

Dwarf Bittern, Borakalalo National Park

Written by Neil Gray

Wednesday, 07 November 2007 15:31 - Last Updated Thursday, 27 September 2012 11:02

6 November 2007 Last Sunday, 4th November, I went on a birding day trip to Borakalalo National Park. The day got off to a great start as I managed to get my first and only photo (not that great I must admit) of a Red-chested Cuckoo, but then tailed off into mediocrity as the day wore on. Not an eremomela, finch, waxbill or canary seen all day, not even a Common(!!!) Fiscal. No kingfishers. Waders at a minimum due to the dam being at max capacity, although there seemed to be a Greenshank convention going on. I don't think I've ever seen as many in one place at the same time. One bright spot was a flight of Greater Flamingo over the dam, as I have never seen them at Borakalalo before.

As I was about to write the day off as a dead loss I called in at the Gadinonyane hides west of Moretele Camp. Water levels here and at Sefudi Dam are the highest I ever remember seeing them. At Gadinonyane the hides and walkways out to them are over inundated grassland. Approaching from the west I first went to the western hide where all that was to be seen were a single Little Grebe, some Southern Masked Weavers and overhead Barn Swallow and Eurasian Bee-Eater. Moving on to the eastern hide, which I had vowed was my last stop for the day, I was treated to a Green-backed Heron sitting in the branches of a tree overhanging the water some 30m away and I had to squint through a bush to see it. Having determined with the binos that my heron was in fact a DWARF BITTERN I got just one photo before the bird disappeared. The photo shows the uniform dark slate grey back, reddish eye, bluish lores and orbital skin, yellowish back to the legs, pinkish leading edge to the wings and just a hint of the vertically streaked black and white front which I had seen very clearly with the binos.

I almost didn't get any photo of this Dwarf Bittern at all. I'd had such a bad day's birding (a 68 species day list at that venue and in summer and after overnight showers!!!!) and this was my last stop for the day, that I almost didn't give the "Green-backed Heron" a second look. Just as well I did! Having to shoot the pic through foliage on manual focus took time and the pic (see Borakalalo gallery) was literally the only one I had time to take before the bird disappeared inside the undergrowth. Nearly paid for breaking my own rule of "Photo first, then binos" - at least if the bird has flown you might have one semi-decent pic to fall back on.

So a lifer to end an otherwise unspectacular day at Bora!

Neil Gray