SOUTH AFRICA

Birding and Wildlife Safari

with Western Field Ornithologists

JULY 20 - AUGUST 1, 2027

WESTERN FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

HOLBROOK TRAVEL

This 13-day birding and wildlife safari immerses you in the natural wonders of South Africa, with a focus on the country's more than 800 bird species. World-renowned habitats and biological diversity are the focus as you journey from the Highveld grasslands of Mpumalanga province to the cliffs and gorges of the Blyde River Canyon, and through transitional habitats before leveling out in the bush plains of Kruger National Park. Cap off the experience birding in the wetlands, grasslands and forests around Wakkerstroom. This translates to a superb range of avian species to be seen, including many regional and country-specific endemics.

Optional post-trip extension: *Birding & wildlife in Cape Town, Jul. 31 - Aug. 4, 2027.*

HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore South Africa's famed Kruger National Park, one of the continent's largest game reserves, for the chance to spot nearly 500 bird species, as well as the "Big 5" – lions, elephants, Cape buffalo, leopards, and rhinoceros.
- Seek out Highveld grassland species such as Wing-snapping Cisticola, Eastern Long-billed Lark, and Denham's Bustard at Verloren Vallei Nature Reserve.
- Hike the escarpment forest of Mount Sheba and look for area specialties like the Knysna Turaco, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, and Narina Trogon.
- Marvel at the stunning landscapes of Blyde River Canyon, the third largest canyon in the world, and spot species like antelopes, hippos, crocodiles, and more.
- Explore the grassland around Wakkerstroom and track down scarce inhabitants like Blue Bustard, Secretarybird, and Gray Crowned-Crane, plus the globally threatened Rudd's Lark and Botha's Lark.

AFRICAN GREEN-PIGEON (ABOVE); LION IN KRUGER NATIONAL PARK (BELOW)

Enrollment opens soon!

ITINERARY

BLD = BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER

DAY 1 | TUE | JUL 20 | EN ROUTE

Depart the United States for South Africa.

DAY 2 | WED | JUL 21 | JOHANNESBURG

Arrive in Johannesburg today. Most participants' flights arrive in the evening. In the winter (June to September), temperatures in South Africa range from the low 60s to mid-30s (°F), with minimal chance of rain. Elevation is 5,600 feet above sea level, with open Highveld grassland habitats. Hotel check-in time is 2 pm. *Overnight at AfricaSky Boutique Hotel.*

DAY 3 | THU | JUL 22 | MOUNT SHEBA

After an early breakfast and welcome orientation, load up the vehicle for the drive to Mount Sheba Rainforest Hotel and Resort, which is situated in a beautiful area of escarpment forest. Spend much of the day traveling to the hotel, stopping en route for some birding if time allows and perhaps visiting a small pan (seasonal, rain-filled body of water), where there are opportunities to search for species such as White-backed Duck, Yellow-billed Duck, Little Grebe, Great-crested Grebe, Purple Heron, and Eurasian Moorhen. Then, drive through the unique Highveld town of Dullstroom. Due to its high-elevation, Dullstroom's temperate climate nurtures the only place in the country where beech and elm trees grow. Continue birding your way to Mount Sheba via the beautiful Verloren Vallei Nature Reserve, a highly biodiverse protected wetland where some of the Highveld grassland species to seek out include Wing-snapping Cisticola, Eastern Long-billed Lark, Yellow Bishop, Denham's Bustard, and possibly Yellow-breasted Pipit, Southern Bald Ibis, and Blue Crane. From here, finish the drive with the aim of reaching Mount Sheba late in the afternoon and spend some time relaxing before dinner. Elevation is 5,300 feet, with Afromontane forest and grassland habitats. *Overnight at Mount Sheba Rainforest Hotel & Resort. (BD)*

