

Namibia

Etosha & the Skeleton Coast

Saturday 09 October – Monday 25 October 2010

Leaders: Leon Marais and Simon Boyes

2010 Cost: **£4,799** single room supplement **£300**



Namibia is a country of contrasts straddled between two deserts – the Namib Desert along its coastline, and the Kalahari in the eastern interior. It is a wild arid country offering superb birding and a whole host of Southern African endemics, many of which can be found relatively easily in Namibia, but nowhere else in Africa. Included amongst these are exciting species such as Damara and Monteiro's Hornbills, Herero Chat, White-tailed Shrike, Bare-cheeked Babbler, Rüppell's Parrot and many more. There are over 100 Southern African endemics in the country. There is a wide diversity of habitats and some spectacular scenery, ranging from the Namib Desert, isolated inselbergs and mountainous escarpments to open desert plains, woodland savanna and the flat expanse of the enormous Etosha Pan. There is also the Atlantic coastline and shallow tidal lagoons which attract vast numbers of waders, Greater and Lesser Flamingos and Great White Pelican. The tour includes areas with good mammal populations as well. We will look for Elephant, Black Rhinoceros, Lions, Giraffe and antelope such as Oryx, Black-faced Impala, Damara Dikdik and other dry region specialists. Close encounters with many of these mammals should provide some exciting moments.

ITINERARY

Days 1 & 2

We leave on a direct evening flight from London to Windhoek, where we arrive in the morning and meet our specialist bird guide. We transfer to the comfortable Villa Verdi, a private guesthouse in a suburb of the capital city where we stay overnight. There will be an afternoon excursion to Avis Dam where we may find Black-necked Grebe, Great White Pelican, White-breasted Cormorant, African Darter, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Hamerkop, Black and Yellow-billed Storks, South African Shelduck, Cape Teal, Red-billed Teal and Maccoa Duck amongst the waterbirds.

Days 3 & 4

We depart after breakfast for the Namib Desert, a vast sea of red sand dunes and one of the most arid deserts in the world. Our drive takes us through some spectacular mountainous country. Lunch will be taken en route and we arrive at the lodge in the late afternoon. It is set against a

backdrop of ancient fossilised dunes, and we stay here for two nights. Birds we could see on our drive include Rosy-faced Lovebird, Short-toed Rock-Thrush, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Mountain Wheatear, Pale-winged Starling, Cape Glossy Starling, Greater Scimitar-bill, Lilac-breasted Roller and perhaps Rockrunner and Ludwig's Bustard. Mammals include Rock Hyrax, Klipspringer, Springbok and our first Gemsbok (Oryx). We take an early morning excursion into the Namib Naukluft Park and the spectacular dunes at Sossusvlei. We walk in the dunes, which are the highest in the world. A rare endemic with a restricted range is Dune Lark and we will search for it in sparse vegetation on the dunes. The gravel plains attract species such as Grey-backed Sparrowlark, Lark-like Bunting, Greater Kestrel, Burchell's Courser, Double-banded and Namaqua Sandgrouse, while Rüppell's Bustard is another endemic to look for.

Days 5 & 6

We have a long, but interesting drive to the coast today and an early start will be made. We travel via

Gaub and Kuiseb Canyons before crossing the Namib "gravel plains" en route to Walvis Bay. We reach Walvis Bay in the late afternoon, and transfer to our hotel, where we stay for two nights. A visit will be made to the Walvis Bay lagoon and salt pans where large numbers of waterbirds gather, with both Lesser and Greater Flamingos in great numbers. Amongst them should be Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Bar-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper and Red Knot. There will be a few tern species and the localised endemic we need to find is Damara Tern. On our full day in the Swakopmund area, we may return to nearby Walvis Bay if the birding was exceptionally good yesterday and there is more to see. Otherwise we will concentrate on good sites near Swakopmund such as the salt pans north of the town, the Swakop River mouth and the rocky shoreline at Vier-kant-klip. Birds to see near Swakopmund include large numbers of Cape Cormorant, another chance of Damara Tern, plus White-fronted and Chestnut-banded Plovers, Curlew, Eurasian Whimbrel, African Black Oystercatcher and Ruddy Turnstone.

