

Fred and Elizabeth's visit to Namibia.

6th December 2006 - 5th January 2007

Fred & Elizabeth Hodgson, Ramsey, Isle of Man, British Islands.

Preliminary information etc.,

Fred had been to Namibia in 2001 on a project with the Cheetah Conservation Fund and of course used the opportunity to have a couple of weeks playing with the Wildlife. He was very impressed with the country, both scenically and the fauna. So he suggested we spent Christmas 2006 and New Year there. There was a natural nervousness on Elizabeth's part at the concept of Self drive because **a**, it is Africa and **b**, Fred's known habit of getting up close to the wildlife. Re-assured on this point the tickets were booked before any lingering doubt could change her mind!

Namibia is two hours ahead of GMT. Light by six and dark again around seven thirty suited us fine. It was of course "summer" in the Southern Hemisphere so temperatures would be high and rain was expected from time to time. This is of course relative as we were heading for a very arid country apart from the Caprivi Strip between Angola and Botswana. This is when birds are in full colour, mammals are having their young and the bush is in full leaf. We took sunhats and sunblock as the midday sun IS very fierce. Noel Coward was right!

Entry requirements:- Relatively straightforward. No visa required and a simple stamp at Immigration on arrival is all that is required. Other countries please Note!

Local currency is the Namibian Dollar (N\$) and is directly linked to the South African Rand (ZAR). As we could not buy N\$ we went armed with ZAR which is freely accepted everywhere. I will give prices where appropriate in N\$. Exchange Rate whilst we were there was around 14ZAR /£

Getting there, back and around. The Capital City is Windhoek and most tour operators route via Johannesburg (12 hours) but the National Airline "Air Namibia" will fly you direct from London Gatwick or Frankfurt in 9 hours so who needs Joburg? Not me! I used this airline in 2001 via Frankfurt in MD11 and was well satisfied, so when the new direct LGW service was started there was no competition. They use a roomy Airbus 340 thrice weekly which was fine. Not bookable on-line yet but very helpful when telephoning. About £500 return. I had used Oryx Tours as Ground Agent in 2001 and as they are now part of Sense of Africa I used them for the lodge bookings etc., Car Hire was through "Cardboard Box" who were very good but alas the Car Hire firm, National/Alamo not up to scratch. We used a Toyota Corolla 1.4 with Air conditioning at N\$270 per day. Unlimited mileage and in view of length of hire dispensed with the additional Insurance Waiver as the additional daily rate for 28 days would have exceeded the amount of the XS N\$3447. The car was fine and we covered 5,000km without trouble. I cannot recall fuel price but it was around N\$250/300 to fill up. (c.40Litres.). We dispensed with the idea of 4x4 as unnecessary and simply encouraging us to go further in before getting stuck. Main roads are Tar with side roads being compacted gravel. Keep your speed down to 80kph on these. Really minor roads to remote Lodges etc., were a bit rutted but we had no trouble if you took care. The car was white and I did wonder if a darker colour would have been better as we did seem a bit more visible to the Wildlife than the red one I hired in 2001. It is not advisable to drive after dusk as Kudu and Warthog are often encountered in the road. They are also there during daylight but at least they see you and you see them. Traffic if very light, and we often drove for miles without seeing another vehicle. Some roads are so straight you could see them going over the horizon. Keep an eye on fuel levels. It is a big country.

Food & Drink. Being a Germanic country the local lager brewed in Windhoek is most agreeable. N\$15 for 500ml. Mineral Water N\$9, Soft drink N\$10. A reasonable bottle of Red wine was between N\$80 & N\$110 depending on the establishment. In a Supermarket the same bottle would be 20% less. Gin & tonics came out at N\$4 a shot plus the tonic. i.e. Doubles were N\$14 including tonic. I could live with that. When we bought

meals a good 3 course dinner was around N\$100. Portions are huge. Veggies should be aware that Namibia prides itself on good meat dishes, Beef, Lamb etc., and Antelope from Eland down to Springbok featured on most menus. Breakfast in the Lodges was very substantial with Yoghurt, Fruit, Cereals, and toast etc., Cooked Breakfast we avoided as being excessive.

