



SPECIAL INTEREST SAFARIS

BIRDING

BEST OF NAMIBIA

This essential Namibia birding departure takes in the key birding areas of this arid wonderland to try target as many of the country endemics and sub-region near-endemics as possible whilst birding in some of the most dramatic, wildlife-filled landscapes on the African continent.

DAY 01

Windhoek to Sossusvlei

DAY 02

Sossusvlei area

Early morning departure from Windhoek travelling through the spectacular Khomas Hochland Mountains with many birding stops enroute. Early on we could see orange river Francolin, Short-toed rock-thrush, Bradfield's lark, Chat flycatcher, Mountain wheatear, Rufous-eared warbler, Black-chested snake-eagle to mention a few. Before dropping down into the Namib Desert, we will stop on the spectacular Sreetshoogte Pass absorbing the vastness of the landscape in front of us. From here we descend in altitude into the Namib with a very different bird community. We could see our first Rüppells korhaan, Stark's lark, Greater kestrel, Red-necked falcon and ostrich. We will arrive at Kulala early evening where we will stay for two nights.

The following morning an early start will be made to find Dune lark. This bird favours the grassed lower slopes of immense red sand dunes that dominate the area, and is best searched for early in the morning. There is also favourable birding habitat along ancient dry river beds for Dusky sunbird, Acacia pied barbet and open gravel plains for the tricky-to find Burchell's courser. A non-birding highlight will certainly be climbing the gigantic 'Dune 45'.



Dune lark *Calendulauda erythrochlamys* | © Martin Benadie

DAY 03 Sossusvlei to Swakopmund

DAY 04 Swakopmund and Walvis Bay area

Early morning departure for the coast and the coastal town of Swakopmund – it is a fairly long drive but so much to see along the way. A stop will be made early on in the Naukluft Mountains for the highly localized Cinnamon-breasted Warbler at the northern extremity of its range. We then traverse the moonscape Kuiseb River canyon before the flat open plains of the Namib Naukluft Park gives way to the high dunes along the coast. Time permitting could do walk around town for marine cormorants like Cape and Bank and foraging orange river white-eyes in the gardens.

Spend two nights in Swakopmund. This pretty town has an interesting mix of German style buildings, continental cafes and interesting shops.

Following day explore birding localities in-and-around Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. Early morning visit to the gravel plains north of town could produce Gray's lark, Tractrac chat and Rired-capped larks. The Walvis Bay Salt Works and lagoon is home to some of the largest concentrations of flamingos, shorebirds and localized endemics like Damara tern and Chestnut-banded plover. The late afternoon could be spent shopping in Swakopmund or catching up on any species we may have missed.



Chestnut-banded plover *Charadrius pallidus* | © Martin Benadie

DAY 05 and 06 :

Doro Nawas Conservancy, Damaraland

A very early start will be made again to maximize the most of this day. Will initially travel north along the coast, then inshore past the spectacular inselberg of the mighty Brandberg, Namibia's highest mountain. In this area a search will be made Herero Chat and there will be many other roadside birding stops for species like Ludwig's bustard. We will arrive late afternoon at the spectacular Doro Nawas Camp where we will overnight for two nights. This camp is well situated in an ancient floodplain with the beautiful red etjo sandstone and Ekendeka Mountains in the distance.

The following day we will explore this diverse landscape exploring associated thicket along ephemeral river systems, gravel plains, dry river beds and rocky outcrops. A highlight could be finding the unique desert-adapted elephant as several family groups roam the area, but other mammals could include oryx, springbok, suricate and even possibly cheetah. On the gravel plains could find Ruppell's korhaan, Lark-like bunting and Namaqua sandgrouse whilst the rocky outcrops often have Benguela Long-billed Lark. Exploring the riverine systems of the Huab and Aba Huab we could find Damara hornbill, Bare-cheeked babbler, Carp's tit, Little banded goshawk (shikra), Madagascar bee-eater (summer), Red-crested korhaan, African cuckoo (summer), grey-backed Cameroptera, Pearl-spotted Owlet and Spotted Eagle-Owl. Another exciting activities in this area is to visit Twyfelfontein – a marvelous San rock art site showcasing a plethora of rock engravings and paintings depicting wildlife and abstract patterns and also a recently proclaimed world heritage site. The birding here is equally good with the likes of Rosy-faced Lovebirds, White-throated Canary, Dusky Sunbird and Verreaux's Eagle with colourful Namib rock agamas basking on the sandstone rocks.