Quiver Trees





Rockrunner

Days 7 & 8

We depart north along the Skeleton Coast towards Henties Bay and Cape Cross where there is a breeding colony of hundreds of Cape Fur Seals. There is the chance of seeing White-chinned and Wilson's Storm-Petrels and perhaps African Penguin offshore. We continue inland via Uis towards the Damaraland Region. Our destination, Twyfelfontein Country Lodge, will be reached in the afternoon and we stay here for two nights. This is the area where one of the sought-after endemics, Herero Chat is found. Other good birds to see include Rüppell's Parrot, Red-billed Francolin, White-tailed Shrike and Bare-cheeked Babbler. The Damaraland Region is the home of the scarce desert Elephants that roam over a vast area. We may walk along the Aba Huab riverbed, which will be dry, and here we could pick up Carp's Tit, Long-tailed Starling and Violet Woodhoopoe. An excursion to view stone-age rock engravings will be of added interest.

Days 9 & 10

We drive via Khorixas and Outjo to Etosha National Park. En route we will include an excursion to see giant fossilised logs in an area known as the "Petrified Forest". We arrive in the afternoon at the Okaukuejo Rest Camp where we stay for two nights. There is a floodlit waterhole at Okaukuejo where some superb evening game viewing is possible. Black Rhinoceros, Elephant and Lion often come to drink at night while Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Barn Owl and Verreaux's Eagle-Owl are often seen. The area surrounding the rest camp is rich in birdlife and we could see Pink-billed, Sabota, Spike-heeled and Stark's Larks, while Red-necked Falcon, Rufous-eared Warbler and Double-banded Courser are "specials" to look for. Mammals could include Giraffe, Kudu, Gemsbok (Oryx), Springbok, Steenbok, Spotted Hyena, Honey Badger and Black-backed Jackal.

Day 11

We move to the central Halali Rest Camp where we stay for one night. On the way we will see the enormous saltpan where the park get its name. It stretches 130km from east to west and 72km

from north to south – over 6,000sq km of flat, shining sand. The name "Etosha" means "great white place". African Scops-Owl and Southern White-faced Owl roost in trees in the camp area and Pearl-spotted Owllet can be whistled up during the day. White-crowned Shrike is also in the camp and Freckled Nightjar can be seen at the floodlit waterhole in the evening. Sandy scrub areas nearby are frequented by Rufous-naped, Fawn-coloured and Monotonous Larks. Meyer's Parrot may also be in this area as well as the scarce Black-faced Babbler.

Days 12 & 13

We continue through the park to the eastern Namutoni Rest Camp where we stay for two nights. The habitat at Namutoni is different from the rest of the park and is more wooded. The trees are a mix of purple-pod terminalia, tamboti and acacias. On the Andoni Flats north of Namutoni we may find Eastern Clapper Lark and Blue Crane. White-headed Vulture, Tawny Eagle, Bateleur, Gabar Goshawk and Secretarybird should be seen. There are a number of permanent waterholes in the vicinity with a good mammal population. We have a chance of seeing Leopard here, as well as perhaps Cheetah.

Days 14 & 15

We leave Etosha and head for the Erongo Mountains and to a lovely wilderness lodge. This small lodge has a marvellous setting with great views from the lounge area, and with a swimming pool dominated by towering granite formations. We can sit and relax with a cool drink as small birds and mammals come to eat and drink almost at arms length. We can watch Rosy-faced Lovebirds compete with the Dassie Rats for food, while White-tailed Shrikes and Monteiro's Hornbills compete for our attention in the scopes. The hills ring to the song of Rockrunners and in the early morning we can listen for Hartlaub's Francolin and Freckled Nightjar. This will be a great finale to a superb tour.

Days 16 & 17

We return to Windhoek airport for our return flight to London where we arrive the next day.



African Elephants

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Depart London
- Day 2** Windhoek
- Days 3-4** Namib Desert
- Days 5-6** Walvis Bay
- Days 7-8** Damaraland
- Days 9-13** Etosha National Park
- Days 14-15** Erongo
- Day 16** Depart Windhoek
- Day 17** Arrive London

Party Size

Maximum of 11 clients (two leaders with more than six clients).

Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms with private facilities has been arranged at all hotels, lodges and guesthouses.










Transport

By minibus.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

Gradings

-  Good
-  250
-  Cool to Hot
-  Low
-  Special
-  Moderate
-  Excellent
-  Moderate
-  Scheduled



Welwitschia mirabilis