



BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division
Self Drive Itinerary

Birding Route Name: Mpumalanga Birding Route

Self Drive Itinerary Name: 6 Day Mpumalanga Escarpment Trip

Habitats: Grasslands, riverine forest and montane forest

Duration: 5 nights

Itinerary:

Night 1: Old Joes Kaia, Schoemanskloof Valley

Night 2: Porcupine Ridge, Sabie

Night 3: Porcupine Ridge, Sabie

Night 4: Forever Resorts Mount Sheba, Pilgrims Rest

Night 5: Misty Mountain, Sabie

Distance covered: 420 km

Costs: Fuel – R200

Reserve Costs (per person) – R20

Reserve Costs (per vehicle) – R20

Guide Costs – see recommended Guide Rates

Accommodation - Variable

Itinerary updated: November 2010

Day 1

Arrive in Nelspruit and early departure for Kaapsehoop

The day will be spent birding the Kaapsehoop grasslands and forests.

Information on Kaapsehoop

Kaapsehoop is situated 25km southwest of Nelspruit on a buttress of the Mpumalanga escarpment. The Kaapsehoop area offers protection to the critically endangered Blue Swallow and is designated as an Important Bird Area. Kaapsehoop is a good locality to see a number of Southern African bird endemics.

A 470ha portion of Kaapsehoop grassland falls under protection of the Natural Heritage Site while the state owned forestry company owns a another substantial expanse of grassland wedged between the reserve and town. Wild horses graze the latter area, a practice that appears to have a beneficial effect on the Blue Swallow. Safcol and Sappi manage the forest areas and encourage some indigenous forest regeneration along the steep eastern drainage lines.

Kaapsehoop is approached from either side of the loop road that joins the N4 at two points. To reach Kaapsehoop from Gauteng, take the N4 east, and turn south at the Ngodwana paper mill. From Nelspruit, take the N4 west and turn south just 0,5km out of town. Then follow the Kaapsehoop/Airport road for 32km. Kaapsehoop town is situated at the highest point and outer verge of the loop road.

Guides

The BirdLife South Africa trained community guide is Enos Zulu. Contact Enos on +27(0)72 331 1197

Habitats

High rainfall montane grassland, a habitat type that has been extensively replaced elsewhere by commercial pine plantations. In addition to grassland there are extensive cliffs, a forested gully with waterfall and broken sandstone formations around town. Fragmented indigenous forest is found on the forestry property of the eastern escarpment slopes.

Specials

Knysna Turaco, Bush Blackcap, Cape Rock-Thrush, Buff-streaked Chat, Chorister Robin-Chat, Brown Scrub-Robin, Cape Grassbird, Drakensberg Prinia, Cape Longclaw, Southern Tchagra, Bokmakierie, Olive Bush-Shrike, Gurney's Sugarbird, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Swee Waxbill, Forest Canary, Blue Swallow, Red-throated Wryneck, Mountain Wagtail, Barratt's Warbler, Wing-snapping Cisticola, Red-necked Spurfowl, Red-winged Francolin, Black-rumped Buttonquail, Blue-mantled Crested-Flycatcher, Lemon Dove, Olive Thrush, Orange Ground-Thrush, Narina Trogon, Grey Cuckooshrike, Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler, African Goshawk and African Wood-Owl.

Accommodation – Old Joe's Kaia, Schoemanskloof Valley

Old Joe's Kaia is a unique small family-owned guesthouse situated in the magnificent Schoemanskloof Valley. It is well known for its excellent cuisine, relaxed homely atmosphere and personal service, with a swimming pool, prolific birding and exhilarating walks. Experience harmony and tranquility at Old Joe's.

Contact

Paul Drews and Marian Cottle
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 E-mail: info@oldjoes.co.za
 Web: www.oldjoes.co.za

Distance covered: 70km

Day 2

Birding in the Schoemanskloof Valley

Information on the Schoemanskloof Valley

Schoemanskloof is a somewhat undiscovered location, tucked away in Mpumalanga. It is the ideal location to unwind and relax amidst the peace and tranquility of stunning scenery and picturesque mountains. The Schoemanskloof Valley boasts a diverse range of interesting birds.

Guides

BirdLife South Africa guide based at Old Joe's Kaia - Appreciate Chiwanza. Contact Old Joes too book a birding trip with Appreciate on +27(0)13 733 3045

Habitats

Schoemanskloof is a valley approximately 50km long and runs in a west to easterly direction. The valley rises in the Highveld and drops down into the Lowveld. The Crocodile River often runs very close to the N4. The plant life is very diverse with riverine forest, mountain forest and broken grass land.

Specials

African Finfoot, Narina Trogon, Blue-mantled Flycatcher, Gorgeous Bush-Shrike, Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike, Giant Kingfisher, Long-crested Eagle, Half-collared Kingfisher, Tambourine Dove, Purple-crested and Kynsna Turaco.

Afternoon: Travel to Sabie

Overnight Porcupine Ridge

This relaxed country escape lies tucked away in the mountains at the heart of the scenic Panorama Route of Mpumalanga, yet only 5 minutes from the amenities of the Sabie village and 40 minutes from the world famous Kruger National Park.

Perched above an old Gold Mine and part of the original mining village, the historic homestead has been extensively remodeled to create a stylish yet informal retreat for lovers of life.... in the slow lane.

Contact

John and Janet Wills

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info@porcupineridge.co.za

www.porcupineridge.co.za

Distance covered: 90km

Day 3

Sabie and Surrounds

Information on Sabie and the surrounding areas

The Sabie area is truly a birder's paradise. Not only is there a huge variety of the more common bird species, but a number of globally and nationally threatened species also occur in the area. Four IBAs (Important Bird Areas) have been identified in the Sabie area, namely the Blyde River Canyon, Graskop Grasslands, Mac-Mac escarpment and forest, and the Blue Swallow Natural Heritage site.

Lone Creek Falls and the Lourie Trail

Lone Creek Falls

A short (200m) walk through an indigenous forest patch takes you to the bottom of the 68m waterfall which is a declared National Monument.

Guides

Self-guided

Habitats

Montane forest

Guides

Self-guided

Specials

Specials include Orange Ground-Thrush, Knysna Turaco, Yellow-throated Woodland-Warbler, Yellow-Streaked Greenbul and Forest Canary.

Overnight Porcupine Ridge

Distance covered: 20km

Day 4

Morning: Drive to the Blyde River Canyon

This is the third largest canyon in the world. The views are awe-inspiring and because it is situated in the transition zone between the inland plateau and the lowland savannah to the east, the bird life is both varied and spectacular.

Afternoon: Drive to the JG Strydom Tunnel

This is the only site in South Africa that supports breeding Taita Falcon. The cliffs of Manoutsa hold over 660 pairs of the vulnerable Cape Vulture, making it the world's fourth largest colony.

En route back to Mount Sheba, stop in at God's Window for a panoramic view of the Mpumalanga lowveld.

Specials

Taita Falcon, Black Stork, Southern Bald Ibis, Cape Rock-Thrush, Gurney's Sugarbird, Cape Vulture, Sweet Waxbill, Cut-throat Finch, Narina Trogon, Forest Canary.

Habitats

Towering cliffs, plateau grasslands, broadleaved woodland, riverine thicket, Afromontane forest, Short grassland on mountain plateaus, tall rank grassland on hillsides and drainage lines, protea shrubveld on mountain slopes, acacia thornveld, cliffs and rocky outcrops.

Overnight Forever Resorts Mount Sheba

Forever Resorts Mount Sheba is situated in the montane forest near the famous town of Pilgrim's Rest in Mpumalanga. Well appointed rooms, gourmet meals, and log fires give a magical feel to Mount Sheba. A blanket of mist usually enfolds the property in the morning and it is not unusual to experience all four seasons in one day.

Contact

Tel: +27(0) 13 768 1241

Fax: +27 (0) 13 768 1248

Email: shebares@foreversa.co.za

Web: www.mountsheba.co.za

Distance covered: 140km

Day 5

Morning: Mount Sheba Forest

Situated in the escarpment mist belt region of Mpumalanga, this 500 hectare reserve supports some of the best preserved indigenous forest in the province. This makes it one of the best spots in the country to see forest specials and endemics. Other habitat includes montane grasslands and rocky ridges

Specials

Knysna Turaco, Orange Ground-Thrush, Chorister Robin-Chat, White-starred Robin, Narina Trogon, Gurney's Sugarbird, Forest Canary, Red-necked Spurfowl, Lemon Dove, Cape Rock-Thrush, Barratt's Warbler and Southern Tchagra.

Afternoon: Depart for Misty Mountain**Overnight Misty Mountain****Contact**

Tel: +27(0) 13 768 1241

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Email: shebares@foreversa.co.za

Web: www.mountsheba.co.za

Distance covered: 80km

Day 6**Morning – Misty Mountain****Information on Misty Mountain**

Misty Mountain is a 280 hectare South African Natural Heritage perched at an altitude of 1650 masl in a malaria-free area. This high-altitude site lies within the South Africa mistbelt and consists of undulating grassland slopes, mountain thornveld, kloofs and rocky outcrops.

Guides

Self-guided

Specials

Misty Mountain is uniquely set in mountainous countryside with fantastic, broad, panoramic vistas offering sightings of Bush Blackcap, Knysna Turaco, Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk, Drakensberg Prinia, Wailing Cisticola and Barratt's Warbler

Afternoon: Return to Nelspruit

Distance covered: 90km

Tour Ends