SOUTH AFRICA: KRUGER NATIONAL PARK AND ESCARPMENT BIRDING TOUR AND WILDLIFE SAFARI

29 SEPTEMBER–06 OCTOBER 2027
29 SEPTEMBER–06 OCTOBER 2028
29 SEPTEMBER–06 OCTOBER 2029



The Kruger is a major stronghold of the Vulnerable (IUCN) ***Southern Ground Hornbill****.*

Overview

Centered between the edge of the impressive Drakensberg escarpment and the bushveld of the Kruger, this is a tour for those who want the ultimate African mammal safari experience while also seeing a huge diversity of birds. This tour should yield **African Elephant**, **Lion**, **Leopard**, loads of antelope species, **Nile Crocodile**, and many of the other megafauna (plus many small mammals too) that sub-Saharan Africa is famous for. We don't neglect the birds, of which a disproportionate number of these are brightly colored, charismatic, and spectacular, along with a few southern African endemics and many raptors thrown in. To whet your appetite, we should come across multiple species of bee-eaters, rollers, kingfishers, hornbills, eagles (including **Bateleur**), vultures, owls, turacos, weavers, storks, and a myriad of others. The Kruger National Park itself boasts some 500 bird species!

The itinerary detailed below is great for first-time visitors to South Africa, or Africa, as it focuses on the bird-rich and mammal-rich southern parts of the world-famous Kruger National Park.



*The rare **African Wild Dog** occurs in Kruger, and is always one of our top targets.*

This tour starts and ends in Mbombela (Nelspruit), the gateway to the Kruger – readily accessed by domestic flights from either Johannesburg or Cape Town. From our arrival, before heading into the Kruger, we venture up onto the edge of the magnificent Drakensberg escarpment for two days, and focus our attention on the birds occurring in the lush forests and grasslands. We will seek out many special birds here like **Knysna Turaco** and **Chorister Robin-Chat**, to name only a few. Following our time here, we descend into the biodiverse-rich lowveld and call into the Kruger National Park. Staying inside the National Park means we are primed to maximize on the plethora

of birds and mammals that call this vast area home. Game drives on open-sided safari vehicles, are the order of our days here, as we track down as many birds and mammals as we can. The time we spend in the park also increases our chances of finding some of the scarcer mammals such as **African Wild Dog** and **Cheetah**. The combination of a never-ending stream of mammals, including The Big 5, and some excellent introductory African birding will leave you eager to return.

This tour is timed specifically to be at the start of the austral (southern hemisphere) spring, when the bush is at its least dense, making wildlife viewing excellent, and when the daily temperatures are comfortable.

You can combine this birding and wildlife safari with another of our flagship South African tours that precedes it: **Western South Africa: Cape Endemics, Namaqualand Wildflowers and the Kalahari**. This more bird-focused tour targets the endemic species of western South Africa and concludes in one of South Africa's most iconic game reserves, the truly wild Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Detailed Itinerary (8 days/7 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Mbombela (Nelspruit) and transfer to Mount Sheba

This tour begins in Mbombela (Nelspruit), where we meet at the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport. This small airport is served by regular domestic flights from Johannesburg and Cape Town on a daily basis. We ask participants to arrive no later than early afternoon (2 pm). Following your arrival, we embark on a 2-hour drive to our first destination, Mount Sheba Lodge.



*The glorious **Narina Trogon** is a target in the forests at Mount Sheba.*

Time permitting, we may be able to explore the lush grounds of this expansive lodge, getting our first taste of some of the common birds of the area – which may include the likes of the endemic **Drakensberg Prinia**, along with **Cape Batis**, **Southern Double-collared Sunbird** and **Swee Waxbill**.

Overnight: Mount Sheba Lodge, Pilgrim's Rest

Day 2. Birding the escarpment

Today will be spent birding and exploring various parts of the Drakensberg escarpment. We'll likely start off birding in the lush montane forests that surround Mount Sheba on foot. Many exciting and colorful species occur here, and we'll try to track down the likes of **Knysna Turaco**, **Narina Trogon**, **Olive Woodpecker**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler**, **Bar-throated Apalis**, **Orange Ground Thrush** and **White-starred Robin**, among others. The montane grasslands found above the forests are also home to more special birds, and here we'll have chances for the species such as **Red-winged Francolin**, **Blue Crane** (South Africa's national bird), **Denham's Bustard**, **Buff-streaked Chat** and **Malachite Sunbird**. We will then likely stop at various panoramic stops in the area, such as God's Window and the breathtaking Three Rondawels viewpoints. While taking in the views of the dramatic mountains, we're likely to see various birds, and we'll keep an eye out for species such as **Cape Vulture**, **Jackal Buzzard**, **Lanner Falcon**, **Cape Rock Thrush**, **Mocking Cliff Chat**, **Lazy** and **Wailing Cisticolas** and **Greater Double-collared Sunbird**.

