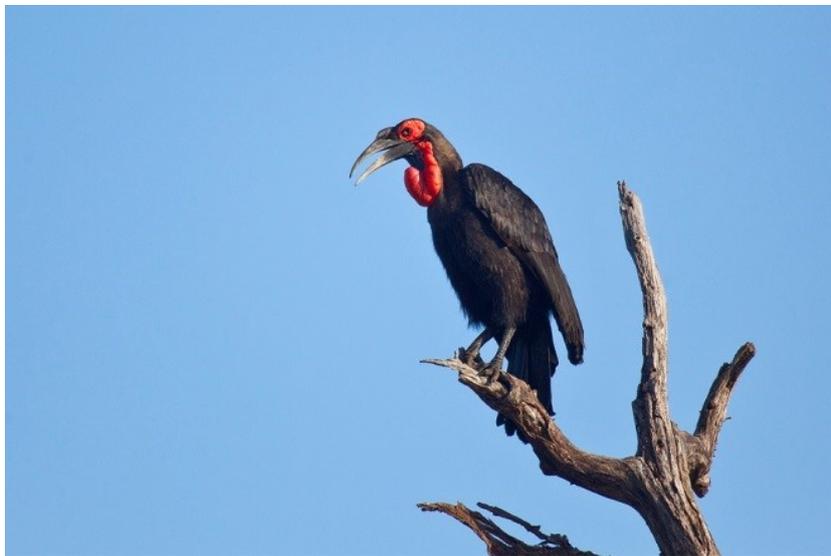


Lawson's Birding, Wildlife & Custom Safaris

# Escarpment and Kruger National Park

## Birding and Wildlife Safari

*6<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018*



### **Daily Itinerary**

#### **Day 1: Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2018 ~ Dullstroom and the Mpumalanga Highlands**

After arrival in Johannesburg we'll drive northwards a short distance to Rietvlei Nature Reserve. This small reserve conserves some Highveld grassland habitat and holds a few bird species which we will not have a chance of seeing on the rest of the itinerary. These include South African Shelduck, Northern Black Korhaan, Greater Kestrel and Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler, among others. We'll then continue eastwards through Mpumalanga Province. The eastern reaches of the province are dominated by extensive beef and maize farming, with coal mining taking place here and there. The scenery is not too spectacular for the first two hours or so, but will improve as we leave the highway at Belfast and head north-east into the highlands. The altitudes around Dullstroom vary from 2000 – 2250 metres (6500 feet) above sea level, and the habitat comprises open grasslands and rocky hillsides, while here and there stands of alien trees provide an additional habitat. We will probably arrive in the afternoon some time and if time allows may have a short afternoon activity before getting ready for dinner.



Species we will be on the lookout for include Southern Bald Ibis, Cape Longclaw, Ant-eating Chat, Mountain Wheatear, Buff-streaked Chat, Pied Starling, Steppe Buzzard, Cape Crow, Common Fiscal, Bokmakierie and many others. The Dullstroom area does not hold too many large mammals, though Black Wildebeest, Blesbok, Springbok and other antelope can be seen on farms, having been re-introduced by many

landowners. Grey Rhebok, Mountain Reedbuck, Yellow Mongoose and Meerkat live under free-ranging conditions and can be seen in the area. We'll then have some time to freshen up before dinner.

