

South Africa – KwaZulu-Natal

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2/3	Wakkerstroom.
Day 4/6	St Lucia.
Day 7	Eshowe.
Day 8/9	Drakensberg Mountains.
Day 10	Depart Durban.
Day 11	Arrive London.



Departs

February & November

Focus

Birds & other wildlife

Grading

A mix of walks & vehicular safaris. Grade A.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ZAF20).



Highlights:

- Blue Crane, Blue Korhaan, Ground Woodpecker, Rudd's & Botha's Larks in Wakkerstroom.
- Livingstone's Turaco, Rudd's Apalis, Green Malkoha & Trumpeter Hornbill in St Lucia.
- Savannah birds & big game of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi.
- Birdwatch from the canopy walkway in Dlinza Forest.
- Take the Sani Pass into Lesotho, in search of mountain specials such as Drakensberg Rockjumper, Lammergeier & Cape Vulture.
- Can be combined with our Kruger birding tour!
- Led by expert naturalist guides



From top: Drakensberg Rockjumper, the Sani Pass and Blue Crane. Images under licence from Shutterstock Ltd



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Introduction

This birdwatching and wildlife holiday explores the beautiful South African province of KwaZulu-Natal, once part of the ancient kingdom of Zululand. Bordered to the west by the rugged Drakensberg Mountains and boasting 600 kilometres of wetland-dotted coastline, KwaZulu-Natal is one of the most varied regions of the country and is home to a wonderful variety of wildlife, including over 650 species of birds. This tour can be combined with our long-running and popular 'South Africa – Kruger' holiday (website tour code: ZAF03), which focuses on the birdlife of Kruger National Park, Dullstroom and the spectacular Blyde River Canyon

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.

Day 1

In flight

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

Day 2 & 3

Wakkerstroom

After meeting our guides at Johannesburg Airport we will depart for Wakkerstroom, a small agricultural town in the Southern Mpumalanga highlands that is well-known as one of South Africa's best birding spots. We should arrive by mid-afternoon and, if time and energy allows, we will take a short drive down to the large wetland on the edge of town. This wetland and expanse of open water is easily viewable from the road bridge and we should record species such as Grey Crowned Crane, Purple Swamphen, Little Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, African Spoonbill, Hamerkop, Southern Masked Weaver and others. Both African Clawless and Spotted-necked Otters are also seen occasionally in the lake. In the late afternoon we will head back to our accommodation and then head into town for dinner. After dinner and completing our lists we will retire in anticipation of a full day birding the Wakkerstroom area, where the hilltops rise to over 2,000 meters above sea level and the lack of intensive agriculture makes for superb highveld grassland habitat.

The next morning, we will head out to explore the Wakkerstroom area. Special birds we will be looking out for include Blue Crane, Secretarybird, Blue Korhaan, Ground Woodpecker, Quailfinch, Marsh Owl and Red-throated Wryneck. Mammals we may see include Yellow Mongoose and the endearing Meerkat (or Suricate). We will return to the hotel for lunch and a siesta, and will have the afternoon open for either another drive or a stroll down to the wetlands once again.

Other birds to look out for include Yellow-breasted Pipit, African Rock Pipit, Southern Bald Ibis, Blue Crane, Denham's Bustard, Jackal Buzzard, Eastern Long-billed Lark, White-bellied Bustard, Black-winged Lapwing, Bush Blackcap and Grey-winged Francolin.

Day 4 – 6

St Lucia

After an early walk and breakfast we will depart for the coastal village of St Lucia on the edge of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. The park was listed in 1999 as South Africa's first World Heritage Site. Comprising three major lake systems, eight interlinking ecosystems, most of South Africa's remaining swamp forests, Africa's largest estuarine system, 526 bird species and 25 000-year-old coastal sand dunes – which are among the highest in the world – this is an extraordinary place indeed! We should arrive in the early afternoon and have time to settle in to our accommodation in town before embarking on an optional birding boat cruise on the estuary, looking for birds such as African Fish Eagle, African Purple Swamphen, Malachite, Pied and Giant Kingfishers, African Jacana, Great White and Pink-backed Pelicans, Woolly-necked Storks and others in addition to the resident Hippos and Nile Crocodiles, some of which are true giants! We will return in the evening and have dinner in one of the town's restaurants before turning in.

On our first full day here, we will depart early for the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, birding our way northwards towards Cape Vidal. At the cape we will have time to stretch our legs and dip our toes in the warm Indian Ocean before slowly birding our way back to town. The region carries a substantial bird list including specials such as Rudd's Apalis, Green Malkoha, White-eared Barbet, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Woodward's Batis, Southern Banded Snake-Eagle, Crested Guinea-fowl, 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, Samango Monkey and Red Bush Squirrel, among others. Interestingly enough, the Hippos resident in the estuary mouth become semi-urbanised after dark, frequenting the lawns and gardens of the suburbs! The metallic 'tink-tink' of large fruit bats and the occasional whooping of African Wood Owls are the sounds of the night, while the nasal whining of the Trumpeter Hornbills is the dominant sound during the day.

On our second full day we will take another day trip, this time into the nearby Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve (45 minutes to an hour from St Lucia), the premier big game reserve of the province, where the 'Big Five' and a range of general game can be seen. We will 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, Gorgeous Bush-shrike and many others. On the mammal front, we will be keeping an eye out for such classic African mammals as Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, African Wild Dog, White and Black Rhinos, Elephant, Southern Giraffe and many more. We will then return in the late afternoon for a rest before taking dinner once again in one of the local restaurants.

Day 7

Eshowe

After a morning activity at St Lucia we will head south, making a detour to Mtunzini to look for Palm-nut Vulture before heading on to Eshowe in the foothills just inland from the coast. This area is rich in history as the seat of the famed Zulu Kingdom of the 1870's, when the British colonial force came into contact with one of Southern Africa's most powerful tribes. We will be staying on the fringe of Dlinza Forest, a relic patch of coastal scarp forest around which the town is built. The highlight of the forest is an aerial boardwalk which allows us to look for birds from high up in the canopy, and even from above on the twenty-metre high canopy tower. There's also a walking trail through the forest, and birds we will be looking out for include Spotted Ground Thrush, Eastern Bronze-

naped Pigeon, Cape Batis, Narina Trogon, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, Grey Cuckooshrike, Green Malkoha, Lemon Dove, Red-capped Robin Chat, Chorister Robin Chat, Trumpeter Hornbill and others, while the tiny Blue Duiker, standing only 30cm tall at the shoulder, is fairly common in the forest. After an afternoon walk in the forest we will head back to the guest house to freshen up before dinner.

Day 8 & 9

Underberg

From Eshowe we will make our way to the town of Underberg ('under the mountains'), which sits beneath the mighty peaks of the Drakensberg, stopping en route to birdwatch and stretch our legs. Arriving mid to late in the afternoon, we should have time for a bit of local birding in the area around the guest house to end off the day.

On Day 9 we will be up early and will make our way up one of the most scenic passes in South Africa, the Sani Pass, one of the few vehicular access points on the eastern side of Lesotho. Not only are we sure to be enthralled by spectacular scenery, but also by the wildlife. Some of the birds we hope to see on the lower portion of the pass include Jackal Buzzard, Malachite Sunbird, Gurney's Sugarbird (these two often in association with flowering protea trees), Cape Rock-Thrush, Buff-streaked Chat, Bush Blackcap, Barratt's Warbler (a real skulker!), Long-billed Pipit, Ground Woodpecker and White-necked Raven, among others. As we continue to climb, the vegetation slowly changes and shrubs start disappearing, leaving only low scrub and grassland, and from this point on we will start to focus on the next set of specials, with Drakensberg Siskin and Drakensberg Rockjumper being two of the prime species for the day, usually found between the sharp switchback turns and the top of the plateau. Once we reach the top of the pass we will officially cross over into Lesotho (passports are needed here), and will start to look for birds such as Southern Grey Tit, Layard's Tit-babbler, Large-billed Lark, Mountain Pipit, Fairy Flycatcher and Yellow Canary. We will have a lunch stop somewhere in Lesotho, perhaps near Black Mountain, which at over 3,000 meters above sea level is firmly in Lammergeier country. Cape Vultures are common here, with a large breeding colony on one of the cliffs to the north of the road. At some point we will turn around and begin the long trek back to Underberg, arriving in the late afternoon for some time to rest before another lovely meal and what's bound to be a good night's rest after an action-packed day of birding.

Day 10

Depart Durban

On our last morning, we will be up early in search of two of South Africa's most sought-after and rare species. Cape Parrot is restricted to South Africa's diminished montane forests, but we hope to see this species as it leaves its overnight roost sites. The endangered Blue Swallow is reliant on upland grassland, a habitat which has sadly been replaced by forestry plantations at an alarming rate in recent years. If our guides are aware of recent sightings of this rare species we will certainly give it a go and hope to round off the holiday with one of the world's most elegant and threatened hirundines.

Then, sadly, we will have to head on to Durban, from where we will catch an afternoon flight to Johannesburg, connecting with our British Airways overnight flight back to London.

Day 11

Arrive London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow early this morning.

Tour grading

Grade A. This is a traditional birding tour with no strenuous walking involved, although there are a few lengthy drives. You must, however, be prepared for a busy programme of action-packed birding and mammal-viewing (though there is nothing to stop you taking a day, or part of the day, off to relax should you so wish!).

Weather

Mid-summer months are December and January, while mid-winter occurs between June and August. Our November and February holidays take place during the early and late rainy season respectively. It will be hot during the day (up to 35°C), with regular short and sharp afternoon rainstorms that are unlikely to interrupt our schedule to any great extent. It can be cold, however, at altitude on the Sani Pass. This season is the best for birds, when resident populations are supplemented by summer visitors from both central Africa and the northern hemisphere.

Guiding

Depending on the final group size (the maximum will be 12 people), this tour will be guided by one, or two, local expert ornithologist and naturalist guide/s who will meet the group on arrival into Johannesburg Airport.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation in South Africa is included, together with breakfasts. **Lunches and dinners are not included**, and will be taken at either our hotels, where available, or in town. Your guide will suggest places to eat and the group usually dine together. You are likely to spend £200-£250 on the tour on these meals, depending on your appetite! Our accommodation will consist of simple, but comfortable, hotels and guesthouses. All rooms have private facilities and single occupation may be reserved on payment of the supplement outlined on our website.

Additional Extra expenses

The cost of drinks, any necessary visas, tips (please allow around £100 for tips), laundry and all items of a personal nature are not included in the price of this holiday.

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 and 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.
