



**WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA: 12-DAY BIRDING
ADVENTURE**

14 - 25 FEBRUARY 2020



Blue Crane (photo Stephen Hammer), the national bird of South Africa, is one of the special birds we will be looking for on this tour.

We often get feedback that the accommodation on this tour is great! Indeed, South Africa is one of the best value destinations on the entire continent. The excellent infrastructure, superb accommodation, great food, wonderful South African hospitality, spectacular and varied scenery, and the presence of Africa's big and small mammals makes it one of the most pleasant countries in the world to bird in. We begin this tour in one of the world's most beautiful cities, Cape Town, looking for a host of avian endemics found nowhere else but in the Cape Floral Kingdom (the richest place on earth for plants) and also doing a pelagic trip. Cape pelagics are among the best in the world. We then head northwards from Cape Town up the west coast, and then across the beautiful and rugged Cederberg range into the Karoo, another one of Africa's greatest endemic hotspots. We then visit the Agulhas Plains, which are the stronghold of South Africa's national bird, the **Blue Crane**, and also are inhabited by localized endemics such as the **Agulhas Long-billed Lark**. We then continue to the picturesque Garden Route, where we have time to sample some of the birds more typical of Eastern South Africa, including **Knysna Turaco**, **Knysna Woodpecker**, **Half-collared Kingfisher**, and a host of others.

All in all, our 12-day featured Cape tour in February this year is full of localized endemics, spectacular scenery, and so much more. This is where Birding Ecotours started as a company in 2002, and nowhere else do we have as much experience as in the Cape.

This tour can be combined with the **Subtropical South Africa 18-day Birding Adventure February 2020**.

Itinerary (12 days/11nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Cape Town

This is the day you need to arrive in Cape Town – any time during the day. You will be met at Cape Town International Airport and transferred to our B&B. Time-permitting, we may already start some birding today – we can bird one of the Cape Peninsula's fine wetlands (Intaka Island, Rietvlei, or Rondevlei). Here we will look for **Great White Pelican**, **Greater Flamingo**, a host of shorebirds, **Cape Teal** and **Maccoa Duck** among many other waterfowl, **Little Bittern**, and many other herons, three grebe species, **Greater Painted-snipe**, **African Snipe**, four species of reed-associated warblers, and other waterbirds. While looking for waterbirds (or even while driving to our B&B) we should also find good numbers of terrestrial endemics, including **Karoo Prinia**, **Cape Bulbul**, and **Jackal Buzzard**.

Overnight: Mariner Guest House, Simonstown, South Peninsula

Day 2. Pelagic trip (or Cape Peninsula and False Bay birding)

After an early breakfast we embark on a pelagic trip (weather-permitting, otherwise Cape Peninsula and False Bay birding), departing from Simonstown, where we will find **African Penguin**, and from here we'll be going 30-50 km out to sea. En route we pass the magnificent Cape Point – really spectacular when seen from the sea. Our first pelagic species are usually **Sooty Shearwater** and **White-chinned Petrel** (with the occasional **Spectacled Petrel**), followed soon by sometimes both species of **Giant Petrel**, **Northern** and **Southern**. Further out, a minimum of four albatross species, **Cape** and other **Petrels**, several storm petrels (two species are usually common), shearwaters, and many others are observed. We almost always find at least

one trawler, and it is around these fishing boats that huge congregations of albatrosses and other seabirds create an amazing spectacle. We also often encounter marine mammals, such as Bryde's Whale, on these pelagics.

Overnight: Mariner Guest House, Simonstown, South Peninsula

Day 3. Birding the Cape Peninsula and False Bay (or pelagic trip)

Today we plan to visit excellent sites such as the Strandfontein Bird Sanctuary, one of the best waterbird sites, and Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden, one of the most beautiful places anywhere and full of birds. At Kirstenbosch it is quite easy to find some important fynbos endemics such as **Orange-breasted Sunbird** and **Cape Sugarbird**, while **Cape Spurfowl**, **Southern Boubou**, **Cape Canary**, **Brimstone Canary**, **Cape Robin-Chat**, **Sweet Waxbill** (with luck), and a whole host of other quality birds entertain us. Many raptors are possible here and at other sites we will visit – including **Verreaux's Eagle**, several exciting accipiters, **Jackal Buzzard** (endemic), **Forest Buzzard** (endemic), **Peregrine Falcon**, **Rock Kestrel**, and others. After birding this beautiful garden we depart for Rooiels (although sometimes we reverse the order and bird Rooiels first). To get to this village we have to traverse one of the most scenic drives in South Africa along the False Bay coast. First we drive parallel to an extremely long white beach bordering the "Cape Flats" that separate the mountainous Cape Peninsula from the inland Cape Fold mountain ranges. Then we reach an area where impressive mountains meet the sea, to begin a truly stunning marine drive. The main target bird at Rooiels is the charismatic and localized **Cape Rockjumper**. But we should also find **Cape Siskin**, **Cape Rock Thrush**, and many more. On our return to the Cape Peninsula, time-permitting (else later in the itinerary), we can bird the superb Strandfontein Bird Sanctuary for a plethora of herons, reed-associated warblers, waterfowl, shorebirds, **African Oystercatcher**, **Purple Swamphen**, **Great White Pelican**, **Greater Flamingo**, **African Marsh Harrier**, and (as usual) many others.

