



BUDGET LIMPOPO: NORTHERN FORESTS AND BUSHVELD BIRDING TOUR

05-13 FEBRUARY 2026

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*The stunning **Violet-eared Waxbill** should be seen on the first few days of this tour.*

South Africa is one of the premier birding destinations on the African continent. The ease of travel, excellent infrastructure, welcoming people, wealth of birding-related information, affordability, and abundant access to reserves and national parks make South Africa an obligatory destination for any global birder. Over 850 species have been recorded in South Africa, and no fewer than 38 are endemic to the country (some are shared with South Africa's two smallest neighbors, Swaziland and Lesotho). The highest levels of endemism are found in the fynbos and Karoo habitats of the Cape provinces, as well as in the country's high-altitude grasslands on its central plateau. In contrast, the subtropical northern provinces are the most species-diverse regions of the country.

This budget Limpopo birding tour focuses on the avian-rich Limpopo Province – the northernmost province in South Africa. In the interest of keeping costs down on this tour, we do not stay in the high-end accommodation typical of our other South African birding tours. Instead, we stay in comfortable, cost-conscious accommodation at all the sites we visit on this tour.

A variety of diverse habitats, including Polokwane Plateau bushveld, montane grassland, Afrotemperate forest, subtropical thicket, Mopani and riverine woodlands, and several types of mixed woodlands, each with their respective avian assemblages, contribute to the impressive array of species on offer on this tour. Over the course of nine days, we may see close to 400 species with highlights including **Short-clawed Lark**, **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Gurney's Sugarbird**, **Buff-streaked Chat**, **Cape Parrot**, **Black-fronted Bushshrike**, **Magpie Mannikin**, **Bat Hawk**, **African Broadbill**, **Gorgeous Bushshrike**, **Arnot's Chat**, and so much more!



Coqui Francolin will be searched for around Polokwane.

Although this tour is not as mammal-focused as some of our other tours in northern South Africa, we should see a few of the more widespread African mammals like **Giraffe, Greater Kudu, Sable Antelope, Plains Zebra, Impala, Common Waterbuck, Vervet and Blue (Samango) Monkeys, and Grey Rhebok**, among others. Our brief time at the beginning of the tour in Dinokeng may yield members of the famous “Big 5”, including **(White/Black) Rhinoceros, Leopard, Lion, African Buffalo, and African Elephant**.

This tour can easily be combined with our Birding Tour South Africa: Budget Cape Town - Fynbos Endemics and the West Coast to create a comprehensive and budget-friendly South African birding experience. These tours combine the endemic-rich Cape, where we target birds such as **Cape Rockjumper, Cape Sugarbird, Black Harrier, and African Penguin**, with the species-rich Limpopo Province – the best of both worlds!

Itinerary (9 days/8 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Johannesburg and transfer to Dinokeng Game Reserve

This budget Limpopo birding tour begins in Johannesburg, the largest city in South Africa and the country’s main point of entry. We ask that you arrive by 2 p.m. today, as we have a two-hour drive to our accommodation tonight. For those of you joining this tour after our Budget Cape Town tour, you will fly in from Cape Town this afternoon. Upon arrival in Johannesburg, you will be met at the airport, and we will make our way north to Dinokeng Game Reserve.

Dinokeng Game Reserve is the only “Big 5” reserve in Gauteng Province, meaning that **(White/Black) Rhinoceros, Leopard, Lion, African Buffalo, and African Elephant** can be seen in the reserve. Additionally, other mammals like **Greater Kudu, Common Eland, Giraffe, Plains Zebra, Common Wildebeest, Red Hartebeest**, and several other species occur here. We will also get our trip list off to a good start and should have our first exposure to common species like **Swainson’s and Natal Spurfowls, Crested Francolin, Red-crested Korhaan, Green Wood Hoopoe, Southern Yellow-billed, Southern Red-billed and African Grey Hornbills, Woodland Kingfisher, Lilac-breasted Roller, Crested Barbet, Magpie and Crimson-breasted Shrikes, Rattling Cisticola, Southern Pied and Arrow-marked Babblers, and Burchell’s Starling**, to name only a few.

After an eventful first afternoon in the bushveld, we will retire to our comfortable glamping lodge.

