South Africa

Western endemics

21st to 31st January 2028 (11 days)



Victorin's Warbler by Daniel Danckwerts

Southern Africa's dry west is a vast and captivating region that remains well off the traditional birding circuit. Stretching from the fynbos-covered mountains of the Western Cape into the open plains and rugged semi-deserts of the Karoo, this remarkable corner of South Africa supports an exceptional concentration of endemic and range-restricted birds, including some of the country's most sought-after larks.

Designed as an exciting extension ahead of Flock to Marion, this tour explores a selection of these seldom-visited landscapes in search of the many special birds adapted to South Africa's arid west. Particular attention will be given to the region's endemic larks, alongside a superb supporting cast of bustards, coursers, chats, canaries and other dry-country specialists.

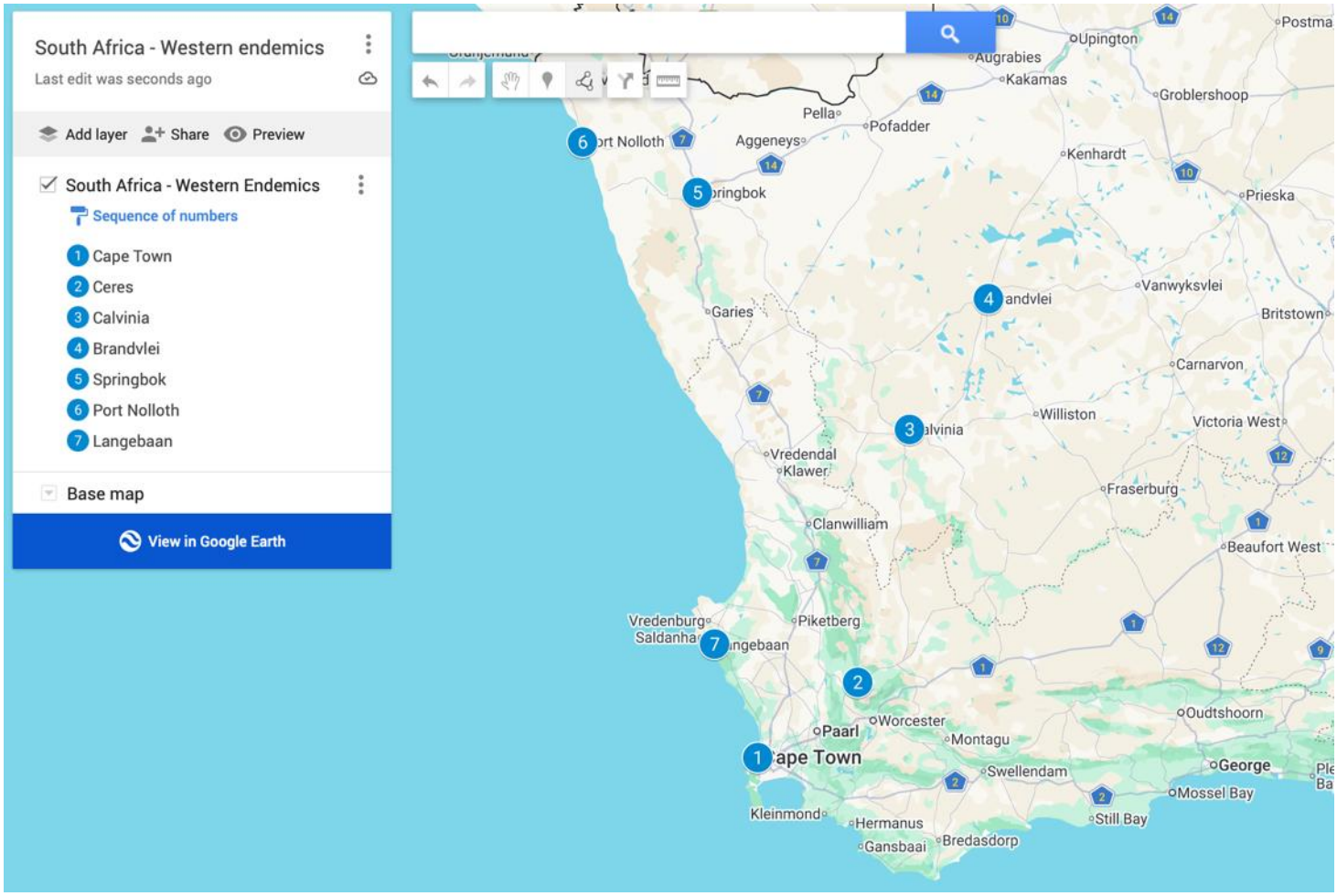
Our journey will also take us through two globally significant botanical regions found nowhere else on Earth: the Cape Floristic Region and the Succulent Karoo. From spectacular fynbos-clad mountain slopes, home to Cape Rockjumper and a host of Cape endemics, we venture into the starkly beautiful Karoo, where wide horizons and seemingly empty plains conceal an impressive diversity of highly localised birds. Returning towards Cape Town,

we round out the experience along the Atlantic coast, with opportunities to visit the impressive Cape Gannet colony and productive wetlands and strandveld of the West Coast.

Combining some of South Africa's least-visited birding areas with a remarkable collection of endemics and dramatic scenery, this extension offers the perfect introduction to the country before the adventure to Marion Island begins.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Cape Town. Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens.**
Day 2	**Hottentots-Holland Mountains & Betty's Bay**
Day 3	**Cape Peninsula**
Day 4	**Cape Town to Ceres**
Day 5	**Ceres to Calvinia**
Day 6	**Calvinia & Brandvlei**
Day 7	**Calvinia to Springbok**
Day 8	**Port Nolloth**
Day 9	**Springbok to Lambert's Bay**
Day 10	**Lambert's Bay to Langebaan**
Day 11	**Langebaan to Cape Town**



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.**



Swee Waxbill by Daniel Danckwerts

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.

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.

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 Siskin by Daniel Danckwerts



African Penguin by Daniel Danckwerts

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.

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.



Cape Rockjumper by Daniel Danckwerts

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



Cinnamon-breasted Warbler by Daniel Danckwerts

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.

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.

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.



Cape Long-billed Lark by Daniel Danckwerts

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



Cape Gannet by Daniel Danckwerts

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.

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

Overall Ease		Moderate. Suitable for all birding / wildlife 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.
Photography		Good to very good. Some hides.
Annoyances		Typical weather variability (seasonally dependent). Some very hot locations in the Karoo and northern West Coast.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

The price for this 11-day Tailor-made tour of Eastern South Africa is **ZAR69,995.00** (roughly US$4,250.00) per person, for group sizes of between 4 and 5 guests.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 11;
- 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.**

- 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.
- We will visit a variety of restaurants, when these are available, for breakfasts that are not included, as well as for lunches and dinners; however, on a few occasions you may be required to self-cater for meals. On these days we will go to supermarkets en route to our lodgings where you will be able to purchase food provisions.
- 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 bird other localities on the Cape Peninsula.

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 11.

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.