South Africa

Western

Bird Photo Tour



Orange-breasted Sunbird by Julian Parsons

Southern Africa's dry west is a unique and fascinating, yet under-visited land and offers exceptional opportunities for bird, mammal, and scenic photography. A hotbed of faunal and floral diversity, this area harbours two botanical regions found nowhere else on earth: the Cape Floristic Region and the Succulent Karoo. Our Western South Africa Bird Photo Tour showcases these areas and the range of special bird's endemic to them; you can expect not only great birds, but some of the most dramatic scenery in Africa! Tour highlights include the stunning fynbos-clad slopes of the Western Cape, home to the stunning Cape Rockjumper and numerous other endemics; and the arid and semi-arid areas of the Karoo, which provide another great backdrop for a variety of bustards, larks and other endemics before we head back to Cape Town, taking in an impressive Cape Gannet colony and the West Coast National Park on the way.

Itinerary & Map



Day 1	**Arrival in Cape Town**
Day 2	**Cape Town to Ceres**
Day 3	**Ceres to Calvinia**
Day 4	**Calvinia & Brandvlei**
Day 5	**Calvinia to Springbok**
Day 6	**Port Nolloth**
Day 7	**Springbok to Lambert's Bay**
Day 8	**Lambert's Bay to Langebaan**
Day 9	**Langebaan to Cape Town via West Coast National Park**
Day 10	**Hottentots-Holland Mountains & Betty's Bay**
Day 11	**Cape Peninsula**
Day 12	**Cape Pelagic**
Day 13	**Final departure**

Highlights

- ***The pelagic trip into Cape Town's Atlantic Ocean offers up some of the very best sea birding on the planet. The spectacle is something to behold and photo opportunities are extremely good***
- ***Visit one of only two land-based African Penguin colonies and enjoy exceptional viewing and photo opportunities of these special and highly endangered birds***
- ***Exploring and photographing the unique Fynbos and Karoo ecosystems***
- ***Visiting the spectacular Cape Gannet breeding colony at Lambert's Bay***
- ***Opportunities to see and photograph some of South Africa's most range-restricted and special endemic and near-endemic species including Southern Black Korhaan, Ludwig's Bustard, Red and Sclater's Larks, Karoo Eremomela, Cinnamon-breasted and Victorin's Warblers, Orange-breasted Sunbird, and Black Harrier***
- ***Excellent chances of seeing the two endemic bird families to Southern Africa – Rockjumpers & Sugarbirds***

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.

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.



Cape Scenery by Julian Parsons

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 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.



Malachite Sunbird by Clayton Burne

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.

Cape 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. Birding is excellent year-round, and we hope to see Indian Yellow-nosed, Atlantic Yellow-nosed, Shy and Black-browed Albatrosses, Southern and Northern Giant Petrels, Cape and White-chinned Petrels, Sooty Shearwater, Wilson's Storm Petrel, Antarctic Prion, Brown Skua and Cape Gannet. 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 wake of the vessel to feed on the fish offal. Once the excitement has subsided, we will carefully search through the thousands of birds present for rarities such as Wandering, Northern and Southern Royal Albatrosses and Spectacled Petrel. Cetaceans are almost always encountered, and we have a good chance of seeing Bryde's and Southern Right Whales.



Indian Yellow-nosed Albatross by Adam Riley

Please note: *it is not unusual for the pelagic tour to be cancelled as a result of bad weather. Furthermore, the weather and ocean conditions off the Cape are extremely unpredictable, so our daily schedule will thus remain flexible to optimise our birding on both land and at sea.*

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.

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.

Paarl Mountain. The site can be a decent backup for the tricky Protea Canary while quality species such as Swee Waxbill, Fiscal Flycatcher, Cape Sugarbird, Malachite and Orange-breasted Sunbirds, Cape Batis, Yellow Bishop and Streaky-headed Seedeater can all regularly be found.



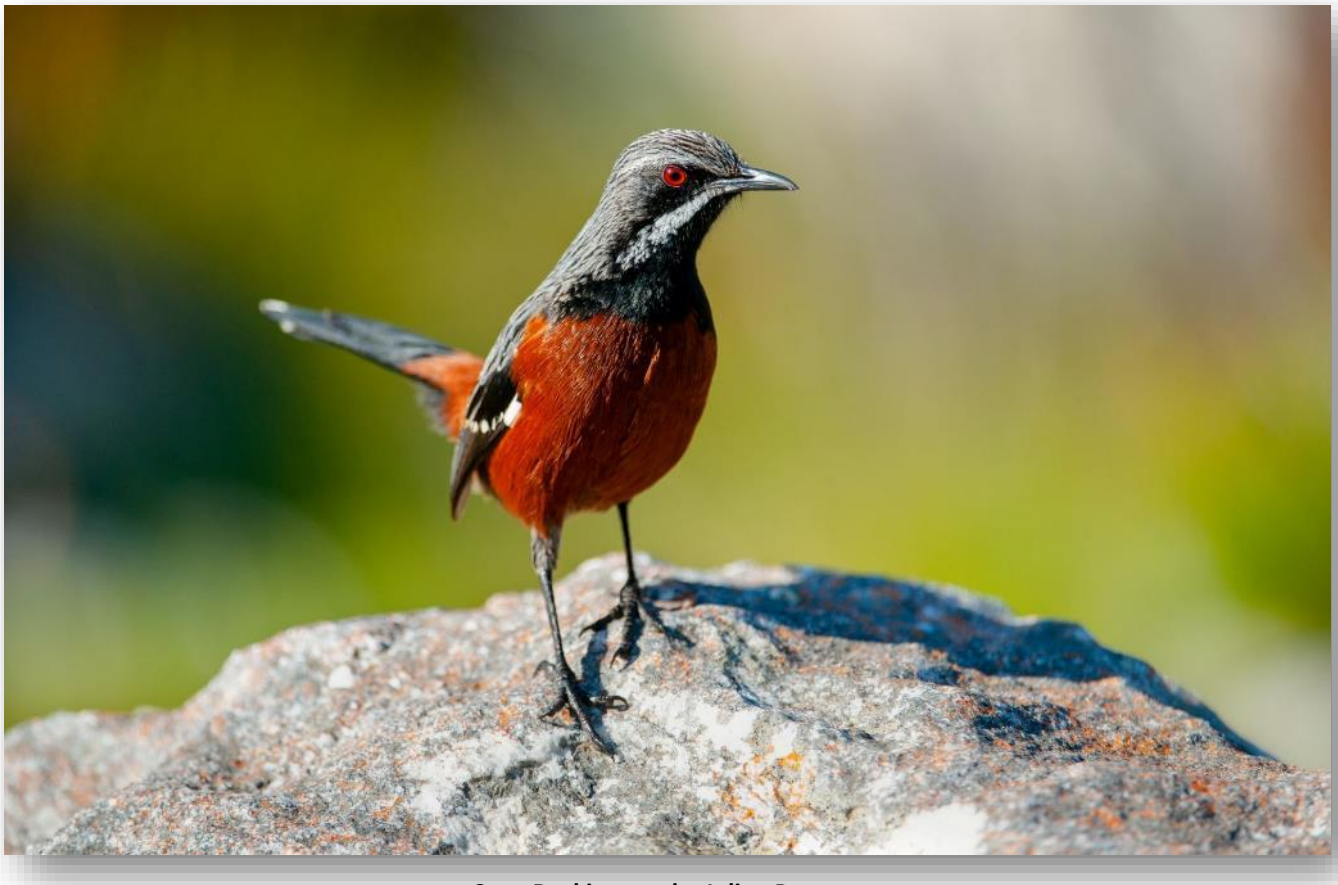
African Penguin by Adam Riley

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.

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 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.



Cape Rockjumper by Julian Parsons

Calvinia area. Here we will be in the Karoo proper. The usually dry river system that passes through the town, as well as the reedbeds here, are home to the endemic Namaqua Warbler (recently assigned to a monotypic genus, *Phragmacia*).

