

Namibia

25th November to 8th December 2024



Okaukuejo sunset

ITINERARY

24/11/24 – depart London. Overnight flight via Frankfurt.

25/11/24 – arrive Windhoek mid-morning. Birdwatch to Namib Grens.

Overnight Namib Grens.

26/11/24 – Birdwatch around Namib Grens, Spretshoogte and Remhoogte Passes.
Drive to Namib Naukluft via Solitaire.

Overnight Namib Naukluft Lodge.

27/11/24 – Sossusvlei Dunes, (Dune 45).

Sunset at Marble Mountain, Namib Naukluft.

Overnight Namib Naukluft Lodge.

28/11/24 – Birdwatch around the lodge. Drive to Walvis Bay via Solitaire, Kuiseb & Guab Canyons,
Tropic of Capricorn and Gravel plains of the Skeleton Coast. Late PM: Walvis Bay Guano platforms.

Overnight Walvis Bay.

29/11/24 – Pelagic trip into Walvis Bay Lagoon and Pelican Point.

Pm: Walvis Bay Salt pans.

Overnight Walvis Bay.

30/11/24 – Drive to Brandberg Mountain via Zeila Shipwreck (stranded 25 August 2008) and Henties Bay.

Overnight White Lady, Brandberg.

- 1/12/24** – Brandberg Mountain early morning bird walk. Drive via Korixhas & Outjo to Okaukuejo, Etosha and birdwatch at lodge waterhole. *Overnight Okaukuejo, Etosha.*
- 2/12/24** – Okaukuejo, Etosha: game drive north to Wolfsnes, Okondeka & Adamax. P.m. game drive south and east to Gemsbokvlakte. *Overnight Okaukuejo, Etosha.*
- 3/12/24** – Game drive to Halali along the southern edge of the Etosha Pan, via Homob, Sueda, Salvadora, Charitsaub & Rietfontein. P.m. game drive to Nuamses. *Overnight Halali, Etosha.*
- 4/12/24** – Halali campsite birding and drive via Pans edge, Goas, Springbokfontein, Okerfontein, Chudob, Koinachas to Namutoni. P.m. visit Klein Okevi & Groot Okevi. *Overnight Namutoni, Etosha.*
- 5/12/24** – Namutoni - Game drive via Klein Okevi, Groot Okevi, Tsumcor to Andoni Plain and outside King Nehale Gate. Late pm visit to Klein Namutoni. *Overnight Namutoni, Etosha.*
- 6/12/24** – Bird walk in the camp then drive to Waterberg Platopark stopping near Otjiwarongo Crocodile Farm for lunch. *Overnight Waterberg Platopark.*
- 7/12/24** – Waterberg Platopark am walk. Drive to Windhoek airport. Overnight flight.
- 8/12/24** – arrive UK.



Leopard, Namutoni

Tour Members Phil Palmer – Leader, Mr T – Driver

Brian Spivey, Catherine Pritchard, Emily Jones, Penny Jenner, Valerie Nuttall, Simon Millin, Pete Smith.

All photographs in this report were taken during the tour.



Kori Bustard

INTRODUCTION

This Namibia tour was planned to take place at the end of the dry season, which is the best for game viewing, and the first showers (best for bird viewing). But the age-old weather patterns have been changing and are now completely unpredictable. After a 10-year drought, there had been particularly good rains with flooding in 2021, but another drought then began in December 2022. The old, tall golden grasses that made bird-finding extremely hard work were still present months later when we visited in September 2023 but had all been blown away to leave a bare soil landscape when we arrived in November 2024. Oddly, the country looked green as we neared Windhoek and the eastern side of Namibia had seen a heavy shower two weeks before we landed. This led to a greening of the acacias but, as the shower quickly evaporated, no grass had sprouted and nothing was in flower. The age old “Little Rains” of September/October failed entirely.

This meant that the trigger for birds to moult, sing and breed had not happened for the second year.

Numbers of common birds were low and the ranges of more nomadic and eruptive species had contracted. So, knowledge of the desert ecosystem would be essential to finding birds this year. On the plus side, there were some odd records as birds wandered in search of water and drought means that game viewing is at its very best; we sure capitalised on this!

For those that had kept an eye on the Etosha webcam before we arrived, it was a massive shock to see so many Elephants, Rhinos and Hyena while we were there. Cat sightings were unbelievable with 5 Cheetahs, a smart male Leopard and loads of Lions. The Blue Crane flock was swamped by the long black line of Wildebeest that crowded Andoni waterhole making this the most memorable of visits.

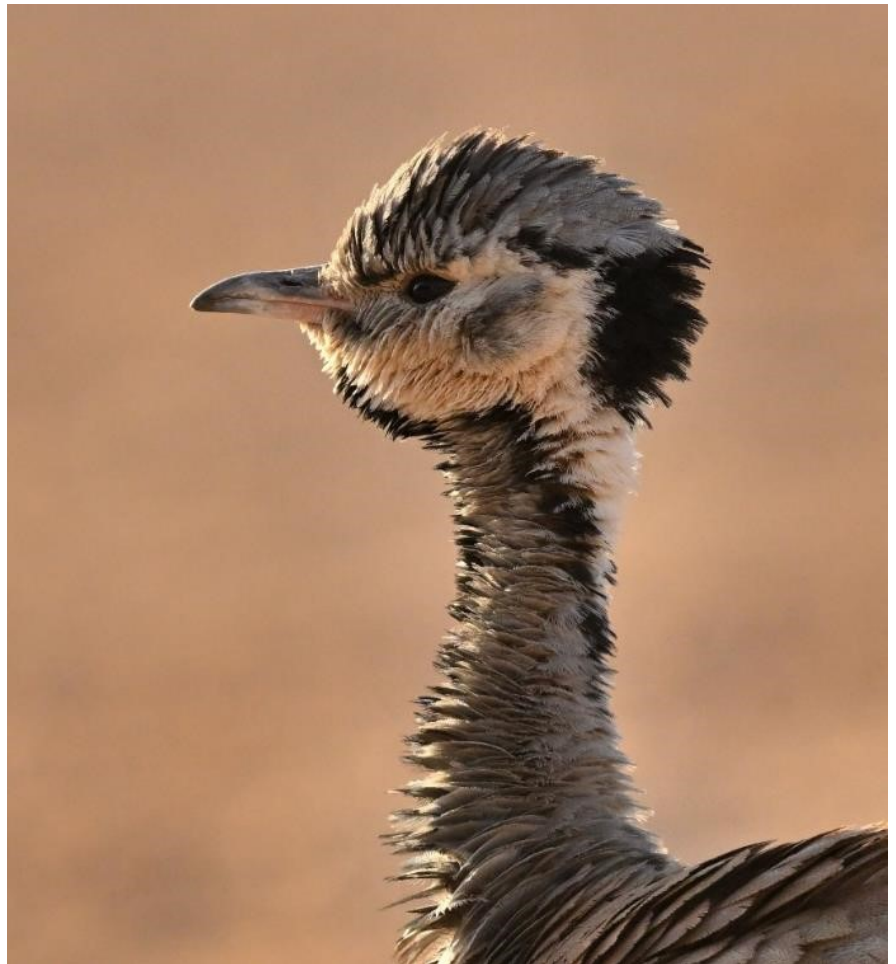
Although the temperature was a hot 38 degrees most days, it was not as excessive as it would become when we left with a record extreme heatwave hitting the whole of Southern Africa; indeed, Mr T reported that it was 48 degrees in Sossusvlei the day after we flew home!

Birding in Namibia is highly dependent on rainfall. This year, it was clear that they had failed to breed or moved out. Few had moulted to attract mates as their priority was food and survival.

Extreme conditions are often compensated by records of African species that turn up as vagrants. This year they included Yellow-White-eye and Yellow-breasted Apalis.

Calm conditions out at sea meant that terns were off feeding, but we successfully managed to see every expected species. Having missed out on pelagic seabirds for the past few years, it was great to find that the wind had brought White-chinned Petrels and Wilson's Storm-petrels into the bay along with Cape Gannet. All three species are seen rarely at this time of year. Pomarine Skua was a bonus.

The African cycle of annual rains starts in the east side of the continent at the end of our summer and slowly moves south down through Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, into Botswana and Zambia before turning west into



Rüppell's Korhaan

northern Namibia and into Etosha. A lack of any water had forced the southern desert species even further south, possibly to South Africa, and those in the Namib Desert had been forced to go east

Without showers, there are also fewer flowers and insects. It was obvious that sunbirds and swallows were missing because of this. Fruit-eaters suffered, and even the hardy hornbills that can dig out the termites that bury themselves deep into the ground, and dung beetles hidden in poo were all in lower-than-normal numbers. *But*, because they were struggling, they had become more tolerant of humans meaning that our views of birds were, perhaps, the best ever.

Being big birds, Ludwig's Bustard managed to cling on near Sossusvlei but Burchell's Courser had gone, having failed to find food. These and the South African species that find home in the Karoo, and whose range extends to Namib Naukluft after years of good breeding seasons had already contracted by 2017. Many had not returned, even in the good year of 2021, but Karoo Robin and Bokmakierie had clung on at Namib Grens, where the provision of water must have helped. The small passerines that host parasitic species like whydahs and cuckoos are now very thin on the ground and, unless they show signs of breeding, these parasites move elsewhere. Presumably, they were in Angola?

Neil Thomson, Rarity reporter for the Namibian Bird Club wrote to me saying *"yes – we have also noticed a decline in bird numbers due to the drought. I think that some species have not recovered from the drought of 2019 and have been hammered again. This seems particularly true of small seed eaters (waxbills etc) and their brood parasites."*

The timing of our trip with regard to weather couldn't have been better for rhino and elephant, with sightings at their highest. A week later, if rain falls from the shower clouds that we saw on our departure, they would be hard to locate, preferring to drink from puddles well away from areas staked out by lions and, if rains are really heavy, the Blue Cranes would depart to breed.



Blue Crane

Daily Highlights

Windhoek Airport to the escarpment.

Bags were loaded onto the bus after folk had walked among swifts and swallows into the immigration lounge and out to the car park. Our heads turned right and left with the first Roller, Cape Glossy Starlings and White-browed Sparrow-weavers on poles and wires. Trees were green but failed to hide our first Chacma Baboons by the roadside.

It was hot, and our first of many Pale Chanting Goshawks was looking for roadkill along the gravel road into the Khomas Hochland. Heading towards the Namib, Springbok, Gemsbok and Kudu were seen among the acacia scrub with Pied Babblers and Ground-scraper Thrushes by a bridge. But, our undoubted first-day highlight was a Pearl-spotted Owlet. We would go on to see at least 16 on this tour with another two before bedtime!



Pale Chanting Goshawk

Reaching Namib Grens, our chalets allowed us the chance to admire a clear southern sky as the desert cooled and our batteries recharged. A rubber snake on each thatched roof was an ingenious way to keep the baboons off.



The night sky at Namib Grens was superbly clear

Spreetshoogte Pass the following morning provided our first look at the vast desert spread out below us. We notched up a singing Sabota Lark and some Klipspringers before beginning our Herero Chat quest. This endemic is a special bird that lives along the escarpment as far north as Angola. Numbers fluctuate with breeding booms in wet years and, having not seen one at this spot for some years, we were surprised to hear one singing away to itself. Presumably an unmated youngster, views of him were particularly good, and so the pressure was off to allow for a more relaxed day.



Bokmakierie



Herero Chat

A Bokmakierie was a bigger surprise as this gaudy granite-lover sang by the roadside. It and the Karoo Scrub-robin are really South African species, but their range extends north to Namib Grens and beyond in wet years, contracting back south when there is a drought. Thankfully, the robins now remain at Namib Grens as the gardens are watered, while those in the surrounding scrub were long gone as the drought hit the region. The robins are so reliant on the watered gardens, that they even move alongside the farm workers as they tend their plants.

Great, Cape, and Grey-headed Sparrows chirped from the trees that held nesting Palm Swifts and a pair of Pearl-spotted Owlets. Last night, one had sung from a streetlight and today it was still around. Its call brought in Dusky Sunbird, Cape Bunting and Masked Weavers to mob it as we took breakfast. Violet-backed Starlings were seen here, well out of range, they eat figs, and so they must have been moved out from Caprivi or Botswana where there had been flooding.

Soon we were on our way through the Remhoogte Pass. There seemed to be a shortage of Rock Hyrax, so it was good that we had found them earlier by our chalets. We kept our eyes peeled for the Mountain Zebra that follow the dry riverbeds but instead found one up a tree!!!! It must have been wonderful for anyone driving this road to see a Leopard putting it there!!



We found this zebra that had been hauled into a tree by a Leopard.

We took lunch nearby but failed to see spots before our eyes, instead finding Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Purple Roller and White-throated Canaries, then a Pygmy Falcon was sighted allowing a good look at it, with a second one located soon after – both were males: and all this before reaching the metropolis that is Solitaire.

On entering the gas station, we passed a Yellow Mongoose and were able to see that there had been no rain here since February!!

