

Introduction

As luminous clouds of dust swirl through the ancient landscape, a tortoise patiently ambles around in search of some succulent morsel, a lizard basks in the sun while gemsboks and red hartebeest share the arid plains with mongoose, orb-web spiders, skinks and leggy toktokkies...

Tankwa Karoo National Park is situated on the southern boundary of the Northern Cape with the Roggeveld Escarpment in the East, Cederberg in the West, and Klein Roggeveld Mountains in the South.

Just a four-hour drive from Cape Town brings you to this truly unique national park. Situated within the Succulent Karoo Biome, the area is renowned for its rare and endemic plant species, rich birdlife, and landscapes that will take your breath away – from the sheer cliffs of the Roggeveld Escarpment to the moonscapes of the Tankwa Desert.

While Tankwa Karoo National Park is still in a developmental and land consolidation phase, expanding from the original 26,000 hectares in 1986 to nearly 143,600 ha by late 2010, it is the ideal destination for those seeking the brightest stars in Africa, a once in a lifetime glimpse of a rare endemic bird or perhaps nothing more than a silence that reaches deep into the soul...

Accommodation

- [Paulshoek Cottage](#)
- [Varschfontein Cottage](#)
- [Elandsberg Wilderness Camp](#)
- [Tanqua Guesthouse](#)
- [DeZyfer Cottage](#)
- [Camping Facilities](#)
- [Gannaga Lodge](#)

Paulshoek Cottage



The Paulshoek farmstead, restored in 2003, is quaintly furnished with antique furniture and able to accommodate up to six guests. The cottage is situated approximately 5km from the park offices at Roodewerf and has beautiful views of the imposing Roggeveld Escarpment and plains between.

- Two bedrooms, 4 beds (1 double bed and 1 single bed per room)
- One bathroom (shower only)
- Open-plan kitchen and living-room
- Braai-facilities
- Fully equipped with linen, towels, cutlery, crockery cooking utensils etc.
- Gas two-plate stove and fridge
- Paraffin lamps and candles (provided)
- “Donkey” / boiler, wood supplied
- Wood stove for lighting during cold spells

Varschfontein Cottage



The Varschfontein Cottage, also an old farmhouse, was renovated in 2005 and is able to accommodate up to nine guests. The cottage is situated 45km from the park offices at Roodewerf within the dry westerly section of Tankwa National Park. The desolate beauty of the area is truly breathtaking and the cottage is the ideal getaway for those seeking a reprieve from the human masses.

- Three bedrooms, 6 beds (1 double bed and 1 single bed per room)
- One bathroom (shower only)
- Open-plan kitchen and living-room
- Braai-facilities
- Reservoir for swimming purposes
- Accessibility by low-clearance vehicles hampered by the occurrence of water relay humps in road
- Access through sedan & 2x4 vehicles not advisable in winter
- Fully equipped with linen, towels, cutlery, crockery cooking utensils etc.
- Gas two-plate stove and fridge
- Paraffin lamps and candles (provided)
- “Donkey” / boiler, wood supplied
- Hearth inside house for cooking or lighting of fire during cold spells

Elandsberg Wilderness Camp



The development of the Elandsberg Wilderness Camp was initiated in September 2006 and completed by April 2008. The five cottages are situated 18km from the park offices at Roodewerf in the hills known as Elandsberg. Each cottage boasts beautiful views of the Karoo plains and imposing Roggeveld Escarpment.

By the use of the locally made unbaked clay-and-straw bricks with sections of walls built with rock, a bygone era is evoked, one of simpler times... Examples of this building method can also be found in the many ruins within the park.

- 3 x One-bedroom Cottages, double bed
- 1 x One-bedroom Universal Unit, double bed
- 1 x Two-bedroom Cottage, 1 x double bed & 2 x single beds
- Queen-sized sleeper-couch in living room
- One bathroom (shower only)
- Open-plan kitchen and living-room
- Covered Braai / Stoep
- Fire-place in living room
- Splash-pool per unit
- Fully equipped with linen, towels, cutlery, crockery, cooking utensils etc.
- Gas appliances
- Paraffin lamps and candles (provided)

Tanqua Guesthouse



The Tanqua Guest House is very conveniently situated on the southern boundary of the Tankwa National Park and a stone's throw from the Oudebaaskraal Dam. Built somewhat like a desert fort, the Tanqua Guest House was formerly owned by Esther and Alewyn Burger and later incorporated into the Tankwa National Park in 2007. The guest house offers a range of accommodation and has played host to weddings, teambuilding exercises as well as film and commercial shoots. Also situated next to the main building is a 900m air strip, allowing fly-ins by guests.

Main House (A)

- Two units with 2 bedrooms (1double bed + 2 single beds per unit) with shared bathroom
- One unit with double bedroom and bathroom

- Kitchen and living area shared by these 3 units
- Braai facilities
- Fireplace in living room
- Fully equipped with linen, cutlery, crockery, etc.

Self-catering Family Unit (B)

- Four bedrooms, 1 double and 3 twin
- Two bathrooms (one en-suite)
- Open-plan kitchen, living-and dining room
- Braai-facilities
- Fireplace in living-room
- Fully equipped with linen, cutlery, crockery, etc.

Only self-catering accommodation available at present. However, catering can be provided if an advanced request is made.

DeZyfer Cottage



DeZyfer Cottage is an old farmstead dating back from the early 1900's. It was lovingly renovated just before Easter 2009. The cottage, with its welcoming stoep and hearth, is a must for the nostalgic heart. Birding enthusiasts will also enjoy the many little visitors to the earth dam nearby.

- Two bedrooms:1 bed (1 double beds in each)
- Queen-sized sleeper couch in living room
- Bathroom (with shower only)
- Open plan living area/kitchen with fireplace
- Lighting by candles only (provided)
- Two-plate gas stove and fridge
- Fully equipped with linen, towels, cutlery, crockery and cooking utensils.
- Braai facilities
- "Donkey"/boiler wood supplied

Camping Facilities

Langkloof

Formerly an informal campsite, Langkloof has been upgraded with ablution facilities and running water during early 2011. The campsite is situated approximately 18km from the Park Reception at Roodewerf, within the scenic upper reaches of the Langkloof (Afrikaans for *Long Gorge*). Kudu, other small antelope and mammals frequents the area and, with you, are the only ones to experience the awesome power of thunder storms and the ensuing wonder of the Rhenoster River in flashflood.

- 2 x campsites, each with own bathroom and kitchen
- Bathroom - toilet, shower, basin
- Kitchen – no cooking facilities supplied
- Braai facilities, no braai grid supplied
- Carport
- Gas geyser
- Paraffin lamps
- No electrical points
- Access by high clearance 2x4
- 4x4 advisable in rainy seasons

Perdekloof

Singing cicadas and the westerly wind in the branches of gnarled Karee trees, is the soundtrack to a hot January day. February brings the anticipation of rain, daily, with soft towering cumulonimbus clouds hovering over the Roggeveld Escarpment and the might of Thunder, finally, ending the wait in its mighty afternoon displays. March, and Tankwa Karoo lulls into a light slumber in anticipation of shorter days, longer nights.

Watch this space!

Informal Campsites

Fully self-sufficient campers are allowed to camp at designated spots on an “only leave your footprints”- basis. Each site is for the exclusive use of the party reserving such a site.

Campsite Name	Proximity to Reception	Access by	Shade Trees	Water/Ablutions	Other
Pyper se Boom	8km	1) Careful driving with high-clearance Sedan 2) 4x4 advisable in winter	Yes – Bluegums & Prosopis4. The latter will be removed in future rainy seasons.	No	En route to Langkloof Section of Park, with kudu, other small antelope and mammals frequenting the area
Steenkampshoek	12km	4x4 only	No	No	Panoramic view of the Tanqua Karoo Basin, with Roggeveld cliffs behind you
Skaapwagterspos	13km	2x4 advisable	Yes – Pepper Tree (<i>Schinus molle</i>)	No	Hilly surrounds with gemsbok, duiker, Cape Mountain zebra and red hartebeest frequenting the area
Oom Rickert se Huis	16km	4x4 advisable in rainy seasons	Yes –Acacia karroo	No	Within Langkloof Section of Park with kudu, other small antelope and mammals frequenting the area
Volmoersfontein	32km	1) Careful driving with high-clearance sedan 2) 4x4 advisable in rainy seasons	No – camping adjacent to old ruin	Not for human consumption	Tankwa Plains – peace, quiet, “frontier”-feel, frequented by Cape mountain zebra and gemsbok. Birding the elusive Burchell's Courser.
Biesjesfontein	35km	1) Careful driving with	No – camping	No	Tankwa Plains – peace, quiet,

high-clearance Sedan 2) adjacent to old ruin
4x4 advisable in rainy
seasons

“frontier”-feel, frequented by
Cape mountain zebra and
gemsbok. Birding.

Please note:

- All visitors are required to report at the Roodewerf Reception on arrival.
- Closest water source Langkloof/Rhenoster river (+/- June-November only) or at Roodewerf Reception.
- *Prosopis glandulosa* is a declared invader (Category 2) & prohibited within 30m of the 1:50 year flood line/watercourses.
- Road to **Pyper se Boom, Langkloof and Oom Rickert se Huis** crosses the Rhenoster River and its Hoenderhoek tributary - potentially flooded in winter/after summer thunder showers.

For further information, contact the Park Office on tel. 027 341 1927, fax 027 341 2814 or e-mail Tankwa National Park.

Gannaga Lodge

The Gannaga Lodge is situated on the striking Roggeveld Escarpment at the summit of the Gannaga Pass. This private property situated within the park, approximately 24km from the park offices at Roodewerf, features a conference venue, guesthouse, restaurant and licensed bar and is managed by the owners Johan and Norette Visagie.

Contact details:

- For bookings and further enquiries please contact Johan or Norette Visagie at:
Tel: +27 (0)79 922 1688
E-mail: agterkop@hantam.co.za
Website: <http://gannagalodge.blogspot.com/>

Vital Information

General Information

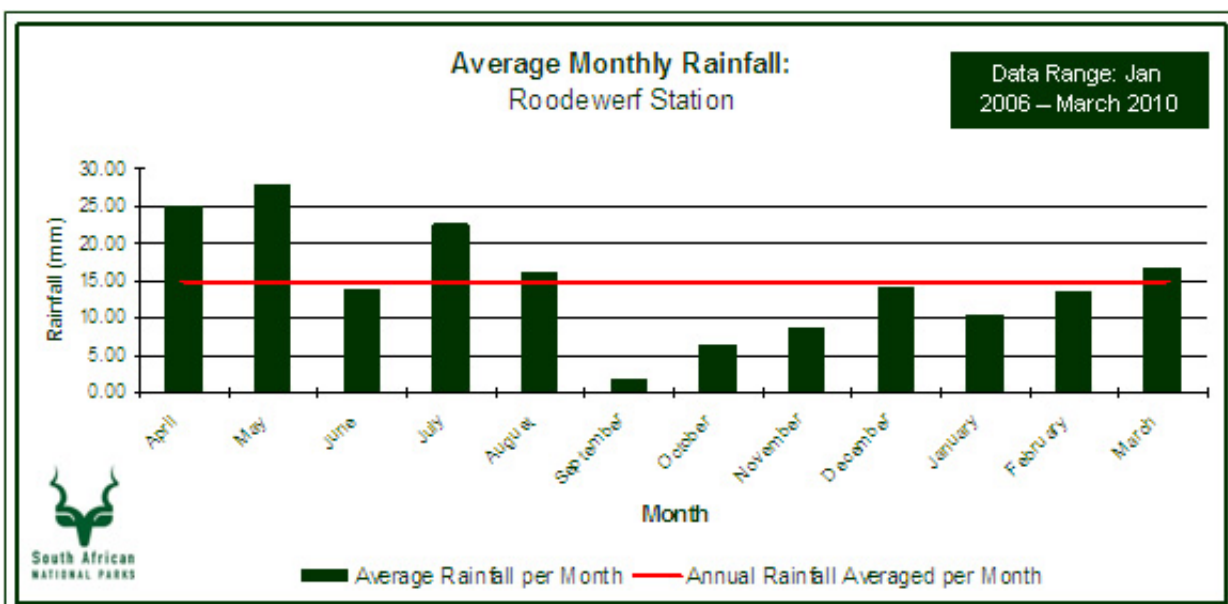
- **Travelling times:** There are restricted travelling times in the park. *No travelling is permitted* within Tankwa National Park during the following times:
 - 1 October to 31 March 19:00 – 05:30
 - 1 April to 30 September 18:00 – 06:30
 - *Exemption granted to visitors arriving on a Friday by no later than 21:00 at reception, to travel by means of most direct route to the reception and from the reception to their booked accommodation.*
- Last stops for fuel (measured from park offices) are Ceres (180km), Sutherland (140km - closed from Saturdays 13:00 for weekend), Calvinia (110km) and Middelpos (52km).
- Vehicle fuel is available in all parks (or is available on the park periphery) - South African legislation stipulates that fuel stations will accept legitimate *petrol/fuel/garage/credit/debit cards* or cash as a form of payment for any fuel purchase.
- Arrivals for accommodation from 14:00 only, departure at 10:00.
- No shops, restaurants, public phones or ATMs in the park.
- General Dealer and Bottle Store in Middelpos.
- No cellphone reception within the park as well as main access roads.
- Credit card facilities are available.
- *Prosopis* Wood for sale in park.
- **Office Hours:**

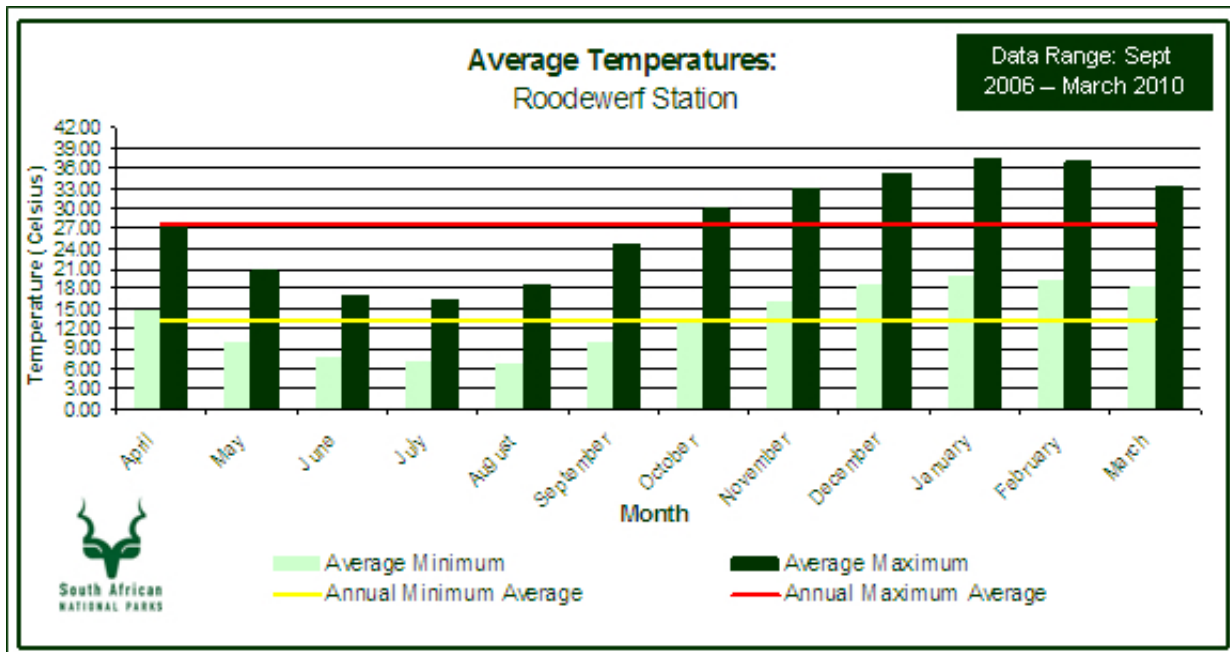
- Monday - Thursday: 07:30 - 17:00
- Friday: 07:30 - 21:00
- Saturday: 07:30 - 17:00
- Sunday / Public Holiday: 10:00 - 16:00
- **Please do:**
 - Ask for plant and animal species lists at Reception.
 - Bring along insect repellent and sun-block.
 - Bring birding books and other plant and animal field guides as well as binoculars.
 - Invite a friend to appreciate the beauty of daybreak and the wonders of the Tankwa night sky.
 - Remember to bring lots of warm clothing in winter.
 - Bring lots of cool goodies for summer!
- **Please don't:**
 - Litter.
 - Feed, disturb or injure any animal.
 - Bring any pets into Tankwa National Park.
 - Take any firearms into Tankwa National Park.
 - Stay or overnight at any other place than those designated as camping or overnight facilities.
 - Damage, remove or destroy any natural item (seeds, plants, animals or rocks) or human artefacts.
 - Light any fires at places not designated as camping or overnight facilities.
 - Leave the road at any point.

Climate and Vegetation

The duration and temperature of the growing season clearly separates succulent Karoo from other biomes. The Tankwa Karoo (Region) is one of the most arid sections of the Karoo. Isohyets of mean annual rainfall (mm) for the Karoo indicate that the Tankwa National Park falls into the 0-100mm range (Venter et al. 1986), with 25% of the mean annual precipitation in summer. In contrast the higher lying regions, within the Roggeveld Escarpment, receive up to five times more rain annually.

The mean July minimum temperature is 5°C-7°C (lowest measured 0°C), and the mean January maximum temperature is 38.9°C (highest measured 46°C). The highest average maximum temperatures occur from November to March with the hottest months being January and February. The highest wind speeds occur from October to March.





Planning Your Visit

Birding

Spring is best: Birding is at its peak from August to October, when the region may also unpredictably burst into flower. However, the majority of the specials (with the possible exception of Black-headed Canary, Ludwig's Bustard and Black-eared Finchlark) are accessible year-round with a little effort.

Roads

Please take care when driving in this region. The road gravel is sharp and often loose, and a great deal of caution needs to be taken with corners and sudden stops. Furthermore, please give some thought to your fuel and water requirements, bearing in mind that there are no proper towns in the Tankwa Karoo, and the closest refuelling points are Ceres, Sutherland, Middelpos and Calvinia. Those with thirsty engines may consider packing a (full) jerry-can to guard against potential concerns over those interesting detours.

Dirt Road Driving Tips:

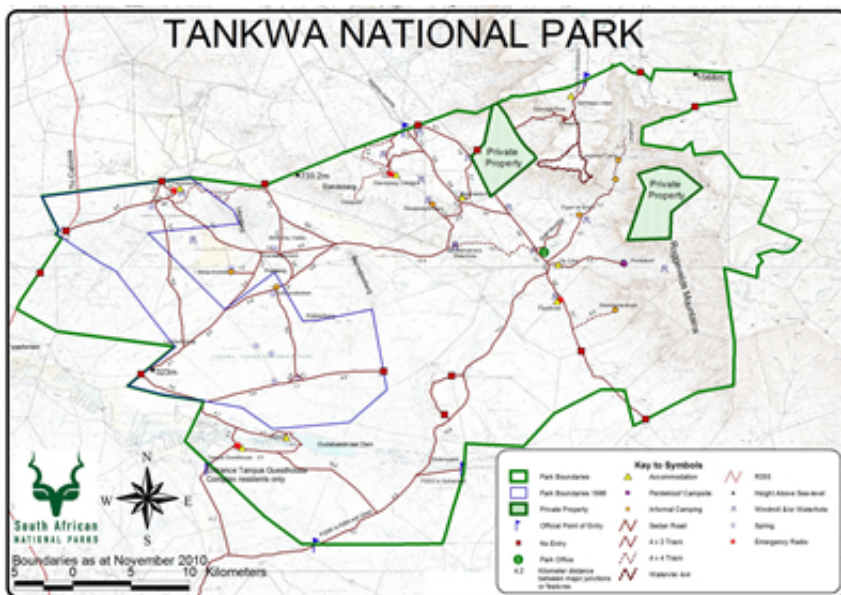
- Slow down when you see approaching traffic.
- Do not allow wheels to lock when applying brakes.
- Never exceed 80km/h.
- Be aware of slippery conditions during wet weather.
- Be aware of flash floods crossing roads as well as road surface possibly washed away.
- If you need to overtake, avoid loose gravel at the side of the road.
- Take along enough drinking water, especially during hot conditions.
- Inform your host of your route and approximate arrival time.
- Check pressure of spare wheel and ensure tyres are at the correct pressure.
- Drastically reduce speed when transferring from tar to gravel and when approaching a motor grid.
- Drive in the existing tracks on the road.
- Keep to the left when approaching a blind hill.
- Put your lights on in the dust of passing traffic.
- See [complete list of tips](#) for driving on gravel roads.

Contact Information

For enquiries e-mail Tankwa National Park or phone us on the following numbers:

- Tel: +27 (0)27 341 1927
- Fax: +27 (0)27 341 2814
- Address: Tankwa Karoo National Park, P.O. Box 299, Calvinia, 8190

Park Map



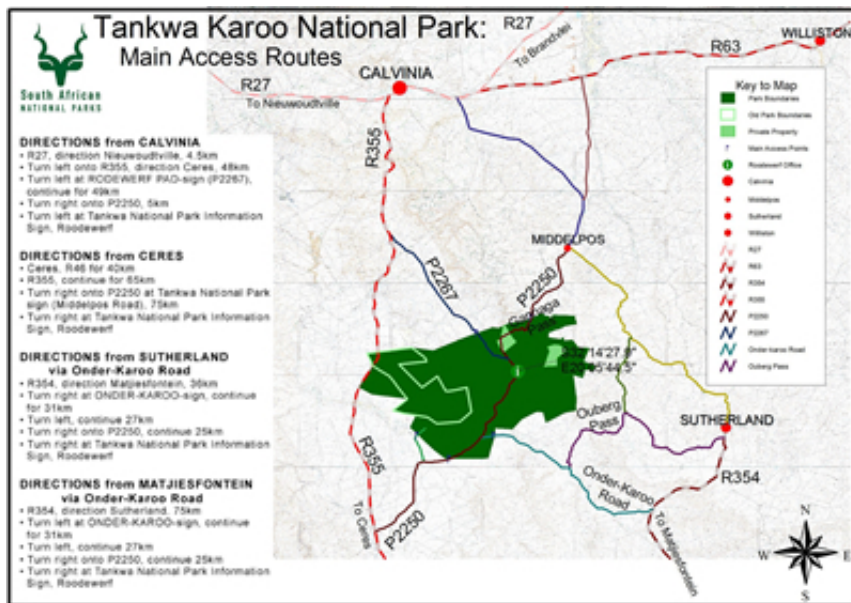
How to get there

Gate Times

- There are no formal gates for this park.
- **No travelling is permitted during the following times:**
 - 01 October to 31 March: 19:00 - 05:30
 - 01 April to 30 September: 18:00 - 06:30
 - *Exemption is granted to visitors arriving on a Friday by no later than 21:00 at reception, to travel by means of most direct route to the reception and from the reception to their booked accommodation.*

Main Access Routes

From Calvinia, Ceres, Sutherland and Matjiesfontein



Distances

- Ceres to Tankwa is about 180km - nearest petrol-point will be Middlepost.
- From Calvinia to Tankwa 110km.

GPS Waypoints

- Roodewerf Office: S32°14'27.9" E20°05'44.5"
- Oudebaaskraal Airstrip: S32°24.044 E19°50.576

Tariffs

- [General Tariff Information](#)
- *A pensioner's discount is not applicable for any of the accommodations in this Park.*
- [Daily Conservation Fee](#)
- *Members of SANParks' loyalty programme WILD do not pay conservation fees provided that proof of Identity and their WILD card are shown on arrival.*
- [Cost of a Wild Card](#)

Daily Conservation Fees for 1 November 2011 to 31 October 2012

South African Citizens and Residents (with ID): R22 per adult, per day R11 per child, per day

SADC Nationals (with passport): R44 per person, per day R22 per child, per day

Standard Conservation Fee (Foreign Visitors): R88 per adult, per day R44 per child, per day

Wild Card: Year Permits available for all our guests

Birding in Tanqua National Park and surrounds

Tankwa National Park is a well-known stop for birding enthusiasts in search of Karoo endemics. The Park's list currently includes 174 bird species of the 178 species known to occur in the Region.

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Birding the Tanqua Karoo

Just two southern African regions have been bestowed the honour of designation as Biodiversity Hotspots by Conservation International. One is of course the Cape Floral Kingdom, and the other the Succulent Karoo. For those whose image of the south-western Karoo is a shimmering wasteland to be endured as briefly as possible en route to Cape Town or Johannesburg, this may come as a surprise. Though - the remarkable endemism and diversity of the Succulent Karoo flora (at its most spectacular from August to October) is its most renowned aspect, the Karoo as a whole naturally has a great deal to offer the birder. With no less than 18 endemics almost wholly restricted to it, the Karoo is an essential destination for any birder visiting southern Africa, as well as a potential source of exciting new species for hardened locals.

Consequently, the accessible south-western corner of the Karoo – a low-lying, mountain-bound section of the Succulent Karoo Biome known as the Tanqua Karoo, after the river that bisects it – has received a great deal of birding attention. Here, in sparsely populated semi-desert just two and a half hours drive from Cape Town, the majority of the Karoo specials are easily accessible in a day's outing from the city. The famous stretch of white, dusty R355 from Karoopoort through Eierkop to Skitterykloof (the latter popularly but erroneously known as "Katbakkies" – the true Katbakkies Pass lies 15km to the west) has been intensively birded as has already received detailed treatment in such accounts as *The Birds of the South-Western Cape and Where to Watch Them* (Cape Bird Club, 1995) and *Essential Birding in Western South Africa: Key Routes from Cape Town to the Kalahari* (Struik, 2000). For a detailed description of birding in these southerly reaches of the Tanqua Karoo, you may wish to visit the free, electronic version of the latter resource on the web at www.capebirdingroute.org.

Our purpose here, however, is to draw attention to some lesser-known areas north and west of the R355, which have proved to supply superb birding. Notably, a number of sought-after species, usually associated with the less accessible Bushmanland region to the north and difficult to find or absent at the traditional Tanqua Karoo sites, appear to reach the south-western limit of their regular range here. We also describe some highlights of the Tanqua Karoo National Park, a much overlooked yet fairly accessible and strikingly beautiful protected area north of the Tanqua River.

Larks, Eremomelas and the P2250

For those unfamiliar with the Tanqua Karoo, the stretch of R355 regional road linking Karoopoort, at the south-westernmost corner of the Tanqua Karoo, to Eierkop and Skitterykloof provides access to a good selection of Karoo endemics. Beyond the Skitterykloof turn-off, the R355 continues northwards to Calvinia through a lonely and very beautiful stretch of semi-desert, bounded on the west by the dramatic skyline of the Cederberg Mountains. Conveniently, however, even day-trippers can add an attractive extra few Karoo specials and enjoy some great landscapes by continuing a more manageable distance north. Twenty-five kilometres north of the Skitterykloof turn-off, a minor road, the P2250, heads off north-eastwards towards Tankwa National Park and the distant towns of Middelpos and Sutherland. We consider this unassuming regional road to be perhaps one of the finest for birding

of the south-western Karoo , particularly in spring, when the scrub is alive with displaying, nest-building and chick-provisioning birds. The initial stretches are relatively heavily vegetated and resemble the familiar R355; however, before long the bushes grow further and further apart. Stretches of gleaming gravel appear, punctuated by the occasional clump of spiny *Hoodia*, a fly-pollinated succulent decorated in spring by droopy and foully malodorous pink flowers.