Overnight: Mount Sheba Lodge, Pilgrim's Rest



*We will look for the range-restricted **Orange Ground Thrush** in montane forests.*

Days 3–7. Kruger National Park

We have a final morning birding around Mount Sheba on Day 3, searching for any species we may still need (see Day 2 above). We will also try for some of the trickier specials of the area, such as **Southern Tchagra**. We then descend the escarpment to the "lowveld", a highly biodiverse wildlife region, home to one of Africa's greatest game parks, the massive Kruger National Park.

We will base ourselves for five nights within the southern half of Kruger (aiming to stay at two different rest camps within the park, but this is ultimately dependent on availability). We will have the use of a private, open-sided safari vehicle during our time in the park, enhancing your experience of the birds and mammals, and ultimately giving you unrivalled views while in the park.

The park has a staggering bird diversity, and we are bound to find a number of these during our visit. Being one of the last major conservation areas in South Africa, large species that require vast amounts of wild, undisturbed habitat thrive here – these include a wide range of raptors from vultures to eagles to accipiters, along with storks, bustards and others. Common and characteristic raptors include **White-backed Vulture**, **Bateleur**, **Martial Eagle**, **Tawny Eagle**, **Brown Snake Eagle**, **Wahlberg's Eagle** and **African Fish Eagle**. We will also keep our eyes peeled for some of the less conspicuous raptors such as **Hooded**, **Lappet-faced** and **White-headed Vultures**, the majestic **Secretarybird**, and smaller species such as **Dark Chanting Goshawk** and **Lizard Buzzard**. Further examples of these larger birds include **Saddle-billed** and **Marabou Stork**, **Kori Bustard** and **Southern Ground Hornbill**.



Bateleur *is one of the most iconic raptors found in the Kruger – one of their last remaining strongholds in South Africa.*

We will also encounter a number of the 'typical' bushveld species as we traverse the park. Species that are likely include **Swainson's Spurfowl**, **Grey Go-away-bird**, **Purple-crested Turaco**, **Red-crested Korhaan**, **Burchell's Coucal**, **Red-faced Mousebird**, **Green Wood Hoopoe**, **Common Scimitarbill**, **African Grey**, **Southern Red-billed** and **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, **Brown-hooded Kingfisher**, **Little** and **White-fronted Bee-eaters**, **Crested Barbet**, **Bearded**, **Cardinal** and **Golden-tailed Woodpeckers**, **Brown-headed Parrot**, **Orange-breasted Bushshrike**, **Brown-crowned Tchagra**, **Brubru**, **Magpie Shrike**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Long-billed Crombec**, **Burnt-necked Eremomela**, **Arrow-marked Babbler**, **Greater Blue-eared** and **Burchell's Starlings**, **Red-billed Oxpecker** (often on various mammals), **White-throated Robin-Chat**, **White-browed Scrub Robin**, **Scarlet-chested** and **Marico Sunbirds**, **Red-billed Buffalo**, **Spectacled** and **Lesser Masked Weavers**, **Green-winged Pytilia**, **Red-billed Firefinch**, **Blue Waxbill** and **Golden-breasted Bunting**.

Wetland areas in the park are also usually well-attended and brimming with life, species that we'll likely find include **White-faced Whistling Duck**, **Water Thick-knee**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **White-crowned Lapwing** (on some of the larger rivers only), **Three-banded Plover**, **African Jacana**, **Yellow-billed Stork**, **African Spoonbill**, **Striated**, **Grey** and **Goliath Herons**, **Great Egret** and **Hamerkop**. The rest camps within the park are also generally a great place to see owls, with **Pearl-spotted Owlet**, **Western Barn** and **African Scops Owls** widely distributed, with **African Barred Owlet** a bit more localized. These are only a small example of some of the species we're likely to see during our time in the park.



*The near-endemic **White-throated Robin-Chat** (above) occurs in the denser stands of woodland and can often be seen in the various rest camps.*

On the megafauna side, we should also encounter large numbers of **African Elephant**, along with **Lion**, **White** and, with much luck, even **Black Rhinoceros**, **Giraffe**, **African Buffalo**, **Spotted Hyena**, a plethora of antelope species, **Hippopotamus**, **Nile Crocodile**, and many small mammals, such as **Common Warthog**, mongooses, etc. However, sightings of **Leopard**, **Cheetah**, and **African Wild Dog** require a good deal of luck.

Our time will be spent slowly driving and exploring the many roads that cover the southern part of the park, adding to our bird and mammal lists as we go, along with some walks around the rest camps (which are better for birding). Optional night drives (at your own cost) are also available, and provide you with chances at some of the scarcer nocturnal creatures that inhabit the park, such as **African Civet**, **Large-spotted Genet**, **White-tailed Mongoose** and perhaps even **Serval**, along with also providing opportunities to observe nocturnal birds; more commonly seen species are **Spotted Eagle Owl**, and **Square-tailed** and **Fiery-necked Nightjars**.

Overnight: Rest camps within Kruger National Park



Leopard *is one of our more sought-after mammals in the Kruger. We'll be keeping a very keen eye open for this beautiful cat.*

Day 8. Departure from Kruger

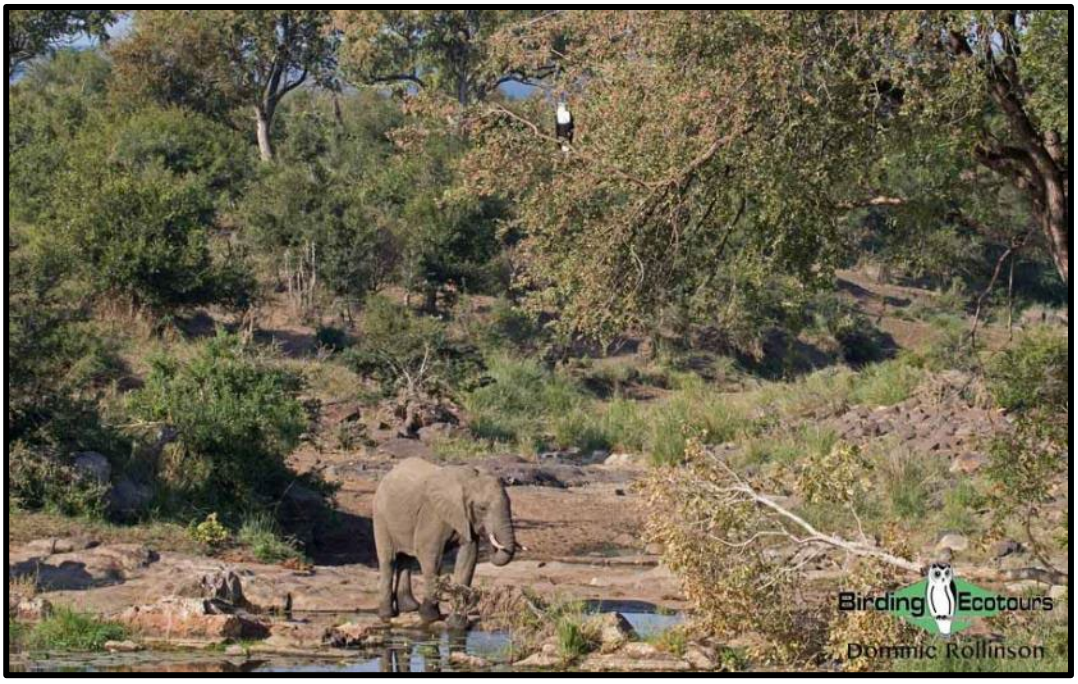
After our four full days (five nights) within the Kruger, it will be time for our departure. We will likely still have this final morning at leisure, before having to depart the park and transit to Mbombela (Nelspruit) and the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport, where the tour ends at midday. *Please do not book departing flights before early afternoon (1 pm).

Please also note that we have other versions of this tour available. For example, we also have a version that explores the extreme north of the Kruger National Park, which increases driving

distances but allows us to find birds that are very localized in South Africa (but more common in Mozambique, farther north). Please ask us for more details.

Overnight: Not included

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 guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.



*A typical scene that awaits us in the Kruger – complete with an **African Elephant** and **African Fish Eagle**.*

Tour Details

Duration:	8 days
Group size:	4–6
Dates:	29 September–06 October 2027 29 September–06 October 2028 29 September–06 October 2029
Start:	Mbombela (Nelspruit), South Africa
End:	Mbombela (Nelspruit), South Africa
Prices:	R 79,700 per person sharing (2027) R 86,100 per person sharing (2028) R 92,600 per person sharing (2029)
Single supplements:	R 15,000 (2027) R 16,200 (2028) R 17,500 (2029)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 8)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance and conservation fees
All ground transport
Airport pick-up and drop-off (on arrival and departure days only)
Open safari vehicle use in Kruger

Price excludes:

International/domestic flights (to/from Mbombela)
Visas
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or activities
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel and medical insurance
Gratuities (please see our tipping guidelines blog)