

Dear Birdos4Eric,

You might recall that I last left you as I was completing my “drive to the north” through South Africa and into the heart of Namibia with my wife Susan and friends Bob and Hanno Lewis in a Toyota Fortuner that turned out to have two-wheel drive rather than the four-wheel we had thought it had (since much of the drive was on dirt roads, we had been counting on that 4x4). My GGAS trip with Birding Ecotours began in Walvis Bay, located about halfway up Namibia’s coast (it’s south of one of Namibia’s most famous geographic regions, the Skeleton Coast, named for all of the ships that wrecked upon that coast over the centuries.) Alas, Susan would be leaving us here, but we were being joined by three people on the tour—Cynthia, Dave, and Peter (Peter being Bob and Hanno’s friend, a superb photographer). The others had all come in a day early, so we were able to begin birding early, led by our guide, Dominic Rollinson from Birding Ecotours, who was driving a very comfortable Mercedes minibuss.

The trip started at Walvis Bay because of the huge concentrations of water birds in the bay itself and the nearby lagoons. The morning’s excursion was to the salt pans south of town to look for shorebirds. But first up were the flamingos. If you’ve ever visited the San Diego Zoo, you’ll know its famous flamingo exhibit—two or three dozen American Flamingos. You can see them up close, and because of the beta-carotene in the shrimp they eat, their color is just gorgeous. But what looks like a large number in Southern California turns out to be a tiny flock in Namibia. Not only does Namibia have two species of flamingo—Greater and Lesser—but it also has each in large numbers. Bob estimated we saw 4,000 Greaters and 2,000 Lessers. That’s a LOT of flamingos!



Guide Dominic Rollinson and our van



Lesser Flamingo
Photo by Bob Lewis



Greater Flamingo
Photo by Bob Lewis

The shorebirds were also pretty impressive that morning. Many familiar ones—stilts, avocets, godwits, turnstones, sandpipers, and stints—but also a couple of new plovers, a White-fronted (a year bird) and a Chestnut-banded (a life bird.) There was also a Grey-hooded Gull (another year bird) and Arctic Terns (another life bird.) We saw 30 species that morning, and on the drive back, I got a good look at what makes the salt pans so special—a mountain of salt created by the salt works that harvests this local natural resource.



Kittlitz's Plover

Photo by Bob Lewis



Chestnut-banded Plover



Mountain of Salt

In the afternoon we left the coast and headed towards the dry interior to see dunes reminiscent of the ones we had seen further south in Namibia at Sossusvlei. This was one reason I had looked forward to the GGAS trip: we were going to see diverse (and different colored) ecosystems in Namibia, starting at the blue Atlantic Coast, moving inland to the red dunes, continuing on to the brown rocky interior mountains, next to the vast arid yellow expanses of Etosha National Park, and finally to the green Okavango riparian system.

This current venture to the dunes was to look for the REAL Dune Lark. A few days earlier near Sossusvlei, our guide Markus had pointed out a Dune Lark. Bob snapped an excellent photo of the bird, but later, having a good look at it, he wasn't happy. In his words, our bird "lacked the rich warm tones" of the bird depicted in the field guide. Since the Dune Lark is Namibia's only endemic bird, it was important to get it right. (It turned out the bird he photographed earlier wasn't even a lark—when Dom saw the picture, he was emphatic: "Chat Flycatcher.")

After an hour's drive, dunes loomed in the distance. Though not as tall as the ones at Sossusvlei, they were big suckers. Dom quickly assured us we wouldn't have to climb them. We parked and headed out into the desert scrub. After about ten minutes of walking, Dom saw larks moving up ahead of us. These larks mostly scurried about on the ground but occasionally would undertake short flights. Dune Lark. We were more than close enough to see their rich warm tones. Beautiful. (Unlike those drab Chat-flycatchers!)



The wannabe Dune Lark (in reality, Chat-flycatcher) The real thing—Dune Lark, Namibia's only endemic

Photos by Bob Lewis

On the next morning we were back in Walvis Bay, setting out on a boat trip. Our targets here were actually mammals: Cape Fur Seals and the Heaviside’s Dolphin, a cetacean restricted to Africa’s southwest coast. The seals showed up even before we left the harbor. There’s a small community of them that were orphaned when young, rescued, and now make their home at the dock. One of them hopped up onto to the boat (not a small feat for a creature weighing up to 650 pounds!) where he was promptly given a fish for his trouble, then encouraged to hop back off as we pushed off. It seems like the orphans make a good living from the Walvis Bay tour boats.

We were only minutes away from the wharf when a Great White Pelican showed up and landed on the railing at the front end of the boat. (These pelicans are aptly named—they are certainly white, but more impressive is the “great” part—they are a little bit larger than our own American White Pelicans. But I don’t usually see our own pelicans this close.) The bird, too, had come for a fish—and he was rewarded with several.



Great White Pelican

Pelican Snack

Pelican Close-up (maybe too close?)

After going out on a pelagic trip to the Farallon Islands with Alvaro Jaramillo at the beginning of August, I found the birds on this boat ride a bit of a come-down. We did get looks at a Wilson’s Storm-Petrel flying away from us and four Cape Gannets on a flyover. But the area’s specialty bird, the Damara Tern, didn’t turn up (or tern up).



Wilson’s Storm-Petrel



Cape Gannet

Photos by Bob Lewis

But, boy, do they have a lot of Atlantic Fur Seals in Namibia—the boat guides like to tell you that there are more seals in Namibia than people (Namibia’s population is 2.5 million). We saw

thousands of fur seals, probably even tens of thousands, and at one point it seemed like you could smell all 2.5+ million of them. But the celebrity cetacean, the Heaviside's Dolphin, like the tern, was a no-show.



Fur Seal on boat



Fur Seals where they belong

The next morning we left the coast and headed inland, once again to the Namib Desert. After a couple of hours driving, we could see our first destination in the distance, Spitzkoppe. In Afrikaans the word means “pointed head.” Given its unflattering literal meaning, it’s no wonder that the tallest of these granite peaks that rise dramatically from the flat Namib desert has been nicknamed the “Matterhorn of Namibia.” The formation is dramatic, and we hoped to find some special birds in the area.



The Spitzkoppen Range—Can you pick out the Matterhorn of Namibia?

In particular, we were looking for the Herero Chat and the White-tailed Shrike, both birds with fairly restricted ranges. We quickly found several old friends at Spitzkoppe, including the Mountain Wheatear and the Southern Ant-eater Chat. The day proved to be a study in black and white since many of the birds we saw were either all black or pied.

Within minutes, Dom was excited. He had a pair of White-tailed Shrikes on the cliff face in front of us. Soon all of us were on the target bird. Next up were the chats. Bob, Hanno, and I had seen the Southern Ant-eater Chat earlier on the trip at Bushmanskloof, but it was new for the others. And then Dom spotted the Herero Chat (brown and white rather than black and white); this bird is a near-endemic in Namibia, occurring also in only a very small range in Angola.



