

SUMMARY: BIRDS OF RED STONE HILLS & ENVIRONS

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Red Stone Hills and adjacent properties are situated on the semi-arid plains of the Little Karoo. The most important habitats for birds include (a) the open karroid veld dominated by stunted trees, mainly Gwarrie *Euclea undulata*, and low succulent shrubs; (b) the dense thickets on the hillsides where the rainfall is higher; (c) the fynbos which occurs on the summits of the hills and where the Waboom *Protea nitida* dominates; (d) several permanent streams, lined by both indigenous and alien vegetation, which transverse the area providing a habitat for birds that do not normally occur in this dry environment; (e) man-made habitats such as the lucerne fields and poplar woods which support birds that would not otherwise enter the Little Karoo.

Birders from abroad visiting the dry western side of South Africa for the first time would find a visit to the low scrub productive. Here one can find **Southern Black Korhaan, Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk, Namaqua Dove, Karoo Lark, Large-billed Lark, Grey Tit, Cape Penduline-Tit, Karoo Scrub-Robin, Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Karoo Eremomela and Rufous-eared Warbler** amongst others. The common cisticola in this habitat is the **Grey-backed Cisticola** whereas the **Neddicky** is more often seen in taller vegetation.

The Acacia thickets support **Acacia Pied Barbet, Pririt Batis and Namaqua Warbler** while the denser and taller vegetation holds **Speckled, White-backed and Red-faced Mousebirds, Cardinal Woodpecker, Cape Bulbul, Layard's Tit-Babbler** (on hillsides), **Bar-throated Apalis, Fairy Flycatcher, Southern Tchagra, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Yellow Canary, White-throated Canary and Streaky-headed Seed-eater**. Birds more often associated with wetter areas but regularly seen here include **Sombre Greenbul, Cape Batis, Southern Boubou and Cape Siskin**.

Raptors present include **Booted Eagle** (at least five breeding pairs), **African Harrier-Hawk, Black Sparrowhawk** (two breeding pairs), **African Goshawk, Rock Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon and Lanner Falcon**. **Gabar Goshawk, Little Sparrowhawk and European Honey-Buzzard** are occasional visitors.

The riverine thickets and poplar woods support **African Olive-Pigeon, Tambourine Dove, Klaas's Cuckoo, Lesser Honeyguide, Karoo / Olive Thrush** (possibly hybrids), **African Dusky Flycatcher, African Paradise-Flycatcher, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird and Swee Waxbill**.

Night birds include **Barn Owl, Cape Eagle-Owl, Spotted Eagle-Owl, Fiery-necked Nightjar and Rufous-cheeked Nightjar**. Due to the lack of large dams, water birds are poorly represented. **African Black Duck** occur on the streams, **South African Shelduck** are occasionally seen overflying and **Spur-winged Goose** is a visitor to the lucerne fields. **African Fish Eagle, African Spoonbill and Red-billed Teal** are sometimes present on the small dams.

Birds that are most readily seen around the farm-yards include **White-rumped Swift, Greater Striped Swallow, White-throated Swallow, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Fork-tailed Drongo and Pin-tailed Whydah** which parasitises the **Common Waxbill**. Birders from Europe will be familiar with **Grey Heron, White Stork, Black Stork** (breeds), **Common Quail, Alpine Swift, European Bee-eater, Common House-Martin, Red-backed Shrike, Spotted Flycatcher, Garden Warbler** (rare), **Willow Warbler**, and **Zitting Cisticola** (Fan-tailed Warbler).

The best time for birders to visit the area is after substantial rains in spring and early summer. No bird check-list is ever complete and the compilers would appreciate receiving information on additional species that have been positively identified.

Please report additional species to:

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A complete list of birds of the area is available from Petro at Red Stone Hills farm.

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