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**Namibia  
7 – 23 November 2015**

**Holiday participants**

Barbara Wheeler  
John Rumpus and Rosemary Macdonald  
Marion Hession  
Brennan and Karin Aunger

**Leader**

Geoff Crane

Report by Geoff Crane.

Photos by Geoff Crane, Karin Aunger and Brennan Aunger.

Cover: waterhole at Etosha National Park. (GC)

Below: Greater and Lesser Flamingos at Walvis Bay. (GC)



This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contributions of £40 per person were combined with those from Honeyguide's group in South Africa's Southwest Cape in October 2015.

When supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust this gave a total of £710, a little over 14,700 rands, sent to the second Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2), an intensive monitoring programme undertaken in South Africa and adjacent countries.

As at December 2015, the total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 was £103,528.

## Daily Diary

### Day 1 – Saturday 7 / Sunday 8 November 2015, UK to Windhoek

The flight arrived on time and there were no casualties with catching connecting flights or lost luggage. We settled in to our guest house and had a light lunch followed by a cup of tea or two. Birding started on arrival, with Groundscraper Thrush, White-backed Mousebird, Southern Masked Weaver and a very vocal Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, which were seen around the pool as well as a few darters and butterflies, including Red-veined Darter and Citrus Swallowtail. It was a particularly hot and sunny day so we decided to have a short walk around the Avis Dam area, with the view to visiting the Windhoek Botanical Gardens in the cool of tomorrow morning. We had great views of Laughing Dove, Bradfield's Swift, Rock Martin, Red-eyed Bulbul, Pririt Batis, White-browed Sparrow-weaver, Grey-backed Cameroptera, House Sparrow, Pin-tailed Whydah, Red-eyed Bulbul, Black-faced Waxbill and Blue Waxbills, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, Marico Flycatcher, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Namaqua Dove, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and Mountain Wheatear during the course of the afternoon. Not bad birding for a hot afternoon in Windhoek! We had dinner at Windhoek's famous Joe's Beer House.

### Day 2 – Monday 9 November 2015, Windhoek to Waterberg National Park

After a leisurely breakfast we packed the vehicle and headed for the Windhoek Botanical Gardens. An African Cuckoo caught our attention on the playing fields opposite the gardens. Our attention was then diverted to Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, White-browed Sparrow-weaver, Lilac-breasted Roller, African Hoopoe, Glossy Starling, Bradfield's Swift and a few Yellow Mongooses, Ground Squirrels and a lone Rock Hyrax. The gardens were extremely dry with no water anywhere. We spent time in the nursery area looking at all the weird and wonderful plants, most of which were succulents. We saw a pair of Namibian Rock Agamas with their yellow and red heads (female yellow, male red) as well as a few birds on one of the circular walking trails. Also here were Dusky and Marico Sunbirds, White-backed Mousebird, Helmeted Guineafowl, Laughing Dove, European Bee-eater, Chat Flycatcher, and a scruffy Red Bishop was just coming into its breeding plumage.

The drive to the Waterberg was fairly uneventful with only one stop for a thermal of vultures. We managed to identify White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures before they disappeared out of sight. Warthogs and Baboons were seen feeding on the road verge.

We dropped our luggage in the cottages and then had a picnic lunch. We were keeping an eye on a troop of Baboons as this particular troop has a reputation of joining any picnic ... without invitations. We had Warthogs grazing on the lawn between us and the Baboons and a few Damara Dik-diks were also happily grazing on the irrigated lawns.

After some R&R time we went for a walk through the forest below the sandstone cliffs. A group of Water Mongooses were foraging under the thick vegetation and a troop of Baboons was feeding in a huge old fig tree. Ruppell's Parrot, Rosy-faced Lovebirds, African Hoopoe, Fork-tailed Drongo, Red-billed Francolin, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Grey Turaco, Purple Roller, Burchell's Starling, Common Scimitarbill, Greater Blue-eared Starling and Groundscraper Thrush were seen during the course of the afternoon.