DAY 4 | FRI | JUL 23 | BLYDE RIVER CANYON

Wake up early to explore the surrounding escarpment forest on foot. Although the number of species that occur in this habitat type is not as high as in other habitats, several of the species here are unlikely to be seen again anywhere else on this journey. Some of the specialties to look for include Knysna Turaco, Grey Cuckooshrike, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Narina Trogon, Cape Batis, African Crested-Flycatcher, and White-starred Robin. Afterward, have a relaxed breakfast before packing up the gear and driving through to the next destination, situated on the edge of Blyde River Canyon. Encompassing more than 1,100 square miles of protected land, the Blyde River Canyon is one of the largest in the world, along with the likes of the Grand Canyon in the United States and the Fish River Canyon in Namibia. Its beauty and magnificence make it one of the most sought-after sites in South Africa. The canyon is home to an impressive variety of species of birds, antelopes, primates, and fish, as well as hippos, crocodiles, and more. Along the way, do some birding in search of species such as Rufous-necked Wryneck, Amethyst Sunbird, Piping Cisticola, and Streaky-headed Seedeater. The aim is to reach Forever Blyde Canyon Resort in the early afternoon to allow for some time to relax during the hottest part of the day before going on a stroll up to a viewpoint overlooking the canyon later in the afternoon. Along the winding paths of the canyon, search for more species like Rock-loving Cisticola, Brimstone Canary, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, and Green-backed Camaroptera. Enjoy watching the sun set over the stunning Blyde River Canyon before returning to the resort for dinner. Elevation is around 3,840 feet, with cliffs and gorges, and forest and thickets habitats. *Overnight at Forever Resort. (BD)*

DAY 5 | SAT | JUL 24 | SATARA, KRUGER

Start the day off with a birding walk in search of a few more species, including White-throated Robin-Chat, Yellow-fronted Canary, Mocking Cliff-Chat, Familiar Chat, and Striped Pipit. Return to the resort for a relaxed breakfast and some time to pack before departing toward the next spot. Begin the journey to the majestic Kruger National Park and search for species along the way that include Cape Griffon, Cape Rock-Thrush, Mountain Wagtail and, with luck, Taita Falcon. Arrive at the entrance gate of Kruger National Park around mid-day and have some lunch. Spend most of the afternoon driving through to Satara Rest Camp, situated about 30 miles away from the entrance. There are a multitude of new species to encounter in the area that keep travelers distracted during the drive, such as Magpie Shrike, Tawny Eagle, White-backed Vulture, Brown-headed Parrot, and Green-winged Pytillia. Kruger is world-renowned for its unparalleled biodiversity and for being home to the Big Five and many other species like impalas, blue wildebeest, kudus, southern giraffes, and much more. Satara is especially regarded for having an ideal location within Kruger due to its prolific bird life. Elevation ranges from 800 feet at Satara to 1,920 feet at Pretoriuskop, with various habitats that include mainly savanna, with various sub-types such as basalt sweetveld, Sabie River thickets, and Pretoriuskop sourveld. *Overnight at Satara Rest Camp. (BD)*

DAY 6 | SUN | JUL 25 | SATARA, KRUGER

Spend a full day exploring the area around Satara. Focus initially on birding around the northern part of the camp, where it may be possible to spot Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Namaqua Dove, Kori Bustard, Red-crested Bustard, and perhaps also Gabar Goshawk, Sabota Lark, Burnt-necked Eremomela, and African Pipit. Then, return for a late breakfast in the camp, followed by a short birding stroll before taking some time to relax during the hotter parts of the day. Later in the afternoon, head out once again to add a few more species to the list, and hopefully bump into some more of the large mammals in the area, as Satara offers excellent habitat for lions. *Overnight at Satara Rest Camp. (BD)*

DAY 7 | MON | JUL 26 | SKUKUZA, KRUGER

Today, the morning starts with a short drive in the region to search for more species such as African Green-Pigeon, African Harrier-Hawk, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Southern Red-billed Hornbill, and

Southern Ground-Hornbill. As usual, be on the look-out for the big predators — lions, leopards, and cheetahs. Then, head back to the camp for breakfast and to pack up all the gear for the drive to the next camp, right in the heart of Big Five territory. Spend the next two nights in the capital of Kruger National Park, Skukuza Rest Camp, known for its particular abundance of wildlife due to its location on the banks of Sabie River. The drive to Skukuza from Satara takes up the rest of the day, so there are great opportunities for birding along the way during the 57-mile journey. Be ready to spot plenty of other species, as this drive affords travelers magnificent views of Kruger. Around mid-day, stop at Tshokwane Picnic Site for lunch and a chance to stretch before continuing on to Skukuza. Arrive in the late afternoon and enjoy some time to relax in the camp before dinner. *Overnight at Skukuza Rest Camp. (BD)*