Overnight: Ngata Safari Lodge, Dinokeng Game Reserve



*We should see the marvelous **Crimson-breasted Shrike** at several sites on this trip.*

Day 2. Dinokeng Game Reserve to Polokwane

Today, we will start with an early morning birding session in Dinokeng before setting off for Polokwane, the capital of the northernmost Limpopo Province. En route, we will stop to bird along the Zaagkuilsdrift Road. This dirt road passes through Kalahari-type Vachellia thornveld, where we hope to connect with birds like **Northern Black Korhaan**, **Southern Pied Babbler**, **Kalahari Scrub Robin**, **Chestnut-vented Warbler**, **Cut-throat Finch**, **Scaly-feathered Weaver**, **White-browed Sparrow-Weaver**, **Shaft-tailed Whydah**, and **Yellow Canary**. In the wet summer months, a large floodplain develops in this area, and seasonal wetlands species like **Dwarf Bittern**, **African Crake**, **Lesser Moorhen**, and large numbers of other waterbirds congregate here. We will, however, have to keep an eye on the road conditions as flooding is frequent here, and the road often becomes impassable towards the end of summer.

After a two-and-a-half hour drive, we should arrive in Polokwane and head out for an afternoon session in the Vachellia thornveld where we hope to see species like the gorgeous **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Kalahari Scrub Robin**, **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Marico Flycatcher**, **Burnt-necked Eremomela**, **Ashy Tit**, **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Great Sparrow**, and **Violet-eared and Black-faced Waxbills**. We should also have our first chance at the range-restricted **Short-clawed Lark**, the uncommon **Bushveld Pipit**, and **Shelley's** and **Coqui Francolins**.

Overnight: African Roots Guest House, Polokwane

Day 3. Polokwane and Chebeng Grasslands

We will have an early start this morning and make our way west of Polokwane to the Chebeng Grasslands. These seemingly overgrazed grasslands between the villages are home to several localized and scarce species. Our main target is **Short-clawed Lark**, and we should connect

with this species after listening out for its distinctive whistling call. Remarkably, no fewer than ten lark species have been recorded from this area, and we will likely see a number of species, including **Spike-heeled** (an isolated population occurs here), **Pink-billed**, **Sabota**, **Rufous-naped**, **Red-capped**, and **Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks**. **Melodious Lark** is rare here, but we do occasionally connect with this special species. Other birds to look out for in these short grasslands include **White-bellied Bustard**, **Northern Black Korhaan**, **Greater Kestrel**, **Temminck's Courser**, **Capped Wheatear**, **Ant-eating Chat**, **Cloud Cisticola**, **Cape Longclaw**, and the stunning **Long-tailed Widowbird**.



*The range-restricted **Short-clawed Lark** is one of our primary targets at Chebeng.*

The scarce **Tinkling Cisticola** and unobtrusive **Yellow-bellied Eremomela** favor areas with slightly more shrubby vegetation. Wetlands in this area can be quite productive in the summer months, and we may see **Maccoa** and **White-backed Ducks**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, and even **Cuckoo-finch**. Other summer visitors here include large numbers of **Amur Falcons** and **Lesser Kestrels**, occasionally joined by a few **Red-footed Falcons**. A nearby granite outcrop supports a small **Cape Vulture** colony, and we often see a few birds cruising overhead, along with the Critically Endangered (BirdLife International) **White-backed Vulture**.



*The short grasslands around Chebeng are frequented by **Temminck's Courser**.*

After a busy morning, we will return to Polokwane for lunch and head out for another birding session in the *Vachellia* thornveld, where we will likely connect with many of the species mentioned under Day 1. Palearctic migrant warblers are well-represented around Polokwane, and we may connect with **Marsh, Icterine, Willow, Garden, and Olive-tree Warblers** and **Common Whitethroat**. Migrant cuckoos like **Great Spotted, Levallant's, Jacobin, Black, and Diederik Cuckoo** can also be seen. The Polokwane Game Reserve also supports good numbers of mammals like **Plains Zebra, Sable Antelope, Giraffe, Topi (Common Tsessebe), Impala, Common Eland**, and more!

Overnight: [African Roots Guest House](#), Polokwane

Day 4. Polokwane to Magoebaskloof (via Wolkberg)

We will leave Polokwane early today and make our way east towards the northern reaches of the [Great Escarpment](#). En route, we will stop to scan a few sports fields where **Southern Bald Ibis** is seen from time to time (although this species is by no means guaranteed). We will then head up into the [Wolkberg Mountains](#), rapidly gaining altitude and leaving behind the Polokwane Plateau bushveld. On our way up, we will visit a large **Horus Swift** colony and stop in the mixed bushveld habitats of the lower slopes to look for **Mocking Cliff Chat, Black Cuckooshrike, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Short-toed Rock Thrush, Striped Pipit, and Rock-loving Cisticola**. Once we reach the higher reaches of the Wolkberg Mountains, we will bird the montane grasslands and Protea stands for species like the endemic **Gurney's Sugarbird** (Cape Sugarbird, the only other member of this southern African endemic family, can be seen on our [Budget Cape Town: Fynbos Endemics and the West Coast](#) tour), **Malachite** and **Greater Double-collared Sunbirds, Wailing Cisticola**, the endemic **Buff-streaked**

Chat, Cape Bunting, and Nicholson's Pipit. We will also keep an eye skywards for **Verreaux's Eagle**, which breeds on the cliffs in the area.



*The characterful **Buff-streaked Chat** is an attractive endemic of South Africa's highlands.*

We will then proceed to the quaint town of Haenertsburg, nestled in the Wolkberg Mountains. The grasslands surrounding the town are productive and may yield **African Yellow Warbler, Red-collared Widowbird, Drakensberg Prinia, Yellow Bishop, Levillant's Cisticola, Cape Grassbird**, and, with some luck, **Fan-tailed Grassbird**. In the afternoon, we will have our first exposure to the Afrotemperate forests of the northern escarpment. These are cool, high-altitude forests that are often shrouded in mist.

Some of our top targets will include **Narina Trogon, Knysna Turaco, Cape Parrot, Lemon Dove, African Emerald Cuckoo, Square-tailed Drongo, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Black-fronted and Olive Bushshrikes, Orange Ground Thrush, Chorister Robin-Chat, Brown Scrub Robin, White-starred Robin, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Grey Cuckooshrike, Barratt's Warbler, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Forest Canary, Sweet Waxbill, Green Twinspot**, and so many more! We may also luck onto the mighty **Crowned Eagle**, which hunts **Blue (Samango) Monkeys** and other large prey species in the forests. We should see the more common **Long-crested Eagle** and **Jackal Buzzard**, too.



*The endemic **Cape Parrot** occurs in the forests of Magoebaskloof.*

After a busy day, we will retreat to our comfortable hotel where we should hear **African Wood Owl** and even the secretive **Buff-spotted Flufftail** at night.

Overnight: Bramasole Boutique Hotel, Magoebaskloof

Day 5. Magoebaskloof and Tzaneen

Our plan today is to spend the morning birding the Afrotemperate forests, targeting any species we may have missed yesterday, and improving our views of some of these secretive denizens. After an early morning session in the forests, we will drop down into the subtropical lowlands around the town of Tzaneen.

We will stop at a few low-water bridges in the area to look for **Mountain Wagtail**, **African Finfoot**, and **Half-collared Kingfisher**. In Tzaneen, we hope to see the localized **Magpie Mannikin** and several new trip birds like **Purple-crested Turaco**, **White-browed Robin-Chat**, **Red-faced Cisticola**, **Holub's Golden Weaver**, **Violet-backed Starling**, **Scarlet-chested** and **Collared Sunbirds**, **Dusky** and **Village Indigobirds**, and **African Firefinch**, to name a few. We will also try for **Blue-spotted Wood Dove**, which is exceptionally scarce in South Africa, and we hope to see the attractive **Broad-billed Roller** and **Woodland Kingfisher**, both of which are summer visitors to the area. Time-dependent, we may bird the mixed woodland habitats east of Tzaneen, where we have a chance at **Green-capped Eremomela**, **Pale Flycatcher**, **Yellow-throated Longclaw**, and **Bearded Scrub Robin**. In the afternoon, we will stop at a eucalyptus stand where a pair of **Bat Hawks** have bred for several years.



*We will look for the scarce **Bat Hawk** around Tzaneen.*

We will return to our accommodation in Magoebaskloof for an early night in anticipation of more exciting birding tomorrow.

Overnight: Bramasole Boutique Hotel, Magoebaskloof

Day 6. Letsitele Woodlands

Today, we will meet up with local bird guide David Letsoalo for what promises to be one of the highlights of the trip. We will make our way east of Magoebaskloof and into the Lowveld, an area of low-lying subtropical woodlands and savanna habitats. On the way, we will keep an eye open for **Broad-billed** and **Lilac-breasted Rollers**, **Lizard Buzzard**, and **Greater Blue-eared Starlings** on the roadside fences and powerlines. Upon arrival at Mahela, a private game reserve, we will immediately start exploring the Mopani woodlands and waterbodies.

A morning total of well over 100 species is to be expected here, and we should kick our list off with **African Grey**, **Southern Yellow-billed**, and **Southern Red-billed Hornbills**, **Woodland** and **Striped Kingfishers**, **Emerald-spotted Wood Dove**, **African Green Pigeon**, **Bennett's**, **Bearded**, **Golden-tailed**, and **Cardinal Woodpeckers**, **Grey-rumped Swallow**, **Southern Black Tit**, **Green-capped Eremomela**, **Grey Penduline Tit**, **Pale Flycatcher**, **Green Wood Hoopoe**, **Purple Roller**, **Violet-backed Starling**, **Bearded Scrub Robin**, **White-crested** and **Retz's Helmetshrikes**, **Red-headed Weaver**, **Red-billed Buffalo Weaver**, and **Orange-breasted Bushshrike**, to name a few. Birds of prey are well represented here, and we regularly see **Bateleur**, **Tawny**, and **Wahlberg's Eagles**, **African Hawk-Eagle**, **Black-chested** and **Brown Snake Eagles**, **Dark Chanting Goshawk**, and **Shikra**. We also stand an excellent chance of seeing a few vultures. **Hooded** and **White-backed Vultures** are most common, followed by small numbers of **Cape** and **Lappet-faced Vultures**.



