

conservation | community | science | creativity



BirdLife KZN Forum

A wonderful programme
of birding and talks

Save the Date

iSimangaliso World Heritage Site
Lake St Lucia Estuary

24 - 28 September 2025

Come birding with us for some local specials

- Guided Bird drives and walks
- An atlas challenge for the local area
- A wonderful programme of talks
- Group get-togethers to chat, eat and talk

Register and make payment from the 15 May 2025 to receive the programme, and be able to book walks and workshops

Note the bookings for walks will only open two weeks before the start date to give everyone a chance to read the programme, register and decide.



The BirdLife KZN Forum is the regional gathering of KZN bird clubs to promote the communication, enjoyment, understanding, study and conservation of birds and their environments in South Africa as well as provide regional support and communication between the bird clubs and BirdLife South Africa.

**BIRDLIFE KZN FORUM | Lake St Lucia
in the
iSimangaliso World Heritage Site
PROGRAMME - Draft 1**

**Bookings for guided walks and other booked and/or paid activities
will open on MONDAY 1st September 2025.
Please make sure you select the right link to book the correct day.**

Ensure that you read ALL the information carefully and follow the links provided to answer queries. If after reading carefully, you have queries that have not been addressed, please send questions to the WhatsApp group.

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PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS DRAFT 1 OF THE PROGRAMME

**LATER EDITIONS WILL HAVE
LINKS FOR BOOKINGS, MAPS, AND OTHER EXTRA INFORMATION.**



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1. THE iSIMANGALISO WORLD HERITAGE SITE, LAKE ST LUCIA ESTUARY AND SURROUNDS AT A GLANCE

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is truly one of South Africa's natural treasures and a place that lives up to its name – “a miracle” as one of South Africa's most ecologically diverse and spectacular natural areas. Stretching along the northeastern coast of KwaZulu-Natal, it encompasses a mosaic of habitats including beaches, coral reefs, wetlands, lakes, savannas, and coastal forests. At its heart lies the Lake St Lucia estuary, Africa's largest estuarine system, while overall the heritage site supports an extraordinary abundance of wildlife – hippos, crocodiles, elephants, rhinos, and over 600 species of birds. This ecological richness, combined with its cultural significance and scenic beauty, makes iSimangaliso a place where biodiversity and human heritage converge. The park plays a vital role in conservation, ecotourism, and community upliftment, living up to the meaning of its name: “a miracle.”

iSimangaliso offers incredible opportunities to explore, whether you're strolling along boardwalks, watching whales from the shore, or heading out on safari or a bird watching adventure. It's a destination where every turn brings a new surprise and a reminder of just how rich and diverse our natural heritage is.

1.1. Ecological Habitats and Land Use around St Lucia hub (25 km Radius)

The landscape surrounding the Forum Hub, which is the St Lucia Village, includes a mix of coastal, estuarine, wetland, grassland, and forest ecosystems, alongside limited urban and vast agricultural, and conservation land uses. These are described in more detail below and should guide your choices in terms of where to bird, photograph and take time.



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1.1.1. Ecological Habitats

Estuarine and Wetland Systems

Lake St Lucia estuary—the largest estuarine system in southern Africa (~350 km²)—supports extensive reed and papyrus wetlands. These are critical habitats for hippos, crocodiles, bivalves, and over 400 bird species, including flamingos and pelicans; it's South Africa's most important waterbird breeding ground.

Coastal Dunes, Beaches & Marine Zones

A long sandy coastline supports dune forests, coral reefs, and marine ecosystems with nesting leatherback and loggerhead turtles, tropical coral communities, and offshore reef systems

Coastal Forest & Savannah (Western Shores & Eastern Shores)

Adjacent woodlands, savannahs, and dry thornveld on the shores of Lake St Lucia, False Bay, and Western Shores support forest canopy species (e.g., wild fig), savannah grasses, and wildlife—such as bushbuck, nyala, buffalo, elephant, rhino, and leopard

Swamps & Floodplain Wetlands

Where the uMfolozi River joins the St Lucia estuary its reed-lined channels and floodplains filter silt and sustain aquatic biodiversity.

Lakes, estuaries & swamps north of St Lucia

Part of the larger iSimangaliso complex, areas like Kosi Bay and the iMfabeni peatland include papyrus-rich swamps and oligotrophic lakes resembling the Lake Sibaya system

This mix of natural habitats and human land use highlights the ecological richness of the region while emphasizing the pressures from urban expansion and agriculture.

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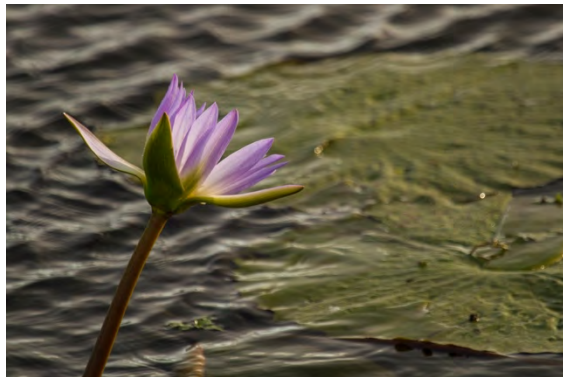
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1.1.2. Land Use

Visiting iSimangaliso Wetland Park is not only about wild beauty but also about seeing how people and nature share the land. Within the park itself, the dominant 'Land use' is **conservation** – protecting wetlands, beaches, lakes, grasslands, forests and the associated fauna. Ecotourism is carefully managed here, so you'll find walking trails, bird hides, game drives, and small lodges that allow visitors to explore without damaging the environment.

Surrounding the park, the land use shifts. Large stretches are under **agriculture**, especially sugarcane fields, which form a marked contrast in land use around the protected wetlands. You'll also find **subsistence farming and rural settlements**, where local communities live and cultivate small fields. In some areas, you'll notice **commercial forestry plantations** – mostly pine and eucalyptus – which contrast with the natural forests inside the park.

Ecotourism also extends outside the park boundaries, with guesthouses, tour operators, and cultural experiences run by surrounding communities. Together, this mix of conservation, farming, forestry, and tourism creates a living landscape where people and wildlife coexist, and where careful management helps ensure the park's incredible biodiversity continues to thrive.



