South Africa

Southern Endemics (Relaxed)

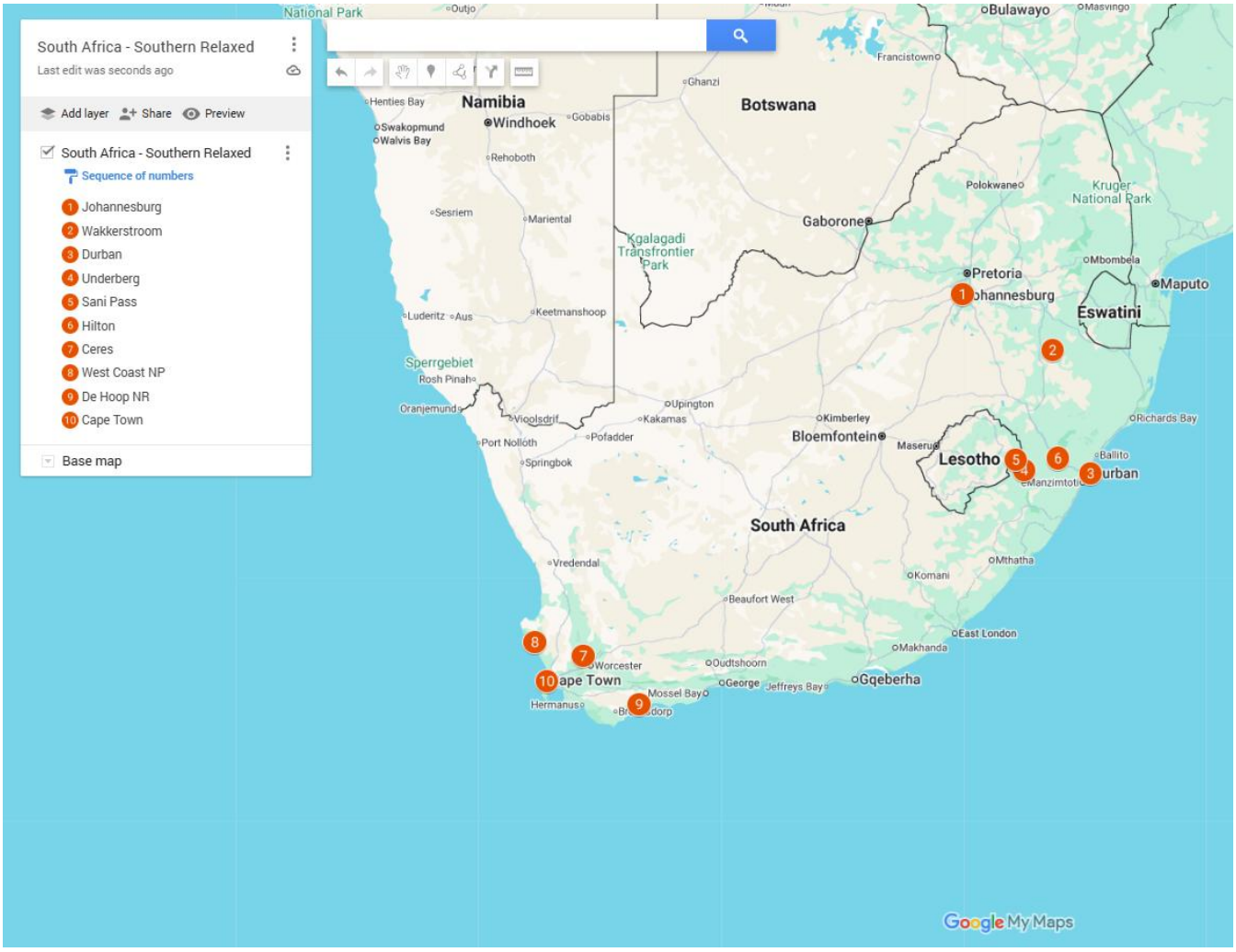


Ground Woodpecker by Clayton Burne

Another of our new Relaxed tours takes us to the key endemic birding sites of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and the Western Cape. 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. Our tour winds its way from the high-altitude grasslands around Wakkerstroom, endemic-rich mist-belt forests of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, lofty peaks of the magnificent Drakensberg, and the remarkably beautiful south-western Cape.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Johannesburg**
Day 2	**Johannesburg to Wakkerstroom**
Days 3 & 4	**Wakkerstroom**
Day 5	**Wakkerstroom to Underberg**
Day 6	**Sani Pass & Lesotho**
Day 7	**Underberg to Hilton via Bulwer**
Day 8	**Midlands Meander**
Day 9	**Hilton to Durban, flight to Cape Town**
Days 10 & 11	**Cape Peninsula**
Day 12	**Cape Town to Ceres**
Day 13	**Tanqua Karoo**
Day 14	**Ceres to De Hoop**
Day 15	**De Hoop**
Day 16	**De Hoop to Cape Town**
Day 17	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail

This itinerary covers different seasons. Please note the below notations:

- *** Summer migrants occurring between late October and early April.**
- **^ Species that undergo distinct plumage changes, best viewed between November and March.**



Blue Cranes by Greg de Klerk

Wakkerstroom. The grasslands and hills surrounding the small town of Wakkerstroom 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 and a highly productive marsh at the edge of town.

