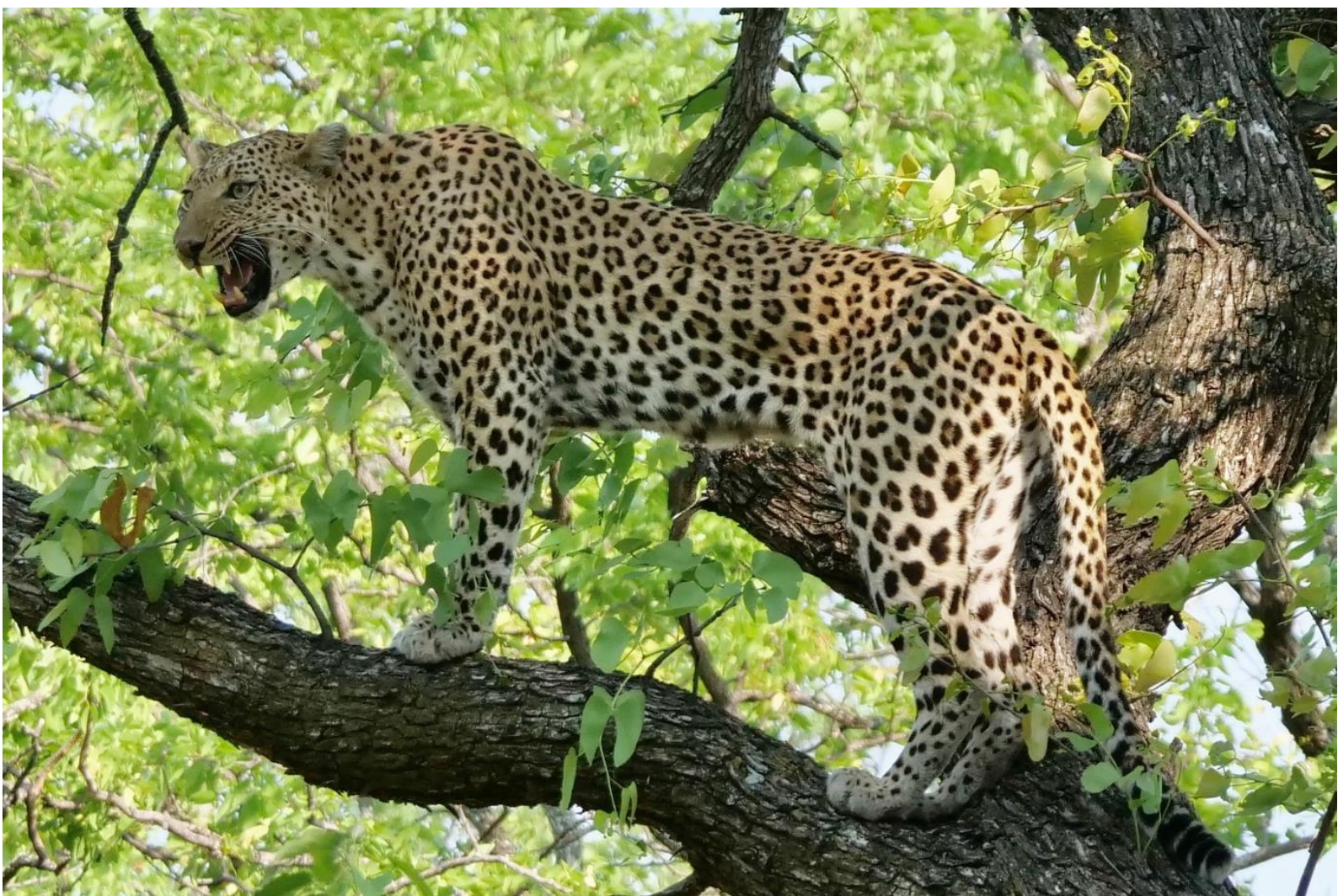




TOUR REPORT

Botswana and Zimbabwe
15th Nov -3rd Dec 2023

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Thursday 16th November

Gary met the group as arranged at international arrivals at Johannesburg airport following their overnight flight from London. The flight was slightly behind schedule, but we still had plenty of time, or so we thought. The sheer size of the airport and varying instructions from staff on duty, meant we took a rather convoluted route to the check-in desk for the next leg of the journey. We checked in to then find the flight time was now an hour earlier than expected, so we headed straight through security, pausing with just enough time for a welcome coffee on the way to the gate. We then sat waiting at the gate to be told, by a clearly stressed member of staff, that the gate had changed, so we moved to the new gate and onto the waiting transfer bus. Whilst taxi-ing off several of the group got their lists underway, with two Black-headed Herons feeding next to the runway. A grand total of ten people including us were on the flight, so plenty of room and a pleasant in-flight service and after around an hour and ten minutes we were landing at Maun. Passport control and luggage was straight forward, and we were soon on the road heading to Maun Lodge which was to be our base for the night. We checked in and then took an hour or so out to freshen up and to let the heat of the day subside to a degree. This proved a good strategy with the temperature notably lower when we met again for a short birding session around the grounds of the hotel. As most of the birds were new ones, we started off by working through the commoner ones on show, largely the Doves, Laughing, Mourning and Red-eyed. A pair of African Hoopoes appeared too, with at least one more noted later in the afternoon too. A group of four Red-faced Mousebirds played hard to get, though eventually at least one sat out on view for us. A Golden Weaver appeared on the top of a nearby telegraph pole, its diagnostic thick bill and pale eyes easily seen. A flock of Babblers were next, initially highly active making ID tricky, but no pale rumps confirmed them to be Arrow-marked Babblers.



Arrow-marked Babbler

Two Starling species, Burchell's and Greater-Blue Eared were seen together on the telegraph wires near the entrance gate. We'd decided to walk on a little bit further and had ended up near the river, not really flowing but it still held water in a large section of it. A nice selection of birds was found, which included several Pied Kingfishers, Cattle, Little and Great Egrets, African Openbills, Blacksmith's Lapwings, Spur-winged Geese, Red-billed Teal, White-faced and Comb Ducks and at least four African Jacanas. A Levillant's Cuckoo showed well in some nearby bushes and a Grey go-away-bird appeared briefly too.



Levaillant's Cuckoo, with its streaked throat.

One bird we'd hoped to see was Swamp Boubou and with a few drops of rain now in the air we thought we may have missed our chance. Fate had a hand here though as, as we returned through the lower gate to get out of the rain, one flew across and landed in some trees nearby. We spent the next ten minutes trying and eventually getting decent views, with a second bird found to be present too. With the long plane journey understandably taken a toll to a degree with the group, the appearance of several white-rumped Hartlaub's Babblers signalled time for a shower and a short relax before dinner.

Friday 17th November

An early start this morning to have breakfast, before our transfer back to Maun airport and our flight to Shakawe Air strip and Xaro Lodge. A small 12-seater plane was to be our mode of transport, with our journey taking around an hour and a half and involving several stops at small air strips along the way. After several technical difficulties involving a seatbelt and

one group member, we were underway. The big plus in flying in such a small plane was the views we had, as we travelled over miles and miles of savannah habitat which was eventually interspersed with water and greener areas as we crossed into the delta and towards our destination at Shakawe. African Elephant and Giraffe were noted below, and several Crowned Lapwings were seen at one of the airstrips stops. On landing we were met by Shaun and Thomas from the lodge, and we transferred to their vehicles, and after another seat belt issue, we took a 15-minute drive to check in at reception, before boarding a boat to make the last part of the journey to the Lodge itself. The river trip was a nice introduction to what lay ahead, and the area adjacent to where we boarded the boat gave us our first Malachite Kingfisher, breeding Wire-tailed Swallows, Green-backed Heron, and African Jacana.



Green-backed Heron was a species we would encounter throughout the trip.

We slowed the boat down periodically on the way to gain views of birds such as Southern Carmine, White-fronted, Blue-cheeked and Little Bee-eaters, Wattled and Long-toed Lapwings, African Darter and Squacco Heron. A treat here was a pair of Sitatunga deer, a nervous and secretive species and not often seen, who reacted true to form as soon as they saw the boat and disappeared again back into the reeds. Arriving at Lodge we were greeted by the smiling staff and after a welcome drink we were shown to our rooms. Lunch followed a short while later, after which we wandered around the grounds which gave us our first Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Woodland Kingfisher, Broad-billed Roller, a small flock of Green Wood Hoopes and Kurrichane Thrush. Our main event for the afternoon was a boat ride along the Cubango river, the river we'd arrived on, in the company our local bird guide Thomas. The riverbanks are largely papyrus swamp with the occasional area of exposed shoreline, and we spent the next three hours trans versing the area. We had an amazing afternoon and picking highlights is a lot easier than choosing just one. The trip started with us having point blank views of a Malachite Kingfisher, followed by us heading into a small

tributary close to the jetty with our target here one of the more secretive Herons, White-backed Night Heron. There were two birds, which were unfortunately flighty, choosing to move deeper into cover on our approach, though we all managed good views of them. We returned to the main channel of the river and headed back along the route we had taken when we'd arrived earlier. We enjoyed a leisurely return along the river with birds seen that included Long-toed, Blacksmiths and Wattled Lapwings, Collared Pratincole, Whiskered Tern, Namaqua Dove, and African Grey Hornbill. A perched Giant Woodpecker allowed some nice views and whilst watching this a lone African Pygmy Goose was seen nearby. A short walk around the grounds of a small lodge proved quiet, but we did add Crested Barbet and Bush Buck to our list as consolation. Returning to the boat we continued along the river having to increase our speed as time was running out. We still managed to pause periodically, firstly to enjoy views of a Goliath Heron, then again for our first Hippo's, with us being thoroughly spoilt with sightings of these by the end of the afternoon! Small numbers of African Skimmers were seen perched along the shore, with several also seen in flight, plus a perched Osprey and the first of two Purple Herons. We had one last stop before heading back, and for some the highlight of the afternoon, Pel's Fishing Owl!