2. DETAILED DAILY PROGRAMME

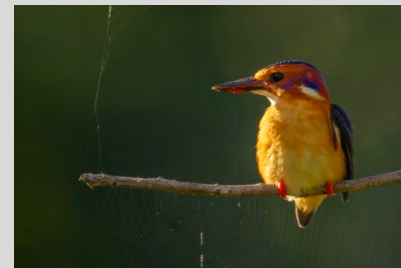
PROGRAMME		
DAY 1 Wednesday 24 September Heritage Day! Wear your proudly South African scarf, jersey, hat...	BLKZN ATLAS CHALLENGE STARTS TODAY AT 00:01 Birding, Birding and more Birding for the Participants	
	REGISTRATION at 14h00	
	Self-Drive routes for a number of sections of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park including Eastern Shores, Western Shores, Cape Vidal, False Bay. See Section 6	
	GUIDED BIRD EXCURSIONS	
	MORNING WALKS ALL START AT 05h30	
	Trail	Description
1. iGwalagwala	Walking Trail - The iGwalagwala Trail in St Lucia village winds through lush coastal forest near the estuary, offering an easy walk with excellent birding where species like Livingstone's Turaco, Green Malkoha and many other St Lucia specials can be seen.	BEX1
2. Beach and Estuary	Walking trail - The St Lucia Estuary Boardwalk leads from Sugarloaf campsite through coastal forest and mangroves to the beach and estuary mouth, where birders can spot waders, terns, herons, and hippos in a spectacular land-sea-river setting.	BEX2
3. iPhiva Trail	Walking Trail - The iPhiva Trail starts near the Bhangazi Gate and winds through open savannah grassland and palmveld, offering opportunities to see raptors, grassland specials, and palm-nesting species alongside grazing antelope.	BEX3
4. Futululu Forest and surrounds	Walking Trail - The Futululu Forest near Monzi is a remnant of the once-vast coastal lowland forest, with towering fig and swamp forest trees that shelter Narina Trogon, Wood Owl, and a host of forest specials, while the surrounding wetlands and grasslands add diversity with waterbirds and raptors.	BEX4

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PROGRAMME			
	5. Eastern Shores, Kwashaleni Tower & Cape Vidal	Driving and Walking Route - The Eastern Shores of iSimangaliso showcase a mosaic of grassland, forest, wetland, and dune habitats with rich birding and game viewing; the KwaShaleni Tower offers panoramic views over these ecosystems and their wildlife; and Cape Vidal combines coastal forest and beach, where birders can see forest specials inland and shorebirds, dolphins, and whales along the coast.	BEX5
	6. Western Shores & False Bay	Driving and Walking Route - The Western Shores of iSimangaliso feature rolling grasslands, pans, and fever tree forests with abundant game and birdlife such as raptors, waterbirds, and grassland species, while False Bay on the western shore of Lake St Lucia offers dry sand forest and shoreline habitats where birders can find specials like Pink-throated Twinspot, Neergaard's Sunbird, and African Broadbill.	BEX6
	AFTERNOON HANDS ON PRESENTATION AND WORKSHOP		
14h30	Bird with a Purpose Atlas workshop Mission Rocks, Eastern Shores	Workshop format - learn about atlassing, get help setting up your phone with BirdLasser, learn the atlas protocols and the finer points of using BirdLasser to contribute to the South African Bird Atlas Programme 2.	WX1

This event is convened by the regional forum **BirdLife KZN** and hosted by the bird club for the greater Durban area **BirdLife eThekweni KZN**



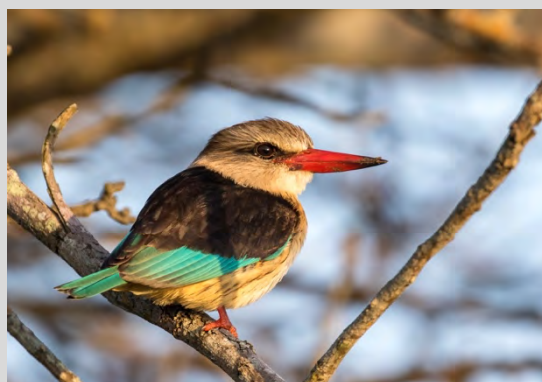
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PROGRAMME			
DAY 2 THURSDAY 25 September	BLKZN ATLAS CHALLENGE CONTINUES Birding, Birding and more Birding for the Participants		
	MORNING WALKS ALL START AT 05h30		
	Self-Drive routes for a number of sections of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park including Eastern Shores, Western Shores, Cape Vidal, False Bay. See pages 14 - 18		
	Guided Bird Excursions		
	Trail	Description	Booking and payment link
	7. iGwalagwala	Walking Trail - The iGwalagwala Trail in St Lucia village winds through lush coastal forest near the estuary, offering an easy walk with excellent birding where species like Livingstone's Turaco, Green Malkoha and many other St Lucia specials can be seen.	BEX7
	8. Beach and Estuary	Walking trail - The St Lucia Estuary Boardwalk leads from Sugarloaf campsite through coastal forest and mangroves to the beach and estuary mouth, where birders can spot waders, terns, herons, and hippos in a spectacular land-sea-river setting.	BEX8
	9. iPhiva Trail	Walking Trail - The iPhiva Trail starts near the Bhangazi Gate and winds through open savannah grassland and palmveld, offering opportunities to see raptors, grassland specials, and palm-nesting species alongside grazing antelope.	BEX9
10. Futululu Forest and surrounds	Walking Trail - The Futululu Forest near Monzi is a remnant of the once-vast coastal lowland forest, with towering fig and swamp forest trees that shelter Narina Trogon, Wood Owl, and a host of forest specials, while the surrounding wetlands and grasslands add diversity with waterbirds and raptors.	BEX10	
11. Eastern Shores, Kwashaleni Tower & Cape Vidal	Driving and Walking Route - The Eastern Shores of iSimangaliso showcase a mosaic of grassland, forest, wetland, and dune habitats with rich birding and game viewing; the KwaShaleni Tower offers panoramic views over these ecosystems and their wildlife; and Cape Vidal combines coastal forest and beach, where birders can see forest specials inland and shorebirds, dolphins, and whales along the coast.	BEX11	

