

Dunblane Birding Brochure

Dunblane is a massive estate, comprising a total of 3 000 hectare of pristine ecology in the Northern Drakensberg Mountains, with 15km of 2 000 foot high escarpment face running through its centre. The Dunblane Golf, Trout and Berg Estate, widely marketed as South Africa's Greatest Lifestyle Development, is currently being developed in the basin. However, the majority of the Estate is situated on the Drakensberg escarpment or on top of the berg plateau, which is totally undeveloped and which is home to 13km of trout streams and endless waterfalls and views over Northern Natal. Dunblane currently boasts a species list of 266 birds.

Birding here on the Estate is made extremely interesting due to it's diverse habitats. From the top of the Estate with it's *Themeda* Grasslands and numerous wetlands, to the slopes and valleys with numerous Yellowwood Forests and then down into the valley bottoms with Moist Tall Grassveld, many habitats are encountered and makes for both excellent birding whilst in an incredibly relaxing atmosphere. Whilst birding one can also enjoy the amazing array of flowers to be found on the Estate.

Grassland birding is particularly interesting here as it is home to many of our LBJ'S. Wingsnapping Cisticola, Cloud Cisticola and Palecrowned Cisticola abound here and Yellow-breasted Pipits, Eastern Long-billed Larks, Rudd's Lark and Bothas Lark are present. Both Sentinel and Cape Rock Thrush and Buffstreaked Chat are also to be seen on the rocky slopes. For a period of two days in November 2008 two Wattled Crane were sighted together with four Blue Crane and it is presumed that these birds are local and make use of our adjoining Freestate Grasslands as well. There is an old known nest site in the vicinity. The slopes are home to Waling Cisticola and Grassbirds; the upper rocky slopes have yielded good sightings of Ground Woodpecker. Whilst walking in the grasslands one often flushes both Common and Harlequin Quail as well as Short-tailed Pipit. Bald Ibis are commonly seen and nest at Dunblanes waterfalls.

The Forests are particularly rewarding during Summer for both the Barratt's and Yellowthroated Woodland Warblers as well as the Bush Blackcap which is most vociferous and easy to see in summer. African Olive Pigeon, Olive Thrush, Olive Bushshrike and Olive Woodpecker are our four resident 'olives' in these forest habitats. Cape Batis, Drakensberg Prinias and Lazy Cisticolas are also to be seen in the forest and on the fringes. These forests are also unique in that they carry populations of our rare Transvaal Dwarf Chaemeleon and there is research currently been undertaken on these reptiles.

The 'bottoms' is where one finds the Yellow Bishop (most visible in summer due to it's dress code) and African Black Duck. Orangebreasted Waxbill can be seen along the water courses favoring the areas in and around the reed beds. There are two dams on the Estate and although still relatively new at this stage are starting to yield quite a few waterbirds.

There is also a 24 Kilometer Hiking Trail for birders, who like to walk. The hiking trail is a 2 day trail, in a circular route, with a 12km walk each day. It ascends the 2 000 foot high Drakensberg escarpment on the first day, and descends it on the final day, both by totally different routes. The

majesty and beauty of this walk, has had it acclaimed in the past, as being on a par with the very best in South Africa. From the cottages the trail can be treated as a one day trail by walking short distances in any direction

Accommodation at Dunblane comprises of three age old sandstone cottages (pre-Anglo-Boer War), which are electrified, with hot running water and flush toilets. They have 2 dormitories with 15 beds and mattresses as well as an ablution, kitchen and open dining room cottage, with chairs, tables and cutlery. Just bring your food, drink, toiletries, clothes (including hat, binoculars, warm tracksuit) and sleeping bag, etc. On the way to the cottages, you will pass numerous rock pools, where you may relax and swim. The environment is totally safe.

To access the Ingogo Cottages on Dunblane Estate one requires a 4X4 otherwise a lift and drop off can be arranged with Tony Roberts, an accredited Bird Guide, prior to your arrival.

Alternatively, Grey Goose Farm Lodge (Dunblanes sister Lodge and a registered Birder Friendly Lodge), can be used as a springboard to accessing birding at Dunblane or the surrounding areas. Top class birding spots such as Memel Vlei, Wakkerstroom, Ncandu Forest, Newcastle Sewage Works, Tweediedale Bird Sanctuary, Balele Conservancy and Chelmsford Dam are all within easy reach for a good days birding.

