

ROYAL JOZINI PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

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INTRODUCTION

This large protected area in the extreme Southeast of the Kingdom abuts a large conservation area to the south that includes Phongolo Nature Reserve, Jozini dam, and a number of private reserves. Royal Jozini PGR is situated mainly on the plains to the West of the Lubombo Mountains, with a sharp increase in altitude from the plains (150m a.s.l.) to the summit of the mountain (730m a.s.l.). There are large herds of game that include blue wildebeest, zebra, waterbuck, common reedbuck, kudu, impala, giraffe, buffalo, and elephant. The nyala and bushbuck populations are also rich in this location. The large game populations support healthy numbers of predators, including leopard, serval, and spotted hyena. There is an extensive network of roads connecting all parts of the reserve that are navigable by 2-wheel drive vehicles. Walking is permitted in the elephant-free zone where the lodges are situated. There is boating access to the Jozini dam. The weather here is hot and humid in summer but cooler in winter. This is also a malaria area, and the necessary precautions should be taken. Expect to see over 100 species in a day during spring and early summer.

SPECIALS

Hottentot Teal, Goliath Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, Marabou Stork, Secretary bird, African Fish Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Martial Eagle, African Crowned Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Black Sparrowhawk, Bateleur, White-headed Vulture, Crested Guinea fowl, Greater Flamingo, Great White Pelican, Black-bellied Bustard, Red-crested Korhaan, Greater Painted-Snipe, Bronze-winged Courser, Collared Pratincole, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, African Emerald Cuckoo, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Eastern Nicator, Brown-headed Parrot, Magpie Shrike, Gorgeous Bush-shrike, Rudd's Apalis, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Purple-banded Sunbird, Pink-throated Twinspot, and Capped Wheatear (winter).

HABITATS

The broad vegetation types for Royal Jozini are those typical of Zululand Lowveld on the basaltic plains, predominantly knob-thorn woodland (*Senegalia nigrescens*), with limited riverine vegetation along some seasonal streams. The foothills of the Lubombo mountains are coated in scrubby bushveld with small patches of riparian forest. Wetland habitats around Jozini Dam include open water, muddy shoreline, reedbeds, and rank grassland. Other habitats include acacia savanna, pans, dry grassland, and cliffs.

FACILITIES

There is an extensive network of roads within Royal Jozini. Visitors may conduct night drives with the permission of the reserve manager. Visitors may also book accommodation at one of the existing lodges (see www.royaljozini.com) for more details).

Popular birding spots include Ndlovu Slipway, Xander Pan, Kaden's Pan, Pan 18 and S10 Pan. The views from Rangers Rock are also worthwhile. Reserve management is currently investigating the placement of bird hides at these locations as well as other hotspots in the reserve.

Please contact your booking agent and ask for the Avenza Map download for Royal Jozini PGR. This gives you real-time location on the reserve and highlights all roads, watering points and places of interest.

BIRDING

The most rewarding birding at Royal Jozini PGR is along the roads and tracks within the elephant exclusion zone where the lodges are situated. There are over 20 km of roads and tracks that can be explored on foot within this exclusion zone, which stretches from the eastern shores of the Jozini dam to the foothills of the Lubombo mountains. Rudd's Apalis is extremely common here and easily located as pairs sound their duet. Burnt-necked Eremomela is fairly common in the same habitat as the apalis. Gorgeous Bush-shrike is also

common and, compared with elsewhere in the country, relatively easy to see here. Crested Guinea fowl collect in large flocks that are best seen as they cross the road, as the undergrowth tends to be quite thick especially close to the eastern shores of Jozini dam. Pink-throated Twinspot can be heard from almost any patch of vegetation, but patience is required to see this beautiful bird that tends not to hang around long enough for decent views. Red-billed, African and Jameson's Firefinches all occur here and may be seen in close proximity to each other but beware of female and immature birds that can easily be mis-identified. Crested Francolin is perhaps more common here than anywhere else in Eswatini. Other birds to look out for include: White-throated Robin-Chat, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Pied Barbet, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Marico Sunbird, Grey Penduline Tit, and Common Scimitarbill. Search for small patches of forest on the eastern-most road that runs north-south through the foothills of the Lubombo mountains where you may hear Scaly-throated Honeyguide and see Purple-banded Sunbird.

The Jozini dam creates an abundance of wetland habitats that are relatively rare in Eswatini. However, the immediate shores of the dam are outside of the elephant exclusion zone and therefore can only be reached by vehicle. A particularly productive spot on the eastern shore and within 100 meters of the exclusion zone is Ndlovu Slipway, which offers diverse habitats near the northern tip of the reservoir. Although the quality of birding depends on water levels, Water Thick-knee, African Jacana, Black Crake, Goliath Heron, African Spoonbill, Black-necked Stilt, Glossy Ibis, Yellow-billed Stork, Woolly-necked Stork, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Martial Eagle, Bateleur, and African Marsh Harrier generally can be seen from this vantage point. Collared Pratincole, Greater Painted-Snipe, and Secretary bird are frequently seen here, as well. Look out for other waders and ducks, especially on the sandbanks and bars which form during dropping water levels. Lesser Swamp Warbler, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Black Crake, Squacco Heron, and Water Thick-knee are common in the reedbeds and rank vegetation on the northern end of Ndlovu Slipway, while the productive grasslands abutting the Slipway hold Rufous-naped Lark, Orange-breasted Waxbill, and Quail finch.

The western shores can be reached by driving around the northern tip of the reservoir, and waterbirds and grassland birds can be particularly rewarding here. While approaching the western shores on the road that leads there through open woodland, look out for Red-crested Korhaan, Sabota Lark. Watch for Black-bellied Bustard, African Pipit, and Quail finch in the grasslands, where Square-tailed Nightjar is common at night. Capped Wheatear has been seen in these grasslands and might be a regular winter visitor here. African Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Goliath Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, Kittlitz's Plover, and a variety of ducks, shorebirds, and waders frequent the muddy areas and narrow channels before the main waterbody. Uncommon species here include Collared Pratincole and Greater Painted-Snipe. Scan overhead for a wide assortment of raptors, vultures, and swallows. Gabar Goshawk (both morphs occur here) and Lanner Falcon often are conspicuous around dusk in this area as they hunt bats and birds over the reservoir and grassland.

S10 Pan is a productive waterhole situated in knob-thorn woodland just west of the western shore grasslands. Large numbers of passerines come here to drink in the early morning and late afternoon. Watch here for Namaqua Dove, Greater Honeyguide, Lesser Honeyguide, Arrow-marked Babbler, Pied Barbet, Brimstone Canary, and an assortment of francolins and waxbills. Bronze-winged Courser often frequents this area at night, along with Square-tailed and Fiery-necked Nightjars.

Venturing up into the grassland areas of the northern sections of the reserve will present sightings of Harlequin Quail, Kurrichane Buttonquail and even the rare Blue Quail. In the dryer northern section, watch also for Martial Eagle, Marabou Stork, Brown-headed Parrot, Lilac-breasted Roller, Magpie Shrike, Burchell's Starling, Southern Red-billed Hornbill, Pale Flycatcher and Eastern Paradise-Whydah. Fiscal Flycatcher is sometimes common here in the winter. Productive pans in the northern section include Kadens Pan and Xander Pan. Kaden's Pan, in particular, attracts a wide variety of species, many of which offer good photographic opportunities as they come in to drink. Species at Kaden's Pan include Common Scimitar bill, Bearded Woodpecker, Black Sparrowhawk, Gorgeous Bush shrike, Fiscal Flycatcher (winter), and a wide diversity of waxbills, including Pink-throated Twin spot and all three firefinch species.

Royal Jozini is a raptor-lovers paradise with a large variety of vultures, eagles, kites, and hawks. Search for White-backed, Lappet-faced and White-headed Vultures soaring on thermals above and follow their movements down to the ground where they may be feeding on a carcass. Watch for Secretary bird in open areas on the western shores of the reservoir. Bateleur is easily spotted by scanning the sky, while Martial Eagle and Black-chested Snake Eagle also are frequent overhead. Tawny and Wahlberg's Eagle breed at Royal Jozini as does Verreaux's Eagle Owl; Royal Jozini is the only known nesting location in Eswatini for the latter species.

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