



NORTH-EASTERN SOUTH AFRICA: PRE-TRIP TO EASTERN ZIMBABWE AND CENTRAL MOZAMBIQUE

14 - 21 NOVEMBER 2017



Buff-spotted Flufftail (photo Hugh Chittenden) is one of our main targets on this trip.

This wonderful tour through less-traveled but very bird-rich north-eastern South Africa will have us explore such renowned hot birding spots as Zaagkuilsdrift, Magoebaskloof, and Mapungubwe National Park. We will search for such special birds as **Marsh Owl**, **African Finfoot**, **Forest Buzzard**, and **Boulder Chat**, while our main targets are three of the very elusive ultimate skulkers: **Red-chested**, **Buff-spotted**, and **Striped Flufftails**.

This pre-tour to our **Eastern Zimbabwe and Central Mozambique 2016** tour can also be booked as a stand-alone tour.

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (8 or 7 days/7 or 6 nights)

Day1. Johannesburg to Zaagkuilsdrift

Morning arrival in Johannesburg, South Africa, or perhaps more preferably the previous day (13th November) to allow rest time. We will be birding south of Johannesburg in the Alberton area, where we search the wetlands/grasslands for specials such as **Red-chested Flufftail** (main target – good chance), **Orange River Francolin**, **Marsh Owl**, **African Snipe**, **Fulvous Whistling Duck**, **Orange-breasted Waxbill**, **Cloud Cisticola**, various warblers, and **Northern Black Korhaan**. Then we will transfer north to Pretoria and bird the Seringveld Conservancy and surrounds in the afternoon for broad-leaved woodland specialists, **Tinkling Cisticola**, **Green-capped Eremomela**, **Pale Flycatcher**, **Fawn-colored Lark**, **Brown-backed Honeybird**, **Coqui Francolin**, and many others. In the late afternoon we will arrive at Zaagkuilsdrift Bird Sanctuary and Lodge. There is an option for owling this evening – this area is rich in nocturnal birds, with representatives of owls, nightjars, and coursers present.

Overnight: Zaagkuilsdrift Lodge

Day2. Zaagkuilsdrift

In the morning we will be birding the famous Zaagkuilsdrift Road and the floodplain at Kgomo-Kgomo for many dry-country birds, such as **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Southern Pied Babbler**, **Ashy Tit**, **Violet-eared** and **Black-faced Waxbills**, **Barred Wren-Warbler**, **Kalahari Scrub Robin**, **Marico Flycatcher**, **Great Sparrow**, and **Cut-throat Finch**. The wetland, depending on conditions, may host **Baillon's Crake**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Black Heron**, **Temminck's Courser** (at the edges), and many others. The afternoon will find us in the nearby Borakalalo Game Reserve, where we bird in the rich woodlands and river fringes for **African Finfoot**, **Bennett's Woodpecker**, **Yellow-bellied Eremomela**, and the above-mentioned dry-country specials. Again there is an option for owling this evening.

Overnight: Zaagkuilsdrift Lodge

Day 3. Zaagkuilsdrift to Magoebaskloof

In the morning we will return to the Zaagkuilsdrift Road for any dry-country specials we may have missed, before transferring north to Polokwane and onwards to Magoebaskloof. After arrival we will begin birding the afro-montane forest for specials such as **Cape Parrot** (an isolated northern population), **Forest Buzzard**, **Bush Blackcap**, **Mountain Wagtail**, **Yellow-streaked Greenbul**, **Orange Ground Thrush**, **White-starred Robin**, **Barratt's**

Warbler, and **Black-fronted Bushshrike**, among others. Please note, however, that some of these species occur in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe as well, so we may receive a bit of overlap with species occurring there. We will transfer to the nearby Magoebaskloof Hotel for the evening. **Buff-spotted Flufftail** occurs in the area and regularly starts calling in the evenings; we will keep our ears open for the eerie hooting, and should we hear them, we will try and get visuals.

Overnight: Magoebaskloof Hotel

Day 4. Magoebaskloof

The main target of this day will be **Striped Flufftail**. This is a notoriously difficult-to-find species, and one that is even more difficult to lay eyes on. This will be the focus of the morning, and perhaps the afternoon as well. The surrounding area is also rich in birdlife, and we may run into **Wailing Cisticola** and various seedeaters, such as **Forest Canary**, **Sweet Waxbill**, **African Firefinch**, and **Green Twinspot**. We will also search a nearby site for **Bat Hawk**, which breeds in the area. Depending on our time we may also pay the nearby town of Tzaneen a visit to try for **Magpie Mannikin**, **Holub's Golden Weaver**, and **Grey-rumped Swallow**. We can try again for **Buff-spotted Flufftail** in the evening if we have not found it earlier.

