



# ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## South Africa Mega Birding Tour *6<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> October 2012 (24 days)*



*South Africa has the highest number of endemic and near-endemic bird species of any country on the African continent. Some of these special birds – examples include Drakensberg Rockjumper and Blue Crane – are beautiful and charismatic; while others, including the endangered Rudd's and Botha's Larks, are less striking but incredibly range-restricted. To boot, South Africa is also home to an endemic family, the striking Rockjumpers.*

*The focus of this 24-day endemics mega-birding tour is to see as many of these South African endemic and near-endemic species as possible. Almost all 143 birds falling into this category are targeted during the tour (and are listed in bold in the itinerary below.) Furthermore, we will seek out other special and sought-after African species; and, in the course of this tour, we have the potential to rack up a very impressive bird list in terms of species numbers, rarities and great sightings. Mammals will likewise form a major focus of our attention, and we can expect to also find an incredible diversity of reptiles, amphibians and other wildlife. We invite you to join us on this exciting celebration of our endemic treasures during this ultimate South African mega-birding adventure!*

**THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...****DETAILS**

<b>Tour Dates</b>	<b>6<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> October 2012 (24 days)</b>
<b>Tour Price</b>	US\$6,830 * £4,710 * €5,340 * <b>ZAR51,300</b> per person sharing (see below) US\$150 approximate cost of domestic flights (Tour price fixed in <b>ZAR</b> , other rates subject to exchange rate fluctuations)
<b>Tour Size</b>	<b>Limited to 6 participants and 1 Rockjumper leader</b>

**THE ITINERARY**

<b>6<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Johannesburg to Polokwane</b>
<b>7<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Polokwane to Magoebaskloof</b>
<b>8<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Magoebaskloof to Wakkerstroom</b>
<b>9<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Wakkerstroom area</b>
<b>10<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Wakkerstroom to Mkuze</b>
<b>11<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Mkuze area</b>
<b>12<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Mkuze to St Lucia</b>
<b>13<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>St Lucia to Eshowe</b>
<b>14<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Eshowe to Underberg</b>
<b>15<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Underberg and Sani Pass</b>
<b>16<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Underberg to Hilton</b>
<b>17<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Hilton to De Hoop via Durban and Cape Town</b>
<b>18<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>De Hoop Nature Reserve to Cape Town</b>
<b>19<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Cape Peninsula (Pelagic)</b>
<b>20<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Cape Peninsula</b>
<b>21<sup>st</sup> October</b>	<b>Cape Town to West Coast National Park and return</b>
<b>22<sup>nd</sup> October</b>	<b>Cape Town to Calvinia</b>
<b>23<sup>rd</sup> October</b>	<b>Calvinia &amp; Brandvlei</b>
<b>24<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Calvinia to Springbok</b>
<b>25<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Springbok to Port Nolloth and return</b>
<b>26<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Springbok to Augrabies Falls National Park</b>
<b>27<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Augrabies Falls National Park to Kimberley</b>
<b>28<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Kimberley</b>
<b>29<sup>th</sup> October</b>	<b>Kimberly to Johannesburg</b>



### THE TOUR IN DETAIL...

**Day 1, 6<sup>th</sup> October: Johannesburg to Polokwane.** On arrival your Rockjumper guide will meet you at OR Tambo International Airport. Thereafter our birding feast will begin as we make our way northwards out of the city. Shortly after we leave the airport we should find our first near-endemic, the **Cape Sparrow**. This well marked and rather beautiful sparrow is wonderfully common around the economic capital of the country. We will make frequent short birding stops today as we familiarize ourselves with some of the country's commoner species. We will also take some time to search an area for the localised **Melodious Lark**, which particularly favours dense areas of 'red grass'. More typical birds seen on the drive up include a variety of widowbirds and bishops, while we will keep our eyes open for the possibility of Pallid and Montagu's Harriers. Bushveld in this area is largely dominated by *Acacia* woodland and is incredibly rich in bird numbers and species. We expect to arrive in Polokwane by late afternoon.



**Day 2, 7<sup>th</sup> October: Polokwane to Magoebaskloof.** Today will be spent birding the bushveld around Polokwane, an area that is home to the highly localised endemic **Short-clawed Lark**. We will take time to visit the Polokwane Nature Reserve where we may find the delectable **Scaly-feathered Weaver**, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver and Black-chested Prinia. Other fairly conspicuous species of the woodlands in the area include delights such as Temminck's Courser, Arrow-marked Babbler, Northern Black Korhaan, African Grey Hornbill, Purple Roller, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, White-crowned and Magpie Shrikes, Gabar Goshawk and Groundscraper Thrush. Seed-eaters are generally very well represented in this area and frequently encountered species include the gorgeous Violet-eared and Black-cheeked Waxbills, Red-headed and Cut-throat Finches, Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver, Great Sparrow and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting.

