

Namibia

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1-3

Waterberg Plateau Park

As we head north out of Windhoek, the landscape becomes increasingly rocky. The dry land is full of life and we'll find it difficult not to stop for all the new birds we pass. Several species of hornbill, weavers and a number of eagles will be seen before we arrive at the Waterberg Plateau Park. The flamboyant brick-red sandstone formations are reminiscent of some of Australia's finest landscapes. It is also a very green place. The vibrant woodlands host a marvellously varied birdlife with an assortment of colourful species, and to us freshly arrived from Europe we'll find them pleasantly approachable too! Bradfield's Hornbills and Violet Wood-Hoopoes form noisy groups in Silver Terminalias and overhead the magnificent Verreaux's Eagle, a typical bird of escarpment country, soars on black and white wings. Clusters of yellow flowers hang from the Weeping Wattle and Flame Acacia, Coffee Mimosa, and purple-flowered Kalahari Apple-leaf emphasise the sub-tropical nature of the higher parts of the plateau. The Waterberg has a very rich mammal fauna with many species re-introduced over the past decades, including Roan and Sable Antelopes, White Rhino and Blue Wildebeest. These are difficult to see because of the thick cover, however night forays can be good, with African Scops Owl and noisy South African Galagos around the lodge, and along tracks we'll look for Caracal and Leopard.

Days 4-9

Etosha National Park

Widely regarded as one of the World's most important conservation areas, Etosha's twenty-three thousand square kilometres of national park is both a scenic masterpiece and a haven for multitudes of animals and birds. At its heart is the Etosha Pan, a six thousand square kilometre depression that in exceptional rains forms a shallow lake. Usually dry, it is the perennial springs round its edges that attract abundant game. There are three government-run lodges inside the park and all other accommodation is outside the park, which means that even when the three lodges are busy there's still huge expanses of park with nobody about. We'll stay three nights at Halili Lodge and three nights at Okaukuejo. Waterholes are the key in Etosha and we'll spend a lot of time watching the comings and goings whether it be dawn as a Black-backed Jackal tries its luck with some tardy Double-banded Sandgrouse, or dusk as Lions spook a departing herd of Burchell's Zebra. Okaukuejo's waterhole is one of the most important and there's regular visits from herds of Elephants, and Black Rhino often appear after dark as do Hyenas (both Brown and Spotted are found within the park) and Lions. Springbok and Gemsbok are abundant, Elephant too. In fact waterholes in the 'haunted forest' of Phantom Trees have had to be fenced off to protect them from Elephant damage, so successful have these huge animals been in

recent decades. The diminutive Damara Dik-dik is found in grassier spots along with Red Hartebeest and Blue Wildebeest, and we'll also encounter Giraffe, Steenbok, Kudu, and herds of spiral-horned Eland.

With six nights in the park we've given ourselves a very good chance of not only encountering all of these animals, and some of the larger predators, but also spending time with them and seeing how they live. And needless to say there are excellent opportunities to photograph them. Leopard and Cheetah are found within the park but cannot be guaranteed, however Lions are never so wary and laze happily in the shade. African Wild Cats are notoriously shy but Etosha offers a good chance to see one in daylight. Great fun to watch are family groups of Bat-eared Foxes, these highly entertaining creatures always seem full of mischief as they cavort in the early morning sunshine.

With over 320 bird species we'll never be short of birds to watch at Etosha. Round the lodges we'll see roosting pairs of Giant Eagle-Owls and White-faced Scops Owls. Out on the dry flats we'll watch the apparently random stridings of the Secretary Bird as it searches for serpents. Burchell's Coursers speed away and Namaqua Sandgrouse take flight from roadside puddles. These dry areas host plentiful larks - Stark's, Pink-billed, Spike-heeled and Eastern Clapper amongst them! Kori Bustards are so impressively big, and well-camouflaged are Two-banded Coursers and Spotted Thick-knees. Both Montagu's and Pallid Harriers quarter the open landscapes as overhead Lappet-faced Vultures and the powerful Martial Eagle soar. Greater Kestrel and Red-breasted Swallow also enjoy the blue skies. Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark and Yellow Canary join weavers and waxbills at waterholes.

