



The Quest for Herero Chat in the Namib Desert

The Quest for Herero Chat (*Namibornis Herero*) You all know the feeling, if you really „have to see a bird“, it becomes harder and harder to track it down. Once you have seen it though, they pop out everywhere around you. Well this story nearly had a very unhappy ending.

Although I have Herero Chat on my list already, my friend Andrew sent me this great pic of „his“ Herero Chat, I wanted one as well... its just the way it works. Of we went; the desert was waiting. The Spitzkopje, a dome shaped mountain (1700m high) protruding the flat gravel plains of the Namib Desert like a sore thumb. This is the home of one of Namibia's most sought-after birds, the Herero Chat. Although described as locally common, it can become a considerable mission to track them down. And the search was a great one.

These gigantic domes of bulbous red granite have attracted people over thousands of years already and it remains a mystical and very special place for those going through the trouble of reaching it. ... Even if you have been there a hundred times, it always feels like...wow... the first time.

This is truly great birding territory.

I had my fire going way before dawn already, since a melodic Bokmakierie (hence its name) woke me to rise and look at it. Chestnut-vented Tittbabblers are common, but a Layard's was my first this morning. This was a good start, or so I thought. White-tailed Shrike, Monteiro's Hornbill, Dusky Sunbird, Mountain Wheatear, Brubru, Pririt Batis and many others kept me amazed and most importantly did they keep my hopes up, but the Chat remained absent. My eyes grazed every Acacia, Combretum or other scrub, tree or creeper next to every boulder this mountain had to deliver; my thoughts turned on what I had done wrong to "not see" this bird again. It did occur to me, that many birders seek up these rocks to find them and probably all used recordings to call them in, so they might be heavily taped. I saw no use a tape this morning and kept on using sight only. Ok, the Long-billed Pipit really made my day... and when Augur Buzzard and Booted eagle kept circling above me I did realize how lucky I was to be there. A truly nice experience was to discover a Pearl-spotted Owlet perching quite near me. The wind did spoil our birding-afternoon a bit, but a glass of cold white wine next to a crackling fire ended the day just fine. Barn owl was heard and seen well.

I stood up even earlier this time and planted myself right in an undisturbed corner of granite outcrops and lower scrub vegetation... this is what they love and this is where they live. A row of Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters sunning themselves had my attention when a chat-like jizz caught my eye – and there it was – no,



sorry, let me rephrase, there they were. As if they have never been anywhere else. As if they wanted to reward me for the previous schlep to find them.

The Herero Chat couple even sat out a photo-session and gave me the best of their beautiful song... what a moment. We did do a scenic walk after breakfast to the infamous „Bushman's Paradise “. A place I have visited ever so often always to be the only visitor around. I guess this is what makes Namibia so special – the feeling of rediscovery and solitude – and of

course great birding.

Bird list – Spitzkopje June: Dusky Sunbird, Rock Kestrel, Mountain Wheatear (Chat), Speckled Pigeon (Rock), Bokmakierie, Brubru, Ashy Tit, White-tailed Shrike, Common Fiscal, please note: *Lanius collaris subcoronatus* with white eye-brow, Scaly- feathered Finch, Bradfield's Lark, Black-chested Prinia, Guineafowl, Marico Sunbird, Booted Eagle, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Red-eyed Bulbul, Pririt Batis, Pale-winged Starling, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Grey Go-away-bird, Long-billed Crombec, Lark-like Bunting, Layard's Titbabbler, Chestnut Weaver, Violet-eared Waxbill, Laughing Dove, Pied Barbet, Namaqua Dove, Fork-tailed Drongo, Common Scimitarbill, Rock Martin, Cape Bunting, White-throated Canary, Monteiro's Hornbill, Black-faced Waxbill, Long-billed Pipit, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Black-throated Canary, Southern Masked Weaver, Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, Red-faced Mousebird, Cape Turtle Dove, Pearl-spotted Owl, Barn Owl, Herero Chat, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Familiar Chat, Augur Buzzard, Cape Wagtail, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Double-banded Courser.