



# Namibia + Botswana

Sept 7 - Sept 22, 2024

Leader Dorian Anderson



## Summary

As one of the least-densely populated countries, Namibia is one of Earth's wildest frontiers. It seems impossible that life could survive in the dry, rocky surroundings, but thrive it does, an amazing array of birds and mammals on display amidst that beautiful desolation. Walvis Bay boasts thousands of flamingos, shorebirds, and terns, and a number of near-endemics (Rockrunner, Violet Woodhoopoe, Herero Chat, Rüppell's Parrot, Hartlaub's Spurfowl) present at Omaruru. Farther north, Etosha National Park hosts most of the mammals a person could hope to find on an African safari. Even in this drought ridden year, we scored views of lions, rhinos, elephants, zebras, giraffes, and a host of antelope. Our time in Kavango yielded another complement of birds — Black-faced Babbler, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, Pale Flycatcher — and three days at the northern end of the Okavango Delta in Botswana rounded out a wonderful trip. Who could argue with Pel's Fishing-Owl, Wattled Crane, White-backed Night-Heron, African Wood-Owl and many others? Read on for a full report! All photos in this report captured on this departure by clients Steve and Anne Bielamowicz and guide Dorian Anderson.

## Damara Red-billed Hornbill



p. 1

**Day 1 - Saturday, September 7 - Windhoek arrival**

Ready. Set. Go! With all four clients present ahead of this scheduled arrival day, we hit the ground running on this first morning. Our primary goal was to track down **Rockrunner**, one of the near-endemics on which this tour focuses (the species is restricted to northwestern Namibia and southwestern Angola). Dorian had scouted two birds at Avis Dam the previous afternoon, and the first of those put on an incredible show when we reached the appointed area at 7:30am. Beyond that target, we also secured **Maccoa Duck, Three-banded Plover, Pirit Batis, Crimson-breasted Gonolek, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, and Chestnut-vented Warbler**. With 54 species tallied before breakfast, ours was a fantastic start (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194229711>).

**Rockrunner**

We returned to Droombos, brunched on the lodge deck, and returned to the field at the Gammams wastewater treatment facility. Access usually requires a bit of haggling; time was no exception. Initially denied, Dorian broke through on his second attempt, when the guard allowed him to talk to his supervisor on the phone! Finally inside, we found **African Swamphen, Great White Pelican, Africa Darter, Common Reed Warbler, Lesser Swamp Warbler**. Waterfowl beyond **Egyptian Goose** and **South African Shelduck** were absent, but time with **African Sacred Ibis, Marico Sunbird, and Rufous-crowned Roller** (unusual here) softened that minimal blow (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194239053>). The midday heat gathering, we returned to the lodge, enjoyed a smoothie lunch, and relaxed ahead of our late-afternoon outing.

That bout of birding began with a quick loop of our Droombos digs. **Rosy-faced Lovebirds** (another near-endemic target) graced the feeders, and we soaked in close, eye-level views of **Southern Pied Bblers** at the back of the property (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194261444>). Returning to Avis after those victories, we scored a pair of **African Hawk-Eagles** and a lone **Black-chested Snake-Eagle**. It was also fun to compare non-breeding **Shaft-tailed** and **Pin-tailed Whydahs** as we

## Short-toed Rock-Thrush



explored the weedy margins of the desiccated basin. Pausing on the dam as sunset approached, we pulled **Greater Striped, White-throated, and South African (Cliff) Swallows** from the swirling hordes of **African Palm Swifts** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194289932>). Most would have been satisfied with 87 species on a day which was scheduled recovery, but not our fantastic five. Taking to the lodge courtyard after diner, we connected with **Pearl-spotted Owlet**, the curious bird coming straight to our tape after ten seconds of play. It was the perfect way to end an amazing first day!

### **Day 2 - Sunday, September 8 - Bonus birding in Windhoek and drive to Namibgrens**

In no rush on this morning, we revisited Avis Dam ahead of a late breakfast. Though it was our third visit in 24 hours, our return netted us ten species beyond those we found yesterday. The first was **Helmeted Guineafowl**, a group conveniently flushed by an unleashed dog. Next up? **Little Sparrowhawk!** Initially observed as a fly-by pair, one gave fabulous views when it doubled back and perched near our dam vantage. Moving along the western side of the floodplain and into the scrubby vegetation below the rocky cliffs, we found **Brown-crowned Tchagra, Cinnamon- and Golden-breasted Buntings, Kalahari Scrub-Robin, and Zitting Cisticola. Pied Crow** soared overheard, and **Bearded Woodpecker** offered a quick-but-identifiable view as it flew between perches. It was also cool to intersect **Monteiro's Hornbill**, two perching in a tree 400 yards from us. No matter that distance; we're knew we'd secure better views of that bird in the upcoming days (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194361795>).

We brunched at Droombos, checked out, and headed towards the Arebusch Lodge, the property where Dorian stayed on last year's Namibia tours. The lodge is located in Windhoek's

developed southern reaches but contains much intact habitat — and a corresponding number and diversity of birds — within its protective walls. Posing as guests, we infiltrated (term used loosely) the grounds and ticked **Pied Barbet**, **Dusky Sunbird**, **Burnt-neck Eremomela**, **Yellow Canary**, and **Cape Crombeck**; **Crimson-breasted Gonolek**, **Marico Sunbird**, and **Pirit Batis** were repeats from yesterday but no less awesome the second time. By the time we rolled out of Arebbusch, we'd pushed the trip list to an unexpected 107 species! Woot woot! Complete checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S194370041>.