Bugs, Beasts n Bowels. Hygiene standards appeared high. We relaxed the peel it, boil it or forget it rule and no adverse reactions were encountered. Similarly most tap water was potable despite remote Lodges having boreholes. Or maybe it was more natural that way? Northern Namibia is Malarial so Prophylactics are advised and sleep under a net. Having said that the drier areas lacked breeding sites for the Mossies anyway. We saw little evidence of the blighters. Little evidence of Tsetse but I am sure they are out there somewhere. There are snakes, Puff Adder etc., and Black Mamba. If you get bitten by a Mamba you should lie down under a tree in the shade. You will still die but you won't smell so bad when they find you.

Accommodations. Camping is readily available and popular due to the climate. Most Lodges also had Campsites and spaces for the Camper type vehicle with tents on the 'roof'. We used Tourist Lodges in the main and these exist right across the cost spectrum. We averaged at around N\$500 pppn. for DBB. Individual Lodges are described at the end of each daily diary. Some places included Game Drives/boat trips etc., in the daily rate, others allowed you to choose the activity or not.

The established daily routine. We aimed for at least two or three nights in each place in order to settle and get the feel of the place. (I hate living out of a suitcase). This worked well and enabled a drive to the next place after breakfast to arrive around midday, settle in and then go wildlife viewing in the cool of 16.00 hours. We kept driving to 4/500 kms between lodges but with hindsight we could easily have done more and cut out a couple of stops. But which ones?

Kit carried. I do not carry a telescope and rely on my Minox 10x42 Binoculars which serve me well enough. I also had my Fuji S5000 Camera with a good 10x Optical zoom and 1.5 converter and an adequate supply of re-chargeable batteries together with the requisite Charger. Most Lodges are on 220volts but have Round Pin sockets so take an adapter. Because of Night drives it is useful if you fit your camera Hot shoe with a Parabolic Flash as the built in flash on most cameras is useless for this purpose. Game viewing at the Lodges is from Open Vehicles, Boats (or on foot) and a tripod is just an encumbrance as is a long Lens. 300mm is adequate. Wide angle for those cherished "Elephant moments"! When driving ourselves we developed a technique of slewing the car when we stopped so that the camera could be used through an open window and not the windscreen. This worked well although we did get the odd 'funny look' from other road users.

Books? Namibia is Southern Africa. My library consisted of the invaluable Bradt Guide. Coverage of the remote areas is patchy as the author, Chris McIntyre, does his best to cover the main tourist areas which were of little interest to us. If there are no Elephants I don't go there! "Birds of Africa, south of the Sahara" by Sinclair and Ryan plus my trusty Newman's although this is getting dated. A good Map was invaluable as 'tourist' ones were delightfully vague. We were only "unsure of our position" once but it was worrying. We were NOT lost just uncertain where we were! There is a good guide to Etosha showing all Waterholes etc.,
Now to the trip itself.:-

December 6th. We took the afternoon flight from our home on the Isle of Man to London Gatwick where we had a few hours wait until checking in for Air Namibia's flight. Hilary and Chris Towers helped us pass the time. The flight boarded and left on time for the 9.5 hour journey. Nice plane, obviously 2nd hand but comfortable. A couple of drinks and dinner still left some time to get some sleep for the long day tomorrow.

