Namibia Holiday Highlights

31 July – 15 August 2025

The grandeur of the Namib Desert; the marine riches of Walvis Bay; the wonder of Etosha and an elephant cast

Leader and African encylopedia: Dalton Gibbs
Drivers and guides extraordinaire: Lazarus Ganuseb and Vince Ward
Scope carrier and doorman: Darren Rees
Mobile snacks and pharmacy: Patty Wimpfheimer
Guests: Patty & David Wimpfheimer, Franky & David Perry, Jane Nickerson, Jayne Behenna, Pam Litton, Joyce Hoy, Gwynne Rees

Day 1: Meeting Up

We meet up at Heathrow Terminal 2 for our big African adventure - there are a lot of familiar faces so this should be fun! We are dutifully processed and through security with plenty of time for our afternoon flight to Frankfurt – there's a bit of a delay but we still meet with our connecting overnight flight to Windhoek.

Day 2: An African Welcome

The Discover Airlines flight takes us south across the heart of the continent of Africa and most of us get some well-earned rest. Towards the end of the flight the cloud thins and we look down on the endless scrub and semi-desert (we can even make out the great salt pan of Etosha) before finally descending into Windhoek airport.

Walking to the terminal we see our first birds – a Cape Wagtail and Rock Martins. It's a bit of a wait at immigration but finally we get through and meet our Birding Africa guides Dalton Gibbs and Vince Ward and Namibian driver Lazarus Ganuseb. They escort us to the vehicles and Vince points to more new birds: Groundscraper Thrush (looking like our Mistle Thrush), Bradfield's and Little Swift. Our modes of transport are two purpose built 4x4 safari vans with a drop down window for each passenger – they should be perfect for the two weeks ahead.

It's only a forty minute drive to our first hotel but we manage to add new species along the way - Go-away Birds, Lilac-breasted Roller, White-backed Vultures and Black-shouldered Kites. Jayne spots a Giraffe and there are roadside Chacma Baboons - the list is well and truly up and running.

We arrive at Arebbusch Lodge and while Dalton sorts our room allocations we notice more birds around the gardens outside reception - our first Marico Sunbird, Laughing Dove, Rosy-faced Lovebirds and Cape Turtle Doves. We move to get some welcoming drinks at the restaurant area and a Yellow Mongoose scurries through the tables! There is also our first Pied Barbet and Red-eyed Bulbuls. After lunch we go to our rooms and freshen up, then drive to nearby Daan Vijoen Game Park, a half-an-hour's drive to the west.

Our route takes us around the city of Windhoek, with its mix of western modernity and unkempt African. We quickly get back to the thick acacia scrub landscape – or *thornveld* – that covers much of central Namibia. We approach the gates to the Game Park and enter, immediately seeing new species – a herd of richly-coloured Red Hartebeestes are browsing on a slope. Marico Flycatcher and Sabota Lark are new birds and we see our first Blue Wildebeeste. These are followed quickly by great looks at a group of Giraffe and Vince takes us through how to sex them using the horns on their head (bare-topped *ossicones* for males and black and hairy for females).

We stop to over look a small body of water backed up by a dam. Below, on a gravel clearing is a beautiful Southern Oryx – perhaps no other animal embodies Namibia better. There's also our first Springbok and Jayne spots a family of Warthogs. Patty spots a Black-backed Jackal reminding her of Californian Coyotes – sadly it doesn't hang around - and there are striking Blacksmith's Lapwings, a shorebird we will become very familiar with over the coming days.

We venture further and at the Visitor Centre there are two very close Ostriches allowing us a great photo opportunity. Vince tells us what to do if an Ostrich attacks us (!) but we are careful to keep our distance, particularly when we look at their powerful legs and feet. Meanwhile, two African Hawk Eagles are soaring over the skyline and Alpine Swifts join Palm Swifts chasing through the air.

We decide to take a walk along a nearby dry river bed with steep rocky bluffs either side. We see White-browed Sparrow Weaver, Helmeted Guineafowl, Red-billed Francolin and Familiar Chat – all birds that will feature throughout our trip. Pam spots some more unusual birds, flying across the boulders - two Rockrunners – a local rarity. Also, we see our first Monteiro's Hornbill on the top of one tree – another prized Namibian endemic. As we are enjoying the evening light and surroundings a chorus of yips and howls echo around us - Black-backed Jackals are waking up and getting ready for their night shift. A nice way to end the day.

Day 3: The Road to the Namib Desert

Before breakfast some of us join Dalton and Vince at 6.30am for a walk around the grounds of the lodge – the plan is to catch some early birds but our timings are off and it's still dark. We wander for a bit but only manage a few species calling, before working our way back to the restaurant area for breakfast at 7am.

After breakfast we get the vans loaded up in good time, then hit the road for our long transfer day to the Namib Desert. Heading south towards Rehoboth, we stop first to check a large field that has a huge group of Wattled Starlings working the short grass. As usual, when we stop and look around we start finding lots of birds species: David spots a Short-tailed Rock Thrush; Vince points to a Black-chested Prinia and Dalton spots a Green-winged Pytilia. There are a group of Rosy-faced Lovebirds on the short turf and behind these are our first stunning Crimson-breasted Shrikes. We also add Pale-winged Starlings and an immature Shaft-tailed Whydah.

Continuing our journey we get some roadside ticks – a large Tawny Eagle and a troop of Chacma Baboons are alongside the road. We come to a quick stop when we see Hornbills in the nearby trees. One shows a huge yellow bill – that will be Yellow-billed Hornbill! The others have red bills and white faces – the endemic Damara Hornbill. There are nice looks at Lilac-breasted Rollers too – one of the most attractive of birds on any African safari.

Next up is a large, long-legged and grey bird of prey - our first Pale Chanting Goshawk. Again, these will prove to be a constant throughout the trip.

South of Rehoboth we turn off the tarmaced road to a minor gravel road heading west through the highlands. We stop when one of the leaders spots a small group of Zebras under a tree – what's this? When we get our binoculars on them we see no stripes, what are horses doing in the African bush? Time to move along.

Next, Patty spots some bright green birds on the fence wire – Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters – another Namibian gem. We enjoy brief views and they quickly fly away. Just before we leave, a large bus with a trailer passes by our parked vehicles and throws a large stone up, freakily catching Vince's drivers window that shatters – infuriating. Lazarus digs out the duct tape and we patch things up as best we can, hoping that we can get a replacement in a few days time in Swakopmund.

More roadside birds include Gabar Goshawk, Great Sparrows, Marico Flycatcher and Chat Flycatcher. Then Vince's sharp eyes pick out our first mighty Lappet-faced Vultures in the skies - two birds soaring with a smaller White-backed Vulture. Next we stop at a small pool of water to the right – any water in Namibia is a big attraction and we see our first Cape Teal, Red-billed Teal, Little Grebe, Egyptian Geese, Blacksmith's Lapwing and Black-winged Stilts. Closer to us are Lark-like Buntings and Pale-wnged Starlings.

We progress through the landscape with hills either side of the road, offering some more rugged terrain amongst the acacias. On some trees are large communal nests, looking like thatched roofs and these belong to Sociable Weavers – we stop at one which is active with these charming little birds twittering and thatching. More roadside stops gain us looks at Black Korhaan and Red-crested Korhaan (small bustards).

Next, Dalton spots one of the birds of the day – a smart, diminutive Pygmy Falcon (the smallest falcon in the world) is perched in a dead tree to the left. We do stop at another larger pond, knowing there will be something different to look at. Sure enough, Dalton spots a Terrapin on the muddy shoreline. In the water are Egytian Geese, Red-billed Teal and Little Grebe. Masses of Lark-like Buntings are in bushes and we see our first Three-banded Plover.

By now we are reaching the highest point in the road and we stop at the summit of the spectacular Spreekhooghst Pass, where the escarpment drops to the desert

plain below. There's a truly bewildering view across serrated mountain ridges to the north and grassy, stony plains to the west. A great place for a cheesy group photo!

Descending down to the grasslands we stop when two Ruppell's Korhaan's are walking alongside the road – we get great looks and find more a short distance further. We add Black-chested Snake Eagle and our first group of Oryx – an iconic animal of the desert with its spectacular straight horns, its striking black-and-white markings and its luxurious swishing tail. A contender for species-of-the-trip methinks.