Waterberg National Park (GC)

### Day 3 – Tuesday 10 November 2015, Waterberg National Park to Etosha National Park

We had a short walk to the restaurant, before an early breakfast. On leaving the park we stopped a few times while we were still on the dirt road outside the Park for fleeting glimpses of Slender Mongoose and a band of about 15 Banded Mongooses. We had better views of Common Duiker, Kudu and Steenbok. On the bird front we saw a Tawny Eagle finishing off a Small Spotted Genet on top of a telegraph pole, Chat Flycatcher, European Bee-eater and Glossy Starlings were on the telegraph wires. We arrived at our destination in time for a light lunch in the air-conditioned restaurant as it was 41.5°C outside.

At 4pm we went out on a game drive to see what we could find. First stop was a couple of Black-backed Jackals, then a small herd of Burchell's Zebra. At the first waterhole (Klein Okevi) we found some Black-faced Impala and Springbok. The next waterhole (Groot Okevi) had a Spotted Hyena lying in the water with four thirsty Giraffes waiting to drink. At the Klein Namutoni waterhole we watched a total of 11 Giraffes, a couple of Spotted Hyenas in the water again and 3 Black-backed Jackals and a herd of 30+ Black-faced Impalas. The Impalas left the waterhole with impressive leaps and bounds. Damara Dik-dik and Slender Mongoose were seen on the Dik-dik Loop and a close encounter with a bull Elephant was had by all on the way back to the camp.



Tawny Eagle finishing off a Small Spotted Genet. (GC)

On the bird front we saw many birds. The new birds added to our holiday bird list were: Southern Pied Babbler, Woolly-necked Stork, Cape Vulture, Martial Eagle, Violet-eared Waxbill, African Pipit, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Cape Teal, Little Grebe, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Kori Bustard, African Jacana, Kittlitz's Plover, Three-banded Plover, Ruff, Black-winged Pratincole, Wood Sandpiper, Blacksmith Lapwing, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Red-billed and Yellow-billed Hornbills, Red-capped Lark, Barn Swallow, African Golden Oriole, Pied Crow, White-browed Scrub Robin, Damara Hornbill, Yellow Canary, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, Amethyst Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird and Little Stint.



White-bellied sunbird, Damara Dik-dik and slender mongoose. (GC)

### Day 4 – Wednesday 11 November 2015, Etosha National Park

We left the camp as soon as the gates were opened at sunrise for a pre breakfast drive. Five minutes later we were all having a 'wow' moment with three Cheetahs on the road. They ambled off slowly with the two young ones playing together. This was a great sighting especially as there were no other vehicles with us! We drove around the local area seeing all the usual plains game with a sighting of four Lions near the Klein Okavi waterhole. Again we had birds galore: Red-headed Finch, Great Sparrow, Black Crake, Violet-backed Starling, Icterine Warbler, Sabota Lark, Red-breasted Swallow, Red-billed Quelea, Crowned Lapwing, Common Moorhen, Spotted Thick-knee, Scaly-feathered Finch and Chestnut-breasted Bunting were all new for the trip.

After breakfast we went out again for a two hour drive towards the Twee Palms waterhole on Fisher's Pan. The temperature was already very warm so most of the birds and mammals were making the most of the shade where possible. We saw a group of Double-banded Coursers by the road, a number of Kori Bustards, a Dark Chanting Goshawk and at the waterhole we watched a herd of Kudu drinking. A large bull Elephant came in from across the pan to drink and scared the Kudu and Springbok away. The large Warthogs were not so intimidated by the Elephant and stayed to drink!

We doubled back to the Chudop waterhole where we found a lone Lion sitting at the waterhole; ten metres away was a dead Giraffe. There must have been at least 400 mammals of 8 different mammal species waiting to come to the waterhole to drink; Gemsbok, Black-faced Impala, Springbok, Kudu, Giraffe, Burchell's Zebra, Black-backed Jackal, Blue Wildebeest and Elephant. The Elephants were not afraid of the Lion and were happily drinking. A second Lion came in and settled down in the shade of a perimeter bush, which was then joined by the first Lion. We then headed back to camp for lunch and some down time, during which sitting at the waterhole was rewarded by a great view of a Black Rhino. Reading, sketching, swimming, photography and snoozing were also enjoyed.



Left: Ostriches, Burchell's Zebras, Blue Wildebeest and Impala at a waterhole in Etosha NP.  
Right: lion on a Giraffe kill. (GC)

Our late afternoon drive to various waterholes rewarded us with a few new birds: Marabou Stork, Cattle Egret, a beautiful Bateleur drinking at the water's edge, Namaqua Sandgrouse, Banded Martin, Lesser Grey Shrike, Red-backed Shrike and Wattled Starling were new. The Lions at the Chudop waterhole were now three and were still being very lethargic, so we spent some time watching a band of Banded Mongooses searching for food. Later on a Barn Owl and Rufus-cheeked Nightjar were seen at the floodlit waterhole and a Cape Thick-toed Gecko was hunting insects around the outside lights of the rooms.

#### Day 5 – Thursday 12 November 2015, Etosha National Park

This morning was overcast with rain clouds – but no rain. Before breakfast we went for a short drive, seeing a small herd of Eland with young by the Klein Namutoni waterhole. A large Plated Lizard was seen in the camp while we were loading up the vehicle with our luggage. We took a quick detour to the Chudop waterhole to see how the Lions were doing with the Giraffe kill. This time we had 10 mammal species at the waterhole; Lion, Gemsbok, Black-faced Impala, Springbok, Kudu, Giraffe, Burchell's Zebra, Black-backed Jackal, Blue Wildebeest and Black Rhino. Our route across Etosha via a number of waterholes showed us a few new mammals and birds. Two good sized herds of Red Hartebeest were seen and we saw plenty of Tree Squirrels at Halali Camp where we had lunch. New birds at the Moringa waterhole were Spotted Crane, Shaft-tailed Whydah, Black-throated Canary, Golden-breasted Bunting and Spotted Flycatcher.



In Etosha NP – a Northern Black Korhaan casts a shadow (GC); and a Southern Oryx (Gemsbok). (BA)

We stopped at Springbokfontein, Goas, Rietfontein, Salvadora, Sueda and Nebrowni waterholes on the way to Okaukuejo Camp. Secretarybird, Greater Kestrel, South African Shelduck, Red-billed Teal, Red-crested and Northern Black Korhaan, Black-winged Stilt, European Swift, Black and Pied Crow, Familiar Chat, Rattling Cisticola and Yellow-bellied Eremomela were all new to us. Sociable Weavers had a huge communal nest in the camp by the waterhole.

After dinner we sat by the floodlit waterhole watching four Lions, a family of Elephants, two Black Rhinos and plenty of Black-backed Jackals. There was also a Rufus-cheeked Nightjar and a few large fruit bats over the waterhole.

## Day 6 – Friday 13 November 2015, Etosha National Park

Again, we were up at dawn and the first vehicle out the gate. We drove out to Gemsbokvlakte waterhole and then back via the Nebrowni waterhole. We stopped to watch a Red-headed Falcon decapitate a small bird for its breakfast and a Slender Mongoose kept us entertained for a while. Just near to our camp we came across two Lions already sleeping in the shade of a bush.



A Black Rhino having a mud bath in the white mud. (GC)

After breakfast we drove up the western 'shore' of the pan to the Okondeka waterhole. Here we found hundreds of mammals refreshing themselves. Springbok, Gemsbok, Ostrich, Giraffe, Blue Wildebeest and Burchell's Zebra just kept coming over the ridge to the waterhole. There were a few Lions tucked under a bush for the day and not much left of the Wildebeest that lay not far from the bush. We saw a couple of Secretarybirds and flocks of Grey-backed Finchlarks as well as plenty of larks. Karoo Long-billed Lark, Rufous-napped Lark and Southern Ant-eating Chat were new for us.

