ROCKJUMPER
Worldwide Birding Adventures

Botswana

Birds & Big Game

2nd December to 16th December 2021 (15 days)



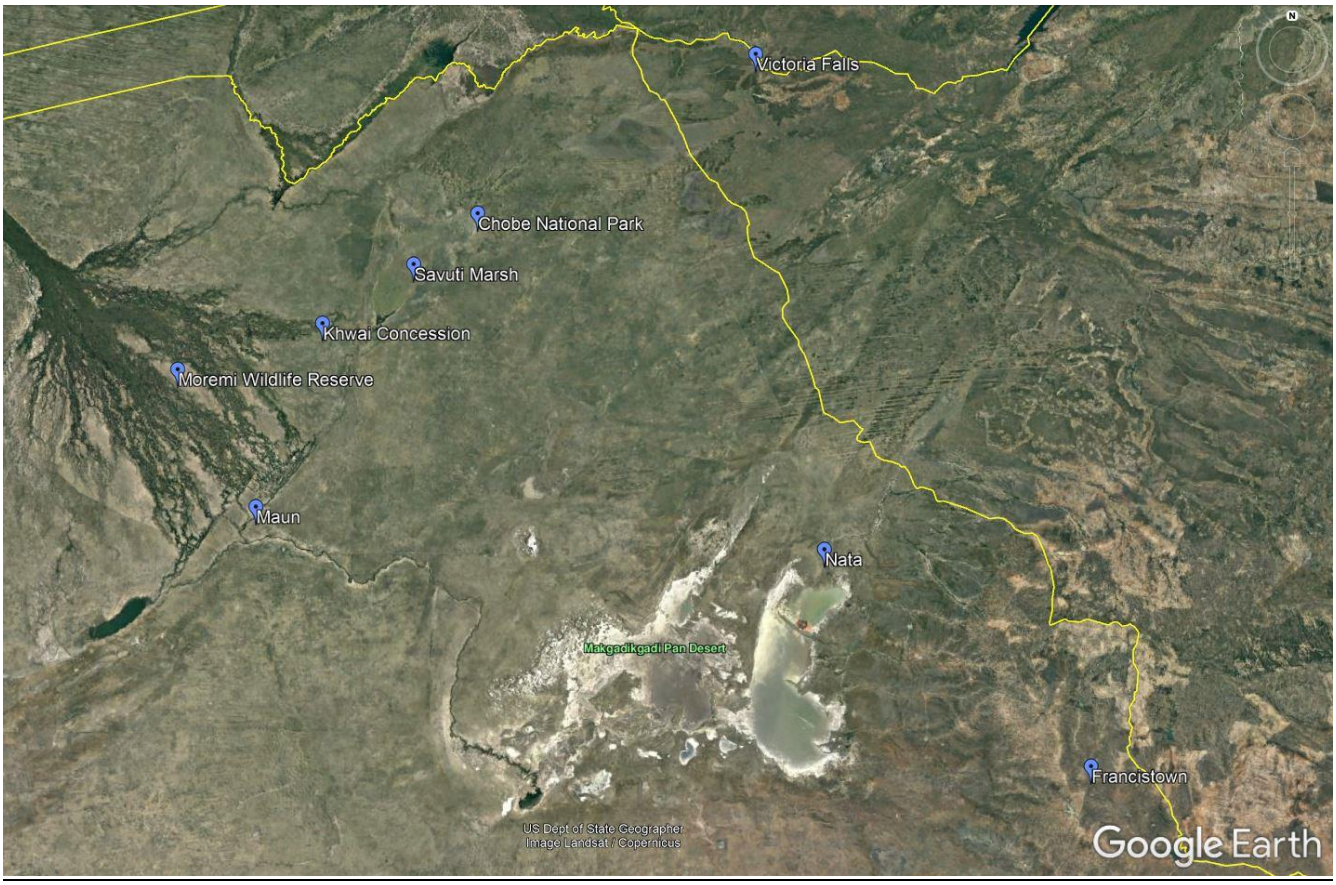
Wattled Cranes by Markus Lilje

This tour has been created as an exciting introduction to some of southern Africa's most famous wildlife destinations, delivering incredible contrasts from the lily-choked backwaters of the Okavango Panhandle to the desolate Makgadikgadi Salt Pans. The region's exceptional avifauna includes several range-restricted and highly sought-after species. Beginning in the dry eastern districts of Botswana, we search for the localised Boulder Chat and the scarce near-endemic Orange River Francolin. Travelling westwards, we head to Maun – gateway to the Okavango. Here we will search for the scarce Slaty Egret, Pel's Fishing Owl and White-backed Night Heron, whilst common denizens of these swamps include African Pygmy Goose, Brown Firefinch, African Skimmer, Western Banded Snake Eagle and Lesser Jacana. Our journey then leads us through several wilderness areas where quality time will be spent observing numerous large mammals such as African Elephant, Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Spotted Hyena, and African Wild Dog. Our trip will conclude at the magnificent Victoria Falls – rightly considered one of the seven Natural Wonders of the World – where the wide Zambezi River plummets over 300ft into the Batoka Gorge.

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrival in Francistown**
Day 2	**Francistown to Nata**
Day 3	**Nata to Maun**
Day 4	**Maun to Moremi Game Reserve**
Days 5 & 6	**Moremi Game Reserve**
Day 7	**Moremi Game Reserve to Khwai Concession**
Day 8	**Khwai Concession**
Day 9	**Khwai Concession to Savuti Marsh**
Day 10	**Savuti Marsh**
Day 11	**Savuti Marsh to Chobe National Park**
Days 12 & 13	**Chobe National Park**
Day 14	**Chobe National Park to Victoria Fall's**
Day 15	**Victoria Falls and final departure**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…

Day 1: Arrival in Francistown. Upon arrival at Francistown International Airport, you will be transferred to our comfortable guesthouse in the city where you will be met by your Rockjumper tour leader. Francistown is the second largest city in Botswana, and is often described as the 'Capital of the North.' To our advantage, some quality birding can be had within the confines of the city itself. After a short rest, we will wander the gardens of our guesthouse. Here we could expect to see the Crested Barbet, Tropical Boubou, Orange-breasted Bushshrike, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Magpie Shrike, and several delightful seedeaters.