PROGRAMME

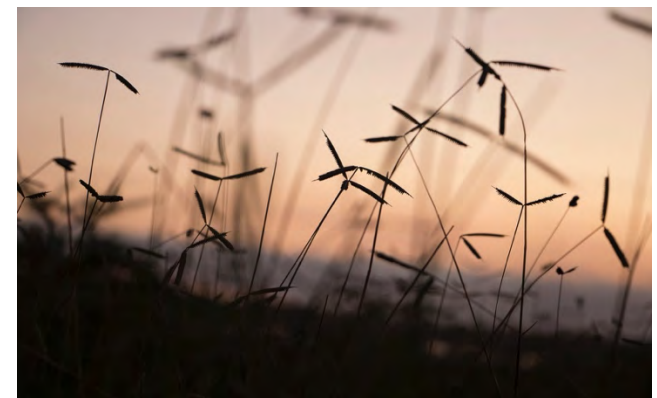
	<p>12. Western Shores & False Bay</p>	<p>Driving and Walking Route - The Western Shores of iSimangaliso feature rolling grasslands, pans, and fever tree forests with abundant game and birdlife such as raptors, waterbirds, and grassland species, while False Bay on the western shore of Lake St Lucia offers dry sand forest and shoreline habitats where birders can find specials like Pink-throated Twinspot, Neergaard’s Sunbird, and African Broadbill.</p>	<p>BEX12</p>
<p>INFORMATIVE TOUR</p>			
<p>06h30 - 14h30</p>	<p>ISIMANGALISO RESTORATION JOURNEY</p>	<p>Join Nicolette Forbes and Ticky Forbes for a unique restoration journey across various areas of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park and a few beyond the park borders – where birding, wildlife, and breathtaking ecological recovery will be discussed and explained. Two game drive vehicles will carry participants throughout the tour.</p>	<p>RJ1</p>



This event is convened by the regional **BirdLife KZN FORUM** and hosted by the bird club for the greater Durban area **BirdLife eThekweni KZN**

PROGRAMME			
DAY 3 FRIDAY 26 September	BLKZN ATLAS CHALLENGE CONTINUES Birding, Birding and more Birding for the Participants		
	MORNING WALKS ALL START AT 05h30		
	Self-Drive routes for a number of sections of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park including Eastern Shores, Western Shores, Cape Vidal, False Bay. See pages 14 - 18		
	Guided Bird Excursions		
	Trail	Description	Booking and payment link
	13. iGwalagwala	Walking Trail - The iGwalagwala Trail in St Lucia village winds through lush coastal forest near the estuary, offering an easy walk with excellent birding where species like Livingstone's Turaco, Green Malkoha and many other St Lucia specials can be seen.	BEX13
	14. Beach and Estuary	Walking trail - The St Lucia Estuary Boardwalk leads from Sugarloaf campsite through coastal forest and mangroves to the beach and estuary mouth, where birders can spot waders, terns, herons, and hippos in a spectacular land-sea-river setting.	BEX14
	15. iPhiva Trail	Walking Trail - The iPhiva Trail starts near the Bhangazi Gate and winds through open savannah grassland and palmveld, offering opportunities to see raptors, grassland specials, and palm-nesting species alongside grazing antelope.	BEX15
16. Futululu Forest and surrounds	Walking Trail - The Futululu Forest near Monzi is a remnant of the once-vast coastal lowland forest, with towering fig and swamp forest trees that shelter Narina Trogon, Wood Owl, and a host of forest specials, while the surrounding wetlands and grasslands add diversity with waterbirds and raptors.	BEX16	
17. Eastern Shores, Kwashaleni Tower & Cape Vidal	Driving and Walking Route - The Eastern Shores of iSimangaliso showcase a mosaic of grassland, forest, wetland, and dune habitats with rich birding and game viewing; the KwaShaleni Tower offers panoramic views over these ecosystems and their wildlife; and Cape Vidal combines coastal forest and beach, where birders can see forest specials inland and shorebirds, dolphins, and whales along the coast.	BEX17	

PROGRAMME			
	18. Western Shores & False Bay	Driving and Walking Route - The Western Shores of iSimangaliso feature rolling grasslands, pans, and fever tree forests with abundant game and birdlife such as raptors, waterbirds, and grassland species, while False Bay on the western shore of Lake St Lucia offers dry sand forest and shoreline habitats where birders can find specials like Pink-throated Twinspot, Neergaard's Sunbird, and African Broadbill.	BEX18
	15h00 - 18h30	PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOP Learn about bird and landscape photography at this hands-on workshop. The workshop will be help on location at an appropriate wild venue in the Park and will focus on the correct settings to use, some composition tips etc. We will be taking landscape and bird, bug and flower photos as well as being on location for the sunset. We will check the photos as we go and correct any errors. Roger Machin from Canon SA will also join us to showcase different lenses and allow you to try out.	BP1
This event is convened by the regional BirdLife KZN FORUM and hosted by the bird club for the greater Durban area BirdLife eThekwini KZN			





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DAY 4 SATURDAY 27 September	BEST OF BOTH WORLDS LET'S LEARN AND TALK BIRDS!			
	08h00-08h30	REGISTRATION		
	Time Slot	Speaker Name	Speaker Affiliation	Talk Title
	08h30 - 08h45	Nicolette Forbes	Chair BirdLife KZN Forum / Chair BirdLife eThekweni KZN	Welcome and Introduction to the BirdLife KZN Spring Forum.
	08h45 - 09h00	Yvonne Pennington	Chair Board of Directors BirdLife South Africa	
	09h00 - 09h45	Matthew Orolowitz	Birding Ecotours Fellow of Grassland Conservation BirdLife South Africa	Saving Larks
	10h00 - 10h30	Morning Tea / Coffee <i>(provided at the venue)</i>		
	10h30 - 11h00	Roger Porter		World Heritage Site Status - iSimangaliso
	11h00 - 12h00	Nicky Forbes	Senior Scientist Marine & Estuarine Research	Restoration of the Lake St Lucia Estuary
	12h00 - 13h00	LUNCH <i>(Lunch is available at the venue (own cost) or you can bring your own)</i>		
	13h00 - 13h30	Hugh Chittenden	Editor: Roberts Fieldguide	A photographic review of the age progression of three Indicator Honeyguides,
	13h30 - 14h00	Ticky Forbes	Lead Scientist MER, BeKZN	Splits, lumps and other rude words
	14h00 - 14h30	Herman van den Berg	Roberts Bird App	A walk-through and detailed explanation of the new Roberts Bird App.
	14h30 - 15h00	Roger Machin	Canon South Africa	Bird Photography - highlights
15h00 - 15h15	Nicolette Forbes	Closure and thanks		
BirdLife eThekweni KZN hosted dinner for speakers, invited guests and talk attendees only				