After the morning's birding we head for the wonderful forests of Magoebaskloof. These forests can be very lively with bird activity and the key here is to locate mixed feeding flocks. Specials of the area include the seldom-sighted Bat Hawk, **Forest Buzzard**, lovely little **Swee Waxbill**, **Barratt's Warbler**, the splendid Black-fronted Bushshrike, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Grey Cuckooshrike, **Forest Canary** and Green Twinspot.



**Day 3, 8<sup>th</sup> October: Magoebaskloof to Wakkerstroom.** This morning we leave the diversity of the forests behind us and head for the grasslands and hills that surround the quaint town of Wakkerstroom, where we will be based for the next two nights. These grasslands are a centre for avian endemism and are critical for the survival of several range-

restricted species. We will make a full exploration of the grasslands tomorrow while this afternoon will be spent birding the highly productive Wakkerstroom marsh at the edge of town. This is a haven for waterbirds and offers the chance of a number of uncommon or localised species. Purple Heron, **South African Shelduck**, **Cape Shoveler**, Purple Swamphen, **South African Cliff Swallow**, Levaillant's



Cisticola and **Cape Weaver** are all regular, and we should also find African Snipe and the elusive African Rail. Rarely recorded species seen here on our previous trips include the secretive Baillon's Crake and Red-chested Flufftail.

**Day 4, 9<sup>th</sup> October: Wakkerstroom area.** Driving along the network of dirt roads radiating out from Wakkerstroom we will explore the grasslands, rocky outcrops and gorges of this unique area in search of some of the countries most threatened and range-restricted endemics, along with numerous other widespread but no less exciting species. These include **Southern Bald Ibis**, **Blue** and **Barrow's Korhaans**, **Jackal Buzzard**, the rare and localised **Botha's** and **Rudd's Larks** (the latter considered one of the world's most endangered larks), **Pink-billed** and the recently split **Eastern Long-billed Larks**, **Ground Woodpecker**, **Ant-eating** and **Buff-streaked Chats**, **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, **African Rock** and **Yellow-breasted Pipits**, **Cape Longclaw**, **Pied Starling**, the spectacular Long-tailed Widowbird, Yellow-crowned Bishop, African Quailfinch and Cape Canary. Red-winged Francolin is fairly common in the moist grasslands and we may find them feeding at the roadside or sunning themselves at dawn. Small mammals occurring in the grasslands include Yellow Mongoose and the rare Cape Fox. One of the more interesting denizens of these grasslands is the curious Suricate, or Meerkat, immortalized in Disney's 'Lion King'. We have a good chance of finding family groups of these unusual yet delightful animals.



**Day 5, 10<sup>th</sup> October: Wakkerstroom to Mkuze.** After some final early morning birding in Wakkerstroom we will drive south to Mkuze, an area in northern Kwazulu-Natal that is home to a host of exciting specials and a handful of endemics. We will arrive in the mid to late afternoon for a two-night stay.

The Mkuze area is one of the most productive birding hotspots in Southern Africa and, with its wide variety of savanna, forest and wetland habitats, you can expect an excellent diversity of bird and mammal species in your days here. While we will take time to appreciate the overwhelming number of birds, we will concentrate particularly on finding the region's more localised specials. These include Eastern Nicator, Bearded Scrub Robin, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Four-coloured (Gorgeous) Bushshrike and the stunning **Pink-throated Twinspot**. More widespread but none-the-less spectacular species that we will look for are Black-bellied Bustard with its strange, "cork-popping" display, the nomadic Senegal



Lapwing and beautiful Narina Trogon.

**Day 6, 11<sup>th</sup> October: Mkuze area.** We will spend the whole day exploring the wonders of the area, searching the great diversity of habitats for its numerous species. One of the more exciting habitats for us here is the park's Sand Forest, a rare and localised dry forest severely threatened by development. This habitat is home to **Neergaard's Sunbird**, **Rudd's Apalis**, the rather bizarre looking Crested Guineafowl, and the strange African Broadbill with its unique circular display.



The ephemeral wetlands in the area can be very productive after good rains, and depending on the local conditions we may opt for some time at one of these ‘pans’ where we will search for Black Heron, Lesser Jacana, African Pygmy Goose and White-backed Duck.