Brandvlei. We'll be searching for scarce inhabitants of this unique botanical region. Three species of lark will be at the top of our hit list, 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 other star birds here include many other nomadics such as Burchell's Courser, while Rufous-eared Warbler, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Grey Tit, White-backed Mousebird, Pale-winged Starling, 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 keep our eyes peeled for the cryptically coloured Karoo Korhaan. Some wonderful non-endemic species bound to capture our attention include the magnificent Martial Eagle, Lanner Falcon, Kori's Bustard and Double-banded Courser. Today is also

our first chance at finding Dusky Sunbird and we will make a concerted effort to locate a party of elusive Karoo Eremomelas.



Cape Gannet by Daniel Danckwerts

Goegap Nature Reserve. The rocky slopes and acacia lined watercourses, provide great opportunities for finding many of the difficult Karoo endemics that we should be getting to grips with by now. These include the vocal the highly localised Cinnamon-breasted Warbler, Layard's and Chestnut-vented Warblers and Black-headed Canary.

Port Nolloth. The diamond-mining town of Port Nolloth is 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, namely Barlow's Lark. Another species that occurs in this low coastal scrub is the endemic Cape Long-billed Lark, an outrageous bird with the longest bill of any southern African lark. Flocks of Cape Penduline Tit can also be found feeding as they move from bush to bush.

Lambert's Bay. If time allows, we will spend some time at the immense Cape Gannet colony here, appreciating the spectacle of thousands of birds engaged in their deafening courtship rituals. The area also supports all three species of marine cormorants (Cape, Bank and Crowned), Kelp and Hartlaub's Gulls and the smart African Oystercatcher.

Berg River estuary. Most of the shorebirds will not have migrated this far south yet; however, checking in at the local hide may reveal Bar-tailed Godwit* and Eurasian Curlew* as well as Kittlitz's and the localised Chestnut-banded Plovers. These areas also support large numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler and numerous other waterfowl. Surrounding low, coastal vegetation (strandveld) is home to Pearl-breasted Swallow, Cape Penduline Tit, Karoo and Large-billed Larks and Fiscal Flycatcher.

Clanwilliam. One of our main targets here is the highly elusive Protea Canary, in case we missed it earlier. Though fairly drab, this endemic has a delightful tri-syllabic call that we will listen out for as we meander the track through the valley.



Black Harrier by Greg de Klerk

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.

Tour Grading & Key

Photography		Good to very good. Some hides.
Overall Ease		Moderate. Suitable for all birding / wildlife / photography interest levels and most mobility capabilities. Can be a little tiring due to travel distances.
Birding Ease		Undemanding, most species provide good visuals. A small number of scarce/rare species.
Accommodation		Comfortable lodges.
Walking / Trails		Walking and hiking mostly limited and over flattish ground. Some areas are uneven with rock/stone.
Vehicles / Roads		Comfortable vehicle. Some long drives on both sealed and dirt roads. Some can be bumpy, others wet and muddy depending on season.
Annoyances		Typical weather variability (seasonally dependent). Some very hot locations in the Karoo and northern West Coast (summer only)

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 lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- 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 are NOT included on this tour. If you feel that your leader/s 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.**

- 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.
- 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.
- The Cape Pelagic is weather dependent and has a departure potential of around 50%. If we are unable to head out to sea, we will photograph birds at other localities on the Cape Peninsula.

Bird Photo Tours

- Our Bird Photo Tours are a hybrid between our Classic birding tours and dedicated photographic tours. You don't have to be a professional photographer or have the biggest lens; this is for everyone with an interest in photography and birding. Whether you're using a bridge camera or the latest body and prime lens, our aims are the same.
- These tours are not aimed at seeing the most species possible on the route, rather taking time to photograph key targets and any other interesting species we may find. Naturally, the overall species list will be lower than a comparable birding focused tour.
- Whilst we may use blinds, feeders and hide setups on some of these tours, we will not be spending an entire day nor even several hours fixed in one spot.
- These tours are suitable for photographers who prefer opportunistic photography over entire days in a hide.
- Our leaders will assist in helping everyone secure good photographic opportunities and advise as much as they can on camera setup. However, they are not professional photographic tour leaders.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour departs from Cape Town International Airport, Cape Town at around midday on day 1. The tour will conclude here after breakfast on day 13.

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.

Cape Town International Airport, Cape Town (IATA: CPT) is the main international point 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.