The marsh is a haven for waterbirds and offers the chance of several 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 our previous trips include the secretive Baillon's Crake, Red-chested Flufftail and even Western Marsh* and Montagu's* Harriers.

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 Korhaan, White-bellied Bustard, Jackal Buzzard, 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 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.



Southern Bald Ibis by Adam Riley

Wakkerstroom is justly famous as one of the best places in the world to see Amur Falcon (November to March only) on their wintering grounds. Having safely navigated their way from eastern Russia and northern China, most of the world's population ends up in south-



Cape Parrot by Glen Valentine

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 1 000 Lesser Kestrels* heading in to roost for the night.

Sani Pass & Lesotho. We'll spend the day travelling into the tiny mountain kingdom of Lesotho in search of a handful of highly localised, highland endemics. 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. Several 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.



Drakensberg Rockjumper by Adam Riley

Bulwer area. The Bulwer area has some large, remnant patches of Mistbelt forest. Here we will listen for the high-pitched screech of the rare Cape Parrot and attempt to locate flocks as they make their way into



Cape Bulbul by Clayton Burne

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.

Richmond area. The Richmond area has tracts of undisturbed montane grassland, a very rare habitat type nowadays due to the proliferation of exotic tree plantations. Here we will attempt to track down the stunning Blue Swallow*, severely threatened due to habitat loss and undoubtedly our most elegant swallow. The birds regularly breed here in the summer months and our chances of finding this rare species are very good.

Karkloof. The Karkloof is a range of forested hills near Howick that is home to several 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.

Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. Arguably the most beautiful set of gardens on the continent. This is an excellent site for Cape Spurfowl, Forest Canary, Cape Bulbul, Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, Cape Batis, Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted and Southern Double-collared Sunbirds 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.



Buff-streaked Chat by Adam Riley

Hottentots-Holland Mountains. The area of attractive Cape Fold mountains is a key area to search for one of South Africa's finest endemics, the handsome Cape Rockjumper. Though strikingly plumaged and conspicuous by their



Orange-breasted Sunbird by Adam Riley

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 Hottentot Buttonquail underfoot or stumble upon a Cape Eagle-Owl at its daytime roost.

Betty's Bay. We will visit the famous African Penguin colony at Stony Point. Here we will enjoy the spectacle of hundreds of penguins waddling about on the beach and rocks at extremely close range, which makes for superb photographic opportunities. We will also keep a lookout for the endemic African Oystercatcher along the adjacent rocky shoreline, and scan through the masses of nesting cormorants for all four species of South African coastal cormorants: Crowned, Bank, Cape and White-breasted.

Harold Porter Botanical Gardens. A smaller version of Kirstenbosch, these beautifully appointed gardens support a wealth of fynbos specialties like Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape Sugarbird and Cape Siskin and is a particularly good site to see the skulking, endemic Victorin's Warbler. We are also likely to encounter a range of other noteworthy and eye-catching species like Cape and Brimstone Canaries, Karoo Prinia, Swee Waxbill, Cape Batis, Bar-throated Apalis, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Cape Robin-Chat, African Dusky and Fiscal Flycatchers, Olive Thrush and Sombre Greenbul.

Strandfontein Water Works. The network of settling ponds here usually supports large numbers of waterbirds of many different varieties and we are likely to encounter good numbers of Cape Shoveler, Cape Teal, Southern Pochard and Red-knobbed Coot, as well as Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Common Moorhen, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Black-necked and Great Crested Grebes, Hartlaub's and Kelp Gulls, Greater Crested Tern, Grey and Black-headed Herons, Yellow-billed Duck and Red-billed Teal. If we are fortunate and depending upon the water levels of the pans, we may also find small numbers of Maccoa Duck, Blue-billed Teal and South African Shelduck. The surrounding reedbeds harbour Lesser Swamp Warbler as well as Levaillant's Cisticola.



Cape Rockjumper by Clayton Burne



Cape Sugarbird by Greg de Klerk

Cape of Good Hope National Park. 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, Bokmakierie 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) Blesbok antelope. In addition, we should see Common Eland and Chacma Baboon.

West Coast National Park. West Coast National Park which is host to the globally important wetland sites of the Berg River estuary and Langebaan Lagoon. Our quest will be dedicated mainly to locating larks. We will stop along the way to search for Cape Clapper Lark, a localised species that favours coastal vegetation called 'strandveld', which is stunted by the salty air from the icy Atlantic.

