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Going North-East: A Trip Report to the Kavango and Zambezi Regions, October 2013

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My Swedish birding friend Per-Arne Larsson and his wife Kerstin joined me on a trip to the two north-eastern regions of Namibia.

We departed from Swakopmund in the morning of 5 October 2013 and our first destination was the grave of Axel Eriksson on the farm Urupupa between Otavi and Grootfontein. It took quite some preparation before I was able to obtain permission from the current owner of the farm, Tate Elifas Hailapa, but once all the formalities had been sorted out, we were granted entrance to this National Monument.

Interestingly the grave of Axel Eriksson was declared a National Monument not on account of his important contributions to Namibian ornithology, but for his assistance to the Dorsland Trekkers whom he found in a despondent condition. On account of his intervention the Cape Government agreed to assist the Dorsland Trekkers.



Figure 1: Axel Eriksson's Grave

Our first overnight destination was Roy's Camp, described by Pompie Burger (in *Birds of Namibia*) as "from a one-night stand to a love affair". Yes, we fell in love and it did turn

into a love affair as we spent some very productive hours of birding after our arrival and before our departure the next morning.

Roy's Camp is well known for good sightings of the Black-faced Babbler. My highlight was a good sighting of a Lesser Honeyguide.



Figure 2: Black-faced Babbler

Sunday's destination was Shamvura, the establishment of Mark Paxton and his wife Charlie. I have to visit Mark to really get into the mood of the Kavango and to experience his bird guiding skills which I believe are indeed superior. This is best observed when looking for Souza's Shrike.



Figure 3: Souza's Shrike

You may try and find the bird yourself and you might be lucky, but it is a different experience when Mark takes you – and yes, after nearly two

hours of walking in the heat of the day we got a pair of Souza's Shrikes. And my old theory of making use of local knowledge and thereby supporting the local economy was proven right once again.

On the way to the Souza's Shrike site we had some splendid views of Bradfield's Hornbill.



Figure 4: Bradfield's Hornbill

Camp birding and a river cruise proved equally worthwhile with African Skimmer, Rock Pratincole, Little Bee-eater...



Figure 5: Little Bee-eater

... and Southern Carmine Bee-eater impressing Per-Arne the most.



Figure 6: Southern Carmine Bee-eater

Much to my frustration I was not able to obtain a good photo of the Cape

Wagtail subspecies, *M. c. simplicissima*, lacking the typical breastband. According to Mark it is expected to become a full species sooner rather than later.

We moved on to Namushasha and the highlight of this stay came early during our lunch break when Per-Arne sighted an African Wood-Owl in the tree right in front of our bungalow!



Figure 7: African Wood-Owl

One owl turned into two owls and later into three when on the day of our departure we spotted an owl chick in the tree. What a delightful sight!



Figure 8: African Wood-Owl chick

When at Namushasha I always do the Horseshoe drive to experience what is for me the most beautiful African bush. After reading about the poisoning of so many vultures recently it was gratifying to see almost one hundred vultures, mainly White-backed and Hooded Vultures, at a fresh elephant carcass.



Figure 9: Vultures at elephant carcass

As we left Namushsha we recorded our first oxpeckers, Yellow-billed Oxpeckers that is.



Figure 10: Yellow-billed Oxpecker

In Katima Mulilo I wanted to see the famous Baobab tree with the toilet in it, but, oh, what a disappointment! It is fenced in with barbed wire and one cannot even take a decent photograph of the tree. But driving there we noticed some curiosity which one would only find in Namibia !!! Landmine Street took us to the Regional Swapo Party Headquarters where the Baobab tree stands on the corner of the street.



Figure 11: Landmine Street in Katima Mulilo

Back to birding, we were now seriously looking for the Northern

Grey-headed Sparrow. I followed the directions given to me and there it was – easier than I thought it would be. The bird even posed nicely for a photograph.



Figure 12: Northern Grey-headed Sparrow

But my biggest surprise came in the evening when I happened to look at my photographs taken previously during the trip – amongst the Grey-headed Sparrows photographed at Roy's Camp I clearly recognised a Northern Grey-headed Sparrow – way south of its recognized distribution.



Figure 13: Northern Grey-headed Sparrow at Roy's Camp

Off course I expected to receive an Out of Range Form from SABAP 2 but armed with a photograph to prove my sighting I was looking forward to receiving the ORF. To my surprise however I did not receive any, which means someone else recorded it before me in the Roy's Camp pentad. It also shows that their range could be much larger than anticipated and maybe we just have to take a closer look at some of the more insignificant species.

At Kalizo Lodge where we stayed for the next two days we saw both species, even together at the same time in the same bush a number of times.

Highlights at Kalizo were the Black-bellied Bustard ...



Figure 14: Black-bellied Bustard



Figure 15: Schalow's Turaco

... and Schalow's Turaco. We took a day trip to Victoria Falls where the birding highlights were Tropical Boubou and Trumpeter Hornbill. The real highlight of the day was the sighting of Southern Ground-Hornbills on our way back to the lodge.



Figure 16: Southern Ground-Hornbill

Our last destination was Mahangu Safari Lodge. During a river cruise we had splendid views of Rock Pratincole

for which I later received an ORF although indicated in SABAP 1 for that area. I keep on being baffled why we receive ORF's for birds where they are known to occur!!!



Figure 17: Rock Pratincole

With a lot of patience our local guide brought us close to some White-backed Night-Herons which enabled us to get some good sightings of this very shy species.



Figure 18: White-backed Night-Heron



Figure 19: Wattled crane

We visited the Mahango Park twice as well as the Buffalo core area but saw very few birds this time. Could it be on account of it being drier than in other years? Still we had some excellent sightings of Wattled Crane and for the first time I saw African Skimmer skimming in the flood plains in small shallow pools.



Figure 20: African Skimmer

As always time comes to an end sooner or later and once again we had a one-night stand at Roy's Camp before hitting civilisation and Per-Arne was trying hard to make contact

with the rest of the world probably wanting to share the over two hundred bird sightings he had on this trip.

