

The Reptiles & Amphibians of South Africa

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Days 1 – 2 Fly Cape Town

Days 2 – 15 Explore superb habitats in search of the regions exciting and varied reptiles and amphibians

Day 15 – 16 Inbound flight

Departs

November to April

Focus

Reptiles and Amphibians

Grading

Important: please read the 'Tour Grading and Focus' section at the end of the document before booking.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ZAF12)

Highlights

- Discover the world's smallest tortoise species, Speckled Cape Tortoise
- Beautiful chameleons include Western and Cape Dwarf
- Exquisite adders include Many-horned, Namaqua Dwarf, Desert Mountain and Puff
- Other exciting snake species include Boomslang, Cape Cobra, Mole Snake, and Cape Coral
- Geckos include Common Giant Ground, Quartz, Rough-scaled and Augrabies.
- Led by the region's foremost field expert
- Exciting Cape to Kalahari route!



Many-horned Adder (*Bitis cornuta*), Cape Dwarf Chameleon (*Bradypodion pumilum*), Geometric Tortoise (*Psammobates geometricus*) ©Tyrone Ping



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Introduction

South Africa has a remarkably rich reptile fauna with impressive diversity; over 400 species and over 50% endemism. This exciting Cape to Kalahari holiday not only goes in search of some of the well-known species; Cape Cobra, Puff Adder, Boomslang and Leopard Tortoise, but there are some truly fantastic little-known species to be discovered here such as Armadillo Lizard, Common Barking Gecko, Quartz Gecko, Augrabies Flat Lizard, Tent Tortoise, Striped Sandveld Lizard, Beetz' Tiger Snake, Cape Dwarf Chameleon and many adder species. Amongst the amphibians, the standout for many will be the Desert Rain Frog which became something of an internet-sensation back in 2013 when a video of an individual with its squeaking call went viral on social media!

This exciting holiday has been timed for the peak of South Africa's herping season (which happily also coincides with some of the worst of the British and European weather!). On an itinerary carefully planned with local herpetologists, we'll explore the very best of the region's offerings.



© Tyrone Ping

Armadillo Lizards (*Ouroborus cataphractus*) © Tyrone Ping

Itinerary

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.

Days 1 – 2

Fly Cape Town

Today we fly to Cape Town from London on an overnight flight which we expect to have a direct option for. If circumstances change and the flights require a connection, these will always be planned for the utmost ease of transit. Should you wish to join the holiday from another home country, please do get in touch and we will be very pleased to assist with such arrangements. We plan to arrive before midday with plenty of afternoon-time to rest and acclimatise. For those itching to start searching for wildlife, there will be instead chance to take an afternoon excursion to the surrounds of Cape Town where such special species as Cape Dwarf Chameleon (*Bradypodion pumilum*), Arum Lilly Reed Frog (*Hyperolius horstockii*), and Angulate Tortoise (*Chersina angulata*) may be encountered.

Whether you choose to rest or go out into the field, it will be a fantastic start to our holiday in South Africa and we'll have a good night's rest before the exciting expedition continues the next day.

Day 3 – 4

Elands Bay

After breakfast we leave Cape Town and head for Elands Bay in the Western Cape Province, on the Atlantic Ocean, where we have two days to explore the region for the magnificent Armadillo Lizard (*Ouroborus cataphractus*), Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*) and Black Spitting Cobra (*Naja nigricincta woodi*), Common Egg Eater (*Dasypeltis scabra*), Karoo Sand Snake (*Psammophis notostictus*), Cross-marked Sand Snake (*Psammophis crucifer*) and many other species. For those who wish, there will be chance for exciting nocturnal excursions in search of Cape Coral Snake (*Aspidelaps lubricus*), Horned Adder (*Bitis caudalis*), Common Giant Ground Gecko (*Chondrodactylus angulifer angulifer*) and Beetz' Tiger Snake (*Telescopus beetzii*).



Cape Coral Snake (*Aspidelaps lubricus*) © Tyrone Ping

Day 5

Namaqualand & Springbok

Today we journey north to Namaqualand. Here we can search for Tent Tortoises (*Psammobates tentorius*), Speckled Dwarf Tortoise (*Chersobius signatus*), endemic Kliprand Pygmy Gecko (*Goggia matzikamaensis*), Namaqua Sand Lizard (*Pedioplanis namaquensis*) and Southern Rock Agama (*Agama atra*). We'll arrive in a comfortable hotel in Springbok between 4-5pm. After enjoying dinner together in the evening there will be chance for a nocturnal excursion where we hope to find Cape Coral Snake (*Aspidelaps lubricus*), Horned Adder (*Bitis caudalis*), Common Egg Eater (*Dasypeltis scabra*), Quartz Gecko (*Pachydactylus latirostris*), Webers' Gecko (*Pachydactylus weberi*) and Barnard's Gecko (*Pachydactylus barnardi*).

Day 6 – 7

Springbok & Port Nolloth

After breakfast we leave Springbok and make a day trip to the small seatown of Port Nolloth. From here we make an exciting trip to find Namaqua Dwarf Adder (*Bitis schneideri*) – the world's smallest viper – Leighton's Sand Snake (*Psammophis leightoni*), Cross-marked Sand Snake (*Psammophis crucifer*), Striped Dwarf Burrowing Skink (*Scelotes sexilineatus*), Coastal Dwarf Legless Skink (*Acontias litoralis*), Desert Rain Frog (*Breviceps macrops*), Dwarf Beaked Snake (*Dipsosaurus multimaculatus*), Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*), and Austen's Dune Gecko (*Pachydactylus austeni*). We leave Port Nolloth to cruise back to Springbok where we can find Beetz Tiger Snake (*Telescopus beetzii*) and will be in the habitat for one of the country's rarest snakes, Fisk's House Snake (*Lamprophis fiskii*). We shall also hope to find Bug-eyed House Snake (*Boaedon mentalis*), Cape Coral Snake (*Aspidelaps lubricus*), and Common Giant Ground Gecko (*Chondrodactylus a. angulifer*).

The following day we'll dedicate to finding Speckled Dwarf Tortoise (*Chersobius signatus*), the world's smallest tortoise and an endangered species, and it will be a real privilege to find this species. In the habitat of the tortoise we can also see Peer's Girdled Lizard (*Namazonurus peersi*), Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*), Karoo Sand Snake (*Psammophis notostictus*), Dwarf Plated Lizard (*Cordylus sublineatus*), Namaqua Gecko (*Pachydactylus namaquensis*), Western Sandveld Lizard (*Nucras tessellata*) and Karoo Girdled Lizard (*Karusasaurus polyzonus*). After dinner there will



Speckled Dwarf Tortoise (*Chersobius signatus*) © Tyrone Ping

be a nocturnal excursion for Many-horned Adder (*Bitis cornuta*), Spotted Rock Snake (*Lamprophis guttatus*), Fisk's House Snake (*Lamprophis fiskii*), Common Egg Eater (*Dasypeltis scabra*), Paradise Toad (*Vandijkophrynus robinsoni*), Quartz Gecko (*Pachydactylus latirostris*), Rough-scaled Gecko (*Pachydactylus rugosus*) and Bibron's Gecko (*Chondrodactylus bibronii*).

Day 8 – 9

Augrabies Falls National Park

Today we leave Springbok for Augrabies Falls National Park, the location of Sir David Attenborough's flat lizard scene in the BBC series 'Life in Cold Blood'. We'll enjoy a lovely day at the waterfalls observing the colourful Augrabies Flat Lizard (*Platysaurus broadleyi*) before returning to our accommodation for dinner. After dinner we'll take an optional evening excursion in search of the area's numerous and endemic gecko species including Augrabies Gecko (*Pachydactylus atorquatus*), Haacks' Gecko (*Pachydactylus haackei*) Namaqua Mountain Gecko (*Pachydactylus montanus*). Here we can also find the scarce Marbled Rubber Frog (*Phrynomantis annectens*), Western Olive Toad (*Sclerophrys poweri*) and Horned Adder (*Bitis caudalis*).

The following morning, we can enjoy a megafauna drive in reserve, and there will be plenty of mammals and birds to enjoy here including Giraffe, Steenbok, Springbok, Gemsbok, Kudu and Eland. Predators include Black-backed Jackal, Caracal, Bat-eared Fox, African Wild Cat, and, though rare, there is chance for Leopard.



Augrabies Falls

We'll also be looking for Black Spitting Cobra, Cape Cobra and Puff Adder which frequent the park. In the evening we'll enjoy another nocturnal excursion.

Day 10

Pella

Today we'll head south to Pella known as the oasis in Namakwa (Bushmanland) surrounded by sun-baked rocky ridges and sandy gravel plains where one species in particular that we shall hope to find is the beautiful and rare Desert Mountain Adder (*Bitis xeropaga*) as well as Namaqua Pygmy Gecko (*Goggia rupicola*), Western Sandveld Lizard (*Nucras tessellata*), Karoo Girdled Lizard (*Karusasaurus polyzonus*), Karoo Sand Snake (*Psammophis notostictus*), Horned Adder (*Bitis caudalis*), Common Barking Gecko (*Ptenopus garrulus*) and Bushmanland Tent Tortoise (*Psammobates tentorius verroxii*).

