



WORDS & PICTURES
MARK D ANDERSON

Garden of plenty

The Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden offers not only a magnificent floral display but also a variety of birds, says Mark D Anderson.



Orange-breasted sunbird



African paradise flycatcher

Cecil John Rhodes bought this 528 ha piece of prime real estate in 1895 for £9 000 to protect the eastern slopes of Table Mountain from urban development.

After his death it became the first national botanical garden dedicated to the cultivation and study of southern Africa's indigenous plants. The garden also offers scenic beauty and relaxing bird-watching.

1 Hang around with the locals

Some birds are hard to miss. Helmeted guinea fowl will turn up to scrounge crumbs from your picnic blanket. Other conspicuous birds you should see in the cultivated gardens are Cape robin-chat, Karoo prinia and southern boubou. The beautiful duet of the **bokmakierie** is one of the mountain's characteristic sounds.

2 Specials of the day

The garden's birding specials include the splendid **orange-breasted sunbird** and the spectacular long-tailed Cape sugarbird, which you will find in the protea and erica gardens. They are often joined on the flowerheads by mala-

chite and southern double-collared sunbird, and even the odd red-winged starling.

The localised Knysna warbler, a southern Cape endemic, can be found at the top of Skeleton Gorge – its beautiful loud song usually gives away its presence.

The small marsh below the old parking area is good for spotting Cape grassbird, Levillant's cisticola and common waxbill.

3 Catch the early birds

Above the garden, Skeleton Gorge and Nursery Ravine cut through the steep and wet eastern face of the mountain on either side of Castle Rock. Acidic streams flow through small pockets of Afromontane forest. If you're up early you may get a glimpse of lemon dove, one of the garden's true forest species. Other forest birds are sombre greenbul, Cape batis and **African paradise flycatcher**.

4 For the raptorphiles...

Early and late in the day are the best times to observe rufous-chested and black sparrowhawk and African goshawk. A pair of Verreaux's eagles regularly hunts along the mountain, sharing the sky with peregrine falcon and jackal buzzard.

The European honey-buzzard is present from mid- to late-summer, especially in the garden's Lubbett's Gift area. 



Bokmakierie

Where is it? Kirstenbosch is well signposted from Rhodes Drive in Cape Town's southern suburbs.

Hours? From 8 am to 6 pm April to August, and 8 am to 7 pm September to March.

Entrance fees? Adults R27, students R15, school children R5 and children under six free. Botanical Society members have free entry

and South African senior citizens are admitted free on Tuesdays.

When is the best time to visit? Bird-watching is good all year round.

Is it safe? There have been attacks on hikers on the mountain above Kirstenbosch, so don't hike alone, and make a note of these numbers: ☎ 086 110 6417 (emergency) and ☎ 021 799 8783 (information).