



Cumberland
NATURE RESERVE



A Birders Guide to Cumberland

VERSION 2



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ABOUT CUMBERLAND

Cumberland Nature Reserve is home to over 280 species of bird and is one of the top birding sites in Pietermaritzburg.

The Reserve is over 500 hectares in size and comprises of a number of different habitats ranging from Moist Savanna to Valley Thickets. A large part of the Reserves boundary is created by the Umgeni River and the Rietspruit Stream cuts through the reserve exiting into the Umgeni in the East. Cumberland is also home to over 30 Species of mammal, including Giraffe, Impala, Zebra and Kudu.

Two waterfalls, a vast network of trails and jaw-dropping scenery add to the Reserves appeal.

To make the most of birding at Cumberland Nature Reserve an overnight stay is recommended.

CUMBERLAND SPECIALS

Olive, Orange-breasted, Grey-headed and Gorgeous Bush-shrike, Green Twinspot, White-starred Robin, Mocking Cliff-chat, Olive and Bearded Woodpecker, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, African Finfoot, Palmnut Vulture, Secretarybird, Peregrine Falcon, Martial Eagle, Cape Batis, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Shelley's Francolin, Cape Longclaw, Narina Trogon, Cape Grassbird, Knysna Turaco, Red-throated Wryneck, Golden-breasted Bunting, Striped Pipit, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Swee Waxbill, African Wood-Owl, Red-billed Oxpecker, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Greater Honeyguide and Bearded Woodpecker.

THE D408

After turning off of Table Mountain Road onto the D408, keep an eye out for Black-shouldered Kite, Jackal Buzzard and Long Crested Eagle which often perch on top of the old telephone poles.

Roadside birding is fairly good in the mornings and evenings, with a host of LBJ's on display.

Helmeted Guineafowl are usually seen toward the end of the dirt road.

THE DAM AND WETLAND

The dam and wetland just before the entrance to the reserve is home to a number of waterfowl. Egyptian and Spurwing Goose, White faced whistling Duck, Yellow-billed Duck, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, Grey Heron, Little Grebe and African Darter are common. Malachite Kingfisher frequent the area where the Reitspruit Stream flows into the dam and from time to time Squacco Heron and African Spoonbill can be seen in the shallows. Scan the reeds for a number of Warbler species such as African Yellow, African Reed, Lesser Swamp, Little Rush as well as visiting migrants such as Marsh and Sedge Warblers.

Below the dam wall is a wetland with extensive reedbeds. During the summer months, Grey Crowned Crane nest in this area. The wetland also supports Red-chested Flufftail and African Rail which can often be heard calling. Thousands of Barn Swallows make use of the reedbeds below the dam to roost at night, during their stay in South Africa. The best time to view this spectacle is in the evenings between 5pm and 7pm, when masses of Swallows return to roost for the night.

FROM THE ENTRANCE

As you enter the Reserve, look out for Broad-tailed Warbler (uncommon) and Croaking Cisticola in the grassland on the left-hand side of the road. Little Bee-eaters are often seen perching on small shrubs scouting the surrounding area for insects. Common Fiscal are generally quite active along this stretch of road. Early on some misty mornings, the call of the Buff-spotted Flufftail is often heard in this area.

In early spring, look out for the Secretarybird which often becomes resident on the reserve after firebreaks and block burning has been carried out. Concentrate on the burnt areas when looking for them.

THE PICNIC SITES

The picnic sites are a fantastic birding location and it is possible to see over 60 species alone in this stretch. The Red throated Wryneck, Golden, Cardinal and Bearded Woodpeckers frequent the Acacias and are most easily located by their calls. Fork-tailed Drongo, Lesser and Greater Honeyguide, Black Cuckooshrike, African Hoopoe, Green Woodhoopoe, Golden-breasted Bunting, Crested Barbet, Groundscraper Thrush, Southern Black Flycatcher, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Cape and Chinspot Batis are all common throughout the picnic area.