PROGRAMME			
DAY 5 SUNDAY 28 September	BLKZN ATLAS CHALLENGE CONTINUES Birding, Birding and more Birding for the Participants		
	BirdLife KZN Forum Committee Meeting - KZN Bird Club Chairs, BirdLife South Africa and other Bird Organisation Representatives		
	MORNING WALKS ALL START AT 05h30		
	Self-Drive routes for a number of sections of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park including Eastern Shores, Western Shores, Cape Vidal, False Bay. See pages 14 - 18		
	Guided Bird Excursions		
	Trail	Description	Booking and payment link
	19. iGwalagwala	Walking Trail - The iGwalagwala Trail in St Lucia village winds through lush coastal forest near the estuary, offering an easy walk with excellent birding where species like Livingstone's Turaco, Green Malkoha and many other St Lucia specials can be seen.	BEX19
	20. Beach and Estuary	Walking trail - The St Lucia Estuary Boardwalk leads from Sugarloaf campsite through coastal forest and mangroves to the beach and estuary mouth, where birders can spot waders, terns, herons, and hippos in a spectacular land-sea-river setting.	BEX20
21. iPhiva Trail	Walking Trail - The iPhiva Trail starts near the Bhangazi Gate and winds through open savannah grassland and palmveld, offering opportunities to see raptors, grassland specials, and palm-nesting species alongside grazing antelope.	BEX21	
22. Futululu Forest and surrounds	Walking Trail - The Futululu Forest near Monzi is a remnant of the once-vast coastal lowland forest, with towering fig and swamp forest trees that shelter Narina Trogon, Wood Owl, and a host of forest specials, while the surrounding wetlands and grasslands add diversity with waterbirds and raptors.	BEX22	
23. Eastern Shores, Kwashaleni Tower & Cape Vidal	Driving and Walking Route - The Eastern Shores of iSimangaliso showcase a mosaic of grassland, forest, wetland, and dune habitats with rich birding and game viewing; the KwaShaleni Tower offers panoramic views over these ecosystems and their wildlife; and	BEX23	

PROGRAMME

		Cape Vidal combines coastal forest and beach, where birders can see forest specials inland and shorebirds, dolphins, and whales along the coast.	
	24. Western Shores & False Bay	Driving and Walking Route - The Western Shores of iSimangaliso feature rolling grasslands, pans, and fever tree forests with abundant game and birdlife such as raptors, waterbirds, and grassland species, while False Bay on the western shore of Lake St Lucia offers dry sand forest and shoreline habitats where birders can find specials like Pink-throated Twinspot, Neergaard's Sunbird, and African Broadbill.	BEX24

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3. FORUM HUB AND DISTANCES

The BirdLife KZN Forum | St Lucia Village hub is marked in the orange circle on the map below.

St Lucia Ecolodge <https://www.stlucia-ecolodge.co.za>

Accommodation venue and tentative venue for the Forum Hub - **please note that this may change closer to the time as it is dependent on numbers of confirmed delegates.** This venue provides a range of facilities, including a restaurant and bar.

Link to the venue

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/tX44vteZBLBGauW86>

Main route distances from KZN Bird Club locations to the hub:

Durban to *St Lucia Village* | 230 km

Richards Bay to *St Lucia Village* | 127 km

Pietermaritzburg to *St Lucia Village* | 310 km

Howick to *St Lucia Village* | 330

Ladysmith to *St Lucia Village* | 402 km

Underberg to *St Lucia Village* | 440 km

Distances within the park to main attractions.

St Lucia Village to Mtubatuba | 27 km

Bhangazi Gate to Cape Vidal (Eastern Shores) | 32 km

Dukuduku Gate to Hlozi Gate (Western Shores) | 22 km

Hlozi Gate to False Bay Park Gate via the N2 | 60 km

St Lucia to False Bay Park | 88 km

St Lucia to Hluhluwe - iMfolozi (Nyalazi Gate) | 57 km

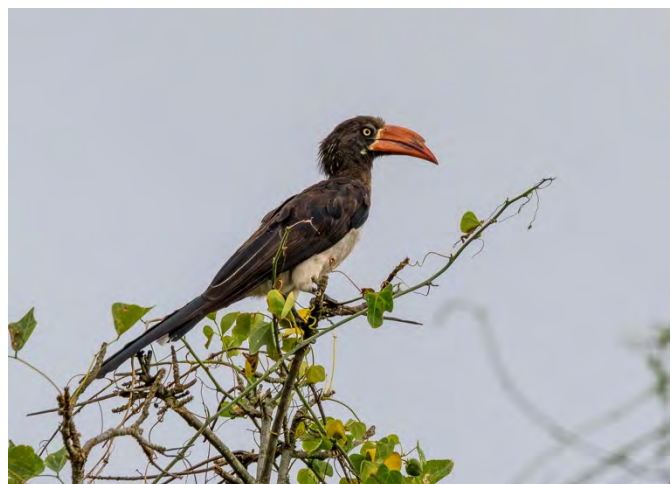


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4. USEFUL INFORMATION

- 1) **Communications** - A WhatsApp group for all registered attendees has been set up to keep you up to date with official notices and communications as well as provide assistance with finding places or to coordinate informal meet ups for sundowners, talks etc. Interesting Bird Sightings will also be posted. This will also be a first point for emergency communications.
- 2) **Accommodation and food** - accommodation in the surrounding area of the hub will put you in the centre of the activities on all three days. The main hub will be at the *St Lucia Ecolodge (TBC)* and the talk day will be convened at this location.
 - a) Accommodation - camping, self-catering, AirBnB, hotels, country inns....the choice is endless
 - b) Food and drinks for own account.
- 3) Events open to all registered participants, nothing compulsory **except the talks on the Saturday** - we really need people to convene for the conference please. **Only people who attend the talks will receive an entry ticket to the Saturday night dinner.**
- 4) **BirdLasser Species Challenge:** There will be a BirdLasser Challenge which will run from one minute past midnight on Wednesday 24/9 to the end of Sunday 28/9.

To join this challenge | Participants just need to send their BirdLasser email address to chair@birdlifekznforum.org. The atlas area is contained within a 25 km radius circle position to incorporate the forum hub and a variety of habitats which includes agriculture, forest and estuaries. **This is a great opportunity to contribute to the South African Bird Atlas Project and an important conservation output from the Forum.**
- 5) **Additional Costs** need to be anticipated - for example, but not limited to:
 - a) Drinks and refreshments (including your own water)
 - b) Entry fees to the different sections of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (uMkhuze, Eastern Shores, Western Shores)
 - c) Donations to bird conservation funds
 - d) Curios



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5. THE ST LUCIA FORUM ATLAS CHALLENGE

A challenge will be set up for the area with a 25 km radius to run from 24-28 September 2025 inclusive. It includes the Forum Hub at the village and covers Eastern and Western Shores sections of the park, a mosaic of agricultural, wetland and natural forest, a 45 km stretch of beautiful beaches and rocky shorelines and the Lake St Lucia Estuary mouth. See indicated challenge area indicated by blue circle on the inset map (right).

This is a private event challenge, and the administrators will need to add you to the challenge. **You will not be able to join on the usual lists of BirdLasser challenges.** To join, please send your name and email address (the one you used to register with BirdLasser) to indicate you would like to join to chair@birdlifekznforum.org and copy to secretary@bekzn.org

Note this will only be available to people attending the Forum. If you wish to travel the atlas routes in teams, you are welcome to give a team name but all the people on the team must be listed by name and be travelling together in the same vehicle.



