The endemic Yellow-breasted Pipit is usually seen around Wakkerstroom.
**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 pre-trips to this cruise in the Western Cape, detailed [here](#), and two post-tours to this cruise in KwaZulu-Natal, detailed [here](#). we are offering further post-tours to the Highveld of South Africa as 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 Highveld tours are shown below while Cape tours [here](#) and the KwaZulu-Natal tours are shown [here](#).

**Highveld Extensions**

Below we detail a 3-day Wakkerstroom birding tour which will take you from the coast at Durban to the highveld of Johannesburg. We are also offering three separate 1-day birding tours around Johannesburg and Pretoria. These tours are all perfect for a wide range of endemics, near-endemics and various other special species.

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 Highveld post-Flock/IOCongress trip are shown below:**

**Tour 1, Grassland endemics of Wakkerstroom: 09-11 February 2022 and 29-31 August 2022**

Price 14,390 per person, assuming 3-8 paying participants (there will be a surcharge for smaller groups), single supplement R1,440.

This tour will start in Durban and finish in Johannesburg, after a couple days in the endemic-filled grasslands of the sleepy town of Wakkerstroom.

**Day 1. Durban to Wakkerstroom**

After your collection in Durban, we will make the long (roughly five hour) transfer to the small town of Wakkerstroom. Most people will never have heard of this small, laid-back town in the grasslands of Mpumalanga province however Wakkerstroom is famous in birding circles for being

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an absolute mecca for grassland birding. The grasslands abound with South African endemics and near-endemics with the area’s most important specials including Rudd’s and Botha’s Larks and Yellow-breasted Pipit.

We aim to arrive in Wakkerstroom in the early afternoon and, after checking into our accommodation, will immediately head out to start tracking down our many target species. We will likely pop into the nearby vlei where we will make a start on wetland species including Cape Shoveler, Southern Pochard, Little Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, Grey Crowned Crane and skulkers such as African Rail and Red-chested Flufftail. After some time at the vlei we will likely take a drive into nearby grasslands where we should get acquainted with common grasslands species such as Long-tailed Widowbird, Ant-eating Chat, South African Cliff Swallow and perhaps some of the specials listed under Day 2!

Overnight: Wakkerstroom

Day 2. Full day of birding around Wakkerstroom

Today will be a full day of birding around Wakkerstroom during which will use the services of one of the talented BirdLife South Africa trained local guides who operate in the area. Our primary targets will include the incredibly rare and localized Rudd’s and Botha’s Larks which often require some work to get decent looks at. While birding in these areas (near to the Amersfoort Road) we will likely also come across some of our smaller targets such as Eastern Long-billed, Eastern Clapper, Pink-billed (tough), Spike-heeled and Red-capped Larks, Cloud, Wing-snapping and Pale-crowned Cisticolas, Banded Martin, Common Quail (tough to see), Cape Longclaw and Yellow-crowned Bishop. We will spend a lot of our time stopping and scanning large open fields for the likes of Blue Crane, Southern Bald Ibis, Denham’s Bustard, Blue

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Korhaan, Red-winged Francolin and perhaps even a Montagu’s or Black Harrier (both uncommon). Depending on the current whereabouts of Yellow-breasted Pipit, we will either target this species this morning or the following morning. In summer there are normally large numbers of Amur Falcon around and perhaps we will be lucky enough to find the rarer Red-footed Falcon in amongst these falcon flocks.

After a picnic lunch out in the field, we will likely head north of Wakkerstroom towards the small town of Dirkiesdorp where we will search for White-bellied and Black-bellied Bustards, Black-winged Lapwing and Secretarybird. We will ensure to stop in at a small forest patch which often holds Bush Blackcap, Greater Double-collared Sunbird, Olive Bushshrike, Swee Waxbill and Barratt’s Warbler (although this species requires a lot of patience to see).

Overnight: Wakkerstroom

Day 3. Wakkerstroom birding and transfer to Johannesburg

This morning we will concentrate on a few species to the south of Wakkerstroom including the likes of Yellow-breasted Pipit, Sentinel Rock Thrush, Buff-streaked Chat, Mountain Wheatear and African Rock Pipit. We will use the rest of the morning to clean up on any targets we may still be missing in the wider Wakkerstroom area.

We then proceed back to Johannesburg, where we’ll arrive at around 6 p.m.
Tour 2, Zaagkuilsdrift day trip: 12 February 2022 and 01 September 2022

Today we will likely spend the entire day birding along the famed Zaagkuilsdrift Road which is about a 1.5 hours’ drive north of Johannesburg. The birding here is good year-round however is particularly exciting during summer (for our Marion post-tours) when the area is dripping with migrants.

We will start off by working the open grassy areas and thick thornveld woodlands where we should come across a number of more typically Kalahari species, here at the eastern extent of their South African ranges. Highlights should include Northern Black Korhaan, Southern Pied Babbler, Kalahari Scrub Robin, Ashy Tit, Chestnut-vented Warbler (Tit-babbler), Barred Wren-Warbler, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Black-faced and Violet-eared Waxbills, Jameson’s Firefinch and Gabar Goshawk. Some of the more common big-and-obvious species include Magpie Shrike, Southern Red-billed and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, Grey Go-away-bird and Burchell’s Starling. In the summer months (for our Marion post-tours) these woodlands are also likely to be full of summer migrants which include the likes of Black, Diederik, Levaillant’s and Jacobin Cuckoos, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes and a host of warblers including Common Whitethroat, Marsh, Icterine and Olive-tree Warblers.

