

South Africa's Rare Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	<u>Depart London</u>
Day 2/4	<u>Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park</u>
Day 5/6	<u>Augrabies Falls National Park</u>
Day 7/8	<u>Kimberley</u>
Day 9/11	<u>Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve</u>
Day 12	<u>Depart Bloemfontein</u>
Day 13	<u>Arrive London</u>

Departs

April, September & October.

Dates & prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ZAF13) or see the current Naturetrek brochure.

Focus

Mammals, birds and other wildlife.

Grading

Grade A. Mix of vehicular safaris and short walks.

Highlights

- Look for South Africa's rare & elusive mammals
- Enjoy multiple night drives
- High success rate for Aardvark, Aardwolf & Bat-eared Fox
- View the spectacular Orange River Gorge & Augrabies Falls
- 3 nights at the vast Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park
- Black-maned Lions of the Kalahari, plus Cheetah & Meerkats
- Abundant birdlife including Ludwig's Bustard, Cinnamon-breasted Warbler & Namaqua Sandgrouse
- Expertly led by South African naturalist guides



*From top: Aardwolf, Aardvark and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater.
Images courtesy of Shutterstock Images & Leon Marais*



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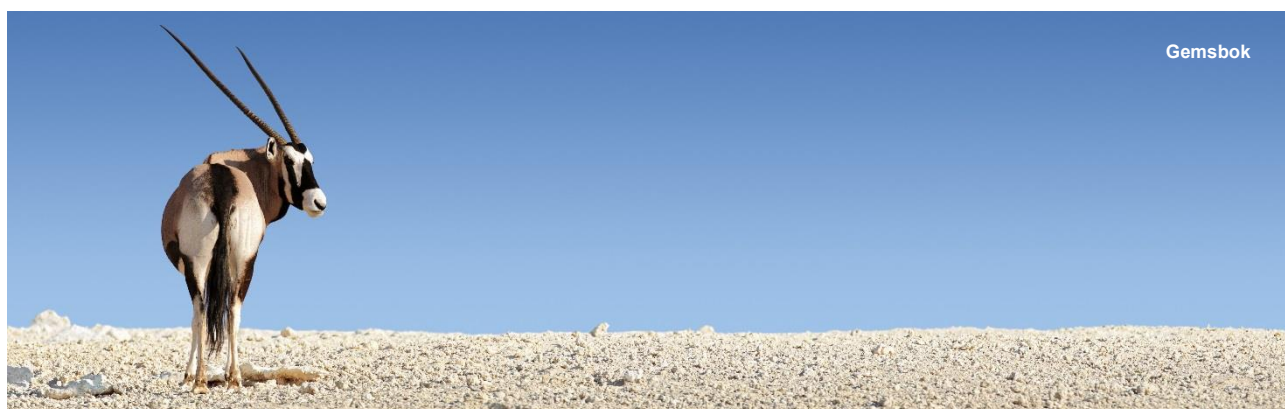
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Introduction

For first-time travellers to Africa, there can be few experiences more exhilarating than seeing your first lion, rhino, giraffe or elephant, and there is no doubt that these are the classic images that are conjured up in most people's minds when they think of this wonderfully diverse continent. Whilst all of these animals are exciting to find and a privilege to watch, Southern Africa is home to another selection of much shyer mammals that do not show themselves quite so readily, but are equally - if not more - thrilling to observe. Many of these species are nocturnal, using the star-studded African night for cover. As such, they are rarely seen and demand both patience and dedication of the observer, coupled with a degree of good fortune, to find.

Thoughts of such species as Aardvark, Aardwolf, Bat-eared Fox and Brown Hyena may get the pulses of many a wildlife enthusiast racing, but they are tantalisingly out of reach on a 'classic' African safari where the 'Big Five' take precedence and night drives are rationed. On this unique tour to South Africa's deserts and bushveld, however, we will offer nocturnal excursions on most evenings, visiting some of the world's very best areas for our target mammal species.

During the day we will explore these beautiful areas in search of such inhabitants as the famous black-maned Lions of the Kalahari, plus Cheetah, Gemsbok, Ludwig's Bustard, and Cinnamon-breasted Warbler. Then, when the sun sets, we will head out in search of our rare nocturnal quarry, spotlights in hand.



Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations may 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

Depart London

We leave London Heathrow this evening on board a scheduled British Airways overnight flight bound for Johannesburg.

Day 2

Our flight is due into Johannesburg in the early morning. From there we will connect with an onward flight to Upington from where we head north to the renowned Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, shared between South Africa and Botswana and covering around 40,000 square kilometres. Amongst the interesting species we could encounter on our way into the park are Karoo Korhaan, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Sociable Weaver (whose communal nests are the world's largest bird-built structures), Stark's Lark and Greater Kestrel.

Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park



The vast Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park protects a huge swathe of the southern Kalahari Desert. This land of extremes is home to a fascinating variety of desert wildlife backed by majestic red sand dunes and lit by some of the most evocative sunsets in all of Africa. Kgalagadi means 'place of thirst'. The park is cut by two dry riverbeds, the Nossob and Auob Rivers, which are said to flow above ground only once a century. However, water does flow underground, which allows grasses and camelthorn trees to grow along these seemingly dry and dusty waterways, making them a magnet for many of the park's mammals and birds and a focus of many of our game drives over the next few days. During our stay in the Kgalagadi, we will be based at either Kgalagadi Lodge or at Twee Rivieren on the park's southern fringes.