The Rietspruit Stream runs parallel to the picnic sites and is a good place to look out for Lazy Cisticola, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Cape Grassbird, Natal Spurfowl and African Firefinch. Burchell's Coucal can be found along the more wooded sections of the stream.

THE CAMPSITE

The Campsite, is undoubtedly one of the most rewarding spots for birding where it is possible to see 80 species in a day without venturing far. As you cross the low-level crossing into the campsite, look out for Black Crakes on either side. Sweet and Grey Waxbill are very common along the section of stream at the campsite. Olive Thrush are often seen behind the ablutions. Most of the birds listed for the picnic sites are present in the campsite too. Please note that the campsite can only be accessed by booking, but birders are welcome to pass through if the site is unoccupied, however please do not make use of the facilities.

TOP OF THE KRANTZ TRAIL

This trail is accessed by taking the trail to the right of the gorge from the last picnic site, where the trails map board is located. The initial part of the trail is summarized in the "along the cliff edges section". This trail ultimately winds its way up to the top of the Krantz. On the way, look out for Trumpeter and Crowned Hornbill in the Figtree behind the Krantz hut as well as below in the gorge. Lanner Falcon and occasionally Verreaux's Eagle are seen overhead. Other species to look out for are Cape Rock-Thrush and Rock Martin.

Occasionally Cape Buntings are seen along the road (not walking trail) from the last picnic site up to the Krantz Hut.

Once at the top of the Krantz, look out for the many African Pipits which love to make use of the many termite mounds as perches, and less common Plain-backed Pipits in the short grassland surrounding the Avocado plants. Cape Longclaw are occasionally seen too.

ALONG THE CLIFF EDGES

There are two hiking trails that run along the edge of the gorge, one on either side, beginning at the last picnic site at the Trails Map Board. Species to look out for along the cliff tops are Mocking Cliff Chat, Cape Rock-Thrush, Black Saw-wing, Lesser-striped Swallow, Little Swift, Rufous-naped Lark, Striped Pipit, African Stonechat as well as Cape and Yellow-throated Longclaw, the latter being the more common of the two.

Down below, look out for Trumpeter and Crowned Hornbill flying between the tree canopies as well as African Olive Pigeons.

Stop from time to time to scan the cliff faces, African Harrier Hawk, Peregrine Falcon and Southern Bald Ibis roost and/or nest on the many rock ledges. An early morning or late afternoon stop along these two trails will provide an opportunity to listen to the overwhelming number of different bird calls echoing through the gorge.

LOLOBAZO TRAIL – to bottom of the big waterfall

The Lolombazo trail is more of a strenuous hike and requires a few hours to complete. It is recommended to spend time sitting quietly along the trail to allow the birds to become comfortable with your presence.

African Finfoot are seen from time to time on the flat-water section of the Umgeni River at the bottom of the Lolombazo trail (also visible from “The Point” view site, along the cliff edge trail). White-breasted Cormorant, African Black Duck, Goliath Heron and African Darter also frequent this stretch of river. Keep an eye out for Red-fronted Tinkerbird before you enter the forested gorge.

Terrestrial Brownbul are a guarantee as you head up the trail to the bottom of the big waterfall and will be heard chattering in the undergrowth as they scratch through the decomposing leaves in search of insects.

Olive Woodpecker, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Green Twinspot, Green-backed Cameroptera, Sombre Greenbul, Bar-throated Apalis and Black-backed Puffback are species to look out for as you enter and travel up the gorge heading to the bottom of the big waterfall. Olive Bush-Shrike can also be seen along this section of trail but are more easily heard than seen. One of the specials to listen out for along this trail are the secretive White-starred Robins.

Red-capped Robin-chat and Knysna Turaco are commonly seen along this trail. Narina Trogons are often heard calling but can be challenging to locate.

