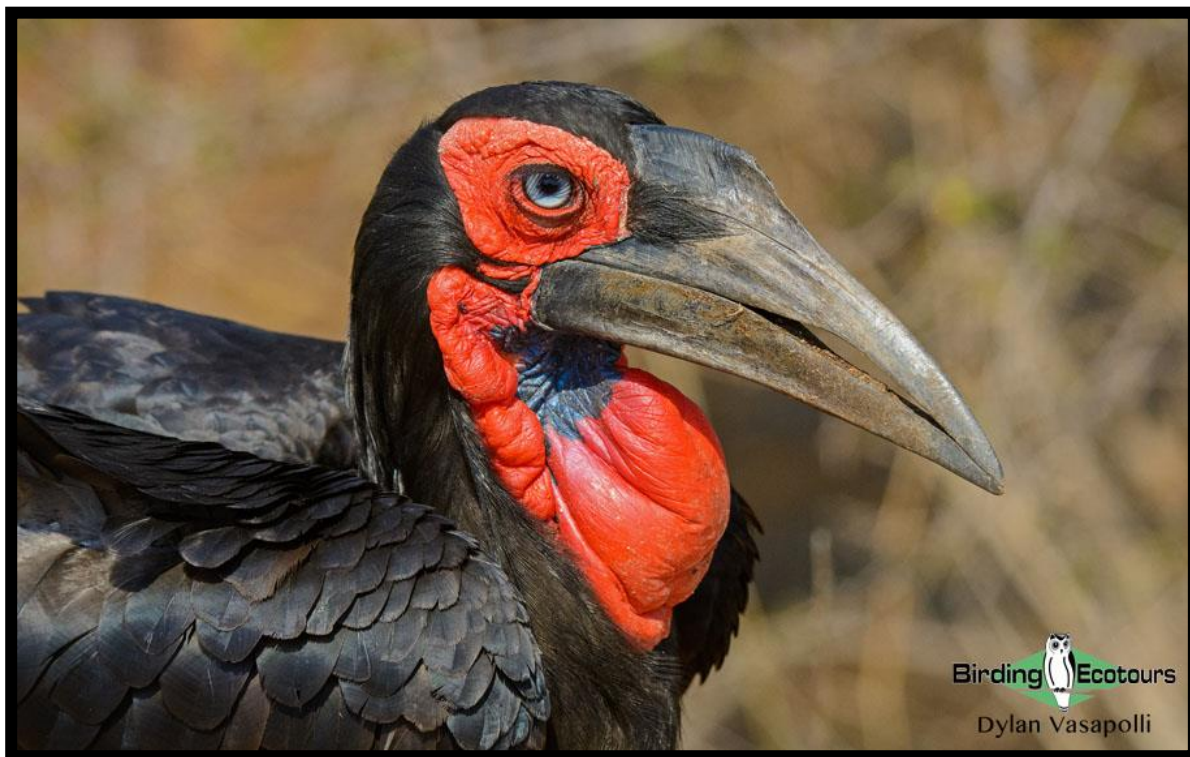




**PREMIUM KRUGER AND ESCARPMENT BIRDING AND
WILDLIFE SAFARI**

09 – 17 SEPTEMBER 2024

09 – 17 SEPTEMBER 2025



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

Centered between the edge of the impressive Drakensberg escarpment and the bushveld of the Greater 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 tour as 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 Greater Kruger. We ensure we spend time in both the Kruger National Park and the exclusive Sabi Sands Game Reserve, to give you the best possible 'safari', with a combined focus on the birds and mammals. Game drives on open-sided safari vehicles, in both the Kruger National Park and the Sabi Sands are the order of our days here, as we track down as many birds and mammals as we can. In addition, this area is also relatively close to the major hub of Johannesburg, which is South Africa's largest city, and is easily accessed. The combination of a never-ending stream of mammals, including The Big 5, and some excellent introductory African birding will leave you wanting more.



*Massive **African Elephants** are a regular feature in the Kruger.*

This tour starts and ends in Nelspruit, the gateway to the Kruger – readily accessed by a short domestic flight from Johannesburg. From Nelspruit, we venture up onto the edge of the magnificent Drakensberg escarpment for two days, and focus our attention on the forests, grasslands and wide panoramic views. 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. We end this tour off a short distance away, in the exclusive Sabi Sands Game Reserve, located in the Greater Kruger conservation area, bordering on the national park. Here a more personalized safari awaits you, complete with arguably an even more complete suite of mammals, with good chances for some of the scarcer mammals such as **African Wild Dog** and **Cheetah**.

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.



*We stand a good chance of seeing the highly sought-after **African Wild Dog** on this tour!*

You can combine this premium birding and wildlife safari, with a number of our southern Africa tours: First off is our preceding Cape Endemics, Namaqualand Wildflowers and the Kalahari Birding Tour – a more bird-oriented trip targeting the endemic species of western South Africa. Secondly, is our Kalahari Mammal and Birding Tour, which follows after this Kruger tour, and is a great complementary tour with similar interests – where we focus on the rare and unique mammals (and birds) of the Kalahari region. And thirdly is our Western Zimbabwe Birding and Mammal Safari – which is another excellent complementary tour, focusing on the wildlife of the world-renowned Hwange, Motobo and Mana Pools National Parks, along with the exquisite Victoria Falls – one of the seven wonders of the world.

Itinerary (9 days/8 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Nelspruit and transfer to Mount Sheba

This tour begins in Nelspruit, where we meet at the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport. This small airport is serviced regularly by domestic flights from Johannesburg on a daily basis. We ask participants to arrive at the latest by early afternoon (3pm). Following your arrival, we embark on a 2-hour drive to our first destination, Mount Sheba Lodge. Time permitting, we may be able to explore the lush grounds of this expansive lodge, getting our first taste 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



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

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**, amongst others. The montane grasslands found above the forests are also home to more special birds, and here we'll have chances for the likes of **Red-winged Francolin**, **Blue Crane** (South Africa's national bird), **Denham's Bustard**, **Buff-streaked Chat** and **Malachite Sunbird**. We will then likely call in at various panoramic stops in the area, such as God's Window and the breath-taking

Three Rondawels view sites. 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**. This area is also home to one of Africa's rarest birds, the small but powerful and extremely fast **Taita Falcon**. This species has become increasingly more difficult to see in recent years, but we'll keep our ears to the ground on latest sightings. Our afternoon will likely be spent further exploring Mount Sheba and surrounds.

Overnight: Mount Sheba Lodge, Pilgrim's Rest



*The edge of the Drakensberg Escarpment here supports small numbers of the very rare **Taita Falcon** – however, we'll need an extreme amount of luck to see this bird!*

Days 3 – 5. Kruger National Park

We have a final morning birding around Mount Sheba, 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 mega-diverse wildlife region, in which is found one of Africa's greatest game parks, the massive Kruger National Park. We will base ourselves for three nights within the Kruger (usually at the Skukuza Rest Camp, as the birds and mammals occurring in and around the camp are arguably unequalled in the park, but may vary depending on availability). We will have the use of a private, open-sided safari vehicle during our time in the park, which enhances your experience of the birds and mammals, 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**.

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 of 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**.



*We'll keep an eye open for **White-headed Vulture** whilst in the Kruger.*

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*



***White-crowned Lapwing** is localized only occurring on the larger rivers.*

On the megafauna side, we should also encounter large numbers of **African Elephant, 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. We would, however, require much luck for **Leopard** or **Cheetah**. Our time will be spent slowly driving and exploring the myriad of roads that cover the southern part of the park, notching up birds and mammals as we go, along with some walks around the rest camps. 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 giving you opportunities to see nocturnal birds as well; more commonly seen species are **Spotted Eagle Owl**, and **Square-tailed** and **Fiery-necked Nightjars**.

Overnight: Skukuza Rest Camp, Kruger National Park (or similar)



*We'll search for **White Rhino** (complete with **Red-billed Oxpecker**) whilst in the Kruger.*

Days 6 – 8. Sabi Sands Game Reserve

The previous three days exploring the Kruger National Park serve as an excellent introduction to your African safari experience. For these next three days, we transfer a short distance to the private and exclusive Sabi Sands Game Reserve. The Sabi Sands needs no introduction and is famous for its exceptional wildlife encounters, especially cats. Bordering on the Kruger National Park, and located in the Greater Kruger conservancy, with no fences between the Kruger National Park and the Sabi Sands, this area is densely populated with wildlife, and offers you the 'ultimate' African safari.

We will base ourselves at an exclusive lodge set deep within the heart of the Sabi Sands, from which we can explore this private reserve. The 'Big 5' abound here, and sightings of them are

almost guaranteed – these are **Lion, Leopard, African Elephant, African Buffalo** and **(White/Black) Rhinoceros** (although **Black Rhinoceros** does remain the trickiest of them to find). Although named for being the five most dangerous animals to hunt many years ago, these are generally the pinnacle of game and mammal sightings in Africa, and are often the most prized. While we would have likely seen some of these mammals in the Kruger National Park already, our views, encounters and experiences of these animals in the Sabi Sands will not be easily bettered. In addition, however, we also have good chances at finding some of the other scarcer mammals and predators in the area, with **Cheetah** and **African Wild Dogs** high on our wish-list as well.



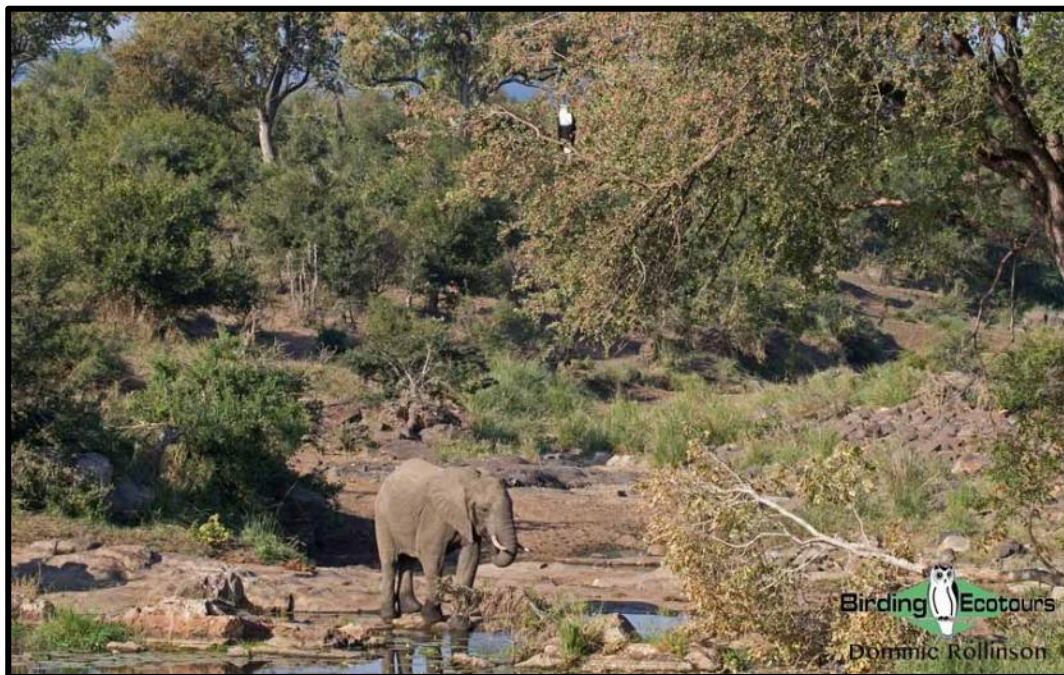
*We stand an excellent chance of seeing **Leopard** in the Sabi Sands.*

As usual, while we're out in the wilderness, birds and birding will not take a backseat, and this diverse area hosts a great many species too. A similar suite of species that are found in the park can also be expected, but the birding here will be easier, due to the combination of both the open-top vehicles present (not allowed in the Kruger National Park), and being able to walk more readily with guides (not allowed in the Kruger National Park). Both of the above allow us to more easily seek out some of the trickier bushveld species, which can often prove difficult in the park. Species we'll keep our eyes peeled for include; **Coqui Francolin, Black-bellied Bustard, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Purple Roller, Bennett's Woodpecker, White-crested and Retz's Helmetshrikes, Flappet Lark, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Bearded Scrub Robin, Grey Tit-Flycatcher and White-browed Robin-Chat**, amongst others. The large **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl** can also be more readily seen in the Sabi Sands.

Overnight: [Umkumbe Safari Lodge, Sabi Sands Game Reserve](#)



The large Verreaux's Eagle-Owl occurs in the area, often roosting in tall riverine woodland.



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

Day 9. Departure

We have our last morning game drive, followed by a group breakfast, before transferring to the nearby Nelspruit, Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport, where this tour ends at midday.

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.

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:	9 days
Group Size:	4 – 8
Dates:	09 – 17 September 2024 09 – 17 September 2025
Start:	Nelspruit, South Africa
End:	Nelspruit, South Africa
Prices:	R90, 363 per person sharing (2024) R100, 302 per person sharing (2025)
Single Supplements:	R15, 311 (2024) R16, 995 (2025)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 9)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance & conservation fees
All ground transport, including airport pick-up and drop-off
Open Safari Vehicle use in Kruger NP & Sabi Sands GR

Price excludes:

International/domestic flights (to/from Nelspruit)
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](#))