

Birds at Plettenberg Bay Game Reserve

Plettenberg Bay Game Reserve is a fantastic birding spot. The local bird society has spotted over 101 different bird species on the Reserve.

- **African black duck, *Anas sparsa*** - is a species of duck of the genus *Anas*. It is genetically closest to the mallard group but shows some peculiarities in its behaviour plumage; it is accordingly placed in the subgenus *Melananas* pending further research. It is an entirely black duck with white marks on its back and is also known as the black river duck, *Anas sparsa leucostigma*, West African black duck or Ethiopian black duck. It is a very shy and territorial duck usually seen in pairs or small flocks.
- **African darter, *Anhinga rufa*** - sometimes called the snakebird, is a water bird of tropical sub-Saharan Africa which builds a stick nest in a tree and lays 3-6 eggs. It often nests with herons, egrets and cormorants. It is an 80 cm long cormorant-like fish-eating species with a very long neck which occurs in both saline and fresh water, especially near mangroves. It often swims with only the neck above water. The male is mainly glossy black with white streaking, but females and immature birds are browner.
- **African hoopoe, *Upupa Africana*** - is a southern African bird with a height of 26 cm and weight of around 57 gm. The head, throat and back are cinnamon coloured while the bill is black, the legs grey and the eyes brown. The male has slightly different physical features to the female bird. It is a monogamous bird which means that the bird finds and breeds with one partner for the rest of its life. The female bird lays between 4 to 7 blue eggs.
- **African rail, *Rallus caerulescens*** - is a small wetland bird of the rail family. Its breeding habitat is marshes and reed beds across eastern and southern Africa. Many birds are permanent residents, but some undertake seasonal movements in response to the availability of wetland. Adults are 28-30 cm long, and have mainly brown upperparts and blue-grey underparts, with black-and-white barring on the flanks and undertail. This is the only *Rallus* species with a plain back. The body is flattened laterally to allow easier passage through the reeds. They have long toes, a short tail and a long slim dull red bill. The legs are red. They are noisy birds, with a trilled whistled tree-tee-tee-tee call.
- **African spoonbill, *Platalea alba*** - is a wading bird of the ibis and spoonbill family *Threskiornithidae*. This species is a widespread resident across Africa and Madagascar. It occurs in marshy wetlands with some open shallow water, nesting in colonies in trees or reed beds. It does not usually share colonies with storks or herons. Usually two to four eggs are laid. The breeding bird is all white except for its red legs and face and long grey spatulate bill. It has no crest, unlike the common spoonbill. Unlike herons, spoonbills fly with their necks outstretched.
- **Black crane, *Amaurornis flavirostra*** - is a waterbird in the rail and crane family *Rallidae*. It breeds in most of sub-Saharan Africa except in very arid areas. It undertakes some seasonal movements in those parts of its range which are subject to drought. The adult Black Crane is 19-23 cm long with a short tail and long toes. The adult has mainly black plumage, with a brown olive tone on the wings and upperparts which is rarely detectable in the field. The eye is red, the bill is yellow (hence the *flavirostra* of the binomial name), and the legs and feet are red, duller when not breeding. The sexes are similar, but the male is slightly larger. Most males, but only 10% of females, have a hooked upper mandible. The immature bird has brown upperparts and a dark grey head and underparts. Its bill is greenish yellow, and its feet and legs are dull red. The downy chicks are black, as with all rails. The main call of the Black Crane is a duet, starting with a throaty chattering krrrok-kraaaa. The response is a dove-like cooing coo-crr-COO.
- **Black-crowned night heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*** - is a medium-sized heron, 64 cm long and weighing 800 gm. They have a black crown and back with the remainder of the body white or grey, red eyes, and short yellow legs. They are short-necked and stout.
- **Black-headed heron, *Ardea melanocephala*** - is a wading bird of the heron family *Ardeidae*, and usually breeds in the wet season in colonies in trees, reed beds or cliffs. It builds a bulky stick nest and lays 2-4 eggs. It is a large bird, standing 85 cm tall, with a 150 cm wingspan. It is nearly as large as Grey Heron, which it resembles in appearance, although it is generally darker. Its plumage is largely grey above, and paler grey below. It has a powerful dusky bill. The call is a loud croaking.
- **Black-necked grebe, *Podiceps nigricollis*** - has an all-black neck and a spray of golden plumes on each side of its head in its breeding plumage. It is 28-34 cm long and the adult is unmistakable in summer with a

black head and neck and yellow ear tufts. In winter, this small grebe is white with a poorly defined black cap. In courtship the male gives a mellow poo-ee-chk call to the female.

