



**SOUTH AFRICA: FLOCK TO MARION AND IOCONGRESS-
KWAZULU-NATAL PRE-TOURS**

JANUARY/AUGUST 2022



Drakensberg Rockjumper can be seen at high altitude in the Drakensberg.

Flock to Marion 2022

Flock to Marion is an incredible opportunity. Please book this amazing value trip to a remote sub-Antarctic Island directly with BirdLife South Africa [here](#). Please also see our blog about Flock to Marion [here](#). This cruise starts in Cape Town on 24 January 2022 and ends in Durban on 31 January 2022. Birding Ecotours is offering a series of extensions to this cruise in the Western Cape, detailed [here](#), and two pre-tours or extensions to this cruise in KwaZulu-Natal, detailed below.

International Ornithological Congress 2022

The IOC Congress from 14-20 August 2022 is coming to South Africa, specifically Durban, and we're offering the same pre-tours and extensions in the Western Cape and in KwaZulu-Natal as we're offering for Flock to Marion. The KwaZulu-Natal tours are shown below and the Cape tours are shown [here](#).

KwaZulu-Natal Pre-tours

Birding Ecotours is offering two pre-flock terrestrial birding tours targeting KwaZulu-Natal and Drakensberg endemics and specials, a 5-day tour around Zululand followed by a 3-day tour to the Drakensberg. If you join both trips you'll basically have birded the area for most of its important specials, but you can also join either tour as a stand-alone trip. These are conservation trips, and we donate a percentage per trip to BirdLife South Africa for their conservation work; the percentage increases as the number of tour participants increases.

We are also running bird-photography-based versions of these same tours; when booking please specify if your emphasis is on photography and we'll add you to that group.

Details of each KwaZulu-Natal pre-flock trip are shown below:

Tour 1: Zululand 16-20 January 2022, 6-10 August 2022, and 24-28 August 2022

Price R13800 per person, assuming 5-8 paying participants (there will be a surcharge for smaller groups), single supplement R2800

Day 1. Durban to Dlinza, Ongoye, and Mtunzini, overnight Eshowe

We will collect you between 5:30 and 6:30 a.m. from wherever you're staying in Durban, then transfer to Eshowe. We will begin at Dlinza Forest, an incredibly exciting mid-altitude birding

forest. We'll be looking for such star birds as **Spotted Ground Thrush** and **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon**. Other targets include **Red-backed Mannikin**, **Green Twinspot**, **Yellow-rumped** and **Red-fronted Tinkerbirds**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Trumpeter Hornbill**, **Ashy Flycatcher**, **White-eared Barbet**, and **Narina Trogon**. The forest is a great spot for the diminutive **Blue Duiker**.

From here we transfer to the fabled Ongoye Forest, looking for **Striped Pipit** en route. The prime target here is **Green Barbet**, a subspecies ("Woodward's Barbet") occurring only in this forest and disjunctively on the Rondo Plateau in southeastern Tanzania, but we will also pursue **African Emerald Cuckoo**, **Scaly-throated Honeyguide**, and **Yellow-streaked Greenbul**. Occasionally **Black-rumped Buttonquail** flushes from the lush rolling grasslands surrounding the forest, and we will search for **Fan-tailed Grassbird** (Broad-tailed Warbler).

We'll also visit humid coastal areas such as Amatikulu Nature Reserve and the Raffia Palm Monument near Mtunzini. Here we hope to find species such as **Palm-nut Vulture**, **Swamp Nightjar**, **Green Twinspot**, **Grey Waxbill**, **Red-backed Mannikin**, and a host of others.



Dlinza Forest holds good numbers of Spotted Ground Thrush.

Day 2. Dlinza to St Lucia, estuary, night drive, overnight St Lucia

We head northward to the wild town of St Lucia, where we'll spend a further two nights. Here **Hippopotamus** sometimes roams the streets at night and **Thick-tailed Greater Galago** (Bushbaby) makes its loud call at night from trees lining the main road.

Stopping on the St Lucia bridge we search for **Eastern Golden** and **Southern Brown-throated Weavers** and perhaps **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**. We'll spend time birding the forest patches around the village, searching for the endemic **Rudd's Apalis**, **Brown Scrub Robin**, and

Woodward's Batis. We expect to find such amazing birds as the magnificent **Livingstone's Turaco**, **Purple-banded Sunbird**, **Green Malkoha**, **Crested Guineafowl**, **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher**, **Green Twinspot**, **Grey Waxbill**, **African Pygmy Kingfisher**, **Southern Yellow White-eye**, and perhaps **Buff-spotted Flufftail** (of course more easily heard than seen, but this is one of the better areas to get visuals on this mega-skulker).

