

Hi All,



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I recently participated in a trip arranged by **Reach Africa Birding Safaris** (Grahame Snow) to **Southern Mozambique**. I was quite in doubt whether to take this trip or not due to the fact that the write up only offered 4 new lifers for me. The main attraction was undoubtedly the **Olive-headed Weaver**, other potential lifers for me were **Sooty Falcon** (never saw), **Magpie Mannikin** and **Lesser Crested Tern**. The fact that **Olive-headed Weavers** can only be found in that area triggered me into going. Below, you will find a write up of the main sightings on the trip.

Day 1 March 13th, Johannesburg to Xai-Xai

I was picked up bright and early in Joburg, by Grahame, his son and 3 other birders. We had a 800km's trip that proved quite uneventful (except some problems at the border post). The only birding we did was a brief stop at the Nkomati and Limpopo flood plains. The most exiting bird was several **Rufous-bellied Herons**. We arrived in Zona Braza quite late and after a couple of quick beers and not too good food, we quickly settled in for the night.

Day 2 March 14th, Zona Braza - Limpopo Floodplain

We started the day birding at a natural lake/vlei close to camp. The birding was quite slow and we decided to head for the Limpopo Floodplain. On the way to the main road, we found a very productive area where we got a host of birds. The best one was **Grey Waxbills**. We continued towards the Limpopo Floodplain. We walked quite a bit in the dryer part of the floodplain looking for **Rosy-throated Longclaw** without any success. We saw plenty of **Openbill Storks**, **Marabou Storks**, **Glossy Ibises** and **Cattle Egrets** without being to exited. However on the way back, we heard the unmistakably booming of an **Eurasian Bittern**. It was already close to noon and we were quite surprised that this bird was vocal at this time of the day. A few of the braver of us went after the bird into quite wet marshland. We stopped at several intervals and the bird was still calling. Somehow it felt that the bird moved further and further away. After quite a while, we were just 2 brave souls still chasing the bird. The heat was bad and we did not bring any water. The bird was still calling and we continued wading through more and more unfriendly terrain. At one point my companion decided that enough was enough and that we needed to turn back to the car. We decided on taking a short cut to the road, but at exact that time the bird started calling behind us where we had just been. My companion still opted for the shortcut whilst I decided to continue after the heard the bird calling in the direction I was walking, but to my surprise it was also answered by a bird to the left and one to the right of me! At that stage I was badly suffering from dehydration and only focused to get back to the car alive. I still had a hope to flush the bird. I had nice views of **Rufous-winged Cisticola** on the way and I also nearly

stepped on a **Fulvous Duck** on the nest. Still no sign of the Bittern. When I finally managed to crawl back to the car, I saw to my horror that my companion was not back yet. I knew where the path he had taken would merge with the road and directed the car there. After a short scanning we discovered a head bobbing up and down over the reed beds. I asked one of the younger members of the group to fetch my companion. He struggled severely to get out to the lost soul. After a couple of bottles of water, I decided to go and help him recover our friend. I stopped halfway to check on the progress and accidentally flushed a **Red-chested Flufftail**. I saw that the pair in the marsh was not making any progress and decided to go all the way out and help. At site, i realized that my companion was badly dehydrated and did not have any strength left in his body. He looked like a baby hippo floating around in the marsh. I dreaded the long walk back with this hippo between us, but somehow we managed to drag him out. On the way we almost stepped on a nest containing 6 eggs. I believe the nest belonged to the **Red-chested Flufftail**. When we got quite close to the car, one of the other birders decided to bring some water to us. After about 10 meters into the marsh she flushed the **Eurasian Bittern**. It took of made a turn and flew directly towards us giving us excellent views. Unfortunately since I was on a hippo rescuing mission I did not have my camera with me. After finally reaching the car and reviving the victim and the rescue team, we took stock of the damages. To our horror our legs looked like open sores. They were red and purple and scars everywhere. In aftermath we agreed on the stupidity of going into that marsh without any water, but in the end we all agreed that it was worth the effort. The entire team got very good views of a bird that was not even on the list for the area. After this great sighting, we decided to return to camp to lick our wounds.

