

Best of Cape & Kruger Reader Rendezvous Itinerary

South Africa

October 1-11, 2019



Day 1, October 1: Arrival Day

Upon your arrival at Cape Town International Airport you will be transferred directly to the guesthouse where you will be based for the following five nights.

Day 2: Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens and Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve

Our tour kicks off in Cape Town this morning, from where we will immediately begin our exploration of the picturesque Cape Peninsula at one of the local birding hotspots. Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens lies on the slopes of Table Mountain and is home to a plethora of endemics restricted to the Macchia-like fynbos vegetation of the southern tip of Africa. Here, Cape Spurfowl scurry across the lawns, the magnificent protea gardens are home to spectacular Cape Sugarbird and Orange-breasted Sunbird, both of which are South African endemics, as well as the exquisite Malachite Sunbird, whilst Cape Bulbul, Olive Thrush, the attractive Cape Grassbird, Karoo Prinia, Bokmakierie, Southern Boubou, and Southern Double-collared Sunbird may be found in areas of denser cover. In addition, we will watch out for African Goshawk and Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk, which occasionally display above the indigenous forest that cloaks the slopes above the gardens. These forests are also home to African Olive Pigeon, Lemon Dove, Cape Batis, and Forest Canary.

In the afternoon we will travel to the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve. This wonderful park showcases the most southwestern point of the continent and is very popular amongst birders and general tourists alike. Here we should again find the enigmatic Cape Sugarbird and the stunning Orange-breasted Sunbird, and perhaps the impressive Black Harrier, Grey-winged Francolin, Cape Grassbird and Cape Siskin. We will explore the network of roads to less-visited parts of the reserve, visiting secluded coves and searching for mammals: the elusive Mountain Zebra and sub-species of Blesbok – Bontebok. In addition, we could also find the magnificent Common Eland, the largest antelope in the world!

Day 3: Table Mountain cableway and afternoon winery visit

Our first point of interest today will be the iconic Table Mountain during the morning. The famous cableway will be our choice of transport once at the base of the mountain and will allow for a relaxed

ascent and decent without much fuss. Birds such as Orange-breasted Sunbird and Red-winged Starling should be easily found along with the possibility of Rock Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon. Depending on the weather we may be able to have incredible 360-degree views of the city of Cape Town and even Robben Island.

With the splendor of Table Mountain fresh in our minds, we shall depart for the spectacular mountains and surrounding valleys covered by myriad vineyards, which welcome us to the heart of the Cape winelands. It is in this magnificent region that we shall enjoy a sample of the superb wines on offer including the South African signature variety, Pinotage, a wine produced from cross pollinating Pinot Noir and Hermitage grapes. Our wine estate of choice this afternoon will be Groot Constantia (South Africa's oldest wine producing estate). We will have lunch at the famous Jonkershuis Restaurant on the property, which serves a lovely selection of food including several typically South African dishes.

Day 4: Rooi Els, Betty's Bay, and Harold Porter Botanical Gardens

A diverse array of birding habitats is present around Cape Town and today we will visit a variety of sites, ranging from wetlands to fynbos and marine shoreline. Making our way early to the rugged Hottentots-Holland Mountains, we will search for one of South Africa's finest endemics: the handsome Cape Rockjumper (see photo at top)! Though strikingly plumaged and conspicuous by their vocalizations, these charismatic birds possess an incredible ability to disappear among the boulders and we may have to be patient if we wish to enjoy decent sightings of these elusive creatures. The thick mountain fynbos here is the favored habitat of Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape Siskin and the beautiful, endemic Victorin's Warbler, while other species including Verreaux's Eagle, Grey-backed Cisticola, and Ground Woodpecker are also found in the area. Chacma Baboon is fairly common, but we will have to scan the rocky ridges carefully for the agile Klipspringer (an antelope).

While in Betty's Bay, we will also visit the famous African Penguin colony at Stony Point. Here we will enjoy the spectacle of hundreds of penguins waddling about on the beach and rocks at extremely close range, which makes for superb photographic opportunities. We will also keep a lookout for the endemic African Oystercatcher along the adjacent rocky shoreline, and scan through the masses of nesting cormorants for all four species of South African coastal cormorant: Crowned, Bank, Cape, and White-breasted.