### **Day 2: Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018 ~ Mount Sheba**

Today we will head out early on a morning excursion into the Veloren Valei (Lost Valley) Nature Reserve and Ramsar Site high up in the Steenkampsberg Range. Here the altitudes reach the 2250 metre (7380 feet) mark, and birds we will be on the lookout for include Denham's Bustard, Secretarybird, Gurney's Sugarbird, Eastern Long-billed Lark, Yellow-breasted Pipit, Grey-winged Francolin, Sentinel Rock-Thrush and Jackal Buzzard, among others. After the morning excursion we will head back down to town for breakfast, after which we will make our way to Mount Sheba, a hotel situated around two hours' drive away on the edge of the escarpment. Here the warm air rising up from the Lowveld (low-lying plain) to the east brings a lot of moisture and large stands of indigenous forest grow here and there on the slopes. Mount Sheba is situated close to one of the largest remaining forest patches, and this is where our main birding efforts will take place. Our temperate forests do not hold as many species as can be found in tropical forests, and yet present many of the inherent challenges of forest birding: reduced visibility, low light levels and secretive birds. Nevertheless, there are some great species to be seen here, such as Narina Trogon, Knysna Turaco, White-starred Robin, Chorister Robin-Chat, Cape Baits, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler, Olive Woodpecker, Orange Ground-Thrush, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Southern Double-collared Sunbird and many others. We may have time for a brief birding session during the afternoon, after which we'll have time to freshen up before dinner in the hotel restaurant.



### **Day 3: Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018 ~ The Blyde River Canyon**

Today we'll hope to have an early start, heading into the surrounding forest for some pre-breakfast birding, though as the region is often shrouded in mist we'll have to play it according to the weather conditions at the time. We'll put in quite a bit of effort to try and rack up a decent list of forest birds before breakfast, and if we still have some key species to see we'll have another bash in the forest before packing and departing for the Blyde River Canyon. En-route we'll stop off at a few of the major view sites before checking in to the resort. An afternoon walk in the resort grounds could produce Lazy Cisticola, Greater Double-collared and White-bellied Sunbirds, White-throated Robin-Chat, White-browed Scrub-Robin, Streaky-headed Seed-eater, Alpine Swift, Rock Kestrel and others, and we'll probably see the day out at the resort's Upper View Point, which provides fine views of the lower Blyde River Canyon and a chance for a few raptor species. We'll then head back to the rooms to freshen up before dinner.

### **Days 4 – 5: Friday – Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2018 ~ The Kruger National Park, Satara**

We'll start the day with a walk in the rocky woodland around the lodges, in the transition zone between the highveld and the lowland savanna. Birding here can be superb and we hope to see Mocking Cliff-Chat, Striped Pipit, Lazy Cisticola, White-throated Robin-Chat, African Firefinch, Sweet Waxbill, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Black-crowned Tchagra and Golden-breasted Bunting, among others. Our route will take us along the Kadisi Trail, with views of some of the stream's wonderful Tufa geological formations. After breakfast we pack our luggage and depart, perhaps taking in the canyon view site before heading for the edge of the escarpment and dropping down to the Lowveld (the low-lying savanna region of the north-east). We enter Kruger National Park at Orpen Gate on the western side of the enormous National Park. This is where the going gets really slow, due to the incredible numbers of bird species to be seen. These could include Green-winged Pytilia, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Yellow and Red-billed Hornbills, Swainson's Spurfowl, Senegal and Crowned Lapwings, Magpie Shrike, Lilac-breasted and Purple Rollers, Common Scimitarbill and many others. Raptors are plentiful and we could see Gabar Goshawk, Wahlberg's, Tawny and Martial Eagles, Bateleur, Brown Snake-Eagle and several other large raptors. Here in the south-central region of the park the basaltic soils result in good grass growth and a reduced shrub component, and this more open Knobthorn / Marula savannah attracts the grazers such as Burchell's Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, Common Waterbuck and African Buffalo. These in turn provide food for Lion prides and Spotted Hyena clans, while the smaller herbivores such as Impala and Warthog are preyed upon by Leopard and Cheetah. Our routine here will comprise morning and afternoon excursions, birding walks in the camp, a rest period and an optional sunset drive.



## **Day 6: Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2018 ~ The Kruger National Park, Skukuza**

Today we'll leave Satara first thing in the morning and make our way southwards through the park, with a breakfast stop at Tshokwane Picnic Site. We'll then push on to Skukuza, arriving in the mid-afternoon to settle in and get ready for the conference.

