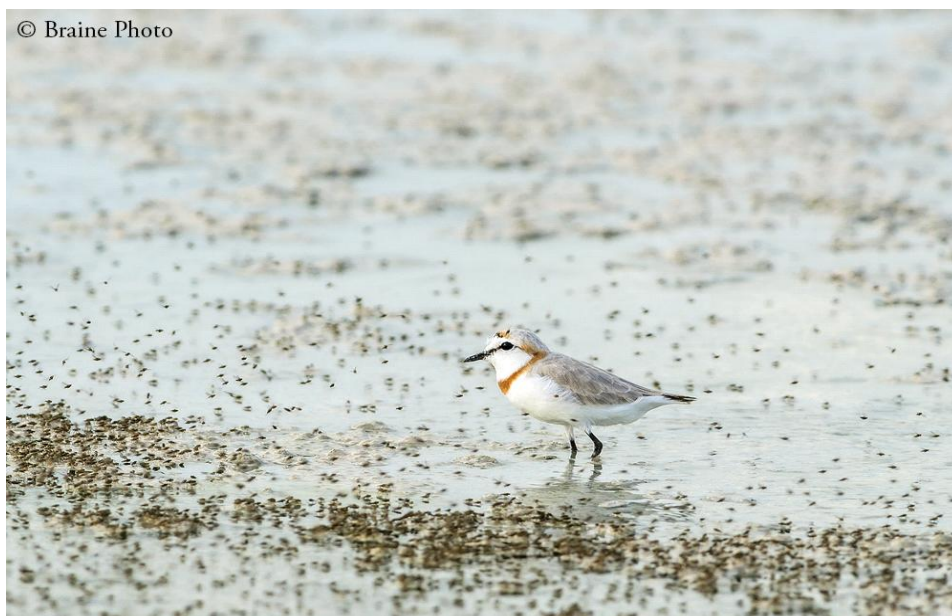


**Trip Report: Simon Gawn**  
**Namibia endemics 25 July - 04 August 2016**



*Dune Lark*

All in all a very productive and in many aspects lucky trip with Simon and Rahat, having seen 207 species during an exceptionally dry winter. Twenty six of those were lifers added to Simon's already large list, missing out only on three possible lifers. Simon and Rahat saw 39 mammal species. It was a pretty straightforward trip with the idea of covering most of the important endemic/near endemic bird species in Namibia. All went according to plan and the trip was a huge success in many aspects as the trip was 'target bird' orientated.



*Chestnut-banded Plover*

I met Simon and Rahat at 8 am on the morning of the 25 July at the Lagoon Loge and we proceeded along the Walvis Bay lagoon towards the Kuiseb Delta in search of the Dune Lark, the only true Namibian endemic. We then proceeded toward the old nursery in the Kuiseb delta. En route we had good views of Black-chested Prinia, and Pale Chanting Goshawk. With a bit of work we eventually located three Dune Larks and had great views of them.

We continued towards the salt pans in search of Chestnut-banded Plover, which we found pretty quickly in large numbers with quite a number of White-fronted Plover present as well.

En route to Swakopmund we entered the dune area and located three very habituated Tractrac Chats who gave us very close views. After that we had a quick stop in Swakopmund and had a hearty meal at the Farmhouse Deli, where we had good views of Crowned and Cape Cormorants on the raft in the Mole while having our lunch. We also observed a school (pod) of Bottlenose Dolphins fishing in the bay. After lunch we tried for the Orange River White-eye in the Lovers Lane (promenade) area and managed to locate a pair providing great views. After lunch we headed towards the Swakop Salt works and very quickly located Gray's Larks. Notably not many over-wintering Palearctic migrants were present this year only a few Black-necked Grebe and several Common Greenshank with large numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingo in Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. Although there are normally a few over-wintering Damara Tern, this year they didn't seem to be present and a quick stop at the bird island confirmed this. We decided to call it a day and headed back to Walvis Bay for dinner at the Raft.



*Greater and Lesser Flamingo*

On the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> we had an early start towards Spitzkoppe. It was a remarkably cold morning. En route to Spitzkoppe we ticked off several more common species like Chat Flycatcher, Common Fiscal (Western Race) and Karoo Chat. A pair of Rüppell's Korhaan showed well along the main tar road past Arandis. On arrival at Spitzkoppe I decided to check my normal reliable Herero Chat spot and before even

getting there we located one individual feeding quite actively low to the ground and it provided really good views. A few more near endemics were added such as White-tailed Shrike, Monteiro's Hornbill and Karoo Long-billed Lark. We also had good views of Short-toed Rock Thrush and Double-banded Courser. It was exceptionally dry and finding common species like Stark's Lark and Lark-like Bunting were fruitless. Also the birds were largely silent and not responding to playback to using most of their energy for feeding. A small detour towards the Uis road for Stark's Lark also produced nothing. I decided to head on to the Khan River junction which is generally good for the more common near endemics. The river was very quiet but we located a small bird party that gave us good views of Violet Wood-hoopoe, Pririt Batis, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Puffback, Great Sparrow and Southern Pied Babbler. En route back to the vehicle we had far off views of Rüppell's Parrot. Calling it a day we decided to head to Hohenstein for the night. The night sky was amazingly clear that evening due to the cold conditions.



