



Above: Lagoon walk. Top: Burchell's coucal (*Centropus burchellii*) and below that the purple-crested turaco (*Tauraco porphyreolophus*) (Loerie).

Accumulated data from hundreds of 'citizen scientists' meticulously records the distribution of bird species in Southern Africa, and maps represent a snapshot of the changing environment. Threats to biodiversity from habitat modification whether from deforestation, agriculture, commercial development or global warming, are often signaled by changes in bird distribution patterns. Southern Africa's birdwatchers are making a valuable contribution to the conservation of biodiversity. It's "birding with a purpose".

We stop at the 19th green. Behind us, across the estate's boundary fence are hills of sugarcane. There's silence as the group raises binocs and scrutinizes the indigenous bush surrounding the golf course green for feathered life. Finally, mutters of "well there's a 'Gyp' of course," breaks the stillness. As novice birders, we are in the dark until an Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*) waddles across the green and we can decode the birders' 'Gyp'. Talk soon turns to other potential sightings. A rare African Finfoot (*Podica senegalensis*)

has recently been spotted down by the estate's Umhlotaan lagoon.

Evidence of a Finfoot is impressive considering the history of Prince's Grant Coastal Golf Estate. Prior to its official opening in 1994, the estate's 160 ha were almost entirely covered in sugarcane. Today thick swathes of indigenous bush, rich in birdcalls, line the fairways. One would swear that the Peter Matkovich designed course was carved out of an existing natural habitat when in reality every indigenous tree, grass and shrub was planted by hand. Over 35 000 trees have been planted on the estate. All these trees and shrubs are endemic to the immediate area.

Even the turf selected for the golf course is a naturalised species. *Paspallum vaginatum* is highly tolerant of saline conditions, an appropriate choice for a golf course bordered by the Indian Ocean. Fairways sympathetically follow the existing lie of the land. The result is a course ranked amongst the best in South Africa and a "must play" destination for golfers of all abilities.

The current fertile biodiversity of

Prince's Grant is testament to the original vision of Guy Smith and Raj Bodasing as developers, and the monumental effort of renowned landscaper Jeremy Stubbs. It is little wonder that the environmental rehabilitation of Prince's Grant has been recognized through numerous awards. These include being named a site of conservation significance by the then Natal Parks Board (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife) and the Gold Award of Excellence from the SA Landscape Institute.

The tang of salt air hits us as we crest the hill. Prince's Grant has the advantage of having direct access to a secluded beach and private lagoon. Its seaside location makes Prince's Grant a popular holiday destination for international and upcountry visitors. Besides various homes on the estate, the four-star rated lodge has 15 rooms ranging from luxury to family arrangements. While golf is the obvious draw card, there are squash and tennis courts, three swimming pools and a spa, where beauty treatments are available on request.

A strange oddity is visible when we reach the expansive beach. A small