FLOCK TO MARION — SUBTROPICAL SOUTH AFRICA BIRDING TOUR: COMPREHENSIVE EASTERN SOUTH AFRICA

07–24 FEBRUARY 2028



*The stunning **Drakensberg Rockjumper** occurs only in southern Africa and is one of the most-wanted specials of this tour!*

THIS IS A PREMIUM TOUR WITH OPEN SAFARI VEHICLES IN KRUGER AND ENOUGH TIME TO STOP FOR MAMMALS WHILE ACCUMULATING A LARGE BIRD LIST

Overview

This tour will form part of our scheduled program of pre- and post-Flock to Marion birding tours. You can book this tour on its own or combine it with one or more of our other Flock to Marion departures, giving you an excellent opportunity to see a wide range of South Africa's endemic and range-restricted birds. Please note that the Flock to Marion cruise fare is not included in the tour price. The cruise must be booked separately, and information on how to book can be found on the BirdLife South Africa website. The Flock to Marion cruise dates are 31 January–07 February 2028.

To make your Flock to Marion experience as smooth as possible, we can also assist with private birding tours, day trips, accommodation, domestic travel, and onward arrangements before and after the cruise. If you have any questions or would like help working out the best combination of tours for your trip, please feel free to contact us.

If you would like to combine this eastern South Africa tour with some birding in the western and southwestern part of the country, you could also book onto our **Northern Cape Desert Endemics tour** or our **Cape Town Fynbos Endemics tour** which both take place prior to Flock to Marion 2028.



*Majestic **Lions**, one of Africa's most iconic mammals, should be seen on this tour!*

This subtropical (eastern) South Africa birding tour provides a representative sample of the very best that African birding can offer. Large numbers of species will be seen (the typical bird list for this adventure is in the range of 400 – 450 species for our October departures when migrants are present). Among these many birds, we encounter a lot of South African endemics such as the numerous localized denizens of the scenically spectacular Drakensberg Escarpment (the imposing "Barrier of Spears" as locals call it). Apart from yielding hundreds of bird species, this dream African experience also provides the possibility of seeing **Lion**, **Cheetah**, **Leopard**, **African Elephant**, **White** and **Black Rhinoceros**, **Hippopotamus**, **Giraffe**, **Burchell's Zebra**, multiple antelope species, **Nile Crocodile**, and *many* other large (and small) animal species, with breathtaking scenery as a backdrop. We also often get feedback that the accommodation on this tour is great and indeed South Africa has an unsurpassed infrastructure of brilliant value B&Bs/lodges as well as good roads, compared to anywhere else in Africa.



Pink-throated Twinspot *is one of the specials of the Zululand region.*

We start this birding safari with an arrival in Durban on the east coast of South Africa, bounded by the warm Indian Ocean. Durban must be one of the "birdiest" cities on earth, and here we spend time looking for subtropical coastal species. We then head inland to the KwaZulu-Natal midlands and the foothills of the spectacular Drakensberg area of the Great Escarpment, where temperate forest and high-altitude grassland birds abound. The rare **Cape Parrot** is one of the targets (which, interestingly, cannot be found on our Cape birding tour despite its name), as are the beautiful **Green Twinspot**, two dapper ground thrush species (**Spotted** and **Orange Ground Thrushes**), the dazzling **Narina Trogon**, the impressively beautiful **Green Twinspot**, and, last but not least, the Vulnerable, declining **Blue Swallow** (what a truly spectacular-looking hirundine!).

We then ascend the heights of the Drakensberg into Lesotho via Sani Pass, an amazing road that gives access from the base of the escarpment right up to the high plateau at 10,000 feet (over

3,000 meters), with different endemics appearing as elevation increases – near the base are birds such as **Bush Blackcap**, then as one ascends **Gurney's Sugarbird**, **Ground Woodpecker**, **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, and the shining, metallic **Malachite Sunbird** appear, followed eventually by high-plateau species including **Drakensberg Rockjumper**, **Drakensberg Siskin**, and **Bearded Vulture** (which we often see across the border in the tiny kingdom of Lesotho).

Zululand, probably the most bird-diverse corner of South Africa, is next on our agenda, and not only does it have a great many species, but there are several very localized ones, basically only occurring here and in southern Mozambique – e.g. **Pink-throated Twinspot**, **Lemon-breasted Canary** and **Neergaard's Sunbird**. This also is big mammal country and one of the world's strongholds for **Black** and **White Rhinoceros**, is very good for **Leopard**, and also hosts a variety of mammals not likely to be seen in Kruger – including **Samango Monkey**, **Nyala**, the absolutely tiny **Suni** antelope, etc.

