Birds of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve

The Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve covers more than 100 000 hectares of both marine and terrestrial ecosystems and extends from below sea level to the mountain tops, the highest point being the Kogelberg Peak (1268 metres). Vast tracts of fynbos, major wetland systems, five towns and various settlements, agricultural lands, commercial forestry plantations and recreational resorts lie within the reserve. The Kogelberg Mountains and adjoining coastal lowlands are regarded as the heart of the Cape Floral Kingdom, home to 1650 plant species. These mountains, which make up most of the core of the reserve, cover some 30 000 hectares. To the east and north lie the Houwhoek and Groenlandberg mountain core zones. Together they encircle the largest town in the reserve, Grabouw, and the orchards and vineyards of the Elgin basin. [The above information was extracted from *Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve: Heart of* *the Cape Flora* by Amida & Mark Johns. Struik, 2001]

The reserve supports all seven bird species that are endemic to fynbos: Hottentot Buttonquail, Cape Rockjumper, Victorin’s Warbler, Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape Siskin and Protea Seedeater. Two of these, the Cape Sugarbird and the Protea Seedeater require mature fynbos for breeding, and have greatly declined in numbers in recent years possibly as a result of the veld being too frequently burnt.

Several species, while not exclusively confined to fynbos, are most often seen in mountainous parts of the reserve. These include Verreauxs’ Eagle, Grey-winged Francolin, Ground Woodpecker, Cape Grassbird, Cape Rock-Thrush, Sentinel Rock-Thrush, Neddicky and Cape Bunting.

The reed-beds on the fringes of the estuaries support an interesting array of birds such as Little Bittern, Purple Heron, African Marsh-Harrier, African Rail, Baillon’s Crake, Black Crake, African Purple Swamphen, Greater Painted-Snipe, African Snipe, African Reed-Warbler, Lesser Swamp-Warbler and Little Rush-Warbler. The mud-flats of the estuaries attract migratory waders including Terek Sandpiper, Common Greenshank and Common Whimbrel. The open water sometimes holds Great White Pelican, Greater Flamingo, Lesser Flamingo, African Spoonbill, White-backed Duck, Red-billed Teal and Spur-winged Goose amongst many others.

A fascinating aspect of the bird-life is the presence of three species of flufftails: Red-chested, Buff-spotted and Striped. They all frequent dense, almost impenetrable, vegetation and seldom venture into the open thus making their status difficult to assess. The Buff-spotted Flufftail occurs in at least four homestead gardens in the Elgin basin, its distinctive call drawing attention to its presence.

Raptors are well-represented with no less than 22 species having been recorded. A pair of Martial Eagles breeds in the reserve and occasionally wanders over the villages of Grabouw and Gordon’s Bay. African Fish-Eagles breed both on the coast and in the Elgin basin. Black Harriers are another threatened species, their numbers fluctuating from year to year. Forest Buzzards are common breeding residents concentrated in the alien pine plantations around Grabouw. Other raptors of this artificial habitat include Rufous-chested Sparrowhawks and Black Sparrowhawks. Yellow-billed Kites breed in the Grabouw area and their numbers may be augmented in summer by non-breeding migrants but this is yet to be established. Peregrine and Lanner Falcons and Rock Kestrels breed on the coastal cliffs.

The Cape Eagle-Owl, a difficult bird to find, has most often been recorded as a road-casualty along the main coastal road (Route 44) between Gordon’s Bay and Kleinmond. Pairs have bred successfully at Cape Hangklip and Rooiels and it is almost certainly more common than the records suggest. The African Wood-Owl is known from alien woodland near Grabouw but, as with all night birds, it is probably under-recorded. The Fiery-necked Nightjar, the common nightjar of the reserve, would also be largely overlooked but for its very distinctive and far-carrying call. There are single records, both road-casualties, of European Nightjar and Freckled Nightjar, scarce birds in the Western Cape.

A vulnerable species is the African Black Oystercatcher which breeds in summer on the beaches where it is subjected to much human interference. African Penguins, their numbers decimated in recent times by oil-spills, breed at Stony Point, one of only two known breeding colonies on the mainland. Bank Cormorants have decreased in numbers and must also be considered to be vulnerable.

Summer visitors from the Northern Hemisphere include White Stork, Osprey, European Honey-Buzzard, Common Swift, Common House-Martin, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Marsh Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Willow Warbler and, rarely, the Garden Warbler. The Icterine Warbler has been reported in the past.

Species that have greatly increased in numbers in recent years include Fork-tailed Drongo and Southern Grey-headed Sparrow. The Red-billed Quelea, recorded only on a few occasions in the reserve so far, is showing signs of invading the Western Cape and more records from the reserve can be expected. Another recent arrival is the Tambourine Dove and it will be interesting to see if this species establishes a breeding population within the reserve. There are several sightings of African Grass-Owl from near the Bot River estuary and perhaps this unobtrusive species is more common than these records suggest.

The removal of apple orchards on some farms in the Elgin basin has resulted in more grassy fields. Several species, formerly uncommon in the area, have moved into this more open habitat. These include Common Quail, African Pipit and Zitting Cisticola.

There are a number of species that just manage to survive in the reserve although there is little suitable habitat for them. Cape Clapper Larks (race *marjoriae –* sometimes called the Agulhas Clapper Lark) are found at a few localities but are difficult to locate. Red-capped Larks have only been recorded near the Rooisand hide and come and go in an inexplicable way. Long-billed Crombecs occur in the coastal strip between Kleinmond and Bot River. The Karoo Scrub-Robin just enters the reserve on the northern slopes of Sir Lowry’s Pass and near Fisherhaven. Yellow Canaries used to occur regularly in Rooiels and Betty’s Bay but housing developments have all but destroyed the last vestiges of their favoured habitat and they are now largely confined to the fringes of the Bot River estuary. There is a small breeding colony of Horus Swifts near the Bot River.

Species that have been reported from just outside the reserve and that are likely to be added to the list include Gabar Goshawk and Lemon Dove.

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