

Bird Identification Groupings of southern Africa

Module 8 · Online Birding Enthusiast Course · curriculum by Joe Grosel (1966–2021)

Southern Africa has more than 950 bird species — but most of the time, you can predict what you'll see before raising binoculars, because habitat does most of the work. This module groups our birds by biome.

8.1 Open grassland

Korhaans, larks, pipits, longclaws, cisticolas, secretarybird, harriers, kites. Big skies, displaying birds, ground-nesters.

8.2 Mopane and miombo woodland

Lilac-breasted Roller, rollers, hornbills, bee-eaters, woodpeckers, barbets, sunbirds, batises, flycatchers, drongos, orioles. Classic 'safari birds'.

8.3 Riverine forest

Robin-chats, paradise-flycatcher, turacos, trogon (in some areas), kingfishers along water. Dappled light, complex layers, lots of voice.

8.4 Wetland (vlei, marsh, pan, river)

Herons, egrets, ducks, kingfishers, jacanas, plovers, sandpipers, crakes, rails, weavers (bishops, queleas). Concentrated bird diversity.

8.5 Coastal

Terns, gulls, gannets, oystercatchers, cormorants, sanderlings, whimbrels, plovers. Many migratory.

8.6 Arid Karoo & Kalahari

Sandgrouse, korhaans, chats, larks, sociable weavers, lanner falcon, pale chanting goshawk. Sparse, specialised, adapted to heat.

8.7 Fynbos

Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape Rockjumper, Protea Canary — endemic specialists you find nowhere else.

8.8 Forest (Afromontane, Wild Coast)

Knysna Turaco, Narina Trogon, robin-chats, forest canary, white-eyes. Limited but spectacular.

8.9 Migrant calendar

Aug-Apr: African Paradise-Flycatcher. Sept-Mar: cuckoos, Yellow-billed Kite. Oct-Mar: Steppe Buzzard, Lesser Spotted Eagle. Nov-Apr: Eleonora's Falcon, Amur Falcon.

Key Terms

Biome Major ecological community type (grassland, woodland, wetland, etc).

Endemic Species found nowhere else (Cape Sugarbird = SW Cape only).

Indicator species 'Anchor' species that signals a habitat type.

Edge effect High bird diversity at habitat boundaries.

Palaeartic migrant Species breeding in Eurasia, wintering in Africa.