DAY 07

Doro Nawas Conservancy to Hobatere

Today we depart for another premier Namibian birding destination – Hobatere. This is a very scenic drive and on the way to Khorixas we will pass through a picturesque landscape filled with ancient welwitchia plants. Stops will be made enroute for Herero Chat and even possibly the Khorixas Sewage Works. We hope to arrive at Hobatere in the early afternoon to settle in and get ready for a night drive on the reserve for nocturnal bird and mammal species. Hobatere is situated in the Khoadi Hoas Conservancy west of Etosha National Park, offering great birding in dramatic landscapes.

Day 08: Hobatere area.

Birding in the scenic area is very productive for species such as White-tailed Shrike, Damara Hornbill, Bare-cheeked Babbler, Rockrunner, Hartlaub's Spurfowl, African Scops-Owl, Chestnut Weaver, Great Sparrow, Red-billed Spurfowl, Bateleur, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Lark-like Bunting, Carp's Tit, Meve's Starling and Violet Wood-hoopoe. The day will be spent targeting various areas for these species on walks and open-vehicle drives.



Hartlaub's Spurfowl *Pternistis hartlaubi* | © Martin Benadie

DAY 09 and 10

Hobatare to Etosha National Park

From Hobatare we head into Etosha National Park and work our way towards the central parts of the park and onto the Okaukeujo area for two nights. This opens up habitats yet unexplored –woodland interspersed with open plains and a vast clay white pan that covers almost 5000 square kilometres. Apart from the opportunity in spotting predators and plains game, the Park's birdlife is staggering. Birds we could find are endless including Secretarybird, Kori Bustard, Northern Black Korhaan, Burchell's Courser, Sociable Weaver, Pygmy Falcon, Red-necked Falcon, Stark's Lark, Doublebanded Courser and Pink-billed Lark.

Day 11, Etosha National Park

The habitats and resultant bird diversity is very different in the eastern parts of Etosha (Namutoni area) with species such as Black-faced Babbler, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Southern Black Tit, Fawn-coloured Lark, Barred Wren-Warbler and an isolated population of Blue Crane on offer. Birding drives will take in all the key areas here such as the vast Andoni Plains and Fischer's Pan as well as the varied Park waterholes in the vicinity.



Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis* | © Martin Benadie

Day 13: Etosha to the Erongo Mountains

Today we travel south to Omaruru at the dramatic Erongo Mountains which rise like mighty whalebacks over the otherwise flat landscape. We will overnight at the Erongo Wilderness Lodge which is a classic style tented camp hidden in the boulders. This area has many Namibian endemics and will give us a final chance for any species we may have missed

such as Rosy-faced Lovebird, Monteiro's Hornbill, Hartlaub's Francolin, Rockrunner White-tailed Shrike and Rüppell's Parrot. Overhead may spot Verreaux's Eagle and Augur Buzzard whilst at night may see Freckled Nightjar. In the area mammals are not that numerous but could see rock hyrax, dassie rat, the recently described black mongoose, chacma baboon, greater kudu and possibly porcupine and caracal in the evening. This venue definitely is a relaxing end to this top-class Namibia birding itinerary.



White-tailed Shrike *Agriornis albicauda*, Herero Chat *Melaenornis herero* | © Martin Benadie

Day 14: Return to Windhoek
Depending on return flights