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6. SELF-DRIVE ROUTES AND SELF-GUIDED TRAILS

6.1. Eastern Shores section of iSimangaliso Wetland Park – self-drives

Entrance Gate: Bhangazi Gate (at the Crocodile Centre in the north of the village)

All loops are sedan-friendly unless heavy rain has flooded low spots; keep to 20-30 km/h for sightings, and grab the official Eastern & Western Shores map before you go.

Please note that exploring the Eastern Shores may be done in a single day but repeat visits to do the various side loops, viewpoints and hides is the recommended way to tackle this rich and scenic area.

At a glance

- Habitats you'll sample include freshwater pans and reedbeds, swamp/dune forest, rolling coastal grassland, lake margins, and the seaside dunes—hence a superb bird mix plus general game.
- Big mammals possible: elephant, rhino, buffalo, hippo, leopard, hyaena, plus, zebra, wildebeest and a suite of antelope (kudu, waterbuck, reedbuck, bushbuck, red duiker).
- Sought-after birds in the section: Southern Banded Snake-Eagle, Green and Pink-throated Twinspot, Livingstone's Turaco, Rudd's Apalis, Rufous-bellied Heron, White-backed Duck, African Pygmy Goose, Lesser Jacana, Rosy-throated Longclaw, Mangrove Kingfisher (mainly winter near town/estuary).

The Eastern Shores section has five separate drives off the main St Lucia – Cape Vidal tar road and these have been specifically planned to allow a visitor to encounter the main habitats in this section of the park. They are listed below in the order you will encounter them from the gate entry point. Note all the loops are ONE WAY so please respect these rules.

- Pan Loop (west of the main tar road)
- Vlei Loop (east of the main tar road)
- Forest Loop (west of the main tar road)
- Dune Loop (east of the main tar road)
- Grassland Loop (west of the main tar road)

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6.1.1. Pan Loop

A short loop near the southern gate past vegetated pans and viewpoints (often including Amazibu/iZindondo pan hide which is on the tar road between the entrance and exit point of the loop). It's one of the first worthwhile detours after entering.

Habitats: shallow freshwater pans with lilies and emergent sedges; adjacent meadow and forest edge.

Bird highlights: African Pygmy Goose, Rufous-bellied Heron, Lesser Jacana and African Jacana on lily-pads; Malachite and Giant Kingfishers, Spur-winged Geese, Black Heron/Openbill in draw-down periods; look up for Southern Banded Snake-Eagle hunting the fringes.

Mammals: waterbuck and reedbuck on pan margins; hippo by day in the pools or grazing at dawn and dusk, buffalo often traverse the open edges.

6.1.2. Vlei Loop (± 4.8 km) – turn east off the main tar road.

A compact loop through reedbeds, wet grassland and a slice of swamp forest; to the east of the tar after Pan Loop.

Bird highlights: Rufous-bellied Heron, Little Bittern (quiet edges), African Marsh Harrier quartering the reeds; forest fringes can produce Pink-throated Twinspot, Livingstone's Turaco, Rudd's Apalis and Crested Guineafowl.

Note that this loop has been flooded for an extended time through the summer of 2024/2025 and therefore the loop may not be a through route.

6.1.3. Catalina Bay lookout deck (west)

Catalina Bay deck offers panoramic views over the calm expanse of Lake St Lucia. Visitors can enjoy sweeping lake vistas that capture the essence of this estuarine landscape. This lookout is among the key viewpoints on the Eastern Shores, offering scenic highlights often featured alongside spots like Lake Bhangazi.

Historically, Catalina Bay earned its name from its use during World War II as a base for Catalina flying boats—remnants of which ("Jock's Mess") can still be found in the area.

6.1.4. Mission Rocks – east of the tar road

Mission Rocks is a scenic coastal area. It's named for the nearby historic mission station at Mount Tabor. Renowned for its rock pools, especially at low tide, where visitors can explore vibrant marine life. Also described as "a rugged and rock-covered shoreline... a scenic spot... popular with rock-and-surf fishermen and rock-pool enthusiasts."

The Mission Rocks drive from the Bhangazi Gate is about a 30-minute journey. A picnic area is situated in a forest near the Mission Rocks parking spot—providing a shaded,

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restful location for day visitors. Nearby, the uMziki viewpoint offers magnificent views of both the Indian Ocean and Lake St Lucia—especially worthy of a short scenic detour.

6.1.5. Dune Loop (± 3 km) – east of the tar road after Mission Rocks

A scenic coastal-dune circuit with viewpoints over the Indian Ocean, Lake St Lucia and the grasslands from the fantastic Kwashaleni tower

Bird highlights: dune/coastal forest species—Livingstone’s Turaco, Green Malkoha, Brown Scrub-Robin, Trumpeter & Crowned Hornbills; raptors include African Cuckoo-Hawk and Southern Banded Snake-Eagle along forest edges.

Mammals: Samango (Sykes’) Monkeys, Bushbuck, Red Duiker in the thickets; Giraffe and Zebra on the fringes.

6.1.6. Grassland Loop (± 15 km) – west of the tar road just before Cape Vidal forest area

A longer loop through rolling coastal grasslands with interleaving swamp-forest tongues—classic “big-sky” birding and game viewing. This route takes you past the beautiful Lake Bhangazi and the associated wetlands which can be easily viewed from the viewpoint and also the levee road which traverses the area in the first third of the drive. The turn-off to the Bhangazi Bush Camp is along this road - please note this is for resident guests only. There is also a viewpoint at the Red Dunes where you can exit your vehicle. The area to the red dunes has some of the most magnificent uMdoni tree grassland in the park.

Bird highlights: Yellow-throated Longclaw, Croaking and Zitting Cisticola, African Stonechat; after burns look for Black-winged and Senegal Lapwings; scan for the scarce Rosy-throated Longclaw in rank grass particularly towards the end of the loop. Denham’s Bustard may be encountered in the last third of this route. Forest fingers hold Woodward’s Batis and Green Twinspot. Raptors quartering include Black-chested and Brown Snake-Eagles.

Mammals: herds of Wildebeest, Zebra and Reedbuck;

6.1.7. Forest Loop

A newer loop (added 2018) takes you through climax swamp/dune forest—excellent for forest specialists at close range. Midway along the forest loop you can park and take the trail into the edge of the forest/grassland margin where the kuMfazana Hide overlooks the kuMfazana Pan. This is a multi-level hide for wildlife and birdwatching. The drive along the Forest Loop—though short—can be very engaging, keeping even butterfly-watchers entertained for longer than you’d expect. The hide provides a prime spot to observe wildlife in and around the pan.

