

NAMIBIA WINTER ENDEMIC TOUR 7 - 19 JUNE 2012.

Arrival at Windhoek International Airport at 13h00 and the plane was on time!!! Here I met with Keith and Borsha Gunning who had completed customs in an amazing record breaking time. We headed off for Windhoek to book into our B&B for the night, the quaint and lovely Galton House. Borsha opted to stay and relax after the long flight and Keith and I spent the afternoon at the Avis dam where we managed to get good views of Monteiro's Hornbill, a pair of mating Hammerkop, Blacksmith's Plover (Lapwing), South African Shelduck, Egyptian Goose, Red-billed Teal, Dabchick, Common Waxbill, Green-winged Pytilia, Rattling & Desert Cisticolas, Marico Flycatcher, White-backed Mousebirds, and also a brief glimpse of African Fish Eagle and African Quail Finch.

The following day we left via Rehoboth and Nauchas for Spreetshoogte where we spent the night. The weather was cloudy and cold but shortly after arrival at our overnight camp we managed to find a pair of Herero Chat, the main reason for staying at this site! The following morning we had another two Herero Chat just below our accommodation, also Black-chested Prinia, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Mountain Wheatear (Chat), Grey-backed Cisticola, Bokmakierie and Pale-winged Starling. We left a chilly Spreetshoogte for Swakopmund and along the way had good views of Secretary Bird, Greater Kestrel, Rock Kestrel, Booted Eagle, Pygmy Falcon, Chat Flycatcher, Karoo Chat, Karoo Long-billed Lark, Red-headed Finch, and Namaqua Sandgrouse and just before lunch near Rostock Ritz we managed to call in a pair of Dune Lark. We also encountered four Bat-eared Foxes, Dassie Rat and Black-backed Jackal the first of many while on the tour. In the true Namib we had a distant sighting of a group of Suricate (Meerkat), as well as several Ludwig's Bustards, Common Ostrich, Namaqua Sandgrouse, and Rüppell's Korhaan. We arrived at Swakopmund where we booked into the Rossmund Lodge where we spent the next three nights.

The following morning we headed off to Walvis Bay where we joined a Dolphin & Seal cruise. We were rewarded with good views of Heaviside's (Benguela) Dolphin and Cape Fur Seals on the boat and on the beaches! We also saw a few Sub-Antarctic Skuas, Cape Gannet, Kelp and Hartlaub's Gulls as well as many Wilson's Storm Petrel. After the cruise we spent some time around the Lagoon and found many Curlew Sandpiper, White-fronted & Chestnut-banded Plovers, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey-headed (Hooded) Gull, Hundreds of Black-necked (Eared) Grebe and two Red-necked Phalarope. The only terns we found were Caspian and Swift (Great crested). The Swakopmund area also produced Cape & White-breasted (Great) Cormorants, Great White Pelican, and on the gravel plains Gray's & Red-capped Larks and two Suricates attended by a pair of Tractrac Chat!

When leaving Swakopmund we drove northwards to Henties Bay and then turned northeast to the small redundant tin mine of Uis. Along the way we had good sightings of Benguela Long-billed Lark and many more Rüppell's Korhaan, Bokmakierie, and at the small storage dam before Khorixas we recorded Egyptian Goose, South African Shelduck, Dabchick,

Blacksmith's Plover (Lapwing), Three-banded Plover, Red-billed Teal and to our astonishment a male Great Painted Snipe! Further along the route to our overnight camp at Damara Mopane we saw our first Damara Red-billed Hornbill as well as many Southern Yellow-billed and Monteiro's Hornbills. After booking in we took a walk to a viewing platform on the side of a hill and were rewarded with very good views of Rockrunner, Carp's Black Tit and a single Lesser Honeyguide! The following morning in the same area we called up a beautiful pair of White-tailed Shrike, more Carp's Black Tit, Brubru, and also recorded African Green Pigeon and a few others like Cinnamon-breasted, Lark-like and Golden-breasted Buntings. On the lawns at the camp there were Groundscraper Thrush, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Red-headed Finch, Short-toed Rock Thrush and Familiar Chat. A group of Bare-cheeked Babblers passed through the camp but were only seen by myself, they would have to wait until later! On departure from Damara Mopane we met an obliging pair of Monteiro's Hornbill which could be easily photographed!