We will take an afternoon trip to St Lucia Estuary to search for waterbirds such as **Pink-backed** and **Great White Pelicans**, **Yellow-billed Stork**, **Pied Avocet**, **Caspian Tern**, and **Hottentot Teal**. This site is a hotspot for vagrants, and with good fortune we might tick a vagrant tern or wader.

In the evening we will take a night drive along the Eastern Shores of St Lucia in an open safari vehicle, using spot lights; this is great for mammal viewing including **Common Reedbuck**, **Waterbuck**, **African Buffalo**, the legendary **Aardvark** (rarely), **Serval**, and **Hippopotamus** (feeding on land), with chances of **Water Thick-knee** and **Swamp Nightjar**.



Rudd's Apalis is fairly common in the right habitat in Zululand.

Day 3. Eastern Shores of St Lucia, overnight St Lucia

An early morning departure takes us up the Eastern Shores. This part of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an unforgettable experience for its scenery, habitats, and biota. In most austral summers the pans offer chances of great species such as **Collared Pratincole**, **Fulvous Duck**, **Senegal Lapwing**, **White-backed Duck**, **Rufous-winged Cisticola**, and **Lesser Jacana**. This is the best place in southern Africa to search for **Southern Banded Snake Eagle** and its more common relative, **Brown Snake Eagle**.



Lesser Jacana can be seen on seasonally flooded pans in Zululand.

We progress through wonderful countryside of coastal grasslands interlaced with freshwater pans to the dune forests on 200-meter-high sand dunes. Here **Red Duiker**, **Bushbuck**, and **Samango Monkey** are common. These forests also host east coast specials such as **Green Twinspot**, **Woodward's Batis**, **Rudd's Apalis**, and **Green Malkoha**.

At night we will search the surrounding forests for **Thick-tailed Greater Galago** (Bushbaby) and **African Wood Owl**.

Day 4. St Lucia to Mkhuze, overnight Msunduze

An early morning departure from St Lucia takes us to False Bay Park, another part of the extensive iSimangaliso Wetland Park, searching en route for the localized endemic **Lemon-breasted Canary**. We hope to get to False Bay Park early to search for a rich trove of species. There is the iconic **African Broadbill**, the endemic and stunningly pretty **Pink-throated Twinspot**, the endemic **Neergaard's Sunbird**, and a swathe of other species such as **White-throated Robin-Chat**, **Gorgeous Bushshrike**, **Grey Sunbird**, **Eastern Nicator**, **Pale Flycatcher**, and **Bearded Scrub Robin**.



African Broadbill occurs in low densities in northern Zululand.

In the afternoon we visit a nearby wetland area to add to the waterbirds on our list and perhaps find **Broad-billed Roller**.

We proceed to our Msunduze overnight site set among fever trees.

Day 5. Mkhuze Game Reserve, return to Durban

Again we have a very early start and head to Mkhuze Game Reserve. Mkhuze is a mega-diverse part of the world, and our bird list should also include a spectacular number of more common bushveld birds in addition to the very localized species which are our main targets. Here too a range of mammal species can be enjoyed, including **Nyala** and the rarely seen **Suni**.

At Mkhuze we can find the endemic **Neergaard's Sunbird**, but there is also a rich haul of species such as **Pink-throated Twinspot**, **Crested Guineafowl**, **Eastern Nicator**, **Stierling's Wren-Warbler**, **Woodland Kingfisher**, **Bearded Woodpecker**, **Burnt-neck Eremomela**, and **Black-bellied Bustard**.



*We'll scan grasslands around St Lucia for **Black-bellied Bustard***

The wetland shelter **Goliath Heron, African Pygmy Goose, African Openbill, Lesser Jacana, and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater.**

We will leave after midday to reach Durban around 6 p.m.

Tour 2, Natal Midlands, Sani Pass, and Lesotho endemics 21-23 January 2022, 11-13 August 2022, and 21-23 August 2022

Price R5800 per person, assuming 5-8 paying participants (there will be a surcharge for smaller groups), single supplement R1400

Special requirements are passport and a warm jacket/waterproof in case of bad weather in the highlands. We'll fetch you from Durban and transfer through the Natal Midlands to Himeville (gateway to the Sani Pass), where you will spend two nights. Within two days you'll ascend from sea level to over 3000 meters.

