

THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

&



**NAMIBIA AND BOTSWANA: BIRDS AND
MAMMALS FROM THE DESERT TO THE
OKAVANGO DELTA**

12-24 August 2021



We hope to see Pel's Fishing Owl in Botswana

This is a 13-day birding and wildlife adventure during which we sample a great variety of habitats. We start in Maun, Botswana, the gateway to the Okavango Delta where papyrus and riparian forest line the riverbanks and islands. We spend two nights on the Panhandle of this huge inland delta before heading westwards to one of the world's greatest game parks, Etosha National Park. After four nights around this park, we then continue westwards first to the rugged Namib Escarpment, and finally to the coastal desert around the huge Walvis Bay lagoon. The habitats encountered during this tour are extremely varied, from the wooded banks of the big Okavango River right through to the Namib Desert, and everything else in between.

We start the trip with a couple of nights on the banks of Botswana's Okavango River, just at the part where this large river starts widening out to form a humongous inland delta that never reaches the sea, instead fanning out and eventually sinking into the deep sands of the Kalahari. This is one of the world's greatest wildlife havens, and we look for **Hippo**, **Nile Crocodile**, **Sable** and **Roan Antelopes** and a good number of birds that are more easily found in Botswana than elsewhere – these include the likes of **Pel's Fishing Owl**, **Slaty Egret**, **African Skimmer** and others – plus stacks of brightly-colored bee-eaters and kingfishers.

We then head for Etosha National Park, where we spend four nights. Here, we'll look for all kinds of special birds such as **Secretarybird** and the world's heaviest flying bird, **Kori Bustard**. We'll also make it an important goal to find African megafauna. We hope to find **Lion**, **Leopard**, **Cheetah**, **Black Rhino** (this is arguably the best place on earth to find this animal) **African Elephant**, **Honey Badger**, **Burchell's Zebra** and all the other big (and small!) mammals.

We then spend a couple of nights looking for localized birds of the scenic Namib Escarpment (many of them restricted to northern Namibia and southern Angola). We'll look for the charismatic **White-tailed Shrike**, **Rockrunner** with its beautiful call and looks, **Damara Red-billed Hornbill**, **Monteiro's Hornbill**, **Rosy-faced Lovebird**, and **Ruppell's Korhaan**.

Ending the trip in Walvis Bay is always productive. Here, tens of thousands of **Greater** and **Lesser Flamingos**, good numbers of the tiny, attractive **Chestnut-banded Plover** and the diminutive **Damara Tern** inhabit the huge Walvis Bay Lagoon and environs. We'll also do a morning boat trip in search of **Cape Fur Seal**, the range-restricted **Heaviside's Dolphin** and other marine mammals.

Itinerary (13 days, 12 nights)

Days 1-2, August 12-13, 2021. Flight arrives in Maun, Botswana and transfer to the Panhandle of the Okavango Delta for two nights

We arrive at Maun airport (everyone needs to arrive by 2 pm at the latest) before we embark on a 4-hour drive to the Okavango Panhandle. We spend two nights at a lodge set in a beautiful patch of shady riverine forest, where the beautiful song of **White-browed Robin-chat** and the liquid call of **Swamp Boubou** enhance the idyllic atmosphere. One has to be careful of foraging **Hippos** if walking around the gardens at night – during the day they are usually safely resting in the adjacent Okavango River. We have a full day in this beautiful spot to look for special birds, largely from the comfort of a boat, but also at times when walking around islands and other places we

stop. **Pel's Fishing Owl, Slaty Egret, White-backed Night Heron, African Pygmy Goose,** brightly-colored kingfishers and bee-eaters, **Brown Firefinch, Red-billed Firefinch** and a great variety of other desirables, will be on the birding menu.

Overnight: Drotsky's Cabins near Shakawe, northern Botswana.



Southern Carmine Bee-eater (photo by Andre Stapelberg) breeds on the Okavango River

Days 3-4, Aug 14-15. Into Namibia: the Caprivi Strip

Today, we cross the border and enter a finger-like piece of land called the Caprivi Strip, a part of Namibia that is wedged between Angola, Zambia and Botswana. This area is a world away from the Namib Desert that we'll explore later in the trip, and the woodlands here in the Caprivi are good for some tricky to find species such as **Tinkling Cisticola, Rufous-bellied Tit, Sharp-tailed Starling, Souza's Shrike** and a plethora of other good birds. We stay right next to the tiny but amazing Mahango Game Reserve, one of the most bird-rich sites in Namibia, which is also full of mammals, some of them absent from or difficult to find in Etosha – such as **African Buffalo, Sable** and **Roan Antelopes**. And the park is full of **Elephants**. We'll be right next to the Kavango River, as the Okavango River is called in Namibia, but here it has not yet fanned out into a delta and is much narrower than when it enters Botswana downstream.