White-tailed Shrike
Photo by Bob Lewis



Mountain Wheatear
Photo by Bob Lewis

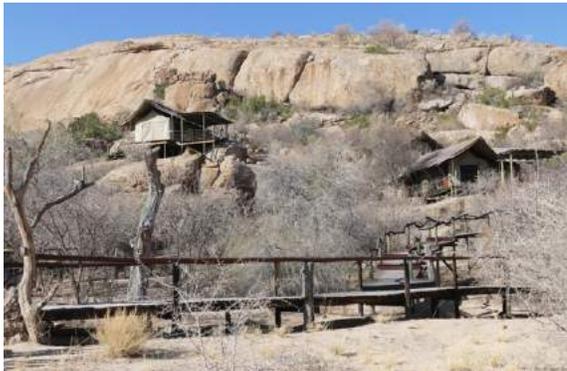


Common Scimitarbill
Photo by Bob Lewis



Black-chested Snake-Eagle
Photo by Peter Hawrylyshyn

That night and the next we stayed at Erongo Bird Lodge. Located in the Erongo Mountains, it's a beautifully situated camp amidst huge boulders. It doesn't have large numbers of species, but it's got some good ones, chief amongst them being the Rockrunner. Since Dom has taken me to see a *Rockjumper* in Cape Town, I was eager to get the *Rockrunner*, and we quickly picked up this bird the next morning. It was very cooperative, and Bob and Peter had a contest to see who could get the best photo. (This competition was so intense that I couldn't choose between them, so you get to look at *my* picture of the *Rockrunner* below. Sorry!)



The Camp at Erongo



Rockrunner

In the afternoon we went looking for Rüppell's Parrot, a bird I'd been hoping to see since my first trip to Africa. We took along Deon, the lodge's birding guide. He warned us that he hadn't seen it in three months. Tough bird to get, even for the guides. We stopped at a series of dry streambeds, known haunts of the parrot. At the first one both Dom and Deon heard the parrot and Dom thought he saw it flying away from us, disappearing from sight at high speed. We consoled ourselves with a Violet Wood-hoopoe (nice name, huh?) another longstanding target of mine. (We had seen a flock of them in the morning, but they were distant and, like the parrot, flying away at high speed—that seemed to be a refrain that was coming to characterize the day.)

At the last streambed we visited we saw flocks of two lovely waxbills—Black-faced and Violet-eared (this latter was one of the exotics that I saw in Southern California back in July—nice to see it on its home turf!) As we turned to head back to the vehicle, I saw a bird in a distant tree, quietly feeding on flowers. It seemed about the size of a dove. I asked Deon about it and he got very excited. Rüppell's Parrot! We were able to walk closer and great wonderful looks at what

proved to be a very plain-looking parrot; it was uniformly dull olive green, almost brown, with a neck that was slightly lighter-colored (not nearly as colorful as the Rosy-faced Lovebirds that flocked around the lodge.) When it flew off, however, I got a flash of yellow under its wings. And all of us were flashing big smiles as we clambered back into the vehicle.



Violet-eared Waxbill

Photo by Bob Lewis



Rüppell's Parrot



Rosy-faced Lovebird

On our last morning at Erongo, we hunted the elusive Hartlaub's Spurfowl. It had given us the slip twice the day before, so we took along Deon for good measure. One of its favorite hangouts was the big parking lot at the bottom of the lodge, so we headed there first. Plenty of Red-billed Spurfowl (we were practically tripping over these!) but no luck with the Hartlaub's. We kept going until we came to a long, sloping rockface, and this time when Dom played the call, there was lots of response (I wish I could do sound in this newsletter—but if you want to hear what it sounds like, go to the Xeno Canto website (www.xeno-canto.org), and type in "Hartlaub's Spurfowl"—hopefully you'll be able to play the one when a duo is calling back and forth—and if you can't be bothered, here's Newman describing this vocal tour-de-force: "Pairs call in a squeaky duet at sunrise and sunset 'eeha-weeha, eeha-ideo, eeha-weeha, eeha-ideo....'" Try it at home with a loved one or friend.) After performing the ritual greeting (not sure whether they were greeting the dawn or one another), the birds began to show themselves. I stopped counting at six.



The (common) Red-billed Spurfowl



The (not-so-common) Hartlaub's Spurfowl

Photo by Bob Lewis

I've been to Etosha National Park three times now—it's the largest park in Namibia, almost to the Angolan border, centered around a huge dry salt pan. The wildlife in the park tends to be concentrated around waterholes, most of which are fed by boreholes since the area is so arid. Because there are lots of large animals roaming free throughout the park, visitors aren't allowed

outside of their car except in the camps. When you aren't in the camps viewing the wildlife that congregates at the camps' waterholes, you are driving on dirt roads, between waterholes, looking for wildlife action. Our first morning drive was one of the best I've had there. Early in the drive two young lions sauntered across the road in front of us. We all looked at each other as if to say, "Did we *really* just see that?" (It was a good reminder of why visitors aren't supposed to get out of their vehicles!) At the Nebrowni waterhole we had the usual action—an elephant in the center of things, and spreading out from him were Plains Zebras (close to 80 of them), dozens of Springbok, some Gemsbok (also known as Oryx), and a few Kudu in the background. A Spotted Hyena wandered through the action.



Lions crossing the road in Etosha



Plains Zebras



Spotted Hyena

Elsewhere on the drive we had had two groups of Black Rhino (a threesome and a fivesome), an extremely endangered species (Etosha is one of its strongholds still). We had also had a White Rhino resting under a tree and a half dozen or so giraffes, three Yellow Mongooses (Mongese? —stop me if you've heard my joke about this...), a couple of Black-backed Jackals. And best of all, when we were leaving the Gemsbokylakte waterhole, I spotted a recognizable shape in the distance, and I hollered for Dom to stop the vehicle. On approach was a Honey Badger, my personal favorite. He came closer and closer, eventually crossing the road in front of us, then disappearing off towards the waterhole. Amazing who you meet out here.



The waterhole: Elephant with zebra, springbok, oryx, & ostriches



Honey Badger

I've just finished two paragraphs and didn't manage to work in a single bird, so now for the morning birds. We began where we left off the previous afternoon, searching for different species of larks. Sabota, Stark's, Red-capped, Pink-billed, and Spike-heeled (I assure you, I am NOT making up these names). At first glance, these birds can look a lot alike, but Dom had something to say about all of them, making each one memorable (my favorite piece of

information concerned the Stark's Lark, which Dom described as "squinty-eyed," and, looking closely, you saw just what he meant.) Larks are tough, though, and when you look at the photos below, you'll be glad I didn't do "Name that Lark." (Use the Zoom function to enlarge this page to 200% so you can check these birds out in more detail!)



The Larks: Stark's, Pink-Billed, Red-capped, Spike-heeled, and Sabota

All photos by Bob Lewis

After the larks, Dom found several Kalahari Scrub Robins and a pair of Cape Penduline Tits (I'm not making this up, either), which are the smallest birds in southern Africa at about three inches in length and a quarter of an ounce in weight. At one of the waterholes was a large mixed flock of birds, the most numerous being Red-headed Finches (a trip bird!) There were also Scaly Weavers and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Weavers (another trip bird). Driving back to the camp, Dom slammed on the brakes and put it into reverse—he had just seen a Rufous-eared Warbler—which he quickly located for us. A life bird for all of us.

Next up were three Pale Chanting Goshawks, each sitting in its own small tree not far from one another. Then Peter noticed a Scrub Hare (which I should have mentioned in the earlier paragraph about the mammals) on the ground between them. It quickly became apparent that the goshawks were hunting the hare. One swooped in and that set the hare off, doing some broken-field running like a candidate for the Heisman trophy. But each time it came out into the open, a goshawk was right overhead, diving in until the hare shook it off, diving under another bush. At last sight it was still dodging the goshawks, but we knew that they would wear the hare down and it would become late-morning brunch.

The final highlight of the morning occurred when we got back to camp. We had picked up some lunch supplies at the small shop at the Okaukeujo camp and we went to the camp's waterhole for a picnic. As we started eating, Dom heard a Long-billed Crombec in a tree nearby. He knew it was a bird I hadn't yet seen in Namibia, and so we went to have a look. As we were standing under a tree, looking up at the next tree over, something landed right above our heads. Dom went crazy. Pygmy Falcon!! We had looked for one the night before (they like to make their homes by borrowing an apartment in the huge Sociable Weaver nests—there can be hundreds of weavers in a single nest. A few days earlier we had seen a large acacia tree that had fallen over under the sheer weight of the nest that took up over half the tree's crown.) The bird must have realized that there were two startled humans standing directly beneath it since it quickly flew off to a limb nearby. We ended up getting great looks at this diminutive raptor. And this all happened before lunch.



