The Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill (Tockus leucomelas) is a common, medium sized bird found in all areas of Southern Africa where there is scrub and acacia woodland. The yellow-billed hornbill is generally found living alongside its close relative, the red-billed hornbill.

It is distinguished by its very large, downwardly curved yellow beak, giving it the nickname of the “flying banana”. The female’s bill is shorter than that of the male, and the casque on the upper bill is also smaller. The plumage is white on the belly, grey on the neck, with the back and wing feathers being black and white.

The yellow-billed hornbill is mainly an omnivorous ground feeder, eating small insects, spiders, seeds and occasionally fruit. The species is known to forage co-operatively with dwarf mongoose, catching prey items that the mongoose scratch up from the ground. In return the hornbills alert the mongoose to danger from overhead raptors. There have been records of hornbills waiting expectantly at mongoose burrows, eager for the foraging to begin.

This species nests in naturally occurring holes in trees or in abandoned woodpecker or barbet nests.

Hornbills are a sociable species, generally living in small groups. They have a very distinctive clucking call. Once one bird starts calling, the whole group will often join in, creating a cacophony of sound. In the bushveld you will often see two hornbills sitting together, clucking away with very entertaining wings open, back and forth rocking, head bowing display.