Overnight: Magoebaskloof Hotel

Day 5. Magoebaskloof to Mapungubwe National Park

We have the morning available for **Striped Flufftail**, if necessary again, before transferring onwards to the stunning Mapungubwe National Park. We will try for the highly localized **Short-clawed Lark** en route. Mapungubwe National Park is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to the ruins and paintings present in the area. Located in the northern Limpopo Province of South Africa and bordering both Botswana and Zimbabwe, this is a stunning area characterized by magnificent riverine woodland surrounded by acacia bush, ephemeral pans, and mopane woodland. Mapungubwe is also a 'Big 5' park with a good sampling of South Africa's mammals. Here we will search for **Double-banded Burchell's Sandgrouse**, **Meyer's Parrot**, **Meves's Starling**, **Senegal Coucal**, **Tropical Boubou**, **Grey-headed Kingfisher**, **Monotonous Lark** (after good rains), **Red-headed Weaver**, **Great Spotted Cuckoo**, **Retz's Helmetshrike**, and various others. The ephemeral pans can prove interesting when inundated, when they play host to many exciting tropical birds, such as **Allen's Gallinule**, **Lesser Moorhen**, **African Crake**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, etc. The nocturnal birding around here is excellent too, and we may see a wide variety of owls, ranging from the large **Verreaux's Eagle Owl** through to the small **Southern White-faced Owl**. **Nightjars** are also present, and species may include **Square-tailed**, **Fiery-necked**, **Freckled**, and **European**. One of the specials of this area is a chance at **Three-banded Courser**, and a night drive is the best way to find this species, although it is never an easy target.

Overnight: Leokwe Rest Camp, Mapungubwe National Park

Day 6. Mapungubwe National Park

We have a full day around Mapungubwe National Park, where we search for the above-mentioned species as well as in the dry-country area for any of the species we may have missed on the tour up until now, such as **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Southern Pied Babbler**, and various seedeaters, including waxbills, finches and weavers. There will also be a variety of mammals to entertain us throughout the day.

Overnight: Leokwe Rest Camp, Mapungubwe National Park

Day 7. Mapungubwe National Park to Masvingo

In the morning we will be birding around Mapungubwe, targeting any of the specials above that we may have missed, before departing and crossing the boarder to Zimbabwe at Beitbridge and transferring to Masvingo. We will bird a few sites en-route, once in Zimbabwe, including the Lion and Elephant Motel grounds for various riverine woodland species, as well as some nearby rocky outcrops for **Boulder Chat**. Depending on our arrival time, we can do some local miombo birding in Masvingo at the Lake Mutirikwi National Park. Here we will be searching for specials such as **White-breasted Cuckooshrike**, **Miombo Tit**, **Miombo Rock Thrush**, and **Miombo Double-collared Sunbird**. The nearby ruins of Great Zimbabwe are also a great 'must-visit' attraction and provide good birding within the ruins.

For those guests NOT wishing to join the Zimbabwe/Mozambique trip, just the pre-trip, we will arrange a free shuttle back to Johannesburg on Day 7.

Overnight: Inn on Great Zimbabwe, Masvingo, or similar

Day 8. Transfer to Harare for the start of the main tour

We will be able to undertake some brief birding this morning in the nearby miombo, or alternatively we can have a relaxing morning in preparation for the main tour starting later in the day. After breakfast we transfer north to Harare, from where we will begin the main tour.

Duration: 8 days
Limit: 4 – 8
Date: 14 – 21 November 2017
Start: Johannesburg, South Africa
End: Harare, Zimbabwe, or Johannesburg, South Africa

Price: 6-8 participants R22,827 per person sharing
 4-5 participants R27,122 per person sharing

Single supplement: R3,566

Price includes:

Meals
 Accommodation
 Entrance fees
 Guiding fees
 All transport while on tour

Price excludes:

International flights
 Personal insurance
 Alcoholic beverages
 Gratuities
 Laundry service
 Personal expenses such as gifts