



ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

WET SEASON BONANZA

Namibia's premiere wildlife destination reveals its hidden unexpected wonders under shining rainbows and stormy skies




Once in twenty years, abundant rains turn the arid landscapes of Etosha NP into a lush, verdant environment carpeted with millions of Devil's thorn *Tribulus terrestris* flowers, and the desert-like panoramas change dramatically as new life blooms unexpectedly everywhere. Namibian or Angolan giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis angolensis*; on the previous spread, South-western Black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis sub.occidentalis*.

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A commonly and oft-repeated truism recites that photographing wildlife in Africa during the rainy season is, generally speaking, more difficult than in the dry one - as large amounts of greenery, foliage and tall grass will hide the subjects most of the times, even if there are larger numbers of them when it rains; and that finding game during the dry season is much easier because animals - especially larger ones - tend to congregate around waterholes and

water bodies in general, as they have to drink at least twice a day. And herbivores coming at a waterhole means having predators sitting and waiting for them right by the water's edge. Sounds reasonable enough - especially where the bush is thicker and woody; but there is just something about photographing African wildlife under stormy, thunderous skies, with dramatic cloudscapes and the smell of moist soil at dawn. We already had greatly

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A huge herd of  Springbok *Antidorcas marsupialis* under a stormy sky.




■ Plains, Common
or Burchell's zebra
Equus quagga,
formerly *Equus*
burchellii.



enjoyed our first visit to Etosha National Park, Namibia's crown jewel (see our [trip report here](#)) with our friend Phillip Conradie of [African Wildlife Photo Safaris](#) at the peak of the dry season, when the Park possibly offers its best and most iconic panoramas, so the three of us decided to give it another try, this time however at the peak of its usually scarce, meager and often non-existent rainy season, in the hope that its endless flat plains, its mostly featureless landscapes and its already sparse and anemic vegetation would offer good chances to photograph the local wildlife in a supposedly and hopefully unusual setting. Very few people in any case seem interested in visiting Etosha during a (possibly) wet time of the year and accomodation inside the Park is usually both easier to book and heavily discounted, so we expected something different, seriously taking in consideration even

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Male Springbok 
Antidorcas marsupialis.



■ *Blue crane*
Anthropoides
paradisea
feeding in
Etosha's
unusually
verdant rain-
soaked fields.

a possible disappointment. After all, who wants to track and photograph a wet lion sitting miserably under the rain in a dreary, gloomy, grey light under an overcast sky?

**NAMIBIA'S EDEN
FOR WILDLIFE
PHOTOGRAPHERS**

We should not have worried. In fact, amazingly, our second trip to Etosha exceeded our wildest hopes. We were lucky: the amount of rain which had recently fallen in the area occurs once in twenty years or so, and Etosha had magically transformed from its iconic ghost-white, bleached desert image into an absurdly colorful palette of pastel colors, with cloudy, dark, stormy skies giving way to blinding azure ones in a matter of minutes and with rolling, endless lawn-like green pastures literally carpeted in millions of bright yellow Devil's thorn (step on one and

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Cheetah Acinonyx jubatus by a once-in-a-lifetime muddy pan.





Left, Shaft-tailed whydah *Vidua regia*; top right, Swallow-tailed bee-eater *Merops hirundineus*; bottom right, Paradise-whydah or Eastern whydah *Vidua paradisaea*.



Red hartebeest ■
Alcelaphus buselaphus.



■ *Namibian or
Angolan giraffe*
Giraffa camelopardalis
sub. angolensis.



you'll understand!) tiny flowers. Our fears of possibly having difficulties in locating wildlife - given the abundance of water animals do not need to visit waterholes, which is where visitors look for them most of the times in Etosha) soon appeared to be completely unfounded: in fact, wildlife numbers seemed to have skyrocketed, with frequent stunning sightings of cheetahs and lions and almost daily encounters with Black rhinos (I believe our record was six in a single day!). Bird life was also exceptionally abundant - with many species in flamboyant mating plumage - and most herbivores such as zebras and springbok had just dropped their babies, providing excellent hunting opportunities to lurking predators. The climate was pleasantly cool during most of our stay, and the occasional shower or fully-fledged but brief thunderstorm provided dramatic skies, magical rainbows and great sunsets. Even our guide Phillip - a veteran of many a visit to Etosha - was greatly impressed.

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*Plains, Common
or Burchell's zebra Equus
quagga, formerly named
Equus burchellii.*



■ *Left, a rainbow over a herd of Springbok Antidorcas marsupialis. Right, female African lion Panthera leo drinking at a roadside puddle.*



■ *Martial eagle*
Polemaetus
bellicosus.






Far left, a pair of Southern masked weaver or African masked weaver *Ploceus velatus*, on their nest. Left, Rufous-naped lark *Mirafra africana*.

South-western Black rhinoceros
Diceros bicornis sub.occidentalis.






Top left, Greater kestrel  Falco rupicoloides;
top right, Eastern Red-footed or Amur falcon Falco amurensis.
Bottom left, Red-necked falcon Falco chicquera; bottom right, Rock kestrel Falco rupicolis.