We stocked up on snacks/water at the SuperSpar and continued south to Rehoboth. After refueling at that Oasis, we turned west, onto a bumpy dirt road, and closed to distance to Namibgrens Guest Farm. Exploring the property entrance and courtyard on our arrival, we bumped into **Karoo Scrub-Robin**, **Scarlet-chested Sunbird**, **Sabota Lark**, **Pearl-breasted Swallow**, and **Common Scimitarbill**. Despite those highlights, the birding was slow in the late-afternoon, so we retired to our accommodations to rest-up ahead of catered, in-villa dinner (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194426697>). The lodging is really spectacular; check it out [here](#). After-dinner stargazing in the deserted surroundings proved incredible. So, yeah; it was another highly successful day.

## Southern Cordonbleu



### Day 3 - Monday, September 9 - Namibgrens to Walvis Bay

A short bout of pre-breakfast birding revealed many of the same species as yesterday plus **Cape Bunting**, a trip first (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194509600>). The subsequent meal, served in the farm house solarium, was excellent. Bidding Sandra and her accompanying pack of dogs — six? seven? — goodbye, we piled into the van and headed for Sreetshootge Pass. The wind was fierce at that overlook, but we had incredible views before beginning our descent west, towards the coast and into the Namib Desert. Though we were unable to find Herero Chat in the gusty conditions, we did connect

p.4

with **Rüppell's Bustard** (another near-endemic) as we surrendered elevation. Roadside passerines were in short supply compared to 2022 or 2023, but we squeezed out **Dusky Sunbird**, **Chat Flycatcher**, and **Sociable Weaver**, the last at a massive communal nest (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194509589>).

The remainder of the drive to Walvis Bay was uneventful; that's a good thing considering the long distance, rough terrain, and lack of assistance/civilization in that part of the world. It's worth noting that the road has been greatly improved west of here (-22.712119186856107, 15.9677881732972); that made the remainder of the drive infinitely less miserable than it has been in the past. With time to spare as we approached Walvis, we detoured south, towards Rooibank, and began our search for **Dune Lark**, Namibia's most range restricted near-endemic. Stomping through the undulating, grass-covered drifts, we eventually connected with four representatives. The species can be skittish, so we were stoked with our close views (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194547570>)! That bird secured, we continued north to Walvis, checked into the Lagoon Lodge, and did some pre-dinner birding along the waterfront. **Greater** and **Lesser Flamingos**, **Pied Avocet**, and **Kelp** and **Hartlaub's Gulls** explored the shoreline, and a loop through a nearby park yielded **Red-faced Mousebird**, **Southern Fiscal**, and **Orange River White-eye** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194547048>). Those birds accounted for, we wandered across the street and into The Raft. Everyone loved the local seafood. #winning.

## Dune Lark



### Day 4 - Tuesday, September 10 - Walvis Bay and Swakopmund

Since we handled Dune Lark yesterday — and avoided the possibility that we'd need to return south (to Rooibank) before heading north (to Swakopmund) — we decided to work our way from Walvis to

p.5

Swakopmund through the day. Marine overcast would keep the Swako gravel plains cool, so we could delay our Gray's Lark search until the afternoon.

We ate breakfast at the lodge (at 7:30) and began our Walvis business in front of the hotel, on the raised concrete promenade which traces the bayshore. The tidal mudflats were alive with shorebirds: **White-fronted Plover, Common Greenshank, Curlew Sandpiper, Sanderling, and Little Stint.** Further out, **Cape Cormorants** and **Common** and **Great Crested Terns** rested on an exposed sandbar. It was bird overload from the get-go! Continuing into the salt work at the southern end of Walvis Bay, we found **Cape Teal, Chestnut-banded Plover, Ruff, Ruddy Turnstone, and Little Egret.** With the wind in check, we did a bit of seawatching once we reached the beachfront. Some were able to get on a **White-chinned Petrel** as it winged by our vantage, but a distant **Parasitic Jaeger** remained 'leader-only'. Retracing our tracks through the salt works, we scored a huge win with **Damara Tern.** The individual had presumably just returned from its northern wintering grounds and offered killer views as it hovered just off the roadway. A final scan of the mudflats in front of the hotel revealed **African Oystercatcher, Whimbrel, and Bar-tailed Godwit** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194610092>). Moving north towards Swako, we made two roadside stops to add **Sandwich Tern** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194611229>) and **Crowned Cormorant** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194612326>) before reaching town and enjoying Indian food for lunch. It was then time to dial down on the day's most important bird, the near-endemic **Gray's Lark.** Dorian warned the group that search for the inconspicuous ground dweller could be both protracted and boring, so everyone (leader included) was stoked when a group of ten materialized fifteen minutes into our vigil (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194653229>). Sadly, we struck out on **Tractrac Chat** despite investing the remainder of the afternoon

## Pied Avocet



## Greater Flamingos



## Chestnut-banded Plover



into it. Oh well. What's one miss in the first four days! You never get them all, right? I (Dorian) didn't make checklists for all of our afternoon stops, but here's one from the river mouth, where we added **Gray-hooded Gull** among many familiar species (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194652752>).

## Gray's Lark



### **Day 5 - Wednesday, September 11 - Spitzkoppe and Omaruru**

With Tractrac Chat our only miss around Walvis/Swako — and it's not a hyper-critical species on this tour because it's easy in South Africa — we vacated the coast and sped inland, towards Spitzkoppe. There we'd search for a much higher-leverage bird, the effectively-endemic Herero Chat. Dorian was three-for-three at the location, so hopes were high as we entered the reserve at 8am. Wait! Stop! What was that? Holy crap! It's a pair of **White-tailed Shrikes!** They are so awesome! And right on the entrance road! We didn't even need to get out of the car to get that near-endemic! Reaching Dorian's chat spot shortly thereafter, we disembarked the van and started into the habitat on foot. A few tape cycles and BOOM! **Herero Chat** at the top of a small shrub! And there's another! **Layard's Warbler** proved more challenging, but everyone eventually secured identifiable views of a slippery individual. The fun didn't stop there; a flock of six **White-throated Canaries** perched for scope views. We did a bit more general birding before vacating the area at 10:45. Checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S194721095>.

Speeding along at an undisclosed velocity, Dorian noticed a pale passerine on a roadside post. *Could it be Tractrac redemption?* No! But it was a **Karoo Chat**, another new bird for the list (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194722098>). The remainder of the drive to Ondudu Safari Lodge was uneventful.



We checked-in, lunched, and relaxed ahead of some late-afternoon birding. Here is should be stated that Namibia is in the midst of a historic drought. The country hasn't been so dry in at least a hundred years. To put that in perspective, it's been ten months, since December of 2023, since it rained in Erongo/Omaruru Given that circumstance, the birding was expectedly-slow; **Helmeted Guineafowl**, **African Gray Hornbill**, and a second **Rockrunner** represented our most exciting finds (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194756165>).

## Herero Chat



Breaking from Ondudu, we drove across the street, to Camp Mara, for the evening extravaganza. Resident/Owner Ecki has been feeding birds for over a decade, and hordes of hornbills descend on the property ahead of each evening offering. Clients couldn't believe their eyes as **Damara Red-billed**, **Monteiro's**, and **Southern Yellow-billed** overtook the yard. Don't believe me? Well, just check out these photos (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194756088>)! While some clicked pics, others sipped wine and beer. Dinner at the lodge was incredible. So were our views of **Freckled Nightjar**, two birds perching on the rocks within sight of our outdoor table (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194764751>). Not a bad way to end the day! But wait, there's more! Two massive **African Porcupines** came into offered food scraps after dark. They were so much bigger than clients expected!

## Rosy-faced Lovebird



### Day 6 - Thursday, Sept 12 - Omaruru

While Omaruru is traditionally very birdy, the drought has severely reduced bird numbers and diversity. **Hartlaub's Spurfowl**, for example, used to be common at Ondudu, but the rock-loving ground-dweller has virtually disappeared from the property across the last three years. A bird that was once all-but-guaranteed now requires significant investment, usually off-property. Against those circumstances, everyone was thrilled when our tape motivated several birds to vocalize at sunrise. We had distant views of one pair before we reeled them slowly closer, the birds eventually atop an exposed boulder fifty yards from our position. The scope views were amazing! It was the easiest time Dorian has had with the near-endemic in his four attempts (he was 2/3 prior to this tour). Checklist deliberately not-linked to protect the location.

Given our spurfowl success, we could have folded birding then-and-there, but we decided to try to extend our hot hand at the Omaruru Rest Camp, where there were recent reports of Rüppell's Parrot and Violet Woodhoopoe (both near-endemic). And wouldn't you know it? We weren't there five minutes before a pair of **Rüppell's Parrots** rocketed over us. Damn it! The view was enough for Dorian to make the ID but not enough for clients to note anything beyond flying birds. Fortunately, we ran into a perched example two minutes later, that bird allowing prolonged inspection before it pushed off. The parrots, like the spurfowl, have dwindled/moved at the hands of the drought, so our encounter represented a huge victory. And coupled with the Hartlaub's, it was a really awesome morning. **Gabar Goshawk** was the only other notable bird from our walk (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194807010>).

We returned to the lodge, ate breakfast, and spent a bit of time exploring Ondudu. It was already very hot, so activity was low. We did, however, run into a cooperative pair of **Carp's Tits** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194812004>)! That gave us 12 of 15 near-endemics, Violet Woodhoopoe, Bare-cheeked Babbler, and Black-faced Babbler representing the two holdouts. We'd have chances for the first two in Etosha and the third at Kayova, so the prospect of running the table on those most-critical birds was intact on this sixth day.

## Carp's Tit



We checked out and decided to kill some of the midday heat with car biding; that 45-minute effort in the midday heat didn't yield much beyond our first **Tawny Eagle** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194817172>). The heat killed birding, so we lunched at Kashana before checking into Omaruru Central Hotel. A bit of relaxation and we were back at it, this time in the dry riverbed behind our lodging. While it wasn't quite the miserable slog of the 2023 Omaruru Death March, which Dorian chronicled in last year's trip report, we found very little on our 2.5 mile foray. A pair of **Bearded Woodpeckers** was a good-get, and we had fun chasing a ventriloquist **African Scops-Owl** before spying its location (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194854548>). Yeah, it was a slow afternoon, but we were 'playing with house money' after scoring the spurfowl and parrot earlier in the day. Dinner was interrupted by a ten minute power outage. Otherwise, all was well as we moved towards bed.

**Day 7 - Friday, September 13 - Etosha NP, Day 1 of 3.**

We loaded the van at dawn and headed north, towards Etosha. Rather than stay on pavement, we veered onto a wide, well-maintained dirt thoroughfare along which we did some casual, roadside birding. Our second **Rufous-crowned Roller** was a nice start — the first at the sewage works in Windhoek — and we added **Crowned Lapwing** and **Southern Anteater-Chat** to the trip list. Pausing at a water trough which we spotted in a cattle pen, we had excellent views of two stunning birds, **Violet-eared Waxbill** and **Namaqua Sandgrouse**. Our subsequent encounter with **Double-banded Sandgrouse** was upsetting. Passing a family of four in the middle of the road, we realized the fifth family member, a newly hatched chick, had been run over by a passing car. The parents were peeping at the dead chick as though they wanted it to move, so Dorian climbed out of the van, shoed the family off the road, and disposed of the carcass so they wouldn't be tempted to return. It was great to see the birds at such close range, but the circumstances were a bummer. Apart from the aforementioned species, our other best find was a massive **Kori Bustard** which flew right around our van. The huge wings were amazing! Our four checklists from this morning stretch were all over the place because we were moving and trying to respect regional boundaries. Nonetheless, here they are: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S194918252>, <https://ebird.org/checklist/S194911032>, <https://ebird.org/checklist/S194912197>, <https://ebird.org/checklist/S194918217>.