We then ascend to the legendary (among birders seeking endemics) Wakkerstroom highlands, and eventually we reach the Kruger National Park, one of the world's greatest game parks, which is not only teaming with African megafauna but also has a brilliant bird list of over 500 species, many of them large and spectacular (e.g. a bunch of stork, raptor and owl species not to mention bustards and **Secretarybird**) or brightly-colored (e.g. all the barbets, bee-eaters, rollers, hoopoes and kingfishers): African birding is a feast for the eyes.

Before flying home out of Johannesburg, we sample an area which gives access to some Kalahari-type birds, meaning we usually add a disproportionally large number of species to our already large bird list right at the end of the trip – these include such beauties as the shockingly brightly-colored **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, the very striking **Southern Pied Babbler**, **Violet-eared Waxbill**, **Black-cheeked Waxbill**, **Kalahari Scrub Robin**, the amazingly beautiful **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah**, and a plethora of others.



Crimson-breasted Shrike *is one of the Kalahari specials we will search for on this tour.*

We have specially crafted this unusually comprehensive birding tour of mega-diverse (from both a bird and mammal point of view) Eastern South Africa, allowing us sufficient time to adequately cover and explore all the key areas, without compromising on rushed visits which lack the time required to both find and enjoy the birds on offer. To further add to the experience, this tour uses open-top safari vehicles for the two full days in the Kruger National Park which ensures guests make the most of their time in the African bush. As always, we also err on the side of superior accommodation, and we therefore call this a "premium" tour, yet the overall price is still reasonable mainly because South Africa is arguably the best value country on the entire continent.



*We have a number of chances to see the stunning **Narina Trogon** on this tour!*

Detailed Itinerary (18 days/17 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Durban and transfer to Pennington on the south coast

For guests who have booked the Flock to Marion cruise, we will arrange a meeting point at the Nelson Mandela Cruise Terminal in Durban after disembarkation from MSC Sinfonia. From there, we will transfer to our accommodation in the afternoon for the start of the tour. For guests who are not joining the Flock to Marion cruise, airport transfers will be arranged.

Following your arrival, the group will have lunch locally, before undertaking a short transfer south of the city, to the small coastal village of Pennington. Here we are conveniently based right next door to the excellent Umdoni Park, which will give us a great introduction to the common birds of the area, while also providing us access to excellent coastal forest, where we can begin searching for some sought-after species. We will likely have the afternoon available to explore

the trails at Umdoni Park, covering a mix of coastal forest and open woodland. Some of the more conspicuous species we're likely to find include the gaudy **Purple-crested Turaco** and the bright **Red-capped Robin-Chat**, while we're likely to come across a number of barbets, flycatchers, sunbirds (including the tiny **Collared Sunbird**) and weavers.

Overnight: Botha House, Pennington (or similar)

Day 2. Pennington to Underberg, birding en route

We have the morning available to further explore the stunning subtropical coastal forests of Umdoni Park. As we will likely already have become acquainted with many of the more common species of the area, we can now focus on some of the more sought-after species occurring here, such as **Crowned Eagle** (Africa's heaviest and most powerful eagle, which sometimes breeds in the park), the incredibly beautiful South African endemic **Knysna Turaco**, the equally dazzling **Narina Trogon**, the personality-filled **Green Malkoha**, the localized **Brown Scrub Robin** and the jewel-like **Green Twinspot**.



*The secretive **Bush Blackcap** occurs in the foothills of the Drakensberg Mountains!*

We will then spend the remainder of the day gradually heading deeper inland, ultimately arriving at our base in the Underberg district, set in the Drakensberg foothills, in the late afternoon. There are a variety of routes we can take to reach Underberg, however, our first stop will likely be for some forest birding where we target a range of localized specials. We will also be sure to dedicate some time today to finding the stunning **Blue Swallow** (the swallows have become rare in South Africa, and, depending on their recent whereabouts, we may only be able to try for them on Day 4). The dense temperate evergreen Ingeli or Xumeni Forests will also likely feature as a

stop today, and here we will be able to sample our first patch of Afro-montane (mountain) forest. While these forests can be quiet at times, persistence and patience are well rewarded, and we stand excellent chances at finding some top specials, including the likes of **Bush Blackcap**, **Orange Ground Thrush**, **White-starred Robin**, **Olive Bushshrike**, **Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler**, **Barratt's Warbler**, **Swee Waxbill** and **Forest Canary**, all of which are regular here. While **Cape Parrots** do occur here, they are scarce and best sought on Day 4 of this itinerary. The forest surrounds are not to be excluded, and host further excellent birding, with species such as **Grey Crowned Crane**, **Red-chested Flufftail**, **African Yellow Warbler**, **Wailing Cisticola** and the spectacular **Long-tailed Widowbird** all possible. Eventually we will arrive at our comfortable base in the Underberg region, where we will begin preparing for one of the most anticipated, and arguably best days of the trip tomorrow, as we bird the famous Sani Pass!