Gembok Oryx gazella. ■
The very unusual greenish cast
of the pan is due to a rain-
triggered algal bloom.

African lion 
Panthera leo.





■ Top left, Kori bustard *Ardeotis kori*; top right, Lesser Grey shrike *Lanius minor*. Bottom left, Crimson-breasted boubou or Crimson-breasted shrike *Laniarius atrococcineus*; bottom right, Double-banded sandgrouse *Pterocles bicinctus*.



African lion Panthera leo lurking in the grass.



A CHOICE OF DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS TO VISIT

Etosha National Park offers several excellent and well-known camps to the visitor such as Halali and Okaukuejo, but we are very partial to the colonial outpost atmosphere offered by the old Imperial German fort at Namutoni, and spent most of our time there. One key aspect for a successful visit to Etosha is being always ready to move to a different area in case good sightings are being experienced there, and obviously having a guide who is good at getting the "pulse" of the current situation. This may also mean having to cover considerable distances on occasion, but of course this offers the added bonus of lucky chance encounters along the way. One thing is absolutely certain - be it dry or wet season, Etosha always delivers and never disappoints. Some species may be easier to be encountered during the dry season (African elephants tend to congregate near water, Greater kudus do not stick to thick bush), but during our rainy season visit we never went back to camp empty-handed or disappointed, and in fact we believe that a wet season

— African elephant *Loxodonta africana*. Notice the typically short and broken tusks usually observed in the elephants of Etosha.



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■ *Left, rain squall in the distance over Etosha's usually parched plains; right, adult male Greater kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros*.*





The stormy skies of the wet season give Etosha a unique photographic quality.



Left, Purple roller 
Coracias naevius;
right, Lilac-breasted
roller Coracias
caudatus.





Adult male █
African lion
Panthera leo.

