

Birds of the Drakensberg, Wakkerstroom and Kruger National Park

South Africa is a large, modern and developing country situated at the 'bottom end' of the African continent. The country has large protected areas in the form of national parks within its boundaries, thus offering visiting birders a huge range of bird and mammal life. This unique itinerary takes in the Drakensberg Mountains, the rural community of Wakkerstroom and the world famous Kruger National Park. You can expect a high percentage of South African endemic bird species and a wide range of mammals within Kruger.

Days 1-2: A late afternoon flight from London to Johannesburg where arrival is on the following morning. After clearing customs, we transfer to our remote hotel which is located high in the Drakensberg Mountains. En route the highway passes through extensive agricultural areas dotted with marshes where birds may include Black-shouldered Kite, Blacksmith Lapwing and displaying Long-tailed Widowbirds. Two-night stay in the Drakensberg Mountains.

Day 3: Our isolated hotel is unique in location with a vulture feeding station close to the rooms. It is possible to get close views of Cape Griffon and Bearded Vultures, Jackal Buzzard and White-necked Ravens which regularly attend the feeding station. Around the gardens we should locate groups of Red-winged Starling, Greater Striped Swallow, Familiar Chat, Malachite and Greater Double-collared Sunbirds, Drakensberg Siskins and White-rumped Swifts. Later in the morning we drive up towards The Sentinel which has incredible views down into the valley below. Raptors are well represented in the area with Verreaux's Eagle, Black Harrier, Rock Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon. Ground Woodpecker and Cape Rock Thrush prefer the rocky outcrops. Our main interest is locating the endemic Drakensberg Rockjumper which inhabits the highest areas.

Dates

Monday December 2nd - Sunday
December 15th 2019

Leaders: Mark Finn and local guides
Group Size: 8
Birds: 280-320

Day 4: Today we leave the mountains and visit Witkoppen Reserve. En route we should encounter large numbers of Amur Falcons on wires and fences. Witkoppen should reveal Eastern Long-billed Lark, South African Cliff Swallow, Banded Martin and mixed flocks of Common and Alpine Swifts. A check of the grasslands may reveal the beautiful Blue Bustard and the localised Secretarybird. Travel to the birding hotspot of Wakkerstroom where we stay for three nights

Days 5-6: Our base is at a farmhouse close to Wakkerstroom with easy access to the main birding areas. Before breakfast an exploration of one of the many dirt roads running through the region should reveal Red-throated Wryneck, Buff-streaked Chat, Red-capped Lark, Yellow-breasted Pipit, Cape Sparrow and displaying Long-tailed Widowbirds. In the extensive grasslands, sightings of Southern Bald Ibis, Grey-crowned Crane and Denham's and Blue Bustards are possible. On one day a drive along the Amersfoort road for Black-winged and Crowned Lapwings, Eastern



Lilac-breasted Roller

Clapper and Spike-heeled Larks, Drakensberg Prinia, Pale-crowned and Zitting Cisticolas. The area around Daggakraal and Fickland Pan is famous for larks and we hope to connect with the rare Rudd's Lark and highly localised Botha's Lark. Several wetlands in the area attract Maccoa Duck, Southern Pochard, Red-billed Teal, Cape Shoveler and African Spoonbill. Closer to base an extensive marsh is attractive to Purple Swamphen, South African Shelduck, Hottentot Teal, Lesser Swamp and Little Rush Warblers and hunting African Marsh Harriers.

Day 7: Before driving to Kruger we check the farm gardens and adjacent bush for African Hoopoe, Crested Barbet, Olive Thrush, Black-throated Canary, Streaky-headed Seedeater and, on flowering plants, Amethyst Sunbirds. We enter Kruger at Malelane and stop at the Crocodile River. Here the birds are both varied and different from earlier in the tour.

The water edge should provide views of Water Thick-knee, White-faced Whistling Duck, Goliath Heron and Three-banded Plovers. Berg-en-Dal is a short distance away from our base for the night. The gardens attract Magpie Shrike, Lilac-breasted Roller, Southern Red-billed and Yellow-billed Hornbills, Blue Waxbill and noisy Swainson's Francolins.

Days 8-9: A dawn start to Skukuza Camp with plenty of mammals along the route. Typical birds include Yellow-throated Longclaw, Red-billed Oxpecker, various starlings including Cape and Burchell's, Martial Eagle, Arrow-marked Babbler, Red-crested Bustard and grass-loving Natal and Crested Francolins. On arrival in Skukuza we have brunch and then a walk around the grounds which hold African Paradise Flycatcher, African Green Pigeon and Violet-backed Starlings. Later in the day there is a visit to a bird hide and pool for wetland birds and a drive into the bush for

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Jacobin Cuckoo, Red-faced Mousebird, White-crested Helmetshrike, Green-winged Pytilia and the inquisitive Pearl-spotted Owllet. On Day 9 a pre-breakfast drive in a westerly direction from Skukuza. The grasslands attract Southern Ground Hornbills and a range of raptors: White-backed Vulture, Bateleur, Brown Snake Eagle and African Hawk Eagle. Other interesting species include Little and Southern Carmine Bee-eaters, Woodland Kingfisher, Black-crowned Tchagra and White-browed Scrub Robin. The scattered bush habitat and rock outcrops may have Rattling Cisticola, Black-backed Puffback, Long-billed Crombec and the localised Southern Black Tit.

Days 10-11: Next on the agenda is the Sabie River which holds storks and White-crowned Lapwings. Satara is our next base with chances of Senegal Lapwing, Purple Roller and White-winged Widowbird en route. In the evening a night drive is planned for African and Southern White-faced Scops-Owls, African Barred Owllet, Spotted and Verreaux's Eagle Owls, Fiery-necked, Square-tailed and Freckled Nightjars and Bronze-winged Courser. On Day 11 an early morning game and bird-watching drive around the eastern area of the park. The open savannah habitat with large trees has a high population density of herbivores and attendant predators: Tawny, Steppe and Lesser Spotted Eagles. Kills attract White-headed, Lappet-faced, African White-backed, Hooded Vultures. The afternoon is spent birdwatching in the woodlands where we may find Bennett's and Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, Green Woodhoopoe and Burnt-necked Eremomela. Satara often has species within the camp with previous visits recording Yellow-breasted Apalis, Orange-breasted Bushshrike and Brown-headed Parrots.

Day 12: Today we leave Kruger and head back into the Drakensberg Mountain range via the Blyde River Canyon - the third-largest in the world. The canyon is home to one of the world's rarest raptors, the tiny Taita Falcon. Nearby, a botanical garden can be productive for Yellow-fronted and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, Black-collared

Barbet, Ashy Flycatcher and Scarlet-chested Sunbird. Later in the day we arrive at Mount Sheba and our hotel surrounded by Afromontane Forest.

Day 13: A full day at Mount Sheba where the forest trails hold the endemic Knysa Turaco. In the undergrowth a search for skulking species - White-starred Robin, Chorister Robin Chat, Barratt's Scrub Warbler and Yellow-throated Woodland Warblers. If we are lucky a Narina Trogon may show, hunting for insects. Other species within the forest include Red-necked Francolin, Black Sawwing, African Dusky Flycatcher, Forest Canary and Swee Waxbill. Outside our rooms common species comprise Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Cape Batis, Olive Woodpecker, Bar-throated Apalis and Cape White-eye.

Day 14: Pre-breakfast walk around the hotel grounds followed by a transfer to Johannesburg Airport. Flights depart for Europe in the evening with arrival early on the following day.

Prices

Ground Price: £3,995
Single room: £250
Deposit: £400
*Air Fare: £695

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*