

Eastern South Africa Birding and Safari

Jan 24 – Feb 5, 2023

Guides: Adam Betuel and
Josh Engel

\$4,675 per person based on double occupancy*
\$ 600 single supplement



Thanks to its stability, safety, natural beauty, friendly people, and incredible wildlife, South Africa has become the continent's top tourist destination. This trip is designed to make the most of 13 days in the northeast of the country. We will spend time in four major habitat types, each with a unique set of birds. We will start in the high-altitude grasslands of Wakkerstroom; drop from there into the lowveld of Kruger National Park; head up again into the montane forests of Magoebaskloof; and finish off in the Kalahari scrub of Gauteng and Limpopo Provinces. South Africa has world class infrastructure, with excellent roads, wonderful hotels, and delicious food, not to mention some of the world's best birding and animal-viewing, all of which we will take advantage of on this trip.

**Based off group size. See price section on page 6. This tour is priced in USD. Due to currency fluctuations, the price may change slightly with the final invoice.*

**Birds:** 280-320 species**Mammals:** 35-45 species**Photographic opportunities:** Excellent**Physical difficulty:** Easy**Pace:** Moderate**Accommodations:** Good to excellent. Kruger National Parks has the simplest accommodations, but with hot water, en suite bathrooms, and air conditioning.**Bird highlights** High-elevation grassland endemics such as Botha's and Rudd's Larks and Blue Korhaan; Kruger specialties such as five species of endangered vultures, Brown-headed Parrot, and Southern Ground Hornbill; montane forest specialties like Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Knysna Turaco, Orange Ground-Thrush; Kalahari specialties like Short-clawed Lark, Violet-eared Waxbill, and Southern Pied-Babbler. Many waterbirds, raptors, and Southern African endemics throughout.**Mammal highlights:** An excellent chance at the Big Five: Lion, Leopard, Elephant, Rhinoceros, and Cape Buffalo; Meerkat; small mammals like Dwarf and Banded Mongoose and Klipspringer; Hippo, Giraffe, and endless possibilities, including Cheetah and Wild Dog, in Kruger National Park.**About your guides:** Josh Engel has been leading birding trips and safaris in Africa since 2006, including when he lived in South Africa from 2006-2010. He is the owner and founder of Red Hill Birding.

Adam Betuel leads birdwatching trips in addition to serving as the conservation director for Georgia Audubon. Adam has lead tours across the United States as well as Central and South America.

DAILY ITINERARY

Days 1-2, Jan 24-25: Arrival in Johannesburg and Joburg area. Nights: Kempton Park.

After an evening arrival in Johannesburg, we will settle into our hotel for the night. The Johannesburg area has excellent birding, and we will take advantage of it the following day to get an excellent introduction to the birds of South Africa.

There are two reserves just south of Johannesburg that we will visit: Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve and Marievale Bird Sanctuary. We will start at Suikerbosrand, where the grasslands are alive with song in the springtime. **Clapper Larks** display over the grass while the raucous calls of **Northern Black Korhaan** ring out. The roadsides are full of **Red Bishop**, **African Pipit**, **Crowned Lapwing**, and **Pin-tailed Whydah**. We will look for **Orange River Francolin** and, in some years, **Melodious Larks** are present. We will then move on to the picnic area, where we may find **Red-throated Wryneck**, **Neddicky**, **Red-collared Widow**, and **Brown-backed Honeyguide** among the more common birds.

After lunch, we will continue on to Marievale, a wetland sanctuary that hosts a wide variety of shorebirds, herons and egrets, kingfishers, reed-warblers, and bishops. The reeds will be alive with **Red Bishops**, **Southern Masked Weavers**, and **African Reed-Warblers**, while **Malachite** and **Pied Kingfishers** perch along the water's edge. Migrant waders will have arrived, and we may see **Ruff**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, and others. **African Marsh Harriers** may be searching for prey over the marshes.

Day 3-4, Jan 26-27: Johannesburg to Wakkerstroom. Nights: Wakkerstroom.

