



**BIRDING TOUR SOUTH AFRICA: BEST OF CAPE TOWN
AND BEYOND: ENDEMIC, SEABIRDS AND MORE**

07 - 14 OCTOBER 2023

07 - 14 OCTOBER 2024



The endemic Cape Sugarbird is one of our targets on this trip.

South Africa must surely rank as one of the best value destinations on the entire African continent. The combination of superb accommodation, excellent infrastructure, great food, wonderful South African hospitality, impressive and varied scenery, and the presence of Africa's big and small mammals makes it one of the most popular countries in the world to bird in. The tour begins in one of the world's most beautiful cities, Cape Town, where we will search for a host of avian endemics found nowhere else but in the fynbos of the Cape Floral Kingdom (the richest place on earth for plants). While in Cape Town we will also do a pelagic trip, enjoying the great numbers and diversity of seabirds which visit the southern tip of Africa. After a few days birding around Cape Town we then head northward up the west coast and finally head inland through rugged mountain ranges into the Tankwa Karoo, another of Africa's great endemic hotspots.

We begin this tour with a Cape pelagic trip, where we invariably find four albatross species and always hope for an additional rarer one like **Wandering Albatross**. Then we hope to encounter some very enigmatic birds: Watch a weird little warbler, a desert bird that skulks, disappear into a rock crevice, namely **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler**, one of the Cape's strangest endemics and one of the toughest of the many Karoo endemics to see well. **Cape Rockjumper** has a beautiful call, striking colors, a boisterous personality and a terribly limited distribution around Cape Town. A terrestrial woodpecker, **Ground Woodpecker**, and **African Penguin** are also found on the spectacular Cape Peninsula. What more can you possibly ask for?



Cape Rockjumper is one of the two species making up the rockjumper family; we normally encounter it on this tour.

But this trip is not only full of localized avian endemics but also of spectacularly famous scenery, such as the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Point, and Table Mountain. All in all, our 8-day Cape tour 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.

The Western Cape is the most important endemic bird area on the entire African continent. It is a truly essential area for any serious birder because of its sheer number of endemics. Pelagic trips off Cape Town also rank as among the finest in the world (with at least four albatross species, **Cape Petrel** (seasonal), and many more on the rich trawling grounds near where two oceans meet). The Cape is also a spectacularly scenic area, with the rugged Cape Fold Mountains that come right down to the sea, white sand beaches, sea cliffs on the Cape Peninsula, and beautiful vineyards. Close inshore **Southern Right Whales** (seasonal) plus a lot of other mammals, spectacular carpets of flowers (seasonal), and the most plant-diverse biome on earth (even richer than the Amazon!) are major attractions that are easily seen incidentally, while not jeopardizing our chances of finding all the birds. We recommend at least a week in the Western Cape. The aim of our standard (set departure) 8-day tour (but we can custom-make a trip of any length) is to find a majority of the endemics of this province, with many other species as an unavoidable byproduct (plus, as always, an amazing overall experience), and of course a lot of pelagic and other seabirds. To find the endemics we budget adequate time in each strategic ecosystem – the fynbos, Langebaan Lagoon, and the Karoo.



Cape Petrel is usually seen on our pelagic trip on our 8-day Cape tour.

The October departures can be combined with our preceding **Kruger National Park and Escarpment Birding Safari** and then with our following **Subtropical South Africa Birding Tour: Comprehensive Eastern South Africa** for a 38-day South African adventure, and, following that, with our **Namibia, Okavango and Victoria Falls 18-day Birding Adventure** for a stunning 46-day Southern African mega tour.

Itinerary (8 days/7 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Cape Town

This is the day you need to arrive in Cape Town – any time during the day at your leisure. You will be met at Cape Town International Airport and transferred to our comfortable guesthouse in the leafy Cape Town suburbs. We should hopefully have some time to start with some local birding this afternoon – probably birding one of the many impressive wetlands nearby, or perhaps the forests on the slopes of Table Mountain. Species to look for include **Great White Pelican**, **Greater and Lesser Flamingo**, **Cape Teal**, **Cape Shoveler**, **Southern Pochard**, and **Maccoa Duck** among many other waterfowl species. Some of the more elusive species we will search for are **Little Bittern**, **African Snipe**, **African Marsh Harrier**, **Malachite Kingfisher**, four species of reed-associated warblers, and other waterbirds. The forested areas host species such as **African Olive Pigeon**, **Cape Batis**, **Southern Boubou**, **Olive Thrush** and **African Dusky Flycatcher**. In the neighboring fynbos we should come across the first of many South African specials, such as **Cape Bulbul**, **Karoo Prinia**, **Southern Double-collared Sunbird** and **Cape White-eye**.

Overnight: Newlands, Cape Town.



*The comical **African Penguin** is always a highlight in any Cape birding trip!*

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

Today is an early start as we embark on a Cape pelagic trip (weather-permitting, otherwise we will spend the day around the Cape Peninsula and False Bay). Soon after leaving the harbor we normally come across large flocks of **Cape Cormorants** and **Cape Gannets** heading out to sea to fish for the day, along with the occasional **African Penguin**. The coastline is incredibly rugged, yet eerily beautiful, with the sharp mountains rising right from the shore. Once we start transiting away from land the serious pelagic birding soon begins as we start seeing good numbers of **Sooty**,

Great, and **Cory's Shearwaters**, **White-chinned Petrels**, and the odd **Storm Petrel** (**Wilson's** and **European** being most common). As we head farther out we will be on the lookout for trawlers, which attract huge numbers of seabirds. If we do find a trawler it normally has a cloud of seabirds behind it, particularly when the nets are being hauled in. Here we can expect to find **Shy**, **Black-browed**, **Indian Yellow-nosed** and **Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatrosses**, **Northern** and **Southern Giant Petrels**, **Cape Petrel**, **Brown Skua**, and occasionally **Great-winged Petrel**. We will always be on the lookout for **Spectacled Petrel**, **Northern** and **Southern Royal Albatrosses**, and **Wandering Albatross** which, although considered rare, are seen with some frequency off the Cape.



Albatrosses such as this Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross are usually seen on our Cape pelagic.

Other marine life to search for include **Humpback** and **Bryde's Whales** as well as **Long-beaked Common Dolphin** and, if we are extremely lucky, **Killer Whale**! If possible/already decided, please let us know if you do not want to join the pelagic.

Overnight: Newlands, Cape Town.

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

Today we plan to visit excellent sites such as the beautiful Hottentot Holland mountain range and Strandfontein Bird Sanctuary, one of Cape Town's best waterbird sites. We start the day with an early departure (we'll take breakfast packs along to enjoy later) heading east toward the Hottentot Holland mountains and particularly the small village of Rooi Els. To get to this picturesque 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. Our primary

target for the day is **Cape Rockjumper**, which only occurs in the Cape Fold Mountains. Rooi Els is perhaps the easiest and most accessible spot to see the rockjumper, and our success rates are high. Other species to find here and nearby include **Ground Woodpecker**, **Cape** and **Sentinel Rock Thrushes**, **Victorin's Warbler**, **Cape Siskin**, **Cape Grassbird**, **Cape Sugarbird**, and many others. We may be lucky with a flyover of the pair of **Verreaux's Eagles** that breeds in the area.

We then head to the small town of Betty's Bay, where we visit the picturesque Harold Porter National Botanical Garden and enjoy lunch after a walk around the gardens. In the gardens we should find **African Dusky** and **African Paradise Flycatchers**, **Black Saw-wing**, **Swee Waxbill**, **Yellow Bishop**, and **Brimstone**, **Cape**, and **Forest Canaries**.



The subtly beautiful Forest Canary

We will also be sure to include a visit to the nearby Stony Point **African Penguin** colony. In addition to the penguins, Stony Point also has numbers of breeding **Cape**, **Crowned**, and **Bank Cormorants** – all offering excellent and close-up views!

On our way back to Cape Town we will visit Strandfontein Bird Sanctuary, which offers Cape Town's best wetland birding. Species to look for here include **South African Shelduck**, **Hottentot**, **Red-billed**, and **Cape Teals**, **Maccoa Duck**, **Cape Shoveler**, **Great Crested** and **Black-necked Grebes**, **African Swamphen**, and a number of other waterbird species.

Overnight: Newlands, Cape Town.

Day 4. West Coast Birding

Today we head north of Cape Town and travel along the west coast. The strandveld vegetation is subtly different and, with the habitat change, results in a different mix of bird species. We will stop

off in some farmlands en route to look for **Blue Crane**, **Pied Starling**, **Cape Clapper Lark**, **Capped Wheatear**, **Cape Longclaw**, **Pearl-breasted Swallow**, and the endemic Cape subspecies of **Cloud Cisticola**. Birding the strandveld habitat around the West Coast National Park and its surrounding areas will hopefully produce **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Grey Tit**, **White-backed Mousebird**, **Bokmakierie**, **Karoo Scrub Robin**, **Yellow and White-throated Canaries**, **Grey-winged Francolin**, **Southern Black Korhaan**, and the striking **Black Harrier**. We will also spend time at a few of the strategically positioned bird hides along Langebaan Lagoon, one of Africa's most important shorebird stopover sites. Here we hope to find an assortment of Palearctic shorebirds as well as resident shorebirds, such as **Chestnut-banded**, **White-fronted**, and **Kittlitz's Plovers**, with the possibility of **Western Osprey** and **African Fish Eagle** overhead. We may have time to look for Langebaan's resident pair of **Verreaux's Eagles** this afternoon; if we run out of time we will look for them tomorrow morning.

Overnight: Le Mahi Guest House, Langebaan.



*The majestic **Blue Crane** is commonly encountered on this tour.*

Day 5. Transfer to the Karoo

We often start this day by birding some of the farmlands north of Langebaan for a few more endemics that are unlikely to be found elsewhere on the trip. Our primary targets this morning will be **Cape Long-billed Lark** and **Sickle-winged Chat**; however, we should also find **Large-billed Lark**, **Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark**, **Blue Crane**, **Ant-eating Chat**, and perhaps **Namaqua Sandgrouse**. After our early-morning birding we head inland through some spectacular mountain scenery. But we have to get to the eastern (rain-shadow) side of the mountains to get to the famed (among birders) Karoo. The Karoo exhibits an amazing level of endemism, as the species need to adapt to the incredibly harsh conditions. This makes for spectacularly exciting birding for any serious birder who has never visited this particular semi-desert.

Overnight: Tankwa Karoo/similar.

Day 6. Birding the Karoo

Today we will have a full day of Karoo birding. Dry, rocky gorges will be explored for **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler** (a truly bizarre rock crevice skulker) as well as **Layard's Warbler**, **Grey Tit**, **Fairy Flycatcher**, and **Booted Eagle** overhead. In the riverbed vegetation we will look for another special, **Namaqua Warbler**. The dry plains will be birded extensively for a number of exciting species such as **Rufous-eared Warbler**, **Black-headed Canary**, **White-throated Canary**, **Karoo and Tractrac Chats**, **Karoo, Karoo Long-billed, Spike-heeled, and Large-billed Larks**, **Karoo Eremomela**, **Pirit Batis**, **Burchell's Courser**, **Ludwig's Bustard**, **Karoo Korhaan**, **Pale Chanting Goshawk**, **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, **Namaqua Dove**, and many others.



*Many species occur here that have 'Karoo' in their names – such as this **Karoo Lark**.*

We will head out this evening to search for **Freckled** and **Rufous-cheeked Nightjars** and any other exciting nightlife we may encounter.

Overnight: Tankwa Karoo/similar.

Day 7. Transfer to Cape Town

After some early-morning Karoo birding, searching for anything we have missed over the last couple of days, we head out of the Karoo and back toward Cape Town. On our way back we will stop on a beautiful mountain pass to search for **Protea Canary** and **Victorin's Warbler** and may get lucky with a flyover **Verreaux's Eagle**.

Once back in Cape Town we will have part of the afternoon to bird at Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden. The gardens here are incredibly beautiful, complete with Table Mountain as a backdrop. In the beautifully maintained gardens we will look for **Orange-breasted Sunbird** and **Cape Sugarbird** feeding on Protea flowers, while **Cape Spurfowl**, **Southern Boubou**, **Cape Canary**, **Brimstone Canary**, **Sweet Waxbill** and **Lemon Dove** should all be seen while walking around the gardens.

Overnight: Newlands, Cape Town.



Protea Canary — a Cape endemic

Day 8. Departure

We may have time to do some final birding along the eastern slopes of Table Mountain before you catch your flight to Durban to join our Subtropical South Africa tour or your international flight to leave Cape Town.

For those joining both the Cape and Subtropical trips, the Birding Ecotours office plans to book the one-way flight from Cape Town to Durban for everyone (on this, the last day of the Cape trip, which is also the first day of the Subtropical trip). It is no problem at all, however, if you have already booked this flight. If Birding Ecotours books the flight the cost can just be added to the balance you owe – the flight usually costs R1000-R2000 (ballpark).

Please note that the itinerary 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. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	8 days
Group Size:	4 – 8
Dates:	07 – 14 October 2023 07 – 14 October 2024
Start:	Cape Town, South Africa
End:	Cape Town, South Africa
Prices:	R40,665 per person sharing (2023) R45,139 per person sharing (2024)
Single supplements:	R6,737 (2023) R7,478 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 8)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance & conservation fees
All ground transport, including airport pick-up and drop-off
Pelagic outing

Price excludes:

International/domestic flights (to/from Cape Town)
Visas
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))