(Small) Sociable Weaver Nest in Acacia Tree



Pygmy Falcon
Photo by Bob Lewis

On the next day, a theme that had commenced the day before—“a-hunting we will go”—with those goshawks continued. We watched a pair of Red-necked Falcons sitting on a solitary acacia tree, occasionally leaving the tree to hawk at high-flying birds. They were soon joined by a Helmeted Guineafowl that came flying in low, then pulled up abruptly, landing near the top of the tree almost next to one of the falcons. A bit strange, we thought. Soon the lone guinea fowl was followed by a second. Then a third, then a fourth. The cause of this odd situation became apparent as a Black-backed Jackal made its way through the dusty shrubbery. Soon there were about a dozen guinea fowl sitting nervously in the tree, obviously made more nervous by the jackal than by the falcon pair.



Red-necked Falcon



Unlikely treemates: falcon & guinea fowl



The rest of the gang

Next we encountered a Gabar Goshawk hunting a Rufous-cheeked Warbler (Dom joked about the timing—if we hadn't seen the warbler the previous day, he would want us on the bird before the goshawk.) The Gabar Goshawk is a small raptor, roughly the size of our Sharp-shinned Hawk. I had noticed the goshawk right outside my window when we had stopped to look at something in the distance. We watched for about ten minutes as the Gabar worked to flush the warbler from the dense bush where it hid. The goshawk finally succeeded, and it had the bird within seconds. As we pulled away, it was casually tearing the wings off the warbler.



Gabar Goshawk hunting

Not to be outdone by the birds, we next watched a Honey Badger hunting while a Pale Chanting Goshawk sat on an acacia bush nearby—Dom had told us that these birds are very opportunistic, and in this case the goshawk was hoping to make a grab for anything the badger might stir up. All of this nature watching made us hungry and we soon headed back to the lodge for lunch.

We moved to a lodge just outside the park and already the birds were changing. The gardens were very green and the lush vegetation was attracting different species. Perhaps most exciting was a new parrot species—Meyer’s Parrot—which proved to be much easier to see than the Rüppell’s was. Additionally, there was a Bearded Woodpecker, a Black-backed Puffback, a Yellow-breasted Apalis, and a Black-faced Babbler. Wonderful to see so many new faces.

The next morning was windy, cooler, and much quieter than the previous day as we headed back into Etosha. Aside from a pair of Spotted Hyena tearing apart a zebra while two dozen vultures and a pack of jackals looked on, we didn’t see much. This can happen in a large park like Etosha. The afternoon was much the same—we did see sixteen Blue Cranes at the park’s extreme north-east end. Dom reckoned that represented about one third of the total Blue Crane population in Namibia (if not for this isolated population in Etosha, the species would be a South African endemic.) On The Drive North, Bob, Hanno, Susan and I had seen some cranes here and there, sometimes fairly close, but mostly while driving by at 100 KM per hour. So it was lovely to see these beautiful birds when we were both close and stationary.



Jackal, Hyena, & Vultures at Zebra carcass



Blue Cranes on the move

We finally said goodbye to Etosha and set off on our longest drive of the trip, nearly 400 miles, leaving the flat, arid plains of the desert, traveling through increasingly wooded hills, and arriving on the other side of them at the Caprivi Strip, a piece of Namibia that, although only twenty miles wide, extends for 280 miles east and is dominated by a lush riparian landscape.

Time seemed to accelerate when we got to the river, and the numbers of birds we were seeing definitely did so. We visited Mahango National Park before crossing the border into Botswana. At Mahango, not only did we see a new suite of birds— Yellow-billed Stork, African Jacana, Goliath Heron, African Spoonbill, and Retz’s Helmetshrike—but also new mammals—Roan, Cape Buffalo, Red Lechwe, and Common Tsessebe (that last one is a tongue-twister—say it fast, five times.)



