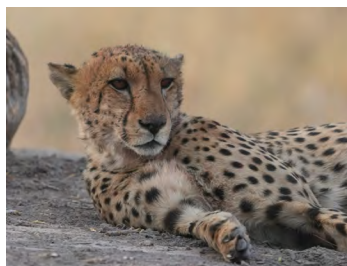
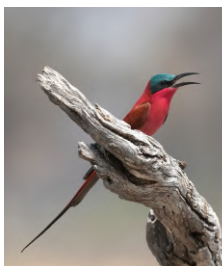
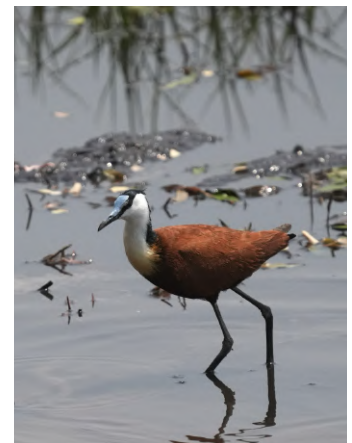


# Delta to Dunes: A Botswana-Namibia Safari Sept. 27 – Oct. 15, 2024 | by Bryan Shirley



**Guide Bryan Shirley, local guides “Mr. G.”, Wago, Kern, & Ike in Botswana and Dayne in Namibia, and participants Darren, Kristen, Glen, Ilayna, Carol, Jason, Coleen, Robert, & Christa**



What a wonderful trip! We spent the first 8 days in Botswana where we visited the luxurious Kwara Camp and Lagoon Camp. The remainder of our trip was spent exploring Etosha National Park, the Namib Desert, and a few other sites in Namibia. We ended the trip with 194 bird species in Botswana and 212 in Namibia for a total of 324, a large part of which are endemic to Southern Africa. Add to those 48 species of mammals and a bunch of reptiles and it makes for an unforgettable trip.



## **Thurs., Sept. 26                      Pre-tour Day in Maun**

Most of the group arrived into Maun a night early giving us time to do a little pre-tour birding around Maun. We all stayed at Cresta Riley's Hotel where the hotel gardens have a lot of the common species to the area and the Thamalakane River is just behind the hotel. So, it is a great place to rest up from our travels and start birding in Botswana! African Gray Hornbills in the garden were a highlight. The male was collecting food and then passing it off to the female waiting in the tree above. A Lilac-breasted Roller was a favorite of the day as well. The river was a lot drier than last year at this time and most of the vegetation along the river had been grazed away by the domestic livestock, but a few waterbirds were still around like Blacksmith Lapwings and a large flock of African Sacred Ibis fly by. We all enjoyed visiting and getting to know each other over dinner and drinks before retiring for some much-needed sleep.

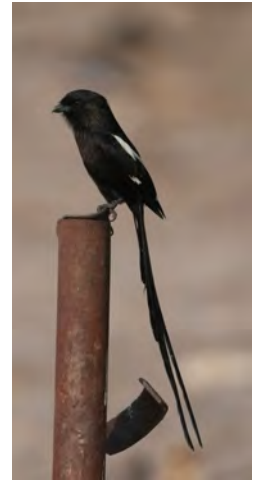
## **Fri., Sept. 27                      Pre-tour Birding | Kwara Camp | First Safari Drive!**

Sunrise had us all out birding around the lodge. We had a few hours to bird before our flight so we decided to take a walk down to the river. There weren't a lot of birds this year due to the lower water and lack of vegetation, but we were very excited to see a Lesser Jacana fly in and land on a small island for a few minutes before it carried on, perhaps looking for some more suitable habitat.

After birding we had a nice breakfast, got packed up, headed over to the airport and got checked in. A few people wandered around the few shops in front of the airport and ended up at the Dusty Donkey for a cold drink before our flight. Glen, Layna, and Carol arrived on the flight from Joburg (Johannesburg) and met the rest of the group and thus began the official start of our tour.

