



**NAMIBIA, OKAVANGO AND VICTORIA FALLS
18-DAY BIRDING ADVENTURE**

2 - 19 NOVEMBER 2019



Pel's Fishing Owl is one of our targets on this trip.

This is a truly marvelous 2.5-week birding adventure, during which we sample three different countries and spectacular, diverse scenery. We start in the coastal Namib Desert with its impressive dune fields (inhabited by desirable, localized endemics) and lagoons filled with flamingos, pelicans, shorebirds, and some really localized species such as **Damara Tern** and **Chestnut-banded Plover**. The mountains of the beautiful Namib Escarpment are next on our itinerary, and here we search for **Rosy-faced Lovebird**, **Herero Chat**, **Rockrunner**, **Monteiro's Hornbill**, **Damara Red-billed Hornbill**, the incomparable batis-like (although largely terrestrial) **White-tailed Shrike**, and other charismatic endemics of northern Namibia/southern Angola. Heading to the palm-lined Kunene River separating Angola from Namibia (this remote, ruggedly beautiful corner of Namibia is often ignored on birding tours), we look for **Angola Cave Chat**, **Cinderella Waxbill**, **Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush**, **Grey Kestrel**, and other desirables.

Eventually, we leave the endemic-rich desert and enter the grassland, savanna, and woodland of one of Africa's greatest game parks, Etosha National Park. This must surely be one of the world's best places for seeing black rhino and big cats, along with all the other African megafauna. And it is excellent for a good range of very special birds, such as Namibia's dazzling national bird, **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, the world's heaviest flying bird, **Kori Bustard**, the diminutive **Pygmy Falcon**, and stacks more.

After Etosha we head into an incredibly bird-diverse tropical corner of Namibia, the Caprivi Strip and the adjacent panhandle of the Okavango Delta, which falls just within the borders of Botswana. The magnificent wetlands and woodlands in these parts support **Pel's Fishing Owl** (this is the world's most reliable place for this monster), **White-backed Night Heron**, **Slaty Egret**, **Southern Carmine Bee-eater**, and literally hundreds of other species, a rather large proportion of them spectacular. Finally we bird around the Victoria Falls of Zambia (with a brief optional foray into adjacent Zimbabwe) for yet again a rich assemblage of birds.

This birding tour covers a vast area and huge range of habitats, from the coastal deserts to the land of big rivers. While Namibian distances are large, we minimize driving time and maximize birding time by starting in Walvis Bay, Namibia, and ending in Livingstone, Zambia.

This tour can be combined with our **Subtropical South Africa 18-day Birding Adventure October 2019** (14 – 31 October 2019) for a 35-day Southern African adventure and even, preceding that, our **Western Cape 8-day Birding Adventure October 2019** (7 – 14 October 2019) for an even longer, 42-day Southern African mega tour. Another possibility is to combine it with our **Best of Madagascar: 14-day Birding and Wildlife Tour 2019** tour (17 – 31 October 2019).

Itinerary (18 days, 17 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Walvis Bay and start of coastal desert birding

Our birding guide fetches you from Walvis Bay airport and we immediately start birding. The first site we usually visit is the picturesque red sand dune habitat across a (usually) dry riverbed from the village of Rooibank right in the middle of the Namib Desert. **Dune Lark** is the main

target here, but we often also find the almost pure white desert form of **Tractrac Chat**. Our accommodation for two nights is at a place where one can sometimes literally see thousands of **Flamingos** (usually about half-half **Greater** and **Lesser**), migratory shorebirds from Eurasia, **Great White Pelican**, and all the rest.

Overnight: Lagoon Loge, Walvis Bay

Day 2. Walvis Bay Lagoon, Swakopmund and other areas

Most tour participants join the optional (around R900) boat trip that is focused mainly on marine mammals such as Cape Fur Seal, Common Bottlenose Dolphin, the localized Heaviside's Dolphin, and sometimes Southern Right Whale. But one also often sees some good birds from the boat, not the least of which is **Damara Tern**. But there is also an incredible drive we do that usually gives us close-up views of all the target birds of the lagoon – these include not only this rare, tiny tern, but also **Chestnut-banded Plover**, **Black-necked Grebe** (often in large rafts) and hundreds of thousands of migrant waders. Today we also look for **Gray's Lark**, a very pale Namib endemic.

Overnight: Lagoon Loge, Walvis Bay

Day 3. The Namib Escarpment via the Spitzkoppe (or “Matterhorn of Namibia”)

Heading inland and northwards, we start encountering some spectacular mountains. The Spitzkoppe in particular is a huge inselberg that rises abruptly from the desert plain. The flat surrounding areas are good for **Burchell's Courser**, **Double-banded Courser**, **Rüppell's Korhaan**, **Ludwig's Bustard**, a number of localized lark species such as **Karoo Long-billed Lark** (replaced by **Benguela Long-billed Lark** slightly further north), etc. The mountains themselves are where we search for the enigmatic, bizarre **Herero Chat**, noisy little flocks of **Rosy-faced Lovebird**, a couple of hornbill species basically restricted to the Namib and adjacent arid habitats, **Bradfield's Swift**, and many others.