THE HORSESHOE WALK, ROAD & HORSESHOE COTTAGE

An amble down the Horseshoe Walk or the Horseshoe road will provide good opportunities to see Little Bee-eater, Red-faced Mousebird, Acacia Pied Barbet, Black-crowned Tchagra, Greater Honeyguide, Common Scimitarbill, Long-billed Crombec and Neddicky.

Between the months of October and April, look out for the Western Osprey in this area, usually seen perching at the top of dead trees or flying overhead.

As you near the end of the horseshoe road, listen out for the calls of the Orange-breasted, Olive and Grey-headed Bush-shrikes. Red-capped Robin Chat, White browed Robin-Chat and Southern Boubou are also common.

Giant Kingfishers are common along the stretch of the Umgeni River on the Horseshoe side of the Reserve, listen out for their distinct calls. African Black Duck are sometimes present on the flat-water sections of the river. Village Weavers nest in the reeds on the banks of the river, where Grey Waxbill, Lazy and Levillant's Cisticola, Little Rush Warbler and Common Waxbill are also found. African Pied and Mountain Wagtail can usually be seen flying up and down the river.

African Fish Eagle are almost always present along the stretch of the Umgeni directly below the horseshoe cottage providing fantastic photographic opportunities as they land, perch and take off from the dead gum trees along the river banks.

The Palmnut Vultures are often seen overhead on this side of the Reserve. When at the horseshoe cottage, take the road/path that heads away from the cottage to the left. Keep an eye out for Palmnut Vulture on the rocky hillside across the Umgeni river. They often perch on top of trees catching the first rays of sun in the early morning.

Purple-banded Sunbird have recently been recorded around the Cottage.

USHELENI TRAIL

Check the path ahead for White-browed Scrub-Robin in search of insects in the short grass path. Common birds along this trail are the very vocal Southern Boubou, Collared Sunbird whose call is very similar to that of the Cape White-eye, Southern Black Tit, Olive Sunbird, Chinspot and Cape Batis, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Olive Thrush, African Firefinch and Bar-throated Apalis.

GENERAL BIRDING

In winter keep an eye on the flowering aloes for Sunbirds such as the Southern Double-collared, White-bellied and Amethyst. Many other species of bird visit the aloes in winter, including Dark-capped Bulbul, Yellow-fronted Canary, as well as Spectacled and Village Weaver.

In Spring and Summer, Black, Diederik, Klaas's and Red-chested Cuckoo can be heard calling, especially in the early morning and evening. The Red-chested Cuckoos iconic call can often be heard throughout the night during the breeding season.

During the heat of the day, the picnic sites, campsite and top of the big waterfall are the most productive spots for birding.

Scan the bodies of the Impala and Giraffe for the resident Red-billed Oxpeckers.

RAPTORS

Other raptors to look out for on the Reserve are Marital Eagle, African Crowned Eagle, Brown Snake Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, Jackal and Common Buzzard, African Goshawk, Little Sparrowhawk, Black Kite (uncommon) as well as Yellow-billed Kite during the spring and summer months.

NOCTURNAL BIRDING

Nocturnal birding requires a stay over in one of the Reserves self-catering accommodations. Horseshoe Cottage and the Campsite are the most fruitful places for Owls. The screeching call of the Barn Owl is often heard overhead at the campsite. The African Wood-Owl is often heard at both the Horseshoe Cottage, Zebra Cottage and Campsite as is the sombre hooting of the Spotted Eagle Owl. Fiery-necked Nightjar are common throughout the Reserve and are most commonly seen along the roads and wider paths, soaking up the last bit of the days' warmth from the ground. Freckled Nightjar can also be heard from time to time. Southern White-faced Owl has been recorded on the reserve recently.

CONTACT DETAILS

Bookings and general enquiries: info@cumberlandreserve.co.za

Contact Number: 0823765600

An up to date copy of the Reserves bird list can be requested by email.