

Kruger-to-Canyons Birding Route Avitourism Project

Location	Phalaborwa, Limpopo province, South Africa
Rio Tinto company	Palabora Mining Company; Palabora Foundation (PF)
Partner organisations	BirdLife South Africa (BLSA)
Key people	Duncan Pritchard, Martin Taylor and Sandra Hedges (BLSA); Mark Glanville and Marc Demmer (PF)
Birds	Pel's Fishing Owl, Taita Falcon, Southern Bald Ibis, African Finfoot, Narina Trogon, Cape Vulture, Black (Verreaux's) Eagle, Southern Ground Hornbill
Outcomes	Avitourism development, environmental education and community-based bird conservation

A community and conservation based avitourism development project developed in partnership between BirdLife South Africa, Rio Tinto, the Palabora Mining Company and the European Union.

Background to the project

The reputation of the Zululand Birding Route as a model for sustainability and for community-based conservation has helped in the application of this model elsewhere in South Africa. Notably, Rio Tinto's operations at Phalaborwa in Limpopo province provided an opportunity for the Rio Tinto-BirdLife Programme to facilitate the extension of this model to another area renowned for wildlife tourism in the country. The Kruger-to-Canyons Birding Route (K2CBR) was established in 2007 and now stimulates avitourism development in an area that includes the Kruger National Park IBA Complex and a number of other IBAs along the nearby escarpment. In addition to the core sustainable livelihood objectives outlined for the Zululand Birding Route, the K2CBR is pioneering exclusive partnerships with accommodation establishments that commit to undertake environmental and social management planning and that support a number of local community initiatives. One of the requirements for 'Birder Friendly' accreditation is that establishments educate their guests on environmental and social issues as well as supporting local community projects through procurement and recruitment policies. In return, BirdLife South Africa helps market these accommodation establishments and assists them to implement their environmental management plans.

While focusing on the development of avitourism, the important role that local communities play in conservation is crucial. The K2CBR has become involved in a number of different community initiatives ranging from guide training, environmental education initiatives, poverty alleviation, skills development projects and birding infrastructure projects. In terms of conservation initiatives, guides are involved in collecting SABAP2 atlas and Cape Parrot census data, monitoring the Manoutsa Cape Griffon Vulture colony and participating in the Pel's Fishing Owl survey in association with the Endangered Wildlife Trust. The route will also assist SANParks to refine their bird survey methods within Kruger National Park, as well as providing resources (through the guides) for data collection within the park.

The aim is for the route to develop into a fully fledged conservation and community based avitourism development project, in a similar way to the Zululand Birding Route. The project is in its second year (2008) of a four-year development phase, and has already met a number of its objectives. The challenges facing the route are to ensure clear linkages between avitourism, accommodation establishments and community and conservation projects initiated by the route or its accommodation partners. A second challenge is to link up the initiatives on the route with those of other BirdLife South Africa initiatives, such as in the formation of Site Support Groups at key locations.

A third challenge is to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the route. Well resourced throughout its development phase by Rio Tinto's Palabora Mining Company, the Rio Tinto-BirdLife International Programme and, more recently, the EU, this route serves as a hub for wider Birding Route development in Limpopo province. Elsewhere in South Africa, a number of other Birding Routes are also well on the way to becoming established as models for sustainable development and community-based bird conservation.



Discovering birds with Martin Taylor, Project Manager of the K2CBR

Undoubtedly, true ecotourism can have significant and positive impacts for local communities if conducted in a proper manner. The objectives of the K2CBR are, therefore, to increase the profile of the area as a birding destination, to link avitourism with local service providers and communities, and to ensure it is done in a responsible manner.

Located in South Africa's Limpopo province, the route takes in three very different terrestrial biomes in one of the most wildlife-rich areas of southern Africa. The diverse habitats provide home for approximately 510 bird species of which eight are endemic to the region. In addition, the excellent road and accommodation infrastructure provides birders with an excellent platform from which to explore the area.

As with the Zululand Birding Route, the local Rio Tinto business – the Palabora Mining Company and its associated Foundation – realised that such an initiative could help it achieve its wider community development objectives, while emphasising the sustainable biodiversity resource values associated with such development.

The Escarpment – an IBA important for raptors