Yellow-billed Stork



Retz’s Helmetshrike

Photo by Bob Lewis



Common Tsessebe

After nine days we entered into Botswana and came to Drotsky’s, a camp on the river that’s been famous with birders for decades. In fact, on their only previous trip to Botswana years ago, Bob and Hanno had stayed here. Hanno remembers it as camping in the dirt and she shared with me a picture of herself looking rather miserable. This time around, though, the “camping” was decidedly more upscale—we stayed in large comfortable rooms, overlooking the broad lawn in the foreground with the river in the distance.

Our last full day in Botswana was spent on the Okavango river, looking for Pel’s Fishing Owl. This is a much sought-after species by birders who visit the area. It’s big, a little bigger than a Great Horned Owl, with large black eyes. As its name suggests, it hunts at night from branches that overhang water. I had seen this bird on my first trip to Africa—a horse safari twenty years ago—when I first began keeping records of birds I’d seen. I didn’t realize then what a special bird it was; I just wrote it down along with everything else I was seeing for the first time.

We set off upriver and right away asked our driver Otto to stop the boat—Malachite Kingfisher dead ahead (well, not literally dead but very close by and very still.) Peter and Bob began their duet with the cameras while the rest of us “oohed” and “aahed.” Next we came to a flock of African Skimmers on a sand island. Bob got excited—these comical-looking birds were one of his target species. We also had wonderful looks at African Fish Eagles that lined the river banks every few of miles. The other bird that caused a sensation was a Pygmy Goose—it was the only one we saw on the trip. It’s not a particularly rare bird, but the morning light and its own beautiful plumage made this one special.



Malachite Kingfisher
Photo by Peter Hawrylyshyn

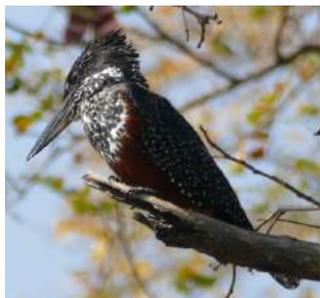


African Skimmer



African Pygmy Goose
Photo by Bob Lewis

Otto made two long stops along the riverbank where he disappeared in the trees, searching for the Pel’s. No luck. But the luck with non-owls continued on the river—we went from that small jewel of a kingfisher, the Malachite, to the largest of the kingfishers, the Giant. We had a great look at one of my favorite African birds, the Hamerkop (the name means “hammer head”; unfortunately, the photo below doesn’t really show off that magnificent aspect.) We also saw a few oxpeckers—birds that fasten themselves to various sorts of mammals and eat the ticks off them. There are two species, Yellow-billed and Red-billed, and we ended up seeing both. We also saw lots of bee-eaters on the river (but more of them a little later in this piece, so hold on.)



Giant Kingfisher



Hamerkop



Yellow-billed Oxpecker



African Fish Eagle

And there were also some pretty good non-birds on the river, including some megafauna—hippos and elephants—and some large reptiles—the Nile Crocodiles (including one that was eating a dead cow in the river.)



Hippopotamus



Elephants



Nile Crocodile

In the afternoon the search for the Pel's continued—but his time we got out of the boat ourselves and helped Otto look. No Pel's. But we did get new bird species, the Ashy Flycatcher and the Brown-Throated Weaver. Then a final try for the Pel's. No owl. This time, however, we got a Spotted-necked Otter. Dom and I were over the moon. Neither of us had ever seen one of these, and we would gladly trade it for the owl. The others, however, looked at us with puzzlement. On the boat ride back to Drotsky's we enjoyed one last beautiful African sunset over the river. And Pel's will remain a cherished memory from a trip many years ago.

One of the things I enjoyed the most about this birding trip was the chance we got to focus on certain family groups of birds. For instance, Bob and I agreed that we did very well with the larks; our list for the trip included Cape Clapper, Dune, Gray's, Fawn-colored, Karoo, Karoo Long-billed, Large-billed, Pink-billed, Red-capped and Sabota, as well as the Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark and the Gray-backed Sparrow Lark (see those earlier photos!) With Peter on board it was inevitable that we would chase sunbirds since Peter was originally drawn to bird photography through our own jeweled wonders, hummingbirds. We did very well with these, too: Amethyst, Collared, Dusky, Malachite, Mariqua, Orange-breasted, Scarlet-chested, Southern Double-collared, White-breasted (and a similar species, the Cape Sugarbird.)