In the yard, we found House Sparrows, Marico Flycatcher and both Pied and Black Crows.



Rainfall is recorded on this board at Solitaire shop: just 3mm in 2024!!!!!!

Onward to Namib Naukluft lodge, Tuhafeni spotted some sandgrouse under a tree, our first Namaqua's, then some Rüppell's Korhaans.

Greeted at the lodge by a Mountain Wheatear, there had been no rain here all year, so the drinking pool was quiet in the baking heat. Speckled Pigeons, Pale-winged Starlings and Social Weavers dropped in to join the Ground Squirrels, before an Acacia Pied Barbet landed in the moringa tree there. Our dinner was in the boma where flocks of Double-banded Sandgrouse circled in the spotlight. This species drinks half an hour after sunset but are the first I have seen here – another indication that desert birds were wandering in search of food.



*Mountain
Wheatear*



Namib Naukluft at dawn



Sossusvlei dunes



Ludwig's Bustard.

Sossusvlei and Namib Naukluft.

An early start took us by four glorious Ludwig's Bustards and into the famous Sossusvlei dunes, a world heritage site, and the highest in the world. As tourists rushed by and hot-air balloons passed over, we took several short walks to the red sands to see the only bird that can truly survive here: Dune Lark.



the dunes where we searched for Dune lark.

Knowing the habitat requirement for this species (tall clumps of golden grass, in red sand), has always allowed us to locate them relatively quickly, but not this time. I think it was this bird more than any other that told us this was going to be a challenging bird trip. The dunes were silent.

We found some lark tracks but saw nothing except a Shovel-snouted Lizard and the fog-drinking Toktokkie beetle. Our time here is always about much more than birds. A Sidewinder track and rodent footprints were noted as we moved location, having never needed to do this in the past – still nothing.

Another spot and, as it was getting hot, Tuhafeni and I left the group taking breakfast in the shade.... Sod's law: I spotted one, but nobody else was there. By the time I had waved the group and they had arrived, it had disappeared, and the dunes were silent again.

There seemed to be a single wandering Dune Lark, not interested in singing or staying. Normally, we have found family parties that call to keep in contact with each other while they spread out in search of food, but this year's drought had meant breeding had not taken place and adult survival rates clearly were low. We began our search again and, this time, Tuhafeni persisted and refound, it, then another. So finally, everyone was able to see this special desert bird, one that features on the national postage stamps. In fact, this was the most approachable Dune Lark ever, virtually feeding at our feet!!

This was to set the standard for our trip. We would see all the special, difficult or out-of-range birds better than ever, while it seemed crazy that anyone could miss out on the (usually) common of species.

Excellent views were obtained of Dune Lark playing hide-and-seek behind the tussocks where they feed on Dune Ants *Camponotus detritus*. Both bird and ant ecology is amazing. The birds eat the ants, while the ants eat the bird's droppings! Scientists found that the ant's major food source was honeydew excreted by aphids and scale insects present on the perennial dune vegetation. Interestingly, pollen, dead animal material, bird and lizard faeces supplemented this.

Dawn is the best time to find the birds, as this is when the ants can be found sipping dew that has condensed on blades of grass during the night. Dune Ants navigate by the angle of the sun and build their colonies in the soft sand under the grasses. Their nests are simple structures excavated among the roots comprising a series of tunnels and chambers 100–400 mm deep, often lined with detritus. Colonies have several thousand ants with nest areas fiercely defended. Mean temperatures in the nest are about 32°C in summer and 20–23°C in winter.

To look for these birds in pristine sand covered in tracks freshly made by snakes, lizards, beetles and spiders, is one of the joys of the Namib. Luckily, few birders and dune-trekkers visit this place and so our birds remain confiding}.



Dune Lark

On to Dune 45 where once again something unexpected greeted us. Normally we would sit under a tree where a Pied Crow and Familiar Chat would come begging for food. Above us would be two tame Greater Kestrels – this has been the routine for over 20 years. But this time, no chat, no crow, but two mega tame Red-necked Falcons above us glued to their perches - *Brilliant!!!*



Above: Red-necked Falcons at Dune 45

The gravel wash plain was empty. No grass, not a single lark or courser, just some Ostriches, and so we headed back for lunch once Penny had conquered a sandy peak. Passing Springbok and Gemsbok that hogged the shade of every tree, we returned to chill in the air-con of our rooms.

As the afternoon cooled, the two local Rüppell's Korhaans came to drink and beg for cake, then masses of Social Weavers before we climbed aboard Ki's Landcruiser. Touring the farm, we passed more sandgrouse and bustards, then Mountain Zebra before stopping to enjoy a Rufous-eared Warbler. This is a Karoo and Kalahari endemic that Ki found on his farm while we checked out the Tractrac and Karoo Chats that thrive here; all had hung on for our visit despite the drought. Chat Flycatcher joined them too as this must surely have qualified for the least interesting family of birds on the trip? – the Namibian equivalent of Caspian Gulls to a British birder.



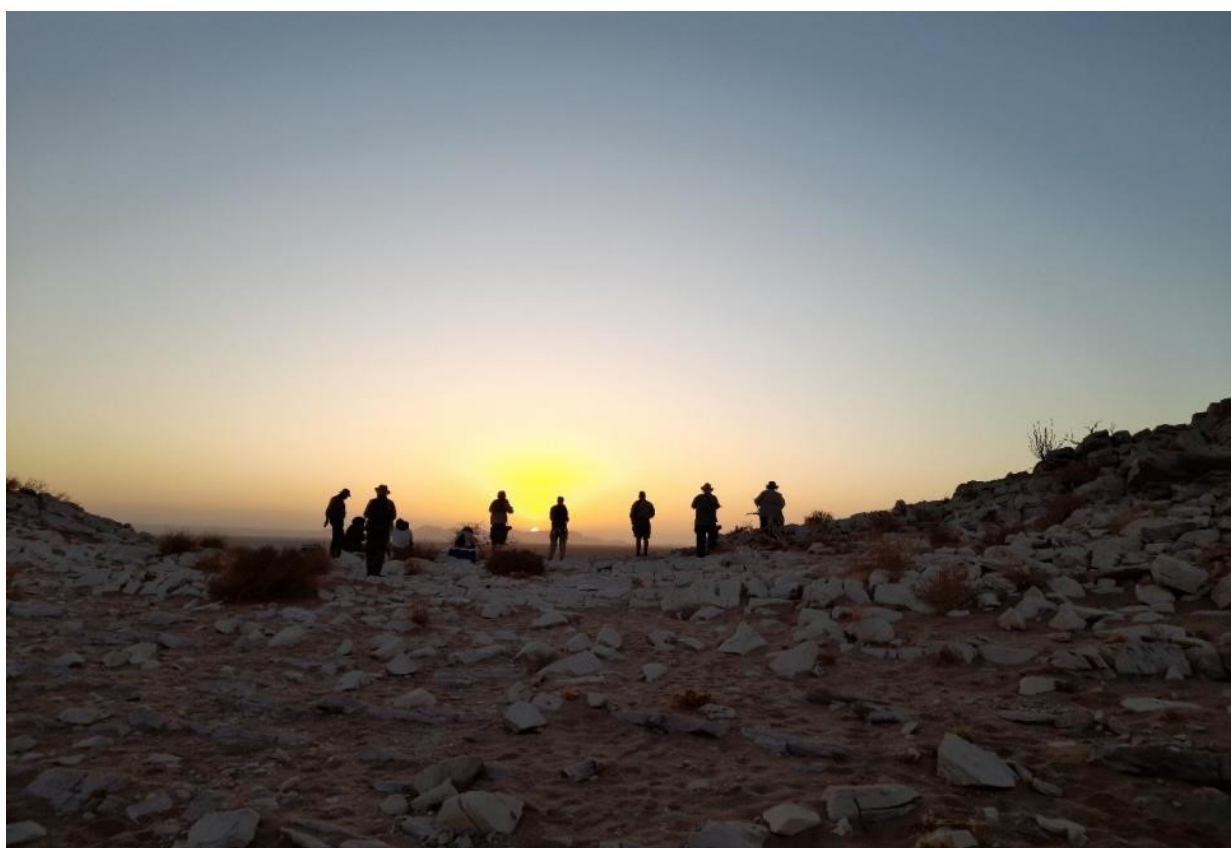
Right: Scaly-feathered Finch



Cape Fox

For years, a Cape Fox has dened close to Marble Mountain, and we saw its ears sticking out of a burrow. The cubs were due out any day now, so we quietly enjoyed its cute features before moving on to watch the sunset. Once dark after our pleasant sundowner, we headed back. Jackals and Cape Hare were caught in the headlights and then 2 Hyenas were spotlighted. We sat quietly as the most inquisitive of the two walked straight towards us – it is a bit disconcerting when the mammal with the most powerful bite in the world comes towards you!

After an al-fresco dinner with Bibroan's Geckos positioned to take flies by the lightshades, we nearly tripped over two Jameson's Red Rock Rabbits as we looked for them by the pool – a nice end to the day.





Jameson's Red Rock Rabbit

Left: this Hyena came to check us out as we went to dinner.

For breakfast the next day, we were joined at the table by Pale-winged Starlings and then Sociable Weavers. The Rüppell's came again and waved us off as we hit the bumpy road past Solitaire and over the Kuiseb Canyon.

A grey morph Mountain Wheatear was a nice find, but the whole area up to and after the Tropic of Capricorn was pretty much devoid of life.

We would normally have expected 3 or 4 species of lark and a few chats, but it was truly now a deserted desert.

If any bird could survive the harsh drought, it would be Gray's Lark. In the top 3 of Namibia's most sought-after birds, this one comes naturally to us. Nobody sees them near the Kuiseb or south of Walvis Bay, but we try.

Ever since I first showed them to Mr T, he has tried to get the South African birders he works with to believe our records, but they refuse to stop for them as he spots one. Instead, refusing to believe him, they go to the same old saltworks car park in Swakopmund where Tuhafeni lets them struggle.

But we love a challenge and, as Tuhafeni needs to watch the road, it gives me chance to locate one. Once again, we found our quarry by the roadside. Backing up, the group enjoyed great close-up views of one poser, while we later saw four more, once again getting photographic evidence that they do exist here.



Gray's Lark

The flat, barren Skeleton Coast gravel plain is probably one of the most inhospitable places on earth, and this lark only occurs here. Without this exciting label, Gray's Lark would not get close to anyone's favourite bird list but lark sudoku is something that gets to you after days in the hot sun!



The male Rüppell's Korhaan came to see us before we left Namib Naukluft.

Passing the odd Greater and Rock Kestrel glued to poles, we enjoyed lunch in a very primitive cave system before reaching the salty waters of Walvis Bay. We stopped by a *stating-the-obvious* “SAND” warning sign, to check our first flamingos; both Greater and Lesser; both of which would keep making exploratory trips to Etosha or Tanzania to see if conditions were right to breed.

There was a Cape Teal, Little Stints and White-fronted Plover, but we needed to get to the guano platforms away from traffic. Whimbrel, Sanderling and Grey Plover strolled the beach as we spotted another White-fronted Plover. Terns rested on the beach: Common, Sandwich and Great Crested. A flock of 19 Black Oystercatcher flew over them, a big number for these days, while on the platform, Cape Cormorants and Great White Pelicans rested, An African Penguin swimming below was worthy of scoping. This species used to visit the oyster farms, but numbers have decreased considerably as the species is declining all over southern Africa.

The air was considerably cooler and more pleasant here, so we strolled the prom by our hotel to check through the Cape and Hartlaub’s Gulls finding a Grey-headed Gull, as well as some hybrids. Two Arctic Terns rested with the Commons on the hotel jetty, but the shock find was four House Crows eating a take-away. This species has increased its world range by travelling on ships and in some larger ports (Mombassa, Cape Town, Rotterdam) have established tiny populations far from its Indian range.

Excitedly presuming that we had found a first for Namibia, I had forgotten that I saw one here in 2017, so at least one had been here for a while. However, we had found a first: 2 juveniles being fed by an adult showed that they had bred: a Namibia first!



House Crow at Walvis Bay.



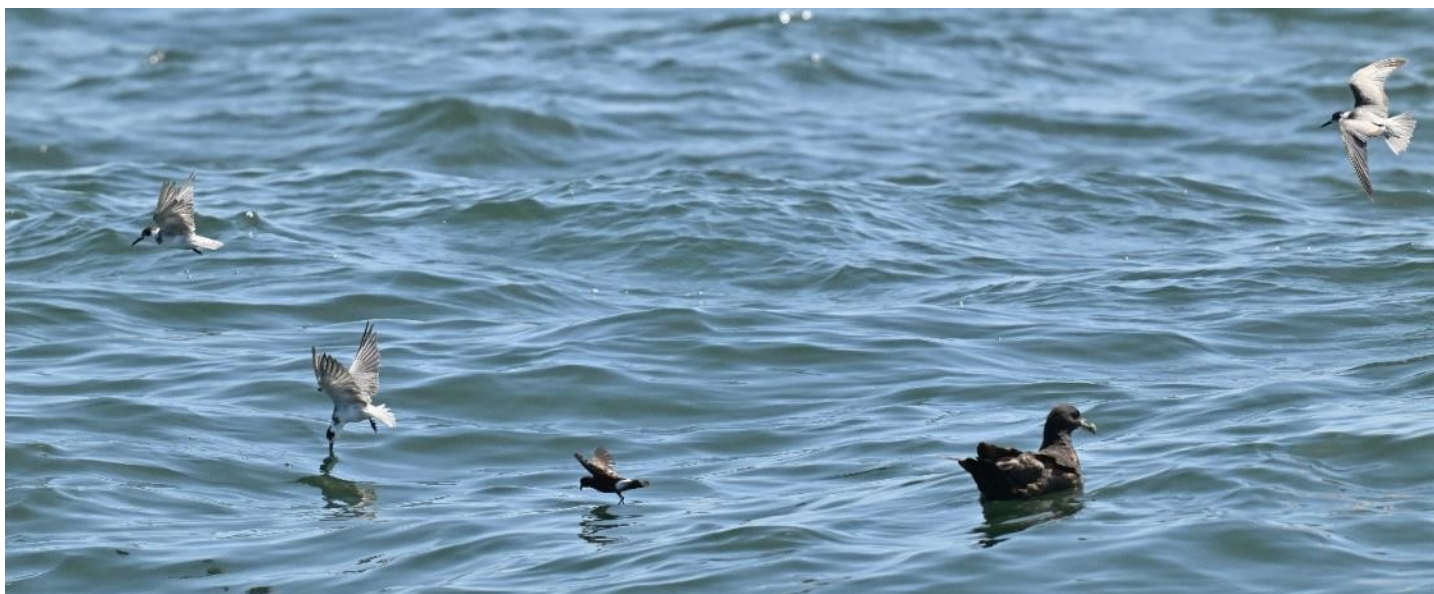
Flamingos over the Fur Seal colony at Pelican Point.

Walvis Bay

The damp, foggy, cool air of the Skeleton Coast meant that it was a pleasure to stroll outside. There was a Crowned Cormorant on the old jetty by our hotel that moved to the rocks where we waited to board our catamaran: *Silverskye*. We were soon joined on board by Great White Pelicans and Fur Seals - a big distraction from the terns around us as we neared the Fur Seal colony at Pelican Point. The place is a cacophony of barking and fighting, as seals ran around the beach or played in the surf. Above and around us, we found Black Terns among the other species already listed. A line of pink drifted over the black and the image of flamingos passing along the colony is what will be remembered most from the skeleton coast.

It has been a long time since we have seen proper pelagic species here and, as we theorised about the lack of terns and cormorants, it was brilliant to see lots of White-chinned Petrels and Wilson's Storm-petrels. Both are birds of Antarctic waters breeding thousands of miles away, but the cold Benguela current brings these non-breeding birds along the Skeleton Coast to feed. Storms can drive thousands of terns into the bay, but there were very few today, so it cannot be the wind that brought the petrels to us. Maybe the smell of the seals is more enticing to them!

A couple of immature Pomarine Skuas entered the bay looking for terns to chase, soon heading back out to sea when there were none carrying fish. Cape Gannets passed along the coast too – all-in-all, a great trip for birds, and worthy of the champagne and oyster toast before getting back.



Black Terns, Wilson's Petrel & White-chinned Petrel.



White-chinned Petrel.

After coffee at the hotel, we boarded our bus to check the salt pans. The saltwork's waters were shocking pink and the last two years had been shockingly low in migrant arctic waders; the theory being that the collapse in numbers is due to avian flu? I know that large numbers of Knot have died in Europe so maybe waders here could also have been affected. But the lack of cormorants on the guano platforms was more indicative of a collapse in the food chain due to warming sea currents than influenza. But 2024 continued this trend, and now there were no dolphins either. I suspect that the bay is being dredged to create deep channels for the Chinese ships now using the port as a major hub, and perhaps it is this that is affecting the food chain?

Below: Chestnut-banded Plover





Damara Tern.

It was nice to find many Little Stint and Curlew Sandpiper present. These were 1-year old birds that had no need to risk flying back to the arctic as they were not yet old enough to breed. There were plenty of Avocet, and a smattering of Ruff, Sanderling, and Black-winged Stilt. The odd Greenshank and Turnstone joined in, but it was great to see a return to form for Lesser Flamingo. The birds here go to Lake Natron in Tanzania to breed and, at times, can be completely absent, leaving their larger less-pink cousins to steal the show here,

The most sought-after wader here is Chestnut-banded Plover and 80% of the world population feed here, (the other 20% are a distinct race that lives in Tanzania). Like all the other special birds of Namibia, the Chestnut-banded Plover showed very well this year. Often a bit skittish when our bus passed, we enjoyed those that trotted up-and-down along the shore.

We had found several Caspian Terns, but we were looking for Damara Tern: a seabird that nests in the desert. There is one spot where water passes under a bridge where the Damara Terns often feed. Sure enough, one was there when we arrived giving us great views of this special bird.

Reaching the Atlantic, we enjoyed the sea air before returning back past a wonderful 'pack' of Black-necked Grebes. At least 60 were bunched against the shore allowing super-close views of this delightful waterbird, many still with golden-plumed cheeks.

Black-necked Grebes



Our quest to find the very localised Orange River White-eye finally proved successful the following morning as we boarded our bus to Brandberg. As we left, Common Waxbills fed in lavender, Cape Wagtail on the lawn, and Cape Sparrows chirped from the banana trees while Red-faced Mousebirds crossed the road failing to stop for a good view.



Stellarangia elegantissima in the Lichen fields

Brandberg Mountain

Heading up the Skeleton Coast, we paused to check out the lichen fields that make this place unique, then ticked off the obligatory shipwreck whitewashed with Great Cormorant nests as we then turned inland towards the Brandberg Mountain.

We gradually watched the habitat change from lifeless sands, through fog-sucking lichen fields, then to sparse stony acacia scrub as we continued to our lodge.

Having missed Karoo Long-billed Lark at Namib Grens, it was brilliant to find the bigger and harder to find Benguela Long-billed Lark here. We have never managed to see both in one trip as their ranges are so far apart, but the latter (sub)species is highly prized among birders with Brandberg providing the only chance without venturing deep into Himba country. Some authorities lump the two larks together, but it is nice to know that we have seen the endemic subspecies if this is the case.



Zeila shipwreck, Skeleton Coast

The big acacia trees in the dry riverbed attracted lots of birds, including our first Rüppell's Parrot, a Namaqua Dove, Brubru, Northern Puffback, Dusky Sunbird, Yellow-billed and Damara Hornbills. It was hard not to admire the gaudy Crimson-breasted Gonolek, and Long-billed Crombecs reacted to my owl impression. After evening dinner, those not tired from the long drive enjoyed a Freckled Nightjar on the roof (*below*)





Mila the Meerkat just passed us by at breakfast time as she headed out to find scorpions.

A pre-breakfast walk the next day started with the song of a lost Reed Warbler, then Blacksmith's Lapwings made their presence known; also Mila the Meerkat passed us by, a bit like the Queen walking along a crowd line, admiring and commenting to us all. Our attempt to leave early was thwarted by the finding of a Senegal Coucal, the first record for the Brandberg Mountain region.....and so to Etosha.



Long-billed Crombec

Right: The very white-faced endemic species or subspecies (depending on which book you read) Damara Red-billed Hornbill





Northern Puffback



Rüppell's Parrot



Senegal Coucal: a vagrant from the north that moved in response to drought conditions.



A Common Swift drinks at the waterhole, part of a big flock that descended here.

*Bottom of page:
Black Rhino approaches Guinea fowl
- a reflection at sunset.*

Etosha: Okaukuejo

With bird densities low on this trip, it meant that mammal watching was at its all-time best. Passing a gorgeous Steenbok keeping the sun off its horns below a tree and then a close Red-crested Korhaan, we found Elephants at the Okaukuejo waterhole almost as soon as we arrived. The night here was packed with Black Rhinos coming, going, snorting and grunting, all desperate to wash down their thorny daytime meals. With at least 6 seen on the first evening, one could be forgiven for thinking they were doing well here.

Yes, of course, the population has rocketed since the 1990s when poaching made them virtually impossible to see in the park and any that you did find were horn-less in a move to put poachers off. Now they were coming out of every bush. *But*, 46 had been killed so far this year, with reserve managers implicated in back-handed deals. Rhino poachers are now shot on sight, with 6 killed in Namibia in 2024 but, as usual, it is the Mr Bigs of the illegal trade that should be targeted.

Bathing Elephants came to drink too, and then a big flock of Eurasian (Common) Swifts dropped out of the sky to circle the waterhole. They then took it in turns to skim the water and drink. This would be unusual anywhere in Europe, but here the swifts had no choice. It was just so hot and, without any sign of rain, this was the only way to prevent dehydration. Life permanently on the wing uses no energy in calm conditions but, if they are forced to flap in strong winds, during feeding or display, then Swifts need food. They follow the African rains that bring out hatching flies, so these birds were not tired, just hot. To us, it was a very unexpected spectacle.

In the dark, we passed a Tree Rat on the way to the waterhole. Three Black-headed Herons eyed up the Dabchicks whose young would be a nice meal should they ever breed here. Low over the pool, and then on to the viewpoint roof, a Rufous-cheeked Nightjar “*chock*”-ed and then rested. This call is the distinctive separating factor from the similar Fiery-necked Nightjar.





Northern Black Korhaan, common around Okaukuejo.

In the morning, we headed north along the Pan's edge to Wolfness. We have never wasted time here before, so I suspected that Tuhafeni had news that 'something' was present. Without prompting, two ears were 'spotted' sticking up from a dilapidated old crow's nest – a Spotted Eagle Owl.

Back on track, we made our way towards Okondeka, again wondering where the usual lark flocks had gone and why we had only seen three Double-banded Coursers and a handful of Northern Black Bustards (Korhaans)!

The white limestone plain was very quiet but, again, special birds more than made up for the lack of numbers. A Secretarybird walked round eyeing the ground. It would flap manically if it spotted a lizard, and the dip of its head would indicate success. Normally these birds walk away shyly from stopped vehicles but, giving it time to get used to us, we slowly moved up the road parallel to it.

The bird was so engrossed in foraging that we worked out where to put the vehicle to let it walk closer - that worked well. We moved again and, this time, it walked right by us, even giving us a tango show when another reptile fell victim. This was, without doubt, the finest secretary I had ever worked with – brilliant.



Secretarybird: this bird was so engrossed in catching lizards. After a slow approach by us, it would approach our vehicle. Definitely bird of the day!

Our second plan also worked. Okondeka attracts lots of larks to drink and also Namaqua Sandgrouse at about 8.30. They were there but again in reduced numbers. Sandgrouse are known wanderers, and so it is probable that many had gone north and east. We watched the comings and goings of Ostrich, Springbok, Gemsbok, Zebra and Wildebeest, but this spot is home to a large pride of Lions. 'Normal' safari groups dash here at daybreak in the hope of seeing them on their way to bed then, if there are none to be found, they dash to Newbrowni waterhole to see if they are there, then Gemsbokvlakte, etc (repeat till you find a lion). Consequently, they rush about missing the other goodies (Spotted Eagle Owl & Secretarybird), leaving us in peace away from the crowds.

As we time our arrival for the sandgrouse, we often find the Lions too. They wait till late morning to drink to avoid the crowds and, sure enough, we spotted our Lions. They were close to the road under a tree. The four big cats snoozed right next to us. They had found shade but would move with the sun.

Off we went, checking larks. Plenty of Stark's Larks with bushy little crests, and a couple of Pink-billed, but not as bright as usual due to the drought and lack of food making breeding too energy consuming. Spike-heeled Larks are a big favourite, and we watched them going in and out of animal burrows before standing upright like soldiers to scan for termites. To avoid the heat, they habitually prefer to nest underground in Aardvark burrows.

Ant-eating Chats reached for the wide-open blue sky as we progressed further to a Sociable Weavers' nesting area. We often find Spotted Eagle Owls here too, but the road was now closed. This meant that we relied on Mr T's local expertise and, sure enough, we found one from another angle.



Double-banded Courser: common by the roadside in the most arid areas.

Back to the camp for lunch, the idea was to rest from the heat before going out later, but many of us were too excited and strolled the shady trees to seek out birds. African Cuckoo is always found here, and always obliging, so it was pleasing to find one: not the old bird that had been here for years, this time a new youngster has taken over his patch.

African Cuckoo has always been very hard to separate from Eurasian Cuckoo so, with photos on the PC, it was nice to be 100% sure that we were looking at African Cuckoo here, despite it uttering a Eurasian-type call. Our bird lacked the reduced yellow on the bill, had broad wide bars to the tail and a dark-tipped tail on the upper surface.