Boulder Chat by Adam Riley

Francistown is surrounded by mixed woodland that offers access to some intriguing and highly range-restricted avian gems. Depending on your time of arrival, we may also have an opportunity to explore a few of these areas. Top prize here is the odd Boulder Chat. This species is fortunately quite common on the outskirts of town, always on rocky hillsides under the cover of broad-leaved woodland, where pairs are found running and ducking behind boulders. The beautiful Mocking Cliff Chat shares this same habitat, while Little Sparrowhawk, Grey-headed Bushshrike and Tropical Boubou are never particularly difficult to find in the surrounding vegetation. Overhead we may be lucky to observe the magnificent Verreaux's Eagle as it searches for Rock Hyrax.



Orange River Francolin by Rich Lindie

Day 2: Francistown to Nata. Today's adventures begin with an early start, as we embark on the 200km journey to the small town of Nata. The trip will be broken up by regular stops, including a special stakeout for the Boulder Chat should we have missed it yesterday.

Nata itself is situated on the very edge of the Sowa (Sua) Pan. Our efforts will be focussed on the delta area where Northern Black Korhaan, Kori Bustard, Secretarybird, Double-banded Courser, Eastern Clapper Lark,

and Desert Cisticola are common. Spectacular numbers of Red-billed Quelea also occur, followed of coarse by several raptor species including the Bateleur, Martial and Tawny Eagles, and Red-necked Falcon. Areas of dense black-cotton soil at the fringes of the pan additionally support the beautiful (yet tricky) Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, while Kalahari sands further away may yield Burchell's Sandgrouse. Depending on the water levels, we may also witness the breath-taking sight of hundreds of thousands of breeding flamingos near the Sowa mine. However, the top prize here is a covey of Orange River Francolin. Pairs of these beautiful birds are regularly heard calling in grasslands, though some effort and luck will be required to actually see them.



Southern Carmine Bee-eater by Adam Riley

The grounds of our lodge, situated very near the Sowa Pan, will not be ignored as the thornveld and mopane woodland here can be extremely rewarding. Red-billed Spurfowl, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Meyer's Parrot, Southern Pied Babbler and the beautiful Violet-eared and Black-faced Waxbills are camp residents, while the scarce Red-necked Falcon is usually perched quietly on one of the nearby palms.