An Etosha Ground Agama and a Black-chested Prinia were seen in the camp at lunchtime and on our afternoon drive we

saw an Eastern Clapper Lark. At the Nebrowni waterhole there was a Black Rhino having a mud bath in the white mud – it was now a 'white' Black Rhino! Later on we saw a Scrub Hare and the two sleepy Lions from this morning were still asleep under the same bush. After dinner the floodlit waterhole had a steady stream of mammals coming in to drink: Giraffe, Black Rhino, Lions, Elephants, Black-backed Jackal

## Day 7 – Saturday 14 November 2015, Etosha National Park to Damaraland

As we were travelling a fair distance today we decided against a pre-breakfast drive and opted for an early breakfast instead. We drove out of Etosha towards the Anderson Gate seeing a small flock of White Helmet-Shrikes by the road. We stopped at one last waterhole en route to the exit gate. WOW! We had 12 mammal species at one waterhole – my personal long-standing 25 year record was 11 mammal species at a waterhole. A Black Rhino was hogging the small spring with Burchell's Zebra, Springbok, Black-faced Impala, Kudu, Blue Wildebeest and Gemsbok waiting patiently for their turn to drink. The Giraffe seemed OK with the Rhino and went straight in to drink as did the Warthog and Black-backed Jackal. The Red Hartebeest was resting in the shade of a tree. All panic erupted when a Lioness came across to take a drink. This was a great 'Grand Finale' to our Etosha experience.

We left Etosha on a high note and headed for the town of Otjo for coffee, Wi-Fi and provisions. We had a picnic lunch at the Petrified Forest just past Horixus and then drove on to our lodge at Twyfelfontein. We were welcomed by a troop of Chacma Baboons, a Dassie Rat, a few Rock Hyraxes, some very colourful Namibian Rock Agamas and the very pied version of the Mountain Wheatear.

## Day 8 – Sunday 15 November 2015, Damaraland / San rock art

We had a late breakfast and then headed off to Twyfelfontein World Heritage Site. We took a guided tour around the impressive rock engraving sites, taking loads of photos and getting distracted every now and then by Verreaux's Eagle soaring above or Dassie Rats scampering around the rocks. We could see the eagle's nest high up on the cliff edge.

At the actual spring we saw quite a few birds, with Lark-like Bunting and White-throated Canary both being new for our trip list. We also saw a Boulton's Namib Day Gecko near the spring and Namibian Rock Agamas and Striped Skinks around the rock engravings.



Rock engraving at Twyfelfontein World Heritage Site. (GC)

We then set off for the Atlantic coast on what must have been the bumpiest and most corrugated road in Namibia. We felt like we were an empty tin can in a tumble dryer! This road took much longer than anticipated but after a long drive we got to our destination. We stopped for Fiscal Shrike and Familiar Chat on the telegraph wires and three Ruppell's Korhaans closer to the coast. Our lodge was situated right on the seafront, so seabird watching and a cup of tea on the room balcony was in order. Cape Gannet, Kelp Gull, Swift Tern and Cape Cormorant were quickly picked up, while Cape Wagtail and House Sparrow were around the lodge.

#### **Day 9 – Monday 16 November 2015, Cape Cross / Swakopmund**

The Cape Fur Seal colony at Cape Cross was alive with bleating seal pups. Just about every female seal had a newly born black seal pup and the big bull seals were keeping out of the way on the shoreline. There was an abundance of smell and even more noise, with plenty of Kelp Gulls cleaning up the mess and the dead pups. We left the colony and headed for Swakopmund stopping at a shipwreck which was covered in nesting White-breasted Cormorants. We also saw a Trac Trac Chat at this stop. On arriving in Swakopmund our first stop was for a good cup of coffee and lunch. I had to sort out the vehicle's tyres, so the group had a couple of hours to look around the town. Tyres fixed, we drove on down the coast to Walvis Bay.

Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey Plover, Avocet, Caspian and Common Terns, Hartlaub's, Kelp and Grey-headed Gulls and Ruddy Turnstone were on the mud in front of the lodge when we arrived. There were also some very large pink jellyfish waiting to be rescued by the incoming tide. Some of the group took advantage of the long promenade to stretch their legs and to watch the Common Dolphins.



Cape fur seals. (GC)

#### **Day 10 – Tuesday 17 November 2015, Walvis Bay / Swakopmund**

The Common Dolphins were seen again before breakfast and also a Black-necked Grebe. We set out to do some birdwatching around the lagoon on the receding tide. Greater and Lesser Flamingos were in their hundreds, or perhaps thousands. Also here were five Great White Pelicans, Reed, White-breasted and Cape Cormorants. The Reed Cormorant was having an easy meal with a shoal of small fish caught in a low tide pool. Grey Heron, Little Egret, Cape Teal, Ringed, White-fronted, Kittlitz's, Chestnut-banded, Grey and Three-banded Plovers, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Ruff, Common, Marsh and Curlew Sandpiper, Pied Avocet, Greenshank, Little Stint, Sanderling, Black-winged Stilt, Dunlin, Red Phalarope (known as Grey Phalarope in the UK) and Red-necked Phalarope were all seen well. I am sure that I have missed a few! We had a fly-past from a Pacific Golden Plover and also a Damara Tern, which we later found roosting. We returned to the waterfront in Walvis Bay for coffee and lunch.

After lunch we set out to try to find larks, but everywhere was remarkably birdless apart from the nice surprise of seeing a juvenile Martial Eagle at the end of the trip. We stopped at the old Swakopmund water treatment plant where we found quite a few birds; Egyptian Goose, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, Blacksmith Lapwing and Common Waxbill to name but a few. At the mouth of the dry Swakop River there was a small wetland which had Little Grebe, Caspian, Swift, Common and Sandwich Terns, Kelp, Hartlaub's and Grey-headed Gulls as well as plenty of waders. Buffy Pipit was seen on the way back to the lodge. By the end of the day we had seen more than 60 bird species.

#### **Day 11 – Wednesday 18 November 2015, Namib-Naukluft National Park**

We spent the morning just inland from Swakopmund looking at the 100 year old lichens, the 460 million year old moon landscape of the Swakop River gorge and the very old welwitschia plants – *Welwitschia mirabilis*. We had a Tractrac Chat at our feet at one of the viewpoints and Mountain Wheatear, Familiar Chat, White-backed Mousebird, Acacia Pied Barbet, Grey Turaco, Pale-winged Starling and White-bellied Sunbird in the dry river gorge. We had a distant view of a Hartmann's Zebra on the skyline and better views of Springbok and Rock Hyrax.

Dollar bush *Zygophyllum stapfii*, pencil bush *Arthroa leubnitziae*, myrrh bush *Commiphora namaensis*, Bushman's candle *Sarcocaulon flavescens* and a very fast Spotted Desert Lizard were also seen. We had a picnic lunch at a nice covered picnic spot at the end of the road before heading back to Walvis Bay.

We had a walk along the promenade in front of the lodge seeing many of the same wader species that we saw yesterday. African Black Oystercatcher and Bar-tailed Godwit were both new for us.

### **Day 12 – Thursday 19 November 2015, Swakopmund to Sesriem**

We said goodbye to the cool coastal weather and headed back inland to the Namib-Naukluft National Park. We had some great views of Hartmann's Zebra out on the plains, also Gemsbok, Springbok, African Ostrich and in the Kuisep river gorge we saw three Klipspringer (another new mammal for the trip) and some Kudu. We stopped a few times to look at the views and also the geology. At one of these stops we watched a Namaqua Sand Lizard and we photographed *Euphorbia virosa*.

We had our picnic lunch at Solitaire, with loads of sparrows and weavers, and then continued on to our lodge. Our luxury 'tents' had fantastic views across the plains to the red sand dunes in the far distance. A few cold beers while watching the sun go down followed by a good *al fresco* dinner was a great way to end the day.

