



GO-AWAY-BIRDING

WITH MICHAEL MILLS

Karoo Mammals and Birds



One of four Aardvark seen at Karoo Gariep © Tertius Gous

*2020 Tour Report by Michael Mills
Photos by Tertius Gous and Don Macgillivray*

Tour Summary

Our inaugural Karoo Mammals and Birds Tour was an overwhelming success with several rarely-seen nocturnal mammals observed well and a good selection of Karoo birds watched at close range. The food, accommodation and company matched our time in the field.

The four night drives on the back of an open vehicle were the most memorable component of the trip and produced some terrific mammals: four Aardvark, five South African Hedgehogs, two sightings of Hewitt's Red Rock Rabbit, three sightings of Striped Polecat, four Aardwolf, one Brown Hyaena, more than 15 Bat-eared Fox, several African Wild Cat, one Cape Fox, no less than 25 South African Porcupine, two Long-eared Mice and a couple of African Pygmy Mice.

During the day our main focus was on birds, and we enjoyed some great sightings, logging 175 species. Highlights included Eastern Clapper Lark, Spike-heeled Lark, Melodious Lark, Blue Korhaan, Karoo Korhaan, Northern Black Korhaan, Ludwig's Bustard, Kori Bustard, Namaqua Warbler, Rufous-eared Warbler, Greater Painted-Snipe, hundreds of Blue Crane, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Violet-eared Waxbill, Buffy Pipit, Nicholson's Pipit, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, African Rail, Double-banded Courser, Verreaux's Eagle, White-backed Mousebird, Cape Penduline Tit, Greater Kestrel, Fairy Flycatcher, Fawn-coloured Lark, Sabota Lark, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Bradfield's Swift, Cloud Cisticola, Orange River White-eye, Sickle-winged Chat and White-throated Canary.

One of four Aardwolf seen during the tour © Tertius Gous



Blue Korhaan at Karoo Gariep © Tertius Gous

ITINERARY

30 Oct	Met at Marrick Game Reserve in the mid afternoon and settled into comfortable accommodation. Early dinner (18h30) followed by first night drive (20h00-23h00). Highlights included Aardwolf, Striped Polecat, Hewitt's Red Rock Rabbit and Long-eared Mouse.	2 Nov	Pre-breakfast outing (07h00-09h30) followed by breakfast (09h30-10h45). Then drove to Karoo Gariep via Orania on the Orange River, arriving 17h00 after seeing Ludwig's Bustard at locust swarm. Dinner (18h30) followed by third night drive (20h00-23h30) with two Aardvark , two South African Hedgehog, Striped Polecat and 13 Porcupine!
31 Oct	Pre-breakfast outing (07h00-09h30) to plains followed by breakfast (09h30-10h45) and late morning outing to (10h45-13h00). Highlights included Eastern Clapper Lark, Secretarybird, Cape Penduline Tit, Double-banded Courser and Rufous-eared Warbler. Afternoon outing (15h00-18h30) followed by dinner. Night drive postponed due to rain.	3 Nov	Pre-breakfast outing (07h00-09h30) with Melodious Lark and Blue Korhaan, followed by breakfast (09h30-10h45). Late morning (10h45-13h00) and afternoon outings (16h00-18h45) to wetlands, with Namaqua Warbler. Dinner (19h00) followed by fourth night drive with two more Aardvark, three Hedgehog and best Aardwolf views.
1 Nov	Pre-breakfast outing (07h00-09h30) to plains followed by breakfast (09h30-10h45) and late morning outing (10h45-13h00). Highlights included Spotted Eagle Owl and Kori Bustard. Afternoon outing (15h30-18h30), followed by dinner and second night drive with Brown Hyaena and Bat-eared Fox.	4 Nov	Pre-breakfast outing (07h00-09h30) to rocky areas with Layard's Tit-Babbler and Fairy Flycatcher, followed by breakfast (09h30-10h45). Afternoon outing (15h30-18h45) with Karoo Korhaan. Dinner (19h00) followed by night drive produced best views of African Wild Cat and only Cape Fox.
		5 Nov	Departure after 07h00 breakfast.

LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

Struthionidae

Common Ostrich *Struthio camelus* – Common at Marrick

Numididae

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris* – Common at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Anatidae

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* – A flock at Karoo Gariep

Spur-winged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

South African Shelduck *Tadorna cana* – Numerous at Karoo Gariep

Cape Shoveler *Spatula smithii* – A few at Karoo Gariep

Yellow-billed Duck *Anas undulata* – Common at Karoo Gariep

Cape Teal *Anas capensis* – About 20 at Karoo Gariep

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha* – Quite a few at Karoo Gariep and one at Marrick

Caprimulgidae

Rufous-cheeked Nightjar *Caprimulgus rufigena* – Very good views of a few at Marrick

Apodidae Apodidae –

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus* – Seen at Marrick

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* – Several seen well at Marrick

Bradfield’s Swift *Apus bradfieldi* – Very good views at Marrick

Little Swift *Apus affinis* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Horus Swift *Apus horus* – A couple seen well at Marrick

White-rumped Swift *Apus caffer* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep



Rufous-cheeked Nightjar at Marrick © Tertius Gous

Otididae

Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori* – Two seen at Marrick

Ludwig’s Bustard *Neotis ludwigii* – One seen at Marrick, and two at a locust swarm as we neared Karoo Gariep

Blue Korhaan *Eupodotis caerulescens* – Terrific views of several at Karoo Gariep

Karoo Korhaan *Eupodotis vigorsii* – Excellent views of a pair at Karoo Gariep

Northern Black Korhaan *Afrotis afraoides* – Common at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Cuculidae

Diederik Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* – Seen at Marrick

Pteroclididae

Namaqua Sandgrouse *Pterocles namaqua* – One seen in flight near Karoo Gariep

Columbidae

Rock Dove or Feral Pigeon *Columba livia* – Seen

Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Cape Turtle Dove *Streptopelia capicola* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis* – Seen at Marrick

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Rallidae

African Rail *Rallus caerulescens* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Gruidae

Blue Crane *Grus paradisea* – More than 100 seen at Karoo Gariep

Podicipedidae

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – A few at Karoo Gariep

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* – Two seen at Karoo Gariep

Karoo Korhaan was seen alongside Blue Korhaan at Karoo Gariep © Tertius Gous





The diminutive Cape Penduline Tit was seen well at Marrick © Tertius Gous

Phoenicopteridae

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* – A few at Karoo Gariep

Burhinidae

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Charadriidae

Blacksmith Lapwing *Vanellus armatus* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Crowned Lapwing *Vanellus coronatus* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Kittlitz’s Plover *Charadrius pecuarius* – Quite a few at Karoo Gariep

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Rostratulidae

Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* – One male seen well at Karoo Gariep

Scolopacidae

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* – A few at Karoo Gariep

Sanderling *Calidris alba* – Two at Karoo Gariep

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* – Several at Karoo Gariep

African Snipe *Gallinago nigripennis* – Quite a few at Karoo Gariep

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* – One at Karoo Gariep

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* – Common at Karoo Gariep

Glareolidae

Double-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus africanus* – Fantastic views at Marrick

Laridae

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* – About 20 seen in breeding plumage at Karoo Gariep

Phalacrocoracidae

Reed Cormorant *Microcarbo africanus* – One at Karoo Gariep

White-breasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax lucidus* – Many at Karoo Gariep

Threskiornithidae

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Hadada Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Ardeidae

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* – One at Karoo Gariep

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – Seen at Marrick

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala* – Seen at Marrick

African Great Egret *Ardea [alba] melanorhynchos* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Sagittariidae

Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius* – Great views at Marrick

Accipitridae

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* – Several at Marrick

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* – One at Marrick

Verreaux’s Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* – Great views of one near Karoo Gariep

Pale Chanting Goshawk *Melierax canorus* – Seen at Marrick and en route to Karoo Gariep

African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Tytonidae

Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba* – Great views at Marrick

Strigidae

Spotted Eagle-Owl *Bubo africanus* – Great views at Marrick

Coliidae

White-backed Mousebird *Colius colius* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Red-faced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus* – Seen at Marrick

Eastern Clapper Lark was seen regularly during the tour © Tertius Gous





Orange River White-eye along the Orange River © Don Macgillivray

Upupidae

African Hoopoe *Upupa africana* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Phoeniculidae

Common Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas* – Seen at Marrick

Alcedinidae

Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristatus* – Heard at Karoo Gariep

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Meropidae

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater *Merops hirundineus* – Great views at Marrick

White-fronted Bee-eater *Merops bullockoides* – One seen along the Orange River between Marrick and Karoo Gariep

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* – Many at Marrick and a few at Karoo Gariep

Lybiidae

Acacia Pied Barbet *Tricholaema leucomelas* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Picidae

Golden-tailed Woodpecker *Campethera abingoni* – Seen well at Marrick

Falconidae

Rock Kestrel *Falco rupicolus* – One seen mobbing the Verreaux’s Eagle near Karoo Gariep