December 7-9th. The overnight flight gets you to Windhoek early enough to pass Immigration etc., and get on the road promptly. Well so much for the theory! We did the Immigration bit and were re-united with our Luggage in good time but oh dear, where was our Meet and Greet with the car? In bloody Windhoek! "We have the car booked today but thought you were coming tomorrow!" Quite why we would want a car standing for 24 hours was never made clear. Another 'Meet & Greet' had been stood up by his client so we hijacked him and drove the 45km to the Alamo. Appropriate name given my mood! Paper work and Vouchers sorted out, no offer of refund though, and we left town on the B1. (No "A" roads in Namibia?) Fortunately we only had about 50km to drive as we had booked 3 nights at Durstenbruck Guest Farm in the Khomas Mountains. 18Kms of farm road but worth it. I had stayed there last time so knew the way and the

owners. Nice place, full of birds and Antelope, Giraffe etc., plus two white Rhino. Johann permits me to wander freely and there are a couple of walking trails. Never met the Rhino but we did have some great Eland Moments by sitting tight and letting them come to us. Their alarm call is a deep grunt/roar. There are also some Leopards and Cheetah in two large paddocks which you can feed. They do game drives in the Mountains to see Hartman's Zebra etc., but the tracks are very bumpy. There is a Water hole/Lake about an hours walk from the farm where we got a few water birds, Darter, Cormorant and Little Grebe to pad out the normal Acacia inhabitants. Carp's Tit, Pied Babbler, Hoopoes and Hornbills etc. The Guest Farm comprises a House and Bar with 3 separate cottages. Our Cottage was roomy and bed comfortable. Meals taken with the Host in the Farm House. Good value and an excellent introduction after the long flight.



December 10th-11th. After a Prompt start we headed north through Okahandja and Otjiwarongo to refuel at Outjo. Then another 110 km of Tar to Kamanjab and south on gravel for 30 more to our next stop at Ondundu Lodge on the seasonal Huab river. We are now in the realm of the 'Desert' Elephants. This is a new Lodge beautifully constructed in the Kopjies and rooms are very well appointed. Plenty of game but no Ellies just dung and footprints. We met our first White-tailed Shrikes which are like Wagtails with attitude! We went on guided walks and also took our car to a Waterhole at mid day and ticked lots of birds, and Kudu, coming to drink. Best bird was an African Hawk-Eagle coming to bathe. We asked for a night drive (it is private land) and whilst reluctant our hosts son took us out the 2nd night. Genets, Hares, and a beautiful Aardwolf. Cuisine was possibly the best of the trip. Ondundu is well laid out with the main building on three floors in neat gardens (Cactus mainly) there are four modern chalets very well fitted out with mod cons. There are also four or five large 'permanent' Tents. All well spaced apart for privacy.

December 12th-14th. As the driving directions supplied had differed from my chosen route to Ondundu we now headed south, the long way round to our next base at Palmwag. It would have been quicker to drive via Kamanjab but as we would be coming back that way we wanted to see more of the country. So south to Khorixas, another Police check, six kms of tar on C39 and then gravel again. However the countryside was very scenic and got more rugged as each kilometre went by. The mountains got bigger and it was very like the Wild West in films. Tall red pinnacles and dry desert. You kept expecting either Clint Eastwood to ride by or a Wells Fargo Stagecoach with Indians chasing it. Sadly this did not happen but the deeper into Damaraland we went the harsher the scenery. Some nice Eagles and our first Springbok and a couple of Giraffe told us we were definitely in Africa and not Arizona or New Mexico. This was a comfort. After 100km we passed Damaraland Camp and the last road to the coast and headed north now to the Entendeka plateau. Really awesome. We found the Veterinary Game Fence and a few km further on turned off to Palmwag Camp which was to be home for 3 nights. We were disappointed to learn that the Rhino trekking was cancelled for a time. They had been darting from Helicopters to translocate some and the rest of the animals were a bit jumpy. Time was being allowed to let them settle. We went on an evening drive and had our first Ruppell's Bustard plus lots of Hartman's Zebra, Springbok of course and five Giraffe. How they scrape a living in this very rocky terrain is a marvel. On the way back we spent time with a family of Klipspringer. Dinner was nice. We had an early start the next day as we had booked on the all day trip to the Hoanib riverbed via Sesfontain. This is about 100km north but is quickly reached. On the way we saw Ellie spoor on the road and there to the right were a party of about 9. Our first Desert Ellies. We also saw many Kudu and Giraffe. At Sesfontain we entered the dry river which is used as the 'Highway'. We saw two Jackal acting up and stopped to watch and suddenly there was a Lion very close to the back of the car. This must have been what the Jackal had been reacting to. Our driver shot away and then turned to watch it but we lost sight of it in the long grass. Driver Harry asked if we had a foto but I had not bothered (Seen one scruffy Lion and you seen em all!) He was upset as they are quite rare up here. I asked why he had moved the car and he said it was to give a safe distance as they are not habituated to cars. Further on the elephant spoor was getting heavy and there was a fine male under the trees. Then even more and we had close encounters with about 50 or so of all sizes. Again a safe