Purple Roller provided another photographic highlight as one just glared down at us circling around like vultures to get the best angle. Then, a strange thrush-like thing caught my eye. This was dull, not worthy of distracting those walking with an African Hoopoe, or chivvying a Crimson-breasted Gonolek (Shrike) into the open for a pic.

Flying off to hide among garden furniture and walls, the 'thrush' baffled me before it showed well enough to clinch the ID as a juvenile Short-toed Rock-thrush. We would have expected this species along the rocky Namib escarpment, so it was strange to find it in a wooded glade, but the drought had caused birds and animals out of the dry western desert and towards the east where the first rains should come. This bird was at the limit of its recorded 'eruptive' range.

Our shady campground glade also provided Golden Oriole, White-crowned Shrike, and Blacksmith's Lapwings. These were self-appointed "keep off the grass" guardians, complaining loudly if we took a short cut. Under the thatch of the bar, the Rock Martins rested from the heat of the day.



Above: African Cuckoo.

Below: Purple Roller





Crimson-breasted Shrike (Gonolek), once Namibia's National bird.



Short-toed Rock-thrush, a vagrant to Etosha.



African Hoopoe

Eventually, we set off on a game drive. The road to Gemsbokvlakte is lined with *Acacia newbournii*: the food of Black Rhinos, but also providing shade for Spotted Thick-knees and Scrub Hare, the big orange ears being the first thing one notices as the sun highlights the veins cooling them. The waterhole had a Jackal waiting, an indication that the chance of a free meal could be on offer. Sure enough, Lions were drinking and resting prior to going hunting. As a Kori Bustard came to drink, a young Lion appeared on a wall that protected the water tanks. No game came, the animals gave it a wide berth, knowing full well that danger was lurking in the four walls. One-by-one, Lions would come out from the shady compound, up, onto the wall, jump down, then stroll to the pool for a drink until we had counted 9 in total.



These were skinny cats. Unable to follow the game to the eastern side of the park as there were other stronger established prides there, this family was struggling (oh, no! sounds like a Simon King Big Cat Diary!).

The younger Lions were wanting to go hunting and set off plodding towards the road, flopping down, exhausted before reaching it.

We drove to a better vantage point, where they would pass by us when Dad woke up. He knew that there was no point moving in the daylight and heat, so snoozed by the pool. Eventually, he joined the rest of his family and they set off towards the mopane trees.

Time to leave, we headed back into the sun, only to see the most glorious line of dark silhouettes lit up on the horizon. Kicking up golden dust, a big herd of mother and calf Elephants came towards us. It was impossible to capture what was the greatest of African artworks, it was just stunning. We just soaked up the atmosphere as we positioned ourselves perfectly to allow them to pass by us.

Jumbos protect their young by keeping Mum between them and us, but we had to keep checking either side of the bus to ensure all was relaxed and calm – it was. The last little chap quickly bounced along flapping his ears in panic to catch up with Mum as they headed away. She knew he was safe, and it was a real privilege to be surrounded by creatures that accepted us.



Jumbo sunset

More Elephant and Rhino came to drink that night. It was still hot and dry. We left in the morning, first heading along the Pan's edge to Newbrowni waterhole. Lions often use the road culverts here to escape the sun and the Red-breasted Swallows nest in them. While watched a pair circling, a distant Hyena was seen getting closer. I knew what he was up to, so I asked Tuhafeni to park above a culvert. So predictable, we were perfectly positioned to see the predator come ambling towards us from a mile away, only to dive under the road below us, unbelievably close. power. It is so good when a plan comes together.

It is nice to watch how each individual behaves. Like most apex predators, this one paused briefly some distance away to assess the situation and make sure we were no threat. It simultaneously made a last check for Lions, then, once the decision was made that it was safe, it trotted on towards us as if nothing was bothering it. The last rushed dive for cover below us, close enough to see its deep furrowed frown, indicated to me that it was fully aware of our position of strength.

Hyenas look like their rear suspension has collapsed, and with a hunched back that make them look at the ground, rather than where they are going. Continuing as if ignoring us, you can be sure that this Hyena was keeping an eye on us all the time. Leopards and Lions are similar in staring straight ahead completely ignoring people. If one looks you in the eye, it is uncomfortable or feels threatened. The old-timers among top predators in Etosha have seen cars before, they know that we pose no threat, which makes observing their behaviour quite natural. Cheetah on the other hand differ as they are bullied by others. This means that they are more likely to keep glancing at you. It is such a privilege to be accepted 'into their world'.



Hyena heading to bed.

Continuing beside the Pan's edge, we paused at a variety of viewpoints and waterholes. One reedy island had a family of Black Crakes for us to enjoy, as a Lanner watched from a treetop. This falcon is a small bird snatcher, and usually there are crowds of Red-headed Finches and Great Sparrows for it to scythe through rather than just the hundred that came. The open grasslands of the park here held Steppe Eagle, Lappet-faced Vulture, and Black-chested Snake-eagle with a single Yellow-billed Kite, as well as Rock and Greater Kestrel, with our fifth Red-necked Falcon for the trip.



This Lanner was at Okondeka



Marabou Stork over the Etosha Pan

White-tailed Shrike and Cape Glossy Starlings, Halali.





Southern Red-billed Hornbill, Halali

Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Halali



Etosha: Halali

Lunch at Halali was delayed as we were confronted by birds as we dismounted from the bus. Tame White-crowned Shrikes were nothing unexpected, but a Bare-cheeked Babbler was just what we needed. This is THE bird to see at Halali, a scarce Namibian Endemic that can disappear from the camp in times of drought and one was perched right next to us!!!

Then, as if that wasn't enough, a Golden-tailed Woodpecker played woodpecker hide-and-seek, staying on the opposite side of a branch. Later it, and its mate, would just sit there posing as if we weren't even there.

The sprinklers were on and, in every drought situation, this brings out the best of the campgrounds. Glossy Starlings took drips from the taps as Shaft-tailed and Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs drank from the lawn. Mopane Squirrels jumped about as we took lunch watching them, but the rooms allowed some air-con'd respite from the afternoon heat.

As there were no mad dogs, the Englishmen dealt with the heat and a trio of Violet-backed Hoopoes came to the lawn for those unwilling to rest. I had turned on a tap to keep dripping and this kept the birds coming, even the woodpeckers sipped from the brass tap. Damara and Yellow-billed Hornbills enjoyed it along with Groundscraper Thrushes, Grey-headed Sparrows and Simon even watched a Gabar Goshawk take a drop!!!



Violet Woodhoopoes

A game drive was offered as the heat was supposed to drop, but we left with little expectation. Best thing on offer was the slim chance of a Leopard as there are several here and all need to drink. Chances are always low as they prefer to move under cover of darkness, but we had been lucky in the past. However, this time it was to be two Southern White-faced Scops Owls that took star billing. Owls are Tuhafeni's favourite birds, and he had seen these birds grow up inside a weaver's nest. But, since an elephant knocked their tree down, they had to find a new home. They never stray far from their birthplace and, while not always in the same tree, they are usually within a few metres of it. Mr T was so pleased they were still around, we didn't need to see a cat to notice his grin!



Southern White-faced Scops Owl.

A Burchell's Courser was a highlight, and quickly ran away. On the other side of the bus, Double-banded Coursers fed, but checking pictures I realised that the head pattern for Burchell's was wrong and the bird had been a Temminck's Courser. Two Secretarybirds perched on a nest and European Bee-eaters took advantage of a dragonfly emergence. Eight Black Rhino were seen on the return journey, some with the finest of horns.



Temminck's Courser

During dinner, Tuhafeni showed us a Barn Owl and then, later, we enjoyed Rhino and Elephants splashing about at the waterhole as we viewed from the rocks above. The following morning began with a walk in the camp. The dry conditions meant that very little bothered to join in with the dawn chorus, just the rowdy Red-billed Francolins. So, we cut the walk short to set off to Namutoni.

{William John Burchell was an English naturalist that collected thousands of specimens during travels in South Africa. His plant collection was given to Kew and his insects to Oxford University, he did discover other new species, including fish and reptiles as well as birds. Sadly, he hung himself in his garden at Fulham in 1863}.

Etosha: Namutoni Fort

Hitting the bumps and ridges, we set off on our next game drive towards Goas. This waterhole is good for waders and here we found our only Painted Snipe: a male, duller in colour than the female, but still smart. A tern caused a headache. Superficially, it looked like a Black Tern but lacked the dark shoulder patch making it a White-winged Black Tern. However, it lacked the dark saddle, and its rump didn't look particularly white. While it generally had the feel of a Black Tern – photos were taken to sort later.

With photos to hand and surrounded by books, we found that the bird was indeed a White-winged Black Tern and quite a scarce visitor here. I have had one of these odd half-and-half birds before in South Africa. It had shown characteristics of both species and was, similarly, a real head-scratcher. Perhaps it is because we European birders never see this plumage state as a bird loses the juvenile plumage and has yet to acquire all of its adult feathers.



White-winged Tern



Painted Snipe, male

Other European migrants appeared today as we logged Common Buzzard, more Bee-eaters, Willow Warbler, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes. 'Our' birds were arriving ahead of the rains, hopeful that Christmas would be a wet one. An Icterine Warbler popped into bushes by the Pan and a Golden-breasted Bunting showed off its yellow bits. Never common in Namibia, Golden-breasted Bunting prefers dry woodlands elsewhere. Here it prefers arid rocky areas with the Halali viewpoint being a hot-spot in droughts. Being a Namibian bird, it has to be adaptable and, while they have moved into alien plantations in South Africa, this one was on the same evolutionary trajectory, being at a refurbished toilet block!!

Still heading east and into a lot more hoofed mammals, there were Zebra and Springbok everywhere with the odd Red Hartebeest. They would stay here where there is more grass until the first rains bring the promise of food, then the migration west towards Okaukuejo would begin. There were fewer Black-faced Impala, which usually prefer the mopane woods. They all give birth simultaneously in a strategy to thwart losses through predation but, this year, I suspect they and the Springbok would abort giving birth as they fought off hunger. Zebra, on the other hand, don't seem to have problems with drought and we even saw some youngsters on this trip.

The number of mammals here had concentrated the predators that, for a few years, have been doing well. Lions once dominated the park, while seeing a Cheetah or Hyena was rare. Now that the Lions have struggled for a few years, Cheetah numbers have risen, so we hoped to find one. We really didn't want to take the long boring journey past Okerfontein, which gives a chance of seeing one, *but* our luck was in again. We noticed vultures in the air, so turned off the main road to find a Hyena running away with a Cheetah's breakfast.

We hadn't had to go far and Mum and three big cubs sat in the shade of an acacia panting. Thankfully, they were still sitting close to the road for us to admire, but soon they would lie down to sleep, or move much deeper into the bush – either way, they would be virtually invisible.



Cheetah and cubs

Reaching the white fort of Namutoni, a band of Mongooses scuttled around the lawns. We wandered among them as these delightful little chaps muttered under their breath at the intrusion. Banded Mongoose (*below*) here are not shy, they descend on the campground attracting an audience in return for tips. They were making a mess of the lawn here digging for invertebrates. One must have found something unpleasant as we saw one retching but it isn't a problem for these indestructible little chaps – they eat cyanide-squirting millipedes, scorpions and poisonous snakes!!



Namutoni waterhole was good for birds and never game. There is a large reedbed that has choked off the muddy edge and it has been waiting for a bomb to hit it for years. Today it did and lunch was once again delayed by Elephants. Jumbos never used to touch it but now they seem to rejoice in throwing black mud all over each other here. They are nature's landscape gardeners, but I doubt they will remove all the reeds. Anyway, a few would be nice to retain the singing African Reed Warblers, roosting Barn Swallows and Black Crakes that we see here.

Blacksmith's Lapwing, Ruff and Wood Sandpiper fed here and, as each of us came to visit for a while in the afternoon heat, other waders were also recorded: Wattled and Crowned Lapwing as well as a Caspian Plover.

The afternoon was again way too hot to go out early, so we decided to leave late and stay local - good job. Admiring butterflies swarming around a Zebra's legs, EJ quietly said "Cheetah". The message took time to sink in before we all realised that a Cheetah was walking by the bus!!!!!!

It was out hunting and staring off into the distance across Fisher's Pan intent on food. As she got further away, we left her and continued to Klein and Groot Okavisa. A Kori Bustard drank with the big mixed dove flock and Kudu joined Giraffe and, while the game viewing was once again good, the number and variety of birds was low. The rains had not reached Namutoni like we had hoped. Returning back towards the fort, every car was dashing by us indicating that there were Lions at Tsumcor,

We don't like crowds and like to find our own stuff, besides that, three Impala were staring at the roadside. Tuhafeni and I knew what this meant, and he asked if we should "go see the lions"?

I am so glad that I said no, as we took time to check and see what the Impala were up to.

They walked away slowly after one had watched a Sabota Lark run across the road. We passed it off as nothing, once again misreading the minds of the Impala but, moving off, I glanced down and, between the big mirror and three tax discs glued to the windscreen, I saw spots before my eyes; "*Leopard*"!!!!!!!!!

As my dry, bloodshot eyes met his gorgeous amber eyes, the bus was still moving. Mr T had heard me as I turned to call into the back. EJ had heard and was already clicking away, but we dare not shout, it was too close.

We stopped a few metres past and my view was obscured by branches, but we dared not reverse for fear of scaring him. It took a while for everyone to realise that the cat was not way off in the distance as they expected and were still scanning for.

"*Look down, it is below you*" – "*Christ!*",..... "*Sh*~!!!*", ...*F*~#!!!!*.... and other expletives were all whispered or shouted inside their collective heads. The Leopard looked up at us into the bus.

For a minute or two, we were all in shock. The Leopard inched forward; the Impala had moved off. He didn't want to break cover because the Impala had not yet seen him and, for him, the hunt was still on. He stood tall and stepped out, now staring as if a waiter had been walking to his table with a full plate then turned around and taken his dinner back to the kitchen!! He crossed the road and headed through the scrub. We turned the bus.

He was following the Impala but we were only catching glimpses between bushes as he must have paused to check their progress.

Tuhafeni was reluctant to move as he knew this cat sometimes climbed a termite mound, but it was now moving straight, and I thought he had given up on the Impala.

I thought that the Leopard's route would take it to Klien Okavi and I said we should go there as I suspected he wanted a drink, or would try to ambush animals there. Mr T was keen to wait longer, hoping it would climb the termite mound or come back to the road.

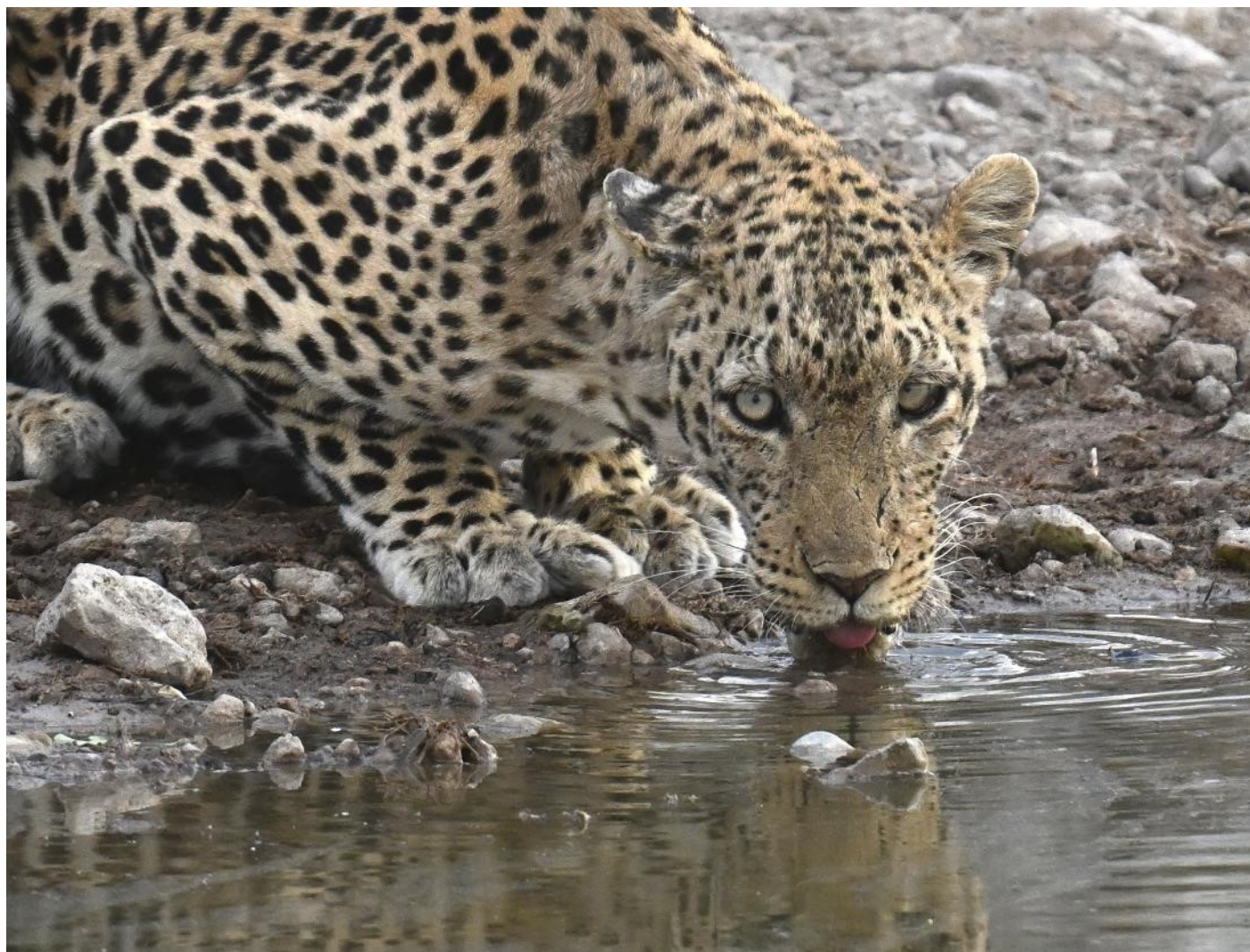
I chivvied him on as I was confident we could find *our* cat there.

Pulling up at the waterhole, our Leopard was already drinking, and he was really thirsty. He drank for ages, in fact long enough for hundreds of photos and video to be grabbed – did anyone look at him other than through a viewfinder?

He then stood, and walked off, glancing back over his shoulder to check that we couldn't follow him – *just magic!!!!*

We had enjoyed this golden wonder by ourselves. No crowds, and with our Leopard relaxed and going about his daily routine. It is moments like this that make Namibia special, and unforgettable - even after 30 tours!

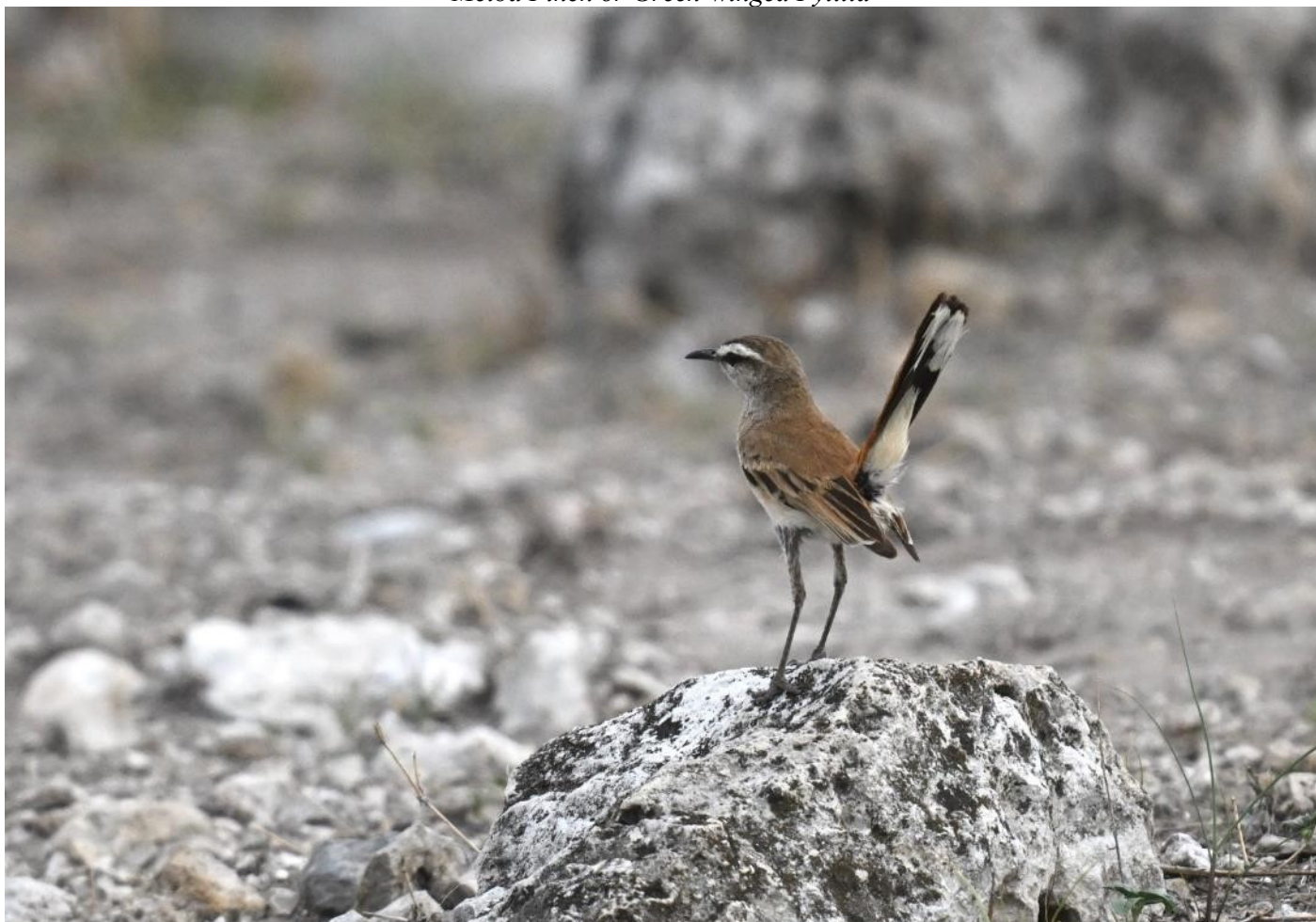
Dinner was extra tasty that night. All memories of hot, dusty, bumpy roads were forgotten.



Our wonderful Leopard takes a drink.



Melba Finch or Green-winged Pytilia



Kalahari Robin

Next morning, we were off to Andoni. Crossing the Fisher's Pan causeway, checking Groot and Klein Okavi, where a pair of Kalahari Robins cocked their tails for us. Then to Tsumcor where we notched up quite a few bush birds. Lots of shrikes about today, some Lilac-breasted Rollers, adult and juvenile Gabar Goshawk, another Spotted Eagle Owl, and a Slender Mongoose. Just before dropping down onto the grass Andoni Plain, a Red Crested Korhaan called "peu, peu, peu", then flew up, only to fold its wings and collapse down as if shot out of the sky: this was his display.



Spotted Eagle Owl



Pearl-spotted Owlet

The toilet compound always has a nearby owl, and soon three Pearl-spotted Owlets were complaining that we had woken them. Small birds came to see what all the fuss was about, and it was here that we enjoyed Ashy Tit, Red-breasted Swallow and a pair of Yellow White-eyes. These birds were far from their normal range and, later, we would hear that they were the first record for the park.



Long-tailed Paradise Whydah



Lilac-breasted Roller – the first migrants were arriving at Namutoni



Red-breasted Swallow

Vultures were in the air, together with a Bataleur, heading out from their roost. There were fewer than normal as their mates were probably all concentrated in the areas where the farmers were losing cattle to the drought, but one looked odd. A bit like a small Lappet-faced, we stopped to check, and it turned out to be a young White-headed Vulture - a real gem. This critically endangered bird is declining at an extremely rapid rate now accelerated by poisoning (linked to Rhino poaching) of the few small, isolated sub populations.



White-headed Vulture



Burchell's Zebra at Andoni waterhole

We had an appointment with a Blue Crane but, although never having missed them in 30 visits, I was more nervous this time, especially as a long black line of Wildebeest collected around the waterhole, crowding everything out - there were no cranes.

It was breeding time, and they start to wander now, checking out water levels usually north of the park. This is a dangerous time for them as they prefer to nest in unprotected areas where they are killed by locals. It was so dry that their cattle were dying and even some elephants had been found dead further north and west. A massive heatwave was predicted for the weekend with red warnings that records would be broken in Mozambique and Zimbabwe, so it was not a good time to be a waterbird here.

The whole Namibian Blue Crane population should have been here as there is no way that they would be breeding. Even if they had found water to encourage them to try and nest, some non-breeders gather at the Andoni waterhole (I think it is the spot where young birds find their future partners, or relatives reunite, like some wedding or a lost children's department).

I had never seen so many Wildebeest here and there seemed to be no room for any cranes, but Mr T was confident that they would fly in. So confident that he went to sleep, snoring as we picked out Pink-billed Lark from Red-capped and Kittlitz's from Chestnut-banded Plovers. Warthogs squeezed through the gaps to avoid being trodden on as they wallowed, then we heard cranes.

Four circled above the bus, getting lower before gliding in, legs down ready for landing. They were outside the muddy melee but began to push through the beasts forcing their way to the bar. Once in place by a wet patch, they drank, and then there was no way that they were going to give up their places. I was shocked to see a tall, delicate, wedgewood-blue bird hold out its wings and stand its ground as a big hoofed, horn-headed brute galumphed towards it. This happened repeatedly, and it was a joy to just sit and watch the interactions going on between them. Four more cranes then called, circled, and landed, By the time the day was done, we would see nine in total, three of which were ringed.