- **Bokmakierie, *Telophorus zeylonus*** - is a bush shrike endemic to southern Africa. It is a species of open habitats, including Karoo scrub, fynbos and parks and gardens in urban areas. The bulky cup nest is constructed in a hedge, scrub or tree fork. The 2-6 red-brown or lilac-blotched greenish-blue eggs are incubated by both sexes for about 16 days prior to hatching, with another 18 days to fledging. The adult is 22-23 cm long with olive-green upperparts and a conspicuous bright yellow tip to the black tail. The head is grey with a yellow supercilium, and the strong bill has a hooked upper mandible. The underparts are bright yellow with a broad black collar between the throat and breast, which continues up the neck sides through the eye to the bill. The legs and feet are blue-grey. It has a range of loud whistles and calls, often given in duet, but the most typical is the one that gives this species its name, bok-bok-mak-kik.
- **Cape teal, *Anas Capensis*** - is a 44-46 cm long dabbling duck of open wetlands and is usually seen hunting for food in the tree foliage. It is essentially non-migratory, although it moves opportunistically with the rains. Sexes are similar. It is very pale and mainly grey with a browner back and pink on the bill. This is a generally quiet species, except during mating displays. The breeding male has a clear whistle, whereas the female has a feeble "quack".
- **Crowned lapwing, also crowned plover, *Vanellus coronatus*** - is an adaptable and prolific species, with bold and noisy habits. It is easily recognised by its combination of brown and white colours with, most tellingly, a black crown intersected by an annular white halo. Males measure on average 3% larger than females. Bare-part colours of males brighten in the breeding season when they use different types of display flights to lure the female. Mates may be retained for life.
- **Eurasian bittern or great bittern, *Botaurus stellaris*** - is a wading bird of the heron family Ardeidae. It is a large, chunky brown bird 69-81 cm in length, with a 100-130 cm wingspan. It is usually well-hidden in reed beds, is solitary and walks stealthily seeking amphibians and fish. If it senses that it has been seen, it becomes motionless, with its bill pointed upward, causing it to blend into the reeds. It is most active at dawn and dusk.
- **Glossy ibis** - This is the most widespread ibis species and is thought to have originated in the Old World. It is migratory and nests in trees, often with herons. It is 55-65 cm long with an 88-105 cm wingspan. Breeding adults have reddish-brown bodies and shiny bottle-green wings. It has a brownish bill, dark facial skin bordered above and below in blue-gray (non-breeding) to cobalt blue (breeding), and red-brown legs. Sounds include a variety of croaks and grunts, including a hoarse grrrr made when breeding.
- **Great crested grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*** - is a water bird 46-51 cm long with a 59-73 cm wingspan. An excellent swimmer and diver, it pursues its fish prey underwater. The adults are unmistakable in summer with head and neck decorations. In winter, this is whiter than most grebes, with white above the eye, and a pink bill. The young are remarkable because their heads are striped black and white, much like zebras. They lose these markings when they become adults.
- **Great egret, *Ardea alba*** - also known as the great white egret, or common egret, is a wading egret, is a large bird with all white plumage that can reach 101 cm in height and weigh up to 950 gm. Apart from size, it can be distinguished from other white egrets by its yellow bill and black legs and feet. It also has a slow flight, with its neck retracted. It feeds in shallow water or drier habitats, spearing fish, frogs or insects with its long, sharp bill. It will often wait motionless for prey, or slowly stalk its victim. It is a common species, usually easily seen.
- **Grey heron, *Ardea cinerea*** - is a wading bird of the heron family Ardeidae, a large bird, standing 90-100 cm tall, with a 175-195 cm wingspan and a weight of 1-2 kg. Its plumage is largely grey above, and off-white below. Adults have a white head with a broad black supercilium and slender crest. It has a powerful pinkish-yellow bill, which is brighter in breeding adults. It has a slow flight, with its long neck retracted. The call is a loud croaking "fraaank".
- **Hammerkop, *Scopus umbretta*** - also known as hamerkop, hammerhead, hammerhead stork, umbrette, umber bird, or anvilhead, is a medium-sized (56 cm) bird with a long shaggy crest. The shape of its head with a curved bill and crest at the back is reminiscent of a hammer, hence its name. Its plumage is a drab brown all over. Its food is typical of long-legged wading birds, including fish, frogs, rodents and similar small animals. It builds a huge haystack-like stick nest nearly 2 m across in a tree fork, and lays 3 to 6 eggs. The nest is reused each year, getting larger and larger as the hammerkop renovates it. It has a noisy call.
- **Hottentot teal, *Anas hottentota*** - is a species of dabbling duck of the genus *Anas*. It is resident in eastern and southern Africa and Madagascar. It breeds year round and stays in small groups or pairs, building nests above water in tree stumps using vegetation. This species is omnivorous and prefers smaller shallow bodies