distance is necessary. This is because there is not much shade and the Ellies want it all and will chase you off to get it. We had a picnic lunch under a vacant tree, with Oryx and springbok under the next one. Back to camp. Next day we had a full day drive in the concession. The highlight was when we were surprised by a large Bull Rhino very close. He was already up to speed when we saw him and my lasting memory is of the front legs moving like pistons and the noise they make is incredible. Pounding feet, and Grunting like a Tennis player at Wimbledon. We could not follow him but tracked two more without success. The rest of the day was good but he was a hard act to follow. Picnic lunch in the wilderness, and hide from the sun before heading back. Nice Camp, with a main Restaurant, Pool and Cafe area. Our Bungalow had air conditioning and a view over the dry Uniab riverbed. Self-guided walks available along marked trails. Plenty birds. Nice Mountain Wheatears. Benguela Lark was a very nice rarity.



December 15th-17th We checked out after an early Breakfast and took the road to Kamanjab over Grootmans pass. Very scenic. This must form some sort of barrier because as soon as we had crossed the scenery immediately became typical Acacia scrub bush. Through Kamanjab where we re-fuelled and had another Police check-point. Then north up the gravel C35 for 70 km or so. There were signs of road improvements in the making. At the gate to Hobatere, which is a private concession, we were met by many Giraffe and Zebra. The Lodge is 18km down in a valley and very scenic. "Hobatere" means "find us" and we did. Settled in and met Steve and Louise Braine who

have run the place for over 20 years. There is a hide in the grounds overlooking a Waterhole and a couple of hours in the afternoon is quite rewarding. Bathing Sparrowhawks and Shikra to name but a few. Multiple LBJs (mainly Quelea) and a so far unidentified Buzzard or small Eagle had developed an interesting technique of diving feet first into the bushes and grabbing his snacks that way. It needed to work on its act though, as with talons full of lunch it could not perch and usually fell to the ground. Evolution in the making! Hobatere offer Night drives and we indulged in these on all three nights. We were usually rewarded with good sightings of African Wildcat, including a cute little kitten, as well as Bat-Eared Fox and Cape Fox. Genets and Springhares were common. Next morning we went for a walk with Martin and saw lots of Kudu and Giraffe etc., plus our only Damara Rock Jumper of the trip. In the afternoon we went out to another Hide, under escort, and watched as plains game came down to drink. There were Three-banded Plover in the mud and a large Steppe Eagle came for a wash and brush up. Next morning we woke to Lions roaring so Fred went off in our car to see if they could be spotted. Tracked them to within 100 yards from the sounds but thick bushes prevented a sighting. Martin reported in later that the Male was just by the airstrip. We saw him later when we went for our second visit to the Hide. We also found his mate and four cubs quite near the hide itself which is why you have an escort! While watching the animals coming to drink we spotted the female stalking along too. But it appeared half hearted and she did not press home. I think she was really coming for a drink. The last evening's drive was remarkable for the amount of Eland on the move in the dark. 200 plus. Hobatere is a superb place to stay, Steve is a keen birder and a good host. The Camp consists of the usual Lapa and grounds with the brick and thatched cottages pleasantly furnished. Twin beds and En suite (but no doors)



December 18-19th We again left early after checking out Steve's collection of snakes. The drive to the road is a game drive in itself and we were seen off by the Giraffe etc., Now back the way we had come to Kamanjab where we picked up the tar road to Outjo. After 100km or so we reached the road north to Etosha and made good time. We checked at the gate, got our pass and went on to Okaukuejo for a two night stay. Fred was back on familiar territory having been here in 2001. The only draw back with Etosha camps is that they lock the gates at sunset so you have to watch the clock. We did a drive to a couple of Waterholes and then headed for Olifantsbad via Aus. Aus provided an Ostrich couple with a dozen chicks plus a few of the endemic Black-faced Impala. Approaching Olifantsbad we noticed more and more Ellie signs (footballs in the road) and then spotted about five heading for the Waterhole. When we got there, there was about 50 already in place which we really enjoyed. When they left they headed up towards us and drank from the fresh rain water puddles right next to the car. Excellent introduction. Next morning we did a tour round the open plains and spotted many new birds including our only Montague's Harrier. We met one chap who was convinced he had seen Pallid Harriers but I could only see BW Kites. Of course in the afternoon we just had

to go back to Olifantsbad and were not disappointed. The Ellies were there in force. Again they came up to the car parking space to drink fresh rain water. The highlight was one young bull who wanted a car to move and got his way. On the return to Camp we saw lots of Springbok gathering to have their young attended by many Jackals. Fred came back next morning solo and managed close views of a Secretary bird and Hyena. The Camp is quite big and whilst the place has been allowed to run down the Restaurant is excellent. The Bungalows have a Fridge and facilities for preparing breakfast if you don't want to go to the Restaurant. There is a waterhole that is floodlit and we saw Black Rhino come down to drink each night.



December 20-23rd We now moved on to Halali in the centre of Etosha. A nice drive round all the loops (called detours) stopped at Reitfontain and noticed a lone Lion in the bush then went on to Camp and checked in. In the afternoon we went east to Nuamses, Goas and Noniams Waterholes. Only the 1st two were any good. Painted Snipe at Goas and lots of Game drinking etc., Nuamses got us our first Comb-ducks of the trip. Back to the Camp and after dinner to the Waterhole where we were not disappointed with Vereaux's Owl, Freckled and Square tailed Nightjar, Ellies and Black Rhino all showing up on cue. Next morning we set off early and went up the aptly named Rhino Drive. A large Black Rhino raced over the road just in front of us. Sadly he went into thick scrub before we even managed to brake. However much further on we spotted a large Rhino looking to cross the road. We stopped and backed up quietly and had good views of him. Then of course the grunting running sounds started and it moved deeper. But not before we counted 3 Adults, One half grown and we think two calves. They were deep in but we could see several heads and horns. A tour of Salvadora area did not yield anything of note. The pm drive to Goas was repeated and rewarded by more Ellies etc., plus Falcons spooking the avifauna. Night at the Waterhole was a repeat plus a Hyena. Next morning we just had to go back on rhino drive but whilst it started well with two Honey Badgers no Rhino were seen. Plenty Hartebeeste etc. Further east along the main track we saw 5 Lion walking with some purpose in mind. Then further on a large White Rhino Bull peacefully grazing and in no hurry. Nice Picture. Turned at Badia (empty) to head back to camp. Spur of moment decision to turn to Goas. Full of Elephant! After lunch headed west to the 'loops' and stopped for a suspicious "tree stump" under an Acacia. A Cheetah! Two others lying down. Wow! Too hot for any action yet so we head for Rhino corner. Mother and Calf but in thick brush. Still they were there! At 17.00 we head back to the Cheetah and catch them on the move as we hoped. We watched for a while but E was anxious not to spoil



their chance of a meal so after a photocall we left them to it. Next morning we went straight back but drew a blank apart from a lone Cape Fox out late. Nice! Some lions courting and Caspian Plovers was all we thought we would get until some excitement in the long grass produced a Female Leopard. We were blocked by a ZA truck pushing in but still managed a couple of fotos. After losing the Leopard in a drain we moved off and found a few Ellies in the road and much sign. We passed on and found the main herd all over the road. We chose our moment to



pick a gap and slid through as I guessed they were all heading for Goas. We parked on the approach to Goas waterhole and waited. We watched through the rear view mirrors and along they came. E whispered "where did the big one go?" I replied through my teeth "Just by my right ear!" We had fifty Ellies all walking past the car in touching distance. A good moment. After lunch/snooze the drive was a bit tame apart from a pair of Lions. Again my instinct played well as we passed Reitfontain which we could see had no cars. No cars but the nicest Black Rhino ever! We watched him arriving dry & grey, rolling in the mud and



emerging a real “Black “Rhino. Two other cars came but seemed more interested in birding!! Takes all sorts. A great 'Finale' for Etosha. Halali Camp was much the same as Okaukuejo with the bungalows adequate but a bit run down. We would have preferred a better choice. However the restaurant here was the worst of the whole trip. A so called “A la Carte” simply was three choices and the service very intermittent. Not a patch on Okaukuejo. So bad that when they forgot to charge for the Carrot Salad we did not point it out. The next evening it did not arrive at all. The floodlit waterhole was good in the evening. Total Rhino for Etosha were seven at night and nine in daylight. No complaints about the Ellies either!

December 24th & 25th We departed Etosha via some old haunts but apart from an interesting encounter with an old (very) male Giraffe walking up the road and simply moving to one side to let us pass nothing much was seen. We exited the park and took to the tarmac again. Quick progress through Tsumeb and to Grootfontein where we filled up with fuel for the long run north. Another 50kms got us to Roy's Camp where we had originally booked for one night (25th) but due to NWR problems we now spend two nights. This was to be a serendipitous decision after the disaster of Halali. We were made welcome and after a nice game



walk in the woods, Eland, Kudu, Zebra & Wildebeeste, the Bird list got a boost too with a Green-backed Heron on the drinking fountain. Dinner was the best ever. Eland Medallions in Stroganoff. Next day, being Christmas, was relatively relaxed but being the only guests we were invited to Lunch with the extended family who had arrived from various parts of Africa for the occasion. In the afternoon, after a postprandial snooze, we had another unescorted walk in the bush. Elizabeth is getting brave. Roy's Camp is a family run place with very rustic en suite Cabins which we found most acceptable. Clean and tidy. Nice Restaurant and bar and a small swimming pool. Very enjoyable and one that we were glad to have tried.

December 26th & 27th As we were checking out, the Eland came to drink and it seems one was hand reared before going to join the herd. She is still tame despite having calves of her own and came to be hand fed. (We did not mention the Menu of two nights ago!) A long drive up to Rundu and then along to Divundu where we turned off the tar for about 20 kms south to Mahangu Lodge on the banks of the Okavango river. The grounds are bristling with new birds but an impending storm prevented us going on a boat trip on the river. At dinner we meet a couple living in Botswana and the lady is from the Isle of Man. Small world. Early start for the Game drive into the Park with lots of birds, a very large Boabab tree and some nice Ellies, some Sable and plenty of other game. The driver gets shouted at for being late back but we say it was our fault. After lunch we take the postponed boat ride and tick more birds including Stint, Collared and Rock Pratincole all on the same sandy Islet. We go for a walk in the afternoon into the countryside and see our first Coppery-tailed Coucal. Mahangu Lodge is quite new, set in a nice cool glade of Mahogany trees with a swimming pool and two terraces built out over the river. Cottages are en suite and the cuisine excellent. The owner, Ralf, could have been warmer but his manager, Felix, was excellent and very helpful. They even washed our car without our asking. This was a place to return to one day, perhaps in the dry season when the game would be more concentrated along the river. We had no complaints about the abundant bird life as the different habitat was producing different species to those seen earlier. Pin-tailed Whydah in place of Shaft-tailed, different Shrikes and more wetland species.