Day 3: Nata to Maun. Our day once again begins with a drive, broken up by regular birding stops, as we traverse westwards towards the magical Okavango Delta. Bird watching en route is excellent, and we hope to see Martial and Black-chested Snake Eagles, Dickinson's Kestrel, Red-necked Falcon, Kori Bustard, Northern Black and Red-crested Korhaans, Secretarybird, and the remarkably coloured Lilac-breasted Roller.

Our accommodations for this evening will be on the outskirts of the town of Maun – considered the gateway to the Okavango Delta. *Hyphaene* palms around the lodge are home to both Red-necked Falcons and Dickinson's Kestrels, while Ayres' Hawk-Eagle and Bat Hawk are regularly sighted in riverine woodland. The latter is best searched for at dusk along the Thamalakane River. Other regular species include the Southern Carmine Bee-eater, Bradfield's Hornbill, African Mourning Dove, Terrestrial Brownbul, White-browned Robin-Chat, Hartlaub's and Arrow-marked Babblers, Swamp Boubou, and the dazzling African Green Pigeon (of the



Yellow-throated Sandgrouse by Markus Lilje

beautiful *damarensis* race). At night, we will be serenaded to sleep by the monotonous calls of the African Scops-Owl, and African Barred and Pearl-spotted Owlets.



Mokoro trip by Andre Bernon

Day 4: Maun to Moremi Game Reserve. Today begins with a brief visit to a few other key sites on the outskirts of Maun. Flooded grasslands near the town's waste disposal site will be our primary stomping ground, where we hope to see Rufous-bellied Heron, Long-toed Lapwing, Coppery-tailed Coucal, Slaty Egret, and Greater Painted-snipe. Stretches of more open water here host aggregations of Southern Pochard, Hottentot and Red-billed Teals, and Knob-billed Duck.

Around mid-morning, we will start making our way towards the Moremi Game Reserve. Considered one of the most famous wilderness areas on the African continent, this visit will surely be one of the major highlights of our tour! Our tented camp is nestled on the edge of the Okavango panhandle, offering access to all of the key south-central African swamp bird species. Riparian and mopane woodlands nearby also support several interesting target species.

Day 5 & 6: Moremi Game Reserve. Our first morning begins with a trip through the lily choked channels of the Okavango. Here will should locate African Pygmy Goose and White-backed Duck, and the diminutive Lesser Jacana. The reedbeds will additionally offer Chirping and Luapula Cisticolas, Greater Swamp Warbler and the huge Coppery-tailed Coucal. Conspicuous species of flooded grasslands include the Woolly-necked, Marabou, Yellow-billed and Saddle-billed Storks, African Openbill, Squacco and Rufous-bellied Herons, Wattled Crane and the rare Slaty Egret. The latter species is often found alongside the similar Black Heron, with which it can sometimes be confused, offering side-by-side comparisons. African Fish Eagle are almost always nearby, while tall trees on the wetland edges will be scanned for the uncommon Western Banded Snake Eagle. Top prize will certainly go to the giant Pel's Fishing Owl, one of Africa's heaviest owl species, and



Slaty Egret by Murray Cooper

the peculiar White-backed Night Heron. Luckily, roost sites for both of these difficult species are usually known!



Cheetah by Markus Lilje

The rest of our time will be spent exploring the magnificent wooded areas here. We begin in the riparian woodland around the camp, where birds are usually tame and conspicuous. Typical species include the African Green Pigeon (of the beautiful *damarensis* sub-species), African Mourning Dove, Swamp Boubou, Ashy Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, White-browed Robin-Chat, and Southern Brown-throated Weavers. Careful scanning may also yield the diminutive Brown Firefinch, among flocks of the more common Jameson's and Red-billed Firefinches. Nearby mopane woodland supports Arnot's Chat, Racket-tailed Roller, Meves's Starling, White Helmetshrike and the occasional Red-headed Weaver, while Ilala palm savanna could also yield Red-necked Falcon, Dickinson's Kestrel, Meyer's Parrot, Grey-rumped Swallow, and the odd Black-bellied Bustard with its long snake-like neck. Raptors abound, and we hope to locate Hooded, White -faced, White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures, Bateleur, Martial and Tawny Eagles, African and Ayres' Hawk-Eagles, Brown Snake Eagle and Dark-chanting Goshawk. Finally, we will explore areas of dry floodplain in the hopes of finding the huge Southern Ground Hornbill, and the Swamp Nightjar.

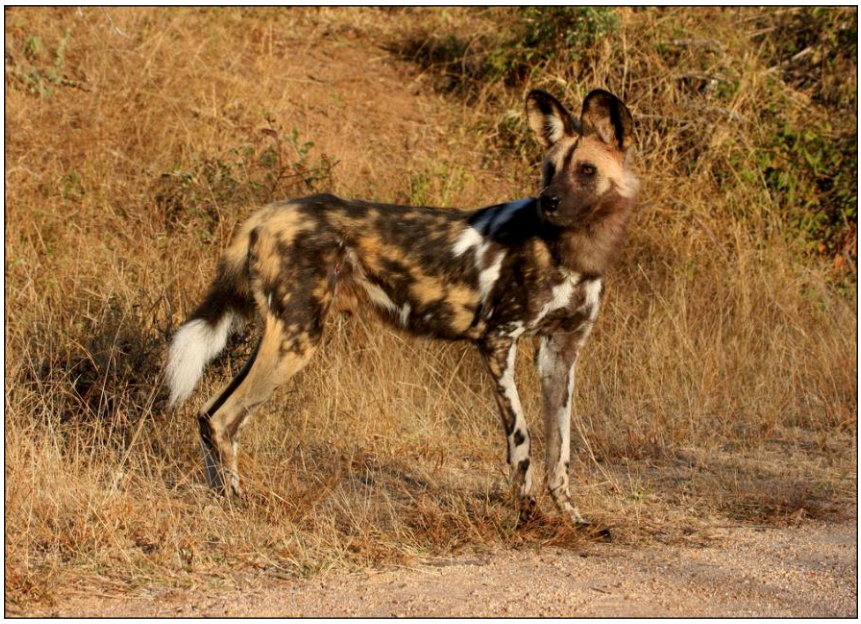


Pel's Fishing Owl by Jonathan Rossouw

As if this wasn't enough to keep us busy, Moremi also hosts impressive game concentrations. African Elephant and Red Lechwe abound, while African Buffalo, Impala and Giraffe are easily found in the open savanna. Nearer the swamps, we will see Hippopotamus, Nile Crocodile, and possibly the shy Sitatunga.

Day 7: Moremi Game Reserve to Khwai Concession. We depart Moremi Game Reserve this morning and set off on an exciting full day's extended safari, including a lunch break at a picturesque site of our choosing, as we slowly meander towards our beautiful tented camp in the famous Khwai Concession. En route we will certainly encounter some of Africa's most iconic game as well as a plethora of interesting bird species. We expect to arrive at camp in the late afternoon where, following a delicious meal under a star-lit sky, we will retire for the evening in a chorus of African night sounds.

Day 8: Khwai Concession. The largely un-fenced Khwai Concession, a community-run eco-tourism initiative, is situated in the extreme north east of the Okavango Delta. It boasts one of the region's most exceptional game concentrations, in that it's the first port of call as a drinking site for animals migrating southwards from the Linyati Reserve. We will focus our efforts on the ephemeral Khwai River area which, at this time of year, should be teeming with water-dependant species including the rare Roan and Sable Antelopes, African Elephant, African Buffalo, Plain's Zebra, Red Lechwe and Giraffe. The concession also supports as many as twenty individual Leopards and at least three resident packs of Wild Dog, along with several other commoner predators including Lion.



African Wild Dog by Leon Fouche

Not forgetting the birds, we will put in a concerted effort to finding several mopane and savanna specialists that occur here. Among these are the difficult Arnot's Chat, comical Southern Red-billed and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, Racket-tailed Roller, iridescent Meves's Starling, and the highly social White Helmetshrike. Red-necked Falcon and Dickinson's Kestrel that frequent the open palm savannah. Stately Saddle-billed Storks are easily seen along the clear Khwai River, along with a plethora of other waterbirds.