Day 3 & 4

Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

We will have two full days to explore the Kgalagadi, venturing in after breakfast each day in search of a variety of desert-adapted wildlife. The Kalahari Desert is home to a surprisingly diverse assemblage of mammals, birds and other wildlife considering how harsh this region can be. Springbok, Blue Wildebeest and Gemsbok are common and we are sure to see smaller numbers of graceful Red Hartebeest, Steenbok and Greater Kudu. Such an abundance of game species attracts predators such as Spotted Hyena and the famous 'black-maned' Lions of the Kalahari, while the Kgalagadi is one of the best places in Africa to see Cheetah. On a smaller scale we hope to see Meerkat and Woosnam's Desert Rat whilst South African Ground Squirrel is common and confiding.



To date around 280 species of bird have been recorded in the park, although only 92 of these are resident. Raptors are common and include Bateleur, Martial Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Black-breasted Snake Eagle, White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Greater Kestrel, and Red-necked and Pygmy Falcons. The huge Kori Bustard and striking Northern Black Korhaan are frequently seen pacing through the grasslands, whilst some of the smaller species include the beautiful Violet-eared and Black-faced Waxbills, Rufous-eared Warbler, Red-headed Finch, Cut-throat Finch and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater.

We will head out on night drives on two of our three nights in the park. We will wrap up warm and travel in open vehicles, with a spotter at the front, in the hope of tracking down a few more nocturnal inhabitants of Southern Africa. Bat-eared Fox, Cape Fox, Scrub Hare and South African Springhare are all quite common here, but we will also be looking for other less frequently seen species such as the shaggy Brown Hyena, Honey Badger, Cape Porcupine and African Wildcat. These drives will be conducted in national park vehicles (and led by national park staff), which we may be sharing with other visitors.



Day 5

Augrabies Falls National Park



After breakfast we will head south once again for two nights in Augrabies Falls National Park. After settling in to our chalets we will wander down to the spectacular Augrabies Falls which thunders into the Orange River Canyon in front of our camp. Rock Hyraxes are often seen running around over the rocks, whilst those with an interest in reptiles will enjoy the colourful Augrabies Flat Lizard (*Platysaurus broadleyi*) which can be watched sunbathing on the rocky walls of the gorge in front of the camp.

Day 6

Augrabies Falls National Park

We now have a full day to explore this small but diverse national park which covers around 820 square kilometres. We begin with an early morning drive to the west of the rest camp following the flow of the Orange River as it cuts through a spectacular 18 kilometre long gorge. There are viewpoints dotted along the rim of the gorge affording both excellent views over the cleft and great photographic opportunities. Cape Clawless Otter is often seen swimming in the river below. An interesting variety of large and small mammals live within the park including Steenbok, Southern Giraffe, Gemsbok and Eland along with Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, a scarce subspecies in South Africa. Amongst the birds we will be looking for such species as Pygmy Falcon, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Cinnamon-breasted Warbler, Short-toed Rock-thrush and Ludwig's Bustard. The most obvious plant within the park is the Quiver Tree or 'Kokerboom', so called because its soft branches were favoured by the San Bushmen to make quivers for their arrows.



Leopard

We will return to our rest camp for a late breakfast after which there will be the opportunity for a siesta or to wander around the grounds of the camp and down to the Falls at leisure. Later in the afternoon we will head out once more on an afternoon game drive, before returning to the rest camp at sunset.

Night drives are currently not permitted in Augrabies National Park, but if they are re-instated a drive will be offered.

Day 7 & 8

Kimberley

Following a leisurely breakfast, and a final look of the Rock Hyraxes, we will head east on the six or so hour drive from Augrabies to Kimberley, perhaps South Africa's most renowned area for seeking elusive mammals. We will make a few birdwatching and leg stretching stops en route and hope to arrive our accommodation for the next two nights around mid-afternoon.

We will spend the daylight hours here in search of the region's birds and diurnal mammals. This will include time exploring the nearby Mokala National Park, where we will search the dry thornveld for a variety of species such as Blue Wildebeest, Gemsbok, Red Hartebeest, Southern Giraffe and Springbok. White Rhino is present too, and Mokala is well known for a variety of antelope that are scarce elsewhere in South Africa, such as Roan, Sable and Tsessebe. Birding here can also be interesting and we will be greeted by an array of dry western species ranging from the delicate Violet-eared Waxbill and Rufous-eared Warbler through to the large and powerful Black-breasted Snake Eagle. Other birds to look out for include Northern Black Korhaan, Pygmy Falcon, Fawn-coloured Lark, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Black-chested Prinia, Chat Flycatcher and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting.



