BUDGET SOUTH AFRICA BIRDING TOUR: NORTHERN CAPE'S DESERT ENDEMICS

30 APRIL–05 MAY 2027



*The charismatic **Red Lark** is one of our primary targets on this tour.*

Overview

This short Northern Cape birding tour forms part of our carefully designed budget circuit, which also includes Cape Town, northern South Africa, and Zululand. Together, these tours offer an exceptional opportunity to explore South Africa's most diverse regions, from arid deserts to fynbos scrub and lush subtropical forests. By combining these destinations, you can rapidly build an impressive and well-rounded bird list, gaining exposure to a remarkable diversity of species, habitats, and endemic-rich ecosystems across South Africa.

South Africa's Northern Cape Province is a vast, rugged, and scenically striking region, showcasing the country's most unique arid landscapes. The desert offers a sense of exclusivity and vast uninterrupted views that are increasingly rare today outside high-end private reserves.



Being the masters of camouflage, ***Karoo Korhaans*** *are usually heard before they are seen.*

This budget tour focuses on the endemic and near-endemic species of the Namaqualand and Bushmanland regions. In the interest of keeping costs down, we stay in comfortable and reasonably priced accommodations while exploring a variety of key habitats. The tour begins around the town of Pofadder, where we traverse stark desert plains and dry river systems characteristic of the Nama Karoo. We will visit the nearby iconic red Koa Dunes which introduce a contrasting environment of iron-rich sands dotted with sparse grasses. Moving west towards Springbok and the Atlantic coastal belt, the habitat shifts into Succulent Karoo, where rocky outcrops and low shrubs, influenced by the cool Atlantic fog, dominate the landscape.

These areas host a fascinating range of species, and we will search for iconic specials such as **Sclater's**, **Dune**, **Stark's** and **Red Larks**, **Black-eared Sparrow-Lark**, **Karoo Eremomela**, **Burchell's Courser**, **Ludwig's Bustard** and the remarkable **Sociable Weaver**. Additionally, the region offers opportunities to see several rarely encountered mammals, these include **Heaviside's Dolphin**, both **Cape** and **Bat-eared Foxes**, **Aardwolf**, and if we are lucky, possibly even **Striped Polecat**!

Detailed Itinerary (6 days/5 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Upington and transfer to Pofadder

This tour begins in the desert city of Upington, and we ask that you arrive before 2 p.m. today. Upon arrival at Upington International Airport, you will be met by your guide, after which we will set off on the approximately three-hour drive to the small town of Pofadder, where we will be based for the next two nights. En route, it will be impossible to miss our first **Sociable Weaver** nests, often built on telephone poles and quiver trees scattered across the landscape. These extraordinary communal structures are the largest nests constructed by any bird and can become so heavy that they occasionally collapse the very supports they rest on. Within these nests, we may also encounter **Pygmy Falcon**, a regular and charismatic tenant.

If time allows, we may also visit nearby riverine habitat, which can be particularly productive. Here we will search for specials such as **Rosy-faced Lovebird** and the prized **Namaqua Warbler**, along with **Orange River White-eye** and **Karoo Thrush**. The river itself and its margins can support species unlikely to be seen elsewhere on the tour, including **Little Egret**, **Reed Cormorant**, **African Fish Eagle**, and **African Pied Wagtail**.



Pygmy Falcon *is the smallest raptor on the African continent.*

We should arrive in Pofadder around sunset, where we will check into our accommodation and settle in for the evening. Even around our base, there is some birding potential, with aerial specialists such as **Bradfield's Swift** often seen overhead. In the evening, we will enjoy our first dinner together while discussing the exciting Northern Cape bird specials that lie ahead.

