



**WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA, 8-DAY BIRDING
ADVENTURE**

9 - 16 OCTOBER 2017



The endemic **Ground Woodpecker** (photo Ian Merrill) is one of our targets on this trip.

“The Fairest Cape” is an apt name for this part of the world, with the iconic Table Mountain, the picturesque Cape Peninsula, winelands in spectacular valleys between the Cape Fold Mountains, and arguably the world’s most beautiful beaches.

It’s amid this splendid scenery that one can find a staggering number of bird endemics, many of them completely restricted to the “fynbos” or “Cape flora” (the richest place on earth for plants, even richer than the Amazon!) and the nearby Karoo semi-desert across the rain shadow formed by the mountainous barrier.

Moreover, off Cape Point and the Cape of Good Hope are the trawling grounds where some of the world’s best pelagic trips venture – we usually see at least four albatross species along with shearwaters, petrels, storm-petrels, **African Penguin**, **Cape Gannet**, and all the others.

Our 8-day tour allows adequate time to do this province justice, finding most of the important birds and hopefully exceeding 200 species.

This tour can be combined with our preceding **Kruger National Park and Escarpment Birding Safari October 2017** and then with our following **16-day Subtropical South Africa Birding Adventure October 2017** for a 27-day South African adventure, and, following this, our **Namibia, Okavango and Victoria Falls 18-day Birding Adventure 2017** for a stunning 44-day Southern African mega 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 days/7 nights)

Day 1: Arrival in Cape Town

This is a travel day. You will be met on arrival at Cape Town International Airport and taken to the southern Cape Peninsula about an hour away (Cape Town central is on the northern end of the peninsula). We’ll spend three nights here, near Simonstown harbor, which is where the one-day pelagic trip will depart from. If time permits we’ll already do some birding today, likely at Rondevlei and/or Strandfontein Bird Sanctuaries. Shorebirds are sometimes plentiful here, as are ducks, including some rather uncommon ones such as **Maccoa Duck** and even **Hottentot Teal**, along with the more numerous **Cape Teal**, **Red-billed Teal**, **Southern Pochard**, and more. **Greater Flamingo** and **Great White Pelican** usually abound, and the large reedbeds are inhabited by several species of warbler, **African Purple Swamphen**, **Little Bittern**, **Purple Heron**, and others. This is one of the best places to see **African Marsh Harrier**.

Around the gardens of our accommodation we’ll hopefully find some of our first Cape endemics such as **Cape Bulbul**, **Karoo Prinia**, **Southern Double-collared Sunbird**, and hopefully **Orange-breasted Sunbird** and **Cape Sugarbird**.

Overnight: Mariner Guest House (or similar), Simonstown

Day 2: Morning/1-day Cape pelagic

The pelagic trip usually sails around 7 a.m. after an early breakfast. Depending on the weather forecast, we sometimes postpone the pelagic by a day or two. In the event that rough seas prevent the pelagic from departing at all, that would of course be very disappointing, but we would do additional terrestrial birding instead.

The pelagic can sometimes go up to 50 km from Cape Point, and we try hard to find fishing trawlers, around which seabirds such as albatrosses and petrels congregate in huge numbers.

Within False Bay, before reaching Cape Point, we sometimes see southern right whale (can be “confiding”), Bryde’s whale (usually fleeting), Cape fur seal, **Cape Gannet**, and several cormorant species (two of them extremely localized), and we also sail past one of only three mainland colonies of the comical **African Penguin**. As we go past the spectacular Cape Point we can already start seeing some true pelagics, such as both species of **Giant Petrel**, **White-chinned Petrel** (and with lots of luck its close relative, the rare **Spectacled Petrel**), **Sooty Shearwater**, and others that are not shy of being close to the coast. A lot of other pelagic species only start putting in an appearance as one gets further from the land, with the Cape Peninsula beginning to disappear behind one. If you’ve never seen an albatross before, the first appearance of a **Shy** or **Black-browed Albatross** will be an unforgettable experience for you. The two species of **Yellow-nosed Albatross** are often the furthest out, sometimes associating with trawlers.

Overnight: Mariner Guest House (or similar), Simonstown

Day 3: False Bay and the Cape Peninsula (or pelagic trip if it did not run on Day 2)

This always proves a wonderful day, birding for fynbos endemics and many others. One of the places we visit in the morning is the gorgeous Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden with the eastern slopes of Table Mountain as a backdrop. **Cape Spurfowl** and **Helmeted Guineafowl** roam the well-tended lawns. **Cape Sugarbird** and up to three species of sunbird abound in the *Protea* and *Erica* (heather) gardens. **Sombre Greenbul** calls loudly from the areas of larger trees, and **African Dusky Flycatcher** quietly forages around the same areas. **Karoo Prinia**, **Southern Boubou**, various cuckoos, **African Olive Pigeon**, **Cape Canary**, **Brimstone Canary**, **Cape Robin-Chat**, and stacks more are often seen here.

Raptors are plentiful around Kirstenbosch and might include the southern African endemic **Jackal Buzzard**.

Sometimes we also visit the Constantia Greenbelt, one of the most reliable sites for the megaskulker **Knysna Warbler** with its beautiful and amazingly loud song.

