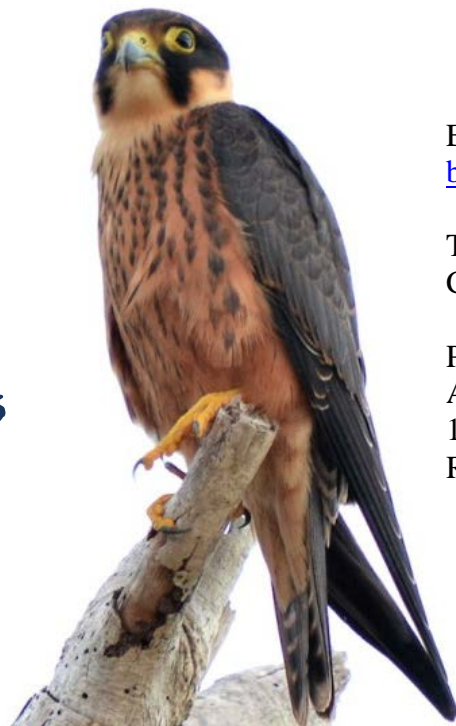


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Image: © Per Holmen

PIENAARS RIVER/MKHOMBO DAM

4 DAY TRIP 24 to 27 March 2012

THE DESTINATIONS

Pienaar's River/Zaagkuilfrift Road/Kgomo Kgomo floodplain

The 20km stretch of gravel road connecting the town of Pienaars River to the village at Kgomo-Kgomo has earned a name for itself amongst local birders as one of the area's best birding spots and, in the latter part of summer, a warbler stakeout of note.

A wide range of raptors, bee-eaters, cuckoos, kingfishers, shrikes, warblers and seed-eaters can be found during the summer months. This is undoubtedly the best site for the much sought after and elusive **River Warbler** in late summer when there has been sufficient rainfall.

The habitat of predominantly Acacia thornveld offers a variety of bushveld species and dry biome specials, notably Crimson-breasted Shrike, Southern Pied Babbler, Acacia Pied Barbet, Ashy Tit, Great Sparrow, Marico Flycatcher, Kalahari Scrub-Robin, Burchell's Starling, Scaly-feathered Finch, Southern Carmine and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Violet-eared and Black-faced Waxbills, and a fascinating variety of warblers such as Common Whitethroat, Thrush Nightingale (rare), Olive-

tree Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Marsh Warbler, River Warbler and Barred



Wren-Warbler Owls are well represented and a night drive could produce Verreaux's and Spotted Eagle-Owls, Barn Owl and Southern White-faced Scops-Owl. Marsh Owls are fairly common in the grassland areas whilst African Grass-Owl is occasionally encountered. Bronze-winged Courser occurs regularly.

The Zaagkuil drift road runs along the Pienaars River and although the river is mostly out

of view, the good riparian habitat serves as the keystone for much of the birding. Along the eastern stretches of the road more open acacia savanna dominates while the confluence of the Apies, Pienaars and Moretele Rivers at Kgomo-Kgomo provides a floodplain with well grazed edges and flooded swampland in the wet season.

The floodplain at Kgomo-Kgomo attracts good waterbirds and in wet years Lesser Moorhen, Allen's Gallinule and Greater Painted-snipe can be found.

Yellow-billed Stork, Great Egret, African Spoonbill, Squacco Heron and African Jacana are common while the power lines have scores of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater in summer. Dwarf Bittern and Harlequin Quail are also encountered when conditions are right.

The floodplain has delivered some exciting rallids in the past, notably African, Baillon's, and Striped Crake. This area is also good for the sought-after Cuckoo Finch, particularly in summer.

Corn Crake occurs each year and with luck may be seen along the roadside early in the morning. Species commonly found on the surrounding plains include Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Capped Wheatear, Red-capped Lark and Kittlitz's Plover. Less predictably but also reasonably regular is Temminck's Courser, whilst Dusky Lark and Caspian Plover are occasionally present.

Mkhombo Dam Nature Reserve

Mkhombo Dam is probably the most productive waterfowl and wader location within easy reach of Johannesburg. It is situated in the very north- western corner of Mapumalanga on the Elands River, east of Rust de Winter Dam

When water levels are high the dam offers reedbeds, inundated grassland and a network of oxbow lakes and shallow pools

The dam is surrounded by large expanses of mixed woodland and is an excellent location for migrant warblers in late summer

Mkhombo Dam has produced excellent rarities over the past couple of years, notably Pectoral Sandpiper and Spotted and Striped Crake.

We will be spending three nights in comfortable farmhouse style accommodation on the charming Wolfhuiskraal Farm