After enjoying this spectacle, we will pay a visit to the nearby Harold Porter Botanical Gardens. A smaller version of Kirstenbosch, these beautiful gardens support a wealth of fynbos specialties like Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape Sugarbird, and Cape Siskin, and is a particularly good site to see the skulking, endemic Victorin's Warbler. We are also likely to encounter a range of other noteworthy and eye-catching species including Cape and Brimstone Canaries, Karoo Prinia, Sweet Waxbill, Cape Batis, Bar-throated Apalis, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Cape Robin-Chat, African Dusky and Fiscal Flycatchers, Olive Thrush, and Sombre Greenbul.

If time allows we will spend the rest of the late afternoon at the productive Strandfontein Water Works. Chances of seeing Maccoa Duck, Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes, African Snipe, Greater and Lesser Flamingos, and Great White Pelican are all possible. This day promises to be full of wonderful birding and varying landscapes and habitats.

Day 5: Cape Town to West Coast National Park

Our first site of interest today is the West Coast National Park. Large numbers of waders spend the northern winter here and we will check the exposed banks of Langebaan Lagoon for any remaining Red Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Greater Sand Plover, and Eurasian Curlew, as well as Kittlitz's and the localized Chestnut-banded Plovers. In addition to the shorebirds, these areas also support large numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler, and other waterfowl. The surrounding short, coastal vegetation (strandveld) is home to the endemic Southern Black Korhaan, Grey-winged Francolin, Grey Tit, Cape Penduline Tit, Karoo Lark, Capped Wheatear, Fiscal Flycatcher, and the magnificent Black Harrier, surely one of the world's most attractive raptors!

Day 6: Cape Town and flight to Kruger National Park

After a leisurely breakfast, we will depart for Cape Town International Airport, from where we catch an internal flight to Kruger National Park in the northeast of the country. Upon arrival in Kruger we will immediately board our open game-viewing vehicle and head to the nearby park headquarters of Skukuza. This is the park's largest rest camp and we will be based here for the next five nights. It is an ideal location to explore most of the southern and parts of the central regions of the park over the next four days.

Day 7 to 10, October 7-10: Explore Southern & Central Kruger National Park

The extensive wilderness of the greater Kruger conservation area incorporates vast areas of adjacent Mozambique and Zimbabwe and forms one of the largest reserves on Earth! It is also one of Africa's most diverse parks, protecting a huge variety of wildlife. In fact, the acacia savanna that dominates most of Kruger National Park contains one of the highest densities of birds of any habitat type in the world! This, coupled with the immense variety of game that we will endeavor to see, ensures a truly unforgettable experience.

The dense bushveld, the woodlands and gallery forest in the southern section of the park, will be our focus for the next few days. One of the many astounding species that we hope to find is the majestic Southern Ground Hornbill that is often seen striding around in small groups, and we will certainly be treated to many encounters with the gaudy Lilac-breasted Roller. Raptors are numerous throughout the reserve, and we will no doubt enjoy sightings of the conspicuous Bateleur as well as Tawny and Wahlberg's Eagles, Hooded, White-backed, and huge Lappet-faced Vultures, and the handsome African Fish Eagle, while other possibilities include Shikra, Lizard Buzzard, Gabar Goshawk, White-headed Vulture, the scarce but extremely good-looking African Cuckoo-Hawk, Black-chested and Brown Snake Eagles, Crowned Eagle, African Hawk-Eagle, African Harrier-Hawk, and Dark Chanting Goshawk.

This area is also famous for regular sightings of the rare African Wild Dog, while we stand an excellent chance of finding the endangered White Rhinoceros and, with exceptional luck, its rarer cousin, the Black Rhinoceros. It is also arguably the best area in the park to see the crepuscular Leopard, certainly one of the world's best-looking cats! In addition, we should encounter Lion, Spotted Hyena, Black-backed Jackal, large herds of African Elephant lounging in the Sabi River, herds of African Buffalo, Waterbuck, the striking Bushbuck and pods of Hippopotami. The persistent troops of humorous Chacma Baboon and Vervet will keep us entertained during the heat of the day.

Scouring the riverine woodland and thickets along the Sabi River, we hope to encounter Golden-tailed, Bearded, and Cardinal Woodpeckers, Ashy Flycatcher, gorgeous White-browed and Red-capped Robin-Chats, Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow-bellied and Sombre Greenbuls, African, Jameson's and Red-billed Firefinches, superb Green-winged Pytilia, Red-faced Cisticola, and Southern Boubou. The large riparian trees lining the rivers provide perfect nesting sites for weavers, which are extremely well represented in the park and include Southern and Lesser Masked, Village, Spectacled, and Thick-billed Weavers. Furthermore, we will endeavor to see various species of brightly colored bee-eaters, kingfishers, rollers, and hornbills, along with the occasional Pearl-spotted Owllet, a diurnal owl with a lovely, characteristic call.