*Herero Chat*

On the 27th July we woke up to the coldest morning of the trip and were up and about before sunrise in search of Hartlaub's Spurfowl and Rockrunner. There were no responsive Hartlaub's Spurfowl and playback was fruitless but at sunrise we found a responsive pair of Rockrunner and with a bit of effort with playback managed to get good views. After breakfast we had a quick look at the bird bath where many Great and Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Red-eyed Bulbul and Cape Turtle Doves were drinking. We checked out and made our way back to the Khan junction. The morning was more eventful and we managed to get good views of Carp's Tit, Pririt Batis and Red-faced Mousebirds. We had lunch on arrival at Erongo Wilderness Lodge and decided to walk the granite outcrops in search of Hartlaub's Spurfowl. After walking the entire hillside we arrived back at the camp to have two males and one female Hartlaub's Spurfowl greeting us at the gate giving us wonderful views. Tawny, and Verreaux's Eagles as well as African Hawk-Eagle were also seen on the walk. That evening a few Freckled Nightjars showed up at the floodlit waterhole.



*Hartlaub's Spurfowl and Rosy-faced Lovebirds*

On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> July we decided to wait for the bird feeding at the lodge where many Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Cape Bunting, Green-winged Pytilia, Dassie Rat and a pair of Hartlaub's Spurfowl also came in to feed and drink. After feeding time we had a quick search through the dry thornveld for Barred-wren Warbler, but it was extremely dry and hardly had any bird activity around. More good views of Rockrunner near the waterhole after we had breakfast and then tried an isolated waterhole near the gate for Violet-eared Waxbills. A Damara Dik-dik had a drink and we then had one single female Violet-eared Waxbill come in for a drink. We then continued to Uis via Omaruru for refuelling. Outside Uis we started looking for Benguela Long-billed Lark and eventually located a pair. We also had good views at some Double-banded Sandgrouse and more Rüppell's Korhaan. After the Ugab River we encountered a breeding herd of desert-adapted Elephants. I stopped for a pair of Damara Red-billed Hornbills about 60km north of Kamanjab and on closer inspection realized one had a pale eye making it a Southern Red-billed which technically is out of range. The present drought conditions may be the reason for this? Driving into Hobatere we encountered a few of the common plains game and on arrival at the lodge discovered that the Lions had just killed a Hartmann's Zebra at the nearby waterhole. During dinner a few hundred Double-banded Sandgrouse came in to drink at the floodlit waterhole. After dinner we had a night drive which added some great mammals like Aardvark, Bat-eared Fox, Porcupine, Small-spotted Genet and Springhare. The target bird was White-faced Owl which with a bit of effort provided incredible views after responding to playback.



*Rüppell's Parrot*

Early morning on the 29<sup>th</sup> we went for a drive and started off with six Lions chasing Black-backed Jackals off their zebra kill. We didn't see any new birds as it was pretty quiet out and the driest I can remember seeing the area. Many common plains game species were viewed though. At breakfast we had several Namaqua Sandgrouse come down to drink as well as Rüppell's Parrot, Rosy-faced Lovebirds and Speckled Pigeons. To this day we had still not seen one Lark-like Bunting or Stark's Lark which is very strange and just indicating the effect of this drought. We had a quick look for Bare-cheeked Babbler around the lodge but with no luck. We then found two groups on the way out of Hobatere. After a lunch stop near Ruacana we found a mixed group of Alpine, Little and Bradfield's Swift. A quick stop along the Kunene produced Malachite Kingfisher, Golden Weaver, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Red-headed Weaver. The camp grounds provided brilliant views of Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush. After dinner we had an early night as we had to be up at 4am the next morning for the Angola Cave Chat trip.