**Rufous-crowned Roller**

## Kori Bustard



We reached Etosha NP and immediately ran into a small herd of **elephants**, the massive beasts hunkered in the little available shade. Continuing to Okaukuejo Camp, we checked in and made the requisite pilgrimage to the water hole. Beyond orienting clients, the visit netted us our first **Burchell's Starlings**. Otherwise, it was entirely repeat species: **Blacksmith Lapwing**, **Little Grebe**, **Swallow-tailed Bee-eater**, etc (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194961780>).

After a two hour rest/recovery, we departed the camp for our first game drive. Scheduled for ~three hours, it would take us on a wide loop northwest of the camp. In short, birds were in painfully short supply throughout, a circumstance which can be blamed entirely on the ongoing drought. Against that expected paucity, we were stoked to find **Lilac-breasted Roller**, **Spike-heeled Lark**, **Plain-backed Pipit**, and **Double-banded Courser** (all new for the trip). The bustard show was also in full effect; at one point we had six Koris in view! We also had point-black, perfectly-lit views of **Greater Kestrel** on a roadside rock. The bird didn't move as we passed twenty feet from it. It was pretty sweet (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194961640>). And damn! What about the mammals? They were mostly absent from the outgoing part of our loop, but we scored numbers of **Springbok**, **Wildebeest**, **Giraffe**, and **Oryx** on the back-end. Plus, we added a **Spotted Hyena**, six **Black Rhinos**, and a lone **Spotted Thick-knee** at the Okaukuejo water hole after dinner (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S194975906>). So yeah - the dry conditions were challenging, but we still had another fun/productive day.

## Lilac-breasted Roller



## Zebra



**Day 8 - Saturday, September 14 - Etosha NP, Day 2 of 3.**

Etosha mornings are a delicate balance; the urge to leave camp to search for mammals is undeniable, but it's critical to spend some part of those most productive hours in camp, looking for skulky birds which are unlikely to be observed along the road (i.e. from the vehicle). With that in mind, we ate an early breakfast before exploring Okaukuejo. **Crimson-breasted Gonolek** appeared en route to the waterhole, and we teased a **Barren Wren-Warbler** from a thicket a moment later. There weren't many mammals at the waterhole, but we enjoyed **Rufous-chested Swallows** as they floated on the morning breeze. An adorable **Brubru** called from a treetop, and a few cycles of Pearl-spotted Owlet tape brought **Red-backed Scrub-Robin** into close view. The action was hot, but we decided to take to the park roads after 52 minutes and 35 species (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195015851>).

This morning's drive would carry us from last night's lodging (Okaukuejo) to tonight's (Halali). Our route was ~75km, so we expected it would take until midday to reach that destination. As with yesterday, and as a result of the drought, birding was slow, but we squeezed out **Gray-backed Sparrow-Lark**, **Red-capped Lark**, and **Red-crested Bustard**, the last spotted through heavy brush by a keen-eyed Steve (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195028713>). Reaching Rietfontein, we connected with **White-backed** and **Lappet-faced Vultures** and a large flock of **Chestnut-backed Sparrow Larks** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195028892>). Those and other birds aside, the morning's highlight was an adult **Black Rhino**. The bulky beast wasn't more than fifty feet from us and crossed the road just behind our van!

**Black Rhino**

We rolled into camp and sat down to lunch but immediately raced into the courtyard when a four **Violet Woodhoopoes** appeared. And while looking at those, we added **Bare-cheeked Babbler**. 14-for-15 on near-endemics in just over a week? Hell yes! That's what I'm talking about. Beyond those, we also ticked **Golden-tailed Woodpecker** and **White-crowned Shrike**. A post-lunch walk revealed **Brown Snake-Eagle** and **Shikra** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195041506>). Among limited species, our afternoon game drive revealed multiple **Kori Bustards**, a flyaway **Eurasian Hoopoe**, and dozen **White Helmetshrikes**, six of which were snuggled on the same branch. Throw in loads of **giraffes** and a handful of **elephants** and it was a nice outing (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195109045>). But we weren't done: a swing through the Goas waterhole earned us **Marsh Sandpiper**, a bird we missed on the coast (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195108655>). We raced back to camp ahead of gate closing and proceeded to the waterhole. We were hoping for **Double-banded Sandgrouse** (spoiler: over 400 showed up after sundown ), but we were treated to a four-pack of **female lions**. Originally spotted moving through the bush, they came straight to the waterhole for an extended drink. It was super sweet. After-dinner owling didn't yield anything concrete. We thought we heard a Southern White-faced Owl, but the bird was too far away and unwilling to come closer. Guess we can't win them all.

## Bare-cheeked Babbler



### Day 9 - Sunday, Sept 15 - Etosha NP, Day 3 of 3

Today started earlier than expected, when Steve and Anne heard what they thought was a **Southern White-faced Owl** calling in the courtyard. It only gave a single note whistle for some time but eventually uttered a forceful, extended call from over our heads. Unfortunately, the bird vanished before we could achieve a visual, the species joining the trip list as 'heard-only. We ate breakfast and extended our camp wanderings to the waterhole, where we bettered our looks at **Golden-breasted**



Lions



Wildebeest



**Bunting** (Avis Dam, Day 2). We didn't find any new birds, but we appreciated bonus looks at **Violet Woodhoopoes** and **Bare-cheeked Babblers** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195162595>).

We left camp and headed straight to Goas waterhole, where we found a massive mixed herd of **wildebeest, zebras, impala, kudu, springbok, and red hartebeest**. A **Red-necked Falcon** made several passes of the area while a **Wood Sandpiper** stalked a muddy edge. Two more trip birds - yay (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195236575>)! The rest of the morning was hot and exceptionally slow. How slow was it? Well, it was so slow that Dorian didn't bother with an eBird list (\*gasp\*)! A stop as Chudop produced our first **Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195177688>), and a quick, post-lunch look around Namutoni Camp didn't yield much beyond better views of **Red-necked Falcon** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195236752>).

At a bit of a loss as to what to do given a general dearth of birds at the east end of the park, Dorian decided we'd head to the Andoni Plains, mostly as a way to kill time before we vacated the park. And boy, that was the right decision. Reaching the manmade pond in the middle of the sprawling grasslands, we found our first (and only) **male lion!** Initially snoozing, he eventually motivated to walk to the pooled water and drink! It was great to see him in action.

And we backed that beast up with three **Blue Cranes!** The birds used to be regular at the location - Dorian saw them on both tours last year - but they mysteriously vanished from the area earlier in 2024; no one had eBirded them in the last 8 months by the time we observed them. We'd written the possibility of the species off, so it was great to connect with it on our final Etosha afternoon (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195236658>). From there, we turned tail, departed the park, and reached our

## Blue Crane, Oryx, Wildebeest, Zebra



Tsumeb overnight. We were nervous that the beer brewers convention at that destination would create a rowdy atmosphere, but things thankfully stayed under control.

### **Day 10 - Monday, Sept 16 - Long drive to Okavango/Kayova**

We'd need to travel upwards of five hours to reach Kayova Rover Lodge in the Okavango Region, so we planned to bird the Kupferquelle grounds in the morning before driving through the heat of the day. Activity was generally low, but our persistence netted us **Lesser Honeyguide** (new for the trip), **Eurasian Hoopoe** (infinitely better views than in Etosha), and **African Green Pigeon** (rare for this area and a Namibia bird for Dorian). It was also nice to enjoy a leisurely breakfast, for once (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195318727>).

We hit the road and added **White-rumped Swift** en route to Grootfontein, where we stopped for gas, snacks, and cash. Rolling north, we watched a Bateleur grab something from the roadside. It was an amazing swoop! Continuing to and through Rundu, we paused at the the Kaisosi Sewage Ponds, where a strong breeze mitigated the otherwise oppressive heat. **Whiskered Tern** and **Wire-tailed Swallow** were trip-firsts, and we had distant views of another in the form of **Blue-billed Teal**. Shorebirds were well represented in the form of **Black-winged Stilt**, **Three-banded Plover**, **Blacksmith Lapwing**, **Wood Sandpiper**, and **Ruff** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195378208>).

It was very hot when we reached Kayova at 4:30, but we started birding immediately. Perched atop a riverside cliff, the lodge offers the opportunity to bird Namibia and Angola simultaneously. The birdlife in the Okavango region is very different from the areas we'd visited previously, so we experienced a huge bump in new birds: **Mourning Collared-Dove**, **Black Heron**, **African Barred Owlet**, **Gabon Boubou**, **Hartlaub's Babbler**, **Pied Kingfisher**, and **Kurrichane Thrush**. We split the checklists based on what we observed in each county (Namibia: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S195378153> and Angola: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S195375676>). And we didn't stop there. A bit of nocturnal birding yielded **Fiery-necked Nightjar**, and **Square-tailed Nightjar** (both heard-only on the Angola side of the river).

### **Day 11 - Tuesday, September 17 - Kayova and surroundings**

Kayova boasts wonderful river birding and has access to one of the most specialized habitats we explore on this tour, broadleaf woodlands. The gusu, as it is sometimes called, can be tricky to bird. The sandy soil makes for wobbly walking and activity drops precipitously through the morning; by 10am, it has entirely shut down. And, no matter how hard you bird, you never get everything because many of the broadleaf specialists (Greencap Eremomela, Rufous-bellied Tit, Tinkling Cisticola) are present at very low densities, a circumstance which the constant cutting of forest does not help. With that in mind, we arrived at our appointed location at 6:25am, exactly as the sun cracked the eastern horizon. **White-breasted Sunbirds** and **Golden-breasted Buntings** were everywhere, and we connected with **Southern Black Tit** and **Southern Black** and **Pale Flycatchers** a moment later. Served with a side order of **Chin-spot Batis** and **Cardinal Woodpecker**, ours was a great start. Moving a kilometer along the road, we found **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird**, **Yellow-fronted Canary**, **Brown-crowned Tchagra**, **Magpie Shrike**, **Yellow-breasted Apalis**, **Rattling Cisticola**, and - best of all - **White-breasted Cuckooshrike!** The outing was an avalanche of new and beautiful birds (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195432166>)

Activity declined towards 9:30, so we returned to Kayova, **Red-billed Oxpecker** and **Collared Pratincole** added en route. After a late breakfast/brunch — and under stifling heat — we took to the lodge grounds. Though small, they nonetheless yielded an impressive complement of birds: **Senegal Cuckoo**, **Purple Heron**, **Bradfield's Hornbill**, and **Yellow-bellied Greenbull**. A male **Violet-backed**

**Starling** was electric, and we reveled in the opportunity to compare **Arrow-marked**, **Hartlaub's**, and **Black-faced Babblers** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195442614>). And how could we forget a soaring **Ayres's Hawk-Eagle**, a lifer for Dorian!

We'd scheduled an afternoon boat trip on the river, but low water levels sank that plan. Instead, we spent the midday hours relaxing, hanging out with the lodge staff and other guests. When the heat broke (sort of), we made several additional loops through the property and found a pair of **Grosbeak Weavers** for our efforts. The action slowing, we assumed a perch on the elevated riverbank and soaked in the sunset (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195482037>). Later, some of us connected with a **Barn Owl** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195530625>). After that? Bed!

## African Fish Eagle



### **Day 12 - Wednesday, September 18 - Kayova to Botswana**

Because we (expectedly) failed to connect with several broadleaf birds, we returned to that habitat on this morning. It was dead at the first place we stopped, so we headed towards a public well, where eBird data suggested we might be able to find **Sharp-tailed Starling**. Pulling over at the roadside location, we found a group of **Cut-throats** feeding on the ground. Then came a flock of the sought starlings. And then a quartet of **Green Woodhoopoes**. Initially distant, they gave us nice views in response to audio. **Mosque Swallow** required no such enticement; a pair perched in a close snag. **Groundscraper Thrush** wasn't a new species, but it was great to see a close example in soft morning light (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195532488>).

Continuing east, we turned south at Divundu and made a stop on the Okavango River. There we found **Rock Pratincole**, **Water Thick-knee**, and **Lilac-breasted Roller** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195538659>). Twenty minutes later, we looped off the main road and into Bwabwata NP (Mahango). Water levels were much lower than last year, but that didn't stop us from spying **Spur-winged Goose**, **White-faced Whistling-** and **Knob-billed Ducks**, **Wattled Crane**, **Long-toed Lapwing**, **Yellow-billed Stork**, **Goliath Heron**, and **African Spoonbill**. On the terrestrial side, we redeemed our hitherto miss on **Swainson's Spurfowl** (great spotting by Anne) and bettered our views of **Meve's Starling**. **Banded Martin** was an additional new tick (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195553602>).

We reached Shakawe River lodge at 1:15pm. We thought we'd have some downtime ahead of a 3:30pm boat trip but a number of snafus, entirely at the hands of the lodge, disrupted those plans. Lunch took over two-and-a-half hours because the restaurant wasn't staffed or the oven fired when we arrived, and the lodge committed to only available boatman to a late-arriving couple when they should have told that couple to get lost since they arrived late. As it was, the combined screw-ups forced us to surrender the first hour of our three-hour boat trip. Temperatures were very nice when we finally pushed off the dock at 4:30pm. **Hamerkop** glided over our low craft while an **African Stonechat** perched on a fluffy reed. Winding through river bends, we encountered **Coppery-tailed Coucal**, **African Skimmer**, and **Saddle-billed Stork**. The last, a yellow-eyed female, gave awesome views as it stalked prey. We were so close that it was hard to fit the huge bird in our camera's viewfinders! Working the reeds with audio, we earned views (however quick or obstructed) of **Greater Swamp** and **Little Rush Warblers**. With **Pied**, **Malachite**, and **Giant Kingfishers** buzzing around, we forgot about the acrimony which preceded our departure (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195592110>).

## White-fronted Bee-eater



p. 21

**Day 13 - Thursday, September 19 - More Botswana/Okavango**

Today's feature activity was a four-hour morning boat ride on the Okavango River, the gentle journey to seek regional specialties like Slaty Egret, White-backed Night-Heron, and Pel's Fishing Owl (among others). The air was crisp and refreshing when started north. **Chirping Cisticola** and **Black Crake** materialized from the phragmites, and we tallied an unexpected victory when two **African Pygmy Geese** buzzed the boat. After that, we turned our attention to **White-backed Night-Heron**, a very stealthy bird which roosts in riverside thickets. It took a lot of hard staring, but we eventually connected with a representative buried deep inside the vegetation. Some of us need to lay on the deck to see through the branches. **Pel's Fishing Owl** required no such gymnastics; Santos (our boatman) put us onto two birds, one of which gave amazing views when it assumed an unobstructed, horizontal perch! **Burchell's Sandgrouse** wasn't so cooperative, scattered representatives offering only quick and/or fly-by opportunities. Continuing upriver to an expansive marshy floodplain, we found **Yellow-billed Duck**, **Collared Pratincole**, **Black Heron**, **African Spoonbill**, and other waders. Sadly, and despite perfect habitat, we were unable to connect with Slaty Egret or Rufous-bellied Heron. The **Red-** and **Yellow-billed Oxpeckers** riding on donkeys were fun though (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195651739>)!

**Pel's Fishing-Owl**

We returned to the lodge, gathered our belongings, and moved upriver to Drotsky's Cabins. We usually spend both Botswana nights at Drotsky's, but we were only able to secure rooms for this night - the 19th - because a huge group had booked the place the night before. That's why we had to use Shakawe River Lodge last night. We anticipate this being a two-night stay on future tours as it has been

in the past. The lodge grounds were alive with bird through lunch but went quiet during our post-meal, heat-of-the-day rest. Birding was a real struggle when we regrouped at 4pm. We ended up with a respectable 40 species across 2.5 hours, but activity was very, very low and we had to work hard for each bird we found. Highlights included **African Harrier-Hawk**, **African Goshawk**, **Brown-Hooded Kingfisher**, **African Black-headed Oriole**, **White-browed Robin-Chat**, and **Southern Brown-throated Weaver**. **Ashy Flycatcher** was ‘Dorian-only’; **Greater Blue-eared Starling** was ‘Anne-only’ (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195698241>). After dinner, we had amazing views of **African Wood-Owl** in the camping area (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195711479>). It was a full and very productive day!

## Brown-hooded Kingfisher



### Day 14 - Friday, September 20 - Botswana mop-up, Windhoek return part 1

While it is tempting to use this second Botswana morning for another boat trip (yesterday’s was great, right?), it was better to stay in camp and bird the grounds for two reasons. The first is logistical; a boat trip would mean a later departure from Drotsky’s and — therefore — a later arrival on the other end. As this day is a very long driving day, it’s best to get it started earlier than a boat trip would allow. And second, Drotsky’s can be very birdy; the trip list is likely to be higher with the inclusion of hitherto missing land birds than with the unaccounted waterbirds. With that in mind, we began stomping the grounds at 6:30am. **Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike** and **African Pied Wagtail** presented right out of the gate, and we had great looks at **Black Cuckooshrike** and **White-browed Coucal** as we extended our exploration. The feeders were a goldmine; beyond repeat finches, doves, and weavers, those also produced **Fan-tailed Widowbird**. So yeah, a nice injection of new birds (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195755084>).

p.23

We packed up, hit the road at 9:30, crossed the border without issue, and made a second, shorter swing through Mahango (we were out of there at noon). Most of the birds were familiar, but **Gray-rumped Swallow** and **Bennett's Woodpecker** were trip birds. The first of those was long-overdue and the second was a nice surprise. From there, we put the pedal down and made miles west. We had a 'pizza' lunch (can it really be pizza without tomato sauce ?!?!?) in Rundu and doubled back to Kaisosi to check the sewage ponds. Among a host of expected shorebirds, **African Snipe** and **Greater Painted-Snipe** were new for the trip (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195786338>). Those secured, we started south towards our Grootfontein overnight, **Crested Francolin** added at the roadside as we neared that destination (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195813711>). We recommend the Courtyard Guest House for dinner. Huge portions - watch out!

## Green-winged Pytilia



### Day 15 - Saturday, September 21 - Windhoek return part 2

Energy levels were pretty low, so we bypassed Waterberg and headed straight to Windhoek. The roadside was alive with raptors; among **Bateleur**, **Black-chested Snake-Eagle**, **Brown Snake-Eagle**, and **Verreaux's Eagle**, the last was particularly celebrated (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S195946715>). We reached Droombos at 1pm, lunched, and relaxed until 3:30, when we headed to the Gammams Water Works for a second visit (the first was two weeks earlier). We'd had only crappy views of **Blue-billed Teal** to that point, so it was nice to better those with a close group of ten. Same for **African Pipit**. Among a long list of species, **Common Ringed Plover** was very notable. New for the trip, it was also the first sighting of the species at that particular location (at least according to eBird). The day expiring, we swung through Droombos to get cleaned up for dinner and, with everyone looking their best,



headed to the Stellenbosch Wine Bar and Bistro, arguably Windhoek's finest restaurant (at last according to those that know about such things). It was an excellent meal!

**Day 16 - Sunday, September 22 - Windhoek mop-up and departures**

The earliest flight out was at 1:45, so a few of us returned to Avis Dam for some relaxed birding. Little did we know it would be anything but! There were birds everywhere! The action was non-stop, and we ended up with 73 species across 2 hours and 20 minutes! Among those, **Bradfield's Swift** and **Ashy Tit** were new for this trip (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S196027241>). It was a great way to finish. Airport runs began shortly thereafter, and by 6pm, all of us were en route to our respective homes. Whew - time to recover from a busy but rewarding trip! We hope to see everyone on another Tropical Birding departure!

**Red-billed Spurfowl**



Full bird list starts on next page

Here is the link to the electronic/eBird trip report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/272945>

### **Complete bird list (327 species)**

\*\*\*eBird report shows 326 species because it does not include the Greater Blue-eared Starling which only Anne saw

Common Ostrich  
White-faced Whistling-Duck

Knob-billed Duck  
Egyptian Goose  
South African Shelduck

Spur-winged Goose  
African Pygmy-Goose

Blue-billed Teal  
Cape Shoveler  
Yellow-billed Duck

Mallard  
Cape Teal  
Red-billed Duck

Maccoa Duck  
Helmeted Guineafowl  
Crested Francolin

#### **Hartlaub's Spurfowl - near endemic**

Red-billed Spurfowl  
Swainson's Spurfowl  
Rock Pigeon  
Speckled Pigeon  
Mourning Collared-Dove

Red-eyed Dove  
Ring-necked Dove  
Laughing Dove  
Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove  
Namaqua Dove

African Green-Pigeon  
Namaqua Sandgrouse  
Double-banded Sandgrouse  
Burchell's Sandgrouse  
Kori Bustard

#### **Rüppell's Bustard - near endemic**

Red-crested Bustard  
White-quilled Bustard  
Gray Go-away-bird  
Senegal Coucal  
Coppery-tailed Coucal  
Fiery-necked Nightjar

Freckled Nightjar  
Square-tailed Nightjar - heard-only  
Alpine Swift  
Bradfield's Swift  
Little Swift  
White-rumped Swift  
African Palm Swift  
Eurasian Moorhen  
Red-knobbed Coot  
African Swamphen  
Black Crake  
Blue Crane  
Wattled Crane  
Spotted Thick-knee  
Water Thick-knee  
Black-winged Stilt  
Pied Avocet  
African Oystercatcher  
Black-bellied Plover  
Common Ringed Plover  
Three-banded Plover  
Long-toed Lapwing  
Blacksmith Lapwing  
Crowned Lapwing  
Wattled Lapwing  
Kittlitz's Plover  
Chestnut-banded Plover  
White-fronted Plover  
Greater Painted-Snipe  
African Jacana  
Whimbrel  
Bar-tailed Godwit  
African Snipe  
Common Sandpiper  
Marsh Sandpiper  
Wood Sandpiper  
Common Greenshank  
Ruddy Turnstone  
Ruff  
Curlew Sandpiper  
Sanderling  
Little Stint  
Double-banded Courser  
Rock Pratincole  
Collared Pratincole  
Parasitic Jaeger - Dorian/leader-only  
Gray-hooded Gull

Hartlaub's Gull  
Kelp Gull  
African Skimmer  
**Damara Tern - near endemic**  
Caspian Tern  
Whiskered Tern  
Common Tern  
Sandwich Tern  
Great Crested Tern  
Greater Flamingo  
Lesser Flamingo  
Little Grebe  
White-chinned Petrel  
African Openbill  
Saddle-billed Stork  
Marabou Stork  
Yellow-billed Stork  
African Darter  
Long-tailed Cormorant  
Crowned Cormorant  
Cape Cormorant  
Great Cormorant  
Glossy Ibis  
African Sacred Ibis  
Hadada Ibis  
African Spoonbill  
Black Heron  
Little Egret  
White-backed Night Heron - special interest  
Striated Heron  
Squacco Heron  
Western Cattle Egret  
Great Egret  
Gray Heron  
Purple Heron  
Black-headed Heron  
Goliath Heron  
Hamerkop  
Great White Pelican  
Osprey  
Black-winged Kite  
African Harrier-Hawk  
Lappet-faced Vulture  
White-backed Vulture  
Bateleur  
Black-chested Snake-Eagle  
Brown Snake-Eagle