Overnight: Pofadder

Day 2. Pofadder Plains

We begin the day exploring the open plains and arid scrub surrounding Pofadder, one of the most rewarding areas for Northern Cape desert birding. These seemingly barren landscapes support a remarkable diversity of specialized species, and we will spend the morning searching for some of the region's most sought-after birds. Key targets include the nomadic and often elusive **Sclater's** and **Stark's Larks**, **Black-eared Sparrow-Lark**, and **Burchell's Courser**, all of which can be unpredictable in their movements and require patience and persistence.



Sclater's Lark *usually takes a lot of effort to catch up with.*

While focusing on these headline species, we will also keep a lookout for a wide range of supporting cast species typical of the Nama Karoo and Kalahari transition zone, such as **Ludwig's Bustard**, **Karoo Korhaan**, **Namaqua Dove**, **Double-banded Courser**, **Pale Chanting Goshawk**, and **Pygmy Falcon**. The area also hosts several other lark species, including **Karoo Long-billed**, **Spike-heeled**, and **Fawn-colored Larks**, as well as the thick-billed form of **Sabota Lark**, alongside other passerines like **Black-chested Prinia**, **Rufous-eared Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied Eremomela**, **Karoo Scrub Robin**, and **Chat Flycatcher**. Water sources such as cattle troughs can be particularly productive, often providing excellent viewing opportunities.

After lunch in Pofadder, we may explore areas to the north of the town, potentially working our way toward sections of the Orange River similar to those of the first day of the tour, or keep traversing the Pofadder plains to continue searching for nomadic specials.

As the day winds down, we will return to Pofadder for the evening. Tonight (and possibly other nights), we may opt for a night drive, where we may be able to find nocturnal mammals such as the peculiar **Bat-eared Fox**.

Overnight: Pofadder



*The tiny **Orange River White-eye** can be seen alongside riverside vegetation along its namesake river.*

Day 3. Koa Dunes and transfer to Springbok

We begin the day in the iron-rich red sands of the Koa Dunes, one of the most important habitats in the region for arid-zone endemics and a stronghold for the highly localized **Red Lark** which is threatened by climate change and currently listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN. The surrounding plains and dune edges also support a variety of dry-country specialists similar to those around Pofadder itself, and we will keep an eye out for species such as **Black-eared** and **Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks**, **Stark's Lark**, **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, **Burchell's** and **Double-banded Coursers**, **Lark-like Bunting** and **Red-headed Finch**.

After the morning's birding, we continuing west toward Springbok. In the afternoon, we will explore the rocky hills and shrublands of the surrounding area, likely with a visit to Goegap Nature Reserve and surrounds, which offers a chance at species such as **Karoo Eremomela**, **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler**, **Karoo Lark** and **Grey Tit** along with a variety of other Namaqualand specials.

We will settle in for the evening in Springbok, where we enjoy dinner together. There may also be an optional night drive, during which we could search for nocturnal species such as the extremely elusive **Cape Eagle-Owl**, along with other nocturnal wildlife of the region.

Overnight: Springbok

Day 4. Port Nolloth and Springbok surrounds

We begin the day traveling west from Springbok toward the remote coastal town of Port Nolloth, gradually descending into an increasingly sparse, desert-like landscape. This transition zone, influenced by the cold Benguela Current, supports a unique suite of arid-adapted species including **Cape Long-billed** and **Tractrac Chat** (particularly the pale coastal form). Our primary target near Port Nolloth itself is the localized **Dune Lark**, best searched for in the

sandy coastal plains north of the town. The coastal strip can be surprisingly productive, and we will watch for species such as **Grey Tit**, **Rufous-eared Warbler**, and **Karoo Prinia**. Raptors such as **Greater Kestrel** and **Pale Chanting Goshawk** are often seen perched along roadsides, while **Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark** and **Lark-like Bunting** may also be encountered.



*Namibia lost what was once considered its only endemic bird species following the lumping of Barlow's Lark with **Dune Lark**, which occurs on South Africa's north-west coast.*

Along the rocky shoreline, we will scan for coastal waders and seabirds. Depending on conditions, we may see **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Sanderling**, **White-fronted Plover**, and **African Oystercatcher**, as well as perhaps **Hartlaub's Gull** and **Crowned** and **Bank Cormorants**. With some luck, the near-endemic **Heaviside's Dolphin** may also be seen moving through the cold Atlantic waters just offshore.