Greater Kestrel *Falco rupicoloides* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* – Seen en route to Karoo Gariep

Platysteiridae

Pririt Batis *Batis pririt* – Seen very well at Marrick

Malaconotidae

Bokmakierie *Telophorus zeylonus* – Seen at Marrick and around the homestead at Karoo Gariep

Brown-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra australis* – Seen at Marrick

Crimson-breasted Shrike *Laniarius atrococcineus* – Seen at Marrick

Brubru *Nilaus afer* – Seen at Marrick

Laniidae

Southern Fiscal *Lanius collaris* – Seen a few times

Dicruridae

Southern Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus [adsimilis] adsimilis* – Seen at Marrick

Rhipiduridae

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Corvidae

Pied Crow *Corvus albus* – Common

Stenostiridae

Fairy Flycatcher *Stenostira scita* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Paridae

Ashy Tit *Melaniparus cinerascens* – Heard to Marrick

Remizidae

Cape Penduline Tit *Anthoscopus minutus* – Fantastic views at Marrick

Alaudidae

Spike-heeled Lark *Chersomanes albofasciata* – Many good sightings

Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix verticalis* – A few seen briefly at Karoo Gariep

Sabota Lark *Calendulauda sabota* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Fawn-coloured Lark *Calendulauda africanoides* – Good views at Marrick

Eastern Clapper Lark *Mirafra fasciolata* – Many great sightings

Rufous-naped Lark *Mirafra africana* – Seen at Marrick

Spike-heeled Lark was seen every day © Tertius Gous





Kalahari Scrub Robin at Marrick © Tertius Gous

Melodious Lark *Mirafraga cheniana* – Terrific views at Karoo Gariep

Pink-billed Lark *Spizocorys conirostris* – Brief views at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Large-billed Lark *Galerida magnirostris* – Seen briefly at Karoo Gariep

Southern Red-capped Lark *Calandrella [cinerea] cinerea* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Pycnonotidae

African Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus nigricans* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Hirundinidae

Brown-throated Martin *Riparia paludicola* – Many at Karoo Gariep

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* – Common

White-throated Swallow *Hirundo albigularis* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Pearl-breasted Swallow *Hirundo dimidiata* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Large Rock Martin *Ptyonoprogne [fuligula] fuligula* – Seen at Marrick

Greater Striped Swallow *Cecropis cucullata* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

South African Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon spilodera* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Acrocephalidae

Lesser Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* – Heard at Karoo Gariep

African Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus baeticatus* – Great views at Karoo Gariep

Cisticolidae

Grey-backed Cisticola *Cisticola subruficapilla* – Seen at Marrick and heard at Karoo Gariep

Levaillant’s Cisticola *Cisticola tinniens* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Neddicky *Cisticola fulvicapilla* – Seen at Marrick

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* – Seen at Marrick

Desert Cisticola *Cisticola aridulus* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Cloud Cisticola *Cisticola textrix* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Black-chested Prinia *Prinia flavicans* – Many at Marrick

Karoo Prinia *Prinia maculosa* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Namaqua Warbler *Phragmacia substriata* – Great views at Karoo Gariep

Rufous-eared Warbler *Malcorus pectoralis* – Incredible views at Marrick and also seen at Karoo Gariep

Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis* – Good views at Marrick; heard at Karoo Gariep

Sylviidae

Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler *Sylvia subcoerulea* – Good views at Marrick

Layard’s Tit-Babbler *Sylvia layardi* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Zosteropidae

Orange River White-eye *Zosterops pallidus* – Seen along the Orange River and at Karoo Gariep

Sturnidae

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* – Seen along the Orange River

Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Cape Starling *Lamprotornis nitens* – Seen at Marrick; one at Karoo Gariep

Pied Starling *Lamprotornis bicolor* – Many at Karoo Gariep

Melodious Lark was common at Karoo Gariep © Tertius Gous



Turdidae

Karoo Thrush *Turdus smithi* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Muscicapidae

Karoo Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas coryphoeus* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Kalahari Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas paena* – Many at Marrick

Chat Flycatcher *Melaenornis infuscatus* – Several at Marrick

Marico Flycatcher *Melaenornis mariquensis* – Seen at Marrick

Fiscal Flycatcher *Melaenornis silens* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Cape Robin-Chat *Cossypha caffra* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

African Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Sickle-winged Chat *Emarginata sinuata* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Southern Ant-eating Chat *Myrmecocichla formicivora* – Common

Mountain Wheatear *Myrmecocichla monticola* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileata* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Familiar Chat *Oenanthe familiaris* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Nectariniidae