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Bird highlights: Woodward's Batis (best toward Cape Vidal too), Olive Sunbird, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Narina Trogon; listen for Buff-spotted Flufftail and search damp edges for Black-throated Wattle-eye.

Mammals: Shy forest antelope (Red Duiker, Bushbuck), plus occasional Nyala and troops of Samango Monkeys.

6.2. Western Shores section of iSimangaliso Wetland Park – self-drives

Overview & Highlights

- Unique landscape: The Western Shores sit on the western side of Lake St Lucia—drier than the Eastern side, with a terrain shaped by grasslands, palmveld, restored wetlands, and regenerating bush.
- Rich in wildlife: This region features a 25,000 ha Big 5 area accessible via the Dukuduku Gate or Charters Creek route. Expect to see elephants, rhinos (both species), leopards, giraffes, antelope, along with buffalo, wildebeest, duiker, nyala, zebra, and more.
- Improved infrastructure: Recent investments include modern ablution blocks, lookout points, hides, and the elevated uMthoma Aerial Boardwalk offering panoramic views over the Makakatana Peninsula.

6.2.1. uMphathe Loop

Offers scenic views from the Kweyezalukazi lookout—a great birding and photo spot.

6.2.2. uMdoni Loop

A well-linked drive that takes you close to natural habitats, ideal for game viewing in rehabilitated landscapes.

6.2.3. uMthoma Aerial Boardwalk

A raised treetop walkway offering sweeping vistas across the Lake's narrows—from Maphelane to Cape Vidal. A must-visit for visual rewards and landscape appreciation. isimangaliso.com+2St Lucia South Africa+2

6.2.4. Charters Creek

This quiet lakeside area is a haven for anglers and birders—particularly those looking for both freshwater and marine species. Due to ongoing construction this area may not be accessible.

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6.3. Futululu Forest and Surrounds

The site is dominated by forest habitats and supports many of the same species as St. Lucia (treated separately). Look out for Grey Waxbill and Green Twinspot, especially when grasses come to seed, as well as Ashy Flycatcher, Dark-backed Weaver, Forest Canary, African Green Pigeon, White-eared Barbet, Narina Trogon, Green Malkoha, Tambourine and Lemon Doves, Black-bellied Starling, Red-fronted and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, and both Livingstone's and Purple-crested Turacos. Crested Guineafowl are frequently seen at the edges of the campsite in the early mornings.

In the open grassland habitats, search for Yellow-throated Longclaw, Croaking Cisticola and Woolly-necked Stork. Wetlands may add African Pygmy Goose, Goliath Heron, Whiskered Tern (summer), and White-backed Duck.

Key species:

Green Twinspot, Crested Guineafowl, African Pygmy Goose, Narina Trogon, Green Malkoha

6.4. Beach and Estuary Boardwalk Trail – Sugarloaf Camp to Estuary Mouth

The boardwalk trail begins adjacent to the Sugarloaf Camp and follows a well-maintained wooden path through a sequence of coastal swamp forest, dune thicket, and wetland edge habitats before reaching the beach and estuary mouth. The combination of shaded woodland, open reedbeds, and expansive estuarine vistas makes this one of the most productive short walks in iSimangaliso Wetland Park.

Forest and Thicket Section: The first stretch of boardwalk winds through coastal forest dominated by fig, milkwood, and other dune vegetation. Bird activity is high in the mornings, with species such as:

- Green-backed Camaroptera and Sombre Greenbul calling from dense thickets
- Red-capped Robin-Chat, Terrestrial Brownbul, and White-browed Scrub Robin often feeding near the path
- Purple-crested Turaco and Trumpeter Hornbill moving between the canopy trees
- A variety of sunbirds (Collared, Olive, Grey, and Scarlet-chested) foraging on seasonal flowers

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- Mixed flocks may hold Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Southern Black Tit, and Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher. Raptors such as African Goshawk and Crowned Eagle occasionally patrol the forest edge.

Wetland Edge and Transition: As the forest thins, the trail skirts patches of reedbeds and seasonal pools. These attract reed-dwellers like:

- Lesser Swamp Warbler
- African Reed Warbler (summer migrant)
- Southern Brown-throated Weaver and Village Weaver nesting in clumps of reeds

In summer, this is also a good area for migrant cuckoos, particularly Red-chested and Diederik.

Estuary Mouth and Beachfront: At the end of the boardwalk, the habitat opens dramatically into wide sandbanks, tidal mudflats, and the estuary channel where Lake St Lucia meets the Indian Ocean. This is a prime area for waterbirds and shorebirds, with regular sightings of:

- Pink-backed and Great White Pelicans
- Yellow-billed and Woolly-necked Storks
- Flocks of Greater and Lesser Flamingos when conditions are favourable
- Resident African Fish Eagle and wintering Osprey hunting over the water

The sandbanks and tidal flats support a variety of waders, including Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey Plover, and Ringed Plover. Along the surf-line, White-fronted Plover and African Oystercatcher are regular, while the skies often hold mixed flocks of Swift, Caspian, and Greater Crested Terns with Grey-headed and Kelp Gulls. A really high point would be the presence of African Skimmers which have been present during the last three summers after an absence of nearly 80 years.

Vistas: The vistas from the estuary mouth encompass the rolling coastal dunes, the open sea, and the wide lake system. Water levels and sandbar dynamics change seasonally. Hippos and Nile crocodiles are frequently present in the estuary, adding to the atmosphere of wildness.



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This trail offers birders a concentrated sample of **forest, wetland, shore, and estuarine birding** within a short, easy walk – a microcosm of the diversity that makes the Lake St Lucia system world-famous.

