

# Birding along the Skeleton Coast and Etosha National Park

Namibia is a remarkable land of contrasting landscapes from the cold Benguela Current flowing off the Skeleton Coast to the Namib Desert, one of the driest places on earth. 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 adjacent to the cold Beluga Current 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, an area of deciduous woodland surrounded by semi-dry acacia forest and cliffs.

**Days 1-3:** We fly to Johannesburg with arrival on July 27th, and connect with a flight to Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. Transfer to our accommodation for a two-night stay. On arrival 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 Chestnut-vented Warblers. Near water-courses the trees are larger with a dense understory attracting African Darter, African Black and Maccua Ducks, South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler, Crowned and Blacksmiths Lapwings, and Hamerkop. Tree-loving species comprise Monteiro's Hornbill, Grey Go-away-bird, Purple Roller, Acacia Pied Barbet, Crimson-breasted Gonolek, Mariqua Flycatcher, Southern Black and Ashy Tits and Groundscraper Thrush. Rocky hillsides with bushes hold Rock Martin, Alpine Swift, Damara Rockjumper, Mountain Wheatear, Familiar Chat and Pale-winged Starlings.

**Day 4:** Today we head west to the coastal town of Swakopmund which is very Germanic in character. Our route takes us through areas with low human habitation apart from isolated cattle ranches. The

## Dates

**Friday July 26th – Sunday August 11th 2024**

Leader: Mark Finn and local guides

Group Size: 8

Species: 220-250

area becomes very arid as you travel west towards the coast. In areas of acacia and stunted trees we may locate Lappet-faced Vulture, Kalahari Scrub Robin, Sabota Lark, Black-chested Prinia and Black-throated Canary. An area of grassland is a favoured habitat of bustards and we have good chances of locating Kori and Ludwig's plus their smaller cousins Ruppell's and Red-crested Korhaans. Along the road edge and areas of cliffs it is possible to see Rock Kestrel, Karoo Long-billed Lark, White-tailed Shrike, Monteiro's Hornbill, Namaqua Sandgrouse and Lanner Falcon. Transfer to Swakopmund for a three night stay.

**Days 5-6:** Rooibank is situated on the banks of the Kuiseb River home to the localised Dune Lark. Visits are also planned to the salt-works, Walvis Bay Lagoon, Guano Platform and Paaltijies. On one morning 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 and Crowned Cormorants, Kelp and



**Bare-cheeked Babbler** *Jo Finn*

Hartlaub's Gulls, Cape Gannet, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, along with scarcer species notably African Penguin, Brown Skua, Northern Giant Petrel and Wilson's Storm Petrel. Walvis Bay Lagoon is a Ramsar site supporting resident species - Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, White-fronted Plover and the scarce Chestnut-banded Plover. Lagoons near the sea attract a wide range of terns including Greater Crested, Caspian, the scarce Damara and over wintering Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns. This area is also favoured by waders which include Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstone.

**Days 7-8:** En route to Spitzkoppe a visit to salt works and scrub to the north of Swakopmund with the near endemic Gray's Lark being our main target. The lagoons here may have Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes, egrets, ducks and waders. We drive east to Spitzkoppe which rises 600m above the surrounding plains, a reliable area 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, African Hawk and Martial Eagles, Black-breasted Snake Eagle, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Ludwig's, Ruppell's and Northern Black Korhaan's, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Monotonous,

Karoo Long-billed, Spike-heeled, Red-capped, Stark's Larks and Grey-backed Sparrowlarks. Spitzkoppe is a reliable spot for Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Common Scimitarbill, Layard's Warbler and Carp's Tit. Our journey ends at Omaruru where we have a two-night stay.

**Day 9:** An early morning drive to Erongo to look for Hartlaub's Spurfowl which can be seen on the exposed rocks at first light. On the road Crowned Lapwing and Red-billed Spurfowl occur. Back to the hotel for breakfast where the grounds attract Crimson-breasted Shrike and Scarlet-chested Sunbird in the gardens. A return to Erongo after breakfast where the extensive scrub and rocks attract Greater Blue-eared and Cape Starlings, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Acacia Pied Barbet, Ashy Tit, Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Nicholson's Pipit. The road towards Erongo Lodge often has Damara Red-billed Hornbill, Purple Roller, Red-crested Korhaan and Marico Flycatcher. By the river Karoo Prinia, Great Sparrow, Kalahari Scrub Robin and African Grey Hornbill reside. In the afternoon a visit to Omaruru campground a reliable place for Ruppell's Parrot, Rosy-faced Lovebird and Black-backed Puffback.

**Days 10-13:** Etosha National Park was proclaimed in 1907 where we have a four-night stay at various camps within the park. 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 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 Crowned Cranes and Clapper Lark whilst sandy areas usually have Burchell's Sandgrouse. In woodland areas we should see Green-spotted Dove, Crimson-breasted Shrike and Black-faced Babbler. Verreaux's Eagle



Ruppell's Parrot Jo Finn

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 White-quilled Bustards. Central and Western Etosha is dominated by Mopane woodland supporting Southern Red-billed Hornbill, White Helmet-shrike, White-crowned Shrike, Violet Woodhoopoe and Carp's Tit. It is also one of the best places to find the scarce Bare-cheeked Babbler. Other woodland species comprise of Shikra, Meyer's Parrot, Grey-backed Camaroptera and Familiar Chat. The scrub mopane supports Monotonous and Fawn-coloured Larks. Among the smaller raptors, we should find Lanner and Red-necked

Falcons and Gabar Goshawks. The latter species can be seen hassling seedeaters and Wattled Starlings. 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 Sparrowlarks. 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. The area around Namutoni is reliable for Secretarybird and Swainson's Francolin. The campground often has nesting Red-necked Falcons and mixed flocks of Red-billed Quelea, Red-headed and Scaly-breasted Finches and Green-winged Ptylia. Isolated trees attract Pale Chanting Goshawk. In the arid grasslands Fawn-coloured, Rufous-naped and Dusky Larks, Temminck's and Burchell's Coursers, Southern Pied Babbler, White-bellied Sunbird and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters. A visit to Halali Camp and its extensive grounds may have Groundscraper Thrush, Rattling Cisticola, White-crowned Helmetshrike and the uncommon Bare-cheeked Babbler. After dinner a visit to the floodlit waterhole to watch mammals coming into drink and Square-tailed Nightjars hunting for insects.

**Day 14-15:** Today we leave Etosha and travel to Waterberg for a two-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 northerly Cape Griffon Vultures in Africa. The cliffs also support Verreaux's Eagle, Rock Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Alpine and Bradfield's Swifts and Rosy-faced Lovebird. Various trails run through the area where Bradfield's Hornbill, Freckled Nightjar and

Short-toed Rock-thrush occur. Other species we may see at Waterberg include Violet Woodhoopoe, Pearl-spotted Owllet, White-browed Scrub Robin, Black-chested Prinia, Southern Pied-babbler, Pririt Batis, Pale-winged and Burchell's Starlings, Black-cheeked Waxbill and Cape Bunting.

**Days 16-17:** A morning spent birding along the track outside Waterberg before we travel to Windhoek for the last two nights in Namibia. En route we may encounter kettles of vultures which should include Lappet-faced, Cape Griffon and White-backed. On Day 16 birding around Windhoek with a visit to the water treatment works at Gammas. The wetland areas attract African Wattled Starlings, Pied Kingfisher, African Swamphen, Black Crake, Black-headed Heron and wildfowl including Cape Teal and Red-billed Duck. In the afternoon a visit to Avis Dam where South African Shelduck, Maccoa Duck, Red-knobbed Coot and the localised Southern Pochard are all possible.

**Day 18:** Transfer to the airport for flights home to Europe via Johannesburg or Cape Town.

## Prices

Ground Price: £3,595  
Single room: £250  
Deposit: £350  
\*Air Fare: £1,200

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

**Not included:** air fares, drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature.

\*please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights