











Best of Namibia

Destination: Namibia **Duration:** 10 Days **Dates:** 14th – 29th Oct 2016

-  Finding and watching 16 different Black Rhinos including a young baby in Etosha
-  Finding Caracal, Brown Hyenas, Cape Porcupines and Honey Badgers at night.
-  Over 120 species of birds, including endemic Tractract chats & Cape griffons
-  Great behaviour between Warthogs, Hyenas, Porcupines & Honey Badgers at once
-  Enjoying fantastic safaris in Etosha and cross country through the Namib Desert
-  Visiting the culturally important 6,000 year old rock art of Twyfelfontein
-  Experiencing the stunning dunes at Sossusvlei and Deadvlei and the Namib Desert
-  Seeing many Lions including them fighting over a kill and 3 Cheetah avoiding one
-  Over 40 species of mammals, including Brown Hyena, Black Rhino & Cheetah
-  Finding the endemic Namaqua Chameleon, Palmato Gecko and Horned Viper

Tour Leader / Guides

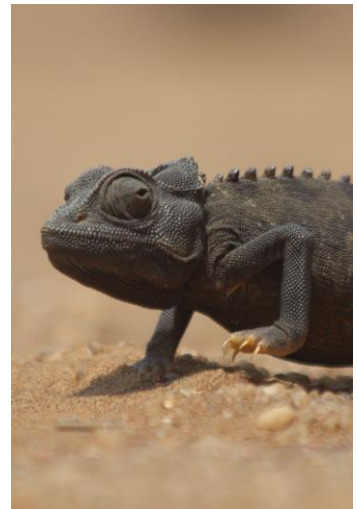
Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
 Elago (Namibian Tour Leader & Guide)
 Tommy & Andrew (Namib Desert Tour Guide / Driver)
 Rehnauldts (Twyfelfontein Guide)
 Moses (Etosha National Park Night Safari Guide / Driver)
 Peter & Martin (Okonjima Reserve Guide / Driver)

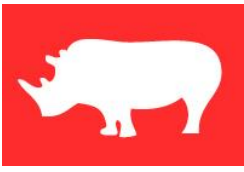
Participants

Dr. Robert Holmes
 Mrs. Angela Caroline Holmes

Overview

Day 1:	Sossusvlei
Days 2-3:	Swakopmund
Day 4:	Twyfelfontein
Days 5-8:	Etosha NP
Days 9:	Okonjima
Day 10:	Home





Day by Day Breakdown

Overview

Namibia's landscape is one of the oldest in the world, with deserts dating back over 180 million years and with some of the rocks now isolated in a sea of sand being home to some of Africa's oldest rock art. The country has been inhabited by people for thousands of years and by wildlife for much longer than that. Being the driest country in Sub-Saharan Africa, Namibia is mostly desert and semi-desert. With the deserts being as old as they are (the oldest in the world) they are also home to more life and also more endemic life than any other dry deserts in the world. But Namibia is much more than just sandy dry desert. Yes the sand has been sculpted into some of the highest and most spectacular sand dunes in the world, but it is the hidden gems in the desert that are really impressive and this tour aims to showcase the best of them in places such as Sesreim Canyon, Sossusvlei, Deadvlei, Twyfelfontein and the Moon-landscape.

It is not just the geological features that dot the backwaters of Namibia that this tour will focus on but also the wildlife hotspots, it is easy to think of Namibia with the hot, dry landscape as being desolate but things couldn't be further from the truth and this tour will take in locations such as the coastal Namib Desert, Cape Cross, Okonjima Conservancy and of course the jewel in the Namibian wildlife crown Etosha National Park.

This is a true exploration tour that aims to cover much of Namibia in 10 days whilst also doing justice to the variety of habitats and wildlife that dot the country.

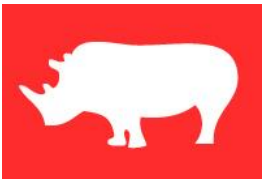
This tour would start and finish in the capital city of Windhoek, like the rest of the Namibia this sparsely populated city is gives the feeling of pioneer settlement more than bustling capital of a large and mineral rich country such as Namibia. Even though the city sprawls over hundreds of square miles the contrast to the thousands and hundreds of thousands of square miles of nothing once you leave the city is incredible. We would start by driving out to the barren desert dunes of Sossusvlei, here the red and ochre sands dominate the landscape and the dunes can reach unbelievable heights. From here we would continue west towards the coast and to the German colonial town of Swakopmund, from this base we would explore two very different ecosystems but both unique to Namibia, firstly the coastal sections of the Namib desert, this being the oldest desert in the world many of the animals here have evolved to the unique and harsh demands of living in the ancient Namib Desert and after the moon landscape that is largely devoid of life expect for only the hardiest species including the amazing *welwitschia* plant. After Swakopmund we would drive northwards along the famous Skeleton Coast and travel back to the culturally important rock art of Twyfelfontein via the booming seal colony at Cape Cross. From here it is east we will travel and into the dry and baking heat of the Etosha Pan.

Here Africa's and one of the world's largest national parks spreads out towards each horizon and huge populations of most of Africa's most famous wildlife inhabitants make their lives here. Vast herds of plains zebra, springbok, black-faced impala, blue wildebeest all seem to march endlessly from one horizon to the other in the bleak bleached landscape of the Etosha Pan. The waterholes offering respite for all wildlife great and small, you will never come across a water hole in Etosha day or night that is not occupied by some wildlife. Whether that is a lone kori bustard or a herd of elephants, the adults packed in now white dried on mud and the youngsters playing joyfully in the muddy water; you will be entertained by the wildlife at the waterholes. In fact it is at one of the most famous waterholes Okaukeujo that we will stay for a couple of nights. Here after dark a procession of endangered black rhinos makes its way from the darkness to drink, wallow and just socialise. We hoped to see this spectacle as well as many more in the huge expanses of Etosha National Park.

After leaving the teeming herds and swaths of predators in Etosha we would continue south towards Windhoek but stopping off at the Okonjima Conservancy, this large farm is now a busy game reserve that works closely with the AfriCat Foundation and has several collared cheetah and leopards in order to educate people (local and foreign) as to the plight facing big cats here and also allowing the local farmers to see that it is possible to live alongside the top predators here in a sustainable way.

All in all we believe that this tour gives the best and broadest view of Namibia's wildlife in the space of 10 days and by visiting so many different habitats and seeing the survival strategies of so many different species you will realise that Namibia is far from just desert, a land of rock and sand it may be, but the sand and rock is alive with wildlife, wildlife that is just waiting to be found by an intrepid wildlife enthusiast.





Day 1 **Sossuvlei**

Arrival, Travelling & Sightseeing

Rob & Caroline's flight arrived ahead of schedule and once Elago and Martin had met them at the airport we departed from the airport and travelled through the suburbs of Windhoek and out into the desert. Along the way towards Sossusvlei we saw some of the more common species of birds including chestnut weavers, African red-eyed bulbuls, Cape sparrows, helmeted guineafowl, feral pigeons, fork-tailed drongos as well as some of the more unusual roadside birds such as common ostrich, pallid harrier, ground-scraper thrush and Damara red-billed hornbill. We also spotted some mammal species as we drove towards the huge sand dunes of the Namib Desert like common warthogs, chacma baboons, springbok, oryx and a troop of banded mongoose that crossed the road not too far from Windhoek airport.

The geological formations in Namibia are wonderful and well worth the visit in their own rights and along the way Elago pointed out various old intrusive volcanoes that dotted the horizon. We stopped in the town of Retheboth for fuel and to get something to drink and Elago told us about the agriculture here and the fight that all vegetation has to get enough water. The acacia trees particularly having roots sometimes 30-40m deep to penetrate deep into the water-table and they have very small leaves to limit evaporation. Another adaptation of the acacia is to blossom very quickly and for a short amount of time after it rains. This is to reduce water loss in flowers and also make sure that it is timed with all of the acacias of the same species also making the most of the rainfall.