6.5. iGwalagwala Trail

Nestled within the iSimangaliso Wetland Park just south of St Lucia town, the Gwalagwala Trail is a gently winding, approximately 1.5 km circular walk through coastal dune forest alongside the estuary. The name “Igwala-gwala” comes from Zulu, referring to the turacos—specifically, the Purple-crested (and occasionally Livingstone’s) species—whose vocal calls echo through the forest canopy

Often described as “one of the best birding walks in the world for the number of quality birds per surface area,” this compact trail is unquestionably rich in avian diversity. It’s accessible for almost anyone, offering easy terrain and dappled shade—perfect for both casual nature lovers and serious birders looking for forest specialties

Birding Highlights: The trail offers an exceptional birding experience across a variety of habitats—from shaded dune forest to glades and grassy edges. Key species you might encounter include: **Forest dwellers:** Narina Trogon, Green Malkoha, Gorgeous Bush-Shrike, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, African Emerald Cuckoo, Livingstone’s Turaco, Woodward’s Batis, Green-backed Camaroptera, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Ashy and Dusky Flycatchers, White-eared Barbet, Rudd’s Apalis, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, and Square-tailed Drongo. **Elusive forest undergrowth species:** Buff-spotted Flufftail—often spotted with the help of a guide. **Edge and flowering tree visitors:** Olive and Purple-banded Sunbirds, Collared Sunbird, and Scarlet-chested Sunbird are drawn to coral trees and other flowering plants. **Grassland and edge species:** Typical bird parties often include species such as Rudds’ Apalis, Woodward’s Batis, Dark-backed Weaver, and Yellow-breasted Apalis—just a few examples of the trail’s richly diverse community

6.6. iPhiva Trail

The iPhiva Trail skirts the Bhangazi Gate on the Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia and threads through a classic Zululand mosaic—open savanna, palm-veld studded with ilala palms (*Hyphaene*), low dune thicket, and seasonal vleis and pans. Underfoot it’s mostly sandy, gently undulating paths with wide sky and long sightlines; in pockets of thicket the feel tightens to cool shade and close birdsong before opening again to grassland vistas. It’s an easy-moderate walk



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best done early or late when the light is soft, the wind is down, and game is active. Expect nyala, red duiker and warthog; on warm days listen for hippo grunts drifting in from the pans and lake.

Birding is wonderfully mixed because the habitats turn over quickly. Grassland and palm-veld hold Yellow-throated Longclaw, Rufous-winged Cisticola, Senegal Lapwing after rain, Plain-backed Pipit, Black-bellied Bustard and small parties of wattled starlings working termite hatches. Scattered acacias and thicket edges produce Brubru, Black-crowned Tchagra, Southern Boubou and Green-winged Pytilia, with Brown-headed Parrot and African Palm Swift keyed to the palms. Where dune scrub thickens, listen for Livingstone's (Knysna) Turaco, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Woodward's Batis and the soft "teeuu" of Pink-throated Twinspot in leaf-litter. In wetter summers, reedier edges may turn up Red-chested and Klaas's Cuckoo, while aerial space often carries European and Red-breasted Swallows, Little Swift, and hunting raptors such as Brown Snake-Eagle or African Goshawk. Winter can be quieter but rewards patient edge-working with cooperative twinspots and tchagras, and clear views of hornbills and rollers on exposed perches.

Target list & quick tips:

- Specials to listen for: Pink-throated Twinspot (soft duet notes at thicket bases), Woodward's Batis (piping song), Blue-mantled Crested-flycatcher (sibilant calls in shaded gullies).
- Open-country set: Yellow-throated Longclaw, Rufous-winged Cisticola, Black-bellied Bustard, Senegal Lapwing (post-rain), Plain-backed Pipit.
- Thicket/forest edge: Livingstone's Turaco, Brubru, Black-crowned Tchagra, Green-winged Pytilia.
- Palms & airspace: African Palm Swift, watch for Barn/Red-breasted/European Swallows in season.
- Best practice: start at first light; carry water and sun protection; move slowly through thickets (twinspots and batis sit tight); scan pans quietly for herons, storks and African Jacana; remain alert for large game and give them space.



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7. BOAT TRIPS

The boat trips on the Lake St Lucia Estuary Narrows are truly marvellous, offering a slow and immersive journey through one of Africa's most iconic wetland systems. Drifting along the winding channel between lush reedbeds, riverine forest, and expansive floodplain vistas, visitors are treated to close-up encounters with pods of hippos, basking Nile crocodiles, and an astonishing diversity of waterbirds. African Fish Eagle call from tall trees, flocks of pelicans and herons feed in the shallows, and seasonal migrants like waders and terns add to the spectacle. Photographers will relish the golden light on the water, reflections of reed-fringed banks, and the chance to capture dynamic wildlife moments at eye level, from kingfishers plunging to hippos yawning wide. These guided trips combine outstanding birding with breathtaking scenery and provide one of the best ways to experience and photograph the natural splendour of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park.

A number of boat tour operators are available through which you can book to suit your schedules. The boats range from the Santa Lucia (90 seater) to a number of operators with 15 seater boats.

8. GUIDED EXCURSIONS AND WORKSHOPS

8.1. iSimangaliso Restoration Journey (offered for one day only)

A tour around Eastern, Western Shores, and uMfolozi floodplain of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park which offers a deeper look into the restoration project for the Lake St Lucia Estuary. This is a unique opportunity to witness first-hand the scale and success of ecological rehabilitation in this World Heritage Site. The journey will visit the uMfolozi floodplain, including the major flow diversion works, designed to alter freshwater flow from the uMfolozi River. On both shores, alien plant clearing, wetland rehydration, and rewilding projects illustrate how large-scale ecological restoration is bringing back biodiversity and resilience, with grasslands, wetlands, and coastal forests changing and starting to thrive once again.

This will likely be undertaken with delegates transported on two game drive vehicles - birding and mammal sightings and photographic opportunities will all be part of the experience.

*RJ1 (Thurs 25/9) | link to follow on 1 September
A second trip will be added if time and bookings allow.*

8.2. Photographic Workshop in iSimangaliso Wetland Park

Join us for an inspiring **afternoon of photography in the heart of iSimangaliso**



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Wetland Park, a World Heritage Site rich in landscapes, wildlife, and colour. This field-based workshop is designed for beginners and enthusiasts who would like to gain confidence in **bird, flower, and landscape photography** while practising in one of South Africa's most spectacular natural settings.

Over the course of the afternoon, we will cover:

- **Camera basics** - an overview of light, exposure, focus, and composition
- **Bird photography** - tips for capturing perched and flying birds
- **Flowers/insects & other creatures** - photographing flowers, insects and smaller details in the environment
- **Landscape photography** - working with natural light, framing expansive vistas, and using foreground elements to create depth
- **Sunset shooting** - practising techniques to capture the drama and colour of the African sky as the day closes

The session will be both a workshop with hands-on practical application, with participants encouraged to experiment under guidance while making the most of the varied scenery around us. From the sweep of wetlands and forests to the delicacy of wildflowers and the movement of birds, every element of iSimangaliso offers a chance to practice new skills.

By the end of the afternoon, participants will have some foundation in nature photography and a collection of images that reflect both the learning process and park inhabitants.

BP1 (Friday 26/9) | [link to follow on 1 September](#)



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9. GUIDED BIRDING EXCURSIONS

These have been set up with BirdLife South Africa trained community guides/other commercial guides who are from this area or guide this area and know their turf and birds. This is specifically to target the special species to be seen in this area. Note that groups will be kept to a maximum of 10 people maximum. If fewer than four people book, the prices may be raised to cover the guiding costs.

