The Reptiles & Amphibians of South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Days 1 – 2	Fly Durban
Days 2 – 12	Explore superb habitats in search of the region's exciting and varied reptiles and amphibians
Day 13 – 14	Inbound flights

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 ZAF19)

Highlights

- Search for superb adders including Puff, Berg, and East African Gaboon, cobras including Snouted, Mozambique Spitting and Brown Forest, plus search for the elusive but sought-after Green and Black Mambas
- Amphibians including Whistling Rain Frog, Painted Reed Frog, Water Lily Reed Frog and Senegal Running Frog
- Chameleons including Flap-neck and Emerald Dwarf



Green Mamba, Emerald Dwarf Chameleon, Gaboon Adder

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Introduction

South Africa has a remarkably rich reptile fauna with impressive diversity; over 400 species with more than 50% endemism. One of South Africa's nine provinces, KwaZulu-Natal has a tropical temperate climate which offers approximately 320 days of sunshine annually, a statistic that makes it highly suitable for reptile- and amphibian-life. Indeed, an amazing total of over 200 reptile and amphibian species call the region home!

Join one of South Africa's leading herpetologists to discover a range of habitats and search for their iconic herpetofauna including Black and Green Mambas, Snouted, Mozambique Spitting and Forest Cobras, Puff, Berg and East African Gaboon Adders, Boomslang, Nile Crocodile, Leopard Tortoise, plus a plethora of chameleons, geckos, frogs, toads and other wildlife!



Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus viridis*) © 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 Durban

For those taking the group flights departing London, we will travel on an overnight flight to Johannesburg with a simple onward connection to Durban in the morning. 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 at our comfortable guest lodge. For those itching to start searching for wildlife, there will be instead chance to take an afternoon excursion to the surrounds of Durban.

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 Durban and Natal Midlands

Today we shall spend the day with local herpetologists where we hope to have our first chance to see and photograph Black Mamba (*Dendroaspis polylepis*) amongst other species. In the afternoon we will head to the Natal Midlands before an exciting evening search for the beautiful Flap-neck Chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*), the endemic KwaZulu Dwarf Chameleon (*Bradypodion melanocephalum*), Pondo Flat Gecko (*Afroedura pondolia*) and an abundance of raucous frog and toad species!



Flap-neck Chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*) © Tyrone Ping

For the next two nights we'll stay in lovely accommodation in the serene KwaZulu Natal Midlands.

Day 4 Natal Midlands

Today our main targets are the endemic and vulnerable Natal Midlands Dwarf Chameleon and an undescribed species of dwarf chameleon, tentatively named the 'Emerald Dwarf Chameleon'. Other species we will search for includes the colourful Drakensberg Crag Lizard (*Pseudocordylus subviridis*), Spotted Grass Snake (*Psammophylax rhombeatus*), Transvaal Grass Lizard (*Chamaesaura aenea*) and several grassland snake species including Herald Snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*), Rhombic Night Adder (*Causus rhombeatus*), Brown Water Snake (*Lycodonomorphus rufulus*), and Western Natal Green Snake (*Philothamnus occidentalis*).

The mammals of the area include Plains Zebra, Cape Porcupine, Black-backed Jackal with enticing species such as Aardvark, Serval, and others also possible! The birdlife includes such fantastic species as Wattled and Grey Crowned Cranes, African Wooly-necked Stork, Pin-tailed Whydah, Knysna Turaco, Malachite Sunbird, and much more!

Day 5 Mtunzini

Today we head to the coast to a small town called Mtunzini. As with the other locations on the itinerary, the area is very rich in wildlife. Our main targets here will be Natal Midland Dwarf Chamaeleon (*Bradypodion thamnobates*), Black-headed Dwarf Chameleon (*Bradypodion melanocephalum*), Brown Forest Cobra (*Naja subfulva*), Twig Snake (*Thelotornis capensis*), Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*), Natal Forest Tree Frog (*Leptopelis natalensis*), Painted Reed Frog (*Hyperolius marmoratus*), Water Lily Reed Frog (*Hyperolius pusillus*).

Mammals of the area include Red Forest and Blue Duikers, Vervet and Blue Monkeys, Brown Greater Galago, and birds including Palmnut Vulture, Trumpeter Hornbill, Purple-crested Turaco, Narina Trogon, Mangrove Kingfisher, Collared and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, and plethora more!

Tonight we will stay in a comfortable lodge in Mtunzini.

Day 6 St Lucia

This morning we will continue searching for species around Mtunzini. In the afternoon we will head further up the coast to the little tourist town of St Lucia. St Lucia is the southernmost part of the huge 239,566 ha iSimangaliso Wetland Park, home to stunning natural scenery, largely pristine and unmanaged by humans.

The superb reptiles and amphibians here include Nile Crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*), Nile Monitor (*Varanus niloticus*), Red-legged Wot-Wot (*Hylambates maculatus*), Edible Bullfrog (*Pyxicephalus edulis*), Eastern Hinged-Back Tortoise (*Kinixys zombensis*), Marbled Tree Snake (*Dipsadoboa aulica*), East African Egg-eater (*Dasypeltis medici*) and Argus Reed Frog (*Hyperolius argus*).



Eastern Hinged-Back Tortoise (*Kinixys zombensis*) © Tyrone Ping

The birdlife here includes Eastern Nicator, Gorgeous Bush-shrike, Livingstone's Turaco, Woodward's Batis, Brown Scrub Robin, Rudd's Apalis, Crowned Eagle, Lemon Dove, Crested Guineafowl, Southern Banded Snake Eagle, Grey

Waxbill, Lemon-breasted Canary, Green Malkoha, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Grey Sunbird, Green Twinspot, Pink-throated Twinspot, Fork-tailed Drongo and many others.