Overnight: Mahangu Safari Lodge, Namibia (our last night in Namibia)

Days 5-6, Aug 16-17. Etosha National Park (eastern parts)

After traveling through the Caprivi and beyond, we arrive at the eastern gate to Etosha National Park, one of the world's great game parks. This is a fabulous place for birds as well as being one of the best places on earth for big (and small) mammals. We start our Etosha explorations at a

lodge just outside the park's eastern entrance for two nights—one of the most reliable sites for the enigmatic **Black-faced Babbler**. During our time in Etosha, we'll also look for several sandgrouse species, **Common Ostrich**, **Blue Crane** (which would be a South African endemic except for this small isolated population here in northern Namibia).

Overnight: Mokuti Lodge right next to Etosha's eastern gate, Namibia



Let's hope that Cheetah (photo by Martin Benadie) shows well on this tour!

Days 7-8, Aug 18-19. Central Etosha National Park

We have two further full days in this incredible park. On Day 6, we drive across a large tract of African wilderness as we traverse this giant game park, looking for mammals and birds we're still missing. Between the two lodges, we usually stop for lunch at Halali Camp which is a great place for roosting owls and which sometimes hosts two localized birds, **Violet Wood-hoopoe** and **Bare-cheeked Babbler**.

The floodlit waterhole at our lodge for the next two nights can be so productive that some tour participants struggle to pull themselves away to sleep at night. **Black Rhino**, **Springbok**, **Burchell's Zebra** and sometimes **Lions** can put in an appearance here. We spend a lot of our daylight hours driving around looking for mammals and birds – because of the dangerous megafauna, it is illegal to alight from the vehicle except around the fenced-off lodges and designated picnic areas. We usually see stacks of raptors (from the largest African eagle, **Martial Eagle**, to the minute **African Pygmy Falcon**), owls (again, including the full size spectrum from

the truly giant **Verreaux's Eagle Owl** through to the absolutely tiny **African Scops Owl**), **Secretarybird**, bustards and korhaans, some localized lark species, and very noisy babblers.

Overnight: Okuekuejo, Etosha National Park, Namibia



Bare-cheeked Babbler (photo by Martin Benadie) – a localized bird that is full of personality

Days 9-10, Aug 20-21. The rugged mountains of the Namib Escarpment

We'll head to the Erongo Mountain Range where we'll spend two nights in search of the elusive **Herero Chat**, the Namibia near-endemic **Rosy-faced Lovebird** (this tiny parrotlet of the desert is locally common and loves to nest and roost high up on cliff faces), **Rockrunner** with its enchanting call, **Bradfield's Swift**, **Burchell's Courser** (nomadic and often tricky to pin down), **Double-banded Courser**, **Ruppell's Korhaan**, and **Ludwig's Bustard**. We'll spend a couple of hours at the impressive Spitzkoppe, or "Matterhorn of Namibia," a massive chunk of rock that rises straight out of the gravel desert not far from the Erongo Mountains.

Overnight: Erongo Wilderness Lodge, Namibia

Days 11-12, Aug 22-23. Walvis Bay and the German town of Swakopmund

We head to the Atlantic coast, where we have two nights to explore the fascinating coastal desert, including a morning boat trip on the Walvis Bay Lagoon. Apart from looking for marine mammals

and birds, we'll also search for the very range-restricted **Gray's Lark** and we'll also visit a fascinating site with red sand dunes and a dry riverbed for Namibia's only true endemic, **Dune Lark**. Here, we often find the almost pure white desert subspecies of **Tractrac Chat**, another localized species. Our accommodation is right next to the Walvis Bay Lagoon with all its **Flamingos** (usually more or less equal numbers of **Greater** and **Lesser**), **Great White Pelican** and shorebirds.

Overnight: Lagoon Loge, Walvis Bay, Namibia

Day 13, Aug 24

You can depart any time today. Most flights are late morning or early afternoon, so there should be time for the group to do some final "cleanup" birding and sightseeing before we take you to the airport and sadly say goodbye.

Please note that the itinerary above cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 13 days
Limit: The price is based on 7-8 participants.
Date: Aug 12-24, 2021
Tour start: Maun, Botswana
End: Walvis Bay, Namibia
Price R89,000 per person sharing, **assuming 7-8 participants. US\$300 per participant is donated to the Golden Gate Audubon Society.**
Single supplement: R11,000 (for those not wanting to share a room or for whom we can't find someone to share a room with)

Price includes:

Meals including tips at meal times
Accommodation
Park entrance fees
Boat ride on Walvis Bay Lagoon
Boat ride on the Okavango River
Guiding fees
All transport while in southern Africa

Price excludes:

Flights
Trip cancellation or interruption insurance, medical insurance, etc.
Drinks
Tips to driver-guide, cleaning staff, etc. – see <https://www.birdingecotours.com/tipping-guidelines/>
Laundry
Gifts
Other items of a personal nature

Accommodation: we use clean and comfortable but not overly luxurious places. Accommodations have en suite baths or showers and toilets. At times we use luxury safari tents with en suite showers/toilets.

GENERAL INFORMATION

This 13-day birding and wildlife adventure includes two countries, Namibia and Botswana. This trip mixes truly unforgettable birding with impressive and unbelievably diverse scenery and opportunities to see iconic African mammals. Please note that drives during this trip can be long, since we have to cover a lot of ground, and both Namibia/Botswana are quite large, sparsely-populated countries with very few places to stay in between the lodges we have chosen. We feel that it's worth the effort of these drives, so as to sample such a big diversity of different habitats.

The trip is considered easy from a fitness point of view because the walks we do are not very strenuous or more than a mile at a time.

Climate

August/September is late winter/early spring. Along the coast (for the first 2 days of the tour), fog is extremely common both day and night, and temperatures are sometimes only a little above freezing. With luck, it can get pleasantly warm during the day if the sun comes out. The boat trip on Walvis Bay Lagoon can be very cold, so please bring layers (several of which can be taken off if the sun comes out). For any boat trip, bring sunglasses and sunscreen since it can get bright if the sun puts in an appearance. As we travel inland, night-time temperatures get colder (often below freezing), but day-time temperatures get warmer – sometimes plain hot (even in winter). Temperatures are typical of desert regions – a huge difference between cold night-time and warm to hot (dry heat) daytime temperatures. In Africa, many accommodations are not heated, so be sure to bring warm clothes for early mornings, evenings and for sleeping in (although adequate blankets are usually provided). It's also important to bring warm weather clothes for daytime comfort. When we reach Etosha National Park, conditions can be similar to the desert – be prepared for temperatures that might be around freezing, heating up during the day. Botswana can be warm to hot and humid, although rarely uncomfortable at this time of the year. At night, it can get close to freezing, and being on the boat in the early mornings and late afternoons can be downright cold, so bring your layers.

This is the end of the dry season throughout the region we'll be visiting, so rain is very unlikely but a rain jacket can nevertheless act as a good windbreaker and can also help along the coast if it's very misty.

Potential hazards

1) Dangerous animals

We will be visiting areas inhabited by venomous snakes, although as usual we will be very lucky to see any. In winter and early spring when the tour runs, they're usually even less in evidence than in summer. But one has to be prepared, just in case, since Puffadders, Black Mambas and other truly dangerous species do occur here. Scorpions and spiders may also cause problems. We recommend hiking boots, jeans/long trousers, and a good dose of care to minimize the danger of snakebites. We do not take anti-venom on our tours, but will get you to a private hospital if you do get bitten (although we will often be in *extremely remote* places); your own travel insurance (especially medical insurance) is crucial. In game reserves where large predators freely lurk, for very good reason it is illegal to alight from one's vehicle except in rest camps and picnic areas.

2) Malaria and health

Please carefully read <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/namibia> and

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/botswana>

Malaria is only possible from Day 5 onwards, mainly Days 9-13.

3) Crime

Over the last 17 years, we have had one or two incidents of petty crime in Namibia (e.g. a van window broken to steal a wallet that was visible on the seat during a 3-hour boat trip). We haven't encountered anything major, but since we'll be travelling with expensive optics, please be careful. Do take good care of your valuables, always be vigilant and never leave valuable items visible in the van. Advice is in line with common sense – for example, also don't leave your room with valuables without locking the door. We trust that we'd never encounter any serious crime incident – but world-wide there is always a risk of something bad happening, so just be aware and listen to any specific advice your guide gives.