A Selection of Sunbirds: Orange-breasted, White-bellied, Dusky, Southern Double-collared & Marico

Photos by Peter Hawrylyshyn except Marico by Bob Lewis

No trip to southern Africa is complete without an assortment of hornbills, and this year I not only saw the usual suspects—the Southern Yellow-billed (AKA “the flying banana”), the Southern Red-billed, and the African Gray—but I got two of the rarer ones that I'd seen on a previous trip, the Damara and Monteiro's, and I added a new life bird, the Bradfield's.

Name that Hornbill—Clues are in the sentence above!



A

B

C



D



E



F

And while I'm on families of birds, I should mention one last one. Although I had been to Namibia a year ago, part of what made me want to go back was a photo that was on Chris Lotz's Birding Ecotours brochure for this trip—the Southern Carmine Bee-eater. I'm familiar with bee-eaters from my travels in Australia, Asia, and southern Africa but I hadn't seen this one previously. These birds vie for one another for the title of "Most Beautiful Bee-eater." Perhaps even "Most Beautiful Bird, Period." Decide for yourself. Here's the ones I saw this trip.



The Bee-eaters: Southern Carmine, Swallow-tailed, White-fronted, and Little
 Southern Carmine and Swallow-tailed by Bob Lewis; White-fronted and Little by Peter Hawrylyshyn

When I finally got home, I took about a week off from birding. Mid-month I went down to Coyote Hills, looking for a couple of birds—one that had eluded me all year, the Ring-necked Pheasant, and one that I'd been looking for since spring, the Willow Flycatcher (see the July newsletter for the Willow that got away, thanks to an overzealous eBird reviewer.) These birds remained elusive. No luck with either. But I did see lots of local birds—and one that was something of a rarity in California, a Blackpoll Warbler. I'd seen this bird in two other places this year—in April with Eddie Bartley and Noreen Weeden on their GGAS South Texas bird tour and in June when Susan and I drove up the Mount Washington Toll Road. But seeing it near home was significant for me—way back at the beginning of the year when I told Eddie of my plan to see a thousand species in a year, he told me, “To get your total, you're gonna need to get 300 species here in California.” The Blackpoll Warbler was my 300th year-bird in California. Thanks for the push, Eddie.

I did some more local birding around the Bay Area, mostly chasing migrating warblers and that missing Willow Flycatcher, but without much luck. I had another pelagic trip scheduled with Alvaro Jaramillo towards the end of the month, and a foggy cool morning found me boarding the boat for a trip on Monterey Bay. Unlike my August trip with Alvaro, however, this one remained cool throughout. Though I didn't see as many new birds as I did on the previous pelagic trip, this one did yield some good ones, including two kinds of jaegers—the Pomarine and the Parasitic, a Buller's Shearwater (a year bird), and a Scripp's Murrelet (a life bird).

Finally, I should mention that I picked up two more species this summer by doing nothing. Yes, that's right—I didn't actually see two new species (I was probably on my sofa at the time), but rather these were birds that I'd seen in the past, species that got split into two or more new species. This happens every summer as part of the process known as “splitting and lumping.” Each year various national and international avian organizations update their databases and make determinations about what's in and what's out for next year.

Basically what this means is that a group of avian scientists examined the new data for the past year regarding speciation and decided that some previous species that were thought to be distinct were actually the same despite certain differences between individual birds; this is “lumping,” and when this occurs you can actually have species deducted from that life list you've been building. Luckily, I was not bitten by lumping. Instead, I profited from splitting—when it's decided that those two (or more) sets of birds that were identified as a single species despite some apparent differences are, in fact, different enough so as to be distinct species.

