

Naturalist Journeys

Delta to Dunes 2025



Day 1 Fly to Maun from Windhoek. Check in at hotel and meet group at tea 16.00. Introduction and discuss times and movements for the next day. Thereafter a short walk around the lodge gardens and then along the river in front of the lodge. In the adjacent trees of the garden several Grey Herons were nesting with young chicks of various ages. A few Red-billed Buffalo Weavers were also nesting in nearby trees flying back and forth carrying large sticks almost impeding their flight! Further along the riverbank good views of these birds plus Northern Grey-headed Sparrows, Red-billed Queleas, Blacksmith's Lapwings, Common Greenshank, White-faced Whistling ducks, Red-billed Teals, African Jacana, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Squacco Heron, and several dove species were observed. A total of 43 species were recorded for the afternoon. Later that evening, we gathered for dinner and finalised the schedule for the next morning.

Text & Photos by Timothy Smith and Steve Braine

Day 2 We took a shuttle from the hotel to the airport and boarded two small planes bound for Kwando Lodge. Upon arrival, lodge staff greeted us and drove us through dry mopane woodland to the lodge. After settling into our rooms and enjoying a light brunch, we rested until tea at 16:00, after which we set off on our first game drive. The first game animals encountered were a nice herd of African Buffalo which supported both species of oxpeckers. We then came across African Elephants, Southern (Angolan) Giraffe, Common Wildebeest, Steenbok, Plains Zebra and an array of birds including a magnificent pair of Wattled Cranes! Before and after sundowners we visited a Spotted Hyaena den where we observed two females with cubs. As we made our way back to the lodge after enjoying sundowners beneath the setting sun, we encountered a large male leopard. He appeared to have been in a territorial fight—limping, with blood on his chest—but despite his shyness, we managed to get a good look at him under the spotlight. A short distance later, we spotted our first Side-striped Jackal. Upon arrival at the lodge we called in a Fiery-necked Nightjar which gave us a fly-by. After freshening up, we sat down to a delicious meal and later settled in for the night.



Day 3 After an early breakfast, we began our first morning excursion. Just minutes into the drive, our guide stopped beneath a pair of towering Jackalberry trees and pointed out a Pel's Fishing Owl! Moments later, a second owl joined it, and we watched them preen quietly together before continuing on our drive –an incredible way to start the day! As we continued our drive, the guide received a radio call from his colleague in another vehicle who had spotted a female cheetah and her large cub actively hunting. He asked if we'd like to see them, and we all eagerly agreed. We quickly made our way to the location and spent time observing the pair before heading back. Further along the route, we encountered African Elephants and a few Kudu cows, their oversized ears on full display. Other sightings included Common Impala, Red Lechwe, and a troop of Chacma Baboons. After reaching a large area of water, we saw more Wattled Cranes, African Darters, and several types of Egrets, including the rare Slaty Egret and the large Spur-winged Geese. Then, some African Elephants started coming out of the woodland—first around thirty or forty, and later a few hundred. They walked past both sides of our vehicle while we had tea and biscuits. After returning to the lodge for a light lunch, some guests relaxed on the deck while others headed back to their rooms—though a few had to wait, as a large Elephant was standing in the path to their lodge. At 16:00, we gathered again for afternoon tea before setting off on another game drive. The afternoon was rewarding, with sightings of Red Lechwe, Roan, and Sable Antelope as we paused for sundowners. On the way back, we spotted our first lioness actively hunting. The guides mentioned she had three cubs, and another female in the pride also had three. A bit further along, we had good views of a Giant (Verreaux's) Eagle Owl.