We enjoyed great views this Pel's Fishing Owl.

The bird was roosting in a large tree close to the water's edge and whilst hidden to a degree, for us with our angle of view from the boat, meant it was in full view. It glanced down at us for a while before deciding we weren't a threat and went back to sleep. We had taken it to the wire timewise, but it was well worth the effort, and we headed back to lodge pausing several times to marvel at the Hippos we were passing in the river, a fitting ending to a memorable afternoon.

Saturday 18th November

The day started in style, with coffee and tea being drunk shortly after sun rise whilst watching a Goliath Heron and a Crocodile on the opposite bank off the river, and a nesting pair of Black-collared Barbets in a nearby tree.



Goliath Heron stood in the early morning sun.

A two-hour bush walk was the plan before breakfast, with us taking a loop out of the camp into the nearby bush. New birds were seen almost immediately and included Red-billed Francolin, Southern Brown-throated Weaver, Meve's Starling, and Grey Go-away-bird. Our first "close' elephant was seen, though largely a restricted view through the bushes, and Thomas showed us Hippopotamus tracks and pointed out some of the other signs of animals that frequent the edge of the camp. Two Fiery-necked Nightjars were disturbed from their roost area, giving us flight views on several occasions but clearly reluctant to allow us any views of them on the ground. Today it transpired was to be an 'Owl Day', with Thomas showing us another roosting Pel's Fishing Owl, this one deep in cover though still an acceptable view! The next Owl was one we were more familiar with and one we weren't expecting to see, a Barn Owl, which again was rather nervous and seeing it well proved a challenge at times! The walk back to the camp for breakfast, produced a Reitz's Helmet Shrike, Red-faced Mousebird, and several Little Bee-eaters. As we arrived in camp a pair of Violet-backed Starlings stole the show, with us gaining nice views of them in the sunlight which highlighted the males iridescent 'violet back", a real 'wow' bird. A brief appearance of two Cape Clawless Otters in the river delayed breakfast for another further few minutes before we accepted it really was time to eat!

After breakfast we had a short respite before heading out for a further hour in an area close to the camp. A short walk took us to our third Owl of the morning, a roosting African Wood-

Owl, this one clearly settled as it peered out through the leaves at us. We continued our walk aware the heat was rising, and bird activity had largely slowed down. That said we managed good views of an African Paradise Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Cardinal Woodpecker, Spectacled Weaver, and a small group of Red-billed Oxpeckers.

A short siesta, including the use of the pool for some, was followed by lunch and then our second planned boat trip of our visit. This time our route took us in the opposite direction from yesterday and involved some of the small tributaries that lead off from the main river. As to be expected there was a degree of repetition from yesterday, with species such as Malachite and Pied Kingfisher, African Skimmer, Blacksmiths and Long-toed Lapwing and Whiskered Terns all seen well. We did well for the Herons too, with lots of Green-backed and several more Goliaths and Purples seen too. New birds came thick and fast, Water Thick-knee, Three-banded Plover, Senegal Coucal, Brown Snake Eagle, African Snipe and Grey-rumped Swallow were all seen. On a non-bird front and in contrast to yesterday only one Hippo was seen, though we saw plenty of Crocodiles. A highlight was our first real views of African Elephant, the first a massive Bull that stood on the bank watching us, allowing us reasonably good views from the safety of the boat, and joined by a smaller male a short while later. We took the opportunity to land briefly adjacent to a large area of dry marsh land to stretch our legs, several new additions included nice views of several African Swamphens, plus a Lesser Grey Shrike and several African Pipits. Reboarding the boat, the opportunity to enjoy a Gin and Tonic as we cruised back seemed too good an offer to refuse, and this coupled with a ridiculously close views of an African Fish Eagle led to a memorable finish to our afternoon.



This African Fish Eagle seemed totally unconcerned with our presence.

Sunday 19th November

As yesterday the day started with coffee and tea at 6.30 and a pre breakfast walk, with this starting well with the first bird seen, a stunning male Violet-backed Starling only a few feet in front of us. We took a slightly different route out of the camp, pausing to look at the birds feeding on the ground below a small lamp. Thomas explained the termites are attracted to it and end up on the ground below, which become an early morning treat for the local birds, and a check through them revealed a Red-billed Quelea, a new bird for us. A small flock of Common Waxbills were seen nearby, and as we walked away from watching them a flash of ginger flew across in front of us, a Pel's Fishing Owl! We walked to the area we'd seen it disappear into, to then find another sat high in a tree near the path, we were certainly being spoilt with our sightings of these birds! A calling African Barred Owlet was nearby, and we traced the sound to find the bird tucked away in a small Acacia tree, we'd gone from one extreme to another in Owl sizes!



African Barred Owlet

We continued our walk, looping back to the camp, noting Crested Barbet, Black-chested Prinia, White-fronted and Little Bee-eaters, though frustratingly we only heard Greater Swamp Warbler with singing birds remaining deep in the reeds. More Owls followed, amazingly another Pel's and a re-look at yesterday's Wood owl, which was still roosting in the same spot. After breakfast we said our goodbyes to the camp staff and started off on the next leg of our journey. This involved a boat and short road ride back to Shakawe airstrip.

Here we boarded our Mac air flight to make the fifty-minute flight to Xakanaxa airstrip in the Moremi Game reserve, to meet our transport for the start of our Safari. The journey from the airstrip to the camp was around an hour we were told by our guide and driver, Bait. If we had driven straight there, I'm sure that would have been the case, but with so much to look at, the journey took closer to three! Bird wise Lilac-breasted Roller, Red-billed Hornbill, Emerald Spotted Wood-dove, and Cape Starling were all quickly added to our lists.



Lilac-breasted Roller, a bird we were to regularly encounter.

Our arrival at several watering holes revealed a plethora of birds, which included wader species such as Wood and Marsh Sandpiper, Ruff and Three-banded Plover but also Wattled Crane, Yellow-billed Stork, African Spoonbill, Glossy and Sacred Ibis and Hottentot Teal, the latter a bird one of the group was particularly keen to see. Antelope species seen included Steenbok and Red Lechwe and our first Lions, a pair sheltering from the heat under a small tree, was a moment to be remembered! Another watering hole revealed at least six Hippos with elephants around the perimeter, and a Giraffe was found nearby too. More birds followed including Bateleur, Lappet-faced Vulture, Slaty Egret, Kittlitz's Plover and Pin-tailed Wydah, though most impressive was undoubtedly a pair of Saddle-billed Storks with both their size and smart bill colouration. On arrival at camp, we had Lunch and a short siesta which was followed by a short game drive. Initially our attention was focussed more on the birds, with us spending time again by several stretches of water. Here we noted species such as African Snipe, Black Crake, Black Egret and Curlew Sandpiper. Swainson's Spurfowl and the similar, Red-billed Francolin, as well as several confiding Double-banded Sandgrouse. As we drove along, we had noticed the number of Elephants increasing and at one stage a large herd of close to a hundred animals could be seen largely heading towards us in small,

staggered groups. These ranged from young Elephants that were clearly still dependant on their mothers and some colossal males, with clearly had a few testosterone issues! We watched in awe as the troop came past, then decided we really should be heading back. We hadn't realised quite how many elephants had come past and the majority were clearly along the route we needed to take. We skirted around the herd taking a convoluted route back, getting a measure of the animal's mood on several occasions when we'd arguably strayed a bit to close! That said we made it back safely after a thoroughly enjoyable day!

Monday 20th November

Rising at dawn, just after five o'clock, we had time for a wash before coffee and breakfast and our first game drive of the day. Breakfast also gave people a chance to share their experiences of the night, with Elephants and Hippos both clearly having ventured on occasions quite close to the camp and people's tents. We headed off to an area to the north of our campsite, again taking in a range of habits, largely savannah and watering holes, but also a small stretch of woodland, we added lots of new birds and saw lots of animals too. Birds included Tawny and Wahlberg's Eagles, Dark-chested Snake Eagle, African Hawk-eagle, Marabou Stork, Black-backed Puffback, Chinspot Batis, Marico Sunbird, Bearded Woodpecker, Southern Ground Hornbill, Coppery-tailed Coucal, Amott's Chat, and some familiar faces in the form of Willow warbler and Spotted Flycatcher. Hippos were regularly seen, including a close male that we happened upon along one of the tracks.



We stumbled upon this Hippo along one of the tracks we drove along.

We didn't see as many elephants, but we did see several more Lions, including a female that appeared to have cubs somewhere in the vicinity, but clearly had no intention of letting us know where. Antelope again was easily seen, Red Lechwe as before, but also the equally smart Impala plus Waterbuck too.



Waterbuck, one of the regular antelope species we encountered.

Warthog and a slender Mongoose were seen, a young Mol Snake was also seen by some of the group. The morning had flown past, so it was back for lunch and a siesta before we headed out again late afternoon, once the temperature had dropped. Heading off out again and with temperatures close to 40 degrees, things seemed a tad slow at getting going again. Elephants were apparent again as yesterday, and as we drove past them, we noted a whole range of shapes and sizes present. Birding this afternoon was on the slow side, with the heat as previously mentioned clearly having had an effect.