Overnight: Sani Valley Lodge, Himeville (or similar)

Day 3. Birding day trip up the Sani Pass and into Lesotho

This is one of the most spectacular birding adventures one can embark on. We spend a full day, taking along picnic breakfasts and lunches, ascending the Sani Pass and travelling into Lesotho (passports required), which gives amazing access to most of the Drakensberg endemics within the space of a single day. The “barrier of spears” (as the Drakensberg is known to locals) is impressive, to say the least, and the scenery today is amazing as we gradually ascend from the foothills up to the plateau.



Gurney’s Sugarbird *is one of many highly sought-after birds occurring in the Drakensberg!*

The birdlife changes as altitude increases with **Red-necked Spurfowl**, **Brown-backed Honeybird**, **Drakensberg Prinia**, **Bush Blackcap** (if we missed it the previous day) and **Cape Grassbird** occurring in the lower thickets (consisting largely of ouhout or "old wood", a bush species that looks older than it is because of its gnarled bark). Moving into the higher '*Protea* belt', these are replaced by **Malachite Sunbird** and **Gurney's Sugarbird**, with a supporting cast of **Grey-winged Francolin**, **Ground Woodpecker**, **Cape Rock Thrush**, **Buff-streaked Chat**, **Yellow Bishop**, and if we're lucky, the scarce **Fan-tailed Grassbird** (Broad-tailed Warbler) and the enigmatic **Short-tailed Pipit** (occurring on grassy slopes).

As we reach the top of the pass and the high-altitude plateau, these birds are eventually replaced by the stunning and charismatic **Drakensberg Rockjumper** (arguably the most emblematic bird of the pass), **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, **Mountain** and **African Rock Pipits** and **Drakensberg Siskin**. At the top of the plateau we cross the border into the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, and will briefly explore the plains that run across this rugged landscape, where we will search for **Southern Bald Ibis**, and some species more typical of the Karoo region further to the west, such as **Large-billed Lark**, **Sickle-winged Chat**, **Grey Tit**, **Layard's Warbler** (Tit-babbler), **Fairy Flycatcher**, **Karoo Prinia** and **Karoo Scrub Robin**. Occasionally a pair of **Bearded Vulture** nest nearby, and we hope to see this glorious bird up on the plateau. After a long day we eventually descend the mountain for a well-deserved dinner (and a toast to all the endemics).

Overnight: Sani Valley Lodge, Himeville



***Wattled Crane** is a rare species in South Africa, and will be a major target on this tour!*

Day 4. Birding the Underberg area, and transfer to Eshowe

We have the morning available to bird the greater Underberg region, which will likely see us visiting a variety of grassland, wetland and forest sites. The rare **Wattled Crane** will be one of

our main targets, as they breed locally within the area, but they are nomadic and difficult to find, and we will need some luck to come across this prized bird. **Cape Parrot** also occur in some of the montane forest patches in the area and will be another key target for the morning. If required, we can also dedicate some time today to finding **Blue Swallow**. This region is a very birdy area and we're likely to come across a great many species across the morning ranging from more widespread birds such as **Levaillant's Cisticola**, **Cape Weaver** and **Common Waxbill**, to more difficult species such as **Long-crested Eagle**, **Denham's Bustard** and **Pale-crowned Cisticola**. We also have further chances for a similar suite of species to those occurring in the Ingeli or Xumeni Forests (Day 2), should we have missed any of those targets. After a fulfilling morning, we will begin our drive northwards to the small village of Eshowe, where we will likely arrive in the afternoon, with an entire new suite of special birds awaiting us.

Overnight: Birds of Paradise B&B, Eshowe (or similar)

Day 5. Birding Eshowe and surrounds

We have a full day to explore a number of sites within Eshowe, and some lying a bit further afield, which will likely include the Dlinza Forest Aerial Boardwalk, Entumeni Forest, Ongoye Forest, and the coastal town of Mtunzini. Our day will likely start off at the Dlinza Forest, located right in the heart of Eshowe, where the secretive and highly sought-after **Spotted Ground Thrush** will be one of the main targets. While slowly walking the forest trails, listening for the tell-tale call of the thrushes, we are sure to come across many other birds, and in particular we'll keep an eye out for **Green Malkoha**, **Lemon** and **Tambourine Doves**, **Scaly-throated Honeyguide**, **Grey Cuckooshrike**, **Common Square-tailed Drongo**, **Chorister Robin-Chat**, **Dark-backed Weaver** and the prized **Green Twinspot**. The forest also features a canopy walkway and tower, and we'll be sure to spend time up here, as it is a great area to see the rare **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon** (although we will need some luck to see this bird), while more regular birds seen above the forest include **African Goshawk**, **Trumpeter Hornbill**, **Crowned Hornbill**, **White-eared Barbet** and **Black-bellied Starling**.

Entumeni Forest acts as a wonderful backup to many of these species, while also holding a small population of the highly prized **African Broadbill**, although as ever, some luck is needed. Ongoye Forest is a bit further afield and preserves the only southern African population of **Green Barbet** (with the nearest population found roughly ~1000miles/1600kilometres further north in Malawi and northern Mozambique) – this localized population being of particular interest as it's a separate subspecies, at times split into a full species restricted to a single forest here at Ongoye! A similar suite of forest birds occurs here as in Dlinza Forest, along with the star of the show, Green Barbet.

The coastal town of Mtunzini presents us with a different, coastal, habitat set, and along with it, a different assemblage of bird species. While our core target here will be the vegetarian **Palm-nut Vulture**, we're also likely to find a wide array of other species such as **Woolly-necked Stork**, **Black-throated Wattle-eye**, **Rufous-winged Cisticola**, **Purple-banded Sunbird** and **Yellow-throated Longclaw**, amongst many others.

Overnight: Birds of Paradise B&B, Eshowe (or similar)



*The scarce **Spotted Ground Thrush** is a big target while we're based in Eshowe.*

Day 6. Birding around Eshowe and transfer to St Lucia

We have the full morning available to continue birding this area, searching for any of the species we may still need, as mentioned under Day 5 above. We have a short transfer (roughly two hours) to reach our next destination – the lovely coastal village of St Lucia, where we will be based for two nights, and we will likely arrive in the early afternoon. St. Lucia is a wild place, where hippos can still roam the streets at night and **Thick-tailed Galagos** (Bush Babies) cry from the tree-lined main street at night. This village is completely surrounded by a World Heritage Site, the Isimangaliso Wetland Park, and is a truly phenomenal birding area. Our afternoon will likely see us investigating the estuary and the surrounding coast. Although tidal to some degree, the estuary is largely cut off from direct access to the ocean and as such doesn't fluctuate heavily. During low-water periods, a number of shorebirds/waders occur here and we'll be on the lookout for species such as **Grey**, **Common Ringed** and **White-fronted Plovers**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Terek**, **Curlew** and **Marsh Sandpipers**, **Common Greenshank** and **Little Stint**. Occasionally rarer species turn up, such as **Bar-tailed Godwit**, and **Greater** and **Lesser Sand Plovers**. There is often a large tern roost present here, and one of our main targets will be the scarce **Lesser Crested Tern**, while more common species include **Greater Crested** (Swift), **Sandwich**, **Caspian**, **Common** and **Little Terns**.



Southern Banded Snake Eagle *is one of the localized, scarce species we'll keep an eye out for around St Lucia.*

The estuary area also supports an array of other waterbirds, and we're likely to see the impressive **Goliath Heron** here, with a supporting cast including **Grey Heron** and **Great** and **Little Egrets**, while **Yellow-billed Stork** is regular along with **Pink-backed Pelican**. The impressive **Saddle-billed Stork** can also be seen, but is easier to find in the Kruger National Park later in the tour. Vocal **African Fish Eagles** are never far away, with a number of pairs breeding in the area. The reedbeds host colonies of the prized **Southern Brown-throated** and **Eastern Golden** (Yellow) **Weavers**. The estuary is also home to **Nile Crocodiles**, and quite a few pods of **Hippopotamuses**, some of which call the St Lucia village home, and can even be seen in the evenings walking around the town grazing on lawns!

Overnight: St Lucia Wetlands Guest House, St Lucia (or similar)

Day 7. Birding the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Isimangaliso Wetland Park

We will spend the day exploring the wonderful Isimangaliso Wetland Park, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and will likely spend time in both the Eastern and Western Shores section of the park. While primarily consisting of coastal grassland, patches of coastal forest occur as well, and host a fine array of unique and special birds which we'll spend time trying to find. These include the sought-after **Southern Banded Snake Eagle**, the glorious **Livingstone's Turaco**, **Narina Trogon**, **Woodward's Batis**, the spectacular (but difficult-to-see) **Gorgeous Bushshrike**, **Brown Scrub Robin**, **Eastern Nicator**, localized **Rudd's Apalis** and **Grey Waxbill**, among others.

We won't ignore the more open areas, as they do also host some great birds and birding; some of the species we'll be sure to keep an eye out for include **Black-bellied Bustard**, **Senegal**

Lapwing, **Collared Pratincole**, **Croaking Cisticola**, **Lemon-breasted Canary**, and with some luck, **Rosy-throated Longclaw**. A number of raptors hunt over these open areas, and it's a great place to see a wide range of these species. These open areas also support good numbers of **Swamp Nightjar**, and with some birding in strategic areas after dark, we stand a good chance of finding this prized bird.



Rudd's Apalis *is another Zululand specialty we should get whilst traversing the region!*

Not to be forgotten, this park also supports a wide array of mammals, and we may see such charismatic species as **African Elephant**, **African Buffalo** and **Giraffe**, along with antelope such as **Waterbuck**, **Impala** and the dainty **Red Duiker**. This is also a great area to see the scarce **Blue** (Samango) **Monkey**, while species such as **Leopard** and **White Rhinoceros** will require a bit more luck to find. This is a very birdy park, and we're sure to rack up a high list of birds for the day.

Overnight: St Lucia Wetlands Guest House, St Lucia

Day 8. Birding St Lucia and transfer to Hluhluwe

We have the morning available to bird around the village, and in particular, along the lovely iGwalagwala Trail, which passes through some excellent coastal forest. Although we should have seen many of these specials the previous day, it serves as an excellent backup for species we could have missed, including some very localized birds like **Livingstone's Turaco**, **Woodward's Batis**, **Brown Scrub Robin**, **Rudd's Apalis** and **Grey Waxbil**l, while also offering chances for species such as **Buff-spotted Flufftail** (with some luck and patience), **Green Malkoha**, **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher**, **Yellow-bellied Greenbul**, **Terrestrial**

Brownbul and others. Strange-looking **Crested Guineafowl** are a common sight around the village as well and are sure to keep us entertained.

We have another short transfer (also roughly two hours) to get to the Hluhluwe area, where we'll be based for two days, as we explore the mega-diverse but compact Mkhuze Game Reserve and surrounds. This is arguably one of the finest birding sites in southern Africa and certainly has a legendary status. We'll likely arrive at our comfortable lodge in the early afternoon, and may explore some of the surrounding open areas, such as Mpempe Pan or the Nibela Peninsula this afternoon still. The birding here can be excellent, and some of the species we're likely to see include **Black-winged** and **Senegal Lapwings** (sometimes offering great comparative views of these similar birds, both of them scarce and local), **Collared Pratincole**, **Grey-rumped Swallow**, all three locally occurring **Longclaw**s (**Cape**, **Yellow-throated** and **Rosy-throated**), and the highly range-restricted **Lemon-breasted Canary**. A wide array of ducks, geese, herons, egrets and other waterbirds can also be seen here.

Our lodge itself also hosts some excellent birding and we're likely to become acquainted with a number of sand forest specials here (sand forest is a delightful, localized habitat typical of Zululand and southern Mozambique, and contains some top birds). The highly sought-after **Pink-throated Twinspot** occurs commonly around the lodge and will be one of our main targets. A number of other sought-after birds are possible here as well, including **Green Malkoha**, **Red-fronted Tinkerbird**, **Rudd's Apalis**, **Eastern Nicator**, **Bearded Scrub Robin**, **White-throated Robin-Chat** and **Purple-banded Sunbird**. More widespread species found here include a wide array of **cuckoos**, including **African Emerald-**, **Klaas's**, **Red-chested** and **Black**, **Striped Kingfisher**, **Orange-breasted Bushshrike**, **Black-crowned Tchagra**, **Black Cuckooshrike**, **Southern Black Tit**, **Violet-backed Starling**, **Pale Flycatcher**, **Scarlet-chested Sunbird** and **Golden-breasted Bunting**, amongst others. Noisy **Thick-tailed Greater Galagos** (Bushbaby) wake up in the evenings, and can often be seen around the lodge. We'll enjoy a good evening meal, in preparation for another excellent day in the heart of Zululand.

Overnight: Umkhumbi Lodge, Hluhluwe (or similar)

Day 9. Birding Mkhuze Game Reserve and surrounds

We will undertake a day trip into the nearby Mkhuze Game Reserve (armed with picnic breakfast and lunch). This tiny reserve is one of the premier birding sites in the country. One is only allowed out of the van in designated areas (because of the presence of dangerous African megafauna), and so we will focus our birding on the excellent hides (and walkways to them), picnic sites and around the rest camp, where we are free to get out and walk around. This incredible reserve has a wide array of habitats, ranging from bushveld through to sand forest, and open wetlands, and we'll explore all of these habitats during our day. The sand forest is home to our main targets, which will include the likes of **Pink-throated Twinspot** (if not seen previously), **Neergaard's Sunbird** and **Gorgeous Bushshrike**, among other prized birds such as **Rudd's Apalis**, **African Pygmy Kingfisher**, **Red-fronted Tinkerbird**, the diminutive **Grey Penduline Tit**, **Eastern Nicator**, the attractive **Stierling's Wren-Warbler** and **Dusky Indigobird**. The large Nsumo Pan also offers excellent birding, supporting a wide array of waterbirds, and depending on the water levels at the time, the pan supports one of the only breeding colonies of **Pink-backed Pelicans** in South Africa. Other species to be found here include the likes of the sought-after **African Pygmy Goose** and **African Openbill** while more