of water. It has a height of 36 cm. It has a brown head and eyes, grey blue bill, a white coloured throat, blue grey legs and a brown coloured back.

- **Little bittern, *Ixobrychus minutus*** - is a wading bird in the heron family Ardeidae, native to the Old World. It is a very small bittern at 27-36 cm in length, 40-58 cm wingspan and 60-150 gm weight. The smallest specimens are perhaps the smallest herons on earth. It has a short neck, longish bill and buff underparts. The male's back and crown are black, and the wings are black with a large white patch on each wing. The female has a browner back and a buff-brown wing patch.
- **Little egret, *Egretta garzetta*** - is a small white heron 55-65 cm long with an 88-106 cm wingspan. Its plumage is all white and it has long black legs with yellow feet and a slim black bill. In the breeding season, the adult has two long nape plumes and gauzy plumes on the back and breast. The bare skin between the bill and eyes becomes red or blue. They are mostly silent but make various croaking and bubbling calls at their breeding colonies and produce a harsh alarm call when disturbed.
- **Little grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*** - formerly known as dabchick, is 23 to 29 cm in length, the smallest European member of the grebe family of water birds and commonly found in open bodies of water. It is a small water bird with a pointed bill. The adult is unmistakable in summer, predominantly dark above with its rich, rufous colour neck, cheeks and flanks, and bright yellow gape. The rufous is replaced by a dirty brownish grey in non-breeding and juvenile birds. The Little Grebe's breeding call, given singly or in duet, is a trilled repeated weet-weet-weet or wee-wee-wee which sounds like a horse whinnying.
- **Maccoa duck, *Oxyura maccoa*, a small African stiff-tailed duck** - Adult males have a chestnut body, a blue bill and a black head. Adult females have a grey-brown body, with a dark grey bill and a dark brown crown, nape and cheek stripe. Their breeding habitat is shallow fresh waters, and they are also found in brackish and saline lakes in winter.
- **Purple heron, *Ardea purpurea*** - is a wading bird in the heron family Ardeidae, a large bird, 80-90 cm tall, with a 120-150 cm wingspan, but slender for its size, weighing only 0.5-1.3 kg. It is somewhat smaller than the grey heron, from which it can be distinguished by its darker reddish-brown plumage, and, in adults, darker grey back. It has a narrower yellow bill, which is brighter in breeding adults.
- **Red-billed teal, *Anas erythrorhyncha*** - is a dabbling duck which is an abundant resident breeder in southern and eastern Africa. It is not migratory, but will fly great distances to find suitable waters. It is highly gregarious outside the breeding season and forms large flocks. The Red-billed teal is 43-48 cm long and has a blackish cap and nape, contrasting pale face, and bright red bill. The body plumage is a dull dark brown scalloped with white. Flight reveals that the secondary flight feathers are buff with a black stripe across them. The sexes are similar, but juveniles are duller than adults. This is a quiet species, but the displaying male has a whzzt call, whereas the female has a soft Mallard-like quack.
- **Reed cormorant or long-tailed cormorant, *Phalacrocorax africanus*** - is a common and widespread bird species which breeds on freshwater wetlands or quiet coasts. Two to four eggs are laid in a nest in a tree or on the ground. This is a small cormorant at 50-55 cm length and a 85 cm wingspan. It is mainly black, glossed green, in the breeding season. The wing coverts are silvery. It has a longish tail, a short head crest and a red or yellow face patch. The bill is yellow. Sexes are similar, but non-breeding adults and juveniles are browner, with a white belly.
- **Sacred ibis, *Threskiornis aethiopicus*** - is a species of wading bird of the ibis family, Threskiornithidae, which breeds in sub-Saharan Africa, SE Iraq and formerly in Egypt, where it was venerated and often mummified as a symbol of the god Thoth. It nests in tree colonies, often with other large wading birds such as herons, builds a stick nest and lays 2-3 eggs. It occurs in marshy wetlands and mud flats, both inland and on the coast. It feeds on various fish, frogs and other water creatures, as well as insects. An adult individual is 68 cm long with all-white body plumage apart from dark plumes on the rump. The bald head and neck, thick curved bill and legs are black. The white wings show a black rear border in flight. Sexes are similar, but juveniles have dirty white plumage, a smaller bill and some feathering on the neck. It is usually silent, but occasionally makes some croaking noises.
- **Squacco heron, *Ardeola ralloides*** - is a small heron, 40-49 cm long with 82-95 cm wingspan. It is a migrant, wintering in Africa. This is a stocky species with a short neck, short thick bill and buff-brown back. In summer, adults have long neck feathers. Its appearance is transformed in flight, when it looks very white due to the colour of the wings.
- **Yellow-billed duck, *Anas undulata*** - These are Mallard-sized mainly grey ducks with a darker head and bright yellow bill. The wings are whitish below, and from above show a white-bordered green speculum. Sexes are similar, and juveniles are slightly duller than adults. The north-eastern race is darker and has a

