

Travel report of bird watching & photography birding trip report

„Endemic rarities of Namibia“

A report by Albert Voigts Von Schütz

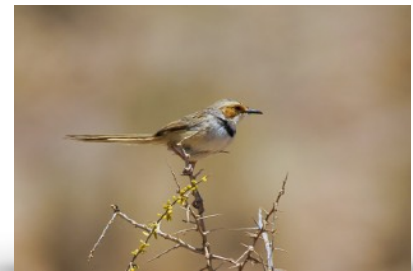
We call them the 'Namibian specials'...

Since the journey to these bird species is likely the most memorable 'trip' for almost every birder or bird photographer, and the observation remains with so many additional experiences and sightings of interesting creatures in the most beautiful landscapes of Africa, I will focus in this report only on the 'challenging' and special observations.

Rita was not feeling well...

And I was already afraid that I would have to reach for the first aid kit rather than the binoculars. However, it was just the flight, and soon, with a good cappuccino and croissant, the plane food was forgotten. We skipped the 'ordinary birds' and immediately headed west, where Namibia's secrets lie. Franz immediately emphasized to me that he was familiar with the birds of Africa and that we 'should not waste any time' in tracking down the legendary endemics.

It's always wonderful for me to see how the blue sky and the vast colors affect our guests. Breathing a sigh of relief and happiness, we came across the obligatory White-tailed Shrike, Village Weaver, and Greater Honeyguide, a few Rosy-faced Lovebirds, and finally something 'better.' The Rufous-eared Warbler, *Malcorus pectoralis*, was just hopping through a winged fruit bush with a few remaining pink flowers when it was captured... the clicking of the cameras will surely require some deleting effort, I thought...



Rufous-eared Warbler

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz

The Red Dune Lark wears a little red coat and is also called... erythroclamys, the one with the little red coat! On our way, we had seen the Sclater's Lark / Red-capped Lark *Spizocorys sclateri*, but of course, the main focus was on photographing the Red Dune Lark, probably the only endemic species in Namibia, in the truly beautiful red dune landscape covered with yellow grass. With the lark, it's like with the lions in Etosha Park... the guests can only enjoy the zebra once they've seen the lion... so I tried to talk about termites, fairy circles, and dune grass, but this only became interesting when we finally saw 3 birds grazing confidently in the dune field. The Red Dune Lark looks very similar to the Barlow's Lark, and we very much hope not to lose this endemic status by merging the species.



We were out very early in Sossusvlei as Leaflove always books directly in the park... the extremely early wake-up, however, was very much worth it, and even the Rüppell's Korhaan and Ludwig's Bustard could be enjoyed at leisure. As the scent of coffee rose from the thermos, the Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler entertained us splendidly... I was already thinking about its counterpart Layard's Tit-Babbler, which will soon challenge me...

The waterhole at the lodge could provide several list fillers, to the delight of all, the Red-fronted Tinkerbird was nesting in a quiver tree, or poking its head out of the cavity, offering splendid photo opportunities before the departure to the gravel plains of the Namib. Finding the Karoo Eremomela / Long-billed Eremomela ...gregalis gregalis, as always, was not easy. I found a small group in the midst of the Tinkas granite hills. Here, once again, an excellent landscape picture was created with simply stunning birds, because only those who have seen the eye of this Eremomela live know what love for creative detail can mean.

Who was Gray?...

He was an English ornithologist, regardless, the perfectly camouflaged Namib Long-billed lark was named after him. It's fortunate that they came to us, because as Rita charmingly remarked, "a bright bird on bright rock isn't much to go by... 'it should come closer for a better look.'" We are happy to do anything for our guests! It should be noted here that we also enjoyed the sight of giraffes and ostriches, a small group of mountain zebras and gemsbok antelopes, and additionally absorbed the vastness of Namibia.

Welwitschia mirabilis was admired and discussed, and even a well-trained Tractrac Chat showed up for lunch... much to the amusement of Franz, whose ham probably shouldn't have been its own, although he's generally against bird feeding.

Apart from the usual succulents, I was able to find a Trichocaulon clavatum for the group, which almost led to my own euphoria.



Acacia Pied Barbet

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz



Gray's Lark *Ammomanopsis grayi*

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz

From a distance, the Spitzkoppe doesn't look particularly sensational...

However, as one approaches this magma chamber, it truly takes one's breath away! Wonderfully fantastic rock formations with peculiar vine-like plants... Leaping klipspringers are to be added to the antelope list, and there is a discussion about why rock hyraxes are the "closest relatives of elephants." We search for the Herero Chat... and search and search and search. In the meantime, I spot the Layard's Warbler, Sylvia layardi, in an Ozoroa resin tree, and we enjoy the Bokmakierie. At the Bushman's Paradise, we find two Herero Chats, Namibornis Herero. It is essential to mention that these birds are a real challenge and, in my opinion, extremely rare! It's worth watching where the Pale-winged Starlings and the Tractrac Chats (Cercomela schlegelii schlegelii, the namesake, live here) settle on the ground to eat termites... that's where the Herero Chats join the party, sometimes.

The lodge here receives much praise, understandably so, as it can't get any better here! The energy at the lodge is still strong, and some even want to visit the rock paintings. I am glad that we are relieved of the pressure of the chat here, and another semi-endemic, the Monteiro's Hornbill, Tockus monteiri, even appears in small groups and impresses greatly with its appearance, song, and demeanor, beautiful!