Blue Cranes coming in to land at a crowded waterhole.

Since finding my first Blue Crane, one on a nest near Halali in 1995, I have sent my records to Bob & Ann Scott who have run the Namibian Crane Project. They have now retired, and I am in contact with the new team. We had seen all three ringed birds last year: Green NAT had been ringed as a chick in May 2020 at Fischer's Pan, Green NEV had been ringed at Halali in April 2020 while Yellow A4 is also from Halali but much younger. I got the email below from the project manager.

Dear Phil,

I can reveal to you that Blue Crane A4 was ringed by Dirk Heinrich, Gabriel and myself on 21/4/22 near the turnoff to Halali. They were actually two chicks from that pair, but A3 was never again observed anywhere, so we presume that he was the victim of a jackal or any other predator.

A very interesting story is at this moment presenting itself. On 18/4/20 we ringed more or less at the same spot a Blue Crane with ring NEV and at the same time fitted a leg mounted transmitter. Since then I check this bird on a daily basis and for the first couple of years he and his mate NAT never left the boundary of Etosha, except for two days, when NEV flew in a North Westerly direction towards Lake Oponono, which is more or less in a straight line to the North of Okaukuejo in the so called Oshana Region.

During the course of this year NEV made a trip far into Southern Angola, just to return after three days back to Andoni. On Tuesday this week he suddenly decided to fly to the North East towards the Okavango River, just to head far South to stay for a day just to the East of Windhoek. On Thursday he took off from there to fly straight West along the road Okahandja/Karibib and since then he stayed somewhere near the road Karibib towards Omaruru. I presume he is near the Khan River, because somebody reported that the area had some good rain showers in the last couple of days.

For us it remains a puzzle, why that bird suddenly left Etosha to venture that far South and we only hope that he will survive, because food and most probably water availability will be a decisive factor. It remains interesting.

Thanks once again for your keen interest in those birds.

Keep well and Kindest Regards

Hanjo

{Lake Oponono is the main breeding area for Namibia Blue Cranes. It gets more water and so is more attractive to them. However, it is unprotected and has a high density of cattle herders. Several cranes have been killed here by them}

An update on Green NEV.....

On Thursday 12th, exactly one week after we had seen him fit and well, he flew west towards the Erongo Mountains as there had been some good rain showers. Apparently, he was travelling at 80kmph, and so was healthy at that point, landing at Karibib Airstrip, Headquarters for the Namibia Air Force Command.

Here, the satellite tracker on his leg showed that he walked the runway several times presumably feeding and spent a while at the sewage ponds at one end. He then went off to feed in some scrub 300m away where his decomposed body has been found.

The loss of NEV brings the total Namibian Crane population down to "no more than 11 individuals (according to Namibian Crane Project workers), all in Etosha". I suspect that when we saw 9 birds there together 2 weeks ago, that we were in fact looking at the whole population as it is too dry for any to be attempting to breed elsewhere.

The current projection is that the Namibian Blue Cranes will be extinct in 3 years.



Blue Cranes will not be bullied by larger animals.

Once through King Nehale gate where Little Swifts nested, we headed to the cattle ponds. There is usually a smattering of new waterbirds here but increased pressure from locals often pushes them further away than we'd like. Marsh Sandpipers were new for the trip and a super Saddle-billed Stork. This monster has been here for years now and is reliably found on each trip, but it is disappointing that the government's tick and disease programmes are perhaps affecting local oxpeckers. Only one was seen in flight which was a shame, while on the plus side, the rare Burchell's Coursers around the bus were simply the best.

Little Swift

Below: Burchell's Courser



Lunch in the cool of the Gondwana Lodge provided a welcome respite with artisan ice-cream, shopping for the ladies, and a nice break before heading back to the fort for a rest.

Still baking hot, our afternoon game drive was shortened as the sun didn't let up. Most birds would be tucked away in the shade, but the last hour of the day is always magical and worth getting out for. This time, I decided to spend time relaxing by my favourite waterhole: Klein Namutoni.

The adjacent to mature woodland conceals plenty but, in this heat, it would not be worth venturing into. There is a rocky cave that is a denning area for 'something': one year leopard cubs, another time hyena pups, sometimes jackals or foxes.

My idea was that things would come to drink for sure and, if we were lucky, something special. So, it was nice when there were loads of Giraffes on our arrival doing ungulate Pilates - all nodding while doing the splits!

All was peaceful with our last Rhino, number 22 of the trip, swaggering up to drink. Once he had downed more pints than he should, he stepped back uphill to sleep it off. It was odd to see a Rhino sat down and he certainly wasn't going to move as our final herd of Elephants trundled by to the water spitting, splashing and snorkelling. One youngster decided that he didn't like the look of the Rhino, so walked over to challenge him. After an amusing stand-off where I could hear the voice of BBC's Johnny Morris in my head saying "c'mon then"... "No you c'mon then"... "wanna fight!" - the Rhino ran off in embarrassment.

It was then time for a Hyena to come for a drink. As it came from the cave, I can only assume that it had cubs there. Having seen a couple of Damara Dik-diks emerge from the trees, then baby Jackals frolicking, it had been a magical hour peacefully watching our own unscripted wildlife drama - Time to go.



A heavyweight contest: Rhino V Jumbo!



Jackal pups at Klein Namutoni

Waterberg Plateau.

The cool morning allowed us to walk around the Namutoni campgrounds. Several birds were singing, Rattling Cisticola, Marico Sunbird and Grey Go-away Bird. The Red-billed Buffalo Weavers fed on the lawn, and we checked out the Spotted and Marico Flycatchers. The Pearl-spotted Owlets have stopped calling here. As soon as one opens its beak, a Drongo would whack it, so today's owl sat quietly minding its own business as the drongos made a poor mimicry attempt to get it to talk.

The small birds were a bit more obliging here, as a young Red-backed Shrike mobbed us. It posed right out in the open and its complaints brought in Bleating (Grey-backed) Camaroptera – *they are always first*. Then Yellow-breasted Apalis, Burnt-necked Eremomola, Pririt Batis, Black-throated Canaries, and a smart Green-winged Pytilia. A Garden Warbler was a good find as they are only thinly distributed in Namibia, but the White-browed Scrub-robins were the best – just so close!

Pearl-spotted Owlet





Red-backed Shrike mobbing us at Namutoni, joined by White-browed Scrub-robin (below).



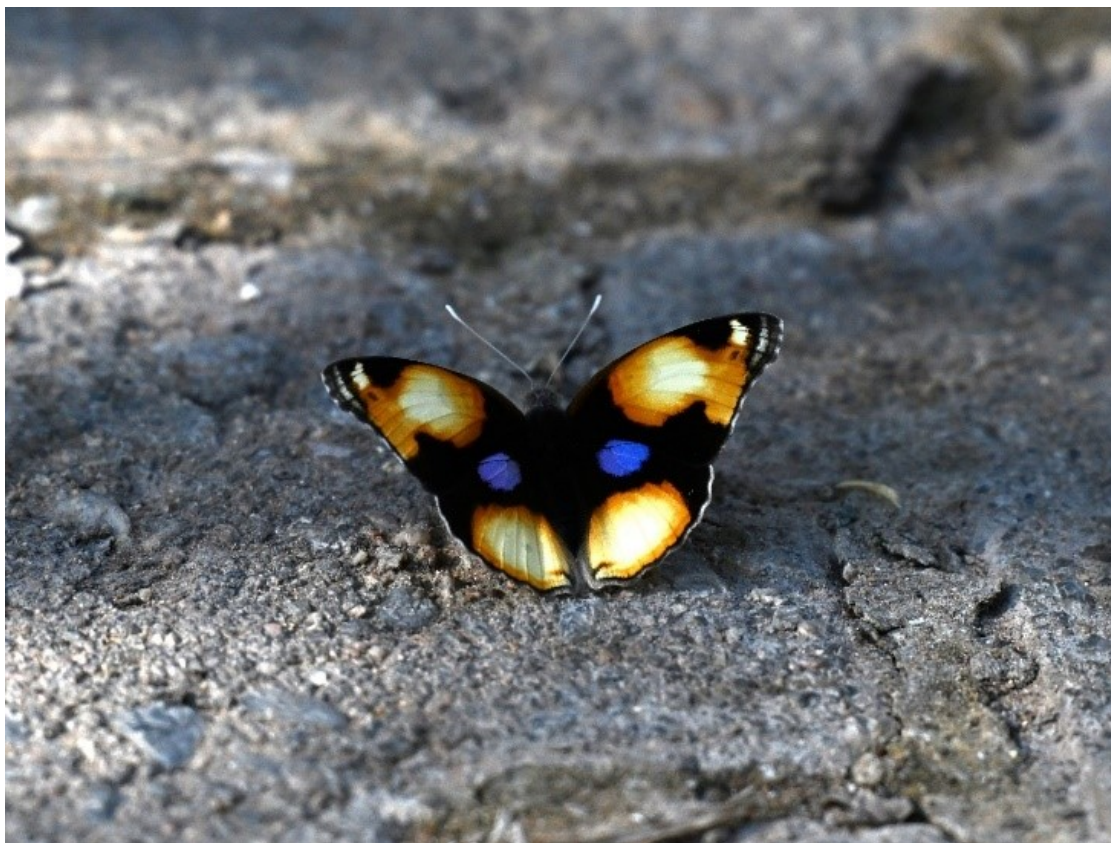
Soon we were underway south, and it wasn't long before wire-watching brought shrike after shrike, after shrike. We must have seen 200 Red-backed and Lesser Greys before reaching Otjiwarongo. There had been rain, but again, not enough to bring out many flowers or insects.

Lunch at the Crocodile farm was not that snappy. We had time to check the Masked Weavers to see if any had white eyes instead of red: one did, a Lesser Masked Weaver. These birds like to nest near water and so were once restricted to Caprivi but, as towns brought water treatment plants and farms created dams, any weavers that followed the river systems found a new home. There was always an occasional pair at Windhoek sewage works and, with an urge to sprinkle a garden or make a pond, Lesser Masked Weavers increased. We then found a nesting pair at Waterberg and so it wasn't a surprise to see that they now like Crocodile farms!



Passing a pole-top Brown Snake-eagle, we managed a few other bird species before entering the platopark (yes, it is spelt that way) as the sprinklers by reception again came up trumps. Burchell's Starlings strutted all over the grass, as big as a magpie. Another Pearl Spot brought in Marico and Paradise Flycatchers, but a Scarlet-chested Sunbird grabbed the most attention, after we took selfies with a Warthog!

Brown Snake-eagle



*Yellow Pansy
Precis hierta*



Our Warthog doorman!!!

Up to the rooms and the dramatic orange cliffs brought us a pair of African Hawk-eagles (*below*). On the cliffs above the rooms, there is a big stick nest, and these birds take it in turn with Black Eagles to use it. Above them, Alpine Swifts joined the Rock Martins that are also cliff-nesters here.



After dinner, a torch-light walk showed us the Dik-diks settling down and Lesser Galago's (Bushbabies) warming up by bouncing on a roof. Breakfast was nice. A balcony gave us chance to join the canopy birds and among the 20+ Marico Sunbirds was a pair of White-bellied Sunbirds. A couple of Golden Orioles paused briefly, and Lovebirds dashed by; it was a busy time of day. There were plenty of butterflies around, mostly attracted to baboon pooh, and Paradise Flycatchers (*below*) once again gave us the runaround. Bulbuls tried their best to warrant more than a cursory glance at this common species but failed to tear us away from the bird with a foot-long orange tail!





Lesser-striped Swallow

In the deserted campground, a Rüppell's Parrot drank, Green Woodhoopoes headed uphill, and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters kept flies from a Bar-b-Q. The only Lesser-striped Swallow of the trip hawked above us, another bird that has expanded its range south by following the river systems that run from Botswana.

Sadly, we were soon on the way to Windhoek Airport and there was the odd addition or re-sighting along the way. A Cardinal Woodpecker and Blue Waxbill saw us off the premises and two strawberry blonde Tawny Eagles scavenged roadkill. Later, a Black-shouldered Kite flew by the bus, as they prefer manicured grass verges by the tarmac roads to the bumpy gravel. As we walked under a Namibian sunset to the steps of the plane home, Alpine and Bradfield's Swifts descended to tarmac level, grabbing the last flies of the day – a picturesque end to the trip.



Namibia is all about a special and unique, harsh, unforgiving environment. We saw what drought can look like and the effects on wildlife. While seeing most of the special birds and mammals that this wonderful place has to offer, many with better-than-ever views, hopefully, the pace allowed time to have a good look rather than dash from one to the other. I hope that your notes and photos provide memories of them all. You will see lots of Wildlife films showing harsh white limestone or red sands and acacias that you may recognise from here. The waterholes will look familiar on many Attenborough epics. We were there, we have seen these places first hand.

Now you are all ambassadors for this landscape so, whenever you get chance to add your name to a petition that keeps it natural, please do so. The pressure is on to create farms and pump water to the desert or rip out trees to provide cattle farms – let's hope they fail and nature grabs it back. Many agricultural projects have failed and those areas, once deserted, soon scrub over again.

This was, like all trips to Namibia, unforgettable. Maybe you will return another time?
I am sure you will see new things and have new experiences if you do.



A Black-necked Grebe surfaces at Walvis Bay

I would like to thank ALL participants for their companionship, great sense of humour and sharp eyes. I would also like to thank my friend and superb driver, co-guide, Mr Fixit and all-round top bloke, Mr T, and who made this trip very enjoyable by working in partnership with us. Together, we achieved maximum sightings and unforgettable experiences.

.....Thanks, Phil Palmer, on behalf of Oriole Birding.

Scroll down for bird list, mammal list and more photos.



We need a drink!!!

SYSTEMATIC LIST: BIRDS

This list includes subspecies name where known and some alternative names.

Common Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*)
Knob-billed Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)
Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*)
South African Shelduck (*Tadorna cana*)
Cape Teal (*Anas capensis*)
Red-billed Teal (*Anas erythrorhyncha*)
Helmeted Guineafowl (*Numida meleagris papillosus*)
Red-billed Spurfowl (*Pternistis adspersus*)
Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus europaeus*)
Rufous-cheeked Nightjar (*Caprimulgus rufigena damarensis*)
Freckled Nightjar (*Caprimulgus tristigma lentiginosus*)
Alpine Swift (*Tachymarptis melba marjoriae*)
Swift (*Apus apus*)
Bradfield's Swift (*Apus bradfieldi bradfieldi*)
Little Swift (Little) (*Apus affinis theresae*)
White-rumped Swift (*Apus caffer*)
Grey Go-away-bird (*Crinifer concolor pallidiceps*)

Kori Bustard (*Ardeotis kori kori*)
 Ludwig's Bustard (*Neotis ludwigii*)
 Rüppell's Korhaan (*Heterotetrax rueppelii fitzsimonsi*)
 Northern Black Korhaan (*Afrotis afraoides etoschae*)
 Northern Black Korhaan (*Afrotis afraoides damarensis*)
 Senegal Coucal (*Centropus senegalensis flecki*)
 Diederik Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx caprius*)
 Black Cuckoo (*Cuculus clamosus clamosus*)
 African Cuckoo (*Cuculus gularis*)
 Namaqua Sandgrouse (*Pterocles namaqua*)
 Double-banded Sandgrouse (*Pterocles bicinctus bicinctus*)
 Rock Dove (Feral) (*Columba livia 'feral'*)
 Speckled Pigeon (*Columba guinea phaeonota*)
 Ring-necked Dove (*Streptopelia capicola damarensis*)
 Laughing Dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis senegalensis*)
 Emerald-spotted Wood Dove (*Turtur chalcospilos*)
 Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis capensis*)
 Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus meridionalis*)
 Black Crake (*Zapornia flavirostra*)
 Blue Crane (*Grus paradisea*)
 Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis*)
 Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis gurneyi*)
 Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)
 Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*)
 Spotted Thick-knee (*Burhinus capensis damarensis*)
 African Oystercatcher (*Haematopus moquini*)
 Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
 Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)
 Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola squatarola*)
 Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula tundrae*)
 Three-banded Plover (*Charadrius tricollaris tricollaris*)
 Blacksmith Lapwing (*Vanellus armatus*)
 Crowned Lapwing (*Vanellus coronatus coronatus*)
 African Wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus senegallus lateralis*)
 Caspian Plover (*Anarhynchus asiaticus*)
 Kittlitz's Plover (*Anarhynchus pecuarius*)
 Chestnut-banded Plover (*Anarhynchus pallidus pallidus*)
 White-fronted Plover (*Anarhynchus marginatus mechowii*)
 White-fronted Plover (*Anarhynchus marginatus marginatus*)
 Greater Painted-snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*)
 Whimbrel (European) (*Numenius phaeopus phaeopus*)
 Bar-tailed Godwit (European) (*Limosa lapponica*)
 Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)
 Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*)
 Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)
 Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)
 Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres interpres*)
 Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)
 Sanderling (*Calidris alba alba*)
 Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)
 Double-banded Courser (*Rhinoptilus africanus africanus*)
 Burchell's Courser (*Cursorius rufus*)
 Temminck's Courser (*Cursorius temminckii*)
 Damara Tern (*Sternula balaenarum*)
 Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*)
 Black Tern (Eurasian) (*Chlidonias niger niger*)
 White-winged Black Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*)
 Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)
 Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo hirundo*)



Rüppell's Korhaan

Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*)
Greater Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii bergii*)
Grey-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus poiocephalus*)
Hartlaub's Gull (*Chroicocephalus hartlaubii*)
Kelp Gull [Cape] (*Larus dominicanus vetula*)
Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*)
African Penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*)
Wilson's Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus oceanicus/exasperatus*)
White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis aequinoctialis*)
Marabou Stork (*Leptoptilos crumenifer*)
Saddle-billed Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*)
Cape Gannet (*Morus capensis*)
Crowned Cormorant (*Microcarbo coronatus*)
Cape Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax capensis*)
White-breasted Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax lucidus*)
Little Egret (Western) (*Egretta garzetta garzetta*)
Great White Egret (African) (*Ardea alba melanorhynchos*)
Cattle Egret (*Ardea ibis*)
Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea cinerea*)
Black-headed Heron (*Ardea melanocephala*)
Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)
Secretarybird (*Sagittarius serpentarius*)
Black-winged Kite (African) (*Elanus caeruleus caeruleus*)
White-backed Vulture (*Gyps africanus*)
White-headed Vulture (*Trionocephus occipitalis*)
Lappet-faced Vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos tracheliotos*)
Black-chested Snake Eagle (*Circaetus pectoralis*)
Brown Snake Eagle (*Circaetus cinereus*)
Bateleur (*Terathopius ecaudatus*)
Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis orientalis*)
Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax rapax*)
African Hawk-eagle (*Aquila spilogaster*)
Gabar Goshawk (*Micronisus gabar gabar*)
Pale Chanting Goshawk (*Melierax canorus argentior*)
Shikra (African) (*Tachyspiza badia polyzonoides*)
Yellow-billed Kite (*Milvus aegyptius parasitus*)
Buzzard (Steppe) (*Buteo buteo vulpinus*)
Barn Owl (African) (*Tyto alba poensis*)
Pearl-spotted Owlet (*Glaucidium perlatus licua*)
Southern White-faced Owl (*Ptilopsis granti*)
Spotted Eagle-Owl (*Bubo africanus*)
White-backed Mousebird (*Colius colius damarensis*)
Red-faced Mousebird (*Urocolius indicus lacteifrons*)
African Hoopoe (*Upupa africana*)
Green Wood Hoopoe (*Phoeniculus purpureus angolensis*)
Violet Wood Hoopoe (*Phoeniculus damarensis*)
Common Scimitarbill (*Rhinopomastus cyanomelas cyanomelas*)
Damara Red-billed Hornbill (*Tockus damarensis*)
Southern Red-billed Hornbill (*Tockus rufirostris*)
Monteiro's Hornbill (*Tockus monteiri*)
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill (*Tockus leucomelas leucomelas*)
African Grey Hornbill (*Lophoceros nasutus epirhinus*)
Purple Roller (*Coracias naevius mosambicus*)
Lilac-breasted Roller (*Coracias caudatus caudatus*)
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops hirundineus hirundineus*)
Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*)
Acacia Pied Barbet (*Tricholaema leucomelas centralis*)
Golden-tailed Woodpecker (*Campethera abingoni anderssoni*)
Cardinal Woodpecker (*Dendropicos fuscescens fuscescens*)

Pygmy Falcon (*Polihierax semitorquatus semitorquatus*)
Rock Kestrel (*Falco rupicolus*)
Greater Kestrel (*Falco rupicoloides rupicoloides*)
Red-necked Falcon (African) (*Falco chicquera horsbrughi*)
Lanner Falcon (*Falco biarmicus biarmicus*)
Rüppell's Parrot (*Poicephalus rueppellii mariettae*)
Rosy-faced Lovebird (*Agapornis roseicollis roseicollis*)
Pririt Batis (*Batis pririt affinis*)
White-tailed Shrike (*Lanioturdus torquatus*)
Bokmakierie (*Telophorus zeylonus thermophilus*)
Brown-crowned Tchagra (*Tchagra australis damarensis*)
Crimson-breasted Shrike (*Laniarius atrococcineus*)
Brubru (*Nilaus afer brubru*)
Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*)
Fork-tailed Drongo (Clancey's) (*Dicrurus adsimilis apivorus*)
African Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone viridis plumbeiceps*)
Southern White-crowned Shrike (*Eurocephalus anguitimens anguitimens*)
Southern Fiscal (*Lanius collaris aridicolus*)
Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*)
House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)
Cape Crow (*Corvus capensis capensis*)
Carp's Tit (*Melaniparus carpi*)
Ashy Tit (*Melaniparus cinerascens cinerascens*)
Spike-heeled Lark (*Chersomanes albofasciata arenaria*)
Gray's Lark (*Ammomanopsis grayi grayi*)
Benguela Long-billed Lark (*Certhilauda benguelensis kaokoensis*)
Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark (*Eremopterix leucotis hoeschi*)
Grey-backed Sparrow-lark (*Eremopterix verticalis damarensis*)
Sabota Lark (*Calendulauda sabota waibeli*)
Sabota Lark (Bradfield's) (*Calendulauda sabota naevia*)
Sabota Lark (*Calendulauda sabota herero*)
Fawn-colored Lark [harei] (*Calendulauda africanoides harei*)
Dune Lark (*Calendulauda erythrochlamys erythrochlamys*)
Rufous-naped Lark (*Corypha africana ghansiensis*)
Stark's Lark (*Spizocorys starki*)
Pink-billed Lark (*Spizocorys conirostris damarensis*)
Red-capped Lark (*Calandrella cinerea spleniata*)
Red-capped Lark (*Calandrella cinerea cinerea*)
African Red-eyed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus nigricans nigricans*)
Banded Martin (*Neophedina cincta xerica*)
Large Rock Martin (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula anderssoni*)
Large Rock Martin (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula fuligula*)
Pearl-breasted Swallow (*Hirundo dimidiata dimidiata*)
Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica rustica*)
Greater Striped Swallow (*Cecropis cucullata*)
Lesser Striped Swallow (*Cecropis abyssinica ampliformis*)
Red-breasted Swallow (*Cecropis semirufa semirufa*)
Long-billed Crombec (*Sylvietta rufescens flecki*)
Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*)
Reed Warbler (African) (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus hallae*)
Icterine Warbler (*Hippolais icterina*)
Rattling Cisticola (*Cisticola chiniana frater*)
Desert Cisticola (*Cisticola aridulus kalahari*)
Black-chested Prinia (*Prinia flavicans flavicans*)
Yellow-breasted Apalis (*Apalis flava flava*)
Rufous-eared Warbler (*Malcorus pectoralis ocularius*)
Grey-backed Camaroptera (*Camaroptera brevicaudata sharpei*)
Yellow-bellied Eremomela (*Eremomela icteropygialis icteropygialis*)
Burnt-necked Eremomela (*Eremomela usticollis usticollis*)

Garden Warbler (*Sylvia borin*)
Chestnut-vented Warbler [tit-babbler] (*Curruca subcoerulea cinerascens*)
Orange River White-eye (*Zosterops pallidus*)
Southern Yellow White-eye (*Zosterops anderssoni anderssoni*)
Bare-cheeked Babbler (*Turdoides gymnogenys kaokensis*)
Southern Pied Babbler (*Turdoides bicolor*)
Wattled Starling (*Creatophora cinerea*)
Cape Starling (*Lamprotornis nitens*)
Burchell's Starling (*Lamprotornis australis*)
Violet-backed Starling (*Cinnyricinclus leucogaster verreauxi*)
Pale-winged Starling (*Onychognathus nabouroup*)
Yellow-billed Oxpecker (*Buphagus africanus africanus*)
Groundscraper Thrush (*Turdus litsitsirupa litsitsirupa*)
Karoo Scrub Robin (*Cercotrichas coryphoeus abboti*)
Kalahari Scrub Robin (*Cercotrichas paena paena*)
White-browed Scrub Robin (Red-backed)
(*Cercotrichas leucophrys ovamboensis*)
Chat Flycatcher (*Agricola infuscatus namaquensis*)
Herero Chat (*Namibornis herero*)
Marico Flycatcher (*Bradornis mariquensis*)
Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)
Short-toed Rock Thrush (White-crowned) (*Monticola brevipes brevipes*)
Karoo Chat (*Emarginata schlegelii namaquensis*)
Tractrac Chat (*Emarginata tractrac albicans*)
Tractrac Chat (*Emarginata tractrac barlowi*)
Ant-eating Chat (*Myrmecocichla formicivora*)
Mountain Chat (*Myrmecocichla monticola atmorii*)
Capped Wheatear (*Oenanthe pileata neseri*)
Familiar Chat (*Oenanthe familiaris angolensis*)
Familiar Chat (*Oenanthe familiaris galtoni*)
Scarlet-chested Sunbird (*Chalcomitra senegalensis saturation*)
Marico Sunbird (*Cinnyris mariquensis mariquensis*)
White-bellied Sunbird (*Cinnyris talatala*)
Dusky Sunbird (*Cinnyris fuscus fuscus*)
Cape Sparrow (*Passer melanurus damarensis*)
Great Sparrow (*Passer motitensis benguellensis*)
Southern Grey-headed Sparrow (*Passer diffusus diffusus*)
House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
Red-billed Buffalo Weaver (*Bubalornis niger niger*)
White-browed Sparrow-Weaver (White-breasted)
(*Plocepasser mahali mahali*)
Sociable Weaver (*Philetairus socius*)
Scaly-feathered Weaver [(*Sporopipes squamifrons squamifrons*)]
Lesser Masked Weaver (*Ploceus intermedius cabanisii*)
Southern Masked Weaver (*Ploceus velatus*)
Red-billed Quelea (*Quelea quelea*)
Black-faced Waxbill (*Brunhilda erythronotos erythronotos*)
Common Waxbill (*Estrilda astrild damarensis*)
Quailfinch (*Ortygospiza atricollis muelleri*)
Red-headed Finch (*Amadina erythrocephala*)
Blue Waxbill [cordonbelu] (*Uraeginthus angolensis cyanopleurus*)
Green-winged Pytilia [melba finch] (*Pytilia melba melba*)
Shaft-tailed Whydah (*Vidua regia*)
Long-tailed Paradise Whydah (*Vidua paradisaea*)
African Pipit (African) (*Anthus cinnamomeus bocagii*)
African Pipit (Etosha) (*Anthus cinnamomeus grotei*)
Black-throated Canary (*Crithagra atrogularis deserti*)
White-throated Canary (*Crithagra albogularis sordahlae*)
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza tahapisi nivenorum*)

Golden-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza flaviventris princeps*)



Above: Golden-breasted Bunting

Below: Lesser Grey Shrike





Kudu

MAMMALS

Rock Hyrax (*Procavia capensis*),
 African Savanna Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*),
 Southern Lesser Galago (*Galago moholi*),
 Chacma Baboon (*Papio ursinus*).
 Jameson's Red Rock Hare (*Pronolagus randensis*),
 Scrub Hare (*Lepus saxatilis*), 5.
 Cape Hare (*Lepus capensis*), 1.
 Black-tailed Thallomys (*Thallomys nigricauda*),
 Damara Ground Squirrel (*Geosciurus princeps*).
 Congo Rope Squirrel (*Funisciurus congicus*).
 Southern Giraffe (*Giraffa giraffa*).
 Black-faced Impala (*Aepyceros petersi*).
 Steenbok (*Raphicerus campestris*).
 Kalahari Springbok (*Antidorcas hofmeyri*).
 Damara Dik-dik (*Madoqua damarensis*),
 Gemsbok (*Oryx gazella*).
 Red Hartebeest (*Alcelaphus caama*).
 Blue Wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*).
 Angolan Klipspringer (*Oreotragus tyleri*).
 Common Warthog (*Phacochoerus africanus*).
 Plains Zebra (*Equus quagga*).
 Mountain Zebra (*Equus zebra*).
 Black Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*), 24.
 Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), 1 adult Male .
 Lion (*Panthera leo*), 23. (4 Okondeka, 8 Gemsbokvlakte, 10 Newbrowni + 1 heard)

Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), 5
Yellow Mongoose (*Cynictis penicillata*),
Common Slender Mongoose (*Herpestes sanguineus*),
Banded Mongoose (*Mungos mungo*),
Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*), 18.
Cape Fox (*Vulpes chama*),
Black-backed Jackal (*Lupulella mesomelas*),
Subantarctic (Cape) Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus tropicalis*),



Scrub Hare, Okaukuejo

NOTABLE PLANTS

Mopane Tree – Namibia's national tree. An evergreen, growing fresh leaves in September despite no rain at this time. A hardwood that provides firewood, a tea-like drink and the Mopane Worms (Mopane Moth caterpillars) to eat as a delicacy.

Phantom Tree.

Shepherd Tree – has a white trumpet flower

Quiver Tree.

Moringa Tree.

Ring Bark Tree.

Paperbark Tree – Marble Mountain, the bark peels off naturally to provide shade to the trunk.

Euphorbia – looks like a Cactus. Namib Naukluft and Kuiseb Canyon.

Butter Tree – with yellow bark, found in dry rocky regions, related to vines.

Sueda – low shrub that covers the plain around the Etosha Pan.

Acacia newbournii, the common tall, dense, pungently scented acacia often stripped by Elephants & Black Rhino in Etosha.

Wild Sage – a common large grey roadside bush in Etosha.

Stink Bush – common roadside bush in Etosha.

Paper Thorn – a bush with pink seed heads.

Cotton bush – a low shrub whose small cotton wool-like seed heads are used in Cape Penduline Tit nests.

Camel Thorn - *Acacia eioloba*

Phaeoptilum – a bush with pink seed heads

Commiphora saxicola – a smelly perfumed bush

Devil's Thorn – looked like Silverweed.

Purple Pod – a purple bush in the Karoo.

Dollar Bush

Resurrection Bush

Mopane Tree

The Mopane Tree has a distinctive butterfly-shaped leaf and thin, flimsy seed pods that make it easy to identify. For human use it is, together with camel thorn and leadwood, one of the triad of definitive firewood trees. The name *Colophospermum* is Greek for "oily seed", in reference to the resinous seeds. The part of the name, *colophos*, apparently refers to the strong turpentine smell of the resin. Colophony is another name for rosin, a substance obtained from turpentine.

Mopane wood is one of southern Africa's heaviest timbers and is difficult to work because of its hardness. However, this also makes it termite resistant. For this reason it has long been used for building houses and fences, as railway sleepers and as pit props. The termite-resistance and rich, reddish colouring also make it popular for flooring. Outside Africa, mopane is gaining popularity as a heavy, decorative wood, its uses including aquarium ornaments and bases for lamps or sculptures. It is also increasingly being used in the construction of musical instruments, particularly woodwind. Suitable quality African blackwood (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*), traditionally used for clarinets, is becoming harder to find. Mopane is fairly oily, seasons very well with few splits, and produces instruments of a warm, rich tone.

Apart from timber, the tree is traditionally used to provide twigs to chew as toothbrushes, bark to make twine and for tanning, and leaves for healing wounds.

The tree is a major food source for the mopane worm, the caterpillar of the moth *Imbrasia belina*. The caterpillars are rich in protein and are eaten by people, and the sale of roasted or dried mopane worms can contribute significantly to rural economies. The tree also acts as a food plant for a wild silk moth, *Gonometa rufobrunnea*. Cocoons of the moth are harvested as wild silk, to make cloth.



Butterflies on Baboon pooh!!!!

Notable Reptiles – some are local names

Bushveld Agama *Agama* – Brandberg.

Etosha Agama *Agama etoshae* - Etosha.

Wedge Snouted Desert Lizard *Meroles cuneirostris* - Namib Naukluft, Sossusvlei.

Bibron's Barking (or Turner's Thick-toed) Gecko *Chondrodactyls bibronii* (or *turneri*) – Namib Naukluft behind the lights. These have always been said to be Bibron's but the fact that they are almost indistinguishable from Turner's means that we can't be 100% sure.

Variegated Skink – *Maboya varigatta*

Striped Skink – *Maboya striati wahlbergii*

Marsh / Helmeted Terrapin *Pelomedusa subrufa* – Etosha waterholes.

About 200 different kinds of Tenebrionid beetles, also known as Tok Tokkies, occur throughout Namibia. One of them *Onymacris unguicularis*, is often referred to as the head standing or fog basking beetle. On foggy mornings this beetle can be found standing on its head with its back facing the wind driven fog, allowing the water to condense on its back and run down the front legs to its mouth. They can drink up to 40% of their body mass, which is the equivalent of a human drinking 25 litres of water. In reality, Tenebrionid beetles can be seen as mobile water bottles for predators.

Additional Photos



Secretarybird



Red-backed Shrike



South African Shelduck



Grey-backed Bleating Warbler



Yellow White-eye, 1st for Etosha



Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills



Groundscraper Thrush



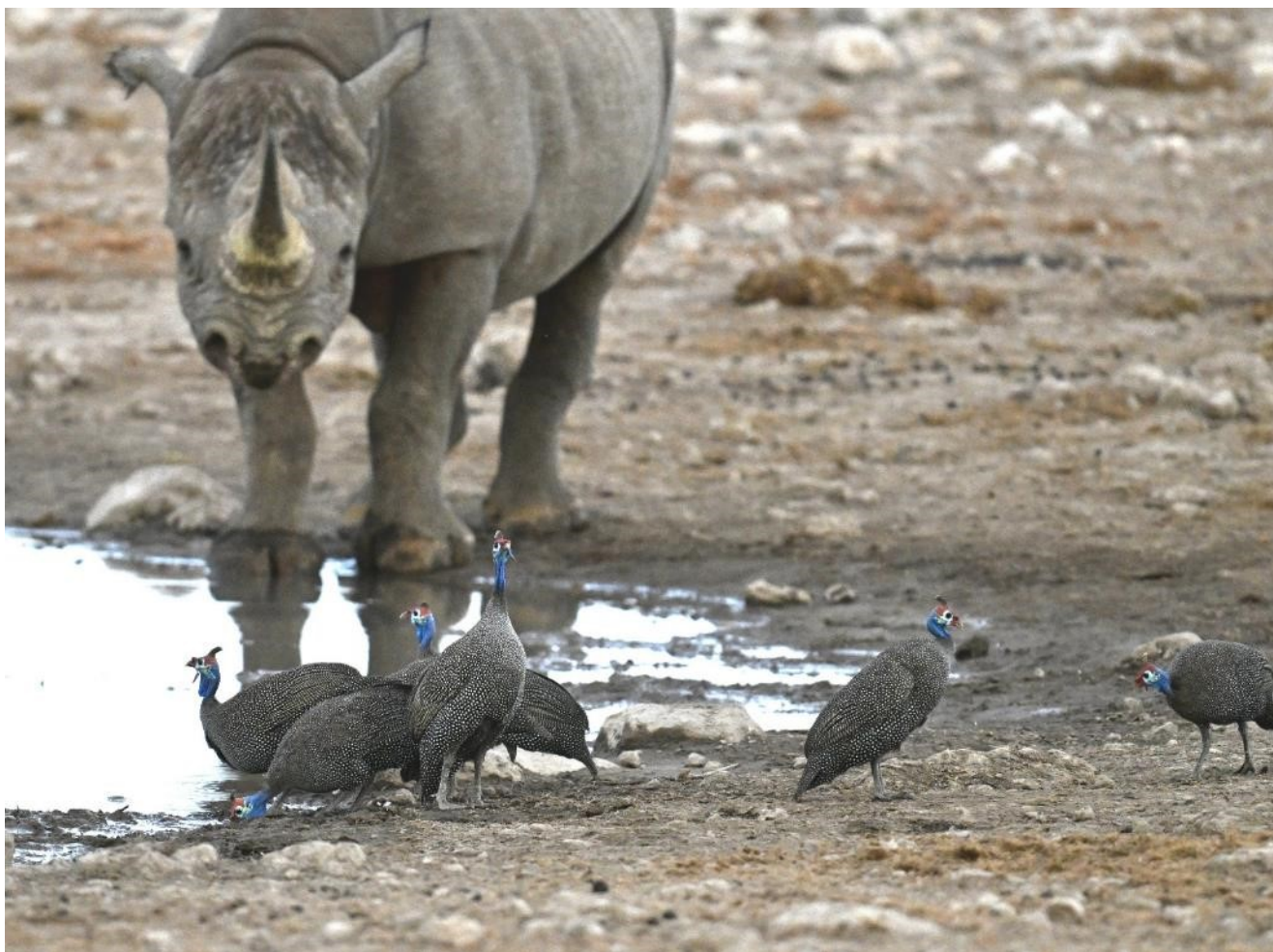
Red-faced Mousebird



Male Lion at Gemsbokvlakte



Cheetah cubs near the Etosha Pan



Black Rhino at Klein Namutoni



Namaqua Sandgrouse, Andoni.



Wilson's Storm-petrels, Walvis Bay



Cape Fur-seals



Speckled (Rock) Pigeon, Walvis Bay



Purple Roller



Gemsbok, Okondeka



Hyena near Halali



Kori Bustard, Black Rhino and Elephants in the evening at Okaukuejo





The biggest bull Elephant!!!! , Namutoni camp waterhole.

Thanks to all that sent some photos for this report. Copyright is with the photographers.

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