



## Birding Trip Report: Namibia Namib Desert, Erongo Mountains, Brandberg, Etosha and the Waterberg Plateau November 2009

For the [species lists](#) of birds and mammals seen on tour, please [click here](#).

### Overview:

This was a relaxed 15-day tour, from 15 to 29 November 2009

Areas visited: Sossusvlei, Walvis Bay, the Erongo Mountains, Brandberg, Hobatere, Etosha and the Waterberg

Number of bird species: 254 species seen, 3 heard, 4 seen by the participants only, 1 seen by the leader only.

Top ten birds: **Burchell's Courser**, **Rockrunner**, **Dune Lark**, **Herero Chat**, **African Quail-Finch**, **Violet-eared Waxbill**, **Rueppell's Parrot**, **Damara Tern**, **Bare-cheeked Babbler**, **Bradfield's Hornbill**, **Double-banded Courser**, **Rosy-faced Lovebird**, **African Hawk-Eagle**, **Orange River Francolin**, **Blue Crane**, **Double-banded Sandgrouse**, **Violet Woodhoopoe**, **Chestnut-banded Plover**, **Black-faced Babbler**, **Great Sparrow** and **Hartlaub's Francolin**.

Number of mammal species seen: 42 species, including **Striped Polecat**!

Top mammals: **South African Porcupine**, **Dassie Rat**, **Bat-eared Fox**, **Cape Fox**, **Black Mongoose**, distant views of **Meerkat**, **Spotted Hyaena**, a pride of **Lion** with very young cubs, two tiny **Black-backed Jackal** cubs at play, **Caracal**, **African Wild Cat**, **Black Rhinoceros**, **Damara Dikdik** and the rarely seen **Striped Polecat**.

We also saw 15 reptile species, the **Marbled Rubber Frog** and the **Namib burrowing Spider**.

Scroll down for the trip summary and detailed report.





Peringuey's or Side-winding Adder, Namaqua Chameleon, Palmato Gecko and Shovel-snouted Lizard © Michael Mills on this [Birding Africa Namibia tour](#) during the Living Deserts Optional Excursion.



Trevor & Jenni Franks and Gillian & David Jackson © Trevor and Jenni Franks on this [Birding Africa Namibia tour](#).

### Summary

This relaxed Namibian tour took in the essential birds of the country, allowing enough time to thoroughly enjoy prolonged views of the specials, and savour the varied scenery, abundant mammal and reptile life, and superb lodges and sunsets. And there was even a little time for shopping! Our circular route took in Sossusvlei, Walvis Bay, the Erongo Mountains, Brandberg, Hobatere, Etosha and the Waterberg, over a 15-day period.



Burchell's Courser and Double-banded Sandgrouse © Trevor and Jenni Franks

Voted Top Ten birds of the trip were: (1) the stubborn **Burchell's Courser**, which only relented on day 12, but gave superb views when it finally did, (2) confiding **Rockrunner** seen on several occasions, on both the first and last full days of birding, (3) a fearless **Dune Lark** that foraged within 5 m of us, (4) prolonged views of **Herero Chat** on the very first day of birding, a flock of 30 **African Quail-Finch** that foraged in the road for at least 15 minutes, allowing us to approach within 10 m, and **Violet-eared Waxbill**, for sheer gaudiness (all in tied fourth), (7) **Rueppell's Parrot** for dazzling with its orange socks, (8) **Damara Tern** for perfection in a tiny package, (9) **Bare-cheeked Babbler** for pure entertainment and (10) **Bradfield's Hornbill** for being unexpected. Other noteworthy highlights included **Double-banded Courser**, **Rosy-faced Lovebird**, **African Hawk-Eagle** hunting **Orange River Francolin**, **Blue Crane**, thousands of **Double-banded Sandgrouse** drinking after dark, **Violet Woodhoopoe**, **Chestnut-banded Plover**, **Black-faced Babbler**, **Great Sparrow** and **Hartlaub's Francolin**.

Mammals of note included **South African Porcupine**, Dassie Rat, Bat-eared Fox, Cape Fox, Black Mongoose, distant views of Meerkat, Spotted Hyaena, a pride of Lion with very young cubs, two tiny Black-backed Jackal cubs at play, Caracal, African Wild Cat, Black Rhinoceros, Damara Dikdik and the rarely seen **Striped Polecat**.