Day 4 Another early morning drive heading east took us to an area known as Paradise—and it truly lived up to its name. The first part of the drive passed through dry mopane woodland, where we saw a Wahlberg's Eagle perched at its nest. As we continued, we reached the edge of a large wetland and spotted our first African Fish Eagle along with many waterfowl. There were three pairs of Wattled Cranes and three species of Vultures including the rare White-headed. Other birds included a few Bateleurs, Long-toed Lapwings, plenty of Lilac-breasted Rollers (still a favorite!), Southern Pied Babblers, and the striking Crimson-breasted Shrike—now sometimes referred to as a Boubou. Other small passerines including Green-winged Pytilia, Red-billed Firefinch, Southern Black Tit, Grey-backed Camaroptera, White-browed Scrub Robin and under the nearby trees a flock of Helmeted Guineafowl. After another morning drive filled with sightings of various game species, we saw our first Black-backed Jackals and a few Nile Crocodiles. On the way back to the lodge, we came across our first male Kudu, easily recognized by their impressive, spiraled horns. There was plenty of good game viewing throughout the morning before returning to the lodge for lunch and a short rest. The afternoon drive delivered huge numbers of game including Roan, Sable, Tsessebe, Common Impala, Red Lechwe plus our first and only Hooded Vulture, other birds included Black-bellied Bustard, Lappet-faced and White-backed Vultures, various starlings and a group of the spectacular Carmine Bee-eaters! We then came across a group of Wild Dogs on the hunt. The guides did their best to follow, but we eventually lost sight of them in the tall grass. Still, they seemed to be heading in a certain direction, so we continued on and soon spotted six sub-adult lion cubs running—clearly reacting to the distress calls of an antelope that the dogs had caught. We followed the sounds and, after circling a large termitaria, found three Wild Dogs feeding on a partially eaten Red Lechwe. Two of them ran off and returned shortly with more members of the pack. Before long, the young lions picked up the scent and chased the dogs away from the kill—an incredible sight, all happening right next to the vehicle. We watched for quite a while before finally heading back in the dark. And to top off the day, we saw a Brown Hyaena, a rare species in the area. Not long after, we saw the bipedal Springhare bounding away from the vehicle. An amazing day all in all with many birds and incredible observations and sightings!



Day 5 Before our flight to Maun, we had one final outing in the area. A few guests chose to revisit the spot where the lions had been seen the night before. The area, which had been full of elephants the previous afternoon, was now quiet, though we did see more Carmine Bee-eaters, several Vultures, and a variety of game species already familiar from earlier drives. After a light meal back at the lodge, we made our way to the airstrip for the flight to Maun, once again traveling in two small aircraft. The low-level flight offered excellent views of the landscape below, with large numbers of elephants, buffalo, giraffe, and other mammals clearly visible as we passed overhead. From the airport we travelled to River Crossing Lodge, the group had some time to relax and take in the views over the surrounding hills. Later, we gathered for a casual briefing with Tim, who would be guiding the next leg of the journey in Namibia. The atmosphere was light and friendly, with everyone reflecting on the memorable experiences in the delta—from the close elephant encounters to the Wild Dog and lion interactions. It had been a special few days shared with great company, and now through the next leg of the journey in Namibia, we looked forward to what Namibia had in store with one of Namibia's top guides. It had been a special few days shared with great company, and now all looked forward to what Namibia had to offer.



Day 6 In the morning the group travelled to Daan Viljoen reserve, just outside of Windhoek. Plenty of general game was viewed including Springbok, Greater Kudu, Southern Giraffe and Common Blue Wildebeest. We ticked off many new birds for the list found in the thorn veld of central Namibia including Purple and Lilac-breasted Roller, Barred-wren Warbler, Shaft and Pin-tailed Whydah in non breeding plumage, Violet-eared, Common, Black-faced and Blue Waxbill. Intra African breeding migrants like White-throated Swallow and White-rumped Swift. Lesser and Southern Masked Weaver, Bradfield's, Little and Alpine Swift, Great White Pelican, Eurasian Moorhen and a lot of Egyptian Geese. In the afternoon we visited Avis Dam to target more central Namibian species like the near endemic Rockrunner and White-tailed Shrike. Other species seen were excellent views of White-backed Mousebird, Ashy Tit, Maccoa Duck, Chestnut-vented Warbler, Reed and White-breasted Cormorant, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Black-chested Prinia, Cape Wagtail and Red-eyed Bulbul.



Day 7 This day took us from the outskirts of Windhoek to Okonjima nature reserve. We added some raptors to our account that included Brown Snake Eagle, Pale-chanting Goshawk and multiple Black-winged Kite before arriving at the lodge. Once in the reserve an abundance of mammals presented themselves. Chacma Baboon, Common Impala, Oryx, Greater Kudu and our first reptile for the Namibian section of the trip - Common Ground Agama. In the afternoon we went on a bush walk where we picked up White-tailed Shrike, Acacia Pied Barbet, Burnt-necked and Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Long-billed Crombec, White-bellied, Scarlet-chested and Marico Sunbird as well as Marico Flycatcher. The dinner was delicious and as we enjoyed we heard and saw Freckled Nightjar hawking insects out of the spotlight-filled waterhole area.



