

SOUTH AFRICA

Coastal and Drakensberg Plateau Extension

October 25 – November 4, 2023

11 Days / 10 Nights

Day 14 (Day 1 of extension), Oct. 25: Wakkerstroom - Mkuze

After a bit of early morning birding for birds we might have missed yesterday, we'll enjoy a hot breakfast at our lodge. Then we will pack the vans and continue our journey south, this time to one of Kwazulu-Natal's premier birding spot, 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. If we have time, we'll take a drive down to the Sand Forest, a dry and localized type of forest that is home to several spectacular species such as **Pink-throated Twinspot, Four-colored Bushshrike, Neergaard's Sunbird, Crested Guineafowl and Rudd's Apalis**, before we head back to camp.

O/N Mkuze Game Reserve (BLD)

Day 15 (Day 2 of extension), Oct. 26: Mkuze

We have a full day ahead to explore the incredible diversity of Mkuze, not just birds but also a whole host of fascinating mammals, from one of Africa's smallest antelope (the Suni) to the largest land mammal on Earth, the African Elephant. African Wild Dog sighting is a very real possibility, as is sighting of Cheetah and, although less common, Serval. Birding-wise, we'll keep an eye out for **Black-bellied Bustard, Senegal Lapwing, several Vulture species, Martial Eagle, White-crested Helmetshrike, Grey Penduline Tit** and, 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**. Several good hides are situated in the park, mostly overlooking waterholes, and these can be worth a visit, sometimes producing memorable moments.

O/N Mkuze Game Reserve (BLD)



Martial Eagle

Day 16 (Day 3 of extension), Oct. 27: Mkhuze – St. Lucia

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. After breakfast, we'll head out and exit the park's eastern gate, which will enable us to stop at several pans (natural, shallow and often ephemeral water bodies, usually with no inflow or outflow) along the way where we will search for **African Pygmy Goose**, **Lesser Jacana**, and **Black Heron**. **Lizard Buzzard** and several other species of raptor are often encountered on this road. We'll arrive in St. Lucia mid-afternoon, in time to head down to the estuary mouth for a rare taste of shore birding. Several Tern species should be present and, for the last few seasons, a **Sooty Tern** has been regular at the Tern roost.

O/N Kingfisher Lodge, St. Lucia (BLD)

<http://www.stluciakingfisherlodge.co.za/>

Day 17 (Day 4 of extension), Oct. 28: St. Lucia, Isimangaliso Wetland Park

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, St. Lucia (BLD)

<http://www.stluciakingfisherlodge.co.za/>

Day 18 (Day 5 of extension), Oct. 29: St. Lucia - Eshowe

We'll bird the well-known GwalaGwala trail at the edge of town before breakfast, where 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; we could see **Yellow**, **Golden**, and **Southern Brown-throated Weavers** here. En route, we'll call in at Mtunzini for lunch, and we'll stop at several wetlands near Mtubatuba, where we might add the likes of **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**, **Red-headed Quelea** and many more. After lunch, we'll do a drive around Mtunzini in hopes of finding **Palmnut Vulture**, usually found in the Rafia Palms in town. From Mtunzini, time permitting, we'll head to Amatikulu Nature Reserve where we'll look for **Swamp Nightjar**, **Broad-tailed Warbler**, **Croaking Cisticola**, and **Brown-backed Honeybird** before making our way to the town of Eshowe, where we'll be spending the night.
O/N Birds of Paradise B&B (BLD)
<http://www.birdsofparadise.co.za/>



Livingstone's Turaco

Day 19 (Day 6 of extension), Oct. 30: Ongoye Forest, Rural Zululand

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 **Green Barbet** can be found. The forest here is also good for **Green Twinspot**, **Narina Trogon**, **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)
<http://www.birdsofparadise.co.za/>

Day 20 (Day 7 of extension), Oct. 31: Dlinza Forest, Eshowe - Umhlanga

Dlinza Forest, with its aerial boardwalk, will be our birding spot of choice this morning, and we'll try to be in position at the top of the canopy tower as early as possible to afford us the best chance of seeing **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon** as they sun themselves before heading off to feed. Another target here is **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'll make the most of all possible birding spots enroute, arriving at our lodge just north of Durban in the late afternoon.

O/N De Charmoy Estate (BLD) or similar

<https://www.decharmoy.co.za/>

Day 21 (Day 8 of extension), Nov. 1: Umhlanga - Creighton

Early morning birding in the gardens and, time permitting, also at the Umhlanga NR where we'll have another shot at **Barratt's Warbler**, **Rufous-winged Cisticola** and several species of **Weaver**. We will leave Durban shortly after breakfast to allow enough time to tackle the longish road to the village of Creighton in the KwaSulu-Natal midlands, which will be our base for two nights of the Drakensberg Plateau part of our extension. We'll probably have time to do some birding en route, and we often take the scenic route via the Hella-Hella Pass (time permitting). Good birds to be on the lookout for include **African Crowned Eagle**, **Pale-crowned Cisticola**, and **White-starred Robin**. We often encounter **Striped Pipit** and **Lazy Cisticola** on the dry rocky slopes. **African Black Duck** and **Mountain Wagtail** can be seen from the bridge over the Mkomazi River. We'll time our arrival at the lodge for the late afternoon.

O/N Creighton B&B or similar (BLD)

Day 22 (Day 9 of extension), Nov. 2: Sani Pass, Lesotho

We'll be off to a very early start heading up Sani Pass into the small mountain kingdom of Lesotho, so have your passports handy. The ascent up Sani Pass is rightly famous as one of the top birding routes in South Africa, and this will soon become apparent as we enjoy our packed breakfast at our usual stop, often in the company of **Gurney's Sugarbird**, **Malachite Sunbird**,



Drakensberg Rockjumper

comfortable with magnificent views over KwaZulu Natal.

O/N Sani Mountain Lodge (BLD)

Buff-streaked Chat, and even **Cape Rock-Thrush**. Higher up, we'll scan the skies for **White-necked Raven**, **Cape Vulture** and the majestic **Bearded Vulture**. We hope to find **Barratt's Warbler** en-route, but with the prospect of road works on the pass for the foreseeable future, it might not be as easy as on past tours. Once we reach the top, we'll be on the lookout for **Drakensberg Siskin**, **Drakensberg Rockjumper**, **Mountain Pipit**, **Sickle-winged Chat**, **Cape Bunting**, and **Large-billed Lark**. Our lunch stop is usually good for **Ground Woodpecker**, **Grey Tit**, **Layard's Warbler**, **Sentinel Rock-Thrush**, and the dainty **Fairy Flycatcher**. We'll be in no rush today as we'll be staying overnight on the mountain. Our lodge, at an elevation of 2874 metres asl, can get very cold, even in early summer, so make sure to pack a few layers. The lodge is superbly

Day 23 (Day 10 of extension), Nov. 3: Lesotho - Creighton

We'll take it easy this morning as the birds here don't get moving too early. With a cup of coffee in one hand, we'll enjoy some of the birds around the lodge before having a welcome breakfast. We'll concentrate on finding any birds we might have missed the previous day, as well as driving out to Black Mountain for **African Rock Pipit**, **Black Stork** and **Bearded Vulture**. After lunch, we'll start our descent, birding all the way. We'll also stop at some of the streams on the way down to look for **Half-collared Kingfisher**, and the dams at the base of the pass often hold some surprises. Fallow field on the way back to our guesthouse often yield **Denham's Bustard**, **Grey Crowned Crane**, **Secretarybird**, and **Southern Bald Ibis**.

O/N Creighton B&B or similar (BLD)

Day 24 (Day 11 of extension), Nov. 4: Lesotho - Creighton

Up at the crack of dawn, we'll head to a nearby stakeout for **Blue Swallow**. This critically endangered breeding migrant to South Africa occurs here in small numbers annually, and we hope to connect with it here. We'll also look for **Black-bellied Bustard**, **Denham's Bustard** and may even visit a nearby patch of forest that may hold **Cape Parrot** and **Orange Ground Thrush**. We'll return to the lodge for breakfast before making our way to the busy port city of Durban, but en-route we might stop at Bulwer or Karkloof for more forest birding with emphasis on finding **Bush Blackcap**, **Cape Parrot**, **Knysna Turaco**, **Forest Canary**, and **Orange Ground Thrush**. The extent of birding this morning will largely depend on the time of your flights out. We'll have lunch en route and get you to the airport in time for your flights to Johannesburg (or Cape Town), from where you will connect with your International flights home

End of tour (BL)

Price includes:

- All meals as indicated.
- Bottled water throughout the trip
- All ground transportation
- All accommodation
- Tips for drivers and local guides
- Expert birding guide throughout tour
- Services of two **Cheepers!** Tour leaders (Jim and Cindy Beckman)
- Post-trip electronic copy of final checklist
- Post-trip photo collection on flash drive
- Pre-trip gift package, including customized checklist and tour book

Price does NOT include:

- International flights
- Drinks other than bottled water (this includes soft drinks and coffee)
- Tips for birding guides
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, souvenirs, alcoholic beverages, etc.

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.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

~ Deposit of \$500 for the East Coast and Drakensberg extension is required with registration, in addition to \$700 deposit for the main (Birds & Beasts) tour.

~ Balance is due 4 months prior to the start date.

~ 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 must 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 these websites:

<http://www.insuremytrip.com>

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

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