Our ten day safari to Botswana covered the permanent waterways of the central Okavango Delta as well as the seasonal floodplains and the savanna woodlands at Khwai to the north of the Delta. We then travelled to the game-rich Chobe region in northern Botswana where we enjoyed the teak woodlands and large rivers of the area. For the last part of the tour we popped over to Livingstone in Zambia where we spent time birding the riverine woodlands along the Zambezi River and also visited the spectacular Victoria Falls.

Okavango Delta

The first two nights in the central Okavango Delta was spent at a secluded but very comfortable lodge where Pel's Fishing Owl was virtually a garden bird (!), roosting in the large mangosteen trees during the day and fishing from exposed perches at night. Our transfer from the airstrip to the lodge and back was via dugout canoe (mokoro) which allowed us close views of waterbirds such as Slaty Egret, Rufous-bellied Heron, African Pygmy Goose, African Fish Eagle, Black Crake and African Jacana. Birding in and around our island lodge produced Terrestrial Brownbul, Cardinal
Woodpecker, Red-faced Mousebird, Black-collared Barbet, Crested Barbet, Grey Penduline Tit, Holub’s Golden Weaver, Green Pigeon, and Arrow-marked Babbler, together with Fiery-necked and Swamp Nightjar in the evening. Banded Mongoose entertained us in camp while Elephants fed on the lush riverine vegetation nearby. We also saw Giraffe and Plains Zebra while Lions roared in the distance during the evenings.

A short walk on Chief’s Island placed us among cavorting Impalas while birding highlights were Saddle-billed Stork, Grey-rumped Swallow, Striped Kingfisher, Bearded Woodpecker, Dickinson’s Kestrel, Allen’s Gallinule and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds feeding on the gaudy maroon flowers of a Sausage Tree (Kigelia africana).

Khwai Concession

The short flight to our next lodge in the Khwai concession situated in the northern floodplain of the Okavango allowed us aerial views over the Delta with Elephant, Giraffe, Hartebeest, Blue Wildebeest, African Buffalo, Great White Pelican and Marabou from the air as an added bonus. After our arrival, all were elated when we found Lesser Jacana on the transfer to the lodge. Our tented lodge overlooked the Khwai River which held Goliath Heron and Long-toed Lapwing, while above raptors such as White-backed and Lappet-faced Vulture, African Hawk Eagle and Brown Snake Eagle showed well.

After an enjoyable lunch and a short rest we headed out for our first game drive and it was not long before we found a massive male Lion feeding on a dead giraffe, an old male that died of natural causes. Over the next few days several male Lions visited the carcass and we had many memorable sightings of these magnificent creatures. Not far from the giraffe carcass we found a pair of Verreaux’s Eagle Owls, with one bird sitting on the nest situated on top of an active Red-billed Buffalo Weaver nest.

We had two full days to explore the woodlands, waterways and floodplains at Khwai. Close to the lodge were several pools of standing water left behind by the receding floodwaters of the Okavango River. Many fish were stranded here, which attracted a multitude of waterbirds such as African Fish Eagle, Hamerkop, African Spoonbill, Sacred Ibis, Saddle-billed Stork, Yellow-billed Stork, Great Egret, Intermediate Egret, Little Egret, Rufous-bellied Heron, Slaty Egret and Striated Heron. The extensive floodplains in the area held large numbers of Lechwe and Elephants were common, while birds such as Wattled Crane, Great White Pelican, African Marsh Harrier, White-backed Vulture, Great Egret, Long-toed Lapwing, Coppery-tailed Coucal and Plain-backed Pipit were
present. Late one afternoon we watched several thousand noisy Red-billed Quelea come in to roost in the reedbeds of the floodplain, with a dashing Red-necked Falcon in hot pursuit!