Day 11

Namaqualand National Park

After breakfast we'll head further south where we can explore the coastal section of Namaqualand National Park bordering the icy waters of the Atlantic Ocean for tortoise, Namaqua Dwarf Adder (*Bitis schneideri*), Many-horned adder (*Bitis cornuta*) and rare fossorial lizards including the rarely seen Lomi's Blind Legless Skink (*Typhlosaurus lomiae*).

Day 12

Vanrhynsdorp

Today we leave Namaqualand National Park to Vanrhynsdorp an arid region of Namaqualand with sparse succulent Karoo habitat and rocky hillsides. We will explore the surroundings for Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*), Common Egg Eater (*Dasypeltis scabra*), Karoo Sand Snake (*Psammophis notostictus*), Angulate Tortoise (*Chersina angulata*), Striped Legless Skink (*Acontias lineatus*), Many-horned Adder (*Bitis cornuta*), Bug-eyed House snake (*Boaedon mentalis*), and Common Sand Lizard (*Pedioplanis lineocellata*).

Day 13 – 14

West Coast National Park/Langebaan

Today we leave Vanrhynsdorp and arrive at West Coast National Park, just inland from the secluded harbour of Saldanha Bay, and only 1.5-hour's drive from Cape Town, one finds the azure waters of the Langebaan Lagoon where we have two days to search the park for Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*), Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*), Mole Snake (*Pseudoaspis cana*), Spotted Harlequin Snake



Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*) © Tyrone Ping

(*Homoroselaps lacteus*), Spotted Grass Snake (*Psammophylax rhombeatus*), Common Dwarf Burrowing Skink (*Scelotes bipes*), Namaqua Rain Frog (*Breviceps namaquensis*), Bloubergstrand Dwarf Burrowing Skink (*Scelotes montispectus*) and Angulate Tortoise (*Chersina angulata*). Amongst the soft sand dunes, shrubby vegetation we'll drive the park for active diurnal reptiles.

Days 15 – 16

Inbound flights

Depending on flights times we have the opportunity to visit Table Mountain (via cable car to 1067m). Here on the peak, we can see the endemic Black Girdled Lizard (*Cordylus niger*) and Cape Crag Lizard (*Pseudocordylus microlepidotus*) and walk the habitat of Berg Adder (*Bitis atropos*) before heading back to Cape Town International Airport for an overnight flight back to London (if using the group flights).

Tour Grading & Focus

On a typical day on our herpetology tours we'll begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has warmed the substrates and landscapes, often getting into the vehicles at 9am and, after stopping for approximately one hour for lunch (which is often a continental-style picnic eaten in-situ), we'll continue into early-evening when we will stop for a rest and dinner. Most evenings it will be possible to do excursions in search of nocturnal species, which will on average be for three hours

after dinner. With an equal percentage of the target reptile and amphibian species likely to be nocturnal, these night searches are an important part of the tour but are optional, with some participants preferring to rest on some of the days. On average, 5-8 miles are walked per day.

We'll focus our time in the field on building an enviable list of reptile and amphibian species seen. Whilst searching, there is no doubt we'll come across a huge variety of amazing fauna and flora, of which we'll also take time to enjoy, but reptiles and amphibians will strongly remain our focus. Sensitive checking under stones, logs and other refugia is an effective way of finding many species. Some of the target reptile or amphibian species may require longer field hours to locate and therefore this tour is suitable, and most enjoyable, for experienced herpetologists or naturalists who, aside from wishing to see the region's rarely-seen reptiles and amphibians, relish being in the field searching for and identifying the vast array of birds, mammals, butterflies, invertebrates, and other wildlife which can be found sharing the wonderful habitats that we'll explore on the tour.

In summary, Naturetrek herpetology holidays are suitable, and offer tremendous value, for those of whom spending most of their holiday time in wildlife habitats and for whom seeing some of the world's superb reptiles and amphibians is the focus of their time away.

On this holiday we will of course often be walking on sandy or rocky terrain with some occasional small ascents required.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Our holiday is planned to be travelling in South Africa's early and late summer months. South Africa is a semi-desert country – that is, with hot, dry days and cool nights – you can expect plenty of sunshine, with daytime temperatures somewhere in the mid-20's. Along the coast it will be generally dry but a lot cooler with dense fogs during the mornings and evenings. It would be sensible to



Table Mountain views of Cape Town

come prepared for some rainfall. A strong waterproof torch is essential and amongst the options available a powerful head-torch will be most useful, which keeps your hands free for balancing.

What's Included

Breakfast and dinners are included in the cost of this holiday, except for those required during travel to and from South Africa and starting

with dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 14.

Extending Your Holiday

We would be happy to assist in arranging pre- or post-tour extensions, should this be of interest. Please contact Dan Lay (dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051) for further information and/or make sure to stipulate any interest in a possible extension upon booking.

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. Please stipulate any special requirements at the time of booking.

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Namaqua Rain Frog (*Breviceps namaquensis*) © Tyrone Ping