



**SOUTH AFRICA: WAKKERSTROOM CUSTOM TOUR
TRIP REPORT SEPTEMBER 2017**



Buff-streaked Chat was seen on this tour.

Day 1: 22 September 2017

Today commenced with a mid afternoon pickup in Johannesburg, from which we immediately headed north to target some of the desired specials. A visit to central Pretoria yielded many common urban species such as **Common Myna**, **Cape** and **House Sparrows**, **African Hoopoe**, **Sacred** and **Hadada Ibises**, **Pied Crow**, **Grey Go-away-bird**, **Dark-capped Bulbul**, **Kurrichane** and **Karoo Thrushes**, and many others. A bit of searching eventually turned up **Ovambo Sparrowhawk**, our main target for the area. Moving east, we targeted **Green-capped Eremomela** without much trouble, but we picked up very few other species during the heat of the day. Just up the road we worked some recently burned thornveld, adding **Crowned**, **Blacksmith**, and **African Wattled Lapwings**, **Helmeted Guineafowl**, **Crested Francolin**, **Swainson's Spurfowl**, and a good number of other bushveld birds before eventually connecting with **Burnt-necked Eremomela**, our final target for the afternoon.



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Ovambo Sparrowhawk (photo Dylan Vasapoli)

Day 2: 23 September 2017

Bright and early we commenced our trip to Wakkerstroom, passing through countless grasslands en route. **Black-headed** and **Grey Herons** were seen on the road side, in addition to **Black-winged Kite**, **Long-tailed Widowbird**, **Southern Masked Weaver**, **Southern Fiscal**, **African Stonechat**, and **African Pipit**. Closer to Wakkerstroom we slowed down and birded a little harder. **Spike-heeled**, **Red-capped**, and **Rufous-naped Larks** showed well. **Mountain** and **Capped Wheatear** as well as **Grey-winged** and **Red-winged Francolins**, a pair of **Blue Cranes**, and a small flock of **South African Cliff-Swallows** were enjoyed en route.

In Wakkerstroom itself we picked up **Cape Shoveler**, **Yellow-billed Duck**, **Black Crake**, **African Swamphen**, **Little Rush Warbler**, **Pied Kingfisher**, **White-rumped Swift**, **Common Moorhen**, **Hottentot Teal**, and a number of others before we headed off to search for **Ground Woodpecker**. A brief stop yielded a family of four, while **Greater Striped Swallow**, **Buff-streaked Chat**, and **Drakensberg Prinia** were added to the tally in the same

area. Running short of light we headed for the hotel; tomorrow was going to be a long day in the field.



Ground Woodpecker (photo Ian Merrill)

Day 3: 24 September 2017

With a full day in Wakkerstroom and the surrounds we set out to target some of the tougher specials. In a short time we had great views of **Yellow-breasted Pipit**, **African Rock Pipit**, **Black-winged Lapwing**, **Wailing Cisticola**, **Sentinel Rock Thrush**, **Buff-streaked Chat**, **Eastern Long-billed Lark**, **Bokmakierie**, and a few others. We then headed north, locating **Blue Korhaan**, **African Stonechat**, **Mountain Wheatear**, and **Red-capped** and **Spike-heeled Larks**. A quick visit to a patch of unburned grassland yielded as pair of the threatened and endemic **Rudd's Lark** as well as **Quailfinch** and **Cape Longclaw**. Then we set off on a loop, where we picked up **Coqui Francolin** (heard only), **African Yellow Warbler**, **Chinspot Batis**, **Orange-breasted Bushshrike**, **Black Sparrowhawk**, **Black-winged Kite**, **Cape Grassbird**, **Cape Robin-Chat**, **Long-tailed Widowbird**, **Zitting**, **Levaillant's**, and **Lazy Cisticolas**, and a couple of other bushveld-type birds, including **African Paradise Flycatcher**, **Dark-capped Bulbul**, **Fiscal Flycatcher**, and **African Hoopoe**. Arriving back in Wakkerstroom we sneaked in a quick view of **Red-chested Flufftail** and saw **Little Rush Warbler** and **White-throated Swallow** before calling it quits for the day.



Rudd's Lark (photo Matt Prophet)

Day 4: 25 September 2017

On our final morning we still had one serious local special to locate. This was our sole target for the morning. We had worked countless sites for any given number of times over the last two days to try and locate Botha's Lark, a nondescript little grassland endemic, which had proven itself to be a tough nut to crack this time. This morning again we scoured grasslands, picking up all the larks and pipits we'd encountered over the previous days. By 10 a.m. we had encountered almost every brown bird in the area, bar one. Returning to a burned patch, which we worked the day before, we eventually stumbled across a pair of **Botha's Lark** feeding near the car. Our last target was finally in the bag, and we were officially 'free' to travel back to Johannesburg after a successful visit to the birding mecca that is Wakkerstroom.

Just before the airport we made a small detour to try and add a few more targets with which we had not connected down south. We were lucky to be able to add **Pink-billed Lark**, **Marsh Owl**, and **African Grass Owl** to the list, meaning great success across the board.

We said our goodbyes after a wonderful weekend with some top South African avian offerings.