Overnight: Huab Lodge, Kamanjab

Day 4. Birding around Huab Lodge

We continue birding the mountains. **White-tailed Shrike**, **Hartlaub's Spurfowl**, **Rüppell's Parrot**, and **Rockrunner** are four of the superstars of the show – all of them are very localized (occurring only in Namibia and a small part of Angola) and full of personality, not to mention striking-looking. Quite a number of brightly-colored seedeaters also vie for attention. We might, if we're lucky, see Black Mongoose, Greater Kudu, or another mammal or two.

Overnight: Huab Lodge, Kamanjab

Days 5 – 6. Birding the Zebra Mountains and Kunene

We venture right to the Angolan border, “marked” by the surprising Kunene River (a perennial river in an otherwise arid landscape), where we stay for two nights at our idyllic, remote lodge in a nice patch of riverine forest including blue-grey palms. **Bat Hawk** (further west than usual) and nightjars such as **Rufous-cheeked Nightjar** can sometimes be seen over the river at dusk while enjoying sundowners from the comfort of the lodge. The next morning we leave really early (about two hours before dawn; non-birding spouses who prefer to relax around the lodge can of course opt out of the morning's birding if preferred). The aim is to be positioned at our site in the spectacularly rugged Zebra Mountains just as it starts getting light. The target is the spectacular-looking, unusual **Angola Cave Chat**, which was only very recently discovered as a

breeding bird in Namibia (it was previously thought to be an Angolan endemic), and it occurs here in this remote mountain range in surprisingly high densities.

After seeing this bird we slowly start heading back to the lodge, stopping at our site for another incredibly localized species, the enigmatic **Cinderella Waxbill**. The lodge itself is very good for some of our other main target birds, so during our afternoon session of birding we'll look for the unspotted form of **Bennett's Woodpecker**, **Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush** (a west-African bird which occurs from here, the Namibia/Angola border, northwards to Gabon). Usually we have to drive around a bit to find **Grey Kestrel**, another species right at the edge of its range here.

Overnight: Kunene River Lodge, Opuwo

Day 7. Etosha National Park: birds and mammals

Justifiably this is rated as one of the best game parks in Africa. The floodlit waterholes at the lodges ("camps") within the park must provide one of the greatest wildlife shows on earth. This is big (and small) mammal country, where African Elephant, Black Rhinoceros, large herds of Springbok, Gemsbok, Plains Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, and many other herbivores lurk, meaning (excitingly) that there are also relatively high densities of predators and scavengers such as Cheetah, Lion, Leopard, Caracal, African Wildcat, Spotted Hyena, Black-backed Jackal, etc.

While we stop to look at all the mammal species, birding is still the main focus. An isolated population of South Africa's national bird, the beautiful **Blue Crane**, inhabits Etosha. **Kori Bustard** and its smaller relative, **Black Korhaan**, are both common. **Secretarybird** and an absolute stack of raptors and vultures are always much in evidence. This is one of the best places in southern Africa for owls, and we often find the tiny **African Scops Owl**, the giant **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl**, and then also others such as the beautiful **Southern White-faced Owl** at their daytime roosts (usually in Halali Camp, where we sometimes stop for lunch one of the days). **Pink-billed Lark** and **Stark's Lark** are common near Okaukuejo, and Etosha must be one of the few sites where one has to kick **Double-banded Courser** from one's feet. The unbelievably huge nests of **Sociable Weaver** are features of some areas, sometimes with **Pygmy Falcon** taking up residence in the same nests.

Overnight: Dolomite Camp, western Etosha

Day 8. Traversing Etosha National Park from west to central

A full day in this great game park.

Overnight: Okaukuejo Camp, central Etosha

Day 9. Central to eastern Etosha National Park

We'll explore the rest of the park today.

Overnight: Halali Camp or Mokuti Etosha Lodge, eastern Etosha

Day 10. Transfer to and birding at Rundu

As we continue eastwards the landscape becomes less arid, and today we start seeing some well-developed woodlands for the first time during our birding tour. We spend a night just west of the Caprivi Strip on the banks of what is called the Kavango River here in Namibia, but which changes its name to the Okavango River when it enters Botswana a bit downstream. In Botswana it also widens quickly, first into a panhandle and eventually into the vast Okavango Delta proper, an incredible inland delta, the waters of which get absorbed by the thirsty Kalahari sands rather than ever reaching the sea.

The tall woodlands near Rundu are home to some tricky birds such as **Rufous-bellied Tit** (which can be very thin on the ground and tough to find; playback often brings in its more common and widespread relative, **Southern Black Tit**). **Sharp-tailed Starling** (along with the more common but also more spectacularly-plumaged **Greater Blue-eared Starling**) and **Sousa's Shrike** are two tough birds of human-modified woodland sometimes in poor condition. There are a plethora of other great birds to be found here, both woodland birds and waterbirds, such as cuckooshrikes, orioles, **Green-capped Eremomela**, **Tinkling Cisticola**, **Swamp Boubou**, **Dwarf Bittern**, **Rufous-bellied Heron**, and a rich assemblage of others.

Overnight: Hakusembe River Lodge, Rundu

Day 11. Into the Caprivi Strip: Mahango

We spend time in the western parts of the Caprivi Strip, a narrow strip of Namibia wedged between Botswana and Angola, where we hope to find **Rock Pratincole** and any of the birds mentioned for the previous day that we may have missed. We stay at a lodge near the tiny but impressively diverse Mahango Game Reserve, a protected area within Bwabwata National Park. Here we add a great many new birds to our list, along with new mammals. African Buffalo occurs here but not in Etosha, and this is also one of the best places in the world to find the rare Roan Antelope and Sable Antelope. **Wattled Crane**, **Slaty Egret**, **Western Banded Snake Eagle**, **Luapula Cisticola**, the oversized **Coppery-tailed Coucal**, several spectacular weavers with their bright yellow plumage and amazing nests, **Greater Painted-snipe**, and **Grey-rumped Swallow** are just a few of the many birds we're likely to encounter at Mahango.

Overnight: Ndhovu Safari Lodge, Divundu

Day 12. Into Botswana: the Okavango Panhandle

The Botswana border is only a short drive away. After crossing it one immediately enters a more open, overgrazed habitat, which is, interestingly, the best place to see the localized **Bradfield's Hornbill**. But the biggest treat awaits us when we arrive at Drotsky's Cabins, from where we take a boat trip to their Okavango sister lodge, where we spend two nights. Here at Xaro Lodge the loud grunts of Hippopotamus startle one as one tries to fall asleep in the luxury safari tents. While in the water during the day, they do lurk around the lodge grounds at night eating grass – it's not advisable to walk around after dark, as this is Africa's most dangerous animal. The lodge grounds, which can become an island during floods, are one of the best places in the world to find **Pel's Fishing Owl**, and **African Wood Owl** and the beautiful **African Barred Owlet** are also usually much in evidence. **Brown Firefinch** and its more common cousins, **Red-billed Firefinch** and **Blue Waxbill**, often feed on the lawns. The liquid calls of **Swamp Boubou** and coucals add greatly to the atmosphere.

Overnight: Xaro Lodge, Shakawe, Botswana

Day 13. A full day in Botswana

We spend a lot of time looking for birds by boat today, but we also do some easy walks.

Overnight: Xaro Lodge, Shakawe, Botswana

Day 14 – 15. Back into Namibia and continuing east through the Caprivi Strip

We continue birding the wetlands and woodlands of this bird-rich corner of Namibia. We spend two nights on the banks of the Kwando River, from where we can do boat trips and birding/game drives.

Overnight: Caprivi Houseboat Cabins or similar, Katima Mulilo

Days 16 – 17. Into Zambia and birding Victoria Falls

The habitat changes into a wonderful broad-leafed woodland as we approach the Zambia/Zimbabwe border. Here a new suite of fabulous birds awaits, many of them characteristic of south-central Africa. **African Ground Hornbill** and **Schalow's Turaco** are two of the most spectacular birds we hope to find. But then there are also **Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah**, **Pennant-winged Nightjar**, **Grey-headed Parrot**, **Dusky Lark**, and so many others also to look for. **Racket-tailed Roller** occurs here but is less conspicuous than the other rollers (several of which we will hopefully already have seen). **Yellow-throated Leaflove** was discovered as a breeding bird on the Namibia/Zambia border (the Namibian side) in 2015, hundreds of kilometers south of its previously known range, and, time permitting, we might look for it today.

We eventually reach the mighty Zambezi River (one of Africa's largest rivers), where we may see **African Finfoot** and many other water-associated and riverine forest birds. This massive river forms the border between Namibia and Zambia, and after crossing the bridge into the latter country we still have a couple of hours of driving before we get to the famed Victoria Falls a bit further east. We'll spend some time admiring the falls, but it's important to note that the whole area has a spectacularly rich birdlife, so we'll add a lot of good new birds to our list near the end of the tour.

We usually find about 400 bird species on this tour of varied habitats – and we also get among the highest mammal lists on this transect of any of our tours.

Overnight: Maramba River Lodge, Livingstone, Zambia

Day 18. Departure

Your flight can leave Livingstone any time today.

Duration:	18 days
Limit:	3 – 9
Date:	2 – 19 November 2019
Depart:	Walvis Bay, Namibia
End:	Livingstone, Zambia
Price	R92,507 per person sharing
Single supplement:	R14,237

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Park entrance fees
One day's entrance to Victoria Falls
Boat ride on the Okavango River
Guiding fees

All transport while in southern Africa

Price excludes:

International flights

Personal insurance

Alcoholic beverages

Gratuities

Please note that the itinerary above cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.