### **Day 13 – Friday 20 November 2015, Sossusvlei**

We started the day way before dawn at 04:30 with a cup of coffee and a rusk. The small moon was over the horizon so we had some fantastic stars to look at: the Southern Cross, Orion's Belt, the Milky Way. The plan was to be at the dunes for sunrise to catch the beautiful colours, so the one-hour drive from the lodge to the dunes of Sossusvlei was in the dark. We jumped onto a 4x4 Landrover to take us through the sand to Sossusvlei. We climbed part way up the main big dune to get a better view of the changing light and colours on the red sand dunes, and Karin made it to the top.



Sand dunes at Sossusvlei, and the view from the top. (KA)

We ate our picnic breakfast under a camel thorn tree *Acacia erioloba*, with the Cape Sparrows and a family of Striped mice. Springbok, Ostrich and a few Gemsbok were heading off into the dunes for the day and a Spotted Eagle Owl was also settling down for the day in one of the acacia trees that surround the dry vlei. We were looking at the many tracks in the sand – from Brown Hyena, Springbok and Gemsbok tracks to toktokkie beetles and millipede tracks, with everything in between!

On the way back to the lodge we saw Lappet-faced Vulture, Rüppell's Korhaan, Black and Pied Crows, Greater Kestrel and Fiscal Shrike. We had lunch in the lodge restaurant and then spent the afternoon relaxing.

### **Day 14 – Saturday 21 November 2015, Sesriem to Windhoek**

Before breakfast we visited the Sesriem Canyon. We had the place to ourselves and the calls from the Pale-winged Starlings were echoing off the canyon walls. Gemsbok, Springbok, Warthogs and Chacma Baboons were on the grassy plain in front of the lodge.

After breakfast we left the lodge for Windhoek, stopping to photograph a large old quiver tree *Aloe dicotema* which must have been at least 800 years old. Plain Sand Lizard, Anchieta's Agama and Spotted Lizard were all seen here.

We drove over the Remhoogte Pass seeing plenty of Kudu and some nice new birds for our trip list: White-breasted Snake-eagle, Brown Snake-eagle, Short-toed Rock-thrush, Karoo Chat and Fawn-coloured Lark. We had a picnic lunch in the shade of a large tree near an old farm and then continued to Rehobeth, with only one puncture / shredded tyre to contend with. Dinner was at Joe's Beerhouse.

**Day 15 – Sunday 22 / Monday 23 November 2015, Windhoek to the UK and home ...**

Our last morning was spent birdwatching at a few local sites. After a very nice leisurely breakfast we drove up the hill that overlooks the city of Windhoek and then had a short tour around the city. We then drove through to the other end of the Avis Dam area for a walk. We had a fair / brief view of a Monteiro's Hornbill, great views of Spotted Flycatcher, Cardinal and Bearded Woodpeckers and Brubru. There was a low fly-past by a Verreaux's Eagle and plenty of good views of some of the waxbills that we had seen during the past two weeks.

After an early lunch we headed for Windhoek airport to start the journey home.

**Some of the holiday highlights from the group**

The outrageous pink emanating from the large flocks of flamingos at Walvis Bay, also watching two flamingos having a squabble about 'who knows what?'

A popular highlight was seeing three cheetahs close to the vehicle in Etosha National Park, as well as the lion on a giraffe kill and the twelve mammal species around the one waterhole.

The sunsets at the Waterberg National Park – the escarpment turned a beautiful orange with the setting sun.

Geology, minerals and gems play a big part in Namibia and we had met many locals selling gems and crystals, so the very informative 'Crystal Gallery' at Swakopmund was well enjoyed.

Sossusvlei sand dunes, the big blue skies, Secretarybirds, Spotted Crake, seeing well over 200 bird species and 38 mammal species, reptiles ... the list goes on. Many photographs and thousands of great memories!



Hartmann's Zebras (GC)



Spotted Eagle Owl (GC)



Kelp Gulls (GC)



Cheetah (BA)