DAY 8 | TUE | JUL 27 | SKUKUZA, KRUGER

Explore the area around Skukuza in a similar structure as at Satara; go out during the morning and afternoon, and enjoy some relaxing time back at the camp around mid-day, when activity slows down during the warmer hours of the day. Start by exploring the Sabie River, where there are chances to encounter Red-backed Scrub-Robin, Bearded Scrub-Robin, Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike, Ashy Flycatcher, Golden-breasted Bunting, and White-fronted Bee-eater. On the river itself, it may be possible to find White-headed Lapwing, Three-banded Plover, Goliath Heron, and with a fair share of luck, African Finfoot. Return around mid-morning for breakfast. Afterward, spend some time birding in the camp, where Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Collared Sunbird, Crowned Hornbill, White-browed Robin-Chat, and Cape Crombec may all be seen. Take an afternoon drive around the area in the hopes of finding some of the usual thickets species such as Southern Cordonbleu, Red-billed Firefinch, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Natal Spurfowl, and Brubru. Return to the camp just before gates close and in time for a lovely dinner, possibly even spotting a greater galago along the way. *Overnight at Skukuza Rest Camp. (BD)*

DAY 9 | WED | JUL 28 | BERG-EN-DAL, KRUGER

Wake up early today for a drive to a nearby bird hide, where the hopes are to spot some species like African Darter, Malachite Kingfisher, African Pied Kingfisher, Water Thick-knee and African Jacana. Make the most of the excellent photography opportunities at this location, as hippos often come fairly close to the front of the hide. Spend some time here before returning to the camp for breakfast, perhaps making a quick stop around the Skukuza Indigenous Nursery for some birding. Embark on the journey to your final accommodation in Kruger, Berg-en-Dal Rest Camp, a newer camp located on the banks of Matjulu Spruit that boasts views of the surrounding rocky hillsides. Arrive in the early afternoon, and then head out on a drive with a focus on some target species such as Yellow-bellied Eremomela, African Penduline-Tit, Brown-headed Parrot, Little Bee-eater, Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow, and Bush Pipit, before returning to the camp for some more leisure time to get ready for dinner. *Overnight at Berg-en-Dal Rest Camp. (BD)*

DAY 10 | THU | JUL 29 | WAKKERSTROOM

After a short morning exploration around the camp, return for breakfast. Then, begin the journey to Wakkerstroom to spend the last two nights of this trip. Wakkerstroom is world-renowned for its birding, which has helped the town develop significantly over the years due to the interest of visitors from all around the world. It is located in a valley that offers stunning panoramic views and features a myriad of species, from grassland endemics to water and forest birds. En route, there may only be one stop at a grassland area to try and track down the White-bellied Bustard, which is formerly known as Barrow's Korhaan and sometimes treated as a distinct species. Arrive in Wakkerstroom late in the afternoon and have some time to relax and get settled in before dinner. Elevation is 5,700 feet, with mainly high-altitude grassland habitat. *Overnight at Wetlands Country Lodge. (BD)*

DAY 11 | FRI | JUL 30 | WAKKERSTROOM

Today, venture on a morning outing with a packed breakfast to explore the area around Wakkerstroom. Focus on tracking down some of the more elusive species of the northern grassland areas like Blue Bustard, Secretarybird, Grey-winged Francolin, Red-capped Lark, Eastern Clapper Lark, Pink-billed Lark, Blue Crane, Grey Crowned-Crane, and Southern Bald Ibis. Two of the most important species to be on the lookout for are Rudd's Lark and Botha's Lark, which are globally threatened and with populations of fewer than 5,000 each, possibly even as low as 1,500 each. Although the Yellow-breasted Pipit can be tough to track down during the winter months, it may also be possible to encounter it in this area. Return to town around lunch time and enjoy the chance to relax. Then, spend the afternoon birding the wetlands along Wakkerstroom to track down Cape Shoveler, Red-billed Duck, Blue-billed Teal, Spur-winged Goose, African Snipe, African Marsh-Harrier, Little Rush Warbler, and Black-crowned Night-Heron. *Overnight at Wetlands Country Lodge. (BD)*

DAY 12 | SAT | JUL 31 | FAREWELL!

Spend the final morning of this journey on an early birding drive in the region. Search for any outstanding species and, perhaps, find one of the local meerkat mobs before heading back to the lodge for breakfast and departure for Johannesburg. All morning activities on this day depend on departure flight times, as it is a 4-hour drive from Wakkerstroom to the airport. Fly home, or begin the post-trip extension in Cape Town. *(B)*

DAY 13 | SUN | AUG 1 | ARRIVE HOME

Spend overnight in flight and arrive home today.

