The provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga on South Africa’s eastern seaboard boast some of the country’s finest birding as well as exceptional mammal viewing. An impressive 750+ bird species occur within the region, reflecting the incredible natural diversity of the area; and this, coupled with a modern infrastructure well suited to the needs of the modern traveller, makes birding here an absolute delight. Moving from the classic African savanna of the world-renowned Kruger National Park and the excitement of the Kruger Park Bird & Wildlife Challenge, to the moist high-altitude grasslands and wetlands of the Mpumalanga escarpment, hosting numerous endemics, on to the teeming savannas of the Zululand game reserves, to the endemic-rich mist-belt forests of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands and the lofty peaks of the magnificent Drakensberg, this tour of eastern South Africa offers the very best of southern African birding and game viewing!
**THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…**

**THE ITINERARY**

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**TOUR ROUTE MAP…**
Day 1: Mopani Camp, Kruger National Park to Wakkerstroom.

We will spend the morning birding around our camp before bidding farewell to the splendours of Kruger. We then move inland to the highveld to the country village of Wakkerstroom for a two-night stay. This quaint village is surrounded by pristine upland grasslands rich in endemic birds, many of which are currently threatened by the ongoing destruction of their grassland habitat.

We will arrive in time to spend the afternoon 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, Little Bittern, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler, African Marsh Harrier, African Swamphen, South African Cliff Swallow, Levailant’s Cisticola, Lesser Swamp and African Yellow Warblers, and Cape Weaver are all regular and, with a bit of luck, we may find African Snipe and African Rail. Rarely recorded species seen here on our previous trips include the elusive Baillon’s Crane, Western Marsh Harrier and Red-chested Flufftail.

Day 2: Wakkerstroom area. Driving along the network of gravel roads radiating out from Wakkerstroom, we will explore the grasslands, rocky outcrops and gorges of this unique area in search of numerous specials and endemics such as Southern Bald Ibis, Blue Crane, Blue Korhaan and White-bellied Bustard (the latter is sometimes treated as a separate species - Barrow’s Korhaan), Ground Woodpecker, 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, Mountain Wheatear, Sentinel Rock Thrush, African Rock and Yellow-breasted Pipits, Pied Starling, Long-tailed and Fan-tailed Widowbirds, Yellow-crowned Bishop, Quailfinch and Cape Canary. Both Red-winged 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, whilst
smaller mammals occurring in the grasslands include Yellow Mongoose and the rare Cape Fox. One of the interesting denizens of these grasslands is the curious Suricate, or Meerkat, immortalised in Walt Disney’s ‘Lion King’. We have a good chance of finding family groups of these unusual mammals.

Wakkerstroom is justly famous as one of the best places in the world to see Amur Falcons 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 roughly 1000 Lesser Kestrels heading in to roost for the night.

Day 3: 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, we can expect an excellent diversity of bird and mammal species in our days here. While we will obviously take time to appreciate the overwhelming number of birds, we will concentrate particularly on finding the localised specials, including Eastern Nicator, Bearded Scrub Robin, Gorgeous Bushshrike, Lemon-breasted Canary and the stunning Pink-throated Twinspot. More widespread but none-the-less spectacular species we will look for are Black-bellied Bustard, with its strange, “cork-popping” display, the nomadic Senegal Lapwing, Broad-billed Roller, beautiful Narina Trogon, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Terrestrial Brownbul, stunning Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Red-capped Robin-Chat and Golden-breasted Bunting.

Day 4: Mkuze area. We will spend the whole day exploring the wonders of this area, searching the great diversity of habitats for its numerous species. One of the more exciting habitats for us here is sand forest, a rare and localized dry forest biome severely threatened by development. This habitat is
home to Neergaard’s Sunbird, Rudd’s Apalis, funky Crested Guineafowl and the strange African Broadbill.

The ephemeral wetlands in the area can be very productive after good rains; 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, among many other commoner species.

While in Mkuze we will be sure to enjoy some ‘bushveld’ birding – an excellent habitat for raptors and ‘flock’ birding. Here we will be ever-vigilant for the huge Crowned and Martial Eagles, Little Sparrowhawk, Striped Kingfisher, Grey Penduline Tit, Bushveld Pipit, White-fronted and Little Bee-eaters, Black Cuckooshrike, White-crested Helmetshrike, Grey-headed and Orange-breasted Bushshrikes, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Black-bellied Starling, Purple-banded and Marico Sunbirds and Green-winged Pytilia. If conditions permit, we will do a night walk or short drive this evening to look for owls, nightjars and small mammals. Thick-tailed Greater Galago and White-tailed Mongoose are often seen.

**Day 5: Mkuze to St Lucia.** After a final early morning’s birding in the Mkuze area, we will make our way back to the main coastal road and down to the village of St. Lucia, nestled on the shores of an estuary of the same name and part of South Africa’s first World Heritage Site and the largest estuarine system in Africa. *En route* we may pop in to False Bay Park to search for any species we may have missed in the Mkuze area. The verdant sand forest here affords us additional opportunities for Narina Trogon, Gorgeous Bushshrike, Neergaard’s Sunbird, Rudd’s Apalis and Pink-throated Twinspot, with other possibilities including Tambourine Dove, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, African Yellow White-eye and Grey Sunbird.