That said we managed new birds in the form of Blue waxbill, Meyer's Parrot, Magpie Shrike, White-browed Sparrow Weaver and a vocal White-browed Scrub Robin. As the afternoon was ending, news of a Leopard in a nearby quickly saw us change tack and we set off hopefully of success. Unfortunately, the next news update said the animal had disappeared and could not be located, so we aborted our mission, pausing on route to add a roosting Barn Owl to the day list. A troop of Baboons were around the gate the Owl was at, and we watched them raiding the rubbish bags, clearly having outwitted the staff there. Vervet Monkeys were also seen nearby, along with a Kudo, which was a particularly impressive looking beast. There was one last treat in store for us this afternoon, our first Zephyrs, a

small herd of eight animals including a foal. They were as we were finding with most the animals, we were seeing happy with vehicles, and we sat and watched them for a while before finally heading back to camp.



Our first Zebras included this mare and foal.

Tuesday 21st November

After an undisturbed night from a wildlife perspective, the group assembled refreshed and ready for coffee and breakfast, after which we set off for another game drive. Hippos and Elephant were becoming the norm and the first things we noted. We quickly switched to 'bird mode' and headed off to a nearby watering hole to see what we could find. As we approached the area, we could see it was busy, with African Spoonbill, Yellow-billed Stork and Great, Yellow-billed, Slaty, and Little Egrets all present. As we scanned the area, we picked out additional species such as Sacred Ibis, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, Kittlitz's and Common Ringed Plovers, Yellow wagtail and Green-backed Heron. With news now having reached us that last night's Leopard had been sighted briefly again, it was felt that that, would be the area to concentrate our efforts on this morning. Though as we journeyed, we made several impromptu stops for roadside birds, which included Greater Blue-eared Starlings, African Grey Hornbill, Crested Barbet and Senegal Coucal. Mammals featured too, with sightings of a group of three Warthogs, followed a short while later by a Side-striped Jackal and then a Giraffe. We arrived in the area the Leopard had been seen but there was

no recent news, so it was up to us to find it. We tried several tracks to no avail but then our luck changed with a sighting of it, a female, through the trees. We put ourselves in a more favourable position to gain better views, as it moved through the undergrowth closely followed by a cub, a real bonus! We then repositioned ourselves to get a better angle with Bait commenting that she seemed agitated by something. The reason soon became apparent with another Leopard appearing in view, this time a large male! The cub immediately took off, at which point the female launched herself at the male, with a short fight ensuing.



The female Leopard driving off the larger male.

They then took themselves off deeper into cover and we lost sight of them, although we could hear periodic noises indicated they were both still present. After a while the female returned, having seemingly seen the male off, and she proceeded to climb a nearby tree and start calling the cub. We sat and watched and after a while the cub appeared with the pair of them showing amazingly well. Bait had positioned us slight back from the other vehicles now present, which proved a good move as the route out the animals could take was limited, and we were sat at the head of the likely route. Sure, enough it was the route they chose, heading past us and pausing at one point to sit only a few yards from our vehicle! With lots of other vehicles now in the area, we decided to move on, with our sights set on a comfort and tea-break which was decidedly overdue. As we moved off, we noted the behaviour of the Impala and Lechwe with the animals snorting loudly and moving towards the Leopards, clearly intent on keeping this potential threat somewhere they could see it. Birds at our tea-stop included a female Violet backed Starling, a pair of Pin-tailed wydah, a Common Cuckoo and a Black-collared Barbet. We returned through the area we'd previously

seen the Leopard re-finding it again on its kill, a Red Lechwe, which it had clearly hidden in the undergrowth, with the intent all along to bring its cub join in on the feast. With all the excitement of the morning the time had flown past, and it was time to start making our way back to camp. We made several stops along the way adding birds such as Black-headed Oriole, African Pied Wagtail, African Paradise Flycatcher, (a long-tailed male), a family of Amott's Chats and soaring White-backed Vultures to our mornings tally.

Our afternoon drive saw us heading initially to several watering holes that were clearly drying out and being exploited by the local bird life. The small pools were crammed with Marabou, Saddle-billed and Yellow-billed Storks, Sacred Ibis, Great, Yellow-billed and Little Egrets and a solitary 'umbrella-ring' Black Heron, all keen to exploit the opportunity to take the remaining fish from the pools.

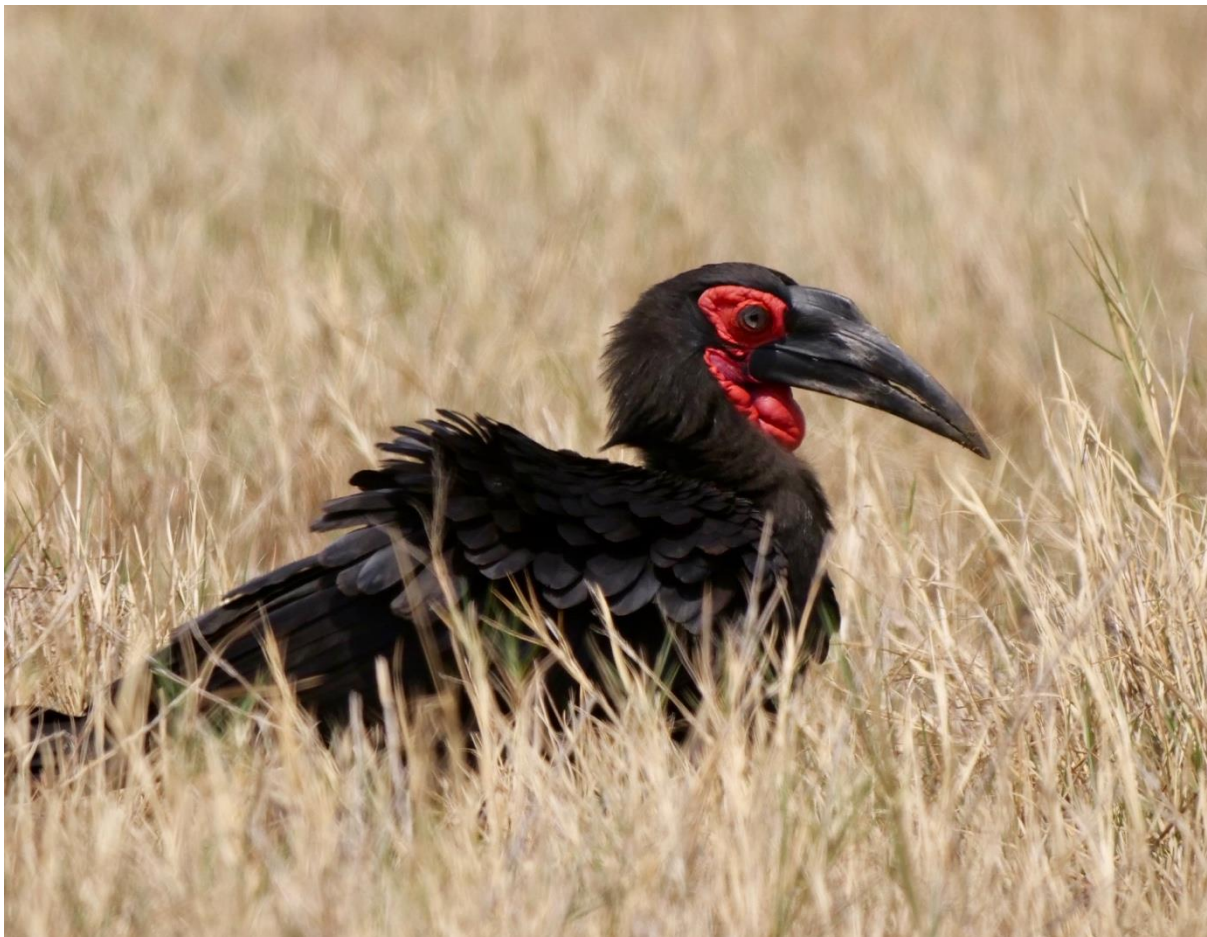


A feeding frenzy of Storks, Herons, Egrets and Spoonbills

A larger pool nearby warranted a stop too and here we noted several Hottentot Teal, Three-banded Plover, and African Snipe. Regular stops as usual as we drove along produced our first Crimson-chested Shrike, a bird you can't help being impressed with! And at the other end of the colour spectrum, Burchell's and Double-banded Sandgrouse and Red-crested Korhaan. We saw several large groups of Zebra and Wildebeest, plus Reedbuck and a Side-striped Jackal. The sky by this time was starting to darken and it was though prudent that we started to make our way back to camp. That of course didn't stop us stopping again, firstly noting three Wattled Cranes, then to admire a small pride of four Lions, comprised of one male and three females, with several of the females clearly impatient to move on. As we drove back the sky got darker and the lightening more impressive, with the forks of lighting stretching both vertically and horizontally into the sky. We just made it back before the rain came, with us hoping it would have passed through by the morning.

Wednesday 22nd November

We woke to a dry start to the day, last night's rain having largely stopped by the time we'd gone to bed. With a change of location on the cards today, we had to depart swiftly after breakfast, due to a full day of travelling on the agenda. We hadn't gone far though before we had stopped, firstly for a perched Osprey and then to try and find a Rufous-naped Lark that could be heard singing. Our search for this resulted in another new bird, Capped Wheatear, being discovered first, before the Lark was found sat singing from a broken stump. An African Paradise Flycatcher had us stopping again, with a Wattled Staring found nearby feeding amongst the legs of a small herd of nearby Red Lechwe. A feeding giraffe did an amazing job of disappearing from view as it stood in the centre of a group of large bushes periodically bending down to eat. A further stop at a waterhole produced the expected suite of Egrets, ducks, and Waders, along with Comb Duck, Water Thick-knee, and Cape Wagtail. Time as always was slipping away, so the next part of our journey was focused more on the travelling side of things, though we still adding species as we drove. These included Levillant's Cuckoo, White-backed and Hooded Vulture, Southern Black-tit, European and Southern Carmine Bee-eaters, Purple Roller, Tawny, and Wahlberg's Eagles, Brubru and Southern Ground Hornbill.



The impressive Southern Ground Hornbill

We did well for mammals too, with two Spotted Hyaenas appearing near the side of the track, with one standing in the open behind the vehicle before they disappeared again. A

well-spaced-out group of six Banded Mongoose entertained us with they're antics, and we enjoyed large herds of Zephyrs and Blue Wildebeests in the open areas we passed. Some roadside tracks revealed Wild Dogs somewhere in the area, so we circled around the general area in search of them and as we turned a bend, we found the pack sleep under the shelter of some bushes. Eight animals in total who were seemingly only interested in sleeping, allowing us some great views.



Sleeping Wild Dogs

We were nearing the end of our morning's journey and as we entered the village of Khwai we were greeted by a perched Brown-snake Eagle, its bulbous head and uniform plumage ensuring ID was straightforward! A brief interlude from travelling was next on the agenda with a ride in a Macoro, the old traditional mode of transport, along a section of the Khwai river. It certainly was a relaxing way to travel though the heat made us grateful it was only for an hour. We did get eye level views of Hippos though, along with several African Jacanas, African Fish eagle and a new bird for the trip Rufous-bellied Heron. A short drive to find a shaded spot for lunch was followed by a brief siesta, before we continued again on our journey. Our route took us into Chobe National Park and then onto our destination, with our camp positioned just outside the village of Mababe. Our journey took a familiar format, with regular stops to look at things along the way. The change of weather wasn't something that had been factored in though, with a heavy down pour of rain mid-way through the afternoon resulting in a hurried repacking of the luggage and the distribution of Ponchos, which kept us dry to a large degree. Regardless of the weather a productive afternoon followed, with birds along the way that included Golden-breasted Bunting, Levillant's Cuckoo, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, African Golden Oriole, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Black-throated Canary, Violet-eared Waxbill, Green-winged Pytilia, Sharp-tailed Wydah and Southern White-crowned and Magpie Shrikes. We also saw a further three Red-crested

Korhaan, following on from yesterday and saw first-hand why locally it's called the suicide bird. As we watched one from the side of the road it gave out a loud call, before climbing into the sky, folding its wings to plummet straight to the ground, only opening its wings at the last minute to break its fall! Animals featured strongly too, Impala with recently born young, several groups of Warthog, a large herd of around thirty Cape Buffalo, three Kudus, several Giraffes, and another new antelope, an impressive looking Tsessebe.

Thursday 23rd November

We woke this morning to a new vista and having arrived in the dark last night we were now able to appreciate our surrounds, with our camp positioned along the bank and overlooking a narrow river. Birds such as a Green-backed Heron, Blacksmith Plovers, Derick's Cuckoo and Red-billed Buffalo-weaver were seen as we ate breakfast, along with a Yellow-billed Hornbill, a new bird for the trip. There had been plenty of noise in the night again from the local Hyenas and Lions, the tracks of the latter, revealing one having passed through the edge of the camp during the night. After breakfast we set off for a morning drive, our route taking us out along the river. A short distance from our camp we encountered one of the Lions, a male around five years old, which it seemed having recently feasted on the carcass of a dead elephant we'd passed, and largely explained the noises in the night. We again enjoyed nice views, with the roaring from another one nearby causing him to rise up and utter a series of roars back, then walk past only a few feet from the vehicle which was very much a 'hold our breath' moment!



A 'hold our breath moment' with this Lion as it walked past the vehicle.

As always, we enjoyed a productive morning with a perched juvenile African-hawk Eagle the among the first birds seen and probably one of the two birds we'd seen the previous evening, followed by a stately looking Kori Bustard, Botswana's national bird.



Kori Bustard, Botswana's National Bird

We stopped and spent awhile looking through the birds along the river, these included Goliath Heron, Comb Duck, Red-billed Teal, Water Thick-knee and a Painted Snipe, a male, with some nice views had of it through the telescope. Hippos were as always plentiful, with several family groups seen as we drove along the riverbank. One group had a dead and seemingly decaying youngster with them, which they seem to still be protecting, though with at least ten Crocodiles floating in the water nearby we got the impression they wouldn't be for much longer! We watched some elephants crossing the river, all different shapes, and sizes, including a young one that was barely able to stay above the water, though the most interesting part was watching the elephants going onto their knees to exit and climb up onto the high bank. Impala, Kudu, Cape Buffalo, and Water buck were also all seen as we travelled along. We went for a short walk with the recent flowering of some nearby trees producing lots of butterflies and insects which in turn attracted the birds. These included Southern and Lesser Masked and Red-headed Weavers, Red-billed Firefinch, Black-faced Waxbill, Tawny and Black-chested Prinia, several Willow Warblers and a pair of African Golden Oriole, before the appearance of some Cape Buffalo saw us heading quickly back to the truck. A break for tea and coffee was next taken in the company of several breeding White-browed Sparrow-

weavers, an immature Bateleur and a Dwarf Mongoose. After brief detour to collect a rifle (a necessity for the walk planned for the following morning), we headed back towards the camp, making several stops along the way to look at a Crested Francolin, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Black-hooded Oriole, and a large family of Banded Mongoose. As previous days a siesta to avoid the heat of the day was followed by tea and cake late afternoon before we headed off out again. We drove back along the river with our first stop being to see how the Crocodiles were faring with the acquisition of the young Hippo. We arrived to find the Crocodiles clearly having made inroads into the carcass, with adult Hippos having admitted defeat and finally left them to it. A short way further on we came across a female Elephant and its youngster (around two years old) being followed it seemed, by an amorous male, along with the reappearance of the herd that had crossed the river earlier in the morning. We sat and watched for a while, curious as to whether the large herd would accept the female and youngster and what the male was planning to do. The herd crossed back over the river and in front of us, quickly exiting the area with the lone female and young following a short distance behind. The male seemed in no hurry, though eventually he too followed the herd, but again at a respectable distance. Several new birds were added during the afternoon, the most noteworthy being a pair of Bronze-winged Coursers and a noisy flock of Pied Babblers. The source of the babbler's excitement was a Slender Mongoose, which would periodically appear as it ferreted through the pile of leaves below the tree the excited birds were sat in with the Mongoose eventually made a dash for it with its noisy entourage in toe.



Slender Mongoose, one of four species of Mongoose seen.

The late afternoon took a slightly different twist for us today with a short night drive planned. This meant we found a convenient spot to stop and enjoy a 'sundowner' drink before driving back in the half-light and then darkness once the sun had gone down. The spot chosen for our drink was a large wetland area complete with feeding Elephants and Hippos, plus it would transpire two Wahlberg's Eagles and a Bennet's woodpecker.



Elephants and Hippos, as we drank our G&Ts

Our route back took us by a Spotted Hyaenas den, and we arrived to find a dozen or so animals scattered around the mouth of it. We sat and watched, with the animals clearly aware of our presence but not overly concerned and some of the very young animals in fact came quite close, their curiosity getting the better of them! As we returned to camp a flashlight was used as we searched for more night creatures. A pair of Honey Badgers appeared next, though they were back in the hole before we could all see them, so we turned the light off and sat waiting. Sure enough after a few minutes they re-appeared, and this time we gained nice views as the light was played back on them. The next animal we saw wasn't something we were expecting, with Bait pointing it out and say it was an African Kangaroo and bizarrely that's exactly what it looked like! The creature it turned out was a Hare, with long bent hind-legs and short front legs and a long black tipped tail, Kangaroo we felt certainly wasn't a bad description.

Friday 24th November

Following breakfast this morning we headed back along the river, with the intention of finding somewhere suitable to do a very welcome hour or so birding by foot. A short way from the camp we stopped to look at a Brown-crowned Tchagra along with the first of the Hyena's we were to bump into this morning, this one judging by the way it looked and

smelt, clearly having spent a percentage of the night feeding on the elephant carcass! A short distance further on we came across a Giraffe that seemingly was hoping to have to a drink from the river. To reach the water Giraffes must spread their front legs which leaves them vulnerable to a degree, so there was lots of looking around and hesitating, though when the animal started doing some leg stretches, we knew drinking was imminent. After watching the Giraffe eventually drinking, we crossed over a large wooden bridge (which was padlocked to stop it being overused) to be met almost immediately by a pair of Levillant's Cuckoos, a noisy pack of Green-wood Hoopoes, a Bennet's Woodpecker and three Brubru's in a tree together. A second woodpecker followed, this one though in the talons of a Pearl-spotted Owlet! It was clearly reluctant to leave its prey as it sat by the track glaring at us, though eventually flying off leaving it behind, to presumably return once we had gone.



Pearl-spotted Owlet plus the unfortunate Woodpecker.