This happened with a species I've seen in Australia—the Rainbow Lorikeet. This bird was actually split into six different species—two are found in Australia and the other four are found from the Solomon Islands to New Guinea, and throughout Indonesia. I've seen Rainbow Lorikeets all over Australia. The ones that I've seen across the southern swath of the country and in Tasmania retain the name Rainbow Lorikeet. But all those birds I've seen in Kakadu National Park and over on the Queensland coast are now called Red-Collared Lorikeets. You might remember these birds from the photo below that's on my big year webpage. Nice to get that extra tick!



Red-Collared (formerly Rainbow) Lorikeets

The second species apparently took a lot of DNA analysis to sort out. It's the Japanese White-eye. White-eyes are common species worldwide. I've seen them in Australia, Southern Africa, India, and the U.S. (and included a picture of the Cape White-eye in last month's newsletter.) The irony here is that I've never been to Japan so I've never seen this bird in the eastern hemisphere where it's from. But it's a species (like the House Sparrow and the European Starling during an earlier age) that got transported a lot.

I first saw this bird some years ago in Hawai'i where it's been common for some time (I've seen it many times since then). Here's what eBird has to say about it: "**Hawaii** – These white-eyes are thought to be *Z. j. japonicus*, so the name for Hawaii changes from Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicus* to **Warbling White-eye *Zosterops japonicus***."

I picked up the Japanese White-eye in Orange County this year on the 4th of July. The Orange County bird is a more recent arrival:

Southern California (2006 to present) – White-eyes released in Costa Mesa, Orange County, California have spread rapidly and occur to Ventura and San Diego Counties now and may continue to spread. Based on one specimen so far, we believe these refer to *Zosterops simplex simplex*, and thus change from Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicus* to **Swinhoe's White-eye *Zosterops simplex*** with this update. These are expanding rapidly and we will be surprised if they are not soon added to the official California and United States list as a fully established exotic.

Below is a picture of a Japanese White-eye taken by my pal Ian several years ago in Hawai'i. It looks exactly the same as the bird I saw in Orange County this year. Ain't science great?



Warbling White-eye (formerly Japanese White-eye)

Photo by Ian Morris

Because of the GGAS trip to Namibia and Botswana, September was one of my best months yet. This was partly because it was such a great trip with such wonderful people—Bob and Hanno, our wonderful guide Dom, and my new photographer pal Peter, as well as expedition members Dave and Cynthia. Over the course of the trip, I ended up seeing 351 species in southern Africa (my goal had been to see 300 species); of these 52 were life birds. That puts my total for the year at 825. Suddenly that target of 1,000 birds in a year isn't seeming so crazy. And next month is Madagascar. The bad news is that for an island its size (roughly the same as Texas), it has relatively few species of birds—according to eBird, 256 species (by contrast, eBird lists 669 species for Texas). The good news? 80% of them are endemics so they'll all be new birds for me.

Bird of the Month. The Crimson-breasted Gonolek is a stunner—and a mouthful. I remember seeing it for the first time in Etosha on my first visit there in 2013. When I first met the bird then it was still called the Crimson-breasted Shrike. Its new name is supposed to represent the sound it makes, “gonolek.” (Can a bird really say “Gonolek”?) It was formerly the national bird of Namibia (that honor now belongs to the African Fish Eagle, pictured earlier in this newsletter.) Its colors—black and white and red all over—are those of the imperial German flag, one of the reasons that the bird was formerly the national bird (Namibia was a German colony until the end of World War I.) I can't believe it's lost its title of National Bird to the Fish Eagle.



Crimson-breasted Gonolek

Photos by Bob Lewis

I only had one new donor step up this month—but what a donor! Linda Carloni, whom I work with on the GGAS Board of Directors, came through big time. Thanks so much for your generosity, Linda. I'd also like to remind anyone who hasn't done so and might be reading this that now would be a great time to make a donation in support of the wonderful work of this organization—my website is <https://goldengateaudubon.z2systems.com/np/clients/goldengateaudubon/campaign.jsp?campaign=449&&test=true>.

Answers to "Name that Hornbill!": A) Montiero's B) Damara C) Southern Yellow-billed D) Gray Hornbill E) Bradfield's F) Southern Red-billed