White-bellied Sunbird *Cinnyris talatala* – Seen at Marrick

Passeridae

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* – Seen

Cape Sparrow *Passer melanurus* – Common

Southern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer diffusus* – Seen at Marrick

Ploceidae

White-browed Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser mahali* – Common at Marrick

Scaly-feathered Finch *Sporopipes squamifrons* – Common at Marrick

Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Southern Red Bishop *Euplectes orix* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Estrildidae

Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba* – Seen by Tertius at Marrick

Red-headed Finch *Amadina erythrocephala* – Many at Marrick and a few at Karoo Gariep

Violet-eared Waxbill *Uraeginthus granatinus* – Several at Marrick

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Black-faced Waxbill *Estrilda erythronotos* – Good views at Marrick

African Quailfinch *Ortygospiza atricollis* – Flight views at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Viduidae

Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* – Heard at Karoo Gariep

Motacillidae

Cape Wagtail *Motacilla capensis* – Seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Cape Longclaw *Macronyx capensis* – One at Karoo Gariep

African Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus* – Common at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Nicholson’s Pipit *Anthus [similis] nicholsoni* – Excellent views at Marrick and heard at Karoo Gariep

Buffy Pipit *Anthus vaalensis* – Excellent views at Marrick

Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys* – One seen at Karoo Gariep

Fringillidae

Black-throated Canary *Crithagra atrogularis* – Many at Marrick

Yellow Canary *Crithagra flaviventris* – Common at Marrick

White-throated Canary *Crithagra albogularis* – Several at Karoo Gariep

Emberizidae

Lark-like Bunting *Emberiza impetuani* – A few at Karoo Gariep

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi* – A couple at Marrick

Cape Bunting *Emberiza capensis* – Seen at Karoo Gariep

Golden-breasted Bunting *Emberiza flaviventris* – Seen at Marrick

Rufous-eared Warbler is one of the top Karoo birds © Tertius Gous



LIST OF MAMMALS RECORDED

Aardvark *Orycteropus afer* – four seen at Karoo Gariep

Vervet Monkey *Chlorocebus pygerythrus* – seen along the Orange River

South African Ground Squirrel *Xerus inauris* – common at Marrick

Long-eared Mouse *Malacothrix typica* – two seen well at Marrick at night

Xeric Four-striped Mouse *Rhabdomys pumilio* – seen during the day at Marrick

Pygmy Mouse *Mus sp.* – two seen at Marrick were most likely, based on range, Orange Pygmy Mice *M. orangiae*

Southern African Multimammate Mouse *Mastomys coucha* – seen at Karoo Gariep during our final night drive

South African Springhare *Pedetes capensis* – many seen

South African Porcupine *Hystrix africaeaustralis* – many seen, including 13 in one night at Karoo Gariep

Cape Hare *Lepus capensis* and/or **African Savanna Hare** *Lepus victoriae/microtis* and/or **Scrub Hare** *Lepus saxatilis* – numerous hares seen on night drives at Marrick and Karoo Gariep could not be identified.

Hewitt’s Red Rock Hare *Pronolagus saundersiae* – seen well twice at Marrick

South African Hedgehog *Atelerix frontalis* – five seen well at Karoo Gariep

Wild Cat *Felis silvestris* – several seen at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Common or Small-spotted Genet *Genetta genetta* – one seen on our final night drive at Karoo Gariep



One of five South African Hedgehog seen at Karoo Gariep © Tertius Gous

Brown Hyaena *Hyaena brunnea* – one seen at night at Marrick where the hyaena man called it in for closer views

Aardwolf *Proteles cristata* – four sightings in total, at both Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Black-backed Jackal *Canis mesomelas* – heard at Marrick

Bat-eared Fox *Otocyon megalotis* – seen in good numbers at Marrick and Karoo Gariep

Cape Fox *Vulpes chama* – one seen on our final night drive at Karoo Gariep

Striped Polecat *Ictonyx striatus* – four sightings of five individuals

Yellow Mongoose *Cynictis penicillata* – many seen

Bush Duiker *Sylvicapra grimmia* - seen at Marrick

Steenbok *Raphicerus campestris* - many at Karoo Gariep

We also saw a wide range of introduced and bred game, including Roan, Red Hartebeest, Sable, Blue Wildebeest, Black Wildebeest, Plains Zebra, Impala, Blesbok, Springbok, Gemsbok, Hippopotamus, etc.



Southern African Multimammate Mouse at Karoo Gariep © Tertius Gous

Bradfield's Swift was seen well over Marrick © Tertius Gous



Double-banded Courser showed well at Marrick © Tertius Gous



