

Caprivi Birding Tour

31 October - 10th November 2024

Trip Report



Day 1: Windhoek to Grootfontein

Our first day of the trip was a long drive north towards Grootfontein. Species today included Desert Cisticola, White-backed Vulture, Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk, Short-toed Rock Thrush, Crimson-breasted Shrike and Tawny Eagles. Just outside of Grootfontein we managed to spot the first European Bee-eaters for the summer. After arriving at camp we headed off on a walk and visited the waterhole hide which gave us multiple dove species, Burchell's Starling, Golden-breasted Bunting, Crested Francolin, Southern Black Tit and a female Red-headed Weaver. Later, we connected with Black-faced Babbler, Lesser Honeyguide and Senegal Coucal was also heard. Some Red-eyed Bulbuls alerted us to a Pearl Spotted Owlet, eventually attracting Violet-eared and Blue Waxbills, Long-billed Crombec and White-bellied Sunbirds. During dinner, we were entertained by some Lesser Galagos jumping through the trees above us.





Day 2: Grootfontein to Rundu

During breakfast, the birds treated us to close up views of Black-faced Babblers, Black-backed Puffback, Willow Warbler, Green-winged Pytilia and Banded-faced Waxbills before heading north. On arrival to the banks of the Okavango River separating Angola and Namibia, we had our first views of Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Terrestrial Brownbul and White Browed Robin-Chat. Arrow marked and Hartlaub's Babbler entertained us during lunch. During the afternoon walk, an excellent view of an African Barred Owlet and Orange-breasted Bushshrike also showed well. The major connection was the Ross's Turaco that showed off drinking and later presented its superb colour at the top of the tree in golden last light.





Day 3: Rundu to the Okavango river

An early departure brought our group into some Miombo woodland areas and we were rewarded with a sighting of a pair of Rufous-bellied Tits, Cardinal Woodpecker, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Striped Kingfisher, Violet-backed Starling and Chinspot Batis to name a few. The first rains arrived as we made our way to Divundu. Hundreds of small black dots swept across the grey skies as Common Swifts followed the storm cells. In the afternoon our walk through the garden and surroundings of the lodge gave us views of African Jacana, Long-toed Lapwing, Water Thick-knee, Crested and Black-collared Barbet, and Southern Carmine, White-fronted and European Bee-eaters. To finish off the day we sat on the river's edge and caught a view of our first of four Eurasian Hobby for the trip.





Day 4: Okavango River

On the morning breakfast cruise, we visited our first Southern Carmine and White-fronted Bee-eater colony along the eastern banks of the river. Gregarious flocks of Collared Pratincole soared above with the other intra-African breeding species, Rock Pratincoles perched on their spots accompanied by African Pied Wagtails. We had a first look at Wattled Crane as we spotted a pair off in the distance. Other species seen were Common and Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, African Fish Eagle, Blacksmith Lapwing and a first sighting of a Western Osprey scouring the surface for any unsuspecting fish. One attempt was unfruitful for the raptor but the bank, drop, and plunge was great to witness in any case. Of course, one should mention Red Lechwe, Common Impala, Common Waterbuck, African Buffalo, Hippopotamus pods and a few reptilian members also showed - Nile Crocodile and Water Monitor. In the afternoon after a rainshower the first audio of cuckoos was heard around camp and in the surrounding bush. We managed to get our first view of African, Black and Jacobin Cuckoo in Mahangu Game Reserve as well as a pair of Wattled Crane with a juvenile. Wetland birds provided some good views of Great, Intermediate and Squacco Heron. At the end of the day a highlight was over 300 vultures, mainly White-backed and one Lappet-faced Vulture perched throughout the bush. In the evening we had a great sighting of African Wood Owl.







Day 5: Okavango River and Mahangu Game Reserve

In the morning, we drove back to the game reserve for a good go at the wetlands. We had good views of hundreds of White-faced Whistling Duck, Spur-winged Goose, multiple egret species, Yellow-billed Kites and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers carrying animal fur back to line their nests. In the woodland, we managed to locate a Pearl-spotted Owlet that attracted a raucous bunch of birds including White-bellied, Marico and Collared Sunbird, Southern Black Tit, Chestnut-vented Warbler, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Crombecs, Dark-capped and Red-eyed Bulbuls. The major highlight was the pair of Crimson-breasted Shrike with one individual exhibiting xanthochroism or better known as the Yellow Morph of this Shrike species. The boat cruise in the afternoon was such a bumper of a cruise. We managed to see Malachite, Giant and Pied Kingfisher, Reed Cormorant, Common Reed Warbler, Spur-winged Goose, Collared and Rock Pratincole as well as a view of Pel's Fishing Owl high up in the dense foliage. A fantastic sighting of a pair of White-backed Night Herons gave amazing photo opportunities. Other species encountered were plenty of Common Sandpiper, African Openbill and Marabou Stork, Western Osprey and African Hobby. Towards the end of the cruise a huge amount of dust erupted from downriver in the Bwabwata National Park side as a herd of Buffalo made an escape from a pride of over-enthusiastic Lion. After the failed attempt the Buffalo herd stared at the young members of the pride as they sat up the steep embankment. A great end to a great cruise and day in general.







Day 6: Okavango to Kwando River

Our journey today would take us from the Okavango River to the Kwando river, crossing the Bwabwata National Park and into the Zambezi region. We started with a pair of Green Capped Eremomela and got views along the way of Dark Chanting Goshawk and five Sharp-tailed Starling. Further on in the Miombo woodland we connected with four Racket-tailed Rollers, Arnot's Chat, Retz's and White-crested Helmetshrike, Woodland Kingfisher, African and Ayres's Hawk-Eagle and a Broad-billed Roller preparing its nest. During our transfer boat trip into the lodge, we got our first look at African Stonechat, African Sacred Ibis and a Sitatunga from the deck of the main area. Our afternoon boat trip was well worth the heat and sweat with views of Lesser and Greater Swamp Warbler, Chirping and Luapula Cisticolas, Goliath and Striated Heron, Blue-cheeked, Little and White-fronted Bee-eater and African Wattled Lapwing. Our sundowner spot was one for the books at a beautiful Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony, with a looming juvenile Nile Crocodile lurking in the water below the holes. It was a real pleasure watching the feeding parents bring copious amounts of invertebrates back to the breeding tunnels. Our mammal highlight was seeing no fewer than five Sitatunga along the very dry Kwando river Papyrus and Phragmites reed banks.







Day 7: Kwando River to Katima Mulilo

We started the day with an early morning boat cruise to try improve our views of Luapula and Chirping Cisticola and got a sighting of a Little Bittern in the golden light. A pair of African Snipe feeding and a grumpy old hippo bull made some waves as we headed back to the lodge for breakfast before departure. Traveling northeast to Katima we encountered Brown and Black-chested Snake Eagle and African Hawk-Eagle. After arriving in Katima, on the banks of the Zambezi river for lunch, we managed to get a look at Schalow's Turaco, African Green Pigeon and Collared Sunbirds. After a short drive we had an afternoon break at the lodge before walking around the garden and surrounding ponds. Just before the walk a pair of African Goshawks had made a kill which gave us great shots but before getting there the group got interrupted by a sighting of a spider-hunting wasp (Pompilidae) dragging a Baboon Spider that it had just paralyzed. Once buried, it would most likely lay eggs inside the spider until the larvae hatch and devour it. Moving down to the ponds we encountered a Lesser Jacana, Purple Heron, Plain-backed Pipit and a nice surprise out of habitat, Wood Pipit. Rain came that evening, that put a damper on things.





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Day 8: Katima Mulilo

We woke early and before sunrise, while driving, it rained which had a potential for a wash out. Thankfully we managed to get onto the African Broadbill that has been hanging around for the past three weeks thanks to Travis Langley. It made its dizzying circular displays for us despite the grey, wet weather. Later on we connected with Olive Woodpecker, Tropical Boubou, Bearded Scrub-Robin and five Pale-throated Greenbul (Yellow-throated Leaflove) before returning for breakfast. We visited some more pans and ponds with water after breakfast and managed to get views through the scope of Rufous-bellied Heron, Knob-billed Duck, Great and Little Egret. African Marsh Harrier and Yellow-billed Kite entertained above while Curlew, Wood, Marsh and Common Sandpiper showed up as well as some Reeves, Common Ringed Plover. After moving into the woodland we found a group of Red-billed Firefinch, Village Indigobird and a variety of Sunbirds including, Marico, Collared, White-bellied and Copper Sunbird. Ashy Flycatcher and a Brown-hooded Kingfisher greeted us before we returned for lunch at camp. In the afternoon we went on a boat cruise to enjoy great views of White-winged and Whiskered Tern, Western Osprey and African Fish Eagle attempting kleptoparasitism from a pair of Great Egrets. Black-crowned Night Heron, African Spoonbill, Great White Pelican, African Snipe, Village Weaver, Malachite, Pied and Giant Kingfisher, Lesser Jacana, Rufous-bellied Heron and Common Moorhen. We ended the cruise with a sunset send-off by a Cape Clawless Otter in the shallows.



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Day 9: Katima Mulilo to Kayova

On our way back into the Kavango region, we managed to find Northern Grey-headed Sparrow around Katima, Tawny Eagle, Yellow-billed Kite, Brown Snake Eagle and Ayres's Hawk-Eagle. On the banks of the Kwando River we found our sixth pair of Wattled Crane for the trip before encountering Rufous-bellied Tit while we searched tirelessly for Souza's Shrike with no luck. Around the lodge Levaillant's, African and Black Cuckoo were heard calling and with the eruption of flying termite alates, Senegal Coucal, Kurrichane Thrush, Lesser Honeyguide, Magpie Shrike and Bulbuls species enjoyed the start of the feast.



Day 10: Kayova to Waterberg

Heading south today, we tried for a last Souza's Shrike without success but found Black-headed Oriole, Chinspot Batis, Retz's and White-crested Helmetshrike, Willow Warbler, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and Pale Flycatcher. Clouds built up south of Grootfontein as we saw Pearl-breasted, Red-breasted, Lesser and Greater-striped Swallow. It seemed to be pouring down towards Waterberg Plateau, which we soon confirmed with the roads becoming red, slippery tracks. The rain continued into the evening but we did hear audio of Freckled Nightjar in the distance and an eruption of termite alates.





Day 11: Waterberg to Windhoek

At sunrise, we targeted shots of the near-endemic Rockrunner and managed to also get views of displaying Black-backed Puffback, Willow Warbler and White-browed Scrub-Robin to name a few. On the way to Windhoek we passed many Red-backed, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Lesser and Southern Masked Weaver, Tawny and Wahlberg's Eagle and a very photogenic White-backed Vulture. Stopping for lunch, we proceeded to add Southern Pied Babbler, Damara Red-billed Hornbill, Violet-wood Hoopoe and Red-billed Buffalo Weaver to the list before reaching Windhoek.



In conclusion, the trip was a great success, with some key species seen and photographed. A wonderful bunch of travel companions drove the Namibian tarmac roads and gelled well together. Thank you to Alison Gardiner, Kit and Peter Watts, Mike and Carole Bridgeford for coming with Batis Birding Safaris, we really enjoyed hosting you. In total there were 295 birds recorded for the trip. Some birding milestones experienced included Alison seeing 127 lifers and Mike seeing the Ross's Turaco for his 850th species for his southern African subregion list. We must not forget to mention Kit's sighting of a Red-chested Cuckoo, at close proximity, she patiently had time to draw all the features, colours and even some feeding behaviour notes.

Guided and led by Steve Braine and Timothy Smith.