Ultimate Zambia: Miombo & African Pitta

2019 Tour Details

13 November - 8 December 2019
Our 26-day Zambia tour is the most comprehensive bird tour offered to Zambia, and is convenient spliced into three shorter sections. A Pre-Tour extension to the north-east of the country targets three rarely-seen species, namely Katanga Masked Weaver at Bangweulu, Tanzania Masked Weaver in the Mbala area and Zambian Yellow Warbler at Lake Mweru.

The Main Tour takes in the best sites in central Zambia, with a strong focus on miombo birding. First we visit Mutinondo, before heading west to the Mwinilunga area, stopping en route to look for specials such as Margaret’s Batis. Our return from Mwinilunga skirts Kafue National Park.

During the Pitta Tour we will visit the Zambezi Valley in search of displaying African Pitta, the Livingstone area and west of there for Black-cheeked Lovebird, and Choma for the endemic Chaplin’s Barbet.

Zambia offers a good list of specials for world listers and a wide array of species and other wildlife for those with a more general interest.

This trip has a strong focus on watching birds, but there are opportunities too for some mammal watching and bird (and other) photography. Let us know if you have target species or want to know more about the species we might encounter.

Let us know if you have target species or want to know more about the species we might encounter. A species list will be handed out to you at the start of the tour and is available beforehand upon request.

The tour is timed to coincide with the peak time for birding across Zambia as a whole. We expect to encounter a fair amount of rain, mostly as afternoon thunderstorms. Most days, especially in the Zambezi Valley will be hot, although rain will bring some relief from the high temperatures.
INTRODUCTION

Zambia, lying on the interface between Central and southern Africa, is largely blanketed in miombo woodlands and dotted with swamps and dambos. In moister areas tropical forests have developed and the drier south also holds mopane woodlands and acacia woodlands and gallery forests along the Zambezi Valley. Although the country only holds two endemics, Chaplin’s Barbet and Black-cheeked Lovebird, a wide range of specials can be found and it is one of the best places to see the desirable African Pitta. Given the quality of the birds on offer Zambia must be regarded as one of Africa’s most under-birded countries.

Our 26-day itinerary takes in the best that the country has to offer, and aims to find as many regional specialties as possible.

Firstly we offer a special Pre-Tour extension to the far north-east. Our main targets are two little-known weavers, namely Katanga Masked Weaver at Bangweulu and Tanzania Masked Weaver near the Tanzanian border. We will also search for two recent splits, Zambian Yellow Warbler and Whyte’s Francolin, split from Papyrus Yellow Warbler and Shelley’s Francolin, respectively. Oustalet’s Sunbird is also a possibility.

The Main Tour will kick off at Mutinondo Wilderness, one of the finest miombo woodland birding sites worldwide. It is undoubtedly the best place to see Bar-winged Weaver, but other target species include Böhm’s Flycatcher, Anchieta’s Sunbird, Reichard’s Seedeater and Anchieta’s Barbet. Along the dambos we’ll watch out for Hartlaub’s Marsh Widowbird, Stout Cisticola, Blue Quail and Black-rumped Buttonquail in the grasslands, and Laura’s Woodland Warbler, Bocage’s Akalat and Black-backed Barbet in the gallery forests. We will try for the incredibly difficult Long-toed Flufftail and there is an outside chance of seeing African Grass Owl.

From here we move on to the north-west of the country to visit the Mwinilunga district, breaking the journey overnight to look for Black-necked Eremomela and Margaret’s Batis.

The Mwinilunga area holds a diverse array of habitats from extensive gallery forests to open grasslands and miombo woodland. The most sought-after bird here is the localised Grimwood’s Longclaw. Other open-country birds could include Black-and-rufous Swallow (a bit unpredictable at this time of the year), Bocage’s Weaver (possibly finished breeding now), Angola Lark and Dambo Cisticola. Forests hold Bamboo Warbler, Bannerman’s Sunbird and Spotted Thrush-Babbler.

From Mwinilunga we’ll wind our way back to Lusaka via Kafue National Park, where we hope to locate Pel’s Fishing Owl and White-backed Night Heron.

Finally the Pitta Tour visits the Zambezi Valley in search of Africa Pitta, Livingstone’s Flycatcher and Red-throated Twinspot, the Livingstone area for Black-cheeked Lovebird, Slaty Egret and Brown Firefinch, and the Choma area for Chaplin’s Barbet.
DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

13 Nov: Arrive Lusaka
Welcome to Zambia! Once you have dealt with arrival formalities and collected your luggage, proceed to the arrivals hall, watching out for a board showing your name or ‘Birding Africa’. From the airport we transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay.

14 Nov: To Kasama
On the first full day of the trip we take a flight from Lusaka to Kasama in northern Zambia, where our vehicle will be waiting for us. This cuts out 1000 km of road travel, and makes for a much more comfortable start of the trip. The flight is currently scheduled to depart just after midday and to arrive in the mid-afternoon. From there it will be a two-hour drive on a tarred road to Mbala.

15 Nov: Mbala area
We have a full day to explore the Mbala area, the most accessible site for the localised Tanzania Masked Weaver. Oustalet’s Sunbird also occurs in the region, and we’ll try to find the localised Whyte’s Francolin.

16 Nov: Mbala to Kasama
After some more birding in the Mbala area we return to Kasama for an overnight stay.

17 Nov: To Nchelenge
Today we drive west to Lake Mweru on the DR Congo border. Most of the day will be spent in transit.

18 Nov: Nchelenge area
We have a full day in the Nchelenge area to search for two localised swamp specialties, namely Zambian Yellow Warbler and Katanga Masked Weaver.

