More familiar birds from a European perspective were large numbers of barn swallows, red-backed shrike, European bee-eaters and a European roller. A group of Senegal (lesser black-winged) lapwings were accompanied, for our vehicle's birdwatchers, by two elegant Temminck's coursers. We made a welcome rendezvous with the other 4x4 for tea or coffee with biscuits and rusks. Collared (red-winged) pratincoles were a highlight of the late part of the drive and we all appreciated the fever trees, acacias with yellow trunks. Both groups stopped by the waterhole on the way back to enjoy a goliath heron with three woolly-necked storks and a group of spur-winged geese. A crocodile was noted by one group – a reminder that the warning notice at base should be heeded – and the others saw a common sandpiper.



Crowned hornbill (JCr); blue wildebeest (JD); and fever trees *Acacia xanthophloea* (JCr).

Early European settlers noted that fever was common in the swampy areas where these trees grew and named them accordingly. Now, of course, we know that malaria is spread by mosquitoes.

The restaurant was still open for a late breakfast on our return just after ten o'clock, after which we were at leisure for the rest of the morning. I spent some time looking at dragonflies on the edge of the lake, finding three additional species: later Helen Y and Jean joined me and we saw a long skimmer eating a scarlet darter. Birdwatching from the 'hide' was again a good option: pied kingfishers, three-banded plovers, lesser striped swallows and many of yesterday's birds were in evidence.

After a late lunch we took a long walk around Bonamanzi following the letters and white stones, a sandy and largely flat trail starting off round the back of the lake. One of the new dragonflies was there: a close eastern blacktail. A nosed grasshopper seemed to have lost one back leg and there were several dung beetles along the way ... and elephant dung. Half way round we crossed the entrance road where, with great forethought, Bruce's minibus was parked to return with half of the group. The walkers found many ticks on shoes and socks, though happily before any became attached, a bearded woodpecker and several butterflies. The butterflies took some effort to photograph or note details, and included blue pansy, common diadem and variable diadem.

Thursday 2 February – Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Park

It was an eight o'clock departure for the short drive to the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Park, and all day in or near our minibuses along a network of metalled roads. As Geoff organised the paperwork for entry a great column of white-necked vultures came over, plus the odd yellow-billed kite and pied crow. This seemed promising for more vultures, but we then only saw one more. A short distance into the park there were two white rhinos, rather static in the heat, plus muddy Cape buffalos.



Mud, glorious mud – white rhinos (JD).



Burchell's zebras – these were at Bonamanzi (JCr).

The game park was mostly open scrub, with some closed scrub and woodland, all less starkly dry than expected with the lack of rains, though some watercourses were dry or nearly so. The park was punctuated with waterholes and here and there with grassy valleys. It was in one of the last that we came across the elephants, family groups in two directions with the nearest including several bathing. Two yellow-billed storks were alongside the left group and several woolly-necked storks by the ones on the right. We had excellent views from one of the elevated picnic places where you are allowed out of vehicles, the first elephants ever for Helen Y who declared she would die happy.

In the now ferocious heat – certainly mid-30s – the air conditioning in the Hilltop café/bar/shop/garage was welcome, and we took our time over lunch. Outside Helen C found a dripping tap with bathing birds, namely Cape white-eye and a female Jameson's firefinch.

Driving on, we searched without success for lions and there was a distinctly quiet period in the heat of the early afternoon. As that faded slightly there was more movement of birds, especially birds of prey, with brown snake-eagle and tawny eagle settling so they could be viewed from vehicles. From my bus three common scimitar-bills flew through but didn't settle and there were passable if brief views of purple-crested turacos.

There were more close mammals, with two elephants browsing and grazing by the road while carefully avoiding poisonous milkweed plants. Shortly before leaving the park there was another buffalo with no less than five white rhinos wallowing in mud, including a young one, plus an attendant red-billed oxpecker.

Friday 3 February – St Lucia Wetland Park (aka iSimangaliso Wetland Park) and boat trip

Geoff and Bruce got us all singing happy birthday to Helen C at breakfast before passing over the card quietly signed by everyone yesterday. Breakfast was only slightly disrupted by the union's staff strike, but our minibuses were led out of Bonamanzi's back gate to avoid the picket.

We enjoyed a coffee stop in St Lucia while Geoff booked the afternoon's boat trip, following which we took a circular walk in the coastal forest, part of the wider World Heritage site of the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park. A red duiker as we drove there was a good start. Some of the trees, such as flat-crown albizia and dune sweet thorn, were helpfully labelled. Butterflies were active, sometimes too active to get close to, though an eyed pansy showed its blue wing patches nicely and a new acraea seemed to fit best the Natal acraea. A large snail, black-and-red millipedes and many unidentified ichneumon wasps were other obvious invertebrates. There were good views here and in St Lucia of white-eared barbet and a dark-capped bulbul, so that these species, seen fleetingly on the transfer day, were enjoyed by more of the group. Yellow-rumped tinkerbird and collared sunbird were new species to all who saw them. A few lucky people had views of a red tree squirrel scampering through the trees and we all got close up to a well-camouflaged toad.

After lunch at the Reef & Dune in St Lucia we took the very short drive to the quay for a boat ride on the lagoon, on an afternoon with few clouds and a gentle breeze giving a near-perfect temperature. Wire-tailed swallows perched by the quay while everyone got ready to go. Bright yellow weavers (aka golden weavers) were near nests in the reeds. It wasn't long before the skipper took us to the first of three groups of hippopotami, floating gently in the shallow, brackish water. One group of hippos included a youngster and the biggest group included one well out of the water that opened its mouth revealing why this species is best kept at a distance. We learned that hippos often come into town at night. There were crocodiles too, some fiddler crabs on the mud by the base of mangroves, a magnificent African fish-eagle, pied kingfishers, little swifts nesting under the road bridge and our first common tern and little egret.



African fish eagle and hippos from the boat (JCr). The hippos remind me of the old Punch cartoon: One hippo to the other, "I keep thinking it's Tuesday".

For the late afternoon we followed a boardwalk overlooking the creek and beyond to where huge diggers were extracting sand for titanium. A pink-backed pelican and a goliath heron were near a group of yellow-billed storks. A large group of swift terns mostly sat on a sand bar; a Caspian tern flew to and fro. Beyond the end of the boardwalk, those that came to the estuary edge over the sand dunes with trailing coastal morning glory *Ipomea pes-caprae* added white-fronted and Kittlitz's plovers to the tally, plus more familiar little stint, curlew sandpiper and ringed plover.

Saturday 4 February – Bonamanzi

The birdwatchers before breakfast found a giant kingfisher on the lake – well, you could hardly miss it – which along with pied and brown-headed kingfisher made a fine collection. The giant kingfisher was there most of the morning, for those who stayed put when the group did a three-way split. Five of us had a quiet morning, adding black-throated canary and a new damselfly, Masai sprite, to the lists. Geoff took three on a walk at Bonamanzi, finding an epiphytic orchid and a very large antlion – star orchid *Cyrtorchis arcuata* subsp. *arcuata* and mottled veld antlion after later research. At a waterhole there were black-winged stilts, goliath heron and pratincoles.



Lesser striped swallow (JC) and giant kingfisher (CD): both regulars at the lake at Bonamanzi (CD).

Bruce had a minibus-load to visit Emdoneni Cheetah Project, a centre that rescues wild cats (cheetah, serval, caracal and wild cat) with some permanent residents beyond rehabilitation available for hands-on encounters, and others that contribute to breeding and release projects. Afterwards there was a little retail therapy at Ilala Weavers. We all had lunch at Bonamanzi, with the staff today singing happy birthday to Helen for yesterday with some cake to share.

At 15:30 we assembled for our second off-road tour, with drivers Mishak (again) and Dave. I was with Dave and we took in a range of habitats: sand forest, scrub and grassland adjacent to Hluhluwe River, plus the river itself. The birdwatching was good, with several red-backed shrikes, common waxbills, yellow-throated longclaw, Amur falcons and brown-throated weavers.

At one point there were six little bee-eaters on the single strand of electric fence running along the river bank, erected at a strategic height to stop elephants from getting out of the reserve but to allow hippos access, in preference to moving onto the local community's land in the floodplain. Near here a black-collared barbet, mousebirds and a little green bee-eater were all in one small tree. Hippos and at least three smallish crocodiles were in one part of the river, and elsewhere there was a black-winged stilt and a goliath heron.

The final leg took us back through open scrub with more mammals, especially close views of giraffes against the setting sun. The other group saw kudu as well as the usual nyala. As dusk fell on the way back to base and our evening meal, a fiery-necked nightjar called.

Sunday 5 February – Mkuzi National Park

A mystery was solved before breakfast: a bird with white outer tail feathers that chases other birds over the lake sat still long enough to be identified as ... a lesser honeyguide. After breakfast we enjoyed a slice of local life while waiting outside the local Spar supermarket in Hluhluwe town while Geoff and Bruce bought lunch and other provisions.

The formalities required to get into Mkuzi, part of the wider Isimangaliso Park, seemed to take an age and even the barrier seemed reluctant to stay up. In we went to mostly extensive, natural scrub, with a network of metalled roads. The terrestrial areas generally didn't make for great wildlife watching, though there were any number of Eurasian rollers, including one that took some considerable time to battle with a large (and unidentified) item of prey before the head was shaken off and the rest swallowed with difficulty.

The first of three excellent hides had next-to-no water, but there was still plenty to see. Black-winged Lucia widow dragonflies were flying over what water there was and they also perched on vegetation. Common citril was a new damselfly and Julia skimmer a species seen previously in the Drakensbergs. A tiny red bird was a red-billed firefinch and a tiny blue one a blue waxbill.

Moving on, my bus with Bruce missed the turn for the hide and the detour took us past a perched brown snake-eagle, zebras, blue wildebeests and giraffes, the giraffes including a calf that was little taller than a human. From Geoff's bus there was a rock monitor lizard and a slender mongoose. Our rendezvous was a picnic site near the edge of the huge St Lucia wetland. We had a quick birdwatch in the baking heat while rolls were organised, safely out of reach of the waiting vervet monkeys.

Lunch over, the main hide here was very close and there was a lot to see. Whiskered and white-winged black terns (in tricky plumage) were over the wide waterway. Closer to, white-fronted bee-eaters and wire-tailed swallows perched or hawked for insects. There were pink-backed pelicans, yellow-billed storks and a squacco heron. Our first open-billed storks and great egrets were noted, and with the aid of a telescope distant perched raptors proved to be a brown snake-eagle and an osprey.



Lucia widow dragonfly (CD), impalas, and blue waxbill (JCr).

The final waterhole hide needed a hushed group as dozens of impalas were very close, including many young, some of which had the attention of one or more oxpeckers. Blue waxbill appeared here, too, and with patience several had excellent if brief views of a brown-crowned tchagra which flew away with a flash of a pale-edge tail. Masai sprite, a red-eyed damselfly, was close enough for several to see. There was a little rain on the homeward journey.

Monday 6 February – transfer to Wakkerstroom

At Geoff's suggestion, most of the group gathered before breakfast to see if the lesser honeyguide showed, but it didn't. The 'usual suspects' at Bonamanzi's lake were, as ever, excellent: giant, pied and brown-hooded kingfishers, water thick-knees, wire-tailed and lesser striped swallows, noisy thick-billed weavers, a close yellow-billed kite at the top of a fever tree, impala and nyala coming to drink, and much more. In with the white-faced ducks were two red-billed teals, a new bird for here.

Today was our second transfer day with the journey starting at 8:30 and ending with our picnic at Wakkerstroom Wetland Reserve and Crane Sanctuary at 1:30, with stops for loo and a Wimpy coffee and another to shop for lunch along the way. It was a reminder that South Africa is a big country, with arable and livestock farming and forestry (eucalyptus and pine) on a huge scale.

An African marsh harrier flew by the picnic tables and after lunch we took a short walk to an elevated hide overlooking the wetland around us. The route took us below a road bridge under which South African cliff-swallows were nesting, mixing in the air with white-rumped swifts. From the hide we located a little bittern that flew into the reeds. We then walked along the elevated road, providing more viewpoints. On one side was an African purple swamp-hen, ducking in and out of sight, and on the other side weaver nests were under construction. There was then time to settle into our two accommodations, most of the group at Wetlands Guest House and four of us in De Kotzenhof Guest House, with evening meals for all at the latter.



Feeding frenzy at the picnic table (JD).

Tuesday 7 February – Wakkerstroom

Gardens of both houses were alive with birds before breakfast, including bokmakierie at De Kotzenhof Guest House and black-collared barbets at Wetlands Guest House. A short walk beyond the garden at Wetlands took us over a stream bordered with brightly coloured crimson flag lillies, *Hesperantha coccinea*, and up a hillside where we could see wild drooping agapanthus *Agapanthus inapertus* flower spikes in one direction and a weir in the other. Wetlands Guest House provided a delicious breakfast for all of us.



On the De Kotzenhof Guest House bird table: southern masked weaver, pied starling, black-collared barbet and Cape weaver (CD). A long-crested eagle was at the wetland reserve (HC).

As we arrived at the picnic tables where we'd been yesterday there was a splendid long-crested eagle on a tree-top ahead of us, and a slightly trickier to find African harrier-hawk to our right. We walked under the bridge with nesting South African cliff-swallows to a different hide from yesterday. There was a great stroke of luck: two spotted-necked otters were playing in the lagoon. Wetland birds were much the same as yesterday, and a Cape longclaw fed in a drier grass patch. In the other direction, towards Wakkerstroom town, there were two crowned cranes among some cattle. Several of us walked further along the river, where intensely blue dragonflies were later identified as highland dropwing (though see ID note in wildlife lists). There were excellent views of the many red bishops, masked weavers and a couple of blacksmith lapwings. Those who went with Geoff to yesterday's hide saw little bittern again and malachite kingfisher.

Lunchtime sandwiches and samosas were provided on the stoop where my father and I had our room at De Kotzenhof Guest House, and very good they were too. Afterwards, a short drive and a walk across a meadow took us to another hide where red-billed queleas settled briefly on the open edge of the reedbed and Levillant's cisticolas buzzed around. Moving on, a flock of about 100 Amur falcons prompted a stop at the old railway station. The route took us back to the main wetland complex where there were wattled lapwings, our first Hottentot teals and a purple heron. The butterfly net came out for the first time, helping us to add marsh acraea to the list. We had an early end to our time in the field and returned to the two guesthouses to relax. Dinner was again at De Kotzenhof.

Wednesday 8 February – Wakkerstroom

A few early risers went to the road causeway between the wetland lagoons and saw the hottentot teals and an otter again and an African rail. Most people simply potted pre-breakfast. As my contingent arrived at Wetlands Guest House for breakfast a Table Mountain beauty butterfly was on red trumpet flowers and was still enough to allow photos. Our contingent briefly visited the causeway on the way back to De Kotzenhof Guest House and we were lucky to see a slender mongoose with black tail-tip run across the road.



Table Mountain beauty (CD); crowned crane (JD); and giant candelabra lily *Brunsvigia grandiflora* (BL).

Our morning excursion was a large circuit in the hills above Wakkerstroom on unmade roads, with many stops. Two crowned cranes were an early find plus an orange-coloured Natal lily (and a closer one during the afternoon). At Thaka River there was a crowd of South African cliff-swallows and two diderick cuckoos that settled on a wire. Not far from the shembe – a ring of white stones for outdoor religious services – a grey rhebok dashed along, and ant-eating chats hunted from fences.

Looking down from the high bridge over Slang (Snake) River, one triangular rock had three dragonfly species landing; the blue ones were two-striped skimmer and yesterday's highland dropwing, the third our final new dragonfly, common thorn-tail. A rock hyrax was well camouflaged and David and John Coish saw a yellow mongoose cross the road. Farther along, a flock of sheep had been joined by blesboks and one had its nose in the trough.

After lunch, again at De Kotzenhof Guest House, we set off in a different direction. Overall it was less successful and the road bumpier, but there were good finds. One lake had three white-backed ducks, a new bird for the holiday, and a black-crowned heron nesting on a dead tree. The most spectacular find – which particularly delighted Barbara L – were pink candelabra lilies, initially behind a fence then accessible by the roadside. White storks were feeding in a hayfield being turned and baled. There were more yellow mongooses, showing that not only meercats can stand on hind legs. Then there was a surprise reminder of the holiday's start in the Drakensbergs: at least four southern bald ibises, with two hadedas, plus an additional five farther on and two more again on the edge of Wakkerstroom between the two guesthouses.

Dinner was a braai (barbecue) with pap (maize meal) and sheba (gravy with onions) at De Kotzenhof Guest House, during which the holiday highlights noted below were collected before a boisterous rendition of 'Mud, Glorious Mud' to celebrate the hippos and muddy rhinos seen during the holiday.

Thursday 9 February – Wakkerstroom to Johannesburg

We spent a quiet morning at Wakkerstroom, mostly birdwatching from the hides previously visited, with more sightings of otters, more butterfly species and a new bird in the shape of a pair of southern pochards. Lunch was in the café in the quiet main street of Wakkerstroom where most of the second-hand and curiosity shops were shut, as usual, except one which received the full benefit of those seeking retail therapy.

Then it was time for the journey, all the way back to Johannesburg, taking the best part of five hours including a stop. The drive took us past several power stations and lakes with greater flamingos and Cape shoveler too, for one bus. We bade farewell to Geoff and Bruce, took the walk to Terminal B for SAA's check-in and another walk back to the shops and international departures. It was a smooth overnight flight back to London, with room to stretch out for those who bagged some of the many spare seats.

Holiday highlights

as nominated by group members on the final evening.

Jan	Long-tailed widowbird; elephants; red and yellow-crowned bishops.
John Croft	Elephant family parades; purple-crested turaco; long-crested eagle; otters.
Peter	Drakensberg Mountains; southern bald ibises; food at Bonamanzi.
Monica	The light during the 4x4 drive at Bonamanzi, with coursers; native vegetation in the forest at St Lucia; watching the jackal.
John D	Stroking a cheetah; the Brunsvigia; the girl with a toddler on her back given a bottle of water by Bruce – the look on her face was 'gold-plated'.
Helen C	Finding the first secretarybird; emerald-spotted wood-dove; the golden-headed bishop flying like a bee.
Malcolm	Long-crested eagle; paradise flycatcher; long-tailed widowbirds; male weaver cutting the supporting ties of his nest because, presumably, it didn't meet female standards!
David	Impalas from the hide; elephants in two directions; rhinos.
Barbara L	Brunsvigia; rhinos; warhog family in the porch.
Helen Y	Elephants; new dragonflies; landscapes; the lady with her baby waving.
John Coish	Johannesburg airport a lowlight; view from Mont Aux Sources hotel; abilities of our guides and all the explanations.
Jean	Rhinos in a group; landscapes; weaver birds in action; amazing close red bishop.
Barbara W	Harrier-hawk; little bittern; sunrise and sunset and their colours; the light on giraffes and fever trees.
Chris	Goldtail damselfly; Amur falcons; the variety of birds at our holiday bases; the South African moment outside Hluhluwe's Spar; warthogs on Barbara W's stoop.
Bruce	A pleasure to meet you all.
Geoff	My highlights are your highlights e.g. Barbara enjoying the Brunsvigia.

WILDLIFE LISTS

BIRDS

Ostrich	Seen on two days in the Drakensbergs and when travelling on 31/1, though may not all be wild birds.
Little grebe	At the small lake in Clarens (Drakensbergs) on 29/1 and arrival day at Wakkerstroom 6/2.
Great white pelican	St Lucia 5/2.
Pink-backed pelican	St Lucia 3/2 and 5/2.
White-breasted cormorant	At the lake-side stop on the arrival day, 27/1.
Reed (long-tailed) cormorant	Several days in the Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom.
African darter	On three days: 27/1, 30/1 and 5/2.
Grey heron	Seen regularly in Bonamanzi and Wakkerstroom.
Black-headed heron	Seen regularly in the Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom.
Goliath heron	Good views on four days at Bonamanzi and St Lucia.
Purple heron	Three days in a row at Wakkerstroom.
Great egret	St Lucia only on 5/2.
Little egret	St Lucia boat trip only on 3/2.
Cattle egret	Almost daily in all areas.
Squacco heron	St Lucia on 5/2,
Night heron	Drakensbergs, 30/1.
Little bittern	Wakkerstroom on 6/2 and 7/2.
Hamerkop	From one bus on 30/1 on the way back from Drakensberg Park.
White stork	Following hay-making in the hills above Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
Black stork	1 in Hluhluwe Game Park, 2/2.
Woolly-necked stork	Daily in the Bonamanzi/ Hluhluwe part of the holiday.
African open-billed stork	St Lucia on 5/2.
Yellow-billed stork	Hluhluwe Game Park, 2/2, with elephants, then 2 more days.
African sacred ibis	Almost daily in Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom.
Southern bald ibis	Regularly on cliffs near Mont Aux Sources; at Clarens on 29/1 and above Wakkerstroom on 8/2.
Glossy ibis	At the lake-side stop on the arrival day, 27/1.
Haded ibis	Daily.
Greater flamingo	Wetlands on the return journey to Johannesburg, 9/2.
White-faced duck	Daily on the lake at Bonamanzi.
White-backed duck	2 above Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
Egyptian goose	Seen every day.
South African shelduck	Drakensbergs, 31/1 but mostly on the Wakkerstroom wetlands.
Yellow-billed duck	Daily in the Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom, 3/2 at St Lucia.
African black duck	2 on a mountain lake in the Drakensbergs, 29/1.
Hottentot teal	Wakkerstroom, 7/2 and 8/2.
Red-billed teal	Drakensbergs, 30/1; Bonamanzi, 6/2.
Cape shoveler	Seen from one bus on the return journey to Johannesburg, 9/2.
Southern pochard	A pair, Wakkerstroom, final morning 9/2.
Spur-winged goose	Daily at Bonamanzi, a few sightings in the other areas.
Secretarybird	31/1 just after leaving Mont Aux Sources; 8/2 above Wakkerstroom.
White-backed vulture	A stack on arrival at Hluhluwe, 2/2; distant vulture 6/2 presumably this species.
Black kite	1 recorded on 4/2, Bonamanzi.
Yellow-billed kite	21 counted by the wetland in the Drakensbergs, 30/1; daily at Bonamanzi.
Black-shouldered kite	27/1 and 30/1, while travelling.
Verreaux's eagle	Distant bird at Protea Corner, Drakensbergs, 29/1.
Tawny eagle	Hluhluwe Game Park, 2/2.
Long-crested eagle	Excellent views at Wakkerstroom, 7/2.
Martial eagle	See from one vehicle on a Bonamanzi game drive, 4/2.
Brown snake-eagle	Seen on 3 days in the Bonamanzi/Hluhluwe/St Lucia area.
Bateleur	This distinctive-looking raptor was at Mkuzi park on 5/2.
African fish eagle	Good views on the St Lucia boat trip, 3/2.
Steppe buzzard	Recorded on 9 days and in all areas.
Jackal buzzard	Recorded on 5 days, in all areas
African marsh harrier	Wakkerstroom, 6/2 and 7/2.
Marsh harrier	Geoff and Malcolm saw a bird with characteristics of our European harrier, 8/2.
Harrier-hawk	Drakensbergs, 19/1 and Wakkerstroom, 7/2.
Osprey	A distant bird at St Lucia, 29/1.
Peregrine	A pair around a nest on a cliff, 29/1.
Red-footed falcon	Geoff found one among the Amur falcons, 8/2.
Amur falcon	Common in rough grassland, often on wires, in the Drakensbergs, one game drive at Bonamanzi on 4/2 and around Wakkerstroom.
Rock kestrel	1 seen well in the Drakensbergs by the vulture restaurant, 29/1.
Crested francolin	Recorded on 6/2.
Natal spurfowl	Recorded on 2/2.

Helmeted guineafowl	Seen every day in the Drakensbergs and several days in the Bonamanzi and Wakkerstroom areas.
Crested guineafowl	From one vehicle on a Bonamanzi game drive, 4/2.
Grey crowned crane	At Wakkerstroom, 1 on 29/1, a pair (possibly the same birds) on two days, 7/2 and 8/2, and from one minibus as we were leaving on 9/2 a pair with a chick.
African rail	Fleeting glimpses for some at Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
Black crake	From a hide at Mkuzi NP, 5/2, and seen by early risers at Wakkerstroom, 9/2.
Purple swamp-hen	Seen daily at the Wakkerstroom wetlands.
Common moorhen	Seen daily at the Wakkerstroom wetlands.
Red-knobbed coot	Seen daily at the Wakkerstroom wetlands and several Drakensberg lakes.
African jacana	Daily on the lily leaves and lake at Bonamanzi.
Ringed plover	On the St Lucia shore, 3/2.
White-fronted plover	On the St Lucia shore, 3/2.
Kittlitz's plover	On the St Lucia shore, 3/2.
Three-banded plover	Daily by the lake at Bonamanzi.
Crowned lapwing	At the lake-side stop on the arrival day, 27/1.
Senegal lapwing	Aka lesser black-winged lapwing, groups on first Bonamanzi game drive, 1/2.
Blacksmith lapwing	Seen on several days in a variety of wetland and grass habitats.
Wattled lapwing	Seen on six days in various places.
Common sandpiper	Occasionally at Bonamanzi's lake.
Wood sandpiper	Daily at Bonamanzi's lake, and other wetlands.
Greenshank	St Lucia, 5/2
Curlew sandpiper	On the St Lucia shore, 3/2.
Little stint	On the St Lucia shore, 3/2.
Sanderling	On the St Lucia shore, 3/2.
African snipe	Wakkerstroom, 6/2 & 7/2.
Black-winged stilt	Bonamanzi, 4/2 and St Lucia, 5/2
Spotted thick-knee	Wakkerstroom, 7/2, on dry meadow.
Water thick-knee (Water dikkop)	Daily at Bonamanzi's lake.
Temminck's courser	2 on the first Bonamanzi game drive, 1/2.
Collared pratincole	On the first Bonamanzi game drive, 1/2, and over Bonamanzi lake.
Grey-headed gull	Travel day, 27/1 and St Lucia 3/2.
Caspian tern	Coast at St Lucia 3/2, flying past us.
Swift tern	Flocks at St Lucia, 3/2.
Common tern	Boat trip at St Lucia, 3/2.
Whiskered tern	Recorded on 3 days, two of which were at Wakkerstroom.
White-winged tern	Recorded on 4 days, mostly in tricky plumages.
Feral pigeon	In towns, no rock doves seen.
Speckled pigeon	Daily in the Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom.
African olive-pigeon	Several at Monk's Cowl in the Drakensbergs, 30/1.
Red-eyed dove	Seen or heard most days, including in gardens at Wakkerstroom.
African turtle-dove	Seen daily in the Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom, and 2 days at Bonamanzi.
Laughing dove	Seen daily in the Drakensbergs and in Wakkerstroom gardens.
Emerald-spotted wood-dove	Seen or heard on 5 days in the Bonamanzi area.
Purple-crested turaco	Seen on three days at Bonamanzi, best of all in a tree by the rondavels.
Klaas's cuckoo	Good view from Protea Corner viewpoint, 29/2.
Diderick cuckoo	On 31/1, best was a pair on a wire above Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
Fiery-necked nightjar	Heard as the dusk game drive came back to base at Bonamanzi, 4/2.
African black swift	Picked out from other flying swifts on 8 days, seen best at Mont Aux Sources.
White-rumped swift	Almost daily, the commonest swift.
Little swift	Best sightings were at St Lucia 3/2, nesting under the road bridge.
Alpine swift	Drakensbergs, 29/2.
Speckled mousebird	At Mont Aux Sources and in gardens in Wakkerstroom.
Red-faced mousebird	Recorded on 5/2, Mkuzi NP.
Pied kingfisher	Daily at Bonamanzi's lake.
Giant kingfisher	Three days at Bonamanzi's lake.
Malachite kingfisher	From the hide at Wakkerstroom, 7/2.
Woodland kingfisher	One seen well on 5/2, Mkuzi NP.
Brown-hooded kingfisher	Daily at Bonamanzi's lake.
Eurasian bee-eater	On 4 days in the Bonamanzi area.
White-fronted bee-eater	Distant view in the Drakensbergs, 30/1; better ones by the St Lucia boat, 5/2.
Little bee-eater	On fences on the second Bonamanzi game drive, 4/2.
Eurasian roller	Common in the Bonamanzi/Hluhluwe area.
African hoopoe	Seen or heard on 1/2 and 2/2, Bonamanzi.
Common scimitarbill	3 while on game drive in Hluhluwe, 2/1
Crowned hornbill	Bonamanzi, 1/2 and 3/1.
Black-collared barbet	Best views on bird tables at Wakkerstroom.
White-eared barbet	4 days in Bonamanzi area, especially during coffee stop in St Lucia town, 3/2.
Crested barbet	Heard by Geoff, Drakensbergs, 29/1.
Yellow-rumped tinkerbird	St Lucia forest walk, 3/2.
Lesser honeyguide	Bonamanzi lake, 5/2.
Ground woodpecker	Drakensbergs, 28/1.

Bearded woodpecker	On the walk at Bonamanzi, 1/2.
Red-throated wryneck	Seen by early risers at Mont-Aux Sources, 28/1.
Rufous-naped lark	29/1, Drakensbergs, and 1/2.
Barn swallow	Common and seen daily.
White-throated swallow	Seen daily in the Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom.
Wire-tailed swallow	Seen daily at Bonamanzi lake.
Greater striped swallow	Seen daily in the Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom.
Lesser striped swallow	Seen daily at Bonamanzi lake.
South African cliff-swallow	Nesting under bridges at two places in Wakkerstroom.
Rock martin	Drakensbergs on 29/1, also Hluhluwe 2/1.
Banded martin	3/2 St Lucia but best seen above Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
Black saw-wing	At lakeside picnic in Drakensbergs, 28/2.
Fork-tailed drongo	At Mont Aux Sources, 30/1 and daily in Bonamanzi area.
Square-tailed drongo	Recorded on 5/2, Mkuzi NP day.
Cape crow	Drakensbergs on 3 days and above Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
Pied crow	Drakensbergs on 3 days and 2 other days.
White-necked raven	Monks Cowl in the Drakensbergs, 30/1.
Dark-capped bulbul	Seen every day in all areas.
Sombre greenbul	Every day at Bonamanzi, often heard rather than seen.
Yellow-bellied greenbul	Recorded at Bonamanzi on 4/2.
Cape rock-thrush	Drakensbergs 28/1 and 29/1; above Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
Buff-streaked chat	Drakensbergs hillside walk, 28/1.
Familiar chat	At Mont Aux Sources 29/1, 30/1 and 31/1.
Mocking cliff-chat	On the roof at Mont Aux Sources 30/1.
Ant-eating chat	Singles on fenceposts every few yards on a stretch above Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
African stonechat	Three days in Drakensbergs and 3 days at Wakkerstroom.
Chorister robin-chat	Bonamanzi on 1/2.
Red-capped robin-chat	Zinkwazi Beach, 31/1 and recorded again at St Lucia, 3/2.
Cape robin-chat	Seen on 3 days, including in the garden at De Kotzenhof Guest House.
White-browed scrub-robin	Reported on 1/2 and 6/2.
Brown scrub-robin	From a waterhole hide at St Lucia, 5/2.
Lesser swamp-warbler	One Bonamanzi day, 3/2 and daily at Wakkerstroom's wetlands.
Little rush-warbler	Seen by some at Drakensbergs wetlands, 8/2.
Bar-throated apalis	Heard only in Drakensbergs, 30/1.
Cape grassbird	Seen or heard on 3 Drakensbergs days.
Zitting cisticola	Seen or heard on 2 Drakensbergs days.
Grey-backed cisticola	Perched on a wire in the Drakensbergs, 28/1.
Rattling cisticola	On 4 days in Bonamanzi area.
Levaillant's cisticola	2 Drakensbergs days and daily at Wakkerstroom.
Neddicky	Tucked into the back of some scrub by the entrance gate, Drakensbergs, 28/1.
Tawny-flanked prinia	Seen well by the Bonamanzi lake, 3/2.
Spotted flycatcher	1 of these winter visitors from Europe at Hluhluwe, 2/2.
Fiscal flycatcher	Drakensbergs, 28/1.
Cape batis	One recorded on 30/1.
Chin-spot batis	One heard on 1/2.
African paradise-flycatcher	Good views by the lake in the Drakensbergs, 28/1, and again Mkuzi, 5/2
African pied wagtail	Daily in the Bonamanzi area.
Cape wagtail	Almost daily in the Drakensbergs and Wakkerstroom.
African pipit	Game drive at Bonamanzi, 1/2.
Cape (orange-throated) longclaw	On 4 days, notably from a Wakkerstroom hide, 7/2.
Yellow-throated longclaw	One perched for one group on the second Bonamanzi game drive, 4/2.
Common fiscal	Seen most days, especially in the Drakensbergs and around Wakkerstroom.
Red-backed shrike	Quite common in Bonamanzi area, seen on 5 days there.
Brubru	Recorded as heard on 1/2.
Brown-crowned tchagra	Seen well if briefly from the game hide at Mkuzi, 5/2.
Black-crowned tchagra	For one group on the second Bonamanzi game drive, 4/2.
Bokmakerie	In the garden at De Kotzenhof Guest House; heard 30/1 at Mont Aux Sources.
Eurasian starling	Daily at Wakkerstroom, especially on the green.
Indian myna	Daily in the Drakensbergs and in gardens at Wakkerstroom.
Pied starling	3 days in the Drakensbergs; in Wakkerstroom gardens.
Cape glossy starling	Almost daily in the Drakensbergs and Bonamanzi.
Black-bellied starling	Trapped in a building at Bonamanzi, 1/2; 4 other days here and Wakkerstroom.
Violet-backed starling	Female on first game drive at Bonamanzi, 1/2.
Red-winged starling	Daily at Mont Aux Sources and in Wakkerstroom gardens.
Red-billed oxpecker	On mammals in Bonamanzi/Hluhluwe area.
Malachite sunbird	On 28/2 in Drakensbergs; daily at Wetlands Guest House, Wakkerstroom.
Greater double-collared sunbird	In the garden at Mont Aux Sources
Amethyst sunbird	Seen well in Mont Aux Sources and Wetlands Guest House gardens.
Collared sunbird	St Lucia forest walk, 3/2.
Cape white-eye	On 4 days, including Monks Cowl, Drakensbergs and under a dripping tap at Hilltop, Hluhluwe, 2/2.
House sparrow	In towns and at service stations.

Cape sparrow	2 days in the Drakensbergs and 2 days at Wakkerstroom.
Southern grey-headed sparrow	Wakkerstroom bird tables.
Thick-billed weaver	Nesting birds were a great feature of the lake at Bonamanzi.
Spectacled weaver	1 in the Drakensbergs, 28/1.
Village weaver	Recorded 4/2.
Cape weaver	Drakensbergs daily, inc. a tame bird at the lake; Wakkerstroom bird tables.
Southern masked-weaver	Common in the Drakensbergs and at Wakkerstroom bird tables.
Southern brown-throated weaver	For one group on the second Bonamanzi game drive, 4/2.
Yellow (=golden) weaver	Nesting in reeds from the St Lucia boat trip, 3/2.
Red-billed quelea	On 4 days, best seen from small hide in Wakkerstroom.
Red bishop	Common in the Drakensbergs and at Wakkerstroom.
Yellow-crowned widow (yellow bishop)	Wakkerstroom, 8/2.
Yellow-rumped bishop	Recorded 30/1.
Fan-tailed widowbird	Often several in a long grass areas, Drakensbergs and at Wakkerstroom.
Red-collared widowbird	3 days in the Drakensbergs.
Long-tailed widowbird	A great feature of grassy areas, especially at Wakkerstroom.
Jameson's firefinch	After much deliberation, ♀ at the dripping tap at Hilltop, Hluhluwe, 2/2.
Red-billed firefinch	From the 'dragonfly hide' at Mkuzi, 5/2.
Blue waxbill	From the dragonfly and impala hides at Mkuzi, 5/2.
Common waxbill	Recorded on six days, Bonamazi area and Wakkerstroom.
Pin-tailed whydah	Almost daily.
Long-tailed paradise-whydah	Recorded on 3 days in the Drakensbergs.
Black-throated canary	3 by the Bonamanzi lake, 4/2.
Cape canary	Recorded 7/2, Wakkerstroom
White-throated canary	Recorded 28/2, Drakensbergs.

MAMMALS	
Chacma baboon	Drakensbergs, Hluhluwe, Mkuzi
Bat (unidentified)	Every evening at Bonamanzi
Blesbok	Drakensbergs, Wakkerstroom
Cape buffalo	Bonamanzi, Hluhluwe
Bushbuck	Drakensbergs
Rock hyrax	Wakkerstroom
Common duiker	Reported in Mkuzi
Red duiker	Daily Bonamanzi/Hluhluwe area
Elephant	Hluhluwe
Giraffe	Bonamanzi, Hluhluwe, Mkuzi
Hippopotamus	St Lucia, Bonamanzi, Mkuzi
Impala	Daily at Bonamanzi
Black-backed jackal	Golden Gate NP, Drakensbergs
Kudu	Seen by some at Bonamanzi
Mole sp.	An active molehill and foot in a Wakkerstroom garden!
Slender mongoose	Wakkerstroom
Yellow mongoose	Wakkerstroom
Vervet monkey	Bonamanzi area
Nyala	Daily at Bonamanzi
Spotted-necked otter	Wakkerstroom
Mountain reedbuck	Seen by some in Drakensbergs
Grey rhebok	Drakensbergs, Wakkerstroom
White rhinoceros	Hluhluwe
Springbok	Drakensbergs
Red tree squirrel	St Lucia forest walk
Warthog	Daily at Bonamanzi
Waterbuck	Bonamanzi
Black wildebeest	Golden Gate NP, Drakensbergs
Blue wildebeest	Bonamanzi, Hluhluwe
Burchell's zebra	Drakensbergs, Bonamanzi

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS	
Nile crocodile	Bonamanzi
Marsh terrapin	St Lucia
Boomslang	Bonamanzi
Striped skink	Drakensbergs, Bonamanzi
Rock monitor	Bonamanzi
Marbled leaf-toed gecko	Bonamanzi
Drakensberg dwarf chameleon	Drakensbergs
Guttural toad	St Lucia
Grey foam-nest tree frog (nest)	St Lucia



Top – Yellow mongoose (JCo)

Bottom -- Rock monitor (JCr)

BUTTERFLIES

Names and order follow *Field Guide to Butterflies of South Africa* by Steve Woodhall

African monarch (plain tiger)	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>	Seen in all areas
Eyed-bush brown (marsh patroller)	<i>Henotesia perspicua</i>	Bonamanzi
Table mountain beauty	<i>Aeropetes tulbaghia</i>	Garden in Wakkerstroom
Garden acraea	<i>Acraea horta</i>	Common in Drakensbergs
Natal acraea	<i>Acraea natalica</i>	St Lucia
Marsh acraea	<i>Hyalites rahira</i>	Wakkerstroom
Spotted joker	<i>Byblia ilithyia</i>	Wakkerstroom
Common diadem	<i>Hypolimnas misippus</i>	Bonamanzi, Drakensbergs
Variable diadem	<i>Hypolimnas anthedon</i>	Bonamanzi
Gaudy commodore	<i>Precis octavia</i>	Drakensbergs
Marsh commodore	<i>Precis ceryne</i>	Drakensbergs
Yellow pansy	<i>Junonia hierta</i>	Bonamanzi, Wakkerstroom
Blue pansy	<i>Junonia oenone</i>	Bonamanzi
Eyed pansy	<i>Junonia orithya</i>	St Lucia
Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Wakkerstroom
Eastern sorrel copper	<i>Lycaena clarki</i>	Final day at Wakkerstroom wetlands
Common (zebra) blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous</i>	Wakkerstroom
Common meadow blue	<i>Cupidopsis cissus</i>	Drakensbergs
Rayed blue	<i>Actizera lucida</i>	Drakensbergs
Bushveld purple tip	<i>Colotis ione</i>	Bonamanzi
Brown-veined white	<i>Belenois aurota</i>	Drakensbergs
African common white	<i>Belenois creona severina</i>	Bonamanzi
Meadow white	<i>Pontia helice</i>	Drakensbergs
Twin-dotted border	<i>Mylothris rueppellii</i>	Drakensbergs
Common grass yellow	<i>Eurema hecabe</i>	Drakensbergs
Broad-bordered grass yellow	<i>Eurema brigitta</i>	Drakensbergs
Striped policeman	<i>Coeliades forestan</i>	Wakkerstroom garden
Citrus swallowtail	<i>Papilio demodocus</i>	Drakensbergs, Wakkerstroom
Green-banded swallowtail	<i>Papilio nireus</i>	Drakensbergs, Wakkerstroom
Gold-spotted sylph	<i>Metisella metis</i>	No photo, prob. this species, Drakensbergs



Eyed pansy (JCo)



Common dotted border (JCr)



Banded groundling ♂, a common species at Bonamanzi (BL)

DAMSELFLIES

Swamp bluet	D		W
Highland spreadwing	D		
Smoky spreadwing	D		
Goldtail	D		
Tropical bluetail		B	
Masai sprite		B	
Common citril		B	



DRAGONFLIES

Julia skimmer	D	B	W
Two-striped skimmer	D		W
Stream hawk	D		
Jaunty dropwing	D		
Red-veined darter (nomad)	D	B	W
Broad scarlet	D	B	
Blue emperor	D	B	W
Banded groundling		B	
Long skimmer		B	
Eastern blacktail		B	
Lucia widow		B	
Highland dropwing			W
Common thortail			W

D = Drakensbergs **B** = Bonamanzi **W** = Wakkerstroom

Highland dropwing (left, BL) and navy dropwing are not normally separable in the field, but there is a variation in one wing vein described as 'less consistent': that variation showed on a photo, pointing towards an ID of the commoner highland dropwing.

OTHER NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES

Many invertebrates couldn't be identified to species or even genus on account of the number of species – often scores – in South Africa and the limitations of ID help in books and on the internet. These included mantids (praying mantis types); fiddler and freshwater crabs; termites; millipedes in red-and black (probably *Centrobolus* sp.); a thin-tailed scorpion that stung Geoff; grasshoppers that flew with a flash of blue, red or yellow; orange spittle bugs; several moths (and caterpillars) and some of the various dung beetles we saw.

Large copper dung beetle	<i>Kheper nigroaeneus</i>	Hluhluwe
Large brown longhorn beetle	<i>Macrotoma palmata</i>	(motorway stop)
Net-winged beetle	<i>Lycus trabeatus</i>	on buttonweed on the stop on the first day
Emerald fruit chafer	<i>Rhabdotis aulica</i>	on a protea in the Drakensbergs
Heady maiden	<i>Amata cerbera</i>	a syntomid moth, Mont aux Sources
Yellow-sleeved maiden moth	<i>Ceryx anthraciformes</i>	Drakensbergs
African hummingbird hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum trochilus</i>	Wakkerstroom
White-tipped bee fly	<i>Bombomyia discoidea</i>	Wakkerstroom
Mottled veld antlion	<i>Palperes caffer</i>	Bonamanzi
Oblong-leaved katydid	<i>Eurycorpha</i> sp.	– there are at least 10 species in SA – loo stop on day 1
Common garden cricket	<i>Gryllus bimaculatus</i>	Drakensbergs
Common stick grasshopper	<i>Acrida acuminata</i>	Bonamanzi
Elegant grasshopper	<i>Zonocerus elegans</i>	near Mont Aux Sources and elsewhere
Green Milkweed Locust	<i>Phymateus viridipes</i>	Mont Aux Sources
Panther agate snail	<i>Achatina immaculata</i>	St Lucia forest
Giant African millipede	<i>Archispirostreptus gigas</i>	St Lucia forest



Left– Elegant grasshoppers *Zonocerus elegans* on bristle-fruited silkweed, one of the foam grasshoppers that can produce a toxic defensive secretion (CD).

Above – Orange-tipped potter wasp *Antehynchium natalense* (JCr). "Completed nests are provisioned with paralysed beetle larvae, spiders or caterpillars, and a single egg is laid in each", says the Pocket Guide to Insects of South Africa.

Large brown longhorn beetle *Macrotoma palmata* (CD).

Yellow-sleeved maiden moth *Ceryx anthraciformes* (BL).

SELECTED PLANTS AND TREES (by area)

Many plants could only be identified by family or genus. In many cases there are large numbers of similar species and information in field guides is limited. Names generally follow *Field Guide to Wild Flowers of South Africa* by John Manning.

On route to the Drakensbergs

Habenaria epipactidae a white-flowered orchid

Drakensbergs	Drakensbergs
<i>Lobelia vanreenensis</i>	Small St John's wort <i>Hypericum aethiopicum</i>
<i>Liparis bowkeri</i> , a green-flowered orchid	Wild orange begonia <i>Begonia sutherlandii</i>
Silver sugarbush <i>Protea roupelliae</i>	Common grassland monsonia <i>Monsonia attenuata</i>
Drakensberg sugarbush <i>Protea dracomontana</i>	Two-lipped drumsticks <i>Zaluzianskya microsiphon</i> . The similar <i>Z. natalensis</i> is pollinated by hawkmoths with its white flowers opening upwards at night.
Cabbage tree <i>Cassonia paniculata</i>	Drakensberg cliff hesperantha <i>Hesperantha scopulosa</i>
Pom-pom tree <i>Dais cotinifolia</i>	Butterfly monopsis aka butterfly lobelia <i>Monopsis decipiens</i>
Golden-haired morning glory <i>Ipomoea peltita</i>	Ruderals (also in Wakkerstroom area):
<i>Delosperma cooperi</i> like a mesembryanthemum	Fine-leaved verbena <i>Verbena aristigera</i>
Common pineapple flower <i>Eucomis autumnalis</i>	Wild verbena <i>Verbena bonariensis</i>
Clover <i>Trifolium burcellanum</i>	Cosmos – widely naturalised from hay imported for livestock
Apple-blossom orchid <i>Disa versicolor</i>	White melilot <i>Melilotus albus</i>
Orchid <i>Disa cooperi</i>	Bristle-fruited silkweed (old man's balls) <i>Gomphocarpus fruticosus</i>
Pink candle orchid <i>Satyrium neglectum</i>	Thorn-apple <i>Datura stramonium</i>
Orchid <i>Habenaria falcicornis</i> subsp. <i>falcicornis</i>	
Fleshy-leaved pink sorrel <i>Oxalis obliquifolia</i>	

Bonamanzi	Wakkerstroom
Blue water-lily <i>Nymphaea noucai</i>	Scarlet river lily <i>Hesperantha coccinea</i>
White water-lily <i>Nymphaea lotus</i>	Drooping agapanthus <i>Agapanthus inapertus</i>
Dwarf boer-bean <i>Schotia capitata</i>	Common speckled gladiolus <i>Gladiolus ecklonii</i>
Coastal morning glory <i>Ipomea pes-caprae</i>	Red-hot poker <i>Kniphofia</i> sp. <i>porphyrantha?</i>
Epiphytic orchid: Star Orchid <i>Cyrtorchis arcuata</i> subsp. <i>arcuata</i>	Wild lobelia <i>Lobelia erinus</i>
<i>Tradescantia zebrina</i>	<i>Haplocarpha scaposa</i> a yellow composite
Wild foxglove <i>Ceratotheca triloba</i>	Canadian fleabane <i>Conyza canadensis</i> – the same non-native ruderal plant as in the UK, but noted as it is a larval foodplant for marsh acraea butterfly
Dronkbessie <i>Solanum africanum</i>	<i>Nerine platypetala</i>
Fever tree <i>Acacia xanthophloea</i>	<i>Berkheya onopordifolia</i> a spiny, thistle-like daisy
Dune sweet thorn <i>Vachellia kosiensis</i> (was <i>Acacia kosiensis</i>)	Natal lily or parrot gladiolus <i>Gladiolus dalenii</i>
Acorn jackal-berry <i>Diospyros natalensis</i>	
Flat-crowned albizia <i>Albizia adianthifolia</i> (a mimosa)	
<i>Cassia fistula</i> golden shower / Indian laburnum, exotic tree with showy, yellow racemes seen on game drive.	Giant candelabra lily <i>Brunsvigia grandiflora</i>