*Southern White Faced Owl*

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*Angola Cave Chat*

At 4:15am of the 30<sup>th</sup> July we left toward the Cave Chat site which was a 1.5 hour journey to get there before sunrise. We climbed a short way through tough boulder strewn terrain and sat in wait along a vegetation line which the Cave Chat feeds along. We heard one calling across the opposite ridge at intervals, coming closer, when suddenly it popped up below us and provided splendid views. Around breakfast we saw Gabar Goshawk, Whit-bellied and Marico Sunbird. We continued to the closest water point in search of Cinderella Waxbill. We arrived and at first no sign but eventually heard them we then saw at least five of them. Continuing on toward the next water point we had around thirty Cinderella Waxbills drinking with Violet-eared waxbill, Green-winged Pytilia, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Red-headed Finch and Southern Grey-headed Sparrow. I had a brief view of one Lark-like Bunting but it didn't stick around for anyone else to see. Still couldn't believe we hadn't seen any yet. En route back to the lodge we saw Shikra and Wood Sandpiper. After lunch we had a short rest and went out on a boat cruise. Little bee-eater, White-backed Night Heron, Pied Kingfisher, Lesser-striped Swallow, Pied Wagtail and Water Thicknee were added. On the way back we encountered a number of Square-tailed Nightjar hawking insects along the river.

We had an early dinner followed by bed.



*Cinderella Waxbill*

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We had another early start on the 31<sup>st</sup> July to attempt locating Barred Owlet along the Kunene toward Ruacana. After calling along at all the best looking areas with no response we stopped at one last site near Hippo pool and put up playback. It was quite cold so we returned to the vehicle but Simon needed the toilet and as a result he heard a response from a Barred Owlet, I put up the playback and within seconds one landed right above us providing great but unexpected views. After having our breakfast packs we headed via Ruacana toward the Galton gate into Etosha National Park. A few common species like Black-chested Snake-Eagle, many Short-toed Rock Thrush, Marico Flycatcher and Purple Roller were observed. In Etosha we observed many plains game and a few Elephant bulls. We also had our first looks at Grey-backed Sparrowlark and Southern Ant-eating Chat for the trip, also large numbers of Red-capped Lark at Ozonjuitji-Mbari waterhole. En route through the Moringa forest we saw an Aardwolf in the distance, and this during the day! Strangely all the Sociable weaver nests around the Moringa forest were vacant, possibly because of drought conditions. We eventually found a colony at Leeubron. On a detour via Okondeka we found the first Burchell's Courser and one pair had a chick present. We had a surprisingly good meal at Okaukeujo and had White as well as Black Rhinoceros drinking at the waterhole.



A walk before breakfast on the 1<sup>st</sup> August in search of Barred Wren-warbler produced Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Ground-scraper Thrush, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler and African Hoopoe. After breakfast we proceeded to Okondeka in the last hope of finding Stark's Lark. We located the same group of Burchell's Coursers from the previous day as well as Pink-billed, Red-capped, and Eastern Clapper Larks. Also we observed a pride of Lions with a large male as well as a female attempting to hunt. Many plains game and common bird species were seen en route to Halali. We finally found a large flock of Lark-like Bunting near Sueda. After check-in and lunch at Halali we did the Rhino drive loop in search of Ovambo Sparrow-hawk with no luck. Goas had a hybrid Shelduck, Egyptian Goose and another Southern Red-billed Hornbill was observed with Damara Hornbill. On arrival at camp I discovered a slow puncture in the tyre which I repaired.



*Greater Kestrel with Lizard lunch*



Early on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August we headed toward Namutoni covering a few waterholes en-route, many general game species were seen as well as common bird species. I decided to head to Mokuti Lodge for lunch in search of the Black-faced Babbler. After lunch we wandered around the grounds with no sign of the Babblers but eventually added Black-faced Waxbill which evaded us throughout the trip. We decided to try the following morning for the Babblers and went back to the park in search of Cheetah or Leopard. A drive down to Two Palms was fruitless and then decided to do Dik-dik drive for Leopard. When getting back to Klein Namutoni we had a herd of Elephants drinking and then I noticed a big cat approaching and on closer inspection identified a big male Leopard coming in to drink and was closely joined by two Spotted Hyenas. It was a lovely end to the day. The birdlife that day wasn't very productive.



After breakfast on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August we did a drive down to Two Palms in search of Cheetah with no luck. A pair of Red-necked Falcons sunning themselves was a nice treat. An interesting event where a Tawny Eagle was trying to hunt Helmeted Guineafowl unsuccessfully unfolded near the waterhole. Many Kori Bustards along the way and an unusual sighting of Short-toed Rock Thrush in the east Etosha. A last try around Klein Okevi for Cheetah then headed toward Mokuti for the Babbler. On arrival we walked through reception into a little group of Black-faced Babbler. We tried for Barred Wren-Warbler with no luck and continued toward Waterberg. We had a quick lunch in Otjiwarongo and attempted Barred Wren-Warbler along the way to Waterberg Wilderness. There was a lot more bird activity in the thornveld around Waterberg but still no Wren Warblers. A little family of Klipspringer greeted us at Waterberg Plateau lodge. A short walk around the ground was fruitless.

We had a short drive to Windhoek on the 4<sup>th</sup> August and tried hard for Barred Wren-Warbler en route to no avail. On arrival at River Crossing I checked Simon and Rahat in and departed back to Swakopmund.

