

SOUTH AFRICA

BIRDS & BEASTS

September 27 – October 12, 2020

Pre-trip Western Cape Extension Sept. 21 - 27

Post-trip Drakensberg Plateau Extension Oct. 12 - 15

The Eastern Seaboard of South Africa offers some of the best birding in all of Africa and on this tour we will sample some of the diversity that makes this part of the country essential to any birder's travels. The area is home to over 750 species; couple this with magnificent landscapes, modern infrastructure and the full big game experience, and you have a winning recipe. Typically, we could expect a bird list in the region of 400 birds, sprinkled with a good number of endemics and unbelievable game viewing.

If you are taking the Cape Pre-trip extension, you will arrive in Durban on September 27 with the group. If you are taking only the main tour, you will need to leave the US at least one day early (September 26) in order to arrive on September 27. You might want to arrive a day early in order to get some rest before starting to bird, and also to acclimate to the time change a bit. If so, you should depart from the US on Day 00 (September 25) in order to arrive in Durban on Day 0 (September 26). If you prefer to spend the night of Day 0 (September 26) in Johannesburg, which isn't a bad idea after such a long flight, we can recommend a lodge near the airport and we will make reservations for you for that night. You can then catch a morning flight to Durban the next day (September 27, day 1 of the tour). If you fly directly to Durban, you can arrive on Day 0 or Day 1. We can make arrangements for you to spend the night at the first lodge on the tour if you decide to arrive early and include the cost on your final invoice. Lodging and meals for Day 0 are not included in the tour price.

Examples:

Sept 25: Depart USA

Sept 26: Arrive Johannesburg, spend the night there

Sept 27: Fly to Durban, begin tour

Sept 25: Depart USA

Sept 26: Arrive Durban, spend the night there

Sept 27: Begin tour

Sept 24: Depart USA

Sept 25: Arrive Johannesburg, spend two nights there

Sept 27: Fly to Durban, begin tour

Sept 24: Depart USA

Sept 25: Arrive Durban, spend two nights there

Sept 27: Begin tour

Sept 24: Depart USA

Sept 25: Arrive Johannesburg, spend one night there

Sept 26: Fly to Durban, spend one night there

Sept 27: Begin tour

Birds & Beasts (Main Tour) Detailed Itinerary

Day 1, September 27

Our first day starts in the City of Durban, where you would be arriving today from various International destinations or from the Western Cape pre-trip extension. You'll be transferred to the lodge in Umhlanga Rocks where we will do some birding in the gardens of our lodge and, time permitting, also at the Umhlanga NR, where we'll have a shot at Barrat's Warbler, Rufous-winged Cisticola and several species of Weaver. This little reserve also often holds the rather elusive Red-headed Quelea.

O/N TBA (LD)

Day 2, September 28

After some early morning birding around the local waste-water treatment plant, we head further north, arriving in the town of Eshowe in the afternoon. In town, Dlinza Forest with its aerial boardwalk will be our birding spot of choice this afternoon and we'll be on the lookout for the likes of Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon and Spotted Ground Thrush, a bird of the shady forest floor. The calls of Scaly-throated Honeyguide can usually be heard while walking through the forest but getting to see this skulker is easier said than done. We hope to also find Narina Trogan here and sometimes, with a bit of luck, even the seldom-seen Green Twinspot.



O/N Birds of Paradise B&B (BLD)

Day 3, September 29

Our first stop today will be at Ongoye forest, a remnant patch of coastal scarp forest which straddles the hills for about 20km between Eshowe and Empangeni. This is the only spot in Southern Africa where the local race of Green Barbet can be found. The forest here is also good for Green Twinspot, Narina Trogan, Chorister Robin-Chat, Grey Cuckoo-Shrike, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, African Crowned Eagle and Striped Pipit. We'll use a different route back to Eshowe, travelling through rural Zululand, giving us an exciting and eye-opening perspective on the everyday life of the Zulu people. Back in Eshowe, we'll enjoy lunch before heading out of town to a good stakeout for Southern Tchagra and we'll also enjoy more forest birding at another nearby forest.

O/N Birds of Paradise B&B (BLD)

Day 4, September 30

Today we'll travel to the small village of St Lucia, gateway to the famous iSimangaliso Wetland Park. En route to St Lucia we'll stop at Mtunzini in the hope of finding Palmnut Vulture. This is usually a good spot for them, and also makes a good stop for lunch. From Mtunzini we'll head to Amatikulu Nature Reserve where we'll look for Swamp Nightjar, Broad-tailed Warbler, Croaking Cisticola and Brown-backed Honeybird. We'll arrive at our lodge in the town of St Lucia later that evening. Time permitting, we'll head down to the estuary mouth for a rare taste of shore birding. Several Tern species should be present; for the last few seasons a Sooty Tern has been regular at the Tern roost.