We had lunch in the isolated and tiny settlement of Solitaire before carrying on the short distance to the lodge and into the Namib-Nakaluft National Park. The lodge is located nearby some of the oldest sand dunes in the world and some of the first that formed in the Namib some 10-15 million years ago. They are so old in fact that they have become petrified (fossilised) into stone. Once at the lodge we checked in and rested, Caroline went for a short walk around and saw many of the resident oryx, white-browed sparrow-weavers and red-faced mousebirds that are abundant in and around the lodge. We then all met for dinner and our first night under the African stars.

Day 2 **Sossusvlei**

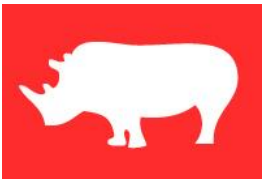
Sightseeing

This morning we left the camp before dawn and headed into sand dune territory, these dunes are truly enormous, some growing well over 100m tall and being several thousand years old. In fact there are many petrified sand dunes here and it is possible to see the sand stone mountains next to their 'younger' sandy dunes. We entered the park and started to drive through a valley of sand dunes until we arrived dune 7 which is regarded as the highest dune in the world being around 360-370m high and also offering great views out over the desert to watch the sunrise. We found a nice view point to watch the sun rise high over the desert, the morning's rays warming us and making all of the sand glow a wonderful red, a couple of hot air balloons slowly drifted on the morning breeze through the desert to add to the view. Carrying on from here we found a pair of Ruppel's korhans walking through the lonely landscape before we arrived at the very popular dune 45, located at the 45 kilometre marker this is not the reason it is named such. When the dunes were being mapped and the area being surveyed this was the 45th dune to be surveyed and when the highway was built it just so happened that this dune is located at the 45th kilometre marker. Opposite dune 45 is probably the most photographed dune in the world. The curved face of the dune making a wonderful picture when the sun is rising and half of the dune is blood red and the other half is still black in shadow. We had breakfast in the shadow of the dune and in the presence of a few pied crows. Obviously the intelligent pied crows know that after sunrise there are many tourists having their breakfast in the car park and where there are feeding people there is always food for bold birds. As well as the pied crows the small carpark here and camel-thorn acacia is home to a small number of familiar chats and also a rock kestrel.

After our breakfast we travelled further down the highway and into the Namib-Naukluft National Park, stopping regularly as the landscape is just about the most photogenic in the world, the numerous picture perfect dunes, the oranges, reds and brilliant blue sky all making for incredible compositions. Some dunes even came complete with a withered and twisted tree in the foreground that added something different to the picture and every now and again we came across the very desert adapted oryx (Namibia's national animal) walking in front of the dunes and giving an awesome sense of size, majesty and grandeur. After 15km of driving and stopping for photographs down the dune corridor we arrived at Deadvlei. On the 30 minute walk to the very appropriately named 'dead marsh' Elago caught a reticulated sand lizard, showing us the hard shovel shaped snout that allows the lizard to quickly disappear into the sand and avoid predators.

All of the animals here have special adaptations to the heat and none more so than the oryx. To get around the very dry temperatures here they have the ability to raise its internal body temperature to 45°C this would literally fry any other species of mammal, but it allows the oryx to survive longer in the hottest parts of the desert. But the most amazing adaptation that the oryx has to surviving in their inhospitable environment is that it can survive for a year by only drinking 4 litres of water if needs be. Its water conservation is incredible and their kidneys are able to tolerate far higher concentrations of uric acid and other toxins that accumulate when they are not diluted with water in urine. Both these adaptations and many others enable the oryx to be by far the most numerous and successful large mammal in the Namibian desert and we saw many today against the desert backdrop.

The walk to Deadvlei is over some smaller dunes and through harder quartz fields with larger pieces of limestone we arrived at the sandy bowl, surrounded by dark orange dunes the pale sand stands in stark contrast. But it is the twisted, gnarly and ancient looking trees that stand a dark brown / black against the yellow, orange and blue

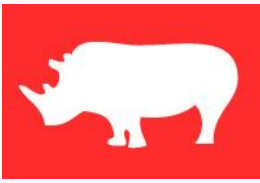


surroundings that make this scene a photographers dream. Deadvlei is not the only sight to behold in this area of the Namib as it stands in the shadow of the largest dune in Namibia and one of the largest dunes in the world the vast Big Daddy that towers to 350m above sea level, on the other side of Deadvlei stood Big Mamma which is small in comparison only rising to around 110m above sea level. On the walk to and from Deadvlei Elago pointed out some of the plants that make a living here, the most numerous and also one of the most important for all of the animals here is the Naga melon; this plant uses capillary action to draw up the slightest moisture from the ground or air and transports it to the roots. The largest tree here is the camel-thorn acacia which can have roots up to 45m deep, this is to tap in the water table and many of the underground rivers that run in this waterless landscape. These can often be very deep under the sand. Another abundant plant that Elago showed to us is the ostrich salad, as the name suggests the plant is loved by the ostriches but the special adaptation of this plant is for its dead looking leaves to open completely and absorb moisture when the slightest drop of water hits the plant. As well as the plants we also found a starkly patterned black and white tok tokkie beetle, this is one of some 200 species tok tokkie beetles that inhabit the Namib desert, all of which have unique ways to capture water and moisture from the air. More of which we would find out about later in the trip.

We then left the area and headed back to the camp as the sun was getting very high in the sky and the temperature was already around 30°C and we decided it is best to get on the road and start the long journey through the desert to the coast and the town of Swakopmund. On leaving the Deadvlei carpark we found fresh tracks of a brown hyena, the hyena had been around the trees in the carpark until people started to arrive as the tracks were over the top of many vehicles and were not there when we arrived. It was incredible to think that one of Africa's most elusive species was here in the middle of the morning and we had missed it. Before we left we visited Sesriem Canyon; this canyon was formed during a flash flood that run through this area several hundred years ago, there are some very small permanent puddles in the deepest recesses of the canyon and this presence of water was very important to the people who travelled this area first. These people were forced from their tribal lands by the German occupation in the 1800's and forced to walk to find new settlements, some of them made it all of the way to Angola and some started small communities along the way. The name of Sesriem Canyon means 6 ropes, this is because it needed 6 ropes (the ropes were made from the skin of an oryx) in order to make it down to the bottom of the canyon from the top. The ropes were used to draw water up from the stream at the bottom (after rainfall) to provide drink for the oxen that the people used to transport their goods and food with them through the desert. The canyon (technically a gorge as it was formed by water and not tectonic activity – which is the difference between a canyon and a gorge) is around 30m deep at its deepest and it is easy to see the two distinct layers of rock either side, firstly you can see the large boulder and rock strewn layer of sediment that was brought down with the initial force of the flash flood. The weight of the water at force being able to move heavy rocks and then above this the smaller and finer sediment that the relaxing water was still able to support and carry along.

As for wildlife around the canyon we found more tok-toki beetles. Apart from the very occasional rainfall and the even rarer event of heavy rainfall that causes flash floods and the ephemeral rivers to flow, the only moisture is what is carried into the desert in the form of blanket mists and fogs that occur when the very cold air of the Benguela current (travelling up the western coast of Southern Africa) meets the dry and hot air being produced from the desert inland. The condensation produces huge fogs that occur on around 200 days of the year and can be transported over 50km inland. So many of the animals (none better than the tok-toki beetles) have come up with ingenious ways of collecting this moisture. Some make crude webs and catch dew, some dig little trenches with the side facing the incoming winds from the ocean being higher and thus catching the dew. But the most famous technique and the one employed by the beetles we found in the canyon is to stand on their front legs and perform a handstand. The hairs on their back legs and the dimples on the otherwise smooth black abdomen collect droplets of water that are all funnelled down small channels to the beetles head where it can drink it.

We then left the Sossusvlei area and went for lunch in Solitaire, driving past various mysterious fairy circles and the occasion herd of mountain zebra, springbok and oryx in the otherwise empty desert landscape. Along the way we crossed the Tropic of Capricorn, stopped at a view point over the often dry Tscheub River, saw many mountain zebra. In Namibia this species is represented by the near endemic (there are some in southern Angola) Hartmann's zebra and differ from the smaller plains (or Burchell's) zebra by having narrower and more clearly marked black and white stripes and their stripes do not go down to the belly but instead leave the belly white. At the Tscheub River Elago showed us more of the countries array of geological wonders, this time the huge quantities of mica that is deposited all over this river course and canyon. As we approached the coast and the towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund the landscape opened out and the rocky scrub made way for sandy desert, the sand dunes (smaller than Sossusvlei) here are home to some of the world's most diverse desert ecosystems. We went through the industrial port town of Walvis Bay (this was a British territory right up to 1990, and was never part of German or later South African rule) to get to Swakopmund that is around 50km further north. Swakopmund is every bit as picturesque as Walvis Bay is industrial and many Namibians have holiday homes, cottages or flats in the town and the area is very popular with holiday makers from Germany too. We arrived at the hotel and after settling in we had a good meal in one of the local restaurants.



Day 3 **Namib Desert**

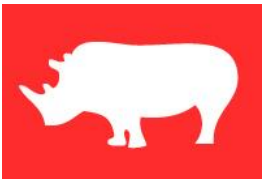
Wildlife Watching

This morning we were picked up by Andrew (our driver for our Living Desert tour) at our hotel and taken to the starting point near the dry Swakop River (this river was last flowing with water 4 years ago and ran like a river for 2 months, but the amount of vegetation present in the slight depression that marks the river bed is testament to the water running underneath the sand here), this is the main entrance into the Namib Desert and where we met with Tommy who would be the main guide taking us into the desert in search of some of the world's most highly adapted animals and plants. We were given a briefing before entering the desert, where Tommy explained about dune formations, the leeward side always being cooler and with firmer sand, so most of the vegetation grows here and therefore most of the wildlife is found here. But there are some species that have found ways of moving quickly over the softer looser sand of the windward sides of the dunes, animals such as like sidewinder snake can move quickly over both types of sand. We were also told about the hand-standing beetles which use special ridges on their abdomen that help to funnel the water down into the mouth of the beetle.

Driving around the dunes we noticed that around the river many marble deposits which have been exposed by regular flooding. In this flatter and more vegetated part of the desert we spent some time looking for an almost microscopic spider that builds the most incredible tunnels. The Namib tube spider digs a burrow down into the sand, they use their sticky webs to create a solid funnel that the spider lives in. The spider also sets out anchor lines in a circle around the tiny hole, these anchor lines are arranged like a cartwheel and are used to detect prey. When a likely prey animal walks by the hole it will trip the silk and alert the spider of the distance and direction of the animal and the spider rushes up from the funnel and grabs the animal. We were shown one of these funnels and were amazed as the tiny spider creates a funnel some 20-30cm long. The wealth of tiny invertebrate life in this part of the desert is incredible and something that would easily go unnoticed without the expert help and experience of Tommy. As we carried on and went deeper into the desert we were shown the Tamarisk tree which is short and stumpy but can tolerate fresh water from the fog and also salt water from the sea equally well. This allows this tree to dominate the coastal areas of the Namib Desert.

The first vertebrate we found was the amazing palmated gecko. This strictly nocturnal animal has near transparent skin and is very susceptible to sunlight, so careful to keep him cool and in the shade we observed the gecko, sometimes called the web-footed gecko. This species is most subterranean in the daytime and only coming above the ground at night to stalk and hunt prey such as beetles. This is one of the most beautiful geckos in the world and with the transparent skin and an almost glowing ghostly appearance this little gecko stole the show. We then left him as he used the large web-shaped feet to burrow deeply into the sand. From the gecko we found shovel-snouted lizard, like the reticulated sand lizard Elago had shown us at Deadvlei this lizard is specially adapted to dive and 'swim' in the sand to evade predators, they are also the species that has been the source of comic reference on TV as they 'dance' on the hot sand, lifting one foot off the ground and changing their foot regularly to avoid one foot burning on the hot surface. Driving and searching for other wildlife we came across the remains of a railroad, this small train line connected Swakopmund with Walvis Bay between 1915-1979, but due to continually being covered by the sand and the highway being constructed it started to get disused and was eventually abandoned to the elements.

One of the most abundant plants around the desert is the very important dollar plant, this succulent is a common house plant around the world now, but it is very important for many species of mammals (including brown hyena and mice), birds (including ostriches) and insects in the desert as the leaves are full of moisture. This plant only lives along the fog belt which is approximately 0-90m inland along this section of the Namibian coastline. But there are also animals living further into the desert and so scientists wondered where they get their water from. Once this thought had lodged itself into the minds of some scientists they started to do incredible work into how some of the rodent species out in the driest deserts where getting their water, when the environment was devoid of water for months or years at a time. They found out that when metabolising the plant matter they fed on the rodent would breakdown the glucose and hydrocarbons in a chemical reaction that produced 6 molecules of water, it is the 6 molecules of water per chemical reaction that provided the rodents with all of the water that they needed. It has now been found that all mammals including humans can get water this way, so called molecular water. However humans and many other larger mammals need more water to survive than we can produce in this way and so cannot survive without in taking extra water unlike some of these smaller desert species in the Namib. We then went to an open area of the desert (where they recently and controversially filmed the *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015) film, and had a small snack, it was here the Tommy also showed us the magnetic properties of the sand here by taking a powerful



magnet and collecting lots of magnetite just on the surface of the sand. As we ate we were joined by 3 tractrac chats, they are very used to Tommy's schedule and show up to get a little hand out, they have even become accustomed to a couple of calls that Tommy uses so that they come to him so he can hand feed them. The affinity that Tommy has for the desert creatures and the desert in general is wonderful and he is a very interesting man to be around in the desert.

Further along we found a reticulated sand lizard as well as numerous locusts and tok tokkie beetles before we had great views of a stunning horned viper, being exquisitely camouflaged even their eye balls are coloured with the colour of the sand grains. We were shown this 20cm snake (one of the world's smallest) up close before allowing it to slither off and into the shade of a small dollar bush to stake out a location and wait for prey to walk close enough for it to strike. It is also microchipped as many of the desert reptiles are here now (the same kind of microchip that are used in pets), which is not only helping us understand the movements of the animals but also combating the illegal pet trade as one of the chameleons chip was flagged in Holland and the animal traffickers were found and arrested. After the viper and some more friendly tractrac chats Tommy found us the desert's most iconic and endearing species; the Namaqua chameleon. We watched the chameleon for a while as it fed on some meal worms and it walked along the sand and climbed a small branch. During the early morning the chameleons are black as they aim to absorb as much sunlight as possible and then as the sun gets very high in the sky and the chameleon has reached its peak temperature their skin colouration changes to a very pale shade and reflects most of the sun back. As we approached the chameleon it changed its colour to display red and yellow spots which is a defensive display. But after a couple of minutes this was replaced by the dark colouration as the chameleon got used to us. As the chameleon climbed into the bush and the meal worms were presented to it, its colour changed to match the bush as a means to remain hidden from its chosen prey animal (in this case the meal worm) before changing back to black after feeding. We then started to leave and along the way back we then drove through some of the larger dunes and the desert landscape changed to pure golden sand dunes some rising very tall.

Once we got back to the town we had lunch and then took a trip with Elago to the moon landscape area north of Swakopmund, the ancient rock formations here are very reminiscent of the moon and the grey rocky formations stretching as far as the horizon look completely devoid of life. However there is life here, in fact we saw a pair of Denham's bustards in the middle of the desert and watched as they walked close to the car before flying off. There were also some brackish pools of water closer to the coast which were home to several species of birds including black-winged stilts, lesser & greater flamingos, Cape teals, sandpipers and wonderful pied avocets. But the main reason for coming out here is to see the strangest 'forest' in the world. In the gravel plains are many of Namibia's national plant which is also one of the most unusual plants in the world. The main habitat for this unusual plant is now the site and surrounding area of a new uranium mine, what long term impact this will have on the plants and the environment as a whole is not known. But management will be needed as the construction of new pipelines was already in progress. But currently there are many of the 'trees' around and we did find many examples of this weird and ancient plant (the *Welwitschia mirabilis*). This is tree although the trunk rarely exceeds more than 30cm high and the whole plant only has 2 leaves in the entire lifetime of the plant, and when you consider that the plant can survive for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years (as some of the plants are estimated to be over 2,000 years old). As you can expect their leaves are hard and leathery to protect themselves against predators and the elements for such a long time, they also grow to huge lengths (between 2-4m long) and they sprawl out, often tattered, either side of the round reddish flowering body of the plant that rests on top of the woody trunk. We found many great examples including one of each sex before leaving back for town and driving through several small 'forests'. We had dinner at one of the best and most popular sea food restaurants in the country and located on the pier itself and then went back to the hotel for a good night's sleep as tomorrow we would hit the road around and travel inland and into the heart of Damaraland.

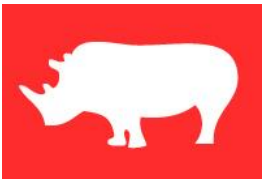


Day 4 Damaraland

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we had breakfast at the hotel before setting off and leaving Swakopmund and heading northwards along the coast. Our first wildlife stop this morning would be the Cape Cross fur seal colony around 1 hour north of the town. Along the way we drove through the sensitive lichen fields (on a road and not the actual lichens) which can take many decades to recover from being stepped or driven on. Closer to the colony we stopped at one of the many shipwrecks that make this coast, the famous skeleton coast, so well known. This is one of the more recent shipwrecks along the skeleton coast, being a fishing vessel that was run aground in 2005, the weather, currents and rocky coastline still causing ships to run aground every year.

We then arrived at the colony, this is the largest colony of seals in Africa and with around 100,000 seals it is of global importance to the Cape fur seal population. Despite this, the Namibian government still controversially cull the seal populations to help the fisheries. The seals here have several predators including great white sharks and



orcas in the ocean, both of these species do not seem to occur here in high numbers despite the large number of seals. But the major predators of the seals here used to be lions and brown hyenas, with black-backed jackals still causing large losses during the pupping season. However people have exterminated all of the lions from around this colony, the brown hyenas have been reduced in number by humans dramatically as well and so the seal population can grow unchecked. However I would prefer people to look to reintroduce the hyena and lion to the area to help keep the population in check as opposed to just cull the seals. After checking in with the officials we walked long the boardwalk and into the colony, straight away we were hit by the noise and smell of 100,000 seals all crammed onto a relatively small rock and sand beach. Along with the seals were many ruddy turnstones, Cape gulls and Cape cormorants. We walked along the board walk with the seal colony sprawling either side of us, the noise of the males trying to battle each other for a section of beach and the females it contains as well as the calls of youngsters trying to find their mothers was nearly deafening. We watched as some of the pups suckled from their mothers very close to the boardwalk and we found a very young pup, it still had its umbilical cord attached and was likely to have been just a week or less old. Unfortunately its mother was nowhere to be seen and being born so early in the season the chances of surviving much longer were very small. Closer to the surf we could see males fighting with each other, as we are just at the start of the breeding season the fights are not very vicious but more jostling for position, so the males would bark at each other and square up but rarely come to blows. Watching the whole colony and the various behaviours was fascinating and we could watch for hours as they played, fought, suckled, swam, sunbathed, slept and chased each other up and down the beach. Out in the sea in the shallow coastal waters there were many sunbathing seals in the water, here they float on their backs with their flippers in the air, with their bellies out above the water. Above the seals were flocks of hundreds of Cape cormorants flying back and forth and several endemic Damara terns which nest in the nearby dunes. The Damara tern has its entire global population within the 50m wide stretch of Namib Desert parallel with the skeleton coast of Namibia. This ground nesting bird is highly sensitive to any disturbance of the desert and large areas (known nesting sites) are closed off to all movement.

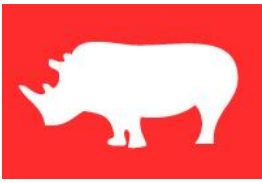
We left the colony and travelled further north and into Damaraland, heading to a town for lunch, along the way we saw a pretty southern pale-chanting goshawk and a flock of white-backed mousebirds before we arrived at the large village, or small town of Uis. This old mining town is almost a relict of the prosperous mining history of Namibia. Now the mine has closed it is mostly tourists traveling north or south along the Skeleton Coast are the only visitors to this sleepy desert town. We then headed inland eastwards and past Namibia's highest mountain the Brandberg mountain (2,606m above sea level). This is the land of the Herero people and we met several women in their traditional dress, the large (almost Victorian) style dresses looked very odd to be wearing in sweltering heat. Their head dress was made into the appearance of cattle horns, as this group of people use cattle as currency (or did do traditionally).

Closer to our lodge we drove along the dry river bed of the Aba Haub River looking for desert elephants. This is one of the best places in the world to see them, but judging by the lack of tracks and very old dung it was a while since they were last here. We did see a large troop of chacma baboons foraging along the dry river bed and drinking from a livestock bore hole as well as Martin spotting a few rock hyrax. But there were no elephants to be seen.

Once we arrived at the very nice lodge located in the lee of a rocky hill, with the main lodge building being built right into the rocks themselves; we unpacked and enjoyed the rest of the day relaxing.

Day 5 Twyfelfontein / Etosha *Travelling, Sightseeing & Wildlife Watching*

At 08:30am and headed just the 4km to the wonderfully preserved bushman rock art of Twyfelfontein. This rock art is dated between 5,000-6,000 years ago and is remarkably well preserved and has helped scientists to understand the development of people in Namibia and the colonisation of Southern Africa by early tribes. The first site we went to was an old ruined farm house from 1946, the name Twyfelfontein means doubtful fountain and there was a spring here (there still is although it runs shallower now) and that is the reason for the European farmers settling here in the 1940's. But the area and the water source was known long before the Europeans got here, the San people (who were the first people to colonise and inhabit Southern Africa) in this region are called Bushmen. It was these Bushmen who made the engravings here, by using quartz crystals on the softer sandstone they were able to make very detailed and informative drawings that are still recognisable and important culturally today. Along the pathway we found a tree that was badly damaged by elephants, showing that they come right into the rocky areas in search of food out here. Reinhardt then told us of the rock art's discovery in 1921 by a German archaeologist named Reinhardt Marx as we were taken to some of the closest drawings. The first drawing we were taken to was a map, this was a very important map as it showed all Bushmen living around here and passing through where the water holes were, they had a key which also showed if the water hole was seasonally filled, permanent or now dry, depending on whether the circles were filled in, hollow or had a dot in the middle. Many of these water holes are no longer around, but this early mapping showed great intelligence, awareness of their environment and also long term communication in a cooperative way. These are all things that are not necessarily thought of immediately when thinking of early settlements and tribal people in Africa. But the sophistication of the drawings and people here gets even more impressive further along as the pictures of animals and tracks show an early school. These large slaps of sandstone were used by the elder hunters and tribal leaders to teach young boys the tracks of various animals and how to find them and hunt them. As well as how to avoid lions and other dangerous animals. The level of detail

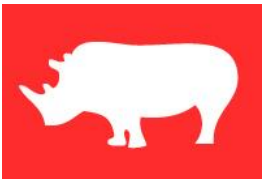


is incredible and the subtle differences between black and white rhinos are also recognisable in the images. The tracks that were shown on this rock included lion, leopard, cheetah, hippo, rhino, elephant, giraffe, oryx, eland, kudu and human (it is unknown if the human foot was used for comparison or as a signature from the artist, As human feet are present on many of the rocks in the same place). Also drawn in good detail were ostriches, lizards and even penguins and seals. This is evidence of the Bushmen travelling long and far to the coast where they collected salt and brought it back, the salt was used to preserve their meat. Whether they traded with coastal people or had a monopoly on the salt we do not know, but these movements would have led to groups of people splitting off and forming villages and colonies throughout the desert and along the coast. Then we came to the most famous piece of rock art at this site and that is the strange lion-man picture. The half man half lion, carrying an antelope is believed to represent a shamanistic transformation ritual. Further on we came to a dassie rat feeding very close to the road. Reinhardt also showed us the *Bosia albitrunca* tree which is used by the San people (and always has been) for a cure against diarrhea. But the tree has other uses the roots are used to make a coffee, the berries are sweet and used for perfume so the tree was a very useful tree to the San people around here.

We then headed back to the vehicle and started the drive to Etosha, via Outjo where we would stop for lunch. Arriving at Etosha National Park at around 15:40 we started the drive from the western gate to Okaukuejo. The first animal seen was a black-backed jackal and then some southern ground squirrels including a sentry that alerted the rest of the family to our presence and they all ran into their burrow near the road. We then started to see some of the more abundant species including female kudus, giraffes and many groups of springboks. Some herds being small and some several dozen in loose aggregations. Most of the springboks were under bushes and in the shade of trees and then came our first elephant sighting. A lone bull elephant at a waterhole followed by distant views of a female black rhino and a calf (around 3 years old), they were standing in thick bush and where not very visible unfortunately. But Etosha is the best place in the world to see this species so were hopeful of better black rhino sightings over the next few days here. We then found a female steenbok resting very close to the road, this small antelope is very common in the western and northern section of the park and around the vast salt pan. It is this huge 20,000km² salt pan that gives Etosha its name. In the local language Etosha means great white place.

As we drove towards the camp we stopped at many waterholes along the way (mostly man made as a means of providing year around water as the animals can no longer conduct their huge migrations around the country when the water is all dried up in certain areas). This means of environmental control may not seem very efficient or 'leaving nature to its own devices' but with so little free space for wildlife to inhabit in our modern world it is now essential for us to help them where we can. We had great views of another ground squirrel, this one being less concerned by our vehicle and feeding next to the road and then at the next waterhole we found a bachelor group of 3 elephants. We watched as they fed slowly as they walked towards us, they would rip up grasses brush off the dust and then eat them. The first bull elephant then put his trunk deep into its mouth and proceeded to spray water over its body. This is a recent discovery, that all elephants have the capacity to store large volumes of water in their throat for future use. This is one of the reasons that this very water dependant species can be found so far from water sources in some of the driest parts of Africa. Further sightings of note we had before arriving at the camp were a pair of feeding common warthogs and two distant sleeping lionesses. On arrival we checked in, had dinner and then staked out the floodlit waterhole here, this location is widely regarded as the best place in the world to see black rhinos, at first we had 2 black-backed jackals, a group of 5 southern giraffes (the giraffe species recently (September 2016) being split into 4 species throughout Africa based on genetic evidence and the fact that the four distinct species had not interbred with each other for over 150,000 at least. Also around where many helmeted guineafowl, rock martins and a couple of kori bustards. However as the sun set the larger wildlife started to arrive and over the next few hours four black rhinos, which was 2 pairs of mother and calf. A little later 3 elephants came down and watching them walk deep into the water and the subtle communications going on between the elephants and the rhinos and each other was fascinating. The number of black rhinos that can be seen together here and interacting at the waterholes of Etosha is shedding new light on the species and it is becoming very apparent that this species (once thought to be completely solitary) does enjoy social interaction and their vocal repertoire is testament to their range of communication. Even though we are yet to understand their meaning the waterholes of Etosha are now regarded as incredibly important places for the transfer of information and also potential mate finding locations for black rhino populations. This may be an artefact of the increased level of permanent waterholes here due to human involvement but with so few large populations of black rhinos remaining we do not know if this normal or not in other circumstances. What a great way to finish our first day in Etosha and tomorrow we would be our all day and hope for more wonderful sightings.





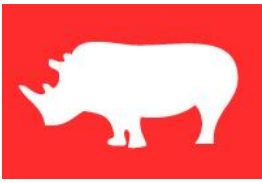
Day 6 Etosha National Park

Wildlife Watching

This morning we left the camp as soon as the gates opened at 06:20am and quickly we found 4 male elephants, many springbok and some male kori bustards. The first waterhole we arrived at had two male lions around it, one of the lions had the remains of a kill and was picking some meat from the bones, the other was walking towards him and when he got within 20-30m of the lion with the carcass he ran off carrying the food away into the grassland. Nearby were six black-backed jackals, clearly attracted here by the carcass, but we couldn't see any more remains of the kill and the lions had probably killed something quite small such as a springbok and had eaten pretty much all of it. Driving from here towards another waterhole we had a lone spotted hyena cross the road before running off. It is not unusual to see lone hyena in the morning, during the night they often split up and patrol the savanna in search of prey or carcasses, when a hunt is successful or they find a large carcass to scavenge they whoop to get the clan together, but some of still left on their own until day break when they slowly make their way back to the den, as this one was doing. We then had a jackal emerge from its den just next to the road, we had great close views of the jackal and hoped that its pups would come out of the den, but after a few minutes the jackal moved off and so did we. We then found 3 tawny eagles, all perched separately and making up a breeding pair and their fully fledged but still immature juvenile. The juvenile was being mobbed by a handful of Cape crows until it took off and found some peace somewhere else. Our next sighting was a honey badger in the daylight, the elusive mustelid foraging nearby the road, sniffing the ground all of the time as it loped along with its ungainly gait. Carrying on and stopping at the various waterholes along the way we found a large family of elephants, the group was a matriarchal herd with 18 in number and included several young elephants, the youngest of which were two 4-6 month olds. The youngsters were playing around, mock charging and play fighting with each other as the adults fed. It was great views and seeing one of the teenager elephants start to kick one of the balls of dung around like a football was great fun. As the sun began to rise higher and higher we decided to turn back and start to head towards the camp before breakfast finished. On our way back we watched another lone spotted hyena trotting towards the road and then going underneath the road through a drainage pipe, the hyenas and warthogs make use of these pipes during the day as shelter, but this hyena was only using it to travel through. Our last sighting of note was a lone lioness walking parallel to the vehicle around 80-100m away, presumably walking to locate the rest of her pride after a night alone or mating with a male somewhere nearby.

After breakfast we came back out into the park and drove in a different direction and towards a different camp (Halali). Early on we had views of giraffes near the road and 3 bull elephants close to the road and then after waiting patiently they crossed the road in front of us. There were also many springbok around again and at our first waterhole a large herd of springbok were joined by blue wildebeest, plains zebra, oryx, a couple of giraffe, several warthogs and finally three black-backed jackals. At the next waterhole along we had many greater kudu, black-faced impala; these two species indicating a change in the habitat type as we moved towards Halali, as kudu and impala prefer denser bush to open grasslands; plains zebra, some oryx and a small herd of red hartebeest just leaving. The animals were acting nervously, not approaching the waterhole and all be concentrated on one side of the waterhole, so we scanned the edge of the bush around the waterhole and found the reason for their nervousness. There were 3 lions around, 2 lionesses sleeping under an acacia one our side of the waterhole and a large male sat under a tree on the opposite side. This resulted in the animals coming to the water very slowly and cautiously from one direction. They were not looking at the lions and maybe they had not located them but could clearly smell them and so they were all very nervous as they drank. As we waited here for a while to see if the lions would move around and come out of the bush a martial eagle perched on a dead fallen tree and then came down and drank in the open. After a few more minutes we left and searched another waterhole which had some oryx, a bachelor herd of black-faced impala, female greater kudu and common ostriches, but as the day wore on towards midday the sightings became fewer and fewer as the animals took shelter from the oppressive sun under shade and became less active. So we drove onto Halali for lunch.

Before we left Halali we visited the waterhole here and found some zebras coming down for a drink and many helmeted turtles basking in the sun on the edge of the waterhole and on the half submerged logs. Shortly after leaving Halali we found 3 black rhinos together, an adult female with a 5 year old (newly independent calf) and a 2 year old calf which was unusual to see together. They were just casually walking across an open savanna giving us great views. We then found an old kill which had been commandeered by vultures including 3 large lappet-faced vultures in a large flock of African white-backed vultures, there were also some jackals in the scrum of vultures too causing chaos among the birds. We then started to visit the various waterholes as we slowly made our way back towards Okaukeujo, finding a family of elephants enjoying the bath and drinking from the water at one waterhole, a huge old bull giraffe fed nearby the road and then a lanner falcon came down for a drink. It was great to see this migratory species up close and drinking. Driving further along we found 2 lionesses moving very purposely through the long grass, then we spotted a male with them. They were all moving very fast, sometimes breaking into a run, so we didn't know if they were starting a hunt or what was going on. We then decided to gamble and went to position ourselves ahead of them and found a half eaten springbok (possibly a cheetah kill) and knew that they were trying to get there first to try and feed in peace. We were there as one of the females got there first and did her best to drag the carcass off, but it was too large and suddenly the male came along and in a cloud of dust and blur of fur and snarling wrestled the carcass off the female and started to feed. Then the other lionesses (a third female had shown up now) came and left him to it and walked towards the vehicle and across the road, but by now the



male had lost interest in the carcass, which was nearly all gone anyway, and followed the females. He stopped and sniffed one female a lot, they both flehmened to each other. This is the grimace face that some mammals pull when smelling something particularly interesting. The face is pulled in this way as they suck the air into their mouths and into the Jacobson's organ located in the roof of the mouth and this is a very sensitive scent detecting organ. So whilst the teeth barred snarling looking face looks aggressive it is purely an olfactory response. But as the male and female followed the other two females away from the road and our vehicle it was clear that the female was either ready to mate or was close to coming into oestrous as the male was very interested in her. Further sightings of note before we arrived back at the camp included another black rhino walking in the semi bush around 30m away from the road, we watched him spray and scent mark the bushes before we had some views of blue wildebeest very close to the road.

After dinner we had booked a night drive organised by the national park, we would check 2 or 3 waterholes and see what was around. The first waterhole had 3 lions around, 2 males and a female, we watched as the males moved off and away and once they were out of sight we left and drove towards another waterhole, along the way we encountered a lion male lion on the road. Just casually walking along the road in front of us, scent marking, including making scraps and urinating as well as calling to the rest of his pride. At the next waterhole (which was where this lion was walking to) we found another lion which was joined by this male in due course. They were also joined by a lone bull elephant and both animals drank next to each other, but both being very wary of the other as they drank in the open. Then back at the first waterhole there were 2 lionesses sharing the waterhole with another lone bull elephant. It seemed that everywhere we went tonight there were lions. But leaving this waterhole Martin spotted a caracal in the bushes, this is a rarely seen species of lynx and we had great views of the caracal around 20m away as it walked and then sat down in the bushes. Other sightings we had on this very lion centric night safari were 3 black rhino and various scrub hares and of course 3 more lions before we called it a night at 11:00pm and retired to our chalets for the night.

Day 7 Etosha National Park

Wildlife Watching

This morning Elago took Rob and Caroline to the western part of the park and found a few breeding pairs of bat-eared fox and several large herd of common eland. The eland being a specialist of this part of the park. The bat-eared fox (so named for its huge antenna like ears) is a specialist ant and termite feeder and they form breeding pairs for life and are often seen in the early morning moving from termite mound to termite mound in search of food. At one of the waterholes there were 2 male lions and a lioness at a fresh springbok kill. The kill having been made the night before or early this morning. As they staked out the waterhole and watched the lions lounging close to the kill a mating pair of lions and a younger male arrived and tried to sneak some food from the kill, but not mastering it very successfully with the larger males being more dominate. Nearby to the kill was an relatively fresh elephant carcass with many vultures waiting nearby for the carcass to be opened up by a larger and more powerful predator such as the spotted hyena or lions. It was interested as to why the lions had made this springbok kill when such a huge amount of food was nearby.

Once back at the camp we decided to have the rest of the day to rest and spend it watching the wildlife at the waterhole. During the afternoon at the Okaukeujo waterhole there were black-backed jackals chasing (unsuccessfully) helmeted guineafowl and then one of the jackals made a half-hearted attempt at the much large kori bustard. Other animals that visited the waterhole this afternoon included southern giraffes, plains zebra and three different families of elephant. They all arrived shortly after each other and the communication between the different families was great to watch. We can only hear some of the interactions as much elephant communication is made with infrasound and out of the human hearing range. They must have been closely related families or at least knew of each other as they were very tolerant of sharing the waterhole together and the youngsters played together in the water. The only other sighting of note at the waterhole this afternoon was a common slender mongoose running from the rocks to the waterhole, drinking and then slinking off again and out of sight.

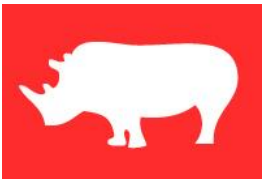
Tomorrow we would leave Okaukeujo and head to another camp, very similar in design but with more human history attached, Namutomi and spend our last full day and night in Etosha here, hoping for new species such as cheetah and eland in the eastern part of the park.



Day 8 Etosha National Park

Wildlife Watching

Last night the sound of lions roaring at the waterhole punctuated the usually quiet night and kept Martin up a lot of the night, they would have been close by this morning but they were not visible at the waterhole before breakfast. After breakfast we packed up the camp and headed across Etosha towards our second camp, Namatoni. This used



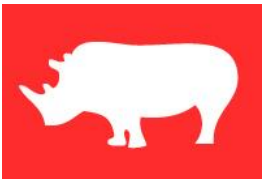
to be a fort that was originally used by the Germans to fight against the local people and establish the presence of farmland on their traditional hunting lands. It was then used by the police to control the animal disease control line. It is now a restaurant at the campsite. But before we would get there we had lots of wildlife watching to do. The first animal of note was a large bull elephant in musth just on the side of the road, we watched as he plucked off very thorny and woody branches of acacia and ate them like the 10cm long thorns were nothing. The house-brick sized teeth grinding the branches and thorns down to nothing. We then saw a couple of lone hyenas trotting across the plains and heading back to their den site, one of which must have been the dominate alpha female of the clan as she was heavily pregnant and only the dominant female will breed in the clan. As we watched the second solitary hyena moving across the plain two bat-eared foxes emerged from their den close by, they were very nervous of the hyena and moved off away from it and always kept an eye on the hyena. But it appeared that the hyena was oblivious to the bat-eared foxes.

Then the hyena noticed them and started to follow the pair, the pair of bat-eared foxes moving the hyena away from the den and safely away from their pups. The hyena lost interest in the foxes and came and walked through the drainage pipe under the road and away.

We then went to the Etosha Pan, there is a little area where you can drive a short distance into the pan and get out, the heat was tremendous and the sight of the vast expanse of white stretching to the horizon is very strange. This is arguable the most inhospitable place on Earth, miles and miles of literally nothing, no water, no plants just rock and crystallised salt as far as the eye can see. Leaving here we carried on in the general direction to Namatoni Camp and came along white-quilled bustards and Namaqua sandgrouse on the road and allowing us some nice views of these pretty birds. Further along we had good views of a perched greater kestrel, scanning his territory searching for prey from a short acacia bush and a little further along we found a single Burchell's courser. As it was now approaching midday we found the animals harder and harder to see as they began to take cover from the sun, but before we reached Namutomi camp we found a male and female steenbok close to the road, for such a small antelope they are often found very close to the roads and are not at all afraid of the vehicles when you pull up close by them for pictures. We then had amazing views of a bat-eared fox, the pair were out foraging but the male was very bold and came to within 3-4m of the vehicle and stared at us, its huge ears erect and listening to us inside the car and letting us take incredible close up pictures. We then happened to pass by a migrating flock of green bee-eaters as nearly every branch and tree had one or two perched on the end and sallying into the air to snatch insects on the wing. Also on the section of savanna we found many plains zebra, blue wildebeest, southern giraffe and of course huge numbers of springbok. But then the sighting of the day for sure was a mother and very young (less than 6 months old) black rhino in the open and around 30m away from the vehicle. They walked through the grassland parallel to the vehicle for around 100m, trotting away and presumably wanting to get into thicker bush and out of sight. However they were trotting towards a lone bull elephant, the elephant was walking at a right angle to the rhinos' approach and so had not seen them. Once the rhinos got to within 20m or so of the elephant, the bull swivelled, faced the rhinos and with ears flared, head down charged them, kicking up huge dust clouds as he came to a stop just 5-6m away from the rhinos. The baby was behind the mother who did well in standing her ground well and then quickly carried on running away and to safety. Seeing these two huge species interact like that was incredible and unusual. But just a product of the two animals having quite bad eye-sight and not seeing each other as the rhinos nearly ran straight into the elephant. Before we arrived at Namutomi in time for lunch we found several lone bull elephants nearby, but nothing else unusual.

At 04:00pm we headed back into the park and at the first waterhole we found a youngish male lion (maybe 3-4 years old) sleeping on the far side of the waterhole. We waited for the lion to move but realised that the chances were slim as he was very much in a deep sleep, so we moved off but as we were leaving we spotted three cheetah walking towards the waterhole. A mother and two cubs, the cubs were around dispersal age but still behaved a little more naively than the mother. Especially when they arrived at the waterhole and they spotted the lion, the lion was still fast asleep, but the mother quickly slunk off in a low (semi-stalk) run, calling quietly to the cubs. However the cubs sat on a ridge close to the waterhole and stared at the lion, possibly weighing up their desire and need to drink and the chances of the lion waking up. But eventually the calls of the mother and the urgency she had moved off must have convinced the cubs that it was not worth the risk to spend any more time around there and they all moved off together. We tried to follow them but there was not another waterhole particularly close by and thick bush with no roads for following them meant we couldn't predict where they were likely to end up. We drove along and were going to check into further waterholes when we found a group of 4 lionesses sleeping in the shade of a large tree just next to the road. Again we watched for a while but at this time of day the chances were that the lions would just sleep and not do anything. The male at the waterhole must be part of this pride as there were only around 200m between them. Then a little further along the same main road we found a large giraffe feeding nervously and close by was an adult male lion lying down in the shade of the tree. It is not unusual for the males of a pride (young and old) to split off after feeding and sleep away from the females and cubs. That seemed to be what was happening here with the various lions found all sleeping close by each other.

We then heard from another guide in another vehicle that a greater kudu had been stuck in the mud at a waterhole nearby this morning, so we went to see. When we got there the kudu was not in the mud, but as we waited we saw many hyena (over a dozen in the end) moving from the bush nearby to the water and back again. They were bloated and bloody and had presumably killed the kudu and dragged the carcass into the bushes and fed. As we waited there we saw the hyenas coming down to the waterhole, submerging themselves and cooling off. Just why



lions do not enter the water to cool off like this is strange, when you can clearly see the lions overheating they still do not just lie down in the water to let the water cool them off like the hyenas do. This waterhole was very productive with different species, as well as the large clan of hyena (more and more hyena kept coming on down to the carcass and waterhole), we had small number of greater kudu, black-faced impala, giraffe, kori bustards, helmeted guineafowl, oryx, Egyptian geese, Namaqua sandgrouse and several smaller species of birds flying around such as Ruppell's long-tailed starling, crowned lapwings, red-billed quelea and violet-eared waxbills. We then departed and headed back to the camp for dinner and our last night in the park. Along the way we saw the first individuals of a new mammal species for the trip as we found a pair of Damara dik-diks close by the road.

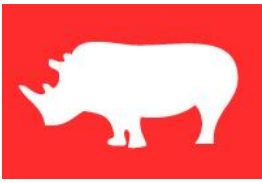
Day 9 Okonjima Conservancy

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning at around 07:30am we left the camp and started our journey out of Etosha and south into the central plateau of Namibia. As we drove towards the gate we stopped at a couple of waterholes and at the first one found a young male lion drinking, as well as many water birds and 2 male kudus holding back and vigilantly watching the lion. Then driving on the main road towards the gate we found a coalition of 4 large male lions moving through the bush around 10m into the thick bush parallel with the vehicle. This is a strong coalition of bachelor males, they are most likely to be related and possibly all brothers. They would be looking to take over a pride of their own and being 4 fully grown male lions they would likely be able to take over any prides in Etosha. Before we left the park we had a common slender mongoose cross the road and many Damara dik-diks and the occasional black-faced impala and steenbok just on the side of the road. It is amazing that even outside of the park and on the main highway that we found many Damara dik-diks around feeding on the grass verges next to the roads.

The drive south took us through the large town of Tseumb, this is a copper mining town with the copper mine still in operation. We then made a brief rest stop in Otjiwarongo before arriving at Okonjima in time for lunch and to meet our guides Peter and Martin who would take us out to track one of their collared cheetah this afternoon. Driving out into the bush and using the VHF transmitter to locate the female cheetah (named Aprella) we saw many of the more common species here including many common warthogs, oryx, helmeted guineafowl, common impala, plains zebra, steenbok, South African ground squirrels (many of which had burrows very close to the road) and chacma baboons. We then hear the signal from Aprella and stopped the vehicle and climbed out, the beauty of the AfriCat Foundation using the ranch at Okonjima for their work means that many of the leopards and cheetahs here are collared and monitored and are therefore trackable on foot safely. This project is concerned with allowing the predators and people (particularly the farmers) to coexist. We walked for 10-15 minutes to find her and then watched from around 15-20m away as she walked purposely along the road and sat down periodically to survey the surroundings, it was as she was looking to hunt. We followed her around half an hour until we entered some thicker thorn scrub and as the sun was setting we turned back and went to the vehicle to return back to the lodge. It was great to share the territory with such an incredible predator and be just a few meters away on foot. This is the kind of wonderful experience that places that AfriCat and Okonjima can offer people and to feel that connection with one Africa's big cat species is awe inspiring. As we drove back to the camp we had a great encounter with a pair of brown hyena running out of the bush and across the road, this is Southern Africa's most elusive predator and to see them in the day was a surprise and an unexpected highlight. We then had nice views of a baby giraffe and two adult females near the road before we stopped for a sundowner watching the sun set over the hills. Our last sighting of the afternoon game drive being a pair of white-quilled bustards in a courtship dance next to the road. But it was not our final African game viewing as after dinner we had a night safari booked.

The night safari was with Jacob and he was very keen to show off some of the rarely seen species and we started very well with a brown hyena being the first animal we saw, this brown hyena was near the vehicle and as we watched it we found 2 honey badgers near by and then a pair of Cape porcupines and a small family of four common warthogs. To see so many animals of 4 different species close by was awesome. We then watched a series of behaviours that looked like something from a Bennie Hill sketch with each chasing each other and all vying for access to one den site. The burrow being occupying by the hyena who was then chased out by the two honey badgers before the warthogs chased the porcupines towards the burrow who evicted the honey badgers who then chased away the warthogs and these four species continued to chase each other around until finally the honey badgers combined with hissing and hackles up to scare the brown hyena away, the porcupines moved on to continue foraging and the warthogs gained access to burrow. But for around 15 minutes we watched this incredible interaction between four species that do not usually associate at all. The rest of the night drive was quieter by comparison with various diurnal species around including oryx, steenbok, plains zebra and common duiker with some scrub hare and a Southern African springhare adding to the list of species seen. Jacob also told us about the replanting project going on here to get the natural grasses and bushes back in the reserve. This was an old farm stead and the grasses and shrubs introduced for cattle not necessarily being the indigenous species and so by replanting the native species the reserve would be able to conserve water better and naturally and also start to get more and more native species of flowering plant, insect, birds and mammals back and was the overall aim. Plus it would show the neighbouring farms that the local plants are better for a healthier farm, both providing fodder for the livestock but also retaining more water for longer and increasing the natural production for lower costs. This kind of eco farming becoming more and more popular in Namibia.