Costs per excursion per person (details on booking forms for payment):

Members | R250 per person per walk/excursion

Non-members | R350 per person per walk (alternatively join your local KZN bird club or BirdLife South Africa and take advantage of the discounts)

9.1. iGwalagwala Trail

The iGwalagwala Trail in St Lucia is a short but rewarding walk through lush coastal forest right on the edge of town, offering an excellent introduction to the rich birdlife of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. Winding along shaded paths beneath towering fig trees, forest mahogany, and milkwoods, the trail provides a tranquil setting where birders can expect close encounters with species such as Livingstone’s Turaco, Narina Trogon, Woodward’s Batis, Green Malkoha, African Green Pigeon and the trail’s namesake Purple-crested Turaco (iGwalagwala in isiZulu). With its mix of dense canopy, understory thickets, and occasional clearings, the trail is alive with calls, making it an ideal spot for an easy bird walk that can be enjoyed by beginners and seasoned birders alike. The trail is easy terrain.

BEX1 (Wed 24/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX7 (Thurs 25/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX13 (Fri 26/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX19 (Sun 28/9) link to follow on 1 September	

9.2. Beach/estuary

The Estuary Boardwalk Trail from Sugarloaf Camp to the beach and mouth of the St Lucia Estuary is a scenic and easy walk that showcases a wonderful variety of habitats, from coastal forest edges and reedbeds to tidal mudflats and the shoreline itself. This mix attracts an impressive diversity of birds: cormorants, kingfishers, weavers, and bee-eaters along the reed fringes; waders, herons, and flamingos on the sandbanks and mudflats; and terns, gulls, and shorebirds closer to the beach. It’s a relaxed stroll with plenty of vantage points to pause and scan, making it one of the best spots in St Lucia for birders to enjoy both forest specials and waterbirds in a single outing.



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BEX2 (Wed 24/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX8 (Thurs 25/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX14 (Fri 26/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX20 (Sun 28/9) link to follow on 1 September	

9.3. iPhiva Trail

The trail at the Bhangazi Gate, near iPhiva, offers a delightful walk through a mix of open savannah grassland and distinctive palm veld, creating a varied birding landscape. The open stretches are alive with larks, pipits, and widowbirds, while raptors such as Yellow-billed Kite and African Harrier-Hawk patrol the skies. Stands of wild date and lala palms provide shade and food for species like Palm-nut Vulture, Trumpeter Hornbill, and various fruit-eaters, while the grassy areas attract rollers, bee-eaters, and flocks of queleas. This combination of habitats makes the trail especially rewarding, with wide vistas and good chances of spotting both grassland and woodland birds in a single walk.

BEX3 (Wed 24/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX9 (Thurs 25/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX15 (Fri 26/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX21 (Sun 28/9) link to follow on 1 September	

9.4. Futululu Forest and surrounds

The Monzi-Futululu Park spans over 1,800 hectares of lush coastal forest located between Mtubatuba and St Lucia, forming part of the larger Dukuduku Forest Complex and the iSimangaliso World Heritage Site. This varied terrain supports a remarkable diversity of bird species. In the forest understorey and edge, expect to find forest specials such as Green Twinspot, Grey Waxbill, Ashy Flycatcher, Dark-backed Weaver, Forest Canary, Green Malkoha, Narina Trogon, White-eared Barbet, Tambourine and Lemon Doves, Black-bellied Starling, and both Livingstone's and Purple-crested Turacos. Walks near the campsite often reveal Crested Guineafowl foraging on the forest fringe

Beyond forest interior species, the mix of open grasslands and wetlands within and around Futululu adds a valuable dimension to the birding experience: watch for Yellow-throated Longclaw, Croaking Cisticola, and Woolly-necked Stork in grassy areas, while wetlands may yield sightings of African Pygmy Goose, Goliath Heron, Whiskered Tern (in summer), and White-backed Duck

BEX4 (Wed 24/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX10 (Thurs 25/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX16 (Fri 26/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX22 (Sun 28/9) link to follow on 1 September	



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9.5. Eastern Shores/Kwashaleni/Cape Vidal

The Eastern Shores of iSimangaliso Wetland Park are a breathtaking mosaic of dune forest, coastal grassland, freshwater pans, and wetlands, all set between Lake St Lucia and the warm Indian Ocean. This section of the park is famed for its abundance of wildlife – from hippos and crocodiles in the pans, to reedbuck and red duiker in the grasslands, and a dazzling array of birds that thrive in every habitat.

For panoramic views, a stop at KwaShaleni Tower is a must. Here you can gaze across the shimmering expanse of Lake St Lucia on one side and the rolling coastal dunes on the other, a perfect spot for spotting raptors and enjoying the park’s incredible scale.

At the northern end lies Cape Vidal, one of iSimangaliso’s most popular destinations. With its pristine beaches, coral reefs, and sheltered bay, it offers a rare combination of game viewing and seaside adventure. Snorkelling and swimming in the clear waters reveal colourful marine life, while offshore the lucky may even glimpse humpback whales in season. Back on land, the surrounding dune forests and grasslands provide rewarding wildlife and bird encounters, making Cape Vidal the perfect place to end your Eastern Shores journey.

BEX5 (Wed 24/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX11 (Thurs 25/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX17 (Fri 26/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX23 (Sun 28/9) link to follow on 1 September	

9.6. Western Shores/False Bay

The Western Shores of iSimangaliso Wetland Park offer wide-open vistas of rolling grasslands, freshwater pans, and woodlands, alive with wildlife and birdlife. Once dominated by plantations, this area has been restored to its natural splendour, now home to elephant, buffalo, leopard, rhino, giraffe, and antelope roaming freely once again. Birders can look forward to raptors circling overhead, flocks of waterfowl on the pans, and grassland specials like the Yellow-throated Longclaw and Senegal Lapwing.

A short drive away, False Bay on the western edge of Lake St Lucia provides a complete contrast – here ancient sand forests, woodland, and the lake shore combine to create one of the park’s most rewarding birding areas. Rare forest species such as the Pink-throated Twinspot, Neergaard’s Sunbird, and Rudd’s Apalis can be found alongside flamingos, herons, and other waterbirds feeding on the lake’s edge. With its tranquil picnic spots, walking trails, and the backdrop of the shimmering estuary, False Bay is a gem for photographers, birders, and nature lovers alike.

BEX6 (Wed 24/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX12 (Thurs 25/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX18 (Fri 26/9) link to follow on 1 September	
BEX24 (Sun 28/9) link to follow on 1 September	



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