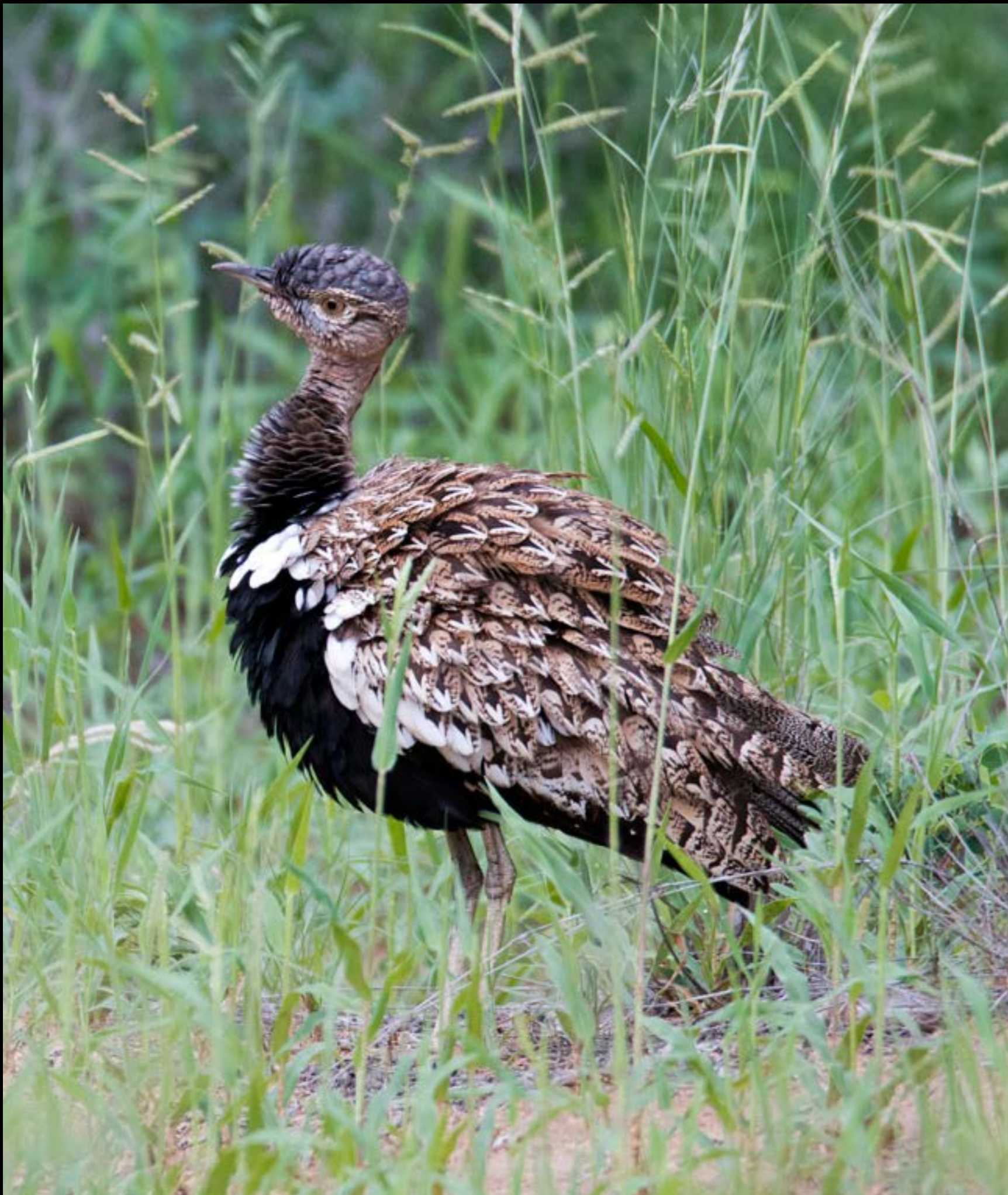


■ Top left, Damara Dik-dik *Madoqua kirkii sub.damarensis*; top right, Common warthog *Phacochoerus africanus*. Bottom left, Black-backed jackal *Canis mesomelas*; bottom right, Cape fox *Vulpes chama*.





Cheetah
Acinonyx jubatus.



Left, Red-crested ■
korhaan or Red-
crested bustard
Lophotis ruficrista;
right, Tawny eagle
Aquila rapax .





■ Namibian
or Angolan giraffe
Giraffa camelopardalis
sub. angolensis.

trip offers all-round much, much better opportunities for sightings and photography than a more "classical" one at the peak of the dry one. The numbers and the variety of animals in Etosha during the rainy season are simply staggering, the sparse vegetation offers no obstacles at all to successful camerawork and the stunning flower beds stretching forever make for a great and welcome change in scenery. Yes, maybe this is not one's "typical" Etosha, and from what we have been told such abundant rains - resulting in such a uniquely verdant, luscious environment - take place only once in twenty years or so, usually being little more than brief, occasional showers with little or no effect on Etosha's barren, desert-like habitat most of the other years. Without such an abundance of water as we have experienced, one must admit that most of times Etosha would not change much



Left, Gemsbok
Oryx gazella;
right, Banded
mongoose
Mungos mungo.

during its wet season - animals would disperse all the same without having to visit the waterholes, but the landscape wouldn't be much to talk about. Also, the overcast, leaden skies often present during the brief wet season can be very good for most images as they produce smoothly diffused lighting, but create havoc with bird portraits, producing brightly lit, burnt-out whitish backgrounds (dry season skies are on the opposite invariably blue). Yet, one can strike gold once in a while - and the glorious spectacle of literally hundreds of giraffes or a lonely Black rhino peacefully foraging in apparently endless meadows covered in bright yellow, pink and purple tiny flowers is too much of a temptation - if you love nature as much as we do - to be passed over without tempting luck. Next time you plan to visit Etosha do give it a try and consider going there during the wet season from December to March - we can guarantee you won't be disappointed. ●



■ Plains, Common or Burchell's zebra
Equus quagga,
formerly named
Equus burchellii.
The foal is just
a few hours old.



Blue or ■
Common wildebeest
Connochaetes taurinus.



■ African lions *Panthera leo*
resting among the
flowering grasses - a very
unusual sight in Etosha.





■ Top, Rock or white throated monitor *Varanus albigularis*; bottom, Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* - a very unusual - or rather unique - sight in Etosha.





African hoopoe
Upupa africana.



■ Left, Grey lourie or Grey go-away-bird *Corythaixoides concolor*; right, close-up of a Plains, Common or Burchell's zebra *Equus quagga*.



South-western
Black rhinoceros *Diceros
bicornis sub. occidentalis*.
This photo was taken right
in front of Namutoni camp.





■ Left, African lion *Panthera leo*, female; right, Southern black korhaan *Eupodotis afra* vocalizing.



Red hartebeest ■
Alcelaphus buselaphus -
an apparently ungainly
but very speedy antelope.




South-western Black rhinoceros
Diceros bicornis sub. occidentalis.
This prehistoric-looking individual is
an old battle-scarred veteran of
many a fight, missing its tail, both
its ears and even one of its horns.



A typically beautiful rainy season landscape in Etosha with a herd of giraffes in an apparently endless field of Devil's thorn *Tribulus terrestris* in bloom.



Cheetah 
Acinonyx jubatus.





■ Left, male and female Ostrich *Struthio camelus*; right, Southern African Ground squirrel *Xerus inauris*.





A juvenile Southern Pale Chanting goshawk *Melierax canorus* swoops down on a fleeing Slender mongoose *Galerella sanguinea*.

Left, African elephant ■
Loxodonta africana,
mother with baby;
right, adult male
Black rhino
Diceros bicornis.



■ Namibian or
Angolan giraffe
*Giraffa
camelopardalis
angolensis.*



Burchell's zebra ■
Equus quagga
socializing.





■ Left, Burchell's zebra *Equus quagga*; right, portrait of a Woolly-necked stork *Ciconia episcopus*.



A herd of Gemsbok ■
Oryx gazella feeding by the
endless Etosha pan.



Black Rhino ■
Diceros bicornis feeding
in a veritable sea of
Devil's thorn *Tribulus*
terrestris flowers.



The Banded mongoose ■
Mungos mungo
is an extremely active,
inquisitive and very
social animal.



Flamingos in the ■ desert - one of the many unexpected sights of Etosha during one of its rare fully-fledged wet seasons.

