



# ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## South Africa

### Kruger Park Bird & Wildlife Challenge 2019 - Highland Endemics Extension

*15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> February 2019 (6 days)*



**Drakensberg Rockjumper by Hugh Chittenden**

*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 two very impressive endemic families, the striking Rockjumper and Sugarbirds.*

The focus of this 6-day endemics birding tour is to see as many as possible of the endemic and near-endemic species (listed in bold in the itinerary below) found in the highland areas to be covered. Furthermore, we will seek out many other special and sought-after African species; and, in the course of this short tour, we have the potential to rack up an impressive bird list in terms of species numbers, rarities and great sightings. Mammals will likewise be a 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 highland endemic treasures!

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

**THE ITINERARY**

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Mopani Camp, Kruger to Wakkerstroom</b>
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Wakkerstroom</b>
<b>Day 3</b>	<b>Wakkerstroom to Hilton</b>
<b>Day 4</b>	<b>Hilton to Himeville</b>
<b>Day 5</b>	<b>Sani Pass</b>
<b>Day 6</b>	<b>Himeville to Johannesburg and depart</b>

**TOUR ROUTE MAP...**



### THE TOUR IN DETAIL...



Southern Bald Ibis by Adam Riley

**Day 1: Mopani Camp, Kruger to Wakkerstroom.** Following the final evening of the Kruger Park Bird & Wildlife Challenge, we will spend the morning birding around Mopani Camp before bidding farewell to the splendours of Kruger. We then head inland to the pristine upland grasslands and hills surrounding the quaint highveld town of Wakkerstroom, where we will be based for the next two nights. These grasslands are a centre of avian endemism and are critical for the survival of several range-restricted species. We will fully explore 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 seeing a number of uncommon or localised species. Purple Heron, **South African Shelduck**, **Cape Shoveler**, African 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 previous trips include the secretive Baillon's Crake, Red-chested Flufftail and also Western Marsh and Montagu's Harriers.

**Day 2: 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 South Africa's most threatened and range-restricted endemics, along with numerous other widespread but no less exciting species. These include **Blue** and **Grey Crowned Cranes**, **Southern Bald Ibis**, **Blue Korhaan**, White-bellied Bustard, **Jackal Buzzard**, vocal **Bokmakierie**, the rare and localised **Botha's** and **Rudd's Larks** (the latter considered one of the world's most endangered larks), **Pink-billed**, **Eastern Long-billed** and **Eastern Clapper 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, Quailfinch and **Cape Canary**. Red-winged



Ground Woodpecker by Clayton Burne





Botha's Lark by Markus Lilje

and **Grey-winged Francolins** occur in the moist grasslands and we may find coveys feeding at the roadside or sunning themselves at dawn, while we also stand a good chance of seeing the stately Secretarybird.

Some of the farms in the area around Wakkerstroom support populations of the peculiar Black Wildebeest (also known by its less-used English name of White-tailed Gnu) and Blesbok, while 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.

Wakkerstroom is justly famous as one of the best places in the world to see Amur Falcon on their wintering grounds. Having safely navigated their way from eastern Russia and northern China, the majority of the world's population ends up in south-eastern Africa. We can expect hundreds, if not thousands of these small falcons hawking over fields throughout the high altitude grassland area. It is at dusk though, that the few tall trees in and around Wakkerstroom come alive, with up to 10 000 Amur Falcons and an estimated 1 000 Lesser Kestrels heading in to roost for the night.



Amur Falcon by Clayton Burne



Southern Red Bishop by James Wakelin

### Day 3:

**Wakkerstroom to Hilton.** After some final early morning birding in Wakkerstroom, we will drive south towards the fabled Drakensberg, arriving in the small town of Hilton in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands in the late afternoon, where we will overnight. If time allows, there are a number of good birding spots worth visiting close to Hilton, including the Cedara area. Grasslands here host Red-winged Francolin, Red-necked Spurfowl, Pale-crowned and Wing-snapping Cisticolas, **Cape Longclaw** and Short-tailed Pipit. The various wetlands may also produce Red-headed Quelea, Southern Red Bishop, calling Red-chested Flufftail and Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, the diminutive Orange-breasted Waxbill and possibly also the parasitic Cuckoo-finch. African Firefinch may occur in the thicket vegetation bordering the wetlands.