Day 3, March 15th. Xai-Xai - Barra Peninsula

We started the day birding another pan close to the camp, but it yielded quite few birds. The most exiting was good views of a couple of **Pygmy Goose**. W had a long drive ahead and soon headed for Inhambane and Barra Peninsula. We stopped at the river front in Inhambane, but the tide was in so only a few **Common Whimbrells** to see. At the Barra Lodge, we met up with Alf Taylor, a friend of Grahame and his girlfriend Hillary. They were quite exited and wanted us to go to the beach with them straight away. We followed them to the beach and there we had more than 40 **Crab Plovers** on display. In between the **Crab Plovers** were a mixture of **Swift and Lesser Crested Terns** (lifer). We returned to the lodge just before the sun set and was treated to a very nice dinner.



Day 4, March 16th, Inhambane - Barra Peninsula

We started the morning in some woodlands around the lodge. We soon had quite a few **Lemon-breasted Canaries** + a single **Collared Palm-Thrush** close by. We decided to head for Inhambane. On the way, we scanned very palm tree for **Sooty Falcon**, without any luck, We saw a single **Gabar Goshawk**. Once in Inhambane, the tide was on its way out and we briefly scanned the flats from the road. We could see quite a number of **Greater Sand Plovers** both in breeding and non breeding plumage. The amount of **Lesser Sand Plover** to their bigger brothers was approximately 1:10. Other birds on the flat were **Terek Sandpipers** and some **Bar-tailed Godwits** in beautiful breeding plumage. We returned to the lodge for a late breakfast. After breakfast we cooled down in the pool for a couple of hours before we decided to try our look at the flats just outside the Lodge. The same mix of birds were to be seen there. some **Lesser Sand Plovers** and plenty of **Greater Sand Plovers**. We also spotted a knot in the far distance. I managed to get close enough to get a few pictures, and it turned out to be a **Red Knot**. Just before sunset, we returned to the **Crab Plover** beach just to confirm that both the **Crab Plovers** and the **Lesser Crested Terns** were still there.

Day 5, March 17th, Barra Peninsula - Panda

We did some woodland birding this morning as well. We connected with some **Red-backed Mannikins** and more **Lemon-breasted Canaries**. After breakfast, we were off to Panda. We stopped in Inhambane and briefly checked the flats. The tide was wrong. Just before we hit the main road, Grahame did a little detour. He told us this would be a good spot for **Magpie Mannikins**. I had to do some bodily fluid adjustments. With my back to the action and holding something else then my binocs in my hands, Grahame shouted: "There it is Per, your 800 bird, what are you doing?" Lucky for me the 2 birds stayed for a while for me to take some very back lit pictures. With my 800th bird in box, I decided I deserved at least one beer :-). We arrived in the heat of the day at Caju Afrique close to Panda. In the afternoon, we took a small stroll to try to find the local **Shelley's Francolins**. We soon heard them calling and I managed to get a few shots of them.

Day 6, March 18th, Panda Area.

We were on the road a little after 04:00 this morning. Our first target was the **Olive-headed Weaver**. In the early morning darkness, we spotted both **Swamp and Square-tailed Nightjars** on the road + 3 different sightings of **Spotted- Eagle Owl**. We arrived at Grahame's favorite spot at around 06.00. It took Grahame less than half an hour to locate 2 **Olive-headed Weaver** males for us! Unfortunately the distance were long and the pictures are not great. We continued walking in the forest and connected with quite a few **Brown-headed Parrots**, a tree full of **Green Pigeons**, a single juvenile **Shikra**, and some noisy **Red-necked Spurfowls**. We drove a few kilometers to a good spot for **Racket-tailed Roller**. On the way we picked up a **Broad-billed Roller**. At the **Racket-tailed Roller** spot, it took us less than 5 minutes to find the bird. On the way back to our first stop we also got very nice views of a **Greater Honeyguide** + a **Coqui Francolin** crossing the road in it's own distinctive way (very slow). We had breakfast in the woods. After breakfast we wandered around a little bit, but it was very hot and the area went quiet. We decided to slowly drive back to camp and bird on the way. There were plenty of

