



Recommended precautionary procedures for birders during the COVID-19 pandemic

Background

The Minister of Tourism has announced several permitted activities for Level 3 of the national lockdown, including nature guiding, hiking, and limited travel. Reserves and parks are set to open for self-drive only and only in-province visitors. BirdLife South Africa has trained a number of community bird guides who we encourage birders to support, especially after a period without income under Levels 4 and 5. There is still a risk of infection of COVID-19 while out birding, despite the lower risk in the outdoors. BirdLife South Africa is releasing a set of recommended guidelines to protect both birders and bird guides.

Recommendations

- If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or are currently sharing a living space with someone who does then do not go out. Rather get tested and quarantine yourself to prevent the spread. Test your temperature regularly and do not go out if you have a fever.
- Birders in clinically vulnerable groups (e.g. people who are 60+ years old, that have respiratory issues or are immunocompromised) should be extra vigilant and reduce potential exposure as much as possible. If possible, either watch birds at home or in less busy areas.
- Always wear personal protective equipment (PPE) such as cloth masks.
- Avoid touching your face or removing your mask.
- Always cough or sneeze into your elbow or into a disposable tissue. Dispose of tissues in a secure bin or container.
- Sanitize your hands often with 70% alcohol-based sanitizer. At a minimum, sanitize when you leave home, after touching every new surface while you are out and about, after coughing or sneezing, after touching your face/mask, after any physical contact, and again before you return home.
- Avoid physical greetings if possible. Use the elbow bump greeting rather than a handshake or hug.

- Observe social distancing etiquette with a minimum distance of 1.5 m between people, though 2 m or more is preferable.
- Avoid sharing equipment such as binoculars, books, and travel mugs.
- Ensure that you have all the contact details of people you meet and engage with and that they have yours. If one of you tests positive, then it is important to have thorough contact tracing.
- Pack your meals at home ahead of time to avoid going to restaurants or the shops unnecessarily.
- Eat your food in an open space away from others or within the confines of your vehicle.
- Note that no group tours are allowed, and that all members of a traveling group should be residing in the same household to avoid community spread. Keep the numbers of people to a minimum.
- When returning home, make sure to wash your hands and face thoroughly using soap and water, disinfect your shoes before entering the house (and/or carry an additional pair to swap out), and preferably change your clothes and wash them immediately.
- Make sure to sanitize the items you took out birding, including your binoculars, camera, cell phone, books, and other items.
- When paying your guide, ask whether you can EFT directly rather than handling cash. Provide the guide with the proof of payment as a courtesy.
- Always pay attention to updates by government on the relevant regulations and abide by these.

Please be considerate while out birding. Be aware that you may still be infected with the virus and transmit it even if you do not show symptoms, as could others. Wearing PPE and social distancing is as much about protecting others as it is yourself, so please be respectful and abide by the regulations as they are laid out by government. Even if you are healthy and in a low risk demographic, others and their families may not be. Lastly, if birders are found not following the rules then you risk ruining the opportunity for others. We are all in this together, so let us show the authorities how wonderful the birding community is.

For any queries please contact Andrew de Blocq, Avitourism Project Manager, on andrew.deblocq@birdlife.org.za.

Disclaimer

BirdLife South Africa is not a source of medical advice and does not accept liability for any health complications or any other issues incurred while out birding. The government directives around permitted activities should be followed strictly and properly and are likely to change. BirdLife South Africa does not undertake responsibility for providing notification of these changes, and it is up to the individual to ensure that he/she has the most up-to-date information at hand before venturing out. Please note that these recommendations are to reduce infection risk but will never eliminate it.