

Grand Namibia: Birds, Wildlife & Landscapes

Trip Report | Oct. 13-25, 2022 | by Steve Braine



With Naturalist Journeys' guide, Bob Meinke and participants Ann, Arthur, James, Kathleen, and Kelly.



Thurs., Oct. 13 **Arrival Day in Windhoek**

Our first night's accommodation was River Crossing Lodge, which is situated on the eastern periphery of the capital city, Windhoek. After checking in and enjoying some refreshments we did a short familiarization walk around the lodge grounds. Here we encountered several Rock Hyrax (Dassies) and a few species of birds including Southern Masked Weaver, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Familiar Chat, Short-toed Rock Thrush, Crimson-breasted Shrike (Gonolek), Pririt Batis and Common Scimitarbill were amongst other species seen. During dinner a briefing of the following days' activities were discussed before retiring for the night.

Fri., Oct. 14 **Windhoek - Sossusvlei**

After breakfast we departed for the Namib Desert. A brief visit to the Gammams sewerage treatment plant delivered a few waterfowl and a passing Peregrine Falcon. Red and Blue-billed (Hottentot) Teals were seen as were South African Shelducks, Egyptian Geese, Little Grebe, Common Moorhen, Three-banded Plovers, two Heron species and a brief glimpse of White-throated Swallows. Other smaller species included Wattled Starlings, Pin-tailed Whydah, Southern Red Bishops (out of breeding) and Southern Cordon Blue Waxbills. We then proceeded from Windhoek towards the Namib where we stopped at the Spreetshoogte Pass for lunch. Along the way we stopped briefly to look at some birds such as Pygmy Falcon, Scaly Weaver, Sociable Weavers, Chat Flycatchers, Lark-like Buntings, Sabota Larks, and many Grey-backed Sparrow-larks. Animals included Savanna Baboon, Rock Hyrax, Black-backed Jackal, Oryx and Springbok. Near our lunch stop where the wind was blowing a gale, we



managed to have a brief look at Bokmakierie and White-throated Canary. After lunch we left for Dead Valley Lodge arriving late afternoon. Pied Crows, Speckled Pigeons, Crowned Lapwings and a Greater Kestrel were seen around the lodge environs and just before dinner I collected a Common Barking Gecko for those present at the time.

Sat., Oct. 15 Full day Sossusvlei and Deadvlei

An early departure got us to Deadvlei before the heat of the day. Along the way we encountered some Oryx, Springbok and Common Ostrich. At the Deadvlei parking lot we saw many Cape Sparrows, Cape and Pied Crows, Sociable Weavers, Scaly Weavers, Familiar Chats and in the Vlei a Red-necked Falcon in close pursuit of a Pied Crow! After having our lunch at the parking area we headed back towards the lodge stopping a few times and also to look for Dune Lark which we found after a short walk in the vegetated dunes. We also had spectacular views of Rüppell's Korhaans and a brief view of Burchell's Coursers. We found another Dune Lark at the Elim Dune and went on to find several more Rüppell's Korhaans and observed three lizard species.

Sun., Oct. 16 Sossusvlei to Swakopmund

On our way to the coast, we stopped in at Solitaire where we refueled while some bought coffee and the famous Apple Pies, while others observed a Lanner Falcon pursuing Larks, and we managed our first views Red-headed Finches. A few birding stops along the way provided Herero Chats, Double-banded and Namaqua Sandgrouse, Karroo Chat, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, more Greater Kestrels and a Karroo Long-billed Lark. Many Grey-backed Sparrow-larks as well as Starks Larks were seen flying up along the road verges for most of the way. We arrived late afternoon in Swakopmund which gave us some time for a stroll around the town. Orange-river White-eyes were seen by some around the guesthouse. We had a good meal at The Tug Restaurant and a briefing for the next day.

Mon., Oct. 17 Full day Coastal Desert Birding

We spent the best part of the day around the Walvis Bay Lagoon and surrounds and managed good views of Caspian, Greater Crested (Swift), Sandwich, Common, Black and the special diminutive Damara Tern, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Grey (Black-bellied) Plover, Sanderlings, Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Whimbrels, White-fronted,



Chestnut-banded and Kittlitz's Plovers. A quick visit to the sewerage ponds added Maccoa Duck, Cape Shoveller, Cape Teal, Red-knobbed Coot, Common Moorhen, and Glossy Ibis. We then headed off into the desert towards the Welwitschia and encountered the cryptic Gray's Larks and Tractrac Chats. All in all, a good day's birding and botanizing! We arrived at the guesthouse late afternoon and had time to prepare for our dinner at the Fish Deli where fresh Kabeljou, a very popular line fish, was enjoyed.