The last stops of the day are south of Solitaire where we scan the grassy plains and mountain ridges. It's that special time of day when things start appearing, readying themselves for the night shift. In quick succession we see two Bat-eared Foxes scurrying along, followed minutes later by two Black-backed Jackals on patrol. At our final stop we find our largest group of Oryx, nearly one hundred animals, looking magnificent in the evening light – a magic moment indeed.

The final drive takes us south in the fading light that colours the landscape of receding mountain ridges and plains – finally, at 6.30pm we check in at the delightful, if unusually named, Soft Adventure Lodge, our base for the next two nights. The setting is spectacular, nestled at the base of one of the many red granite *inselbergs* that rise up from the grass and stony plains. After smartening up we enjoy a lovely meal and watch the wonderfully named and spectacularly marked Bibman's Fat-tailed Gecko.

Day 4: The Red Dunes of Sossusvlei

We meet up at 5.45am for a quick coffee before loading the van and heading off for the day, although it is still dark. The road is bumpy in parts and as the light emerges we note the rugged peaks either side of us. The final section of paved road leads to Sossus Oases and Sesriem, the gateway to the Namib Naukluft National Park. We stop at the closed gate and park with several other vehicles waiting for the opening at 7.30am.

Soon we are on the move, inside the gates and venturing into the dynamic Sossusvlei, rimmed by dynamic desert ridges and distant dunes. We stop at a couple of points where we can photograph Oryx, Ostrich and Springbok with the beautiful backdrop of red dunes – a wonderful natural amphitheatre. Stony plains stretch to the base of the dunes and hillsides and birds are catching the eye. We see more Ruppell's Korhaans dotted about and Chat Flycatchers. To the south a few hot air balloons are lifting into the sky – what a view they must have!

Keen to track down one of the rare endemics, we head to the base of our first red dune on the right side of the road, marked by some grasses and other pioneer plants on its lower slope. It is classic habitat for the specialist breeder Dune Lark and we wander over to explore, checking out the tracks in the sand. Dalton informs us of some of the animals that frequent the area pointing to Oryx, Hyena and Black-backed Jackal tracks. Meanwhile, Vince has seen the target bird and we are

guided to the area where we see two clean-looking Dune Larks. They move off quickly so we have to settle for less than optimal views of another Namibian endemic.

Next stop is at a dry river crossing where there is a ribbon of trees and taller vegetation that offers some shade – an ideal spot for breakfast. The birding continues after eats and we watch Dusky Sunbirds, Red-eyed Bulbul, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Cape Sparrow and a brief Swallow-tailed Bee-eater amongst others. Then Lazarus beckons us, he's been investigating the river bed while we've been eating and has come up with a treasure. In the tangle of branches and twigs of an old dead tree is a large owl – we get wonderful looks through the telescope at a fantastic Spotted Eagle Owl (although one of the clinching i.d. features is the barred breast!), contender for bird-of-the-day for sure.

We continue west through the great Sossusvlei and at the 45km mark the road skirts the base of one of the huge red sand dunes – Dune 45 no less – yes they number the dunes in the National Park! It's a chance to walk on one of the dunes and some of us start climbing the steep red slope. The views are arresting with a wrap-around panorama of the ranked series of red dunes and the stony valley floor. We even see some of the fabled dune beetles that eke a living from this, one of the most hostile environments on earth. It is a tad windy and Dalton loses his hat – he quickly descends the slope to retrieve, never catching up with the hat until reaching the valley floor. Most out us are content with the view half-way up and back at the bottom we compare notes and empty our shoes of red sand. Pied Crows fly by us looking great against the blue sky and red sand. Not to be outdone, a Red-necked Falcon does the same and we find it in one of the few trees that dot the landscape – looks great in the scope.

We continue to the Deadvlei area where we have lunch at the furthest point we can drive to - there are some low tables under tree, ideal for a picnic. We enjoy eats with some very confiding Cape Sparrows (that come into Jane's makeshift bird bath), Chestnut-vented Tit Babbler and an over-Familiar Chat.

Returning along the main route through Sossusvlei we still keep finding new birds. Sandy coloured, upright birds are busily working the stony plains. Burchell's Coursers are running around and stopping abruptly and we can make out that there are young chicks in the group.

Close to Sossus we stop to admire more Springboks, the drive beyond Sossus Gate along the bumpy track heading north. We stop at a wide open vista to scan the grassy plain - it's a wonderful scene straight from 'Out of Africa' with distant herds of Oryx, Ostrich and Wildebeeste. We carry on to the lodge for some late afternoon chill time - with beers in hand we spot our first Mountain Zebra in the distance. We set up scopes and enjoy looks, albeit too distant to pick out the defining features – they are stripey horses though! Closer to, is a handsome Mountain Wheatear and there are Double-banded Sandgrouse coming in to water feature – a perfect end to the day.

Day 5: The Road to Walvis Bay

It's another sensational dawn over the Namib Desert, looking across the grassy plains and rocky outcrops. Breakfast is at the adjacent Namib Naukluft Lodge just minutes away and there are treats in store. The open breakfast area overlooks a small pool stuffed with birds – the majority are Pale-winged Starlings and Sociable Weavers, but we get visits from Lark-like Bunting and one Gray-backed Finchlark. There are also delightful Cape Ground Squirrels looking for food scraps too and these are more than willingly supplied by guests! Scanning beyond to the rolling grasslands we see Mountain Zebra herds and a lone Black-backed Jackal doing the morning rounds. There are also our first Ludwigs Bustard – so lots to distract us from eating breakfast.

The transfer route takes us north to Solitaire, where we check-in at the station to refuel and investigate the campsite. There are more Ground Squirrels and delightful Yellow Mongoose sharing burrows – sadly no Meerkats though. We add Karoo Scrub Robin to the list, as well as seeing Cape Glossy Starlings, Rock Martin, Cape Sparrow and Familiar Chats.

The road to Walvis Bay goes through more dynamic countryside with vast panoramas sweeping before us. We stop at one spot when Dalton spots a Black Korhaan, then when we get our binoculars up we see little heads popping up in the grass close by – Meerkats! We get in position and its like a game of 'Wack-a-mole' trying to spot what's popping up next. As well as Meerkats there are Yellow Mongoose and Cape Ground Squirrels raising their heads in similar upright poses – great fun. Further out are groups of Mountain Zebra and we get nice looks at a smart Black-chested Snake Eagle too.

Other roadside birds for the morning include Lappet-faced Vulture, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Chat Flycatcher and Namaqua Sandgrouse. Next stop is at a sign that marks the crossing of the Tropic of Capricorn, where we take some cheesy photos (has to be done). As we approach the Kuiseb Gorge we can look down on the spectacular landscape of folded rock and cliffs, then we drop down to the dry river-bed for lunch.

Finally, we arrive at Walvis Bay and the cooler Atlantic coast. As we approach the town we notice our first flamingo in a pool by the side of the road, along with our first Kelp Gulls. We continue to the shore road and head to the south where the road hugs the bay and runs through working salt pans to the ocean beach. The place is stuffed with both Greater and Lesser Flamingos – what a sight! Other waders, gulls and terns are on show and we soon see Kelp Gull, Hartlaub's Gull, Swift Tern and David points to a nice Caspian Tern on the mud bank. More spectacular are three Black-backed Jackals that are lazing on the mud bank.

We go through the plover species, first seeing Kittlitz, White-fronted, then Chestnut-banded. Further along we see our first Curlew Sandpipers feeding along the mud with a dainty Little Stint. There are big groups of Pied Avocets and we add White-breasted Cormorants to the list.

We continue to the beach, where we can scan the rolling surf of the Atlantic Ocean. Big groups of Cape Cormorants are flying by and in the shallows there are Cape Fur Seals porpoising in the waves - there are a few Bottlenose Dolphin fins appearing too.

Retracing our steps we see more shorebirds and nearer town we add Little Egret, Greenshank, Grey Plover and a nice Bar-tailed Godwit holding its breeding plumage.

Finally we check in at the Walvis Bay Iris Hotel – another grand day out!