O/N Kingfisher Lodge (BLD)

Day 5, October 1

An early morning departure will see us at the gates of the Isimangaliso Wetland Park (Eastern Shores section) in time for a truly magnificent day's birding. Various habitats straddle this section of the park, from coastal dune forest, wetlands and moist coastal grasslands to exotic plantations at Cape Vidal. Several good hides have been built over the last few years and we'll spend some time at these, ticking off several wader species as well as possible African Pygmy Kingfisher, Rufous-bellied Heron and a number of duck species. At Mission Rocks

we'll search for Woodward's Batis, Brown Scrub-Robin and Livingstone's Turaco and sometimes we encounter Southern Banded Snake-Eagle here. Cape Vidal itself is usually good for Green Twinspot, Grey Waxbill, Green Malkoha, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher and Black-throated Wattle-eye. We also have the chance of encountering Samango Monkeys here alongside their more common cousins the Vervet Monkeys - just be sure to watch them closely while we enjoy our packed picnic lunch here or they will help themselves to a portion! The drive back to town will have slightly fewer birding stops, but we'll keep our eyes peeled for specialties such as African Crowned Eagle, Yellow-throated Longclaw, African Cuckoo-Hawk, Collared Pratincole and Croaking Cisticola.

O/N Kingfisher Lodge (BLD)

Day 6, October 2

We'll bird the well-known Gwala Gwala trail at the edge of town before breakfast. Here we often encounter birds such as Lemon Dove, Livingstone's Turaco, Olive Bushshrike, African Emerald Cuckoo, Trumpeter Hornbill, African Green Pigeon and Brown Scrub-Robin. After breakfast we'll stop at the bridge over the estuary for some Weaver action and we could tick Yellow, Golden and Southern Brown-throated Weavers here before continuing our journey north, this time to one of Kwazulu-Natal's premier birding spots, Mkuze Game Reserve. We should arrive in the park mid- to late afternoon and after checking in we'll waste no time finding some of the spectacular birds that call this remarkable area home. We'll drive down to the Sand Forest, a dry and localized type of forest that is home to several spectacular species such a Pink-throated Twinspot, Four-coloured Bushshrike, Neergaard's Sunbird, Crested Guineafowl and Rudd's Apalis, before we head back to camp.

O/N Mkhuze Game Reserve (BLD)

Day 7, October 3

We have a full day ahead to explore the incredible diversity of Mkhuze, not just birds but also a whole host of fascinating mammals, from one of Africa's smallest antelope, the Suni, to the largest mammals, the African Elephant. African Wild Dog sighting is a very real possibility as is sighting of Cheetah and even Serval.

Although the mammals will have our attention at times, we will continue to watch for interesting birds such as Black-bellied Bustard, Senegal Lapwing, several Vulture species, Martial Eagle, White-crested Helmetshrike, and Grey Penduline Tit. At one of the large wetlands, species such as Pink-backed and Great White Pelican, African Openbill, Yellow-billed Stork, Goliath Heron and Whiskered Tern are possible. Several good hides are situated in the park, mostly overlooking waterholes, and we will take some time to enjoy these spots, which often produce some of the most memorable moments of the trip.

O/N Mkhuze Game Reserve (BLD)

Day 8, October 4

We'll spend the morning birding in camp, where birding can be top-notch. We often find birds such as Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Eastern Bearded Scrub-Robin, Green Twinspot, Eastern Nicator and Purple-crested Turaco in camp. We have a fairly long but scenic drive from Mkhuze to the small hamlet of Wakkerstroom, which stands in stark contrast to the habitats we've visited thus far. Wakkerstroom is situated on the Highveld plateau dominated by rolling hills and upland grassland. Several special birds occur here, with a good number of them being endemic and difficult to find elsewhere. We should arrive in time for some afternoon birding and usually our first port of call is the marsh just on the outskirts of town where we have a good chance of finding skulkers like Little Rush Warbler, African Rail and even a Red-chested Flufftail, if we are very lucky. More common



species include African Purple Swamphen, Purple Heron, Cape Shoveller, Cape Weaver and we often find Grey-crowned Cranes roosting here in the late afternoons.