Reptile highlights included the Peringuey's or Side-winding Adder, Shovel-snouted Lizard, Palmato Gecko, Namaqua Chameleon, and several species of Agama.

This is a more detailed account of our travels...

#### Detailed trip report

Avis Dam near Windhoek provides a superb introduction to central Namibian birding, and shortly after arriving in the country we found ourselves surrounded by thornveld full of birds. While most species seen here would be seen again, our first **White-backed Mousebird**, **Swallow-tailed Bee-eater**, **Barred Wren Warbler**, **Burnt-necked Eremomela**, **Mountain Wheatear**, **Dusky Sunbird**, **Black-faced Waxbill**, **Prrit Batis**, **Ashy Tit** and **Cape Bunting** were very welcome. More noteworthy were **Cape Penduline Tit**, **Grey-backed Cisticola**, **Bradfield's Swift** and **Icterine Warbler**. However, the undoubted highlights were a displaying male **Monteiro's Hornbill** and very confiding pair of snappy **Rockrunner**, in full, melodious song. We also heard distant calls of **Orange River Francolin**, but that was all they remained by the time it was to move south to Sossusvlei.

We took the scenic route via a breathtaking mountain pass, where we were thrilled to find a confiding pair of **Herero Chat**, probably Namibia's trickiest special. En route we also notched up **Karoo Long-billed Lark** and **Spike-heeled Lark**, before arriving on the flat desert plains near Sossusvlei. Along the entrance road to our accommodation we notched up the first of many **Rueppell's Korhaan** and **Stark's Lark**, a watched a pair of striking **Ludwig's Bustard** feeding in the afternoon light. While Sossusvlei is not an essential birding destination, it did give us the chance to look for the localised Dune Lark whilst enjoying the world-renowned scenery. At first several birds were heard in the distance, and after trudging up a tall, orange dune we were rewarded with perhaps the most memorable bird sighting of the trip, a **Dune Lark** scurrying between wiry grass tufts not more than 5 metres from us, focussed on finding breakfast and not in the least perturbed by our presence. Other highlights during our visit included **Double-banded Courser**, **Namaqua Sandgrouse**, **Desert Cisticola** and **Tractrac Chat**. The best mammal was Bat-eared Fox, with its radar ears.

From Sossusvlei we headed for Walvis Bay, making numerous stops en route to watch **Black-chested Snake Eagle**, a striking Bokmakierie, impressive numbers of **Gray's Lark**, a very responsive **Rufous-eared Warbler** and our first **Karoo Chat**. And we were on the continual lookout for **Burchell's Courser**, of course, but to no avail. At Walvis Bay the hordes of waterbirds were as impressive as ever, and included vast numbers of **Great White Pelican**, **Cape Cormorant**, **Greater Flamingo** and waders. Some careful sifting through the thousands of birds turned up **Common Redshank**, **Terek Sandpiper** and **Red-necked Phalarope**. Also spotted were **Cape Teal**, **Crowned Cormorant**, **African Black Oystercatcher**, **Cape Gannet**, the ever-popular **Chestnut-banded Plover** and **Orange River White-eye**. However, the star of the show was the near-perfect **Damara Tern**, watched fishing for extended periods less than 10 m away. We also made a return visit to the desert to log some more hours unsuccessfully looking for **Burchell's Courser**, and took an exciting dune tour on which we saw some fantastic reptiles, including Sidewinder Adder and Palmato Gecko.



Rosy-faced Lovebird and White-faced Scops-Owl © Trevor and Jenni Franks

Our next destination was the Erongo mountains, specifically in the surrounds of our superb accommodation. Here we were treated to prolonged views of two covays of **Hartlaub's Spurfowl**, our first **Red-billed Spurfowl**, flocks of **Rosy-faced Lovebird** near our breakfast tables, **Carp's Tit**, **Short-toed Rock Thrush**, numerous **Great Sparrow** and gaudy **Violet-eared Waxbill**. Nearby excursions to some river beds turned up **Verreaux's Eagle Owl**, our first of many **Rueppell's Parrot**, excellent views of **Bradfield's Swift**, **Damara Red-billed Hornbill**, a band of **Southern Pied Babbler** and **Burchell's Starling**. To our frustration all woodhoopoes we laid eyes on turned out to be **Green Woodhoopoe**, and not the expected **Violet Woodhoopoe**!

At night we watched Caracal and South African Porcupine drinking at the waterhole, and by day we were accompanied by Damara Dik-dik, Dassie Rat and Rock Hyrax.

From the Erongo mountains, we continued north towards Etosha, pausing en route at the Brandberg to visit the famous White Lady rock art and to find **Benguela Long-billed Lark**. And we continued logging many more miles in **Burchell's Courser** country, still without reward. A roadside dam turned up **South African Shelduck** and **Southern Pochard**, and a final stop en route turned up the first flock of **Chestnut Weaver** (all in non-breeding plumage).

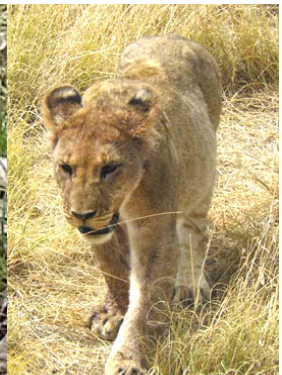
Our first stop in the Etosha area was at our fantastic lodge, where **Bare-cheeked Babbler** was studied in detail, a snappy **Rueppell's Parrot** impressed with its orange socks, **Olive Bee-eater** was breeding, **Meves's Starling** walked on the lawns and **Red-headed Finch**, **Augur Buzzard**, **Double-banded Sandgrouse** and **Pearl-breasted Swallow** visited the nearby waterholes. Our first **Kalahari Scrub Robin** was seen further afield and a night drive turned up **Rufous-cheeked Nightjar**, with three individuals captured and ringed by Steve.

The nocturnal mammals were even more impressive and we saw, in short succession, Bat-eared Fox, Cape Fox and Striped Polecat. Other mammals seen were a pride of Lion, Hartmann's Mountain Zebra and the scarce Black Mongoose.

Perhaps the most memorable birding experience of the trip, however, was provided by two species... distant calls of **Orange River Francolin** lead us up a rocky hillside where we, after much persistence, managed to track down our quarry and watch a group of eight birds stalking through the rocky grassland. Suddenly all havoc broke loose a pair of **African Hawk Eagle** swooped in, sending birds running for cover and shrieking off in all directions. The francolins were lucky this time, and all appeared to escape unharmed... before we made our way to Etosha National Park.

At Etosha National Park, we worked our way from west to east. The plains north of Okaukuejo were fertile hunting grounds for bustards and larks, with **Kori Bustard**, **Northern Black Korhaan**, **Eastern Clapper Lark**, **Pink-billed Lark** and **Red-capped Lark** all seen well. In camp, **Shaft-tailed Whydah** was in breeding plumage. Towards Halali David spotted his much-desired and much-deserved **Burchell's Courser**, and we enjoyed prolonged views of six birds, followed shortly by another two. Another highlight of the trip was finding a flock of **African Quail-Finch**, which fed in the road and allowed us to approach within 10 metres! Further east still the rains had come and the bush was greening up quite nicely. **Rufous-naped Lark** sang from the bushtops, we spotted a perched pair of very smart **Red-necked Falcon** and a trio of **Blue Crane** fed near the roadside. Raptors and vultures were numerous, and we found both Lapped-faced Vulture and White-headed Vulture. In the dense Commiphora bush near Namutoni we were treated to good views of **Black-faced Babbler** and **Crested Francolin** crossing the road. Before heading for the Waterberg we searched for **Burchell's Sandgrouse** and waited at a waterhole for them to come and drink, but without luck.

Mammal highlights in Etosha included a pride of Lion, Spotted Hyaena, Black Rhinoceros, Banded Mongoose and Black-faced Impala.





Banded Mongoose, Lion, African Elephant, Black-backed Jackal, Greater Kudu, Gemsbok © Trevor and Jenni Franks

Finally we returned southwards back towards Windhoek, pausing for a night at the Waterberg Plateau National Park en route where we immediately found a smart Bradfield's Hornbill, even before we could unload our bags from the vehicle. Bearded Woodpecker and Golden-tailed Woodpecker were also seen well and, after dark, Freckled Nightjar, which landed nearby and called in the torch beam. At the last minute we snatched Violet Woodhoopoe from the jaws of defeat, with a group of six birds first rallying noisily above our heads and then watched at eye level, feeding in the bright sunlight! What a fitting birding end to our Namibia tour!

Birding Africa Trip Report by Tour Leader [Michael Mills](#).