Lion by Rich Lindie

One evening, we will embark on a night excursion through the game area. Here we may encounter as many as 9 owl species, including Western Barn, Marsh, Southern White-faced, African Scops and African Wood Owls, Spotted and Verreaux's Eagle-Owls as well as African Barred and Pearl-spotted Owlets. Other nocturnal denizens could include Three-banded and Bronze-winged Coursers, and Square-tailed, Fiery-necked, Swamp, Rufous-cheeked and Pennant-winged Nightjars.

Day 9: Khwai Concession to Savuti Marsh. Today we leave the Khwai Concession and embark on yet another extended safari, including a field lunch. Our destination, where we will spend the next two nights, is a tented camp at the edge of the Savuti Marsh. Savuti Marsh is now a dry, sand-filled basin within the Madabe Depression. It boasts a classic 'drowned' landscape, with dead trees scattered across a vast grassy plain. Several remnant pans still exist, some of which are maintained by pumps. As such, game and bird viewing here offer exciting opportunities!



Verreaux's Eagle-Owl by Adam Riley

Day 10: Savuti Marsh. Our exploration of the Savuti Marsh begins in the vast open grasslands that dominate the area. New bird species here could include Temminck's Courser, Small Buttonquail, Rosy-throated Longlcaw, and the beautiful Chestnut-backed and Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks. The gigantic Kori Bustard, the world's heaviest flying bird, is rather common here. This species is often seen alongside Southern Carmine Bee-eaters; the Bee-eaters having the lazy habit of riding the backs of the bustards, hawking any insects that are flushed as they go along. Should we have missed the difficult Yellow-throated Sandgrouse at Sowa Pan, we have another opportunity to find it here. Flocks of these peculiar birds are regularly seen drinking at the pans, where Collared and Black-winged Pratincoles and White-fronted Plover are also regular.

Savuti is considered one of Africa's best-known big game areas, boasting one of the greatest concentrations of animals anywhere on the African continent. It is particularly famous for its predators, being one of the last remaining strongholds for African Wild Dog. We will spend time locating both of these species, as well as a famous pride of lions that consists of an impressive 30+ individuals.



Kori Bustard by Adam Riley

Days 11: Savuti Marsh to Chobe National Park. Today, we leave Savuti early and head even further north towards the Chobe River. Most of the day is spent traveling through the ever-changing Botswanan landscape; from stunted mopane scrub of the Goha clay basin, across the sand-ridge, through Zambezi teak woodlands, and finally to the banks of the Chobe River. This drive will take the better part of the day, though we will make regular stops for any animal or bird species that we may encounter.

Day 12 & 13: Chobe National Park. Chobe is perhaps most famous for its African Elephant populations, with the reserve supporting the world's largest protected population of these majestic animals, amounting to over 120 000 individuals! However, some 74 other mammal species also occur including African Buffalo, Plain's Zebra, Impala, Giraffe, Topi, Roan and Sable Antelope, Waterbuck, Puku and Red Lechwe. Game viewing in Chobe is hard to compete with, and by the end of our 2-day stay, we should have spent ample time with most of these species. We have good chances of finding Lion, Leopard, African Wild Dog and Bat-eared Fox should we have missed any to date.



African Skimmer by Markus Lilje

Linked to the sheer variability in the Chobe landscape, from vast floodplains to tall mixed woodlands, it is no surprise that an impressive 450 bird species are probable during our stay here. As many as 300 bird species have been recorded on a single day in the park!

Our efforts begin with a cruise along the Chobe River, where we will almost certainly encounter Southern Carmine Bee-eater, White-crowned and Long-toed Lapwings, African Fish Eagle, Collared Pratincole, African Skimmer, African Finfoot and the tricky Half-collared Kingfisher. Careful scanning of the river edges will likely also deliver Slaty Egret, Wattled Crane, Rufous-bellied Heron, Allen's Gallinule, and Coppery-tailed Coucal. Should we have missed any of these species previously, Chirping and Luapula Cisticolas and Greater Swamp Warbler are all common in herbage here. Nearer the rapids, we will observe the delightful Rock Pratincole at close quarters offering sublime opportunities for any of our photographers!



Roan & Red-billed Oxpeckers by Clayton Burne

Birds of the vast floodplain could include Slaty Egret, Wattled Crane, and Rosy-throated Longclaw nearer the river, whilst Fawn-coloured Lark, Temminck's Courser and Burchell's Starling are to be found in dryer areas.