Arnot's Chat is one of our primary targets at Mahela.

The woodlands here also host several trickier species, which we will focus on finding. These include **Arnot's Chat**, **Bushveld Pipit**, **African Cuckoo**, **White-breasted Cuckooshrike**, **Stierling's Wren-Warbler**, **African Barred Owlet**, and **Grey-headed Kingfisher**. The property has several large dams which are usually good for waterbirds like **African Darter**, **African Jacana**, **African Wattled Lapwing**, **Water Thick-knee**, **Knob-billed** and **White-faced Whistling Ducks**, **Common** and **Wood Sandpipers**, **Goliath Heron**, **Hamerkop**, and even storks like **African Woolly-necked**, **Abdim's**, **Marabou**, and **Saddle-billed Stork**.

In the afternoon, we will make our way back to Magoebaskloof via Tzaneen, cleaning up any missed targets in the subtropical woodlands of Tzaneen.

Overnight: Bramasole Boutique Hotel, Magoebaskloof



African Barred Owlet is an adorable inhabitant of the Mopani woodlands around Letsitele.

Day 7. Magoebaskloof to Soutpansberg

We have a few options for this morning. Option one is to return to Tzaneen or the forests to try for any potential missed species. Option two is to have a more relaxed morning with some birding around the hotel before we make our way north towards the Soutpansberg Mountains.

The Soutpansberg Mountains are the northernmost mountain range in South Africa, stretching east to west for over 130 km. These semi-isolated mountains are home to several endemic species (unfortunately, no endemic birds) and have a unique avifaunal assemblage featuring several sought-after species. In the afternoon, we may explore some of the higher Afrotemperate forests, which are inhabited by many of the same species found in Magoebaskloof. However, we are likely to focus our attention on the lowland thickets. Here, our primary targets are **Eastern Nicator**, **African Broadbill**, and the aptly named **Gorgeous Bushshrike**. **Brown-necked Parrots** (which are similar in appearance and were once considered conspecific with the Cape Parrots, which we hope to see in Magoebaskloof) occur in this area, and we will listen out for their screeching calls.

After a busy afternoon, we will retreat to our accommodation and discuss our plans for the next day.

Overnight: Pecan Farm Guest House, Soutpansberg

Day 8. Soutpansberg and Polokwane

We will have an early start this morning and join the legendary local birding guide, Samson Mulaudzi, for what promises to be a productive morning. We plan to visit several sites in the Soutpansberg searching for **African Broadbill**, **Gorgeous Bushshrike**, **Eastern Nicator**,

Magpie Mannikin, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Brown-necked Parrot, Narina Trogon, and Green Twinspot, among many others. We will scan a number of the waterbodies in the area, searching among the lily pads for birds like **African Pygmy Goose** and **White-backed Duck**, while the overhanging vegetation along the Levubu River may yield **White-backed Night Heron, Half-collared Kingfisher, and African Finfoot**.



*We will look for **African Finfoot** along the Levubu River.*

After a few hours birding the Soutpansberg, we will make our way back to Polokwane, where we will likely enjoy a final birding session in the Polokwane area. We could spend the afternoon birding the farm roads north of Polokwane, where we have a chance to see **Pale Chanting Goshawk, Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes**, the scarce **Burchell's Sandgrouse, Short-clawed Lark**, and many of the species mentioned under the first three days of the itinerary.

Overnight: African Roots Guest House, Polokwane

Day 9. Polokwane to Johannesburg and departure

We will bid farewell to Polokwane and the Limpopo Province and make our way to Johannesburg this morning. After just over three hours on the road, we will arrive in Johannesburg and make our way to O.R. Tambo International Airport, where we will catch our connecting flights home. We plan to arrive at the airport by 12:00 noon today and will conclude the tour at the same time. You are free to depart at any time after 12:00 noon.

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.

Duration: 9 days

Group Size: 4 – 6

Dates: 05-13 February 2026
05-13 February 2027

Start: Johannesburg, South Africa

End: Johannesburg, South Africa

Prices: R47,900 per person sharing, based on 4-6 participants (2026)
R59,547 per person sharing, based on 4-6 participants (2027)

Single supplements: R9,800 (2026)
R10,412 (2027)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from dinner 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

Price excludes:

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