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle  
Tawny Eagle  
Verreaux's Eagle  
African Hawk-Eagle  
Gabar Goshawk  
Pale Chanting-Goshawk  
African Goshawk  
Little Sparrowhawk  
Shikra  
African Marsh Harrier  
Black Kite  
African Fish-Eagle  
Western Barn Owl  
African Scops-Owl  
Southern White-faced Owl - heard-only  
Pel's Fishing-Owl - special interest  
Pearl-spotted Owlet  
African Barred Owlet  
African Wood-Owl  
White-backed Mousebird  
Red-faced Mousebird  
Eurasian Hoopoe  
Green Woodhoopoe  
**Violet Woodhoopoe - near endemic**  
Common Scimitarbill  
Bradfield's Hornbill  
African Gray Hornbill  
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill  
**Monteiro's Hornbill - near endemic**  
**Damara Red-billed Hornbill - near endemic**  
White-fronted Bee-eater  
Little Bee-eater  
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater  
Southern Carmine Bee-eater  
Malachite Kingfisher  
Brown-hooded Kingfisher  
Giant Kingfisher  
Pied Kingfisher  
Lilac-breasted Roller  
Rufous-crowned Roller  
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird  
Pied Barbet  
Black-collared Barbet  
Lesser Honeyguide  
Bearded Woodpecker  
Cardinal Woodpecker  
Bennett's Woodpecker

Golden-tailed Woodpecker

Rock Kestrel

Greater Kestrel

Red-necked Falcon

**Rosy-faced Lovebird - near endemic**

Meyer's Parrot

**Rüppell's Parrot - near endemic**

White-breasted Cuckooshrike

Black Cuckooshrike

African Black-headed Oriole

**White-tailed Shrike - near endemic**

Chinspot Batis

Pirit Batis

White Helmetshrike

Brubru

Black-backed Puffback

Brown-crowned Tchagra

Gabon Boubou

Crimson-breasted Gonolek

Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike

Fork-tailed Drongo

Magpie Shrike

Southern Fiscal

White-crowned Shrike

Cape Crow

Pied Crow

Southern Black-Tit

**Carp's Tit - near endemic**

Ashy Tit

Spike-heeled Lark

**Gray's Lark - near endemic**

Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark

Gray-backed Sparrow-Lark

Sabota Lark

**Dune Lark - endemic**

Rufous-naped Lark

Red-capped Lark

Long-billed (Cape) Crombec

**Rockrunner - near endemic**

Yellow-bellied Eremomela

Burnt-neck Eremomela

Barred Wren-Warbler

Green-backed Camaroptera

Yellow-breasted Apalis

Tawny-flanked Prinia

Black-chested Prinia

Rattling Cisticola

Chirping Cisticola  
Zitting Cisticola  
Common Reed Warbler  
Lesser Swamp Warbler  
Greater Swamp Warbler  
Little Rush Warbler  
Gray-rumped Swallow  
Banded Martin  
Plain Martin  
Southern Crag-Martin (Rock Martin)  
Pearl-breasted Swallow  
White-throated Swallow  
Wire-tailed Swallow  
Greater Striped Swallow  
Lesser Striped Swallow  
Rufous-chested Swallow  
Mosque Swallow  
South African Swallow  
Yellow-bellied Greenbul  
Terrestrial Brownbul  
Common Bulbul  
Black-fronted Bulbul  
Layard's Warbler  
Chestnut-vented Warbler  
Orange River White-eye  
Southern Yellow White-eye  
Arrow-marked Babbler  
Bare-cheeked Babbler  
Southern Pied-Babbler  
Hartlaub's Babbler  
Black-faced Babbler - special interest  
Red-billed Oxpecker  
Yellow-billed Oxpecker  
Wattled Starling  
Violet-backed Starling  
Pale-winged Starling  
Burchell's Starling  
Meves's Starling  
Sharp-tailed Starling  
Cape Starling  
Greater Blue-eared Starling - Anne-only  
Groundscraper Thrush  
Kurrichane Thrush  
Marico Flycatcher  
Pale Flycatcher  
Chat Flycatcher  
Ashy Flycatcher - Dorian/Leader-only

**Herero Chat - near endemic**

Southern Black-Flycatcher  
Karoo Scrub-Robin  
Kalahari Scrub-Robin  
White-browed (Red-backed) Scrub-Robin  
White-browed Robin-Chat  
Short-toed Rock-Thrush  
African Stonechat  
Karoo Chat  
Southern Anteater-Chat  
Mountain Chat (Wheatear)  
Familiar Chat  
Collared Sunbird  
Scarlet-chested Sunbird  
Marico Sunbird  
White-breasted Sunbird  
Dusky Sunbird  
Scaly Weaver  
White-browed Sparrow-Weaver  
Sociable Weaver  
Holub's Golden-Weaver  
Southern Brown-throated Weaver  
Southern Masked-Weaver  
Red-billed Quelea  
Southern Red Bishop  
Fan-tailed Widowbird  
Grosbeak Weaver  
Black-faced Waxbill  
Common Waxbill  
Cut-throat  
Red-headed Finch  
Violet-eared Waxbill  
Southern Cordonbleu  
Green-winged Pytilia  
Red-billed Firefinch  
Pin-tailed Whydah  
Shaft-tailed Whydah  
House Sparrow  
Great Rufous Sparrow  
Cape Sparrow  
Southern Gray-headed Sparrow  
Cape Wagtail  
African Pied Wagtail  
African Pipit  
Plain-backed Pipit  
Yellow-fronted Canary  
Black-throated Canary



Yellow Canary  
White-throated Canary  
Golden-breasted Bunting  
Cape Bunting  
Lark-like Bunting  
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting