

Birding the Skeleton Coast and Etosha National Park

Namibia is a remarkable country of stark landscapes with the Namib Desert, one of the driest places on earth, extending right to the ocean at the Skeleton Coast. Dunes and gravel plains of the Namib eventually give way to bush and secondary woodland. Our tour starts in the capital city of Windhoek with a visit to Daan Viljoen Game Reserve. Swakopmund is situated on the Skeleton Coast, where the adjacent cold Benguela Current results in an area rich in seabirds and waders. Spitzkoppen is next on the agenda, holding the endemic Herero Chat. Our main birding region is Etosha National Park, the jewel of Namibia. Etosha, translated literally, means Great White Place – a reference to the vast pan that dominates the centre of the park. Our final destination is Waterberg Plateau National Park, a district of deciduous woodland surrounded by semi-dry acacia forest.

Days 1-2: We fly to Johannesburg and connect with a flight to Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. Transfer to our accommodation for a one-night stay. On arrival we make an initial visit to Daan Viljoen Game Reserve covering the rolling hills of Khomas Hochland. The main habitat is grassland dotted with small trees attracting a range of seed-eating birds. These may include Orange River and Red-billed Francolins, Stark's Lark, Rufous Sparrow, Green-winged Pytilia, Violet-eared and Black-cheeked Waxbills, Shaft-tailed Whydah, Red-headed Finch, Scaly Weaver, White-throated Canary and Lark-like and Cape Buntings. Near watercourses the trees are larger with a dense understorey, attracting African Darter, African Black and Maccoa Ducks, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler and Hamerkop. Tree-loving species comprise Monteiro's Hornbill, Grey Go-away-bird, Purple Roller, Acacia Pied Barbet, Crimson-breasted Gonolek, Marico Flycatcher, Southern Black and Ashy Tits and Groundscraper Thrush. Rocky hillsides with bushes hold Rockrunner, Mountain Wheatear and Familiar Chat. On our way out of the park, we may locate Three-banded Plover and Namaqua Sandgrouse.

Day 3: Today we head west to the coastal town of Swakopmund, which is very Germanic in character. The Namib is an important breeding ground for Lappet-faced

Dates

Saturday July 23rd – Sunday

August 6th 2022

Leader: Mark Finn

Group Size: 8

Species: 230–250

Vultures which often perch in the top of Camel Thorn Trees. In the same habitat we may locate Rüppell's Korhaan and Double-banded Courser. Transfer to Swakopmund for a three-night stay.

Days 4-5: Rooibank is our destination. It is situated on the banks of the Kuiseb River, which is home to the localised Dune Lark. Visits are also planned to the salt-works, Walvis Bay Lagoon, Guano Platform and Paaltijies. On one morning we take a pelagic trip into the Southern Atlantic Ocean, with late July being an optimum time for seabirds from the southern oceans. Birds we hope to see include Cape Cormorant, Cape Gannet, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater and Shy and Black-browed Albatrosses, along with scarcer species notably Brown Skua, Northern and Southern Giant Petrels, Yellow-nosed Albatross, Wilson's Storm Petrel and Broad-billed Prion. Walvis Bay Lagoon is a Ramsar site supporting resident species such as Pied Avocet, Black-



Southern Red-Billed Hornbill Photo: Jo Finn

winged Stilt, White-fronted Plover and the scarce Chestnut-banded Plover. A visit to Walvis Bay Sewage Works is expected to produce Hottentot and Cape Teals, Red-billed Duck and Cape Shoveler and possibly early returning migrants from Europe.

Days 6-7: Today we leave the coast and drive east to Spitzkoppe, which rises 600m above the surrounding plains. This is a reliable spot for the endemic Herero Chat. Rainfall in the arid Namib is extremely variable and this has an enormous effect on the birds within this region. Likely species include Common Ostrich, White-backed Vulture, Tawny, Booted and Martial Eagles, African Hawk-Eagle, Black-breasted Snake Eagle, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Ludwig's, Rüppell's and Northern Black Korhaans, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Monotonous, Karoo Long-billed, Spike-heeled, Red-capped, Stark's and Gray's Larks and Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark.

Day 8: An early morning walk to look for Hartlaub's Francolin before we travel north

to Etosha National Park in time for an afternoon's birding and game drive. We have a four-night stay in the Etosha area.

Days 9-11: Etosha National Park was designated in 1907. The Etosha Pan which dominates the park is 150km long and 70km wide and is dry for most of the year. Two rivers run into the park along with various artesian wells and seepage of saline and non-saline water. Consequently, this attracts large numbers of birds and mammals. We can cover Eastern, Central and Western Etosha and stay in each area for easy access. The eastern region receives the highest rainfall, much of it draining into Fischer's Pan. The pan verges occasionally hold African Openbill, Marabou and Saddle-billed Storks. The Andoni Plains have Blue and Grey Crowned Cranes and Clapper Lark whilst sandy areas usually have Burchell's Sandgrouse. In woodland areas we should see Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove, Crimson-breasted Boubou and Black-faced Babbler. Verreaux's Eagle-Owl is sometimes seen at Klein Namutoni.

The camp itself has African Palm Swift and, at dusk, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Red-billed, Swainson's and Crested Francolins can be common here along with Red-crested and Northern Black Korhaans. Central and Western Etosha is dominated by Mopane woodland supporting Southern Red-billed Hornbill, White-crested Helmetshrike, White-crowned Shrike, Violet Woodhoopoe and Carp's Tit. It is also one of the best places to find Bare-cheeked Babbler. Other woodland species comprise Shikra, Meyer's Parrot, Grey-backed Camaroptera and Familiar Chat. The scrub mopane supports Monotonous and Fawn-coloured Larks. Among the raptors we should find Gabar Goshawk – which is often seen hassling seedeaters and Wattled Starlings – and Lanner and Red-necked Falcons. At night we can search for African Scops and Southern White-faced Owls. The Charitsaub and Salvadora Plains offer us a chance of Blue Crane. Desert species thrive in drier areas particularly Double-banded Courser and Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark. Scrubby bushes may have Rufous-eared Warbler. Okaukuejo Camp has a number of trees with Acacia Pied Babbler and Burnt-necked Eremomela. At night the waterhole is floodlit allowing views of Namaqua and Double-banded Sandgrouse coming to drink. The surrounding countryside has Sociable Weaver colonies attracting Pygmy Falcons to nest.

Day 12: We use a lodge outside the park today and travel towards Namutoni where we may find Secretarybird and Swainson's Francolin. At Uris Lodge a walk around the extensive grounds for Familiar Chat, African Paradise Flycatcher, Long-tailed Paradise Whydah and Golden-breasted and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings.

Days 13-15: Today we leave Etosha and travel to Waterberg Plateau Park for a three-night stay. The plateau itself rises 420 metres above the surrounding countryside. Sandstone cliffs dominate the side of the plateau with the slopes being covered in rocks. Waterberg attracts a high number of species due to its location where broad-leaved woodland meets the Kalahari Desert. The cliffs at Waterberg hold the most north-

erly Cape Vultures in Africa and also support Peregrine Falcon and Rosy-faced Lovebird. Various trails run through the area where Bradfield's Hornbill, Freckled Nightjar and Short-toed Rock Thrush occur. We also take a four-wheel drive trip onto the plateau looking for Coqui Francolin and African Barred Owlet. Other species we may see at Waterberg include Black-chested Prinia, Southern Pied-babbler, Pirit Batis, Pale-winged and Burchell's Starlings, Black-cheeked Waxbill, White-breasted Sunbird and Cape Bunting.

Day 16: Travel to Windhoek where our flight departs for Europe. If time permits, we can make further visits to Daan Viljoen Game Reserve.

Prices

Ground Price: £3295
 Single room: £250
 Deposit: £350
 *Air Fare: £1100

This holiday is fully inclusive of flights, accommodation, meals, transport, entrance and permit fees, guidance and tips.

Not included: drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature, a visa to enter Ethiopia and any fuel surcharges.

* Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights