



**NAMIBIA, OKAVANGO AND VICTORIA FALLS
BIRDING ADVENTURE**

02 – 19 NOVEMBER 2024



*The cute **White-tailed Shrike** is a sought-after Namibian near-endemic.*

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 a desirable, localized endemic) 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 species of northern Namibia.

Eventually we leave the 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 Rhinoceros** and big cats, along with all the other African megafauna. It is also 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.



*Etosha National Park is full of game, and is an especially good area to see **Black Rhinoceros**.*

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 Livingstone in Zambia (with a brief foray to view Victoria Falls from the Zimbabwean side) for yet another rich assemblage of birds.

This birding tour covers a vast area and a 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 Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

This tour can be combined with our premium **Comprehensive Subtropical/Eastern South Africa Birding Tour** which precedes this tour, for a 35-day Southern African adventure and even, preceding that, our **Best of Cape Town and Beyond Birding Tour** 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.

Itinerary (18 days, 17 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Walvis Bay and 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 around the village of Rooibank, right in the middle of the Namib Desert. Namibia's sole endemic, **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



Dune Lark, Namibia's only endemic bird, should be seen around Walvis Bay.

Day 2. Walvis Bay Lagoon, Swakopmund, and other areas

Today we take a boat trip on Walvis Bay Lagoon 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 later in the day 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 Desert near-endemic.

Overnight: Lagoon Loge, Walvis Bay

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

Heading inland and northward 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**, **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 farther north), etc. The mountains themselves are where we search for the enigmatic, bizarre **Herero Chat**, noisy little flocks of **Rosy-faced Lovebirds**, a couple of hornbill species basically restricted to the Namib and adjacent arid habitats, **Bradfield's Swift**, and many others.



*Another Namib Desert special we'll search for on this tour, **Rüppell's Korhaan***

The rocky areas near Omaruru offer some great habitat for watching hunting raptors, including **Verreaux's Eagle** and **African Hawk-Eagle** as well as **Augur Buzzard**. A diminutive antelope, **Kirk's Dik-dik**, is often encountered in the area.

Overnight: Ai-Aiba – The Rock Painting Lodge, Omaruru

Day 4. Birding the Namib Escarpment

Today we have the full day to continue birding the mountains of central Namibia. **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 around the lodge.

We will also head slightly farther west, targeting another Namibian near-endemic, **Benguela Long-billed Lark**, and may also have another shot at **Herero Chat**, if need be. We might, if we're lucky, see **Kaokoveld Slender Mongoose**, **Greater Kudu**, **Hartmann's Mountain Zebra**, or another mammal or two.

Overnight: Ai-Aiba – The Rock Painting Lodge, Omaruru



*The stunning **Rosy-faced Lovebird** usually provide excellent views in the Namib Escarpment.*

Day 5. Etosha National Park: birds and mammals

Etosha justifiably is rated as one of the best game parks in Africa. During our time in this amazing park, we will partake in an open-top game drive which is always a great way to experience the

area's birds and wildlife. 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**, **African Wildcat**, **Spotted Hyena**, **Black-backed Jackal**, etc.

Although 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, **Northern 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 on one of the days). 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: Okaukuejo Camp, central Etosha



*We'll search for the scarce **Burchell's Courser** in Etosha National Park.*

Day 6. Bird and wildlife viewing in Etosha National Park

We will have the full day in this impressive park birding the open plains and various waterholes. We hope to find a multitude of **Lark** species, including **Eastern Clapper**, **Stark's**, **Sabota**, **Pink-billed**, **Fawn-colored**, and **Rufous-naped**, as well as larger and more brightly colored species

such as **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **Gabar Goshawk**, **Greater Kestrel**, **Lappet-faced Vulture**, and **Namaqua Sandgrouse**.

Overnight: Okaukuejo Camp, central Etosha

Day 7. Central to eastern Etosha National Park

Today we make our way from the central section of the park to the eastern edge. As we head farther east the bird species change gradually, and we hope to find **Blue Crane**, **Secretarybird**, **Red-necked Falcon**, **Burchell's Courser**, and **Caspian Plover** among the usual suspects. Around Mokuti Lodge we should see **Black-faced Babbler**, **Crimson-breasted Shrike**, **White-browed Scrub Robin**, **Black-faced Waxbill**, **Bearded Woodpecker**, **Pearl-spotted Owlet**, and other woodland species.

Overnight: Mokuti Etosha Lodge, eastern Etosha



Etosha National Park is one of Africa's great game parks, and is a major highlight on the tour!

Day 8. Full day in eastern Etosha National Park

We will have the full day to enjoy the birds and wildlife of eastern Etosha today. We will likely head up to the grasslands of Andoni Plains to look for **Blue Crane**, **Pink-billed Lark**, **Eastern Clapper Lark**, and **Burchell's Courser**, while also having some time to bird the woodlands around our lodge for **Black-faced Babbler** and many others.

Overnight: Mokuti Etosha Lodge, eastern Etosha

Day 9. Transfer to and birding around Rundu

As we continue eastward the landscape becomes less arid, and today we start seeing some well-developed woodlands for the first time during our tour. The tall woodlands east of Rundu are home to some tricky birds, such as **Rufous-bellied Tit** (which can be very thin on the ground and tough to find). **Sharp-tailed Starling** (along with the more common but also more spectacularly plumaged **Greater Blue-eared Starling**) and **Souza's Shrike** are two tough birds of human-modified woodland sometimes in poor condition. There is 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.

We will also bird the wetlands around Rundu for **Collared Pratincole**, **White-backed Duck**, **Baillon's Crane**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, and perhaps even **Lesser Moorhen** and **Lesser Jacana**.

Overnight: Taranga Safari Lodge or similar, Rundu



*The relatively large **Rufous-bellied Tit** is one of the prized denizens found in the tall woodlands of the Caprivi Strip.*

Day 10. Into the Caprivi Strip

After some early-morning birding we will make the relatively short transfer to the Mahango area, which is incredibly biodiverse. We will have another shot at **Souza's Shrike**, **Sharp-tailed Starling**, and **Rufous-bellied Tit** as we head east through the tall woodlands. We stay at a lodge near the tiny but impressively diverse Mahango Game Reserve, a protected area within Bwabwata National Park. Species to look for around the lodge include **Meyer's Parrot**, **White-breasted**

Cuckooshrike, African Golden Oriole, White-browed Robin-Chat, Brown Firefinch, and many others.

Overnight: Mahangu Safari Lodge or Ndhovu Safari Lodge, Divundu

Day 11. Mahango birding

We spend the day in the Mahango Game Reserve, enjoying birds such as **Rock Pratincole** and any of the birds mentioned for the previous day that we may have missed. Here we also 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, Tinkling 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: Mahangu Safari Lodge or Ndhovu Safari Lodge, Divundu



African Skimmer is regular around the Okavango Panhandle.

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**. At Drotsky's Cabins the loud grunts of **Hippopotamus** startle you as you fall asleep in your cabins; 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 are a haven for birdlife, and we can expect to find **Hartlaub's Babbler,**

White-browed Coucal, and **Meves's Starling**, with **African Barred Owlet** in the nearby woodlands. **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: Drotsky's Cabins, Shakawe, Botswana

Day 13. A full day in Botswana

We spend a lot of time birding by boat today as we slowly cruise the upper panhandle of the Okavango Delta. This day is usually excellent for photography, as we are able to approach many birds and animals really close from the boat, and highlights include **Pel's Fishing Owl**, **Slaty Egret**, **White-backed Night Heron**, **African Skimmer**, **African Pygmy Goose**, **Long-toed Lapwing**, **Coppery-tailed Coucal**, and **Southern Carmine Bee-eater**. We may also be lucky enough to encounter the rare, swamp-dwelling **Sitatunga** antelope.

In the nearby woodlands we hope to find **African Barred Owlet**, **Narina Trogon**, **Retz's Helmetshrike**, **Grey-headed Kingfisher**, **African Golden Oriole**, and **Crested Francolin**, among others.

Overnight: Drotsky's Cabins, Shakawe, Botswana



*The Okavango Delta is surely the best place in the world to find **Pel's Fishing Owl** – we stand a good chance of finding one on this tour!*

Day 14. 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 Zambezi River, from where we can do boat trips and birding/game drives. A late-afternoon boat trip along the Zambezi is extremely productive and usually produces great sightings of **African Finfoot**, **White-backed Night Heron**, **Half-collared Kingfisher**, **White-crowned Lapwing**, **African Skimmer**, and **Rock Pratincole**. We often head out this evening to look for night birds such as **African Wood** and **Western Barn Owls** and a host of **Nightjars** including **Fiery-necked**, **Square-tailed**, and the spectacular **Pennant-winged**!

Overnight: Caprivi Houseboat Safari Lodge or similar, Katima Mulilo

Day 15. Birding around Katima Mulilo

Today we have the full day to explore the productive woodlands in the far-eastern Caprivi. **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 is one of today's targets. **Olive Woodpecker**, **Schalow's Turaco**, and **Western Banded Snake Eagle** all occur in the riparian vegetation along the banks of the Zambezi River.

In the surrounding woodlands we search for **Racket-tailed Roller**, **Arnot's Chat**, **Copper Sunbird**, **Striped Kingfisher**, **Grey-headed Bushshrike**, **Grey Penduline Tit**, **Wood Pipit**, and **Lizard Buzzard**.

Seasonal pans in the area are explored for **Hottentot Teal**, **Rosy-throated Longclaw**, **White-backed Duck**, **Lesser Jacana**, **Rufous-bellied Heron**, **Luapula Cisticola**, and perhaps even **Black Coucal**.

Overnight: Caprivi Houseboat Safari Lodge or similar, Katima Mulilo



*The spectacular **Pennant-winged Nightjar** can be seen breeding around Katima Mulilo.*

Days 16 – 17. Into Zambia and birding Victoria Falls

After some early morning birding around Katima Mulilo we will make our way through the border into Zambia. As we head further east we will pass through more broad-leafed woodland, where we may see **Southern Ground Hornbills** as they move around in small family groups. We eventually reach the busy little town of Livingstone, where we will be based for the next two nights on the banks of the Zambezi River. The woodlands outside of Livingstone hold good numbers of **Racket-tailed Roller** along with **Miombo Pied Barbet** (here at its southern extent), **Miombo Rock Thrush**, **Stierling's Wren-Warbler**, **Green-capped Eremomela**, **Cut-throat Finch**, **Lizard Buzzard**, and **Pale Flycatcher**.

We spend some time admiring Victoria Falls, 'the smoke that thunders', from the Zimbabwean side, but it's important to note that the whole area has spectacularly rich birdlife, so we'll add a lot of good new birds to our list near the end of the tour. Birding around camp is extremely productive with regular sightings of **Collared Palm Thrush**, **Natal Spurfowl**, **Bearded Scrub Robin**, **Schalow's Turaco**, **Western Banded Snake Eagle**, **Trumpeter Hornbill**, **Olive Woodpecker**, **Broad-billed Roller**, and other species along the Zambezi River.

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

Overnight: Camp Nkwazi, Livingstone, Zambia



Racket-tailed Roller can be seen in the broad-leafed woodlands around Livingstone.

Day 18. Departure

Your flight can leave Livingstone any time today.

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 from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 18 days
Limit: 3 – 8
Dates: 02 – 19 November 2024
Start: Walvis Bay, Namibia
End: Livingstone, Zambia
Prices: R 136,200 per person sharing (2024)
Single supplements: R 14,900 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 18)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance & conservation fees
All ground transport, including airport pick-up and drop-off
Entrance fees to Victoria Falls
Boat ride on the Okavango River
Boat trip along the Zambezi River
Boat trip from Walvis Bay
Open-top game drive in Etosha National Park

Price excludes:

International/domestic flights (to Walvis Bay/from Victoria Falls)
Visas
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))