19 Nov: To Lake Bangweulu // Arrive Lusaka
Leaving Nchelenge early we have a long drive to Lake Bangweulu, where we overnight on the lakeshore. // Those arriving for the Main Tour arrive in Lusaka today, where they overnight.

20 Nov: To Mutinondo
At Lake Bangweulu we have another chance to find Katanga Masked Weaver. We may also find Long-toed Lapwing, Swamp Flycatcher, Chirping Cisticola, Hartlaub’s Babbler and Coppery-tailed Coucal, before driving to Mutinondo. // Those arriving for the Main Tour will be transferred by road from Lusaka to Mutinondo, where they will meet up with the rest of the group.

21-22 Nov: Mutinondo
The spectacular wilderness of Mutinondo is one of the top miombo birding localities worldwide, and we have two full days to sample its delights.

In the miombo woodlands the top bird is Bar-winged Weaver, but there is a strong supporting cast with Anchieta’s Barbet, Anchieta’s Sunbird, Eastern Miombo Sunbird, Western Miombo Sunbird, Reichard’s Seedeater, Red-capped Cisticola, Shelley’s Francolin, Böhm’s Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Hylota, Pale-billed Hornbill, Miombo Tit, Miombo Scrub Robin and Souza’s Shrike all possible.

We will also dedicate a significant amount of time birding the dambos (depressions) with their moist, open grasslands and forests. In the grasslands we aim to find Hartlaub’s Marsh Widowbird, Fawn-breasted Waxbill, Black Coucal, Füllborn’s Longclaw, Pale-crowned Cisticola, Stout Cisticola, Blue Quail, Black-rumped Buttonquail and, with some luck, African Grass Owl. Forest birds include Schalow’s Turaco, Ross’s Turaco, Black-backed Barbet, Black-throated Wattle−eye, Laura’s Woodland Warbler, and Bocage’s Akalat.

23 Nov: To Nsobe
After some final birding around Mutinondo we’ll start our journey westwards, although the first overnight stop is not too far a drive. On the way we’ll search for Black-necked Eremomela and Chestnut-mantled Sparrow−Weaver in the tall woodlands near The Forest Inn, before continuing on to our overnight accommodation.
26-27 Nov: Mwinilunga district
The north-western corner of Zambia, wedged between DR Congo and Angola, is one of the wildest and most exciting regions in the country for birding. We have two full days to sample its delights. Floodplain grasslands are home to the localised Grimwood’s Longclaw, our top target in the area. Other grassland birds include Rosy-throated Longclaw, Dambo Cisticola, Fülleborn’s Longclaw, Hartlaub’s Marsh Widowbird and Sooty Chat. The forests hold a host of other species, and Bates’s Sunbird, Bannerman’s Sunbird, Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, Grey-winged Robin-Chat and Bamboo Warbler. Forbes’s Plover and Black-collared Bulbul are also possible.

28 Nov: To Solwezi
After some final birding in the Mwinilunga region we return towards Lusaka, breaking our journey for an overnight stay at Solwezi.

29 Nov: To Kafue
Our final destination on the Main Tour is the edge of Kafue National Park at Kafue River Lodge. Here we hope to find Pel’s Fishing Owl, Grey-olive Greenbul and Rufous-bellied Heron.

30 Nov: Return to Lusaka // Arrive Lusaka
After some final birding at Kafue River Lodge we return to Lusaka where the tour ends in the evening. // Those arriving for the Pitta Tour will meet up with us here for an overnight stay.

1-8 Dec: Pitta Tour
Following on seamlessly from our Main Tour we offer our Pitta Tour, which aims to find African Pitta, Black-cheeked Lovebird and the endemic Chaplin’s Barbet. Please see our Zambia Pitta Tour brochure for full tour details.

24 Nov: To Chingola
One of the most localised specialties in Zambia is Margaret’s Batis, and this morning will be dedicated to tracking down one of these rare birds. Be prepared to get muddy feet as we need to enter swamp forest in search of this special. In the afternoon we’ll continue on to Chingola for an overnight stay.

25 Nov: To Mwinilunga district
Continuing further west we’ll do some birding in the early morning in the Chingola area where Sharptailed Starling and Whyte’s Barbet are possibilities. The rest of the day will be spend driving to far north-western Zambia, with Red-throated Cliff Swallow the most likely addition to the trip list during the drive.
BOOKLET AND CHECKLIST

Birding Africa provides:
1. Tour Details leaflet with detailed itinerary (this document).
2. Tour Information Pack, emailed to you.
3. Tour Booklet with checklists, provided in hard copy at the start of the tour.

QUESTIONS?

Email Michael at michael@birdingafrica.com and copy callan@birdingafrica.com.

HOW TO BOOK

1. Complete our easy online booking form.
2. Secure your booking deposit by credit card on our 3D secure online payment site (ZAR2000 or about $110.)
3. Settle the balance by bank transfer 150 days before the tour. We will email you a reminder and the banking details.

INCLUDED IN THE PRICE OF THE TOUR

- services of Birding Africa tour leader and local guides
- entry fees and activities as per itinerary
- ground transport in Zambia and an internal flight on the Pre-Tour extension only
- accommodation and all meals starting with dinner on the first night and ending with lunch on the last day
- airport transfers
- bottled water in the vehicle
- one soft drink per meal
- general tips