Rufous-eared Warbler



Aardwolf

On each evening, after an early dinner, we will head out to the Marrick private reserve in search of Aardvark, Aardwolf and, if very fortunate, perhaps the rare Black-footed Cat. Sadly, although this scarce and attractive feline – the smallest cat on the continent – used to be regularly seen in the Marrick reserve, sightings in recent years have dropped off significantly and they are now rarely sighted. We also have a chance to see a few more nocturnal species such as the peculiar South African Springhare, Cape Hare, Bat-eared Fox and Aardwolf. The latter is another target species for

this holiday and we have a chance of seeing this small relative of the hyena here and at the other locations included on the tour. Aardwolf means 'earth wolf' in Afrikaans. They are also nocturnal, generally emerging around sunset, and live primarily on termites, consuming up to an impressive 300,000 in a single night which they lick up with their long sticky tongue. We should also keep our eyes open for a few nocturnal birds such as Spotted Eagle-Owl and Rufous-cheeked Nightjar.

Day 9

Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve

After breakfast we will drive to the nearby Kamfer's Dam, home to a resident population of Lesser and Greater Flamingos. Other birds to look out for include Black-winged Stilt, Chestnut-banded Plover, Cape Shoveler, South African Shelduck, Black-chested Prinia, White-browed Sparrow Weaver and African Sacred Ibis. We then head south on the three hour drive to New Holme Lodge in the Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve. After settling in, we should have time for a sunset drive, where we may encounter Cape Buffalo and Hippo, which has been reintroduced here after over 200 years of local extinction. After dinner back at the lodge, we will again head out for our first night drive. Karoo Gariep is an exciting new destination that is gaining an excellent reputation for elusive mammal sightings, and we can hope for Aardvark, Aardwolf, Cape Fox, Bat-eared Fox, African Wildcat, Cape Porcupine and perhaps even Zorilla.

Day 10 & 11

Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve

We will have two full days in the wonderful Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve, enjoying morning, sunset and night drives on both days. During the day, we will be able to relax around the lodge, and explore the reserve, on foot and on game drives, in search of its diurnal mammals and birds. Karoo birds include Burchell's Courser, Blue Korhaan, Blue Crane, Pale Chanting Goshawk and Spotted Eagle-Owl. For those that are interested, it will also be possible to take a guided walk from the lodge to an ancient rock art site, while learning about the area's fascinating history, including the legacy of the Anglo-Boer War. Meals will be taken at our comfortable lodge, while there may be an opportunity to eat dinner out in the bush one night. Of course, the focus of our stay here will be the nocturnal mammals. Over the last few years, this reserve has proven to be especially reliable for Aardvark, perhaps the most sought-after of Southern African rare mammals. Although widespread in Africa, Aardvarks (which means 'earth pig' in Afrikaans) are rarely observed, in most areas being strictly nocturnal in their habits and emerging from their burrows well after sunset.



Day 12

Depart Johannesburg

We have a final morning to enjoy the wildlife of the Karoo Gariep Nature Reserve, before we must leave on the three hour drive to Bloemfontein Airport to catch our late afternoon flight to Johannesburg. From there we continue home on our early evening British Airways flight to London Heathrow.

Day 13

Arrive London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow early this morning.

NB – Please be aware that we will be searching for some of Africa's rarest and most elusive mammals on this holiday and so cannot give any guarantees of success! We will do our utmost, however, to maximise the chances of finding these elusive species and have designed the itinerary around this goal. We hope that patience and perseverance will be rewarded, but whether or not our quarry decide to reveal themselves, we are still assured of an exciting variety of nocturnal and diurnal African wildlife backed by some of the most spectacular scenery in Southern Africa.

Weather

We are expecting dry and sunny weather for the majority of this holiday with daytime temperatures climbing into the mid-20s to low 30s Centigrade. Nights will be much colder, however, with temperatures dropping down close to freezing, particularly in August and early September. Since all night drives are conducted in open vehicles, warm clothing (including hat and gloves) is essential. The occasional rain shower is possible but unlikely.

Tour grading

Grade A. This is a traditional game viewing tour including morning and afternoon vehicular safaris and gentle wildlife walks around the lodges and camps. While you should be prepared for a busy programme of wildlife watching – including plenty of late night activity and several early mornings – there is nothing to stop you taking a day, or part of the day, off to relax at the accommodation should you so wish.

Your transport

We use 10-seater Toyota Quantum minibuses for this tour. Whilst all passengers will have a window seat, in common with the vast majority of safari vehicles in South Africa, Quantums do not have an opening 'pop-top' and the rear windows do not open. Group members will be rotated frequently. Throughout the holiday all night drives will be undertaken in open vehicles. For the majority of night safaris we will have exclusive use of the vehicles, although since night drives in private vehicles are not permitted in South African national parks, those in the Kgalagadi will be conducted in open national park vehicles driven by park staff. These drives are also open to the general public.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included in the cost of this holiday. We will be using a mix of guesthouses (Karoo Gariep and Kimberley) and national park rest camps (Augrabies and the Kgalagadi). All rooms have private facilities.

Extra expenses

Please note that the following expenses are excluded from the cost of the holiday and are paid locally. Any necessary visas (not needed for UK citizens), locally paid airport taxes, additional night drives not outlined above, drinks, tips and all items of a personal nature.

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, Commonwealth & Development 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 or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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