Large numbers of waders spend the northern winter here and we will scan 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.

Tanqua Karoo. Just a short drive from the village of Ceres is the semi-arid, central plateau of South Africa known as the Karoo, a land of endless vistas and spectacular sunsets, renowned for its endemic larks, chats and canaries. Our first stop is likely to be at Karoopoort, a narrow canyon that forms the gateway to the Succulent Karoo. Birds inhabiting the arid, rocky slopes and acacia-filled watercourses of this area include White-backed Mousebird, Acacia Pied Barbet, Mountain Wheatear, Layard's and Chestnut-vented Warblers, the dainty Fairy Flycatcher and Pririt Batis, whilst the adjacent reedbeds are home to the endemic Namaqua Warbler. One of the area's most charismatic birds is the highly localised Cinnamon-breasted Warbler. Though fairly vocal, this species is highly



Protea Canary by Clayton Burne



Victorin's Warbler by Daniel Danckwerts

elusive and seeing it in its habitat of jumbled boulders and rocky scree will require a combination of patience and perseverance.

Continuing northwards onto the open flats of the Karoo, we will watch the roadsides carefully for Karoo and Spike-heeled Larks, Tractrac, Sickle-winged and Karoo Chats, the elusive Karoo Eremomela, Rufous-eared Warbler and Yellow and White-throated Canaries. Pale Chanting Goshawk and Rock Kestrel perch conspicuously on any vantage points and, if we are lucky, we may find Booted Eagle or Lanner Falcon. We will also stop to listen for the distinctive flight calls of Namaqua Sandgrouse as well as look for the cryptically coloured Karoo Korhaan. If very fortunate, we may even see the nomadic Ludwig's Bustard striding through the desolate plains.

Ceres area. The surrounding protea-clad mountain slopes support the endemic, range-restricted Protea Canary. We'll spend some time at key positions listening for its distinctive call. The moist gullies here also hold a few other endemics such as the skulking Victorin's Warbler, Cape Grassbird, Cape Sugarbird and Bokmakierie.

Overberg. Our drive through 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 several stunning birds, none more so than South Africa's national bird, the Blue Crane, which is occasionally seen here in very large flocks. Other exciting and noteworthy species we will keep an eye out for along the way include Agulhas Long-billed Lark, Southern Black Korhaan and Denham's Bustard.

De Hoop Nature Reserve. The approach to the De Hoop Nature Reserve through a series of fallow wheat fields is the ideal place to search for Cape Clapper Lark and Southern Tchagra. The endemic Cape sub-species of Mountain Zebra are 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 Honeyguides and Brown-backed Honeybird, as well as a chance for Hottentot Buttonquail.

South Africa's endemic Rudd's and Botha's Larks have undergone dramatic population declines (>90%) in the past 10 years. To limit human disturbance of the remaining population, we will not drive or walk off roads in areas that either species is known to occur, nor use playback or flush lines. Our chances of seeing either species is very low, but should we happen to spot either from a safe distance, we will not use laser pointers or spend significant time in the area. Our decision making on the ground will be led by our local guides who are part of the research and conservation efforts to save the species.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Undemanding, perfectly suited for all birding / wildlife interest levels & most mobility capabilities. Drive times can be tiring.
Birding Ease		Undemanding, most species provide good visuals. A small number of scare / tricky species.
Accommodation		Good to comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Walking and hiking quite limited. Mostly over flattish ground, some areas are uneven with rock/stone. Lodge gardens.
Vehicles / Roads		Comfortable vehicle. Closed minibus/mid-bus style. Some long drives. 4x4 vehicles to get up Sani Pass
Photography		Good to very good.
Annoyances		Hot & exposed in some areas

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 17;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- 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 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.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is 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. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Our Relaxed series of tours are designed to focus on having an enjoyable holiday with a bird and wildlife focus. Where possible; we have reduced or removed long drives, single night stays and poor/rustic accommodation. We have also sought to reduce or remove difficult hikes, narrow/muddy trails, and otherwise oppressive environmental conditions. Early starts and night birding are mostly optional, and we will not spend much time searching for difficult and/or skulking species.
- This tour is not suitable for hardcore birders and listers, or dedicated photographers.
- Exiting the vehicle is prohibited in all areas and parks that contain dangerous animals.
- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we must 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.
- Winter and Autumn in southern Africa provide variable weather conditions. In the east, clear sunny skies are the norm, with mornings and evenings getting cold – especially on open game drive vehicles.
- 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

The tour begins in Johannesburg with an introductory dinner in the evening of day 1. The tour concludes on the morning of day 17 in Cape Town.

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.

O.R. Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg (IATA: JNB.) and Cape Town International Airport, Cape Town (IATA: CPT) are the main international points of entry and exit for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.