

Bitou Birding Festival 2026: Slow Down, Look Up, Reconnect

Plettenberg Bay, South Africa | 23–30 October 2026

Plettenberg Bay will once again welcome birders, nature lovers, and conservation champions from across South Africa and beyond when the Bitou Birding Festival returns from 23–30 October 2026. Now entering its third year, the festival continues to grow as a celebration of the Garden Route's extraordinary birdlife and the community dedicated to protecting it.

Built around the 2026 theme — "Slow Down. Look Up. Reconnect." — the week-long programme invites participants to step away from the rush of daily life and rediscover the restorative power of time spent birding in nature.

Kwendalo will again function as the Festival Hub, serving as a central gathering place for the birding community. Here, attendees can enjoy a lineup of expert presentations, witness bird-ringing demonstrations, and browse the outdoor exhibitor area. Guests can also explore one of the birding routes or visit one of the bird hides mindfully positioned around the estate. Between excursions, visitors can enjoy light, healthy meals at The Kwendalo Café, making the hub a perfect space to relax and share stories of the day's sightings.

The 2026 festival will feature a diverse programme of guided bird walks, river and estuary excursions (including canoe and boat trips), a pelagic seabird expedition, conservation-focused talks, hands-on workshops, and family-friendly activities. From forests and fynbos to wetlands and the open ocean, participants will explore the remarkable habitats that make the Bitou region one of South Africa's premier birding destinations.

Previous festivals have delivered unforgettable sightings — from the impressive diversity of species recorded along the Bitou River to spectacular pelagic encounters featuring albatrosses, petrels, penguins, and even visiting orcas. Conservation science has also taken centre stage, with bird-ringing demonstrations offering insight into long-term monitoring efforts and local biodiversity research.

Beyond birding, the festival has become a platform for collaboration and conservation impact. Through fundraising initiatives and community support, past events have raised meaningful funds for local conservation organisations working across the Garden Route, reinforcing the festival's commitment to tangible environmental stewardship.

The 2026 edition will once again bring together respected conservationists, researchers, and local experts who will share their knowledge, inspire responsible birding, and highlight the importance of protecting South Africa's avian diversity. Whether you are a seasoned birder chasing "lifers" or a newcomer simply curious about the birds in your backyard, the Bitou Birding Festival offers a welcoming space to learn, explore, and connect.

Tickets are on sale through Quicket.

Visit www.bitou.birdingfestival.co.za for more information and to book your tickets.

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Festival Highlights:

- **Fundraiser Dinner an unforgettable evening around the fire:** Enjoy gripping, hilarious bushveld tales from Ian Thomas as he recounts tracking the infamous lion, BIG BLACK. All profits support critical avian conservation.
- **Engaging Expert Talks:** Enjoy insightful presentations on birding-related topics from renowned experts.
- **Guided Bird Walks:** Participate in guided bird walks through diverse locations and habitats.
- **Universal Access Birding Route:** Explore an accessible guided birding walk in Nature's Valley.
- **Unique Birding Activities:** Experience bird netting, ringing, and recording with Dr. Mark Brown.
- **Birding Canoe Adventure:** Embark on a canoeing journey along the Bitou River or Keurbooms Estuary.
- **Pelagic Birding Excursion:** Join a pelagic birding trip along the breathtaking coastline.
- **Birding-Centered Wellness activities:** Blending wellness practices and Stand-up Paddle with birdwatching
- **A Guided Keurbooms River Boat Cruise:** Join us for a unique guided birding expedition up the Keurbooms River.
- **A Parliament Of Owls at the Raptor Rescue Centre:** An enchanting evening of owl-inspired art, live music, food, and a silent evening owl walk. All ticket sales directly support local bird of prey rescue and rehabilitation.
- **Self-Drive Birding Route:** Navigate at your own pace with a self-drive birding route through diverse habitats.
- **Fun Bird Quiz** A fun evening to test your bird knowledge while soaking in the beauty of the Bitou River and enjoying some of the best pizza in Plett.

Explore Diverse Habitats:

- Wetlands, rivers, and estuaries
- Fynbos habitats
- Afromontane forest biomes
- Urban areas and grasslands
- Coastal areas and pelagic zones

Build your own birding adventure today! Visit our website for more information, to book your favorite birding activities, and for a self-drive route map with birding hot-spots.

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