December 28th & 29th. Our next move was further east still to the Kwando river which we crossed after 200km through the Caprivi Game Park with its regular warning signs of Elephant. We saw plenty signs but no Ellies and presume they had more sense than to cross this road in daylight. At Kangola we initially missed our turn off and retraced our route by about 4kms. We were still unsure and there were no signs so it was comforting after 40kms or so to enter the park and see a sign to Lianshulu. This camp is unique in that it is actually in a National Park, having been built before the Park was proclaimed. The Kwando forms the border between Botswana and Namibia here and is quite narrow in parts and much more “African Wilderness” than the bigger Okavango. We do a boat trip in the afternoon and see our first Pygmy Geese and other waterfowl. Lots of Crocs and Hippos around and we even have a 'Sundowner' in Botswana. Next morning we take an early (6.00) game drive with Thompson deep into the Park. We are the only guests, the car is the most comfortable yet and Thompson is pleased to have the rare opportunity of “doing” birds. We see the usual Kudu, Giraffe etc., a solitary Hippo in a mud hole plus Lesser Moorhen and other Waterbirds. The trip ends with an obliging Martial Eagle. We do another river trip in the afternoon which was dominated by Hippos

but also a nice Red Lechwe and several Bishops etc., in full colour now. On our return we find our bath has been run for us and decorated with candles and some kind of shubbery. Very decadent. Lianshulu is an excellent Lodge well worth more time. It is set on the banks of a Lagoon off the main river. The Cabins are quite luxurious, see bath above, set well apart in leafy grounds that are bristling with birds and mammals. Each cabin has its own verandah and an outside shower area if you care for this kind of thing! The service and cuisine was first class. Strongly recommended.



December 30th. Time to turn back now and we retrace our tracks almost to Rundu before turning off for the Okavango River Bank and our only one night stopover of the trip. If we had known how good the roads are we could have skipped this one. We are glad that we did not as N'Kwazi Lodge is in a nice location. We booked on the sundowner cruise but it rained and the engine would not start. We were actually quite relieved as the Okavango was running quite fast. We had a beer instead. This Lodge is very welcoming owned and managed by Wim and Valerie. The thatched Chalets are spacious and well laid out some distance apart in grounds frequented with Duiker and Steenbok and plentiful birds. We were sorry to have missed the boat trip which lands for a sundowner in Angola on the opposite Bank.

December 31st was a straight uneventful run south through Grootfontein and Otavi almost to Otjiwarongo. Quite scenic in places and a little birding was achieved despite the difficulty in stopping quickly. We were booked into Frans Indongo Lodge for two nights but January 1st is having a day to itself. After checking in etc., we went for a walk and climbed the hilly area to the north for a view of our surroundings. Ok! So we saw a nice Short-toed Rock Thrush too plus other birds, plus Oryx, Zebra, Tssebe and Roan Antelope etc. On returning to the lodge we were surprised to be told that a car would pick us up at 7.30 next morning. Dinner was excellent if a little slow, possibly due to it being New Years Eve. We did not stay up but some very noisy Italians did so we knew it had happened on time. This lodge is very nice with its own private game reserve which does hold Rhino. Wild Cheetah pass nearby. Cabins are mud/brick with thatch. There is a swimming pool, hogged by the Italians.

January 1st deserves a day to itself. We were picked up on time and driven to Cheetah Conservation HQ which was a game drive through local farms. Our driver was amused when I got out to open and close gates etc., for her. I said "Old Volunteers never die, they merely slave away!" I had been a "Volunteer" at CCF in 2001 and this trip was to introduce Elizabeth to the Spotty Cats. Whilst I had given notice of my visit I had not expected the reception afforded to us. On arrival we went first into the big enclosure to exercise three young Cheetah by chasing an Electric Hare. Actually a red cloth. Nice fotos of running cats but oh so difficult to keep them in the frame at 60kmph. Then the next treat was to go with Doctor Laurie to exercise and habituate the youngest inmate, 6 month old Kunini. She was very timid and hissed and spat from time to time but enjoyed playing. When this was done we had Coffee and Muffins in the house and a long talk over my previous visit. (I seem to have been appreciated.)