Day 1. Durban to Himeville, overnight Himeville

After collection we drive to the midlands, passing through the forest to an arboretum. As we pass through grassland areas we have the chance of seeing **Blue, Grey Crowned, and Wattled Cranes. Long-tailed Widowbird** is common, while hillsides provide a chance for **Buff-streaked Chat** and **Wailing Cisticola**. A forest patch gives an opportunity for **Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Knysna Turaco, Olive Woodpecker, Forest Canary, and Olive**

Bushshrike. At the arboretum we will search for **Orange Ground Thrush** (the best place in South Africa to search for this elusive species) and **Lemon Dove**.



Forest Canary is a colorful South African endemic

Day 2. Sani Pass and Lesotho, overnight Himeville

An early start will take us up South Africa's most spectacular pass, the Sani Pass. It is one of the world's most exciting birding routes, which provides opportunities for four of the most-restricted-range species in Southern Africa: **Drakensberg Rockjumper**, **Drakensberg Siskin**, **Mountain Pipit**, and **Bearded Vulture**.

We begin at wetlands close to Himeville, looking for **Half-collared Kingfisher** and **African Yellow Warbler**. We will stop for **Bush Blackcap**, **Drakensberg Prinia**, **Greater Double-collared Sunbird**, **Red-throated Wryneck**, **Brown-backed Honeyguide**, and other denizens of the lower reaches of this pass. Higher up the vegetation changes from *Ouhout* thickets to *Protea* savanna and grassland, where **Ground Woodpecker**, **Gurney's Sugarbird**, and the superb **Malachite Sunbird** are quite common. Depending on early summer rains and burning, there is a chance of **Fan-tailed Grassbird** and the very difficult **Short-tailed Pipit**.

As we go higher we will search for **Barratt's Warbler**, the Sani Pass being one of the best places to find this species. Higher altitudes above the treeline, just before reaching the tiny mountain kingdom of Lesotho, are perhaps the most exciting part, as the charismatic **Drakensberg Rockjumper** and **Drakensberg Siskin** start putting in an appearance. As we cross the border into Lesotho we earnestly start looking for the truly magnificent **Bearded Vulture**, along with **Sentinel Rock Thrush** and **Mountain Pipit**. Several Karroo species reach the north-eastern edge of their range here, including **Grey Tit**, **Fairy Flycatcher**, **African Rock Pipit** and **Layard's Warbler**. At any altitude we could encounter the beautiful, scarce, and localized **Southern Bald Ibis**.

We return to Himeville for the night.



Southern Bald Ibis is fairly common in the Drakensberg Mountains.

Day 3. Natal Midland forests and grasslands, return to Durban

Another early start takes us to another forest, where we target **Cape Parrot** and also **White-starred Robin** and **Chorister Robin-Chat**. Careful searching may produce **Olive Bushshrike**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Southern Double-collared Sunbird**, and even **Lazy Cisticola** on the edge. And with luck, perhaps, we'll see **African Goshawk** or **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk** overheard.

We continue to Highover Wildlife Sanctuary to try for the rare **Blue Swallow** and other cryptic and difficult species. In the grasslands we will search for **Black-rumped Buttonquail**, **Fan-tailed Grassbird**, and **Black-winged Lapwing**, as always dependent on conditions. Other sightings might include **Pale-crowned Cisticola** or **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk** overhead.

We then proceed back to Durban, where we'll arrive at around 6 p.m.

Birding Ecotours is also offering a series of Flock to Marion – Western Cape post-tours, see [here](#) for more.

Duration: 5 or 3 days

Group Size: 5-8

Dates: January/August 2022

Start: Durban

End: Durban

Prices: 5-day trip R15,200 per person sharing, assuming 5-8 paying participants
(there will be a surcharge for smaller groups)
3-day trip R6,400 per person sharing, assuming 5-8 paying participants
(there will be a surcharge for smaller groups)

Single supplements: 5-day trip R2,450
3-day trip R1,100

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Transport
Fuel
Tolls
Guiding fees
Entrance fees

Price excludes:

Drinks
Laundry service
Personal expenses such as gifts