

Reach Africa Birding and Getaways



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KAROO MAGIC

7 DAY TRIP

10 to 15 October 2012

This trip is tailor made for lovers of wide open spaces, glorious night skies and great Karoo hospitality.

We leave Johannesburg bright and early and head for our first overnight destination, **Garingboom Guest Farm**, near Colesburg and the Gariiep Dam. The farm is well known in birding circles as being a reliable spot to find the Kimberley Pipit.

Other special birds to be found here are Burchell's Courser, Orange River and Grey-winged Francolin, Melodious Lark (after good rains) and African Rock Pipit.

After some early morning birding and a hearty Karoo breakfast, we proceed to **Mountain Zebra National Park**, near Cradock, where we spend our next two nights.

This Park may be unique in having as many as 20 species of birds endemic to Southern Africa. It consists of a rugged landscape of mountains, grassy plains, bushy hillsides and rocky gorges.

The park is ideal habitat for Verreaux's and Booted Eagle and Cape Eagle-Owl which all breed there. Ground Woodpecker, Cape Rock-Thrush and African Rock Pipit are rock loving birds to watch for while Layard's Tit-



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babbler, Dusky Sunbird and Black-headed Canary occur in hillside shrubs. Rufous-eared Warbler, Sickle-winged Chat and Eastern Clapper, Thick-billed and Spike-heeled Lark are resident breeders. Eastern Long-billed Lark, Long-billed Pipit, Grey-backed Cisticola, Southern Tchagra and Namaqua Warbler are all regularly seen. The park is home to 6 species of Canary, namely, Yellow-eyed, Black-throated, Cape, Black-headed, Brimstone, White-throated and Streaky-headed Seedeater. The Park is also home to numerous mammal species including Cheetah, Black Rhino, Buffalo, Eland, Roan and Sable Antelope, Kudu and, of course, Cape Mountain Zebra.



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The charming village of **Nieu Bethesda**, set in the fertile valley of the Sneeu Berg Mountains, is our next port of call. Life in Nieu Bethesda potters along much as it did 130 years ago, when the village was founded. Stone water furrows still line the wide, dusty streets. Night skies are unpolluted by streetlights, and the air is still fresh and clean. As always, the Compassberg watches over the village and Nieu Bethesdians still while away the hours on their stoeps, watching village life go by.

All around stretches the arid expanse of the Great Karoo, "where the land meets the sky". This is a nature-lover's paradise, a high altitude semi-desert that is home to the largest variety of succulents in the world - as well as eagles, secretary birds, blue cranes, flamingoes, otters, lizards, snakes, tortoises, bat-eared foxes, kudu, springbok, reedbuck, wildebeest, wild cats, ground squirrels and aardvarks.

We spend one night in a charming guesthouse on Doornberg Farm, a working wool and mutton farm. This family farm has been farmed for 5 generations over 130 years. Two hundred year-old oaks surround the homestead and numerous fountains and streams give one a sense of peace and tranquility.

Our final destination is **New Holme Karoo Guest Farm**, situated on the banks of the Zeecow River, between Colesburg and Hanover. New Holme is set in a sweeping landscape of wide open spaces and spectacular sunsets, combining traditional Karoo hospitality with vast scenic beauty. The farm, which was originally a thoroughbred racehorse stud farm, is presently an active sheep and ostrich business.

More than two hundred million years ago this landscape was part of a large lake and a vista dotted with gigantic trees. It is a birding paradise with over 200 species recorded. The farm supports a variety of vegetation types with mountains, hills, plains and permanent water, which provide ample suitable habitats for many wildlife species.

An added attraction is a 180° "Star Deck" fitted with a wide angle telescope from which one can enjoy breathtaking star studded Karoo night skies.

New Holme boasts an impressive array of large birds including Verreaux's and Martial Eagle, Karoo, Northern Black and Blue Korhaan, Blue and Grey Crowned Crane and Kori and Ludwig's Bustard. Both Burchell's and Double-banded Courser occur and LBJ's are well represented with 6 Lark species being resident. Other arid area specials such as Fairy Flycatcher, Rufous-eared Warbler, Karoo and Sickle-winged Chat and Cape Penduline-Tit are regularly seen.

We spend two nights in the excellent guesthouse on the farm where we enjoy superb Karoo hospitality.