Day 6: Big Things in the Water

After breakfast we drive the short distance to the quayside, where Levo Dolphin trips are based. We have to walk the plank to get on the small boat but all manage it without falling in. Once on board the 'Antie' we are introduced to our captain, Ruaan, who's been working these waters for many years and now enjoys showing folks the wildlife wonders of the bay. We move out into the misty morn, passing the industrialised landscape of a busy modern port. Large ships are cradled in huge floating dry-docks that tower above our small vessel.

Our captain is on a mission today and we speed across the lagoon passing the many tanker ships at anchor in the bay. Our destination is the mouth of the bay, marked by the tall black-and-white lighthouse at the tip of Pelican Point. As we approach we see the big numbers of Cape Fur Seals in the water and lined up on the beach. We'll see more of them later but for now we push out to the open water and are soon into a group of dolphins. These have distinctive triangular dorsal fins and when they jump we can see the white marking on their tail stock – these are Benguela or Heaviside's Dolphins.

The dolphins are in playful mood this morning (not always the case) and several come to our vessel which has a double hull. We take it in turns looking down from the bow to the pale-headed dolphins, effortlessly riding the pressure wave – a special encounter, new to all the leaders as well as everyone else – fabulous!

After spending time with the dolphins we cruise to where there is a group of small vessels – Ruuan has word that they are watching something rather special and we approach slowly…. then, like magic, two huge whales surface, announcing their arrival with the characteristic blow of air. They have a long, dark and humped spine with a small slightly hooked dorsal fin - Humpback Whales - what a bonus! We watch them surface and shallow-dive several times – it's always a humbling experience being in the prescence of these gentle giants and for one guest, Gwynne, it's a special moment as she's never been so close to these ocean leviathans.

After a while we leave the whales in peace then cruise along shore, getting great looks at Cape Fur Seals. They approach the boat closely and we can watch them going through their marine routines – porpoising, resting with their rear fins in 'tea-pot handle' mode or waving their webbed fore flippers. Birds include Common Terns, Grey Heron and two Black Oystercatchers.

Ruaan then brings out the table cloths and food platters for a small picnic afloat – there are only a couple of takers for the raw oysters, but the champagne and canapes are welcomed by everyone. It's a great way to end the cruise and we make our way back to the quayside.

We are soon reunited with Lazarus who has driven to Swapokmund to repair the window of Vince's vehicle – it's had a clean too, so looks as good as new. Next, we leave industrial Walvis Bay driving past the huge dune field to the east and onwards to the astonishing area referred to as the 'Valley of the Moon' (as we approach we spot two pale chats next to the road – Tractrac Chats). It's easy to see why the area has gained its unofficial name and has been likened to a lunar landscape – the landscape is one of endless rock ridges with no vegetation in sight. Just bare rock, gravel and stone as far as the eye can see – truly bewildering.

Yet there is an oasis within the wilderness and we drop down through narrow ravines to Goanikontes, where there is a bar and café and somewhere we can get a bite for lunch. After eats we take a wander and as you'd imagine there are more birds in the trees and bushes than in the surrounding barrren landscape. The bird list includes Southern Masked Weaver, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Familiar Chat, Go-away Birds, Red-eyed Bulbul and wonderful White-backed Mousebirds.

From the oasis we venture through one of the stunning dried *kluft*s, admiring the twisted layers and volcanic intrusions that have been eroded away to make some of the most inspiring desert landscapes. Birds are few, just a small flock of Pale-winged Starlings, but we are content with wondering at the geological treasures. At the furthest point we get out to walk and Dalton takes us to a stand of Welwitschia plants – primitive conifers that pre-date the dinosaurs, with the longest leaves of any plant in the world. They attract beautifully marked beetles, another endemic species, appropriately named Welwitschia Bugs.

We return, via the oasis where we see a stunning roadside Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and over the stony plain seeing more Tractrac Chats. And so to Walvis Bay and the sun setting over the white dunes – another great day.

Day 7: Cape Cross and Brandberg

After an early breakfast there's still time for one last look over the bay – it would be rude not to. There are masses of Flamingos and Avocets and several Caspian Terns loafing, all catching the morning light perfectly.

We soon load up the lunches and set off north, hugging the coastline, to our first stop at the site of a Damara Tern colony - sadly it's the wrong time of year and they are absent. We enjoy a stroll, checking the gulls and cormorants and admiring the productivity of the place – there are vast numbers of mussel shells strewn across the sand and all the while the breakers roll in from the ocean.

After half-an-hour or so we reach the historic town of Swakopmund, noting the collection of camels on the southern edge, but the tempting signs offering camel

rides fail to win our custom. We drive into town, enjoying its mix of old and new streets – all spotless and tidy. We pass along the sea front, or Strand, admiring the German influence on the architecture and stop on the main street for some brief retail therapy.

After an errant tyre check we continue north across a wide coastal plain with very little vegetation, stopping at one point to admire the coloured swathe produced by the lichen fields. Further along the famed Skeleton Coast we encounter one of the many wrecks along the shore – an "A" frame trawler, now stuck in the shallows and surf, supplying the ideal breeding station for White-breasted, Crowned and Cape Cormorants.

A distance further, we stop along the road to check some larks that are foraging roadside – our first Red-capped Larks and these are joined by a flight of Gray's Larks. Finally, we reach our destination for the morning, the windswept Cape Cross. We pay our fees at the entrance kiosk then drive the final mile to the point. We park and the scene (and smell) is unbelievable, grabbing all the senses: Cape Fur Seals are covering the rocks and beaches in their tens of thousands as well as playing in the breakers and shallows. Their raucous calling is the constant backdrop, as is their pungent odour. It's a wonderful sight and must be a real highlight of the trip.

We walk along the boardwalk that gives us uninterrupted views across the gathering and everyone is in their own little world taking photographs or videos or just plain smiling with a happy mix of awe and wonder. Other things are on view, including White-fronted Plover, Cape Cormorants, Kelp Gulls and two Cape Gannets. Yet the stars of the show are the fur seals – a true sensory overload experience, with the raucous sound of barking mums and pups in one big smelly, writhing, chaotic encounter. We later learn that 350,000 animals are present – a truly memorable visit.

We take lunch near Henties Bay, then head inland along the long straight road heading north and east towards Uis. It is seemingly empty of birds for the first section that passes over a vast stony plain. However, we do find a small party of larks at one point and get out of the vehicles to examine them further – they are mostly Stark's Larks, another endemic, looking like a washed out Skylark. There are also Grey-backed Finchlarks and Vince finds one Gray's Lark.

After refuelling at Uis we enter spectacular country for the last section of our journey - Crowned Lapwings and Ruppell's Korthaans are roadside. We finally reach our destination, the wonderful White Lady Lodge that sits at the base of Namibia's highest mountain, the mighty Brandberg. It's a dramatic setting with multiple boulder outcrops and on one sits a cute Rock Hyrax. We play the 'hunt-the-chalet' game before dinner, noting Freckled Nightjar calling before we eat – our lovely meal is finished off with a performance by the White Lady singers. A great end to another full day!

Day 8: A Cast of One

We gather at dawn and wander to the dining room for an early breakfast, then leave on our morning quest to see the fabled Desert Elephants of Damaraland. The camp is in the heart of the Ugab Valley and we are soon crossing the dried-up sandy river-bed and driving in to the Sorris Sorris Conservancy. The landscape is beautiful in the morning light, with the grasslands interspersed with the boulder heaps and deep shadows sculpting Brandberg mountain.

We see our first Springbok and then an Ostrich. A little further on Dalton's van stops when he sees some tall, long-necked birds in the grass – Ludwig's Bustards. Franky looks the same way and says 'They 're not bustards, they're Meerkats!' Just a little to the right of the birds are a small group of delightful Meerkats at their burrow entrances, catching the first of the suns rays. Simples!

We enjoy comparing the Meerkats and then continue on our mission, passing through simple Herero villages and driving east across the veld. At one point Lazarus spots some tracks in the sand. We get out and he points to some huge flat oval depressions with a 'tail' – the unmistakable footprint from a big bull elephant, the tail from where it drags its feet. The hunt is on and Lazarus is the man to guide us as he has great experience of showing people the Desert Elephants. We continue along the track, then take off to the left and off-road into the bush.

We twist this way and that through the scrub, and then it happens. There to the right is the stuff of dreams… a large bull African Elephant emerges from behind a tree, slowly working along, browsing the acacias. We drive nearer for a closer look and the excitement level in the van goes up several notches from Stark's Lark. We are all eyes as Lazarus and Vince skillfully guide us to spots where we can stop and gaze in awe. A large male from the legendary Desert Elephants is doing his thing - a chance to see wild African Elephants outside one of the National Parks is a rare treat. We notice that it is carrying a radio-tracking collar – part of a much-studied group of animals from this part of Damaraland (we later learn that he's called Bernie).

We watch it saunter through the bush and then get out to initiate 'operation plaster cast'. Sometime earlier in the trip Jayne had talked about her most-prized possession, a cast of a bear footprint from the shores of British Columbia. Dalton responded with 'you must get a cast from an elephant for your collection' and a plan was hatched. Boxes of plaster of Paris were purchased and now was the time to act. We walk to where a perfect large oval impression is in the sand – a footprint of the very animal we've been watching. Jane, Dalton and Vince swing into action, to capture evidence of our special encounter.

While the three artisans are at work Patty's sharp eyes find a nest on the ground – a perfect cup of grass with two precious small eggs. We've noticed that we flushed two Stark's Larks up and they have been nervously hanging around so we presume the nest is theirs.

We've some time until the cast is set, so drive further to a raised *koppie* for a break. From our elevated position we can keep an eye on the elephant, now at a distance. We can also get out, stretch our legs and watch a few birds. We see our first Benguela Long-billed Lark, more Lark-like Buntings and get great looks at the rare endemic Herero Chat. We also watch the grizzly sight of cannibalism from two Brown-armoured Bush-crickets!

The elephant eventually walks away from view and it signals time to back-track. We return to where the plaster cast has set and delicately extricate it from the earth. It is carefully packed, loaded into Vince's vehicle and we continue enroute back to camp. Along the way we get better looks at the Benguela Long-billed Lark, fab looks at a Double-banded Sandgrouse in the sandy track and nice views of a Purple Roller. Arriving back at White Lady lodge for a late lunch we are greeted by a characterful Yellow-billed Hornbill - what a haul for the morning!

At the camp we are introduced to a friendy Meerkat called Milla, who was found as an orphan and has been adopted by the lodge owners. It is clearly used to the attention from guests at lodge and she relaxes in the garden by the pool and there is much clicking of cameras!

After lunch there is some down-time for everyone before the late-afternoon activities and we meet again at 5pm for an exploration along the dry bed of the Ugab River. Lots of flood debris and dead trees litter the sandy valley floor and there are lofty trees offering some shade. The birds are largely quiet but we do manage some new species including a smart White-crowned Shrike, African Grey Hornbill and a small gang of Red-faced Mousebirds. Others include Glossy Starling, Cape Turtle Dove, Laughing Dove and Lark-like Buntings. Things don't go quite to plan as the sand proves difficult to deal with for the smaller vehicle. Yet, with a little help from Lazarus we get back on track and drive to the waterhole. The last twenty or so minutes of light brings the Double-banded Sandgrouse down to drink – a wonderful finale to another magical day.

Day 9: Etosha and Okaukuejo

We have an early breakfast at the White Lady Lodge, say our goodbyes to the staff and are soon on our way to join the road from Uis to Khorixas. To the left is the Brandberg massif looming large above the grassland and scrub, as we work our way north. After a while we note a roadside pool that is attracting lots of birds, so we stop. Groups of Namaqua Sandgrouse are alighting on the mud and scuttling to the water to drink. Small birds are gathering too, with Red-headed Finches and Lark-like Buntings bathing and drinking. As well as Blacksmith's Lapwing there are some Three-banded Plovers on the sand bars. Waterfowl include Cape Teal, Dabchick and the ubiquitous Egypitian Geese, this time with a family of goslings. Alpine and Little Swifts are charging around in the air and a single, brilliant blue-and-white swallow zips through – a Pearl-breasted Swallow, new for the species list.

We've still a distance to drive, though at Khorixas we join the paved road so the drive is more comfortable once we've passed through an officious police check

point. We see roadside Giraffes and Warthogs before arriving at the town of Outjo, where we have a comfort break and refuel the vehicles.

From Outjo it's a straight forward drive north to the southern entrance of the famous Etosha National Park and as we wait in line while Dalton fills out the paperwork the expectation mounts. Etosha is one of the largest Parks in Africa at over 8600sq miles (over twice the size of Yellowstone) and its wildlife rivals that of any in the East Africa, so we've reason to be excited.

We raise the observation roofs as we enter and proceed slowly through the acacia scrub. It doesn't take long before we start seeing our first game - Burchell's Zebras are by the side of the road and we can check out their bold stripes and 'shadow' rump bands. At Ombika waterhole are more Zebras, Ostrich, Wildebeeste, beautiful Black-faced Impala and our first Kori Bustard. The last section of the drive takes us across the stony plains around Okaukuejo where we see more Kori Bustards and smart Black Korhaans.

We arrrive at Okaukuejo Lodge in time for lunch at its famous waterhole. We can think of no better place to enjoy snacks while watching the comings and goings of a desert oasis. Smart Springbok are in the water and are joined by a larger Oryx that throws its weight about, pushing the smaller Springbok aside. Zebra, Wildbeeste and Giraffes are on the stony plain behind – its only a matter of time before they visit for a drink. Pam spots an animal working its way along the ground and it has a long, whip tail – we get the scope trained on it, revealing a Rock Monitor Lizard. There are birds around too, including some new species: a Black-headed Heron wades in the shallows and a Booted Eagle passes overhead; in the distance, a Tawny Eagle is in a large tree; Crimson-breasted Shrike, Little Grebe and Blacksmith's Lapwing are present too. We'll be back for more later.

After checking into our rooms, we quickly freshen up and are back out ready for an afternoon's game drive. We want to explore the drier areas that fringe the mighty Etosha salt pan, to the north of Okaukuejo. We haven't driven far before we see some new birds – buffy, short-tailed Spike-heeled Larks are close to the road, along with smartly marked, upright Double-banded Coursers. Then we look ahead and we can't believe our eyes - strolling along the road towards us is a stately looking rhinoceros. It has the distinctive narrow snout with a hooked lip – a rare Black Rhino – holy horns!! We anticipate its path, park up and wonder at this marvel of the animal kingdom (little did we know that we would see so many in the coming days).

Lazarus has gleaned info from another guide about a lion sighting to the north, so we drive across the plain towards Okendeka, at the edge of the salt pan. A little further on a few vehicles are parked by the road and we approach optimistically. There, to the left, sat in the long grass is the king of the jungle – the unmistakable profile of a maned, male African Lion, peering out across the grassy expanse to the distant herds of Springbok and Zebra. Wow! The views are all too brief, as it drops back into the grass and away from our prying eyes, but for our first sighting we are

content and after a while we start the journey back to camp, knowing we have to return by the 6.15pm curfew.

There are a few stops along the way back, with nice looks at Kori Bustard, Black Korhaan and Paale Chanting Goshawks in the evening light. We arrive at Okaukuejo in time for sunset at the waterhole and although there are no big game at the water, it is far from quiet as the Double-banded Sandgrouse have arrived to drink. Time for us to go for dinner.

We walk to the restaurant for our evening meal and recap the day with our checklists. No sooner have we finished, Vince announces there are lions at the waterhole – he's been checking the link to the live webcam on his phone. We'd better get down there!

We rush to our rooms for our cameras, binoculars and jackets, then hurry to the famous waterhole where a vision greets us. A quiet crowd of people are gathered and beyond them, the waterhole is lit up by floodlights and a Black Rhino is at the water's edge. We scan and there are two lions sitting in the grasses beyond – they've had their drink and have retired to sit and wait. Another rhino comes in from the right – wow! Understandably, with large predators present, there are no small game at the water and we settle in for evening to see how events will unfold. We are lucky that there is a full moon and we can see beyond the waterhole to the stony plain behind. We can make out two more rhinos that slowly work their way to the water, so we have four in view at the same time at the water's edge. There is much snorting and interaction when they arrive but all the while the lions rest in the grass – clearly rhino is not on their menu.

With the rhino comings and goings we can't relocate the lions that have slipped away into the darkness, but we wait to see what else will appear.

The time passes, the four rhinos melt into the night and we follow Black-backed Jackals running back and forth. A Spotted Thick-knee calls and comes to drink, then Jayne spots a small mammal trotting to the water – through the scope we can clearly see its a delicate Cape Fox – what a beauty.

Later two more rhinos enter in from the left and one is larger than the other - a mother and calf pairing. After drinking, the sizeable youngster attempts to suckle from mum, who at first doesn't respond - you can't blame her as the calf has a substantial horn already – how uncomfortable must that be! Eventually they unite and the calf does indeed get its milk from the mother rhino – what a thing to witness.

The rhinos eventually disappear and all is quiet - we can make out a giraffe in the moonlight and we wait to see if it will venture to the water but it seems nervous and walks on by. We finally call it a day at midnight – phew! We've seen six rhinos and three lions - what an introduction day in Etosha.

Day 10: To Halali

Before breakfast, the early birds take a first visit to the waterhole while its still dark and there's a single male elephant under the full moon – a good start! The light lifts and the animals become active: there are Springbok, Zebra and a single Oryx at the water with Blue Wildebeeste dotted around further; birds include Little Grebe, Black-headed Heron and we note that the Blacksmith's Lapwings have three fluffy chicks – no wonder the parents are so noisy and nervous. There's also a male Shaft-tailed Whydah with its absurdly spectacular long tail in a close acacia. A beautiful Crimson-breasted Shrike makes an appearance too.

We load the vans and leave Okaukuejo, checking a group of Banded Mongooses (Mongeese?) near the exit gate. Heading east into the Park we work the plain near Gemsbokvlakte, finding another big male African Lion strutting across the plain in the distance - its all a bit hazy but very atmospheric.

At Olifontsbad waterhole (translates to Elephant's bath) there are lots of Plains Zebras, including a young foal that is marked distinctly with a mostly black coat and minimal stripes. Birds include Gray and Chestnut backed Finchlark, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Red-headed Finch, Fork-tailed Drongo, Lilac-breasted Roller and Namaqua Doves. Just as we are about to leave a group of Warthogs come to the water – amusing looking characters, though we learn from Vince how dangerous they can be with their very sharp tusks. Again, as we are about to leave, a female Kudu arrives for her morning drink – a beautifully marked animal.

We take a quick visit to the nearby restroom facilities and whilst there we hear the unmistakable trumpeting noises from elephants, so we quickly return to the waterhole. There we find a big group of elephants in ebullient mood, rejoicing in the mud and water – there is no finer sight in the whole of Africa! We watch enthralled by the comings and goings of between thirty and forty animals as they bathe, drink and socailise around the water. There matriarchs and mothers, feisty young males and plenty of small infants going about their daily routines – spellbinding!

We continue east, stopping at the spectacular Rietfontein waterhole where lots more game are gathered – Zebra, Springbok and Kudu. The water has a row of fresh green reeds and a Cattle Egret really stands out. There are also Egyptian Geese, Red-billed Teal, Black-winged Stilt and a Little Grebe. Then Vince spots a large bird dropping out of the sky – the unmistakable and unusual shape of a Secretary Bird, with its long trailing legs and thin tail. African Pipit is added to the species list too.

Onwards, we see some obliging Red Hartebeeste - a trio with a close mum and calf.

Reaching Halali we arrive in time for a late lunch, while Dalton sorts out the room allocations. We meet up afterwards to take a late afternoon stroll, noting Tree Squirrels, Red-billed Hornbills, White-crowned Shrike, Glossy Starling, Go-away Bird

and Grey-backed Cameropteras. The path takes us to the Morengi waterhole - it's another superb facility with a raised view from the rocks (with seats) to another waterhole surrounded by mopane woodland. People are gathered to watch the sun go down and we settle in. Lots of Cape Tutle Doves are coming to drink and they are attracting attention - a dark raptor zooms through, scattering the birds – it lands on a small tree and we are treated to lovely views of a dark-form Gabar Goshawk. There is a surprising lack of large animals but nevertheless we clock up some bird species: Laughing Dove, Red-billed Teal, Red-headed Finch and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting.

The sun sets at 6.40 pm and then the fun begins – at first the Double-banded Sandgrouse arrive and then a Black Rhino enters from the left. A second one follows and walks around the pool to drink, their silouhettes cutting a striking sight against the fading light. Two more rhinos enter stage left – a mother and young and the smaller animal proceeds to suckle from the parent. Soon the two rhinos seem agitated and they keep looking left. The stage is set for the grandest of entrances - on march a big group of eighteen African Elephants direct to the water for their evening drink and bathe. More mothers, young males and small infant animals – what a finale!

Day 11: Encounters with Lions

After breakfast we decide to explore the grounds around Halali camp, so we meet at the cabins for an easy-going stroll. We note a family group of White-crested Helmet-shrikes as we start – fabulous and engaging looking birds. We take our time along the path to the waterhole, getting looks at Violet Wood-hoopoes, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Violet-eared Waxbills and Red-billed Hornbills. At the waterhole is a group of stately looking bull Kudus – our best views yet. There are also Impala, Shaft-tailed Whydah, Black-throated Canary, Cinnamon and Golden-breasted Buntings.

We return to the cabins and load our stuff into the vehicles for another exploration of the area around Halali. We first approach the waterhole at Goas where we there are lots of Zebras and Springbok drinking. We also note Black-chested Prinia, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Black-winged Stilts, Three-banded Plover, Red Hartebeeste and Banded Mongeese. We then drive towards the salt pan viewpoint and as we approach we see our first Oryx and Steenboks of the day. The road takes us a little distance out on the salt flats where we can stretch our legs and fully immerse ourselves in the barren white landscape. The only life of note is an African Monarch and a young woman exercisng her hoola-hoop skills!

We then drive to one of the few picnic sites in Etosha – a fenced-off area with restrooms and shaded tables, where chefs Dalton and Vince prepare our luncheon meat and crackers snacks, garnished with apple slice and delicately sprinkled with crushed spicy crisps – novel Namibian fayre! Afterwards we drive the route close to the salt pan edge where, at Charitsaub, Patty finds a Red-necked Falcon sheltering in one of the few trees in the landscape. At Salvadora we can see the mirage

of legless game shimmering far out on the pan. The visits here are brief as Lazarus has news of Leopards… our quest begins.

We drive a loop around the dense thornveld to the south and east of Halali but fail to find our target spotty cats, but, as with so many chance encounters our timing works in our favour. We first get stuck behind five huge male elephants who are taking their time to stroll along the road – it must be easier walking than pushing through the heavy bush – wonderful rear views!

Next, beyond the waterhole of Goas, we come across a few vehicles bunched together in the road. There to the left, a pride of lionesses are walking along in the late afternoon light – we enjoy the most wonderful looks at these superb animals, their muscles beautifully defined by the angled light – what beasts! A moment we shall all treasure.

We need to continue on to Halali as it is nearing the 6.15pm curfew and we dutifully arrive with minutes to spare. Yet there is still the sunset to watch and most of us venture to the waterhole to watch the events there at the end of the day. As we arrive there is another magical Etosha vision. The group of eighteen elephants from yesterday are gathered for their evening drinks and behind them, two rhinos are waiting their turn – a favourite and lasting image.

After dinner, a few of us take a last look at the Halali waterhole – we just can't resist. We arrive to see the two rhinos are still there, now at the water's edge under the yellowish light from the floodlights. The elephants have left and now they can drink at their leisure. There are calls from a Barn Owl and we see one land on the stones beyond the water - through the scope we can see the markings beautifully (three owls are seen through the course of the evening). The rhinos wander of into the dark and all seems peaceful… then we hear deep grunts.

We peer to the far right where we can just make out a rhino being chased by something.. was that a lion? Then we hear further growls and then all is revealed. A Black Rhino walks into view and two lions are menacingly pacing behind. Wow!

Time and time the rhino turns to address the big cats, charging at them and grunting. There is a tense interaction before the lions settle, in full view, in the short grass to the left – through the scope we can see the 'mohican' fur around the head and small mane below the chin – they look like young adult males and perhaps they are not equipped to deal with a rhino.