Herero Chat *Namibornis herero*

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz

The deeper exploration of the already impressive granite bubble formation

The deeper exploration of the already impressive granite bubble formation has generated boundless enthusiasm. In the darkness of the morning, "because you have to be at the spot BEFORE dawn," to spot the Hartlaub's Francolin (*Pternistis hartlaubi*). Initially, the group was quite disappointed, as the silence suggested a lack of birds. A Bokmakierie called, and slowly we also heard Rosy-faced Lovebirds and the usual seed eaters. We ascended a gorge identified the evening before, and I set my phone to loud... let them respond if they won't call themselves!

Suddenly, a cacophony of calls erupted, and we were able to see two, a male and a female, calling together. At the other end of the gorge, another pair. Axel was thrilled, and I wondered who would be sorting through all these photos...



Hartlaub Spurfowl *Pternistis hartlaubi*

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz



Rockrunners now emerged from their hiding places, behaving so confidently that my "rarity statement" from the previous day could not be confirmed. Again and again, one could hear their liquid calls, and the rocks, now glowing orange in the sun, stood in wonderful light amid the green acacias. Can one ever get enough of it?... No!

Rockrunner *Achaetops pygmaea*
Klippensänger

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz

Once again, we saw various hornbills, buntings, finches, sparrows, and time and again, sooty nectar birds, whose specific descriptions would exceed the scope of this report. However, I would like to point out the beauty of the mountain bunting, which is often perceived too quickly as a rockrunner by laypeople. When the sun then shone a bit, the splendor of the rosy-faced lovebirds on the birch-bark acacias left our guests speechless, and a warm feeling spread through the group... Success, found what we wanted and then this picture! Wonderful.



Cinnamon-breasted Bunting
Emberiza tabaci



Rosy-faced Lovebird
Agapornis roseicollis

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz

After what Axel considered to be a

“once again, far too much“

lavish breakfast, the journey continued along the western loop of the Damaraland up into the Mopane savanna. The target was the Damara or Steppen Tree Creeper, which we were able to locate quite quickly as it responded very obligingly to our calls. I will keep the description of the encounters with the cats, the numerous antelopes, and the desert elephants in this report brief, with just this mention. However, I was delighted that especially the ladies of the group enjoyed the diversity of the trip and the well-chosen accommodations, expressing heartfelt gratitude with a "always a pleasure.".



On the way, we came across the Rüppell's Korhaan (*Eupodotis rueppellii*), or rather a small family of them. As a sought-after and coveted semi-endemic among birders, there was joy over the vocal interaction and "the fact that they didn't seem to be afraid of us at all."

The burnt mountain was initially just a part of the itinerary, but who could have guessed that a Benguela Long-billed Lark would choose to appear in this inhospitable area. We were fortunate to have seen Weiterre on the way north, but encountering the lark in this "burnt" landscape was not an everyday occurrence for me either.

The drive on the gravel road in the Damara semi-desert area was enriched with wonderful photo stops. The mountain chestnut with its bright white trunk against the red granite, the butter tree so thick and fleshy yellow in picturesque hills, and the now red-yellow-green mopane trees complemented the somewhat sparse but interesting birdlife quite well.



Benguela Long-billed Lark
Certhilauda benguelensis

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz



Rüppell's Korhaan
Eupodotis rueppellii

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz



Little Sparrowhawk
Accipiter minullus

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz



Bare-cheeked Babbler
Turdoides gymnogenys

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz



Rüppell's Parrot
Poicephalus ruepellii

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz

„You can have a vacation at this lodge," was the sentiment expressed.“...

I understand, a journey with us is not a vacation, and perhaps it shouldn't be. Leaflove Safari aims for guests to experience something, and you can get sunburn elsewhere. Indeed, in the lodge's "garden," we were able to record some wonderful experiences in our diaries, as Rüppell's parrots (*Poicephalus ruepellii*) came to the water from 11:00 a.m., and we didn't know whether to sip on Rockshandy or photograph parrots. A small shikra (*Accipiter minullus*) also waited at the waterhole... brilliant!

The bare-cheeked babbler (*Turdoides gymnogenys*) chattered in the dry mopane foliage, and once again we saw the Damara hornbill! The Carp's tit (*Parus carpi*) was desperately photographed next to the grey-backed camaroptera (*Camaroptera brevicaudata*), and the small group rejoiced over more larks, pipits, and their relatives on the safari. The amethyst sunbird remains a promise... you can't have it all.

Had I mentioned the Damara red-billed hornbill (*Tockus damarensis*)?... seen, over and over again, of course!



„Over Etosha, as always“...

Books can be written about Etosha! On our way to Etosha, we came across Monteiro's Tockus (*Tockus monteiri*) in the mopane foliage, and we discovered klipspringers on the cliffs. There was so much to see in the park as always, and of course, the entire animal observations triggered the usual camera clicking, but to report on everything would be akin to a wildlife documentary. The Rotschnabellerche was particularly important here, and this time, we didn't find it so easily. Please note the subspecies *Spizocorys conirostris damarensis*, as it is much lighter and less streaked than its southern counterparts... We also discussed this regarding the next trip... oh, how wonderful that there are so many species and subspecies :-)"

„White-tailed Shrikes everywhere...“

No, that's not true, but they followed us on this tour, and we were able to appreciate this semi-endemic species quite well. The sound, the movements, the character... I personally like these birds a lot because they are part of an intact world.

Since we have seen almost all possible birds and birds of special interest on this trip, we were able to spend the last few days in the eastern park and the central high plateau with 'list fillers' and undergo the annoying COVID testing.

The lonely airport was supposed to be approached with a nice observation of the cliff swallow, but unfortunately, this was not granted to us... next time!



White-tailed Shrike
Lanioturdus toquatus

Photo: Albert Voigts Von Schütz