Day 8 The next morning we rose up early and managed to find Hartluab's Spurfowl with chicks, White-tailed Shrike, Rockrunner, Carp's Tit and a Pirit Batis that was on a nest which gave us excellent views of the nest structure next to the path we walked. A fly over by a Eurasian Hobby capped off an excellent hour bird before breakfast. After coming back for a very hearty breakfast we drove to the eastern side of Etosha and on arrival at Onguma Bush Camp we had a group of Southern Pied Babbler, Southern Red-billed Hornbill and Meyer's Parrot show themselves at check in. We joined a sunset drive conducted by one of the private reserves guides and we viewed a pride of ten Lion, lots of general game, White Rhinoceros and a few Elephant bulls before a Gin & Tonic stop prevailed. As the sun set - the full moon rose. A great start to our Etosha section of the trip.



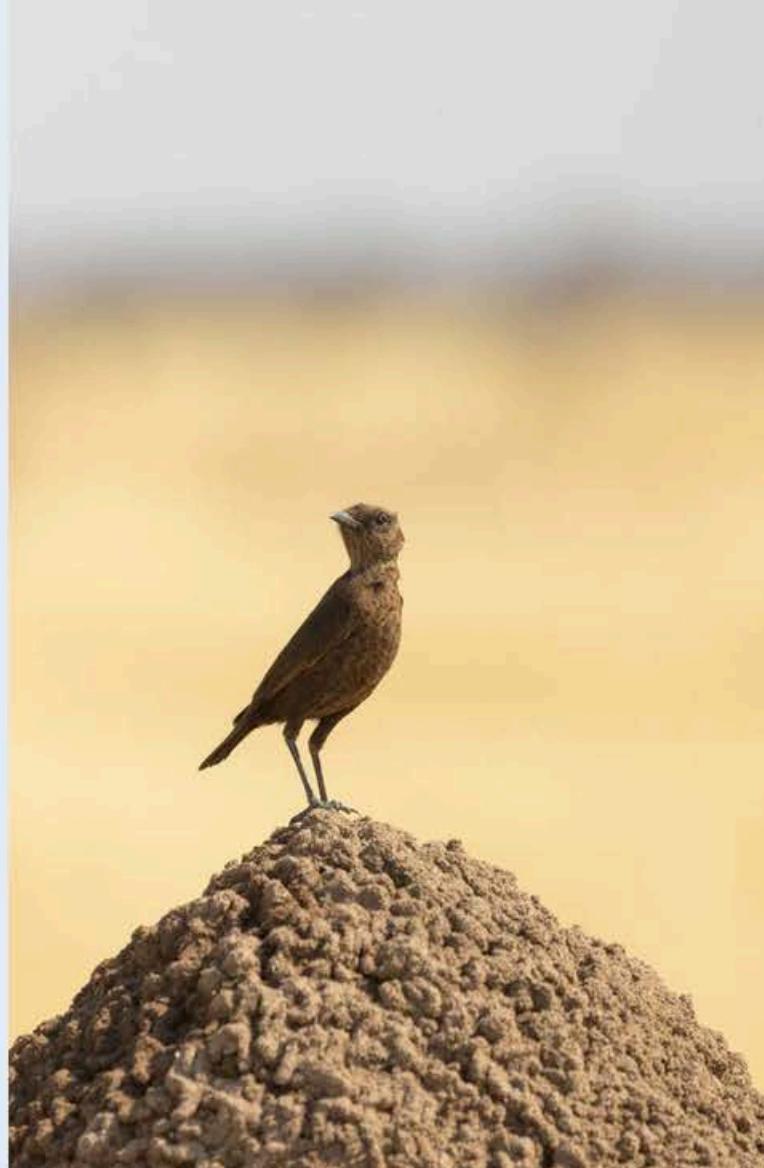


Peter Eriksson





Day 9 Early the next morning we went into the park for an extended game drive but stumbled across a great sighting before reaching the gate! We saw a Verreaux's Eagle Owl feeding on some type of waterfowl with an adult feeding its young while the other adult showcased their low baboon-like call from the nearby Makalani Palm. In the flagship National Park of Namibia, herds of African Elephant, three Spotted Hyaena and thousands of Springbok gave views before we reached the open Andoni plains. At the plains we viewed the critically endangered sub population of Blue Crane and many many Plain's Zebra, Common Blue Wildebeest, Common Warthog and Common Ostrich who came to drink at the water point. Some waders showed including the palearctic migrants Little Stint, Common-ringed Plover, Ruff and Intra-African breeding migrants, Red-breasted Swallow. Eastern Clapper Lark, African and Plain-backed Pipit, Red-capped Lark and Burchell's Courser revealed themselves on our journey back towards the lodge. The last waterhole we visited before exiting the park had forty African Elephant drinking and a hand full of Southern Giraffe. In the afternoon we went back into the park to explore a different side of the park and managed to find Black Rhinoceros, more African Elephants and two male Cheetahs who eventually started to walk and scent mark on termite mounts. To end the great afternoon of sightings an ostrich family with chicks fed on the edge of the pan with the golden light rim-lighting their odd shaped figures.



Day 10 This was a full day drive through the park, game viewing towards Okaukuejo. Starting off proceedings by viewing the Verreaux's Eagle Owl again in the morning on the way out from the lodge before connecting with a Leopard, Cheetah and lots of Elephant bulls. Just before lunch at Halali we managed to see Wood Sandpiper and Greater-painted Snipe at Goas waterhole. Down the road from Goas we stumbled across a pride of Lion sprawled out not five metres from the roadside. It was unclear how many were in view but as we tried to count them we noticed the posture and tawny yellow flash of a Lioness stalking towards a herd of Plain's Zebra behind the pile of fur next to the truck. We reversed quite far and just in time to watch the Lioness charge at the herd and narrowly miss making a kill which was exciting to see at midday in summer. Another highlight was seeing Cut-throat Finch at one of the water holes quite far west of their range. We also managed to get views of a greater flamingo who decided to stay in the National Park rather than flying back to the coastlines of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. After dinner at Okaukuejo the waterhole was as iconic as ever for game viewing with Black Rhino and Lion around the water hole. Drinking at the same time!