ELECTRICITY

Electricity is 220-240V. If you intend to recharge video batteries etc. in your hotel room you will need an international adapter (3 round prongs in a triangular pattern). Note: Please check all equipment that you plan on charging to see if it is 110/120 –220/240V compatible. If that is the case you only need an adaptor to plug the US plugs into. If your equipment is only listed as 110-120V then you will need a converter to convert the electric current to 220-240V. Generally, this is only an issue with hair dryers.

SOME THINGS WE RECOMMEND YOU BRING

**(GENERAL LIST FOR ALL TOURS – SPECIFIC DESTINATIONS MAY NEED FURTHER
RECOMMENDATIONS)**

Please note that space in the vehicle may be fairly limited, but we understand that birders do need lots of equipment! There will be opportunities for laundry.

- Binoculars (the guides cannot lend theirs)
- A spotting scope and tripod or window mount (optional)
- Field guides
- Any other birding equipment
- Photographic equipment
- Spare batteries for photographic and other gear
- Flashlight/torch/headlamp with spare batteries
- Toiletries
- Personal medication (including anti-malaria drugs). We recommend packing important medication (and a change of clothes) in your hand luggage in the unlikely event of lost luggage
- Some countries might require a valid Yellow Fever Certificate and we advise visiting a travel clinic or your family doctor and visiting the Center for Disease Control website, for health advice. Yellow Fever is not an issue in Namibia/Botswana
- Rain gear (rain is unlikely on this trip though)
- Alarm clock

- Passport and if required, visas – the latter should not be needed for US citizens visiting Namibia and Botswana but this needs to be checked from time to time since the situation changes periodically
- Copies of passport, medical insurance policies and other important documents that can be left with the Birding Ecotours office or at your home
- Money for drinks, gifts, tips, items of a personal nature, etc. Traveler’s checks are not recommended but Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted including for drawing local currency at ATMs
- Hiking boots plus another pair of shoes and sandals. Flip-flops/sandals are very good when we spend a lot of time in the van and during our stay in Etosha National Park
- Swimming gear – not usually needed on this tour, especially in winter
- Cap/hat & sunglasses
- Sunscreen and lip sun protection
- Mosquito repellent
- Long-sleeved clothes as a precaution against biting insects

EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

Our emergency contact numbers (all cell phones) are as follows (please note that the “+27” or “+26” should be substituted by a “0” if dialing from within South Africa):

Birding Ecotours office: Nadia: +27 72 211 9863

Fax: +27 21 592 7438

E-mail (which is checked almost daily): info@birdingecotours.com

BOOKS AND OTHER MEDIA

Birds

Please refer to our online resource for field guides and apps:

<http://birdingecotours.com/blog/?cat=recommended-bird-field-guides-for-the-7-continent>s

Mammals

Smithers’ Mammals of Southern Africa – a field guide. Edited by Peter Apps. 1996

Reptiles

Field Guide to Snakes and other Reptiles of Southern Africa by Bill Branch, Struik

Publishers. 1998 - Excellent

Butterflies

Field Guide to Butterflies of South Africa by Steve Woodhall, 440 page Paperback

Published (2005) – the best of those available

Sasol First Field Guide to Butterflies and Moths of Southern Africa by Simon von Noort ,56 page Paperback, published (1999)

Insects

Field guide to Insects of South Africa by Mike Picker, Charles Griffiths and Alan

Weaving, 2004, Struik publishers. This is an excellent insect book which Chris will have with him.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is imperative that you have proper medical cover while travelling (through your health insurance company and/or through a short-term travel insurance policy). Trip cancellation or interruption insurance is also vital – we find that it's not uncommon for people to cancel due to last minute illness or whatever. <https://www.allianztravelinsurance.com/> is a good place to start.

TRAVEL AGENT

Lori Heathcote can help you arrange air travel (and sometimes travel insurance) and if you book through her company (at a reasonable cost), she can also provide emergency assistance. If you want to use her services, call her on 1-800-224-5399 or direct at 717-855-2128 (or e-mail her at lori@trvltime.com). She is based in PA so is on Eastern Time.

Expectations and rules for group tours:

Thank you for joining a small group tour, and we trust you will have a truly wonderful experience.

If you are on a group tour with more than 2 or 3 participants, then kindly take heed of a few simple rules we follow to keep everyone in the group happy, and ultimately to maximize enjoyment of the tour for the group:

- 1) Once a day we swap seats in the vehicle. Those at the front one day go to the back the next day and then move forward each day until the process is repeated. Usually tour

members sort this out automatically, but the tour leader will help after the first couple of days if there are problems.

