



**SOUTH AFRICA: FLOCK TO MARION –
HIGHVELD/JOHANNESBURG EXTENSIONS**

FEBRUARY 2022



*The endemic **Yellow-breasted Pipit** is usually seen around Wakkerstroom.*

Flock to Marion 2022

Flock to Marion is an incredible opportunity. Please book this amazing value trip to a remote sub-Antarctic Island directly with BirdLife South Africa [here](#). Please also see our blog about Flock to Marion [here](#). This cruise starts in Cape Town on 24 January 2022 and ends in Durban on 31 January 2022. Birding Ecotours is offering a series of pre-trips to this cruise in the Western Cape, detailed [here](#), and two post-tours to this cruise in KwaZulu-Natal, detailed [here](#), we are also offering further post-tours to the Highveld of South Africa as detailed below.

Highveld Extensions

Below we detail a 3-day Wakkerstroom birding tour which will start in Mkuze town (immediately following our [Zululand extension](#)) and end in the highveld of Johannesburg. If you would like to join our Highveld extension, without joining our preceding Zululand extension, we will happily organize a transfer from Durban to Mkuze town where you will join the tour. We are also offering three separate 1-day birding tours around Johannesburg and Pretoria. These tours are all perfect for a wide range of endemics, near-endemics and various other special species.

We are also running bird-photography-based versions of these same tours; when booking please specify if your emphasis is on photography and we'll add you to that group.

Details of each Highveld post-Flock trip are shown below:

Tour 1, Grassland endemics of Wakkerstroom: 09-11 February 2022

Price: 14,390 per person, assuming 3-8 paying participants (there will be a surcharge for smaller groups), single supplement R2,300.

This tour will start in Mkuze town (after our [Zululand extension](#)) and finish in Johannesburg, after a couple days in the endemic-filled grasslands of the sleepy town of Wakkerstroom. Should you only be joining our Highveld extension (and not our preceding [Zululand extension](#)) we will organize a transfer from Durban to Mkuze where you will join the tour.

Day 1. Durban to Wakkerstroom

After your collection in Durban, we will make the long (roughly five hour) transfer to the small town of Wakkerstroom. Most people will never have heard of this small, laid-back town in the grasslands of Mpumalanga province however Wakkerstroom is famous in birding circles for being an absolute mecca for grassland birding. The grasslands abound with South African endemics and near-endemics with the area's most important specials including **Rudd's** and **Botha's Larks** and **Yellow-breasted Pipit**.

We aim to arrive in Wakkerstroom in the early afternoon and, after checking into our accommodation, will immediately head out to start tracking down our many target species. We

will likely pop into the nearby vlei where we will make a start on wetland species including **Cape Shoveler**, **Southern Pochard**, **Little Bittern**, **Black-crowned Night Heron**, **Grey Crowned Crane** and skulkers such as **African Rail** and **Red-chested Flufftail**. After some time at the vlei we will likely take a drive into nearby grasslands where we should get acquainted with common grasslands species such as **Long-tailed Widowbird**, **Ant-eating Chat**, **South African Cliff Swallow** and perhaps some of the specials listed under Day 2!

Overnight: Wakkerstroom



Botha's Lark is another of the Wakkerstroom specials.

Day 2. Full day of birding around Wakkerstroom

Today will be a full day of birding around Wakkerstroom during which we will use the services of one of the talented BirdLife South Africa trained local guides who operate in the area. Our primary targets will include the incredibly rare and localized **Rudd's** and **Botha's Larks** which often require some work to get decent looks at. While birding in these areas (near to the Amersfoort Road) we will likely also come across some of our smaller targets such as **Eastern Long-billed**, **Eastern Clapper**, **Pink-billed** (tough), **Spike-heeled** and **Red-capped Larks**, **Cloud**, **Wing-snapping** and **Pale-crowned Cisticolas**, **Banded Martin**, **Common Quail** (tough to see), **Cape Longclaw** and **Yellow-crowned Bishop**. We will spend a lot of our time stopping and scanning large open fields for the likes of **Blue Crane**, **Southern Bald Ibis**, **Denham's Bustard**, **Blue Korhaan**, **Red-winged Francolin** and perhaps even a **Montagu's** or **Black Harrier** (both uncommon). Depending on the current whereabouts of **Yellow-breasted Pipit**, we will either target this species this morning or the following morning. In summer there are normally large numbers of **Amur Falcon** around and perhaps we will be lucky enough to find the rarer **Red-footed Falcon** in amongst these falcon flocks.