Afterwards we returned to our camp and headed to our rooms which had great views out over the plains with many common warthogs, springbok, common duiker and helmeted guineafowl around. This was a great way to end our Namibian wildlife adventure and tomorrow we would return to Windhoek and begin our long journeys home.

Day 10 Home

Departure

This morning was nice and relaxed and we left the camp at 10:00am and drove southwards towards the capital. Being a Sunday the traffic was quiet and we made good time, we stopped in Okahandja for a coffee before making it to the airport in plenty of time to check in and relax before our flights to Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Species List

Best of Namibia / October 2016

Mammals (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>
2	Common impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>
3	Black-faced impala	<i>Aepyceros petersi</i>
4	Red hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>
5	Springbok	<i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>
6	Cape fur seal	<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>
7	Black-backed jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>
8	Caracal	<i>Caracal caracal</i>
9	Blue wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>
10	Spotted hyena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>
11	Black rhino	<i>Diceros bicornis</i>
12	Plains zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>
13	Mountain zebra	<i>Equus zebra</i>
14	African wild cat	<i>Felis lybica</i>
15	Common slender mongoose	<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>
16	Southern giraffe	<i>Giraffa giraffa</i>
17	Giant leaf-nosed bat	<i>Hipposideros gigas</i>
18	Brown hyena	<i>Hyaena brunnea</i>
19	South African porcupine	<i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>
20	Striped polecat	<i>Ictonyx striatus</i>
21	Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>
22	Namib long-eared bat	<i>Laephotis namibensis</i>
23	Scrub hare	<i>Lepus saxatiis</i>
24	African bush elephant	<i>Loxadonta africana</i>
25	Damara dik-dik	<i>Madoqua kirkii</i>
26	Honey badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>
27	Banded mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>
28	Cape serotine bat	<i>Neoromicia capensis</i>
29	Egyptian slit-faced bat	<i>Nycteris thebaica</i>
30	Oryx	<i>Oryx gazella</i>

October									
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
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					54	~20	48	12	
					11		38		
	31			~229	~1,813	~1,000	~683	~74	6
			~50,000						
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				4	~149	~50	~207	22	
					2		18		
				6	8		2		
					~109	~92	~266	4	
	31							1	8
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		*				2		2	
				9	21	21	46	6	7
2									
	*							3	
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			*	7	69	41	8		
							3	14	
					1			2	
~10									
				5	1	~20			
8									
17	68			1	29	22	26	40	14

31	Bat-eared fox	<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>
32	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>
33	Chacma baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>
34	Southern African springhare	<i>Pedetes capensis</i>
35	Common warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>
36	Rock hyrax	<i>Procavia capensis</i>
37	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>
38	Dent's horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus denti</i>
39	Common duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>
40	Common eland	<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>
41	Acacia rat	<i>Thallomys nigricaudatus</i>
42	Greater kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>
43	South African ground squirrel	<i>Xerus inauris</i>

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				2	18	3	6	5	
~78			~35					6	31
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7				2	2		5	34	9
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								1	
								3	1
						~130		10	
					1				
				1			8	37	3
				3	29			1	

Birds (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
2	African jacana	<i>Actophilornis africana</i>
3	White-quilled korhaan	<i>Afrotis afraoides</i>
4	Egyptian goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
5	Red-headed finch	<i>Amadina erythrocephala</i>
6	Cape teal	<i>Anas capensis</i>
7	Plain-backed pipit	<i>Anthus leucophrys</i>
8	Buffy pipit	<i>Anthus vaalensis</i>
9	White-backed swift	<i>Apus caffer</i>
10	Tawny eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
11	Kori bustard	<i>Ardeotis kori</i>
12	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
13	Spotted eagle owl	<i>Bubo africanus</i>
14	Cattle egret	<i>Bubuclus ibis</i>
15	Red-capped lark	<i>Calandrella cinerea</i>
16	Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
17	Familiar chat	<i>Cercomela familiaris</i>
18	Tractrac chat	<i>Cercomela tractrac</i>

October									
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
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			4		1		2		
				3	2				
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				1	10	7	11		
			~10						
					1				
		2			2	1	2		
		6							
	1							3	
		3							

57	Common fiscal	<i>Lanius collaris</i>
58	Red-backed shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
59	Southern grey shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
60	Hartlaub's gull	<i>Larus hartlaubii</i>
61	Cape gull	<i>Larus vetula</i>
62	Marabou stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>
63	Southern pale chanting goshawk	<i>Melierax canorus</i>
64	European bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
65	Blue-cheeked bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>
66	Short-toed rock thrush	<i>Monticola breviceps</i>
67	Cape wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>
68	Southern ant-eating chat	<i>Myrmecocichla formicivora</i>
69	Helmeted guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
70	Namaqua dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>
71	Mountain wheatear	<i>Oenanthe monticola</i>
72	Capped wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pileata</i>
73	Pale-winged starling	<i>Onychognathus naboroup</i>
74	Southern grey-headed sparrow	<i>Passer diffusus</i>
75	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
76	Cape sparrow	<i>Passer melanurus</i>
77	Great sparrow	<i>Passer motitensis</i>
78	Great white pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>
79	Cape cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i>
80	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
81	Sociable weaver	<i>Philetairus socius</i>
82	Lesser flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus minor</i>
83	Greater flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>
84	Dusky lark	<i>Pinarocorys nigricans</i>
85	White-browed sparrow-weaver	<i>Plocepasser mahali</i>
86	Spectacled weaver	<i>Ploceus ocularis</i>
87	Chestnut weaver	<i>Ploceus rubiginosus</i>
88	Southern masked weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>
89	Martial eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
90	African pygmy falcon	<i>Polhierax semitorquatus</i>
91	Groundscraper thrush	<i>Psophocidhla litstsirupa</i>
92	Red-billed francolin	<i>Pternistis adspersus</i>
93	Namaqua sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles namaqua</i>
94	Rock martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne fuligula</i>

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		28	48						
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27			7	~30		27	~153	~203	6
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3	6		13	37					
11					1				
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	~600	~30	3						
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1					1				
								5	
					4		~114		
6				~15	3	3	2		

95	African red-eyed bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus nigricans</i>
96	Red-billed quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>
97	Pied avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
98	White-throated canary	<i>Serinus albogularis</i>
99	Laughing dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
100	Scaly-feather waeber	<i>Sporopipes squamifrons</i>
101	Damara tern	<i>Sternula balaenarum</i>
102	Cape turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
103	African mourning dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>
104	Common ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>
105	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
106	Alpine swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>
107	Brown-crowed tchagra	<i>Tchagra australis</i>
108	Bokmakierie	<i>Telophorus zeylonus</i>
109	Batelur eagle	<i>Terathious ecaudatus</i>
110	Damara red-billed hornbill	<i>Tockus damarensis</i>
111	Southern red-billed hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>
112	Southern yellow-billed hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>
113	Monteiro's hornbill	<i>Tockus monteiri</i>
114	African grey hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>
115	Lappet-faced vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotus</i>
116	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
117	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
118	Southern pied babbler	<i>Turdoides bicolor</i>
119	African hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>
120	Red-faced mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>
121	Blacksmith lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
122	Crowned lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>

12					5	5	3	2	
							~150		
		2							
				2	2				
~10	2	3	7	6	13	~10	11	~116	
~40	~25		2	~15	~20	6	~10	~10	~20
		3							
					2	1	2		
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				4	28	27	22		
				2	12	4	3	3	

Reptiles (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Horned adder	<i>Bitis caudalis</i>
2	Peringuey's adder	<i>Bitis peringueyi</i>
3	Namaqua chameleon	<i>Chamaeleo namaquensis</i>
4	Ovambo tree-skink	<i>Mabuya binotata</i>

October									
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
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