After lunch we embark on one of the world’s most spectacular marine drives to the village of Rooiels. This is one of the best sites for **Cape Rockjumper** as well as **Cape Rock Thrush** and perhaps even **Sentinel Rock Thrush**. **Cape Siskin** is also often seen here, and a pair of **Verreaux’s Eagles** breeds here.

If time permits we might also visit Betty’s Bay, which has a colony of **African Penguins** and all four species of marine cormorant, and which also boasts Harold Porter National Botanical Garden, where **Sweet Waxbill**, **Bar-throated Apalis**, **Cape Batis**, the localized **Victorin’s Warbler**, and numerous other high-quality birds lurk.

Overnight: Mariner Guest House (or similar), Simonstown

Day 4: West Coast National Park

As always we add a lot of new birds today, as the West Coast is much drier than the other areas and presents a completely new habitat. This is the only area in the world where the strikingly-marked **Black Harrier** can truly be said to be common. Other endemics and specials we might find here include **Grey-winged Francolin** (and it’s much more numerous here than **Cape Spurfowl**), **Cape Weaver** (abundant, in fact), the diminutive **Cape Penduline Tit**, which usually moves around in small, inconspicuous flocks, **Southern Black Korhaan**, some very special larks such as **Cape Clapper Lark** with its bizarre display flight and also **Large-billed Lark** and **Cape Long-billed Lark**. **Chestnut-banded Plover**, along with a true spectacle of migrant shorebirds and terns, can be seen from the nicely-laid-out blinds (hides) of the huge Langebaan Lagoon. **African Fish Eagle** and **Western Osprey** are both possible.

Overnight: Le Mahi Guesthouse (or similar), Langebaan

Day 5: Crossing the Cederberg Range into the arid Karoo

This is a day during which we can try and clean up on a few odds and ends, which might include birds of the higher mountain reaches like **Protea Canary**, **Cape Rockjumper**, **Ground Woodpecker**, etc. **European Bee-eater** is often common in this area. After a very scenic drive we eventually arrive in the Karoo, where we may already start finding some of the species mentioned for the next day.

Overnight: Sothemba Lodge in the Tanqua Karoo, or in Ceres near the Karoo

Day 6: Tanqua Karoo

Endemics galore await us! This is always a life-bird-filled day (unless you've been to the Karoo before). **Cinnamon-breasted Warbler** is one of the trickiest endemics of this semi-desert, but the good news is that it occurs on the guest farm we usually stay at (Sothemba). Other brilliant Karoo endemics right on the grounds include **Layard's Warbler** (along with its more widespread cousin, **Chestnut-vented Warbler**), **Fairy Flycatcher**, and **Bokmakierie** (a beautiful bushshrike with an equally beautiful, loud, duet song).

Heading away from the slopes along which our lodge is positioned, onto the vast plains, we look for seven different chat and wheatear species, including the endemic **Karoo Chat**, **Tractrac Chat**, and **Sickle-winged Chat**. Small groups of **Karoo Eremomela** are always a joy to behold, as is the confiding, stunningly-marked **Rufous-eared Warbler**. **Lark-like Bunting**, **Spike-heeled Lark**, with lots of luck **Coursers** (usually **Double-banded** but rarely also **Burchell's**), **Karoo Korhaan**, and even (with luck) **Ludwig's Bustard** are sometimes encountered on the flats. We might also find **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, **Namaqua Dove**, and **Namaqua Warbler** today.

The Skitterykloof Picnic Area almost always generates **Pirit Batis**, and ascending the pass above here is good for **Karoo Lark**, **Black-headed Canary** (although unpredictable and nomadic), **Cape Clapper Lark**, and others.

There are a good many other birds we might see today, such as two **Mousebird** species, **White-backed** and **Red-faced** (the third and final mousebird, **Speckled**, is usually a "dead cert" on the Cape Peninsula, so we usually do a "clean sweep" of South Africa's mousebirds on this tour), and with luck **Grey Tit**.

Overnight: Sothemba Lodge in the Tanqua Karoo, or in Ceres near the Karoo

Day 7: Back to Cape Town

This is basically a clean-up day to try and find any of the target birds we are still missing. The drive from Sothemba Lodge back to Cape Town is about four hours, but we spend a large part of the day birding whatever sites we need. Paarl Botanical Gardens/Paarl Mountain Nature Reserve and Paarl sewage works are often worthy of a half day, and these sites are conveniently located midway between the Karoo and Cape Town.

Overnight: Fernwood Manor (or similar), Kirstenbosch area (this is less than half an hour's drive from Cape Town airport and central Cape Town, traffic-permitting)

Day 8: Departure

While this is basically a travel day to Durban, we often fit in some birding before taking our flight from Cape Town to Durban to start the 16-day Subtropical South Africa tour.

For those joining both the Cape and Subtropical trips, Chris in the Birding Ecotours office plans to book the one-way flight from Cape Town to Durban for everyone (on the last day of the Cape trip, which is also the first day of the Subtropical trip). It is no problem at all,

however, if you have already booked this flight. If Chris books the flight, the cost can just be added to the balance you owe – the flight usually costs R1000 – R2000 (ballpark).

Duration: 8 days
Limit: 8 (rarely 9)
Date: 9 – 16 October 2017
Start: Cape Town
End: Cape Town

Price: R28,727 per person sharing

Single supplement: R4,395

(The prices assume a group of 8, but we typically guarantee the departure even with a smaller group.)

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