After a picnic lunch out in the field, we will likely head north of Wakkerstroom towards the small town of Dirkiesdorp where we will search for **White-bellied** and **Black-bellied Bustards**, **Black-winged Lapwing** and **Secretarybird**. We will ensure to stop in at a small forest patch which often holds **Bush Blackcap**, **Greater Double-collared Sunbird**, **Olive Bushshrike**, **Sweet Waxbill** and **Barratt's Warbler** (although this species requires a lot of patience to see).

Overnight: Wakkerstroom



*We'll look for **White-bellied Bustard** in the grasslands around Dirkiesdorp.*

Day 3. Wakkerstroom birding and transfer to Johannesburg

This morning we will concentrate on a few species to the south of Wakkerstroom including the likes of **Yellow-breasted Pipit**, **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, **Buff-streaked Chat**, **Mountain Wheatear** and **African Rock Pipit**. We will use the rest of the morning to clean up on any targets we may still be missing in the wider Wakkerstroom area.

We then proceed onto Johannesburg, where we'll arrive at around 6 p.m.

Tour 2, Zaagkuilsdrift day trip: 12 February 2022

Today we will likely spend the entire day birding along the famed Zaagkuilsdrift Road which is about a 1.5 hours' drive north of Johannesburg. The birding here is good year-round, however is particularly exciting during summer when the area is dripping with migrants.

We will start off by working the open grassy areas and thick thornveld woodlands where we should come across a number of more typically Kalahari species, here at the eastern extent of their South African ranges. Highlights should include **Northern Black Korhaan**, **Southern Pied Babbler**, **Kalahari Scrub Robin**, **Ashy Tit**, **Chestnut-vented Warbler** (Tit-babbler), **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Black-faced** and **Violet-eared Waxbills**, **Jameson's Firefinch** and **Gabar Goshawk**. Some of the more common big-and-obvious species include **Magpie Shrike**, **Southern Red-billed** and **Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills**, **Grey Go-away-bird** and **Burchell's Starling**. In the summer months these woodlands are also likely to be full of summer migrants which include the likes of **Black**, **Diederik**, **Levaillant's** and **Jacobin Cuckoos**, **Red-backed** and **Lesser Grey Shrikes** and a host of warblers including **Common Whitethroat**, **Marsh**, **Icterine** and **Olive-tree Warblers**.



*The striking **Crimson-breasted Shrike** is often seen along the Zaagkuilsdrift Road.*

As we get into the more open areas of the Kgomo-Kgomo floodplain we are likely to come across a different mix of species which often includes **Black-winged Pratincole**, **Temminck's Courser**, **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**, **Pearl-breasted Swallow**, **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Chest-backed Sparrow-Lark**, **Capped Wheatear**, **Scaly-feathered Weaver** (Finch), **Great Sparrow**, **Red-headed** and **Cut-throat Finches** and **Yellow-crowned Bishop**.

The tropical wetlands that form here are a magnet for waterbirds, and depending on water levels during our visit we may come across **Lesser Moorhen**, **African Crake**, **Allen's Gallinule**,

African Jacana, White-faced Duck, Squacco and Purple Herons, Yellow-billed Stork and many others.

Tour 3, Mabusa Nature Reserve, Wilge River Valley and surrounds day trip: 13 February 2022

On this day trip we'll head to the north-east of Johannesburg and Pretoria to explore some highly productive areas of highveld grasslands and broad-leafed woodlands (a habitat generally not found in the Johannesburg/Pretoria area).

In grasslands near to Mabusa Nature Reserve, we will bird the grasslands for **White-bellied Bustard, Blue Crane, Red-winged Francolin, Secretarybird, Melodious Lark, Buffy Pipit, Black-chested Prinia** and **Quailfinch**. These grasslands do hold a disjunct population of **Short-tailed Pipit**, however these birds can often prove very tricky to see. Small wetlands in the area host such exciting species as **Red-chested Flufftail** and **African Rail**, along with other sought-after species such as **Cape Grassbird** and **African Yellow Warbler**.