If time allows, upon arrival in St Lucia we will take a drive to the nearby river mouth where we can obtain great views of Hippopotamus and Nile Crocodile lazing on the exposed sandbanks. We may also encounter several species of tern and waders here such as Caspian and Greater Crested Terns, Common Ringed and White-fronted Plovers, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Water Thick-knee. The surrounding reedbeds often harbour reasonable numbers of nesting weavers that could include Southern Brown-throated, Eastern Golden, Lesser Masked and Thick-billed Weavers.
Day 6: St Lucia and Isimangaliso Wetland Park. This morning we will make our way into the dune forest on the edge of St. Lucia town – the dunes here are the world’s second highest vegetated dunes! This rich forest supports an exciting variety of endemics and specials, including the beautiful (but tricky) Livingstone’s Turaco, Green Malkoha, Woodward’s Batis, Brown Scrub Robin, Dark-backed Weaver, Green Twinspot, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Red-backed Mannikin and shy Lemon Dove. Blue Monkey, Natal Red Duiker, Banded Mongoose and Red Bush Squirrel are possible mammal species that we may encounter. Other more widespread birds to keep our eyes peeled for are Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, White-eared Barbet, Lesser Honeyguide and Collared and Olive Sunbirds.

We will also take some time to drive the road through the Eastern Shores section of Isimangaliso Wetland Park to Cape Vidal. The habitats we traverse include moist coastal grassland, wetlands and coastal forest, and this translates to a large number of potential new species! Some of the top birds we will search for in the grassland and forest mosaic include the scarce Southern Banded Snake Eagle, Crowned Eagle, African Cuckoo-Hawk, Collared Pratincole, Rufous-winged and Croaking Cisticolas and Yellow-throated Longclaw, while in the tall coastal forest at Cape Vidal itself we will look for Green Twinspot, Woodward’s Batis, Brown Scrub Robin, Livingstone’s Turaco and Grey Waxbill. The grasslands en route support populations of African Buffalo, White and Black Rhinoceroses, Southern Reedbuck, Warthog, Greater Kudu and Plains Zebra, while forested areas hold Natal Red Duiker and Blue Monkey. After our day exploring the park we will make our way back to St Lucia.
Day 7: St Lucia to Hilton via Dlinza Forest and Mtunzini. Today we will depart early for Dlinza Forest near Eshowe. This beautiful forest reserve supports an avifauna comprising both coastal and mistbelt bird species, and here we will search for African Goshawk, the rare Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Narina Trogon, Purple-crested Turaco, Crowned and noisy Trumpeter Hornbills, Square-tailed Drongo, Chorister Robin-Chat, Grey Cuckooshrike and the highly endangered Spotted Ground Thrush. We are likely to also be entertained by the diminutive and at times surprisingly confiding Blue Duiker, a tiny antelope species that feeds almost exclusively on fallen leaves. In addition, South Africa’s only forest canopy walkway is situated here and we will spend most of our morning birding from this superb viewpoint.

If time allows we will make a quick stop at the coastal town of Mtunzini where we hope to find Palm-nut Vulture and Black-throated Wattle-eye. Journeying south and then inland we will arrive in the small town of Hilton in the late afternoon.

Day 8: Hilton to Himeville. We commence our birding this morning in 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.
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.

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.

**Day 9: Day trip up Sani Pass, Lesotho.** 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 on the ascent are home to family groups of the bizarre Ground Woodpecker, Drakensberg Prinia, African Yellow Warbler, Cape Grassbird, Cape Rock Thrush and Yellow Bishop, whilst stands of protea bushes support the impressive Gurney’s Sugarbird (belonging to a family endemic to southern Africa) and dazzling Malachite and Greater Double-collared Sunbirds. As we approach the crest of the escarpment we will be scanning the rocky scree at the roadside for the stunning Drakensberg Rockjumper, African Rock Pipit, Sentinel Rock Thrush 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, African Black Duck and Southern Bald Ibis may be found alongside the mountain streams, whilst Grey-winged Francolin, Red-capped Lark, Sickle-winged Chat, African Rock and Mountain Pipits, Yellow Canary and Cape Bunting prefer adjacent meadows. A number of birds more typical of the Karoo, such as Grey Tit, Layard’s Warbler, Fairy Flycatcher, Large-billed Lark and Karoo Prinia reach the eastern limits of their range here in the Lesotho highlands. We will also keep a careful watch skywards as the endangered Cape Vulture, magnificent Bearded Vulture, 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 Sloggett’s Vlei Rat, endemic Drakensberg Crag Lizard and the colourful Southern Rock Agama.

Day 10: Himeville to Durban and departure. Today we depart early for Durban to connect with our departure flights.

GROUP SIZE:

This tour is limited to a maximum of 6 participants.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:
The prices for the Eastern South Africa Extension are as follows:

1 participant = ZAR 77 500 per person
2 participants = ZAR 48 500 per person
3 participants = ZAR 39 750 per person
4 participants = ZAR 37 500 per person
5 participants = ZAR 35 500 per person
6 participants = ZAR 35 500 per person

Single Supplement: ZAR 1 750

This includes:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 10;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees;
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** (see above);
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other 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:**
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 commence after breakfast at Mopani Camp in the Kruger National Park at the end of the Kruger Park Birds & Wildlife Challenge 2019. The tour will conclude by **12:00 noon** at King Shaka International Airport, Durban on day 10.
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.**