



BIRDING ROUTES



Garden Route, South Africa

GEORGE
WILDERNESS
UNIONDALE



Feathers, forests and footpaths:

George's best birding routes

If you are up at dawn, then the forests, fynbos and karoo of the George municipal area come alive with birdsong - a vibrant invitation to explore one of South Africa's most rewarding birding regions. From a lush botanical garden to remote mountain passes, the Garden Route is a birdwatcher's paradise, offering a remarkable diversity of habitats and over 300 species of birds. Whether you're a seasoned birder or a curious nature enthusiast, the region's avitourism offerings will leave you spellbound.

Prime birding hotspots

George and surrounds

Start your journey in the heart of George at the Garden Route Botanical Garden. This urban oasis introduces you to forest-edge birding at its best - keep an eye out **Forest Buzzard** overhead and for flocks of **Sweet Waxbills** at the forest edge, or head to the wetland and relax in the bird hide for views of **Black Crake** walking on the lily pads, a **Malachite Kingfisher** perched ready to strike, reed warblers flitting through the reedbeds, and a chattering colony of **Cape Weavers**.

Just east of town, the Groeneweide Forest Trails wind into an extensive area of indigenous Afrotropical forest, where the elusive **Scaly-throated Honeyguide** may be heard before it is seen. Here too, you might glimpse the rare **African Cuckoo Hawk** or see the crimson-red flash of a **Knysna Turaco's** wings as it moves up in the canopy or even catch a fleeting look at the shy but exquisite **Narina Trogon**.

To the west of George, the rolling farmlands of the Geelhoutboom area offer expansive vistas and excellent birding. The lush pastures attract **Cape Longclaw** and **Black-winged Lapwing**, while the abundance of rodents draws **Black-winged Kite** and **Long-crested Eagle**.

North of George, the Outeniqua Mountains rise steeply, and several hiking trails start from a small parking area at Sputnik, near the summit of the pass. Here, you are surrounded by pristine fynbos and its avian inhabitants. Flowering Proteas and Ericas attract **Cape Sugarbird** and **Orange-breasted**

Sunbird. Listen for the song of the **Cape Grassbird** ringing down the valleys.

Once over the pass, look out for **Cape Rock Thrush** as you drive through Paardepoort and link up with the Heimersrivier Road, which takes you deeper into the karoo veld. A favourite among local birders, this quiet country route frequently produces **Lanner Falcon**, **Black Harrier**, and the occasional **Booted Eagle** patrolling the skies. The arid farmland hosts a host of LBJs, including the melodious **Large-billed Lark** and **Grey-backed Sparrowlark**, while patches of riparian woodland produce Pirit Batis, Long-billed Crombec and Yellow-bellied Eremomela.

Wilderness and Hoekwil

Further east, the charming villages of Wilderness and Hoekwil are surrounded by some of the finest forest, fynbos and wetland birding in the region. The Half-collared Kingfisher and Brown-hooded Kingfisher Trails trace their way along lush, forested valleys where **Knysna Warbler**, **White-starred Robin** and **Green-backed Camaroptera** call from the dense foliage.





The Woodville Big Tree Trail, which starts at an 800-year-old Outeniqua Yellowwood, also hosts a variety of forest specialists including both **Olive** and **Knysna Woodpecker** as well as noisy flocks of **Green Wood Hoopoes**.

A drive up the Bergplaas Road offers both forest and fynbos habitats, rewarding birders with sightings of **Grey Cuckooshrike** and, if you are lucky, the elusive **Victorin's Warbler**. Above Langvlei, the elevated plateau hosts a rich assemblage of open-country species.

Secretarybirds stalk through the fields, and **Denham's Bustards** may be seen striding across the grasslands.

Most notably, this area is anchored by the Wilderness Lakes system. Two bird hides offer intimate views into the world of wetland birds. The Malachite Hide, perched over Langvlei, offers a peaceful vantage point for spotting **Great Crested Grebe**, **Black-necked Grebe**, and various species of duck. On the Touw River near the Fairy Knowe Hotel, the Gallinule Hide is a tranquil retreat where you may encounter **Half-collared Kingfisher**, and amongst the reeds - **Purple Heron** and

Uniondale and the mountain passes

To the north-east, Uniondale - also part of the George Local Municipality—acts as a gateway to the vast, semi-arid mountain landscapes of the Kammanassie Mountain range. The Kammanassie Birding Loop leads you through dramatic scenery and delivers equally memorable birds, from **Verreaux's Eagles** and **Fairy Flycatchers** to the elusive **Layard's Tit-Babbler** and **Lark-like Bunting**.

South of Uniondale, the Prince Alfred's Pass links the fynbos - covered slopes with lush forest valleys, delivering yet more endemic specials. **Cape Siskin** and **Protea Canary** play among the proteas, while **African Olive Pigeon** and **Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler** haunt the shadier gullies and forest corridors.

Avian highlights: South African endemics and regional specials

The region is home to several South African endemics and near-endemics, making it a must-visit for both local and international birders. Notable birding highlights include:

- **Knysna Warbler, Knysna Woodpecker** and **Knysna Turaco** - forest specialists.
- **Protea Canary, Cape Siskin, Cape Sugarbird** and **Orange-breasted Sunbird** - iconic fynbos endemics associated with protea-rich habitats.
- **Victorin's Warbler** - a shy, skulking species best detected by its distinctive call.
- **Fairy Flycatcher, Pririt Batis** and **Layard's Warbler** typify the arid habitats.
- **Half-collared Kingfisher, White-starred Robin** and **Narina Trogon** - rare and rewarding sightings for the dedicated birder.

A birder's dream destination

With its mosaic of habitats - ranging from ancient forests and coastal lakes to windswept mountain ridges and arid Karoo plains - the George Local Municipality is unmatched in its avian diversity. Whether you're ticking lifers off your list or simply enjoying the symphony of birdsong at dawn, George, Wilderness, Hoekwil, and Uniondale welcome you with wings wide open. Come for the birds. Stay for the wonder.

Special thanks to local birding specialist, **Christiaan Viljoen**, as well as **John Kinghorn**, from **BirdLife South Africa**.

Birdlife South Africa

