

## Raptor Challenge



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My wife Karin is a birder and through her I have been drawn into the somewhat mad world of birding. People say that I am a closet birder and that I need to come out, but I call myself a photographer that just happens to maintain a life list of bird photographs.

Once again, against my better judgment, I listened to the voices in my head saying “go on a birding trip – you will enjoy it”. Were they voices in my head, or was Karin whispering to me constantly?

We signed up for another survivor challenge, the Reach Africa Birding Safari’s four rivers trip, which would take us to the Caprivi region of Namibia. This trip is named after the four rivers in the area being the Zambezi, Chobe, Kwando and Kavango

rivers. In contrast to the rest of Namibia, this area is lush with forests, marshes, dense savannah and Mopane woodland.

I should have taken note of the marshes and the fact that we packed our Wellington Boots!

We departed bright and early and en route Graham mentioned that they had a record number of raptor species sightings, 31, on a previous trip to the area. Was that a challenge??

During this trip we visited:

- Chobe National Park, including an afternoon boat cruise;
- Popa Falls, Bwabwata National Park and the Mahango Game Reserve;
- Nunda Lodge on the banks of the Kavango River, which is a great spot for spectacular sunset photographs;
- Kalizo Lodge, on the banks of the Zambezi – really amazing as the river was in flood.

However, back to the challenge - during the journey from Johannesburg to Nata (Botswana) we ticked Black-shouldered Kite, Bateleur, Steppe Buzzard, Amur and Peregrine Falcons, Greater Kestrel, Tawny, Marshall and Wahlberg’s Eagles, Dark and Pale Chanting Goshawks, Shikra, African Harrier-Hawk and Montague’s Harrier. At this stage we had 14 raptors and were well on our way.



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From Nata to Kasana we added Yellow-billed Kite, Black-breasted and Brown Snake Eagles (17 raptors).

The Kasana area did well for our list, by adding Pearl-spotted Owlet, Steppe Eagle, Lanner Falcon, Fish Eagle, African Goshawk, Osprey, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Dickinson's Kestrel, White-backed, Hooded and White-headed Vultures (28 raptors).

Kasana to Divunda brought us saw European Honey-Buzzard, African Marsh-Harrier, Little Sparrowhawk and Western Banded Snake-Eagle. Ha, 32 and a new record!!

Although raptors seemed to be few and far between we persevered, and in Bwabwata saw the elusive African Hobby and just outside an African Cuckoo Hawk (34).

But why stop now; we still had a few days to go. The Katima Malilo area produced Lizard Buzzard, Gabar Goshawk and an African Wood-Owl (37 and still counting . . . . .)

Adrenaline was still flowing so instead of sleeping on the way home we managed to tick Black Kite (eventually), Lappet-faced Vulture, Lesser-spotted Eagle (my first) and Lesser Kestrel.

41 raptors and a new total to challenge!

We tried, to no avail, to convince Grahame that, as the new record holders, he should "donate" the next year's trip to us in order to attempt to break the record.....

Oh, by the way some of our other good sightings included over 300 Yellow-throated Sandgrouse (Pandamatenga area), Black Coucal, Dwarf Bittern, Lesser Jacana, Lesser Moorhen, Greater Swamp-Warbler, Half-collared Kingfisher, Three-banded Courser, Shelley's Sunbird, Slaty Egret, Schalow's Turaco, Rufous-bellied Tit, Broad-tailed Paradise-Whydah, Orange-winged Pytilia, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, Copper Sunbird, Black-faced Babbler, Sharp-tailed Starling, Arnot's Chat, Thrush Nightingale and Collared Palm-Thrush.

Our trip list totalled an impressive 327 species



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Besides the above I also managed to photograph various cisticolas and warblers, bringing my photographic total to 721. I am sure that approximately half of this total can be attributed to trips undertaken with Reach Africa Birding – Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Kgalagadi and various day trips. Wait a minute, I think we should be Reach Africa Birding Gold Card Customers!