O/N Wakkerstroom Country Inn (BLD)

Day 9, October 5

After an early morning coffee we head out in search of Wakkerstroom's two very special and endemic Larks, Rudd's and Botha's, the former critically endangered. In our search for these two dowdy denizens of the grasslands we'll also be on the lookout for their more common cousins, Eastern Clapper, Eastern Long-billed, Pink-billed and Red-capped Larks. Wakkerstroom isn't just about LBJ's, though - Yellow-breasted Pipit, Blue Korhaan and Cape Canary will add a subtle touch of color and in the village the striking Bokmakierie is usually an easy find alongside the peculiar Red-throated Wryneck. We'll also visit a local sit in search of White-bellied Korhaan, Denham's Bustard and at another spot we'll look for the enigmatic African Rock Pipit and Buff-streaked Chat. Some of the other birds that we might encounter include Bald Ibis, Jackal Buzzard, African Pied Starling, Cape Crow, Sentinel Rock-Thrush, Grey-winged and Red-winged Francolins and the 'often-heard-but-rarely-seen' African Quail-Finch.

O/N Wakkerstroom Country Inn (BLD)

Day 10, October 6

After some more birding around the Wakkerstroom wetlands we'll tackle the rather long drive to the savannahs of the famous Kruger National Park with the odd birding stops and lunch break en-route. We should arrive at our camp in the late afternoon and might just have a bit of time to bird the grounds, where we often find the likes of Purple-crested Turaco and Brown-headed Parrot before dusk.

O/N Kruger National Park (BLD)

Day 11, October 7

The rich bushveld of the Kruger National Park offers very rewarding birding, and we will use every opportunity today to explore as much of the area as possible. The possibility of the 'Big 5' (Lion, Leopard, African Buffalo, African Elephant and Rhinoceros) ever present, of course we'll also encounter a whole host of other exciting mammals which may include the likes of Cheetah, African Wild Dog, Hippopotamus, Giraffe, Warthog, Greater Kudu and many more. Of special interest here are some of the larger terrestrial birds as well as birds of prey that are difficult or nearly impossible to find reliably outside protected areas such as Kruger. These include Kori Bustard, Southern Ground Hornbill, Martial Eagle,



Bateleur, Lappet-faced Vulture, Secretarybird and Saddle-billed Stork. Other typical bushveld birds that we should encounter are Southern Yellow-billed and Southern Red-billed Hornbills, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Red-billed and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers, Brown-headed Parrot, Purple-crested Turaco, Crested and Swainson's Francolin, White-crowned Lapwing, Grey-headed Bushshrike, Lilac-breasted Roller and African Mourning Dove, among others. At our camp for the night there is the possibility of an optional night drive (extra fee) and we highly recommend taking at least one of these during the trip. Several nocturnal mammals such as Serval, African Civet, Aardvark, Small and Large Spotted Genets and African Wild Cat are possible, as well as some nocturnal or crepuscular birds such as Spotted and Verreaux's Eagle Owl, Square-tailed Nightjar and Bronze-winged Courser.

O/N Kruger National Park (BLD)



Day 12, October 8

Our final full day in Kruger would have arrived all too soon for some but we intend to make the best of the time we have left and will concentrate on slightly different habitats today with the focus on areas of open grassland, waterholes and broad-leaved woodland hosting species such as African Cuckoo-Hawk, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Green-capped Eremomela, Bennet's Woodpecker and even Bushveld Pipit. The damp depressions around streams sometimes yield Black Coucal and in season the odd Corncrake. This area is particularly good for the elusive Black Rhino and Lichtenstein's Hartebeest.

O/N Kruger National Park (BLD)

Day 13, October 9

We continue our journey towards the historic mining village of Pilgrim's Rest, where we will stay at Mount Sheba, a superb spot that will offer us some more Afromontane forest to bird. This is one of the best sites in the country for Orange Ground-Thrush. Forest birding can be hard work but often the reward is worth its weight in gold, with tantalizing species such as Cape Batis, Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler, Olive Bush-Shrike, Lemon Dove and African Emerald Cuckoo waiting to be found. Birding the surrounding grasslands can be equally rewarding and here we'll hope to find Wing-snapping Cisticola, Denham's Bustard and possibly even Secretarybird. The scrub and Protea-dotted slopes hold Gurney's Sugarbird, Wailing Cisticola and Buff-streaked Chat.

O/N Mount Sheba (BLD)

Day 14, October 10

After some more birding around the magnificent Mount Sheba, we head further north to the village of Magoebaskloof with the odd birding stops and lunch break en route. We could possibly also make a slight detour to a rugged cliff face on the side of the escarpment that used to be the best spot in Africa to see the rare Taita Falcon. A pair of these rare falcons used to breed here annually but it seems that one of the pair might have perished and sightings, while still possible, are now far more irregular. Cape Vulture is also common here. Another option is a quick drive into the Blyde Canyon where we often find Half-collared Kingfisher, African Finfoot and, if we are very lucky, Thick-billed Cuckoo. We continue to our destination in the Magoebaskloof where we will have our first taste of forest birding. Species to look for include Knysna Turaco, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, White-starred Robin, Gorgeous and Black-fronted Bush-Shrikes, Swee Waxbill and, with luck, we could even find African Wood-Owl after dinner.

O/N Bramasole Guest House (BLD)

Day 15, October 11

We'll start the day with some more forest birding before heading south, arriving in the town of Polokwane around lunch time. A short stop at the Polokwane Game Reserve should hopefully net us the Southern African endemic, Short-clawed Lark. This after a quick stop in Tzaneen for Pied Mannikin and, time permitting, even a short visit to the nearby stakeout for Bat Hawk. From here we will continue to just north of Pretoria where we hope to arrive at our lodge in good time.

Overnight Zaagkuilsdrift Lodge (BLD)

Day 16, October 12

The Rust-de-Winter area and more specifically Zaagkuilsdrift Road, is an area very popular with local birders. We can expect a good selection of typical bushveld species but the real drawcard here is a whole host of species more typical of the dry west, which are pretty much at the edge of their range here. Highlights to look for include the spectacular Crimson-breasted Shrike, always a crowd favorite, as well as species like Violet-eared Waxbill, Kalahari Scrub-Robin, White-throated Robin-Chat, Marico Flycatcher, Southern Pied Babbler, Great Sparrow, Ashy Tit and many more. Further along this road we'll come to another top birding

spot, Kgomo-Kgomo Floodplain. For a couple of weeks in years of good rainfall this place comes alive and arguably offers some of the most spectacular birding in the country. Even when there is not much water around there is always some rewarding birding to be had. During drier spells there is usually quite a spectacle with hundreds of Black-winged Pratincoles filling the sky. Temminck's Courser can be plentiful at times and an added cast is made up of Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks and Shaft-tailed Whydahs. We'll only have a limited time to explore this area, however, before having to make our way to OR Tambo International Airport for your evening flights out or to your lodge for the night if you are continuing on to the Drakensberg Plateau post-trip extension.

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PLEASE NOTE: Your international flights should arrive in Durban and depart from Johannesburg. You can arrive and depart in Johannesburg and then buy a one-way ticket to Durban for day 1 of the tour. We will arrange the JNB – DUR flight for you and include the cost on your final invoice if you prefer.

PRICING DETAILS

Price includes:

- ~ Lodging in comfortable hotel/lodges/B&Bs
- ~ All meals as indicated
- ~ All land transportation
- ~ Transfers
- ~ Entrance fees
- ~ Expert local birding guide at a ratio not to exceed 1 guide per 6 birders
- ~ Pre-trip gift package
- ~ Post-trip electronic group checklist

Price does NOT include:

- ~ International airfare to Johannesburg and from Durban, South Africa
- ~ Alcoholic drinks
- ~ Travel insurance
- ~ Gratuities
- ~ Expenses of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, extra drinks and snacks, etc.

PAYMENT INFORMATION:

Deposit of \$950 with registration for the main tour, \$350 for the Cape Extension, and \$200 for the Drakensberg Extension (registration form can be downloaded from a link on the website). Balance is due 4 months prior to the start date of your tour.

Checks should be made payable to **Cheepers! Birding on a Budget** and mailed with the registration form to:

Cheepers! Birding on a Budget
Post Office Box 385
Spring Valley, OH 45370

Cancellation policy:

Cancellation should be made in writing (email or snail mail)

More than 6 months prior to departure – full refund of deposit

Between 4 and 6 months prior to departure – 50% refund of deposit

Less than 4 months prior to departure – No refund of deposit

If cancellation occurs after full payment is made, a refund will be given only if the vacant spot is filled.

Trip insurance is recommended.

You can compare prices offered by various trip insurance companies at this website:

http://www.quotewright.com/?sub_id=6056

Cheepers! Birding on a Budget LLC reserves the right to make changes in the itinerary if the need should arise due to unforeseeable circumstances such as weather, landslides, and other natural phenomena, as well as suggestions by local guides in order to take advantage of an unusual birding opportunity. Lodging is subject to change based on availability.

Contact us:

email: cheepers@sbcglobal.net

cbeckman4505@gmail.com

jamesdbeckman@sbcglobal.net

erroldb@gmail.com

snail mail: PO Box 385
Spring Valley, OH 45370

Phone: 937-862-4505

937-974-0802 (Jim's cell)

937-974-0803 (Cindy's cell)