The highlight for most during our stay at Khwai was a visit to a Wild Dog den where we spent a whole afternoon enjoying the antics of a very active pack of twelve Wild Dogs. Nearby, a small dam produced Yellow-billed Stork, several African Spoonbills, Three-banded Plover and Cape Wagtail. Many birds were recorded in the open woodlands including Red-billed Spurfowl, Meve's Starling, Burchell's Starling, Little Bee-eater, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Meyer's Parrot, Double-banded and Burchell's Sandgrouse, Senegal Coucal, Lilac-breasted Roller, Green Wood-hoopoe, Southern Ground Hornbill, Tawny Eagle and African Hawk Eagle. African Barred Owl and Fiery-necked Nightjar showed well at night.

Chobe National Park

From Khwai our next destination was a short flight away in northern Botswana and we soon settled into our comfortable lodge overlooking the Chobe River, but not before seeing Martial Eagle, Bateleur and Bradfield’s Hornbill en route from the airport to the lodge. Our time at Chobe was spent on the river and within its magnificent riverine and teak woodlands. Birding in the woodlands was excellent and produced birds such as Dickinson’s Kestrel, White-crested Helmet-Shrike, Crested Francolin, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Gabar Goshawk, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Shikra, Racket-tailed Roller, Fawn-coloured Lark, Yellow-throated Petronia, Pale Flycatcher, Stierling’s Wren-Warbler, Yellow-fronted Canary and Golden-breasted Bunting. We also had good views of Greater Kudu, Giraffe and Honey Badger in the woods while African Rock Python and Mole Snake also put in an appearance. In
the evening we found African Wild Cat and Side-stripped Jackal not far from the lodge.

Game viewing from a boat on the Chobe River is one of the most memorable wildlife experiences one can have in Africa, and the ample time we spent on the river was a major highlight for all. Chobe National Park is well-known for its large herds of **Elephants** and we were not disappointed, experiencing these majestic pachyderms at close quarters as they drank, grazed, bathed and played in and around the river. Huge Crocodiles basked on the banks and pods of Hippos eyed us from the water, while large herds of African Buffalo grazed on the lush grasslands surrounding the river. Other mammals seen were Puku, Lechwe, Impala, Common Waterbuck, Common Warthog, Plains Zebra, Chacma Baboon and Smith’s Bush Squirrel. There were large numbers of Knob-billed Ducks and White-faced Ducks on the shore, and we marvelled at an African Snipe doing its drumming display flight. Hooded Vultures, Pied Crows and Wattled Starlings fed on the remains of a Spotted Hyena and Giraffe, both recently killed by lions. Several **African Skimmers** were found nesting on an exposed sand bank. Kingfishers were plentiful and we recorded Pied, Giant, Malachite and Brown-hooded. Many pairs of African Fish Eagle were found perched along the river.

**Livingstone**

The last part of the tour was spent in Livingstone, Zambia, after we did a short boat transfer across the mighty Zambezi River at
Kazungula, where the four countries of Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe meet. Our spacious lodge situated in the riverine forest alongside the Zambezi River was the perfect base to explore the region, and we soon had a good list of lodge birds including Trumpeter Hornbill, Brown-necked Parrot, Retz’s Helmet-Shrike, Ashy Flycatcher, Hooded and White-backed Vulture, Shikra, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Lilac-breasted Roller, Holub’s Golden Weaver, Village Indigobird, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver and Red-faced Cisticola, with Half-collared Kingfisher and an African Finfoot (previous page) along the river. A boat trip on the Zambezi River above the Victoria Falls produced another African Finfoot, Half-collared and Malachite Kingfisher, a nesting colony of White-fronted Bee-eaters, African Skimmer, no less than three White-backed Night Herons, and Black-crowned Night Heron. The last morning was spent at the awe-inspiring mile-wide Victoria Falls where African Black Swift, Black-collared Barbet, Grey-backed Camaroptera, African Pied Wagtail, Red-winged Starling and Trumpeter Hornbill were seen.

At the end of the tour we recorded a total of 220 birds and 26 mammal species.