We boarded a Cessna Grand Caravan for our 20-minute flight to Kwara Camp. For most of the flight, the area was extremely dry with not a lot to see, but as we approached camp, we starting seeing patches of water and lots of animals – especially elephants! Our guides, Mr. G and Wago, were there to meet us along with our two trackers. We loaded the bags and made the short drive to our camp where a delicious lunch was waiting for us. As we ate, we enjoyed seeing some of our first African wildlife. Red Lechwe lounged around the edges of the lagoon and every once in a while, a Hippo would stick his head out of the water. Once we got settled in our rooms, we headed out for our first safari drive. The amount of wildlife was unbelievable. Large herds of Wildebeests, Zebras, and Impalas seemed to be everywhere. Several herds of elephants worked their way across the open areas nearby, and giraffes could be seen here and there stretching out their long necks for the green leaves high in the Acacia trees. Birds were good too. A pair of Wattled Cranes walked among the Impalas and our first Lilac-breasted Roller had us all oohing and aahing at the beautiful colors. After watching the sunset





while enjoying our “sundowner” drinks and snacks, we took a night drive back to camp. We saw the first of many Spotted Hyena slinking along the road.

### **Sat., Sept. 28                      Leopard | Boat to Heron Rookery**

We all had an interesting night last night trying to guess what was roaring and making noise outside of the tents! Definitely hippos were making noise, but lots of guesses as to what else was. This morning, we started our safari drive and hadn’t gone far when our guides started talking on the radio. Another guide had let us know that they had found a leopard in a tree! We tried to keep moving since we had a bit of a drive to where the leopard was, but stopped when we saw something too good to pass up, which was often! We stopped to look at a few Spur-winged Geese as a pair of Knob-billed Ducks flew by - the only ones we saw on the trip. The adult female leopard was sleeping comfortably on a branch of a large sausage tree. We took photos and watched it until we were all content with our sighting, then slowly started birding our way back to the lodge. Due to our group size, we always used two Land Cruisers to make sure we all had plenty of room and nobody had to sit in the middle seats. That meant that sometimes we didn’t see all the same birds, but on the other hand it allowed us to split up and call the other vehicle over when we found something good. A pair of Ostrich with 13 chicks was one of those examples where we called the other vehicle, and we all got to enjoy the happy family feeding just in front of us. We did well with birds of prey today too and saw an endangered Martial Eagle, a Tawny Eagle, and an African Hawk-Eagle before returning to the camp for lunch.

In the afternoon today we drove for about 20 minutes to the river and took a boat ride to the heron rookery in the lagoon. As expected, it was wonderful. Nothing beats watching birds while floating along leisurely in a boat! Several times we had African Darters perched in branches over the river, but before we could get close, they would make a kamikaze dive into the water and disappear. Pied Kingfisher was common, but a tiny Malachite Kingfisher stole the show and ended up being the favorite bird of the trip for at least one of us. The rookery was an awesome sight – Yellow-billed & Marabou Storks were bill clapping and jockeying for position on the branches just a few feet from us. Great Egrets and African Sacred Ibis (another one of the trip favorites) were mixed in as well. A handful of Pink-backed Pelicans were a bit of a surprise – they weren’t seen on our tour last year. We had a hard time making ourselves leave, but we finally pulled ourselves away and cruised back to the waiting Land Cruisers for the short drive back to the lodge for dinner.

### **Sun., Sept. 29                      Jackal vs Squirrel | Hyenas at Carcass**

Another beautiful morning at Kwara Camp. Nothing could beat having breakfast around a campfire and watching an elephant walking around in front of the breakfast area as the day breaks over the lagoon. Today we drove out to the far north end of the area. It is a good area for lions and cheetahs. As always it was hard to keep moving



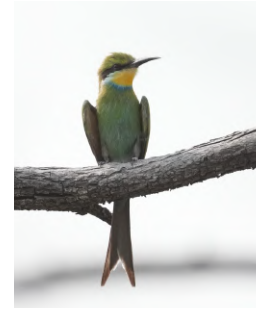
because of all the wildlife. Herds of Lechwe and Impala were everywhere. We found a Side-striped Jackal that had a squirrel trapped on a tree stump. The stump was just standing all alone with no other trees or cover for the squirrel, so it just kept going around and around with the Jackal nipping at it. We didn't know if the Jackal would ever be able to catch his meal, but after about 5 minutes it finally caught it and walked away with its prize. We had an interesting plover out on the plains – even Bryan was confused by it. After we got back that afternoon to check the bird books and compare with our pics, we realized it was a winter plumage Caspian Plover. On the way back to camp one of the trackers spotted a carcass under some trees. When we got over there, we were excited to see two Spotted Hyenas laying near the carcass. One of the hyenas took a few steps back into the brush, but the other one was either too full to move or just didn't care we were there – probably both. There were Leopard tracks around, so it appeared to have been a leopard kill that was taken by the hyenas.