For the next two nights we'll stay in homely accommodation, a short walk from the beach.

Day 7 iSimangaliso Wetland Park

Today we'll explore the eastern shores of iSimangaliso Wetland Park. This area is host to over 30 species of amphibians, Setaro's Dwarf Chameleon (*Bradypodion setaroi*), numerous other lizards, and around 35 species of snakes, including three species of egg eaters, two species of shovel snouts, herald snakes, Brown House Snake (*Boaedon capensis*), three species of purple gloss snakes, Southern African Python (*Python natalensis*), Black File Snake (*Gracililima nyassae*), Eastern Green Mamba (*Dendroaspis angusticeps*), Twig Snake (*Thelotornis capensis capensis*), Forest Cobra (*Naja subfulva*) and the exquisite and elusive East African Gaboon Adder (*Bitis gabonica*).

The birds here include Rudd's Apalis, Green Malkoha, White-eared Barbet, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Woodward's Batis, Southern Banded Snake-Eagle, Crested Guineafowl, Livingstone's Turaco, Brown Scrub-Robin, Grey Waxbill, Green Twinspot, Purple-banded Sunbird and others. The iSimangaliso Wetland Park also has a substantial mammal list, many species having been recently re-introduced, including White Rhino, African Buffalo, Leopard, Waterbuck, Samango Monkey and Red Bush Squirrel, among others. The Hippos resident in the estuary mouth become semi-urbanised after dark, frequenting the lawns and gardens of the suburbs!

Day 8 – 9 Kosi Bay

After breakfast we'll head further north to Kosi Bay, close to the border with Mozambique where such species as Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*), garter snakes (*Elapsoidea spp.*), quill-snouted snakes (*Xenocalamus spp.*), Snouted Cobra (*Naja annulifera*), Herald Snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*), Brown House Snake (*Boaedon capensis*), Eastern Tiger Snake (*Telescopus semiannulatus semiannulatus*), Olive (*Psammophis mossambicus*) and Short-snouted Grass Snake (*P. brevirostris*), Eastern Natal Green Snake (*Philothamnus natalensis*), Giant Legless Skink (*Acontias plumbeus*) and many other diurnal species can be found.



Eastern Tiger Snake (*Telescopus semiannulatus semiannulatus*) © Tyrone Ping

Birdlife is again abundant and specialties here include Brown-hooded, Pied and Giant Kingfishers, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, African Pygmy-goose.

For these two nights we will stay in a lodge in Kosi Bay.

Day 10 – 12 Umkhumbi

This morning we have a relaxed morning before we head south to Umkhumbi via the little-travelled coastal forest roads.

In the afternoon we will enjoy a guided walk and an evening walk provides chance for active nocturnal snakes such as Marbled Tree Snake (*Dipsadoboa aulica*), Brown House Snake (*Boaedon capensis*), Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*) and sleeping diurnal species like Eastern Natal Green Snake (*Philothamnus natalensis*) and Twig Snake (*Thelotornis capensis capensis*), plus numerous beautiful scorpions.

On our second day we'll have a trip into the nearby Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve, the premier big game region of the province, where the Big Five and a range of wildlife can be seen. We'll also be looking out for a wide variety of savannah birds, such as Martial and Tawny Eagles, Bateleur, White-backed Vulture, Southern Ground Hornbill, Red-billed Oxpecker, White-eared Barbet, Cardinal and Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, and many others. On the mammal front, we'll be keeping an eye out for such classic African mammals as Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, African Wild Dog, White and Black Rhinos, Elephant, Giraffe and many more. After dinner, there will once again be opportunity to search for reptiles and amphibians for those who wish.



Nile Monitor (*Varanus niloticus*) © Tyrone Ping

The following morning, we will visit Mkhuze Game Reserve where we expect to find Leopard Tortoise (*Stigmochelys pardalis*), Eastern Hinged Tortoise (*Kinixys zombensis*), Serrated Hinged Terrapin (*Pelusios sinuatus*), Southern Marsh Terrapin (*Pelomedusa galeata*), Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*), Rainbow Skink (*Trachylepis margaritifer*), Nile (*Varanus niloticus*) and Rock Monitors (*V. albigularis*), and other wildlife including Nyala, Impala, Hippopotamus, and mongoose. Common but beautiful birds include Red-billed Oxpecker, Cape Starling, Little Bee-Eater, Southern Cordonbleu, Red-faced Mousebird and others.

In the evening we will visit the False Bay side of Lake St Lucia, with the potential for over 15 species of amphibians plus Puff Adder, Black File Snake (*Gracililima nyassae*), Purple-glossed Snake (*Amblyodipsas polylepis*), Herald Snake, chameleons and plenty more besides.

Day 13 – 14 Inbound flights

Today we'll have a leisurely breakfast before, sadly, we'll have to head on to Durban, from where we'll catch an afternoon flight to Johannesburg, connecting with our overnight flight back home.

Tour Grading & Focus

On a typical day on our herpetology tours we'll begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has begun warming 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, 5-8miles 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. Sensitively 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 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. Snakes do, of course, occur at low densities and are notoriously elusive, so it's unlikely that every species mentioned will be encountered. However, with the guidance of a leading herpetologist, your chances improve dramatically. A realistic goal might be to observe around 10 species – sometimes more, sometimes fewer – depending on conditions.

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 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. You can expect plenty of sunshine, with daytime temperatures somewhere in the mid- to late-20's with occasional rain showers. A strong waterproof torch is essential and amongst the options available a powerful head-torch will be most useful, keeping 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 12.

Extending Your Holiday

We would be very pleased 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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Flap-neck Chameleon rescued from the road