



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

14 - 21 NOVEMBER 2020

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Birding Ecotours
Dominic Rollinson

*The attractive **Black-faced Waxbill** should be seen on this tour.*

This wonderful tour through less-traveled but very bird-rich north-eastern South Africa will allow us to 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**.



*The marshes around Johannesburg hold good numbers of **Marsh Owl**.*

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

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

Day 1. Johannesburg to Zaagkuilsdrift

Morning arrival in Johannesburg, South Africa, or perhaps more preferably the previous day 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 surroundings 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

Day 2. 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 Crane**, **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 onward to Magoebaskloof. After arrival we will begin birding the Afromontane 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



Bush Blackcap can be seen in Afromontane forest around Magoebaskloof.

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



A super-elusive male Striped Flufftail.

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** and **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 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 **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



We will hope for similar views of Southern White-faced Owl in 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 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, or return to Johannesburg

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 border 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 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 from Mapungubwe back to Johannesburg on Day 7.

Overnight: Inn on Great Zimbabwe, Masvingo, or similar



*We'll look for **White-breasted Cuckooshrike** in miombo woodlands in Zimbabwe.*

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.

Please note that the itinerary 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. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 8 days

Limit: 4 – 8

Dates: 14 – 21 November 2020
14 – 21 November 2021

Start: Johannesburg, South Africa

End: Harare, Zimbabwe, or Johannesburg, South Africa

Prices: 6-8 participants R30,027 per person sharing 2020
4-5 participants R35,678 per person sharing 2020
6-8 participants R31,528 per person sharing 2021
4-5 participants R37,462 per person sharing 2021

Single supplements: R4,468 2020
R4,710 2021

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