**Day 4: Hilton to Himeville.** We have an early departure this morning for the Karkloof, a range of forested hills near Howick that is home to a number of uncommon and local birds restricted to Afro-montane forests. We will be searching for southern African endemics such as **Forest Buzzard**, **Knysna Turaco**, the highly endangered **Cape Parrot**, elusive **Bush Blackcap**, **Barratt's Warbler**, Olive Bushshrike, **Swee Waxbill** and **Forest Canary**, as well as many more widespread yet no less desirable birds including Long-crested Eagle, African Olive Pigeon, Olive Woodpecker, African Emerald Cuckoo, Black-headed Oriole, the uncommon Orange Ground Thrush, Cape Batis, White-starred Robin, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Red-backed Mannikin, Red-collared Widowbird and Brimstone Canary.



Bush Blackcap by Andrew Sutherland

Further up the Karkloof range, we visit a pristine area of upland grassland where breeding Grey Crowned and **Blue Cranes** and, if we are lucky, Wattled Crane can sometimes be found. Black-winged Lapwing, Fan-tailed Grassbird and **Cape Longclaw** also occur here, but the star bird is undoubtedly the striking **Buff-streaked Chat**, an endemic wheatear that is striking both in appearance and song. Mammal possibilities include Mountain Reedbuck and the sleek Oribi antelope.



Buff-streaked Chat by Hugh Chittenden

Next we will head for the Richmond area where we will attempt to track down the stunning Blue Swallow, undoubtedly our most elegant and severely threatened swallow. The birds regularly breed here in the summer months and our chances of finding this rare species are very good.

Continuing on we will pass through the dramatic Umkomaas River valley before arriving at a wonderfully lush patch of Mistbelt forest in the late afternoon. Here we will listen for the high-pitched screech of the similarly rare **Cape Parrot** and attempt to locate flocks as they make their way into the forest to roost. Other species to keep a look-out for include Black Saw-wing and **Southern Double-collared Sunbird**, with further chances for

**Knysna Turaco**, Grey Cuckooshrike, White-starred Robin, **Swee Waxbill** and **Forest Canary**. We will then wind our way along a scenic country road to the small town of Himeville at the base of the majestic Drakensberg Mountains.





Cape Rock Thrush by Clayton Burne

**Day 5: 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 x 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**, African Yellow Warbler, **Cape Grassbird**, 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 scan the 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 and White Storks, **Southern Bald Ibis** and African Black Duck frequent areas 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 Warbler** and **Fairy Flycatcher** and **Karoo Prinia**, reach the eastern limits of their ranges here in the Lesotho highlands. We will keep a careful watch skywards as the magnificent Bearded and **Cape Vultures**, Verreaux’s Eagle, **Jackal Buzzard**, Lanner Falcon and White-necked Raven are regularly seen overhead, along with fast-flying flocks of African Black and Alpine Swifts. Other animals of particular interest atop the “Roof of Africa” are the approachable and endearing Sloggett’s Vlei Rat, the endemic Drakensberg Crag Lizard and the colourful Southern Rock Agama.



Jackal Buzzard by Hugh Chittenden

**Day 6: Himeville to Johannesburg and departure.** Today we depart early from the majestic Drakensberg for the long drive back to Johannesburg, where the tour will end at O.R. Tambo International Airport.



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**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**

The prices for the Highland Endemics Extension are as follows:

- 1 participant = **ZAR 49 500** per person
- 2 participants = **ZAR 30 000** per person
- 3 participants = **ZAR 24 500** per person
- 4 participants = **ZAR 22 500** per person
- 5 participants = **ZAR 21 000** per person
- 6 participants = **ZAR 21 000** per person

The single supplement cost for this tour is **ZAR 750**

**This includes:**

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to lunch on day 6;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- 4x4 excursion into Lesotho;
- Reserve entrance fees (where applicable);
- All activities as mentioned in the itinerary; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

**The tour fee does not include:**

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights;
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and items of a personal nature.

**Single Supplement:**

The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBT cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights 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.

**IMPORTANT NOTES:**

- a) The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold (ZAR), and the actual cost in any other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.
- c) 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 and / or the designated Rockjumper leader 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:**



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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 he has given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip him.

**Special Notes:**

- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover long distances in order 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 yourself and your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- Exiting the vehicle is prohibited in all areas and parks that contain dangerous animals other than at designated sites (These parks include Kruger, St. Lucia & Isimangaliso)
- 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 officially commence after the breakfast at Mopani Camp, Kruger National Park on day 1 of the tour. The tour will conclude by **mid to late afternoon on day 6** at O.R. Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. 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 (IATA: JNB) is the main port of entry for international flights into and out of South Africa and is well serviced by all of the world's major airlines. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

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