regular birds include **White-faced Whistling Duck**, **Black Crake**, **Water Thick-knee**, **African Jacana**, **Whiskered Tern**, **African Spoonbill**, **Squacco** and **Black Herons** and **Pied Kingfisher**. The trees on the edge of the pan support the dazzling **Broad-billed Roller**, along with an array of woodpeckers, kingfishers, barbets, honeyguides, bushshrikes, flycatchers, robins, sunbirds and weavers. **Pel's Fishing Owl** do occur in the area, but are nomadic and very rarely seen, and are more reliable on our tour to the Okavango Delta in Botswana/northern Namibia.



*The rare **Neergaard's Sunbird** is one of the top targets of Mkhuze, and indeed the tour!*

The park will also allow us to increase our raptor list, being an excellent area for some of the more iconic bushveld species such as **Bateleur** and **Martial Eagle**, while **White-backed Vultures** are never far away. The bushveld areas are not to be ignored, and are home to species such as **Common Scimitarbill**, **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill**, **Lilac-breasted Roller**, **Chinspot Batis**, **Brubru**, **Sabota Lark**, **Long-billed Crombec**, **Burnt-necked Eremomela**, **Red-billed Oxpecker** (often catching a ride on large mammals), **Kurrichane Thrush**, **Blue Waxbill** and **Green-winged Pytilia**, among others.

In addition to all these excellent birds, Mkhuze also offers a wide selection of mammals including the full complement of big game species. While mammals such as **Lion**, **Cheetah**, **African Wild Dog**, **Leopard**, **African Elephant** and **Black** and **White Rhinoceros** occur, they are scarce and we'll need some luck to find these. More commonly seen species include an array of antelope, including the spectacular **Nyala**, along with **Greater Kudu** and the ever-charismatic **Plains Zebra**. The diminutive **Suni** antelope can also be seen in the sand forest.

This is sure to be an excellent day, with a high number of birds and mammals seen. We'll return to our comfortable lodge for a well-deserved dinner later in the afternoon.

Overnight: Umkhumbi Lodge, Hluhluwe (or similar)

Day 10. Birding Hluhluwe and transfer to Wakkerstroom

We have the morning available to bird the excellent grounds of our lodge, or some other nearby areas, such as False Bay Nature Reserve, should any target species still be outstanding – these may include the likes of the difficult **African Broadbill** and **Neergaard's Sunbird**. We'll then begin the fairly long drive (4 hours+), to get to our next destination, Wakkerstroom, set in the montane grassland belt at high altitude. This is another one of the premier birding destinations in the country, and is a must for any world birder, as it hosts a number of prized endemic birds.

Wakkerstroom is a lovely, quaint and charmingly small village located along the Drakensberg escarpment, and as such is fairly high in elevation (only just below 6500ft/2000m). We will likely only arrive in the afternoon and may begin exploring the area slightly lower in elevation located to the east of the town. Here, a number of species not regularly seen in the immediate vicinity of the town can be seen and include the likes of the curious southern African race of **White-bellied Bustard** (known locally as Barrow's Korhaan, split by some authorities), and **Cloud Cisticola**. We're also sure to get our eye in on some of the other more widespread grassland species occurring in the area, such as **Swainson's Spurfowl**, **Cape Crow**, **Spike-heeled** and **Red-capped Larks**, **South African Cliff Swallow**, **Banded Martin**, **Cape Grassbird**, **Pied Starling**, **Ant-eating Chat**, **Capped Wheatear**, **Red-collared Widowbird**, **Cape Longclaw** and **Cape Canary**, amongst others.

Overnight: Forellenhof Guest Farm, Wakkerstroom (or similar)

Day 11. Birding the Wakkerstroom area

We will spend a full day birding the upland grasslands and wetlands surrounding Wakkerstroom, usually accompanied by a knowledgeable local guide. The area is particularly well known for its special grassland birds, including three highly sought-after targets: **Rudd's Lark**, **Botha's Lark**, and **Yellow-breasted Pipit**. However, it is important to be aware that **Rudd's** and **Botha's Larks** have become considerably rarer and more localised in the Wakkerstroom area and are no longer reliable targets here. Access to some of their remaining suitable habitat is also complicated by private land ownership and the need to secure permission. Consequently, sightings of either species cannot be guaranteed and may not be possible during our visit. **Yellow-breasted Pipit**, by contrast, is generally much easier to find in the surrounding grasslands and remains a realistic target for the day.

