

Butterflies of South Africa

Naturetrek Tour itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Depart London.

Day 2/3 Wakkerstroom.

Day 4/5 Tembe Elephant Park.

Day 6/7 St. Lucia.

Day 8/9 Eshowe.

Day 10 Depart Durban.

Day 11 Arrive London.

Departs

November & March

Focus

Butterflies, birds, mammals and general natural history.

Grading

Grade A. Easy wildlife walks and vehicular safaris only

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ZAF01) or brochure

Highlights:

- South Africa has over 800 species of butterfly!
- General wildlife tour with a special focus on butterflies
- Variety of species possible from Dwarf Blue to Emperor Swallowtail
- Look for butterflies in coastal tropical forests & savannah
- Numerous birds including Grey-crowned Crane, Southern Bald Ibis & African Crowned Eagle
- Black Emperor & endemic St Lucia Basker dragonflies
- Elephant, Southern Giraffe & Nyala in Tembe Elephant Park



From top: Gaudy Commodore, Pin-tailed Whydah & Paradise Skipper. Photos by Leon Marais and Derek Brown



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In Flight

We depart this evening on the South African Airways' or British Airways night flight from London Heathrow to Johannesburg.

Day 2

Wakkerstroom

We are due to arrive into Johannesburg's bustling international airport early morning where we will be met by our local tour leader. From here we will head south to the small village of Wakkerstroom in the high grasslands of Mpumalanga province. En route we call in at Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve in the Heidelberg hills where we will stop for a picnic lunch. This small reserve is in a scenic mountainous area of the highveld and has a variety of habitats, including grassland, rocky outcrops, acacia and broadleaf woodland. The vegetation type is transitional between bushveld and highveld grassland and consequently has a wonderful mix of wildlife from both the eastern and the drier western parts of South African. Here we can look for our first butterflies of the tour including Sandmen, African Monarch, Garden Acraea, Twilight Brown, Brown-veined White, African Migrant and the large and beautiful Citrus Swallowtail.

Suikerbosrand is also home to a variety of interesting mammals and we will particularly be on the lookout for highveld endemics including Blesbok and Black Wildebeest and species such as Springbok, Red Hartebeest and perhaps the mighty Eland, the largest antelope in all of Africa. Smaller mammals are also common and include Yellow Mongoose and, that favourite of the wildlife film-maker, the endearing Meerkat. For those interested in birds there are several western species here that we will not encounter elsewhere on the holiday including Ashy Tit, Yellow Canary, Red-eyed Bulbul, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler and Kalahari Scrub-Robin.

We aim to reach Wakkerstroom late in the afternoon and on arrival will check in our comfortable guesthouse. We will probably arrive too late for butterflies on this first day, but for those who would like to see some birds the nearby wetland reserve will make an interesting pre-dinner trip. Species to look out for here include African Purple Swamphen, Yellow-billed Egret, Maccoa Duck, Hottentot Teal, South African Cliff-Swallow and White-throated Swallow to name but a few. Your tour leader will be keen to discuss and log the first day's sightings during the evening and this will be the pattern - for those who wish - throughout the trip.

Day 3

Wakkerstroom

Those wishing an early pre-breakfast bird walk may be treated to an exciting variety of species such as the beautiful Blue Crane and localised Blue Korhaan. Others to look out for include Denham's Bustard, Jackal Buzzard, Southern Bald Ibis, Cape Longclaw and a number of larks such as Red-capped, Spike-heeled, Eastern Long-billed plus the rare Rudd's and Botha's Larks.

Once the sun has warmed this highveld region we will spend the rest of the day visiting a variety of habitats in search of butterflies and other wildlife. These may include Meadow White, African Clouded Yellow, Zebra White, Common Diadem and Painted Lady. To add a further facet to this morning's wildlife we are also sure to encounter a variety of dragonflies and damselflies hawking over the freshwater pools and marshes that dot this area. Species to look out for include Fitzimon's Jewel, Goldtail, Keyhole Glider and others. Mammals are not prolific around Wakkerstroom but Grey Rhebok will be new for the tour and unlikely to be seen elsewhere.

Days 4 & 5

Tembe Elephant Park

From Wakkerstroom we move to Tembe Elephant Park, a large reserve in the far north of KwaZulu-Natal Province, near the border with Mozambique, with an entirely new and wide range of habitats. These include sand forest habitat interspersed with grassy marshes. It is a great area for butterflies, particularly the big, showy swallowtails (*Papilio sp*), swordtails (*Graphium sp*) and emperors (*Charaxes sp*). In terms of South African butterfly distribution, a few choice species can only be found in this north-eastern corner of the country (such as Flame-bordered Emperor, Mamba Swordtail and Gold-banded Forester).

Birdlife is also prolific and special birds to look out for include Pink-throated Twinspot, Plain-backed Sunbird, Woodward's Batis, Rudd's Apalis, African Broadbill, Black Coucal, Rosy-throated Longclaw and many others. As the name of the reserve suggests, Elephants are common within the park, many of which carry impressive tusks! Lion, Impala, Nyala, Suni and Red Duiker may all be seen, as well as Red Bush Squirrel, and Bush Pig.

Since Tembe is a wildlife reserve containing big game animals, we are restricted to our vehicle in many areas. There are still a few places, however, where we are permitted to leave the vehicle and walk in search of butterflies, birds and other wildlife.