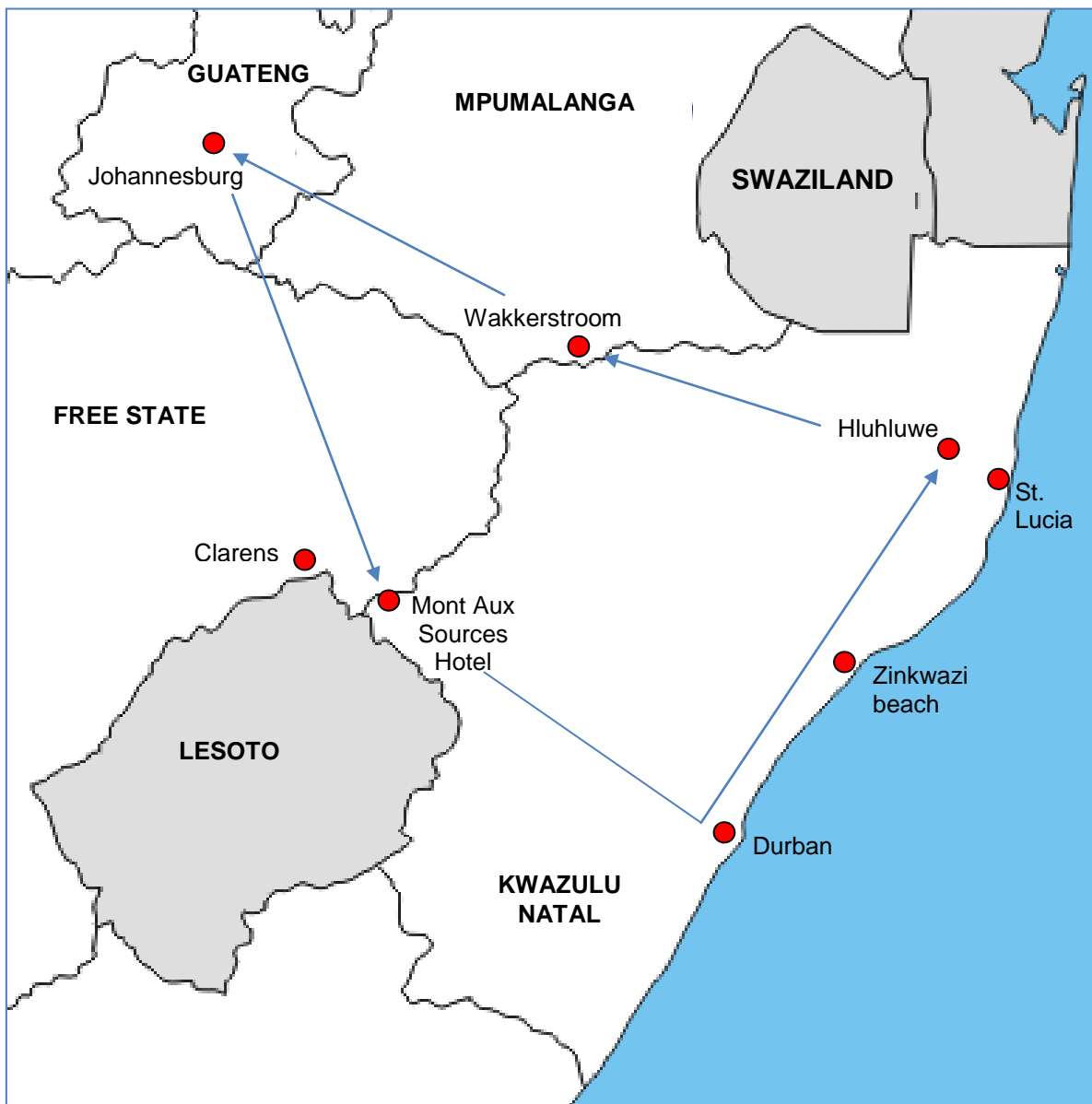
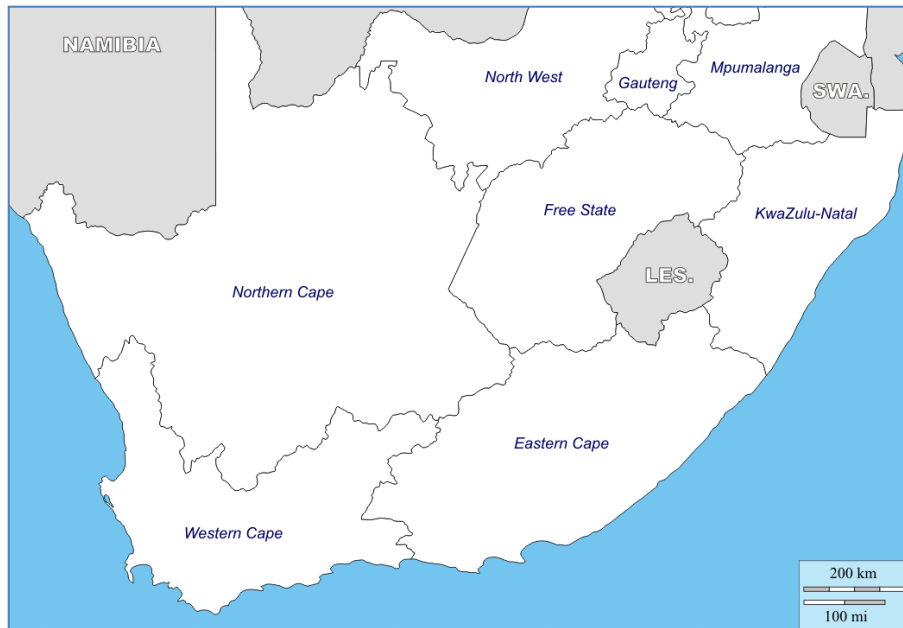


Above: two-lipped drumsticks *Zaluzianskya microsiphon*, at the Golden Gate NP (HC).
Star orchid *Cyrtorchis arcuata* subsp. *arcuata*, an epiphytic orchid,
with a nectaring African common white butterfly *Belenois creona severina*, at Bonamanzi (JD).
Dwarf boer-bean *Schotia capitata* at Bonamanzi (CD).

Below, all at Wakkerstroom:
Nerine platypetala (HC).
Natal lily or parrot gladiolus *Gladiolus dalenii* (CD).
Common speckled gladiolus *Gladiolus ecklonii* (JD).



WHERE WE WENT
(approximately)



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