



After brief introductions, we set off into the grey light. It quickly becomes apparent this is not a casual birders get-together. These folk are ardent 'twitchers' on a mission. Meeting regularly throughout the year, these birding enthusiasts operate as 'citizen scientists', collecting data for the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2).

The Bird Atlas is a project involving thousands of volunteers nationwide. Each group of birders is allocated a geographical area or 'pentad', just enough to cover in a couple of hours. Prince's Grant on KwaZulu-Natal's north coast is the general extent of our birders range. After each outing, data is uploaded to SABAP2's website. Satisfyingly, birders can view results reflected in maps in almost real-time. Regionally elected experts confirm any evidence of rare sightings.

With the Bird Atlas' second edition in the pipeline, data is being collected over five to ten years from South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. The project is a partnership of BirdLife South Africa, the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).



The signature view from the 15th T-box at Prince's Grant. A 19 year old vision of the developers to 'go entirely indigenous', means that today, the 160 hectare estate, once entirely covered in sugar cane, replanted with over 35 000 trees, is a haven for 265 bird species.