Southern Carmine Bee-eaters around: The entire area was extremely dry. We eventually found



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a smallish wetland where we stopped. Grahame pointed out a **Dwarf Bittern** in a tree in the distance. At the same time another one flew just in front of him and landed in a tree close by the road. Grahame was still busy pointing to the one far away, but we went to see the close one :-). The bird was badly back lit, but indeed a lifer for me. We then had 2 **Brown Snake-Eagles** circling over us.

We did not see any other good birds on our way

back to camp. We took a stroll around camp upon our return. The best bird we saw was a **Broad-billed Roller**.

Day 7, March 19th, Panda Area

We headed for some permanent wetlands in the morning. On the way, we saw a single **Dickinson's Kestrel** perched on top of a dead palm. Further along we came across more **Red-necked Spurfowls**. Just before we reached the wetland we saw a **Black Kite** perched in a tree. At the wetland we got nice views of no less than 3 **Lesser Jacanas** and a **Little Bittern** (All 3 Bitterns on one trip!). We continued on to the small wetland where we saw the **Dwarf Bittern** the day before. Sure enough it was still there in the reeds and I managed to get a few better pictures than the day before. We stopped for a while and managed to find a couple of **Rudd's Apalis** at the same place. We heard a **Collared Palm-Thrush**, but could not locate it. We again headed back to the camp in the heat of the day. In the afternoon, Wilna (Steenkamp) and I took a stroll around camp. We managed to get brief glimpses of a **Pink-throated Twinspot**. Unfortunately no pictures. We also had good views of a **Lizard Buzzard**. Just before dark, we headed out to a small valley in order to look for **Bat Hawk** and/or **African Hobby**. No such luck, but we found the **Dickinson's Kestrel** perched in the same dead palm.

Day 8, March 20th, Panda - Chidenguela

We went to the same valley in the morning, but still no luck. On the way back Grahame found 2 **African Hobby** perched in a tree. I discovered to my horror that I forgot the battery to my camera in camp. Wilna was kind enough to let me borrow her Nikon body on my lens and we both took some pictures of the birds (Thank you Wilna!). After this fantastic lifer, we returned to camp for breakfast. After breakfast we headed towards Chidenguela. We arrived in the heat of

the day and booked into some really rustic accommodations. Wilna and I took a stroll and had good views of a **Black-throated Wattle-eye**. In the afternoon we took a drive. Nothing of interest, but good photographic light and I took pictures of some more common birds: **Red-backed Shrike**, **European Roller** (maybe the most common bird of the trip) and **Lilac-breasted Roller**.

Day 9, March 21st, Chidenguela - Joburg - Cape Town

On the dirt road towards the main road we came upon another **African Hobby**! On the main road we found a Juvenile **African Cuckoo Hawk**. We stopped on the Limpopo Floodplain, but nothing of interest. we had a roadside breakfast at the Nkomati floodplain. Again, plenty of **Rufous-bellied Herons**. We took a dirt road towards the border post and saw Red-faced Cisticola, Marsh Warbler, Lesser Crested Eagle and a juvenile Brown Snake-Eagle. The drive from the border towards joburg was quite uneventful and I arrived in good time for my plane from Lanseria.

As mentioned in the beginning, I was hoping to get 4 lifers based upon Grahame's write up of the trip, but was lucky enough to get 6 lifers. (2 **Bitterns**, **Magpie Mannikin**, **Lesser Crested Tern**, **Olive-headed Weaver** and **African Hobby**) This must be the only birding trip I have ever been on where I ended up with more lifers than I was hoping for. All in all we saw around 230 different species. Not the most I have had on a trip, but indeed we saw some good birds. A note on pictures. We had extremely bright weather every day and very harsh light from early morning onwards. I am not happy with the quality of most of the pictures :-)

Best regards

Per Holmen