NAMIBIA
giant sand dunes, the Skeleton Coast and Etosha National Park

Made popular by Phil’s successful lecture programme at the British Birdwatching Fair, our Namibia trip has consistently been voted one of the best holidays our clients have ever been on. Since our first visit, when it was an unknown birding destination, we have watched Namibia develop into a leading African hot spot. Our knowledge of the birds here is second to none. We are very proud of the fine-tuned itinerary that we have developed, and feel that our tour here cannot be bettered.

Namibia provides many examples of the best that Africa has to offer; from abundant and approachable big game in Etosha, plenty of endemic birds to target, the highest dunes in the world, and the harsh beauty of the Skeleton Coast. Needless to say, it offers fantastic photographic opportunities.

Namibia is still a relatively unknown and sparsely populated country that is politically stable, having achieved independence from South Africa in 1990. The infrastructure is first class, with good quality accommodation, food and transport. In Etosha the game watching is unrivalled, without the attendant crowds experienced in some parts of East Africa.

The key to finding wildlife here is knowing their ecology and habits, as unpredictable rainfall determines where and when vegetation will grow. Many species are nomadic, and our experience of what a bird’s habitat requirements are (rather than relying on sites where a species was seen ‘last year’) pays dividends time and again. Each trip brings new surprises; one year it was a wild cat extravaganza with four Leopards, several Lions, two African Wild cats and a gorgeous Caracal.

On arrival we will recharge our batteries with one night in Windhoek. The next day we drive south-west to the famous Sossusvlei dunes for two nights, before heading to the Skeleton Coast, for a stay of two nights. On day seven we pick up some localised species on our way north towards Etosha, breaking the journey with one night in the picturesque Erongo mountains. Etosha National Park merits the greatest share of our time, and we shall spend a total of five nights at game lodges here. On day 13 we will head south to the dramatic Waterberg Plateau, for the final night. From Waterberg there is a relatively short drive back to Windhoek, in time for our flight home.

ITINERARY

THE NAMIB DESERT
Arriving at Windhoek on an overnight flight, we transfer straight to a pleasant guesthouse, our base for the first night. Relaxing after our flight, we are not in a rush to leave. Many birds visit the gardens, such as our first Yellow-billed Hornbill, White-backed Mousebird and Grey Lourie. A visit to a nearby wetland should yield African Darter, Red Bishop, Hottentot Teal, White-throated Swallow and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater.

The next day we enter the Namib Naukluft Desert birdwatching en route. This ‘travelling day’ has developed into one of the highlights, as there are so many new birds to see. There may be a nesting Black Eagle or endemic Bradfield’s Swift, and if we are lucky, a party of Meercats.
An early start into the superb Sossusvlei dunes the next day allows us to search for Dune Lark and Burchell’s Courser before it gets too hot. Dune Lark is the only bird that can eke out a living from the red sands. It is located using knowledge of its critical habitat requirements. The dunes are the largest and most spectacular in the world. Rising to over 1000 feet above the surrounding plains, they hold transient mammals including Oryx and Springbok, with Ostrich striding, statesman-like, across the horizon.

**WALVIS BAY**

The next day we cross the Kuiseb Canyon en-route to the coast. With two nights in Walvis Bay, we explore the Skeleton Coast. The climate is remarkably cool, a result of the cold Benguela Current which flows all the way from Antarctica. Thousands of Lesser and Greater Flamingos form a pink backdrop to the masses of waders and terns. Specialities include Chestnut-banded Plover and the endemic Damara Tern. Thousands of Cape Cormorants nest on specially constructed guano platforms and Cape Fur Seals will be pupping. Pelicans, Cape Gannets and White-chinned Petrels can be found during a boat trip in the bay, when we also have a chance of seeing Jackass Penguin. We are usually successful in locating the rare and localised Benguela Dolphin – sometimes right under the bow!

**ERONGO**

On day seven we return inland via the impressive granite outcrop of Spitzkoppe, watching for Mountain Zebras en route. We hope to find the endemic Gray’s Lark and the elusive Herero Chat. The pale wheatear-like Karoo and Tractac Chats perch on boulders and we should find many of the lark species for which Namibia is famous.

Our lodge is situated among the spectacular granite domes of the Erongo Mountains. Birdwatching is excellent with Verreaux’s Eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Hartlaub’s Francolin, Pririt Batis, Melba Finch, Freckled Nightjar, Short-toed Rock-thrush, Kalahari Robin and the endemic White-tailed Shrike all possible.

**ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK**

Etosha, ‘The Great White Plain’ as it is known in bushman language, has been made famous by numerous TV documentaries. A vast salt pan is surrounded by a mixture of bush, woodland and savannah with three camps inside the park. Each one has a waterhole to attract animals and we will spend a total of five nights here.

Only with experience can one find the star birds and mammals along the many winding trails which connect the springs and waterholes. Elephants, the largest in Africa, dominate the waterholes, driving off other game such as Zebra and Giraffe. The many Lions wait for Blue Wildebeest, Red Hartebeest, Springbok, the regionally endemic Black-faced Impala, and the appealing Damara Dik Dik. At the time of our visit, towards the end of the dry austral winter, game should be concentrated around the few remaining pools. Double-banded Courser feed precariously amongst the feet of big game. Secretarybird and Kori Bustard strut by. Although rare here, we have always located the beautiful Blue Crane, arguably the most elegant crane in the world. Owls feature too. We saw African Scops, White-faced Scops, Spotted Eagle Owl, Giant Eagle Owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet and African Marsh Owl on one visit!

After dinner, we shall wait in anticipation at the camp waterholes for the arrival of Elephant, both White and Black Rhinos or Lion. Hundreds of Double-banded Sandgrouse congregate to drink. As the light fades Rufous-cheeked Nightjars take moths around the floodlights.

**WATERBERG PLATEAU**

Driving south on day 13 takes us to the Waterberg Plateau. This impressive feature dominates the landscape. Specialities such as Monteiro’s and Damara Red-billed Hornbills, Damara Rockrunner, Crimson-breasted Shrike and Ruppell’s Parrot occur, and Lesser Bushbaby may show up at night.

On our last day we will make our way back to the capital, Windhoek, in good time for our evening flight home.

**PACE**

The cooler morning temperatures and peak in wildlife activity mean that we must rise early to make the most of the opportunities available. The pattern in Namibia involves early morning and late afternoon excursions, resting and relaxing, or travelling, between these times. Basic fitness is all that is required. Walking will be at a sensible pace. There will be a little uphill walking in the Waterberg Plateau and at Erongo. Away from the coast temperatures can be high, but you can take things easy during the heat of the day.

**ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD**

Full-board accommodation is provided in excellent hotels, lodges and camps. We shall spend one night at the Palmquell Guesthouse, Windhoek, two nights at the Namib Naukluft Lodge near Sossusvlei, two nights at the Hotel Langholm, Walvis Bay, one night at Erongo Wilderness Lodge, five nights in Etosha (at Okaaukeujo, Halali, and Namutoni Rest Camps) and one night at the Waterberg Rest Camp. All accommodation has private facilities en suite.

**PRICE INCLUDES …..**

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader and local driver/guide, full-board accommodation (starting with lunch on 23rd, ending with lunch on 5th), soft drinks at meal times, local transport, boat trip, park entrance fees, international flights and airport taxes.

**WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED**

Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

**INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS**

Return flight from London Heathrow to Windhoek (via Frankfurt) using the scheduled services of Air Namibia. Outbound flight departs late afternoon, return flight arrives back late morning. Domestic flights from Manchester and other UK airports are available on this tour. See booking form for details.

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<td>two overnight flights:</td>
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<td>Principal leader:</td>
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<td>Maximum group size:</td>
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