

go!

TOP SPOT

WORDS MARK D ANDERSON
PICTURE ALBERT FRONEMAN



Eyes... white!

There is hardly a campsite or garden in South Africa without them. **Mark D Anderson** tells us more about white-eyes, those cute little birds that can be endlessly entertaining but easily overlooked.

I never tire of watching white-eyes. Always busy, they fly between bushes, probe in crevices and under bark for insects, drink nectar from flowers, interact in their small flock, and call continually. They get quite agitated if a cat, snake or raptor appears on the scene, and their alarm call is usually my cue to go and investigate what's happening.

So they're all the same, right? Actually, there are three types of white-eyes in South Africa. Next time you are visiting Augrabies

or some other spot along the Orange River in the western part of the country, take a closer look. You'll notice that these birds (the Orange River white-eye) have lovely peach-coloured bellies.

By contrast, their cousin, the Cape white-eye, is grey underneath, and the African yellow white-eye (which is found in northern KZN and the far north of Limpopo) is almost uniformly yellowish green.

There are also differences in their call, but it takes a well-trained ear to tell them apart, and some white-eyes are known to mimic other birds.

Where can I compare notes? In parts of central South Africa, like Dewetsdorp in the Free State, you can see the Orange River and Cape white-eye side by side.

And the name? The name comes from the attractive white ring (0,5 to 1 mm) these birds have around the eye.

Make your own nature reserve. We have an indigenous garden at our home in Kimberley – with aloes, karees, acacias and much more to attract some 77 bird species, including flocks of white-eyes that



The Orange River white-eye (inset) has a peachy colour under the wings, which distinguishes it from the Cape white-eye (above) and the African yellow white-eye.

love to bathe in water that has collected on the leaves.

Not only is our garden low-maintenance, but it also provides food and nesting places. In the dry winter months, when food is scarce, we put out wild bird seed, fruit and suet, and also keep our bird baths and ponds brimming to keep our feathered friends happy. ☑

If bird-watching and bird conservation is your passion, join BirdLife South Africa – call ☎ 011 789 1122 or e-mail ✉ info@birdlife.org.za

INSET MARK D ANDERSON