By late morning, we return inland toward the Springbok area, where we will spend the afternoon exploring the rocky ridges and shrublands of Goegap Nature Reserve and surrounds. This habitat supports a rich diversity of dry-country specialists, and our focus will be on key regional targets such as **Karoo Eremomela** and **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler**.

While searching for the above two targets, we are likely to encounter a variety of supporting species including **Fairy Flycatcher**, **White-backed Mousebird**, **Layard's Warbler**, **Spike-heeled** and **Karoo Larks**, **Karoo Chat**, **Mountain Wheatear**, and **Dusky Sunbird**. The more open areas may also produce **Booted Eagle** and **Ludwig's Bustard**, while scattered trees and drainage lines may hold species such as **Acacia Pied Barbet**, **Pririt Batis**, and **Cape Penduline Tit**. Mammal sightings are also possible here, with **Gemsbok**, **Springbok**, and **Mountain Zebra** all occurring in the area.

After a full day exploring both the stark Atlantic coastline and the rugged interior of Namaqualand, we return to Springbok for the evening.

Overnight: Springbok

Day 5. Filling gaps between Springbok to Pofadder

Today is designed to fill any gaps for target species we may have missed so far between Springbok and Pofadder, ensuring we maximize our chances of connecting with key birds still absent from our list. Whether it's another attempt at a tricky lark (most notably the notoriously difficult **Sclater's Lark**, which is often best searched for on a drive from Pofadder, or the true needle-in-a-haystack **Black-eared Sparrow-Lark**, which could turn up in a number of areas), a skulking warbler (both **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler** and **Karoo Eremomela** can require some persistence), or a wide-ranging but sparsely distributed **Burchell's Courser**, today provides valuable time to consolidate our birding in the region.

The day will likely begin around the town of Springbok, giving us another opportunity to search for the suite of succulent Karoo specials mentioned on Day 4, should we have missed any. From there, we have the flexibility to revisit key areas such as the Koa Dunes from Day 3, as well as the open plains around Pofadder itself. By the time we return to our accommodation in Pofadder, we should have built a well-rounded list of Namaqualand and Bushmanland specials, having made the most of the diverse habitats explored over the past few days.

Overnight: Pofadder



Cinnamon-breasted Warbler *has a beautiful song which echoes through arid valleys.*

Day 6. Pofadder to Upington and departure

We may enjoy a final morning of birding around Pofadder, making the most of any remaining opportunities before departing the region toward Upington International Airport. The route itself also still offers worthwhile birding, and we will keep an eye out for any final additions to the trip list. We may have time to pop into the Augrabies Falls National Park should we still be missing species like **Namaqua Warbler**.

We will arrive at Upington Airport around midday (please do not book flights any earlier than 2 p.m., alternatively you can depart the following morning) for onward afternoon departures, marking the end of a rewarding exploration of the Northern Cape.

You can extend your South African birding with a flight to Cape Town should you wish to join our **Budget South Africa Birding Tour: Cape Town's Fynbos Endemics** which will start the following day.

Overnight: Not included



Burchell's Courser *is one of the most difficult and nomadic species we hope to find.*

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.

Tour Details:

Duration: 6 days

Group size: 4–6

Dates: 30 April–05 May 2027

Start: Upington, South Africa

End: Upington, South Africa

Prices: R 41,430 per person sharing, based on 4–6 participants (2027)

Single supplements: R 9,660 (2027)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from dinner on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 6)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance & conservation fees
All ground transport
Airport pick-up and drop-off (Days 1 and 6 only)

Price excludes:

International/domestic flights (to/from Upington)
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/medical insurance
Gratuities (please see our tipping guidelines blog)