Then Laurie and Bruce took us back to the big enclosure for more photos with the other Cheetah. It was still not over as we then collected Ambassador Chewbacca and went out to his play tree area. This is always fun as you never know what an Eleven year Male will do. He got very upset when he discovered scats in his tree, from a Wild Cheetah, and hunted around for it. He calmed down after a while and came to Elizabeth to have a drink from 'his' flask. You do not touch him but he will touch you if so inclined.



Then back to the HQ to meet the Anatolian dogs/pups which CCF train to guard small stock such as goats. With their use, losses to Cheetah etc., have dropped by 80% with no harm to the spotty Cats. After that there was a moment of disruption when a dog was brought in that had come off 2nd best in a dispute with a Warthog. Nasty slashes along her side. She was promptly stitched up and placed in the CCF recovery room. Then it was time to feed the cats which I had done many times before so knew what to do. By this time it was well past 5pm and time to go home. We thanked Laurie and Bruce for making the day so special for Elizabeth and were then driven home via the large 10,000 acre enclosure where 'problem' cats live in semi wild conditions. Lots of Giraffe and a nice Cape Griffon added to the pleasure. Back at the Lodge we had a cool beer and dinner was much more co-ordinated. Slept well.

January 2nd-3rd. We were not finished with cats yet as due to another mix up we had been booked into Okonjima which is home to Afrikat Foundation. An easy drive, with a detour to show Elizabeth the Waterberg Plateau, and we reported at the very secure gate. We had been upgraded to BushCamp which was nice. We checked in and were pleased to see each Tent had a supply of birdseed and a birdbath outside. This came in very handy to tempt LBJs except they were rarely brown. We went for the Cheetah drive and saw lots and then had a talk about their work at the Foundation. Met the tame Warthog Orphans and the surviving Wild Dog pups (as seen on TV). After dinner we went up to the hide and watched two Honey Badgers and several Porcupine come to drink (and quarrel.) Next day we went Cheetah trekking for 'wild' cheetah. We do this on foot and found two with a recent Antelope kill. All a bit artificial but interesting. We spend the afternoon tempting small birds with the seed and have Scaly Finches, Melbas, Whydahs etc., actually taking food from our hands. Not to be outdone an "Elephant" turned up too but it was Ok just an Elephant Shrew. Nice



to have the chance to view one at such close quarters. Around four we went 'leopard trekking' which is the same as Cheetah but with the spots arranged in a roseate. We did not go on foot which was a pity. A very shy and somewhat tetchy Male was found and then we found a much more photogenic young lady who posed and preened for the camera. We skipped the Waterhole tonight and retired relatively early. Accommodation is excellent, Roomy cabins, all en suite, with frig and Lounge area with roll up front 'windows' which made for great views and friendly birds. Set in secluded woodland well away from other guests. Excellent Cuisine and Wines. I did say we had been upgraded!



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January 4th - 5th. After breakfast we left for the drive to Windhoek. Along the road we had to slow for a party of Kudu to cross. Where else would this happen? Into Windhoek for some shopping and a look round. We have lunch at the Kalahari Sands. We order a sandwich & beer. It was the best steak I had had in a long time. Grilled to perfection. If this is a sandwich I must never eat a whole dinner. Hand over the car after filling with fuel. All

seems ok and we are run to the airport and check in. Flight goes on time and we manage some sleep. Catering a bit haphazard. Land on time and check through for IOM flight at 8.30. Away a little late and when we land the taxi is waiting to take us home. House still there after the storms and we start unpacking before planning the next one. We will go back to Namibia before long!

Most of the photographs are of birds (some nice Rhino). If Elizabeth tells me not to photograph Ellies and Giraffe I am left with birds. (And quite a few spotty cats!) Tick list a respectable 285.

