

## Eastern South Africa Birding Tour

We just completed a very successful South Africa birding safari with 2 clients from Canada. This was their 4<sup>th</sup> African birding safari with Nature Travel Birding and the main focus was on finding key endemic and range restricted species and species still missing from their African lists.

We started off at Magoebaskloof, a very attractive part of South Africa offering excellent forest and grassland birding. One of our main targets was the localised Short-clawed Lark which we found not far from our excellent lodge. In the forest our main targets were Cape Parrot, Olive and Black-fronted Bush-shrikes and we had great views of all three of them. Other specials we saw include Bat Hawk, Magpie Mannikin, Lazy Cisticola, Olive Woodpecker, Cape Batis, Lemon Dove, Long-billed Pipit, Brown Scrub-robin, Gurney's Sugarbird, Drakensberg Prinia, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Knysna Turaco, Purple-crested Turaco, African Black Duck, African Emerald Cuckoo, Grey Cuckooshrike, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Sweet Waxbill, Grey-rumped Swallow, Long-crested eagle, Jackal Buzzard and Barrat's Warbler.

From here we moved onto Kruger National Park, one of Africa's best game viewing parks offering excellent birding as well. Kruger is fantastic for raptors and we saw White-headed, White-backed, Lappet-faced, Cape and Hooded Vultures, Martial, Tawny, Lesser Spotted and Bateleur Eagles, Black-chested and Brown snake-eagles, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Gabar Goshawk, Black-winged Kite, Yellow-billed Kite, Amur Falcon and Secretarybird. Other interested birds include Kori Bustard, Red-chested Korhaan, Dusky Lark, Brown-headed Parrot, Bearded, Golden-tailed and Cardinal Woodpecker, Southern Ground, African Grey, Southern Yellow-billed and Red-billed Hornbills, Crested Francolin, Mocking Cliff-chat, Burchell's Starling, Eurasian and African Golden Orioles, White-crested and Retz's Helmet-shrikes, Grey-headed Bushshrike, Burchell's Coucal, Southern Carmine Bee-eater and Yellow-billed Oxpecker to name a few. The game viewing did not disappoint (never does in this fantastic game reserve) and we had great sightings of African Wild dog (followed them on the hunt for 15 minutes), Cheetah, Leopard, Lion (including 3 different sightings in a 45 minute period), White Rhino, Cape Buffalo and off course hundreds of Elephant and Hippo.

From here we moved south to Wakkerstroom, an excellent place to see many of South Africa's endemic birds and grassland specials. The key targets here for most birders are Botha's and Rudd's Larks and we had excellent views of both including Botha's Lark on a nest! Other great birds we saw are White-bellied and Blue Korhaan, Southern Bald Ibis, Ground Woodpecker, Buff-streaked Chat, African Rock and Yellow-breasted Pipit, Sentinel Rock-thrush, Denham's Bustard, Black-rumped Buttonquail, Red-chested Flufftail, Eastern Long-billed and Spike-heeled Lark, Cloud, Zitting, Wing-snapping, Levillant's and Croaking Cisticola, Cape Longclaw, Cape Weaver, Fan-tailed, Red-collared and Long-tailed Widowbird, Malachite Sunbird, South African Cliff Swallow, African Snipe, Grey-crowned and Blue Crane.

Our final stop was northern Kwazulu Natal visiting key sites such as Mkuze Game Reserve, Ongoye Forest, Amatigulu, Nkandla Forest, Mtunzini, Richard's Bay, Dlinza Aerial Board and Eshowe Forest. This part of South Africa had a lot of rain over the last few weeks but this did not prevent us from finding Gorgeous Bushshrike, Rudd's Apalis, Spotted Ground Thrush, Lesser Crested Tern, Allen's Gallinule, Pink-backed Pelican, Common Quail, Common Buttonquail, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Green Barbet, Grey Cuckooshrike, Narina Trogon, Black-bellied Starling, Little Bittern, Trumpeter and Crowned Hornbill, Square-tailed Drongo, Chorister Robin-chat, Olive Sunbird, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Purple-banded Sunbird, Rufous-winged Cisticola, White-eared

Barbet, African Pygmy Goose, Red-headed Quelea, Palm-nut Vulture, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Crested Guineafowl and African Cuckoo-hawk.

We ended up with an impressive 375 birds and 45 mammals and had great sightings of most of the key targets. This part of Africa is still one of my favourites and a must for any serious birder whether on a first African birding trip or having done several previous African trips. Extensions to the Drakensberg Mountains and Cape Town area should be considered to complete the South African endemics.

**Written by: Nick Buys**

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