We watch and wait to see what will happen: a Black-backed Jackal walks by and catching sight of the lions, about turns and runs off. Eventually all the players in the game wander out of view and it signals our time to exit. What a day.

Day 12: Spotty Things

We have another early breakfast then wander back to the cabins to ready ourselves for the day ahead. Just outside one of the cabins a Golden-tailed Woodpecker is tapping and giving us great views – a nice start.

Loaded up we head east and can't resist another look at Goas waterhole. A Gabar Goshawk is lurking and being mobbed by small birds. There are the Zebras and Springbok we've seen here before and we soon move on. We catch some roadside views of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters and African Pipits in the scrub before breaking out into the grasslands. Here we find more game and some different birds: African Hoopoe and Greater Striped Swallow, along with better views of Bateleur. We then get news of some Leopards showing further along the road so drive to where a few vehicles are parked. They are all looking the same way so we join in the fun.

At first it is confusing as we are scanning for anything spotty and find two Spotted Hyenas in the long grass! Surely the reports are of Leopards and not Hyenas? We keep looking and eventually, all is revealed.. A Leopard moves from the grass and jumps up into a tree, with a Hyena moving swiftly to the base of the tree to harass the cat. From our different angles we can make out bits of Leopards behind the foilage and it seems there maybe two. The top animal then manipulates a carcass and starts to gnaw – we can hear the crunching of bones. It looks like an Impala has met its death and the Leopard has taken its kill into the tree away from the scavenging (and bigger) Hyenas. Then we can make out a third Leopard and another Hyena – in total six spotty animals. As the top Leopard eats, bits of the carcass fall to the ground, gratefully snapped up by the Hyena. Overhead two Lappet-faced Vultures are circling as the word and smells get around. We watch for the special encounter for over an hour.

We move on to a nearby shelter site where we can use the restrooms and the talk is of spotty things. Then Lazarus learns of more big cats nearby, so we drive to Batia where another group of African Lions are resting in the grass. We get looks of a mixed group of powerful lionesses and younger males.

Towards Namutoni we reach the Chudop waterhole, another promising oasis. In the middle of the pool is a stand of tall green reeds, busy with Blue and Violet-eared Waxbills. At the base of the reeds four Black Crakes make their way into the open, looking fine with their bright yellow beak and pink feet. Emerald Spotted Doves are coming to drink with Namaqua Doves and the light is catching the iridescent wing markings. Little Grebe and Red-billed Teal complete the bird list, with the only game coming to drink, a lone Giraffe.

At Namutoni we have a late lunch and then some relaxing down-time in the heat of the day - we are readying ourselves for some night-time activities! After an early meal we join a night drive organised by the National Park authorities. The excursion takes us to the nearest waterhole at Klein Namutoni where there are two Rhinos centre stage. We can't help notice big white birds in the water too – these are two

African Spoonbills and a single Greater Flamingo – the spoonbills are sifting the water all the while.

Driving north along the edge of the pan through heavy scrub we catch animals in the sweeping red light. We see Black-backed Jackals and Cape Fox, but perhaps the best sighting is a close Spotted Eagle Owl that sits in the open only twenty feet or so away.

The last waterhole we visit is Tsumcor and when we pull up there is a vision to behold. Pride of place in the centre is a large elephant but around the perimeter is no fewer than eight Black Rhinos and one is feeling grumpy, challenging others and roaring.

Day 13: Waterberg and Eagles

After breakfast at 7am there's time for a final stroll round Namutoni, first taking in the waterhole. One of the African Spoonbills we saw on the night drive is feeding infront.

We also visit the historic Fort Namutoni, established by the first German settlers with its well preserved courtyard and ramparts. We pack the vehicles and leave Namutoni and start the last cruise around one of the gravel tracks, tantalisingly named Dik-Dik Drive and within minutes we see two alongside the road. Looking like small toy deers, these diminutive creatures are the smallest of the African antelopes. They have big dark eyes, made more appealing by the black 'tear' smudge and a delicate flexible snout with the smallest black tip - just exquisite.

A little further is Klein Namutoni waterhole and the Kudu bulls are in town looking so impressive with their large twisted rack of horns. A Giraffe slowly enters and comes to the water to drink, splaying out its front legs to do so. Meanwhile, the supporting cast includes Zebra, Impala, Black-backed Jackal, South African Shelduck, Cattle Egrets and African Spoonbill.

Reluctantly we have to say goodbye to magical Etosha National Park, as we've some hours to drive to our next destination. We refuel at Tsumeb, grabbing some food for lunch, then make another pit stop at Grootfontein, to grab some tile grout so Dalton can strengthen the plaster cast. The road to Waterberg takes us cross-country and along gravel tracks but we make good time.

As we approach the Waterberg Plateau the landscape becomes more impressive. The steep escarpment walls and wooded slopes offers a stark difference from the Etosha panoramas. We eventually arrive at Waterberg Rest Camp, where Dalton checks-in. We are assigned our rooms and drive to the row of chalets with a view of both the cliffs and the expansive wooded plain below – a nice place to end the tour on. We are unpacking the vans when we notice a large bird on the skyline. We examine through the telescope and there is one of the most beautiful of birds of prey – a pair of Verraux's Eagles.

After some down-time we meet up again at 7pm planning to walk to the restaurant down the hill, intent on maybe catching some nightime animals. A Pearl-spotted Owlet is calling but fails to show up. Vince then spots a nightjar on the road – catching some warmth from the bricked surface. Through the scope we see no particularly striking markings, pointing to Freckled Nightjar - sadly the views are brief. It's a nice stroll to the dining area that has been fashioned from the old infirmary that was associated with the former settlement. We enjoy a lovely meal too.

On the walk back we keep scanning for eye-shine and then bingo! Two little eyes are watching back and we even manage to get a scope on the critter – an unbelievably cut Lesser Bushbaby or Gallago. What an end to the day!

Day 14: Sables and Elands

It's our last full day in Namibia and after meeting early at 6.15am we drive to the camp office to rendezvous with our guide for the morning game-drive in the Park. We are soon in our 4x4 safari truck that will take us into the Waterberg Wilderness Area, now designated as Namibia's newest National Park. Ivan is our driver and we load-up driving east to the Park gates. No sooner have we entered we encounter a group of Giraffes – a large female is with a group of younger animals. What's interesting to note is that she is lying down, her head and neck appearing periscope-like above the tall grasses. Dalton points out that, as there are no Lions in the Park the animals seem more relaxed.

Further along we find a small herd of interesting antelope – looking like the Red Hartebeeste we've seen earlier in Etosha, these are tawny (and not reddish) coloured and have a sloping back and less twisted horns – they are Tsessebe – difficult animals to see in Namibia.

The road then starts to climb the ridge and we pause at the escarpment edge to take in the fine view south, over endless thornveld. The sun is rising and colouring the already pinkish sandstone cliffs a rich red. We take some photos and note some birds in the bushes: Ashy Tit, Long-billed Crombec, Brown-capped Chagra and our first Puffback. From there we start working the sandy tracks that criss-cross the plateau that's covered in pristine thick acacia scrub with sandstone outcrops here and there. Yellow-billed Hornbills, Red-billed Francolins, Go-away Birds and Drongos are perched on bushes as we pass.

Reaching our breakfast stop, we walk down a sheltered path to a large hide where we can look over a small waterhole. There are some doves, a Groundscraper Thrush and two Golden-breasted Buntings drinking when we open our breakfast sacks. Go-away birds also visit and in the far trees is a Swallow-tailed Bee-eater. Sadly, no mammals are visiting so we move on after eating.

We drive along more sandy tracks and at one point we see a big Eland crossing – the largest antelope in Africa. Thankfully, when we reach the second waterhole there is a group of Eland in the open so we can get fab photos - a Little

Sparrowhawk is in a tree beyond. We spend ten to fifteen minutes with the animals before Ivan moves us on. He'd like to take us to an area he knows is good territory for White Rhinos.

We drive further along the sandy tracks but stop when we interupt a group of female Sable Antelope browsing in the bushes – really dark coats and swept back horns and our third new antelope species of the day.

Reaching the furthest point we stop and examine tracks in the sand – the distinctive large prints from Rhino – there's even an imprint in the sand showing us that a White Rhino has been overnighting here. Nearby there's a midden – a collection of droppings – so we are in the right place but sadly the wrong time this time.

Retracing our steps we see a male Sable Antelope with its long swept back curved horns and later we see a group of young Kudu. Birds along the way include African Hoopoe, Scimitarbill and Grey Hornbill. Reaching the escarpment edge we descend through the red boulders and Jane spots something fury in a low bush – it's a cute Rock Hyrax and its nibbling leaves. More are out on the rocks catching the morning sun and we get wonderful views, looking down on them.

When we drive along the base of the escarpment we see a large bird of prey soaring along the ridge – a Verreaux's Eagle on patrol showing off its black and white markings. Its not quite the finale for the game drive, as when we come back to the camp there are a family of Warthogs grazing on the watered grass and Baboons working along the fenceline – the perfect ending for our morning excursion.

After some down-time we wander to the restaurant but have to stop for a muddy puddle full of butterflies – a wonder of a view of six or seven species.

Next to the dining building (the former police station) there is a large flowering tree – a Welcome Boerbean – and it's attracting birds. We postpone lunch for half an hour while we sift through what's on offer. We see Ruppell's Parrots, Glossy Starling, Red-eyed Bubuls, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird and Marico Sunbird all in the same tree! Jane then poits to two Green Wood-hoopoes in an adjacent tree – blimey!

There's more down-time after lunch as its still pretty warm. We finally meet up at 4pm for a wander around the taller trees. We find a Pearl-spotted Owl that's being mobbed by a small group of birds including a White-browed Scrub Robin and Grey-backed Camaroptera.

There is one trail taking half the group through the thickets that now cover the series of terraces that the German settlers fashioned into the landscape. Water from the foot of the escarpment (hence the name of the place) could be diverted through canals to newly formed orchards. Now the place is overgrown but the stone gutters or canal sides are still strewn about.

Back on the road we get looks at the Verreaux Eagle pair, Alpine Swifts, Rosy-faced Lovebirds, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Groundscraper Thrush and a big troop of Chacma Baboons. And so to our final meal together.

Day 15: The Journey Back

We meet at 7am for a last bird walk around the lower slopes of Waterberg Resort. Around the campsite we see several Bearded Woodpeckers, Red-billed Spurfowl, Grey Hornbills and a few Pearl-spotted Owls that are still vocal in the early morning.

We wander back to the dining room for a last breakfast, then prepare for the drive south to Windhoek, leaving around 9.30am.

There are roadside sightings along the way, including Tawny Eagles, Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters and Chacma Baboons. We break the journey for lunch at Okahandja and one last round of toasted sandwiches. The last leg sees us slowly climb into the more hilly terrain of the central highlands as we get nearer Windhoek. Finally we arrive at the airport and there is some last minute repacking of luggage and the final touches to the packaging of Bernie's footprint cast – Dalton's box and plastic wrap is inpenetrable!

The winner of the mileage sweepstakes is Joyce, who guesses 2995km– she's just 44km out at 3039km.

We say our last goodbyes to Dalton, Vince and Lazarus who have shown us so many things and have seamlessly made sure we have had a trouble-free Namibian adventure. Our sincere thanks to a great team who have delivered Africa without tears.

Day 16: We arrive at Heathrow for last goodbyes.

Birdy Top Three

1= Crimson-breasted Shrike
1= Secretary Bird
3 Ostrich

Mammal Top Three

1 Elephant
2 Black Rhino
3 Leopard

Top Antelopes

Oryx and Dik-dik

Places of the Trip

The choice reflects the diversity of Namibia: from the landscapes and dunes of the Namib Naukluft, to the riches of Walvis Bay and the incredible Valley of the Moon. Every place had its own magic but one above others captivated us all – Etosha, in particluar the famed waterholes and especially Halali.

Magic Moments

So many to choose! From the vision of the evening light on Oryx in the Namib; the raucous spectacle of the Fur Seals colony at Cape Cross; encounters with Lions and Leopards in Etosha; Rhinos and Elephants at waterholes and finding our rare Desert Elephant and the subsequent cast of Bennie. Perhaps it is best summed up by Lazarus who highlited three things – teamwork, happiness and pride in Namibia, a land of treasures.

BIRDS (194)

Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
Cape Gannet	*Morus capensis*
Crowned Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax coronatus*
White-breasted Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax lucidus*
Cape Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax capensis*
Great White Pelican	*Pelecanus onocrotalus*
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
Black-headed Heron	*Ardea melanocephala*
Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*
Greater Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus ruber*
Lesser Flamingo	*Phoenicopterus minor*
African Spoonbill	*Platalea alba*
Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
Egyptian Goose	*Alopochenae gyptiaca*
South African Shelduck	*Tadorna cana*
Cape Teal	*Anas capensis*
Red-billed Teal	*Anas erythrorhyncha*
Southern Pochard	*Netta erythrophthalma*
White-backed Vulture	*Gyps africanus*
Cape Vulture	*Gyps coprotheres*
Lappet-faced Vulture	*Torgos tracheliotus*
Bateleur	*Terathopiuse caudatu*
Black-chested Snake-Eagle	*Circaetus pectoralis*
Tawny Eagle	*Aquila rapax*
Verreaux's Eagle	*Aquila verreauxii*
African Hawk-Eagle	*Aquila spilogaster*
Booted Eagle	*Aquila pennatus*
Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk	*Melierax canorus*
Gabar Goshawk	*Melierax gabar*
Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
Little Sparrowhawk	*Accipiter minullus*
Black-shouldered Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*
Pygmy Falcon	*Polihierax semitorquatus*
Rock Kestrel	*Falco rupicolis*
Greater Kestrel	*Falco rupicoloides*
Red-necked Falcon	*Falco chicquera*
Common Ostrich	*Struthio camelus*
Red-billed Spurfowl	*Pternistis adspersus*
Crested Francolin	*Peliperdix sephaena*
Helmeted Guineafowl	*Numida meleagris*
Black Crake	*Amaurornis flavirostris*
Common Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*
Secretarybird	*Sagittarius serpentarius*
Kori Bustard	*Ardeotis kori*
Ludwig's Bustard	*Neotis ludwigii*
Red-crested Korhaan	*Eupodotis ruficrista*
Northern Black Korhaan	*Afrotisa fraoides*
Rüppell's Korhaan	*Eupodotis rueppellii*
African Black Oystercatcher	*Haematopus moquini*
Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*
Pied Avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*
Grey Plover	*Pluvialis squatarola*
Kittlitz's Plover	*Charadrius pecuarius*
Three-banded Plover	*Charadrius tricollaris*
Chestnut-banded Plover	*Charadrius pallidu*
White-fronted Plover	*Charadrius marginatus*
Blacksmith Lapwing	*Vanellus armatus*
Crowned Lapwing	*Vanellus coronatus*
Bar-tailed Godwit	*Limosa lapponica*
Common Sandpiper	*Actitus hypoleucos*
Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*
Curlew Sandpiper	*Calidris ferruginea*
Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*
Ruddy Turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*
Spotted Thick-knee	*Burhinus capensis*
Double-banded Courser	*Rhinoptilus africanus*
Burchell's Courser	*Cursorius rufus*
Kelp Gull	*Larus dominicanus*
Grey-headed Gull	*Larus cirrocephalus*
Hartlaub's Gull	*Larus hartlaubii*
Swift Tern	*Sterna bergii*
Caspian Tern	*Sterna caspia*
Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*
Namaqua Sandgrouse	*Pterocles namaqua*
Double-banded Sandgrouse	*Pterocles bicinctus*
Speckled Pigeon	*Columba guinea*
Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*
Cape Turtle-Dove	*Streptopelia capicola*
Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove	*Turtur chalcospilos*
Namaqua Dove	*Oena capensis*
Feral Pigeon	*Columba livia*
Rüppell's Parrot	*Poicephalus rueppellii*
Rosy-faced Lovebird	*Agapornis roseicollis*
Grey Go-away-bird	*Corythaixoides concolor*
African Barn Owl	*Tyto alba*
Spotted Eagle-Owl	*Bubo africanus*
Pearl-spotted Owlet	*Glaucidium perlatum*
Freckled Nightjar	*Caprimulgus tristigma*
African Palm-Swift	*Cypsiurus parvus*
Alpine Swift	*Tachymarptis melba*
Bradfield's Swift	*Apus bradfieldi*
Little Swift	*Apus affinus*
White-backed Mousebird	*Colius colius*
Red-faced Mousebird	*Urocolius indicus*
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops hirundineus*
Lilac-breasted Roller	*Coracias caudatus*
Purple Roller	*Coracias naevius*
Monteiro's Hornbill	*Tockus monteiri*
Red-billed Hornbill	*Tockus erythrorhynchus*
Damara Hornbill	*Tockus damarensis*
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	*Tockus leucomelas*
African Grey Hornbill	*Tockus nasutus*
African Hoopoe	*Upupa Africana*
Green Wood-hoopoe	*Phoeniculus purpureus*
Violet Wood-hoopoe	*Phoeniculus damarensis*
Common Scimitarbill	*Rhinopomastus cyanomelas*
Acacia Pied Barbet	*Tricholaema leucomelas*
Golden-tailed Woodpecker	*Dendropicos abingoni*
Bearded Woodpecker	*Dendropicos namaquus*
Sabota Lark	*Calendulauda sabota*
Dune Lark	*Calendulauda erythrochlamys*
Gray's Lark	*Ammomanopsis grayi*
Spike-heeled Lark	*Chersomanes albofasciata*
Karoo (Benguela) Long-billed Lark	*Certhilauda subcoronata*
Chestnut-backed Finchlark	*Eremopterix leucotis*
Grey-backed Finchlark	*Eremopterix verticalis*
Red-capped Lark	*Calandrella cinerea*
Stark's Lark	*Spizocorys starki*
Red-breasted Swallow	*Hirundo semirufa*
Greater Striped Swallow	*Hirundo cucullata*
Pearl-breasted Swallow	*Hirundo dimidiate*
Rock Martin	*Hirundo fuligula*
Fork-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus adsimilis*
Cape Crow	*Corvus capensis*
Pied Crow	*Corvus albus*
Carp's Tit	*Parus carpi*
Ashy Tit	*Parus cinerascens*
Southern Pied Babbler	*Turdoides bicolor*
Bare-cheeked Babbler	*Turdoides melanops*
African Red-eyed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus nigricans*
Short-toed Rock-Thrush	*Monticola brevipes*
Groundscraper Thrush	*Psophocichla litsipsirupa*
Familiar Chat	*Cercomela familiari*
Karoo Chat	*Cercomela schlegelii*
Tractrac Chat	*Cercomela tractrac*
Mountain Wheatear	*Oenanthe monticola*
Ant-eating Chat	*Myrmecocichla formicivora*
Herero Chat	*Namibornis herero*
White-browed Scrub-Robin	*Cercotrichas leucophrys*
Kalahari Scrub-Robin	*Cercotrichas paean*
Yellow-bellied Eremomela	*Eremome laicteropygialis*
African Reed-Warbler (h)	*Acrocephalus baeticatus*
Rockrunner	*Achaetops pycnopygius*

Grey-backed Camaroptera	*Camaroptera brevicaudata*
Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler	*Parisoma subcaeruleum*
Long-billed Crombec	*Sylvietta rufescens*
Rattling Cisticola	*Cisticola chiniana*
Desert Cisticola	*Cisticola aridulus*
Black-chested Prinia	*Prinia flavicans*
Chat Flycatcher	*Bradornis infuscatus*
Marico Flycatcher	*Bradornis mariquensis*
Pririt Batis	*Batis pririt*
Chinspot Batis	*Batis molitor*
Cape Wagtail	*Motacilla capensis*
African Pipit	*Anthus cinnamomeus*
Crimson-breasted Shrike	*Laniarius atrococcineus*
Brown-crowned Tchagra	*Tchagra senegalus*
Brubru	*Nilaus afer*
Black-backed Puffback	*Dryoscopus cubla*
White-crested Helmet-Shrike	*Prionops plumatus*
Common Fiscal	*Lanius collaris*
Southern White-crowned Shrike	*Eurocephalus anguitimens*
Pale-winged Starling	*Onychognathus nabouroup*
Cape Glossy Starling	*Lamprotornis nitens*
Burchell's Starling	*Lamprotornis australis*
Wattled Starling	*Creatophora cinerea*
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	*Chalcomitra senegalensis*
White-bellied Sunbird	*Cinnyris talatala*
Dusky Sunbird	*Cinnyris fuscus*
Marico Sunbird	*Cinnyris mariquensis*
House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
Great Sparrow	*Passer motitensis*
Cape Sparrow	*Passer melanurus*
Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	*Passer diffusus*
Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver	*Bubalornis niger*
White-browed Sparrow-Weaver	*Plocepasser mahali*
Sociable Weaver	*Philetairus socius*
Southern Masked-Weaver	*Ploceus velatus*
Lesser Masked Weaver	*Ploceus intermedius*
Red-billed Quelea	*Quelea quelea*
Shaft-tailed Whydah	*Vidua regis*
Long-tailed Whydah	*Vidua paradisaea*
Red-billed Firefinch	*Lagonosticta senegala*
Violet-eared Waxbill	*Granatina granatina*
Blue Waxbill	*Uraeginthus angolensis*
Red-headed Finch	*Amadinae rythrocephala*
Scaly-feathered Finch	*Sporopipes squamifrons*
Green-winged Pytilia	*Pytilia melba*
Black-throated Canary	*Serinus atrogularis*
Yellow Canary	*Serinus flaviventris*
Lark-like Bunting	*Emberiza impetuani*
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting	*Emberiza tahapisi*
Golden-breasted Bunting	*Emberiza flaviventris*

MAMMALS (37)

Damara Dik-Dik	*Madoqua damarensis*
Southern Oryx	*Oryx gazella*
Red Hartebeest	*Alcelaphus buselaphus*
Tsessebe	*Damaliscus lunatus*
Blue Wildebeest	*Connochaetes taurinus*
Black-faced Impala	*Aepyceros melampus petersi*
Klipspringer	*Oreotragus oreotragus*
Greater Kudu	*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*
Eland	*Taurotragus oryx*
Springbok	*Antidorcas marsupialis*
Steenbok	*Raphicerus campestris*
Sable Antelope	*Hippotragus niger*
Burchell's Zebra	*Equus burchellii*
Hartmann's Mountain Zebra	*Equus zebra hartmannae*
African Lion	*Panthera Leo*
Leopard	*Panthera pardus*
African Elephant	*Loxodonta Africana*
Black Rhinoceros	*Diceros bicornis*
Black-backed Jackal	*Canis mesomelas*
Bat-eared Fox	*Otocyon megalotis*
Cape Fox	*Vulpus chama*
Southern Giraffe	*Giraffa camelopardalis*
Savannah Hare	*Lepus saxatilis*
Spotted Hyena	*Crocuta crocuta*
Rock Hyrax	*Procavia capensis*
Banded Mongoose	*Mungos mungo*
Yellow Mongoose	*Cynictis penicillata*
Meerkat	*Suricata suricata*
Chacma Baboon	*Papio ursinus*
Cape Fur Seal	*Arctocephalus pusillus*
Common Tree Squirrel	*Sciurus carolinensis*
Cape Ground Squirrel	*Xerus inauris*
Mountain Ground Squirrel	*Xerus princeps*
Warthog	*Phacochoerus africanus*
Heaviside's (Benguela) Dolphin	*Cephalorhynchus heavisidii*
Bottlenose Dolphin	*Tursiops truncate*
Humpback Whale	*Megaptera novaenglandii*

SOME BUTTERFLIES AND INSECTS

Queen Purple-tip
Bushveld Purple-tip
Zebra White
Foxy Emperor
Doubleday's Orange-tip
Small Orange-tip
Yellow Pansy
African Monarch
Speckled Sulphur-tip
Topaz Arab
Guineafowl Butterfly
Painted Lady
Common Dotted Border

Brown Armoured Bush-cricket
Southern Field-cricket
Desert Locust
Toad Grasshopper
Welwitschia Bug
Darkling Beetle

SOME REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Rock Monitor
Bibram's Fat-tailed Gecko
Variable Skink
Southern Ground Agama
Spiky Agama
Dwarf Plated Lizard
Variable Lizard
Wedge-snouted Desert Lizard
Helmeted Terrapin