While in Mkuze we will be sure to enjoy some ‘bushveld’ birding – an excellent habitat for raptors and ‘flock’ birding especially. Here we will be ever vigilant for the huge Crowned and Martial Eagles, Little Sparrowhawk, Grey Penduline Tit, Bushveld Pipit, White-fronted and Little Bee-eaters, White-crested Helmetshrike, Grey-headed and Orange-breasted Bushshrikes, and Purple-banded and Marico Sunbirds.

If conditions permit, we will do a nightwalk this evening to look for owls, nightjars and small mammals (Greater Galago and White-tailed Mongoose are often seen).



**Day 7, 12<sup>th</sup> October: Mkuze to St Lucia.** After some final early morning birding in the Mkuze area, we will make our way to the coastal village of St. Lucia. This is nestled on the shores of a lake of the same name and is part of a world heritage site. If time allows we will take a drive to the nearby river mouth where we can obtain great views of Hippopotamus and Nile Crocodile lazing on exposed sandbanks. The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park is an incredibly important breeding site for many species of waterfowl and protects some excellent patches of coastal forest and grassland. This afternoon we will bird our way slowly through the patch of forest that flanks the St Lucia estuary, which is an excellent site for the regional endemics. Woodward’s Batis, **Rudd’s Apalis**, **Brown Scrub-Robin** and Livingstone’s Turaco will be the focus of our efforts. Other birds to look out for here include the iridescent African Emerald Cuckoo, the scarce Southern Banded Snake Eagle, Lemon Dove, Grey Waxbill, Red-backed Mannikin, Narina Trogon and Red-fronted Tinkerbird.

**Day 8, 13<sup>th</sup> October: Greater St Lucia Wetland Park to Eshowe.** This morning we will visit the finest and arguably the most beautiful of Zululand’s forests, the storied Ngoye forest. This majestic forest enjoys an important place in Zulu history and is a very important site for birders. This is the only place in the world where one can find the endemic subspecies of Green Barbet (**Woodward’s Barbet**).



The nearest place to spot the nominate race is hundreds of miles away in northern Mozambique and this, coupled with plumage and song differences, have led many to believe that this is a ‘full’ species. Ngoye is also a good site for Yellow-streaked Greenbul, African Green Pigeon and White-eared Barbet.

From here we will journey back to the coast, stopping in at the small town of Mtunzini. The town looks down on a wonderful patch of coastal forest and a large plantation of *Raffia* palms. These palms are an intricate part of the life of the Palm-nut Vulture and this represents the southern breeding limit of this species. Other target specials include Black-throated Wattle-eye and a chance for African Finfoot.

Our final destination for the day is the small town of Eshowe,



which gives us an excellent launching pad to locate a number of key species in Dlinza Forest the following day.

**Day 9, 14<sup>th</sup> October: Eshowe to Underberg.** This morning we will enter into the verdant Dlinza Forest that is situated on the outskirts of Eshowe. Our targets here may not be endemic, but they are certainly very special. Spotted Ground Thrush, for instance, which is pleasantly common here, has a patchy distribution throughout its range and is uncommon everywhere else. We will also amble along the Dlinza canopy walkway in an attempt to locate the very uncommon and sparsely distributed Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon.

In the afternoon we will then make our way towards the fabled Drakensberg. *En route* we will stop at Impendle N.R., an area of pristine rolling grassland. This locality supports a breeding population of the rare Blue Swallow, a species that only visits our region during the summer months in order to breed. Other birds we have a chance of locating are Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Red-necked Spurfowl and Fan-tailed Grassbird. In the late afternoon we



head for the small town of Underberg that is nestled in the foothills of the Drakensberg mountain range.

**Day 10, 15<sup>th</sup> October: Sani Pass.** Today we travel up into the tiny mountain kingdom of Lesotho in search of a handful of highly localised, highland endemics. In order to do this, we will transfer to 4 by 4 vehicles and make our way up the rugged and spectacular Sani Pass, birding *en route*. The grassy slopes and rocky outcrops at the lower end of the pass are home to the bizarre **Ground Woodpecker**, **Cape Rock Thrush** and Yellow Bishop, whilst stands of *Protea* support the spectacular endemic **Gurney's Sugarbird** (belonging to a family endemic to Southern Africa), **Greater Double-collared Sunbird** and the dazzling Malachite Sunbird. As we approach the crest of the Escarpment, we will be watching rocky scree at the roadside for the stunning **Drakensberg Rockjumper**, **African Rock Pipit**, **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, **Drakensberg Prinia** and **Drakensberg Siskin**. Atop the plateau, the steep slopes and rugged cliffs are replaced by gently undulating terrain and endless vistas of distant, blue mountains. Black Stork and **Southern Bald Ibis** may be found alongside the mountain streams, whilst **Grey-winged Francolin**, Red-capped Lark, **Sickle-winged Chat**, African and **Mountain Pipits**,