Days 10 & 11

Hobatere

A private thirty-two thousand hectare concession of acacia bush off the Western end of Etosha is managed as a wildlife reserve. Unlike Etosha one can roam freely, and guided walks here are sure to be one of the highlights of the tour. Three hundred metres from the swimming pool there's a hide that overlooks a small water hole frequented by all sorts of game. Small groups of Hartmann's Mountain Zebra join Elephant and Kudu. White-tailed Shrike, Red-billed Wood-Hoopoe and nesting colonies of Red-billed Buffalo-Weavers are found around the lodge grounds. The latter make large 'thatched' nesting colonies and these play host to the diminutive Pygmy Falcon. Walks through the surrounding bush will be awash with interest as the bird life seems to be ever-changing. Early morning at the waterhole is very busy. Warthogs and Eland stop by amid a stream of weavers, sparrows and finches. Hartlaub's Francolins potter through thin dry grass and in the trees we'll look for Carp's Black Tits, Olive Bee-eaters and Damara Hornbills. Bare-cheeked Babblers and Golden-breasted Buntings emerge from the shade to drink by water where already Colotis butterflies are sipping at the salts. Fast-flying Charaxes hurtle past us, and above Black-breasted Snake-Eagles and the lovely Pearl-breasted Swallow are on the wing. Night forays are allowed here and after dark the richness of Africa's

nocturnal fauna will be revealed on walks and drives. The Scrub Hare is common and so too the distinctive long-legged Springhare. African Wild Cats are shy and secretive by daytime but much easier to find at night. Genets, Bat-eared Foxes and that most sought-after of Africa's nocturnal mammals, the Aardvark, are all possible here after the sun goes down.

Day 12

Spitzkoppe

The Rock Paintings of the Bushman have received much attention over the past few decades and it is in the 'inselbergs' that rise spectacularly from the pale plains of the Erongo region, that we'll see some fine examples. Dome-shaped Pondok Mountain has rock paintings at well-named Bushman's Paradise, a place of fabulous panoramas, and with many strange and unusual plants, including the endemic *Euphorbia virosa*. Spitzkoppe itself is a magnificent sight with red-tinted granite rising precipitously out of the flat lands. It fully deserves the description 'Matterhorn of Africa'. Rising to almost 6,000 feet the peak dominates the landscape. Yet there is much else besides, with a fascinating bird and reptile fauna and a staggering variety of rock formations including a dramatic natural arch.

Days 13-15

Walvis Bay & Swakopmund

At Sandwich Bay is an expanse of lagoons, sand spits and tidal mudflats that are a haven to a multitude of birds. Both Lesser & Greater Flamingos make for a special image as they feed actively in the largest lagoon. However we will probably barely notice all this avian activity as behind the lagoon rise some of the most majestic dunes in Namib Desert - pure richly coloured sand untainted by vegetation. Inland the route back to Walvis Bay takes us through a marvellous desert where we can find crystal 'desert roses' and wildlife in the form of Shovel-nosed Lizards and the elusive Dune Lark. Occasional Oryx and Mountain Zebra seem surprising in such a vast emptiness! Ruppell's Korhaan marks our progress back to town where we'll explore the productive coastal marshes and saltworks. Here are African Black Oystercatcher, Kelp Gulls, White-fronted Plovers and terns, including Damara and Swift.

The cold currents offshore are the reason for the early morning fogs that are common in Walvis Bay, these soon burn off, but it is just possible that they provide enough moisture for the bizarre *Welwitschia mirabilis* to survive. This is one of the wonders of the plant world - it seems strange that they can survive at all in such harsh dry landscapes, but they do, and for a very long time. Most plants are over a thousand years old and some almost two. Youngsters are very rare and reproduction is still something of a mystery! Around them grows little except the occasional lichens, but these turn out to be varied with many endemic species too!

The cold upwellings offshore have produced a rich fishery and of course where there's lots of fish there's predators, be they avian or mammalian. We'll take a boat trip into the bay to seek Humpback Whales and Bottle-nosed and Heaviside's Dolphins, the latter two species often bow-ride, so views can be excellent. Cape Fur Seals are abundant off the Namibian coast and there's plenty of birds from Cory's Shearwaters to Cape Gannets, and from Cape Cormorants to African Penguin. There's several species of petrel, with White-chinned common.

Days 16 & 17

Windhoek & Return to the UK

Late morning we'll head inland towards the capital. If there's time before the flight we'll visit Windhoek's Sewage Farm where beautiful White-throated Swallows hawk over White-backed Duck and Southern Pochard - a great place to see many waders and wildfowl. We'll arrive in the UK morning of Day 17.

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