Tues., Oct. 18 Swakopmund – Erongo Mountains

After breakfast we left for the Erongo Mountains. We managed to call in the impressive Rufous-eared Warbler just outside Swakopmund. We stopped in Omaruru for lunch and arrived at the lodge shortly after. After checking in we went for a walk and had good views of the specials in the area including Rockrunner, Carps Tit, White-tailed Shrikes, Monteiro's Hornbills, and a brief sighting of a pair of Hartlaub's Spurfowl with two tiny chicks. At dinner we called in a pair of resident Freckled Nightjars and heard a Barn Owl screaming in the distance. While at dinner an impressive Greater Kudu bull came and drank at the waterhole. A Dassie Rat genus *Petromus* was also observed as were many Rock Hyrax and we had a close encounter with a Small Spotted Genet, which has been habituated to feeding.

Wed., Oct. 19 Erongo Mountains to Kaokoland

Before packing and leaving The Erongo Wild, we had a marvelous display of Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Pale-winged Starlings, and a close encounter with a Monteiro's Hornbill which they feed near the kitchen. Just before departure we also had good views of a Southern White-faced Scops Owl which Bob and Kelly had found during a short morning walk. We then proceeded on a long drive through some spectacular scenery to Khowarib Lodge in Kaokoland. Unfortunately, this time around the roads were in an awful condition and the drive took a bit longer than usual.

Along the way we stopped at suitable habitats to look for some specials and had lunch in the Ugab River under large Faidherbia trees. Here we had our first sightings of Bare-cheeked Babbler, Damara Hornbill and Rüppell's



Parrots, and found some more White-tailed Shrikes and another Pearl-spotted Owlet. In another large river bed, we had good views of White-crowned and White Helmet Shrikes as well as the first Burchell's Starlings. We then stopped at a suitable habitat and managed to call in the rare and special Benguela Long-billed Lark. After a late afternoon arrival, we did a short walk around the grounds and saw African Mourning Dove (one on a nest), Namaqua Doves, Brubru, Black-backed Puffbacks, and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings.

Tues., Oct. 19 Full day nature drive along the Hoanib River Valley

Today we visited the Hoanib River Valley, the home of several Desert-adapted Elephants. On the way we saw more Bare-cheeked Babblers and Damara Hornbills. In the river bed we encountered two troops of Savanna Baboons, Steenbok, and Angolan Giraffe. We also enjoyed several Elephant sightings. Our first sighting was of a lone bull and the second sighting was of a breeding herd, which we watched at close quarters while they drank at a small waterhole. We then left continuing down river and encountered the rest of the herd. We stopped at the Ganamub/Hoanib confluence where we checked the waterhole surrounds for Lion spoors and other activity and then had our lunch under the huge Ana trees (*Faidherbia albida*) before slowly driving back to our accommodation at Khowarib. Upon our return, the entire Elephant herd was found shading under the large Ana trees and seemed relaxed except for one old cow that flapped her ears at us.

Wed., Oct. 20 Kaokoland to Etosha National Park

Today's drive took us to Etosha National Park. Along the way, between Khowarib and the veterinary fence, we encountered several Angolan Giraffe, Springbok and eventually some Hartmann's Mountain Zebras. We then stopped on top of the Grootberg Pass where we walked around for a while seeing only species which we had seen previously. Just before the small town of Kamanjab we also stopped to look at a few new birds including Helmeted Guineafowl, Blacksmith's Lapwings and Long-tailed Paradise Whydah out of breeding. We stopped in Outjo for lunch and then continued North to Okaukuejo.

