South Africa

Sani Pass post-tour extension

31st January to 3rd February 2025 (4 days)



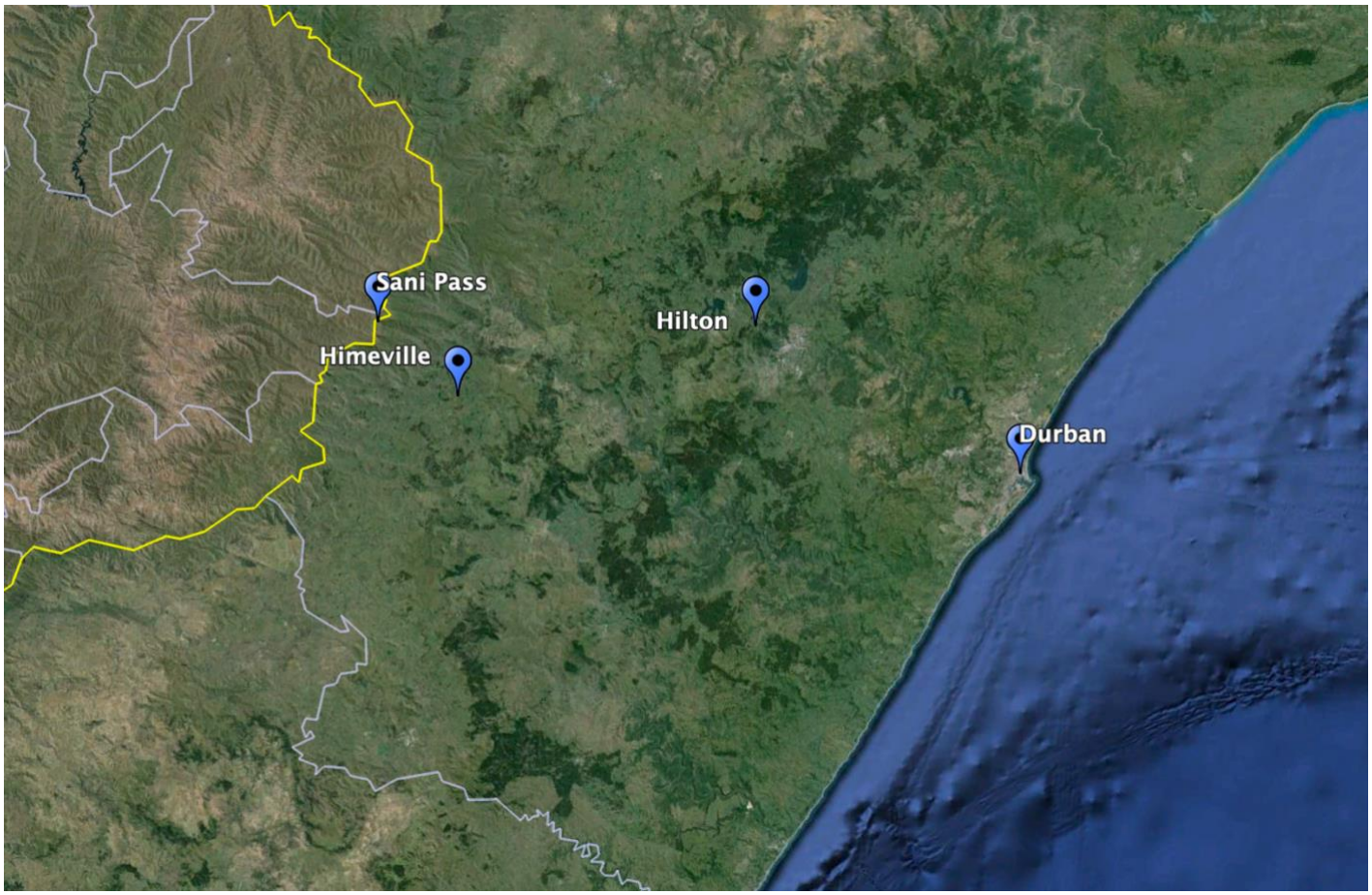
Drakensberg Rockjumper by Adam Riley

Embark on a thrilling birding expedition to the famed Sani Pass, the highest mountain pass anywhere in South Africa where the rugged beauty of the Drakensberg Range meets the high Lesotho Plateau. With a blend of modern convenience and untamed wilderness, this journey promises unforgettable encounters with several of South Africa's most sought-after near-endemic species. Top among these are the Drakensberg Rockjumper and Gurney's Sugarbirds, each belonging to endemic bird families. Other notable targets will include the little-known Mountain Pipit, Sentinel Rock-thrush, endangered Cape Parrot, Orange Ground Thrush, Bush Blackcap, Barratt's Warbler, Cape and Bearded Vultures, and Drakensberg Siskin. Join us for a short tour that will leave a lasting impression on both novice and seasoned birdwatchers alike!

Itinerary & Map

Sani Pass Extension

Day 1	**Arrival in Durban, and overnight**
Day 2	**Durban to Himeville via Hilton, the Karkloof and Marutswa Forest**
Day 3	**Sani Pass & Lesotho**
Day 4	**Himeville to Durban for final departures**



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.**



Cape Parrot by Glen Valentine

Karkloof. The Karkloof is 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.

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.



Buff-streaked Chat 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 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.



Malachite Sunbird by Adam Riley

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. 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.

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	☐ ☐ ■	Good to comfortable.
Walking / Trails	☐ ☐ ■	Walking and hiking mostly limited and over flattish ground. Some areas are uneven with rock/stone.
Vehicles / Roads	☐ ■ ☐	Comfortable vehicle. 4x4 vehicles for the Sani Pass day excursion.
Photography	☐ ☐ ■	Good to very good.
Annoyances	☐ ☐ ■	Typical weather variability (seasonally dependent).

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 4 of the Sani Pass extension;
- 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 made 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.**

- 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.

Arrival and Departure Details

The Sani Pass Extension begins in Durban on Day 1 and ends here by mid-morning on Day 4.

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), Cape Town International Airport, Cape Town (IATA: CPT) and King Shaka International Airport, Durban (DUR) 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. The following website provides detailed information about visa eligibility and assistance with online applications options where viable: Visa HQ for Travel

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