Days 6 & 7

St Lucia

Moving on we reach the Indian Ocean coast and spend 2-nights at the holiday town of St Lucia, which we use as a base from which to explore the world famous St. Lucia Estuary, Lake St. Lucia and the coastal dune forest. Covering 325 square kilometres this is the largest estuarine system in all of Africa and is of international importance for its wildlife. Here we will look for butterflies such as Green-banded Swallowtail, Mamba Swallowtail, Golden Piper, Dancing Acraea, Straight-line Sapphire and Two-pip Policeman.

Whilst not abundant, a variety of mammals also frequent the estuary and dune forests including Blue Duiker, Samango Monkey, Thick-tailed Bushbaby, Bushbuck and Bush Pig. Birdlife is prolific, however, with around 400 species recorded to date. The dune forests around Cape Vidal can be especially productive holding such specialities as Green Twinspot, Brown Scrub-Robin, Woodward's Batis and Livingstone's Turaco.

On our full day we will probably depart early (with a packed breakfast) to spend the day in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, the name meaning 'Place of wonder' in the local isiZulu language. Here we will visit some of the get out points where we can look for butterflies and birds, while some of the hides and viewpoints may offer sightings of various game species, as well as spectacular views over the lake. At Cape Vidal we may have a chance to dip our toes into the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, before we head back to town for lunch, followed perhaps by some

more butterfly hunting in the coastal forest surrounding the town. In the evening we'll then have some time to freshen up before dinner. We stay at a comfortable guest house in lovely en-suite rooms.

Days 8 & 9

Eshowe

We next move inland for our final two nights at the small town of Eshowe. This pretty little town (whose name means 'the wind sighing through the trees') lies at the centre of the Zulu nation and was the site of a 10 week siege during the Anglo-Zulu war, eventually becoming the British capital of Zululand. It has the added attraction for the naturalist in that a unique aerial boardwalk and tower has been constructed high in the canopy of the adjacent Dlinza Scarp Forest. This localised woodland is located at around 500 metres above sea level and from the elevated boardwalk we can be eye-to-eye with the high fliers of the butterfly world such as the charaxes and attractive Common Mother-of-Pearl. As we rise up through the forest, we are sure to notice twisted vines, roots of strangler figs, epiphytic orchids and even a few bird's nests. At its highest point there is a stunning panoramic view over the canopy down to the Indian Ocean in the distance. This boardwalk gives a unique opportunity to explore the world of the canopy and enjoy the smells of blossom, butterflies sipping nectar at close range and a selection of birds difficult to see from ground level.

Moist grassland adjoins the forest and this is home to a different selection of butterflies including Dusky Acraea and Polka Dot, plus Natal Acraea and Spotted Joker in the gardens of the lodge. Dlinza is well known for its abundant birdlife and is home to a wealth of localised species such as African Crowned Eagle, Spotted Ground-Thrush, Brown Scrub-Robin, Lemon Dove and Narina Trogon.

Day 10

In Flight

A couple of hours of 'pre-butterfly' birdwatching from the boardwalk may yield a variety of interesting species such as Chorister Robin-chat, Purple-crested Turaco, both Trumpeter and Crowned Hornbills, Green Malkoha, Terrestrial Brownbul, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Olive Woodpecker and Red-backed Mannikin. There will also be time to look for a few last butterflies on nearby grasslands or in the spacious grounds of our lodge. Natal Acraea, Common Hottentot Skipper and Spotted Joker are all likely before we must sadly drive to Durban Airport to catch our late afternoon flight to Johannesburg to connect with our overnight flight to London.

Day 11

London

We are due to arrive back into Heathrow early this morning.

Tour grading

Grade A. This is a traditional wildlife tour with no strenuous walking involved. However, do be prepared for some drives of 3-4 hours. We will enjoy plenty of wildlife walks at a gentle pace. We regard the tour as suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness. NB - Please note that much of the game/wildlife viewing at Tembe will be undertaken from the vehicle.

Weather

This tour runs during South Africa's summer months and the rainy season (the best time for the butterflies). Each season is variable, so it's hard to predict how much rain to expect. Suffice to say, one should expect some rain during the tour, which usually takes the form of short and sharp showers. It should be pleasantly warm to hot with temperatures ranging from a minimum of 16°C to a maximum of 30°C, coupled with generally high humidity. It can get fairly cold in Wakkerstroom if a cold front passes through during our time there.

Focus

This is a general natural history tour focusing on all aspects of South African wildlife, especially butterflies, birds and mammals.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation in South Africa is included together with all meals, excluding lunches at Wakkerstroom, St Lucia and Eshowe. Our accommodation will consist of simple but comfortable twin bedded ensuite rooms in comfortable (but not luxurious) lodges and camps. Single occupation of these rooms may be reserved on payment of the single supplement cost outlined on our website.

Please note that the accommodation outlined above may, very occasionally, need to be amended. Replacement lodges and hotels will always be of the same standard as the ones outlined in the itinerary and will in no way affect your holiday. Should we have to implement any changes to the above we will notify you as soon as possible.

Your transport

We use 10-seater Toyota Quantum minibuses for this tour. In these we can carry up to 6 passengers, plus your naturalist guide who is also your driver.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: dinner on Day 10 and all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs and guides' tips (allow £40 - £50).

Mammal, bird & butterfly lists

Where available these are automatically provided prior to travel, and will gladly be sent to you earlier if you wish for a more detailed preview.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to South Africa. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/south-africa prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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