- 2) On narrow forest trails and even on broader trails, kindly swap your position every 10 minutes. If you are walking at the front, please drop to the back every 10 minutes, allowing the next person time near the tour leader. Both the local guide and the tour leader are often at the front, especially when communication between the two is necessary – one of these leaders may also sometimes be at the back of the group at times to help birders not near the leading guide at the time.
- 3) If you have any concerns or problems, please speak to the tour leader so we can solve the problem – that is our job but we do need to hear from you as soon as possible if you have any concerns. The longer you leave it, the more difficult it often becomes to solve.
- 4) Please be very quiet whenever birding. If you need to talk, please whisper and only to the person next to you. When we use playback, kindly keep absolutely quiet and focus on trying to see the bird approaching. We discourage talking on the trails, especially on forest trails, but whispering to the person next to you can be acceptable if done discreetly. The tour leader will sometimes say when it is even more necessary than usual to be quiet. The tour leader may also occasionally say if it is OK to talk freely. The guide may occasionally shout if he or she wants to get the group rapidly onto a bird that is already flying away – but this does not mean that it is OK to become noisy! ☺ The guide uses his/her discretion and aims to get everyone onto all the birds – but this usually means the group needs to stay very quiet whenever birding.
- 5) On forest trails, only the front two or three people usually hear what the tour leader or local guide is saying. We therefore ask that you whisper what is being seen or what the guide is saying, from the front to the back, so that the people at the back can be kept informed of what is being said and what the guide has found. It can get very frustrating for the people currently at the back, otherwise.
- 6) We emphasize communication. If anyone has missed a bird, it is critically important that this is communicated to the tour leader who then needs to make sure you get onto the bird at some stage. Also, the guide sometimes ignores birds that the whole group has seen well, so please say if you want to see something again. While we love studying each species, we often don't have the luxury of spending as much time with each species as we'd like. For those who want to spend extra time photographing or studying fewer species, we recommend a photography or special trip – in some cases a private trip.
- 7) Scope – we ask that all participants have a quick look in the scope. Once everyone in the group has had a quick look, further saturating views can then be obtained by those who feel like it. Don't spend long at the scope when others in the group have not seen the bird through it.

- 8) Please be aware at all times of where you are standing relative to other people. Taller people should generally allow shorter people to stand in front of them, or at very least to ensure they aren't in other people's way.
- 9) It is always good to wear neutral colors and to try and avoid fabrics that make a lot of noise when walking.
- 10) Opinion varies as to whether pointing chases the bird away – the guide will advise on this. Sometimes you might be advised not to point directly at a bird. Importantly, control your excitement and don't shout out when you see a bird – it happens all the time!
- 11) During any trip there will be activities that are optional and participants are welcome to sit out on these for various reasons—ill health, tiredness, difficulty of said activity etc. Please do not feel obliged to partake in every activity. These will often be highlighted in your itinerary. In some trips and on some days, there might not be opportunities to opt out though – please try and speak to us in advance if you plan to opt out.
- 12) When on a group tour remember that the guide make decisions in favor of the majority of the group; this might not always suit every individual but it is important to keep in mind that the group's needs take precedence over an individual's needs.
- 13) At certain stops there are invariably curios for sale. We won't always have time to shop and when we do please try to keep it brief unless otherwise indicated by the guide.
- 14) Safety always comes first, so if, for example, stopping along a freeway is deemed by the driver/guide unsafe, then we might in some cases have to forfeit stopping and seeing a bird.
- 15) We use playback with great care. If we are going to use playback (ideally only once we've failed to see the bird without this tool), please gather around and see the bird; to protect the bird's interest we usually only call it in once.
- 16) Group dynamics on a birding tour can sometimes be tough because of personality clashes. We recommend keeping spirits up and making the most of a trip and compromising as much as possible to maximize enjoyment for everyone on the trip.
- 17) Get excited about the birds – it keeps the guides motivated – just don't make it noisy, though, or you'll chase the birds away! 😊
- 18) For specific destinations, we like to warn people about what to expect. For example, some countries are strenuous (e.g. Madagascar and Cameroon), some have times when we are restricted to the vehicle (e.g. some parks in South Africa), some have substandard accommodation in parts, etc. We strongly advise you to ask as many questions as you can

before the tour, to avoid nasty surprises! ☺ We'd prefer you to be pleasantly surprised, rather than the other way around.

- 19) If you have never joined a birding tour, we highly recommend speaking to us in detail first to find out which trips we recommend you start with (e.g. South Africa which is a very easy destination), what to expect, etc.