The entire area is particularly species-rich with many of the following likely: **Red-winged** and **Grey-winged Francolins**, **Southern Bald Ibis**, **Denham's Bustard**, **Blue Korhaan**, **Eastern Long-billed**, **Pink-billed** and **Eastern Clapper Larks**, **Pale-crowned** and **Wing-snapping Cisticolas**, **Nicholson's Pipit** and **Cape Bunting**. The wetlands in the area are home to a number of birds, and amongst others we will search for **White-backed** and **Maccoa Ducks**, **African Rail**, **Red-chested Flufftail** (with some patience), **African Snipe** and **Little Bittern**. Aside from these, many other more widespread grassland species feature here, from **Blue** and **Grey Crowned Cranes** to a variety of raptors, cisticolas, larks, widowbirds, weavers and more.



*The highly sought-after endemic **Yellow-breasted Pipit** can be seen around Wakkerstroom!*

Areas of woodland line some of the ravines and valleys, and these provide us with further species such as **Red-throated Wryneck**, **Bokmakierie**, **Lazy Cisticola**, **Drakensberg Prinia**, along with **Bush Blackcap** and **Barratt's Warbler** in the wooded areas. We will also be sure to keep our eyes to the sky for raptors such as the tricky **Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk**, along with **Black Sparrowhawk**, and **African Marsh** and **Black Harriers**. This is also a great area for aerial feeders (swifts, swallows and martins), and we'll also keep an eye out for the tricky **Horus Swift**, along with **Alpine** and **African Black Swifts**.

While few of Africa's larger mammals are found here, this area is a great place to find smaller mammal species such as the charming **Meerkat** as well as **Yellow Mongoose** and **Common Duiker**. After dark, we can also try for **Marsh Owl**, and if we're lucky, the rare **African Grass Owl**.

Overnight: Forellenhof Guest Farm, Wakkerstroom

Day 12. Birding Wakkerstroom, and transfer to the Kruger National Park

We have the morning available to try for any highland birds we may still be missing, before having to gather our things and set off to our next destination. We have arguably the longest drive of the trip today (roughly 6 hours), but the reward is that we'll eventually arrive in one of Africa's greatest game parks – the Kruger National Park. We will spend three nights in this great park attempting to find as many of the birds and mammals mentioned below as possible, along with enjoying a great safari experience. The mammal and bird diversity here is nothing short of staggering. **African Elephant**, **Hippopotamus**, **Lion**, **Leopard**, **Cheetah**, **African Wild Dog** (now extremely rare but regularly sighted in the park), both **White** and **Black Rhinoceros**,

Giraffe, and a stack of antelopes and smaller mammals will all be sought. **Nile Crocodile** is quite common in many of the park's waterbodies.



*Whilst in Kruger, mammals, such as this **White Rhinoceros**, are major targets!*

The park is absolutely full of birds as well, including a mega-diversity of raptors (ranging from the tiny **Little Sparrowhawk** to the massive **Lappet-faced Vulture**, and a great many in between), an array of storks, the most admired being **Saddle-billed Stork**, while on the other end of the spectrum 'the undertaker' **Marabou Stork**, and other large birds such as **Southern Ground Hornbill**. Indeed, the raptors and other large birds thrive here, as there is such a vast amount of conserved and wild land, allowing them to breed largely away from human disturbance – making this a stronghold for these species in South Africa. A great many other species occur, and include a number of francolins, cuckoos, hornbills, rollers, mousebirds, kingfishers, bee-eaters, woodpeckers, bushshrikes, flycatchers, robin-chats, starlings, waxbills, firefinches, canaries and buntings. The diversity of birds and mammals in the park has to be seen to be believed, and we will accumulate a long list of species during our stay in the park.

Overnight: Skukuza lodging, Kruger National Park (or similar)

Days 13–14. Birding the Kruger National Park

Making use of open-top safari vehicles, ideal for bird and game viewing in Kruger, we have two full days to explore the southern areas of this iconic park. Our exact routes may vary depending on which rest camp(s) we stay at, but we stand good chances at finding most of the above-mentioned (Day 12) species. We will also have the opportunity to undertake optional night drives (at your own cost), which can produce some of the scarcer nocturnal birds, such as

Bronze-winged Courser and **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl**, and mammals such as **African Civet**, **South African Large-spotted Genet** and perhaps even **Serval**.

Overnight: Skukuza lodging, Kruger National Park (or similar)



*Kruger is home to a vast array of birds as well, including the **Saddle-billed Stork**!*

Day 15. Birding Kruger, with a transfer to Dullstroom

We have our final morning available to spend within Kruger, before having to exit this wonderful area, and continue onto our next destination, that being Dullstroom, located in the highlands of the northern Drakensberg escarpment. The drive will likely be around 3 hours and should see us arriving with time to spare in the afternoon, where we'll check into our very comfortable lodge and acquaint ourselves with the area and some of its birds. Dullstroom is a small, charming village which plays host to a number of specials which we'll be targeting during our time here. Foremost amongst these is the rare **Cape Eagle-Owl**, which we will attempt to track down this evening.