**Note:** *The exact itinerary will depend on availability of accommodation at time of booking.*

### **Tour in brief**

**Group size:** maximum of 12 participants, 1 guide per 6 participants

**Areas visited:** Dullstroom, Mount Sheba, Blyde River Canyon, Kruger National Park

**Expected weather conditions:** cool to warm conditions in the highlands of Dullstroom, warm to hot on from Blyde to the Kruger National Park. Possible afternoon thunderstorms.

**Tour tempo:** medium-plus to fast, optional mid-day breaks on non-travelling days (advisable in the hotter areas). A great trip for both casual and serious birders.

**Accommodation standards:** medium: lodges, guest houses and National Park's rest-camps.

**Birding in brief:** excellent variety, three major habitats included, tops for endemics.

**Top birds:** Southern Bald Ibis, Denham's Bustard, Gurney's Sugarbird, Jackal Buzzard, Buff-streaked Chat, Yellow-breasted Pipit, Sentinel Rock Thrush, Eastern Long-billed Lark, Knysna Turaco, Orange Ground Thrush, Cape Vulture, Southern Ground-Hornbill, Martial Eagle, White-headed Vulture, Malachite Kingfisher, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Kori Bustard, Retz's Helmet Shrike.

**Mammal viewing:** excellent, especially in the Kruger National Park

**Top mammals:** The Big Five, Klipspringer, Honey Badger, African Wild Dog, African Wild Cat, Nyala

**Other wildlife and attractions:** the Drakensberg Escarpment and the Kruger National Park

### **Tour Costs**

**R 16 750** per person sharing

**R 3 250** single supplement

Price is based on a group size of 6 participants. Small group surcharge will be levied for groups smaller than 6 participants. Price subject to change based on external factors. Please contact us for more details.

#### **Includes**

- Accommodation
- All breakfasts and dinners
- Ground transport in Toyota Quantums / VW Kombis / Ford Everest & Open safari vehicles in Kruger
- Bottled water in the Lawson's vehicle whilst travelling
- Entrance fees
- Personalised checklists
- Specialist guide fees

#### **Excludes**

- All airfares and associated airport costs
- Travel and medical insurance
- Lunches
- All drinks
- Optional excursions where applicable
- Gratuities
- Items of a personal nature

#### **Note**

- This itinerary is subject to change due to weather conditions at the time and other factors beyond our control.
- Vehicle used will depend on size of group.
- Birds and mammals mentioned on this itinerary do not represent all that can be seen. A full list of possibles appears on your checklist.

## **Terms & Conditions**

### Payment / Acceptance of Booking

A non refundable deposit of 10% of the tour price is payable on confirmation of the booking. Any variance to the deposit amount or payment date will be advised at the time of booking. Acceptance of the booking will be confirmed in writing at which time a contract comes into existence. The balance of the tour price is due 8 weeks prior to departure date. Should the final payment fail to reach us by the date specified, we reserve the right to treat the booking as cancelled. If a booking is made 8 weeks or less prior to the departure date the full amount is then payable on booking.

Due to the revised South African National Parks (hereafter referred to as "SANParks") Terms & Conditions the exact deposit requirement will vary according to booking time frame and the proportion of the tour spent in SANParks accommodation.

### Cancellation after Payment of the Full Tour Price

Any cancellation must be in writing. The date on which the correspondence is received by us will determine the cancellation charges applicable. The cancellation charges are expressed as a percentage of the total tour price and are as follows:

#### *Tours excluding SANParks accommodation*

Less than 6 weeks before departure	30 %
Less than 4 weeks before departure	50 %
Less than 3 weeks before departure	60 %
Less than 2 weeks before departure	100 %

#### *Tours including SANParks accommodation*

Less than 6 weeks before departure	50 %
Less than 4 weeks before departure	80 %
Less than 2 weeks before departure	100 %

However, in the event of a cancellation we will endeavour to recover as much of the payment as possible on behalf of the client, subject to the cancellation policies of all the accommodation establishments used in the itinerary.