An early start from Johannesburg will get us to the small town of **Wakkerstroom** at a reasonable hour so that we can enjoy an afternoon of birding to get a head start on the local specialties before our full day there the following day.

The grasslands around Wakkerstroom, at about 1700m (5200 ft.) elevation, contain some of South Africa's most endangered birds. These birds inhabit the unique grassland habitat around the small town, which is imperiled by overgrazing. But the grasslands are still full of birds, including those rare endemics—**Botha's Lark**, **Rudd's Lark**, **Yellow-breasted Pipit**, and **Blue Korhaan**—and the birding in these areas is truly enjoyable. Many species of Southern African endemics that inhabit rocky hills can be found here too, like **Eastern Long-billed Lark**, **Buff-streaked Bushchat**, **Sentinel Rock-Thrush**, and **Ground Woodpecker**. Flocks of **Long-tailed** and other **widowbirds** and **Spike-heeled** and other **larks** fly up from the roadsides. **Anteating Chats** display around their termite mound homes as **Cape Longclaws** peer out of the grass. **Meerkats** stand sentinel over their colonies. **Cranes** are also common here, including the wonderful (but endangered) **Gray Crowned Crane**, and there's always a chance to find **Secretarybird** or **Denham's Bustard** stalking the grasslands. This is an area where the abundance and diversity of **larks** and **cisticolas**—the classic “little brown jobs”—will make your head spin, but your guide will be there to help sort them all out.

The wetlands on the edge of the small town are usually full of waterbirds, and we will be sure to spend time sorting through the waterfowl, shorebirds, long-legged waders, swallows, and bishops and weavers that call the wetlands home. We are likely to find several South Africa endemics, like **South African Shelduck** and **Cape Weaver**, along with many more widespread species, including **Purple Swamphen**, **African Snipe**, **White-throated Swallow**, **Cape Wagtail**, and **Southern Red Bishop**.

Day 5, Jan 28: Wakkerstroom to Misty Mountain. Night: Misty Mountain Resort or nearby.

We will have a final morning around Wakkerstroom to look for any birds that we missed the previous day. We may check ouhout thickets for the endemic **Bush Blackcap** and **Drakensberg Prinia**, scan fields for **Secretarybird**, check rocky hillsides for **Lazy Cisticola**, or check the wetlands one last time for the secretive **African Rail**.

Depending on our timing, we may take a detour through the grasslands near the town of Dullstroom along our way during the day. There are a few birds here that don't occur or are rare around Wakkerstroom, in particular **Wattled Crane** and **Gurney's Sugarbird**. Eventually we will arrive for an overnight at Misty Mountain or a nearby hotel for a night in the beautiful mountains.

Days 6-9, Jan 29-Feb 1: Kruger National Park.

After a short morning of birding around the grounds of our hotel, we will head off to South Africa's flagship national park, Kruger.

Kruger is one place that deserves its outsized reputation. The list of megafauna that we are likely to see in our two full days and two partial days of exploring the park is long: **Elephant, Lion, Giraffe, Burchell's Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, White Rhinoceros, Hippopotamus, Impala, Cape Buffalo, Spotted Hyena**, and on and on. With luck, we might spot a **Leopard**, a **Cheetah**, or even a pack of **Africa Wild Dogs**, Africa's most endangered large predator. We won't ignore the minifauna, either, and we have a chance of seeing **Dwarf Mongoose, Slender Mongoose, African Wild Cat, Steenbok**, and **Greater Bushbaby**. Optional night drives in the official park vehicles can get us out into the park at night, when a whole different suite of animals becomes active: **genets, civets, Springhare, nightjars and owls, Leopard and Serval** and much more.

Of course birds don't take a backseat. Kruger is renowned for its bird diversity, and seeing **more than 100 species in a day** is possible. Many species that have become endangered or are nearly so because of loss of habitat, poisoning, or other factors are still common in the park. This includes **five species of vultures, Bateleur, Kori Bustard, Southern Ground Hornbill, Saddle-billed Stork, and Martial Eagle**. **Brown-headed Parrot** is a specialty of the park, sometimes even coming into the camps to feed in fruiting trees. Large mammals often host **Red-billed** and, less commonly, **Yellow-billed Oxpeckers**. Common birds that are easily seen in the park include **Lilac-breasted Roller, Magpie Shrike, Red-billed, Yellow-billed, and African Gray Hornbill**, and **Tawny Eagle**. Waterholes hold their own suite of birds, including **African Jacana, Three-banded Plover** and other shorebirds, and the hulking **Goliath Heron**. The veld is full of songbirds, too, and we may see **Brown-crowned** and **Black-crowned Tchagra, Long-billed Crombec, Green-winged Pytilia**, and **Golden-breasted Bunting** among many others. The camps themselves, with their lush vegetation and watered lawns, provide excellent birding, especially if there are fruiting trees. In camps we will look for **Red-faced Mousebird, African Mourning Dove, Brown-headed Parrot, White-throated** and **White-browed Robin-Chats**, and a variety of **hornbills, barbets, thrushes, finches, and warblers**.

Days 10-11, Feb 2-3: Kruger to Magoebaskloof.

We will have one final morning to enjoy Kruger as we work our way out of the park. The nature of Kruger is that even after 3 ½ days here, we will continue to see new and interesting things this morning. We will take one last view of **elephants, impala, giraffes**, and the rest of Kruger's megafauna. Once we're out of the park, we'll make our way to our beautiful hotel, nestled in the forests of Magoebaskloof. We will arrive with time to do some birding around the lodge, which is situated in high-quality montane forest. This is a very different habitat type than we will have been in previously in the trip, so it will bring a new set of birds. Around the lodge itself we will look for forest and forest edge species like **Swee Waxbill, Forest Canary, Knysna Turaco, Olive Thrush, Olive Woodpecker**, and **Chorister Robin-Chat**. **African Wood Owls** are likely to be calling once darkness falls.

We will have a full day in the area. Our morning will be concentrated around Woodbush Forest Drive, a steep dirt road that descends a forested valley. The forests here are home to some of the rare and hard-to-find humid forest birds, like the endangered **Cape Parrot, Orange Ground-Thrush, Buff-spotted Flufftail, Black-fronted Bush-shrike**, and **Yellow-streaked Greenbul**. While searching for those we will encounter many other forest-dwellers, birds like **Cape Batis, Olive Sunbird, Mountain Wagtail, and Square-tailed Drongo**. We will watch overhead for **Black Sawwing, African Goshawk, African Crowned Eagle**, and **Forest Buzzard** and will visit the nesting site of **Bat Hawk**. We may also come across troops of

Samango Monkeys. We will eventually make our way back to Magoebaskloof for another evening of birding around the lodge.

Day 12, Feb 4: Magoebaskloof to Gauteng. Night: Dinokeng Game Reserve.

We will spend a final early morning enjoying the peace and birds of the grounds of our hotel. After breakfast we will pack up and head down the pass into our final biome of the trip: the Kalahari. While we won't be in the heart of the Kalahari, most of the characteristic birds will be in the area. Our first destination will be Polokwane Game Reserve. Best known among birders as a classic site for the localized endemic **Short-clawed Lark**, it also hosts Kalahari specialties like **Ashy Tit**, **Violet-eared Waxbill**, **Black-faced Waxbill**, **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Pale Chanting Goshawk**, and **Shaft-tailed Whydah**. It also hosts an excellent diversity of mammals, including the rare **Sable Antelope**, **White Rhinoceros**, **Giraffe**, and many others.

From here we will head south towards Johannesburg, but will cut off the highway before reaching the metropolis into Dinokeng Game Reserve. We will have our final night here. Birding on the grounds can be very productive, and we may find **Marico Flycatcher**, **White-throated Robin Chat**, **African Hoopoe**, **Groundscraper Thrush**, and **Karoo Thrush**.

Day 13, Feb 5. Dinokeng Game Reserve and departure from Johannesburg.

We will spend the early morning in and around Dinokeng. We will start right around the lodge before breakfast. After breakfast, we will check out the wider reserve, where we may find **Monotonous Lark** if the rains have been good, along with raptors like **Black-chested** and **Brown Snake Eagles**.

After our morning of birding we will need to start heading to Johannesburg for our international departure. If there's still some time as we get close to the airport, we may stop in at Rietvlei Nature Reserve, a grassland reserve conveniently located along the way to the airport and one of the best places to see the endemic antelope **Black Wildebeest**, along with a good variety of grassland birds, including a few birds that are difficult to find elsewhere on our route, like **Cloud Cisticola** and the tiny and beautiful **Yellow-crowned Bishop**.

IMPORTANT NOTES

Contact information

Direct all questions and concerns to Adam Betuel at Adam.Betuel@GeorgiaAudubon.org. Nathan Goldberg of Red Hill Birding will be the tour manager for this trip.

Timing

The trip will **begin in Johannesburg** on January 24, 2023. This is an arrival day, with no activities planned. The trip will **end in Johannesburg** on February 5, 2023.

Passport and visa information

It is **always best** to check on the **latest visa and passport information** before you travel. Please contact us if you have any concerns. Americans do not need visas to travel to South Africa. You will need two consecutive blank passport pages and your passport must be valid for six months after your scheduled departure from South Africa. There are no arrival or departure fees.

Physical difficulty

This trip is **physically easy**. Most of our walking will be on flat trails or on roads, and while we may be on our feet for extensive periods, we will be walking at a “birding pace.” Much of our birding will be done along roads, driving and stopping frequently. In Kruger National Park we are not allowed to exit our vehicle except at designated locations. The roads in South Africa are excellent and there are usually places along the way to stop with clean bathrooms and cold drinks.

Pace

The pace of the trip is **moderate**. A typical day will have us up early to catch the peak early morning bird activity. Some days will have us returning for breakfast at the lodge where we are staying; some breakfasts will be in the field. Lunches will sometimes be picnics and sometimes will be at cafes along the way. Some days we will be in the field all day, other days will afford us the opportunity for an afternoon siesta. We will have optional nighttime excursions in Kruger National Park and elsewhere (one night drive in Kruger is included in the price of the tour). We will compile our daily checklist, which your guide will provide at the beginning of the tour, at dinner.

Price

The price of the trip is \$4,675 and the single supplement is \$600. This price **includes** all meals (including soft drinks, bottled water, and limited alcoholic beverages), from dinner on Day 1 to lunch on Day 13; all transportation and accommodation during that period; a Red Hill Birding guide and a Georgia Audubon guide; local guides and tips for local guides as required; all entrance fees; and one night drive in Kruger National Park. It **does not include** optional activities such as night drives; snacks; laundry; tips (apart from meals); or other items of a personal nature. This price also assumes a minimum of six participants. The trip can run with a minimum of four people but at a cost of \$5,775.

A deposit of \$800 per person and the submission of the booking form will secure your place on the trip. Final payment is due by September 16, 2022. We accept payment by check, bank transfer, or the app Zelle. We also accept PayPal but there will be an additional fee added.

Hotels

The hotels we use in South Africa are **generally excellent**. We aim for small hotels that provide the best value and are near our birding destinations. All have en suite bathrooms, hot showers, electrical outlets for charging electronics, good service, and some have air conditioning. The accommodations in Kruger National Parks are simple but more than adequate and are located in the heart of the parks (these are also the hottest areas we will go, and there is air conditioning). Wireless internet access will be limited on this tour, and when it is available the quality may be unreliable. Electrical outlets are “Type M”, with three large round prongs (see picture below). Please note that, because we often use small hotels, the

exact accommodation used during this tour are dependent on availability and slight modifications to the itinerary may be necessary.



Photography

The **photographic opportunities** in South Africa are **excellent**. That said, this is primarily a birdwatching tour, so while there will be ample opportunities for photography along the way, we will not be making special considerations for photographers. If you are a photographer, you are sure to go home with many great photos of birds, animals, and scenery.

Weather

This trip is scheduled to coincide with the South African spring. The weather will generally be **mild and comfortable**, with nighttime temperatures as low as the 40s in Wakkerstroom and the high temperature possibly as high as 90° in Kruger. Typical early morning temperatures will be in the 50s-60s and typical daytime highs will be in the 70s-80s. Rain is possible, especially in the eastern portion of the trip, but rainy weather typically does not last long.

Food

The food is generally of a **very high standard** on this tour. The food has strong European influences, so is generally familiar to Americans. There will be opportunities to sample more **distinctly South African foods and drinks**, such as boerwors, pap, game meat, Rooibos tea, and South African wine. Vegetarian and other dietary restrictions are easily accommodated; please let us know of any when you complete the booking form. Snacks can be easily purchased at gas stations and elsewhere, but if there's a particular birding snack you like at home, feel free to bring some along.

Packing considerations

You will generally want to wear **comfortable clothing** that you don't mind getting a little dirty. The dress for the tour is entirely casual. **Lightweight clothing, with layers**, and long pants and long sleeved shirts are recommended for protection from the sun and to be prepared for various weather conditions. Comfortable walking shoes are a must, but hiking boots or rubber boots are not necessary. An umbrella and/or raincoat as well as a mid-weight jacket or sweater for cold mornings are also important. Some lodges have swimming pools, so a bathing suit is recommended if you think you might take advantage. There will be opportunities to do laundry along the way, especially in Wakkerstroom and Magoebaskloof, where we will be for two nights each.

In terms of gear, apart from the usual binoculars, hat, field guide, etc., a flashlight or head lamp is very useful. Most people appreciate having a camera along. Sunscreen and bug repellent are useful, although biting insects are rarely a problem on this tour.

You will also want to bring a Type-M electrical adapter. Only Type-M adapters will function in most places.

Resources

The best bird field guide for this region is *The Birds of Southern Africa* by Ian Sinclair and Phil Hockey. There is an accompanying app, *The Sasol Birds of Southern Africa*. Another good app is *Roberts Multimedia Birds of Southern Africa*. Our favorite mammal guide is *Stuarts' Field Guide to Mammals of Southern Africa* by Chris Stuart and Mathilde Stuart.

There are many good books about Southern Africa, many of them with themes about apartheid and race relations. There are literature classics, such as *Cry the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton, the books of Nadine Gordimer, and *The Power of One* by Bryce Courtenay. Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *The Long Walk to Freedom*, is also highly recommended.

A good, brief history of South Africa is *South Africa: History in an Hour*. A more detailed history is Leonard Thompson's *A History of South Africa*.

Tipping

We aim to provide **exceptional service**, using guides that are knowledgeable, interesting, personable, and experienced. While tipping is never expected, if you feel that your guides went above and beyond, you are welcome to leave them a gratuity. Tips at restaurants are included in the tour price.

Money

The South African currency is the Rand. You can easily change money upon arrival at the airport. Alternatively, ATMs are widely available in towns and accept most American ATM/debit cards. Credit cards, especially MasterCard and Visa, are widely accepted.

Travel insurance

We do not require travel insurance for trips to South Africa. However, we highly recommend buying it as it is relatively inexpensive and can protect you from unforeseen costs associated with missed, delayed, or canceled flights, sudden illness, medical evacuation, damaged equipment, or other unexpected issues. Red Hill Birding is not responsible for such costs, as laid out in our [Terms & Conditions](#). Please review Georgia Audubon's Terms & Conditions that accompany the registration form. Note that in some circumstances, such as if you have preexisting medical conditions, travel insurance must be purchased within 1-2 weeks of paying the trip deposit.