Overnight: Mariner Guest House, Simonstown, South Peninsula

Day 4. West Coast birding

Today we begin an exciting birding journey northwards from Cape Town. We hope to find **Black Harrier**, **Chestnut-banded Plover**, **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Cape Clapper Lark**, **Cape Long-billed Lark**, **Grey-winged Francolin**, **Southern Black Korhaan**, and other specials in addition to a tremendous shorebird spectacle. Langebaan Lagoon is one of Africa's most important shorebird stopover sites, and there are good hides (blinds) from which to observe the spectacle. We may also find **Western Osprey**, **African Fish Eagle**, and many others.

Overnight: Le Mahi Guest House, Langebaan

Day 5. Transfer to the Karoo

Today we head inland past some spectacular mountains. On the way we may stop to try for **Protea Canary** and many other species. But we have to get to the eastern (rain-shadow) side of the mountains to get to the famed (amongst birders) Karoo. Here, almost every species encountered is endemic, so it makes for spectacularly exciting birding for any serious birder who has never visited this particular semi-desert.

Overnight: Village B&B, Ceres, or Tanqua B&B, Route 355

Day 6. Birding the Karoo

A full day of Karoo birding. The pickings here include the likes of **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler** (a truly bizarre rock crevice skulker), **Namaqua Warbler**, the lovely **Rufous-eared Warbler**, **Black-headed Canary**, **White-throated Canary**, **Fairy Flycatcher**, **Southern Grey Tit**, **Karoo Chat**, **Sickle-winged Chat**, **Tractrac Chat**, **Karoo Lark**, **Karoo Long-billed Lark**, **Spike-heeled Lark**, **Large-billed Lark**, **Karoo Eremomela**, **Pirit Batis**, **Burchell's Courser**, **Double-banded Courser**, **Ludwig's Bustard**, **Karoo Korhaan**, **Pale Chanting Goshawk**, **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, **Namaqua Dove**, and many others.

Overnight: Village B&B, Ceres

Day 7. Transfer to Cape Town

We will drive back to Cape Town, birding at Paarl en route for fynbos species and those waterbirds we are still missing. A night back on the Cape Peninsula will give us time to find some of the Cape's more difficult species.

Overnight: Mariner Guest House, Simonstown, South Peninsula

Day 8. Birding the Overberg and the Agulhas Plains

Today we drive eastwards to Africa's southernmost point, where we begin birding the superb Agulhas Plains and the Overberg. Here flat plains and gently rolling hills separate the southernmost tip of the African continent, where two oceans meet, from the Cape Fold Mountains further inland. These plains are one of the few areas where **Secretarybird** and **Denham's Bustard** are still common. They are also the most important stronghold for South Africa's magnificent national bird, **Blue Crane**. **White Stork** is common in late summer. Extremely localized endemics such as **Agulhas Clapper Lark**, **Agulhas Long-billed Lark**, and others lurk here. We will also visit the De Hoop Nature Reserve, which protects a large tract of highly threatened lowland (as opposed to mountain) fynbos. Here we will see lots of waterbirds and **Southern Tchagra**, plus we may encounter Cape Mountain Zebra, Bontebok, and other mammal specials of the Cape. Time permitting, we can visit the De Mond Nature Reserve, an excellent site for the rare, localized, diminutive **Damara Tern**.

Overnight: Pride of Africa B&B, Agulhas

Day 9. Birding the Agulhas Plains and the fringes of the Langeberg Mountains

We will spend the morning birding the Agulhas Plains. In the afternoon, we will head to our B&B adjacent to a lovely temperate forest at the base of the Langeberg Mountains. This forest is inhabited by such sought-after birds as **Knysna Woodpecker**, **Olive Woodpecker**, **Olive Bushshrike**, **Narina Trogon**, **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher**, **Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler**, and of course many more. The forest fringes host the localized **Victorin's Warbler** (it is great fun trying to outsmart this vocal but skulking species), **Forest Canary**, **Cape Siskin**, **Sweet Waxbill**, and more. A night trip to the edge of the forest usually yields **African Wood Owl** and **Fiery-necked Nightjar**.

Overnight: Honeywood Farm, Heidelberg

Day 10. Birding the Garden Route

We drive eastwards for three hours to the beautiful Garden Route, where a large diversity of birds can be found in idyllic surroundings. We'll start looking for some birds that are quite widespread through large tracts of Africa, but which are nevertheless sought-after because they are so elusive – things like **African Finfoot** and **Red-chested Flufftail** (we often get great views

of this skulker around here). Other star birds we look for in the Garden Route include **Knysna Turaco** (endemic), **Scaly-throated Honeyguide**, **Chorister Robin-Chat** (endemic), **White-starred Robin-Chat**, and a host of others. And the Garden Route is the only place in South Africa where certain species – such as the endemic **Forest Buzzard** and **Half-collared Kingfisher** – are common.

Overnight: Wilderness Ebb & Flow Rest Camp, Garden Route National Park

Day 11. Birding the Garden Route

A full day looking for the rich diversity of species the Garden Route has to offer.

Overnight: Wilderness Ebb & Flow Rest Camp, Garden Route National Park

Day 12. Transfer to George and flight to Durban, or departure

We drive to George (half an hour's drive) to catch our 2-hour flight to Durban to begin the Subtropical leg of the tour,

OR

for those ending their trip here, you fly (or drive) back to Cape Town.

Duration: 12 days
Group size: 8 (rarely 9)
Date: 14 - 25 February 2020
Start: Cape Town
End: George

Price: R50,955 per person sharing
Single supplement: R8,260 (The prices assume a group of 8, but we typically guarantee the departure even with a smaller group.)

Price includes:

Meals
 Accommodation
 Entrance fees
 Guiding fees
 All transport while on tour

Price excludes:

International flights
 Personal insurance
 Alcoholic beverages
 Gratuities
 Laundry service
 Personal expenses such as gifts

Please note that the itinerary above cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