Overnight: Linger Longer Country Retreat, Dullstroom (or similar)

Day 16. Birding Dullstroom, and transfer to Rust de Winter

We have the morning available for some final birding around Dullstroom and surrounds. We usually focus our efforts on the nearby Verloren Vallei Nature Reserve, which hosts some of the most pristine montane grassland in the area. While we should have seen many of the species occurring here previously on the trip in the other highland areas (Wakkerstroom and Sani Pass), this stunning area offers us an excellent backup for a number of scarce and prized birds, such as **Wattled Crane**, **Secretarybird**, **Denham's Bustard**, **Red-winged Francolin**, **Southern Bald**

Ibis, **Black-winged Lapwing**, **Gurney's Sugarbird**, **Eastern Long-billed Lark** and **Yellow-breasted Pipit**.

We will eventually make our way onwards to our final destination, Rust de Winter, and have a relatively lengthy transfer (roughly 4 hours) to get here. We will likely take an 'off-the-beaten-path' route to get here, visiting some of the superb mixed broad-leafed woodlands north-east of Pretoria, which support some localized and scarce species. Here we can search for **Shelley's Francolin**, **Melodious** and **Fawn-colored Larks**, **Green-capped Eremomela**, **Short-toed Rock Thrush**, **Tinkling Cisticola**, **Bushveld Pipit** and **Red-headed Weaver**. If conditions are right, we may also be able to find the incredibly difficult **White-backed Night Heron** and **Half-collared Kingfisher**. We will eventually arrive at our comfortable lodge located in the Rust de Winter district in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Golden Impalas Bush Resort, Dinokeng Game Reserve (or similar)



*The stunning **Violet-eared Waxbill** is one of the specials of the Zaagkuildrift area!*

Day 17. Birding Zaagkuilsdrift, Kgomo-Kgomo and Rust de Winter

We will spend the last full day of the tour birding the rich "acacia"-dominated savannas and other habitats of the area. We usually focus our efforts on the superb Zaagkuilsdrift Road, which offers a great transect through this habitat, and puts us in an excellent position to find some of the many more typical Kalahari edge type species that occur here. The road continues on for a while through bird-rich savannah before arriving at a floodplain, which also hosts some excellent species, but birding here is very much dependent on the conditions (usually dry on our October tours). This is another of the country's premier birding sites, with a huge diversity of birds, and we're sure to build up an extensive list of species. Some of the Kalahari-type birds we'll try for include **Northern Black Korhaan**, **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Southern Pied Babbler**, **Kalahari Scrub Robin**, **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Chestnut-vented Warbler** (Tit-babbler),

Cape Penduline Tit, **Burnt-necked Eremomela**, **Marico Flycatcher**, **Violet-eared** and **Black-faced Waxbills**, **Great Sparrow**, **Cut-throat Finch**, **Scaly-feathered Weaver** (Finch), **White-browed Sparrow-Weaver**, **Shaft-tailed Whydah** and **Yellow Canary**. These are just a few of the many birds occurring in the thornveld, and the usually dry (at this time of the year) and open lands around the floodplain can support interesting birds such as **Temminck's Courser** and **Caspian Plover**.

The nearby Rust de Winter area supports a similar suite of birds to those mentioned above. This is also a great area to get to grips with owls, and some dedicated nocturnal searching may produce the likes of **Western Barn**, **Southern White-faced** and **African Scops Owls**, while the larger **Spotted** and **Verreaux's Eagle-Owls** do occur in the area as well. The dainty and partly diurnal **Pearl-spotted Owlet** is ever-present too, sometimes surrounded by a host of passerines mobbing it (which is useful to us as it means we can accumulate a lot of bird species fast!). We'll eventually settle in for our last dinner together, reminiscing about all the excellent birds we've experienced over the course of this tour.

Overnight: Golden Impalas Bush Resort, Dinokeng Game Reserve (or similar)

Day 18. Transfer to Johannesburg and departure

We have the morning available to bird and explore the surrounds at our leisure, and being no more than 2 hours away from the main Johannesburg Airport (OR Tambo International Airport), we do not have very far to travel today. The tour will conclude at the airport later in the day.

We kindly ask that you book your international flight to depart after 3 p.m. today.

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.

Tour Details

Duration:	18 days
Group Size:	4–6
Dates:	07–24 February 2028
Start:	Durban, South Africa
End:	Johannesburg, South Africa
Prices:	R 146,900 per person sharing, based on 4–8 participants (2028)
Single Supplements:	R 27,400 (2028)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until lunch on Day 18)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance fees
All ground transport, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flock to Marion cruise fare
International/domestic flights (to Durban, and 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)