To access Dunblane Estate from Gauteng, one turns onto the R103-Vrede route, just before the Villiers tollgate on the N3 to Durban. Follow the R103 for ±64km and turn left to Vrede (notice our Dunblane billboard on the far left hand corner before you turn). Just before Vrede turn right to Memel (55 Kilometers), which is bypassed towards Newcastle. 4X4 Vehicles from the Freestate and Gauteng, would turn off on the S781, just after Memel (to the right) and travel this very scenic 4x4 route around Kranskop Mountain to the cottages. (See GPS Map)

4X4 Vehicles from Durban will take the N3 towards Gauteng and turn off through Ladysmith, to travel on the N11 to Newcastle. Enter the first entrance into Newcastle, drive through the CBD and over the Ncandu River Bridge; turn left at the very next robot, which is the R34 to Memel. A McDonalds outlet is on the left. The D96 to Dunblane Estate, is the gravel road on the left. Follow this road for 18km. Do not turn off the main road, it is well sign posted. The road is a reasonable dirt road but saloon cars will need to travel slowly as it is corrugated in places.

Grey Goose Farm Lodge is 4 Kilometers further along the R34 to Memel from the Newcastle approach. From Gauteng Grey Goose farm Lodge is to your right 4 Kilometers from Newcastle. Either way, watch for the game fence and entrance to Grey Goose.

Newcastle also has a tarred 1200 meter airstrip with lighting for those birders who wish to fly in. Arrangements can be made with Grey Goose Farm Lodge or with Tony Roberts for airport transfers to and from the airfield. The GPS co-ordinates for the airfield are: S 24° 46' .02; E 029° 58' .06

The following Tariffs apply:

- R100.00 deposit payable upfront, refundable, to cover damages or loss of cottage property

- (payable at Grey Goose).
- R100.00 per 4x4 vehicle (own)
 - R50.00 per person hiking trail.
 - R100.00 per person for the Academy Accommodation at Grey Goose Farm Lodge
 - R350.00 per person single; R250.00 per person sharing B & B at Grey Goose Farm Lodge
 - R150.00 per person per night (Ingogo Cottage)
 - R150.00 for guide/cleaner per day and to be supplied food (Ingogo Cottage)
 - R90.00 per person camping.
 - R100.00 Rod and reel hire fee for fishing.
 - R100.00 per person Public Access fee for fishing.
 - R100.00 Half day per person; R150.00 full day per person Guide and tuition fees for fishing.
 - R 6.00 per fly
 - Fuel/Gas / Wood / Electricity/Paraffin included

Book and pay at Grey Goose Farm Lodge – Pieter Erasmus (Phone +2734 3153221)

The following are available on the website, and can be downloaded from www.dunblaneestate.co.za.

1. Lists of the fauna and flora
2. A GPS 4x4 Trail Route map (To come)
3. A GPS Hiking Route Map
4. Directions to Grey Goose Farm Lodge
5. Directions to Dunblane Site Office
6. Dunblane Holiday Camp Application Form
7. Indemnity Form

A caretaker is essential, (Johannes), although he need not accompany you on the trails. He will also open up the Ingogo River Cottages for you, fill the water tank, boil the water and start the fires, as well as set out the tables, chairs, and clean up. Please check the “asset list” on arrival to ensure that it is correct. You will be held responsible for items subsequently missing.

Please pay him at least R150.00 per day (i.e. R300 for two days) plus give him food for the duration of your stay. If he has done a good job please pay him more than this.

Optional extras:

Book personally with Grey Goose Farm Lodge. Telephone number +2734 3153221

Tony Roberts was a member of the Natal Parks Board for over 22 years, and is an acclaimed authority on all birds, flowers, trees, grasses and mammals of the Drakensberg. His contact details are +2782 8217779 and Email tony@bushbaby.co.za

1. Bush walk with Tony Roberts, R75.00 per person for 5km bush walk (minimum of R300.00) - proceeds from the Cottages.
2. R500.00 for a one hour slide show at the cottages (flora and fauna of Dunblane Estate).
3. Game drive from Grey Goose Farm Lodge either on the Friday afternoon or on the Saturday or Sunday morning, R75.00 per person for a 2 hour game drive, (minimum of R300.00). The Grey Goose Farm Lodge has over 600 head of game, and Tony will enthral you with his knowledge of the game and veld.
4. Flyfishing with Stuart Slabbert at R100.00 per person per day on Dunblane Estate. Trout or bass fishing.
5. Dunblane Golf Estate. The first 9 holes of the 18 Hole Championship Peter Matkovich Golf Course. Contact Marx Bach on 079 506 7437, if you want to play.
6. 4x4 Route up Donkey's Pass and around the plateau including the 4x4 graded course (contact Tony Roberts).

Ensure that your "Indemnity Form" is completed (all hikers – names, identity numbers and signatures) prior to this hike. This is your responsibility. Collect at Grey Goose or online.

We cannot be held liable for any theft, injury or death that may occur. The Drakensberg is a potentially dangerous/lethal environment and great care is always needed.