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Namibia and Okavango Delta January 2019 Trip Report:

We just finished a very successful customised Namibia and Okavango Birding trip where the main focus was on finding the near endemic birds and key mammals.

We started in Namibia's Eastern Caprivi where we had a fantastic two days of birding along the Zambezi River. From here we spent two nights on the Okavango River and Botswana's northern Okavango Delta before heading to Etosha, Namibia's flagship wildlife reserve. Next up was Damaraland and the Skeleton Coast, home to most of Namibia's near endemics; always a highlight.

We ended up with more than 375 species of birds with 7 species of owl and 32 raptor species. We ended up with over 40 mammals with two Cheetah sightings on one day in Etosha being one of the highlights. Catching up with the famous desert adapted Elephants of north-western Namibia was also special.

Few trips in Africa can rival the diversity of birding, mammals and landscapes that you see on this itinerary.

Day 1: Zambezi River

The trip got off to a great start with our clients seeing both African Elephant and African Buffalo while being transferred from Kasane Airport, Botswana to Katima Mulilo, Namibia where our birding and wildlife trip started.

After freshening up we immediately started birding with a short walk around the lodge area. Two roosting African Wood Owls gave us brilliant views while there were many African Paradise Flycatchers around. Other interesting birds seen on the walk include Common Scimitarbill, Lesser Honeyguide, Black-collared Barbet, Little Bee-eater, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Grey-rumped Swallow, Common House Martin, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, White-browed Coucal, Red-billed Firefinch, White-browed Robin-Chat and Red-faced Mousebird.



White-browed Robin-Chat

Our late afternoon sunset boat cruise on the Zambezi River did not disappoint and we saw four African Finfoot, White-backed Night Heron, Half-collared Kingfisher, Osprey, Rufous-bellied Heron, Wahlberg's Eagle, Southern Brown-throated and Village Weaver, Southern Red Bishop, Pin-tailed Whydah, Striated Heron, Black Crake, Tropical Boubou, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, White-crowned Lapwing, White-fronted Plover, White-faced Whistling Duck, Spur-winged Goose, Crocodile and Hippopotamus.



Black Crake

What a way to start a trip! We enjoyed a nice meal while we got to know one another and discuss the plans for the rest of the trip.

Day 2: Seasonal Pans, Broad-leafed Woodland and Mopane

Our morning coffee was interrupted with Schalow's Turaco calling in the lodge gardens and we ended up with great views.

We decided to explore some nearby woodland and seasonal pans before breakfast and ended up with an incredible morning. Our first stop produced Luapula and Zitting Cisticola, Fan-tailed Widowbird, African Crake, Rufous-bellied Heron and a very confiding African Barred Owlet. Our first pan had at least 8 African Pygmy Goose and 4 Lesser Moorhen.



Seasonal Pan

A patch of surrounding woodland produced Grey-headed Kingfisher, Black Cuckooshrike, Red-backed Shrike, Long-billed Crombec, Willow Warbler, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Black-backed Puffback, African Golden Oriole, Cardinal Woodpecker, Diederick Cuckoo and Black-crowned Tchagra.

We continued to a next pan where we found one of our main targets, a Lesser Jacana, as well as White-backed Duck, Purple Heron, Lesser Moorhen, Malachite and Woodland Kingfisher and Neddicky nearby. On the way back to lodge for breakfast we found two Cuckoo-finch which is very uncommon in this part of Namibia.



Black-crowned Tchagra

After a very enjoyable breakfast we spend the rest of the morning visiting several spots around Katima Mulilo. The first spot in town produced Copper Sunbird, Village Indigobird, White-bellied Sunbird and Red-breasted Swallow. After a nice Broad-billed Roller we had incredible close-up views of Racket-tailed Rollers – the closest I have ever come and by far the most confiding – what an incredible experience. The next seasonal pan was home to Hottentot and Red-billed Teal, Thick-billed Weaver, Common Moorhen, Village Weaver and Retz's Helmetshrike, Burchell's Starling and Red-headed Weaver was found nearby. And then a beautiful Ayres's Hawk-Eagle ended off a fantastic morning.



Retz's Helmetshrike

We were birding in the Mopane Woodland this afternoon which can be a bit of a hit or miss affair but again we had a fantastic few hours. It started off with a great sighting of a family of Arnot's Chat

followed by Bennett's Woodpecker, Red-headed Weaver, African Golden Oriole, Bearded Woodpecker, African Cuckoo-Hawk, Steppe Eagle, Meyer's Parrot, White-crested Helmetshrike, Scarlet-chested, Amethyst and White-bellied Sunbird, and Yellow-throated Petronia. A small pan produced Little Grebe, White-faced Whistling Duck and Lesser Moorhen and once back at the lodge we managed to get really nice views of Schalow's Turaco and Terrestrial Brownbul. What an unbelievable day.

Day 3: Kwando River and Okavango Delta

Since we had such an unbelievable day the previous day and with no missing birds we decided to depart early and explore the beautiful Kwando River in the Bwabwata National Park. The highlights of the morning were a confiding Slaty Egret and a great sighting of a Western Banded Snake Eagle. The Teak Woodland produced a few nice mixed flocks with Black-backed Puffback, Chinspot Batis, White-crested Helmetshrike, Violet-backed Starling, African, Diederick, Black, Red-chested and Klaas's Cuckoo, Fork-tailed Drongo, Cardinal and Golden-tailed Woodpecker, African Golden Oriole, Southern Black Tit, Kurrichane Thrush, Green Woodhoopoe and Southern Black Flycatcher.



Red-chested Cuckoo

We had great views of Broad-billed Roller, White-headed Vulture, Bateleur, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Wattled Lapwing, Red-billed Teal, Brown Snake Eagle, Dark-chanting Goshawk, Tawny Eagle, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, Crested Francolin, Levillant's Cuckoo, Rufous-naped Lark, Hadeda Ibis and Knob-billed Duck as we explored the floodplain, Mixed Bushveld, Acacia Woodland and seasonal pans of this stunning park.

Although not the best time for mammals we saw Southern Reedbuck, Red Lechwe, Hippo, Impala, Kudu, Tsessebe, Banded Mongoose, Warthog and Chacma Baboon.

From here we made our way to the Okavango River and crossed over into Botswana for our one night in the upper Okavango Delta.



Red Lechwe

We arrived at our lodge early enough for short walk in the gardens which produced Spotted Flycatcher, Hartlaub's Babbler, Orange-breasted Bushshrike, Swamp Boubou, Woodland Kingfisher, Broad-billed Roller, African Paradise Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Red-faced Mousebird, Holub's Golden Weaver, Common House Martin, Brown-backed Honeybird and Thick-billed Weaver. Water Thick-knees kept calling as we enjoyed a wonderful night's rest.

Day 4: Okavango Delta and Mahango Game Reserve

After an early cup of coffee, we did a quick walk around the lodge where Narina Trogon was our main target and we had beautiful views of a male facing us showing off his bright red chest. Other nice birds we found were Black Cuckoo, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Diederick Cuckoo, Hartlaub's Babbler, Brown Firefinch, Holub's Golden Weaver, Swamp Boubou, Meves's Starling, Black Cuckooshrike, Little Sparrowhawk and Terrestrial Brownbul.



Narina Trogon

After breakfast we did a 3-hour boat cruise with the rising water just covering the floodplains. We had a spectacular few hours with the highlights 3 Wattled Crane, a very close Slaty Egret, African Snipe, hundreds of Long-toed Lapwing, a juvenile Martial Eagle on the ground, Western Banded Snake Eagle and a stunning Pel's Fishing Owl. Other birds include White-backed Night Heron, Collared Pratincole, Brown-throated and Banded Martin, Goliath Heron, Ruff, Hamerkop, White-winged Tern, Black-winged Stilt, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Glossy, Hadeda and African Sacred Ibis and Red-billed Teal. As we got to our next lodge we watched a Giant Kingfisher kill, smash and eat a crab while we were also having lunch.



Hamerkop

After a short break we did an afternoon drive in Mahango Game Reserve where our main target was finding Sable Antelope – a species that have always eluded our clients and after patiently waiting at

the waterhole for more than an hour a beautiful male appeared. At least we had top class entertainment while we waited as 3 bull Elephants were keeping Roan, Warthog and Greater Kudu away from the water while they enjoyed their drink.

Although birding was not the main focus this afternoon we did see Tawny Eagle, Marico Flycatcher, Black and African Cuckoo, Rattling Cisticola, Black and Grey Heron, Long-toed Lapwing, Red-billed Oxpecker, Capped Wheatear, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Shaft-tailed Whydah, Common Ostrich, Crested Francolin, Red-backed Shrike and from a mammal point of view more Elephant, Buffalo, Chacma Baboon, Red Lechwe, Burchell's Zebra, Tsessebe, Giraffe, Impala and Vervet Monkey.

Day 5: Off to Etosha

Today was essentially a travel day as we made our way from the Okavango River to Etosha National Park, Namibia's flagship park and one of the best wildlife areas in Africa. We did a very short pre-breakfast walk around the lodge gardens and managed to find Levillant's Cuckoo, Brown Firefinch, Holub's Golden Weaver, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Terrestrial Brownbul, Village Indigobird, Blue Waxbill, Violet-backed Starling and the ever-present Grey Go-away-birds. We also enjoyed watching both Lesser and Southern Masked Weavers busy building their nests.



Blue Waxbill

We did do a few roadside stops along the way and had a fantastic sighting of an Ayres's Hawk-Eagle. What a privilege seeing this special bird twice on one trip. We also had Southern Black Tit, Southern Yellow White-eye, Southern Black Flycatcher, Chinspot Batis, Golden-breasted Bunting, Spotted Flycatcher, Yellow-fronted Canary, Kurrichane Thrush, Violet-eared Waxbill, Black-chested Prinia, Willow Warbler and African Golden Oriole.

After lunch we didn't have many stops but still managed to see Black-chested and Brown Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Purple Roller, Red-backed Shrike and Red-headed Weaver.

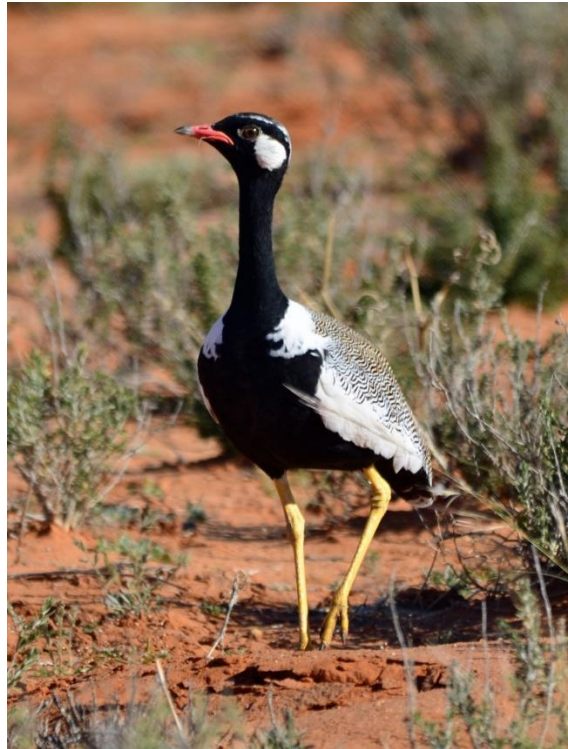


Bateleur

We arrived at our lodge by late afternoon and still had time for a short walk around the gardens which produced Crimson-breasted Shrike, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Blue Waxbill, African Palm Swift, Black-backed Puffback, Banded Mongoose and the highlight a pair of Pearl-spotted Owlets. We enjoyed a very nice dinner under the stars.

Day 6: Eastern Etosha

Our first morning in Etosha got off to a great start with our first loop producing Greater Kestrel, Scaly-feathered Weaver, Chat and Marico Flycatcher, Violet-eared Waxbill, Northern Black Korhaan, Kori Bustard, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Red-necked Falcon, Desert Cisticola, Banded Martin, Kalahari Scrub Robin, Shikra, Red-crested Korhaan, Ant-eating Chat, European and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Secretarybird, Barred Wren-Warbler, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Sabota Lark and Capped Wheatear.



Northern Black Korhaan

We had a great sighting of a mother Cheetah and 3 cubs followed by a small pride of Lions not even 10 minutes later. With the good recent rain Fisher's Pan was full of water and had a great selection of water birds that included both Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Cape Shoveler, Red-billed and Cape Teal, Lesser Moorhen, Little Grebe, Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, and Marsh Sandpiper.

A drive to the Andoni Spring just north of the park produced Fawn-collared Lark and Brown Snake Eagle while the spring itself had Saddle-billed Stork, Little Stint, Grey-headed Gull and at least 60 Caspian Plovers. The short afternoon drive was also very productive with two surprise raptors in Dark Chanting Goshawk and Lesser Spotted Eagle as well as a Blue Crane. Etosha and northern Namibia is home to an isolated population of Blue Crane with the main population found in the Overberg region of South Africa.



Cheetah

We found our second Cheetah of the day with a female that just killed a baby Springbok. This time of the year there are baby Impala, Springbok, Blue Wildebeest, Zebra and Oryx everywhere. We also had a Spotted Hyena on the way back. With so many baby animals around there are plenty to eat for the predators. By having most of the lambs, calves and foals born at the same time there are too many young animals for the predators to eat insuring survival for a high percentage of the population.

Day 7: Central Etosha

We had a full day to get to Okaukuejo in the central part of the park and our drive started very well with a flock of Chestnut Weavers. As is always the case in Etosha the birds are very active after some rain the previous evening and this was again the case with Lesser Masked Weaver, Green-winged Pytilia, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Kori Bustard, African Hoopoe, Crimson-breasted, Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrike, Wattled Starling, Black Crake, Common Moorhen, Lanner Falcon, Rock Kestrel, Tawny Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Red-footed Falcon, Yellow Canary, Bateleur, Common Swift and Common Scimitarbill all seen during the morning drive.



Crimson-breasted Shrike

We had a great sighting of a male White Rhino and other interesting mammals were Scrub Hare, Red Hartebeest, Giraffe, Steenbok, Common Duiker, Banded Mongoose and Ground Squirrel. On the Halali Plains we found Double-banded Courser, Red-capped, Sabota and Rufous-naped Lark, Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark, Desert Cisticola, Northern Black Korhaan, Cape Crow, White-backed and Lappet-faced Vulture, Blue Crane and Kori Bustard.

We stopped for lunch in Halali where we found African Scops Owl, Red-headed Weaver, Little Sparrowhawk, Groundscraper Thrush, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Southern White-crowned Shrike and Red-billed Hornbill.

We arrived in Okaukuejo in time to still have a walk around the camp and found Rock Martin, Chestnut-vented Warbler, Sociable Weaver, Black-headed Heron, Acacia Pied Barbet, Bearded Woodpecker, Southern Masked Weaver, Dusky Sunbird, Lilac-breasted Roller, Namaqua Dove, Shaft-

tailed Whydah, Red-billed Quelea, Spotted Flycatcher, African Cuckoo, African Red-eyed Bulbul, Long-tailed Paradise Whydah and Black-chested Prinia.



Okaukuejo Waterhole

A Barn Owl was displaying around camp during dinner and then it was time for a night drive where we again saw Barn Owl and Rufous-cheeked Nightjar and on the mammal side Black Rhino, African Wild Cat and Bat-eared Fox.

Day 8: Far Western Etosha and Kamanjab

We had a long but exciting drive to the far western corner of Etosha and our morning got off to a great start with Lappet-faced Vulture, Spike-heeled Lark, Ant-eating Chat, Eastern Clapper Lark, Pygmy Falcon, Namaqua Sandgrouse, Black-winged Kite, Burchell's Courser, Burchell's Starling, Bateleur and a nice close-up Yellow Mongoose before we re-joined the main road leading to the Galton Gate.



Namaqua Sandgrouse

From here we stopped at several waterholes along the way and since this part of Etosha has not received any rain the waterholes were really productive. We had a pride of Lions feeding on a dead Elephant, another mating pair of Lions, Black Rhino, a breeding herd of Elephant, Eland and Hartmann's Mountain Zebra. This is the only park in Africa where you can see Burchell's and Hartmann's Mountain Zebra side by side and the only park where you can see Impala (in this case Black-faced) and Springbok together, Nxai in Botswana being the other. We continued to add good birds like Lark-like Bunting, Spotted Thick-knee, Lanner Falcon, Secretarybird, Black-throated Canary, Cape Crow and Chestnut Weaver.



Black-faced Impala

We spend the rest of the afternoon at Toko Lodge where we saw Alpine, Common and Bradfield's Swift, Monteiro's Hornbill, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and Green-winged Pytilia.

We did a night drive after dinner and quickly added Barn Owl, Spotted Eagle-Owl and Rufous-cheeked Nightjar and from a mammal point of view we saw African Wild Cat, Aardwolf, Black-backed Jackal, Black-tailed Tree Rat, Springhare and Scrub Hare.

Day 9: Damaraland

Today was again a travelling day as we made our way to Damaraland, one my personal favourite places in the world. Our main focus was the drought resistant birding endemics, mammals and plants that have adapted to survive in this inhospitable environment. We did see Spotted Flycatcher, Familiar Chat, Marico Sunbird and Purple Roller during breakfast and on our way south we saw Chat Flycatcher, Kalahari Scrub Robin, Black-chested Prinia, Rufous-naped Lark, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Violet-backed Starling, Short-toed Rock Thrush, Common Buzzard, Damara Red-billed Hornbill, Klaas's Cuckoo, Dusky Sunbird, White-backed Mousebird, Southern Fiscal and Black-chested Snake Eagle along the way. We also had a great sighting of a Ruppell's Parrot as we crossed the Ugab River.



Pale Chanting Goshawk

Our lodge was situated at the base of the Brandberg Mountain, Namibia's highest mountain, and close to the Ugab River this was the perfect base from which to search some of Namibia's near endemics.

After relaxing at the lodge, we did a short afternoon drive where we found Violet Woodhoopoe, Damara Red-billed Hornbill, Cape Sparrow, Cape and Pale-winged Starling, Rock Martin and Dusky Sunbird around the lodge and riverbed.



Brandberg, Damaraland

We then drove through the vast plains where we found Karoo Chat, Mountain Wheatear, Benguela Long-billed Lark, Ruppell's Korhaan and Burchell's Courser. Congo Rope Squirrel and Meerkat were both new mammals. Barn Owl was calling around our rooms as we enjoyed a great night's rest.

Day 10: Ugab River and Erongo Mountains

We did a very quick walk/drive around camp before breakfast and had to work a bit but had good views of Carp's Tit, Brubru, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill and Common Scimitarbill. After breakfast we did a slow drive in the dry Ugab riverbed and had great views of Bare-cheeked Babbler, Violet Woodhoopoe, Carp's Tit, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Ruppell's Parrot, Damara Red-billed Hornbill, Pale-winged Starling, Red-billed Spurfowl, Long-tailed Paradise Whydah, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Rock Martin, Dusky Sunbird, Southern White-crowned Shrike and Spotted Flycatcher.



Bare-cheeked Babbler

Having seen all the specials for the area we tried to track the famous desert adapted Elephants and found a nice breeding herd followed by a Bull all relaxed and feeding away peacefully. Then even as it was getting pretty warm we had a spectacular sighting of Herero Chat at a personal stakeout. This is arguably the toughest Namibian near-endemic to track down. After a quick lunch in Uis we made our way to the Erongo Mountains.



Desert adapted African Elephants

As always there were plenty of Rosy-faced Lovebirds and Rock Hyrax around and while relaxing during the heat of the day we saw White-backed Mousebird, Green-winged Pytilia, Familiar Chat and Dassie Rat. We did a late afternoon walk and got both our targets – Rockrunner and Hartlaub's Spurfowl. While enjoying dinner under the stars we had great close-up views of Freckled Nightjar and Barn Owl.

Day 11: Erongo and Walvis Bay

We did a quick pre-breakfast walk where we again found Rockrunner and Hartlaub's Spurfowl. Besides these two tricky endemics we also enjoyed great views of Pririt Batis, White-tailed Shrike, Carp's Tit, Black-chested Prinia, Red-billed Spurfowl, Black-faced Waxbill, Acacia Pied Barbet, Long-billed Crombec, White-browed Scrub Robin, African Grey Hornbill, Purple Roller, Marico Flycatcher and Pale-winged Starling. While enjoying breakfast we had Chestnut Weaver, Southern Masked Weaver, Green-winged Pytilia, Black-throated Canary and Speckled Pigeon.



Hartlaub's Spurfowl

Once we reached the Skeleton Coast, we did a quick stop at the Mile 4 Salt works where we saw our first Great White Pelican, White-fronted Plover, White-breasted Cormorant, Kelp and Hartlaub's Gull, Common, Greater Crested and Damara Tern, Grey Plover, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, African Oystercatcher and Little Egret. We would see most of these again that afternoon at the Walvis Bay Lagoon.



Great White Pelican

After lunch in Swakopmund we spent the afternoon birding around the Walvis Bay Lagoon where we found Caspian Tern, Chestnut-banded Plover, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Black-necked Grebe, Sandwich Tern, Common Ringed Plover and a Three-banded Plover.

Day 12: Back to Windhoek

Since Dune Lark, Namibia's only true endemic, was previously seen by our clients near Sossusvlei on a previous visit, we could have a relaxing breakfast after which we made our way back to Windhoek.

We had time for a quick stop at the water treatment works on the city outskirts where we found quite a few South African Shelduck, African Jacana, Common Moorhen, African Reed Warbler, Southern Red Bishop, Red-knobbed Coot, African Darter, Great White Pelican and a Squacco Heron.



Common Moorhen

From here it was a short drive to the airport where our trip came to an end.

It was a very enjoyable and highly successful trip.