We arrived at midday at our next destination, the Etosha Safari Camp and after booking in we left immediately for the Etosha National Park where we had our first taste of big game, African Elephants on the way in and a beautiful bull Black Rhinoceros on the way out before sunset! Here we also saw more Secretary Birds, one close up on its nest next to the road, as well as Burchell's Starling, the impressive Crimson-breasted Shrike, Marico Sunbird, Social Weaver, Capped Wheatear and Green-winged Pytilia in the camp grounds at Okaukuejo. On the road north to Okondeka waterhole we found Southern Ant-eating Chats, Spike-heeled & and Pink-billed Larks, Double-banded Courser, Kori Bustard and Northern Black Korhaan. A circular drive back yielded many plains game, Burchell's Zebra, Springbok, Oryx, and lovely views of Giraffe on the open plains. The following day we spent in the area of Okaukuejo and once again saw many plains game. We spent a lot of time at Newbrownii waterhole and watched the game come and go with many interesting interactions; there were also many Grey-backed Sparrow Lark, Red-capped Lark, Red-headed Finch and our first good views of Greater Sparrow and Marico Flycatcher. Pied and Black Crows were seen throughout and at further waterholes we encountered Red Hartebeest, Black-faced Impala and many Helmeted Guineafowl, also a single juvenile African Hawk Eagle and two Gabar Goshawks. We also witnessed an incubation changeover of a pair of Lappet-faced Vultures and then later on the tour once again at the Namutoni waterhole in the east of the park.

On the way to the east from Okaukuejo we had marvellous sightings of Lion, Spotted Hyena, Black-backed Jackal, and four Cheetah. We also witnessed a single Cheetah stalking Springbok and Wildebeest and another being chased by a Lioness!! En-route we stopped at Halali and here we had good views of Violet Wood-hoopoe, Damara Red-billed Hornbill and a Green (Emerald) Spotted Wood Dove. Later in the day we did a drive in the vicinity of Namutoni and had excellent views of a pair of Red-necked Falcon, Kori Bustard, Tawny Eagle, White-backed Vulture and many Lilac-breasted Roller, we also came across a breeding herd of African Elephant, Warthog, Steenbok, and a bull Giraffe chewing a bone

(Osteophagy), a second Giraffe had been doing the same and had got the bone caught up on its lower incisors and was unable to get the bone dislodged and subsequently could not drink!

The following morning before departing for the Waterberg Plateaux Park we did a quick drive to Dik-dik Drive where we had splendid views of Southern Pied and Black-faced Babbler, White-browed Scrub Robin as well as a single Dik-dik. We drove via Tsumeb, Otavi, and Otjiwarongo and on to the Waterberg. We managed to have a brief view of Bare-cheeked Babbler and on arrival at the Waterberg we later tried our luck at Hartlaub's Spurfowl without success! The following morning we managed to call in a male with two females and had good views of them on the top of the sandstone cliffs, there were also many Rockrunner around and later we had good views of Rüppell's Parrot, Rosy-faced Lovebird, White-crowned Shrike, Bearded and Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Lesser Honeyguide, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Pied Barbet, Pririt Batis, and very good views of a band of Dwarf Mongoose. The only owls we recorded on the trip were the diminutive African Scops Owl and the Pearl-spotted Owl; fortunately we also had good views of Bradfield's Hornbill just before departing from the Waterberg back to Windhoek. Keith and Borsha opted for a trip to the top of the Plateau and did not see much except for a Freckled Nightjar identified by their guide as a Pearl-necked Nightjar!! En-route to Windhoek we saw an adult and Juvenile Bateleur, several White-backed Vultures, Black-shouldered (Winged) Kite and good views of Burchell's Sandgrouse drinking at a cattle post near the road.

On arrival at Windhoek we went to the Gammams Sewerage Works where on arrival we saw a single Saddle-billed Stork and a single Yellow-billed Stork flying in tandem, both rare birds for that part of the world! Here we also recorded about 120 Great White Pelican, Grey and Black-headed Herons, a single Striated Green-backed Heron, Cape Shoveller, Southern (Red-eyed) Pochard, African Black Duck, Hottentot Teal, Sacred Ibis, Black Crake, hundreds of Wattled Starlings and a single Booted Eagle. We then had lunch in Windhoek before departing for the last night near the International Airport where we notched up the last species of the trip a farewell Ashy Tit! Good views of Fawn-coloured Lark were also had.

All in all the trip was a great success for winter with 32 different mammal species and 224 different bird species being seen, including all the specials and endemics of Namibia. A total of 2435 km was travelled through various habitats which harbour the Namibian endemics from the deserts to Bushveld, Mopane woodland and the rocky hills and jagged sandstone peaks of the Waterberg.