**Yellow Canary** and Cape Bunting prefer adjacent meadows. A number of birds more typical of the Karoo, such as **Grey Tit**, **Large-billed Lark**, **Karoo Prinia**, **Layard's Tit-babbler** and **Fairy Warbler**, reach the eastern limits of their range here in the Lesotho highlands. We will keep a careful watch skywards as **Cape** and the magnificent Bearded Vultures, Verreaux's Eagle, **Jackal Buzzard**, Lanner Falcon and White-necked Raven are all possible. Other animals of particular interest atop the "Roof of Africa" are the approachable and endearing Ice Rat, the endemic Drakensberg Crag Lizard and the colourful Southern Rock Agama.

**Day 11, 16<sup>th</sup> October: Underberg to Hilton.** We have an early departure this morning for the Karkloof, a range of forested hills not far from the town of Hilton and home to a number of uncommon



and local birds restricted to Afro-montane forests. We will be searching for South African endemics such as **Forest Buzzard**, **Knysna Turaco**, the highly endangered **Cape Parrot**, elusive **Bush Blackcap** - one of South Africa's most sought-after endemics - **Chorister Robin-Chat**, **Greater Double-collared Sunbird**, **Southern Tchagra**, **Swee Waxbill**, **Forest Canary** and **Barratt's Warbler**. We may also see more widespread, yet no less spectacular birds such as African Olive Pigeon, Olive Woodpecker, Narina Trogon, the uncommon Orange Ground-Thrush, White-starred Robin, Olive Bushshrike and Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler. Further up the Karkloof range we visit a pristine area of upland grassland hosting breeding Black-winged Lapwings, but the star bird is undoubtedly the striking **Buff-streaked Chat**, an endemic wheatear that is breathtaking both in its appearance and song. Wetlands in this area host a variety of waterfowl that might include the uncommon Maccoa and White-backed Ducks, as well as Grey Crowned Crane. If we are lucky, we may encounter a pair of the endangered Wattled Crane striding majestically across the grasslands.

The afternoon will be spent in a forest nearby our accommodation. While afternoon forest birding can be challenging, we will make an effort to locate the secretive Buff-spotted Flufftail, White-starred Robin and **Chorister Robin-Chat**.



**Day 12, 17<sup>th</sup> October: Hilton to De Hoop via Durban and Cape Town.** Today we have a mid morning flight to Cape Town. We will arrive in the "Mother City" in the early afternoon and then make the drive to the De Hoop Nature Reserve. Our drive towards the wheat lands of the Overberg region takes us on a very scenic coastal route where we can enjoy breath-taking views of False Bay and the Indian Ocean. This area is home to a number of stunning birds, none more so than South Africa's national bird, the **Blue Crane**, which is occasionally seen here in very large flocks, **Agulhas Long-billed Lark**, **Southern Black Korhaan** and Denham's Bustard. We will overnight at a wonderful lodge next to De Hoop Nature Reserve.

**Day 13, 18<sup>th</sup> October: De Hoop Nature Reserve to Cape Town.** This morning we will enter the reserve and begin our search for **Agulhas Clapper Lark** (sometimes considered a full species) and **Southern Tchagra**. The endemic Cape Mountain Zebra is refreshingly common here and we may also



encounter the shy Cape Grysbok. A nearby patch of woodland houses the most sought-after woodpecker in the country, **Knysna Woodpecker**. This rather secretive endemic can be very difficult to find - patience and a little luck will be needed to track it down. Further bonuses are the possibility for three honeyguide species, namely Greater and Lesser and Brown-backed Honeybird, as well as a chance for Black-rumped (**Hottentot**) Buttonquail. On our route back towards Cape Town we might stop in at Harold Porter Botanical Gardens. This is an excellent site for several tough birds and will serve as a backup for us if we

are still on the hunt for some of the Cape endemics. The scenic gardens are blessed with fynbos patches and forested ravines. **Victorin's Warbler** and **Cape Siskin** are found here, while commoner species include Black Saw-wing, Malachite and **Orange-breasted Sunbirds**, and Brimstone Canary.



In the afternoon we will stop *en route* at the rugged Hottentots-Holland's Mountains in search of one of South Africa's finest endemics, the handsome **Cape Rockjumper**. Though strikingly plumaged and conspicuous by their vocalizations, these charismatic birds possess an incredible ability to disappear amongst the boulders and we may have to be patient if we wish to enjoy prolonged sightings of these elusive creatures. Rock outcrops here also support **Ground Woodpecker**, White-necked Raven and **Cape Rock Thrush**, whilst the thick mountain *Fynbos* is the favoured habitat of **Cape Siskin** and the smart, endemic **Victorin's Warbler**. If we are very lucky, we may flush Black-rumped (**Hottentot**) Buttonquail underfoot or stumble upon a Cape Eagle-Owl at its daytime roost. We will arrive at our accommodation in Cape Town towards the early evening.



**Day 14, 19<sup>th</sup> October: Cape Peninsula (Pelagic).** The cold upwelling of the Benguela current off Cape Town supports a wealth of pelagic seabirds, with vast concentrations of albatrosses, petrels, shearwaters and prions gathering in the deeper water at the edge of the continental shelf. Though boat trips are generally most productive in mid-winter due to the possibility of vagrants from the Subantarctic, the birding is excellent year-round and we hope to see Shy, Black-browed and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, Cape and White-chinned Petrels, Sooty, Great, Manx and Cory's Shearwaters, Wilson's and European Storm Petrels, Cape Gannet and Parasitic Jaeger. If we manage to locate one of the commercial fishing trawlers, the birding can be truly spectacular with a cloud of seabirds following in the vessel's wake to feed off any resultant offal. Once the excitement has subsided, we will carefully search through the thousands of birds present for rarities such as Wandering Albatross and Grey (Pediunker) or Spectacled Petrel. Cetaceans are almost always encountered and we have a good chance of seeing Southern Right and Bryde's Whales and Dusky Dolphin. It goes without saying that a day off the Cape is likely to be a highlight of any trip to South Africa!

Whilst in False Bay, we will also visit the famous **African Penguin** colony. The comical antics of the penguins make for superb entertainment and here you will be treated to exceptionally close views of these endearing creatures. **African Oystercatcher**, **Cape Cormorant** and the abundant



**Hartlaub's Gull** are often nearby. There will be time enough for us to hunt down the remaining endemic cormorants and our search will begin not far from the Penguin colony. **Crowned** and **Bank Cormorants** are largely restricted to Southern Africa and their numbers are densest here around the Cape Peninsula. Granite domes, pounded by icy Atlantic swells, are the best areas to search for roosting cormorants.

The weather and ocean conditions off the Cape are extremely unpredictable, so our daily schedule will remain flexible to optimize our birding on land and at sea.

**Day 15, 20<sup>th</sup> October: Cape Peninsula.** Today we have the whole day to explore the peninsula for its numerous endemics. We will start the day off with our greatest challenge, **Knysna Warbler**. This secretive, drab skulker has frustrated many a birder, and any view of it is a good one! By way of relief we will occasionally focus skyward for **Forest Buzzard**. After the hard work for the warbler, we then



visit Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, arguably the most beautiful gardens on the continent. This is an excellent site for **Cape Spurfowl**, **Forest Canary**, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, **Cape Batis**, **Cape Sugarbird**, **Orange-breasted Sunbird** and further chances for the delightful little **Swee Waxbill**. The dramatic backdrop of Table Mountain, coupled with the great birding, makes this a very memorable stop.

After enjoying this spectacle we travel to the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve. This wonderful park showcases the most south-western point of the continent and is very popular amongst birders and general tourists alike. Here we should find the impressive **Cape Grassbird** and **Cape Siskin**. We will explore the network of roads to less visited parts of the reserve, visiting secluded coves and searching for the elusive Cape Mountain Zebra and Bontebok antelope. In addition, we should see Eland and Chacma Baboon. If time allows we will spend the rest of the day at the productive Strandfontein Water Works. This is one of the best-known sites in the country for waterfowl and is always teeming with birds. Yellow-billed and Maccua Ducks, Red-billed Teal, Southern Pochard, Black-necked Grebe, **South African Shelduck**, African Marsh Harrier and Levillant's Cisticola are all regularly encountered here.



**Day 16, 21<sup>st</sup> October: Cape Town to West Coast National Park and return.** This morning we will be up early for our drive out to the West Coast National Park, including the globally important wetland sites of the Berg River estuary and Langebaan Lagoon. The morning quest will be dedicated mainly to larks. This time we will be looking for **(Cape) Clapper Lark**, a very localised sub-species that favours coastal vegetation called '*strandveld*', which is stunted by the salty air from the icy Atlantic. At this time of year we should be treated to the obvious, vocal displays of this species.

Large numbers of waders spend the northern winter here and we will check for Red Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Greater Sand Plover and Eurasian Curlew, as well as Kittlitz's and the localised Chestnut-banded Plovers. In addition to the shorebirds, these areas also support large numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos, **South African Shelduck**, **Cape Shoveler** and numerous other waterfowl. The surrounding *strandveld* is home to **Southern Black Korhaan**, **Grey-winged Francolin**, **Grey Tit**, **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Karoo Lark**, Capped Wheatear, **Fiscal Flycatcher** and the magnificent **Black Harrier**, surely one of the world's most attractive raptors.

**Day 17, 22<sup>nd</sup> October: Langebaan to Calvinia.** We will begin our journey north today, travelling along the main national road out of Cape Town. Our first stop will be at Paleisheuwel, arguably the best site for the tricky **Protea Canary**. Other birds of interest here are **White-backed Mousebird**, **Layard's** and **Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers**, the dainty **Fairy Warbler**, **Acacia Pied Barbet** and **Mountain Wheatear**.



In the mid afternoon we will arrive in the Calvinia area where we will be in the Karoo proper, with a whole host of special birds now possible on the desolate plains around town. These include **Pirit Batis** in taller vegetation, **Karoo** and **Spike-heeled Larks**, **Tractrac**, **Sickle-winged** and



**Karoo Chats, Rufous-eared Warbler, Yellow and White-throated Canaries and Pale Chanting Goshawk.** If very fortunate we may see the nomadic **Ludwig's Bustard** striding through the desolate plains. The usually dry river system that passes through the town will also form the focus of our attention, as the reedbeds here are home to the endemic **Namaqua Warbler** (recently assigned to a monotypic genus, *Phragmacia*).

**Day 18, 23<sup>rd</sup> October: Calvinia & Brandvlei.** Today we have a full day to search for some of the scarce inhabitants of this unique area. On leaving Calvinia we will search for flocks of **Pale-winged Starlings**. Three species of lark will be at the top of the hitlist, namely **Red Lark**, a striking and very range-restricted endemic, and the highly nomadic **Sclater's Lark** and **Black-eared Sparrow-Lark**. Some of the many star birds of the region include other nomadics such as **Burchell's Courser**, while **Ashy Tit**, **Bokmakierie** and **Pririt Batis** should be less of a challenge to find. We will also listen for the distinctive flight calls of **Namaqua Sandgrouse** and the strange, dawn croaking of the **Karoo**



**Korhaan**, which will help us locate these cryptically coloured birds. Some wonderful non-endemic species are also bound to capture our attention and the magnificent Martial Eagle, Lanner Falcon, Kori Bustard and Double-banded Courser are all likely. Today is also our best chance at finding **Dusky Sunbird**, while we will make a concerted effort to locate a party of elusive **Karoo Eremomelas**.

We also have the opportunity of venturing out this evening in search of desert denizens such as Bat-eared and Cape Foxes, African Wild Cat, the bizarre Aardwolf and the strange, kangaroo-like Springhare. Nocturnal birds here include Spotted Eagle- and Barn Owls and Rufous-cheeked Nightjar.

**Day 19, 24<sup>th</sup> October: Calvinia to Springbok.** This morning we have a fairly lengthy drive on some of the Karoo's typical gravel roads. Our journey gives us further chances for a number of unique Karoo species that we may still be missing. In the afternoon we will make a stop at Goegap Nature Reserve and, while searching the rocky slopes and *Acacia* lined watercourses, we have great chances of finding many of the more difficult Karoo endemics. These include the highly localised **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler**, **Karoo Eremomela**, **Layard's** and **Chestnut-vented Tit-babblers**, **Dusky Sunbird** and **Black-headed Canary**.



**Day 20, 25<sup>th</sup> October: Springbok to Port Nolloth and return.** We have an early start today from Springbok as we strike out for the diamond-mining town of Port Nolloth, a small town nestled near the Namibian border on South Africa's west coast. This area is famous for a single species of lark that is found only here and in the extreme south of Namibia: **Barlow's Lark**. Another lark that is found in this low coastal scrub is the endemic **Cape Long-billed Lark**, an outrageous species with the longest bill of any Southern African lark. **Cape Penduline Tit** can also be found feeding while little groups move from bush to bush. The road that

gives access to the **Barlow's Lark** habitat runs up the Atlantic coastline; however, most of the road passes through restricted diamond areas, and no stopping is allowed on except for the first few



kilometres where we may alight from the vehicles. Along the coastline we could enjoy sightings of **Crowned, Bank and Cape Cormorants**, Kelp Gull and the smart **African Oystercatcher**. In the afternoon we will make our way back inland to Springbok and, if time permits, we will visit the Goegap Nature Reserve once again in an attempt to track down anything that we may still need.

**Day 21, 26<sup>th</sup> October: Springbok to Augrabies Falls National Park.** Our journey today is rather short, though we will still be making many stops *en route* to search for any specific targets. Before reaching Augrabies Falls our route will take us through a few more of South Africa's prime endemic sites. These include the gravel plains surrounding Pofadder, where **Slater's Lark** and **Burchell's Courser** reside, while the red dunes around Aggenys are a good location for the dune form of **Red Lark**. The immense communal nests of **Sociable Weavers** are also conspicuous on telephone poles in this area and these colonies frequently host "tenants" such as Pygmy Falcon and **Red-headed Finch**. In the late afternoon we arrive at Augrabies Falls National Park for a one night's stay.



A linear oasis in the desert heralds our arrival on the banks of the Orange River, South Africa's largest waterway. We will follow its course westwards to where the river narrows and plunges headlong over the 100m high Augrabies Falls, scouring an impressive gorge on its way to the Atlantic Ocean. The national park, centred on the falls, protects a range of bird-rich habitats, and we will search the riparian vegetation and dry *Acacia*-filled watercourses for Red-necked Spurfowl (an isolated population well west of its usual range), **Double-banded Sandgrouse**, **Rosy-faced Lovebird**, **White-backed** and Red-faced Mousebirds, **Acacia Pied Barbet**, Black-chested Prinia, **Pirit Batis**, **Dusky Sunbird**, the attractive, apricot-flanked form of **Orange River White-eye** (split from Cape White-eye) and Black-throated Canary.

**Day 22, 27<sup>th</sup> October: Augrabies Falls National Park to Kimberley.** We have a morning to explore the riches of this scenic reserve. Here we will be scanning the skies constantly, as the rocky gorges below the falls are home to Verreaux's Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Greater Kestrel and large numbers of Alpine and the endemic **Bradfield's Swifts**. The apparently desolate, boulder-strewn landscapes away from the river are also well-worth exploring for **Mountain Wheatear** and Familiar Chat and, if we are lucky, **Short-toed Rock Thrush**. Although big game is not plentiful in this arid park, we should see the sure-footed Klipspringer and the unusual Dassie Rat, while Rock Hyraxes are numerous and can frequently be seen grazing fresh leaves atop flimsy *Acacia* bushes! The highly localised, brightly coloured Broadley's Flat Lizard is also conspicuous along the walls of the gorge.



We then embark on the long drive east and south to the fabled mining town of Kimberley, where we will arrive in the early evening.

**Day 23, 28<sup>th</sup> October: Kimberley.** Our search today will revolve around finding the **Kimberley Pipit**, only recently described to science and incredibly range-restricted. The Kamfer's Dam, situated just outside the town, is usually an excellent place for Lesser and Greater Flamingos as both species have



attempted to breed here in the past. We will also take some time to bird the mosaic of grassland and *Acacia* thornveld that dominate the area. Many interesting species can be found in this habitat, and these include the strikingly marked **Northern Black Korhaan**, stunning **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Marico Flycatcher**, Long-billed Crombec, **Cape Longclaw** and Common Scimitarbill. This area also holds some interesting wildlife and bird species that are strictly nocturnal, and tonight we will head out after dark in search of a few of these strange animals. The amazing Aardvark tops the list of amazing potential nocturnal beasts in the area, while other highlights include the endearing Aardwolf and the unusual Springhare. On previous Rockjumper night drives in this region we have recorded over 25 mammal species in a single evening! Night birds include Spotted Eagle- and Marsh Owls and the migratory Rufous-cheeked Nightjar.



**Day 24, 29<sup>th</sup> October: Kimberly to Johannesburg.** Today is the final day of our incredible journey through some of South Africa's most beautiful and scenic countryside. We depart Kimberley this morning for the hub of Johannesburg, where the tour will conclude.

#### **Financial arrangements:**

The price for the **South Africa Mega Birding** tour is US\$6,830 \* £4,710 \* €5,340 \* **ZAR51,300** per person sharing. (**Please note:** This does **NOT** include the domestic flight from Durban to Cape Town. As a general guideline, we suggest you budget +/- **US\$150** per person. RBT can book this flight on your behalf at no extra charge.)

The single supplement for this tour is **US\$620**, and will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBT cannot provide you with a rooming partner although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

#### **This includes:**

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to lunch on day 24;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- 4 X 4 excursion into Lesotho;
- Cape Pelagic outing;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Extra activities as mentioned in the itinerary; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

#### **The tour fee does not include:**

- **ANY** flights, including the domestic flight from Durban to Cape Town (see above);
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and items of a personal nature.



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**IMPORTANT NOTES:**

- a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we now quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold (South African Rands), and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 3 months before the tour.) Approximate domestic flight and single supplement rates have been converted to US\$ but are also subject to exchange rate movements.
- b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration (a minimum of 6 paying participants) a small party supplement will have to be charged.
- c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.
- d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

**Tipping:**

As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc) are included on this tour. However, this does not include your Rockjumper leader. If, therefore, you feel that has given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip him.

**Special Notes:**

- Our Mega tours are **very** fast-paced birding adventures designed for the **dedicated lister and serious birder**. The focus of the tour is to see as many of the endemics and area specials as possible in our given time. In order to cover the necessary route to maximise the species list we therefore stay for only a single night at most sites.
- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we have to cover long distances to get to the best areas for birds and animals. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg for check in luggage and 8kg for hand luggage.
- In all areas that contain potentially dangerous animals you are confined to the vehicle and are, quite understandably, not allowed to exit.
- Pelagic trip in the Western Cape: If we are unable to fill the boat there will be a small group supplement. We will more than likely only be able to confirm this near to the time of the pelagic departure. If this proves cost prohibitive then the option will exist to cancel the pelagic entirely.
- Please note that the seas during the pelagic trips off the Cape can be rough and participants who opt for this pelagic must therefore bear this in mind. If you have any medical conditions or physical limitations relating to balance and mobility please do let the RBT office know.
- For much of this tour you will be well away from medical facilities. It is essential that you let the Rockjumper office know in advance of the tour if you have any physical limitations or medical conditions.
- Crime is problematic in certain areas of South Africa. Exercise caution as you would for any big city where crime exists. Do not unnecessarily flaunt cash and valuables and do not leave valuables exposed in the vehicle.

**Arrival and Departure details:**

This tour **does not** include **any** airfares. The tour will depart from O.R. Tambo International on day 1 by **9am**, kindly arrive in advance of this time on this day or arrive the day before. Further meeting



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details in this regard will be forwarded to you in due course. The tour will conclude by **mid to late afternoon on day 24** at O.R. Tambo International. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

**Flights:**

O.R. Tambo International Airport (Johannesburg) is the main port of entry for international flights in South Africa and is well serviced by all of the world's major airlines. We have the capacity to advise you on the best route according to your preferences, but your local travel agent will best be able to book these flights for you. We can, however, book the domestic flight from Durban to Cape Town. If you would like further assistance kindly contact the Rockjumper office, and we will happily help you plan your route. **However, please DO NOT book your international flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

**Photos credits from top:** Drakensberg Rockjumper (T. Schall), Sweet Waxbill (A. Riley), Violet-eared Waxbill (J. Rossouw), Southern Bald Ibis & Four-coloured Bushshrike (H. Chittenden), White-crested Helmetshrike (L. Fouche), Green Barbet & Spotted Ground Thrush (H. Chittenden), Ground Woodpecker & Bush Blackcap (A. Riley), Blue Crane (S. Davis), Orange-breasted Sunbird (J. Wakelin), African Penguins, Black Harrier & Ludwig's Bustard (M. Lilje), Bokmakierie (A. Riley), Cinnamon-breasted Warbler (H. Chittenden), Rosy-faced Lovebird (M. Lilje), Burchell's Courser (I. Yufera) & Crimson-breasted Shrike (J. Wakelin).

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**Rockjumper Birding Tours CC**  
**Worldwide Birding Adventures**  
Registration number 2001/059480/23  
**PO Box 13972, Cascades, 3202, South Africa**  
**Tel: +27 33 394 0225**  
**Fax: +27 88 033 394 0225**  
**Email: [info@rockjumperbirding.com](mailto:info@rockjumperbirding.com)**  
**Alternative email: [rockjumperbirding@yahoo.com](mailto:rockjumperbirding@yahoo.com)**  
**Website: [www.rockjumperbirding.com](http://www.rockjumperbirding.com)**