Finally, we will explore the riverside thickets. Here where we hope to find White-browed Coucal, Southern Brown-throated Weaver, African Mourning Dove, Collared Palm-Thrush, White-browed Robin-Chat, Bearded Scrub Robin, Copper Sunbird, and the difficult Brown

Firefinch. Other wooded habitats in the park could deliver the tricky Racket-tailed Roller, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Orange-winged Pytilia, Miombo Rock Thrush, Tinkling Cisticola and Green-backed Honeybird. The latter is notoriously difficult and exists here in a tiny isolated population.



Rock Pratincole by Markus Lilje

Day 14: Chobe National Park to Livingstone. This morning we depart Chobe National Park before crossing the border into Zimbabwe and enjoying the Zambezi National Park. Our drive through these mega parks is liable to turn up an array of exciting mammals including Giraffe, Plains Zebra, Impala, Greater Kudu, Hippopotamus, herds of muscular African Buffalo and the iconic African Elephant. On the birding front, we shall keep an eye open for Racket-tailed Roller, Bradfield's Hornbill, Southern Pied Babbler and both Long-tailed and Broad-tailed Paradise Whydahs, whilst a number of raptors may also be seen including Tawny and Wahlberg's Eagles, African Harrier-Hawk, Amur Falcon, Eurasian Hobby and even the elusive Dickinson's Kestrel and African Cuckoo-Hawk.

After settling into our well-appointed lodge, we head over to visit the world-famous Victoria Falls. These falls have rightly been considered one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World and we will spend some time appreciating the immense spectacle of the Zambezi River plunging 300ft into the gorge below. The spray from the falls has created a verdant rainforest and we will undoubtedly find some interesting birds here that may include Trumpeter and Crowned Hornbills, Bearded Scrub Robin, Yellow-breasted Apalis, various sunbirds including Amethyst and Collared, Purple-banded, Black-backed Puffback, Tropical Boubou and Red-winged Starling.



Victoria Falls by Glen Valentine

Day 15: Final departure After some early morning birding and a scrumptious breakfast, we will begin our drive back to Victoria Falls. The tour will conclude at Victoria Fall's International Airport.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

The tour price includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 of the tour to breakfast on day 15;
- Drinking water throughout the tour;
- All lodgings as per the itinerary;
- Ground transportation;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services; and
- Tips for local guides and services.

The tour price excludes:

- Any airfares, taxes and visa costs;
- Alcoholic beverages;
- 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 RBL 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) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the 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.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration 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 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, porters and restaurants) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Much of our time is spent in specially converted Toyota Landcruiser vehicles. The vehicle is fairly spacious with large windows which allows for great bird and mammal viewing.

- Accommodating during much of the tour is in mobile safari camps (tented accommodation). There is no air-conditioning, running water or electricity.
- Showers are taken using a large metal bucket with a shower head hoisted into position. There are no bath facilities.
- Devices can be recharged in the safari vehicles only.
- It is highly recommended that you bring a good quality head lamp and torch.
- There is limited to no mobile phone reception for the majority of the tour.
- During the tour, we visit several national parks and game reserves which contain potentially dangerous animals and therefore you are confined to the vehicle and are, quite understandably, not allowed to exit except at designated viewing and picnic sites.
- Temperature and humidity in Botswana can be very high at this time of year (>33°C / 92°F) during the day, becoming cooler in the evening (20°C / 68°F). If you suffer easily from heat exposure, please do contact the RBL office for more information.
- The areas that we are visiting on this tour are designated malaria areas. We suggest you speak to your healthcare provider and take the action they recommend as there are various considerations about what prophylactics to take, if at all.
- For the comfort of your fellow travellers and yourself, please do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 7kg (+-15lb) for hand luggage.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS

This tour **does not** include any international airfares. Day 1 is essentially an arrival day in Francistown, Botswana. However, to spend the afternoon birding around Francistown, please do arrive before **13:00**. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 15 at Harry Mwanga Nkumbula International Airport, Livingstone, Zambia.

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

Francistown International Airport, Francistown (IATA: FRW) is the main point of entry for this tour, while Victoria Falls Airport (IATA: VFA) is the main point of departure. Reliable airlines with the most direct routing for these airports typically operate via the hub of Johannesburg, South Africa. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**