Day 11 Another sunrise departure rewarded quickly as we picked up Pink-billed Lark, Northern Black Korhaan, Spike-heeled Lark and a quick visual of Honey Badger. Eventually we got to the natural spring, Okondeka, and found 21 Spotted Hyaena feeding on Oryx carcass with thousands of game looking on nonchalantly. Proceeding up the ancient Kalahari dune fields towards a comfort break we picked up Rufous-eared Warbler, Red-necked Falcon hunting, Pygmy Falcon and Harlequin Quails. Once we returned to Okondeka - a pair of Lions had made their way for a drink and some interaction with the hyaenas started. The lions walked straight past our vehicle as well as some hyaenas giving us a thrill. We went for a short game drive in the afternoon and found another pride of lion, who started to hunt springbuck lambs which was such an intriguing sighting as it was still very warm in the afternoon but obviously the Lioness was very dedicated to make a kill for her sub adult youngsters. Stalking and chasing behaviour is always welcomed, especially for a Lion sighting during the day - anything to differ from the usual sleeping position.









Day 12 The day saw the group move from Etosha and drive south to the Erongo mountains. Before getting there we picked up Bare-cheeked Babblers, Fawn-coloured Lark and many raptors along the way. Once we had checked in to the lodge we opportunistically had a glimpse of a female Red-billed Firefinch drinking at reception water point. We then headed out to find Rüppels Parrot and also saw a brief glimpse of Peregrine Falcon. One of the highlights of the day was finding a parliament of young White-faced Owls in a drainage line totalling four individuals. We could not locate the adults but judging by the size the chicks they had recently fledged out of the nest.





Day 13 Early in the morning the group searched and located Hartluab's Spurfowl, Monterio's Hornbill and a pair of Rock Kestrel. At breakfast we had a visual of the special mongoose of the Erongo Mountains, the Black Mongoose come in to drink at the lodge waterhole. Departing towards the coastal town of Swakopmund we managed to see a few reptiles along the way, noteworthy the Giant Plated Lizard. Many other new birds were added like Karoo Chat, Layard's Warbler, Mountain Wheatear but the highlight was the near endemic Herero Chat that warbled right above the car and gave us the best possible sighting you could ask for! Approaching the Atlantic ocean a wonderful sighting of the Namaqua Chameleon presented itself and we all stopped to photograph this specialist desert reptile. Gray's Lark and Trac-trac Chat also managed to sneak into the highlight reel before the cool south west breeze of the ocean hit us. We stopped off at the Zeila ship wreck before arriving into Swakopmund and had a wonderful meal to finish off a great day.





Day 14 A full day in and around Walvis Bay Lagoon was enjoyed - as the tide was high in the morning we decided to drive up the beach to pelican point where we encountered no less than 15 Humpback Whales with six individuals breaching at once in front of us that left us in silent awe. Not a bad sight from shore! As well as the whales we saw Benguela Dolphin, lots of Cape Fur Seals and many terns which included Common, Greater Crested, Caspian, Damara and Black tern. We also saw a Sooty Shearwater, thousands of Greater and Lesser Flamingos. On the way back we stopped off at the lagoon to look at waders where we scoped many of the non-breeding palearctic migrants who spend their winter in the Ramsar listed protected wetland of Walvis Bay. These included Curlew Sandpiper, Common-ringed and Grey Plover, Common Greenshank, Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstone and some resident Chestnut-banded Plover. Grey Heron squabbled over a Sand Eel to finish a productive birding session around the mud flats before we departed towards the edge of the water treatment area of Walvis Bay. There we were treated to a pair of Little Bittern in the phragmites reeds, White-throated Swallow, Cape, Red-billed and Blue-billed Teal, Cape Shoveler, Maccoa Duck, Eurasian (Common) Moorhen, Three-banded Plover, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Glossy Ibis and Kittlitz's Plover. We then returned to Swakopmund in the late afternoon after stopping to view Cape, White-breasted and Crowned Cormorant.



Day 15 Today's mission was to go from the coast to the great Namib sand sea, so we decided to first check the salt works in Swakopmund and found the first Eurasian Curlew for the season! We then searched for Namibia's national plant, the Welwitschia in the desert. Along the way we stopped for lunch at a spring in the middle of the Namib-Naukluft National Park and viewed Common Ostrich, Springbok and a kettle of Lappet-faced Vulture soaring in the sky. During lunch a beautiful song of the Bokmakierie travelled through the sound waves before we continued down the gravel roads that produced Trac-trac Chat, Gray's Lark and Rüppels Korhaan which appeared to be around every corner. We arrived late afternoon in time for ice cold beer, completed our checklist and had dinner with a very vibrant chef serenading us all night with his drum.







Day 16 Early morning departure took us towards the area known as Deadvlei. A crisp morning was enjoyed inside the most photographed space in Namibia. We made our way out before the heat increased and went in search of the endemic Dune Lark. Once we found some good habitat for the specialist Lark of the dune sea most of the group had got out the car BEFORE one of the famous Lark's flew and landed right in front of us with an invertebrate in its bill. Coming back for lunch and a siesta in the afternoon we then went for a little walk down the Tshauchab riverbed and located a total of 18 birds including Karoo-scrub Robin, Ashy Tit, Acacia Pied barbet and White-backed Mousebird. Luck struck on our way back to the lodge with a young Brown Hyaena next to the road which gave a few photo chances. After another yummy dinner with drum entertainment we went in search of Spotted Eagle Owl which did not take long at all to locate just out side the lodge area.



Day 17 The morning of departure some of the group went early morning into the Dunes and had a look at various tracks from the night activity. We saw Shovel-snouted and Wedge-snouted Lizards, White Lady Spider nest and tracks, Namib Dune Cricket and another close view of Dune Lark. We returned for breakfast before saying farewell to each other at the airstrip as the group flew from the dunes back to Windhoek to catch their international flights home.





In conclusion Through the entire trip we managed to locate 304 bird species with another five only heard. Mammals tallied up to 32 species which included some fantastic African Wild Dog interactions, big cat sightings and hundreds of African Elephant, the iconic Black Rhinoceros, Black Mongoose, big pods of Humpback Whale and so much more. We cannot forget the many reptiles from the trip with 14 species seen or photographed which included Tree Skinks, Agamas, Namaqua Chameleon and various Sand Lizards. What a pleasure and privilege to have shown Bill, Lois, Louise, Becky and Garry around these fabulous southern African countries, delving into all sorts of topics, flora, fauna and more! We look forward until the next time they return.