The woodlands of Mabusa Nature reserve offer some fantastic birding and we will hope for **Green-capped Eremomela, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Red-headed Weaver, Little Bee-eater, Bushveld Pipit, Fawn-colored Lark, Southern Black Tit** and **Ovambo Sparrowhawk**. The rocky grasslands bordering the woodlands patches often hold **Shelley's** and **Coqui Francolins, Lazy Cisticola, Mocking Cliff Chat, Short-toed Rock Thrush** and **Striped** and **Nicholson's Pipits**. The riverine areas can sometimes produce a rare sighting of **Half-collared Kingfisher** or **White-backed Night Heron**.



Pearl-spotted Owlet is often seen in the woodlands north-east of Johannesburg.

The nearby Wilge River Valley again offers a slightly different mix of bushveld species and here we will be on the lookout for **Green Wood Hoopoe**, **Grey Tit-Flycatcher**, **White-crested Helmetshrike**, **Grey-headed** and **Orange-breasted Bushshrikes** and **Greater Double-collared Sunbird**.

Tour 4, Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve and Marievale Wetlands day trip: 14 February 2022

Today we will bird some of Johannesburg's more popular birding spots. We will start the morning off at Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve where we will target a number of grassland specials such as **Melodious** and **Eastern Long-billed Larks**, **Orange River** and **Grey-winged Francolins**, **Mountain Wheatear**, **Long-tailed** and **Red-collared Widowbirds**, **Cuckoo-finch**, and **Orange-breasted Waxbill**. A plethora of Cisticolas can be found here, and we'll be searching for species such as **Levaillant's**, **Wailing**, **Zitting**, **Desert**, **Cloud** and **Wing-snapping Cisticolas** and **Neddicky**. While driving around the reserve we will also bird patches of extremely productive acacia woodland which often hold **Common Scimitarbill**, **Brown-crowned Tchagra**, **Acacia Pied Barbet**, **Ashy Tit**, **African Red-eyed Bulbul**, **Chinspot Batis**, **Kalahari Scrub Robin**, **Mocking Cliff Chat**, **Red-throated Wryneck** and **Black-chested Prinia**. This is a very birdy reserve, and we're sure to build up a long list of species!



*Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve is a fairly reliable spot for **Cuckoo-finch**.*

Our afternoon will see us transiting to the wetland areas around the nearby village of Nigel, such as the famous Marievale Bird Sanctuary. These areas play host to a number of rarities each summer and we will be sure to pay attention to any rare bird alerts during our visit here. Rarities aside, we hope to find a wide range of wetland species, with waterfowl including **Cape Shoveler**, **Southern Pochard**, **Hottentot Teal**, and scarcer species such as **Cape Teal** and **Maccoa Duck**. Other

wading birds we'll be looking for include **Little Bittern**, **Goliath** and **Black Herons**, along with **Greater** and **Lesser Flamingos**. We may also find skulkers such as **Red-chested Flufftail** and **African Rail**. A wide range of shorebirds also occur, and on top of the resident **African Snipes**, **Black-winged Stilts** and **Pied Avocets**, we're sure to see various migrant species such as **Ruff**, **Common Greenshank**, **Marsh** and **Curlew Sandpipers** and **Little Stint** as well.

Birding Ecotours is also offering a series of Flock to Marion Cape pre-tours, and KwaZulu-Natal post-tours.

Duration: 1 or 3 days
Group Size: 1-day trips 4-10
3-day trips 3-8
Dates: February 2022
Start: Mkuze/Johannesburg, we can organize a Durban-Mkhuze transfer at the start of the trip.
End: Johannesburg
Prices: 1-day trips R1,400
3-day trip R14,390 per person sharing, assuming 3-8 participants
 (there may be a slight surcharge for smaller groups)

Single supplements: 3-day trip R2,300

Price includes:

1-day trips

Transport
 Fuel
 Tolls
 Guiding fees
 Entrance fees

3-day trips

Meals
 Accommodation
 Transport
 Fuel
 Tolls
 Guiding fees
 Entrance fees

Price excludes:

1-day trips

Meals

3-day trips

Drinks

Laundry service

Personal expenses such as gifts