In the afternoon we went back to check if the leopard was able to get his prey back from the hyenas. He was nearby waiting for a chance, but it was really thick and hard to see him well. On the night drive back to camp one of the vehicles saw a Honey Badger, the only one on our trip.

## **Mon., Sept. 30      Lions & Vultures! | Botswana Independence Dance**

We heard about lions with a kill near the Kwara Four Rivers Camp. It was a long drive but we decided to go for it. We stopped at the leopard kill along the way. He was up in the tree above the carcass, but was pretty jumpy and didn't stick around for us to watch for long. When we finally arrived in the area we were first greeted by large numbers of vultures. Mostly White-backed, but there were a few Lappet-faced and Hooded as well. There wasn't a lot left of the carcass when we found it – the lions had finished it up overnight. There were several females and their young offspring in the area though. Some were just laying around and some others started working their way toward a water source. We followed along and got to watch all the young lions drinking – it was quite a sight (and voted a trip highlight by at least 2 people). We were hoping for wild dogs today but they apparently had moved into the neighboring camp area across the river. On the drive back we got a few new birds. Interestingly, Gray-rumped Swallows were common around Four Rivers, but we hadn't seen one near Kwara Camp. Back at camp we learned that today was Botswana's Independence Day. They had made a cake for the occasion and at dinner all of the guides and staff sang and danced to celebrate the holiday.





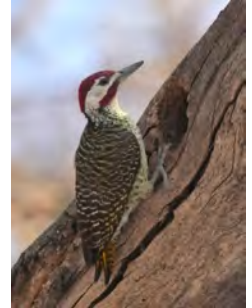
## **Tues., Oct. 1                      Mokoro Ride | Flight to Lagoon Camp**

Another beautiful morning at Kwara Camp. Since we had a flight today, we didn't do a drive but decided to take a ride in the lagoon in a Mokoro, a traditional canoe. We had a big group of Hippos eyeing us as our guides paddled us across the lagoon. It was impressive to see them at eye level from the Mokoros! Many of the evenings we had heard the Angolan Reed Frogs calling, so we were excited to finally see a few of them on the reeds as we floated by. An African Fish-Eagle was flying around the lagoon and a Goliath Heron, the largest heron in the world, was walking along the edge of the water. After our Mokoro rides we had time to enjoy a bit of birding in the trees around the lodge and enjoy a little down time before our 30-minute flight to Lagoon Camp. The flight covered a lot of very dry country and we saw no water until we reached the river at Lagoon Camp. The drought looked like it was taking its toll and the boat at Lagoon Camp obviously hasn't been moved for a very long time due to the low river level. Upon arrival we met our new guides, Ike and Kern, had our lunch, and then got settled into our rooms. The rooms at Lagoon Camp all have a deck overlooking the river, so we all enjoyed the steady stream of animals coming to the water.

On our afternoon drive, we followed the river and saw a lot of elephants, hippos, and antelope that kept us entertained. At one marshy area in the river, we spotted a lot of exciting new birds including African Skimmers & African Spoonbill. Another trip highlight today. Both vehicles were close together watching some elephants and other wildlife spread out over a wide plain. My vehicle had left and went a few minutes when the other vehicle called us to come back. They were watching a few warthogs when all of a sudden, a female lion jumped out of the grass and took after a small warthog! The lion wasn't very close at first, but quickly closed the gap and caught the warthog! When we got there, it was walking with its prize toward some thick brush. It stashed the warthog and walked off and soon returned with two cubs! After our sundowner drinks, we had a wonderful night drive. We saw a leopard, a group of lions, Spotted Hyenas following the lions, and the kangaroo-like Springhare. Everyday is amazing here, but this one was especially memorable!

## **Wed., Oct. 2                      Cheetahs & Elephants**

This morning our guides took us into the area where two cheetah siblings had been seen recently. When we arrived there our tracker found tracks. We followed them for a bit before they spotted the cheetahs under a tree a few hundred yards away. We called the other vehicle and headed over there. The cheetahs were so gorgeous! They were laying on a termite mound in the shade of a large tree – apparently full from something they got during the night and content to just relax in the shade. In my experience, cheetahs can be much more difficult to find than leopards in Botswana, so we felt fortunate to get to see them at all. Not to mention, we could watch them as long as we wanted at such a close distance. While we were watching them, a Greater Honeyguide flew into the tree the cheetahs were under so we were all able to get good views. After we finally left the cheetahs,

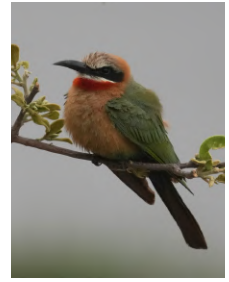


we stopped for snacks and had a Bennet's Woodpecker working a dead tree nearby and a small group of White Helmetshrikes come by as well. During our afternoon siesta time, there was a pretty amazing herd of elephants working their way along the river. There were over 100 elephants, and they were there the whole time during our siesta. It was so enjoyable to be able to watch them as long as we wanted from the shade of the deck with a cool drink! This afternoon we'd had a tip on some wild dogs out near where we had seen the cheetahs in the morning. We tried to get there but ran out of time and decided to give up the chase. Of course, a bit disappointed to miss the dogs, but we enjoyed having time to watch the more common species at length.

### **Thurs., Oct. 3                      Leopards | Evening birding in Maun**

Our last morning at Lagoon Camp and our last safari drive in Botswana ended up being one of the best. We headed north into some areas along the river that we hadn't seen yet. Not far from camp our tracker spotted some leopard tracks. It was pretty amazing to watch him lead the Land Cruiser through the scrub for 30+ minutes following the tracks. At one point the tracks went first to the river, then went a different direction. But we stayed on the trail and eventually found a female leopard with two cubs resting in a large tree! We called the other vehicle over and spent the next 30 minutes or so watching them climb up and down the tree and reposition themselves. At one point the female came down and took off away from the tree. Before long we noticed four Impalas feeding near her. She made a mad dash at them but the Impalas scattered and she didn't get very close. She retrieved her two cubs and they walked a few hundred yards out into the grass until they found a nice termite mound to sit and scan the area from. The cubs were being quite playful and kept wrestling with each other and occasionally they would both pounce on their mom who didn't seem as enthusiastic as they were. It was another one of the wonderful experiences we had here at Lagoon Camp.

By this point most of the birds were familiar to us, but who can ever tire of seeing birds like Carmine Bee-Eaters?! We added a few new trip birds including a gorgeous Golden-breasted Bunting and Wire-tailed Swallows. A bit further along, we found another small group of lions sleeping under the bushes. There were two males and several females and sub-adult males. We also had a gorgeous Sable sighting, but he didn't want to stick around. On the way back, a showdown with an elephant who didn't want to move off the road was fun. Eventually, he moved off but not before giving a loud trumpet-like blast from his trunk. Back at the lodge we had our lunch, then had a bit of time to repack before our 40-minute flight back to Maun. On arrival in Maun, our shuttle driver was waiting and we made the short drive to Cresta Maun Hotel. This evening, we did some relaxing birding around the hotel and enjoyed the air conditioning as we got ready to start the Namibia portion of the trip.



### **Fri., Oct. 4 Birding in Maun | Flight to Namibia | River Crossing Lodge**

Most of our group opted for a chance to sleep in, but a few of us met to bird around the hotel before breakfast. The river was not productive at all – not a lot of water and almost no vegetation due to the drought - but the woodlands around the hotel and near the river were very active with lots of birds. We saw 40 species in about an hour including both Lesser and Greater Honeyguides, Terrestrial Brownbul, and an eye-popping Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike. The breakfast buffet was wonderful, and we had a relaxing morning repacking and getting ready for our flight. We cut the arrival to the airport a bit tighter than ideal, but arrived in Windhoek Namibia without problems where we were met by our guide, Dayne, for the Namibia part of our tour.

We drove about 30 minutes to River Crossing Lodge. It was nice to see some mountains after the flat terrain in Botswana for the last week. After a bit of a break in the rooms to get organized we went for a walk to enjoy our first birds in Namibia. Several of us had Cape Bunting in front of our cabins and a Pririt Batis gave a nice show. We had 5 species of swifts soaring around the canyons including Bradfield's (endemic to southern Africa). The sunset and the night lights of Windhoek visible in the distance made the perfect backdrop for our first evening in Namibia!

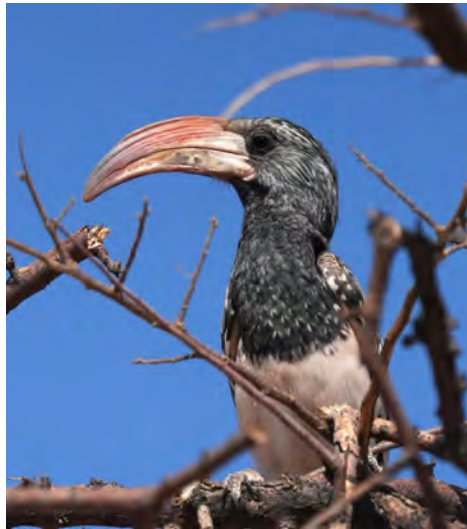
### **Sat., Oct. 5 Water Treatment Plant | Okonjima & Brown Hyena**

We were out early and birding around the lodge. It was a bit windy and quite cool. A flock of Rosy-faced Lovebirds perched in some dead branches next to the lodge. The cliffs and rocky areas in front of the cabins are good for Rockrunners and that was our main target this morning. It took a few minutes before one showed up, but it stayed low in the bushes and was a challenge to try to get everyone on it. While we were watching it, we noticed a pair of Rock Hyrax peeking out at us from the rocks. These unique herbivores were on the “want to see” list for several member of our group, so we were glad to get good views of them.

After breakfast we loaded up and drove into Windhoek and visited every birder's favorite place – the sewage treatment plant! Birding was great here and there were lots of birds to keep us entertained. There was a lot of waterfowl; mostly Egyptian Geese and South African Shelducks and a couple Blue-billed Teals and Red-billed Ducks as well. Besides the waterbirds, we got some other goodies like White-backed Mousebird and White-throated Swallow as well.

We arrived at Okonjima and had a late lunch while watching the birds and wildlife come to the waterhole next to the restaurant. After a quick break, we left to do an evening game drive on the huge preserve. We saw a lot of good birds and several new mammals like Gemsboks, Hartebeests, and the highlight was a Brown Hyena that





posed for photos near our vehicle. This rare hyena was high on the target list for several members of our group. After we watched it for a little while, the hyena got up and walked along the riverbed. We followed it for a few minutes before it walked into some thick brush and gave us the slip. It made for a happy group during our sundowner drinks!

## **Sun., Oct. 6                      Onguma Camp | Lions at Giraffe Carcass**

Breakfast at Okonjima was wonderful. Fresh berries, cream-smothered pancakes, omelets, and the latte machine were all great, but it was still hard to eat since there was so much activity at the waterhole in front of the table! Dozens of warthogs & Springboks were drinking and feeding around us and we had a pair of Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills eyeing us and our breakfast from the railing a few feet away. After breakfast, we birded a bit around the gardens. A bunch of bulbuls, starlings, and other small birds were causing a racket in a tree and upon further investigation we found a Pearl-Spotted Owlet being mobbed.

We had a few hours to drive to our next destination – Onguma Bush Camp at the eastern entrance to Etosha National Park. We arrived just in time for lunch and then a bit of down time to either bird the area around the cabins or relax in the air-conditioned rooms before our evening game drive. As soon as our drive started, our guide informed us that yesterday some lions had killed a giraffe, so we worked our way to that area. Two males were sleeping near the carcass and we parked nearby to watch. Before long, three females walked in and after nuzzling and greeting the males, they started feeding on the giraffe. It is amazing how they don't care about us at all; allowing us to witness the interactions at such close range! It was another one of those experiences that seem like they should be a once in a lifetime experience but end up being a daily occurrence on this tour!

## **Mon., Oct. 7                      Etosha National Park | Big Cats | Black Rhino**

Another great day in paradise! This morning, we started early and were one of the first vehicles in Etosha National Park when they opened at sunrise. We were going to cover the northeast end of the park this morning hoping for Blue Cranes, coursers, and lots of animals around the Andoni Plains. Not long after entering the park, we started seeing good numbers of Plains Zebras and the "Black-faced" Impalas – a separate subspecies from the impala we had seen previously. Not long after we passed Namutoni, an old German fort which is now the park headquarters, we noticed a few safari vehicles parked at a waterhole all pointing in one direction so we went to investigate. Leopard! A bit distant and moving through the brush, so not nearly as good as the several sightings we'd had in Botswana, but a leopard is always exciting. We continued on, stopping for birds as we went. A couple of lions were sleeping under a tree, but a bit tough to see so we didn't spend a lot of time there (plus we had such a great time with them last night). Namibia is home to a bunch of different lark species. They are all



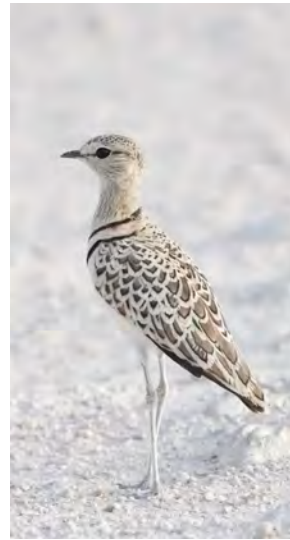


quite difficult to ID and luckily, we have one of the best birders in Namibia for our guide to help us! We had several species throughout the morning. Red-capped Lark was by far the most numerous, but we also had a Fawn-colored Lark, Eastern Clapper Lark, and a few Flappet Larks. Dayne picked out a Spotted Eagle-Owl roosting along the road and there was a Red-necked Falcon perched on the other side of the road, so we had cameras and binoculars pointing all directions! When we got to the waterhole at Andoni Plains, there was an amazing amount of wildlife coming and going all directions across the plains. Hundreds of wildebeest, zebras, Oryxes, Springboks, and other large mammals were covering the wide-open plains as they trekked toward the waterhole. Definitely another one of those National Geographic moments! Large flocks of Burchell's and Namaqua Sandgrouse were coming in to drink and there was a pretty good mix of shorebirds as well including Kittlitz's Plover. We hoped to find the small population of Blue Cranes that live in Etosha, but there was no sign of them. We did have great luck with coursers though and saw several Burchell's and one Double-banded Courser. As we were starting to make the drive back toward our lodge, Bryan spotted one of the main targets for at least one person in the group; a Secretarybird! We watched it for few minutes and then surprisingly it flew and circled around our vehicle a few times before it soared out across the plains.

After lunch and a good siesta, we went back into Etosha for a couple of hours in the evening. We drove the Fisher's Pan loop. Overall, it was pretty quiet, although we did have a pair of Double-banded Coursers pose for photos. After we finished the loop, we had a few minutes before we had to head out of the park, so we stopped at the waterhole. There was a Spotted Hyena rolling around in the water and a couple of Zebra watched cautiously. In the back of the vehicle somebody spotted a cat and it turned out to be a pair of cheetahs, our 3<sup>rd</sup> cat sighting of the day! We drove back and positioned ourselves where we could watch them. They were pretty concerned about the hyena walking by, but it kept its distance. When we left to start towards the park exit, we were surprised to see a Black Rhino feeding along the roadside. It was in some thick vegetation, and we only had a few minutes to get to the park gate, but it was wonderful to get our first sighting of this exciting animal.

## **Tues., Oct. 8                      Bare-cheeked Babblers | Okaukuejo Camp | Watering Hole Elephants & Rhinos**

This morning, we loaded up and started our drive across Etosha to our next lodge. We stopped at the gate for a few minutes and picked up our first White-browed Scrub-Robin of the trip. Our lunch stop was at Halali Camp – a large resort in the middle of the national park. It was nice to be able to get out of the vehicle and walk around a bit. Lots of birds were around the grassy areas near the pool and after a few minutes searching we located our target; a pair of Bare-cheeked Babblers - arguably the best-looking babbler of our trip and they were very cooperative for photos too. After lunch we continued on and arrived at our lodge at Okaukuejo Camp. It had been a long, hot day so some people opted to relax in their rooms, others sat watching the waterhole, and a few



went for a walk around the camp. We had seen several huge Sociable Weaver nests during the drive, but in the camp, we finally found some actually using the nest. Sociable Weavers build the largest nest structure of any birds. It is basically like an apartment building and can hold over 500 nests! We also had a few Willow Warblers (migrants from the Northern Hemisphere) here to enjoy the heat. The waterhole here is possibly the best place in the world to see Black Rhinoceros. I wish I had kept an accurate count of how many we saw total during our stay; maybe twenty? Besides the rhinos, we had many groups of elephants too. It was fun to be able to watch them playing in the water and the interactions with each other and with other species.

### **Wed., Oct. 9                      Secretarybird | Rufous-eared Warbler**

This morning, we did a loop to the northwest end of the Etosha Pan. The habitat was a lot flatter, drier, and less vegetation than what we had seen up until now. Across the plains, not far from camp, we found a big bull rhino feeding, but he was quite a way out from us. This habitat is perfect for Pink-billed Larks and we drove along slowly searching for them until we found a small group foraging along the roadside. A Capped Wheatear was also an exciting find for everyone. At a bathroom stop it was interesting to see the huge Sociable Weaver nests built into the roof over the picnic tables. We had another Secretarybird searching for prey as it strutted alongside us, but compared to the last few days it seemed a bit slow for wildlife. We were back at the camp for lunch, then we enjoyed a good siesta with plenty of time to check out the waterhole in camp or rest in the rooms.

In the afternoon, we did a drive around the eastern side of our camp. We saw elephants scattered here and there and a whole mess of wildebeests at a waterhole. Our target this afternoon was a Rufous-eared Warbler. They live in arid climates with lots of open areas and scattered bushes. We worked hard for it, but eventually got a fabulous look for all and it was one of the highlights of the day. Possibly the main highlight for many in the group was tonight at the waterhole – it lived up to its reputation! The sunset was out of this world. There were two rhinos, a herd of elephants, a few giraffes, zebras, and Springboks with the sunset just behind them. After the dinner party, the show at the waterhole continued with more of the same, plus a couple of Spotted Hyena and Black-backed Jackals showed up as well. There were three Rufous-cheeked Nightjars picking bugs out of the air over the water and near the lights too. It was one of those special nights and was the perfect ending to our time in Etosha before we headed out to some new areas for the remainder of the trip.

### **Thurs., Oct. 10                      Travel to Ondudu & Erongo Mtns**

This last morning at Okaukuejo, we weren't leaving early so it gave us time to enjoy the grounds and the waterhole one last time. A rhino was at the waterhole before breakfast – we never got tired of seeing those





guys. Today we were traveling south into the Erongo Mountains, but first, we stopped for drinks and pastries at what was, possibly, the best coffee shop in Namibia. At lunchtime, we arrived at Omaruru and had a nice meal in town before continuing on to our lodge, Ondudu Safari Lodge. While we were checking in, there were several Rock Agama Lizards on the natural rock wall that the office is built into. The habitat was different than anything we had seen so far – the Erongo Mountains are a reddish granite and make the perfect backdrop for the luxurious tents and lodge. It was very hot when we arrived so we took a long break. The pool was surprisingly cold and refreshing! Later in the evening we did a short walk to bird. We had brief looks at a Rockrunner, and Rosy-faced Lovebirds were common. Rock Kestrel was a bird we were hoping to get here, so we were excited to have one soaring above the canyon. During dinner we were excited to learn that they have a Common Genet that comes to eat at the restaurant every night and a Freckled Nightjar was calling and flying around during dinner as well.

## **Fri., Oct. 11 Erongo Mtns to Swakopmund & the Coast**

Some of the group opted to sleep in a bit this morning, while others opted for an early walk to search for Hartlaub's Spurfowl. Dayne had told us it was going to be tough – he has missed them on several trips lately. Not sure if it is related to the drought or just bad luck, but we missed them this morning too. It was still a great morning though. Watching the sun come up and shine on the cliffs surrounding us was worth getting up for. A bunch of baboons were silhouetted on one of the rock mountains and others were skillfully scaling what looked to be pretty sheer cliffs. The lodge puts out food for the birds in the morning and Monteiro's hornbill, Cape Bunting, and about 50 Rosy-faced Lovebirds cleaned it up pretty quickly. After we checked out, we drove a few minutes to a dry riverbed and walked looking for Ruppel's Parrot. We heard a couple on the far side of the river, but couldn't find them once we got there. When we finally gave up and walked back to the vehicle, we were happily surprised to have one perched right by the road! We made a couple of stops looking for a few key species as we drove, but the heat was pretty brutal which kept the birds hiding. We were excited to reach the cool coast! We arrived in Swakopmund in the early afternoon and decided to take the afternoon off to enjoy the beautiful city and soak in the cool temperatures as some tried to search out bargains at the nearby market. Indian food was a hit for dinner tonight.

## **Sat., Oct. 12 Dune Lark | Flamingos | Walvis Bay**

It was cool and a bit foggy this morning – the jacket weather felt great. Today we had all day to explore around Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. We started a bit inland at a spot for Dune Lark, Namibia's only true country endemic. There are many near endemics though – most species either make it into Angola to the north or South



Africa to the South. We found lark tracks immediately but it took us a bit of exploring the dunes before we found the resident pair. While we were watching and photographing the Dune Larks, Dayne was running around looking for snakes and before long he came back holding a Horned Adder in his hat!

Our next stop was along the coast. Damara Terns, endemic to the west coast of Africa, were searching for fish in the bay. Hartlaub's Gulls were the common gull, but there were a few Kelp Gulls as well. There were good numbers of Curlew Sandpipers and other shorebirds, but the stars of the show were thousands of Lesser and Greater Flamingos. Everywhere we went around Walvis Bay there were hundreds or thousands of them. After lunch we drove towards Swakopmund, birding along the way. We stopped at an area known for Gray's Larks and were surprised to see a Dideric Cuckoo there as well – no doubt wondering where he had made a wrong turn to end up in the middle of the Namib Desert. Dinner tonight was the Italian place next to our hotel and it was another hit.

### **Sun., Oct. 13                      Drive to Sossusvlei | Ruppel's Bustard**

Started the morning with a bit of birding at the mouth of the Swakopmund River. We were hoping for a Bank Cormorant, but Dayne had told us they are not doing well in the area in recent years and are pretty tough to find. We didn't find one, but enjoyed our last chilly morning watching flamingos and Hartlaub's Gulls before heading back into the desert. During our drive toward Sossusvlei, it was interesting to see the changes in the scenery. The maze of canyons we crossed was a surprise for the group as it looked nothing like the areas we had seen in so far. We made a couple of stops to try for birds, but today, probably due to the drought and the heat, the birds were few and far between. We did get lucky and see a Bokmakierie at one stop, adding a bit of excitement to the drive. We arrived in the unique crossroads known as Solitaire (population 4) for lunch. The food was good, but the cold drinks were better. There were quite a few birds taking advantage of the trees and water here and a Yellow Mongoose cruising around the area was fun to see as well.

We got to Dead Valley Lodge and after checking in headed straight to the rooms for a siesta and break from the afternoon heat. We met again in the evening and drove the road toward Sossusvlei. Not many birds can handle this harsh environment, but we got great looks at a pair of Ruppel's Bustard during our drive – another species that is endemic to Namibia and a tiny bit of Angola.





## **Mon., Oct. 14                      Deadvlei Dunes | Oryx Sandscapes**

We left the hotel early today to get a jump on the heat and beat the crowds. Since we are staying in the park, it allows us a bit earlier access to the dunes. We made the 45-minute drive to the end of the road and got to the Deadvlei parking area just as the sun was cresting the dunes to the east. It was a bit hazy today from the wind and surprisingly, a few clouds. We spent the morning exploring and photographing the dunes and the 1000-year-old trees at Deadvlei. Other than a few Cape Sparrows in the parking area, we didn't see any other birds, but the scenery was spectacular! A couple of Oryx walked across the big dune and made for some wonderful photos. By 9 AM it was getting hot quickly and there were hundreds of other people showing up – we were glad to have arrived early. We made one stop on the way back to our hotel for a photogenic Dune Lark, but mostly just enjoyed the scenic drive and the occasional Oryx walking across the desert.

After lunch and a long siesta, we decided to drive the entrance road and try to find a couple of birds that we hadn't connected with yet. The wind wasn't helpful, but we enjoyed seeing some more oryx, Ruppel's Bustard, and added one new bird to our trip list – the Southern Fiscal.

During our final dinner together, we had a good time reminiscing about what a wonderful trip we had. Some of the favorite birds of the trip included the Secretarybird, Hornbill, both Carmine and White-fronted Bee-Eaters, and flamingos. Cats were the big winners in the "non-bird" category. Lions, cheetahs, and leopards all got a mention. Elephants and the surprisingly cute warthogs made the list as well.

## **Tues., Oct. 15                      Last morning - Pygmy Falcon!**

We had a relaxing morning packing and enjoying our nice breakfast while we watched oryx and a few other birds coming to the waterhole. Of course, we were hoping for new birds until the end and found an eleventh-hour Pygmy Falcon near the parking area to cap off our wonderful trip. The airstrip was only about a 5-minute drive and our plane flew in and landed just as we arrived. We said our many thanks and goodbyes to Dayne, then flew to Windhoek where our group all went separate ways as we started the long journey home.

*Photos by Bryan Shirley: Group, Carmine Bee-eater, Cheetah, Lesser Flamingo, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Secretarybird, African Jacana, Crested Barbet, Holubs Golden Weaver, Green Woodhoopoe, Magpie Shrike, Red-billed Spurfowl, Ostrich family, Southern Ground-Hornbill, Yellow-billed Stork, Pink-backed Pelican, Hadada Ibis, Swallow-tailed Bee-Eater, White-breasted Sunbird, Cheetah, Bennet's Woodpecker, Southern African White-Eye, Leopard, Southern Masked Weaver, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Groundscraper Thrush, Montiero's Hornbill, Spotted Eagle-Owl, Double-banded Courser, White-quilled Bustard, Bare-cheeked Babbler. Secretarybird, Gray Go-Away Bird, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Lesser Flamingo, Chestnut-banded Plover, Dusky Sunbird, Cape Sparrow*