brighter bill and blue speculum. The male has a teal-like whistle, whereas the female has a Mallard-like quack.

- **White-backed duck, *Thalassornis leuconotus*** - is a waterbird of the family Anatidae. It is distinct from all other ducks, but most closely related to the whistling ducks in the subfamily Dendrocygninae, though also showing some similarities to the stiff-tailed ducks in the subfamily Oxyurinae. It is the only member of the genus *Thalassornis*. Well adapted for diving, they have been observed to stay under water for up to half a minute. They search especially for the bulbs of waterlilies.
- **White-backed night heron, *Gorsachius leuconotus*** - is a species of heron in the Ardeidae family. Because of its nocturnal habits and secretive and elusive nature, it is one of the more difficult birds to see in Africa. Without a stakeout, your best chances of seeing this bird, is probably on a canoe in the warmer regions where there are some quiet backwaters with low overhanging branches.
- **White-breasted Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus*** - is the only form of great cormorant found in sub-Saharan Africa. As its name suggests, the 80-100 cm long bird has a white neck and breast when adult. In other respects it is a large cormorant generally resembling the great cormorant. The black-faced cormorant, *Phalacrocorax fuscescens*, is also sometimes known as the white-breasted cormorant.
- **Yellow billed egret, *Ardea intermedia*** - is a medium-sized heron which often nests in colonies with other herons, usually on platforms of sticks in trees or shrubs. Two to five eggs are laid, the clutch size varying with region. It is about 90 cm tall with all-white plumage, generally dark legs and a thickish yellow bill. Breeding birds may have a reddish or black bill, greenish yellow gape skin, loose filamentous plumes on their breast and back, and dull yellow or pink on their upper legs. The sexes are similar.
- **Yellow-billed duck, *Anas undulata*** - is a 51-58 cm long dabbling duck which is an abundant resident breeder in southern and eastern Africa. This duck is not migratory, but will wander in the dry season to find suitable waters. It is highly gregarious outside the breeding season and forms large flocks.