SCARLET-CHESTED SUNBIRD

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR QUESTIONS:

Contact Jill Hays
jill@holbrooktravel.com or 877-846-6296

MEET YOUR HOST

Kurt Leuschner is a Professor of Natural Resources at College of the Desert in Palm Desert, California. For the past 30+ years he has been teaching courses on environmental science/conservation, entomology, field ornithology, native plants, reptiles, wildlife management, and desert natural history. He has a bachelor's degree in zoology from U.C. Santa Barbara and a master's in wildlife ecology from the University of Florida. Kurt has extensive experience abroad including a year at the University of Nairobi, a semester studying tropical biology in Costa Rica, two years in the Peace Corps working in Tanzania's Wildlife Division, master's research in the Kibale Forest of Uganda and with the Royal Geographic Society in the Mkomazi Game Reserve, and two years running a hotel and horse-riding school in the Bavarian Alps of Germany. Since 1993 Kurt has been leading natural history and birding trips all over the United States and the world. Kurt is a past-president of the Western Field Ornithologists and has been active with this group for over 25 years.

PRICING DETAILS

From $5,545 per person

Price includes:

- Accommodations, meals and activities as described in the itinerary, including entrance fees
- Non-alcoholic beverages with meals
- Full-time expert birding guide for duration of program
- Private vehicle transportation and driver
- Arrival and departure airport transfers based on individual flight schedules
- Carbon offset

Price does not include: international airfare, passport/visa fees, meals not mentioned in itinerary, tips/gratuities, travel/trip cancellation insurance, drinks or snacks purchased on own, laundry services, or other items of a personal nature.

THE FINE PRINT

Pricing is based on a minimum of 10 participants in double occupancy; for a single room throughout the trip, add $650 per person.

A deposit of $500 is required for participants to register and reserve space on the program. This deposit is refundable minus a $300 cancellation fee 240 or more days before departure. From 239 to 126 days before departure, the full deposit of $500 is forfeited upon cancellation. Final non-refundable payment is due in full March 17, 2027.

Holbrook Travel strongly recommends the purchase of travel protection for medical emergencies while traveling and to protect your investment. Please note the purchase of Cancel for Any Reason Coverage or to exclude pre-existing conditions with Trip Cancellation coverage may require policy purchase within 10-14 days of your initial deposit, depending upon the provider.

AFRICAN PENGUINS AT BOULDERS BEACH

OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

Birding & Wildlife: Cape Town

DAY 1 | SAT | JUL 31 | CAPE TOWN

Upon arrival at the Cape Town International Airport, after collecting your luggage, you will be met and taken to your hotel where you will have a program orientation before enjoying a relaxing evening and dinner. *Overnight at City Lodge Pinelands. (D)*

DAY 2 | SUN | AUG 1 | CAPE TOWN

After breakfast, begin your day with a cable car ride to the top of Table Mountain (weather permitting). Vegetation found on the mountain consists primarily of fynbos, a unique and endangered collection of shrubs and plants that are endemic to the Cape. They form part of the Cape Floral Region protected areas, which boast the world's highest known concentration of plant species — 1,300 per 3,800 square miles. The cable car takes visitors from the lower station to the upper station, ascending to 3,500 feet above sea level. Then visit the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve. The incredibly beautiful reserve is teeming with rich biodiversity, including 1,100 indigenous plant species, 250 bird species, zebras, elands, and baboons. After your time at the reserve, visit the penguins at Boulders Beach as you walk along the boardwalk of the white sand beach of Simon's Town. African Penguins inhabit 27 different locations on the continent; most of these sites are inshore islands. The penguins are protected by the Southern African National Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds to ensure that they do not become an endangered species. This evening before dinner at the Manor, there will be a briefing and bird checklist review. *Overnight at Whale View Manor. (BD)*

DAY 3 | MON | AUG 2 | CAPE TOWN

This morning, depart for the scenic drive to Rooi Els, located within the UNESCO-designated Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve. This area, rich in fynbos and dramatic coastal landscapes, is a hotspot for endemics. Spend the morning birding in search of key species such as the Cape Rockjumper, Ground Woodpecker, Cape Grassbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape Siskin, Cape Sugarbird, Cape Rock Thrush, Cape Bunting, Grey-backed Cisticola, Jackal Buzzard, and others. Return to the Manor in time for dinner. There will be lots of stops for birding along the way. This evening there will be an evening briefing and bird checklist review. *Overnight at Whale View Manor. (BD)*

DAY 4 | TUE | AUG 3 | FAREWELL!

Today, visit Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens before transferring to the airport for your international flight home. *(B)*

DAY 5 | WED | AUG 4 | ARRIVE HOME