Perhaps the most conspicuous species along these arid stretches is *Tractrac Chat*, a gravel-plains specialist with a short-tailed, dumpy jizz. The commonest bird of the adjacent scrub is usually Rufous-eared Warbler, a noisy, neurotic and beautifully marked endemic of southern Africa's arid west. *Spike-heeled Larks* are also particularly common here, as well as Thick-billed, *Karoo* and *Red-capped Larks*. *Karoo Lark* is particularly easy to find in spring, when its rattling call is heard everywhere. The commonest seedeater in the area is usually *Yellow Canary*; however, nomadic species like *Black-headed Canary* and *Larklike Bunting* periodically invade the area. The latter can be particularly abundant at times, and is generally present much more regularly than further south in the Tanqua Karoo. Coveys of *Namaqua Sandgrouse*, another erratic visitor further south, flush up at intervals from the roadside. Especially in winter and spring, *Ludwig's Bustard* may be present in some numbers and are best spotted in flight, while *Karoo Korhaans* occur year-round. Pairs or small parties are occasionally seen within sight of the road, although their true density is only revealed at dawn, when their atmospheric frog-like duets drift across the scrub. *Greater Kestrel*, a scarce bird further south in the Tanqua, is fairly regularly seen along the P2250, as well as the commoner *Pale Chanting Goshawk*, *Rock Kestrel* and the occasional *Black-chested (breasted) Snake Eagle* and *Martial Eagle*.

Karoo Eremomela , a curiously localised and sometimes tricky Karoo endemic, is remarkably common along here. Look especially along the shallow drainage lines 4-7 km from the R355, always remaining alert for its two calls (a high-pitched, pulsating whine, somewhat like the tightening of a rusty bolt, and a Spike-heeled Lark-like *krrr-krrr*). Small groups of this social and cooperative-breeding species follow each other through the scrub, popping up at intervals to let forth a volley of whines.

The highly nomadic *Black-eared Finchlark*, usually considered a Bushmanland special, may well be a regular visitor to this region. In 1996, they bred in the Tanqua National Park (see *Africa: Birds & Birding* 2(1): 74), and in spring 2001 invaded the Tanqua Karoo once again. In this exceptional season, they occurred and probably bred right down to Eierkop at the Tanqua's southern edge; however, they occurred at highest densities along the P2250, and patchily in the Tankwa National Park. When breeding, aerially displaying males are easy to locate, looking more like giant, floppy black butterflies than birds. In flight, only their dangling white legs break the pure black of their underwings and bodies. Small groups tend to land frustratingly concealed in the scrub; the best technique is to walk slowly up to the spot, and wait quietly until a foraging bird potters into view in a gap between the bushes.

As the day heats up or once you have exhausted the possibilities of the gravel plains and scrub, you may wish to make a stop at the first or especially the second Acacia-lined watercourse, the latter crossing the P2250 27.6km from the R355. These supply all the expected Karoo thicket species, such as *Pirit Batis*, *Cape Penduline Tit* (also in the adjacent lower scrub), *Rufous-vented Titbabbler* and *White-backed Mousebird*. Just beyond the second watercourse, a turn-off to the left, takes one 12 km further to the Tanqua River and Tanqua Guest House. The Tanqua Guest House (see Box) makes an excellent base for exploring this area and the National Park as a whole.

Namaqua Warbler, which in the Tanqua Karoo occasionally also occurs into Acacia thickets far from water, is very common and fairly easily seen in the mixture of reeds and Acacia thicket densely lining the Tanqua River. This riparian strip is also one of the more reliable sites in the Tanqua Karoo to look for Dusky Sunbird, a highly nomadic desert sunbird that only occasionally ventures south to the Eierkop-Skitterykloof area. The Tanqua River is dammed just beyond the guest house, rather startlingly creating a substantial waterbody which hosts varying numbers of waterfowl and waders, perhaps most characteristically *South African Shelduck* and *Avocet*.

Tankwa National Park

The Tankwa National Park protects one of the most starkly beautiful tracts of the Tanqua Karoo and is well worth visiting for several reasons, among them its koppie-studded, moon-like landscape, diversity of succulent plants, fine Karoo birding and, perhaps most notably for hardened birders, above-average chance of finding the enigmatic Burchell's Courser. The park is criss-crossed by a number of vehicle tracks, most of which are easily negotiable by two-wheel-drive. However, please don't let courser-ambition get the better of you.

Birders will probably want to concentrate their efforts along a track on the Park's southern boundary, and easily accessible from the Tanqua Guest House. *Burchell's Courser* is seen fairly regularly on the patches of bare, burnished gravel along this road, and was even seen with chicks in spring 2001. *Burchell's Courser* is a poorly known and notoriously tricky bird: it may be absent altogether in some years, and even when present requires considerable effort to spot. The best techniques are to drive along slowly, stopping now and then to scan promising-looking expanses of gravel, and to keep a very sharp eye out for odd-shaped birds flying over. Strangely, we have picked up most of the coursers we have seen in the park this way! *Double-banded Courser* also occurs here. A bird that appears to reach the southern limit of its regular range in the Tanqua Karoo here is *Karoo Long-billed Lark*, which becomes very much commoner as one enters Bushmanland to the north.

Ouberg Pass and on to Sutherland

Heading eastwards from the National Park, a potentially confusing network of roads works its way over the Roggeveld escarpment and on to the town of Sutherland, whose one-horse appearance belies its astronomical fame with SALT (Southern African Large Telescope), the largest single telescope in the southern hemisphere). These are beautiful, remote roads, worth driving for their solitude and landscapes alone. However, if a birding objective is more acceptable, then Ouberg Pass does admirably. Ouberg is a truly spectacular pass, rising precipitously up through 600m of Roggeveld escarpment in a series of dramatic switchbacks which may not, perhaps, suit the particularly fainthearted. The rewards are superb views of the great, hazy basin of the Tanqua Karoo below, and excellent birding. Ouberg Pass is possibly the most reliable place within striking distance of Cape Town to see *African Rock Pipit* (knowledge of its call is essential), and is also a good site for other Karoo escarpment birds such as *Sickle-winged Chat*, *Pale-winged Starling* and, together with the plateau beyond, *Cape Eagle Owl*. The latter can be looked for any time from dusk onwards, simply by scanning the roadside telephone poles. *Cape Eagle Owls* can be unexpectedly common in many mountainous Karoo regions, though do beware of the occasional *Spotted Eagle Owls* venturing out of their favoured copses of exotic trees.

Planning Your Visit

When To Visit

Spring is best: birding is at its peak from August to October, when the region may also unpredictably burst into flower. However, the majority of the specials (with the possible exception of *Black-headed Canary*, *Ludwig's Bustard* and *Black-eared Finchlark*) are accessible year-round with a little effort.

Mammals



During 25 to 29 May 2009 saw the commencement of the largest single relocation of antelope into Tankwa National Park since its reintroduction programme began in June 2004. During this week, 81 Gemsbok and 69 Red Hartebeest from Mokala National Park found a new home in Tankwa.

The introduction of antelope to Tankwa National Park is aimed at restoring large mammals as a key driver in maintaining biological diversity through trampling and herbivory disturbance. Research was thus initiated with the release of the antelope in order to study their use of, and influence on, vegetation within the Park. On capture, radio transmitter-collars were fitted to six each gemsbok and red hartebeest to track the movements of the various groups.

Vegetation monitoring began during October 2009 with species composition and groundcover to be measured on a yearly basis. The influence of rainfall, rodents and insects on vegetation cannot be overlooked and these factors will also be monitored with the first rodent survey scheduled for September 2010. As the radio transmitter-collars have an expected lifespan of 15 months, information gathered on game movements will largely be finalised by December 2010. However, monitoring of vegetation and field observations on antelope movements will still continue thereafter.

By October 2009, a further 170 springbok, 36 gemsbok and 20 red hartebeest were reintroduced to Tankwa National Park. The introduction of another 130 springbok will commence during May 2010 with six springbok also to be fitted with radio transmitter-collars. This will bring the total number of game reintroduced to TNP to 19 Cape Mountain Zebra, 213 Gemsbok, 104 Red Hartebeest and 250 Springbok.

All species have adapted very well to their new home, with various newborn noted since September 2009.

Vegetation

Research concerning vegetation is still ongoing within Tankwa National Park, with 615 plant species noted within the park boundaries to date.

Tankwa National Park is situated within the Succulent Karoo Biome. The Succulent Karoo Biodiversity Hotspot covers some 116,000km² of desert stretching along the Atlantic coast of Africa, from south-western South Africa into southern Namibia,. It is one of the 25 richest and most threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life on earth and the only arid region recognised as a biodiversity hotspot. Biodiversity hotspots cover only 1.4% of the planet, yet contain 60% of all terrestrial species diversity.

The Succulent Karoo boasts the world's richest succulent flora, as well as high reptile and invertebrate diversity. Compared to other hotspots, the vegetation remains relatively intact. However, only 30,000km² of the original vegetation remains in a relatively pristine state with only 3.5% formally conserved. Dwarf Shrubland dominated by leaf succulents is found throughout the hotspot, a unique vegetation among Earth's deserts. Nearly one-third of the floral species of the region are unique to the hotspot.

Succulent Karoo is vulnerable to several land use pressures, particularly overgrazing on communal lands, ostrich farming in the southeast, mining and the illegal collection of plants and animals for trade. Climate change is also expected to have a serious impact on the region's biodiversity.

People with disabilities



All units within Tankwa National Park are spacious for easy access by wheelchair, with one of the Elandsberg Wilderness Camp Cottages specifically designed to accommodate mobility-impaired guests. However, please feel free to contact the Park Office with your specific requirements.

Elandsberg Wilderness Camp - Universal Cottage:

- One bedroom, double bed
- Queen-sized sleeper-couch in living room
- One bathroom (shower only)
- Open-plan kitchen and living-room
- Covered Braai / Stoep
- Fire-place in living room
- Splash-pool per unit
- Fully equipped with linen, towels, cutlery, crockery, cooking utensils etc.
- Gas appliances
- Paraffin lamps and candles (provided)

Wheelchair Access

(Please see additional information on [Wheelchair Accessibility](#))