The striking Crimson-breasted Shrike is often seen along the Zaagkuilsdrift Road.

As we get into the more open areas of the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain we are likely to come across a different mix of species which often includes Black-winged Pratincole (summer), Temminck’s Courser, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (summer), Pearl-breasted Swallow, Cape Penduline Tit, Chest-backed Sparrow-Lark, Capped Wheatear, Scaly-feathered Weaver (Finch), Great Sparrow, Red-headed and Cut-throat Finches and Yellow-crowned Bishop.
The tropical wetlands that form here are a magnet for waterbirds and depending on water levels during our visit we may come across Lesser Moorhen, African Crake, Allen’s Gallinule (these three only in summer), African Jacana, White-faced Duck, Squacco and Purple Herons, Yellow-billed Stork and many others.

Tour 3, Mabusa Nature Reserve, Wilge River Valley and surrounds day trip: 13 February 2022 and 02 September 2022

On this day trip we’ll head to the north-east of Johannesburg and Pretoria to explore some highly productive areas of highveld grasslands and broad-leafed woodlands (a habitat generally not found in the Johannesburg/Pretoria area).

In grasslands near to Mabusa Nature Reserve, we will bird the grasslands for White-bellied Bustard, Blue Crane, Red-winged Francolin, Secretarybird, Melodious Lark, Buffy Pipit, Black-chested Prinia and Quailfinch. These grasslands do hold a disjunct population of Short-tailed Pipit however these birds can often prove very tricky to see. Small wetlands in the area host such exciting species as Red-chested Flufftail and African Rail, along with other sought-after species such as Cape Grassbird and African Yellow Warbler.

The woodlands of Mabusa Nature reserve offer some fantastic birding and will hope for Green-capped Eremomela, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Red-headed Weaver, Little Bee-eater, Bushveld Pipit, Fawn-colored Lark, Southern Black Tit and Ovambo Sparrowhawk. The rocky grasslands bordering the woodlands patches often hold Shelley’s and Coqui Francolins, Lazy Cisticola, Mocking Cliff Chat, Short-toed Rock Thrush and Striped and Nicholson’s Pipits. The riverine areas can sometimes produce a rare sighting of Half-collared Kingfisher or White-backed Night Heron.

_Pearl-spotted Owlet_ is often seen in the woodlands north-east of Johannesburg.
The nearby Wilge River Valley again offers a slightly different mix of bushveld species and here we will be on the lookout for Green Wood Hoopoe, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, White-crested Helmetshrike, Grey-headed and Orange-breasted Bushshrikes and Greater Double-collared Sunbird.

**Tour 4, Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve and Marievale Wetlands day trip: 14 February 2022 and 03 September 2022**

Today we will bird some of Johannesburg’s more popular birding spots. We will start the morning off at Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve where we will target a number of grassland specials such as Melodious and Eastern Long-billed Larks, Orange River and Grey-winged Francolins, Mountain Wheatear, Long-tailed and Red-collared Widowbirds, Cuckoo-finch, and Orange-breasted Waxbill. A plethora of Cisticolas can be found here, and we’ll be searching for species such as Levaillant’s, Wailing, Zitting, Desert, Cloud and Wing-snapping Cisticolas and Neddicky. While driving around the reserve we will also bird patches of extremely productive acacia woodland which often hold Common Scimitarbill, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Acacia Pied Barbet, Ashy Tit, African Red-eyed Bulbul, Chinspot Batis, Kalahari Scrub Robin, Mocking Cliff Chat, Red-throated Wryneck and Black-chested Prinia. This is a very birdy reserve, and we’re sure to build up a long list of species!

**Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve is a fairly reliable spot for Cuckoo-finch.**

Our afternoon will see us transiting to the wetland areas around the nearby village of Nigel, such as the famous Marievale Bird Sanctuary. These areas play host to a number of rarities each summer and we will be sure to pay attention to the any rare bird alerts during our visit here. Rarities aside we hope to find a wide range of wetland species, with waterfowl including Cape Shoveler,
Southern Pochard, Hottentot Teal, and scarcer species such as Cape Teal and Maccoa Duck. Other wading birds we’ll be looking for include Little Bittern, Goliath and Black Herons, along with Greater and Lesser Flamingos. We may also find skulkers such as Red-chested Flufftail and African Rail. A wide range of shorebirds also occur, and on top of the resident African Snipes, Black-winged Stilts and Pied Avocets, we’re sure to see various migrant species such as Ruff, Common Greenshank, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stint as well.

Birding Ecotours is also offering a series of Flock to Marion and IOCongress - Cape pre-tours, and KwaZulu-Natal post-tours.

Duration: 1 or 3 days
Group Size: 1-day trips 4-10
            3-day trips 3-8
Dates: February and August/September 2022
Start: Durban/Johannesburg
End: Johannesburg
Prices: 1-day trips R1,400
         3-day trip R14,390 per person sharing, assuming 3-8 participants
         (there may be a slight surcharge for smaller groups)
Single supplements: 3-day trip R1,440
Price includes:
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Transport
Fuel
Tolls
Guiding fees
Entrance fees
3-day trips
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Tolls
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Price excludes:
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