We found a suitable place to park and after a short chat H&S chat from Bait we set off, complete with rifle, for our walk. We enjoyed a nice walk, with Bait on occasion pointing out animal tracks and telling us more about the wildlife generally. Birds seen on our walk included Tawny Eagle, Greater Honeyguide, Red-backed and Southern White-crowned Shrikes and Bateleur. A calling Black Cuckoo frustratingly refused to reveal its location, though we had more luck with an African Harrier-Hawk which we watched clinging to the tree-trunks to search for nests, whilst being mobbed by half a dozen Lilac-breasted Rollers. A large flock of two hundred or so Burchell's Sandgrouse were seen flying into drink, a regular morning ritual for them, with the large flock splitting into smaller ones as they dropped

down to drink at different spots along the river. Arriving back at the truck we had our morning tea break before heading off back towards the bridge. Birds enroute included, a seemingly (in our view) poorly named Grey-backed Camaroptera, which showed well for us as it fed at the base of a small bush. Six Freyer's Parrots were seen too along with Cardinal Woodpecker, White-backed Vultures and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters. After some technical difficulties undoing the padlock on the bridge we finally exited and made our way back along the river towards the camp. Several stops along the river gave us a selection of the usual birds we'd seen previously including another Painted Snipe, though this time a brighter plumaged female. Large numbers of Barn Swallows were seen too, well into four figures, and made an impressive sight sat on the branches of two large bare trees. Lunch was next, which was punctuated by the appearance nearby of a Saddle-billed Stork and a large flock of Shaft-tailed Wydahs which had settled to drink from the river in a spot opposite where we were sat. This in turn had attracted a Gabar Goshawk, which flew into the flock and scattered the birds, then conveniently sat in the canopy of a large nearby tree waiting to see what the flock did next.



This Gabar Goshawk was a welcome lunchtime distraction.

As lunch was ending a final distraction was smart, and this time very aptly named, male Red-headed Weaver which was seen as it came down to drink by the river. After lunch we headed out for another drive which as it turned out was to be a somewhat raptor biased afternoon. This started off with a well-hidden Pearl-spotted owlet, though when I say well hidden, it was perched in full view in the front of a dead stump but seeing it was a different

matter! A commotion from a nearby bush revealed a small band of Pied Babblers, Meve's Starlings, Red-billed Buffalo Weavers and a Brown-crowned Tchagra but despite as looking we couldn't discover the source of their displeasure. A group of seven Giraffes were well received and seemed for some reason slightly paler than the ones we'd seen up until now. We paused briefly by a tributary from the main Bababe river, noting several Water Buck, Hippos, and a Cape Buffalo the latter being followed by three Cattle Egrets. We moved on stopping to look at a juvenile Tawny Eagle then again to look at a nearby Gabar Goshawk. As we watched the Goshawk, we realised there was a second one present, and it quickly became apparent they weren't happy. An African Hawk-eagle was sat nearby, and the Goshawks wasted no time in voicing their displeasure at it being there, constantly swooping down to mob it.



A harassed African Hawk-eagle and retreating Gabar Goshawk.

The Hawk-eagle eventually moved on with us encountering it again further along the track in the company of a second one. More raptors followed with another Tawny Eagle, Pearl-spotted Owlet and a Bateleur. A surprise bonus this eve was to have our 'Sundowner' out again as we did last night, then make a slow drive back in the dark. A suitable spot was found for our drink, which included views again of Elephants, Hippos and African Openbills. Our drive back was productive too, a Scrub Hare our first addition, then a Southern White-faced Scops Owl picked out in the spotlight sat on top of a tree by the track.

Saturday 25th November

Another moving day today, with us heading off once again shortly after breakfast. A pair of Crested Francolins were the first notable addition for the day, and as we were heading past the Hyaena den we thought we have another speculative look. This paid off with one adult and a pup sat by the den entrance, though another smaller pup did no more than poke its head out and then disappear quickly out of view. With a long drive ahead of us today the plan wasn't to spend too much time stopping, but as always things don't always go to plan! We headed through and out of the Park Gate with a comfort stop revealing a surprise addition in a Large-spotted Genet in the roof framework of the gate. We'd seen birds along the way too, which had included Tawny Eagle, Red-crested Korhaan, Red-winged Pytilia and Black-chested Prinia. The habitat started to change as we neared the depression, the point the river ceases to exist, and the first Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes of the day were seen along with a small flock of White-crested Helmet shrikes, a new trip bird. As we entered the depression itself, we were faced with a large vista, with the most striking and immediate thing, the large number of Cape Buffalo we could see, along with an increase in Warthog numbers too. There were also large areas of obviously lush green vegetation in the distance, which was attracting flocks of herons and egrets. News then reached us of a Lioness on a kill, so we headed over to join several other vehicles that were watching. On arrival it was apparent the Cape Buffalo that the Lioness had brought down was still alive, and she was in the process of suffocating it, seemingly not an unusual way for large prey to be killed. The process took at least half an hour and left the Lioness exhausted, and she walked away from the kill, clearly looking for some shade and a chance to recover.



The Lioness and her Buffalo kill.

There are two Lion prides operating in the area, the Lioness part of one and as we left, we stumbled open the second. They were spread out under several bushes, one group of fourteen of varying ages including a male, with a further six including two males, under two more bushes. They'd clearly eaten well recently and were seemingly very settled, and a spirally kettle of White-backed Vultures nearby highlighting the likely site of the kill. We continued our journey, noting a flock of Grey-backed Sparrow-larks, before finding some shade for an overdue tea break. Our drive to our next stop for lunch was punctuated with several stops, and we managed to see both Dwarf and Slender Mongoose plus several more Red-crested Korhaans, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes. A Lark-like Bunting appeared briefly as we sat and ate lunch, and after a short siesta we continued our journey. With time against us and the plan to arrive at our new campsite at least in daylight this evening, we minimised our impromptu stops. The stops we did do though produced several Long-tailed Paradise Wydahs, and an adult Martial Eagle that soared lazily over the road in front of us. As we arrived at Savuti and the gate into the park we stopped at a small drinking pool, this had attracted many Wattled Starlings, several Grey go-away-birds and a pair of rather smart Scaly-feathered Finches. Our next stop at a larger waterhole, revealed large numbers of Blacksmiths Plovers, two Little Grebes and two Giraffes that had come to drink. Once again, we watched as they spread their front legs to lower themselves down, often in unison, which made for a nice photo opportunity.



Synchronised drinking from these two Giraffes.

Several Kori Bustards and Woolly-necked Storks were seen at our final stop, along with Rufous-naped Lark, a species we'd seen before, but being more numerous in the area it was an opportunity to study them a little bit more. Their habit of sitting on a prominent perch whilst singing made them easy to find, and we watched them sing four or five times before

shaking their wings which was clearly part of their display and made for an amusing end to the day!

Sunday 26th November

We woke to a welcoming cooler start to the day and as it turned out a few spots of rain too. We enjoyed breakfast listening to calling Southern Ground Hornbills, after which we headed off out and with a different habitat to explore hopefully new birds. We made our way through the scrub area that surrounds the camp and then out into the more open like habitat, referred to as a marsh but named more in line with historic flooding as opposed to how it looked now. We started our bird list off with Black-headed Heron, a pair of Black-backed Puffbacks, Bronze-winged Coursers and a small party of four Violet-backed Starlings, including a smart male. A displaying Red-crested Korhaan called loudly by the path before launching itself up and into its 'suicide' display flight. Our first stop was at a small waterhole, though there was little around, so we moved on a bit further. A Lion appeared a short distance away, one of four it transpired, as they slowly all appeared and walked towards us in a loose line. The four were brothers and part of the pride that dominate the area, with the first one we'd seen, who had part of his tail missing, the Pride leader. We positioned ourselves to watch them, clearly a very tight knit unit, and the show of affection towards each other was both surprising and interesting to watch. We continued our drive with Wildebeest, Zebra and Impala easily seen along with Warthog and Tsessebe with a new addition for us, Black-backed Jackal, seen as well.



Black-backed Jackal

New birds as usual came thick and fast, with a surprisingly showy Small Buttonquail seen walking through the grass, then out in front of us on the track. New Bustard species seen included both Black-bellied and Northern Black Korhaan, with several Kori Bustards seen as well. We did well for birds of prey with numerous discussions taking place regarding the identification of Steppe and Tawny Eagles as we passed one large eagle after another, perched up in the trees following the rain.



Steppe Eagle, its long gape line helping to confirm its identity.

Several small flocks of Lesser Kestrels and a male Montague's Harrier were also seen, plus other birds that included Common Ostrich, Spotted Thick-knee, Temminck's Courser, Capped Wheatear, Woolly-necked Stork, and Great-spotted Cuckoo. We had taken a long looping route around the area and as we headed back for a late lunch, we stopped briefly near several elephant carcasses. These had attracted the attentions of the local White-backed Vultures and Marabou storks, which enabled us to get some good views of them and more stops on the way back produced an adult Lanner Falcon, African Harrier-Hawk and African Hawk Eagle. Arriving at camp we had our lunch and then a short siesta before heading out once again. We had started the afternoon by gaining nice views of a Pearl-spotted Owlet around the camp, and once again we went from the 'sublime to the ridiculous' when it came to Owls. We'd checked several trees along the start of our route looking for roosting owls, with us finally striking it lucky as we found two Verreaux's Eagle-Owls, an adult, and a well grown chick. The adult was perched high the canopy, with the youngster initially laying along a branch, before standing upright to look down on us. A decent selection of birds followed during the afternoon, which included Violet-eared Waxbill, Scaly-feathered Finch, Green-winged Pytilia, Kittlitz's Plover and lots of shrikes, the majority Lesser Grey and Red-backed.

A Gabar Goshawk, an immature bird, was found dismantling its newly caught prey, which it continued to do as we watched, before eventually flying off with it.



The aptly named Violet-eared Waxbill.

Word had reached us that a Lioness was in the process of staking some Impala nearby, so we headed off for a look. When we arrived, the Impala had clearly got wind to the Lioness's intentions, snorting in alarm, and facing the lioness. With the element of surprise lost the Lioness dropped to the ground seemingly having given up on the idea. We then realised we could see three more Lioness's which were heading towards the first, followed by eight cubs. This we were told was the pride the four Brothers we had seen in the morning belonged too. There were six male cubs, making a pride total of ten males, a potentially formidable combination for dominance over the area in the future. A bonus sighting here was two Bat-eared Foxes, though with so many Lions in the area their appearance was rather brief.

Monday 27th November

Breakfast as usual was followed by another drive out once again into the marsh largely encompassing the latter part of the route we'd taken yesterday. Wildlife sightings though are rarely the same, and today was no exception, Grey Go-away-bird, Red billed Firefinch, Comb Duck, Red-billed and Hottentot Teal started us off, though they were quickly out shone by the animals. A Yellow Mongoose was spotted and as soon as it saw us it amusingly went into Meerkat mode, sitting upright on its hind legs. We'd driven along the river entering an area clearly favoured by Elephants, we passed several before happening on a mother with a new-born elephant, with the thoughts being it was only a day old. The mother was clearly intent on protecting the youngster, fanning her ears out and raising her trunk and bellowing,

signalling it was time for us to move on, very quickly! We were soon back out in the more open habitat we were in yesterday, and as before we could easily see good numbers of Zebra and Wildebeest plus Marabou and Woolly-necked Storks and Kori Bustard. There were also twenty or so White Storks present, new arrivals and the vanguard for the larger numbers that will appear over the forthcoming weeks. Raptors again featured with both juvenile Lanner and Eurasian Hobby seen, along with Tawny, Martial and Lesser Spotted Eagles. A call then came over the radio to say that two Cheetahs had been found a short drive away and unsurprisingly we headed straight off, hoping they'd hang around. We needn't have worried, with the pair, two brothers, clearly not intending to leave their shaded spot under a large bush. With only one other vehicle present we were able to position ourselves to get some great views, with the animals no more than ten metres away. When we'd finished looking, we headed off for some shade and a welcome tea break, it had been an exciting morning!



We enjoyed nice views of these Cheetahs as they sat in the shade.

After our break we continued, basically heading in the general direction of our camp. Before we arrived back though there were a few more surprises in store. The first of these was a Secretary Bird, a bird several of the group had been hoping to see. Bait said as a species they are often reluctant to allow vehicles to get too close, though this one clearly had eating on its mind. This allowed us to get reasonably close and we watched the bird walking along repeatedly stamping its foot down, presumably killing or stunning whatever it was eating before picking it up in its bill. A pair of Marico Flycatchers were next, a welcome addition especially as we'd looked at and checked so many Spotted Flycatchers! Cardinal Woodpecker and two African Hawk-eagles followed, though once again outshone by mammals, firstly by a family of Black-backed Jackals and then an African Wildcat. Wildcats are normally nocturnal, so we were lucky to get a sighting during the day. The cat hurried off through the bush, but as usual Bait was ahead of the game taking us ahead, to turn and intercept it. This worked a

treat as we found the cat peering out from the base of a small group of trees, clearly under the impression we couldn't see it. Lunch and our afternoon siesta followed, before we headed off out again, taking an easterly route along the dried riverbed then back out onto the marsh. Kudus and Steenbok along with the numerous Impala were seen as we drove along, the latter two species often in the company of their young, many clearly only a day or so old. Birding was a bit slow until we reached the marsh, though we did manage nice views again of Violet-eared Waxbill and Southern Masked Weaver. The Weaver was a male and had just finished constructing a nest and was in the throes of trying to attract a female and hopefully her approval, otherwise he'd have to start all over again. As we moved onto the marsh herds of Zebras were seen, stretched out across the visible expanse, with Ostriches noted nearby too. Other expected species included Kori Bustard, Marabou and Woolly-necked Storks, Red-naped Lark, and African Pipit. A Black-backed Jackal was seen followed by what we initially thought was a second, but closer inspection revealed it was an Arndwolf, another usually very secretive species. The light by now was starting to fade and it was time to head back. We had one more surprise instore for us though when a large Red-chested pipit was spotted in the grass ahead of us, a Rosy Longclaw, which showed very nicely for us, a much-appreciated addition.



Rosy Longclaw, a much appreciated addition

With the light dropping and a curfew set by the park for all vehicles to be back by Seven o'clock we had to drive back quickly. It was a shame as the trees were literally dripping in roosting Eagles, the majority appeared to be Tawny and Lesser Spotted with two adult Bateleurs seen too. An advantage of being on the late side though was the sunset, with the moon illuminated bright pink by the dropping sun.

Tuesday 28th November

Another travel day for us, which meant a prompt start with a long drive, some 170 Kilometres, ahead of us. Breakfast first though which was taken in the company of three calling owl species, Verreaux's Eagle Owl, Barred and Pearl Spotted Owlet. The first of these was glimpsed as it unfortunately flew off as we tried to find its roost spot, and the third visible around 'tent number four' as previous days. With the camp being dismantled we had a few hours to do some more birding in the general area, with the camp team ideally needing to get ahead of us to set the camp back up. As always there was plenty to see, a pair of Spotted Thick-knee with a recently hatched, though as it turned out, mobile youngster, a flock of Burchell's Sandgrouse coming into drink at a waterhole, plus Red-crested Korhaan, two male Montague's Harrier, African Hawk and Tawny Eagles. Smaller birds seen included Greater Honeyguide, Lark-like Bunting, Southern Masked Weaver and Tawny-flanked Prinia. With such a long journey ahead of us we really had to focus on covering the ground today so once we were underway stops were kept to a minimum. One stop we did make though was for an Ayre's Snake Eagle found perched high in a tree canopy. Superficially very similar to African Hawk-eagle, as it was a pale morph adult, but the black spotting on the legs ruled that species out.



Ayres Hawk-eagle, showing its diagnostic spotted leg feathering.

Other birds noted along the way included two European Rollers, Green-winged Pytilia, Golden-breasted Bunting, Yellow-fronted Canary and two species of Sunbird, both new for us, White bellied and Scarlet-chested.



The rather smart Golden-breasted Bunting

Several encounters with animals crossing the road included Zebras and a party of elephants, with one female again clearly not impressed with our presence with her young nearby. We stopped for a welcome lunch break and a short siesta, then we were off again. The hardest part of the journey had largely been done but we still had a similar distance to travel, the difference being we had left the rutted sandtrack and joined a tarmac road. This meant we made better time and obviously had a more comfortable ride. Several stops along the way added a pair of Red-breasted Swallows that were sat on some telegraph lines and a rather smart, Orange-breasted Shrike. With the river alongside us as we drove, we took the opportunity to pull over for a look at one stretch, where there was clearly birds present. The heat of the day had made things a bit hazy but larger birds such as Pink-backed Pelican, African Spoonbill and Hamerkop were immediate obvious, with further scanning with the scope producing a flock of around twenty African Skimmers, Whiskered Tern, Ruff, Greenshank, Little Stint, Red-billed and Hottentot Teal. As we neared our destination, we stopped to sign in at the park gate, before once again returning to a dirt track to finish the remainder of the journey. We noted a few more birds before arriving at our camp, the more noteworthy being Southern Ground Hornbill, Steppe Buzzard, African Paradise Flycatcher, Terrestrial Bulbul, and Tropical Boubou. As we drove the last part, we could see thickening clouds and lighting flashes, and we hoped we could avoid the impending weather. We nearly made it, but not nearly enough, as the wind picked up and the rain fell, with us hastily donning Ponchos to try and stay dry.

Wednesday 29th November

We woke in our new campsite in Chobe National Park, and as the previous days we were woken by the sounds of Pearl-spotted Owlet and Cape Turtle Doves, the latter chanting their monotonous 'Bots-waana' song. After breakfast, our morning drive took us initially through the bush, down to a track that runs alongside the river, giving us the best of both worlds from a habitat and bird perspective. New birds came in the form of African Green Pigeon, which was found only a short distance from the camp, Eye-browed Coucal, and a pair of White-browed Robin-chats.



Eye-browed Robin-chat, one of the two we saw.

A Jacobin Cuckoo was a particularly welcome addition as well, especially as we had checked so many of the similar looking Levallant's, in the hope of catching up with this species. Other birds seen in the bush habitat included Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Cardinal Woodpecker, Amethyst and White-bellied Sunbirds, Marico Flycatcher and Long-tailed Paradise Flycatcher. Shrikes featuring strongly too, with numerous Lesser Grey and Red-backed seen. The river and surrounding marshland enabled us to refresh our memories of species we hadn't seen in any number for a while, such as Whiskered Terns, African Openbills and African Jacanas. Large numbers of Southern Carmine Bee-eaters were also seen, disturbed on occasion from their nesting area by marauding African Marsh Harriers. A Black-crowned Night heron appeared from its nearby roosting tree, flying away noisily in complaint, and a Black-shouldered Kite sailed past overhead. A new Antelope addition this morning was a small herd of Puku, small brown antelopes like Lechwe in their habitat choice, marshland or near water, but lacking the short front legs and two-tone body colouring of that species. Several Hippos were also noted along the river, along with

Crocodiles and Water Monitors too. After our stop for our morning tea break, we took a more inland route back to camp, though with the heat already climbing things had quietened down considerably. Several African Fish Eagles were sat high in the trees, along with Yellow-billed Kites, and at least one Bateleur was noted. A small flock of Red-billed Oxpeckers appeared, their concolorous back colour helping to identify them as they flew in to land on the backs of a several Impalas. After our lunch and a siesta, which included a flock of White-crowned Helmet shrikes in the vicinity of the camp, we were treated to a tour of Life's (our cook) bush kitchen. Understandably quite rudimentary, but impressive all the same, even more so having thoroughly enjoyed the tasty food he had been producing. As we stood talking the storm, we could hear approaching was clearly now centred above us. We expected some rain, but a hailstorm in the high 30s temperature was a total surprise and lasted for a good five minutes. The hail was followed by rain which then delayed afternoon tea and our departure for our bush drive. The rain stopped and we headed out and birds that followed included several Magpie Shrikes, Cardinal woodpecker, White-browed Scrub Robin, Black-throated Canary, and pairs of both Brown-crowned Tchagra and Violet-eared Waxbill.



Magpie Shrike, a regularly encountered species.

A section of our drive back had taken us down past the river again, and a look along it revealed two African Skimmers and a Black Egret. As we continued back and as dusk was falling several hundred Collared Pratincoles appeared, seemingly hawking for insects over the bushes.

Thursday 30th November

We woke to a much cooler start to the day and a few spots of rain in the air, not ideal, as we'd a boat trip planned. Today was also our last day in camp and transfer day to our Lodge for the next two nights in Zimbabwe, close to Victory Falls. We were a little behind schedule as we set off, but we soon made up the time, with birding kept to a minimum and many species noted as we sped along the tracks. We even managed a new species, Black Cuckoo, conveniently perched alongside the track, plus three other cuckoo species, Jacobin, Levillant's and Great spotted. Other noteworthy species included White-browed Robin-chat, Meyer's Parrots, and Grey go-away-birds. The heavy rain over night had flooded parts of the road, with one particularly large pool attracting several hundred Cattle egrets which made an impressive sight. As we travelled along, we noted Vultures, White-backed and Hooded, sat high in some dead trees and as we slowed to look, we were told there were several Lions nearby on a kill. The Lions, it turned out, had killed a young elephant and the Vultures were clearly waiting for their turn. We managed to glimpse the animals through the under growth, but with other vehicles in the vicinity and time on the tight side, we decided to continue our journey. We made one more stop before the boat rendezvous, for a very smart Grey-headed Kingfisher, which posed nicely for us as it devoured a scorpion.



Grey-headed Kingfisher complete with snack.

Our boat trip took us west along the Zambezi River, which acts as the border between Zambia and Botswana. We started off with more new Kingfishers, a flighty Half-collared, and several more confiding Brown-headed. Malachite's were seen well too, with some very close views, at times allowing the boat to approach to within six feet.



We did well for Kingfishers on our boat trip which included this Malachite Kingfisher

The best part about the boat trip though was the spectacle of seeing so many birds, with the marsh areas along the side of the river proving an irresistible draw to them. There were large flocks of Glossy and Sacred Ibis, African Spoonbills and a variety of Egrets and Herons that included Goliath, Purple and a single Rufous-Breasted. A large flock of several hundred Collared Pratincoles, many of them immature birds, also made an impressive sight. Barn swallows were sat in the reeds, with small numbers of Lesser Striped Swallows found in amongst them, along with Sand, Banded and Brown -throated Martins. Several new birds here were Luapula Cisticola, its song helping to confirm its identity and White-crowned Lapwing, which was somewhat more distinct and easier to identify! Other species seen during the trip included Painted Snipe, African swamphen, Copper-tailed Coucal, Gabar Goshawk, Hamerkop, Whiskered Terns, and African Marsh Harrier. The harrier was perched on a small mound and with us trying yesterday with no success to see the finer ID points that separate it from Western, such as barring on the tail, we were pleased that today's bird showed this feature well. Lunch followed on our return to dry land, before we headed off to the border, being stamped out of Botswana and then into Zimbabwe, noting a new bird for the trip at the border crossing, Little Swift. Our hotel was next with us checking in, followed by an afternoon siesta before we headed up into the hotel viewing tower, which provided an impressive vista over the immediate area, over the Zambezi River and into Zambia with

Victoria Falls just visible too. We obviously did some birding whilst we were there too, and all though activity was somewhat subdued we did manage to see a pair of Trumpeter Hornbills, Southern Yellow White-eye, Red-winged Starling and Collared Sunbird, all new birds for the trip.

Friday 1st December

A relaxed start today, with a pre breakfast coffee and birding on the hotel tower. Things were a bit on the slow side, and we only had half an hour, but we did see several South African White-eyes, Violet-backed Starling, Black-backed Buffback and Amethyst Sunbird. After breakfast we were collected by our driver, then off to our destination for the morning, Victoria Falls. Being early we were amongst the first in, which lead to a pleasant walk round the falls. The water level was on the low side, but this didn't distract from the sheer vastness of the spectacle or stop us getting wet from the spray! Our route took us along the edge of the falls for around a kilometre, stopping on the way at various viewpoints, before reaching our last stop to look the bridge. We then returned to the entrance along a more inland route. As we started out from the entrance, our first bird was a new and unexpected one, a Bearded Scrub Robin, complete with diagnostic buffy-orange chest and flanks. We did though have our sights on several other key birds here with the first, a Rock Pratincole, found perched on a distant rock high on the falls, but not the most ideal of views. Our second hoped for species, Schalow's Turaco, was found being admired by several non-birders as it sat drying itself on a branch near the main path, and we couldn't have wished for a better view!



We enjoyed great views of this Schalow's Turaco

As we stopped to view sections of the falls, we managed to add a few more birds to our list for the day, which included Red-winged Starling, African Pied Wagtail, Collared Barbet, Pied Kingfisher and African Openbill. More Pratincoles were seen, a dozen or so in total, again on the Zambian side and we achieved some nice flight views of them in between the clearer spells of mist from the falls, as it drifted across in front of us. Other bonus birds here included Purple-banded Sunbird, European Honey Buzzard and a stunning adult African Emerald Cuckoo which sat motionless for several minutes, some five metres in front of us.



African Emerald Cuckoo

Lunch back at the hotel was followed by a change of tact after our siesta this afternoon, with the plan being a long overdue leg stretch. We left the hotel and decided to explore a small scrubby car park to start with on the opposite side of the road followed by a small track through some undergrowth which eventually led us back to the road. We enjoyed a nice variety of species on our walk, these included pairs of Scarlet-chested, Purple-banded and Collared Sunbirds, along with Black-backed Puffback, Violet-backed Starling and African Paradise Flycatcher. We added two new species to our trip list too, a skulking Garden Warbler and a small flock of Bronze Manikins. We returned to the hotel with the walk having taken us just short of an hour, though we'd managed to walk no more than a hundred yards!

Saturday 2nd December

Our last day before starting our journey home and we took the opportunity again to start the day with coffee in the tower, looking out over surrounding countryside. A pleasant hour followed, with birds of note including a Common Cuckoo, Black-headed Heron, Collared Barbet, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and several Southern African White-eyes. A new bird for the trip, came in the form of a distant male Village Weaver, though bird of the morning was Trumpeter Hornbill, with a pair seen and the views very much an improvement on our previous ones. Breakfast was followed by a relaxed couple of hours to pack and prepare us for our journey home, then we were off to Victoria Falls Airport for our flight to Johannesburg and our return flight back to the UK.



ORIOLE BIRDING BOTSWANA 15TH NOVEMBER TO 3RD DECEMBER 2023

#	Common Name	Scientific name		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
1	Babbler Arrow-marked	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>		x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
2	Babbler Hartlaub's	<i>Turdoides hartlaubii</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					x		x		
3	Babbler Southern Pied	<i>Turdoides bicolor</i>									x	x	x	x	x	x				
4	Barbet Black-collared	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>				x	x		x										Z	
5	Barbet Crested	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>			x	x	x		x											Z
6	Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
7	Batis Chinspot	<i>Batis molitor</i>						x												
8	Bee-eater Blue-cheeked	<i>Merops persicus</i>			x	x	x	x			x			x	x			x		
9	Bee-eater European	<i>Merops apiaster</i>			x					x		x		x						
10	Bee-eater Little	<i>Merops pusillus</i>			x	x	x	x	x			x					x			
11	Bee-eater Southern Carmine	<i>Merops nubicoides</i>			x		x			x							x			
12	Bee-eater Swallow-tailed	<i>Merops hirundineus</i>								x	x	x	x			x				
13	Bee-eater White-fronted	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>			x	x	x	x												
14	Boubou Swamp	<i>Laniarius bicolor</i>		x	x	x	x	H	x	H										
15	Boubou Tropical	<i>Laniarius aethiopicus</i>														x	x		Z	
16	Brownbul Terrestrial	<i>Phyllastrephus terrestris</i>														x			Z	
17	Brubru	<i>Nilais afer</i>						H	H	x	H	x	H		H					
18	Bulbul Dark-capped	<i>Pycnonotus tricolor</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x				x	x	Z	Z
19	Bunting Golden-breasted	<i>Emberiza flaviventris</i>								x			x			x				
20	Bunting Lark-like	<i>Emberiza impetuanii</i>								x			x			x				
21	Bustard Black-bellied	<i>Eupodotis melanogaster</i>												x						
22	Bustard Kori	<i>Ardeotis kori</i>									x		x	x	x		x			