After arriving in the park, we checked into our accommodation in Okaukuejo and then did a quick trip up to Okondeka where we had two pairs of lazy Lions doing what Lions do best during daylight hours. On the way we saw many Northern Black (White-quilled) Korhaans and a few Kori Bustards. Other species included Southern ant-eating Chats, Spike-heeled Larks and a Pale Chanting Goshawk feeding a chick on its nest. On our return we had a lovely sighting of a Black Rhino on the open plains as well as other game such as Springbok, Blue Wildebeest



(Brindled Gnu), Oryx, Angolan Giraffe and Plains (Burchell's) Zebra. After dinner those who visited the floodlit waterhole at the camp saw more Black Rhino and Spotted Hyena.

Thurs., Oct. 21 Full day birding and wildlife drive through Etosha National Park

We were out of the camp soon after the gates opened at sunrise and we repeated the trip via Okondeka this time to search for various Larks. We found many Red-capped Larks, Grey-backed Sparrow-larks, a flock of Chestnut-backed Sparrow-larks, Spike-heeled Larks and eventually a few Pink-billed Larks. Besides species observed the previous few days we added good views of Spotted Thick-knee, Kori Bustards, African Pipits, and more Rufous-eared Warblers. Although we saw plenty of plains game a Honey Badger eventually stole the show while digging out prey. After lunch we travelled via Newbrownii Waterhole where more Lions were seen and a single Lioness walked past us within touching distance from our vehicle. At the waterhole we also watched some old Elephant bulls drinking and spraying their bodies. During our drive we also encountered many plains game, a few Black-faced Impala, and a single distant Cheetah.

The afternoon we travelled through the park from Okaukuejo to Halali visiting several waterholes along the way. After arriving, we walked around the grounds and besides a nesting Southern White-faced Scops Owl we had good views of Violet Woodhoopoes, Damara, African Grey and Southern Red-billed Hornbills (with possible hybrids?) After calling in another Pearl-spotted Owllet we had a Little Sparrow-hawk fly over, we then followed him and called him in to observe him a little better.

Fri., Oct. 22 Full day birding & wildlife drive from Halali to Namutoni

As we travelled from Halali to the eastern side of the park, we saw our first Red Hartebeest, Eland as well as more Black-faced Impala. Near Salvadora Waterhole there were thousands of plains game, we then encountered the



only White Rhino of the trip and had two resting Cheetah lying in the shade right next to the vehicle. A stop at Klein Namutoni Waterhole provided us with quite a show with a hundred or more vultures, mainly African White-backed but also a few Lappet-faced and three White-headed. A Bateleur joined in and gave us a show while drying his wings in the sun. A Spotted Hyena arrived and decided to submerge himself in the water to cool down while other animals were coming and going. However, the star of the show and bird of the trip was a Three-banded Courser right next to our vehicle. I later learnt that it had laid eggs which were destroyed after a couple of days. Other birds seen were large numbers of Grey-go-away Birds, Purple (Rufous-crowned) Rollers, various Hornbills, more Elephants, Greater Kudu, and many other game species were seen.

Day 12: Etosha National Park to Windhoek

Today we could only spend a short while in the park before departing on the long haul back to Windhoek. In the early morning, we travelled northbound to the Andoni plains to search for Larks and the elegant Blue Cranes, luck was on our side and we saw several Eastern Clapper Larks before coming across 14 individual Blue Cranes! A quick trip around Dikdik drive delivered many of these quaint diminutive antelope, and then with a sad tone we realized that it was time, and we left the park for Windhoek stopping at the town of Otjiwarongo for lunch. All in all, everyone seemed to have enjoyed the trip and the sightings, even though at times the roads were 'testing' and the days long. In the end the observations were very good, and all the specials were seen many of which were photographed by some of the participants.

Photos by Art Cimento - Monteiro's Hornbill, Zebra, Elephant, Oryx against contrasting landscape, Deadvlei, Lovebirds, Ruppell's Bustard, Namibia Round-ear Senji, Chacma Baboon, Sociable Weavers, Springbok, Lesser Flamingos, White-fronted Plover, Common Greenshank, Black-winged Stilts, Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Broncos Lizard, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, African Scops-Owl, Damara Red-billed Hornbill, Antelope, Elephants, Giraffe, Greater Kestrel, Tortoise, Gnus, White-quilled Bustard, Lions, Black-winged Kite, White-backed Vulture, Hartebeest, Lioness, Blue Crane, Common Ostrich, Kori Bustard