The park's numerous large rivers and wetlands harbor a number of exciting water-associated birds, and we will be on the lookout for the massive Goliath Heron, stately and severely threatened Saddle-billed Stork as well as the commoner Woolly-necked and Yellow-billed Storks, African Spoonbill, the unique and monotypic Hamerkop, Wire-tailed and Grey-rumped Swallows, White-crowned Lapwing and, if we are lucky, the rare African Finfoot or unpredictable Greater Painted-snipe.

Our base here in the southern part of the park is situated on the banks of the Sabi River, where the huge Sycamore Fig and Sausage Trees that tower over the camp attract some brilliant birds. Included in this suite of species are African Green Pigeon, with its lovely, mournful, liquid call, the tiny Little Sparrowhawk, African Goshawk, sensational Purple-crested Turaco, Red-headed Weaver, Black-headed Oriole, the showy African Paradise Flycatcher, Arrow-marked Babbler, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Green-backed Camaroptera, iridescent Collared, Marico, White-bellied, Amethyst, and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, and the vocal Black-

collared and Crested Barbets.

In the central part of Kruger, the countryside is dominated by open, grassy plains and sparsely vegetated woodlands. The birding and game viewing in this region is excellent, with many bird species attending mixed flocks, particularly in acacia-dominated woodland. Our camp itself is conveniently located in such habitat and is an excellent place to see Bennett's Woodpecker, African Hoopoe, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Burchell's Starling, Mourning Collared Dove, and Brown-headed Parrot, while the surrounding rich bushveld and grasslands are particularly productive for a number of special species. These include Kori Bustard—the world's heaviest flying bird, the magnificent Martial Eagle, Bateleur, Marabou Stork, and the impressive Secretarybird, one of the world's avian gems.

Further specialties that we will search for in the woodland areas include the lovely Orange-breasted and Grey-headed Bushshrikes, African Grey Hornbill, Southern White-crowned and Magpie Shrikes, Red-billed Oxpecker riding on the backs of big game, Red-crested Korhaan, Southern Black Tit, tiny Grey Penduline Tit, noisy Green Wood Hoopoe, Common Scimitarbill, Greater and Lesser Honeyguides, Acacia Pied Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Sabota Lark, Mosque Swallow, Black Cuckooshrike, Kurrichane and Groundscraper Thrushes, eye-catching White-throated Robin-Chat, melodic White-browed Scrub Robin, Burnt-necked and Yellow-bellied Eremomelas, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Black-crowned and Brown-crowned Tchagras, Brubru, and Golden-breasted Bunting. Noisy flocks of White-crested Helmetshrike are regularly encountered, and we will also be on the lookout for the much more rare Retz's Helmetshrike.

In the expansive grasslands we will seek out the bold Black-bellied Bustard, Crested, and the rare Shelley's and Coqui Francolins, Swainson's and Natal Spurfowls, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, European and Purple Rollers, Yellow-throated Longclaw and, with luck, the erratic and nomadic Temminck's Courser and Senegal Lapwing, while rocky outcrops might yield Mocking Cliff Chat, Red-winged Starling, and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. In the late afternoon pairs of boldly patterned and crepuscular Double-banded Sandgrouse come to the edges of the road to feed before making their way down to watering holes at dusk to drink.

The sweet grasses here are also excellent for large herds of grazing mammals such as Common Wildebeest, Plains Zebra, and Impala. These huge herds in turn support a healthy population of predators. In fact, we have an excellent chance of finding Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Spotted Hyena, and the very scarce and highly threatened African Wild (Painted) Dog in this area. High densities of other game include Giraffe, Greater Kudu, Klipspringer, Bushbuck, Warthog, Chacma Baboon, Vervet, and Dwarf Mongoose, to name just a few.

During our stay in the south of the park we will embark on two pre-arranged night drives. Success on these drives varies greatly, but the list of possibilities is impressive and includes a good number of owls and nightjars, as well as Bronze-winged Courser, both Common and Central African Large-spotted Genets, Southern Lesser and Thick-tailed Greater Galagos, White-tailed Mongoose, African Savanna Hare, the incomparable Cape Porcupine, Wild Cat, African Civet, Serval, and Spotted Hyena – plus the Big Five (Lion, Leopard, Rhinoceros, Elephant and Cape Buffalo)!

Day 11, October 11: Departure Day

This morning we will say our farewells to Kruger and the incredible animals that we will have seen over the past few days. Our tour will end at Skukuza Airport, from where we will fly to Johannesburg to connect with our international departures home.