#	Common Name	Scientific name	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
23	Buttonquail Small	<i>Turnix sylvatica</i>											x	x					
24	Buzzard European Honey-	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>																Z	
25	Buzzard Steppe	<i>Buteo vulpinus</i>			x										x				
26	Camaroptera Grey-backed	<i>Camaroptera brevicaudata</i>			H	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	H	x	H	Z	
27	Canary Black-throated	<i>Serinus atrogularis</i>							x							x			
28	Canary Yellow-fronted	<i>Serinus mozambicus</i>													x				
29	Chat Arnott's	<i>Myrmecocichla arnotti</i>					x	x											
30	Cisticola Chirping	<i>Cisticola pipiens</i>		x													x		
31	Cisticola Luapula	<i>Cisticola luapula</i>															x		
32	Cisticola Rattling	<i>Cisticola chinianus</i>					x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x		
33	Cisticola Red-faced	<i>Cisticola erythrops</i>																Z	
34	Cisticola Zitting	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				x	x	x				x	x	x					
35	Cormorant Reed	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>	x	x	x	x			x							x	x	Z	
36	Coucal Coppery-tailed	<i>Centropus cupreicaudus</i>					x	x									x		
37	Coucal Senegal	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>			x	x		x		x			x	H		x	x	Z	
38	Coucal White-browed	<i>Centropus superciliosus</i>			x											x			
39	Courser Bronze-winged	<i>Rhinoptilus chalcopterus</i>								x			x						
40	Courser Temminck's	<i>Cursorius temminckii</i>											x						
41	Crake Black	<i>Amauornis flavirostris</i>		x		x	x												
42	Crane Wattled	<i>Grus carunculatus</i>				x	x	x											
43	Crombec Long-billed	<i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>					x		H	x			x		x	x			
44	Crow Pied	<i>Corvus albus</i>	x	x		x											x	Z	Z
45	Cuckoo African Emerald	<i>Chrysococcyx cupreus</i>																Z	
46	Cuckoo Black	<i>Cuculus clamosus</i>									H						x		
47	Cuckoo Common	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>						x				x							Z
48	Cuckoo Diderick	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>		x	H	H	H	H		x	H	H					H		
49	Cuckoo Great Spotted	<i>Clamator glandarius</i>											x			x	x		

#	Common Name	Scientific name	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
50	Cuckoo Jacobin	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>														x	x		
51	Cuckoo Klaas's	<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>													H				
52	Cuckoo Levallant's	<i>Clamator levallantii</i>	x						x	H	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
53	Darter African	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x		
54	Dove Cape Turtle-	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
55	Dove Emerald-spotted Wood-	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>			x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x		
56	Dove Laughing	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	x	x						x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Z	
57	Dove Mourning African	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>	x	x	x	x													
58	Dove Namaqua	<i>Oena capensis</i>		x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x			
59	Dove Red-eyed	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		
60	Dove Rock	<i>Columba livia</i>	x	x															Z
61	Drongo Fork-tailed	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Z	
62	Duck Comb	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>	x	x					x	x	x		x	x	x		x		
63	Duck White-faced	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x		
64	Duck Yellow-billed	<i>Anas undulata</i>				x	x												
65	Eagle African Fish-	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x		
66	Eagle African Hawk-	<i>Hieraaetus spilogaster</i>					x		x	x	x		x	x	x				
67	Eagle Ayres's Hawk-	<i>Hieraaetus ayresii</i>													x				
68	Eagle Black-chested Snake-	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>					x					x							
69	Eagle Brown Snake-	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>			x				x			x							
70	Eagle Lesser Spotted	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>												x	x				
71	Eagle Martial	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>										x		x					
72	Eagle Steppe	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>											x	x					
73	Eagle Tawny	<i>Aquila rapax</i>					x		x		x	x	x	x	x				
74	Eagle Wahlberg's	<i>Aquila wahlbergi</i>					x		x	x			x						
75	Egret Cattle	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	x		x	x	x	x			x		x			x	x	Z	Z
76	Egret Great	<i>Egretta alba</i>	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x		

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#	Common Name	Scientific name	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
131	Kingfisher Half-collared	<i>Alcedo semitorquata</i>															x		
132	Kingfisher Malachite	<i>Alcedo cristata</i>		x	x	x											x		
133	Kingfisher Pied	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x				x	x	Z	
134	Kingfisher Woodland	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x							
135	Kite Black-shouldered	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>					x									x			
136	Kite Yellow-billed	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Z	Z
137	Korhaan Northern Black	<i>Eupodotis afraoides</i>											x	x					
138	Korhaan Red-crested	<i>Eupodotis ruficrista</i>						x	x			x	x	x	x				
139	Lapwing African Wattled	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>		x		x													
140	Lapwing Blacksmith	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
141	Lapwing Crowned	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>		x		x	x	x					x		x				
142	Lapwing Long-toed	<i>Vanellus crassirostris</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x								x		
143	Lapwing White-crowned	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>															x		
144	Lark Fawn-coloured	<i>Calendulauda africanoides</i>													x				
145	Lark Rufous-naped	<i>Mirafr africana</i>							x			x	x	x					
146	Longclaw Rosy-throated	<i>Macronyx ameliae</i>												x					
147	Mannikin Bronze	<i>Lonchura cucullata</i>																Z	
148	Martin Banded	<i>Riparia cincta</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x								x		
149	Martin Brown-throated	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>		x	x	x											x		
150	Martin Sand	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		x	x	x											x		
151	Moorhen Common	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		x		x	x	x	x										
152	Mousebird Red-faced	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>	x		x								x		x	x	x		
153	Nightjar Fiery-necked	<i>Caprimulgus pectoralis</i>			x														
154	Nightjar Swamp	<i>Caprimulgus natalensis</i>					H		H										
155	Openbill African	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>	x	x	x		x		x	x	x				x	x	x	Z	
156	Oriole African Golden	<i>Oriolus auratus</i>							x	x									
157	Oriole Black-headed	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>						x		x	H	H							

#	Common Name	Scientific name		16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
158	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			x					X										
159	Ostrich Common	<i>Struthio camelus</i>												x	x					
160	Owl African Scops-	<i>Otus senegalensis</i>									H	H	H	H						
161	Owl African Wood-	<i>Strix woodfordii</i>				x	x													
162	Owl Barn	<i>Tyto alba</i>				x		x		H				H	H		H			
163	Owl Marsh	<i>Asio capensis</i>																		
164	Owl Pel's Fishing-	<i>Scotopelia peli</i>			x	x	x													
165	Owl Southern White-faced Scops-	<i>Ptilopus granti</i>										x								
166	Owl Verreaux's Eagle-	<i>Bubo lacteus</i>												x		x				
167	Owlet African Barred	<i>Glaucidium capense</i>					x					H		H	H	H	H	H		
168	Owlet Pearl-spotted	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>						H		H	H	x	H	x	x	x	H			
169	Oxpecker Red-billed	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>				x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x			x			
170	Oxpecker Yellow-billed	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>					x		x	x	x	x	x			x				
171	Parrot Meyer's	<i>Poicephalus meyeri</i>						x	x	x	x	x						x		
172	Pelican Pink-backed	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>														x				
173	Petronia Yellow-throated	<i>Petronia supercilialis</i>						x		x	x	x								
174	Pigeon African Green-	<i>Treron calva</i>															x			
175	Pipit African	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>				x	x	x	x	x				x	x		x			
176	Plover Common Ringed	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>						x												
177	Plover Kittlitz's	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>					x							x						
178	Plover Three-banded	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>				x	x	x		x										
179	Pratincole Collared	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x		
180	Pratincole Rock	<i>Glareola nuchalis</i>																	Z	
181	Prinia Black-chested	<i>Prinia flavicans</i>					x				x			x						
182	Prinia Tawny-flanked	<i>Prinia subflava</i>				H					x			H		x			Z	
183	Puffback Black-backed	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>						x	x	x	x	x	x	x				Z	Z	
184	Pytilia Green-winged	<i>Pytilia melba</i>								x			x	x		x	x			

#	Common Name	Scientific name	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
185	Quelea Red-billed	<i>Quelea quelea</i>				x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
186	Robin Bearded Scrub-	<i>Cercotrichas quadrivirgata</i>																Z	
187	Robin White-browed Scrub-	<i>Cercotrichas leucophrys</i>					x	x		H		x	x	H	x	x	x		
188	Robin-Chat White-browed	<i>Cossypha heuglini</i>			x											x	x	Z	
189	Roller Broad-billed	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x							
190	Roller European	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>		x											x				
191	Roller Lilac-breasted	<i>Coracias caudata</i>		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
192	Roller Purple	<i>Coracias naevia</i>							x										
193	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x		
194	Sandgrouse Burchell's	<i>Pterocles burchelli</i>						x		x	x				x				
195	Sandgrouse Double-banded	<i>Pterocles bicinctus</i>				x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x		
196	Sandpiper Common	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		x	x	x				x	x	x	x			x	x		
197	Sandpiper Curlew	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>				x													
198	Sandpiper Marsh	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>				x	x	x	x										
199	Sandpiper Wood	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Z	
200	Secretarybird	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>												x					
201	Shrike Crimson-breasted	<i>Laniarius atrococcineus</i>						x		x			x	x	H				
202	Shrike Lesser Grey	<i>Lanius minor</i>			x							x	x	x	x	x	x		
203	Shrike Magpie	<i>Corvinella melanoleuca</i>		x			x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		
204	Shrike Orange-breasted Bush-	<i>Telophorus sulfureopectus</i>													x	H			
205	Shrike Red-backed	<i>Lanius collurio</i>									x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
206	Shrike Southern White-crowned	<i>Eurocephalus anguitimens</i>							x	x	x	x	x		x				
207	Skimmer African	<i>Rynchops flavirostris</i>		x	x		x	x							x	x			
208	Snipe African	<i>Gallinago nigripennis</i>			x	x		x									x		
209	Snipe Greater Painted-	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>								x	x				x		x		
210	Sparrow Southern Grey-headed	<i>Passer diffusus</i>					x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	Z	
211	Sparrow-Weaver White-browed	<i>Plocepasser mahali</i>					x	x		x	x	x							Z

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